

1

April, 1786.

New York.

Morning piled up, folded, the tractor feed printout of a sixty-page paragraph.

Dostoevsky.

Jerrymander Mold glanced at his Rolex Presidential. Wishful thinking. Its status remained static, the chronometer no longer ticking.

Checked the VCR. Four new episodes of COSBY. Then, the machine had ran out of tape. Nevermind, rewind it. Reset.

Scripts splayed out on the floor. Babble drifting in through the mail slot. How many of these could he avoid reading?

Delegate. Yes. But, his assistant was unreliable.

"Snitches," he thought. And then, "Trim."

"Conserve paper now," he concluded, "Save yourself a world of hurt, sixty or seventy years down the road."

Was this sound advice?

"Pro-tip 1763: You fucked up."

Jerrymander wiped his brow. Cracked open a beer. If this was the life, he was living it.

"My kingdom for a business-friendly government."

2

April, 1954.

Los Angeles.

Flannel Ritchie blared from the house speakers as Rose Shitbark abandoned sedentary action, leaping smoothly to her feet. The echoing patio made it

impossible for her not to get up and dance.

Senator Dick Rich sank into his cream-colored deck chair, somehow resisting the urge to movement. He basked in the afternoon sunshine, vaguely pondering the scene. Frankly, he was impressed. In the months since his last visit, Rose's coordination had improved.

Dick considered the lawn through his tumbler of scotch. All was green. But the lot certainly needed mowing. Or, maybe it was just an illusion born of refraction. Whatever. He flexed in his cotton polo shirt, enjoying the feel of the cool white fabric stretching over his taut muscles.

"I don't know much about comic books," he finally admitted, sinking further into his deck chair, sliding the ice around in his glass. Dick Rich was not accustomed to the practice of surrendering ground.

Rose suddenly stopped, halted her gyrations. She gathered up her undergarments and made her way back over to the patio. Gripped Dick's shoulders and fixed her eyes directly upon his face as she settled onto his lap.

Giggling, softly.

"It's okay, baby," she whispered in his ear, jerking in time with the soundtrack. "I can behave the teacher if you want to learn."

3

October, 1492.

Guanahani, San Salvador.

"Crackers," observed Thomas.

Four nondescript whites approached, inching ever closer to the tribal gathering. These white men seemed undeterred by the chief's security detail, which was strange enough in itself. When no one else responded, Piro stepped forward and dispatched the interlopers

with his sidearm. This caused a predictable stir at court. Natives scattered, spitting unintelligible lyrics towards the bewildered corpses on the shore. Piro simply shrugged. Someone had needed to act.

"More crackers!" cried Thomas, spotting them easily from his vantage point high atop the leaves of a forward leaning palm tree.

The place was going to hell.

Thomas reached into his bag and sprinkled a handful of crack rocks onto the sand below. Advertising. Hoping the product would go viral.

"What are you doing?" whispered Piro into his commlink.

"In this economy? You have to ask?" replied Thomas.

Events progressed according to the usual pattern.

Actron, Inc.

Financial solvency.

4

June, 1989.

New York.

PRAYER: IT WORKS!

The slogan on Blactron's t-shirt communicated a subtle criticism of the dominant religious themes of his time. He stumbled slightly on the courthouse steps as his handlers ushered him through the throngs of paparazzi.

Up the steps. Into the building. No time for applause.

Blactron's handcuffs chafed, possibly scratching the face of his chronometer. He cursed his mode of transportation, an unfortunate byproduct of his newfound

public status.

The hearing would be brief. But crucial, he had been assured, to the nation's future. A referendum on the structural integrity of U.S. history. Business he could readily transact.

Blactron affected disinterest in the proceedings. Heaved his manacles onto the witness stand and propped himself up against its wooden surface. He began to speak. In the large room his words were practically inaudible, swallowed up by the granite echoes of institutional racism. Silence.

The microphone had not yet been activated. A bailiff snickered at Blactron's apparent pantomime and corrected the technical gaffe. Without waiting for further confirmation, Blactron tried again.

"It all started back in 1492," he began.

"Let me stop you right there," countered the Prosecution.

The judge didn't bat an eyelash. So, nothing at all had changed. Blactron tried another tack.

"The truth is, those kilos were probably overpriced."

Ah.

Hit them in the pocketbook.

Now he was getting somewhere.

5

January, 1347.

China.

The RAGNAROK righted herself and shed excess fuel as she accelerated through the decades. Normally, she was not one to interfere, but the present situation demanded careful attention. Her son had seemed so distracted. Thomas, as always, was worse than useless

when it came to restoring drive symmetry.

Piro could no longer discern the marker points. He steered blindly between the eras, confusing passing fads for venerable traditions. His sense of taste seemed incongruous with reality. Possibly criminal in its myopia.

These and other problems loomed large in her thoughts as the RAGNAROK clocked out for her morning break. She hoped things would sort themselves out while she was gone. Anyway, not her problem when she was off the clock.

Thomas stomped down the stairs and sat on the floor, chewing on the end of his necktie and pressing software buttons on his leaf.

Piro settled into the captain's chair and paged for his morning tea.

Bleep.

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