



Quantum

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Realities

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INTERVENTION IN UNIV 7695

by Guy Prevost

Stalin spent a month in Vienna in 1913...Hitler was still there and Stalin may have rubbed shoulders with him in the crowd. - Alan Bullock

MINUTES FROM THE DOCTORAL THESIS COMMITTEE:

The candidate:

Let me again thank the members of the committee for their time and patience in listening to my petition on the matter of my practicum. As most of you know my work has been primarily theoretical and I have generally been averse to, and downright inept in laboratory or fieldwork. I am much happier modeling the complex and chaotic outcomes of world paths and lines in any number of infinite dimensional spaces with data already collected or given to me by those much abler at working in the multiplicity of universes. However, since a lab experiment is a requirement for the degree, and I'll admit that the degree is important to me for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the ability to prosper in a pleasant slice of the east globular quadrant of Nova #235589, I did cobble together a small experiment, on the fly, without much, to be honest, thought or preparation. I had no idea the result would be as indicated and while certainly pleased, I am as surprised as anyone else.

The fact of the matter is that I was toying with a few basic resonances of strings at sub-Planck length, to use the quaint idiom of the protoplasts, and my intent was to see if these elements would combine in some interesting way given the laws of a fairly simple universal structure, vastly different than our own. I nosed around through several branes, using wormholes, worldtubes, and other gradient probes, and found a quiet little univ semi-parallel to our own with an intriguing limit of three orthogonal spatial dimensions, and one temporal which were hyper-linked in series. Searching further through this almost kindergarten simple dimensional array (which, by the way, was expanding)- you'll admit the simpler the better for predicting results through the temporal continuum, which, as you know, has become my speciality - I found a charming and crude orbital system in which one of the satellites was undistinguished except for an abundance of what the future protoplasts would call atmosphere and water.

So, I introduced some of my basic string resonances, in sequences that might lead to exciting harmonics, to see what would happen, if anything, on this orbiter. By luck or instinct, the combinometrics went exponential. The strings manifested as quarks, the quarks as particles, the particles as elements and so on...A certain basic vita was formed, very crude, mildly intriguing, but then it grew and before we knew it there was a whole panoply of vitae (quadrupeds) wandering around this little R4 coordinate system. Some of you have specimens of this type at home; we know it became illegal to export these exotic creatures but they were hard to resist. The quadrupeds with smooth skin and long necks, and very tall legs were novelties in our multi-dimensions. And after they became extinct in the experimental environment, due to sudden climactic changes, they became extremely valuable, as we all know. I mention this only because I believe the practice of importation set a precedent - the rules have been bent before, as I am going to ask you today.

The extinction of this sub-group I thought, as did others of my fellow researchers, was the end of my little adventure in the world of experimental resonances and their possible growth into vitae. Still, my lab requirement was satisfied so I thought that, as they say, was that. But then a minor miracle occurred. Other branches of the vitae survived the climatic alteration, and in fact, over the course of the one temporal dimension, grew, altered and evolved into an even greater variety of vitae, until there was a quantum leap into the protoplasts themselves. And we have all marveled how this group has evolved; forming mastery of its environment, consciousness of itself, reproductive capacities and resiliencies, which seem to lead to its constant improvement. And the singular quality of what I can only call imagination has been the primary mover of these phenomena. And we've all been astonished as the protoplasts, as they approach the 1,914th year by their own most recent temporal measurement, show signs of even greater advancements – which might, and I will address this later, even enhance and teach us something.

I cite Vesuvian files #KB47 for the alternate view of the protoplasts, being, of course their instinct for violence, aggression, brutality, and domination over each other. This was present in their genetic ancestors, but the aggression has recently taken a particular virulent form in the protoplasts, and this is a disturbing development. Now they use their amazing technological progress to destroy each other with remarkable cold-blooded efficiency. Certainly it can be argued that aggression was perhaps a necessary and benign instinct leading to the survival of the best and the brightest. But I would argue that this has become an atavistic trait, no longer necessary for the survival or prosperity of the specimens, a kind of crude out-dated tool. Which brings me, at long last, to the subject of my petition.

I have conducted extensive world path modeling forecasting the future of the protoplasts from this date by their measurement, 1913 (in our time the 10 to the fifth eon and five thousand decimal places which I will omit), on through the next fifty years. I have used the most sophisticated eigenvalue vectoring, which, applied to this universe, have almost 0 degree of error as you know. And the results have been alarming. The next 40 years especially will prove to be the most violent and destructive ever experienced by the protoplasts. More than five per cent of their most prime specimens will be either killed in conflict, or eradicated and destroyed – not by some chaotic and uncontrollable aspect of inanimate nature, as we would expect, but by their fellow species. What is most interesting, however, and this is why I am here before you today, is that my modeling forecasts the root cause of the violence, not necessarily to the general predilection of the entire group, but to TWO SINGLE INDIVIDUALS, whom I shall heretofore refer to as Specimen #1 and Specimen #2. These two will be directly responsible for the destruction of over 18 million protoplasts. I know there will be a theoretical outcry, and we can argue this until the world lines collapse, but I must tell you that when I remove, theoretically, these individuals from the time line, the consequences are radically different; in fact, benign. There are conflicts, but not cataclysms, there is what they call death, our world-end, but not at the scale which will ensue should the status quo remain. And most importantly, the removal of these individuals will save the existences of a vast number of protoplasts – and their progeny - possessing a wealth of talent, imagination, and energy which could only accelerate their progress and would be lost forever if nothing is to be done.

I know that dispensation for an intervention into an ongoing experiment is a privilege rarely granted. But I want to say that the quantum variables at play here argue that the benefit outweighs the risk. I ask for a single intervention to destroy the two Specimens in question. Moreover, both of them will be in the same coordinate relation, in fact what they call the same “city,” at the same time of the intervention, before either of them will have had the opportunity to wreak the havoc they would eventually inflict. So I will be able to complete my task efficiently with the least perturbation of the existing world-lines protecting, in so far as possible, the integrity of the experiment.

The committee's response:

We grant the request of the petitioner, with several provisos. First, this must take the form of a soft intervention, to minimize its effect on the parameters of the experiment. By this we mean the candidate must assume the form of a pre-existing specimen, must finish the work within one day, and must be bound by the dimensions of the environment and must not rely on any multi-dimensional tools except, of course, his departure mode. If the candidate is willing to assume these risks, we see the value of the intervention.

* * * *

Universe 7695, Spiral Galaxy SBbc 5695 10 to the fifth branes

In protoplast terms:

Vienna June 3, 1913

It was a shock. To be squeezed down from 1129 dimensions to 3 – claustrophobic to say the least. I “awoke” on a park bench. It was morning. The necessary orientation data had been downloaded and I was, at least in part, a protoplast, in fact one Gunther Menzl. I had papers in my black frock coat to that effect, and I had stored all the dull and uninteresting bits of Gunther's life in my data bank, though it was most probable that I wouldn't need to access it for any particular reason. It was a security precaution.

(The actual Gunther Menzl, a government clerk, kept what they call a low profile, and that's why his identification and blueprint had been used. My researches showed he had few friends and this day he was ill, at home, nursing a cold, and would be unseen by anybody.)

Suddenly, after the initial vertigo, I felt something that I had never before experienced in my lifetime. It was as if all the energy contained in 1129 dimensions were focused on just three, and I had now five senses instead of 530. So everything had a polished intensity. The light struck the green leaves in such a way as to make them brilliant; the luminosity was almost too much. The clapping of the horses' hooves were like loud galactic explosions, but not unpleasant. And there was an orchestra playing nearby, in the park, near a gazebo. A synthesis of sounds that overwhelmed me with its beauty. I had not anticipated this. Senses. We in univ 5732 have diluted our sensations. We have so many ways of experiencing our surroundings that they all seem to become mild and insubstantial.

I felt in my coat pocket for the instrument of my mission. It was a pistol, polished steel. It felt cold to the touch. A cruder simpler mechanism you couldn't imagine. But the protoplasts had invented it only over the past several centuries, and it had become a vehicle of world-end for them. You couldn't imagine how much world-end it had caused. Especially when you're from our univ, where world-end almost never happens to anyone.

A policeman came by and looked at me suspiciously. Of course, he thought I had slept in the park, as my target specimen #2 had been known to do several years earlier. I smiled politely, and the policeman was disarmed by my humor. Such a person could not have been a vagrant, I could almost hear him thinking.

I sat up, stretching my appendages, trying to get used to my new skin. I stood up, did a little hop.

I started to walk in the park. I knew both Specimen #1 and #2 habitually strolled here, and it is this

afternoon that the Emperor Franz Joseph will be coming by the boulevard on his way back from his country estate. There will be a big crowd to watch the procession, his magnificent carriage drawn by eight white horses, and this might be a good place to take care of at least one of my responsibilities.

The rich sound came from behind the trees, a wild synthesis of wave forms so simple yet so enchanting that I had to get a closer look. A woman walked by with a baby carriage, her young protoplast smiling in the morning sun. I tipped my hat. And even before I identified the source of the sound I became aware of my nose, a new feature for which there is no corollary in our own world. There was a delicious aroma emanating from some kind of white fractal-like thing. Flower, my language program quickly provided the info. Well, I smelled the flower, and it was an experience I will never forget: intoxicating. I plucked it from the bush and put it in my buttonhole as I saw others had done.

I suddenly become aware that my business here is not research, but action. I made a note to come back, when I am done, because there is a lot to learn from the protoplasts after all.

* * * *

Sosa, as he was called, held out his two fists, one containing a delicious nougat candy wrapped in rice paper and enclosed in a tiny cardboard box. Galina, the eight-year-old girl with the red curly locks down to her pretty white frock, smiled in delight and anticipation.

“That one!” she said.

Sosa opened his fingers to reveal an empty hand. Galina’s face fell, but Sosa opened the other hand, unable to bear her suffering.

“You may have it anyway!”

“Thank you,” she squealed, seizing the treat with her right hand. She examined the box, elaborately decorated with a flattering portrait of the Emperor Franz Joseph, and ran off. Olga, the nanny, watched with a wry smile.

“You’ll spoil her,” she said with mock scowl. “Not what I’d expect from a true revolutionary.”

“Somebody needs to be spoiled.” And Sosa wished that Olga had shown more interest in him, as a guest, than his friend Bukarin who had visited the night before. But Sosa smiled nevertheless and went back to his writing.

“But,” he said, unable to regain his concentration. “That was my last one so I must get more.”

He rose from the pecan wood desk, put down his quill and walked to the window. The wide boulevard of S_____ Strasse stretched out below him. Horse drawn carriages and broughams, handsomely appointed, swept by. Then Galina skipped out the front door, across the street, and into the park where he knew he would later walk with his host and hostess, as he did every night after dinner. Certainly this was the first time Sosa had ever encountered such opulence, and though it represented much that he wished to destroy, he couldn’t help but be charmed by it. This spacious apartment of the Troyanovskys, in the center of bourgeois Europe. Quite a change, especially after three years in the Siberia.

Galina was eating her candy now; he could see her by an oak tree sprawling its roots near the sidewalk. And just then he noticed a figure on the other side of the street, behind a lamppost, looking up, it seemed, at him. The face was in shadow, but it was a man, dressed as government clerk, nothing fancy, with a common gardenia in his buttonhole.

Sosa wondered at this. He had the vague feeling earlier that morning, when he had gone out to buy the papers, that he was being followed. It was a sixth sense that he believed he was born with, but cultivated in Siberia when he would hunt bear near the prison camp. The man, seeming to sense he'd been noticed, retreated into the park and suddenly Sosa wondered if the Tsarist secret police had actually followed him here to Vienna. He hadn't survived his thirty-five years without an uncanny sense of imminent danger.

Time for a walk anyway, he thought. To get some more nougat for his lovely Galina, and he needed a break from his treatise. How to centralize the new government they envisioned and still preserve at least the appearance of autonomy of different ethnic groups. It was a question of the minorities. Lenin was waiting for his analysis, and he wanted Lenin to be pleased.

Sosa nodded graciously to Olga and went to his room to get his coat. He decided, thinking of the man by the lamppost, that he would take his knife, which he kept in a sheath sewn into his boot.

* * * *

In the study room of the Home for Men, not far from the park bordered by M_____ Strasse, the Artist, a short man of 23 years old, sat poised over a watercolor splayed out across the broad oak table. With a fine tipped brush he touched up various little portions of the project, which depicted, quite realistically, the monumental structure of the Austrian Parliament Building. The Artist moved the brush delicately along the columns, smoothing out the places where he had strayed. This would be, he thought, perhaps his last work in Vienna. He was planning to move to Munich in the ensuing months, after he'd earned enough money. It was about time to make a change. Vienna had been in some ways very disappointing. He had been rejected by the Art Institute *twice* and this was no doubt because the faculty had been corrupted by an influx of Slavic professors. The Art Institute in Munich would certainly appreciate his talents, he thought. After all, he was a professional – various shopkeepers and tourists bought his watercolors, and this is more than could be said of some of the Institute's graduates.

The Artist looked up at the rogue's gallery of fellow residents at the table. One man was sleeping and snoring – the Artist frowned. Two others were reading yesterday's newspaper and only one seemed to be doing any useful work. As he was a senior member here, he'd been a resident for three years, people showed him more respect. But still he knew he was destined for bigger things – this would all come, he was sure. He thought of his mother, who had died two years before. He had loved her deeply and only wished she could be alive to see what he would become. He wasn't sure himself what that would be, but he knew it would be something wonderful and grand.

He sat up and observed his watercolors. They had told him at the Institute that his skills were more suited to architecture, and somehow by painting these grand buildings he knew he was tapping something important in his spirit.

Later the Artist rolled up the thick textured paper into a scroll and extracted several others from his trunk, his latest output. He was in a long narrow dormitory with twenty beds. Carefully locking the trunk he withdrew his overcoat from the steel armoire. It was a cashmere coat, given to him by his mother. The collar was now frayed, and his cravat was also a bit soiled. Two bunks away a Czechoslovakian man, a new member, an interloper, was coughing incessantly. The Artist thought that in Munich, across the border in Germany, perhaps there would be fewer of these undesirables.

Outside in the bright sunshine the young Artist walked purposefully along the S_____ Strasse. He carried the three scrolled watercolors under his arm and used an ivory tipped black umbrella to pace his steps. He was, after all, an aristocrat, and must be perceived as one. And this heirloom from his

father, with the exquisite carving on the handle, bespoke his lineage. He passed the Opera House, where had seen *Lohengrin* just two nights before, and thought that above all, this would be the thing he would miss most about Vienna. The opera and his promenades in the park near Franz-Josef's Schonbroon palace, which he saved as a pleasure for himself later that day.

He was headed for the gift shop on F_____ Straase. The proprietor there liked his watercolors and would usually buy them unframed, so the Artist wouldn't have to bother with this tedious and expensive task. On N_____re Strasse he passed a candy shop, then waited for a procession of broughams before crossing the street. One was approaching very quickly and the Artist pulled back, noticing a puddle from the previous night's storm. When he retreated he bumped into another man walking down the sidewalk as the brougham passed by, kicking up a curtain of water. The man dropped a parcel, a box of nougat candy, and the Artist's first reaction was to reprimand him for his clumsiness, but then he realized the fault was his. Carefully putting his umbrella parallel to the watercolors under one arm, the Artist reached down with the other, picked up the parcel, and handed it to the man, who was wiping some drops of water from his stylish coat.

The man was short of stature, as he was, but broad shouldered. He had a full moustache, sallow cheeks, and unusual eyes which were almost yellow. He would have fit right in at the Home for Men, except he was far too well dressed.

"Excuse me, sir," said the Artist.

The man said nothing for a moment, taking the package and looking back at him with a chilly stare - almost a stare of recognition. But he had never met him, the Artist was sure.

"These drivers don't look where they're going sometimes," said the man, suddenly smiling. Then, with the wariness of a cat, the man seemed to be distracted by something or someone across the street. He quickly moved away.

* * * *

Even the modeling protocols had not foretold this particular event, that the two target specimens would be literally standing next to each other on the F_____ Strasse the very day that I was there to eliminate them. I was, at that moment, across the street, having followed Specimen #1 from his house, waiting for an opportunity. I looked around, checking for bystanders and witnesses. Surreptitiously I withdrew the pistol, hiding it in the folds of my coat. I cocked the lever and aimed. It was a clear shot; I might even get them both at one time. What good fortune! But just as I was about to fire, a trolley hurtled in front of me, blocking my shot, and then when it passed, Specimen #2 had started off down the sidewalk, and Specimen #1 was proceeding midst many bystanders across the street.

I decided at once to follow Specimen #2, the Artist. I was reversing the order of my plan, but I also had to think about my escape, back to the room of Gunther Menzl, where the only access to my own universe was through his mirror. If I were to be suddenly apprehended by the authorities, or anyone else - well, I loved the protoplasts but not enough to sacrifice my own existence.

So I kept Specimen #2 within view as he strode across the boulevard, hurrying his pace, and turned left down the B _____ Straase. I knew from my forecasts that he was most likely headed to the gift shop of Johannes Schmidt, where he often hawked his latest paintings. The shop was in a narrow side street off the T_____ Garden, in a quiet section of town.

Specimen #2 went through the banking district, near the Bourse, very crowded at this time of day. I could see the nervous *tap tap tap* of his umbrella, almost like a cane, as he strode through the

sea of businessmen and office workers. It was nearing lunchtime, and some people were having sandwiches on the steps of the museum. Specimen #2 paused in front of this building and walked on.

Suddenly I lost sight of him. I couldn't believe my bad luck, and only wished for the complete overview I would have had from my own multi-dimensional perch. I pushed forward as fast as I could, it seemed that maybe Specimen #2 knew he was being followed and he might have slipped into the train station to avoid me. I stood helpless at a corner where a man was selling newspapers, trying to spot the cane or Specimen #2's coat in the crowd. But each coat seemed identical. And then I was possessed by an odd feeling. A feeling that someone may have been following *me*.

"Gunther." It was a female voice. I turned and saw a young woman nearby. She had pretty green eyes and a nice smile. She was dressed in the style of the many secretaries who worked in the area.

I nodded politely. This was Marthe. The information was coming up from download. A woman from Gunther's office.

"We heard you were sick today, taking the day off."

I smiled sheepishly.

"Well, I won't tell anybody."

"In fact, I am sick," I said. "But I needed to get to the apothecary for some medicine."

"Of course."

"See you tomorrow," I said. I had begun to sweat, another new sensation, along with a feeling of guilt, having to lie, having to compromise poor Gunther Menzl. Well there were more important matters at hand at the moment.

I shuttled down three blocks toward the Schmidt gift shop. I could only hope that my predictions were correct about Specimen #2's destination. The wide boulevards narrowed to the cobblestone alleys, and finally I was on a quiet street lined with elm trees, their leaves shimmering in the sunlight. I paused and spotted the sign *Herr Schmidt: Art, Notions, & Gifts* at the end of the block. Quietly I proceeded, crossed to the other side of the street, and ducked into the recessed doorway across from the shop. This was near the corner. Across the way, I could see inside the shop, and I could see that Specimen #2 was arguing with someone inside. I bided my time.

* * * *

Sosa was almost certain he was being followed when he bumped into the man with the scrolls, evidently a painter. He had momentarily lost sight of his pursuer, who seemed to be trailing him from the opposite side of the street by the park. He had the appearance of an innocuous clerk, a predictable disguise for an agent of the Tsarist police. The gardenia was a nice touch, common to many Viennese gentlemen that day, so he blended in.

But before Sosa could make sure of his suspicions, there was this collision, a momentary distraction caused by the painter, who picked up his fallen nougat box and returned it to him with a manic fussiness. Sosa was suddenly struck by this fellow's vacant expression – polite yet disturbing, and familiar. He also had the strange premonition that he and this man would cross paths again. But how, and why? Sosa had been polite, muttering something, just as he saw the "clerk" standing on the other side of the street, removing what might have been a weapon from his pocket. Before he could react a trolley passed between them. Afterwards the "clerk" had vanished into the crowd.

Having extricated himself from the painter, Sosa was anxious to return to the apartment of the Troyanovskys and also to Galina whom he knew would be ecstatic at the new supply of nougats. But he was now resolved to deal with this new potential threat. He had learned from his gangster pals in Baku never to leave loose ends.

He crossed the street to the park. There was no sign of "the clerk," but on instinct Sosa headed downtown with the flow of other pedestrians. And sure enough, after several blocks, he spotted the clerk conversing with a woman in front of the train station.

* * * *

The Artist came out of the gift shop carrying only his umbrella. Herr Schmidt had been ungenerous, but with 5000 marks in his pocket now, the Artist felt he had enough money to make the move to Munich. He was done with this petty life, he thought to himself. It was to be a new beginning in a way. With all the disappointments of Vienna, there had been lessons learned.

Striding, unburdened of his watercolors, which somehow he never really liked when they were finished, the Artist proceeded apace playfully click clacking the umbrella on the cobblestones. Now he could go to the park, perhaps have a sherbet, and then later take in the opera. Three women emerged from a nearby teashop, talking no doubt, thought the Artist, of the most unimportant things. One was quite pretty he perceived, but he assured himself that now was not the time for romance. After he had made his mark, after he had realized his destiny, then things would fall into place with women. He smiled and tipped his hat as they walked by, and then heard the sound of footsteps behind him. He turned and saw no one, but maybe the shadow of someone behind a doorway. The Artist felt uncomfortable, a sense of dread, in fact. There was the Slav at the Home who wished him harm. He knew about these unwashed people. How they would slit someone's throat without a moment's thought. He had insulted the man the other day, well deserved as the man was disgusting and filthy in his habits, and the man had shouted terrible epithets at him, threatening to kill him. At the time the Artist had shrugged off the man as an ignorant and pathetic peasant, one of the many from Slovakia who had come to Vienna looking for work. But now the Artist thought the man may be stalking him.

The Artist quickened his pace considerably. The sun was high in the sky now and he could hear the footsteps behind him again rapidly accelerating. He was afraid to look over his shoulder. He was afraid of what he might see, but he forced himself to look. The glare of the sun in the window of a candle shop blinded him. He could only see the dark figure of a man approaching, only the outline, only a shadow. He averted his gaze and started to run. The street was completely deserted, giving him the feeling of a trapped animal, or a man doomed to execution. He ran as fast as he could, crossing a narrow street into the deep shadow of a tall cathedral.

He found himself in a picturesque square, the gothic spires of the cathedral looming. There were sounds of celebration and the church doors swung open. A triumphant march was being played by the musicians inside, and the wedding party was just emerging, the bride and groom being showered with rice as seeming mobs of well wishers suddenly burst out into the street.

At last he was safe. No one would harm him now, here, in broad daylight, in the midst of religious festivities. He was exhausted from running and stopped to catch his breath. The celebrants descended the steps and surrounded him, as they followed the bride and groom approaching a carriage waiting to sweep them away to a new life, as he was about to be swept to Munich. How foolish of him to be worried he thought. How completely stupid. He breathed deeply and even picked up a handful of rice and threw it wistfully at the newlyweds.

Then, as he turned back, he saw another man, who looked like a clerk, standing behind him, removing something hidden just inside the fold of his coat. The Artist could see it was a pistol aimed at his heart.

* * * *

I was in wonder as the quantum effects of chance and probability had helped my cause, and with no prompting from me. I had not foreseen the wedding party. In this crowd I could do it and disappear amidst the chaos. I stared into the specimen's face. He was no more than four feet away from me. I could see the beads of sweat dropping from his brow, the look of utter fear and surprise. Such contorted visual impressions were completely new to me. I had to take a moment to take them in, as I remembered all the world-end and destruction this individual would cause, how I should take great pleasure in removing him, as I was about to do. But all I could feel at the moment was pity. These protoplasts, even the worst of them, had a capacity for pain that I had never imagined. Suffering, a concept foreign to us. Something I could see now before me. I hesitated. I studied the man's face. And before I could close my finger around the trigger I felt a sharp sensation in my back, and a sudden loss of feeling. My grip loosened, the pistol fell from my hand, and the first thing I saw was blood, my own blood, that of the duplicate of Gunther Menzl, spilling on my shoes behind me. All strength and purpose drained out of me. I stumbled backwards, whirled, fell to my knees as Specimen #2 looked on in astonishment. As I peered up, I saw the face of Specimen #1, the bloody knife in his hand.

"Long live the revolution!" he said, dropping the knife, and I don't know if he looked at his counterpart or not, but both men disappeared into the crowd and that was the last impression I ever had.

The End

GUY PREVOST's background encompasses work as a story editor in Hollywood, real estate agent, screenwriter, and college teacher. His fiction has recently appeared in *The North Atlantic Review* and *Lively-Arts.com*. He has written produced episodes of *Walker, Texas Ranger*, *Dead Man's Gun*, and co-authored the film *Dinoshark* (SyFy Channel, 2010). Guy lives in Los Angeles with his wife and dog. He has no website but is happy to connect via GBPrevost@cs.com.

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