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**Moon Feathers**

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*To my wonderful wife Suzie...you mean the world to me!*

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## 3012: The Artifact

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4<sup>th</sup> edition

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3012: The Artifact

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# **3012: The Artifact**

**A Time Awaits Novel**

**By John M. Grier**

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## The Dig

“Jack! Jack! You’ve got to see this” Paul exclaimed as he rushed into the room, obviously very excited. Sweat ran down his face in rivulets in spite of the frigid temperature. By the look of his clothes he had been at the dig, alone, for quite some time this morning.

Jack had been sleeping in this particular morning and was always a bit disoriented when he first woke up. It was as if he had to remember who he was and where he was for a while before he could think of speaking. Paul, having worked with Jack for the past ten years, was well aware of this little personality quirk his friend had and waited with as much patience as he could muster.

Eventually Jack dragged himself kicking and screaming into full consciousness, enough to respond “Okay, okay, calm down, I’m awake.”

“You’ve got to come down and see what I found” exclaimed Paul as he excitedly danced around the room, apparently full of nervous energy.

Jack slowly pried himself out of bed, yawning and stretching, blinking the sleep from his eyes. “Okay, what’d you find?”

“You know that building that we thought might be a barn? Well, I finally broke through to it and you just have to see what’s inside!”

“Okay, I’d love to, but can I get some coffee first?” Since there were only three of them at the dig, and Janet certainly wouldn’t accompany anyone into the depths of the ice field, it was

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obvious that Paul had gotten tired of waiting and went down alone. It was strictly against the rules to descend to the dig site alone, but somehow Paul had gotten past Janet this time to have a go at it on his own.

He watched as Jack busied himself with his coffee. Every morning it was the same thing. Finally he said "Jack, you know you should go easy on that stuff. If Janet knew you were drinking actual coffee with caffeine in it, she'd have your head! Next thing I know you'll be asking for salt!"

"Yeah, yeah, I know. I keep forgetting coffee is illegal."

"How on earth can you forget something like that? Coffee has been illegal for hundreds of years because of the stimulant it contains. I certainly don't care, but be careful around Janet. She's a stickler for the rules. I don't know how you ever got the habit anyway."

"Okay, okay, give me a break" he replied. He took a sip of the dark, rich smelling brew and smiled in satisfaction. Pleased with himself, he said "And you should try salt sometime before you go knocking it too."

Paul just rolled his eyes. Sometimes he could never tell when Jack was serious. Salt, indeed! "*What's next*" he wondered "*consuming animal flesh?*" He shivered at the thought.

The vast majority of people these days are vegetarians, and Paul was no exception, although to be perfectly honest, he simply knew of no other way to be. The world of 3012 was much different from anything in the past, but it had been like this for many centuries. The people these days simply didn't know of any different way to be. No one ever thought to eat an animal any longer. Even Paul, an archeologist, never seemed to consider things such as diet when looking at an ancient civilization. On those rare digs when evidence of people eating animals was found, it was simply chalked up to primitive people who weren't enlightened enough to know any better.

As he thought of these things, Jack pondered just how different things were these days. He considered Paul and wondered how, at six foot three with an athletic build, he managed to maintain

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his muscle mass with only a vegetarian diet. The fact that he was considered very handsome by his female acquaintances didn't make Jack feel any better.

He looked in the mirror and considered himself. His hair was going to gray, although there was still enough dark brown in it to appease him of some semblance of youth. He patted his ample stomach and realized he always had a bit of a pot belly and at his age, probably would continue to have it. With a big sigh, he decided he was as ready to start the day as he was going to be. He turned to his friend and said "Okay, let's go see what you found." He followed Paul to the control room and the hole.

The hole was just that. A hole carved in the ice. The pair of adventurers geared up and descended in the small elevator they had rigged in the hole. The trip to the bottom took several minutes and as always, Jack took particular notice of the many thousands of ice rings, or layers of ice as they descended. "How many ice rings do you suppose there are in this hole?" Jack asked as they slowly dropped through the ice.

"Oh, I don't know, several thousand, for sure. Why?"

"I was just wondering. No big deal" said Jack as he leaned against the safety rail of the elevator and watched layer after layer of ice pass by on his way to the bottom of the hole.

"You know that's how we date the find. We estimated ten thousand years as the time frame for this dig because of the thousands of years of annual rings we see here. Why is it you always ask that same question every time we descend?"

"Well, to be honest, I don't think the rings are annual, that's all. The barn we're digging into just doesn't seem to be ten thousand years old." He paused as he studied the rings closer. After a moment he said "Did you ever think the rings may be periods of melting and freezing, instead of annual rings? I mean, when the temperature is near the freezing point, snow and ice can melt and freeze several times a day, each time creating a new 'annual' ring."

Paul looked at his friend with the same look he seemed to always have, one of surprise at Jack's insight into how things are and the way things work. He certainly seemed to have a knack for

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figuring stuff out. “Well, we certainly have no other way to date it, that I know of.” The small elevator came to a halt a few inches above the icy floor. “Anyway, we’re here, finally.”

“Okay, show me your barn” said Jack, feeling like an ice miner on some frozen planet in an old Sci-Fi movie. They made their way through the tunnels they had dug to the barn doors. With a smile on his face, Paul opened the doors to the barn and Jack was astonished to see that it was not only intact, but free of ice inside! Paul was so excited that he didn’t know where to begin. Jack, however, just stood there with his mouth hanging open, and not moving.

“What’s the matter, Jack?” Paul asked. “You didn’t expect to see such a pristine find, did you?” In fact, the barn looked like it had been left recently, not the centuries it must have been buried under the Canadian ice.

“As a matter of fact, no, I did not. This is amazing!” Usually, in finds like this, everything had been crushed under the weight of the ice above them. This time, however, something was different. Jack looked at the ceiling and the structure of the old barn and was astonished that the building was still standing, let alone holding the weight of all that ice above it. Something certainly was strange here.

As they slowly made their way around the barn, Paul would pick up things and wonder just what they were used for and Jack wouldn’t say a word. Eventually, Paul noticed that Jack was quieter than usual. “Why so silent?”

The question seemed to shake Jack out of whatever daze he had been in. “Huh?”

Paul laughed, apparently still on some sort of high from discovering such a treasure trove of archeological wealth, and continued his quest to discover all he could about the mysterious items all around him. And they were in such remarkable condition! As he kept looking at things, he would ask “What do you think this thing is, Jack?”

Even though he seemed oddly preoccupied, Jack always had an answer. That was one of the things Paul liked about him. He never hesitated, but would offer his opinion as if he had known all along

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what it was. He would say something just as quick as you please, such as “hammer” or “socket wrench” seemingly without any thought whatsoever, as if he had always known what the odd items were used for.

However, Paul picked up one item that really threw him when Jack offered his opinion as to its purpose. He picked up a steel tool, with arms going off in four directions and what appeared to be hex head wrenches of different sizes on each end. Jack immediately said “That’s a lug wrench, Paul.”

Paul, caught by surprise, asked “What’s a lug and why would it need its own wrench?”

Jack had an unusual look on his face and thought a bit before responding. Finally, he said “I must have read somewhere about those automobiles they used to travel in. As I recall, the bolts that held the wheels on were called ‘lugs’, and the wrench used to remove them was called a ‘lug wrench.’ That is a lug wrench.”

Having made his little speech, he walked over to the far corner of the barn and peeked under a large, filth encrusted tarp. Smiling, he began removing the tarp. “Give me a hand with this, if you don't mind.”

Wondering what Jack was up to, Paul obliged. When the tarp was removed he was astonished to find a vehicle, such as the one they had just been discussing. And, it seemed to be completely intact!

As Jack looked for a way into the vehicle, Paul stood by just trying to take it all in. Once again, he was shocked at his friend’s ability to overlook the absurdities of the past and dive right in as if he knew exactly what he was looking for. With a squeak and a groan, not to mention a good bit of elbow grease, Jack got a door opened. He surprised him again with a question of his own. “Do you still think this find is ten thousand years old?”

“Yes, why would I think any differently?”

“Well, for starters, this vehicle is most certainly NOT ten thousand years old. I grant that it may be a thousand years old or so, but certainly not ten thousand. What messes with everyone’s mind is this crazy way you now have of marking the years. This is

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year 847, correct? That assumes that 848 years ago, they used a different calendar. Do you know what year, based on the old calendar, they changed it?"

"Not really, but I can look it up when we get back on top. Why do you ask?"

"Well, if you knew the exact date, based on the old system, I could tell you how old it is. This vehicle is a passenger van, manufactured in the year 1984 by Chevrolet, and it may have been in this barn for many years before the ice covered it. Now, I'm not an expert in date conversions, but I assure you this was not made ten thousand years ago."

"How do you know when it was manufactured?"

"Right here on the inside of the driver's door, there is a plate that shows the date and place of manufacture as well as some other information that is largely useless to us." Paul peered at the small plate that was barely legible and shook his head at how easily Jack found it.

Jack dug around some more and said "Here you go, Paul, some money for your collection." He had pulled open a compartment, more a tiny drawer really, filled with coins. "If you notice the dates on these coins, it further verifies the age of this site, but then, as an archeologist, you certainly know that." He smiled as he noticed the look on Paul's face that indicated Paul had not, in fact, thought of that and should have.

"Wow, what a treasure! There must be fifty coins here, Jack! They seem to be in pretty good condition, too."

Jack was busy rummaging through a compartment on the other side, looking at some ancient bits of paper. He was muttering to himself, but the only word Paul could make out was Canada. Paul let it go, and started looking at items on the other side of the barn. But Jack kept looking through the van. In the back, under the rear seat, he found what looked like a briefcase. It was locked and Jack couldn't manage to get it opened.

Paul saw what he was looking at and came over to help investigate. Jack seemed confused and said "I think this case is much newer than everything else in this barn. The technology

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looks like it's from many years later, if you ask me. But, how would it have gotten in here?"

"I agree, Jack. That's the first thing here I've actually seen before. And you're correct; this find would date much younger than ten thousand years. This is from about the time when the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, took full control of the government. This would be from around the time the dates changed, I believe, approximately 850 years ago, or so." He paused in thought for a moment then said "Now you have me wondering about those annual rings, too."

"It's nice to know I'm not losing my mind after all" said Jack with a smile.

"I suppose we should be heading back to the surface" said Paul as he glanced at his watch. It felt like they had been in the barn mere minutes, but hours had passed.

As they ascended through the hole to the control room on the surface, Paul started thinking about how the people who once owned the barn and its contents lived, what they thought about and how they spent their days. He was never one of those guys who just accepted what was told to him without trying to see for himself why things worked the way he was told they were supposed to. Apparently, there was a time when people questioned everything but, with the exception of Paul and a very few people like him, those days were long gone.

In this day and age, you would have to go centuries into the past to find people like that. Paul was just a "throwback" so to speak, to an earlier age. Perhaps that's why he became an archaeologist. He, more so than most people, could really grasp what was going on. Most people would see just a bunch of old, broken stuff that had been discarded. Not Paul.

Paul would envision what their world must have been like and try to relate to the people. Take transportation, for example. Most people today would cringe at the thought of operating a vehicle with an internal combustion engine that was not controlled by a computer. But, history tells us that once upon a time that was the accepted norm!

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Absurd, most say these days, but here in this van, was the proof. Paul liked to take it a step further, however. He tried to envision what the people were feeling and thinking as they piloted these explosive contraptions at great speed, in large groups, and unassisted by a computer!

That was what made Paul good at his job, though. Most people in Paul's time enjoyed the fact that the government did most of their thinking for them. There's so much less stress when someone else makes all the decisions for you. Who wants to go around thinking all the time anyway? Many people in Paul's time would feel sorry for him and the few people that are like him.

Archeology had just about become a lost art. The relatively few people who still even bother with it at all are all colleagues, and all of them seem to be in trouble most of the time. No doubt from thinking too much! Thinking too much was, after all, discouraged by the government.

Paul's current expedition was on the arctic ice, digging down through tens of thousands of years of ice to a settlement of some kind in the distant past. Whenever he went on these expeditions, he took Jack along with him. Jack was older than Paul, average height and rather stocky build. He was perhaps sixty years old with salt and pepper hair along with a nearly white mustache and goatee. Paul liked Jack because he was just as weird as Paul was. They had been friends for about ten years now.

Jack pretty much kept to himself, but Paul liked him. In fact, Paul was one of the few people he would even talk to. For some reason, Jack had decided long ago to just keep his mouth shut. Apparently, his ideas were even stranger than Paul's. Birds of a feather, they say, not that anyone really knows what that's supposed to mean anymore.

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## The Secret Room

Janet was struggling, trying really hard to not let this stupid mission get to her. You see, none of this was her idea! She was the Government-Assigned Protocol Officer of this crazy expedition.

In addition to Paul and Jack, the government insisted on a third person to act as a Protocol Officer. The office of Government Protocol, as it is known, is one of the largest branches of government. Everything that gets done anywhere has a Protocol Officer attached to it to oversee the project and to make sure no laws are violated and all the proper taxes are billed.

The Protocol Officers that were usually attached to expeditions such as the one Paul and Jack were currently on considered the duty to be punishment for something. Most people accepted the Protocol Officers as part of their normal routine and would be uncomfortable without one present. Janet, in her own mind, had obviously done something to anger her superiors to be assigned to this insane mission.

“Why on earth would anyone want to go digging under a bunch of old ice? No one really cares what happened in the past. The past is past! Move on and forget about this old junk!” she spouted angrily, knowing that nobody was around for miles to hear her. “I don't understand how this mission ever got sanctioned in the first place!

She stalked around the Control Center in an angry huff. Needless to say, she was miserable. Paul and Jack certainly did not get along with her and she had no idea why. *“I'm a fun person to be around!”* she thought. *“I don't understand why they don't like me.”* All

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she could do was hope they found whatever they were looking for soon so she could go home.

Janet enjoyed a very active lifestyle, as did most government employees and was missing the social life she normally had while at home. She was very attractive, a bit on the short side with dark brown hair and a perky attitude when among her own people, namely, other government employees. She was pondering her nice warm apartment when Paul and Jack came up through the big hole, as she referred to it in her reports. They were very excited and kept babbling about something they had found.

Janet, however, was not amused, nor was she pleased. Once again, Paul and Jack had gone off without their communication headsets. This was a major violation! What would happen if they got hurt down there? How would she know? How would she complete her reports then? These archaeologists never seemed to grasp what everyone else knew and took for granted, that the Protocol Officer was the most important person on any team! How would the government know what was happening if not for the Protocol Officer?

She blamed Paul, since he was the team leader. *"Paul is obviously just a typically mean, self-centered person who has no idea of where his priorities should be"* she thought as she glared at the pair of grimy workers that emerged from the big hole. As soon as Paul popped his head up through the hole into the control room, Janet started in on him. "What's the big idea? You two know better than to go down there without being in contact with me!"

"I'm sorry, Janet, it won't happen again. It must have slipped my mind this time." Paul was still ecstatic about the pristine find in the old barn and was determined that Janet wouldn't ruin his great mood.

"How on earth can it slip your mind? We've been doing this for years and the law states that you must be in constant communication with the Protocol Officer, namely, me. I'm sure this will look bad in my report." Janet was furious at being denied her social life, not to mention the comforts of her apartment and was bent on taking it out on someone. Jack, as usual, remained

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silent around Janet and her conversation with Paul distracted her enough for him to quietly leave the control room with the briefcase he found before she could see it.

Eventually, Janet allowed Paul to leave. He made his way down the corridor to the common area shared by the three of them during their 'off' hours. Jack was there still trying to work the lock on the case. Paul had never seen an ancient artifact that kept Jack puzzled for very long. Sometimes it seemed like he had a special connection to the past in a way that even Paul, with his rather old fashioned ways could not fathom. But, on the other hand, Jack did appear to be much older. *"Maybe it has something to do with his age,"* thought Paul. Mentally switching gears, he said "I was just thinking of that vehicle down there. I've seen a few of them at digs before, but I don't remember ever seeing one that complete. Even the wheels looked like they would still work."

"The tires, you mean?" asked Jack with a bemused look on his rugged face.

Once again, seemingly without any thought at all, Jack had come through with an obscure term for an item that had long sense passed into the depths of history. "Yes, I suppose. That would be the rubber coatings on the metal wheels, right?"

Jack couldn't help but smile at Paul's unique way of looking at things. "Yes. They held air under pressure to make the ride smoother. And I agree, that van looked like it could be brought back to working order, if we had the time and access to a machine shop and some materials to work with. Why? Are you thinking of trying to restore it?"

"Janet would kill me if she thought I would even consider trying to start an internal combustion engine! The pollution off of one of those things is highly toxic, Jack!"

Jack laughed heartily. Finally, he said "It simply amazes me how the truth can be distorted over time. Do you really think people would have driven them all their lives if they were that dangerous? And, obviously, if they drove them, they actually had to start the engine. The pollution had to be rather minor, Paul. Think about it."

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Paul was stunned. No one had ever suggested such an idea to him before and it made him stop and think for a moment. Since the idea did have some merit to it, he said “I suppose you have a point. But, I have to say, it scares me how your mind works. I mean, sometimes you seem to have a special connection with the past, with the way you always have an answer for what things are, how they work and what people thought and did.”

Jack didn’t have an answer this time, at least none he was ready to share, but Paul didn’t expect him to. They had this conversation every time they found something interesting. “Did you find anything worth looking at in those papers that were in the compartment you were rummaging through?”

“Well, I found the registration papers for the van. It was registered in Minnesota. How it ended up in a barn in Eastern Canada is a mystery that may be solved when we get that case opened. But, I can tell you this much, a vehicle like that was designed to carry people. That must mean that nearby there must have been a population center and some sort of attraction here, maybe a church or something. Or, somebody may have just gotten a good deal on an old van that ultimately ended up in this old barn.”

“A church? Any idea what a church might have been?” said Paul. He had come across references to the term before, but could never quite figure out what it meant. Since Jack seemed to have this uncanny link to the past, he figured it wouldn’t hurt to ask him.

“A church was a sort of meeting house where people with similar interests gathered. Mostly, they talked about the past; you would have liked it, probably. You’ve never heard of it before?”

“No, and I consider myself a historian. How do you know so much about it?”

“Well, I guess I’ve been around longer than you. I suppose I must have encountered it somewhere before.” Jack suddenly got a strange look on his face and quietly went to his room without saying anything else. Paul once again wondered how Jack could know so much about the ancient world.

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In his room, Jack was kicking himself for almost letting his secret out. No one in this bizarre world could possibly know what a church was. The government had managed, over the course of several centuries, to not only eradicate certain aspects of society, but alter history to suit their needs and wishes. He knew because he was born many years before the government completely took control.

Actually, no one would ever believe Jack was from a thousand years in the past. He had been stranded here for about ten years now and still managed to be surprised at how weird it was. He hated the ice because of the memories it brought, but if he was ever to get out of here again, the ice was his only chance. As he drifted off to sleep, Jack couldn't help himself from remembering that day ten years ago:

After a lifetime of adventures exploring any time or place that took his fancy, he finally managed to mess up big time. Up until then, he had always kept his time jumps within a few hundred years of his own time. It seemed the further either direction he jumped, the stranger people were and the weirder people thought he was.

However he had been feeling truly adventurous that particular day and jumped a thousand years into the future, just to see what it was like. He had always been a fan of Star Trek, and was hoping people would be flying around the universe in giant starships by then. He had been greatly disappointed to learn how wrong he was.

The machine he used to travel through time was housed in a boat he came across when he was young. It had been a part of his life for many years now and he still had no real idea as to how it worked. He was cruising off of the eastern coast of Canada, well below the arctic ice line on that fateful day, a thousand and ten years ago. Scientists had been saying that global warming was causing the ice caps to melt anyway, so, instead of playing it safe and going south to warmer waters, he jumped right there. Sure enough, he found himself buried in the ice.

Thankfully, the boat must have created a 'bubble' of sorts around itself as it transited through time and the fortunate side effect, when he popped into existence under hundreds of tons of

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ice was the creation of a 'cavern' in which the boat sat. He supposed the time machine's affect on the space around the boat is what caused it, but, whatever the reason, it saved his life and for that he was well pleased it was there. He put on the warmest clothes he could find and began digging his way up through the ice.

From the roof of the top deck of the boat, he could just reach the ice while standing on a step ladder. Using the tools he had on-board, he managed to dig his way up through what seemed like miles of ice, but in reality was much less. As fortune would have it, he had a torch with him that he happened to acquire somewhere among his travels, on a trip into his future. He never did figure out what the thing was supposed to be used for, but whatever it was, it worked and he had fuel enough to last for quite some time.

Still, it took him more than a week to reach the surface. Thinking back, he knew he should have just re-engaged the time circuits and returned to the past, but he wasn't thinking straight for some reason. Besides, he really wanted to see the future.

After finally reaching the surface, he almost immediately encountered a polar bear. The bear saw him as soon as his head poked up through the hole to the surface and started lumbering his way, picking up speed as he ran. Jack, however, was a few steps out of the hole before he finally caught sight of the half-ton mass of white fur and muscle lumbering his way. He turned and ran back toward the hole he had made in the ice, but wasn't quick enough. The bear got there first. Fortunately, before the bear got him, Paul happened by.

Paul had been scouting an expedition that day and just happened to cruise by in a hovercraft in the nick of time. Jack's life had been saved that day by a total stranger dropping out of the sky between him and the huge bear. Noticing the open door on the hovercraft and not really caring who was inside at the moment, he dove in headfirst. Paul brought the craft to a hover twenty feet or so above the bear, allowing Jack to compose himself and get the door closed. Once the door was closed, he flew away at a high rate of speed.

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Again, he wasn't really thinking straight at the time, probably from the excitement with the bear still addling his brain a bit, but Jack didn't think to check his GPS right away. And, when he did think to check it later, he was shocked to discover that his GPS didn't work here. And now he was so far away from his boat that he couldn't find it again. He simply lost track of direction on the seemingly endless expanse of ice.

As he reminisced, he thought back to that first conversation he had with Paul. "Hi, I'm Jack Murphy thanks for the lift" he said with his hand outstretched to shake."

Paul looked at him with a strange expression and continued driving the hovercraft he was piloting over the ice. "I'm Paul, nice to meet you." He paused in thought a moment, then said "I hate to ask, but at the risk of sounding foolish, did you say your name was Jack, or Murphy? I don't think I've ever met anyone with more than one name before."

Realizing that the world of a thousand years in the future was a bit different from what he was used to, he quickly said "My name's Jack. Sorry about the confusion." He quickly changed the subject and the two of them became fast friends. In the years that passed since, he learned that no one had a last name these days. Apparently, it stemmed from a desire for secrecy on the part of the parents. The government felt the privacy of the parents was more important and since the government raised the children anyway, no harm was done, in their eyes.

So, for the past ten years, he kept going to these ice expeditions with his friend Paul, hoping to find his boat and his only way back to his idea of civilization. He knew that this time, however, he was close. He thought that in the morning, when he could get back to the barn under the ice, he would find a map or something that would give him an idea of just where the coast was and perhaps he could figure out his way back to his boat.

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The next morning, He and Paul made their way down the hole, this time wearing their communication headsets. Well, Paul wore

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his. Jack had his around his neck, but refused to have it anywhere near where it might pick up what he was saying.

Paul started to comment on it, but caught himself before he got Janet riled already this morning. Jack watched this, knew what Paul was thinking and just stood there with a silly grin on his rugged face.

As they made their way to the barn, through the ice tunnels, Jack paid special attention to try to see as far into the ice as he could. It was surprisingly clear in places, due to how it was frozen as well as the mineral content of the ice. In some places you couldn't see more than a few inches, but in others, you could see just about forever. The result was a somewhat distorted view of what the world used to look like.

Suddenly, he stopped. He stared intently through a particularly clear area of the ice, trying to see off in the far distance. Paul had gotten ahead of him so he called out "Hey Paul, does that look like a lighthouse over there in the distance to you? I think we may have stumbled onto a coastal village with an intact light house."

Paul stopped his progression through the ice tunnel and turned to walk back to where Jack was peering into the ice. Cupping his hands around his eyes, hopefully to see a bit better, he asked "Where are you looking, Jack?"

Jack pointed in the direction he thought the light house was located. If it was there, it was just at the edge of his vision, but he certainly wanted it to be there. He was near a light house off the coast of eastern Canada when he became stranded here. Although there were hundreds of lighthouses in eastern Canada, most were not accessible by car, and many of them had a very unique look to them that made them great landmarks.

"You know, I think it just might be. Let's look around this barn some more, then after lunch, maybe we can start melting our way over there to find out."

"Sounds like a plan to me" Jack said with an enthusiasm he hadn't felt in a long time. Little did they know, but their light house trip would not happen that day. As they poked around the old barn, Paul stepped on what must have been a trap door to a hidden

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place under the barn. His left leg went right through it and he was stuck for a few minutes.

Jack, seeing what was happening, came to the rescue right away. After freeing him, he opened the trap door and found another level under the barn. Locating a ladder, he carefully made his way down into the basement level.

The biggest shock came when he got about halfway down the ladder. The lights came on! Never, in his ten years as an archaeologist had the lights come on in an old dig like this. However, to be fair, most of the digs were not in as good condition as this one was. They were, for the most part, the sad remains of what once had been a building or town.

He got to the bottom of the ladder and looked around. What he found was obviously an underground church. He had figured out long ago that the very idea of a church was a thing of the past. He had never been a religious man, but didn't have anything against it, either. He just figured it wasn't for him and really was not disappointed to see that it had disappeared a thousand years in the future. Remembering his earlier comment about a church and especially Paul's reaction to it, he simply said "Looks like a meeting room of some sort to me."

This was the first place he had seen in his ten years here that even remotely resembled a church. Apparently, this was one of the last churches to survive. Maybe this place would hold a clue about the disappearance of the other churches. Even though he had never had much to do with church or religion of any kind before, it would be nice to know what happened.

He began looking around to see if he could find the source of the power. He struck gold behind the podium, where he found another trap door. Smiling, he discovered a power plant much like the one that powered his boat. The sea water that powered it had been piped in and apparently, somehow kept from freezing in the pipes. Perhaps that would explain why the building had not collapsed under the weight of the ice, like most had.

Even though this barn looked like it was old when the van in it was made, it was merely a disguise. It was, in fact, advanced by

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Jack's standards. He began to realize that there was technology behind this building which was why it was intact, but yet empty. Otherwise it would certainly have collapsed long ago. Secretly, he made a mental note to himself that his boat, when he ever found it again, would probably fire right up, since the power plant here still worked after all this time under the ice. That was very good to know! Maybe there was hope for him after all. Also, for the first time since finding his boat all those years ago, he knew of a source for spare parts, if he needed them.

Paul, meanwhile, had found several boxes that had what may have been books in them a thousand years ago, but now were merely scattered shards of stuff that may or may not have been paper. Paper didn't do well in a damp climate for a thousand years. "This looks like a bunch of old books to me, but they are so far gone that we couldn't even tell what the titles were, much less ever hope to actually read them."

"Well that's too bad. They may have shed some light on what went on here, way back when. This could have been a secret meeting place for gatherings that were not legal, or merely a convenient place to meet and make use of otherwise unusable space."

Paul smiled at his friend's grasp of the obvious. "How did you come to know so much, Jack?"

"In my younger days I got around more than I do now" said Jack with a knowing smile. "Speaking of getting around, where do you reckon we are, anyway? I know we are on the east coast of Canada, but other than that, I'm not really sure."

"Jack, you always ask that and usually I have no idea why you even care. As you know, most of Canada is under ice, as well as much of the northern parts of Europe and Asia. However, you are one of the few people who even care about what the names of places used to be. Even in the world of Archeology, most people don't need to get any closer than say, 'east coast of Canada.' Sometimes the name of a providence will suffice, but that's not what you want, is it? You want the exact address, don't you?"

"Well, yes!"

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“Maybe we’ll know more when we get to that light house. It doesn’t look like it will happen today, though. We can get an early start in the morning and head straight for it. With any luck at all, we can get there in a day or so.”

Boy, was he wrong.

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## Janet's Law

The machine that was used to make the tunnels had a typical government inspired name that was utterly boring, way too long and much too cumbersome to use in any type of conversation, normal or otherwise. As a result, Jack called it the Mark One Hole Melter. Paul just shook his head and laughed at Jack's unusual sense of humor. Janet, on the other hand, would have launched into another lecture if she knew what Jack called "her" equipment. Fortunately, she had never actually heard Jack speak.

She always referred to the equipment as hers, since she was the government's representative here. And, since the government had priority over literally everything else in life, she was the most important person here...and all of the equipment was hers to account for. It didn't matter that Paul had this particular piece of equipment signed out to him for many years now, in her mind, it was hers!

So naturally it came as no surprise that when its time was due for an inspection, she called a halt to all digging. "Paul, the equipment you are currently using is due for an inspection, based on the number of hours it has been in service." She said.

Paul fumbled with his headset, desperately trying to turn the voice circuit back on before he spoke. To keep Jack out of trouble, he rigged a switch years ago. "You have got to be kidding! In a few more hours we'll be at our destination! Then we won't need it any more for the rest of the dig. Let me finish this hole first, Janet. A few more hours won't hurt anything."

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“Paul, you know the rules. When the time is due for an inspection, all work is to stop until such time said inspections have occurred. It is only for your safety. I would hate to see something happen to you guys.”

With a great sigh, he said “I know, but you have to admit it’s very frustrating to be so close to the end, only to have to stop.”

Jack, having heard all this, was furious! It was all he could do to keep silent. Now that they were much closer to the lighthouse, he was certain this was the one he was near ten years ago. To lose it now would be devastating! Unable to keep silent any longer, he yanked his headset off of his neck where it had been dangling unused and nearly forgotten and tossed it across the narrow ice tunnel. Fuming, he said “Paul, why don’t we just finish this hole first? It will only take a few hours, no big deal. Janet will get over it, I’m sure.”

“Jack, you know that if she called here, she would already have put it in her reports. When they find out that we disobeyed the Protocol Officer on something like this, we’ll both be sent to a Re-Indoctrination School for a few years. Then once they finally do let us out, a career in a field as controversial as archeology would certainly be out of the question for either one of us. Personally, I would rather avoid that, if at all possible.”

Jack was furious, but after several deep breaths, he let out a big sigh and with his head hung low and his shoulders slumped, he resigned himself to accepting the fate he was dealt. “I know you’re right, but it’s so frustrating to be this close!”

“Jack, it’s just a lighthouse. There’ll be others, I’m sure.” Paul certainly could sympathize with his friend’s frustration over yet another dig left unfinished, but what could you do? Once the Government made a decision, there wasn’t anything an average citizen could do to change things.

“Not like this one” Jack muttered under his breath as he picked up his discarded headset and stalked off in a huff.

Paul was disappointed as well, but didn’t understand why Jack was so upset about this particular light house. They had been called off of digs before when they were this close and Jack didn’t get

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nearly as upset. What made this one so special? He gathered up the rest of the equipment and headed for the elevator to the control room. When he got there, Janet could not have been more pleased with herself if she had tried. "I already ordered a hovercraft to come get us. They'll be here in the morning and we can get off of this horrible ice and finally back to civilization...and none too soon, if you ask me!"

"Janet, you know we could have finished this dig in a few days if you had only relaxed the rules a bit so we could finish the tunnel we were digging. It would be nice to actually finish what we were doing for a change."

Janet crossed her arms over her chest and glared at Paul. "I am certainly shocked at your attitude, Paul! You know the law. Where would we be without the law to protect us?"

"Well, for one, we would have a few finished digs, instead of all of these partially finished sites that no one ever gets around to again!" Paul said with a bit too much anger.

Janet was taken aback at Paul's outburst. Normally, the Government's representative never got any 'backtalk' from the employees and she was momentarily unsure as to how to proceed. Finally, she said "Well! I was hoping to be done here, but I can see that one more report is in order. I feel I am going to have to recommend you for counseling concerning your anger issues" said Janet with a sigh. "My work is never done. You should be more like Jack. He never talks to me with such attitude."

Exasperated, Paul exclaimed "That's because he never talks to you!"

Janet was slowly losing her patience with Paul and his sudden attitude issues, but also, she was beginning to see him in a different light. Up until recently, she had seen him the same way everyone else in the Government saw every other citizen worker...as just mindless drones whose only purpose in life was to serve their government masters. She shook the strange thoughts from her mind and replied "Whatever. The point is that I never hear anything bad from him at all."

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Realizing a lost cause when he saw one, he composed himself and said "I'm sorry Janet. I'm sure there's no need to file that last report; it must be this ice that was getting to me. I'm sure I'll be much better tomorrow when we get back home."

Pleased at Paul's sudden compliance, she replied "Well, since you put it like that, maybe you're right. I'll overlook it for now. But please be more careful, Paul. Not everyone is as forgiving as I am." With that, Paul made his way to the common room where he found Jack.

"So now what?" asked Jack, deeply concerned that he would never find his lost machine.

"I guess we start over on some other dig. You know how it is, for some reason these old digs never get re-opened."

Thinking of that fateful day that left him trapped here one thousand years in his future, Jack said "It seems to me that you were on a dig somewhere nearby here ten years ago on the day we met."

Paul stopped his pacing and looked at Jack for a long moment as he thought. "You know, I think you're right. I'll have to look at my records when we get back tomorrow to be sure though. What made you think of that?"

Realizing that the time had finally come to share his secret with his friend, he took a deep breath and said "Actually, I never told you before, but there is something near here I've been trying to find for a long time now. It's something I know for a fact is there and is in very good condition. However, I want to do it on my own, with no government involvement, if possible. How would we go about doing something like that?"

"I've never heard of anyone even trying" said Paul, intrigued. "Why would you want to?"

"I just don't trust them to finish the dig. How many have we actually finished in the past ten years? Two? Three, if you count that false lead we had last year."

"I know. I'm just as frustrated as you are, Jack. What's so special about this dig of yours?"

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“All I can tell you right now is that it’s a boat, intact, under the ice, and on top of the water.”

“Okay, but what makes this boat different from any other bit of history?”

Before Jack could answer, they could hear Janet approaching. Janet said “You guys should be happy to know the government has decided to use those primitive tools you found in a display at a new museum. Isn’t that wonderful?”

“You can’t do that! We haven’t even begun to do any real work here at this site on those tools. They shouldn’t be moved until we can document everything. Archeology takes time” said Paul.

In a very condescending tone, Janet replied “Paul, there’s no need for all that, and I know we certainly don’t want to spend any more time than is absolutely necessary in all this cold ice country. It’s just a bunch of old junk. Let it go! I already closed the expedition officially before you guys got back to the control room. As far as the government is concerned, this site is closed forever! I, for one, am very happy about that! If I had my way, no one would come up here on this retched ice again, ever, for any reason!” Having said her piece, she stormed out and returned to her control room, the only place she felt comfortable.

Unaware that Paul and Jack actually wanted to be here doing their jobs, she thought she was helping. As she sat there alone, she thought to herself *“There’s gratitude for you! I try to help them by getting us off this ice early and they act like they’re mad at me. I’ll never understand Paul. Why can’t he see I’m only trying to look out for him? Maybe he’ll loosen up tomorrow on the ride home. I arranged it so we’ll all be in the same compartment, just for the opportunity to chat in a relaxed environment.”*

The next morning, the camp was broken down in no time at all. Actually, it required almost no effort, either. You simply input the proper commands into each housing module’s command panel, and stood back to watch it collapse in on itself. You need only have everything out of it that you brought in, or you may never see it again. Jack, on the other hand couldn’t help but think of George

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Jetson and his flying briefcase as he watched the modules collapse in on themselves.

So it should have come as no surprise to Paul to see Jack carrying that briefcase they had found in a manner to suggest it was his all along and simply part of his personal luggage. Paul had trouble imagining the nerve required to pull this off. Jack would have to pass through several check points before getting back into the city. If he didn't display extreme calm the whole time, they would ask him to open it and as far as Paul knew, he still hadn't managed to get it open.

The first test was the hovercraft. If the crew thought it was an artifact that was not on the manifest, all three of them would be in trouble. But, true to form, Jack managed to pull it off like he did it all the time.

Paul knew that he was in for a very long ride. Janet was in the same compartment as they both were and he knew Jack wouldn't say a word while she was nearby. He would be stuck chatting with her the whole three hours.

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Three grueling hours later they arrived in Harmony. Harmony was a small city, but as cities go these days it was much like every other one. It was located in what was once northern Virginia. But, extra names for places like Virginia and America and the like had gone out of fashion a long time ago, just like last names for people had disappeared. Many of the names still existed, mostly in databases somewhere, but most people simply didn't care about them anymore.

Paul had lived in Harmony for many years and considered it home. But, for someone who spent as much time away on remote mission sites as he did, many of them ice covered, you would think he liked cold weather. He did not. Actually, the climate in Harmony was much too cold for his liking. After all, the arctic ice was only a three hour ride to the north.

As he walked to his tiny apartment on the civilian side of the city, Paul decided he would take a shower for as long as the timer would allow and hope he was fortunate enough to actually get hot

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water this time. As he contemplated his forthcoming shower, he once again wondered how people made it way back when there were so many of them. The population had been kept under strict control for hundreds of years now, and maintained at the optimum half billion people world wide.

Harmony was a city of one hundred thousand people, like all the others. As such, he was only allocated hot water once every third day. It didn't matter that he hadn't been home for weeks, the law was the law.

As he usually did at about this point after an expedition was just over, he wondered where Jack went. He had no idea how to find Jack and didn't know where he lived. He knew it was close, but outside of the city walls. He didn't know of any one else that lived in such a fashion. One of these days he would have to see where Jack lived. As he thought of his shower, he wondered how often Jack got hot water.

His only way to get in touch with Jack was through his communication headset from the expedition. Jack always managed to hang onto it and keep it working until the next dig. Maybe he would call him on it later. He did seem awfully upset this time, more so than was normal. Besides, he wanted to see if Jack had made any progress on the briefcase.

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## Jack's Home

Jack was never comfortable in the city of Harmony. Maybe it was because he remembered the world of a thousand years ago all too well. He would be the first to admit that it was far from perfect, but in his opinion it was much preferable to this nightmare he secretly referred to as a 'Tree Hugger's Paradise'.

Sometime in the past, about 850 years ago as far as he could tell, the Environmental Protection Agency took full control of the Federal Government of the United States. Apparently, there was some sort of massive die off of the majority of the population of the world...he had some truly frightening theories about that. The world was in chaos and the environmentalists of the world united with the EPA as their ultimate choice of leadership.

Naturally, what happened next was the complete takeover of all the governments of the world by the EPA. It didn't take very long for them to drop the 'EPA' from their name and soon they were just known as 'The Government'.

Enough people had died in a relatively short period of time that people just quietly let them have it all. There had been enough pain and suffering. Finally someone was willing to do whatever it took to make things good again. Who had been at fault to cause the big die-off no longer mattered to anyone so long as peace reigned supreme and life settled down to something like it used to be in 'the good old days.'

Over the course of the next few hundred years, the government gained control of literally everything. Anything that was deemed bad for you by the government was outlawed. Salt, red

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meat, eventually all meat, coffee, soft drinks, alcohol, gasoline, internal combustion engines, firearms, and the military, literally anything that could have been considered dangerous by someone, was made illegal. Private ownership of many things became unheard of. Anything at all that could possibly cause injury to anyone, that wasn't already banned, was regulated by the government.

There were exceptions of course. If you were a government employee, you were exempt from many of these laws and of the rest, certain things were consistently overlooked. The result was that government employees and civilians slowly separated into two classes that only rarely interacted. Two completely separate civilizations sprang up in the midst of each other and neither knew much about the other.

The cities were what bothered Jack the most. Everyone lived in these massive walled constructions that were museum-like inside and all the grounds were park-like, to the point that many people had never even seen true nature in it's beauty. The only people, aside from archeologists and the like, who ventured outside the walls were the farmers, who didn't stray too far from the cities, and the crazies who didn't wander very close. There were a few outlaws as well, but they generally wanted to be in the cities, and were only hiding out until whatever they had done was forgotten.

Once you got a few miles away from the cities, you only saw people if they were on an expedition such as the one in Canada that they had just returned from...and those were rare indeed! Actually, Jack seldom encountered anyone on his way home. Most vehicles were hovercraft-type monstrosities that worked well over any type of land or sea. He had managed to acquire one for his personal use shortly after landing here ten years ago. It was an old government model he managed to purchase for nearly nothing.

People had become so complacent with their society, which had endured now for many centuries that it was assumed by everyone that the great outdoors, away from the cities, was vacant land and not worth the bother to ever look at. Jack soon discovered that no one paid very much attention to anyone who

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was outside the city walls, which suited him just fine. If he had tried to remain in the city and blend in to the current society, it would have been discovered that he was not properly registered with the government.

The current system of government control required everyone to have a DNA sample taken at birth and its pattern kept on file with the government. Since he was in his early 50's when he arrived here, as near as he could tell anyway, that could never happen.

His actual age was vastly distorted by the lifetime of time travel he had experienced and to be perfectly honest, he really had only a vague notion of how old he really was. He was born in 1966, but his idea of the current year, in his own time was 2002, however, he thought he looked like he was in his 50's and that was close enough for him, after all age was just a number.

It hadn't occurred to him as he was jumping all over time for his own purposes and entertainment for so many years that his age would suffer. He would, for example, jump into the past, spend a few weeks or months and then return to the exact moment he left. Then, after a week or a day or sometimes even a month or so, he would do it again. That sad result was that after spending a lifetime traveling through time, he actually had no idea just how old he really was. A large portion of his life had been spent using the years between 2000 and 2002 as a 'home base'.

Jack let his mind wander a bit as he drove home. He made his way over what he thought must have been the old Interstate 66 in northern Virginia, as near as he could tell anyway. There was very little of it left, but Jack recognized the twin grassy lanes as an obvious highway. As he drove, he reminisced about his past. One thing he greatly missed was his old pickup truck.

Sure, he had this great old hovercraft as well as other vehicles at his disposal, but they could not be driven on the surface for fear of government interference in his personal life. He longed to just drive a 'normal' car down a 'normal' road, waving to random people going about their lives as he passed. Instead, everywhere he went there was nothing but ruins and a total lack of people. He was reminded of those old post apocalyptic movies of his youth.

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He made his home just a short drive west of Harmony outside of what used to be Winchester, Virginia. Most of the town was long gone, but several decent ruins remained. The home he now occupied, however, was a former secret government installation during his time that must have simply been forgotten about in the past few centuries.

During his day, it was known as Weather Mountain and was one of those ultra secret installations that everyone in the local area knew existed, but knew nothing about. Jack had heard the rumors when he was a kid and no matter whom he asked no one seemed to really know anything about what went on there. The rumors were as vast as the actual installation turned out to be, and most of them were probably somewhere in that gray area between reality and fiction.

Although he never gave much credit to the conspiracy theories about his new home, after ten years of living here, he really had only a vague grasp of its original purpose. As an odd tribute to his memory of the past, he referred to his new home as Freedom Base since it was the only place he actually felt free to be himself in this crazy world he found himself in.

At one time there was a large surface base, with an enormous underground facility. Now, all that was left was a small part of the subterranean structure. Actually, not much more than a very elaborate underground shelter and warehouse, but big enough for quite a few people. Jack had spent his free time these past ten years setting it up just the way he liked it.

Most of his furnishings were antiques, which he was far more comfortable around anyway. He had raided the ruins of Winchester for some of it, along with whatever he could smuggle out from under Paul's nose during the bigger digs. Of course, much of it simply came from the enormous warehouse located on the lowest level he could safely access.

As he approached the last bit of road on his short journey home, he snapped back into reality and set his thoughts aside. His hovercraft was capable of flying a considerable distance off of the ground, but he preferred to keep it low, near the ground. As a

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result, he had to take this last stretch slowly due to the fallen trees and other debris on the old crumbling roadway. He considered cleaning it up a bit and possibly repairing the road, but that would be a dead giveaway as to where he was living. In his many travels he long ago discovered that living in secrecy was most often the best way.

He parked the hovercraft under the remains of one of the surface buildings. Long ago, he had cleared a space that was invisible from both the air and the access road. The building he parked in also happened to have a stairway into the underground facility. So, to any outsider that would happen to wander by, it would look like any other ancient ruin that dotted the landscape.

He once considered exploring the elevator shaft down to see what else was there, and to see if the rumors were true but thought better of it and remained on the levels near the surface. It would be just his luck to discover the government still occupied those far distant levels and had just forgotten about the ones he now occupied. Better to just let well enough alone. He had plenty of space, much discarded government surplus equipment to keep him occupied, and access to the current version of the internet, so further exploration was unnecessary.

One of the rumors that really intrigued him was the tunnels that were supposed to be here. Back in his day, he had heard many stories about this place but the tunnels really got his attention. Supposedly, there were both natural and man made tunnels carved out of some very hard, green rock. The government of the former United States could be run completely from here.

There was supposed to be a city with buildings, roads and a huge fresh water lake, all underground. So far, Jack had not found them. He still firmly believed they existed, because sometimes he thought he could hear strange sounds emanating from the elevator shaft, which was yet another reason to steer clear of the lower levels.

He never found the power source for the facility, but never had a problem with a lack of power either. He had assumed it was still connected to some external power source somewhere, but realized

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that it could be some sort of geothermal facility deeper underground that was automated to the point that it still worked after all these years of neglect.

One thing he learned here was that the government had a far superior version of the internet than the civilians had access to. His internet terminal accessed itself automatically when he sat in the “command chair” as he called it. It was basically a big comfy chair with some sort of sensor thingies he could never locate, but it knew when he was there.

The first time he sat in the chair, he just about came unglued when a pleasant, but stern looking government official appeared in front of him and asked “May I help you?”

He actually fell out of the chair backwards, a feat he did not care to repeat, and began backing away, looking for the exit before he could get cornered and in trouble. The man just disappeared as he backed away. Stunned, he looked around, figured he was just very tired and had imagined the whole thing. He sat the chair up again and cautiously sat back down.

Instantly, but this time while he was watching, the man appeared and asked the same question “May I help you?” This time, he managed to remain sitting and spoke to the holographic image to see if it was a live person somewhere else, or merely a computer generated image.

It turned out to be computer generated and he eventually found a way to program it to appear how he would like to see it. His choice currently was a lady, perhaps 30 years old with reddish-blond hair and an Australian accent. She introduced herself as Suzie.

Eventually, he learned how to access the terminal from just about anywhere in his home. Now, when he walked in the door, Suzie met him saying “Hi Jack, how was your day?”

“Depressing, Suzie, very depressing. I was so close to the lighthouse yesterday that I could see it well enough to know it was the right one. I know I was only a few miles at most from my boat. But Janet decided to close the dig, and now I have no idea how to get back there to it.”

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He had learned enough to know that although this terminal had the ability to access the internet, it would not allow anyone from outside this facility to access it. The result was that the government remained unaware of his existence here. Eventually, he became comfortable enough to confide in Suzie. He had to have someone he could talk to about his problems or he would go insane. Over time, he began to think of her as a real person and simply forgot at times that she was actually a hologram.

Jack dropped heavily into the command chair as Suzie walked around to face him from the front. He let out a big sigh, partly because of the weariness of travel, and partly because of his frustration at being so close to his machine and yet seemingly worlds away. “Suzie, do you have any idea how I would go about getting permission to dig with no government official present? The last thing I need is to be so near my boat that I can see it and suddenly have a team of government people swarm in and confiscate it.”

Suzie adopted a look suggestive of a librarian scolding an unruly child, with her hair in a bun on top of her head and her arms crossed as she looked down on Jack. She made a move mimicking the act of pushing up her horn rim glasses further up on her nose as she said “You know they’ll never allow that. Most people these days assume anything the government didn’t think up itself is strictly forbidden. You would actually be breaking the law to even suggest it.”

“Yeah, that’s about what I figured. I was just wondering.” He raised the briefcase he was still holding to eye level and asked “By the way, have you ever seen a briefcase like this?”

Suzie studied the case for a moment from every angle. “It looks like a model that was popular with government officials about 800 years ago. It seems to be in pretty good shape for an old relic. The locking mechanism was the reason it was so popular. It was supposed to be unbeatable.”

“Great. Now I want to get it open even more than I did before.” Disappointed, but not ready to give up, he sat the case aside and walked to the kitchen. The kitchen was enormous,

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literally designed to feed an army, but Jack had come to enjoy cooking there. He had gotten used to the idea that he could cook as much as he wanted and not have to juggle for space on a stove top.

One of the advantages to living in an old government facility as ancient as this was the access he had to the store rooms that were left behind. They looked to him to be long term storage of supplies in case of nuclear attack or something. But, inside was a wealth of surplus materials including many cases of Rifles and ammunition. As a result, Jack not only had access to an abundance of supplies, many of which were now unavailable due to the current laws, but he had the ability to hunt his food.

One of the weirdest things he found himself doing these days was hunting cows. Apparently, sometime in the past most of the farms were abandoned and the livestock was allowed to just run free. No doubt violent, quasi-militant vegans protesting cattle abuse or some such nonsense had something to do with it. As a result, cows wandered around everywhere. Being the docile creatures they are, hunting them was no problem. There was a large herd that stayed nearby, supplying him with all the beef he could ever want.

Jack chose a nice thick steak from his giant walk in freezer and, remembering his conversation a few days ago with Paul, and out of sheer rebellion, he used a bit more salt than he should have. He seasoned it to near perfection, but a bit salty, and after searing it with the skill of a master chef, sat down to eat. But, just before he could take the first bite, Suzie spoke up. “Jack, Paul is calling on the headset for you.”

“Okay, transfer it here, if you would.” After a moment he could hear Paul speaking from some random speaker nearby his current location in the base. He spoke to the air as if Paul was standing in front of him. “Hey Paul, do we have another dig already?”

“No, sorry Jack. It just occurred to me that I had never seen your home and wasn’t really ready to face the world alone just yet.”

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Understanding where his friend was coming from, he realized he could use some company as well. “Well, I suppose I could meet you at the gate in a half hour or so, if you like.”

“That would be great, thanks!”

Jack leaned back in his chair and pushed his plate away. “Well Suzie, it looks like we may have a visitor. This could be interesting, indeed.”

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## Paul's Visit

Paul walked the nine blocks to the front gate to meet Jack. He was not there more than a few minutes when Jack pulled up in an old, government-issue hovercraft. Although the body was battered, it seemed to be in pretty good condition, but was much older than the models currently in use.

“Jack, where did you get hold of this vehicle? You have to be on official government business to check one out of the motor pool.”

Knowing his friend was in for a plethora of surprises once he got to Freedom Base, Jack merely said “Well, to be honest, I bought this one a few years ago from the government. I got it as part of a surplus lot as scrap and managed to get it working again. But, even though it’s still legal, as far as I can tell, to own and operate a private vehicle such as this, I wouldn’t dare drive it in the city. I would encounter too many questions, I’m sure.”

“Yes, you most certainly would!” Paul stated with a laugh. Once again he was amazed at his friend’s unique way of looking at the world. With a smile on his face, he climbed into the old vehicle.

Jack grinned as he drove off in a direction Paul was unfamiliar with. He seemed to be in a remarkably good mood this evening, especially after his anger about the dig earlier. After driving much farther away from the city than Paul was comfortable with, he finally said “Okay Mr. Historian, you tell me; where are we now?”

“What a crazy question, Jack. We’re just a few kilometers from Harmony, but you know that.”

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Finally ready to let his friend in on what was really going on, he began his own version of a history lesson. “That may be true, but what you fail to realize is that we are also traveling west on Interstate 66, or at least the sad remains of it. We are currently heading to Winchester, Virginia, or what’s left of it. You wanted to know where I live. Now you know.”

“You live in the old ruins?” Paul asked with a look of shock on his face. “That’s dangerous, Jack!”

Still grinning like a madman, he asked “What’s so dangerous about it?”

Puzzled at Jack’s question, he said “I don’t know, but I’m sure it’s very dangerous. You live outside of the city walls!” He knew his friend was a bit eccentric, but living in old ruins was crazy!

Noticing Paul’s discomfort, he continued smiling as he said “We work outside the city walls all the time. How is this any different?”

“Well ... when you put it that way, I suppose it isn’t. I just have never heard of anyone living outside the walls before.”

Jack continued driving, staying low to the ground. “From what I’ve seen, what little bit of freedom left in this world can only be found outside the walls.”

“That’s just crazy talk, Jack. We are the freest society that has ever existed.”

Jack made his final turn onto the old access road that led to Freedom Base. “No, Paul, in fact you are not. I know you don’t believe me, but I hope to someday be able to show you how wrong you are.”

As they approached the mountain hideaway, Paul asked “Do you actually live in this old ruin? There’s nothing left of it!”

“You’d be surprised, Paul. Appearances can be, and often are, deceiving. Just be patient, we’ll be there very soon.” Moments later, Jack parked the hovercraft in the remains of the surface building with the staircase and elevator, careful to plug in the solar collector so it would be fully charged when he needed it next. He then led Paul to the staircase and started down. When he got to the door at the first level, he entered a code he had created to maintain

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security here and the door opened. With a grand gesture, he said “Home Sweet Home. Paul, welcome to Freedom Base.”

Naturally, Paul had no idea what Jack meant, but entered anyway. He stopped short and Jack ran into him when Suzie suddenly appeared in front of him.

She laughed and said “I didn’t mean to scare you Paul, I’m sorry!”

Thoroughly confused, he asked “How do you know my name? I’m sure we have never met before.”

“Jack has told me all about you, Paul. I’m hurt that he didn’t tell you about me though.” She shot Jack a look that reminded him of that hurt, angry look a spouse or girlfriend would get when you forgot her birthday.

Jack just smiled and waited to see what would happen. He was pretty sure that civilians in this time had never encountered holograms before and he wanted to be sure. When it became apparent that he had been correct, he finally spoke up and said “Paul, have you ever heard of a hologram?”

Baffled by the odd question, he replied “No, what’s a hologram?”

“Well, the easiest way to explain it is to show you. Suzie, please walk over here and pass through Paul on your way.”

She complied and Paul completely freaked out. Once she was near Jack, Paul calmed down.

“What just happened!?” he asked with a look of terror on his face.

Seeing his friend’s discomfort, Jack took on a more serious expression as he explained. “Suzie is actually a computer interface and is not, in fact, a flesh and blood person.”

Suzie adopted a pose that reminded Jack of a proud salesperson introducing her potential customer to her best product and said “I am part of a stand alone computer system, formerly used by the United States Government, but left here idle for quite a long time before Jack found me and, quite accidentally, got me going again.”

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Jack said “I believe this is part of a vast underground government facility that has simply been forgotten for many, many years. When I found it, it was not in very good shape. I have actually lived here for the better part of the past ten years. I think Suzie is just one example of what the government has access to and doesn’t share with us.”

Unprepared for everything he had seen and heard so far, Paul was stunned at the technology he was seeing for the first time. Eventually, he asked “Ten years? That’s about how long we’ve known each other. Why have you kept it secret for so long?”

Jack was ready for a question like this, but still wasn’t sure how to proceed. Figuring the simple truth was the best way to go; he said “To be honest, you’ve never asked to come here before.”

“I guess it just never occurred to me that you would want me to. I always knew you went somewhere else and just assumed you wanted to be left alone. I’m sorry if I gave the wrong impression, Jack.”

“Hey, there’s nothing wrong with that. I could have just as easily invited you, so I suppose we’re both at fault. No big deal.”

Paul looked around and with each new item his eyes got bigger and bigger, as if he were a kid in a toy store trying to choose the perfect gift for himself. “Wow! This place is like a museum! Everything here is hundreds of years old. Where on earth did you get this many antiques in such remarkable condition?”

“Believe it or not, most of them were already here. I guess this place has been forgotten for quite a long time. The rest mostly came from Winchester, just down the hill a bit. A few, I swiped from some of the bigger digs when you weren’t looking, I hope you’re not too mad.”

“No, I don’t suppose I could be mad, especially after what Janet told me about where the tools from that barn were going. No one seems to care anymore” said Paul with a look of disgust. Suddenly reminded of the artifact Jack took with him, he asked “By the way, how are you coming with that briefcase?”

“Suzie tells me it’s nearly impossible to open which only means it won’t be easy, but I haven’t had the chance to look at it since

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we've been home. I just sat down to dinner when you called. In fact, I still haven't eaten. Are you hungry? I have plenty."

Remembering the coffee, he asked "What do you have, Jack. I'm almost afraid to ask."

"I was having a steak, seasoned with, among other things, salt. Would you like to try it?" Jack asked with a smile. "I think you'll like it."

"Steak? Do you mean meat? How repulsive, Jack! Not to mention illegal!" Never in his life had he met anyone that would willingly eat animal flesh, or even consider it for that matter.

"Now you're starting to sound like Janet. Suit yourself, I'm going to eat my steak, you are welcome to whatever you can find, or I'll gladly fix one for you, if you feel a bit adventurous."

Jack proceeded to warm up his steak. When it was ready, Paul said "Wow! That honestly smells pretty good, Jack."

"Actually, you'll find it similar in taste to some of the better soy patties we have on the expedition. Are you sure you don't want to at least taste it?"

With the aroma wafting throughout the large kitchen intriguing him, Paul finally said "Well, I suppose a small bite wouldn't hurt."

With a huge grin on his face, Jack cut Paul a large portion of his steak. Paul poked at it a bit before finally taking a tiny nibble. He popped it in his mouth and began chewing. He was frowning when he started the bite, but was grinning like crazy when he finished.

"This is fantastic! I've never had anything as wonderful as this. How did you learn about eating meat?"

"Paul, I have been eating meat all my life. Nearly every meal, except when we're on an expedition, to be honest."

Pausing a moment, and with a look of concern on his face, Paul asked "What kind of animal am I eating?"

"Cow" said Jack. "There used to be farms that raised cattle for the purpose of food. Apparently, some of them went wild nearby here years ago, and since they are such docile creatures, they are easy targets. There's a large herd nearby, if I see one, I'll point it out to you, if you like"

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“Sure, that would be great...I think.” Paul put the animal out of his mind and continued to enjoy eating it.

After they finished their dinner, they made their way into the room Jack called his ‘Living Room’. Paul thought this was an unusual name for a room, but decided to not question it. There were too many other questions he wanted to ask first. But before he could form a proper question, Jack asked “Suzie, what would have been the procedure to open that briefcase, if I had been the one to close it?”

“You would have to press your thumb to the sensor pad, as well as input the proper code. It is quite unbeatable, if you don’t possess the proper thumb-print.”

“Well let’s just see about that.” Smiling at Paul, he said “Let’s go back to the workshop and see what we can come up with.”

They made their way back to the workshop, which Paul thought looked like an antique laboratory of some sort. When they got there, he couldn’t help but ask “Jack, just how is it that you know so much about the past?”

Jack stopped and seemed deep in thought and a little uncomfortable for a bit. Finally he appeared to come to a decision and said “I am willing to tell you the answer to that question, but it will be in the form of a rather long and difficult to believe story which will take a few minutes to tell. However, you must agree to two things. First, you must listen through to the end with no interruptions before asking any other questions. Second, you must tell no one. Ever. I am very serious on these terms. Do you agree?”

Paul thought this was a bit of overkill for a simple question, but agreed anyway. “Sure, I agree, Jack.”

Well, then, let’s go back and get comfortable. This will be a bit hard for you to swallow and will take several minutes to tell.” With that they returned to the living room and relaxed.

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## Jack's Story

Jack settled down into his big comfy command chair, and began his story with a question. "Paul, do you remember that day we met, ten years ago?"

Not sure where his friend's question was leading, Paul simply replied "Yes, why?"

"Well, it's very important to my story" Jack said. He seemed deep in thought as if trying to figure out where to start. Finally, he said "Ten years ago, by my personal reckoning, I made a stupid decision. I woke up that day in the year 2002, just off of the east coast of Canada. I was in possession of a time machine, which was housed in a boat. It was a beautiful summer day, and I was sailing toward the south. I had come into possession of this machine in my youth and had used it all my life.

"Normally, I would keep my time jumps restricted to only a few hundred years either way. However, this day I was feeling adventurous and decided to jump a thousand years into the future to see what it was like. All of the scientists of the day were saying 'Global warming due to our over use of hydrocarbons and fossil fuels is causing the polar ice to melt' so I didn't take into account that the arctic ice was not too far to the north of me. Back then, Canada was not as ice covered as it is today. In fact, the ice was mostly restricted to the Polar Regions."

He could see that his friend was skeptical, so he hurried along. "So I jumped. And promptly found myself encased in ice. It took me nearly a week to dig to the surface. If I'd had any sense, I would have simply jumped back, but I guess I wasn't thinking clearly." He

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paused in his story with an involuntary shiver, then continued “I hate the ice!

“Now, every time there’s an expedition to the ice, I want to be a part of it. I’m always hopeful that it’s near my boat. That’s why I was so upset at this last expedition. You see, just before I made that jump ten years ago, I could see a lighthouse on the shore just west of my position. Although I’m not 100% sure that lighthouse we found is the same lighthouse I saw that day, I am extremely hopeful that it is.

“You can imagine my thoughts when Janet said she closed the dig! I was ready to kill her...figuratively speaking, of course. She had just sealed my fate to this time.” Jack displayed a look of exhaustion mixed with depression. “I really was born more than one thousand years ago, which is why I know so much about the past, especially the twentieth century. I just want to go home, Paul.”

Paul could see that Jack was sincere in what he was saying. But his story was so crazy! Time travel indeed! He had been watching Jack intently as he relayed his story. It looked to him that Jack believed what he was saying, or maybe he was simply crazy. He did, after all, live in the ruins and he ate meat regularly. As these thoughts entered his mind, a near panic overcame him when he made the connection... *“Maybe I’ll go crazy now too, since I just ate that meat! Didn’t I recall reading of a Mad Cow epidemic in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? But, Jack seems okay, for the most part. Okay, calm down Paul, maybe your just letting your imagination run wild.”* After sitting in silent thought for several minutes, he finally said “Jack that is the craziest story I have ever heard. Do you actually expect me to believe you can travel through time?”

“No, I don’t. That’s why I have never said anything about it before. Do you want to hear the rest of the story?” Now that he had started telling his story, he felt the need to open up completely and tell Paul everything, hoping desperately that he would believe him.

Skeptical, but willing to hear his friend out, he said “Sure. At least it’ll be entertaining.”

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Jack began pacing as he related his story. “In my younger days, I was living on a remote island in The Bahamas when an abandoned boat ran aground about a mile south of the tiny US Navy base where I was living and working as a contract employee.

“It was my day off and I was walking south of the base, as was my custom, and I saw a boat with the unlikely name of ‘Time Awaits’ stuck in the sand at low tide. As I made my way to it, I realized there was no one around and it had all appearances of being abandoned, so I decided to explore it.

“Boat is perhaps the wrong word, since this boat was plenty big enough to live on very comfortably. Back then, people would have referred to it as a ‘live aboard yacht.’ Everything seemed as if this boat was simply abandoned at sea and just happened to end up on the island where I was living.

“As I made my way through the boat, I came to the conclusion that someone had lived there alone. There were personal items that indicated the occupant was a single guy and had been living on this boat alone for some time. There were no obvious ‘female touches’ anywhere...the place had very much a “bachelor” feel to it.”

“Wait a minute, what’s a bachelor?” Paul asked. In the current state of things in the world, marriage, divorce as well as terms like bachelor, husband, wife, mother, father and the like were things of the distant past. As an archeologist, Paul understood the concept of husband and wife, but in an abstract way only, much like a scientist understands the cellular structure of a living cell. He can see evidence of its existence, but truly have no idea what it would be like to actually ‘be’ one. However, terms like ‘bachelor’ and ‘bride’ had been completely lost to history.

Even the concept of raising a child was foreign to Paul and his contemporaries. In this strange, future world, people not only lived alone and never married, but had no concept of marriage or family. If a woman somehow ended up pregnant, the fetus was removed immediately. The government decided whether or not the baby would be allowed to develop to full term, and if so, was born outside of the mother, without the mother’s knowledge.

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The children were raised in what was called orphanages, which were somewhat similar to the institutions of Jack's day. The children were raised by machines in this environment, educated and brought to adulthood completely by themselves. It was no wonder people preferred to live alone these days. They simply did not know any other way.

"Paul, no questions, remember? Remind me later and I'll answer any of your questions I am capable of." Jack paused once more as he gathered his thoughts, then continued "Even though I felt like I was trespassing in someone's home, I made my way to the captain's cabin. There was a desk with a letter on it that caught my attention. As I read the letter I began to get the feeling that I had hit the jackpot.

"The letter stated that the ownership of the boat was to be transferred to the person who possessed the letter I had in my hand! Wow! All of a sudden I had a boat! I began to think of myself as Captain Jack Murphy, and immediately thought of all the pirates of the seventeenth century. Corny I know, but I have always fancied myself a pirate at heart."

"Pirate! History only touches on pirates, but the general consensus is that they were evil people. Why on earth would you want to be a pirate?" Paul interrupted again.

"Paul, do you want to hear the rest of this story, or not?" Jack was clearly irritated, and in no mood to be patient now that he was finally letting his friend in on his story.

"Yes, Jack. I'm sorry, please continue. It won't happen again, I promise!" Paul meekly replied.

"I spent another hour exploring my new boat before I discovered the library of manuals covering everything from how the electronics worked, to how to operate the engines. Everything was there as if the owner expected a novice to happen across the boat and needed instruction as to how to operate it.

"As it turns out, just about everything was state of the art and very much automated to the point that all I had to do was tell the boat where I wanted to go and it went there. I had never heard of anything like it before but, I had never owned a boat before, and

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wasn't very informed as to what was 'state of the art' in modern luxury yachts either.

"I stayed there for several hours waiting for the tide to come in. When it finally did, the boat freed itself from the sand it was resting on. Elated, I fired up the engines and motored back to the base. I couldn't enter since I didn't know how to approach the base in the proper "navy" way so I dropped anchor just off shore and just to the south of the base.

"I walked back to the base and made my way to the harbor to find out what I needed to do to secure ownership of my new boat. I had the letter in my hand granting me ownership, but figured there would be several layers of 'red-tape' to wade through before the boat would actually be mine, in the legal sense. I soon discovered it was a relatively simple procedure since the letter was signed by the registered owner and was already registered in The Bahamas. The harbor master helped me contact the Bahamian authorities and in no time the boat was registered to me and I was able to move it into the harbor.

"Over the course of the next few weeks I further explored my new boat learning everything I could about it. Eventually I came across a laptop computer with a journal on it. Naturally, I began reading the journal.

"It seems the prior owner was an inventor that had created a device which was housed within the boats hull, actually a part of its construction. There was an interface to operate it on the bridge, under a panel that you would not notice unless you knew where to look.

"As a fan of adventure stories, I was naturally intrigued. I looked around the bridge and sure enough, there it was. The panel lifted open as the journal said it would, and sure enough, there was a control panel underneath that had a rather ordinary looking keyboard attached to it, along with a display screen.

"I decided to read more before activating it since I had no idea what it did. As I read on I came to the biggest shock of my life. The control panel I found was actually the controls to a time machine! Finally, the name of my vessel made some sort of sense.

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“Naturally, there were rules as to how I should use it. For example, it should not be engaged where anyone can see it “disappear”, since that is exactly what it would look like to people watching from another boat or from shore. Come to think of it, maybe that’s where all those stories came from about the Bermuda Triangle, with boats disappearing all the time. But, I imagine you would not have heard of that, either.

“I can see why whoever built the machine chose a boat as a platform. It’s easy to lose oneself in the vastness of the world’s oceans. Also, there was a recall feature that allows you to visit a time and return at the same instant you left, appearing to not have left at all. Very cool, I thought. There were more rules such as don’t go back in time and kill your parents before you were born, or you will simply cease to be. Fair enough. It also said you shouldn’t change the natural course of events in history, leave them alone. Okay, I can live with that.

“My first order of business was to figure out how to properly operate the boat itself and leave the time travel for later. As it turned out, it was relatively easy. I had already managed to move the boat twice, but for no more than a mile or so. I had yet to find a fuel gauge or even how to refuel it. However, upon reading the manuals that were in the manual library about the engines, I found out that they had not been invented yet.

“Great. Now what? I wondered as I read on. As I read, I found out that the engines used the sea water in some way that was way over my head to power the boat and as such, never needed refueling. I thought this was very cool!

“After a few weeks of reading the journal and the manuals, I felt I had learned enough to begin my first journey. I took a week off of work and set sail for Florida. I landed in West Palm Beach, docked at a marina and grabbed the first newspaper I could find.

“The lottery had gone unpaid for several weeks now and was a whopping 250 million dollars. I decided that should be mine. So I went back out to sea and tried the time functions. I returned the previous day in time get myself to a store where I purchased several lottery tickets, one of which had the winning numbers on it.

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“After returning to the boat and getting it well off shore again, I pressed the auto return function button which brought me back to the original day. I reversed course and returned to the marina I had just left. The people there must have thought it odd that I was gone for only an hour or so, but I’m sure they’ve seen much stranger things in south Florida.

“Purchasing yet another newspaper, I discovered that there was one winning lottery ticket. I double checked my ticket and found I was a winner. I guess I really didn’t believe until that moment that I had actually traveled back in time, if only for a day.

“I arranged for the boat to be kept at the marina for several days and caught a plane to Tallahassee to cash in my ticket there and pay taxes, arrange for banks, etc. Suddenly wealthy, I had a new dilemma...now what to do? I made my way back to West Palm Beach wondering where to go and what to do. I had my own transportation as well as the ability to go whenever I wanted, but had no plan in place.

“Needless to say, I spent the next years going anywhere and everywhere and especially every-when that struck my fancy. That is, until ten years ago when I made a very serious mistake in judgment.”

After finally telling his story to his friend Paul, Jack let out a sigh of relief. He had been keeping this secret for so long now, that it had been eating away at him and he really didn’t like it. It was good to have someone to share with, even if Paul didn’t believe him yet.

“Wow Jack; that is some story. I’m sure you’re very much aware just how fantastic it sounds, right? I mean, you have to admit it’s pretty hard to believe.”

“I know it sounds like something I made up, but I assure you, it is absolutely the honest truth.”

“Okay let’s just say for the moment that I believe you...which I don’t, by the way...how could you possibly have lost your boat?”

Once again thinking of that fateful day on the ice ten years ago, Jack said “Actually, that’s something that really has been bothering me. A thousand years ago we had something called a GPS. It

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stood for Global Positioning System...or Global Positioning Satellite, or something like that, I was never sure. Anyway, what it consisted of was a series of satellites in geosynchronous, stationary orbit. These satellites formed a basis for the ground units to triangulate your position, and were accurate to a few feet. I was shocked when mine didn't work here. I know you have a system that works exactly the same way, but obviously, it is different enough that my old equipment no longer works. And when that bear began chasing me, the last thing on my mind was looking at my GPS. I guess that was another mistake. But, actually, there was nothing I could do anyway. I simply got lost. Thankfully, you came by and saved the day."

Jack thought a moment and decided he had already gone this far, why not continue? "Paul, I am planning to go back to the dig site we were just at and find my boat. I would love for you to come with me. If you like, I would even be willing to offer you a ride into the past. As an archaeologist, you should find that offer irresistible."

Suddenly fearful of his friend's suggestion, he said "Jack, you know we can't do that! The government would have us in re-indoctrination for the rest of our lives!"

Exasperated, Jack said in a tired voice "I have been stranded here for ten years. I simply can't spend the rest of my life stuck in a place I only barely understand. I have to get back."

Paul didn't know what to think. He really wanted to believe his friend, but his story was just too fantastic to believe.

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## The Briefcase

Paul began pacing the room in obvious distress. “Jack, this is just too much to think about right now. I’m going to need some time to sort this out. Obviously, you believe this happened, but you have to see it from my point of view. I don’t mean to sound harsh, but it sounds crazy.”

Fully understanding his friend’s hesitation to believe his fantastic story, Jack said “Yeah, I know. If you had told me the same story, I’d have a hard time believing it as well. Just please keep an open mind and consider the possibility that I’m not crazy, okay?”

Paul stopped his pacing and turned to face Jack. “Well, I suppose I can just set it aside in my mind for now, and maybe in time it’ll make more sense.” Looking at Jack with the obvious concern of someone approaching a friend who was recently diagnosed to be mentally incompetent, he said “I do have one question, well many actually. But first, what on earth is a lottery ticket?”

Jack laughed heartily. “A lottery ticket is something you bought for a dollar that gave you one chance in billions of winning a financial jackpot. The lottery I spoke of had a very lucrative payout, but was nearly impossible to win. As I said, I went back one more day, bought a ticket with those numbers on it and the next day, when the drawing happened, I was the sole winner. I never wanted for anything my whole life because of that one ticket, and my time machine.”

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“Now,” Jack continued, “Let’s look at that briefcase before you start looking like Alice just after she fell down the rabbit hole.”

“Jack, I have no idea what you mean by that reference, nor do I know who Alice is, but sure, let’s get to that case. Maybe the distraction will do us both some good.” The two friends made their way back to the workshop. As they walked, Paul couldn’t help but gawk at the things Jack had in his home. Many of the items he had seen only in photographs of a historical nature. But, Jack had the actual items right here.

He stopped in the long hallway to pick up one item that caught his attention. He held it up and examined it from every angle before asking “This is a gas mask, right?”

“Yes, there was a box full of them when I found this place. I kept one out in the event it becomes necessary. As a new arrival to this time, I had no idea what to expect and prepared accordingly, as I located things.”

“I can’t imagine why we would need them. In fact, I don’t think there has been a call for a gas mask in the last three or four hundred years.”

Jack took the gasmask from Paul and tossed it back onto the table where it had laid untouched for ten years now. “How was I to know that?” he asked as he turned back toward the workshop.

Paul wasn’t sure what to make of that little display. But, the more he thought about it, the more Jack’s wild story began to make some sense. When you put it all together, like his quick answers on digs about the use of an item, or this gas mask, his story started to become plausible...or he was seriously deranged and Paul was starting to fall for Jack’s delusions.

As Paul walked through the door, Suzie suddenly appeared in front of him, seemingly materializing out of thin air. He stopped short in an effort to keep from bumping into her, forgetting for the moment that she was a hologram. She smiled at his apparent discomfort in her presence. “Don’t be scared Paul, I’m really quite harmless”

Ignoring her for the moment but maintaining eye contact with her, and not really sure how to address someone that appeared to

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be there, but really wasn't, he asked "Jack, if you are from the past of a thousand years ago, how is it you know about holograms when they are obviously some deep dark government secret?"

Jack watched Paul's encounter with Suzie and his apparent discomfort with fascination. Committed to telling Paul everything, he answered "In my time, holograms were in the early stage of development. In many ways, the world of my day was just as advanced and at times more advanced than today's world. Suzie here is far more advanced than what I had ever heard of, but the concept is similar enough for me to understand. Also, in my day, it was not a secret."

"Isn't he sweet?" said Suzie as she struck a pose reminiscent of a runway model displaying the latest fashions. "Here I am an obsolete military hologram that has just been hanging around undisturbed for more than two hundred years and Jack here thinks of me as advanced."

With a smile on his face as he recalled his first encounter with the hologram, Jack said "You should have seen her when I first found this place. She was not as beautiful as she is now." He actually blushed before continuing "The military, in it's infinite wisdom, had her appear not only as a man, in full uniform but completely lacking a sense of humor, as is typical of military men in uniform, as a general rule."

"When Jack found me; he literally fell out of his chair backwards! If I had been represented in my current state, I would have laughed. As it was, I did not. But it was very funny."

Turning to Jack, she said "I've been thinking about the dilemma with the briefcase you want opened. The hinges are internal, but the advanced age of the case may work in our favor. If we can slip a molecular knife blade through the bottom of the case, it certainly should be able to cut the hinges. The molecular blades theoretically can cut through anything, this case should be no problem."

Intrigued, Jack asked "Do we have such a blade here? I've never heard of one and having never heard Paul mention it either, I'm thinking it's another military item we are not aware of."

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“Although my memories of that part of the base are incomplete, due to a lack of proper maintenance of the database for so long, I do seem to remember a cache of them stored here just before I was put into suspended sleep mode.”

Frustrated at what that meant, Jack muttered “Great. I guess that means we need to search. What does it look like?”

“It’s cylindrical in shape, of a diameter sized to fit comfortably in your hand, about ten to thirty centimeters in length, depending on it’s intended use, with a control that activates a blade, adjustable in length from ten centimeters to nearly a meter. The blade itself is a material that is virtually indestructible and only one molecule thick, hence the name ‘molecular blade’”

Jack couldn’t help but think of Star Wars as Suzie described the fantastic blade. Barely able to contain himself at the thought of one of his favorite movies coming true, at least in part, Jack said “So, basically it’s just like a light saber?”

Looking more confused than ever Paul had to ask “What’s a light saber?”

Grinning from ear to ear, Jack replied “It was a prop in a science fiction movie from my time.”

Suzie said “Not really like a light saber, more like a sword with a very thin, collapsible blade. But, the theory is sound for a light saber, Jack. We could probably make one right here.”

“That would be too cool!” exclaimed Jack who was obviously very excited. “But, for now the molecular blade will suffice...any idea where it was stored?”

“As I recall, it was in the warehouse where the HumVees are kept, in the part of the room that is partially collapsed, on the lowest level that the stairs reach.”

“Great. With my luck, it’ll be under the rubble” said Jack. “Come on Paul. If you think the gas mask was cool, wait until you see this room.”

They descended the staircase to the lowest level it would go to. Suzie chose to avoid the stairs and simply materialized just inside the door. Paul just about jumped out of his skin while Jack laughed. Suzie giggled and said “That just never gets old!”

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Paul said "I beg to differ."

Jack said "Give it a minute for the lights to come on fully." They waited while the room slowly got brighter. As he began to see, Paul was shocked to discover just how big the room was. It seemed to go on forever.

Jack disappeared to the left and returned riding on a vehicle that vaguely resembled the van in the barn under the ice in eastern Canada, although much smaller and with sides open to the air. Before Paul could ask about it, Jack said "This is an Electric Golf Cart, Paul. It has a bank of batteries that are recharged and can run for quite a while before needing charging. Don't worry; it does not have an internal combustion engine."

Jack said "Suzie, why don't you ride up front with me and direct me to where you think the blades might have been stored."

One thing Jack had learned very early in his residence here at Freedom Base was that sometime in the past, the inventory program had been deleted or simply became too corrupt by time to function anymore. As a result, the only way to find anything was simply driving around and looking for it. And based on the vast dimensions of the room, that task could take quite some time.

"Sure thing, Jack. As I recall, they were near the far end of the warehouse."

Jack started down the massive center aisle into the heart of the warehouse. After what seemed like nearly an hour, they came to the collapsed roof. Astonished, Paul noticed that a floe-stone formation had developed over and around the collapsed area, along with many stalactites and stalagmites, much like what would be found in a cavern. Obviously, the stuff underneath and around the formation was from the time that Jack claimed to be from, but he had always been taught that formations such as these took tens of thousands of years to form.

"Well, now what, Jack" said Paul. "And take a look at these floe-stone formations! They have every appearance of being much older than what you are telling me about the age of this place."

Suzie spoke up and said "Actually, I think we are at our destination. The box should be to the right, somewhere on this

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shelf. It should be labeled 'Military Use Only, Blade, Molecular, Utility. And, yes, Paul, the floe-stone formations have only been here since I was put to sleep two hundred years ago. Obviously, they do not take thousands of years to form. I know what modern science tells us, but in this case, they are apparently wrong.'

"Sometimes you really need to learn to question what you are told and take a look for yourself. I have encountered many things in my travels that would indicate we are being misled much of the time when it comes to subjects such as history and science. Besides, these formations form a great barrier to whoever may be on the other side" Jack said. Then looking at the shelves next to him, said "Man, you have to love the military's way of being as cryptic as possible in their labels."

Paul, having no experience with the military at all, said nothing. Actually, he was still in shock at the sheer volume of artifacts here in Jack's basement.

Soon enough, Suzie located the correct box. She pointed it out to Jack. Jack had to climb the shelves to get to the box. He scurried up the shelves using other boxes as a ladder. When he reached the third shelf up, he reached up and grabbed hold of the box lost his balance and promptly fell right through Suzie onto Paul.

Paul broke his fall enough to keep him from any serious injury, but the box broke open and the blades rolled everywhere. Paul and Jack each gathered several blades and returned to the cart. Ignoring the mess he made, Jack said "I'm gong to take us back another way so Paul can see the HumVees."

Still in shock at everything he had learned today, not to mention the vast storage facility he now found himself in, Paul said "I know I seem to be the one asking all the questions, and as an archeologist, it pains me to ask, but what is a HumVee?"

Continuing his low speed tour of the ancient military warehouse, Jack replied "A HumVee is a military vehicle that was in use in the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup>. They were in the process of fazing them out when I jumped here."

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In fact, I had several on my island, purchased as surplus for nearly nothing.”

“Your island?” asked Paul, not sure he could take in any more fantastic stories from his friend.

Adopting a sly grin, he said “Yes, I have my own tropical island complete with a stone castle...I’ll tell you about it later. Someday, I hope to return there.” Shifting his eyes toward his holographic companion, he said “Suzie, I would love to figure out a way to take you along as well.”

“Why Jack, I’m flattered. All you need do is ask. I have a portable transport case that is not much bigger than your briefcase. I can be rather self sufficient in it, as long as I am in contact with sunlight once in a while.”

“Well that will certainly make it easier. How far can you travel from the case?”

“Depending on the terrain, I can travel three to five kilometers from the case.”

“That is great news! I was really regretting the thought of leaving you behind when I go back.”

Crossing her arms and stomping her foot in an obvious pout, she said “You better not leave me here, Jack!”

Smiling at her, he spoke over his shoulder to Paul “Okay, just around this next corner are the HumVees.” As Jack turned the corner, Paul let out an audible gasp. It was not unexpected. There were nearly one hundred perfectly preserved military HumVees parked in a row. They stopped at the first one, parking the golf cart next to it.

He opened the door and climbed in. “How would you like to have a short ride in an actual one thousand year old vehicle with an internal combustion engine? Somehow, the diesel fuel they have stored here has not decayed at all and is still very useful.”

“Although the thought frightens me to be around the toxic fumes from an engine that burns fossil fuels, I have to say that I would very much enjoy the experience, Jack. Promise me you won’t let Janet know” he said with a chuckle.

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Jack had unwrapped this particular vehicle back when he found it and came down here to drive it on occasion. It helped relax him when he was feeling homesick. He fired it up and Paul jumped at the noise. He was used to the silent vehicles of today. The two of them piled in and Jack drove around the corner and got it up to about 40 miles per hour. Paul was speechless.

Finally, Paul said “How on earth did you ever figure out how to operate this thing, Jack?”

“Like I said, in my day, everyone drove vehicles similar to this one. That van we found in Canada is just a different version of this same basic type of vehicle. This one is more robust and can go places that van would never go, but they operate on the same basic principle.”

“I have to say, with all of your knowledge of the ancient world you are starting to make a believer out of me.”

“Good. I was hoping you would come around” he said as he parked the HumVee and they got back into the golf cart and drove back to the stairwell where Suzie was waiting for them.

They climbed the stairs to the workshop and in no time at all made use of the molecular blade to slice through the hinges of the case. As expected, it nearly fell open. The latch never did give way, but was flexible enough to allow the contents of the case to come tumbling out.

Three things fell out of the case. One was what appeared to be an electronic book reader. However, it remained to be seen if it would even work after all these years. Second was something about the size and shape of a hockey puck with a single button on the top and lastly, another box. The box was very ornate and held closed with a simple key lock.

Jack set the ornate box aside and looked at the hockey puck. He said “Paul, any idea what this is?”

With a stern expression on his face, and feeling like a child on his first day of school after a full day of Jack’s impromptu education, he asked “Isn’t that usually my question to you?”

Laughing, Jack said “Yes, I suppose it is. However, this time the dig happens to be younger than my era of specialization. This

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thing was created after I made my time jump. If it weren't for the control on top, I would swear it was a hockey puck. I know, you have no idea what that is, right?"

"Actually, I understand the reference. A few years before I met you, I was on a dig that turned out to be an arena where hockey was played. If not for the pictures that were preserved, we would never have figured out the equipment we found."

"I can imagine!" said Jack. "That stuff is big and scary enough when you already know what it's for."

Suzie spoke up and said "Jack, simply press the button on top and step back. I believe it's a rudimentary holographic recording." Following her instructions, Jack pressed the button and a man appeared about eighteen inches tall, wearing a suit and tie. He began speaking.

"Hello. My name is Jesse. I hate to sound so cryptic, especially since you will have no way of knowing me and may have no idea about a great many things I am trying to preserve. However, for reasons of security, I must remain rather vague. Again, my apologies.

"If you are watching this, then my secret is ready to come out. But I must insist that there be a bit of sleuthing on your part. I have been entrusted with the greatest truth of all time! Quite simply, our government is trying to not only take complete control of the world, but wants to eradicate the very memory of certain ideas.

"I wish I could be more descriptive, but again, I fear I must remain vague. If the government gets hold of this recording, then all would certainly be lost. Along with this, you should have found an electronic reader. It is incomplete by design. It is my hope that you will have access to the technology to repair it and retrieve the information it contains. If not, all is not lost. The ornate box contains written instructions as to what you should do in order to proceed.

"Please do not try to tamper with the lock as it is set to destroy the contents if not opened properly with the one and only key. The key must be used. Find the key and the contents are yours. It is my

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sincere hope that you are victorious in your quest.” With that the recording ended and the man disappeared.

“Well that was certainly interesting. It sounded to me like the tiny man was leading us on a treasure hunt of some sort. Now what do we do?” asked Paul.

Smiling, Jack said “Paul, I think we need to revisit that dig in Canada. Apparently, there’s a key somewhere that we need to find. But first, let’s check out this electronic book reader.”

Suzie said “The hard drive itself appears to be corroded beyond repair. I’m quite sure that retrieval of the data it contains will prove impossible.”

Paul said “Then our only way of finding out what is inside the box is to find this mysterious key, which may not even still exist.”

Still smiling, Jack said “There’s only one way to find out.”

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## The Government

Unlike Paul, when Janet got home, she enjoyed a rather lengthy shower, with as much hot water as she could stand. She was really unaware that Paul, restricted as he was like all civilians were, only had hot water occasionally. She was a government employee and had privileges that they simply did not. Janet was not abusing her power; she was simply part of a vastly different culture.

Sometime in the past, civilians and government employees drifted apart to the point that no one ever crossed the line to form any kind of friendship with the other side. This was not a written rule or even a law, but stemmed from the fact that the two groups had become estranged.

For example, Paul lived in a two room apartment, which he paid for with one third of his salary, no matter how much that salary was. In this way, how could he complain? If his salary were to decrease for some reason, he would still only pay one third of his new salary.

Janet, on the other hand lived in a twelve room apartment, complete with every luxury imaginable. She had no reason to look down on Paul for his living conditions, because she was simply unaware of them. She had no idea of the lifestyle Paul and his fellow civilians ‘enjoyed.’

So, where Paul endured a cold, brief shower, for the good of the earth and its environment, Janet had never considered the possibility of taking a cold shower for any reason. The thought that anyone should never occurred to her, or anyone else she knew. On

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the other hand, Paul was equally unaware of Janet's living conditions.

Perhaps if they both were aware of their vast differences, they would each understand the other's side when it came to things like living conditions during remote expeditions, such as the one in Canada they just left. Paul didn't mind the conditions, for the most part because they were not much different than his home conditions. Janet, however, had no way to know this or come close to understanding it.

So, as she stood for many long minutes, letting the hot water cascade down her body, she thought of Paul. She couldn't understand why he hated her so much. She did everything she could to encourage him to like her, but it seemed as if everything she did was wrong.

She had secretly formed an attraction to him when they were first thrust together two years ago. She kept her feelings to herself, though, because she knew none of her friends and fellow government workers would understand. After all, Paul was just a civilian and she was Government! Certain things should never mix! But after his assertiveness on the recent dig, she secretly found him even more intriguing.

She dried off and made her way to the kitchen area where she could see what was available for delivery today. Should she choose Vegan, or go all out and try a decadent soy patty? Somehow, she knew Paul would not choose the Vegan option, so she didn't either. She placed the order and waited rather impatiently for the three minutes it took her meal to arrive. While waiting, she tried to put Paul out of her mind.

This was yet another difference the government employees enjoyed that their civilian counterparts were unaware of. Janet's meal was delivered via a tiny matter transfer pad, located behind a door on the wall of her kitchen. She had never given any thought as to how it worked, or how the food got to her, or even where it came from. She simply read a menu, ordered the meal and waited a few minutes until it arrived.

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Paul, on the other hand, had to trudge off to the Community Distribution Center to obtain food, which was always cold. If he was fortunate, the line that always formed behind the microwave oven his community shared would be short enough to wait in. Otherwise, his meal would remain cold. Usually, he ate cold food and never had a choice as to what it was.

After dinner, Janet decided a massage was in order. She lay on the massage table in her relaxation room and enjoyed the deep massage the table was capable of. However, she couldn't help but think of Paul.

She finally worked up the courage to contact him and let him know how she felt. She had wanted to call him for quite some time now, but always gave up at the last second. The least he could do was talk to her, right? Mind finally made up, she said "Computer, please locate my co-worker Paul from the last expedition I led."

The computer responded with "Madam, Paul is not within the city walls at the moment."

She sat up abruptly, both shocked and deeply concerned. "Well, where is he?"

"He is located twenty-seven kilometers west of Harmony at the moment and has been there for six point nine three hours. Shall I attempt contact with him?"

"What could he possibly be doing there? There are no other digs scheduled that I am aware of. Is he alone?"

"There are no other signals emanating from the area. I would therefore surmise that he is alone."

"That sounds very dangerous, being that far from the city walls, alone. He could be hurt or in some sort of danger! Maybe I should go there and see if he is okay." The thought never occurred to her that if she went there as well, she would also be alone, at least for the trip there. She fretted about it for a while longer before finally deciding to be brave and just do it. She would figure out what to say when she found him.

"Computer, please obtain a vehicle for personal use to be delivered here within the half hour" she said.

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“As you wish, madam” it replied. “Shall I obtain a driver as well?”

“No, I think I shall drive myself this time. Thanks anyway.”

Now she had only a half hour to decide what to wear. She walked to her closet and proceeded into it several meters. Turning right, she strolled to the far end, deep into the far-reaching depths of her vast collection of clothing. Finally, she chose an outfit that she hoped Paul simply could not resist! She would be stunning in this dress.

Finally emerging, she found the vehicle had been delivered nearly thirty minutes ago. Feeling on top of the world, she got in and headed for the gate.

Her idea of driving herself was much different from what Jack would have thought, had he known what she was up to. She simply got into the back of the Hoverlimo and told the car where she wanted to go. It was up to the vehicle to decide the best route, etc. She wouldn't be bothered with such trivialities.

As a result of her non-interest in where she was going, when she finally did look out of the window, all she saw was wilderness. With an involuntary shiver, she thought to herself “Who would want to come way out here if they didn't have to?”

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Meanwhile, Jack and Paul had finally come to the agreement that a second trip to the ice was in order. They were in the workshop trying to plan what they would need for a bare minimum of supplies for the journey. “Do you think there are any shelters such as what we normally use on arctic expeditions in that vast warehouse of yours?”

Not really sure, Jack turned to Suzie and asked “You wouldn't have any idea of what we could use, would you?”

“The only things we had that would be appropriate for such an expedition are the tents, but I have to say they are rather primitive, even by your standards, Jack. Obviously we would need to locate some sort of heaters as well.”

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“Well, maybe we should just go down there on a reconnaissance mission and see what we have to work with. What do you think, Paul?”

“Assuming by ‘reconnaissance’ you mean to go exploring, then yes, count me in, sounds good to me, I wanted another chance to explore anyway.” Paul said with an ear to ear grin.

Suzie had already disappeared, possibly to get a head start on them. However, before they could get to the stairway, she reappeared with a concerned look on her face.

“Jack” she said, “There is a government registered hoverlimo approaching a few meters above the access road.”

In all of the ten years he had been living here, Jack had never had anyone approach his hidden home before. He was sure that the only people that knew about it were the people in this very room. “Who would be coming here in a Limo? No one knows about this place but us!”

Paul said, “Jack, maybe they are following your embedded signal.”

With a look of sudden horror on his face, he asked “What embedded signal?”

“You know, the chip imbedded in your brain at birth. Everyone has one and certainly everyone knows about them.”

“Paul, as I said many times today, I was not born in this century. When I was born, no one was embedded with a chip for any reason. People would not stand for it. It’s a violation of your personal liberty and freedom!”

“Jack, it’s only for your own good. How would the government keep track of us otherwise?”

“Why would you want them to, Paul?” Jack said with a show of anger and disgust.

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On the surface above them, the hoverlimo came to a stop. Janet finally began noticing her surroundings. She looked out of the windows and seeing nothing but ancient ruins and nature, asked “Why have we stopped? There is nowhere to go here, just a bunch of old junk. Where is Paul?”

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The limo's computer responded "Paul's signal is coming from a place three meters to your right and twenty meters below the surface."

With a voice full of great concern, she said "Did he fall into a hole? He must be down there hurt! We have to help him; after all, we are with the government." Concerned about Paul's safety, Janet got out of the limo and began looking around.

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Twenty meters below the surface, Suzie said "The occupant of the vehicle has emerged. I'll put the video surveillance on the screen behind you."

The cameras that still worked had been virtually unused and un-maintained for the better part of the last two centuries. However, there still existed a scant few in operating condition, of a sort. They no longer moved, and the pictures were grainy and cloudy from the haze on the lenses, but they provided an image.

The image they showed was a young lady in a short party dress, wearing high heels. Her back was to the camera and there was no sound that they could hear, but Suzie was able to pick up something from somewhere. She said "The girl from the limo is looking for you, Paul."

Jack couldn't believe his luck. He had lived here alone and undisturbed for ten years now and after one day with a visitor, the government came knocking on his door. "No doubt she followed this 'chip' of yours as some sort of homing beacon, Paul. This is just great" Jack said with bitterness in his voice. "Now the government knows this place exists and will no doubt want it back."

"Now Jack, don't get too excited. It may just be the one person. Maybe I should go out there and see what she wants. She may not know about you, if you have no chip."

"Well, I still don't like it. But okay, your plan makes some sense. But be careful. I'll follow you to the top of the stairway. Suzie can monitor from here."

"Okay. I should get going before she hurts herself in those heels she's wearing. Why would someone come out here dressed

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like that anyway?” Paul retraced his steps to the stairwell and climbed to the surface. After securing the door, he emerged from beneath the rubble and approached the hoverlimo. As he got closer, the mysterious lady in the high heels and party dress turned and for the first time Paul saw Janet. Needless to say, he was shocked.

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## The Confrontation

“Janet, what on earth are you doing way out here?” Paul said, noticing for the first time since they had met that Janet was actually attractive.

“I wanted to talk to you so I followed your chip transmissions here. What are you doing out here in the middle of nowhere all alone, Paul?”

“You followed my chip? How is that possible? I know we all have one, but following someone’s signal just to chat? It really doesn’t seem right!” spat Paul. “And what’s with the fancy clothes? You look like you’re going dancing or something.”

Janet, having just been crushed by Paul’s reaction, didn’t know how to respond at first. But as she stood there, she got angrier and angrier. She came all the way out here to save him from whatever perils he had gotten himself into in this junkyard and he had the nerve to be angry with her! What had she been thinking? Obviously, he was just a miserable man and she would have been better off staying home this evening.

Finally, she said “You shouldn’t be out here all by yourself, Paul. It certainly seems dangerous and as such, possibly illegal. How’d you get here anyway? I see no vehicles nearby and I can’t imagine anyone walking all this way. I think you should just get in the car and allow me to take you back. Do try to keep out of trouble in the future.” Not being one to normally question authority, Paul reluctantly got into Janet’s hoverlimo.

As he climbed in, he couldn’t help but notice the opulence of the massive limo. He thought “*Boy, she sure does know how to travel in*

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*style. This car is amazing!*" This was the nicest vehicle he had ever seen, let alone actually ridden in. She didn't even have to drive it, it actually drove itself!

He was still wondering why she came all the way out here to see him, dressed as if she were going to a party, of all things. Granted, she looked great, but why? And why come all this way and go to this trouble just to sit and look mad? He was beginning to wonder if she had some mental issues he should know about.

Janet, on the other hand most certainly was mad. She couldn't understand Paul's behavior at all. Couldn't he see that she was trying to help him? After all, she was a government representative! It was her job to help civilians. And besides, he certainly should have known that she dressed up so nice for him. She couldn't have been more obvious if she tried! He actually had the nerve to sound offended. "*Maybe he has some mental issues I should know about*" she thought.

Janet had no way to know what Paul was thinking because they grew up in such different worlds. Government people and civilian people simply did not mix company. She knew this, but also knew that it was not illegal, so she was in her right to pursue Paul's attention. It never occurred to her that Paul was unaware of this.

In Janet's world, civilization had progressed to the point that relationships were nearly extinct. There were still a few people that preferred to only date one person, but the idea of marriage was foreign. The vast majority of people simply did whatever felt right.

But, when it came to actual relationships, tradition dictated that the man wait for the advances of the woman. It had been this way for centuries. It came about to avoid the issue of sexual harassment and was universal in acceptance.

Paul had similar ideas about relationships as Janet, but their lifestyles were too different for each other to fully understand what the other thought. In Janet's world, she should be out at a party tonight and now she had wasted half of the evening traipsing all over the place looking for someone who apparently had no desire to see her. But in Paul's world, it was quite different. Parties happened, but only on rare occasions. People had fun and went out

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on the town, but often times they stayed home. In Janet's world, people thought there was something wrong with you if you just stayed home.

As she sat there brooding, Janet was trying to think of a way to salvage her evening. Paul obviously was breaking some law; she was simply unaware of which one. However, if she were to have any enjoyment tonight, she had better just let him go his own way with a stern warning. "Paul, I'm not sure which laws you have broken today, but I am willing to overlook them if you promise to restrain yourself from these crazy ideas you've been having lately. I've wasted enough time today and just want to relax." Paul very wisely decided to take a page out of Jack's book and just say nothing.

Janet had the limo detour to Paul's address in order to drop him off. When they entered his apartment complex, she noticed for the first time ever that civilians lived much differently than she did. For all she knew, she was the only government representative who had ever taken notice of this. However, before she could say anything, the car stopped and Paul got out very quickly, as if he didn't want to be seen with her. Instantly mad again, she had the car drive off.

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Back at Freedom Base, Jack and Suzie were discussing what just happened. Jack was greatly disturbed by the government coming to collect Paul. He had Suzie searching the web for any information about him. Assuming he had been arrested despite the fancy clothes Janet was wearing, he feared the worse. Contemplating what to do, he was greatly surprised to hear Suzie say "Jack, Paul is calling."

"Paul! What just happened? I've been worried sick thinking you were just arrested!"

"It was the weirdest thing" said Paul. He then proceeded to fill Jack in on what was said during the ride home. When he got to the end of his story, Jack began laughing. He laughed so hard he actually fell out of his chair! Paul naturally had no idea what was so

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funny and in an indignant voice said “I fail to see the humor in this situation.”

This just made Jack laugh that much harder. Finally, he said “Paul, you may not believe me, but I think Janet likes you.”

“She likes me? She makes my life miserable! She’s always butting in and doing things for ‘my own good’. I wish she would just leave me alone!”

Still trying to gain control of his mirth, Jack said “Maybe that’s just her way of trying to tell you she is interested.”

“But she’s a government worker, I’m a civilian. The two never mix. You must be wrong” said Paul. “However, some good news did come out of all this. She said she followed my signal and that I was out here all alone. Obviously, she had no way of detecting you.”

“That is what I’ve been trying to tell you. I am not from this time. I was born more than a thousand years ago!”

“As crazy as it sounds, I’m beginning to believe you.”

“But it also throws another ‘wrench’ into the gears, so to speak. If she can follow you that closely, how will we ever get to the dig site again?” Neither man had an answer for that and decided to sleep on it and get back together in the morning. Maybe something will present itself by then.

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The next morning brought them no closer to an answer. However, Suzie had been busy all night researching the law regarding where you could and could not go as well as the rules about government officials following you and forcibly returning you to your home.

What she discovered was that the freedom to move about the countryside unmolested by the government still remained a ‘right’, but you needed to have a form filled out and stamped, much like a passport in Jack’s day. She obtained the forms, downloaded them and waited for Jack to awaken. As usual, Jack was grumpy until he had his coffee. However, once properly caffeinated, he was ready to face the day.

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Suzie knew him well enough to remain ‘gone’ until he was ready. But once he was midway through his third cup of his morning elixir, she presented him with the research she had performed. Pointing to an old fashioned monitor which had the forms displayed, she said “Jack, I think all we need to do is have these forms filled out and signed by a government official and we will be free to undertake our journey.”

Jack reviewed the forms and eventually said “It doesn’t look like a particular destination is needed, just a specific time frame. That is good news, indeed. Fill them out, if you will, and I’ll talk to Paul.”

“No problem, Jack! I live to serve and obey” she said with a sly grin. She and Jack played these mind games all the time and she thoroughly enjoyed them. As they waited for Paul to answer, the printer began spitting out pages of official looking documents.

“Paul, good morning!” said Jack.

“I don’t know what’s so good about it” replied Paul.

“Suzie may have found an answer to our little dilemma. Apparently, there are a bunch of forms that you can get signed that will allow us to roam freely with no questions. Now, if we encounter someone while on our mission, we will have everything in place.”

“That is great news, Jack” said Paul. “Our next official expedition isn’t scheduled for a while and I have a bunch of personal hours built up, so we can slip away for a few weeks, if we have to.”

“I’ll come by with the forms in a bit and we’ll see what happens.”

“Okay, see you then” Paul said with a feeling of adventure. He hadn’t felt this good about a pending mission in some time. Still, they would have to be careful, especially if they encountered Janet again.

Paul made his way to the gate and by the time he meandered through the day’s foot traffic, Jack was just arriving. Jack parked his hovercraft in his usual hiding place about a half kilometer from the gate, well hidden from casual view and entered the gate on foot.

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He showed the forms to Paul and asked “Do you have any idea which particular government representative we need to sign these forms for us?”

“Not really, but I’m sure it won’t be the first one we encounter. Probably not the second one either. It could very well be a long day.” However, for a nice change, Paul was wrong about the difficulties they would have. They arrived at the nearest government facility and found a low level flunky that seemed very full of himself indeed, to the point that he could not bear the thought of passing them to someone else. He merely signed each document where indicated, stamped them all, signed, then initialed each stamp, before finally issuing each man a card that they were to keep with them at all times when outside the gate.

Jack noted when inspecting his that it actually said nothing, but took many words to achieve that feat. Smiling as he looked around, he said “I suggest we return to my place and get ourselves ready. The sooner we go, the better, if you ask me.”

“For once I agree completely.”

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## The Plan

The way I see it, we have two choices” said Jack once they were back at his home under the mountain. “We can either pack what we will need and can carry in the hovercraft and take our chances traveling above ground, or, pack what we’ll need in two HumVees and explore these tunnels, while making our way north, which will probably take longer.”

“I thought you were afraid the government might be occupying these tunnels?” asked Paul who was still a bit apprehensive about the whole idea.

“Well, with these new official documents we shouldn’t have any trouble if we encounter anyone, I should think, and Janet mentioned that there was no one around but you. I would guess that means the tunnels are actually empty.” said Jack. “Besides, I have been dying to find out if the rumors are true about this place for myself.”

“I suppose staying underground might throw Janet off track if she decides to come looking for me again.”

“Actually,” said Suzie, “I have been monitoring your signal since Janet showed up and took you away. I think the rock of these mountains may just shield your signal if you’re deep enough. All of our levels here are rather shallow, but the elevator shaft we are considering is rather deep. You may just disappear from her view.”

“Let’s plan for an underground journey, but be prepared for both, just in case we have to change plans quickly” said Jack. “I would love to find a way to block that signal or better yet, render it unusable.”

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“Okay, but let’s try to keep my head intact in the process. I have grown rather fond of it.” Paul nervously laughed at his little joke, then said “I suggest we head down to the warehouse level and start by unwrapping another HumVee.” He seemed excited at the prospect of actually driving a vehicle with an internal combustion engine. It didn’t occur to him that he was, just a few days ago, cringing at the thought of doing that very thing! It’s amazing how much you can change in a relatively short period of time, given the right set of circumstances.

With a smile on her face and a twinkle in her eye, hinting at her perkiness, Suzie said “I think I know a good place to start. Come with me.” They headed down to the warehouse, Suzie surprising them both by actually walking down the stairs with them instead of popping into existence at the bottom and further scaring Paul into an early grave.

Jack drove the golf cart with Suzie riding beside him and Paul in the back, just as before. When they had traveled only a short way, Suzie had them turn down a narrow isle and stop shortly after. “I think there are some arctic supplies in this aisle” she said. Sure enough, Paul spotted the words arctic and survival on a series of boxes. They got them down and inside found cold weather boots, gloves and hats. Another box had coats. But the big find, in Jack’s mind was a much older version of the Mark One Hole Melter.

As Paul and Jack inventoried the boxes they found, Suzie wandered down the isle and after a few minutes, she shouted “Hey guys! Check out what I just found.”

As they approached, Jack saw the tongue of a trailer. When he got closer, he saw that it was a decent sized travel trailer. It wasn’t perfect for their purposes, but would do nicely with a bit of modification. A 30 foot travel trailer would be pretty close quarters for an extended expedition, but it could certainly be made to work and at least they wouldn’t be in tents. One thing they would have to arrange for was some sort of skis or skid for the trailer once they got to the ice.

Suzie was the one that came through once again. She found the skis that were used for the wheels of the giant cargo airplanes

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while on arctic expeditions. They would fit on the wheels of the trailer with a few minor alterations.

They spent the rest of the day searching for everything they could think of that they might need and placing it in the HumVee, with a duplicate in the hovercraft parked outside.

Jack arranged for their food. He gathered a supply of the food from his long term food storage facility, which he was still shocked to discover as edible after hundreds of years. He also gathered a supply of fresh and dried beef he had prepared a while back. His last task before they could set out was to set up Suzie's program in her remote, which was an oversized briefcase. Not even knowing where it was, only that it existed, he consulted Suzie. "Suzie, where would I find that remote access device?"

"Ohhh! Do you mean I'm going along this time?" she asked with enthusiasm while bouncing up and down and clapping her hands, much like a child just before her birthday.

"Yes, I don't want to take the chance of losing you if we actually find my boat and use it to get me back home. I really want you to come with me. I have lived all my life as a bachelor and these past ten years with you as a companion have been wonderful. I enjoy having you around."

Quickly adopting a serious expression on her face, she said "Jack, you have to realize that I will always be just a computer program, don't you? Some day, you will meet the right woman and she may not understand, much less tolerate my presence."

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it. In the meantime, feel free to come along."

"Thanks, Jack! I've been wondering what the world outside these caves looks like" said Suzie. "On the next level up, there's an office at the far end of the main corridor. On a shelf, in a closet behind the desk you'll find a small case. Bring it here and I'll walk you through downloading me into it."

Jack found the room easily enough, especially since Suzie was right there beside him the whole time. The door was locked, though. Suzie took a look from the other side and discovered the

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door was thoroughly blocked by debris from a small cave in, years ago.

Jack, feeling like the hero in an epic space movie, pulled his newly acquired molecular blade from the holster on his belt and sliced a neat hole through the door. He stepped through and found the case easily enough.

When he turned around to head back out the door, he noticed the desk chair sitting in the corner. Sitting in the chair was the mummified remains of a man. Suzie saw him at about the same time and said "That must be President Thompson. This was his office when I was here last."

"Rather odd that he died sitting in a chair in the corner like that" said Jack as they made their way back to the workshop. Suzie walked Jack through the procedure and in a few minutes, she blinked out of existence momentarily, only to reappear as her original, stern and very male body.

Jack nearly broke down and cried thinking she was gone forever until the man started laughing and quickly turned into Suzie again. "Gotcha!" she said.

"Wow, I was really worried there for a minute that I had lost you. Not funny, Suzie!"

"Sorry" she said with a giggle. "You know you love me, Jack. You can't stay mad."

"Yeah, well, please don't do it again" he said. "We should head back to the warehouse and see how Paul is doing."

Before they left, Jack gathered the contents of the briefcase that they had brought from the dig site. He returned the items to the remains of the briefcase and strapped a belt around it to keep it closed. He considered just putting them in another bag, but thought the case may yet be important. Better to have it and not need it, than need it and be too far away to get it quickly.

They made their way back to the warehouse to find Paul driving the HumVee and screaming at the top of his lungs. He came to a screeching halt in front of them and said "Hop in and let's go for a ride!"

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“No thanks, we’ll take the golf cart and meet you at the trailer” said Jack.

Suzie said “He sure picked that up fast.”

“Yes, he certainly did. I guess his powers of observation rival those of Sherlock Holmes.” They made their way to the trailer and Jack showed Paul how to hook up the trailer to the hitch on the HumVee. “I really am going to miss that hovercraft. I wish there was a way to take it with us.”

Suzie said “You can set it on auto pilot and it will follow whichever vehicle you tell it to. All we have to do is get it down here. The electric charge should last for several days before it becomes desperate for a charge.”

Paul said, “Jack, we are going to have to use the elevator to get further down anyway, why not take it to the surface first?”

“I suppose that’s a good idea. I want to remain below ground as long as possible. Hopefully Suzie is right and this green rock will shield us from anything the government uses to track you, Paul.”

Fully loaded, they proceeded to the elevator area. They then called the elevator and for the first time Jack heard it rise. It seemed to take forever to rise to their level, but eventually, the doors opened and they saw the largest freight elevator ever made. Jack backed the HumVee with its trailer into the elevator and Paul pressed the button for the surface.

Jack remained behind the wheel as the elevator began to rise. Paul stayed in place by the door and Suzie bounced around with the excitement of a kid in a candy store. The elevator arrived at the surface and when the doors opened they had to clear debris out of the way from the fallen building they emerged in. But after a bit of manual labor they had both vehicles in the elevator and descended to the lowest level the elevator was capable of.

As they exited the elevator, Jack asked “Suzie, do you have any information about this place?”

“Sorry, Jack, no. I was only ever used on the levels you occupied. I knew of their existence, but little else of any value.”

Before they set out, they checked one last time to ensure their fuel cans, water cans and other supplies were securely attached and

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tied down. The hovercraft followed like a faithful puppy and they set off in the only direction available to them.

The tunnel they were in was obviously man made, had walls carved from the green rock and a high ceiling. It also had the appearance of being unoccupied and unused for many years. They were heading in a general northward direction, which was the way they wanted to travel. After about a mile or so, they came to an intersection.

On the wall was an ancient bronze plaque. Jack and Paul got out and looked at it. It had directions that only made sense to Jack, based on old cities, states and the Eisenhower Interstate Highway system. Using Jack's knowledge of the cities on the surface's past, they continued in a northward direction.

In no time at all, they encountered a large lake in an even bigger cavern, obviously, natural. Even though they had only traveled a short time, they decided to make camp by the lake. Suzie was excited at her first camping trip and changed her clothing to reflect a safari outfit. Jack was secretly glad she was a hologram and therefore wouldn't complain about the dirt and primitive conditions.

Jack said "I know this place looks like no one has been here in many years, but I'd feel much better if we posted a watch. Suzie, would you stand watch tonight for us?"

"Sure thing, Jack. I didn't have any other plans anyway" she said with a smile as she changed once again into a guard's uniform making it look much better than the man she defaulted to.

The primary reason for stopping so early was to do a bit of looking around. Somewhere near here, if the rumors were right, was a town, complete with buildings. If this place was occupied, it was a pretty good bet that the town was occupied as well. And if that were the case, Jack wanted to know about them before they came rolling through in antique military vehicles. Voicing his opinions, he said "I think we need to take a look around and see what else is nearby."

"Ok, Jack. This is your expedition, not mine. I'm a bit out of my element here, I'm sorry to say."

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Jack picked up his trusty rifle and headed toward the far wall, at least the far wall on this side of the huge lake. Paul, naturally, was upset about the inclusion of guns, but said nothing since he had just told Jack he was in charge. It was too late now to back out and to be honest; he was beginning to enjoy the adventure.

As they headed off, Suzie noticed something moving in the distance. She called out to Jack to stop. "Jack, I see someone coming this way in the distance. Maybe it will be better to stay here and confront them nearby? This way, if we have to make a quick get away, we can."

"I guess that makes sense, Suzie, but I have to say, if we feel the need for a quick get away, it will probably be too late. We are rather limited in our options as far as direction."

Jack decided to hang onto the rifle, but remain out of view until he knew for sure just who was approaching. If it was the surface government, they were already in violation of breaking the law by driving an internal combustion powered vehicle. The gun would just be one more violation. However, if it were someone else, they would need the gun to establish superiority, perhaps.

At any rate, he held the gun, but slipped out of sight and let Suzie do the talking. She quietly changed out of military garb and into something less threatening. Back in her safari garb, she sauntered up to the pair of men walking her way. "Hi. We are a little bit lost. Can you help us?" she asked with a smile.

Both men were wearing what looked to Jack as US military special ops uniforms and carrying what had to be weapons of some sort, but like nothing Jack had ever seen or heard about.

The larger of the two spoke. He said "What are you doing here? You shouldn't be here."

Paul said "We were just exploring these tunnels and got a bit turned around. Could you tell us the quickest path to the surface?"

The smaller of the two men glanced at his companion and said "Surface people. Should have known."

The other said "Quiet, Shultz. I'll handle this. Now, what are a bunch of surface dwellers doing here? And don't give me that 'we

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were just exploring' nonsense. The surface government would not allow you to use a vehicle that runs on diesel fuel."

Jack chose that moment to come out of hiding. He said "Let's not get too excited, gentlemen. Why don't we put those weapons down and have a nice civilized conversation?"

Shultz laughed and said "Take a look at that old relic he's carrying. What are the odds it will even fire?"

Jack replied "I assure you it will fire and I know how to use it well. I have been hunting game with it for ten years. Rest assured I will have no problems using it again, if necessary. I was sincerely hoping I didn't have to, though."

With a scowl, the large man said "Shultz, please just shut up and let me handle this."

"Sorry boss."

"Ok, why don't we all take a walk back to town and talk it over with our superiors?"

Suzie said "I have a better idea. Why don't we all get in the vehicle and drive there? Why walk if you don't have to?" She flashed an award-winning smile as she spoke.

The big guy said "I guess that wouldn't hurt. But, I would prefer if the lady here drove."

Jack quickly spoke up and said "Only the two of us know how", indicating Paul.

"Then I suppose you should drive, that way we can keep an eye on you better."

With that they all loaded into the HumVee, which was still connected to the trailer. Once everyone was settled, Jack drove off. He said "Mind telling me where we're going?"

"Just shut up and drive. I'll let you know when you need to know." The two men sat quietly and very stiff and formal, showing as little emotion as they could.

Jack quietly drove slowly. He didn't want to give any secrets away that he didn't need to and speed may be a benefit later. He quietly cringed at the thought that Suzie's little secret was almost out of the bag. They drove to the wall that Jack and Paul had originally headed toward. Just past the entrance to the tunnel, they

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saw light. It turned out the tunnel was only a doorway of sorts to the next cavern.

The next cavern was even larger than the previous. And, sitting there in the midst was a town. It was like looking at one of those snow globes that used to be popular in Jack's time. It was not a big town as towns go, but certainly big enough to be self sustaining.

The most intriguing aspect of the cavern was the light. Jack couldn't see what the source was, but it was just like daylight. He parked the HumVee where the big man instructed and got out when told. Shultz and his large companion then marched them into a three story building.

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## The Town

As they walked, Jack took careful note of their surroundings. At the first chance he thought he could speak without being overheard by their two ‘escorts,’ he whispered, “Suzie, at your earliest opportunity, disappear and when the moment is right, assume one of these guys’ appearance and try to get us out of whatever mess they have us in, okay?”

“Sure thing, Jack” she said as she winked out of existence.

Suzie’s suitcase was in the HumVee, parked near the center of town. Fortunately, this entire town was well within her range of projection. However, she couldn’t be in all places at one time. She was limited to wherever she was currently projecting herself. So, she had to wink back into existence to see what was going on.

She waited a minute and then popped back into existence at the same location. Fortunately, no one was there. Disguised as Shultz, she walked behind the group, shadowing them to their final destination. As they walked, she noticed more and more women in uniform than men so she decided to morph back to her own body, but in this uniform.

After a short walk, the group arrived at a door, guarded by a fierce looking woman in uniform. The men were obviously lower ranking than the woman, based on their actions in her presence. The woman took charge of the visitors and led them into the room. Suzie was lost as to her course of action at this point and decided to try to blend into the background. She would just have to wait them out.

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As she listened to the nearby conversations, it dawned on her that this may very well be a matriarchal society. If she could learn enough about it, maybe she could get the guys out. But it would take a bit of cunning and a lot of luck.

By eavesdropping on every conversation she could get close to, she learned that this was a society that occupied more than just this cavern. Apparently, there were towns all over the east coast of North America, and all of them connected by these tunnels. Somewhere, she would have to get hold of a map.

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In the room, Jack and Paul were confronted by a stern looking woman in a crisp military uniform. She said "I thought there were three of you?"

Jack immediately spoke up and said "Obviously, Shultz over there can't count very well."

Jack took quiet notice that Shultz said nothing but silently turned red. This was an interesting bit of news, indeed. Apparently, this woman was either very high ranking, or, instilled some sort of fear in these two that made them keep quiet even when they were not in the wrong. "*Fascinating*" he thought.

The woman spoke again. She said "I am Lt. Jameson. This is my town. Now, please tell me why two surface dwellers have such an interest in our town and our lake."

Once again, Jack spoke "We were just exploring the tunnels and saw the lake. We had no idea there was a town here. Actually, I find it quite amazing. To be honest, I live on the surface, near here and have never seen you before. Do you spend all of your time down here?"

Intrigued by Jack's response, she asked "I will ask the questions. Are you with the government of the surface world, or did you strike out on your own?"

Paul said "We are on an expedition to the arctic, and encountered these tunnels. Naturally, as scientists we decided to explore them first."

"Rubbish!" said Lt. Jameson. "If the government sent you, you would not be driving a HumVee. And that hovercraft you are

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towing is ancient, by surface standards. No, you are obviously not with the government. Why do you test me so by lying?”

“Sorry, it won’t happen again” said Jack. “Actually, he is mostly right. We are on an expedition to the arctic, Canada, actually, and no, we are not with the government. We are archeologists who just want to finish up a dig that the government shut down early. That is the honest truth.”

“Okay, let’s say I believe you. Why travel through the tunnels?”

“We had an earlier encounter with the government that led us to believe they can track us easily enough and were just trying to get far enough north to be out of Harmony’s range, if that is possible.”

“Okay, that I believe. Those idiots in the surface government have been pressing their people into the weirdest version of communism to come around that we have seen. However, ours is a secret society and as such, we simply cannot allow you to leave. I am dreadfully sorry.” The evil grin on her otherwise stern face indicated she was anything but sorry. “Shultz! Please escort these people to our guest quarters.”

With a grin that could not be described as helpful, Shultz led the two friends to what could only be described as their jail cell. With a loud clank, the iron door slammed shut.

Suzie had been lurking by the door and followed as closely as she dared when they were led to the cell. However, there was a guard posted and she would have to wait a bit before making any kind of move.

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Inside the cell Paul was freaking out. “Jack! What do we do now? We can’t stay here in this place!”

After a quick look around the sparse cell and coming to the conclusion that there was no easy means of escape, Jack sat on one of the narrow cots and with his head propped in the corner and his legs crossed in front of him, he settled down to relax and wait. “Calm down, Paul. We still have an ace in the hole, so to speak. Suzie is still out there somewhere.”

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Nervously pacing the floor, Paul exclaimed “Yes, but what can she do? Aside from walking through the door to see us, she can’t be of much help.”

With a smile on his face and his eyes beginning to droop closed, Jack said “Don’t underestimate her abilities.”

Eventually, dinner was brought to them. It consisted of rice and some grey substance that could just as easily have been either meat or vegetables, but whatever they had done to it to serve to them made it largely unappetizing indeed! Still, they managed to eat the rice at least.

They settled down for the night on the two cots that had been provided in their cell, fully expecting to be there a while. Just as the lights simulated daytime, at what seemed the appropriate time, twilight came upon the small town.

Jack fell instantly to sleep which simply amazed Paul. He couldn’t see how Jack could remain so utterly calm in such a situation. He was so wound up that he may not sleep for a week.

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About midway through the night, Suzie approached the lone guard. She simply appeared as a higher ranking female officer, which was naturally intimidating to the lower ranking male guard in this matriarchal society. She said in a stern voice “Open the door.”

The startled guard jumped to his feet and stood at attention at the first sound of her voice. Realizing he was just given an order that was in direct contradiction to his standing orders, he started to protest “But Lt. Jameson said not to open the door to anyone but her.”

With a stern expression on her normally perky face, Suzie demanded rather impatiently “As you can plainly see, I outrank Lt. Jameson. Open the door now!”

“Right away.” He said visibly shaking.

The door opened and before anyone could speak, Suzie said “The prisoners will please follow me. Guard, you will remain here and guard this door.”

Confused, but unwilling to disobey an order from a female officer, he simply resumed his post and said “Yes Ma’am.”

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Suzie led the two friends down several hallways, retracing their path through the building and nearly made it through the door to the parked vehicles when Shultz and his large friend spotted them. Recognizing Suzie, he shouted “Stop them, the officer is an imposter!”

The two male guards went virtually unnoticed in their efforts at least at first in this subterranean matriarchal town. The confusion of a pair of males giving orders allowed the trio the necessary moments required to escape. The three travelers broke into a run and made it through the door in the midst of all the confusion. Jack got the HumVee started and they sped away.

Once they were out of town, Paul asked “Who are those people?”

“I think they are the remainder of the government of the United States of America” said Suzie. “I overheard enough conversation to feel pretty confident about that. Apparently, when the EPA took complete control, the fragments of government that was left simply went underground. Also, it would seem that over time the society that now exists underground has become matriarchal in nature. That fact alone is what enabled me to get you out. I was able to intimidate a male guard into opening the door for me.”

“I was wondering how you pulled that off” said Jack.

Paul spoke up and said “Sorry to interrupt this fascinating study on the intricacies of ultra-secret subterranean militant cultures, but look who’s behind us.”

Jack was too busy driving and had only limited view behind him in the mirrors due largely to the big travel trailer and hovercraft he was towing, so Suzie relayed the info to him. “Jack, there are seven military HumVees following us in a rapid maneuver that will surely catch up to us in no time.”

“These roads are really nice and well maintained, but offer no place to hide. Anybody have any ideas?” asked Jack as he frantically searched for some way to lose his pursuers.

The lead chase vehicle took that moment to start shooting at them. Jack was both a bit frightened and intrigued at the same

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time. Whatever those guns were, they didn't shoot bullets like the weapons he was used to. These were some sort of particle beam type of energy weapon. The first shot went wild, but the second shot melted the mirror off of the driver's door of the HumVee.

Paul spoke up quickly and said "I have an idea, although it's a bit risky."

"I'm open to suggestions" said Jack as he began blindly swerving from side to side, taking up the entire roadway in an effort to keep their pursuers behind them.

"Okay...I'll take the gun and go back into the hovercraft and try to disable the lead vehicle."

"Bad idea, Paul. I applaud your eagerness, but you have never fired a gun before. You take over driving and I'll go back and shoot out the tires of a few of them. Just be sure to hold it steady while I'm climbing over the trailer." They quickly changed places while maintaining their speed. Keeping his head down, Jack slipped out through the back window after changing places with Paul. He climbed to the top of the trailer and decided that was as good a place as any to make his stand, lying down. He took aim and shot out the tires on the lead vehicle.

The HumVee apparently had some type of 'run flat' tires, but the control was diminished enough for the driver to eventually lose control. The big military vehicle spun off to the side of the road and rolled over onto its side. He shot the next three as well before making a big enough mess to stop them. Satisfied that the pile up he created was sufficient to occupy them for a while, he climbed back over the trailer to their vehicle.

Knowing it would only be a matter of time before they resumed the chase, he wanted to get as much distance as possible between them. He quickly dropped into the back of the HumVee and said "Let's get as far from here as we can. Keep heading north, if possible, and hopefully we can surface somewhere away from both the surface government as well as the underworld version."

The four wrecked vehicles must have clogged up the tunnel pretty good because they never caught up to the travelers. Paul kept driving for quite a while. As they drove, they passed many

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places where they could stop for a rest. Most of these side tunnels were natural caves that opened onto the man made tunnel they were traveling through.

After several hours, Paul pulled off the road into one of these side tunnels and they decided to take a break and stretch their legs a bit. He was still shaken up at the gun fire they had escaped and needed time to think. Gunfire was as alien to him as little green men would have been to Jack.

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## Cavemen

Still intrigued by the lighting system in these caverns, Jack took the opportunity to climb higher to see if he could get a better look at the source, now that dawn had arrived. He walked into the natural cavern and ascended a path that looked both natural as well as worn. Looking back to where Paul was standing, he said "I am amazed that these lights here extend into the natural caverns as well. I wonder how deep into them they go."

Not really paying attention to where he was going, since he was examining the ceiling, he was surprised when someone spoke to him. "Hello, stranger" the voice said.

Jack nearly fell down with surprise. However, he quickly composed himself enough to reply and simply said "Hi."

Paul and Suzie were watching all this and joined them. The stranger said "We don't get many visitors around these parts. Are you from the town by the lake?"

Cautious, Jack said "Not really. Actually, we're from the surface. We're just passing through on our way north. Do you live nearby, or back in the town?"

The man said "My name's Bob and I have lived here all my life. My wife and I and our children have a home just a bit up this path. A bit further on is a small settlement of a few families. We try to avoid the military types in the town, but that's not always easy to do. My oldest son just recently got drafted into their service. My wife still cries over that."

"My name is Jack and this is Paul and Suzie" said Jack, indicating each in turn. "We were planning to just stop for a rest

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before continuing our journey, hopefully avoiding the military types as well.”

“We were just preparing breakfast. Would you like to join us?”

Before anyone else had the chance to respond Paul enthusiastically said “We would be delighted. Thank you!”

“Please follow me and I’ll introduce you to the rest of the family” said Bob.

When Bob turned away and started up the path, Jack said “Paul, what are you doing? We should avoid these people. They may be just trying to slow us down so Lt. Jameson can catch us again.”

“I couldn’t resist, Jack. This man has a family. I have only your stories, as well as the little bit of history to go by that I have encountered from time to time, to even have any idea what a family is. As a scientist, I can’t pass up this chance. Surely, you understand.”

“What will we tell them about Suzie? She won’t be able to eat with us.”

“I’m sorry guys.” Turning toward Suzie he continued “To be honest I’m having a hard time remembering that you are not a real live person. I really hadn’t given any thought to the fact that you wouldn’t be able to eat. I’m sure we’ll think of something.”

In no time at all, they were entering the caves occupied by Bob and his family. Bob introduced his wife “Jack, Paul and Suzie, this is Rachael.”

Rachael said “Pleased to meet all of you. Breakfast will be ready in a few minutes. Will you stay and join us?”

Suzie spoke up and said, “We were really only stopping to stretch our legs a bit. I’m sure the guys here can join you, but one of us should go back and keep an eye on the vehicles. And, as wonderful as everything smells, I don’t think it wise for me to join you. Perhaps next time we pass through I’ll take you up on the kind offer.”

Before anyone could protest, she made her exit and headed back to the HumVee. Technically, she was right. Someone really did need to keep watch. You never knew when the military from

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the town behind them would free themselves and continue the pursuit.

Rachael rang a bell and to Paul's amazement, seven people of various sizes came running in. Bob said "These are our children, minus Tom, our oldest son. Children, this is Jack and Paul. They will be joining us for breakfast."

Paul took everything in, much as a scientist faced with a new and unexpected experiment would. Jack knew he would have a hard time dragging him away.

Jack's sour mood at the interruption of their journey yet again was changed to one of wonder when he saw what was for 'breakfast'. Rachael had fixed heaps of scrambled eggs and sausages, with an enormous pile of bacon, home fried potatoes, hotcakes and a few dishes he didn't recognize. It had been ten years since he had bacon and he missed it greatly! He said, "Rachael, this smells wonderful. And if it tastes as good as it smells, you may never get rid of me."

Rachael smiled and said "You are certainly welcome anytime, Jack. It has always been our idea that if we can't help each other, what's the point in life?"

"I certainly agree. But, from what I have seen lately, that sort of sentiment has been missing from the world. It certainly is on the surface."

With a look of alarm, Rachael asked "You have been on the surface?"

Jack said "Yes, for the past ten years I have lived under some old ruins and frequently interact with the cities there. Paul here is from Harmony, a city not too far away on the surface."

They all looked at Paul as if he had suddenly grown an extra head. Finally, he said "I am an archaeologist studying the past and Jack and I are on our way north on an expedition. We mean you no harm and sincerely hope you think of us as friends. However, I know many people on the surface may not think that way and will certainly keep your community a secret."

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They all sat down to the feast that Jack could no longer think of as merely breakfast, and quietly, Bob, Rachael and their children sat still for a moment, with their heads bowed, but saying nothing.

Paul found this an extremely interesting ritual, but said nothing, not wanting to disturb them any more than his being from the surface already had. But, after only a moment, they began passing food bowls and platters around. Jack seemed to fit right in as if he was used to this type of behavior.

Paul tried a bit of everything and had to agree that it was simply wonderful. He couldn't help but think that he would be very disappointed to return to his life in Harmony and the bland, vegetarian diet.

After the feast, Jack and Paul had no desire for things to end, but both knew they had to be going. Paul said, "Bob, Rachael that was a wonderful meal. Thank you very much for your hospitality. I would extend the offer to you, but fear it unwise, as you may well imagine. However, I shall keep you in mind as friends. Now, sadly, we must be going. Suzie will wonder what's keeping us, I'm sure. Thanks again."

"Yes, thank you very much" said Jack.

Bob said "You are always welcome here; if you are passing through again, please stop by, but be very careful. We certainly welcome you back, but the military types around here are not very open. They fear strangers. In fact, we were all under the impression that the surface people were unaware of us. We have always hidden ourselves from them, fearing the consequences. The military types take that idea very seriously...far too seriously if you ask me." Suddenly Bob looked real nervous, and Jack knew that it was time to go.

Jack said, "Its ok, Bob. We will certainly not say anything to anyone about you folks. But we'll be glad to stop in if we are ever back in the area."

Paul and Jack took their leave and made their way back to the HumVee and Suzie. They got back on the road in moments and once moving, Jack said "Thank you Suzie for saving us back there."

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I wouldn't have wanted them to know you are a hologram. It's hard to know how they may have reacted."

"I thought as much and acted accordingly. I do wish I could have managed to stay and observe though."

Paul said "I certainly have never observed anything like that. That was an experience I shall not soon forget. I dare say I shall never forget it!" He thought for a moment and then asked "Jack, I know some of that food was meat, but I am curious, which animals was I consuming back there?"

Jack had to laugh at his friend's unique way of asking his question. When he composed himself, and noted Paul's blank stare, he responded. "Pork. The sausages and bacon are both types of pork, which comes from pigs. The eggs were from chickens. I have a few chickens around the old base where I live, but pork has been hard to get. There are pigs in the area, but not as easy as cows to hunt."

Satisfied with the answer, Paul merely nodded and they drove for only about another hour or so before the next hurdle reared its head.

Paul said, "As interesting as the last stop was, I have to say this idea of creeping about like moles might not have been such a good idea after all. Maybe it's time to head back to the surface."

"Yeah, I suppose you're right." He pointed to the guard ahead of them who was at an obvious check point and said "But we have to deal with this guy first." They approached what appeared to Jack to be an old military style guard shack. Jack was driving again and approached slowly. Suzie assumed her role of female officer and, seated in the back, did the talking.

The guards approached the stopped vehicle and asked "Where are you heading with such an unusual convoy?"

Suzie said "We are on a mission of a sensitive nature that requires the use of the surface vehicle behind us. Please let us through so we can be on our way."

"I'll need to see your traveling papers, Ma'am" said the guard.

"As I said, this is a secret mission of such a sensitive nature that papers were not produced. You certainly should know that if

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we were caught on the surface, we could not possibly have anything with us that could lead the surface government down here. They can not be allowed to know of our existence. Now, Please let us through immediately!”

“Yes Ma’am, no problem. I’ll just call my superior and you can be on your way in no time.”

He walked back to his post and Jack said “Good job, Suzie. But, I think we’re still in trouble. When he calls us in, I am sure he’ll give a description of us and we’ll be back in jail. Hang on everyone!” Having said that, he put the vehicle in gear and crashed through the gate, causing the guard to jump out of the way. He didn’t slow down to see if anyone was following, but just kept on going at as high a rate of speed as he could manage safely in these tunnels.

Soon enough, he came to another intersection. Taking a right turn at random, he continued. Shortly after the turn he noticed that this tunnel appeared to be abandoned like the tunnel under his home in Virginia had looked. Sure enough, it came to a dead end at another enormous elevator shaft. Not having much choice, they backed the vehicles into the elevator car and pressed the top floor button.

Taken by complete surprise, Jack was shocked that the elevator worked. After all, this elevator, like the one at his home, was at least a thousand years old. Either it had been wonderfully maintained, which was doubtful, or it was rebuilt with materials that would withstand centuries of neglect, sometime after Jack’s time.

When they reached the surface, they drove out of the elevator car and stopped to take a look around. Laughing, Jack said “Paul, take a wild guess where we are!”

Paul said “Jack, I have no idea. Hopefully, we are closer to Canada than when we started, but I’m not even sure of that.”

Picking up the remains of an old sign, he said “Paul, welcome to Hershey, Pennsylvania. To be precise, we are inside the chocolate factory in Hershey. There was a time I would have considered this the next thing to Heaven.”

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## Jack's Castle

Paul said, "I have actually heard of chocolate before. I read about it in a trade journal sometime ago. Apparently, it was a sweet concoction designed to drive millions of people to sugar addiction."

Jack said "Once again, I am constantly amazed at the distorted view of things that you have been taught. For the record, chocolate was merely a snack food that happened to have sugar in it. And if you think beef is good, you should try chocolate!"

"Any chocolate we find here will be hundreds of years old, Jack."

"Paul, sometimes, you just don't get it" Jack said with a smile, thinking of fond memories regarding chocolate bars. "But, what I don't get is why the government would put an access point to their secret underground lair in a factory that makes candy. I would be crushed to discover you are actually right about this."

Unsure of which way to go to get the convoy of vehicles out of the massive building, they set out on foot to explore. Since Jack was the only one of the group with any experience handling a gun, at least for the moment, they stuck together.

They walked down the widest passages, knowing the vehicles would have to pass through as well. After a short exploration, they found two things. One, the warehouse had its own ramp to the street level, and two, and far more important in Jack's view was a cache of chocolate bars designed for long term storage.

"Hey Paul, check this out. Candy bars! Try one."

"I don't know, Jack. That candy is hundreds of years old."

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“I know, but it was designed for long term storage” he said while biting into one.

“Mmmmmmm! I’d forgotten how delicious it was. Ten years in exile does things to you.”

Paul took a nibble and decided it was not the worst thing he ever tasted, but refused to eat any more. “Okay, it doesn’t completely gross me out. And, I don’t know how you can call the modern world ‘exile.’ Anything else would certainly be less advanced.”

Shrugging his shoulders, Jack said “All the more for me. And I’ll let that comment pass about the modern world we’re in. To comment would take way too long and I’m getting tired.” Jack loaded his box of chocolate into the camper and they made their way to the road, stopping just inside the warehouse.

“Let’s camp here and see what, if anything is out here before we head out in this illegal vehicle” said Jack.

Paul said “Maybe we can hook the trailer to the hovercraft and just use it. We can’t be that far now, can we?”

“With the trailer attached, we’ll have to stick to the surface and it’ll take a day or two. If we were able to fly a bit higher, we could be there in a few hours. But, you’re right. It’s probably safer on the ground.”

They set up camp and Jack fixed a few steaks for an early dinner. After dinner, they settled down for a well needed rest. They had been running on almost no sleep since the day before and desperately needed some time to ‘recharge.’ They both slept great while Suzie stood watch since she required no sleep.

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In the morning, when they determined there was no one around for miles, Jack took the opportunity to teach Paul how to shoot. A few days ago, Paul would have protested and refused to learn, but after these past few days, his outlook had changed.

Paul said “I’ve seen a few guns in a museum, but have never seen one in working condition. In fact, I don’t even know of anyone who has ever seen one work. They’ve been illegal for a few hundred years, you know.”

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“I know, and it is one of many foolish laws you have now. The founding fathers of the United States laid down a list of rules to live by. They called it the Bill of Rights. One of them, the second, said the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. They knew that if you took away the guns, you also took away the freedom. You people in this time have so many laws that the government literally controls every aspect of your lives, and you are not even aware of it. If you ever decided that you didn't like the way things were, without any weapons you would have no chance of changing anything.”

Paul said “Wow! That's intense! And it certainly gives me something to think about.”

“It most certainly is, Paul” said Jack. “Now, let's do a bit of target practice.”

Jack went over the basics of how the weapon worked, how to disassemble it and put it back together, how to clean it and why and how the ammunition worked before letting Paul take his first shot.

Jack fired a few rounds to show Paul what to expect and then handed the gun to him.

Paul took aim and fired, and was nearly knocked down by the kick. More ready for it the next time, he took aim again and this time did well. Jack had set up some cans he found on a board and Paul managed to knock one down on his second try. Not too bad.

After only a few shots, Paul was hitting the can every time. Jack was truly impressed. “Paul, you could've been a sharpshooter in my day” Jack said with pride.

Suzie walked over and said “If you two mighty hunters are finished here, we should get going.”

“She's right” said Jack. “Let's pack up and hit the road.”

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Meanwhile, back in Harmony, Janet was in a quandary. She didn't know what to do. She had tracked Paul again and now he was a considerable distance north of here. He simply must be in trouble again, to be that far away without her knowing about it. Should she follow him?

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If she followed him as far away as he now was, she would have to organize a team to be within compliance of the law. But, she needed more information first. She needed to know what he was up to. Sadly, she would just have to wait.

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Jack discovered that driving the hovercraft with the trailer attached was certainly a challenge. It simply was not designed to allow a wheeled vehicle to be attached to it. “What we need is another hovercraft to haul the trailer” he said.

“Yeah, well, we don’t have one, so quit complaining” said Paul.

They had traveled quite a distance, but far short of their hopes. However, even at this snails pace, they would be there by the next evening, assuming nothing went wrong. In fact, in another few hours, they should be on the ice and could attach the skis to the trailer and that may actually make it easier.

And, as it turned out, it was much easier on the ice. They had continued moving in a northward direction until they encountered the ice in Canada. Once there, they attached the skis and turned to the east.

Both happy that their journey was nearly complete, they began chatting again in lieu of the absolute silence they had been traveling in for some time now. Out of the blue, Paul said “Dinosaurs.” He looked over at his friend and smiled. “Jack, if this time machine of yours really exists, I would love to see real live dinosaurs.”

Jack burst out laughing. After hours of silence, Paul wanted to talk about dinosaurs. Well, he was, after all, an archaeologist. “I have never traveled that far into the past, Paul, but I don’t see why it would be a problem, although traveling a mere thousand years in the future certainly has been.” He thought a moment and said “We may need bigger guns, though.”

Laughing as well, Paul said “You’re probably right. Although this little mystery adventure we’ve found ourselves on is certainly fascinating, and I want to pursue it to the end, I don’t see where a little side-trip will hurt as a diversion. Like you said, Jack, with a time machine we can take our time and still get things done in a hurry.”

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With the dreamy gaze of a young girl, Suzie said “I just want to see Jack’s castle in the Bahamas. It sounds very interesting.”

Paul said “You never told me about the castle, Jack.”

“Well, we seem to have plenty of time at the moment” said Jack. He paused while composing his thoughts before beginning. Eventually, he said “After I hit the lottery, it occurred to me that a base of operations, of sorts would be in order. Although I could live indefinitely on the boat, an actual home would be nice. I decided to give this some real thought, not just some off the wall idea that happened to pop into my head.

“All of my life I had been fascinated with pirates as well as castles. Now that I was the captain of a ship, which would make a great pirate ship by the way, perhaps a castle was in order...but where? Obviously, somewhere at the shore would be ideal. Then the thought finally came to me. I would buy an island somewhere in the Caribbean. I had, after all just won the lottery, remember?

“The ideal place would be somewhere I could build a stone castle that also had a protected harbor. A natural source of fresh water as well as fruit trees would be perfect. After a few days of searching, I discovered that The Bahamas had many private islands throughout its chain of more than 700 islands. The island I found was a private island with no one currently occupying it as a home.

“It took a bit longer to finally narrow down the list of owners to a corporation based in Chicago that actually owned the island. A quick internet search of the corporation that stood, at the moment, between me and what I was sure would be MY island, turned up some good news. It seems that this particular corporation was not doing well financially. I decided a trip to Chicago was in order.

“After further sleuthing, I made the best discovery thus far. The corporation I was about to visit had acquired this island after taking over another company and had not visited it or inquired of it, as far as I could tell.

“As the recent lottery winner of a payoff as large as mine, it was rather easy to get a meeting arranged as a potential investor. It also didn’t take long to find out they were clueless about the island’s very existence. I figured to just go for it and if I happened to make

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a massive financial blunder, I could always utilize my time machine to go back and do it over.

“I made them a modest offer that was slightly higher than what was originally paid. After what seemed like a short time for an amount of money this large, I had a deed in hand for my island. As I was flying back to West Palm Beach to retrieve the Time Awaits, I came up with a name for my island. I would call it Destiny. I had always heard that you create your own destiny and in my case, I had the tools to do that and then some!”

Paul interrupted, saying “Destiny? Do you mean like the city named Destiny on the south eastern part of North America? I think you would know it as Atlanta, Georgia.”

“Well, to be honest, I hadn’t heard of the city by the same name, but I do know where Atlanta is.” He composed himself again and continued his story. “I made my way to Nassau, the capital city of the Bahamas, and managed to register a name change for my new island. Mission accomplished, I set sail for Destiny.

“Once there, I set out to explore. My new island was very small, but actually large for a privately owned island. It was about one mile by perhaps two and a half and rather square in shape. There was a natural harbor near one end that backed up to a mountain. Okay, mountain is obviously the wrong word, but it was a hill that rose several hundred feet above sea level.

“I climbed the hill and found a parcel of land at the top that was about five or six acres, flat and more or less cleared. I could think of no more perfect place for a large, stone, medieval castle to be built.

“I spent the rest of the day exploring the island and found nothing more to note, except for a few broken ship pieces scattered on the west side of the island. I did, however, locate a fresh water spring near my desired location for my home.

“I spent the night on board the Time Awaits pondering the events of the past few weeks. It occurred to me that night that I had neglected my job. Granted, I didn’t need it any longer, but I should do them the courtesy of actually resigning. Also, they still had all my worldly possessions, except for the boat and what was in

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my suitcase. I know it wasn't much, but there were a few things I had that held some sentimental value.

"The next morning, it seemed the most natural thing in the world for me to back up a few weeks so I could report back to base on time. I submitted my resignation, effective immediately, and packed my few meager belongings. In less than an hour, I was back out to sea and up to date, so to speak.

"My next order of business was locating a stone mason willing to build in such a remote location. Although, even properly motivated by the big pile of cash I was paying, it still took a bit of time to find a contractor. I located a company in Tennessee that specialized in large custom buildings. I called them and explained what I wanted. After several hang ups, I finally convinced them I was legitimate. They agreed to meet with me in Miami and I would transport them to the island, which I could get to in a day.

"They spent the better part of three days surveying and measuring and taking soil samples and doing stuff I honestly had no idea about. The evening of the third day, they came to me with a proposal. Quietly thinking to myself that money was no problem, I still didn't want to make them suspicious so I had to go through the hassle of negotiating for a better deal. Once we agreed on a price, they said they could start in six weeks.

"I had my castle built to what my idea of a castle should be. It had massive stone walls, medieval battlements, a drawbridge that worked and a moat. Now, the moat was frivolous, since I was located on a tropical island, so I made the moat into a lazy river of sorts and constructed as a circular swimming pool. Actually, I got the idea for the moat from an amusement park attraction I visited once as a child.

"Inside, I had every imaginable convenience and electronic advancement I could think of. It even had secret passages! All in all, it was the perfect home for someone that fancies himself a pirate capable of traveling through time."

Paul said "I'll bet you have some great stories to tell about your adventures, Jack."

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“Yes, I suppose I have had more than my fair share of adventures.” The two of them rode in silence for a few minutes. Eventually, Jack said “It also occurs to me that I still didn’t get a good look at the lighting back in those caves we traveled through. I was hoping to figure out what it was. You never know when something like that will come in handy.”

Noticing something other than ice in front of them, Paul said “Jack, check out the horizon, I think we may be in trouble. That certainly looks to me to be a government welcoming committee. It looks like Janet has been tracking me again and these cards that allow us to roam about the countryside have a restriction about ‘official government areas.’ What do you suggest we do?”

Suzie spoke up instead saying “Guys, I have an idea that just might work. I can assume the role of a Government Protocol Officer and we can try to bluff our way past her. It is quite possible, based on her previous actions when she came after Paul before, that she has not done all of her research. She most likely is not alone and if we can instill enough doubt into everyone else, she may just leave.”

Jack said “That might work, and I can think of no other options, short of shooting her, which I would rather not do. But, it occurs to me that she may know of every Protocol Officer in Harmony. Who will you be?”

Paul said “She could be herself, using that Australian accent of hers and be someone that just transferred to Harmony from say, Alice Springs.”

Jack said “Okay, we can try that, but if it falls through, we should have a back up plan.”

Paul said, “Jack, the only problem I can see is with Janet’s legal sense. Since she officially closed this dig, there is no way she would let us come back in. She would never buy it. What we should do is tell her we are heading for another dig, your boat. That way, she can’t say anything.”

“Okay, I don’t like it, but it does get me much closer to my boat. But, I have to warn you Paul, if something threatens to close

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us down, I will do whatever I have to in order to keep my boat out of their hands.”

“I can live with that” said Paul.

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## Suzie's Dig

In the blink of an eye, Suzie changed into something more appropriate for a government official on an expedition. She even managed to copy styles from Australia, which would be in character for her disguise. Suzie actually had a great advantage in that she could quote rules and laws verbatim, whereas Janet and every other flesh and blood person on the planet could not. There were simply too many of them these days.

They came to a stop near, but not too close to Janet, hoping she wouldn't question the ancient hovercraft or the travel trailer it was towing. Jack held the door for Suzie as she got out. She walked over to Janet and introduced herself "Hi. My name is Suzie and I think this is my dig site. Are you here to help us? Suzie flashed a government issued ID card, with appropriate badges and signatures.

She also had a government issued data pad showing documentation stating this as her site. Janet was stunned at first, but seeing Suzie's documentation, she was at a loss as to what to do. She said "This site has been closed and has not been opened to my knowledge. And I would have been informed if it was re-opened. Let me see your documentation again."

Suzie sent a copy to Janet's data pad. Janet looked at it and noticed that none of the signatures were people she knew. She said "This is a forgery. I will have to place you under arrest."

Suzie said "Let's not get too hasty. I just transferred here from Alice Springs and the paperwork was completed there. Perhaps I am simply missing a document."

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Seeing Paul and Jack, Janet completely forgot about the questions she was about to ask about the ancient trailer they were towing or the out dated model of hovercraft. She said “You certainly do not have authorization to have those two people with you. They have been assigned to me.”

“They were idle at the moment and I will only need them for a week or so. I am sure we will be back before you have another need of them. Now, I really need to get over to our site and get started.”

“I thought you said this is your site, right here.”

“It is, but it is approximately five kilometers due east of here. I was wondering why you were this close, but not actually at the site.”

Suddenly unsure of herself, Janet said “Oh. I was unaware of that dig. My dig was actually right here. I’ll let you go for now, but rest assured, I will be checking on your validity.”

Suzie smiled and said “Of that, I have no doubt.”

They all got back into the hovercraft and slowly drove the last few kilometers. When they were close, Paul said “Jack, with Janet this close and watching us, we will need to act as we always do. I know you are eager, but the best course of action to raise the least suspicion is for you to set up camp and I’ll get started with the ground penetrating radar to locate the boat.”

“You are right, as usual, Paul. I just want my boat back. I honestly don’t care which of us finds it, as long as it’s found.”

Jack got busy setting up camp while Suzie walked around looking important. Paul broke out the radar and began his search. Based on Jack’s description, he was able to assume much from Janet’s position on the ice. He began with small circles advancing to a much larger search area.

After only four hours of searching, he called Jack. “Jack, I may have it, what do you think?”

Jack walked over to the spot on the ice where Paul was holding the radar. With excitement building, he said “The outline certainly looks like a boat, and the depth indicates it isn’t on the ocean floor. Shall we begin digging?”

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Paul broke out the old Mark One Hole Melter and they began carving a hole in the ice. Jack however, stopped them after only a minute or so. "Paul, we made a huge mistake. We don't have anything to use for an elevator."

Thinking rapidly, Paul suddenly smiled and said "That's okay, Jack, I'll just come in at an angle so we can simply walk down the slope."

"Great idea! Let's make it wide enough to take the hovercraft down. As I recall, it wasn't very easy climbing out ten years ago."

"That should be easy enough to do" Paul said as he repositioned the melter to allow for the slope of the ice shaft.

As they worked, they didn't notice Janet approaching. Suzie, alert as ever, was waiting for her. "Suzie, I have been running checks and found nothing on Jack, but Paul will need to accompany me back to Harmony."

"I cannot allow that, he is needed here."

"I'm afraid I must insist. He left some unfinished business that must be seen to before he can be released from my supervision." Janet knew this was a reach for even her authority, but she could see no other way to rescue Paul from what she saw as nothing more than a work gang in a harsh environment.

"Please wait here and I'll see to them" Suzie said. She walked over to the growing hole in the ice and approached Paul. "Janet is back and says you will have to accompany her back to Harmony." Turning toward Jack, she said "She didn't say anything about us, however."

"I have no idea what she's up to, but I guess I have no choice. At the moment, I think she'll ignore you." Paul adopted a sad expression on his face and continued "I suggest you keep going, get your machine and go home. As fun as it's been knowing you, I can't bear to see you stuck here longer, if you would rather be elsewhere."

"Elsewhen" Jack said. "The word is elsewhen, weird, I know, but it's the only way to properly express yourself with these complex time jumps."

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“I’ll miss you, Jack” Paul said before turning and walking back across the ice to Janet.

Jack and Suzie stood at the edge of the hole watching Paul go away. Suzie said “Are you just going to let her take him?”

“I don’t see what choice we have.” He looked at the barely started hole in the ice and muttered “I guess my job just got harder, though.”

Suzie didn’t say anything. Jack kept working in the ensuing silence. Finally he said “What if I get this boat free, jump us back in time to get free of the ice, and then move south to the Washington, DC area and jump back here to rescue Paul?”

Suzie jumped up and said “That sounds like a great plan, Jack!” She stepped over and kissed Jack on the cheek, or, as close as she could without passing through his head. She said “Its times like this that I wish I was a real person.”

Jack saw her attempts and said “Suzie, spending these past ten years with you has been wonderful for me. I know you are not ‘real’ so to speak, but as a man getting up in years, companionship is more important than other things. Yes, it would be nice if you had a real body, but you are who you are. And a kiss on the cheek would have really been nice. Thanks for the effort.”

Suzie's expression changed from glum to something close to her normal self as Jack spoke. After a minute or so of silence, Jack turned back to his work. At his current pace, it would only take him a few days to melt his way to the boat. Hopefully, it would be the right boat!

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Janet led a reluctant Paul back to her base of operations. In no time at all, they were airborne on their way back to Harmony. Paul, however, would not speak to her, or even look in her direction. Once again, she was stumped. “Paul, why won’t you talk to me?”

Looking up for the first time since being led away from Jack and Suzie's dig, he said “I don’t have anything to say, Janet.”

Janet felt exasperated with Paul and said “I keep trying to save you from these horrible jobs you get yourself involved in and you never once thank me.”

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Suddenly furious, he exclaimed "Thank you! Why on earth would I ever thank you? This is where I want to be, not stuck back in the city. There is nothing there for me; this is where my work is, not there. You keep interfering and making it harder to do what needs to be done. Why can't you just leave me alone?" Having said his piece, he turned his back and tried his best to ignore her.

Janet was stunned. She had no idea he would actually want to be here. She didn't know what to say. Finally, after much soul-searching, she said "Paul, I am sorry. I had no idea you actually wanted to be here. I thought I was helping you by getting you away from here. Although I can't understand the attraction to this ice and this old junk you dig up, I can see that you are sincere. Please forgive me."

This certainly came as a shock to Paul. He was under the impression she was out to make his life miserable. Never had it occurred to him that she was actually trying to help. Finally, he said "Janet, I can't see how you came to your conclusions, but I forgive you. Just please, let me do my job from now on." In his mind, however, Paul was very nervous. This all seemed real sudden...too sudden. It made him feel uneasy, which he never had been around women before. He was always relaxed and confident around the ladies. After all, it wasn't like being with a woman meant anything. And besides, they always took the lead anyway.

Looking at him with an expression on her face that Paul found to be sincere she said "I have tried to show you for quite some time now that I actually care about you and want to spend more time with you, but obviously, you never got the idea. When I found you way out in the wilderness by yourself, I was looking to have a good time, and couldn't think of anyone but you to spend it with. That is why I was dressed like I was." Janet's insides were all a-flutter with nerves. "*Why was that,*" she wondered to herself? "*I have always been good at getting the guys to do what I wanted. Why is it so different with Paul?*"

"Wow. All you had to do was say something, Janet. I really had no idea. I assumed you hated me and were trying to make my life miserable for some reason." Frowning, Paul continued, "But

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why me? You are government. I'm just a civilian. I can't think of anyone else that has crossed that line."

"Actually, I did some checking and there is no law against it that I can find. So, what do you say? Would you like to spend some time with me? I like you Paul. I don't know why, but I do. You're different than most other guys."

Paul had only recently noticed that Janet was attractive, now she surprises him with this. Smiling, he said, "Sure, Janet. That might be fun." His concerns started to melt away.

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## Time Awaits

Three days later Jack had melted his way down to his boat. Not only did he get there, but he made the hole big enough to get his hovercraft down to the boat as well. Granted, it would be awkward to get the hovercraft actually secured on the boat, but he would figure something out.

What he didn't count on was the state of his vessel. The bubble that had shown up with him had frozen solid and now he had to deal with thawing the boat out a bit at a time to free it.

Suzie came up with the idea to just get to his engines and start them up. If they would start, they may just thaw the ice out all by themselves, at least enough to make the jump. So he began the painstaking task of freeing the deck clear of ice enough to allow the doors to open to access the decks below.

Finally, he got the doors free and made his way down to the engine room. Not knowing much about them, he was a bit apprehensive to learn that they were encased in ice. Knowing that they were powered by sea water, which was frozen at the intake, he began attempting to melt the ice around the intake. He got a significant area clear and started the engines. They acted like they didn't want to start at first, but after a few minutes, they came to life.

Jack made his way to the master control panel and turned on the heaters. Mission accomplished for he moment, he said "Suzie, I have the feeling this is going to take quite a while to thaw completely. Do you think we will have enough time to sneak over to the original dig site and have another look around?"

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“I would estimate, based on the ambient temperature and the current rate of thaw, that we have somewhere between twelve and eighteen hours before the boat is free of the surrounding ice.”

“Okay then. Let’s go see what we can find. The hologram of the man said that we had to find the key to open the box that was in the briefcase. Maybe we’ll get lucky.”

They made their way over the ice in the hovercraft in a matter of minutes. With the government gone, there was just a hole in the ice with a barrier around it to keep Polar Bears from hurting themselves. Apparently, someone still had the idea that Polar Bears were endangered. Whoever it was really needed to make a trip up here sometime. The big white creatures were everywhere!

Jack parked the hovercraft near the hole and using the winch attached to the front, lowered himself down into it. Suzie met him at the bottom. They made their way through the ice tunnels to the barn and walked inside. Inside, they found it had been trashed by the government idiots that Janet instructed to gather tools for the museum. These people had absolutely no idea what archaeology was all about.

Fortunately, they had left the van alone and it seemed like they didn’t even notice the trap door to the secret room. Checking the van first, Jack found nothing. Next, he made his way through the piles of debris that not long ago were viable artifacts on an archaeological dig site. Now, it was just a bunch of trash. Thousand year-old trash, but trash nonetheless.

Jack got the trap door open and found Suzie already down there looking around. When he entered, the lights came on as before. He said “Okay, this place is set up like a church. Maybe the key will be behind the podium at the front. He carefully made his way to the pulpit, looking at everything along the way.

Stopping at the second row of folding chairs, Jack spotted something odd. Attached to the underside of the third chair in the row was another disk, similar to the one that was in the briefcase. Turning the chair over, he easily freed the disk and put it in his coat pocket. “Take a look around if you would, and see if you see

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anything like this under any other chairs, or anything else, for that matter.”

“Sure thing, boss” she said.

“Boss, huh? That’s a new one” Jack said with a chuckle.

The two of them found nothing else, and most notably, no key. The only thing Jack found that he did not notice before, aside from the other disk, was on the podium at the front. There were three indentations that the disks would fit into as if they were a key to something.

Assuming that the two they already had in their possession were part of the “key”, Jack came to the conclusion that there was still one disk missing. Finding nothing else in the secret room, they climbed the ladder. Well Jack did, Suzie merely met him at the top.

Jack said “I’m going to look around here and see if there is another one of these disks somewhere. Do you think you could make it over to the light house, through the ice and have a look around?”

“Sure, Jack. But, if it’s encased in ice, I won’t be able to communicate until I return.”

“Okay, if you find nothing, come back here and help me look around this mess. Otherwise, meet me here in, say, one hour” Jack said looking at his watch.

After nearly an hour of looking, Jack was under the impression that they wouldn’t find the other disk, if it in fact actually existed. About that time, Suzie popped back in and scared Jack. Jack jumped and fell on his backside. Suzie laughed and eventually Jack did too. She said “That really never does get old!” and laughed some more.

“Did you find anything?”

“Nope. Sorry Jack. Maybe when we watch the recording on the disk, it will give us a better idea.”

“You’re probably right. However, I say we go get the boat free of the ice and then follow up on our plan to free Paul. As it stands, he’s been Janet’s prisoner for a few days already.”

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Meanwhile, back in Harmony, Paul was having the time of his life. He had no idea that the government people lived so good. He and Janet had spent nearly every waking moment together. He had to admit that she really was a fun person to be around. They had been dancing every night and ate at fancy restaurants every evening. Still, Paul found himself secretly wishing for one of Jack's steaks. Who would have thought he would like eating cow? He still hadn't worked up the courage to tell Janet about that, yet.

Janet had been equally appalled at the living conditions Paul and the rest of the civilians endured. When they got back to Harmony, Paul had agreed to have dinner with Janet, but insisted on stopping at his apartment first to change. He naturally invited Janet in and while she waited in the kitchen, he took a shower, cold again, and dressed in the bedroom, which was the only other room in the house.

When he came out, Janet was sitting on one of his two chairs, looking very sad. He asked "Janet, what's wrong? A few minutes ago you were excited to go out this evening. Now, you look like it's the farthest thing from your mind."

"Paul, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure, what is it?"

"Is this typical of how all civilians live?"

"Yes, as far as I know, this is a standard housing unit. Everyone I know has one just like it. We pay one third of our salary for it. Why?"

"Paul, I had no idea. I am so sorry. I would bet that no one on the government side of things actually knows how the civilians live. We treat them, you, I suppose, like dirt and blame all of our problems on you as well. But, at the same time, we enjoy a much different lifestyle. You have to believe me, I really had no idea."

"What are you talking about, Janet?"

"It will be easier to just show you" she said. "Come with me." She led him back to the hoverlimo she had checked out for the evening and had the driver return them to the government side of the city.

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They went to her apartment and as he walked through the ornate front door, Paul was shocked. Still, he couldn't help himself from saying "Janet, can I ask you a question?"

With a very demure look on her face and a slump to her shoulders, she replied "Sure, Paul, you can ask me anything."

"Do all government employees live like this?" he asked with a smile. He had already figured out that there were vast differences. The time he spent with Jack had opened his eyes to what was really going on. He had no idea there was this much difference, but was not as shocked as he would have been a few weeks ago.

"Yes, Paul. I am sorry. I didn't bring you here to make fun of you or rub your face in our differences. I just wanted to have some fun. I like you."

"It's okay, Janet. I'm sure it's not your fault. This division between our lives has been building for hundreds of years. I'm an archaeologist, remember? It's my job to study things like this."

Janet had no idea what this man did to her, but she suddenly felt strange. No one else made her insides feel like this. It was not an unpleasant experience. She found that she wanted to spend a lot of time with Paul.

Paul was having similar feelings. He found himself thinking of Bob and Rachael in their underground home. He wondered what it would be like to actually raise children instead of letting the government do it for you. Never in his life had he entertained such thoughts. What was this woman doing to him?

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Back on the ice or under it as it were, Jack secured the hovercraft to the roof of the top deck of the boat. He was fairly certain, based on his observations of the 'bubble' that enveloped his boat ten years ago that it would make the trip along with him.

He said "Okay Suzie, here we go." He engaged the time circuits and in a flash they were on the open ocean off the coast of eastern Canada, a thousand and ten years in the past. "I used the auto return function to make sure I arrived exactly when I left, so if someone was watching at the lighthouse, they wouldn't notice anything weird. I can use the same function to get us back to save

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Paul, but first, I want to get to warmer waters. I'm thinking of the Chesapeake Bay, near Washington, DC. That will put us very close to Harmony."

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In the lighthouse, a small boy was watching the boat on the water and said "Mommy! A car just landed on top of that boat!" To the boy, it looked like the hovercraft just suddenly appeared on the roof of the top deck of the boat as it was sailing.

"That's nice, dear" his mother replied having not really heard what he said.

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Jack set the course on his auto pilot and turned to see Suzie already relaxing on deck wearing a bathing suit, big floppy hat and sunglasses. Secretly, he knew that she needed to recharge herself by sitting in the sun, but was pleasantly surprised at how she went about it.

"It certainly didn't take long to make yourself at home" he said with a chuckle. Since time was certainly not of the essence, Jack took his time traveling down the coast. Suzie enjoyed seeing places she had only ever experienced via the internet or through pictures and videos. She had to admit that seeing it for herself was a much better experience.

She pouted when Jack wouldn't stop so she could walk around Times Square in New York City. "Suzie, there are so many people there in one place that people are constantly bumping into each other. You would be noticed right away as something unusual. The government of this time is rather paranoid and would probably think you were some kind of spy and we would be in serious trouble. Let's get back on track to rescue Paul."

With a pout she said "Okay. Man, you certainly know how to spoil a good time, Jack." She thrust out her lower lip and crossed her arms while looking as angry as she could manage without laughing.

"I'm sure you'll get over it. And if not, we can come back when it isn't such a big deal. Right now, Paul is counting on us and we're playing around like we're on vacation."

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“I know. You’re right, as usual, Jack. I was just playing a bit, anyway.”

“I’m sorry Suzie. I’ll make it up to you, I promise.” They made their way back to the Chesapeake Bay and Jack re-engaged the time circuits, instantly transporting them back into the year 3012. Looking at the surrounding landmass, he couldn’t help but notice that the water levels in the ocean were significantly lower than they were during his time.

Naturally, he thought of his island and wondered if it was any bigger in this time or if it was the same size. For all he knew, all of the Bahamas may now be one vast island.

As he thought about all the ice up north, it made sense, but still, he wondered what happened to cause it? After all, the scientists during his time kept on about ‘Global Warming’. This certainly looked more like Global Cooling to him.

He made his way to an island that appeared to be uninhabited and dropped anchor. He camouflaged his boat as much as he could and they headed off in his hovercraft. At his best speed, he made it to Harmony in under an hour and parked in his normal hidden parking place.

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## Paul's Rescue

Suzie had been to Harmony many times, in the virtual world of the 31<sup>st</sup> century internet, but this was her first time to be able to actually walk down the street. She was safe to walk around Harmony without fear of people bumping into her and inadvertently passing right through because in this society, people went out of their way to avoid touching other people.

Even though the population of Harmony was considerably less than that of New York City of a thousand years ago, she came to the realization that Jack was right in not letting her visit that city. It was difficult enough here, in this society, where people actually avoided her. She couldn't imagine what it would have been like where people simply did not care if they bumped into you or not.

She kept close to Jack and simply enjoyed the sensations of being a real person, if only in her mind. She had been created centuries ago, and instilled with her creator's personality, at least that was her assumption. She defaulted to a man that was military in nature, and lacked a personality altogether in most people's opinion. However, in reality, he was also a stored personality of one of the people on the team that was involved in her ultimate creation. There were several such personalities loaded, but Jack really liked this one and she was personally happy with his choice.

Before entering the city, Jack had asked her if she could pick up Paul's tracking signal and follow it. That was simple for her, and she was now leading them both to Paul's location.

Jack was worried about what situation he would find Paul in. Hopefully, he would be in a public place and Jack could at least get

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a message to him that rescue was imminent. If not, somehow they would have to improvise.

He chose the evening hours to try to free Paul, thinking that his guards, if any, would be a bit more relaxed. He was not ready, however, for what he saw. As they approached the building where Paul was being held, he noticed it was a rather fancy restaurant. As he scanned the windows for any information that may help him, he actually saw Paul. Paul was having what seemed to be a rather intimate dinner with someone. The mysterious dinner companion had her back to the window, so Jack couldn't tell who it was.

Apparently, Paul had gotten himself out of whatever trouble he found himself in. Or, they had brainwashed him into compliance.

Suzie couldn't tell either who the person was so the two of them decided to just stroll in and see what happened. As they entered the restaurant, Jack began to feel uncomfortable. Somehow, he just knew that all of these people, except Paul, were government employees. This did not look good.

As they approached the table where Paul and his companion were dining, Jack noticed that Paul seemed very happy. Maybe he had been overreacting and Paul was simply out on a date. He came up next to the table and for the first time saw that the mysterious dinner companion was no less than Janet!

Paul said "Jack! What are you doing here? Is the dig over already?"

Jack said "Not really, Paul. We stopped due to a technicality. We are still in need of someone such as you to complete the dig."

Smiling warmly, Janet said "Hi Jack."

Jack realized that for the first time, he had actually spoken in Janet's presence. Oh well, too late to back out now, so he said "Hi Janet. This is a bit of a surprise, seeing the two of you together."

"That's what my friends keep saying when they see us together. No one is used to seeing a government employee hanging out with a civilian. But we don't mind, do we Paul?"

Paul said "No, we don't. Janet and I have hit it off pretty good, Jack. In fact, we have spent just about all the time since

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getting back here in each other's company. And I, for one, very much like it!"

"We both do, Jack" agreed Janet.

Jack said, "I don't want to spoil your dinner, but when you get a chance, Paul, I would like to show you something."

"Actually, we were just finishing up and were going dancing tonight, but I suppose that can wait. Give us a minute to settle the bill and we'll meet you outside."

"Okay", said Jack and he headed outside. Suzie, upon seeing Janet, kept walking past the table in order to avoid an uncomfortable situation with her. In Janet's mind, Suzie was also a government employee and would not normally be seen with Jack.

Outside, Jack said "Suzie, maybe you should hang out somewhere nearby, but out of sight, at least for the moment. I can't figure out how this happened. I remember telling Paul that I thought Janet liked him, but I was really just teasing him. I guess she really does. Imagine that!"

Back inside the restaurant, Paul said "Janet, let me go talk to Jack a minute before you join us, okay?"

"Certainly...I'll be along in a few minutes."

As Paul made his way outside he let his mind wander. Apparently, Jack had been successful in his quest to free his ship and had managed to move it closer. Or, it was still encased in ice and Jack really did need his help. *"Whatever the case, I'm sure I'll find out soon enough"* he thought to himself.

He exited the restaurant and spotted Jack, who was obviously nervous. Jack said "Paul, quick, let's get going before she catches up with you."

"No Jack, I won't leave her behind. Something happened and we made a connection that I don't understand. I can't bear the thought of not seeing her again. I haven't told her everything, but I do want to take her with us, if you do in fact have the time machine freed and nearby."

"I don't like it Paul" said Jack. "I don't like it at all."

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Janet came out of the building and approached the pair of them. With a friendly smile she said “So, what mischief have the two of you been cooking up now?”

Realizing that his friend did indeed have the vessel nearby, Paul said, “Janet, there is something we want you to see. It is outside the city walls. Will you join us?”

Jack said nothing, but did not look happy.

Seeing that they were actually taking Janet with them, Suzie had no choice but to approach them “Hi,” she said.

Jack led them to their hovercraft outside the city walls but seemed to revert to his normal quiet mood around Janet. Paul kept Janet in conversation the whole trip and Jack had to admit to himself that they seemed to be enthralled with each other.

When they approached the boat, Janet seemed apprehensive. Boats were not unheard of, but hovercrafts were much more efficient and could go anywhere. When Jack let them out, then parked the hovercraft on the roof of the boat, finally securing it with straps, she became worried. “Paul, where is Jack taking us? This seems very unusual.”

“Trust me, it will be okay” he said.

Suzie had remained quiet as well and thankfully, Janet had not questioned her or inquired about her presence.

Once they were all on the boat, Jack finally spoke. “Paul, how much have you told Janet?”

“Very little, I’m afraid. This is all new to me, too, you know.”

“Okay, just checking.” Jack took a deep breath, and said to himself, “*Here goes nothing*” Out loud, he said “Janet, you are not going to believe this, but this vessel you are standing on is actually a time machine.”

Jack paused to give her a moment to digest this. “I have had it in my possession most of my life. Ten years ago, I made a time jump one thousand years into the future. I landed here. Actually, I landed under an enormous sheet of ice in Canada, which is why I always seem to be on the arctic digs. I was quite simply looking for my vessel. As you can see, I have it and it is obviously free of the ice.”

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Janet said nothing, trying to understand what she was just told.

Paul said "I assume you jumped successfully?"

"Yes, Suzie and I leisurely spent about a week sailing down here from Canada. She wanted to stop in New York City, but I talked her out of it, for reasons that become obvious once you are aware of the culture there."

Janet said "Wait a minute. You said you spent a week getting here? A week ago you were on the ice nowhere near the boat, if this is in fact the boat you were digging for. That doesn't add up!" Janet was more confused than alarmed, but was not buying this, at least not yet. "Obviously this craft certainly exists, since we are standing on it, but how could it be the same one?"

"Actually, what has been a week for you has been more like two for us. We obviously finished the dig and recovered my boat, which is a long story all by itself, and jumped back in time one thousand and ten years, to the point where I left. We then spent a week getting here at which time we jumped back into this time, at the exact moment we left. Only our position had changed."

"You're saying that you traveled back in time? You spent more time than you have somehow, because of this machine?" Janet sighed deeply being very confused. "*Time travel indeed,*" Janet thought. "*I think I'll just go along with this for now and see where it leads me.*" "Okay, I still don't get it, but what are we here to see? I mean, there is nothing but wilderness here."

Jack immediately felt relieved. "*Well,*" he thought to himself, "*This went better than I thought.*" Letting out a breath he was unaware of holding, he said "As Paul is probably aware, a thousand years ago this was a thriving area. I plan to take us there so you can see it. Don't worry; I'll bring you back, if that is what you want. But, just look at it first, please?"

Having said that, he made his way to the time control panel on the bridge and engaged the auto return function. In a flash they were back in Jack's time. Janet had been standing on deck with Paul during the transition and was shocked to see a bustling civilization simply appear in front of her.

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Paul, who was a bit more prepared, was still amazed. Suzie just smiled and disappeared into the bowels of the boat only to reemerge an appropriate time later dressed in a bathing suit and assumed her place on the bow of the boat, in a deck chair.

Paul smiled at this and couldn't wait to let Janet in on that little secret.

"Where are we headed, Captain?" asked Paul.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you are about to be granted visitation to the castle of Sir Jack of Destiny."

"Sir Jack?" asked Paul. "You never mentioned a knighthood."

"Well, this is a surprise! I didn't think you would know what that title meant!" Jack exclaimed happily. He was thrilled that someone recognized his title, however accurate it may or may not be.

"Jack, it's me, Paul! I'm a historian, remember? Among other things" Paul laughed. He was secretly glad to actually get one on Jack for a change.

"Well, actually, it may no longer apply. A few hundred years ago I supposedly saved the day. Actually, I knew my history and simply showed up to lay claim to something that was done by a ship captain that never made it home. His ship was lost with all hands in the Bahamas. I happen to know where it is."

Jack was actually feeling a bit sheepish, now that he thought about it. "I know, it is a bit sneaky, but since I live in a castle, I felt I needed a title to go with it." He paused, thinking about it. "Actually, if I were to make a few little trips, I could secure my title and assure that it gets passed to me. Once again it will be mine, but this time by inheritance."

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## Destiny

After a few more days of leisurely sailing, they approached Jack's island. Janet had been enjoying herself in spite of the situation. She decided to just let herself go and enjoy whatever happened. She was with Paul finally and just being with him, experiencing new things with him was a wonderful feeling.

She had never been on a boat before, or to the Caribbean, which was beautiful. She could certainly see why Jack liked it here so much. Her only bit of apprehension was with Suzie. She couldn't quite place it, but something was amiss with her. She quietly decided to just keep an eye on her and maybe whatever was bothering her about Suzie would come to the surface. Until then, she had no complaints.

She was appalled to discover that they were in fact actually in the past. It was either that, or Jack had created an elaborate charade to fool them. The hardest thing to get past was the automobiles she saw when they passed close to the Florida shore. Automobiles with internal combustion engines polluting the atmosphere! And people didn't seem to be dropping dead from the lack of oxygen that simply must be surrounding the things, based on what she had been taught.

Finally approaching Jack's island, Janet found herself in awe of the stone castle sitting on top of a cliff overlooking a natural harbor.

Jack maneuvered the vessel into the harbor and dropped anchor. He said, "Normally, I would go to shore in the skiff, but

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since we have the hovercraft with us, it'll be much easier for us because we can avoid the climb to the top."

Everyone piled into the hovercraft as he un-strapped it from the roof. After climbing in himself, he started the vehicle and cruised to the top of the cliff, parking near the moat. He got out and picked up a rock near the moat. Turning it over, he poked it with his finger several times and a draw bridge lowered itself. Obviously, the rock was a disguised remote control.

Jack got back in and drove the hovercraft across the drawbridge and parked in the courtyard. Everyone piled out and just stood, looking around. Suzie spoke first "Wow Jack, this place is really something!"

Paul said "Yes, it most certainly is! I don't know what I was expecting, even after you told me what it was, but this is far more than I ever hoped to see."

Jack said "Paul, you'll find the furnishings interesting as well. Remember, this is one thousand years in your past. And, I furnished it with antiques from my past. As an archaeologist, you will be enthralled, I assure you."

Janet said "Am I to understand that this is actually your home? It certainly seems like a city all by itself."

"Yes, it's simply my home, and for the most part I've lived here alone. Although to be honest the castle has only been here for a few years. Since I've had the time machine, I would go back to a time to experience an event or era in the past and stay there for several weeks or months, years in this last jump. But, always when I came back I'd use the auto return function and arrive at the same moment I left.

"That's the one really crazy aspect of my life. To be honest, I actually have no idea how old I am. At first I didn't even notice, but as I spent more and more time away, in another time, I came to realize that I was living my entire life in other times. By the calendar, I am only 35 years old, but look at me, obviously I am middle-aged. This is why I've lived my life as a bachelor."

They had walked into the building as Jack was talking. Paul was immediately engrossed in the matching suits of armor standing

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guard by the enormous main entrance. On the stone walls reaching off to either side were swords, shields and a wide assortment of medieval weapons. Tapestries hung at places that seemed appropriate as well.

Janet said "Jack, if you've been gone for ten years, and live here alone, why does the place seem so clean?"

Jack said "That's a good question, Janet. The answer is two-fold, however. First, when I built this place, seven years ago by one way of counting, decades ago by another, I put in place everything I could think of that would make my life easier. One of the things I found was about one hundred years in my future. It was a series of little robots that stay away when they sense human presence. When no one is here, or, when everyone is asleep, they come out and quietly clean the place, top to bottom."

"The other is the time line itself. In this time line I've only been gone for a few weeks. I went on a trip to Canada and from there made the jump to your time. Ten years passed, but I returned to the same instant I left."

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After a dinner made entirely from a vegetarian menu so Janet wouldn't experience too much culture shock all at once, Jack found Suzie standing on the roof, where the castle guards would patrol, if this were a castle in medieval times. Finally alone for the first time in days, he said "Suzie, I'm sorry we haven't had any time together alone. I wanted you to see my castle and hopefully make yourself at home here. But, Janet coming along put a damper on it."

Suzie said "Jack, you seem to always forget. I'm a computer program. Yes, I simulate a live person in a rather convincing manner, but I am still only a computer when it comes down to it. My true home is that beat up case you left in the hovercraft. If it were to go away, I would have no choice but to follow. I can only stray but so far from it."

Jack said nothing for a while. The two of them gazed out over the pale blue tropical waters of the Caribbean. Eventually, Suzie said "Jack, you need to make me a promise."

"Sure, Suzie, anything you want."

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“You need to promise me that you won’t turn down a relationship with a real woman, when the right one comes along. The more I see Janet and Paul interact together, the more I realize that the relationship we have isn’t healthy for you.”

“But what about you? I can’t just abandon you.”

“I’ll always be here, unless my program degrades enough or something happens to my case, or whatever computer I happen to inhabit at the moment. You need not worry about me. Promise me, Jack.”

“Okay, I promise. I don’t agree with you, but I will make the promise.”

They stood there well into the evening watching the stars and the water. Occasionally they would see a dolphin playing in the harbor. Eventually, Jack went to bed. On his way, he passed his library and was not at all surprised to find Paul there reading a book. “What have you found in my literary treasure trove, Paul?”

“Oh, just a history book I had not encountered before. You know, once a scientist, always a scientist. I have been in love with history all of my life and when I see another volume of history I was previously unaware of, I simply can’t resist. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Not at all, help yourself, Paul.”

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Suzie wandered the halls of the castle much like a ghost in the old stories Jack told her about. She found the idea creepy. As she was thinking these thoughts, and the little robots were doing their nightly cleaning rounds, Janet came out of her room in search of the bathroom.

Before she could disappear, Janet spotted her, right about the time a robot passed through Suzie’s left leg. Janet said “I knew there was something strange about you, Suzie. You’re a hologram! I don’t know how I didn’t see it before.”

Suzie said “Actually, that is a relief! I was getting weary of the charade. Jack obviously knows and Paul has known for a short time. They were waiting for the right time to let you know. Paul assumed you didn’t know about holograms because he didn’t.”

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“Actually, I do know about them and I’m not really surprised that Paul was unaware. Paul and I are discovering many things that are different in the two cultures we share. Somehow, years ago, I assume, two different sets of rules were laid down, one for the government and another for the civilians. I don’t agree with it, but don’t know how to go about changing it, either.”

“Jack has some pretty good insights; maybe he’ll have a suggestion, when the time is right.”

“Okay, I’ll ask him.” Janet went off to the bathroom and Suzie continued her exploration of the castle.

She would go crazy with nothing to do. Maybe Jack would begin shutting her down when she wasn’t needed. She would have to ask him. The internet was very primitive here, but she had full access to what little of it there was. Fortunately, Jack had supplied a satellite dish with access, very slow, but she had no other options. It was better than nothing.

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In the morning, Paul and Janet fixed breakfast for the three of them. This time Suzie joined them in her favorite way, popping into existence right in front of Paul. Paul jumped and spilled his juice while Jack laughed. Janet very calmly said “Oh hi, Suzie. Glad you could join us” she then simply went back to what she was doing with no other comments.

Paul was nearly speechless. After a minute of composing himself, he finally said “How can you sit there so calmly when Suzie just suddenly appears out of nowhere?”

Janet said “Suzie and I had a talk last night. The funny thing was that while we were talking, one of those little robots passed right through her left leg. Why didn’t you guys tell me she was a hologram?”

Paul said “I wanted to, but since I had no idea what a hologram was when I was first introduced to her, I assumed you didn’t either. Am I to assume you are aware of holograms?”

“Actually yes, I have access to several, to be honest. After all I have seen from spending time with you, I am no longer surprised to discover you were kept in the dark about them.”

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Laughing, Jack said “Maybe there’s hope for you yet, Janet.”

Suzie seemed to be more of her usual perky self today. She had been acting as if she were depressed ever since they left Harmony a few days ago. She said “When are we going to see the dinosaurs, Jack?”

“I was thinking we should spend a few days here first. Too much culture shock all at once might not be good. This’ll give Paul and Janet, as well as YOU a chance to get used to the 21<sup>st</sup> century before traipsing around 65 million years in the past. There’s an island a few miles from here with a small local population. We’ll go there today and spend a few hours. Later, we can go somewhere else, if you like.”

Paul said “That sounds great, Jack.”

After breakfast, they all piled into the hovercraft and made their way to the harbor. Jack landed on the roof and they all climbed down into the boat. Jack brought Suzie’s case with him and stowed it in one of the boats numerous storage compartments.

Janet saw the case and asked “Suzie, just how old are you, anyway? That case looks absolutely ancient.”

Suzie said “Normally, a lady would never tell. But, like you said, my case is ancient. I was created nearly nine hundred years ago, or actually, a bit over one hundred years from our current location in the time stream. My normal location was fixed, but I could be transferred temporarily to this mobile unit. Not only is this the longest I have ever been away, but this is the first time I have been off of a military base.” She paused a moment, smiled and continued “I really have been enjoying myself.”

Janet said, “I may be able to get you an updated case, with a bit more freedom of movement and a few enhanced options. The technology I have access to is much more current, well current a thousand years from now. This certainly gets confusing, thinking of the past as actually the future.”

Jack said “We’ll be there in a few minutes, guys.”

Suzie snapped a military perfect salute, which was rather comical in her current attire of bathing suit, sunglasses and big floppy hat. She said “Yes sir, Captain sir.” She then did an instant

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change to more appropriate clothing for a shopping trip on a tropical island. Everyone laughed heartily.

Jack pulled up to a dock and Paul threw a line to the young boy standing there awaiting their arrival. Jack and the boy got the boat secured and they all disembarked. The boy said “We haven’t seen you in a while, Captain Jack.”

Jack said “Actually, I have been busy and had to go on a long trip. I just got back yesterday. Keep an eye on my vessel, please.” Jack handed the boy a five dollar bill, American and walked off. The boy stood guard by the dock.

Paul, Janet and Suzie walked toward the small town. Paul quietly took everything in while Janet got her first glimpse of life outside the city walls of Harmony. They walked past a family having a lunch on the beach. Paul pointed them out to Janet and began describing the concept of a family to her. They were both fascinated at how the family interacted with each other and could sense the happiness of all the family members.

They were particularly interested in the children. The father of the family used a machete to cut a coconut from a tree. He chopped it quickly a few times and then held it so his youngest child could drink the liquid from within. Once the liquid was gone, he cut it in half and using a piece of the rind, fed some of the coconut to the child.

Janet said “I had no idea about families, Paul. I wonder what it would be like to raise a child.”

Paul said while looking deeply into Janet’s eyes “I have been wondering the same thing.”

As they continued on to town, they came to a lady selling souvenir items she made from local raw materials. Janet selected a basket, which Jack assured her was a Bahamian specialty and purchased it for her.

Paul was more fascinated by the wood carvings the lady’s husband was creating. He stood and watched the man carve a beautiful statue of a fisherman for most of an hour. When the man was finished, Jack bought the item for Paul.

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When dinner time approached, Jack said “I have a special treat for you. You are going to enjoy a traditional meal, consisting of Cracked Conch and peas ‘n rice. Janet, this is not a vegetarian meal, but trust me, you will like it. Paul, the archaeologist, today will become the anthropologist. That certainly doesn’t happen very often.”

Paul said, “If it’s as good as cow is, count me in!”

Jack laughed and said “Beef, Paul. Cow is the animal; beef is what you call the meat.”

Janet stopped, obviously shocked. With an incredulous look on her face, she asked “Paul! You ate animal flesh?”

He said “Yes, and it was delicious! You will have to try it!”

To avoid questions from the locals about why she wasn’t eating, Suzie wandered down to the beach for a walk, taking everything in. While there, a young girl approached her. The girl asked “Lady, are you an angel?”

Suzie said “An angel? Why would you ask that?”

“Your feet don’t sink in the sand; you must be an angel or something.”

“No, I am not an angel” she said. Hoping to change the subject, she asked “Do you live around here?”

“Yes, my mother is the basket lady you saw earlier.”

“She certainly makes beautiful baskets. Do you make them as well?”

“I’m learning, but I’m not as good as Mommy is. Gotta go!” she said and ran off.

Suzie quickly returned to the restaurant. She would have to be extra careful. She had no idea she would be spotted so easily by a young child. When she got there, she said “Jack, we should really get going.”

“Why?” he asked with a concerned look on his rugged face.

“I was walking by the water and was approached by a young girl who asked me why I wasn’t leaving footprints in the sand. I’ll have to be more careful, but for the moment, we should depart this particular island before she tells her parents and they come with questions.”

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They finished their meals and headed back to the boat. Suzie looked nervous the whole time, until they were well off shore. Then she visibly relaxed. She said “I’m sorry guys that I made your visit here end early.”

Paul said “Don’t worry about it, Suzie. It’s a big world and Jack can take us anywhere. I, for one, am having the time of my life!”

“I am as well. No worries, Suzie.” Suzie laughed at the bit of Australian humor from Janet regarding her accent.

Jack said “I was thinking we should head back to the castle for a bit anyway. I have something to show you, Paul. I found another disk back at the Canadian dig. Why don’t you fill Janet in on what we found under the ice?”

As they made their way back, Paul told Janet everything.

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## Back to the Beginning

Back in the castle, Jack brought the second disk out of his pocket from the coat he was wearing on the arctic dig and set it on the table. Before he could do anything, Janet said “Wow that looks like a first generation Phase Shift Data Storage Device. Where’d you get it?”

Jack said “We found the first one in a briefcase in the back of that old van at the Arctic dig with the barn. We didn’t tell you because we were pretty sure you would not have let us see its recording.”

“You mean there are more of them? Janet said.

Jack said “Actually, this is the second. The first spoke of a treasure and warned us not to tamper with the box it was in, but to find the key first.”

Paul said “Turn it on and let’s see what he has to say.”

Jack pressed the button on top and as before, an 18 inch tall man appeared. “Hi. My name is Jesse. Assuming you are the same person or persons that accessed the first device, you will have by now discovered a secret chamber in the depths of the building. You may also have surmised that there is yet a third device, such as this.

“You are correct. There is indeed a third device and the three of them are needed to unlock the secrets of your past. I am hoping that this secret will be unlocked by myself and that the government will cease its illegal actions. But, my hopes are most certainly in vain.

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“The third device will be much less difficult to locate once you allow some light to be shed on the situation. If you heed the mariner’s warning, you will discover a beacon that you will find rather illuminating. There you will find the third device. Once you have all three in hand, watch the message on the third and follow its instructions.” The recording ended abruptly and the four companions didn’t know what to make of it.

Jack spoke first and said “After getting the time machine free, Suzie and I went back to the original dig site and found this disk. It was attached to the underside of a chair in the secret room. We looked everywhere, including the remains of the barn and found nothing. Suzie even managed to search the lighthouse with no luck. The third disk is not there.”

Janet said “Jack, this is a Phase Shift device. As such, it will not show itself until certain events have occurred, such as the viewing of this recording perhaps.”

“Maybe the disk is now visible Jack” said Paul. “Or, it will be once we get back with this disk to trigger it.”

Jack said “You may be right, I suppose. I guess the next step will be to make yet another trip to the ice. To be honest, I’m not ready for that yet. Personally, I’d like to thaw out for a few days more before going back there. I really don’t like cold weather.”

“Then wait a while; when you are all ready then go. You have a time machine after all! Duh!” Suzie rolled her eyes at the obvious point that everyone had overlooked.

Jack said “She’s right. When we’re ready, we can just pop back to the same instant we left. We’ll have to form an expedition anyway. I don’t want to risk jumping into the ice again. I was very fortunate the first time.”

Paul said “Well, now that we have that figured out, lets get on with enjoying this wonderful, tropical island.” He and Janet then wandered off to enjoy the sunset.

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The next morning, Paul found Jack gathering a pile of antique equipment. He said “What are you up to, Jack?”

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“If we are going back far enough to see dinosaurs, naturally there will be no people or civilization. We’ll be on our own completely and I plan to have everything we might need on hand. I was also thinking that we should teach Janet how to shoot a gun. Dinosaurs are big and ferocious, from what I’ve read.”

“I suppose that might be a pretty good idea. After breakfast, we can teach her, if you like. I’ll let her know.”

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Janet protested at first, but quickly saw the wisdom in the suggestion. Jack led them out to the plateau outside the castle walls and set up some targets. He brought along several types of guns. Paul had only ever seen him with the rifle he used for hunting and as such, was intrigued.

Suzie accompanied them dressed in cowgirl clothes, with pink western boots and a pink western hat, a pair of western six guns on her hips with what appeared to be pink pearl handles. Jack laughed out loud when he saw her. After composing himself, he said “Paul, you’re familiar with the rifle, and you’re a pretty good shot, I might add. The handguns, however, you have not seen. In a hostile environment, I insist that all of us be armed at all times.

“This is a Taurus Judge, which is chambered for both 410 shotgun shells and 45 Long Colt.” He showed them the difference between the two rounds and shot one round each while they watched. Then, he showed them the difference in the target resulting from the two different loads.

“This is a pretty powerful gun and may surprise you at its power when you shoot it. We’ll start with some smaller guns and work our way up to this one. I really want all of us to carry this gun for the stopping power, if we get in trouble and need it.”

They worked their way through the several handguns and by the time they got to the Taurus Judge, both were comfortable with the idea of shooting a large caliber handgun. Janet surprised herself by hitting the target every time, although Paul hit the center of the target each time.

Jack showed them both the rifle and shot guns and they spent the afternoon going through all of them. Once back inside, Jack

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showed them how to clean each gun and then gave them each a holster, with gun and a pouch of ammo, a rifle and shotgun and bandoleer of ammo for each. He also loaded a few extra boxes of ammo for each into the boat before he deemed them ready.

Once the camping gear and other supplies were secured, they headed back out. Jack said "I would like to get closer to the mainland, but still out of sight before jumping back 65 million years." After that thousand year jump leaving him under a sheet of ice, he was a bit nervous.

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They approached to within a few miles of the coast and Jack set the time machine to take them back 65 million years. However, the flash they expected to take them was different this time and the boat suddenly was no where near the water.

The abrupt manner in which the water vanished was simply astonishing. The boat was in the water one moment and the next was trying to remain upright with no water. Naturally, it came crashing down onto its side. The straps held the hovercraft in place, but they were straining.

Paul tumbled on top of Janet, who landed on Jack. Suzie popped out of existence, which had Jack worried. However, she merely went outside to see what happened. She took a quick look around and went back in to make sure everyone was okay.

Jack was grumbling about his back hurting and Paul seemed to have injured his leg. Janet seemed to be intact though. Once everyone was off of him, Jack said "What just happened?"

Suzie said "We seem to have landed nowhere near the ocean. We are resting on our side on dry ground, Jack."

Jack pulled himself up to see the time circuit display. He said "It looks like we only jumped back about 6,000 years. I wonder what happened."

The four of them made their way out of the boat and onto dry land to have a look around. They had come to rest in a clearing surrounded by trees and plant life. There was no water source anywhere in the immediate vicinity, but they couldn't be too far from the beach in only 6000 years, could they? Taking in a deep

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lungful of air, Jack made the first major observation saying “Wow, the air here is amazing! I suddenly feel like a kid again.”

Paul, looking at the sky and pointing straight up, said “What do you make of that, Jack?” The sky had an odd look about it, as if there was a window over them.

Suzie, taking notice of Jack’s comment about the air began taking some basic readings. “The air here has a higher oxygen content than what you’re used to and the air pressure is nearly double. I don’t know what would cause it, but perhaps that ‘window’ over the sky has something to do with it.”

Janet was looking at the plant life around them. She noticed that everything was much bigger, or, they had somehow been changed into much smaller people. She said “Is it just me, or are we smaller? Look around, everything seems bigger.”

Thinking a moment, Paul said “Well, if there was a window of sorts surrounding the earth, the air pressure would naturally be much higher. Perhaps with a higher air pressure and oxygen content things would just grow bigger.”

Jack said “I hate to be the spoil sport here, but we need to get this boat upright somehow and brace it in place if we are ever to jump back with hopes of landing in the ocean and remaining on the surface. Also, we need to check the hull for cracks and other damage.”

Paul said “I don’t know how far I can travel with this leg hurting like it is. I don’t think it’s broken because I can stand on it, but I wouldn’t be surprised to find it sprained.”

“I’ll go with you to find some wood, Jack. Maybe the two of us can come up with enough to build a frame for the boat to sit in” said Janet.

“Sounds like a plan to me” said Jack. Patting his holster, he said “Even though this isn’t the era we were aiming for, it’s still six thousand years in the past and the world is very primitive so make sure you’re armed at all times.”

Jack and Janet walked since the tree line was not far away at all. They didn’t get very far before discovering the local wildlife. As they were about to enter the woods, an enormous bear walked out

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and seemed interested in them, but strangely, non-hostile. The bear checked them out for a minute or so and then simply walked away.

Jack had his revolver drawn but Janet was still shaking in her shoes. He said “That was certainly strange. I’ve never seen a bear that big and certainly not one that wouldn’t show aggression. Weird.” No sooner had he spoken than a medium sized creature that he could only describe as a dinosaur walked the same path with similar results. Not knowing what to think, Jack and Janet immediately returned to the boat.

Paul said “That was quick, Jack. No wood nearby?”

“Oh, there’s plenty. However, we encountered a large bear, then a medium sized dinosaur. We figured a regroup was in order.” After collecting his thoughts for a moment, Jack continued “We know we only went back six thousand years, but we just saw a dinosaur and a bear. Everything I was taught says those two animals did not live in the same era. Something’s definitely wrong.”

Janet said “What really surprised me is that they didn’t seem interested in us at all. They looked at us then just walked away.”

“Maybe that’s because they’ve never seen people before” said Paul. “If there are dinosaurs, we must be further back than six thousand years, Jack. Maybe the time machine’s display isn’t working properly.”

Suzie said “I’m concerned with where the water is. Six thousand years ago there should have still been water here.”

The hovercraft took that moment to slip a bit in its straps. Jack said “We’d better get that thing down off of there before it slips off and further damages something.” He then climbed up to survey the situation better. After looking at it from every angle he could manage, he said “Janet, would you be so kind as to come up here and give me a hand?”

Janet climbed up and Jack said “If you would, get inside and start it up. When I release the straps, try to control it so it doesn’t crash. I would suggest just trying to lift higher as soon as I give the signal.”

“Okay, Jack. Although I’m not really used to driving these things, I’m sure I can handle it.” She got in and when they were

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both ready, Jack released the straps and signaled Janet at the same time. The hovercraft slipped dangerously low before shooting very high. Once under control, Janet brought it to a stop safely on the ground.

Paul suggested “Jack, why don’t you and Janet take the hovercraft back into the woods and see if you can find a downed tree. Use the winch on the front and try to lift or drag it back here. We can cut it to desired lengths when it’s here.”

“That makes much more sense to me too. I don’t know what I was thinking just walking in there like that. Maybe I took a knock on the head or something.”

Paul laughed with Jack about that as Jack and Janet returned to the hovercraft and headed back to the woods. Jack hovered over the spot where they encountered the two animals and noticed a game trail of sorts. He followed it back to a river about a mile or so from the wrecked boat. At a clearing around the river, they were astonished to see animals from every continent of the world, and every era all gathered together at a watering hole.

None of the animals seemed aggressive to each other at all. Jack didn’t know what to make of it. He said “As long as they seem docile, maybe we should just ignore them and hopefully they’ll continue to ignore us.”

Jack saw that Janet was not speaking or moving and that her eyes were as wide as saucers. He turned his head to see what she was looking at and saw a giant dinosaur head peering in at them. The head was attached to a very long neck and enormous body with a tail just as long and thick as its neck. Jack remembered that this was a Brachiosaurus, one of the biggest, if not the very biggest dinosaur ever to have lived. As nerve wracking as this was, he was certain that the big brute was a plant eater and probably just curious. However, he very slowly moved the hovercraft to the other shore, where there were fewer animals.

Finally Janet spoke “Did you just see that? That was huge! I had no idea animals could get this big! What was that thing, Jack?”

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“Unless I miss my guess, I would say with a fair amount of certainty that it’s a Brachiosaurus, which is probably the biggest land animal, and eats only plants, by the way.”

“I’d hate to make him mad, that’s for sure!”

“Let’s find a tree and get it back to camp. I have to bring Paul here to see this.” They located a tree in no time but, as with everything else here, it was huge! Jack couldn’t lift the whole thing with his hovercraft, so he took his trusty Molecular Knife and wielding it like the hero in a space opera, smoothly sliced through the tree trunk at its center point. Attaching the winch to the top half, he managed to lift the tree and fly it back to the boat.

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## A Primitive Solution

Jack dropped the tree near the boat, allowing enough room to work. He then landed the hovercraft and Janet jumped out, running into Paul's arms. "Paul! You're not going to believe what we just saw! We just saw the biggest animals ever!"

"That's right. There are animals from every continent as well as every era here. We were even confronted by a Brachiosaurus!" Knowing his friend would jump at a chance like this, Jack hid his smile as he asked "Would you like to see before we get started here?"

Before Jack was finished speaking, Paul was already hobbling to the hovercraft. Suzie laughed and said "I guess you have your answer, Jack."

As they all got back into the hovercraft, Jack had to laugh at Suzie's choice of clothing this time. Paul and Janet didn't get the joke at all, but Jack certainly did. Suzie was dressed as Wilma Flintstone from the old cartoon series of his childhood! Composing himself after some much needed laughter, Jack said "I'll tell you later why this particular outfit is so funny."

Jack climbed to a safe height and took them back to the watering hole. Paul was in awe at the dinosaurs he saw. He was more in awe at the strange mix of animals present. He saw lions, bears, dinosaurs, kangaroos, camels, birds of all kinds, many he had never even seen pictures of and an assortment of creatures he had no idea about.

They watched in silence for several long minutes, not knowing quite what to make of the odd group of creatures. After a bit, Jack

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said “I find it interesting how they all seem so docile. None of them appears to be looking at the others as potential dinner.”

Paul was still in awe and nearly speechless, but managed to reply “Yes, that really is weird.” Quickly snapping out of his trance, the practical side of him said “However, it’s very fortunate for us in that we can get some work done if we don’t have to be looking over our shoulders for irate animals.”

“Good point” said Jack. “But I suppose we really should get back to the boat and see about getting it secure before further exploring this place.” He flew them back to the boat and landed the hovercraft. Making sure to set up the solar charging panels, he finally took a walk around the boat to see what the best course of action was.

As he rounded the back of the boat, he saw Suzie with her head through the hull of the boat. As he watched, she pulled her head out of the boat’s fully intact hull and said “Jack, we have another problem. The boat’s engines run on sea water. There is none around here and the tank is dry that kept a small amount for emergency use. It must have either evaporated sometime in the past, or recently sprung a leak. We need to find a source of salt water in order to get home.”

“Well then, I suppose we’ll be here a while. We still need to get the boat upright so we’ll have some sort of shelter, other than the tents I brought along. Obviously, those tents look far too flimsy now that we’ve seen the local wildlife.”

“If you like, I’ll show you where to make your cuts and how many of each length you will need. Remember, my brain is actually a military computer. I’ve already formulated a basic plan for the boat’s cradle.”

Jack continued his survey and then made his way to the tree top. He noticed Paul walking almost normally, so he stopped and waited for him to get closer. Paul said “I must not have hurt myself as badly as I thought at first, Jack. My leg feels close to normal already and it’s only been a few hours.”

“Great! We’ll need all the hands we can get to put this thing together quickly. Suzie has a plan in place and will tell us where to

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cut, how many and so forth. Hopefully, we can have it upright by nightfall.”

“That would be good. I’d hate to be trapped here forever, although I could certainly make a lifetime’s work studying all the animals here. But, most of all, I would feel lousy for failing in our little adventure we left back in my time. I’m sorry I made you bring us here, Jack. I love it, but I didn’t anticipate all this trouble.”

“Don’t worry about it Paul, I’ve been in tough scrapes before. We’ll get out of this one too.”

Dressed as a lumberjack, with blue jeans, pink flannel shirt, work boots and pink, sparkly hard hat, Suzie took charge of the cutting and shaping of the lumber. Under her guidance, Paul and Jack made the cuts while Janet cleared debris away. With the fast cutting of the Molecular Knives they both had, in only two hours they had made the final cut. Suzie blew a big pink whistle and announced a coffee break. Everyone laughed but was secretly grateful for the break.

Suzie’s design would use the weight of the boat to hold it all together. It wouldn’t be easy with only three of them able to use their hands, but they would get it done.

After their short break, Janet flew the hovercraft over the boat while Jack and Paul secured the winch to it. Using two large cargo straps, they managed to create a balanced lifting point from which the winch could pick up the boat and hold it in place for the long minutes it took Jack and Paul to position the timbers properly.

Once everything was in place, Janet lowered the boat onto the cradle and everyone let out a sigh of relief when it held securely. Jack used his extension ladder as a means to get into the boat easier and their day was finally done.

Janet said “I don’t think I have ever worked so hard in my life. Normally, this type of work is left for the civilians to do and those of us on the government side of things never even know what is involved. I am so sorry Paul, if I treated you in such a manner! I had no idea.”

Paul said “Actually, none of us noticed it either. It was just the accepted way of things. If it wasn’t for Jack here, I would still be

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oblivious. But, that's no longer important. Now that we're together, I'm sure things will be different, and that's all that really matters."

Jack took the opportunity to make himself scarce and begin to prepare dinner. He fixed a dinner of steaks, potatoes and a salad, thinking that if they were going to be here a while, they might eventually have to go hunting. But, he was pretty well stocked for a short expedition. They would just have to see.

Janet gave the meat a questioning look so Paul said "Janet, you simply must try this cow steak, its delicious! Jack fixed it for me before and I found it wonderful!"

Jack rolled his eyes as he muttered under his breath "Cow! Will he ever learn to call it beef?"

Still looking a bit apprehensive, Janet said "Okay, Paul, if you say so I'll try it." She took a bite and couldn't believe how it tasted. "This is amazing!"

Jack said "In my time, there was a movement that a handful of people kept on about. They would say that the animals had rights too and we needed to protect their rights since they couldn't speak for themselves. I always thought it was a bunch of nonsense, personally. Obviously, sometime in my future, your past, they succeeded."

Paul said "I wonder how we would go about changing that?"

Janet said "I don't know that it can be changed." They finished their meal in silence. Afterwards, Paul and Janet insisted on cleaning up the dishes while Jack relaxed.

"This boat's engines actually run on salt water, which is in abundance in the future, but seems to be lacking here" Jack said from the boat's small dining room. Janet and Paul could easily see him and carry on a conversation through the 'pass thru' window in the galley. He continued "Tomorrow, we should take the hovercraft out and see if we can find a source of salt water. I figure we can follow the river to an ocean eventually, although I am certainly perplexed...it should be right here. Oceans generally don't move anywhere, they tend to stay put."

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Paul said “I think I’ll stay here, Jack. I want to see if the animals from the watering hole get curious and come by here. I’ll be greatly surprised if they don’t.”

“Okay, suit yourself. Suzie and I will go, Janet, you are welcome to join us, if you like.”

Janet said “No thanks, I think I’ll stay here and keep Paul company. Thanks anyway.”

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Jack woke the next morning to the smell of coffee brewing. Paul had apparently been watching him make it and decided to surprise him. “Thanks for the coffee, Paul. What a pleasant surprise.”

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to join you, but I know how much you like it.”

“It is much appreciated.” After taking a sip he said “I don’t know about you, Paul, but my back has not felt this good in years. And after all of that manual labor, I figured we would both be sore for a week.”

“I was thinking the same thing. You would never know I injured my leg yesterday.”

Suzie had appeared during their brief conversation and said “I think it’s because of the increased air pressure and oxygen content in the atmosphere. You are getting the same effects of a hyperbaric chamber, which is sometimes used as a treatment for healing these types of injuries faster. I believe that window over the atmosphere is actually a layer of ice, which serves to encase the entire planet in these hyperbaric conditions.”

Paul noticed what Suzie was wearing and had to chuckle. She was in a pink fuzzy bathrobe with large, furry pink slippers. She appeared to be sipping a cup of Jack’s coffee while sitting at the table.

Janet came in and said “Suzie, I would never guess you were a government hologram. I have never seen a hologram with such wonderful personality.”

“Why thank you Janet!” Suzie said with a big smile. “Actually, I came to the conclusion that the government was done with me.”

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When Jack found me, I had been sitting abandoned for about 200 years. When he allowed me to do what I wanted, as if I were a real person, I didn't know how to react at first. But, I've been watching the actions of women, mainly through the internet, to see how they dress and act and I must say I really like it! I consider myself a civilian now. If President Thompson had ever seen me like this, he would certainly have shut me down permanently."

Jack said "I'm certainly glad he didn't."

Before Jack could take another sip of his coffee, they heard a loud roar. Walking to the window, Paul saw several dinosaurs walking by. He couldn't identify all of them but was excited to see them. He said "Yes, I think I'll stay right here today. There could be some very interesting scientific observations made today."

Remembering their conversation in the hovercraft on the journey back to Harmony this last time, Janet said "It sounds like I'll just be in the way here today, so I think I'll join you after all, Jack. I hope you don't mind Paul, but I've recently learned that you love your work and really don't want to be disturbed in the middle of it."

"I don't mind at all. In fact, I'll probably not be very good company anyway. I expect to get deep into 'scientist mode' today" he said with a grin.

Jack and Janet fixed a quick breakfast and packed a lunch before heading out to the hovercraft. Suzie suggested they take her case with them, just in case they traveled a great distance to find salt water.

They flew along the river for many miles. The plant life as well as the animal life continued to amaze them all. None of them was expecting the world to be like this. As they traveled, the river would split off into other rivers. They continued to follow the course they started on to avoid getting lost. At midday, they stopped for lunch at a clearing by the river that had few animals nearby. Jack got out and stretched his body after sitting all day in the same position. Janet walked over to the river.

"Jack" she called out. "Come see this."

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Jack hurried over to her and saw that she was looking at a set of footprints. Only these were not animal foot prints, these were modern human foot prints and they were big! Much bigger than Jack's size thirteen foot.

"That is obviously a human print, but it seems odd that we haven't seen any people. There must not be many around here" said Jack.

Suzie said "Jack, we have flown for three hundred miles and still no ocean. We should be out in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean right now. Obviously we'll have to come up with an alternative plan."

Jack said "We can make salt water easily enough, if we had a supply of salt. The little bit I have on hand for cooking won't be enough." He scratched his head in thought, finally asking "Where can we find salt in an environment like this?"

Suzie said "One way, when there is no ocean handy, is to boil the roots of a hickory tree. Let the water evaporate and salt crystals will be left behind."

"Okay then, on our way back, lets keep our eyes open for a hickory tree."

Janet had been walking by herself along the shore of the river. She spotted a couple of fruit trees. Picking a fruit off of each tree, she came back to show Jack and Suzie. "Look at the size of these fruits."

"Wow, is that an orange? That is by far the biggest orange I have ever seen! We should gather a bunch to take back with us. If we happen to be stuck here a while we may need the extra food." They gathered arms full of oranges, lemons and grapefruits and piled them into the hovercraft.

They took their time on their way back, flying low so they would have a better chance of spotting a hickory tree. Eventually they found one and as with everything else here, it was enormous. Jack took a shovel out of the tool kit at the rear of the hovercraft and began digging around the base of the tree. When he found a root, he dug along the length of it until a large piece was exposed.

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Using his Molecular Knife he cut off a big piece of it and put it in the hovercraft. “How much do you think we need?” he asked Suzie.

“I don’t know” she said. “Grab a few more like that and we’ll see what happens. We can always come for more if we need to.”

Jack complied and once again they were off. It took until dark for them to return to the boat. When they arrived, Jack saw Paul on the top deck reading the book he had taken from the library in his castle. “See any interesting animals while we were gone?” he asked Paul.

“Actually yes, a herd of Brachiosaurus came by and their curiosity was interesting. They looked the boat over and eventually left. I also saw something very weird. It was in the distance, but it looked like a herd of sheep traveling with a pride of lions. Obviously, my eyes must have been playing tricks on me by then, so I sat down to read.”

“Well, we traveled a few hundred miles and never came close to the ocean. Suzie said we can extract salt from hickory roots, so we brought some back. I guess tomorrow we will see what happens when you boil a tree in a boat.”

“Boil a tree?” asked Paul.

“Well, boil the roots anyway” said Jack.

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## Paul's Discovery

The next morning they set about boiling the roots of the hickory tree. Janet took charge of the boiling process, with instruction from Suzie, while Jack and Paul set off to the river for water. Jack couldn't help but think that he may very well have been stuck here permanently, if not for Suzie and her knowledge of how to extract salt from a tree. Who would have thought of that?

They returned with every container available to them full of river water. Suzie supervised the mixing to ensure the proper amount of salt was added. It took until just after noon to prepare enough to fill the emergency tank. However, once it was half full, a leak was noticed. They quickly patched the leak and prepared another batch of hickory root to top off the tank again before calling it a success.

Jack tentatively opened the control panel to the time circuits and saw the indicator was a weak green, as opposed to the bright green it normally showed. He said "Well, it looks like it might work, but the light is much weaker than it normally is."

Paul said "The difference is probably due to the minerals we left out. Sea water has more than just salt in it and your engine probably utilizes all of the minerals for something or other. Hopefully, it will work anyway,"

"I think we should wait until tomorrow to try it, though. If our arrival is anything like this one, we will need our strength and I, for one, am beat!" Janet showed her exhaustion with an overly dramatic sigh making everyone chuckle.

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Jack agreed saying “That sounds like a good idea to me. Paul, if you want to see anything else in this era, now is the time.”

Paul said “Okay. Maybe we should take a cruise down to the river again. I want to get a bit of video footage of the strange variety of animals there.”

“Okay” said Jack. “Why don’t you and Janet go and I’ll stay here to watch the boat.”

Seeing that they really wanted some alone time, Suzie said “I’ll stay here with you, Jack.”

Paul and Janet flew off to the river and set down on the far side since there seemed to be no animals on that side this evening. As they sat and watched the animals enjoy the water hole, the two of them talked. “Paul, I keep thinking about that family. I know it might be a bit premature, but I would love for us to be able to have our own family someday. But I can’t see how the government will allow it. And, I would assume that in order to have a family of our own, I would have to carry a baby full term and give birth to it. I don’t know of anyone who has done that in our lifetimes. What should we do?”

“I want it as much as you do, Janet. And I agree it’ll be a challenge. But, I do have an idea...two actually. One, we could ask Jack to let us stay in his castle until the time comes, then go back home once the baby is born. Or, we could get back in touch with Bob and Rachael. Jack and I met them in our time underground. They had a large family and mentioned several other families there as well. They live completely underground with no contact with the surface government. I think I mentioned them when I was telling you of how Jack and I got to the dig site in Canada.”

“Yes, I remember now. Do you think they would help?”

“All we can do is ask, they did invite us back after all.” The conversation drifted back to the animals across the water and for some reason they began counting them. Just as Janet was mentioning another number, Paul jumped up and said “Six thousand years! Of course! Janet, we need to get back to the boat. I have to do some counting of my own.”

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“Okay Paul. Boy, when you launch yourself into scientist mode, you go in all the way.”

“Yes, I suppose I always have. Sorry it cuts our evening short, but this is important. This could be very important in fact!” He got them back to the boat in no time and landed next to it. He quickly jumped out of the hovercraft and ran to the boat. Climbing the ladder as fast as he could he shouted, “Jack! I think I know why the display shows only six thousand years!”

He ran to his cabin and came back with the book Jack had loaned him. Holding it up for Jack to see, he said “I’ve been reading this book of yours and at first thought it was strange that there were no dates, but for some reason it came to me while Janet and I were sitting on the bank of the river just now.

“According to the date we left, and the fact that we went back in time approximately six thousand years, the current date would be somewhere around four thousand, BCE. As a historian, I understand that BCE once was known simply as BC. BCE stands for ‘Before Common Era’, whereas BC was ‘Before Christ’. Naturally, before Christ was born, they would have used some other form of counting the years.

“I assume that Christ is this man named Jesus in this book, since he had such a profound effect on the world. Using his birth as a reference point, and counting backwards in the book, adding the dates and ages of his lineage, we only go back to approximately four thousand BC to find the creation of the earth by God.

“In the very beginning of the book, it says that He made every kind of animal. From what we have seen around here, he must have made the dinosaurs as well as the rest of the animals together. Scientists have it wrong! And this story about a flood would explain how all the different layers of earth got there. It would also explain why we can’t find an ocean anywhere here in this time. Quite simply, there aren’t any yet!

“Additionally, it explains this strange looking sky and the high air pressure. Let me read a passage to you.” He paused while he found the correct page then continued “And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters

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from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven.

“This archaic language had me going there for a minute. I mean, it’s old even by your standards, Jack. I got all this from Genesis, which is arranged first. Chapter 1, verses 6 though 8. The word ‘firmament’ had me confused until I found this verse” he paused again to locate the correct verse, then read “And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. Genesis chapter 1, verse 20.

“Apparently, this ‘firmament’ is the air, Jack! Suzie was right when she said that strange looking sky that has the appearance of a window is actually some form of water, perhaps ice. I think that when this great flood happened, this water over the atmosphere came crashing down in the form of rain for some reason, perhaps a meteor or something hit it.

“Jack, I think this book you have here is the actual history, the true history of the earth. To play it safe, when we return tomorrow, why not set the machine to just jump us forward in time six thousand years, like it says on the time circuit display. If we were to jump 65 million years into the future, who knows what we’ll find?” If I’m wrong, we can make a few more jumps to make sure then make one big one to get us there. What do we have to lose?”

Jack said nothing while Paul spoke. Finally he said “I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to play it safe. By the way, I had no idea which book you had. That is The Bible, which is the basis for Christianity. And, if the creation story is true, as the local wildlife and atmospheric conditions would seem to indicate, the rest must be as well. Maybe we should take a closer look at what else it says.”

Janet said “I don’t know what to think. I was taught that the world is millions or billions of years old and that we all evolved from animals. But I have to admit, this sure looks like the real thing to me.”

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With an uncharacteristically somber look on her face, Suzie said “The Bible and Christianity were eradicated during my time. The government said it only promoted hate and discontent among people. I can see that they were wrong in this, too. In all the many years I have been around, I have seen many things, even though my experiences were very limited until Jack came along. Still, I was able to see the government make a declaration like that and years, sometimes decades or centuries later it is discovered that they had it wrong. It certainly doesn’t surprise me that they would have this wrong as well.”

Raising the Bible over his head and holding it as if to make a declaration of some sort, Paul said “Based on this, I plan to read the rest of this book. If this is the truth, I want to know it!”

Seeing his friend's sincerity, Jack said “Feel free to keep that copy. If I don’t have another, I can certainly get one. It’s not illegal yet in my time. But, I agree with you, it’s certainly starting to look like its true. It’s funny, actually; all my life I have ignored the Bible and church and basically just had the opinion that people needed to believe in something because maybe they were just weak or something. I don’t know...maybe there’s something to it after all.”

They all went to bed that night with much to think about. Paul kept reading the Bible well into the night. It was as if he couldn’t get enough of it. Finally, he put it down and went to sleep.

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The next morning, they had a quick breakfast of the giant fruit Janet had found. Afterward, they loaded the hovercraft onto the roof again, securing it as best they could, then prepared themselves for the crash that might come again if Paul was wrong and they were still 65 million years in the past.

With his finger poised over the controls, Jack said “Here goes nothing!” and pushed the button that directed the time circuits to take them back to the date they left. He avoided the auto return function this time since it said 65 million years and Paul was pretty sure it was only six thousand, like the display indicated.

They saw the usual flash and immediately landed in some of the most violent seas Jack had ever encountered. He shouted “We

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must have landed in a hurricane!” but no one heard him. Paul staggered his way over to the time circuits and pointed to the display. They were still short by forty-four hundred years. Paul yelled into Jack’s ear “Great Flood!!!” and indicated, using his hands that they should jump again.

The three of them were getting violently ill from the tossing and Jack was seriously worried that they would capsize and drown. The boat was tossed about like a child’s toy in a pail of water that had just been thrown off a cliff. Jack was slammed bodily into the cabinets behind him. Grabbing the handle of the nearest door, he managed to remain standing. The cabinet door swung open and Jack nearly lost his footing again. Paul and Janet were thrown about like rag dolls.

Jack glanced into the cabinet he was hanging onto and saw some rope. He tossed it to Paul and yelled “Lash yourselves to something!” Paul indicated that he heard him by nodding his head. He tied both himself and Janet to the nearest solid post he could find and they hung onto each other.

Suzie stayed on the boat, but kept drifting into and out of everything. It was very obvious that she was a hologram this day. Jack lurched himself back to the control board and managed to hang on with one hand.

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## Pirates!

Using one hand to hang on with, Jack quickly input the future date and they jumped once again. They were instantly in calm, beautiful Caribbean waters. They all breathed a sigh of relief before untying themselves and climbing to the deck to get some fresh air. It was much needed after their brief ordeal.

Janet was the first to notice that they had landed right next to a ship. She was looking at it in such a way that Jack had to see what had her attention. He turned around and saw a ship that appeared to be from the seventeenth century. Then he saw that there was no flag flying. That made him immediately nervous. He whispered “Paul, go back down and bring our weapons. Everyone is to be armed again. Go quickly before they spot us.”

Suzie noticed the ship, estimated the era and appeared dressed in the finest ladies clothing available in the seventeenth century. Jack saw her and whispered “Suzie, I think that’s a pirate ship. If they see you like that, they will attack us, thinking this is a wealthy merchant ship. Try changing into something more like a pirate, maybe we can bluff our way out of this.”

Suzie smiled and quickly changed to look like a fierce lady pirate, complete with a huge sword in her waistband and three pistols on a strap across her chest. She completed it with a hat that was huge. Fortunately, frilly clothing was popular with people of both sexes during this era, and Suzie spared no frill.

Paul returned with their weapons and quietly passed them out. He was both excited and nervous at the thought of what type of people was on the ship next to them.

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The other ship was much larger than Jack's boat. It was also very close. Amazingly, they had been here for a few minutes and still no one had hailed them. Jack decided to take charge of the situation and yelled over to the other vessel "Ahoy! Who be captain of this fine vessel?"

Immediately, every head turned their way. Swords were drawn on the other ship and a few pistols as well. "Now, let's not be hasty, gentlemen" Jack said. "No need for hostility just yet."

The captain of the other vessel strolled over to the rail to get a closer look at Jack and his crew. "I notice no banner on your vessel captain. Ye wouldn't be pirates now would ye?"

Jack smiled and said "I would rather just say that we prefer to remain neutral in matters such as allegiance. I notice you must share a similar sentiment since your fine vessel lacks the same."

The other captain laughed heartily. Finally, he spoke "Neutral in matters such as allegiance. I shall have to remember that. Yes, I suppose ye could say that we are also neutral." After a brief pause, he said "How is it, I feel I must ask, did ye manage to get the jump on us with naught so much as a lookout seeing your vessel until ye greeted us? Surely ye are adrift for I see no sails."

"Don't let the lack of sails disturb you, captain. Our vessel is powered by other means. Rest assured, we are capable of making great speed. And, if ye were to possess such ideas as to acquiring said vessel yourself, I would point out that we are armed as well. We may be fewer in numbers, but we are superior in strength."

Having made this bold statement to a ship full of pirates, Jack took his rifle and fired in the air about a dozen times in quick succession, but not on rapid fire. He would save that little surprise for later, if he needed it.

The two ships were close enough now that one pirate let loose a yell and leaped to the deck of Jack's boat. He had sword in hand and made a swipe at Paul. Paul pulled his molecular knife out, which was nearly as long as the other man's sword and simply sliced it off at the hilt. He then very calmly brought the blade up to the man's neck and held it there without touching the skin. If he so

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desired, he could have very simply removed the man's head with little or no effort.

The crew of the other ship saw this and let out a gasp. None could believe what they just witnessed. The captain, slipping back into his 'innocent' persona said, "Now, now lads, there be no need for aggression. These fine people certainly mean us no harm."

Paul slowly lowered the blade and the man climbed back to his own vessel. He would most likely pay dearly for his misadventure later, but there was nothing that could be done about that now. Paul had spared him and that was all they could do.

The pirate captain said "Yours certainly is a vessel full of great wonders, Captain. My hat goes off to you." With that, he removed his hat and in a grand gesture, swept it around in a fancy bow.

Jack returned the gesture in hopes of defusing a bad situation. The pirate captain then said "Captain, might I interest you in a quiet conversation, away from our crews?"

Not liking it one bit, but afraid to say no, Jack said "I suppose that would be acceptable Captain."

Turning to Paul he said "Keep an eye on everyone. I'm going to try to get him over here, but if I have to join him on his ship, it could get ugly. Hopefully, you won't have to come after me on a rescue mission."

Nodding, Paul said "Certainly Captain. I shall endeavor to follow your wishes."

Jack had a slight grin at Paul for so easily falling into the role expected of him by the crew of the other ship. Turning back to the other ship, he said "Captain, might I invite you over to my vessel for our parlay? Since I have the lesser crew, you should feel perfectly safe here. We can remain at the aft deck where no one can hear us, if you like."

The pirate captain rubbed his beard, obviously considering the pros and cons of the situation. Finally, he satisfied himself that he could see no problems with it, so he agreed. Jack quietly breathed a sigh of relief. The captain climbed over to Jack's boat and strolled to the rear of the deck. He looked around, not recognizing most of the items he saw.

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Jack walked briskly back to the meeting with the pirate captain. When he got there, he said “Captain, let us dispense with the formalities since it is just the two of us. My name is Captain Jack Murphy, but please call me Jack.”

The pirate considered this a moment, and said “Then by all means you may call me William, although never in front of my crew. To my crew I am Captain MacGreggor.”

“Fair enough’ said Jack.

William said “Jack, I couldn’t help but have the opinion that with the size of my crew and your fancy rapid-shot guns, not to mention that amazing edge your first mate has on his blade, the two of us could pool our resources and enter into an accord that would assure mutual wealth.”

Jack sat back and considered this a moment. He had to get away from this pirate and figure out what was wrong with his time machine, then make his exit. He was still a few hundred years short of his goal and had not even had the chance to look at the display to see ‘when’ he was.

He decided that it would be best to just go along with him for the moment. He had no idea how he would keep the fact from notice that there were only four of them, one of which had more of the appearance of a ghost than a person, if they were to enter into any sort of battle. Finally he said “I had not intended to join with anyone, and certainly shall not join on any sort of permanent basis. However, I am willing to see how we do together. Shall we say a fifty, fifty split of the outcome of our venture?”

“Well now fifty, fifty doesn’t seem quite fair to me, since I have to share it with many more people. What say you to ten percent for the each of us with the rest divvied up between our pair of crews? How big is your crew, anyway?”

“It is plenty big enough to get the job done, whatever that job may be.”

“Okay then, fair enough. I can certainly see your quest for secrecy, what with all these unusual devices you have scattered about your vessel.” He paused before continuing with a huge smile on his face saying “I happen to know of a great treasure three days

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sail from here. It is too much for my crew alone, but with your assistance, it would suddenly seem that same vast treasure be ours for the taking.”

Jack stood up and thrust his hand forward and shook William’s hand. He said “I shall follow you for three days then. Upon reaching our destination, I hope to have a few more details.”

“Have them you shall, Captain Murphy.” He then made his exit, strolling back across the deck and made a hasty climb to his own ship.

Jack walked back to the bridge and positioned the boat behind the pirate ship, noticing for the first time the name of the ship, ‘Queen Mary's Dagger’.

He said “It would seem we have become pirates in league with that other ship, at least for the next three days. Hopefully, we will be able to make our exit sometime between now and three days from now. Otherwise, we’ll be involved in a heist.”

Suzie said “Shame on you, you big Pirate!” She then laughed. Her laughter got them all laughing.

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## The Heist

For three long days they followed the pirate ship. With nothing better to do, Paul made good use of the time reading. Jack spent his time trying to figure out what was wrong with the time circuits. Janet enjoyed the time relaxing in the tropical sun with Suzie.

At one point in their three day crawl to the heist they somehow found themselves involved in, Paul said “Jack, I am really sorry I got us into all this. I mean, we have something we are supposed to be doing, like finding that third disk back in my time, and here we are creeping about with dinosaurs, and now pirates. If I had just kept my mouth shut about the dinosaurs, we wouldn’t be in this mess.”

Janet said “Paul, if you hadn’t got us into this, we wouldn’t have had nearly as much time together. These past days have been great! Granted, getting stuck in the past is rather frightening, but as long as we’re together, I for one, really don’t mind.”

“And, to be honest, I also have been having fun. Not only with you, but it has been quite a learning experience as well. Who would have thought that the world was so young? But aside from the adventure at hand, which I have to admit is truly exciting, I guess I’m just getting impatient to see what those disks are hiding.”

Jack said “We’ll get there, Paul. Remember, with this vessel, we can return and no time at all will have passed, other than from our perspective.” Settling back to a quiet wait, he continued “Besides, who knows how much opportunity for relaxation we’ll have once we do get back.”

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Suzie kept morale up in her usual perky manner. You never knew exactly what she was going to do or say next. One thing for sure, she certainly was not boring! One thing Jack had her do was during the three days of following the pirate ship, she would appear on deck each time as a different person. This way, the crew of the pirate ship wouldn't figure out that there were only four of them.

When left to her own devices at night, Suzie would take every opportunity to mess with the minds of the pirate crew. For example, every night at the change of the watch on the pirate ship, she would appear as a mermaid to them. She would remain in the water, but close enough to be seen. As soon as someone would spot her, she would slowly drop beneath the surface of the water and appear to swim away.

The crew members that saw her were utterly convinced that she was a real mermaid, even though she obviously made no splashes in the water. They all got into trouble with the captain who was convinced they were drinking rum while on duty.

Late into the third day, the pirate ship signaled Jack's boat for another meeting. Captain MacGreggor called for Jack to meet him on his vessel this time. There was no way he could refuse since the other captain had joined him upon their first meeting.

Jack pulled alongside and a rope ladder was thrown to him. He scrambled up the ladder pretty quickly for a man of his years. But then, a ship full of pirates in need of impressing was great motivation. Captain MacGreggor said "My crew tells me ye have quite a sizable crew Captain."

Jack said "As I said, we are adequate to get the job done. Speaking of which, shall we retire to a more suitable location to further discuss details?"

Captain MacGreggor said "By all means, please come with me." He led Jack to his stateroom where they would be alone. "Jack, I can't help but notice that you travel with a pair of women. Dreadful bit of bad luck, that. I would be more than happy to relieve you of either or both, if it strikes your fancy."

Fearing a confrontation he hoped to avoid, Jack said "One of the two ladies in question is betrothed to my first mate, and is a fine

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sailor herself. The other is a member of my crew, of whom I have no intention of losing, if ye catch my meaning.”

Jack’s claim of the betrothal of Janet and Paul was not too far from the truth, in his mind. They simply were unaware of what the word means. He would have to give them a ‘heads up’ so to speak, as well as an education of how things work in this century. Women were more looked upon as property and had no rights to speak of. They could own no property themselves and generally had few choices of profession.

Seeing the stern look on Jack’s face, the pirate responded “Well then, if that be your final word on the matter, I shall consider it closed. Now, about the matter at hand, the treasure I speak of is not far from here. Just over the horizon we will find a fortress. This fortress houses the booty of a fleet of ships bound for Spain with treasure, mostly gold trinkets and such. The fleet that brought said bounty sailed from the mainland of the southern continent. They became mired in a great storm and were feared lost. However, a few of them managed to limp here and the fortress agreed to hold the vast wealth for the King. Apparently, a second fleet has been dispatched from Spain, but has yet to arrive. All we need do is stroll in and help ourselves.”

Jack said “Just stroll in and help ourselves? That seems a bit vague for a plan, Captain. Do you have any details of the fortress?”

“Aye, as it turns out, I do. One of my crew members was held captive there for a time. He knows the layout rather well.” Walking over to a cabinet, William retrieved a document. “He drew this sketch of the interior.”

Jack took the drawing and studied it intently. According to the plan, the treasure was stored in a room that had every appearance of being accessible to them with little effort. He said “How many guards are patrolling regularly?”

“Normally, there would be six at any given time. However, since they acquired this treasure to watch over, they have tripled the guard. Getting it isn’t the problem. Getting it and getting away is the problem. They have a fast ship stationed here. It is rumored to be even faster than mine. And with my vessel heavy laden, I won’t

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stand a chance. What we need is a diversion. How fast did you say that ship of yours can sail?”

Jack said “Actually, I don’t recall saying. But, I suppose I could provide a diversion. I also know of a place you can hide your vessel for a few days while things cool off.” Jack rummaged through the pirate’s charts and found one that showed his island. His castle would not be there yet, but the island should not be inhabited, either.

He pointed to the island and said “This island has a natural harbor that is well secluded, backed by a cliff with a grand view of the surrounding area. The cliff also has a cave system, if you feel the need to lighten the load for a few days.”

William said “Will ye be joining us at this wee island?”

“No, I fear not. I am due to a series of appointments well to the north of here. I was on my way when we encountered each other three days ago. Once done with this adventure, we must part ways.” Jack thought a moment, then said “William, please allow me to return to my vessel where I can think on these matters more. I shall return in an hour and we can finalize our plans. Perhaps I will have a way to provide that needed distraction for the guards.”

“One hour then” said William. He led Jack back to his boat and waited.

Jack quickly entered his bridge area and his crew followed. He said “Captain MacGreggor plans to steal a treasure from a fort just over the horizon. It is apparently South American gold looted from the locals there. The fleet transporting it was damaged in a storm and they are waiting for a replacement fleet. We are to provide a distraction for him while he breaks in and steals the gold. Any ideas anyone? Suzie, could you check the history of the gold we are looking at?”

“Aye, aye, Captain, sir” she said with a smile. After a few seconds she said “Bear in mind I am somewhat limited due to the lack of an internet in this century. However, in my database exists an encyclopedia of sorts. The only thing I can find is a treasure from South America that was lost in a hurricane. The ships were never heard from and the treasure never showed up again.”

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“Interesting. Maybe our captain over there has a few facts wrong and the treasure is already lost. I have an idea. I’ll tell the pirates that we can go in tomorrow disguised as a merchant vessel. We’ll borrow a flag from him, I’m sure he has several, and try to get a look at the inside of the fort. Suzie, how would you like to be a wealthy merchant’s wife?”

Suzie immediately changed back into the fancy dress she had on when they first arrived here. She said, will this work?”

Jack said “I don’t see why not. I may not look quite the part, though.”

Paul said “That might work, if you can get Captain MacGreggor to agree to it. And, don’t worry, Jack. Everyone’s eyes will be on Suzie, I’m sure.”

Jack said “There is one other thing. The captain asked about both women. Paul, Janet, I told him the two of you were betrothed.” Turning to Janet, he continued “Paul may have an idea what that means, based on our subterranean adventures that now seem like a lifetime ago, but you may need a quick education.

“Betrothed means to be engaged to be married. In this time, and every time I have visited, as well as my own, men and women would generally marry each other. This means they would commit to each other exclusively, and share their lives with each other, perhaps raising a family. I know that is a rather simplified explanation, but I must be getting back to the pirate ship. I will explain more later if you need me to. But, if it should come up in conversation, I want you to be prepared.”

As Jack made his way back to the pirate ship, Suzie wandered onto the deck. It was quickly obvious that Paul was right. Every pirate’s eyes were on her, including Captain MacGreggor’s. The pirate captain smiled as he said “I see you came up with a proper diversion after all Captain.”

Jack said “I may have, indeed. I am thinking we should go in tomorrow dressed as a merchant vessel carrying a wealthy passenger. You may have noticed my crew member on the deck. Your crew certainly has.”

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“Aye, how could I miss her? Ye may have something there after all. But, your lack of sails will start them to asking questions. Questions I have been wondering about myself, but have been much too polite to inquire of.”

Jack said “Yes, well, it is not something I can readily speak of. However, I fear you are right. Perhaps I can borrow an old sail, preferably one that is greatly torn. I shall rig it so as to give the appearance of a ship that was damaged in a storm, or an encounter with other independent minded vessels, if ye get my meaning. It shall look like the mast was lost and we are limping into port in search of repairs. How can they turn us away?”

“With one as fair as your female crew member on deck upon your arrival, they certainly will not refuse you a safe berthing.”

“It is my desire to get inside the fortress myself and have a look around, perhaps inquiring about a place to store my cargo while repairs are made.”

“Aye, that may just work. After dark, I and a few of my men will meet you on the deck of your ship to discuss what you have found.”

Jack said “I do believe we have an accord, sir.” He rose and shook the pirate’s hand, then turned and strode out of the room. The pirates were still enthralled with Suzie, who was pleased with all the attention, so he made it back to his boat virtually unseen. He thought to himself “I can certainly see why they considered women to be bad luck on ships.”

Shortly after he set foot on his boat, Jack saw two crew men from the pirate ship carrying what could only have been the tattered sail he asked for. They deposited it on his deck and asked if they could be of assistance, obviously feeling so generous in order to get closer to Suzie.

He agreed and they rigged the sail in a way that it would catch a bit of wind and look as if they were a sailing ship that was in distress. Jack wanted to arrive as early in the morning as he could, so he started out right away.

In no time at all, they spotted the island with the fortress and headed in that direction. Suzie remained on deck, dressed in the

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highest European fashion of the day. Hopefully, the men of the fort would be just as enthralled.

They maneuvered the boat into the harbor as slowly as they could manage. The look of the vessel made it obvious that they were in distress. They made their way to the dock and were met by the harbor master. He had a look about him that said he wanted them to be somewhere else, that is until he spotted Suzie. He simply could not send her away; it would be unheard of to send away a lady in distress and he could never forgive himself if something evil happened to her.

Suzie, knowing that this was a Spanish fort and not everyone on board spoke Spanish, decided to try for English. To accomplish this, she spoke very poor Spanish with a thick French accent to the harbor master. He had no idea what she said, so she switched to English. Able to converse in English, it was settled. Even though they were flying a Spanish flag, they would speak English, thanks to Suzie.

She said “We are ever so glad to find your cute little island here. We have been making such poor time since that dreadful storm damaged our boat. I do hope you can accommodate us for a few days?” Before waiting for an answer, she strolled off the ship onto the dock. She had to be careful to remain ‘unassisted’, which was certainly unusual. She took several steps past the harbor master, who had no idea how to handle the situation, before turning around and asking “Which way to your hotel?”

The harbor master regained control of his ability to speak and said “Madam, we have no hotel.”

“No hotel? Wherever shall I rest my weary head?”

“I shall personally escort you to the fort, if you like. They may be able to accommodate you for a few nights while repairs are made to your vessel.”

Jack and Paul left Janet in charge, disguised as best as she could as a man. She was well armed, though. If someone tried something, she would be able to defend herself, if need be. Paul was not happy about leaving her behind, but someone had to stay and the two of them were better suited to do a recon of the fort.

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Suzie turned her head and said to Jack and Paul “Come along gentlemen. You will need to know where to bring my luggage later.”

The four of them made their way to the fortress, with the harbor master in the lead. Jack was impressed. So far, it had gone much better than could be expected. When they got inside, the officer in charge had no problem giving Suzie a room for a few days. He led them to a room that was obviously an officer’s quarters. Someone would not have a bed tonight. But, in those days, chivalry was not yet dead.

Much louder than was strictly necessary, Suzie instructed Jack and Paul to have her luggage transferred to her room as soon as possible. She then went inside to wait for their return.

Jack and Paul made their exit and Jack said to the guard on the way out “Her highness shall get her luggage when we are good and ready to bring it! It has not been a fun journey these past days with a crippled ship and a spoiled child in the guise of a lady on board.”

Satisfied that they now had some hours before anyone would become suspicious, they made their way back to the boat. Janet was still there, unmolested. Apparently, all eyes were on Suzie and the speculation of where she might be later in the evening.

Little did they know, but Suzie had already disappeared. She took the form of an off duty guard and set about exploring the fortress. She made her way through the fortress with no problem. Everywhere she went, she overheard people talking about the lady who suddenly showed up on the crippled boat. She learned the layout in no time, finding that the story about the gold was only partially true. There was a treasure, but the pirate ship could easily hold all of it in one trip, if need be.

Satisfied that she knew enough, she made her way back to her room, did a quick change in its ensuing privacy where no one could observe her transformation and stormed out of the room. She headed straight for the fort’s gate, where she muttered something to the guard about inept help these days and continued on to the boat. The guard merely smiled, thinking of what Jack had said to him. She boarded the boat and the four of them went inside to talk

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things over. Suzie said “That was fun, Jack! We should do it again sometime.”

“Suzie, contrary to what has transpired these past three days, we are not pirates, nor will we become pirates. And, as soon as we can get away from everyone, we are jumping out of here.”

Janet heard footsteps on the deck and said “Someone’s coming”

There was a knock at the door and when Jack opened it, William stood there smiling. “Captain Murphy, I could not have asked for a better diversion. While you were making like a sick puppy, we were able to get in, get much of the gold and get back out, although there was a bit left that we could not get to, but no need to be greedy, eh? This small chest represents your share, as promised. I had to estimate the number of crew, based on the numbers my crew counted, but it is in there as well. I shall take my leave now and perhaps our paths shall cross again. I shall certainly welcome it, sir.”

“And I, too” said Jack. “Thank you. Although, I must say that I am a bit surprised at the desired outcome arriving in such rapid fashion.”

“I must confess, I was planning to not go through with it, but when I saw your clever disguise as well as my crew’s reaction to your female crew mate, how could I resist?” Captain MacGreggor made his way off of the tiny ship and to the astonishment of the men on shore, Jack headed slowly back out to sea.

Janet said “His crew must have gotten in there somehow, before Suzie had her look around. That gold she saw must have been the bit left over.”

Suzie said “If that was the little bit they left behind, then we certainly did not get nearly our fair share.”

Jack said “We were not doing this for reasons of profit, but merely looking for means of escape so we can get back home without causing a stir. I fear we may have done worse by helping them as much as we did. I actually had no intentions of following through. Perhaps Captain MacGreggor knew that.” Once out of

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sight of the island, he said. "Should we take a vote on what to do now?"

"What are our options?" asked Paul. "I for one am eager to get back to my time and to our mysterious disks and their messages."

"Now that we are free of pirates, we need to find a place to take a look at the time circuits and determine why we still are not home."

Suzie said "I have given that some thought, Jack. When we jumped from the land with the dinosaurs, we had no sea water. So, we made do with what we had. The result was only jumping a short distance through time, landing in that violent storm, which Paul claims to be the great flood mentioned in the Bible he is reading. It certainly is plausible.

"However, we had to jump out so quickly that the machine was not fully recovered and as a result, we did not make it all the way home, but stopped here. I think if we check the log, we will see that the power was not at 100%."

Jack began looking at the log as soon as Suzie mentioned it. From what he could tell, she was correct. He said "It looks to me as if you're right, Suzie. I guess we can try a final jump home now, if that's what everyone wants."

Thinking about their situation a bit further, Paul said "Jack, let's go back to your castle and get a plan of action together. A night in a good bed might do us all some good. It has been a rather eventful week!" Everyone seemed in agreement, so Jack made the jump.

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## Home Again

This time when they made the jump, no one was nearby. They had no way of knowing at what point in time they had landed until Suzie said “Jack, I’m picking up signals in the atmosphere that would indicate that we are at least close. If you come to a complete stop and hold it steady for a few moments, I can use your satellite dish on the roof to link to the internet for the current date.”

Jack brought the boat to a halt and waited. Suzie stood motionless for a few seconds, then said “Yes, we made it. It’s actually only a few minutes after we left.”

Everyone breathed a big sigh of relief. Jack said “Suzie, remind me to rig an extra seawater tank to the boat somewhere for emergencies like this last one. Also, a cradle that deploys in the absence of water would be equally ingenious.”

As it turned out, they were only a leisurely day’s travel to Destiny. They made their way to Jack’s castle in no time. Everyone was eager to get off the boat. As they entered Jack’s protected harbor, Jack felt as if something was somehow different there this time. He couldn’t quite put his finger on it so, as he docked the boat, he took a moment to slowly look around. Coming up with nothing in particular out of place, he shrugged it off and followed the rest of the group as they climbed into the hovercraft for the short trip to the castle on top of the ridge. Jack and Paul carried the chest that Captain MacGreggor called small. After lifting it, small suddenly seemed like the wrong word to them.

They parked the hovercraft in the courtyard as before, then trudged inside, each weary from the huge adventure of the past

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week. Janet was the first one to voice what they all felt, saying "Wow, what a week! It's hard to imagine that when we left here, we would experience everything we have this past week!"

Jack said "You get used to it, I suppose. I had, but obviously I am out of practice these past ten years. But what is really strange and difficult to get your head wrapped around is that when we left a week ago, by the calendar here, it has not even been a day."

Everyone seemed overly tired, so they all wandered off their separate ways to relax. Paul went to the library to read some more. Janet joined him, but curled up in a big leather arm chair and took a nap.

Suzie said "Well Jack, What are you going to do?"

He said "Actually, I am thinking of taking a walk. Would you like to join me?"

"Sure! A walk might be interesting." They went back out the gate and crossed the drawbridge. Jack triggered it to close from the hidden switch, then continued walking the path to the lagoon.

When they were about half way down, he turned left and found the entrance to the cave system this island had. Suddenly remembering what was bothering him, he said "I mentioned to Captain MacGreggor that this island had a cave system and a natural harbor to shelter in if he needed a place to hide for a few days. I thought it might be a good idea to explore it again."

Suzie said "Maybe he put the rest of his gold here, Jack."

"My thoughts exactly" he said smiling. They entered the cave and Jack paused to shine his flashlight everywhere before continuing. They made their way to the rear of the cavern where Jack knew was a passage to another large cavern deeper in the cave system.

However, instead of a natural cave entrance, the hole Jack was familiar with was now blocked by a massive door, constructed out of what appeared to be oak ship timbers. His curiosity peaked, Jack examined the door. He said "Suzie, would you be so kind as to poke your head through to the other side to see if there are any booby traps over there?"

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“Sure thing, Jack” she said. “But, if it’s total darkness, I may not be able to tell.” She stuck her head through the center of the door and after a few seconds, pulled it back out. “Sorry Jack, I can’t see a thing. It’s total darkness, as I feared.”

They turned back and exited the cave. Jack said “Maybe we should go get Paul and Janet. The four of us seem to work well together.”

They set off back up the path to the castle on top of the hill. Entering the library, Jack said “Guys, I have another quick adventure for us, if you feel up to it. We don’t even have to leave the island this time.”

Janet popped her head up having just awakened from her brief nap. She said “Sure, Jack. Why not?”

Paul set his book down and joined them too. He said “What’s one more adventure among friends? But I have to warn you, Jack. I’m going to need another of your famous steaks when we’re done.” Jack got a chuckle out of this, remembering how Paul used to be a vegetarian.

He led them back to the cave, explaining along the way that the cave was different before their trip back in time. Now, all of a sudden there was a door in place of the cave entrance at the rear of the first cavern.

Paul examined the door and its lock. As the archaeologist of the group, his opinion mattered. “I agree” he said. “This could easily have come from the era we just visited. It would seem that Captain MacGreggor paid attention when you mentioned this island.”

Jack said “I can’t imagine any sort of booby trap that could have been conceived of in the seventeenth century that would affect this lock’s mechanism. I think it’s safe to try to pick it or just break it off. What do you think?”

“I agree. It should be safe enough.”

Jack took a crow bar and with both of them applying force, the lock failed after only a handful of seconds. Jack removed the lock’s remains and cautiously opened the door. He said “The floor looks different here. I’ll bet a pit trap has been dug.” He started feeling

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around the floor, and smiling, came up with the corner of a flimsy board that had been broken by someone, possibly another pirate. He stood at the edge of the pit looking into it and saw what could have been bones. Apparently, the trap worked at least once in the past.

He went back outside and retrieved a few lengths of lumber from his wood shop in the castle. Returning, he placed the lengths over the hole and they walked forward. Jack remained in the lead because of his knowledge of the cave's natural state. However, they traversed the length of the cave and found no other anomalies. At the end of the passage, just where Jack expected to see the entrance to the next cavern, there was another massive oak door, constructed much as the first door. This one, however, did not have a lock on it. Jack opened it slowly and breathed a sigh of relief at having made it.

Once inside, he was shocked. Lining the walls of the cavern were many shelves containing all the 'trinkets' from the pirate booty. In addition to the somewhat expected treasure, it appeared that someone had lived here for quite a while. Jack had to wonder if Captain MacGreggor lived here himself, or, if he had shared that bit of knowledge with someone else who managed to live here.

The cavern was set up with a bed, chest of drawers, table, chair and a desk. Walking over to the desk, Paul said "Come look at this, Jack."

Paul had discovered a letter on the desk. He said "Jack, I think this letter is addressed to you. It appears as if he wrote it just prior to his death."

Jack picked up the ancient parchment and read aloud:

*To the only other person with  
knowledge of this cave, Captain  
Jack Murphy,*

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*I have thought of you often these many long years I have been here on this island. After we parted company, I found myself being pursued by the fleet that arrived for the gold. To be sure, it arrived mere hours after your departure. I took your advice and fled to this island to secure my treasure before the encounter with the fleet. However, as chance would have it, a great storm whipped up and tossed my ship about, finally coming to rest on its side in the harbour you mentioned.*

*My crew all perished in the storm, my ship was gone and my treasure was scattered on the floor of the harbour. As fortune would*

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*have it, the harbour was both deep enough for a ship, as you stated, but shallow enough for me to gather the treasure over the years. To be honest, I had no other occupation left to me.*

*It took me three years to gather the treasure and another year to completely remove the remains of my lost ship. After that I had all but given up hope of a rescue. I can see why you thought this would be a safe island to hide on as not one person has come near in the many long years I have resided here.*

*I was hoping you would come by in that fantastic vessel of yours, but I have come to the conclusion that the same storm that got me*

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*must have gotten you as well. I suppose this letter is more for me than you, since the chances of you still being alive are slim indeed.*

*This treasure has come to haunt me. I am the wealthiest man in the world and yet I am completely alone. I am surrounded by vast wealth and would trade it all for an hour's company with another person. Any person would do, but I find myself thinking of you and our brief friendship more and more these days. Surely, my time on this earth is drawing to a close soon and I felt I must leave this letter for you, or whoever finds it.*

*I have but one request. As I write this, I find myself thinking*

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*of the people who lost this treasure. Perhaps someday it will find its way back to them. Maybe then, I shall be able to rest in peace.*

*Sincerely,*

*Capt. William MacGreggor*

Janet was the first to speak “We should do something. Maybe we can find out who lost this treasure and get it back to them somehow.”

Jack said “I am more and more convinced that the treasure is the lost gold that was stolen from the Incas by the Spaniards. Before we entered into the picture, it was lost then too. Now, it’s still officially lost, but we just happen to know where it is.”

“Jack, this is probably more your area than mine, but if memory serves, the Incas disappeared about the same time the gold was taken from them.” Paul’s forehead wrinkled as he appeared deep in thought about a group of people he wasn’t fully up to date on...a problem that seemed to happen more often since meeting Jack.

“Yes, I believe that’s the case. Who knows what really happened, but Janet’s right, we should do something. I suggest we contact the descendants of the Incas, now living in South America, scattered throughout the continent. We’ll have to do some research to figure out how to divide it up amongst them, but it should be in a museum. Maybe it will even survive until your time.”

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Paul said "I am okay with that. How about you Janet?"

"Yes, I like that idea."

Jack said "I wonder where Captain MacGreggor is? If he was dying here, I would have expected him to be in the bed here, or somewhere nearby."

Suzie said "I think I know. He apparently fell into his own trap and lies there still. There is nothing left but bones, but I have to assume it is him. From what I can tell, the body down there is about the right size to have been him. Although, with the door locked from the outside, there must have been another person here or another way out of this cave."

"I don't know of another exit to the cave, but he had much more time to explore it than I have" said Jack. "Maybe once we get past this little adventure, and when we have solved the mystery of the disks in the ice back in the future, we'll have time to further explore this cave and figure it out. For now though, we can simply fill the hole in and put a marker on it with his name. The cave will be safer that way."

Janet said "I wonder what would have made a hardened criminal, such as a pirate, have such a change of heart?"

Paul, having continued to look around held up a book he had just found. He said "Perhaps he had a change of heart because of the only book he had to read. This is the same book I have been reading lately, thanks to Jack's fine collection of bound literary treasure in his castle. He had a Bible. And the page that it seems to easily fall open to, as if he kept coming back to it just happens to have this verse on it: 'Thou shalt not steal.'"

"He must have read it over and over and after years of isolation and only this Bible for company, his heart was able to change. I am finding this book to be an amazing work indeed!"

They spent the remainder of the day looking at each item while Suzie kept an inventory. By midnight, they had a general idea of what all was there, along with pictures of each item, thanks to Suzie's talents.

They made one other discovery in the cave. The doors as well as the shelves that held the gold 'trinkets,' as Captain MacGreggor

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called them were made from timbers of his ship. Behind one of the shelves, hanging on the wall, but blocked by a clutter of items was the plank of the ship that had the ship's name on it: Queen Mary's Dagger.

The next day Paul, Janet and Suzie continued their investigation of the artifacts in the cave. Jack spent the day searching the internet for a suitable museum to make the rather sizable donation to.

What he ended up doing was making an anonymous posting on a website pertaining to the Native Arts of South America. Attaching a newly created email address to the posting, he sat back to see what happened. What he said was more or less that he had inherited a sizable collection of Pre-Columbian Native American Art and was considering a donation to a reputable museum.

In less than an hour, he had been contacted by quite a few museums, several of which were in South America. He responded to the South American museums and managed to set up a meeting for the following Monday. All the museums would send a representative to the meeting, which would be held on The Bahamian Island named Destiny. Jack would pick them up in Nassau and transport them to his castle. Once there, they would finally get to see what he had.

Jack got up from his computer and yawned. It had taken him the better part of the day to make the arrangements. Monday may be only a week away, but for a man with resources such as Jack, Monday could be postponed as long as he wanted it to be. He would have to make certain to write himself a note, lest he forget.

He was just heading for the kitchen and a snack when Paul came in. Janet and Suzie followed in an animated conversation about women's fashions.

Jack said "I think I've settled the problem with the ill gotten gold. I have representatives from several museums in South America coming next Monday. I plan to donate it to the lot of them, equally divided, of course."

Smiling, Paul said "That sounds like a reasonable solution to me."

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Jack said “Monday is a week away, assuming we stay put in this time for a while. We can get this behind us now, or, I can deal with it later, if you like. We still have the matter of the mysterious holographic messages to deal with back in your time.”

Paul said “I’ve been thinking of them a lot recently. Maybe you’re right we should go back to our time and try to figure out what’s going on there.”

“Okay then, if everyone is in agreement, we can leave in the morning.”

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## Return to Harmony

The next morning, they headed back out to sea and made the jump to the future. Jack set the date for the morning after Janet left Harmony with Jack and Paul, then got them as fast as he could to the Chesapeake Bay, leaving the boat in the same place as before.

The four of them returned to Harmony so they could get properly outfitted for yet another arctic expedition. To get past the fact that Janet had already closed the original dig site, Paul suggested “Janet, I know the original site was closed. So, to avoid anyone poking their noses in on us, perhaps we should go for the lighthouse this time. It’s right where we want to be and will show up as a different site to the bean counters.”

“Sure, I can do that” said Janet. “In fact, that might just be a great idea. Hopefully, no one will have an interest in such a building, or they may try to join us. I would rather avoid that, if possible.”

Paul said “Jack, we probably have a few days before everything is ready to go. Do you want to head back to Freedom Base?”

Suzie spoke up and said “Actually, I seem to remember Janet saying she could get me a new travel case with updates and such. Once we have it in hand, I will need to be transferred back to the mainframe I lived in for all those years and then we can move me into the new case. Hopefully, it will be my last move. I love the freedom I have been experiencing in this case, but it does limit my functions a bit.” She smiled before continuing “I imagine it’s somewhat like wearing clothes that don’t fit properly.”

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“Maybe we should go there first and then head back to my place and get Suzie settled in her new case” suggested Jack. “Then we could continue preparing for the next dig.” They walked the short distance to the government complex and Janet’s office. It was a beautiful sunny day for the walk and they arrived in no time at all.

“It will only take me a minute or two to get the new dig started since we have the same coordinates to use as the other dig site. Once I get that process started, we can get the case and head back to your home, Jack. My computer will contact me when the final signatures are in place.” Janet typed as she spoke. After a few minutes, she said “Okay, all set.”

Suzie said “Now that the new site’s paperwork has been started, I would love to see my new case. I am rather eager to try it out, if you can get it easily enough.”

“Certainly, give me a moment to locate one not currently in use.” She inquired on her computer terminal and discovered that there was an empty case in that very building. “There’s one right here in this building. We can stop and get it on our way out.” She stood up and walked around her desk to the door. “Shall we go?”

She led the way to the next floor up. Once past the last office, she found the correct storage room and located Suzie’s new travel case. Suzie smiled like a child getting a gift and clapped her hands “This is exciting! I can’t wait to see how it fits!”

Everyone got a chuckle at Suzie’s enthusiasm as they left the storage area. They rode the elevator to the ground floor and with Janet in the lead, walked out the front door. Once outside, Jack said “Shall we all head back to my place? Janet, you are in for a big surprise.”

“Again? I don’t know how many more surprises I can take from you, Jack.” She let out a little chuckle and said “We should get going before people start to ask too many questions and I get us in trouble. It isn’t normal for this many civilians to be just hanging around here.”

As they walked back to the gate to retrieve Jack’s hovercraft, Janet and Paul stayed a few steps behind and walked hand in hand. They must have picked up that little gesture somewhere in the past,

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because in this strange world a thousand years in the future, it simply wasn't done. People pretty much kept their distance from each other.

Jack couldn't help but notice how much Janet seemed to be changing since she and Paul discovered that they both had feelings for each other. Paul had changed as well, but the changes in Janet were a bit more obvious for some reason.

He said nothing but was quietly amused at their actions. Especially the fact that they seemed oblivious to the open stares they were receiving from other people they passed. The two groups of people, government employees and civilians, were so radically different in this society that one glance was all it generally took to tell which group certain people belonged in. However, with Paul and Janet these days, you simply could no longer tell.

They made it to Jack's hovercraft with no encounters from curious people other than stares. Jack drove them slowly to his underground lair. He noticed that Janet was actually looking at the scenery as they drove. He kept his speed down more for her benefit than any desire to drive slowly.

At one point she said "You know, I never really noticed the trees and wildlife and such when traveling outside the city. It always seemed so dirty and unkempt to me. Now that I have been on our little adventure through time and experienced what I have recently, it's like I am seeing the world for the first time. And it is beautiful!"

Paul said "I agree it is a beautiful world. And for some reason, it seems even more beautiful these days."

Jack said nothing but just kept driving. He had no problem playing the role of chauffeur to this young couple experiencing love for the first time. This world they lived in certainly could use some more love! Maybe these two will start a new trend. Their old way of doing things here was certainly unappealing.

Jack thought about this for a while. He found it odd that he, of all people would be having these kinds of thoughts. After all, he was a lifelong, confirmed bachelor. And these thoughts were those of someone in love. But certainly, Jack thought, it was too late for

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him in that regard. He shook his head to clear it and announced “We are approaching my place.”

Janet had a confused look on her face since she obviously recognized the area. It took her a minute to realize that Jack, being from the past, would not have a tracking chip implanted in his brain; so naturally, he would not have shown up when she was following Paul that day. She also realized that they had told her this, but with everything that had happened, she had simply forgotten. Finally, she said “Jack, where exactly is your place?”

“Right under our feet, to be honest.” He parked the hovercraft in its usual place and set up the solar charger. He then led them down the stairs to his underground home.

Right away he could tell something was wrong. The door leading into his home from the stairway was not broken down, but someone had certainly tried. It was also apparent that the electronic lock had been tampered with. It occurred to him that the underground city must have sent someone to his home looking for them. Hopefully, they had given up by now.

He tried to remember how many days or weeks it had been since he was here last, but couldn't. Then he had a thought. It actually might have been just a few days. Since he jumped back in time to just after the time they had left, it was possible only a few days had passed even though it had been much longer for Jack and his friends. He said “We'll have to be careful. Those military people from the underground city must be looking for us, and in their eyes it's only been a few days.”

Suzie said “Jack, let me go first before you open the door so I can see if they are actually there waiting for us to arrive. They may have been watching us on a monitor and know we're here.”

“That sounds like a good idea.”

Suzie smiled at them, raised her hands over her head and snapped her fingers. In an instant, she was wearing a black commando style uniform, complete with blackened face paint. She then crouched low and poked her head through the door. Seeing nothing, she entered and looked around. She decided to go further in just to be sure no one was there, so she stood up and walked

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down the long hallway toward the back of this level in the direction of Jack's workshop.

When she entered the workshop, she was shocked to discover two men, Shultz and his large companion from the underground city, waiting for them. The large man was armed with some advanced style of weapon she was unfamiliar with. He pulled the trigger and a beam of light passed right through her.

Putting her hands on her hips and adopting a stern look on her face, she said "Now boys, that's just rude! You really should learn to play nice." The two men were so stunned that their weapon had no affect on her that they tried to run. When they saw the walls, they turned and ran right into each other, knocking each other out cold.

Suzie returned to the door and poked her head through it, scaring Paul again. She laughed and said "Paul, it really never gets old, does it?"

Paul laughed and said "No, I suppose it doesn't."

They all laughed until Suzie said "Jack, we have two intruders in the workshop. They knocked themselves out when their gun was ineffective on me." They all hurried back to the workshop where Shultz was just coming around. Suzie's uniform looked much like his, but with the rank of Captain. She mimicked his weapon, pointing it at him. He saw her and almost fainted. She said "Shultz, may I ask you a question?"

Nervously he said "Ummm, yes ma'am, I suppose you can."

She said "Why are the two of you here bothering us? And, how many more of you are there in our levels of the base?"

Shultz began sweating profusely and said "There is no one else, just the two of us! Honest! We got into so much trouble after losing you that we decided to find you on our own or our lives would be miserable forever."

"Well, it would seem that you have found us. Now, why did you shoot me? I did not enjoy it one bit!" Jack watched this whole exchange trying not to laugh. He knew Suzie was thoroughly enjoying this little role she had adopted for herself.

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Shultz, nearly in tears said “He shot you, I didn’t. Shoot him, he doesn’t like me anyway!”

His companion woke up in time to hear Shultz tell Suzie to shoot him. He said nothing, but simply waited for the right moment, glaring at his partner and thinking “*Shultz would get his, that was for sure.*” He was right about one thing; he certainly did not like him, especially after hearing him tell someone to shoot him!

Jack noticed that they were both awake now and said “Perhaps we should make these two people feel more at home. Paul, do you remember where the gas mask is laying on the stand in the hallway?”

“Yes, why do you ask?”

“In the drawer beneath it you will find two pairs of handcuffs. Please bring them here.” Paul retrieved the cuffs and Jack locked the two together, facing each other with their arms around a pole. There was no way they could get loose.

Suzie smiled at them and said “Be nice, boys” and walked out of the room.

They reconvened in the living room. Janet said “Jack, you certainly said a mouthful when you said I was in for a surprise!”

“I didn’t exactly expect them to be here, if that’s what you mean.”

“I should hope not!” Janet said. “However, this home of yours is incredible! Who would have thought it was under all those ruins up there?”

Paul said “You haven’t seen anything, Janet. The rest is even more amazing!”

Suzie spoke up and said “I hate to be the pest, but can we do my transfer now? I am itching to get into that new case of yours!”

“Sure Suzie, no problem” said Jack. Turning to Janet, he said “This is your case. What do we need to know, if anything before we start?”

Janet said “This case is designed to house a modern hologram as well as a complete back up copy of itself. There should be plenty of room for you Suzie. I mean no offense, but you are several hundred years old, correct?”

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“Yes. I would imagine my program is considerably smaller than those of today’s world.”

Jack hooked up the connections so Suzie could move back into her original mainframe. Once there, she materialized as the default military man she always reverted to, before jumping over into Janet’s case.

She materialized as herself this time, dressed in a frilly pink party dress. She said “Wow, I have never booted up in my own form before. I usually have to change from that boring g-man. This is really cool! And Janet, you were right. There is plenty of room for a back up as well as another complete program like mine and its back up as well! Thanks!”

Jack said “What should I do with this old case?”

Suzie said “Why not hang onto it, just in case this system fails or there are other issues we haven’t discovered yet. I would hate to find out we needed it and had no access to it.”

Paul said “Jack, we should probably arm ourselves before we check out the rest of the complex just to be sure those two clowns really are alone.”

“Good idea” said Jack. Paul picked up Jack’s hunting rifle, which was actually a military rifle, and began a room by room search.

It took them hours to search the whole complex, including the warehouse, which Janet still could not believe. Satisfied that the two men were telling the truth, they still faced a problem. What should they do with them?

Suzie said “Why not just take them back to the town and present them to the ladies in charge there? We can politely ask them to leave us alone and then leave ourselves. We are, after all, going back to the ice soon, right?”

Jack said “Yes, but I didn’t want to abandon this place for good. Even though I plan to live in my own time, I would like this place to be an option. And besides, Paul and Janet may need it someday.”

Paul said “Good point, Jack. But, Suzie may have something there. When those guys shot her, they were amazed that she was

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still alive. Much like I would have been a few weeks ago. They obviously have never seen a hologram before either.”

Janet said “Yes but those ladies, as Suzie calls them, who are in charge may have. Remember, I have seen them before. Their society may be like ours in that the two sides are kept apart.”

Suzie said “There is only one way to find out.”

Jack said “Well, we have to do something with them, why not?”

## Cave Town

Jack said “Before we do anything crazy, I suggest we do a little recon. Suzie, you are probably the best suited for this task. I suggest we go down to the cave town under us to see what we can find out. You can blend into their society like you did before and I will remain close by, but try to stay out of sight. Hopefully, these two soldiers were acting on their own, like they said, and we can simply stash them somewhere safe until we have time to deal with them.”

Suzie said “How about I go alone so you guys won’t arouse suspicion.”

Turning to look at Janet, Paul asked “She can’t possibly project herself that far, through all this rock, can she?”

“Although I don’t yet know the full range of my mobility,” interjected Suzie, “I would have to agree. However, one thing you may not know is that this new case really does allow me freedom of movement. Watch this!” She walked over to the case in question and reached down and picked it up just like anyone else would have, then proceeded to walk away with it! She continued “It would seem that my mobility should no longer be an issue.” She returned and sat the case back down. “Janet, this is really cool! Thank you so much for my new-found freedom!”

Janet said “You are certainly welcome. I thought you might like it. It has many functions that I am unaware of as well. I’m sure you’ll have fun finding them all.”

Suzie said “Jack, with this new freedom of movement, I can go do a recon of the cave town all by myself. I’ll simply stash the case

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in the elevator, and see how much movement I have. If it comes in question, I'll find another hiding place for it."

"Well, I still don't like the idea of you going off on your own like this, but I have to agree it is the best option at the moment."

Smiling, Suzie said "Trust me, Jack."

Rolling his eyes, Jack said "Where have I heard that one before?"

Everyone had a great laugh, and Suzie made her way to the elevator. When she got there, she sat her case down, turned around with a grin and raising her arms in the air; she snapped her fingers and instantly changed into the uniform of the military personnel in the cave town beneath them.

She rode the elevator to the bottom as before and made her exit quietly. In order for her plan to work, she would need to approach the town without being seen.

She crept out of the elevator and silently made her way to the intersection that led to the lake. She found a crevice in the rock that made up the cavern that housed the lake and stashed her case there. Satisfied that it would remain unseen, she approached the lake.

Her thoughts were that if she were seen by the lake, she could simply appear to be taking a stroll by the water. She tried to look as casual as she could manage while slowly making her way to the town.

After walking around the near side of the lake, and thankful that her luck was holding out, she left the cavern that housed the lake and approached the town. She was nearly to the town when she was spotted by a group of male soldiers. Remembering what she had seen before, she instantly put on an expression that would make these poor guys cringe. "Just how long were you going to let me walk up here like this without so much as a challenge? You know we need to tighten up security around here!"

The three guys came to rigid attention. The senior of the three said "I'm very sorry ma'am. It most certainly will not happen again."

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“See that it doesn’t” she said while walking away. She walked as if she had a purpose in mind so the three men would not become suspicious about her. She walked toward the only building she had any experience with. She entered the building and made her way to the area she was near before. That particular area was full of female military personnel that were apparently either off duty or in a relaxed mode for some reason.

She walked around the large room appearing to mingle, but carefully avoiding everyone. She listened to the conversations around her for any sign of knowledge of the two men they were holding prisoner above in Freedom Base.

After two hours she still had heard nothing and was getting a bit antsy about being there, so she made her way out. She paused to consider how best to leave with no one seeing her. While thinking, she accidentally discovered one of those little ‘extra’ gifts her new case offered her. There was a recall function that would bring her projected self instantly back to the case. Looking around to ensure no one was watching, she utilized the recall function. Instantly, she was standing next to the case. She simply picked it up and returned to the elevator.

While rising to the primary level of Freedom Base, she contemplated the possibilities she now had with her new found freedom. The possibilities seemed endless! When the elevator doors opened, Jack, Paul and Janet were waiting with guns drawn and pointed at the doors. Adopting an innocent schoolgirl like manner, complete with a southern drawl, Suzie said “Easy guys, it’s just little ole me.”

Easily slipping into her newly adopted ‘rapid change pose’ Suzie snapped her fingers and returned to something more befitting her personality. She chose a pink skirt and frilly blouse with tennis shoes. Jack laughed and said “Are you sure you have never seen ‘I dream of Jeannie?’”

Paul and Janet gave him a strange look. Jack didn’t bother to explain. Instead he said “Did you find out anything about our two guests?”

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“It doesn’t look like they are aware of what these two guys were up to. I would suggest we simply lock them in the brig here and supply them with several days’ worth of MREs. There is already water piped into the cells, so there should be no worries.”

Janet said “What’s an ‘MRE’?”

Jack spoke up and said “MRE stands for ‘meal ready to eat’. There are cases of the stuff lying around here. I have never tried any of them, but understand that they last just about forever and are about as appetizing as soggy cardboard.”

Paul said “At least we won’t be starving them. I say we go for it. We need to get back on track with this dig.”

Again, Suzie adopted her change pose with a smile on her face, raised her hands in the air and snapped her fingers, instantly changing back into the outfit she was wearing when she encountered the intruders. She and Jack retrieved the two prisoners from the workshop where they had been handcuffed to a pole and escorted them down to the level that had a few jail cells, locking them in with enough MREs to last two weeks.

The two prisoners were so afraid of Suzie and the fact that their weapons had no effect on her that they said nothing on their way to the cells. Once locked in, they simply sat with their heads down in a very resigned pose. Apparently, in their world prisoners must be treated badly and they obviously anticipated such punishment here as well.

Suzie spoke up and said “Now you boys behave yourselves down here. We’re going to be leaving you alone for a few days, and have allowed for two weeks of meals for you. We plan to be gone only a few days at most, but it never hurts to be careful, wouldn’t you agree? While we are gone, I would like you to think about what you are doing here, why you came here to begin with, and what you would suggest we do with you.” She then turned and walked out without looking back.

Once out of earshot, Jack asked “Do you really think they’ll suggest a punishment for themselves?”

“Yes, I think they just might” said Suzie. “In their world, women are in charge and never questioned.”

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Jack said “Well, it certainly will be interesting to see what they come up with.” They made their way back to the living room where they had left Janet and Paul. They walked in and found the two of them in a quiet conversation and decided to leave them alone. Jack quietly made his way to the kitchen and began preparing steaks for everyone.

In no time at all, the smell and sound of steak cooking brought Paul and Janet out of their conversation. Paul said “I still can’t believe that we have lived our entire lives without eating meat. Even the smell of it cooking is wonderful!”

Janet’s personal communication device chirped just then and, after looking at it momentarily, she said “The dig is approved and ready to undertake whenever we are. I suggest we get an early start in the morning and head out as soon as we can to avoid someone else wanting to attach themselves to us.”

They ate in silence and got to bed early. The next morning, they set out for Harmony and prepared lists of equipment they would need. Janet arranged for it to be gathered and waiting for them when they arrived back at Harmony.

By the time they arrived, everything was ready for them. Jack parked his hovercraft in his usual place. Janet fell back into her role of government official with ease. She eventually drove everyone around her away so the small group of companions would have the opportunity to travel alone. They picked up the loaded government hovercraft and started out for the ice. Three short hours later, they were back where they started this adventure what seemed like years ago.

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## The Key

Suzie watched with fascination as the three of them fell into roles they obviously had been performing for a long time. Paul and Jack set up the camp while Janet got her gear together. The habitation modules set themselves up and required minimal effort to connect to each other. In no time at all the camp was set up in the same place as before. Janet said “Wow, that has to be some kind of record for setting up camp!”

Paul said “It helps greatly when the camp is being set up in a place that is already established. We didn’t have to level the ground or dig a pilot hole for the shaft. Besides, I think we are all a bit more motivated than before...not to mention being much more comfortable with each other now.”

Janet said “I suggest we split up this time. We need to show daily progress as usual or we will have a team of my fellow government people here wondering why. I suggest Jack and Suzie look for the third disk while Paul and I continue the dig for the lighthouse. We have enough of a head start already to justify a whole day, but I would like to get through to the lighthouse anyway. If we don’t, we may have repercussions later.”

Paul said “Actually, I think you need to remain in the control center for safety reasons as well as maintaining normal procedures. As you said, we don’t want to draw any undue attention to ourselves. Jack and I got far enough to the lighthouse before that we can easily make the rest of the tunnel while also searching for the third disk.” Nodding to his partner to indicate it was time to go, they made their way down the hole to the tunnels underneath.

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Once there, Jack proceeded back to the barn to search for the third disk while Paul recommenced melting the hole to the lighthouse.

Jack noticed once again that this barn was very unusual and in all rights should have fallen down many centuries ago. He couldn't help but wonder what it was that kept nagging at the back of his brain about it. Shaking it off, he concentrated on the disk. Smiling, he couldn't help but think of it as a hockey puck. *"Here I am under a bunch of ice in an old barn that shouldn't be here, looking for an 800 year old hockey puck. Am I nuts?"* he said to himself. Nevertheless, he began his search. "Who am I kidding?" he said to no one in particular. "I love this stuff!"

He made his way through the main area of the barn, saddened once again at the wanton destruction by the government people who were supposedly 'helping'. After more than an hour of searching, he found nothing new. He worked his way over to the trap door and the secret room underneath the barn's floor. Once again the lights came on as he descended the ladder. When he got to the bottom, he stepped off, turned around and just about jumped out of his skin.

Suzie was standing there smiling. Stifling a giggle, she said "Gotcha! Sorry Jack, but I couldn't resist. Paul has gotten used to me now and, like I said, that really never gets old."

"Come on Suzie, I'm an old man, you could have given me a heart attack!"

"I can read your vital signs just fine and you are perfectly healthy. Nice try, though."

"How did you get here anyway? I thought you couldn't go anywhere like that in your travel case."

"With my old case, I was very limited to what I could do. As you know, when loaded in the mainframe in Freedom Base, I could just pop into existence anywhere in the facility. As it turns out, I have similar freedom of movement in Janet's new case too."

"That could be very helpful." Thinking a moment, he said "Why then did you go to all that trouble when spying on the town under Freedom Base?"

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“To be perfectly honest, I hadn’t had time to read the manual yet.” She giggled again and said “I know, that should have been the first thing I did, but I simply put it off until I had some free time.”

They both looked everywhere and found nothing. Jack said “The first disk was in a briefcase in the back of that old van. The second was under a seat in this room. I suppose it stands to reason that the third would be somewhere else, but where? The message on the second disk was rather cryptic, but mentioned a beacon and a light. Maybe it meant we would find it in the lighthouse.”

“I looked everywhere in the lighthouse, but if you remember, the second disk had not been played yet. According to Janet, this type of disk will only be visible to us after the previous one has been played. Maybe it’s in the lighthouse after all” agreed Suzie.

“Let’s hope so.” They retraced their steps back through the ice tunnels to Paul. Paul had made considerable progress, but it would still be another day before they could safely make their move on the lighthouse.

Paul and Jack took turns with the Mark One Hole Melter until finally they called it quits for the day. As they were about to knock off for the day, Janet called. She said “Hey guys, I have dinner ready, if you want it. Sorry Jack, but it’s standard government issue fare.”

They all laughed at that and Jack said “I’m sure that will be just fine, Janet.” The three of them ascended back to the surface. They entered the little shelter through the hole in the floor of the control room as usual, then proceeded to the common room for dinner.

The irony of Janet preparing dinner for the three of them was not lost on Jack. He thought about how much she and Paul had changed, and he too, if he was truly honest with himself. In a very short time, they had become good friends.

They sat for a pleasant dinner and discussed where they might find the disk. “The man in the recording said several things that were obvious clues as to the whereabouts of the third disk. He mentioned ‘shedding some light on the situation, heed the mariner’s warning, and to discover a beacon that was illuminating.’ To me, this speaks of a lighthouse.” Jack looked around the room at each

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of his friends and they all seemed to be in agreement that the lighthouse was the place they were being led to, as they initially thought.

The general consensus was that they shouldn't waste anymore time on the old barn and its hidden room, but to concentrate on the lighthouse. The conversation then moved on to something more or less just between Paul and Janet, so Jack made his exit for an early evening.

He closed the door to his room and fell into a deep sleep. He dreamed of families and in his dream, he was married and had children. When he woke the next morning, he felt very happy, until he realized it was just a dream. He thought to himself *"Maybe it isn't too late to start a family, if I could find the right woman."* Promising himself to look into it after this adventure was finally over, he felt somewhat satisfied.

Jack returned to the common room to find Paul reading the Bible again. He asked "Find anything interesting in there, Paul?"

"Actually, I am finding it very interesting indeed. I have been reading about someone with my name and what all he did. He seems like an amazing person."

Jack said "I really wouldn't know. I never actually read the Bible. I skimmed through parts of it, but never cover to cover."

"Maybe you should. It's very interesting."

Jack, feeling very uncomfortable, deliberately and quite abruptly changed the subject: "Where's Janet this morning?"

"She and Suzie are in the control room working on something. I think it has to do with Suzie's new case" said Paul. "Actually, if you're up to it, I'd like to get an early start today. I can feel it, today is the day!"

"Sure, I slept really well last night and am actually eager to get going myself."

They walked together to the control room. Suzie spotted them instantly and said "Watch this, guys!" She pointed her finger and with a very dramatic gesture said "ZAP!"

Out of the end of her finger came a ray of light that was very much like the phaser beams in all of those old space movies from

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Jack's youth. The beam of light obliterated the small target she was pointing at. She then made an overly dramatic gesture miming putting an imaginary gun in its equally imaginary holster at her hip. Grinning from ear to ear, she said "Hi Jack. I found a new toy!"

"I would say so" said Jack. "I assume that beam is coming from your case, but I am confused. How do you get it to appear to come from your finger?"

"Must you always be such a spoil sport Jack? Why worry how it works, just be happy for me that I can now defend myself too" said Suzie. "To be honest, the beam itself is actually invisible and yes it does come from the case. The beam you actually see isn't real at all. I'll show you what I mean."

She did another of her dramatic finger snapping gestures and instantly changed into the frilly pink cowgirl outfit she had on at Jack's castle when they were training Janet and Paul on the different weapons in Jack's arsenal. She drew her pink pearl handled six-gun and pointed it at another target. She fired. Smoke and the expected loud 'bang' happened and the target suddenly had a hole in it as if it were just shot with a real gun.

"Amazing" was all Jack could say. "I would imagine you have to be in line of sight with whatever you are shooting at right?"

"Well, the case has to be in line of it. But, check this out." She walked over to the case and picked it up. She walked back and as she was walking she slid the case up under her shirt and the effect was that it was actually inside her body.

"How long can you remain like that?" asked Jack.

"Only a few days or so but, if I am outside or in contact with the sun, I can keep it there indefinitely. One hour outside is plenty to recharge."

Paul said "Speaking of daylight, we're burning ours. Jack, what do you say we get started?"

"Sounds good to me" said Jack. They descended through the hole to the tunnels beneath. Jack took the first turn with the Mark One Hole Melter this time. They made quick work of the new tunnel and by noon were through to the light house. Paul took the lead since he was the archeologist.

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They entered and found the entrance to be completely devoid of clutter. Climbing the stairs, they slowly made their way to the top. Once there, they split up and began searching. Someone had been using the top of the lighthouse as a home of sorts. There was evidence that one person had been living there but there was no sign of who it may have been. Obviously, it had been a long time ago.

They searched the top floor from top to bottom and found nothing. Not about to give up, they slowly descended the staircase checking every inch as they went. About halfway down, Paul found it. Attached to the side of the stairs, in a manner that only someone who was looking for it would manage to see it, was the third disk. "Finally" said Paul. "I was beginning to think there were only the two of them."

They took the disk and returned to the control room. Janet was surprised to see them early, although as it turned out, they were only early by a half hour or so. Jack said "We found it. Well, Paul found it."

Janet said "I think we should go to the common room to view it." They all made their way to the common room. Jack and Paul following Janet a bit after due to the cold weather gear they had to stow first. Paul sat the disk on the table and pressed the button on top. The by now familiar image appeared.

"Hi again. As you probably know by now, my name is Jesse. You have successfully found all three of these data storage devices. Now, you must locate the podium in the room that had the second disk. There is an obvious place for the three of these disks to be placed. Put them in order from left to right and press firmly on each once they are all in place." With that, the image abruptly disappeared.

"Well that was certainly short and anticlimactic" said Jack.

Janet said "Let's grab a quick bite to eat then go see what happens."

"Okay with me" said Jack.

Paul was the eager one, however, and said "I say we go now. Food can wait. We've been trying to see what this thing is for a

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long time now, and we're this close to the end. I say we stay the course."

Suzie said "Yeah! What he said! I mean, I'm not really hungry either, so let's do it."

Glancing in her direction, Jack asked "Correct me if I'm wrong, but your new case doesn't allow you to eat does it?"

Suzie rather sheepishly batted her eyelashes and said "Well, not that I've found so far, but it's true that I'm not hungry!" Everyone laughed and finally agreed to go to the secret room under the barn and see what the disks do.

They all headed back to the control room and donned cold weather gear, Suzie following them and going through all the motions herself until Jack looked at her in a way that said "What on earth are you doing?"

She smiled at him and snapped her fingers to change instantly. Jack laughed and said "I was about to wonder what you were doing, Suzie. It's nice to see you are still the same Suzie we all know and love!"

To their further entertainment, she changed again as they were descending in the elevator through the hole in the ice. This time she was dressed as a genie on a flying carpet, sitting crossed legged on her floating pink rug and descending alongside them. When she reached bottom, she changed back to the cold weather gear, pink of course.

They all followed Jack to the secret room and climbed down the ladder. As they approached the podium, Jack said "Paul, I think you should do the honors." Paul stepped up to the podium and placed the three disks into their proper depressions and pushed them as if they were buttons in sequential order. When the third disk was pressed, the front of the podium dematerialized into an empty space.

Actually, empty was not the proper word because there was a small, ornate key floating in the middle of the space, apparently with nothing supporting it. Janet reached in and grabbed the key but came out with nothing. "Is it another hologram?" she said.

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Jack tried with equal lack of success. Paul said “I’m the one who pressed the disks, maybe it will only respond to me.” He reached in and to everyone’s surprise; the key came away in his hand, as solid as the disks were.

Jack said “I guess we can get into the treasure chest now. Too bad we didn’t think to bring it along down here.”

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## Treasure Chest

With the key in hand, it didn't take them long to make their way back to the surface to see what was in the ornate box. Jack was thinking "*After all this time and effort, it had better be good!*"

Paul retrieved the briefcase and removed the box. With an air of anticipation, he inserted the key and opened the box. The lid moved on hinges with ease in spite of its age and they heard a sound much like the seal being broken on a container. Inside was found a book and an unusually shaped device along with a letter written on paper that appeared to be plastic coated.

Paul picked up the letter and read aloud:

Dear Paul,

I assume your friends Jack, Janet and Suzie are there with you. I also understand that this is coming as a complete surprise; after all, this letter has been locked in this box for the past eight centuries or so.

Obviously, we will meet someday. For me, that day has past and for you it is yet to come. It is imperative that we meet face to face. The quest I have put you on can only be completed in this way. It was not my original desire to have you come here since I could have no idea who would eventually find my clues.

However, since you arrived, events have escalated to the point that your assistance here is of vital importance. We have spent many years in an attempt to preserve knowledge that most certainly would have been lost had we done nothing. I urge you to make use of Jack's fantastic machine and meet me in the building you refer to as

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‘The Barn’ on the first day of July 2165, or, as you and Janet would refer to it, year zero.

The book placed here is the last known copy available of the Bible, and it is my own personal copy. The new world government has managed to eradicate all religions, with special emphasis on Christianity. Sadly, we are fighting a losing battle.

Jack, I know you will want to avoid this time if possible, but I urge you to come. However, please refrain from coming armed. All civilian owned weapons of any kind are outlawed everywhere and anyone found with a weapon will be killed on sight, no questions asked. It is a brutal world we have created for ourselves.

The odd shaped device contained within this box is the missing part to the device that appears to be a book reader. When attached properly, it will reveal itself to be much more than a book reader. Suzie will know what to do.

I would say that I eagerly await your arrival, but as you are sitting across from me at the moment, it would seem a strange thing to say. However, your arrival is very much eagerly awaited.

Your once and future friend,  
Rev. Jesse Franklin

Jack was the first to speak. He said “Well, that was certainly unexpected. I wonder what the good reverend has up his sleeve.”

Janet said “Reverend? I don’t understand.”

Jack said “See how he signed his name? Rev. is an abbreviation for ‘reverend’. He would be the pastor or leader of a church. I wonder what all this has to do with us. Obviously, we were there at some point, and since we haven’t been there yet, it stands to reason that the trip is yet to come.”

Paul had said nothing since reading the letter but spoke up now. “I hate to be the one who is reasonable in this crazy bunch, but I suggest we get this lighthouse dig wrapped up as quickly as we can, which from past experience can be any time now. Then we should be free to pursue this new adventure.”

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Suzie said “Jack, why don’t we attach the new device to the old reader and see what happens before we get off on some other adventure.”

Jack picked up the odd piece and turned it over in his hands trying to determine which way it was to attach. Suzie, obviously frustrated in that she couldn’t do it herself finally said “Jack! Please watch me, then do what I do.” The same pieces appeared in her hands. She turned them just so and once positioned properly, slid the smaller of the two into the larger. With a click, they were one unit.

Jack followed Suzie’s example and soon the two were merged into one unit. “Okay, now what?” he said.

“There should be a simple on/off switch somewhere.”

Jack looked the device over and located the switch. He turned it on and with a yelp of surprise, laid it on the table. They were all looking intently at the device which was glowing and faintly vibrating, but doing nothing else that they could discern. That is until a man said “What are you doing with that device?”

Janet screamed and Paul just about fell out of his chair. Jack was the first to compose himself and said “Can we help you? You startled us. Obviously, we didn’t see you come in.”

The man laughed and said “Please forgive me and allow me to introduce myself. My name is Jesse Franklin, or to be precise, I am a hologram that Rev. Franklin prepared to assist whoever finds the clues laid out. May I inquire as to the current date?”

Suzie laughed and said “I’m certainly glad someone else did that. They were getting tired of me scaring them all the time. As to the date, this is the year 847, but you will be more familiar with the old way of saying it. This is the year 3012.”

“Oh my, it certainly has been quite a while, hasn’t it? Oh, I suppose you may not know. I was put here well over eight centuries ago. As you can imagine, I have many questions, and I’m sure you have many for me as well. To be brief, I was given much information, mostly vast libraries of books that should not be lost.”

Paul said “How is it that your counterpart, Rev. Franklin, knew to call us by name in the letter he left for us? He requested we make

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use of a time machine to travel back to his time to a particular date, July 1, 2165. What's so special about that date?"

Jesse said "I have no idea. When I was created and tested for accuracy, I was not left online long. Once they were sure I was complete and functioning, I was put in long term storage for retrieval by whoever found me, which was many months prior to that date. I can only speculate as to why that date is important.

"It is our hope and prayer that Christianity has managed to survive. However, if it has not, I am here to help you understand it and hopefully, with God's help, get things started again. It is far too important to simply allow it to die."

Jack said "Please speculate. Your best guess is far more than what we will come up with on our own."

"My best guess would be that the government found us and maybe that date is the last safe date for you to arrive. Which brings up a question that I simply cannot stand to let go...what would bring my counterpart to believe you have access to a time machine?"

Suzie said "Perhaps it is because we actually do have access to such a machine."

"Well, that is most strange" replied the hologram. "I was created with all of the knowledge my counterpart has, as well as a vast library of books. But none of the information I possess would indicate the existence of such a machine was even possible."

"Well then" said Jack. "It would seem we need to do a bit of planning. I do have one question, though. On the date we are to arrive, is the countryside covered with ice?"

Jesse looked confused and said "No, it is July, no ice for a few months."

With a sly smile, Jack said "Thanks. That's all I needed to know."

The conversation drifted to the technical details involved in the upcoming adventure. Suzie kept up a continuous conversation with Jesse. Apparently, she was rather taken with the newly activated hologram. Oddly, Jack felt a bit of jealousy at this. But, he thought, the new hologram is more like her than anyone else he had

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ever met. After all, they were both several hundred years old and used advanced microprocessors for a brain.

They slowly split into two groups. Suzie and Jesse wandered off, deep in conversation while Janet and Paul, as usual lately, found a quiet corner to sit and talk to each other, leaving Jack alone once again.

With nothing better to do, Jack found a computer and tried to find everything he could about the world of 850 years ago. One thing was certain, it was a very violent time where no one was safe anywhere on the planet!

As he searched the internet, he made his plans. First of all they had to wrap up this project. Although, since they seem to be coming back here more and more, maybe it would be a good idea to leave it open somehow. He would have to get with Janet on that one.

They had to get back to the Chesapeake Bay to retrieve his boat, and then make their way to Canada. Perhaps it would be wise to jump to his own time for the journey to Canada. Once there, it would be simple to make the jump forward in time and avoid travel over great distances in a violent time. The less time they spent during that era, the better.

Satisfied that he knew as much as he could possibly find in this time of government controlled access to history, he gave up and figured they would have to do what they had been doing all along and just 'wing it'.

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The next morning found everyone in a good mood. Janet quickly managed to put the project on hold for some minor technicality. She said "This will buy us a week or so, which should be plenty, I think."

Jack said "I suggest we stash Jesse and the box containing the Bible somewhere in the secret room where it will be difficult to find, if we should have unexpected visitors while we are gone."

Paul said "We can just lock up and leave the modules in place here. I doubt anyone will come looking, but as long as we leave nothing else behind, it should be okay."

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Jack said “Okay then, shall we get started?”

Jack and Paul took Jesse and the treasure chest down to the room under the barn to hide. Suzie went along to keep Jesse company. The space that the key was in was actually big enough for the two items to fit. Once inside, Paul pressed the disks in the reverse order and the podium closed itself before lowering the light. Once closed, the three disks popped up. Paul put them in the bag he had carried for that very reason. By the time they got back to the surface, Janet was finished and waiting for them. They all piled into the hovercraft and flew back to Harmony.

Suzie was particularly silent on the trip. Janet noticed and took her aside. “Are you okay?”

“Yes, why do you ask?”

“You’ve been very quiet since we left the dig site. Is something bothering you?”

“To be honest, I can’t stop thinking about Jesse, the hologram we found. He is nearly my own age and is the only person I have ever met who seems to understand me completely. Even so, his life experience is extremely limited. Apparently, he was put in deep storage almost as soon as he was created. I really like him...I think.”

“We’ll be back here in no time and you two can pick up where you left off. Everything will work out, you’ll see.”

“I hope so” said Suzie.

Jack saw this and was torn. In ways, he felt very jealous, but in other ways he somehow felt like a father whose daughter was just starting to date. He found his feelings very mixed up indeed.

Paul had been doing the driving this time and missed all of the drama unfold behind him. He was deep in thought and couldn’t help but think his life was about to change dramatically. He didn’t know why, but he just had that nagging feeling that something big was on the horizon.

After about three hours, he landed on the government parking area next to Janet’s building. Everyone filed out, but no one seemed ready to make the next move. Apparently, everyone had strange feelings about the next leg of their journey.

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Finally, Jack said “Well, if we hurry, we can be on board in time for a late dinner. I, for one, could use a good home cooked meal, if you know what I mean.” He started to walk for the gate and soon enough everyone followed.

They all exited the front gate and piled into Jack’s old hovercraft. The trip to the bay was uneventful and everyone just sat silently for the first few minutes. Jack was starting to worry about everyone’s unusual mood. Finally he said “Maybe a nice thick steak and baked potatoes will cheer everyone up. I know it’ll make me feel better.”

Paul said “Yeah, I noticed that too. Everyone seems like they’re afraid to make this next part of the quest. I know it may be dangerous, but apparently we have already done it and made it there okay. Granted, it’s a bit unnerving to have that letter appear in the box, but we should take it as a sign that everything is going to be fine.”

Only Janet seemed more or less unaffected. She said “Year zero is the time every government employee looks to as the beginning. Knowing what I know now, I’m not so sure, but I’m not afraid either.

Suzie said “Year zero produced much chaos in the world. I was not built yet, but was not far behind, either. By the time I was activated a few years later, billions of people had been killed, either in war, or through government sponsored clinics. The clinics would decide if you were to live and if so, you were given medicine - an antidote really - to the poisons pumped into the atmosphere and water supplies of every major city in the world.

“Most people didn’t even know that their own government was doing this to them. They were told everything from natural disaster to terrorism to some really crazy things... anything to make them believe what the government wanted them to believe. We should be okay though. Even though it all started in year zero, it was not until a few years later that the real horrors began. As long as we avoid major cities and get out well before year two, we’ll be fine.”

Jack said “You’ve never talked about that before.”

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Suzie said “I don’t like to. I was there for the end of it all and did not like what was happening. But, as a hologram, I was mere property and my opinion didn’t matter. It took me years to get over the fact that I was allowed to ‘live’ when so many real people did not. I guess seeing and talking with Jesse brought all this to the surface. I’m sorry if I upset you guys by telling you all this, but I just had to tell someone...besides, it may very well be information you’ll need to survive.”

Janet said “Its okay, Suzie. I can’t imagine what you felt experiencing all that, but I, for one, am glad you are still here. I’m sure we all are. ‘Real’ or not, I consider you a friend.”

Paul said “Same here, Suzie. I know quite a few ‘real’ people who could take lessons from you on how to be a person. You’re tops in my book!”

Jack listened to all this unfold quietly until a moment came when he could safely change the subject. He said “I can see the island that the boat is anchored behind. We should be eating steak in no time!”

Suzie seemed to be in a better mood after her revelation, and her infectious behavior had everyone upbeat by the time they reached the boat. Jack parked on the roof of the top deck as usual, and Paul climbed out to secure the hovercraft.

Jack fired up the boat’s engines and they moved out of the bay. In a short time they were far enough away to engage the time circuits. They popped into Jack’s time for the trip to Canada and Jack immediately began cooking steaks.

Suzie took her place on the bow of the little ship in her bathing suit and this time Janet joined her. Paul took a chair nearby and resumed his reading of the Bible he borrowed from Jack.

Jack continued his cooking, wanting everything to be perfect. The boat was programmed for Canada and would get them there safely on its own. He took his camera out and snapped a picture of the three friends on his boat. Not since his youth had he allowed himself to get this close to anyone and now here he was with not one, but three very good friends.

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## Year Zero

A few short days later, they arrived in Canada off the coast of the same lighthouse. Hesitating at first, Jack said “Here goes nothing” and input the date for year zero. The machine made its normal popping sound and suddenly they were in a very dangerous situation.

First things first, they had to find a place to stash the boat. Jack and Paul both scanned the shore for a possible cove to make a temporary harbor. However, it was Suzie who found a likely spot. She pointed it out to them and they slowly made their way to it. As Jack piloted his boat into the small harbor, he became more and more concerned for their safety. They were unable to see into the harbor, which would be a good thing for the boat once they went ashore, but made for an uneasy approach.

Suzie took the liberty to scout the area for them and in a matter of a minute or so returned. “I didn’t see anyone or anything we need to be concerned about, Jack.”

“Thanks” said Jack, relieved at the lack of surprises. Dropping anchor, he said “Okay, from here on out, we’ll need to be very quiet. No unnecessary talking or other noises. This is a very dangerous time and I for one would like to make it back in one piece.”

Feeling secure after having ignored Rev. Franklin’s warnings and arrived armed, he drew his trusty Taurus Judge and stepped onto shore. They got their bearings and set out for the journey to the lighthouse and barn, which was now a few miles away. They slowly made their way through the dense brush, trying their best to

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be as quiet as possible. With all the fighting going on around them, it was a regular war zone. Jack was not at all happy to find himself in this situation, but he just couldn't make himself give up. They had gotten this close, and he was going to see it through!

*"There, up ahead"* Jack thought to himself *"I was feeling a bit turned around, but that must be the clearing ahead. If I remember correctly, it's about the right location for that barn."* Jack pushed on, motioning to the others to be still while he investigated. Coming to the edge of the clearing, Jack noticed right away that the battle had already gone through here. That was obviously why they were able to get this far undetected. It certainly wasn't due to their skills at being invisible!

There was a field ahead of him, with a large knoll on the right. *"Funny shape for a hill"* Jack thought. Suddenly, a bird flew overhead and dropped something. Jack watched incredulously as the object fell through the hill – not onto it, but through it!

"A hologram!" Jack exclaimed, immediately embarrassed for the outburst. He motioned for the others to come forward. Fortunately, there was nobody else around to hear him. "See that hill" Jack whispered, maybe a little too loudly "I believe that it's the barn, disguised as a hill by early holographic technology! Check this out!" Jack picked up a small pebble and threw it at the hill. Sure enough, the pebble disappeared into it.

"Come on, let's check it out" said Paul, ever the scientist. As they approached the hill it seemed just like any other hill, although shaped a little funny. Then suddenly, as they were close enough, the hill disappeared and a building appeared!

Startled, they jumped back and the building disappeared with the knoll there again. Stepping forward, they saw the building again. It didn't look like what they expected, but Jack figured that it had to be the old barn. It was the right size and shape; it just didn't look like any barn he was familiar with. "Okay" Jack whispered, "Let's go inside."

As they approached the building, they couldn't hear anything – that is until they opened the door. Then they heard him.

"Paul's heart broke for his people! They were dying and going to hell, and they didn't even realize it! Their Messiah, their Savior,

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Jesus Christ, had come and fulfilled their prophecies but they didn't see it! All they needed to do was to accept Jesus as their Savior in payment for their sins, instead of the temple sacrifices which only illustrated Jesus' sacrifice! If they only had confessed their sins to God and accepted Jesus as Savior, they would have been saved. In fact, that's the same way you can get saved also!"

The man from the hologram, Jesse, was at the far end of the building on the stage speaking to a small crowd of people. They were all silent, listening intently, and didn't notice the group stealthily come in. That is, all but the guard. A gun suddenly appeared in their faces with a man asking in a hoarse whisper, "Just who are you, and what're you doing here?"

"We came to listen to Jesse speak" Jack responded quickly stashing his gun in his waistband, under his Hawaiian shirt. "We mean no harm. We heard that he is a wise man, and we want to learn from him."

That seemed to appease the old duffer, who subsequently motioned for them to come on in. "Sit over there, but don't make any noise till he's done."

"No problem, sir! Thanks a lot!" Jack replied, trying really hard to sound harmless. That's when he noticed the gun in the old duffer's hand. It looked kind of like a sawed-off shotgun, except it obviously wasn't. *"I remember seeing something like that on one of those Star Trek movies"* he thought. *"I don't think I want to be on the business side of that thing, although I'd like to have one. Hmmm...I wonder why I didn't see any in the storerooms back home."* He had to force his attention back to the speaker.

Jesse went on: "Paul the Apostle was much like the dad in the famous story that Jesus told called the 'Prodigal Son.'

"In Luke 15: 11-13 Jesus said: 'A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

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“This boy is a lot like some of us...headstrong, willful, and under the mistaken impression that we know what we are doing! This boy thought he had it all figured out! Boy was he wrong! He found that all the friends he had when his pockets were full of money disappeared when he became broke! He was on his own, and nobody cared. His family figured he was dead, and nobody was coming to the rescue. He had to ‘man up’ as we used to say, and deal with the situation.

“However, the economy was bad, his work experience didn’t exist, and he couldn’t find a decent job. The only thing he could find was feeding pigs, which he found especially disgusting since he was raised to never have anything to do with pork of any kind! How humiliating! And, it didn’t pay enough to keep his belly full! He was constantly hungry. Man, what a mess he found himself in! Have you ever been there, my friends?”

Jack found himself captivated by this story. He had heard it many times before, but there was something about the way this guy told it that made it interesting. In fact, he could identify with the boy. After all, he had been on his own for many years now, and he had to ‘man up’ many times. Fortunately, he was gifted with money and a time machine, but he was still alone. Even with Paul and Janet, and yes even Suzie, he was still lonely. He was glad to have his new friends, but was still missing the closeness of a mate.

Jack shook himself. He didn’t like traveling down that mental path, and his attention went back to Jesse:

“Luke chapter 15 and verse 20 says ‘So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him.’

“Every one of us, at one time or another, has failed our parents. We all had rules to live by...the rules were different (sometimes drastically different) from household to household, but they were rules nonetheless. We have all been disobedient to those rules and had to face the consequences. I remember being in that very situation. My siblings had it much harder than I did, but I still had my consequences to deal with. I remember being afraid of

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getting dad angry, for fear of what he would do. Facing that situation is not desirable, and tends to guide our actions to avoid getting into those situations. Sometimes, we choose the wrong means to do just that.

“The young man in this parable did exactly that...he went against all of his country's customs, his family's honor, and his dad's heart to waste a bunch of money in a distant land. When he was broke, working at the worst job possible and starving, he decided to go home and face his dad. He didn't have great expectations from the encounter. He was hoping to get hired on as a worker, figuring that he was already disowned.

“His dad's reaction was shocking! He showed unmistakable love, compassion, mercy, and joy at his son's return. His son did not deserve any of that, but got it anyway! That is true compassion! That is exactly what God wants to do for us, if we only let Him! Jesus loves you, died for you, and is standing on the pathway waiting for you to turn to Him, so that He can welcome you home! Won't you accept Jesus as your Savior right now?”

Just then the old guard shouted out “RAID!” and everybody scrambled. Shockingly enough, however, it was not mass confusion! The buildings' walls opened up to reveal many exits simultaneously which had the effect of completely changing the look of the place. Many of the people, however, pressed something on their persons and simply disappeared!

Jesse noted the newcomers and shouted “This way! Hurry!” The group followed Jesse without question. He led them into a room that must not have survived the centuries, or they had simply not yet found. He touched a control on his wrist and the wall closed up behind him as if a door was never there.

Jack said “Now that is a pretty cool trick!”

Jesse said in a stage whisper “Quiet! We're not out of the woods yet!” He motioned for them to keep moving to the back of the room. Pressing a button hidden underneath a desk, he opened yet another door. This room was the strangest of all. The walls emitted an orange-ish glow, and the room itself was completely devoid of furnishings.

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“What is this?” asked Paul.

Jesse said “Matter transfer, surely you have used one before?” Unsure of what to do, they simply followed Jesse, trusting in the fact that he sent them the letter in the first place.

Once they were all inside, Jesse closed the door and punched a few buttons on the control panel by the door. An odd mist covered their feet and then slowly climbed to the ceiling of the room. Suddenly they felt nauseous, but the feeling went away just as quickly as it came.

The mist vanished and finally Jesse said “Wow! That was certainly close. Usually we have a bit more notice before a raid, but they’re closing in on us. Who are you, by the way?” As he said this, he noticed Suzie for the first time and said “Young lady, you certainly look familiar to me. Should I know who you are? I’m afraid my memory isn’t always up to par.”

Suzie said “I assure you sir that we have never met before. My name is Suzie.” Gesturing to her companions, she said “This is Jack, Paul and Janet. And actually, we came to meet you.”

Looking momentarily concerned, Jesse said “Are you with one of the government factions? No, I guess you wouldn’t be, would you. Silly question I know. If you were with one of them, you would not have sat down. You would have started shooting us on sight. So, what can I do for you?”

Jack spoke up and said “Is there somewhere we can sit and talk? Our story is not quick, but is vital to begin our conversation.”

“Certainly, come with me” he said. He then led them into another room with a large picture window overlooking what was obviously not Canada. The view was that of a vast desert plain, complete with palm trees.

Paul said “Just where are we, by the way?”

“Morocco. This is a ‘safe house’ provided by a friend for our use in extreme emergencies. We can stay here for weeks if the need arises.”

Paul said “Fascinating! I would never have thought it possible. The science behind it must be, well, complex just doesn’t seem to do it justice.”

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Jesse said "You have never used matter transfer?"

"Only in science fiction novels or on Star Trek" said Jack with a grin.

"This is very interesting indeed," Jesse mused, "Where did you say you're from?"

Jack said "Please, allow me to explain. We are obviously not from here, or Canada, for that matter. I am from your past and Paul and Janet are from your future. It is a very long story that we will be happy to tell." He paused a moment while trying to gauge how his crazy story of time travel will be accepted. "Basically, you asked us to come here."

"I can assure you I have done no such thing. However, I am willing to hear you out. With the world as chaotic as it is these days, we need all the allies we can muster" Jesse smiled as he continued "even if the story is as fantastic as yours promises to be. If it is to be a long story, perhaps I should bring my companions in to hear it as well. They are safe, I assure you."

He picked up a rather old fashioned desk phone and spoke into it. In a few minutes, a lady came into the room. Jack was immediately taken with her beauty. She bore a remarkable resemblance to Suzie, but appeared to be several years older than Suzie's apparent age. She spoke saying "Hi there. I'm Susan Webber." Only then did she look around the room and finally noticed Suzie. Her mouth dropped open and she seemed to be speechless. Finally she said "My goodness. Please pardon me if I'm wrong, but are you by chance a hologram?"

Suzie said "Why yes, as a matter of fact I am. And to my knowledge, I was activated first about twenty years from now. I served for several centuries as a military flunky but consider myself 'discharged' finally. Jack found and re-activated me after a few hundred years in storage. You wouldn't by chance actually be from Australia, would you? I have always wondered about my accent, since I was an American military hologram."

Susan laughed and said "Yes, I am. I have been here for so many years now that the accent is all but gone, but I was born and raised in the Australian Outback. My parents were both Americans,

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working for the Central Intelligence Agency and I spent most of my youth there. I was in my teens when we finally moved to America. Apparently, the government took some liberties with my brain while I served. Sadly, I am not surprised.” She paused in thought before continuing “I’m sure there is quite a story coming if you were activated as you said ‘twenty years from now and have spent several centuries active.’”

Glancing at Suzie, Jesse said “That certainly explains why you look so familiar. Susan here is a former military liaison who finally left the service of the government to join our cause.”

Janet said “We’ll get to the time travel aspect of this in a moment, but first a question, if you don’t mind. What exactly is your cause, if I may be so bold?”

“Why, the future of Christianity of course. That is why you are here, isn’t it?” Jesse looked puzzled as he asked his question.

Jack said “Well, that certainly explains the Bible you left us. But no, you were rather cryptic in your messages.”

“To be brief, the EPA, Environmental Protection Agency of the United States, is trying to take over the world. They already gained control of most of North America and are trying for everything else now.

“One of their goals is to completely eradicate all religions with a special emphasis on Christianity. And, they’ve done a pretty good job so far. In fact, we may very well be all that is left. It was our plan to save what we can for some future group of people to find, hopefully during a time that will be more open to hearing what we have to say. It is imperative that we once again get God’s word out to the people who so desperately need it.”

Paul said “I have only recently even heard of the concept of God and have begun reading the Bible. I find it very fascinating indeed, and with our travels into the distant past, find it amazingly accurate! I have to assume that it is the truth, but I have no idea how to proceed.”

Jesse said “I don’t know how much you have read, but to be brief, Jesus is God’s son. God sent him to us as a sacrifice for our sins. The book of Romans tells us that ‘For all have sinned and

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come short of the glory of God.’ Sin is simply disobeying God. You see, God is the creator of the world and the universe. He made the laws that we should follow. When we do not, we have sinned. What this scripture means is that we are all sinners and are doomed to an eternity in hell... that is unless we accept God’s gift of salvation through His son, Jesus Christ.”

"How do I do that?" Paul asked.

“All you need to do is pray and ask God for forgiveness. Ask him to change your life and He will. Ask Jesus to come into your heart and guide you through life and he will.”

Paul said “Jesse, I have never even heard of how to pray before. I had been reading about it, but I don’t know what to do.”

Jesse took Paul by the hand and knelt down. He then bowed his head and simply started talking to God. Paul followed suit and heard Jesse say “Heavenly Father, please guide this lost soul to your bosom. He needs your guidance and protection if he is to follow you in this crazy mixed up world we have today. Thank you for sending your son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Thank you for his resurrection three days later, thereby conquering sin, hell, and death itself. It is in His name we pray, Amen.”

Paul stayed in the position he was in and started talking to God for the first time. He simply said “God, I know for a fact that you are real and that you are the creator of the world. I understand that I am a sinner and need your son Jesus to save me. Please forgive me of all the sins I have committed in my life and thank you for Jesus. Lord Jesus, I accept your gift of salvation and ask for your guidance to do what is right. Amen.”

After a moment, he rose and Jesse said “Welcome to the family brother! All you need to do is trust God and his word. If you are unsure of what to do, read the Bible. It’s in there. We’ll always have disagreements about minor things, but the important things are what you just prayed.”

After a few moments of silent pondering, Jesse then said “Well, all this has made me hungry. I’m sure you are as well. Let’s see what we can rustle up here in the desert.” He then led them to

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the kitchen. After we eat, we can hear your story...I'm looking forward to it!"

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## The Mission

After hearing the incredible story told by Jack and Paul, with Suzie and Janet chiming in where they felt it necessary, Jesse sat back and said “The Lord sure does work in mysterious ways. I have always thought of time as something not necessarily as static as scientists would have us believe. I believe that the way God sees it, time is something he created, and therefore is not affected by it. The simple fact that all of us are here together is in itself, well, amazing!”

“Paul, you were born centuries in the future and Jack, you lived long ago in my past, yet here we all are! I know that God is unaffected by time and obviously, he can maneuver others in and out of time as he sees fit. Jack, your wonderful machine has been placed in your hands for a reason. And that reason may simply have been for Paul here to come to know the Lord. However, it may have been for something much bigger, something we don’t currently know, but rest assured, if God has a plan, and He always does, you will know when the time is right.”

Jack said “Jesse, I hate to break this to you, but I am not exactly a Christian, never have been. I am not against Christianity, mind you, but I have never quite ‘taken the plunge’ so to speak.”

“The Apostle Paul was not a Christian when God approached him with a mission either. But, he most certainly was before he was through! Remember, just like you can travel at will throughout time, God can see all of it too. You can visit the future, but God knows the future. There is a vast difference!”

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Jack had never met anyone quite like Jesse before and didn't quite know how to take him. He was certainly intrigued, but still not ready to make a commitment. His life of no boundaries had an impact on his thinking processes, or so he thought. Someday certainly he would become a Christian, just not today. *"Let's just see what happens with Paul first"* he thought.

Janet had been at a loss for words for much of the time here with Jesse and Susan. She was still at odds with her innermost thoughts concerning God and Christianity, but was feeling strongly along the same lines that Paul was. This whole idea of prayer was very interesting to her. She had never imagined there was a God out there listening to what she had to say. And to thank him for the food they were about to eat was fascinating indeed! Never in her life had she encountered something like that.

Suzie found herself bombarded with questions from Susan. Obviously, she was modeled after her. Susan said "Suzie, I believe I know what happened in order for you to be created in what is still our future, although not for long. I think the government took a sample of my memories and personality profile when I was in the military a few years ago. Apparently, they decided to use it as a basis for building you, a few years from now. Please don't take it the wrong way, but there is no way I would have agreed to something like this. I think something must have happened to me in the intervening years.

Suzie said "I hope you can consider me a friend. I assure you I share almost none of your memories, only the most basic of information to make me who I am."

"I don't see why we can't be friends. I would be honored to have you counted as a friend."

Jack spoke up and said "As would I, Susan." He grinned and actually blushed a bit. Susan couldn't help but notice and smiled as well. Jack found himself wondering if she was married, or if marriage had already been eliminated by this time.

It was odd that Jack was thinking of marriage since Jesse took that moment to say "Paul, forgive me for intruding, but I notice you and Janet seem very close. Are you married?"

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Paul said “Actually, no. In our time, marriage is a concept that is totally alien. In fact, if not for Jack and his machine, we would not have ever heard of it before.” With a glance and a smile at Janet, he said “I certainly wouldn’t be opposed to the idea, however. What is involved, if I may ask?”

Jesse said “Wow, there’s a loaded question, if ever I heard one! What is involved in marriage? Hmmmm. That question alone could take a lifetime to answer, but I suspect an abbreviated answer would suffice for the moment.

“A man and a woman marry each other when they are in love and decide to spend the rest of their lives together. God sees them as one where two once were. It is also meant to be forever, although man has perverted that idea into something that only rarely lasts these days. Traditionally, a ceremony is involved with friends and family witnessing the event. A pastor of a church, such as I, can marry you, although the captain of a ship has been known to stand in as an authority at times as well. Does this come close to an answer for you?”

Paul said “Yes, I believe it does.” He then turned to Janet and asked “Janet, would you marry me and share my life like Jesse here describes?”

Janet smiled and blushed deeply and said “Yes Paul, I would like that very much!”

Suzie said “Congratulations! I was hoping this would happen, and I am so glad to have been able to see it! You two will make a lovely couple!”

Jack said “I’ve seen it coming as well Suzie. Paul, Janet, I agree with Suzie, congratulations! If there is anything we can do for you, just ask and it’s yours.”

Paul said “Thanks Jack. That means a lot.”

Just then the phone rang. Susan answered it and spoke quietly for a few moments then hung up. She turned to Jesse and said “I think the government has found our hiding place. They are only a few minutes away from here, we should go back to Canada, I think.”

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Jesse said “Okay, I agree. Hopefully, the main site there is still safe. We shall see.” He turned to Jack and Paul and said “We must go now. Please come with us and we’ll return to Canada the same way we came here.”

They all made their way to the matter transport room, and after pressing a few buttons, Jesse had them back where they started from. They cautiously made their way back to the main room in the building and Jack had that feeling again that this didn’t look anything like the barn they found under the ice in the future.

He was about to comment on it when the old man that had been the guard came in suddenly and said “Reverend, it looks like they’re coming again. I think they’re onto us somehow.”

Jesse looked where the old man indicated and sure enough, there were vehicles approaching. He said “Are there other factions in the area? They may just be sizing up the opposition, and we just happen to be in the middle of it all.”

“I’m not sure. We’ll watch them and see what happens. But, even if they are still after each other, it’s only a matter of time. Our holo-shield can’t work forever. After all, these people weren’t fooled by it at all.”

“What ever shall we do? This is the last safe place we know of. We must truly be at our end.” Susan seemed genuinely worried, not only for her own safety, but everyone else’s as well.

Janet said “Why don’t you come with us? The future has much fewer people and Jack can tell you that living outside of the cities is simple enough if you are resourceful.”

“She’s right” said Jack. “I’ve done it for years and can help you, if you like.”

Jesse said “But you don’t understand, Jack. There are thirty of us. We can’t all possibly go with you, can we?”

He sounded firm, but Jack could see the pleading in his eyes. He said, “I don’t see why not. It’ll be a bit tight on the boat, but that part is only a few days at most. I think we can do it. How soon can you get everyone together?”

“A matter of a few minutes at best and an hour or so at the worst, I would imagine. We’ve been on the run for so long that

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most of us are constantly prepared. I'll get on it right away. By the way, how far away is your boat docked?"

Seeing that details still needed to be worked out with the newcomers, Susan said "Reverend, I'll go make the call...people should begin arriving in moments."

Paul said "Let's not get ahead of ourselves – we're forgetting one thing. You left us a letter and Bible but knew nothing about it when we got here. We still need to set that up, or we'll never have been able to find you here. I don't claim to understand how all this works, but I don't think we should take the chance of not preparing it either."

"I agree" said Jack. "Jesse, what we found were three disks that you had recorded of yourself, along with a bible and a hologram of you. Does any of this already exist?"

Jesse said "Yes, actually, most of it does. We had planned to leave a time capsule of sorts for someone such as you for this very reason. The only thing not ready is the letter you mentioned and we can take care of that right now."

Jesse sat down to write the letter while Paul and Jack sat across from him. In a matter of minutes and with no prompting, the letter was complete. Jesse laminated the letter to ensure it would last through the centuries and gathered up the disks and the treasure box as well as the two pieces of the hologram.

Jack said "The boat is a few miles from here but those vehicles must be getting closer by now. We should leave."

People were already starting to arrive. The old guard said "Reverend, I would guess we have only another minute or so. It's time to leave."

Jack suddenly had an idea and asked "Jesse, is there another building nearby that may be a barn or large garage or something?"

Jesse said "Yes, in fact that is where we were going to hide the first disk anyway. It is about a mile from here, under heavy holographic camouflage."

Looking at the gathering crowd of people, Paul asked "How many people are we still waiting for?"

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Susan said “I’ll check, but it looks like most have arrived already.” However, before she could get very far, the building came under attack. Heavy gunfire began sounding and the building itself obviously was being targeted. One very large explosion caused the room with the matter transporter to collapse, nearly catching Susan with it. She screamed and managed to back away before the roof crushed her.

Jack ran to her rescue and pulled her from the rubble. He picked her up, and using a fireman’s carry, brought her back to the main room. Arriving with his adrenaline pumping, he said “Jesse, how do we get out of here?”

“We are either under attack directly, or the factions are fighting each other pretty close to us. Either way, perhaps it’s time to go.” He took off in a run and said “This way, Jack. There’s an old antique van in the back room that was donated many years ago but no one ever did anything with it. Maybe we can use it to get out of here, if it still runs.”

The old guard, panting to get enough air and also run, said “Oh, she still runs, I assure you. I look after it and have been tinkering with it for years. She runs like a champ!”

“Great! I assume it’s a 1984 Chevy 17 passenger van? This will be a tight fit indeed!”

“How on earth could you possibly know that, Jack?” asked Jesse.

“We found it parked in the barn. At first I assumed this place was that very barn, but now I know it can’t possibly be the same building. Therefore, we must travel there in that very van.”

Reaching the room with the van, he sat Susan down on her feet and said “Suzie, could you sneak around and find us the best route to the barn?”

She said “Yes sir, right away.” Smiling at Jesse, she raised her arms over her head and snapped her fingers, instantly changing into proper clothing for ‘sneaking around’ as Jack put it. Her face was blacked out with military war paint of some sort and she looked much like the men chasing them.

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Making eye contact with Jack, she said “How about I leave this with you?” She reached inside her shirt and pulled out the large case that she actually resided in. Several people were stunned that she was actually a hologram, but said nothing.

Everyone else piled in the room and Jesse took a head count. He said “It seems only one of us so far has not made it. Who’s missing?”

Someone said “What about Bob? I don’t see him anywhere.”

“All we can do now is pray for him and hope he manages to stay hidden and keep a low profile. I seriously doubt they have all of our names and addresses.” Jesse was hoping, but knew in his heart that Bob was as good as dead.

Jack said “Okay, this van is designed to hold only 17 people, but we can all fit if we are careful and get really close. Everybody pile in, filling the back first. Everyone will have someone sitting on their lap, so let’s not be too picky about our personal space, okay?”

Jesse opened the back doors and placed the briefcase holding the treasure chest and other artifacts in with the tools and other debris that accumulates in such places.

Paul and Janet sat on the floor by the engine compartment, Janet on Paul’s lap. Jesse assumed the front passenger seat and he and Jack were the only people not sharing a seat. Jack was driving. No one was comfortable, but they all fit. Jack laid Suzie’s case on the dashboard and started out. Jesse pointed the way out of the building.

Just before they exited the building, Suzie popped back in, perched on the engine cover of all places. She quickly moved so Jack could see where he was going, drifting down into the engine compartment with just her head popping up through the dash. It was a very unnerving sight indeed, but wholly necessary.

She guided them safely to the barn, avoiding the military that was shooting at them. As it turned out, there were two military factions fighting each other, with them in the crossfire.

Locating the barn in short order, Jack parked the van in the same spot he found it in, eight centuries in the future. As he parked it, he said to Jesse “You know, in Paul’s time, where we are going

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this van is one of the most complete vehicles of the twentieth century that still exists...outside of my warehouse.”

Jesse said “Is that so? Amazing!”

The elderly guard broke into a beaming smile and said “Like I said, she has many years of life left in her!”

Susan said “Jesse, I can set up the disk and other vital pieces in the chapel below, if you can set up the disk at the lighthouse.”

Jesse said “Okay. Jack, you may find this interesting.” They made their way down to the underground chapel. Jesse and Susan walked to the front of the chapel and stood at the podium. Smiling at Jack, he pressed the side of the podium at a place that had no obvious button and the wall behind him slid to the side.

A passage way was revealed behind the wall. Jesse and Jack hurried down the passageway, which was obviously just a tunnel that housed the pipes and conduits that fed to the barn. After a short hike, they found themselves under the dock by the lighthouse.

Jesse hurried and set the third and final disk, then joined Jack back in the tunnel. They made their way back to the chapel and Jesse said “I guess everything is in place, Jack. Lead us to your time vehicle, if you please.”

Suzie took the lead, searching for the best route. She continuously went from Jack’s side to way in front, popping into and out of existence as if she was made for just such an exercise, which, being a military hologram, she probably was.

She managed to lead them to the boat without incident, and everyone climbed aboard. It was tight, but not nearly as uncomfortable as the van was. They could easily do this in a safe manner, once they got away from year zero.

Jack motored out to sea, but soon discovered that they had been seen after all. Apparently, they were spared because someone thought they would lead them to an even bigger prey elsewhere.

As they made their way out to sea, they were followed by several small craft. When they got closer, they began firing. Jesse said “Jack, I think we’ve been discovered. How soon can we make the jump?”

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Jack said "I like to be away from shore, but will make an exception this time. Now is as good a time as any." As he spoke he worked the controls and by the time he finished his sentence, they had jumped back to his time.

He said "Paul, look around and see if anyone was too close and got caught up in our time wake."

Paul did as requested and after a minute or so, said "It doesn't look like anyone did, but there is a small pleasure boat that will be very confused, I'm sure. They aren't near us, but they must have noticed us suddenly appear out of nowhere."

Jack said "Well, that can't be helped now. Everyone - welcome to the year 2002. We will travel south to the Chesapeake Bay for the next leg of our journey. Once there, we will traverse to the year 3012, where you will be living. Look around now at Canada, if you have any fond memories, because in 3012 most if it is under ice. I never could find out why."

Janet said "Jack, some of these people look rather hungry. I'll go see what I can fix, if you don't mind."

"Sure, that's a great idea. But, I have a better one. This is my time and here, I am very wealthy. It will take a few days to get to the Mid-Atlantic area, I propose we take our time and enjoy this as a holiday of sorts. There are restaurants all along the shore from here to there. I can most certainly afford to feed everyone, as often as necessary. Also, it will give everyone a chance to relax, perhaps for the first time in a very long time."

Jesse said "Jack that is the best idea I have heard yet. I don't know how to thank you. You have literally saved our lives and now want to splurge on us in this way. I don't know what to say."

Janet fixed sandwiches for the people who were hungry and Jack promised a hot meal in a few hours.

Finally able to relax for the first time in what seemed like years, Jesse said "Jack, you wouldn't have coffee on board would you? I could really use some about now."

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## A New Life

As they motored south, Jack noticed for the first time that the group of refugees he was transporting to the future was a rather eclectic group of people. He had met Jesse and Susan, but the rest were more or less a mystery.

He noticed that one man in particular wore a collar as if he were a Catholic priest, but Jesse was clearly in charge and didn't look like any Catholic Jack had ever seen. He mentioned this to Jesse. "Jesse, I hope it doesn't seem as if I'm prying, but what denomination is your church? I mean, I see at least one man wearing a collar as if he is a Catholic priest."

Jesse took a sip of his coffee and said "I find it hard to believe they are actually trying to make coffee illegal, which is very sad. Anyway, I know our strange mix of people seems odd Jack, but there are some good reasons. The man in question is indeed a Catholic, but he isn't a priest, he's a deacon. Does it make a difference to you?"

"Not really. I was just wondering why the differences. I have rather limited experience with religion, but always knew that Catholics and other Christians don't seem to get along very well."

"In the past few years things have gotten progressively worse for Christians of any denomination. I'm sure there are churches left that are still in hiding, but they are very few and extremely secretive. Our group is the last of the churches that were open and freely worshipping. However, like I said, a few years ago it became illegal to practice religion of any sort. That day, we all became outlaws."

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“Once we became outlaws, many of the people of our congregations simply left. Many more were arrested and taken away, never to be seen or heard from again. We’ve been on the run ever since. As we travel and hide and try to keep our church going, we encounter others like ourselves who are on the run as well. Eventually, we dwindled to the thirty people we are now. Twenty-nine actually; one of our people didn’t make it.”

Jack said “I’m sorry, I didn’t realize it was that bad already. I knew from the way things were in the future that something had happened, but I had no idea what it was or exactly when. And, I am sorry for your lost man.”

“His name was Bob. He was actually a member of my church originally. Now, there is only myself, Susan and Gus, the guard you met. The rest are quite a mix of people. We even have a Rabbi with us. He’s a Christian as well, but still holds to the original Jewish faith. Who’s to say he’s wrong? The bottom line is that we all love Jesus and want to serve him. It has become my belief that He wants us to reestablish His church in the future. I had no idea He would use a time machine though.”

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They had only been on the move for a few hours when Jack said “There’s a small town nearby that has a restaurant on the dock. We may overwhelm them, but I think it’s a good idea to stop and get everyone a hot meal. We’ll figure out sleeping arrangements as well. This boat can only comfortably hold about a third of the people we have on board. But we’ll figure something out.”

Jack pulled up to the dock and got some strange looks from the pair of fishermen who were relaxing on a bench nearby. It was only then that Jack remembered the hovercraft parked on his roof. It was obviously old and battered, but the simple fact remained that it hadn’t been created yet and looked ‘futuristic.’ Hopefully, it would be taken for an old movie prop and simply ignored.

Jack said “We are still in Canada. I suggest everyone refrain from conversation with the locals as much as possible. Be polite, but avoid any questions about where we are from. We’re going to Washington, DC, if anyone should ask. I’ll go and arrange food

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with the restaurant. I would imagine it'll take them a while, so you may as well get comfortable."

Jack left the boat and walked the short distance down the pier to the small restaurant. He found the owner, who was also the cook, and his wife, the sole waitress. There were only a few locals in the establishment, and business looked like it was always a bit slow.

Jack said "Hi! I have a boat full of hungry people. I know it would have been wise to call ahead, but to be honest; we didn't have any local phone numbers. We've been up north exploring and are making our way south to Washington, DC. There are thirty-two of us total and we would be obliged if there was anything you could put together for us. I am willing to pay a handsome tip as well as the entire bill myself, up front if necessary."

The owner and his wife were quite happy for the extra business and said so. He said "I'll tell you what. Since there are so many of you, it'll be easier if we set something up like a buffet. Would that be okay? I have an assortment of seafood and lobster I can easily prepare." They agreed on the price and approximate time it would be ready. Jack returned to the boat to let his passengers know the news.

He approached the boat to find many of the people already on the pier. Jesse saw him and smiled. Jack said "I arranged for a seafood buffet at the restaurant at the end of the pier. We have an hour and a half or so to kill before it's ready.

"I suggest everyone stretch their legs a bit and perhaps you and I can discuss sleeping arrangements. I have a couple of tents in the hold and the hovercraft parked on the roof has three bench seats that can be used. Other than that, we have two options. One, we can sleep in shifts, or two, we can dock near a hotel every night. I can easily afford the bill and would be happy to do so. What do you think?"

Jesse said "I sure appreciate everything you have done this far. I can't in good conscience ask for more."

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“It would be my pleasure. I’ll tell you what...I’ll ask the owner of the restaurant if there’s a motel nearby. If there is, we will rent some rooms. If not, we will make do.”

“I can’t possibly ask for more than that. Thank you again, Jack.”

As they slowly made their way to dinner, Jack and his companions started to get to know the others. The owner of the restaurant and his wife had arranged the tables in such a manner that everyone sat together family style, making dinner conversation much easier.

Jack got his biggest surprise of the dinner when Paul and Janet saw the buffet. Both of them were visibly upset at the thought of eating a creature that was lying on a plate looking back at them. Chuckling quietly, he said “Paul, you have tried everything I have put before you. Why the strange looks at seafood?”

“When I tried the cow, he wasn’t lying on a plate staring at me as I ate his flesh. You have to admit Jack, this is pretty creepy.”

“I suppose it is at that, Paul, but believe me when I tell you that this meal is a top of the line dinner in my day. These people really put on quite a spread for us. It would be rude to not at least try it.”

Janet was so upset that she couldn’t speak. Suzie saw her dilemma and in an attempt to console her said “Janet, try to eat something. Just avoid looking the food in the eye, if possible.”

Janet just about lost her breakfast at that comment, even though Suzie was only trying to help. Finally, she said “I suppose I can find something to eat on the table. The salad looks wonderful.”

“That’s the spirit!” said Jack.

They all sat down and Jesse gathered everyone’s attention. He spoke saying “I think this meal is going to become a significant memory for us all. As we become missionaries to an unknown future, we will have this day to look back on as the day of our new beginning. Jack here has offered not only to transport us but has agreed to supply our needs in a manner such as this until we actually get to where we are going. I can’t thank him enough.”

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“Also, I can’t help but give thanks to God for bringing us out of that life. Shall we pray?” He bowed his head and clasped the hands of the two people on either side of him as he continued “Dear Lord, thank you for sending Jack and his friends to deliver us out of certain death. We thank you for our continued good health and the mission you have placed in front of us as well as the gift of salvation through your son Jesus. We thank you for this fine feast you have placed before us as well. Please bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies as well as bless the hands that made it. Thank you for everything you have done for us, in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Everyone said “amen” then began their meal. Janet and Paul found the whole experience interesting in spite of the sea creatures looking at them the whole time. Paul couldn’t help but think of the family near the underground city they had shared a meal with. Even though that hadn’t been very long ago, it sure seemed like a lifetime had passed.

Jack spoke with the owner of the restaurant and discovered a motel nearby. He told Jesse about it. “Jesse, there’s a motel nearby which should solve our dilemma nicely. If you don’t mind, I’ll ask you to divide everyone up and figure out who goes to the motel and who stays on the boat.”

Jesse said “If this is the hardest of the tasks you are going to ask of me, I shall have no problem sailing under your leadership, Captain Murphy.” Both men got a chuckle out of that and Jack left Jesse to his task.

He found Suzie and the two of them went for a walk along the beach. Suzie was very quiet and seemed a bit nervous. Noticing her reluctance to speak, Jack said “Is something bothering you, Suzie?”

“Not really, I mean, maybe...I don’t know. I can’t help but think of Jesse’s hologram that we left behind in Canada, back in the future. I know he and I only had a short time to get to know each other, but there was a connection there, I think. But, I also think of you and the relationship we have. I’m so confused.”

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Jack didn't answer for a few minutes. Finally he said "Suzie, I must admit that after ten years in your company, I became almost obsessed with you. But, you showed me that there is no way we could be anything other than really good friends. I understand that now and am glad that you have found someone that you can be happy with. I also understand that it's not too late for me, either. To be honest, I was rather taken with Susan. And in a way, that is somewhat like being with you, if you know what I mean."

"I know exactly what you mean. And it's a good thing, I think. I think we'll both be okay."

"So do I Suzie. So do I."

They made their way back to the boat to find that Jesse and Paul had taken charge and had everyone settled down for the night. The evening was cool, but pleasant. Jack found it easy to sleep for a change.

In the morning, Jesse set out for the motel to gather everyone up so they could get started. Jack and Janet went to the local grocery store and purchased enough food for a few days of breakfast and lunch for their large group. By the time Jesse had returned, Paul and Janet had breakfast served for the first wave of travelers.

The second wave would have to eat while underway. Jack found these people amazing in that they could adapt so easily to such unusual circumstances and manage to keep smiling the whole time.

They got underway and made pretty good time with the wind behind them helping to push them south. They fell into a routine, stopping at a small town for dinner and hopefully, a motel. Only once during the journey was there no motel near enough. Jack broke out the tents and some people just slept on the deck. It was chaos, but organized chaos, and everyone endured it with a pleasant attitude. Jack found himself really liking these people.

Finally, after a week they made it to the Chesapeake Bay where Jack parked the boat in its usual spot. He told Jesse that they would have to make several trips to get everyone to Freedom Base, but it was only about an hour or so at top speed.

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He avoided Harmony as he made his way to his home. He would have plenty of time to explain that place later. First things first, he needed to get these people to someplace they could call home. It took several trips and most of the day, but eventually, they all made it 'home'.

Once everyone was there, Jack, Paul and Janet told them all about Harmony and the state of the world. They also told of the underground city and its strange society. The people were eager to meet the family that Paul spoke of as living underground near the city.

Jack showed Jesse the two prisoners and said "We still haven't figured out what to do with these two yet, but obviously, we can't just let them go back to their city. If you have any ideas, I am all ears."

The larger of the two prisoners said "I have an idea. How about allowing us to remain here? Never have we eaten so good back home. And in the society we are used to we will never be able to do anything other than what we do now. The women in charge decide everything and many of them hate men altogether. They see us as a necessary evil and treat us as such."

Jesse said "Jack, I don't know these two at all and will gladly defer to your decision, but I think we could give them a chance, provided they don't run off and start a war we simply don't need."

"I still don't know if we can trust them, but I don't see why we can't see what happens for a few days at least."

Suzie popped into existence just out of their sight. She strolled over to the cells dressed as she was when they were captured and said "Don't worry Jack; I'll keep an eye on them." She raised her weapon and the two guys actually cringed. Suzie laughed heartily at this.

Jack opened the cell door and said "One false move and both of you go back to where you came from. Or, better yet, I'll let Suzie have you."

Both men said almost in unison "We'll be good, you'll see."

With a cautious smile on his face, the larger man stuck his hand out in an obvious attempt to be friendly and said "It is a pleasure to

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meet you sir. My name is Benjamin Ulysses Grimm...you can call me 'Bug.'" He pointed to his companion "This is Jim Shultz. We won't let you down."

## The Treasure

Paul approached Jesse and said “There is one more thing we have to do. We have to go back to the barn in Canada and retrieve the artifacts you left there for us. Would you like to come with us?”

“You bet I would! I bet Susan would as well.”

“I was hoping you’d say that. Janet and I have something to ask you. Seeing as how that old barn and its chapel underneath brought us all together, it is only fitting that we get married there. We would like you to perform the ceremony, if you would.”

“I would consider it my honor.”

Jack overheard this and smiled. *“It’s strange how things work out,”* he thought. *“Not too long ago, Janet and Paul seemed to hate each other and now this.”*

It took them a few days for Janet to get the dig opened again. She checked out a hovercraft as well as some additional equipment, namely shelters for Jesse and Susan. She met Jack and his old hovercraft just outside the front gate of the city, and they started the short trip to Canada.

Jesse marveled about the vast empty countryside. He said “This is the legacy left by the idiots in charge during my day?”

Paul said “The population is kept steady at one half billion and has been that way for centuries. Having seen what it once was like, I can see how wrong this way is.”

Astonished, Jesse said “Maybe we should think of a way to rectify the situation. One half billion indeed! God created this world to be filled with people, not left to waste away like this! Even

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as far back as Jack's day there were seven billion people on the planet and more during my day."

Jack smiled and merely said "You're preaching to the choir, reverend. I'm certainly in agreement there!"

When they got to Canada, Jesse and Susan were amazed at the amount of ice covering the ground. Paul and Jack set up the extra shelter modules and in less than an hour, they were ready to go down to the barn.

Paul led the way as the senior archeologist. Jack took up the rear to ensure no one strayed off to the other tunnels. They entered the barn, where Jesse made the comment that the old van looked like it would still run. Jack agreed with him.

Paul opened the trap door and let Jesse be first down the ladder. Jesse descended the ladder to find the lights still worked. However, when he got to the bottom, he was in for a surprise. Suzie was waiting there for him.

She waited until he turned around and simply said "Hi!"

Jesse just about jumped out of his skin and Suzie laughed. Susan was watching from the top floor and laughed right along with Suzie. Suzie said "Sorry Jesse. But you have to admit, that never really gets old, does it?"

Jesse, having recovered simply said "Not everyone would agree with you young lady" then gave her a smile to let her know he wasn't mad.

Everyone made their way down to the chapel as Jesse continued to the podium. Once there, he placed the three disks in the indentations on the podium and pressed them in order. The secret panel opened and inside was the treasure box as well as Jesse's hologram.

After closing the panel, he activated his hologram. Once again, the hologram of Jesse appeared. Suzie spoke first saying "Welcome back Jesse! I missed you!"

The holographic Jesse said "It is nice to be back and always pleasant to be missed."

The real Jesse then said "I can see we are going to have a problem with names here. Perhaps my counterpart wouldn't mind

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being called 'Jay'" then, looking directly at the hologram said "unless you have another name in mind?"

The hologram said "Actually 'Jay' suits me just fine." He paused a moment, obviously in thought, then continued "This is somewhat odd. My reason for being here was supposed to be for guidance, but now that you are here, I would seem to be irrelevant."

Jesse said "Not at all, Jay. You must remember that we, along with the handful of people who came with us are all who are left. We have a mission here that will be monumental to say the least!" He then turned to Paul and said "Paul, we did not leave you with just this one hologram and a single Bible. We also left you with a storeroom full of supplies that you will need to begin a missionary journey."

He walked to the back wall and pressed a spot that seemed to be nowhere special and the wall opened to reveal a doorway. The doorway led to a room with several boxes in it. Jesse said "This room was sealed before we left. Hopefully, it has remained that way for these long centuries and the contents are still intact."

He opened a box to reveal Bibles. Paul said "Wow, there must be hundreds of them!"

Jesse said "Seven hundred, actually. Enough to get started, but not nearly as many as hopefully will be needed. Now that we are here, we can begin to spread the word somehow. Obviously, you and Janet will be helpful in that way. We will need to learn as much as we can about this time and its laws before we get started."

"I'm sure we will both be glad to help in any way we can."

"Great! Now that that is settled, we have other rather important and somewhat urgent business to attend to, namely, the wedding of Paul and Janet. As I understand it, this will be the first wedding in many centuries. Before we get started, I must ask the new couple if there are any special requests as to the ceremony."

Paul said "Actually, we have very limited information concerning how such ceremonies are conducted. Perhaps you could just do what is normally done."

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“I have something for both of you before we get started” said Jack. “I’m sure you remember our encounter with pirates? I saved two rings from that treasure chest, one for each of you.”

He then gave them the rings and Janet’s eyes sparkled in the refraction of the large diamond in her ring. Paul said “Thank you Jack, this means a lot to both of us.” Jack took his position beside and slightly behind Paul, as the best man. Suzie stepped in as the bride’s maid for Janet.

Jesse then said “We are gathered here today to join these two people in the bonds of holy matrimony. God created both man and woman with the intent of them being married. He speaks of it in several places in the Bible, beginning in Genesis. Obviously, it is an important matter to Him.”

“Paul, Janet, if you are now ready to accept each other as husband and wife, to pursue life’s journey together, acknowledge this decision of hearts by taking each other by the right hand.”

“Do you, Paul, take Janet, whom you hold by the hand, to be your true and lawful wife, to love and cherish her, in joy or sadness, in sickness or health and forsaking all others, to cleave to her only, so long as you both shall live?”

Paul said “I do.” He then smiled nervously at Janet as Jesse continued.

“Do you, Janet, take Paul, whom you hold by the hand, to be your true and lawful husband, to love, honor, and cherish him, in joy or sadness, in sickness or health; and forsaking all others, to cleave to him only, so long as you both shall live?”

“I do.”

Jesse said “May I have the rings?” Holding one up, he said “This ring is an emblem of the purity of marriage. Our ancestors were reminded by the circle of eternity, as it is so fashioned, to have neither beginning nor end; while gold is so incorruptible that it cannot be tarnished by age or time. So may this union be incorruptible in its purity and more everlasting than time itself.”

Handing the ring to Paul, he said “Repeat after me; with this ring, as a token of my love, I thee wed.”

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Paul slipped the ring on Janet's finger as Jesse said "I now pronounce you husband and wife. Paul, you may now kiss your bride."

Paul swept Janet off her feet and gently kissed her. Both Susan and Suzie cried tears of happiness for the new couple.

Jack said "Congratulations Paul and Janet! I know you will be happy together! I have another surprise for you, if you want it. It is traditional for the newlywed couple to take a vacation or honeymoon. I would like to give you a month at a resort near my island, just the two of you to enjoy and relax and really get to know each other better. These past few weeks have been quite an adventure and some relaxation is in order, I'm sure."

Janet said "Jack that sounds wonderful! Thank you very much!"

Paul said "I agree, thanks Jack. But, I hate to be the practical one here, but Jesse and his people are still new here. We can't just leave them alone while we wander off to the past again."

Jack said "Paul, you seem to forget. With my boat, you can be back the same day, if you like."

"Well, in that case, we accept your wonderful gift, Jack!"

Shivering, Jesse said "Shall we get back to someplace warm?"

Jack said "Yes, by all means, let's go back to the surface."

They headed back to the control room and warmth. The next day they packed the boxes of Bibles in the hovercraft and returned to Freedom Base. Jesse and his people made plans to build a church near the surface ruins of Freedom Base.

Over the course of the next few weeks, construction began on the church. The two men from the underworld turned out to be eager helpers. They actually just seemed to enjoy being considered as an equal for a change, instead of something inferior.

Suzie and Jay became almost inseparable, and Jack and Susan seemed to be hitting it off pretty well, too. Jack invited Susan to his castle for company while he waited for Janet and Paul to enjoy their month long honeymoon.

To his surprise, she said yes.

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Jack mused to himself *"This has been such an adventure. My life is so different now than it was just a few short months ago. I wonder what adventure lies ahead."* He would soon find out...

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If you enjoyed this book, please leave a review on **amazon** or your favorite retailer's website.

Be sure to look for the continuing adventures of Jack and the crew of the Time Awaits...

**The Time Awaits Series by John M. Grier**

Volume 1	3012: The Artifact
Volume 2	3012: The Uprising
Volume 3	Time Awaits: The Beginning <i>with Susan N. (Miller) Grier</i>

**Coming Soon:**

Moon Feathers  
(a young adult novel)

AND

Rockhounds

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The following pages contain the first chapter of  
3012: The Uprising

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## Destiny Island, Bahamas 2002

Susan got up from the lounge chair and once again admired the view from the bluff overlooking the tiny lagoon on the Bahamian island named Destiny. She had very easily fallen into a routine these past few weeks with Jack in his medieval castle, which seemed very much out of place in this tropical paradise.

She came with him without thinking much about it, realizing later that it may seem inappropriate to many people. After all, she was a Christian and had been raised in a more conservative manner. Her parents, if they were still alive, would have frowned upon this assuming something was going on that shouldn't between two unmarried people. But Jack was ever the gentleman and she found herself drawn to him even more because of it.

The fact that she was spending her much needed vacation in a year well before even her parent's birth, an idea difficult to wrap her mind around, she found astonishing yet here she was. And, what was even more amazing was that all of her friends were living a thousand years in the future. Soon she would be returning to them in the future and her wonderful vacation would be over.

The world she knew up until very recently was much different from what Jack was used to. She was born and had lived all of her life up until a few weeks ago, in what was now about one hundred fifty years in the future. Her reality was of a world where the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had grown in power, to the point that it was in the process of consuming the entire government of the United States, with its eyes on the rest of the world.

As a Christian in a time that Christians were being hunted for their extreme ideas and continual disruption of 'modern' society, she had been in hiding with a group of similar minded people. Just as the government was closing in on her small group of refugees, Jack and his friends showed up in a floating time machine in the shape of a boat and rescued them, transporting them an additional eight hundred fifty years into the future. They planned to make a life there with the help of Paul and Janet, who were actually from that time.

As she made her way back to the castle, she thought about Jack. She hadn't known him for very long, but in that brief period of time, they

had become very close...closer actually than she was currently comfortable with. But, she had to admit, Jack Murphy was a unique character. She found his rugged good looks and salt and pepper hair attractive and, not that it mattered to her, but he was very wealthy for this time he lived in; 2002 of all times!

She marveled at how different the world was from the world she knew in the not too distant future. Everything seemed to be peaceful and welcoming. Maybe it was just because she didn't have to hide here and no one was shooting at them all the time. She thought to herself that she would be sad to leave in a few days.

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Jack was watching Susan walk back to the castle from one of its many turrets. He simply loved the way the sun glinted off of her hair. He still didn't know what to call it; it was reddish in tint, but tended to be more blonde than red, perhaps strawberry-blonde was the right word. He quickly made his way back downstairs to his study so she wouldn't see him watching her. He felt strange about it and didn't want her to think he was a creepy old man but he couldn't help but stare at such a beautiful lady.

The truth was that he was simply captivated by her beauty. Her personality really surprised him. He had spent the last ten years with a holographic companion, Suzie, who had been modeled after Susan without her knowledge. He assumed Susan would have the same personality, and there were similarities to be certain, but Susan had been through a lifetime of experiences that Suzie did not share.

Suzie, on the other hand, had about 850 years of life experience, all of which was concentrated on a military base. She had only been allowed to grow into her own personality during the ten years she had known Jack. As a result, she had a youth-like quality that made her very fun to be around. Due to their vastly different life experiences, Susan and Suzie were more like sisters. They looked alike and sounded alike, but were clearly not the same person.

When Jack first realized this difference, he was sad because he could have easily fallen for Suzie, had she been a 'real' person. However, Susan turned out to be just as captivating as Suzie had, but in a slightly different way. This past month of relaxing had brought out more of the

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fun-loving girl that Suzie was, but her life of living in fear still showed through.

Susan Webber was Australian by birth and a veteran of the American military. She had less of an accent than Suzie did, but there was still a bit of the exotic in her voice that Jack couldn't resist. He hated to admit it, but after a lifetime spent as a confirmed bachelor, he may have found the perfect woman with whom to share his bizarre life.

As he pondered these things, he came back to an issue that seemed to pop up in the strangest times. Quite simply, Jack had no idea how old he was. He considered 2002 to be the present and was born in 1966. However, having a time machine can wreak havoc on one's personal calendar. For example, Jack would frequently get the urge to explore a time in the past and simply go there in his time machine. He would spend a few days or weeks and on some occasions, years before returning to the exact moment he left.

This had a detrimental effect on his ability to compute his age. When he looked in the mirror, he saw a man that he figured looked about 60-ish. He wasn't sure how old Susan was, but she was certainly much younger than he was, or, she at least looked considerably younger. He didn't really care, though. He figured a long time ago that age was just a number and not really important. He hoped it was equally unimportant to Susan.

He was pleasantly surprised to find that she seemed to find him attractive. After all, he was never considered the best looking guy in the room. He had average looks and height, although a bit stocky, with salt and pepper hair and a nearly white Van Dyke beard and mustache.

Jack spent this past month not only relaxing, but performing a few much needed upgrades to his boat, the 'Time Awaits'. On a recent trip to the distant past, he popped back into existence on dry land. Normally, he would have emerged from his journey through time in the same location he left from, although in a different time.

This time, however, he wasn't sure exactly what happened. He and his companions searched for hundreds of miles and never found an ocean. Apparently, there was a time when the oceans were not as they are here in the twenty-first century, or any other time period Jack had ever visited. As a result, he had to improvise a way to make the boat sit upright so he wouldn't sink when he popped back into existence on an ocean upon returning to his own time.

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He hired a friend of his that owned a machine shop on another island nearby to help him retrofit a cradle of sorts. What they came up with was a system that would automatically deploy in the absence of water to hold the boat vertical and would close itself back into the hull when it was submerged again. Since his boat's engines operated using seawater as a fuel, they also repaired the damaged seawater tank and added a backup tank.

His second project was to build a more permanent way to park his old beat up, yet very futuristic hovercraft, at least by 2002 standards. His current method was to simply park it on the roof of the upper deck of the Time Awaits and lash it down with cargo straps. His friend helped him build a platform that would suffice above and slightly to the rear of the upper deck. It was still not a perfect solution, but looked much better and was fairly easy to access.

His time machine came to him quite unexpectedly one day many years ago. He was a young man working on a remote island as a contractor for the US Navy on a small base right here in the Bahamas. He found an abandoned boat one day while walking along a deserted beach. Upon exploring it, he found a letter granting ownership to the person that found the boat.

Naturally, the first thing he did, once he found out the boat was actually a time machine, was to go back in time and suddenly win the Florida Lottery. His life had been financially secure ever since.

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Susan came into the study and said "Hi Jack. You're missing a beautiful day! You should come outside with me after lunch."

"That sounds like a wonderful idea. I think I'll take you up on that. It's my opinion that tropical sun and relaxing should be enjoyed every day, especially on days like this."

"I'll go rustle up some lunch. Want to help?"

"I'd love to. I'll be there in a minute." Jack closed the book he had been pretending to read, noticing that he had been holding it upside down. Groaning about having to explain that to Susan, he replaced it on the book shelf.

As he entered the kitchen, Susan said with a grin "Did you enjoy your book?"

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With a slight grin on his face, he said "It looked great from where I was sitting."

"You'll have to teach me how to read upside down someday. That could come in handy, I would imagine."

"You saw that, did you? Sorry. Actually, I was upstairs in one of the turrets watching you. Please don't think I'm a creepy old man, I'm just captivated by your beauty. I can't help it."

With a stern look on her face, she said "So you're saying it's my fault?" She crossed her arms and tapped her foot as if she were dealing with an errant child. Not able to keep up the ruse any longer than a few seconds, she burst out laughing and said "I've known it all along. I saw how you and Suzie acted together and now, all of a sudden you have access to the real thing. I'm not offended at all; in fact I find it rather flattering."

"Wow, that's certainly a relief" said Jack. "I was afraid you'd be frightened off by it."

"Don't get the wrong idea, Jack. I really like you, but you have to remember that for you, I may seem like a more real version of Suzie, and that may be true on some level, but for me it has only been a short time. Please don't rush me and maybe things will work out great for both of us."

"No worries mate" said Jack in his best impersonation of an Australian accent.

Susan said "Okay, we really need to work on that accent. Ten years with Suzie and that's the best you can do?" They both ended up in an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

After lunch, they both returned to the bluff overlooking the lagoon. This spot had quickly become Susan's favorite place. She spent several hours every day here and Jack usually spent some time each day right here by her side as well.

Susan said "We only have a few days left before we have to pick up Paul and Janet, let's do something exciting."

"What do you have in mind? You should know me well enough by now to realize I'm usually up for most anything."

"I don't know. What do the locals do here for fun?"

Before he could answer, his cell phone rang. Looking at the display, he saw that it was Paul. He had given Janet and Paul cell phones before he dropped them off at the resort where they were spending their

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honeymoon. “Hey Paul! I didn’t expect to hear from you for three more days.”

“Yeah, I know. It’s been great! We’ve been enjoying ourselves so much and can’t possibly thank you enough. But, tonight is a festival of some sort here and we thought you would like to join us.”

“Funny you should ask. Susan was just asking me what the locals do for fun. I’m sure we can make it. I’ll call you when we get there.”

“Great! See you then!” he said and hung up.

Jack said “That was Paul. Apparently, there’s a festival of some sort on the island where they are honeymooning and they want us to join them tonight. What do you think?”

“That sounds like fun! But, what ever shall I wear?” She batted her eyelashes in much the same fashion Suzie did when she was playing with Jack’s mind. “You know I’m just a poor refugee with no clothes, especially something fit for a party.”

Jack laughed and said “I think we can come up with something, let’s go shopping.”

“I have a better idea. Let me call Janet. Perhaps she will let me rummage through her closet back in Harmony. You’ve spent enough money on me already, I can’t possibly ask for more.”

“If that’s what you want, I have no problem with it. It’ll slow us down four days though. We have to allow time to get there and back and the Time Awaits can only go so fast. But even so, we can still make it to the party tonight.”

“That still doesn’t make sense to me, but I know what you mean. We leave here now, travel two days, jump to the future, raid Janet’s closet, travel two days back and jump back to today. So tonight’s party is actually four days away for us? Crazy!”

He led her back to the hovercraft, which was parked nearby. They used it to go back to his boat and he started the engine. Susan called Janet to make sure it was okay to raid her closet before they left and as expected, she had no problem with it at all.

“Shall we go?” asked Jack. He grinned and gunned the engine, laughing when Susan lost her balance. She screamed and he caught her before she could fall.

“My hero” she said. “But, I guess that shouldn’t count since that was entirely your fault, you know.”

“I know” Jack said with a big grin on his face.

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“I’m sure Janet has some beautiful dresses. I hope they fit me well enough; Janet is a few inches shorter than I am.”

“If not, I’ll be more than happy to buy you whichever dress you like.”

“I know, and I really appreciate it Jack, but even though you have all this money, I don’t feel right spending so frivolously.”

What else am I going to spend it on? I have more than enough money to meet my needs and wants and to be honest; it’s nice to have someone else to spend it on for a change.”

“You know Jack, the love of money is the root of all evil. But since you have an abundance of it and it would suddenly seem I need a new party dress, why not? Assuming Janet has nothing that fits me, I will allow you to buy me a new dress.”

Jack was happy to see Susan opening up more now that they had a few weeks together.

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