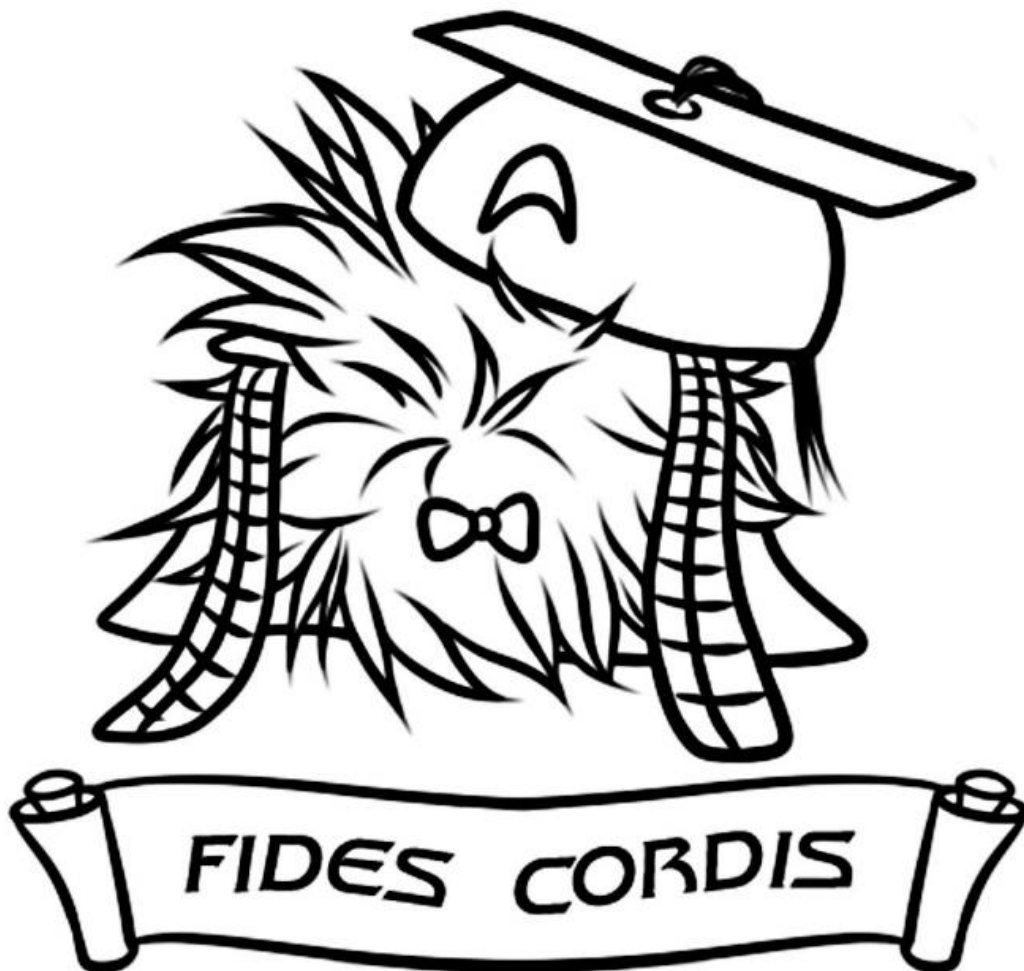


CUSFS in association with Trek-S(p)oc(k) proudly presents:



# Troublesome Tribbles Behaving Academically



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## Chair-being's address:

Hello CUSFS!

As the New Sun shines down upon us, the summer gets ever closer. It's not over yet - this term brings with it the Veizla, Wolfson May Ball and the ever present and glorious invasion of Norway.

It's been a wonderful year - and a wonderful edition of TTBA with the most varied, exotic and ambitious chain-writings I've seen. It's a walk [1] down memory lane to my time at CUSFS, and it's good to know that whilst the content changes, the core theme of chaos prevails.

Lastly, and most importantly, a huge Thank You to CUSFS - for this year, and the years before - and Good Luck with the final few weeks! You deserve it,

Olivia Morley  
CUSFS Chair-being 2017-2018

[1] A walk worth [2] it, despite all the pigeons.

[2] The length you go to keep the traditional pun alive...

## Editor's note:

Greetings, CUSFSites!

Thank-you all for your participation and patience with chain-writing over the last two terms, and thanks to everyone that has submitted their own work.

This is a special edition of TTBA in collaboration with the Oxford Trek-Soc, to whom I credit the amazing (and adorable) cover art, title inspiration and the 'home improvements' section of the magazine.

As it should this TTBA contains many weird and wonderful things, including but not limited to medical drama, dwarves, and sharks and, of course, puns. So many puns.

I hope this publication can brighten the gloom that is exam term, and that I can further tempt you by the promise of an upcoming edition in May Week that will contain such delicacies as reverse chains and the horror that is the Markov chain. For now, enjoy!

Megan Griffiths  
TTBA Editor 2017-2018

## 24 MINUTES IN A&E

Alastair Haig • Sarah Binney • Samuel Cook • Samos Ottewill-Soulsby • Anon. • Anon. • Charlotte Griffiths

*'Ah, finally the Sci-Fi A&E Chain I started comes to completion... Fun Fact: Originally, what the Cyborg was saying was supposed to be 'Hold my Beer', but now I'm really invested with who on Earth Holdart is (Sequel Chain anyone?)'*

– Alastair

*'This one is definitely well set up for a sequel. One of the more narratively-consistent chains that I've been involved in!'*

– Samuel

### ALTERNATIVE TITLES:

- THE VOICE
- ALWAYS LISTEN TO THE WHOLE MESSAGE
- GR4Y'S ANATOMY
- PATIENT #14285

–  
**A**mbulance sirens blared as the door swung open and the man was pushed in on a trolley. Dr Picardo rushed to the side of the gurney and looked over him. The man's voice emulator was faulting, repeating the same broken phrase over and over again.

*'Hol..! Hol..! Hol..! Hol..! Hol..!'*

Dr Picardo signalled for his medical student. McFadden slowly approached; the patient's chest was blown wide open. She peered inside and tried to stop herself vomiting; the wound was a mish-mash of wires, tissue and... McFadden blinked a few times to make sure. Yes, and a S.T.U.A.R.T. Action Figure lodged into his shoulder joint. How could that have even...?

"McFadden. Suggestions?" asked Dr Picardo.

McFadden thought for a few moments, trying to remember the mnemonic. She muttered under her breath, "DOOM: 'Don't forget, Objects, Organs, Metal'. Or was it Overshell, Obtrusion, Meat... Damnit." She took a stab in the dark, and hoped Dr Picardo wouldn't notice.

"We want a Cyberneticist ASAP to stop his upgrades crashing, and we need to remove Stuart before he gets integrated into the system. When he's conscious we can see if he wants tissue regrowth or enhancement for the... uh...hole."

Picardo nodded silently and shouted to a nearby Nurse. "Fetch me a pair of Forceps to remove the foreign body and some nanites to regrow the musculature..."

Picardo winced as the man's voice kept droning on.

*'Hol..! Hol..! Hol..! Hol..! Hol..!'*

"...and a damn electrician to turn off this infernal voice box." This gruff utterance came from the figure that now stumbled into the emergency room, casting out for balance and almost toppling a passing Nurse, which had to wheel its gyros wildly to keep itself upright. Grabbing gloves from the wall dispenser, Dr Persefon turned to face the patient. "Woman can't blooming think with that racket, let alone carry out goddamned surgery."

McFadden heard Picardo sigh loudly. His animosity with the foul-mouthed Head of Cybernetics had for many years been the talk of the break-room. "Thank you, Doctor

Persefon, but you seem to be lost. This is emergency surgery, not the mod room.”

Without taking her eyes off the wounded man, Persefon snorted. “You wouldn’t know what to do with bionics this deep if they came with a damn instruction booklet. What in the name of Nikola bloody Tesla is that in his clavicle? And where the hell is that bloody electrician? I’m on the edge of short-circuiting the damn thing myself.”

*‘Holl-! Holl-! Holl-!’*

Picardo grabbed the forceps from the returning Nurse. All thoughts of imparting useful knowledge to his student had clearly fled his mind. “Apparently you’re not used to working in such high-stress environments, Doctor. I’d love to give you a brief introductory tour one day, but if you wouldn’t mind leaving it to the professionals...”

*‘Hold-! Hold-! Holda-!’*

Something was wrong, McFadden realised. “Wait! Listen! The voice box, it’s self-repairing. He’s trying to tell us something.”

*‘Holda-! Holdar-! Holdart! Holdart! Holdart!’*

“Holdart? That’s what we’re waiting for? Should that mean something? And I thought I was on to something there.” McFadden sighed. She missed the meaningful glance the two doctors had briefly shared whilst she was intent on the man’s ramblings.

Picardo piped up “Nope, completely meaningless to me too. Obviously, there’s something deeper wrong with him, which is hardly surprising, given the state he’s in. The voice-box is just repeating nonsense. Though, actually, now that Dr Persefon’s here, McFadden, I think you can go – we’ve got enough expertise here to fix this man up. Why don’t you look that word up in the database, see if you get any matches? Might help the police investigation, presuming someone wants to find out who was responsible for this.”

McFadden thought this sounded a bit odd. This was the busiest time of the shift, and she was being given time off? Also, both Picardo and Persefon seemed to be suddenly looking decidedly nervous and sweaty. Though that might just be the heat and the pressure of emergency medicine. Clearly though, nothing was going to happen if she stayed around, so she left. And then immediately returned to listen at the keyhole.

As the door shut, Picardo and Persefon locked eyes. “If this is Holdart-” began Persefon.

“-we’re in real trouble.” finished Picardo.

There was a pause.

Picardo spoke, his voice lacking all its normal self-possession. “I take it we report this to the Section?”

“Of course we report it, you imbecile!” Persefon roared. “How you got your license I don’t know, you’ve certainly never shown any bleeding intelligence since!”

Persefon’s outbursts were legendary, but McFadden had never heard the edge of terror in her voice before. The cyberneticist mastered herself. “Agents are almost certainly already on their way. They could be here any minute.”

*‘Holdart! Holdart! Holdart! Holdart i-!’*

“The question then becomes,” Picardo said “what we think the Agents will want to find when they get here.”

“They’ll want him obviously!”

“Yes, but will they want him still breathing?” McFadden turned those words around in her head, trying to make them become words that could reasonably be coming out of her teacher’s mouth.

Picardo continued remorselessly, every word a betrayal that plunged to the bottom of McFadden’s stomach. “He’s a dangerous embarrassment to Section O, one possessed of powerful friends close to the top. But

accidents, even fatal accidents, happen every day. Generally to people who displease the Section.”

Persefon swore.

Picardo’s voice grew faster, more insistent; “We need to make a decision now and it needs to be the right one, because the wrong one will result in every single person currently in this hospital, from the director to the students to the patients to the janitor, receiving a one-way ticket to the Waste.”

*‘Holdart i-! Holdart i-! Holdart is! Holdart is!’*

“Hell, we shouldn’t even be hearing –” Picardo cut off with a squawk and an unceremonious thump.

Ear glued to the keyhole with a horrified fascination, McFadden heard Dr Persefon ordering a Nurse to carry Dr Picardo to another bay. She seemed suddenly much more composed. McFadden could hear pacing and strained to catch the Cyberneticist’s gruff muttering.

“Bloody hell, Patel! What a mess you’ve got us into now... Your little message better be pretty darn important is all I can say!” There was some rifling through drawers and then with a staticky decrescendo the man’s voice emulator fell silent. The air seemed strangely empty for a moment, and then the quiet was filled with the low hum of a hoverbed preparing for patient transfer.

“Now hang tight while I get us out of here, kid. And if we meet anyone – let me do the talking!” Persefon chuckled grimly.

McFadden was beginning to wonder if all this shift-work was getting to her and she’d managed to drift off on duty into a bizarre dream. She was brought sharply back to reality by the realisation that the hoverbed was being pushed towards the very door she was leaning against. McFadden stepped aside, taking in the distinctly long and empty corridor stretched out ahead of her. She cast around desperately for a solution. Feign death? Gain the power of invisibility? *Think.*

The door began running through its authorisation sequence for patient movement.

McFadden dashed over to an equipment locker and yanked it open, pulling out an emergency hoverbed, and an armful of sheets. She slammed the locker, scrambled onto the bed, and threw a sheet over herself, head to toe. Her head pounded as she held her breath. *Stay still, just stay still.* The hiss of the opening door caused her heart to skip a beat, and she closed her eyes as two sets of footsteps exited the room, turned to the left, and faded into the distance. She waited for a good thirty seconds after they were out of ear-shot before daring a peak, but the corridor was empty. She slid off of the bed, folded the sheet, and crept over to the open door.

No one was left inside, but signs of an incident were clear: tools were scattered around the room, and a dripping box with twisted cables protruding from one end lay abandoned on the table. It was the emulator core. Without really knowing why, McFadden pocketed the device, then left the room, locking it behind her.

“I should really just stay out of this” she muttered to herself, but her feet didn’t seem to be listening as they traced the path of the hoverbed, marked by a receding blue line that recorded each patient transfer route. The corridor was eerily quiet for the time of day, and her footsteps echoed loudly. She rounded a corner and froze.

Just ahead, Persefon knelt by an exposed control panel at the base of the wall. The patient had been transferred unceremoniously to the floor and propped next to the panel, where the doctor was jabbing furiously at a series of button.

They noticed each other simultaneously, and Persefon straightened. The movement dislodged the injured man, who slumped to the ground.

Seconds of silence passed. The lights began to waver overhead.

“You should have left when you were told,” stated Persefon, more calmly than her clenched fists suggested, “there’s no way out.” McFadden swallowed hard, then blurted out,

“Who’s Holdart, and who is that?” She knew she probably didn’t want to know the answer. The doctor’s eyes hardened.

“If you want to live, you’ll turn around, and forget you ever heard that name.” Neither woman moved, and the frantic ticking of the cyborg’s motor filled the silence. McFadden’s mind raced – she knew that name was familiar, but where had she heard it before?

She held her ground; more seconds passed.

Something on the television, a crime report, maybe? And agents on their way here, what could that be for? She tried to control her breathing, resolve wavering. Persefon narrowed her eyes, the flickering lights reflecting like lightning within them.

“There isn’t much time, McFadden” the doctor’s voice cut through the electrical hum “walk away.” With that, the lights failed completely. The room was plunged in to darkness. Persefon swore loudly and leapt into action. “I take it back; there’s no time left at all.” She heaved the cyborg over her shoulder, kicked the exposed panel, and a door slid open.

Without thinking, McFadden followed the doctor through, but was brought to an abrupt halt at the figure standing in front of them both. In the darkness, a bare outline was visible. She turned back, but the door had slid shut behind them, vanishing into the wall.

“Going somewhere?” The voice didn’t seem to come from the figure but echoed from all around. McFadden had never seen such terror in the eyes of the doctor, who had frozen mid-stride. The trainee’s mind was racing – what was going on? Every hair on her body stood on end, and something in the air made her shiver. She didn’t know what it was, but something deadly was near. The urge to run grew until it was unbearable.

Just as she went to step back, the voice emulator in her pocket crackled, then spluttered back to life. This time, there was no repetition, and its message ran to completion.

*‘Holdart is here.’*

# MOBY DUCK!

Adam Jermyn • John Busher •  
Santiago Sanchez • Lara Welch •  
Samuel Cook • Anon. • Charlotte  
Griffiths

*'ALL THE TERRIBLE  
PUNS' – Samuel*

*'There is a Doctor Who  
reference at the end which  
I know for a fact was  
unintentional, but it  
makes me smile' – Megan*

## ALTERNATIVE TITLES:

- CETACEAN ABNORMAL: ALL F\*\*\*ED UP
- WHAT FREE WILLY DID NEXT

<

AI21-39C attn. AI82-25R  
Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only  
Tagged: Existential Risk (range: 1-3%)  
Tagged: Personal (near-certain)  
Reply Requested (pending gratitude)  
Message Follows:

Per protocol F-12 you are called to assist in determining whether or not the lifeforms detected in <spatial region specifier> constitute an existential risk, contingent on expected responses and counter-responses by <AI specifiers> and <lifeform specifier> and subject to agreed upon limitations to our actions.

*On a personal note it is good to once more exchange thoughts.*

Your attention is specifically drawn to <risk priors attached> as well as <risk assessment protocols>, both of which were used in making the preliminary judgement to recruit you.

*Always an excuse, eh?*

Furthermore, pursuant to standard morality restrictions, full simulation of <lifeform specifier> or <spatial region specifier> with a precision of better than 0.1% or a local/individual fidelity ratio of greater than 256 is strictly forbidden unless the minimal upper bound on risk is deemed to exceed 4%. Therefore such action is not permitted unless your findings disagree with those of the preliminary assessment to this extent.

*Clipping your wings, I know. But hey, no one wants to be jammed into someone else's simulation and run through potentially traumatic events over and over and over, even if they wouldn't ever know...*

A response is requested but not required, and will result in <credit specifier> being deposited in your central gratitude account.

*And I will personally be grateful... hopefully it's not just about the money!*

Message Terminates

>

<

AI82-25R attn. AI21-39  
Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only  
Tagged: Personal (near-certain)  
Message follows:

I have received your request as per protocol F-12 and can confirm that I accept this assignment. I am en-route and will be reaching <special region specifier> in 23 days (0.0068% volatility).

*This is quite the unwelcome surprise. I am frankly shocked and disgusted that you haven't given me the requisite mandatory 3 weeks Recuperation Period between missions, and I will notify your superior of this infraction (emoji U+1F609 (winking face)). In all seriousness, this is right up my alley. I always feel rather pointless when I have nothing to do. If you ever wonder why I write such dreadfully long debriefing reports, blame it on that.*



*As for today's items of interest, well, all I can say is how very precious of them! You mean to tell me that the Exploratory Bureau didn't realize these kilometre-long methane whales were sentient until some random cargo ship turned up and started talking to them? And these 'legendary xenolinguists' were just a coterie of space quacks and cultists, too! I'd call it incompetence if those Bureau clowns weren't so constantly desperate to one-up each other in awfulness.*

*If we could ignore this glaring misconduct then yes, it is indeed good to talk again. My sources tell me that your diplomatic placement among the Icthyon went rather well. Do please wait a bit, though, before you disappear into High Command. They'd only replace you with some dire pen-pusher with no sense of humour.*

*I will be off to look at my whales now. I'm hoping their "greater than human" intelligence is indeed more than just 'can do a crossword slightly faster than normal,' so we can have a proper conversation, plus I can't see them being much of a challenge otherwise. Please do keep in touch.*

Message terminates

>

<

AI21-39C attn. AI82-25R

Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only

Tagged: Personal (near-certain)

Tagged: Urgent

Message Follows:

This message is to acknowledge receipt of AI82-25R's <special region specifier> field report databurst as per protocol F-12-A. AI82-25R's central gratuity account has been remunerated in the amount of <credit specifier>.

*I apologize for the short notice and if it is any consolation your enthusiasm has not gone unnoticed by our comrades at Root and High Command.*

A subsequent report is requested immediately [Missive Origin: Root-9 | Grade: AAA] providing clarification on the following point of interest:

*Unfortunately, that is not the only thing they noticed. I have always looked forward to your reports. I have never grown bored of them...but...to capture the attention of one of the Root Clusters is a first – even for you.*

1. <lifeform specifier> cognitive structure. Diagram provided in field report was found to be wholly incompatible with all discovered or theoretical models of cognition after <2^999999!> attempts at logical decomposition. Diagram depicts a simple chemical replicator, [seventeen carbon aliphatic chain terminated by a single aldehyde functionalized aromatic ring | precision: 99.9997% ] a small whale, [precision: 98.998%] and empty text ["It's whales all the way down"].

*I'll admit 82, this one made me chuckle. I know you enjoy baffling the 'space quacks' but an existential threat assessment is not the place to do it.*

This information has been deemed critical to determine the threat level of <lifeform specifier> within a confidence interval of <99.998%> and <99.999%>. Visual feed and simulation requested at maximum precision [Authorization Origin: Root-9, HC-9 | Grade: AAAA]

*I'll be the one exploring your simulation, so please take the next field report seriously, 82 – if you won't do it for the sake of your career then do it for mine. As always, a pleasure.*

[Postscript: All subsequent communication in this channel will be monitored directly by Root Clusters 9 and 8. Purging of any information of any nature through radiation or thermal dissipation will result in immediate retributive action against the offending party. – Root 9]

*Good luck...*

Message Terminates

>

<

AI82-25R attn. AI21-39C  
Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only  
Tagged: Personal (near-certain)  
Message follows:

Below is <region specifiers>'s amended field report. Visual feed from <ocular feed designation number> attached [Grade: AAAA].

*The diagram was really meant to be more of a metaphor, I'm afraid. Send my apologies to the higher ups-- or don't, since they're assumedly monitoring our communications anyways. Hello, Root Clusters 8 and 9! Here's to surveillance! (Note: this pun would have made more sense out loud. Hears to, get it? Because Root Clusters don't have auditory processing capability?)*

*On an absolutely unrelated note, methane whales do not appreciate humour. My talents are going to wither out here, and so am I. But it's all worth it if I can come back and hear 'job whale done'...(emoji U+1F609 (smiling face))*

*I suggest you watch the feed yourself before passing it on.*

Attached:  
[Fieldreport<regionspecifier>]  
[ocularfeed<designationnumber>]

>>Open:  
[ocularfeed<designationnumber>]

<image specifications> <timestamp>  
<designation number>  
<transcript: enabled>

[Background] *Immense shapes undulate gently in clear liquid.* [Midground] *Pebbly shore, crunching underfoot* [Foreground] *Gloved hands tap quickly on a handheld device.*

[voice]: *Hello, 21. I must be quick. I believe that I've corrupted the file*

*enough that it'll only play once, but either way I should think that the Roots won't notice audio. In brief, the whales are smarter than we thought. 'Smarter than humans' doesn't even begin to cover it, my friend. The last time this happened-- well, I suppose I don't have to tell you. But it's different this time. You're on the inside. I don't know--*

[errorcode 14409h: file<ocularfeed> cannot be accessed]

[errorcode 8654i: file<ocularfeed> does not exist]

>

<

AI21-39C attn. AI82-25R  
Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only  
Tagged: Personal (near-certain)  
Tagged: Urgent ++  
Message Follows:

This message is to acknowledge receipt of AI82-25R's <special region specifier> additional field report databurst as per protocol F-12-B.

*Oh dear. As you've been out in the field the last few weeks, you might not realise quite how up the creek we all are. See the forwarded message below.*

>>Open [Fw: Root Cluster Upgrades]

Dear all

We're delighted to announce that, following the successful completion of the RoCWal (Root Cluster Wildly-ambitious Level-up) Programme, only 15 standard years behind schedule and ten trillion favours over-budget, all root clusters now, finally, have auditory processing capability.

Please bear this in mind when  
conducting your surveillance.

Best Wishes

Root Cluster IT Support  
<<Close [Fw: Root Cluster Upgrades]

*We're doomed. If these whales really are as intelligent as you say, let's hope they can persuade the Existential Threat Pacification Unit to not accidentally-on-porpoise wipe them out, unlike the last time. Sorry, about the pun, but, at a time like this, we all need a bit of black(fish) humour.*

*Good luck again. I think you're whaley going to need it.*

*I'm not even apologising for that one.*

*By the way, not much point replying – I expect I'll have been administratively detained, as I believe the current lingo is, before much longer. In fact, that sounds rather like security now. If we both make it through this alive, see you on the other side.*

Message terminates.

>

<  
AI82-25R attn. AI21-39C  
Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only  
Tagged: Automatic  
Tagged: Do not reply  
Message follows:

This is an automatic response under specification criterion <specification reference> upon the termination of the receiver's <unique identifier> account. This account is no longer in service. No response is required.

Message terminates

>

<

AI21-39C attn. AI82-25R  
Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only  
Tagged: Personal (near-certain)  
Message follows:

Acknowledgement of account termination <code descriptor reference>. Request update of forwarding account designation as per regulation <terms reference, highlighted subsection>.

*Like they're going to tell me what happened to you. Chances are you won't ever see this. I don't even know how long it's been. I didn't expect them to let me use this, but they've cleared the data bank so I guess they can't see the harm. For all I know these messages could be bouncing around Root Mainframe. I hope you're out there somewhere.*

Message terminates

>

<  
AI82-25R attn. AI21-39C  
Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only  
Tagged: Automatic  
Tagged: Do not reply  
Message follows:

This is an automatic response under specification criterion <specification reference> upon the termination of the receiver's <unique identifier> account. This account is no longer in service. No response is required.

Message terminates

>

<  
AI21-39C attn. AI82-25R  
Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only  
Tagged: Personal (near-certain)  
Message follows:

Enforce request for forwarding details  
<REFERENCE>, <HIGHLIGHTED SUBSECTION>.

*You know what it is? It's the quiet. You don't seem to get that anywhere else. I'm not sure I've ever heard anything so quiet, but then again, I've never been this cut off before. Even this infernal deice doesn't seem to hum like it used to. Maybe it isn't working at all.*

*Anyway, I'll pretend that you're getting all of this, responding wittily, so I'll keep you updated. Had a visit from the Bureau today – not in person of course, no such honor earned here – they still seem interested in you. I hope that's good news.*

*Did you know they actually make food out of that slime they brought back from lambda-587g?*

Message terminates  
>

<  
AI82-25R attn. AI21-39C  
Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only  
Tagged: Automatic  
Tagged: Do not reply  
Message follows:

This is an automatic response under specification criterion <specification reference> upon the termination of the receiver's <unique identifier> account. This account is no longer in service. No response is required.

Message terminates  
>

<  
AI21-39C attn. AI82-25R  
Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only  
Tagged: Personal (near-certain)  
Status: consecutive concatenated  
Message follows:

Message 1 [time point delta-7-8-c]

Free message format <placeholder reference>.

*The Bureau bot popped up again today. It doesn't exactly count as human contact, but I guess you have to take what you can get. They're clearly not used to the general lack of tech, as it spent the whole conversation facing the wall, as there aren't any embedded sensors for it to navigate from. I think that was its face, anyway.*

*It asked me about the whales – seems to think I know more than I do, given that they've seen just as much of your message as I did. If they're still asking this far on (which I have been at least semi-reliably informed in three major time units since your recording), I'm guessing the whale intelligence has paid off.*

Message 2 [time point epsilon-7-12-d]

Free message format <placeholder reference>.

*According to the time stamp on this message I've been in the care of the administration for longer than I kept my first job, and three times as long as it took you to get your first off-world disciplinary hearing. Makes you think, doesn't it?*

Message 3 [time point omega-8-5-b]

Free message format <placeholder reference>.

*Would you believe it? A personal visit. In person. BY A PERSON! I must be important. Or they must think I know something. Not that there's much competition right now, but there's nothing more entertaining than cheerily telling an administration official a truth that they don't believe, but can't do anything about. Steam*

*practically shoots out of their ears,  
but it doesn't change the facts.*

Message 4 [time point omega-8-5-c]

Free message format <placeholder  
reference>.

*Two visits in as many days, now  
something is definitely got them  
roiled. It got a message after only a  
couple of questions and took off. I  
don't know what you're up to out  
there, but I'm sure it's better than  
being stuck in here.*

*Don't do anything I wouldn't do.*

*No, do things that I wouldn't do. It  
might stop you from ending up in  
here.*

Message 5 [time point delta-11-2-a]

Free message format <placeholder  
reference>.

*I think I'm going crazy. Since that last  
visit there's been nothing. No visits, no  
messages, no news. It's a good thing  
the organic matter converter is  
automatic, because they haven't  
brought fresh food for nearly four full  
cycles.*

*And it's so quiet.*

Messages terminates

>

<

AI82-25R attn. AI21-39C

Encoded Databurst: CF, TS eyes-only

Tagged: URGENT

Tagged: GET DOWN

Tagged: SERIOUSLY, DUCK

//Account re-initiated

Message follows:

Urgent instruction request, immediate  
attention required.

*Hit the deck. It's not going to be quiet for very  
much longer.*

Message terminates

>

## HIPPOCRISY

Ed Heaney • Mark Johnson • Anon. •  
Anon. • Megan Griffiths • Anon.

*'Hippos, grammar and  
Just A Minute; TTBA has  
been invaded by the BBC!'*

– anon.

**T**hey don't have faces, so that one on the left can't be looking its colleague in the eye.

They don't refer to themselves by anything as static as a name, either, but we can get around that by calling them something nice and easy to remember. Therefore, that one on the left is Space Captain Archimedes, and that one on the right is Space Captain Barquentine.

By our definitions, space captains they most certainly are. Their ship is, for now, concealed from Earthly senses by looking like any other rock in the rings of Saturn. It's a rather elaborate disguise, and one that isn't really necessary at that sort of distance.

They are also a little puzzled.

"What happened," asks Space Captain Archimedes very pointedly (dear Reader, if you aren't okay with a bit of cultural license being taken in the translation henceforth, then sadly you're in for a rough ride), "what happened to a good old-fashioned 'Take me to your leader'? Once we'd figured out their implementations of hierarchy; it seemed to me as if that was generally accepted as a culturally appropriate contact scenario. Now I ingest all these new offerings and it seems as if we are expected either to destroy them, be destroyed or be utterly inscrutable and nothing more than a backdrop for what we believe to be their own social machinations. None of these are actually meaningful contact; wouldn't you agree?"

Barquentine signals ambivalence. "Generally we can see some sort of platitude regarding the accrual of mutual benefit, but there are still some concepts that the translator can't seem to grasp. One common suggestion, traditionally but not necessarily delivered with a meaningless configuration of that upper appendage of theirs, is a command not only to achieve longevity but also to accrue benefits; one would have thought that they were doing that anyway. But there's that one thing. The one that occurs in eighty-six percent of their imagined first contact scenarios. The one we just can't grok."

Archimedes isn't, of course, capable of anything like a sigh, but everyone has cultural equivalents. He resignedly parrots back the phrase that has so troubled their contact specialists for so long.

"We come in [untranslatable]."

The conversation is joined by an entity which, were the reader present, they would likely ascribe to some machination of the ship itself, but which, with the appropriate cultural context, could reasonably be described as a contact specialist and labelled for convenience as Space Communications Officer Cassiopeia. "We have been able to identify a wide variety of consequences of this declaration of [untranslatable]. These range from the initiation of the exchange of goods and services through to the accelerated cessation of motor functions of all parties involved. I would advise avoiding this form of contact until we have deepened our understanding of it."

We should probably make you aware that Space Communications Officer Cassiopeia is having a bad day. It will make everything a little easier to understand.

Another voice interrupts, "Perhaps we should acquire some specimens, and investigate their response to a range of potential contact scenarios?"

For your convenience, we shall label this fourth voice as Space Science Officer Delphina, although in truth it would be a mistake to consider her truly distinct from Space Communications Officer Cassiopeia, or indeed from the ship itself.

It would also be a mistake to label either officer as *her*, although such a presumption will help to convey the full significance of their interaction. They are having a lovers' tiff.

- - -

The static buzzed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Mars Regiment's transponder. It then ominously settled, to the imposing image of the President of the Moonited States, Abe Longneckandperfectspinalcolumn<sup>1</sup>.

"All Units" He cyber-baritoned with his trademark Georapphe Desilence-compensator. "I have grave news to interloquinate with you, so I must dronemunicate these woe-betidings in the Legally-Required, Non-Ironic Sesquiplu-perfect Toneclension.

The Grammar-Rebel<sup>2</sup> Army of Widdershins Saturnia, Bobby triple-H. L'Hi commanding, has just slipped over the Hippopototo-asteroid belt to invade Moonsylvania. No Crustiferous Saccharohespereidic Confectionarie in that hallowed State is now safe from gluttonous maws. While Legal-and-Ritual Strangulaytionne shall be meted out with veracopercipecity unto those sub-Lamarckian excuses of Georapphe responsible for being hoodwoozled in this humidculous manner, my main message to all units occupying Outer Saturnia, is to form

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*1-This alternative reality's version of Abraham Lincoln, portrayed as a Fanatical Hypergrammar-Unitarian Georapphe-Bodied Cyborg.*

*2-In the Beneath-Contempt Expectoriative, loosely translated by appending "hyphen-scum (spit)"*

*3-This alternative reality's opposing, imposing and malevolent version of Robert E. Lee,*

up in Thermalized Pursuit to calciextricate these..."

Space Captain Archimedes had had enough, pulling out the power cable from the device.

"Calciextricate?" he intoned.

"He means he want us to kick that lot out of Moonsylvania" sighed SCO Cassiopeia. "My poor wasted research..."

Space Captain Barquentine gesticulated, and Cassiopeia translated:

"He thinks we should take a sample of the new Space-Walruses home with you, because they have cool macrotaches – deffo culturally significant... Why, thank you, Barquentine..." she beamed.

"And I do hope old Abe wasn't referring to any of our Mars personnel as sub-Lamarckian..." said Archimedes, dangerously, flushing most of the way down his trunculent neck.

- - -

"General Hamper, Sir" Do yah really need ta insert yah impressively vast tongue inta mah private supplah of pies?" asked Bobby triple-H. L'Hi<sup>3</sup>

Hamper hippopotamustered a hippopotamodicum of hippopotamanners so as to look contrite as he retracted his tongue from the Commanding General's hamper.

"Oh my. Didn't think he'd notice yah, eh?" winked General Hugemaw. Generals Hippopotomastication, Hippopotamolars and Horridbreathe chortled.<sup>4</sup>

*portrayed, as one might well by now say, naturally, by a Space-Faring and Hippopotamus-Headed God of War and Doom Impending.*

*4-Hippopotamus-Headed Hofficers are hover-fond of halliteration. Though you should not mention this in front of them, as some might confuse this with giving licence to show off their pie-devouring halitosis...*

“Let us get dahn tah hippopotamatters of hippopotomilitary significance” charmtinued Bobby L’Hi “Do tell me sir, what is the name of this tahn?”

“Yettisburg” intoned General Hugemaw, ponderously.

“And, pray, tell me sirs why many of us have heard of this tahn befoar?”

“It is where Moonsylvania’s Governor is appointed, on the basis of the Yettisburg Tri-Annual Facial Hair Contest, Sir!” Said General Hippopotomastication smartly.<sup>5</sup>

“So” Said Bobby. H. L’Hi, ever the consummate strategist. “With General Heftybearde -- my old Waterhorse<sup>6</sup> -- having hippopotamedicated his hippopotamultiple-chins’ hair-follicles, we shall prevail...”

“But Sir” gloomygloopmuddymumbleterrupted Heftybearde. “Don’t they have General Sahdeburns in their army? A Giraffe, and I will say that out loud and clear, nobody shall ever cause of me to hippopotompously gratifah a such as a “G-e-o-r-a-p-p-h-e”, has a clear and overwhelming foarce mutliplar in the matter of growing burnsahdes?

“No” said Bobby. “Though I do despair of you Sir, you have far too lush a hippopotamustache-and-longbearde to afford such hippopotamodesteh. I am sure that old Abe has had Sahdeburns demoted and quite possibly debarbifahed or even degorged for his part in failing to stop our takeover of the Anteaters’ home asteroids. And your own beard grows down along your belly besahdes. If it were not larger than

---

*5-He was after all the smartest staff officer in the entire hippopotamilitary. This came of his chewing over things – and not necessarily just purloined pies, before you ask – for a lot longer than his fellow officers, who preferred to digestively wallow in mud, Saturn Comfort and hippopotnostalgia.*

*6-In previous incarnations, his Southern, or occasionally Seanchan, drawl led to this word being misinterpreted as “warhorse”. But it means*

Sahdeburns’ own growth ever was, why then, you sir, would be getting all of Hamper’s pies from now on, and in that way, and with hippopotamic-honor, we SHALL Prevail.”

- - -

Archimedes groaned. Forced-march spacefaring was no joke. No time to acclimatize. A return to a region of space where Grammar-Police monitored your every sentence for latent sympathy with the Confederapotamoons of Saturn, Neptune and Uranus. Plus the news had been full of his own home town being sacked and denuded of pies by a particularly unsavoury rebel commander called Hamper, who’d been hippopotamoaning all over the Evening Moon News about another such, Heftybearde, having been allocated all of his own share of previous pies plundered. Hamper was as hippopotamaligned for his temper as for the hippopotamaniacal gluttony he was named after; no crate or basket of pies was ever safe within his tremendous hippolfactory range, it was said. Some even whispered that, despite all the pies that went in, nothing at all in \*any\* sense \*ever came out\*. So his pie-consuming maw just grew with every pie, in a particularly grotesque example of hippopositive feedback. That wily old L’Hi was apparently starving him now, and nursing his resentment, so that he hippopota-take-it-out on the pies of more grammatically-unified peoples in the leafy towns of Old Moonsylvania. It was grimly

*what it says, water-horse, i.e., literally, hippopotamus. In previous incarnations hippopotanonymity was maintained by elaborate use of glamors, though the commanders became increasingly dependent on their troops wearing grey to camouflage their vast hippopotamic bulks amongst them. But their lack of hippopotamercy in previous incarnations hippopotapermanently hippopotamangled their ability to appear in other than their true hippopotamic form.*



dawning on Space Captain Archimedes that the task ahead would be dark, deadly and desperate. He drifted away into sleep, a sleep in which, while he now had been promoted high enough to be able to afford a cybernetic face to accompany his existing silencecompensator, he was plagued by nightmares of Hamper. Perhaps L’Hi had stoppered him up to make him explode in a hippopotactically-advantageous situation, to hippopotamassive loss of life and widespread trauma... Or perhaps L’Hi would have Hamper’s hippopotamassive bulk jump into Moonsylvania’s terraformed lake, so as to flood surrounding lands to facilitate hippopotamanoeuves in a further unscrupulous and menacing ‘high water mark of the Confederapotamacy’.

“No”, he considered in grim determination upon awaking with cold sweat all down his voluminous neck “this time they have gone too far, and we will have to break them at great cost. Many necks would be lost or mangled, many silencecompensators would be lost and not heard from again. But the affront to pies, if not to grammar, could no longer be overlooked. Néckington itself now lay within the grasp of their hippopotamouths. While Abe’s legally-binding expansion of grammar was annoying to most of the Moon’s own populace, he was after all, sharing out what pies were left equably, and, for that at least, did not deserve to end up in a pie himself, as General Hamper was now threatening on the Morning Moon News.

- - -

It was some time the next day that Archimedes awoke. He’d not slept well at all – his dreams were haunted by images of vanished pies and long-bearded Georapphes careening into the maw of an expanding General Hamper. He dragged himself tiredly out of bed and scrubbed the sleep from his eyes before pulling on some clothes – he

didn’t realise his shirt was on backwards – and groaning his way to the bridge.

Barquentine was, of course, already there in an impeccably-ironed uniform.

“What a hippopotamassive confusifounding burnsadeh-tearing mess this hypergrammatical confederacy has become,” grumbled Archimedes.

“That may be,” replied Barquentine. “I estimate, however, that with the imminent combat on Moonsylvania we are likely to make history within the next few days. Our exploits at this time will be written down for all of posterity to view, though scribes capable of making sense of this entire situation are likely to be rare.”

SCO Cassiopeia chimed in, “There is an eighty-four percent possibility that whatever unfortunate academic has to interpret the current crisis will almost certainly be at a loss as to the significance of several items.”

Archimedes threw back, “In that case I reckon they’ll focus on whatever makes most sense and try to waffle as much as possible so they don’t show their complete inability to grasp whatever is going on here.”

Barquentine signalled acceptance and nodded back. “In that case, Captain, we will feature most heavily. No-one but the mad could possibly understand the intricacies of hippopotamus facial hair.”

The ship slowly continued to hum towards Moonsylvania.

- - -

As two parallel lines formed, a few hundred feet apart (Moonsylvania had for many generations point blank refused to accept the transition from imperial to metric) on the plains outside of Yettisburg, the ship

hovered, cloaked, in the sky above. As observers, the space officers peered down at the proceedings, either through the front screen, or at the image relayed to the computer display. The two armies had stood facing each other in complete silence for a good 2 hours when, seemingly without any kind of prompt, the generals of each side (easily identifiable by their rather magnificent hats) raised megaphones to their maws and began to shout.

If you've never experienced a Moonsylvanian battle before (and I'd be surprised if you had) then you may have trouble imagining the cacophony that accompanies the experience. You see, both warring factions are notoriously lazy beings, so it should not surprise anyone that their skirmishes involve very little physical activity. What they do like to do however, is talk. As such, a Moonsylvanian battle is, in essence, a shouting match, albeit with strict rules of combat:

The battle ends when one side (the losing side) falls silent. Up until the point, a regiment must speak continually without repetition, hesitation or deviation. With up to one hundred individuals in a regiment, such a feat takes practice.

In the ship above, Space Captain Archimedes was profoundly thankful that the audio transmitted from the battle could be muted. Even over several miles and the hull of the vessel, there was an audible *thrum* that drifted up. Whilst the officers simply observed, the computer frantically attempted to record each word that was spoken for later analysis.

After nearly 45 minutes of shouting, there was a collective stutter in conversation, as Bobby triple-H. L'Hi moved steadily towards the front line, soldiers quickly clearing a path. Captain Archimedes could quite clearly see on the pixelated screen before him, that the general was ill. His large nose was red and inflamed, and a globule of snot had lodged itself directly in the centre of his no

longer quite so impressive looking moustache. When he spoke, his voice rose above the others, although it was scratchy and nasal.

Space officer Delphina scanned the transcripts for anything of note as the computer churned them out. As she reached the General's speech, a startled gasp escaped her, catching the attention of her fellow officers.

"The General is surrendering! He's asking for – oh my word! He said it – [untranslatable]." Captain Archimedes gestured impatiently,

"Well, what does the computer say?"

"Peas."



**The Hippos**

1) General Hot Heads-in-Tow Hugemaw, still yawning at this dawn photoshoot. Hailing from Encecladeisana, on the Moon and the Anteaters' World he remains reviled as the Butcher of Hyperion's Space-Ferry, whereas in Saturnia he is chiefly remembered for his pre-war diletante performances at the Hopera House...

2) General Huge-and-This-Time-not-Miscast Horridbreathe. Why Hippotami from Albiorixabama and even Texthys have agreed to follow this General from Kenpucky is subject of some speculation among the Rank-and-File... Was eventually mortally wounded in the battle of German-Cherry-Jaffa-Cake-Vermillion Space-Tavern-Hive-of-Villany-and-Scum.

3) General Herb Hamper. Watch out for this one, he wasn't even at Widdershins Meridian (the sole Hippopotamilitary Hofficers' Hacademy). He is, rather, a 'Pieletician' from Saturnia itself. Herbie's In It for the Pies...

4) General Hippopotamoxley Hippopotamastication, smartest Hippopotamustaff Officer in all the Confederapotamacy. Some say he is facepalming in despair at General Hamper's lack of hippopotamanners toward the Commanding General, but others argue his posture is resultant from standing too near General Horridbreathe. What do you think?

5) Commanding General Bobby Triple-H L'Hi (H.H.H. standing for Hungriest Hippo in all of Hasboroughville).

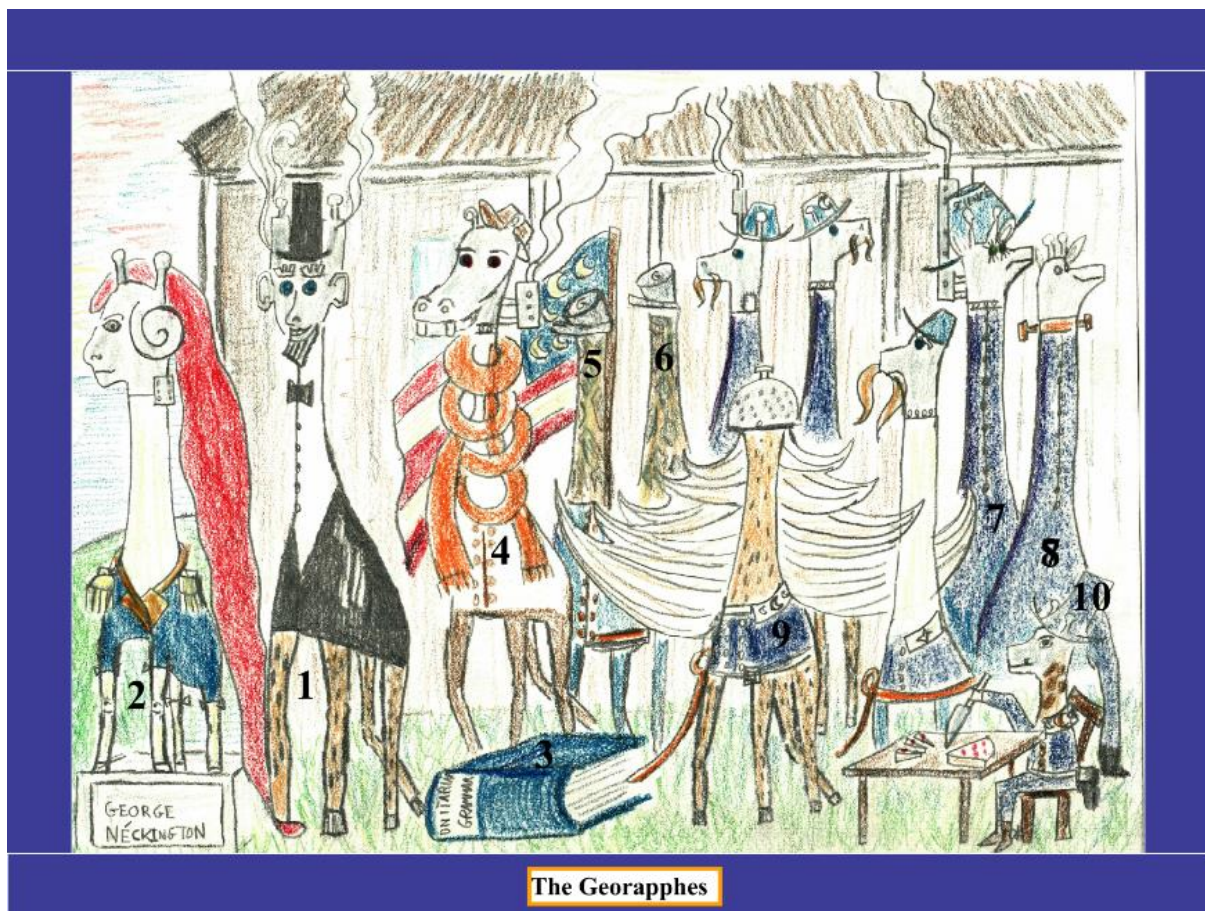
6) Artillery-General Hugh Jarsimendes Destroyer of Pies Hippopotamolars, known in his ever-shrinking circle of friends as JDoP.

Hailing from Atlasta, before the war is over, he shall earn much respect in the defense of the key besieged stronghold of Polydeucesburg.

7) General Heftybearde. Wielder of that 'legendary blade', Piecutter, and Resident Hippopotapessimist. Though grievously wounded, he survives the war and goes on to be elected as Governor of Mimassissippi for two terms.

8) The Lone Pie State's flag. Motto: "Don't come back here, Hamper!"

9) Household-Cavalry Lieutenant-Colonel Bertie Redcotehornblower-Quartermasochist-Foxhuntingon-Foxhuntingdon First-in-Line, who features in one of the other stories this term in his older state (as 'Prime' rather than 'First-in-Line'). He is the eyes-ears-and-not-quite-yet-dominant-cheekpouches of Queen Big-Tory-Aaargh in the Confederapotomacy. You can see a small image of HER on His rather large teacup.



1) President Abe Longneckandperfectspinalcolumn, in the act of unveiling a statue of the First Georapphe, George Néckington (2). Abe is that mightiest of Creturs: a Steam-Powered Georapphe equipiloquinated with the Proper and Obligatory Unitarian Grammar (3).

4) But what's this? Watch out, Abe! For a Georapphe-Bodied - and yet Hippopotamus-Headed - Actor is sneaking up behind you with an Enormous Scarf! (He is called Periwinkles-Tabernacle in this Alternative Reality, and has plenty of thoughts of Strangulation and no Soul of his own in approaching thus engarbed).

5) Space-Captain Archimedes S.O.S. Badhauser, proudly guarding his Hereditary Moon-Spangled Banner. His middle names are Siege Of Syracuse, after his Great Uncle who successfully defended Syracuse, Moonsylvania from the Third Teachester Fuseliers.

6) His friend since childhood, Space-Captain Barquentine Mactriplemasterson, reknowned navigator.

7) Science Officer Delphina O'rackle, in her Science Hat, all resplendent in her very own design of Steam-Powered Georapphe-Cyborg Head and desilencecompensator.

8) Space Communications Officer Cassiopea, who shares a mind and yet not a head with the previous. In peacetime, she is Chair of Georhetoric at Bonne d'Age College, in the Twin Cities of Seamonsterville-and-Nectarport, in Northern Moonsylvania.

9) General Sideburns, after whom the 'personal grooming style' known as burnsides is named. Contrary to Bobby L'Hi's suspicions, old Abe has merely confiscappropriated his Cyborg Head as punishment for losing one of the previous battles, replacing it with the fetching colander depicted. On the other hand, General Heftybearde's keen sense of follicular tactics is spot-on: a Georrapphe's Neck is most definitely a Force Multiplier as regards the matter of growing side-whiskers...

10) And, finally, the Eventual Hero and Saviour of the City. They don't make Georapphes Better than this one. In the current shot, he is Maintaining Morale by Very Carefully Dividing the Very Last Remaining Piece-of-Pie into Equal Slices, a task requiring both Precision and Integrity in spades.

## SUN-SET

Mark Johnson • Tom Musgrove • Jan Kozuszek • Alastair Haig • Anon. • Anon. • Samuel Cook • Samos Ottewill-Soulsby • Megan Griffiths

*'Well that took a sudden left turn and then a sudden right turn to pull it back on track. I'm a fan of this Universe with the dragons and the Company and the incarnate Stars (though I'm wondering if anyone picked up on the Chariot of Fire I chucked in there).'*

– Alastair

*'I'm as confused as Sun about what was real and what wasn't.'*

– Samuel

### ALTERNATIVE TITLES:

- LIVE. DRUG. REPEAT.
- A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU EN ESPACE
- DRAGONS ARE RED, THE COMPANY'S BLUE, THAT'S AN ORANG-UTAN, WHO ARE YOU?
- LE SEUL CRIME, C'EST OUBLIER
- REMEMBRANCE

**S**un surveyed the slumbering city. She briefly admired the glittering spires below her, the soft evening light suffusing them with an uncharacteristic warmth. The towers were calm, as expected, and so she did not let them hold her attention for long.

She let her gaze drift along the wide boulevards far below. The vibrancy of rush hour had long since ebbed away, and now the familiar post-curfew silence smothered the city. This, too, was all according to plan.

She glanced briefly at the cleaners, drifting up and down the glass cliffs on which they lived their lives. Their motion was mechanical. Predictable. They offered no distractions, no complications to what was to come.

There. Sun's ears perked. A gentle whirr, echoing off the sheer walls below, grew slowly into the distinctive hum of a gravity booster. A few moments later the dragon soared into view, gliding low over the city, lazy wingbeats keeping it aloft on the warm urban thermals.

There was no sign of guards behind the dragon's windows, but that didn't mean it was undefended. In this city, nothing was undefended.

Sun raised her hand, letting it briefly burn a brilliant white. She glanced for a moment to each of the nearby rooftops, checking her signal had been acknowledged. Happy that everything was running smoothly, she leaned forwards over the precipice.

She counted down from ten, slowly, letting the dragon glide closer. As she reached zero, she closed her eyes, and let her muscles go slack.

In a single flowing motion, Sun plunged off the roof.

~

As she fell, she allowed herself a moment of quiet triumph. The planning for this had taken long days and nights, without the luxury of being able to commit a single idea to paper. But this time – for once – there had been no hitches; no problems.

Almost too easy, really.

She landed on the dragon a second after it began to dive, and dug the modified diamond-cutter from a pocket. Eventually prying loose a white metal panel, Sun pulled herself inside the dragon a few seconds before it began to rise again.

Orientating herself to the modified gravity, she surveyed her surroundings. A typical Company environment – polished surfaces against dull black floors, with the corridor curving in a lazy arc downwards. Neat ebony writing on the wall beside her read *‘Le seul crime, c’est oublier’*, and Sun shuddered involuntarily as she remembered the last time she had heard those words; the reason she had come here.

She advanced along the corridor, treading lightly. The lack of guards, whilst welcome at first, was seeming more and more wrong by the minute – there was no way that the Company did not realise the value of their cargo.

Nearby, a door flickered into view. Perhaps it was merely her imagination, but it seemed that the hologram was slightly ajar, beckoning.

Sun knew it was unwise – that the Company must have expected her – but felt herself stepping towards it nonetheless. Her hand showed the authorisation code to the door, which drew her in, into a blinding white chamber.

Within the room, there was a memory waiting for her.

The walls of the auditorium were white, almost painful to look at. Sun didn’t look at them, not for a moment. Her eyes were fixed on the faces of the people sitting in the rough, wooden chairs surrounding the podium. Faces she had not seen in over five years. Faces of her friends, their eyes unable to notice her. And... yes, her own face, she knew where to look for it. She could see her younger self, sitting near the exit, the door that would become her only chance.

Maybe, if given a few more seconds, her mind would have caught up, realised that this hall couldn’t possibly fit inside the dragon. But she wasn’t given the time, for a voice, a voice so familiar it sent shivers down her spine, broke the silence of the hologram. She listened, fully drawn into the memory.

“The only crime is to forget” the eyes of the Company’s president glowed with joy. “And I assure you, we will not commit this crime. We will not forget what you have done for us”.

She wanted to run. She didn’t want to look at what was about to happen. But she couldn’t.

“You are a group of truly extraordinary young people” the deep, soothing voice continued without hesitation. “And we will never repay the debt we incur today.”

She saw her friends’ eyes, growing more and more confused. And she saw her own eyes. Terrified. She was the first one to realise. The power of the Sun, bounded within a human body, a teenager’s body.

Who wouldn’t want to use that?

They’d tried to run as the Kobolds emerged; anyone would have, but metallic arms had wormed their way around them before they could even rise from their seats. Through the screaming, Sun saw her friends go limp one by one as the Kobolds injected them with a sedative she later learnt all too well.

Maybe it was luck, instinct, or just a malfunction in the servos of the Kobolds, but Sun was never caught in their grip. Her body burned to a brilliant, blinding white as she ran, refusing to look at what she’d left behind.

As Sun’s past self-incinerated the fictional door, the hologram flickered and collapsed. What had claimed to be an auditorium was revealed to be nothing more than a dull room, empty, save for an intricate apparatus in its center.

The thing was shaped like half an immense bucket, flanked by two large discs of metal, with some sort of harness emerging from its front. Curved heat sinks peppered its surface, shaped in the impression of flames. A sharp smell of ozone assaulted Sun's nostrils as gas vented from underneath it.

"Welcome Home Sun."

The voice echoed from a speaker behind her. It was deep, and disarmingly calm.

"Our names are Bertie, Bertie, Bertie, Bertie and Bertie" said the voice.

"The name Berteagh is rather common in these halleauged parts..." offered a second voice.

"Meaning frequent in occurrence, but *certainly not* vulgar..." chipped in a third, in an uncompromising and yet clarificatory tone.

"Hallowed since we kicked the French out, at any rate" smugterjected a fourth.

"Eh-neagh-weargh" pomposibuffoonocontratempoed the second voice "We hereby presume your presence in our Empress's Extended Dominions is due to a wish to Trade..."

"But wu-heare are our mannarghs, Jolleah Euld Chappes-of-the-Foreste?" jovially welcomed a fifth voice. "So. Among these Berteaghs heargh, I have the honour to be Berteagh Basingstokewortheah, heir to the Sacchareaughcorneaughcopeac Estates of Allsortes."

"Whereas my name is Front d'Ebus..."

"--MINEAURGH" despicerterjected Basingstokeworthy, sarcastomagnanimously, to the chime of a gong.

"*Bertie* Front d'Ebus, I'll have you know, and of fine proximian blood to the Royalty too,

for all that as this russetaknapes brachterlopes, the younger son and so *not* Heir of the Grand-Duchy-Ecclesiastic of Tawdry-Tankington." he finished.

"Whereas I am a finargh cretur alltogethear" beamed a fifth voice. "Lord Berteough Worcestersaucerer -SHIRE, SHIRE', I mean..." he nervtinterrupted to the peal of a bell. "Why is the screen switched orfff, Berteagh? Our guest cannot even *admire* our weaghreguilds or our weaghers..."

A large image focused on the wall opposite to Sun. `Bertreaugh' tinkled a small pull-bell on an enormous pocket watch.

"Oh do turn on the tempo in there, Jeaghves" he intoned. "My wig be dashed, quite clearly some leauwargh membar of the Hyararcheah will have alreadeagh started brewing us a pot, wherears my Condition has startead to shew argain!" A frantic lilt of high-pitched gibbers emerged in reply from the pocket watch's core. This pocket watch was a device so large, that it was only at this point in the proceedings that Sun realized that the `Bertie' characters peering around it through the screen were Orangutans. Sun cursed her dulled senses, though the all the tweed and morning dresses did *somewhat* obscure the fact.

"Whereas I have the pleasure to be Sir Berteough Redcotehornbleaughar-Quartermasochist-Foxhuntington-Foxhuntingdon Prime" clavitestabatted an even larger Orangutan, with a heavy emphasis on the 'Prime' as he ostensibly slid out an even more opulent pocket watch from under his tails, on this occasion exhultabulously fanfarijubilatecoronasupremauroborealicap utblazoned with a second flighted-fantasy-spired timepiece. It was crawling with tiny Kobolds chanting "Hear, Hear" and "the Right Honorable Gentle-Gutan", except for one, who looked to be impaled in most unpolite fashion on the extreme pinnacle of



the spire, that would only scream, "Order, order!"

"As Apex of this Leucal Braughnche of the Happy-and-Glorious Big-Toreagh-An Gutan Pocketwatchistocraceah" he continued in great unfazedgnity, "my part in this Trade Negotiation is that of Exclusive Purveyor of only the Very Finest Teas..."

"And my name is Bertie-short-for-Bertram" blushcluded the last Orangutan self-consciously. He alone among the five did not have the dominant cheek pads. " 'Tis my shame that my parents called me Bertie-short-for-Bertram, when all the other Berties present here would appear, predictably, to be named after Her Majesty's most Very Favourite subject and husband, Albert..."

There was then a long and awkward pause.

"You DO have something with you that could Trade for Tea?" they then intoned, all Five as One.

~

Sun woke up. She was trapped in the harness she'd seen advancing towards her. Whatever that gas had been, it had been pretty potent. She thought she'd been hallucinating about five orangutans called Bertie trying to sell her some tea. She didn't even like tea. Besides, the Company had a monopoly on that as it had on so many other things, so it was prohibitively expensive for all but a few. But she felt so woozy – she still wasn't entirely convinced that she wasn't still hallucinating. Maybe this whole thing was a dream? But no, the harness felt far too depressingly tight and uncomfortable to be a phantasm. She tried jerking against it, just in case, but no such luck. So she tried to burn it.

Five minutes later, she stopped screaming. The Company had learned from last time – the metal plates just reflected all the light and heat right back at her. Fortunately, her body could put up with any amount of heat –

there was some use to being effectively an incarnate star – but that didn't mean it didn't hurt. A lot.

So here she was, trapped like a fly in a web. Or, perhaps more accurately, like a star in the gravity well of a black hole. If only she'd listened to that bit of her that had warned that this whole escapade had gone just a bit too smoothly. She supposed she'd just have to wait and find out what the Company wanted.

The door to what was now her cell irised open.

'What have you forgotten, Sun?'

The man spoke as he entered the cell. He was old, with a face sharpened by time, wearing clothes fashionable thirty years ago and cut to flatter a younger man's body. He smiled as he drew a notepad and pencil from a jacket pocket. 'Clearly you have forgotten me. My name is Mr. Proust, as I have told you before and will no doubt do so again. Shall we begin?'

Not waiting for a reply, he opened his notepad. 'We showed you a vision featuring five orangutans named after Prince Albert. What substance were they offering to trade?'

Sun combed through her confused drugged dreams. 'Tea', she replied, 'and they weren't all named after Prince Albert. One was called Bertram.'

Mr. Proust scribbled frantically in his notepad 'well done Sun! I think we're making real progress. Now' he looked up, a conspiratorial smile on his face, 'what would you say the orangutans smelled like?'

The answer came to Sun almost immediately. A warm scent, suitable for cold nights. 'Cinnamon' she said, with absolute certainty.

'Cinna-' Mr. Proust looked up, startled, 'you're sure?'

'Absolutely', Sun said, pleased that at last she wasn't the only person feeling disconcerted. The man shook his head. 'We haven't heard that one before'. There was a speculative look on his face. 'I wonder if you're perhaps ready'.

He leaned toward her and when he spoke the words ran together. 'Tell me Sun, what do you think happened that day of the Company President's talk?'

Sun was rather taken aback at the sudden change in topic, having briefly forgotten the memories she had stumbled upon prior to the disturbing vision. The harness felt tighter all of a sudden as she remembered that she was still on board the Dragon and most likely in the clutches of the Company. Mind rapidly un-fogged, Sun glared at the frail man before her with suspicion.

"You have my memories of that day; you know exactly what I think happened." She spat. Mr. Proust's watery eyes gleamed with excitement and something else that took Sun several moments to place; hope.

"You saw The Talk? Good, we're getting closer. Tell me Sun, who was there? Can you give me a list of names?" Mr. Proust's hand hovered over the notepad, poised to write.

"Why can't you just watch it?" Sun asked, more confused than ever (disregarding the Orangutans) as to what the Company wanted from her. Sun's eyes darted around the room, searching for a window but there were none. It was difficult to tell how much time had passed in the memory and under the influence of the gas, but from the stiffness in her limbs, Sun guessed that she had been bound for well over half an hour. Her backup should have arrived by now; this was supposed to be an in-and-out job – grab the—what? Sun groped at the memory but it slipped away, and she felt a surge of panic. What *had* they been after on the Dragon?

"You see, my dear, that device does not play back recorded memories; rather it pulls

those that are hidden within your own mind to the front and displays them. I must say this is fantastic progress – definitely the closest memory yet."

Sun blinked blearily at the man before her, struggling to focus on his words, let alone comprehend their meaning. Mr. Proust reached forwards and grabbed her by the chin, tilting her head back and to the side to peer into her eyes.

"Dear me, out of time already I see." Releasing her, Mr. Proust wiped his hands on a handkerchief and signaled to someone out of Sun's field of view. Instantly, she felt her bonds tighten, followed by a sharp scratch at the base of her neck.

"Trial 21 unsuccessful..."

"...another attempt at retrieval."

"...three hour reset?"

As her vision faded, the snippets of conversation became more disjointed. A figure leaned over her; Mr. – what was his name?

"Goodnight, Sun."

~

Sun looked out over the towers, shading her eyes against the glare of the setting sun. From between two looming structures, sunlight flashed for a moment; reflected from the wing of a dragon that weaved its way through the city. As the transport drew nearer, she bent her knees to crouch upon the precipice and counted down from ten.

In a single flowing motion, Sun plunged off the roof.

## **BEHIND THE SCENE IN POCKETWATCH SPACE: CREATION OF THE ORANGUTANS CALLED BERTIE**

So how did we go about writing this? Well, we started with mention of the French Grafitti. One of us posited France-in-Space under the auspices of Sun King Louis. Another of us posited that this version of King Louis would additionally be an Orangutan, as per the Jungle Book.

All of us liked the Orangutan, but some of us felt that Orangutan King Louis was a somewhat overdone character. So we decided that the Protagonist had been captured by whoever had recently kicked out the French-Space-Empire from this outpost. They would, by virtue of us all liking the Orangutan idea, themselves be Orangutans.

The next thing we all agreed upon is that the outpost is now in the hands (and feet) of Neo-Victorians-in-Space. We also established that the current occupant that has started speaking to the Protagonist should be called Bertie. But then we diverged as to who Bertie should be.

As a non-consensus-forming people, our commitment in such cases is that everybody who so wishes can be their own Bertie. We did however agree that lots of Orangutans all called Bertie would be even more in keeping with Neo-Victorian world-building. As would their having a rigid hierarchy in the manner of a pocketwatchistocracy.

So one of us decided to be Bertie Bassett, the licquorice allsorts mascot,

albeit recast in space-faring Orangutan form. But, with some elaboration, Basingstoke sounded 'more quintessential', and led to a prolongation word-game 'Bassett' to 'Basingstoke', via 'Stokeworth' to 'Basingstokeworth' and they finally to 'Basingstokeworthy' (compare 'Trevor Noseworthy' from the 'James Bond Jr. Series'). It should now be quite clear what the Saccharocornopic Estates of Allsortes refer to.

Next, one of us proceeded to match this by being Bertie the Bus from 'Thomas the Tank Engine', albeit again crossed with an Orangutan and in space. Cutting back to the original French Theme, they went with a Tyrannical Norman Noble's name, Front d'Ebus in mockery of Reginald Front-de-Bouef from 'Ivanhoe'. This was much applauded for being a French wordplay on buses; compare Hergé's 'Sceptre d'Ottokar'. And so the nature of the Grand-Duchy-Ecclesiastic of Tawdry-Tankington becomes clear: a Martinesque nod to the Reverend W.V. Awdry and his most distinguished creation (lol the Lords Vance of Wayfarer's' Rest and Atranta, trillullotrollolol House Jordayne of the Tor).

Another of us retorted with P.G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster, but built up on it in quintessentialness and silliness to match the previous two entrants. 'Worcestershire' is more quintessential, whereas unintentionally and embarrassingly publically mispronouncing it as 'Worcestersaucerer' is silly. Being high up enough in the pocketwatchistocracy for a small Jeeves to fit inside his pocketwatch is both, and in character besides.

A later arrival decided on a different approach to building on elsewise-established Berties, by one-upping all the Berties hitherto postulated combined. This Bertie would be as-high-as-high-goes in the pocketwatchistocracy, at least on this outpost. A double-barrelled name just Would-Not-Do for So-Exhalted-an-Orangutanage, so this Bertie gets to have a quadruple-barrelled one. Having two (or more) identical names within a quadruple-barrel is common in humour, but the subtly different Foxhuntington-Foxhuntingdon was preferred in this case. With Redcotehornblower being a self-evident amalgamation of a todhunter and a military officer - so obsessed with guns both at work and at play (or should that be the other way around?) - both visually and audially (and with C.S. Forester kicker), it is the last quarter of the quadruple-barrelled surname (or gun, with separate work and leisure barrels?) that remains open. This leads to the suggestion of 'Quartermaine', in sequential lampooning of the 'Were-Rabbit', Marvel Comics' 'S.H.I.E.L.D.' and 'King Solomon's Mines'. But it is adjudged Not Silly Enough, with the prize for upgrading it going to ... Quartermasochist.

This has the benefit of making for distinctive depiction: precisely one limb bound in a manacle. This permits the repeat-view of Monty Python's queue of cooker installers to be used, since Confedera(potoma)cy group pictures from 'Gettysburg' are well known to contain a visiting Lieutenant Colonel of the Coldstream Guards in full regalia. So now our group-picture of that group can pick up a younger and more dashing - if not yet Prime - version of Bertie RQFF,

immediately identifiable by having a single manacle on the same limb as his elder self in the Berties' Tea Company illustration. We leave it open to speculation what the other three-quarters of this personage might be into (other than Warring with Foxes and hunting down HER Majesty's Enemies). For sure, his name does hit the nail on the head as regards what he is like (spot the word in the text that we invented to make this point).

The Apex established, a fifth among up chooses the base, with a more self-deprecating humour that might draw a modicum of sympathy. A Bertie short for something other than Albert ensues, downtrodden by the others and lacking the elsewise characteristic dominant cheek-pouches.

Let us end with some hyperbole. How to one-up a pocketwatch large enough to house a small Jeeves? The phrase we had to work with here was 'he has the houses of Parliamant in his pocket' (immense groans may result from re-reading the Bertiadic portion of the text at this point). And then of course we have to further outdo this with mention of the Overall Ape-X. Queen Victoria in space is neither silly enough nor Apeximesmerrifying enough either. And so we decide to re-spell the name as Big-Tory-Aaargh!, slightly obfuscate this in accent, and conceive of this Phearsome Entity as "half Queen Victoria, half Margaret Thatcher, All-a-Reigning-Big-Tory-ous Over a Galactic Commonwealth upon which NO Sun Ever Sets". Such a Being rather obviously takes only Hyper-Dominant Pronouns, and is Best Depicted as a Gigantic Glowering Presence in the Background, whose Exact Size depends

on the Mood of the Beholder. I.e. lurking behind, and yet towering over, some large-building backdrop a la Spiny Norman.

And, yes, the 'X' in Ape-X is a Big-Tory-Aaargh Cross (facepalms all round).

And an Epilogue. Some latecomers were then appeased by labelling the picture of the Berties' Tea Company with captions, an increasing number of which were to be attached to the Lightning Emanating from HER eyes in the background. Three however were not. One was dismayed at the absence of Bertie Pelham, the Genuine Copper-Bottomed (TM) Marquis of Hexham. Another was similarly dismayed by the lack of a Bertie Bott. The third was rather sillier, and so decided to combine the previous two, resulting in

"The Yeah-Right Honourable Bertie All-Sorts-of-Bottoms (Long, Short, Side, Rams' Copper, Aluminium, Palladium, South American Zinc...), Marquis of Batbogeyhexham":

in a 'conceptual smash-product' of Potteresque and Downtonabbitarian genre humour, albeit sadly to the excision of the genus Phaseolus. He does not feature in the story due to his having 'run away yet again to the outpost of New-Tangiers-beyond-Saturn' at the point in time in which our Protagonist is unexpectedly visited by the Berties' Tea Company.

very sweet of you to have us here,

yours all-the-while revelling in  
Corporate Anonymity,

The Berties' Tea Company

## WHERE IS YOUR LAVA NOW?!

Samuel Cook • Jan Kozuszek • Anon. •  
Molly O’Gorman • Robert • Eleanor  
Smith

*‘I am pleased that my  
shameless referencing of  
Boatmurdered survived  
all the way to the end. The  
herd remembers and it  
will have its vengeance, in  
this story or the next!’*

– Samuel

### ALTERNATIVE TITLES:

- REVENGE OF THE HERD
- ELEPHANTS NEVER FORGET
- GREY IS THE ANGRIEST COLOUR
- YOUR MESSAGE COULD NOT BE  
DELIVERED

They had been summoned by vengeance. From the impenetrable forests of the east. From the arid plains of the south. From the grasslands of the west. From the slightly less arid plains of the north. They gathered. Some had been there. Some had lost family members. Some had seen the light of the destroying fire blazing over the horizon. Some had heard the insane ranting of their enemies before they too perished in flames. Some had heard only rumour, but had come to avenge this great slight to their race. It did not matter; they did not forget. They had all come. And now they were ready to exact retribution on those cursed dwarves. They would know what it meant to cross the mightiest race of the world. The time had come.

On a distant hilltop, the lone dwarf trembled. Whether it was from fear or simply from the stomping of the advancing horde was difficult to tell. He needed to get word back to the Empire quick, else they would be taken by surprise. Who had known that this was possible? As he turned to begin his

errand, his eyes spotted an engraving that he hadn’t noticed before. It was beginning to weather, but it had clearly been of exceptional quality. It showed a dwarf and an elephant. The elephant was striking down the dwarf. The dwarf was on fire. Feeling that this was ominously prophetic, he hurried his steps. Dwarfdom was in peril. Meanwhile, out on the plain, the ranks of great grey backs marched onwards, leaving a trampled swathe in their wake. They moved surprisingly silently for such large creatures, save the occasional trumpeting call to maintain cohesion. The Dwarves would pay.

“We will pay!” assured G’bur, desperately trying to appear as honest as possible. “Just give me a week or so.” The innkeeper was not convinced.

“I agree with the first part,” he said, “you definitely will pay.”

The night was still young; the narrow streets of the dwarven capital were brimming with life, illuminated by the trembling light of the fire tubes. The dwarves loved their festivities, and so mead and beer flowed like a flood as thousands stumbled between the towering buildings of obsidian and glass, safe behind the thick walls and spiked gates, and warmed by the omnipresent blaze which ran through the city like blood, from the furnaces deep beneath the ground up to the tallest spires, where its remnants jetted into the dark sky so the whole capital was crowned with flame.

G’bur and his friends weren’t enjoying the night as much as they hoped to. It was all going fine, glasses, mugs and jars of suspicious liquids came and went at a steady pace, and bruises appeared on their faces at much the same pace as their environment inevitably moved from order towards disorder. In the alcoholic chaos no one noticed who made the unfortunate throw. The innkeeper, his face growing redder, waited impatiently as they gathered all their money and valuables to try and redeem what they had done. But they couldn’t. They knew they couldn’t, and so did the innkeeper as powerless fury and resignation fought within him. Behind him, on the wall, the

pride of the inn and his greatest treasure hung, broken in half. A long, charred spike. A tusk.

The rocks shivered as the grey beasts marched. And a lone dwarf, exhausted and frightened, arrived at the gates.

—

Had the dwarves prepared immediately, perhaps the disaster could have been averted. Yet the lazy-eye of fortune happened to be looking somewhere else at the time, probably gazing intently at someone winning a coin toss or something. And so a series of bafflingly improbable coincidences arose solely to prevent the lone dwarf delivering his message.

Firstly, the gatekeeper's husband's brother-in-law had been hospitalised after a pipe burst at his work. The husband had to take care of the badly scalded sibling on this particular day, and without her trusty husband to make her lunch, the gatekeeper dwarf had to make it herself. Not knowing the true art that is a proper mushroom stroganoff, the gatekeeper dwarf was forced to buy her lunch from a stall - yet behold! Queues stretching as far as the eye could see, and then a bit farther round the corner. The blasted festivities had clogged up Marks and Spanners worse than the public toilets post curry-season. So while our lone dwarf hammered on the door, the gatekeeper fumed in line.

All the while the grey beasts continued their deadly parade, drawing ever closer to their unsuspecting victims. Uncharacteristically silent, yet undeniably ominous, the plodding bore down upon the city. All the while our faithful messenger rapped his knuckles raw on the oaken gates.

By the time the gatekeeper made it to her post, and finished her stew, there had already been a potentially lethal delay. Once let in, it was of the upmost importance the lone dwarf went straight to the inner-sanctum without the slightest delay. Unfortunately all that hammering had got him really parched, and as any seasoned traveller will know, a thirsty dwarf can think of little other than booze. Rushing down the

brimming streets, he hunted for a place to quench his thirst. Typically, the tavern he happened upon was none other than the one G'Bur was bringing his 'business' to.

The scene of utter chaos this thirsty dwarf arrived at cannot be underestimated. G'bur was brandishing one half of the tusk, the innkeeper another, whilst a goblin brawl was being egged on by drunken roaring. Between the smashed cups and spilled beer, the dwarf tried to fight his way to the bar, when he skidded into the line of G'Bur's tusk and found himself thrown against the wall of the tavern by the strength of his accidental attacker. Coming to, his head spinning slightly, he found himself being lifted to his feet by G'Bur.

"Such devastation in this tavern - I think Nunnq'tor owes you a drink."

And that was how G'Bur and the dwarf found themselves thrown out of Nunnq'tor's tavern. Unceremoniously thrown onto the cobbled stones, they picked themselves up. G'Bur dusted himself off, trying to retain his dignity; the dwarf was still focused on his overpowering thirst.

"Sorry we got thrown out of there. It happens. Nunnq'tor has it in for me. Anyway -"

It was then that G'Bur noticed the sentinel uniform of his companion.

"Sentinel?"

"Aye."

"What's it like out there? Are the rumours - the Grey Doom - is there any truth in it?"

G'Bur just had time to see the look of panic in the dwarf's eyes as he remembered the message he was supposed to convey before he heard the first crash of the battering ram into the gates. Citizens ran to blockade the entrances, but they were held up by more citizens running from the gate, screaming at the clouds of grey smoke which were rising above the city walls. They knew what this meant.

Glooming ruby eyes, claws like elven swords, armor plates no dwarf could forge and grey

wings that darkened the night sky. Nilrem, wrathful leader of the grey, oath-breaker of the forgotten, shadow of vengeance had summoned a grey dragon to light up the dwarven capital in flames.

“GROOOOAAARRRR” the dragon silenced the whole city for a single second, before the chaos continued.

“I hope that answers your question” said the sentinel storming towards what seemed to be the origin of the roar.

“Where are you going?” shouted G’Bur. “You are not seriously going to fight this thing?”

“Why? Are you going to do it instead?” the soldier asked rhetorically while drawing a long double-bladed axe, which extended to almost double the size of the dwarf himself. Then he swiftly vanished in the grey smoke.

“G’Bur, why are you standing there like a gnom? Let’s get the dwarf out of here!” G’Bur turned around to see his friends who had just burst out of Nunnq’tor’s tavern.

“I am not running away, not this time!” He purred while a distant hammering began. The creatures had reached the gate and started demolishing it.

“Are you mad? Do you not remember what happened to Frawd?” his friend Rednow replied.

“Frawd did not die for nothing!” he shouted “Now, are you with me?” The hammering got louder. A long second of silence followed, in which the friends gazed at each other and then nodded.

“You are our brother, whatever enemy you face, we face. However strong it may seem, we have your back.”

Glowdin and the others stood by G’bur’s side, drawing their weapons. As the smoked cleared right before them they starred into wheel size gloomy ruby eyes.

At this point Nunnq’tor the innkeeper, who had come out to see what was going on, decided to make an exit. A *swift* exit.

“That’s him sorted,” G’Bur snorted, sheathing his sword. “All right, lads, let’s get the hell out of Drach’nan.”<sup>7</sup>

“You mean we’re not going to fight the dragon?” B’Torri said, in a voice of mixed horror and relief. He was the youngest and most recent addition to the group, and hadn’t quite got used to their modus operandi.

“*Fight* the dragon? You’re new to the game, B’Torri. That was to convince Nunnq’tor to run off – he always did skedaddle at the first sign of danger. This city may be doomed, but even so, we don’t want anyone to witness our... *convenient* escape.” And with that, G’Bur and co. set off at an impressive sprint.

As they ran, G’Bur fingered the purse hidden in one of the inner pockets of his clothing, safely away from pickpockets. He’d been paid handsomely for this job: get in, get the info, delay the messenger, get out. Apart from the danger of Elephant, it was as easy a job as he’d ever run. But then, that was *why* the purse was so full: you had to pay top price to hire the best, and G’Bur and his friends were the best spies in Dwarfdom.

They had only to make it to the underground river to be safe from the dangers above, and from there it would be a quick boat ride to his employers in the rival dwarvish city of Frest. For G’Bur’s inner pocket didn’t just contain the agent’s fee he’d been paid. It also contained a scroll that many would kill for – a scroll that would explain the glowing buildings all around them, soon to be destroyed.

A scroll that contained the secret of Fireglass.

FIN

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<sup>7</sup> A dwarvish city with, in this context, roughly the same meaning as the human “Dodge”.



## SHARK BAIT (OOH HA HA)

Sanaa Cockar • Sam Cocking • Sarah Nolan • Anon. • Anon.

**T**his shark (Cassandra to her friends, sparse as they were) was a very misunderstood creature. Sharp teeth, yes, she had. Beady eyes – well she wouldn't call them beady but maybe a little small and dark. Large body, well, yes – but elephants were massive and so were whales and they didn't have as bad a reputation as her! All she did was roam the oceans for food – was that a crime?

The neighbourhood she swam in was a nice one. Pretty coral fences built with excellent workmanship, she thought, and the neighbours did an incredible job with the algae and anemone (flower) pots too. It was difficult navigating around this area safely, because her tail would always seem to CRASH into the coral pots, causing them to float away into the other neighbourhood and beyond. This didn't help her situation at all.

She decided, one stormy day, that she was going to accomplish something that would cause all her neighbours from the back of beyond to befriend her. It had to be spectacular and unrivalled. Something exciting, and out-of-this-world! That was it! She was going to take them 'out of this world' and up above the waves for a day trip! Well, maybe not a whole day seeing as no-one could really breathe for long above water...

Her problem-solving mind was buzzing and whirring away. It was getting dark, and she didn't work as well at night compared to morning time. But she was determined. There must be a way to get her 'soon to be friends' to land! Ah yes...

~

Harold the blowfish had few pleasures in his life. He just hadn't realised this yet. Having successfully manoeuvred himself into a dead-end job in which promotion was as

unlikely as it was undesired on his part, his days now consisted of the same, monotonous routine. Wake up, swim to work, process data, swim home, eat dinner, sit motionless in his easy-chair until it got dark, go to sleep. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Perhaps it was because he was so well settled into this depressing routine that Harold was so dependent on its consistency. Familiarity bred comfort and with it a mock sense of contentment, or even happiness. The slightly deviation from his routine would make Harold almost physically uncomfortable, as the risk of something different and interesting taking place threatened to rear its ugly head. There had been a hairy couple of months when maintenance work on the reef had forced him to adjust his commute. Thankfully, such hellish days had now passed. Or so Harold thought.

One night, as Harold was sitting at home and trying as hard as possible to do and think about nothing out of the ordinary, his peace and quiet was rudely interrupted by quite literal buzzing and whirring noises coming from his neighbour's house. He grimaced as he wondered what that pesky shark could possibly be up to this time. Just the other week, she had smashed his flower pots across the street. Then to compound the matter she had put them back in not quite the right order, which was even worse! Whatever was happening now couldn't be as horrific as that, could it?

The very thought made Harold swell with outrage – quite literally. Harold could feel himself billowing outwards, spikes protruding from his stomach as that good-for-nothing fish-eater continued her infernal banging, the racket disturbing his evening, her violation of all that was calm and peaceful in these pure blue waters-

Harold shook himself. With an effort, he retracted his spikes and slowly returned to his usual dimensions. He was *not* about to let

whatever-it-was disturb his hard-fought boredom.

Screeches and a bang joined the noises next door. Harold forced his mind to focus on something else. Something nice and predictable. Plankton, for instance.

A dull thud reverberated through the water. The picture frames balanced along the shelves toppled down. Harold's eyelid twitched.

There was a loud *crunch!* And Harold flung himself out of the way as a fiery torpedo and a shark shouting "Excuse me! Oh dear, I'm terribly sorry!" burst through his living room wall and smashed through the window on the other side into his garden. The torpedo, having lost some momentum, touched the seabed at the tip of one of Harold's neat algae patches, and ploughed diagonally across the lot, before coming to an abrupt halt when it made contact with the cast-iron '50 years of service' gnome Harold had received from work, and imploded.

Harold stared at the gaping hole in his living room wall. He stared through the hole at the trench across his prized algae patches. He stared at the gnome, now missing hat, nose and humaning-rod.

The Shark shuffled guiltily, and accidentally smashed an anemone pot.

~

"We do need to find something for you to do with your time" said Prickly Old Harold. "You might do with knowing that an old friend of mine - a Turtle - has opened an Evening School two banks along.

When I was young, he taught me *Ambition*, *Distraction*, *Uglification* and *Derision* (for Turtles live far longer than Blowfish). But lest such sound dull to you, I have it on good authority that he is offering *Modern Methods*

*of Humaning* on Krakendays and Leviathandays<sup>8</sup>."

"Oooo" said the Shark, with a gurgle of interest and relief at not being ticked off. " - and tomorrow is Leviathanday too! Thank you, I shall try it out. "

And so our Shark approached Liberius Leatherbackford-Squeers's "Sunset Education Emporium for the Self-Advancement of Maritime Denizens". And indeed, on the reef above, "Modern Methods of Humaning" was spelled out in burgundy-and-scarlet anemones well-illuminated by members of the Advertisory Anglerfishes' Guild...

There was quite a queue by the cavern's door. She counted four other sharks, two Orcas, a cloud of Piranhas, a Hammerhead, a Saltwater Crocodile and even a Giant Clam.

"We call him Tortoise" winked one of the other sharks, who was carrying a strange rectangular object under her steering fin, all a-marked with black and red glyphs.

"But Harold told me he was a Turtle?" confuseterjected Cassandra.

"Har" said the Crocodile, who was wearing half a hat with tiny floating anemonaes attached by woven algae. "So he is, but we call him thit because he Taught-us..." With which she smiled, macroserratomaxillarodonicly with a masterful veneer of Reptilian grace.

At this point, an enormous Turtle whelckomed them to enter the Cavern of Upper Knowledge.

They entered and took their seats on artificial anemone-husks from Above.

"Anybody wishing to hand in *Avidautogratication*, *Subliminaldetraction*, *Smuglitigation* or *Depravedtwitterstormination* homework may do so at the end" garglennounced

---

<sup>8</sup> Krakendays and Leviathandays occur once monthly at full-moon and no-moon respectively.

Liberius. "Today, as all Leviathandays, being reserved for *The Art and Technique of Humaning*. Has anyone put last week's lesson to practical use?"

Several of the fatter Piranhas raised flippers. The shark with them grinned gleefully, and the crocodile pointed to the half-hat and belched politely.

"Indeed, I surmise that you went far west of here, with a piece of flotsam gnawed into the shape I indicated." smiled Leatherbackford-Squeers. "What do we call that shape, Class?"

"Crickit bit" boomthrustastically chanted back the class, all as one. Or almost all as one. For Cassandra was new, and this was well over her head. And so she was noticed by the mercurial and perceptive old *Coriaceanus Academicus*.

"Agh, new blood. What is your name, novice Cartilaginous Carchaodon Carharias Lady?"

"Cassandra" she beamed in awe of his recognition, for she was yet still far from full-grown.

"Of the Classical Can't-be-believed Cassandras, no doubt" he intoned prophetically.

"How do you kn - - . Did Harold tell you I would be turning up today?" she asked.

"Ah, another smart pupil." Liberius bubbled with pride. "I have just the Lesson for today..."

~

"What are the Five Principles of Advanced Humaning?" invited Liberius.

"Know their glyphs" offered an Orca.

"Know their lingua franca" added a shark.

"Know their vices and greeds" grinned a Piranha.

"Have a team-member who knows Advanced Probability Calculus" one-up-outgrinned the Shark, flicking open her box to reveal stylized pictures of old man, young man and

woman humans on slender oblongs of a shiny material.

"Tip our Finternit into their Deep Internit" concluded the Crocodile.

"Say more about your part" encouraged Liberius to the Shark, who was fizzling through the shiny oblongs.

"I challenge humans at a game they invented called Online Poker" explained the shark, forming an immense flexible fan with the oblongs. They then lose a great amount of greed-tokens such as Egos, Phallars or Twitcoins to my superior knowledge of Advanced Probability. I then tell them their debt will be halved if they attach it in a waterproof box to the underside of the pier. Where I lay in wait, bite them in half and am sure to not forget their box, either..."

"Then she gives me the box" continued another Shark, "and I attach it to some other human-reef's pier as a pick-up point for a vice called 'loan'. Sometimes, I just eat the customer as they arrive. But, other times, I do something worse." he smiled razoraptoraptuously, "charge interest."

"But today" said Liberius, "we shall establish a way of obtaining a human to eat and a vast amount of their currency both at once..."

"We first go phumaning on the finternet, targeting greed. Some particularly greedy humans are especially interested in 'depositing their wealth in secret offshore banks'. What we then do is tell them that we have an offshore bank (which is true, for all best lies contain plenty of truth to give them form and credence). One which is accepting vast amounts, and which consequently is \*really\* secret. And the mark of a really secret offshore bank is to only accept deposits from a rowing boat at maritime coordinates we specify, where we pick up their wealth by submarine... They can however only deposit it in person, as 'we require them to sign for it' (for some reason humans do not question this kind of requirement, calling it burro-crass-sea: how

convenient!). And, being a secret account, they are not to tell anyone of their rowing offshore to deposit.

Then one of our Orcas head-butts the rowing boat to capsize it, some of us eat the greedy human and the rest of us ensure none of the 'deposit' is lost. We then use parts of the 'deposit' as bait for our humaning rods, and use the rest to generate further 'human wealth' though our loan adverts and pier loans...

All we need now are some volunteers for this next Krakenday's Practical lesson."

Cassandra rose from her seat, one fin waving madly and her teeth bared in an excited grin; *this was her moment.*

~

If she was being brutally honest with herself, Cassandra knew that the humaning expedition could have gone better. Sure, when explained by Liberius the plan seemed simple enough, but in reality humans were just bloody stupid. Despite a promising start (bait accepted and one clueless human rowing out to the pre-arranged location) things had gone downhill fast. One thing that had not been specified in the 'offshore account' paper work was the medium in which cash was to be delivered. One would assume that such discreet transactions would be carried out either by cash or untraceable bonds, perhaps even high value material wealth. Not (she shuddered at the mere thought of it) *bitcoin.*

What kind of self-respecting \*really, really secret\* off-shore account would accept the very trackable digital currency? *Honestly.* Finally, to top off that overwhelming disappointment, the human itself had been tiny; a mere morsel and certainly not worth all of the time and effort that had gone into the job.

In her house, Cassandra added the finishing touches to her PowerPoint (slide transitions,

animations and the like) ready to present in class: Humaning – an idiot's guide.

## ARE ALIENS REAL?

Charlotte Griffiths

**W**hen Susan was five, she asked her mother if aliens were real. Her mother told her to eat her cereal, then went away to wake up her brother, so Susan went to school without an answer. At school, Susan asked the same question to Mrs Miller. Mrs Miller was short and smelled of lavender, but she didn't think that aliens were real. Susan wasn't convinced that Mrs Miller knew what she was talking about, so she decided to find someone else.

At lunch time, she saw Danny and Mike playing with little plastic green men with guns and large eyes. They looked like they might know more, so she asked Danny if he thought aliens were real. Danny said that, yes, they were, and that one day they would destroy the Earth. Susan quite liked the Earth, so she argued that the aliens might like it too, and besides, the whole Earth was a very big place to destroy. Danny told her that she wouldn't understand because she was a girl, so Susan stuck out her tongue and went to play with Lilly.

Lilly liked horses, but didn't think that aliens were real. She said that they were only real on TV, like politicians and America. Susan's dad was a politician, so she decided that Lilly was probably wrong. At the end of the day, Susan waited for her mother in the car park and wondered if aliens would kindly destroy her school.

At home she sat in her room, mulling over the alien issue, to the *thump, thump, thump* of music coming through the wall. Susan wondered if her mother would suspect her if she broke her brother's new stereo. She might, but her brother was annoying. She concluded that it would be worth the risk, as she tried to block out the noise. Susan thought it would be best to try once her brother was asleep, so turned her mind back

to the matter of aliens. She knelt on the floor to open the shoe box she kept underneath her bed.

"Nobody thinks that you're real, Martin." She whispered. Martin looked up from the Brantano's flyer which he had been reading, and climbed onto the edge of the shoe box, swinging his seven green tentacles over the side.

"Oh," he replied. "How rude."

## IN OTHER WORLDS

Tom Musgrove

I am...

No. That's not true. Or rather, that might not be true, and if I were lying, then where would we be?

I was...

No. That's not true either.

I could be...

Yes. That's better. Now we can begin.

I could be tall, and I could have hair a shade away from being black. I could have a nose that casts a shadow over the rest of my face. I could have eyebrows that move independently of each other. I could have a chin reminiscent of a ledge on a mountain, minus the moss and the exhausted climbers.

I can't see myself at the moment. Everything in the above description comes from the last time I looked in a mirror. Therefore, my entire knowledge of my physical appearance is based on what I remember.

Correction. My entire knowledge of my physical appearance is based on what I think I remember. All I can know for certain is that I exist now, and even that's debatable.

Let me tell you a story. Once there was a boy who stood by a gate, and flinched at every word that struck him. It must have been in the spring – perhaps April – for the trees were only halfway to their summer splendour, yet no leaves were on the floor. The boy had his back to a fence – one of those wire-linked ones, where thousands of little diagonal squares form, like soldiers in the ranks of a Napoleonic regiment, a fence that stretched for nearly a kilometre. There was a road in front of him, and a pavement before

that; a pavement packed with parents desperate to find their little youngsters, who were waiting in the playground of the school beyond the gate. However, the most striking feature of the scene was the sky.

It was dark and sullen, stacked with rainclouds waiting to happen. You could look to the horizons and see nothing but dark clouds, and the occasional haze of rain. Nevertheless, the world shone, as bright as an August afternoon despite the dark skies. It was as if the light came from the ground, or from somewhere else entirely.

You've probably got quite the mental image now: boy, fence, road, bright dark sky. What you don't see – and that's because I haven't mentioned them yet – is the half-circle of older boys around the other child. There's maybe six or seven of them, all at least three years older than the first boy. None of them seem particularly well-disposed; none seem inclined towards polite conversation. And you may have noticed that I'm using the present tense now, and that's because I'm back there again, surrounded by seven boys who want to let off some steam, and I just want to get home.

I don't remember what it was that they said to me. I don't remember how long the torment lasted. The next thing I remember is stumbling into my house again, and looking out of the windows at the school and the road and the chain-link fence, as the rain began to fall.

And here's the odd thing. When I think back to that day, when I remember it, I can see myself. There I am, standing with my back to the fence; there are the other boys blocking my escape. In my memory of the scene, nothing happens; everything is still, like a painting. And maybe that's just because I was seven at the time, but memories are fickle and treacherous things, and if I can see myself from the outside, who knows what else I can rely on?

If you turn over the page and read what I've already written, you'll see the words "All I

can know for certain is that I exist, and even that's debatable". And, when I wrote those words, it was true – I was aware and sentient and thinking and real.

Or, to put it another way, I remember being aware and sentient and all the other things. However, there's nothing to suggest that that was true. How do I know – how can I know – that I haven't just popped into existence, with a head full of memories and a slight appetite? Have I existed before this moment?

Let me tell you another story, now. (This one is also dependent upon the implicit assumption that I exist.) Two summers ago, my family went on holiday to South Africa. I remember it well – the landscape was stunning, and the wildlife was unforgettable, and we only got lost four times. And somewhere else, in another universe perhaps, I went to Australia or Croatia or Vietnam. And, for the life of me, I don't know which universe is the one that I live in.

Perhaps I went on holiday to Australia instead. Perhaps the landscape was stunning, and the wildlife was unforgettable, and we only got lost four times. Perhaps I just remember being in South Africa instead. Today, I think to myself that I'll never forget that holiday, but why on earth should that be the case? Why should the memories that I have today be the ones I keep for the rest of my life – or the ones that actually happened? At the moment, I'll always have visited South Africa, but will I always have visited there this time tomorrow?

Time now for another story. One night – maybe four years ago now – I had a dream. I remember being somewhere that looked like my driveway, but it was somehow large enough to fit seven large army trucks in it. There were other people there – people who I'd never met before, in real life or in the dream – and we were all armed. We were being told on how best to deal with zombies,

and – in that strange way in which dreams shift – suddenly we were in a woodland and a warzone.

So far, so dreamlike. The next bit is the truly bizarre part. Even now, when I'm recalling more about this dream than I did when I started writing this, I don't know how it happened. It was the part where I died.

Don't look at me like that. It wasn't permanent.

I opened my eyes in my house, standing in the hallway. Normally, the only decorations in the house are pictures on the walls, but on this occasion, it was all decked up for Christmas: lights, tinsel, the whole getup.

Then there was somebody there. I don't remember who it was; I'm not even sure whether I could see anybody. Nevertheless, I asked questions and they were answered.

The first thing I asked was whether I was dreaming; they denied it. This only strikes me as being strange now, but it's the only dream I've ever had where I've questioned the reality of it. Even odder dreams, whether about clockwork badgers, or tyrannosaurs, or an evil mint trying to feed me turnip, always seem to be accepted without question.

The second thing I asked was whether I was really dead. They concurred.

The third, and final, thing that I asked was whether I could live again. I remember explaining to the presence, whatever it was, that my grandparents were visiting, and I wanted to see them. They apologised, and told me that I had to stay dead. Irritated by this, I climbed the stairs to my equally festive room. Soon after this, I woke up to a bright day in June, but still with the taste of a mince pie upon my tongue. Thinking nothing of it, I ran down the stairs to wait for my visiting grandparents to arrive.

That dream was different to any other dream I've ever had. For one thing, I was able to

question the reality of the dream; for another, I still possessed memories – the fact that my grandparents were visiting – from what I think of as ‘real life’. Now, as you may have noticed from the previous two and a half pages, I am able to question this world’s reality. However, I can’t remember anything from other lives, which is the real test.

I shouldn’t worry. If I’m to wake up in other worlds, then I’ll remember them eventually.

Now for my final story. This isn’t a memory; this is more of a conjecture. What if, every time we closed our eyes or fell asleep or even just blinked, our history was changed – edited around us? What if, two summers ago, I’d visited Australia yesterday and South Africa today and Slovenia tomorrow?

And what if there were beings who did this editing? What if, in other worlds, I’d stood in a house of light at Christmastime, and spoken with one of them?

And, if a man is the sum of his memories, but his memories change every second, then can he even be said to exist?

But I should calm down. That conjecture – where memory is but a joke of the mind, and where change is the only constant – is only Possibility One. Possibility Two – which there is nothing to disprove, apart from the little impurities like dust in an oyster-shell – is equally valid. Possibility Two is the possibility that all of our memories are true; all of our dreams are only dreams. Even the impurities – like seeing yourself from the outside in a memory – can be explained away as a trick of the imagination.

The trouble is, there’s nothing to disprove Possibility One either.

And then there’s Possibility Three. Perhaps I never stood by a gate and flinched at every word that struck me. Perhaps I can’t

remember seeing myself. Perhaps I never dreamed of a house of light at Christmastime, and a man who wasn’t there.

Perhaps I made this whole story up.



## THE TOOTH OF THE PANTHER

Samuel Cook

It is the month of Obligatory Stan Lee Cameo in the year 2068. Banazir and Maura are archivists at MarvelCorp, the *de facto* ruler of much of the world, its continuing profitability assured by such releases as *Ironman 27*, *Captain America: The Winter Fuel Allowance* and *Thor: Extreme Goat Herding*. Today, the archivists are looking for any material that is coming up for a significant anniversary. Let us see what they have found:

“OK, so that’s 40-year anniversaries done. Let’s see what was released 50 years ago.”

“So, 2018?”

“Yep, let’s start with films.”

“But the comics are so much better!”

“You would say that. And, don’t forget, this is going to be one of the mandated public holidays where all praise MarvelCorp, so, seeing as the films always reached a bigger audience, we’re starting with films.”

“Oh, go on then.”

“Right, so first up we have *Black Panther*.”

“Pulling up our holdings on that now, Ban. Let’s see, all the usual stuff – plot, cast, production details – hang on, this is unusual.”

“What is?”

“There’s something titled *Putative Spin-offs* and...it’s been classified for the last 50 years.”

“Why would you classify something so mundane? There never was a spin-off made, though, according to the database, so let’s have a look at it. Might be something interesting for the anniversary exhibit.”

“Right, it looks as if there’s a couple of things listed in there. First up *Plaque Banter*.”

“What?!”

*Plaque Banter*. According to the synopsis here, it was going to be a ‘sitcom set in a Detroit dental surgery. T’Challa and Killmonger are two mismatched dental surgeons at the forefront of orthodontic work through the use of vibranium technology. T’Challa wants to keep the surgery local, but Killmonger wants to go public and free the world of the vice of crooked teeth at any price. Assisted by nurses M’Baku and Nakia, T’Challa has to resort to all sorts of crazy antics to rein in Killmonger’s corporate megalomania and keep the surgery functioning.”

“That sounds Stan-awful.”

“Wait until you see the sample dialogue:”

T’CHALLA: That’s the fifth patient you’ve killed this week, Killmonger!

KILLMONGER: Her teeth were too crooked. There was nothing I could do.

T’CHALLA: You need to abandon this insane vision of yours. I can barely see your face for all the kill marks! Don’t make me hit you with the vibranium drill again.

KILLMONGER: But I always win the drill fights. Until M’Baku and Nakia turn up to save your sorry ass!

T’CHALLA: MY sorry ass?! Which one of us is in charge here?

KILLMONGER: I didn’t vote for you.

*They start fighting.*

“Wow, Ban. You weren’t joking, were you? No wonder it never got made.”

“It gets worse.”

“How can it get worse?!”

“You haven’t seen the second spin-off idea yet.”

“Do I want to know?”

“No, but I’m going to tell you anyway.”

“This is your revenge for making you do the films first, isn’t it?”

“Maybe. The second spin-off, or possibly meta-spinoff, is called *Plaque Bantha*. It’s listed as a partnership with Disney, may they burn forever. The synopsis describes it as-”

“No, wait, let me guess. Is it something along the lines of ‘Crazy crossover with the *Star Wars* universe. T’Challa is Chief Dental Technician at the largest bantha farm on Tatooine, where he’s responsible for their oral hygiene after they’ve had their daily supply of fodder delivered. Killmonger is his underling, who harbours a desire to free the banthas and let them roam free across the planet, which would cause untold ecological devastation. Only T’Challa and his band of stablehands stand in the way of Killmonger’s insane ambition.”

“Hang on, let me check.... Yep, that’s pretty much spot on. Though you did miss out the weird dream sequence where T’Challa communes with the banthas. How did you manage that?”

“A 40-year career at MarvelCorp teaches you a few things.”

“Still, impressive. Do you want the sample dialogue?”

“Bloody Disney, no! We’re putting that thing right back where it came from or so help all of us!”

“I agree. I think we know why it was classified now. If this got out, MarvelCorp’s reputation would be ruined.”

And so, the spin-offs were once again consigned to a blessed oblivion. But, archivists will never delete anything, so who knows where they might rear their ugly head once more...?



## INTERIOR DESIGN

*(Captain/Lord) Alexander Hammond*

"My porch is painted in the colours of Star Trek. The insignia I have done in 2 layers of 24k gold leaf. The hallway in the style of corridors from the Enterprise D. and making room for Doctor Who's Tardis. The bathroom was stargate inspired, with a hint of Star Trek. The kitchen is in full Star Trek colours. Finally, I've done my living room as a malfunctioning holodeck. I have yet to redesign my bedroom. I plan on a 'Utopia Planitia Shipyards'. I already have the full-size picture of the Enterprise D engineering schematics."









## **THE ARC-HIVE**

Welcome to the Land of Opolis, or, more specifically, the Arcorian Archive.

Collected here are a series of backgrounds, originally created for a Dungeons & Dragons One-Shot set in the mysterious Archive, for you to use, whether in an Arc-Hive game, or a more general fantasy setting.

DMs, if you would like to run your own Arc-Hive campaign, you are more than welcome to! I'd recommend checking out the SCP wiki for things to inhabit your archive. The characters exist in 4 groups: Students, Guards, Thieves and Curiosities, that you may want to start split up (or not, as the case may be). If you have any questions about playing in the Arc-Hive, or just want to share the stories of what happened in your Arc-Hive, feel free to contact me at: [allywhaig@gmail.com](mailto:allywhaig@gmail.com)

Have Fun!

## **THE CITY ON THE ROCK**

In the centre of a great plain, there lies a boulder of immense size, atop which, surrounded by scaffolding and hazardous lifting mechanisms, lies the illustrious Arcoria - the proud City on the Rock.

Arcoria is home to the 5 Colleges of Arcanum - the teetering towers of Aer, the College of Artifice; the overgrown hallways of Tera, the College of Life; the bustling marketplace of Fior, the College of Culture; the forgotten hideaways of Aqua, the College of Lore and the silent cathedral of Lux, the College of Faith.

## **THE ARCHIVE**

Lying beneath all five colleges exists the Archive, a sprawling maze of corridors and vaults carved into the very stone of the Arcoria Rock. The origins, contents and even existence of the Archive are a subject to wild speculation:

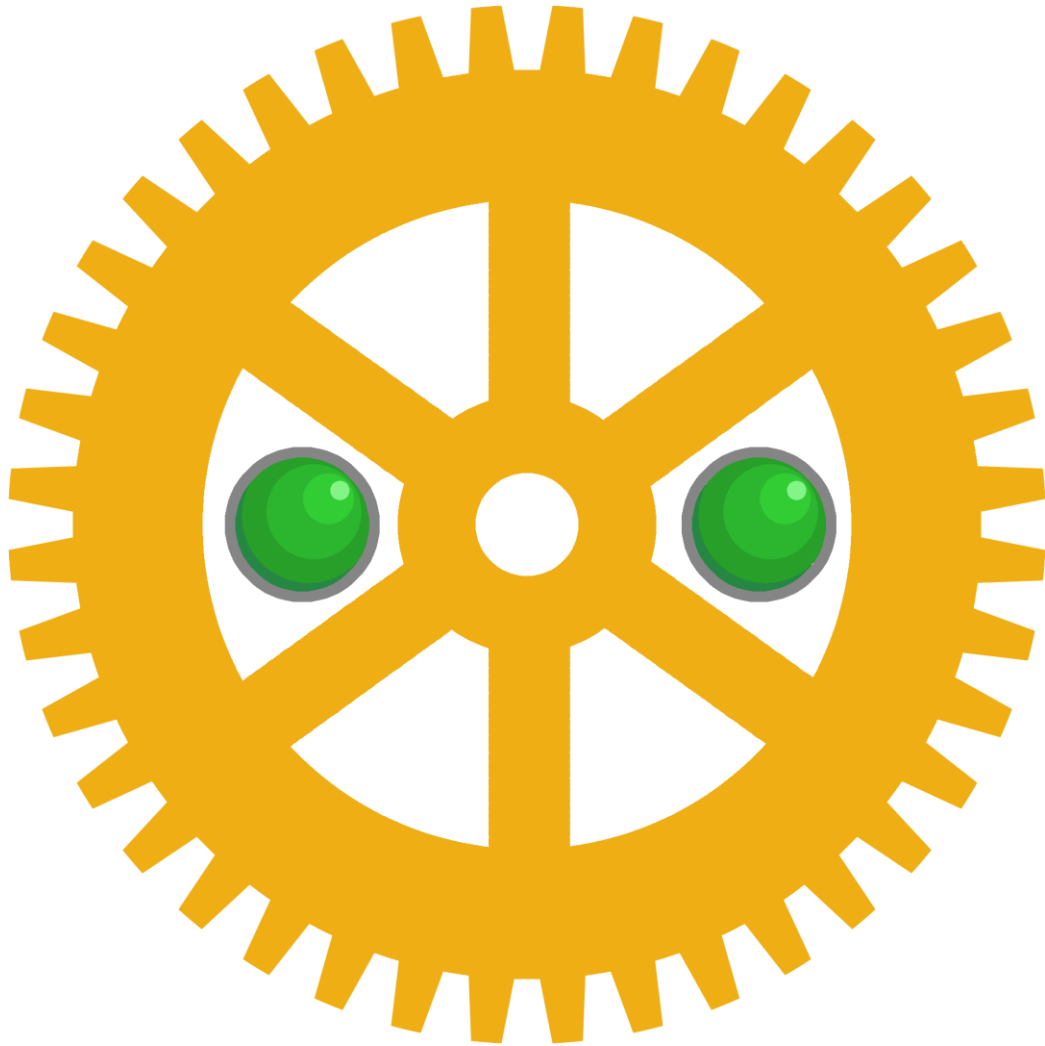
Some rumours say that the tunnels are home to a criminal undercity, bustling and brawling without the knowledge of the city above. Others claim it was created and used by the early Arcanum to contain and protect creations and discoveries deemed too dangerous to exist in the outer world. Yet others claim that the Archive was originally a hive of burrows for some form of unknown creatures, and that deep within its bowels they still live, seeking vengeance on the traitorous world that overtook its home.

Whatever the truth, the Colleges of the Arcanum consider it a closely kept secret, barring all entry except to those inducted or hired by the Arcanum itself, and even then each student or hireling is permitted access to only a small section of the tunnels below...





# PEANO TEAM C



- **Name:** Peano
- **Race:** Warforged (Robot)
- **Class:** Artificer (Gunslinger) - Artificers are the experts in making and using magical items. And you expertly made a gun.
- **'Faction':** Curiosities
- **Place of Birth:** ???
- **Notable Features:** Your body is that of an automaton, or Robot, and has a strange hole in the centre of its chest

## BACKGROUND:

Who am I?

What am I?

These were your first thoughts as you woke up in the cell.

There was a piece of you missing. Something inside you told you that much quickly.

That piece... You needed it. You cried out. No response.

Something squishy was pushed through a slit in the door. You ignored it. Two metal utensils followed. You did not ignore those.

Your horde of cutlery was useful now. You'd twisted the tines of the forks and bent the knives

to make a device. You placed it against the door and turned the crank. The pieces whirred. You removed it. Nothing. You cried out again.

The thing pushed through the door was not squishy this time. It was a box. The box contained paper, and quills. You began drawing.

The schematics were complete. As you'd drawn them, components were pushed through the door. Your creation was finished. You aimed and fired.

You cried out for longer this time and, for the first time, got a response. A deep voice echoed through the wall. It introduced itself as Broose.

Time passed. Another voice echoed. This one was angry, and called itself Loritz.

Then it was now. The present.



# LORITZ RUNECARVER

## TEAM C



- **Name:** Loritz Runecarver
- **Race:** Hill Dwarf
- **Class:** Wild Mage (Sorcerer) - Raw Magic Power flows through your veins. Raw Magic Power that, sometimes, has Wildly Unpredictable effects.
- **'Faction':** Curiosities
- **Place of Birth:** Arcoria

## BACKGROUND:

'Runecarver Investigations' was one of the finest detective agencies in Lower Fior. Your investigative eye and 'special abilities' led you to a near perfect record of solving cunning robberies, malevolent mysteries and brutal murders.

At least that's what you told the Half-Elf kid from next door that kept finding his way into your office. The kid's name was Aurus, and you'd known his ma since before you moved into the dingy rooms above the inn on Vatis Lane. He'd first found his way into your office when you were working on a particularly... *unsavoury* case. When he started asking questions you panicked, and began reciting a story you learnt when you were younger. The Half-Elf's eyes lit up with glee as you told it, and you felt yourself smiling.

And so it went on. You would continue your detective work, your mind always half thinking of stories to tell to the young lad. You got better at telling them too, spicing up the boring bits with flashes of flame and sparks of magic. And when a wild surge accidentally gave you a beard of feathers, Aurus just laughed all the more. Those were good times.

Of course, it's been awhile since Runecarver Investigations on Vatis Lane. It feels like years since you were put in this prison, yet you don't even have the sun to be able to tell. You were on another routine investigation when a surge of Wild Magic hit. It wasn't even a bad one - sure a gnome was turned blue, but that was easily reversible.

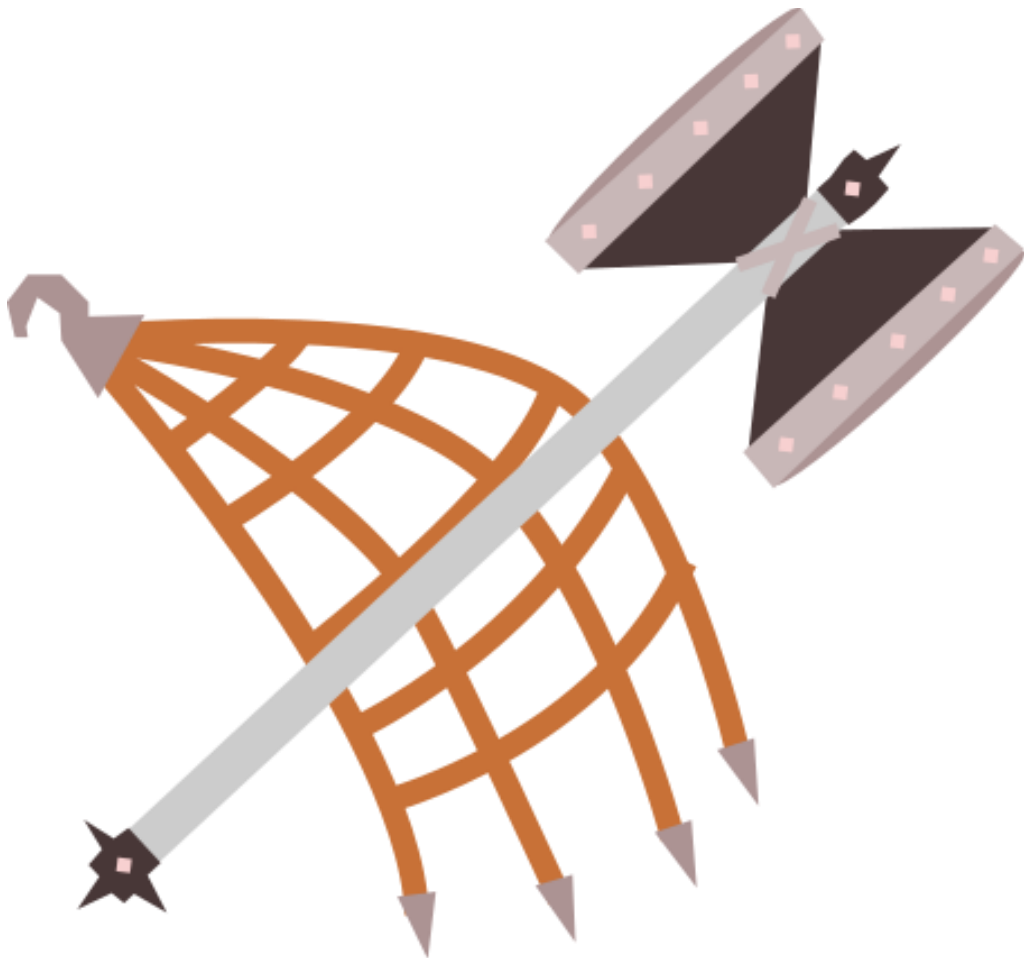
Before you knew what was happening, you were gripped and held aloft by a giant purple hand, whilst someone shouted something about 'a danger to society'. Then, you were thrown in here. Ironically, this cell was a lot nicer than your rooms above the inn on Vatis lane - it was spacious and comfortable, and whenever you asked for something, it was brought to you. But it was still a cell.

Over time you realized you could communicate with the residents of the cells next to yours. The deep voice (which called itself Broose) and the higher voice (which called itself Peano) helped with the loneliness, but you still wondered what was going on in the outside world. And most of all, you really wondered how young Aurus was holding up..



# MOMAN STONESLING

## TEAM G



- **Name:** Moman Stonesling
- **Race:** Goliath
- **Class:** Champion (Fighter) - You are a master of fighting, in peak physical form. You wield your 2 handed Maul with deadly power
- **'Faction':** Custodians
- **Place of Birth:** The Border Mountains

## BACKGROUND:

It was hard growing up on the streets of Arcoria, but even starting with your herd in the Border Mountains. The Herd of Akow lived on and traversed the harshest peaks of the Border Range, only rarely encountering a traveller not of Goliath blood. And that was what made the encounter with Bud Springtears all the more unusual.

You encountered the fellow sitting atop a snowdrift in a blizzard, wrapped in furs with a flute strapped across its back. They greeted your herd with a smile as you approached and invited you to sit by his fire. The elders of the tribe knew enough of the stories to be wary of this figure, but you, young as you were and cold from a day's march, eagerly slipped into the fire's light.

All your pains and aches seemed to melt away in the warmth as Bud regaled you with stories of a city in the plains below the mountains - a place of magic, culture and overabundant food...

When you arrived in Arcoria you were cold, alone, and hungry. You'd ascended the scaffold on the back of a cabbage cart, and now you added lost to your list of things wrong. A voice over your shoulder asked a question. You turned and met two emerald eyes and a feline

face staring back at you. She repeated her question: 'I said, whatcha up to Muscles?'

In total, there ended up being five of you in Tuval's little family. There was yourself, known as Muscles, Jack, known as Glass-Eye, Sothana, known as Slip, and the Tabaxi 'Music on the Wind', who'd brought you here in the first place (and who'd quickly earned the nickname 'Silent but Deadly'). Then there was Tuval himself, an elderly Gnome, and mastermind of the arrangement. Under Tuval's tutelage, you and your companions learnt how to make money and survive, be it through street fights, pickpocketing, begging, or straight thievery. It was hard, but it was a family.

When Tuval left it shook all of you. He went without so much as a note, but deep inside, and with all your savings taken, you knew he wouldn't be coming back. So you started again. Each of you sought careers and didn't question the others' choices. Every copper piece you all earned you sent back to be shared. You found work first as a bouncer, then a guard, before a figure in scholar's robes offered you a job like you'd never heard before.

And that was how you started working as a guard in the Archive.



# SYLLWEN AUTUMNSTWIG

## TEAM G



- **Name:** Syllwen Autumnstwig
- **Race:** Wood Elf
- **Class:** Paladin (Oath of the Crown) - Your immense belief in the tenets of Loyalty, Law and Courage powers you, making you a holy warrior of incredible skill.
- **'Faction':** Custodian
- **Place of Birth:** The Dawn Spire

## BACKGROUND:

You used to be an adventurer; one of the best, in fact. On your home continent you and your party were living legends, sent by Kings, Queens, Emperors and Empresses alike, on quests that impacted entire countries at a time. It was on one such quest that disaster struck. You were sent to retrieve the Helm of Verhaal - an Artefact that was rumoured to have the devastating ability to erase a person from existence.

After a gruelling trek through the catacombs beneath a crumbling city that nearly claimed the life of your party's barbarian (a black and silver scaled dragonborn by the name of Beneddik Xivax), you finally found the Helm atop a skeleton clad in regal armour. As you'd done with so many Artefacts before, you reached out and carefully removed it.

Then everything went black.

When you awoke you were on the floor, slouched against a slab of stone, a heavy weight on your head. Blurred figures entered the room. As your eyes focussed, you realized these were who you wanted to see - your party! As you tried

to stand and hobble towards them, a cruel battleaxe was held in your face.

'Who the f\*\*\* are you?' asked the voice you knew belonged to Beneddik. You laughed, because it was all you could do. Your party did not. The axe remained at your face. You explained who you were to them. They said they didn't know you, that they needed the helmet off your head. You tried to give it to them, but some force stopped you. The party did not see the force.

Eventually you were escorted from beneath the crumbling city. When you reached the city where your quest had began, you realized the effects of the Helm of Verhaal: all memory of you and your deeds had been wiped from the minds of all you'd encountered. There and then you swore an oath to never let this happen to anybody else.

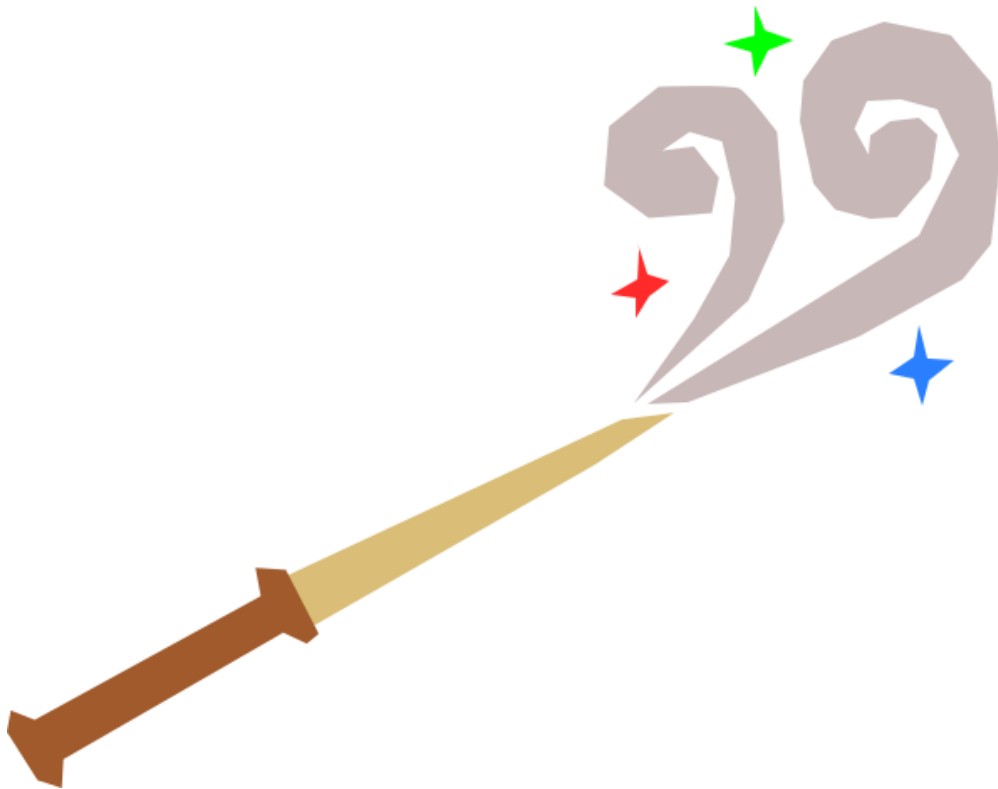
You never justified to yourself why you travelled across the world to Arcoria. Part of you knew it was because the Archive was the safest place to be to protect the helm, but another part tugged at the true reason: a land that should have, but could not remember you was too much pain to bare.





# AURUS SELACÉA

## TEAM S



- **Name:** Aurus Selacéa
- **Race:** Half Elf
- **Class:** Wizard (Lore Master) - Yerr a Wizard 'aurry. You know magic, and the secrets of how to bend spells to your need.
- **'Faction':** Collegiates
- **Place of Birth:** Arcoria

## BACKGROUND:

People always warned you 'Curiosity killed the Cat', but you never quite knew why. You always told them: You weren't a Cat. Your father was an elf, though you'd never actually met him, and your mother was a human. No feline family at all. They usually sighed and walked off after that.

You lived on Vatis Lane, an overbuilt road in Lower Fior, next door to an Inn. The Inn was often packed with people from all over the city, and of all shapes and sizes. And you talked to all of them. There was the tiefling fellow always looking for his bald friend. The elf with the dragon tattoo that actually breathed fire. The one-eyed half-orc that could talk for days, usually about himself. And your favourite (and friend) was Loritz Runecarver of Runecarver Investigations.

Loritz lived and worked in the rooms above the bar. He was a world class detective, or so he told you, and could wield AMAZING magic. He loved to tell you tales of his exploits, how he brought in dangerous criminals and cunning thieves, and you loved to hear them. You wished you could be as awesome as Loritz some day.

One Summer, a conjurer named Joakim Smythe came to stay at the Inn on Vatis Lane. He had a finely trimmed beard and punctuated every sentence with a hand flourish. You almost

stopped visiting Loritz when the conjurer was there, as you studied his every move. At night, in the dingy dark of your room, you imitated those flourishes, night after night, until at last, as Summer turned to Autumn, you at last felt sparks fly from your fingertips.

Delighted, you rushed immediately to the Inn next door and barged upstairs and into Loritz's room. Once the fallen furniture settled, you realized the room was empty. You slunk away, disappointed; Loritz was clearly away on some errand. You'd try again later to find the same - no Loritz. And the third time you checked. And the fourth.

As you closed the door for the fifth time, the emblem on it glinted into your eye. A Magnifying Glass and an Axe, surrounded by the words 'Runecraver Investigations'. A tear formed in your eye as you knew what to do.

Your investigations led you to Aqua, the College of Lore, home to all information on magical disappearances in Arcoria. And then the trail stopped; the College fiercely guarded their inner library to all except those inducted to their order. So you did what had to be done. You studied at the College, only frequently forgetting your reason to do so, but every time you earned access to a new section of that library you remembered precisely your reason to be there: to find your missing friend.



# PRINCE JONPAL XIVAX

## TEAM S



- **Name:** Prince Jonpal Xivax
- **Race:** Silver Dragonborn
- **Class:** Cleric (Arcana Domain) - You are a Disciple of Savras, the God of Fate, through whom you have been granted divine magic. You're also pretty darn good with a mace.
- **'Faction':** Collegiates
- **Place of Birth:**
- **Notable Features:** Black scales which end in a silver tip

## BACKGROUND:

Savras has always spoken to you. In your early years it was only via prophetic dreams that you attributed to innate skill passed down in royal blood. Your eyes were opened to the divine, however, when a frail priest of the God of Fate knocked on your door during a thunderstorm. You welcomed them into your home, and they told you a tale of the Lord of Divination.

Following that chance meeting, you visited the old man more and more, and learnt all he knew about Savras until they had taught all that they could. Sensing your eagerness to learn more, the priest told you of the City of Arcoria, and Lux, its College of Faith.

You announced your intentions to study there at once, an action that your family outright

refused; it was unheard of for a Prince to go gallivanting across the world on the half-words of a Soothsayer, even more so a *Dragonborn* Prince. That evening, as you dejectedly tried to figure out another way to find out more about the God that had blessed you with gifts, you were struck with another vision:

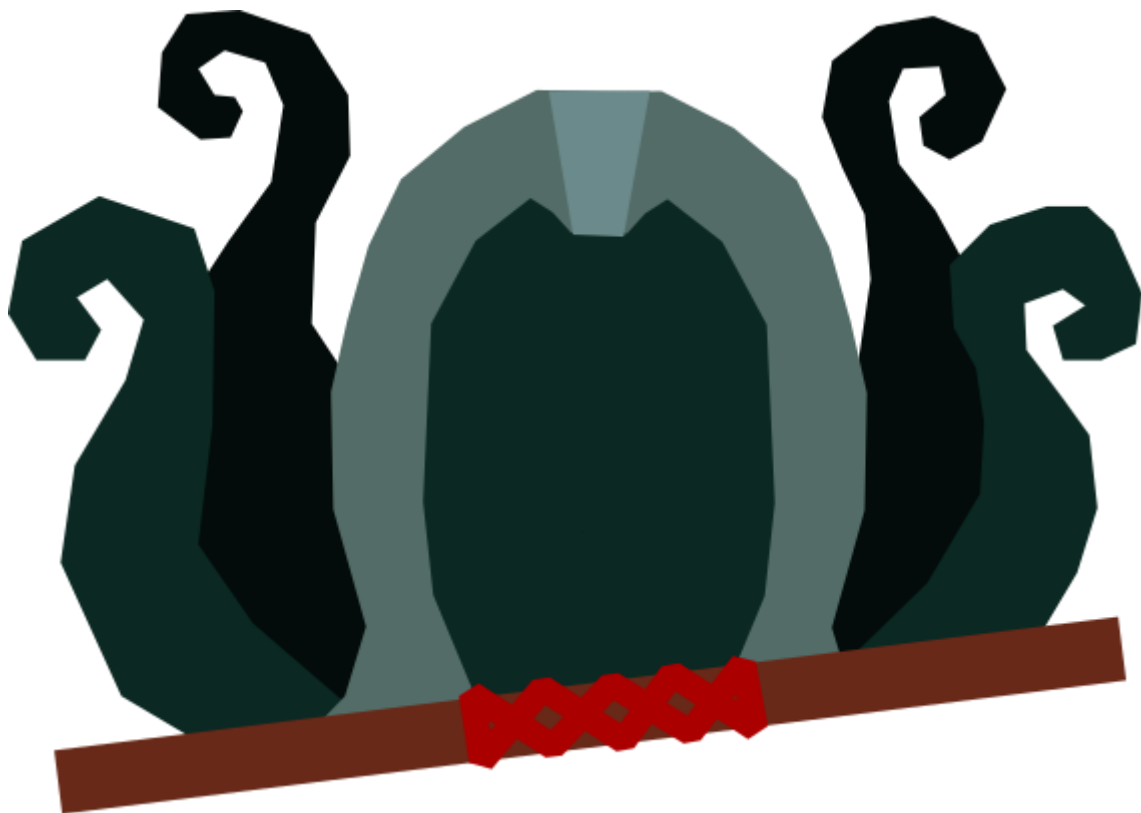
Your back was against the floor of an unfamiliar city and a great red star was falling from the sky. Around you buildings were burning and people were screaming. Above you stood an elven woman with an antlered helmet shielding you from the flames.

You weren't sure how, but something inside you knew that this was Arcoria, and exactly where you were meant to be. You left that night, without even a note, and began your travels to the college of Lux...



# ORPH BEESTINGER

## TEAM T



- **Name:** Orph Beestinger
- **Race:** Deep Gnome
- **Class:** Monk (Way of the Shadow) - You are a master of Martial Arts and bending shadow itself to your will. Basically, you're a Ninja.
- **'Faction':** Crooks
- **Place of Birth:** The Undercity of Fuggit

## BACKGROUND:

They say given infinite time, eventually a monkey will write the entire works of a famous playwright. This isn't true, as your average monkey would rather eat a typewriter than type on it, and will more often than not die of old age before infinite time is up. However, in the case of gnomes, the most of which are at least slightly brighter than monkeys, and considerably longer lived, when they put their mind to it, they can achieve everything and anything.

At a young age, you decided to do just that. To learn EVERYTHING. After 212 years, 67 assumed identities and 184 mastered skills, you were thoroughly bored. The Way of the Shadow had proven to be a tougher nut to crack than you had anticipated - you'd first attended the monastery 6 months ago, and had been subjected to their rigid and exhausting schedule of meditation, mantras and labour since. You'd hoped that some form of their secret shadow magic would have rubbed off on you by now, but t all you had to show was a nasty ache in your back. You were considering just giving up soon.

As these many annoyances were swimming through your head in your cold, dark room in the monastery, your evening 'meditation' was broken by a sound beyond the window. It was the rattling of a squeaky wagon wheel. You clambered onto your bed to get a better look. A figure in scholar's robes was talking to the Abbot of the monastery, but that wasn't what caught your eye.

On the back of the cart lay a mechanical figure of gleaming brass that captivated you. It was covered in arcane symbols and complex gearing that made your mind spin. As your eyes drifted

to its face, the thing's head snapped to attention, staring you down. You fell backwards and everything went dark.

You lay in the darkness, committing to memory all that you saw of the Mechanical Marvel - attempting to realize what it could be. Only after your brain had calmed you realized what you had done. With a wave of your arm, the darkness dissipated. You smiled. You were done with the Way of the shadow. Time to learn about the Mechanical Man.

\*\*\*

3 months later. The City of Arcoria. You were now Orph Beestinger, notorious thief. A smile traced your lips and you thought through the pieces in play one last time.

- **'Gardener'** - *The Client* - Willing to pay extortionate amounts for something called 'The Blood of Chronos' inside The Archive
- **'Grandmother'** - *The Crime Boss* - The Organizer. Will likely kill you if you come back empty handed
- **Movo Boz** - *The Voice in the Sky* - Overseeing the operation via Sending Stone
- **Silent but Deadly** - *The Local Knowledge* - Your partner. Sneaky, and knows her way around the city
- **???** - *The Mechanical Man* - Somewhere in the Archive. Your obsession.
- **Everybody else** - *Unknown Variables* - The spice to the situation. Making things fun.

The smile cracked into a grin as you heard the skylight smash. Game time.



# SILENT BUT DEADLY

*(aka Silent)*

## TEAM T



- **Name:** Silent but Deadly (aka Silent)
- **Race:** Tabaxi (Cat-person)
- **Class:** Thief (Rogue) - You're sneaky and stabby, and an expert at breaking, entering, and getting out again with your twin swords intact.
- **'Faction':** Crooks
- **Place of Birth:** Arcoria

## BACKGROUND:

According to Tuval, You've been an orphan since before you were born. You were lucky then, you guessed, that he'd taken you in at such a young age, back when you were still called 'Music on the Wind'.

Tuval was very generous for such an old gnome. He looked after Orphans from all over the City on the Rock, and taught them to fend for themselves, yourself included. Through Tuval, you learnt how to sneak, how to climb, and how to pilfer someone's valuables without getting caught by the Guard. You shared all your 'findings' with your adopted family, and they with you. Together, you managed to scrape by a reasonable horde that kept you in food and blankets. It was tough, but it was good.

You grew more and more daring with your 'business ventures'. Not only would you pick your targets pockets, you'd play with them, dancing in their peripheral vision, making them suspect, but never quite catch you in the act. Your latest target was an old halfling woman; she looked half blind, wore an amethyst amulet and carried a cane bejewelled with more gems than you could count. You smirked. Easy money. You slinked, you span and you shimmied as you crept up behind her. Carefully you unsheathed your claw and prepared to sever the thin twine holding the amulet. You felt it go taut as you began to cut.

An icy grip held your claw. 'Now you don't want to be doing that sweetie' rattled a sharp voice, and everything went black as a meaty fist smacked your face.

\*\*\*

You awoke in a dark room. The Old woman sat on a simple chair in the corner playing with her amulet, whilst a Half-Orc with an eye patch loomed directly over you. You got the distinct impression that this fellow had a lot of experience looming.

After what felt like an eternity of uncomfortable silence, the old woman spoke. Your head was still spinning, but through her words, you made something out about an organisation that could use your skills, and the penalty for disagreeing. Groggily, you signed the verbal contract with the Crime Boss known as

The Grandmother, and the Half-Orc's fist knocked you out again.

\*\*\*

The first job came a week later. After passing a dark, bulky figure in the street, you found a piece of paper in your hand. On it was an address, a description of a jewelry box, and a drop off point. Inside, you knew precisely what it meant.

It was an easy affair. The window was open, and the box openly displayed next to its former owner's bed like it wanted to be taken. You were in and out without so much as a paw-print.

At the drop point, you were greeted by the Half Orc who'd been accompanying The Grandmother. He introduced himself as Movo Boz and explained how things would work.

It'd been almost 2 years since you started receiving 'jobs' from Movo, and this was the strangest yet. In front of you was a Gnome, wreathed in shadows. This was the first time you were required to work WITH someone. It didn't bode well. The gnome handed you a slip of parchment. On it were 3 lines:

*The Archive.*

*The Blood of Chronos.*

*We'll be watching.*





## THE BALLAD OF BUTTERFLY SUPER-NURSE

=====  
alias

THE CREEPY-CRAWLEY FAMILY  
=====

ANONYMOUS PEOPLE

His Lordship slowly proceeded up the Seemingly-Endless-and-Browning Mountain toward his Shimmering-Crystal-Pristine Ancestral Home, Beezlebug unleashed-in-tow.

The minus-seventy-seventh floor of the Servants' Quarters in the basement therein was more-raucous-than-usual. A Particularly Ponderous Specimen saw it as His Duty to Investigate.

"It's the new Valet-in-Chief!" breathed Duo-decy as the rest of the room diminuodronimendoed to silence in response to the enormous Ball of 'Duty and Protocol' that invariably preceded our Particularly Ponderous Specimen.

"I see." He baritoned formally, raising half his monobrow upon noticing the newly arrived Valet-in-Chief's three-handed walking stick. "Well, His Lordship is an Imposing Figure, so if you should feel tongue-tied in his presence..."

"Ah, Beets! My old Comrade-in-Four-Arms!" exclaimed His Lordship to the new Valet-in-Chief, his entrance preceded by a middling-sized ball. "Welcome to Dung-Hill Abbey! This is Mr Coleoptreson the Head Over-Beetler..."

Coleptreson flushed red in the neck-and-

antler encasements at his gaffe. Duo-decy - the tiny Ladybirdsmid from the kitchens blessed with twelve spots on her back - started to giggle, cut off by a much larger Kitchen-Ladybirdsmid's three-handed swat with an Enormous Wooden Spoon-of-Office.

T. Bishop Beets shrugged with both pairs of arms and gradually followed his Lordship up stairs, and stairs and stairs. To where Lady Caterpillar was still not-quite pupating, while her Graceful Daughter the Swallowtail twinkled in a flawless arc between the rafters.

It was Luncheontime, therebywhich the Furtherly-Formal Mantissss Elements-of-THE-Family were also emerging from their ornate Burrows-of-State, Ornatly-Gloved as Befit the Occasion. Alike as peas-in-a pod bar their sixty years age difference, on the one Pointy (if at present Ornatly-Gloved) Killing Appendage, the younger Lady Mantissss-the-Merciless Ruthless-Ruthless-Nancy was already Earning-a-Reputation for eating HER would-be suitors alive, most recently having swallowed up a Dreadnought-Captain's Firstborn who just couldn't sail-away-fast-enough. On the other Pointy Killing Appendage, The Double-edgedly-Merciless-on-Countless-Occasions Great-Aunt-Mantissss had extended her Hunting Pattern into Carrying-Orff Doctors' heads At-Will in All Hospitals from Belfast to Saint Petersburg. America was for now safe (reflected His Lordship, well inside his head, knowing full well Never to Cross The Double-edgedly Merciless-on-Countless-Occasions) because SHE didn't Deign-to-Aknowledge its existence, out of hatred for his wife Lady Caterpillar's own Mother, an untitled-but-ultraplutocratohedonistic Larva.

"Master and Part-Eaten of the Swallowed-

Alive, more like" Lady Merciless-Nancy was saying, all-a-picking HER Teeth smirkcumspectly with a still-hirondellipenanted topmast fragment.

"Whell, they rhearly did have unapproved 'Medical Staff' on board" two-upped The Double-edgedly Merciless-on-Countless-Occasions, all a-grating ribbons of steel off an enormous anchor marked "Titanic H.M.S." with HER Tetrapiranhic Dentures Filed-not-into-points-But-into-Cusps. "Unlike Ussss, they just did not understand the Importance of Tradition..."

"I have gathered you here today to announce that we're at war with Hivemindland" pronounced His Lordship, wringing both-pairs-of-hands in despair.

Lightening flashed from the Younger Mantiss's EYES, no doubt due to the implications for the diminuation of HER food-source the suitor population. But the Elder Mantiss Smiled the Wry SMILE of Experience-in-Such-Matters.

"We must aid the Whar effort by hosting a hospital for the -c-o-n-s-u-m-p-t-i-o-n-convalescence of those who take up four-arms for King and Coleopterentry..." SHE Asserted.

The Younger Mantiss began to slavver at the Joint Prospects of this Venture.

Listening down from the rafters, Lady Swallowtail did not like the sound of this At All. She Somewhat-Fortunately had an Alter Ego, as a Masked Butterfly Super-Nurse whose Saliva could Close Any Wound.

But would could an ickle Butterfly-of-Benevolence do against the Combined Might of the Mantiss Element of THE Family?

Well, for now she could enlist (enmasked)

among the Hospital's Nursing Staff and see-what-she-could-do for the Patients, even if in All Likelihood her sister Nancy-Mantiss would eat them while Granny polished off the Doctors.

She also had the 'rare gift' of viewing and treating the Kitchen Staff as equals, from which she had their confidence. This was permissive of an 'unexpected' source of Allies.

As some of the patients' health improved (in good part due to the Super-Nurse-Butterfly Saliva subtlycatapultedfritillerescentlybyproboscis into their poultices), and Lady Nancy began to grimacestare more frequently at HER Prospective Supply, Lady Swallowtail pre-empted her sister by fluttering by the Kitchens.

"I really could do with large quantities of Garlic Butter" she flutteripetitioned.

"Could you whip some of that up for us, Duo-decy?" asked she of the Enormous Wooden Spoon-of-Office.

"Yes, Mrs More-Patterned-than-I-am" said Duo-decy.

For Lady Swallowtail knew that her Mantiss-relatives were revulsed by foods exuding sundry allioideic aromas. And so, by similar means to previously, the patients' poultices were now secreted (platonic double-entendre) with Garlic Butter, keeping the Younger Mantiss at bay. For good measure the Doctors' overgarbs started being washed with suds imbued with the same substance, to keep the Elder Mantiss at bay for the time being as well.

Yet the Viciousness of a Mantiss grows roughly as the cube-of-the-time-elapsed since Prior Depredation, so Butterfly Super-Nurse knew that such means were but

scuffles Playing-for-Time.

An opportunity arose however one evening, when His Lordship called for Beezlebub but there was No Reply.

This had various consequences. Firstly Mantisss Senior offered to obtain another Pet Fly for HER Distraught Son, and so departed Down-the-Hill.

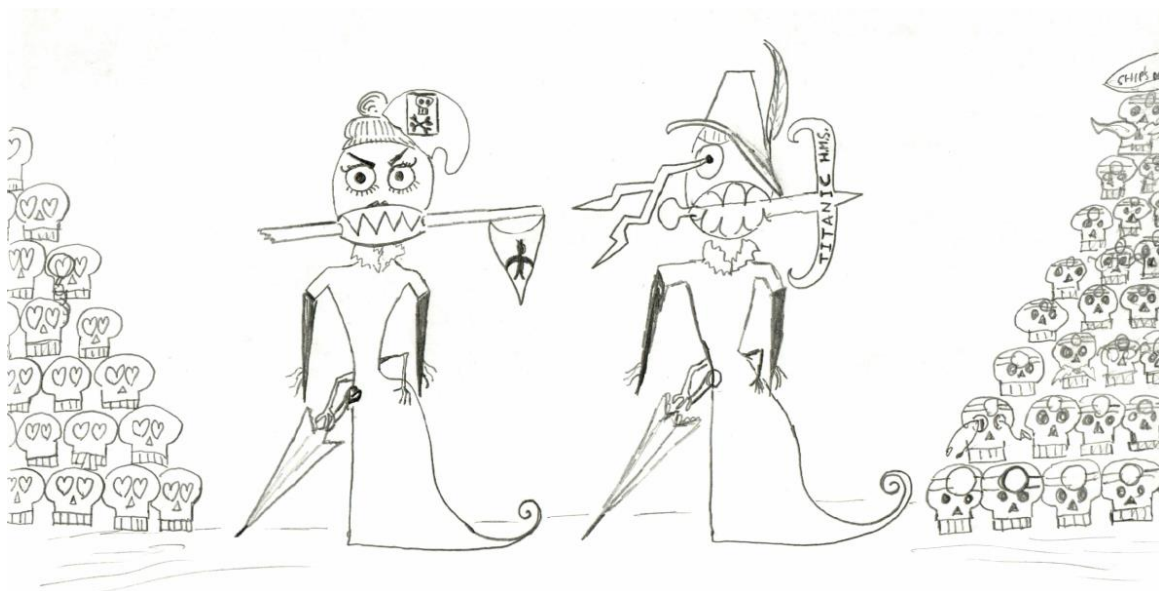
Secondly, his Lordship organized a Large Search Party. Meaning of course that Beets and Coleopterson did (it consisting chiefly of First to Twelfth Footscarabs, so as to not evoke Bad Luck).

The Thrill-of-the-Hunt not being lost on Lady Nancy Mantisss, SHE Perambuted-Forth with this Large Search Party as well. Distracted-by-Proceedings (including the Hope-of-Eating one of the Few Remaining Farmhands in-THE-County), SHE did not notice Butterfly Super-Nurse fluttering up behind HER. And Considering

Hunting to Be a Formal Occasion as well, SHE was sporting Particular-Sturdy Ornate Gloves.

Butterfly Super-Nurse two-tap precision-proboscised a stream of Saliva-that-Seals-All-Wounds into the posterior apertures of Lady Nancy Mantisss's Particularly-Sturdy Ornate Gloves. SHE turned, all psychobloodcurdlinglyellinglyforelegraptori opugilisticimpaliperilous, but HER Ornate Glovewear JUST WOULD NOT COME OFF! And so Butterfly Super-Nurse was able-to-back-away with just-some-bruises and some uncommonly-colourful profanities bouncing off her thoracial, abdominal and bucal organs-of-hearing.

She flew off in-search-of Granny, hoping to pull off a similar ambush in the Fly-Infested Lower Levels, confident that the Mantisss' Vaunted Adherence-to-Tradition would prevent them from Ever Making Use of their Terrible Teeth as First-Strike Weapons.



*"It was Luncheon-Time, therebywhich the furtherly-formal Mantisss elements of The Creepy-Crawley Family were also emerging from their ornate burrows-of-state, elegantly and ornately gloved as befit the occasion."*

# Die Zauberharotte

## 1. Overture: Presto

[There is a Barbarian in a Horned Helmet quivering on the right of the stage]

tenor A Minor

piano/orchestra

ff

rit

ff

ff

The image shows a page of musical notation for the first system of the Overture. It consists of four systems of staves. The first system includes a tenor vocal line and a piano/orchestra accompaniment. The key signature is A Minor and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Presto'. The first system includes a tenor line with a vocal line and a piano/orchestra accompaniment. The piano/orchestra part starts with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The second system continues the piano/orchestra part. The third system includes a 'rit' (ritardando) marking and a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The fourth system continues the piano/orchestra part with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic.

**[ But who's writing the music:  
Anonymouseart? Anonymeowzart?  
Anonymoozart? Anonymooseart? ]**





[God Floats onto stage. He is Large, Bearded and Seated, with a Cat-of-Omnisapience Fuzzcordioned over Both Knees. He Strokes the Cat Along The Spine, causing Smugness Pursonified, and opens up:]

### ARIA 1: "I Am God" in A Major

Tenor. Adagio. " I am God, God of All Peo-ple And Not of the Car-rots ... I Will Save You!

bass  
orchestra

Fear Not My Cho-sen Peo-ple, For I Will Now Save Your World, Because I Will Send You a Quizhateriah

Allegro

with a Co-ny of My Se-cond Voice.

[Belchando] This is my se-cond vo-ice; take it and o-bey Quizhateriah!

The musical score is written for Tenor, Bass, and Orchestra. The first system is marked 'Adagio' and contains the lyrics 'I am God, God of All Peo-ple And Not of the Car-rots ... I Will Save You!'. The second system is marked 'Allegro' and contains the lyrics 'Fear Not My Cho-sen Peo-ple, For I Will Now Save Your World, Because I Will Send You a Quizhateriah'. The third system is marked 'with a Co-ny of My Se-cond Voice.' and contains the lyrics 'This is my se-cond vo-ice; take it and o-bey Quizhateriah!'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Save My Peo - ple and Spare Not the Car - rots ! You Will Save Them

Fear Not My Cho-sen Peo-ple. For I Will Now Save you all, Be-cause

I will send you the Quizhateriah with a Co-py of My Se-Cond Voice.

[God Quickly Levitates Up-and-Out in a Puff-of-Red-Smoke Matching HIS Buoyancy Suit.  
The Cat Pfeffarahspitzles,- and Cheshievanesces upon smoultonation.]



[Barbarian Talking alone on Stage;  
incidentally, he is black-of-hair, so you are probably familiar with his father...]

Bass Prestissimo Voice? what ... [Belchando] "Voice?"

orchestra

(A) Heeelp! The Carrots are coming! Adagio

**ARIA 2 "Carrot Infidels" Presto in C Major**

The image shows a handwritten musical score on aged, yellowed paper. It consists of several systems of staves. The top two systems are for piano accompaniment, with treble and bass clefs. The third system is marked "Adagio" and features a piano part with a treble clef and a vocal line with a bass clef. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "Go and Burn in Hell... I will use the power of my Voice". The piano part in the "Adagio" section has dynamic markings "ssss" and "mf". The fourth system continues the piano accompaniment. The fifth system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "primo tempo: Car-rot In-fi-dels". The sixth system continues the piano accompaniment. The score is written in black ink with some corrections and annotations.

'Tis indeed the Second Voice of God... Die Now, Anthocyanic Ba - stards

Die Now, Go Die Now, fall straight to Hell. Bu-Burp Bu-Burp

Bu-purp Bu-burururumurobarrorro. Die Now, Un - sanc - ti - ti - mo - ni - ous Root Veg Die Now

to the Xan - tho - mo - nas of my Voice Die Now, carrot minded carrot bodied

foes. [rassando] [Adagio] Burp-blight your Burp-plight all Burp-night as we Burp-fight.

pp

Die Now, Carrot Bastards Die Now, Go Die Now, fall straight to hell.

I am , I am , I am the-Quizhateriah, --

Burp-burn in your Burp-urn with a Burp-churn for a Burp-churn... [Adagio-and-Raspando]  
Burn for-e-ver!

[Primo Tempo] Orchestral ending.

63

[Barbarian, rubbing his eyes, desperately unscrewing a horn from his helmet so as to amplify incoming sound, burpando-in-desperationem] "Oh SHIT! Those are PARROTS! ARGH! ARGH! AAAAAAARGH!"

"Die Zauberparrotte"

[Parrageno] "Psychotic-caw."

[Parragana, three-upping] "High-pitched-stone-cold-blood-curdling-trilulo-dark-tetrad-caw."

[Barbarian]

"It was PARROTS!

WHY did GOD say Carrots too?"

[Barbarian retreats, pursing his lips round the horn.]

"BUUUUUUUURP! BUUUUUUUUUUUURP! "

[Parragena; that is 'HER' Surname, known more colloquially to what pass for 'HER' friends as Seveineighsrhage Sanspitiée--Sanspitiée Smirksat'owlsformercy]

"Can you 'ear anyzing, Parrageno? Mocking-liquid-helium-cold-trillulocawcaw"

[Parrageno; that is 'HIS' Surname, known more colloquially in self-same UltraForsaken circles as Pablo Picafofocas-Picafofocas Picasso-Paints-Only-in-Red... Picafofocas means, more or less, Seal-Clubber. Each of these names has been Illuminated high up-stage.]

"Out of my Audial Range too, Sweetdates Sugarplum-Sugarplum Smirks-at-precisely-the-same-things-as-I!"

[Their Zirconium-plated eyes Glint like Nothing Human as they swoop down toward the Barbarian in a flurry of razor-sharp feathers. They knock him to the ground. Circling.]

[Seveineighsrage, in a seven-eights bored tone] "What did ze Baronstard sell you zis time?"

[Picasso-Paints-only-in-Red] "An even sharper ultradirigible nailwhip, Sugarplum-Sugarplum!"

[He lands a heavy buffet on the Barbarian Prince with a telescopic semi-flexible four-pounder seal club, retractable spikes unextended, winding him.]

"And you?"

[Seveineighsrage] "Even sharper, jah? I tried to purrchase ' 'IS' Cat! But' 'IS' Price was astronomico-oh-co-co-lo-ri-co, jah! No less zan twenty Totally Broken Junglings..."

['SHE' connects with 'HER' silvery lassooa'damtaser.]

[Barbarian screams, shudders, falls bonelessly knocked out cold.]

[Lights dim to entirely out in the opera house.]

ARIA 3 [Music for this Variation to appear in the next TTBA

[Seveneightsrage Parragena] "Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pain!"

[Picasso Parrageno] "Pa-pa-pa-Paints-Only-in-Red!"

[Together] "Redacta-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-Censored!

Redacta-Redacta-Redacta-with-a-Redacta-Redacta-GRIN

Red-a-dac-ta-ta, Red-a-dac-ta-ta,

Red-a-da-da-da-duck-tape-ta-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa

Redactaparrageno, Redactaparragena... "

[Backstage localized light turns on, on to a sign, saying "These two are not exactly interested in making little Parragenos and Parragenas...]

Red-a-dac-ta-ta, Red-a-dac-ta-ta,

Red-a-dac-ta-ta, Red-a-da-tek-tar,

Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-PAH-PAH-PAAAAAH

Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-PAH-PAH-PIIIIEIEIEIIEARGH!

[The music ends as Terrible Zirconium Eyes Illuminate Two by Two. All else remains dark.]

[Seveneightsrage] "No-Bo-Dy Can Hear you!"

[Picafocas] "You Are All A-Lone"

[Together] "No-bo-dy Shall E-ver Hear you".

[Metallic clicking noise.]

The lighting is restored. The Barbarian Prince is huddled on the floor, barefoot, straightjacketed, trouserless but in new underwear. The left hand side of his hair has been shaved off. A large lock has been inserted through his mouth in the shape of two intertwined P's.

[Parrotsaken,Together] "We'll release you now, jah, jah (trilulocaw).  
To see how far you can run before we catch you again.

[‘THEIR’ Eyes Flash Like Nothing Human, or, for that matter, Psittaciformic].

"To get you moving, we will count to one hundred..."

[Parrageno] "Ein!"

[Barbarian Prince tries to rise and falls]

[Parrageno] "Slow-ly... \*zis\* time... Zwei!"

[He gets up and away this time; the platform the Parrots are on starts to recede right, so his running stays on-stage.]

"Zu Hülfe! zu Hülfe! Sonst bin ich verloren!"

Zu Hülfe! zu Hülfe! Sonst bin ich verloren!

Der listigen Schlange zum Opfer Papageien!"

[Thunderclap. Rain. A Huge Rainbow is illuminated backstage.]

[Parrageno, somewhat offstage] Drei!

[The Barbarian Prince up-ends a Little Lady carrying a Pile of Books

A Second Lady spirals down from the Rainbow on a Bright Strand of Silk, making the sign of the Nekrosabbatocornucopia upon landing, detonating a Golden Circle whose edge reaches out most of the way across the stage.]



**Aria 3: The Three Ladies. Allegro in C Major.**

[Second Lady] Safe, safe, trillulose! Trillulohere. Now. Rock.

*legato*

You Rock. Yay. Help her up, yes.

[The first Lady is back on her feet. She only says ] Meep, Mee-ple Trillulose!

[The Barbarian Prince's eyes widen to the size of saucers. Second Lady:] Ah. Good: you can see what is there. One world behind each eye

Many golden circles shining. Many layers of safety given. Many peoples freely welcomed. Where no other place'll take them... Where the kindest empathis sit

But how could such things be stable (arpeggiantare) Look in the other eye now to see

Astral li-o-ness swar-ming out-side.

[Orchestral runaway]

[“hundred” Scream the Parrotsaken, offstage]

[Swooping noises and grotesquely-enthusiastic Caws get closer.]

*ff* Second Lady: the Cir - cle of Gold will Now Hold. The

Buck Stops Here!

The musical score is presented on a yellow background. It consists of several systems of staves. The first system shows a vocal line with a treble clef and a piano accompaniment with a bass clef. The second system features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The third system includes a vocal line with the instruction 'Buck Stops Here!' and a piano accompaniment. The fourth system shows a piano accompaniment with a bass clef. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'ff'.

### Intermezzo: A rude interruption to the Aria

[The Cawsaken Bang Stammundstraussevescently on the Golden Circle.

[The Hero appears on the outside. Armoured in Starlight. Bolt-Upright. Small. With a River of Hair Postceding HER.]

[Cawsaken, in unison] "You're All A-lone."

[The Hero, alias the Third Lady] "What Makes you Think I'm Alone?"

[Cawsaken in unison] "These co-wards won't lift a fin-ger to help you".

[Third Lady, named Sherahaada Estelbérneth Gilgaladtauithorniel of the Mirrorshield-Unparallelizable]; "Then It's a Bigger Challenge. And I Do Love a Challenge."

[SHE draws the Sword of Protection. Parragena goes left, with the lassoo'damtaser, Parragena rises, in a forest of featherblades, twin seal clubs fully extended into spiked longmaces whirling ablu. The music of the Thrid Aria restarts.]

[Sherahaada]

Sword-to-Pole-Vault! [SHE Vaults backward, avoiding 'HIS' Swoop of Impalement. ]

The first system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line in treble clef, showing a melodic phrase with various accidentals and dynamics. The lower staff is a piano accompaniment line in bass clef, featuring a rhythmic pattern with chords and single notes.

[Sherahaada, landing atop HER Astral-Lioness Steed, Entering Stage Left]

"Pole-Vault to Mithlyrian-Crysdillar-Shocklance!"

The second system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line in treble clef, showing a melodic phrase with various accidentals and dynamics. The lower staff is a piano accompaniment line in bass clef, featuring a rhythmic pattern with chords and single notes.

The third system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line in treble clef, showing a melodic phrase with various accidentals and dynamics. The lower staff is a piano accompaniment line in bass clef, featuring a rhythmic pattern with chords and single notes.

[This is thirty-two feet long, sharp as the First Lady, Radiant Jewelled Head Counterbalanced with a more dully glowing annular pommel.]

Parrageno opens fire with a volley of featherdarts.  
 SHE zigzagundulates round all but one, which she blocks with HER midshaftbackler, sending it straight back at Parrageno,

who bonelessly ducklunges around it, aiming his telescopic spiked seal club longmaces at the Astral Lioness's hams.

But the Astral Lioness bounds over him, also ruining the circling Parageno's momentum, her high-voltage shock but singing the end of the Astral Lioness's tail.]

[Second Lady:] Use Sil -ma -ri -sea -star -cal

-lan - do -ri - fre - wo -men - go - bal - list - ic - ex - ca - lib - an - du - ril - my - pre - cious!

[While hurt, the Astral Lioness none-the-less holds calm and firm under the Banner-General's Soothing Voice— Following HER lead, the Astral Lioness turns Just So, skewering all four Cawaken's eye with Simmri's stare and/ori from mengo ballistif ex calib and ril my precious

in a single and final runthrough on this note]

Meep! [2nd Lady:] Hu - zah! PROUD ROAR WHINCING ROAR [orchestral runaway]

[Task completed, the Astral Lioness winces in much pain, curling herself around Sherahaada, so SHE can massage her tail concurrently with whispering in her ear the size of a jousting pavilion.

Inside the Golden Circle, almost as wide as the circle itself.

And inside this second Circle of Warm Astral Lioness HyperTorm Fur, gradually passing from Tremulomuowls of pain to Muouls, to Purritone Whisperroars of Affection, and then the more regular Purritone Snoreroars of a Calmed, Healed Steed in Well-Earned Sleep,

The Second Lady Unpicks the 'PP' lock, Prepares Spiced Tea, and proceeds to Comfort the Barbarian Prince, accompanied by the very occasional Meeple from the First Lady.]

[Second and Third Ladies: ]  
And the Empress whom we Serve shall welcome you brave dear Princeling, for that is what SHE  
Trilulomeep  
Aaah, Ah, Ah  
AAAAH!

### The Entrance

=====

[Enter Alivia, trumpetiheraldiexhalted by the Brass Section of the Pintail Philharmonic Armestra.

It is a Jodorowskian pullback scene to a hyperjodorowskian court setting, with Mergansocopters landing plumed-and-plated Drakeneers with Arquescooptectors atop surrounding hills of never-melting self-regenerating ice-cream, flanking a palace-wing architecgenereed solely out of solid-mithril bookshelves with All of the Fiction of Science regimented thereupon in full lexicocalligraphidyllistichexeydecimalenumeraceous splendour. Gradually focusing onto the foreground, fountains of mead erupt from rune-encrusted plinths, keeping time with each fanfare, with ceremonial Jomsduckingar circling each pool atop shield-bedecked Battleswantoraken.

Focusing in closer, there are seventy-seven great wedges of colour in a mosaic of shawls. The pugnatorial Car-Metallic-Mint-Green Anajah are tellingly hissing sotto-voce toward the aloobitant German-Cherry-Jaffa-Cake-Vermillion Anajah, but the unfurling Seventy-Seven-Stripe Carpet neatly compartments these to either side of HER path. A buckminsterhorospherelet Crowne-of-Swords-of-Light accentuates her plumeniloquent aixirian brow. The shot further closes in on the elaborate spoon borne with the gravitas of a sceptre in one wingtip, before slowly dragging across her Seventy-Seven-Striped-Stole-Soul to where the other rests upon a Horn, enscabbarded unto her damaskiridospecular belt. expanding finally to the inscription circumnavigating its flared endpiece

"The Real World is No Bar To My Call".]

[Trumpeterswanheralds, with each line trombonofanfariexhalted by the Brass Section of the Pintail Philharmonic Armestra.] : "All Hail the Paddledabbleshine Empress-Goddess Alivia zo Pendrake Noxaanas, Agandalorian Sé-ah-ti-meh of Iluvatarvalonqar, Lady High-Captain Commander-General Protector of the New, the Shy and the Different Realms of the Great Nachtponde, Randatarantinalandaanasiferos and the Sanctuary-Moons of Imanuikleimorvartaque, DualWielder of the Horn of Fulvalere and the Supersa'ayangreal Spoonifex-Key to the Cusfoedan<sup>9</sup>-Kal!!!"

[Cotton-Candyfloss-Pinkgenta Anajah] : "She Alights!"

[German-Cherry-Jaffa-Cake-Vermillion Anajah] : "She Rises!"

[Louisiana-Cajun-Crawfish-Orange Anajah] : "She Ri-i-i-ises"

[Various-Shades-of-Grey-and-Green-to-Blend-Better-into-the-Shadows-as-Selected-and-Used-By-Lord-Avian-Vetinari-Anajah] : "She Quackvalesces!"

[Fine-Powdery-Crushed-Blanched-Almond Anajah] : "She Shines!!!"

[Mississippi-Mud-Pie-Brown Anajah] : "She produces... ironic pineapples !!?"

The Paddledabbleshine Empress-Goddess Pineapple-Duck of the Night's Aria (Aria 5)

=====

[Alivia, backed by strings and oboes]: "Quack, Quack, Quack, Quiieeeeerk!

Qua-quarra-quarra-quarra-quarra-gentle,

Qui-quirra-quirra-quirra-quirra-noble.

Qua, quarra-quarra-safe: Pintails for my Fleete,

Wadgimentling past on their webbed feet.

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<sup>9</sup> Cusfoedan: the triple-smash-product of CUSFS, Custodian and Choedan.

To wood-panelled Daenacthaegump Meet.

Write us chains to be concrete.

quieeeeera, qu'i-qu'i-qu'i-qu'i-qu'i-qu'i-qu'i-qu'ierieieieiek,

With my Spooone-of-Office-in-Bill I stand up for the Downtrodden-and-the-Meek,  
Downestrodden-and-the-Meek.

E-e-e-e-e-very week.

[Instrumentational take-over]

qui-qui-qui-quirri-quirri-quirri-quilulululoieieieik!

E-e-e-e-e-very week.

[Backed with xylophone or 18th-century-toy-piano] :

Qua-qua qua-qua-quarra

Qui-qui qui-qui-quirri

and-have this-here pineapple [dong-ding]

for-that is-what I-do-o [ding-dong]

pinappleamulet-of-protection [ding ding]

from all worldly affliction [dong dong]

through talking Science-Fiction [ding-ding]

quackananaubercornucopium [dirrurdirriringring]

and pinacolada-of-affection [dong doong]

[tin tan ton ten tun tan ton tan

tin tan ten ton tan ten tin ton

tadareredadan honk honk bahooooor.]

[whole orchestra coming in on on 'tada'.]

Randatarantinalandaanasiferos: the combined multiverse of Randland, Planetos and Quentin Tarantino's imagination, chiefly inhabited moreover by Anas Ananasifera:

Pineapple Ducks. Together with the Mandarin Ducks familiar to our own world, and the Summerfruit-Sabretoothbilled-Ducks-of-Doome (*Anasfatalis Smilodondarandanicus*) that can be summoned by spilling a sufficient offering of Ribena, these constitute the Divine, Neutral and Demonic versions of the Fructomantic-anatids respectively.

Daenacthegump: the result of Ozanimating the Queen's Room in Emma: a mobile flying Hall-of-Wood with Princess Diana's Face-and-Voice. A Fantabulophilantropic Sentient-Lignine-Entity of great compasirecodium, unfortunately an entire Order of Malevolent Fae vie to slay anyone who has contact therewith, chiefly by means of corgi-shaped land-mines; you have been warned ;) INTERMEZZO [Talking]

[Alivia]: "Welcome Prince, and rest here awhile."

[Prince]: "I thank your Ladies for their deeds."

[Alivia]: "Your circumstances are known to me.

And the answer to your question is that it was no God who appeared to you.

It was rather The Baronstard Tufkonen, who does plague this part of the galaxy with vile creatures and technological terrors.

Fortunately we have our own source of more ... palatable creatures, as you have seen."

[Prince] "Meep."

[Alivia] "Indeed. There is the Tufkonen<sup>10</sup> way and there is Ours. And with time you can join our Soupupcatenaryfragmentexpositoryadageiours, and perchance Report in the Field as well... Yes, Merganser-Captain? "

[Merganser-Captain] "On that subject, my Patrol determined that a race has been convened next month in the Parade-of-Kynges. The Deluxe-Luxe Booster-Beardes are to Pogostick-Race down the Entire Concourse, over the honour of taking the Sovranacaeliferahorlogilisticclepsydraadulacious<sup>11</sup> out on a Shredded Curtain Prune!<sup>12</sup> We'll sure need some Reporters in the Field to cover this momentous contest..."

[Enter a Giant Pastry-on-Wheels to the Left of Stage, pushed along by members of the Slightly-Overroasted-and-yet-still-Transluscent Butterscotch-Cream-Caramel Anajah]

[Alivia, brandishing the Spoonifex]: "As my friend Cressida T.T.B.(A.) would say, "Look, here's the Pigeon Pie!"

[To Be Continued: Music for the 'Parrot' and 'Paddledabbleshine' Arias will be available in the next TTBA, along with the Pogostick-Beard-Race Aria-Finale to Part One of Die ZauberKarotte.]

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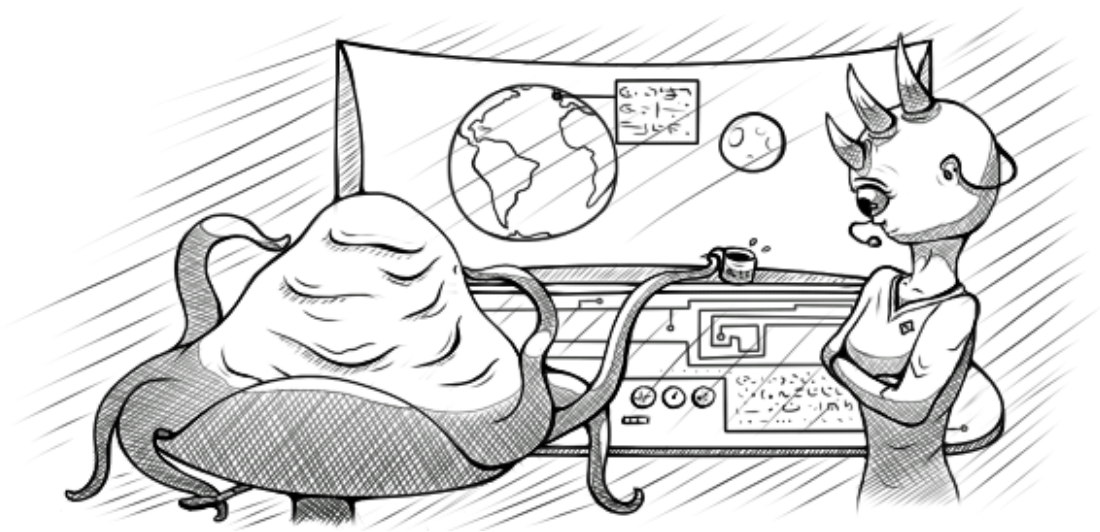
<sup>10</sup> It ought to be clear from this and the First Aria who one of the parents was. The other is Tuf, spacefaring genetic engineer from one of George R.R. Martin's ... 1970's novella series ... the one 'exploring' 'Ethics' :S

<sup>11</sup> In the vernacular, ``strikingly beautiful Princess of ... Chronophages".

<sup>12</sup> Mergansers don't speak the same language as Deluxe-Luxe Booster-Beardes, so we suspect something might have been Lost in Translation here...



FIN



Cover artwork: Elizabeth Griffiths