

The Watchers World

November 12, 2005

1 The Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies

The star was dying, its vast supplies of hydrogen gradually being fused together to form the heavier elements of its core. Soon, with its supply of energy exhausted, it will no longer be able to maintain its size - collapsing in on itself to create spectacularly chaotic explosion, then much like an elastic that has been stretched to the breaking point and then released, the titanic force of its own gravity will pull it back together again, becoming in its death a prison for all light and matter which wander too close to its grave. In short, it was the perfect candidate for the experiment.

None of this was of particular importance now to the captain of the *Banach's Pride*. Instead, his attention was focused on the solitary planet orbiting the dying sun. His wife was on that planet, preparing the final stages of this damnable experiment. Sure, should the experiment succeed it revolutionize space travel, energy production, and few other subjects whose exact details weren't quite clear in the captain's mind, but that is a very small comfort when faced with the risk of being trapped in a gravitational tidal wave. Behind him, at the ship's science stations, could be heard the obscure chatter of physicists, nattering on about spin, quarks, the Hawking effect - the usual stuff that the captain didn't understand and didn't much care for. He ignored them, choosing rather to watch the planet on his screen contemplatively, waiting for his wife to give the signal.

After a few moments of dreadful waiting, the communications system made its characteristic beeping. Wordlessly, the captain motioned for the signal to put on his view screen. "Everything just about ready to go down there?", he inquired hopefully as the image of his wife flickered onto the screen. "We are just about ready to power up the main reaction chamber. Waldo's out there now doing the final inspection. In the meantime, you should move on to phase II of the operation." His wife finished the last sentence with a smile - she knew that in her husband's mind phase II was one step closer to the part of all this he was actually going to like - riding the waves. Smiling back to her, the captain stood up and turned to his crew. "Alright boys and girls, let's get this high tech surf board into position shall we", then after giving the order, he turned back to his view screen, "Alright Janet, I'll catch you at the extraction point - just be careful."

Janet smiled back at her husband as his image dissolved from the screen. Her husband may be very many things - explorer, leader, warrior and even a philosopher at times - but he was certainly no scientist. In fact, she was certain that the only reason he ever agreed to take this job - other than the fact there was no way he was ever going to convince her to stay away from it - was the unique chance to try his skill against what was likely to be the most powerful burst of gravity waves ever directly witnessed by known civilization - the gravitational shock wave associated with the birth of a singularity. Mind you, before this could happen, she needed to get this fusion accelerator fully charged up, a task which the local nomadic tribes were not contributing to. As if by instinct, she glanced out the view port of her fortified laboratory and felt a short pang of guilt - the experiment was going to destroy their world along with it what little rudiments of civilization they had managed to build up for themselves. Indeed, from their perspective, she was a harbinger of the apocalypse, an evil omen. The very idea made her shudder - it was far easier not to think of what they were about to do to these natives, to ignore it, and forget about them forever. We need this technology to continue to survive - she told herself - there was no other place where they could perform the experiment,

not within range of their current ability to harness the power of gravity. There was no choice - the experiment had to proceed.

Waldo had been the first to remark on the sheer number of natives still thriving on the planet. Originally, the survey team had been quite clear in saying that although the star solitary planet did harbor some forms of plant life, there was absolutely no sign of intelligence to be found on it. Admittedly, the orcs weren't particularly bright, only had the barest rudiments of speech and were capable of surprising amounts of violence - they still qualified as intelligent. At first glance, it appeared that they may be able to just fit them on the ship - Waldo, with his never resting electronic brain, quickly put the idea to sleep. Even if they had ten ships, each of greater capacity than the Banach's Pride, the natives numbered far too high to be relocated to a new home. Briefly, Waldo had considered the idea of working exactly what resources would be needed to move the numbers he had discovered on this small, one island planet, but years of dealing with biologicals told him that rather than spend the massive amount of resources required, the outer galactic government would simply cancel the experiment. He knew Janet would rather die than have her life's work thrown down the drain, the report, if he were to ever have made one, would never have made it beyond the ship. It was a waste of time to try, not worth the effort. At least that's what he told himself, and as a machine, a device built and optimized for logical thought, this had to be most logical possible course of action - didn't it? It wasn't possible for a machine to rationalize illogical behavior - or was it?

Continuing to contemplate his previous actions, Waldo looked up from his work performing the final safety check on the escape equipment. Although the crew seemed to have come to terms with exterminating an entire race, the very idea they should in some way suffer in the process was abhorrent to them. Typical behaviour of a biological, one should expect no more - or perhaps no less - after all, without that drive to keep themselves alive, none of the biologicals would gotten off their own worlds, let alone reach such heights of science as required in an experiment such as this. Congragating around the lab complex were an increasing large number of the planet native population - Orks as the scientists had affectionately call them, naming them after the characters from human fantasy that the natives so closely resemble. Something strange seemed to be going on today however, the Orks never come this close - they've always kept their distance, why today of all days would they start approaching the lab in such large numbers?

Standing at the back of his hoard, watching them assemble for the efforts to come, the Ork cheiften watched the abomination carefully. The trespassers had long been tolerated on his land - to eat his food and desecrate his forests, provided they left well enough alone. This however, summoning daemons to his world as the Shamans tell him, can not be allowed. This heresy must be ended, quickly. From afar, he could hear the rumbling of the siege engines, the mighty catapults of his people, devices that they haven't needed to use for many years. Soon, they cease the world of these unclean demons, the catapults will reign down with the heavy fist of the Ork's and the world will again be free of the usurpers. Drawing in a deep breath, the cheiften let out a mighty cry, "Prepare the attack!"

Janet saw the commotion outside her window as she began to confirm the final calculations for the experiment. Swarming like bee's, the Orks seemed to be organizing themselves, preparing for something. They were also getting far closer to the laboratories than she liked. Pushing a button on her console, Janet brought her husband's excited face onto her view screen. "Good to go?", he inquired cheerfully. Janet simply shook her head, "Not yet Marcus - hold your horses. Soemthing strange is going on around here - the natives seem to behaving - well, oddly. They appear to making their way to the labs...", Janet paused for a few moments as she stared out her window. "Janet, what is it, what do you see?", Marcus inquired nervously. "Is that a cata...", Janet began the sentence, but was cut off before she could finish.

"What the hell is going on down there?", Marcus screamed to his crew. "Get me a scan on this screen, I want real time information - as best as we can get!" In response one of the communications officers began typing frantically at this keyboard, pulling up a new image, labelled "SAT-1" in white lettering on the side. Sliding one of the controls, the officer managed to have the screen zoom in right on the lab area. Flaming rocks were flying through the sky, forming graceful parabola's, and smashing heavily into the lab complex and as the firey rocks continued to fall, the orderly ranks of

the Orkish hoard made their way steadily towards both the labs and his towards his wife. "Arm the missiles", the captain commanded steely.

Everything was going exactly as planned, the Ork chieftan remarked to himself triumphantly. Taken by complete surprise, the usurpers would not be able to resist - the land would be clean of their filth and his people could again live in undisturbed peace. "War Chieftan". The sound of title took a moment to register before he looked to his side. One of the younger generals was standing at attention beside him - waiting to be acknowledged. "General. What brings you from your post?", the cheftan grumbled. "War Chief, we have encountered a strange resistance on our front - a warrior with surprising skill...", the Cheftan looked at his general in disdain - could it actually be that on front of such a victory one of his top general's was choosing now to show cowardice? Unfettered by the unrelenting gaze of the War Chief, the general barged on with his news. "...fights with the strength of ten men - he wares some armor that resists our axes - tosses our warriors like children...". The War Chief smiled at this - perhaps there would be something interesting to do in this battle after all. "Take me to this great warrior you speak of. I will see what he is truly made of myself".

Killing turned out to be a much simpler task than the biologicals like to make it appear. There was no menace required, no emotion, it was a simple, clean and efficient affair. Waldo began to glean some insight into why some biologicals have a nasty habit - despite all the consequences their societies try to force on them - it gave one clear perspective into the nature of biological life, the looks on their faces as they ultimately fail in the age old game the biologists call survival of the fittest. Waldo shut down this line of thought - although intriguing - it was not productive. That of course is the difference between the electrical and biological forms of life, electrical life was ultimately driven by purpose, productivity, achievements, while in the end the biologicals are driven only by the crank of survival. Taking a moment to toss one of the advancing Orks back into the crowd of soldiers, Waldo begins to rapidly move towards the primary lab complete. Primary Purpose - Maintain stability of the experiment. Secondary Purpose - Defend the biologicals. As he begins to make his way towards the main lab, the air around him begins to fill with a high pitch whine. Smashing yet another Ork to the ground methodically, Waldo looks up into the sky. Banach's Pride had begun orbital bombardment.

"Our missiles will reach their targets within a few more seconds Janet - just hang in there baby - just a few more seconds", Janet looked into the concerned eyes of her husband intently, "It's just...Marcus we may have other problems..., the main power generator was active,...the system..., Marcus we need to shut it down". Silence passes as Marcus contemplates the information that has just be dumped on him. Nodding his head, he asks, "How long until the sequence self starts?" Janet pauses to clear some debris off her computer's keypad and then strikes the button to display the data. "Five minutes until main sequence start - Marcus, you have got to contact Waldo, he's the only one that can do it fast enough"

Primary Purpose - Disable Beam, Secondary Purpose - Defend the biologicals. Having silently updated his goals, Waldo sharply alters his path - narrowly avoiding two charging Orks in the process - and makes his way to the beams power station. Without power the beam cannot fire, so to obtain primary goal one need only destroy the power station. The solution was obvious, why the biologicals worry so much about such trivial things puzzled him. Did they not see how easy it was to solve the problem at hand? Did they not see that there was no risk of failure in such a simple task? Are biologicals so easily panicked? Probably not - otherwise they'd have never risked coming here. It must simply be another of the biological emotions, something that unlike an electrical, they can't override, only resist.

He was closing in on the power generator now, only a few more seconds and he would arrive at the giant dome like reactor which provided energy to the entire lab complex. Behind him, an entourage Orks scrambled to catch up, one of which looked particularly larger and was dressed in a red tunic in stark contrast to the faded leather that the rest of the soldiers appeared to be wearing. Killing him should incite a bit of panic, one should think. With the missiles have destroyed nearly all of their primitive artillery devices - leaving the Orkish armies rear scrambling in fear, all Waldo should need to do to complete his secondary objective is kill one last Ork. Luck, one of the ideals shared by both electrical and biological forms of life, appeared to be on his side today.

Time was running out, the daemons had already begun to bring down the first wave of hellfire

onto them. Most of their siege engines had been purged in the fiery carnage that had followed the falling of the flames. Despite it all, the gods must still be on their side - for, if by stroke of luck, they had one the daemons outnumbered and on the run. The Ork Chieftan smiled to himself as he gave chase - we will stop this daemon and cleanse ourselves of him - even if we can do nothing else against this new found evil. All he needed was to keep the daemon on the run just a short time longer - long enough for the shaman to release their little - surprise.

"Captain!", one of the communications officers yelled frantically to get Marcus' attention. "We've lost Waldo's signal - he seems to have disappeared!". Marcus wasted no time in his response - experiment be damned, consequence be damned, there was only one thing left to do - they had to save his wife. "Fine - ignore the power generator and send down the escape pods - if we act quickly we may be able to get ourselves into position to escape." Swiftly, the crew of the ships bridge went to work, organizing the ships resources to get the escape pods down, loaded, and back as quickly as possible. Only one member of the crew removed himself from his post and approached the captain. A dark skinned woman in a white lab coat, whose id tag confirmed her status as a member of Janet's science team.

"With all due respect captain, I don't think we can ignore that generator - it must be destroyed". Marcus listened to her calm, cool assessment of the situation and shook his head, "I can't let my wife die Elizabeth, I won't let her die.". Looking at the captain with cool, emotionless stare that only one who has spent their entire life centered around purely logical choices, the woman responded quickly, "Do you know what that thing down there could do to the space-time if it's not correctly run - do you? Any change in deviation could place - ", Marcus cut her off angrily before she could continue, "I will not let my wife die - I am saving her and that's final". Realizing the futility of her actions, Elizabeth looked directly into the captain's desperate eyes for several seconds without speaking. "You are going to get us all killed over this." Having given her final say, she turned around abruptly and stormed off the bridge.

More Daemons were coming from the sky now, just as the shamans predicted, called down no doubt by the pillar of fire which shot towards the sky from the top of their temple. Stepping forward, the Ork Chieftan looked down into the newly created chasm before him. How the shamans achieved such wonders was beyond his understanding, but the opening in the world was before him, and at the bottom - smashed against the jagged edges of the interior of the world, the daemon lay motionless and defeated. The shaman who had arranged the trick of magic came up beside him - grinning with pride at his achievement. "You see, even the world itself joins in the fight against the infidels. Your faith in the gods is what made this possible, and only your continued faith can defeat the daemons that come down onto us now. Go now, War Chieftan - show them that evil shall find no home here on our world". Acknowledging the mystic's words, but not quite certain as to their exact significance, the War Chieftan nodded at the instructions and turned around. With a wave of his axe towards the daemon's largest temple, he commanded his people towards what could be their final march.

Janet watched the scanner with dread. The initial bombardment had knocked out their much of their what few security measures that had been in place - none of them had ever expected to have to worry about a battle breaking out on the planet. When the Orks arrived, they would be defenseless, but for a few blaster pistols brought along to defend them from any local wildlife. Her only hope for survival was for her husband ignore the generator and send down the ship's security forces to rescue them. It was a false hope of course, she'd explained to Marcus a thousand times the need for this to be exactly timed - the star had to be in the right galactic position, the beam had to run for exactly the right amount of time at the right energy levels, or the effects would be catastrophic in proportion. The resulting gravity well would be too large and in the wrong position - it would pull planets too far out of orbit, disrupt the stability of many populated solar systems, dooming many planets to their death. She shuddered to think of that, surely, Marcus would not be so careless as to allow that to happen, would he?

"Rescue teams will land in 10...9...8...", something on the crewman's control panel made short beeping noise. After a quick glance he turned to the captain, "Sir, we have an incoming solar disturbance". Marcus glanced at the tactical panel on his control station - he only needed a few more moments - he had to get his wife off that planet - nothing could take precedence - nothing.

"Hold our position", he commanded. "Sir, if that solar flare hits us in this position, we could lose navigational control - the computer system will be fried!" the navigator protested. Marcus brought up the trajectory of the flare onto his tactical screen. The ship had precious few minutes before the flare reached their position. Marcus clenched his teeth - if he moved out of the way of that flare, they wouldn't be able to retrieve the rescue ships in time, if he didn't move out the way, that flare could cause enough electrical interference to destroy the ships navigational systems. Damned if he did and damned if he didn't. Hell, Marcus figured, if I'm going to be damned, I'll be damned saving my wife. "Crewman," he ordered, "hold our position at all costs.

Janet heard the rescue ships land just as the first of the Orkish soldiers made their way to the lab entrances. Damn his arrogant stupidity, Janet thought, he can't possibly think he can save us from all this. Nearby, the mettalic clang of the metal doors being smashed inward was revibrating throughout the lab area, followed quickly by the sound of the Orks heavy feet as they rushed into the complex. Janet motioned to the few asistants that were still with in the room, "Come with me - let's get ourselves to the escape pods!". She turned towards the landing bay, and began to run.

"War Chieftan - the daemons are running towards their chariots!". Excellent, the War Cheif thought to himself, soon we will be free of their evil, then we will tear down this temple of hell piece by piece. Grinning now, he turned to the General, "Good - give chase, if any of the daemons turn around, kill them before they can speak. "

The impact was sooner then they had expected. Something had caused the flare to accelerate much faster then they were used to. Marcus shook his head, this was no time for trying to work out the cause of things, they needed to get the ship operational fast. He checked his console instinctively to check the ships status. As expected, all he got back from it was the empty blackness of a blank screen. Nearly every electronic circuit was inoperable - only life support and emergency power remained. They would be unable to save the crew on planet, they were out of position to ride the shock wave, their was nothing left to be done except hope his engineers had the skill to keep them alive. Sighing heavily, Marcus sat back into his chair and waited for his destiny to take hold of him.

A philosopher once claimed that time is an illusion, an invention of the mind in order to make sense of the universe. Another, greater philopher showed that was far from the truth. Time is part of space, and when you change space, you change time. The experiment of Janet Malovich was about to change space and time in way no one had yet theorized possible. A solution to the field equations that phycisist would deem impossible, mathematicians deem exciting and the crew of the Banach's Pride frightening. It is happening now. Having lived a good life, for a star, it was now time to die and raise from the ashes like a phoenix into something new. It's death, violent as it was, happened in the time frame of the people on the ship and the planet, in an instant. Burst of plasma exploded, then collasped in on themselves as the very shape of time and space began to twist into something new and stranger than before, sucking all matter inside of its unescapable vortex. Everyone, biological and electrical should have killed, ripped into uncountable pieces by the tidal force of gravity, yet somehow, unexplainably, they survived.

"Captain, we have regained main power and navigation - but something seems to driving the computers guidance systems haywire". Marcus shook himself in awareness - he hadn't expected to live this long, perhaps Janet's experiment failed? Pressing the com button on his panel, Marcus remembered the other dangers at hand - even if they had avoided all of the catastrophic events his wife had been warning him about all these years, the danger was still not passed. "What exactly do you mean by haywire?", he inquired to the engineer. "Sir, it claims that only two objects exist in the observable universe - our ship, and that planet. Also, we are getting weird readings from the gravitational mapping - ", Marcus pushed the button on his panel again, "Bottom line leutenant, can we get back to that planet and save my wife or not?". There was long pause as the engineer very audibly clear his throat. "Yes sir, but if these scans are correct, time for us will be seriously slowed down compared to their, I don't think that - ", again Marcus interrupted - "How long will it take us to get their?". Another pause as the engineer worked out the details, "Our time, two hours". Excellent, this shouldn't be so bad, those security forces should be hold out until we get there. Just as he was about to sit back and give the order to change course, the engineers voice popped up again over the com - having finished the second set of calculations. "Uhh, sir, if I'm right, then, well....", the engineer paused again, "in their time, those two hours will translate into roughly twenty-five

thousand years....". What remained of the engineers words was lost to Marcus, he merely placed his head in his hands and prayed to whatever god might be listening, that the engineer was completely and utterly wrong.

2 The City of Aquatauren

Year 2507, after the war of enlightenment

Mathematicians have a saying about the weather, that a butterfly in Japan can cause snowstorms in New York. As with many sayings mathematicians have, it is of course an attempt to explain a technical idea in words the average joe can understand. Looking down from his balcony on the upper stories of the Aquataurenian residential platforms, Frobozz Frotz can't help but wonder if similar ideas apply to people in large numbers. Peasents, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, await camped outside the great city for a chance to enter the safety of its walls, hoping it can protect them from the rifts. More would be coming soon, if the reports he had received could be trusted. Soon, if the pace kept up, the refugees would number within the millions, each placing their misguided trust of safety of the worlds largest and most powerful city - the city of Aquatauren.

Frobozz turned around to examine the map which lay outstretched on the table of his study. A large red circle denoted those areas in which the rifts had not yet been sighted. At the centre of this rift was Aquatauren, which for reasons he could not yet fathom, remained unaffected by the great rifts. The priests are claiming that the city remained undisturbed only by the grace of the Watcher, and that only through their faith in him could they survive the ordeal. Of course, zealots attribute everything from the morning breeze to the unending twilight to the Watcher, so one cannot exactly say that their opinions are unbiased. Taking a puff from his pipe, Frobozz examined the affected areas carefully, hoping to discern some form of pattern - something that might save them from their fate. Priests might well believe that faith would suffice, but Frobozz always believed that the Watcher only helped those who helped themselves, faith would not save them from this.

He walked over to his bookshelf, tracing the titles with his index finger - Mathematical Methods of the Magical Arts, Janetozz's Principle of Natural Philosophy,... his finger stops momentarily on his copy of the book of gamma, the most holy book of the Watchers religion - despite the fact no one can actually decipher what it says. Mystics and Priests claim that it was gift from the Watcher, a final gift to creation before beginning the great experiment. Frobozz wasn't sure if he believed that, after all, if all they say about the Watchers creating the world as an experiment is true - wouldn't giving them such a book affect the outcome - ruin the data? Mind you, for all he knew, the book itself was the experiment, a test to see how long it would take his creation to decipher it. It could also, Frobozz thought with a smile, be all bunk.

Seeing nothing on the bookshelf to inspire him, Frobozz returned to his balcony, looking up this time instead of down. The sky, as one should expect, was empty, the Watcher would not grace his view of the void for a few hours yet. Exactly what that point of light really was had turned out to be subject of great debate amongst those of his order in recent years. Time honored answers given by religion, that it was the home of the Watcher, his place of observing the progress of his work, seemed to be the only sensible explanation that could be contrived by anyone. Frobozz was forced to agree with this idea, there was simply nothing else in experience which could fit the facts - nothing else would account for that pin-point jewel of light which floated above them in the heavens.

Some of the observers - watchers of the Watcher if you will - had begun to question that fact however. They claim that the Watcher was moving on its own in erratic ways, almost as if out of control. Some even believe that the Watcher is getting even closer to the world, making its way here slowly but surely for some unknown reason which the observers have yet to explain. Perhaps they are both correct in their own way, but Frobozz suspects that real situation is far more complicated than either the zealots of the philosophers have yet to fathom. Those philosophers do have a point however, Frobozz mused to himself as he stared up into the abyss, the Watcher does seem much brighter these days, then it did when he was a child. Much brighter indeed.

Returning his attention to the ground, Frobozz could see the crowd begin to stir, quickly moving themselves out of the way to create a large passage way through them to the gate. It would appear

that the food caravan is arriving he thought. Now there was a real wonder to behold, giant scaled creatures ridden by comparatively tiny pilots, lugging on their very backs enough food and water to feed millions. Standing and watching as the food caravan began its march into the city, he couldn't help but notice how orderly it all looked from up on his balcony. From here, society appeared almost like a well ordered machine, gracefully adapting to changes and accommodating new components without so much as a flinch. Society on the whole, appeared to be much like the machines the philosophers were making - what did they call them - logic mills. Yes, society on the whole was quite definitely one large logic mill, with everyone inside nothing more than bits in the program. Maybe that's why the Watcher was getting brighter - he was on his way to come and collect the final readout.

Chaotic, Amy thought as she scrambled throughout the crowd, trying to find a safe place as far away from those blasted animals as possible, that is best way to describe society, one big chaotic mess. Everyone was moving this way and that, trying to find a place for themselves as the crowd tried to arrange itself safely. Why can't they just grow their own food like most cities do - after all, isn't this the biggest, most powerful city in the world, shouldn't they be able to feed themselves? Amy choose not to think too hard about this, for the reality was, if the city could feed itself, her plan to get in wouldn't stand a chance. Pushing her way to the front of the crowd, she smiled as the ground began to vibrate from the heavy plodding of the giant lizards which made up the food caravan. She couldn't remember what they were called - her father told her once when she was young, but back then she was more interested in what behind the next doorway or over the next hill to have given it much credit - but it didn't matter. What mattered was the gigantic things were big enough to hide her enough and thick enough skin that she could simply attach herself to one of their stomachs - riding in unseen and unexpected. It was a good plan, nothing could possibly go wrong, provided she could get to the front of the crowd of course.

If any flaw could be found in Amy's plan so far, it would be that she had not yet considered what to do about the guards. Guards wearing the white and blue uniform of the guards of Aquatauren stood on either side of the Caravans path, keeping the peasants back with the point of their spears. She was going to need a distraction of some sort, this was certain. Searching her pockets, she pulled a small, spherical object not much larger than the palm of her hand. It had been purchased for just such an occasion of this - she could only hope it worked. Getting herself up close to the front of the crowd, she hurled the object underneath one of the animals. The explosion was magnificent, startling the animal to begin struggling against its masters commands as it attempted to maneuver itself as far from the source of the disturbance as it could manage. Having no desire to be crushed under the panic stricken animal, the guards, along with much the peasantry began to scramble out of the animals path. Now was the time, her only chance, without hesitation, she jumped into action and began to head straight towards the beast. Nimbly, she managed to avoid being trampled under the hulking feet of the terrified beast, making her way directly under its massive midsection. Pulling out two strange gloves - each equipment with tiny sharp hooks on the fingers and thumbs, Amy gathered her courage and her strength, and leaped upwards towards the belly, praying to the Watcher that everything would go exactly according to plan.

This commotion did not go unnoticed by Frobozz Frotz as he stared down from his balcony, brooding over the problem the council had put on his shoulders. He watched with vague interest, as the guards and animal trainers regrouped themselves into an orderly position, gradually calming the beast down so that it could complete its journey through the gates of the great city. All in all, it was simple matter, and did not warrant any further attention from the Wizard than he had already given it. He turned around to return to his work just as thumping sound of his door knocker echoed throughout the house. Funny time of day to be disturbing my work, Frobozz muttered to himself, making his way towards the old wooden door. On the other side of the door turned out to be a tall man - an elf, or terran perhaps - whose height towered over Frobozz's mere three foot stature. Straining his neck, he looked up at the man, dressed in a ragged, slightly over used uniform signifying himself as one of the cities postal workers. Inhaling deeply on his pipe, the old Wizard inquired, "And exactly what mail shall I be receiving today, old friend?" . The worker, who had been Frobozz's personal delivery worker for as long as he had known him, smiled and delved into his bag. After a few moments of rumaging he pulled out a small envelope, yellowed with age and

shut with a seal the Wizard could not recognize. On the front, in a strangely perfect hand, was only written the name Frobozz Frotz. Bending over, the deliveray made handed the note to the old Wizard and then quickly excused himself.

Alone now, with the message, Frobozz examined it carefully before opening it. It did not appear to have hidden traps or devices with which to cause him trouble, but then one could never be sure. Closing the door, he swiftly made his way back to the study and dragged his copy of the book of the lords from his dusty keeping place. Licking his fingers, he turned page after page, comparing the strange symbol on the seal to those of the lords of the lands. He could find no match - the seal was not in use by any member of any family of importance in or out of the city. Who would have sent him a message at this time of night then? There was only one way to find out, and deciding that the chances of this note being some kind of trap were rather slim, the Wizard broke the seal and extracted the paper from its holding place. It looked like it was created on a printing press, the letters were perfectly formed, but its content was ridiculously short.

FROBOZZ FROTZ,

THE RIFTS SHALL SOON COME THIS WAY. A PERSON STRANGE STATURE AND BEARING SHALL PRECEDEE THEM, SHE WILL CARRY THE KEY TO YOUR PROBLEM - YOU NEED ONLY HAVE THE WILL TO TAKE WHAT YOU REQUIRE.

Frobozz read and then reread the note, unable to make any sense of it. It appeared as if another crank had decided to start throwing conspiracy theories his way again - he would need to speak to his messenger about properly screening his senders again. Shaking his head in disgust at the time wasted on such a thing, Frobozz crumpled the message and tossed it into the fire.

As the old wizard layed down to rest for the night, the food caravan made its way into the city of Aquatauren. Hanging on the undercariage of one of the caravans titanic beasts of burdan, Amy watches the huge iron gates of the city close behind it. Popping her head upwards at different intervals - hoping to find a safe place with which to make her escape into the depths of the city. As the caravan moves towards the cities trade centre - a large open air circle in the centre of the city which representitives from nearly every major trade guild in the world - Amy can hear the whispering prayers of the cities lower class between the vibrations caused the caravans hulking steps. Plodding away, the caravan moved silently through the city for what seemed to Amy's ever tiring arms as ages before finally coming to a stop. From her position on the underside of one of the beasts, Amy could just barely make out the conversation being called back and forth between the riders.

"Hey - y'all see we ain't there yet - what the hell's the hold up this time?", the pilot of her beast called out. A gruff response came back from the beast ahead of them, "Not sure - looks like a customs inspection of sorts". The pilot controlling the beast Amy was clung to didn't seem to agree with this intrepotation of the situation - at least this is what she inferred from the long guttering curse he directed towards his work mate intelligence. Still, the last thing Amy needed at this point was to be captured by customs agents. With the cities detention areas already filled far beyond capacity, the Watcher only knows what it is that they will do to her if they find her having snuck into the city without a pass. Taking great care not to push the spiked hooks in her gloves any further into the thick leathery skin of the beast than was absolutely required, she slowly climbed down the beasts leg to hard stone roads that lead to the trade centres. Taking a quick survey of her surroundings, she swiftly decided to choose the small pub that stood on the side of the road as her new destination.

The bard was enthusiastic, if nothing else, as he stood in the centre of the crowd, weaving his tale of adventure, romance, and woe with periodic stops to induldge himself in Pubs less than steller ale. "...there they were - Hilbert and Stalin - greatest heroes of their time standing alone against the crazed Wizard Marvin the terrible. This was it my friends - that last battle between good and evil - the time for the final overthrow of the intellectually unclean!", the bard's fist was clenched now, as the crowd rolled their eyes - this having been about the hundreds time they had heard this particular story, although some of the embellishments were slightly new. Amy payed little attention to the rest of the narritive as she makes her way with her ale to a more seculded section of the pub. Sitting down in the hard wooden chair, she stared thoughtfully at her drink. So here I am, she thought to herself, the city of Aquatauren, the greatest and most prosperous place in the world. She looked around herself again discretly - too bad the first place she came to had to be such a dump.

She looked into the ale again, shuddering to think of just how badly watered down it must be in a place like this before deciding to take her first swig. After all, it hadn't killed anyone else in the room yet. Well, it wasn't completely terrible - it did have a surprisingly nutty flavour to it, if one left the nuts to rot long enough anyway. It was however, better than nothing, and the spirit of the drink helped to relax her nerves.

First order of business was to find a place to sleep for the night. Looking into her coin purse, she conceded to herself that this wasn't going to be easy - the Watcher had blessed her with little means and high standards. This was the least of problems of course, since even if she had the money, she hadn't a clue as to where in this labyrinth of a city one could go to get descent lodgings. It was clear that if she was going to make her way around this city tonight she was going to need a guide. The prospects for this did not look promising. Most of the patrons of the bar didn't look coherent enough not to get lost getting out of bed in the morning - and that's assuming they gained enough mental control to take their eyes off their behind to get up and do so. The only available person in whole pub who even appeared to have the ability to string two words together was that bard. Travelling around the city having to listen to raving tales of that man wasn't the most appealing idea she could think of, but then it wasn't the worst either. At least he was clean - well, after a fashion anyway.

Quietly, she made her way into the bards semi-captivated audience. "...the thunder was deafening!", he proclaimed - now well into the battle he had begun to narrate much earlier, "With his comrade down for the count, Hilbert stood, sword glistening in his mighty hand and the wind blowing through his righteous hair, and stared down the evil Wizard. The Wizard sneered back at him raising his staff to prepare another of his deadly spells - but our hero was too fast for him. Seeing his chance, Hilbert thrust forward with his sword, forcing the wily wizard to jump to the side onto the edge of the mountains slippery slope. With no place to escape, and no way to fight without losing his footing on the precarious edge, the wizard still remained defiant. 'You think you've won - don't you infidel? You think that you and your false god - your Watcher - will control everything? Well, I spit on your false god infidel' as if to make the point clear the wizard spat a gob of yellowish liquid onto the ground before himself. 'I would rather die as a followerer of the one true god then spend one moment worshipping a point of light in the sky.' With a dastardly smile, the evil Wizard stepped and pushed himself from the cliff. Hilbert ran forward to watch his most despised opponents final fall - but, when he looked over the great cliffs all he saw was air!", the bard spoke the last sentence mysteriously, attempting to give more emphasis to the strangeness of the events he was describing. After a brief pause, the bard continued his story, "they say that when he fell, he cast a great spell - a spell which would destroy our world as vegence for the fate he suffered. This my dear people, is the origin of the rifts!"

Great, Amy thought, another bard with some crackpot theory about the origin of the rifts. If it wasn't wizards who caused it, it was the readers, or the philosophers, or the Watcher himself - wherever the bards could weave a tale with the plight of the rifts you could bet they were busying string people along with their have baked ideas. Bards were pretty much all alike in this way, but then, could you really blame them? Stories about the rifts kept audiences interested in times like these and who knows - maybe this guys right? With the bards tale now finished, his audience began to slowly disperse. Amy waited until some of the more disreputable audience members went on their way before approaching the bard. Smiling demurely, in hopes her feminan charms could score her a few points and keep the price down to something affordable, she walked up to the skinny, underfed bard and shook his hand. "Name's Amy - what's yours?" she asked in the most upbeat manner she could manage. Returning Amy's smile, the bard answered quickly, "Dave, Dave McGregor - former companion of the great-...", Amy cut him off before he could get too far into this speil, "Yeah, yeah, let me guess companion of one of the worlds greatest adventurers? Mightiest Wizards? Most reknown thinkers? Most daring prospectors? Anything I might've missed?". Looking slightly deflated, Dave simple shaked his head. With a sigh, he looked back at Amy, "So if it's not tales your interested in - what are you looking for from my humble self.". Chuckling at the very idea of this bard referring to himself as "humble", Amy phrased her request as simply as possible, "I need a guide".

Guide, now there is a new trick for me, Dave thought to himself. Considering the idea, he take a

few seconds to give his perspective client a once over - he had to admit she was attractive if nothing else. She stared at him expectantly, her face just barely disguising her impatience, around himself she wore a loose fitting cloak and travelling outfit that masked most of her other features. Indeed, if she were to raise her hood, she could easily pass as a male from a distance in her current get up. Dave's only problem with the whole situation was that he didn't really know his way around the city that well - hell, no one really did, he thought. Every day on his way to "make the rounds" of the local pubs and provide his services to those with coins in need of a exciting tale, he was constantly besieged by lost citizens trying to find their way to or from on place or another. Besides, he thought to himself as a final point while looking into his change purse, I need the money.

"Well sure - if it's a guide you need, then I'm your man! Where'd you have in mind to go?", Dave replied to Amy's request. Amy sighed slightly before responding - something about the man was already getting on her nerves and they had yet to even leave the pub - "For this cycle, I need place to sleep, in the morning, I'll need help finding my way around to look for work". Smiling mischievously, Dave responded to this rather quicker than Amy had expected, "A place to sleep for the night eh? Why I've got just the place we can be comfortable - heck, I'll get us a few candles - ". Amy was looking him rather testily, her eyebrows raised in a questioning manner. "I do not recall inviting you to rest with me. If this is a problem, I am sure I can find someone else to take my money".

Dave shook his head frantically. "No, no that's quite alright pretty lady - I'm more than happy to your money. Just give the word and I'll take ya somewhere that fits the bill." Dave stands up and looks at Amy expectantly. Not quite satisfied that Dave was completely capable of the task, nor that he was actually intent on doing it, Amy shrugged her shoulders. What other choice did she have really? "Let's go then," she instructed Dave, tossing a slightly worn coin his direction.

Standing in the shadow of the northern residential platforms of Aquatauren - huge hulking metal slabs supported by pillars - connected by ladders and tubes- on which the majority of the cities housing stands, is the entrance to the Engineering Guild. As the guild is built completely underground, in a little visited neighbourhood of the Aquataurenian underground at that, Dave guided Amy away from it. Dauron watched the two go by with little interest - his thoughts were elsewhere and only a need for a change of scenery had driven up to cities ground level. Short, but muscular, the young engineer rubbed his chin thoughtfully while staring up wards towards the Watcher. The Arcane Cannon, as the quacks in the mage's guild had forced him to call it, was nearly complete. Why so much importance had been placed on the construction of a weapon, was beyond his comprehension. Someone in the city clearly believed that they were going to have need of some powerful weapons very very soon. Powerful weapons they would have too, if he could just work out a way to stabilize the power source. Mind you, it would be a heck of a lot easier if they had any coherent idea on how this power source worked - all they knew was that it never seemed to run out. The Wizards had hoarded it their towers for years studying it, testing it, probing it - yet what could they tell him about it? Nothing! That's what! Some good the bloody wizards were!

Dauron sighed, it was pointless to continue trying to work this cycle - the only thing he was getting any closer to was frustration. What he needed as a way of examining the inner workings of the machine without destroying it. There had to be some way of doing it, he just had to figure out what. Checking the time on his watch, the Engineer turned around, back towards the Aquataurenian underground. The next cycle still held hope - with luck tomorrow's caravan from Marina would have the corospondance he had been waiting for all this time would at last be ready. Smiling, he made a point of being up early in the next cycle - he'd intercept the caravan before it became too busy and use his new found goods to get straight to work. If all went well, tomorrow would be the day he would discover the secrets of the ancients.

3 Turing Machines

In antiquity, before the perfection of the gravity drive, many among the human race set out to answer a fundamental question about themselves. As is typical amongst humans, they tended not to focus on studying themselves directly, but casted their question in a more indirect manner.

The question asked was simple - "Can a machine think?". Understanding the question and its implications turned out to be far more in depth than anyone at the time imagined. The answer, when it came, came first from mathematics - a strange branch of the theory of operators which allowed them to manipulate data in a new way - some of which not computable by the machines of the time. This new theory provided the doorway, the key to understanding the nature of what they called Artificial Intelligence, and for a time it appeared that all they needed to do was open the door. Unfortunately, the tools that existed at the time, the door was very much locked.

The mathematics was attacked viciously, thousands of dissertations suggested possible pitfalls where the calculations may have gone wrong - or possible places where the theorems could be extended to just the place they needed to build the holy grail of computing machines. All of these turned out to be fallacious. It took a radical change in a point of view and a feat of engineering to construct a new form of computing machine - the machine described by the mathematics - the programmable Neural Machine. A variant of this very machine rests, manipulating signals at rapid speed, in the head of the man that stood at the doorway of the philosophers abode.

Archistotle examined his guest cautiously. His robe, dusty and weather worn from over use, hung heavily on him. As usual, the stranger's hood was drawn upwards, covering his strangely angular face and peculiarly grey tinted eyes. Those same eyes now watched Archistotle purposefully, giving him the feeling much as if he were one of the beasts under the microscope. It was not a comfortable feeling. "Can I help you?", the old scholar hazarded.

Continuing to examine the scholar with great care, the robed man stepped forward slowly - as if considering every minute consequence of each time he took. Motioning towards a large heavy door to his left, the man spoke tersely. "Your telescope - is it free?". The voice was emotionless - almost metallic if such a thing were possible. Unsure of how to respond to the robed man's question - knowing from experience that every motion would be read as a sign of intent or purpose - the scholar simply nodded. Pulling a large bag of coins from his pocket, the robed man searched through and picked out a particularly large, purple coin. Tossing it towards the scholar, the robed man stated simply - "This should cover the charges" and made his way into the observatory.

As one would expect, the Watcher's World harbours few observatories - all of which are trained to the single star which graces the world's otherwise bleak sky. Having spent hundreds of years observing the single pinpoint of light, those few observers who toil away their time tracking the path of their God in the sky, have devised clever gears and spring devices which automate the movements of the great telescopes keeping them synchronized with the path of the star. Approving of this, the robed man took a seat in the observation area and placed one of his grey tinted eyes up to the lens of the telescope. He observed the path for several minutes, unmoving, appearing to be concentrating heavily. A few moments later, the man stands up abruptly, straightening out his old dusty robe and begins to walk out of the room.

"Short session today sir?", Archistotle inquired - in the past the man would spend many hours just sitting, unmoving, staring into the lens of the telescope. He seemed different now, full of energy - a greater presence if possible than he was a few moments ago. He turned his gaze onto the scholar and held it there for a few moments, perhaps rethinking his decision to display such a large amount of excitement in front of the scholar. "Aquatauren?", he inquired evenly, "what is the fastest means of getting there in this town?" The scholar sighed, at least his question was easy - the city of Marina, like any other populated town in the world, sent a Caravan every week to the mighty capital of Aquatauren to obtain new supplies and trade the unique wares developed by the diverse interests of the Neural Philosophers that dwelt here. The robed man listened carefully as the scholar explained this to him, nodded his head and began to make his way quickly out the door.

As far as cities went, Marina was sparsely populated - desire for solitude was one of the main attractions that brought in its residents. Houses were placed at great distances from each other - in many cases placed with the idea of never having to run into one's neighbours strongly on the minds of the builders. Each house was unique - customized to serve as both residence and laboratory to the point where the experienced traveller could tell the trade of a house's residence by a mere glance at the front yard. Doctors would house fields of bone yards, extended over the years by multitudes of experiments on animals and corpses. Mechanically inclined residents filled their fields with a museum of strange clockwork devices, some of which sat failed and useless while others chugged

around under the power of all variety of engines, springs and gears. Having been a resident in this city for far longer than he cared to remember, the robed man made his way directly towards the town square - the only place in the city where any two buildings were built within sight of each other - in hopes of meeting up with the caravan before it left for the capital.

Dodging in and out of the residents' properties - avoiding those who take less kindly to trespassers than most major countries take to invasion forces - he arrived at the town square from its northern road. Moving, much like ants endeavouring to transport the sum total of unsuspecting picnicker's lunch back to their hill, works weaved in and out of storage houses and buildings, grabbing all nature of strange devices, potions, and barrels and converging with the goods to the carts of the caravan. It wasn't the largest caravan in the world, its goods were so specialized that the demand for its wares was not overly great, but when compared to the desolate solitude that accounted for the rest of the city, it appeared enormous.

Biologicals, the man thought, an entire cesspool of irrationality. How they had managed to survive - even prosper - all these years still mystified him. At first, when he had awoken, he was able to avoid them - stay out of their constant fighting over who was in control of what land, who controlled what resources, etc, etc - all without purpose, all counterproductive, all so very inefficient. He had tried to convince them to co-operate with reason - but no one would listen. Biologicals, it seemed, based their decisions on emotions, on individual wants and desires, on personal survivability - not on logic and purpose. Waldo would have long ago concluded that this was a defective way to run a society, a defective way to exist, but the endurance of the Humans and the Orks served as continually evidence against his hypothesis. Shaking his head, Waldo headed towards the crowd, despite all the millennia of observing biologicals, he still was not entirely certain how they managed to survive.

One of the caravan's merchants turned to Waldo as he approached - recognizing him as one of the many hermits that have been known to travel amongst the philosophers' grounds. Unsure of exactly how to approach the new comer, he opted for the old try and true way of simply offering a simple hand shake. Waldo regarded the outstretched hand with curiosity - biologicals had such pointless customs - but if he was going to engage their services it would be best to play along. Grabbing the outstretched hand, Waldo shook it slowly then released it. "I seek passage to the capital," he stated factually, "Can you provide that?" Breathing deeply, the merchant thought it best not to refuse this strange hermit, responding quickly he answered "Of course - provided you can pay the fare. Price is set at two -full-", he emphasized the last word, hermits weren't exactly known for their riches after all, "iridium coins. Can you pay?". The merchant stared at Waldo hopefully. Pulling his tattered leather pouch from his pocket, Waldo flipped two large circular coins in the merchant's direction. "I believe you shall find those more than sufficient", he stated, before making his way into the nearest wagon.

Electrical life, although built by their masters to be durable, reliable, stronger, and smarter than the average machine or even biological in many cases, were never intended to survive the length of time that Waldo's existence has stretched. His stability was far from certain - he knew this. Mathematically, his matrix had been declared "asymptotically stable" - a buzz word essentially describing him as a machine that would eventually remain sane forever. The time it would take to reach even a tolerable level of stability over time, was never specified. Waldo was begging to wonder if twenty five thousand years was even long enough. Alone, he found himself instinctively pulling out his quill and scratching out the equations of the operators that controlled his mind - unconsciously hunting for some form of comfort against the ever pressing fear that he was slowly losing his mind. Fear - where electricals even supposed to feel that emotion? He knew electricals could feel, having been built on the same principles that biological minds functioned, it was inevitable that they would begin to emulate some of their emotions as well. Waldo considered such emulation a sign of weakness rather than a sign of strength. Emotions served no purpose to an electrical, they were a waste of mental powers that could be better used to achieve the goals they had been created for.

His purpose. That had been lost long ago of course. The scientists he had been built to protect gone to dust, the experiment he had been constructed to serve long since forgotten - remembered no longer even in the legends of the biologicals that now populate this strange new world. He had been purposeless for a time - useless. He should have disassembled or at least reprogrammed, but

their were no masters around to do either. Suicide had been considered of course, but Waldo was a highly expensive machine - only a fool would have given such a machine the ability to destroy itself out of hand. For the first time since his activation, he had forced to seek out his own purpose - a new goal to justify his existence. Technically, he knew, he shouldn't exist in the first place. This world, these people, should all have been destroyed when the singularity was formed - sucked him by the massive tidal forces created by mass of the black hole. Janet has spent what remained of her life - when she wasn't being forced to fight for her own survival against the unrelenting attacks of the Orkish hoards, searching the mathematics for a solution which would explain what had happened to them. Despite her brilliance, she was no further towards a solution then the day she had started. Waldo choose this to be his new purpose - to continue the work of his former master, and in doing so found comfort for a time.

With few resources to work from on a world that was rapidly falling into barbarism, Waldo struggled with the puzzle for a long time. Days he would sit, all other inputs disabled, meditating on the issue - filling pages worth of calculations in his mind. Bending and twisting the tensor equations that dictated the shape of space-time finding no solution the equations which could account for their survival. All of them seemed to place this planet right in the middle of singularity, gravitational forces ripping it to peices in the process. He had, at one point given up the issue, deciding that his very eyes must be deceiving him, but their was one source of information he had not tried. Buried within the rubble of the lab complex had been the main computer of the complex - an Artificial Intelligence - a fellow electrical, that had gone offline during the Orkish raids. If only his fellow electrical didn't look down on him as some form of inferior.

Electricals whose purpose it was to administrate tended to have an ego problem, this was something he had learned soon after being constructed. Something about being in complete control of every detail of a Starbase, a Starship, or a simple research complex, seemed to twist their field equations into devolping an ego. A very biological trait that Waldo was of the opinion lowered their actually functionality. The conversation with Archimedes had not gone well. She was pompous, dismissive, and due to the damage done to her from years of neglect, was more than a little insane. In the end, despite all the pleas he had made, despite threats, deals, and all other negotiation tactics he could muster, she had simply shut herself off to him. This was something he intended to change very soon.

A loud cry could be heard from outside the Caravan, as a slight shaking followed by an uncharacteristic calmness signified they had come to a stop. How long he had been sitting, contemplating the past, Waldo wasn't sure - a few hours at least as the Watcher had moved far further in the sky then he had remembered it when he last saw it. Mumurred conversations could be heard outside - some stranger was attempting to negotiate a fair price for transport no doubt. Not all that well educated for these parts, at least not from the sound of her, Waldo concluded. Indeed, she spoke common in broken sentences - interspaced with many long pauses as if she were unsure as to exact word she should say next. Their was also the accent - certainly not from this part of the World - one of the Northern Barbarians perhaps? Something in Waldo's mind told him that this wasn't the case - there was something strangely familiar about that accent, lost in the endless noise that had filled the circuits of his mind.

When the negotiations were at an end, the stranger stuck her head into the wagon and looked around cautiously, as if everything that she saw was strange and unfamiliar. As she pulled herself up and into the wagon, Waldo could see she was dressed in a stangely new looking leather tunic. As she walked she seemed to hoard her bag to herself, as if guarding something of immense value, all Waldo could make out from the general shape of the bags contents as she crushed it against herself was that it was roughly rectangular. A book perhaps? He questioned this idea - what would such an uneducated woman as this be doing with a book?

She sat alone, making an effort to avoid eye contact with Waldo and the few other passengers that had purchased passage on the wagon. Once the wagon began to move again, filling the wagon with the sound thumping sound of horse feet and occasional rattle as the wagon frame shook at each nick and cranny on the road, Waldo was almost certain that he heard the woman begin whispering to herself, speaking in quick spurts, then going silent for many minutes before speaking again. Although Waldo was unable to isolate the individual words from the noise that surrounded them,

he was certain that the language was not common. It was a language he recognized however, one that he spoke himself, long ago. His head shot up, the realization of the strangers language had sparked within him the solution of another puzzle. The box that woman carried was no book - it was something far more valuable. Suddenly, sections of neural network began to activate in sequences that had not been triggered in this way for many years, obeying age old commands coded into this system at his construction. It would appear that he had a purpose again - but was it one he agreed with?

Elizabeth crouched down in the corner, gripping her radio with both hands. She still couldn't believe the captain had volunteered her for this mission. Ever since the incident he had become more and more irrational, clinging to the pipe dream that his wife was still alive somewhere on this wretched planet. Having seen the place herself, Elizabeth was certain that this was nothing more than a fantasy in the captains slowly dying mind. She checked the time again on radio - thirty more seconds until her next position update. The orders were simple, if not generally insane, scout out the remains of the world and find the captains wife. Her attempts to reason with him, to explain the futility of such a quest and why they should instead focus their efforts on finding a way out this precarious situation had fallen on deaf ears. The captain would not give up without absolute proof that his wife could no longer be saved. Turning on her radio again, Elizabeth shook her head - how was she to prove anything to the captain when the woman he looked for was by all logical accounts dead for the last twenty-five millenia?

"Position confirmed Doctor, the captain requests you continue your search", this was getting to be a bit over the top, she had been searching this blasted planet for nearly a week - even the most desperate of men should have given up by now - what the hell was Marcus expecting her to find down here? "Tell the captain," she replied to the com officer, "that with all due respect, but searching for anything on this barbaric planet is complete waste of time. I should trying to find way...". She examined the radio curiously - the communications officer had already cut the signal, no one was listening. swearing to herself softly, she placed the radio back into her pocket.

Soon she would be arriving at this worlds largest settlement - the only place that could be really considered a city in her experience. If any historical records existed that could help her get this overwith, it was there. She was about to lay back and make some attempt at rest when her radio began to beep. Swiftly, before it drew too much attention, she swiped it from her pocket. "You were supposed to keep radio silence - you know not speak unless spoken to? Just what is going on?" she whispered harshly into the receiver. A hushed voice responded back, "Look, your going to that settlement right? Science crew detects something odd there - ships grav. detectors are showing an unusual bending their - almost like gravity was appearing out of nowhere". Elizabeth shook her head, "then the sensors are broken, the laws of physics simply don't allow for it!". The com officers answer came quickly, "Just like the laws of physics don't allow for our survival either, doctor?"

Ok, so the man had a point - everything they currently knew about the situation pointed to something impossible happening. Their was no escaping that singularity - they were too close and it would have been too powerful. This planet, their ship - all them, had to somehow be inside the singularity itself. This was absurd of course - nothing could survive entering a singularity in this way, the gravitational forces would have ripped them to pieces within a few seconds. Her first hypothesis - once the shock of having survived this impossibility had passed, was that they got lucky - the ship had somehow managed to ride the gravity waves and planted them into a dark nebulae somewhere in the galaxy. It certainly explained the strange lack of stars when they attempted to take observations to triangulate their position in space-time. This idea however, completely failed to jive with the ships gravitational sensors - the local curvature of space-time in this area of space was bizzare to say the least. Somehow, their seemed to be some kind of reverse relationship between the strength of the local gravitational field and their distance from that planet. It was precisely this disparity in the gravitational field that had caused the massive time-dilation effects they had experienced in the eyes of the planet. What had been nearly two hours in their lives had turned out to be nearly twenty-five millenia on this World.

It was rather hard for her to get her head around the sheer enormity of that fact. Whatever hopes and dreams the crew they left behind had held, they had been long since forgotten in the mists of time. Many of those people had been her friends - Janet and her had even been in grad

school together, Janet taking the route of theoretical physics and her taking the route of applied mathematics. Elizabeth never could get the hang of the experiments they kept insisting people do in physics - she couldn't even hold the ruler without finding some magical way of messing it up - but Janet, she had endured, even excelled at it. After grad school, they had again found themselves together within a few years - they had both managed to get themselves position at one of the prestigious universities of the home system. The Marshian Planetary University had long disguised itself as one of the best in the Alliance - raking in more research grants than any two of the outer system schools combined. Janet had obtained her full professorship quickly of course - she'd already been brilliant - while Elizabeth was happy to plug away through the ranks as an Assistant Professor. It was then that they'd come up with the idea for this project - the idea that had led to Janet's death in the end and God only knows what this idea was going to bring to her.

These energy levels however, might just provide the key for their survival - if she could work out what was causing them, she might be able to use that to get themselves away from the place. The question was, if they got out of here, where would they go? They couldn't even be certain of the date in their respective homes, let alone the legal ramifications of this accident. Shaking her head, she ran through the possible ramifications that she had helped Janet work out so long ago. They had tried to choose the place most remote from other planets and solar systems that they could reach, it was hard to predict the effects of adding a new singularity of this magnitude at an arbitrary point in the universe. The balance of probability was that other than a slight, short lived perturbation from their orbits, the nearby star systems would be unaffected. Under natural circumstances, none of those star systems would have had anything to worry about from that star - but that beam Janet had designed, if not properly controlled, could wreck havoc with the structure of a star. Elizabeth closed her eyes and ran herself through the calculations she had completed so long ago, her results clear as day now - There existed a non-zero probability that the system would cause a chain reaction, creating a far more tightly wound singularity than they could reasonably account for. If that happened - the ramifications would quite probably be catastrophic for many of the nearby systems.

It was illogical to worry about that now - even if every major star system had somehow found a way to explode simultaneously there would be nothing she could do about it. The best way for her to help herself and the rest of the crew was to concentrate on the current problem. If only she could get some readings on the planet itself without being seen. To do that, she would need to wait for nightfall - or at least whatever passed for a sleeping period on this eternally dark planet. This brought whole new problems to her mind, but fatigue was beginning to take over, she pushed them aside - if she was going to get any work done, she best be rested. Discreetly, she moved her bag to end of the bench she was sitting on and laid her head on it, falling quickly into a dreamless sleep.

4 Hausdorff Robotics Corporation

Light, sound, confusion. Strange sights and concepts surrounded him. There was a strange sensation in his head, almost as if someone had coupled a water hose into his mind and cranked up the pressure. Slowly, continually, the world began to make sense. Symbols, concepts, languages, history, mathematics, sciences - the systems of the universe crystallized together in his mind. For the very first time, the machine opened its eyes.

A woman stood before him, she had shoulder length hair that might once have been red but was quickly losing its color. She was a little short, with an average figure by human standards. Her eyes were staring at him - examining his moves with inquisitiveness uncharacteristic for a human. Where did this knowledge come from, he wondered? How did he know what was characteristic or not for a human? Logically, such knowledge must have been built into him - hence he could only assume it would be useful, he needed only wait for the correct chance.

"What did you name this one, Collin?", the woman asked in a slightly high pitched voice. The voice that responded was upbeat, "This one - I figured I'd call him Waldo - you know after those old Earth games we say in the museum." Placing her hand on her hand, the woman simply chuckled, "Collin, have you ever considered trying to behave normally - you know just for kicks?". "Now,

what would be the fun in that?", Collin shot back, before walking into Waldo's field of view.

The creator - the closest thing Waldo would have to a father - examine his carefully, waving a small cylindrical device this way and that across several places on the machine's body scanning his internals for defects, malfunctions, anything unexpected. After several minutes of this, Collin finally satisfied Waldo was in perfectly working order, straightened himself up and turned to Janet. "He's all yours - try not to damage him would ya?". Janet raised an eyebrow, "Him? Doesn't my well being come into your thoughts anywhere anymore?" Taken aback by this reprimand, Collin solemnly responded, "Yes, of course it does - especially with you taking off with irresponsible, dare-devil, jackass of a pilot you decided to call a husband"

"At least with him I know I'll never be second place to a bucket of bolts!", something about the way she phrased that let Waldo know that although the colloquism generally refers to those his kind, the woman - Janet - was not directly referring to him. Collin appeared flustered at this response and without any retort simply turned around and walked out of the room. It would be the last time Waldo would set eyes on his creator. Janet waited for Collin to walk out of the room - watching his every move as he did so - before turning her attention towards Waldo. She stared at him for some time, examining his features with her inquisitive eyes, finally she cocked her head in the direction of small portal a few metres ahead. "So, you coming with me - or staying here with him?" Waldo examined the woman as she headed towards the exit. Something inside of him - an urge that he didn't quite understand and certainly could not resist, told him he had to follow her. He glanced one more time in the direction that his creator had left - he was now long gone and would not likely be coming back any time soon. Taking one last look around the room, he began to plod his way in the direction of Janet. What other choice did he have?

Waldo followed her into the grey steel halls of Hausdorf Robotics, Janet noticing him coming towards her, slowed down her pace to allow him to catch up. "So, out with it - what nifty high class features did Collin outfit you with anyway?" Waldo tilted his head and examined Janet carefully for several seconds. Somehow, despite never having been spoken to before, Waldo knew that the language the woman spoke was Galatic - a diverse mix of the most common languages spoken in Earth's antiquity. Instinctively, he also knew his own specifications perfectly. He was a class "A" Artificial Intelligence, modeled to look akin to a human male of a rough age 22. His personality operators had been chosen to reinforce analytic thinking and defensive skills. His model number was WLD001. All this he recited rotely to Janet, whose expression was one of repressed boredom, when he made it as far as the model number she finally put up in hands in protest. "No no no - I know all that!", she said cheerfully, "I want to know what the cool stuff is - you know brand new cpu, state of that art gizmo's - what makes you special?"

Special was not the easiest concept to grasp in Waldo's universe at this point. Having only been self-aware for all of perhaps twenty minutes, he hadn't even fully assimilated all the raw data that his maker had piped into his brain. On short notice, the best definition he could come up with was unique. What made him unique? His head seemed to spin as the neurons pushed signals from one end of of associative network to the other, building the fixed points and cycles that would form the basis of his memories all the while exciting still others to activate the concepts that had preprogrammed into him. At last - as if by magic - an answer materialized in his mind. It was absurdly simple to be sure - but it was logical and fit the facts. Turning to Janet, who had begun to look extremely impatient by this point, he responded very simply - "I am the first of my Model - the creator will build no more machines from my design. Hence I am unique, hence I am special".

"Only one, huh?", Janet replied lightly, "I guess I'll have to make sure not to break you!". Laughing at her own joke, she motioned for him to follow her out of the building.

All that had been before the experiment began. Waldo had been put to use in varying capacities - house servant, research assistant in the labs, go getter and handy man - never jobs that he had considered of high importance in the grand scheme of things, but nonetheless they gave him purpose. Often during these times he would be left to his own devices - time he would spend in random conjecture about what his place was in the world. Not that this was a hard question to answer, his creator had found some way to embed within his neural operators the irresistible desire to follow every instruction Janet gave him. He was the property of Janet until such time as she gave him up or relinquished her hold on the world of the living. This still left an important question in his mind

unanswered - what was he to do when Janet died - what then would be his purpose?

It could not be said that Janet didn't appreciate everything Waldo did for her - indeed everywhere she went Waldo was dragged along, regardless of whether he actually served a purpose on the outing or not. Waldo had become the bouncing board for those ideas that went above her husbands head. Using the advanced analytical circuits hard wired into his mind he was able to quickly give her what she was apt to refer to as a "thumbs up" or a "thumbs down" on any idea she might have. Often, she would try to encourage him to have his own ideas - to innovate - but whenever he tried something seemed to be missing, none of his ideas seemed to live up the quality that Janet was able to produce. At first he conjectured it was some problem with him, a limitation of the electrical compared to the biological. Experience taught him differently. It appeared that Janet was also special - perhaps even unique like he was - she had the uncanny ability of being able to come to the correct solutions faster and more efficiently than anyone else around her.

Perhaps this was why she was the first to see the way towards the creation of artificial singularities - artificially increasing the energy of a star to push it over the limit, perturbing it from a simple death to that a singularity. What was even more amazing that - with the help of Elizabeth - she was able to show it could be controlled. It was an achievement that should have placed amongst histories greatest thinkers - and it would have if everything had not gone so horribly wrong.

Janet had been the first to find him that fateful day, her great dream a failure, her staff and the brave crew members sent to save them stranded on this strange new world. Her face was haggard from many days of constant stress - how many Waldo was never sure, something about the fall must have damaged the occillator crystal he used to keep track of time - she was bruised and cut from missing one two many steps in last ditch attempts to avoid falling objects of a variety of sorts. Yet, despite it all she was still smiling. This was puzzling. What precisely did she have to smile about at the time - she had found a broken robot, a machine without purpose, one would believe she would simply have cast him aside as a waste and curse her poor luck. Instead, wasting precious time in escaping the Orkish raiders Waldo later learned had been busy chasing them from the research labs for days on end, and with the help of several others lifted him out of the chasm the Orks had trapped him in. They couldn't repair his motor function right there of course - that would require equipment. Prudence would've dictated that they leave him there - logically the good of the many should supercede the good of the one - foolishly they did not.

Under fire from sporadic bolts fired from primitive cross bow style weapons, Janet and her companions - consisting of one of her junior research assistants and several of the Banach's Pride's security officers - made their way north, heading towards the main edge of the main river. It was there that the some of ships more adventerous officers had found the remains of a former attempt to colonize this remote world. No one could find a record of the attempt in the galactic records, which made the discorvery all the more exciting. It was the remains of a city. The archeature was strangely unique - at least in the limited experiences of the scientists that worked on the Banach's Pride. It was built upwards instead of outwards, giant platforms forming as foundations for both homes and factories as well as supporting yet more platforms above them. The structures streched into the sky with royal magnificience, over shadowing the world below it in a continuum of shadow. The Orks avoided it - from what the scientists could tell, the primitives seemed to believe that the city was haunted somehow. It was exactly this that Janet and her comrades were banking on. With luck, fear of whatever power had once been there would keep the Orks at bay long enough for them to regroup and form an escape plan. That they would spend the rest of their lives in this long dead city had not yet began to enter into their thoughts.

They sprang from the underground with unexpected ferocity, raising up nearly directly underneath the crews feet. Several of the crew had been killed right there - skewered through by the sharpened spears of the Orkish barbarians. Those that remained panicked, running in random directions hoping to escape the fate these heartless creatures seemed to have in store for them. Not being satisfied with the few kills they had made on their first strike, the Orks pushed their victims off their spears - leaving them to die alone and forgotten in the worlds jungle, and swiftly gave chase.

Janet, along with one of the security forces carrying Waldo, dodged into the thick plantation that made up the worlds jungle - shielding them from the sight of the blood thirsty Orks. "Johnathan, we've got to get Waldo working again." Janet stated quietly. Johnathan gave Janet a confused look,

"Ma'am, with all due respect, I'm just a security guard - I took this job because it's all I could get - fixing robots isn't something they train us for." Janet was ignoring him, instead she had already kneeled down beside Waldo's immobile body and began to unscrew the protective shielding for his motor control servos. Without looking up, she gave Johnathan a quick, terse response, "Don't need you to fix the 'bot - just distract those damned Orks!".

Johnathan nodding, charged up his lasgun and rushed out into the clearing. Janet watched him make his way out, saying a silent prayer for the man before going back to work on Waldo. Carefully she began re-attaching wires by the servo. "With luck, this should allow you to move around a bit better. The fall seemed to have damaged your motor control, but I think this cludge should give your servos enough power to run for a short period of time.". With the patch complete, she quickly snapped Waldo's protective sheilding shut. "Ok - get up".

It took a few moments for his neural network to register his leg's presence, but soon the familiar stream of information began to flow into his mind. His leg was active - he could control it, albeit for a a limited time, its power levels were truly limited. Janet had routed power from his chronological backup battery to run his leg. Great, he thought, the more I move, the greater chance I won't know what time it is in a few hours. Waldo quickly stood up and looked around, assessing his surroundings. He could hear the Orks chasing their comrades around the jungle, keeping them on the move lest they have time regroup and return the attack. In few scattered places he could hear the sounds lasgun fire - some of the soldiers had clearly gotten their heads together and decided to mount an attack of their own. "Suggestion on a next course of action Janet?"

"We've got to make it to that anchient city Waldo - I don't know how to get there and without help we won't make it." Janet looked at Waldo critically, "I need you to get me there Waldo - the soldiers should be able to keep the Orks distracted and once they regroup the Orks won't be able to hold their own against them. If I can get to that city however, I can begin to work out what the hell went wrong and maybe, just maybe, find us a way out of this place".

Another quick assessment of his status - Waldo pulled up his internal representation of the map of the world. Primary Goal: Protect Janet. Secondary Goal: Get Janet to the city. Fact - even in his current condition, with Janet on his back he could move faster than they could if she were on her own two feet. Fact - he currently had enough power to make to the city - but only if there were no deviations on the way. Fact - deviations should be expected - the Orks seemed to be out in full forth. His circuits chugged away at the problem, sending and passes signals from one end of his neural net to the other cycling at speeds far exceeding the responses of even the fastest biologicals. Long term, success would only be acheived one way - he had to get Janet to that city, the deviations would have be risked. He knelt down, "Janet, get on my back" he said simply.

That was the first time he had approached Aquatauren, thousands of years ago. He watched as slowly the realization came over the survivors that they would never be able to escape this planet - that they would be resigned to spend the rest of their lives there. Some accepted this truth with less enthusiasm than others of course. A few simply went mad - running to the hills proclaiming that they had seen some magical portal that would take them home. Those whose minds were not lost began the slow rebuilding of the city around them - improving the houses, the foundation, the defenses. Soon, children were born, the crew grew older, and as time passed Waldo found himself knowing fewer and fewer of the inhabitants of the city. When, after years of running the city, finally circumed to the trails of old age, Waldo found himself with nothing left in the city that had any meaning for him. With no purpose, and no real friends remaining, Waldo left the city of Aquatauren to its founders and moved out into the World - dreaming of a new purpose.

In all that time, as hard as it was to believe, Waldo had managed to avoid returning the great city. Instead, he spent his time in the barbarian lands, far from civilization, secluded, with all the time he desired to simply sit and think. Only now was he returning to city he had helped found so long ago. None of its inhabitants would recogonize him of course - from what he gathered most of them believed that Aquatauran was built by the Watcher himself, as a safe haven for the civilized peoples from the dangers of the world. But before he got there, he had one last task, he had to honor Janets final request - and to do it, he was going to need Elizabeths box.

5 Bifurcation

Everyone was asleep, so far as she could tell anyway. The campsite was quiet, the fire had begun to die down to its last glowing embers, only the constant singing of the birds can be heard from the distance. If she was going to do this, now would be her only chance. Grabbing her bag, Elizabeth rushed her quickly made her way from the campsite, swiftly making her way out site from the slumbering campers. Once she was satisfied, She opened up her bag and pulled out a small grey box. On the front of the box was reflective back screen, at the bottom of the screen were two buttons one marked "Power" and the other marked "Emergency". Without hesitation she depressed the "Power" button, causing the screen to light up with a multitude of different brightly coloured options. She pressed the one marked uplink, followed by another marked sensors.

After a few moments - during which the screen had light up with the words "Please be patient..." in large friendly yellow lettering, the screen flipped to an array of numbers on side and a strange twisted grid on the other. Moving her index finger around the twisted grid, Elizabeth managed to change it to several different positions and orientations, each time she did so a set of equations displayed below it began to morph along with the numbers along side the screen. After a few moments, she arrived a configuration in which grid seemed to nearly pinch together completely. Staring at the equations for a few minutes, she switched back to the main screen.

"Ricci-Perelman Flows" she choose after a few minutes of browsing through the systems mathematics section. Clicking her way through a few more options, she was eventually able to have the computer begin to calculate the flow for the data she had just collected. Perhaps this bizzare occurrence would shed some light on the bizzare geometry of this new universe. Elizabeth put down the box as the words "Please Wait.." came up in large friendly letters while a small red status bar gradually increased underneath it. Relaxing, she sat back and grabbed her radio from her pocket. She felt a cold hand grip her shoulder with unexpected strength as she did so. "It would be best if you put that device away, old friend."

Elizabeth jumped forward, spinning around to meet her assailant. Her jaw dropped at the sight of him. "How....how....are you...even functioning still?". Waldo, having pulled back the hood of cloak to reveal his greyish skin and hard grey eyes answered smoothly, "By being very clever old friend. I must point out, your rescue mission is bit ill-timed." Elizabeth simply blinked at him. Ill-timed was an understatement at the very least. "You are wondering why I am here no doubt, the answer shall become clear to you in time. I need you to do me a favour Elizabeth, it's very important. Can you do that for me?"

Elizabeth was skeptical to say the least. True, their was no denying that this was Waldo, but after twenty-five millenia, God only knows what could have happened to his neural matrix. All told, she decided it would be better if she worked she played his game for now - at least until she worked out what was going on. Slowly, she nodded her head and said, "Yes". Waldo acknoldged her statement, then directed his focus towards the box. "Care to share what is your calculating" he inquired.

"Curvature", Elizabeth responded tersly, "if I can work the geometry, I can find a way out". Waldo simply shook his head. "You understand what this place is don't you? Do you understand what could happen if we leave this place?" Elizabeth thought about this for a few moments. Waldo had been here for twenty-five millenia, it was a safe bet that he knew something she didn't. Why didn't he just come right out and tell her, why was he behaving in such a strange matter?

"Waldo, could you perhaps skip all this crap and get to the point - this isn't exactly the time for games". Probably a stupid way to handle this situation on her part, but she was betting that whatever safety measures Hausdorff had programmed into him so long ago were still in tact in one way or another. If they weren't - if he had found some way to override them - it was best not to think of such things. Controlling her fears as best as she could, she stood her ground before Waldo. Whatever he intended to do, he would likely do it now.

Much to her surprise, Waldo actually laughed. Robots - even the ones made by Hausdorff - didn't laugh in her experience. It wasn't that there was any that was technically stopping them, they just saw no purpose in it. Hearing a robot laugh was unsettling, just like the abrupt way in which he stopped several seconds later. "My lady seems to believe we are playing some kind of game - I do

hope I sound as if I am enjoying myself, it has been so long since I have played a game. My favour is simple - I must ask that you not approach the city. Go back to your ship and do not come back"

Raising her eyebrows, Elizabeth was shook her head - she was not about to give up on her only chance to go home so easily, not without at least some form of explanation. "Why? You can't possibly think I want to be struck on that ship for the rest of my life - I had a life outside this place and even if I can't return to it, I'd at least like to live out my days in a world I can recognize!" With a smile, Waldo quickly responded, "Intriguing - what is it about the universe that makes you believe you will recognize what you see after so long as time? Even if you escape, the world you will find will be as alien to you as this one. You must know this" Just as the sentence was completed, the box began beeping frantically - apparently it has completed the calculations it had been set to perform. Cautiously, Elizabeth bent over and grabbed the box, examining the screen for several minutes.

"Look Waldo, I don't know what your after, or why, but we do not know how time in this place relates to the outside world. For all we know mere seconds have past since the accident and when we leave, we'll be home. So long as that chance exists, there is a chance I'll get to see my family again. I'm not giving up on that unless I have to Waldo - do you understand that?"

Throwing the hood his cloak over his head, Waldo responded "So be it then, make your attempt" before turning around to head out of the forested area. Walking alone back to the caravan he chastised himself at the apparently mess of affairs he had created. Somehow he had thought that Janet's last wishes would be easier to implement, only now was it becoming apparent to him that this was going to be far more difficult than he had ever suspected.

6 Unstable Solutions

"Alright, rise and shine my friend!", Dave cringed at the cheery ring in the womans voice, rolled over and checked his time peice. They had only been asleep for a few hours - it was barely the next cycle was barely beggining - did that wretched woman not sleep! Bouncing forward, the woman dragged Dave's blankets off him - exposing him to the cold crips air that filled the old inn that they had found. "Get up", she said again, "We've got work to do today!"

Dave rubbed his eyes and looked blankly into the ceiling. This would mark the start of his second day working as Amy's guide. So far, his experiences were slowly convincing him that the woman was nothing short of insane. Last night, she'd sleep all of about three hours before bouncing into an annoyingly cheerful form of wakefulness and practically pushing him from his bed. Grumbling, he'd put down the behaviour as mere excitibility on her part - she'd never seen the worlds greatest city and couldn't wait to get a real life glimpse of the place. For most people however, the love affair with this stench filled metropololis of moving, semi-sentient flesh, quickly ended. Aquatauren was polluted, over croweded, crawling with the sick and the poor, infested with theives, and run by parasitic bueracratc bastards who seemed to have nothing better to do with their time than bicker about the cost of butter. It was anything but a tourist attraction, most people were almost instantly demoralized.

Not Amy. She'd taken to life in this horrible city like a flea takes to a mongrol. Nothing anyone told her seemed to destroy her inner optimism - her drive - her little misguided belief that there was actually someway to succeed in this blasted place. They'd started in the merchants district. Youd think that would have destroyed her point of view on the situation. Dave could count on one hand the number of those merchants who hand't simply slammed their door shut at the mere sight of her - taking her to be a thief or perhaps a well dressed begger. Those that did take the time to listen had little to offer - Amy was far from qualified or in some cases far from willing to do the jobs they had in mind. Still after a full cycle of running around, being rejected, insulted, fighting off pick-pockets, avoiding the plague stricken, jumping out of the way of rushing carts and angry guards, the woman wasn't even winded - let alone demoralized in some way. It simply wasn't natural. Smiling wickedly to himself Dave supported the idea for a moment that she might be some form of Demon - the worlds first cheery voiced demoness hell bent on destroying the world through an annoying desire to be overly productive. Last thing the world needed was more people like that.

Today - oh for Watcher's sake, what was the hair brained scheme that insane woman had in

store for them today? She gone on about it at great length on the way back to the inn yesterday? Something involving the noble district if he recalled correctly - the only thing he was sure of was that it didn't involve drinking excessive amounts of ale and telling more and more exaggerated stories to a semi-interested audience as he usually preferred to spend his time. Part of him was ready to tell this woman exactly where she could shove this guide job she'd given him, but the money she paid was still slightly better than he'd been making at the pubs lately and so, for now, he would endure the torturous schedule.

Placing his feet on the cold stone floor, Dave quickly got up and got dressed in his wool tunic. By the time he had made it down the stairs, Amy had already finished her breakfast - being looked after by what was clearly less than a fully awake inn keeper. "You're late", she said simply as he walked into the dining area. "You're lucky that I don't insist we leave right now, but luck seems to be on your side - the inn keeper tells me the noble district is unapproachable for at least a few more hours".

Score one for the nobles, thought Dave, even they have more decency than this crazy woman. Not wishing to waste anytime - lest she change her mind and demand they leave immediately - and began to work his way through breakfast. Despite being slightly cool from sitting out on the table for as long as it had, it was actually much better fare than he had grown used to from the local inns. This probably had to do with the fact that the only people in whole city who were actually awake at this hour were him and Amy. After all, who else in this city would possibly get up at such an earlier time after the setting of the Watcher?

Frobozz Frotz paced his study impatiently. He hadn't slept for two cycles now - the Watcher had risen and fallen since he had last awoke. The Caravan was late - it was supposed to arrive yesterday morning. His aides assured him that no word had been received. As the day drew on, they'd sent out scouts, scouts which should have returned by now - yet nothing had been heard from them. With no reliable information to go on, most of the city council had been inclined to assume the worst. Somehow, the Caravan had been attacked and destroyed. This theory didn't sit overly well with Frobozz, if the Caravan had simply been destroyed by bandits, they'd have heard something, one of the scouts would've found some trace of them. Nothing had been found, nothing had been heard.

Everyone who approached from the direction of Marina was interrogated of course. Guards were stopping them on the incoming roads by the hundreds, questioning everyone. All the evidence seemed to indicate that somehow, a Caravan of nearly five hundred to a thousand souls had simply vanished in thin air. How in the Watcher's Name was that even possible? It wasn't, it couldn't be! There was simply no force which could have done it! Biting his pipe, Frobozz shook his head. This was clearly something he was going to have to look into himself - grabbing his walking stick he opened his door and began walking out his door. Time to purchase some provisions.

"What do you mean you 'can't let me pass!'", Amy was clearly outraged - so far they had been blocked at every attempt to get by the guards into the noble district. No one was to pass today they claimed. Frustrated, Amy had begun to jump and stamp her feet, making every form of demand she could think of in some desperate attempt to gain entrance. Dave had spent most of this time making side bets in his head regarding how long it would take on the guards to skewer her just on the basis it would shut her up. Dave shook his head, Probably wouldn't work however - woman like that would still find some way to make their lives hell - it was their purpose in life, a special gift from the Watcher whose had seen fit to punish everyone the woman came within a ten foot radius of.

Not wishing to be skewered himself - which would surely be the case if someone mistook him for one of the woman's companions with her acting the way she was - Dave stepped back from the commotion. If Amy wanted to make a fool of herself, let her, so long as she didn't take him down with her. Eventually, realizing the futility of her efforts, Amy turned away, head down, dejected. Now she was actually starting to fit in around here, Dave thought to himself.

Just as she began to walk away from the guard, a short, well dressed fellow began shoving his way between them, rushing past Dave and Amy without paying them any notice. Seeing the short fellow walk by, Amy looked up. Much to Dave's horror, her shoulders raised up, a glimmer appeared in her eyes. He cringed. He knew - just knew - what was on her mind. He knew it because it was the

worst possible way he could think of to spend his time and such past-times had already proven to be the woman's insufferable hobby. Like clockwork, she turned towards Dave and smiled demurely. She was extremely beautiful at times, if nothing else, and right this moment was one of those times. Despite what common sense was telling him, he felt himself melt towards her will. "Come on Dave", she said happily, "Let's follow him - see where he goes!"