

Fifty-two and a half novels and seven nonfiction books --- 26/5/26

--- As advised by Brooke A. Wharton, Esq, in her book
The Writer Got Screwed (But Didn't Have To), HarperCollins, 1996:
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Yes, By The Way, the following is indeed currently getting shopped around for comments and leads and suggestions, and leads, *such as*;

Oh, might someone happen to know a lawyer with literary interests, or a literary agent, either of whom are interested in chatting with a potential client? If so, Cassiel C. MacAvity can be reached through the email address of books@infochambers.com . . .

- A. Regarding . . .
- B. Commentary books
- C. Novel outlines
- D. Ten Novelry submission entries and one excerpt
- E. Four times backstage at a bellydance festival

A) Regarding the following list of outlines of textbooks and novels:

<https://www.thetimes.com/culture/books/article/got-a-book-idea-write-first-three-pages-and-you-could-win-75000-b3ft5fwgm> and <https://www.thenovelry.com/prize> tell of a writing competition requesting the first 1,500 words of a novel. Ten of the novel ideas listed here were entered as submissions, and are flagged as such. On 25/9/28, a shortlist of eight finalists was announced, from an also announced pool of 22,500 submissions ---yes, they claimed there were twenty-two thousand five hundred submissions. None of these ten submissions listed here were any of those eight finalists, but given the odds, that result was quite rather expected . . .

The following are short descriptions of a book, or a description of the basic beginning of that book. For the Novelry competition submissions, all of those are added in section D), with an additional scene excerpt that was not a competition submission, that of *_The Werewolf, The Vampire, And The Dragon Lady_*. Also, sections C) and D) include *_Libraries Forever_*, a novel fragment that can be the start of Harry Potter fanfiction, or where Of Course all the names in the story can be adapted to tell one to three entire novels with a different set of names and legal property.

And, quite more to a point, the competition was seen as a prod to finally scribble something down of a novel idea that had been in mind, but nothing had ever quite gotten written out, yet . . . Because after

reading of the competition, and noting that _a_ novel idea had indeed come to mind, there was also that second idea, third, oh yeah, also that other couple of ideas --- After a bit, about 45 or so different novel ideas soon got dredged out of several years of memory, where the half novel is a collection of story setting ideas that got vaguely poked at with no particular story idea for them, yet. --- The 45 or so novels were the first collection of memories, some more have been trickling in, and that number is now higher than 45.

Added to the list are a few non-fiction text ideas, where there is interest in a subject, interest in getting a few notes jotted down, where getting some notes jotted down can indeed have a short briefing essay turn into a not so short pile of pages of text.

As an example, _Chunk By Chunk C_ is the current main writing project, where chapter four is being worked on at the moment --- worked on along with much else, so often progress is incremental. See <https://infochambers.com/#tey> for a more detailed outline.

As another example, _Class_ started as a short briefing essay . . . which then expanded. Slightly. --- It needs a bit of commentary on Henry II and Thomas Becket as examples of administrators rather than posturing incompetents that just hold office.

Chunk By Chunk C and the material at <https://watcherpoint.com/> all have a pen name of Cassiel C. MacAvity, and the same would be expected of all of the novels and the rest of the textbooks.

The competition submission _JTown_ is the start of the novelization of a preexisting screenplay and stage play, both titled _JTown_, currently parked at <https://watcherpoint.com/#script> . . .

The competition submission _The Fatal Assumption_ is the start of the novelization of the preexisting screenplay _Landing_, also to be found at <https://watcherpoint.com/#script> and where that screenplay is the first scene of the novel idea _The Fatal Assumption_.

B) Commentary:

01: Chunk By Chunk C

A study of the C coding language, starting from utter basics and commenting. Only after quite establishing the basics does the commentary get more and more detailed. And, the commentary relies on code examples that have actually been tested, with actual outputs used as demonstration text.

02: Five Seasons Of Systems

Basically Chunk all over again, only being a very general overview of four open source operating systems: FreeBSD, proly OpenBSD, and two examples of Linux. The fifth season is then an overview of similarities and identical tools and commands across them all.

03: Class

David Cannadine, Jilly Cooper, Paul Fussell, Kate Fox, in bits of their commentary, have basically been saying basically the same thing over and over, discussing assorted social class variations. One particular note comes from Cooper, who notes a particular oddity --- and then keeps right on going, rather than trying to solve the puzzle. This is a collection of essays that take the oddity and quite expand it out, noting additional examples and details which completely tie everything in to what's been established.

04: One Plus One Is Two

Chunk does math. With the occurrences of my quite not nice background, I merely muddled in algebra and geometry and never got further . . . My overall assessment of math is Oooooohh, look at all those unending puzzles to go play in!!!!!!

05: Doe Ray Meeeee

Chunk does basic music. What are those circle and line things on a piece of paper? How does a piano, guitar, flute, violin work? How do those circle and line things relate to playing a piano, guitar, flute, violin. Et cetera.

06: Handsome Gigolo, Poor Gigolo: Multi-layered cinematic excellence with butchered editing and release.

In 1977, David Bowie, David Hemmings, Sydne Rome, Kim Novak, Maria Schell, Curt Jürgens, and a number of others, all got together in Berlin to make what would ultimately be Marlene Dietrich's final film. Dietrich didn't join them in Berlin, the German expatriate stayed in Paris and shot her two or three scenes there.

In 1978 and possibly a bit later, various forms of the horribly edited movie got released with a variety of names; *Schoner Gigolo*, *Armer Gigolo*, for one name, *Gigolo*, for another, *Just a Gigolo*, for a third. The critics of the time absolutely ripped to pieces the various results, but then at best they were reacting to the editing. Of the actual complete movie itself, it actually happens to be a very well done, very subtle, very multi-layered, black comedy, a very humorous classic tragedy.

So, with the movie being a comedy, why all the criticism? The film critic commentary that one finds online states claims of boring, some sort of fiasco, horrible, Etc. Perhaps they were hoping for an extended length music video, maybe they thought it would be Bowie's version of *Yellow Submarine*. In several spots when trolling about online, one finds an extremely quoted line from Bowie that the movie is his 32 Elvis movies all rolled into one. Hemmings is quoted as stating that his movie is intended to be highly *ironic, tongue-in-cheek, about the period*.

And there is just one problem with all these bad reviews---they completely miss all of the layers and most of the movie.

07: The Congeal And Further Decline Of The Farthing

There are the occasions when a description turns up of something or someone being “a two cent version of . . .”. And then there is the farthing. A farthing is a quarter of a cent and, as a person or multi-person project, wishes to someday attempt to manage to be mistaken for resembling as much as two cents And then there are those who actually are the metaphoric full price, but still must sort out how to circumvent the farthings

--- One book example variation is <https://www.amazon.com/Age-Greed-Triumph-Finance-Decline-ebook/dp/B004DEPF6I> where that covers the same sort of mindset in finance . . .

C) Novels

01: We Hold These Truths

---Novelty competition submission

The Prime Minister of the United States has opposition factions joining together to try to redefine politics in the leadup to the impending House Of Representatives general election.

02: Counties

As the U.S. Prime Minister goes about running the United States and working with the assorted U.S. State governors, the U.S. President goes about administering the U.S., with a good deal of assorted administration being a matter of what goes on in the assorted counties of the U.S.

03: One Hundred Fifty States

The United States Of America started with 13 colonies and a revolution. Over time, more settlers arrived, the original settlers expanded out themselves, and over time territories became additional states. Over time, entire areas of the North American continent got bought from other countries. Over time, entire areas of the North American continent had their own revolutions. Over time, someone else's revolution or really badly run war got the US involved, and now what does the US do? And in many cases a saying kept floating up of; *We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately* . . . One Hundred Fifty States is a collection of short stories that form a history of the United States, from founding bits up to the present day, telling in chronological order of the original formation circumstances of the one hundred fifty states of the US, with a particular focus on the time and circumstances of each state joining the rest of the US . . . and, certainly, once in, a state is a State, it is not some quasi area, some vague territory. For each such state, Washington DC now has two more senators and some gaggle of representatives . . . So yes, for 150 states, therefore, 300 senators, and whatever the supporting population number of representatives each quite equal to each other and all sorting out assorted issues . . .

04: The British Civil Peace

In the 1800s in Britain and the Germanies, Prince Albert and Queen Victoria married and had a collection of children. Albert, with his background, training, whatnot, proceeded to improve this situation, that bit of finances, arranged for several rounds of improvements in various areas. In parallel, assorted parts of the British government rather needed general improvements, and there were assorted discussions and plans to sort out all that. At some particular point, Albert wound landed in a rather dicey medical scare, did manage to get nursed through it, came out quite as inclined to observe and improve, and proclaimed a particular set of improvements; Very Generally Speaking, he noted the Magna Carta. the Wars of The Roses, the English Civil War, oh, yes, and the American Revolution. And, in this modern age --- at that time --- assorted titles of nobility that people have were originally and certainly now should still be quite descriptive job titles dammit!!!! So, some [Title] of [region] is ostensibly the person in charge of that area? Do that person's people in that area do well? Are there improvements that other areas and people can note and make use of? And, most importantly, for this new British Civil Service that Albert proposed and proceeded to lead by general example, is there 1) a formal mechanism where all can be recorded and referenced, and 2) while the assorted titles are involved, is everyone else also involved . . .

05: Little Emmy

---Novelty competition submission

Ten years after the end of the twenty-five year long war, a general who grew up in that war finds that an opposition combat team from that war, and from thirty-five years earlier, has arrived in the middle of her own base.

06: Collecting The Bet

---Novelty competition submission

“My Dinner Party With Andre At The Overlook Hotel”

Arthur is going to Las Vegas for a meeting with Mordred and the rest of the council. He's going, but at the same time, there are also other problems and issues to solve with others. Therefore, Arthur, Lancelot, others, also arrange a parallel unconference to pick through the admin puzzles . . . and then the discussion subjects also start to turn up at the unconference and also the council meeting, where sometimes the discussion subjects simply appear out of the walls, turn up in people's dreams, turn up as additional memories that clearly are someone else's memories

07: Up The Organization

---Novelty competition submission

Difirme Ltd. has offices in San Francisco, London --- specifically in the City ---, and Tokyo. Craig has worked in the City for some time and been hired to move to San Francisco instead. He is to be the new manager of the SOP division in San Francisco, and then finds out that he and his staff have to outmaneuver the BS and HR divisions that are causing problems in the SF office.

08: Marketing

---Novelty competition submission

T'Chotchke Is Luxury. Luxury Is T'Chotchke. If It's Not T'Chotchke, It's Not Luxury. At the T'Chotchke company headquarters in Tokyo, Ishi-san is giving Yajirushi-san the overall briefings on T'Chotchke background and tactics. As this is occurring, they learn that several wannabe competitor companies are merging and proolly planning a very unfriendly buyout.

09: JTown

---Novelty competition submission

Alice finds out that a very valued family heirloom went missing during WWII. She enlists the help of fellow Uni professor Charlie, and the two of them find out that Went Missing is only the beginning of the puzzles.

10: Confidence

The summer biathlon team captain of a San Francisco high school leads her team to and in the California state championship.

11: Dungeons And Deacons

TheHall is the site of the local biannual, joint altogether, charity event for meeting/grant and support giving/We Have Information. Faction leaders of local branches of The Church Of Mithra and Isis, and The Family Temple, and others, combine to Forbid the event for being Not Proper and even verging on Serious Error. As issues of organized faith clash with matters of personal religious practice, the owner of a game and gaming supply store provides _very_ pointed commentary.

12: Commedia/Embezzlement Del/Theft Arte/Murder

The owner of the local gaming supply store is running the funding of the local upcoming street theatre festival, and then lots of money disappears, with his signature on everything. While he's confirming that no, he didn't steal the money, assorted other stufh comes up missing . . . and then the dead body turns up.

13: Salmoncisco

The city of Salmoncisco has rather a variety of populations and layers and details, and one such location of basically several such locations is San Francisco. Someone gets murdered, the most likely prime suspect does get quite thoroughly cleared, and then everything in the investigation goes cold. There is a second murder with very much the same prime suspect, who does again get quite cleared, and then everything goes cold. And around the same time, a woman in Salmoncisco stumbles into something related to the Rangers of Salmoncisco, but the details aren't certain, and she is quite aware that the Rangers can be extremely lethal. And there is a third murder, and the Rangers of Salmoncisco themselves run across the three murders, and they get the very definite indicators that there might not be a general scattering of assorted murders, there might particularly be three different sets of murders.

14: The Werewolf, The Vampire, And The Dragons

---Novelry competition submission

One night in Salmoncisco, an Auditor meets with a vampire and a werewolf for a debrief. Local dragons had requested that the vampire and the werewolf help run an operation to clean out an infestation of zombies in the area. The results are so successful that everyone wants the notes on just _how_ did you _do_ that?!?!?

15: Runaway Train

Someone in or near Salmoncisco is moving about in assorted areas, trying to escape being very malevolently stalked. At the same time, the Rangers of Salmoncisco note that aside from dealing with the attacker with intent, one solution for assisting the one being threatened is to have the runaway train.

16: The Werewolf, The Vampire, And The Dragon Lady

--- See excerpt, below

Someone, or several someones, have started stalking dragons --- Quite entirely, yes, one just does not stalk or even try to think about threatening dragons --- and just the same, several dragons in Salmoncisco have had someone try to kill them. Yes, normally something like that would be the

concern of the Rangers of Salmoncisco --- or, for that matter, dragons themselves ---, but investigation can be difficult when all the suspects keep winding up as a scattering of ashes. So one dragon in particular gets in touch with a vampire, and the vampire gets in touch with a werewolf

17: Thirty-Five Seconds Splat

Cal has a rather large campus that spreads over a chunk of the Berkeley landscape. Some organization turns up with a plot to destroy some or all of the campus as an attack on . . . the campus, on a different organization . . . with a or the other organization also being about as malevolent and useless . . . and the Rangers of Salmoncisco note that one solution can be to note where exactly Cal is located, and in what form, and in a very specific instance of Salmoncisco, to note how far up over the ground Cal extends and what can be used with that height.

18: Rebuilding

---Novelty competition submission

TheRegion has a sports and entertainment complex that is sufficient enough that both the U.S. World Series and Superbowl will take place there in four years. A large sect arranges to completely rent out the entire complex and staffing for The Big Meeting, where in this case, completely rent is to the level of sect vendors, sect security, sect everything, all throughout the complex for the duration of that Big Meeting. --- TheRegion certainly has no issues with a short event complete takeover rental, the sect is large enough and has paid all the rental and insurance money up front. And then at the height of The Big Meeting, the entire complex blows up and is completely destroyed.

19: Elite

The Math department student leaders at one of several unis are in the process of getting towards the planning of the next triennial, multiple uni, Big Math Conference And Competition. At that uni, quite a number of other student groups, movements, whatnot, are having rather unrelated total spasms in dealing with each other and trying to demand precedence . . . and all of those other groups keep encountering the Math and Math Department related certain terms and situational realities that all of them just have no way to avoid or deny.

20: The Way Of The Cousins

Nukatabe is the eldest child of the current great high priest, and she is quite rather expected to follow in his place once he dies or retires. As a ten year period starts, she had recently graduated college with a degree in cultural history, and had started dating and getting quite involved with Henry, whom she had met in college. Regardless of The Household throwing a fit ---she threw one right back --- she and Henry marry, and after some time, they have twins. Getting towards the end of the ten years, her father notes time and age and arranges to retire.

21: Urg The Sithyann

---Novelty competition submission

Urg the Sithyann --- sometimes Urgh, sometimes Sythian --- stumbles into a large recreation organization with lots of events. Work is busy and involves travel, so he just attends events rather than

run any. Over time, while getting handed The Big Three major recreation awards, he never registers with the organization and never formally signs up for any newsletters. Emma, his girlfriend and then wife, goes to a few events and registers with the organization but never gets any awards and never signs up for any newsletters. Joe, their son, goes to a few events, but only gets signed up for all the newsletters, and never gets registered with the organization or gets any awards.

22: Knowing The Game

Sumname and his wife are the current local heads of a branch of a large recreation organization with lots of events. The organization has been going on for a number of years, and has wound up with several groups of related jokes and anecdotes telling of doing recreation stufh. Over a period of a month or so, Sumname and his wife encounter or carry out every one of the jokes and anecdotes.

23: Three Of A Kind, Queens Wild

Sumnamea, Sumnameb, and Sumnamec are in or arrive in San Francisco and go to college. Sumnamea has a collection of older friends he hangs out with. At some point word gets around of A, B, and C all being around . . . and of having quite a resemblance to each other. . . all about the same time that the older group of friends start noting something definitely awry with a situation and some people that they know.

24: Playing Go

Geoffrey is a British spy, and has been for quite a number of years, where very early on he got caught by Barry, got turned, became a double agent. During his travels, he takes up the game of Go, where assorted meetings, writing papers, doing commentary, give him some additional cover as a spy, and definitely as a double agent. And then he got caught by Sean, got turned, became a double agent. And then he got caught by George, got turned, became a double agent. And then he Archeigh is a Very Up And Coming British Spy Administrator, and one day he runs across a rather skimpy personnel file and notes that Something Must Be Done.

25-27: The Faire Commedia, Parts One To Three:

25: 1: A Day In Hell

Sumname helps run a small game and tchotchke and assorted souvenir company that has assorted booths, stores, event attendance that is done. And then assorted staff scheduling has a hiccup, and he needs to cover a staffing shortage for a day. Except that in this case, the event site for the booth is a totally nightmarish fiasco that has actually functionally only heard of events called RenFaires, while vehemently claiming to be one, has no intent to ever actually be one, and how Dare anyone even suggest otherwise

26: 2: Making Amends

Sumname and his girlfriend are regular staff at a local RenFaire. Various Occurrences go on or are expected as part of a particular day at the extremely historically grounded Faire, with he, she, and their associates working through the details.

27: 3: Pair O' Dice

Pair O' Dice is _the_ ultimate live action role playing game competition . . . of some sort and scale --- others are perfectly welcome to do more elaborate and larger events or something, there is lots of room and time and audience, so what. As each year's Pair O' Dice occurs, there is a basic framework that assorted participants and staff follow and take part in, and then there is no predicting what the participants and audience and staff will get themselves into . . .

28: Antarctica

Sumname spends a winter season in Antarctica doing scientific research. The scientific research is very serious and very grounded in reality. Absolutely never whatsoever does Antarctica have a particular plateau with a city on it. Utterly no way whatsoever is there an opening that leads to the center of the earth. Absolutely everyone, Sumname in particular, is quite aware that no one will ever encounter anything of the sort whatsoever Or, there may be some totally different story, but at the very least, Sumname spends a winter season in Antarctica

29-32: Two British Debut Novels, Parts One through Four

This is a four part study and comparison of the debut novels of two mid century British authors. One novel is J. R. R. Tolkein's best selling first novel, _Casino_Royale_, and the other novel is _The_Hobbit_, by Ian Fleming.

29: Part One: The Hobbit By Ian Fleming

Gandalf the wizard guides a hobbit and thirteen dwarves.

30: Part Two: Casino Royale By J. R. R. Tolkein

British spy James Bond vs a Soviet paymaster in a casino.

31: Part Three: The Hobbit By Ian Fleming

British spymaster Gandalf guides a really short and pudgy spy and thirteen dwarf commandos.

32: Part Four: Casino Royale By J. R. R. Tolkein

British hobbit James Bond vs a dragon in an Elvish casino.

33: Raising Taxes

The tyrant of an extremely large, Victorian, nation state and city wants to carry out The Grand Plan, but that's going to take a lot of money. So far, the tax collection system has basically involved holding people upside down and shaking them. However, the current head tax collector can be convinced to finally retire, and the tyrant's favorite miraculous trouble shooter is getting bored, again. Assorted businessmen and nobles find the idea of paying taxes to be utterly Not To Be Done, but the head of the police --- and the richest man in the city --- thinks paying one's fair share is a perfectly fine idea. About this point, someone asks if the organized thieves of the Thieves Guild are also going to be expected to pay taxes, and someone heads over to the Assassins Guild and hires an assassin, again

34: Harry And The Award Of Valor

Harry just wants to go home to England and his wife and be left alone, except he gets shanghaied in Singapore and winds up in California. If he keeps going east, he can at least get home that way, so he takes a job that will take him to the Atlantic, selling and installing lightning rods. About that point, the stupid Americans all start shooting at each other, and Harry is right in the middle of it all. It doesn't matter how many medals he's already collected, he has no interest in what the Americans do to each other, the last thing he wants is to get stuck in another war.

35: Harry And The Medal Of Honor

Harry just wants to go home to England and his wife and be left alone, except that he's wound up in the Unites States as the stupid Americans are still shooting at each other and that's making ship bookings complicated. He finally does manage to arrange to get on a ship leaving New York, except that U.S. President Abraham Lincoln finds out that Harry is in the country, arranges to get him held for questioning, and then Lincoln quite utterly and absolutely blackmails Harry

36: The Fatal Assumption

---Novelry competition submission

The watchers of an interstellar trading organization note a very definite shipping contract oddity and arrange to hand a trading captain the contract to have a look. The ship gets destroyed during arrival near the end of the contract. At that point the watchers arrange with the captain to take another contract that rather seems to have definite common points with the first contract, the watchers arrange to be doing a very enhanced and definite investigation of the second contract, and all and sundry then wait for any numbers of traps to get sprung.

37: You Can Leave Your Hat On

The watchers of an interstellar trading organization note an interesting oddity with a particular multi-system spacecraft race. There might be too interesting sorts of smuggling being enabled, or there might be some too interesting methods of getting from point A to point B, both of which could extremely interest the traders. The traders decide that they will do their own entry, adapting one of their own Lt. Kije class runabouts to take part in the next competition.

38: Themselves

An interstellar trading organization has had quite a lot of experience over time with large organizational logistics, small organizational logistics, moving focus, and assessing what needs to be where. A trader captain has a long time acquaintance pop up to note that a large group of he and his now need to somehow arrange to not be a particular group in one place, and quite could use the trader expertise to quite be themselves some other way or somewhere else.

39: Once More With Feeling

An interstellar trading organization encounters a group, or system?, or company? where the whomever claim to pretty much be the same as the traders, but then again a bunch of oddities keep turning with

the new arrivals. So the watchers of the traders have one of the trader captains go have a really close look at the whomevers

40: The Singer

An interstellar trading organization is having further encounters with a collection of organized odd occurrences, something not adding up. By this point, the oddities are starting to situationally rampage here and there and actually have stumbled over stuph and a situation that could definitely cause a lot of problems for a lot of people. The watchers of the traders then hand the oddities what they claim they are demanding . . . but what the the traders hand off has its own built in booby trap to be triggered.

41: Bye-Bye Life

An interstellar trading organization and quite a number of independent interstellar system governments are having to deal with a rather organized collection of posers and failures who are using assorted techniques and tools to interfere with and try to destroy everyone else.

42: Theseus And Hippolyta

Puck wanders here and there as Theseus and Hippolyta get ready for their wedding . . . but first there is a plea from a collection of queens to assist with a collection of dead kings, a cluster of actors rehearse a scene, there is a matter of two captured combatants, an entire court of fairies sort out local politics, and

43: Mandate Of Heaven

George Adams has gotten in trouble with the Royal Government and has gone sprinting over the border to the next country. On an other hand, the RG has been, literally, Royally screwing up and is rather tottering. With his legal and logistical skills, Adams keeps noticing that one can arrange things much better --- which is what got 'im in trouble in the first place. And then the Royals collapse, Adams hops back over the border, and Adams and associates point out that repeating the Royals ain't gonna work, something else needs to get put in place to keep the roads paved, and such . . .

44: Altared States

[Altared States, part one]

In a cathedral of The Church Of Mithra And His Holy Mother Isis, a priest is found laid out on the altar. Except that he is from The Church Of Mithra, full stop --- no Isis --- and therefore he is definitely the wrong variety of clergy from the wrong schism. And he shouldn't be lying dead on the altar. And he was strangled with a string of beads with a pentagram, which means The Temple Family, and of course the T.F. is a totally different organized faith entirely, so why are T.F. prayer beads in a Mithra variety cathedral? And a string of beads is merely what one prays with, so why is one such string so strong that someone can get strangled with it? And a bunch of money is missing from somewhere in the Family Temple hierarchy, except that the complaint about the money is coming from the Templars Familial rather than the Temple Family or Family Temple, all three sects of which are their own also quite separate schisms quite separate from anything of the Mithrans. And at this point, the local police are definitely noting right wing politics, right wing politics, general politics, more

politics, even more politics, and so detectives Abraham Tanaka and Bodhi Schmidt `_get_informed_` that they `_are_assigned_` to do some sort of investigating. And Do It Quickly.

45: Gimme That Old Time Religion

[Altared States, part two]

Yes, the loose ends got tied off when a dead priest turned up on an altar and in the wrong cathedral, but the strings tied to the loose ends are now turning up.

46: Shall We Gather By the River

[Altared States, part three]

47: Hadavar Shelanu

[Altared States, part four]

48: Who are you?

[Altared States, part five]

49: School Of Nothing

[School Of Nothing, part one]

50: Show The Work

[School Of Nothing, part two]

51: Libraries Forever

[School Of Nothing, part three]

Libraries Forever is a novel fragment that's somewhat outlined as part of the Harry Potter universe . . . except that there's no way that it fits the Harry Potter storyline. It is from the third book of three, where the other two books introduce and outline a somewhat different set of details than what one finds in Harry Potter.

In `_School Of Nothing_`, a student of magic has wound up getting cursed. As enough time goes by the details of the curse are that when he is awake and aware, he can create magic that is totally perfect, impenetrable, unstoppable, unless he's unconscious, asleep, or, in enough time, if he's drunk. The curse was put on him by a wizard who wanted the perfect weapon, to use on others, and, well, that weapon really does not appreciate being turned into someone's weapon. And the intended weapon can not even use his magic on himself, can not lift the curse. However, if he's drunk, there's going to be a flaw. When there's a flaw, the Ministry of Magic can supply a solution. As long as he's drunk, the Ministry stops dropping him in their basement. He doesn't mind being drunk, he'd just rather be sober. But when he's sober and does magic, the results make the Ministry grab him and drop him into a basement.

When the Ministry drops him into their basement, he leaves because he doesn't like it there, and can always break out.

52: Being Japanese

An American research director is living in Tokyo as he runs and sometimes does assorted research projects. And then some local cops encounter a convoluted attempt to do fraud, embezzlement, assorted other stupidities, and the research director then starts having to sit in on entirely too interesting research vetting and questions.

“Among your problems is that utter idiots like you make people like me look bad.”

0.5: Han Tze-Lee

There is a collection of individuals who are being hunted for certain talents, or for a situation they've wound up in, or something . . . they are being hunted by some organization, or mebbe some government, or mebbe something of both . . . Those doing the hunting also have a very large project that is being developed . . . and those being hunted proceed to steal the project and use it to do massive misdirection and proolly vanish without a trace . . . or at least the hunted can't be seen by the hunters . . .

D) Competition submissions and additional excerpt

The competition requirements were the first 1,500 words of a novel, and don't finish in the middle of a sentence. What was done for each submission here was to type out 1,600something, 1,800something words, then find the 1,500 word point, and then tinker with the final sentence or so to have each entry be exactly 1,500 words. What is listed here is the complete original competition submissions, all going over 1,500 words. What is also added is an excerpt from The_Werewolf,_The_Vampire,_And_The_Dragon_Lady_, with the excerpt being the scene that inspired the novel idea. Also added is

01: We Hold These Truths

---Novelty competition submission

The Prime Minister of the Unites States has opposition factions joining together to try to redefine politics in the leadup to the impending House Of Representatives general election.

We Hold these Truths

In the Oval Office of the White House, Washington D.C., U.S. Prime Minister John Adams watched cheerfully as an aide popped through a doorway to deliver a tactical update.

“What’ve you got for me?”, asked Adams.

The aide sat. “We are doomed, we are doomed, we are doomed, verily, woe is us.”

Adams gave the aide an ear to ear grin. “Delighted to hear it! What are the details?”

“The rumors are correct. A scattering apiece of the faiths and the identities have actually held their noses, gathered together in each other’s company, and jointly plotted our demise. Having done so, they note that we of the Conservative party, we who are the current government, are running out of time. Soon, we must declare the next general national election to elect or reelect all members of the House Of Representatives. As soon as we announce the date of the election, the trap will be sprung, and our joined opposition will achieve its inevitable victory . . . of some sort.”

“How?”

“As of a few days ago, politics as everyone knows and have practiced for centuries has now miraculously been replaced with the all new paradigm, and other assorted marketing phrases. No longer does politics consist of the three quite separate orientations of large organized faiths in one direction, assorted personal identities in some other direction, and then in the quite third direction, we conservatives who actually get things done, as we play the ideologues against each other, and as we ask the_ most important overall question in politics; What_ are you trying to get done, how do you plan

to achieve this plan by, and for the benefit of, the greatest number of people, how do you plan to get the greatest amount of result with the absolute least amount of cost and effort?

Adams nodded. "Go on."

Yes, the aide was being absolutely pedantic. Of course Adams knew what was being described, where such knowledge is how he had become the Prime Minister of The United States Of America. And quite to a point, of course with what the aide was briefing on, of course Adams needed to hear all of the details, the reasoning, the examples. As always, as with in mathematics, Show me your proof.

And the aide continued, pedantically. "Instead of the three political orientations that everyone always Just Does, political reality is to be a single spectrum stretching from one newly named extreme to another. In turn, anyone not at the extremes are to be denigrated as being 'Moderate', or "Centrist", or some variation or another that means lightweight, not serious, to be ignored, et cetera, et cetera. With this new scheme, the faiths are now to be called 'The Right Wing' --- call 'em 'The Ares' --- and the identities are to be called 'The Left Wing' --- call 'em 'The Elles'. Some of the theorists are claiming that this new scheme is to be declared a relic of the French Revolution --- the one with all the guillotines. Anyone Conservative, of course, is to just conveniently disappear in the confusion of the Ares vs the Elles --- and the hopes of the Ares and the Elles is that everyone will then vote only for them instead of mostly for us."

"The Arse and the Else indeed," Adams agreed, and the aide chuckled. Adams continued. "Interesting." He considered for a moment. "Soooo, an issue with the organized faiths is that any and all organized faiths have always been screaming at all the other organized faiths, given that, by definition, some other faith is going to be The Wrong Faith. Intrinsicly, any two faiths will be opposing factions within the faiths even while not being any of the identities. And we always see the same with the different identity focused factions. How is any sort of unity going to occur with their new political plot?"

"I don't think they're going to get any unity," the aide replied. "At least as far as grouping faith with faith and identity with identity. Everyone does know what faith means, and identity. However, with their brand new and opaque terms like 'Right Wing' and 'Left Wing', one can shift all the facts about as one wishes."

The aide continued; "Over in the identities, there are those who identify as 'The Working Class', where the best sort of person is a properly labeled worker. Of course, a different group of identity factions are the racial supremacists, where the most important matter is to be white, black, polka dotted, Elvish, whatever. For the race supporters, they don't care what work you do. Instead, you have to have the correct color of skin, ancestry, DNA, whatever, to have the best identity.

"Yes?" Adams prompted.

"Well, when political labels become 'The Arse' and 'The Else', both the faith and the identity theorists are already trying to reverse that faith is the same as faith and identity is identity. Now, as always, with the identity movements ---and just like any faith ---, the most important matter is one particular identity being good and some other identity being bad. Therefore, any support for the identity

movement that you like --- such as 'The Workers', such as _your_ preferred identity movement --- is to be "Left Wing". The hot new name for large organized faith is to be 'Right Wing'. And, in turn, any support for the identity movement that you don't like is to be called '_Far_ Right Wing'."

Adams absolutely roared with laughter.

The aide emphasized; "No, really, it does not matter at all that one faith is the same thing as another faith and that one personal identity movement is the same thing as another personal identity movement. Instead, with this new idea of 'Left Wing and Right Wing', the pretty identity movement that you like is to be called 'The Left Wing'. In turn, because faith is icky and must be opposed, it is therefore now called 'The Right Wing'. And, for the identity movement that is icky and that you oppose because it's not your identity, well, it's not faith, so it can not be called 'The Right Wing', so instead, any icky identity movement is now going to get called ---" And Adams joined in; "The Far Right Wing!"

Adams spotted another issue; "Wait, wait, wait! Therefore, if there is some really, really, icky faith that you don't like, so you call that," and the aide joined in "The Right Wing."

Adams continued. "And, there is some other faith that the icky faith opposes, because, of course, it is a different faith . . . "

The aide continued, "Where in that case, because pretty identity movement is a good thing, and an icky identity movement is to be called "Far Right Wing", then when someone 'Right Wing' declares that a different faith is to be opposed --- because it's a different faith --- then clearly the opposed faith can not be 'Right Wing', even though it is a faith. An opposed faith can't be 'Far Right Wing' because 'Far Right Wing' is what you call the icky identity that you don't like. Therefore, what you do is to decide that the opposed faith must not be any version of 'Right Wing' and must instead be some sort of identity, and therefore 'Left Wing'".

Adams stared at the aide.

The aide continued. "Yes, we're going to have both faiths and identities claiming that one. Now consider when a faith decides that it is 'The Right Wing', because, of course, it is the one, true, and only faith --- just like any and every other faith. So when some other faith is opposed for being a different faith, then, when your faith is 'The Right Wing', then obviously some different faith can not also be 'Right Wing' because your faith is 'The Right Wing' . . . and therefore, when political reality becomes 'The Right Wing' and 'The Left Wing', then the faith that you don't like must be 'The Left Wing'. And, because all those identities don't even do faith, that's even worse, and therefore all identities are, therefore, 'The Far Left Wing'."

Adams stared at the aide. "An icky identity movement isn't a faith, and a faith is considered 'Right Wing', therefore the icky identity movement has to be considered 'The Far Right Wing'."

"Yes," the aide confirmed.

Adams continued. "However, when your faith is declared to be 'The Right Wing', all other faiths must be declared to be 'The Left Wing', and the identities must be 'The Far Left Wing'."

The aide nodded. "Oh, basically,"

Adams stared at the aide, then stared at the ceiling, and finally, he asked the ceiling; "Do they really think that people will believe that?" Then he answered his own question. "Well, yes. As the axiom notes, 'There's an influencer born every minute.' Therefore, there are people who will believe that politics based on ancestry should be called, as you say, 'Far Right Wing'." He paused for a deep breath and a sigh. "Oh, deary, deary, me."

Adams stared across the room for a moment, then looked back at the aide. "Do they even have anything else?"

The aide shrugged. "That's basically what's turning up. Representatives here and there have this particular interest or that, but a lot of those occurrences are pretty much keeping in touch with constituents and counting local votes."

Adams nodded, commented, slowly. "Thus, at this point we, basically, have the election nailed . . . and absolutely we will believe that idea only after all the votes have been counted and we do have all the numbers. But, just the same. Wow."

A pause, finally continuing. "All right." Adams smiled. An apex predator about to have lunch would have had a nicer smile. "Go have a talk with Nicholas, give him all the new information . . . and tell him that I think we should go ahead with the smokescreen . . ."

The KSM advertising and marketing company was literally K Street Marketing, where having such an address rather simplified going to find clients, and having clients go find them. At some point, the three principle partners had wound up being nicknamed Ping, Pang, and Pong, following repeated all nighters trying to solve one riddle or another. However, to their benefit, while the three did repeatedly work odd hours themselves, their main request for their support staff was to have the company framework running steadily, leaving the three of them to go gallivanting through the company latticework whenever they felt like it.

One afternoon, Ping wandered in on Pang and Pong. "Someone wants to talk to us."

Pang: "Big someone?"

Pong: "Little someone?"

Pang: "Charity someone?"

Pong: "Money someone?"

Ping: "Dunno. The phone caller was clearly merely the caller of a phone."

Pang: "Oh, Ghods."

Pong: "Mystery Someone, again?"

Ping: "There is a clue. We are to go to the Rayburn at 4 O'clock sharp and meet Nicholai"

Pang and Pong chorused: "Nicholai."

Pang: "But that can't be the Conservatives."

Pong: "They don't need to talk to us."

Pang: "They're doing fine."

Pong: "Of course, absolutely we will believe that the Conservatives are doing fine only after all the votes have been counted and we do have all the numbers."

A pause.

Ping: "Shall we?"

Pang and Pong stirred.

Pang: "As the tabloid proclaimed regarding a particular premiership, lettuce."

The Rayburn House Office Building is one of three main buildings for housing members of the House Of Representatives. As far as deducing mystery meeting personnel, however, the building also features tunnel walkways and a private subway system, which connect the Rayburn building to the Capitol and to the Longworth House Office Building.

Ping, Pang, and Pong wandered in through the main entrance, noted the and nodded at building security, and considered likely meeting personnel.

"Good afternoon," purred Nicholas as he passed behind them. Ping, Pang, Pong, pivoted. "Right this way," Nicholas continued, verbally and physically. They followed as he headed towards a flight of stairs.

Downstairs, Nicholas made his ID very clearly visible to security as he waved the trio towards the tunnel walkway, and then led in the direction of the Capitol. Once reaching the Capitol building itself, Nicholas did more displaying and guiding, and lead them to the offices of the Conservative Chief Whip. They entered, and Prime Minister Adams announced; "Hullo, there. So nice of you to join us . . ."

Adams waved the four of them at seats near where he was sitting, as Nicholas closed the door. The four of them sat.

Ping: "Good afternoon, Prime Minister."

Pang: "Good afternoon."

Pong: "Good afternoon."

Ping: "What can we do for you?"

Adams: "We would like to hire your agency to develop some advertising for the Conservative Party."

"To develop," Ping noted.

"Down payment, up front," commented Nicholas.

"Unlike some political posers," added Adams, "we're perfectly happy to actually pay instead of merely promise."

Pang: "Payment is good."

Pong: "Did you have any particular themes or messages for the advertising?"

Adams tilted his head. "The Conservative Party, what makes actual conservative the ideal choice to vote for, what we propose and support which the assorted opposition does or will not. As a theme, 'About Being Conservative.'"

Ping: "Did you have some material we could work from, briefing information, position papers or so?"

Adams wrinkled his nose. "Oh, there's masses of paperwork floating around, everyone has that."

Nicholas continued. "How about some meetings?"

Ping: "And the meeting scheduling, and topics?"

Nicholas nodded. "We were thinking of a series of meetings over the next few weeks, going over material, examples, often with the Prime Minister, sometimes with me."

Ping: "Did you have any particular parameters in mind, methods, medium, scale?"

"Video gives visuals," noted Adams, "slogans give one hooks to work from when adding more concepts and materials . . ."

Nicholas continued. "Rather likely, we'll see what comes of the discussions, see what presentation forms the different discussions and topics work well in, see from there."

Adams surveyed the trio. "Does this sound of interest?"

Ping momentarily eyeballed to either side. Pang and Pong nodded. "We're in."

"Excellent!" Adams chirped.

“Shall we begin?” asked Nicholas.

“Certainly,” replied Ping, and pulled out a cell phone for notes.

05: Little Emmy

---Novelty competition submission

Ten years after the end of the twenty-five year long war, a general who grew up in that war finds that an opposition combat team from that war, and from thirty-five years earlier, has arrived in the middle of her own base.

Little Emmy

In the morning, a funeral.

Two cadets strolled into the entranceway hall, and reflexively scanned for some nearby higher rank which would be required to get a salute. In just a few hours they would graduate, become shiny new Second Lieutenants, and of course nothing would change about saluting, but at least they would have the new rank.

They wandered through the crowd --- and did wind up saluting on multiple occasions --- and arrived near the entrance to the main hall, and near the easel with the picture of the funeral's guest of honor. After a moment, one cadet commented.

"Ok, I met her a few times at the occasional reception, I know exactly who she is, or, yeah, was, and I still have the thought of 'Oh, so this is Mrs. Woodward.', or was."

"Right." agreed the other cadet. "And, 'This woman was the general's mother?'"

"Yeah," the first cadet agreed.

The other cadet looked at the program he had been handed by the door. "According to this, the general is even going to be the officiating chaplain for the ceremony."

The first cadet looked at his program as well. "Yes, it will be that bit about a family member automatically being the lead religious practitioner, or something like that."

The other nodded. "That makes sense."

They continued on into the hall and scanned for a pair of empty seats.

In the late afternoon, a ballet class.

In a large studio, five rows of dancers waited for the next directions. Emma called off a series of movements; do one of these, two of those, do one of another, repeat a bit, now go. The dancers moved through the sequence, a leg into a bend, an arm up in a curve, the rows of bodies doing a twirl, a step to the side, pause.

The students in the class were a bit of a mix. Some were in full leotard and tights, some in cut off shorts and a t-shirt, some in military P.T. uniform shorts and t-shirt. Emma herself was in leotard and tights. The class included a scattering of civilians, even a cluster of professional dancers, there was rather another scattering of military, there was a scattering of teenagers.

When a ballet class is known to specifically occur at the whim of the commanding general of the undergraduate Military Academy at Memorial Base, as part of the Academy physical education classes, there is a bit of curiosity about that class. The class ran all year round and each class started with basic floor exercises, then moved to the barre, then moved to far more complex levels of ballet, all in each class. The closest to an audition was to ask if the inquiring student even knew what ballet was, regardless of whether the student was civilian or military, professional or just curious. From there, the beginning students filled the middle row, took the middle barre, so that they could see the rest of the students and learn by example. And then they shifted on towards the outer rows as experience and muscle memory settled in.

Near the middle of this day's back row, newly graduated Second Lieutenant Scott McWilliams moved with the other students in what would probably be his final ballet class. His first ballet class had been over three years earlier, when there was a bit of curiosity about that class. Now that he had graduated from the Academy, he would get his second command station, probably off somewhere else, far away, some assignment that certainly did not include late afternoon ballet classes. Although, depending, he could always keep the idea in mind.

First, though, he was going to carry out his first command assignment, and that definitely would not include a ballet class. Of his graduating class, he had been declared to be the first of the class. Therefore, his first assignment was going to be that night, where he was going to be The Host of The Memorial.

Memorial Base itself was in fact named after The Memorial, and the complete base was quite vast, and rather complex. One section of Memorial Base was the undergraduate Military Academy that McWilliams had just graduated from, earlier that afternoon. Officers went to the Officers' Military College, for graduate studies, on another section of Memorial Base. A large section of the base was assorted areas for very hands on war gaming. One set of sections included boot camp, for both ground troops and navy. Another section was an entire multiple hospital campus that also did its own medical development and training --- and the training was undergraduate through full medical doctor, civilian or military. And other areas of Memorial Base were also their own assorted commands, as needed --- in some instances, an entire military unit would rotate in, spend a couple of years being on site, doing training, doing what was deemed necessary, and then would rotate out again.

In turn, in the center of the entire base was The Memorial, which was a multi-level underground complex. The Memorial, in general, was in memory of all who died in The War, civilian or military. That was the general focus for The Memorial because there tended to be rather a few visitors of all sorts, all throughout the year. In The War there really weren't a lot who got to be civilian. Quite instead, over twenty-five years of ongoing, constant, multiple system, interstellar war, there had been a lot of civilians who simply got to die --- if they were lucky. The War had been one of those wars.

In particular for The Memorial, the only time around the clock that The Memorial was completely empty, except for The Host, was on the eve of the anniversary of the beginning of The War. Each year

on that anniversary, starting at sunset, The Host of The Memorial became the sole representative of those who survived The War, civilian and military. During that night, starting at midnight, all around The Memorial, all units and sections of Memorial Base would go on full alert for the remainder of the night --- and that would include a number of visiting units who were in attendance expressly for the anniversary.

Inside The Memorial, The Host would wait all night, alone, waiting for those who, thirty-five years earlier, had known that a war was about to occur, who had deliberately taken themselves into the beginning of the war, and who had never returned.

The ballet class finished with the usual general applause for work well done. Most of the students wandered out and off to the dressing rooms. One or two trailed in the studio, asking Emma a question or two. Out in the hallway, someone else leaned against a wall, quite out of the way of the general exit from the class, knowing the general schedule from long experience, and today wearing complete military full dress uniform, ribbons, medals. After the last students came out, he strolled in, Lieutenant General Jefferson Parris, veteran of The War, current commanding general of the Officers' Military College at Memorial Base.

With the last of the students out of the studio, Emma basically ignored Parris, leaned against a wall, and after a moment, slid on down to the floor. Parris walked over towards Emma, stopped a few feet away, and looked down at her as she sat, staring across the studio.

After a moment; "Are you going to be OK?" he asked.

Emma sat, still, still staring across the studio. Parris waited. Finally, she looked up, Lieutenant General Emma Allison Woodward, very much a veteran of The War, had wound up growing up in The War, extremely decorated hero of The War, current commanding general of the undergraduate Military Academy at Memorial Base.

Looking up at Parris, Emma stared some more. Finally; "This morning I had to officiate at the funeral of a woman who basically merely gave birth to me. This afternoon, I got to take a bunch of children in uniform and push them out into the abyss, where yes, I know, we have had more and more quiet in the last ten years, and, we both absolutely know, that they are still being pushed out into the abyss, in whatever form that abyss will exist, not may exist. This evening, I have to observe the thirty-fifth anniversary of the annihilation of basically the only actual family I have ever known."

A pause, and she continued.

"I am not having a good day."

Very, very, far above the surface of the planet, the rather battered ship slid out of nowhere and into orbit. On the bridge originally staffed by many, a crew of three watched the main viewing screen, checked control panel readouts, continued to ignore the dust that covered most of the bridge. The two pilots, mostly organic, definitely mechanically augmented, were themselves both wired into the consoles

they sat in front of, as they checked details in the very dim light. Behind them, the third crew member quite perched in the evident command chair, and was clearly not even of the same ancestry as the pilots, and also was totally organic, no circuitry whatsoever.

Finally, from behind the pilots; “And?”

One pilot spoke, the voice totally flat, mechanical, the mouth not even moving; “On course, impeccable timing, we’re right over the horizon.” The other pilot then spoke, a voice notably different, but also flat, mechanical. “Communications traffic, is benign, is very busy, but no alerts, no oddities.”

The third relaxed in his chair, slightly. “The shuttles?”

The first pilot looked up at the screen, back down at the console. “Scanning, I should have confirmation in a few minutes.” The third looked about the bridge, noted with slight curiosity that a small black pebble had turned up on the arm of the command chair. He picked up the pebble, looked at it.

In a few minutes the third had left his chair and was standing near the pilots. Then the planet vanished off the main screen and a very magnified oblique view of a lake appeared instead. The first pilot spoke. “That lake will be our destination, where we can unload and then put the shuttles into the lake. The lake vicinity seems rather built up, and we can assess on arrival. And going down, the shuttles can stay on autopilot with no need to adjust the course presets.”

“Oh, excellent,” the third announced. At that point the cables connecting the pilots to their consoles popped loose and retracted into respective arms. The pilots both turned in their chairs to face the third, and stood. The third still had the pebble in his hand, sitting in the palm. The first pilot looked at the pebble, smiled, spoke. “Time for us to leave.”

06: Collecting The Bet

---Novelty competition submission

“My Dinner Party With Andre At The Overlook Hotel”

Arthur is going to Las Vegas for a meeting with Mordred and the rest of the council. He's going, but at the same time, there are also other problems and issues to solve with others. Therefore, Arthur, Lancelot, others, arrange a parallel unconference to pick through the admin puzzles . . . and then the discussion subjects also start to turn up at the unconference and also the council meeting, where sometimes the discussion subjects simply appear out of the walls.

Collecting The Bet

Ongoing pounding rain continued to puddle across the sidewalks of Las Vegas. Drivers peered past overworked windshield wipers as they negotiated their vehicles through intermittent inland seas.

Riding in the airport shuttle van, Arthur watched the rain sluicing across the windows. The driver's long white ponytail went flipping back and forth as he double checked intersections for any oncoming idiots or for other traffic.

Once safely paused at one red light, Arthur looked over at the driver. “So. Rain does occur in Las Vegas, does it?” The driver cackled and nodded towards Arthur's gray duster and wide brimmed blue hat.

“Oh, yeah. Snow, too. Every once in awhile. Rain like this surprises people, but then they haven't been seeing the flash flood channels that we have here and there. This storm is being one of the big ones, so that's why there's as much water on the pavement as there is.”

“Seems rather like steering across a river,” Arthur said, as the light changed to green. The shuttle driver waited. A BMW ran the red light, went past the front of the van, spun its way through part of the intersection, and plowed through a streetlight, knocking the light pole into a cartwheel. The shuttle driver cackled again and jutted a chin off in in the wake of the loser.

“Failures like that, with brand names and no brains, can only drive if someone sweeps a broom ahead of them. And, weather like this makes the roads exactly like steering over a river, where those idiots just keep running themselves aground.”

No other idiots appeared, so the driver finally drove on through the intersection and continued down the street. “And my passengers keep arriving, so I keep ferrying them across this river.” Lightning flickered overhead, and after a moment the booming crack of thunder echoed down the street. The driver continued. “So what do you do when you're not being rowed to your destination?”

Arthur replied. “I'm one of the doctors at a place called Crown Medical Center, where I talk to patients a lot and help keep the whole thing running.”

“A royal profession!” crowed the driver.

Arthur shrugged. “There is a good deal of peers working with peers. I’m here in Las Vegas this week to make a presentation to a particular council of titled rulers like that. And, in parallel to the council meeting, I’m going to be hosting an unconference so that additional peers can take a pulse of our assorted medical realms . . . or whatever else turns up at the unconference, given that it is going to be an unconference.”

The driver cackled again. “Excellent!”

The van soon slowed and then turned to pull into a long, curved, driveway with a slight slope. Following the driveway, the van aimed towards the relative dryness underneath a massive, pillared overhang. At the top of the driveway, the van pulled up in front of a set of large hotel sliding doors. Stopping the van in front of the doorway, the driver ceremoniously proclaimed to Arthur. “Here we are your majesty. Welcome to the surf line of the Isola Hotel and Casino. I present to you this other dock and its pier, but do watch out for the water.”

“Oh, no problem.” Arthur assured him as he pulled out a wallet. “Onto every king some reign must fall.” He fished a bill out of the wallet and handed it to the driver. “I give you these two coins as payment for your excellent navigation.”

Out on the walkway, a doorman approached as Arthur closed the van's sliding door. “Will you need any assistance, sir?” Arthur shook his head as the dark colored van started up again. Painted on the side of the van were the shuttle company's name and slogan: Kharon Airport Shuttle, “From first exit to last flight” The driver saluted Arthur before starting the van forward, going back down the driveway. “I think I’ll be fine,” replied Arthur to the doorman as he waved back at the the driver.

Elaine strolled across the Isola Hotel lobby, pulling her wheeled suitcase along behind her. This was her first time in Las Vegas, and monsoon scale rain was not what she has been expecting. She’d decided to come to Las Vegas because Arthur and Vivian were going to attend a particular council meeting in Las Vegas. The council had been created a few years earlier by Vivian, and was made of Vivian, Arthur, Mordred, and a number of others.

Around when the council meeting had been called, a number of other people had been noticing assorted questions and puzzles and complications. Therefore, Arthur had decided to sort of host an unconference, to be sort of in parallel to the council meeting, and see if the assorted issues and oddities could be addressed with that. Elaine wasn’t a member of the council, but she was very interested in the unconference, and she was interested in seeing what Las Vegas looked like. And, sure, Elaine had also agreed to babysit Arthur and Vivian’s three kids for the couple of days of the council meeting. Of course, the Isola was also a casino, and Arthur and Vivian’s eight year old middle ---

Elaine remembered looking up, looking up at what she also remembered was to be a new diaper changing table for her, a table being given to her parents. She was standing by the table, where the table, and the adults looking down at her, were outside the house, so if she was standing, then this must be when she had been just maybe two years old or so? One of the adults was saying something to her about this being a new changing table, but . . . Two of the adults were clearly supposed to be mom and dad, but, . . . no. Those two faces she did remember . . . but one of them had murdered the other a few

years later, and they definitely were not _her_ mom and dad . . . and no, her family had never had that table.

Across the Isola hotel lobby from Elaine was the hotel reception ---

Elaine sort of remembered sitting on that changing table, but this memory was frozen, motionless. In front of her was dad . . . no, the memory claimed that the one in front of her was “dad”, but also no, that was still the same man who committed that murder several years later, where this time the man had his arm held out and bent, hand up, where he clearly was in the middle of a full force swinging smash with that hand, the hand very definitely aiming for her head, and --- .

Elaine lurched to a stop in the Isola Hotel lobby, stared, vaguely, she still did have the suitcase handle ---

Elaine remembered being at the back door of her house, peering out at the back yard, and also looking further, out to the back yard of the house behind her house. So this was before they had left the country, so at that point she must be remembering when she maybe just three years old. In that further yard, the neighbor and his two sons were playing with something like a race track with toy cars that was sitting on the ground in front of them. Elaine remembered that right after seeing the neighbors from her back door, she was soon in that other yard, with the back fence neighbor father and children, where she was just sitting near them, watching them play with the race cars. Elaine remembered looking back at the back door of her house, where in the doorway was “dad” with “mom” just behind him . . . no that is not “dad”, it’s that man who later murdered that woman just behind him, where also Elaine had never lived in that house, actually, but now she did remember living there or at least Elaine did now have the memory of living there

Elaine remembered that the man in the doorway was screaming in absolute hatred, ordering her back into the house. Elaine remembered she was then back in the house, where the man immediately ripped her clothes off of her, and then he was hitting her with a belt, over and over, with the woman clearly just standing there, clearly just watching, not objecting whatsoever, just standing there. Elaine remembered that obviously she was not someone’s child, she clearly was just a piece of meat, just an object, just property. There should have been pain, but all that Elaine remembered was that the man was hitting her with the belt, over and over and over, and no, he was not doing light swings, he was putting all the force he could into each smash with the belt, and the woman was just standing there, clearly not objecting in the least, the woman just standing there, certainly considering the assault and battery to be totally normal, totally expected.

Elaine stared across the lobby of the Isola Hotel, sort of, that is, the lobby was definitely that of the Isola Hotel and Casino, and Elaine was definitely standing in that hotel lobby What.

The.

Utter.

Bugger.

Was.

That.

Memory.

What The Utter Bugger Were Those Other Memories??

Elaine sort of stared across the lobby of the Isola Hotel lobby, it was a lobby, it was the lobby of the Isola Hotel.

07: Up The Organization

---Novelty competition submission

Difirme Ltd. has offices in San Francisco, London --- specifically in the City ---, and Tokyo. Craig has worked in the City for some time and been hired to move to San Francisco instead. He is to be the new manager of the SOP division in San Francisco, and then finds out that he and his staff have to outmaneuver the BS and HR divisions that are causing problems in the SF office.

Up The Organization

Ima Coprolite barged into the meeting room, glared at Vacuous Paperpusher, and blurted; “What went wrong?!” Off in the depths of the back of Ima’s head, Real-Ima was, for once, also screaming the same words as Ima; “What went wrong?!”

Vacuus, looking up from his laptop, went with the handiest retort; “You’re, like, HR, like, how would I know?” Off in the depths of the back of the head of Vacuous, Real-Vacuus proclaimed; “Like, you’re HR, like, hiring is, like, your job!!!”

Ima flounced over to a chair, plotzed. “How could that idiot. Where did he. No.”

Real-Ima seethed. “How dare something get done proficiently?!”

A growl from Ima. “Alistair.”

Vacuus looked confused. “What about Alistair?”

“He did it,“ announced Ima.

Vacuus remained confused. “Like, but Larry, like, sent out that email. Alistair just does, like, Finance.”

Larry Franke was the San Francisco branch president of Difirme Ltd., doers of business. Difirme had three main offices. One was in San Francisco, one was in London --- notably located in the City ---, and the third was in Tokyo. In the SF office, Alistair Sanders was the director of the Finance department. Also in SF, Ima was the director of the HR department, and Vacuous was the director of the BS department. As usual, Ima disliked and distrusted anything involving Finance because Finance did real work with real money. As always, HR merely sat on paperwork and sent out memos. And in the previous half hour, Larry had sent out a company-wide email announcing a new employee. For the previous several months, Larry had also been the acting head of the SOP department of the SF office, and now someone else was arriving to do that.

From: pres-sf [Larry Franke]

To: difirme-sf-list, difirme-city-list, difirme-tokyo-list
CC: pres-city, pres-tokyo, sf-dir-finance, sf-dir-legal, sf-dir-hr, sf-dir-bs
Subject: Welcome Craig McKay, new SF SOP director

I am delighted to announce that Craig McKay will be transferring to San Francisco from the City, to be the new director of the SF SOP department. Craig has a pair of B.A.s in History and English and has worked in the City office Finance department for the last five years. He will be starting with us in San Francisco, next week.

He reports that his hobbies are reading, particularly reading and rereading Charles Dickens, occasional movies, playing golf on occasions, and playing Go. He states that by all means do feel free to get in touch with him if you have any further questions.

Larry

“What do we know about him?” asked Vacuous

Ima: “He plays golf.”

Real-Ima: “It’s in that email, didn’t you read it?”

Real-Vacuous as well, even: “He plays golf.”

Ima continued. “I told Larry that we need to be very careful who we promote to that job.”

Real-Ima continued. “We still have to have someone in that job who will totally and completely screw up in the job and screw over the department, someone who is just like you. Or me.”

Vacuous griped. “Chester would have been perfect.”

Chester was another completely off center axle in the wheel of life. About three months earlier he had collected his third piece of wallpaper from some typical M.B.A. mill --- this last one being online. In the BS department and its inevitable open office seating --- inevitable for the BS department, that is ---, the section of table that he sat at now included all three pieces of wallpaper which declared that Chester quite absolutely Manages Bugger All. Of course, and on an other hand, in the BS department quite a few had a similar piece of wallpaper. There were some in the department who had wallpaper reporting an individual to be E.M.B.A., that is, Entirely Manages Bugger All. And then there were quite a few others in the BS department with a Ph.D, each of whom apparently believed that each one’s first name was now required to be Doctor.

“And Larry hired that someone else as well,” added Ima. “It’s not in that email.”

Real-Ima announced: “And since he did that hiring, I can’t stop it. Or make certain that she is suitable. And of course by suitable, that means dumber than a sack of hammers. How dare anyone with any intelligence get hired in this company, I am the center of everything!!”

As Real-Ima babbled, Ima reflexively fiddled with her oversized and tacky eyeglass frames.

“Like, he doesn’t have to put her in BS,” meandered Vacuous.

“Is like, Willow like, a her?” Real-Vacuous also meandered.

“He hired her for SOP,” added Vacuous. Vacuous reflexively further yanked up his shirt collar, quite enhancing his resulting appearance of a recently castrated dog with a vet’s collar.

“He still says that SOP having that contract collapse on them is the reason for less need in SOP right now.” recited Ima.

“He should still toss her ass,” announced Real-Ima. “I haven’t met her to see what she’s like, and if she turns out to be good at anything, then that is just wrong.”

When Craig arrived for his first day, Larry took him on a general walkaround. The SF branch was about 150 people, so there weren’t a lot of rooms to visit. Larry had his office next to that of William Paget, who did legal assessment of whatever went through SOP and BS. Alistair was next, with a wave at the other people in the cubicles of the Finance department.

Larry then led Craig to meet Vacuous with his seat among the tables of the BS department.

“Call me Vee,” announced Vacuous. “Oh, yes, my name is absolutely esteemed, it’s one of those timeless and classic Shakespearean english names, like Worldly Wiseman, Scaramouche, Wanton Professor.”

“Of course you’re going to continue to be absolutely in awe of me,” added Real-Vacuous.

Ima and HR were next, with comments mixed in with the introductions.

“Yeah, basic employee paperwork handling is done the same way in San Francisco as in the City,” noted Larry, “but just in case, check with Ima if anything seems to be missing.”

“Well, I have to figure out how to screw things up for him as well as his department,” announced Real-Ima, “So I’ll have to see what Vee can do.”

Larry and Craig finished up in the SOP cubicles.

“Basically, you know SOP and you know BS and you know the differences,” Larry noted. “In this office, a couple of years ago, BS changed over to open seating, so it has all those tables there, and BS works on things that way. Of course SOP does the same business work in the different direction of sorts. Therefore, with those different ongoing details, SOP has stayed with the cubicles and kept everything arranged this way, to get all the SOP work, processing, done this way.

Craig nodded. "Oh, yes, this is sounding very familiar."

"I've been working out of my office, while filling in as SOP director," commented Larry. "But you'll be able to set up as you wish here."

Craig pivoted back and forth, noting the department main entrance this way, the rest of the room that way, a main aisle throughout all. "I'm going to see of setting up back there, and that way have have everything coming all the way in and past everything."

Larry noted the assorted direction details, nodded.

A day with the arrival of a new department head is rare, and everyone gathered for a reception at the end of that day. Some had been busy when Larry was walking Craig around and the walkaround wasn't a grand introduction, so now there was the general immersion. Of course Larry handed Craig a microphone.

"Hullo everyone," Craig announced. "As Larry's email noted, I've been with the company for several years, but I was in the City and not in San Francisco. Yes, I'm happy to be here in SF, I am looking forward to working here, ah, what else, yes, my hobbies do include reading, occasional golf and a game of Go. Yes, I have read pretty much everything by Charles Dickens. I pretty much majored in that in back in college. And, definitely, rather than listen to me yammer here, if you have any questions, feel free to ask."

Off in the depths of the back of Hudson's head, Real-Hudson blurted out; "Like, wait. Like, he doesn't even have, like, a master's degree? He only went, like, to college and, like, he's been given a director's job?!!!"

And Craig quickly and cheerfully handed the microphone back to Larry. There was a scattering of rote applause, the standard appreciation for keeping the comments short. The floating about then began, most people starting with the drinks and the snacks, some just shifting and chatting, some going over to Craig.

"I'm Doctor Beau Attersly," announced Beau, with oversized eyeglass frames perched over his mildewface, which Beau claimed was called ""stubble"", double quotes deliberate there. "I'm in the BS department. I saw that you play golf. I worked on a golf course when I was in school."

Hudson had wandered over with Beau. He had hair by Exxon, where Hudson's mildewface had sort of gotten hacked at, leaving his chin seeming more of a bathtub ring, rather than full mildewface. "I'm Hudson Lantree, I'm also in the BS department, but I'm only working here for a bit before I get my doctorate.

Craig was somewhat impressed. "Indeed. Taking a break from the pre-med courses?"

Hudson blinked. "Pre-med?!" announced Real-Hudson. "Like, medical?!"

“Like,” Hudson began vaguely. “I haven’t picked a school. Like _doctorate_, like Ph.D.”

“Ah, I see,” noted Craig. “Not medical, then.”

Opal wandered in, Willow a bit behind her.

“I’m Opal, from BS. I only got my M.B.A. last year.”

“Hullo,” Craig said.

Opal continued. “If you read Charles Dickens, are you from Scotland?”

“No, I’m from Iowa”, Craig replied, “I only worked in very far outer Scotland.” He looked at Willow.

“My name is Willow,” she said. “I only majored in history in college, basically medieval Japan, which was one reason I applied here --- I just started in the BS department, just this week, so I’m also finding out about everything.”

“Welcome to Difirme,” replied Craig. “I have been to the Tokyo office a few times. All three offices are always in touch at some point in a day, so you may indeed get to chat with them.”

08: Marketing

---Novelty competition submission

T'Chotchke Is Luxury. Luxury Is T'Chotchke. If It's Not T'Chotchke, It's Not Luxury. At the T'Chotchke company headquarters in Tokyo, Ishi-san is giving Yajirushi-san the overall briefings on T'Chotchke background and tactics. As this is occurring, they learn that several wannabe competitor companies are merging and proly planning a very unfriendly buyout.

Marketing

Tokyo in August.

_Ick_and_Ugh_.

One is inspired to go northeast for awhile, or way up mountains and into mountain valleys, the ones with lots of trees. And shade under those trees. Or just stay indoors, if one's building can keep the temperatures down.

The T'Chotchke headquarters building in Tokyo did have really good air conditioning. Therefore Ishi-san and Yajirushi-san met in Ishi's office. Ishi had his own tea. Yaji had her own tea.

Begin at the beginning. Ishi did. "The issue is a matter of marketing."

Yaji didn't have to take notes. Ishi was reciting from paraphrased memory, from his own company briefing material, quite available online, which she had already read.

"The primary marketing message is the basic axiom:

T'Chotchke is luxury.

Luxury is T'Chotchke.

If it isn't T'Chotchke, it isn't luxury.

We. Do. Luxury. There is quality, and then there is what we do, and that difference is how we make our money."

He took a sip of tea. "The overall description of what we do, what we sell, is the cargo cult. Of our main competitors, what they do, what they sell, is the cargo cult. At this moment, those major competitors are: Gardileau, John-Frum, and Kegare, and then there are the minor market companies, Etcetera, Yadda, and Blah. For all of those companies, regardless of what marketing they claim, what they actually do, what they actually sell, is a cargo cult."

A bit of history.

"Cargo cults got that name in the south pacific in the early to mid twentieth century. In the time leading to and then during world war two, the natives of a number of areas and islands in the south pacific encountered the Japanese, and then the Americans. Both the Japanese and the Americans

showed up with massive amounts of manufactured clothing, medicine, tents, canned goods, all the materials needed for a major war. All of this miraculously arriving material got called cargo, because, basically, that's what it was, delivered by cargo ships, cargo airdrops, cargo, cargo cargo. And of course, for those on the assorted islands, when one received some of this cargo, one didn't have to go hunting, one didn't have to build housing, everyone admired you because you had cargo, as long as one can get cargo, as long as cargo keeps arriving."

Another sip of tea.

"And the big problem was, once the war ended, the supply of cargo stopped. Those wanting more cargo had to figure out why the cargo stopped, and how to get cargo to come back. Given that cargo would miraculously appear from over the horizon, or would appear from the sky, then clearly the source of the cargo was the gods, and those who had been supplying cargo knew how to get the gods to deliver cargo. Therefore, all that was needed to make cargo appear again was to do the same things as the original suppliers of cargo. Groups of cargo suppliers had regularly lined up and marched back and forth with particularly shaped sticks on a shoulder. A cargo supplier would regularly salute a particularly colored piece of cloth that was at the top of a pole. The cargo suppliers had this long flat area where the gods regularly delivered cargo. To tell the gods where to deliver the cargo, there would be a little hut near the long flat area where one would talk to the gods . . . and so forth. Obviously if one was sufficiently sincere and did the same things that the original suppliers had done, then the gods would listen and would once again deliver cargo. Following the return of cargo from the gods, there would be that most important matter, one would have cargo and one would be admired for having cargo."

"Well, that is the theory," Ishi noted. "And, in time, cargo never came back. After a while though, what did arrive were anthropologists. The anthropologists looked at the properly sincere worshipers of cargo. They noted that what was going on was definitely an example of totally standard organized faith, aka, a cult. Therefore, as the focus was cargo, the anthropologists thus named such a faith the cargo cult."

And Ishi summed up the introductory chapter. "And that is where we get the name of what we do."

Another sip of tea. More history.

"Now, the cargo cult term dates from the 1900s, but of course what we do dates back centuries. In the 1800s, P.T. Barnum didn't actually say 'There's an influencer born every minute,' but the thought definitely applies. And, in turn, I'm not certain if anyone's ever tried to declare various succeeding generations of cargo cults, first generation, second generation, and so forth, but, the thought does occur. Therefore, if we say the pacific cargo cults are a first generation, then a sort of second generation turned up in European colonies in Africa after the second world war.

Additional history.

"In this case, there wasn't a war and deliveries of cargo. Instead, there were colonial administrators, where the administrators had stufh. Now, for many in the colonies, there weren't any great mysteries of how cargo started to appear. The colonialists were merely these odd looking people who showed up one day, and they had a bunch of things that they brought with them. On the other hand, from the native

point of view, there were a few who looked at the administrators, and got the idea of ‘Oh, if I look like that, then everyone will think that I am important.’ And with that, a whole new cargo cult got created. Apparently there is a French slang term of sape, or something like that, with a meaning of cloth, therefore clothing. The members of this new cargo cult wanted that cloth, or what they thought it looked like, so a rather convoluted cargo cult name was created based on sape, where the members of this cargo cult then got called sappers.”

Yaji noted an oddity. “You say that a few natives created their own new cargo cult. But not other natives.”

“Right,” Ishi confirmed. “In the colonies, the only real difference between the natives and the colonialists was that the colonialists had colonialist stuph, rather than what stuph those in the colony had. Administrators and managers talk to other administrators and managers, and as long as a job gets done, no one cares what the background of the manager or administrator is. And, in turn, for someone who is more concerned with what something looks like, such as the sappers, then, as that axiom notes, there really is an influencer born every minute.”

“And in time, colonies became independent,” added Yaji.

“Yes,” agreed Ishi. “With independence, the change was hardly like the original cargo cults. In former colonies, just because a lot of people with stuph went away, how to get that stuph wasn’t a mystery. For sappers and this second generation cargo and cargo cult, just arrange for shipments. Or, if funding is ‘limited’, arrange for smuggling of shipments. Or, pay the full price, but arrange for interesting variations for payment. Whatever it takes. And, those extremely few, self important fantasizers were still the only ones stuck in that cult. Many more just watched the colonialists leave, and just continued on. And for those not taking part in the cargo cult, and looking at the gullible who did take part in this new cargo cult, the commentary could get distinctly scathing.

Ishi paused, considered just where had he left something . . . “Somewhere in notes I have, there is an article on the sappers, and very particularly, on those outside of the cargo cult. The article reports that cargo cult members would burn through masses of money to have this costume, or that knick-knack, some other thing. And then the article reports that regularly when someone native knows a cargo cult member, that someone is a relative. There is one interview with a brother or cousin or something, where the relative is definitely not a sapper, and the relative is saying, basically, ‘For the amount of money which that useless idiot has spent on his costumes, he could have bought a house!’”

Yaji was amused. And just the same, there is the important issue. “So where would we come in?”

Ishi nodded. “In that situation, we would be the suppliers of the costumes and assorted knick-knacks. All we need is to guarantee that we get paid, up front. Why someone bothers to buy is not our problem.

Yaji noted, “We are suppliers, but, those colonial cargo cult members are not the only market.”

“Correct,” Ishi nodded. And that brings us to a sort of third generation of cargo cult. In the mid nineteen seventies, a woman named Cyra Mcfadden wrote a book called The_Serial_. The book is basically about a sort of third generation cargo cult, with the exact same frantically floundering mindset.

In turn, after The Serial, a few years later, that exact same mindset of grasping desperation was outlined again. This time, however, the book was more of a how-to manual, rather than a novel. Once again and basically given that any cargo cult is a cargo cult, the title of the how-to manual was, effectively, ‘The Official Cargo Cult Handbook’. Absolutely unsurprisingly, the book immediately went straight to the humor section of the bookstores, because, of course, no functioning adult is going to take a cargo cult seriously.”

“And lots of nonfunctioning adults do take a cargo cult very seriously,” Yaji noted.

“Yes!” agreed Ishi.

“And, ‘effectively’ titled?” Yaji added.

“Yes, effectively, because the immediate problem with the actual title was that language constantly changes. Various labels of the moment, various names, various references, always shift about, and always will. Different regions will have different terms, even if all the regional references all mean cargo cult. So, consider; every one of our customers has no taste, no style, no clue, and absolutely masses and masses of money. They have no class, therefore, an excellent overall label for a cargo cult member is the underclass.”

Yaji was amused.

“However, on our part, we don’t have to be too concerned as to what this week’s label is, as long as we keep a eye on the generalities. For the market that we sell to, cargo cult is very definitely very apt. For the frantically desperate that we sell to, underclass is certainly also completely apt. That second book could just as easily be ‘The Official Underclass Handbook’, and the title would be totally accurate. In the last hundred years or so, among the fluidly shifting terms for one version or another of members of blatantly obvious underclass, cargo cult, whatnot, there has been,” Ishi paused to poke at a reference to read off. “T’Chotchke is luxury, therefore any and all T’Chotchke customers are best known as; yuppy, yobbo, yob, upscale, the underclass, trendy, thought leader, sloane, pretentious, preppy, plebeian, plebe, lad, hoi polloi, hipster, gatsby, fraternity or sorority, fail, douche, douchebag, chav, bro,” and Ishi took a breath, “and that is basically this week’s list.”

Yaji was very amused.

Ishi had another look at the list. “Yes, and these days, this week, one definitely should add ‘influencer’ to that list. When noting that influencer does mean, intrinsically; no class, no taste, no clue, it’s just too obvious.”

And yet another look at the list. “And we do make our money, and that is good . . . and of any of these underclass, there is no possibility of having any respect or admiration for anyone whose social and cultural inspiration, ideal, and epitome, is Corky St. Clair.”

Yaji was very, very, amused.

A television ad for T'Chotchke makeup:

The rectangular screen started as black, empty.

In the upper left, lettering appeared, gold, fine detailed, large;

T'Chotchke Cosmetics

After a moment, more lettering appeared in the lower right, blocky, pale, rather gray;

Other makeup.

Common makeup.

After another moment, more lettering appeared in the upper left, under the first lettering, also gold, fine detailed, large;

Your Choice.

09: JTown

---Novelty competition submission

Alice finds out that a very valued family heirloom went missing during WWII. She enlists the help of fellow Uni professor Charlie, and the two of them find out that Went Missing is only the beginning of the puzzles.

JTown

Pronunciation note: JTown, from Japantown, doesn't have some obscure or complicated way of saying it, it is simply "Jay Town", as a single word.

A morning in JTown, San Francisco.

A staffer sat at the front operations desk of an elder care home. The staffer looked up as Alice walked up to the desk.

“Hullo, how are you?” greeted the staffer.

“Not bad.” replied Alice.

“What can I do for you?” asked the staffer.

A pause.

Finally; “How is Noriko doing?” asked Alice.

Another pause . . .

The staffer finally started a sentence. “She . . . “ And stopped.

“Yes,” agreed Alice. “That.”

After a moment, Alice continued. “There is something . . . going on . . . Or . . . not going on.”

The staffer nodded. “Yes.”

Alice began; “She . . .” and clearly searched for the rest of her thought.

Finally, the staffer continued. “She’s fine . . . for someone over a hundred, she . . . She takes part in activities, she gets along with everyone just wonderfully, she . . .” the staffer dwindled.

Alice added. “But there’s something . . .”

The staffer nodded slowly. “Yes. . . . But.”

Alice charged ahead. “Mom's worried, grandpa's worried, no one can put a finger on What I'm thinking is that I'll have a chat, go over stuff, I'm the youngest, so what can she tell me . . . and I wanted to see if anyone here had also noticed anything . . .”

That's the answer. The staffer agreed. “Oh yes.” The staffer considered, assessing. “She's doing very well. There is nothing I can point to that is wrong And it's like she's hanging on?? It's . . like . . . there's something, and she can't let go . . . ?”

That's the answer. Alice picked up. “Yes. Right. There's something going on.”

“Gimme a moment,” commented the staffer, and grabbed a phone; The staffer listened to the phone for a moment. “Alice is here to see Noriko.”

A pause. More listening.

“Domo!” the staffer announced, and put the phone down. “She's in the green room . . . Definitely let us know what we can do to help you . . .”

A morning at a university.

Charlie Hawthorn sat in his office and its scattering of books and papers. On a wall was a poster for a major museum pottery exhibit. There were some pictures of California gold rush miners, a map of the early Bart line proposals, and more posters telling of Asian glassware and pottery. Charlie taught classes in California history, and did studies of Asian pottery.

The door swung open, and Alice stuck her head in. “Hi. Are you free?”

Charlie blinked. “Never. But I am available at the moment.”

“Oh good.” Alice continued on in, a bag slung over a shoulder, and paused by a chair. Finally; “I'm looking for a particular Japanese vase.” Charlie leaned back, raised an eyebrow.

Alice sat, the bag went onto the floor. A moment to arrange thoughts. “This is about my great-grandmother, Noriko. She was born in Japan about nineteen oh five, these days she's living in a residence home in JTown.”

In the early twentieth century, several thousand Japanese moved from Japan to the United States, with a large number settling in California. Noriko would have been one of them.

In the office, Charlie nodded, Alice continued.

“When she was about five or so, she and her parents came over to America. Once they arrived, they settled in, they never left. At the same time, when they came over, they brought with them a family heirloom, a particular vase from Japan that was given to her parents by her grandfather.”

After arrival in the US, a good number of the Japanese settlers became farmers, and a number settled in various cities, Seattle, San Francisco.

Alice; “At the beginning of World War Two, Noriko and her husband were living in JTown. Her parents had settled in JTown after they arrived from Japan, and either they owned some local business or worked for one. And also with the beginning of the war, there were the internment camps.”

Charlie sat, nodded, as Alice continued.

“Noriko and her husband had to keep track of her parents and in-laws as well as her children, and in the middle of all the chaos, someone had to take care of the vase. Her father brought it to her and told her to take it to a friend of the family, a monk who was at the local Temple. She met with the monk and he wrote up formal receipts for his receiving the vase and holding it for them. And of course he's a good family friend so everything should be fine.

Should. Charlie looked properly dubious.

“And then during the war, the monk and the vase disappeared. Noriko wants the vase handed on to her children, but she can't do that until the vase is recovered. Also years later, while the monk is remembered, all anyone knows is that he died during the war, so there's no telling where the vase wound up.”

Charlie continued to lean back in his chair. Consideration occurred. “What does the Temple say?”

“The Temple's been gone for years”, Alice replied. She leaned over, fished through the bag, pulled out a clear plastic folder. “The only trace of anything that anyone has is this receipt that he and Noriko signed, and a picture.”

Charlie peered. There was a receipt in the folder, and a picture of a woman and two men; the woman and one man in their thirties, the other man slightly older.

Alice continued. “That was shot sometime in the late thirties, and that's Noriko and great-grandpa Jeffery, and the two of them with the monk.”

Charlie considered some more. “Does she have any pictures of the vase?”

Alice shook her head. “No. She remembers what it looks like, sort of. She says it's green, and it has a rounded top.”

Charlie very particularly stared at Alice. Finally, very precisely; “Just how large is this vase?”

Another morning in the residence home.

Noriko was definitely now over a hundred years old, as she sat in a chair, and peered up at Alice and Charlie as they came across the room. Charlie was carrying a somewhat fat, cluttered notebook.

“Hiibaba!”, Alice announced. “This is my friend Charlie who I told you about, and he wants to ask you some questions.”

Noriko looked significantly at Charlie. After a moment; “Hello Charlie.” Very measured. “Do you think you can find my grandfather's vase for me?”

A pause. Charlie replied. “I don't know. But I may have some ideas, and you may be able to give me some directions. Tell me what you remember of the vase.”

Charlie and Alice collected chairs and sat near Noriko. After a moment, Charlie had his notebook open and showed Noriko a picture, then another, and another. After a bit, Noriko shook her head. “No. No. None of these pictures are the vase.”

Charlie slipped the last picture back into the notebook and sat back. Alice looked disappointed. Charlie finally commented. “I . . . didn't think those were going to be the vase.” He looked at Noriko very particularly, then shifted pages about. He found what he was looking for, and then held up another picture. “What about this?”

Noriko's eyes widened. She lifted a finger. “That's not the vase . . . but the vase is very much like that.”

Charlie dropped the picture back into the notebook, quite leaned back in his chair.

Alice peered over at the picture. “What is it?”

“This isn't a vase,” said Charlie. “This is an urn. This is a cremation urn, one that carries someone's ashes.”

Alice stared at Noriko.

Noriko stared across the room, into the past.

“Grandfather,” Noriko said, very softly.

“You were very young when you came to America,” noted Charlie. “Do you remember your grandfather?”

Noriko stared into infinity. Then, slowly; “I remember my grandfather. He waved to us as we got onto the boat. My parents said he gave us the vase so that he would come with us to America --- No. So that someone would come with us to America. They never said vase. They never called it a vase. They always said . . . sofū.”

Alice inhaling at that moment could challenge a vacuum cleaner. Charlie looked puzzled. “Sofu?”

“Sofu . . .” Alice finally said. “That's grandfather.”

Charlie looked at Noriko. “Your grandfather's father.”

Noriko nodded, slowly. “Yes.”

Charlie continued. “Your grandfather gave you the ashes of his father, to come with you to America.”

Noriko stared at Charlie. “Yes.”

San Francisco's Hall Of Records has information for and on business owners and property, has information on birth, marriage, and death certificates. And, on one morning, also had a very puzzled Alice. Stumped, scowling, she drifted back towards the clerk's window.

“How's it going?” asked the clerk.

“It isn't,” replied Alice. A pause. “Let me check my logic. Someone died several years ago. I'm trying to find his death certificate so that I can get more information about his circumstances when he died.”

The clerk checked details. “You said World War Two?”

Alice nodded. “The story is that he died sometime during World War Two.”

The clerk shrugged. “That could be anywhere. It was a war. He'll only be listed in here if he did die in San Francisco.”

Alice looked at a notepad. “And we don't even have certainty on his name.” Continuing, to the clerk. “He was a Japanese monk, Japanese-American, and we have a name on a receipt, but there might be a different name on a driver's license or something.”

14: The Werewolf, The Vampire, And The Dragons

---Novelty competition submission

One night in Salmoncisco, an Auditor meets with a vampire and a werewolf for a debrief. Local dragons had requested that the vampire and the werewolf help run an operation to clean out an infestation of zombies in the area. The results are so successful that everyone wants the notes on just how did you do that?!?!?

The Werewolf, The Vampire, And The Dragons

Children yelled as they raced up the ladders, the ramps, plunged down the slides. Sections of the park were brightly lit under the evening lights, where the sun had just disappeared into the darkness. Scattered adults stood around, wandered around, chatted together, most of them rather probably being parents associated with the playing children.

In the tea house, the stocky fellow strolled over to the table and pulled out a chair.

“Hi there,” he said, and started sitting down. “Since we’re just past sunset, he should be appearing soon.”

“Oh, good,” replied the Auditor. “Can I get you anything?”

The Auditor then flinched when a third chair seemed to pull itself out, well, the chair almost sort of started to, where of that second man to join the Auditor, the tall man who was now standing there and pulling that third chair out from the table, he hadn’t been standing there the moment before, the moment that the chair started to pull itself, or get pulled out from the table.

The werewolf laughed, a short bark, as it were, as the vampire also sat down. “Yeah, sometimes I still have that reaction myself.”

The werewolf and the vampire looked at the Auditor.

“I won’t need anything,” the vampire said. “And, of course as you’re an Auditor and you’re doing Auditing, I’ll prolly be talking more than anything else, anyway.”

“I’ll get something to nibble on, over time,” commented the werewolf to the Auditor. “We should be polite and do table rental. Of course, given the amount of detail you’re going to want, once the tea house shuts down, we can shift over to one of the tables near the koban.”

The Auditor nodded, agreeing. He stared off past the vampire and the werewolf for a moment, then turned and looked out into the park, the dark areas in the distance, the nearest brightly lit playground area nearby. He turned back to his table mates, looked at both. “So, according to one description, all of that out there, all got built, onsite, in just one night --- although I’m also hearing that most of that did get done, but not all.”

The vampire nodded. "Everything got timed for a full moon, with all of the advantages of what one can do with a full moon, so definitely quite a lot did get done through that one night." The vampire nodded in the direction of all of the huge playground sculptures under all the lights. "All of those were started during the night, where basically each one of those is, basically, shall we say, cast steel, or so. All of the melting of the metal, all that went in, the initial casting, all that did occur during the night. Cooling of steel actually turns out to be a rather fast process, even with, basically, tons and tons of molten metal --- and, of course, the dragons were getting all of that done on the spot, on the wing, as it were, so they were quite on top of all the process details as needed."

"Granting, all the metal casting was the playground sets," the werewolf commented. "This tea house, that koban over there somewhere, the other assorted extra buildings, those were all brought in the next day with, a good deal of prefab coordination, so of course that got arranged ahead of time. Things like getting the plumbing set up, getting the assorted wiring done, that was done over the next day or so --- and of those details, the dragons did help with getting that done as well . . . just not as hyperkinetically as during the night when most of the work got done."

"For anything involving werewolves," the Auditor continued, picking off details, "doing all this during a full moon allows for getting a massively increased amount of work done, staying on top of the logistics, keeping everything as smooth as possible, even with all the absolute complexities of everything . . ."

"Yes," agreed the werewolf. "Through the night, werewolves stayed basically outside of the park perimeter, and then coordinated a lot of that outside traffic for a good, oh, a couple of miles in all directions. And being werewolves, during a full moon, we could basically just stay on our feet instead of relying on vehicles. We could keep going in person to where ever we needed to go from one moment to the next. We could channel the zombies in towards the park, we could definitely be aware and filter out any and all adults to direct them away from the park . . . and of course, we did get the occasional zombie that would get towards the park, that would actually finally assess the situation, and then see about turning around and getting out of there . . . and of course when a zombie gets the clue, sometimes that newly resurrected adult will then have to get out from a stream of zombies, get out through a stream of zombies . . . and so we would help with those instances as well."

The Auditor noted the detail. "So there were zombies that did stop being zombies, and then having become adults, they did then get out."

"Yes." "Yes," confirmed the werewolf, commented the vampire.

The vampire continued; "Sometimes I was doing general monitoring from the air, where I could see a stream of zombies coming into the park area, and then every once in awhile there would be a shift in the flow, some disruption of someone changing direction or flat out turning around. At that point I could drop down and then work from the ground, or get directions to a werewolf and guide in the werewolf to cover that situation."

The Auditor nodded, going over the generalities. "All of the preparations, presetting signs, multiple entire containers, lining up the assorted cabling, getting all that wired in, all that was done through the week leading to the full moon."

“Yes.” “Yes,” confirmed the vampire, commented the werewolf.

Continued the Auditor. “And that variety of project support was basically being handled by the vampires involved in the project, basically acting as some variety of management, onsite or wherever.”

“Yes.” And, “Yes.”

The vampire continued, “Some of the werewolves did some of the coding for the assorted software that was pieced together, albeit most of that was done by vampires. Some of the vampires did some of the perimeter set up and route mapping on site, where most of that did get done with teams of werewolves working from the planning documents.”

The Auditor nodded, noting assorted. “This was a dragon project, from the beginning, with vampires and then werewolves adding in more and more as the project continued along.”

“Yes,” confirmed the vampire. “About six months back a pair of dragons got in touch with me to see if I could help with a project that they were piecing together. We had some general meetings after that, I started bringing in more vampires and,” a nod towards the werewolf, “brought him in, and he brought in more werewolves.”

More nodding from the Auditor. “The full moon night itself . . . there were dragons onsite, multiple dragons, but did they . . . were they all here in the park all the way through, did they arrive or leave over time . . . ?”

The vampire noted, considered for a bit, “by the end, I think we may have had even up to thirty dragons onsite.”

The Auditor whistled.

The vampire continued, still considering, “Definitely at the high point with everything ricocheting about, there may have been a good mebbe, ten, twelve, by then . . . and then once the metal crafting and such began, well, fire is fire, and that was rather a lot of completely molten metal being worked with . . . soooo, there just did seem to be quite a few more dragons than there had been earlier . . . Yes, I could definitely posit that by the time of getting the metal worked, park perimeter and vicinity covered, noting all the variables, yes, more and more dragons through the night. After all, it’s a good idea to have onsite backup staff.”

The Auditor and the werewolf didn’t quite entirely get the giggles at that point, but yes, there was the absolutely immense amusement caused by the idea of a dragon, and in fact quite a few dragons, being referred to as “staff”.

The vampire continued to consider processes, variables. “Early in the evening, definitely by late afternoon, there were definitely at least two dragons wandering around in the area, and I’m fairly sure of at least a third, while various things got into gear.”

The Auditor noted timing. “So, for zombie bait, there had already been general announcements of brands, brands, brands. And then with the full moon rising, that’s when more and more trickles, and then entire waves of zombies started to converge on the park area”

“Yes.” “Yes,” concurred the werewolf and the vampire.

16: The Werewolf, The Vampire, And The Dragon Lady

Someone, or several someones, have started stalking dragons --- Quite entirely, yes, one just does not stalk or even try to think about threatening dragons --- and just the same, several dragons in Salmoncisco have had someone try to kill them. Yes, normally something like that would be the concern of the Rangers of Salmoncisco --- or, for that matter, dragons themselves ---, but investigation can be difficult when all the suspects keep winding up as a scattering of ashes. So one dragon in particular gets in touch with a vampire, and the vampire gets in touch with a werewolf

The Werewolf, The Vampire, And The Dragon Lady

--- introductory excerpt ---

The vampire looked down at the dragon lady.

The dragon lady [. . . . something about color of skin, makeup, costuming, almond shaped jade green eyes, black hair, how tight the dress, very developed chest, shoes with six inch spike heels, something, something, et cetera, something: Consider media imagery dating from Fu Manchu, et al, i.e. totally stereotypical _Dragon_Lady_].

The vampire had already been hearing someone breathing, somewhere behind him, but then there was something of fabric moving about, and the noise of a pistol being cocked. So the vampire shifted a step or two off to the side as he blurred about to face whomever had the pistol, saw a man standing there with, indeed, there was the pistol, held straight out to threaten both the vampire and the dragon lady and the minor puff of the the expanding cone of complete incandescence as it reached out to, and then washed over, the brick wall in front of the vampire, with the extending mass of extremely cool fire continuing beyond the man with the gun who was no longer even there anymore, and even the gun wasn't there anymore, that fire becoming a billowing flower of scattering bits of flame as they danced across the surface of the brick wall, and then also ceasing to be as the last flickers of flame disappeared and the room went back to being basically just dim and shadowed.

The vampire just stood there for a moment, waiting for his eyes to shift back from totally overloaded near blindness, into an also incandescent blur, and then into a bunch of dancing fireflies, and then the fireflies also finally faded into the shadows. If the dragon lady, behind him this time, was breathing, he wasn't hearing her. Then again, from the wall in front of him, there were still the minor tinkles and pops as the glowing bricks continued to cool off. Oh, and once his eyesight finished readjusting, that glowing section of the wall also had the outlined silhouette of a person, as if someone had been standing in front of the wall when the flame had arrived. The vampire finally turned back around. He found that where he had gone off to the side in one direction, the dragon lady was now standing a good fifteen feet further to the side in the other direction.

The vampire looked down at the dragon lady.

“So,” he finally commented, “I’m getting an idea of why the dragon owned buildings I’ve seen here and there are all brick . . . or concrete . . . or cement block, but not any glass blocks . . .”

The dragon lady nodded.

The vampire looked down at the dragon lady.

After a further time, he noted. “We are in a dragon owned building, where dragons can be found at times.”

The dragon lady nodded, noted. “We are in a dragon owned building, where dragons can be found at times.” Quite British accent there, but then she grew up in Hong Kong.

The vampire continued. “Anyone coming into this building will only get in here with the definite knowledge of who or what sort of person is likely to be in here.”

The dragon lady noted. “Anyone coming into this building will only get in here with the definite knowledge of who or what sort of person is likely to be in here.”

The vampire continued. “That fellow with the pistol was openly being a threat to someone who is in this building, or to someone who would be likely to be found in this building.”

The dragon lady looked up at the vampire. “That fellow with the pistol was openly being a threat to someone who is in this building, or to someone who would be likely to be found in this building.”

The vampire looked down at the dragon lady.

The vampire noted. “Dragons are dragons.” A moment. “Dragons _are_ dragons.” Another moment. “And, regardless, someone apparently came in here to threaten and possibly attempt to kill with the full knowledge of who would be in here.” And another moment. “Someone appears to be targeting dragons.”

The dragon lady looked up at the vampire. “Quite.” A scent of burnt brick arrived from across the room.

The vampire looked down at the dragon lady.

The vampire noted. “Those bricks behind me were glowing just a moment ago. With that amount of heat, I also should have gotten entirely barbecued when that glob of flame went past me, but I didn’t feel any change in the temperature . . .”

The dragon lady looked up at the vampire. “Fire control.”

The vampire looked down at the dragon lady.

The dragon lady looked down towards her chest, proclaimed; “Ugh.” She shifted weight, kicked a spike heeled shoe several feet off to one side, then quite casually dropped the foot into half of a fifth position. Lifting the other leg in a plie, she kicked the other shoe off to join the first shoe, and dropped that foot into the other half of the fifth. Following that, she left her arms at her side as she extended fingers and then leaned back and forth for a few moments of a complete body stretch. Then she went back to standing entirely relaxed. “I utterly adore ballet, and, point shoes are a total and complete bitch.

I have never understood what anyone finds the least bit interesting about shoes that are anything more contrived or complicated than correctly comfortable flats.”

18: Rebuilding

---Novelty competition submission

TheRegion has a sports and entertainment complex that is sufficient enough that both the U.S. World Series and Superbowl will take place there in four years. A large sect arranges to completely rent out the entire complex and staffing for The Big Meeting, where in this case, completely rent is to the level of sect vendors, sect security, sect everything, all throughout the complex for the duration of that Big Meeting. --- TheRegion certainly has no issues with a short event complete takeover rental, the sect is large enough and has paid all the rental and insurance money up front. And then at the height of The Big Meeting, the entire complex blows up and is completely destroyed.

Rebuilding

Anthony strolled into one of the main rooms of the club. Susan looked up, raised an eyebrow.

“Are you off tonight?, she asked, sounding puzzled.

“Yes,” he answered. “Why?”

“I was reading about the Regional rental,” she said, “and a large church taking over absolutely everything for their event, soooo mebbe y’all having to going on backup, or something like that.”

“Oh. No. Not really.”

A cluster of party goers went past them and down a hallway.

“So yes, there is CultusIngens. CultusIngens is indeed a massive, totally typical organized faith, church, temple, whatever the label, entirely typical faith just like and totally interchangeable with any and every other faith. CultusIngens is renting all of the Regional complex entirely, where they are indeed renting all of the stadium and all of the conference center. They are expecting to have easily ninety-five thousand members in attendance, but, this is their really big conference that they do every ten years. And yes, also in this case, renting entirely even means all the concession stands, they’re using their own staff, all the security stations, they’re using their own staff, all the parking lot operations, they’re using their own staff, everything. So, with this event, yes, this is a complete takeover of both the stadium and also the conference center.”

He paused, then continued. “But this is CultusIngens, they do have that many people, and they have that much money if they want to spend it, and they can do all that.

Susan added. “And no city police, no sheriffs, no . . .” She waved a hand for everything else.

Anthony shrugged. “That’s fine. And they’ve even got their own paramedics, and, being CultusIngens, they even have their own field hospital onsite, so they have that covered too. From there, the city police are in the area, but that’s standard. For the sheriff’s department, my deputies are doing their usual . . . And let’s see what happens.

And Susan had noted rather a bit of familiar recitation. “You’ve been giving briefings at press conferences, haven’t you.”

Anthony managed to sort of nod and shrug. “Press conferences have occurred. Department briefings have occurred. CultusIngens renting the entire Regional Center is the biggest event that some have seen, but, the Regional is going to host both the Super Bowl and the World Series in four years. There are always ongoing rental bid discussions for assorted other events I attend the occasional press conference. I occasionally brief at the occasional press conference. I brief my staff and visiting staff. And there are lots of press conferences that other people do that I don’t. “ He added for a finish. “And, yeah, in general there is the definite awareness of Big Event In Progress, so there is that.”

Onsite at the Regional, Saturday evening was in full gear, in several senses of movement, clothing, and nick-nacks. Around the perimeter, the CultusIngens Guardians were in full uniform as they strolled the parking lots, the outer fencing, monitored radios, padded about in pairs. At the gates, Guardian teams of five kept an eye on traffic, but with basically no arrivals, mostly they just stood at the gates themselves. By Saturday night, no one was coming in, anyone who would arrive was already on site. There was no interest in anything outside of the fences, out there was beyond the concern of heaven.

In the conference center, the quietest spot was the overall field hospital and nursery. At most, the hospital was getting the occasional medical call for feet with blisters, and medical issues of that scale. The hospital could handle much more than sore feet, at least on a first response level, but anyone with any ongoing major medical issues wasn’t going to be onsite. Or, someone focused on being Joined With Heaven would definitely make certain to attend the conference extravaganzas and just make certain that medical issues didn’t get in the way. The nursery had a large collection of mostly sleeping bodies, but at that time of night, and that age, that was the conference attendance.

The main conference rooms had rather a gathering of people watching the evening stadium service on large video screens. The stadium was certainly the closest to heaven, but then again, not quite everyone would have the energy, or the eardrums, for the full stadium experience. The conference rooms did have different seating and lower levels of sound. Besides, as long as one was at the conference, and as quite a few posters and displays reminded, one was clearly Joined With Heaven anyway.

Out in the hallways, in the conference center and in the stadium, a fair number of attendees and some conference and CultusIngens staff were milling or practically marching about. The concession stands, souvenir stands, and bathrooms were doing excellent business. The CultusIngens staff at all the various stands kept certain to steadily and speedily collect payment and hand off orders. Trios of Guardians patrolled about in the conference center and the stadium, albeit with more trios in the larger space of the stadium.

In the stadium, the Saturday night service had waves of people and light and sound rippling through the stadium, had echoes bouncing off the domed roof. Up high and ringing the field, the two levels of upper seating were filled to capacity. Spaced across those upper levels, rows of boxes decorated with the CultusIngens logo ran from the back of the stadium down to the front of the seats.

At one end of the stadium, two competing choirs called back and forth, their chants echoing across the large stage and altar that was between them. On that stage a CultusIngens priest bounced back and forth between the two choirs, directing both, echoing both, waving his arms up and back and forward. Behind the altar, more seating in both upper levels, the seats quite filled, the congregants jumping up and down in time with the choirs. Along with all the seats and attendees, each level also had its pair of rows of the decorated boxes, each row running from the back of the stadium, extending down towards a back corner of the altar.

The field of the stadium was covered in seating and aisles of flooring, all facing towards the altar. In several rows across the stadium field there were large video screens, set up high over the seating, each with a row of boxes underneath. Hanging from the dome of the stadium, more screens, more views of the altar. With the seating and screen arrangement, from one seat or another, most of the attendees could both see the altar and also have a much larger view on a screen.

The seats on the field were also extremely filled, with additional people milling about in the aisles. The aisles were very wide and a snake dance was moving down the right aisle, across in front of the altar, and weaving back up the center aisle, feet stomping in time with the priest's piston-like jabs and with the syncopated chant of the two choirs. Clump, clump, moan! Clump, clump, moan!

Another man marched out in front of the altar, the CultusIngens Great Prophet himself, wired for sound and trading off with the priest. The prophet reached the center of the stage, turned towards the congregation, and raised his arms high. "Who's happy?" he bellowed.

The congregation roared, "WE'RE HAPPY!"

"Why are we happy?"

"WE ARE JOINED WITH HEAVEN!!"

"The Highest Lord declares!" roared the Great Prophet.

"WE ARE JOINED WITH HEAVEN!!" screamed the congregation.

Outside the stadium, in the parking lots, there were more of the decorated boxes, some by the walls of the stadium, others further out in the parking lot, the outer set forming an intermittent ring, circling the stadium. The Guardians in the parking lot used the ring of boxes as a demarcation line, where they patrolled from the boxes out to the fences. Several pairs of Guardians turned and looked in curiosity as one side of each of the boxes opened, and a grey-green mist started spraying out across the parking lot.

Inside the stadium, the roaring chant continued.

"The Highest Lord will show!"

"WE ARE JOINED WITH HEAVEN!!"

"We will see we are!"

Inside the stadium, the top of every single decorated box popped open as each box began to spray a column of mist up towards the roof of the stadium.

“WE ARE JOINED WITH HEAVEN!!”

Out in the parking lots, each Guardian radio broadcast a loud pair of tones, and through each radio a voice announced; “Heaven calls!” Every single Guardian immediately started sprinting towards the stadium, running into and through the grey-green clouds from the boxes.

Inside the stadium, the Great Prophet flexed his arms as he watched the columns of mist extending up and out from the boxes, expanding out into a single cloud that continued up towards the stadium roof.

“WE ARE JOINED WITH HEAVEN!!”

Inside the hallways of the stadium and the halls and hallways of the conference center, more of the boxes opened up and began spraying mist. In the enclosed space of the hallways, the mist immediately enveloped everything, then billowed towards and through any available exits.

“WE ARE JOINED WITH HEAVEN!!”

About that moment, both the stadium and the conference center detonated, entirely, all at one.

Inside the stadium, the upper levels of seating ruptured and crumbled and smashed down towards the ground floor. Overhead, the domed roof of the stadium lifted up evenly, propelled on a cloud of fire. The outer walls of both the stadium and the conference center simply shifted out several feet, and then disintegrated in billowing flame. Outside, parked vehicles turned into shrapnel as the shock wave from the explosion smashed across the parking lots.

21: Urg The Sithyann

---Novelty competition submission

Urg the Sithyann --- sometimes Urgh, sometimes Sythian --- stumbles into a large recreation organization with lots of events. Work is busy and involves travel, so he just attends events rather than run any. Over time, while getting handed The Big Three major recreation awards, he never registers with the organization and never formally signs up for any newsletters. Emma, his girlfriend and then wife, goes to a few events and registers with the organization but never gets any awards and never signs up for any newsletters. Joe, their son, goes to a few events, but only gets signed up for all the newsletters, and never gets registered with the organization or gets any awards.

Urg The Sithiann

They went to his company picnic at a local park.

Dating had gotten to the point of seeing how the coworkers would react to the new girlfriend, and vice-versa. The event should be basically low key, ideally have a nice day at the park. And just in case, do have an easy exit if something goes awry. Nothing unusual expected, and, have the tactical plan in mind, anyway.

Everyone did get along just fine as the morning progressed. No issues. Assorted things to eat arrived to be eaten, assorted people arrived to do eating, assorted rounds of chatting with others.

“How _is_ the project going?”

“So nice meeting you, finally.”

“That _is_ odd, they were telling me about that. Yeah, send me a note and I’ll see what I can dig up.”

Chat and sit and munch, and

Oh _Um_?!!??

What are those people doing over there?

Around when the company picnic began, another group started wandering into the other area, more or less, of that section of the park. Albeit, though, those others were over there, and, over here, who’s got the charcoal?

In time, there were bits of metal over there, some large bags of some sort. Oh, you brought the other salad. Yeah, put that here.

Big flat things turned up over there, here are some more hot dogs. Yes, we do have more mustard, it’s right here.

After a bit, there was a yell from over there, and then several mild bangs and a thud.

Waitaminnit.

Are they wearing big _metal_ helmets?!?

Sitting and munching continued. Not so much chatting. The sitting had shifted about to best see the other group over there while still munching on things over here. By this point, she could recognize when he got _that_ look, but now quite a few of his coworkers also had _that_ look.

A few in the other group over there had long striped poles. The ones in the helmets had something much shorter, looking like shiny sticks. As two or more of the helmets would face off and hit each other with the shiny sticks, the ones with the striped poles would stand around them, holding the poles horizontally. Oh, the ones with the long poles are being safety guards. That's a good idea. Oh, and those flat things are being used as shields. Oh. Those _are_ shields.

Someone dropped to her knees, hitting the ground hard, but that's fine, she's wearing kneepads Wait. She's wearing _metal_ kneepads?

Finally; yes, _really_. What _are_ those people doing over there?

A cluster of picnic goers wandered over, sort of, don't mind us, we're not invading, what _are_ you doing?!?!?!?

Someone from the other group peered over a shoulder, and then turned and strolled to meet them.

“Hullo, I'm Jules, welcome to fighter practice.”

Uhm. Fighter practice?

Yes, that question. “We do a variety of medieval reenactment, where in our case, doing is very hands on, and includes medieval combat.”

“Swords and shields ‘n’ stufh,” said one of the coworkers, one of whom also had _that_ look.

Another coworker; “So you just decided to start doing this?” The coworker didn't have _that_ look, but the question was valid.

“Not exactly _just_ start,” answered Jules, as some others of the others of his group also drifted up. “A number of years ago in Berkeley, there was a group of students, some studying history, several medieval studies, some English, and then one of them was going into the Peace Corps. So they had a medieval theme going away party. There were dances, and songs, and some party goers had done some sword training, so they also had a small tournament to be the king for the day. Someone would fight for

the honor of someone else at the party. And then they finished with an impromptu march up Telegraph Avenue, protesting the twentieth century.”

One of the coworkers noted, “That could be fun.”

“Yes,” Jules agreed. “And people did say it was a lot of fun; ‘Oh, hey, how about we do this again next month?’ By two months later; ‘Oh, we’re gonna get bored by the end of the year’. Soon after, the non profit paperwork was filed for the ‘Medieval Gaming Collective’. Today we have branches throughout all fifty states and into Canada. Europe and Australia are their own Gaming kingdoms.

One of the others with Jules commented. “We do fighting, we do dancing, we do singing, we do name and device research, we do medieval clothing, we do festivals with feasts, we have entire wars between kingdoms . . . “ She trailed off.

While quite a few of his coworkers had that look, he was the one who asked the question.

“You have wars? How large are these wars?”

One of the others shrugged. “We can have a thousand fighters in a single army. The opposing army can be another thousand.”

Jules noted, “Those are the large wars, where smaller wars can have a hundred on a side, fifty on a side, two hundred on a side, it all depends on the event.”

Another coworker didn’t have that look, but, “What do you mean by name research, and you said, device? research?”

Jules answered. “Yes. Sooo, combined, names and devices and research and stuph, and how fighters go about doing the fighting. The MGC does medieval recreation stuph. We’re not doing history. We don’t have anyone claiming to be Henry II Plantagenet, he’s been dead for nearly a thousand years, and we’re in the United States, we’re not in England. Instead of England, in the MGC, we’re in the Kingdom of The Midlands. Here in The Midlands, the current queen and king are Isabeau and Maelgwn. I say current queen and king, because the royalty are chosen by combat in a tournament, and we have new crowns every six months, or sometimes four months, that depends on the kingdom. I also say current queen and king, because in our last tournament, Isabeau fought for the honor of Maelgwn, and she beat everyone else who she fought against. Maelgwn did fight in that tournament, by the way, fighting for Isabeau, but he got eliminated during the tournament. And . . . um.”

“Names and devices,” reminded one of the others.

“Right,” said Jules. “For those medieval pictures on shields that you see here and there, the name for that sort of picture is a device, with stripes, and lions, and flowers, and circles, and lots of other things. They’re medieval, we do ‘em, and the people who do that research are called heralds. Heraldry also do name research, where when you want to do fighting in the MGC, you need to blend in with the middle ages, and a name like Motorhead just doesn’t do that.

Several cackled, both coworkers and others.

Jules continued. “Lessee, names like Maelgwn, and Isabeau, both can be shown to be in use in the middle ages, they don’t sound modern, and they blend in just fine.

While quite a few of his coworkers had that look, he was the one who again asked the question.

He asked, “So you get a name from the heralds, and then you go do the fighting?”

“Oh, you don’t have to get a name from the heralds,” Jules answered. “Name research just makes certain that the name is authentic for the middle ages. In fact, most people just pick their own names, and quite a few never do any sort of name registration with the heralds.” Jules looked at him. “You look like you’re interested in the fighting, so to blend in, what name would you pick?”

He stared off past Jules, definitely with that look on his face. Finally, “I’ve . . . read almost nothing historical . . . a name . . . ? Something like ‘Urg the Sithyann’.”

Jules beamed at the newly named Urg. “I like it!” Someone next to Jules quite raised both eyebrows. Jules looked over at the someone, patted her on the shoulder. “We just won’t tell the heralds.” Jules turned back to Urgh and his coworkers. “I do expect that Erg will be fine, blending in is a big deal, and, all the time in the MGC, we get three particular groups of people, where quite often the three groups just completely overlap and never even mix, and they all blend in just fine.

Jules gestured at Urg, stuck up a thumb. “One: Here we have Urgh the Sythiann, who is interested in the fighting. He is not alone, we have thousands of fighters. He has a name, and his name definitely does not sound modern. So we have Ergh and everyone like him.”

Jules stuck out his index finger to go with the thumb, and continued. ”Two: There are the heralds and people doing very particular research, finding out what names were actually used in the middle ages. And, so, a lot of people do register a name with the heralds, have a name and device that is completely genuinely medieval.” He paused. “A lot of people register, but not everyone.”

Jules added his middle finger to the other fingers. “Three: All of these events we do are published in local monthly newsletters, where you sign up with the MGC, you get a newsletter sent to you, you see what you want to do. Joining can be a really good idea, so that you can get the newsletter each month, and, then again, there are a lot of people who make it to events by word of mouth --- They don’t have a newsletter, but they know someone who does.”

Jules then relaxed his hand, dropped the count, and continued. “Therefore, all the time, that one, we have people who just show up and completely join in at events, and never register a name or get a newsletter.” The thumb again. “That two; we get people who do talk to and get registered with the heralds, and mebbe attend some events, and never get a newsletter.” The index finger again. “That three; we also get people who sign up for the newsletter, they keep in touch that way, but they can’t make it to events at the moment, and so they also don’t register a name with the heralds.” And the middle finger again, again for the third group.

“So, that is both names and fighting, and we have all sorts of interests for all sorts of people. And for one set of interests, quite a few of you do look like you could be interested in the fighting.” Urg and his

coworkers with that look all perked up. Jules continued. "You don't have to have a name for the moment, but how about we start with Urg, and then you can follow along?"

That seemed reasonable, everyone nodded. Jules paused, stared for a moment, began.

"The first issue is safety. You want to have a full medieval combat experience, but you do not want to break the people you're playing with. If you break someone, you have to get someone else to play with, and that is just no fun." He turned to someone standing nearby who was dressed in blue jeans and a rather tattered long sleeved shirt. "This is Lord William, one of our peers. He's a Knight Commander, which makes him a member of the Order of Chivalry, where the Chivalry are the peers who do combat stufh really, really well, and better than others. The other kinds of peers are the Order of the Pulpit, which has the scholars, and the Order Of The Cornerstone, which has the service peers, the MGC peers who do all the support work."

A pause, and Jules added. "Yes, we do a good deal of counting in threes in the MGC, it helps with keeping track of things." Several chuckled. "Although we do actually have a fourth group of peers; the royals --- They're the peers who have been on the thrones for an entire reign, the ones who have been king and queen, the ones who have been prince and princess . . . But anyway;"

Jules gestured at Lord William, where Lord William was carrying a metal helmet, had something strapped around his neck, and he was another person with those metal kneepads.

36: The Fatal Assumption

---Novelty competition submission

The watchers of an interstellar trading organization note a very definite shipping contract oddity and arrange to hand a trading captain the contract to have a look. The ship gets destroyed during arrival near the end of the contract. At that point the watchers arrange with the captain to take another contract that rather seems to have definite common points with the first contract, the watchers arrange to be doing a very enhanced and definite investigation of the second contract, and all and sundry then wait for any numbers of traps to get sprung.

The Fatal Assumption

It was a vast, shining globe and it cast a light of lambent topaz into space.

Far enough away from the planet that it still appeared to be more round than flat, an extremely bright blue speck flickered into view. After a moment, the blue speck expanded to also be a sphere, the sphere separated out into a ball of fat bands, the bands split into threads, and finally, the Interstellar Traders' Ship Salinas popped into view.

On the bridge of the I.T.S. Salinas, pilots Derek Caventour and Kansas eyeballed assorted readouts. The large viewscreen on the bulkhead in front of them showed a universal view of the area around the ship, with the center of the screen less distorted than the edges. The approaching planet filled the lower part of the screen, with stars appearing up and past the horizon line. As assorted other displays shifted with shapes and colors, Derek commented for the general log.

“Captain’s log, continuing. Prime space emerge successful.”

One of the display plates flickered. An image materialized over it of a stylized old man named Legba, with a cane, while particular points of the main screen over the planet lit up in unison.

“Planetary traffic control contact established,” Legba announced. “Landing approach course and coordinates placed at prime control station.”

Prime control was Derek, and he tapped on the console in front of him. “Course locked in and engaged,” he confirmed.

Another plate lit up with an image of a man in an admiral’s uniform, as Agwe reported on the exit from tunnel space. “Standard exit from tunnel drive confirmed,” This time on the main screen, the curve of the planet flickered with a highlight.

The view of the planet’s atmosphere lit up as Freya, a stylized image of a a woman, turned up over a plate. “Planetary atmosphere is acceptable for local life support,” commented Freya. “Planetary gravity standard is one point zero six. Transition of internal gravity from two point zero to one point zero six is scheduled and holding.”

Kansas didn't really have to turn his head much to see what was going on, as having five equidistant eyes in that head give him rather a field of view. He folded his upper arms as he reached out with one of his lower hands, tapped on a console. "Gravitational transition is approved," he commented.

Freya announced further. "All hands, prepare for internal gravitational transition."

For this trip, the entirety of all hands was Derek and Kansas. Just the same, making general announcements anyway did have its uses.

Freya continued. "Gravity transition will be from two point zero to one point zero six. Internal gravitational transition commencing in five, four, three, two, one." A display next to the main screen started counting down from 2.0. Freya finished with one more comment. "Internal gravitational transition is in progress."

Kansas nodded. "Ex Oh log continuing," Kansas announced. "Our prime control computers are not repeating the anomaly from when we left the space station archaeological site. Legba has successfully received and recorded our intended course. Loki reports no engineering problems, all power systems are fine. Freya shows no life support problems. Ghede is on standby because we're healthy and nobody is shooting at us. And Agwe shut down the tunnel drive with no problems, a totally standard transition from tunnel space to prime space."

A pause.

"All in all, a totally standard trip, ship, cargo, and crew arriving right on schedule . . . and I don't like it. We had a system-wide anomaly report and I want to know the cause of it."

And that was the overall main issue. Derek was a citizen of the Interstellar Traders, the captain and owner of the long range freighter, Bobbie McGee. Kansas, also a citizen, was his regular executive officer, first mate, additional two sets of hands --- the four hands, altogether. And they would normally also be on the Bobbi McGee itself, be working with the Bobbi's regular navigator and accountant, and also the engineer and loader.

And then a Watcher turned up at the Bobbi's main hatch, with a very quiet question.

Someone had gotten in touch with the Traders to ship some cargo. That was fine, perfectly normal, moving cargo from here to there is one of the Traders' regular occupations. The someone and associates were an archaeological expedition. No problem there either, there are lots of things to look at in lots of places, and getting from one planet to another involves just a little more detail than merely going for a stroll with a handcart. And the archaeologist announced, quite emphatically, that what they're shipping is absolutely perfectly, perfectly normal, no issues whatsoever. Really it is. Did they mention that they're archaeologists?

At that point a variety of button under a variety of table got pushed. Just in case.

Going from point A to point B is always perfectly normal. Of course, just the same, when A and B are in different parts of interstellar space, well, space is big. You just won't believe how vastly, hugely, mind-bogglingly big it is. I mean, you may think it's a long way down the road to the chemist's, but

that's just peanuts to space. However, when dealing with all that, when regularly and successfully getting this to turn up over there, the dealing with all that actually does just get really standard, and really innocuous, really quickly, and really not a big deal. Therefore, certainly there won't be issues with moving things from point A to point B. So why make a point of just how totally normal things are expected to be?

So an I.T. Watcher learned of the button push, asked a couple of questions, and announced the classic phrase; "I've got a bad feeling about this." And another of the I.T. Watchers somewhere nearby also commented on just how totally normal things like shipping and travel and such just are. Therefore, as a part of the process of hiring an I.T. ship and crew, that second Watcher --- err, well actually, there are no such people in the I.T. as Watchers, never heard of 'em, have no idea just what "Watcher" might possibly mean at all. Really. --- Therefore, as a part of the process of hiring an I.T. ship and crew, that second very particular and totally innocuous I.T. Business Representative got in touch with the archaeologist. The B.R. noted that if an archaeological expedition was going here and there, and if there was shipping of expedition stuff, might the expedition also be in need of a small passenger and cargo ship, not necessarily a big one, a ship to allow the expedition to also travel in comfort as they went about, and it could include some cargo space, --- no? No need at all, assured the archaeologists, they, ah, everything is just fine, really just fine, none of the archaeologists have a need to need to go along with the cargo, they just need to move some cargo.

Businesses do move cargo. In fact, in the I.T., there are quite a lot of I.T. citizens who are a part of or entirely are their own businesses, and they move a lot of cargo thataway, so that a lot of cash or credit can subsequently come thisaway. Therefore, as long as that cash or credit does come in this direction, quickly and steadily, there isn't always specific concern about going with the cargo, why bother, as long as the process works just fine. However. When one is a detailed variety of historian, archaeologist, whatnot, when something of particular interest turns up, and is getting assessed, well, doesn't that usually also involve wanting to be certain of safe delivery, and also wanting to repeatedly have a look at it during the trip?

And then that second Watcher turned up at the Bobbi's main hatch, with a very quiet question.

A decision Had Been Made that the contract was going to go through, the client paying the usual fees. And on behalf of I.T., the Watcher was going to offer Derek and . . . someone --- Kansas is interested? Fine, and Kansas --- offer the same fee, each individually, to take the contract, using a ship that the Watcher would provide, guaranteed to be a perfectly innocuous ship that would be just the perfect size for this shipment and mebbe a few other items, the ship in quite impeccable condition, and then all and sundry would see what just might happen with the delivery.

So far so good, albeit when leaving the archaeological site, there had been a very odd pause among the ship systems computers. Everything on the ship did continue to work, and the computer logs did show the pause. A reason given for the pause being that assorted cargo item details seemed odd, but no definite error or oddity was able to be declared. Now, yes, particular cargo placement could be an issue, so that is what a cargo loader keeps track of, and the computers do help with that. In this case, noting that the computers weren't vetoing anything, the particular cargo hold would get quite left alone --- assorted legal liabilities coming to the fore, there.

But, overall, someone had pushed a button, and so had several Watchers.

On the bridge of the Salinas, Ghede commented. "Planetary traffic control reports standard security challenge." Locations on the main screen flickered in unison. "Transit Collective Treaty registration has been accepted for standard landing approach. Tactical systems remain at active standby."

Derek continued his log. "We are closing on planetary transition. Approach speed is decreasing."

As the Salinas continued to drop towards the planetary surface, the planet appeared to become more of a flattened curve. The main shields of the Salinas started becoming a little more visible than usual as the density of the planet's upper atmosphere increased.

In a bit, the main screen showed the planet as more of a really large, flat plain as seen from their quite high altitude. Guidelines on the screen showed the Salinas continuing to follow the declared course.

51: Libraries Forever

[School Of Nothing, part three]

Libraries Forever is a novel fragment that's somewhat outlined as part of the Harry Potter universe . . . except that there's no way that it fits the Harry Potter storyline. It is from the third book of three, where the other two books introduce and outline a somewhat different set of details than what one finds in Harry Potter.

In School Of Nothing, a student of magic has wound up getting cursed. As enough time goes by the details of the curse are that when he is awake and aware, he can create magic that is totally perfect, impenetrable, unstoppable, unless he's unconscious, asleep, or, in enough time, if he's drunk. The curse was put on him by a wizard who wanted the perfect weapon, to use on others, and, well, that weapon really does not appreciate being turned into someone's weapon. And the intended weapon can not even use his magic on himself, can not lift the curse. However, if he's drunk, there's going to be a flaw. When there's a flaw, the Ministry of Magic can supply a solution. As long as he's drunk, the Ministry stops dropping him in their basement. He doesn't mind being drunk on occasion, he'd just rather always be sober. But when he's sober and does magic, the results make the Ministry grab him and drop him into a basement. When the Ministry drops him into their basement, he leaves because he doesn't like it there, and can always break out.

And, see also; Paul Erdos.

Libraries Forever

Far inside the door she turned up out of nowhere. After a convenient sidestep, she slid onto the next seat over and signaled for something liquid.

“You are delighted to hear that the protege is showing immense satisfaction with her new identification as a witch.”

The head turned. The ellipsis and following question marks were tangible. An exclamation point tagged on after the last question mark.

“Identification, as a witch?”

“Of course you sympathize, extending from your ongoing identification as a wizard.”

“At the moment, I identify as a drunk balancing on a bar stool.”

The face went white as it peered into the surrounding black, and the surrounding black peered back.

“What.”

After an eternity, a scream continued.

“What have you done?”

But no one else was there. Forever.

The head turned. Three eternities below, Dumbledore looked back.

“All right, old boy, I've gotten us into this. Now it's up to you to get us out.”

Dumbledore almost purred, and held out a hand. Finally, another hand took it. And then the eyes bulged, as everything utterly and absolutely stretched, and then the ultimate champagne cork of the universe went POP.

Three eternities above and a few hundred feet off to the left, his feet went skidding through the scattering of snow on the ledge. Arms windmilled for a moment before the balance returned, so that he could then come to a stop before going another few feet, off the ledge, and into . . .

“Well, the Ministry won't have to put any repelling spells on that, that's for certain. The muggles will just take one look at the picturesque loch, note that it's going to be too bloody cold to even stick a toe in, and settle for a decorative postcard.”

And the head turned again. “And how in the bloody hell did you manage to get us out of that?”

A very long pause. Dumbledore looked out over what had been the valley. Trees over the cliffs. Assorted cliffs dropping straight into utterly black, featureless water. The occasional outcropping that looked like it might serve as a beach, except with no way to approach except across the water. And no way to get to the water. And no way to get from the water. And very, very, black. And very, very, cold.

“Well.” Dumbledore finally answered. “Just how did you create all that?”

Another long pause, and a stare out across the water.

Finally, “It's what I do when I'm sober.”

Yet another long pause. “I create,” and an arm went out, “all that.”

And the arm dropped. “Speaking of which, I need to go find a drink.”

Dumbledore twinkled and peered back out at the trees and their sprinklings of snow. “Oh, only if you wish to. You don't have to you know.”

Another look out across the water. Another look out at the cliffs. The entire body turned.

“Albus, you did a deal with the mandarins at the Ministry.”

Dumbledore practically cackled.

“Oh, yes. I did a deal. You no longer have to perpetually take the edge off of creating perfect and utterly impenetrable and unstoppable magic at every opportunity.”

A stare. “All right, Albus. And just what have you set up to keep the Ministry away from me?”

“Oh, it's very simple. They're not going to care about where you are, because instead of being around here, you're going to Durmstrang.”

A very definite stare. “Like hell I am. Durmstrang is not going to allow me in.”

“Oh, no, no, no. What they're going to do is send you over the pole to Mahoutokoro.”

“Mahoutokoro? They're not going to take me either!”

Oh, Mahoutokoro will probably bounce you on to Ilvermorny. Ilvermorny may send you to Uagadou, or just to be perverse, they may pick Castelobruxo instead. It's all going to be a matter of who's not paying enough attention, and off you'll go again.”

This time the stare was towards Dumbledore, but not at him. Wandering, always wandering. Never in one spot for more than a few days, a week at most, and then off again to the next puzzle, the next meeting, the next

“Here I am. My brain is open.”

“Exactly.”

Forever.

“I'm going to drop dead at some point.”

“That's going to be their problem, not yours.”

“Someone's going to send me to Hogwarts.”

“That's going to be our problem, not yours.”

“You're all going to try and hide me in your libraries.”

“You're going to be the most published magic user in the history of magic.”

Forever.

E) Four times backstage at a bellydance festival

Someone posted an email celebrating international stage manager's day, October 10, and asked for stories of being a stage manager.

Four times backstage at a bellydance festival

On one occasion, a dancer finished her act and came off stage, and the next dancer was cued up and sent on stage, and the first dancer marched over to and stared up at me.

Dancer: I saw you yawning during my act!

I peered down at her, nodded.

Me: And would you like to see your stage manager looking bored, or looking panicked?

Eyes got very wide, and as I recall, she somehow got about three or four inches taller.

Dancer: _Oh_ Never, mind!

And she drifted off to the dressing rooms.

On a second occasion one of the festival instructors found me backstage.

Instructor: Are you going to be running my stage when I perform later?

I pulled out the program booklet and looked at it.

Me: Yes, I will be the stage manager at that point.

The instructor took a deep breath, and launched.

Instructor: Ok. It's really important you're going to need to take all sorts of notes I have this show where the music will start and I go onstage and dance but then the music stops but the music doesn't stop and I come off stage but I'm not finished and I have to get a prop and the music will start again and the music can not stop and I have to have the video keep going and I'm going to go back onstage --- I stuck up a hand.

Me: _Hold_.

He . . . He . . . He juust say that hees French doos not exeest IN PERFAICT FRAINCH!!!!!!!

Wheeeeeze . . . Wheeeeeze . . .

How . . . How do you say _My Eye_!!!!!!!

On a fourth occasion, that was late one night, with one act on stage and two acts to go before the end of the show; Troupes One and Two. ---At this festival, troupe scheduling is fifteen minutes, single person acts are seven minutes, festival instructors get ten minutes.

At that point, Video is recording the current act. Audio is playing the recording for the current act, and is setting up the recording for Troupe One. --- Audio and Video are parked out in the middle of the auditorium, tracking the show details from there, while they and I comment at each other by radio and headset.

Backstage is near the main dressing room for the one person acts. The troupe dressing rooms are upstairs. Getting in and out of the main auditorium is out through the stage back door and past security, around the corner, in through the auditorium back door and past security, down the hallway filled with vendors, then hang a right into the auditorium.

Troupe One was standing by, ready to go on. The Announcer was parked in her chair, watching the show and waiting for my next cue. Troupe Two was floating in a back corner of the backstage, waiting for their next cue. My act Timer and the act sign in staffer were parked at their table, also watching the show.

I'm padding about with headset, eyeballing assorted, the stage, the other staffers, the waiting troupes

Audio: Backstage? I can't get Troupe One's CD to play.

Me: Do you have a backup?

Audio: No.

Me: Stand by.

I drift enthusiastically over to Troupe One.

Me: Audio is trying to set up your CD, but he says it won't play. Do you have a backup?

Eyes very wide in the troupe, one replies.

Troupe One: I have one in the dressing room.

Me: Get it and get it out to Audio.

The troupe member sprints for the dressing rooms. I comment to the rest of the troupe.

Me: Do you mind going last, if I switch Troupe Two ahead of you?

Troupe One: No.

Me: Audio, a troupe member is about to run you a backup. For the moment, I may switch Troupe Two to go first, do you have the audio for Troupe Two?

A pause.

Audio: Yes.

I drift enthusiastically over to Troupe Two.

Me: We have an issue. Troupe One is having problems with their audio. If needed, can you go on next?

Eyes rather wide in Troupe Two. They look at each other, shrug.

Troupe Two: Sure.

Me: Audio, Troop Two is going to go on next. Cue up Troupe Two, and stand by.

Back to Troupe Two.

Me: Ok, you are now scheduled next, as soon as the current act comes off stage.

Troupe Two starts to drift over to where they need to enter, as I drift enthusiastically over to the Announcer.

Me: I have a change in schedule. Troupe One is having audio issues, so I am changing Troupe Two to be the next act, and Troupe One finishing the show.

The Announcer looks at her program to see what she's reading for Troupe Two, nods.

Announcer: Ok.

The Timer waves at me.

Timer: Two minutes.

The current act is about to get towards finishing, where as I very vaguely recall, I think I had a solo dancer on stage.

Me: Audio, Video, we are going to change the program. Next on the schedule will be Troop Two. Following Troupe Two will be Troupe One.

Audio: Change confirmed. Video just gave me a thumbs up.

I drift enthusiastically back over to Troupe One.

Me: We're good for a moment, Troupe Two is going on next, with you to follow. Now; I say that the backup disc is also fried. What are you going to do?

Eyes wide in Troupe One. Then, eyes not so wide.

Troupe One: I have an additional CD of music we can use.

Me: Get it and get out to Audio.

The troupe member sprints for the dressing rooms.

Me: I say that the additional CD also is fried. What are you going to do?

Eyes not so wide in Troupe One.

Troupe One: We have Audio put on a disc of intermission music, and then then we bloody well wing it.

The current act finishes and sweeps off stage.

Me: Audio, Video, And the dancer is off.

I drift enthusiastically over to Troupe Two.

Me: Are you ready?

Troupe Two: Yes.

Me: Audio, Video, lemme know how you're doing.

A pause.

Audio: Audio ready.

A pause.

Video: Video ready.

Me: Video, stand by.

I turn to the Announcer.

Me: Announce the schedule change.

The Announcer flicks on her microphone and looks at her program.

Announcer: Ladies and gentlemen, we have a sudden change in schedule. Instead of finishing up with Troupes One and Two, we will instead have Troupe Two coming up next, then followed by Troupe One.

A pause. A very short pause.

Me: Roll video.

A pause.

Video: Rolling.

Me: Announce.

Announcer: Now, give a warm festival welcome to Troupe Two!

Me: Roll audio.

A slight pause.

Audio: Audio rolling.

A slight pause. The audio for Troupe Two starts playing, and after a moment, Troupe Two starts onto the stage to begin their act. Two dancers on stage, two more, all are on stage, none of them look at all concerned, all are working together, pivot, and back to Troupe One. I get Troupe One within hearing range of me, and comment.

Me: All right, Audio, Video, now we see about Troupe One. Video, there are no changes aside from the schedule. Audio, we have a plan B and then two more backup plans after that. Audio, do you have the backup CDs?

Audio: I got the backup and just got the second disc as well. I'll test in a moment.

Me: Excellent. Here is what will occur. You will see if the backup disc plays fine. If it does not, you will switch to the second backup and play from that. If that also is fried, then you will play one of your own intermission CDs, and Troupe One will come on stage and just wing it.

A pause.

Audio: The first backup is playing just fine.

Two dancers materialize from behind a curtain.

Me: Audio reports that the first backup disc is playing just fine.

Much Troupe One relieved expressions all around.

Me: Excellent. Of course we will keep the backup sequences in mind, just in case.

After a number of minutes, Troupe Two finished up and came off stage. Troupe One was in place, Audio and Video announced ready. Video started, the announcer introduced, Audio was queued.

And the backup CD played over the speakers, Troupe One made clear that yes, that was exactly what they were to be hearing, and on stage they went to finish up the show