

DEEP WITHIN, TROUBLE AWAITS.

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ALSO: A MYTH: OUR WORLD, DEGENERATE. THE MAN AND THE WORLD: THE WILLFUL DISCARDING  
OF LIFE'S PLEASURES.

## WAY DOWN BELOW THE OCEAN, WHERE I WANT TO BE, PART 2

H. P. Legomenon

The first day was not so bad, for the water was lit well by the sun and one could see rather far out into the blue. There was a slightly perilous moment in the bridge, when a large shark had floated mindlessly past the big window, and other dark forms swarmed just beyond the limits of view. But the glass was thick and the captain unflappable, and they pushed onward. Nevertheless, Amy and Isabelle, the only other people in the bridge at the time, chose to sit elsewhere.

The mess was off-limits, generally speaking, because no one wanted to get that close to the abyss that yawned beneath them. Jules, in particular, had taken to walking like a cat with bags on its feet, pulling her knees up much too far to avoid even the pretense of stepping firmly on the glass.

The doctor spent a lot of time lying flat against the cargo glass, attempting to make friends with passing fish.

The days that followed began to wear on everyone's nerves. Jules, who had a particular affinity for sunshine and open spaces, had taken to lying on her hammock and trying not to think about the heavy, crushing darkness that surrounded her at every instant.

Charles was up to his elbows in work. Having never worked on a submarine, he did his best to keep up with the pressure demands the ship was making, trying as best he could to keep the thing from imploding on itself.

"We might be doomed," he cautioned Amy, who had come down to hold a wrench and press a button in the capacity of his assistant.

"It is a hazard of the occupation," she said sagely, and she wasn't wrong.

Isabelle, unsurprisingly, was cross, though for a highly specific reason.

"The food is disappearing," she said at one meal. They'd not thrown a tarp over the mess floor, out of deference to the captain and engineer's hard work, but no one looked down--except the doctor, whose neck seemed stuck that way.

"We're eating it," Charles observed.

"It is disappearing out of proportion with my cooking it. I keep a list." She consulted it now, as Mr. Magihana performed the duty of serving. "Yesterday I had three bags of dried fruit. Even allowing for you low, unscrupulous thieves and snackers, there's no reason that I should only have two bags today. Nor that I should be out an entire smoked fish, nor, Mr. Magihana, one of your bottles of sake."

Mr. Magihana's back straightened and he did two very peculiar things. After a moment, everyone realized that his eyes had narrowed and his smile had disappeared. It was something of a shock to the room at large--the man had never done such a thing before.

"My sake?" he asked, his voice as quiet as it ever was. Everyone tensed, waiting for some type of spring or catch to snap.

"Yes," said Isabelle.

"I see," he said. He looked carefully around the room, gazing particularly in the corners and the shadows of the area. After a moment, his meaningless little smile returned. "I shall make a note of it."

"...great," said Isabelle, and everyone began to eat, thoroughly unsettled.

Two days later, they touched down to the bottom of the Marianas trench. About half a mile away, they could see a faint glow in the dark, and knew that had to be their quarry. As it happened, the bacteria's phosphorescent glow ended up being useful.

"Well," Jules said. "Now what?"

"I volunteer," said Dr. Solomon, without any prompting.

"We'll need someone to go in the diving bell," Reynard said.

"It would be my pleasure to accept the position," said Dr. Solomon.

"It will need to be someone who stays cool under pressure," Jules said, unable to resist the pun but simultaneously making herself a little light-headed with claustrophobia. The day before a truly hideous example of undersea life had bumped against the glass bottom of the submarine and put her even more on edge.

"For the good of the mission, I will go," said Dr. Solomon.

"Someone who can be trusted not to wander off," Amy said.

"The oxygen hose will make that an impossibility, though I will restrain my curiosity for the time being to efficiently complete the task," said Dr. Solomon.

"Someone who has experience with strange organisms," Isabelle said.

"What could be more suited to a doctor? I will be proficient in this capacity."

"I think Charles should do it," said Reynard decisively. Dr. Solomon looked like she was going to cry.

Charles shuddered. "Really? Me? Why not Magihana?"

"I am more useful here," Mr. Magihana said, and everyone kind of avoided making a comment. Mr. Magihana had been...peculiar of late. Everyone had an instance of this peculiarity to recall--Jules thought she saw him ducking every now and then in the hallway, unprompted. Amy would've sworn he'd sat in the same position for six hours, a defiant look on his face, playing with a little sharp knife as he sat at the mess. Isabelle was angry about the still-diminishing quota of food, and knew that it had to have something to do with him.

"Right," said Reynard. "Suit up, Charles, you're the only man for the job."

Dr. Solomon gave the captain a final look of miserable betrayal and went to go commune with the sand-dwelling creatures at the very bottom.

The diving bell was a pretty damn scary thing to be incased in, but Charles admitted that the only reluctance he felt was based on the fact that he hadn't designed it. He was commenting on ways to improve it all the way through, though no one could hear him.

Part of what made the bell scary was that, you were finally forced to consider how tiny you were and what a damn great lot of ocean was around and above you. Everything was blacker than pitch, outside of the cold glow from the Geryon's spotlights, and in that blackness Charles, not an imaginative man, began to think he saw huge, aquatic shapes swimming dreamily past, just out of sight.

What could be seen was small and inoffensive, with the unearthly, horrid quality of all deep sea life. Here was nightmare, if ever it could be found on earth.

Every moment he expected the sea bed to sink beneath him, to reveal that it was all a clever trick, the camouflage of some giant, hideous fish, over whose mouth he had been walking.

Once, he nearly tripped over a large, iron ring buried in the sand. A tremor of sheer fright shook up both his legs and, possibly in defiance of the laws of physics, he jumped. He pressed onward, trying not to think about such a thing and why in the name of any sane and decent God it would be stuck on the bottom of the deepest, darkest bit of the ocean.

Far and away, the bacteria oozed, moving like a swarm of glowing, tiny insects over the sea floor. The doctor had explained with unbridled jealousy what would happen if any of the bacteria touched his skin. First it would be a rash that would spread quickly, and then his skin would open up in boils, revealing the tissue--probably within 72 hours. It would become extremely difficult for even a highly advanced hospital to treat, let alone the doctor's cute little rig of medical supplies and pure medical enthusiasm.

He was about to face one of the deadliest creatures on the planet.

And Charles was armed with what essentially amounted to a turkey baster.

He approached carefully. It wasn't an intelligent being, or even an intelligent swarm, after all. It couldn't be suspicious of him. He'd do it quickly, finish the job fast. He had several inches of metal and industrial rubber keeping him safe--of anyone, he was probably the most well-protected to encounter the thing.

He stuck the opening of the baster into the thick of the bacteria swarm, sucking up a sample and hardly believing it could be so easy.

Then he tried to sprint back to the ship. At it happened, he wound up trudging. He still made a pretty good clip, he thought.

The bacteria seemed pretty well contained, which was making this far and away the most efficient, easiest job the Geryon had ever performed.

"Nicely done, everyone," Reynard said, smiling with obvious pleasure. "Now then--how about a trip to the surface."

"Yes, please," echoed everyone.

"Right. We'll just--"

The lights flickered, dimmed, and disappeared. The whirr of the engine slowed and stopped.

"Right," said Reynard. "Smashing."

Dr. Solomon held the jar of bacteria above her head, lightly the crew in a terribly faint glow.

"I have a confession to make," said Mr. Magihana.

"You don't say," said Reynard, crossing his arms.

"I fear we may have been harboring ninjas,"

Once the world was nothing but one vast organism, and it was perfect. Blood bright and lucent with the heat of life surged from core to extremity and back again, electrical impulses swirled in flocks and clouds through intricately woven nerves in pursuit of near-divine thoughts, forests of muscle grew dense and stretched again, impossibly long, as the parts of the body shuffled and re-ordered in its eternal dance; for no energy was lost in the metabolic exchange of the perfect organism, the universal being, but its every vital force rebounded to its spring to re-create and re-birth it new in every moment, reconfigured but always itself-in-itself, as ancient as forever and as young as a breath inhaled, a moving image of eternity.

Except it had a flaw. How it got there you'll have to ask the liars, because I don't know, but there it was like a tiny grain of sand had worked its way into a nautilus shell, and it gave birth to friction, and irritation, and the flaw grew, and now the parts of the organism no longer worked in harmony but what was healthy and hale in one organ taken by itself now sometimes frustrated and harmed another organ. Still the flaw grew, and the vitality of the organism no longer returned to it full and unadulterated but some was diverted along entirely useless channels, feeding the flaw, as the flaw became a sickness and spread throughout the organs of the body. Finally a greater part of the body was sickness than remained whole, and the moribund organism for the first time in its ageless life thrashed and threw and then collapsed utterly, its flesh putrefying and disintegrating into the inert and dead matter that forms our world.

But though it was itself lifeless, the broken residue of the organism remained fecund with its lingering vitality, and in time new life sprouted from it and grew in power and sophistication: first microscopic diggers, opportunists working in the universal carrion, and alongside them near-creatures like the lightning and the greater and lesser luminescences, and then simple plants feeding off the luminescences, and simple animals and parasites feeding off the others: the strange fungi infesting other creatures or living off their byproducts, herbivores consuming the plants and fungi, carnivores consuming and assimilating even the herbivores. As life arose and continues to arise out of the earth, air, and rock all of these creatures struggle against each other and against the remaining inert matter for expansion and dominance, for increased vitality, to make what is not them into a part of them and so become a greater portion of the whole world. The ingenuity of warfare and the appropriation of greater and greater amounts of vitality have seen the present organisms grow in size and complexity; man is the most developed example, though he certainly does not recapture all the subtlety and diversity of the one-time universal being, with its organ systems unknown to modern biologists. And the end and goal of all organisms, in their struggle and alliances of opportunity, is to one day become or give rise to the new and final organism, the one that will dominate all else, consume or symbiotize into itself all other substances whether living or dead, and out of this synthesis of the whole world take its place as the new and eternal perfect organism.

## THE PEOPLE'S VOICE (MATCHES: PART II)

By Slaya Nemoy

"Bloody, fucking, stupid deadline." Quilla glanced out the window and glared. "Bloody, fucking, stupid soldiers." She did a double take and jumped out of her chair. She raced out the door only just remembering to grab an old sweater to cover up her indecent top. Outside in the hall, Jacques was peering out of his room toward the stairs.

"What the hell is going on?"

"No fucking clue," Quilla replied in passing. She was down the hall and at the top of the stairs just in time to hear the captain of the squad read out the arrest warrant.

"By order of his Royal Majesty King Compten IV, I hereby arrest Colin Welton for insulting his Royal Majesty and denouncing his right to rule. The crime is high treason and is punishable by either death or life imprisonment." The captain, a rather handsome man in his early thirties, rolled up the warrant and turned to Welt who looked dour.

"If you will just come with us, sir, the little fuss will be made the better for you," the captain said. Welt carefully removed his leather printing apron and took down his coat from the rack by the door.

"No!" Quilla yelled. She bounded down the stairs and stood in front of the captain. "You have no right!"

The captain looked at her exasperated. "We have every right, young lady, the king has ordered the arrest."

"What was his crime?" Quilla demanded.

"I have already read out the warrant," the captain explained patiently.

"Let it rest, Quill," Welt said so only she could hear, shrugging on his coat.

Quilla rounded on him. "No! They have no right. You have done nothing wrong."

"He has committed high treason."

"How!" Quilla said fiercely.

"Is he not the editor of The People's Voice?" The captain asked.

"Aye," Welt admitted.

"The People's Voice is not treason; the king has already ruled on this matter," Quilla said glaring at the captain.

"He ruled begrudgingly and only if certain conditions were met." The captain matched her gaze.

"We have met them." She raised her head stubbornly.

"Publishing a certain article is not meeting the conditions."

Quilla frowned. "What article?"

The captain waved a hand and a week old paper was produced by one of the soldiers. Splashed across the top was the title in plain, simple letters, The People's Voice. Underneath in eye catching bold font was the article heading; **The Hypocrisy of Kings** and in smaller lettering the sub-heading, *Is the King Really Worthy of his Crown?* The captain read the offending title out loud. Quilla blanched.

"The king has tolerated your little penny rag because it gives the people a sense that they actually," he grinned nastily, "have a voice. But this time you have gone too far."

Quilla bit her lip. "Welt did not write that article. You have no right to take him into custody."

"Yes, but Welton printed it. He is just as guilty as the writer, who will also need to answer for his crimes."

Quilla took a deep breath. "Please! None of it his fault. Don't arrest him!"

Welt laid a restraining hand on her arm. "The captain is right, it is still my paper. I will willingly go with them."

"No! You can't." Quilla made to grab his shoulders but he pushed her away.

"Officer, I am ready to go," Welt said, standing tall. The captain nodded and ushered him over to one of his men.

"We also have the arrest warrant for the writer, The Quill. If you will hand him over to us we will just be on our way." This the captain directed at Quilla. She glowered.

"You will find no such man here."

"Oh really? Search the place," the captain ordered. Soldiers started searching all over the building. The captain looked at Quilla for a long moment. She glanced down at her stocking feet and after a minute the captain looked away and started to interrogate Welt who, like Quilla, insisted The Quill was not to be found.

There was a slight commotion at the front door. The captain glanced up as a young lord walked in his bright eyes sweeping over the room. The captain clicked his heels together and bowed slightly.

"Are you here to arrest the printer?" the lord asked. The captain nodded.

"My men are now searching for the writer of the offending piece, though the printer and his daughter insist he is not in residence."

Quilla looked up angrily. The lord turned to her and she stiffened.

"I am not Welt's daughter," she muttered. The captain shrugged but the lord glanced at Welt then at Quilla.

"Then who are you?"

She said nothing. The lord walked over and she glared up at him.

"There is no reason to arrest Welt. He is not guilty of any part of this crime."

"He is the printer of The People's Voice, and he printed an offending article. That is enough of a crime."

"He didn't print it," she said bristling. "I'm telling you he had nothing to do with this."

The lord leaned in slightly and a lock of his fine light brown hair fell loose from his queue.

"Do you know what damage this article has done? In only a few words the city has been knocked off its feet. It will take months to recover, if not years. Everyone is hounding for blood, nobles, bourgeoisie, destitute, everyone. In one way or another this will end in blood, but we'd rather it not be a revolutionary blood."

"So what do you want it to be?" she sneered.

"A public hanging of the offending persons. A simple death that will calm the nobles and frighten the masses enough."

She paled. "You're going to hang Welt?"

"We may very well have to."

"But he didn't do anything. I really mean that. We printed the article after he had retired for the night. We knew he wouldn't allow it, but the people need to speak. Without a voice, you do realize the people

will be soundlessly yelling in their minds until one day they will not be able to stop themselves and the words will burst forth in yells and screams. And trust me, you do not want to have that happen."

The lord looked at her shrewdly. "You are awfully poetic," he noted. "But there are things that must be done for the greater good."

"Whose greater good?"

He said nothing.

"Please, you must believe me, Welt is not to blame. Hanging him would be a gross injustice and will do you no good." Without thinking she clutched at his arm and he, startled, pushed her away. The loose button on her sweater finally snapped off and her sweater gaped open. Furiously she pulled it close but not before he could see she wore little more than a chemise underneath. His eyes suddenly went wide and he reached down toward her neck. She jerked back.

"Don't touch me."

"What is that around your neck?" he came forward and lifted up her necklace to get a better look at the milky white crystal hanging at the end. She pulled it away from him and tucked it beneath her chemise. He was staring into her eyes intently and she felt confused and horrified.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"Your necklace.." He recovered himself and stood up straight. "If you say, what was his name? Welt? Did not print the article then I assume you did?"

She hesitated then nodded proudly.

"And who wrote it?"

She looked up at him. There was still a strange look in his eye which was the only reason she admitted the truth.

"I did."

He looked shocked, then slightly confused but also curious and proud. He turned suddenly.

"Captain, release this man and order your soldiers to leave the premise."

The captain's mouth dropped open as did Quilla's.

"Sir?" the captain said tentatively.

"You heard me, release this man."

"But, sir, we have orders," the captain sputtered.

"I have made new ones. Do as I command this instant."

The captain struggled with himself briefly then clicked his heels again and bowed. He called his men back and told them the change of plans and without further ado they marched off the premise. The lord gave Quilla one last look and swept out after them.

## THE PERFECT SOLDIER

By Jack Farrell

*One more kill and I will be able to feel again.* I follow the child through the ruined streets of the city, and I begin to wonder what it will be like to be myself again. My calculations tell me that it is tired and wounded, but also that it is afraid. This is a weakness I do not have. The men who made me this way saw to that.

When the Iron Corps was created, my home country was deep in the throes of war. Old grudges we had held with ancient enemies had been boiling under the surface for generations, and eventually the proper excuse was found to begin a conflict. The full ferocity of the war was more than expected, however, and it became necessary to explore drastic alternatives. The casualties were in the millions as the fighting became domestic, and desperation led to the creation of the Corps.

*Blood. Fresh.* The child is near. Its tracks take me into a dark building. There are few exits. The child will not escape. In its fear it made a mistake and did not view all of its alternatives. Soon it will no longer matter.

As the war raged the resolve of the citizens began to weaken, but the zeal of the leaders did not allow them to forget the ethnic hatreds that began the conflict. But even they were startled at what began to become necessary. As enemy refugees flooded our borders, the decision was made that they be eliminated. But our soldiers often did not have the necessary determination to open fire on women and children as ordered. So they created the Corps.

*It is weeping.* The child knows what I am about to do. Its fear once again ensures its destruction. Its cries point out its position, and I find it all the faster. It is in the next room.

The purpose of the Iron Corps was to create a unit of soldiers unaffected by the normal inhibitions and weaknesses that were hindering the war effort. Free of empathy or fear we would be able to do anything and everything needed to bring the war to an end. The program was an even greater success than they expected. They brought us in, and through a special combination of mental conditioning and chemical alterations, they removed all our capacity for normal emotion and human empathy. Part of the programming ensured our loyalty to our own country, and we were allowed to retain some of our feelings so that we might "revel in the glory of our victory", or so the director said as we were being conditioned.

The results were more drastic than they believed. We of the Corps determined that the most effective method of ending the war was not through conventional methods. Biological toxins are wider reaching, less expensive, and more efficient. Of course, the flu virus we modified also spread into our own country, but the Corps considered these acceptable losses, of which there were a mere ten million. Our creators were displeased with the proposed method of assault, but as this constituted a hindrance to the war effort, we reclassified them as enemy combatants and they were quickly eliminated.

Over the years much interbreeding has occurred between our two peoples. Given that our standing orders were the destruction of all members of our ethnic enemies, it became necessary to cull many from our home

country in pursuit of this goal. The other members of the Corps are currently dealing with them. I am tasked with the elimination of those with an immunity to the disease.

It was expected that a certain portion of the enemy would be free from the weapon we engineered. These were rounded up and placed in a secure holding facility, and they quickly died due to dehydration - all but the child. Soon, that will no longer be an issue.

"Please, sir. Please," it cries. It is relying on a false assumption that I will be swayed by its plight. An intriguing tactic. One we should consider for the Steel Corps, should it ever be necessary to recreate our successes. The child is no threat, and use of ammunition on it would be a waste. Its eyes spread more tears and its legs kick uselessly in the air as I strangle it. As its blood pools at my feet I turn and begin walking back to the camps. Soon I shall be returned to my old self. *I wonder what it will be like.* Wonder. A sign of curiosity, and thus returning emotion. This is going to be an interesting day.

## **THOMAS AQUINAS AND THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS PART 2**

**By Leonard Franks**

The name's Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas. I'm a private eye. And there I was, about to drive off to see the latest victim of some killer going by the name of Heraclitus when I suddenly find that The Wife of Bath, madame and most annoying woman on the planet, is sitting in the back of my created IntelLexus. I think you can understand that I wasn't exactly beatified.

"All right, Alyson," I said. "Why don't you just make like a developing sea urchin and split? I don't have time for you."

"I'll answer that question," she said. "But first, I'd like you to drive for about five feet in any direction."

That struck me as a relatively humble request, and I like humility. So I geared the car and pulled out. I hadn't gotten much more than five feet when I heard a loud bang from behind us. I turned around to see most of the parking space I had just been in falling back to the ground behind us.

"What in the appropriate name of..."

"Before you make too much commentary, you should probably know that that wasn't my bomb. It was, however, attached to the bottom of your car. Interested in what I have to say yet?"

I knew a lot about Alyson, and one thing I knew was that bombs were not her mode. And even if she had started going into that, I couldn't blame her too much for blowing that particular parking meter. I called it the Eleatic philosopher, because it didn't accept change.

"Fine," I said. "You have my attention. What do you got?"

She smiled again. "Are you going to believe a word I say?"

"Alyson, the day I trust you will be the day all the moral precepts of the old law become irreducible to the ten precepts of the decalogue."

"I'm glad to hear you missed me too. I hear that you've been trying to track down The One."

"The ultimate beatitude of man consists in the use of his highest function, which is the operation of the intellect."

"Yeah, well, see how you feel about that when your soul atoms are going out your mouth. But stupid as this is going to sound, I'm asking for your protection."

Protection. I supposed that that was about that than which nothing greater could be expected, coming out of her.

"I'm not an ellipse, Alyson. I only have one focus at a time. Why not go to someone who does that for a job? Like the police?"

"Because I've got a proposition for you."

"A proposition, eh? That would definitely be a common notion for you."

She rolled her eyes, making sure she was in the rear view so I could see it. "It's a worthwhile proposition, Tommy. But I'm going to need you to accept some first principles first."

"Just get to the point already. I want to know what your line is."

"Don't be such a square. This is all very plane. Look, around here, half of being is an emanation from the One. You're one of a very few people that I know absolutely I can trust. So I figure the two of us should work together. You give me protection and I give you underground connections. It sounds like a perfectly good friendship of utility to me."

"If you've got some annals, lay them out. I'm listening."

"Thank you. Look, you know that I'm perfectly nice, overall. I may have gotten lost in a dark wood at the halfway point of my life, but I'm basically a good person." I motioned for her to skip it. I could never stand a prologue that was longer than its tale. "Fine. Look. I get occasional communications from the upper steps on the ladder about what I should and shouldn't do. Well, I decided that I might as well be a fine, upstanding citizen for once and turn in a criminal I was aware of."

"A competitor in your field?"

"There may have been a little bit of honey around some of the wormwood for me. Yes. A competitor. So anyway, that gets certain parties a little bit upset with me. It ended up being the genesis of a few nasty things, so I make a quick exodus and come here. I ask you: did I really do anything wrong?"

I sighed. "Nothing outside the realm of natural reason, I suppose. If I decide to help you, what can you offer?"

"Well, I can't give you the name or predicate much info on the person you're after. But if you need someone to be your guide through the underworld, I'm your girl."

I considered this. It wasn't my favorite idea ever, but it had some advantages. I was going to have make it to the very center of this mess if I was going to unravel it. It was going to be one hell of a summa, and it couldn't hurt to have someone to help. After thinking for a little, I made up my mind. "Deal. But for now, hide under the seat. I have to look at this crime scene."

"As you like it." With those words, she disappeared under the seat and I pulled up tangent to the curb. I got out of the car and was immediately met by the person I was most hoping not to run into here.

Commissioner René Descartes.

He was standing by what was clearly the crime scene, though I couldn't see much of it other than all the cops swarming the place. He gave a smile that made him look like he was pushing a kidney stone and someone was telling him he was about to become Thane of Cawdor.

"Mr. Aquinas!" he said. "I didn't expect to see you here."

"The fact that you didn't let me know that there was a crime here might contribute to your surprise."

The smile broadened. "Yes, well, I didn't want to take from you the pleasure of figuring it out yourself."

"Well, you'll be glad that I'm here to save your ass then."

"I will have you know that my method of rightly conducting one's reason and seeking truth in the police forces is doing spectacularly on this case! Already, we have made a very important deduction."

"Which is?"

"I exist."

"Inspiring."

"We're working on the theory that a being more perfect than me exists too."

"Hard to believe."

I pushed past him. He followed me.

"Admit it, Aquinas. You just can't stand that you're not needed on this case."

"You just keep telling yourself that, Renny."

I came in view of the body. Just like John Calvin had said, it was gruesome. There was a deep char-mark in the ground around the corpse, which, I presumed, was formed of remaining pieces of Dido. The fragment, with all its confusing grammar, was written in something red on the wall behind her.

René walked up to me. "Not pretty, is it?"

"It's not exactly the Godhead, no."

"I'm afraid that I can't let you interfere with this investigation, Aquinas. My analytic method requires focus."

"Of course."

I turned around and walked back towards the car. I hadn't expected to find clues on the scene. If there was one thing the police were good at it, it was forensics. But I did need to be able to describe the scene more exactly. Because there was one person I knew who could solve this. Even though it meant that, between him, Alyson, and Descartes I would have completed meeting all of my least favorite people in the world on one day.

I climbed into the car and drove away. Alyson sat up in the back. "Where are we voyaging to now?"

"We're going to the mental asylum," I replied. "It takes a serial killer to track down a serial killer. And we're going to talk to one."

She looked genuinely shocked. "You don't mean—"

"That's just who I mean," I said. "William Harvey. The Hearthrob Killer."

## THE MAN AND THE WORLD

By Jack Berry

The World creates the Man. The World tells Man that he is to find a better place. The world tells him that he is what man is and he must walk to find a better place. The World tells him that on his journey he will find a dog, an old man, another man, and a woman.

The man walks and finds a dog.

"Man, where are you walking to?" The dog says.

"I am going to a place better than here." The Man replies.

"If I become yours, will you take me?"

"Why would I want you to be mine?"

"I can provide friendship by being in your company, I can also provide protection with my teeth, and I can provide food that I will hunt for you."

"I do not want friendship, for I am not lonely. I do not want protection, because I am not afraid, and I do not want food, for I am not hungry. Instead, I only want to find a better place." The man says.

The dog looks at the man. "Then I will not go with you."

The Man walks more. The World comes to him and asks him: "Why did you not take the dog with you?"

"I do not need friendship, protection, or food, for these things will not help me find a better place." The Man replies. The World leaves. The man walks on more and finds a new place. He is now lonely, afraid, and hungry. He goes back to look for the dog, but the dog is gone. He goes back to the new place. The new place is not better, it is not worse. He is in a place where the floor is metal. He finds a chair with an old man sitting in it. He walks past the old man.

"Where are you going?" The old man asks.

"I am going to a place better than here." The Man replies.

"If you sit, I can ask you questions, and if you get them right, I will give you knowledge."

"Why would I want knowledge?"

"Knowledge can help you find a better place."

"Then I guess I want knowledge."

He sits down, and listens to the old man asking him questions. After each question, the Man provides an answer. The old man asks nine questions that are answered by the man's memory, the tenth question is about the man's opinion.

"Why can't you answer the question?" The old man asks.

"Because I do not know the right answer." The Man replies.

"There is no right answer, it is your opinion."

"I do not have an opinion."

"Then I cannot give you knowledge."

The man stands up and leaves. The World comes to him again and asks: "Why did you not take the knowledge?"

"Because I don't have an opinion." The Man replies. The world leaves once more. The Man walks and finds another place. Once he enters the place, he is confused, and wants knowledge. The Man looks back but the old man is gone. He goes into the new place. The place is still not better and not worse. The floor is wet. In the place he sees something far away. He walks to it and sees it is money. Another man walks to it. The Man says to the other: "Will this money bring me to a better place?"

"Yes, this money will bring you whatever you want, and that includes a better place." The other man replies.

"Then I must have the money."

"But I need it as well, and if you take it, then I will never stop trying to get it back."

"If I give you the money, will you take me to a better place?"

"No." The other replies.

The Man kills the other, and takes the money.

The Man walks with the money to another place. The World comes to him a third time and asks: "Why did you kill that man?"

"Because I need the money to find a better place." The Man replies. The World leaves. The Man finds a new place. Again, the place is not better and not worse. The money did not bring him to a better

place so he drops it. The floor is warm and soft. He walks and sees a woman lying down. The woman stands up and looks at the Man.

"Where are you going?" The woman asks.

"I am going to a better place." The Man replies.

"If I become yours, may I come with you?"

"Why would I want you to be mine?"

"I can provide love with my kindness, passion with my body, and lineage with a child."

"Why would I want love, passion, and a child?"

"Love will make the place you are in feel better, as will passion, and a child."

"Then you can be mine."

The Man and Woman walk together more to new places. The floors are made of grass, wood, and stone. The Woman gives him love, passion, and child. The places they go feel better with the love, passion, and child to the Man. As they walk more, the Man starts to not feel that the places are better, and the love, passion, and child are not helping him find a better place.

The Man says to the Child and Woman: "I cannot have you anymore, because you are not making the places better, nor have you helped me find a better place." He leaves them, and walks more. The World comes to him and asks: "Why did you leave the Woman and Child?"

"Because the Woman and Child did not help me find a better place." The Man replies.

The World does not leave. It says to him: "There are no more places, and you have not found the better one." The World removes the Man. The World goes to the Child and Woman, and removes the Woman. The World makes the Child into the Man. The World tells the Man that he is to find a better place. The world tells him that he is what man is and he must walk to find a better place. The World tells him that on his journey he will find a dog, an old man, another man, and a woman.

### THE SINDRI SAGA

Chronicled by Jason Abidan, Chief Librarian Magus of the Archive

By Aki O.

The fall has come to its natural and temporary end, dear reader, and ending with it the hours that I must dedicate to helping others in our archive. Now, having blanketed myself in wool and fur, and having lit the candle that glows a halo far brighter than its own size, I once again return to my task in chronicling the life of Morgan Caron Sindri and Alpin von Lamis. I fear that this entry will be less exciting for those amongst you who are awaiting the beginning of their famous quest, yet it is the duty of a chronicler to tell all that which happened in order. I could no sooner pass over this entry to reach the more rousing entries that follow them, than I could will the sun to pass over a single zodiacal constellation on its ever-winding path. I hope, dear reader, that you will thus be patient with me, knowing of this difficulty.

As you might well remember, we had left our dear boy and rabbit, the rabbit firmly nestled in Morgan's house, on their way to the young man's house, with Morgan having completed his duty of reading the clock of the Day and, in doing so, signal the change in shifts among the day workers.

### Chapter 3: Vaguely sauntering downwards

Morgan walked briskly through the town towards home, passing by the cold, stone apartment high rises of the Payday neighborhood; the dome houses made from recycled wood and glass that marked the eco-friendly Mayday neighborhood; and even the bales of bundled straw and the barns painted flawlessly with brick red paint of the Heyday neighborhood, and walked up to what, in the crimson light, appeared to be an ordinary cottage made of wooden logs and a thatched roof.

"This looks like a comfy place," Alpin said from Caron's arms.

"Don't believe the outside," Morgan told Alpin simply, reaching out to open the door and step inside.

"What do you-ooh," Alpin said, cutting himself short as Morgan entered the cottage.

There, lit by a brighter light that seemed to be offered from a lamp in the corner, which someone had conveniently placed three mirrors placed behind to amplify its gleam, was a far larger house. The floor that Morgan and Alpin stood on turned out to be a wraparound balcony, whose sole opening was to a staircase that had steps that had been drilled into the wall, but were otherwise unsupported, which twisted and descended past two floors onto the ground. In the space that marked each floor, Alpin could see what could best be described as an organized explosion of papers, books, pillows, cushions, blankets, knick-knacks, curios, souvenirs, bric-a-brac, and even a trinket or two, piled up into corners and onto tables.

"This...this..."

"So the bedrooms are up here," Morgan said as he began to walk down the stairs, "but I'm thinking dinner first. I mean, I'm hungry, and I didn't hop the world for years like you, so you definitely must be starving."

"There's...but...how...it's..." Alpin continued to stammer, his ears drooping down to the sides of his head as the rabbit looked around.

"After dinner- I'm thinking a lot of carrots for you and, I dunno, whatever I can whip up for myself," Morgan said, seemingly oblivious to the rabbit in his arms, "I'll get settle you inside my room. Don't worry, I try to keep it pretty neat. I mean, I do have a lot of random stuff in there, but you'll be able to sleep pretty well."

"IT'S BIGGER ON THE INSIDE!" Alpin finally snapped, the shout echoing around them twice before fading away.

Morgan paused on the stairs. "Are... you okay Alpin?"

"It's so big," Alpin said, curling up into a ball in Morgan's arms, his ears wrapping around him. "It's- it's so big... I could hop around in here forever and never be found, I'm never going to be found, we're gonna die and nobody's gonna find us, I'm too *pretty* to die, and—"

Morgan rolled his eyes. "Oh calm down you drama rabbit, it's not that big," Morgan said. "Besides, we can't get lost. You're basically in a big hole in the ground. The only way out is the way we came in. It's a finite space."

"I'm gonna be fine," Alpin was muttering to himself. "I'm a good rabbit. I'm a brave rabbit."

"Seriously, this isn't some weird multidimensional thing that travels through space and time."

"—I'm with my buddy, I'm gonna be okay—"

"Alpin," Morgan said, turning the rabbit around to look him in the eyes. "Alpin."

"Ye-yes?" he stuttered, lifting one of his ears.

"We're at the bottom of the stairs."

"We- we are? Really?"

Morgan nodded his head. "Yes, Alpin, we are the bottom of the stairs," he said slowly, turning the rabbit around to show him that they had, indeed, reached the ground floor. "You looked and walked into the Abyss, and you're totally safe."<sup>1</sup>

Alpin heaved a great sigh. "Oh yes," Alpin said.

"You were that scared?" Morgan asked while he began to walk from the base of the stairs towards a door in the left-most corner of the floor.

"I don't like that big a height, okay? These paws were made for hopping, thumping, and nothing else."

"But you don't seem afraid when I carry you normally."

"Well, yeah, because you're under me and there's ground under you," Alpin replied. "But a space that big? One false step and we'd be doomed."

"In that case, when we're going back up? Try looking at the thick stone wall next to us," Morgan told him, pushing open the door to reveal a small kitchen, consisting of a table, chairs, refrigerator, microwave, cabinets bearing all manner of kitchen utensils and dishes, sinks, and a dishwasher, all placed in the appropriate fashion for a lounge.

At the table sat a tall man, with salt-and-pepper hair, who had glanced up at the sound of Morgan entering.

"Well, hello there kiddo," the man said.

"Hi, Dad," Morgan said to him, managing to wave a hand as Alpin, in the hopes of making a good impression, shifted to sit more upright. "How was work?"

"Pretty decent," Morgan's father replied. "Helped out a few groups of people doing research for their next latest and greatest, and finally managed to get the writer's corner back in order. You?"

Morgan shrugged. "Pretty much just hung around all day, watching people," he said flatly. "Oh, and my designated-buddy here hopped onto my chest for the first time."

"Your designated buddy?"

"Yes sir," Alpin said politely. "Alpin von Lamis, reporting for duty, sir."

Morgan's father paused. "That was a very well-spoken response for an Elfin-Baladi rabbit that's at least a few time zones away from home," he said at last.

Alpin's eyes widened. "You know I'm an Elfin-Baladi?"

"Well, I wouldn't be one of the two head-librarians of the Subterranean Library if I couldn't identify at least 1 rabbit race," he replied.<sup>2</sup>

"So you're okay with the keeping of the rabbit?" Morgan asked.

Morgan's father nodded. "How about putting the rabbit on the table here and joining me for dinner?"

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<sup>1</sup> This was not technically true- unbeknownst to Morgan and his family, the Subterranean Library was very much alive and aware of who was inside of it, and had no hesitation in transforming an irritating guest or two into a bobble-head to add to the collection. However, it considered the Sindri's to be friendly entities, and found the rather small and frightened furry thing not worth the effort.

<sup>2</sup> This was true, as the job application required all head librarians to be able to identify, on sight, 40 types of minerals and stone, 31 types of trees, 23 breeds of dog, 17 breeds of cat, 13 types of fish, 7 types of lizards and insects, and 1 breed of rabbit. It also required them to invent at least 1 form of scribbling that would confuse a doctor, 3 forms of paperwork that could confuse a government agency, and to host at least 2 book "sales" a year.