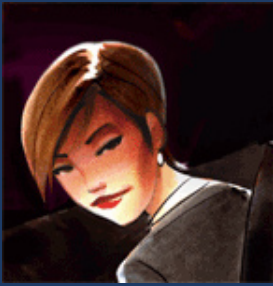


Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Introduction

Do you know the feeling you get when you've become very wrapped up in another place? When you feel like you're perhaps floating a few inches above your head, and everything seems a bit further away than it really is? I have that feeling when I go home every day.

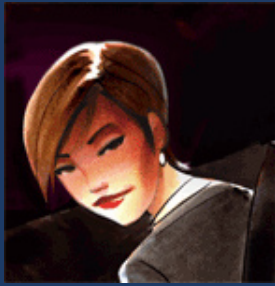
When I was a child, I would often lose myself in the imaginary worlds I found in books. This compulsion did not fade as I became an adult; rather, I found a more vibrant alternate world to immerse myself in: the Earth.

I'm Anna Heath. I have two profoundly important projects in my life: my work at the Academy, and my family at home.

At the Academy, I'm of course the second-most senior member of the Cube Retrieval Team after Master Sente Kiteway himself, who is often too busy to take the reins. I'm also a Fellow of the Languages department, and help quite a bit with administration; but most important, I teach a full plate of classes. The only thing I love more than exploring language is sharing that joy with someone else.

My twin sons Pip and Otto are in school now, and I am perpetually amazed when I watch them. Their language acquisition process was particularly interesting to me, and I wrote a number of papers based on my firsthand observations of the boys. My daughter, Eve, is two years old now, and already talking up a storm for her age! I couldn't be prouder of them.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Earth Linguistics

As a scholar of language, the question of why Perplex City seems to share a language with some geographies of Earth is one that pulls me back again and again. An itch that can't be scratched, if you will.

It bears noting that in the seventy-some years since the Centre for Reality Research first discovered Earth, the language Perplexians speak has been profoundly influenced by Earth, so the overall level of similarity has been growing; new words, slang, and figures of speech have been borrowed, and pronunciation has been altered to some degree, though some researchers believe some of the pronunciation shifts were already under way before the discovery.

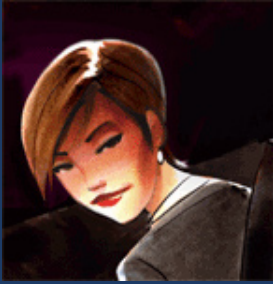
As you know, the late and much-lamented Academicians Ruth Coralhouse and Horatio Flynn developed CF Theory together. This convergent development model suggests that that the two worlds began development from widely different points, but that we are at a point in our histories in which we very coincidentally use very similar language. This model is considered the best contender as the truth, though other theories still have their adherents.

Karel Panaya, for example, suggests that language is strongly shaped by a culture's environment and internal development, and posits that this is evidence that the culture and environs of Perplex City must therefore be extraordinarily similar to certain locales on Earth. I have my doubts about this, based on my long exposure to Earth culture. We simply don't seem that fundamentally the same to me.

Other, less reputable sources suggest any number of other wild theories: that the Earth and Perplex City share a resonance in the fabric of reality that has an effect on the brain, and therefore on language (though no evidence of such a resonance has been found); or that this is evidence that Perplex City and Earth were somehow once part of the same physical world (despite the known fact that language is evolutionary, and a point of divergence would make the languages very different by now); or that this is evidence of an intentional design by a cosmic maker (a point that may or may not be disputable, but is a tenet of faith not of science; and yet does not explain the mechanism by which it came to pass).

Controversy aside, the discovery of Earth has been an unbelievably rich treasure for the linguistics department at the Academy. The array of languages spoken on Earth is so rich and varied compared to our own world that we are making vast strides in understanding. There has never been a more exciting time to be a linguist than now.

Anna Heath



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Earth Linguistics

Did You Know...

Did you know...

...Economists have calculated that, if Earth and Perplex City were in the same economy, it would take five lecks to a British pound sterling and around ten lecks per American dollar or Euro?

...The Perplexian year zero was during the Earth year 1737? The Earth and Perplex City share a common annual calendar as well as the names of months and days.

...Perplex City is ruled by a City Council in which the electorate chooses one council for each of the nine voting districts, with the City Council Leader being the elected Councillor who received the most votes from multiple regions?

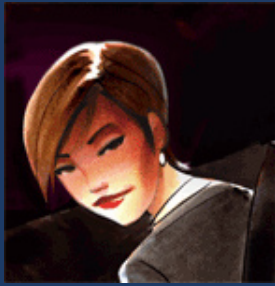
...Sente Kiteway, though he is embarrassed to admit it now, once took the top prize in the Academy first-years' prank tournament? He won it by cracking the Academy's security system and setting it to sound the alarm every time the Master or a Senior Fellow even so much as passed close to a Gatehouse!

...In Perplex City, fifth-year students and onward are encouraged to take control of their curriculum to shape it according to their abilities and interests?

...The discovery of Earth cast into serious question several prominent cosmological theories of the day - most notably soundly debunking the Fellowes-Tse-Tartalla Theory?

...The average PCAG competitor is 39 years old, though champions have historically been as young as 15 and as old as 94?

Anna Heath



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About Me

Earth Linguistics

Did You Know...

My relationship with Isaac

Thursday, 2nd March 2006

My first days in the Academy were difficult. I was a bit young for my peer group - just 18 when I was accepted to the Academy - and although I was able to keep up on an academic level, I often felt a bit left out once study time was over. I found myself drawn to the Academy library, burying myself in a mountain of words, looking for distraction to keep from becoming too very lonely.

This is where I met Isaac Cymbalisky. He was already on his way up through the mysterious hierarchy of the library by then, and he must have seen me a dozen times before he ever spoke to me. Then one day, he asked me what an awkward and horsey child like myself was doing in his library. I told him that it wasn't nice to call people names, particularly when one is as old and homely as he. I braced myself to be thrown out of the library, but instead, he about split his sides laughing.

This was the start of a long and meaningful friendship. He felt sorry for me at first, and began directing me to books he thought I might find interesting. Then he began directing me to people I might find interesting. Why, he even introduced me to my husband! He also encouraged me to push myself forward, and helped me to navigate the murky waters of academic ambition. I would not be where I am today without him.

Certainly, Isaac has always had his detractors. He was a man of earthy wit, and choosy with where he gave his friendship (though he did always have a soft spot for pretty girls). But he was also a tremendous lover of books and of knowledge, and he found great happiness in sharing the fruits of his work. He felt that guiding young minds toward the proper nourishment they needed to grow properly is one of the most important tasks one can take on.

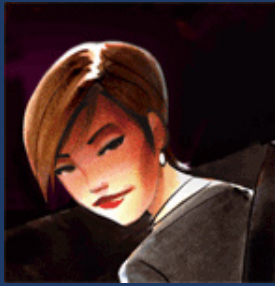
I say all this to show you how well I knew Isaac. I can't think of anyone who knew him better. And no matter what the inquest says, he would never have contemplated suicide. Everything about it rings false to me. He was a stubborn man, and once said that suicide was like throwing away a book when you hadn't read the end. How can you resist seeing how it turns out, even if it is a tragedy? And Isaac's life was no tragedy! He loved

Continued »

the library. He felt a kind of paternal, proprietary affection for it - the buildings, the books, the librarians, all of it. Perhaps some people might see a life lived among books and centuries of scholarship as a tragedy but I don't, and I know Isaac didn't either. He loved his life. I know he did not choose to end it.

A grave injustice is being done here. A great man has been lost, and his death has been swept under the carpet. I can't let this lie unchallenged. I am going to find the truth. I am going to find his murderer.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Constant reminders

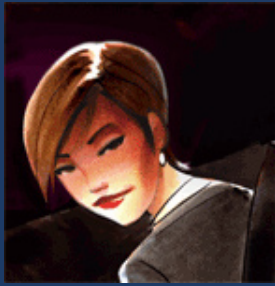
Monday, 6th March 2006

Sunday morning, my boys were scrawling upon their boiled eggs with coloured pencils while waiting for them to cool. I asked what they were making, and Otto pronounced that the eggs were now hideous farvelfengs from the Collected True and Accurate Tales of Beasts Exotic and Dire, by one S.A. Wetherby (said farvelfengs to be slain in the fullness of time by righteous spoon, of course). Isaac had lent them his own copy of the Collected Tales in mid-December, and it's been one of their fast favourites ever since.

The pair roared on about how fierce their farvelfengs were, even asking me to rule on which one was the more frightening. Then Pip looked at me with his big, sad eyes, and said, "I miss Uncle Isaac, mummy."

I've been trying to probe the police department for more information, but thus far they barely return my calls. This isn't getting me anywhere, there has to be a better way.

Anna Heath



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Earth Linguistics

Did You Know...

Fleming is plotting

Wednesday, 8th March 2006

Well, I've about had it with the police. It's not just that they won't give me any information at all, it's that in the process of being of no use whatsoever, they've treated me like a toddler - and a dull one, at that! I'm being a reasonable woman. I'm not making wild accusations of incompetence or tomfoolery, no matter how accurate they might be. I'm simply asking, as a close personal friend of the victim, if I could have copies of any public-domain records in the case file. What will they give me? Nothing! Why, they won't even permit me a copy of my own testimony! It's simply ridiculous. Unconscionable!

Meanwhile, I've been receiving emails from a number of Cube hunters on Earth, offering anything to help with that could aid in my search for justice for poor Isaac Cymbalsty. I am both surprised and gratified by this unexpected wave of support. To be honest, just thinking about it, how very kind you've been to me, makes me just a touch misty.

And I've also been speaking to Fleming, my husband. He's a member of the Perplex City Auxiliary Volunteer Police, and he was called into service last weekend when Roll for Damage held their surprise concert at The Stitch, with all of the ensuing security trouble. Based on this, Fleming has an idea. He thinks we might be able to use the next surprise show to our advantage to sneak into the police network and grab the information we're looking for.

At any rate, here's his plan. Tippy is hinting that the next RFD surprise show is going to be sometime early next week in the Amandier district. (A word to the wise: never tell our Tipster a secret you want kept.) Fleming says that if someone -- or many, many someones -- were to report ongoing crimes in every police district in the city at the same time the show were going on, it is likely that the police would activate the volunteer forces. If the situation appeared bad enough, the police would then go into "Emergency Scenario 205-Z," which gives the volunteer forces temporary full access to the police network. I suspect if I asked Kurt, he could very easily set up a way for all of you to call into our system and look, well, local. We've spoken about that kind of interconnection in a more theoretical sense in the past, and he's said "that kind of hack is child's play."

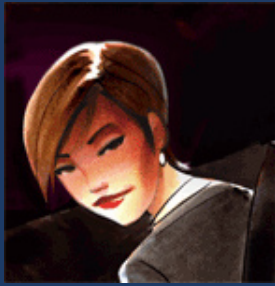
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I'm really torn about this idea, because it seems to be of such questionable ethicality, but so is letting a murderer run around loose. I can't think of why anyone would have wanted to harm poor Isaac in the first place, so there's no telling when and where this killer could strike again. Fleming assures me that with police crawling all over the city checking out falsely reported crimes, there is little chance that a real crime could be carried out successfully, but if anything happened that night, I would never forgive myself.

At any rate, I'm still not sure it's the best way to get the information. I'll still try through the proper channels this week, and if I've not come up with anything by the time the next RFD show is announced, Fleming says he'll provide me (and you) with the information you'd need to carry out this scheme of his.

I really hope it doesn't come to that.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Dead End

Friday, 10th March 2006

I went to pick up a few personal items of Isaac's from the police that they had collected as evidence and are now releasing late in the day yesterday. The officer on duty - a brusque slip of a girl who must have been half my age - sneered at me and said that she had heard I've been a thorn in the department's side lately, and that if I felt competent to second-guess the police, then I should take the service examination myself. I think it's perfectly clear by now I won't be making any progress going down that route.

Roll for Damage has also announced their next surprise show, at Euler's Disk in Amandier. It's just for around an hour on Tuesday evening, but Fleming says the police will be on high alert from probably around half past five clear through to eight o'clock to cope with the gathering crowds. He suggested that this would be the time to schedule for a bit of diversion.

However, there may be a problem with you actually causing a diversion.

I cast a feeler at Kurt this morning about setting up a way for people on Earth to contact the police by phone. It went... poorly. I would think Kurt would take into consideration his knowledge of my character. I am not given to wild flights of fancy. I've always been able to face difficult truths head-on. But instead of giving me a fair hearing, he bristled up and flung a most hurtful diatribe at me about 'giving up on my conspiracy theories.'

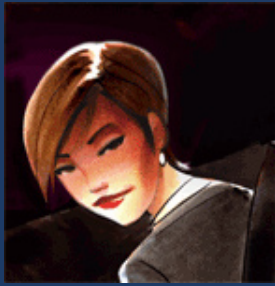
I find myself really quite overwrought about it, not just because Kurt has always been a dear in the past, but because it's difficult to discover you can't rely on someone to the extent that you had previously believed. I would do anything I could to help Kurt if he were in a spot - for anyone on my team, really - and I suppose I had just expected that the others would all feel the same way.

One strange thing I noticed, though, looking back. If there is one thing Kurt McAllister is not, it is a competent liar. And when I asked him about setting up a phone exchange system, rather than getting the distant look he gets when he is trying to solve a problem, he took on the rather bored expression he adopts when talking about a problem he's moved well beyond. I'm not sure what to make of it, but I almost think he must have done or seen this sort of thing before. When, though, and why?

Continued »

Nonetheless - I feel at the end of my wits. It's rare I've felt as helpless as this; I think not since my father passed away when I was fourteen. I would expect to feel some relief from the removal of my ethical dilemma, but instead I'm left with a leaden weight on my chest. How can I live with myself if I permit Isaac's loss to go unpunished? How can I allow others to misremember him as a lonesome coward, and not the devoted scholar I knew him to be? And yet I see no way to move forward.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Proof of Life

Monday, 13th March 2006

Thank you for the very kind messages you've been sending me. I can't say they've helped me come to any great revelations, but it's nice to know someone outside my own family thinks I've still got a brain in my head. Certain parties have whispered to me that Kurt has been involved in some unsavoury activities of late, and suggested a course of blackmail. I find it hard to believe that Kurt McAllister - my Kurt, pure as a cloud in the sky - could be up to such tricks. I do admit that it would explain his vehemence in our conversation last week. A guilty conscience might indeed cause him to lash out in just such a way. Still, I don't have the heart to confront and coerce one of my own team-members, for a just cause or no.

I've suggested we meet for a cup of coffee after work this evening, to perhaps get a second chance at convincing him to help me in a less underhanded way, but he hasn't yet agreed. If he doesn't, I simply don't know what I'll do.

At any rate, I spent this weekend with my family, trying to let go of everything that's happened, but it didn't help. I suppose this shouldn't come as a surprise. When you've had a friend for twenty years, you can find reminders every place you look. I rest my head on Fleming's shoulder, and remember the day Isaac sent him to tea with me because Isaac "wasn't feeling well." The liar.

Or I look at Eve and remember Isaac giving her his mother's silver bracelet as a birth gift, gruffly informing me that he had "no personal use for the thing." Everywhere I look is something else just like that filled to spilling with memory - books he'd recommended, trophies he'd urged me to compete for, little trinkets he'd given to one or another of us. Letting go wasn't working, so I thought perhaps I should just wallow in my grief for a bit and see if that helped, instead.

So early Sunday evening, I went over to the library and let myself into Isaac's office. It's been locked all of this time, so it was still exactly the way he left it. A mess, of course. Isaac always had a keen intellect, but orderly he never was. I used to joke that without his cleaners coming every Thursday afternoon, his home would suffocate him under an avalanche of the accretion of life. He always complained that come Friday morning he

Continued »

couldn't find anything he needed, though, and so he chased away cleaners from his office in the library as routinely as he could manage it.

Isaac's office, then, was just exactly the way he always left it; a complete and utter disaster. There was a small pile of mostly-empty noodle cartons, thankfully dried up rather than smelly, sitting on the floor by his desk, and on every surface precarious towers of books, notes, documents; all the paper of his work. Dust, of course, covering everything to a greater or lesser degree.

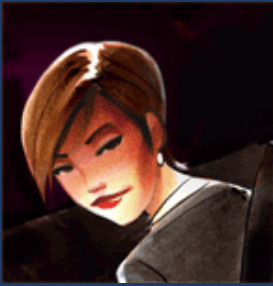
In the middle of his desk, in a lonely clear spot, was his list of things he'd intended to attend to the following Monday: a meeting with Anja Marlowe from the museum in the morning; some sensitive acquisitions for the library that needed following up; some notes on a major restoration project he'd been considering; a bit of chicken-scratch about Violet and Anthony Granier's diary.

I just stared at that page, this proof that he had plans for living at least another few days, and I started to cry and cry. I don't know if Kurt would take this as any sort of proof, but I folded up the list and tucked it into my bag, and I'm going to try to show it to him today as all the evidence I've been able to muster. Men planning on killing themselves don't tend to draw out their agendas for subsequent days, do they? It seems so mundane, but so expectant. It carries with it a basic assumption that life will continue as normal.

I sorted myself out eventually, of course, and put on a brave face when I went home and tucked the little ones into bed, but even this morning my head is sore and my eyes feel unpleasantly puffy. Garnet and Aiko have both taken me aside and asked if perhaps I should take the day off, but I think working may take my mind off things for a while. Although I do still find myself staring at the wall in my interstitial moments, trying to make sense of Isaac's death, trying to puzzle out how I can live with this sorrow if I can't work toward justice.

Oh, and one last thing - some of you have been asking me about a missing page of Anthony Granier's diary. I think the document you're so keen on was returned to me from the police under my authority as a fellow at the Academy. As far as I can tell, the thing is indecipherable. It's really incredible how much hand-written script has changed in so little time. I left the document locked up in Isaac's office after I left yesterday.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

We're On

Monday, 13th March 2006

I don't even know how to express how I feel right now. I met Kurt after work today, and I think we were both more than a little prickly at first, but I tried to keep my head and lay down my case, and I could tell Kurt was trying to give me a fair hearing. I took out that agenda of Isaac's and showed it to Kurt, and he frowned a bit and admitted it seemed a bit irregular.

Then I relayed to him of some of the wild theories you've been sending me about the mythical Third Power and suggestions that someone had a motivation in not letting Anthony Granier's diary be read, and he frowned a little more. Though I have to say I felt a touch ridiculous spreading such fairy tales around. Still, I could tell I hadn't convinced him, not by a long way.

At last, Kurt started probing for information on Isaac and his work, his life, his comings and goings, anything I could tell him, looking for anything definitive. And it was such an offhand remark that turned the tide. I mentioned Isaac's cleaners to Kurt, the ones that always come round on Thursday afternoons, and he looked at me sharply. "Cleaners?" he said. "And they came every week?"

Yes, I told Kurt, for as long as I had known Isaac it had been the case.

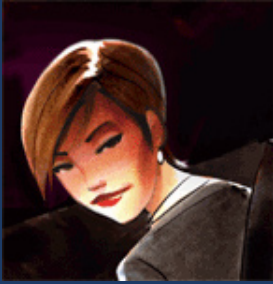
He turned a bit pale, then, and leaned back into his chair. "Cymbalistry was discovered dead midday on a Saturday," he said, "and according to the inquest, there were no fingerprints or other evidence showing anybody but him had been on the premises in days."

I blinked a bit, clutching my cup of coffee, and wondered why I hadn't seen it before. "So what happened to the evidence that the cleaners had been there?" I asked.

Kurt's mouth narrowed into a very stern line. "You've made your case, Anna," he said. "I'm your man."

He tells me to tell you that he'll be setting everything up overnight and leaving you the information you need to help temporarily overload the police system. Thank you, all of you, and if I don't get another chance to write beforehand... good luck.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Guilty Conscience

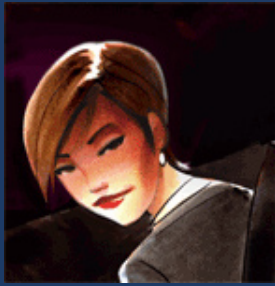
Friday, 17th March 2006

Well, we've got what we wanted. I've been looking through the police records, and I'm not quite sure what to make of it all. The fact that Ceretin was in his coffee, and that it appears to be a black-market version, doesn't make any sense to me at all, though I'm not yet sure how to follow up. Some of you have suggested I speak to his cleaners, so I've called them and asked if they could meet me sometime next week, but I doubt that's going to really get anywhere.

Mostly, though, I feel really terrible about the things that happened Tuesday night. I don't know if you've read, but there were a number of injuries that might have been prevented if the police hadn't been hindered by our actions. I've not been able to look Kurt in the eye since Tuesday night. I had hoped nothing terrible would happen, but I knew there was a chance, and now I feel like Vadik from the fairy tale, like I've called a horde of rapacious demons down onto my own people for a selfish end. And of course I did it intentionally and knowing what might happen.

Fleming and I are taking the children camping for the holiday weekend. Next Tuesday is the Builder's Celebration, and the past few years we've taken the boys to help maintain the park lands south of the city as our spring building. I'm taking the whole report on my key, though, to see if I come up with any fresh ideas by the time I'm back.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Coming Up Empty

Monday, 27th March 2006

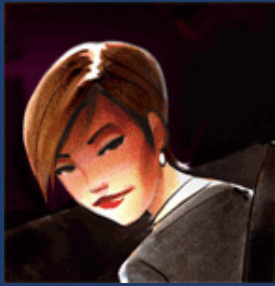
I finally got a chance to speak to Isaac's cleaners late on Friday afternoon. I would have sooner, but you know how work always piles up after a holiday. And I still don't know really how to address all of you after the fiasco with the police. I thought before you were perhaps some kind of faceless, homogenous block of like-minded people, but I've been asked not to write off all of you because of a few bad nuts. And you're right; it's extremely foolish to behave as though you were all eyes and hands with a single mind. It's certainly something I'll try to keep in my head going forward.

At any rate, I wasn't really sure what I'm after, but whatever it is, I don't think the cleaners know anything about it. They're a very sweet married couple, getting on a bit in years, now. Very puzzled about why I'd wanted to meet them, of course. They hadn't even heard anything had happened to Isaac until they came around the next Thursday and couldn't get into the apartment (the police changed the access codes to prevent tampering while the death was still under investigation).

Anyway, Evelyn told me they'd knocked on a few neighbours' doors until they found someone home, who explained what happened. Much dismay all around, so I gather, though it's hard to tell if the Rokitas are more upset over the tragedy or over losing a long-time customer.

Basically another dead end. I'm still scratching my head over those reports. I suppose as long as Kurt is in the kettle with me already, I might as well ask what he thinks, though I'm still too nervous to really broach the topic.

Anna Heath



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About Me

Earth Linguistics

Did You Know...

Cognivia

Wednesday, 5th April 2006

I've spoken to Kurt, and he's expressed some skepticism regarding the ceretiva the police found in Isaac's body. If there's a new type of ceretiva on the street, the police should certainly have known; failing that, I'm trying to get some information from Cognivia. I think a good first place to check would be that private shareholder report they issued last week. If Cognivia knows anything at all about this new ceretiva derivative, it's likely they'd put it in the report, since black market activity has a significant impact on their legitimate business.

I've done everything I can think of to get my hands on that report, though, with no luck whatsoever. Cognivia won't give it out to non-shareholders, so I've asked around and discovered that none of my friends are feeling upbeat about the pharmaceutical industry. No shareholders there.

In a fit of desperation, I even bought a share myself and then requested the report through shareholder relations. Sadly, the moment it was released, it became an 'historical document' to the company, and they had to send me to their corporate librarian to request a copy. For some reason, Cognivia still handles this type of request on paper, ridiculous though that may be, and they absolutely insist they won't be able to get me the report for eight to twelve weeks. Eight to twelve weeks! With that kind of service, I must say I'm not surprised the stock is plummeting.

Meanwhile, our lovely and reliable Tippy got up to her usual antics this morning and threw a positively epic tantrum right in the corridor outside her office. It seems her recently ex-boyfriend Helix Hesh sent her an absolutely exquisite bracelet (if I do say so) as something of an apologetic parting gift. This did not sit very sweetly with our girl, who made a show of hurling the jewels to poor Von's feet and demanding that somebody send them back at once. "It's an insult," she shouted, chin high up in the air. "My forgiveness is not something that can be purchased." She carried on to that effect for several minutes. Then she got a wicked little smirk on her face, and announced, "I don't even know how Helix can afford to be sending out party favours like this, when he's taking such a terrible beating on Cognivia."

Von, of course, was quivering like the mouse who's spotted the owl the entire time, though he eventually squeaked out a few words volunteering

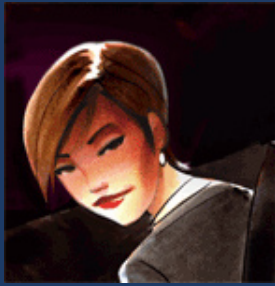
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to send the offending bracelet back to Hesh Records. I'm sure Tippy would have been more satisfied had he volunteered to turn it into a bomb first, but she takes what she can get. (She's fine, by the way; I think the drama of a celebrity break-up suits her even better than the attention of a celebrity relationship. I had a talk with her, and after her outburst, she seemed to feel much better.)

So now I know of one Cognivia shareholder for certain. It would be much more useful if Tippy and Helix were still dating; I'm sure Tippy could talk Helix into handing over the report, she's a genius at getting her way. It would just be a matter of talking Tippy into it. This is assuming that anyone can ever convince Tippy to do anything she doesn't absolutely want to do, which is of course flatly impossible.

Still, it's just wishful thinking, and unless someone has a bright idea for me, it'll be eight to twelve weeks, yet, before we know anything more.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Unexpected Fortune

Wednesday, 19th April 2006

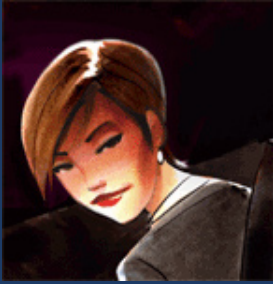
I'm sorry I haven't come back to you with any comments on the stockholder report. (I'm amazed at how simple it was for you to get it!) It's just that the boys have both been sick with sore throats and fevers all last week - nothing serious, mind you, but they're a handful when they're not both tired and ill-tempered. And then of course Eve and Fleming caught it, and then finally I did over the weekend. For those of you who are not parents but plan to be someday, take heed: the only thing worse than a sick child is a well child when you are sick.

It was a beautiful morning today, and I turned my face up to the sun while I was walking to the office and thought about how strange it is that ordinary life always carries on. I'm missing Isaac, and working on this covert investigation of his murder, and still my family gets sick and I have to attend to the laundry and there are beautiful mornings, just like nothing important has happened at all.

Anyway, I have exciting news to report. Some of you have written expressing interest in that forthcoming report on Ceretin 6, and I absolutely agree that it might tell us something. For once, serendipity is smiling upon us! Just this afternoon, I was approached by one of the Academy's cognition researchers - Oistin Meade, a brand new member of the Natural Sciences department. He's looking for a way to forge a reputation in his field, and he was asking about the potential of collecting some sort of research data from you, our Cube hunters on Earth, in order to do a bit of comparative analysis.

I'm not sure precisely what he has in mind - he doesn't have the study fully designed yet - but I casually mentioned that for purely intellectual purposes I'd be interested in reading that Ceretin 6 report when it comes out, and of course he fell all over himself assuring me that he'd let me have as many copies as my heart could possibly desire if only I would let him conduct this research of his. So it looks like we have a way to get the report! I'll do my best to help Oistin, and I hope you will, too, and hopefully he'll hold up his end of our informal bargain when the time comes.

Anna Heath



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About Me

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Did You Know...

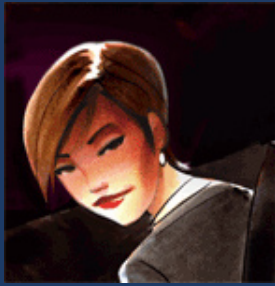
Oistin's Research

Monday, 24th April 2006

Looks like Oistin's got his survey up here. I have to admit I haven't had any time to look at it myself, but Oistin's done some terrific graduate work on the effects of multiple variables on cognition and behaviour, so I trust you're in good hands. I would ask you to encourage others to participate in this study, as well, because the more favourably Oistin feels his research has gone, the more likely it is he won't have a fit of excessive ethicality and refuse to give me that Ceretin 6 report when it's out.

You know, there was a time not long ago that I thought scrupulous adherence to a rigid set of ethics was a good thing.

Anna Heath



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About Me

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Did You Know...

Making Excuses

Friday, 28th April 2006

I'm sorry I've been lax about responding to your mail. I'm conducting exams next week, so I've had a steady stream of students coming into my office all day long for extra help, or to clarify what I'll be testing on, or to explain that their Great-Aunt Millie's cat has fallen very ill and can they please have an extension due to this family emergency? And on top of that, Roberto Solitano, my superior in the Languages department, has thrown me some extra departmental administrative work to handle. Though I suppose you aren't so interested in departmental politics, so I won't bore you with it.

Meanwhile, Fleming's birthday is coming up soon, and I'm trying to think of something wonderful to do for him, but it seems like my inspiration runneth dry. I'm starting to feel like I might have too many pots on the fire to all stir at once.

At least Oistin seems tickled pink by the data he's gathering. He told me this morning he's got his third survey up and ready for participants. I finally took a look at his surveys, and they do seem a bit whimsical, don't they? Still, he wasted a good hour of my time earnestly explaining to me his research objectives, and he does give an air of confidence that he knows what he's doing. He feels strongly that 'research doesn't have to be deadly dull.' Interestingly, this doesn't prevent conversation with him from being remarkably dull all the same.

Two questions, though, that you keep sending me in email, though I can't imagine why; you want to know precisely what Isaac's daily agenda said regarding Violet, and you want to know what's become of his personal key. I've long since thrown away the agenda. It seems a bit too macabre to just keep it hanging around. Still, from memory, I believe the item said:

* Violet go over Granier diary after hours doc preservation room

I could be slightly mistaken; Isaac's penmanship was atrocious, and it is from memory.

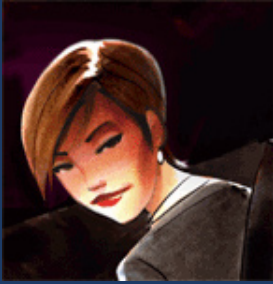
His key, though, was returned to me with the rest of his personal effects. I've not thought about it again, as the police went over it pretty carefully and didn't see anything useful. I suppose I could hand it over to Kurt and

Continued »

see what he comes up with, but I can't imagine he has tools the police don't.

Sometime over the next few weeks I'll be disposing of the key, too, as well as many of Isaac's other belongings - we're trying to arrange an estate sale, with the proceeds going to the Perplex City Historical Society, as per Isaac's wishes. The paperwork involved in this, though, is absolutely awful. It's sad enough having lost a dear friend; I wonder how mourning families are expected to wade their way through this mess of regulations?

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Ceretin 6

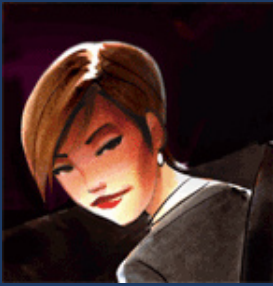
Tuesday, 2nd May 2006

Well, it looks like Oistin has delivered for us, after a fashion. The paper actually came out last Wednesday, but he's been so giddy over his data that he didn't think to get it to me until I gently prodded him yesterday afternoon.

And even despite his giddiness, he did get a fit of conscience right at the end, so he only gave me the summary page, rather than the whole paper. (Though it may be just as well, since what would we do with all of that tedious raw data and analysis of computer simulations?) At any rate, I've left it here for you.

It certainly is thought-provoking, isn't it? It makes we wonder... well, don't let me bias you. Take a look and tell me what you think.

Anna Heath



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About Me

Earth Linguistics

Did You Know...

Shell Shocked

Wednesday, 10th May 2006

When all of this began, I was certain Isaac had been murdered, but I never really gave much thought to who might have done it, nor why. If I had considered it, I might have spun something up about an insurance scheme gone wrong, or an angry neighbour, or perhaps a psychopathic history buff. I never would have thought it was Miranda (or anybody that I knew at all) and now that the truth is out, I'm at a loss for what to do next.

I got your messages about Kurt, about how he was hurt in that Old Town explosion. I visited him in the hospital, and tried to talk to him -- just to see if he was all right -- but he was very evasive. Of course I wasn't about to press him for information at a time like that, and now he's understandably taking a leave of absence, so I have many more questions than answers, yet. Still, I get the feeling that he and Violet are involved in something much deeper and darker than I could ever have guessed, and I'm frightened. The whole world seems somehow more strange and menacing than I ever would have believed, like nothing is what it seemed before.

I feel such a fool. Where did I think all of this was leading? I still have nothing like the kind of evidence one could bring to the police, and our suspect has fled justice, anyhow. It was ridiculous to ever think that a vigilante investigation could be successful in anything but a terribly plotted spy film. But I'm not a heroine, am I? I've never been brave, or strong, or stalwart; I'm not Rivka at the river, or even Sedgewick at a protest. I wish I were. And with all I owe to Isaac, I wish I hadn't failed him in the end.

Anna Heath

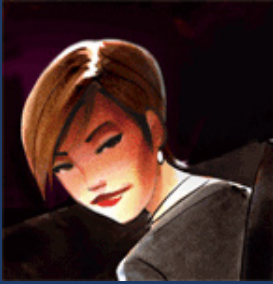
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Did You Know...

New Perspective

Tuesday, 16th May 2006



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Violet unexpectedly came round for tea in my office late yesterday afternoon. Now, Violet is one of those people who isn't quite sure what to do with children. She probably thinks she's terrible with kids, and gets by speaking to them very seriously, as though they were tiny adults. In my experience, though, children adore being taken seriously like that, so my brood has always been enthusiastic about her. Violet, though, seemed a little taken aback to find the boys in my office with me.

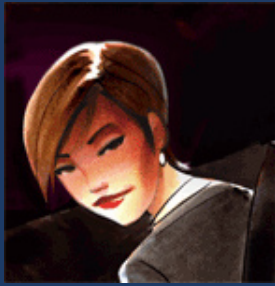
Otto and Pip were drawing 'engineering diagrams' for some sort of giant flying robots - they come back to the Academy sometimes after school, when Fleming isn't free. They keep themselves busy and stay quiet - quieter than my colleagues can be! - and Caine and Aiko like to abduct them from time to time to test out some of their puzzle designs on 'minds free of preconception.'

When I figured out Violet wanted to have a private chat with me, I sent them off to see if Caine needed their 'help' with anything. (Caine may try to seem a ruffian, but he's the one who taught the twins how to play Pyramid; they really love him.)

Violet sat perched at the very edge of her chair and she told me, first, that Kurt was off chasing Miranda; then words just started spilling out of her mouth, about Miranda, about Anthony Granier, about mysterious murderers and Cube-thieves and the Third Power, who I always thought were just bugaboo villains from children's stories. I think I know everything now, and it's like my whole world has snapped back into focus. Suddenly, it all makes sense again. When she was done talking, I looked at her face, pinched and pale and so very worried, and I asked her what I could do to help.

For now, I'm doing my best to conceal Kurt's absence at the offices. We do allow quite a lot of field research and working from whatever place is the most convenient at the time, but Kurt's lack of tangible output will be noticeable before long. I'll be taking some of my own work and presenting it as his, though my maths puzzles aren't but a dim candle to his. Meanwhile, I don't suppose you lot would be willing to chip in with any puzzles you have lying around? We couldn't put them on cards, I suppose, so I'd have to quietly weed them out in the later phases, but it would make it easier to protect Kurt. As a bit of a reward for your efforts, I'll post the best of the lot up here so you can all enjoy them.

Anna Heath



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About Me

Earth Linguistics

Did You Know...

Making Shelter

Tuesday, 23rd May 2006

I'm not sure how to address this, but it looks like Kurt won't be back to the CRT for a while. I've not yet spoken to him directly, but Violet told me a little about what's happened. I gather Kurt caught up with Miranda, and then she was killed in some sort of accident. It sounds positively horrible, and I for one am content not to ask too many questions about it. Still, when I'd envisioned justice for Isaac, this isn't what I had in mind. I'm trying to make peace with it all the same.

My heart really goes out to Kurt, and I hope that all of you will be there for him if he needs you. I'm sure he's bleeding inside right now. How could it be otherwise? But I think he's not very likely to reach out to the people all around him who care about him. I just hope he knows that the rest of us aren't setting out to betray him, as well.

Meanwhile, I'm planning to keep covering for Kurt as long as I am able. I'm pleased by the response I've received from all of you! I'm sorry I've been a bit quiet since asking for your help. I've been completely buried trying to cover for Kurt on top of my own commitments, plus I've begun feeling a bit under the weather lately; and to top it all off, Eve has started waking a few times every night again, so I haven't had a solid night's rest in nearly two weeks. (I think she's just discovered when she wakes up at night, she can come and find us, and expects we may feel like playing at 3am, as well.)

Some of you have asked questions about what to send to me. You don't need to send finished cards by any means, just puzzles of any variety; and they can be images, text, whatever suits the puzzle. Please, though, don't send in puzzles you've found elsewhere and didn't make yourself, that simply isn't how we do things at the Academy.

I'd appreciate if you could send along the answers with your puzzles, and perhaps a brief explanation of how each puzzle works -- I can't very well submit a puzzle to the team if I don't know how to solve it myself, and I sadly don't have time to work them all out just now, though I'd really love to do so. If you've sent in a puzzle already with no answer, it would be lovely if you could just email me a quick explanation. None of these puzzles will be making it to cards, mind you; I'll be working diligently to

Continued »

weed them out during the long card-approval process. This shouldn't be so difficult, given the outsized number of cards Kurt's done already.

And now, here are a pair I've received already (I'll post answers in a few days).

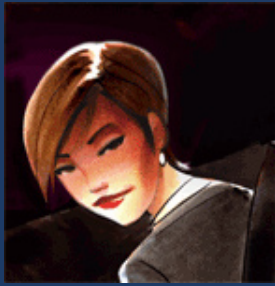
From Martin Baker, we have:

((Billy Crystal + Mark Christopher) * David Fincher) ((Catherine Hardwicke - Tom O'Hara) * Blake Edwards) = ?

This one, Farmer's Market, from Helen Roy:

Running a farm and trying to make ends meet is hard work. Last week, however, I had a particularly good day at the farmer's market. In the morning I sold four pigs and two cows for 2990 lecks. Then in the afternoon I sold two pigs and three cows for 2645 lecks. Then, just as I was loading up the trailers, I managed to sell another pig and 4 sheep to a latecomer who had missed the earlier sales for 1120 lecks. How much did I charge for each pig, cow and sheep?

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Your Puzzles and Some Conclusions

Thursday, 1st June 2006

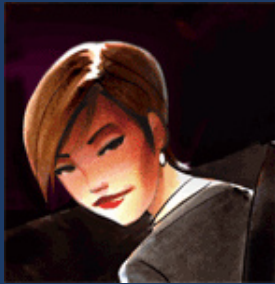
After some consideration, I've decided to put the puzzles you're sending up on a separate page, including the ones I've posted before. The answers are there alongside, but concealed through the wonder of technology so you don't need to see them unless you choose to.

I'm starting to think Sente suspects something, though. I made another little speech at our Thursday meeting about Kurt continuing to feel unwell, but that he'd sent in a number of puzzles for the team to review. When I was done, Sente gave me one of his trademark long, silent, calculating looks; the ones that make you feel like you've been caught with your fingers in the candy dish after your parents have told you no sweets. I think I held up gracefully. Or at least he hasn't said anything about it to me. Still, that man could teach mountains to keep secrets, and I do wonder if he knows more than he's letting on.

There's something else, though. When I was helping Violet with that recovered page from Anthony Granier's diary, we got to talking about Miranda and the Third Power. We came to a conclusion we should've really stumbled on before. Surely Miranda had other co-conspirators in the Academy? It's a thought to make one feel a bit queasy. Certainly one can't go around clamouring that the Academy is infiltrated by spies from the Third Power. To be honest, I still feel faintly ridiculous saying it myself! And yet, I'm certain someone has to do something about this. Given how things have turned out, I suppose that someone will have to be us.

I'm still trying to work out how to tell who can be trusted, or what to do about it if we find someone who can't be. A cake best eaten in small bites, I think.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

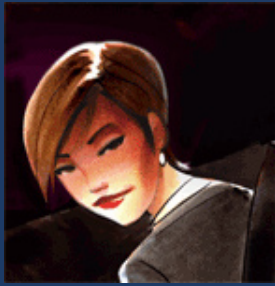
Violet Calls

Friday, 2nd June 2006

Violet's called to invite me to some sort of conclave she's holding on Sunday. She was less than forthcoming, but she sounded remarkably resolute. I think something serious is at hand.

Usually she puts on a particularly flippant facade - you know the one I mean, like she's too detached to find anything but dry amusement in the world - but not this time. It's often difficult to believe that the Kiteways are related to each other at all, they're so different. Today, though, it suddenly struck me how very like her father Violet is, after all.

Anna Heath



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About Me

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Did You Know...

Secrets and Lies

Wednesday, 14th June 2006

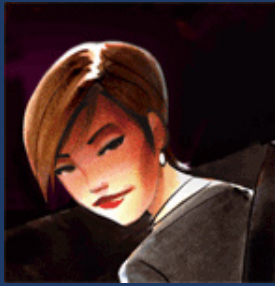
I imagine Violet's already told you about our big meeting. I'm refraining from telling Fleming very much about it for now. I know I could trust him of all people, but many of these secrets aren't mine, so it isn't my place to reveal them. I have told him, though, that we're very concerned that some sort of organised criminal group is undermining the hunt for the Cube. He's under the impression this is all part of my regular position on the Cube Retrieval Team, though. No need to mention the Third Power, he'd think I was just being ridiculous. It's like something you'd read in a terrible adventure novel when you're eight years old.

My job in this secret cabal is to try to find out anything I can about the equipment Bernardo Holyoke had from the Academy. What exactly was this gear, and what was it for? And what other things have gone missing, if anything? I suspect the man who would know the most is Henrik Tanner, who runs all of the Academy's security, so there's my obvious path.

Now, many years ago, Henrik and I were very friendly, but we haven't really spoken very much since I've been married. I'm trying to find a way to reconnect with him. Just enough to gain some confidence, and possibly surreptitious access to his office, but not enough to - you know - give him the wrong sort of impression.

It's a nasty business, using people like this, though I'm afraid it comes easier to me every day. Still, the enemy uses much dirtier tricks, and we won't save the world by keeping our hands clean.

Anna Heath



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About Me

Earth Linguistics

Did You Know...

Into the Lion's Den

Tuesday, 20th June 2006

For years, I've kept a careful distance from Henrik. We see each other at formal Academy events, of course, and even talk, but I've steered clear of anything too personal, too potentially hurtful to him. I should make things clearer: Yes, when we were younger, Henrik and I were once romantically involved, and for a while, we were even very serious. Ultimately, though, I broke things off for -- well, for the kinds of reasons that seem all-important and insurmountable when you're that age. Freedom. Independence. Fear. The usual bunch. The specifics don't really matter anymore.

I've always felt terrible about it, because I didn't go about it gracefully, and I know that I hurt Henrik terribly in the process. We've seen each other professionally since then, of course, and he's always been the very soul of courtesy; he even asks after Fleming and the children. There's always a gentleness in his smile, though, every time he first catches sight of me, that brings back a paralysing guilt. It would be easier for me if he held a grudge. It's a difficult thing to know that someone you wronged has so completely forgiven you when you've never forgiven yourself. It's difficult to wonder if someone still loves you, even when your own heart has long since been given elsewhere.

I suppose that sounds arrogant of me. I don't really mean it like that.

Today, I dabbed on a bit of my old perfume for luck and went to the Academy security offices. Coming up with a reason to be there isn't a problem; between my roles on the CRT and in the Languages department, I've always got something I need to take care of. Still, talking to Henrik himself isn't usually something I need to do, and I struggled to find a good excuse. Or even a bad one, really.

I hadn't hit on it by the time I got there. Before long, I finished up all of my legitimate business, and still hadn't come up with anything. I decided to walk by Henrik's office and see if it were perhaps unlocked, if perhaps I could do a quick shuffle through his papers to see if I could find anything worthwhile, avoiding the whole problem entirely.

Naturally, Henrik was in his office, working.

Continued »

When he saw me in his doorway, he of course gave me that soft smile of his and waved me in. ‘Anna,’ he said, ‘what brings me the pleasure?’

No inspiration struck, so what else could I do? I bluffed. I pasted on a brave face and said, ‘Henrik, we need to have a private conversation.’

‘Oh?’ he raised an eyebrow.

‘Meet me for lunch tomorrow?’

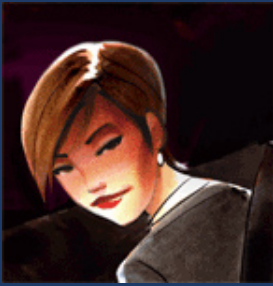
He hesitated. ‘My schedule is a bit crowded,’ he said. ‘But for you, I’ll always make time.’ He spent a few seconds scanning his calendar, then asked, ‘Can it wait until Friday?’ I nodded. And then, of course, he asked the inevitable question: ‘What’s it about, anyway?’

I smiled at him, wondering that myself. ‘I’ll tell you on Friday,’ I said. ‘I’d rather not discuss it here.’

He frowned a bit, but seemed to take me at my word. ‘Well then,’ he said lightly, ‘I guess I’ll see you Friday.’

I rushed off before he could get a chance to reconsider. I have no idea what I’m going to say when I meet him, though. I certainly hope I think of something before then.

Anna Heath



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About Me

Earth Linguistics

Did You Know...

The Lunch Date

Friday, 23rd June 2006

If I didn't owe all of you before, I certainly do now.

I was terrified all this morning, waiting for lunchtime to arrive. You'd think a woman of my age and experience would be a bit calmer, but something about dredging up the past made me feel like I was that callow girl all over again. I'm sure I'm going to have to redo all of the work I touched this morning, as nerves kept me from thinking straight.

I met Henrik in his office. He of course locked everything up on his way out - I suppose it was foolish of me to think I could ever snoop on the Academy's head of security, of all people. We walked to the Bridge Restaurant, making awkward chit-chat about the weather, or Fleming and the children, or the latest gossip about the senior fellows. Shallow, harmless things.

When we were settled at a very private table in the back of the restaurant, he nodded to himself a bit and asked, 'So why is it we're here today?'

And here, my friends, is where I owe you, because I took your advice. 'Henrik, I felt it was high time I cleared the air between us,' I said. Then I embarked upon a recitation of all of the ways in which I was insensitive, or ungrateful, or thoughtless, or immature, and as I itemised them I apologised for my behaviour and for any injury I had done to him, intentionally or no, then and in all of the years that have passed since. I thought of more as I went on, so it was a veritable flood of apologetics I unleashed on poor Henrik, but he weathered it gracefully.

When I was done - it must have been after a solid ten minutes - he smiled like the sun rising and said that he had always forgiven me, and that no further discussion of it was necessary. 'That was all a long time ago,' he said. 'We've both grown up quite a lot since then. Though I do wish I could've seen your wedding.'

Continued »

There was a bit of a silence as the waiter set our meals upon the table. I have to tell you, I felt like someone had given me a billion lecks. A weight I didn't even know I was carrying has been lifted from my shoulders, and for this, I am grateful to all of you.

And then he leaned back in his chair and gave me a long, measuring look. 'So,' he said. 'What is it you really wanted?'

I of course stuttered and protested regarding my sincerity for a minute, and probably turned an alarming shade of red. I thought I might take a week or two to work up to this. Some spy I am, as easy to read as a traffic sign.

Henrik shook his head. 'It's all right, Anna. I'm glad we've had this talk, and I'm sure you mean it all, but it's definitely not why you wanted to see me. So what is it?'

I took a long drink to try to regain my composure. Truth tempered with prudence, that's the line I tried to walk. 'I need information,' I said at last. 'Last year, there were reports about some equipment being stolen from the Academy, and I need to find out more about what went missing, and what was found,' I took a deep breath, 'in the Five of Cups.'

Henrik had developed a peculiar thoughtful look, and was tapping his finger on his chin. 'I think we can help each other,' he said, slowly. 'Can you meet me after hours next week? Discreetly. Not on the Academy grounds.'

'I likely could,' I said, cautiously.

'It'll take me some time to gather all of the pieces I need,' he said. 'Keep your schedule free, and I'll give you word on when and where to meet me.'

Gyvann help me, I agreed.

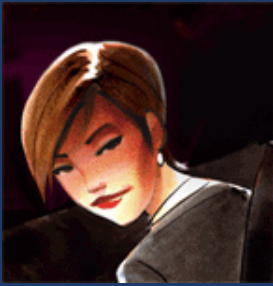
Then Henrik shook himself a bit, and stood up straighter, and asked me how I'd really been doing all this time. We spent the rest of our lunch just catching up on everything that we've missed these past few years. The time flew by unbelievably fast. It even feels like we might be

friends again! Do you know Henrik is seeing a woman who works in the Maitland? And he still paints mazes in his spare time. His mazes were always so elegant and beautiful to look upon. He's even promised to make one for my boys!

So. It looks like I have a secret rendezvous for sometime next week, and I'll hopefully get some of the information we need then. Yes, don't worry, I'll take utmost care for my personal safety. I feel I'll be perfectly safe under Henrik's watch, anyway.

(As a bit of a postscript, I'm taken aback that you ever for a moment considered sending me against Henrik as some kind of temptress. A woman with three children of course knows how that game is played, but I do take my marriage very seriously!)

Anna Heath



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About Me

Earth Linguistics

Did You Know...

Secret Rendezvous

Thursday, 29th June 2006

You may be relieved to know that I made it through my meeting with Henrik intact in mind and body.

I do find it comforting that you're all so concerned about my safety. Believe me, though, when I say this: In all our motley band of conspirators, I am not the risk taker! The others may all do brash and senseless things, but I do have children to be concerned with, don't I? I'm not going to be leaping from exploding buildings or breaking into secret military bases, that's for certain!

Still, it is important to keep in mind that anybody at all could be dangerous. I suppose even Henrik might be. I discussed it with Kurt, and he didn't want to give me any sort of beacon that could be easily detected, for obvious reasons. We did reconfigure my key settings a bit, though; so if my key detected signs of injury or significant agitation, it would alert the others as well as the medical authorities. As you can see, it wasn't necessary.

Henrik signalled me last night in the most adorable fashion. He ordered a delivery of Julian blooms to my office yesterday morning - nine of them - and I laughed aloud when I saw them. You wouldn't know it from his professional behaviour, but he always was something of a romantic. This was a code we used in the old days, meaning that I should meet him by the Julian beds in Polygon Park at 9pm. Who would know but us? And it was fun to be sharing a little secret like that, like I was that carefree young girl again.

I of course told Kurt the specifics, as an extra safeguard. I'd told Fleming days ago that I was going to have a sudden evening meeting sometime this week, so we already had a plan in place in case I was out in the evening; but fortunately, the meeting was late enough in the day that I could have dinner with my family and even read a few bedtime stories before I left.

Have I mentioned how very strange it is to kiss your children good-bye so mummy can go out to a covert meeting? So much for the life of the dusty academic!

Continued »

At any rate, I met Henrik by the Julian beds as scheduled. He was already there, and indicated we should walk while we talked, and so we spent a very pleasant time strolling among the gardens at Polygon, looking at the blossoms. So very like old times. Except for the conversation.

‘So,’ I ventured, ‘I think we have some business to conduct?’

‘Ah, Anna, direct as always,’ he said. Then he was quiet for a while. ‘What I’m about to tell you is somewhat in violation of certain professional standards I uphold, if you follow.’

I nodded.

‘I’m putting a lot of trust in you,’ he continued. ‘It’s a ridiculous and impulsive gamble, but I think giants are battling above us, and I don’t want to be stepped on.’

I nodded again. A light breeze picked up around then, and bathed us in the incongruous scent of lemon balm.

He shook his head back and forth a bit to loosen his neck. ‘Starting in late 267, there were equipment thefts from certain very sensitive areas of the Academy,’ he said. ‘So sensitive I’m not officially aware of them - but if you do my kind of job well, you eventually catch on. Some theft reports were filed with my office, though, and I began an investigation. I think that was never supposed to happen.’

‘What did you find?’ I asked.

He shook his head. ‘Mostly a lot of nothing. Nobody knew what the gear was, or what it was for, or who it was going to or missing from. It became an unscratchable itch for me.’

I crossed my arms in front of me. ‘That sounds ominous,’ I said.

He grimaced. ‘As best I could discover, something very suspicious was going on in the cryptography department. I think there’s an internal breach of security on the crypto team.’ His jaw clenched. ‘I can’t even prove it’s not the whole department.’

‘But before I could crack it, Bernardo Holyoke was murdered in the Five of Cups. Around then, I was officially notified that the thefts had become

a police matter and out of my jurisdiction, and that I shouldn't spend any more resources on the investigation.'

I blinked, surprised, then pursed my lips together. 'And then the police said it was nothing special.'

He shoved his hand in a pocket and fished out his key. 'I'll give you all of the data in the case file,' he said. 'Provided you tell me why it is you want to know.'

I stopped, then, and looked at my feet. 'I can't,' I said. 'I really can't.'

He frowned at me, and I relented a bit.

'I think you're right about the giants battling over our heads, Henrik,' I said. I paused and ran my fingers over the petals of a rose. 'All I can say is, my aim is to find out what's happening, the same as you. I have pieces of a different puzzle, but I think they fit together. And that's really - that's all I can say.'

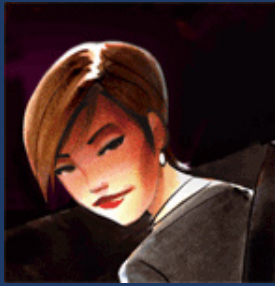
He started to shake his head, slowly.

'Please, Henrik,' I said. I think my voice was rising a little as my sense of desperation grew. I laid a hand on his arm. 'Please just trust me.'

He reached a hand to my chin and stared intently into my eyes for a minute. And then he sent a data burst to my key.

I haven't looked over the data much myself - so far it looks like a bunch of witness reports in which various people say absolutely nothing interesting at all. I've turned it all over to Kurt, though, and we'll see what he makes of it in the coming days. I had a brief talk with Kurt and Violet on my way in this morning, and it seems clear to all of us that somehow, we have to get more information on what's going on in crypto, somehow.

Anna Heath



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Earth Linguistics

Did You Know...

Henrik's Dead End

Wednesday, 5th July 2006

We've looked through Henrik's case files, and I can see why the whole affair is bothering him so much. These theft reports were submitted through an automatic process, not by a human being; basically, a computer noticed they'd gone missing on performing a routine inventory check, and reported them as stolen to the security office. But as soon as Henrik started checking into them... well... I have no less than two dozen interviews with people the computer had flagged as interested parties in the whereabouts of these items, and they all go something like this:

'Do you have any idea what happened to part XYZ?'

'Part XYZ? What's that? Never heard of it. Leave me alone to do my research.'

'The computer indicates you were in the chain of possession/the sender/the recipient/otherwise involved in a project with part XYZ.'

'There must be some sort of mistake. I have no idea what you're talking about. Please go away.'

At any rate, this is the list of item numbers Henrik compiled from these theft reports:

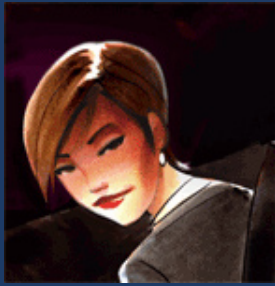
813QE2-7X 122C76-3S 254ID9-3R 460WDN-4X 384621-5A

He later connected two of those part numbers to Reynolds ionisers and Klebold plates, whatever those are, due to a lucky cross-check he happened to run right after Bernardo Holyoke was murdered. But that's the last information he was able to find. He was almost immediately ordered to turn over his files to the police and cease investigation of the matter internally. It seems pretty clear, though, that the police didn't really look into it at all, at least not on the Academy side.

It's all very suspicious, isn't it?

I've heard of black-ops work before, but I'd never suspected anything like this was going on inside the Academy. If you'd asked me a few months ago, I would have happily told you I thought the CRT was the most non-academic group in the Academy's entire umbrella of operations. I suppose I'm learning to question everything, though.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Isotope Alarms

Friday, 21st July 2006

It looks like a lot of progress is being made, toward... something. Kurt has been keeping me up-to-date with his progress in cracking the Crypto department, and I had just one little task to perform to round out this isotope-tracking scheme of his. (Which, by the way, sounds suspiciously inspired by a very popular adventure game from when Kurt was around ten years old. I'm not offering criticism, since his strange ideas have a habit of working out, but in this case, biting my tongue is proving difficult.)

That one little task was to visit Henrik again and persuade him to disable any isotope alarms the Academy may have in place. Kurt doesn't know what kind of tag his Karen will come up with, and he's worried that Security will detect our shenanigans and step in before the trap can be sprung. It wouldn't be much use to have our goods seized by the authorities for suspicious tampering, would it? And for all we know, the Academy is rigged to alert security if any sort of isotope is detected outside a few select labs, just as a measure to prevent misuse of laboratory resources.

So I arranged to meet Henrik in Polygon Park again, yesterday in the early evening. It's funny, after all these years, how quickly the feeling of awkwardness has faded. We sat together on a bench watching the sun setting, and it all seemed very comfortable, just a pair of old friends talking about old times.

Except, of course, that wasn't what we talked about at all. I explained just the barest sketch of our plan -- that I had some suspicion regarding what parts might go missing next, and that I planned on setting an isotope tag to find where it disappeared to.

Henrik gave me one of those long, steady gazes of his and asked what information I'd found, exactly.

I told him about finding those files in the Crypto department. His eyebrows climbed up to the clouds when I told him about the audio diaries, and about how poor Karen was being blackmailed to spy for some shadowy third party. (Which, by the way, I'm trying very hard not to think about too much.)

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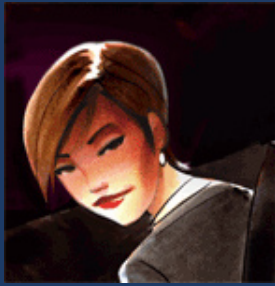
I did try to conceal the existence of the others in our merry band, though I think I probably let slip more than I'd wanted to. But -- honestly, half the CRT hanging around the Cryptology Department is surely gossip for every junior fellow and guest lecturer on campus, by now. If Henrik doesn't have an inkling I'm in on something with Kurt and Caine, I'll eat my key.

Still, he seemed to take me at my word and didn't press for any details of my investigation. When I'd finished talking, Henrik nodded, slowly. "I'm surprised you've found results so fast," he said. "Don't worry, I'll arrange for discretion for your isotope tags. I'll just set the alert threshold much higher for a few weeks. That should be long enough?"

"I hope so," I said, fervently. "Thank you."

He reached over and squeezed my hand for a second. "I could never refuse you anything, Anna," he said, and then he stood up and was on his way.

Anna Heath



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Did You Know...

Waiting, waiting

Monday, 24th July 2006

The die is cast, the course is set, the shot is loaded. All we can do now is sit on our hands and wait for something to happen.

Now is when the doubt sets in. What if the thieves aren't up to thieving anymore? What if they've long since taken every small piece of equipment they need and have moved on to some nefarious second stage of their plot, whatever it may be? Maybe we're simply too late. Maybe the AQSYS system will fail us. Maybe we've all spent a little too much time sitting in the sun and it cooked our brains. All we can do is wait and see what happens, if anything happens.

I'm trying to stifle those little voices by focusing more on my family. Poor Fleming must think I'm having an affair, with all of my creeping off in the evenings! And the children have all started to misbehave; bedtime has become an all-out brawl, and it just can't go on like this. So all through the weekend I did my best to push the Third Power and isotopes tags clean out of my head and do right by the ones who need me most.

It's been a busy time; we had a few all-out wrestling matches, a finger-painting contest, some very creative cookery, games of Pyramid with some extremely alternate rules, long and elaborate story-times... You know, I've been spending nearly as much actual time with my three little ones all along, but I think I hadn't been really there when I was with them, and they must have missed that. I think I missed it, too. But how in the world do you weigh being a good mother against saving the world?

After the children were all asleep at night, Fleming and I snuggled up together to watch old vids, the way we used to when we were first married. Though I really didn't watch them very carefully. I felt Fleming's arm warm around me, and all I could do was ache for the time when that was all I ever needed to feel perfectly safe.