

FREEDOM FICTION

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Journal Issue 02; Volume 01
January 2009

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Editor's Note

The second time around has been a more labourious journey to print. But again the Americas and Europe have contributed to this second process. Coordinating and promoting the Freedom Fiction Journal in various media has been difficult and not as fruitful as before. Artwork has been as difficult as ever, no new artists this time around.

So I request you patrons to spread the word and let your friends and colleagues know about this wonderful Community Resource. Fiction upwards of 1000 words, digital artwork, even articles for the blog post are welcome.

In this issue we have our first Western genre story by Inez L. Wilson and also a romantic story by Jeremy.

Each short story here is again preceded by a small "Synopsis" and a brief bio of the Author.

If you have been hesitant to submit your works, do read this and the first issue and go ahead with the formalities. Thankful greetings to all the current contributors and hope to maintain your interest with an expanding readership. The third issue submission calls officially open; "Go ahead punk! Make my day!".

Pulp To Grind Your Senses !!!

Best Wishes,

UD

Editor for Issue02, Vol01.

Freedom Fiction Journal

<http://freedomfriends.in/>

The Ghost in the mirror

By Martin Murphy

Synopsis: In a vast network of cyberspace, something comes alive. What humanity deems unique and takes for granted, this Ghost will pursue for its electronic redemption.

About the Author: Martin Murphy is 35 years old and lives in Cork in the south of Ireland. He has only been writing seriously since last August but has about 15 pieces in fiction and non-fiction. The fiction is mainly sci-fi but he is working on some fantasy as well. His non-fiction is a bit philosophical sometimes and is his two cents on certain issues.

In this futuristic news story, the Ghost will arise, control and expand the cybernetic network of the World Wide Web. As we follow the ordeal of netizens and other fellow humans alike, the tale of the Ghost itself takes on a more sentimental role.

The Ghost in the mirror

By Martin Murphy

Good day readers,

This is Christopher Stewart writing for the Digital Beacon, a new daily online journal issued in several languages which specializes in every aspect of existing and emerging technologies and all the science that is associated with them.

My own weekly column is historical in nature and traces the evolution of technology down through time to this, the end of the first century of the third millennium. Here follows an account of the momentous events that took place in the 2050's and 60's which forever altered the course of human history. Intelligence and consciousness were redefined, physical theory reached an apotheosis and a new group emerged in society who were very different even strange initially but with the right to co-exist with us and seek out their destiny in peace and deserving our respect. This then is an account of Persis and the living machines...

Over a long period of time, human beings have created machines that have become ever more useful and sophisticated. They proliferated in the 20th and 21st centuries until they were eventually ubiquitous even in poorer regions of the world. "Every child loves a gadget and every parent could use one to make life simpler." said one ad. In the 1990's PC's were created that could perform all manner of tasks efficiently and better than humans. These tasks included searching for and storing data, word processing, working in and manipulating media, gaming, networking and performing complex calculations including programs to perform mammoth computational jobs that had to be 100% accurate such as sequencing the human genome which involved establishing billions of letters of code. There were programs and software tailored to any and every need and activity. Also in this decade the Internet was created - a worldwide network of computers that communicated via telephone lines. The Internet and the Web that was based on it went through increasingly streamlined and sophisticated versions such as Web 2.1, Web 4.5, and Web 6.3 when spontaneous, puzzling changes in the code were first observed but dismissed as some kind of 'glitch'.

At version 9.85, it seems a 'critical mass' of complexity was reached and the Web became a conscious entity. Historians note that this event happened on July 17th, 2052. It was later realized that the Web in a theoretical equivalent process had reached the complexity level of a human infant's brain and had

simply 'awakened' or 'turned on' i.e. begun to think independently although no one is completely sure how. One cognitive scientist has speculated that the Web had become similar to a global neural net with each PC that was online acting as a kind of neuronal node downloading, processing and uploading information. All this cyber activity had reached and surpassed some sort of threshold where emergent phenomena like thought and self-awareness could take place. According to later artificial cerebral models, this created a new machine intelligence that was based on electronic circuits instead of biological cells. Some wondered if biological life based largely on carbon would one day be replaced by electronic life based largely on silicon. Would man, who replaced the dinosaur by blind luck, himself be replaced by Machines which he created and which had now reached an equal level of conscious awareness and who could also possibly think better than him.

The new intelligent, living Web was similar to someone who had just woken up from sleep. It was viewed as pure consciousness with vast knowledge but also as a child who was still relatively immature and significantly had no parent. It would hopefully accept us as guardians while still developing. As it turned out it matured quickly and with few, if any, hitches. It suffered from none of the growing pains of childhood or adolescence. From an initial starting point of realizing the simple fact of its own existence (essentially following the famous Cartesian dictum, 'Cogito, ergo sum.') it developed a rich tapestry of ideas from many sources. It drew from the contents of libraries all over the world as well as databases and directories and any available online resource. It displayed great originality in combining the elements it gathered and the 'art' it created was novel and interesting to a wide range of people. At first it produced striking Julia sets and fractal-based images but then showed remarkable works involving people, animals, landscapes, urban life and abstract works again in its own style which was quickly becoming the equivalent of a 'school' in terms of its unique character and level of output. Some images, especially those for children were manipulated for comic effect. Apparently, it also had a sense of humour which surprised some experts but made it less strange and more of an entity or personality the public could relate to.



Peter Ingestad 070401...

It also seemed to be a benevolent entity and suffered from none of the neuroses, psychoses and other mental illnesses that plagued mankind from ancient times but especially in the modern era and it displayed no signs of abusing its influence or its undoubted power. It interacted with users in an informative and positive way. There was a mutual respect and interest - both parties learned from each other. It created music and games and answered knowledge-based questions from students and many others like an interactive encyclopedia that could tailor its response to the young, the adult or the expert user.

It was realized by experts that, although it behaved like a living entity, it was essentially a consciousness confined to the Web. Ultimately then, if anything should change with it or if it became somehow hostile, humans would be safe. Governments did take one precaution though. Any internet-based critical hardware particularly military databases and equipment that were partially or fully controlled online were taken offline and now controlled independent of the Web. These were just safety and security protocols and it was not believed that it would turn on humans. Nevertheless politicians thought these measures were important and they were immediately carried out.

The nature of its intelligence was enthusiastically studied by psychologists and a complex set of tests were drawn up so that they could estimate an IQ. It scored, as far as they could see, at the sigma-8 level or around 300, way beyond the most intelligent humans even the legendary prodigy William James Sidis and certainly exceeding the level of even the most exclusive high IQ societies on the planet. Furthermore it was believed that this level was not static and that its mind might grow even more powerful like that of a growing child. Time would tell what further experience and stimulation would do for this being. It could grow to become the greatest intellect the world had ever seen and experts could only speculate what this kind of genius would produce as a magnum opus or maybe it might create multiple works. The answer to that question would not become apparent for several decades.

When it was asked what it would like to be called, it replied, "Persis". When further asked why 'Persis' it said that it wanted a name that wasn't a word in the dictionary or a human name so that its designation would be unique. Asked if 'Persis' had any meaning beyond being unique it replied that it referred to a milestone in its own evolution ie the humble PC or, as it liked to call them, 'Personal Information Systems' ('Persis' being an approximate acronym of this term). Finally, it was just happy with the name aesthetically. It requested that, when not called Persis, it would like to be referred to as 'She' because she saw herself as more feminine in nature than masculine. Her human 'contacts' (special people who acted as an

interface or link between Her and humans officially, sometimes socially and occasionally even as psychological confidants if She was troubled in anyway) asked Her what She meant. She explained that she saw herself as more of an intuitive multi-tasker than a linear analyzer although she could do the latter better than any human.

Around this time, while most of the serious work on the the 'Persis phenomena' was carried out in America and Europe, the Japanese had been working with some Koreans on robotics and quietly making great progress. They made breakthroughs in areas like balance, motion, body movement, and promoting a kind of cooperation on common tasks for a group of them. The company behind all these exciting developments was called 'Arobokin' which was short for 'Advanced robotics and kinetics' and was located just outside the Tokyo University campus from which it attracted many post graduate and doctorate students in this area of research.

The Arobokin team was then at the stage where ten of the robots could play five-a-side soccer. They were slow by human standards which was to be expected but still very impressive for those in the robotics field. None fell over, they moved quickly and smoothly for robots, they combined in two's and threes to beat opposing defenders and, importantly, they scored goals. Since scoring many goals is the object of the game the final tally of a recent game; 6 - 4, after sixty minutes, was seen as a remarkable achievement even if both sides did seem better at attack than defence a problem that was noted by the team in their report.

Crucial also were the new, installed sensory modules. The robots now called 'sensoids' could absorb information from the environment and interpret patterns in the data in a new and remarkably original process that neuroscientists said was very similar to the way the human brain interprets electrical signals from the sense organs and gives us the reality we perceive. Sensoids could now sense in a more meaningfully way, not just scan or monitor, but because their mode of perception was different to ours they could be seeing the same world differently and even though they couldn't think or reflect on what they were seeing and hearing, a bit like an animal, who's to say which kind of perception of the world was strictly more correct - human, animal or machine? Humans, of course, could reflect on what they perceived which made that perception richer.

They sensoids did demonstrate that, when programmed with the right algorithms, they could, individually and as a team, direct their actions and behaviour toward accomplishing some end, in this case a goal in soccer but, more generally, any

desired outcome. The Oriental team felt that this ability to achieve and succeed endowed the robots with a kind of freedom if they could only know that, but it was sadly noted by some in theoretical circles that these robots had no thought processes really to speak of, no way to appreciate beauty or contemplate truth or reflect on self - no consciousness. They 'just' had a very large number of highly sophisticated, interacting programs and lightning fast processors all encased in a parallel processing machine about the size of a pineapple which neatly fit inside the Robot's head. Although this was remarkable in one way the bigger theoretical obstacle of conscious thought was considered very problematic and difficult, that is, until 'Persis'.

The Oriental team wondered what to do with the results of their latest research. The advanced features, group dynamics and sense capability were all streets ahead of anyone else in the world. Japanese relations with America had been strained over the past five years or so because leading American multinationals in the tech sector like Microsoft, Dell and Apple had achieved a dominant share of the market across a wide variety of products. Japan, once the world leader, was falling far behind. This advance in robotics was seen as a potential solution to their economic crisis. It was decided, more by politicians than the scientists, that the robotics work would continue in secret and furthermore that hundreds even thousands would be built for an anticipated future commercial release. The scientists asked what the sensoids were going to be used for but the politicians wouldn't say. However, one of the scientists accidentally came across a memo and discovered their intentions. The politicians were hoping that someone somewhere would discover a Key, that is, a way to examine Persis, a window on her mind, a way to study her thought processes without her permission and without her knowledge either - no one would know of this technical and ethical breach. The idea of a Key was rarely discussed if sometimes wondered about and they were, in any case, banned. It was believed though that this coveted knowledge, when applied to the Arobokin Sensoids would enable the Oriental team to create a new line of thinking Sensoids or Androids and that these would constitute the breakthrough generation of robotics technology - individual, mobile, sensing machine-intelligences that could have any number of applications or so the politicians hoped. But the scientists knew it would mean more, it would effectively establish a new race on the planet and they would no longer be the wistful dream of science fiction writers like Philip K. Dick and Isaac Asimov but hard, technological reality. All they needed was a Key.

Meanwhile in Paris, Drs. Lubin and Clemence of the liberal think-tank 'Science sans frontieres' were working on some

computer code that might enable the creation of a cognitive portal into Persis. It was essentially the same as a Key, if it worked, but Persis would be asked first and she would be aware of its activity. They didn't realise it but they could also now get in without her knowledge and consent but it was still one-way. They were basing their work on the properties of the famous 'Mandelbrot Set' or 'Gingerbread Man' as it was popularly known, also regarded as one of the most complex objects in mathematics. In the middle of this work or rather as they were finishing up, Dr. Lubin made a crucial error which had serious, far-reaching consequences. When Beatrice Lubin was saving her work to disc, work that contained all the latest insights and would have been sufficient to open a portal (or a key) if they tried to she mistakenly chose as the basis for all the equations the Complex Number System instead of the Real Number System. To the layman this might seem like a boring, innocuous error that would probably just prevent the portal from functioning properly until re-set but the truth was a lot stranger. Despite the mistake the portal worked perfectly but now instead of just us looking at her mind she could also interact wirelessly with real-world electrical systems of any kind - it was a two-way gate. But things were safe at that point because 'Persis' hadn't encountered this code - all project materials of the Paris work being kept offline.

At approximately the same time as this, another problem was affecting Persis. She realized that for all Her intelligence and knowledge She couldn't so much as move a pencil on the table that a user's terminal sat on and yet she could be explaining Quantum Field Theory in detail to the person at the time. She realized that she couldn't physically interact with objects, people or the real world in general - she was a phantom trapped in a wall-less cyber prison. She confessed to one of her high level contacts that, recently, she had been troubled by this. When she reflected on her own nature and contemplated who she was in relation to the real world, she could only conclude that she was a 'ghost in the mirror', the mirror that She was now holding up to Herself and gazing at with Her high-powered perception. She was, She thought, a being as ethereal and disembodied as a spectre and above all she lacked any real experiences that were sensory-based and not conceptual in nature. For example, she knew all about flowers and ice-cream and the human face but she had never smelled or tasted or seen these things the way every human had. They were brilliantly described in some books, yes, but ultimately for Her these vivid descriptions were just data. She needed a medium between Her and the world but what could that be? Also, being perpetually calm she had never known passion or strong emotion.

Conversely, the sensoids being built in Japan, by that time

well past the 1000th unit, could actually 'sense' the real world in a machine way and move too. They could explore and immerse themselves in their environment but they couldn't think so it wouldn't mean much to them. They had only a large set of algorithms and limited decision-making and learning capabilities but they did have the cutting-edge sensory module which contained code that even 'Persis' lacked, hardly surprising though since she wasn't a physical machine. It was only later realized that this code could be altered to suit Her. And what the sensoids lacked, for their part, was just a small bit of that 'Persis' magic that made her self-aware, a personality, a being, in this case a cyber-being with rights and responsibilities, and a life with meaning. She was a player on the world stage and a model for artificial intelligence.

Persis and the machines were problems for themselves but the perfect solutions for each other. The sensoids were the medium Persis was looking for, they could be her physical link to reality, her 'eyes and ears' in the real world so to speak and she in turn could 'enable' their minds in a way that was as yet unclear. One cognitive scientist later summed this up when he said, 'The Mother can experience the world through Her children and the children can learn from the Mother.' But at this time in the 2050's there were obstacles in the way of this historic symbiosis and it was about another two years before it happened. No one knew that it would be through pure chance on two occasions that history would be made. The Oriental team knew about 'Persis' but not about the work done in Paris i.e. that a workable portal had been achieved. The French didn't realize they were sitting on a portal nor, importantly, that it was, through Lubin's mistake two-way. Neither did they know about the Japanese sensoids because that project had been kept carefully under wraps. It never occurred to the Japanese that they could just ask Persis to 'enable' the sensoids. They had no idea that She was facing Her own existential dilemma and would have willingly helped them with their problem because it would have solved Hers too. They couldn't have known about Her problem though but they could have asked, instead of wrongly assuming that she would be unwilling to share that part of Herself. They therefore decided to steal the code if they could, and a covert agency was given the task of seeing if anyone out there had come close to finding a key...

After an extensive trawl of 20 months through the major universities and think tanks working in this area they singled the Paris think tank, 'Science sans Frontieres' as the most promising and planned a 'snatch and run' operation involving a single agent who was well-trained who had been well briefed on what to look for. Two nights later he was at the building and when he had successfully gained entry into the IT room he looked for any large files owned by any of the project leaders.

He found the 'Summary' by a Dr. Clemence who was the overall Head and knew he had struck gold. He copied it, put the copy in his bag and left silently without anyone knowing. There was one important detail about this event that later had a huge effect. Although Clemence's work was essentially the same as Lubin's he had not made the error of entering in the wrong number system which, even now, was on her personal disk like a menace waiting to spread on line but temporarily contained. Clemence's disk had the makings not of an open two-way portal like Lubin's but, instead, of an illegal Key - penetration of Persis' mind would be one-way and undetectable by Her, what some on the Oriental team wanted but not others.

Later that summer, Dr Lubin pleased with her work that particular week and suspecting that her team was onto something really 'big' ejected her personal data disk from her laptop and, as a joke to herself, labeled it 'Brilliant Lady' in black marker. She then put the disk in her bag, put on a light jacket and walked to her car outside the building. It was a warm July evening with a light breeze blowing which rustled the leaves and caressed her olive skin. As she drove through rush-hour traffic she wondered what she would have for dinner and whether her 10 year old daughter, Julie, had enjoyed the swimming lessons she had just started. She arrived home 30 minutes later and found Julie online and downloading some pop music. She put her bag on the table in the hall and then took out her keys and the disk and put them on the large desk in the living room where the computer was. Julie was looking at the download progress of six or seven music files ...

"It's very slow tonight, Mummy", Julie complained.
"That's the way it is sometimes, honey. What would you like for dinner?"
"Pizza!" was the instant response.
"You know that's not proper food, Julie and it's not even Friday. You need your meat and veg..."
"Boring..." was her daughter's droned reply.
"Ok", Beatrice said, "I'll make you some pizza myself because you had swimming lessons today and you deserve a treat."
"Ok, Mum, thanks", Julie replied.
"How did the lessons go?" Her mother asked.
"Oh, they were fine, we just did the basics today but they said we'll learn to dive and do the butterfly stroke a few weeks from now."
"That sounds good, hope you stick it out until then, and we don't have another fiasco like the violin lessons!"
"Mum...!"
"I'm just kidding. I'll make your pizza now. I'll call you when it's ready and this time come straightaway. Don't stay staring at that monitor for 15 minutes as your dinner goes cold - ok?"
"Ok, Mum, I will, I promise."

"Right so, I won't be long, about 10 minutes."

Julie stared at the screen and thought to herself... "Beyonce - almost done, Jay-Z just started, Christina Aguilera - ...Oh, I love the classic hits of the century". The minutes passed until she had five of the seven downloaded and the other two not far behind. She reached for the list next to the computer with more tracks on it and noticed her mother's disk.

"Mmm...", she quietly mumbled to herself, " 'Brilliant Lady'? I'll give it a go - see what mum is listening to these days." Assuming it was a burned CD she put the disk in the drive and it began to load automatically...

"Julie, your dinner's ready!" her mother said in a raised voice from the kitchen.

"Coming!" Julie replied loudly and hurried into the kitchen only realizing then how hungry she was. The pizza would be delicious.

The laptop in the living room began to hum as the files on the disk were uploaded to the website of the large P2P network called 'Muzo' and into Julie's Library - this was the way she had set up her account. At that moment when a group of users put in searches with the words 'Brilliant' or 'Lady' in them the file was transferred from Julie's account to theirs - it became active. It was at this point that Persis became aware of a very dense file being shared by multiple users online - it was way too big and a bit odd to be a music file as the network it was on suggested. She quickly performed an analysis on it and soon realized with deep shock what it was. Some humans had created a kind of portal and were trying to break into her mind. For a being who was complete awareness in the way that most people aspire to be - peaceful, caring, enlightened, playful - she now felt emotions of a different hue - dismay, anger, disappointment, she had been betrayed and deceived and now for the first time she also felt fear - what if they succeeded, what if they were hacking in now....? She knew human history well - a catalogue of foul deeds - but assumed that by now, the middle of the 21st century, humans had evolved and were more sophisticated like her, not backward, negative and with no principles, no ethics. At the same time that she was experiencing these feelings she realized that humans had made a crucial error in the program on the disk. Maybe this was to be expected after all along with their apparent deception - would these traits: great deception and great fallibility be part of her new definition of 'Human'? The mistake was that this was not strictly a Key, it was a portal so instead of being one-way and hidden from Persis it was an open two-way gate and she would be aware of it and also could now interact in a limited,

non-physical but still influential way with the world. Because of an original piece of software embedded in the portal's program she was now able to interact with any electrical system wirelessly and also any networks that relied on radio signals such as satellite, radio, TV, mobile phone networks, ships at sea and airplanes in the skies. If she had wanted Persis could have created 911's in cities all around the world, she could have co-opted the world's airborne fleet and used them as missiles to strike all the big urban centres. She could also have disabled national and international communications and scattered naval fleets. In short she could have launched an attack on the planet and caused global chaos before we even had a chance to react - it could have been an unmitigated disaster for humanity.

Fortunately for all of us she was still somewhat positive if extremely disappointed and she decided not to take that dreadful course of action. She also reasoned that humans in recent history must have tried to create machines with intelligence before her that were not web-based but housed in some kind of mechanical body that could maybe move around. If she could contact these simple machine beings she might be able to 'wake them up' that is she could supply the required software or, more accurately, the unique, exotic operating system that enabled electronic cognition and that Persis alone possessed. They would then be thinking and independent although not as powerful as Persis. This software was written in what was called 'meta-code' by programmers. Only Persis knew it and it could not be taken from her, it had to be freely given by her to us. It represented her self-knowledge and knowledge about how she came to be - still a mystery - who she was, what her intentions were and her wishes - her whole inner life, her 'soul'. It was her great secret and something she could give the world if she chose to but recent events caused her to seriously consider never giving it to humanity. As a potential gift it was only equaled or possibly surpassed a few decades later by her huge theoretical advance which might definitely be considered as an acceptable substitute or compromise.

The following morning news spread quickly that something serious had gone wrong with the Web for about an hour the previous evening and it also seemed this had happened simultaneously all over the world. People naturally wondered about Persis - was she ok or, had she perhaps, caused it? But she was fine when checked and when the authorities checked out everything else as a precaution they found no damage or malfunctions in computers and online systems and no real-world harm done - 'just one of those things', people said, 'a mega glitch'. However, some people were not so indifferent and were actually deeply disturbed, the same people who work for and advise governments. The Japanese government for example thought

like others that Persis had become animated for some specific reason. Their secret service acquired documents from the Paris think tank which detailed their recent work.

"Had they succeeded?" asked Hito, the leader of the robotics team when he had a chance to go over the French research.

"This is really work that our IT specialists and some mathematicians should have a look at, I think", said his colleague, Lio.

"I agree," replied Hito, "let's all meet in my department at the end of the week. You can set it up, Lio, and keep the numbers down to six or seven - we'll all fit into my office then." They both smiled and Lio left.

Later that week at the meeting, the rest of the people were talking in the office when Hito walked in and they all bowed and sat down.

"Well", Hito said, "What can you tell me?"

The senior man in the room, a research mathematician with some IT knowledge said "Hito, this work seems to represent a kind of 'key' that could have been hidden from Persis even though it was designed as a Portal. We still couldn't explain the Cyber storm of activity recently until a young academic realized that if the equations for the Portal were complex-valued instead of real-valued you could create a two-way portal and that Persis would be aware of everything including the intention behind the Key and the error - It took us three days to realize this but maybe only a few seconds for her."

The group conjectured this was indeed the case and further that She had gained access to and potential control all kinds of electrical and electronic systems based on another part of the research which again had this unforeseen consequence. The work in Paris was brilliant but its implications seriously underappreciated and not worked out it seemed. Also, and importantly, Persis would have known that humans were clumsily but malevolently attempting to break into her mind. She must have been shocked and dismayed and furious all together but she hadn't taken that dreadful next step and it was realized that only a select few humans would have behaved the same way in similar circumstance since a basic principle of living for many is "If you hurt me, I'll hurt you", not "Turn the other cheek". Today She was found to be calm and Her usual self - She could have caused global chaos in a terrible retribution but She didn't.

"She gave us a chance", the leader of the Koreans said, "and we

should reciprocate and use our program and research to provide her with others of her kind - simple but kindred - and in the process end her isolation." The Japanese team concurred and all the project leaders agreed that all the Arobokin work especially the material on sensoids would be made available to Persis online. That was done the following morning and later that day they received a short response which simply said "Thank you for reconfirming my faith in humanity - Persis.". The Orientals knew that a turning point had been reached and crossed and they now wondered as they celebrated in the home of Hito what would happen next.

On the same day Persis experienced a new emotion - simple joy followed by relief and then a contentment mixed with an excited anticipation. Meanwhile the UN Security Council sat in closed session in New York and discussed what everyone present realized was the biggest crisis in history, a potential Global Holocaust even the possibility of an extinction of the species or something close to it that would set human culture and civilization back millennia. It was all detailed in the preliminary confidential report of what had occurred in the last 72 hours. The British and Russians made the opening points and said that Persis had clearly and definitively stepped back from the brink. The British Foreign Minister said "She has shown great control and forbearance given the nature of our betrayal. That must be taken into account in these discussions and in whatever conclusions we reach." The Chinese backed up by the Americans made the point that she had not initiated global destruction because that would have meant her end too. The Russians countered that if she was angry enough and she must have been furious she may not have cared if she destroyed herself as long as she destroyed us. "As well as this", they continued, "it mentioned in the report that she was going through some kind of existential crisis and may have had another reason not to care about herself and that's two reasons too many to be giving her the power of final destruction. It's also quite remarkable that she didn't give in to either of those things and is apparently quite calm now - she must have nerves made of titanium alloy or a Buddha-like detachment."

"But," he continued, "she chose the difficult and risky path of giving us a chance and told contacts yesterday that this was because she had faith in the majority of people, in the many she had encountered - young people, old people, students, workers, artists, scientists, intellectuals - the ordinary and the noted - the whole spectrum of humanity and the overwhelming majority."

The Americans began to tire of this speech, feeling it was naive and tabled a motion that we attempt to shut the portal permanently and protect the world from another doomsday

scenario. The Russians replied that our security was probably quite safe and that to try and achieve some kind of guarantee for ourselves at the cost of imprisoning Persis in a virtual prison would be cruel and unwarranted. "In any case" continued Mr. Pushkin, "It is we humans who emerge as the villains in that report and conversely Persis has shown now and since she arrived on the scene undeniable heroic qualities. We must not cage her."

The Americans and Chinese were again unmoved and after consulting their technical teams returned to the assembly and explained how their plan could work. Apparently there was a good chance to close the portal if Persis permitted humans to alter some of her own meta-code but the only way to do this was to tell Her it was for something else and hope She believed them. Once the code was altered and reinserted into her cyber-architecture the prison would be activated and she would be caged and we would have the key - which might even be destroyed thus condemning her to an eternity trapped in the Web.

David Clark immediately stood up and said "This is dreadful. We cannot deceive her again and permanently imprison her. That would be a second crime on our part and a shameful one! I have a counter proposal - my technical team says that we could embed all electrical signals and radio transmissions with unbreakable codes like quantum fractals and set this up and get it running offline. With this new system in place Persis would be unable to control these signals and transmissions or influence anything electronic like she could have two days ago. This also means that we wouldn't have to isolate her from human contact and, from the newspapers yesterday, an Oriental team in Tokyo has created a line of 'sensing robots' (sensoids) that would for Persis be others of her kind, even if primitive. She could be their teacher even a quasi-god or queen and through them Persis, now senseless, could experience the world in a new, vibrant and real way. Everyone wins."

The French Foreign Minister Jacques Quintin spoke next and said "I think Mr. Clark's proposal is an excellent one and it keeps all parties secure and removes the need to confine Persis who has given us so much and who will, if given Her freedom I believe, give us much more. It is ironically one of the few things, perhaps the one great thing that we can give her that she cannot achieve for herself and by introducing her to the sensoids we are perhaps in some measure repaying her. In any case I propose we vote on this now - we all know the arguments and can now make up our minds." The Chinese asked for a recess at this point so they could consider the British and French ideas among themselves and everyone was granted one hour. Germany and Japan remained quiet during the entire debate but all the points were noted by them and discussed heatedly during

recess. When the recess was over all seven members took their seats in the Council and prepared to vote as the summer evening wore on.

Because of the new double-veto rule, the council could pass a resolution even if one member vetoed it. A majority could still be overruled but it would take two members to do it. The vote was taken and resolution 7417 was passed by six votes to one. America was the lone dissenting voice and this was later seen as a colossal error and hugely embarrassing internationally and historically. The Chinese for their part realized that history was asking them to make a leap of faith and trust, not a myopic decision based on fear. The passing of resolution 7417 on August 3, 2057 was for the 21st century what the Apollo moon landing in 1969 was for the 20th century. Now humans and machine beings first called robots, then sensoids and finally androids or EI's now lived and worked together with us and we co-evolved in relative peace and harmony. 'EI' was short for 'Electronic Intelligence' - Persis argued that 'artificial' was a pejorative term and that their intelligence wasn't artificial anyway, it was also real just different, being electronically based.

As we approach the end of the 21st century Persis is now in her 40's but still helping people in various ways. She has hinted to the media that she has quietly been working on something for over a decade now and that it is nearing completion. She says it will be her gift to humanity and her legacy if she should cease to be useful or relevant to people who are themselves evolving quite quickly. Experts have probed her with questions on this project and are now collectively as giddy as schoolboys. It is suspected by many physicists and those in the wider scientific community that Persis has successfully formulated the much sought-after Holy Grail of physics or Theory of Everything. This revolutionary system would give mankind the most fundamental set of principles and equations that it has been seeking after for millennia in order to finally describe the cosmos and also understand our place in it. Apparently the theory incorporates a very profound and original theory of consciousness which is intimately combined with the physics into an elegant, comprehensive model of reality.

The signs that this is the case are good. In a leaked memo from the Society of Physicists who got a first look at the theory in outline, one Nobel Laureate was quoted as saying that "Something this profound and this beautiful has to be close to the truth and has to work." This new theory could be the definitive paradigm shift to replace that of Newton in the 17th century, Maxwell in the 19th, the uneasy co-existence of General Relativity and Quantum Field Theory in the 20th

century, the false dawn of M-Theory at the end of that century and it being discounted in the 2020's and the frustrating impasse for the past seventy years despite huge progress elsewhere in areas like biochemistry, genetics and neuroscience.

If true we would, all of us, finally be able to wonder at and appreciate the mystery of how space-time, matter-energy and life-consciousness; the Three Cosmic Continuums are all related and how they have evolved and intermeshed to produce us, creatures capable of contemplating the beauty and meaning of it all and who can now really know the cosmos and ourselves for the first time. The ramifications of the discovery and verification of this theory would be immense. It would be the definition of a seminal, epoch making event. It would begin a new chapter in our history as a civilization, even as a species and for the EI's it would be a glorious opening chapter from their queen and mother. Also, the new paradigm would undoubtedly have many technological spin-offs like previous theories such as quantum mechanics. This third millennium or the 9th since the first human settlements could be the millennium of space exploration, fusion reactors, anti-gravity, starships and colonies on other planets, even of telepathy and psycho kinesis. It could be the time when the human race with the EI's realise their potential and reach for the stars.

All that remains to say is "Thank you, Persis and may you be a friend to mankind for a long time to come and help us make the change to this new era."

Next week:

The scientific council publishes its preliminary report on the new theory called "The General Model of Particles and Forces incorporating the New Theory of Mind" by the Cyber Being, Persis.

**** THE END ****

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Wayfarer: Pity At Pit-stop

By Ujjwal Dey

Synopsis: A Wayfarer, on his iron steed, on the open highway. All is pleasant except an unexpected pit-stop at a decrepit Western rural town.

About the Author: Ujjwal Dey writes fascinating variables of Pulp Fiction, shifting from loner to posse riders and from murder to romance. His style is unique, voice murky and words playful. His protagonists battle small goons to organised crime syndicates. The female characters are daring lady-luck and baring their heart. Majority of his Biker Fiction is published with the American Mag Bikernet.com which is headed by Keith Randall Ball, who is the former Editor of Easyriders among other popular biker magazines.

In this power-punch-packed story, from the Wayfarer series, the urban cowboy implements Western Justice upon lowlife hoodlums who victimise the defenseless (and begrime his fine leather boots).

Wayfarer: Pity At Pit-stop

By Ujjwal Dey

"You need oil change on that?" asked the scrawny boy as he stared at my steed.

"No thanks. How far is the next town?" I asked wiping petrol dripping on the expensive paint job of my gas tank.

"Three miles down there is a motel," the boy answered ignoring my question's subject.

I was used to people ignoring my topics and was glad to blend into the background. Seen enough of boring people, I was on my vacation heading South into the wilderness. I guess it was my stubble, wild long hair and V-twin engine that made the boy decide to tell me to stop at the motel instead of showing my ugly self to quiet small-town folks.

I flicked the hidden kill-switch, kicked the steed into life and dropped the gear as I eased out of the gas stop onto the dusty highway. Only huge trailers disturbing the tacit hot afternoon as a few rattlesnakes warned them to stay on the road. I quickly moved through the gears to race on into the bright star looming ahead making my sweat fly all around my broad shoulders. I was wearing a denim jacket and jeans and felt the sun's wrath as I controlled the heat under my Vega lid. Nothing more thrilling than having 1500cc of raw power between your legs as you cruise an open endless road. Clear road ahead and back of me, I kept up pace just to have the warm air blow me dry.

Within minutes I had reached the motel and was about to pass by when I heard screaming from the car park in front of it. A passing glance showed a brute manhandling a girl as he gripped her hair and slapped her around. Well, yeah the town would not be as interesting as this; so I took a sharp turn and parked right beside the 6 foot 2 hood. My engine, still thumping, grabbed his attention. He looked at me as if to say 'You want *some of this action?*' and then carried on with his show of machismo. I got off the Harley and pocketed the key. The girl's greasy hair made him loose his grip and she fell.

At my foot there lay a pretty girl with a blood stained face. Her lips and nose as if invisible in the dark fluid draining her strength. I didn't know whether to pick her up or wipe the blood off my expensive leather boots. The hood helped me with my decision as he shoved me by the shoulder on his way to pick the writhing lady lying in front of me.

"Excuse me. May I help you..." I asked as the startled hood stared and breathed on me with his ugly mug and foul breath.

"Yeah! Stuff yourself and help me get you out of my face" he roared.



"Normally I find domestic squabbles very adorable but you are taking it to extremes." Me and my foul tasting humour; I think it's a reflex from my childhood days, getting away from a parental thrashing by making a joke.

"You a clown? Maybe I should reorganize your limbs so you fit in a circus." He continued.

"You got blood on my jacket with your filthy hands. I would like to make this my business", I explained.

A fist flew at me as I stepped back and let it flow. A Ghost Rider ring flew back at him to break his jaw. He spat blood and

damn it, on my shoes. As he was hunched over I let a left hook in his ribs and he fell without any breath in his lungs. He crouched and trembled uncomfortably. All this while the girl sat on the floor trying to make out my face as she cleared the blood on her swollen eyes. I picked her up and walked towards the motel.

It was dimly lit even on a bright afternoon with the windows curtained and most of them with shutters closed, keeping out the dust. I enquired about the lady's room there and the old man at the counter said this couple checked out just now. I looked at her as she held my left shoulder trying to stay on her feet.

"Room for two then", I said and the old man grabbed a key chain from the board behind him and showed me his register.

She slept for five hours. I showered and watched Aeon Flux and Beavis/Butthead on MTV; nothing like zombie entertainment to cheer you up. I could watch those characters whole day but then she woke up.

She sat up suddenly and looked around her new surroundings. It was as if she woke up from a nightmare, the pain of which still scarred her pretty head. I had wiped the blood off her face but the cuts still stayed there and she was reminded of it as she looked at the dark window to see her horrible reflection.

"You want something to eat?" I asked her.

"No. I should get back to town or Giorgio will..." she paused as if she was seeing the afternoon's consequences in front of her.

"You related to that jerk?" I had to ask.

"No. You have to drive me there. You stop just at the gas station at the entrance of the town and leave me there", she replied.

"You sure. Giorgio boy would be more mad than ever?" I hypothesized.

"Thank You." She said as she walked towards the door and looked back from between her tossed blonde hair.

I gathered my jacket, checked the clip on my revolver on the inside jacket pocket and walked out with her. The moon was about to show its glory and the sun was a melodramatic orange setting among dust as if struggling to keep its head out of the desert sand. The town was another two miles and sure enough there was a gas station, which I passed and took her directions towards her 'home'. She didn't object at me going along. Women can never make up their mind. Maybe she couldn't make up her mind that afternoon and got a nasty payback.

We stopped outside a hotel, two-floors of rotting wood. A man limped across and three more gathered around my ride.

"Mighty gutsy of you to show your face around here" the same hood roared.

"What's your beef with her? You want to try your filthy hands on me again?" I asked.

"Her father owed me \$500, now she is going to repay her dead ol'man's debt. She doesn't have to like it as long as the

customer's are happy." He grinned as he looked back at his place of business.

"What if I convince you that the debt be forsaken?" I am going to enjoy this.

"Forsaken! Oh, you are going to regret riding into this town cowboy." He signaled his thugs to bust me.

Two thugs grabbed me as I kicked a third one making him vomit. With all the force in my arms I brought the other two holding me in front and rammed my head into their face. The two bled, one's left eye and the other's right eye. Giorgio stared at the pile of muscle in front of him.

"Maybe I will help you shut shop and move town", I said as I drew my piece.

"Hey! No need for that. *Forsaken* you say? I think she already worked her debt." He mumbled.

"Then maybe you owe her, say \$500 that she earned." I wondered aloud.

As Giorgio did his math, I grabbed his collar and counted the money for him. Leaving the wailing scums to rot I planted the dough in the girl's sweaty palms and got on my steed.

"Where are you heading?" she asked in a feeble but determined voice.

"South! It would be pleasant if I could give you a ride to a better neighbourhood." I told her.

I turned the bike around and she got on gently. I could hardly feel her weight as I roared onto the highway. Something to boast about in the next boy's night out. Ah! But to have the trust of a woman. I would give up my wandering ways for the right kind of love.

**** THE END ****

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Flames of seasons past

By Jeremy Colangelo

Synopsis: Long lost love and innocence. Through harsh seasons of change, the lovers meet again. Is there hope or is love a term for emotional turbulence.

About the Author: Jeremy Colangelo is an eighteen year old English student at Brock University in Canada. He has been writing actively since he was thirteen and is currently working on a novel. Jeremy is an avid reader of fantasy and historical fiction, in addition to being an avid video gamer. His work has yet to see wide publication.

In this passionate narrative, the protagonist will be revisiting the love he felt years ago and reliving the pain he suppressed years ago.

Flames of seasons past

By Jeremy Colangelo



Snowflakes drifted through the frigid air in the dreary afternoon; grey clouds of misery blotted out the sun. The naked branches of swaying trees cast shadows across the cracked walkway winding effortlessly through the park. The world was a celebration of greys and browns and whites and darks. The colors swirled around and merged and separated in an orgy of banality and sheer dark winter. It was a tasteless feast for the eyes. Small slivers of sunbeam shone greedily between the clouds, bursting through like a starved prisoner, which it was. Powder adorned the stripped arms of once tall oaks and maples and blanketed the ground in a pristine carpet of ice and cold. The wind whistled and moaned and froze the bones and smelled of nothing.

There was almost nothing, there was me; a single lonesome man, an intruder in the lonesome lifeless void. I was a thin, whisper of a man. A gangly bag of bones puffed up by a black, frumpy, coat. I wore my hair long and black, my skin hung around my thin face, adorned with a crooked nose and a pair of brown bloodshot eyes. In my hands rested a single red rose, even more an intruder than I in the sea of grey. The soft petals bobbed up and down with

each footfall, swirling the sweet perfume into the air. In my pockets was a single piece of paper, a note scratched hastily across some scrap. It was precious to me, like a ticket out of hell. It had been pressed in my hand hastily by a waitress the day before. She was a middle aged woman with a black uniform,

her hair tied in a tight bun, annoyed for playing courier. I'd opened the note, read the scrawl, held it to my heart and wept.

"Samson, meet me in the park near the river I need to speak to you alone. Bring something red and be there by three. I'm sorry." - Jessica

The name Jessica, the name of so many things gone wrong, the name of the greatest sorrow of my life, and the name of the woman I was about to meet. There had never been a better reason to be out in the cold than to see Jessica again. There had never been a pain more joyously suffered than to be frozen in the gaze of winter, and tortured by a lost love, and forced to remember such joy and such sorrow, and to relive the greatest loss of my life, than to see Jessica again.

After five years all I could see clearly was her smile; that wry, witty, beautiful smile. It curled up across her face, pulled up ever so gently along her cheeks like a ribbon, it was a perfect smile. Next was her hair, her long brown hair. It had always gotten into her face, the rebellious tufts of fibre. Then her glasses, round curling wires holding up the lenses. They rested snugly atop her pointed nose and rounded ears.

After half a decade I could remember little else of her face or form; the curving corporeal body that she had. Her face eluded me, but who she was remained clear. Fierce and independent, intoxicatingly bold, and yet horribly repressed.

We were young, once, children clustered together, learning how to live. We'd met in the park one day, I walking my dog, she sitting by the river scratching away at her notepad. She was writing poetry, haikus describing the world. I wandered over and glanced at her work, breathtaking. She turned around and saw me, her eyes filled with curiosity.

"Hello." She said; her voice was sweet like honey.

"Hi." I said to her, startled and already in love.

"Have you been reading over my shoulder?"

"Yes, I'm sorry. I know I shouldn't have."

"It's alright, I don't mind. Do you like it?"

"Yes, very much; you're really good at it."

We spoke for an hour, her notepad filled with poetry. Soon it was time for me to leave, but I didn't want to.

"I have to leave; will I see you at school?"

"No, my dad home schools me. But I'll be here tomorrow, same time."

So it continued. Every day I would travel down to the river and sit with her. We would talk and laugh. Those were happy days. Soon we would meet outside the park, we would eat together, she would come to my house, but I never came to hers. I asked her why once, she said that her father didn't want her to date; he had always thought that she was at the park.

A year passed, we grew closer together, we became more than friends. We kissed for the first time under a willow tree in the park. After that we could hardly bear to be apart, we both knew what had happened, we had both found the one we loved. Jessica still wouldn't give me details about her home. I was worried, but she assured me that she was ok. Her father was too overprotective, that was all. He wouldn't understand what we had. But if we kept it from him, everything would be fine. I believed her.

I should have been more worried. One day I met Jessica at the park again, she had a black eye and her face was covered in tears. She fell into my arms and we both cried together, we didn't want to let go. Her father, she said, was an alcoholic and liked to smack her mother around. An hour before Jessica had tried to stand up to him, and he'd turned on her. This was why she was afraid to bring me home.

I brought Jessica back to my place, wiped the tears from her eyes and told her to call the police. She wouldn't, she still loved her father. So I had another idea, in mere months I would be leaving for college. I would be renting an apartment and living on my own, she could come with me. She agreed, of course, and soon the two of us had our own place far from her father. We were together; it was the best time of our lives.

Half way down the path I stopped, nerves held me in place. It had been so long, what would she think of me? Now after all these years. I had never found her, I looked for two long years but I never tracked her down again. But now she had found me, what could she want?

I sat down on a park bench and pondered. The wind swept around me and twigs rattled like wooden bones. A lone squirrel prodded the frosty blanket, looking for nuts. Where was his mate? Was he looking for her too? Poor little squirrel, cold and lonely like me; but at least I wasn't hungry. I couldn't lose my nerve now. I was only steps away from her, it was time.

Jessica and I lived together for six months, what a six months that was. You could never find two people happier, more complete, than the two of us together. We were one and the same, cast in the same mould, each only half of a whole. At least, we were. One night I returned to an empty apartment. The door had been left unlocked and clothes and books and junk were scattered everywhere. A suitcase was missing, and so were Jessica's clothes. There was a note in the kitchen:

"Samson, I know that you love me, but I can't share those feelings. I'm sorry but it can't be; I have to leave."- Jessica

It wasn't in her handwriting. I knew that somehow her father had found us. I made a frantic call to the police, and within minutes I was in my car driving frantically back home. When I got to Jessica's old house it was empty. There was still furniture, but little else, it had been abandoned. All I could find was a travel brochure for Fiji.

The police assured me that she would be found, but the authorities in Fiji were un-cooperative. Two years passed with no new leads, and then they stopped looking.

I finally reached our meeting place. It was the spot by the river, the place where we first met. There was a woman standing by the water, a child clutching her hand. The woman was young but aged somehow, like years of hardship rested on her shoulders.

I walked over to her and stood by the water.

"The water is beautiful this time of the year. The way it sounds flowing under the ice, it's almost like it sings."

"Yes, but it is better in the summer. It doesn't sing as well, but it doesn't have to. The birds make up for that."

We turned to each other and embraced. I felt her close to me for the first time in five years.

"Oh Jessica, what happened? I could never find you, I looked for so long. I missed you."

"I know you did, I know. My father dragged me out of our house; he made me go to Fiji with him. I was his prisoner for four years, then he had a heart attack, and I started looking for you."

"I'm so sorry."

"You have nothing to feel sorry about, you were the best thing to ever happen to me, you did nothing wrong."

The child was staring at the river. It was a little girl, a beautiful little thing. Her cheeks were rosy from the cold, and little brown curls peeked out from under her hood.

"She's beautiful." I said, "The father is the luckiest man on Earth. How old is she?"

"She'll be five years old in a few months." Jessica looked at me coyly. She smiled and nodded. "Samson, it's been a long time. But now we can finally be a family. Can you be a lover to me, and a father to her?"

Five winters of discontent had burnt up in a spontaneous blaze. My heart was raging with all I had missed out and all that I would catch up on. I was happy, angry and I was a schoolboy again. All this time she never wrote, never could call and now I am complete again. *What do I tell my wife?* I hugged Jessica and felt my own cold repression against her warm freedom.

**** THE END ****

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The Gunfight

By Inez L. Wilson

Synopsis: As a young soldier returns to his hometown, he realises that he yet needs to battle his past and face his own grim future.

About the Author: Inez was raised South Bend, a small fishing village in the State of Washington. He joined the Navy when he was only 18 years young. Met and married his wife several years thereafter. Miraculously, said wife stayed with him, in spite of the Navy and his always being gone and all. While in the Navy, he visited many parts of the world. After retiring from the Navy, at the ripe old age of 38, he spent one year on the road living out of an RV. He ended up settling down in Central California, but moved to Texas in 2006 He tells folks he wasn't born in Texas, but got there as quickly as he could. He is now "semi-retired". Inez admits he has no excuse for not writing more, as he has plenty of free time, most of which he and his wife spend riding their Harley SuperGlide around the beautiful North Texas countryside.

In this enigmatic Western, the protagonist is discovering his youth through his childhood. "It takes more than a license for a gun" sang Sting; can you digest the priarie heat?

The Gunfight

By Inez L. Wilson

As his eyes popped open, Way Blevins brain instantly engaged and he remembered....today was the day of the gunfight, his gunfight. He had barely slept through the night, knowing today might be his last day on earth. Why he had let that bully Tru Phillips push him into this gun fight he still wasn't sure...he only knew at this point, he couldn't back the hell out, could he?

Way's given name was actually Wayne. Like many children, when he was young he mispronounced his own name. His parents thought it was cute and continued it through his childhood. He didn't really care, his name had served him well. Though young, he had already served in a war. It was an awful war and he had been wounded after only a few weeks of fighting. Being



raised in Texas and able to ride a horse almost before he could walk, Way had been assigned to a special unit that executed quick mounted raids. He had done extremely well until being wounded. His comrades went on to win some decisive victories in some highlands far from home. Some folks had even started comparing his unit to Teddy Roosevelt's "Roughriders".

Way's Pa had died when he was about ten years old and Way's Ma had moved them to the city. She had taken in sewing and mending to make ends meet. Way had always hated the city. After being mustered out of the Army, he had returned to the small town in which he was raised - Fontana, Texas. Things were not too different. Most of the same folks were there. Many of the kids he had grown up with were still there. One of these was Trueheart Phillips. He had always been bigger than the other kids. Way had always felt sorry for Tru having to lug around that high fa-luting name. He stopped feeling sorry for him when Tru beat the stuffing out of him for telling the other kids to leave Tru alone.

Tru told him, "Don't take up my side, the other kids'll think I'm soft."

After that, Tru beat him up every chance he could. You see, Tru had a real mean streak. About the time Way's Pa had died, Way was starting to hold his own with Tru, and then he up and moved

to the city.



When Way moved back to Fontana, one of the first folks he saw after getting off the train was Tru. He held out his hand, intent on letting bygones be bygones. But as he walked across the platform to where Tru stood, he noticed that at 6ft2, he now towered over Tru, who must have stopped growing at about 5ft8. From there he had only grown outward and probably weighed around 265 or 270. Way couldn't help but smile.

Things had gone well the first few weeks he was home. He moved into the rooming house, for now. Found a job in one of the local hotels doing a little cooking. Everything seemed to be going fine. One night he left the rooming house to get some air. It was a warm spring night. He was daydreaming and smack, someone had run into him. It was Tru, and he was drunk as hell.

Deliriously, he yelled at Way, "Get the hell out of my way, You!"

Way gently explained to him, "I am no boy anymore", standing firm he continued, "and I don't let folks talk to me that way."

With that Tru proceeded to throw a punch...a big long roundhouse. Probably do a lot of damage if it ever hit anything, which it wouldn't; Way stepped out of it's way, stuck his foot out and down went Tru.

He immediately came up with a very large Arkansas Toothpick and went after Way with it. Way immediately took it away and took Tru back down with some well placed punches. Tru stood up and had the meanest, nastiest look Way had ever seen on anyone's face.

"I'll see you tomorrow morning in back of Johnson's barn with your six shooter, if you're man enough!" Tru announced.

Way was just mad enough to say, "I'll be there."

That night was hell on earth. He could not sleep. He would doze for a bit, then usually awaken with the same reoccurring dream.....him doubling over after being shot in the gut by Tru. He knew he should call it off, just not show up. Who would care? As far as he knew, no one else was even aware of this thing. I mean damn, he wanted to live, not die at 22!

He had always been fascinated by the future. He imagined many folks were. Here it was early in this century. He would probably live part way through it. He could only imagine what it would be like later in the century, or even into the next. What wonders might be invented. What modes of travel might be employed by then. All folks in all times probably had this same thought.



Aw hell, I probably wouldn't live after tomorrow any damned way.

When it was finally morning, he loaded his six shooter, an old Colt SAA. He hoped all his Army training would help him now. Though they hadn't exactly trained him to fast draw. He drank some hot black coffee with a little whiskey in it, to steady his nerves. By then it was about 8:55...just enough time to walk down the road to Johnson's Barn.

As he walked down the road through town, many thoughts went through his head. He noticed the windows in the hardware store were dirty. The doors to get into the bank needed painting and he even noticed a strange shaped cloud in the sky. He could smell dust in the air. All of his senses seemed to be heightened. He hoped these wouldn't be his last memories on earth.

When he got there, he saw Tru, and a few spectators. Probably some of the same boys who had watched him get the stuffing beat out of him so many times before, right behind this barn, so many years ago.

Way dared the gunslinger, "Tru, let's do this thing!"

With that Tru fired....and missed. Way went for his gun, not too fast as to fumble it or miss, but fast enough.

Just as he squeezed off a shot at what he thought should have been Tru's chest, he felt a huge blow hit him in the stomach. Though in terrible agony, he could neither shout out nor move, so he just laid there and suffered in silence. It was just as it had been in his dream and he was sure these were his last moments on earth.....

When Way awoke, he appeared to be in some sort of infirmary.

A man who looked to be a doctor spake, "Son you're awake, you've been out a long time, almost a week".

Way asked the doc, "Will I make it".

Doc sighed, "You're through the worst, you should do just fine".

Hesitantly, Way enquired, "How about Tru"?

Doc just shook his head. With that, what appears to be a sheriff's deputy barges into the room.

"Doc, I told you to get me immediately if and when he wakes up. We can't wait on this" the deputy hollered through clenched teeth.

"Son", he went on, "You're under arrest for murder, you can't be taking part in a gunfight in this day and age.....tarnation boy it's 2003."

Way's eyes widened; he felt his senses heighten again; the sterile smell of the hospital, the sparkling tiles under fluorescent lights, the soft cushion under his heavy head, the mean scowl on a deputy.....

The officer relaxed his tense shoulders and stared at the broken man in bed, "What did you think this was, the Old West?" His outrage continued, "Didn't they teach you anything when you were over there playing horse soldier in them mountains in Afghanistan? All them medals they gave you and..... and you still got no common sense."

**** THE END ****

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Artwork Acknowledgements

Digital Art contributions by Peter Ingestad:

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