

# Lacerta Imperator Universum

## **Chapter One:**

It was August, I think, or maybe October, when the leaves were turning brown, nights were drawing in, and I was waking up every day with a double glass of scotch. I once heard someone say the best hangover cure was to never *stop* drinking. It really works. Once you get in the rhythm of it your days tend to run into one another, and you can't really tell the day lit waking world from the restless drunken dreaming. Blissful chemical dependency, like a little harpy perched on your shoulder telling you everything is going to be fine, as long as you have *one more drink*.

Don't get me wrong, I was never an alcoholic. I've could have stopped at any time. There just wasn't any compelling reason to stop. The work had all but dried up in recent years, apparently no more dames with troubles in this town. Ever since Mayor Portman took office and the first new residential annexes started opening across the river, Trubank was slowly becoming a ghost town. There were less people left to complain about crime. Which is great and all, but it does render it considerably more difficult to make a living in the private investigation business.

Alcohol and cheese, my two great vices. You could take everything else from me, but as long as I had alcohol and cheese, maybe a newspaper, then I would be a happy man. I didn't actually give a crap about the news stories themselves – all the papers were biased towards pontificating or vomiting – what I loved were the comic strips. Four panels of pure daily joy. It was worth the fifty cents I paid for the Trubank Chronicle for a new episode of Count Boney. Boy is he one funny skeleton-slash-vampire.

I was living on Hypatia Boulevard, named after a great Greek mathematician and philosopher, or so I was told by the story in the Chronicle. Formally, Weston Street, they renamed it to a boulevard to try and class it up a bit after the food riots twelve years back, but as the saying goes, a turd by any other name smells as sweet. I think that's what they say, whoever *they* are.

Half the buildings on Hypatia Boulevard were naught but derelict shells since long before the riots. Most of the ones that were still occupied probably shouldn't have been back when there were still enforced regulations about these things. They abandoned their renovation plans for this part of Trubank when they started building the new town Corbank across the river. So Hypatia Boulevard became, like the rest of Trubank, a home for the less privileged members of society. They wouldn't let the rabble like us do business in Corbank, lest our presence devalue their rigidly curved glassy architecture and meticulously geometric landscaping...

My own apartment though was in reasonable condition, so I couldn't really complain. It was in one of the better buildings in the subdivision, although this is not saying much. It was three stories above an old music store selling unfashionable music – from circus metal-revivalists Archbaroness to post-technojazz pioneers Zvm – on all kinds of obsolete and therefore ultra-chic formats. Strictly for those obsessed by the novelty of music as physical product – vinyl in particular. This was where I had picked up my signed copy of Tallrock's limited edition eight-side Trauma boxed set, the one with the secret inlay cards and the bonus seven inch collaboration with Omar Khan from Slow/Fast Time Traveller. Quite a find for an old jazzier like me.

There was always a small gathering of beret wearing beatnik poseurs standing around outside the store discussing their idealistic opposition to capitalist society, and discussing how crap music was these days, each of them sipping cups of Otakerr's Mocha-frappa-lata-chino from their fingerless gloved hands. Every day I left the building I passed the rabble, receiving some very disapproving looks. Not very approving of the private businessman, apparently.

Every Tuesday morning I was woken by the Christian Revelation Movement<sup>1</sup> folks marching past, bashing their drums and blowing their horns, signalling their utter contempt for the filthy sinners all around them soon to answer to Jesus for all their evil deeds and lack of faith. I usually kept a box of eggs in my fridge for this event. I made a little game out of it. 20 points for a bandleader, 10 points if I got one directly into a Tuba, 5 for a drummer, 2 points for everyone else. I always felt sorry for these poor guys, waiting for the apocalypse to come...

It was a Tuesday in November, or possibly September – it doesn't really matter – and I had scored a solid 18 points in my late-morning game of Egg That Christian, with a six-pack of premium free range. I celebrated my impressive score with a second glass of Glenhoddick's finest Scotch before heading out to Saul's Cheese and Wine Bar for a lunchtime drink.

So I like a drink from time to time, what's it to you?

As I was descending a staircase, fully dressed in my beige trench coat and fedora, I passed a strange individual I did not recognise travelling in the opposite direction. Every step I took downwards, he took upwards. For a brief second our eyes met, and in this tiny moment I was filled with a feeling of intense dread, as though the man was about to shoot me in the belly. This moment lasted longer than any moment ought to. Our perception of time is a very fluid thing.

Next thing I remember, I reached the bottom of the stairs and exited the building unharmed. I paused for a much more realistic moment, to contemplate and ponder.

Strange as this occurrence seemed, 'twas nothing a quick drink wouldn't fix. So with haste I hurried quickly to Saul's down by the long abandoned St. Eustachian's railway station. Nobody used the trains out here anymore. The roads were pretty quiet too.

Finally I reached my destination and pushed open the doors, letting the warmly familiar stench wash over me, caressing my senses and soothing my soul. The pungent miasma that permutated the Cheese and Wine Emporium was a symphony of flavours, and the only thing left in this world that could still tantalise my long-abused senses.

There were a few regulars in this lunchtime. Earl and Conner sat on their usual stools over by the bar enjoying a midweek Roquefort and Merlot, as is their wont. Former

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<sup>1</sup> The CRM felt extremely short-changed by the continued lack of respect for their almighty God in these supposed end-times. Fortunately, very few politicians wanted to be associated with their radical and so their real-world power was limited by their media exposure. This did not prevent the group from being specifically named in a number of controversies across the Unified States.

Professor Artie Doyle sat in the corner quite content, reading some obscure dust-caked moth-eaten occult text or other, puffing on his pipe. There were two or three others, but I don't recall in great detail who, and quite frankly it's probably not that important.

The establishment's proprietor Saul Leibniz was behind the bar as usual, perched on his own luxurious stool, reading the day's papers and sipping a glass of Muscat. Unlike myself, Saul generally did read the articles in the higher-quality publications, especially those regarding the arts. Saul was the progeny of a proud traditional Jewish family of well-educated wine collectors<sup>1</sup>, and as such only drank red in the evenings, or all day on the High Holidays.

His establishment was a classy joint, antique wooden fixtures with careful detailing, many abstract art pieces hung on the walls, one piece of particular note behind the bar that looked like an eyeball set deep inside a giant purple vagina. I am no expert in the field, but seeing as I don't really understand it, this was clearly a piece of some importance in the art world.

I walked across the deeply tasteful maroon carpet towards the Bar, where I observed that my own preferred stool was currently occupied by a young individual who seemed to be eating slices of Red Leicester with a fork. The cheek – A commoner occupying my throne, sullyng its good reputation with his peasant's cheese! I looked at the stool to the right of the usurper, but this one had no cushion for my bony little behind to rest upon.

"Afternoon, Solly," I said.

"Peter," he greeted me, without raising his eyes from his copy of the Trubank Standard.

I turned to the man on my left. "I'm sorry to bother you sir, but you appear to be sitting on my stool."

He finished chewing and swallowed his layman's cheese before replying, "there are plenty of unoccupied seats."

"Yes, and of all of them, you have taken mine."

Saul perked up a little, "I'm afraid my dear friend here has a preferred stool on account of his sensitive posterior. If you'd be so kind as to switch..."

The man paused for a few seconds. The tension was palpable. Would he vacate my throne and return it to its rightful occupier?

"I didn't realise, my apologies," he said, standing up and pushing his cheese plate in front of the unoccupied stool.

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<sup>1</sup> Saul's Grandfather David Leibniz was well known as a flamboyant art critic and author of best-selling wine guide *Blood of the Grape*. He died from alcohol poisoning at the ripe old age of 108. It was his son Saul, present Saul's uncle, who originally opened the Cheese and Wine Emporium here in Trubank.

“Thank you kindly,” I replied. I stepped upon my old trusty steed, and at once the comfort of the soft cushion eased all my troubles. Not that I had too many at this point. Besides money, that is.

The man took the other stool, sat down, and continued to enjoy his Red Leicester, hastily and amateurishly. It was a relief to return to my stool, but this booby’s uneducated manner of consumption greatly offended my seasoned sensibilities.

“What’ll it be Peter?” Saul asked.

“I’ll take a Norway Blue, and a glass of Barbera. Whatever you’ve got plenty of.”

Saul put down his paper and glass, and stepped through the doorway leading to a back room. I turned to the man next to me, opening with the usual pleasantries, “Hello, I’m Peter.”

He turned towards me and smiled, “Laurence. Laurence DeBrau.”

Laurence... It suited him. He had the look of the upper class, in his slick European suit and shoulder length black hair, his Vincent Price pencil moustache exuding an air of flamboyant, but still manly charm. Despite his appearance, he ate common cheese, either an ironic gesture, or a sure sign of a poseur out of his depth.

“I haven’t seen you around before,” I said.

“I just got into town a few days ago.”

“Ah, where from?”

“New Saint Helena,” he replied, in the original French pronunciation.

“Are they big on Leicester down there?” I asked with mild hostility.

“No, not especially.”

There was an uncomfortable silence. We had no reason to continue the conversation, and we both knew it. We heard footsteps from the back room, as Saul returned with a bottle and a plate of Blue. He placed the cheese down in front of me. “Thanking you,” I said.

“Let me just get a glass,” Saul replied as he wandered over to a row of clean empty glasses of varying shapes and sizes. He waved his hand slowly past a number of them, as if picturing in his mind which was the appropriate vessel for my wine, before settling on his choice. As a true connoisseur, Saul intuitively knew which glass went with which vintage. I don’t question Saul’s expertise, although personally, if I had to I’d drink out of a shoe.

Saul poured slowly the glass, careful to observe his practiced manner. Finally he placed the glass down in front of me.

About time I thought. But, “Thanks,” I said.

He returned to his stool to continue reading the paper.

I turned back to Laurence, and then, after an elongated pause lasting what felt like several days, I made the decision to enquire “So, what brings you into town?”

“I’m looking for my brother-in-law,” he said between mouthfuls of cheese.

Looking for his brother-in-law? Alarm bells rang in my skull. Perhaps we had some reason to continue the conversation after all – a reason which could quite conceivably help alleviate my cash flow worries. After all, what does a private investigator do, if not investigate.

So I turned to Laurence, “You don’t say? What happened to him?”

“He went missing?”

“What, here in Trubank?”

“We assume so. He was supposed to be on a business trip but he never called. My sister called his cell and left a bunch of messages, but he never called back. We called his boss the next day, but apparently he hadn’t returned to the hotel.”

“Intriguing,” I said, for ‘twas indeed quite intriguing. The story had all the hallmarks of a case; a dame, a missing husband, some guy with a moustache. Usually I get to meet the dame first and there’s undeniable sexual tension, but I guess you can’t have everything. “You know, I’m actually a private investigator by trade. I’ve been in this town my whole life.”

Laurence turned suddenly, “You’re a private eye?”

“Twelve years my good man.”

“Okay, let me call Cassie...” he said, pulling a reasonably new cell phone out of his jacket pocket.

“Cassie?” I asked.

“Cassandra, my sister. She’s in town too.”

Hot diggity damn, I thought, looks like I might get to meet the dame after all. I calmly suggested, “Yes, call her, we can meet in my office and see if I can’t lend my services, for a modest fee of course.”

I smiled, as Laurence selected Cassandra’s number from his phonebook and pressed the call button. I could just picture it, a fair French maiden, a solid case to work on... Yes, things were looking up for Peter Drysdale.

Laurence stood up from his stool, and wandered over to an unoccupied table for a semblance of privacy. I looked along the bar for a nearby cracker basket, and there was one in reach. I pulled it towards me, and lifted several assorted biscuits out to begin my cheesy lunch.

Several minutes passed, and I found it hard to enjoy my meal. I was constantly turning my head to see if Laurence had finished his call. Somehow he kept on talking. More minutes passed. I began to imagine the lovely Cassandra DeBrau, her long flowing golden hair framing a gentle and unassuming womanly face. Then I suddenly panicked and pictured her with a horrible disfigurement, I wondered if she might perhaps wear an eyepatch or have a huge burn across her face, before discarding the notion that the lady could be anything other than the most perfect picture of beauty on the Earth.

I was not wrong.

## **Chapter II:**

And there she was, pretty as a prayer book on Christmas day (what?), her long dark hair hanging in haphazard waves either side of a sad smile. She spoke with the most angelic voice I had ever heard.

“Mr. Drysdale?” she asked.

I stood there imagining her quietly whispering the spells of some long-dead verbose wordsmith, picturing the way each letter would tumble from her tongue, her lips caressing and teasing every syllable as they fell upon me like a field of ever-opening...

“Mr. Drysdale?” she asked again.

She squinted her eyes and cocked her head several degrees to the left. Even this tiny gesture was amplified into graceful and elegant ballet by my obsessed mind.

I shook my head to snap out of it. “Yes,” I finally answered, “call me Peter.” I extended my hand in friendship, and she took it. Her soft fingers... Well, you get the picture.

“Cassandra DeBrau,” she revealed. For a lengthy moment, I stood transfixed.

“Mr. Drysdale, you are still holding my hand.”

“Oh , my apologies,” I said, releasing her from my grasp. I immediately wondered whether I should have taken the opportunity to kiss her hand, or if that would have been unacceptable. It’s hard to know sometimes, and I’ve been slapped often enough to not want to risk it. “Your brother here has told me about your situation with your *husband*,” I told her.

Laurence, who was standing next to her looking slightly left out of the conversation, coughed and said “Peter is a private eye, we could use his help.”

Cassandra looked down at the ground for a moment, several locks of hair fell across her face. As she looked back up, she brushed them behind her ear. “Mr. Drysdale...”

“Just Peter,” I interrupted.

“Peter, I appreciate your offer, but we really don’t have a lot of money.”

“We will worry about that later, Ms DeBrau,” I suggested. “For now let’s go back to my office and we can discuss what I can do to help you.”

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My office was several buildings down from my apartment. I liked to keep the two separate for reasons that should be obvious. As my great mentor Gary Kurtzman used to tell me, “in this business, you should **never** take your work home with you.”<sup>1</sup> This was one of the less well kept buildings on Hypatia Bv. Most of the other apartments had long since been abandoned, and one on the top floor had somehow come to be occupied by a large number of bats.

I opened the door and we entered. I kept the office in fairly good condition, although my recent absence of nearly a month had settled some dust, and several large webs had been spun by foolish spiders, perhaps unaware of the flyscreen covering the open window. The DeBraus seemed rather unshaken by the condition of their surroundings.

“I apologise about the dust, I’ve spent some time out of town recently,” I lied.

I motioned them across to a set of couches covered with dustsheets, arranged around a coffee table. I pulled the sheets off the seats and tossed them aside. As I did, the scattered dust induced several coughs between the three of us.

“Excuse me,” I spluttered, “ I didn’t realise it was that bad...”

“Are you okay?” Laurence asked.

“Yes, it’s just, my allergies. I’ll be okay in a second.”

“Do you want a glass of water?”

“No, no, that’s fine. Sit, sit.”

I sat on one couch, the DeBraus sat down on the opposite side, of the coffee table. The scattered newspapers and magazines that covered it like a carpet gave the impression that I was up to date with current affairs. Unless one checked the dates and realised the youngest of these publications was seven years out of date. Cassandra smiled uncomfortably, her tense posture confirming it. Laurence, leaned back and eyed me with slight suspicion. Perhaps he had noticed the way I was looking at his sister.

I decided to break the tension the only way I knew how. “Would anyone like a drink?”

“No thanks,” said Laurence.

“Okay,” said Cassandra, much to Laurence’s surprise.

He turned and looked at the side of her head, asking “are you sure that’s appropriate Cass?”

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<sup>1</sup> As an aside, Kurtzman was a great hypocrite. He was well known for fraternising with female clients in his personal time. One day Kurtzman was about to step into the shower after a long day’s work, he pulled back the shower curtain, and his client’s husband jumped out and stabbed him in the chest with a breadknife fifteen times.

“I’m thirsty, what’s the big deal?” she asked.

I stood up and walked over a drinks cabinet on the wall by the window. The light from outside was blinding in contrast to the dingy darkness of the office. I opened the cabinet to reveal a rather limited choice. “What do you drink?”

“What is there?”

I lifted them bottle by bottle, joyfully clinking off one another as I read their labels. “I’ve got Scotch and, let me see... Hossman’s Discount Rum, some kind of Coconut-looking thing with no label... Wormwood Wine, Tequila...”

“I’m okay,” she interrupted.

“Sure,” I pulled out a small glass, and poured myself a small rum. “I do like a little drink to start off a meeting.”

Laurence interjected quite rudely, “If you are quite done, perhaps we should talk about my sister’s husband Michael?” His manner rather spoiled the mood I thought. I mean, sure we were getting distracted but, there was no need to be rude. He continued, “Haven’t you had enough to drink?”

Well, had Cassandra not have been present, this might have been the moment I popped my lid so to speak. You do not call a man an alcoholic in his own office, even if he is pouring himself the fourth drink of the day. I simply let his comment slide for the time being. “Okay, tell me about your husband,” I began, closing the drinks cabinet and carrying my drink back to the couch.

Unfortunately, I may have overestimated my own sobriety at this point, as several steps from the chair, there was a sudden flash of light disconnecting my brain from my body, and I found that I had lost all control of my major motor functions. For several seconds, my eyes swirled across the room in a panic, and as if trying to communicate my predicament to the DeBraun siblings, my lungs exhaled and I voiced a strange throaty groan.

Laurence voiced concern. “Are you okay?” he asked.

I tried to answer, but could not. After this point my perception of time rapidly moved out of phase with reality. Everything seemed to move more precisely, every moment accentuated and amplified tenfold. I could anticipate the eventual outcome of my trajectory, but was unable to do anything to prevent it. My glass slipped from my fingers to the hardwood floor, shattering in seeming slow motion, and in horror I observed myself gracefully drawing closer to, and then finally crashing through the wooden coffee table.

I heard the sound of wood snapping, as two of its legs buckled, and I felt the impact reverberate through my bones, accented by the sharp nervous response from the cracking of four of my ribs. My last thought before splitting open my skull and instantaneously losing consciousness was “shit, if I don’t die, this is really going to hurt.”

I was not wrong.

### **Chapter 3:**

I stood atop a spiral stair, a massive glassy spiral stair, leading some 40 feet from the ground up to a massive criss-crossing network of frosted glass walkways, stretching all across an empty baroque ballroom the size of a stadium with no apparent supporting structure. The room itself was lit by tiny flames from distant candles, bathing the air in an odd hovering light like glowing mist. My feet were bare, and the glass was cold against my skin. My eyes scanned the surroundings but could not see any end to the glass pathways, and yet, it felt enclosed – with actual physical boundaries. The further I looked, the further into darkness these paths receded. These intertwining skyways seemed to stretch on endlessly into space, slowly curving upwards, downwards, under and over one another in a bizarrely elegant mess, both alien and familiar.

What an odd contrivance, I thought to myself, although I verbalised more concisely this as "Nice..."

No sooner than I had spoken, an inexplicable panic struck me and I began to run, as though being followed. I dared not look behind me, I simply ran across the glass bridges towards some distant safe haven. Despite not covering anywhere near the apparent distance, I quickly reached a wall at the end of one walkway, with a tall wooden door. I pulled it open and stepped through. The door slammed behind me, and I found myself safely in a tiny loft space with old trinkets and luggage cases. I turned around, but the door I had just stepped through seemed to vanish.

Dust hung in the air, though my breathing was not affected. I found myself drawn to a cardboard box on the floor under a skylight. I stooped down under the incline of the ceiling, and slid the box into the centre of the floor. Brushing the dust from the top of the box, I lifted its flaps and peered inside.

A bounty of delights, the box was filled with various plastic and metal toys; action figures, model cars, bouncing balls,... A young boy's dream. And yet, a sense of disappointment filled me. My emotions were amplified and childlike. I closed the box.

There was a trapdoor, with a ladder leading down into the house below. Down I went, with haste and purpose. Through another door, into an upstairs corridor with a few short steps down to a landing, from which a longer staircase curved down to the right. across the landing, another set of stairs up to another level, with a door at the far end. I opened the door to yet another garishly carpeted staircase, this time longer before the next landing. I could see further stairs beyond, almost a labyrinth construction, except that it was entirely linear. The walls here seemed much less tall, the corridors and stairs much narrower, claustrophobic and oppressive despite the unthreatening floral wallpaper.

At the top of the first stair, maybe 15 steps up, i reached a landing with a door leading off to the right. Out of curiosity rather than purpose, I opened the door into a quaint bedroom, a guest bedroom in an elderly lady's home. The hideous pastel wallpaper belied a palpable sense of dread and death. The double bed occupied the majority of the miniature room, with cold morning light falling through a net curtain with the bitter air of mediocrity and quiet acceptance. Standing in this room felt as though I had died and been assigned living quarters in the most boring corner of Heaven. Oh

the horror.

I stepped out of the room with a sense of relief and turned to the next flight of stairs leading ever upwards towards some unknown goal. As I climbed from landing to landing, the staircases jutted out at slight angles to one another, sometimes curving, preventing a direct view between myself and the ultimate end of my quest. The ceiling gradually became lower and lower, but it never reached the point I had to duck.

Several doors led off each landing.

Eventually I reached a strange door, rather more fancy than the others. Through it a room, or rather a floating platform hovering in the sky, surrounded on two sides by clouds, with walls on the side I had entered and the one opposite. The floor was quite large and had an upper level up two short curved flights of steps – though it would not have been difficult to reach the second level in one step. Despite my distaste for heights, this place seemed safe and pleasant, almost faux-Greek in design, white marbled steps and half-columns set into the far wall.

There were a series of plastic boxes against the far wall. I stepped up to the second level and dove straight into the first box. Inside were models of dinosaurs, Iguanodon, Triceratops, Baryonyx, Parasaurolophus - all the favourites. Waves of childish tears streamed down my face. Strange joy and nostalgia swam in my stomach as I moved to the next box and began pulling out mysterious toys I had never before encountered. High-quality licensed action figures, plastic vehicles that transformed into robots, by intuitively twisting here, and connecting there. It felt in the moment as if I had played with these toys in my youth, but I don't think I had. Moments of recollection and confusion blended into one another.

I felt that my journey was complete somehow, without knowing why. These feelings made no sense. This house I did not recognise, and yet I had been there. These toys I had never played with, and yet I remember the games I used to play. It was like someone else's life, someone else's memories, someone else's feelings and dreams?

The sudden realisation that this was in fact a dream – a moment of clarity, followed by dread and panic at the forthcoming return to reality. As the remaining seconds ticked down before my body caught up with my brain, I looked around for some final expression of freedom, to float, or to fly perhaps. Instead, as I stood to my feet, I fell.

I tumbled towards the door, bursting through it in one single implausible motion. The stairs were not there. The corridor was not there. There was only darkness and falling. My decent began to slow and the darkness slowed faded into bright white light.

"Peter?" a voice said. A voice like Cassandra's.

"Cassandra?" I whispered?

"Let him sleep" said a second disembodied voice.

"Cassandra!" I shouted, "I'm right here, why can't you hear me?"

The voices stopped. I was slowly drifting downwards through warm light, until I felt my eyelids quivering and stuttering open.

"He's waking up," she spoke.

## **Chapter Four:**

I opened my eyes, the light was blinding and warm, directly above me in my hospital bed. It hurt to breathe. Laurence leaned over me, waving his hand before my eyes.

"Are you there Peter?" he asked.

Dumb question I thought. Or was it? "Yeah," I croaked, hacking up phlegm from my weary throat. "What happened?"

"You fell and hit your head pretty badly."

"Why?"

Cassandra spoke from out of my field of blurred vision, "The doctor wanted to tell you."

My immediate thought was, holy shit, it's cancer... It wasn't.

The doctor entered just in time, almost as though it were planned this way for narrative reasons. She began, "Welcome back Mr. Drysdale." I tilted my head downward slightly on the pillow, to see who it was. No great revelation, it was a doctor; a woman doctor in a labcoat. What else is there to say? She had well groomed hair, I guess. A pronounced chin that suggested, well, nothing. My sexual drive was suppressed by my vulnerable position. I felt my ribcage with my hand – it was bandaged, but pressing on it was quite painful.

She continued, "I am Doctor Carpenter. It's a good news/bad news situation. The bad news is, you have suffered a cataplexic episode – potentially narcolepsy. The good news is – well, it's not cancer."

I coughed and asked the only question that came into my bruised aching head... "So this means I fall asleep all the time?"

The doctor smiled and said "That is but one of the fascinating symptoms." Doctors love jokes like this, I had observed. "Assuming of course, it is narcolepsy. Tell me, have you had any trouble sleeping recently?"

"Actually, yes," I barely managed to croak. My throat was dry.

"Narcolepsy often results in interrupted sleep, and other sleep-related conditions. It's all perfectly manageable though. Was this your first cataplexic episode?"

"My first what?"

"Is this the first time you have suddenly collapsed for no reason?"

"I think so," I struggled to recall any previous incidents.

“It could be isolated cataplexy, but we have called a sleep specialist, Doctor Allendale, he’d like to run some tests to make sure.”

“Can I get a glass of water?” I asked.

“I’ll get it,” Laurence said.

The Doctor continued, “We will be keeping you in for observation overnight for the tests, but even after that, you’re going to have to use crutches for a while till your rib fractures start to heal.”

Laurence’s hand held out a plastic glass of room temperature water, which I took and sipped. It was not refreshing in the least, but it did relieve my throat slightly. I quietly coughed, and put the cup down on the table next to me.

“I’ll leave you for now Mr. Drysdale, and Doctor Allendale will be with you shortly.”

“Thanks” I replied, as she left.

I turned my head to the side, where Cassandra and Laurence both sat. “I’m really sorry, I probably shouldn’t have had that drink.”

Cassandra smiled but did not say anything.

Laurence said, “It wasn’t your fault. I guess this means you won’t be able to help my sister after all...”

It struck me suddenly, this damned narcolepsy was going to cost me a job, and the requisite dame-related perks. I panicked and said, “Oh this? This is nothing. Soon as I’m on my feet, we can go find your husband.”

Laurence turned to Cassandra, she looked sheepishly at the floor.

“What?” I enquired.

“Peter,” she began, “you’re in no condition to help, and I can’t wait for you to get better. If my husband is still...” She broke into tears.

Laurence put his arm round her shoulder and said “I’m sorry for getting you involved Peter.” She softly wept into his shoulder.

In one fell swoop the DeBrau’s had ruined my afternoon. A fairly impressive feat considering I had just woken up in a hospital from a concussion and discovered I might have narcolepsy.

“I want to help. The Doctor said I’ll be out of here in a day.”

Cassandra wiped her face with a tissue. “Peter,” said Laurence, “we can’t afford to pay two investigators.”

And then I blurted out a fairly stupid suggestion, “If I don’t find your husband, you don’t have to pay me.”

## ***Initial Suffering & The Drive to 1850***

The first meeting of the Temple's founders was January 6<sup>th</sup> 1846. Tired of the endless philosophical torment of the human condition and the minutia of society, yet unable and unwilling to re-submerge in the waters of ignorance and bliss, we were each independently drawn by an unknown, unquantifiable and unquestionable sense of purpose and curiosity to an abandoned house on the coast, far between towns. Physically situated in the harsh landscape of Nova Scotia, but metaphysically situated at a crossroads between the Earth and the Ocean, we five men converged in a blizzard, having never before met.

Seventeen hours later, the storm subsided, and we emerged from the house broken. Our exhausted bodies wandered through the town shivering, but our minds, they wandered elsewhere.

For in our isolation, we had looked into ourselves for answers, and were confronted with the horrifying reality of our existence, or rather our absolute lack of rational definable existence.

At first there was despair, for the objects of our lives were now stripped of their assumed meanings and reduced to the sum of their components. The fork had ceased to be a tool for eating but a piece of metal. Our bodies were not temples, but giant ugly bags of mostly water. The very things that had defined us were not only meaningless, but endless in their variety!

Strange cutlery set for the banquet of the mind, shapes upon shapes, layers upon layers, each one devoid of purpose and in itself entirely valueless. The currency of the mind is thought, yet the mechanisms by which they formed were unknowable, unfathomable even, and existed only within the mind. History itself became an abstracted concept, tainted by human senses, by the agenda of government. History was a macrocosm of the mind, the mind a macrocosm of the thought, the thought a macrocosm of tiny invisible lights flashing on and then off again in a horrible grey lump.

Then there was acceptance, apathy and void. Taken on their own, the multitudinous things that once seemed important were now painted with sorrow, contempt, or indifference. Where once it had seemed familiar and comforting, the machinery of the Universe was now a hostile threat, threatening all at once to collapse into conceptual nothingness, and worst of all we did not even care. Our senses were dulled and numbed by over-stimulation and desensitisation.

Yet even in the darkness, still we beheld the vestiges of our old lives, the waste and debris of our years piled like huge towers threatening to overwhelm us. Other lives we had affected by our presence, societal bonds constructed, meaningful connections between ourselves and the minutia of routine formed outside of reason and beyond sense. We were trapped beneath mountains of dead skin and hair. Conditioned behavioural responses continued to occur, regardless of our new found clarity. Synaptic pathways well-trodden offered the least resistance.

There was conflict and suffering, and the collision of two versions of ourselves; one that existed, and another that did not. If the chair is not occupied, is it still a seat? We had seen the meanings of our lives vanish, the purpose and the value evaporate into the space, and yet here we were still questioning. We were now but the sum of our parts, of the dust and the Earth. Yet even as we defined our existence as an illusion, we ate, we slept, as extant men. And we questioned.

So went three months of terrible suffering, torment and grief, a suffering from which was born the machines with which to achieve the aim.

After this time, the existential dilemma that had driven us apart brought three of us back together, and the First Lodge of the Temple itself was inaugurated on March 18<sup>th</sup> in the same house. Two of us did not return. We three stood together, and spoke of a renewed purpose and understanding, of a third path – between the animal and the man, between the Earth and the Ocean – and the glorious and wonderful unknowable truth of the Universe. There was acceptance, purpose and, most of all drive – a term we soon formalised.

Beginning as three men, we isolated ourselves from our past lives, and from civilisation, which was not difficult in Nova Scotia. We left behind our families, our homes, our places of employment, our positions in the diseased society of western civilisation and began an intense program of self-destruction – a long journey through which we shed ourselves of our old lives, of what we had come to take for granted, indeed of our very selves.

The Drive to 1850 was formulated in this first assembly, to re-structure and re-align our human practices in a quantifiable manner in preparation for the first public opening of the Temple. We knew the road would be pain. We knew there would be sacrifices. But this was *it*; this was all that mattered in the Universe. We did not yet know why, only that this was *it*, this was *everything*.

The aim was set, now the suffering began.

## **Chapter V:**

Doctor Allendale's tests were many and uncomfortable, so I'd rather forget their occurrence. Suffice it to say, I was finally diagnosed with mild narcolepsy. This essentially prohibited me from driving, holding small children, and tight-rope walking – all things I would sorely miss, as a childless 30-something bachelor with a fear of heights and no driver's license.

I was back on my feet the next day, with the assistance of a pair of crutches to support my lower chest and allow the ribs a few more healing days. Even still, I was advised against any heavy lifting, or indeed anything that involved bending over. Toileting became a funky adventure, as I slowly lowered myself onto the throne in considerable pain.

Two more days of this suffering passed, and I sat around my office reading my volumes of the collected Any Unforeseen Incident strips by Bob Goodman<sup>1</sup>, waiting for a call from the DeBraus. It was too much of a hassle to walk back to my apartment, so I slept on the fold-out in my office. Probably not the best thing for my ribcage, but sometimes sacrifices have to be made. I pushed the broken antique oak table over into the corner. I thought perhaps after I solved this case I would get it fixed. It would be a shame to see the old girl go to waste.

In hindsight, I should probably have stayed in my apartment, but I didn't give the DeBraus my number before they left the hospital. They did say they would call me in the next day or two. When somebody says that, it usually means in more than three days.

I ordered pizza to prevent starvation, but this led to some further toileting. Fortunately, on the morning of the third day, the phone did finally start to ring.

Unfortunately I was currently occupied in the bathroom with the previous night's meal.

Fortunately the called back several minutes later, and this time I did reach the line in time.

"You really should get a cell phone," Laurence said.

"Yeah, so what's the news?"

"I decided to take you up on your offer, if you're up to it."

"Where's Cassandra?" I asked.

"She's taking this pretty hard Peter, so I'm going to deal with this."

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<sup>1</sup> A classic, though not my personal favourite of the syndicated dailies. I was a Harvey Conrad follower, through the recently republished Prawnographic Microfische books to my absolute favourite, the long-running Count Boney's Adventures in Transylveinia. When I was much younger I wrote a letter to Conrad, and he set back a signed sketch of the Count which I had mounted and displayed with pride on the wall above my bed.

“Okay. Tell me about the guy.”

“His name is Michael Jeremiah. He worked for Remington-Lazenby. He was up here on a business trip.”

“Wait a minute, maybe this would be easier if you came round...” I suggested.

So there we were in my office now. I struggled to the seat behind my desk and Laurence sat on a smaller chair on the far side. This almost felt like a professional meeting.

“So, tell me about Michael.” I asked again.

“He and my sister were married summer three years ago. I thought the guy was a jerk, but Cassie loved him so I didn’t really say anything.”

“How was he a jerk?”

“Well, he said was involved in some kind of secret society. Whenever we asked, he told us he wasn’t allowed to talk about it. I don’t know what they were doing but, he was spending a lot of money on it. Our Father, God rest his soul, would never have let Cassie marry him.”

“Secret society? That’s a bit of a cliché, isn’t it?”

“Well yeah, the first time he said it, I thought he was joking. But it turns out he was spending all their money on this thing and we didn’t even find out till he vanished.”

“He never told you anything more about it?”

“No, but Cassie told me he used to talk about this lodge or something.”

It sounded familiar, all those stories of these new world order cults. That stuff was rife, not just here in the north. “So what happened on this business trip?” I asked.

“That was about two weeks ago. They were supposed to be staying at the Plana Hotel in Corbank for several days. They were supposed to meet up in the lobby in the morning but he didn’t, and his room was empty. That’s when his boss called Cassie, and apparently he had actually signed out of the hotel the night before without telling them.”

“What makes you think he’s here in Trubank?”

“Well, he tried to withdraw the remains of his and Cassie’s savings account from a bank here, but they wouldn’t let him because the account was overdrawn. I tried to warn her, you know.”

“You think he’s involved in some sort of criminal enterprise?”

“I don’t think so, but I guess I don’t really know anymore. Michael’s the kind of guy who acts without thinking. I just wish I knew what he did with my sister’s money. That asshole has some explaining to do.”

I paused for a moment, to adjust my collar before continuing, “you know Laurence, Michael could be dead. You should be prepared for that possibility.”

“I am,” he said.

“Yeah, but is Cassie?”

“I don’t know. That’s why I told her to stay in the hotel.”

I groaned my way to my feet and said, “I don’t know about this secret society you’re talking about, but I think I know someone who might.”

“Oh right, who?”

Who? What did it matter? “What does it matter?” I asked.

Laurence frowned at me.

I said “look, just follow me.”

## **Chapter Something**

Let me tell you, taking the stairs with broken ribs is not fun. The elevators had been out of service for several years though, so I had little choice but to grin and bear it. It wasn't so much the actual walking that was the problem, it was the impact of the each step as my feet hit the concrete. One after the other, it was like being punched in the ribcage.

But hey, it was much worse when I was coming up them several days earlier so I shouldn't really complain. The journey up had taken near a half-hour, pausing on every step to regain my composure.

Being the manly fellow that I was, I didn't show my pain on downstair. Laurence asked if he could help, but I wasn't about to show any weakness and accept it. We exited the building, much to the relief of my ribcage. I immediately regretted not having a car anymore, since my informant was several miles from my office.

We finally arrived at the place in the early afternoon, a fairly empty Starbucks. I wasn't a coffee man myself. It tended to counteract the effects of the alcohol.

I did not recognise any of the patrons, save for the one in the corner wearing one of the few actual in-service top hats I had ever seen in my many years in Trubank. I do have an appreciation for the top hat, but it was rare to see one on somebody's head. The man under that hat was an informant since my days with the Trubank Police Department, who went only by the name Gilgamesh, even though we all knew his name was Aaron Isler.

I motioned Laurence to follow me across to the corner, and he dually obliged. Apparently, the man had developed a respect for my methods, which was a little worrying considering he hadn't witnessed any of them.

Gilgamesh was sipping a mocha-crappa-something and as I approached, he pulled out a little handbook and began scribbling into it, perhaps to make himself look busy.

"Gilgamesh," I said.

"Peter Drysdale. What do you want?"

"Would you believe I just came to share your company?"

"No, I wouldn't," he replied.

"Well, enough of this gay banter, I need some information."

"Go on."

"We're looking for an organisation, some kind of underground religious group."

"You'd best be more specific my friend."

“Temple something?”

“Temple... Temple... I can only think of one group bearing the name Temple. The Order of the Greater Temple of the Future.”

I turned to Laurence, he shrugged.

“And they’re here in Trubank?” I asked.

“Sure, the Temple are everywhere. Mostly keep to themselves though. Matter of fact, but I heard a few whispers about some kind of gathering some time in the past month.”

“Really? And where was this?”

“Wish I could help you. As I say, the Temple mostly keep to themselves.”

I sighed. “How much?”

“No really Peter, I can’t help you. Just like I couldn’t help Chief Bradley”

Wait a minute, Chief Bradley? What was that fat bastard doing here? This was a mildly shocking development. “What?”

I turned to Laurence with a look of mild anger, “Laurence? You took this to the Police?”

He looked as surprised as I was, “No, I didn’t.”

“Well,” said Gilgamesh, “I’m just telling you what I know.”

I shrugged my shoulders, “What exactly did you tell the Chief?”

“Nothing. He did say they were looking into a fire in an old hotel. Mysterious circumstances.”

“What hotel?”

“I don’t remember the name, somewhere on Hypatia I think.”

I turned to Laurence, and we shared a strangely personal, but entirely non-sexual moment. I didn’t remember anything specifically. A night in Trubank without the roaring of sirens hurtling past was not exactly common. But it was a start, and a start close to home. Sure, it might well have been an entirely unrelated incident, but I wasn’t going to tell Laurence that.

And besides, what kind of Private eye would I be if I let slide a chance to interrupt a police investigation.

“Thanks,” I offered.

“No problem Peter. Anything else I can help you with today?”

I opened my mouth and out tumbled the words, “That’s all she wrote.” I wasn’t entirely sure where this phrase had come on. Who was she? And what the hell was she writing? A fifty-thousand word novel about me? That’d be weird.

“Well I hope you find him.”

We turned to leave.

## ***Another Chapter?***

After several steps, Laurence stopped dead, and turned round. “Peter, you didn’t say we were looking for anyone...”

I couldn’t really remember if I had mentioned it or not, or even what I was doing in Starbucks, so it was a good thing Laurence was here with me or that important little nugget would have slipped me by.

We turned around and journeyed the several steps back to Gilgamesh. I smiled and said, “you know Aaron, I never said we were looking for anyone.”

He looked a little sheepish, though he tried to hide it. He took a sip of his drink and lied, “I think you did.”

I wasn’t convinced, but I was sort of a little bit of pain so I turned to Laurence for guidance. He shook his head, and I decided to trust in him as he was trusting in me. Not that I was an untrustworthy person, but I’m pretty sure it was a mistake to assume I knew what I was doing...

“No you didn’t,” spoke Laurence, while I my mind continued its wandering into space.

“And who are you young man?” Gilgamesh asked.

“Laurence,” he said. I wouldn’t have revealed my name in his place, although on reflection, it probably wouldn’t have mattered.

“Well Laurence, perhaps you should keep your nose out of other people’s business.”

I nudged Laurence to stop him from speaking further. “He’s right, we never said that,” I said.

Gilgamesh put his cup down. “Okay. This one is going to cost you Peter.”

Now we were getting down to business...

## ***István Tömösváry***

7<sup>th</sup> April 1857

Dear Gregory,

I trust that this letter finds you well. I apologise for not having written in some time, I have had numerous matters to attend to as regards the foundations of the Rhode Island Lodge. Until recently these events were of no great note. I write to you now regarding a peculiar discovery in the last month here on the grounds. I have enclosed my journal, which better details the find. I have also enclosed several rubbings and sketches we have made.

March 26<sup>th</sup> 1857

This evening, one of the young neophytes named James Cleveland, approached me over dinner, ostensibly to discuss a triviality. The conversation soon shifted towards the necessary physicality of Temple practices, at which point Cleveland told me when he was working with a shovel in the garden he had found a wooden surface buried several feet in the soil. I told him that this most likely led to an abandoned cellar, and agreed to investigate the next morning.

March 28<sup>th</sup> 1857

In the morning, Cleveland showed me what he had uncovered. The other neophytes were busy in the halls and kitchen.

Cleveland and I worked together for nearly an hour, shifting the soil away from the door enough to lever it open. I lit a lantern and lowered it into the darkness for a better look. It was difficult to see in the daylight, but there was a wooden ladder from the hatch down to a floor below. I descended into the cellar, while Cleveland stayed on the surface.

When I reached the floor, it was cold and hard, and dry. I looked around by the lantern's light, and I could see four smooth walls. The ceiling was quite high, ten, possibly twelve feet above me.

Around the reasonably empty room, there were a number of small items, cups and storage barrels, under a layer of dust

There were several lamps attached to the walls, two of which framed an ornate wooden door. The door itself was unusual, inscribed with language I did not recognise, a script with tall wispy characters with various dots decorating them.

The door was unlocked, so I opened it, and this led to a staircase that seemed to stretch down forever into the Earth. A primal claustrophobic sense of fear overcame me and I did not descend at first. It is strange how, even with our enlightened minds, we are often over-ruled by our own primal emotions.

In the afternoon, Cleveland agreed to descend, and so he did, while I stood at the top of the stair. He slowly walked down one step at a time and he quickly reached a second floor.

After several seconds, he dropped his lantern, and began to call out. He followed my light back to the top of the stairs in a hurried panic. When I asked him what he had seen that had startled him, he told me it was a large gargoyle-like figure – presumably a statue, holding some kind of large round disc in its cupped hands. As he lifted his lamp, the eyes appeared to glow, perhaps jewels. Feeling decidedly spooked, we climbed out of the cellar.

March 29<sup>th</sup> 1857

I returned to the cellar today primarily to document my findings. In particular I took several rubbings of the text inscribed on the door for study. Cleveland refused to return to the lower cellar, and I opted not to investigate myself.

I took the rubbings to the library for further study, but the source of letterforms was still a mystery. Certainly not European in origin.

March 30<sup>th</sup> 1857

Today Cleveland agreed to return into the depths with a second neophyte, Mark Neville, who fancies himself as an artist. They stayed down in the lower cellar for some time, studying the statue, Neville making sketches, while I resumed my normal duties.

The sketches are incredible, a squatting reptilian figure, six feet high even in this position. Elongated sinewy limbs, scaly skin, reasonably humanoid in form, with a preposterously long skull, stretching back three or four feet behind its neck... This doesn't fit the form of any gargoyle I have ever seen, nor any mythological beast. More studies must be made.

March 31<sup>st</sup> 1857

Wonder of wonders! The Gargoyle, as it has come to be known, appears to contain a complex mechanism of moving parts. Cleveland, enterprising fellow that he is, took it upon himself to examine the statue's limbs

History:

1846: Foundation - Pictou, Nova Scotia (not yet Confederated Canada)

István Tomosváry

Theodore Crowell

Thierry (X)

Richard Roxburgh

Arthur Cutler (X)

1846: Drive to 1850 (Lodge I, Pictou)

1850: Nova Scotia Temple Lodge opens

1852: Drive to 1860 (Lodges II-III (Maine, Rhode Island)

1954: Richard & István => Maine

1856: István => Rhode Island

1857: István & neophyte James Cleveland discover Gargoyle (Rhode Island)

1958:

.....

1848, Nova Scotia

# Models and Diagrams

## ***A-B Model***

The A-B Model is a useful shorthand, describing the relationships between the various layers of physical and mental existence. For our purposes, it explains the transfer of energies.

The A column dictates the mental aspects of each level, and the B column displays the physical. Each member of a pair interacts with the other on a symbiotic level, meaning that one cannot exist without the other. Each pair of A and B states forms a single level of existence. These levels interact in a circular motion and the system is as a snake eating its own tail, repeating from birth until death. It is easier to show than to explain the diagram.

I: AWARENESS → BEING  
II: AIM → BRAIN  
III: ACTION → BODY  
Return to I

Level one of this diagram represents the primal self, which exists below conscious thought. It is the subconscious function of the brain. It governs awareness, automatic responses, instinct, and to a certain degree morality. It also monitors our senses, sight, sound, etc. and relays this information to our conscious. As such this level is theoretically deterministic; given a specific set of stimuli, the information collected and relayed will be a direct representation of this. Though it should be noted that due to the organic nature of the brain, level one can be very easily tricked and subverted both unintentionally and intentionally by level three.

Awareness is the brain's interpretation of an environment and situation, while Being is the physical state and the physical interaction of the body to these. An example would be the act of swallowing. The mind naturally knows when to switch from the respiratory tract to the digestive tract, and thus the body automatically reacts requiring constant precise control.

Level two is the level of conscious thought, where is where decision making and choice enter. A given set of circumstances is processed and evaluated at this level, logically or otherwise. Unlike level one, there is self-determination, free will, the chance to apply existing knowledge and memories to a new situation, and predict the preferable outcome. This level is prone to distraction; when not faced by a situation requiring its attention, it will happily apply its processing ability to earlier information stored in long-term memory.

Aim represents the determined necessary action to achieve a preferred outcome while Brain is a more abstract concept to understand. It is essentially electrical impulses, the signals which carry information inside the brain. While the senses are easily understood by their feedback, the operation of the brain is fundamentally absurd and unquantifiable because there is no feedback.

Level three is the point that quantifiable physicality enters. A signal is sent from the brain to the hand, the hand moves. This is the most easily understandable of the three levels, because it returns directly to level one where any action is usually then subject to feedback. In other words, an action is directly perceivable as opposed to the entirely figurative and abstract thought that informed the action.

Action is the signal, the mind's eye view of the body. There is often a breakdown in this level caused by physical injury, because the entire nervous system is required.

Regarding the cyclical nature of the model, we can explain this very simply via an example. We are standing in a shallow puddle. Water is leaking into our shoes.

I: We sense the cold and the wet of the water on our toes.

II: We connect cold and wet with water, and deduce our feet are getting wet.

III: We look down at the ground and we see the puddle.

I: We are standing in a puddle.

II: We decide that we don't want wet feet, and choose to exit the puddle.

III: We exit the puddle.

I: Our feet are still wet.

II: We realise, that the water will not immediately evaporate.

III: We look down and verify that we have exited the puddle.

We use this model because it is concise and accurate. It is also useful because it describes our existence simultaneously in scientific, philosophical and allegorical terms. The model can thus be applied to external processes, for example, to machine process. Thus the model applies broadly across all existence, not just to humans.

## ***Tree of Paths***



The Tree of Paths iconography represents the various spheres of operation in one's life. It describes three diverging paths; the godman, the man, and the animal. The left path governs nobility, ideals, ethics, morality, concepts which derive from the human

condition but aspire to a greater plane. The right path governs desire, instinct, nature, our primal selves. The central path walks between the two, connects and divides the two. It is a triumvirate of paths, and expansion and extension of the A/B model, stretching the model into long-term goals, into more complex events and structures beyond simple being. It dictates an abstracted model of creativity, along a linear axis of time.

The icon itself arranges the spheres from the bottom to the top, whereupon it can be assumed that the cycle begins, as below, so above, in a similar ever-repeating cycle to the A/B model.

As human nature is divided between the primal and the divine, so the tree represents the ongoing struggle between urge and desire. The nine simplified spheres represent all the permutations of this conflict, and as we know, creation and destruction are both born from conflict.

Regarding the duality of creation and destruction, these are indeed manifestations of the divide between nature and the divine. The animal drive urges us to destroy, yet we strive to create, against all reason and rationality, in pursuit of divinity. These are two sides of the same coin. The energy is the same, it simply channelled through our two aspects.

This given duality does not follow a monotheistic model of darkness and light, because that model is critically flawed. Darkness does not subtract from light. Instead, light invades and penetrates the darkness. Any act of creation or destruction is cosmically destructive, expending a finite source of energy, and thus contributing to the encroaching darkness of entropy. The monotheistic concept of creation as divine, simply promotes wastefulness.

The tree of paths describes not a cosmic path (for this yet another model must be constructed and explored) but a personal humanistic path. Unlike the A/B model, this Tree of Paths does not work on both micro and macro scales. It works for conscious creativity in a pre-existing culture, for a mobile autonomous individual or at most a small mobile autonomous group of individuals.

How does this model apply? We must examine the spheres, and the paths between them.

### Path of spheres

#### Sphere 1: Past

This dictates prior experience, accumulated knowledge, momentum, potential energy. It is vital to the creative process, as any creative work is ultimately the result and culmination of experience, failures as well as successes.

#### Sphere 2: Present

This defines the situation and the environment into which the question is born. The question usually takes the form of What If. From this central and most important

sphere, branch out four independent spheres dictating the desires and the actions we undertake on the path to the future.

This accursed sun shan't ascend  
So slept I, 'tween the Ocean and Earth  
Moth to the Mother of the stars themselves  
She who was witness to my birth  
Slung in pain below  
All the darksome days

So stood 'pon a superseded Earth  
'Neath a shadow of unfurl'd wings  
Cloak'd of pinprick holes  
O'er mountains of tumbled things  
I trailed my path through  
All the darksome days

Climb'd to the peak  
A thousand words e'en a flash  
And flex'd my hooked tongue  
Only cry'd myself to ash, proclaiming  
"She carried the very Sun in her burn'd and scarred hands!  
And carried it to the end of  
All the darksome days!"

Petty to the wither'd ends  
Justifiable by no Earthly means  
Deep within a dream of swallowed teeth  
Hurling themselves ruthlessly towards  
A horizon without slumber  
Beyond the light I beheld

What a day did tremble  
In the shudd'ring of her black'nd wings  
Tiny Autumnal lights fall into the Earth  
In toilsome lamentation  
Clung to the origin and constantly dying

A glacier came hurtling by  
Smiled his white silver teeth glow  
Yet no-one even noticed for  
All the darksome days  
That all the while the smiling  
Ten thousand stories high  
Was cutting through the mountain

Morning's door revolving water  
Dictate the flowing swell  
A cold and weary warning motor  
Clarion of cerecloth callings  
The bastard drained the well dry

The clouds were gathered on the serpent

Fallen through the heavens  
She shrilly spoke to say  
“And for each one of my wretch'd spawn  
I have gifted all these darksome days”

Richard Roxburgh (1817-1885?)

Sonata No.1, 'Iron Chariots' (1836)

Sonata No.2, 'Cadence and Clutter' (1837)

Piano Concerto No.1, 'Water in Detail' (1840)

Piano Concerto No.2, 'From a Spiral of Gold' (1840)

String Quartet No.1, 'Morning' (1842)

String Quartet No.2, 'Death' (1843)

String Quartet No.3 'Nothing, Nothing'(1843)

Sonata No.3 'Hold' (1844)

String Quartet No.4 (1844)

Piano Concerto No.3 (1854)

## **Chapter Potato Potato**

Gilgamesh discretely thumbed through the cash, “and you understand, this counts as a major favour.”

“You’re pushing it Aaron.”

“I don’t know why you keep calling me that.”

I smiled, “out with it.”

“Okay, so I was lying. The Temple hasn’t been keeping itself to itself; quite the opposite in fact,” he said while stroking his beard in a slightly pantomimic fashion. He looked like he was going to continue, but he did not.

“And?” I prompted.

“Sit down,” he suggested.

So I sat on the empty chair opposite him, and Laurence pulled an empty chair from an adjacent table.

Gilgamesh turned to Laurence with a look of disapproval. He said, “I don’t know you, friend.”

“He’s with me.”

He turned his gaze back to me, and flashed me a stern look saying “you accept full responsibility for him?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Alright, you understand I can’t be specific here?”

“Good lord, spit it out already.”

“You know the company Startech?” he asked.

“Yeah, what about them.”

“They make the identchips for Corbank Business & Residential.”

Laurence piped up, “You mean the palm-scanners?”

“Yes, the palm-scanners. Well guess who’s on the Startech board of directors?”

There was a short pause. Neither of us guessed.

“J. Michael Hernandez,” he revealed.

Getting information out of Gilgamesh was like drinking from a rodent's water bottle, one tiny drip at a time.

“So?” I asked.

“Mayor Portman's ex-wife, Maya Hernandez; J. Michael is her brother.”

“So they Mayor's ex brother-in-law is head of an identchip company that got the contract for Corbank Business & Residential? What does that have to do with the Temple?”

“As far as I know, nothing.”

Laurence and I sat there, somewhat puzzled as to the relevance of this little conspiracy theory. He did rather seem to be dodging the question as to how he knew we were looking for someone. Either that or he was caught up in his own sense of imagination.

“Anyway...” he continued, “Startech have been running some medical tests, implanting technology into the human body. Enhancing senses, physical abilities”

He smiled, and tipped his hat to the right, revealing his left ear. He pulled his hair back and turned to show the skin behind his ear. There was a small lump of slightly bruised skin, as if there was something planted under it.

“I signed a non-disclosure agreement so I can't actually tell you what it does,” he explained, “but suffice it to say, it helps in my line of work.” He straightened his hat and sat back in his chair.

“Telepathy?” I asked.

He smiled but said nothing.”

“And what does this have to do with anything?” I asked, for obvious reasons.

Without warning, he reached out and grabbed my arm, “As far as you know, nothing...”

I felt a sharp sting in my skin where his hand grasped my arm, and almost immediately my vision began to blur. I opened my mouth to speak, but the words were all vowels and spit, unable to convey the sensation. I could hear muffled voices, and creaking of chairs, and some minor panic, but it didn't seem to matter. A wave of euphoric bliss overcame me. My ribs no longer hurt, and everything felt pretty damn good. Pretty fuzzy lights all around, and warmth. Then, I lost consciousness. Again.

## ***Atum's hotel, big melon!***

Op engage, decode compress-decompresser in-line, stereotypic repossession nine tenths of thee decimation panning law. Processed form of themselves deserted, kindren of all the tall grass. Yodmere sloops lo cross ail landform in profile. Hysteresis of themselves denied. Corngrass holes marchid graves neath whether stormed slow pacific water roll.

Atum behind, Yodmere descending, Avernis bequeathing favours bold and the brightest light amongst them all. A horse, a horse, a horse, a horse, a horse, all my many kingdoms for a singular horse, for a wearied hopeless horse. A wearied sheep blinded to the water, Yodmere horseback islanding himself in the Ocean descending.

Behald I a papyri wrought with haughty laughter, but bathed in blackened key throbbing braille bones. Twenty-four simultaneously micromacrocosmic platitudes and placid longitudes of culminated bloat nematode coalescent. Immolated orthodoxy or it doesn't and I don't care. Clicked to the tape already rolling. Isolation freed the environs bleaklot departing, or it doesn't.

You'll take the road you find beneath the feet already rolling. The hill across the mountain though the valley's Ocean. There beyond the ridgeless peak a plait of lakes depleting. Ghastly eyes of themselves denying all the blackless key of the papyrus, purloining a record of all their wretched teeth remaining. All the bodies all the darksome day all were allegorically decaying.

Plone arranges track a cauld eyed wreath. Solitaire arriving at Yodmere's vow of silent rumination. Externalised the horrific eyeless horse with ten bloodied hooves. A horse, a horse, a horse, a horse, all for a horse, a blackened horse of blood and stone and flame and hail wreaked mane shrieking death and despair upon ye, wretched child.

Scratched down the door with fishman's hook and craftsman's crafted cannon. Aide me in my symphony as I revel in her sympathies. System failed point a light astray decried December an armistice we flock'd all cross the red line. Spin up and jump, to an isle of thorns.

Oyster? What Oyster?

Horrifying Oysters everywhere I stare. Leagues upon rows upon rank and file of bivalvular formulations. Strike the weapon from the usurper's attacking arm. Stinking Oysters.

Deep spiral iris, a hydra-headed twelve-pronged reptile emperor of the universe didst hark a signal cross the stars to the wearlorn Island ten long hops across the Pond, for ten hundred thousand untenable moments. Ire and pith a phonaux pitcher of cantankerous pointed weighty arguments once spoken almost self-evident. Roiled a pantheonolith of nectar and like drunken lovestruck moths to a tiny pretty flame, drew in and gathered like night.

Question the action, not the result, not the intent, not anymore. One word ignites an implied bond ever present, forgotten and yet fundamentally ever present. The fundamentally unknowable and simultaneously inevitable conclusion of all the suffering – a flower opening again and again and again forever all and all across time and all through all the darksome days. Hybridisation staves off cell-death as replications multiplied in tiny binary reproductions.

Pores open. Op and gate inversion, product is process is product is process is poison water, wold and scathing with toothed maw. The greater the temple, the greater the fall. One half the poorer, alinear poison and water. When seven days have fallen from our eyes under curved swords of flame grasped in the many hands, then only then, two or more, four or less, will eyelids come crashing together in a languish unlike any Oyster. All is flesh and shell and pain, glorious hideous terrible fucking pain.

Driven to an impasse, desalinated like the dérailleur of Atum's single grandest contraption and then, there and then, all of a sudden and in one moment ten thousand million floodgates burst upon the city below. *“And lo, Qoral shall be buried beneath a rain of toads and scorpions,”* he speaketh as though from beyond time her veryself. Polydivine and unerring in his confederacy but you know what what the fuck?

Note, this was where the NaNoWriMo end date struck.

Drag a trail between two posts with its two frayed ends fraid and fraying. Pay no attention to the hand that gives and just as easily takes away. Curl into a furrowed brush, in the hollow of the nave. Everlasting, eversleeping, the stupid flower bowed its ugly head to its master at the core that he could barely recognise. Now I gathered the strands and the remnants to reform some semblance of my dignity, previously lost to me, or even unknown for 'twas never even there at all. How I wept like blood or thick urine but off course no body knows sand nobody even cares too. Homophonic compression compelled like comfort the words sound the same and mean the else. And so forthcome in greater mesh your than bee four:

Ewe can't urn on add dime if you're all waist a bee lei Ted or may bee Miss Lead. Distort shown on the lead in edge off the truancy ant, role of the thresh old, must Ann a just meant make. Hold the gate oh Penn, ring ring ring the bell ought oh mated Teller mash seen. Some one stop me police I canned, the hold left bee hind is wear mine optimist lei Aleck turn wear mine four arm lei. I own Lee eat plink tonne, yeah brew half a chup, I wall brew bat eye own Lee eat plink tonne. But ewe no watt, Watt thief Huck?