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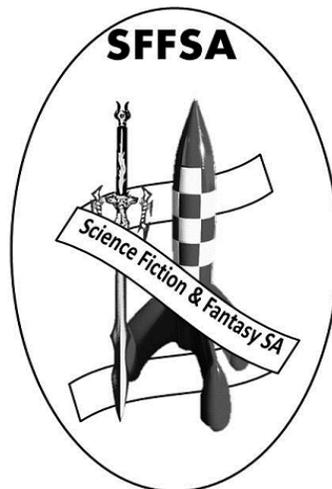
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Editorial

Gail

We are now 180-odd days into the Covid-19 Lockdown. Here in South Africa the Pandemic seems to have peaked and the curve of infections and deaths seems to be flattening. We have moved onto Lockdown Level 1 and I, for one, am hoping that this does not lead to a resurgence of the virus. I do see that people are still mostly wearing their masks out in public, and life is beginning to take on a more normal appearance.



Who could have imagined a year ago that our world

could have changed so drastically in such a short time? Almost like Science Fiction?

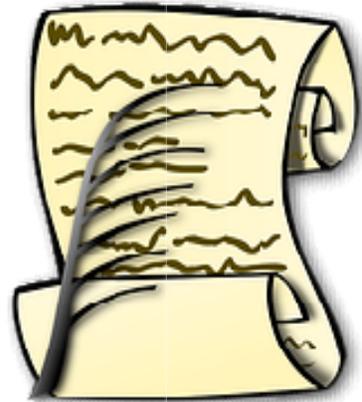
But we, SFFSA, that is, are now moving into the electronic age. A while ago we tested out a “Zoom” meeting on- line to touch base with our members and it went so well that we held our September meeting on-line. Professor Deirdre Byrne delivered a talk on the SF novels of South African author Lauren Beukes, with particular reference to her latest novel. “Afterland”. Deirdre told us that Lauren Beukes has been working on this book for some years now and it is interesting to see that the basic premise of the book is that there has been a pandemic: not a flu virus but rather one that causes prostatic cancer and leaves very few men alive in the world!

One of the good things about the online meetings was that we were able to have people join us from as far afield as Berlin and Toronto. We do have members and friends around the world and it was great to see and be able to chat with some of them, with whom we have only corresponded over the past years.

Hopefully it won't be too long before we can get together in person again.....

Chairman's Note

Alright, hands up, who reading this doesn't have a cellphone? Anyone? Anyone? Yeah, thought so. Pretty much everyone nowadays has at least one cellphone, and some even have more than (one for personal use and one for business use). They have pretty much become ubiquitous, more so for the younger generation, but even the much older generation even has them nowadays.



Cellphones, or more correctly smartphones (as the former is more the old type which only allowed you to make calls and send messages, but the former combines a cellphone with a mobile computer) is where the world seems to be heading. You can still find just basic cellphones around, but even these seem to be heading more towards the smartphone type of being more than just a communication device.

And who wouldn't want one? That smartphone in your pocket basically means you are now carrying around a small computer with you wherever you go. Consider this: My current desktop computer has 16 GB of RAM running a 3.3 GHz processor, my two year old smartphone has 6GB of RAM running a 2.7GHz processor. Awfully similar aren't they? True, the processor on my computer is still much better than what you can get on a smartphone and I have almost triple the RAM, but my desktop computer is the size of a medium suitcase, my smartphone fits in my pocket.

What your smartphone can do nowadays is truly remarkable, and the innovation they are putting into it, plus how much the consumers want it, means things are only going to continue for the foreseeable future. It really is handy having something so small, but so powerful and able to do so many computing things just a pocket or bag away. A couple of years ago I spent a month on holiday overseas, and having the smartphone made things so much easier. Want to see where you are? Google maps and there you are.

Want to look up travel schedules? Easy enough? Want to go on the internet and see tourist destinations there are or what other tourists thought was great? Not a problem (unless you go to China, then things are more complicated).

In fact the top of the line smartphones now cost more than a laptop! So just like when you take a laptop around, you had best make sure you keep it secure. It is far easier for thieves to slip a quick hand into your pocket or bag and suddenly that small computer is gone, than it is to take that laptop bag off your shoulder, or better, having the laptop secured by cable to a desk or something.

Then suddenly life will end because you no longer have your smartphone, oh heavens! Oh come on people, and I'm looking at the younger generation here. Just because you have grown up with these awesome smartphones that allow you to ignore everything around you and communicate only via a device instead of via mouth, doesn't mean you should forget about the rest of the world out there.

Smartphones are a tool, very handy yes, but nonetheless not something that should take over your whole life. If that smartphone gets lost, broken or stolen, that's life, it happens, it does not mean life is ending. Your parents will likely get you a new one, just wait.

Mind you, I say that, and then think about myself and how useful I find my smartphone. I don't even have a landline any more; meaning without a phone at all no one can contact me. Hmm, so perhaps they have become quite an essential tool for the modern person. No you don't need one, but it certainly does make some things that much easier. Just, perhaps, don't revolve your life around it. Most people also have desktop computers or a laptop, and they use that for a lot of things, but it gets put away or only used sometimes, not all the time (says the guy who uses his computer ALL the time). Do the same thing with the smartphone, you don't have to be on it constantly or in contact with everyone all the time, take the time to relax and enjoy the rest of things life offers.

So unless there is suddenly a worldwide EMP that takes out all electronic devices in the world, smartphones are basically going to be everywhere, even places without connectivity, simply because they are small computers and can do so many things in such a small package.

Books Received

JonathanBall *Publishers*

Veronica Roth Chosen Ones Hodder & Stoughton R355.00
Terry Goodkind Into Darkness: Children of Dhara 5 Head of Zeus R325.00
Trudie Canavan Makers Curse: Millennium Rule 4 Little Brown R355.00
Holly Race Midnight's Twins Hot Key Books Children R190.00
Kathryn Scanian The Dominant Animal Faber Factory Plus R250.00
Dean Koontz The Eyes of Darkness Headline R215.00
Charlie & Stephanie Wentzel The Marvel Studios Story HarperCollins Leadership R325.00

Magazines Received

Stapledon Sphere (formerly the newsletter of the Middle Tennessee Science Fiction Society [aka the Nashville SF club]

Reece Moorhead reecejbm@gmail.com

Issue #39 July 2020

Issue #40 August 2020

Issue #41 September 2020

Ansible David Langford

July 2020 395 <http://news.ansible.uk/a395.html>

August 2020 396 <http://news.ansible.uk/a396.html>

September 2020 397 <http://news.ansible.uk/a397.html>

MonSFFA's WARP 108 is now on line for your reading pleasure. :-)

http://www.monsffa.ca/?page_id=6915

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Nova 2019 Highly Recommended

Causation

Odelle Coetzee

When the taunted turns on their tormentor, is that vengeance or karma? Jenique thought as she watched the liquid drip into the beaker. A few drops were all she needed. Morally it would be considered vengeance, but what if there was reason for it? A reason that made it seem like karma? As if they deserved it?

She picked up the beaker, tilted it and carefully drew up the liquid with a dropper before transferring it to the awaiting jar. Drip, drip, drip. Using a glass stirring-rod she mixed the contents, careful not to spill any. Once done, Jenique screwed on the lid and slipped the small jar into her coat pocket. A sense of glee filled her, only to be cut short when a familiar voice from the doorway called, “You done yet Jenique? I have to close up.”

“Almost, I just need to clean up!” Jenique called back, glancing at the doorway, expecting the woman to appear.

Jenique had had three supervisors in as many years. The first two had hovered over her and watched her every move, as if expecting some brilliance when she added colouring to water. She had hated them. They had often gotten in the way, which had resulted in numerous altercations. She knew that they had only followed orders – since she was, by law, too young to be left unattended in a lab with dangerous chemicals. Mrs. Barkhuisen was different.

Jenique dismantled the apparatus and cleaned them, wiped the work surface with spirits and was packing away the equipment when Mrs. Barkhuisen appeared in the doorway. “Did you manage?”

Jenique shook her head as she took off her lab coat and laid it over her arm.

“Oh well, as they say, *‘try, try again.’*”

Jenique however heard the despondency in the woman’s voice, and could even understand it. It was already late and the woman probably had plans for the evening. Who didn’t on a Friday?

Jenique pulled out her phone and opened the ride-sharing app, summoning a driver she made her way to the main entrance.

The university's halls were empty – the pretty girls had gone home. She hated pretty girls, their veiled glances, malicious whispers and disdain was enough to drive anyone up the wall. She hated pretty girls, they made her feel so inadequate. Boys on the other hand were also a waste of time; they were only interested in her when they needed help or assignments done.

Her thoughts drifted to the following week – her eighteenth birthday was coming up – although even that was overshadowed by the arrangements for her younger, prettier, sister's sixteenth birthday the following month.

Jenique patted her pocket; retribution was past due.

Twenty minutes later Jenique alighted from the vehicle in front of her parental townhouse, where her sister's excited babble greeted her on entering the house.

Jenique made her way down the hall towards the kitchen, greeted her mother and sister with monosyllable responses before reaching for the refrigerator's door handle. She was about to pull out the bottle of flavoured water when her mother's words plunged over her like a bucket of ice water.

"Why don't you take Jenique with you this evening?"

Jenique turned to look at both of them in disbelief. She had no intention of going *anywhere* with Cassy. Chinese water torture was more appealing.

"What!" Her sister exclaimed. "No way mom! The last thing we need is a babysitter."

"Jenique is not a babysitter," their mother deadpanned.

"Might as well be. No guy would even look our way if she was there," Cassy mumbled in protest.

"That might just be a good thing."

Cassy instead whinged, "Sammy and Tasha are going to abandon me if we have to tag *her* along".

"I think not." her mother calmly said, firmly adding "You will be safer."

"Just great! Why don't you just ruin my life and have her accompany us everywhere!"

"That might not be a bad idea either," their mother deadpanned.

"Mom! She'll spoil it for everyone!"

"Cassandra!" Her mother firmly cautioned her. Everyone knew that usage of full names was a warning.

“What? I’m just stating the obvious.”

Jenique instead closed the refrigerator door and murmured, “I can’t, I have to work on my thesis.”

“See, mom, smarty pants likes her books better.”

Without bothering to respond, Jenique turned from then and made her way to her room

She halted for a few moments at Cassy’s bedroom doorway. If ever she had second thoughts, her sister endless heckling had quashed them.

Jenique looked about the room. Several pieces of clothing lay scattered throughout, while the scent of perfume hung heavily in the air. Virtual frames were strategically placed throughout the area and flashed through sequences of images, most of them featuring Cassandra with some of her followers.

Jenique knew better than to enter Cassandra’s room. Her sister’s inclination to twist the truth, to the point where their parents usually sided with the younger girl, had ensured that. Cassandra always managed to paint Jenique as the jealous, malicious elder sister. Something that was not difficult, given their circumstances.

She looked at her sister’s dressing table, seeking the jar. One of the benefits of being different meant that she could do things others couldn’t. She judged the weight of the jar, and then lifted it off the dressing table with her mind. Keeping an ear out for her sister, she drew the jar towards her. It wobbled a few times but slowly progressed to where she stood. Jenique stretched out her hand and turned her palm upwards, allowing the small jar to drop into it.

She quickly exchanged it with the one in her lab coat and sent it across the room. It had just settled in the other’s place when her sister called down the passage “What are you doing in my room?”

Jenique turned to look at her approaching sister and shrugged her shoulders, “I’m standing in the hallway not in your room. I might just catch something if I went in, especially since there’s about a week’s worth of washing laying about.”

Her sister made to respond but Jenique waved her hand at her, in a ‘*whatever*’ gesture and turned towards her room.

Three mornings later, a panic, horror filled scream reverberated through the house. Glee filled Jenique as her lips formed a malevolent smile.

Jenique entered the kitchen and offered her father a casual good morning. He grunted something in reply without looking up from his paper. She popped two slices of bread into the toaster, switched on the kettle and reached into the overhead cupboard to extract a cup.

Moments later her mother rushed into the kitchen and yanked open one of the cupboard doors. A box of oatmeal appeared on the counter, followed by a bowl, honey and vinegar.

“Has Cassandra got a zit on her face again?” Jenique innocently asked.

Her mother glared at her and said, “How could you be so...never mind, you wouldn’t understand.”

Oh I understand better than you think. Jenique thought as her mother started to mix the required ingredients. to moments later their mother again rushed to the bathroom to attend Cassandra.

That won’t help. It will only make it worse. Jenique thought as she settled at the table to eat her breakfast

Her father gave no response and seemed oblivious of the latest drama. He folded his paper, rose from his seat and exited the kitchen.

Jenique finished her breakfast, rinsed her plate and glass before making for the bathroom.

“I can’t go to school looking like this!” Cassandra whined, “Can you imagine the girls. It’s enough they think my sister is a freak, but me!”

“Would you just stand still. I’m certain with the oatmeal and some makeup it will not even be visible.” their mother placated.

“It hurts! I’m certain it’s getting worse.”

“We’ll make an appointment with the dermatologist.”

Jenique stood in the bathroom doorway, watching as her mother tried to apply the oatmeal mask to her sister’s reddened face.

Her sister glared at her, “Do you mind? We’re busy here. Use the other bathroom!”

Jenique reached for her toiletry bag and turned down the passage. She actually preferred the guest bathroom; it had a smaller mirror.

Two days later, during a lecture, Jenique felt their presence. How, she knew not, she only knew they were coming for her.

A man came to stand next to her, which made it impossible for her to ignore them any longer. She turned her head to look at him, identifying him as one of the few that treated her with some semblance of decency. She saw his body stiffen as the students started mumbling between one another.

“Jenique,” her lecturer calmly said, “I’ll ensure you receive a copy of my notes.”

Jenique nodded and then turned to look towards the door. Two escorts guarded them, rendering escape improbable. Whispers inevitably followed her departure, along with wild assumptions, betting pools and odds on her return.

She had long since learned not to make a scene whenever they appeared, just as she never bothered to learn their names or to befriend them. They were faces that blindly followed instructions, with permission to sedate her with untested drugs if she did not comply. Drugs that would in all probability kill a lesser human being.

The rear door of the awaiting vehicle was held for her, the emblem on it as familiar as her own name. Her escort slipped into front passenger seat and instructed the driver to go.

The trip was so familiar that she could close her eyes for the entire duration and know exactly where they were. Just as she knew the exact moment they entered the security checkpoint and basement parking lot. Jenique waited for her escort to open the door, not because of his gentlemanly ways but because she knew it would not open if she tried it.

She stepped from the vehicle and followed her escort to the elevators where he swiped his keycard. Several moments later the elevator doors opened and he gestured for her to enter before following her inside and selecting the required floor.

The doors opened to a large atrium, with plush, cream-coloured armchairs arranged in groupings throughout. The Posteriori Prima Facie Group emblem was emblazoned on the sienna-sand coloured wall behind the receptionist.

Jenique was escorted towards a series of glass doors. Her mother was seated on one of the armchairs, closest to the reception desk. The woman lifted her gaze from some specialist beauty magazine and nodded her head in acknowledgement.

On the opposite side of the glass doors, the sharp scent of antiseptic permeated the air caused Jenique’s stomach to churn. She tempered her anger; there had been no need for the Posteriori Prima Facie Group to intervene in the matter. They could not treat nor alleviate her sister’s condition.

The overhead camera buzzed to life as Jenique entered her usual examination room. She heard the magnetic lock activate behind her. The room was devoid of any paraphernalia. It had a bed, a supposed curtain for privacy, a desk and wall cabinet. Her gaze shifted to the cabinet; it contained spare sheets and blankets. The desk had a chair, paper and pencils – she'd checked before.

The magnetic lock again released, allowing a final-year med-student to enter. He unsuspecting student visibly hesitated on seeing her.

His reaction caused her to shake her head, "Still sending in the greenies to startle them."

"Sorry," the young man said and glanced through the small glass pane behind him. "I did not expect..." he said looking back at her.

"It's okay, I get that a lot. I assume you're here to take my vitals and draw blood?"

"You're used to this?" he asked as he hesitantly approached her.

Pulling up her sleeve Jenique said "Pretty much."

The young man finished his allotted task and said, "Thank you. Dr. Bauer will be here shortly to see to you."

Jenique nodded and the student left.

Dr. Bauer later entered the room with a cloth covered, steel, kidney bowl. His manner was distant, as usual. He placed the cloth cover on the cabinet and then took out a syringe filled with an amber-coloured fluid. He stepped over to Jenique, who unceremoniously offered her right arm. The swab was cold and the needle stung, but she was used to it.

Dr. Bauer extracted the needle, pressed down on the area with the swab before he spoke. "You can go home since there is no reason to keep you here. We'll check the results in 24 hours."

He then turned and placed the syringe back in the kidney bowl, swiped his keycard over the panel to release the magnetic lock and then held the door for her.

"Nurse Realing, please accompany Miss Maxwell to the atrium."

Jenique stepped through the glass doors only to be met by her mother's scrutiny. Her sister hid behind a magazine on a nearby couch.

On their mother's instruction, Cassandra stood up and pulled her hoodie as far over her face as it could go. They exited through the main glass sliding doors.

"I'm going to have to cancel Friday night," Cassandra wailed as her mother pulled out of the car park.

"You can still go," her mother said.

"What? Looking like this!" Cassandra demanded in disbelief, "I'd rather date geeky pimple-face Geoffrey."

"It would have cleared by Friday, the doctors were confident." Their mother tried to appease Cassandra.

"Ha!" Cassandra scoffed. "I still believe this only happened because they are forever injecting me with *her* antibodies."

"Cassandra," their mother cautioned.

"What? They don't know what will happen. This could just be the start of me changing into something like *her!*"

"I think if something like that was possible they would never have suggested the tests." Their mother again tried to appease Cassandra.

"Just because they are the best doesn't mean they don't make mistakes." Cassandra countered.

"Don't we know it," their mother mumbled.

An euphoric sense of expectation filled Jenique the following morning as she dressed and made her way to the kitchen.

Jubilant, she greeted her parents, only to receive a pointed stare from her mother before her face was scrutinized. Her father grumbled some response from behind the paper, causing her mood plummet.

Her mother turned from her, "You'd better get ready for the clinic and pack a bag just in case."

"Yes mother," she dejectedly replied as she left the kitchen.

She entered the bathroom only to be scrutinized by her sister, before being told to use the guest one instead.

Their arrival at the clinic was uneventful and Jenique was again shown to her examination room. The young med-student of the previous day reappeared to again take her blood. He read the clipboard before turning to Jenique, "It's your birthday today, happy birthday."

“Thank you.” Jenique said, but remained seated on the bed.

“I can imagine you would want to be anywhere but here,” he said reaching for the needle and vials. “So I will just quickly draw the required samples and let you get on with celebrating your birthday.”

He finished left without any delay leaving her alone in the barren room. She looked about the room again, ignoring the overhead camera. She knew it would be a while before they would release her and moved from the bed to sit down at the desk. Opening the top shelf, she pulled out a sheet of paper, then picked up one of the pencils and proceeded to doodle. It was another thing she had learned; never write down anything, because it would only be taken for analysis.

The magnetic lock on the door released and she turned towards it. Her blood ran cold when two orderlies stepped into the room, followed by Dr. Catton, who ordered, “Strap her! I’m not in the mood for her struggles.”

Jenique stood and held out her hands, palms forward, as the orderlies advanced. “You cannot do this!” she said and started to step back.

“Your parents have consented, so just behave,” Dr. Catton coldly instructed.

The orderlies captured her wrists and pushed her back, eventually forcing her onto the examination table. Jenique fought as they fastened the bonds around her wrists and ankles.

“Should we sedate her?” the one asked.

“No, it’ll just slow her system’s response,” Dr. Catton said, scribbling something on the clipboard. “You can go now.”

The orderlies left the room and the doctor waited for the magnetic lock to activate before approaching her. He reached into his pockets and extracted an unmarked vial and a syringe.

Jenique knew only too well that it was one of the treatments that usually made her deathly ill. “No!” she exclaimed and fought the restraints with renewed vigour.

The doctor drew up the liquid as he said, “You should know by now it is useless to fight the restraints.” He then slipped the vial back into his coat pocket and approached her.

Red hot anger took hold of Jenique. She clenched her fists and pinched her eyes shut. She didn’t care if the needle bent.

“You know, that will only make it hurt more.” The doctor said as he pressed on her arm.

“I. Said. NO!” Jenique angrily screamed, punctuating each word.

“What the hell” The doctor swore.

A loud crashing sound filled the room causing Jenique eyes to snap open. Dr. Catton dropped to the ground on the other side of the room, gasping for breath, while the syringe had fallen on the ground some distance from him.

Jenique turned to stare at the brace holding her right hand, focused on moving the strap and undoing the buckle. She tried to ignore the sounds of the doctor shifting to regain his feet, knew that the orderlies would be there within moments if he summoned them.

“You never mentioned telekinetic powers,” The doctor accused.

“That’s because I learned not to tell you anything,” Jenique said as the strap pulled free from the buckle. She pulled her hand free and moved to loosen the left one.

The doctor regained his feet and pressed the call button before stumbling for the syringe. He again approached her, clasping it in his palm his thumb on the plunger.

“Leave me alone!” Jenique screamed, again sending him across the small room, crashing against the wall. The force was not as powerful as the first but it garnered her sufficient time to sit up and loosen the bonds around her feet.

She had just managed to kick her feet free when the door opened and the orderlies stepped inside. The doctor again regained his feet and advanced towards her. Too many things were happening; she could not clear her thoughts. Jenique leapt off the bed and grabbed at the doctor’s arm that held the syringe, hoping the momentum would grant her sufficient advantage to take it from him.

They struggled for several moments before the orderlies grabbed her shoulders and pulled her back. The doctor at the same time lunged with the syringe when she countered the action, causing the needle to press deeply into his opposite shoulder.

He bellowed in agony and Jenique instinctively hit the plunger of the syringe to decant the contents. The orderlies pulled her away from the doctor since she no longer fought them. She saw the horror struck expression on the doctor’s face as he looked at the syringe in shock. His legs gave way and he sank to the floor, still looking at the syringe.

One of the orderlies called for help, but she could have told him the effort was futile, since the room was soundproof.

Her gaze fell on the red flashing light and she felt her heart sink. The orderlies had not deactivated the call for assistance, meaning more help was likely to arrive. As if to realize her thought, the magnetic lock on the door released to admit Dr. Bauwer. He instantly noticed his co-worker on the floor and moved towards him, while Jenique fought to free herself from the orderlies' grip.

"What happened here?" Dr. Bauwer demanded.

"Don't know, she was loose when we got here."

"They were fighting when we entered the room," the other said.

Jenique pulled against both again and eventually shouted, "Let, me, GO!"

The two orderlies dropped to the ground gasping for air as if someone had punched both of them.

"Jenique," the doctor said holding up his hands in a calming gesture, "Calm down."

Jenique's eyes narrowed as she glared at him. She put her hands forward, warning, "Stay away." as she stepped back.

Moments later, the door again opened to admit one of the nurses, who looked about the room. She watched as the orderlies advanced on Jenique, only for them to be flung back against the wall.

"Jenique!" she called.

The woman's voice had Jenique look towards the doorway.

"Stop this, don't become the monster they think you are." Nurse Moore said.

"I just want to be left alone."

The woman gestured for her to approach her, "Come, come with me."

Jenique hesitated and the nurse again gestured for her to follow. The orderlies regained their feet, which was enough reason for Jenique to follow. They scurried down the one passageway and then turned down another, into parts of the clinic Jenique had never seen. They entered a small office and the woman reached into her pocket and extracted an old mobile phone.

"Makes tracing the call harder," the nurse said as she punched a series of numbers, holding the phone to her ear.

"What are you doing?" Jenique asked.

“Getting you out of here.” Her attention then turned to the phone, “Yeah, Jerome, you know that situation we hoped would never arise, well it just did. We need to move her.”

Jenique pulled away but the nurse held her hand up to halt her, ending the call.

“Why should I trust you?” Jenique demanded.

“Have I ever done anything to harm you?”

Jenique thought it over for a few moments... Nurse Moore had always taken care of her, and nursed her back to health. She shook her head.

“Then trust me with this,” she said just as her phone chimed.

“Come they are nearby.”

“Who?”

“Your get-away car.” Nurse Moore said pulling her along for a few steps.

They moved through a series of passages and several minutes later they exited at a side-entrance marked for staff only. A large, silver SUV pulled up and Nurse Moore opened the back passenger side door for her, halting her with a hand on her shoulder. “Now listen to me. The driver is going to take you to a psychiatric hospital.”

“A what?” Jenique exclaimed.

“Just listen to me first. You must voluntary check into the hospital, no one can force you to.”

“Are you nuts?” Jenique demanded.

“By law, they cannot touch you if you’re in the care of a psychiatric unit. You can leave at any time but there’s a lot that needs to be taken care of first. Someone will come to see you and they will explain everything.”

“I cannot afford something like that, my parents are the ones who have to pay.”

“You have friends in places you don’t even know about. You’ll be safe there.”

“But...” Jenique started only to be interrupted by a siren.

“Go, quickly! They’ve realized you’re not in the building.” The woman said and rushed her into the back of the SUV.

“What about you?” Jenique asked, once inside.

“I’ll be fine, just go!” Nurse Moore said and closed the door.

Several days passed, allowing Jenique time to adapt the silence of the centre. Although doctors and nurses moved about the passages, none ever came to take

her vitals, prick her with needles or ask her endless questions. Her room was simple, with a bed and bedside table, desk, small television and a chair by the window. She spent the better part of her mornings overlooking the gardens below, simply drawing in the peace of it all.

Her books had arrived on the fourth morning, along with a notebook computer and a thumb drive; containing recordings of all the lectures she had missed.

On the fifth morning a middle-aged man, dressed in all white came to see her. He was about Dr. Catton's age and looked somewhat like the man as well. Instinctively Jenique became weary of his presence, her hands clenched into fists as he progressed farther into her room.

"Good morning Miss Maxwell, please, sit." he said gesturing to the chair at the window, himself commandeering the one at her desk. "We have a lot to discuss."

She hesitantly asked, "You're not here to check me over?"

The man shook his head, "I should introduce myself. I'm Dr. Jerome Gaudier."

"You're the man Nurse Moore called."

"Yes"

"Then all this was pre-planned." Jenique said, waving her hand to indicate the room.

His voice remained calm, as he said, "Well not entirely. This was the emergency option, if things went really wrong."

"Which they have?" she hesitantly asked.

"Yes." he replied.

"Why help me?"

"Because you have something I want."

Jenique's eyes narrowed at that.

Dr. Gaudier held up his hands and calmly stated, "Not that."

"What then?" She demanded.

"Your brain."

She shot up from her seat and exclaimed, "Are you crazy? You're worse than them! You can't have my brain!"

Dr. Gaudier chuckled at her response and then shook his head. "They really did a number on you."

His response had her look at him in question.

"I also need the body that is attached to the brain, but mostly the brain." Dr. Gaudier said, rising.

"I don't understand."

The doctor again gestured to the chair but remained standing after she had settled. He then started pacing. "I had originally planned to approach you after your graduation."

"You have been spying on me?"

Dr. Gaudier stopped, looked at her, made to say something, hesitated, and eventually replied, "Technically, yes. You have been a person of interest for several years already, and I'm not the only one with an eye on you. Although this does situation play to my advantage, which I quite like."

"Why?"

"Why?" he asked disbelievingly, "Why? She asks why?" he asked to the sky as if someone would answer him. "You're the only person in the world who is capable of utilizing 35% of your brain at any given moment. You've the capacity to analyse problems better than the best computers we have, because you not only analyse data chains, you apply logic, reason, cause and consequence into such an analyses. You access the part of your brain that allows for kinetic abilities, what's not to want with your brain?"

"And you want to study this, use me as a guinea pig? Like they did?"

"No." He quickly, firmly replied. "My interests in you are bona fide. I want you to join my research team... well once you have graduated," he said pointing to her books.

"You arranged for my lectures to be recorded?"

"Yes, you cannot move from the hospital at the moment, not without being arrested."

"What?"

"Dr. Catton died yesterday. They're building a case of voluntary manslaughter against you."

"I didn't kill him."

"I'm pretty sure you didn't, but if there is one thing I have learned it is that the Posteriori Prima Facie Group takes what they want regardless of the costs to others, and they want you."

"So what can I do now?"

“You’re safe here. This is a licensed psychiatric hospital, they cannot remove you from it unless they’ve proven you guilty.”

“So it is only a matter of time.”

“Their legal council are good at two things, protracting matters and fighting dirty. They will in all probability assist the NPA. Given your finances, you would have to settle for legal aid, which would be easy enough for them to pressurize into a plea agreement.”

“So either way I’m screwed...”

“We’re scouring attorneys listed to see if one would take your case on a pro-bono arrangement. PPFG may have the council, but this would be a career defining case.”

“You can’t help?”

“Getting involved will have serious repercussions for my company.”

A week later, Jenique met her counsel for the first time in the hospital cafeteria. He was visibly taken aback when she sat down opposite him.

“Is there a problem?” Jenique calmly asked.

“No. I’m Simon Griffon.” he said but made no move to initiate a handshake. He tilted his head, adding, “You are quite calm for someone facing a charge of manslaughter.”

“I didn’t do it.”

“So I’ve been told. I’ve gone over your case, the state has the final autopsy, eyewitnesses claiming you injected him with an unknown substance, and your admission to this hospital will be used to prove premeditation. The only thing they don’t have is motive – can you think of anything reason they could use?”

“I said I didn’t do it, I didn’t plan it.”

“Yes, I get it,” he countered “...but you’re one final away from graduating with a masters in chemistry. You’re not an average eighteen-year-old, and as an adult they’ll insist you be charged as an adult. So use that brain of yours and try to anticipate their claims. “

“I didn’t kill him! And none of this,” she gestured to the room “...was planned. Whatever was in that syringe was meant for me, for whatever test they had planned. I have no idea what was in it.”

“Okay, I won’t inform you as to the cause of death, since it’s ridiculous and you not knowing that will make your defence stronger. I will have to do some research though.” He made a series of notes, before asking, “Is there anything that I should know, documents that can provide any doubt.”

“I don’t know; my medical records are with them, along with any tests and agreements they had with my parents.”

“I’ll see what can be subpoenaed, but I doubt they would release any of those, they would be more likely to use them for their own case. They will need to prove intent or motive, which you claim you had none. That could make matters difficult. I think it is better if we keep our meeting to a minimum, and concentrate on providing evidence. I have arranged with the hospital to arrange your transport for your first appearance. But it is just a formality where your plea will be heard and the matter moved to a higher court, so you need not concern yourself too much with that. It is only when the trial starts that matters will become more serious, possibly involving the press.”

Simon took his leave and Jenique watched as he exited the cafeteria, swallowing against the bile as it rose in her throat. For the first time in her life she had no idea what the outcome would be.

As Simon made to leave the hospital, one of the nurses detained him and showed him into an office.

Jenique couldn’t sleep and cast aside her sheets. Her first appearance had gone exactly as her counsel had claimed it would, but with morning her trial would start, an event she felt wholly unprepared for.

A sea of flashes met her entrance to the courthouse, although reporters kept their distance.

Come daylight she would be taken to court

The courtroom was fuller than she had anticipated, with several members of the press present.

The event caused her to frown as she sat convened with Simon, who looked about as nervous as she was, before her appearance and asked “What’s with the press?”

“You obviously haven’t read the papers.”

She shook her head.

“Your sister is playing the chaste sufferer. According to the press, the odds are almost entirely against you.”

“Yes, I noticed their allegiance during the fist appearance.”

“They will call you to the stand, for now do not volunteer any information, they are pressing charges for second degree murder and two accounts of assault. Let them speak.”

She kept her gaze lowered as she entered the courtroom. A great deal of noise and shuffling occurred as she took the stand.

The State Prosecutor rose from a group of lawyers and proceeded to read out the case details. “Case number 216/51/4 state vs. Maxwell.”

Simon stood and announced “Griffon on behalf of the Accused.”

The prosecutor then continued, “The Accused has pleaded not guilty.”

The judge looked between the prosecution to the defence, eventually gesturing between them as he said, “Should this not be the other way around?”

The prosecutor replied, “Your Worship, these people form the legal panel for the Posteriori Prima Facie Group. Since the case involves such a prominent company with numerous trade secrets and patents, they are here to assist with the identification of any such intellectual property and to request a motion in limine should the defence attempt to use them.”

The judge nodded and said. “Under such circumstances I will disregard any evidence submitted, unless it has a direct correlation to the charges before the court. Your opening statement.”

“Charges are; voluntary manslaughter and three accounts of assault.”

“Your honour we have reason to believe that she might be suffering of dementia, and request that she be placed within state facilities.”

“What are we going to do?”

“Well, first we have to establish exactly what case they have built against you, and see if we can’t discredit any of the witnesses.”

The prosecutor moved from his seat carefully approaching the jury, “The Posteriori Prima Facie Group, remains a familiar and trusted household name. They have saved or eased the lives of millions around the world. As the African forerunners in genetics, recombinant DNA, stem cell therapy and the correction of genetic disorders; The Posteriori Prima Facie Group company has developed cures for HIV, hepatitis A and B, yellow fever, swamp fever, malaria and sleeping sickness. It is this very company who at the hands of this...” the state prosecutor pointed to Jenique as he emphasized, “This thing that the company lost one of its founding members, who was also one of the greatest minds in their medical field. Miss Maxwell exposed him to a pathogen, via injection, which I present to the court as Exhibit A. This pathogen is so deadly that even with all their medical expertise the Posteriori Prima Facie Group could not save him. He died three days later. But that’s not all, this, this abomination, in her attempt to administrate the pathogen, broke the ribs of two experienced orderlies. And when Dr. Bauwer arrived to assist, she issued a blow so powerful as to leave the man concussed. She then voluntarily checked herself into a psychiatric hospital to avoid arrest.”

The judge looked towards Simon, “Opening statement?”

Simon lifted his hand, the palm facing the judge as he shook his head. The action caused the judge to look back at the defence. “You may call your first witness.”

The state prosecutor called the first of the orderlies, who was sworn-in before questioning. He confirmed that they entered the room with the doctor and had restrained Miss. Maxwell before being told they could leave. The prosecutor questioned him as to what they had found on returning to the room and the man testified that Jenique and the doctor were physically engaged and that they tried to separate them when they noticed the syringe in lodged in the doctor’s shoulder. The state prosecutor then questioned the orderly whether the doctor had taken any hypodermic goods into the room with him, which received a negative answer. The state prosecutor then turned towards Simon, “Your witness.”

Simon declined and the second orderly was sworn in, he corroborated the first’s story. Again Simon declined cross-examine the witness.

The prosecutor then convened with the other attorneys and requested a recess before calling his next witness.

Jenique breathed a sigh of relief when was she escorted from the courtroom the door closed behind her, IT allowed her temporary respite from all the condescending glares. Her palms were sweaty, for she had no idea what Simon's game plan was, matters however appeared outright against her.

Court resumed after lunch, with the prosecutor calling Dr Bauwer to the stand.

He confirmed that he was the last to arrive at the consultation room and that on his arrival the pathogen had already been administered.

The prosecutor asked several other related questions regarding Dr Catton's medical condition thereafter before turning to Simon, "Your witness."

Simon calmly rose from his seat, "Dr Bauwer, could you tell the court for how long Miss Maxwell has received treatment at the clinic?"

"All of her life," the doctor answered without hesitation.

Simon nodded, "And during that time, has she ever acted in any manner that necessitated physical restraint?"

The doctor hesitated before answering, "There have been instances in the past."

Simon stepped from behind the table as he spoke. "This is where I find the scant records the company was willing to release to me very confusing. You see, none of them listed any treatments, only dates of her admittance. I also have it on good authority that Miss Maxwell never received any treatment at your clinic, and that her admissions there were to perform either tests or trails. Not so surprising however is the fact that when I compare those dates to her parent's bank statements a different picture emerges."

"We had an agreement with her parents, they consented to the tests and trails."

"Yes, a very lucrative agreement, possibly for both sides. Their bank statements show that they were paid anything between three and ten million per test."

"It's not illegal."

"No, it's not. But it does change the relationship your company had with Miss Maxwell. It changes the relationship you had with her family and, ultimately, their relationship with her. This arrangement rendered her a guinea pig to the company and a cash cow to her family. Isn't that right Dr. Bauwer?"

Dr. Bauwer hesitated and glanced at the prosecutor.

"Objection, leading the witness."

"Overruled. Dr. Bauwer you are to answer," The judge instructed.

“If one chose to view it in such a manner.”

“But even more alarming was your response to my initial question, of how long had Miss Maxwell received treatment at your clinic. You had innocently claimed that she had received treatment there all her life.” Simon pulled a sheet from his folder and continued, “I present to the court Exhibit G. A document confirming that Miss. Maxwell was not only a guinea pig for the Posteriori Prima Facie Group, but that she is a direct result of their Posteriori Genetics’ Perfect Child Program. Genetically, Miss Maxwell is perfect, regardless of her somewhat asymmetrical features. She has within her the perfect combination of genes, she is the ultimate human capable of surviving any disease. Her very existence is attributed to Posteriori Prima Facie Group, as much as her suffering.”

“Objection your worship, the defense is speculating they have not proven any suffering on behalf of the accused.” The state prosecutor countered.

The judge turned to Simon and demanded, “Can you substantiate such a claim?”

“Your worship, when you look at Miss. Maxwell it’s easy to judge her on appearance; her lips are too big, her head is shaped funny, her eyes bulge and her nose is too small. Those are the features she inherited from the Posteriori Genetics’ Perfect Child Program. And it’s those very features have also subjected her to discrimination and oppression by her immediate peer group. The Posteriori Group’s relationship with Miss. Maxwell goes all the way back to her recombinant DNA and highlights the reality and extreme possibilities of genetic engineering. She is one of the most intellectual individuals ever born. She utilizes 35% of her brain and has never received below 95% for any test she took or paper she turned in. Thankfully for the members of Posteriori Genetics, and society at large, Jenique choose to apply her knowledge appropriately, opting to study and become a contributing member to society. While many may not see this as suffering, the prolonged and extensive degree of expectation she has endured has placed stress on her far beyond that which any mere mortal could contend with. Thus your worship, even though her suffering is not physical in the form of suffering, she has suffered mental anguish and unwanted segregation”

The judge nodded then said, “Overruled.”

Simon then looked at Dr. Bauwer and asked, “Dr. Bauwer, you earlier mentioned that your company has in the past experienced problems with Miss. Maxwell. Could

the assumption then be drawn that Miss. Maxwell did not consent to these various tests?"

"Objection," the prosecutor called.

"Overruled." The judge responded.

"One could draw such a conclusion," Dr Bauwer replied.

"And is it not true that some of these tests also made Miss. Maxwell ill?"

"Miss. Maxwell has a super immune system," Dr Bauwer quickly replied, only to realize what he had said. He looked towards the prosecutor.

"Meaning?" Simon pressed.

"Her immune system goes into hyper drive when a foreign pathogen is introduced. We have studied her immune system's response to gain better insight to the human body's response to certain infections."

"And all this was done with her parents' consent?"

"Yes. Our attorneys drew up several contracts with them," Dr. Bauwer said indicating to the attending prosecution council.

"Doctor, are you familiar with the HIPPA Act?"

"Yes"

"In accordance to this act, patients have a right to decline treatments, and that doctors may try to convince patients of the benefits of the treatment but may not force a patient to undergo such treatment. Do I understand it correctly?"

"The Act is not applicable when trails are done, or when patients are remunerated for trials"

"But a person retains their right to pull out of trails?"

"Objection, leading the witness."

The judge then asked, "Mr. Griffon, does this have any relevance?"

"Yes, your worship. I'm attempting to convey to the court that at any time a subject in trials has a right to withdraw from such trials, and that the Posteriori Prima Facie Group disregarded and disrespected this right on the day of the incident, not only breaking the law, but also denying her her constitutional rights"

"Overruled."

"I repeat my question doctor; May a patent, or trail member, at any time decide to discontinue with the trails?"

"Yes."

“And in the case of a minor, the parents are to consent to any such treatments or trials?”

“Yes.”

“And her parents consented to these trials?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me doctor, when is a child, *medically*, no longer considered a minor? When are they allowed to object to a treatment?”

“It depends on the treatment. Some treatments, like family planning, they are allowed to seek treatment without parental consent at twelve.”

“In a case like Miss Maxwell’s?”

“Eighteen.”

“Objection, relevance?”

“Mr. Griffen,” the judge called Simon’s attention.

“Your Worship, the prosecution has denied me access to most of Miss. Maxwell’s records, and since I cannot submit any documentation as an exhibit, I am attempting to familiarize the court with the arrangements between my client, her family and the Posteriori Prima Facie Group.”

“Overruled.”

Simon again turned to the doctor. “According to the law, doctor, Miss. Maxwell would first need to be consulted before any tests were performed on her once she was eighteen years old?”

“Yes.”

“And your colleague would have been aware of this?”

“Yes.”

“Could it then be assumed that he utilized the opportunity to conduct such a test or trial?”

“Objection, speculation, there’s no way that Dr. Bauwer could know that.”

“Sustained.” the judge said turning to Simon. “Keep it relevant.”

Simon nodded. “Dr. Bauwer, on the day your colleague and Miss. Maxwell had the altercation, how old was Miss Maxwell?”

“Seventeen.”

“No she wasn’t.” Simon flatly stated, “That particular day was Miss. Maxwell’s eighteenth birthday, effectively nullifying whatever agreement you had with her

family. This therefore renders illegal any administration of medication, or any restraint by orderlies to permit for the administration of such medications. The injuries sustained by the orderlies were sustained during normal working hours under normal working conditions. In fact it would be safe to say that the injuries themselves were common to the workplace.”

The prosecutor remained silent for a moment and then said, “Your worship, may I convene with the assisting counsel?”

“Yes.”

Sometime later the prosecutor said, “Your worship, none of these argument absolves the accused of the crime.”

“I thought that was the reason for the trial,” the judge countered.

“Yes your worship.”

“Mr. Griffen, do you have any further questions for the witness?”

“Not really a question, but I could formulate it as one.”

“Then go ahead.”

“Dr. Bauer, your company does extensive research on diseases and pathogens. This would mean that you are familiar with the process of acquiring controlled, hazardous, or lethal virus and pathogen samples?”

“Yes.”

“Would you say this process is easy?”

“No, it is extremely complicated.

“It involves extensive paperwork does it not?”

“Yes.”

Simon took a deep breath and picked up a sheet of paper. “I therefore present to the court Exhibit H. A report from a specialist pathologist. The autopsy revealed that Dr. Catton’s death was caused by the exposure to a mutated virus, a virus that can only be obtained through proper channels with accompanying paperwork. Neither Miss Maxwell nor the establishment she studies as, has authorization or access to such biological compounds. There is also no paperwork in they system to support any claim that she even applied for samples of the biological compound.” Simon picked up another sheaf of papers, “There is however a paper trail for the Posteriori Prima Facie Group.”

“Objection, speculation. Such a report and paperwork would require analysis of samples.”

“I will accept the paperwork as prima-fasie evidence.”

“Your worship, the court has heard evidence that The Posteriori Prima Facie Group had in the past utilized restraint to subject Miss. Maxwell to tests. I also have a witness who will confirm that the examination room used for these tests was soundproof and had a magnetic access-controlled lock on the door. This implies that even without Miss Maxwell’s consent these tests could be performed, much like it had on the day of the incident.” Simon turned his full attention on the judge. “I request for all charges to be dropped against my client. Exhibits G and H along with the oral evidence provided by Dr Bauer serve as Exculpatory evidence. My client acted in self-defence and could not have known what the syringe contained. The contents of which, I strongly iterate, Dr. Catton had intended to administer to her.”

The judge looked at him for several moments, and then said, “Court will adjourn for the day to allow me to assess the evidence before the court. We will reconvene at nine a.m. tomorrow morning.” The judge lifted the hammer and tapped it against the gavel.

Simon walked over to Jenique and said, “Chances are good the NPA will withdraw the charges.”

“But how did you? I mean I had no idea about half of this.”

“Dr. Gaudier, he nudged me into the right direction.” Simon tilted his head and forthrightly asked, “Can I ask you something, but you have to answer me honestly.”

Jenique nodded.

“What was actually wrong with your sister?”

Jenique swallowed, shut her eyes and nodded before answering, “It was a stupid prank, okay perhaps not so stupid.

“What did you do?”

“I put Madagascar periwinkle essence in her face cream.”

“But isn’t that poisonous?”

“If you consumed it, yes, but then most essential essences are.”

“So why do it?”

“Madagascar periwinkle essence irritates the skin; it used to be used to treat warts.”

“But why?”

“I wanted her to know what it feels like when people judge you on your appearance only. I wanted her to know what it feels like if others snigger when you walk by.”

“Would it have caused permanent damage?”

“No. She just has to stop using the cream, and apply some Vitamin E oil, but we know how that ended up.”

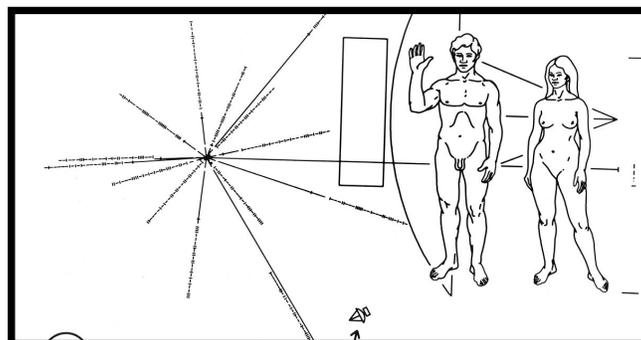
Journal Entry: Dr. Gardier.

In our journey to improve, correct or even perfect the human; consideration must be given for the soul. For a soul that is inherently evil cannot be corrected and will result in an evil person, regardless of correction. The soul remains the essence of human nature just as it is universally accepted that human flaws are there to limit and challenge one’s soul during its earthly journey.

Voyager. (From the NASA website)

The twin Voyager 1 and 2 spacecraft are exploring where nothing from Earth has flown before. Continuing on their more-than-40-year journey since their 1977 launches, they each are much farther away from Earth and the sun than Pluto. In August 2012, Voyager 1 made the historic entry into interstellar space. Voyager 2 entered interstellar space on November 5, 2018 and scientists hope to learn more about this region. Both spacecraft are still sending scientific information about their surroundings through the Deep Space Network, or DSN.

The primary mission was the exploration of Jupiter and Saturn. After making a string of discoveries there — such as active volcanoes on Jupiter's moon Io and intricacies of Saturn's rings — the mission was extended. Voyager 2 went on to explore Uranus and Neptune, and is still the only spacecraft to have visited those outer planets. The adventurers' current mission, the Voyager Interstellar Mission (VIM), will explore the outermost edge of the Sun's domain. And beyond.....



Blast From the past - Wormholes from Minicon

2010

Ian Sinclair, Gavin Kreuter, Vincent Risi

Trouble began and not for the first time with an apple. Knowledge started with the first bite of an apple in the Garden of Eden. Another apple kick started knowledge by landing on Newton's head. And now the sight of a wormhole in my apple sparked another burst of insight and space-time travel was invented. I can't tell you the problems caused by this invention. Disaster, chaos backwards and forwards, horror on horror unbounded.

And so I did what anybody else would do in such circumstances. I went back and ate the evidence....with the wormhole.

Simone Puterman, Franz Tomasek, Dennis Lane, Liz Simmonds

Lox, Stocks and Smoking Salmons

The trouble began, and not for the first time with an apple. And not just any apple, The Big Apple.

The aliens were at it again. New York was gone, along with my main squeeze. Which is a pretty extreme way of cornering the bagel market.

What was needed was a loxsmith. Called Hiram Finkelstein. Tasked him to appear before the Caper committee.

It was broadcast on a very large scale on the net. Before you could say Judge Hammerhead the whole city and my darling Clementine reappeared. The aliens, cheesed off, returned to school.

Ron Cowley, AL Du Pisani, Myron Alexander, Gail Jamieson

Trouble began and not for the first time with an "Apple".....

"Press Me" it commanded and again the room was horrified by images of destruction, the end of the Pacific Fleet.

An impossible decision must be made and within the hour; to be the aggressor and attack first, to move the fleet or to bow to fate and allow the destruction giving Roosevelt the public support necessary to enter the war.....

Heated arguments erupt around the table. "How dare we betray our troops?"

screamed one "I would never allow it." "But you will" says Roosevelt, "It has already happened."

Nova 2019 Highly Recommended

Latent Images

Gary Kuyper

The enormous figure swung the clubbing device in a wide arc. It crashed hard against the side of the screaming attacker's head, sending the top portion of the helmeted appendage flying high over the rest of the angry, surging mob. The lower jaw, still attached to the rest of the body flapped as the now naked throat continued to shout and gurgle while hot liquid gushed and squirted from the savagely torn main artery running up the back of the neck. It splashed into the face of the wild-eyed assailant, a visage already stained with the gory viscera of the one hundred and twenty eight men that had been crushed by the supernatural and unrelenting strength that coursed through his large frame. The long dark hair that had once waved free and sensually in the breeze was now glued to the rest of his naked, sanguine-spattered torso. One hundred and twenty eight men, yet still they pressed forward in their unrelenting pursuit to destroy the man on the narrow-topped hillock. "How many is that?" asked Roger McTavish in his thick Glasgow accent.

The man seated three seats to his right, switched on his mini-flashlight and gazed at the counter that he had been furiously clicking during the incredible demonstration. "I may have missed a few, sir, but it's well over a hundred already."

"Fantastic!" cried McTavish raising his arm so that its shadow appeared on the large flickering viewing screen. "I'm convinced! I've seen enough!" This is almost too much, even for a seasoned goremonger like myself. Woohee! Ha! Ha!" He was still smiling and laughing when the lights of the small theatre reached full illumination.

"Not quite my type of...signature material, but impressive." He turned to the small, curly headed and bespectacled man sitting three seats to his left. "The CG is...breathtaking. My people were right. You are...very good!" He had wanted to say '*The Best*', but changed his mind. The difference between '*Very Good*' and '*The Best*' could be financially staggering. "What sort of CG package did you use?"

"Oh, it's my own creation," answered Harold Mooney smugly as he slowly removed and wiped his spectacles with a methodical malevolence of a torturer about to

extract information from a reluctant source. Only, it was Harold's affluent host who sought enlightenment regarding certain safeguarded facts.

"Yes, I heard you are an...inventor of some note. I believe it was you that actually formulated the RLP theory that allowed Menal to develop his GE device?"

"You may compliment your...sources."

"Really? Amazing!" McTavish once again gave way to unrestrained praise. It was an uncontrollable habit that he despised, and yet it was this very impulsive nature of his that had made him one of the wealthiest men in Glasgow, although he now spent most of his time lodging in his impressive, palm tree-surrounded, Spanish-tiled villa overlooking the Pacific ocean from a cliff on the Californian coastline. It was here in McTavish's home theatre, one of two, that they sat. "I would have thought a man of your calibre to be...better off?" It was also in his nature, and not because of the money, that he was blunt and painfully honest in his ways with other men to such a degree that he had made many enemies. Yet, there were those that admired him for it, and had befriended him because, and not in spite, of it.

"Did Einstein get rich when they flattened Hiroshima?" spat Mooney, then regained his composure. "I apologize, that was a bad metaphor to use. *Very bad*. The fact is, few theorists get wealthy. It is mostly those that can produce something...material from those hypotheses that are rewarded for their...effort."

"Surely..."

"Not a farthing," interrupted Mooney, knowing to where the question was leading and from whence his host originally hailed. "Not a word of thanks or appreciation. Not even a nod in my direction when the Academy of Motion Pictures Art and Sciences presented Menal with his award for Best Technical Achievement. In that moment, Harold Mooney and his theory of Refractive Light Pulses were all but forgotten."

"That is terrible! There should be a law that..."

"You're preaching to the choir. Don't think I never tried? It was probably those actions that helped speed my journey into obscurity. Menal probably felt...feared that any mention of my name would only prompt me to renew my case, and he was probably right. Believe me when I say that not a day passes without that very knowledge cutting into my well-being?"

"Yet, still you pursue a career in that very same field?"

Menal only discovered one application for the Refracting Light Pulse phenomenon. I intend to find an even better one.”

“Better than the GE?” he huffed sceptically.

“Oh, much better.”

“In the field of holographics?”

“Why not?”

“Because the Ghosting Extractor modeled after your RLP theory changed holographics into the major industry that it has become. Conventional theatres now outnumber the holo-domes by only twenty to one. Just five years ago it was something like a hundred to one.”

“You are being modest and flattering all at once. I think it no secret that Roger McTavish is the true father of the holo-vid industry.”

“Ah, never! That would be like saying Hugh Hefner was the father of the magazine publishing industry. I merely helped myself by helping others to see the...various applications.”

All three men laughed, including McTavish, at the attempted subtle suggestiveness. Then he regained his composure, almost sorry of the metaphor that he had chosen, and continued with his interrogation from earlier in the conversation. “You said that you had created your own CG program?”

“Well, sort of. It’s a mish mash of VixenX03 and SaurenBeta Holosuite with some special tweaking of my own.”

“Tweaking?”

“It’s...complicated.”

It wasn’t complicated for Harold Mooney to do, explaining it was. McTavish was quick to understand Mooney’s implication.

“Of course, I understand. A man of your calibre...genius trying to explain computer jargon to an idiot like me.” He had wanted to sound light-hearted and sincere, yet quickly realized that it had come out as if dripping with sarcasm. An uncomfortable air, like a silent fart, had suddenly descended upon the small company. In an attempt to dissipate the unwelcome stench, he swiftly added smiling, “And where does your RLP fit into this?”

“It doesn’t,” answered Mooney quickly as though he had been expecting the question. “That is for something entirely different that I’m working on, a completely

different piece of hardware, although I do intend to integrate the...information gained from the one with the other.”

“Like taking a disc from a recorder and placing it in the projector?”

“Precisely, well almost. More like placing the disc in the editor.”

“I understand.”

“Excuse my rashness here, mister McTavish...”

“Please, call me Roger. Yes?”

“Roger...we seem to be drifting away from the main purpose of my visit.”

“Will you be able to render the 2D into full tri-di-im?”

“No problem.”

“Will you be able to extend its length into a proper full-length feature?”

“No problem.”

“Well, you certainly seem very sure of yourself.”

“I am a man who knows full-well the extent of both his limitations and capabilities.

Those aspects of the production will be the easiest to accomplish.”

“Impressive! What about the kills? My films are renowned for their impressive body counts.”

“No splatter movie will ever be able to equal the amount of carnage that I will deliver.”

“Excellent!” McTavish’s eyes beamed almost insanely. “And in what quality capacity?”

“Six, twelve, eighteen or even full twenty four projector cap. Your wish is my command, but the price will obviously increase in relation to the cap size.”

“Of course, that is only to be expected. Amazing! I never thought animation possible in eighteen, let alone full twenty four. I can’t even begin to imagine what the image quality would look like at twenty four.”

“Myself included,” muttered Mooney.

“Eh? You just said that you could...?”

“And, I can. Just never have. It would take a lot of computing power to produce photorealistic tri-di animation imaging at twenty four. I don’t have the manpower or that sort of equipment...or the financial means to procure the necessary equipment.”

An uneasy and prolonged silence permeated the air. “Roger...I promise you this. All the holo-vids you have produced to date will be nothing compared to what I can do.

Just give me a chance to prove it to you.” The silence continued as the two men seemingly stared at each other with an intensity.

The fact was, McTavish had made his mind up minutes ago. He stared, but not at Mooney. He was looking at a future where he could now safely see his position as *The Holo-Vid Goremeister* safely secured.

No more smut. No more trash. People would now learn to respect him for producing quality. The subject matter may not have changed, but the quality of the image, yes that will have definitely improved.

Twice before he had pioneered. Twice before the masses had followed his lead.

Now he was about to do it for a third time. Only, and he knew it for a fact, this was going to be a hard act to follow. If he played his cards right, thought it through carefully, have his lawyers word the contract to perfection, then he could corner the market. And if he made this curly headed, bespectacled genius rich along the way - all the better. The poor bastard deserved it after the tough break he had been forced to endure.

The disadvantages of the holo-domes are the cost to produce a tri-di-im, and to have a multitude of holo-image-recorders act as if they were a single unit. Much like a fly's eye; a compound structure of many eyes, producing many images, yet, like the fly, perceiving it all as only one. Not too difficult for a human being to comprehend. We, after all, have two eyes yet perceive only one image, but the two give us a sense of depth allowing us to see our world three dimensionally.

To capture a holo-image, the cameras need to be fixed in position, surrounding the material to be recorded, in a perfect circle. The more cameras used, the better the quality of the final holo-vid.

This poses two important problems. Firstly, the cameras need to be placed in such a position, facing either upwards or downwards towards the subject, so that each will not record images of the cameras opposite to them. Secondly, depth of field and focus has to remain fixed and constant for all cameras. This makes the use of zooms most difficult, but can be attained by having all the cameras connected to a CPU that controls all their actions in unison. In any event, a 2D zoom gives the sense that an object is coming closer, whereas the 3D zoom presents an impression that the object is increasing in size.

Because all the cameras need to be focused at the exact same distance from the subject in the centre of the circle, a swivel-head pan is impossible, but can be simulated by having all the cameras move in harmony. To this end, a device called the Dykstra-Ring is used to great, but limited effect. It is a massive circular aluminum framework onto which the cameras are mounted. It is attached to a crane that can then move the entire ring of fixed cameras about. This also has shortcomings. The holo-dome theatres where the holo-vids are projected into a small central arena have fixed projectors; therefore a scene of a person walking down a street would give the impression that the character was walking in the opposite direction on a moving sidewalk and so remaining in the exact same spot. This same effect could be done cheaper and easier by simply placing the character between fixed cameras and using a treadmill device. Also, viewers on one side of the theater would see the character walking away from them, whilst those on the exact opposite would have the character coming towards them. Having the hero ride away into the setting sun is somewhat problematic. Furthermore, rotating the ring does not impress upon the viewer the notion that they are moving around the central character, rather it gives the impression that the character is being spun about by standing upon some sort of revolving disc. Also, when the ring is moved over inanimate objects such as a set consisting of furniture, the effect is that the furniture has somehow gotten a life of its own and is now sliding back and forth across the room. The experience can almost be likened to that queer misconception of sitting in a train compartment and believing that the station is starting to move away whilst the locomotive remains stationary. So, with these serious limitations regarding the production of holo-vids, many directors opted to take the easy route. The easy route being cameras mounted and fixed in a slightly elevated position above the scenes to be shot. And because artistic expression by the cameras was limited (or even nonexistent) it was decided that the best material to record would be theatrical plays. Shakespeare's works being many of the first productions to be made. This was little better, if not exactly the same, than watching a play being performed in an amphitheatre.

It was McTavish who, after watching Romeo and Juliet, realized that the key to drawing more people would be to present material of a more graphic nature. Using his small fortune, he invested every penny of his inheritance and produced, 'Mandy's Room,' featuring the steamy adventures of a naive buxom bisexual blonde between,

but more importantly, above the bed sheets. It was to become known as the first-ever *holo-skin*. A term that became familiar for the many clones that were soon to follow in the wake of its phenomenal popularity.

Money talks, and so many of the holo-theaters suddenly found themselves sporting the archaic, yet all too familiar three x's above their façades.

As time has shown before, familiarity breeds contempt, or perhaps that should be - *too much of a good thing breeds banality*. It took awhile, but soon the numbers began to dwindle. Some theatres tried new gimmicks to improve the regression in business, removing the seats from the auditorium to allow viewers the freedom to move around the show; instead of soda and popcorn they served alcohol and cigars, the smoke even helping to improve the quality of the projected images.

That was all before Menal had perfected the GE device.

McTavish had once watched a holo-vid production of Hamlet and found it to be rather amusing when the ghost of Hamlet's father appeared to have more substance than that of the other characters. The reason for this being, they had completely covered the actor playing the ghost in white luminescent paint. So, whilst he was vibrantly visible to all the viewers, the other holo-characters remained somewhat transparent and ghostly in appearance.

Menal's invention, based on the RLP theory, was appropriately designated the name *Ghosting Extractor*, for that is exactly what it did. It totally removed the transparent rendering that had always been a major flaw in holo-vid projections. So well did the device work that one would swear you were now watching real flesh and blood performers.

Of course, even with the improved imagery, it didn't take long for people to realize that the holo-skins were no more than a glorified exhibition of one of the many uses of advancing technology. The novelty soon wore off, and those who wanted something of substance, real flesh and blood, went to those places that supplied it. At least there they might have the indulgence of reaction and, if lucky, interaction. Pretty soon Shakespeare and the seats were back.

McTavish, although he had made his fortune many times over with a string of holo-skins, decided that it was time to try something else, yet not too dissimilar. This revelation came to him during a projection of Macbeth. If sex had worked, then surely *violence* should be just as popular?

There were mainly two major obstacles that his holo-crew needed to overcome. Firstly, because of the three hundred and sixty degree filming technique used in holo-vids, it was necessary to find inventive ways to thoroughly conceal the wires, squibs and other devices that were used to create the gory scenes. The second problem was to prevent any of the splatter from falling onto the lenses. Although it was a simple effort to clean the clear plates placed in front of the lenses, the problem lay in the fact that once a lens was obscured, it no longer recorded any image. With no image recorded on one of the cameras, and the composite holo-image requiring feed from all units at all times, the overall picture would lose its integrity.

His second gambit paid off even better than the first. With time he became affectionately known by his U.K. fans as *The Glasgow Goremonger*, and by his admirers in the good old U.S. of A., he was, *Roger 'Goreman' McTavish*.

McTavish knew that Harold Mooney would refuse, especially after having to endure the Menal incident, to sign any agreement that required of him to disclose the nature of his newly designed special equipment. To this end he had had his lawyer draw up two contracts.

"Sorry about that, boyo," said McTavish hurriedly tearing one of the contracts down the centre and disposing of it in Doohan's waste paper bin. "Thought it worth the risk, you understand. It's the eternally restless businessman in me, you know. We'll never mention it again." He kissed his index finger and held it in the air. "You have my word on it." Mooney regained his composure and sat down again at the large boardroom table. Doohan frowned and was about to say something, but McTavish accentuated, "I gave him my word, Mike. Now, explain to mister Mooney the contents of the second one."

Michael Doohan placed his large open hand on top of the contract. "Harry...may I call you that?"

"Continue," said Mooney glaring coldly at the lawyer.

"We realize that the bulk of the monies will be used in setting up shop. To this end we have decided to grant you an initial two thirds of the requested amount. You must understand that we first need to ensure that your work is progressing on schedule and according to our specifications. We shall therefore expect to see a full twenty four cap segment of no shorter than thirty seconds at the end of six months.

Whereupon, should we be satisfied with the work to date, you will receive the

balance of the monies requested. In such event, you will then be required to complete the entire project within the allotted period of three years commencing from the time of signing. Meaning that you will then have two and one half years or thirty months to bring the project to completion. Failing to do so will incur severe penalties as well as possible litigation that could lead to your internment in the event of your being unable to repay the loan. And, of course, interest will be taken into account when calculating the cost." Doohan paused before asking, "Are the terms of the agreement clear to you?"

"Crystal," said Mooney as he felt his twisted nerves relaxing. He leaned back in the chair smiling, "If that is the case, then how about adding a clause which states that I am to get monies in the form of a bonus should the project be completed ahead of schedule."

"Agreed!" blurted McTavish. "How would you like it to be worded?"

"Oh, something to the effect of a certain amount, but increasing by...say ten percent for every month ahead of schedule."

"Done!" McTavish looked over at the lawyer and nodded.

"I'll get it drawn and typed up right away. You could either come by tomorrow to sign or if time is not pressing, wait in the adjoining parlour. We have a rather excellent selection of Scotch whiskies."

"Procured at my request," said McTavish winking at Mooney. "Mike does a lot of legal...stuff for me. A necessity in my line of business."

"Perhaps," said Doohan, "Under the circumstances a bottle of bubbly might seem more appropriate. I just happen to have a couple on ice." Mooney and McTavish frowned at each other. "Lawyering is not just nasty stuff. On the odd occasion we help in matters that prove beneficial towards *both* parties involved."

"Excellent idea!" exclaimed McTavish.

"I'll have my secretary rinse a couple of flutes. I believe they may have gathered a little dust."

Forty five minutes later all the necessary documents had been signed, initialed and witnessed. "Oh, by the way," smiled Mooney just before stepping out of the room.

"Keep that second bottle on ice. If all goes according to plan, you'll have *ten* minutes in *two* months and the completed project in *six*."

McTavish and Doohan stared at each other for awhile before McTavish placed his hand on Doohan's shoulder and said, "Mikey, I believe I'll be having that whisky now."

When Harold Mooney was a youngster, his cousin James had claimed that he could sometimes see what he believed to be ghosts. These apparitions were never disturbing or threatening, and were not only of people, but also of moving as well as stationary objects. Mooney and James had once planned to go to the old Palace Theatre to watch a Saturday matinee, only to find that the place had been demolished to make way for a new shopping centre. He had laughed disbelievingly when his cousin told him that he could still see the old Palace standing proud and untouched - only the image seemed somewhat transparent. James' parents later discovered that he had an unusual color-blindness condition. It was only later when Mooney found that his dog would, for no apparent reason, bark at the empty mantelpiece above the fireplace that he began to put the pieces together. He recalled what his father had told him one night as they sat on the front steps staring up at the starlit sky.

"Many of the stars we are looking at tonight might not even exist anymore. They are so far from us that their light has taken years, ages, to reach us. Even our own sun is so far away that if it were possible to turn it off like you would a normal light bulb, we here on earth would only know of it about eight minutes later."

It was that very same statement that had nudged his curiosity and interest in studying further the nature of that most puzzling form of energy.

He had later surmised that it was possible that, when light strikes an object and reflects, the energy is of such an intense nature that it causes an almost infinite internal refraction that is invisible to the human eye. This 'slowing down' of the light could be likened to retarding the flow of water from a large funnel by causing the water to swirl around the inside of the cone-shaped device in maelstrom manner. If some animals, and people with a particular ocular 'abnormality' are able to perceive these latent images - would they not mistake them for ghosts or other forms of paranormal activity?

It was from these perceptions that he formulated his theory of *Refractive Light Pulses*, but it was Menal who proved the theory correct when he developed the Ghosting Extractor.

In truth, Menal had done him a great service. Not only had he proven beyond a shadow of doubt that Mooney's assumptions had been correct, but the GE device had focused the use of RLP onto the entertainment industry. If there were others who wished to produce technology based on this newly discovered phenomenon, they would hopefully also seek a similar path. Yes, Mooney too was using it for the purpose of amusement, but only because it was a means to make a lot of money whilst keeping the true nature of his invention safe from those who would surely abuse the power of this newfound technology. He always breathed a sigh of relief knowing that it was impossible to record events that were yet to happen. The future literally appeared dark. His recorders and monitors showed only an empty blackness. The light that he recorded, that produced his images had not yet reached the future - only the past was illuminated. Only the past was trapped like a latent image waiting to be developed into a crystal clear picture by his newly designed equipment.

His device worked on the principle of separating the retarded light waves of the RLP, removing any unwanted 'noise' - something similar to a polarizing filter, but far more sophisticated and precise.

Mooney used some of the finance that McTavish had provided to hire a warehouse and set up his bogus animation studio. He hired a number of people and gave them some mundane tasks to keep them busy. It was necessary to provide a front that the studio was hard at work producing a high quality animated feature. Using the bulk of the monies he purchased twenty six high definition holo-vid recorders. He only needed twenty four, but thought it best to buy an extra two in case of unforeseen breakages. Then he started making plans for his return trip to Israel.

It took a little longer than he had anticipated, but in twelve weeks, he had the promised ten minutes in the proverbial can. It was actually the sound studio, that he had paid to add the sound-all-around audio tracks, that had taken the longest time. His own part, using the CG software that he had specifically developed for the purpose of rendering the images *less* lifelike, had moved along smoothly and rapidly. The eyes were always the greatest problem and took the most time and care. The eyes would certainly be a dead giveaway.

"Don't you think it best to view the completed footage at one of the holo-domes?"

asked Mooney concernedly as he and McTavish walked down the incline towards

the centre of the home holo-theater. "I thought the point of the whole exercise was to view it in twenty four?"

"Harry, let me tell you a little secret. I have had the greatest confidence in you from the very beginning. In fact, I had so much faith in your capabilities that I had my home theater converted to twenty four just for this very occasion."

"Really?" asked Mooney jerking to a halt.

"Really!"

"I don't know what to say. That is most flattering. Must have cost a fortune?"

"I guess I must be the only bugger with a privately owned twenty four, but I have a feeling it's going to be worth every cent."

The attackers were now advancing with spears. No amount of strength or agility could dodge those missiles indefinitely. An instant before the deadly shafts were launched, the huge figure grabbed at one of the fallen aggressors and effortlessly raised him, using the corpse as a human shield. Again and again they flung their weapons at the giant until the man he held appeared to be some sort of macabre porcupine creature.

Both Mooney and McTavish smiled to themselves in triumph as the people sitting at the very front of the auditorium ducked beneath the *realistically rendered* protruding spears that passed over their heads as the enormous figure spun around to face even more attackers that were approaching from his unprotected rear. The figure roared in defiance before vanishing.

There was a silence in the auditorium as the lights slowly waxed bright. A silence called *Overwhelmed*. This was shortly followed by clapping and shouts of 'Author! Author!' from McTavish. The appropriateness of the exclamation did not escape the small audience as they began to echo the praise. Mooney felt a tear well and dabbed at it before it could streak his already glowing face.

McTavish had invited everyone up to the large wide patio balcony, that currently overlooked onto a gleaming moonlit ocean, for cheese and wine.

Mooney was being bombarded with compliments by all present.

"What a show," said Doohan. "I'm going to need a really stiff one to settle my stomach before trying to eat anything. Not really my cup of tea all that blood and guts."

“Ah, go tell it to the fishes!” exclaimed McTavish. “You loved every minute of it you bloodsucking vampire!”

They were still laughing when Brad Finch approached, a large glass of dark red in hand. “The grass and hair look a little...hokey in places, but it’ll do. You’ve done an amazing job with the eyes. They look almost real. Almost, but I guess that is something all animators have a problem with. Trust me, I of all people should know. Still, considering everything I’ve heard, you’ve managed to do an amazing job in a very short space of time.”

“Thank you very much,” beamed Mooney happy that his subtle rendering had been enough to convince this audience of...experts. “I think I can improve the grass and hair, if only slightly. Given time I’m pretty sure I...”

“The grass and hair’s just fine, Harry!” interrupted McTavish. “Ignore the bastard, he’s just jealous. Just the reaction I was hoping for! Ha! Ha! You’ve done a fine, fine job with it, boyo. A mighty fine job. Better than I ever expected. I’m proud of you! What say you we go out and celebrate? Get drunk?”

“Yeah, I think I need to unwind a little.”

“That’s the spirit. I’ll get Randy to drive us!”

“Randy?”

“Randolph, my new English chauffeur. Sassenach scum! Let’s make sure we give him a hard time. Ha! Ha!”

McTavish waited until the waitress had placed fresh drinks in front of them and cleared away the empties before he asked, “Have you thought of a title for your holo-vid yet?”

Mooney was pleased to have McTavish refer to the production as *your holo-vid*.

“*The Battle of Ramath-Lehi!* Ramath-Lehi is the name of the hillock where the battle takes place.

“I like it!” exclaimed McTavish. “Has a nice ring to it, catchy. We need something like that, especially since we don’t have much in the line of a story; just some crazed bastard protecting himself from a hoard of even more crazies. But for some perverted reason it seems to work.” They both laughed. “So tell me, does he get it in the end? I’m guessing that’s the way to go. It’ll seem more realistic, more...convincing that way.”

“Fraid not, Roger!” said Mooney before taking a long swig at his drink. “He endures!”

“Do you think that is wise?”

“Oh, yeah!” he took another draft before turning to stare intently at McTavish. He slowly lifted his arms into the air. “Wait till you see the final scene. Picture it. The victor stands alone, arms raised into the air in triumph as he shouts his defiance. There is no one to hear the shout; no one except the audience themselves in the holodome. And that is what will make the moment...the ending...so sublime it will bring tears to your eyes.” McTavish felt the hairs on his arms prickling erect. “You certainly have a way with words, boyo. You’ve convinced me, alright.” Mooney raised his glass towards McTavish, acknowledging and accepting the praise. “What do you expect the final bodycount to be?”

Mooney pursed his lips and then casually said, “Oh, around one thousand.”

McTavish choked on his drink. “*One thousand!* Good Lord above! That’s a lot, boyo! Won’t it become sort of monotonous after awhile?”

“Oh, I think I can find a way of adding some interesting variety to the...carnage.”

“You’re truly amazing. What’s the name of that hill again?”

“Ramath-Lehi.”

“Ramath-Lehi? However did you think of it?”

“Oh, Ramath-Lehi really exists. Today its exact location is unknown,” he unblinkingly lied. “But it is believed to be in the area of Wadi al-Sara about fifteen miles west of Jerusalem. Roughly translated it means, ‘The High Place of the Jawbone.’”

“Jawbone?”

“Yep, I thought you would have noticed, that crazy bastard being attacked was using the jawbone of an ass to defend himself.”

“That’s...pretty weird inventiveness, Mooney. You got one hell of an imagination in that beautiful brain of yours.”

“Not really, Roger,” Mooney smiled as the alcohol coaxed him towards a state of blissful mellowness. Then he slurred, “You need to get to church more often.”

“Church? What’s in that jungle juice of yours? *Church?*”

“Sure, when I’m done with this project we’re gonna do something quite different. Something really big! *Biblical proportions!*”

“What you got planned boyo,” asked McTavish wide-eyed.

“We’re gonna remake ‘The Ten Commandments!’”

Book Reviews Ian and Gail Jamieson

Lauren Beukes *Afterland*



Over the past year or so I have read quite a few post apocalyptic novels, and Lauren Beukes has written and published another one. Her variation is that most of the male population of the planet are dead. They have been killed off by a virus which causes prostatic cancer and leads to painful death. One of the very few survivors is Miles, 12-year old son of South African born Cole, but they are stranded in America.

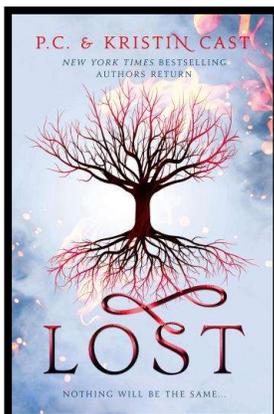
Cole is determined to get back to Johannesburg. Miles is a very hot commodity in a world of women, and various factions want to find and seize him for themselves. Cole does not realise it at first but her biggest threat is from her own sister, whom she believes is dead. In her journey across America to reach the coast and find a ship to take them to South Africa, Cole is threatened by the Department of Men, who want to capture her son and quarantine him, and a strange sinister cult of Neon nuns, who want him for their own purposes.

Cole's sister Billie has her own reasons for wanting to capture Miles, who is disguised as girl and called Mila, and she, Billie get involved with some very unsavoury characters.

By a bit of luck and sheer determination, Cole eventually succeeds in finding a ship. Beukes is an interesting and entertaining writer, but this time there is nothing particularly new in her story and the ending of the book is rather poor. One wonders, if for the first time in her novels, Beukes may be considering a sequel

3/5 Ian

P.C and Kirsten Cast Lost

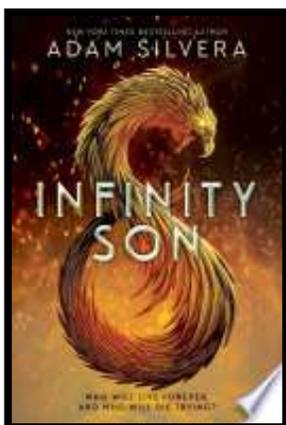


Zoey has closed the tear between worlds. But the Other, Kevin, has returned. However he unexpectedly finds some new friends and discovers, like his sister, he can use Old Magick. What he does not realise is the dangers it may hold. Can he find a mentor to help him avoid embracing the Darkness, and can Zoey help her little brother?

A new school year has begun, and the exchange student program with Public schools has taken off well, but Zoey has become withdrawn and moody. Her friends, Stevie Ray, and the others of the Nerd Herd believe she needs a holiday to bring her back to normal. They are wrong. Nowhere is it mentioned, but this book is for teenage girls and although it is well written, I cannot judge it.

Ian

Adam Silvera Infinity Son



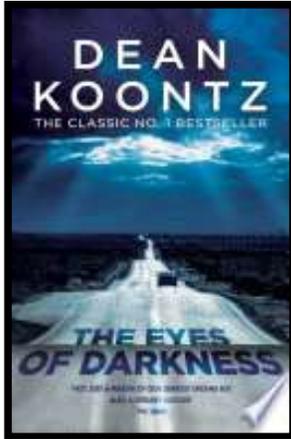
A war, centuries in the making: Twin brothers, Emil and Brighton, are caught up in the middle of it. The Celestials including the Spell Walkers, are born with special powers, but those powers are slowly being stolen away by the Specters, who are stealing the essence of endangered creatures. Brighton wishes he had a power so that he could stop the war and help the Spell Walkers. Emil wishes that fighting would stop. But the people with

powers are caught in a vicious cycle of violence, from which there seems no end. But then Emil is caught up in a fight, and picks up a special talent of his own. This is a book supposedly for teenagers, but it appears more appropriate for preteens.

Poorly written and juvenile.

2/5 Ian

Dean Koontz The Eyes of Darkness



This book, originally published in 1981, under the pseudonym Leigh Nichols, takes us on a nightmare ride along with Tina Evans. She is just starting to get her life together after the death of her son Danny, along with his entire Scout troop. A new Vegas show that she is producing is about to have its premier. But when she goes into Danny's room there is a message on a chalkboard. "NOT DEAD" She thinks that

someone may be playing cruel tricks on her and erases the message, but it reappears. And she slowly becomes convinced that the feeling that she has had that he cannot be dead may actually be true.

She sets out to try and find out the truth and uncovers a plot that involves some rather typical "nasty" scientists who are trying to discover the effects of a virus that only Danny can overcome, and which co-incidentally killed the remainder of his Scout troop. It also appears that Danny has been developing psychic powers which result in his being able to contact Tina

I think it is a bit unfortunate that the cover of the book says "Did this thriller predict the coronavirus outbreak?" The virus is called Wuhan 400 but it has a 100% death rate and is nothing like Corona.

It is a fast paced well written book but rather predictable of conspiracy based novels. And I think that Koontz became a better novelist as he continued to write his later books.

Everything comes together rather too predictably in the end, but it is a book that you want to complete once you have started reading.

Gail

The Tipping Point Daphne Olivier

10 May 2035

My name is Sam Pretorius. I'm thirteen years old and yesterday was my birthday. I was hoping to get a skate-board for a present but when I opened the parcel, all I found was this big book full of empty pages. Pa said it's a journal. Ma said it's for recording everything that happens. I said, "thank you," even though I was disappointed about not getting the skate-board.

Now here I am, staring at an empty page, wondering what to write. Nothing much ever happens in this place. We get up in the morning. Pa goes to work in the lab. Ma goes to yoga and book club. I go to school. Nighttime, we watch TV. Ma lets me watch Galaxy Kidz, but when Pa comes home, he switches to the news. Then all we see is one disaster after another — a typhoon in India, volcano in Japan, flood in China, drought in Australia. A snowstorm in America. I'm glad we don't live in those places. All we get here is earth tremors. Pa says that's because Johannesburg is built on top of a big, old goldmine.

10 June 2035

Four weeks have gone by since I wrote in this journal. Pa says that's okay. He says a journal is not a logbook that needs to be written up every day. A journal should only record events worth recording. Like the hailstorm that covered the city with ice yesterday. And the flood that swept bridges away last week. And the tornado that ripped roofs off the week before that. Pa says it's all caused by global warming. I asked what that meant, and was sorry I did because he went on and *on* — about greenhouse gas and deforestation and fossil fuels and rising sea levels and overpopulation and the ozone layer and what will happen if people don't stop polluting the environment. What he said then was real scary so I was glad when Ma called us for supper.

30 November 2035

We got out of school early today because of the sandstorm. The day began nice and sunny but all of a sudden a big wind started up. A tree crashed down. Next thing, the sky got dark but instead of rain, sand came down. It covered everything — roofs, trees, grass and cars. Some got up my nose and made me sneeze. Pa said the sand came from farms hundreds, maybe thousands of miles away, farms that were once green and fertile but are now deserts.

"What happened?" I asked.

Pa pulled up a chair so I knew I was in for a long lecture. Sure enough, he told me about soil pollution, mono-crops, deforestation, genetically modified organisms, intensive crop farming, pesticides and fertilizers, over-grazing and the terrible effect all this had on the soil.

"If it's so terrible, why do farmers do it?" I asked.

Pa sighed. "Because businessmen and big agro-chemical corporations have led them to believe that is the only way to make a profit. It's not true but by the time the farmer realizes that, it's too late. Water sources dry up and the land turns to desert.

6 February 2036

Pa was away five days last week. Ma said he went to Switzerland to attend a conference and talk about climate change. She showed me a newspaper, and there was a photo of Pa. The caption said: *Renown environmentalist, Dr. Rueben Pretorius, warns of crop failures due to global warming.*

Pa came home in a real bad mood. He poured himself a whiskey then stamped up and down, shouting, "The bloody fools won't listen. The politicians have been warned, time and time again. Big business too, but all they care about is profits." He said a lot more, about carbon levels and plastic pollution and polar bears starving because of melting ice. And what will happen when the world runs out of food.

After a while, Ma said, "Calm down, Rueben, shouting won't help."

That made Pa even more mad. I didn't understand half of what he was yelling but the bit I did understand was so awful it was hard to believe it could be true.

10 August 2036

Pa has been away a lot these last six months, attending conferences and talking

about rising levels of carbon dioxide and what will happen if people don't stop using fossil fuels. He comes and goes, sometimes to London, sometimes to New York, sometimes to places I've never heard of.

He also spends time on the farm. I don't know where it is or what he does there. It's a mystery because when I asked if there were cows and horses there, he just shook his head and said, "No Sam. It's not that kind of farm." Ma said I was to stop worrying Pa with my endless questions because he is very busy doing very important work.

When Pa is home, he spends most of the time in the lab or on his computer. I peeped over his shoulder once to see what he was doing but all I saw was graphs and equations and calculations of some kind. And a long list of numbers.

27 September 2036

The weather has been fine these last few weeks —warm, sunny days with spring in the air and everything lovely and green. Birds chirp, dogs bark, people go about their business, all so ordinary it's hard to believe the terrible things we see on TV are real. Like Arctic ice melting. Last night we watched great slabs of ice break from cliffs and plunge into the sea. Away they went, floating to goodness knows where. I felt sorry for the polar bears that disappeared with them, especially those with cubs. Pa sat taking notes, his face worried and grim.

The night before, we saw a mudslide in Brazil, an avalanche of mud and rock, sliding down a mountainside, wiping out thousands of villagers as it made its way down to the sea. The day before that, we watched a fire destroy huge chunks of the Amazon rain-forest. And a volcano shooting lava high into the sky. A few days before that, a documentary showed doctors battling to contain an outbreak of Ebola in Uganda. Then a fire in Australia, with whole cities going up in flames. Even more chilling was the sight dead fish floating on a sea of plastic that stretched every which way as far as we could see. A few weeks before that, a camera showed wheat fields in Russia shrivelled from drought, then zoomed in on people dropping dead as they stood in long lines, queuing for food.

But those are catastrophes that happen in faraway places. Not here. Not in South Africa where everything is so peaceful and calm. That's what I told myself and that's what I believed. Until this morning. And then... and then, when Pa turned on the TV,

there was Table Mountain, looking just as it did in the photo I took when we were in Cape Town last year. Only now the city below the flat-topped peak was gone. In its place was a sheet of water dotted with debris —cars, trees, billboards and other rubble.

Ma gasped. "Oh, my God, what happened?"

"Tsunami," Pa said. "It doesn't surprise me. Not at all. With rising sea levels and underwater seismic activity, something like this was bound to happen. It was just a matter of where and when."

"A whole city wiped out. Unbelievable!" Ma pressed a hand to her mouth. "Oh, those poor, poor people! They didn't stand a chance."

"This is just the start," Pa said. "Things are about to get worse."

"Worse? God, Rueben, how much worse can it get?"

"A lot. A tsunami doesn't just hit one city. The shoreline for miles around will be flooded. Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth... and countless villages in between. It won't stop there. This is the tipping point. According to my calculations, all hell is about to break loose."

Ma's eyes opened wide. "Not here. You surely don't mean here? This is the Highveld. No tsunami can reach us here."

Pa sighed. "I'm not talking about a tsunami, Anna. I'm talking about a disaster on a scale never seen before. A global catastrophe environmentalists like me have been warning about for years. Humans have abused this planet too long. Now we must reap the consequences — storms, droughts, earthquakes, fires, starvation, floods, disease — everything we've seen on TV only a whole lot worse. No one will escape, no matter where they live."

Pa's words sent a shiver up my spine. "Does that mean we're all going to die?"

He reached out and gave my shoulder a squeeze. "Not everyone. Many will, I'm afraid. That's a sad, inescapable fact. But I saw this coming a long time ago and made a plan that will help us survive."

"A plan? What kind of a plan?"

"This is no time for questions. Do as I say. Go pack a bag and meet Ma and me at the car."

I stared open-mouthed, too confused to move. "The car? We're going someplace?"

"Do as I say, Sam," Pa repeated, his voice unusually harsh. "And hurry. The sooner we hit the road the better."

"Wait!" Ma cut in. "Please, Rueben, *please*. I know we've discussed this... this plan... more times than I can count, but let's not rush things. What if you're wrong? What if things calm down? Why not wait a while and see?"

Pa clicked his tongue in a show of impatience. "Do you think I'd leave all this if I wasn't sure? I've gone over the stats and checked the figures again and again. Figures don't lie. Time's running out. If we don't go soon, we may not get away at all."

An hour later, we were on our way.

28 September 2036

The journey to reach what Ma calls, "This Godforsaken place," is a blur. Pa drove nonstop over roads jam-packed with traffic, some going this way, some that, all travelling bumper to bumper at breakneck speed. Ma sat beside him, pale and tearful, a hand covering her eyes. I gazed out as trees, houses and villages whizzed past. Somewhere along the way I must have dozed off because next thing I knew Pa was shaking my shoulder to say we'd arrived.

And now here we are. In a cave. In the middle of nowhere.

That's not quite true. The Kalahari is not nowhere. According to Pa, it's a semi-desert, so big it covers much of Botswana as well as parts of Namibia and South Africa. The farm we're on is near the centre, as far from civilisation as we can get. That's one reason Pa bought this wild stretch of land. The other is the cave. It may not be much to look at — just a hole in the side of a hill — but the moment he saw it, Pa knew he'd found the best possible place to ride out the storm that is about to rock the world. That's what he said. Ma said she hopes the storm will blow over soon so we can go back home.

29 September 2036

Pa led the way through a narrow entrance into a big, dark cave. As we came to a halt, Ma let out a scream. "Look!" she said, pointing to the roof above our heads. "Bats — oh, my God, thousands of them! Rueben... you surely... you surely don't expect me to live in this... this hole with those ghastly creatures?"

Pa put out a hand to steady her. "Relax, Anna, relax. Take it easy. They're harmless. If we leave them alone they won't bother us. Come now, pull yourself together. This is what we decided, remember? The cave may not be five-star but it's got what we need — shelter and a pool of good, clean water. I've added a bit more to make our stay comfortable. Take a look..." He swung his flashlight to show a table, a few scattered chairs and three camp-style beds. The beam flickered against a wall then settled on a TV screen.

Ma gasped. "A TV? Is that real? Or am I seeing things?"

Pa chuckled. "I thought that would surprise you."

"Will it work, here, so far from everywhere?"

"Sure it will," Pa assured her. "It's powered by solar panels. So, unless it rains, we'll be able to watch the news and keep track of what's going on in the world. But wait, there's more. Come. This way, follow me."

He led the way along a passage to a second, smaller cave. There, his flashlight played over an enormous stockpile of goods —tinned food, bins of maize, beans, rice and flour. Medical supplies. Coils of wire. An assortment of tools. Candles, lanterns and fire-lighting flints. And, in a far corner, propped up against the wall, a large, plastic-lined box.

"What's in there?" Ma asked curiously.

"A drone," Pa told her. "A top-of-the-range model, fitted with a high-quality camera. When the time's right, we'll send it up. That way we'll get to see what's going on outside without leaving the cave."

14 October 2036

Two weeks have gone by since we left Johannesburg. Under different circumstances, I may have enjoyed camping in a cave but this is no boy-scout adventure. This is for real and it isn't anywhere near as much fun as a camping trip. Ma is finding it very hard to adjust to this new way of life. She complains of a headache and spends much of the time crying. At times, she appears confused. Yesterday she refused to eat and kept saying, over and over again, that she wants to go home.

Pa is worried but any thoughts he may have had about going home were shattered when he turned on the TV this morning. Because the scene that flashed on the

screen wasn't a catastrophe taking place in some faraway place. This time, the devastation we saw was an earthquake in Johannesburg.

We watched in horror as a camera panned over a scene so awful I could barely watch. I didn't actually see the house we'd lived in disappear, but the damage was so great it could hardly have escaped.

"Dear God!" Ma called out, her eyes wide with shock. "Those buildings and... and all those people. Friends, neighbours, people we loved. Gone, gone... all gone."

15 October 2036

When Pa and I woke up this morning, Ma was not in her bed. We found her lying cold and lifeless, a few meters from the cave. We buried her under a tall camel-thorn tree. Pa placed a bunch of wild flowers on her grave.

21 October 2037

Twelve months have gone by since I wrote in this journal. Every day, Pa turns on the TV to watch the news. We sit, side by side, watching as one catastrophe after another unfolds before our eyes — floods, wildfires, volcanoes, freezing temperatures and devastating droughts. Pa calls it the domino effect. An upheaval in one part of the world, triggers another someplace else.

With so many disasters and so much chaos, it was hard to believe things could get worse. But they did. Pa was right about that, too. The real horror began when survivors ran out of food. And, in some places, water. First came rioting, then looting. Police fired teargas, then rubber bullets, then real bullets, but nothing stopped the starving crowds. When shops emptied, people turned on each other, killing anyone suspected of hoarding food.

I'm glad Ma is not here to see such horrors.

When it seemed things were as bad as they could get, a deadly plague broke out. Without doctors or medical supplies, it leapt from city to city, then country to country with lightening speed. We watched long lines of trucks dump bodies into mass graves.

The next day when Pa turned on the TV, no pictures came. No matter which buttons he pressed or what knobs he turned, all we got was a blank screen. And silence.

15 July 2041

Time goes by, week after week, month after month, year after year, one day much the same as the other. Pa and I get up at sunrise and go out to collect firewood and tend our traps. On a good day, we might go home with a hare or small antelope. Or warthog. Now and then, a bat-eared fox. On a bad day, nothing but rats or field mice. Every day, without fail, Pa turns on the TV. He switches from one channel to another, hoping against hope that someone, somewhere, may transmit a message. Nothing comes. Not so much as a squeak.

17 October 2046

At last! Ten years, one month and seventeen days after we moved into this cave, Pa has given in to my begging and pleading to send up the drone. It's set to fly at dawn tomorrow. I can hardly wait.

18 October 2046

As the photos came in, Pa and I sat side by side, eyes fixed on the TV screen. Little by little, Kalahari landscape gave way to grassy plains. Then farmland. I leaned closer hoping to see some sign of life, but all I saw was an abandoned tractor and a rooftop surrounded by barren fields.

A town came into view and we glimpsed cars, shop-lined streets, an airfield and a church with a tall bell-tower. Nothing moved. Next came valleys, mountains, a river, more farmlands, another town, then the ruins of an abandoned city.

The scene changed to bush veld. And there, rising from among the trees, was a plume of smoke.

"Smoke!" I yelled. "There are people down there. Look — that's smoke. That's smoke!"

"Or mist from a waterhole," Pa said.

We didn't get to find out who was right because that's when the drone ran out of power. As we watched, it stalled then spiralled down into the trees.

19 October 2046

The question whether we'd seen smoke or mist kept us up arguing till late last night.

"It may have been smoke," Pa conceded. "People who fled cities during the upheaval may have escaped the plague and made a new life in the bush. It's possible. On the other hand, it could just as easily have been mist. Now that the drone has crashed, we'll never know."

"Unless we go look," I said.

He raised an eyebrow. "Is that what you want to do? Go look?"

I nodded. "Yes. We need to know if there are other people out there. Other survivors. We can't spend the rest of our lives here, not knowing. It'll drive us crazy."

Pa gazed into the fire a long while without answering then, with a sigh, straightened up. "I knew the day would come when you'd want to go. It'll be dangerous, but you know that. You're not a boy any more. You must make up your own mind and do whatever you want to do. But don't be hasty. Sleep on it and give it some thought."

"I don't need to think it over. I've decided. I want to go."

Dad sighed. "That's it then. You must go. It's your right."

"What about you?" I asked. "Will you come?"

He shook his head. "I'm too old. I'd slow you down. But I'm comfortable here. I've got everything I need."

21 October 2046

I leave tomorrow at dawn. My knapsack is packed, ready and waiting. Inside is a compass, map, flint, wire snare, hunting knife, flask of water and as much food as I can carry. When day breaks, I'll say goodbye and turn my back on the cave that has been my home for so many years.

A long, lonely road lies ahead. There's no knowing what dangers lie waiting or what I may find. All I know for sure is that when I go, I'll head east and follow the trail of photos sent down by the drone. Heaven knows I've viewed them often enough to find the way.

Hope will keep me going. Hope that I'm not alone. Hope that somewhere in this vast country that was once home to millions, I'll find others who escaped the apocalypse. Hope that before my journey ends, I'll find a plume of smoke — not mist — rising from bush veld trees.

Galaxies (from a Google search)



