INTERTEXT

An Electronic Fiction Magazine

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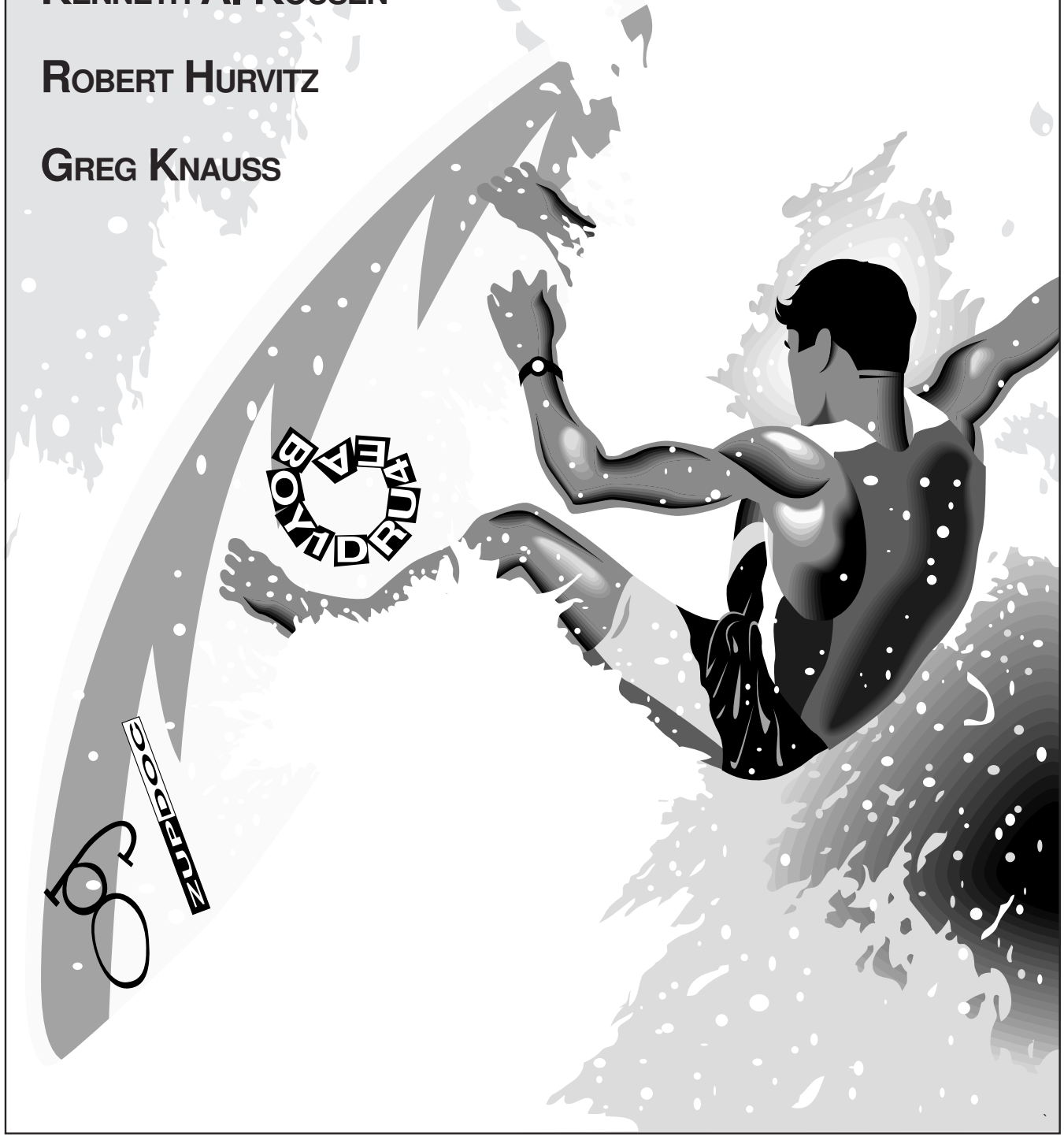

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First*Text*

Jason Snell

Do you remember the television series *The Incredible Hulk*, starring Bruce Bixby as David Banner — a man cursed with becoming a monster whenever his pulse (or was it his blood pressure?) reached a certain height?

"Don't make me angry," Bixby's character would say. "You wouldn't like me when I'm angry."

I'm not the pushover I appear to be, he was saying. *I'm not like anything you've seen before. So watch out.*

InterText isn't like any magazine you've read before. I'm not bragging by any means — in fact, I'm not talking about the quality of *InterText* at all. I'm talking about the fact that, unlike professionally edited and distributed magazines, this is one magazine that relies on all of you.

You see, all of you don't just make up the reader base of *InterText* — you're also the writers, editors, publishers, advertisers, corporate executives — just about everything.

So what the hell is this guy talking about?, you're asking yourself.

One of the problems with a magazine like *InterText* (and its predecessor, *Athene*) is that it is absolutely dependent on the efforts of those who submit stories to it and those who put it together. What this means is that, with *InterText*, the work of about six people is read by over a thousand.

Distributing a magazine via computer network is a new idea, one that's only been around for a handful of years. But for all the applause we give to this new mode of communication, the fact is that it all still boils down to a small group of authors sending editors stuff now and again. I edit this magazine, Dan Appelquist edits *Quanta.* My stories appear there. His appear here. Phil Nolte appears both places. The snake eats its own tail.

And everybody else is left on the outside. The names blur — if they pay attention to the names at all.

Last issue, I mentioned the potential of computer networks to assist in communication. It was a positive picture, an optimistic (a rarity for me, I can assure you) view that these networks *can* create a "global village."

That's what they said about television, too. It didn't happen. Instead, television fulfilled another, less honorable, aspect of its potential.

The other potential of a medium such as this is that it degrades into just another clique — you've got the *have*s and *have nots*, the writers/editors, and the readers. And then we're no different from any professional magazine, at least in the barriers that we've erected between readers and writers.

This magazine is not just for me — I do this in my "spare time" (whatever that is; now that it's summer, I've got a little more breathing room), and I'm certainly not getting paid for it. But I like being an editor, I like publishing, and I saw a need for something to fill *Athene*'s space.

But I can't do it alone, and neither can the other names you see on issues of *InterText, Quanta,* and such publications.

If you have something you'd like to have over a thousand people read, submit it to us. I don't want netnews-style posts here, but if you write something in magazine style, I'd love to run it.

If you've written a story, submit it. Take an old one, dust it off, re-work it to your satisfaction, and send it in. Non-fiction stuff, personal narratives, anything *about* computer fiction, or about computer networks.

This is a plea for submissions, true, but it's more than that. It's also my way of telling you that this is not just my magazine, it's *your* magazine. In newspapers, readers' comments are left to one section: the letters to the editor. Here, the whole thing is open to you. I encourage you to take advantage of it.

I think I'll stop here, if for no other reason than to slow down my quickly-beating editor's heart. *Calm yourself, Jason old boy, calm yourself. Don't make the readers angry — you wouldn't like them when they're angry.*

This magazine isn't like other magazines. And *you* aren't like other readers.

And on that note, I wish you all well. See you next time.

Dragon Financing

Kenneth A. Kousen

The day dawned bright and clear as King Teradoc and I rode off with our honor guard to challenge Pfotor the Dragon. It was the first fresh day of spring after a frustratingly long winter, and I was eager for the hunt.

The winter had been spent pouring over scholarly texts written by ancient masters, and learning from my tutor. Old and stodgy, he forced me to spend more time than I would have liked learning and reciting. Still, however interminably, the winter had passed and I was free again. The Chancellor informed me that the King wished me to accompany him on his quest to suppress Pfotor, and I eagerly accepted the challenge.

Adventure filled the air. I took out my sword and watched the sun glint from its blade.

"Prince Dorn," my father said, surprising me from my reverie, "are you so eager to fight a dragon? Pfotor is a wild beast, and a worthy foe."

"Of course, father," I mumbled, abashed. I noticed a twinkle in his eyes, though, which belied his stern words. He too must have been feeling the sweetness of our quest.

As we neared the town, signs of Pfotor's attacks became evident. Instead of containing fresh plantings, the lands around the town were blackened and deserted. We rode past the charred frames of several farmhouses, but saw no one. At length, we reached a fork in the road. To the right lay the town, to the left lay the route to Pfotor.

"Go to the town and secure lodging for us there," my father said to the guards, dismissing them. "Prince Dorn and I will go confront Pfotor."

I gulped. "Alone?" I asked.

"Yes, my son. Against a dragon, a few guards will not make any difference." He led his horse to the left.

Mystified, I followed. I felt excitement and fear in equal proportions. To face Pfotor alone, virtually unarmed, seemed the height of folly, yet also the pinnacle of bravery.

Eventually we reached the black mouth of an enormous cave at the base of Mt. Fire. Without a word, my father dismounted, lit torches for us, and led the way inside. I followed warily.

The torches provided a dim illumination as we proceeded. The stench of dragon was overpowering, and grew worse as we neared Pfotor. My eyes began to water, making it difficult to see.

At the end of the passage was an immense cavern filled with jewels of every type and description, piled in heaps. To one side golden items were strewn haphazardly. I could identify lyres, goblets, various coins, and scepters of different lengths. These objects surrounded an old, golden throne. In the distance, the cavern vanished into blackness, from whence came a great rumbling.

"Who dares enter the domain of Pfotor the Invincible?" boomed a powerful voice.

I am forced to admit that I immediately froze. My father, however, did not. In a loud voice of his own, he replied, "It is I, King Teradoc, ruler of all the peoples of Bailia. I command you to approach and be recognized."

A low roar filled the cavern in response, and the terrifying green bulk of Pfotor entered the light. He moved to the center of the treasure, extended his wings, and belched fire upward toward the roof of the cave.

"No one commands the mighty Pfotor!" he bellowed. "Do you dare to challenge me?"

"No, I do not," my father replied, his voice returning to its customary low volume. "I have come to talk."

The laughter of the dragon filled the cavern. "Talk? The great Pfotor has no need for talk. His strength speaks for itself."

My father did not reply, and a silenced stretched on as he and the dragon studied each other. The king looked strangely calm, as though he were in no danger. Pfotor seemed puzzled by this. I, on the other hand, was still staring wide-eyed at the dragon. His long, scaly tail swayed back and forth, knocking treasures to each side. At long last, he settled his huge mass onto the ground and broke the silence.

"Pfotor has no need for talk," he said, "but he is curious. Why have you come here to disturb him? Speak."

"Pfotor," the King said, "there has been peace between humans and dragons for generations. Why do you choose to break it now?"

"I did not break it!" Pfotor roared. "You foolish humans did! You breed like rabbits and move into our lands! Three hundred years ago, your puny kingdom did not even exist, yet now you are everywhere." The dragon shook his head. "At first we welcomed you and the treasures you brought, but now there are too many of you, and too few treasures."

The King ran his eyes around the cavern. "If this

is too few treasures for you, you are going to be sorely disappointed with Bailia."

"Then you will have to get more," Pfotor demanded. "Bring them from other lands, or I will destroy you! I must have more!"

The King moved to the throne, brushed away the valuables covering it, and sat down. To my astonishment, he winked at me.

"Pfotor, old boy," he said, "there may be a way out of our dilemma." He paused as Pfotor snorted, then continued. "Have you ever considered letting some of your wealth work for you?"

Pfotor raised his eyebrows, which on a dragon is quite an impressive sight. "Work for me?" he asked.

"Yes. Look, you've got an enormous amount of money sitting around here doing nothing. You are also surrounded by ambitious, hard-working people who lack the funds to begin any of the building they'd love to do. I'll tell you what. We'll help you exchange some of your valuables for coinage, which you can lend to the people for their own uses. They then will pay back their loans with interest."

My father's enthusiasm was infectious, and I could see Pfotor considering the plan. My father continued. "By pumping money into the local economy, everybody wins. The townspeople get the capital they need in order to improve their standard of living, and your wealth will increase as they repay their loans."

"And you," Pfotor said, "get a thriving kingdom with peaceful borders. But suppose some of your subjects refuse to pay?"

The King gave him a dour look. "It would be a brave man who would default on a loan to a dragon. Besides, we would set up a group to handle such problems ourselves, wouldn't we, my son?"

The last was directed at me, and I almost jumped. "Yes, sire," I said. Suddenly I realized that my hours spent studying this winter had been neither by accident nor in vain. My father was giving me a chance to take part in a great expansion of his kingdom. "I would be honored to help organize such a project."

He smiled at me. "There you have it, Pfotor. The royal seal of approval. Prince Dorn will act as a liaison between you and the local populace, and will help set up the guilds necessary to acquire, use, and repay the money. What do you say?"

Pfotor leaned back on his haunches, folded his wings, and cocked his head thoughtfully in a manner I would soon come to know well.

"I agree," he said.

The next several years passed quickly. I sold the idea to the town and collected applications for loans. These went to Pfotor, who selected the necessary valuables which were then exchanged for currency at the hastily established Royal Mint. The funds were then distributed to the people. New houses sprang into being almost overnight. Schools, public meeting houses, and even a great cathedral soon followed.

Pfotor turned out to be a pretty good fellow, once you got to know him. Interestingly, he had the same opinion about humans. He really hadn't wanted a conflict at all, but when we started encroaching on his territory he became a laughing stock among the other dragons. Now he was envied. When I discovered this, I started communications aimed at establishing a series of Dragon Banks throughout Bailia, each near a dragon hoard.

During one of my reports to my father in his private council chambers, I told him about the methods we were using.

"One of the beautiful things about the entire system," I said, "is that we never have to spend anything on security. There's no place in the world safer for all that gold than in a dragon's lair."

"Indeed, and not just for the gold," my father replied, the old twinkle in his eye returning. "Can you think of a better guardian for the heir to the throne?"

KENNETH A. KOUSEN KAK%UTRC@atrcgw.utc.com

Regression

Dave Savlin

Marc stepped out and pulled his towel off the hook. The vacant spot in the four-stall shower room was immediately filled by another disheveled boy, tired and sweaty with a few cuts healing on his lithe body. Most of Marc's dormitory hall had just returned from a great game of rugby, and the race to the showers may as well have been a continuation of the game. Sterling and Kris, two of Marc's closest friends, had slammed into each other outside the door, giving Sterling a bloody nose and blacking Kris's eye — much to every one else's amusement.

"Hey! You should have pulled that head-knockin' move earlier, Kris! You woulda taken that other butthead's nuts off!" was yelled several times — Kris had tripped and sent his head between an opponent's legs. Half an inch higher … well, enough of that.

"Not MY fault he wasn't wearing a shield!" was the quick retort. "He wasn't even using an old cup!"

This day and age, most college sports, a typical college experience, are played with a small shield generator in the waistband, which protected the abdominal area from injury, but even in a University as upper class as the one Marc was in, a few people could only afford plastic cups. More than one occasion had seen a broken cup, however. This was not a nice sight.

Marc was remembering this as he closed the door to his room, a shoebox (but still a Single), and examined his cup. The crack was still there, but it hadn't broken all the way across. He disliked playing with it, but didn't have any cash credits to spend to get a new one. He could use his loan cards, but the interest rate was too high. "*Sigh* oh well. I'll just have to keep getting lucky," he told himself.

"No, you're wrong! The integral of e to the minus j two pi f not t is not negative. It's positive," said the TA, a slight man with thin hair and faintly Polish looks. Not surprising, considering his last name is Slawecky. "Besides, that's a moot point. You are still not going to pass this exam by collecting measly single points on signs. Now, if this were a borderline C or B or something, I'd maybe give you a point for the hell of it more than for correcting my grading, but there's no way in hell that's going to happen now. Your score might as well be confused with a golf score or something!"

Ouch. That hurt. This TA was a real asshole, telling me this in front of the rest of my class. Like I need my academic status announced as though it were another of those homework assignments. Why am I an engineer? I can't be an engineer. I'm not good enough to make the grades.

"Marc!" came the fierce whisper. Sterling pushed a note my way. 'I just got this great book on regression. I talked with someone at home about it who does this type of stuff for a living, and she said it's genuine. It's putting you in a trance' … I know that already, and nodded my head in Sterling's direction. 'Anyway, it's kinda simple, and I want to try it. Just on Kris, but with you, Kenny and I to watch, we can take turns. Want to?'

This looked kind of fun. I'd heard about regressions, the way people hear about some sort of new magic forces coming about that science can't explain. I snorted (bringing a glare from Slawgeeki the Tweaking Assistant) and wrote down 'Yeah right you can perform that. Count me in…' (I seriously doubt he can do it, but it'd be fun to toy around with anyway.)

'I gotta go to the sporting goods store and get a new cup or a shield or something though before tomorrow's game, Okay?' was the next thing written down. I passed it back and concentrated on the bizarre formulas that were slowly transmuting themselves across the blackboard. Why they haven't put in a glowboard in here I have no idea; the dust from the blackboard makes me sneeze, and you can't see the writing when the sun reflects off the board.

I signed onto the computer and connected with the sporting good's store terminal. It took awhile to set up the connection, as I didn't have a nice machine like all the other rich pigs on campus. Punching in "jock shield" produced a description and a cost of 220 cash credits. I wouldn't be able to buy that one textbook required for my antigrav fields course… well, I can probably live off of Sterlings' book. I would be able to appreciate a real shield more than I would

(. . . appreciate the water I need to stay healthy for the next few days. Besides, I can …)

Huh? Water? Why was I thinking of buying corn seeds for 220 dollars instead of water? … I shook it off and punched in the order for the shield.

"SCRKEEEK! SCRKEEEK!" jeezus but the phone system here is weird. It has different rings depending on whether or not you are using the Panasonic

optical box for data. I picked it up. "Marc! Get down here! We gotta do the regression! On the Double! <snick>" I smiled. Sterling has this annoying habit of ordering people around, but I find it funny. I'm the only person here who's met his father, and his father was a general in the Province Wars. He jokes around with his younger kids like that, and they laugh — well, so does his older son. On my way out the door I snagged an ID card and my loan card (First National Loan Bank's own MasterCard) and headed out, planning on stopping off at the sports store at the bottom of the campus to pick my new toy up. This toy would provide nearly

(two hundred ears of corn, from which from which I can harvest kernels and sow even more)

…what? I stopped and looked around. At the other end of the hall was someone chewing a camph, but that's it. Nobody around me here trying to shake me up by whispering something over my shoulder. Bad enough that I have to wear a hearing aid due to a birth defect, almost unheard of in this day. Pun intended.

The door opened right when I was about to swing into it, and I stepped on Kris. "There you are. Why don't you get yer ass in here, already!"

"I gotta go down to get something from the store. I just bought some corn."

"What?"

"I said, I gotta go pick up a jock shield. I just put the order through over the computer."

"That's not what you said. You said you bought some corn," said Kenny. The only oriental in the group, he was fairly heavyset and quick. He never missed anything. I stared at him suspiciously, wondering if he was somehow putting these corn things in my head. I was getting confused and annoyed; and a bit scared, although I wasn't about to show them that.

"Must be thinking of corn then, I had some for dinner. I meant a shield." I saved myself. "Let's go. What's involved with regression anyway? Who's going first?"

"I don't really want to go first. I would feel more comfortable if someone else went first so I can see what happens," said Kris. Carcernus Polapas, commonly known as Kris, an American with an incredibly Greek set of parents (he was adopted) had a kind of worried twist to his nervous, rugged face.

If it weren't for the fact that I'm a guy, I'd say he was downright handsome. Funny how he never seems to get…

(. . . the girls seem to love him, aside from the fact that one of the three females left is adding to the community's population and longevity courtesy of Kris. . .)

…any girls, even with all the looks he gets from the rare girl on campus.

What?

You know, these weird subliminal thoughts that keep popping up are getting really annoying… agh, never mind.

"I'll go then. What the hell, the store is gonna be open for another hour anyway." I decided to go ahead and be the guinea pig.

"OK, Marc. Close your eyes. Wait, no, don't use the couch, use the floor. Maybe if you move around when you're regressed you won't fall off." I climbed down to the floor, thinly carpeted with a burnt red carpet that was noticeably worn in front of the threedy box in front of the room. There was a burnt-in impression on the ceiling where somebody'd taken a huge magnifying lens and focused the threedy's beam onto the ceiling.

"Close your eyes, and feel the muscles in your eyelids relax. They seem to naturally gravitate closed. You're not even using that section of your body. Now the midsection and arms. They are slowly relaxing, the muscles turning into putty, letting your arms slide to the ground. Now, the legs …" I began to relax, letting my mind envision a completely limp Marc on the ground, with three other guys sitting on chairs and the sofa-thing around me, one glancing at a book and saying things. The room is full of detail, the wood frames of the furniture, the two tone paint on the walls, a few windows…

Then the scene was suddenly different. It didn't change right off the bat, to use an ancient cliche, but slowly seemed to swirl in, as if certain parts of my thoughts disappeared, the visions that didn't really matter, such as the color of the walls or what furniture was in the room. Suddenly I noticed a new thought, a new sight, and that led me to realize that I was in an entirely new surrounding. I was fully aware, just like that, and saw that I was in a sort of barren earth, with the opposite side of the long, shallow valley a few miles down the way. I could barely see that side, though, under the sick grey clouds with sparse breaks in it, letting the sun shine though onto dirty brown and grey earth.

There were a few pinpoints of murky green vegetation — even this was limp and sick looking —

scattered around the valley, next to a lot of what looked like sod-house cellar stairs leading right into the earth, like the pioneers of the American Plains all those decades ago.

This was nothing like the world I had envisioned I would see in a former life. I expected to come back as some guy in the 1800s or something, getting ready to go into town and shoot some guy in the street like those old westerns or something. I'd walk into the bar — and then it hit me that there were no buildings out here. From the looks of it, there were dwellings underneath the soil… then I realized where I was standing. I was leaning against a tree, one that had to have been here longer than any other tree in sight, judging from the fact that it was supporting my heavyset body… no, a thin, sickly, starved body.

What happened? I used to be strong, able to knock down any Rugby player… I seemed to have lingering thoughts of a voice talking to me inside my head but I can't place it anymore. I was wearing what looked like old T-shirt material wrapped around my waist, in my "relaxation" clothes. Or what my fuzzed mind was insisting I was wearing. The cloth did not provide very adequate coverage, and I found myself blushing, when I realized that nearly half the people (and all the children) in sight wore no clothes at all.

It seemed then that cloth was a rare item, and I seemed to have two outfits; this thing that scantily covered me and a full work outfit that included denim and some form of leather. This placed me in some kind of prestige position, but why? I turned, and saw that there was a grove of perhaps twenty trees behind me, the largest being the one that supported me.

Suddenly it hit me, the full truth of it all, the full reality of the world I was in: I was a survivor of World War III, started when PISC cut way back on production. PISC stands for Producers Internacionalle de Solar Cells, a basic equivalent to the oil exporting countries' coalition of the late 1900s. Wasn't that OPAC or something? A war began; Argentina launched nuclear missiles at the United States, and several other countries simultaneously began tossing missiles at each other, all of which were supposedly part of a "permanently dismantled nuclear armament". I had been one of those lucky few to have a fully stocked shelter underground, apparently, and had saplings frozen in state to later grow trees with. These saplings were fast growing softwood and slow growing hardwood; I was a tree producer, able to supply other survivors with construction materials and easily producible tools (easy to carve wood into tools and building materials). I was a success in my day, but what a sad day it was. A world so bleak … three colors on this world: gray, brown, and dark green — there were no flowers, no red, blue, or mixes of green. How destroyed this world is…

"Marc, you have to go." spoke a voice behind my left shoulder.

"What?" I couldn't place the voice, but it was naggingly familiar.

"You have to come back. You need to go to the store."

"Oh, right, I have to get the corn." CORN? No wonder I was having those premonitions earlier… uh… what premonitions? I don't remember where I came from. No, I do remember; I came from right here. But what was that hauntingly familiar voice in my head coming from?

"Marc…"

I whirled around, eyes wide.

"You have to…

"You must return to us, Marc…

"You don't have to buy any corn, Marc…

"Marc…

"Mah…

"M…

…

"THREE!" I jolted up, a strange buzzing sensation in my head. I looked around, seeing the familiarity of the study lounge where my hall mates and I began a regression. A number came to mind, and I immediately said it, lest I forget it; at this point anything I remembered might be neat to examine. 2138. It is a year. The year that I regressed to. Then all visions of my vision disappeared, and I was left with a shocking memory of what happened…

Or rather, what was to happen. This year, the year here at school, is 2132. Sterling said that every time he'd asked a question when I was in the trance, I shook my head and had said "Later". I told Sterling what had happened, what I remembered of it (most of it, anyway). He grimaced and looked aghast… more so than the others, who looked just shocked. Then Sterling explained.

"Every so often, according to my friend back home and this book, a person 'regresses' into a former state … sometimes of their present day. And thus they

see their current state. Which is in the future. Every time this has happened, it has been true… they are usually only a few hours or days in advance and the visions are always, always true. I was regressed by my friend and went to the future too — I saw myself in California somewhere watching my car's rear windshield wiper get ripped off. Two weeks later, we cruised down there and it happened. Exactly. To the letter. So what you basically saw is that the world is going to end in six years." He looked aghast.

"Hell no, I refuse to believe that. I can't accept that in six years the world is going to be politically unstable enough to warrant a war," said Kris. I didn't respond, but Sterling slumped back into his chair. Kris was being stubborn; relations between the US and the Argentinian government, the major producer of solar cells, had recently broken down again.

"Um. I want to think about this, guys." I got up unsteadily, and left quietly, to pick up my shield. The world may end in six years but I was going to at least protect my manhood until then. Besides which, I may actually use it to further the continuity of the community. I did have fading thoughts of being married and having two children with a third on the way. Picking up my shield was at least a real-life thing to do right now; it wasn't a vision. I needed something to do to keep my sanity.

If this world I had "reverse regressed" into was real, then it showed I was to preserve myself and, I don't know, build an underground shelter. This pleases me. But… what if I do this and it's for nothing? What if I don't and the regression is real, and a nuclear war is started? Who can I tell about this regression? Or rather, who would believe me? A small handful of psychics, who are routinely thrashed by the free press? My small group of close friends believe me, because they knew about the "power" of regression to begin with. We had all seen the results of it at one time or another. Nobody would believe me; with relations with PISC having gone downhill for the last two years, it's not that hard to think that there's a war in the future, but who would believe that? People are too busy enjoying their current life to worry about world situations. I think that solution is definitely a "not quite" situation.

Oh hell. I don't know what to think.

Life sure was simpler when all I had to do was play rugby, one of the most typical college experiences there are. College sports.

I'll just pick up my … corn … and get ready to … plant some more rugby players in the field tomorrow. Final day of the tournament. If I can just stop treating the others like vegetables.

Ignorant, nonbelieving vegetables.

Typical college experience.

Dave Savlin dhs1@ns.cc.lehigh.edu

Is attempting to study Electrical Engineering at Lehigh University, where he dreams of one day having his own private room. In between attempts at accomplishing a writing minor, his tired hands scribble meaningless chatter, like the previous few paragraphs — which can be interpreted any number of ways.

The American Dream

Robert Hurvitz

John Griffiths was sitting on a bench in the little park conveniently located a couple blocks from his house. It was a sunny and warm Sunday afternoon, and he couldn't stay inside. So there he was, in the park, feet crossed and hands clasped behind his head, squinting across the small stretch of grass at four small boys — no older than six, he guessed — who had just arrived at the basketball court there.

John sighed and tried to remember when he last played basketball. He shook his head. It had been a long time.

The boys started playing, dribbling and passing and stealing the basketball. Rarely did they take a shot, and when they did, they invariably missed; the hoop was much too high for them. John smiled as he watched them.

Birds were singing in the oak trees that lined the park, and a cool breeze whispered by, playing with a few strands of hair that hung down over John's forehead.

The sudden stench of urine and filth made John Griffiths flinch. He quickly looked around in alarm and to his right saw a homeless man shuffling towards him. John recoiled at the sight of him: unkempt hair, deep-lined face smeared with dirt, soiled and tattered army fatigues, and dragging a rusty shopping cart filled with junk.

The vagrant stopped about a dozen feet from John and stared. "Spare some change?" he asked hoarsely.

John felt paralyzed. He didn't know what to do. It was usually he who was walking and the homeless man who was sitting down, and so John would always shrug and sometimes quicken his pace. But now the tables were turned; John was trapped.

"Uh," John muttered, "yeah." He dug into his pocket and pulled out a five dollar bill, which he then nervously held out.

Smiling, the panhandler stepped closer, and John gingerly placed the money on the outstretched hand so as to not risk the chance of getting his fingers dirty in any way. The five dollars quickly disappeared into a well-patched pocket.

"God bless you, sir," the homeless man said. He returned to his shopping cart, grabbed hold, and started back on his way. As he passed in front and then to the left of John Griffiths, his odor began to dissipate, much to John's relief. "Yes sir," the transient was saying, mostly to the asphalt path he was on, "God bless you. Have a nice day, sir. You're a real humanitarian, you are. Yes sir."

"Actually," John Griffiths said, "I'm a lawyer."

The homeless man stopped and turned. "Eh?"

"You called me a humanitarian," John explained. The homeless man nodded, a quizzical look on his face. "And I said, 'Actually, I'm a lawyer.'"

The homeless man nodded again, then smiled dumbly. "Well, maybe you can be my lawyer next time I get arrested."

John laughed out loud. "Yeah, right."

He watched the vagrant lose interest and turn back to his shopping cart. "I drive a Porsche," John called out.

The homeless man stopped again and looked at John.

"I'm married to a beautiful woman," John added. "We live in a four-bedroom house, right near here."

The homeless man blinked, and several seconds ticked by before he did anything. Then his hands suddenly clenched into fists. "Who the fuck do you think you are?" he yelled. "I act nice after you gave me money, and you start hollerin' at me how successful you are, how wonderful your fucking life is!" He pointed at John now, and trembled. "Well I don't give a shit! You hear? Fuck you! Fuck your wife! Fuck your car! Fuck your whole fucking life!" He spun back around and stalked away, the shopping cart clattering as he pulled it along behind him.

Stunned, John Griffiths stared at him as he made his way down the path, reached the end of the park, and crossed the street, disappearing behind some trees. His gaze lingered for some time afterwards.

Fuck my wife, he thought. Fuck my car.

He slowly faced forward, looking straight ahead, at the boys still playing basketball. They hadn't noticed a thing.

Fuck my whole fucking life, he thought.

Before he realized what he was doing, John Griffiths had stood up and was walking to the basketball court. The boys stopped their game and looked at him suspiciously as he approached them. He smiled and held out his hands as if to catch a pass. The boys smiled back, laughed, and threw him the ball. John caught it, dribbled down the court, leapt, and rammed the basketball through the hoop. The boys cheered.

The next day, John Griffiths quit his job, bought a small house in an undistinguished neighborhood, filed for divorce, sold his Porsche and picked up a used Honda Civic, purchased a Nintendo Home Entertainment System, and lived happily ever after.

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The Ambiguity Factor

Pete Reppert

The green blur passing beneath the transparent hull of Peter Lyod's solar powered hovercraft disguised the hundreds of houses spaced evenly throughout the leafy canopy. No telephone wires could be seen.

In fact, the only evidence that anyone lived in the forest was the evenly-spaced clearing for hovercraft like his own. The clearing had smatterings of the latest fashion in landscaping: fuchsia trees.

"God I hate the suburbs," he thought, as he popped a disc labelled "Red Planet Surprise — Goop!" into the stereo. As the crisp, very non–suburban sounds of Goop! came on, Peter pushed a button marked with a down arrow to let in some air. A red vehicle sped past.

As the wind brushed his hair, Peter thought about the meeting he had just left. He had read and mostly comprehended the ground–breaking paper on Time Distortion Around Massive Objects as soon as it was made available on FreeNet, several years ago. The paper had generated wild-eyed speculation about time travel, which quickly abated when people realized the nearest object massive enough to do the job, a particular galaxy, was mind-bogglingly far away. Even a near-lightspeed ship would take thousands of years to get there. Now it had been discovered that the effect was present around objects of any mass, and the world's first "temporal quanta amplifier" had been built.

Peter's job, along with that of several hundred other media people, was to describe what the marvel of time amps could mean to the rest of the world. It meant that in the year 4491 the human race could contemplate travelling to other galaxies. It meant freedom from the prison of Cartesian three-space (he could think of a few people who had already left Cartesian three-space, but that was another story) and the resolution of some paradoxes in Physics that had been plaguing scientists for hundreds of years. There was a renewed interest in Grand Unified Theories (Lyod's first reaction to this last bit of news was, "maybe there'll be a renewed interest in circle-squaring as well!").

Peter's hovercraft came to a smooth landing on the 30th floor platform of his building in Sioux Falls. His friend Anola had left a message on the videowall: "Honey, I missed you — hope the meeting went well. I'll be back from class at 6:00 and here's a free demo of what's in store for you."

She undid her top two buttons, blew a him a kiss, tossed her dreadlocks and headed for the door. As soon as the message ended, the videowall turned pale purple.

Peter grabbed an organically grown peach from the fridge and sat on the balcony to gather his thoughts for the news story he would produce. We could now go anywhere anywhen. There was one nagging exception: the past. Backward time travel was thought to break several of the laws of thermodynamics, in particular the fifth and seventh, but the new results showed it to be technically feasible. In addition to the strong argument that there were now so many more interesting destinations to choose from, the World Council had already agreed not to send anyone backward in time to a point before the invention of the time machine out of fear that ancient time paradoxes could come true. He felt intuitively that there must be some way around the "Back To The Future" problem, as they called it.

The videowall displayed some FreeNet artwork by Padma Sanchez — dinosaurs romping across a wasteland in an infinite loop, running forward but never getting closer. The image was overlapped with time-lapsed footage of fabricated crystalline flowers blossoming, covering the screen then shattering to reveal the dinosaurs again. The soundtrack was like an underwater duel between a tuba and a trombone. He wasn't sure what it meant, but he liked it.

To be able to travel back to the days of dinosaurs. Or to his favorite time in history, the mid- to late-twentieth century. What a blast! His friends didn't understand why he was so fascinated with that time period. "They were so absurdly uncivilized with respect to their technology. Probably the goofiest period in all of history. A television commercial model was President of the United States at the same time they had the biggest nuclear arsenal ever! They got electricity from fission-generated steam! And think of what it would be like to see New York or London or any of the other great port cities before the seismic wave broke up the ice cap in 1993. Right when the greenhouse effect was about to go nonlinear thanks to automobile emissions! How did we ever make it out of that dismal time?"

Just then Anola walked in, put down her computer and stepped out on the balcony. "Peace."

"Peace your own self!"

Then over each other, "How are you?" and "I missed you." After a warm hug Anola said, "Time to meditate."

"Aw Ma', do we have to?"

"Now come along with Auntie Anola and take your shoes off like a good little boy," she replied while lighting some incense.

Actually, Peter loved his daily meditation. Hundreds of years of history had proven its value. It was gradually revealed that Peace was not achievable through the manipulation of tanks, guns, soldiers, or exchanges of tariffs, bank loans, or donations of food and hardware. World Peace did not require supercomputers or artificial intelligence or some great discovery. The hypersaturation of the senses brought on by five-D info transfer required people to go into deep sensory deprivation for an hour a day, and as more people took up the practice, other benefits soon became apparent. People felt full of energy yet relaxed. Outward comparisons and jealousies were erased by inner harmony. Acceptance of the present replaced dissatisfied yearnings for an infinitely regressing future. The limitless conspicuous consumption made possible by the exploitation of the Martian colonies tapered off. The advertising industry went bankrupt.

Above all, competition with the limits of one's self replaced competition with others. When they realized there hadn't been a war in half a century, they called it the Silent Revolution. World Peace began with individuals becoming peaceful one at a time. The economy went through several "severe fluctuations", but had reached a stable state satisfactory to Martians and the Earth-dwellers alike. All needs were provided for, but luxuries cost money. It was often said that the wise forsook luxuries in exchange for freedom. All possessions require maintenance — things demand the acquisition of more things. Before you know it, all of your time is spent shopping. It was also said that these same people were merely lazy.

It was going on 8:00 and they had been working up an appetite. Peter rolled out of bed and heated up some leftover Thai food. Anola slipped into a white one-piece self-cleaning jumpsuit that looked and felt like a second skin. "If you can't go back in time, why not send a 'message from the future'?" From the eating area he shouted back, "Thought of that — if we tell them how time travel works, our present won't be the same. Might screw things so royally that you and I'd never meet. Never be born."

"Wouldn't it be O.K. just to let them know what the future could be like? Couldn't you just tell them that time travel is possible without saying how? Then they could figure out the details themselves."

"But Anola, how would I do that?"

Just then the videowall flashed "YOU HAVE A CALLER". It was D-Jing Six, a downstairs neighbor who wanted them to come over to hear his latest acquisition: a 1920's orchestron which he had just restored. D-Jing was a musician who repaired antiques on the side. Ancient keyboard instruments were a specialty and this was a rare find indeed. They flew down to D-Jing's and were ushered into a living room strewn with techno junk. They pulled up some antique plastic crates and watched as D-Jing installed a metal roll into a recess of the orchestron. The sound that poured out of the huge wooden automaton was remarkable. There was a full drum set with cymbals, a wind section whose air came from a cam-driven bellows, and an assortment of chimes and other plucked or struck instruments. D-Jing played along with the roll, stopping every now and then to make some adjustments. It looked like he'd used some of the junk to add a few sounds of his own.

"Where did you find it?"

"Oh, I just beamed back in time and stole it."

"WHAT??"

"Just kiddin'."

D-Jing Six was one of the people who had left Cartesian three-space quite a while ago: one could never tell when he was joking.

Anola's semisweet chocolate skin and white jumpsuit were reflecting blue light from some strange boxes in the corner.

"What are these?"

"That one's a 1950's era oscilloscope and you'll never guess what that other thing is."

"It looks like something out of an ancient sci-fi movie." "Doesn't it? It's a computer terminal circa 1970." "Woa-AH!" exclaimed Anola and Peter in unison. "Look at it. It looks so funny!" They all giggled at the absurdly overbuilt box. As D-Jing kicked over a jar full of nuts and bolts, he said, "You'd be surprised what they could do with these old clunkers. You know, they had a global computer network using satellites and telephone lines. Quite sophisticated, really." "Another weird juxtaposition of technology — Alexander Graham Bell meets the Space Age." "Yes," replied D-Jing, "they even had these funny little keyboards before we Chinese improved 'em."

"Oh yes, by adding twenty thousand new keys." The trio laughed at the old joke, but the Chinese data

input system permanently changed the slowest part of information transfer — telling the computer what you wanted it to do.

On the way back to the apartment, Anola said "What a junk bin!"

"Yes, but he has some amazing stuff."

"No denying that."

"Woa-AH, man."

"Listen, Peter, I think I know how you can tell the twentieth century about this future."

"How?"

"To create enough ambiguity, disguise the message as a science fiction story. Have D-Jing hook his 1970's terminal up to the time amp, and you've got it. the primitive network was connected to all other media outlets, so there you have it."

"Anola, that's brilliant!"

Peter stepped out onto the balcony and began working furiously on his story. As the twilight faded, Anola gently placed a candle on the table.

"You're working as if your life depended on that story."

He looked her dead in the eye and said, "It does."

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Haircuts $20

Jason Snell

The old riddle goes like this:

You're in a small town, one with only two barbers. One of the barbers has a terrible haircut—there are long strands of hair in some places and bald patches in others. His competitor, on the other hand, looks great. Not one hair is out of place.

Which barber do you choose?

The correct answer is that you choose the barber that looks terrible, because if there are only two barbers in the whole town, they must end up cutting each other's hair. The barber with the bald patches is the one who gave the other barber the great haircut.

It's a dumb riddle.

Joe, my old barber, was just like the guy with the nasty hair in the riddle. He looked awful, but his haircuts were cheap and looked sharp. My father and I had been going to Joe since my family moved here 15 years ago. Dad was almost completely bald by the time I was 10, but he still went to Joe every month.

Joe told dirty jokes while he cut hair, and discussed whatever sport happened to be in season at the time. He also loved the kind of food that doctors warn you not to eat. And that's why Joe keeled over mid-haircut one day and dropped face-first onto a floor strewn with little piles of wet hair.

With Joe gone, the only other place in town that I could go was the salon that my mother visits twice weekly to get her hair bleached. The alternative to the salon was putting a bowl over my head and trying to cut it myself.

The moment I walked into the place, I could tell that it was nothing like Joe's barber shop. Joe's smelled faintly of beer and Old Spice, while the salon smelled of wet hair, hairspray, shampoo, mousse, and nail polish. It was a disgusting combination. I wondered about the people who worked there — what kind of condition were their noses in? Had the stench completely ruined all sense of smell? Maybe they just walked into a salon one day, took a big whiff, and declared, "Ah, haircutting, that's the job for me."

In addition to wishing I had a clothespin stuck on my nose, I felt extremely out of place in the salon. There were women sitting under hairdryers, women getting their nails painted, and a few women with plastic bags and cotton wrapped all around their heads. And I was there, some kid with his hair a bit too long, wearing a faded T-shirt and old jeans that probably needed to be thrown away.

Then I saw the person walking toward me from out of the back of the salon. She was six feet tall if you measured her from the bottoms of her black spiked heels to the top of her wild blonde hair. She was wearing a spandex jumpsuit, with a little red sash tied around her waist. I guess the sash was supposed to make her outfit look more like fashion and less like a wet suit. It didn't help.

"I'm Robin. You must be my three o'clock appointment," the woman said. Her hair was fluffed up several inches above her head all the way around, and I could see dark roots showing underneath it all. She wore four pairs of earrings.

I nodded and smiled. She led me into the back of the shop, and I began to think of what I was going to tell her about my haircut. All I wanted was something simple — shorter hair. Nothing fancy, just the same style as I was wearing, only shorter. I didn't want to wear a plastic bag on my head, and I didn't want to get my hair cut in some cool new style. I just wanted my hair to look like it always had.

There were sinks in the back of the shop. I sat down in a chair next to one, and she began washing my hair. This was something else that Joe had never done before. It was almost like I had my own personal servant. Clean my shoes, feed the dogs, and while you're at it, wash my hair.

Robin was quite unlike Joe in another way, too. When she leaned forward to begin washing my hair, her chest moved right in front of my face. I was leaning back in a chair, water spraying into my hair, and the only place I could look was straight up. Right into Robin's cleavage.

"So, you're Janice's son, right?" she asked me.

"Yeah," I said to the spandex.

"Are you going to the Junior College now?" Her fingernails were massaging my scalp. It felt great.

"No, just to high school."

"Is this your senior year, then?"

"Hmm?" I was too busy focusing my attention on her right nipple.

"Is this your senior year?"

"Uh… yeah."

"What are you going to do after you graduate?"

"I'm not sure."

She leaned back. Suddenly I could see the ceiling again.

"Okay, let's go back out to the chair," she said, and wrapped a towel around my head.

Robin led me out to a high-backed chair, and I sat in it. She covered me with a plastic sheet, and unwrapped the towel from my wet head.

"How would you like your hair cut?"

I paused for a moment. I hated it when people asked me this question. Did I look like a recent graduate of the Ace School of Beauty? I had no idea about how I wanted my hair cut.

"I don't know. Pretty much the way it was before. Not too short, or it'll stick up all over. A little longer in the back."

"Okay." She began cutting.

She had no problems with my conservative hair style, I guess. Sometimes I wish someone would tell me "change your hair!" It might actually get me to do it. As it is, my hair has looked the same since I was ten years old.

Once I almost did something to change that. I held my head over a sink filled with peroxide for twenty minutes, like a suicidal person holding a loaded gun to their temple. In the end, I chickened out and drained the sink.

"I guess this is the first time you've had your hair done here," she said.

"Hmm?" I wasn't paying attention to what she was saying. Instead, I had been drifting. That's one of the things that always seems to happen to me when I get my hair cut — I drift, and begin to fall asleep. I don't know what causes it.

"I asked you if this was the first time you've had your hair done here."

"Yeah. My barber died."

"Joe?"

How many barbers around town had died in the past few months?

"Yeah."

"It's too bad about him. He was a great guy. It's kind of scary that people can die, just like that."

"Isn't it, though?"

That was the end of our conversation, which is just as well. It wasn't exactly material you'd expect to turn up on *Nightline*.

After Robin had finished cutting and blow-drying my hair, I realized that she had cut it too short. Hair was sticking up all over. She had also cut the sides much shorter than the top. There were no initials carved into my head — believe me, I checked.

"That'll be 20 dollars," she said.

I handed her the $20 bill that mom had given me. I guess she knew exactly how much a haircut cost here — about $12 more than Joe charged.

"It was nice having you here. Come back soon."

"Thanks."

"Oh — one more thing."

I turned back around, noticing that there were little black hairs all over my faded T-shirt.

"You should think about getting an earring. In the right ear. It'd look really cute."

I nodded, smiled, and walked out of the salon. Next door to the salon was a jewelry store, one that pierces ears. I knew that fact only because my mother had taken me with her when she had her ears re-pierced when I was seven.

An earring?

I stood outside the jewelry store for a minute or so. Then, scratching my neck, I turned away.

I tried to pat down all the hairs sticking straight up out of my head as I walked back to my car.

I've made up a riddle. It goes like this:

You're in a small town, one with only two hairdressers. One of the hairdressers has fluffy pink hair and a nose ring. The other has the sides of her head shaved, while the back of her hair goes halfway to the floor.

Which hairdresser do you choose?

I'm not sure.

It's a dumb riddle.

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New Orleans Wins the War

Greg Knauss

In 1948 my Daddy came to the city
Told the people that they'd won the war
Maybe they'd heard it, maybe not
Probably they heard it, just forgot
'Cause they built him a platform there in Jackson Square
And people came to hear him from everywhere
They started to party and they partied some more
'Cause New Orleans had won the war
We knew we'd do it, we done whipped the Yankees!
—Randy Newman

In 1868, the American Civil War ended when a battle-weary United States population voted the Democratic candidate for president, William Blakely, into office. The republicans, throughout the course of Lincoln's second term, had received the majority of the blame for both allowing the Southern states to "slip away," and then not be regained. Blakely ran on a platform of peace with the Confederate States and won a resounding victory.

Though relations between the United States and the Confederate States remained chilly over the next decade — abolitionists and unionists still held powerful minorities in the U.S. Congress — the situation began to smooth as first Blakely and then his Democratic successor, Thomas Howell, courted the Confederacy, eyeing its powerful, and growing agricultural wealth.

The former Southern states, for their part, changed little politically over the course of those ten years, yet the economic differences where dramatic. After the war ended, there was a drive to adopt a new state-rights constitution, and a document very similar to the original U.S. Articles of Confederation was drafted and finally signed by all the "rebel states" in 1871; the capital of the new country moved from Richmond to New Orleans. Soon after the war, the Confederacy again emerged as the world's leading supplier of agricultural staples — tobacco, cotton, corn and sugar — and its first president under the new constitution, R. E. Lee, used this power to win concessions from the United States' president, Blakely, then in his second term.

Lee's strategy was to bring the import of industrialism to the overwhelmingly agricultural South. Slave labor, used throughout the Confederacy and explicitly sanctioned by the Document of Confederation was perfectly suited to the harsh rigors of quick industrialization, and Lee used this to his advantage. The Confederate States, by 1900, were as much an industrial powerhouse as the U.S., with the addition of heavy agriculturalism as well. The United States was forced into importing a large amount of food from the South because of delays in their expansion of the trans-Appalachian railroad.

Both countries attempted to gain territory by annexation between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century. Though the Mason-Dixon line was formally rejected by the Confederate Congress, the Confederacy only half-heartedly pursued new lands, eventually adding only the New Mexico Territory and the unorganized Indian Reservation north of Texas. The United States, however, spread westward, over the rest of the continent.

When World War I began in Europe, the Confederate States and their president, Thurmond Byron, immediately sent troops, sensing the opportunity to increase their international power and prestige. Though England, with whom the Confederacy had allied itself, disapproved of institutionalized slavery, it needed the men, machinery and food that the South could provide and welcomed the assistance. When the United States joined the fight against Germany in 1917, the war was all but over and the Confederacy was now a powerful force in Europe as well as North America.

Over the next ten years, between 1920 and 1930, the United States became the only World War I victor to withdraw from the European theater and become isolationist. The Confederacy stayed involved in European politics and formally allied itself with the German Republic when Adolf Hitler was elected German Premier in 1933. By the next year, the Confederate States remained Germany's only major ally after the burning of the Reichstag and the dissolution of the Republic, and was the sole voice of democratic international support when Poland was invaded in 1939.

As World War II began, all ties between the so-called "Allied Forces" — England, France and the United States — and the "Axis Powers" — Germany, Italy, Japan and the Confederate States — collapsed. In 1941, caught off-guard and unprepared, the United States was invaded by the Confederacy, with heavy

German U-boat support. Washington, D.C., the capital, was taken within two months and the Confederate army slowly marched up the eastern seaboard of the United States.

In Europe, France had fallen to the Nazis by the time of the Confederate invasion and England was slowly losing the "Battle of Britain." In 1944, London was finally occupied, and without a western front to contend with, Hitler undertook his long-delayed invasion of the Soviet Union. Japan began its landing on both the west coast of the United States and east coast of China during the same summer that Hitler exploded the world's first atomic weapon over Moscow, in 1946.

By 1948, Italy controlled all of Africa, Germany dominated Europe and Russia, Japan held China and western North America, and the Confederacy occupied the United States from the Great Plains east. On October 19, 1948, the United States president, Franklin Roosevelt, surrendered to the Confederate forces in Boston, Massachusetts.

The Confederate States annexed the territory of the United States over the course of the next five years. Each state, to be admitted to the Confederacy, redrafted its constitution in the style of the Document of Confederation and instituted legal slavery. Germany, Italy and Japan, by 1955, followed Confederate examples and began to use slaves both inside their borders and in conquered territories. Certain regions of Africa and China were entirely depopulated by the early 1960s and about the same time, Germany, operating chiefly with the support of the Confederacy, eliminated the last followers of Judaism.

The world economy surged during the 1960s, '70s and '80s, driven mostly by the availability of cheap labor. Trade between the three major world powers (Italy had slipped in dominance and was hardly more than a German puppet by 1965) ranged from wheat to consumer electronics to medical equipment. Though occasional protests against slavery and the treatment of the Jews erupted, especially in western Europe and the northern Confederate States, they petered out as the first generation born with slavery as a world-wide institution grew to adulthood.

Today, in 1991, the world is at peace.

The Explosion That Killed Ben Lippencott

Greg Knauss

There are few things less pleasant than being pelted with the remains of another human being.

Lippencott was hunched over a few vials of something or other before the explosion. He was a deeply serious man and did not enjoy frivolity or even companionship in the lab. "Lipp's Corner" was in the far section of the biology floor, and it took weaving around several long tables to get to. One day many years ago, I was approaching him from behind and was about to ask him if he would join the rest of us for lunch when his head bolted up from its hunched position.

"Uh!" he said, and there was a tremendous explosion.

Lipp quite literally unraveled. Though they did find his legs still attached to his pelvis and his arms were almost unscathed in themselves, his head and torso were, well, untraceable.

They found pieces. All over. But the majority of the matter that made up the upper half of Benjamin Lippencott just wasn't accounted for.

Quite a bit of the pieces they *did* find ended up on me and one of the things that *is* less pleasant than being pelted with remains of another human being is having to wipe those remains out of your eyes. I am thankful that my mouth was closed.

There were questions later on, of course, as to what Lipp was cooking up in those vials of his. Though glass all over the lab was broken, the feds spent quite a bit of money attempting to reconstruct each broken beaker, test tube and vial. They're meticulous people, federal investigators, and eventually they decided that there was only one piece of glassware that couldn't be accounted for. Their report made a big deal about the fact that it was the one Lipp was using. Analyses of blood and other tissues taken off my person gave no spectacular or unusual results.

I, of course, underwent therapy. Though the cases where a man has been smeared all over another man are rare, there were a few precedents. There was even a therapist who specialized in the area, in a manner of speaking. He had made a career of counseling veterans who had seen friends killed, usually messily, before their eyes.

What we found was this: I was upset by the incident. I had nightmares for two or three weeks. Though Lipp wasn't what I would have called a friend, I had known him for over five years, and, yes, I was sorry he was dead. But we also found out that I have a highly analytic mind and that I'm able to take such things as the random probability of life. We found I was mentally healthy, considering the circumstances. We both thought it noted a humorous mention that I now favored glasses over contacts.

I last saw the psychiatrist about three months after the accident, and I only mention him at all because I quickly had a nagging suspicion I should have stayed with him longer. This little voice kept telling me I shouldn't bother going back, but I didn't know whether to listen to it. It, surprisingly enough, was Lipp's voice.

Lipp was never a man to waste words. He would often arrive in the morning, forgo coffee or a donut, and slouch over to his corner to begin work. We might exchange a few words as we passed in the halls or when he would turn down my invitations to lunch, and I knew his voice as well as I knew those of the rest of the guys. It was a low, growly voice, never happy to be called into service.

It was my first week back at the lab, and I was doing some virus isolation experiments, using dyes to trace various substances through the bloodstream. It's simpleminded, easy-to-goof work, and I was reaching for a small vial of dye when, over my shoulder, I heard someone say, "No, that one's fat soluble. You'll lose it."

I started and turned around, somehow almost sure I wouldn't find anybody there. That type of voice isn't common, and there was only one person I knew — had known — with it. It was Lipp's voice, giving me instructions, apparently from beyond the grave.

It was a little unsettling.

It was also a little frustrating. Hearing voices is a common psychiatric complaint, and many people spend their entire lives listening to these ethereal spirits. Socrates claimed to have a voice in his head, but he apparently had no trouble communicating with it. I, however, tried everything I could think of, with very little initial success.

At first I ignored it, hoping it was just a phantom memory of the explosion, but it corrected another three mistakes that day and I decided it was something that I

was going to have to deal with.

Just figuring out how to attempt communication with a disembodied voice is a serious exercise. At first, I just tried thinking at it.

"Hellooo," I thought. "Lipp?" He hated being called Lipp and I thought that if anything was going to bring out some sort of schizophrenia, it would be anger.

Nothing.

I excused myself to the bathroom and, Lord help me, tried speaking out loud. It sounds ridiculously corny in retrospect, something out of a really bad TV movie.

"Hello," I said again. "Lippencott? You there?"

After fifteen minutes of talking to myself in the bathroom, I decided that an appointment with my ex-therapist might be a good thing to consider. *That* brought the voice back.

"Don't do that," it said.

I sighed. Not only did I have enough of a psychiatric problem that the voice of a dead co-worker was in my head, but that voice didn't want me to get it taken care of. I wondered if a mental disease could be self-defensive.

Normally, I would have finished out the day, gone home, made an appointment with the therapist for the next day, and gone to sleep. This is pretty straight thinking, but it didn't work out that way at all.

I was home, making dinner, when Lipp again reared what I suppose you could call his head.

"Get a pencil and paper," he commanded. "Quickly."

I sighed again. I wasn't too worried about Lipp's voice, or the fact that it was in my head. I had a certain degree of faith in the psychiatric profession and I had recently been through a traumatic experience; it was to be expected that I would have some sort of delayed reaction. My therapist would just comfort me through this and I would soon be better. A mental disturbance is nothing to worry about if you have confidence in your sanity.

"Quickly!" the voice hissed at me.

"Yeah, yeah," I said. "Gimme a sec." Apparently, my delayed traumatic reaction was a pushy one.

I moved the pot I was boiling spaghetti in to a cool burner and sat down at the table with a pencil and a piece of paper.

"Listen to what I say," said Lipp. "Don't ask questions."

He began talking, in that low, gruff voice of his, and I slowly transcribed what he said. He corrected my chemistry errors and once reminded me where the apostrophe goes in a possessive.

I have to admit, in the end I'm glad that I never made my appointment with my therapist. Lipp had an incredible mind and most of his time in the lab had been spent working on unofficial pet projects. The only reason he took the job at the lab at all was because he didn't have the equipment he needed at home.

Maybe some day we'll try to work out how smearing the majority of his brain on my face transferred his quiet, sulky consciousness into my head, but for now, we're ankle deep in other ideas.

Lipp was working on what he called a "friendly virus" to fight cancer when he died. It seems that he wasn't boiling the two components before mixing them, and that caused the explosion. It was a simple mistake, but it allowed me to be up on stage with him when we got the Nobel Prize for medicine. He, of course, wrote the speech.

Right now, we're working on a friendly virus to fight AIDS and it looks promising. I guess I'm now considered the foremost biochemist in the world, and that's why they allow me my eccentricities.

Lipp and I thought it would be a good idea to have someone stand behind me while we work.

Greg Knauss gknauss@ucsd.edu

Was a senior at the University of California, San Diego, majoring in Political Theory, when work began on this issue. Now he's a graduate with nothing to do. He recently mailed off a "Star Trek: The Next Generation" script submission, proving once again that he is indeed as loopy as a loon… whatever that means.

QUANTA

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