

# THE GROOTERS



**Book 1**

**Henrik Hillerström**

# The Grooters Book 1

<b>Part 1</b>	<b>Dreams.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Part 2</b>	<b>Pact.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Part 3</b>	<b>Fuconcius.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Part 4</b>	<b>Goldilocks.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Part 5</b>	<b>Heidi.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Part 6</b>	<b>Dimenport .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Part 7</b>	<b>Reunion.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Part 8</b>	<b>Machine .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Part 9</b>	<b>Sydney.....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Part 10</b>	<b>Moovia .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Part 11</b>	<b>Flirtown .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>Part 12</b>	<b>Morocco .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Part 13</b>	<b>Bridge.....</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>Part 14</b>	<b>Arrendee.....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Part 15</b>	<b>Steamaru .....</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>Part 16</b>	<b>2061 .....</b>	<b>182</b>
	<b>Sauna and Fondue.....</b>	<b>194</b>

Leo could feel that he was falling... and falling fast. His clothes were making a lot of noise due to the air friction at almost 200 km/h. He opened his eyes and was relieved to see that the ground was still around another 3km down, but it approached quickly and he did not have much time before he had to open the parachute.

The landscape was desert-like. On the ground, Leo could identify a few roads, some green spots, and, on a hillside, a big circle with something that looked like a star in it.

Leo had only skydived once before, many years ago in New Zealand, but this time he did not have any professional instructor on his back. Fortunately, it seemed that he had an appropriate backpack and quickly found a ring with a string on which it was written in small letters: "pull to open".

But he had no clue at what altitude he should open the parachute. He looked at his altimeter: 2200m. He took out his smart phone and searched "altitude open parachute". Typing in these words took him more than 700m... There are times when you are really happy that such an Internet search only takes 0.19 seconds. Altimeter: 1050m. Finally, he found the number he was looking for: "800m or 2600 feet". Which gave him another second and a half before he had to pull the string.

He enjoyed the silence of the last five minutes gliding down to a big area that was obviously the landing field. The landscape was absolutely magnificent, arid stony steppes with snowy mountains in the background and some green oases here and there.

Leo landed safely, but his heart was still beating like it had never been before. This time he really thought his last hour had come.

He gathered the parachute and started walking towards the small crowd that was waiting behind a fence to watch the skydivers land.

Then, at the far left, he noticed a gorgeous brunette, elegantly dressed in high-heels, a white mini-skirt and a black top with "LEO" undulating in white text above her decent-sized chest.

He tried to dismiss the coincidence by telling himself that it must be the girl's astrological sign and had no connection with his own name. But he had read somewhere about serendipitous encounters and gathered the courage to go up and talk to her, especially that she seemed to be looking his way all the time.

As he approached, she started to smile even more and before he had time to utter a word, she said: "Welcome to Adrenaland, Leo. I am Leandra, your girlfriend."

Those few words were followed by a warm and passionate kiss, as Leo had seldom experienced before.

*Leo quickly started to understand the forewarnings and promises so often repeated by Professor Dimenport before his departure. These allowed him to react in a more relaxed way to all the amazing things that were currently happening to him.*

Nevertheless, Leo was still under shock from this “arrival”, and Leandra, who could sense that, told him: “Take it easy, Leo.”

“What do you mean, easy? I almost died,” he answered.

“No, you did not. The parachute would have opened automatically if you had not done it on time. And even if it had not, your clothes have an in-built anti-gravitational technology that is activated when necessary, so you would have landed smoothly in any case.”

Leandra took him by the hand and led him out to the parking lot. Strangely, there seemed to be almost only sports cars and camels. Leandra's transport means was a Porsche, but a model he had never seen before. Its colour was white, which made sense, thought Leo, in a desert climate like this. It was sunny, not a single cloud on the horizon, and the temperature was very agreeable, not too hot.

As they came up to the car, he noticed that it was unlocked.

“Don't you need to lock your car here in Adrenaland?”

She looked at him with a smile, aware that there was a lot she would need to explain to him.

“It locks automatically as soon as I move a few meters away from it, and in the same way it can feel when I approach again. The principle is similar to the automatic sliding doors at the entrance of many stores, except that it only opens to the owner of the car when the in-built sensors recognize either their voice, face, smell or way of moving.”

∞

Verity woke up by the train loudspeaker announcing: *“In a few minutes, the train will arrive in Shoparadise. This is the end station. We kindly ask everyone to step off here.”*

As the train entered the station, Verity could see two brightly coloured parrots sitting on top of a big sign on which it was written *SHOPARADISE*, with a star in the middle of the “O”.

She noticed the dense vegetation everywhere, although it was the centre of the city. It seemed like all the buildings were built in stone. It reminded Verity of some ancient ruins as she had seen quite a few during her travels to Central America and Asia. But these were not ruins, instead they were magnificent solid stone buildings in various styles, where people lived, worked and enjoyed themselves.

As she walked down the train platform, she heard a deep voice behind her saying: “Welcome to Shoparadise, Verity.” She turned around and was immediately turned on by the muscular tall man standing next to the platform pillar. She could feel the self-confidence exuding from him.

She wondered why he was talking to her, and how he knew her name, but that question would soon be elucidated: he came close to her, and said: “I am Tirvey, your boyfriend. Did you have a good journey?”

As he said that, he took her slowly but firmly around her lower back and neck and gave her one of these kisses she had only read about in her romance novels.

*Verity was glad she remembered what Professor Dimenport had told her before she left, so that she could let herself go to the wonderful happenings.*

Tirvey took her by the hand, they walked for a while and ended up at a river with rapid white waters flowing a dozen meters below.

“The *Café Rebosch* is just on the other side.”

“Sure, but how are we going to get there?” wondered Verity as she could not see any bridge in the vicinity.

“Relax,” said Tirvey, walked up to a tree, got hold of a liana, then told Verity in an assuring tone: “Hold onto me.”

She did and they swung their way across the deadly waters.

With beating hearts, they arrived at *Café Rebosch* which was one of the most well-known tearooms in Shoparadise. The place was magical: at the entrance, they had chocolates and various sorts of cakes nicely displayed on different tables and behind the counter. And there were flowers everywhere: even in the ceiling. It was the most colourful and romantic café Verity had ever been to. They had an open fire at the back of the place, and they sat down on a sofa next to it.

They got to know each other over a hot chocolate, found out that they both were the oldest child out of three and that they had had very similar upbringings and some common experiences they both could relate to. Tirvey was funny and made her feel very strong emotions as he told her some wonderful stories. After a while he said:

“OK, I will let you go shopping now and we can meet at the *Ranwor Piano Bar* at 7.04PM.”

∞

Leandra slowly drove out from the skydive compound and sped up on the highway. She put on the stereo and turned up the volume to a level that Leo hoped was a maximum.

♪ *Dreaming – Måns Zelmerlöw*

Leo could not believe his eyes: she accelerated like crazy and the speedometer was quickly over 250 km/h. She slalomed between other cars and also had to give way to some others behind her, who obviously thought she was moving too slowly.

For Leo, this was an amazing blend of the craziest Hollywood movie, a car race video game and a German Autobahn. And his girlfriend seemed more skilled than the best Formula One or Indy Car driver he had ever seen.

“Leandra, do you always drive like that?”

“Of course, it is fun and a great way to fill up on the adrenaline that gives us our vital energy here in Adrenaland. Do you want to try?”

“Yes, but wait, isn't this dangerous? Where did you get these driving skills?”

“Don't worry. There is a pit stop with a great bar a few kilometres down the road. Let us stop there and have a few beers then I can explain more to you before you take the wheel.”

“What, you drink and drive too?”

“That makes the driving even more fun!”

“But that's even more dangerous.”

Leandra smiled at him with glimmer in her eyes: “Relax. Different rules apply in dreams.”

It was hard for Leo to fully take in the beautiful landscapes that were evolving at great speed outside the window. They were first driving through a big arid plain, and then they approached a snow-capped mountain range with sandstone villages at its foot. The highway went into a huge canyon and came out in a sand desert at the other end. That's where the pit stop was.

Leandra saw that Leo was observing the camels that walked on a road parallel to the highway, so she told him: “Yes, it would have taken us two days to cover the same distance with them. It's a totally different experience that I want you to try with me some day.”

Leo knew what she meant, as he had taken a camel tour in Rajasthan a few years earlier. There is a kind of peacefulness you get in the middle of the desert that you hardly get anywhere else.

Leo's heart was still beating in overdrive as they sat down at a shaded table on the roof terrace, overlooking the highway, with the mountain on the left and desert everywhere else.

“How come that the cars make so little noise, even at high speed?”

“The engines run on an optimal mix of water and electricity. And our engineers have found a way to recycle the noise that comes out of the car. Finally, the asphalt is absorbing any residual friction sounds from the tires.”

“I guess your engineers know stuff that ours do not?”

“Well, yours already have most of the knowledge necessary, they just need to fit the puzzle together by learning to think more clearly and creatively. It is actually not the technology that your scientists need to understand better, it is rather how the creative process works, so that they can consistently make new inventions and innovations.”

The beer was one of the most refreshing Leo had ever drunk. Leandra saw him enjoying it and told him that they charge the beer with small doses of electricity, which gives people an additional positive energy next to the normal effects of alcohol.

The beer, combined with the electric kiss Leandra just gave him, made Leo feel as if floating on a cloud.

∞

Verity went off to discover the heart of Shoparadise that lies on the same side of the river as the train station: *Riccalut*, a huge, circular, Coliseum-like building with a garden and a small lake in the middle. This time, to get back on the other side of town, she had walked a bit downstream and found a beautiful stone bridge that helped her cross without fearing for her life.

The inside of the building had columned alleys so that people could look down at the garden on one side and see the shop windows on the other side.

With its seven levels and 396 shops, restaurants, entertainment centres, cafés, bars, fitness, and much more, it was the most amazing complex Verity had ever seen. On the top floor, there was a great view of the rest of the city and the jungle all around.

She especially liked a Chinese-inspired fashion store with beautiful Asian furniture and interior design. In one corner of the store, there was a cute tearoom where traditionally clothed Chinese waiters poured tea from funny teapots whose necks were at least half a meter long.

The clothes were either traditional Chinese style or Western style with beautiful calligraphy, sometimes in small discrete characters, sometimes in bigger fonts.

Even though she herself could read Chinese, Verity asked the storekeeper how people could know the meaning of all these characters.

“You just download the camera-based translation application to your smart phone, to find the meaning of a character you see here in the store. Or you go to our website where you can

browse a whole *chictionary* of Chinese characters and order your own customized piece of fashion that will be ready for you within an hour.”

Sometimes, women are easy to convince, and Verity bought a tee shirt with the corresponding character of her name on it.

## 真理

“Do you want to take it with you, or do you want us to deliver it?” asked the shopkeeper.

Verity thought it would be more practical if they delivered it. Then she realized that she was in a dream and probably had to skip that tee-shirt altogether. Still, she said:

“Delivery would be great. But I’m not sure you can deliver to where I live.”

“Should be easy, we do IDD’s.”

“IDD’s?”

“*Interdimensional Deliveries*. What is your name and address?”

“Verity Blesse, Winner Building, 11 Wong Nai Chung Road, Happy Valley, Hong Kong.”

“Yes, and what’s the IDRN number?”

“You mean the postcode? Hong Kong does not have any postcode numbers.”

“No, the *Interdimensional Routing Number*.”

“Not sure of the IDRN. Can’t you just send it to Planet Earth – in the Solar System?”

“Planet Earth exists in many dimensions, and to find you, we need the IDRN.”

“But...”

“Young lady, if you don’t know where you live, how are we supposed to be able to deliver a package to you?”

Verity was very confused and a little sad to have to skip that tee-shirt. She had never thought about which dimension she lived in. Maybe Professor Dimenport understood and could explain that IDRN stuff because it was clearly beyond her mental grasp.

∞

“OK, now I want to hear more about your crazy driving” said Leo, “how come I have not seen any accidents, it must be quite frequent given the way you guys drive here?”

“Well, think for a moment, Leo. There are only two possibilities: either we are all super humans with amazing driving abilities... or we get some technological help.”



“Tell me more.”

“The good news is that it is the latter which means that you will be able to drive as crazy too. Next to the better-performing steering, acceleration and breaking technologies than in your dimension, our cars are guided by an advanced time- and GPS-technology which keeps track of all the cars on the roads and makes sure that no two cars end up in the same space at the same time, which equals accident, or that no car hits obstacles on the side of the road.”

Although it must have been quite complex to build such a system, Leo could perfectly imagine the feasibility of such a technology, as the theory made perfect sense.

Leandra continued: “In other words, cars are programmed to take over the driving as soon as the driver is about to make an error. Let us say that you drive towards a curve on a cliff road that can only be taken at a maximum of 197 km/h due to the Laws of Physics. Well, then the car will only let you accelerate to that speed so you will not have to worry about going over the edge.

In the same way, if you are on a collision course with another car, the wheel will turn itself to avoid the car, or break automatically to avoid any collision.”

“Ingenious,” said Leo.

“Well, it’s actually like riding a camel: he will bring you home if you fall asleep, and will refuse to walk into a ditch even if you tell him to do so.”

“I get it: your technology is so advanced that it has found ways to counter any possible human driving errors.”

“Indeed, and this is why you are allowed to drive drunk as well!”

“Cool...”

Leo and Leandra had a few more drinks, getting to know each other better and enjoying the silent races in front of them, with amazing landscapes behind the highway.

Then they went back to the car, and Leo took over the commands. What an acceleration: he clearly felt pushed back against the seat. Nice feeling, he thought. Adrenaline certainly kicked in, as he approached 300 km/h on an empty straight stretch of the highway. Then traffic got denser, the highway slightly curved and Leo had to concentrate fully and started to sweat, as this was way beyond how he was used to drive.

Leandra had been observing everything and told him:

“OK, Leo, now let us try something. So far, you have been driving great, now you have to put all your faith into our technology. Try and accelerate more than you know you should in the next curve.”

Leo, obviously worried about their safety and damaging the beautiful car and the beautiful lady, was not too eager of trying any stunts, but he trusted Leandra and accelerated more than he should have. Wow... he could feel the car taking over, not letting him drive off the road and instead negotiating the curve at an optimal speed, like on rails. Then he tried to drive up

behind another car, coming up at huge speed and the car smoothly turned the wheel automatically and broke slightly at the same time to avoid a collision.

So now Leo could drive more relaxed... and still get some huge adrenaline kick.

Once he had calmed down, Leo could pay more attention to the dashboard and he asked Leandra:

“And what is this kind of news ticker?”

“It shows important personal messages to the driver.”

“Then maybe I should pay attention to it?”

“Yes.”

The ticker on the dashboard read:

**When the northern southern hemisphere clock of the Mitchell Library shows a quarter to ten, the hour hand will point towards the Crystal of Beauty.**

“Not sure what is meant by that,” said Leandra.

“I actually think I know what it is about,” said Leo, “but it is going to be tricky to decipher.”

Then Leandra put a hand on his thigh and said: “Don’t worry about that now... there is one more thing you need to know about the cars here in Adrenaland: when you do not feel like driving for fun any longer, you just tell the car the destination you want to go to and it switches from *Manual Auto Drive* (MAD) into *Full Automatic Chauffeuring* (FAC), so that you can take a nap, watch a movie, or have some other kind of funny business in the backseat.”

Leandra's hand started to get more convincing, and as soon as Leo told the car “home”, he could feel it taking over the driving. Then the seats turned 180°... the windows blackened and Leandra was quickly all over him...

*“You have two wishes left, Leo,” said Professor Dimenport.*

∞

Verity only had time to get a partial glimpse of the *Riccalut* shopping-heaven during her afternoon in Shopparadise.

Fashion on one level, food on another, interior design on a third one, various special stores on yet another floor... and the level where she spent most time was filled with bookshops: 56 different small bookshops: some only sold comics, some travel books, some short stories, cooking, history, technology, fantasy, erotica, photography, children's books, novels...

And there was a 19<sup>th</sup> Century bookshop, where Verity sat down for a while and skimmed through an old Jules Verne book, *From the Earth to the Moon*. Sitting in this bookstore where she felt like traveling back in time with the mahogany bookshelves and leather club sofas, she laughed to herself thinking that even in Jules Verne's wildest dreams, he could never have imagined something like Shoparadise.

Suddenly, a bold phrase in the book jumped at Verity's attention:

**A crystal is buried a ship's length from the ship on higher ground.**

“Wait,” thought Verity, “I don't remember this being part of the original text.” And with her photo reading skills, she was quite confident about her memory. She read the text again, then realized that in this world anything is possible, and this text could be one of those hints that Professor Dimenport mentioned before her departure.

She put back the book on the shelf and then saw a few people queuing in front of a machine with a screen on it in one corner of the store and asked herself what that could be.

She asked the owner, an old man who looked like he had been reading books for 200 years, what this machine did.

“Very simple, it is a 3D-printer that can print any book that has ever been written. Obviously, we cannot store everything in our little shop, so we help our customers find what they look for on the Internet and a few minutes later, they have their physical book. On top of that, the machine recycles old books, so when clients have finished reading a book, they bring it back, and the machine spits out a new one with a discount.”

It was now time for Verity to go and join Tirvey at the *Ranwor*, which was not far away, but she had to cross the river again. This time she gathered the courage to use the liana to cross, which also saved her some time as she did not want to be late. She liked to respect other people by being on time. The river was not very large, but its white waters were flowing by at a big speed and you could hear it from many places in Shoparadise. Verity loved the colourful parrots, monkeys and other wildlife everywhere, even in the town centre. She watched how the monkeys used the lianas, so she aped them and slung herself over the river again.

Verity arrived right on time at the piano bar. Tirvey was already waiting for her. The place was enthralling: an exceptionally talented young woman with a powerful voice was entertaining the crowd.

♪ *And Now... Ladies and Gentlemen – Patricia Kaas*

Verity was sitting in Tirvey's strong arms and they both enjoyed the champagne-based house specialty drink. Verity knew that song and thought the singer really looked like Patricia Kaas.

“It’s not a cover song,” said Tirvey.

“What do you mean?” asked Verity, now unsure if it was actually Patricia herself standing on the stage in front of them.

“Why would you want a fake when you can get the original? In dreams, everything is possible.”

After a good hour, Tirvey said to Verity: “You must be fairly hungry by now, I have a surprise for you.”

They left the *Ranwor* and walked through a park, along an alley with tiny small street lamps. In the park they could hear all kinds of jungle birds and other animals; the place was really alive. They crossed the river further upstream on a wooden hanging bridge, and Verity could sense the coolness of the water flowing in strong currents under her. On the other side, they came up to a stone pyramid. The entrance of the “surprise”, the *Rellek* restaurant, was situated at the top of this pyramid with candles on the steps the whole way up.

When they entered the pyramid, there was just an elevator, that took them down far below ground surface and they stepped out in a wonderful arched room that looked like it could have been an old wine cellar. Not a single artificial light, candles everywhere, white napkins and beautifully decorated tables.

The dream went on: the evening with Tirvey was magical beyond words, he made her feel so good that she wanted it to go on forever. After the dinner, he suggested they go back to his place for a last “drink”.

Tirvey closed the door of his apartment, and quickly took strong hold of Verity and gave her yet another ocean of emotions. She wondered if any girl could have resisted him... she felt his strong body against hers, he kissed her neck...

*“That was your first wish, Verity. Only two left.” said Professor Dimenport.*

## Part 2      Pact

Geneva, Switzerland, 8 July 1992

Boss's parents had a big house with a huge garden. With his friends, he had built a cosy hut in an old tree in the southwest corner of the garden.

The great thing with this wooden hideaway was that it was concealed by the leaves of other trees in summertime and his parents could not see anything, even if they were sitting outside on the terrace in front of the house.

The small house in the tree had one fairly big room and was hanging more than two meters above ground so that, once the ladder was withdrawn, it was difficult, even for an adult, to get up in the hut.

A very kind Portuguese carpenter, who helped Boss's parents in their house from time to time, had taught Boss how to build a roof in such a way that water would not leak in. Thus, they could use the hut even when it was raining.

It took Boss and five of his friends the whole summer of 1990 to build it.

The year after, they dug up the whole garden to lay an electric cable to install a mini-fridge and lights for the evenings when they decided to stay late in the hut or even spend the night there when the weather was warm enough.

At the same time, they also laid a small cable to install an intercom system so that Boss's mother could call when lunch or dinner was ready or when it was time to go to bed.

On top of that, his friend Webbo, a tech wiz, had helped link an answering machine to the intercom so that they could screen his mother's calls when she tried to get hold of them at inappropriate times.

Boss and his friends could probably just have used walkie-talkies, but this was more fun and kept them busy for a big part of the summer 1991. Furthermore, Verity had read about the potential risks of radio waves, so that was another good argument in favour of the intercom line.

They had also been able to lift up a sofa into the hut, one that a neighbour was about to throw away. This had been a tricky endeavour, even if they had been six of them at the task.

And they had found various kinds of cushions that they spread all over the floor and made the hut a very comfortable place to be in.

They had also put on the walls some posters they liked. In one corner, next to the mini-fridge, they also had a small cabinet where they stored some food that did not need to be refrigerated.

And they even had a small balcony on which they put some grains and nuts to feed the happy birds and squirrels that came to visit them regularly.

Last, but not least, Modella had insisted that they get a small stereo where they listened to the radio or played cassettes she had recorded for them.

On it, she often played one of her favourite songs that described their mindset, elusive to their parents and other adults.

♪ *Det gåtfulla folket – Olle Adolphson & Beppe Wolgers*

Having spent the last two summers building and enhancing the hut, this year was the first year when they could fully relax and enjoy their creation.

It was the beginning of the summer holidays and Boss's parents had gone away for a fortnight to some friends in England, leaving him alone with his four years older brother, Bert, who wouldn't be a nuisance as he was playing video games the whole day in the basement of the house with his friend Trebbo.

So, Boss invited his five friends who all happened to be around, and he knew they could have a lot of fun together during the next 14 days without any adult interference.

Although they did not fully realize it, these years in the hut would be the best they would have in a very long time.

They actually came to the hut as often as possible to escape the boring life at school and the negative world that surrounded them in their respective homes.

Although they all came from very different backgrounds, this sad feeling united them and made them strong.

They? Six kids.

Boss Pibolodari, 11 years and almost 8 months old.

Verity Blesse, 10 years and 4 months.

Webbo Maraj, exactly one year younger than Boss.

Richie da Sousa, 9 months older than Webbo.

Modella d'Allema had just turned 10.

And Leo Berger would celebrate his 11th birthday in a month.

They called themselves *The Grooters*, as they all had Global ROOTs:

Webbo had an Indian father and a Kenyan mother.

Modella got her blonde hair from her Swedish mother and her brown eyes from her Argentinian father.

Leo's parents were both American, but his grandparents emigrated from different countries: Ireland, Germany, Holland and Russia. The mix turned out blond with blue grey eyes.

Richie's father was from Brazil, and his mother from Finland. Guess who gave him dark blue eyes and who his brown hair?

Verity's mother was from Japan, her father half French, half Chinese.

Boss's father was Swiss, his mother from England, and he had ancestors from Italy.

The Grooters felt good being with each other, as they had this emotional bond of belonging to nowhere, somewhere and everywhere at the same time.

The reader would argue correctly that such international backgrounds are nothing uncommon in Geneva, with all its multinational businesses and international organizations like the United Nations or the Red Cross.

But the Grooters had two more things in common. One of them was that they all had some kind of unique power that appeared natural to them, but as none of their classmates in school, nor any adults seemed to have them, they got mobbed or just felt misunderstood and lonely. Their friends were actively making fun of them and adults were just dismissing their behaviour as “child imagination”, or “ghost stories”.

Richie had the ability to see into the near future. This actually saved his and his parents' lives once when he warned them from a possible car accident. He did not understand why people were so interested in watching the lottery drawings on television – he always knew what numbers were coming out. How boring, he thought.

Webbo had the capacity to see live happenings at remote places. So, he could always sense what his parents or friends were doing. “Right now, my father is having lunch with a new colleague and just ordered a *pizza capricciosa* at *Da Paolo's*.” He has busted people more than once lying about what they had done or where they had been. Obviously, people with low integrity did not like Webbo.

Verity was not only an enthusiastic reader, she also had the ability to remember anything she had seen printed. This is why her friends at school nicknamed her the not very beautifying term ‘Cyclops’ because she was like a living encyclopedia. Verity’s teachers were also annoyed because she frequently pointed out inaccuracies in their teachings. Recently, she also got hold of a photo reading course, which enabled her to fine-tune her photographic memory. She is now not only able to remember everything that she reads, but has also learned to read extremely fast, ‘photographing’ a whole book in a matter of minutes.

Modella, on her side, had the capacity to see and communicate with dead people. She often talked to her grandmother who passed away three years ago. Her parents forced her to go and see a psychiatrist, but he was not able to 'help' her. Most adults were just too close-minded or just afraid of admitting the possibility of her abilities. She did not understand why they got so overly sad when their loved ones passed away. For Modella, the relationship continues, but just a little differently. Of all the Grooters, she was suffering the most from the incredulity of adults and mobbing of other children.

Boss, on his side, had the ability to read people's minds. He had access to a fascinating and scary world, but one that explained people's behaviour quite accurately. From most adults' and normal children's perspective, Boss was the most annoying of them all, because they could never hide anything from him. Too bad his parents dismissed his ability, as it would have saved them many headaches recruiting the right colleagues at work. Like for Webbo, people with low integrity were very irritated by Boss' capabilities.

Leo had a much more practical ability, the one to teleport himself physically from a place to another. He scared his parents the first few times he went playing with his friends without leaving his bedroom. The school attendant still does not understand how Leo is able to get into the building in the mornings before he has unlocked it. Lastly, this capacity serves him well to 'climb' up into the hut in Boss's garden.

It seems like the Grooters' unique abilities can be traced back to some kind of shock or trauma that happened to each one of them in earlier childhood.

Leo thinks his teleportation capacity is linked to the fact that there was a terrible thunderstorm during the night he was born.

Verity had fallen from a tree at three.

At four, Richie had to live with his parents on the streets for four months as his father lost his frustrating job.

When Modella was five, a friend of hers from kindergarten was killed by a forty-ton truck in front of her feet.

At six, Webbo was sexually abused by a sick uncle.

And Boss was involved in a severe car accident at the age of seven.

Finally, one more thing sealed their friendships: the fact that their parents' relationships were not very good.

Again, the reader would be right in saying that there is unfortunately nothing uncommon with disharmonious relationships. But due to their special abilities, the Grooters were much more sensitive than normal kids, and therefore suffered far more every time their parents shouted at each other. Or at them.



To summarize everything, the absolutely unique emotional bond between the Grooters was due to the fact that they were suffering threefold:

First, they suffered from the fact that they did not feel totally at home anywhere, be it in Geneva or in their respective countries of origin.

Secondly, due to their strange abilities, which tended to scare away others or just had them laugh at the Grooters.

Third, they suffered both directly and indirectly from their parents' quarrels and unhappiness. Lately, the parents' situation and negativity at home had worsened for some of them and Boss decided that they must do something about it.

So, he called in a crisis meeting with all six Grooters. And there they were, six kids in a hut in a magnificent tree, trying to help the adult world.

“OK, any ideas of where we can start?” launched Boss.

They all remained silent for a while, then Modella finally broke the silence: “What if each one of us tries to first explain the main reason they think their parents' relationship is failing?”

“Great idea” all exclaimed almost simultaneously.

Richie took the lead:

“In my case, it is fairly obvious, my parents always quarrel about money matters. And my mom often repeats that we cannot afford this, or afford that. And she yells at my father that he should bring home more money...”

Verity followed:

“I also think I know why my parents are not getting along very well: Because I feel that they do not really love each other enough. My mum once told me she only married dad because he had a good job and could provide for the family.”

“And what about you, Boss?” asked Richie, “your parents seem to have everything they need to be happy: a big house, nice cars, a chalet in the mountains, and a summer house in Southern France. And you often go to exotic places on vacation.”

“Yes, on that side we are very fortunate,” answered Boss, “but my parents are not happy. And the only reason I can see is that they do not like their jobs, although they get very well paid, especially dad.”

“Is it not fun to be a banker?” asked Modella.

“Well, the only thing I can say is that he often complains about his irritating boss and his incompetent employees. And he is always tired when he comes home. Also, my mom does not seem to get along with her colleagues and finds her job boring.”

“It sounds like job dissatisfaction is probably behind both your parents’ issues, Boss,” said Richie.

“Yes,” said Boss, “it looks like we have three good reasons so far, to explain our parents’ unhappiness: **money problems, lack of love and job dissatisfaction.**”

“In my case, it is clear too,” Leo continued, “dad takes coke and both my parents drink and smoke too much, especially mum.”

“I also drink a coke from time to time, when my parents don’t see me,” said Modella.

“Not the drink, the drug,” explained Verity who had read a book about various drugs and their effects.

“What? Coke? How do you know that?” asked Webbo.

“I overheard my aunt and uncle mentioning it when they were over at our place last time.”

“But, isn't your father a lawyer, Leo?”

“Yes...”

“And what about your parents, Modella?” continued Boss.

“I am not really sure. My mum seems to eat a lot more lately; she is actually very fat now. Do you think that could be linked to her temperament swings?”

“That could very well be,” said Verity, “and your father?”

“He totally lacks energy. Grandma told me once that he was depressive or something like that. Not sure really what the causes are and where he is heading. The doctors have given him a lot of different pills, but it only seems to get worse.”

Verity intervened again:

“Let me guess... they do not do any sports?”

“You are right,” answered Modella.

Verity continued: “It looks like some health issues. In your mother's case it is poor physical health, and your father has issues with his mental health. I read an interesting article the other day stating that there could be a link between the mental and the physical health. So maybe we can just sum up your parents' problems with “health”?”

“Great, then we have two more reasons: **addictions and health.**” summarized Boss “Your turn now, Webbo.”

“I don't know.”

“What, you don't know? There must be some kind of signs.” said Leo “I know adults are good at hiding things they do not want us to know, but there are always signs.”

Leo was a great observer, and he often came up with some genius ideas just based on things he had observed, be it a process to improve or a device that could be made better or used for new purposes.

“I don't know,” repeated Webbo “but for some reason my mom is nagging my dad all the time, for small insignificant details. And I really do not understand why she makes such a big deal out of these things.”

“Hmm... What could that tell us?” asked Boss looking at the other four. They did not seem to have much of a clue either.

Then Webbo added: “The only thing that comes to mind that I overheard the other night when they thought I was asleep, is something about my mother complaining that she “needs more, she is not satisfied”. Not sure what she means by that.”

“**Sex!**” exclaimed Verity, “I read somewhere about the importance of sex to release tensions that build up from modern-day stress. I am not really sure how all this works in detail, but maybe your father is not able to help your mother release enough tension.”

“I wonder why most adults are so secretive about everything around sex,” said Modella, “if it is good, why don't they talk more about it? And if it's bad, why don't they tell us why?”

“Perfect,” finalised Boss, “it looks like we have six different reasons for the problematic behaviours of our parents. Now, where do we go from here? Does anyone of you have an idea how we can help them?”

Silence.

“There must be something that we can do,” said Richie, for whom nothing was impossible. But even he had to admit that he was also fairly lost in this case.

Leo intervened: “Any problem can be solved, even if you do not have a clue at the beginning. That actually makes the challenge more interesting. You see, we have cars and planes and computers, but human adults are more complex than that...”

“So, what do we do? Anything we can start with? Where shall we search for answers?” asked Modella.

Then Richie, refusing to give up, came up with an idea: “Let us make a pact: to do whatever we can to break the vicious circle of adults' unhappy lives and relationships.”

All the Grooters thought that was a great idea.

“We need to have a written pact,” said Leo.

All agreed, so Modella and Boss ran back to the house to gather some pens and paper.

Leo, whose father was a lawyer, and who had seen many documents at home, helped to structure the pact.

## **PACT between the Grooters**

We, the Grooters, commit ourselves to do whatever it takes to help our parents improve their unhappy lives and relationships.

We have found the following probable reasons for their unhappiness:

Money problems: Richie's parents

Lack of genuine love: Verity's parents

Job dissatisfaction: Boss's parents

Drugs and addictions: Leo's parents

Health problems: Modella's parents

Sexuality problems: Webbo's parents.

We will do everything in our power to go to the root of our parents' problems. As long as we live, we will search for solutions to help them as well as other people with similar issues, and we will share our findings with each other.

Done in six original copies.

Geneva, Wednesday, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1992

## **THE GROOTERS**

**Webbo   Verity   Richie   Modella   Leo   Boss**

Modella, who loved her parents, added: “Let us not be too hard with adults: they do their best with the limited knowledge that they were given.”

Yes, said all, and Verity fished out a quote from her incredible memory bank: “*Forgive them for they know not what they do.*”

“Well, I think most adults are not stupid, it just seems like something blocks them from doing the things that would make them really happy,” said Webbo.

“Agreed,” said Boss, “and that’s what our Pact is all about: to find out what hinders adults from living more fulfilling and happy lives.”

“Yes,” confirmed The Grooters in unison.

After this interlude of seriousness, Modella turned on the stereo in the hut.

♪ *Enfants de tous pays – Enrico Macias*

The Grooters had a lot of fun together that summer, not knowing that most of them would soon have to move away from Geneva.

## Part 3

## Fuconcius

*Buenos Aires, Argentina, early October 2017*

Mr. Pong was mesmerized by the beauty of the show that was taking place on the scene just a few meters in front of the dining table where he was sitting.

The tango dancers exuded a mix of grace, elegance and overt sexuality at the same time. They were elegantly dressed and you could feel the electricity in the air emanating from the closeness between the hyper-feminine woman and the very masculine man. It was vertical lovemaking to each other and to the music.

♪ *Balkanski Tango – Đorđe Balašević*

This wonderful tango show made Mr. Pong almost forget the beauty sitting next to him with whom he had just shared a succulent typical Argentinian dinner with a piece of meat so tender that it could be cut with a spoon, accompanied of course, by a genuine Malbec from the Mendoza region at the foot of the Andes in the western part of the country.

Towards the end of the dinner, Mr. Pong asked her:

“So where do you know Richie from?”

Knowing that Mr. Pong was coming to Buenos Aires for business meetings, Richie had asked Modella if she could entertain him one evening. He was not only a very important business contact, but also a dear friend of his. As it was Mr. Pong’s first visit to Argentina, Modella decided to take him to one of the most prestigious tango shows in the capital.

“We grew up together in Geneva, in Switzerland.”

“Aha,” said Mr. Pong, nodding in a very typical Chinese way.

Two years after the Grooters had made their Pact, Modella’s father got a job at a telecom corporation in the United States, and the whole family moved to New Jersey when she was twelve.

For some reason, Modella got caught in the unhealthy American lifestyle and by the time she finished high school, she had gained so much weight that the scale showed almost the double of what it should have. And the scale in question was unfortunately functioning correctly.

One day she woke up, looked herself honestly in the mirror and told herself: “This is not me.” She realized she had hit the rock-bottom of beauty and self-confidence, and it couldn’t get much worse.

Somehow, she was able to get hold of her Swedish determination and said out loud:

“I am Modella Stella d’Allemo and I am going to prove to the world that one can go from being obese and ugly to becoming healthy, slim and beautiful.”

Except some weight, she thought she had nothing to lose, so she might as well shoot for the stars: the goal she set herself was crystal clear: two years later, at the age of twenty, to become a model.

Modella loved personal challenges. Simple common sense of healthy nutrition and exercise helped her shed many pounds, but she wanted to take her weight loss one step further and tried the Grooters approach: to find the root of her weight problems, instead of just treating the symptoms.

So, she started to read a lot of books, not only on weight loss, but also on general health, beauty and wellbeing. She found some gems of information here and there that would help her get on the right track and find her own solutions.

It took Modella an additional year to reach her goal, but at 21 she had signed with one of the bigger model agencies in Manhattan. Modella definitively stands out on the catwalk with her rare combination of brown eyes and natural blonde hair.

In retrospect, she found that the determining factors to her success were threefold.

First, the mission she had set herself put her life back on track and gave her the necessary energy to follow through the inevitable ups and downs of such a journey.

Second, the love and sex that she received from her caring boyfriend at that time helped her build a positive self-image.

Third, and this probably made the difference between success and failure, she put a paper in her fridge with the inscription: “*Are you REALLY hungry, or just bored?*” That note in the fridge actually incited her to start doing fun, non-boring stuff, and she thinks those positive activities also helped her lose weight, and gain self-confidence.

Thus, by working on the roots of her weight problems – a missing goal in life and a lack of affection – Modella was able to not only reach a healthy weight level, but also maintain it ever since. After New York, she worked for two years as a model in Milan. However, catwalks have their limits, she got bored again and was constantly quarrelling with her employers as she stood her ground, because she wanted to smile in front of the public and cameras. So, despite all that profession’s perks, she ditched her job and moved back to the United States to study architecture at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. Thus, Modella went from being a model, to building models.

And, after only two years of working in an architecture office in Florida, she moved to Buenos Aires, to be closer to her father’s family.

As she got to know him a little during the dinner, Modella could sense that Mr. Pong was a person with good intentions. Being an industrialist from Shanghai, he had helped create many jobs not only for his compatriots, but also for a lot of other people working for his various companies around the world.

So, she felt comfortable enough to tell him the story about forming the Grooters together with her friends, among them Richie. Modella also told Mr. Pong about the Pact they had made at that time.

“And have you since then been able to gather the clues necessary to fulfill the Pact?” asked the industrialist.

“Only a few,” responded Modella, thinking about how her own weight success had helped her mother as well, but not to the extent she had wished, “Of course additional twenty-five years of life experience has taught us a lot of things, but we still haven’t reached a point where we can give people consistent and reliable advice on how to solve their life and relationship issues.”

“Don’t give up, Modella, and continue to gather as much information as you can that you think can help your parents and others.”

“Would you have any life advice to share?”

“I know a thing or two from life experience,” said Pong, “but I suggest that you meet Fuconcius, an old wise man living in the *Emei Shan* mountain region in the Sichuan province in western China. He knows much more than me.”

“Do you have his address?”

“No. But he shouldn’t be difficult to find: he is around 110 years old and lives in a monastery not too far from Leshan. When you are there, just ask some local villagers, most of them know about him. The best is to fly into Chengdu, then take the bus to Leshan, the place with the giant Buddha next to the river.”

Modella had never heard of Leshan, but remembers Verity mentioning that she had been on vacation to Chengdu to visit the Panda Research Centre, which was like a zoo for pandas only.

“I have fourteen days vacations later in October, and nothing planned. *Xie xie*, Mr. Pong,” said Modella, proud of being able to place the only word she knew in Mandarin. During a boring long-haul flight over some ocean a few years ago, she had learned how to say “thank you” in a hundred languages – a list that has served her well as she likes to travel.

“You are welcome, Modella,” said Mr. Pong, “I am sure Richie will keep me up-to-date about the insights you get from this amazing centenarian.”

“Yes, we always keep each other abreast about any valuable information that can help us fulfill our Pact.”

### *Sichuan, China, late October 2017*

Fortunately, Modella had been to China before, but she still had difficulties to accommodate to all the people everywhere and was glad to go to the slightly less populated mountain region two hours South-West of Chengdu.



As most people in this remote area did not speak English, Modella was happy to have downloaded the *VRT* application on her smart phone before she left. The *Voice Recognition Translator* was a recently developed application that was great to understand and get understood, but the technology was far from perfect, which sometimes led to some hilarious misinterpretations of the device's proposed translations.

As she arrived in Leshan, Modella was able to get some information about Fuconcius from an ambulant merchant selling drinks to the people happily queuing up to see the 70m-tall Buddha.

Out of the *VRT* came:

*"You go need to Emeishan town."*

*"Xie xie,"* said Modella underlining her extensive one-word Mandarin knowledge with an even broader smile, but a genuine one, being positively understood in all languages and cultures.

Modella then took a taxi to Emeishan town where she found a group of women sitting on a park bench, and she asked them through the *VRT* where she could find Fuconcius.

*"Two walk hours here from it is you Fuconcius find,"* was the answer.

Modella talked into the *VRT* again: *"Maybe you know a guide that can take me to him?"*

Again, the women laughed out loud as they heard the *VRT* translation. Modella concluded that if the translation into Chinese was as funny as it was into English, the ladies had a good reason to laugh.

*"To Fuconcius guide you cousin mine Zebedee name his,"* said the woman who had talked earlier. She made a sign to Modella to wait and she quickly walked away.

And ten minutes later, she returned with a man who looked like he was in his early forties.

The man talked into the *VRT* and the following came out: *"Problem no, guide you I Fuconcius to 100 RMB pay you me."*

Modella thought that was a good deal, and off they went.

The *Heilongjiang Plank Way*, as the trail was called, was magnificent: it was not a tropical jungle, but the forest was luxuriant with such intense green colours, as Modella had never seen before. They walked through the *Joking Monkey Zone*, probably named so after funny interactions between some tourists and their first cousins.

The monkeys living in this area, macaques, although not winning any cuteness awards, were entertaining to watch. Modella saw plenty of them along the way.

A little further up the trail, a fluorescent green-coloured snake crossed her path. Zebedee could see that it made her uncomfortable, but he was used to this reaction from tourists, so he told her through the *VRT*:

*"This why reason is most visitors this zone past come back never."*

Modella turned pale, but then Zebedee gave her a tap on the back and the blonde girl finally understood that it was just a joke. Apparently, it was not only the monkeys who were joking here, she thought, relieved but a little annoyed at her own naivety.

An hour later, they arrived at a small settlement, just a few huts, and Modella concluded that the monastery must be fairly close now.

After Zebedee had talked for a while with one of the locals, he came back to Modella with a worried expression on his face:

*“Monastery lives where Fuconcius only 20 away minutes is. But problem: Fuconcius sick very is.”*

Modella knew it was never a good sign when an old person got really sick, and she just hoped that he would be fit enough so that he could talk to her.

They continued to walk for fifteen minutes until they came to the foot of steep and long stairs.

*“It here is,”* said the grammatically challenged VRT.

Yes and no, thought Modella looking up the endless stairs disappearing into the mist.

It must have been over a thousand steps. Modella lost count half way, but did a rough guesstimate when she arrived breathless at the top. Zebedee didn't even sweat when they arrived and Modella told herself that maybe the people were immune to gravity in this region.

Anyway, amazed at how fit Zebedee was, she asked him about his age:

*“Only fifty-eight age me am,”* came out of the VRT. Mountain air keeps young indeed.

Zebedee talked to a middle-aged monk at the entrance of the small monastery perched on a rock with beautiful forest landscapes all around. The monk was talking in a very low tone.

Modella understood why, when the VRT spit out:

*“Fuconcius been coma in three days for now.”*

She felt a big weight in her chest after these news, and asked Zebedee:

*“So, what do we do now? All this way for nothing.”*

Zebedee/VRT: *“You stay can days a few. Good fortune you then Fuconcius up wake. Room sleep plus food yes here.”*

*“Xie xie, Zebedee. Then I stay here for a few days in the hope that Fuconcius will regain consciousness. You can go home now, I will find my way back alone.”*

Modella gave him RMB 300 and Zebedee left with a big smile of gratitude.

A while later, as it started to get dark, Modella had dinner with all the monks and a few other tourists who also spent the night in this fantastic place.

She woke up refreshed the day after. She knew that this was by far the most amazing place where she had ever spent a night. Despite the morning fog, she could feel how the mountain air filled her with energy and she was not surprised to hear that some people here lived to a very old age. She hoped that this *mysterious myst* would clear before she left so that she could see more of this stunning landscape.

She was glad she had brought a book with her as there was not much to do in the monastery except for the morning Tai Chi exercises led by one of the older monks.

So, she read *Wild Swans*, an exceptional book about three generations of women living in Communist China under Mao. It was a very real and a very sad story about this huge country. Modella would never see China and the Chinese with the same eyes again.

On the second day, one of the older monks came to Modella and told her in broken English:

“Fuconcius died this morning.”

“I am sorry to hear that,” said Modella, already knowing this, as Fuconcius had visited her a few moments earlier to say that he was busy sorting out his death right now, but would come back tomorrow for a longer chat.

She did not want to let the other monks know about her ability to talk to the dead, so she just said:

“Too sad I came all this way for nothing. But it is so beautiful here, I would like to stay another day or two.”

“No problem,” said the monk, “enjoy the fresh mountain air and calmness here.”

“*Xie, xie!*”

In the afternoon of the third day, Modella was sitting and reading her book on a small balcony of the monastery overlooking the wonderful green valley. The fog had now cleared.

Suddenly, she heard a voice next to her. Or rather, she could feel a presence, and she knew it was Fuconcius. He did not talk to her with words as we know it, but rather communicated with feelings and emotions on a telepathic level.

She was used to this, not only with her grandparents, but also with old friends and acquaintances that had passed away in the last twenty years.

For someone with Modella’s abilities, it was actually easier to communicate with the deceased Fuconcius, than it would have been if he had been alive, because he did not speak English and it is not convenient to hold a longer conversation with the VRT.

The telepathic discussion went on as follows:

“Thank you for taking the time and come and talk to me,” said Modella.

“I have all the time in the world right now,” replied Fuconcius.

“Mr. Pong suggested I talk to you regarding a complex problem: I need to better understand what blocks people from living healthy and happy lives.”

“Ah, Mr. Pong, I remember him. Many years ago. A good man. So why do you want to find solutions for this?”

Modella told him about the Grooters and the Pact they had made as kids.

“Ah! A true Chinese puzzle, or *casse-tête chinois* as the French would call it. You’ve come to the right address.”

Modella laughed at the old man’s humour. She had noticed that humour was often a common denominator among centenarians.

“So, you think you will find a solution where all others have failed?”

“Thanks to our combined superpowers, we have a competitive advantage. Doesn’t mean it’s going to be a walk in the park.”

“Well, I have spent most of my long life, almost 112 years, to ponder those questions. Hopefully some of my insights will be able to help you.”

“Thank you,” said Modella, “I am very grateful for this.”

“There are quite a few things that you need to understand when it comes to bad things that happen to people, for example your parents,” continued Fuconcius. “Some people would claim it’s the Devil’s work, other say it’s the system, others say it’s communism, others say it’s capitalism... I prefer to reframe the situation and say that when bad things like that happen, it means you are not on the right path, *dào*. An easy analogy could be a wall. If a wall is in your way, don’t curse it, it doesn’t help to call it evil. Instead, look for a door or archway that takes you through the wall to where you want to go.”

“Put like that, it sounds quite easy.”

“I wish it were. But it is not. Identifying the wall is the easy part. Finding the door is the tricky part. Just look at our Great Wall of China: there are far more wall bricks than openings. But you can get past the wall.”

“Any practical suggestions?”

“The solution is different for every problem. However, there are two main categories of things that will help you get through to the other side.”

“And what are they?” Modella could feel that she was up for some powerful wisdom.

“The first is knowledge. So, if you know where the door or opening is, you go there instead of banging your head against the wall. Or, put differently, knowledge can be seen as a form of key or password. If you don’t have the key, it’s very hard to get in. But with the right key, it’s easy as.”

Modella laughed at Fuconcius’ humour, thinking about a Kiwi friend of hers who always said ‘easy as’. It is not unlikely that Fuconcius had met some New Zealand traveller during his 112-year journey.

“That makes sense,” she said.

Fuconcius continued: “Yes, and I want to underline the importance of this analogy again. Knowledge can be the difference between life and death. Let’s say you’re out in a snow storm. You come up to a house but don’t have the key to go into the house. Then you may die outside. That’s how important the right knowledge can be.”

“And what about the second category?”

“The second category is creativity. Back to the Great Wall example: if there are no existing doors, how do you get through?”

“I don’t know.”

“There are always alternatives. You can walk around the wall, for example. Admittedly, this would mean a lot of walking in the case of the Great Wall. Or you could dynamite the wall. However, that’s less elegant and you may get UNESCO and a billion Chinese on your back. So, the easiest of all is simply to fly over the wall.”

“Fly? You mean with an airplane or helicopter?”

“No, fly like a bird, or Superwoman.”

Modella’s limiting beliefs dismissed that last solution instantly. However, she still felt wiser from Fuconcius’ words.

“Thanks for all these ideas.”

The ghost continued: “Now, remember that there is a close link between knowledge and creativity. The more knowledge you have, the more creative mental associations you will be able to make. So, in a first phase, I would recommend that you and your Grooters friends do whatever you can to gather as much knowledge as possible, with the hope of coming up with creative solutions to help your parents, and humanity. This is very important, and you do not have a lot of time.”

“What do you mean, we do not have a lot of time?”

“Two, maximum three years.”

“What will happen then?”

“Unless you or someone else comes up with a solution, there is a very big likelihood that a worldwide pandemic will spread, with unimaginable suffering.”

“Thank you for your warning. On a practical level, what would you suggest that we do now as a first next step?”

“As I mentioned, knowledge is the starting point. So, my recommendation is that you gather with your Grooters friends, brainstorm with each other and do research until you find the solutions you’re after.”

“OK.”

“That being said, there is something that could improve your odds even further.”

“And what is that?”

“A secret weapon against dark forces.”

“A secret weapon? And what does it look like?”

“No one has ever seen it, but if the legend is true, then this weapon will help a group of pure-intentioned warriors to save the planet.”

“You think that could be us, the Grooters?”

“Maybe.”

“So where do I find this special weapon?”

“Not on a supermarket shelf,” joked the wise ghost.

Modella laughed again.

“I wouldn’t really expect that either.”

Fuconcius continued: “I do not know any details about it, but there is one person who might be able to help you further.”

“Who is that?”

“She is a shaman and her name is Goldilocks Dove. You should be able to find her somewhere in the South-Western United States.”

“Thank you so much, Fuconcius,”

“You are welcome. I could spend a deathtime talking to a lovely lady like you, but right now I think that the most important thing is that you get the ball rolling and activate the Grooters’ combined powers. Anyhow, feel free to contact me again, should you get stuck or have specific questions that you think I may be able to answer.”

“Again, thank you, Fuconcius,” said Modella, “and now that you are dead, that makes it easier for me to reach you, and I do not need to travel to China to talk to you.”

“Good luck, Modella,” were Fuconcius’ last words.

Straight after her conversation with Fuconcius, Modella went to her room, packed and left the monastery.

As soon as she came down closer to Emeishan town, where the mobile network coverage was sufficient, she sat down on a bench and e-mailed a summary of her discussion with Fuconcius to her Grooters friends.

As Modella knew she may not come back to this part of the world for a while, she took the opportunity to spend another few days in Chengdu, visiting the Panda Centre she had so much looked forward to see. Except maybe some dog puppies, she had never met such cute animals before. She spent a whole afternoon in this very unique zoo.

Then she attended a great Sichuan opera show with traditional costumes, tea pots, dolls, and, like Fuconcius, a lot of humour, something she felt was a scarce resource, and not only in China. Modella particularly enjoyed the hand shadow puppets. They really made her laugh.

Once all the Grooters had woken up in their respective time zones and read Modella's message, they e-mailed each other back and forth whereafter Boss suggested that Webbo and Richie go and find Goldilocks Dove, as they both live in the United States.

Richie called Webbo:

“Hi Webbo, what's up?”

“Up and down these days, I have an annoying client right now...”

“Then just fire him.”

“But I am the only one who can help him,” retorted Webbo.

“You need to set your own rules.”

“You think I can do that?”

“If you want to keep your sanity, you need to do it. You can start with letting your client know that you need to take a few days off. Where do you think we shall start looking for Goldilocks?”

“Tricky. I cannot locate her with remote viewing for the moment, as I have not met her and do not have any photograph of her.”

“Yes,” added Richie, “and you will not find her in the white pages either, as we only know her shamanic name.”

“Maybe we can contact a shaman or some American Indian association?”

“Good idea, Webbo, I'll have my assistant work on this. She is used to locate people, even much sought-after VIPs, so this should not be a big issue for her. I get back to you as soon as I have some more information about our dove.”

Two hours and twelve minutes later, Webbo's mobile rang again.

“Hi Richie!”

“Hi again Webbo, so even my charming and over-efficient assistant Christella was not able to fully locate Goldilocks, but she found out the name of another shaman who would probably be able to help us. He has no phone, so we need to go and find him.”

“Where is he?”

“Pahrump, Nevada.”

“Never heard of.”

“In the middle of nowhere, about sixty miles equidistant from Death Valley in the west and Las Vegas in the east.”

“OK,” said Webbo, “so if I jump into my car now, I can pick you up at Las Vegas airport in a few hours’ time – it should take you approximately the same amount of time to fly in from the east coast, as me to drive from San Francisco.”

“Good idea, Webbo,” said Richie, “I’ll call my pilots straight away and have them get ready for take-off.”



Nevada, USA, early November 2017

When Webbo drove into the LAS compound, Richie was already there waiting for him.

“Nice to see you again, old friend!” said Richie and gave Webbo a big bear hug, “it took you long to get here...”

“Speed limits...”

“On straight empty roads?”

“Yes, it’s not Germany or Montana. At least Nevada’s alcohol laws are a bit more relaxed than California’s.”

The drive from Vegas to Pahrump gave Richie and Webbo time to catch up, as they hadn’t seen each other for many years.

In 1996, Webbo Maraj had moved back to Bangalore with his family, then on to Boston when he was 18 to study IT at MIT. After his studies, he moved to Silicon Valley to work for various big technology firms until 2011 when he set up his own consultancy in San Francisco, helping companies improve the security of their IT networks.

His client acquisition strategy was quite straight forward: he hacked into their systems and left a virtual business card in places he was not supposed to have access to.

*“You are lucky. This is a friendly nasty little curious beast that has found its way into your not so very secure computer system. Call Webbo on (415)-911-9911 to help you keep these beasts out of your firewalls.”*

He only did this with firms he thought had positive ethical missions, and that he genuinely wanted to help improve their IT systems.

As for Richie Delano da Sousa, his parents had divorced the year after The Grooters made their Pact, leaving Richie alone with his mother Rita. As she had borne him fairly young, she was only in her early thirties and still a very attractive blonde Nordic woman.

A few months after her divorce, she got to know an American billionaire, Bill, who was a few days in Geneva to check his various bank accounts.

Rita could not believe how lucky she was, the kind of encounters that most girls dream of and that only happen in fairy tales – but we are in a fairy tale now, so that makes it a believable story.

Bill, although already in his mid-fifties, was a sporty and very handsome billionaire with a big heart.

It was a wonderful love story, Rita and Richie moved to Bill's main residence on Nantucket Island.

Then, in 1995, Rita and Bill married on his luxury yacht cruising around the Maldives in the Indian Ocean.

They lived happily ever after until two years ago when death came seeking Bill out, a stroke on the 19<sup>th</sup> hole, after one of his best golf games ever: he had played one stroke under par, thus joining a very select club of golf players having played less strokes than their years of age.

That left Richie and his mother with a few billion dollars each. But it also left them with a void in their hearts, as Bill had genuinely loved both of them and cared about Richie as if he were his own biological son.

Having grown tall at 1m95, Richie Delano Johnson was an impressive figure and had been trained the old rich way at Harvard and Wall Street. He now has all the experience necessary to monitor his various business investments. Which he does from his home offices in New England and the Caribbean. But he also travels extensively to meet the people involved in these ventures and constantly looks for new visionary projects to invest in as well.

But there are things that all the money in the world cannot buy, so even if Richie had looks to die for with his well-trained and tanned body and his mix of brown hair and blue eyes, he too hadn't so far found the love of his life.

“So, what is the name of the shaman we want to meet here in Pahrump?”

“Lowlight Nightowl.”

“Another funny name.”

“And a serious tongue-twister,” said Richie.

“Where do we find this night owl? In a night club?”

“I wouldn't bet that there are any in Pahrump, but I expect him to show up after sunset. Given there are only forty thousand souls living there, if we ask around, we should be able to locate him sooner or later.”

“The power of local networks,” Webbo remarked.

“Yes, they often beat the Internet.”

It was getting past mid-afternoon, so they checked into a simple motel in Pahrump that had a swimming pool where they relaxed getting the last rays of sun for the day.

Then they took a short and well-needed power nap after their respective long journeys and were again full of energy before dinner time.

They first asked the lovely motel receptionist if she happened to know *Lowligh Nightowl*. She did not, explaining that she had only lived in Pahrump for a few months. But she suggested we ask around at *Terrible's Road House* casino, which is the place where many locals meet at night. It is also a good place to have dinner.

"A casino," Richie told Webbo, "I hope they will let me in."

"Why wouldn't they?"

"Well, my capacity to see into the short-term future has certainly some evident advantages when it comes to gambling..."

"But you don't really need the money, do you? Especially since your father passed away..."

"No, but I used to play a lot for fun a few years ago. I like to beat the system. And upset the system's watchdogs. Well, I pushed the watchdogs' buttons a little too much, so now I am banned from most bigger casinos in the world including Las Vegas, Atlantic City, Monte Carlo, Singapore and Macau."

"That's too bad," said Webbo, "but I don't think it should be a problem in a place like Pahrump. Casinos here are more a social than a gambling thing."

"Anyway, after a while, gambling gets quite boring when you win every time," added Richie.

Webbo was right: it was a relaxed and for a casino a fairly warm atmosphere in *Terrible's Road House*, with some people hanging out around the bar, others eating at the diner, and a few people playing black jack or slot machines.

Richie ordered two pale ale beers and asked the bartender if he knew *Lowligh Nightowl*.

"Yes, I do," said the bartender who looked like he had probably worked there since the casino opened, "he usually comes in a little later. I will let him know that you are looking for him."

"Thanks!" said the billionaire, then turned to Webbo: "so now, let us see if we will be able to afford our dinner tonight. Roulette or black jack?"

"Let's go for roulette."

"Good. I will let you play and will whisper the winning number to you in French."

"*D'accord,*" said Webbo, "that sounds like a plan."

"A few ground rules before we start: in order to not draw too much attention, only bet on the sides: columns or rows, red or black, odd or even."

"I understand, obviously they would start to get suspicious if I hit the jackpot five times in a row, as the odds would be one in sixty million..."

Webbo sat down at the roulette table and Richie stood up behind him. Webbo exchanged a five-dollar note for a five-dollar chip.

*“Le premier numéro gagnant est le six,”* said Richie in Webbo’s ear.

Webbo bet his chip on the third column, and not too surprisingly, the white ball finished its course in the slot with a black six.

“Black six wins!” said the croupier.

“I wish I had this capability,” thought Webbo, as the croupier forked over two additional chips to him.

*“Le prochain numéro est le vingt-quatre.”*

This time, Webbo wondered if he should bet on even or black, but finally decided to put two chips on the 19-36 field, to cover the 24.

“Black twenty-four wins,” said the dealer and gave Webbo another ten dollars.

*“Le numéro suivant est le onze,”* continued Richie.

“OK, eleven black,” thought Webbo, “this time I put two chips on black and two on odd.”

To his surprise, though, the casino employee announced “Thirty-four red wins!”

*“C’est quoi ce bordel?”* Webbo asked Richie, “now I am back where I started from.”

Continuing in French so that the other players and the croupier wouldn’t understand, Richie said:

“I just wanted to test you. You see, you shouldn’t believe blindly what people tell you, even close trustworthy friends. You need to feel if what I tell you is right or wrong.”

“You got me on that one. Let’s continue.”

*“Le prochain numéro est le trente-quatre.”*

“Thirty-four again?” thought Webbo

Richie, who could see that he looked puzzled, told him that the probability that the thirty-four comes up again, is as high as any other number.

Somehow, Webbo felt that Richie was right this time and bet his last chip on the first column.

“Thirty-four wins again!” exclaimed the croupier and all other players made obvious noises of hopelessness against the tyranny of casino fate.

Webbo was back at fifteen dollars.

“OK, let’s continue,” said Richie, *“Le numéro suivant est le dix-sept.”*

This time Webbo had a hunch that Richie had given him the wrong number, so he asked him to give him the right number instead.

*“Bien vu mon gars, le prochain numéro est le zéro.”*

“Zero?” thought Webbo, that only left him with the option of betting on the zero, so he put a chip on the green zero, just in time before the croupier stopped the bets for that round.

“Zero wins!” said the croupier and forked over 175 dollars worth of chips to Webbo.

“That should be enough for the dinner,” said Richie, “let us head over to the restaurant, I am hungry!”

Just after they had finished the main course, an older man with a beer in one hand and a dog on a leash in the other, came up to their table.

“You were looking for me?”

“Lowlight Nightowl?”

“That’s me. But you can call me Bobby.”

“Sure, Bobby, please sit down,” said Richie.

“Nice dog you have,” said Webbo.

“Thanks. It’s not a dog, it’s a wolf,” said Bobby calmly.

Webbo froze. And then withdrew a little, uneasy. Bobby smiled as he was used to such reactions after him mentioning his pet’s true nature.

Lowlight Nightowl looked like he would be somewhere in his early seventies, with long grey hair held together in a ponytail. He had obvious American Indian traits.

Richie continued: “Actually, we are looking for Goldilocks Dove, and we were told that you were acquainted with her and might know where we can find her.”

“That is correct,” said Bobby in a very calm voice, “but tell me, why do you want to see her?”

So, Webbo told him about the Grooters, their Pact, Modella’s ‘encounter’ with Fuconcius, and his mention of a secret weapon.

“A very wise man, Fuconcius,” said Bobby, in such a slow pace that it made Webbo slightly impatient. But he was smart enough to see that this was a slowness of wisdom, not an issue of a lack of brain activity.

“Indeed, there is an old legend among the Indigenous people of this planet, saying that such a weapon exists. I can still remember my grandfather telling me stories about it when I was a child.”

Richie and Webbo were listening intensely.

“He said that one day a small group of Crystal Children would come and find that secret weapon and save the world from some major calamities.”

“Crystal Children?”

“Yes, children with very pure intentions.”

“So, what kind of weapon is it?” asked Richie.

“I do not have the slightest clue what this weapon looks like, I only know that it exists. And that is why you need to get hold of Goldilocks Dove. She is much younger than me and has spent many years researching this legend, both online and offline.”

“Where can we find her?”

“In Vegas. She is a trapeze artist working for the *Cirque du Soleil*. Her stage name is Sarah Queen.”

“We are so grateful for your help, Bobby,” said Richie, “how can we thank you?”

“By finding the secret weapon and activating it. That is worth far more than all the money in the world. If money alone were the solution, then I am sure that you and your billionaire friends would already have made sure this world got no disease, wars or pollution any longer. But it needs more than money. Much more. And probably secret weapons as well.”

Bobby said that in a calm and slightly sad voice, but you could also feel that there was hope in it. And hope keeps us alive.

He finished his beer and stood up, ready to leave. Then added:

“I sense that you have the potential to find that weapon, as well as the answers required to prevent the coming pandemic.”

“You really think so?” asked Webbo.

“I can feel it. But do not underestimate the difficulty of the task and move as quickly as you can. As Fuconcius mentioned, time is ticking. You only have one year, maximum two. Good luck.”

“Thank you, Bobby.”

Bobby just gave them a warm smile in return, took his wolf and headed slowly for the exit of the casino.

“A trapezist?” wondered Webbo looking at Richie.

“A shaman trapezist, that sounds like a mostly original combination.”

After dinner, they went back to the motel and switched on their computers. Webbo sent an email to the other Grooters to update them on the meeting with Lowligh Nightowl, and Richie looked up the *Cirque du Soleil* shows in Las Vegas.

It was not hard to find Sarah Queen – she was one of the lead artists in the new *Eroticus* show, the most daring show ever played in Vegas.

“A very controversial show – but controversy sells, we all know that.”

Webbo looked at Richie’s screen and saw that there was a show tomorrow night. However, it was sold out.

“Too bad it is sold out,” he told Richie.

“In my world there is not such a thing as sold out.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have this new Black Platinum-Gold-Jade-Diamond credit card that gives me very special VIP treats when I need them. Let me just make a phone call.”

Richie walked out of the room and came *black* less than five minutes later.

“8PM at the MGM tomorrow night. *Eroticus* show. Front rows. And a drink with Ms. Queen after the show.”

“Wow!” said Webbo. “Well done.”

“I rarely use these extra services with my card, but in this case they came in handy.”

The show was absolutely magnificent – it was a high-class erotic show, mixing the best of circus and erotic cabaret.

The artists, both male and female, were stunning, perfectly blending into the mysterious and sensual music and light show.

Although all of them were amazing, Goldilocks stood out, with incredible pirouettes far above the scene, almost as if she was able to bend the law of gravity. She also bent herself around a pole in a very arousing dance.

The deal was to meet Sarah Queen at 11.30PM at the adjacent bar, giving her time to shower and get dressed after the show.

She arrived on time at the lounge bar, dressed in a very elegant black and gold evening dress that contrasted nicely with her curly blonde hair. Although there were many beautiful girls all over the place in Las Vegas, somehow Goldilocks looked different, she had a sort of unexplainable aura. Maybe this was the outer expression of true inner beauty?

She looked slightly apprehensive, as it was probably one of those chore routines she sometimes had to endure due to her specific job.

But her face brightened up and she seemed to wake up when Richie greeted her:

“Goldilocks Dove?”

“Yes. So, you are not the usual kind of VIPs?”

“I guess not,” said Richie.

Goldilocks seemed relieved and got curious: “How did you find me? And why are you here?”

“Through Fuconcius and Lowlight Nightowl.”

“Very wise men, both of them,” said the blonde artist.

“Unfortunately, Fuconcius passed away a few days ago.”

“So sad to hear, despite his advanced age.”

“Yes, but fortunately a friend of ours was able to reach him in the other dimension.” They told Goldilocks about the Grooters, their superpowers and the Pact they did many years ago.

“And Fuconcius mentioned a special weapon that we may need to solve our Pact.”

“The Crystallica!” exclaimed Goldilocks.

“So that is the name of the secret weapon? *Lowlight Nightowl* told us that you knew more about it than anyone else.”

“Indeed, I have been researching this old legend since I was fourteen. Half my life by now.”

“How come?” asked Webbo.

“A hunch, I guess, because I am a very sensitive person and love nature, so I really feel a strong urge to do something for the environment.”

“The environment? What has that to do with the weapon?”

“The weapon will be needed to help you find specific answers, not only to the microlevel of your parents’ issues, but for the macro level too, to reverse the environmental damage on this planet. The Black Sea and the Gulf of Mexico for example are virtually dead already. And the poles are melting...”

“We are aware of this,” said Richie, “but what can we do about the situation? In my opinion, there’s a lot of greenwashing going on. These solutions are seldom the magical solutions they are marketed to be and sometimes I wonder if the net pollution footprint is not even worse than before. What about all the chemicals used for electric cars batteries? The metal used for windmills? And all the visual pollution generated by them and solar panels?”

“I agree,” said Goldilocks, “it would have been far better to just stick with hydraulic and last generation safe nuclear power plants until real ecological solutions have been invented.”

“Yes, often the only green effect of these new ‘green’ solutions are the additional greenbacks in the investors’ bank accounts.”

“We need to get to the source of the problem,” said the beautiful dove.

“Which is?”

“That’s the thing. If we knew exactly what the source of the problem was, it would be fairly easy to address it. However, as you can see in your parents’ case, we can only observe symptoms of a problem that probably runs much deeper.”

“And what do you think that deeper problem is?”

“Most people don’t know who they are.”

“Please explain,” asked Richie.

“With a few exceptions, most humans have not found their path, feel lost, take bad decisions and compensate for this inner emptiness with various forms of addictions.”



That reminded Webbo and Richie of Boss' and Leo's parents' issues.

"Please tell us more about the Crystallica, Goldilocks," asked Webbo.

"Well, it is probably not a weapon like you would imagine one, with explosions and deaths. It consists of a series of different crystals, and when brought together, they resonate at such a positive frequency that, if the legend is true, they should help bring harmony to the world."

"Very interesting."

"You can compare the magnitude of the power of the Crystallica to a thousand atomic bombs. Except that it does not kill innocent people, plants and animals. Instead, it sends positive energy to the whole world."

"Thank you, that gives us a better idea of the extent of the weapon's powers. We absolutely need to make the Crystallica operational. Where do we find the single crystals?" asked Richie.

"I wish I knew that. The legend only says that they are scattered on different continents."

"Not very precise... And how many are there?"

"We don't know, but think there are at least half a dozen. The legend also says that the Crystal Children will eventually find all these crystals. And the legend keepers have a message for them: *'Let your dreams guide you'*."

"Our dreams?" asked Webbo.

"Yes," continued Goldilocks, "I guess the legend means that you might find clues in your dreams at night. But I am not sure."

"I hardly ever remember my dreams."

"I know that can be trained," responded the girl.

"Yes, but even if I remember them, dreams tend to be very weird and it is almost impossible to get reliable information from them."

"I agree on that one," interjected Richie, and Goldilocks nodded, "this sounds like a very difficult task."

"Sorry guys, that is all information I have for the moment. In any case, I will contact you if I come up with further insights. In the meantime, you will need to follow your intuition as to what next steps to take."

"Thank you, Goldilocks," said Richie, "I am convinced that all this information is going to be very valuable to us sooner or later. By the way, how come that you are a shaman? You don't look like one at all."

"I was asked to become one by the elders of the main indigenous tribes of New Mexico and Arizona. They chose me, as I am very much in tune with nature. I can communicate with animals for example. I wish everyone could do that, it opens up a whole new world."

"So how do you communicate with animals?" asked Webbo.

“I tune into their feelings.”

“And why are most people not able to do that?”

“It is part of my ongoing research to find ways of helping people get more in tune with Mother Earth. The process has many similarities with your abilities to look into the future or remote viewing. But you have not been able to teach other people how you operate either, have you?”

“You are right,” said Webbo, “it somehow just comes naturally.”

Finally, Goldilocks Dove said: “I wish you and your Grooters friends all the luck in the world with your daunting task to gather the crystals necessary to make Crystallica operational.”

“Thank you!” said both Richie and Webbo simultaneously. They exchanged contact details in case either party would come up with additional information about the Crystallica.

Then Goldilocks left as graciously as she had arrived an hour earlier.

Webbo turned to Richie and asked him:

“So, what do we do now?”

“Let us enjoy Vegas and get some new inspiration over a real beer at the *Hofbräuhaus*,” said Richie, “I haven’t been to Munich for a while, but here we can celebrate a mini-Oktoberfest all year round.”

They took a cab to the *Las Vegas Hofbräuhaus* and ordered two *Maß* straight away. Webbo had never seen such a big beer glass: one litre, almost two pints!

Then Richie asked Webbo: “So, do you know the similarity between American beer and making love in a canoe?”

“Not the slightest idea.”

“Both are fucking close to water.”

Webbo laughed out loud on that one. Fortunately, the *Hofbräuhaus* served real beer. The more beer they drank the better they managed to sing along to the German *Schlager* songs that came out of the loudspeakers.

♪ *Ein Stern (der deinen Namen trägt)* – DJ Ötzi, Nik P.

There were definitively many ways of having fun in Vegas. Even for two introverts like Richie and Webbo.

## Part 5

## Heidi

*Verbier, Switzerland, 1 January 2018*

Boss woke up with a slight headache – but this state of affairs had a very logical explanation, as he had lost count of the number of champagne glasses he had drunk by the second hour of the New Year.

Well, at least he remembered having left the party at 3.56AM. The VIP event had taken place in a sumptuous chalet that belonged to a wealthy client of his father. There had been over 200 guests, which is a lot, even for a big chalet like that.

Boss took a long shower, had some breakfast, then, out of habit, turned on his computer to check his e-mails. His inbox showed only one new email. That was rare. He smiled thinking that not even spammers work over New Year. Good.

*From: hwmywfct@hotmail.com*

*Subject: Meeting*

*Date: 1 January 2018 at 04.07*

*To: bosspibolodari@gmail.com*

*Dear Boss,*

*Please come to Blindekuh in Zurich tomorrow January 2<sup>nd</sup> at 19.30. It is very important.*

*Ask for Heidi.*

Boss thought this must be somebody he had met at the party, but he could not remember having talked to anyone named Heidi. Then he searched his contact list but could not find any Heidi there either. Strange.

Boss had already heard of *Blindekuh*, the blind cow, but had never been there. It was the first restaurant of its kind when it opened in 1999, and the concept has now been copied in many other cities around the world. The particularity is that you dine in total darkness. And all the waiters are blind or somehow visually challenged.

New experiences always motivated Boss, so despite the enigmatic flavour of the email, he accepted, convinced that this Heidi would enlighten him at the meeting.

*From: bosspibolodari@gmail.com*

*Subject: RE: Meeting*

*Date: 1 January 2018 at 11.47*

To: [hwmywfct@hotmail.com](mailto:hwmywfct@hotmail.com)

Dear Heidi,

I will be there.

Boss

Of all the Grooters, Boss George Pibolodari was the only one who remained in Geneva until he finished high school. He attended a chic private school where he had classmates from all over the world. Many of them were even more Grooters than himself.

Before university, Boss was sent to Bochum to learn German and then to Bologna to learn his forefathers' language. Thus, he became proficient in most of his multilingual country's forms of communication. And spoke four times as many languages as most of the family members on his mother's side.

Following good Swiss banking family traditions, he then started to study business administration at the University of St. Gallen in north-eastern Switzerland where he had some student fun, learned discipline and how to digest a lot of information in a short time. But he also had to endure a lot of theoretical bullshit.

After three years of studies, he woke up one day and thought: "What is all this about?" He was frustrated by all the unnecessary information he was forced to clutter his brain with.

Then he got an idea. Being an entrepreneur at heart, he saw plenty of opportunities all the time. He had often observed how many working people had lunch by themselves or how other professionals were bored always eating with the same colleagues every day.

After that realisation, Boss packed his university bags, went back to Geneva and started a lunch restaurant for lonely people. The trick was to have only tables for two people and seat people with someone they did not know. Everyone was of course billed separately. So, one day, you could land with a doctor, and the next be seated with a painter. Or, if you were lucky, with an attractive person of the opposite sex. It was a great way to meet new people and widen one's horizons. The trick was that the restaurant had two entrances from different streets, so people could not easily just jump into the queue next to a person they may fancy.

Boss argued that if the concept flew in Geneva, it would fly almost anywhere. And fly it did.

Once the restaurant chain *Lonely Rest* had reached a hundred franchises in fourteen countries, he sold the company for a nice profit that he re-invested in his next ventures.

He used his mind-reading superpower to assess the integrity level of people, and that served him well to find the right kind of partners and employees for his various companies.

And after he sold his third business, he decided to take some time off and travelled around the world for a year. That journey would change his outlook on life forever.

Zurich, Switzerland, 2 January 2018

The restaurant was set in a villa in one of the nicer parts of town. When he arrived, Boss asked for Heidi. The woman behind the counter replied with a warm smile: “She is already inside. Just wait a minute here and a waiter will guide you to your table. In the meantime, please choose what you want to eat and drink from the menu here.”

A few minutes later, a blind young lady called for Boss.

“Hi, I am Basine, I am your waitress tonight. Just put your hands on my shoulders and I will guide you to your table.”

Boss did as he was told and followed the blind waitress. He pondered on the reversal of the situation: normally it was sighted people leading the blind. However, he was in her world now. And in that world, he was the blind. This was a weird experience. The darkness was total. He could hear other guests talking and laughing in various languages, mostly Swiss-German, but also English, French and Japanese.

It seemed like they walked through the main room and although he could not see anything, it felt like Basine took him into a smaller room, because he could not hear the other guests as clearly any longer.

Then she stopped, took his hand and put it on the back of a chair.

“Here is your seat. When you are ready to order, just push the small button on the right-hand side of the table, next to where the knife is.”

Then she shut the door and left, before Boss had time to say thank you.

“Welcome, Boss,” said a sexy feminine voice at the other side of the table.

“You owe me some explanations, Heidi,” said Boss, not sure if this was a business meeting or a blind date.

“Yes, I guess I do. Sorry for the setting, the profession I exert and the projects I work on require full discretion.”

“I can see that,” responded Boss.

“No, you can’t. And by the way, my real name is not Heidi.”

“You’re right, I can’t. But I can see what I hear and smell,” said Boss, hinting at Heidi’s sexy voice and nice perfume.

He was slowly starting to get more comfortable in the darkness, having identified the napkin, the fork and knife, the glass, the famous button, and he got a feeling for the size of the table and the room.

Boss wondered what kind of profession Heidi was referring to, but did not ask and let her continue. For some reason he was not able to read her mind. Did that mean that she was a Grooters, too? Because he could only read people’s minds if they had something to hide.

Which was the case for 97% of people. More than anything else, that is what he liked about his Grooters' friends: they had nothing to hide.

“My network of – let us call them ‘true friends’ – told me that you were looking for solutions to help people improve their lives. Is that correct?”

“Yes, I did a Pact with some friends of mine when I was a kid, to devote my life to find answers to our parents' various life issues, like job dissatisfaction or health problems.”

“You are aware that not everyone would be happy were you to find such solutions?”

“I certainly am.” answered Boss, knowing that a lot of companies with questionable ethics were thriving on people's diseases and unhappiness.

“I am getting hungry in this darkness,” said Heidi, “let us get some food!” She pushed the button and less than half a minute later, Boss could hear someone open the door and he recognized Basine's voice: “You called me. Ready to order?”

“Yes!” said Heidi and Boss simultaneously.

They both ordered the rabbit dish and a glass of red wine from Spain. Basine had brought some appetizers with her, so their initial hunger could be satisfied.

When she had left, Heidi continued:

“Through my work, I get access to some of the richest and most powerful people on this planet. Some of them are good people, some less so. Lately, I overheard the latter group talk about a machine that would give them tremendous power. Although they know who invented that machine, they have so far not been able to locate neither the machine nor its inventor. He disappeared over a year ago.”

“What kind of machine is that, Heidi?” enquired Boss.

“I don't know. The only thing I know is the name of the inventor of this machine, a certain Professor Dimenport.”

“So, you have absolutely no clue about where he could be?”

“No. The only thing I can help you with at the moment is to give you a photograph of him, so that you can recognize him when you find him.”

Boss could feel something moving and touching his right hand: it was Heidi handing him over the photo. He thought her hand rested on his a little longer than necessary, but maybe it was just his imagination running wild.

“Thank you, Heidi.”

He could obviously not see anything, so he just put the photo in his chest pocket for the moment.

Right after that, he heard Basine open the door and put two plates and wine glasses on the table.

“Enjoy your dinner,” she said and left in the dark.

This was a strange but fun experience for Boss. He calculated that if he only makes slow movements, he should manage not to put food all over the place, and spare his clean shirt.

The first few times, he lifted an empty fork to his mouth, but after a while got more proficient at recognizing what was on his plate and find a consistent way to get it into his mouth. Polenta, some squash and a good sauce accompanied the rabbit. He pictured in his mind the three different colours and that helped him to enjoy the food more, even if the important visual sense was temporarily turned off.

“Cheers,” said Heidi.

Boss, who in the meantime had precisely localized his glass of wine, lifted it and pictured in his mind how to find Heidi’s glass, and indeed, he could hear both glasses cling soon thereafter.

“Tell me more about yourself, Heidi,” Boss asked, “what kind of job do you do exactly? How come you are able to get so close to these very powerful people?”

“Some call it the world’s oldest profession...”

As she said that, Boss could feel her leg rubbing against his under the table. No more explanations needed.

But Heidi continued:

“I happen to like sex a lot. And I get handsomely paid for doing what I like. Of course, my clients are very demanding, but I have a lot of experience and have a degree in massage therapy and have been trained in the arts of ecstasy in Japan, India, France and the United States. So, I can live up to my clients’ dreams.”

For some reason, Boss had difficulties to concentrate on his food... even the sweet dessert trilogy that Basine had just brought could not compete with the voice on the other side of the table. So close, yet so far away. Then there was her perfume. Thanks to his mind-reading capabilities, Boss had had quite some success with women over the years, and could by now recognise most of the main brands of perfumes for women. However, he was sure he had never come across the perfume that Heidi wore.

“And why are you helping us?”

“I am a Grooters myself and I would love to see a world where people love each other instead of hurting each other. That’s the kind of world I want my children to grow up in.”

“I understand.”

Then Heidi said:

“It is time for me to leave now. Please keep me posted by e-mail on how things advance. And I will get in touch if I am able to leak some additional information that might be helpful to you.”

Boss could now hear Heidi standing up.

“There is one more thing I wanted to say before I leave.”

He could feel her getting closer, her face now only millimetres away.

“Even girls in my profession want to find their prince one day...”

Her voice lowered, Boss could now feel her lips against his, and she started to kiss him. It was the most sensual kiss Boss had ever experienced, like a silk lightning bolt that went through his whole body. Now he could also better smell Heidi’s unique perfume – a magical moment.

Finally, she said:

“I wish you all the luck in the world. You will need it. And my feminine sixth sense tells me that you will need to act very quickly to succeed. Bye for now.”

And she left, closing the door behind her.

Boss finished his dessert in a positive state of shock. He called Basine to order a coffee, savouring the last few minutes in this strange but exciting atmosphere.

Then he left Blindekuh, walked down to the lake and turned right in direction of his hotel, Eden au Lac. The lake was calm and dark except a pair of white swans silently gliding by not too far from the shore. What a contrast to crowded warm summer nights here, he thought.

He had a first glance at the photo: Professor Dimenport really looked like an old school inventor: grey hair with a grey moustache. The inescapable academic eyeglasses. And on the photo he wore a blue-whiteish shirt with a blue bowtie. Boss thought to himself that he wouldn’t be very difficult to recognize, even in a big crowd.

The sense of urgency in Heidi’s words and voice told him that he couldn’t just go back to sleep, so he went to the hotel bar and ordered a cognac to digest the happenings of the evening and eventually come up with a plan of action.

As a serial entrepreneur, he knew there were always solutions to problems. And indeed, after a few minutes, the fine beverage gave him some inspiration. He took up his phone.

“Hi Boss, long time since I heard from you. You are lucky, I just got back from my morning swim.”

“Hi Leo, still in Manly then I guess?”

“Yes, and working in downtown Sydney at the moment. Need to catch the ferry in forty minutes.”

“Forget the ferry, Leo,” said Boss, “there is something very important and urgent going on. You need to come over here as soon as possible. I am staying in room 511 in the Eden au Lac hotel in Zurich. You can land on the roof.”

“It better be important then,” said Leo.



“And don’t forget that it is a five-star hotel. Don’t come in your surfing outfit. And it’s winter here.”

“All good, said Leo,” who was the last person that needed to be reminded of the inverted seasons on planet Earth. He had committed a few fashion faux-pas during some of his early teleports, though. And despite the fact that he knew that it was winter in some of his teleport destinations, he had made the error of disregarding that reality, maybe due to wishful thinking that the weather would be warm and sunny everywhere all year round.

Boss sat for a few more minutes in the Eden Bar lounge and went through his plan in his mind. He looked at the photo once again: he liked the Professor, he could sense that he was a good person. He took a picture of the photo with his smartphone.

He finished his cognac and went up to his room. As he was not very often in Zurich, he had given himself a treat and booked a luxury suite with a wonderful view of the lake and the city centre.

He took off his jacket, then sent the photo of the Professor to Webbo. Then Boss stood for a while in front of the dressing mirror and thought of the grown-up man that was reflecting back to him. In this man there was still a child. And that child had made a Pact. And the man in the mirror was now going to help the child fulfil his Pact. His determination had grown stronger, especially since his friends had met Fuconcius and Goldilocks two months ago.

### ♪ *Spiegelbild – Subzonic*

Boss walked over to the mini-bar, but even before he had time to reach it, someone knocked at the door. That was quick, he thought. He went to open the door.

“Nice to see you again, Leo!” said Boss hugging his old friend. “Thank you for coming over.”

Within the forty-three minutes since they had talked on the phone, Leo had taken a quick breakfast in his house looking out at the South Pacific, got dressed, checked the hotel website and Google Maps to get a picture of the landing place, teleported himself to the roof of the hotel and found his way down to Boss’ suite.

Yes, there were some locked doors to the roof, but Leo had gotten quite proficient in opening most kinds of doors, as he had been schooled by a professional burglar, the kind of people that are good to know sometimes.

For Leo, this adds some fun around teleportation and he does not have any bad conscience, as he does not harm anyone by just unlocking a door here and there.

“It is a five-star hotel, but you wouldn’t have needed to dress in a tuxedo, Leo,” said Boss, observing his friend’s blue tuxedo with a slightly imperfect dark blue bowtie.

“I like to teleport in *stile*,” Leo answered with a *smyle*.

“Let us see if there is something in the mini-bar that suits your outfit... Vodka tonic maybe?”

“With lemon, not lime, please.”

They hadn't seen each other for a while, but it felt like yesterday. They lifted a toast to their long-lasting friendship, enjoyed the drink and the nocturnal view of Zurich. Thanks to his unique superpower, Leo was the only one who had regularly visited his Grooters friends over the years. First, because they were the only ones of his friends who were not scared by having him suddenly show up out of nowhere. And secondly, because he liked them. So, during his visits, he updated them about each other's lives.

Then Boss switched to business:

“You will not have to worry about teleportation lag this time, Leo. I have plans for you.”

He explained to him what had happened this evening, and everything Heidi had told him... well, almost everything.

The conversation paused for a while, giving Leo some time to digest all the information.

“And are you sure you can trust this Heidi? I mean, with that name, she certainly got stuff to hide.”

“Well, I could not read her mind, which is usually a very good sign.”

“Are you sure it's only people with good intentions whose mind you cannot read?”

“I think so.”

“You mentioned she was working for some people with questionable ethics. That's a warning sign, isn't it?” Said Leo who had learned to cure his naivety through some hard life lessons.

“But I couldn't read her mind.”

“Yes, but what if she uses some kind of dark magic to prevent people like you reading her thoughts?”

“You think that's possible?”

“I am only asking you to be vigilant. Maybe she only uses you to find the machine because her bosses need the Grooters' superpowers to do it? I wouldn't be surprised if they wait for you around the corner once you've found the machine.”

“OK, I'll keep that in mind,” said Boss, hoping that this was not true because he believed in the possibility of a future romance with Heidi.

Leo continued: “So what do we do now? We have no idea where Professor Dimenport is.”

“Not yet,” responded Boss, “but I just sent the photograph to Webbo. With his remote viewing capability, he should be able to locate the professor fairly easily.”

Just as he had finished his sentence, Boss' mobile phone rang.

“Hi Webbo, thank you for calling back so quickly. How are things in California?”

“Fine, sunny as always, thank you. Or foggy, as often, here where I am in San Francisco. You were lucky to catch me, Boss, I just got back from a business lunch.”

“I am in Zurich with Leo, he just joined me from Sydney. I’ll put you on loudspeaker. So, what have you found out?” Boss asked eagerly.

“OK, I can clearly see the place where the professor is right now. It is still dark there, and he is sleeping. He is in a house on a lake.”

“On a lake?” asked Leo.

“Yes. Let me continue. It must be in Asia somewhere, but I don’t recognize the place. I also had a flash coming to my mind: it is four letters: ‘INLE’. Not sure what could be meant with that.”

“Of course,” exclaimed Boss “it must be Inle Lake in Burma. I spent a few days there during my round-the-world trip a few years ago. But most houses on the lake look very similar. Webbo, did you see anything that you think could help us recognize the specific house?”

“Maybe. They have some potted plants hanging in the windows. But there are no windows, just openings in the walls. I guess the climate is hot there?”

“Indeed,” confirmed Boss, “anything else?”

“Yes, there is a towel with Mickey Mouse on it hanging to dry outside on the balcony. Does that help you?”

“Yes, thank you so much for these most valuable pieces of information. We will get back to you soon to let you know if we find him. Enjoy your afternoon.”

“Thank you. Good night, Boss. And good morning or night or whatever to you, Leo.”

Leo and Boss sat silently for a while, then Leo said:

“Could you describe Inle Lake?”

“Well, it is a gem of a place, it is a very shallow lake in central Burma, also called Myanmar, with wonderful landscapes all around, slightly reminiscent of Geneva Lake with the Jura Mountains in the background. There are some towns and villages on the shore, but also quite a few villages on the lake itself where the houses are built on stilts. The people there seem happier than in the rest of Burma, and by the way happier than most people in the world. I guess it is because they live in a magical world that is not very easily accessible.

These lake villagers use either noisy motored long boats or long wooden rowing boats, some of which are especially designed for fishing where they stand up at one end of the boat, row with a leg and handle the fishing net with both hands. That is quite impressive to watch.”

Boss paused for a moment, then continued:

“We need to get hold of Professor Dimenport as quickly as possible. That is why I called you. My plan is that you teleport to Inle Lake, find the professor and listen to him. Why is he

there? What does his machine do, exactly? We will probably need to somehow get him out of that place and have him show us his machine.”

“And how do you suggest I land there? Landing in the middle of the water or on a straw roof of a house does not sound optimal. I might have it fairly easy to get around, but I am not Jesus and cannot just ‘walk’ around the wet ‘streets’ of Inle Lake. Or Venice.”

“Calm down Leo,” said Boss, “my suggestion is that you teleport yourself to Nyaung Shwe. It is the main township that is located a few miles down the river that leads to the lake, on its Northern shore. There you will need to hire a water taxi that takes you around the lake to help you find the professor.”

“Good. If I hurry, I could be there before dawn, which would make it easier to land without catching too much attention.”

“Yes,” said Boss, “and don’t forget your satellite phone so that you can call me as soon as you have talked to Professor Dimenport. I’ll send you some of my travel photos from Nyaung Shwe, so that you can visualise where to land. Good luck!”

“Thank you, Boss.”

“Oh, by the way, take the photo of the professor with you, you might need it.”

And swoosh. Leo teleported back to Sydney, leaving Boss alone in his suite, this time ready for bed, as there was not much more that he could do before Leo had talked to the professor.

Leo’s house was by no means the most luxurious on Bower Street in Manly on the North Shore of the Sydney metropolitan area, but it had a great combined view of Manly beach to the left and the immensity of the Pacific Ocean to the right.

To afford this house, Leonardo Irwin Elton Berger had made some decent amounts of money capitalizing on his ability to teleport. After his studies of criminology in London, he had worked for a major detective company there, helping their clients gather valuable information that would help them win lawsuits or just put an end to cases of corruption.

Before accepting any mandate, Leo always made sure it was for the greater good of society and not only for his clients’ own revenge or other personal winnings. So, for example, he never accepted clients who wanted him to spy on their spouses, he told them they were very welcome to act as adults and sort out their relationship issues by themselves. And he never accepted clients for industrial espionage, instead he gave them a book on creativity and innovation.

This detective work was fun for quite a while. However, Leo, given his absolutely unique lifestyle, was used to variety, and got bored with the detective job at some point.

So, he decided to move to Sydney, and live a more relaxed life concentrating on his real passion: inventions and research. His interest in clocks and watches, probably due to his years in Switzerland, had led him to invent a few new designs and complications to show the passing of time in new and fresh ways.

And since living in Australia, he had become more interested in outdoor sports, and had invented a few new skateboard designs and is currently experimenting with a new surfboard that stabilizes the surfer on it, and not the other way round, that the surfer needs to stabilize the board, which results in a lot of swimming instead of surfing.

The aim is that the surfer falls far less often into the water. And is thus less likely to be food for sharks.

Leo also works on a surfboard model with a remote-controlled propeller that enables the surfer to gain speed and momentum to better catch the waves on time.

With his California-style looks, blond hair, blue-grey eyes and well-trained body, Leo was a very unusual inventor, and, although he couldn't shake off his American accent, he blended into Australia's surfing scene quite well.

In his home, Leo has plenty of maps on the walls, as well as an opera-like dressing room with a wide range of clothes and accessories from many countries and regions so that he can melt in in the best possible way at his teleportation destination.

For Burma, he reckoned a typical backpacker outfit would do the job.

While Leo was taking off his tuxedo, Boss e-mailed him the photos of Nyaung Shwe. Leo looked at the photos and reckoned that he could land safely on a small beach on the river just next to the main silver pagoda of Nyaung Shwe.

Due to his special ability, Leo's lifestyle was very different from most people's. The authorities of most countries did not like him, as he never paid a visa or went through the customs to enter a country. The very zealous American police had arrested him a few times, but had given up by now, as it was impossible to lock him up anywhere. So, they better leave him alone than getting laughed at by their bosses and the media, when they had to admit that the convict "just disappeared".

Inle Lake, Myanmar/Burma, 3 January 2018

Leo landed safely in Nyaung Shwe. It was still fairly dark, but the dawn was well on its way. It is the middle of the dry season in Burma, and there was not a single cloud in the sky. Leo took a long walk, then sat down to admire the silver pagoda.

When he reckoned that people had started to wake up, he found a small hotel where he could change some American dollars for the local *kyats*. He asked the very kind receptionist at the hotel if they knew where he could find a good water taxi to take him for a tour of Inle Lake.

He was lucky; the cousin of the receptionist's wife owned his own water taxi. He told Leo his name was Kyaw and explained where he could find him down at the river.

Leo was amazed at how friendly and helpful the Burmese were. He found Kyaw without any difficulty.

His English was not perfect, but they could understand each other.

"Where you want to go?" Kyaw asked Leo.

"Actually, I am looking for a friend who lives out on the lake."

"Maybe I can help find him."

"That would be great," said Leo.

Having travelled extensively, Leo knew how efficiently specific information flows between people even without modern technology. And he was sure that if there indeed was a white bearded man living amongst the lake villagers, then most of them would be aware of it.

Kyaw started the longboat motor and off they went. The engine of the water taxi was so loud that it was not possible to hold any longer conversations with Kyaw, especially that he was sitting at the back of the boat to steer it.

Leo thought that they could need serious noise reduction technology here. He knew some amazing progress had been made in that field in the last few years in specific research centres around the world.

Once they were in the middle of the lake, Kyaw stopped the engine for a while and asked Leo:

"How your friend look like?"

Leo took out the photo of Professor Dimenport and showed it to Kyaw.

"Interesting, yesterday two men look for him too."

Leo, realizing that it must have been some of Heidi's acquaintances, asked Kyaw:

"And, did you find him?"

“Two men yesterday bad intentions,” said Kyaw, “We had them make big circle of Inle Lake, but not show where Professor Dimenport.”

“What, you know him?”

“Yes, and I can feel you good intentions, so I bring you to him.”

Then he started the engine again and set direction towards the opposite end of the lake.

First, they passed a village on their left-hand side, and then entered another one a little further away. After a while, Kyaw slowed down and Leo could recognize the house with the potted plants hanging in the windows. And the Mickey Mouse towel was still hanging outside. He was amazed by the accuracy of Webbo’s remote viewing.

Kyaw docked at the house and they both climbed up. Kyaw said something in Burmese to the man who came to greet them.

“Hello, I am Nyan, welcome to Inle Lake!”

“Thank you,” said Leo, “it must be amazing to live like this.”

“Indeed, we are very fortunate,” responded Nyan, whose English was excellent, “to live far away from the stress and problems of the modern world. Can we offer you some tea before you go and meet Professor Dimenport?”

♪ *Once Upon a Time in Burma – Éric Serra*

“Yes, please, that would be very kind.”

Nyan’s wife, Nyein, came shortly afterwards to serve the tea with one of the most radiant smiles Leo had ever seen. They were all very curious about Leo, where he came from and what he was doing.

Leo did not go into details about his lifestyle, just said that he was living in Australia and working in the research field.

Then Nyan said:

“You will find Professor Dimenport in the room at the back of the house.”

“Thank you,” said Leo.

The house was fairly simple, one main room with kitchen and living spaces. Then there were two bedrooms in the back, the latter of which the family had given to the professor.

Leo knocked at the door.

“Please enter,” said a voice in the room.

Leo entered and there was the man on the photo, looking more alive, probably due to the healthy food and great climate at Inle Lake, almost 900m above sea level.

Professor Dimenport was sitting at a small desk writing something. Then he raised and said:

“Whom do I have to have the honour to have as a visitor?”

“My name is Leo Berger,” answered Leo, “I have come to help you.”

“I know you have good intentions, otherwise Kyaw would not have led you here.”

“Very kind guardian angels you have here on Inle Lake, professor. But tell me more about you, why do you need to hide? I was told something about a special machine that you have invented...”

“That is correct,” started Professor Dimenport, “I worked for *CERN*, the *European Centre for Nuclear Research*, in Geneva for over twenty years.”

“I lived there as well for about ten years when I was a kid,” said Leo.

“*Alors nous pouvons parler français ensemble?*” said the professor, and they switched to French.

He continued:

“I worked on some quite advanced stuff at *CERN*, but when I reached pension age, they asked me to leave, which was annoying, because I felt that I was close to a breakthrough. So, I bought an old farm outside Geneva with my pension money and continued my research from there. It took me another five years to get the machine operational, but I succeeded.”

“What kind of machine is it, professor?” asked Leo.

“It is a machine that enables you to travel to your Dream Worlds.”

“Sounds fun,” said Leo, “I wonder what such an experience would feel like. But why are you hiding here?”

“Put on your thinking cap, Leo,” said Dimenport, “what would happen if everyone lived their dream life?”

“Well, I guess that controlling governments and media would be out of a job.”

“Correct. Now, the power of this machine is that it lets you travel to your Dream Worlds to collect clues and inspiration on how you could make those Dream Worlds a reality one day. And once people realize their true power, they will not let authorities tell them what to do any longer.”

“Now I get it,” said Leo, “so this machine has the potential to threaten the status quo.”

“You are right,” said the professor, “which is why I had to hide the machine, but somehow they must have got hold of the information of its existence, so I had to flee.”

“Well, it looks like you have found a great hideaway.”

“I have been here for over a year now, but they have ears and eyes everywhere, so it is just a question of time before they find me. The amazing villagers, to whom I owe a lot, cannot hold them off for much longer.”



“So, what are your plans now?” asked Leo.

“I really do not know. My tourist visa has expired and they will catch me at the border if I try to leave. Maybe you have any ideas?”

“The first question I would ask is: if you were able to leave Myanmar, where would you go?”

Professor Dimenport pondered for a while, then came to the conclusion: “Well, I guess there is nowhere I am really safe. So, I might as well go back to Geneva.”

“I think you are right, professor, there are hardly any places on Earth at the moment where we can enjoy true freedom.”

“And where is the machine?” continued Leo.

“In Geneva. Fairly well hidden.”

“I must admit that I am very curious about this machine,” said Leo. Then he told the professor about The Grooters and the Pact they had made and that there were still so many questions they had no answers to.

He continued: “Do you think it would make sense for me and my friends to travel to our respective Dream Worlds to get clues for our Pact?”

“Of course,” said the professor. “Listening to you, it sounds like the Grooters could be the perfect match for an extensive testing of the machine.”

“You really think so?”

“Yes, I do. Like in the dreams you have at night, you might not always get straight answers in your Dream Worlds, but you will definitively get a clearer picture and stronger hints to possible solutions for your parents’ happiness. And your own.”

“I look forward to hearing more, and especially to test it soon. But for now, we have to get you back to Geneva.”

Leo took up his satellite phone and called Boss.

A drowsy voice answered: “That was quick, Leo, you did not even give me time to sleep out – it is 5AM here in Zurich...”

Leo explained everything the professor had told him. That gave Boss time to wake up properly and after a while, he could say with a clear mind:

“We have a tricky situation here. Any ideas what we could do?”

“Not really” answered Leo.

The line went silent for a minute, and then Boss said suddenly:

“I might have an idea. Stay where you are, and I will call you back as soon as possible.”

Boss dialled Richie’s number.

Boss did not know exactly why he called Richie, probably just a hunch, he hoped that Richie might have a solution that big money can buy.

“Hi Boss,” answered Richie, “Nice to hear from you. What makes you call at such a strange hour? It must be very early in Switzerland. You are lucky, I was just about to get to bed here in Anguilla.”

“We need your help, Richie” said Boss and then told him about his meeting with Heidi and Leo’s current stay in Burma.

Finally, he said: “Do you think we could bribe the local authorities to get Professor Dimenport out of the country?”

“I am not sure that is a good idea,” answered Richie, “but I might have an alternative solution.”

“What would that be, Richie?”

“A few years ago, I invested over five hundred million dollars in a space technology company and they just got a prototype ready that was successfully tested a few times last month.”

“A rocket?” wondered Boss.

“Well, it looks more like a spaceship than an airplane, but with more modern and much safer technology than explosive rocketry. It reaches Mach 5 and flies along the ionosphere, then goes down almost vertically to reach its destination, which makes it tricky for radars to spot it, especially that it is also equipped with the latest invisible stealth technology. We call it *Ei in the Sky*. You’ll soon understand why.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Boss “Tell me more.”

“Because it is a revolutionary technology, it is much more silent than a regular space rocket. But of course, we would still need to make such an operation at night.”

Richie paused for a moment, then continued:

“The best time is around 3.45AM, when most people are asleep. There are five and a half hours’ time difference between Burma and Switzerland, so I suggest that once we have picked up the professor, we fly around the globe once so that we do not land too early in Geneva.”

“That makes sense,” said Boss.

“So, you and Leo just need to give me the exact GPS coordinates where we shall pick up the professor in Burma, and where you want us to drop him in Geneva.”

“We will inform you as soon as possible.”

“Great,” finished Richie, “in the meantime, I will have my people at the research centre in Québec get ready for the flight.”

“Thank you so much, Richie!”

Then Boss called Leo again.

“I have organized a spaceship that comes to pick up Professor Dimenport tomorrow morning.”

“A... what?” asked Leo.

“You heard correctly. Now, listen: what you need to do is to find a discreet spot, on firm ground, where the spaceship can land. Roughly, the double size of a helicopter landing pad should be sufficient. When you have found this spot, just text me the GPS coordinates and make sure to bring the professor there at exactly 3.45AM Burma time tomorrow. *Capito?*”

“You’re the boss, Boss!”

“And make sure you do not get caught by the authorities.”

Leo went through Boss’ and Richie’s plan with Professor Dimenport, who thought this sounded like a far-fetched, but interesting plan.

Before he had come to Burma, Dimenport had heard about commercial spaceship projects, but he didn’t think they would be operational already.

He told Leo: “For the landing place, I suggest a spot close to here, between two villages on the shore, a mile or two in the back-country at the foot of the mountain range.”

And he added, still talking in French: “The best is if we let Kyaw take us ashore and find the place as soon as possible so that we can send over the GPS coordinates. Then find a hideaway nearby where we can wait until the morning. I am sure Nyein will prepare a good picnic for us. Although I trust all my friends here, I think it is unnecessary to give them any details about my escape.”

“I agree,” said Leo.

After that, Professor Dimenport packed the few belongings he had and went out to tell his hosts that it was time for him to leave. Nyan was able to convince him and Leo to stay for lunch before they left.

Nyein cooked a wonderful meal, a blend of Indian- and Thai-inspired small dishes with the same great tea Leo had tasted when he arrived.

When lunch was over, Nyein quickly prepared two bags of food that Leo and the professor could take with them on their journey.

Then it was time to say good-bye.

“Thank you so much for your warm hospitality, Nyan and Nyein. I will never forget what you have done for me.”

None of them could hide the tears in their eyes as they hugged each other a last time.

Finally, Kyaw broke the ceremony: “Time to go it is.”

It was a short ride this time, as the shore was fairly close.

Well ashore, Leo helped the professor with his luggage, and he paid Kyaw for the Inle Lake tour and thought to himself that it was really sad that he couldn't spend more time in this magical place. But now that this location was well ingrained in his memory, he knew he could teleport back again any time.

Then they started their walk inland. It took them less than an hour to find the spot Dimenport had in mind for the landing place.

“Great,” said Leo, “then I’ll just send Boss the GPS coordinates, so that he can coordinate everything with Richie.”

20°31'26"N 96°56'7"E

“And what do we do now?” asked the professor.

“Let us find a good hiding place from where we can see the landing spot.”

They found some bushes a hundred meters away that should hopefully shelter them well enough from the afternoon sun and from curious souls walking by.

Leo said: “OK, this place should do it. Let us just hope that the few people who have seen us in the last hour do not talk too much...”

In the meantime, Boss had got dressed and eaten breakfast. He thought he would wait until after 9 o'clock to drive to Geneva, to avoid the worst commuting traffic in the Zurich metropolitan area.

So, he took it easy, enjoying the luxury of the Eden au Lac hotel and planning the next moves in his mind.

He sent Leo a text message:

“Where exactly shall we drop the professor, *rive gauche* or *rive droite*?” he wrote referring to the left or right side of the Rhône river flowing through Geneva from the end of the lake.

“I guess *rive gauche* is best, I suggest we take him to your place for a start, it will probably be safer.”

“Sounds good.”

Geneva is not very big and you can get anywhere fairly quickly if you are on the same side of the lake.

Then Boss took his hybrid *Karma Revero* and left for the three-hour drive to Geneva to find a good landing spot as quickly as possible.

Leo's worries were not unfounded: someone had contacted the authorities, letting them know that the professor had left the lake village.

As the evening came, they had been able to localize the area where the professor and Leo were, but the hideaway was good enough so they had not found them yet.

The clock approached midnight in Burma, and the agents had still not been able to find Leo and the professor. Leo thought they were really lucky, as the Burmese police had come very close to their hiding place, but always kind of avoided just the spot where they were hiding.

Finally, Leo could hear their car driving away, and he was relieved that they were leaving.

Boss drove back from Zurich to Geneva, crossing a big part of the country while listening to Swiss German songs before switching to French music after he had crossed the Sarine river, one of Switzerland's language borders.

♪ *Mini Schwiiz, mini Heimat – Beatrice Egli*

All went well, until the normal traffic congestions heading into Geneva's city centre. He thought to himself: "It does not matter how advanced cars they build nowadays, driving is not a pleasure with all this traffic. I guess it needs an entrepreneur who is not even aware that there is a box, to think out-of-the-box to find a solution to the worldwide traffic problems."

Knowing Geneva very well, he had already a few ideas in mind about possible good landing places.

He chose one in the middle of some fields close to Meinier, one of the few spots in the canton of Geneva where there were no houses within a radius of 500 meters. He took up his smartphone and texted Richie.

46°13'56"N 6°14'1"E

Boss then spent the end of the afternoon calling the other Grooters to inform them about the happenings. Richie confirmed that his crew was ready for take-off and would be on time at Inle Lake.

Boss went to bed early that evening, knowing he would need to get up in the middle of the night to pick up some space tourists.

Once the police had left, everything went quiet, most people had gone to sleep in the nearby villages. Leo had put his alarm clock at 3.30, which ended up not being necessary, as adrenaline kept them both awake.

At 3.43AM, they started to see something sinking down from the clear star-filled sky.

It was almost full moon, so there was enough light to clearly see the egg-shaped form of the spaceship.

Leo assumed they had turned off the lights in the cabin to avoid being seen from a distance.

Professor Dimenport was impressed by the fact that the ‘egg’ did not need any support to stand once it had landed. And Columbus’ egg trick was not applicable in this case. It must be a new gravity-stabilizing technology that he had not heard of yet.

Soon after the landing, a part of the egg-spaceship opened and a staircase appeared, very much like in some smaller airplanes, so that people can get on and off the aircraft.

A young beautiful couple greeted them. Both were wearing a thin tight white overall. Leo felt like he had landed in the middle of the filming of a science-fiction movie, so he reckoned that these outfits fitted well into the picture.

“Hi, my name is Aurora, and this is Aaron, my co-pilot. Please come on board.”

Leo and the professor entered the spacecraft, then Aurora told them: “Welcome aboard *Ei in the Sky*. Please sit down in the armchairs and fasten your seat belts so that we can take off immediately. Thank you.”

The passengers did as they were told.

The cabin was not very big, but the interior was totally unexpected, more like a living room than an aircraft cockpit: it had a nice wooden floor and in the front was a red sofa, and behind it were two separate cosy armchairs in the same style but in orange-brown colour, and at the back was another sofa, an orange one with plenty of cushions. The walls that were not windows were mahogany-clad.

Leo estimated that *Ei in the Sky* was designed to transport a maximum of six people.

Soon thereafter, Aurora and Aaron sat down in the couch in front of them. When they held each other’s hand, the electrical engine started to roar smoothly.

“A coincidence?” wondered Leo.

Then something extraordinary happened: Aurora and Aaron started to kiss and at the same time the spaceship took off and Leo could feel the acceleration as he was scotched to his seat.

Once the speed had stabilized, Professor Dimenport said:

“Impressive. Very, very ingenious: you have been able to harness the most potent energy of the universe.”

“Yes,” said Aurora.

“What do you mean, professor?” asked Leo.

“The spaceship is powered by love.”

That made Leo think of the several songs titled *The Power of Love*. But not even in his most creative moments would he have come up with the crazy idea of powering an airship with love. This was high level genius.

They now had more than five hours in the air before they could land in Geneva. Or rather in space, as they were cruising above the 100km Kármán line that officially delineates outer space and the atmosphere. And more importantly, no governments had any jurisdiction above that line. They only have jurisdiction over their own airspace, but at higher altitudes, there is no air.

They moved at around five times the speed of sound, or approximately 6,000 km/h. Because of this great speed, it would only have taken them less than two hours to reach Europe flying straight northwest. So instead, they headed southeast, flying down over Thailand and Malaysia towards the equator, then having a beautiful view over Indonesia’s endless islands heading east towards Papua New Guinea, then past scattered Polynesian islands going slightly North again, passing Hawaii, then up towards California.

Leo thought about all the wonderful landscapes that he missed by teleporting instantaneously but concluded that his superpower had its advantages too. He could take the classical transportation means anytime he wished, which is why he often took the ferry from his home in Manly to downtown Sydney so that he could enjoy the magnificent Sydney harbour.

They were lucky to see the stunning Grand Canyon just before night caught up with them. Next, some lights indicated that they must have been above Denver, Colorado. After that, Leo expected to see more lights around the Great Lakes but saw nothing and concluded that some clouds must have come in the way. The darkness continued over Eastern Canada, Greenland, and Leo had almost fallen asleep when Aurora shouted:

“Look, we are flying through an aurora borealis here over Iceland: it is amazing!”

Indeed, the whole sky was now lit up in green around them. Very few people get to see actual auroras, whether borealis or australis, and they were probably the first humans to fly directly through one.

Then came the final descent over the North Atlantic and the North Sea down towards Holland and Germany, and a last hook southwest through Switzerland until the on-board GPS blinked that the destination 46°13’56”N 6°14’1”E was reached, and the spaceship started to go down like an elevator.

Like a Swiss train, Boss was on time for the *rendezvous*. As Richie had not described the spaceship in detail to him, he was eager to see what it looked like. Finally, he saw an egg-

formed shade coming down and he had to admit, although he was hard to impress, that this really stretched his imagination.

*Ei in the Sky* had landed.

Now he understood why the spaceship was called like that. Because *Ei*, pronounced ‘eye’, means egg in German. He reckoned one of Richie’s German engineers had probably come up with that name.

♪ *Eye In The Sky – The Alan Parsons Project*

Boss was surprised to see Leo come out of the egg, as he thought he would have simply teleported back home once he had made sure the professor was safe onboard the spaceship.

He greeted all of them and was pleased to get to know Aurora and Aaron as well and thanked them for the ride. Unfortunately, they had to leave again to get back to their spaceport in Québec before daylight.



Geneva, Switzerland, 4 January 2018

Boss drove Leo and the professor back to his parents' home in which he lived at the moment as they had just moved to Singapore for a year for professional reasons, and wouldn't come back until next Christmas. Boss enjoyed the housesitting, as the house was in a quiet green neighbourhood so he could think of his next career steps. Also, it was the house where he had had so much fun with in Grooters friends when he grew up.

Professor Dimenport and Leo were understandably exhausted after their sleepless night followed by their longest and highest journey of their life, so they went straight to bed when they arrived.

“Good night,” said Boss, “now you can rest into a well-earned sleep.”

Boss, who had already slept half the night, was not very tired, so he sat down at his computer and messaged the missing Grooters: Webbo in San Francisco, Richie in Anguilla, Verity in Hong Kong, and Modella in Buenos Aires, to give them an update of the happenings.

Then he surfed around the Internet for a while, more precisely looking at maps of the Earth, trying to retrace *Ei in the Sky's* flightpath. He also wrote a mail to Heidi, to let her know the good news without giving her any details of where they had taken the professor, just in case she was the person Leo feared she could be.

At around eight o'clock, Boss walked to the local bakery, bought a bunch of croissants and baguettes, then went back to prepare breakfast for his guests. The crisp cold winter morning did him good to oxygen his brain and wake up a second time on this fourth day of the year.

Once everyone was awake, they all sat down at the breakfast table and both Boss and Leo were impatient to hear more about the machine, and where it was currently hidden.

Professor Dimenport felt the pressure to reveal more, so after his first bite of strawberry-jam-clad croissant, and a sip on his coffee, he told Boss and Leo:

“Before we get the machine, we need a plan. The first alternative we have is to destroy it which is a safe way to go to make sure it doesn't fall into the wrong hands.”

“But then we will not be able to use it either,” commented Leo.

“Very much correct so, young boy,” said Dimenport, “which is why I did not destroy it in the first place. It is crucial that some good-intentioned people travel to their Dream Worlds to get clues to solve some of the world's major human issues.”

“You mean both of us, for example?” asked Boss.

“Well, it would be optimal if there were more people with different backgrounds and experiences who would travel as well in order to get a richer breadth of feedback. How many Grooters are you?”

“Six altogether,” said Boss and told the professor that the Grooters had actually met and played in this same garden over twenty-five years ago and that they were now spread over the globe but still got in touch with each other on a regular basis. More precisely, they had emailed from time to time, and Leo had visited them all, but apart from that most of them hadn’t seen each other for over twenty years. The exception being Webbo and Richie in Nevada two months ago.

“Six kids,” said Dimenport ignoring the fact that he was conversing with two grown-up men, “that should be enough. My suggestion is that you all tell them to come here as soon as possible. I will need a few days to get the machine up and running again. Boss, do you think we can install it in the basement here in this house?”

“If it is not too big, yes,” answered Boss, “there is actually a secret chamber behind the wine cellar. It does not serve any purpose at the moment and is about 30 square meters in size. I hope that will be sufficient.”

“Perfect,” said the professor, “now we need to design the room in an original way to make it easy to recognize when you are back from your dream. We need a comfortable bed for the “traveller”, a couch and a table for the rest of us. And another table for the machine and the computer, with space for three monitors. It would be nice to have some carpets on the floor as well, to make it homier, we will spend quite a lot of time down there.”

“Should be easy to organize,” said Boss, looking forward to put his entrepreneurial talents to use again.

“Finally, we need a bookshelf where we can store boring books that the travellers will need to read to fall asleep.”

“Boring books!” exclaimed Leo, “no problem to find that.”

“It should be enough if each one of you brings four or five books that you know will be more efficient than the latest sleeping pills.”

“We should be able to find enough boring books here in this house,” said Boss, “the others will need the space in their suitcases. How long do you expect the experiment to go on?”

“Hard to tell,” said the Professor, “I’d say at least a few weeks, probably a few months.”

Then Boss, the great organizer, took over:

“OK, I suggest that I call Richie, Webbo, Verity and Modella. And you, Leo, take my parents’ car and help the Professor gather the machine. The car should hopefully be spacious enough, otherwise we’ll need to hire a small van.”

“Any regular car should work fine,” said Dimenport.

“Where is the machine, by the way, professor?” asked Leo.

“It is at three different places, but not far away. When I started to sense the danger and felt the need to flee, I disassembled it and hid the parts in three unrelated locations. I think it

should take maximum two days to gather everything, then another day or two reassemble the machine.”

“Great,” said Boss, “Leo and I will help you go and get it.”

“Thanks. Before we leave, I need to make a few phone calls to the people that can give me access to the machine parts here in Geneva,” said the Professor.

“Go ahead,” said Boss, “you can use my phone here.”

When that was done, Leo left with the Professor, and Boss called Verity first, as she was in a time zone where people were not sleeping at the moment.

“Hi Verity, it is Boss!”

“Nice to talk to you again, Bossy!” answered Verity, “thank you for your email with the update earlier today.”

The Grooters had been in touch quite a lot since last autumn’s events with Fuconcius and Goldilocks. However, despite the urgency conveyed by both Fuconcius and Goldilocks Dove, they had all found various reasons for not meeting up, all being busy with their respective lives. But now, with Dimenport’s machine, Boss hoped it would be easier to convince his friends to reunite.

“You are welcome,” said Boss, “we have discussed the ongoing plans this morning, and we need yours’ and all the other Grooters’ help. You must come to Geneva for a few weeks. At least. This is of uttermost importance.”

And he explained everything to her about the Dream Travels and the necessity of combined knowledge and experiences to get the most out of the machine’s possibilities.

“I cannot leave my job just like that.”

“Yes, you can. Just dress up and make a big smile to your boss and explain to him that you need to go and see a sick relative in Europe. That would just be a mild white lie, and because Einstein said that everything is relative, we can hypothesize the extrapolation that everybody is relative too, which means that you are my relative too, and I am sick of the system. Got it?”

“Sounds like professorial thinking is contagious...”

“The worst that can happen to you is that they fire you. And then they can look for a while before they will find a better librarian with your photo reading and information processing capabilities. And they lose a beautiful colleague too... Well, in any case, even if they do fire you, you will find something else quickly and Richie and myself will make sure that you do not get stuck with any cash-flow worries.”

“Thank you, Boss,” said Verity, “that is not only reassuring, but also very motivating and exciting. I look forward to meet all of you again!”

“Me too! A few more things: buy a prepaid phone card and top it up with plenty of credit. Also: fly into Milan and take the Pendolino to Geneva from there. And make sure you pay everything in cash.”

“Milan, that’s a good idea, then I can add a few hours of shopping there before I jump on the train,” said Verity.

“Women...” thought Boss... then he said: “as long as you pay cash... Well, have a nice travel and send me a text from Milan to let me know at what time you will be arriving in Geneva at *Cornavin* train station.”

Then he texted his three other friends on the American continent to have them call him as soon as they were awake.

After that, he started to look up some second-hand furniture for the basement.

Modella was the first one to call around lunchtime.

“Hi Boss! Nice to have you on the line again. I just saw your email and got your text message. Tell me more.”

Boss went through all the happenings with her as he had done with Verity. After all explanations, Modella said:

“So, you are trying to convince me to trade a warm Argentinian summer for a grey cold winter in Switzerland?”

Boss had to admit that on the surface it was not a very good deal for her, but Modella cut him short:

“I just finished a project before New Year and have no specific plans for the January summer holidays, thought of maybe heading to Punta del Este, but been there done that, so I can join you guys if you promise to take me up skiing to the sunny mountains.”

“I promise,” said Boss, “and so we don’t attract too much attention, I’ll have you fly in to Paris and then take the TGV to Geneva. And he explained how all the others would also arrive through different ways...” and he repeated the same safety measures about paying in cash, etc. as he had to Verity.

“I look forward to meeting all of you again!” said Modella.

“Me too,” finished Boss, “enjoy your flight and don’t forget your winter clothes!”

Then Boss had a quick lunch and called around for some furniture that he planned to look at later in the afternoon.

The next to call was Richie.

“Hi again, Boss!”

“Hi Richie. Thank you so much for organizing the ‘taxi’ for the professor.” And again, Boss explained the plan, as he had done with the girls.

“What, you expect me to come and join you guys for a few weeks?” exclaimed Richie, “Do you realize how busy a billionaire can be? Among other things, I have a meeting with the president of the world in a few days.”

“I didn’t know the world had a president,” said Boss.

“No, fortunately enough, it hasn’t. It is just some politician who thinks he is the president of the world.”

“Well, then just tell him that you have something more important coming up than meeting the president of the world.”

“He is not going to like it, but it will do him good. Most people do not dare to put him into place.”

“Thank you, Richie!” said Boss, “we look forward to have you among us. In your case, I think it is OK if you fly directly to GVA. We could eventually need your private jet as things evolve. Does that work for you?”

“No worries, Boss,” said Richie, “I have my own security measures in place and my move shouldn’t be too suspicious, as I am certainly not the only *UHNWI* coming to Geneva to meet my private bankers.”

“*Ultra High Net Worth Individual*,” clarified Boss.

“I don’t like this labelling bankers’ jargon.”

“It is funny how they put you guys in different boxes depending on the number of digits you have in your bank account,” said Boss.

“Well, I am glad that I finally found some bankers who honestly care about me and my wealth preservation. I can sense straight away when they are just nice because they want my money. I observe a lot how they treat waiters, cleaning personnel, secretaries, etc. That reveals their true identity.

“Sorry to mess with your sunny Caribbean winter program, Richie, but you will see it is going to be fun to gather all The Grooters again.”

“I look forward to see all of you soon,” said Richie, “I guess I can be in Geneva by tomorrow, just need to cancel and re-schedule some appointments. And enjoy my last day of heat.”

“Don’t worry, we’ll find you a sauna here in town, so that you can get your required dose of heat,” said Boss, very aware of Richie’s Finnish roots and love for saunas.

Leo’s and the Professor’s first stop was at Guardia’s place in Cologne. Guardia was an old friend of Dimenport’s younger sister, now living since many years with her family in South Africa. She recently retired after a long career in private banking, having been very

successful as one of the first female private bankers. Some wise wealthy people had correctly understood that women are on average better at handling finances than men.

Now she has more time to enjoy her wonderful house overlooking the lake and the Jura Mountains in the background.

The professor had counted on her Swiss banker's discretion and experience from guarding her clients' secrets and money.

In this case, she did not really know what she was guarding, especially that it was only one part of something she had never seen before. But Dimenport had promised to let her know more about the machine when the time was right.

"I am so glad to see you again, Ingo! I have been very worried, no news for over a year," said Guardia.

"Sorry about that," responded Dimenport, "I had to keep low profile for a while. Until help came."

And he looked at Leo with a grateful smile.

The three of them had tea with cakes that Guardia had bought in one of New York's airports, having been there recently to celebrate New Year's Eve with friends. Her living room had a wonderful view on the terrace, garden and the lake.

The professor and Guardia talked about common memories from their younger years, and he also told her about Myanmar and what an amazing country that is.

"Your story really inspires me to visit not only Inle Lake, but the rest of Burma as well," said Guardia.

"Unfortunately, we need to move on now," said Leo, realizing that they could keep on talking forever.

"I understand," said Guardia, "the machine is still in the back of the attic where you deposited it, Ingo."

Leo and the professor went up to the attic, and Dimenport said:

"There, at the back, it is in the black garbage bag."

"It is smaller than I thought," said Leo looking at the bag that was filled with something not much bigger than a mid-sized desktop printer.

"Do you think you can carry it alone, Leo?" asked the professor.

"Yes," said the athletic surfer after having tried to lift it and realized that it was also about the same weight as a printer.

They thanked Guardia a last time and drove back to Boss' parents' house with the first piece of the puzzle. So far, so good.

"All those years of research for a small thing like that?" wondered Boss.

“It is just the head of the machine,” said Dimenport, “the body and the brain are still missing.”

Boss realized that it would be good if they could repaint the secret room as soon as possible so that the Professor could quickly start and re-assemble the machine in there.

“So, what colour shall we go for?” asked Leo.

“Grey,” said Dimenport, “and I will explain why later when all of you are gathered here.”

“Good,” said Boss, “then no need to repaint as the walls are already grey; but we need to get rid of the dust and spider webs.”

“Yes,” said the professor, “that should be enough. And then we will need some yellow paint, not very much. Again, I will explain the reason for this later as well. Could you please also buy a flipchart? Thank you.”

“I’ll organize everything.”

While the professor started tinkering with his toy, Leo and Boss helped each other to clean the chamber from dust and dirt that had accumulated over the decades.

Towards the end of the afternoon, they went to look at some second-hand furniture they had found online, as many regular shops were still closed for the holidays. They were really lucky: a cute United Nations intern was just about to move overseas and sold all the furniture she had in her studio.

“Sad that she moves”, whispered Leo studying the nice curves of the girl.

“I agree,” said Boss, “seeing this makes me want to work for the UN.”

“Maybe you should apply for a job there?” said Leo jokingly.

In fact, she had precisely the pieces of furniture they needed for the secret chamber: a big bed, a sofa, two tables, some chairs and bookshelves. That was a perfect win-win deal. On top of that, her neighbour had a van they could borrow to transport everything.

As they had just come back to the house, Webbo called, lagging 9 hours behind.

“Sounds like there is a lot going on in Geneva, Boss.”

“Indeed, things are starting to fall into place,” he said and once again explained the whole plan.

“Wow!” exclaimed Webbo. “You are lucky, I just finished a big mandate and can take a few weeks off.”

“Great,” said Boss, “I suggest you fly into Zurich and take the Intercity train from there. Please come as quickly as possible, we need your nerd magic to install security systems and webcams around the house and garden.”

“No worries, Boss,” responded Webbo, “I’ll pack straight away and catch the next flight so that I land in Europe tomorrow morning. Which means I could probably be in Geneva sometime after lunch.”

“We look forward to seeing you again.”

“Me too,” said Webbo.

Boss and Leo cautiously brought the furniture into the secret room, making sure that they did not knock over any of Boss’ father’s wine bottles. Once everything was in place, they decided to call it a day.

The professor, too, was done with his machine, as he could now only continue once he had the remaining parts he would go and get tomorrow.

Boss opened a *Domaine du Paradis* chardonnay – bottled from grapes grown just a few miles down the road in the outskirts of Geneva. He also started a fire in the fireplace and then they all sat down in the comfortable sofas of the cosy living room.

“How is your jet lag?” he asked addressing both Leo and the Professor.

“Gladly not too bad,” answered Dimenport, “that is the advantage of flying west.”

“Although we actually flew east, but we ended up west of Burma anyway,” corrected Leo.

Then Boss said after a while: “You must be quite hungry by now. I’ll go and prepare some dinner.”

Which he did and they ate in the elegant dining room, and then went early to bed. Boss himself was also tired, not used to wake up at three o’clock in the morning.

### Geneva, Switzerland, 5 January 2018

After breakfast, Boss drove with the Professor to get the remaining parts of the machine. That gave Leo time to teleport back home to pack some winter clothes and other things he needed for his stay in Geneva.

“So where are we heading?” asked Boss.

“To the place of a former colleague of mine, Nerdoc,” said the Professor, “he is still working at CERN by the way.”

“Interesting.”

Nerdoc was living in a small house with his wife on the other side of the lake, *rive droite*, not too far from the airport.

The professor was happy to see that everything was still there, as he had deposited it in Nerdoc’s cellar over a year ago.



They thanked Nerdoc a lot and headed back “home”. After a few minutes’ drive, Boss told the professor:

“It looks like we have company. A car has been following us for a while, and I think it is the same car that I saw parked in Nerdoc’s driveway.”

“I fear you are right, Boss,” said Dimenport, “I could feel that something was wrong with him. He didn’t seem as relaxed as he used to. Probably he wants to follow us to see where we bring the machine.”

“Fasten your seat belt, Professor!”

The first thing Boss did was to head in another direction to confuse Nerdoc as to which part of town they were going to.

Wherever possible, he accelerated as much as he could, but it was not that easy because of the heavy traffic in the centre of Geneva. Fortunately, Boss knew where all the speed cameras were placed, so he knew where it was wiser not to attempt any illegal manoeuvres. The problem was that Nerdoc followed him anyway so he was not able to get rid of him.

Finally, Boss got an idea: They had come to a traffic light where there was a red-light camera. He saw that there were two other cars between them and Nerdoc behind. So, he faked a breakdown and then accelerated just when the light turned orange, knowing that the other cars behind him would stop at the red light to avoid getting flashed and fined.

It worked. Nerdoc remained stuck behind the other cars and Boss and the professor could drive back safely.

“That was tricky,” said Dimenport.

“Yes,” said Boss, “but it is a good warning for us: we have to be very vigilant in the future.”

Back at the Pibolodari house, Leo had already come back through his wormhole. They unloaded the remainder of the machine, many parts and wires, as well as three monitors.

The Professor was smiling like a kid as he could already picture himself puzzling the machine together again. He said:

“Now it is only the brain missing.”

“Where is it?” asked Boss.

“In my bank safe,” answered Dimenport, “We need to go and get it today before the bank closes for the weekend. Then I will need quite some time to make it operational.”

Then Boss received a text message from Richie: “Landing in less than an hour.”

He replied: “Great, Richie, welcome back to Geneva. Just take a cab downtown as I need to go there for an errand with the Professor. Let’s meet up at *Café du Centre*. Place du Molard, remember?”

Next to text was Webbo: “ETA Cornavin, 12h48.”

Boss replied: “Cool, just walk to the *Place du Molard*, we’ll have lunch at the *Café du Centre*.”

“OK, see you shortly.”

Boss and Leo drove with Dimenport to the bank. The Professor had to go through various security procedures and was then finally able to access the vault far below ground level.

That made Boss think of the urban legend going around in Geneva that they could not build an underground metro because it would threaten the security of the numerous bank vaults in the city centre. Maybe this was true.

In the safe, there was only an external hard drive. Dimenport had borrowed an old laptop from Boss and quickly transferred the necessary data to the laptop, and to a second hard drive as well, just in case. Then he put back the original hard drive in the safe.

They left the bank and once back on the street, Boss told Leo and the Professor:

“You go to the restaurant, I’ll meet you there in about half an hour, I have an errand to do.”

“OK,” said Leo and left with Dimenport.

Boss then entered another bank and, like Dimenport had done just earlier, he asked to access his bank safe.

“*Oui, monsieur Pibolodari, venez avec moi,*” said the bank clerk, and they took the elevator down.

In his bank safe, Boss took out a document, made a copy using the copy machine just outside the bank vault, then left the copy in the safe and took the original with him.

Then he joined the others at the *Café du Centre*, and arrived just a minute before Richie and Webbo.

“So nice to see both of you again!” said Boss and Leo, embracing their old friends as they entered the landmark seafood restaurant.

“Richie and Webbo, meet Professor Dimenport,” said Boss.

“A pleasure, Professor,” said Richie and Webbo, extending their hands to the old man.

The five of them shared a big seafood platter, with a cool white Burgundy wine.

“So now only the girls are missing,” said Richie.

“They should arrive tomorrow,” said Boss reassuringly.

“Did your errand go well?” Leo asked Boss.

“Yes, see what I got,” he told Leo and took out the document he had fetched in his bank safe.

“The Pact!” exclaimed Webbo, “you’ve kept it.”

“I have,” answered Boss, “we’re not done yet.”

“Indeed, it feels like we still have a long way to go until we’ve fulfilled that Pact,” said Richie.

The four Grooters shared some memories from their time together over twenty-five years ago. They also discussed some highlights of what had happened to them since then.

The professor, whom you could sense was so eager to get back to re-assemble his machine, made subtle hints for them to continue their discussions at the Pibolodari house.

They drove back home.

Boss found an old glass frame, put the Pact in it, and hung it up on the wall in the living room.

“That should remind us daily why we are here,” he said.

Leo, an amateur inventor himself, was very curious about how exactly the machine worked, so he proposed to help the professor.

“Thank you, Leo,” said Dimenport, “I will indeed need some help.” And they both disappeared in the basement.

Then Boss and Richie went through the security and communication plan with Webbo. Boss provoked Webbo:

“OK, imagine the Pentagon, we need our system to be more secure than that.”

“I thought about a few solutions on the plane and train coming here. I have some ideas, but it is going to be expensive,” said Webbo.

“Over five million?” asked Richie in a worried tone.

“No, but probably over five thousand” answered Webbo, amused by Richie’s notion of expensive. He continued:

“Computer stuff and network installations do not need to be very expensive if you know what you are doing. It is just that most providers overcharge heavily because many clients have no clue how all these things work.”

“That’s not only in the computer business,” confirmed Richie.

“In our case, I would like to test a few new things: a good friend of mine, an old schoolmate here from Geneva, works for a company building secure networks based on quantum teleportation of information. And they have just launched a new, unbreakable version. I can assure you that the bad guys can scratch their heads a few years before they will be able to hack into that kind of network.”

Then Boss intervened: “Actually, I think that my father has already installed a similar, quantum teleportation-based network so that he could work safely with his bank clients’ data from home.”

“Cool,” said Webbo, “that makes things much easier, then we just have to upgrade the network and don’t need to install a new one. In my personal nerds’ network, I also have a good friend working for CERN, and he told me we could anonymously plug into their network to get the fastest Internet connection in the world with the additional advantage of not being geographically traceable. How does that sound?”

“That’s the kind of plan I like,” said Richie, “I would even be ready to pay a few millions for a system like that.”

Boss and Webbo looked at each other with a smile.

“I am serious,” said Richie, “When we are done here, Webbo, could you do that for me as well and link up all my residences and companies with a similar system?”

“Sure, but let’s discuss that later. In the meantime, for the in-house network, I suggest that we use cables as much as possible, and Wi-Fi only sparingly. I’ll also get Internet down in the basement so that we have quick access to any information we might need. With some proven proverbial proactive proxy protocols, this network is going to be so professionally protected that I will not even be able to hack into it myself.”

“I hope you are not overwhelming the readers with all your technical jibber,” said Richie.

“Don’t worry, that jargon is just to confuse them, so that they don’t go and reveal the details of our security system to the public. You can never take too many precautions.”

“Good,” said Boss, “that sounds like a great plan for the communication system. Now, have you also thought about any security system for the house and the garden?”

“Yes,” answered Webbo, “we’ll encircle the property with sensor-fitted cables to track any person entering the property. And I plan to link that system to a few web cams around the house that will automatically warn us if there is human activity anywhere in the garden.”

“How does that work?” asked Richie.

“The webcams have infrared and movement sensors.”

“Great,” said Boss, “and if we also ask the professor to deploy his ‘field of good intentions’ over the property like he did in Burma, then we should have a pretty solid security system.”

“Sounds great,” said Richie.

Boss continued:

“Let us get to work then. Tomorrow morning, I suggest that you go with Webbo, Richie, to help him buy all the stuff he needs for the installation. Again, please use cash, or Richie’s Caribbean credit card. And as for today, maybe we can already start to dig the small trench for the sensor cable. I guess that will take some time.”

Webbo and Richie left for the garden, and Boss went downstairs to check how things were advancing there. It was still a big mess in the room, but it looked like the machine was starting to take form.

“So how is it going?” he asked the Professor.

“Good,” answered Dimenport, “thanks to my new-won disciple I think we should be able to get the machine operational earlier than planned.”

“When do you think that would be?” enquired Boss.

“Hopefully by tomorrow afternoon.”

“Perfect, the girls should have arrived by then. Is there anything I can help you with?”

“Maybe you could bring us a drink? Do you have more *chocolat chaud*?”

“Any respectable Swiss household has *chocolat chaud*,” said Boss, “and *chocolat froid* in summer.”

“Thank you!” said both Leo and the Professor.

“Care for some *pralinés* as well?”

“Of course!” both exclaimed enthusiastically.

After the secret room service, Boss went out to help in the garden.

“If we hurry, we should be able to finish digging before it gets dark.”

The task was trickier than you would think. “I am glad the winter is fairly mild, so that the soil is not frozen” said Webbo.

Richie and Boss could only agree to that, as they were already sweating enough like this.

They finished digging an hour after it got dark, then Webbo continued to draw the plans and make a shopping list for the day after.

At eight o’clock, they all gathered for a nice dinner that Boss had prepared. And after eating, they relaxed in front of the fireplace in the living room. Boss had decorated the living room with red Christmas flowers, to colour up the Swiss winter months. Cared for properly, they normally lasted till the end of the winter.

### Geneva, Switzerland, 6 January 2018

Once they had finished breakfast, Leo and the Professor went straight back to the basement.

Webbo and Richie left for a nerd’s shopping spree. And Boss went to buy the yellow paint and the flipchart as well as groceries.

Three hours later, they were all back at the house.

They started with laying the sensor cables around the garden, then Webbo continued to play with his installation inside the house. And with Boss’ help he put up the webcams on the roof and balconies.

There was a great energy in the house, a frantic pace to finish installing everything as fast as possible.

At four in the afternoon, Webbo had finished installing the security system and it was successfully tested with Richie trying to sneak into the back of the garden.

Then came a text message from Modella:

“*Bonjour Boss, j’arrive à 16h16. Are you coming to pick me up?*”

Almost at the same time Boss receives another text:

“*Buongiorno Boss, arrivo alle 16h24. Verity.*”

Boss texted back to both of them: “Perfect timing for the *apéro*.” Then he asked them for security reasons to take separate taxis to La Gradelle where he would come and pick them up.

With the arrival of Modella and Verity, for the first time since the famous summer 1992, all the Grooters were now reunited.

Back to the roots, so to say. Actually, the Grooters were not rootless, just rooted in a different way: through each other and through other significant people in their lives. Even though they had lived at opposite corners of the world, with the ups and downs of moving from a place to the next, the similarity of the Grooters’ life experiences bonded them together in a very powerful way.

### ♪ *Reunion – Emil Sagitov*

The fact that they now met at the same place where they used to play together over twenty years ago, made the reunion kind of special.

After chatting for a while, the Grooters noticed that they now had an additional thing in common: they were all single. The reasons for them being single were all different. Boss, a true womaniser, certainly had no difficulty in attracting women, but he hadn’t found the right one yet. Richie, with his amazing looks and tremendous wealth should theoretically have it easy to find a partner. However, like most Finns, he is not good at small talk. And he can’t ever be sure if women are more interested in him or in his wealth. Webbo, on his side, still suffered from the aftermath of being sexually abused as a child, which led him to have poor sexual and relationship confidence. As for Verity, she hadn’t found anyone to match her brains, and got quickly bored with her lovers. And Leo was all over the place. Literally and romantically. Maybe it was the mad inventor’s syndrome. Finally, Modella probably had too high standards. Or maybe it was her high sensitivity that made it tricky for her to find a fitting partner.

Boss did not deceive his guests with a great *apéro* followed by a very Swiss raclette which fit perfectly for the season.

“Is the hut still there?” asked Modella.

“It is, but it would need some serious repair after all those years. I think last time I went up in it was when I was sixteen. Anyways, it’s winter now...”

The professor was an outsider, but he really liked the Grooters, and could feel the deep connection between them.

“The machine is operational again,” he said. “Tomorrow morning, I can start to explain everything to you.”

“Sounds good,” said the Grooters, very curious about this exceptional machine.

Once they had all spent some time catching up and talking to each other, and realised they were all single, Leo came up with an idea:

“Maybe we need an addendum to our Pact? To help single people find romantic partners. Including ourselves. What do you think?”

Everyone agreed that was a good idea, and would make their challenge even more interesting.

So, Leo suggested they simply add a sentence at the bottom of their 1992 Pact:

*Addendum on 6.1.2018:*

*We also commit ourselves to help all single people find romantic partners.*

As most were jetlagged, they went to bed fairly early, and all looked forward to learning more about the machine in the morning.

Even though they had no clear idea about what would be awaiting them in the coming weeks and months, the Grooters could feel that this was the beginning of an exceptional adventure. And they liked that.

Geneva, Switzerland, 7 January 2018

They had a good breakfast, then the professor told the Grooters:

“Let us all go down to the secret chamber - I’d like to call it the *Dreamcockpit* now - it will be easier to explain there, as I can show you everything at the same time.”

So, they all went downstairs.

The first impression was to enter some kind of mix between a living room, a bedroom and an IT support centre.

At the entrance to the right was a bookshelf and a small table with Webbo’s security monitor that also served as a general Internet access post. On the left wall was a big TV-screen.

In the middle of the room stood a table with six chairs and next to it against the right-hand wall was a three-seat sofa.

At the back of the room there was a bed in the right-hand corner, and in the left-hand corner was a table with the machine to the left and three computer screens taking up the most of the table space. The canopy-like bed had a metallic rod structure around and above it.

All the furniture and surroundings were grey, and the only thing that cut the monotony were some yellow triangles with a star in the middle, painted on various spots on the walls.

Next to the table with the machine, there was a flip chart. The lesson was about to begin.

“Please sit down,” said Dimenport showing the sofa and the three chairs next to it.

Boss, as usual, was very lucky and happened to land in the sofa surrounded by both pretty girls. Leo, Richie and Webbo sat down on the chairs.

Dimenport stood up at the flip chart. He was relaxed and enthusiastic, you could feel that it was not the first time he was explaining things to people. He started:

“I have already told some of you a few things about this machine, but I will start from the beginning to make sure all of you understand everything.”

“That is a good idea,” said Modella who had only received very fuzzy information from Boss.

“And please interrupt me if something is unclear or ask questions if you feel it will help you better grasp the whole thing.”

“I call this machine a *DWT* – a *Dream World Teleporter*. As you may know, every human being has dreams and hopes, many of them hidden deep in their subconscious. Only a tiny percentage of people throughout history have been able to access these dreams properly and make them a reality. In other words, living their dream lives.”



“So why are we not able to access our dreams?” asked Verity.

“I do not have a definite answer to that. One hypothesis is that because we hide stuff from others, we inevitably hide stuff from ourselves. And the reason we hide stuff from others is most often due to various social taboos that may need to be lifted before we can be fully honest with each other - and ourselves. However, with this machine, I’ve found a way around this confusion.”

“In what way are these dreams different from the dreams we have when we sleep?” asked Richie.

“The dreams we have at night have many purposes: first to help your brain digest all the information you have acquired during the day, then to give you hints about things you wish for as well as things you need to address in your life.”

“These hints are very difficult to understand, if we’re able to remember them at all,” said Verity, “I have read a few books on dream interpretation, but it is a mess and seems like you need years of tracking your dreams regularly before you are somehow able to understand their meaning.”

“You are totally right, Verity,” said Dimenport, “our night dreams seem to have encrypted messages using familiar and unfamiliar symbols, but it is extremely hard to filter out anything useful from them.”

Modella nodded, knowing the difficulties she has to remember and understand her nightly dreams.

“So,” continued the professor, “from now on, when I talk about dreams, I mean the genuine dreams and desires we have that are the guide posts for us living an amazing life. Otherwise, I will specify night dreams.”

The six Grooters were very quiet, their interest level at its peak.

“True dreaming normally happens in a state of wakefulness, but to work well, the person needs to be in a fairly relaxed state – like the one you fall into when daydreaming.”

Verity, who had often been very bored at school because she knew more than her teachers, has a long experience with daydreaming, and she still remembers dreaming about various boys in class when she was a teenager.

“I can relate to that,” confirmed Verity.

Dimenport went on:

“Artists and other creative people have acquired the ability to consciously get into this state and dream up new things. But most people are busy working and stressing and watching TV, so that there is unfortunately very little true creativity out there. On top of that, if artists want to sell their stuff, it often needs to contain physical violence or relationship drama, which have nothing to do with living a dream life. So, there is a gap between what people buy and what they truly want.”

“And what do they truly want?” asked Modella.

“They want the stars, without the wars,” replied the professor, pointing at the star in the middle of one of the triangles on the wall. “With the *DWT*, I have found a shortcut to access people’s deepest dreams and desires.”

“How does that work?” asked Leo.

“Well, the machine is able to put you in an alternative state of sleep that I call *EDS*-sleep which stands for *Ecstatic Dream State* sleep. This *EDS*-sleep is only different to the other kinds of sleep, REM or deep sleep for example, by the wavelength of the brainwave activity during sleep.”

And Dimenport showed the Grooters a chart with the different kinds of sleep states and where the *EDS*-sleep fits in.

“Put in numbers, the *EDS* frequency range is between theta and delta waves, between 3.93Hz and 3.97Hz. The key is to stabilize sleep between these wavelengths in order to get an optimal dream. And that is what the machine does. Also, it helps shortcut the time to reach the dream state, which normally is about 90 minutes of deep dreamless sleep before regular night dreams.”

Boss intervened: “So if I have understood correctly, once we fall asleep here in this laboratory setting, we go straight into *EDS* dream sleep?”

“Yes, although it can take five to ten minutes before you start to dream. But the *EDS* kicks in before any regular deep sleep, which is not conducive to dreaming.”

“OK,” said Webbo.

“Now, the dreams you have in the *EDS*-sleep have some similarities with normal night dreams: for example, time passes more quickly than in the wakeful reality: I have calculated that in an *EDS*-dream, time goes by on average twelve times faster than in wakefulness. So, one hour of *EDS*-sleep gives you twelve hours in the dream.”

“I have already noticed that with night dreams,” said Webbo, “sometimes my alarm clock rings and I push the snooze-button that is timed at nine minutes; then I fall asleep again, and continue my night dream or have a new one with so many happenings that could never have taken place in such a short period of time.”

“Exactly, Webbo,” said the professor, “it is a strange feeling, isn’t it? When you remember your dream, of course... which leads us to the next similarity with night dreams: based on my experiments and tests so far, it looks like most *EDS*-dreamers only remember very little of their *EDS*-dreams.”

“So, what is then the point of all this,” asked Richie, fearing that Dimenport was joking with them and he would be losing his billionaire time here, instead of meeting the president of the world.

“That is where the magic of this machine comes in: I have found a way to record the whole *EDS*-dream.”

“But how does that work if time passes by much faster in the dream than in reality?” enquired Verity.

“Very good point,” answered the professor, “on this central screen, you will indeed see images flashing by very quickly, like when you fast forward a video on your television. In a reverse process, we just need to slow down the video by a factor of twelve to watch the *EDS*-dream normally. But of course, the dreamer needs to finish his dream first.”

“Ingenious!” exclaimed Leo, “tell us more about the machine. When can we test it?”

“Take it easy, Leo,” said Dimenport, “there is a lot more I need to explain to you first. The screen to the right shows the sleep state the dreamer is in: either *EDS*, *REM* or dreamless deep sleep. You will know quickly when the person is in an *EDS*-state as you will see images appear on the central screen.”

“I could theoretically film normal night/*REM* dreams as well, but I have programmed the machine to only register *EDS*-dreams, as the information we get from night dreams is coded and very unreliable. The whole point of the *EDS*-dreams is that most of the time the information we receive in them is fairly straight forward.”

“And what about the third screen to the left?” asked Boss.

“That is my working screen from where I monitor the whole experiment; for example, I can increase the magnetic waves in the bed if I see that the dreamer is about to fall into regular sleep.”

“Amazing!” whispered Modella in Boss’ ear.

“OK, so let me tell you more about how the whole thing works. First, the dreamer chooses a really boring book and lies down on the bed and starts to read it. That will help the person to fall asleep.”

“Can’t we just take sleeping pills?” asked Leo.

“Good question, my friend,” answered Dimenport, “no, we can’t because the chemical stuff in the pill interferes with the proper functioning of the brain. But the magnetic waves that come out of the metallic bed structure will help the person fall asleep, and reading a boring book simply speeds up the process.”

“And what are these loudspeakers above the bed for?” asked Modella.

“They are not loudspeakers, Modella, they are silent speakers.”

“Silent speakers?” replied Modella, “Am I too blonde to have missed that new technology? Never heard of it.”

“Silent speakers emit silence instead of sound. More precisely, they cancel the surrounding noise. On top of that the silence does not spread like normal noise, instead it is directed to where you want to have it. In this case, over the bed, so that the dreamer is bathed in total

silence and doesn't wake up if we happen to make some noise around him or her. They are like big noise-cancelling headphones, if you want."

"And why do you use silent speakers with the television?" asked Richie pointing at the similar-looking speakers above the television on the wall behind the Professor.

"Maybe it is better to call them directional speakers," answered Dimenport, "with the same device, you can either emit silence or any other sound that you like, and use as normal loudspeakers, with the advantage of the directional feature."

"I am not sure I understand," said Verity.

"Imagine a theatre with a spotlight lighting up only one or two actors on the scene, with the rest of the room in total darkness. Well, these directional speakers work the same way, but with sound instead of light. So, in our case, only the people sitting in front of the television at the table or in the sofa will be able to hear the TV. Thus, I can work quietly in my corner, and the dreamer will not be woken up by the sound of the television."

"You are a genius, professor," said Richie.

"In this case, no," said Dimenport, "this technology was invented at MIT almost twenty years ago."

"So why have we never heard about it?" asked Verity.

"Maybe they only directed the broadcast to a handful of people, or sent a silent news release," said Boss jokingly.

"It is definitely not the first useful technology that has been 'silenced'," said the professor, "just ask Nikola Tesla."

"What do they gain from that?" asked Webbo.

"Well, this technology has the potential to help people sleep better, and fight less with their neighbours or roommates, which makes it harder for the powers that be to control people."

"Now I get it," said Verity, knowing from experience how stressful and tiring it is to live in a noisy city, which makes her more suggestive to bad influences.

Modella couldn't help noticing the big yellow triangles on the walls of the chamber, so she asked Dimenport:

"What is the purpose of these yellow triangles?"

"I knew that question would come sooner or later," replied the professor. "These triangles are there to make it easy for you to know that you have come back from your dream."

"And why the yellow colour?"

“The yellow represents the beauty, the fun and the good happy times we have in our lives. As you can see, when you look at the big picture, there is unfortunately not very much yellow compared to all the grey around,” said the professor and pointed at the grey bed, the grey sofa, the grey table, the grey walls, the grey ceiling, the grey bookcase.

“Sadly enough, this represents far too many readers’ lives – *métro, boulot, dodo* – their lives comprising not much more than commuting, work and sleep.

“And why triangles?” asked Modella, “Couldn’t it be another shape?”

“Good question, Modella. The sharp edges of the triangles are there to represent all the suffering most people have to endure at some point in their lives, like divorce, accidents, illnesses, grief, etc.”

“But isn’t that an inevitable part of life?” asked Verity.

“It is my belief that it is not,” said Dimenport, “and that is one of the main reasons why I built this machine in the first place. Once people are able to access their Dream Worlds, they will get a better feel for what is possible.”

“And what does the star in the centre of the triangle represent?” asked Leo.

“This is your guiding star, your dream, and it is always there, even if you are living a miserable life and decide not to pursue your dreams.”

Verity could very much relate to what the Professor was saying.

And he continued, emphasising the star: “The star is always there, and chances are tiny that you will lead a fulfilled and happy life as long as you do not actively pursue these dreams and seek to align yourself with your life purpose.”

“But how do I know exactly what my dream is or what my dream life should look like?” asked Boss.

“Well, this is exactly where the *Dream World Teleporter* comes in. Finding your life mission and what I said before about pursuing your dreams tends to be very difficult in practice due to all the obstacles and the confusion all around us. And this is why the machine is so important. Travelling to your respective Dream Worlds will help you to better picture this dream life of yours, and thus find solutions to one day make it your reality.”

“Professor,” asked Modella, “could you please tell us more what it feels like to experience an *EDS* dream?”

“The sensations will be much stronger than in your current reality where all your senses are dumbed by drugs, negativity, pollution, dishonesty, processed foods, noise, etc. In an *EDS* dream, the colours are more intense, more beautiful, and you will experience a broader range of wonderful smells, and artificial sounds will be soothing, not disturbing. On rare occasions, some of you might have experienced such amazing surroundings in night dreams.”

“Wow!” exclaimed Verity.

“Food will have much more taste and the experience of touching will take a whole new meaning whether you are touching plants, clothes, animals... or a person you are attracted to. Also, you will be able to do things that you are not able to do in waking life.”

“Like what?” Wondered Modella.

“No spoilers, I’ll let you discover this by yourselves, just be prepared for anything,” said Dimenport with a smile. “However, I warn you that your regular superpowers will not work in these Dream Worlds.”

“And how do I know when I have arrived in my Dream World?” asked Webbo.

“Within the first few minutes of your arrival, you should see the Dream World Symbol, a circle with a star in the middle.”

“I guess that symbol is somehow related to the triangles we have in this room, professor?” remarked Leo.

“Correct,” answered Dimenport, “the circle represents the smoothness, harmony and fulfilment that was lacking in the triangle.”

“But why is the star still there? Haven’t we reached our dream now?” asked Richie.

“Yes, you have, but living your dream life is a process, not a goal, and your star will continue to guide you forward on your mission even when you are already living a life of abundance and happiness.”

“I guess we always need something to strive for to be happy,” said Verity.

“That is very true, Verity, and the goals that make you happy might change along the way as well,” confirmed Dimenport.

“Talking about symbols, do we have to search for symbolic clues in these dreams, like in night dreams? For example, the appearance of specific animals in the dream?” wondered Modella.

“No, normally not. That’s the point with my invention: no major decrypting should be necessary.”

“Not even for sexual dreams?” asked Richie.

“No, my machine would have saved Freud a lot of headaches and wrong conclusions.”

“So can we test the machine now, professor?” asked Leo, very eager to discover what his dream life would look like.

“Take it easy, surfer boy, there are a few warnings I first need to give you before I let you loose. To begin, I want you to know that the arrival can be... how shall I put it... ‘action-filled’, which means that you might have to take some quick decisions. But do not worry; everything will work out fine in the end. Just keep cool and enjoy the adventure.”

Of course, it was difficult for the Grooters to imagine exactly what the professor meant by that, but like with any adventure, you will never grasp it fully until you have experienced it yourself.

Then Dimenport continued:

“At the beginning of each dream, you will have a guide that will meet you.”

“How do we recognize this person?” asked Modella.

“Don’t worry about that, it will be very obvious, and if you don’t recognise them, they will come to you and introduce themselves. Now, listen carefully, it is very important that you ask this person a lot of questions so that you get as many clues as possible on how to live your dream lives.”

“You are also likely to get direct or indirect hints about solutions for your Grooters’ Pact. And you may even get clues about where you can find the crystals. This information is vital, so be very observant about everything that happens around you, and, I repeat: ask many questions.”

This reminded Verity about a quote from a bright guy she had read somewhere:

*Ask and you shall receive.*

“Is there anything else we need to know, Professor?” asked Boss, “What happens for instance, if we die in a dream?”

“If you die, you just wake up here but will not be able to return to that specific dream again, and will thus miss out on all the valuable information you should have collected in the dream. In other words: don’t die.”

“Will we get into trouble in our *EDS* dreams or is it truly *la vie en rose*?” asked Modella, slightly worried.

“Normally not. The whole point of the machine is to show your subconscious’ deepest desires, not your fears. However, please understand that it is a scientific experiment and we may still discover new things. So, relax, and enjoy the ride. But remain vigilant and don’t be naive.”

“And how do we wake up from the dream?” asked Webbo.

“This is still a little unclear, but you seem to just wake up once you have been given all the information that you needed from that specific dream. Normally, you spend something between six and forty-eight hours in each dream, which means you will be sleeping on this bed for half an hour up to four hours.”

“Can we travel to as many dreams as we want?” asked Leo.

“Wishful thinking, Leo. No, you only have three wishes each, so you can only travel three times. Otherwise, there is a big danger of getting addicted to this machine, and you will soon understand why. Furthermore, three dreams each should be enough for you to collect all the information that you need.”

“And what happens if there is a power cut?” enquired Richie.

“The machine has an in-built battery, like in a normal computer, that lasts for up to four hours, to make sure the experiment can be followed through even if there is a power cut, which by the way is very rare in Switzerland. So, you should not need to worry about this issue at all.”

“OK,” said Richie.

“And one last thing you need to be aware of is that the people you will meet in your Dream Worlds are products of your own imagination, so they know everything about you. They have access to all your memories, and know not only what you consciously know about yourself, but also your subconscious truths. Which means that you don’t need to explain to them who you are, your relationships, the experiment, the Pact, etc. They already know all that. So, focus on asking them questions. Plenty of questions. One good question to ask is what they think was the main trigger that enabled such a Dream World, such a harmonious society.”

“One last question, professor,” asked Leo, “why do you want us to wear loose-fitting clothes?”

“For the same reason you don’t sleep in your tuxedo at night. The other reason is that the *EDS* state is very similar to the *REM* dream state, and you will experience similar physiological responses, including “nightly erections.”

Verity and Modella laughed at Leo.

The ever-so-serious professor added: “Women too, get wet during dreams. My scientific hypothesis is that there is a link between sexuality and creativity, whether the creativity includes building dreams or building babies.”

“So, who wants to test it first?” asked Dimenport.

The question was almost redundant, as everybody knew how eager Leo was to try out the *DWT*.

“I suggest we start right after lunch then.”

“Thank you so much, professor, for this introduction,” said Boss, “I think we are all looking forward to test the Dream World Teleporter.”

“Yes, thank you!” exclaimed all the Grooters simultaneously, which made Dimenport smile.

After a light lunch, they all went back down to the *Dreamcockpit*.

The professor told Leo:



“First of all, choose a boring book.”

Leo looked at the two or three dozen books that stood on the bookshelf. There were law books, programming books, religious scripts, a few novels, self-help books, overrated old literature, some economy and mathematics books... all with dull covers, packed text and long sentences.

All of them sounded pretty boring to Leo and finally he chose a thick self-help book and said: “I’ll help myself to fall asleep with this one.”

Leo lay down on the bed and started to read. At first, he was smiling because of the funny character of the experiment, but then slowly started to yawn. In the meantime, the professor sat down in front of his working screens and one could hear a magnetic sound when he turned on the machine. Around ten minutes later, the book fell from Leo’s hands as he fell asleep.

The professor had put sensors in the mattress so that he could monitor the sleep stages based on how much the dreamer moved. He had also mounted a camera on the bed canopy to analyse the face and eye movements of the person sleeping.

Now the third monitor was activated, and the Grooters could see how Leo’s sleep was evolving towards *EDS*-sleep. Once the book had fallen, it took Leo another seven minutes to reach the *Ecstatic Dream State*.

At that point, the central screen woke up and images started to flash by at tremendous speeds. The Grooters tried to follow what was happening, but due to the speed of the images, they just got a few glimpses of what was happening to Leo in his dream: it first looked like something in the sky, then a girl, then a car, desert landscapes, more cars, a bar on a roof terrace, and then another car ride.

Forty minutes later, the central screen turned black. The Grooters looked at the sleep monitor and could see that the graph had now left the *EDS*-zone. And they heard Dimenport say:

*“You have two wishes left, Leo.”*

It took Leo a minute to realise what was happening, then Verity asked him:

“So how was it, Leo?”

“How was what?”

“Well, your dream, we saw some interesting images on the screen.”

“Sorry, I cannot remember anything.”

“Don’t worry,” intervened the professor, “that is perfectly normal. Your dream is still stuck in your subconscious, but you will start to remember everything once you watch the film.”

“I look forward to that,” said Leo.

“Just give me a few minutes to format the video, and we’ll all watch it together.”

“You look like you need a coffee, Leo,” said Boss, “I’ll go up and prepare one for you. Anyone else?”

“Espresso, *per favore*,” said Richie.

“And a green tea for me,” added Verity.

When Boss came back with the drinks, the Professor had finished the movie formatting and the big TV-screen was on pause with the title:

### **LEO BERGER – FIRST DWT – 07.01.2018**

It took them the major part of the afternoon to watch Leo’s dream, just stopping for a short afternoon snack. They fast forwarded small sections, for example when Leo was sitting and staring at Leandra’s décolleté for several minutes.

What they saw was quite different from a normal film, as everything was filmed through Leo’s eyes, in *FPV - First Person View* - so they never actually saw Leo himself.

Once they had gone through the entire video, Dimenport stood up and asked the Grooters:

“So, what can we learn from this film?”

“That Leo likes brunettes with big boobs,” said Webbo.

Leo’s face turned red, but he quickly regained composition and said:

“Well, I don’t think there is much I can hide from you right now. By the way, from what I could see, it looks like brunettes with big boobs like Leo too.”

“Let us concentrate,” said the professor, “what else?”

“The circle with the star was easy to spot,” said Verity, “funny, it reminded me slightly of the Nazca lines in Peru in the sense that they are so big that you can only see them from the sky.”

“Yes,” said Dimenport, “that is our proof that what we are seeing is part of an *EDS*-induced Dream World. What else?”

“Leo is asking many questions, which is a good thing,” said Richie.

“Yes,” continued the Professor, “but he could have asked even more questions. Now, let us ask the dreamer himself a few questions: Leo, once you had seen the start of the video, were you able to remember the rest of your dream?”

“Yes,” said Leo, “I felt that I was quickly able to reconstruct the main scenes and happenings of my dream, but the film has given me so many more details that I would otherwise not have paid attention to.”

“Partly true, Leo,” interrupted Dimenport, “remember that a video only records sights and sounds, you need to help us with some additional information about smells, touch, and overall feelings in your Dream World.”

“I see what you mean, Professor, I will try to describe my experience the best that I can: first, the green irrigated area around the skydive landing spot smelled fresh in the morning sun, and the scent of the pink and purple bougainvillea was wonderful. The desert scents are more subtle, but recognizable if you have already visited such arid landscapes before. Normally I do not really pay attention to scents, but everything was so intense in Adrenaland that even I noticed it.”

“And what about touch?” enquired Modella.

“I think I’m not exaggerating if I say that the kissing and lovemaking with Leandra was of an intensity well beyond anything I had ever experienced in my life.”

Suddenly, you could see Modella’s and Verity’s eyes light up and you did not need to be a body language expert to understand that their initial fear of the *DWT* was now gone and that they also wanted to try out this experiment as soon as possible.

“What else?” asked Boss.

“One thing that the film is not totally able to translate, is the general feeling of being much more alive. It is hard to describe in words how that actually feels, but to give you an idea, you somehow feel much lighter, especially around the chest and the heart, as if some weight had been taken off you. I sincerely hope you will also have the opportunity to experience similar wonderful dreams.”

“Thank you, Leo,” said Dimenport, “and now, how do you think this Dream World relates to the Pact?”

The Grooters remained silent.

“What? No idea? According to me, there is a fairly obvious one, related both to the skydive, the car and the beer. Shake your grey cells a little.”

The room was silent for another minute. Then Modella suggested:

“Maybe it is something with technology?”

“We are slowly getting there,” said the Professor, “first of all, technology can be life-saving, thus preventing many catastrophes leading to physical or psychological harm. Then, remember that Leo’s parents’ issues are about addictions. And advanced technology can allow some addictions without any negative side-effects. What a cool beer you imagined there, Leo!”

“But this is science-fiction technology,” remarked Boss.

“Not for much longer,” said Richie, “I just invested some money in a small company building GPS-based *MAD* software and hardware, and I have heard about other firms and research centres working on *FAC* software already.”

“Cool,” said Webbo, thinking about the overall car dependency in most parts of the United States, “I look forward to more relaxed commuting in the future. Is the brunette included in the car purchase as well?”

“*Retournons à nos moutons*,” said the Professor, “now let us discuss the last obvious clue from Leo’s dream: the news ticker.”

They viewed the part of the film with the ticker on the dashboard again:

**When the northern southern hemisphere clock of the Mitchell Library shows a quarter to ten, the hour hand will point towards the Crystal of Beauty.**

“This is a good example of how an EDS-dream is far less cryptic than a normal night dream: it tells us straight out that the first crystal you need to find is the Crystal of Beauty.”

“But the message is still fairly cryptic to me,” said Modella.

“I guess,” continued Dimenport, “there is still some deciphering needed in case the message falls into the wrong hands. I think it will need the combined Grooters’ brain power to be decoded.”

“Anyone heard of the Mitchell Library?” asked Boss.

“Of course,” said Leo, “The Mitchell Library is the oldest building that is part of the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia.”

“That is not around the corner,” said Verity.

“Do you mind if we borrow your spaceship again, Richie?” said Boss, “I have the feeling the Grooters need to fly to Australia.”

“We do not want to get too much attention. We may or may not have been observed picking up the professor in Burma, but another similar flight in such a short interval will definitely raise suspicion.”

“So, what are our options?” asked Boss.

“*Lady Globalia*, with which I came here to GVA. It is a custom-built *Boeing 787 Dreamliner*. About a 22 hour journey to Sydney. Plus, the stopover in Asia. Sorry guys, that is the best way I can get you to Sydney from Geneva. I have Internet and everything needed onboard so we can plan our search for the crystal on the plane. Real beds, Jacuzzi, showers and a professional masseuse are also on board. Remember, we are not flying first class, we are flying *Richie Airlines*.”

Boss switched to his entrepreneurial organiser mode:

“I suggest Leo teleports home and then takes a few photos of the library when they open tomorrow morning. He can then send up the photos to *Lady Globalia* so that we can analyse everything and find a strategy to locate and retrieve the crystal. Richie: when can we take off?”

“In about two hours. I will call my crew straight away. If we leave Geneva at 8PM, we will be in Singapore by mid-afternoon tomorrow.”

“So, I guess that I take care of the house in the meantime?” said the professor.

“That would be very kind of you,” said Boss.

Sydney, Australia, 8 January 2018

Leo teleported back home. It was already daylight at six o'clock in the morning in Sydney, so he took a quick power nap, grabbed his surfboard and went out for his regular morning surf. The waves were to his liking today. Then he had a good breakfast on his veranda, shaded from the strong Australian summer sun.

After breakfast, he assembled his miniature camera equipment and strolled down to Manly wharf to catch the 8.20 ferry to downtown Sydney, so that he would be on time for the library opening at 9 o'clock.

Leo had a tiny camera hidden in his baseball cap, so that he could walk around the library without any suspicion from the security guy or the library employees. He had a small remote control in his hand, which he used to take the photos and zoom in and out for better views. He made sure to walk around the building inside and outside to get a good digital overview of the whole library building. Leo had been on many similar missions when he worked as a detective in London.

He then teleported back home to Manly and uploaded the photos on the Internet so that the other Grooters could access them in the airplane.

A little earlier, the other Grooters had boarded *Lady Globalia*, and were greeted by a stunning blonde stewardess.

“Welcome to my mobile office,” said Richie, “meet multitalented Christella, she will take care of us during this flight. Next to being a professional air hostess, she is a trained massage therapist. And she’s also my personal assistant.”

That stewardess didn’t leave any of the guest Grooters unmoved.

“What a combination,” thought Boss, admiring the hostess’s perfect curves and her short dress that would probably not qualify for regular airlines.

Webbo, too, wasn’t blind, and told himself: “Not being able to teleport should have its perks too... if Leo only knew what he was missing out on.”

“I wouldn’t mind a massage from her,” thought Verity.

“Lucky woman,” thought Modella.

On board his custom-fitted Dreamliner, Richie had a well-equipped conference room with a big screen. Verity, Modella, Boss, Webbo and Richie all went through the photos that Leo had sent them a few moments earlier.

Before that, Verity had scanned through the library’s website and knew all the available information about the State Library of New South Wales.

Because Leo did not feel confident teleporting up to a moving aircraft, Richie called him via conference call instead, so that he could fill in with any information they were not able to see on the photos.

The meeting in the Dreamliner started somewhere within Iranian airspace:

“OK,” said Boss, “so what does ‘northern southern hemisphere clock’ tell us?”

“Well, the first thing we can see is that there are two wall clocks in the Mitchell library room, one at the northern, and one at the southern end of the room,” said Webbo.

“So, I guess we should focus on the one at the northern end of the room,” suggested Modella.

“That makes sense,” said the other Grooters.

“But what is meant by ‘southern hemisphere clock’?” If it is specified, it must mean something. Does our encyclopedia have any clues on that?” asked Richie turning to Verity.

The beautiful knowledge database thought for a while, then she said:

“I read somewhere that the original European analogous clocks were inspired by the movement of the sun, moving clockwise from the east in the morning, to the south at midday and setting in the west in the evening.”

“That is only true for the northern hemisphere,” interjected Modella, “I have now lived in Argentina for a few years and can tell you that the sun moves counter-clockwise, with the sun pointing north at midday.”

“I confirm that,” said Leo, sitting on his Manly terrace watching the Southern Hemisphere sun move counter-clockwise.

“I had never thought of that,” remarked Boss.

“Me neither,” said Webbo.

And Modella continued: “In Buenos Aires, the sun rises over the Rio de la Plata in the east in the morning, then points toward Iguazu in the north at midday, and sets over the pampa in the west in the evening.”

“Same for most of Brazil,” said Richie.

“So, the sun moves counter-clockwise in the whole southern hemisphere. I travelled there a few times, but never noticed the difference, I guess one must pay attention,” said Boss.

“Can we then suggest that the ‘southern hemisphere clock’ is just a normal clock that runs counter-clockwise?” asked Boss.

“When I think about it,” added Modella, “such a clock would actually make much more sense for me in BA.”

“Does that mean that the over 800 million people living in the southern hemisphere have watches and clocks that are not adapted to their environment?” asked Verity.

“I guess so,” said Boss. “Let us now try this hypothesis: what direction would the hands show at quarter to ten on a southern hemisphere clock?”

Modella was quick to respond: “Exactly the same as quarter past two on a regular clock.”

Again, Leo confirmed.

“You would think that it is pretty straight forward to simply imagine a clock running counter-clockwise,” said Leo, “but most people have tremendous difficulties to think out-of-the-box and picture things differently from how they normally are.”

“Let’s continue,” said Boss, “if we assume that our deductions are right, what do we get?”

“The hour hand pointing towards the shelves on the top floor of the library, to its north eastern corner,” said Webbo.

“Interesting,” said Richie, “it looks like there are some fairly old books in that corner, it is probably very seldom that anybody asks for them. Good hiding spot.”

“But it looks like we have a problem here,” said Verity, “the upper floors are not accessible to the public and the spot we aim at is just above the desk of the security guard at the entrance of the library.”

“So, what can we do?” asked Modella.

The Grooters remained silent for a while, then Webbo tried hesitantly:

“I could hack into the library’s security system so that we could enter safely sometime during the night.”

“That could be an option,” said Boss, “what else?”

“I could use my charms to divert the attention of the security guard.”

“I have no doubt that you could manage that, Modella,” said Boss, “security jobs must be among the most boring in the world. It is sad that we need security at all. But in our case, your charms would need to divert the attention of all other library employees and visitors as well, which will be rather difficult. And not all employees are male.”

“Maybe I could make a huge donation to the library and ask in return to get access to it on a Sunday when it is closed to the public?” suggested Richie.

“In theory that could work,” said Boss, “but in practice it will most likely take a lot of time to get through various administrative processes.”

Then he said looking at Modella and Richie:

“Sex and money can take you a long way most of the time, but if we want to change the world, we will need genuine creativity.”

Richie and Modella looked at each other with a smile, then turned back to Boss, and Modella said: “You are right: it will need sex, money and creativity.”



“Maybe we could do something else to catch people’s attention? Like walking into the library dressed as a clown, then blowing in a whistle once inside?” proposed Webbo.

“Fun idea, but you will get kicked out very quickly which will not give us enough time to find the crystal. On top of that you risk being arrested.”

“What if we just told the library the whole story and asked them to access the second floor?” suggested Verity.

Boss stopped her: “First of all, I am not sure they would believe us, then if we find the crystal, they might seize it, there is no reason why it should belong to us.”

“True.”

“Webbo,” continued Boss, “it seems like your plan is the only one that could work. Can you see if you can access the library’s security system?”

“Yes, give me an hour and I will see what I can do.” And he left for the computer room next to the conference room.

Twenty-two minutes later, Webbo came back.

“OK, guys, this was easier than I thought. Maybe I should send them my friendly nasty little curious beast at some point...”

“What are your conclusions?” asked Boss.

“I can turn off the movement sensors of the library easily and I can get the plans of the building to check where the easiest access would be: probably the roof or the basement.”

“Or we get some professional help,” said Modella.

“Professional help? We should not involve other people in this, that would be far too risky,” said Richie.

“I mean Leo, he could teleport directly into the library. No access issues. Furthermore, this is exactly the kind of things he used to do when he worked as a detective.”

“Of course!” exclaimed the other Grooters.

“What would you do without blonde brainpower?” laughed Modella.

“How does that sound, Leo?” asked Boss.

“Sounds fun! Indeed, if the security system is deactivated, then I can easily teleport into the library at night.”

“I think we are all set then,” said Boss.

“Just a small problem,” said Leo. “It seems like bigger pieces of crystal, for some reason, interfere with my teleportation abilities. So, if I find the crystal, I must get out of the building the conventional way.”

Boss turned to Webbo:

“Do you know if there are any fire exits that Leo can use?”

“Not really, only the main entrance that will be locked during the night. But as you need to force that door manually, I cannot neutralize the alarm system linked to it, which means that the police will be around soon thereafter.”

“But by the time the police arrive, we are gone,” said Verity in a hopeful tone.

“So, we just wait for Leo in a car outside the library?”

“This starts to feel like a bank robbery,” said Richie.

“Without guns and masks, please,” said Modella. “And by the way, Webbo, could you also make sure you neutralise any inconveniently placed street cameras in front of the library?”

“Will do,” said the tech wiz.

“And what is the best time for our *coup*?” asked Boss.

“I would say 3.45 as usual,” said Richie.

“We can take my car,” added Leo.

“We will not arrive in Sydney on time tonight, so we might as well spend a few extra hours in Singapore, then land in Sydney on Tuesday morning. But we have a few hours left before we arrive in Asia, so please get comfortable, watch a movie, take a nap or a jacuzzi bath.”

“Do you have seat belts in the jacuzzi in case of turbulences?” asked Webbo.

“No, but handles you can hold on to, like in any aircraft or train toilet.”

“Sounds great,” said Boss, “I am sure that Verity and Modella feel like a Jacuzzi as well.”

“Dream on,” said Verity.

“OK, you go first, I need to call my parents to meet up with them in Singapore. I hope I will be able to catch them for a Singapore Sling at the Raffle’s Hotel Long Bar. And for all of you, I would recommend you to test the pool and restaurant on the rooftop of the Marina Bay Sands, it is absolutely amazing.”

“I have read about it,” said Richie, “I will call them to make sure that we get access to the pool area, avoiding the main elevator queues.”

“I look forward to that,” said Modella, despite despising that weird building’s architecture. Creative, yes. Aesthetic, no. She was not happy with most modernist buildings built by her architecture colleagues.

“Me too,” added Verity.

“And I’ll organize a limo that will wait for us at the airport upon our arrival,” said Richie.

“Then you can just drop me off at the Raffle’s on the way to the Marina Bay Sands,” said Boss.

Singapore, 8 January 2018

In Singapore, Boss met his parents and had the abovementioned local cocktail with them. They also showed him where they lived and then the family had a nice early dinner together.

Richie and Webbo felt like kings showing up at one of the most impressive pools in the world with the two beauties at their side. They also had a stroll in the Marina Bay Sands' utterly luxurious shopping centre.

The Grooters had a short, but wonderful break in Singapore and then slept most of the way to Sydney where they landed the morning after.

Sydney, Australia, 9 January 2018

Richie had asked the others if they wanted him to organize a helicopter to take them directly to Manly, but they had voted against it. To get a better feel for one of the most beautiful harbour cities in the world, the Grooters chose to take two cabs to Circular Quay and then a water taxi from there to Manly, where Leo lived.

They enjoyed the electrically powered floating taxi that enabled them to listen to the music onboard without any explosion engine interference.

♪ *Outback Journey – Koomurri Dreaming*

Leo greeted them at the Manly wharf and they all had lunch at the Bavarian Bier Café, overlooking Manly Cove. Then all the Grooters spent the afternoon at the beach, swimming and surfing and tanning. They were also able to test some of Leo's latest surfboard prototypes.

"This is the way I like January," said Modella, glad to be back in her preferred hemisphere.

In the evening, they were all very hungry after their aquatic adventures, and enjoyed a tasteful Aussie barbeque in Leo's garden, topped with a great Shiraz from Hunter Valley. Cockatoos and various other parrots played a background symphony that, combined with the wonderful eucalyptus scent of the gum trees made the Australian experience very unique to the visiting Grooters.

At one point, when Verity had just gone into the house to grab something in the kitchen, the others could hear a loud scream, and a second later she came running out in the garden again.

"Sounds like she just met Johnny," said Leo.

"Johnny?" asked Webbo.

"Yes, a very big spider that comes to visit from time to time. Harmless."

They went to bed early and woke up at 3AM to drive downtown to the library. Leo's car was not big enough for all the Grooters, so Richie and Modella stayed behind at Leo's place.

With his expertise from the detective world, Leo had come across some interesting technologies to support him in his work. For example, he had a microphone that registered soundless talk. So, he just had to talk normally, but without sound, and the face and throat muscle movements were enough to translate what he had said into audible sound at the other end of a miniature walkie-talkie.

Of course, he had an infrared camera so that the others could follow what he was doing; and an earpiece to listen to their ideas and suggestions on how to go forward.

They parked in front of the steps of the main entrance of the library. It was not optimal, as the car was in full sight, but they did not want to park behind the building, where there were many more cameras due to the next-door parliament building of New South Wales. Webbo had preferred to only disable the absolute minimum number of cameras required. And they could not park on Macquarie Street, as they would disturb the traffic.

Before he left the car, Leo said:

“Get ready to start the engine when I tell you. And I think it is better if you let me drive as I know the city well and am used to drive on the left side of the road.”

And swoosh. Leo did not bother open the car door, he just suddenly disintegrated from the driver's seat. A few seconds later, Webbo could see something moving on his laptop screen in the backseat of the car. Thirty seconds thereafter, the image slowed down and they could hear Leo's voice:

“OK, I am up on the top floor of the library in the north-eastern corner. What do I do now?”

Webbo had set up the system so that Modella and Richie also could follow the happenings back from Leo's house.

Then Boss said:

“If my calculations are correct, when it is quarter to ten, the hour hand of the library clock should point exactly at the third shelf row from the top, or the fourth from the bottom if you prefer. Start by taking out the books on that shelf and put them on the floor.”

Leo did that. The street and city light that lit through the translucent white glass roof of the library was enough for this first manoeuvre.

“And now you will need your pocket lamp to check if there is some kind of opening in the wood panel behind the books,” continued Webbo.

Leo looked and looked but did not find anything.

“Try and gently knock on the wood to see if it is hollow somewhere,” suggested Modella.

“Good idea,” said Leo.

“Indeed, I can feel something here. But I still don’t see any ways of opening the panel.”

“Just punch it in,” said Boss, “you need to get out as fast as possible.”

Said and done. Leo punched a hole in the wooden panel, broke away some more panel and found a cylinder-shaped package, about 25cm big, wrapped in old paper.

“That must be it,” said Leo.

“OK, now run,” said Boss.

“Wait,” said Verity, “maybe it’s worth a few extra seconds to put back the books, so there are no signs of stealing?”

“Good idea,” said Leo. He put back the books on the shelf. No one would have a clue what happened.

With Leo’s expertise, it only took half a minute to open the library interior entrance door, but that triggered the alarm.

“Start the car!” he shouted silently.

He ran into the toilets and opened the window and jumped out in front of the building where the car waited. Once in the car, Leo gave the package to Verity and hit the gas pedal, took left on Macquarie Street, then saw some blue lights just a hundred meters behind.

“That’s bad luck, it looks like a police patrol happened to be just around the corner.”

Then Leo turned right down Hunter Street and accelerated all he could as the cops were coming closer. He drove down to George Street and took right towards the Rocks. At the height of Argyle Street, he turned right again.

Now the police were closing in on them.

“What are you doing?” asked Verity as Leo drove straight at the parking entrance barrier, “this looks like a dead end.”

“No worries!” said Leo putting on his best Australian accent. He stopped and pushed the button to get a ticket for the parking. The barrier opened. And it closed just in front of the police, who now thought they had got the Grooters in a cul-de-sac.

Leo then turned left on Circular Quay West, all of which was a parking lot, but there were not many cars parked there at this time of the night. At the end of the street, Leo turned left before the trees and came out on the pedestrian area where he turned right, facing the Sydney Opera House across the waters from Sydney Cove.

The water was just twenty meters away now, and Leo accelerated again.

“What the hell...” exclaimed Webbo.

“I haven’t had so much fun for a while,” said Leo.

The three passengers Grooters were very far from reassured, wondering what had struck Leo.

The car jumped down half a meter into the water. Just before that, Leo had pushed a blue button on the dashboard, and they could all hear some mechanical noises under the car.

“Welcome to Leo’s very special water taxi!”

“An amphibious car,” said Boss, “very smart!”

“Yes,” said Leo, “on the outside, it looks like a normal Holden car, but I have rebuilt it entirely. Very useful in Sydney.”

They were now ‘sailing’ past the magnificent Sydney Opera House and could see the police stranded on the quay with their limited technology.

Leo continued: “But we are easy targets on the water, it’s better if we get out quickly. Fortunately, there is a small ramp at Mrs. Macquarie’s point beyond the Royal Botanic Gardens.”

“Don’t they have our license plate number now?”

“Yes, and it will lead them to a deserted farm fifty kilometres outside Broken Hill. Again, no worries, it takes me half a minute to switch to Victorian plates. And there are plenty of white Holden cars around, so it will be tricky for them to find us.”

Now that the police had given them a few minutes’ break, Verity took the opportunity to open the package. The paper around it was indeed very old, she guessed that the crystal must have been hidden at the library shortly after its opening in the year 1910.

“Wow!” exclaimed Verity.

It was a statuette of a beautiful woman made entirely out of what they thought was rose quartz crystal, perfectly transparent which is rare for that kind of quartz.

Boss and Webbo also looked at the crystal with amazement.

“I have seldom seen such a beautiful piece of stone,” said Boss.

There was also a letter in the package.

“Let us look at that later,” said Leo as he started to drive up the ramp at Mrs. Macquarie’s Point, which was one of the most beautiful spots in Sydney from where you could get a combined view of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House.

Fortunately, it looked like there was nobody around at 4.30AM. They drove up on Mrs. Macquarie’s Road, along the Botanic Gardens, past the Art Gallery of New South Wales, then turned left down St. Mary’s Road and parked in the underground Domain Car Park.

Boss called Richie to confirm that it was indeed the first crystal in the package.

“OK, let us meet at the airport at around 6AM, but not too early to awake suspicion and we cannot take off before 6.30AM anyway.”

“Great, see you there!” said Boss; then turning to the others in the car:

“I suggest that we split, and let’s give Verity the crystal, it is far less likely that a girl will run into problems with the police. Plus, the crystal will fit neatly into her handbag.”

“So, you can head toward the Central Business District with Verity,” Leo told Webbo, “and I will walk through Woolloomooloo towards King’s Cross with Boss. We’ll just hang out at a bar or a fast-food restaurant until 5.45AM, then Boss can take a cab to the airport which is not too far away.”

“Sounds like a good plan,” said Verity.

“And if you spot any police, make sure you look like a slightly drunk couple in love.”

“We’ll keep that in mind,” said Webbo, secretly hoping they would cross some police.

The plan worked fine. All the Grooters except Leo who had teleported home for his morning surf, met at the airport as convened and *Lady Globalia* could already take off at 6.40AM. Leo would join them again in Geneva.

### Hong Kong, China, 10 January 2018

This time, they decided to refuel in Hong Kong, where Verity invited them all for dinner at her place, a small but nice apartment in Happy Valley with a great view over the Hong Kong skyscrapers and Victoria Harbour.

They placed the Crystal of Beauty in the middle of the table and the Grooters could feel the positive energy emanating from it.

Now Verity finally opened the letter and read:

### **The key is incrementally negative for each letter in the word.**

“Not sure what this is supposed to mean, but it looks very much like some information that could be useful for us in the future as we hunt for the other crystals,” she said.

“Yes, let us park that information in the back of our heads and celebrate the Crystal of Beauty,” said Boss and held up a toast.

The Grooters spent the following day sightseeing the former British colony. And then boarded *Lady Globalia* again in the afternoon so they could land in Geneva that same evening.

Geneva, Switzerland, 12 January 2018

The Grooters were now back in Europe again, a place that probably only Boss could call home nowadays. But they knew they had a common home called planet Earth.

Leo had already teleported back to Geneva a day ahead so that he could spend some time with Professor Dimenport and pick his brains about his invention.

Despite some jet lag, they decided to continue their Dream World travels the morning after their arrival.

“Well done,” said Professor Dimenport, “that’s what I call beginners’ luck. Please don’t expect all clues to be so straightforward. And there might not be clues for the crystals in all Dream Worlds you travel to. Who’s next?”

Verity’s curiosity took overhand and she raised her hand before the others had time to react. Same procedure as with Leo, she fell asleep fairly quickly after having read a boring law book for a few minutes.

The others watched the central screen and tried to figure out what was happening in Verity’s dream: they saw jungle landscapes, various stone buildings, but also cafés and restaurants and some kind of shopping centre.

*“That was your first wish, Verity. Only two left,” said Professor Dimenport.*

“Wait!” exclaimed Verity, obviously upset to be back in the Dreamcockpit with its grey walls and yellow triangles, “You can’t cut it off right now. I started to really enjoy my dream. I want to go back.”

“Sorry, I cannot steer your exact time of return from a Dream World. That point comes when you have experienced everything you were supposed to in that specific dream. But it seems like you remember your dream. That’s interesting: maybe some people do, others don’t, like with night dreams.”

“Yes, and the same person can probably remember one dream one night, and not remember other dreams on other nights,” added Leo.

The Grooters and the professor watched Verity’s dream together.

### **VERITY BLESSE – FIRST DWT – 12.01.2018**

After that, the scientist asked:

“Any obvious clues?”

“The message in the Jules Verne book,” said Verity.



**A crystal is buried a ship's length from the ship on higher ground.**

“OK, that doesn't help us very much,” said Webbo.

To which the Dimenport responded:

“Just let the feeling sink in and something might pop up in the next few days or months.”

“Professor,” asked Verity, “do you happen to know how this *Interdimensional Routing Number* system may work?”

“Sorry, that is even above my paygrade. Which means you Grooters need to add this to your list of things that require more research.”

“Understood,” said Leo.

Then the professor continued:

“Another thing: As both Leo and Verity have noticed so far, there is a great deal of romance and sex in your Dream Worlds. This makes total sense because the machine helps you to bypass all of society's hang-ups and enjoy life as it is really meant to be.”

“We look forward to experience more,” said Boss.

“Yes, we'll continue tomorrow. Who's next?”

“Ladies first,” said Richie.

The morning after, Modella got on the bed with a boring novel and she thought: “I can't believe that this author won the Nobel Prize in Literature...”

The first thing Modella heard was someone shouting:

“Jump, Modella, jump!”

Modella opened her eyes and realized that she was hanging in the air holding herself at a helicopter’s landing skid.

She could feel a lot of air moving, but there was something strange, almost no noise from the rotors.

She looked up at her hands and could see her ski sticks dangling from her wrists. And looking down she saw her skis, or rather she saw her ski: she had a yellow monoski on her feet. And at the front of the board, she could see a blue circle with a star inside it.

“Good,” Modella told herself, “just stay calm...”

The helicopter was hovering a few meters above the ground and she estimated that her feet were approximately three meters above the slope.

She took a big breath and released her grip from the helicopter.

“Wooooow!” she screamed and shortly thereafter she landed in the soft powder snow, stabilized quickly and began her ride down.

“What a feeling!” she thought as she wrote the first trace of the entire slope, enjoyed the sun and the extraordinary landscape: further below, she could see the ocean, and it somehow looked like she was on an island.

It was a long slope, first treeless with only a few rocks here and there, then she could see a forest starting a little further down.

Just before she reached the entrance of the forest, she could hear a voice behind her:

“Welcome to Moovia, Modella, just follow me, I know the way through the forest down to the village.”

“Strange,” thought Modella, “I have a feeling that I have heard that voice before.” Then she dismissed the idea, as she had never been on this island, and it did not even remind her of any place on Earth she had seen on photos.

And for the moment she was not able to recognize the tall guy behind his sunglasses as he quickly overtook her and was now skiing in front of her.

They slalomed between the trees, the powder snow was exquisite, and she even spotted an Alpine ibex and a few white rabbits on the way down to the village.

Modella was sweating on arrival, as it had been a fairly long descent and she was no longer used to riding a monoski, but it was a great feeling and easier than regular skiing in powder snow.

Her ‘guide’ had arrived a few seconds earlier and was waiting for her next to a sunny restaurant terrace. He took off his sunglasses.

“Richie!?!” exclaimed Modella, “what are you doing here? Did you jump onto the experiment bed after I had fallen asleep? I don’t get it.”

“Remember, this is your dream, Modella.”

“You mean that...”

“Yes,” said Richie and kissed her...

Now Modella was very confused. She knew Richie was kind and good-looking, but because they had known each other for so long, she hadn’t even considered the possibility of both of them together.

A thousand thoughts and worries ran through her head: “What will happen when I wake up? Maybe Richie has already seen everything on the screen? What shall I do now?”

But she came to the conclusion that now that the dream had already begun, she might as well enjoy the full extent of it.

They found two deck chairs on the terrace in the sun, and ordered hot chocolates.

“Life is wonderful, isn’t it?” said Richie.

“As far as I am concerned it is not reality life, but a dream, but I must admit that it is a wonderful one,” said Modella, looking at the circle with the star on her monoski.

“Like in a dream... as they say... I never grow tired of this amazing view, the silence of the mountains and the mix of snow and sun.”

“Yes, sun and snow are like wine and cheese.”

“Or like women and chocolate mousse,” said Richie and gave Modella another kiss.

“Do you know how weird this situation is, Richie? A few minutes ago, we sat next to each other watching Verity’s Dream before it was my turn.”

“I can imagine.”

“So does your presence here mean that I have a secret crush on you? One that I had not even been aware of myself?”

“A Dream World reflects your deepest desires, Modella.”

“Well, I can imagine worse than being together with a handsome young billionaire,” said Modella and kissed Richie again.

“What is this place, Richie?”

“It is an island called Moovia. I think you can say that it is some kind of sportive persons’ paradise. This ski resort is named Mattzer.”

“I love it, the wooden chalets are magnificent, with artistic carvings on most of them, it must have taken years to bring so many details to the architecture?”

“Yes, people here are passionate about beautiful things and give their whole *arts* to the works of *heart* they are creating.”

“And it is so quiet here,” noticed Modella, “aren’t there any cars here?”

“Just a few electrical vehicles to transport merchandise and luggage,” answered Richie, “otherwise, as the village is not very big, and the people are sporty, everybody walks around from place to place.”

“By the way, I must have been lucky to arrive with such perfect weather conditions. This powder snow was absolutely fresh, it must have snowed last night?”

“You are right, it snowed last night. But it wasn’t luck.”

“Are you kidding me? What do you mean, not luck? Such perfect skiing conditions normally only come a few days every season...”

“Yes, when you do not know how to control the weather,” said Richie.

“Control the weather? You mean snow machines? But wait, that would not work, there was fresh snow over the whole mountain, not just on a specific ski slope. What’s your trick?”

“The power of intention.”

“Please explain.”

“Some people also call it group prayers, but it is a quantum physics scientific fact that when enough people gather and intentionally ‘pray’ for a certain outcome, they are somehow able to bend reality – in this case the weather – into their favour.”

“Does that mean that we will no longer have any droughts or floods or other destructive weather patterns?”

“Yes, you are totally right, Modella,” confirmed Richie, “and in the case of Mattzer, we think it is so romantic to have it snow in the evening, and then have the sun appear in the morning for full skiing enjoyment.”

“How wonderful!”

Modella and Richie continued to talk for the rest of the afternoon until the sun set in the distant ocean, which left both of them speechless. It was the most beautiful sunset Modella had ever experienced.

Then Richie told her:

“Come, I have something to show you!”

He took her by the hand and they walked down past the centre of the village to a big building that lay at the lower entrance of the ski resort.

“What is this building?” asked Modella.

“You will see.”

They entered and Modella could not believe her eyes: it was a huge hall for figure skating. The amazing thing was that almost all the inner architecture was built of ice: there were big ice pillars around the rink whose walls were also made of solid ice.

Huge chandeliers with dimmed golden lights were hanging from the ceiling.

The beautiful girls skating had elegant golden or silver sequin dresses, and the men skated in either tuxedos or tailcoats.

Their proficiency levels were incredible and you could feel that they loved skating and there was a palpable sexual tension between the couples skating together.

To decorate the air between the ice pillars and walls, there was a live performance of two young artists with exceptional voices. Modella wondered how the crystal chandeliers didn't explode. “What a treat for the senses,” she thought, “hardly anything in real life that I've experienced has reached such a level of beauty.”

♪ *Concerto pour deux voix – Saint-Preux, Clémence, Jean-Baptiste Maunier*

The magnificent performance in front of them was so powerful that Modella got tears in her eyes from watching it. They sat for almost an hour admiring the exceptional figure skaters.

It was fairly cold in the skating hall, so when they felt they had seen enough, Richie came up with a genius idea:

“What about a sauna?”

Modella could feel her Swedish roots shouting “Yes!” so they went home to Richie's luxurious chalet and quickly jumped out of the ski outfit and into the sauna.

“That felt so good,” said Modella afterwards.

“You must be really hungry now? I have reserved a table in a cosy restaurant in the centre of the village,” said Richie.

“That sounds like a very good plan, I am starving!”

The restaurant was so nice; wood everywhere and a very tasteful rustic mountain chalet interior decoration.

“*Fondue* or *raclette*?”

“Both sound appealing, but tonight I feel more like *fondue*,” answered Modella, as she’d already had a *raclette* recently, albeit in another dimension.

“Good choice,” said Richie, “and I suggest a good white *Fendant* wine with that.”

“I can see that you have been to Switzerland,” said Modella with a glimpse in her eye.

“Yes, and it is always funny to see some overseas tourists eating the *fondue* with a spoon.”

They laughed and had a great time together, talking about their common childhood memories, but also about their dreams and plans for the future.

“Tomorrow morning, we leave Mattzer so that I can show you the rest of Moovia before you have to travel back to reality.”

“Please don’t remind me of it.”

After that wonderful dinner, they walked home to Richie’s (or was it their?) chalet and did the kind of things that people do when they are in love.

Modella, being very lucid in her dream, was smart enough to turn off the lights in the bedroom, as she knew the other Grooters would watch the video.

The morning after they walked to the entrance of the village where Richie had parked his car. They drove down the mountain and after approximately an hour’s drive, Richie turned into a magnificent property with a discreet plate at the entrance: “M.G.C.C.”

“What does that stand for?” asked Modella.

“Moovia Golf & Country Club.”

“Classy,” thought Modella as they were driving along a beautiful tree-lined alley up to an old building the size of which put it in the *château* category.

“Does the king of Moovia live here, or is it just the clubhouse?”

“Just the clubhouse.”

They parked next to the impressive building and before they left the car, Richie gave Modella a kiss and asked her:

“So, what colour?”

“What, what colour?”

“What colour do you want the golf course to be today?”

“What do you mean exactly? Aren’t golf courses supposed to be green? Or exceptionally sand or white coloured for some arid desert courses or arctic courses? But the climate here looks temperate.”

“Scientists have been tinkering with chlorophyll lately and found out that they can change its colour under certain conditions and now they have developed a special grass whose colour can be changed instantaneously by sending out specific radio waves.”

“Are you kidding me? Does that mean that I can choose any colour from the light spectrum, or do I only have the choice between half a dozen colours like when I am choosing a new car?”

“Any colour,” replied Richie, “and there is a computer at the reception where you can play around with different colours to see how they look on-screen.”

“Cool.”

They went into the clubhouse, and Modella chose a light blue colour for the grass.

“Wow, I like this! And I want to play with a yellow ball, which reminds me of my countries of origin.”

For Modella, this was a very strange experience, but it was a lot of fun, and she felt so good being around Richie.

As they were walking on the golf course, she asked him:

“So, tell me more about Moovia, Richie.”

“Well, I think the main difference to sports in your reality, is that on Moovia, there is no competition.”

“No competition? How is that possible? But I saw tennis courts next to the clubhouse. Isn’t tennis a very competitive sport?”

“Here on Moovia, you can play tennis without a competitive mindset. First of all, there is a sensor in the handle of your tennis racket, and if it feels a bad intention or some kind of killer instinct in your play, then it sends out an electrical shock to your wrist.”

“Oops...”

“That same sensor also measures the enjoyment you get from playing and gives you points according to its intensity.”

“So, the person with most points wins?”

“No, it is like our skiing yesterday: both enjoyed it and both won. Make love not war.”

“But who then pays the drinks after the game?”

“For that the racket has an algorithm based on many factors: on the number of enjoyment points, on how much you sweat, on how many jokes you crack during the match, on the rolling of digital dice, and on the weather pattern of the last week.”

“Sounds like we could just as well roll the dice to determine who pays the drinks.”

“Yes, but sometimes complexity has beauty in it. Women for example,” said Richie and gave her a kiss.

Hole after hole, Modella was trying to soak in this strange feeling of playing on a blue golf course with saffron-coloured sand in the bunkers. She also appreciated the fact that the golf balls had an in-built GPS-system so she had no problems to find her ball even in the thick grass of the rough. This tracking also enabled them to follow the exact trajectory of the ball from start to finish on a small handheld computer tablet.

“And what about football?”

“People still play football for fun, but there are no championships with war-like religious or nationalistic pride any longer.”

“I never thought about it like that.”

“So, if people play, they focus on the beauty of the shots or dribbles and you get points like in figure skating. Teams are randomly mixed up and the players change side often so that at the end everybody has been part of both the winning and the losing team.”

“I understand.”

“Again, like for all other sports, it is just for the enjoyment and the work-out. And the social side of getting to know people or meeting up with friends.”

After having holed out the 15<sup>th</sup> hole, Richie told Modella:

“Thank you, it was a nice game, a true pleasure to play with you!”

“Aren’t we going to finish the last three holes?”

“There are only fifteen holes on this course. And the other courses on Moovia all have a different number of holes, all between 12 and 21. We found it too boring to always have 18 holes.”

“Sounds like you are challenging British logic...”

“That being said, if you absolutely want to stick to 18, maybe we can play another three holes together tonight.”

“Hmm...” said Modella, “I’ll consider your proposition.”

“As for tennis here on Moovia, you get a random number from one to sixty, and the person who first reaches hundred points wins the set. Furthermore, the size of the tennis courts changes depending on the mood of the architect, and the serving square can be everything from a circle to a triangle to an octagon.”



“That sounds much less boring.”

“Let us now take a well-earned drink and something small to eat before we head down to the coast,” said Richie.

The golf club compound was situated on a small plateau, a few hundred meters above sea level, and only a few kilometres from the sea.”

From the terrace of the clubhouse, they could look down at the water activities, and Modella spotted some windsurfers and sailing boats on the ocean.

After the drink, they took two what looked like regular mountain bikes for the ride down to the coast.

“What about your car?” asked Modella.

“Don’t worry, I’ve programmed it to drive itself to the coast, so we can drive back to Mattzer tonight.”

“Of course,” said Modella, not used to some obvious technological solutions.

“This is fun!” she said as they rode down a track in the forest. Modella especially liked that the slope of the winding track was sufficient to give her another adrenaline kick, but not too steep so she didn’t have to fear for her life. Maybe she was a bit quick with that conclusion as the latter part of the track became steeper.

Then, as they started to accelerate and came towards a spot with bumps that seemed to have been put there on purpose, Richie said:

“Let go of the brakes!”

“What, are you crazy? I’ll kill myself.”

“Trust me. The bikes have an in-built anti-gravity device that smoothens the landing. You can’t die anyway, you’re in a dream.”

“Letting go... letting go... why was this so hard?” thought Modella, but finally followed Richie’s instructions.

At the first bump, she took off in the air, but instead of crashing heavily, she landed almost like a feather, a sensation she’d never had before.

“What a feeling!” exclaimed Modella.

“Told you.” Replied Richie.

This was absolutely amazing, and Modella tried out even bigger bumps and flew higher in the air, a little like she had seen daredevil motorbikes do on TV. Except that her life was not at stake, the speed combined with the smooth landings gave her incredible feelings around the heart and chest. She felt so light.

Modella now understood why cycling and happiness are anagrams in the Swedish language.

They arrived at the coast, and once they had parked their bikes, Modella couldn't help herself but hugging and kissing and thanking Richie for those wonderful sensations.

*Welcome to Marelmar* was written on a big stone block at the entrance of the resort. There was a long stretch of sand beach with many nice bars and restaurants on the shore. You could see palm trees all over the place and beach sand even on the floor of the restaurants, which gave the place a relaxed holiday feeling.

Modella looked out at the sea and saw kite-surfers, some futuristic sailing boats, and a few surfers with surfboards that reminded her of Leo's inventions in Australia.

Then one thing struck her: out on the far right towards the end of the beach there was a small bay where some people seemed to walk on the water.

"Must be an optical illusion," she told herself, but as they got closer, it still looked unusual, so she asked Richie: "Wow! That looks fun, what are they doing out there?"

"You just said it: they are training to *WOW*."

"*WOW*?"

"Yes, *WOW*-boots so you can *Walk On Water*."

"Walk on Water?"

"Yes, some people even call them *Jesus Boots*: They have injected helium in the soles, and the special rubber and clown-size of the boots add to the floating capacities. The first version they invented a few years ago floated well but was unstable so people needed a lot of balance to walk on the water."

"But as far as I can see it looks like they seem to manage it quite well out there."

"Yes, now *WOW 2.0* has added the stabilizing feature that Leo has been testing on his surfboards."

"I want to try that!" exclaimed Modella.

"Sure. You'll see, it's great fun, but quite tiring, especially the first few times. There is a *WOW* rental place further down the beach."

### ♪ *I Can Walk on Water* – Basshunter

Modella fell in the water a few times. That's what Richie called the *wow-effect*, but she quickly learned *wow* to hold her balance and was able to *wow* quite some distance as the sun started to set in the ocean. After their most exhausting exercise of the day, they *wowed* back ashore, and hugged and kissed again.

After that unique experience, they went to watch an underwater rugby match in a sea aquarium: dolphins playing against humans.

"Guess who normally wins?" said Richie.

Modella woke up.

*“So, that was your first dream, Modella,” said the professor.*

She was first a little confused, and then she remembered that Richie was in her dream and started to look around the room, but couldn't find him.

“Where is Richie? Did he get stuck in the dream?”

Leo and Boss were smiling, as they had followed at least parts of what had been happening in Modella's dream, and a few scenes were quite obvious.

“Take it easy, Modella,” said Boss, “he left just before you fell asleep. He had to go to a meeting with his private bankers in town.”

“So, he doesn't know?”

“No, don't worry,” said Leo.

“Please don't tell him anything,” said Modella.

“Promised,” said Verity.

Boss nodded and added: “Let's watch your dream before Richie comes back.”

“Thank you, guys!”

### **MODELLA D'ALLEMO – FIRST DWT – 13.01.2018**

The professor kept track of their respective travels on a big piece of paper stuck to the wall, a simple grid with 18 boxes. Three filled so far.

Verity had calculated that they could only do on average one *DWT* per day because the dream itself took time, then the viewing took even more time. And the very important discussions that followed were equally time-consuming, but necessary for the Grooters to decipher the clues for their Pact, including the hints for the crystals.

Once they had watched Modella's dream Boss asked:

“What additional clues do we have now?”

“I'd say something that is linked to sports,” ventured Verity.

“Exactly,” said Dimenport, “for me at least, this seems quite obvious given Modella's parents' poor health: physical exercise is certainly a positive action towards better health.”

“Agreed,” said Modella, “but it's not sufficient, especially for mental health. In any case, I had the time of my life in Moovia, and believe that is certainly good for my health.”

“What more?”

“I like the concept of non-competitive sports,” said Leo.

“Yes,” joked Webbo, “I think it’s better if Modella and Richie don’t start discussing football or ice hockey. Or even tango, although Finnish tango is no competition to Argentinian tango.”

Everyone laughed.

“Anything else?” said the professor at last.

“Let’s ask Richie once he has seen the video,” teased Webbo, looking at Modella.

Modella blushed, but then said: “You’re up next Webbo, time for us to make fun of you.”

“That would only be fair,” he admitted.

## Part 11                      Flirtown

Webbo arrived at a busy underground station. Peak hour. People everywhere, walking in all directions.

“Great,” thought Webbo, “how am I supposed to recognize anyone here?”

After a few minutes, though, he saw the circle with the star knitted in red on the back of a man’s black leather jacket. He approached the person, a man around his age with a handsome bad boy kind of look.

Before Webbo had time to say anything, the man exclaimed: “Hi Webbo! Welcome to Flirtown. I am Rodd. Hurry up, you have an appointment.”

“An appointment?” wondered Webbo.

“Yes, your FC starts at 7 o’clock. It’s not too far, but you need to get home first and change clothes. And while you do that, I have some important things I need to tell you.”

“FC? What is FC?”

“Flirting Class.”

Webbo looked at the big analogous clock on the underground hall wall: 5.47PM.

As they hurried out of the subterranean maze, Rodd continued: “Consider me as your wingman here in Flirtown. I am going to support you and do everything I can so that your dating game will be successful.”

“Dating game?” he asked Rodd.

“Yes, there are three levels to the game. This first basic level is primarily about gaining self-confidence and learning how to attract women’s attention. In this level, you’ll also meet quite a few women so that you learn to get comfortable around them and so that you get a better feel for what you like and dislike in potential partners.”

“And the other levels?”

“First, to reach the second level, you need to kiss at least one woman. Don’t worry, no pressure, there will be plenty of opportunities here in Flirtown.”

“OK.”

“The aim of the second level, which will take place in another Dream World, is to have a full intimate relationship with a wonderful woman where both of you learn more about sex and have deeper discussions about what you like with a partner that fits you, and also get more at ease with your body. And to graduate to the third level, you need to have quality sex with a woman you care about.”

“And the third level?”

“In the third level, you need to become an expert lover, you need to make a women’s wildest fantasies come true. This means you need to be fully in tune with your partner’s needs and

gradually help her fulfill her fantasies... and yours. In the end, it's all about being completely honest with yourself and your partner. That's what is required so that you can save the princess."

"Save the princess?"

"Yes, the princess aka. your future main life partner is currently stuck in another dimension, and you have to bring her into your physical reality, meaning planet Earth in 2018. That's the ultimate goal of the game. Only then will you have successfully completed Level 3 of the game."

Being an avid gamer, Webbo liked and could very much relate to this video game approach. However, this felt far more real than any on-screen or virtual reality games he had ever played.

They reached Webbo's apartment. He was amazed to see that he had a big wardrobe with a great selection of different kinds of clothes.

Rodd continued with the instructions: "Choose an outfit that makes you feel confident and feel good in your skin."

Webbo chose a pair of beige chinos, brown leather shoes with a matching belt. A white shirt and a light brown blazer. Rodd scrutinized him. Good, thought Webbo, he seems to approve of it.

Once ready, they walked a few blocks to an old elegant building, on which it was written:

### *A&R's Flirting School*

"Is that your school?" asked Webbo.

"Yes, I run it with my colleague Anna, she's the boss."

They walked up to the third floor which was the top floor of the building. It was an apartment-like interior, and there were already a few other students there, about half a dozen.

They all had a drink, and Rodd told Webbo to have one too, 'to loosen up a little'.

A few minutes later, two elegant women entered the room. One mature, maybe mid-thirties, the other one younger, somewhere in her twenties.

The older woman spoke: "Hi everyone, my name is Anna, and this is my assistant Annina. Welcome to A&R's Flirting School, and I guess you've already met Rodd."

The three teachers all took turns to coach each student, and taught them about the importance of good posture, trained confident eye contact, and showed them various body language gestures and stances that are favourable for attracting women's attention.

Webbo and his fellow students were taught to create a sense of mystery, what kind of things to ask and say, without it sounding like rehearsed pick-up lines.

They also had an hour of a more theoretical lecture where they were taught how they could best set up their lives in order to be generally attractive to women: working out, being passionate about their job, having a social life.

All that made sense but was always easier said than done, thought Webbo. Nevertheless, the intense course gave him more confidence and made him aware of all the things he still needed to learn and improve upon.

Towards the end of the class, all students had to pick a random piece of paper in a bowl: on it was written the name of a bar in town.

On Webbo's paper it was written: *Funny B*.

"The class now continues in a real-world setting. Good luck everyone!" said Anna.

Webbo approached Rodd: "Aren't you coming?"

"No, but don't worry, our colleagues in each bar will take good care of you. However, call me tomorrow. We'll meet up and I'll explain the next steps." Rodd gave him his number.

"OK."

As Webbo walked around town, he felt there was something strange with this place. It had already been dark outside when he arrived before six o'clock, and he thought it must be winter with short days, but the weather was really warm, like a tropical night, but not too humid. He walked up on a hill and got a clearer view of the sky and was amazed to see three moons of different sizes, the biggest being about the size of the Earth's Moon, and the two others slightly smaller.

"Weird," he thought, "where am I?"

He walked down the hill and arrived at the Funny B: the venue was underground, and a winding staircase led down to the bar.

He couldn't believe his eyes: the place was full of the hottest women he had ever seen and plenty of handsome men as well. The music was very uplifting and energizing. People were already dancing everywhere, Webbo could feel how they were truly having fun and enjoying themselves.

♪ *I Am Alive – Lazard*

Some stood chatting at the bar, and others sat down at tables or on the various couches.

The Funny B reminded Webbo of some good after-work places he had been to in San Francisco, but this went well beyond anything he had ever experienced: there was a long

mahogany bar, and the good-looking bartenders of both sexes were juggling bottles as they prepared the drinks for the customers. Everyone seemed to be flirting with everyone.

“No wonder, *flairing* and *flirting* are almost anagrams,” he told himself.

The interior design was exceptionally creative, it was a revisited modern baroque style with comfortable sofas, some wooden tables, carpets and mirrors on the walls, the ceiling and even on the floors.

The light bulbs had pyramidal forms, and the dimmed lamps changed colour at regular intervals to give a mysterious feeling to the bar.

The place was quite big and at one end there were some round billiard tables with phosphorescent balls and glowing cues that resembled light sabres. And in the middle of the room there was a green laser that sent holographic figures turning around, increasing and decreasing in size somewhere between the floor and the ceiling.

“But how shall I find my tutors with all these people?” wondered Webbo.

The answer came after a few minutes when he noticed a small circle with a star tattooed on the neck under the ear of one of the girls. She was a beautiful mulatto and wore an asymmetric silver mini-dress. It looked like she would come directly from a beach in Brazil, perfect body, and self-confident allure.

“She would be something for Richie,” thought Webbo, forgetting that Richie preferred blondes. With a few exceptions.

There were many gorgeous girls in California where Webbo has lived for the last few years, but he had always deemed them as unapproachable, a limiting belief of his own, he now understood after tonight’s FC.

He went up to the girl with the small tattoo and said:

“I noticed your tattoo.”

She smiled and said:

“Hi Webbo, nice to meet you, Rodd told me a lot about you. Yes, I put on that tattoo today so that you could recognize me. My name is Hottia.”

“Nice to meet you Hottia.”

“We only use temporary tattoos here in Flirtown. They are sugar-based and can be licked off easily...” she said with a glimmer in her eyes.

“That sounds practical,” responded Webbo, not daring to look her into the eyes.

“Let us sit down on the couch behind that table, it will be more comfortable to talk.”

Hottia took him by the hand and they sat down on the sofa. On the low table in front of them was a nice bowl of fruit.

“Here, take a date,” said Hottia, “Flirtown’s dates are the best in the world.”



Webbo couldn't believe what was happening. Not only had this girl an amazing body, she had humour and was also very suggestively dressed with a natural sex appeal that even most professional escorts would never match.

But what amazed Webbo the most was how gentle and caring Hottia seemed, she made him feel at ease around her straight away.

“So, how do you like Flirtown so far, Webbo?”

“I love it! It has a certain feeling of mystery that I'm still in the process of discovering.”

“Yes. Now, are you ready to get more practical exposure and train what you learned in the school earlier tonight?”

“I wish all schools were like this...”

Hottia confirmed with a smile:

“Indeed. Anna & Rodd's school is a kind of charity work. Like you would give computer lessons to children in difficult neighbourhoods, we help people improve their relationships skills.”

“That is a very worthwhile charity initiative.”

“Let us start with repeating a few basic rules. Dating is very simple: men look for feminine women and women look for manly men. Yin looks for yang and yang looks for yin. The great thing is that when we girls dress like this, it is not only to trigger men's reptilian brains, it is also for ourselves, as we feel much more alive and feminine like this.”

“And what exactly do you mean by 'manly men'?”

Hottia continued: “By that I mean a guy who is self-confident, who takes charge, who knows what he wants, who has a mission in life, who takes risks and who takes the lead. That is what turns most of us on.”

“That sounds a little like macho behaviour.”

“There is a crucial difference: you need to treat women with respect as well, be nice, romantic and protective. A blend of the positive traits of the dominating macho and the romantic gentleman is what most women are looking for.”

“I think I start to get it.” said Webbo.

“Great. And next to this yin/yang theory, there is another important thing that you need to know about relationships: there should be no competition.”

“No competition? What do you mean no competition? On Earth there is always big competition between guys to date the hottest girls in school or at the office, and girls compete with each other to be the most beautiful so that they can attract the richest guy around.”

“Primitive behaviour,” interrupted Hottia, “here in Flirtown, there is no neediness nor competition: we look for emotional compatibility for long-term relationships, and simply fun flirting times for shorter relationships.”

“OK.”

“When it comes to long-term relationships, some people have only one soul mate during their life, and others have more than one if they happen to grow apart after some years. And some people may not have any soul mate in the classic sense, but several seasonal partners.”

“So, there is not one rule fits all?” asked Webbo.

“No,” said Hottia, “and no media brainwashing or social duress will help people fit into boxes that don’t suit them.”

“That may explain why so many relationships fail?”

“Yes. Here on Dewal, our aim is that each individual be happy, and not to force them into a box that doesn’t fit them, just because it may be a box that suits the majority.”

“I understand,” said Webbo, thinking that he was glad to be living in San Francisco where he regularly meets people who did not fit the traditional relationship model.

“The only thing is that when a couple thinks they are mature enough and decide they want to have children, then they should ideally commit to stay together for the next fifteen to twenty years to give their children an emotionally stable upbringing.”

“That sounds like a mature and responsible approach.”

“As already mentioned, it boils down to being honest with yourself. And to be that, you need know what you want. And to know what you want, you need to try out a few partners until you can feel what genuinely makes you happy. So, this is what tonight’s and tomorrow’s training is mostly about.”

“That makes a lot of sense,” said Webbo.

“We believe it does. Our first aim is to help you get more relaxed and comfortable around beautiful women. Which is why I am soon going to introduce you to some of my girlfriends standing over there.”

Webbo had a look at the beauties standing at the bar.

“I like this kind of training. Far better than biology and sociology back at school.”

“If you are a normal male, there are chances that you might get sexually excited in our presence, but now listen carefully: I want you to feel the emotional connection you will have with each one of us here, and then compare it to what you feel for other girls you’ve met in the past or will meet in the future.”

As she said that, Hottia stood up in a sexy move and walked up to the bar. A minute later she came back to Webbo with two other goddesses: a blonde, with a red mini-dress, and a stunning black girl with a white outfit, both as elegant and appealing as Hottia.

The blonde was the quickest to greet him:

“Hi Webbo, I am Sexya, nice to meet you.”

“And I am Bomba,” said the sharp-featured black girl, “some people call me Love Bomba.”

“Hi...” said a slightly trembling Webbo. This was far more than he was used to handle. As for Bomba, her nickname could as well be Sex Bomba, he thought.

The couch was big enough for all of them, so Bomba and Sexya sat down on either side of Webbo, and Hottia sat to the right next to Bomba.

The new girls were as relaxed and nice as Hottia, they laughed a lot and Webbo started slowly to get less tense. They did not take life too seriously either, but were well-educated and told Webbo many interesting things about life in Flirtown.

They exchanged for what Webbo perceived to be over an hour, and he gradually got more relaxed around them.

At that point, Hottia took Webbo by the hand and stood up in front of the sofa and started to slowly dance with him.

“So, how does it feel?” she whispered in his ear.

“Absolutely great,” said Webbo, “I really enjoy this wonderful feminine presence. Actually, I think it somehow has a healing effect on me.”

“It has,” confirmed Hottia, “your computer back home is probably not able to give you all the yin energy a man needs.”

“Can’t argue with that,” he replied.

“Now it’s time to choose.”

“Choose?”

“Yes, you will need to choose one of us for tonight. So, what you need to do now is dance with each one of us for a while, and then kiss us. And you choose the one you feel most comfortable with.”

“What happens then?”

Hottia whispered in his ear, “there are private rooms at the back of the bar. You will go there with your chosen girl, and then both of you do what you feel like.”

Now Webbo was far out of his comfort zone... but he knew that that was the whole point of the training. He remembered the Grooters’ Pact and why he was here.

“I think I have understood the rules of the game,” he said, then pulled Hottia’s body closer to his, danced a little more, then started to kiss her.

A few minutes later, he took her by the hand, led her back to the sofa, and invited Bomba for a dance. She was very eager. Again, they danced for a while and started to kiss... Lastly, it was Sexya’s turn. She turned him on too, and they danced... and they kissed.

He led Sexya back to the sofa and stood in front of the three beauties.

“The moment of truth!” said Hottia.

“Not an easy choice, you are all amazing,” said Webbo. He reflected for a while, then said:

“Bomba.”

He had expected the two others to feel disappointed, but instead they felt so happy for Bomba, and helped her to stand up.

Bomba approached Webbo, gave him a kiss, then took him by the hand and led him to the private room at the back of the bar. Once they had closed the door, she rubbed her perfect silhouette against Webbo, and said:

“The great thing is that one does not need to have perfect emotional compatibility to enjoy a moment of fun... Do whatever you want with me. The more turned on you are, the more I am.”

An hour later, they went back and joined the others, who were now jumping around on the dancefloor.

The intensity of the night had taken its toll on Webbo, who was now tired and felt like going home to sleep. It was 3AM. He hugged them all, and gave a last lingering kiss to Bomba, then left the Funny B.

The next morning, Webbo woke up feeling refreshed. He looked at the clock: 9.30AM. But wait... it was still dark outside.

So, he rang Rodd.

“Brunch?”

“Good idea. Join me at the Stellar Tennis Club at the opposite side of the park from the restaurant Funny B. 10.30AM?”

“Sounds like a plan.”

He had not seen daylight since he arrived, so he asked Rodd:

“Is it always night here?”

“Yes, on this side of Dewal. I can explain more to you over the brunch.”

“Indeed, I think some explanations are needed.”

It felt strange to have brunch when it was still completely dark outside, but Webbo remembers that he had a Swedish friend from Kiruna above the Arctic Circle in northern Sweden, who had told him about the contrast between their endless winter nights and long summer days. Now he felt how it feels when the sun or at least daylight does not show up in the morning. A candle-lit brunch.

After they had gone for a first round at the copious buffet, Rodd told Webbo:

“Flirtown is situated on the shadow side of our planet, Dewal. Unlike your planet Earth, Dewal does not rotate on itself, it only rotates around our sun, Orangia. Like your Moon always shows the same side to Earth, so does Dewal to Orangia.”

“But how can the trees grow if they never get any sunlight?”

“Good question, Webbo, nature is amazing to adapt, and the trees and plants you find on the shadow side of Dewal get enough light from the triple moonlights. So, the reverberated sunlight from Dewal’s three moons, Noom, Mono and Nomo, is sufficient for the photosynthesis. That being said, all this has only been possible thanks to some plant engineering before Dewal was settled.”

“And don’t you get depressed when it is constantly dark?”

“We love this darkness and are used to it as we grew up with it. The human body can adapt to many conditions. We only need to go a few days per year to the sunny side of Dewal to charge our batteries for another year.”

“OK.”

“It’s very similar to some people on Earth who work night shifts, or various other night owls who are more active at night and sleep in most of the day, they don’t get to see much daylight even though there is daylight on offer, at an average of twelve hours per day.”

“Got it. So basically, the night side of Dewal caters for night owls, and the sunny side for morning larks. By the way, how is the sunny side?”

“The light is slightly different from what you know on Earth, it is more orange, but with a comparable brightness.”

“So, when do *day* sleep if it never gets dark?”

“The principle is very similar to your polar zones in summer. People follow the same living habits as in the rest of the world, and they sleep between midnight and 6AM, or more.”

“Yes, now that you say it, it must be very much like the polar places on Earth.”

“Except the climate.”

“The main difference lies in the fact that Dewal does not rotate, so we only need one time zone. And we could theoretically have chosen any length of our ‘day’ cycles, ten, twenty or thirty hours a “day”, but we came to the conclusion that a 24-hour period works well for us too, as it is adapted to the needed resting cycle of the human body. So, we have divided our ‘day’ into three phases: the C-phase, the F-phase, and the R-phase.”

“Which means?”

“First, the C-phase is what we call the Constructive phase, and this very much like what you call business hours. It is from eight o’clock to four in the “afternoon” on whole Dewal.”

“And the F-phase?”

“That is the Fun-phase,” continued Rodd, “or leisure time if you prefer. What makes Dewal so unique is our ability here to bend time in both directions, so the perceived time for the C-phase is only about two hours for most people, whereas the F-phase can last for up to 14 hours.”

“14-hours of fun per day! That concept would sell anytime to bored workers on Earth. And the R-phase, is that sleep?”

“Yes, that’s the Rest-phase, and it includes sleep time, but that time is shorter on the sunny side than on the shadow side of Dewal.”

“Can you bend time when you sleep as well?”

“No, and the body needs to rest. On the sunny side, people sleep on average four hours, and spend the remaining of their R-phase to take it easy, to read, meditate, relax, etc. And on our side, we need on average six hours of sleep.”

“Do you often visit the sunny side yourself?”

“I have what you would call a summer house, but we call it a ‘sun-day house’. The main difference is that that house doesn’t stay empty 90% of the time. Instead, someone lives there permanently, and then they stay in my house when I stay in theirs. Simple house-swapping. So, my place here in Flirtown is their ‘moon-day house’.

“Interesting. And how much vacation do you have here on Dewal?” asked Webbo.

“As much as we want.”

“As much as you want? What company do you work for? I’ll sign up straight away!”

“Yes, that is a concept you are not very familiar with yet, as only a handful of visionary firms on Earth proceed like that for the moment. All the others think that they get more out of their employees by controlling them.”

“But aren’t there people abusing the system, who take most of the time off then?”

“No,” said Rodd, “because people here on Dewal love the jobs they are doing. And they understand the importance of constructive work for their health and happiness.”

Webbo knew what Rodd meant by that, as he himself loved his IT job, but he had so many friends who were always complaining about how unfulfilled they were at work. He made a mental note to discuss this with Boss, whose main goal was to find solutions for job dissatisfaction.

“Now,” said Rodd, “are you ready for tonight’s event?”

“Which event?”

“Your speed dating event. That’s also part of your training, and specifically geared at helping you get a better feel for what kind of woman you are looking for. The event takes place at the Deep Satin bar at 5PM.”

“Great, that leaves me some time after our brunch. Any suggestions of things to do or see here in Flirtown?”

“Yes. A cinema. Let’s finish our brunch, then I’ll show you.”

“This was so tasty!”

They left the Stellar Tennis Club and walked a few blocks down the road.

Webbo could read 'Daynight Cinemas' at the entrance of the place Rodd was taking him to.

"So, what's on today?" he asked.

"Most of the movies that have ever been made."

"Yes, but hold on, then all customers have to agree on a film to see?"

"No, no," said Rodd, "you just choose a film before you enter, then you are assigned a seat and watch your movie there."

"With a mini-screen and headphones like in airplanes then?"

"Do you think that is satisfying technology?"

"Not really, but it is better than nothing when you are on a long-haul flight."

"But you cannot really call it cinema, can you?"

"Certainly not."

"You will see: the cinematographic experience at Daynight Cinemas is amazing."

For the purpose of trying this special cinema, Webbo chose to watch *The Return of the Jedi* from the Star Wars series. He hadn't seen it for many years and can remember that it is the kind of movie that is far more impressive to see on a big screen.

"Enjoy," said Rodd, "and let us meet at the cinema bar after the movie."

Two hours later, Webbo joined Rodd at the cinema bar.

"Wow, wow, wow!" he exclaimed, "but I still don't get it. Looking at the other people in the cinema, it was obvious that they were watching something different, as some seemed bored, others frightened, some had tears in their eyes and some were laughing. But where is the screen? I could see the film, but I could not see any screens."

"That's the trick, actually," said Rodd, "the film is projected directly onto your retina with a laser ray. So, the screen is in your eyes. And the sound comes from loudspeakers directed straight to your seat, almost like the reading light in an airplane or on a bus or train."

"It is amazing that I could only hear my movie and the guy next to me heard the sound for a totally different movie."

"That is why I wanted you to test this. And what did you think of the advertising before the film started?"

"It is as if the advertisers could read my mind: the advertising was only for products or services that I need, and tailored to my taste as well. And there was this encrypted message."

“Encrypted message?”

“Yes,” said Webbo and he showed Rodd the photo he had taken with his smart phone:

**Pwa mkzp eplj fvk Dcucyys gq Wkwxjeyils ok fjw lqwxw ph Djhvpgyiv.**

“No clue what that could be,” admitted Rodd.

“Well, I hope I will be able to decipher it together with my Grooters friends.”

Then he asked his wingman: “What shall I talk about at the speed dating event?”

“Try and let the conversation flow naturally, see if you can identify something in the girl’s outfit, or manners, or maybe just an intuition of something you want to talk to her about.”

“Yes, but that’s exactly the kind of small talk I’m not so good at...”

“Great practice then. Talking about travel is always good, or ask her what her biggest dream in life is, etc. Asking where she comes from could lead you to some topics you may have in common. Or you can broach subjects that interest you, and see if you’re on the same page. However, don’t start with details about Python or C++ coding, unless she’s a passionate coder too.”

“Noted, thanks.”

“Just call me after the event, then we can have a quick debrief,” said Rodd.

“That sounds great, I will.”

Webbo thanked him very much for his support, and went home to change and get ready for the speed dating event.

The Deep Satin bar lived up to its name, with deep blue satin sofas with blue and silver cushions, as well as satin curtains on the walls. The bar had eight two-seat sofas, clearly set up for speed-dating, with dimmed lights and candles on the tables and drinks ready.

“Welcome to Deep Satin’s monthly speed dating event, Webbo,” said an elegant woman, wearing a blue silk dress with silver jewellery. “The human version of the sofas,” thought Webbo. He liked the match.

“My name is Tina, please start by putting on this name tag.” She handed him a nice tag on which it was printed in big letters: “WEBBO”.

“The rules are easy: 8 partners. 8 minutes each. The flip of the coin gave you guys the honour tonight, so the girls will rotate at the sound of my bell. And once you’re finished, write down the names of any of them that you’d like to meet for more serious dating. If she wants to meet you too, she’ll text you.”



“Understood,” said Webbo and sat down in one of the sofas that Tina indicated to him.

Webbo felt like in heaven: his dates were all beautiful, each in their own way. On top of that, they all looked quite different from each other: two were blonde, one red-haired, two brunettes, one dark-haired Asian, and two black women.

Given that science says that most people take partner decisions within less than two minutes, the time at their disposal was very long for speed dating standards.

After eight conversations, some more interesting than others, Webbo noted three names of his favourite dates: Johanna, Valentine, and Marry.

He then left the Deep Satin bar, with the statistical hopes that at least one of his preferred girls would get in touch with him. He was aware of the much higher likelihood of getting an actual date from a speed-dating event compared to online dating.

Again, he called his wingman.

“Hi Rodd, I’m done with the speed dating event.”

“Great, let us meet at the Half Moon Café, a place just a few blocks away from the Deep Satin bar, on Nightingale Street. I can be there in half an hour.”

“Great, see you there,” responded Webbo.

Webbo arrived first and had a look around the place: except the special lighting, it was like a normal bar in any city. He liked the orange-painted walls, that gave the place a warm feeling.

Rodd stepped in a few minutes later, grabbing the attention of most female patrons. Talk about magnetic personality. “Good,” thought Webbo, “the perfect wingman who walks his talk.”

Once they had ordered a drink and sat down on the balcony on the second floor overlooking a small park, Rodd asked with great curiosity: “How was it?”

“Wonderful! It was a treat for the eyes, all the girls were beautiful in their own way.”

“But I suppose you had some favourites?”

“Yes, at the end I wrote down three names. Let us see if they contact me.”

“Well done, Webbo. Whatever the outcome, just know that this is valuable experience. What trait do you think your three favourite girls have in common?”

“That’s a very good question. They have different styles, different backgrounds, so I guess what I liked with them was their brains. I felt I could have some longer intellectual discussions with them.”

“Sounds great.”

At that moment, Webbo received a text message on his smart phone:

*“Hey Webbo, it was so nice to meet earlier tonight. Care to get to know each other better? Marry.”*

“Congratulations!” said Rodd.

Webbo was slightly panicked, though. “Yes, but what shall I do now? How do I respond to her?”

“You do what you do with dates: you ask her out for a date. Both of you must be hungry after the speed dating event, why don’t you take her out for dinner. For example, at the Night Lovers’ restaurant. Trust me, it’s a great place for a first date.”

“Second date you mean,” corrected Webbo, “but isn’t that too early, shouldn’t I wait to meet her again tomorrow?”

“Only if she prefers because she can’t make it tonight for whatever reason. All dating ‘waiting’ rules are bullshit, do what feels natural. If there is a genuine attraction between both of you, you’ll want to meet sooner rather than later. I think there is a saying in French that blacksmiths need to hit the iron while it’s hot. Same with dating.”

Following his wingman’s wise advice, Webbo wrote back:

*“Hi Marry, sure, I’d love to. Let us meet at Night Lover’s restaurant tonight at 9 o’clock.”*

*“Looking forward to, see you shortly.”* Marry replied shortly thereafter.

“Good,” continued his Rodd “and to increase the chances that your upcoming date goes well, I will order a special drink for you.”

“A special drink?” asked Webbo, remembering last time a friend of his in California had ordered a special drink for him and he had ended up very drunk.

“Yes, just wait and see.”

Rodd walked up to the bar and gave some kinds of instructions to the barmaid, flirting with her at the same time. After a minute, she started to mix something behind the bar.

She then gave the strange-looking drink to Rodd.

Back at the table, Rodd told Webbo:

“Here is the special drink that you need. It’s called BAD.”

“BAD? That doesn’t sound good. Hope it doesn’t stand for Boring And Dysfunctional.”

“No, it stands for Boost-A-Date.”

“What is in there?” asked Webbo, watching the weird pink, white and red drink, with some bubbles somehow stuck in the middle of the glass.

Rodd, very proud of what he had brought to the table, said: “In addition to all the normal ingredients of a drink, in this case grenadine, milk, vodka and soda, we have put in a few drops of *knowledgura*.”

“Know... what?”

“*Knowledgura*. It is a knowledge and information additive, in this case, we have downloaded the best information available on basic dating rules.”

“Are you making a bad boy player out of me?”

“No, don’t worry,” said Rodd, “it is more like a new positive software for your brain to overwrite the current insufficient neural wiring you have in the flirting part of your brain. To get rid of your limiting beliefs in the field of dating. You’ll see, BAD is good for you.”

“Well, I have to admit that I could need some of this stuff,” said Webbo.

He drank the whole glass in one go.

“I see that you are eager to update your flirting software,” said Rodd.

“Is there anything else you think I need to know for this date?”

“No, just dress as elegantly as you did earlier today. Marry seems to like it. Apart from that, relax and enjoy your time with her.”

“I look forward to that. So where is the restaurant?”

“It’s in the main park in the centre of Flirtown.”

“OK, I think I saw that park from the hill yesterday evening.”

As he walked through Flirtown to his night *dayte*, Webbo thought about all the creativity of the lighting they used on Dewal’s dark side, some of which reminded him of Christmas or winter lights used in northern Europe.

A few houses were framed with small lights, some had dimmed lights inside, while others only had natural cosy candle lights.

Other places, mostly commercial, had creative modern illumination, but always smooth, never aggressive, neon or blinking lights. And there were lights with different colours, and also some that changed colour slowly.

Webbo told himself that here in Flirtown people had all the night in the world to think about creative lighting solutions, and he admired how the light specialists played with light and used a lot of reflected light, which gives a wonderful effect.

At the entrance of the Night Lover restaurant there was a big mirror, and Webbo looked at himself, quite satisfied with what he saw. It felt unusual compared to his usual nerd outfit: old jeans or shorts, tee-shirt or unironed shirt and flip-flops. But it felt right.

He walked through the lounge and restaurant section to the beautiful terrace right on the small park lake. Candles everywhere, and various couples sitting at nicely decorated tables.

Webbo spotted Marry at one of the tables just next to the water. She smiled at him.

“Hi Webbo, Great to see you again!”

“Likewise Marry,” said Webbo, still a little shy, but somehow showing an unusual confidence. Maybe there was more than just placebo in the drink that Rodd gave him?

Marry was simply but elegantly dressed in a white evening gown. The only jewellery she had was a single discreet white pearl earring in each ear.

“I didn’t even get time to ask where you come from,” he told her.

“I know, in those 8 minutes we only talked about dreams and parallel dimensions. My mother is from Cameroon, and my father from South Africa.”

“*Alors tu parles français?*” asked Webbo, silently thinking that Marry was a Grooters like himself.

“*En Afrikaans.*”

“Well, maybe let us continue in English, to make sure the readers understand us.”

Marry had studied physics in Boston, where Webbo also had studied.

“What? You also lived on Shepard Street in Cambridge? It is a small world...”

“It really is,” said Webbo, then continued: “there is one thing I don’t understand... Boston is on Earth, so how on earth did you end up on another planet?”

“I am part of a science experiment in Boston where we travel to other galaxies, far, far away.”

“So how far from Earth is Dewal?”

“If you travel at the speed of light, it would take you a three billion years to travel here.”

“And how did you get here?”

“Thanks to a machine that enables us to travel at the speed of thought. It uses shortcuts through dimension to get to destination. I’m just a beta tester.”

“And how do you get back?”

“Well, our scientists are still working on that part.”

“So, you’re stuck on Dewal?”

“Worse places to be stuck. Imagine being stuck in a boring 9-to-5 job on Earth commuting for three hours a day.”

“Yes, that’s part of our Grooters’ Pact, to find solutions to unstuck people.”

“The Grooters?”

Webbo told Marry all about his Grooters friends, and the Pact they did as kids, and the reason why he is on Dewal.

“So, like you I am also part of a scientific experiment.”

“Fascinating!”

The conversation went smoothly, Marry and Webbo were really on the same wavelength. She laughed at his jokes, they found out that they had two friends in common, and liked the same wine grapes...

After the first drink and a passionate discussion, Webbo asked:

“You must be hungry now. I suggest we order a tapas plate to share.”

“Good idea, Webbo, my stomach is screaming for food!”

The delicacy was brought to them, and the evening went on as magically as it had started, so Webbo really lost track of time.

“I didn’t take my watch with me, but, let me guess, it must be around midnight by now?”

“It is only ten past ten.”

“But that is impossible, we have been sitting here for hours.”

“Remember what Rodd told you?”

“Yes, but...”

“Don’t worry about how this time bending works, not even Einstein understood this concept fully, so just do as the two white doves on that tree, and live in the moment. We have all the time in the world. That being said, if you and your Grooters friends want to succeed with your Pact, you need to better understand the relationship between time and love.”

They continued to talk for a long time. When the conversation came to a natural end, they took a stroll in the moonlit park, holding each other by the hand.

Everything felt so right, they kissed under the triple moonlight, giving Webbo the triple depth of sensations compared to the rare other times he had kissed girls in the past.

“Can it get any better than this?” he asked Marry.

“Maybe it can. Let me show you something.”

They walked through the park to a magnificent iron gate that led into the adjacent botanical gardens.

Then Webbo realised what Marry meant. All around them were incredible bioluminescent plants giving the place an exceptional feeling and luminosity.

They sat down on a bench, kissed again, this time for much longer. Then Marry told Webbo: “Congratulations, you passed Level 1.”

*That was your first DWT,” said Professor Dimenport.*

Webbo clearly remembered his dream, and like the others, he was very disappointed to get back to the yellow triangles and grey surroundings.

“Don’t worry,” said Dimenport, you will have further nice experiences in your two upcoming Dream Travels. Now, let us all take a break and then watch your dream together.”

**WEBBO MARAJ – FIRST DWT – 14.01.2018**

*Marrakech, Morocco, 15 January 2018*

The taxi chauffeur was funny and outgoing. His old sand-coloured Mercedes mini-bus took Richie, Modella, Webbo, Boss and Verity from the airport to the Medina.

Boss thought it was amazing that these cars that are over 30 years old can still run daily in countries like Morocco. But then he noticed something was different compared to last time he was in Marrakech five years ago.

He asked the driver:

“How come that the car makes so little noise?”

“Aha, you noticed that! We have added a simple water-based system that works through electrolysis to turn H<sub>2</sub>O into HHO and thus fuels the car additionally with HOD, hydrogen on demand. HOD under the hood, as we say. So not only does the old engine run smoother and get less noisy, the car also needs less petrol. In some cases, you can double your mileage.”

“Water for gas, that’s ingenious. Is that a local invention?”

“No, Mr. Internet invented it.”

“Yes, he is a great guy,” said Webbo, smiling at the other Grooters.

After having watched Webbo’s adventures in Flirtown, it had taken the Grooters several hours to decrypt the message Webbo had received in the cinema.

**Pwa mkzp eplj fvk Dcucyys gq Wkwxjeyils ok fjw lqwxw ph Djhvpgyiv.**

As some of the readers will soon notice, the deciphering was not quite as straightforward as one could have thought from the key in the Australian letter. But the combined Grooters’ brainpower was finally able to solve it:

**You will find the Crystal of Creativity in the souks of Marrakech.**

Boss, who knew Marrakesh quite well, said:

“Finding a crystal in the souks is almost like searching for a needle in a haystack.”

“So, what do you suggest we do?” asked Verity.

“Let us just fly to Marrakech and see what comes up. You have to trust your guiding star and be confident that you will find what you are looking for,” said the entrepreneur who had had to solve some other ‘impossible’ questions in his career. And to remind him that nothing was impossible, Boss had bought a *Maurice Lacroix* watch with a square cogwheel.

So, once again, The Grooters had entrusted the *Dreamcockpit* to the Professor and had boarded *Lady Globalia* for the three-hour flight to Marrakech.

Leo, who was allergic to queues, customs and security checks, had decided to join them directly at La Mamounia, where Richie had organized rooms for all of them. Actually, Leo hadn’t even bothered to renew his passport in the last fifteen years. He could travel anyway.

The Mamounia hotel is conveniently located just within the city walls of the Marrakech Medina, its old town. It is walking distance to the souks.

After a quick check-in, all the Grooters congregated in the magnificent hotel gardens where Churchill used to chill out and paint the beautiful contrasted landscapes of the region.

“OK, let us start our brainstorm,” said Boss.

A waiter, who had overheard the start of the conversation, asked the Grooters:

“Maybe you want to try our very special *Creativitea*?”

“Yes, please,” said Leo, “I think we will need some.”

“I think we can even call this a ‘crazy’ brainstorm,” said Webbo, “as our chances of finding an old crystal in the souks of Marrakech are very slim.”

“Yes, but that is what makes the task so interesting,” said Richie. “Do you think Kennedy knew exactly how to put a man on the moon when he first announced it in 1961?”

“Certainly not,” said Richie, “and compared to that, what we are aiming at is kindergarten play.”

“Yes, but we are only six people to play, not four hundred thousand on the project...” remarked Verity, who once again illuminated the audience with her factual precision and critical thinking.

“Good,” said Boss, “any initial ideas?”

“We could start and ask all the shopkeepers if they have heard of the Crystal of Creativity,” suggested Modella.

“I would not ask around in such an obvious way. Walls have ears and doors have eyes. If the crystal was hidden over a hundred years ago like the one in Sydney, then maybe we should focus on the shops that have been around for a long time.”

“Good idea, Boss,” continued Leo, “but how do we find out which places have been around for so long?”

“We just need to get hold of someone who knows the souks very well,” said Richie.



“You are right,” said Webbo, “we need to tap into the power of local knowledge. Let me call Nafissa, a Moroccan girl from Marrakech that I know from my studies in Boston. She moved back here recently.”

After the call he said:

“Great, she happened to have a day off work. I will meet her in an hour at the *Grand Café de la Poste* in the New City.”

The café where he met Nafissa had a wonderful relaxing interior, a mix of local and western lounge style.

Webbo hadn't seen Nafissa for over eight years, and he thought it was great that she had moved back to Morocco after fifteen years of very valuable life experience in the United States that she could enrich her home country with.

They first caught up with some news about common friends. After that, Nafissa told him many interesting anecdotes about Marrakech and Morocco. Then Webbo asked her about the souks and if she was informed about anyone who knew the souks and their history very well.

“You should definitively talk to my uncle, Othman, who is a carpet merchant in the souks. I'll call him straight away.”

Nafissa talked to her uncle in Arabic for a while, then hung up and gave Webbo a shop name and an address.

“He is waiting for you. With a surprise.”

“Thank you so much for your help, Nafissa. It was so nice to see you again!”

“You are welcome, Webbo. Good luck with your endeavours and don't hesitate to call me if you have any further questions.”

The clever reader would now ask why Webbo did not just locate the crystal with his remote viewing abilities. First of all, he doesn't know exactly what the crystal looks like, and secondly the issue here is the same as with Leo's teleportation abilities: the crystal itself seems to cancel out the Grooters' unique powers.

So even Richie's capacity to see into the future is useless when it comes to locating the crystals.

They reckoned that the mastermind behind the Crystallica knew that some dark forces had similar capabilities to the Grooters, and was aware of the importance preventing those forces from getting hold of the crystals, while at the same time making it feasible for people with good intentions to find them.

The great thing was that the more crystals the Grooters would find, the bigger a shield the growing Crystallica would create, protecting them from malevolent forces.

Webbo took a cab back to the Medina and called Boss to ask if he, Verity and Modella could join him at the *Café de France* on the *Jemaa El Fna* place close to the entrance of the souks.

The *Jemaa El Fna* place is what UNESCO considers a ‘*Masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity*’ where tourists and locals alike are able to enjoy snake charmers, monkey trainers, fortune tellers, tooth pullers and various other entertainers next to orange juice and aromatic food stalls.

The sun had just set and they found a great spot on the terrace of the café, overlooking the night markets of the place. Webbo told them about his meeting with Nafissa.

“And you? Have you come up with something on your side?” he asked them.

“I tried to contact the spirits...” said Modella.

“And?”

“The only clear message that I received was: ‘storytellers’, and I am not sure what that is supposed to mean.”

“I photo read a guide to Marrakech at the airport in Geneva before we left,” said Verity, “and they mentioned storytellers that regularly come and entertain the public on the place *Jemaa El Fna*. Storytelling is a tradition in Morocco that is older than the Atlas Mountains. Apparently, there are only a handful of them left in Marrakech, most of them very old men.”

“That sounds very interesting, almost mystical,” said Modella.

“As you speak Arabic, Verity,” said Webbo, “I suggest that you and Modella try and find out if there will be any storytellers around the place tonight. And Boss and I will go to the carpet merchant.”

“Sounds good,” said Verity, “just text me when you are done then we can meet up again somewhere around the place.”

“I did not know you spoke Arabic,” said Modella turning to Verity.

In the spring of 1995, Verity’s father, who had been a French ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva for six years, was offered an opportunity to work at the French embassy in Moscow, so the whole family moved there with him.

He did not really like his job and colleagues there, so the Blesse family moved on two years later to Cairo where another opportunity had opened up for him.

In either location, Verity Amore Blesse had needed only three to four months to master the local language. Thus, next to the Japanese she had learned from her mother, the French from Paris and Geneva and some Cantonese from her father, and English from school, Verity also spoke fluent Russian and Arabic before the age of 18.

Languages fascinated Verity and her photographic memory made language learning as easy for her as it was difficult for the average reader.

In Cairo, Verity took the opportunity to learn hieroglyphs as well and had some summer jobs showing tourists around Luxor and translating the texts on the buildings for them. She stunned more than a few visitors, sharing some still unknown facts about Egypt's pharaonic past.

After her international baccalaureate in Cairo, Verity decided to go and study Mandarin and librarianship in Singapore. There she had an Indian boyfriend for a while, adding Hindi to her list. And suddenly she was mastering seven world languages, allowing her to communicate with a few billion people.

Needless to say, Verity started to feel at home in many places – and even though she liked to enhance her Asian heritage, especially in the way she dressed, she was the ultimate Grooters, a kid with global roots, or *Third Culture Kid*, as one anthropologist would call the 'prototype citizens of the future'.

Boss and Webbo headed for the souks and had to ask five times before they finally found their way through the maze to Othman's carpet shop.

"*Bonsoir*," said Webbo entering the shop, "*nous cherchons Othman*."

"That's me, said the middle-aged man behind the counter. So, you are Nafissa's friend from America?"

"Yes, my name is Webbo, and this is my friend Boss from Switzerland."

"Nafissa told me that you wanted to know more about the history of the souks."

"Indeed," answered Webbo, "it is for a research project we work on."

"Please have a seat and I will tell you what I know over a sweet mint tea."

"Thank you very much, we look forward to hear your story," said Webbo.

"Since its founding around a thousand years ago, Marrakech has been trading with the Africans from the south and with the Spaniards from the north, many of whom also came by sea. Over the centuries, the *souk* markets grew and are now offering many classic Moroccan products like leather slippers, dyed wool, lanterns and other ironworks, jewellery, carpets, pottery, woodworks, argan oil."

"Are there many shops that are over a hundred years old?" asked Boss.

"Only a handful actually: I think there are two antiquaries, one woodworks shop, a Berber pharmacy and a pottery shop that can claim to have belonged to the same family for over a century. All other shops have changed owners in the meantime."

Webbo thought for a moment: If he wanted to hide a crystal for a long time, what kind of shop would he choose? The conclusion that made the most sense was an antiquity shop. So, he asked Othman:

"Maybe you have the names and addresses of the two antiquity shops?"

“I will write them down for you.”

“*Merci beaucoup!*” said Webbo.

“But before you leave, there is something I want to show you.”

Othman closed the shop, pulled down the curtain, and told Webbo and Boss to follow him. They went through a backroom, then out into a small courtyard that seemed to belong only to the carpet shop.

“I can feel that you are not the average tourists,” said Othman, “I have been a carpet merchant for over 35 years and have travelled far and wide throughout North Africa, the Middle-East, India and Central Asia to find the best carpets in the world to sell to my clients.”

“Yes, we saw many beautiful carpets in your shop,” said Boss.

“Thank you, but there is one very special carpet I wanted to show you. If you could just help me to carry it out, please.”

“Of course,” said Webbo.

He showed them a fairly big, but at first sight unpretentious carpet, rolled up and standing behind many other carpets against the wall of the courtyard. They brought it forward and helped Othman to roll it out.

Suddenly, something magical happened: the carpet started to hover at maybe half a meter above the ground.

“So, the legend is true,” said Boss in amazement, obviously impressed.

“Yes, it is,” confirmed Othman, “do you want to try it?”

“Of course!” exclaimed Webbo.

“Good. It is night time now, so we can fly without catching too much attention. Please board Othman Airlines.”

The three of them sat down on the carpet, Othman said something in Arabic and gave a slight touch to the front of the carpet and they lifted up in the air.

“Where do you want to go?”

“Maybe you can suggest some place? How fast does it fly?”

“There are actually two gears, one for gentle flying, that we use for take-offs, landings and short trips, and the *CODE* gear, for *Carpet Over Drive*, for longer distances. Shall we take a quick tour to Essaouira?”

“But wait, that is on the coast at almost 200km from Marrakech, isn’t it?”

“Yes, that is correct.”

Suddenly, things started to move very fast. Boss reckoned Othman had just switched into *CODE* gear. Strangely enough, they were not blown off the carpet by the speed. Instead, the laws of physics, as Boss and Webbo knew them, were totally thrown overboard. It was as if they were travelling in some kind of bubble. They could not even feel the acceleration.

♪ *Morocco – DNDM*

Ten minutes later, the carpet slowed down and they could see the lights of the coastal city. They landed on a rooftop.

“Welcome to Essaouira. The local time is 18.18 and the outside temperature is 18°C. Please remain seated until the carpet has come to a full stop.”

Once he had finished his formal message, Othman continued: “This is my second residency where I often come to get some fresh ocean air, especially in the middle of summer.”

They rolled up the carpet, walked down the staircase of the house, and went strolling around the streets of Mogador, as Essaouira is often also called.

The place was much calmer than Marrakech, and Boss and Webbo could clearly smell the ocean air and hear the seagulls. They both took some photos to make sure the other Grooters would believe their story when they came back.

“Let us have some grilled seafood,” said Othman.

After the ocean eatery, Boss sent a teasing text message to the girls:

*“Slight sea breeze. Delicious grilled seafood. Seagulls hovering over us in the night sky.  
From Essaouira with love, Boss & Webbo.*

*P.S.: Let us meet next to the calèches in half an hour.”*

Soon thereafter, they took off from Essaouira again and were shortly back in the middle of the souks in Marrakech.

“Thank you so much,” said Webbo.

“You are very welcome,” responded Othman.

Before they left, Boss couldn’t help but asking:

“Do you have many of these carpets? Could we eventually buy one?”

“As far as I know, it is the only surviving specimen in the whole of North Africa. Most of them were destroyed before the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This carpet has an invaluable cultural heritage.”

“I understand,” said Boss.

“But... you can borrow it under one condition.”

“What would that be?”

“That you take the carpet to a modern research lab and do your best to reverse-engineer its technology.”

“So even you do not know what makes it fly?”

“The only thing we know from some ancient scriptures is that the difference with normal carpets probably lies in the dyeing process. First, the artisans prepared special clay from mountain springs that had to be heated to big temperatures in Greek oil. This process gave the clay anti-magnetic properties and then the wool was dyed in it before it was woven like a normal carpet on a loom.”

“Very interesting,” said Boss.

“Now your task will be to find out the exact preparation of this anti-magnetic *play*. And to understand if other factors come into *clay* as well.”

“Sounds like a worthwhile challenge,” said Boss again, thinking of his inventor friend Leo.

Othman continued: “What you also need to know is that, like the acupuncture meridians in the human body, there are similar magnetic lines in the Earth. The Asians call them *feng shui* lines. In the west, they are known as *ley lines* and the builders of churches and cathedrals knew very well how to place their architectural masterpieces on these lines. And the strategic location of these lines is one of the reasons you often feel an unexplainable sense of peacefulness in these buildings. Especially in churches or mosques or synagogues that are located on the intersection of two such lines.”

“Wow...” said Webbo.

“I am quite sure the propulsion system of the flying carpet uses these magnetic lines, like invisible rail tracks in the sky.”

“Can you have the carpet delivered to the Mamounia hotel? My last name is Pibolodari. How can we thank you?” asked Boss.

“Of course, we’ll deliver it. The only way you can thank me is by finding out how we can rebuild this cultural heritage technology.”

The first thing Modella asked when they met up was:

“What have you guys been smoking?”

“A very powerful mix of opium herbs and hallucinogenic mushrooms smoked through a water pipe. Why?” joked Webbo, but then showed them the photos from Essaouira.

“But how is that possible?” asked Verity, perfectly aware of how far Mogador was from Marrakesh. “Did Leo teach you how to teleport?”

“No, we just rode a flying carpet to the coast,” said Boss as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“What? Repeat that again. A flying carpet? How does it fly?”

“We hope to find out that one day. We’ll show you the carpet tomorrow.”

“Did you buy it?”

“No, but we were able to borrow it for a scientific study. How about you, have you found any storytellers?”

“Yes,” said Verity, “there are only two of them left in Marrakech, but one comes almost every evening around 8.30.”

“That’s soon, let us go and see him,” said Boss.

The four Grooters strolled the short distance to where the storyteller had already started to gather a crowd. None of them except Verity understood anything of what the storyteller was saying, but they certainly noticed his ability to captivate the audience and saw how Verity was as focused on the story as all the locals that were also standing around the storyteller.

When the storyteller was done, Verity told the others:

“Wow, this is an amazing story. And the old man really masters the art of storytelling. I can’t wait to hear how it finishes.”

“How it finishes?” asked Webbo.

“Yes, he will tell us how the story ends tomorrow evening.”

“Did you get any clues that would help us find the crystal?”

“Yes, the whole story was about a crystal, and tomorrow he will let us know where the crystal was hidden and what happened after that.”

“Maybe you could summarize the story for us, Verity?” asked Modella, eager to hear more.

“Yes, I will tell it to you over dinner so that Leo and Richie can also hear it. Let us go back to the hotel now.”

At the dinner table, Verity told the Grooters:

“OK, I will do my best to tell you the story, but please excuse my amateur storytelling.”

“Just go for it, tell us a fable,” said Richie.

“*A long long time ago*, in a land far far away, there was a young merchant travelling through the desert. One day, he arrived at a fortified city where he found a strange object in an old shop. It seemed like some dusty old crystal that had a bizarre but unique shape. It looked like what future generations would recognise as a lightbulb except it was fully in white transparent crystal and had a square instead of round shape. It was a unique piece of art that could only have been chiselled with true creativity.

“The merchant asked the shopkeeper about the stone, and he said that it was a magical crystal which gave the owner tremendous creative powers, if he used it for the benefit of mankind.

“But there is one thing you need to know,” said the shopkeeper, “you have to make sure that this Crystal of Creativity never lands in the hands of ill-intentioned people. That could lead to generations of calamities not only for your family, but for the whole world.”

“That being said, the young merchant bought the crystal, and started heading back to his home country. The long journey gave him time to think and he came to the conclusion that he wanted to build something that would last beyond his lifetime. So, he decided to sell his camels and take up architecture studies. His teachers were amazed by his creative solutions to some longstanding architectural headaches.”

“The young man grew to become one of the most famous architects of his time and built many wonderfully creative and beautiful buildings, not only in his home country, but also in many neighbouring lands.

“Just after his studies, he met the girl of his dreams, far more beautiful than any building he would ever construct. They had several children and lived happily until old age. A few months after his wife had died, he felt that his time was coming too, and needed to pass on the crystal.

“Unfortunately, the times were getting darker in his homeland and he was not able to find anyone with such purity of heart that he felt he could entrust them with the crystal. Not even his own children. So, he decided to hide the crystal instead.”

“And where did he hide it?” asked Leo.

“That, the storyteller will let us know tomorrow.”

“That gives us an extra day to enjoy Marrakech,” added Richie.

“Or we could go skiing in the Haut Atlas? It is the right season,” suggested Modella.

“Great idea!” said the others.

### Marrakech, Morocco, 16 January 2018

The morning after, they were woken up by the Medina’s loudspeakers.

The snow conditions in the Haut-Atlas may not have been the best they had ever had, but the feeling of skiing on the African continent, and the views over the arid landscapes below were indescribable.

Later that evening, after the storyteller had finished his tale, Verity translated it to the Grooters.

“So, the old architect bought a simple clay jug and built in a double bottom under which he hid the crystal. He then asked a good-hearted antiquary in town, Sami Ben Youssef, to keep it at the back of his shop until the day someone would come and specifically ask for it.



“The old man had earned a lot of money from his lifetime architect work and thus told Sami: “Here is some money to keep your shop going for another ten years. I have instructed my notary firm to come by every ten years and pay you as long as the jug is in your shop. Don’t put it out for sale, just keep it at the back of the shop.”

“I will do that,” said Sami, happy that his family shop would survive despite difficult economic times.

“The decades went by, Sami died, his son took over, then one day the son died, and Sami’s grandson followed. After that, his great-grandson...”

“Nobody found the crystal?” asked Modella.

“The story ends like this: “Many, many years later, a beautiful young lady with blonde hair and brown eyes would come from far away to ask for the jug. Some people thought she was the reincarnation of Saint Lucy. She would find the crystal as expected and unleash a new age of creativity into the world.”

“Beautiful story,” said Leo.

Boss took out from his pocket the note that Othman had given him: one of the addresses he had written down was: “*Famille BenYoussef – Antiquaires – the Kissaria*”.

He could not believe his eyes.

“Looks like the pieces of the puzzle start to come together,” he said, passing around the note to the other Grooters.

“It seems like Modella will have the honour of going to pick up the jug,” he continued.

“Maybe Richie can come with me in case it is heavy to carry?”

“Of course,” replied Richie.

“But it is getting late,” said Verity, “I think we need to wait until tomorrow morning before we go there. The shop has most probably already closed.”

They went for a late dinner in a well-known local restaurant where they enjoyed succulent couscous and tajine with some delicious bottled poetry from the Meknès region. And then they went to bed fairly early, tired from the skiing.

### Marrakech, Morocco, 17 January 2018

The antiquary was located in a tiny street towards the back of the souks, where far less tourists found their way. Modella entered the shop, with Richie staying a step behind her.

“*Je cherche Monsieur BenYoussef,*” she said.

“*C’est moi,*” said an old man sitting in a corner dusting off some old metallic artifact. There was no one else in the shop.

“Did you have an ancestor, *Sami BenYoussef*, who also ran this shop?”

“Yes, the father of my great-grandfather. How do you know that?”

“I have come to pick up the old jug your family has been keeping in your shop since Sami’s time.”

Ben Youssef’s reaction was a mix of surprise, then relief, then curiosity. He clearly knew what she was talking about.

“Ah, yes, I had almost forgotten about it. Just a moment, I will bring it forth. Hope you don’t mind some dust.”

The old man left for the adjacent room and came back a few minutes later with an old black clay jug.

“Sorry it took so long, the jug was hidden behind many other antiques and was fairly difficult to reach.”

“So how do we know it is the right one?” Richie whispered in Modella’s ear.

“Try and visualize the near future when we will extract the crystal from it,” answered Verity.

“Strange, I cannot do it, everything seems fuzzy.”

“That’s your proof that this is what we are looking for.”

They could feel that Mr. BenYoussef was a good man.

“What you and your family has done is probably invaluable,” said Modella, “When the time is right, we will let you know the secret behind the jug. In the meantime, we have a big task ahead of us.”

“I understand,” said the old man.

Then Richie added: “As the notary will see that the jug is gone next time he comes by, please accept a small contribution that should keep you and your family going for a while. Again, thank you so much for your tremendous help.”

Back at the Mamounia, they all met in Richie’s suite and were able to punch through the double bottom of the jug fairly easily to find another wonderful crystal, enrobed in leather skin on which it was written on the inside in Arabic:

**May the Crystal of Creativity help you make the world a better place.**

And yes, the crystal had indeed a very creative form, a shape that none of them had ever seen before.

For the occasion, Richie ordered in a bottle of *1998 Louis Roederer Cristal* Champagne.

The Grooters celebrated their second victory but were very well aware that the journey would still be long until they had gathered all crystals.

Then someone knocked at the hotel room door. Boss opened the door.

“*Une livraison pour Monsieur Pibolodari.*”

“*Oui, c’est moi,*” said Boss, gave the delivery man some money and took the carpet.

Boss brought the carpet to the middle of the suite lounge.

“I thought you were joking regarding that carpet,” said Modella.

Webbo and Boss unfolded the carpet, and swoosh, it started to hover in the air, like at Othman’s shop.

“This is so cool, said Verity, and the other Grooters were clearly amazed too. Verity and Modella jumped up on the carpet, and had their drink there.

After the celebrations, Boss told the others: “Time to head back to Geneva.”

“I’ll have *Lady Globalia* ready for take-off within the next hour,” said Richie.

“And I will do some more sight-seeing here in Marrakech and join you guys in Geneva tonight,” said Leo.

The other Grooters looked at him with a slight hint of jealousy – even if they were travelling in style, what an advantage it was to just be able to teleport back instantaneously.

With carpet and jug – Modella wanted to keep the latter as a souvenir – the teleportation-challenged Grooters headed for the airport in two other desert-coloured taxis.

## Part 13            Bridge

Geneva, Switzerland, 17 January 2018

Later in the evening, when they came back to the Pibolodari house in Geneva, Boss had a strange feeling... Something was not right.

They searched the house and quickly realised: the professor was gone.

Boss tried to call him. No answer.

What had happened?

“What do we do now?” he asked the other Grooters. “Webbo?”

“Sorry, can’t locate him, that’s very strange,” replied Webbo.

Then Boss got an email. He read it out loud.

*From: hwmywfct@hotmail.com*

*Subject: The Professor*

*Date: 17 January 2018 at 20.06*

*To: bosspibolodari@gmail.com*

*Dear Boss,*

*The powers-to-be want me to let you know that they have taken Professor Dimenport to a secure place. He will be released if you pass the following test.*

*One of you Grooters needs to slackline between the towers of a suspension bridge in operation. The span between the towers needs to be at least one kilometre.*

*Film it and send it to me. No special effects.*

*Deadline: a fortnight from now: 31 January 2018, at midnight Geneva time.*

*Heidi.*

“I told you we couldn’t trust Heidi,” said Leo to Boss.

“Don’t shoot the messenger.”

“So, they’ve been watching us all the time, you think?” asked Modella.

“Unfortunately, it seems like other people have Webbo’s remote viewing powers too,” said Richie.

“And they must have some black power magic to hide him so that I cannot locate him,” said Webbo.

“Yes, we have to admit that fact,” said Verity.

“So, what do you guys suggest that we do now?” asked Webbo.

“If we do not find the professor, I might still be able to run the *Dream World Teleporter* alone, he showed me how to operate it, it is fairly simple,” said Leo who had just arrived from Marrakech through his wormhole.

Boss took over: “Let us all brainstorm tomorrow morning. It’s getting late, let us have a quick dinner now and go early to bed.”

“Good idea, Boss.” said the other Grooters.

Geneva, Switzerland, 18 January 2018

The morning after, they all stayed at the breakfast table to brainstorm ideas that could somehow lead to finding the professor.

Boss said: “I see three possible ways of tackling this situation. First, ignore the challenge, and see if we can find the professor anyway. Second, ignore the challenge and forget about the professor. And third, raise up to the challenge.”

“The first two are not optimal,” said Modella.

“I agree,” said Leo who had learnt so much from the professor.

“Me too,” said Webbo and Richie simultaneously.

“Yes,” said Verity, “I’d say the challenge is not easy, but it still feels feasible.”

“I like challenges,” said Richie.

Boss took over again: “So we all agree on the challenge?”

“Yes,” confirmed the others.

“OK, so we need do the slacklining between the two main towers of a suspension bridge.”

“Then let’s find the shortest bridge possible,” said Modella.

“Except that the message states that we must choose a bridge with at least 1,000 meters main span.”

“Which narrows our choice,” said Verity.

“Yes,” said Webbo, who was the quickest to find the information online, “only about 30 bridges worldwide qualify. Most of them are in China.”

“How nice to give us such a large choice,” said Richie ironically.

“That’s it?” asked Boss, “Was there something more in the message?”

“No, just that we can’t use any Hollywood special effects. No cheating in other words,” added Boss and showed the others Heidi’s message again.

None of the Grooters knew what to say. After a while, Boss continued:

“OK, let’s dissect the problem. The first problem of the problem, or sub-problem if you prefer, is to decide which bridge to choose. Then comes the problem of getting the slack line up there. After that, the third sub-problem is that this kind of procedure is most likely illegal in most countries and that the police would stop us before we’d even started.”

“Yes, and here my money won’t help,” said Richie, “because it’s a question of public safety, as most of these kinds of bridges have 24-hour traffic on them with plenty of security cameras and they don’t want any circus going on above the bridge.”

“I hope your list is not much longer than that,” said Verity.

“The fourth sub-problem is who of us will do it? Anyone done slacklining before?”

“I’ve tried it a few times,” said Leo, “it’s not easy to master.”

“Lastly, these kinds of acrobatics can draw unwanted attention to us, something we don’t want.”

“Are you done now?” asked Verity.

“And even if we succeed, the police will arrest us when we reach the second bridge tower. Or at least once we climb down from it. Like they did with Philippe Petit when he had a go walking between the northern towers of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1973.”

“And after he walked between the Twin Towers in New York the year after,” added Verity.

“And they certainly arrested the crazy Kiwi who bungee jumped from the Eiffel Tower in the 1980s.”

“Why do Heidi’s guys do this?”

“I guess they want us to come out of our hiding,” said Richie, “it will make it easier for them to hunt us down or at least delay our Pact.”

“Don’t you think there’s more to it than that?” asked Verity.

“You’re right, they may want us to get arrested so that we don’t annoy them any longer.”

“Wait,” said Leo, “I also see this as some kind of test to overcome our fears. Because these guys represent fear. So, overcoming our fears means beating them.”

“Isn’t it strange that they would put us in situations that would help us beat them?” wondered Modella.

“Maybe that’s the elusive name of his game?” said Boss.

Then he summarized all their problems on the flipchart.

Number	Problem description	Solution
1	Choice of bridge	
2	Who of the Grooters will do it	
3	Lack of experience	
4	How to get up the slackline between the towers	
5	Unwanted attention	
6	High risk of being arrested	

Then Leo intervened: “Out of all the problems that have been listed, I can lighten the burden a little by telling you that one of the sub-problems has been resolved.”

“What? Which one?” asked Modella.

“I volunteer. For three reasons. The first one is that I already have a little slacklining experience. Second, if I were to fall, I can easily teleport back home instead of dying.”

“Thank you, Leo,” said the other Grooters, “and the third reason?”

“The third reason is that my great-grandfather was a Mohawk from the Kahnawake reservation near Montréal and I have inherited something he hadn’t.”

“What kind of cryptic formulation is that, Leo? Please explain,” asked Boss.

“The thing my great-grandfather didn’t have, like many other Mohawks, was a fear of heights. He helped build the first skyscrapers in New York City. This asset is also very useful for teleporters like me, as I often land on top of high buildings. And it can certainly be useful for someone who plans to slackline over a suspension bridge.”

“Montréal, you said, isn’t that where the *Cirque du Soleil* comes from?” asked Richie, thinking about Goldilock’s performance he saw in Las Vegas with Webbo. Many of those artists clearly have no fear of heights either.

“Yes, do you think it’s a typical québécois thing, not to fear heights?”

“Maybe.”

“Good,” said Boss, “are we all OK that Leo is going to do it?”

The other Grooters nodded and Boss wrote Leo’s name on the board.

“Next thing,” Boss continued, “is sub-problem number three: Leo still needs to improve his slacklining skills. My best suggestion is that he gets in touch with the local slackline club here in Geneva to ask them to teach him.”

“Good idea,” said Leo, “and I am sure they can give us some tips on how to extend the line between the towers as well. Verity, could you scan the Internet for knowledge about slacklining and even high wire walking and give me a briefing before I get in touch with the professional slackliners? So that I know what to ask them. Thanks.”

“Sure, will do that straight away,” said Verity and opened her laptop.

“OK,” said Boss, “so problems three and four are in progress. Now let’s focus on problem number one, the choice of bridge.”

“I guess that choice will be linked to the remaining problems of illegality and drawing attention?” asked Modella.

“It certainly will,” said Boss, “so let’s list the important factors that come into play for the choice of a bridge.”

“Politics,” said Richie, “so what countries are those thirty bridges in?”

Webbo pulled up the list of the world’s longest suspension bridges on his laptop, and said: “Japan, China, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, United States, Turkey, and the UK. As well as Portugal and South Korea.”

“But we shouldn’t go for the longest ones, I suppose?” said Modella.

“Good point,” said Boss, “let’s eliminate the ten longest ones which leaves us the bridges spanning between 1,000 and 1,400 meters.”

“The shorter, the better, no?” asked Webbo.

“Not necessarily,” said Boss, “let’s look at the other factors coming into play.”

“Population density?” wondered Modella.

“Yes, so the New York or Istanbul bridges are certainly not optimal. Neither is Lisbon or San Francisco... or most of the Asian bridges by the way... which leaves us with Scandinavia.”

“The Hardanger Bridge in Norway is on the road that links the country’s two biggest cities, Oslo and Bergen...” said Webbo.

“And what about the one in Sweden?”

“Probably it’s the one with the least traffic if we avoid the summer months.”

“It is not summer now.”

“Aren’t these bridges a little too close to the Arctic circle?” said Leo who had become accustomed to the Sydney climate, “Ideally, I wouldn’t want to have to fight the cold as well as all other difficulties of the task.”

“And you probably don’t want the weather to be too hot either? Which leaves out many Asian bridges,” said Richie.

“Nor too much wind...” added Modella.

“Yes. So, if we want bridges without cold or too much humidity, we’re basically down to two bridges: the *25 de Abril Bridge* in Lisbon, and the *Golden Gate Bridge* in San Francisco. The Portuguese bridge has the non-negligible advantage of being 250 meters shorter. And it’s closer, it’s here in Europe which would spare us some jet-lag.”

“So, we’re set then?” asked Leo.



“Wait,” said Webbo, “remember that I live in San Francisco.”

“And?”

“And if we think a little out-of-the-box, then the Golden Gate Bridge may have a tremendous advantage, especially for the last three problems.”

“What would that be?” wondered Modella.

“The fog.”

“Isn’t that rather a disadvantage?”

“Not when you want to extend a slackline between the towers, remaining unnoticed.”

“You’re a genius, Webbo!” exclaimed Boss, “This may actually be our most optimal solution. If we catch a day when the fog is in and at least covers the top of the bridge towers, then we could extend the line incognito. Webbo, you would still have to disable any potential security cameras and radars.”

“No problem.”

“And I can make sure that we gather all the technology necessary to get the line up there – problem number four,” said Richie, “I suggest we use my electrical helicopter, *Elhelia*.”

“Great,” said Leo, “and I’ll ask the slackline professionals about the best gear they recommend.”

“OK,” said Modella, “but you can’t walk in the fog, can you? We must film it, remember? And when the fog clears, we’ll be news all over the world.”

“If we’re extremely lucky with the weather conditions, it could work,” said Webbo.

“What do you mean?” asked Boss.

“Sometimes the fog is quite low and covers the whole Bay area except the top of the bridge towers.”

“Let’s then just decide to be lucky,” said Boss.

“I’ll throw in a possible joker,” said Richie, “my scientists are experimenting with new technology to control micro-climates and there is a chance that they can help clear some of the fog if necessary, by pushing it down by cooling the ambient air.”

“It would be amazing if that worked,” said Leo, “could it work the other way around as well? In case there is no fog at all?”

“It should,” said Richie.

Then Verity came back, having read a few thousand pages about slacklining.

“Leo, what you’ll be attempting is called *highlining*, which is like slacklining, except that it’s very high above ground. Normally, it’s done in the mountains or sometimes over rivers or between high buildings.”

“And what’s the distance world record for highlining?” asked Boss.

“About 1.6km.”

“And how long is the Golden Gate Bridge between its towers?”

“1.280km”

“So, we won’t get into the Guinness Book of Records.”

“The only record we want is the one we send to Heidi. Not to the public. So that we get the least attention possible all the while we save Professor Dimenport.”

“This is crazy!” said Modella.

“Yes, but we’ll need something to tell our grandchildren one day,” said Richie, unaware that that sentence triggered something within Modella.

“Verity,” said Boss, “did you read something about how long it takes to learn?”

“Yes, and the good news is that it is fairly easy to reach an acceptable level. The more well-trained you already are, the better.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem,” said Leo, “I surf regularly.”

“Yes, but there is also a mental focus that is required, which may sometimes be quite tricky to learn.”

“I hope that my Mohawk genes will be helpful,” said Leo.

“They certainly will,” said Boss, “so you see, within a couple of hours we’ve turned an impossible task into a potentially manageable project.”

“Yes, our combined Grooters’ powers make tasks like this easier, but still far from easy,” said Verity.

“So, we’ll send you to a slack line course straight away,” said Boss to Leo. “Actually, I suggest you find a teacher in the Bay Area, so that you’re in the same time zone and climate.”

“Good idea, Boss,” responded Leo, “but before that I’ll need to teach you guys how to operate the Dream World Teleporter machine first, so that you guys can continue the travels while I train funambulism.”

“That’s actually a very good point,” said Boss, “let’s all get down in the basement then.”

Leo briefed the others on the functioning of Professor Dimenport’s machine. It was much easier than what they would have thought, especially for Webbo with his technical competencies.

San Francisco, United States, 18 January 2018

That same afternoon Leo teleported to California, and got hold of a professional slackliner who was able to help him consolidate his latent slacklining skills. He did not mention his reason for learning, more than the true fact that he wanted to work on his fears and courage.

Even if he was already fit, new muscles came into play so it hurt quite a bit during the first few days of training. But the initial progress was quick, which was very encouraging.

After seven days of training, he could confidently walk a short line of about 50 meters. Thanks to his good progress, at the start of the second week, the teacher took him to train longer distance highlining in the Mt. Diablo mountain range, just east of Oakland.

Webbo had looked up the weather statistics and weather forecasts for San Francisco and the other Grooters agreed to get there a week before the deadline – an appropriate word for the circumstances – to get a fairly high chance of catching the world-famous Bay Area fog.

The date approached and the other Grooters arrived in San Francisco. Richie had organized all the technology stuff needed to extend the line and to film Leo during his crossing which was expected to take at least two hours.

He had also booked hotel rooms in Sausalito, which would be their temporary headquarters.

They had come to realise that the advantage of fog is that it is almost never associated with any strong winds, which is a clear advantage when it comes to funambulism.

The first four days of the last week did not offer the optimal weather conditions they needed. They reckoned that if the weather didn't play its role, then they would need to do the operation in full sight on the last day of the deadline, unless Richie's researchers could come up with a last-minute solution to create artificial fog.

They thought it would work on the fifth day, but an unexpected wind cleared the fog very early.

On the sixth day, however, the fog moved in, and stayed. It was a race against the clock because the fog sometimes clears before noon. Which gave them less than seven hours for the whole operation.

*Elhelia* lifted Boss and Webbo up to the northern tower of the bridge. Fortunately, the helicopter was equipped with very sensitive radars linked to screen-goggles so that the pilot could see everything as if there wasn't any fog.

Boss jumped off on the tower, secured the line as well as the usual backup line for additional security.

Then the helicopter flew over to the southern tower and this time Webbo went off to secure the other end of the line. They had rehearsed this procedure twice in the mountains the days before and knew exactly how hard the line needed to be stretched.

Now they just had to wait for the fog to clear. But leaving that to chance, in the hope that the fog would just lower and not dissipate or move away completely from the bridge, was pushing the luck factor a bit too far.

So, Richie's silent helicopter started to 'sow' an inoffensive chemical that made the fog just a little heavier so that it would sink down sufficiently to clear the top of the towers.

Fortunately, Heidi's guys didn't specify that the full bridge should be visible on the video.

And it worked.

Leo decided to walk from the south to the north tower, where he would be less visible in case the fog decided to leave by its own accord before he had finished his walk.

227 meters above the water level, and 1,280 meters across, or 80% of a mile, it wouldn't be a world highlining record, but it came fairly close.

### ♪ *The Show Must Go On – Three Dog Night*

Leo's crossing was impeccable. Webbo and Boss filmed everything with big lenses from each tower and Leo also had a small headset filming from his own perspective. It looked almost as if he were walking on clouds.

After the event, the Grooters disappeared as discreetly as they had arrived, leaving the slackline between the towers as a souvenir for the public and the police to try and figure out what had happened. One day, they may decide to publish the video online. But not for now.

Leo teleported back to Geneva, and the other Grooters drove and flew straight to SFO to board *Lady Globalia*.

Webbo uploaded the videos and Boss sent the link to Heidi.

Three hours later, she replied: "*Congratulations.*"

And following that they got a call from Professor Dimenport who told them where they could pick him up. Leo, who had already teleported back to Geneva, picked up the professor and they both celebrated at Boss' house, waiting for the other Grooters, who would only land the morning after.

Back at the Pibolodari house, Modella and Verity said:

"So glad you're back safe and sound, professor,"

"Thanks to all of you. However, I feel that I am endangering your mission, so what I suggest is that I follow two more Dream World travels and teach Leo and Webbo the last few things

they need to know so that they can run the rest of the experiment on their own. How do you feel about that?"

"We understand," said Boss, "Leo, Webbo, what do you think?"

"Well," said Leo, "the Dream World Teleporter was unexpectedly easy to run, so I feel confident we can do it. Webbo?"

"Me too."

"Great," said Dimenport, "and I'll be monitoring the logs of your travels from Guardia's place where I plan to move. Looks like we had more than just memories in common."

"I'm so happy for you," said Verity.

"And you can always get in touch with me should you have any questions. Who's next?"

"Richie," said Boss, "but maybe we should wait until tomorrow, I think we'll all take the day off to cure our jetlag."

"I understand," said Dimenport.

“Open your eyes, Richie! Open your eyes!” said a voice Richie clearly recognised.

♪ *Open Your Eyes – Shoreditch*

“What a feeling!” he thought after he had opened his eyes, “I feel so light.”

The explanation came when he saw a beautiful landscape below him, with a lot of waterways and forests.

“I am flying!”

“Yes, you are,” said Leo.

Richie was very astounded to hear Leo in his dream, but thought he better focus on the flying and ask questions later.

He could feel some kind of device in his right hand. He looked at it: it was a remote control with a wire that led back to his backpack. There were only two buttons on the device: “UP” and “DO\*WN”.

“Just follow me,” said Leo, “we are soon arriving.”

Richie followed Leo, although he did not really understand how he was able to move forward. As they approached the island, he could see Leo starting his descent, so Richie pushed the “DO\*WN” button and his altitude decreased slowly.

The island was maybe two miles long and wide, with some small hills and a lot of nature with various buildings sticking out from the woods.

Three minutes later they landed smoothly in front of a futuristic-looking building that seemed to be built only out of wood and glass.

“Welcome to Arrendee,” said Leo.

“What are you doing in my dream, Leo?” asked Richie.

“You are investing in your dream research project, and I am working in my dream research facilities. A true win-win.”

“Wow! You have to tell me more about this flying technology.”

“Your backpack is a PDF, a *Personal Device for Flying*. It has an anti-gravity mercury-based engine. To move up and down, the system works similarly to a hot-air balloon.”

“Yes, it was not difficult to move up or down. But how was I able to move forward? There was no button for that.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Leo, “the device also has a TWA, a *Thought Wave Amplifier* that registers your intent in form of thought waves, amplifies them and sends the information to a micro-computer that turns on the propulsion system accordingly.”

“*Thought Wave Amplifier?*”

“Yes, that’s a very useful technology that is now used in most computers to replace the mouse and the keyboard. It is more efficient than voice recognition, a technology that became redundant even before it was fully developed.”

“What kind of research is done on Arrendee exactly?” asked Richie.

“It is a big multidisciplinary research centre with the aim of making people’s lives more comfortable and to solve any problems that are in the way of human beings’ full blossoming.”

“And what is this building?”

“This is the *Social Centre* that is located in the middle of the island easily accessible from the various labs and living areas. There are around 800 people living and playing on the island. And, contrary to most research centres, there is a healthy gender mix. Every individual is unique and complements the others in great ways.”

“More precisely, what do people do in the *Social Centre?*”

“They gather to eat, drink, or just talk and play. We have everything from board and video games, table tennis, billiard, baby-foot, and of course a big library. There is also an auditorium where there are daily presentations about new technologies, new findings and various creative insights. People also present their travel experiences and there are also some artistic performances by multi-talented researchers.”

“Very interesting,” said Richie, as they walked around the premises, “I didn’t know research could be so much fun.”

“We believe we get better results if we have fun. And our model seems to work. Actually, last year, our researchers were banned from being nominated for Nobel Prizes, because of ‘unfair competition’. Indeed, we have taken creativity and innovation to such levels that we won a dozen Nobel Prizes in the last five years alone.”

“That’s incredible!” exclaimed Richie.

“It’s all thanks to you, investing and trusting in our research capacity. Now, let’s order transport to get around the island,” said Leo.

“Good idea!”

Five seconds later, Leo continued:

“Our *Personal Transporters* should be arriving any minute.”

“But you haven’t ordered them yet?”

“Yes, I have. Sorry for the confusion, for me it is a reflex by now. It works like this: I just think “*Two PTs ASAP to the SC. Thank you.*” My thoughts are then registered by this small computer I have in my pocket.”

Leo took out a small piece of glass from his pocket to show Richie.

“Then my handheld glass computer communicates wirelessly with a central computer database that sends us the two closest available *PTs*.”

And as they walked out the front door of the *Social Centre*, Richie could see the two-wheeled *PTs* arriving on their own.

“Like two modern horses,” laughed Richie.

“Except that you do not even need to whistle for them to come. And they do not shit on the ground. This system was fairly easy to set in place for this small island. We are now working on solutions to put in place similar transport ordering systems for big cities.”

“Cool!”

“And if our calculations are correct, with a well-oiled central computer system, we will only need 5-15% of the current quantity of cars so that we can recycle all ugly ones and keep only well-designed cars.”

“So, you mean that when I order a car, one day a Ferrari will come, and then the next day it is going to be a Porsche or a Rolls Royce?”

“Yes, depending on availability and your specific transport needs. Sometimes you may have to settle for a Tesla or a BMW.”

“Excellent!” said Richie, “Even if I can afford to buy several luxury cars, I don’t do it for environmental reasons, so I’m stuck with my Bugatti but get bored of it after a while. It would be great to have alternatives, like the luxury car sharing you’re describing.”

“Variety is spice of life. Anyway, on this small island no cars are needed. *PTs* are mostly to show visitors around. Everyone else simply walks or uses good old bicycles. Keeps them fit too,” said Leo.

They boarded the *Personal Transporters* and took off towards the west of the island, with the plan to tour the island clockwise.

“The first lab you see here on your right-hand side is the *Biomimicry Lab*, where many of our new ideas come from. It is our belief that nature always has clues for our technological problems, and the inspiration we get from nature is amazing.”

“So, you think you can solve any problem by finding clues in nature?”

“Most problems, yes, for example we are currently looking into some reproduction and behaviour patterns of eels for clues about teleportation.”

“That is certainly going to be a tricky one to solve,” said Richie.



“Indeed. But that is what makes research interesting. We start with the impossible, then, through reverse creativity, work out a way to make it possible.”

“Fascinating.”

“And lately we have also started to do some reverse biomimicry.”

“Reverse biomimicry? Never heard of.”

“This is how it works: instead of observing nature to get inspiration to build technology, we observe technology to find inspiration to better understand biology. In this case, to better understand how the human body and mind work. For example, we take a fresh look at how computers work, to better understand how human brains work.”

“Can you give a practical example?”

“Sure. So, you know when your computer slows down because you have too many applications open and running at the same time?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it’s very similar with our brains: when we feel sluggish, can’t think properly, or have burnouts, it’s most of the time because there are ‘programs’ running in the background that slow down the operative system.”

“What an important insight.”

“I agree. The details about how our brains work is a little more complex, but the two of our researchers who figured all this out won a well-deserved Nobel Prize for it.”

They travelled a little further, then Leo continued:

“Here to the left we have the *Preventive Health Centre*. They have already come up with some models that makes it mathematically impossible to become sick.”

“Impossible to become sick?”

“Yes, we have relegated sickness to the history books.”

“How is that possible?”

“First of all, it is a question of balanced lifestyle. People are taught what needs to be done to keep healthy and it is not only about nutrition and exercise.”

“What else then?”

“The most important factors for your health are that you have a mission in life and have a caring community around you.”

“That sounds simple.”

“Well, finding your life mission is actually trickier than you think, which is why most people in your dimension haven’t found theirs yet. But we are working on methods to help people find their passions and see what they can bring to the world that no one else can.”

“As for the caring community, I can understand that our individualistic society is the source of many diseases,” said Richie.

“Indeed. Our researchers have also invented a new kind of wristwatch that measures your energy level, or *chi*, as they call it in Asia. Think of it like the petrol gauge on your car dashboard. You get a warning when your energy level is low. And like fuel for a car, you want to fill up your chi level to avoid a breakdown. The ingenuity of this watch is that you get instant feedback on what, or who, gives or takes energy from you. A boon for dating, among other applications.”

“Let me guess,” said Richie, “when you go out in nature or do something you love, it gives you energy. And when you are exposed to computer screens or negative people, that takes energy from you.”

“Yes, that’s the main idea. However, it’s not completely as straightforward. Because if you do something you love that includes a computer screen, then it gives you energy. Also, remember that your own negative thoughts can drain you as well, even if you sit out in nature.”

“OK, hadn’t thought about those subtleties, but they make sense.”

“Now the breakthrough finding of our researchers was that if the energy level reaches and stays above a certain threshold, bacteria and viruses are powerless, so you literally cannot get sick. Of course, it will take some work and discipline to keep the *chi-o-meter* above that threshold.”

“Wow! And what do you reckon is the best way to ‘recharge’ your batteries?”

“Next to loving what you do and the people around you, one of the best ways to recharge is to live and work in healthy buildings. Studies have shown that buildings made of massive wood are the healthiest for human beings. When we sleep in a room with breathing wooden walls, our heart works the equivalent of one hour less per night compared to sleeping in buildings that have non-breathing walls.”

“So that’s the secret of people’s radiance here? But what about places on Earth where trees are not available?”

“Second-best options for healthy building materials are straw bales or hempcrete.”

“Very interesting.”

“The concept is the same for clothes or bedsheets: if they are made of natural breathing materials, you will feel and sleep much better compared to artificial non-breathing clothes or bedsheets.”

“I can confirm that from my own experience,” said Richie, “and what’s the building just next to the *Preventive Health Care*?”

“That’s the *Emotional Mastery Lab*, which focuses on finding better ways to help people handle their emotions. In your reality, many people live miserable lives and have relationships dramas just because they do not understand their emotions and are not able to handle them in a constructive way.”

“I am fighting with that myself,” said Richie, “and am fortunate to manage it quite well compared to many people I know.”

“Yes. And the lack of emotional mastery not only leads to relationship dramas, it is also a big part of physical and mental diseases. This area is so important and far too under researched in your dimension. We have given it its own building, although in theory it’s a part of *Preventive Health Care*.”

They drove on and Leo pointed up to a very unique building at the top of one of the small hills.

“Up there is the *Creativity Lab*, where we dive into all the facets of creativity, trying to understand it better and come up with ways to help people find their own personal creative element so that they can contribute positively to society. For one person it can be painting, for another starting a business while a third will find his element in fundamental research. The key is that there can be a creative side to any human endeavour.”

“Yes, it would be great if more people worked more creatively, not only for their clients, but also for their own well-being.”

“Just imagine if every person lived up to his or her full creative potential. I would not even dare to think what the world could look like in that case.”

“Mind-blowing certainly,” said Richie.

“Yes, just imagine if everybody was able to replicate the constant and systematic flow of creativity that only a handful of artists or business innovators have been able to manage throughout history.”

“Beyond grasp, indeed. Just think if everyone became some kind of Leonardo da Vinci.”

Leo continued: “What regards our own creativity on this island, to get the most out of the synergetic potential of our researchers, we have built a database where everybody has listed all their knowledge and experiences they have acquired since early childhood.”

“Such a database gets more interesting the bigger the group, I guess,” said Richie.

“Yes,” confirmed Leo, “and I do not know many corporations that harness the full uniqueness of their employees to help their company innovate. That database taps into the power of *‘you don’t know what you don’t know’*.”

“Can you give me an example of how it works?”

“Let’s say you have an organisation of a hundred people. This organisation is trying to solve a specific problem. You check the database, and it turns out that the cousin of one of your employees has come up with an ingenious way to solve a similar problem in India. Or another acquaintance of an employee manufactures parts that you need for your product.”

“Ingenious.”

“I can’t understand no one had thought of that before.”

“You need to truly value your employees or organisation members to come up with such an idea, I think,” said Richie. “It doesn’t work for unethical companies that only care about money and shareholders.”

“In the next building here, the *Pollession Lab*, researchers are working on solutions for less pollution in the world. And that means not only water and air pollution, but also visual and noise pollution that are so common in your dimension.”

“That’s a daunting task.”

“Yes,” confirmed Leo, “and they go even one step further and look into solutions to tackle pollution emanating from negative thoughts that most people emit to various degrees.”

“I had never thought of that as pollution, but now that you mention it, it makes sense. I think most of us can relate to the poor ambiance in a working or living environment full of negativity.”

“And then there is the media and advertising pollution as well...”

“Please stop, this becomes depressing.”

“Further down this road, we have the *Transport Lab* working on new transport developments: everything from simple *Personal Transporters*, to the *PDFs* we arrived with, and finally all the way to complex thought-driven intergalactic starships.”

“Thought-driven?”

“Yes,” Leo continued, “that is the only way we have found so far to travel between stars at reasonable speeds. Because the speed of light is far too slow once you want to get anywhere beyond our solar system.”

“So, you mean that your researchers have been able to build technology that enables starships to travel at the speed of thought?”

“Well, I must admit that we got some outside help on that one. But we’re not fully there yet, more research is needed.”

Richie was not really sure what Leo meant with “outside help” but decided he would ask him that question later.

“And the house here next to the small river is our *Information Decoding and Transmittal Department. IDTD*. Let’s say for example that a mother feels her child is in danger. It means that there is some kind of information that somehow arrives to her. And the physical distance seems to be irrelevant, so it doesn’t matter if her child lives in the same village or on another continent. The information reaches the mother in any case. The IDTD tries to elucidate how this information is transmitted.”

“Now that you mention it, I’m convinced that information is transmitted in many ways we still do not understand.”

“Decoding animal language is another hard nut to crack.”

“Well, when a pet is hungry, the decoding is fairly obvious,” said Richie.

“Researchers have for a long time been convinced that animals talk to each other sharing sometimes important pieces of information. For example, whales. However, we didn’t know that animals of different species also communicated.”

“What?”

“A few weeks ago, we intercepted some messages between African elephants and Australian dolphins. We also caught some Bengali tigers chatting with Antarctic penguins. But we haven’t been able to decipher what they are saying yet.”

“It is time to put a new Alan Turing to work.”

“Yes, this decoding is likely to also need some serious lateral thinking. If a machine was needed to decode another machine, maybe we should involve animals to help decode other animals’ chatter?”

“Never heard of any labs where researchers collaborate *with* animals, instead of experimenting *on* animals.”

“We’ve put out job ads in researcher magazines and at pet shops and on farms, but we haven’t received many CVs so far.”

“I’ve noticed many wild animals roaming around the island. Is that linked to this research you’re doing?”

“No, that’s because we hardly have any traffic noise here, and they like the energy of this place. In the same way as you can see kangaroos on some traffic-free university campuses in Australia. Cars and wildlife are not compatible.”

“What else do you research on at the IDTD?”

“Communication with other dimensions. We had a breakthrough last month when we were able to send an e-mail to Albert Einstein.”

“Are you kidding me? He has been dead for over sixty years. And emails have hardly been around for twenty-five.”

“That’s the point. We figured out that if mediums, like Modella, are able to communicate with deceased people, then there must be some kind of information channel flowing between their ‘death’ dimension and our living dimension.”

“I guess some religions will need to revise their theories...”

“Yes, but the research is still ongoing. We need to find a way to build a ‘*REPLY*’ button so that the deceased can write back to us. For the moment, they still need to go through mediums for that, but Einstein confirmed he had received our email and his answer was quite

funny: he said we shouldn't be worried if we happened to find new theories that would discredit his own."

"Which you will do if you manage to travel faster than the speed of light?"

"Yes, there may indeed have been a few inaccuracies in some of Albert's equations."

"So, you are tinkering with parallel dimensions?"

"Well observed, Richie. And these latest insights led us to launch a new lab recently, *Dimensia*, which focuses on better understanding various dimensions, how they are linked and how we can move or at least communicate between dimensions. *Dimensia* is the lab just next door to the IDTD. It has been growing very fast since its launch a few months back and *dimensionomics* are the hot topic right now in Arrendee."

"And how many dimensions have you guys found so far?"

"About 12. But it all depends on how you define 'dimension'. Do you count time as one dimension, or do you split it up in the past, present and future dimensions?"

"Amazing, now I get why more research is needed."

"Like a lot of research, some insights happen by accident or through creative neural connections when you're drinking or taking a shower. So, one day, one of our researchers at *Dimensia* thought about the similarity with the word *dementia*: What if people with dementia actually live in a parallel dimension while their body is stuck in our dimension?"

"Do you think there is a link between dimensions and memory?"

"We are fairly convinced of that," said Leo, "and it can explain why we have such a hard time to remember our night dreams, when we travel to different dimensions. This is what we are investigating at the moment."

"Fascinating."

They had already circled more than half of the island.

"In this building lies the *Brain Decoding Lab*. We finished to decode the male brain last year, but we are still struggling with the female brain."

"For obvious reasons," pointed Richie.

"This neuroscience department also dwells on solutions for education – how to harness the brain's potential to improve the learning curve and increase creativity."

"And what is that cute little house with the garden, a bit further down the road?" asked Richie.

"Good question, that's the *Sustainability Home*, which is an attempt to create a whole independent self-sustaining eco-system. The idea is that people should be able to live there

off the grid with a minimal impact on the environment. So, they have a vegetable garden, wireless Internet and electricity. They get water from the air and from their rain tank and have a 3-D printer to create any small objects and clothes they need. And of course, they are recycling their own rubbish and body outputs.”

“All that is bad news for monopolistic companies...”

“And good news for the people,” said Leo, “however, I think we need a balance between DIY and industry. It is probably more efficient to have a big corporation build your computer or washing machine.”

“Yes, at this stage of evolution, I think you’re right,” said Richie.

“Last, but not least, researchers in the funny building here to the left look at the big picture. We call it the *Symphony House* – in here we leverage the power of multidisciplinary research: we look for intersections between various disciplines and how to integrate new disruptive technologies with a positive social community and the individual’s subjective dreams.”

“So, this is some kind of coordination centre?” asked Richie.

“Yes, to make sure that every piece of the puzzle neatly fits into the big picture. And this is the kind of thing that is lacking in most research centres at universities worldwide, where departments don’t exchange enough knowledge. Actually, the centrally located *Social Centre* also serves as a powerful interdepartmental knowledge exchange.”

“That’s genius.”

“Ideas in the Symphony House tend to get quite philosophical, but we have noticed that sometimes when you just ask the right questions, things get clear and the answer becomes obvious.”

“Very interesting,” said Richie.

“Of course, we still have a long way to go, but it wouldn’t be as interesting if we already had all the answers, would it?”

“I couldn’t have summarised it better.”

“Next to all the buildings that I have shown you, there are also a few more places where researchers work on ad-hoc projects like influencing the weather, finding alternatives to money or building various websites and mobile applications.”

“Wow!” said Richie at the end of the tour, “this is more than just cool stuff you are working on here. We are talking about really useful technologies and insights to help make people’s lives better.”

Richie realised that most of the research done on Arrendee had the potential to be part of a bigger solution to lift humanity out of poverty and lack. And that was his life’s goal: to help find solutions so that no human would ever experience poverty again. And he was now more convinced than ever that research would play a big role to achieve a world of abundance.

“Thank you,” finished Leo, “we are fairly proud about how things are advancing here.”

*“Open your eyes, Richie. That was your first Dream World Travel,” said the professor.*

### **RICHIE JOHNSON – FIRST DWT – 01.02.2018**

The Grooters watched Richie’s Dream World travel to Arrendee. After the viewing, Leo told Richie: “Thanks for including me in your dream. I am indeed also passionate about research and technology.”

“I guess you’ll have to thank my subconscious,” said Richie.

This conversation made Modella think about who her subconscious had included in her travel to Moovia.

“This was a quite long and detailed viewing,” said Boss, “let’s call it a day and see what additional insights we can come up with tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow, you’ll be travelling,” said Modella.

“Yes, I look forward to that,” answered Boss, who was the only Grooters who hadn’t tested the *Dream World Teleporter* yet.



Boss woke up feeling a lot of wind around him and hearing some mechanical sounds, and not feeling like he was on stable ground. He opened his eyes, and indeed, he was in an airplane, but a very weird looking one.

The flying machine reminded him of some old twin-seat biplanes he had seen at an air show a few years ago. However, the whole airplane was built in a mix of iron and brass tubes instead of lighter materials. Cogwheels and various bolts could also be seen at various places and there were bird cages on the wings with strange-looking birds inside.

It was dusk, so Boss couldn't see all the details.

However, he spotted the circle with the star underneath the top wings next to the bird cages and was not surprised. He thought to himself: "No way this thing can fly. And who in their right mind puts bird cages on top of airplane wings? I must be dreaming."

Then he heard a female voice, the pilot behind him.

"Hi Boss, I'm Tamara, welcome to Steamaru, keep on pedalling, we will soon arrive, get ready for landing."

Indeed, there was a set of pedals at his feet, and Boss did as he was told.

"I don't get how this pedalling can keep us up in the air," he wondered, slightly worried that they may crash.

He looked down and saw a coastal town, not very big, but clearly out of a steampunk imaginary world. In this case, his own subconscious, he realized, having started to understand how Dream Worlds work. His own, personal Dream World!

The level of creativity and artistic intricacy of buildings, vehicles, people's outfits, everything was extraordinary in Boss' eyes. He noticed a few airships hovering above the town, a steam train taking off to somewhere, and many strange-looking vehicles with various mechanical features flying over the roofs or driving on the ground.

The architecture of the buildings definitely reminded of the Victorian era, but there was something strange with many of them, something Boss could not put his finger on for the moment.

Despite the clunkiness of their airplane, they landed smoothly on a small square with many impressive buildings around it, two of them having an illuminated clocktower.

Boss almost got a neckache as he turned his head in all directions looking at the steamy girls walking around on the square. There were some handsome men too, but he was quite consistent in his gender preferences.

Tamara hopped out of the plane, and told Boss to do the same, which he did. Boy, was he eager to discover this world!

Tamara kissed him on the mouth, which reminded him of Leo's and Verity's Dream travels. Was it now his turn to have a dream girl stuck in another dimension? Whatever the case, he wanted to make sure he savoured this experience to its fullest, and to ask as many questions as possible.

"You owe me a few explanations," he told the red-haired beauty, drinking in her creative femininity: she wore a brown leather corset which put her decent-sized breasts into their best light. A pocket watch was hanging around her neck, way down into her cleavage. As she took off her pilot hat with goggles and cogwheels, she shook loose her beautiful long hair, slightly curly. She kept her pilot gloves on, they contrasted in a very appealing way with her see-through white lace blouse. Boss was in heaven.

"I will be delighted to answer your questions," responded Tamara, "let's go to a place for a refreshment."

Now that there was no noise from the wind up in the air, Boss had a slight feeling that something was familiar with Tamara's voice, but he couldn't place it. He wondered how he could recognise a voice in a woman he had never seen in real life. Although he wished he had, because this specimen was gorgeous.

"I follow you," said Boss.

The steampunk girl took him by the hand and led him through a few narrow streets until they ended up on a smaller square where they entered a building and walked up creaking stairs to the second floor.

It was a bar with coloured neon lights mixing with the otherwise very steampunk atmosphere. He liked the eerie music that perfectly fit the atmosphere.

### ♪ *Louie's Lullaby – Beats Antique*

Boss also noticed the strange writing on the walls and on the drink menu.

They found a table overlooking the square, with a perfect view on all its hustle and bustle.

A very attractive Maori bartender came up to them:

"*Kia ora*, what drinks were you after tonight?"

"Two *Liquid Locos*, please," said Tamara, taking the initiative of ordering while Boss was transfixed on the waitress's cleavage.

"You like her?" asked Tamara.

"Not only her," answered Boss honestly, "all women here seem to be stunningly beautiful, all in their own unique way."

"Yes, we like to please, both ourselves, and others."

Boss told himself that something felt familiar with this place, but he couldn't put his finger on what it was.

"Yes, this place is what you have experienced as Oamaru in your dimension. It changed name in 1932."

"Oamaru?" wondered Boss who could now make the not so obvious neural memory connections, because this place was wildly different from the place he had visited during his travels. He asked Tamara:

"Which year is this?"

"2018."

"2018?"

"Yes."

"But how is that possible?"

"Parallel dimensions. Alternative history. Same situation as in some movies. Except that we think this alternative is better than your 'original'."

"And when was the fork in time?"

"1915. Europe had started yet another useless war, and for some reason, after a few months, soldiers on both sides of the trenches simply stopped following orders."

"Stopped following orders?"

"Yes. Our history books tell us that during the 1914 Christmas truce, a historical unofficial ceasefire, a mysterious man who called himself *The Statistician*, visited the trenches on both sides to teach the soldiers about statistics."

"Statistics?"

"Simple maths, actually. He explained to them the statistical likelihood of them surviving if they followed orders. Let us just say that the statistics, like for happy marriages nowadays, were not in their favour."

"And what happened then?"

"Both German and Allied soldiers simply packed their bags and travelled back home to where they came from. Many of them had been inspired by their parents' and grandparents' generations of the industrial revolution and all its possibilities. And they wanted to continue to build a world like that, instead ending up like statistical death numbers, or worse, mutilated for life."

"Wise choice."

The waitress came back with two steamy drinks in glass flasks with a copper support for stability. Boss's drink was a cloudy blue, and Tamara's was pinkish red, although the steam of both drinks was of a similar white colour.

“*Tena rawa atu koe!*” she thanked the waitress, then turned to Boss.

“Cheers!” said the enticing girl.

“Cheers!” said Boss, a bit apprehensive to taste the unknown drink. Tamara could feel his doubt and gave him a kiss. The drink, however – or was it the kiss – created an instant brain explosion inside Boss’ head. He felt he could think much more clearly, and at the same time he felt a little drunk. “What an exquisite feeling!” he told himself.

He then asked Tamara: “OK, so how does your plane fly? It’s far too heavy, especially as it seems to be only powered by pedals.”

She laughed at him, explaining: “In 1969 we had a technological breakthrough that enabled us to lift things easily off the ground.”

“Some kind of anti-gravity technology?”

“Yes.”

“And how does it work?”

“I don’t know exactly, I just know that we put a small piece of metal at the bottom of our vehicles, and then just a tiny amount of energy, like from pedalling, is sufficient to lift even the heaviest of vehicles off the ground. Something mercury-based, I think. The metal is called *helibeh*.”

“Couldn’t you install a simple motor that does the pedalling for you?”

“Sure, but this saves me a gym membership. Physical exercise is still required to look attractive.”

“Well, the pedals pay off,” said Boss, again scanning the beauty by his side, then leaning over to give her a kiss.

She gently smiled at him, enamoured of his desire for her.

Boss then said: “Your airplane reminds me of the early aviation age.”

“Yes, I’m so proud of that period because my great-great-grandfather was Richard Pearse.”

“Richard Pearse?”

“Not very well-known apart in this part of the South Pacific. He did build his own airplane around the same time the Wright Brothers were tinkering in Kitty Hawk. Some claim he may have flown before them, but it doesn’t matter. It shows Kiwi ingenuity. We have quite a few firsts on our list, among them we were the first to give women the right to vote, over two decades before the time fork.”

“So interesting!” he replied. “Funny the rest of the world has not heard about all this, maybe it has to do with Kiwi humbleness, not seeking the spotlight?”

“Maybe, yes.”

“And what about those bird cages on the wings? It doesn’t feel very nice to keep birds in cages.”

“This is just to keep them safe.”

“Safe? Can’t you let the birds fly on their own?”

“They were lazy at school.”

“Lazy at school?”

“Yes, unlike fish, who were diligent in school, which is why all fish can swim. We even talk about schools of fish.”

“You mean some birds didn’t learn to fly?”

“Yes, for some reason, birds here in Aotearoa were very lazy at school, and their punishment is their incapacity to fly.”

“That’s a myth?”

“Well, scientists pretend that their laziness is due to the lack of predators here. Anyways, the fact is that Aotearoa has the biggest number of flightless birds in the world.”

“Like the famous *kiwi*?”

“Yes, and the *kākāpō*, the *weka*, the *takahē*. And our favourite local little blue penguins here in Steamaru, the smallest penguin in the world.”

“That’s quite a list.” said Boss.

“Yes, and I haven’t even mentioned the extinct flightless bird like the *moa* or the *North Island adzebill*. Although a moa would be far too big for my cages.”

“So, you take flightless birds on flying tours?”

“Yes, it’s also part of a program of teaching them how to fly, to give them the sensations of what it feels like.”

“Now tell me,” continued Boss, pointing at the drink menu on the table, “what is this alphabet?”

“A Maori alphabet.”

Looking closer, Boss could indeed feel a Polynesian flair to the symbols making up the text on the menu.

“I must say it looks really cool.”

“Yes, it was invented back in the 1980s by a Maori master carver and we have used it in the last thirty years. We need only fourteen letters, and it doesn’t make sense to use a European alphabet in Polynesia. We’re located as far from Europe as you can get.”

It reminded Boss that Aotearoa/New Zealand was indeed part of the huge Polynesian triangle, bigger than Russia, stretching from Hawaii to Rapa Nui/Easter Island to Aotearoa.

The drink had made Boss more talkative and he continued to bombard the red-haired bombshell with more questions.

“And what about the buildings here in Steamaru? They seem to be creative masterworks, but there is something strange with them, what am I missing?”

“What you probably are missing is the fact that once you add *helibeh* to the architectural equation, much more become possible.”

“Of course,” realized Boss, “once architects are no longer stuck with the traditional laws of gravity, they can become far more creative.”

“Yes, and the same applies to the laws of aerodynamics.”

He marvelled at the buildings around him, glad to recognize the local white Steamaru stone still being used in many of the buildings.

Then Boss mentioned his parents’ overall job dissatisfaction issues, which was shared by millions of other people in his dimension. He asked Tamara:

“People here seem busily happy, are there any secrets to job satisfaction?”

“I wouldn’t say it’s such a secret, the most important thing is that you love what you do.”

“OK, but why is it so hard for us to find a job that we like?”

“Maybe you should start to remove the word “job” from your vocabulary. Don’t think 9 to 5. Instead, think of an enjoyable occupation full of creativity. Like tinkering with a flying object, writing a fascinating book on an old typewriter, or sewing an attractive dress.”

“But people need money to survive, you can’t just do what you like.”

“To survive you need food, clothes and shelter. You cannot eat money. Let me take you to the casino, it will help you better understand our mindset.”

“Casino? You just told me that money wasn’t important here?”

“It is not. Wait and see.”

Tamara just gave him a kiss, stood up, and told him to follow her. Again, they cruised through various cobble-stoned streets in this for Boss very eerie futuristic atmosphere.

They then entered another building and headed down to the basement where another special ambiance welcomed them with subdued lighting and card tables everywhere except for a bar corner. It felt like some kind of underground casino.

At first, they just walked around the tables and Boss noticed that they did not use the kind of cards they have in his dimension, the ones most of readers are accustomed to.

Instead of numbers, and royalties and aces, the cards all had different symbols or drawings on them. After a while, Boss observed that the same kind of cards came up over and over again. Like with regular card games, actually.

“I need to explain the rules,” said Tamara and asked a card dealer to lend her a set of cards. Then they sat down at a table in the bar, ordered two more drinks, and then Boss’ dream guide and girlfriend sorted the cards, left most of them in a stack and kept maybe a quarter of the cards in her hands.

Boss was very eager to learn. He wasn’t a gambler, but didn’t mind some entertainment from time to time. Tamara was soon to shake up his culturally ingrained thinking patterns.

“OK,” started the red-haired steampunk girl, “A few decades ago, when a long-sitting royalty died and the royal house of cards crumbled, we took the opportunity to rethink our card games and bed sizes. First of all, we realised that playing with thirteen different kinds of cards meant bad luck, so we settled for twelve instead.”

“The cards I’ve seen on the tables tonight?”

“Yes. Now, in a casino in your dimension, who sets the rules?”

“The casino.”

“Indeed, and they make sure you lose more often than you win.”

“That’s their business model.”

“Well, we changed that model, because people losing don’t feel well, and on top of that the concept of money has become very secondary in people’s lives, not the worshipped God like in your world.”

Boss had to admit that people’s obsession with money often had a negative influence on their happiness.

“So, explain those cards to me, and the rules of the game here in Steamaru.”

Tamara laid out the twelve cards on the table in front of Boss, first a group of nine cards, then an additional three on the side.

The first card had a drawing of some kind of garden on it, with a lawn and a few trees. The second card was a picture of a house. The third, a plate with fork and knife. The fourth, a coat hanger. The fifth, two arrows in opposite direction. The sixth, a heart. The seventh, a dumbbell. The eighth, a circle with a star.

Boss definitely recognised that card but did not understand why it was appearing in the card game because he had already seen this Dream World symbol on Tamara’s plane.

And the ninth card of the first group represented an eye.

As for the last three cards on the side, they had drawings of a book, a clock and a dollar-sign.

“Neat,” said Boss and thought that whoever had come up with these cards had a good capacity to think out-of-the-box. But he couldn’t figure the underlying meaning of these cards and how they interacted.

Then Tamara continued: “Some of these symbols are fairly obvious, others need some explanations.”

Boss nodded and asked what the garden on the first card represented.

“Land,” she answered.

The next three were more straightforward and represented a home, food and clothes.

“And what’s the fifth card with the arrows?”

“Before I tell you that,” said Tamara, gently touching Boss’ hand, “let me touch a word on the bigger picture of this game. It is a reflection of humans.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well, every human being has been dealt a few cards in life. Some good, some bad. Not a single person has been dealt only good cards. This card game is a simplified version of the cards people have in life: some inherit land and/or property. Some are dealt good health or love or time or money.”

“So, the aim of the card game is to have as many of these cards as possible?”

“No, no, no, no. This is not monopoly and hoarding stuff is not the solution to health or happiness. Instead, the aim is balance, which means the goal is to have one each of these cards.”

Boss was fascinated and urged Tamara to explain the remaining cards, which she did:

“The fifth card with the two arrows represents positive give and take social relationships, including family relationships. The sixth card with the heart stands for love, as in intimate and romantic relationships. The dumbbell card is a symbol for health.”

“And the circle with the star?”

Tamara smiled and said: “I know that one can be a little confusing for you. It represents a purpose, a goal in life, a meaningful occupation, a dream or a guiding star as Professor Dimenport explained to you.”

“Got it. And what about the eye symbol?”

“That’s a simplified symbol for artistic talent, or visual aesthetics, although art need not only be visual. As for the last three cards, they represent money, knowledge, and time.”

“Yes, I thought so,” said Boss, “and how is the game played?”

Tamara’s answer surprised him: “You have already been playing this game whole of your adult life.”

“What do you mean?”

“Unfortunately, you were not taught the rules of the game at school, so you are playing the game with a blindfold and have to submit to, instead of consciously controlling the game.”

“I am not sure I understand,” said Boss.



“It’s simple: you were dealt a specific set of cards in life. And the goal of the game, aka. life, is to collect the cards that will ensure your physical, mental and emotional well-being. So, these twelve cards represent a simplified version of all your main needs in life.”

Boss reflected on his life: as a heir to several generations of Swiss bankers, money had never been an issue in his life, and he had been lucky to have the entrepreneurial ‘life goal card’ that unlike his parents gave him recurrent new purpose in life. However, he had no special artistic talent that he was aware of, nor the ability to keep a woman in his life more than a few months. And his health was not the best, he was not sleeping well anywhere. Since he sold his last venture, he had more of the time card. As for knowledge, he had his business education but no knowledge on how to solve his health and romantic issues.

Tamara could feel the introspection he was going through and said compassionately: “Don’t worry, Boss, no one has got all the good cards, we need something to strive for in life.”

“Sure, but should life really feel like such a struggle?”

“No, so let me explain how to play the game.”

“OK.”

“The last three cards are what we call the ‘currency’ cards. Money, obviously, but as you’re perfectly aware of, money can’t buy everything, especially things like genuine relationships, health or artistic talent. Or purpose for that matter.”

Boss, through his upbringing had met plenty of very wealthy people, but had always observed that they had things lacking, or various problems in their lives that money couldn’t solve.

Tamara continued: “And even land and property are not always for sale, so it doesn’t matter how much money you have, you can’t buy it. Time, most often associated with knowledge, allows you to at least partially circumvent the need for money, for example by growing your own food, building your own house or repairing your own computer. Or by honing your artistic talents.”

“And what about knowledge?”

“The right kind of knowledge can solve almost all your problems. How many experts have you consulted for your sleeping problems?”

“At least a dozen, and I’ve probably read a hundred books on the topic.”

“A dozen or even a hundred people out of over 7 billion people, is an extremely tiny percentage.”

“Sure, but I can’t talk to billions of people until I find someone with the answer.”

“Good point. And even then, no one may even have the specific health card that you need.”

“Is it then a lost cause?”

“Certainly not, that’s what research is for: to print the missing cards.”

“I know that, but sometimes it can take generations of research to find solutions.”

“That’s why you need a shortcut to your answers.”

“And what would that shortcut be?”

“You are in the shortcut.”

As Boss looked confused, Tamara explained: “The shortcut is lucid dreaming, where most of your answers can be found. Professor Dimenport’s machine has been a shortcut to your lucid dreams world, but soon you’ll need to learn how to access those dreams without a machine.”

“Is that easy?”

“It takes a few weeks or months of practice, but it’s quite a fun process if you have the right guidance.”

“How do I know if I have the right guidance?”

“You can start by reading the book *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*.”

Boss was observing the people playing at the tables nearby, then he asked Tamara: “So the card games in this casino are just a simulation of real life?”

“Precisely. It helps people to gain the mental flexibility of thinking about sharing and bartering their cards with others. Hoarders are losers. Playing this game also helps people reflect on some of the cards they are missing.”

“I see there are tables of four players, how do you win?”

“That’s the mental hurdle many of you in your dimension may struggle with: you win by collaborating, not competing. The game has been conceived in a way that either everyone wins, or everyone loses. Or in Sting’s eternal words: ‘*There is no such thing as a winnable war*’. Instead of making war and competing against others or against the bank, cooperation is the key.”

“So, the game ends when all players have all twelve cards?”

“Yes, in this simplified casino version of the game. In the real world, the game presents far more subtleties, the game is more dynamic, and even if you happen to get all twelve cards, your needs will evolve, pushing you to look for new cards to replace or complement some old ones.”

“This is such a cool game, thanks for enlightening me.”

“Yes, and if you can bring back one message from Steamaru, it is this: that your world’s problems will continue as long as people abuse their cards and as long as people think that the cards they happen to have in excess are more important than the other cards. All cards can be abused, but some are more abused than others. You know which ones.”

“Yes, this card game makes it crystal clear what’s wrong with our society.”

“I wish more people would understand how magnificent a world they could build if they started to share their cards instead of hoarding them, consciously or unconsciously.”

The attractive steampunk girl gave Boss a set of cards as a souvenir, forgetting that he would have the same problem as Verity in Shoparadise and couldn't take it back with him.

However, Boss easily memorised the Steamaru Cards, and made sure to lay them out clearly on the so they would be visible in his Dream World video.

1. Land
2. Home
3. Food
4. Clothes
5. Relationships
6. Love
7. Health
8. Life goal
9. Arts
10. Money
11. Knowledge
12. Time

Boss, feeling that his dreamtime was running towards an end, and fearing to soon hear Professor Dimenport's voice, told Tamara, looking her straight into the eyes:

“What if we just played card number six tonight?”

“I was about to suggest the same; sure, I live just around the corner.”

Suddenly, Tamara's wristwatch started to beep. A weird kind of sound, like an old alarm clock, but steampunk style.

“What's that about?” asked Boss.

“It's a reminder that I need to show you something. But don't worry, my apartment is waiting for us.”

The enticing red-haired took him by the hand and they left the casino. Up on the street again, they walked two blocks.

“Look, we can take these,” said Tamara, pointing at two scooter-looking things. They had a simple wooden plank with brass surrounding, as well as a copper shaft with handles. They reminded Boss of the modern e-scooters in his dimension, except that they had no wheels.

“Who cares about wheels anyway,” he told himself.

Tamara continued: “Let's see if you can handle this.”

“How does it work?”

“Work? It flies.”

“Yes, but how?”

“You just control it with your mind.”

“Yes, but how?”

“Just try it.”

Boss stood on one of the steampunk scooters, but nothing happened. He tried imagine it flying, it started to wobble a little, but it did not do much more than that.

“That’s cute,” said the steamy girl, “but I think you’ll need to catch a ride with me, otherwise we’ll miss what I want to show you. The additional advantage is that I’m going to feel your arms around me.”

So, they both jumped onto the other scooter, and they instantly took off and Boss held on tightly to his hot pilot.

“Take it easy, we’re not going far, just up the hill so that we get a good view of the ocean.”

This little ride gave Boss an amazing adrenaline rush. They arrived at the top of the small hill, and now Boss could clearly see what it was all about: a fascinating green aurora.

They sat down on a bench admiring the green magic of the night skies on the southern horizon.

“Yes, an *aurora australis*. We don’t get them very often, but we need a cloudless night like today so that we can see it, which is even rarer.”

“The famous Southern Lights. They leave you breathless,” said Boss.

“Yeah, I thought you’d enjoy it.”

“I enjoy everything with you and look forward to enjoying more at your house.”

They flew back to Tamara’s place. Boss very much liked her house, filled with wall clocks, airplane models and photos of flightless birds. She also had the most creative coffee machine he had ever seen, literally steaming when used. And plenty of other gadgetry the usefulness of which Boss doubted. But it looked cool. A true steampunk world.

Now he shifted his focus on the house owner, slowly but surely ridding her of her sexy corset...

*“Welcome back, Boss,” said Professor Dimenport.*

## **BOSS PIBOLODARI – FIRST DWT – 02.02.2018**

They watched Boss’ steampunk adventure together, then Verity said:

“I like that card game.”

“Me too,” said Webbo.

“Yes,” said Leo, “let’s keep that game in the back of our heads, I think it’s quite an important insight for our Pact.”

Once they had nothing more to add, Dimenport said:

“Well, that was my last travel with you, from now on you shouldn’t need me any longer. But as I said, I will check the logs and I’m available for questions if necessary. Good luck to all of you, you are my heroes!”

“All the best to you too, professor. Thank you so much for everything!” said Modella and Verity.

“Thanks,” said the four male Grooters as well.

Dimenport went up to pack his bags, Guardia would pick him up a little later.

“What do we do now?” asked Modella.

The Grooters were silent for a short while, then Boss said:

“Let’s take the day tomorrow to reflect on our first *DWTs* to see if we already can identify patterns and if we might remember more clues. After that, let’s continue on Sunday.”

“Sounds good,” said the others.

“I’m already ready for my next trip,” said Verity eagerly.

Verity landed in the middle of the hustle-bustle of a city market. She thought this looked very reality-like and could be in almost any European city.

She took a closer look at one of the vegetable stalls: the fruits and vegetables seemed unusually fresh, almost glowing, she had never seen something like that. Then she remembered that Professor Dimenport had told the Grooters that their five senses would be drastically heightened in a Dream World. She certainly remembers this from Shopparadise.

They also had many other products from the farm: honey, grilled chicken, sausages, cheese, etc. The smells were intense and varied. Verity enjoyed every moment of it.

After a while she thought: “Wait... I know this place... isn't it Geneva's *Plaine de Plainpalais*?”

“Yes, it is,” said one of the ladies selling fresh berries, “try these blueberries!”

Verity did and they tasted heavenly. “*Merci*,” she said, and continued to walk around and tried to find landmarks she would recognise. She made a mental note of what she saw:

“There are plenty of trees, and many new buildings I have never seen before. But the skate park is still there and so are many of the old buildings. Strange... everything is so harmonious... as if they had torn down all ugly buildings and replaced them with new more beautiful ones that better fit into the cityscape.”

The next thing she noticed was how quiet everything was. People got around mostly by foot or bicycle, with a few using various kinds of electrical two-wheelers. No noisy petrol vehicles. It looked like the only cars around – and there were very few of them – were delivery vans, and all of them seemed to be silently powered by electricity.

“Nice feeling,” thought Verity, “what a difference it makes when there are not plenty of cars parked and driving around everywhere.” She asked a woman on the street where all the cars were, and she responded that next to the delivery vehicles, the only cars were automatic rental cars parked in the outskirts of the city and used by people who want to drive further afield.

“And what year are we?” The lady looked perplexed and answered: “2061, of course, a very special year here in Geneva.”

As she walked towards the *rond-point* de Plainpalais, she was relieved to see that the big fast-food chain was gone. The tram rails were gone too, replaced by a new a metro station entrance, beautifully decorated. Apparently, the underground was the only necessary public transport in this future Geneva. But the famous bronze statues were still there. They hadn't moved since she last saw them in 1995.

The franchise café had been replaced with an authentic café that somehow melted better into the cityscape with no advertising to be seen anywhere. And the foods and drinks they sold looked much healthier.

However, Verity was slightly worried that she hadn't seen the circle with the star anywhere. Had she somehow landed in a different kind of alternate reality?

It certainly felt like a 'regular' Dream World. But she needed confirmation. She walked on into the Parc des Bastions, where people were still playing chess on big chessboards on the ground, and others were playing cards, reading, chatting or embracing on benches or on the lawn. And dogs were playing with children and adults alike, no leashes to be seen anywhere.

Inside the park, she turned left to reach the Reformation Wall, which was still there with its four big statues of Calvin, Knox, Farel and Beza. On the wall, along its 100 meters of length, in huge letters, was written *POST TENEBRAS LUX*. But wait... something was out of place from what Verity remembered: a star chiselled inside the letter "O". There was her proof.

"*After darkness light,*" thought Verity. That quote had kept her fighting through the many downs and dark times of her life. She knew there was hope and a better world was possible. Because of the length of the inscription in the light-coloured stone, it is very tricky to take a full photograph of the whole text. It is just one of those places in the world that one has to visit in person.

She also noticed another strange thing: two much smaller letters, 'I' and 'O', had been carved just after the 'R' of '*TENEBRAS*'.

"Rio?" wondered Verity. It made her think of the city in Brazil and wondered if that was some kind of hidden message. Maybe.

She was glad to see that the main university building, facing the wall inscription, was untouched.

What astonished Verity the most was how radiant all the people looked. She could really feel their happiness and well-being, even among older people. All that made her think of the project a friend of hers had launched to incite people to smile on the tramways in Geneva. Maybe he finally succeeded?

People were dressed in a very tasteful way. Elegant men and women everywhere wore some timeless fashion.

There were also many street artists singing or playing beautiful music on original instruments. She watched some very talented circus and magic street entertainers.

Verity walked on to the *Vieille Ville*, the old town, which now had cobbled stone streets everywhere instead of asphalt. And the sound of the St. Peter's Cathedral bells reminded her that time goes on even in a Dream World. The old town had remained mostly unchanged, with the difference that most stores, cafés and restaurants seemed to emanate much more warmth and cosiness than what she could remember.

Then she strolled down towards the lake, happy to see that her favourite lingerie shop was still there – and what a selection they had in the window!

The city was beautiful and well kept. No advertising anywhere. There were flowers on the balconies, many trees and green areas all over town, places where children could play and amazing artworks that made the place unique.

She went on, past *Rive* and the *Café Léo*, down to the *Jardin Anglais*, which she almost did not recognize with plenty of nice new cafés and restaurants on the waterfront, tastefully merged with their surroundings. She sat down on a sofa in one of the cafés, just next to the water. She ordered a *Café Viennois* and watched Geneva's centenary aquatic landmark, the *Jet d'Eau*, a hundred and forty metres high water fountain. And she was happy to see the water of the fountain blowing in towards the city, a sign of continued good weather. But if the year was truly 2061, then the *Jet d'Eau* was slowly approaching its bicentenary.

Again, she couldn't hear any noisy car traffic or motorboats disturbing the quietness, only silently gliding sailing boats. There were also many birds on the lake, and even in this Dream World, the majesty of the white swans stood out.

Verity wondered why no one had come to guide her, as Tirvey did in Shoparadise and as the professor had told the Grooters there would be in each Dream World.

But suddenly an elegant brown-haired woman came up to her:

“Good afternoon, Verity, my name is Smaranda. Welcome to Geneva.”

“Hi there,” said Verity, “thank you, please have a seat.”

Smaranda was probably in her mid-forties, but looked at least ten years younger.

“I followed you from a distance since your arrival, I wanted to let you discover the city by your own first so that you would not be distracted by my talk. How do you like it so far?”

“It is wonderful here,” said Verity, “so beautiful, calm and romantic... And people are so nice and friendly, smiling all the time. And they look very healthy as well. Smaranda, you need to tell me how all this is possible.”

“I will answer all your questions,” said Smaranda, “but first let me tell you a story.”

“I love to hear stories,” said Verity, thinking back at Marrakesh.

“*Once upon a time* there was a little blonde girl. Her name was Belinda and she was living on a big island in the southern seas. It was a beautiful island with many beautiful landscapes, plants and animals.

Belinda grew up in a small village not too far from the biggest city of the island. She realized that she was very lucky to live on this big beautiful island. But she also saw many things that she did not like, especially how many adults behaved.

Like many children her age, Belinda dreamed of a better world, so she noted all the things that she did not like in her journal.



♪ *Un autre monde – Téléphone*

By the time she got older, she had written many notebooks with things she wanted to improve.

She grew to become a very beautiful young woman and started to meet some boys. But there were many things that she did not like with these boys, so she noted that in her journal as well.

After Belinda finished school, she decided to study law at a big university on the mainland because she wanted to understand how all laws – good and bad – came into life and made people's lives better or worse.

During her studies, she read not only law books, but also many other books about topics like health, physics, psychology, history, architecture because she wanted to understand the big picture of what could make people's lives better or worse.

And after university, Belinda started to work for the government in the capital city of the mainland. She had now grown to become an attractive and mature woman with many feminine assets she was very aware of.

She got to know many of the people in the government who had some influence to write the laws that influenced people's lives, both on the mainland and on her island.

She regularly flew back to her island to meet with the local politicians who could also make laws that made people's life better or worse.

After two years, Belinda knew most of the people who had the power to impact the lives of the people on her island.

She was now ready to execute her plan.

Belinda carefully chose the men in the government – married or not – she had to seduce and sleep with so that her plan would work. She gave them the best sexual experiences of their lives. And she made sure to discreetly record everything they said and filmed all the sexual acts with her.

Then, looking at them with her angel eyes, she asked them if they could push through specific law initiatives that would make the lives of the people on her island better. She honestly promised to have wonderful sex with them again if they succeeded.

Some of these men refused to cooperate, saying that such initiatives might be unpopular and would compromise their political careers. But after Belinda sent them a USB-key with some very specific material on it, they were suddenly very eager to cooperate.

Belinda's plan worked, and thus after three years and a lot of sex, the local and federal government had passed many new good laws that would make the lives of the people on the big island better.

For example, it was now forbidden to sell food with additives, preservatives or any other chemicals in them. And chemically altered low-fat foods and drinks were taken off the shelves.

There was a big track down of all visual pollution sources on the big island: no advertising was allowed in public places, only on dedicated pages on the Internet.

Based on solid scientific research proving their negative health effects, irrelevant negative news were now forbidden in newspapers and magazines. And especially on TV.

Only beautiful houses and buildings could be built, and the architects had to have their names engraved on their building to make sure that they would not build anything they were not proud of.

Polluting noisy cars would gradually no longer be admitted on the roads. Urban planning initiatives were taken that would minimize the need for daily car use in the first place.

Income taxes were abandoned, forcing the government to work more efficiently with the VAT income.

Tree planting programs were launched and replanting quotas had to be met.

Career advisory programs were introduced to help unhappy people find their mission in life. And upskilling initiatives supported people who wanted to change careers.

The results were close to miraculous and scientists from all over the world flew in to the big island to find out how they were doing this.

Most criminals were taken out of prison and it was explained to them what had led to their destructive behaviour. They were put to do some productive work while at the same time being helped by psychologists and career coaches to find their passions in life, and how they could positively integrate society again working with something they loved to do.

Finally, in the same way that people had to maintain their houses and gardens out of respect to their neighbours, people had to take care of their bodies and clothes out of respect for the people they were meeting on a daily basis.

Belinda's vision had succeeded. After ten years, the big island had changed completely to become the closest thing to paradise on Earth. Belinda was now nicknamed *The Tasmanian Angel*.

And the people on the big island in the southern seas lived happily ever after..."

"Wow, what a story!" exclaimed Verity. "Now, let me guess... to make Geneva as beautiful as it is today, you most probably got inspired by this story?"

"Exactly."

Verity wondered whether Smaranda had gone into ‘horizontal politics’ in the same way as Belinda.

“The result is beyond belief,” she told the gracious woman.

“We are not talking science-fiction here, Verity,” said Smaranda, smiling. “Changes like this will take some time, especially to let the new-planted trees grow, but once the collective mindset shifts with the aim of building more liveable cities, then everything is possible.”

“It reminds me slightly of the after-war expansion in the USA, but also the re-building of Germany and Japan, in many ways miraculous.”

“When people help each other, everything becomes possible. However, this time around, we want to rebuild aesthetical cities. Back when you come from, in 2018, some efforts in that direction have already been made in Dresden.”

“Thank you so much for illuminating me on the possibilities that lie ahead. By the way, I also walked past the place where the hospital used to be and saw that it was gone.”

“You mean the former *Hôpitaux Universitaires de Genève*? Yes, the ugliest building in town was replaced many years ago by a wonderful *HUG-Centre*, where people come to refuel on affection.”

“But where do they treat sick people?”

“Well, there is a very simple *principle* that explains most of the differences between what you see here and the Geneva you know of. You might have heard of it: it’s called supply and demand.”

“Of course, I’ve heard of it.”

“Which means that if there is a demand for a certain product or service, there will be a corresponding offer to meet that demand. In other words, as long as there continues to be a demand for numbing drugs, medical services, cigarettes, weapons, junk food, banking or legal services, etc., there will be people and corporations to provide such products and services.”

“I hadn’t thought about it like that.”

“And whether you are aware of it or not, the fact that you, the Grooters, now reunite to solve some big issues, is just due to the fact that more and more people out there demand change. They just don’t know how to make things change, so they need your combined brainpower.”

“Interesting point of view.”

“Then you can also create a positive demand by offering new products or services: that’s called innovation and is necessary because the average customer will not demand a revolutionary smartphone, or a silent vacuum cleaner, or free Internet communications. That’s why inventors and entrepreneurs are needed: to make people’s lives better.”

“Thank you so much for these explanations, Smaranda.”

“Before you leave, there is something I want to show you, Verity.”

Smaranda and Verity left the café at the lakefront and headed back up in the old town. They entered a small courtyard and walked into a sober and elegant building.

“This is an old book club,” she said.

Verity was amazed: “What a beautiful interior.”

It was as if time had stood still for several centuries in this place. So calm and peaceful. And books everywhere. They entered what seemed to be the main *salon* where a handful of people were sitting and reading various books or magazines.

“Come with me,” said Smaranda, showing Verity into an adjacent room, with lower ceilings and equally wonderful views of the lake. Her guide did not need to say anything more. There it was: above a wooden commode on which stood two lit candles, hovering in the air, was a shining heart-formed red crystal.

“This is the Crystal of Love,” whispered Smaranda.

Verity’s heart started to pound. This was too good to be true. No riddles to solve, no long flights to take, the third crystal was there right in front of her, easy to grab.

Then ‘reality’ struck her that she was in a dream... and would probably not be able to bring the crystal back to her dimension, in the same way she hadn’t been able to bring back the tee-shirt from Shopparadise.

“I know what you are thinking,” said Smaranda, “indeed, you will not be able to bring back the crystal with you.”

What struck Verity and what she thought made the crystal exceptionally beautiful was the fact that it was not perfectly cut like a jeweller’s diamond. Instead, the heart crystal had been shaped by many imperfect strokes, creating some rough edges.

“So close and still so far away,” said Verity, “but can I at least hold it for a while before I return?”

“Of course you can, and you should. By the way, it’s the biggest ruby ever found.”

Verity took the heart-shaped crystal with both hands. It was glowing, pulsating a beautiful reddish light from inside. Almost like a heartbeat. She could also feel a tingling warmth emanating from it, which hadn’t been the case with the Crystals of Beauty or Creativity.

“It is the most powerful of all the crystals that constitute the Crystallica,” said Smaranda, “but it’s also the most difficult to materialise. To your consolation, I can say that at least the Crystal of Love is safe in this dimension and you do not need to worry about any malevolent forces trying to get hold of it. It will stay here until you, the Grooters, find a way to access this dimension.”

“But how can I get hold of a crystal that exists in my Dream World?” asked Verity.

“By creating that Dream World,” answered the elegant woman.

“If only I had a simple manual on how to access Dream Worlds.”

“You’ll need to puzzle together that manual with your Grooters’ team.”

“I guess you’re right.”

Verity put back the Crystal of Love, amazed how it just hovered in the air.

“How come that it floats in the air like that?”

“Have you ever heard the saying that love gives you wings?”

Verity started to think that there must be some link between the forces of gravity and the concept of love. The technology behind *Ei in the Sky* apparently proved that, but Verity still had no idea how it worked. She would have to investigate this further.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” said Smaranda, “I have a letter for you.”

“A letter for me?”

“Yes.” She handed Verity a nice envelope with *Verity Blesse* handwritten on it.

She thanked Smaranda, who had to leave, then she walked over to the Cathédrale Saint-Pierre and sat on a bench in front of it, and started to read:

*“Dear Verity,*

*I just wanted to thank you for the wonderful time we had together in Shoparadise the other day. Things evolve even in this dimension, and it happens that I have met someone else in the meantime. A girl I have fallen deeply in love with and plan to marry very soon. So, between us, it is over. It was just a dream. Sorry for that.*

*I wish you all the best,*

*Tirvey.”*

*“I guess you only have one wish left now,” said Leo, who had now taken over Dimenport’s duties.*

## **VERITY BLESSE – SECOND DWT – 04.02.2018**

Verity woke up slowly and started to cry.

“Why are you crying?” asked Boss.

The dream had been so powerful that Verity remembered most of it. She was emotionally completely confused between the beauty of the new Geneva and the Crystal of Love, and then the heartbreaking letter from Tirvey.

“It was so beautiful. So full of hope. So calm with plenty of wonderful sensations. And I held the Crystal of Love in my hands. There was so much warmth and love coming out of it. And then the letter...”

“The letter?” asked Modella.

“Yes, Tirvey broke up with me,” she said with desperation.

♪ *Frag den Abendwind – Francine Jordi*

“Take it easy, Verity,” said Boss, “let us look at this situation as objectively as possible.”

“What do you mean? He broke up with me. After all those wonderful moments we spent together. Wasn’t that supposed to be my dream life, without heartaches?”

“You are right, Verity,” said Leo, “but maybe there is a good explanation for what happened. Now, let us all watch your film and see if we can draw some conclusions.”

“Good idea,” said Webbo.

After they had watched the film, Boss said:

“Verity, I don’t know what you smoked before travelling this time, but the quantity of clues you got in this Dream World is absolutely amazing. Just Smaranda’s story about the Tasmanian Angel gives us so many ideas to help us fulfill our Pact. And I recognized the library where you found the Crystal of Love.”

“You did?” wondered the other Grooters.

“Yes, it’s an old book club in the old town of Geneva, and I’m actually a member, so I’ll take you there for a visit sometime.”

“We’d love to!” exclaimed the others.

Then Modella asked:

“I am not sure I understand how the crystal could have landed in Verity’s Dream World.”

“I don’t know either,” said Leo, “but at least our goal is pretty clear now, don’t you think?”

“You mean that we need to create the future Geneva so that we can get hold of the Crystal of Love?” asked Richie.

“We have no choice,” said Modella.

“Remember the year: 2061,” added Webbo. “Another 43 years of patience, then we’ll get the Crystal.”

“I fear we won’t have that much time,” said Richie.

“Even if Geneva seems to be a good place today,” said Boss, “there is still plenty of negativity, sickness, ugliness and corruption here as well. Read a newspaper, or just go out and look on the streets and listen to people. Far too many mostly talk about illnesses, relationship dramas, or other problems at home or at work.”

To that Verity responded:

*“Post Tenebras Lux.”*

“Yes, you are right. Thank you for your positivity, Verity.”

“Does all this mean that Verity and I need to get involved into horizontal politics?” worried Modella.

“That solution worked for Belinda. It is not even sure it would work for you,” said Leo.

“So where shall we start?” asked Webbo.

“I know that there are many grass root communities here in Geneva that want to change things. Maybe we should reach out to them?”

“That’s a good idea. And never forget that a handful of people can change the world. Remember, Belinda was alone,” said Verity.

Suddenly, something struck Leo:

“Wait, if we need to create the Geneva of the future to get hold of the Crystal of Love, does this mean that I need to create Adrenaland so that I can meet Leandra?”

“That is a very good question,” said Boss, “I don’t know. However, I guess the closer you get to creating your Dream World, the higher are your chances to meet your beloved Leandra.”

Webbo looked slightly worried, knowing that his Marry was also stuck in another dimension at the moment.

“But,” continued Boss, “my personal belief is that it will be much easier for each one of us to materialise our respective soul mates in our reality dimension, than it will be for us to get hold of the Crystal of Love, which seems to require some drastic re-thinking of our society.”

After these clarifications, the goal-driven entrepreneur went up to the flipchart and drew two circles with a dotted bridge between them. And he explained to the Grooters:

“OK, here in the circle to the left is today’s Geneva, our current reality, 2018. And the circle to the right is the wonderful Geneva of the future, in 2061, the Dream World that only exists in a parallel dimension for the moment, or if you prefer, a potential future in Verity’s imagination.”

“So, our task is to build a bridge between these two dimensions?” wondered Leo.

“That sounds very much like science-fiction to me,” said Modella.

“Nothing is impossible,” said Boss, showing his watch with the squared cog wheel. “The way we need to proceed is just a step-by-step process that I call *reverse creativity*. And this is the

way any innovation has been done throughout history: you imagine what you would like to create, and then you find ways to create it. And yes, it includes some intuitive processes, but once you know how that works, everything is possible.”

“In the case of Geneva 2061, I do not think that we even need any yet uninvented technologies to build such a healthy society,” said Leo.

“Well, I think most households were off the grid,” said Verity, “Smaranda mentioned something about the availability of free energy.”

Boss pointed at the dotted bridge on the flipchart again: “We are just six people. We cannot rebuild a whole city by our own. We are just the bridge-builders. Think of it as for the colonization of the western USA. The first bridge over the Mississippi River was built in the nineteenth century.”

“1855,” added the Grooters living encyclopaedia, “and only a year later, there was a railway crossing it. More bridges followed soon thereafter and the West of the continent was ready for massive and rapid colonization.”

“So only a handful of people were needed to build the bridge, but this allowed millions of others to build everything from Denver to Los Angeles,” finished Boss.

“OK, I can picture a bridge over a river,” said Modella, “but what would a bridge from one dimension to another look like?”

“Good question. Remember the *Tasmanian Angel*? She helped to build a new reality thanks to new laws,” said Boss.

“That sounds good, but a little too simplistic,” said Richie.

“Why?”

“Because laws are not sufficient to change people’s mindset.”

“That makes the task even more impossible,” said Webbo.

“More interesting, you mean!” said Richie.

“The good news,” said Boss, “is that we now have a video of what Geneva in 2061 needs to look like for us to get hold of the Crystal of Love.”

“Yes, but this is far more complex than just changing the building facades like in a Hollywood studio. We may actually need 43 years to reach the result that Verity saw in her Dream World,” said Webbo.

“Except that we don’t have so much time at our disposal,” said Leo. “Remember Fuconcius’ and Goldilocks’ prophecies? We only have one, maximum two years to go. Which means we have no choice. We need a shortcut. At least to get hold of the Crystal of Love.”

“Indeed, in order for Geneva to look like it does in Verity’s dream, we need to get rid of all current corruption and other non-ethical and destructive behaviour, both in normal businesses, as well as in international and charitable organizations.”



“And in families,” added Modella.

“Yes, look at how radiant all people are in 2061. How do we solve that?” asked Webbo.

“And even if we change Geneva positively, how do we keep negativity out of the borders? We are not a remote island in the southern seas,” said Leo.

“Good point. Well, we cannot and do not want to close the borders,” said Boss.

“Which means the task seems even more daunting...” said Webbo.

“Which means that if we want to change Geneva, we need to change the whole world. Everything is interconnected nowadays,” said Boss.

“Now it really starts to become interesting,” said Richie.

“What do you mean,” said Webbo, “this means it is completely impossible for us to get hold of the Crystal of Love.”

“Only things that seem totally impossible from the start get me motivated,” said Richie.

“I guess we will need to travel to more Dream Worlds to get further clues on how to solve this global challenge,” said Leo.

“Yes, and we should try and find the other crystals first,” said Modella.

“Talking about more clues,” said Boss, “what about those added letters on the Reformation Wall? It must be some kind of clue.”

“I think so too,” said Verity.

“Yes, but if it is a clue, it is very vague,” said Webbo. “If it’s about Rio de Janeiro, then what?”

“Let’s just assume that the fourth crystal may be in Rio. Somewhere in Rio. The other clues were much more precise. Maybe we’ll get new insights later on.”

## Sauna and Fondue

“OK, guys,” said Boss, “what about giving our brains a break and take a week vacation to go skiing to celebrate our reunion?”

“And to celebrate our successful finding of the first two crystals,” added Verity.

“There are always reasons to celebrate. I love skiing,” said Modella giving an intense glance at Richie.

“Yes,” said Boss, “let’s go to Megève tomorrow.”

“OK,” said Richie, “but let’s make it two weeks. The last month has been extremely intense, and on top of that it has snowed heavily in the last few days in the mountains, so the skiing conditions should be perfect. And... I don’t like to work on my birthday.”

“Anyone not happy with taking two weeks’ skiing vacation?”

No answer.

“Great,” said Boss, “as for tonight, I suggest we go to the *Bain des Pâquis*.”

“Great idea. Sauna and cheese fondue!” exclaimed Verity.

“Yes, but only those who swim in the lake before are entitled to have fondue,” said Richie.

The Grooters drove down to the lake, and were welcomed with an out-of-this world sight: the lakeshore was covered with ice, it was so beautiful. Some people were even ice skating on the lake promenade.

“This is an absolutely unique weather phenomenon,” said Boss, “I have only seen it twice in my lifetime: it happens when there is a lot of wind mixed with very cold temperatures, so the waves of the lake blow up on the shore and freeze instantaneously.”

Many boats were fully covered in ice, and so were some cars that had parked too close to the lake. And there was even ice on the trees along the lake, making *magnificent* natural ice sculptures to photograph. The Grooters had to walk very carefully, but got used to balancing on the ice after a while.

Boss continued: “As you can see, don’t park your car too close to the lake in winter, or you may need an ice pick to access it.”

They went down to the sauna complex, enjoyed both the steam bath and the exceptional sauna with a view of the Saint-Pierre cathedral and the old town.

It felt strange for Modella to sit next to Richie in a sauna again. As the professor had mentioned, sensations are felt more strongly in a Dream World, but this wasn’t bad either, she thought, glad she could better hide her arousal than men.

“So, do you like sauna?” she asked Richie.

“Remember, my mother is from Finland – it’s like asking a French if he likes wine or a German if he likes cars.”

“Sorry, I had forgotten about that.”

Webbo and Verity had to be gently pushed into the cold lake, but in the end they had all ‘earned’ the cheese fondue in the adjacent restaurant, with good Swiss white wine, a log fire and a happy relaxed winter atmosphere.

Not only is the setting of the *Bain des Pâquis* unique, on top of that the fondue is one of the best in the world.

Boss, the natural project manager, who was fully aware of the importance of keeping track of how a project advances, asked the other Grooters:

“So, when we look back at our original Pact, what new insights do we have from our respective life experiences and especially from our recent Dream World travels?”

“That it’s crucial to have fun in life!” said Leo.

“Romance, to enjoy the moment and never take anything for granted,” said Verity.

“Sports and physical activity, although that’s probably not a very new insight, but it can’t hurt to repeat it,” said Modella.

“Knowledge and education,” said Webbo.

“Gambling” joked Leo thinking about Boss’ steampunk story.

“Research,” said Richie, “without research we won’t solve major problems in the world. And research needs money.”

“And researchers,” added Leo, smiling at Richie.

“OK,” summarized Boss, “it feels like we’ve come a little further although the battle is still far from won. Let’s celebrate our first two crystals.”

The Grooters all lifted their glasses and then plunged their forks and twisted their bread pieces into the fondue.

“And by the way,” added Boss, “I have some further good news.”

“What’s that?” enquired Verity with curiosity.

“I have been sleeping better since you all arrived early January.”

“That’s so great to hear,” said Modella, “that may mean that you’re on the right path.”

“You think so?”

“Yes, because job dissatisfaction is never an optimal recipe for good sleep.”

“So, you think our Grooters quest may be my right path in life?”

The other Grooters nodded: “We’re so happy for you, Boss, thanks for bringing us together.”

“Now, the moment of verity,” said Richie.

“That’s me!” Exclaimed Verity.

“With a small ‘v’. It’s a question to all of you: have you ever used your superpowers in a way you were not very proud of?”

Silence.

Finally, Boss said: “Yes, I admit I’ve used my mind reading power a few times to play on some women’s insecurities to get sexual favours.”

“Isn’t that what ‘players’ do all the time?” asked Webbo.

“Yes, but because I’m not such a player, I’m not proud of that behaviour.”

Then Modella gathered the courage to say: “I once had an architecture client who tried to take advantage of me when we visited an old home he had bought and planned to renovate. I knew the house was haunted, so instead of making the ghosts go away as I normally do in my clients’ homes, I made a deal with the ghosts to organise a poltergeist party to scare this client.”

“And what about you, Richie?” Asked Verity.

“There was a guy mobbing people at school, and one day I ‘saw’ that he would have a severe accident. I didn’t take any action to prevent it.”

Leo intervened: “You can’t prevent all people’s accidents. Despite most people denying it, such things happen for a reason, although people don’t understand the cause-effect relationship because there is a time lag between doing something wrong and getting the punishment for it. It’s as predictable as gravity and I still don’t get why people do bad things to others. Sooner or later, they pay for it. It’s called karma.”

Verity added: “What about bad things happening to good people?”

“In their case, they probably have had too many negative thoughts and let their fears master them. This should no longer be the case once people are taught how to handle their thoughts and emotions.”

“And you, Verity, have you used your superpower in a way you were not fully proud of?”

“Far too often at work: I say that I need a day to do some work; given my photoreading capability, it only takes me half an hour. And the rest of the time, I read interesting books or surf the Internet.”

“Maybe it’s time to give you a job where you don’t need to hide your talents, Verity?” said Richie.

“I’d love to.”

“Webbo?”

“You mean if I’ve misused my remote viewing or my coding superpowers? Well, I met this rich arrogant guy a while ago who had bought a new Tesla car. Remote viewing, I saw him driving in a remote area in Nevada, I hacked his car so it happened to breakdown in the middle of the desert. But I didn’t hack his phone so that he could call for help.”

“Your turn, Leo,” said Modella.

“In theory, I could have beamed myself into many banks or other locked doors to steal money or other things. The only time I did such a thing was in high school, when I came across a school gang that stole stuff from other kids. I teleported to the gang’s lair and stole their stuff, but leaving a note: *How does it feel getting your stuff stolen?* The gang stopped after I had teleported to their places a few times to show I meant business and threatened to tell the police. I kept some of their stuff which I shouldn’t have and that’s why I’m not so proud of it.”

They now had a digestif, and funnily enough all Grooters chose a different one: *abricotine, grappa, kirsch, poire, pomme*. And a hot tea for Verity.

Boss, who was interested in the history (and future) of his hometown Geneva, asked Verity:

“Why do you think that your Dream World was specifically set in the year 2061? Why not 2059, or 2073?”

“I don’t know.”

“Read it backwards,” suggested Webbo.

“Of course!” exclaimed all the Grooters simultaneously.

♪ *Geneva – Christer Gärdshy*

As music was playing in the background, they merrily ended the evening looking forward to their ski vacation.

