

LANRUO JIFICS

SAU
SCI-FI
CLUB

SPRING
2001



*The Alfred University
Science Fiction Club*

Presents...

Lanruojifics: Chronicles of Reality, Volume VII

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Nadir Balan, "Jake of Time"
Michael Cook, "The Imposters"
Alexander Fluegel, "The Pearl of Light"
Erica Hesselbach, "Wavefunctions"
Ashley Johnson, "End of Innocence"
Jason Maier, "The Dynasty"
Amanda Miller, "Mira's Mission"
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Crystal Nichols, "Earthsapplings at
Twilight"

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Plague"

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Travel: A Look at the Many Possibilities"

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Editor's Note:

I'd like to think of this issue of Lanruojifics as more experimental and free than the last one, with less of an emphasis on it being Science Fiction, and more of a focus on each contributor's personal creativity, whether each submission is clear-cut Science Fiction or not. This is an extremely diverse issue, with submissions of short stories, poetry, and artwork not only from current members of AUSciFi, but alumni as well as students who are not currently members of AUSciFi. I hope that this kind of communication will continue as long as this publication exists, and that more students at Alfred University will take part in creating it in years to come. It is a pleasure to see the interest in Lanruojifics grow!

The AUSciFi web page can be found at:

<http://campus.alfred.edu/organizations/auscifi/index.html>

Past issues, events sponsored by the AUSciFi Club, and other information related to this organization is on that site.

A copy of each issue of Lanruojifics is donated to Special Collections, located in Herrick Library. We hope that students will take advantage of this by enjoying all of the fiction and art in each issue.

Read on, and enjoy!

Oh, and by the way...

"All your base are belong to us." -- Zerowing

Ah, but all the stories/poems/artwork in this journal belong to those who created them.

"Introduction"

By Josh Arzt

Can you hear them calling to you...?

Darkness covered the abandoned alleyway. Lightning and thunder threatened overhead, almost as if foreshadowing a much greater darkness to be revealed to the world. The harsh rain pattered on the ground as if it was lifelessly punishing it for existing. And in all the gloominess of that night it was almost invisible to him. He couldn't even feel the cold water running down his face as he stared, mesmerized by the fixed glare of the other. As the lightning would caress the sky with its scattered pulse, their swords could be seen glittering in return pulse as they awaited the inevitable. His heart began to slightly increase in each beat, making his head feel the pounding thumps. There was no room in his chest for anything but emptiness. He knew nothing clearer than this moment. The other matched his now noticeable pace as he walked sideways in an accompanying circle with his opponent. And then, as if they were in a predictable movie, the other spoke.

"So, it all comes down to this," the other said darkly, walking with his 2-foot long sword pointing down and away, as he slowly encompassed the shrinking circle to his opponent. His overcoat gleamed in the shine of the spilling rain that flowed off to the ground. "You should have given up when you had the chance Marcus." Lightning flashed, illuminating his face briefly revealing that all too familiar grin Marcus was learning to hate.

"I never would have thought it was you," Marcus replied in a dark tone. "I trusted you." Marcus increased the grip on his matching sword, his fighting stance matching that of the other.

"And why face me now?" The dark one questioned, almost amused by this engagement. "What good would it do for you to stop me now, when the damage has already been done?"

"I can't allow you to do any more!" Marcus yelled out into the echoing thunder. The trail of his voice scattered to the far reaches of the alleyway, making a stray cat run off in terror. "Too many people have died for this. How many more have to die before it's wrong?"

"Now, that's not fair," the other responded, slowly closing the circle even more. "It isn't my fault those pathetic flesh-sacs cannot understand my methods. This is all part of a greater plan that is even bigger than you and me. I have given you all the keys to understanding it, why won't you see what I have been showing you."

"Enough!" Marcus exclaimed, quickly raising his sword back in a defensive fighting stance. "I won't let you do anymore. Your end is now."

"Well," the other said thoughtfully, changing his stance to match to other, "You better be right. Because if you don't

stop me now, I will take the girl next." His grin widened with the ending of his sentence.

"You won't touch her!" Marcus yelled, as he quickly closed the circle, bringing his sword down on the dark one. The other simply blocked it, and spun away sending Marcus past him to the other side of the alley.

"Nice move, but clearly you have met your maker," the dark one claimed, spinning his sword upward from its previous defense grip. "Clearly you have underestimated my ability..."

"Shut up, would you?" Marcus charged once again, this time meeting the dark one in a massive pattern of relayed quick hits and slashes, none connecting to either body. The motions were so fast, that sparks began to shoot off the swords into the walls of the adjoining buildings in the alley. Marcus then tried once again to connect, missing and sending the other spinning away towards a far wall in defense.

"Very good," he stated, surprised at the outcome of this battle. "But we cannot end this now I am afraid."

"Are you a coward?" Marcus shouted, lowering his sword in resisted anger.

"Hardly," the dark one explained. "It simply isn't the right 'time' if you will to commence in such activities. 'You will know when.'"

"What...?" Marcus began.

"Now, catch me if you can," the dark one said, cutting him off. And with that, the dark one disappeared into a door that was not visible earlier at the end of the alley.

"Bastard," Marcus muttered under his breath, sheathing his sword, and giving pursuit down the alley in a light jog.



SCENE 2

Rachel looked over the piece of paper on her dash with the address she scribbled down earlier. This was indeed the place, and there was no doubt in her mind that this is where Marcus went. She only hoped that the man they were looking for was here. She leaned over her console, and pushed the paper in her glove compartment next to the slew of parking tickets she had collected over the last year. As she closed the compartment and leaned back in her seat, she noticed something shining from the passenger seat to the right of her. She looked closer in the darkness of the car, and saw the small silver pendant in the crevice of the red upholstery of the seat. She leaned over and lifted it up slowly to get a better look at it. The small silver raven looked back at her, wings spread in flight. Marcus, please be safe, she thought to herself. Rachel then placed the pendant around her neck, and pulled her keys out of the ignition.

She opened the car door, and let herself out quietly. She then closed the door, and walked quickly towards the alleyway entrance to the building. The door was always open, so she decided to take advantage of this odd situation. Why was it open?

Marcus quickly scaled the poorly lit incandescent hallways after his opponent, unaware of where the dark one

went. "Where are you, you coward?" Marcus shouted down the hall. His voice echoed almost endlessly in the direction he was going. How long was this building? And then before he could ponder it any longer, he fell through an unseen opening in the floor. He fell for a long while it seemed. And once again without warning, he hit the soft ground below. Marcus took a second to realize where he was. As his eyes focused, he could see that he was lying on top of some old soil. All around him were the bodies of those that the dark one had killed. "Bastard," Marcus muttered again.

As he was about to get up, he was hit hard by something that came from above. The collision was immense, launching him to the ground once again. His head was spinning, but he managed to slowly focus his vision again. Next to him lay that which compromised his decision to get up moments before. He quickly got up to meet the unconscious body.

"Rachel?" He called, bending down to lightly push the hair away from her face. He caressed her face, trying to resuscitate her. She slowly stirred.

Rachel opened her eyes, and began to slowly focus on a somewhat familiar face. "Marcus!" she exclaimed, suddenly realizing it was him. She sprung up to a sitting position, making the blood painfully rush from her head. She reached out and touched his face, as she was happy to see him.

"You shouldn't have come here," he said darkly, pushing her hand away slowly.

"But why? What the hell is so important that you came here by yourself?" she questioned, looking deep into his eyes. She was a little confused by his new attitude. She lightly touched his face again.

He got up, making her hand drop. He then reached down, and picked her up by the arm effortlessly. She was standing before she could protest.

"Look around you," he said. The bodies were now visible to her as well, as she strained to see in the dim room.

"Oh my god," she said, covering her mouth. "They're all here. I can't believe it. We have been looking for them for months. I have to go call the station."

"Never mind about that, you won't get them out in time." He said looking away, unaffected by her reaction. He slowly unsheathed his sword.

"What are you talking about?" she said, confused by his sudden change. "Marcus, what is going on here, what aren't you telling me?"

He looked over at her, unable to smile. "I told you once that there were things you cannot understand. I have seen things that I cannot explain. I know things that your kind cannot see or predict." He turned away once more, thinking about how to get out of this place.

"What do you mean my kind?" she protested.

"I cannot say at this time, but in five minutes and thirteen seconds you best be far from this place." He then turned to a solid wall, and began to slowly meditate.

"Marcus what are you..." she began.

A small circular entrance burned into existence, large enough for them to fit through. "Come on," he said. "I have no time to explain."

She ran over to him, and he took her arm. They quickly ran down the new hallway towards a small light at the end.

4 minutes, 12 seconds...

They emerged from the circular hallway and entered a darkened room. "This is the place," he said, raising his hand. The walls all around began to light up, making the room visible. Rachel didn't even bother to ask him how he did that. The room they were in was not very long across, maybe twenty feet. But the only way out seemed to be up, and that was a long ways indeed. In the center of the room was a wide circular column that followed up into the darkness of the invisible ceiling. A staircase rounded it upward into the darkness.

"We need to take these stairs if we are going to get out of here," he said, looking up at the ceiling as if trying to find the top.

"Marcus," she said quietly, almost unsure of what to say next.

He looked over at her and saw she was looking down at the ground. He could sense she was upset, and he wished he could comfort her. He knew he couldn't really do that now. "Rachel," he said quietly, touching her chin and raising it to meet her eyes with his, "We need to get out of here, or we're going to die. This place is lined with explosives all the way up this chamber," he said, guiding her eyes with his left hand, pointing towards a now visible packet on the wall.

"Is that what I think it is?" she asked, backing off from his touch.

"There's enough C-4 in this place to take out the whole block. We need to get going."

"I wonder how much time..."

"We have three minutes and two seconds," he said suddenly brash. He grabbed her arm, and hurried for the stairs. "Let's get the hell out of here."

2 minutes, 23 seconds...

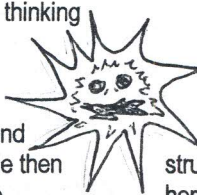
They quickly ascended the circular stairway, which seemed to be endless. Rachel struggled to see if she could make out a ceiling, but she had no such luck. "How far does this go?" She asked, unsure if they were going to make it.

"A ways yet," just don't think about it and keep running...

And so they ran as fast as their legs could carry them...

1 minute, 34 seconds...

"I don't think we are going to make it," Rachel said, struggling to find her breath. She was starting to stagger on her feet. Marcus seemed unaffected.



"We don't have time for this," he said, sheathing his sword and picking her up over his shoulder. Before she could understand what was going on, they were running up the stairs a lot faster than she felt was humanly possible.

"Gotta make it," she thought to herself. She would worry about the "how" part later.

32 seconds...

"We're here," he said, quickly putting her down. She was standing before she could understand what he said to her through the rush of the wind of the stair ascension. They were standing at a small opening on the wall at the top of the stairs. Rachel looked out, and saw the rushing waters of the river down below. She figured they were roughly 4 stories up.

"Are we going to jump?" she asked, looked over at Marcus worried.

"That's the idea," he said stepping towards her. "You go first."

"But I..." she started. She broke her protest, suddenly understanding. "You're not coming with me, are you?"

He reached out and touched her face lightly. "Just remember," he said quietly. "I will always love you. No matter where you are, I will be there in your heart." He turned away and placed his arms on the handrail, looking down the chamber they had just ascended.

"But..." But then it all seemed to make sense to her. She couldn't find the words to argue.

9 seconds...

"Now go," he said quietly, still looking down the chamber.

Rachel took hold of the sides and prayed for luck. She then leaped from the opening, and fell for what seemed to be a year. She suddenly came crashing down into the water. She quickly surfaced in time to see the opening sealed up from where she fell. Marcus didn't come after her.

3 seconds...

"One day," Marcus said under his breath, looking down at the blinking packets on the walls. "One day I will return, and make right... what you did to this world."

0 seconds...

And with those words, the chamber exploded all around him, engulfing him in a sea of flames...

From the water, Rachel could see the building explode. She quickly dove under the cold darkness of the water, to avoid the falling debris. She swam a bit, and was suddenly whisked away by the current to another location on the shore. She managed to reach out and grab a branch she

saw hanging out in the water. She quickly latched on, and pulled herself to shore.

Rachel shivered in the night air, looking off in the distance as the entire chamber went up, expelling its debris into the water. She knew he didn't make it. There was no way anyone could have survived that blast.

"Thank you my love," said, slowly rubbing her arms to stay warm. She heard a light jingle as she did that, which brought her attention to her neck. The raven pendant glistened in the firelight. The silver shone bright as the chamber continued to burn. She lightly reached down, and held the pendant in her left hand. "Maybe one day..." she said with tears in her eyes, "we will be together again."

In the distance Rachel could hear the police and the fire department approaching. She got up, and shook off as much water as she could and began to walk back to where the sirens were going. She made sure to wipe the tears from her eyes as well. She would have to make a statement, and report her findings this night. Somehow this was going to be very difficult to explain...

End of Introduction...

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"Jake Of Time"

By Nadir Balan

(This is a Science Fiction story. It IS funny. Remarks about Jesus are NOT to be taken seriously.)

"Grandaad-GRANDAAAD ...

GRANNNNNNNDDDDDDAAAADD!!!!" Little Jake aged 5 lived with his grandad alone in a comfortable apartment in a quiet neighborhood in the year 2011.

"Yes, what is it son?...oh! look at you, all tucked in and ready for bed?"

"NOOO, I'm ready for my bed time story."

"Heh heh, all right, but tonight I'd like to tell you a story MY grandad told me when I was your age."

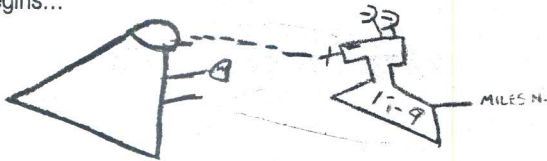
Grandad's name was also Jake. Jake was born in the year 2077 but he never lived then. He was taken back to the year 2006 by a time traveler who he grew to know as his grandfather and was raised by this man who told him fantastic time travel stories, many of which he would never remember. When he encountered these situations himself later in his life as a time traveler he felt amazingly calm because deep inside his mind somewhere he had already experienced them.

As Jake grew older he slowly started to understand the relationship between him and his grandfather; he also started to understand the mechanics of the time machine granddad always referred to in his stories. Jake eventually built his own time machine based on his grandfather's model and used it to travel in time. He had many great adventures and at the age of 55 he decided to retire and focus on a family. He looked back at his life and remembered a spectacularly happy childhood – who knows how mundane

his life would turn out to be if he was left in 2077. Being raised by yourself, so to speak, was incredible. You never had to feel ashamed and you never got in trouble for the bad things you did. That was especially a good thing because you could never lie either!

"Grandad, are you going to tell me a story or are you just going to sit there?"

"Huh? Oh, sorry son must have dozed there... this story is about a time when a man named Jake went veeery far back in time with a special time machine. In fact he went soo far back that he met a man named Jesus..." and so one of the many adventures of the great "Jake of time" begins...



As Jake walked out of his tiny sphere machine, he coughed. The air was clean...too clean. He looked down at his compass/watch. It was the best travelers brand money could buy so there was no reason to doubt its accuracy. He turned and started walking east. He encountered a couple of villagers on the way and had no difficulty understanding the language. He was there to find Jesus Christ and get to experience some ancient history. As he approached the small village, he asked around until suddenly he heard a gentle voice behind him say "Hello son, I see you are looking for an important man here in the village. Why do you seek him?"

Jake immediately knew it was him, his heart raced with excitement, it was Jesus Christ! He slowly turned around with big eyes and a stupid smile on his face. "...Jesus?-HUH?! JESUS?!? YOU'RE JESUS?!?!!" Jake was astonished to find the "Son of God" to be 5 feet tall with a crew cut and a silly little goatee. "What the hell is going on? You can't be Jesus, you don't look anything like these people!"

"Yeah-Yeah, Shaddap! I know you're a time traveler as well, the watch on your wrist gave you away faster than a wolverine high on angel dust!"

"Huh? Wh...how?"

"Don't worry, come back to HQ and I'll tell you everything."

Jesus and Jake walked down the road to a little structure guarded by 3 men. As they went in, Jake saw the room illuminated "miraculously" when Jesus said "Let there be light!" *Clap-Clap* "A little 20th century technology helps the faith immensely" Jesus said with a snicker.

"What's going on here? I came to meet Jesus Christ the Son of God, and I end up with you!"

"Yeah- Yeah but these people do not have any idea that anything is unusual, and neither will history."

"I...s...so you guys are time travelers?"

"Yes, me and my friends here have been doing this holy crap for quite a while now"

"But I don't get it. You obviously are no holy man who could perform miracles. How did you end up in this situation, how did you influence so many people?"

"It's a long story my friend, but what else do us time travelers have...Very well where do I begin?...It was a late, dark afternoon in the year 2025. Me and these 11 buddies of mine here were at my place kinda hangin out you know? Suddenly out of nowhere some dude appears in the living room! He comes out of this big funky device. Obviously we were all interested in what he had to say. He proceeded to explain that he was a future version of Paul here and that he came to give us this machine so we could go back in time to fulfill our destinies. We were all like "HUH?" But anyways, we ended up believing him, which took a while by the way, and in we go, 12 punks in biblical garment. We were supposed to come back to meet Jesus or something, we did not fully understand the future Paul's instructions, he had developed a heavy accent. So there we are with a copy of the bible, and obviously we knew that technology was quite poor back then so we brought a whole lot of stuff to impress the dudes of the past as well. We installed the clapper ourselves. Isn't that cool?...So like I said we had a copy of the bible in order to have some idea of what to expect. I don't know what your time machine looks like but ours was pretty big you know? Like 5 or 6 sofas and a trunk. We came back in time a little too far. When we stopped we stopped with a big crash, we all tumbled out and saw a dead body jammed in our main engine! Initially that was pretty funny but then we learned that that was the original Jesus!! That was kinda funny too but we kinda freaked out as well. We were like " OH my GOD! Our time machine fell on JESUS CHRIST!!" But eventually we got over it and realized that our mission here was not to kill Jesus but to act out his life. Influencing people and creating a legacy that would last for thousands of years!"

Jake's eyes were wide open; he could not believe what he was hearing. He finally opened his mouth "Dude, you're so full of yourself! How did you, as Jesus Christ the Son of God almighty, perform such fantastic miracles?!"

"Heheh! That's the funny part man, I didn't!!! It's lies, all made up! You know all those people I supposedly healed?... NEVER HAPPENED!! Now of course some people have witnessed the technological wonders I posses and after that, with a little bit of humor and a little bit of charisma, these folk would believe I could turn water into wine!! HAAAAHAHA!!! JESUS CHRIST I kill me!!" Tears of laughter filled Jesus' eyes. Jesus continued with his story.

"So we've been going by the book ever since and everything seems to have worked out just fine, I mean influence-wise. The bible would be a pretty dry book if I rewrote it."

Jake looked around, still light-headed from all he was experiencing. "This is incredible. So the almighty savior Jesus was going by a copy of his life all along. I mean this is what really happened, there was no other "original" Jesus. This is going to disappoint Sister Karen quite a bit!"

Jesus stepped in front of him "Well, it's not over yet, although we seem to have ran out of things to do in the book. It's quite late now, why don't we sleep? Tomorrow we will move to another location. Join us at dinner 3 kilometers to the south. You will find a building with a cross on it, this is how we signal each other as the cross currently has no religious meaning."

When Jake woke up the next morning, his back pains were unbearable, but he had slept on a bunch of hay after all and had not expected anything else. He rubbed his neck as he slowly stood up. "I can't believe that Jesus is actually an obnoxious little time traveling punk with a copy of the bible... I would have made a MUCH better Jesus."

Jake wandered around the village all day, talking to a whole variety of people. "This Jesus fellow is quite popular," he kept telling himself. He even met some very respectable people who showed interest in joining them for dinner so he told them of their little meeting place thinking that Jesus could use the social interaction.

As evening time rolled around, Jake decided to start walking toward the place Jesus described.

When he finally got there 3 hours later he was so exhausted that he just barged into the building without announcing who he was before he went in. He was immediately tackled to the floor by 2 of Jesus' larger friends. "HEY! What the hell is going on here?" Jake asked as he received a swift kick to the chest. "It's me Jake remember?"

"OH, Jesus Christ, sorry Jake" said the large guy with curly hair as he helped Jake back on his feet. "We can't be too precautious these days." Jesus was sitting at the far end of the table waiting for his friends to join him. They all sat down and Jesus started to talk.

"My friends, as you know, we have been acting out Jesus' life as accurately as we could possibly perceive; although we failed to perform any "real" miracles we have touched many. Over the years we created a legacy. Our names shall live forever! Even though we were not spoken to by God, I do believe we were put here by him, God bless you all."

Jake was surprised to hear him speak in such a calm "Jesus-like" manner. Jesus continued, "JAKE! I find you to be an inexperienced, lousy time traveler, although I do not want you to feel guilty about what you have done... it was meant to be."

"But Jesus, I don't understand. What do you mean?" Before anything else could be said the doors barged open again. This time in came 20 big hairy men. Jake recognized the smaller one in the back. "Oh! hello there, I didn't think you were going to make it. I see you've brought some friends." Jake turned to Jesus and said "I hope you don't mind, I invited some friends I met in the villa-" but before he could finish the big guy in front of the crowd punched him across the room.



Jesus turned to Jake and calmly said "THOSE ARE ROMANS YOU IDIOT! THEY'RE GONNA KILL ME, JESUS CHRIST!! WHAT ARE YOU SOME SORT OF MORON?!!!"

The Romans pushed everyone aside with great ease and picked up Jesus by the neck. Before anyone could do anything they were out the door again. The place was suddenly very cold, all eyes were on Jake. "I-I... don't get it!" Paul pointed to Jake's watch, Jake looked at it and said, "So what? it's a nice wat-..." Jake's silence lasted for a few seconds but for him it was a lifetime. Finally he spoke again: "J...it's not....it's just a brand name...J,J...JUDAS THE TRAVELER!!"

"Granpaaaa!! Is that the end of the story?" little Jake asked.

"Well pretty much son, I mean after that Jesus' 11 friends weren't very friendly, as a going away gift they left me with a lot of blood on the wrong side of my skin!"

"You said me granpa, was that Jake you?"

"Yes it was son, er, yes it IS...um... whatever."

Little Jake did not believe a word he had heard.

"Granpa, that story sucked, why would that guy even want to be Jesus if he really wasn't anyway?"

"-That's a good question son, let me sum it up for you. You see, we all have a purpose here, but when we are taken out of our time and placed in another we can no longer live as we did mentally, so we take upon a more reasonable, logical existence that fits into that time. This is not conscious, nor is it something you could stop, it all takes you over in the form of free will. When you are there, that is what you WANT to do, you never can do anything that hasn't already happened or is not supposed to happen. You could not, for example, kill your own grandfather because when you get there you wouldn't be able to get yourself to WANT to do it! There are no exceptions. Does that clear things up for you son?"

"Granpaa, you never make any sense!!"

"I know son, thank God for alcohol!"

The END

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"The Imposters"

by Michael Cook

It was Monday morning, on a sunny spring day. I had just woken up, while my friend Sam was still asleep next to me. I immediately jumped out of my desk chair screaming. Sam woke right up from the screaming. We both realized that we must have dozed off last night some time when we were trying to finish our paper. The paper was assigned to us a while ago, but, being the procrastinators that we were, we both waited until the last minute to start it. Our English teacher let his students pair up to write it, on a topic of their choice. Sam and I were in the same English class and had been friends since the third grade when Sam moved next

door to me, so we joined together to write this paper. The topic we chose was time travel. It was something that we were interested in and figured it should be pretty easy because we could get all the information we needed from Rob.

Rob lives just down the street from both of us and he is a senior as well. He doesn't really have any friends and was voted the weirdest kid in school two years in a row. Most people think he is just plain dumb, but that isn't the truth. His shyness presents him that way, because of his lack of trying to socialize. He is obsessed with the idea of time travel. It seems that he has read everything you possibly can on time travel, and seen all the TV shows and specials dealing with time travel. Every time you tried to talk to him he would always find a way to start talking about time travel. Anybody who has seen his bedroom calls it the Mecca of time travel. Sam and I were the closest people that Rob could call friends. We figured a paper on time travel would be easy as long as you know someone like Rob. All we had to do was have Rob give us some ideas and some good reference sources. The paper would be an easy A.

We got all the information we needed on Friday after school. There was no way we were going to start it on Friday night. We already had plans. We tried starting it Saturday afternoon, but were distracted by the beautiful weather outside. Nobody wants to be cooped up in a house all day writing a paper, so we ended up spending the rest of the day at a friend's house. Our friend got a new video game and we had to try it out. Eventually Sunday came. We both had to work Sunday morning until four in the afternoon. After we ate dinner, we got together to finally write this paper. This time the television was the distraction. There was a movie on channel 11 that we hadn't seen in a while and wanted to watch it. Within the two hours the movie lasted, we had a total of one paragraph written. After the movie, the Knicks game was on. A win tonight for the Knicks win clinch the division for them, and guaranteed them home court advantage throughout the playoffs. There was no way Sam and I could miss this.

The game ended up going into double overtime with the Knicks pulling out a win from a last second three-point shot by Allan Houston against the Heat, which put me and Sam in a good mood, until we noticed the time. It was close to midnight, but we weren't worried since all we really had to do was copy the information we got from Rob onto paper. Time was flying by. Minutes seemed like seconds. Before we knew it, it was already three thirty in the morning and we weren't even close to being done. What seemed like a breeze at first now seemed impossible. Sometime soon after, we both fell asleep.

When I woke up it was seven fifteen in the morning. We had to be at school in forty-five minutes, because our first class was English. If we skipped class our teacher would take an automatic fifty points off the paper for being late, and there was no way we could afford it because Sam and I are on the borderline of failing, and if we fail this class we won't be able to graduate and will probably sitting in

those same seats again next year. We started to panic since the paper wasn't done and there was nothing we could do about it. Our only option was to go to Rob's house and see if he had something we could turn in.

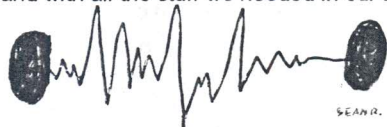
We went straight to his house and explained to him the predicament. Rob said that he couldn't help us. Sam and I told him that we were desperate and if he had something we could use, anything at all, we would do anything for it. Rob thought for a minute and told us he had an idea. He would help us out on the conditions that we would keep this a secret and we would have to hang out together for the rest of the school year and the whole summer. We really didn't care about the conditions as long as we got a paper to turn in.

Rob led us to the basement of his house. There were gadgets and devices all over the place. Sam and I were starting to wonder what we were doing down here, until Rob told us to our surprise that he had a time machine. Rob gave it some technical term. All that we understood was blah blah blah transporter. We didn't see how this would help us, let alone believe him that it worked. What we wanted was something solid, something tangible, preferably a paper, and became a little frustrated with Rob. He was wasting our time showing us one of his toys or something. We told him to stop fooling around and be serious. Rob explained that he could send us back in time so that we could write our paper, and when we are done we just come back to the time right after we left and go off to school like we were never in this situation.

All Sam and I really cared about was if the machine was safe. We were desperate, and were going to do this, because we had to do this. We had no real choice. Rob assured us it was safe, at least he thought it was. He only used it once before, so he knew that it worked and everything was safe then. We still asked him if we could pass over the time machine and have him just give us some kind of paper to turn in, but he said he had nothing and his time machine was the only way he could help us. Sam and I got all the materials we needed and met back in Rob's basement. We were very skeptical at first since we were about to do something that had previously seemed impossible and was now a reality. You can surprise yourself at some of the things you will do when you are really desperate. I thought the time machine looked dumb but Sam thought it was actually kind of cool looking. Rob had to input some data into his computer, which was hooked up to his time machine. When he was done, he told us to stand back and wait. Two metallic balls, which were perfect spheres, on the top of separate poles started to become energized. They became pretty bright and sparks started to fly all over the place. At the blink of an eye, the balls released the energy they were generating and it traveled along wires to some type of circle and seemed to create some kind of energy disruption and filled the circle with some sort of energy source. The metal circle looked like a big letter o that you would find on a store sign in front of a big store. The middle of it was originally filled with some



type of clear plastic, which was transformed into this energy source when the energy burst hit it. It looked like you were staring straight at a pool of water in this circle. Rob said it was a time ripple and was created from the mixing of certain chemicals, gases, and elements that created the burst of energy, which caused the time disruption. The circle is made from some special metals and alloys which allow this energy disruption to occur. It seemed like some type of portal. Rob just jumped right through. It took Sam and I a minute, but we jumped through simultaneously with our eyes closed and with all the stuff we needed in our arms.



We were transported instantly back in time to about two days ago. When Sam and I came out and opened our eyes, everything looked the same. The first thing I did was take a deep breath. Rob told us he sent us back in time to Saturday morning. He was away at his grandparents house all last weekend, so the house was empty. Then all of a sudden the portal disappeared. Just then it hit us, that we had no idea on how we were going to get back home. Rob said he had it taken care of. After six hours, his computer would reopen the time ripple so they could go back to the future. Then he started to brag about the computer program he made, which allowed him to travel back and forth in time. Apparently this program is what reopens the time ripple. It can differentiate between the differences in real time and the time they are facing in the past. So they could spend long periods of time in the past, but only be gone for a second, and the computer understands this. We ran straight upstairs, confirmed that it was really Saturday and got straight to work.

We finished our paper just in time. There were only three minutes to spare. The time ripple opened right on time without a problem, and we went right through it, Sam and I a little bit more confidently. As soon as we got through, Sam and I let out a big sigh of relief. We made it back safely and wrote what seemed to be a good paper. The time ripple was only open for a minute and then closed back up. It was sort of amazing that what we couldn't do in a weekend, we just accomplished in a second. Rob had to go check out something on his computer real quick when I noticed something quite odd on the other side of the room. Rob saw it too, and the room was completely silent. They were looking at exact human duplicates of themselves. It was like something out of a sci-fi movie and not something that could happen in real life. Yet again I just traveled through time in some magical portal device, which also is like something out of a sci-fi movie. Rob demanded to know who they were and what the hell they were doing here in his basement. They asked the same question back at us. At first I thought it was some practical joke. Everything seemed surreal. I thought maybe Rob had some other fancy, groundbreaking hologram device that produced duplicate images of themselves, but I changed my mind when I heard the tone

of his voice. He was being extremely serious. He tried to say something else but he kept stuttering and blinking his eyes really quick. He was freaking out. I had no idea what to think or say. Rob reached in a drawer and pulled out a gun. He aimed it at these imposters and told them not to move or he would blow their brains out. I almost wet my pants when I saw Rob do this. I was shocked to see that he owned a gun and that he had the guts to actually use one. The imposters put their arms up in the air giving up. Rob had us tie their hands together behind their back as tight as we could, and round them up into a big metal cage-like closet, which he locked with his key. The imposters put up no resistance at all. I guess they were scared of Rob and his gun. As soon as Rob locked the closet he ran to the computer to check out his calculations and some numbers. Everything checked out. They should be in the right place, which would mean the imposters were really the imposters. Rob knew that it couldn't be the machine that messed up and sent them into some parallel universe. Sam asked him if Rob had any idea what was going on and he had absolutely no clue at all. We didn't have much time to chat, because it was getting late. So much just happened in a short period of time that I didn't get a chance to think about it at all, like actually going back in time and meeting a clone of me. I could write a novel on everything that happened to me so far this morning. Rob double-checked that the closet was locked and it was off to school we went. If my morning was this bad, I couldn't wait to see what my school day was going to be like.

After school, we raced back to Rob's house. Nobody said a word to each other the whole school day. I tried my hardest not to think about what had happened, but it was impossible not to. Rob still had no explanation for what happened earlier. The only thing he could think of was that the time ripple sent them to some a parallel universe, but everything was the same before they went back in time, and everything on the computer checked out. That assured us that we were the ones in the right place and the only option we have is to dispose of these imposters. The only question is how do we do this? We only had two hours, because that is when Rob's parents would be home, and his parents would kill him if they found out what he had done. Sam and I were clueless on solving this dilemma, and were counting on Rob to figure it out. With the time we had left, the only thing Rob could come up with was to send the imposters through time machine to get rid of them for good. The only problem was that Rob's program wasn't designed to do this. It would always make a time ripple for the people who went through to return. It took Rob an hour to figure out a way to make it so that only a time ripple would open to go into the past and not one to get back. All he had to do was change some equations around and play with some numbers, nothing hard. When he was finished his shirt was all sweaty and his hands were a little shaky. He was really nervous. Rob had no idea if it would work or where and when he was sending them. Rob figured that as long as he didn't know where he was sending themselves, he wouldn't feel guilty later on for sending them somewhere bad where they might

die. All he could do was hope and pray that it would all work out. Within that hour, Sam and I gave the imposters some food and water. Ourselves looked hungry and thirsty, and I wasn't about to let myself suffer. It is a little weird that one of the persons that is being imprisoned is actually myself. You treat them a little different since you know them well.

It was time to send these imposters away somewhere. Rob planned to overload the time machine, creating a time ripple in a parallel universe, which would keep them from interfering with the history in their universe and keep them from bumping into each other again in any future trips to the past. Rob was going to make them somebody else's problem. He had no way of controlling what universe he was going to send them to and nor did he care. It was all random. Then, he fired up the machine. Rob grabbed his gun, Sam and I picked up baseball bats, and we forced them out of the closet. They complied with our demands, but didn't look happy at all. If they had the chance, or if the roles were reversed, they would beat us down or shoot us in a second. The time ripple opened seconds after. We were like pirates making the imposters walk the plank through the time ripple. All of a sudden, I hear a car pulling in the driveway. My head turns to the window facing the driveway, hoping to see something, when I feel a blow to the gut. Myself kicked back and landed a solid hit in the gut. Sam swung his bat and cracked myself in the ribs, knocking him through the portal. Sam and Rob's imposters broke through the ropes that tied their hands together. They must have loosened them beforehand while locked in the closet. Sam's imposter tackled Sam to the ground and Rob's imposter wrestled with Rob for the gun. I felt paralyzed, because myself knocked the wind out of me and I couldn't move. I found out then that I guess I could kick really hard.

Sam and himself were wrestling on the ground. Sam threw himself off himself, and himself landed right beside me. I got up and kicked him. I seemed like a kicker in the NFL. The imposter went straight through the upright. I knew I had perfect form on that kick, and if I were twenty yards away it still would have been good. Now Sam and I had to help Rob get the gun away from himself. We had to be careful because if they pointed the gun in our direction, we could get shot. We could hear the front door shut upstairs. We didn't have much time left at all, so we tried sneaking up on them from behind when a loud bang filled the room.

I thought that the noise had broken my eardrums. The last imposter pulled the trigger of the gun, and the bullet hit Rob in the foot. We could see blood coming from his foot, spilling all over the floor. Rob and himself just stood there looking at it. The imposter stared at Rob's foot as if he had shot himself in the foot, and Rob had a look in his face like he shot himself when it was really himself that shot him. Sam and I saw this as the perfect opportunity to get rid of the imposter while he was gazing at Rob's foot. We both shoved him through the time ripple. It closed two seconds after we shoved him through. We finally got rid of them and everything was solved. Rob's mom came halfway down the basement stairs to see what that loud noise was. Rob just

told her it was nothing and she went away. We had to cover his foot up quickly, because if she saw it she would definitely freak out. I was fine, Sam's face was all red and he had some scratches on him from wrestling himself, and Rob of course was shot in the foot. Sam and I wanted to take him straight to the hospital, but Rob insisted he do something first. Rob picked the gun off the ground and aimed it at the computer. He put three bullets into it, and then went right after the rest of his equipment to the time machine. He completely destroyed the whole time machine. It was so bad that it wouldn't even be considered scrap metal. His mom came back down and said if he didn't stop it with that noise, then he would be grounded for all of next week. Rob didn't care, as long as he knew the time machine was destroyed, it would be worth any punishment to him. Rob said that he wasn't about to let anything like that happen again.

After his wreck less tirade, Sam and I snuck him out the back door of his house and brought him to the hospital. As we sat in the emergency room waiting to be treated, we all agreed that we had learned a lesson from this once in a lifetime experience. It was, DON'T MESS WITH TIME TRAVEL.

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"The Pearl of Light"

A Fairy Tale

By Alexander Fluegel

Once upon a time there were two brothers who lived in a village. The elder brother was called Dizuto and possessed great riches. He was never content with the wealth he accumulated, and hence amassed an ever-greater fortune. However the younger brother, Antino, was a poor hunter. His cabin was situated along the village border behind a curve in the river at the forest's edge.

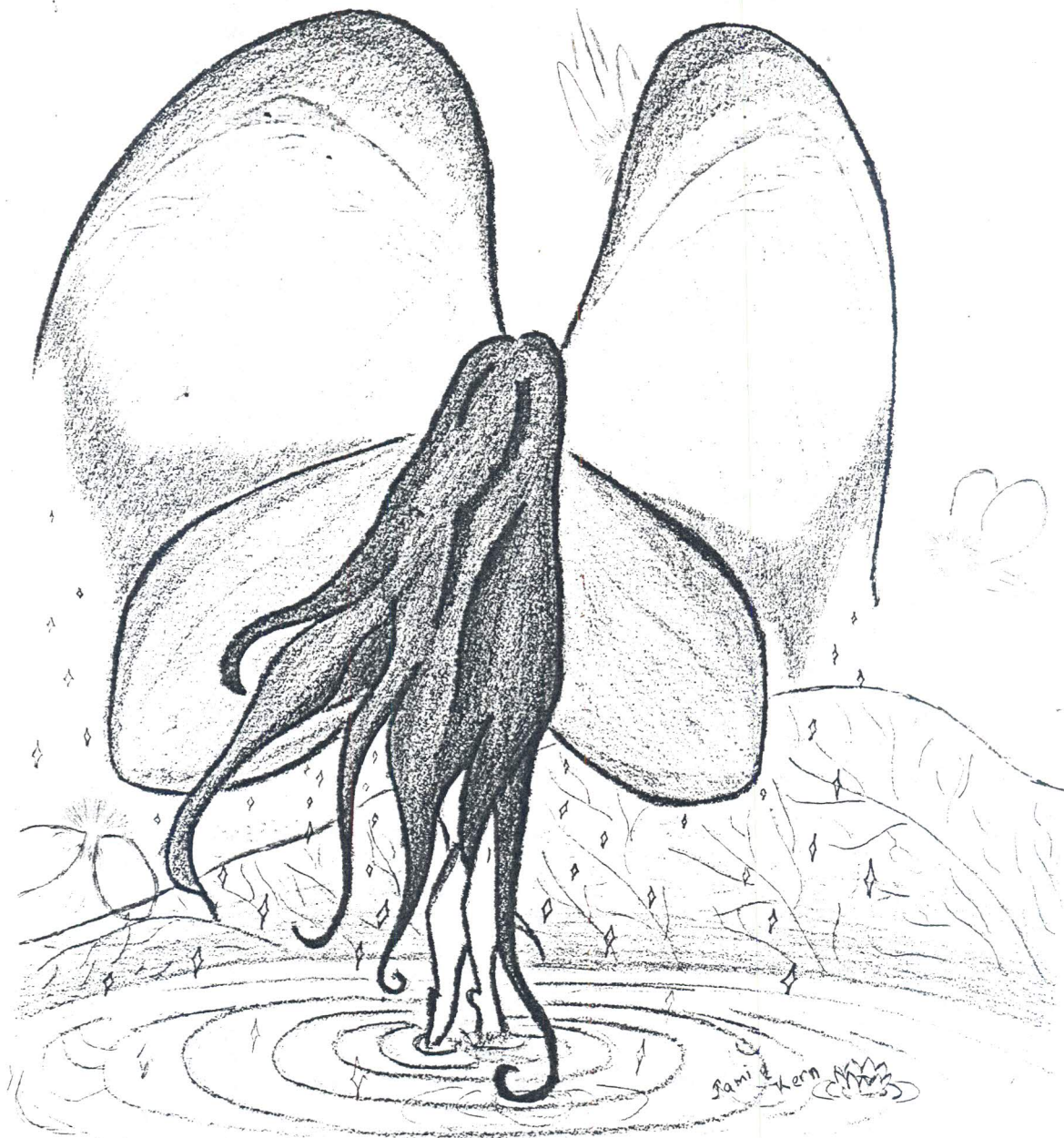
Just a few hours' walk from the village rose a towering mountain visible from a great distance. Many fairytales and legends were told about it, about enchanted castles and great riches, but nobody knew if any of this was true. For whoever once lost his way in the foothills at the base of the mountain might suddenly, especially at night, hear the chatter of mysterious voices behind him! Were evil spirits up to their mischief? Who knows?! No one wanted to tangle with them, so they all made scarce as quickly as they possibly could.

One day, after a rather disappointing hunt, Antino discovered deer tracks which, as the prints indicated, must be very big and strong. He immediately followed them deeper and deeper into the forest. "When one is so seldom met by the blessings of good fortune," he said to himself, "one is even happier as a result!"

Finally Antino had made it. He saw the magnificent animal, concealed now by only a few bushes, standing in the clearing. Antino sneaked up on him quietly, tightly grasped his bow and arrow, and - "Oh, dear hunter, please

help me!" he suddenly heard a wretched voice moaning behind him. Bewildered, he let his arms fall and turned around: There in the thick brushwood of a briar, a little bird helplessly flapped its wings. Antino carefully opened the branches and helped him out.

off to in the midst of the hunt? Everything looked strange and unfamiliar. From the clearing he saw his village down below in the valley, which was much too far away for him to think of returning now. Then, all at once, he realized where



"Thank you very kindly, dear hunter, this you shall not regret!" it spoke before flying off, its heart gladdened. However, unfortunately, the deer was alerted to the imminent danger it faced, and it, too, was away quicker than a fleeting breeze.

Thus Antino was left alone in the clearing. The sun was rapidly approaching the horizon, and it was now time to think about heading home. But wherever had he wandered

he was. He had begun to climb part of the mysterious mountain! This had never happened to him before!

Antino was tired after such a hard day. He made camp for himself beneath a big tree, laid down his weary head and fell asleep in the blink of an eye.

He did not rest for long, however. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, he heard a voice! Startled, he quickly sat up. Was it not the sound of someone calling his name? Or was it only a dream? Cautiously, he tip-toed into the

darkness - indeed, there it was again! No, this was no dream! He could hear it very distinctly: someone was clearly calling his name, and it seemed to be coming from the direction leading to the top of the mountain! But whatever should this mean? Was it robbers, or was it a ghost hoping to lead him astray? Or was someone in danger who needed his help? Upon hearing the strange voice a third time, he took heart and followed the call.

The journey through the nighttime darkness was long and hard. Antino pondered whether it might not be better to turn back and wait until daylight. Then, finally, he saw a faint gleam from within the fog; with tremendous anticipation, Antino climbed the rest of the way to the top. Oh wonder of wonders, before him stood an enormous castle! Its walls and towers rose, perfectly erect, high up into the sky, so high that it made him dizzy looking up at the top! Although a muffled shimmer came from all the windows and the open gate, it was strangely silent. Could they have forgotten to turn out the lights before going to sleep? The old watchman standing at the entrance would surely know the answer. Antino called out to him, but he stood, motionless, uttering not a word. He bravely tapped the dark figure on the shoulder and - But what was this? The soldier was as lifeless as stone! There was something mysterious going on here! In order to get to the bottom of things, Antino courageously entered the castle through the open gate.

It was built in the shape of a star around the courtyard in the middle, and further subdivided into four sections of three corresponding to the twelve months of the year. The walls consisted entirely of brilliant jewels in the colors of the sky and the earth. If only it weren't for this dim half-light. Then it would truly be the Palace of the Sun! But, oh dear, all the people, the animals and plants, indeed even the water in the fountain, and the flames in the fireplace - everything once living had been turned to black stone! Dark wafts of mist circulated.

Antino passed through many rooms before finally exiting out into the courtyard. Never before had he experienced anything so truly amazing as here, when, surrounded by twelve massive trees, he beheld the wondrous crystal tower! From the outside, one saw only one's own reflection. From the inside, however, one could have looked far out across the land had it not been for the shroud of mist! Astonished, Antino climbed the many steps to the top. But in a small room at the top, he encountered something greater than could ever be expressed in words: Here, in front of the window, sat, a thousand times more beautiful than the stars in the heavens, the Princess of the Castle - stone, from head to toe! Calmly she looked into the distance.

He was so moved by the sight of her that he could think of nothing but returning life to her and all the other motionless beings, no matter what this might entail!

He turned around and saw, above the entrance to the chamber, the following words:[rhyme in German]

"Here there once was a kingdom / Of great power and glory, / And for miles was known / Its greatest treasure, the

Pearl of Light. // From within this castle it radiated light, / From the tallest tower out across the world. / Its luster to life joy did give, / Like the sun that crosses the firmament. // But through greed and false devotion, / Its worth was soon forgotten, / And in time the kingdom consumed, / Its inhabitants lifeless, turned to stone. // Now rests the pearl deep in the Eastern Sea / In the home of the Lord of the Dragons. / To clear a path through the high waters / This sword on the wall the power doth have."

Beneath it hung a sword, and one could read these words: *"He who finds the Pearl of Light / All suffering shall overcome."*

After hesitating briefly, Antino took the sword and examined it carefully. Secured in its sheathe, it looked rather inconspicuous; when he removed the sword, however, it flashed brilliantly, and so sharp was the blade that it could even cut water in half! Yes, with its help, it must be possible to cross the Eastern Sea to the Lord of the Dragons. Antino fastened it and began his journey.

Upon reaching his village in the wee hours of the morning, he was met by his older brother, Dizuto.

"Greetings to you, dear brother! Since when do you carry a sword with you? Do you want to become a soldier?"

Antino recounted the previous night's experience and said:

"This sword has the power to part the waters of the Eastern Sea, so that one may make one's way to the Lord of the Dragons. I intend to find out how to gain possession of the Pearl of Light, so that life may be returned to the castle atop the mountain."

"Oh, a very bold resolution!" Dizuto cried in his astonishment. "But, say, why don't you spend your last night here at my country estate? I invite you for a farewell dinner!"

Hmm. Antino paused to reflect. Is it not better to leave at once? But his older brother persisted until he finally agreed.

In reality, though, Dizuto had concealed his true designs. He wished to possess the brightly shining pearl himself, even if this meant he would have to err from the straight and narrow! However, in order to do so, he would have to take from Antino the sword with the power to part the waters - and this by the end of tonight!

The day was soon over, and when it was dark, Antino went, as planned, to the magnificent house in which Dizuto lived. The latter had prepared a sumptuous meal and secretly placed a sleep-inducing drug in Antino's wine. Both brothers ate and drank to their heart's content. Soon Antino felt so tired that he fell asleep right at the table! Dizuto rejoiced. He took the sword and hid it under his cloak before carrying his brother off into the forest. May the wild beasts feast upon him there! Then, feeling content, he returned home, saddled his horse and rode off, taking the road which headed east.

Meanwhile the forest crawled with wild beasts! Those hungriest among them came closer and closer as they circled in on Antino in his deep slumber. At this very

moment, the little bird he had freed from the briar the day before flew over. Quickly it summoned its friend, a big eagle. He seized Antino by his belt just as the monsters' gaping jaws were poised to close down upon him! He brought him to his cottage and laid him down safely on a bed of straw.

Here Antino rested an entire week! Not until the morning of the seventh day did he open his eyes. At first, everything seemed normal, but then, suddenly, he recalled the petrified castle on the mountaintop. Had he been dreaming? No, that couldn't be. Antino would never forget the princess, more beautiful than the stars, and her crystal castle! But where had he left the sword with the power to part the waters? He searched to no avail. Then he recalled the farewell dinner at his brother's home. Quickly he asked the villagers, but no one had ever heard of a sword with such magical powers, and Dizuto had already left.

Thus neither did Antino hesitate. He hung seven pairs of straw shoes over his shoulders and began his journey to the Eastern Sea without the sword.

Much time passed. One day Dizuto crossed a broad stream and came to a place where it had rained continuously for a long time. As it was a very low-lying area, the water continued to rise; most of the fields and farm houses could not be reached without getting one's feet wet! If this continued, the harvest was sure to be ruined and the houses brought to collapse! The old folks and children had fled to the nearest hills, while men and women paddled around their farmhouses and tried to save their possessions.

There was an old fortuneteller, however, who knew what to do: "We must quickly go to the Lord of the Dragons whose home is in the Eastern Sea and fetch the Silver Ladle. Only with the Silver Ladle can we clear away the flood waters; and then the rain will also stop."

But who would perform such a difficult task? No one could be found.

Dizuto had finished the rest of his provisions just before arriving and was once again hungry. What to do? When he heard that the peasants were searching for someone who would go to the Lord of the Dragons, the idea dawned on him: "I am on my way there, countrymen. If you give me enough to eat, I will fetch you the Silver Ladle!"

The peasants were very happy when they heard this. At once they gathered their meager provisions and gave them to Dizuto. He was more than willing to accept them and rode off, content.

Some time later Antino, too, crossed the broad stream before coming to the flooded fields. When he saw the calamity, he was filled with grief and did all that he could to help the villagers recover their things from the water. While working alongside them, he overheard that they needed only the Silver Ladle in order to clear away, without effort, the terrible flood-waters! And this one could find in the possession of the Lord of the Dragons.

Antino did not need think for long: "I am on my way, friends, and I shall bring you back the ladle."

All were amazed, for a man had just arrived with the same goal in mind, and now another so daring wayfarer has come! But they said to him, too: "Bring us the Silver Ladle, dear friend!"

Antino promised to and resumed his journey.

Then, in the midst of a storm, he reached the Eastern Sea. It was like a raging battlefield: the wind howled like whole legions of rabid dogs, the waves pounded the shore, and huge rocks were flung about in the surf.

Grasping the water-parting sword, the elder brother, Dizuto, stood at the water's edge, for he did not wish to gamble with his life. Then, to his great surprise, he saw Antino approaching; after he had overcome the initial shock, he thought of a solution. Quickly he spoke, in as friendly manner as he could: "Oh, how good it is to see you again safe and sound and looking well, dear brother! I had begun to fear that you might sleep for all eternity after our meal together! Yes, and therefore I finally decided to embark myself in search of the pearl; surely you would have done the same in my position? Now, if you like, you may, of course, have your sword back and be the first to descend into the sea."

Antino could sense that his brother was not telling the whole truth. But should he engage in an endless discussion with him now? Should the beautiful princess be forced to wait still longer, and should the peasants in the flooded regions be left to drown? No, time was short! Antino took heart, retrieved the sword, unsheathed it and descended into the raging Eastern Sea.

What happened next was unbelievable: it became light, and, as if cut in two by a sharp knife, the waters parted. There was an open path into the chasm! Dizuto seized the favorable opportunity. He grabbed hold of Antino's coattail, closed his eyes and ran blindly behind his brother. Meanwhile his horse remained back on the beach.

The path descended sharply now. It took extraordinary courage to follow straight along the sword's path through the furious waters, while, to the left and to the right, horrible monsters from the bottom of the sea fought one another!

Finally, though, both brothers arrived at the fortress of the Lord of the Dragons. His loud bellow penetrated one's bones, and he intended to gobble them up without delay!

However, like a flaming meteor, the light from the water-parting sword struck him!

"I am Antino! We seek the Pearl of Light and the Silver Ladle!"

Blinded, the Lord of the Dragons shrank back as he produced an awful howl! Then he hissed, "This sword is your good fortune, mortals! But keep in mind: We have an old law here! And he who fails to heed it, ah, soon his final hour shall have struck! Now follow me!"

He led the brothers to the treasure chamber and pointed to an inscription above the entrance: *When you see the treasures here, / One thing you must not forget: / But one alone here for each - / No more thee I do beseech!*

They both knew at once what this meant. Dizuto wished to beat his brother and quickly shouted, "I want the shining pearl!" Then he darted into the treasure chamber.

Inside lights flashed and sparkled as in the fabulous lands of magical dreams! On the walls, on the tables - everywhere - were the most beautiful treasures imaginable. Dizuto had already taken for himself the biggest of the pearls. Its golden shimmer filled the entire room, in which mysterious, moving images were reflected: great heroes, shining palaces, amazing wonders! Dizuto put the pearl in the bag he strapped to his back. However, this was not nearly enough. He would have preferred to take everything, had it not been for the Lord of the Dragons ominous warning.

And Antino? Did he not also need a shining pearl, in order to deliver the castle atop the mountain from its awful plight? No, this one was enough. He thought of the great flood and the promise he had made to the poor peasants there. So he asked for the Silver Ladle.

The Lord of the Dragons gnashed his teeth and hissed: "Take with you that which you have chosen! But out of my sight, before I change my mind!"

Neither of the brothers hesitated, both embarked upon their journey home at once.

When they came again to the water's edge, the storm had subsided. The elder brother mounted the horse and raced off with the shining pearl. Antino, traveling by foot, was much slower.

Soon, Dizuto reached the flooded region. Here the rain had still not stopped, and the flood-waters continued to rise. The peasants eagerly awaited their rescuer. Finally, Dizuto rode in! They surrounded him from all sides and inquired about the Silver Ladle.

"The Lord of the Dragons did not wish to give it to me," he lied. "There was nothing I could do." Then he spurred his horse on and made sure he was soon out of sight.

Three days passed before Antino arrived. As he approached from the distance, he cried out to the peasants: "Come here, friends, I have brought the Silver Ladle!"

This they did not need to hear a second time! Antino took the ladle himself and began to clear away the water. After the first scoop, the peasants' homes were dry, and after the second, the fields were no longer covered by water; his third and final effort cleared the entire plain. The rain had finally stopped. The peasants were beside themselves with joy!

But good heavens! Whence had this big mussel suddenly appeared? After the flood-waters had vanished, they found it lying in a deep pit. But with the water gone, it was already dead. They opened it and discovered inside a big, black pearl. The old fortuneteller, whose idea it had been to obtain the Silver Ladle, gave the pearl to Antino and said, "After the great flood, we have nothing else with which to express our gratitude. So please take this black pearl. May it bring you good fortune!"

Antino accepted and placed it in the bag he carried on his back. Then he worked vigorously in helping to rebuild the village.

In the meantime, Dizuto delighted in unimaginable abundance during his journey back. People came in droves to see the brilliantly shining pearl. Anyone who wished to glimpse the enchanting images it contained had to pay in pure gold! And wherever Dizuto passed through, he acquired all the riches, the lands left behind poor and barren!

Then one day he came to the big mountain, which he climbed all the way to the top of. Finally, all his wishes were about to be fulfilled! Now no one would ever be able to match him!

As evening approached, he entered the castle in great splendor. From the center of the courtyard, an image of the shining pearl was reflected in the crystal tower. At the same time, something truly extraordinary happened: the pearl began to glow with such intensity that it burst into a thousand rays of light! A sparkling shower of flames rained down, and every flammable thing caught fire! Dizuto ran off as fast as his feet would carry him, but in his haste, he failed to notice a deep crevice. He fell headlong straight into it! The disaster spread rapidly. A terrible firestorm swept across the land, leaving nothing alive in its wake!

It was not until the fires reached a big river far off in the distance that the disaster came to an end.

Antino, who was still helping the peasants to rebuild their village, knew nothing of the horrible calamity. However, still occupied by the thought of the beautiful princess, he found no peace of mind. Then one day, after all the work was done, he began his journey back home.



As soon as he crossed the broad stream, however, he saw a terrible sight. Everything, wherever he looked, was black and burnt to the ground! A huge wilderness of ash was spread before him, as far as the eye could see! But whatever could have happened?! Had his brother not rescued the castle with its stone inhabitants and become King of a powerful Empire? Determined to solve the mystery, Antino ventured on.

He traveled for days across the desolate land destroyed by the fire. After a long time, believing himself too exhausted to continue, he finally saw off in the distance

the towering mountain of his native land! With what little strength he had left, he climbed to the top. To the left and right of the path were strewn about the golden treasures Dizuto had collected. Now, of course, they were of no use to anyone. And, yes, up above, at the very top, stood, as before, the petrified castle. In the center of the crystal tower, the beautiful princess still sat, waiting, and looking into the distance. Apparently no one had been able to find the Pearl of Light; and who knew if it had ever existed at all?!

What more, now, could Antino do? He took the last thing he had left, the black pearl, and placed it in the lap of the Princess.

Then a miracle occurred.

The pearl emitted a bright light. Indeed the true Pearl of Light shone like the golden sun from atop the tower out across the entire land! Once stone, the castle's occupants awoke, rubbing their sleepy eyes while gazing up in amazement at the wondrous sight. Even those who had perished in the firestorm were given new life, yet one a thousand times more wonderful than before. All around grass and flowers, shrubs and trees, grew up, and all experienced the purest of joy. Antino was certain he would awake from a deep slumber! Then, suddenly, the little bird flew up, the one he had once helped. He landed on his shoulders, and answered every question asked of him.

No one heard anything more from Dizuto, though. Indeed there seemed no end to the golden treasures he had collected, which were given to the needy.



Then a great feast was celebrated, as the world had never seen before. It lasted forty days and forty nights! Everyone who wished to come was invited, for there was no shortage of anything! The highpoint occurred when Antino

and the beautiful princess gave each other their hands in marriage.

They ruled the Kingdom to the delight of everyone. Over time a powerful city grew up around the mountain, and because it was constructed according to the paths of the rays of light radiating out from the pearl, it resembled a magnificent jewel! Indeed throughout the entire land structures were built according to this plan, and no one can begin to describe the splendor.

So happy as they were, so long they lived - in the Kingdom of the Pearl of Light.

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translated from German by William Eric Barcel

"Wavefunctions"

By Erica Hesselbach

Susan hung up the phone in a daze. Although she knew that space travel had risks, she had never really believed something could go wrong on one of her brother Jerome's missions, not deep down. The mission was nearly over, too; the most dangerous parts had seemed to be past. But something had gone wrong. They had lost contact with Jerome's ship early in the morning. He was returning from an exciting voyage to Mars, and everything had been going so well. It seemed certain now that they were on the road to eventual colonization. Even the long journey home was nearly over, and she had been confident that she would see her brother safe back on earth within the week. But now, with contact lost for most of the day, and with confusing messages from right before indicating that something big had happened, NASA was estimating a 15% chance of the ship returning safely. Susan had been on the phone all afternoon, first to her family, then to anyone at NASA who would talk to her, and she finally understood how they came to that number. Unfortunately, it made sense. They wouldn't know for certain for another few days, when the ship would be close enough to reach, but NASA was doubtful that the astronauts would be safe.

She picked up the toy TARDIS on her desk and rotated it in her hands, letting out a little nervous energy. The part that bothered her the most was the helplessness. Everyone she had talked to had told her that all she could do was wait and pray. She had already started the praying part, but waiting was not Susan's style. And although she was a religious woman, she was also a scientist, and 15% was a small probability. It wasn't devastatingly small, as everyone she had talked to had pointed out in reassuring tones. Still, it was not a bet she would choose to take. But what other choice did she have? NASA was doing all they could, and had explained to her apologetically that she could not help them. It just wasn't her field; space had always been her brother's realm.

She looked down at the blue plastic "time machine" in her hands. Space was her brother's realm; hers was time.

Could she use the time machine her lab had been working on to help somehow? Unlike in the sort of science fiction the toy on her desk came from, the real machine couldn't take her anywhere in time and space just by setting the coordinates. It was developing well, but testing was slow and cautious. The most they had done so far was to send a person five minutes into the future, keep them there for five minutes, then pull them back. It didn't move in space at all, just stayed in the lab. Susan couldn't take it to her brother's ship before whatever it was happened, and even if she could, she probably couldn't help. In fact, if the ship actually was safe, she might get in the way and be part of the problem.

Well, no, that didn't really fit with the lab's theory of a fixed past. If her brother was safe now, traveling to the past would not cause him danger. If she traveled into the past and caused him danger, then she had already done so, and he was not currently safe. Her lab had been working on a theory of how time worked based on quantum mechanics. The past was fixed because it had been observed. That observation had collapsed all the wavefunctions, and now what had happened had been forced to decide itself. They hadn't experimented as much with travel into the past yet, largely because it was tricky to set up the experiment so that no one would see when the time machine arrived in the past, which could cause paradoxes and free will questions that they were not ready to deal with yet. The few tentative experiments they had done, however, seemed to confirm this theory.

The future, on the other hand, was a different matter. It had not yet been observed, so the wavefunctions had not been collapsed. All the possible futures existed, as parallel universes of varying probability; wavefunctions more likely to be in some places than others, but with nearly anything still possible. The really neat part of the theory was that, when the time traveler arrived in the future, in order for them to see anything they needed to collapse the wavefunctions, and that made the future as fixed as the past. Many of her colleagues worried that a side effect of this would be that in order to preserve free will their time machine must never have a significant range (why this worried them varied from person to person). The theory also left open the question of how it was determined which future crystallized. The quick answer to that had been, "the most probable one," but then someone had asked what happened to 50-50 wavefunctions, such as a coin flip. Everyone in the lab had been stumped for quite some time by that one. Susan laughed to herself as she remembered that the best answer to the question had come when attempts to move the time machine in space had failed. The machine was designed to move in space as well as time, but it didn't. Somehow it kept up with the rotation of the earth well enough (although nervousness on that point was part of why they hadn't gone farther than five minutes yet), but setting the coordinates to move it in space had not been observed to work. The solution that had been given was that those functions did

not move the machine in space at all, but rather across the different probable futures.

Susan froze. Could that be her answer? Could she aim the time machine at the future in which that 15% probability worked out? Would that collapse the wavefunctions to insure that her brother survived?

A million more questions flew through her mind at once, many of them doubting the sanity or at least the plausibility of the idea. But one didn't succeed in helping invent a time machine without being able to embrace some crazy ideas and stick with them like duct tape. Once an idea was in Susan's head, she didn't give up on it until it had been scientifically disproven. If there was a chance she could help her brother, she wanted to take it, and she would find a way.

She could not do it alone, though, Susan quickly realized. There was the practical question of would someone stop her using the time machine for a personal reason, and more importantly for what would have to be a larger than 5 minute jump. All the scientists with access to the time machine on Susan's clearance level knew each other well enough to trust that anything she did would fit with the agreed upon path for research with the machine, and would be duly entered in the log. It would still help to have a partner, though, particularly because Susan hadn't personally had much to do with directing the machine in probability. The best person for that would be Ringo. It was his group that had been working on the probability studies, and he was an old friend. Also, Ringo was just crazy enough to agree with her.

The serious, sympathetic expression on Ringo's face flashed to a smile as he burst out laughing. "That's just crazy enough to work," he exclaimed. Then the serious look won out again. "But it won't be simple. There's a lot of risk involved, many variables we don't know if we can control. It might be a brilliant success, but if we slip up it could be a catastrophic failure."

"How have your studies been going? Can we actually point at other probabilities?" Susan asked.

"Surprisingly well," he answered. "We think we've figured out how to use the directional controls of the machine to select probabilities. Just this morning we moved up to determining the roll of a 20-sided die. And we've been monitoring the news closely; as far as we can tell no bizarre random events with a probability of 5% have happened, no crashing airplanes, no countries bursting into war. But then again, we've only gone forward a few seconds, you would want, what, about a week?" Susan nodded, if Jerome was coming home safely, he should be back in just under a week. "I think most of the big shots in the lab wouldn't like this idea very much, it sounds like there are too many risks. Jumping a week would be a big step forward, and you know we've been taking baby steps for safety's sake...." Ringo trailed off, and Susan sighed, already starting to think of what to do when he turned her down. "But I think it'll work!" Ringo started again, and Susan jumped. "If the theory

behind the machine is right, and we set the coordinates carefully, there should really be no danger," Ringo continued, "And I put a lot more faith in the theory than some of the others do. The physics behind it is sound. I admit, we don't know if you will collapse just the wavefunctions you deal with directly, or all of them, but if we set the coordinates right that shouldn't matter."

"And you think you can set the coordinates well enough that everything else will be the most probable future, but the future of Jerome's ship will fit that 15%?" Susan asked.

"Yes, we should be able to," Ringo replied. "Today's experiment dealt with 5%, we passed 15% weeks ago. True, that was a very short jump, but I actually think the short jumps are harder than the long ones, it takes more precision. There are more variables farther in the future, but that just gives us more desirable outcomes to choose from. When you jump just a few seconds, if your probability is off by just a little, something totally different might happen; if you jump a few days, that same error will change some details, that's all. I'm confident that I can program your coordinates right, but to select just Jerome's ship to be affected I'll need your help."

Susan nodded again. "Whatever you need. What does it take, do you need something of Jerome's, like a sample of his DNA?"

Ringo scoffed, "It's a time machine, not a seance! No, we design a computer model of the situation, tell the computer which solution we want, and it points the time machine." A funny look passed over his face. "How exactly it points at the solution, even I'm not really sure." He laughed, "you know, it's a crazy feeling, helping invent something and not knowing how it really works."

Susan nodded yet again (she was always nodding when she talked to Ringo). "Dr. Geistesblitz probably understood it." Dr. Geistesblitz was the scientist who was mostly responsible for the invention of the time machine. He was a genius, and one evening just before the time he normally went home he'd had an inspiration. They'd found him in the morning collapsed at his desk, face down in a pile of notes. He was rushed to the hospital (he was a very old man), and he died about a week later. He managed to explain how to use the notes on his desk to finish the time machine first, but a large portion of the hows and whys had died with him.

"Probably so," Ringo agreed. "Actually, I think Pete understands more than he lets on. A good chunk of the programming is his doing." Pete was Dr. Geistesblitz's nephew. He was so quiet and unassuming that it usually took people quite some time to notice he was almost as much a genius as his uncle was. Susan didn't think she had ever seen him more than two feet from a computer, except maybe at the annual picnic.

"Will this be too much more complicated?" Susan asked.

"Nah," answered Ringo, "I've modeled all kinds of stuff before, that's no problem. I just need you to tell me everything you can so we can get as much detail as

possible. Then we just plug the model into the time travel program."

Ringo paused. "I have a question, though. If whatever happened to your brother's ship already happened, isn't that the past, not the future?"

"Yeah, I was thinking about that," Susan answered. "But actually, the odds that the astronauts are alive right now but won't make it home safely are rather large, according to NASA. They don't think that what happened to the ship was so likely to be deadly, they just don't think they'll make it back safely after losing communication at the point they did. Something damaged part of the ship, and the odds that the damage hasn't killed them yet but will prevent their safe return are the highest. Really the most dangerous part of the trip left is landing. Without communications, something really simple could happen, such as there could be bad weather at the landing site and ground control won't be able to tell them not to land there."

Ringo nodded pensively, then looked at Susan suddenly. "Or it could be like Schrodinger's cat. We haven't observed either way, so they are currently both alive and dead."

"I never liked that image, but it does fit now," Susan observed. "I always asked, doesn't the cat know which happened? It seems like any observer should collapse the wavefunctions, and even if a cat isn't a qualified observer, Jerome certainly is. But right now, I sure hope Schrodinger was right."

Ringo had some reports to finish from his morning experiments, so Susan left him to his work and went back to her office to call NASA again and take down the details of what had happened (she figured that no one would bother about the work she was supposed to be doing while Jerome was missing). At 5 o'clock they met back by Ringo's computer, ordered a pizza and started work on the model. They interrupted their work to get some sleep (not that Susan slept very well) and for the lab's scheduled business the next day, but by around 7 the next night Ringo declared that they were ready. Most of the lab had gone home for the night; just a few others were left, more scientists unwilling to leave the next step of their pet projects til morning. No one questioned Susan and Ringo as they entered the lab with the time machine. No one was nearby, not even janitorial staff. There were no experiments scheduled until morning, and the time machine and surrounding labs were only cleaned under the supervision of the top scientists. Ringo had always considered that a symptom of the lab's paranoia; the odds of a cleaning lady accidentally traveling through time were almost nil, but no one was willing to take that chance.

The time machine equipment filled most of the large lab room, but the part the time traveler actually dealt with had been whimsically designed to resemble a phone booth (several of the scientists, including not only Susan but Dr. Geistesblitz himself, were fans of Doctor Who). Inside was a chair that had originally been fitted with a variety of safety

harnesses. After the first few experiments had demonstrated that the ride was gentle, these had been removed and sent to the people who were trying to determine if time travel had any strange side effects. The chair swiveled to face three walls full of displays monitoring everything the time traveler could possibly want to know, and the doors which filled the fourth wall opened to face a large clock displaying the current time and date. Most of the equipment's exterior was designed to look as ultramodern as can be, with smooth lines, digital displays shining out of screens that were like deep black pools, everything polished and sterile. Most of these shiny control panels were linked by masses of wires, duct taped to the floor or walls, which took away somewhat from the glamour but was considerably more to Susan's liking. Experiments shouldn't be too shiny. But for the booth, and most of the clocks (and there were many clocks), someone had let older science fiction fandom run wild.

Aside from the phone booth shape, there were hints of Jules Verne in the form of brass highlights. After the first few trips demonstrated that all the careful reinforcing and heat-shielding was unnecessary, someone had taken the time to make the outside of the booth resemble rich wood (it would have been made entirely out of wood if only they had known from the beginning that it didn't need to be stronger than that). The machine pushed this booth back or forward in time, where since it did not move in space it merged with its past or future self, giving the effect of only the passenger traveling.

Ringo had sent the time machine computer his model, and now he set the machine to work on finding the right coordinates. Then he turned to Susan. "Ok," he said, "let's talk this through one last time."

Susan nodded. "Sure. You are setting the coordinates so that I'll travel exactly one week into the future. According to the lab calendar, this lab should be just as empty then as it is now. I'll have five minutes to make certain that Jerome is safely home, and then I'll come back. The way the time machine is set up, I will be pulled back automatically wherever I am, but it's still standard procedure to return inside the machine, just to be careful."

"Right," Ringo jumped in. "In addition, the computer is setting the probability coordinates so that in all probability, you will visit a future in which Jerome and the other astronauts are safe, but everything else has happened about the way it normally would. There most likely won't be any strange side effects, no damage to anything else, just that one factor will be singled out as occurring in a way that has a lower probability. Assuming our theory is right, this will collapse the wave fronts so that the future we chose is the one that will happen. I agree with you that this theory is pretty sound, and besides, if we're wrong, we won't have fixed the future at all, so there'll be no harm done by trying. Now tell me again how you were planning on checking on your brother in five minutes without risking a Bilking's paradox or calling someone in the future and confusing them?"

"I have my laptop with me," Susan explained.

"Someone at NASA always emails my family status updates regarding Jerome, no matter what happens and no matter how much we talk to them. I've been on the phone with NASA constantly the past two days, and I still got two emails. They are always accurate and detailed, I think they have a guy who does nothing else all day but update astronauts' families by email. There is a network port right over there. When I get to the future, I will plug my laptop into that port and check my email. I'll look for and read the updates relating to the end of the mission, and that should count as observing Jerome to be alive. Then I'll unplug the laptop, get back in the time machine, and come back here. I suppose I could still cause a paradox by deleting the email I read in the future when I get them through normal time, but that would be highly out of character for me. I don't want to do that."

"Ok," Ringo said firmly. "I think we're all set. The probability is in our favor, and I think we've accounted for everything. Or at least, neither the computer nor I can come up with anything more we should cover."

You're all set to go."

The computer beeped that it was ready, almost like it was agreeing with him. Susan took a deep breath, clutched her laptop tightly, and turned to the time machine. "Here goes nothing, then. Wish me luck."

"Good luck," he answered sincerely as she sat down in the chair, and set the laptop in her lap. Susan took another deep breath, nodded to Ringo, and closed the doors. Then she turned to face the more informative walls, and reached for the headphones that would let her hear Ringo's countdown. Unlike the outside of the machine, the inside had real wood. It was funny, she paused to think, to see digital displays set in brass and maple fixtures. Then she almost laughed outright, as she realized that it probably ought to be mahogany. Apparently the whimsical appearances had been kept within their budget; this was a research time machine, not a spare-no-expense publicity campaign. Well, maybe they'd stain it when they were ready for the press.

Through the headphones, Susan heard Ringo counting down. His zero seemed to be cut off short, before he'd really pronounced the "o", and then...

It was a little like blinking, Susan thought. No, more like the feeling when you fall asleep for an instant and wake up wondering how much you've missed, with no idea whether it was a few seconds or a few hours. It was vaguely disconcerting. Something had definitely happened, Susan just didn't really know what. Then she looked at the displays. It was indeed exactly one week later. Cautiously, she swiveled the chair towards the doors, cracked them open and peeked out. Nobody there. Susan carried the laptop over to the network port and plugged it in. It took just a minute or two to reach her email. She carefully looked at the server rather than downloading all the messages to her laptop directly; she didn't feel like taking email from the future back with her, and she dared not delete anything lest

her future self miss it. Susan held her breath as she typed the last letter of her password and hit enter.

There it was! Near the bottom of the most recent page of mail, a message from NASA with the subject "Astronauts Return Safely," immediately followed by a response from her mom. She clicked on the one from NASA and skimmed it quickly, wondering just how much it took to collapse wavefunctions. Rather than drain her brother's free will, she closed that one and opened the message from her mom. She had, typically, forwarded Susan the identical message she had received from NASA along with her comments. "Oh I'm so glad," Susan's mom wrote. "Of course they're still debriefing Jerome, and won't let him come home for another few days I imagine, but he called me already – oh, but you know that, I called you right afterwards! Silly me. Anyway..." The rest of the email was also exactly what Susan expected of her mom. She breathed a sigh of relief. She was in a future in which Jerome was safely back on Earth. Susan hoped she'd done enough to collapse the wavefunctions. She didn't have time to do anything more. Swiftly she shut down the laptop and returned to the booth.

About a week and a half later, Susan was sitting down with her family for a big "Welcome back Jerome" dinner. Although everyone had heard it several times, they'd insisted that Jerome tell the story of what had happened himself. A random but very fast micrometeorite had blasted through part of their communications systems, which had then sputtered for a few moments before failing completely. One or two of the astronauts had shouted in surprise at this, resulting in the message that had made NASA suspect something big had gone wrong. They'd continued on without communication with Earth. When they got close to Earth, one of the other astronauts, Margaret, had the idea to use their lights to flash Morse code at the international space station. The ISS had noticed, and responded in kind. That way they learned that it was raining in Florida, but they were all set to land in Texas. With that knowledge, the landing went smoothly. They were lucky; inspections of the ship after they landed showed that several other systems had been hit by the meteorite, and could have given out at any moment.

Ringo was torn between wanting to report their experiment and push to move everything ahead, and wanting to keep it quiet lest they get in trouble for breaking with the scheduled experiments. He'd decided to hold off on his decision until he was certain that there were no negative side effects. This meant he was spending all his spare time researching everything that had happened over the week. The last day or two he'd started to tell Susan he was worried that they had made the week unremarkable. As far as he could tell, nothing unusual had happened at all. The entire week had been very predictable, with even the weather hitting perfect statistical averages. Ringo was starting to worry that time travel into the future, if careful not to cause random events, would thus force the world to be boring. Susan would probably start to worry about that too, soon,

but for now, all that mattered was that Jerome was home and safe.

Susan smiled across the table at her brother. Maybe the clever astronauts would have made it home safely without any help from her. Even so, at least this way she had been able to feel like she was helping, not just waiting around. And after all, what were big sisters for?

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"End of Innocence"

By Ashley Johnson

Karman sat in a small room, staring at the smoke wafting in through the window; his thoughts of escape had deflated hours ago. His captors had left him unfettered, but he knew that there were guards posted outside his door, and the window he now contemplated was not an option since it was at least two hundred feet from the ground.

The waiting had become agonizing. He knew that the end of the empire had finally arrived, and he figured that it also heralded his end. He wondered whether he would end his days as a slave to the Warlock Lords or would they kill him right now.

Scarcely two hours before he was historian for the emperor, but now he was imprisoned in a room of Zyconidon, the palace of the emperor at the heart of the Zandras, the capital of the planetary empire on Vadin. Established just after the Great Cataclysm that nearly destroyed Vadin two centuries ago, the Imperial structure was to regulate the substance that nearly brought the planet's end: Technology. In the wisdom of their forefathers, it was decided that unbridled expansion and dependency on technology caused too much strain among the people, which spawned hate, death and war. Thus it was the Empire's duty to have total control of technology and when they felt that the people were ready for a particular item, it would be released upon a responsible world.

Until recently though, it was a planetary empire in name only. The imperial court had been decadent since its conception, and did not realize that most of its power was slowly being taken by the lesser lords. These lesser lords had hoarded technology, keeping it from the masses, and developed it to their own ends. When the current Emperor finally realized what had happened, his armies were too weak to put the upstarts in their place.

Meanwhile, the people of the world had to find something to replace the complete loss of technology. In some cases, it was replaced by hard work, but there were those who desired to make their toil easier. That desire spawned the creation of magic: the use of latent energies to perform menial tasks quickly and efficiently. Of course its uses at the time were benign; levitating a rock or burning out a stump was its extent.

As this went on, the lesser lords formed a coalition of over fifteen members to bring the emperor down and

establish their own form of government. In the initial battles, the empire suffered crushing defeats one right after the other. All was lost.

It seemed very convenient that at this point, the empire's darkest hour, They arrived, offering Their services to aid the Emperor in returning control to him and establishing peace. They called themselves the Warlock Lords.

Warlock Lords. How he now reviled those words. He had first heard it vaguely mentioned, with a disdainful chuckle, as an apprentice to the former historian. It was only after he succeeded his former master, and after the war broke out, that they moved to the forefront. The Lords were originally minor rulers who controlled insignificant fiefdoms, but during the uprising they had built up large armies and increased the size of their lands. Even though their power was great at this point, when their emissaries arrived at Zyconidon conveying the news that their lords offered to bring down the entire minor lord coalition using only their armies, it seemed preposterous. It wasn't until the emperor and his ministers saw the means to this first-hand that the proposition was not as far-fetched as it seemed. To see an example of their power, the Imperial Family was told to go to the fiefdom of Stratamard. Upon their arrival, they saw two groups, the Army of Malkrin, the Warlock Lord who ruled that land, and a major army group of the coalition, facing each other. That day a battle broke out, and the Army of Malkrin decimated the entire army group. It was then revealed that the Warlock Lords had infused magic into their army, creating a deadly combination.

Karman had sensed the magic when he arrived; he had some magic training in order to be able to understand it for the histories. This magic that he felt here was different, almost bastardized in some fashion. He was not quite sure how or why, but after he witnessed that unbridled display of power, it left him unnerved.

Karman snapped into reality upon the sudden opening of the door. Beyond the portal, in the smoke filled hallway was a tall figure of a man obscured by the haze that was flanked by guards. Slowly it moved into the room, and by degrees Karman could discern its appearance. It wore a loose fitting tunic and cape accompanied with fitted pants of white silk trimmed with ermine, and riding boots made of whitened leather. The being's face was framed by raven locks and was lightly creased with the lines of wisdom. Its mouth was thin and drawn, surmounted with a mustache whose ends looked like they were sharpened with a whetstone. The nose was prominent, much like a hawk's, and the Warlock Lord's eyes were of a piercing white as they lazily peered at Karman from under the forest of hair that encompassed the eyebrows. This head that was perched upon the body was crowned with a conical iron helm trimmed with a rabbit's pelt.

Its slight lips parted, and spoke two words.

"The Historian?"

Karman nodded. He knew who this was. It was a Warlock Lord -- the one from the Ice regions of the Northern continent of Kenillia. The one called Apolis.

Apolis slowly raised his arm with a closed hand. His finger curled three times, beckoning Karman to follow.

The sent of smoke and brimstone wafted into Karman's nose as he and the Warlock Lord walked down the gilded halls of Zyconidon. These halls, once resplended with the riches of the empire, now had piles of gutted bodies where statues once stood; the walls were painted red and the floors were sticky with the blood of the Emperor's defenders.

With each turn the carnage grew more gruesome. No one seemed spared. One hall was rank with the sent of burnt flesh and littered with charred corpses, obviously the result of some twisted magics. Another had former courtiers who were turned inside out. Each new site horrified him so that he looked toward Apolis for solace. The creature's face was impassive, its eyes never turning toward Karman, but stayed focused at some point in the distant horizon.

As Karman walked, he found it hard to believe that just a few hours ago these halls were filled with the bright laughter and revelry of the victory festivities that were being held for the Warlock Lords: the same people who now held the palace in their grasp.

He could not help but wonder if things would have been different if the palace guards were not drunk at the end of the evening; but with each new discovery of death, it seemed unlikely. What bothered him the most was how the Warlock Lord's armies gained access to the palace in the first place. Zyconidon was impenetrable and all who belonged to the Warlock Lords were outside. None of the walls were breached; he would have heard that. Karman was just walking to the library when the first thing he heard was the general alarm; it was about a minute later when he was captured.

By the time that he finished that thought, the little group stopped at the door to the throne room. Beyond the door there could be faintly heard the muffled sound of screams. Suddenly Karman's thoughts turned to the Imperial Family. Had they escaped; were they dead?

The two guards with them opened the doors and Apolis gestured for Karman to move forward. Slowly he complied, and as soon as he stepped in, a cold chill ran down his spine. All around the room, hanging from the rafters, the light fixtures, the tapestries, were dead bodies, or entrails draped across them like streamers with pools of blood beneath them. Karman's eyes darted from one horror to the next, like a frightened rabbit.

Suddenly there was a crack followed by a ghastly howl to the left of him, which caused Karman to lose his balance and hit the floor. When he regained his senses he found out that he had been too focused on the ceiling and not on his surroundings. Scattered about the floor were dead bodies as well. The sound that had caused his current situation came from a whip held by a striking woman with a sinister beauty.

Karman's eyes swept over her slowly; from the thigh high, high healed boots; to her torso which was clothed in net and strips of fine purple silken cloth, that hung on her like wet cotton, which made her decent. Up farther to her metallic shoulder guards from which hung a cape made of the same material. Within her oval face, purple eyes glowed at Karman, and she produced a slight smile. It slowly licked its black painted lips, adjusted its turban-like headdress, and turned around. Behind that creature were three girls, bloodied and scarred, shackled to the wall. They were the daughters of the emperor, the torture victims of that evil creature. Together they made a strange picture.

Karman was now on the defensive. He turned on the next noise. It was the dark skinned man dressed in hides; its orange catlike eyes flashing wildly as it beat, dismembered, and violated a pile of bodies in the corner while howling with delight. The inhuman fiend only stopped for a second to smile at Karman, bearing its razor like teeth before it continued its task.

A childlike giggle then drew his attention to the opposite corner of the room. Karman saw a chair with two people paying attention to its occupant. One was a female dressed in a silken kimono of the lightest blue. All that could be seen was the long raven hair on the back of its head. The other was a man dressed in green frock coat and breeches who was whispering in the occupant's ear as it lightly dragged the tip of a knife on the occupant's arm, leaving little red rivulets in its wake. Its beet face was damp with perspiration as its portly frame giggled with some obtuse glee.

The green dressed one whispered to the female in the kimono, who turned its head. Karman was met with a set of almond shaped, innocent eyes of a pale blue that sparkled in the light of the room. It smiled, its deep red lips showed distinctly on its white painted face. She turned fully to Karman, who now could see that the kimono was cut in such a way as to leave just enough hidden to let the imagination run wild, and brought a gloved arm up in a meek wave. It giggled and grinned playfully as it stepped aside, allowing Karman to view the occupant of the chair. There, in his tattered robes of state, his head hung low, was the Emperor himself.

Slowly, the one in the kimono got on her knees. Its tongue parted those ruby lips, and it started to lick the neck and side of the face of the Emperor as its hand sensually caressed his chest.

Karman had to look away in disgust, but his eyes focused forward, toward the throne. Apolis had made its way there and stood at its side, arms akimbo. On the other side was a female figure in a toga of sapphire blue. Its hair was perched atop its olive skinned head, and its eyes glanced at Karman with cool calculating indifference.

Sitting in the throne was a dark figure in a hooded cloak. Through the open front, Karman could tell that the figure was dressed in a black shirt with a high collar covered with a similar vest trimmed with silver. The black calf high boots that it wore gleamed brightly as they were crossed in

front of it, and from under the hood burned a pair of red eyes that bore into the heart of Karman's mind.

Karman broke into a cold sweat, and had to fight the urge to flee. He now realized, too late, that he was in the center of the most sinister circle of beings ever found on Vadin.

They were here. All of them.

The one with the whip was known as Zenatai, the ruler of the desert regions of the Northern continent of Kenillia. The dark skinned wild man was Palaka of the Islands of Harkralus, while the one in green with the emperor was named Kalakyne of Dakanasal, and its companion was Fenseia of Quovedia. The olive one on the dais with Apolis was Malkrin, the ruler of Astania.

All of the Warlock Lords, Karman thought. All of them here. All of them to be feared, but that one in the throne... the one who can see into the soul. The one that makes even the rest of his brethren tremble. Their leader. Zyklon. It was here too.

"Come forward."

Zyklon's melodious voiced echoed throughout the now silent hall. Its gloved hands flexed on the arms of the throne, their metal claw-like tips clicking in anticipation.

A strange feeling came over Karman; in his mind he was caught between anxiety, a desire to flee, and the feeling that all was right with the world. Each emotion fought with his conscious being, driving his mind to a standstill. Then slowly, mechanically, without himself willing it, Karman inched forward. He tried to stop, but to no avail. Soon he was in front of the dais.

"So," Zyklon said sensuously. Its eyes burned into Karman's mind with restrained anger. "My dear historian. Could you tell that this would happen from the past?"

A chuckle went up from the rest of the Warlock Lords as Karman stared at the floor.

"No? I am surprised. Many times in our history those who have been the followers of history became the ones who make it. Was this not foreseeable?"

"The results of blind aggression are not a discernible science." Karman forced the words as his eyes remained focused at the floor.

Zyklon stood up and walked toward Karman, placing its hand gently at the nape of his neck.

"Oh come now my dear sir. You think that this was the result of blind aggression?" Its hand slowly slid down Karman's jaw line until two fingers rested under his chin. Gently Zyklon elevated Karman's eyes to its.

Zyklon smiled, its prominent canines glistening in the light.

"You are right and wrong."

All the Warlock Lords roared with laughter.

"Now, on to business," Zyklon's mood changed abruptly. Its sensuousness was replaced by an authoritative demeanor. "Fenseia, get our historian a chair and make him comfortable."

The one in the kimono immediately jumped up and plucked a chair from the corner.

"You," it said to the page at the door as it turned and walked back to the throne, "Bring the rest in."

"Zenatai," continued Zyklon, "are you about finished with their highnesses?"

Zenatai walked toward one of the princesses, gathering up its whip as it went, and grabbed her face violently. "Of course my dear brother, they are used up anyway." Zenatai then spat in the girl's face, motioned for the guards to unshackle them, and sauntered toward the dais.

"Kalakyne, would you bring our guest of honor, our dear emperor, closer to the festivities."

"Yes Zyklon," responded the little pudgy man. He chuckled to itself and leaned toward the ear of the emperor.

"Heh. You are going to love this."

Kalakyne then stood a slight distance from the chair, took a strange vial from its pocket, sprinkled the contents on the Emperor and his chair, and concentrated. A green glow surrounded it, and it started to float toward the front of the dais.

Meanwhile Fenseia had gotten the chair and sat Karman down in it. As he waited there she started to caress his hand.

On the dais, Malkrin turned toward Zyklon.

"Zyklon," it whispered, "do you think this is wise. It may anger him."

"It does not matter," replied Apolis, "it is over anyway. What is done to them now is of no consequence."

"Do not worry you two," soothed Zyklon. "All works in favor of the Ultimate Plan."

All of a sudden Karman nearly fell over in the chair as Fenseia jumped into his lap. The force of its jump surprised it as well. It giggled as it brushed its light blue colored forelocks out of its face. Karman could smell the intoxicating sweetness of its perfume as it started to rub his shoulders. It brought its mouth close to his ear where he could feel its warm breath on it. Suddenly he no longer had the desire to resist, he actually enjoyed it

"Fenseia!" snapped Zyklon.

Fenseia jumped out of Karman's lap, and to the side of the chair.

"I told you to make him comfortable, but not that comfortable."

"But Zyklon," Fenseia cooed, "I want him. Can I have him when we are done?"

"No."

Fenseia obviously didn't care. It started to move back into Karman's lap, when the loud snap of Zenatai's whip sounded behind it.

"Didn't you hear Zyklon you cheap tawdry tart." Zenatai advanced toward them with venom in its voice.

"Get off him."

Fenseia huffed a little, and then moved to the side, and suddenly the desire and want that clouded his brain a few seconds ago disappeared. Zenatai then took her position lounging on the steps of the dais.

The guards had now released the three princesses, and were met with four guards bringing in five struggling

young men, the princes. All of them were brought to the center of the room, each with a guard behind them.

Once everyone was in place, Zyklon spoke.

"Isn't it nice. The entire family is here." He then left his throne and started to walk amongst the Imperial family. "Must be nice for all of you, to see each other again. You were all scattered across the palace when we found you. So odd that the ruling family is so disjointed."

"Get to the point," spat the emperor.

"Well, I have orchestrated this little family reunion for a reason. As you may have noticed that a rather important person is missing."

As the family glanced around, a smile curled on Zyklon's lips. "Yes," he stopped to caress one of the cheeks of the princesses "your dear sweet mother. Sadly she will be indisposed for a long time."

"You see, she was needed for an experiment. I had to see if my two new advisors lived up to their promises. You may know them."

Zyklon gestured toward the shadows behind the throne. Two figures stepped out from them. Karman recognized them immediately. One had sharp features and was known as Bertram, while the other was more rounded and was known as Goodwynn. They were the emperor's former advisors before the empress ordered their dismissal, but something about them had changed. They seemed more sinister.

"Apparently these two have harbored ill feelings toward you and did not appreciate what your mother did to them, so they worked in tandem with us. They were our inside men. Their requests for their services were simple. First: they wished to work for me. In order for them to be truly useful, I granted them power and eternal life. Their other request was even more simple: one hour to do with the empress as they pleased. I didn't know that Mr. Bertram was such a magnificent torturer, or that Mr. Goodwynn was excellent at breaking wills. Sadly, though, your mother didn't handle the ordeal as well as we hoped. She will be indisposed...permanently."

Upon that note, the children broke into tears and some tried to break free. The emperor struggled at his bonds.

"And now you young ones, it is time to join her." Zyklon then waved his hand. The guards behind each of the children drew their knives and slit each of the children's throats. Quickly the front of their clothes became red with blood, and they all collapsed. When each hit the floor, the guards would take their knife and plunge it into their heart. Then Palaka came forward and bashed each of their heads in.

At this point the emperor broke free from his bonds and ran to his dying and dead children. His sobs wracked his body as he tried to throttle Palaka and lashed out at the guards.

"See emperor," taunted Palaka as he dogged the attempts, "You are slow and old. We are your

replacements. To replace, we must kill and ensure you don't return."

The emperor then took a knife out of one of his dead children and grabbed a guard. Holding the knife to the guard's throat, he started for the door.

Zyklon then snapped its fingers and from the far wall a strange staff flew toward it. It was metallic, with a long ornate shaft, ending at a large triangular head. The head's perimeter was covered in some archaic script and at the heart of the triangle was a large finished ruby. When the staff reached Zyklon's hand, it began to float. It then pointed this staff at the emperor.

Suddenly the emperor froze and dropped the knife. He whirled around three times, releasing the guard, and finally faced Zyklon. His breathing was shallow.

Zyklon then floated toward the emperor. It placed its hand under the chin of the emperor and whispered something. Zyklon's arm tensed. Karman then noticed something flowing down Zyklon's glove and arm to the tip of its elbow. It dripped to the floor. Blood. Its fingers had ripped into the emperor's flesh.

Zyklon whispered again, and pulled its hand forward violently. The motion was quickly followed by the sickening crack of the emperor's jaw breaking.

Then the fiend released its grip, turned around, and started to float away. Once it got some distance, it spun violently, wielding the staff. In a flash the head of the staff turned into a crescent blade and cut the emperor's head clean off.

Each of the Warlock Lords let out a high pitched, melodious wail that lasted for what seemed forever, and then started to laugh. Each smiled, except Malkrin. There were tears in its eyes.

Zyklon then turned toward Karman. The maniac's chest was heaving and it had a wild look in his eyes. A sadistic smile was perched upon its lips.

"My dear historian," its voice was hard, "I give you this choice. You can join me and I will give you the same gifts as I gave my advisors, or you can join your emperor. The choice is yours, but I ask you to think of the power at stake."

Zyklon's eyes met Karman's, and suddenly it made sense, but it didn't. It was the same feeling he felt earlier.

"Just think Historian." Zyklon's voice synched with Karman's thoughts, "instead of writing history, you could create it. You would be in control. You could make this world the utopia you and we wish it to become. You could make anything happen."

Yes, it made sense to Karman, everything he wished for could be his. Then he remembered what he had seen.

"Yeh...."

Karman stopped in mid sentence. Suddenly what he had seen moments before flashed before him. He could see the dead bodies in the hall, the viscous way that that royal family was slain... His mind rippled with pain.

"No," screamed Karman, "Get out of my mind you barbarous demon."

Karman collapsed to the floor. "Your friends pretend to be human, but all you are animals. You are monsters, cruel and petty. The world must know this."

"Your choice," said Zyklon blankly. "You are strong willed. Strong enough to break my control. You would have been useful."

It pulled its staff back, and the head changed into that of a pike. It was about to thrust it forward when Bertram, who had wandered toward the now dead family, let loose a piercing scream.

"One's missing!"

"What," bellowed Malakasrin as it ran toward the chaos.

"One of the princes is missing, that one is just a servant!"

Zyklon spun around, shouting. The entire room descended into chaos. Armed guards of each of the Warlock Lords poured in and started obeying the various orders each shouted to them. Some of the Warlock Lords ran outside the room to handle the search personally. The only one that did not seem agitated was Apolis, who sighed and left the room.

Suddenly Karman was grabbed by his collar and was dragged through a dart hole. Once he got control of himself, he found that his savior was Zenatai, the one who had tortured the princesses. Karman tried to protest, but it put its hand over his mouth and continued to drag him along.

Soon they arrived in the vehicle bay at the back of the palace. There was only one guard. It waved its hand and an image of a beautiful girl, seductively dancing, appeared in front of him. As the guard was distracted, Zenetai quietly got behind him, and snapped his neck.

It then motioned to Karman to come out of hiding, saddling a horse.

"Here," it said, "take this and ride. Ride far away and fast. You need not die; I know you have a mission. We are not all like Zyklon in that way."

"Yes," said Karman as he got on, "try telling that to the princesses you laid your whip upon."

"Don't be too acid tongued, my dear Karman. I guarantee that we will see each other again, and I may forget my civility then." It then disappeared.

An illusion, Karman thought, but he realized there would be time later to puzzle over that possibility. He reigned the horse and rode out of the bay. Soon, the castle and the armies of the Warlock Lords were far behind him. As he rode, he looked to the sky. From the east, like dye spreading in water, came a redness. Soon the sky was completely red, with lightening flashing and auroras dancing through it. Karman could tell that this was a dark magic at work, one that would doom the planet. Clouds started to gather.

So this is their plan, thought Karman. Well with the gods as my witness, I will write down everything they do, every heinous act, every misdeed, every atrocity, so that the younger generations may know that they are true evil! May I last long enough to do so, and see this reign of terror end.

It then began to rain.

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"On the Water Rising"

by Jamie Kern

*Girl in the stream
Cold as you are
Wind in your bones
Cracks in your hands*

*Weather in your eyes
Breakers in your heart
Daggers in your smile
Winter in your make....
Shift...*

*hide...
away.*

*Do you know I am always watching?
Faded breath on the water rising
Now you feel my icy fingers rest upon your skin.*

*Petals shatter, crystal cages
Floating, silence, stillness
On the water, from the bank
I watch as you join us, Rise...
Fall...
fade...
away.*

*Sentinels in the darkness lead you
From the touch that forever freed you.
Smile.*

*You hear
My icy
Whisper
Melting
On your skin.*



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"The Dynasty"

by Jason Maier

The floorboards creaked above the huddled group as ages of dust and dirt poured over their heads. Shards of lights pierced the damp darkness at sharp angles as lanterns wandered the ground floor directly overhead. And Hagar sat with his eyes closed, thinking, "soon, soon, soon this will all be over." He could feel the breath of the other Firebrands around him, but could hear nothing. Their mission, their final mission was too important to risk being caught. The thick moldy air made Hagar want to cough, but he didn't. He couldn't risk the future. He swallowed the putrid rot and kept chanting in his mind "soon, soon, soon."

Above head the heavy boots made their way to the front of the building and the Firebrands could hear words, but couldn't make out their meaning. Shortly after the last step was heard they felt the door slam. All was quiet. Hagar and the rest of the group did not move.

One more layer of dust and dirt settled on their heads before they even dared to look around. As Hagar looked up, a chill ran through his spine. All around him were brave souls, risking their lives for his cause. But they were scared, and tired of being scared. They were oppressed, and tired of being oppressed. Their eyes seemed to be pleading with Hagar's conscience, "please, before it's too late please."

And with that, the decision was done. The mission would start that night. And if it worked... a tear came to Hagar's eye. He felt as though his heart would explode with joy if he thought about the mission actually being a success. Instead, he looked up and said with a certain conviction, "Upton, it will be you." A spark of hope drifted across Hagar's face as he said it.

The Society of Firebrands was established in the year 95. They have risked their lives for the past 900 years practicing science and researching the ways in which the world worked in perfect secrecy from the Dynasty. And it was risky business. The Dynasty outlawed science in the year 100, and getting caught practicing science was punishable by immediate death. Membership to the Firebrands was a "birth-burden"; recruiting new members would be sure suicide, especially if the Dynasty found out. And recruiting new members now, made no sense at all. No one in the outside world knew the slightest bit of physics, biology, chemistry, or even mathematics. Through years of persistence the Dynasty managed to breed (or kill) the last bit of rational thought out of the human species. The Firebrands where the last strong hold.

The Dynasty knew of the Firebrands since the year 150, but could never seem to get a control over their organization or the fruitful progress they have made in 900 years. For a short time, the Firebrands were systematically sought out and killed. Eventually their superior technology provided a reasonable amount of safety. As computers, cameras, and the written language drifted out of the culture, the Dynasty relied on archaic methods to investigate crimes. Still practicing science in secret, the Firebrands were able to develop state of the art communication and spying equipment. The Firebrands were never in any real danger of being outsmarted, only out powered. They still had to be careful.

For the past 200 years, the Firebrands had been making serious progress in the field of time travel. Meeting in secret and not being able to find materials safely slowed down progress significantly. An invention that should have taken 40 years to finalize was still in the prototype stage in the year 1000!

Their mission was simple enough. Go back in time 1000 years and prohibit the creation of the Dynasty. Hagar knew it could and must work. The Firebrands would breathe

life into the dead body of science by discovering and finalizing its holy grail: time travel. Hagar, or any other person on the planet, had never heard of poetry, but the sweetness of this justice could have caused him to invent the concept.

But their mission was hard. Of course, the Firebrand's elite team of scientists been working on time travel for several years, but science wasn't their biggest hurdle. The entire world had been at the mercy of the Dynasty's historical engineers. No one knew what it was like 500 years ago, for certain. And absolutely no one knew anything about the world before the Dynasty developed. It was almost as if the world started, with the Dynasty, at year zero. Sure, everyone else believed that because they were supposed to, but the Firebrands needed to believe in a better world. It was a craps shoot with loaded dice, but it wasn't really. Gambling wasn't a part of this world.

If Upton was going to go back in time 1000 years and upset the world's entire political system, he would need a history lesson. For the next two days Hagar met personally with Upton to complete his historical knowledge of the Dynasty and how world culture had changed under its oppression. Being the leader of the Firebrands, Hagar was privy to the most controversial knowledge on the planet. A verbal record had been kept by the Firebrand leaders of exactly what it was like before – that's right, before the Dynasty. Being the next leader of the Firebrands, Upton was about to learn a lifetime of knowledge in two days.

Hagar began: "One thousand years ago, the world wasn't unified like it is today. There were different regions all around the planet called countries. Each country had its own system to rule its own people. And each group of people had it's own culture and belief systems. Each group of people was different. Everyone looked different, spoke different languages, ate different food..."

Upton looked confused and scared. Upton knew what Hagar had to say could get them both in trouble, but he had never heard of people being different. Hagar knew Upton would have trouble understanding; he grew up under the oppression of the Dynasty. Hagar had trouble when he first learned. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a torn piece of paper. He held it up for Upton to see, but not touch. There was a picture of people with dark skin wearing clothes that the Dynasty would surely kill someone for wearing. Long grass bunched together around the women's waists and above it the letters "Haw." Upton almost jumped out of his pale white skin. He had never even heard of a person having dark skin, or wearing anything but Dynasty approved clothing.

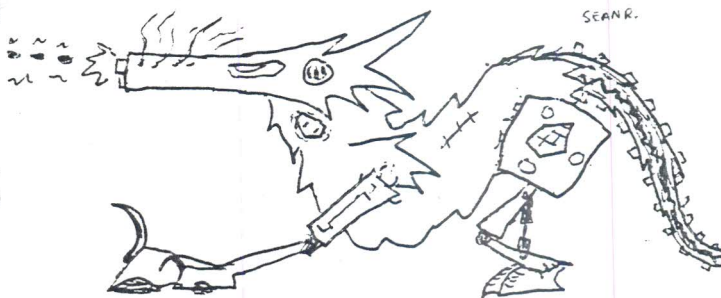
Hagar went on explaining the world before the Dynasty. He described its beauty and freedom. He told Upton about things like art that the Dynasty abolished. He explained the love of science the world had before the year 50. Hagar talked and talked; it seemed that nothing was the same as it is now. Could the Dynasty really change the world that much in 1000 years? Upton sat silently and thought to

himself, "I don't want to be the next leader of the Firebrands. I don't want to go back in time. And I don't want to see freaks with dark skin."

After 36 hours of tutoring, Upton was finally piecing together the picture. In the year zero, the Founder came to power in a small part of the world now known as the F.T.A. (Hagar had no idea what it was called 1000 years ago.) When the Founder came to power he banished things called abortion, welfare, and the five-day waiting period. (Hagar had no idea what these things were.) Even though the people of his country did not want him to abolish these things, he did anyway. The Founder began deteriorating the then-current system of education, which was open to all people before the Dynasty, and used many of the country's resources to expand the border of the F.T.A. The area of the world that Hagar and Upton now live in used to be called Mexico and was easily taken over by the Founder 6 years after he took power.

Shortly after the Founder began going to war to increase the size and power of the F.T.A., he made English the official language of the F.T.A and declared an official religion called "Christianity." Upton really wasn't aware that there was really a world before the Dynasty, and he could hardly believe how different it seemed to him. All the different people and all the different words he would have to know seemed unreal.

The Founder changed the system of rule in his own country, declaring that the country should obviously be ruled by members of his family, declaring divine inspiration. This change was easy after the Founder starved the poor people of his country and seriously manipulated the educational system. The rule of the Founder lasted 35 years and was followed by the his son. In the year 50 public education was completely eliminated. In the year 90, every buk not published by the Dynasty was destroyed. Hagar didn't have any idea about what a buk was, he just knew that they were good things.



Of course the year 100 lived in the minds of Firebrand members from birth. Science was outlawed in the year 100. No study, teaching, or creation of science was allowed. The Dynasty proclaimed that science was detrimental to the well being of the planet because it stood at odds with the Dynasty's religion. Failure to comply with the new law resulted in death. Over 1 million people died between the years of 100 and 105 for studying science, many of them Firebrands.

After the Dynasty outlawed science, people began to die sooner. Upton was told he would see "old" people when he traveled back in time. He had only heard of one or two people living past 40 years old. Of course those were just fairy tales. No one ever lives past 30 years now. He cringed just thinking about old people. The world suffered from disease after disease that went uncured. The population of the entire world dropped to 10 million after 50 years of no science. Of course the Dynasty regulates world population now, so it fluctuates between 5 and 7 million every 20 years.

In the year 807, the Dynasty officially took control of the entire world with its last military victory. After the Dynasty gained control of the world, it destroyed all military weapons and eliminated the last scientists on the planet. (The Dynasty, of course, retained some scientists to ensure military victory around the world.) Since then, the Dynasty has attempted to control the population of "undesirables" and has killed millions of people with dark skin and millions of people with different beliefs. The Dynasty cleansed until it could find no more dirt. And for the past 193 years the world has seen no war, and has lived in an ignorant bliss.

Upton didn't like the idea of standing naked in front of every Firebrand in the world. In order for the time machine to work, a three-dimensional electric current passed through Upton's entire body. Clothing would upset the process and cause his clothes to form inside his body when he appeared 1000 years in the past. This option sounded painful, but he still didn't like the idea of standing in front of all 150 Firebrands naked. He swallowed hard and walked out to the center of the giant floor, back straight and naked.

In the middle of the gymnasium-like floor sat the time machine. It was about as tall as Upton's knee and looked like a gas generator. Gathered around, in perfect silence, were the Firebrands from every precinct around the world; they watched intently. Hagar attached the electric diodes to the tips of Upton's middle fingers. Three-dimensional electric current was used for several years by the Firebrands for communication reasons. It took years to discover that the current was actually the source of every advanced wave in the universe. After the discovery, it took several years and attempts to perfect harnessing the advanced waves in a way that wouldn't rip the human body to shreds. Four people had died trying to create the world's first time machine, and Hagar hoped that Upton would be the world's good luck charm. At the age of 27, he was becoming too old to choose and train yet another follower.

As he snapped the last buckle, Hagar breathed deep and hard. He was scared. He looked Upton in the eye and gave him his last instructions. "Upton, when you travel back in time 1000 years, the year will not be called zero, it will be the year 2000. The people you will be around will have never heard of the Dynasty because it hasn't been created yet. And the Founder has a name – it is Bush. You must kill Bush; the entire world depends on this man not coming to power in the year 2000. Good luck." Upton nodded, his mouth was too dry to speak.

As Hagar flipped the switch, the time machine began to run smoothly and silently. Upton felt a slight tingle running through his body, but nothing was really happening. He looked at the crowd of people and blinked hard. He was still in his own time and still naked. Slowly the machine began to get louder, increasing its power output. The exact amount of power needed to bring Upton 1000 years in the past was calculated precisely. The distance formula through four dimensions called for a lot of energy to be pumped into Upton's body. His vision slowly began to blur and he could no longer hear anything around him. Upton felt completely normal, he just had no senses. Suddenly his ears popped and he crashed to the floor.

When Upton opened his eyes everything was blurry and there was a funny taste in his mouth. He wasn't sure how much time had passed, or unpassed if he was lucky. His hip was sore and he realized that he had dropped about 3 feet to the ground. The mathematicians made sure that Upton didn't "appear" within the earth's crust 1000 years in the past. They made sure by about 3 feet. Upton climbed to his feet feeling out his hip and other parts of his body certain that 3 feet was overkill. Once on his feet, he focused his eyes on a group of people staring at him. At first he wasn't sure if he had actually gone anywhere. Upton looked around at the people and noticed that none of them were wearing Dynasty approved clothing. In fact, all the different colors hurt his eyes.

Upton looked away from all the red shirts and blue pants, and in doing so he realized he was still naked. A streak of panic ran through Upton's mind. Not sure what to do, he ran away, bursting through the wall of people that had gathered to see the naked man. He wasn't running on grass though. He wasn't sure what the ground was made of, but it was hard and hurt his bare feet. In Upton's time the entire ground is covered with grass. He was certain that this must be the past. If a group of people that size were wearing unregulated clothing, a sure massacre would follow. Upton was scared and ran along what looked like an ocean line. People were bathing in the sun and swimming and having playing games.

This was the paradise that existed before the Dynasty took control. People actually played games. People knew how to have fun. Upton had never seen anyone playing a game before, but Hagar mentioned it. Upton couldn't really picture a game being played until he actually saw it. As Upton ran he noticed that there was a pile of clothing on the sand a few yards ahead. As he approached the pile, he wasn't sure what it was, or if it would fit. The clothes weren't regulation, being made from several different colors, but Upton knew that didn't matter now. He just wanted to get something on his body. He ran towards the pile and quickly put on the pair of shorts (green and red plaid) and the orange T-shirt (XXL). He kept on running.

After several hours, Upton had collected himself. He was clothed. People were no longer gawking at him; they

were laughing at him. Upton had never seen anyone laugh before. It wasn't really a popular thing in his time. He had seen the transporters that Hagar had described, and thought how lovely it would be to have a love of science all around the world. He heard someone call them taxis, but they were the transporters that Hagar told him about. He had found a newspaper in a trash receptacle and had a chance to look it over. Upton had never seen a newspaper, and didn't know what to call it, but Hagar had mentioned that printed text would be common before the Dynasty got control of education. Upton could read, only because he was a Firebrand. And he read.

He was apparently in a place called Miami, Florida. The date was November 8, 2000, just as Hagar had predicted (postdicted) it would be. The leading story concerned something called an election. Upton had never heard of such a concept. He gathered enough information to realize that the people of this country, to use a new term, were allowed to choose their leader. If Hagar's information was right, this meant that the people chose to have the Founder as their leader. Why? Something must be wrong. Upton flipped through the paper restlessly. Some explanation would surely present itself if he just looked hard enough. Why would people choose such an evil man?

What was the name, Upton could hardly think. Boosh? Bush? Coosh? Hagar stopped the first person he saw to ask. The man had dark skin, at first Upton flinched, but Hagar had prepared him well. Upton spurted out "Who won the... ele.ction?" The man looked at him as if he was crazy; he didn't answer and kept on walking. He stopped another, this time a woman. "Who won the election? Where is the Found... Where is Boosh?" The woman replied "Too close to call, we'll know tomorrow." She walked on. Upton was confused. Didn't they know? They must care who comes to power; the entire future of the world depends on it.

Upton quickly got dejected. How was he to kill the Founder without knowing where he was? How was he even to get close enough to the Founder to try and kill him? Hagar had taught Upton how to get money, and how to buy guns, and how to fill out paper work, all things Upton never had to deal with in his own time. Is that enough to end an empire before it starts? One man. Can one man ruin the world? The Firebrands had taught him to believe that. And he was just one man; can one man save the world? The Firebrands had taught him to hope for that.

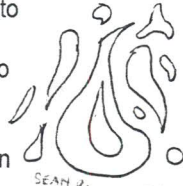
Upton looked down at the paper. He wasn't sure what a Herald was, but it didn't have the answers to his questions. No one here could answer Upton's questions. He was alone. Just then, Upton heard a noise. He wasn't sure what it was. It wasn't a noise that he had ever heard before. Of course there had been a lot of those today. But this noise was different somehow. It didn't sound harsh, or short, or ugly. This noise really wasn't noise; it was something else. It sounded like someone was making noise just to make noise, and it sounded good to Upton. He had never heard anyone trying to make noise before. He was pretty sure the Dynasty didn't allow such a thing.

He followed it, not sure where it would lead him. He didn't expect any answers, but he wasn't get any just sitting there. Hagar. Why hadn't Hagar mentioned anything about this noise? Oh, the closer he got the nicer it sounded. What was it called? It must have a name. He turned a corner and saw nothing, but the noise got louder. He found another corner to turn and he saw a group of people. Upton decided to join the crowd. For the first time of the day, he wasn't the center of the attention. But what was?

He peeked over a couple's head to see another dark skinned man banging on a large metal bowl with two mallets. He was indeed doing it on purpose, and it sounded as wonderful as Upton could imagine something sounding. He nudged the person next to him to ask, "What is that?" The short old man replied "It's a steal drum." Upton seemed satisfied with the answer though it really didn't mean anything to him. Upton continued, "What is the noise called?" The short old man seemed physically hurt. "That's no noise son, that's music." Upton had never heard it, never been allowed to hear it. "How beautiful" he thought out loud.

And that was the last thought to cross Upton's mind. A well-dressed businessman walked behind Upton in the crowd and fired two bullets into the back of his head. The gun was silent; no one even noticed. As Upton fell to the ground the man kept walking, his sunglasses hiding his serious eyes. The man made his way through the crowd, and no one saw anything. Upton's world went black and the music slowly faded into nothingness, and with it the hopes of every human being for the rest of time. The crowd gathered around the pool of blood that surrounded Upton. He was the first victim of the Dynasty.

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"Midra's Mission"

By Amanda Miller

After months of fly-by photographs and high-tech readings it was finally time to land. All the work that I had done to get to this moment; all the convincing I needed to do in order to get funding for this flight; all the setbacks; it was finally here. Would it be worth it? Would we find anything exciting? Just then, Haver tapped me on the shoulder and interrupted my persisting thoughts.

"We are about to land, you might want to get suited up and have your pal, Delta, check your equipment. Don't want to forget anything, we are only going to get one chance at this. Our funders are not going to be very lenient with us!"

I knew he was right. I should stop day dreaming and get down to business. This was, after all, not a safe mission. Landing on the most active volcanic body in the solar system isn't something to be taken lightly.

I leaned into a plastic figure and instantly felt the suit snap on around me. The suits always took a little getting used to since they were skin-tight. They were designed to protect us from extreme cold or heat; but in this case, Loki Patera was a nice sixty degrees Fahrenheit, so there was

no need for that aspect of the suit. I heard the water tank and air tank click into place and I proceeded to turn on the computer via my voice.

"Hello Midra. Running system checks right now. System checks complete and you are ready to go."

"Thank you Delta, your efficiency is always appreciated."

Delta was my electronic teddy bear, something I always had with me when I was away from home. It sounds silly for a girl like me to bother with such foolish things as befriending a computer, but it gets lonely out in places never before explored and having a familiar voice, even if it is computerized, was comforting. She provided me with everything I needed, from distributing my water and air supply, to analyzing data in crucial moments. I trusted Delta to say the least.

Our ship came to a stop, hovering above the island of hardened sulfur. Haver and I had already stepped into the exiting area leaving Jumar, the pilot, aboard to man the ship. Jumar had the safe job; no matter what, she would be going back home. But it was Haver and I that had to deal with the wrath of Io's volcanic surface. If Haver and I did not make it back, Jumar was to go on without us.

"Jumar, we are ready, you can open the gate. Wish us luck!" Haver exclaimed, a little nervous.

Jumar wished us luck as the gate descended slowly to the sulfur surface. I stood in awe of the brilliant colors I saw in front of me. Reds, oranges and yellows decorated the land, making me feel like I was walking into a giant flame. Even though the colors were beautiful, they were created by heated sulfur and just like a flame, sulfur is something not to be touched unless you are properly protected.

As I was staring at the majestic scenery around me, I realized that there was something falling from the brownish-red sky. I told Delta to take a sample of the substance to see if my assumptions were correct.

"Compound made of sulfur. Assumption is correct, Midra," Delta chirped in with her mechanical voice.

I was so thrilled about my finding that I yelled into my speaker to Haver, "Look! Sulfur chips, just as we had predicted!"

Haver replied with a laugh, "Yeah I know Midra, I am way ahead of you. Why don't you stop gawking and get down here with me!"

Haver was already on the ground using his tools to collect samples of the surroundings. I stepped down the ramp and into the fiery colored chips. The chips were from one of the many volcanoes erupting. The volcano could be 1000km away and we could still see the effects of its sulfuric eruption. It was all so fascinating to me.

I caught up with Haver, who had already collected several samples. We decided to make our way to the edge of Loki Patera to take a sampling of the black liquid that surrounded the island. The walk would take a little while, so in the meantime, I had Delta take pictures of the surroundings.

"Delta, why don't we get a picture of the sky here."

Unfortunately, the sky would not hold any stars to add to the photo since the sulfur dioxide atmosphere clouds the view. Not even the sun was very bright because it is so far away; however, Jupiter, the parent planet, is large enough and bright enough to see. Jupiter always sees the same side of Io just like earth always sees the same side of the moon, Luna.

Suddenly, the ground started to shake. It wasn't a violent shaking, but it was enough to notice.

"Midra," Haver called out, "the tidal pumping is occurring now. I am running measurements on the movement, you get ready to record images of any eruptions you might see."

This is what made Io such a unique moon. It literally turns itself inside out! I still remember the shock of learning about the tidal heating system in school. It amazed me to think that because of Ganymede, Europa and Jupiter, Io was in a constant tug of war that made the surface bulge and heat up just like a coat hanger being bent back and forth. This created the volcanic eruptions that spewed 1000 tons of material every year. This constant renewing of Io's surface didn't allow any impact craters to stick around like the crater-filled surface of Castillo. Underneath that crust and molten layers, however, was an iron core that provided Io with a magnetic field. Ever since then, I had wanted to experience this monumental event and now I was.

I kept glancing around trying to spot the blue plume of a volcano. That's when Delta reported to me, that there was a sighting over to my left. I turned and saw the glowing blue spout over the horizon. I asked Delta to estimate the size of the plume.

"It is about 100 miles high Midra. This is not the highest they can go. They have been known to shoot up to 190 miles long, for your information."

"Thanks Delta, you are always on top of things for me!"

After recording a few images of the blue spout, we continued on our journey. Finally we reached the lake of sulfur. The black liquid cut into the yellowish border and provided an interesting contrast worthy of another picture.

Haver sent the special equipment into the melted sulfur to retrieve a sample of the substance. His computer reported that the sulfur was rich in sodium and potassium, things that may come in handy if humans could ever figure out how to live on the ever-changing surface of Io. When we had exhausted every source of samples, Haver and I decided to head back to the ship. With the help of Delta, my trusty companion, the ship would not be hard to find.

While heading back, the data rolled in on how much the tidal pumping had moved the surface. An estimated 330 feet! On earth the water tide in its greatest movement is only 60 feet. Io was definitely a powerful planet.

Since Haver was analyzing the data, I decided to try to take in all my surroundings. Everything was so new to me that I marveled at the slightest things, like how rocky the ground was; a ground that no one else had set foot on till the two of us. A sense of pride surrounded me.

Then, out of nowhere, there was a silence; the hum of Delta had vanished. I realized the desperateness of the situation when I tried to draw in a breath of oxygen and found myself suffocating. Delta had shut down! Things appeared to me in slow motion; I saw Haver struggle for air to breathe with a look of panic on his face. Visions of the safety of the classroom where I had learned all about the dangers of lo sprung into my spinning mind. It had all been a dream, a fantasy, even when taking the pictures, the reality of the dangerous beauty had not set in, not until now. Now I was on my own, without the help of Delta or Haver. I had to think, by myself.

I remembered the switch. The switch that was not discussed much in the lectures on how to use the space suit since everyone relied on computers so much. I reached around to the air sack and felt around for the switch. My fingers grasped a little lever. With one flick, a flow of oxygen came into my mask. Air.

I looked over at Haver. He was lying on the ground. He had not remembered how to manually control the oxygen. A surge of sickness hit my stomach as I woke up to the fact that I was truly alone. No Haver, and most of all, no Delta. I had to make it to the ship by myself, with not even any footprints to follow. With a newly forced confidence, I marched off in the direction of which I had recalled the ship to be at and soon, I saw that lovely ship on the horizon. I would make it.

Once aboard the ship I had the rotten egg smelling suit taken off by the plastic human form that had given it to me in the first place. Jumar was terrified by what had happened and at the same time, profoundly grateful that I had made it back alive. Somehow neither of us cared about what the funders of this mission were to think; we had learned all we wanted from lo.

I looked out the window as we parted from the lava-spewing planet and caught something out of the corner of my eye. There, in Jupiter's atmosphere, was an aurora. The peaceful movements of a glowing cloud of ions seemed inappropriate considering the disaster it had caused. That torus was the same thing that had caused the Galelian computer system to shut down temporarily way back in the 20th century. The Galelian craft had flown close to the radiation belt produced when lo crossed into Jupiter's magnetic field. One trillion watts of power is what shut down Delta. One trillion watts of power is what killed Haver. One trillion watts of power is what it took to make a new me: someone that no longer needed the comfort of a familiar voice. Someone that can survive anything on her own.

*(This story was originally written as an assignment for Dr. DeGraff's Astronomy 103 class)

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"The Payback"

By Sgt. Matt "Raynor" Newberry

He looked at his hardened hands. He saw the fine

cracks crisscrossing his palms, the painful trickle of blood seeping from where the cracks had widened too much. He found it hard to believe that the "blood from a stone" cliché had some validity to it. He continued to stare, trying to remember what they looked like when his skin was normal, without the rock coating it now.

In fact, his whole body looked like it had been fashioned from rock, except his eyes and mouth, which were still as human as the day he was born. He remembered his normal life before, as a child, then as a growing adolescent. Those days were filled with inquiry and irresponsibility, and stretchy, lightweight skin that didn't crumble or crack when he moved too quickly.

He was 17 when the Thrüng-Sha arrived on Earth. Many people rejoiced at the promise of peace with these extra-terrestrials, but he had a gut feeling that the total reasoning of the Thrüng had not been discovered. He had never seen the world so united before. All major conflicts and wars came to a standstill, temporarily bringing peace so everyone could see these visitors from afar (the Vega system, to be exact). Ireland was finally united under Irish government, and the Arabs gave up their bloodquest to re-obtain Jerusalem. There was a sense of happiness almost everywhere he went, except the mass suicides of a few cults claiming annihilation was at hand. He cracked a smile (almost literally) as he thought how lucky those radicals had been.

Then, without warning, the attack came. Their weapons were undetectable by human instruments. He could not help watching as the Thrüng-Sha "Diada-trium," as they called it, leveled the major cities of the world in one blast each. It happened so quickly that no one even had time to scream. Half of his family had been disintegrated in these blasts. He had been told it was painless for these victims, but it did nothing for the gaping hole inside of him.

He practically had fainted with excitement when he heard that the president had been away at the time of the attack, dodging the death that was surely meant for him as well. Of course, the normal human reaction to this devastation was taken: full nuclear barrage. There was no second thought of this, because the entire Thrüng presence had been in orbit the whole time. Everyone was surprised that these "visitors" had not detected the overbearing nuclear arsenal on the planet, but because of the immense shielding surrounding the missiles, they could not be detected by the Thrüng sensors. He had screamed in joy when the thermonuclear explosions lit the sky, bringing the swift death some of his family had experienced.

The Thrüng did leave a legacy to be felt by the remaining human population. The whole planet was doused with an unknown form of radiation, assumed to be residual from the aliens' first strike, or from the power generators onboard the ships. The remaining scientists designated it "delta radiation," and it was the deadliest, as fate would have it. After only a minute of exposure, it was considered terminal. Even lead suits were not impervious to this energy, and a person could only stay outside for a short

period of time in these. Another frightening aspect of this legacy was the ability of it to make other materials emit these deadly rays, making most buildings uninhabitable. Until people could be contained deep underground, the death toll had been rising astronomically.

Finally, completely by accident, a scientist discovered that somehow granite blocked the delta radiation fully. Because of the extreme risk involved in mining granite, though, it was too time consuming to make suits out of the stone. After the news had been spread, an obscure geneticist discovered a very amazing way of turning skin into granite. No one, not even the geneticist, knew how this process worked, but everyone was willing to try it. He smiled again, thinking how easily people take to an idea in a post-apocalyptic world dying of radiation. Pretty soon, you could see countless people walking around in their new granite skin, wearing special eye-covering contacts, since that was the only place that couldn't be covered by the granite-skin. Even with this "disfigurement," he managed to find some beauty in the many colors that resulted from different shades in people's skin. The most striking were the tinges of green and purple; these he considered absolutely beautiful. He was a drab brown, with a few flecks of gold over his face and arms. Nobody had any hair, which wasn't really any problem, although everyone had to get much stronger as the granite layer built up. He now weighed around 700 lbs, which was normal for a man his size. After the transformations, though, the radiation deaths dropped almost to zero, leaving a total world population numbering in the 10 millions.

Now, five years later, a new problem had arisen: the Thrüng-Sha had returned. They had first been detected around Mars' orbit, giving any resistance force on Earth little time to prepare for the attack. Almost every able person on the planet was recruited to the defense force, and given short basic training, then armed to the teeth. The tacticians figured that with the obvious numerical superiority of the Thrüng-Sha, that guerrilla warfare would be the best tactic to repulse the impending ground attack. He had been given a small stockpile of weapons – enough to take on half the Thrüng, he mused to himself. Numerous small bases had been set up in stable buildings, connected by the still existing Internet, which proved its usefulness in the years after the attack. He was camped out near one of entrances of what had been Washington, D.C., along with around 100,000 other "minutemen." After being at his post for only two days, he saw the first of the Thrüng ships coming down outside the district. He found it surprising that the invaders hadn't taken more precaution in landing, because they must have figured that some humans would be left. He could see the door to the spaceship opening, and could see movement, but could not make out an individual Thrüng. He then noticed that he was breathing hard, and if he could, would have been profusely sweating. He took a deep breath, and sat down, attempting to calm himself. This is what he had been waiting for, the chance to personally avenge his family, to rip a few heads off and watch his

enemies die. He had no choice but to wait, since he was at the edge of the large rubble of the former nation's capital. His eyes came down then upon the Washington monument. It was the only building within miles that had not been leveled by the initial blast, though it did show its scars from debris collisions. While some people looked at it with a Freudian opinion, the majority of the survivors saw it as hope incarnate, and naturally, his local base was contained below its signature obelisk.

A few hours later, he heard movement from the direction of the Thrüng-Sha landing force, and risked a peek from his lookout. As he watched, he practically fell to his knees. These aliens looked almost exactly like humans, with the notable exception of flaps under their arms, larger than normal ears, and a singular rhino-esque horn emerging from what he guessed what their foreheads. There had to be at least half a million of the invaders moving toward the city. With his binoculars, he ranged them at about 500 yards, and immediately crouched and picked up his laser pointer he had been provided and signaled at one of the windows at the pinnacle of the monument. It had been equipped with a sensor that would relay his signal of sighting of the enemy and willingness to attack. He waited a few moments, then saw a light flashing in the adjacent window. His message had been received, and his request had been acknowledged. He peeked again excitedly at the advancing force, and guessed them to be about 300 yards from his position. He then climbed down and began to ready his weaponry, clipping numerous grenades on his belt, holstering numerous handguns on his pants (yes, even some tailors had survived to make new lines of clothing for the granite-clad population) and cocking his newest weapon, a cross between a sniper rifle and a high fragmentation grenade launcher. In field tests, it had a frag range of 20 yards, and a firing range of over 500 yards. He carried all this ammunition with him back to his post, where he laid prone, preparing to fire the rifle. He aimed at the middle of their ranks, checked the safety, and fired. Nothing happened. No shot, no death, no revenge. He looked at the safety again, and it was off. Now the Thrüng were a mere 100 yards from his hideout. He swore, and regretted it, and he watched as numerous alien heads turned in his direction. He knew there was no way they could see him, and slowly scuttled back under the cover of the darkness of his hideout. He could hear feet running toward his position, and hid under a ledge, covered with small boulders. That way, he could keep an eye on the advancing aliens without them seeing him. He was shocked again at the fact that as they came closer, he could see that these invaders had no eyes! None that he could see, anyways. "That would explain the large ears," he thought, "they must 'see' like bats." He kept watching as one of the four aliens brought out an instrument that made numerous beeps and whistles that confirmed the lack of eyesight as well. He guessed it was some sort of scanner as the instrument emitted a beam of greenish light. It was recognizable as delta radiation, which he guessed the Thrüng to be invulnerable to. As they

approached, he reached slowly for a grenade, ready to pull the pin should he be discovered.

The green light washed over him, he clinched his eyes...and the Thrüng kept walking. He suddenly realized that the scanner couldn't penetrate his granite skin, and he would just show up as a pile of rocks. The Thrüng continued on, and eventually returned to their ranks, which moved on towards their destination. Suddenly, he heard a squeal and an explosion as another one of his companions fired their rifle and caught the Thrüng-Sha off guard. He could see bodies flying through the air. He quickly jumped from his hiding spot and pulled the pin on the grenade he had been clenching, throwing it into the rear ranks, not waiting for the explosion that would result. He jumped for his rifle, and grabbed it, turned, and fired. The explosion from the grenade and the shot from the rifle impacted at the same time, causing dual explosions that threw Thrüng everywhere.

Soon, shots and explosions could be heard throughout the area, and he turned his attention to the landing ship. He gauged it at near 600 yards from his position. Being one of the furthest positions out, he had also been equipped with a missile launcher that could neutralize a large tank. He was about to take a shot with the launcher when a Thrüng leapt up in front of him. He fell back, shocked, as the creature leveled a very nasty-looking gun at his torso. He once again clinched his eyes as he heard the click of the gun, and felt nothing. He slowly opened his eyes to a very shocked alien, as the strong delta radiation from the gun splashed harmlessly off his chest.



He laughed, as he drew a .45 from his belt and shot the Thrüng straight in the head. He had to shoot three more times before he found a good kill spot, 'cause obviously the Thrüng did not have their vitals in the same place as the humans. With the dead alien next to him, which was spooky enough, he took aim once again at the landing ship. He obtained a lock, and as he pulled a trigger, an explosion nearby caused him to fall back, firing the missile above the ship. He was distraught as the rocket shot upwards, then began to feel much better as the radar guidance kicked in and the missile made its way toward the ship. He watched as it curved gracefully toward its target, and even as the ship began to lift off, corrected its trajectory to catch it right in its belly. The explosion bounced the ship, but it still rose toward its escape. He heard a *whoosh* to his left and right, as smoke trails from the two other missiles converged on the ship. As they caught up with it, the resulting explosions managed to tear the ship in half, which hung in space until the halves exploded in a spectacular red, orange and green explosion.

Within an hour, any Thrüng-Sha forces in the area had been neutralized. The only human casualties were caused by certain morons who had thrown the pin instead of the grenade. Although tragic, he could feel the exuberance in the air overcome it all, as every person in the area gathered at the foot of the monument to hear the results from other encampments around the world. Widespread reports of victory were coming in already, as battle after battle was dominated by the transformed humans. Within a few more hours, the Thrüng ships were detected to be leaving earth's space, encouraged by a few ICBM launches from random sites around the globe.

Years passed, and even though the war had been seemingly won, people were still speculating as to whether or not the Thrüng-Sha would return with stronger weapons. A decade passed, and the aliens never returned, and life began to return to a semblance of normal. Small communities began to spring up, and he became a wanderer, stopping every once in a while to talk to the people who had settled here and there. A couple of times, he stumbled into a battleground from the war, and found numerous remains of mostly Thrüng bodies. He decided to collect a few small Thrüng bones, which although a bit morbid, would serve as trophies and marks of vengeance for his family. He would reach in his pocket and rattle them every once in a while, whenever he thought about his unfortunate family. He took solace in the fact that the creatures who had done this had paid in full, and that the Thrüng-Sha would most likely not be coming back to this little blue dot in the universe.

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"Earthsapplings At Twilight"

By Crystal Nichols

As he was hovering below the jet lines and above the curious creatures' high fog, Donsey flinched at the sudden disturbance. As usual, he was being reamed for watching and listening to various Earthsapplings during the twilight. "You should understand by now Donsey that settling your ship within the planet's atmosphere is the most dangerous at twilight since so many of the saps are watching for something to happen through their minuscule glass tubes." Donsey rolled his eyes as he listened to the Watcher Guard carry on about the obvious. He knew how to simulate the star patterns on his ship to compensate for the difference the ship would have made but explaining this to the Watcher's Committee would be useless. Donsey couldn't help but reply with the same nonsense that he's given before "So little is known about the powers of their sleep-life. I want to discover their secret and understand why some do not have sleep-life at twilight..." Before he could finish he was cut off with the orders to return.

Donsey knew that he would have to stay until dusk, that way the stars would fade and he could take off without notice. He would be forbidden to survey them for another 6 rotations so he knew that he had better take advantage of the time remaining. The only problem was that he knew it would be tricky to remain there for so long undetected. He realized the truth behind the Watcher Guards nagging but he didn't care. He also didn't want to remain with the same stars and simulating long-term start movement, especially since it can show a few glitches that the saps might notice. That's the last thing Donsey needed, was to be blamed for yet another glitch light that the Earthsapplings call UFO's. That may cause an investigation before he can remove himself from the location and risk being seen. Perhaps he should have entered during the Jet-Streamlining time as usual but he had to discover the mystery of sleep-life.

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"The Wall"

By David Seymour

A great magician once created a world. His name was Evah. He was a kind wizard that wanted a world that he could use as a refuge to bring races of creatures to that they might live in peace. An old man in appearance, with a short white beard, flowing purple robes with silver trimming, and short walking staff topped in gold and blue crystal. Strength could still be seen in his body and wisdom shone from his eyes.

Many tales were told of him before he performed this great deed. It was said that animals would often follow him and he would converse with them in their native tongues. People who simply passed by him would later discover that they had a deeper understanding about the world around them. His love of life knew no bounds.

When his world was created no life was present. Water flowed in the rivers, the wind blew across the land unchecked, mountains stood against the sky, and the sunlight fell on the empty land. Even with all his power he could not create life. Evah had built the house and now he searched for those that would live in it.

To many worlds he traveled. He searched for those suppressed races, slaves to others. He looked for races that valued peace, knowledge, and love. When he found such a race he would approach them with an offer. He would tell them about his world and his plan. He would bring them to his world if they agreed to live in peace with the other races he would bring there. If they did not expect his offer he would nod his head in acknowledgment, wished them well in their works, and disappeared.

If they agreed to follow him he would have the community gather in a location. He would then withdraw a flask. It was a pretty thing. Blue tinted glass with a silver stopper. Removing the stopper he asked for those present to enter the bottle. In whisks of mist each individual would enter the flask. Replacing the stopper, Evah traveled the

surrounding land asking each living thing, whether it be plant or animal, if they would like to come to his world. In this way many living things came to his world which he now named, Laphah.

It is noted here that Evah never punished other races that enslaved the races that he saved. Rather, he left them alone, which some say was a punishment in itself. These races had depended on slave labor for many lifespans. Now they had to fend for themselves. It is believed that in this fashion Evah hoped the enslaving races would come and see the error of their ways.

For countless years Evah traveled in this fashion. Laphah now brimmed with life. Laphah was not without its problems or hardships. Diseases, accidents, and weather still plagued the inhabitants of Laphah, but now the races of creatures would come together to battle these plagues and thereby reduce the stresses that they produced. Happiness was found throughout the land.

Once an evil magician came across this land. His name was Nadrid. His appearance varied from person to person but usually referred to a man fair in face with a weakened body (attributed to the affects dark magic plays on one's body) and carrying a wooden staff topped with silver and crystal. He looked upon Laphah with scorn and malice. He saw the riches of the world and desired them.

In a twisted version of Evah's travels of gathering peoples in the name of peace, Nadrid traveled to different worlds gathering an army to invade Laphah. Nadrid's actions did not go unnoticed by Evah. He called to all living things in Laphah to come to the center of the land where he lived in a tower made of marble. Everything obeyed the call and came to the center. The land was now the same as when it Evah first created it.

When Nadrid's army was formed he traveled to Laphah. When he reached it he unleashed his hoard. They were undaunted by the bareness of the land. They marched towards the center of the land; to Evah's tower. No army opposed the hoard's march. Nadrid rejoiced in the upcoming slaughter.

When the hoard reached the hills surrounding Evah's tower, Nadrid looked down. The land was bare right to the doorstep of the tower. No defenses were seen. Nadrid was about to give the command to attack when movement was seen around the tower. From the ground grew a wall. The wall was in the form of a square and made of the same white marble as that of the tower. It grew from the ground and surpassed that of the surrounding hills. When the walls stopped growing, there was a moment's pause before the walls started to move forward. To each direction the walls moved; North, South, East, and West.

Nadrid tried to use his magic to stop the wall's movement but nothing would slow the wall's march. Nadrid tried to destroy the wall but it remained untouched. Meanwhile the wall had climbed the surrounding hills to where the hoard waited. They did not retreat but rather attacked the wall with what they could. Their attack did not

deter the wall's desire to grow. The wall pushed back the forces.

Nadrid used all of his resources. He tried tunneling under the wall and flying over it but each with no avail. The wall continued its advancement without check. The hoard was pushed back to the edge of Laphah, however they were not pushed off Laphah. The wall stopped its movement leaving a strip of land surrounding the wall. It is believed that Evah did not want to push the hoard off the edge, choosing to give them the choice as to how they wanted to finish their lives. He now gave them a strip of land for them to do with as they pleased. Some deem this a punishment in itself because they knew they were feet away from a paradise that they could be a part of.

Some of the hoard would not accept Evah's mercy and jumped off the North side of Laphah, cursing the land so that nothing would ever grow there again. Some of the hoard decided to wait for Evah to remove the wall or his power to weaken so that they might again try raiding the riches of the land again. Still some others saw the mercy of Evah and were grateful. They cast their weapons over the edge of Laphah as a sign of repentance. To them the land yielded its riches with which they built their homes and lived out the rest of their lives on the East edge of Laphah.

Nadrid continued battle the wall but never gained any ground. With his magic spent along with his life, he cursed the land and died. This occurred on the South edge of Laphah.

It is said that someday Evah will remove the wall so that he can continue to search other worlds. Till then he is trapped within the walls he created.

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"Free Will in Time Travel: A Look at the Many Possibilities"

An Essay By Jennifer Shuler

Free will- n. 1. The ability or discretion to choose. 2. The power, attributed especially to human beings, of making free choices.

Many of us believe that we can affect what will happen to us in making decisions. A fundamental belief of democracy and the founding of this country is that our actions as a nation will decide what becomes of our government and our nation. (Not that we can actually decide anything as a nation, according to this latest election... but, I digress.) What, exactly, happens to our notions of free will when you add the possibility of time travel? How does foreknowledge of an event become a monkey wrench in the smooth flow of time? Or does it?

But first, some ground rules:

1. Niven was incorrect; time travel is possible.

2. Travel to the past, however, is impossible. I can only deal with so many possibilities. Therefore, the past is immutable.

3. For now, I shall also assume that there is only one universe. Later, I will tackle multiple universe possibilities.

In a block universe, the past, present, and future still do or already exist. They have been there since the beginning of time, and every decision you make every day is the one you were intended to make since before you were born. This is universe behind the tale of Oedipus Rex; he learned of his future and tried desperately to make it not come true, only to discover that, in attempting, he actually fulfilled the prophecy in the end. One easy way to visualize this kind of universe is to consider a movie. The present is one scene in the ongoing story. If you rewind the movie, you can see the "past"; fast-forward, the "future". No matter where you are in watching *The Wizard of Oz*, you know that, in the end, Dorothy goes home, the lion becomes courageous, the scarecrow gets a brain, and the tin-man, his heart. Considering free will within the movie, Dorothy still has the "free will" to choose whether to follow Glenda's advice, but time has already accounted for her decision in the block universe. Does her free will, then, even exist? Walter Kubilius argues, "Free will is simply an illusion. It is synonymous with incomplete perception." If something is known to happen in the future, it is impossible to make it not happen in exactly that way. Conversely, no matter how hard you try to not do something, it will happen if it is supposed to. One argument presented for the existence of a block universe follows:

-The future follows from the past. (*Indisputable.*)

-The past is unchangeable. (*See ground rule #2.*)

-What follows from the unchangeable is unchangeable.

(*Ok, this makes sense.*)

...Therefore, the future is unchangeable. (*Wait a minute...?!*)

But what happens when a person fails to make the "correct" decision? According to "Time Travelers Never Die", the universe will slowly fade into nothingness until it no longer exists, or the correct action is made. In this case, entire neighborhoods surrounding a home disappear into a gray mass of nothingness, known in that story as the November Delusion. If someone else knows your future, do you still have free will? Free will may still seem apparent to you, even if someone else knows exactly what you will decide. Scary thought, isn't it? And if you know your own future, like in the television series "Early Edition" (where the newspaper comes a day early, every day – though the universe is not a block universe, but changeable, in this show); then do you have free will? A wrong decision could prove catastrophic (as it nearly did in "Time Travelers Never Die") so free will is definitely not present here. Overall, a block universe can have what seems to be free will to the person making the decision, but the future will still hold the same, and the decisions will still be the same, as it has been since the beginning of time.

Still keeping a block structure, what happens if there is not only a single universe, but, instead, a manifold universe (which is made up of multiple universes stacked in 4-space)? More universes are created each time there is a decision of some sort to be made. Think of the cheeseburger you had for lunch; there is a universe where it had pickles and one where it did not. Then, these two universes become four when you consider the choice of ketchup (pickles/ketchup, no pickles/no ketchup, pickles/no ketchup, no pickles/ketchup). This would mean infinitely many universes are created every second. If you are a vegetarian, though, the universes in which you had no cheeseburger will greatly outnumber those in which you did. Universes are created by statistical probability. When time traveling into the future, the future seen could be in any of infinite universes, not necessarily one's own. When looking at it this way, free will is still plausible. Add to this thought that what happens in one universe must be the opposite of what happens in another universe, and the idea changes slightly. If the other you in the other universe decides something, it follows logically that you (in this universe) must decide the opposite.

Now, consider an alterable future, first with a single universe. If the future is alterable, free will is complete and true. Any decision will "change" the impending future, and exercising one's free will by changing one's mind will affect how the future occurs. This is the view of most people as they go through their daily lives; the most simple, most accepted, and most acceptable of the possibilities. People like to feel as if they have control over their own destinies. In this case, time travel to the future would be fruitless (and perhaps even impossible), because the future does not already exist. Any vision of the future is prone to change millions of times over before it occurs as present. It is then impossible to know one's future.

A manifold universe would be similar to a single universe concerning free will, but traveling to the future could put the traveler in another universe (not that it would matter much – the future is alterable, remember? – The future he sees is not really his future.) *Note: I am not sure there would be a manifold universe without a block structure, but if it is possible, then this is my analysis of it.*

According to the laws of physics, everything not forbidden is required. So far, time travel has not been forbidden, but I am not sure it will be even in my lifetime. Besides, I do like my free will, even if it is an illusion.

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"The Cyprus Plague"

By Kathleen Sinnamon

In the middle of the narrow, cramped room sat Robyn, a young girl with long, red hair who was currently

surrounded by papers, books, chemicals, beakers and test tubes. Robyn looked up from her work and sighed. The chronometer read 1800 hrs. Sat. October 2nd, 2042. She sighed again and tucked the long curly lock of red hair that always fell in front of her eyes behind her ear. Katalina should be back by now, she thought. Oh well. That girl had never had a sense of time. In the next room, the stolen terminal was blaring the evening news. She paused to listen.

"Another outbreak of the infamous Cyprus plague struck in lower France today..."click

"La plaga de ciprus fue despiadada. El muerte está abundante..." click

"Local scientist Damian Reviour denies having found a cure for this plague despite recent allegations. Reviour is quoted as saying that..."click

"Locals say that he is keeping the cure from those who are genetically impure, saying that he believes the disease will purify the human race. Some residents of the complex have been charged with burning him in effigy..."click

"Reviour, head of Reviour Labs: 'The so-called Cyprus plague only affects those unable to afford or those wealthy who are foolish enough not to accept genetic engineering. Since only those with corrupted genes are being affected, perhaps we should let the Nature take its course...'click

"Genetic engineers assure the public that all people who have been genetically engineered will not suffer from this disease."

"Well, that's a relief, Doctor..." CLICK

John turned off the set and slammed down the remote control, casting a hateful glance at the now silent terminal. "Who cares if the g-e's get the plague anyway? I am sure they'd be able to find a cure before they lost too many of this world's fine aristocrats." he muttered angrily.

Robyn called sarcastically from the back room "Calm down. What do you think I'm trying to make in here, the world's biggest Easter egg?" She returned to her work, carefully adding the blood samples from the plague victims to the bluish liquid in the beaker.

The outside door slid open and Alan stalked into the room. "That's twelve we lost today, Robyn, twelve! All under 35 and that's only in the smaller complex. Who knows how many the larger ones lost!" he said angrily as he made his way into her lab, carefully avoiding the piles of papers on the floor.

"Katalina will know. She's been playing administering angel since dawn this morning. Where is she?!!!" Robyn said while hunched over the flame, gently stirring the mixture of chemicals while the computer hookup recorded temperatures and compounds. She looked up to see the hurt and anger in his eyes. More softly she said, "I'm trying, really I am. But when you are an outlaw its kind of hard to obtain chemicals. I have tried every combination that I know. I rediscovered the new Juneau drug twice, the standard cancer drugs about fifteen times, and penicillin about fifteen hundred times. I just can't seem to find the right combination

to block the reproduction and spread of that damned plague!"

She turned as the outside door slid open again and an exhausted Katalina stumbled through the doorway, almost falling into a chair. There was a vacant expression in her eyes.

"The youngest... so far... two of them were only 4... only 4.." she said, trailing off into a whisper.

Robyn came up to her and put her hands on Katalina's shoulders as if to shake her out of it. "Kat," she said, "when was the last time you ate, never mind slept?"

"Could've been around four when I got up this morning, don't really remember," she answered.

"Now don't you dare start lecturing, girl," said Alan when he saw the look on Robyn's face. "I know for a fact you haven't moved from that seat or taken a break in at least 8 hours."

Robyn smiled ruefully. "You're probably right. So what's for dinner?"

"Don't have a clue, John's on tonight."

"Did I here my illustrious name?" asked the six-foot overgrown blond cherub from the doorway.

"Yeah, you pompous oaf. What's for dinner?" Robyn asked him.

"Pasta. Same thing as was for lunch, considering nobody ate that," said John kidding.

~~~~~  
Damian Reviour, head of Reviour Labs, looked up from the report he was reading as his private detectives came into his office. "So?" he asked.

"We have searched every 'bandoned building in town. Nothin. You'd think they were ghosts or something," replied Detective Peterson.

"Every time we get close, they vanish. And every time we think we've finally caught the leader, it turns out to be the wrong one. They always bust them out too, which is something of a feat, considering all the security we got around here. They take care of their own, I'll give them that." Detective Johnson added, with just a hint of admiration in his voice.

"All right, keep looking. Dismissed," the chief said.

This band, Robin Hood and his Merry Men, was turning out to be more elusive than he had originally thought. When they had first shown up, he had just assumed that they were another gang, nothing to worry about. But their tactics were not the violent, brutal and random gang tactics he was used to encountering. They were clever and professional. They used scare tactics and clever "jokes" to panic the wealthy class while at the same time managing to obtain the items they needed. They had been charged with ten break-ins to major chemical companies, three of those times only to steal what had appeared to be a common pain killer. They stole food, blankets, and even tablecloths from some of the city's most influential citizens.

Just last week they'd made off with a very clever prank. Apparently there had not been enough copper to maintain the electrical connections for heat, lights and terminals in

several of the complexes where the poorest of the poor lived. A number of complaints were filed, but the Director had ignored them. Robin Hood and his Merry Men broke into the Director's house, and made off with his old-fashioned copper water piping and several of his wife's necklaces. Amazingly, the next day the connections in the complexes had been fixed. Coincidence? He doubted it.

Damian was the real authority in not only that district, but in most of the world's major corporations, and he knew it. And now this band of petty thieves was mocking him in his own district. Damian slammed his fist down on the desk. He wanted Robin, not just any member of the band. But every time they caught one of the young men from the band, it was the wrong person. Why does Robin always slip through my fingers? he mused. The phone rang, interrupting his tirade for the moment.

After answering the phone, Damian's mood turned from annoyance and frustration to fury. The Black Cat, another local fugitive from justice, had made another "appearance". Rumors suggested that the Robin Hood and Black Cat incidents were linked, even though the Black Cat had shown up about a year before Robin Hood's band. There was very little information on record about this mysterious figure except for the relative height, about five feet seven inches. No one even knew whether the Cat was a female or male, young or old. The Black Cat was like a shadow, in that both vanished in the dark and both were elusive around direct light. The fugitive's name came from the fact the figure's feline agility and old superstition. Everyone knows that having a black cat cross your path is bad luck. Well, to have this Cat cross your path brought on luck of the worst kind. Usually bank files went missing, computers crashed, heirlooms were stolen, and identification key cards vanished - just enough to make the victims really paranoid.

The odd thing about the Cat was that he or she had passed numerous retina scans and fingertip analyses to break into buildings. How exactly he or she managed to pull this off was puzzling, since the Cat could not possibly be g-e. Criminal tendencies were among the first traits to be eliminated in the genetic engineering process. In addition, all retina and fingertip scans were designed only to recognize the perfect genetically engineered family that ran that business.

The Cat only struck at dusk or directly at midnight. No one ever saw the Black Cat arriving, but he or she took great care in being observed leaving the scene so there could be no doubt about who committed the crime. The Cat took even greater precautions against being caught. Tonight at dusk, a little under fifteen minutes ago, the Black Cat was observed leaving Reviour Labs.

Damian Reviour rushed to the Labs, carefully going over all his work and files. He was relieved that nothing was taken or tampered with. After he got over his initial, he decided that the break-in just a way of insulting him, and believed there was no chance of further danger. He refused both to increase security and to accept police protection.



After supper that evening, Katalina had gone straight to bed at Robyn's insistence. John led a small group of the rest of the members of the band on an excursion to find arsenic, chlorine, sodium, a high power microscope and food. Robyn was attempting meditation and Alan was composing yet another song on his small harp. He was actually quite good, in fact one of the Irish ladies in the complexes told him he had the voice of a bard. He sometimes sold the songs for extra income to g-e singers because although the voice can be genetically engineered, the talent and creativity cannot.

In the middle of a soft sweet lullaby, Alan hit a mischord and let out a grunt of frustration. "I realize this is really a bad time, Robyn, but this has been perplexing me for a long time. Why is it that Katalina can spend so much time around the victims of the plague and not catch it? Is she immune or somethin'?"

"In a way. I though you knew. Katalina is a g-e," answered Robyn, absentmindedly from the rather strange position she was in, on her back, head tucked and legs straight up.

"Then how come she's helpin' us? Thought they got rid of all the criminal genes in g-e's."

"They think they did. But they can't eliminate people's consciences or their hearts. Katalina's mother was not a g-e. She died of the plague when Kat was only 7. Her family told her to forget her, that her mother was inferior and worthless. Kat rebelled."

"Some family." Alan muttered, and turned back to his music and began a sadder song, one full of grief and pain as Robyn executed a neat flip.

Two nights later the Black Cat entered Reviour Labs through the front door and managed to pass a retina scan and a finger print scan. Quietly, like a shadow, the Cat entered the elevator and climbed down the shaft. Upon reaching the basement, the Cat was forced to hang from the walls of the shaft and pray when an elevator moved down from above. Jumping onto the roof, the Cat rode the elevator to the secret levels below. After two scientists exited the elevator, the Black Cat pried open the top and dropped through. Forcing the door open, the Cat stepped out into the hall and sprinted down the corridor.

Damian Reviour looked on in surprise when his security cameras suddenly went out. Dam inferiors! I never should have let them build any of the equipment in my lab, he thought. He walked slowly out of the control room to the main repair room. As soon as he exited the room, the Cat entered and called up all files on the plague.

Quickly scanning, the Cat found a string of genetic coding that created immunity to the plague in g-e's, and it appeared purposeful. This can only mean that the genetic engineers know of the disease's existence! the Cat thought, stunned. Scanning further, the Cat almost fainted when the formula for the plague appeared on the screen. The engineers did not just know of the plague, they created it! The Cat's anger was almost consuming at that point.

Determined to find a cure, the Cat did not notice the alarm sounding that Damian was returning. The Cat's fingers danced over the keypad, and the records for Damian Reviour appeared on the screen. The Cat scanned through page after page of articles praising Reviour, and yawned. Nothing useful here... the Cat thought, Wait a minute... As the Cat located the genetic background files on Damian Reviour, he entered the room. Not quick enough to react, the impossible had happened. The Cat was caught!!!

Hours later, Robyn heard the report of the Black Cat's capture over the terminal. She ordered the band to meet in the main part of the headquarters. Meanwhile, she donned her "uniform", a copy of the original Robin Hood's costume, but much warmer and equipped with modern tools. She was worried. Kat was experienced at what she did, she had been the Black Cat for over 3 years now, but she had never been caught. Kat was an expert with dealing with computers, break-ins and security. Had she engineered her own capture? If not, Robyn seriously feared for her safety.

Robyn hurried down the corridor to the meeting room. The main members were all there. She was relieved to see John and Alan taking charge of the 10 or so minor members of the group. They nodded to her as she entered the room.

"Are you all ready?" she asked, the tone of command in her voice. The group nodded. "Katalina is in trouble. She broke into Reviour Labs, trying to find the information that will lead to a cure of this damned disease, and managed to get caught red-handed. And we know that Reviour is not planning on letting her go soon. In fact, he's ordered the Interrogation team in."

There were gasps from around the room. The Interrogation team was well known and feared by outcasts everywhere. The members of the Interrogation team were g-e's whose genes were specifically altered to create sadistic and merciless personalities. They tended to pick a person to blame for a crime, and then tortured them until they confessed.

Robyn noted the reaction and decided that nothing else need be said. "Let's move out."

Meanwhile, Damian Reviour was pacing outside the interrogation room, looking through the one-way mirror at his silent prisoner. The first attempt to make the Cat remove the mask had failed when the Cat had neatly dispatched all six guards into a tumbled heap in the corner. No one had dared a second attempt. Damian found the mask disconcerting. He liked to know who he was dealing with, it gave him an advantage. Right now, the Cat had the advantage. More than that, he was positive this intruder was genetically inferior and he couldn't stand someone so unworthy having the upper hand. The police had yet to find what the Cat had been after, for the Cat had crashed the computer system right after he had interrupted his or her work. It was four hours later, and the system was still down.

He paused to look closer at his prisoner. The Cat wore a long black cloak over a black jumpsuit. The cloak was



currently pulled close around the body, as if to shield something from him. The Interrogation Team asked another question, but no response came from the Cat. One of the members began loading a combination of a truth serum and a sedative into a dart gun. But Damian was tired of waiting for the Interrogation Team to do their job. Dam Its - they're almost as bad as the non-genetic engineered. Whoever thought of adding inferior personality genes to g-e's deserved to be shot. He decided to take some action.

Damian opened the door and strode into the room. The interrogation team looked up, startled at his entrance, but the Cat sat back, with an air of confidence, as if he or she knew the exact moment when he would enter. It infuriated him. He dismissed the interrogation team with a wave of his hand and a "GO!" They started to protest, but he cut them off with a glance. He watched until they had shut the door.

"WHO ARE YOU?" he thundered at the prisoner.

The Cat stood up and looked at him, then proceeded to walk around him.

"You poor, pitiful little man." the Cat said, in a definitely feminine voice. "You have to control everything in your little world or it falls apart. What a horrr-ible shock this is going to be."

"What??" asked Damian, clearly confused and thoroughly nonplused. "What do you mean?" he asked in a voice that was simultaneously threatening and frightened.

"You think everyone is inferior to you, that you are the purnt-ect example of humanity's triumph, don't you? But I have a sssecret for you." the Cat almost purred.

By this time Damian was incredibly angry, annoyed and frightened. He was about to say something when an investigator walked into the room to tell him that the results of the Cat's blood test were back. He glared at her as she calmly removed her cloak, showing off an excellent figure and almost preened. He exited the room before he could say anything stupid.

Robyn, Alan, John, and the other members of the gang had reached the compound where Katalina was being kept. Alan had isolated the two rooms where she could be and pointed them out to the others. They split into teams, one to cover the perimeter and one for each of the rooms. Quietly, John disabled the guards standing outside the door and picked up an unconscious man to press the palm of his hand to the door scanner. The two infiltrating groups entered while the third kept guard. No alarm was sounded. John then pried open the panel behind the door, and disabled the alarm circuits throughout the compound

By the time Damian had finished reading the report, he was livid. "Impossible, absolutely impossible!" he cried. "This cannot be true!" The report stated that the Cat, a common criminal, was genetically engineered. Her blood tests showed perfect blueprinting - without a single flaw, not even a single genetic fluke. He slammed the report down

on his desk and marched down the hallway towards the interrogation room.

Kat was sitting on the floor, discussing the escape plan with Robyn when she heard Damian's footsteps. "Quickly, out the window!" she cried. "Don't forget what I told you. And remember to be back in exactly seven minutes."

She listened breathlessly as the guard let Damian in. But he was detained by his own security measures and Robyn made it out. Damian entered, furious. He's probably seen the reports, she thought.

Sure enough, the first words out of his mouth were "How did you do it? How could it possibly happen?" He paced from one side of the room to the other. "They guard against this type of thing. You can't be a g-e and be a criminal, its impossible!!!"

She answered him sweetly "Just because they eliminated the criminal gene doesn't mean they eliminated my conscience or my sense of justice." Her words just made him angrier. But she had to stall him, just a few more minutes.

Luckily, he gave her the perfect opening "But you have everything, justice is yours. I don't understand!" he said, almost stamping his feet, like a child having a tantrum.

"Let me tell you a story about my mother..." she began.

Robyn was racing down the corridor, closely followed by four others. She slipped silently into the doorway leading to the chemical labs. It was open. She motioned for the others to wait outside while she entered the room, heading directly for the freezer where Kat had told her the specimens were kept. Before opening it, she put on the special gloves necessary for handling such things. She scanned labels and grabbed a vial that was third from the left. Robyn carefully slid the vial into a transporting container. Then she removed the dart gun from the holster on her leg, which was filled with tranquilizers. She removed the dart from the chamber and took an empty one from her ammunition belt. She put the gun, the empty dart and the container in a small satchel. She checked her chronometer - three minutes left. She shut the door to the lab as she exited and almost sprinted down the hallway, the others following. She hoped she was not too late.

They dodged several guards by ducking into alcoves, and then exited through a large black door. Robyn made her way over to where the window to the interrogation room was. Kat was talking to Damian Reviour, and his back was to the window. Carefully Robyn lowered the satchel into the window, praying the alarms were still disconnected.

Kat looked up and saw the satchel descending. She chose that moment to start to wrap up her story, walked around the table until the satchel was behind her back before Damian turned around. Robyn dashed away from the window as she spoke, ordering all her people outside of the building and as far away as possible. She sprinted down the road, where she met Alan, John and the rest of the group. They hitched a ride back to the complex to wait.



Katalina had retrieved the satchel and hid it underneath her cloak. She had finished her story, now all she had to do was load the gun. Damian was staring straight ahead, not looking at her. His confusion and frustration was almost a tangible presence in the room. "Why break into the computer lab if you knew I had the cure?" he asked.

"I wasn't sure," she answered truthfully. "Plus, it wasn't enough to have the antidote, I had to know how to make it. But here is a question for you: Why did you design the plague?"

He turned, he must have heard the hurt in her voice, but the surprise and anger was more evident on his face. "What else do you know?"

She had finished loading the gun underneath her cape. "I know something even you don't know Damian. You are not genetically engineered. I accessed your genetic files in the computer. You never knew, because you had codes to bypass security, you never had to go through a retinal check."

"I don't believe you. I designed the plague to kill off all those with corrupted genes, and I will succeed. You're bluffing - you are just trying to trick me into giving you the cure. Well, I won't, not ever," he declared. She was again reminded of a stubborn child.

Katalina had been afraid of this, but she was also prepared. "Poor man - if you want to eliminate all those with 'corrupt genes', you'll have to die yourself." She pulled the gun out from underneath her cloak.

"If I don't give you the cure, you'll kill me? You'd be killed as soon as you walked out of this room."

"I'm not that foolish. I'm just going to make you suffer the plague you designed." And with that, she pulled the trigger. Damian Reviour hit the floor. Alarms sounded and guards swarmed, removing Reviour, and checking the cell. They confiscated the gun. Katalina remained a silent, smiling Avenging Angel in the center of the room. Only when she was handcuffed did she move.

"Damian Reviour, head of the Association for Genetic Supremacy, announced earlier this morning that he will be distributing the cure for the Cyprus plague. He claims to have recently discovered the drug. He says that although he believes that people who are not genetically engineered are inferior, it does not mean that they should suffer. He has offered support for the people who have already lost family members to the plague. This is a major development in the war against this deadly disease.

It also comes as a surprise, since Reviour has long since battled against the inferiors, wanting to deny them rights to certain jobs because they, quote, cannot be trusted. This epidemic could have eliminated all inferiors. Reviour could have withheld the cure, ensuring the supremacy of the g-e's, but he did not.

Reviour also denied the reports that he captured the Black Cat breaking into his lab last night. He also disavows all rumors that Robin Hood's Band tried to help the Cat escape. These criminals remain at large, although....." CLICK.

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Jamie Kern: "WORM Part 1: A New Proposal"  
Adrienne Robbins: "Abort"  
Sean Rook: "The Price of Power," drawings  
Andria Schwartz: "Revenge," drawings

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### **Issue # 6      Fall 2000**

#### Officers:

Benjamin Miller: President  
Jennifer Shuler: Vice President  
Erica Hesselbach: Secretary  
Jamie Kern: Treasurer  
Jamie Kern: Editor

Dr. David DeGraff: Advisor

#### Contributors:

Amanda Piering: Cover Art, "Voice of the Other"  
Andria Schwartz: "Dianna"  
Jennifer Shuler: art  
Katerina Naumento: Lots of Art!  
Benjamin Miller: "Our Neighbors"  
D.C. McCoy: "Lost Time Never Returns", "Yes!"(art)  
Justin Long: "Artificial Disaster"  
Jamie Kern: "The Moirai"  
Aaron Hydrick: Comic Strip, Lots of art!  
Erica Hesselbach: art  
Anonymous: Untitled

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## ***Books and Movies Donated to Herrick Library:***

### **Books**

The Currents of Space by Isaac Asimov  
Nightfall by Isaac Asimov & Robert Silverberg  
Robots and Empire by Isaac Asimov  
Foundation and Earth by Isaac Asimov  
Anti-Ice by Stephen Baxter  
The Quincunx of Time by James Blish  
A Princess of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs  
The Warlord of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs  
Against the Fall of Night by Arthur C. Clarke  
3001, The Final Odyssey by Arthur C. Clarke  
Another Part of the Galaxy by edited by Groff Conklin  
A Call to Arms by Alan Dean Foster  
The False Mirror by Alan Dean Foster  
The Spoils of War by Alan Dean Foster  
The Difference Engine by William Gibson & Bruce Sterling  
The Dragon Reborn by Robert Jordan  
The Eye of the World by Robert Jordan  
The Fires of Heaven by Robert Jordan  
The Great Hunt by Robert Jordan  
The Shadow Rising by Robert Jordan  
A Wrinkle in Time by Madeline L'Engle  
The Farthest Shore by Ursula K. Le Guin  
A Wizard of Earthsea by Ursula K. Le Guin  
Damia by Anne McCaffrey  
The Rowan by Anne McCaffrey  
The Gripping Hand by Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle  
The Man-Kzin Wars by Larry Niven & Poul Anderson & Dean Ing  
Man-Kzin Wars II by Larry Niven  
Man-Kzin Wars V by Larry Niven, S.M. Stirling, Thomas T. Thomas & Jerry Pournelle  
Blue Mars by Kim Stanley Robinson  
The First Book of Swords by Fred Saberhagen  
The Return by William Shatner  
Her Majesty's Wizard by Christopher Stasheff  
The Oathbound Wizard by Christopher Stasheff  
The Witch Doctor by Christopher Stasheff  
Snow Crash by Neal Stephenson  
Star Wars: The Last Command by Timothy Zahn  
Star Wars: Dark Force Rising by Timothy Zahn  
We by Yevgeny Zamyatin

### **Movies**

Matrix  
Labyrinth  
Star Trek: First Contact  
Star Trek: The Next Generation The Best of Both Worlds Part I  
Star Trek: The Next Generation The Best of Both Worlds Part II  
Spaceballs  
Godzilla King of the Monsters  
Godzilla vs. the Sea Monster  
Planet of the Apes  
The Blob  
Dragonheart  
Apollo 13  
Ice Pirates  
2001  
Ghost in the Shell  
Stargate  
Independence Day

### Metropolis

### Willow

### The Dark Crystal

## **Gift Collection from AU Sci-Fi – as of Fall 1997**

The Worlds of Poul Anderson by Poul Anderson  
The Robots of Dawn by Isaac Asimov  
Voyagers by Ben Bova  
Privaleers by Ben Bova  
Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card  
2061: Odyssey Three by Arthur C. Clarke  
Reach for Tomorrow by Arthur C. Clarke  
Jinxon a Terran Inheritance by Brian Daley  
Fall of the White Ship Avatar by Brian Daley  
In Conquest Born by C. S. Friedman  
The Adventures of the Stainless Steel Rat by Harry Harrison  
Children of Dune by Frank Herbert  
Dune by Frank Herbert  
God Emperor of Dune by Frank Herbert  
Dune Messiah by Frank Herbert  
Chapterhouse: Dune by Frank Herbert  
The Mansions of Space by John Morressy  
Afterwar by Janet Morris  
Polar Fleet by Warren Norwood  
Gateway by Frederik Pohl  
Beyond the Blue Event Horizon by Frederik Pohl  
There Will Be War by J. E. Pounelle  
Men of War by J. E. Pounelle  
Warrior by J. E. Pounelle  
Blood and Iron by J. E. Pounelle  
Prince of Mercenaries by Jerry E. Pounelle  
Call to Battle! by J. E. Pounelle  
The Mercenary by J. E. Pounelle  
Day of the Tyrant by J. E. Pounelle  
Armagedoon by J. E. Pounelle  
Guns of Darkness by J. E. Pounelle  
After Armagedoon by J. E. Pounelle  
Computer War by Mack Reynolds  
Red Mars by Kim Stanley Robinson  
Green Mars by Kim Stanley Robinson  
Men and Machines edited by Robert Silverberg  
City by Clifford D. Simak  
A Company of Stars by Christopher Stasheff  
Star Wars: Vol. 1 Heir to the Empire by Timothy Zahn