

ABOUT QUIRKY ACUITY

I'm Violet and this is my blog. It's mostly just some of my thoughts for my friends to enjoy, but since Kurt's persuaded me he has this "really cool" puzzle idea, I guess I might be getting some more traffic. Welcome. Pull up a chair. Don't put your feet on the furniture or drop stuff in the fishtank.

ABOUT ME

I'm Violet. I'm 27. I'm a Dragon, since you ask. Other FAQs include:

Aren't you related to someone famous?

Sigh. Yes. My dad's Sente.

So why aren't you in the Academy? Not smart enough to get in?

I got in. I just wasn't that into the whole idea of going to my dad's institution.

What do you do, then?

This and that. I work at the Academy library most afternoons. Other than that, I spend time with my friends, I hike Catbite, I read, I do sport, I play poker. I live on the Mobius Strip.

You live there? On a librarian's salary?

Like I said, I play poker.

Isn't that kind of a precarious way to live?

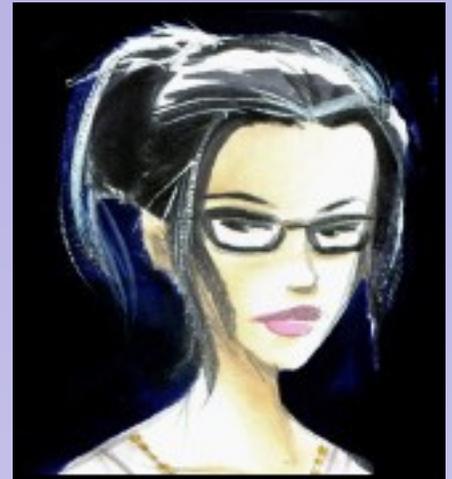
Yes. If you'd like to talk to someone who'd agree with you, can I suggest you get to know my father better?

So, um, are you single?

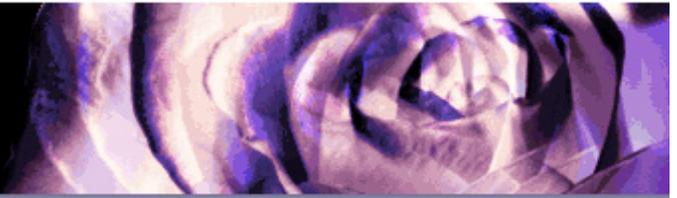
Currently, yes. But this is not an invitation to email me with your vital statistics and/or supposedly humorous lines.

What about this guy Kurt?

What about him?



Has anyone else been having these weird dreams where they've found the Cube, and it was in the back of the refrigerator or under the bed or something? OK, just me then.



 Saturday, April 9, 2005

The weirdness of here

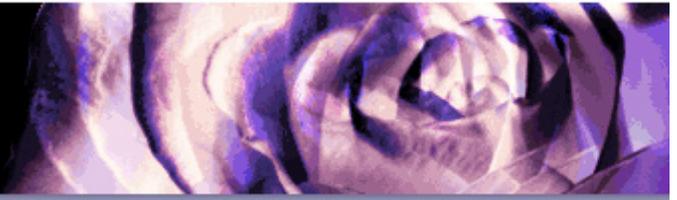
Category: me

Time: 07:56 PM

Rained today, washed down the buildings and reminded me that I live in a really beautiful place. Went for a walk in the park - white blossom everywhere from the Tago trees - and found these two girls, about 14 years old, playing Pyramid in the rain. They were sitting under one of the awnings in the East Promenade, so they weren't actually getting rained on, but still the ends of both their coats were soaked through. They were pretty evenly matched, and so focused, they didn't even seem to notice I was watching. Either that or they didn't care. I watched for about half an hour, until one of the girls, maybe a bit older than the other, suddenly stood up, nodded, shook the other one's hand. I took a careful look at the board before they packed it up, but it still took me a few minutes before I worked it out; the win was about 40 moves away! And you see, that's one of the reasons I love this city.

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 Sunday, April 17, 2005

Looking darkly at the world

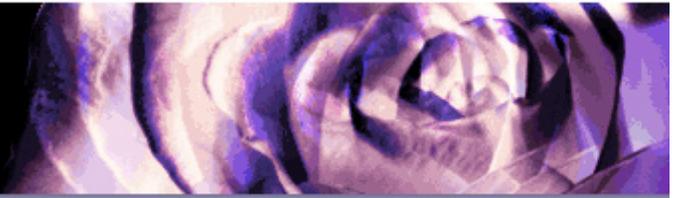
Category: me

Time: 10:55 AM

Not a good morning. Woke up with that feeling of “something bad has happened” before even opening eyes. Remembered a) the amount I drank last night and b) the amount of money I lost last night and felt worse rather than better. Tried to remind myself that poker is one long game, and what you lose one night you’ll make up and better another night. Tried to remind myself about the amount of money I’ve won over the years. Neither of these things helped. Shower helped. Couple of Saptivan with a glass of water helped. Finding that my dear sister, who came over yesterday to borrow a couple of books, had “accidentally” managed to “borrow” my brown leather coat did not help. Scarlett, if you should happen to read this, can I suggest extremely strongly that, when I get home tonight, it would be a very good thing if I should find that my coat has mysteriously returned? A very good thing indeed, Scarlett.

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 Tuesday, April 19, 2005

Haven't done one of these for a while....

Category: words

Time: 08:28 PM

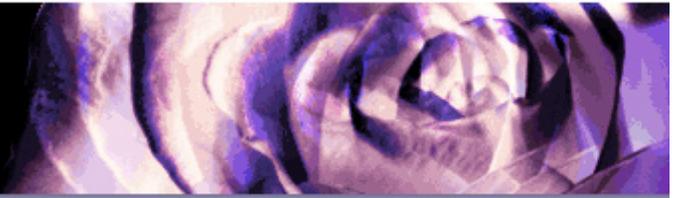
Word of the day (found it while reading, er, ahem, checking the quality of the binding on an old novel in the library).

Velleity: a desire which exists, but is not strong enough to be acted upon.

“Violet contemplated actually cooking a meal, rather than ordering in, but the thought was a mere velleity.”

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Thursday, April 28, 2005

Whoops

Category: me

Time: 06:44 PM

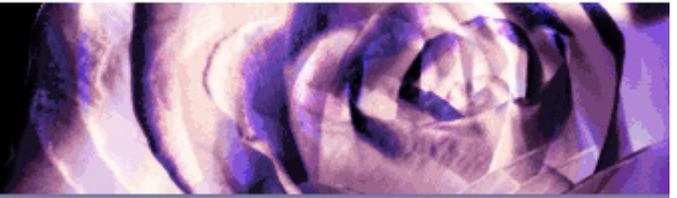
So. I was being interviewed for some audio program yesterday, can't remember the name, something with an exclamation mark in it. Maybe "Youth on the Move!" Or "Youth in Action!" Or "Hey, isn't it great to be twenty-something!" Or something. I don't know why I did it; I was just pleased to be asked, I guess. Vanity, vanity.

Anyway, the interviewer asks me, as if she's asking the most incredibly original question in the world: "So, who do you think took the Cube?" And I looked at her. And looked at the recorder. And I know, I know, there's something wrong with my brain because I said: "my dad." She kind of gasped and bubbled a bit, but I made quite a cogent case, I thought. He had the opportunity, he's got the all-sections clearance. He even arranged the party on the night of the 15th. And the motive... oooh, I don't know, maybe he's a loony who thinks he'll be able to use the Cube to destroy the world. Yeah, I told them I thought my dad might be insane. Or, in my exact words "a power-hungry psychopathic megalomaniac".

I mean, I never thought they'd broadcast it.
So now I'm in trouble

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 Thursday, May 12, 2005

Ruth Coralhouse

Category: me

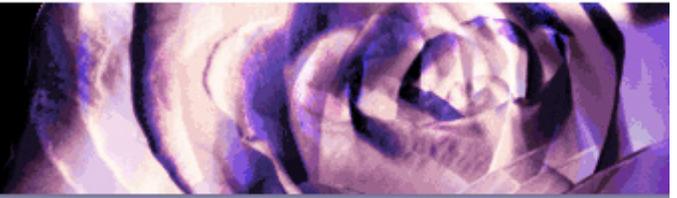
Time: 09:40 AM

Can't believe the news about Ruth Coralhouse. I know she was old, but I remember her from when I was little and she was still at the Academy. She was so vital, it's hard to believe she's gone.

Even when I was playing with my blocks I could tell she was one nutty cookie. Geniuses always are, though, aren't they? I remember her office was full of the weirdest stuff - she was the first person I knew to have Earth-replicas. Painted masks, a huge blue and white urn, a display of canned goods... you never knew what you'd find in there. And even when I was small, she used to take the time to explain to me what these things were. I've cancelled Saturday plans to make it to the memorial service; I'm sure hundreds will do the same.

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Wednesday, May 18, 2005

Ah... the city

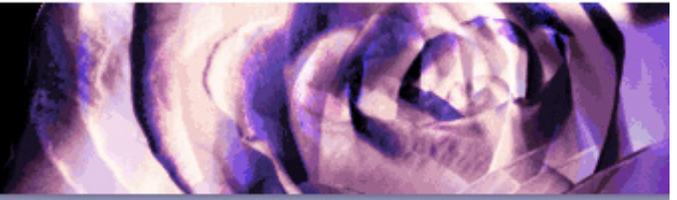
Category: me

Time: 07:07 PM

Went to the market in the south of the old town yesterday. The real market, not that ridiculous “quaint gifts from Perplex City” market they direct the tourists from the towns to. I love it, it’s so grungy, that mixture of old and new. It has almost the feeling of an old town fair, sometimes, with people selling weird bits of carved stone they claim to have fetched up from the catacombs (at enormous personal cost and danger to life and limb, of course). Most of them look so obviously fake that it’s kind of funny. At least, it’s obvious to me. But that’s because I’ve been down there; there’s an entrance underneath my dad’s “official Academy residence”. We were never allowed down there alone of course, but when Scarlett and I were little, and we nagged him enough, sometimes he’d take us for a walk. And (be jealous, be very jealous) not just the bits they show the tourists, but some other places too. Nothing terribly mysterious, but more of those strange mosaics on the ceilings (how did they get up there? Why those symbols? Weird). I always loved it down there; shame I’m a bit too grown-up to ask my dad to let me have a look round now.

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 Friday, May 20, 2005

My life of crime. Or... my life near crime

Category: me

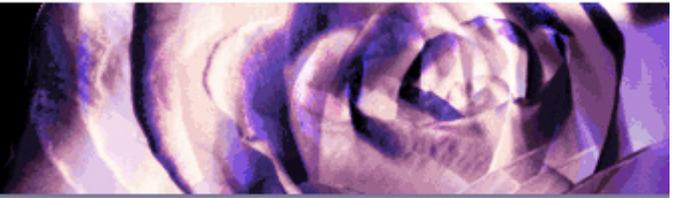
Time: 08:09 PM

I see from the Sentinel there are yet more startling revelations about the Five of Cups bar. It now seems to have been some sort of den of iniquity, a veritable hothouse of crime. This is, well, a little weird to me because I've actually been there. Only the once, about 18 months ago - the place had a really odd vibe about it, whispered conversations in dark corners and strange looks at newcomers. I only went because my friend Arman said I could get a good game of poker there. Instead, I got a bunch of jittery men with five o'clock shadows staring at me... I don't think I even stayed to finish my drink. I've thought about it since, because I don't usually run out of poker bars without having had a game. Seems I was wiser than I thought.

Anyway, when the Sentinel says that the bar was "notorious as a meeting place for crooks and low-lives" and that woman they interviewed says it's "not the sort of place decent folks would want to visit", I just wanted to put my hand up and say "um, I would". Then again, maybe I'm not decent folks. :-)

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 Tuesday, May 24, 2005

More history....

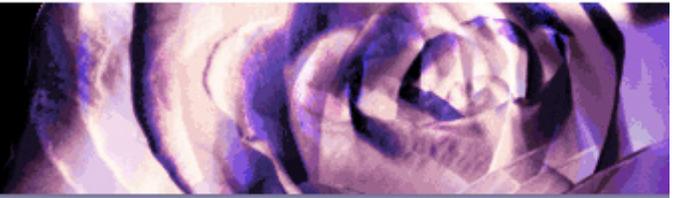
Category: me

Time: 05:12 PM

Back to the Perplex City Historical Society for monthly meeting. OK, I know this makes me a geek, but I just love this stuff. I can't help it. This evening we had a presentation about the pre-history of the city. They've been doing some amazing archaeological work on the far side of Catbite... apparently there's evidence of a settlement in the area much earlier than they've thought before. The guy presenting - Dr Dunroe - is quite controversial, but he thinks that the site could date back more than 1,000 years before the first recorded settlements. I've read some of the stuff by people who disagree with him, who say that the things he's found could easily be just the remnants of encampments by the nomadic tribes we already know were all over the area. But last night's presentation was really convincing - showing what he says are the outlines of large buildings, even perhaps some "civic" buildings, and a huge gateway to the north. On the walk back I was pondering on what on earth it could have been... what could have needed a gateway that big, especially if the settlement was really pretty small. Mind-blowing.

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 Wednesday, May 25, 2005

Recons

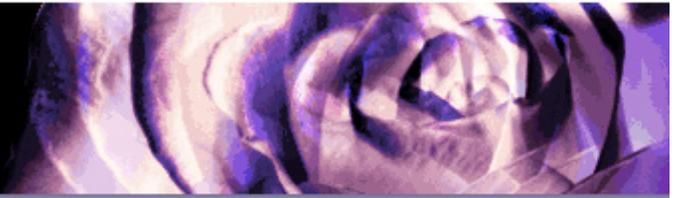
Category: me

Time: 12:05 PM

Grrr... this article in the Sentinel is just ridiculous. I can't believe that the Reconstructionists are so completely above the law as for the police to be worried about even going to interview them. I hate to use the word "incompetent" but honestly they're treating the Recons with such kid gloves now, it's absurd. I know, they've probably got a million lawsuits pending after the Recon8 business, but still. I bet I could get in there and talk to this Holyoke woman. I've been to Recon compounds before - there was a whole push about 4 or 5 years back to get "young people with an interest in the Academy" to attend Recon presentations. I think they were going on the get 'em young theory, the idea being that if they convinced us of the rightness of their cause, and someday we were in charge of the Academy... Anyway, we had to sit in an overly-warm lecture theatre while three people in robes talked to us for half an hour about "the mystery of the cube" and its "unjust imprisonment". Yawn. Other than that, it was just a pleasant stroll round their farmlands and a bit of discussion of meditation. They're really not threatening, it's just the isolation that makes it seem that way. Seriously, I bet I could call right now and get in, just on the basis of having been on that tour. It would be good to find out what was really going on in that bar, as well.

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 Friday, May 27, 2005

I'm in!

Category: me

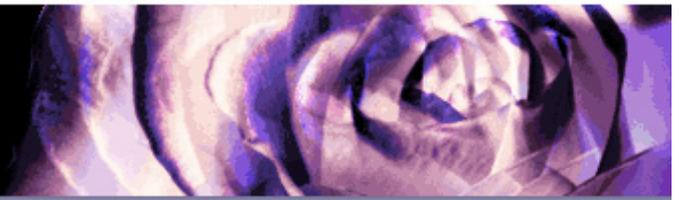
Time: 04:54 PM

I've got an appointment to visit the Recon Compound on Monday. Just said I wanted to come and have a look around, have a discussion with them; they seemed really delighted to invite me in.

Otherwise... blech, spent today archiving in the deep stacks with loathsome Cymbalists constantly looking over my shoulder and leaning in a bit too close. Still, it's sunny outside now - ooh, maybe meet Lyssa in the park for icecream.

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Monday, May 30, 2005

Back

Category: me

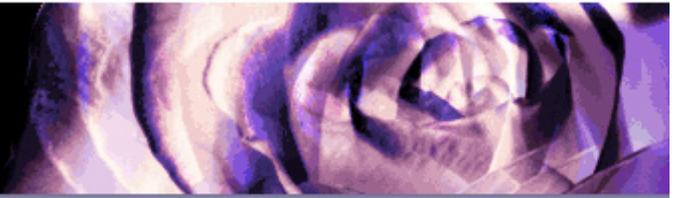
Time: 11:05 PM

Well. That was weird. You know how sometimes you can think you understand something, and suddenly everything swings round and it looks completely different? Like, one of those pictures which you think is a rabbit and then looks like a duck? Or, like your life, which you thought was all about one thing, turns out to be something else? Or... actually maybe I'm too tired to go into this right now.

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 Tuesday, May 31, 2005

Yesterday's visit

Category: me

Time: 07:30 PM

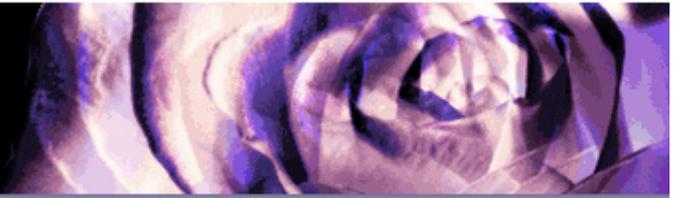
Right. Had an interesting if somewhat predictable afternoon yesterday at the Recon Compound. As I suspected, it involved wandering round a farm (lambs are cute) and yet another long presentation about the evils of the Academy, the Museum, the imprisonment of the Cube etc. What was interesting was their take on the theft of the Cube. They seemed unexpectedly delighted, sort of gleeful. They'd added another section onto the end of their standard presentation where they talked about the Cube's "self-liberation" and how they knew (somehow) that the theft was a good thing. I would have thought they'd be worried for its safety, or threatened by the idea that someone else has got hold of it. Which made me think... yeah... it would have made anyone think it.

I didn't get to talk to Jessica Holyoke, though. I asked my guide, Brother Tomas about their new member of the sisterhood, "Kostka" (which, if you ask me should have the word Krazy in front of it and be the name of a low price store). He feigned complete ignorance and, when I pushed a bit, said that new members never spoke to people from the outside until they had fully "communed with the Cube". So, no joy there.

What I did notice was that they're using a very antiquated key system. They don't carry keys with them, there are only about half-a-dozen for the entire compound. They're kept in a glass-walled room in the centre of the compound, presumably so that everyone else can see that you're using them to contact the outside world. They're really ancient models - literally, I recognised a couple from Kurt's collection of prehistoric technology. So... unless they've done some unexpectedly nifty security stuff on them, I reckon it wouldn't be too difficult to take a look at their files. Need to talk to Kurt.

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Thursday, June 2, 2005

A plan

Category: me

Time: 01:37 PM

Long discussions with Kurt about the ancient key systems at the Recon Compound have resulted in... well, a lot of nervous foot-shuffling from Kurt about the legality or otherwise of what we want to do. But yes, he thinks he can do it. And I just so don't think they'd ever prosecute us. All we want to do is take a look around and, if we come up with something deeply worrying, we'll hand it right over to the authorities, so we're fundamentally in the clear.

Now, according to Kurt the files would be quite easy to get into if we got hold of one of their keys. Physically. Which, er, presents one or two additional problems. Firstly: the glass room they're kept in. I don't think this is too much of a problem; they have prayers about eight times a day and I reckon I can slip away while they're all in the prayer hall. Secondly: the fact that they'd surely notice one of only six or seven keys going missing. Which, again, is not so much of a problem because Kurt has a couple of the same models as them (which he has pointed out are not literally prehistoric, but just about 40 years old) so I could do a swap with one of his collection and they wouldn't be likely to notice for a while. And thirdly: the lock on the door of the key room. My guide pointed it out as we went past. A really old fashioned puzzle-lock, with a keyboard for inputting a word and some text above as a riddle. Apparently it's supposed to give room for a few minutes reflection on "the words of Gyvann" before attempting to contact the outside world. I copied it down, but can't seem to get anywhere with it (I think my knowledge of ancient belief systems isn't quite up to the job...). I'm a bit concerned - if I don't solve it within the next few days they'll probably change the riddle and then I'll have to start all over again. Anyway, here it is:

"My children, it is only that which is absent which must be sought."

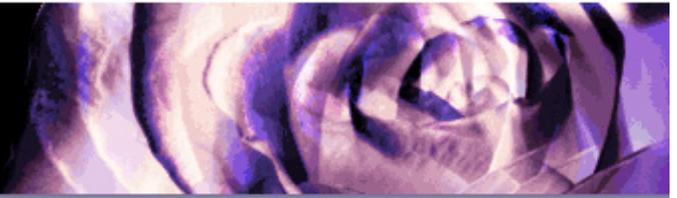
Sayings of Gyvann

shake - face - eye - work - length - head - fly

So if anyone else has a clue, please let me know....

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 Friday, June 3, 2005

Thank you

Category: me

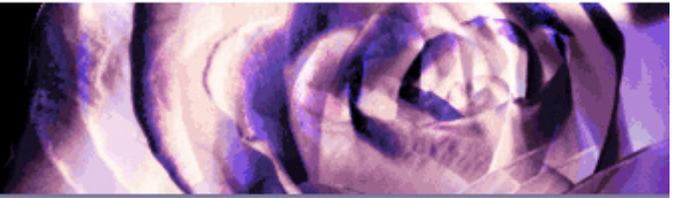
Time: 05:19 PM

Well. I have to say I didn't expect that.... I know Kurt and I directed some people from Earth to this blog through that puzzle card, but I didn't expect so many people to be reading, let alone responding. So, er, hi. And thanks. I'm still working on that puzzle - lots of people have sent me suggestions of what the answer might be but none of them seem quite right to me.... Keep on sending your thoughts, though - it can't be that tricky so it's probably something we've overlooked!

Anyway, er, yes, thank you again. I'm touched by your concern.

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 Friday, June 3, 2005

Success

Category: me

Time: 11:20 PM

Brilliant! A guy called Peter Howard has sent me a solution that I think is the one. Here's what he says:

“we think the 7 words match up with Futures signs...

Hand - Shake

Baby - Face

Eagle - Eye

Spider - Work

Wave - Length

Archer - ?

Jug - Head

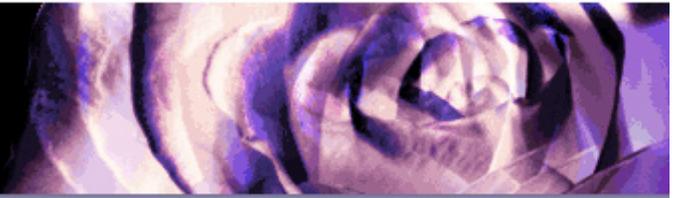
Dragon - Fly

the assumption then is that the missing sign is the Archer, and so that ARCHER is the key-phrase.”

I have to confess, that's brilliant work. I don't pay any attention to stupid futures, so it just didn't occur to me. [Hits self on forehead.] Of course, the wacky religious make all sorts of links between these old mystical systems... I'm sure the Cubists have some marvellous explanation which links the futures signs with the cube with the current value of the PCX. Ah well, at least I know what the solution is now. Thank you!

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 Tuesday, June 7, 2005

Back to the compound

Category: me

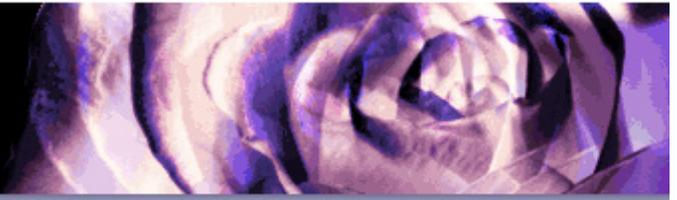
Time: 02:41 PM

OK, well I've spent the weekend thinking round this Recons business... it all seems pretty straightforward except for one point - what excuse can I give them for wanting to come back? I've already taken the tour, received the leaflets, watched the presentation, waited in the meditation room for the holy light of Gyvann to rest upon my forehead. If I say I want to do it all again because I'm so committed to the religion it's going to be a bit difficult to say no to prayer-time, which would be my only opportunity to snatch the thing. So... since I find I have some allies over on Earth - any thoughts? All suggestions gratefully received.

Oh also, Peter the puzzle-solver asked for some more info about the Recons, the Cubeheads etc. So, how it works is that there's one "Brotherhood of the Six" to which a few different groups claim they are the legitimate successors. There's the Brotherhood in the Old Town, who are really fairly harmless old buffers - a lot of people attend their services at holiday time just for the songs, the atmosphere and the cube-shaped cakes after the service. They're the largest group of Cubeheads in the city. The Recons are a splinter group. They're far more into radical action (not that they've actually done anything dangerous... so far... but they like to talk big) and withdrawal from the evils of modern society. Hence the farm on their compound - they're big on self-sufficiency.

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 Wednesday, June 8, 2005

Plans, plans and further plans

Category: me

Time: 07:38 PM

An avalanche of suggestions. Thank you.

One theme kept on coming up - the idea of taking someone else with me. I've talked it through with Kurt and we think it's a good idea. (Well, I persuaded him it was a good idea....) He's not too keen on doing the actual "lifting" himself, but if I say that I've just come to accompany him (he's nervous about confronting his deep spiritual needs, obviously) then I have an excuse for hanging around outside during prayer-meeting. Also, he'll be able to give useful advice about which one to take, unhooking it, etc etc. So, it's agreed. We've called the Recons. We'll be back there on Friday.

Now that I've actually decided to do it, I find I've got butterflies in my stomach....

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 Thursday, June 9, 2005

Deliquesce

Category: words

Time: 12:59 PM

All this waiting is driving me crazy so, for a minute's distraction, here's a word of the day:

deliquesce: to melt

“Lyssa!’ I cried. ‘If you don’t take care, your icecream will deliquesce irretrievably.’”

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Friday, June 10, 2005

Today's adventures

Category: me

Time: 08:53 PM

We're back! Alive, in one piece, have not been kidnapped by the Recons or subjected to too many inspirational presentations about the life of Gyvann. And, we have the key, although it took a bit of doing - Kurt is working on pulling the files off it now. First of all, thank you so much for the help with that door puzzle - it was invaluable, and the solution was right first time. It was about the only thing that went smoothly, though - apparently today, second Friday before midsummer, is some minor festival - the Celebration of Water, which meant that their usual prayer schedule was off...

Actually, why don't I start at the beginning? Much better; I think I'm still a bit jittery and overexcited from the whole business. OK, so as we planned I called a couple of days ago to say that Kurt was interested in finding out more about the religion and that I'd agreed to come with him; they were pretty amenable to the plan and didn't seem puzzled or worried at all. We arrived at the compound as arranged at 1pm; there'd usually be prayers at 3.30pm and again at 5pm, so we thought we'd be pretty safe.

The compound's huge - must be at least 500 or 600 people living there. The construction, as you'd expect, is really impressive - stone buildings (dormitories, refectory, library, school) that look like they'd survive for thousands of years. The walls are incredibly thick - must be two or three meters thick, I'd guess. I suppose this sort of construction is what gives outsiders the idea that they're planning for armageddon, but I think they just take their construction really seriously. It has the look of a brand-new ancient rustic village, if you see what I mean. The place is dominated, of course, by the huge temple, with those six enormous spires you can see on the skyline for miles around. There's a sense of order as well - you always hear it described on the news as a "compound including livestock", which makes it sound as though there are sheep wandering the streets. But no, it's all ordered pens and bells ringing to signal feeding time. It's peaceful, actually.

Anyway. Our plan had been that we'd arrive, take the tour as I'd done before, which would be about an hour of presentation, a tour of the temple and communal buildings - where the keys are kept - for Kurt to take a quick

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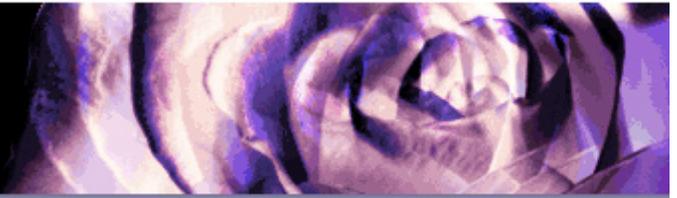
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peek, then some wandering round the sheep-pens while one of the guys told us about the importance of knowing how to live without technology and embracing the simple art of building with stone, at which point, the bell would ring, they'd ask us if we wanted to worship with them, Kurt would say "sure", I'd say "no thanks" and sneak off to get the key.

As it turned out not that simple. Because on the Celebration of Water there are constant prayers, which almost everyone attends, except those who have to watch the herds or, indeed, the tourists. Great, you might have thought, that will have made the whole business so much easier. Which in a way was true because the whole of the administration building, where the keys are kept, was completely empty and left open. But then, no, because whereas usually the guides will go off for a quick pray at the appropriate time, our guide today - Brother Hans, a man who appeared to have a disapproving look grafted onto his face - told us that he had agreed to "sacrifice his time of communion with the ineffable" in order to take us round. Meaning, he wouldn't leave us alone.

And, you're going to hate me for this but I have to go now! Just looked at the time and realised that I'm going to be late from my usual Friday night table at Bullets if I don't get ready to leave now. On previous experience, I'm going to be in no fit condition to continue this when I get home later ... will try to finish it off as soon as possible, though.



 Sunday, June 12, 2005

Adventures (Part II)

Category: me

Time: 12:15 AM

Right, where was I? (Apart from: about to head out to Bullets to win quite a substantial sum of money, thank you very much, which will comfortably cover my rent for the next six months if I choose to spend it on anything so sensible...)

Oh yes. We were at the compound and, having taken the tour and listened to the presentation, we heard the bell ring for services but discovered that no, yesterday being this special celebration, our guide would not in fact be leaving us alone to consider the wisdom of the holy Gyvann, but instead would be accompanying us wherever we went. We were standing next to a sheep pen when we heard this news and I swear I thought I saw one of the sheep smirk at me. Well, maybe not.

I was completely baffled by this news - couldn't think what to do next. Which, credit where credit's due, is where Kurt came to my rescue. We walked on past the cows and goats with Brother Hans still waffling on about the miracle of construction whereby one stone upon another creates a wall, when suddenly Kurt says, in this quiet, awed voice:

"I have seen the holy light of Gyvann."

And I'm about to turn round and say "don't be such an idiot," but fortunately I realise what he's up to in time. So I just look at him, trying to arrange my features into a suitable expression of surprise and delight. Brother Hans looks at Kurt too and Kurt, because he is a true friend and ally, kneels down in the mud, looks toward the temple and says:

"Gyvann is calling me to worship in his holy name! I must attend the Celebration of Water! The water is the holy light of the Cube!"

Brother Hans is absolutely delighted with this turn of events, of course, and hurries Kurt off to the temple to participate in the water-pouring ritual, leaving me standing by the sheep-pen very much alone and free to do as I wish.

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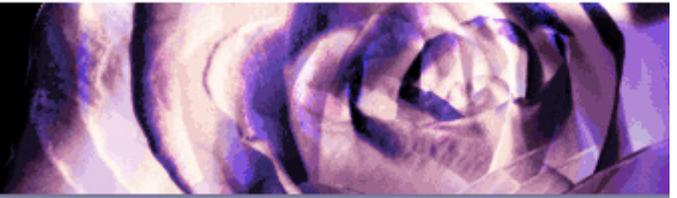
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Which I lost no time in doing.

It was pretty straightforward after that; I found the key room again without difficulty. The codeword Archer worked perfectly. Kurt had pointed out to me, as we went past, the right key to switch for the one from his collection - he's done something clever to it so that it'll mimic whatever signature their other systems are looking for, so they won't notice it's gone for a while anyway. I hooked it up as we'd practised, shoved the Recons' one in my pocket and I was out of the room within five minutes. All I had to do then was wait another three hours until the ceremony of water immersion and water meditation was over so that I could retrieve Kurt. The Recons were all over him, wanting to hear about his "moment of dawning" and even encouraging him to stay overnight to fully experience life "with the Cube". Poor Kurt. He's going to be getting mail from them from now until forever.

And here we are. Kurt's still working on pulling files off the key - most of what he's found so far are farm accounts and multiple versions of holy texts, but he hasn't finished yet, so we wait to see what we find out.



 Monday, June 13, 2005

A mysterious file

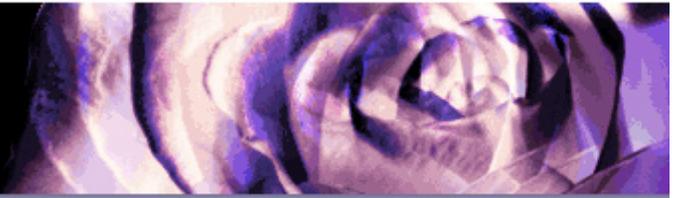
Category: me

Time: 06:04 PM

Poking around on the Recon key, Kurt's come up with something he thinks looks promising; it's definitely not one of their standard farm-expenses spreadsheets. He thinks it might be encrypted using some sort of Earth-technology but is a bit stumped so I thought, well, ahem, if you have time. The file's attached.

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 Wednesday, June 15, 2005

Some things I don't know

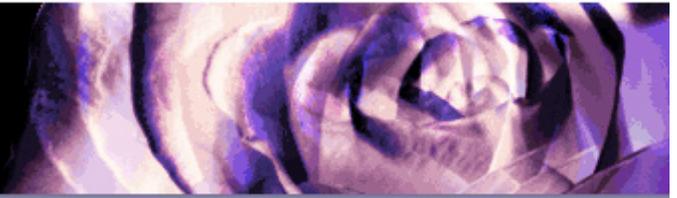
Category: me

Time: 11:33 PM

I don't know what to say. At first I was too shocked by the solution you guys sent me to know how to respond. And then there was this. And now all I feel is, well, betrayed. I don't know who sent that information to my dad. I don't know why they did it. I suppose that I'd have had to go to the police with the info anyway. But I just - with it happening this way - I just feel like suddenly I'm the enemy. And I don't know what to tell my dad, and I don't know whether you'll tell him first. I just - I don't know how to trust you.

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Friday, June 17, 2005

After all that

Category: me

Time: 12:43 AM

OK, so maybe I over-reacted in my last post. I guess I was just shocked, upset and... well, I'm still trying to get over the news that Aiko's a Recon. It seems completely unbelievable - she's always been so level-headed. I mean, a bit pretentious about her work, but fundamentally just a normal person. I've chatted with her loads of times about her art, been to her exhibitions. My dad's even had her over for dinner quite often.

And my dad... we had a quick conversation this morning. He's concerned for a member of his staff, of course, and angry that she didn't come to him first so that he could protect her better. I still haven't told him that I was involved, though. I don't know how to, or what to say. That element has become kind of irrelevant because she's confessed anyway. I'll have to... I just don't know.

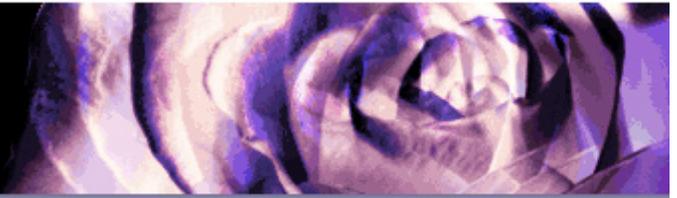
Kurt's really upset as well; he's been working with Aiko for months now... she's always kept herself to herself, but he thought he knew her pretty well. And now... well it looks like she might have taken the Cube, doesn't it? I mean, in all honesty it does. She has motive - because the Recon's always wanted it "liberated". She was at the party, so I guess she had opportunity, and with all the tech inside her sculptures, she might have had means.

It makes me wonder about how well we can ever know anyone. How can you tell who's a friend and who's just... a sharp in sheep's clothing?

So this is by way of an apology. In the region of an apology. You know. You're quite right, this information would have had to go to my dad and the proper authorities one way or another. I wish I'd been able to go to him myself. But still, I guess if Aiko's the culprit it's better we find out now. Sigh.

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 Wednesday, June 29, 2005

A vacation on the plains

Category: me

Time: 11:09 PM

Just got back from the plains. With all the Aiko stuff, I just wanted to get away from the City. I love my City, but it gets so crowded at Solstice time and all those tourist events can drive you mad. Took the train out as far as it goes - hiked the last few miles and camped in the fields. It's so quiet there, and so strange, the way the line just ends at nothing. Plains that stretch flat and wide across the horizon, the grass rippling in the wind, the mountains in the distance. And the stars at night - you never see so many in the City. Suddenly my head feels cleaner than it did before, not so full of static.

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 Friday, July 1, 2005

Word of the day

Category: words

Time: 04:55 PM

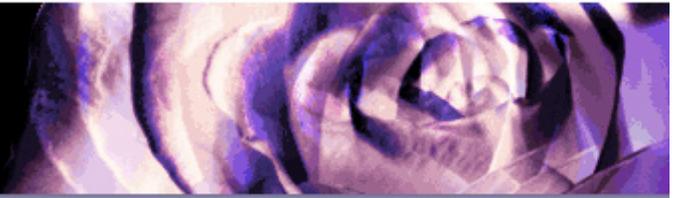
Back to work, back to words as well.

volacious: apt or fit to fly

“Though Kurt’s entry into the annual Academy paper airplane competition was ugly, it was certainly volacious.”

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 Wednesday, July 6, 2005

Blue day

Category: me

Time: 07:56 PM

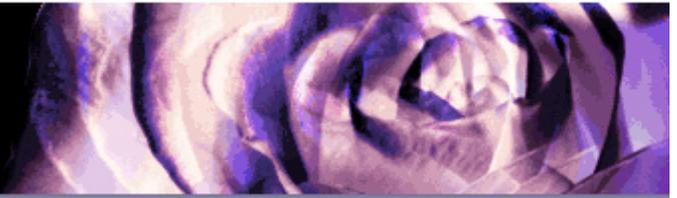
Don't know why. Everything seems to be weighing me down today. Cymbalisty had me archiving the old books again; there's been a lot of interest in them lately and he thinks we need to have better cross-referencing indexes. Actually, I usually love working with those old documents. There's something about handling books which no one else gets to touch, and in some cases even look at, which is sort of thrilling. To someone as geeky as me. But today... sigh.

After work I went walking in the Old Town again. The place felt so haunted to me today; the streets were weirdly empty. A couple of times I thought someone was watching me, but when I turned round there was no one. This all made me walk much too quickly, so that I found myself on Wardlock without meaning to be - near the Five of Cups. Which just made me start thinking about all that again.

I tell you, much as I love history, the Old Town really does have an uncanny atmosphere about it. I just can't see the renovation working out, no matter how much money they pour into it, or who's backing it.

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 Thursday, July 7, 2005

Ineffable

Category: words

Time: 12:32 PM

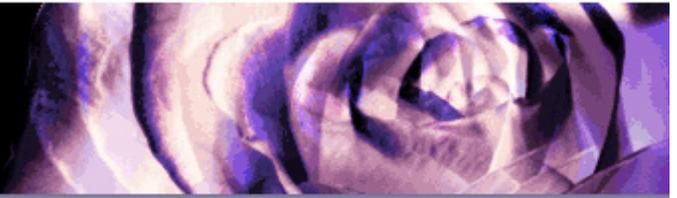
A good word, which sort of describes how I'm feeling today.

ineffable: indescribable, unable to be explained or expressed

"The motives of the Cubeheads, who have to cut all their food into cube-shaped pieces, are ineffable."

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 Friday, July 22, 2005

Sigh

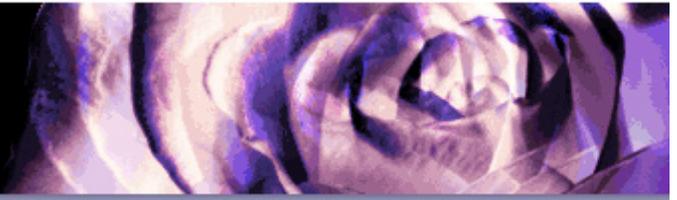
Category: me

Time: 05:44 PM

Sigh. Completely exhausting week. Not only was Cymbalistry on my case again about the piles of work I should apparently have done weeks ago, but also today some stupid guy just wouldn't give up on a query about material in the deep stacks. Honestly, I try to be helpful with queries, I don't like to be the angry-librarian-with-face-like-I-just-sucked-a-lemon, but the stacks are closed for a reason and I really can't let anyone take a look around just to see if there are "ancient documents relating to the brotherhood". This guy was really persistent, hung around for about three hours bothering me until I eventually threatened to call security. Weird, really - the insane ones are usually much older, he can't have been more than 23 or 24.

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 Friday, July 29, 2005

Oh no

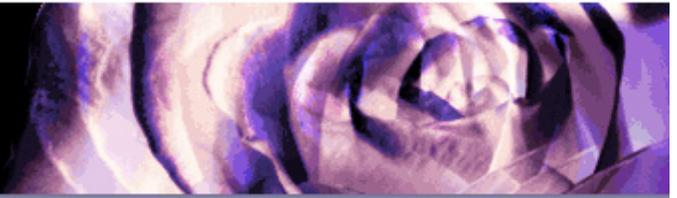
Category: me

Time: 06:14 PM

Went to visit my dad today at the Academy and as I was going into his office, who should be coming out but Aiko. She didn't say anything to me, just gave me this look. I'm sure she knows. My dad didn't say anything, he was shaking her hand and wishing her well, but I'm sure she was trying to tell me something with that look. I don't know what to do about this. She's coming back to work at the Academy soon. Maybe I should have a talk with her. But then what if she doesn't know anything, if I'm just imagining stuff because I'm paranoid? Ugh.

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 Wednesday, August 10, 2005

Historical Society

Category: me

Time: 01:34 PM

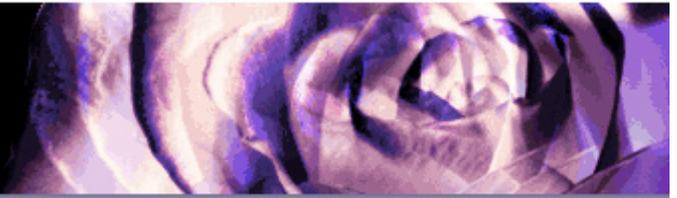
Went along to another meeting of the Historical Society yesterday. I seem to have been receiving a lot of emails from you Earth readers about Perplex City history recently, so I thought you'd probably want to hear about any and all research I do. I can understand why you're interested. I have to confess, much as I complain about archiving in the stacks, there's something almost mystical about it, about being able to touch these books that are centuries-old, that perhaps no one else has seen in my lifetime.

So, we had a talk yesterday evening about the ancient belief systems of Perplex City. Fascinating stuff - about the evolution of hunter-gatherer iconic totems into myths of gods and goddesses, and how those beliefs were affected by the development of philosophy and mathematics. The speaker, Dr Aisling, talked a lot about the interest in geometric shapes at that time, in tessellation as a manifestation of the divine order in all things, and compared that to modern cube-based religion. With the growth of interest in non-representational images of god, tessellated patterns were seen as a way to produce holy objects without having to depict a god as a person or animal. She looked at the way that translates to the cubeheads today, who see the Cube as being in some way divine. Really thought-provoking.

Anyway, after the talk, because you guys have been bugging me about it to such an extent, I went and asked her if she knew anything about secret societies in Perplex City, or anything that represented itself with the number three. Fat lot of good that did, though. She said she thought she might have heard about something like that, but couldn't remember anything about it. Still, I have to say, my interest's been piqued on that question - I'll keep digging.

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 Friday, August 19, 2005

Don't say I never do anything for you

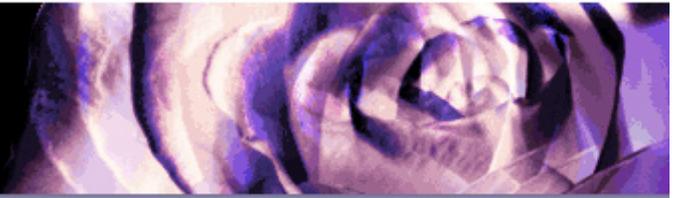
Category: me

Time: 07:25 PM

After a flood of requests (well, OK, five) I am calling up from the stacks of the Academy library a book that a few of you asked for: "The Third Power, the Archers and the City of Dawn: An investigation into the Power of the Perplex City Cube and those who have guarded it". Don't know why you wanted it - from the digest it just looks like the usual mumbo-jumbo cubehead rubbish about how the Cube is at the centre of an huge conspiracy stretching back for millennia, or was the reason for the foundation of Perplex City, or, I don't know, is the source of all cheese in the universe. This book looks like basically a catalogue of every instance of anything cube-shaped that's ever been used by any known religion. Including stones used to build walls. Anyway, it's not kept on site, and hasn't been deemed worthy to be electronically stored (it's about 60 years old) but if you have anything in particular you'd like me to look for when it arrives, I'll put some extracts up here.

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 Tuesday, August 23, 2005

Huh

Category: me

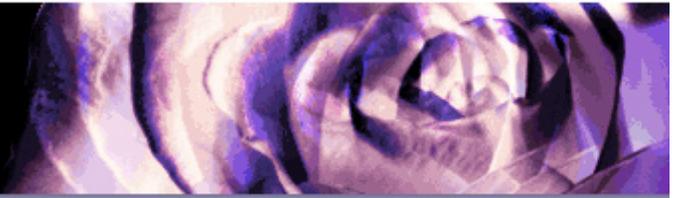
Time: 07:32 PM

Got a note back on that book that I ordered for you from the stacks. You know, "The Third Power, the Archers and the Socially Inadequate Conspiracy Theorists" or whatever it was. I hate to put fuel on your fires but, well, apparently it's been withdrawn from circulation. Using my exciting privileges as a junior librarian I had a look at the reasons for withdrawal, but nothing's listed on the system. Before you get too excited, though, it's not completely bizarre - they often withdraw books that have just become too fragile for general use. So, I'm pulling in a favour from Cumber, a guy I know who works in the central stacks, and I'll see if I can get to have a quick look at it.

Got to go now - dinner with dad and Scarlett this evening. She's going off on her big summer trip soon, so I think he's keen to have a few more family dinners before then. It's sweet really.

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Thursday, August 25, 2005

Worst. Family. Dinner. Ever.

Category: me

Time: 11:51 AM

Scarlett's heading off on her big summer trip soon, so my dad decided that we should have regular (if not constant) family dinners between now and then. Which is fine. Except that Scarlett's now dating this bloke Brede Hunterton from her student newspaper, and says can she bring him along? Which is also fine. Except of course then my dad calls to say: "You should bring someone, Violet. Why don't you bring Kurt? You two get on so well." To which I reply: "You know Kurt and I aren't involved, dad?" At which point my dad goes quiet. I know what this is about. My dad loves Kurt. Kurt's a big hero on campus, he's a computer genius, and my dad thinks we'd be so perfect together. In any case, I don't get much say in this because it turns out my dad's already invited Kurt to dinner anyway.

So, there were Scarlett and Brede being snuggly with each other at dinner, like new couples always are. This Brede seems OK enough. (Although, if I were being acid, which I never ever am, he strikes me as not quite smart enough for my baby sister. Still he seems to really like her.) But it was awkward. I could just read the words in neon above my dad's head as he was serving his specialty burgers: two perfect couples.

So, like, as much to break the tension as anything else, I said:

"How's the search for the Cube going, Dad?"

Which was not the right thing to say at all. He looked at me and said:

"I'm surprised you're interested, Violet. It's going fine. Despite what Scarlett's friends at the Sentinel may think, we have it all under control, don't we Kurt?"

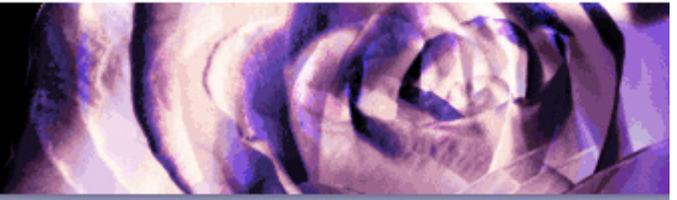
Which, just, aaaaargh, parents. Always know how to get under your skin. I know he didn't mean it, but attacking me and my sister and appealing to my best friend in one sentence? OK, I know, this does not in any way justify the next thing I did, which was to calmly take a breadstick, snap it in half, and say:

"Oh well, it doesn't really matter, does it? Who really cares about the Cube anyway?"

Damn damn damn. Big angry argument ensued. Relations between me and my dad now even worse than after the radio interview debacle. Will have to call tomorrow and apologise.

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 Friday, September 2, 2005

The book, the cube, and a resolution on my part

Category: me

Time: 06:43 PM

Well. Spoke to my dad. I did (and do) feel bad; he seems to think that I really don't care whether the Cube is ever found or not. Which really couldn't be further from the truth. But there's nothing I can say to convince him of that. So. Decision. I'm going to devote as much of my brainpower as I can spare from (yawn) archiving duties to finding out who took it. Or, at least, to finding out as much as possible about it. Which leads me neatly back to that book I've been trying to track down - "The Third Power, the Archers and Something Else Sinister Sounding." I went to see Cumber at the central stacks yesterday afternoon and he says, yes, the book's been damaged - water damage in fact. His systems don't say how damaged, but maybe if it's not too bad and I ask really nicely my dear friend Kurt might be able to help me reconstruct anything that's only partly readable. We're getting the book at the start of next week.

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Thursday, September 8, 2005

Today's word

Category: words

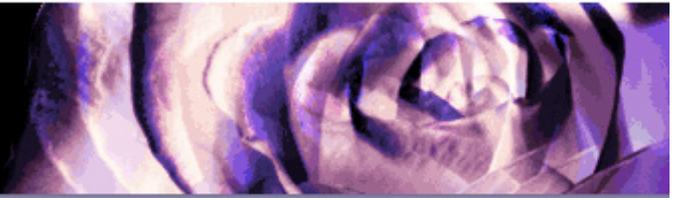
Time: 12:08 PM

Exsanguinate: to drain of blood.

“Satine Noir thinks her new look is very mysterious, but she really just looks like the victim of exsanguination.”

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Monday, September 19, 2005

Last Friday

Category: me

Time: 09:45 PM

I really don't know who you people are or where you get your information but I guess I should say: thanks. Or. Well. I'm starting backwards. But then I guess maybe you know more of the story than I do. Anyway. Starting from the beginning. It's been quite a weekend. I was just finishing up at work on Friday when I got a message from a woman called Cassandra: "Please, get to the residence of Sylvia Salk immediately. I cannot explain how, but I have knowledge that she may have just attempted suicide."

I didn't even know the name Sylvia Salk. I did a quick key search and came up with the information that her husband was a journalist on the Sentinel and died a little while ago. I remember Scarlett saying something about the memorial service, about how this journalist's wife was sitting at the front just crying and crying. I tracked down Sylvia Salk's contact details and called her on my key. No answer. This was about five minutes after I got the email.

So I did something a little bit illegal. This is not, of course, because I enjoy doing illegal things or talking my way into tricky situations, certainly not. I called the Sentinel. I told them I needed Pietro Salk's home address because "George in accounts" had asked me to forward his widow some important documents. They told me they couldn't give out that kind of information. I told them I didn't have time for this nonsense, and if they didn't give me the address now I'd have to speak to their supervisor. They gave me the address. If you accuse me of having enjoyed that, I'd have to say that was a terrible slander on my good character.

So. I jumped in a car round to the Salk home. It's lovely, on a quiet little street, the garden absolutely *filled* with Julian Blooms. I rang the bell. No answer. I rang again. Still nothing. The windows were open, though. One of those awful cheesy 20s songs was playing on continuous loop. Seemed weird that the woman would go out and leave the music playing and the windows open. So I stuck my head in the window. And there she was. Lying on the couch. One arm dangling down. She looked peaceful, though, as if she'd just gone to sleep.

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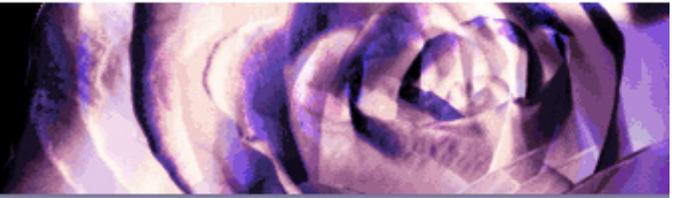
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I shouted at her through the window, called her name so loudly I would have woken her if she could have been woken. She didn't move. I called the emergency services using my key. And I scrambled in, past the Julian Bloom thorns, over the window ledge and into the room. I went over to her, knelt down next to her. There was a glass of water and a bottle of pills on the side table and I kept thinking how weird it'd be if I touched her and she just woke up and asked me what the hell I was doing in her home. That stupid, sickly song Sweet Serenity was playing over and over in the background. I leaned down and shook her shoulder. Nothing. I put my face close to her mouth. The sweetest and best sound in the world. She was breathing. Just a little, but she was. I held her hand and waited.

I went with in the ambulance to Phuah Hospital; they asked me if I was a relation and I just lied and said I was her cousin. It seemed like the best thing to do. I spent Friday night waiting in that hospital for news about a woman I'd never met before, as more and more people arrived: some people from the Sentinel, a police detective, then Sylvia's brother. At about 4am, she asked to see me. She was very weak - they'd had to flush everything she'd taken out of her system. We only spoke for a few minutes. She thanked me, and she wanted me to thank you too. If you hadn't emailed us, no one would have known until it was too late. Thank you. I'm going back to see her tomorrow. I don't know how you knew about Sylvia or what she was planning to do but I'm glad you did. Thank you.

Oh, and some of you wrote to wish me a happy birthday and ask what I did. Nothing much. It was the Friday before last - I had dinner with Kurt, went to poker, won a fairly nice amount of money, turned 26. It all seems pretty irrelevant now.



Wednesday, September 28, 2005

Sylvia

Category: me

Time: 02:27 PM

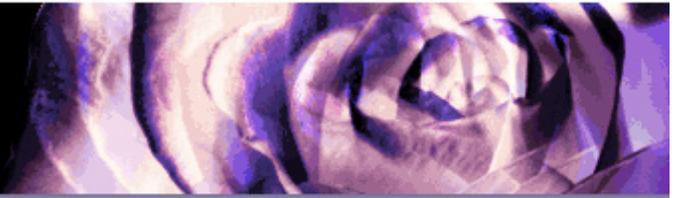
I've been spending a lot of time with Sylvia Salk, up until yesterday, when she went to stay with some relative or other outside the city. We talked quite a bit about you lot, actually. It's a little strange to find that you're up to things I don't know about. I'm constantly needing to re-evaluate what I had thought about you.

She also told me a lot about her husband and the work he'd been doing, and the circumstances that led to our rather unusual meeting. It certainly has me thinking about all of this in a new light.

So. With this new information from poor Sylvia, I'm going to try a little harder to get that book -- "The Third Power, the Archers and the Shadowy Masters Behind the Scenes." It seems like we may actually be on to something. I know I was supposed to get it from Cumber a few weeks ago, but he left me a note saying there's been a bit of a problem, and I've been meaning to follow up. I'll let you know when there's been a development.

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Friday, October 7, 2005

Trip to the library

Category: me

Time: 04:31 PM

OK, so it's not that I'm unreliable. Well, maybe it is that I'm unreliable but, hey, I've spent a great deal of my time recently comforting a woman who tried to kill herself. (Incidentally, Sylvia's doing a lot better, I think. I had a note and a couple of pictures from her yesterday from her aunt's place in the country. She had a little colour in her cheeks and wasn't looking quite so thin. We're planning to meet up when she comes back to the city for a visit sometime.) Anyway so I've been busy, what with one thing and another, you know, and it's not that I'm unreliable as I said to Cumber when he called yesterday to find out why he was still holding onto this book for me that I hadn't yet made time to go and examine. Yeah. In no way unreliable at all.

So, anyway, yesterday afternoon I finally made it along to the central archives to take a look at this book. And, yeah, Cumber had been quite right to say there was a problem. The thing's not just water-damaged, bent at the edges, a little mildewed... whole pages have been practically erased. No one knows how it happened, because this is part of the permanent, non-circulating collection and is tagged so it can't be taken out of the building, and there hasn't been a flood. It's weird - some of the pages are really badly damaged while others are completely fine. As if some idiot had poured a bottle of water over it repeatedly. Cumber and I flipped through the pages together shaking our heads.

It was nice to see Cumber again, actually - we went to nursery school together, and have been part of the same loose group of friends for a while now. We share an affection for books and bookish things; in a sweet way I think he was quite shocked by what had happened to this book.

He said: "I suppose that's it then - it can't be any use to you in this state?"

I said: "Wouldn't say that... I have a friend who reckons he might be able to reconstruct text from a water-damaged book. We'll come tomorrow and take another look if that's OK?"

He looked at me, raised one eyebrow and said: "Tomorrow? That means

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“several weeks from now”, does it?”

So I had to explain to him how I’m really, definitively, not in any way unreliable. Honest.

And to prove that I’m so amazingly reliable, this morning Kurt and I swung by the archives.

Kurt took a look at the pages, using his key to make a test scan - he thinks he can make something of it. Apparently the ink leaves a residue in the paper even when it’s washed away. It’ll take time, but he thinks he can make it work.

Cumber was slightly hesitant about allowing us to use a room meant for “bona fide researchers” for our work.

I said: “Go on Cumber. We’ll only come after-hours and it won’t take that long...”

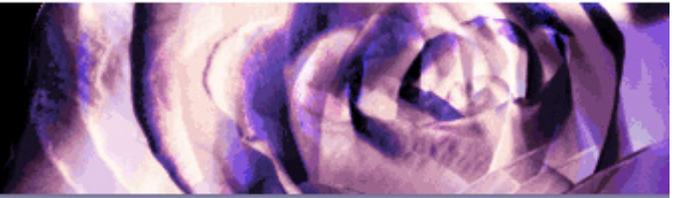
He hesitated.

I said: “Otherwise I’ll tell Kurt what they used to call you in nursery....” and grinned. “I promise we won’t be too much trouble.”

Cumber smiled and agreed.

After he’d left the room, Kurt was quiet for a few minutes, examining the book’s binding and taking some preliminary scans. Then he looked up at me and said: “Was it Cucumber?”

I’ve sworn him to secrecy.



 Tuesday, October 11, 2005

Going cross-eyed over this book

Category: me

Time: 07:34 PM

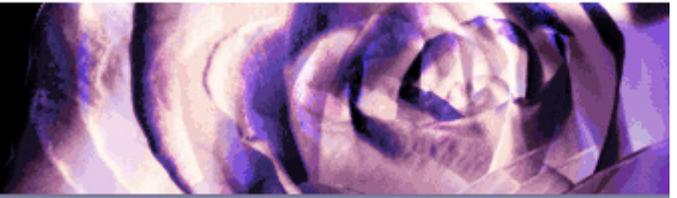
So, Kurt and I have been working really hard on this book (well, OK, Kurt's been working really hard and I've been mostly supervising) but it's slow going. In the off-time, when he's recalibrating his scanner or uploading additional data or, I don't know, giving it a cup of really hot tea or something, I've taken a look at the other pages, the bits that aren't water-damaged. I have to say, if you guys hadn't been so persistent in asking about it, and if it hadn't been so obviously damaged deliberately, I'd give up. As far as I can tell, the majority of the book is made up of a lengthy discussion by the author of all the people who have wronged him, done him down or otherwise questioned his academic theories and how they'll get theirs in the fullness of time. Seriously, typical sentence:

"In her book Squaring the Cube, Adrienne Savillard scoffs at my contention that the Tarsian pentagram-symbolism constitutes an early form of Cube-worship, instead maintaining that it has links to the 'vegetation goddess' of her own irrationally-held theories regarding the ancient religions of the southlands; in this she simply panders to her own prejudices against the indisputable connection between all geometric-based cults."

I mean, really, the syntax alone would make me want to pour a bottle of water over this thing. Still, it seems pretty clear that the vandal isn't just some retired grammarian gone stir-crazy. The book is mostly ridiculous academic posturing, but every time it gets to talking about something vaguely interesting, something that might potentially be based in fact rather than opinion... water all over the pages. So we'll see what Kurt manages to recover. Just to whet your appetites, though, he thinks that the phrase "the Third Power" is coming up much more frequently in the damaged pages than the undamaged ones. Creepy, huh?

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Wednesday, October 19, 2005

See? I deliver

Category: me

Time: 03:39 PM

At long last, some success!

Right, so, Kurt and I have finally managed to decipher some of this waterlogged book. And when I say "Kurt and I" I mean that Kurt used his extensive and detailed technical knowledge and skill and I brought beverages and sat around being charming. Hey, we all bring what we can to the party.

Kurt's managed to retrieve a few pages which I've read through and, believe me, they are mostly drivel. Just take my word for this. Some edited highlights include:

* An account of how the author was denied entry to the Academy library on the grounds of being improperly dressed. He appears to think they ought to have let him in dressed in his flashing-LED headdress, designed by him to honour the Cube.

* A long, pointless rehashing of the debate about whether the extinction of the square-bellied lizards of Catbite was caused by anti-Cubists. The author willfully does not mention that a full ten years before the publication of his book, an entire population of square-bellied lizards was found to the north of the city, and that most naturalists think they simply migrated to follow food sources.

* Wild misquotings from the ancient sources. For example, where Lemnal describes Madna rowing the sky-boat through the maze of stars and being helped by the spider who spins out her thread behind them so they can find their way back, this Lencival decides that the word "spider" is actually another word for "cube" and that the whole story is an allegory for Madna being guided on a spiritual quest by the power of the Cube.

So you see what I mean. Drivel.

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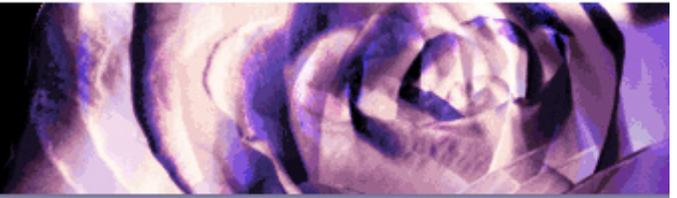
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But I do have one little snippet for you that's actually of some interest. In amongst all his meanderings in the world of mythology, he comes up with this:

“Although as I have clearly demonstrated the Cube is mentioned in mythological sources dating back at least 1,500 years, there is a definite upswing in Cube-based myth in the years following the end of the War. Even before the purported “discovery” of the Cube, the immediate post-war period contains extensive Cube-related material such as has not been seen in any earlier time period when Cube-texts must be meticulously pieced together [he means “invented” - Violet.] from the existing sources. And even at this juncture the name of the Cube is strongly linked with one of it's [his error, not mine - Violet.] guardian cults, the Third Power; the linkage is stronger at this time than any other, suggesting to me that it was at this point that the meditative powers, spiritual leadership and guidance of the Third Power reached its contemplative zenith.”

I have to say, that's not what it suggests to me at all - shadowy organisations don't usually become well-known through meditative powers alone. And what's a “contemplative zenith,” for goodness' sake? Anyway, I thought you might like to chew on that. There will be more.

Also, the word from Kurt is that the next page he's working on seems to include diagrams as well as text. Excited? I know I am...



 Thursday, October 27, 2005

Symbols

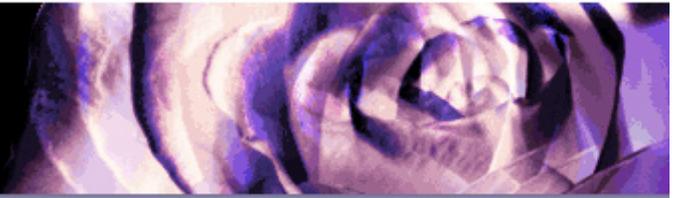
Category: me

Time: 05:27 PM

OK, Kurt, being the star that he is (but don't tell him I said so or he might get ideas) has fetched up some more information from several apparently blank pages. It's still not the clearest, but I've copied down what he's shown me and the file is here. Lencival, the incredibly incompetent author of this terrible book, has decided that all the organisations he's listed here are actually Cube worshippers (I happen to know that the Tarsians, at least, worshipped a sea god and that most historians believe that their symbol is a stylised representation of waves, but whatever). Anyway, he devotes a page each to large figures of the symbols of each of these groups. Personally I think he's just trying to pad out the page numbers. Apparently, Kurt thinks that the next couple of pages - and we're getting close to the end of these water-logged pages - are potted histories of each of these groups, so when we get to those I'll post them up here.

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 Tuesday, November 1, 2005

More from Lencival

Category: me

Time: 07:01 PM

The restoration work on this book continues, but slowly. Cymbalistry, my boss, has had me working extra-late to get stuff ready for this big exhibit the museum is putting together. Apparently, they're delving into parts of the archives that were sealed more than 200 years ago. That's not the stuff I'm working on, of course. Instead I'm putting together more contemporary references (within the past hundred years) to the war for the additional material made available to museum visitors. It's pretty interesting stuff, actually. Until you look at it systematically, like this, it's hard to see how the war has been so consistently concealed. Or, well, not concealed. Just looked away from. It's hard even to write the words: "the war". We talk about "the conflict" or "our sad history". I don't know what I think about that.

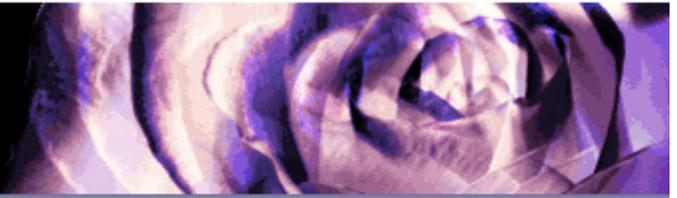
Anyway, Kurt and I have managed to make a little time to carry on with our work on this conspiracy-theory tome. Lencival's terrible way with a sentence continues unabated, but he does claim to know something about the Third Power (which, from your letters, you seem to be interested in) so here's the relevant paragraph.

"Although the Third Power's roots certainly extend back through time until the very foundation of the city and into the prehistory of our world, with all that implies, they are nonetheless intertwined with the growth of the Academy. It is my belief, backed up by the spiritual guidance I have received through meditation on the Cube, that the Third Power was begun in the Academy. [He does not indicate how this can be true, given that the Third Power also extends back through prehistory. - Violet.] Certain symbols, found in various locations in the Academy confirm this to me and I have, through lengthy and extensive researches which have taken many years to complete, definitively proved that certain high-ranking personages within the society of Perplex City at the time in question were, in all probability, also members of the Third Power."

I imagine that the next section might be a list of names... we'll have to wait and see.

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Wednesday, November 9, 2005

Some news

Category: me

Time: 06:45 PM

Well, possibly. Not from the new scans of the book. All that turned up was a list of people that the great academic theorist Lencival claims, with apparently no evidence whatsoever, have been members of the Third Power throughout the centuries. What he's basically done is to make a list of famous people from history. That's essentially it. He says he's found documentary evidence to support at least one of these claims, but doesn't, you know, produce it or anything, instead saying that it's been kept in a sealed archive in the Academy. (Without letting us know how he managed to get into that archive, of course.)

Anyway, because I know you'll ask me otherwise, here's his comprehensive list:

- * Albert Wardlock
- * Hsu-Chi Radine
- * Sarawak Munroe
- * Eugenia Hall
- * Simone Delfcast
- * Ngaio Simon
- * Nechama Raman
- * Anthony Granier
- * Faisel Chumal
- * Aelfric Liu

I know you guys don't know about Perplex City history, so just to let you know: Radine was a famous painter whose works are still iconic, Delfcast basically founded modern mathematics, Granier was a politician who became a brilliant novelist, Hall was probably the finest composer of the past 300 years. And so on. Saying that they were all members of some secret organisation is like, I don't know, claiming that Da Vinci, Newton, Churchill and Mozart were all secretly in league with each other to run the world. We're basically at the end of the information we're going to be able to extract from this book. I hope you found what you wanted.

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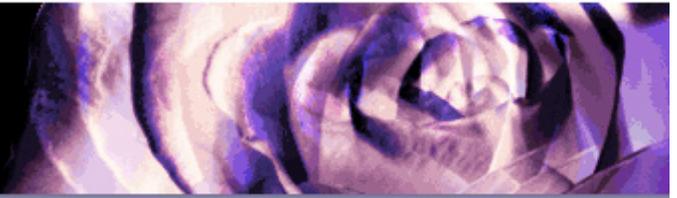
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Anyway, that's not the news. The news comes from a much more disconcerting source. Kurt and I were going over some scans from this book in his office at the Academy a couple of days ago. Specifically, we were looking at the pages with the symbols on. He was enthusing about some piece of specially-wonderful kit he's working with now, and I was trying not to yawn, er, I mean, paying close attention. Anyway, I wandered off to get myself some coffee, and when I came back who should I hear talking to him in his office but... Aiko. I still haven't talked to her about the business with the Recons. I think that on some subconscious level I'm hoping I won't ever have to speak to her again. I always feel that she's looking at me strangely when we meet, but maybe I'm imagining it. So, she was discussing some puzzle with Kurt, and I thought I'd wait in the corridor until she left - that way we'd just have to nod at each other in passing. But then she noticed the display of symbols over Kurt's shoulder and, without stopping to ask what they were, she pointed at one of them "the three interlocking squares" and said she'd seen it before, somewhere in the city.

Kurt didn't seem that interested, just made his typical little "hmmmm" noise and went on looking at her puzzle notes. But I thought I couldn't let the matter rest there. Oh no, I was quite aware of the emails I'd get if I didn't pursue this lead. So, I walked into the room, as if I'd just come back with my coffee and, trying to be casual, asked where she'd seen the symbol before. But, well, as soon as I came in, she clammed up, said she couldn't remember. I guess my paranoia might have some actual roots to it.

So, later, after I'd left, I suggested to Kurt that he might like to ask her again. And, being the sweet guy that he is, he sat her down with a cup of tea, spun her some line about needing to investigate the symbology of the city for a "puzzle he's working on" and, surprise, surprise, when I wasn't there, Aiko's memory got a bit more accurate. Kurt mailed me a little while ago with the results of his investigations - she saw the symbol when she was doing research in ancient houses around the city for an art project she was working on. Specifically, she saw it carved into the panelling in the house of my uncle, Sanjean Adamek. So, just for you, I've made an appointment with my uncle to ask him what it means.



 Tuesday, November 22, 2005

My visit to Uncle Sanjean

Category: me

Time: 05:58 PM

Had such a nice weekend - great night of poker on Saturday night, woke up about midday on Sunday which was just about right because I'd arranged to go for afternoon tea with my aunt and uncle in the Old Town. It was one of those clear, bright autumn days, so the half-hour walk from Foreman Station was a real pleasure. I love this city, particularly on beautiful days like that! And, even better, Aunt Annaliese had made her specialty honey and almond cake, yum yum.

After catching up on family news - I told them about Scarlett's latest plans to rescue small furry creatures in the mountains and they told me about my cousin Tavit and his archaeological expeditions to the south; we certainly seem to be an adventurous family - I asked my uncle about the "Third Power" symbol. He seemed surprised to hear it described like that; as far as he knew it dated back to the original builder of the house, Anthony Granier.

The house has been in my family for generations, but it was actually built by Granier, who gave it to Vianne Adamek when she retired as Master of the Academy. Apparently the two were very close; anyway, I think very wealthy important people make more of a habit of giving each other houses as presents than normal people do. The house has been passed down in my family ever since, going to the eldest child every time, so my uncle got it not my mother.

Uncle Sanjean was delighted to show me the "Granier mark", as he called it. He told me that he often points it out when schoolchildren come to tour the house. He remembered Aiko coming to see it, photographing it from different angles for some project she was working on. It's certainly very striking; it's carved in very heavy relief in both the floor and ceiling of the great hall on the east side of the house. On the ceiling, it's worked in polished wood, very intricately done, and on the floor, it stretches across three flagstones. Still, despite the size and the intricacy of the carving it's the same pattern as in Lencival's book, the same three interlocking squares.

So, now, this got me thinking. Because there does seem to be some kind of

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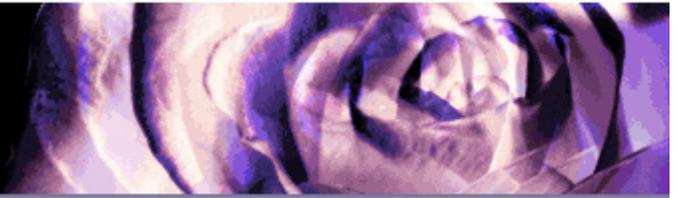
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connection. Lencival describes a “third power” symbol, and says that Anthony Granier belonged to this group. And now I find that same symbol in my Uncle’s house described as the “Granier mark”. Now, maybe Lencival just went on a tour of the Adamek home when he was a child, saw the Granier mark and made up the phrase “third power” to go with it. But it made me think that perhaps I could do worse than investigate Anthony Granier a bit more.

Sunday night I had dinner with Kurt. He was still moaning about some girl who he’d gone on a date with last weekend, but who hadn’t been interested in seeing him again. He thinks maybe he said something wrong, but he can’t work out what. He was trying to explain to me how she’d gone a bit cold when he started telling her about our work deciphering the book. Now, if you ask me, discussing spectroscopic analysis perhaps isn’t the best idea for chat on a first date, but Kurt doesn’t seem to quite see it like that. I don’t know, he can be really funny, but somehow has trouble showing it in a date-type situation. Anyway, the point of all this is that what sparked off the disastrous conversation with the girl was that Kurt spotted an exhibit in the library that reminded him of the Lencival book: the diary of Anthony Granier! This is rather exciting; it’s been in sealed archives for a long time now, so hasn’t been part of the study of the period. I can’t help feeling it might be interesting to get my hands on.

So, this afternoon I popped down to the museum to see if I could arrange an after-hours viewing of the Granier diary with all my spiffy Academy-librarian privileges. I know you’ll believe me when I say that I smiled, I was charming and persuasive, I brought all my force of personality to bear but to no avail. The book is under very heavy protection because of the protesting, and because it’s such a valuable resource to begin with. The museum staff were very apologetic, but said that they could only allow access to published and credentialed researchers. I certainly don’t have a book to my name. So, I think I’m stumped, unless you have any ideas.



 Thursday, November 24, 2005

Your suggestions

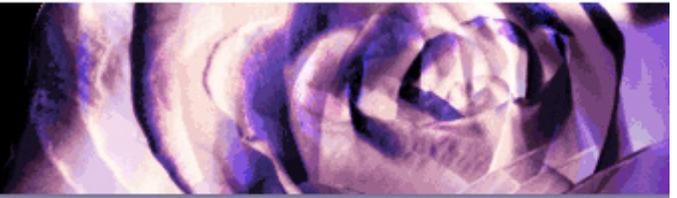
Category: me

Time: 05:06 PM

Wow, thanks for all your email suggestions! I feel quite overwhelmed. A lot of you have suggested that I should talk to either my uncle or my father about getting hold of Anthony Granier's diary. I don't feel so comfortable about this, really. For one thing, it's kind of favouritism to try to use family connections to get privileges I'm not entitled to. For another thing, I doubt either of them would agree! They'd be more likely to send me away with a flea in my ear, telling me that just because I'm related to some senior people in the Academy doesn't mean that I can just disobey any rule that I don't like. Finally, if I asked either of them for this sort of favour, I'd have to explain what I needed it for and... I'm thinking you'd probably rather I kept all this stuff secret for the moment. There must be some other way.

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 Monday, November 28, 2005

A brainwave

Category: me

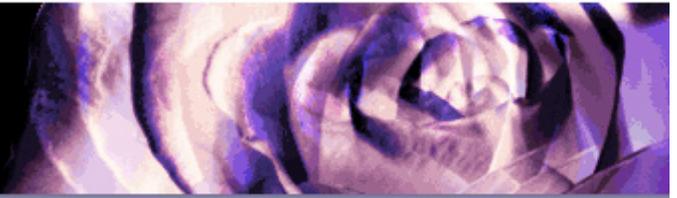
Time: 05:04 PM

So, I was talking through this problem about getting hold of Granier's diary with Kurt over the weekend. A few of you have suggested that I could contact some author or other to try to get their help. I can't see it working, really. Whoever I contacted, I'd have to explain to them why I wanted the book, which would either mean inventing a legitimate research need (and if I had the evidence for that, the museum would let me look at the diary anyway) or telling them that I'm investigating a wacky secret society that I think might have something to do with the theft of the cube and whose tendrils have permeated Perplex City for centuries and no, honestly, I'm not crazy, why are you backing away like that?

But Kurt and I had another thought. There are quite a lot of you guys, right? I think the only answer is for you all to get together and *actually write a book*. It shouldn't be that hard; you could do a book of short stories or essays on "Earth life", or one long narrative if you like. I think that Seaside Press are looking for books on Earth, so I could be the editor, you could all be the contributors. I reckon if we get going, we should be able to produce a book really quickly, and even get it printed! Hey, I'm quite excited by this idea now!

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 Tuesday, November 29, 2005

On writing a book

Category: me

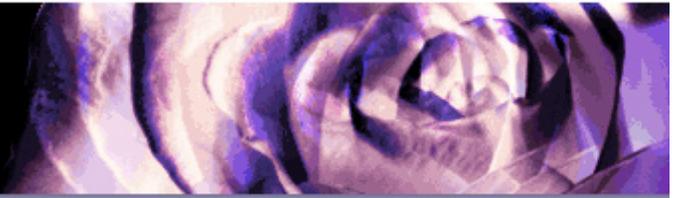
Time: 04:23 PM

I've had quite a few emails about this writing-a-book idea. I'm glad you're all as into it as I am. It does seem a little ridiculous that we have to write a book in order to be able to read one. (What next, I ask myself, having to compose a symphony before we can listen to one? Cook a four-course dinner before you're allowed to eat at Conundra? If so, I may never eat again.) But I'm fully convinced this is going to work. I think the best plan is if you all get together to decide on a theme for your stories or essays; it'd make it an easier sell to Seaside Press if there were a theme linking all the parts together. Plus, it's going to be your book, so I guess you want to make it as good as possible. The best thing would be if you send me the whole document, all collated in the order you want the pieces to go in, with all relevant information. I guess every author should have a little biography of, say, 50-100 words as well, so we know who you are.

In the meantime, I'll get in touch with Seaside Press to let them know that I'm working on a book with you. If you can nominate an editor or two on your side, I expect they'll want to get in touch. Also, while you're working on this, I'll get the ball rolling with the Museum. Their approval-of-credentials procedure is rather long, so I'll put in the request via my boss here at the library, Isaac Cymbalistic. If we can get this book done before the holidays (we break for winter solstice on 21 December), I should be able to present the museum with my proper credentials just at the point that they ask for them. Ah, I love it when a plan comes together.

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 Tuesday, December 6, 2005

Book update

Category: me

Time: 02:20 PM

From what I hear, you're making good progress on writing this book. That's great news - we'll get our hands on this diary soon, or my name's not Violet Kiteway.

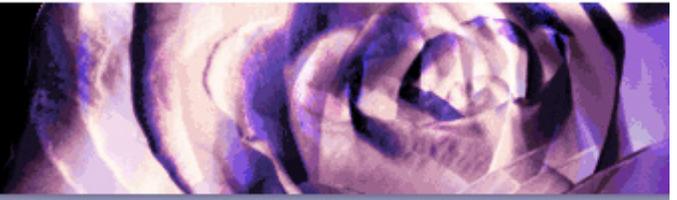
Actually, perhaps I'll have to change my name, because it turns out we can't really get our hands on the book. It's very fragile, and has to be kept in some special preservation chamber. Most of Granier's diary has been known about and studied for many decades, but this piece is new. It's the section of the diary that deals most explicitly with the conflict and was sealed up with the rest of those documents more than 200 years ago - the pages look like they were ripped right out of the diary and shoved into the sealed archive.

Apparently, when I finally get to look at it, I'll have to look at one leaf at a time, and be supervised by an expert in the care of ancient documents. Luckily, my boss Cymbalistry is such an expert, so it's good that I put in the request for the document through him. Unluckily, that means I'll have to be in the same room as him for hours at a time looking at this manuscript. The things I do for you guys.

Actually, I might be able to ask one of the new guys to help. Two new junior librarians arrived at the end of last week, to help out with the archiving around the museum exhibit: Jason Mariem and Miranda Katsoulis. They seem pretty nice, if a bit gung-ho about the whole archiving thing. The enthusiasm of two people who haven't spent 10 hours a day for the past two months on this particular task. In fact, when Kurt came by to pick me up this evening, I thought he seemed a little interested in Miranda. We shall see.... Anyway, I'll talk to them tomorrow. If either of them have a qualification in "ancient document management" I could bypass Cymbalistry entirely.

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Wednesday, December 14, 2005

Developments

Category: me

Time: 08:06 PM

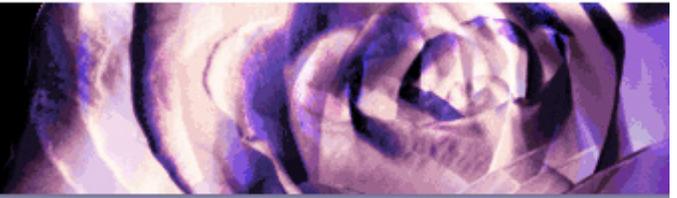
Sigh. No luck with the new Junior Librarians, I'm afraid. Neither of them is sufficiently senior to be able to help me when I look at the Granier diary. Which means that I'm stuck going through Cymbalistry, my boss. He'll take a page out of the museum every night, we'll look at it together, I'll transcribe it and post it up here for you guys to have a look at. I have to say, nights-with-Cymbalistry aside I'm excited about the whole thing; no real work has been done on this manuscript yet, so we'll be the first to examine it properly.

On the subject of the new juniors, though, they do seem to be settling in rather well. In fact, I think Cymbalistry has taken quite a shine to Miranda. He's been talking to her more than he talks to me (which is quite a relief, to be honest), and I've noticed him popping a Ceretin a couple of times before he goes over to her desk to talk to her. I guess she's good-looking if you like that whole fluffy-hair, cute little nose look. Kurt certainly seems taken by her. They're going out to a PCAG event together tonight. I know I should be supportive but, really, I can't see it working out. She's just a bit too giggly-girly for him. Still, I guess you never know.

The other thing is that Kurt taking Miranda out leaves the field clear for me to try getting a little closer to Jason. He seems very calm and level-headed, kind of quiet but with the occasional flash of humour. He's also been very helpful with the manuscript stuff. Even though he's not qualified enough to help out with supervising me when I examine it, he was really interested when I asked for his help. He's asked about it quite a few times, and had found me some good reference material on understanding slang terms from that period, which should be helpful. Also, he's sort of dark and handsome. Hmmm... maybe if the Kurt/Miranda thing does work out, we could double-date.

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 Tuesday, January 3, 2006

Progress

Category: me

Time: 03:28 PM

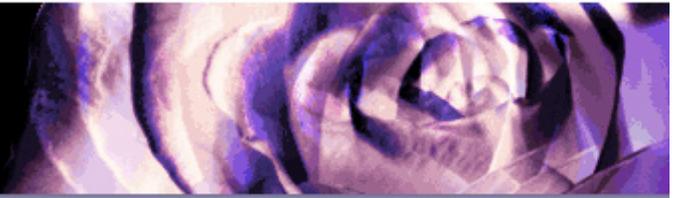
Well, success at last. I had a mail this morning from Ellen Moriyama at Seaside Press to say that I've been accredited as a "co-author/researcher" on their upcoming book of stories from Earth. And, following hot on the heels of that mail, another one from the staff at the Museum to say that my request for access to the Granier diaries has been granted, now that my status is properly affirmed. So, go you guys! I've spoken to Cymbalistry, and we ought to have the first page of the diary tomorrow.

That's if he has time to help me with it, of course, given how much time he's spending with Miranda. Honestly, it seems like every man who comes into contact with that woman is instantly besotted. I mean, not that I mind Cymbalistry swishing down the Ceretin so that he can spend hours discussing new classification systems with her - it keeps him away from me, at least. But there is now a steady stream of first-year Academy students making ever-more-complicated requests for material from the archives and asking if they can talk to "the other librarian, you know, the young one". I mean, she's only about three months younger than me!

Ah well, maybe I'm just frustrated - I've been trying to arrange a date with Jason but he's been mysteriously elusive, always going away for the weekends on unspecified "projects", or just "busy" in the evenings. Even Cymbalistry seems to be having more luck than me - the other evening I saw him actually leave the office with a woman. For a moment, I thought it was the ubiquitous Miranda, but it turns out not - it was Anna Heath, one of the puzzle scribes. Kurt says that she and Cymbalistry are old friends, which came as something of a surprise to me. I wouldn't have thought that Cymbalistry had any friends at all, never mind old ones.

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Wednesday, January 4, 2006

Granier diaries, installment one

Category: me

Time: 06:42 PM

Just got back home from the library where I have been looking at the first of these diary pages from the Museum. It's really rather exciting, I hope you're proud of yourselves - I'm an accredited author thanks to you. It's been a bit of a weird afternoon, looking at this page handwritten by someone almost 300 years ago. The pages are pretty small, and so is Granier's handwriting. This was obviously a journal which he carried everywhere with him, so it had to be small - about 7x12 centimetres. The edges are roughened and the pages have gone yellow, but it's still quite legible, although we have to go slowly, and I'm not allowed to get too close to the paper in case my breath damages it. I spent a couple of hours on this page today - Cymbalistry, for all his irritations, was actually quite useful, helping me to decipher some of the more tricky words. He's taken that section of the manuscript back to the Museum now, and picked up the one we'll work on tomorrow.

In any case, enough of this preamble. Here are the fruits of my labours, the first page of the parts of Anthony Granier's diary which were held in the sealed archive. It's all very mysterious, I'm looking forward to finding out what happens next:

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13 March 1736

Have embarked upon Northern expedition. Accompanied by Edwina Mountling, an Academy scholar of about fifty despatched by my Master. "Accompanied", but not "companied", for she is a woman of little conversation, preferring her mathematical calculations to civil discourse. Three days journeying and we are still only halfway to our destination. Exceeding weary. Provisions provided tiresomely similar. I relish a leg of mutton as well as any man, but cannot feast upon it for lunch and dinner every day without some decline in appetite. The lands through which we journey are as well-formed as I have been led to expect, but pleasant vistas give no relief from the awful task which confronts us. I find my heart is heavy indeed, despite the serving girl's charming attempts to lift my spirits.

17 March 1736

At last, the castle is reached. I find the hospitality very fine. My lord is an excellent host, and the feast with which he greeted our arrival would have honoured nobler men than we. I have writ to my Master that the first part of the journey is successfully completed. It is odd to muse upon my Master in this place. She would take some pleasure in this locale, I think; she has ever delighted in new landscapes and the new creatures found there. I recall her once, above ten years past, taking such pains to instruct me in some new specimen of hive-bee she had found, enumerating its parts and elaborating upon its society. Had the times not needed her resolve, she might have remained merely a fine naturalist. Would that it had been so. My Master has never visited this place, I think, nor ever will do now, but the fate of all the people within one dozen miles of here rests with her.

19 March 1736

I visited the mining works this day. Almost as much as can be done, has been done. They have extracted sufficient of the material for my Master's experiments. There is so little, so very little, and almost all of it will be needed if the thing is to be done. The men and women working at the mine know nothing of this, of course. They are so cheerful and so resolute. They tell me that they are honoured to work at an occupation which may prove the salvation of the City - this, of course, they have been told. Wanion!

21 March 1736

Today we feasted for The Builders Celebration, a festival of the Way of the Cube. Excellent sport, with several bouts of combat between the people of the village, divers plays and masques, and three boar roasted whole upon the fire. Ground struck for a new general store on the Green. A figure of the Holy Cube, along with images of Gyvann paraded through the streets. The matter struck me as curious. I shall write more upon this anon.



 Thursday, January 5, 2006

Granier diaries, installment two

Category: me

Time: 09:59 PM

Cymbalistry brought installment two of Granier's diary today - it was lucky he'd had it overnight, because one or two of the words were very tricky, and he'd had to spend a bit of time researching what ancient acronyms/contractions referred to. Anyway, we puzzled it out in the end. Here it is:

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22 March 1736

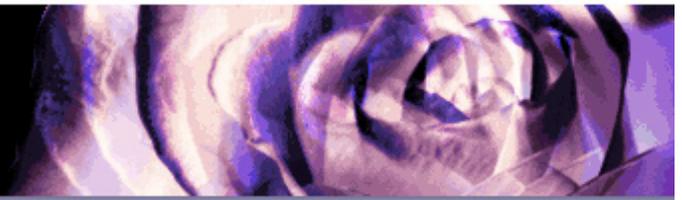
Passed several hours in company with Mistress Mountling today. She, attempting to explain the convolutions of number which allow her, she declares, to know with certainty the effect of any mining before that operation has begun. I declared that if she can predict the future using numbers, she is surely a numerologist or fortune-teller of the kind employed at country fairs to entertain the simple-minded. She did not appreciate this witticism. I own that, once she had explained to me the basis for her calculations, her claim seemed less an idle boast. My Master's preparations have been long in the making. Nonetheless, certainty is needed. There will, Mistress Mountling informed me, have to be an experiment here, during our visit. This, it appears, is the reason that she accompanies me on this expedition. To her credit, Mistress Mountling seems to suffer some of the same pangs and regrets as I regarding this matter. She is a handsome woman. When not frowning over her books, one can see that she cannot be more than five-and-thirty.

24 March 1736

Hunting with my lord, while Mistress Mountling completed certain preliminary surveys of the mine site. Took some very fine game by the edges of the lake - banded ducks and seven Burg Fowl - and my lord proved excellent company, good-humoured and full of tales. Put to him EM's notion regarding an experiment. He agreed the thing must be done. Returned home to feast upon the game we had taken, but afflicted by an unaccountable melancholy. My lord, noting my mood, supplied the cure in the form of a chamber-maid sent to my rooms for sport.

25 March 1736

Dined upon a fine ham with spiced plums and roast parsnips. Rain all day, mining impossible. All but EM downcast. She positively delighted in her calculations and rather astonished I could not find useful work to undertake despite the rain. Mockery ensued. I see now that I was mistaken in my estimation of her age: she is at least forty.



 Friday, January 6, 2006

Granier diaries, installment three

Category: me

Time: 06:54 PM

The next set of pages in this translation project:

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28 March 1736

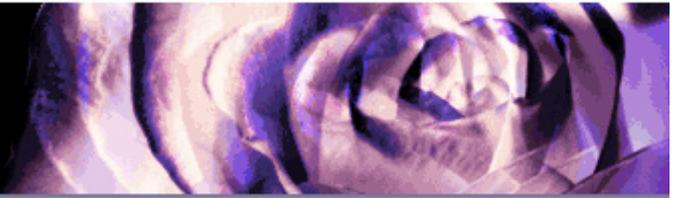
Rain past two days. Have occupied my mind reading once more the Essays of Varkin: On Love, On Marriage, On the Existence of the Celestial Bodies, On the Ancient Myths, and so on. Certain passages very fine.

30 March 1736

Rain at last begins to pass. Accompanied by my lord and EM, made a visit to the village. Charming rural scenes of agriculture and village life such as one rarely sees any longer in the City. Small children playing at Pyramid in the street. Pausing to observe the game, I notice that the pieces are cube in form, rather than the triangular forms common in the City. Conversed on this topic with my lord, who noted that the old forms of worship still retain much of their force here, while in the City they have waned these hundred years past, at the least. Recalling the excellent Builder's Celebrations, I suppose this to be but natural. Many of these children's fathers and mothers have worked daily in the mine, or have observed the place themselves. This shape has retained with them the significance it had for our ancestors, who journeyed out to this spot to observe the phenomenon for themselves and saw in it the hand of magic, or of an immortal force. It is curious. I am no man of science, I have no gifts in physic or alchymical minglings, but the old modes of worship have ever seemed lacking to me. But my Master, though of a deep and perceiving intellect in scientific matters, still holds to the religion we learned as children. Even though she has seen the root of it, even though she has - of all people - the greatest understanding of the mystery, sees that it is no mystery. I have spoken with her on this matter. She is of the view that even the deepest knowledge can penetrate only the "how" and not the "why", that the "why" is a matter for religion, not science. But what would her religion make of what we are to do here?

31 March 1736

Dined on a dish I have never before encountered: a soft-fleshed river fish steeped in a sauce of ale and cream, served with little radishes and onions. On inquiring the provenance of the recipe, discovered that the cook is a native of Machiantes. I inquired of my lord whether he did not fear for his life, but he replied jestingly, that he keeps the man so busy that he could scarce have time to plot or plan.



 Tuesday, January 10, 2006

Granier diaries, installment four

Category: me

Time: 06:57 PM

We're about halfway through these entries now - talking to Cymbalistry, he says there are only another three pages to go. Can't say I'm sorry we won't be having to work on this together too much longer; not only is he kind of slimey, but he's also impossible to work with unless he's had his Ceretin. He ran out last night, so we got no work done at all - it looked like he was half asleep, so I decided to call it a night after half an hour. But apparently he managed to replenish his supply today, and here is the fruit of our work:

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2 April 1736

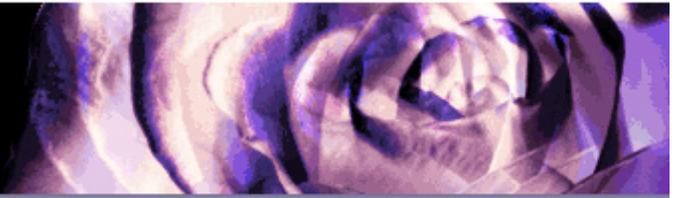
EM's preparations for her experiment continue. She has become peevish and irritable, and appears tired. Today, when I made to fetch her for dinner, she barked that "unlike you, I am not constantly concerned with the needs of my stomach and the desires of my..." [here she used a low word which startled me considerably]. When I expressed my astonishment at being spoken to in this fashion, she began to cry. Women are a constant mystery.

3 April 1736

The reason for EM's sullen and inconstant mood today became clear. We are to select the subjects for the experiment ourselves. The thing is dreadful. We have been given a list of suitable persons, given such matters as health, strength and height. EM and I examined this list for above two hours today, but were unable to reach any conclusion. It is intolerable that the decision should rest with us; doubly so because we do not know these men and women, and have no notion of their situations. I have requested from my lord that he should at least tell us which of them have children or aged parents in their care. He has agreed.

6 April 1736

Received grave news today from the City. The peace with Viehattle is disintegrating. There have been incursions and breaches of treaty. Our spies indicate that Viehattle may even now be allying with Anjsbourg. My mood is so much depressed by this that even the girl's most sincere efforts to enliven me brought no relief.



 Thursday, January 12, 2006

Granier diaries, installment five

Category: me

Time: 03:44 AM

Slightly shorter than normal today - he seems to have left some space at the bottom of the second page. Don't worry, we've checked it out and there's no hidden writing! It looks like he just left a gap, and started afresh on the next page. I can sort of see why:

I'm Violet, so you don't have to be. I'm a history geek. I neither cook nor sing. I love my city to the point of obsession. I do not suffer fools gladly. I have a soft spot for Alejo, even though I know he's sold out. You don't want to play poker with me. I'm fond of words, the more unusual the better.

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7 April 1736

Today, the final preparations for the experiment have been made. After much converse with EM, we have selected two men in their middle years, unmarried and without living parents. This brings us but little comfort. Edwina said: "all men touch one another's lives", and she speaks truly. To make such a choice! It brings to mind the worst excesses which one hears occur in Machiantes. My lord appears not one whit disturbed, however, and dined heartily this evening while Edwina and I ate but little.

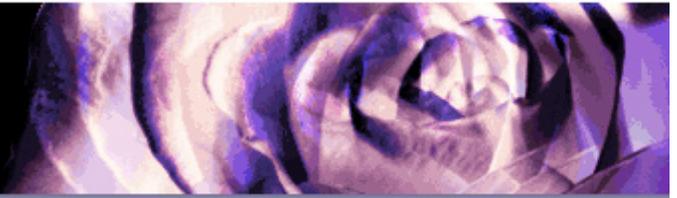
"Come come," he said, "they do but go on ahead of their fellows, who will follow them soon enough, if you have figured your sums sharply, Mistress Mountling."

She nodded gravely at this. We have talked upon the matter a good deal these past few days. If some must be sacrificed that others may live free, is that so hard to bear? And if we should spare these few, only for them to perish at the hands of our enemies, would we be thanked?

It is better that they do not know, that the children continue to play innocent in the streets. We who bear the knowledge shall do so as our burden.

8 April 1736

Experiment conducted today. An awful spectacle. I have no energy to write more this night.



Thursday, January 12, 2006

Granier diaries, installment six

Category: me

Time: 06:54 PM

Only one part left to go after this - it's all getting rather interesting, and a little creepy. Granier seems to be trying to be very discreet, but I can't help guessing what might be going on. I'm sure you're all doing the same. I can't stop thinking about it. Would discuss it with Kurt, but he seems to be spending all his time with Miranda. However, luckily the lovely Jason seems to be interested in hearing about what Cymbalistry and I are up to. Jason's some sort of military history buff in his spare time and is fascinated by what we're discovering in this diary. Because the archives have only recently been opened, it hasn't been properly catalogued yet, so I guess we're the first people to sit down with it properly and work through every word. In any case, Jason and I are going out tomorrow night to discuss what I've found out so far, so we're putting off looking at the last page until Monday. It's not exactly a date but I'm hoping to persuade him to turn coffee at Fenlon's into drinks at Conundra and take it from there....

So here is your penultimate installment from Mr Granier:

I'm Violet, so you don't have to be. I'm a history geek. I neither cook nor sing. I love my city to the point of obsession. I do not suffer fools gladly. I have a soft spot for Alejo, even though I know he's sold out. You don't want to play poker with me. I'm fond of words, the more unusual the better.

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13 April 1736

Edwina has been busy with her calculations these three days. She tells me that she has taken many useful readings which go to prove what we have long suspected: the entire place will be destroyed. There is no help for it. We walked today upon the upland slopes and around the lake. She intimated that she was grateful for my continued counsel and I was glad to hear it. These days since the experiment have brought us into closer intercourse than I had ever envisaged. She finds the companionship of my lord and his household hard to bear - they regard the people of this place as their possessions, to do with as they please. The City has given them free hand here, so far from our own environs, and it has led to this unwelcome circumstance.

15 April 1736

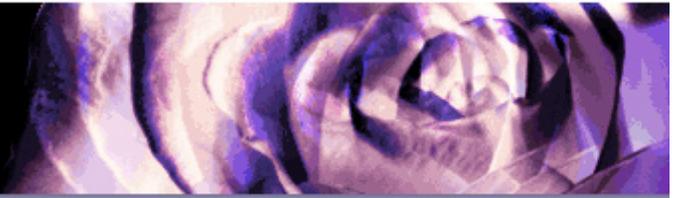
Edwina and I dined heartily this night upon fine cakes of cornmeal, with figs and venison sliced thin. Talked long into the night upon divers subjects: art, literature, philosophy and science. She confessed that she had admired several of my short writings - declared that I should attempt longer works, perhaps a novel. I found myself delighted by this news. Felt no need for the attentions of the serving girl and told her that she need not return for several days.

17 April 1736

Despatched news of our progress to my Master. We are almost finished here - but a few more days, and Edwina's calculations will be completed. We have only then to agree with my lord a time for this matter to be concluded. It will not be long now.

21 April 1736

Abed this morning, Edwina most disconsolate. Upon inquiring of her what the trouble might be she, with a most mournful countenance, explained that she had been concealing a secret from me. I teased her a little upon this point, maintaining that she must have some other gallant gentleman admirer. She laughed a little at this. I entreated her, again, to entrust her secret to me. She replied that she desired to do so, but wished to ponder on the matter, taking her own counsel until to-morrow. My bed remains forlorn and lonely this night.



 Monday, January 16, 2006

Some sad news

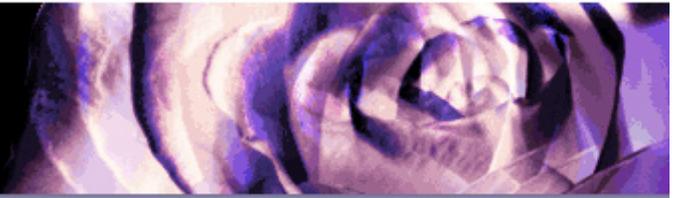
Category: me

Time: 03:48 PM

I... well, I don't know what to say. Had some very sad news over the weekend about Cymbalistry, which means that we won't be getting to look at the last page of Granier's diary for a little while. It's all just... look, I guess you'll hear about it from the Sentinel anyway. I'll write more tomorrow.

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 Wednesday, January 18, 2006

Cymbalistry

Category: me

Time: 06:35 PM

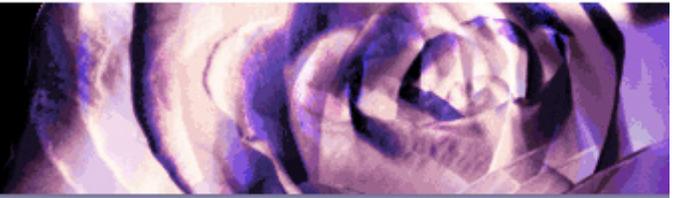
It's been a weird few days in the office. Cymbalistry was found dead in his home on Saturday - I guess you know that from the Sentinel. I found out on Sunday when my dad called me at home. There were official call-rounds to all the library staff later in the day, but my dad called me first. It's hard to take in, really. I can't say I'm going to miss him because I'm not - but I guess that was the whole problem. It's hard to think that someone was so lonely and desperate right in the middle of your life and you didn't notice.

A few of you have emailed me to suggest that Cymbalistry's death might not have been suicide. To be honest, with all that's happened, I'm not going to rule that out. But I can't really see why anyone would have killed him. The only possible reason would be the Granier diary. I told my father about that - don't worry, I didn't tell him why we'd been looking at the diary, only that I was interested in the city's history (which is perfectly true). Anyway, he made a couple of gentle enquiries with the police, and they've confirmed that a document like that was found in Cymbalistry's apartment. They'll release it back to the museum when their investigations are concluded. So, if he was killed, it wasn't because someone wanted to steal the last page of the diary. And I can't think of another motive for a crime like that.... Maybe you guys have a better handle on this, not being right in the middle of it. Otherwise, I guess we'll just have to wait for the police reports.

Anyway, the atmosphere in the office has been horrible this week. Anna came to look at Cymbalistry's office - she was a bit red-eyed and upset; I guess since she was about his only friend she must feel a little responsible. And I can't seem to get a hold of Kurt - just at the point when I really need a listening ear, he seems to have fallen off the map completely. I presumed he was with Miranda, but she says she hasn't heard from him either. I'm sure it's just that he's working on some particularly knotty puzzle and has turned off his key's communications functions, but with everything that's happened I can't help worrying.

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 Monday, January 30, 2006

Hesh poker night

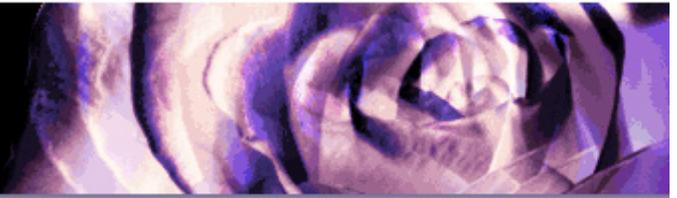
Category: me

Time: 07:23 PM

Had a rather interesting evening yesterday, catching up with Kurt - Miranda was out somewhere, so he found himself at a loose end. He finally filled me in on the exploits you guys have been involving him in. It's all rather intriguing but I can't help feeling worried for him. After all, he's in trouble with the law now, which can't be good. Still, I agreed to help him - he told me that he needs to find out who produced the Viard CD which was sent over to Earth, and which contained the message which got him into all this trouble. Someone else had emailed me earlier to say that there's a poker game between Hesh employees every Monday night. So, I'm heading over to Brain Bender later tonight to see what I can winkle out of them over a friendly game of poker. Or, if it turns out the games aren't so friendly, maybe I can pick up a few lecks. I'll let you know how it goes.

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 Tuesday, January 31, 2006

Seven reasons I hate Pyramid

Category: me

Time: 08:30 PM

- 1) No one plays for money. What's the point of a game you can't play for money?
- 2) It's too quick-fire. There's really no chance to sit around, shoot the breeze, see what information you can, for the sake of argument, winkle out of people.
- 3) There's really no reading-people involved. You've either got it or you haven't got it. No amount of skill in working out what someone else is thinking will help.
- 4) There is no role for lying of any description.
- 5) All the variations! Speed Pyramid, Fool's Pyramid, Action Pyramid, Skew Pyramid. Each one demanding new paraphernalia. A marketer's dream. I like a game with many versions, but the purity of one deck of cards.
- 6) Oh the jollity. It is a family game. There were teenagers at BB last night.
- 7) And, did I mention, no one plays Pyramid for money?

So, all in all, I'm not tremendously pleased that you guys sent me to an evening of Pyramid when I was expecting a night of Poker. Still, I did my best for you.

As I was leaving my house, I got the idea that it might be a good plan to take Caine, one of the puzzle scribes who works with Kurt, along for the night. Caine's in a band, knows about music, so I thought he'd be the perfect person to blend in at a puzzle bar full of music producers. Luckily, he was free and happy to participate in my little escapade.

And actually, he was pretty good to have along. I like listening to music, but I've never understood the finer points of production (and you really don't want to hear me sing). Caine, on the other hand, blended in like a native, talking about new production technology with one table, then moving over to discuss the updated Gavretch-model guitars which are, apparently, set to revolutionise the face of something-or-other.

I think Caine was really enjoying himself too, particularly the "secret agent"

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element. I'd told him I needed to find out who had produced the Viard album, and that he should try to get chatting to the guys from Hesh, to get this information. I didn't tell him why I needed it, and he didn't even ask. I was pretty impressed by that - he cheerfully agreed to go along and try to find this out for me without needing to know why. I think I can see now why Kurt says that Caine's "a good bloke" - despite the slightly dodgy name.

After we'd been in the bar for about an hour, I'd subjected myself to more games of Pyramid than I've probably played in my life before, but still hadn't managed to get any of the Hesh folks to talk. I never knew anyone could be so intent on Pyramid. They didn't want to speak to me, and when I tried I found that it became obvious extremely quickly that I wasn't one of them - not a cool person working in the music industry anyway. I was losing hope when finally Caine sidled over to my table, put his hand on my shoulder and said:

"Get your coat, love, you've pulled."

I raised an eyebrow.

He grinned, and lowered his voice.

"I've got your secret info, all right?"

I smiled, threw down my current game and left with some relief.

As Caine was walking me back home from the bar, I asked him why he'd agreed to come along so easily. He didn't answer for a minute, then grinned and said:

"Just. You and Kurt seem to have a lot of fun with... whatever it is you guys do. And since you invited me and not Kurt... well, I just thought we might have fun too."

I thought about that.

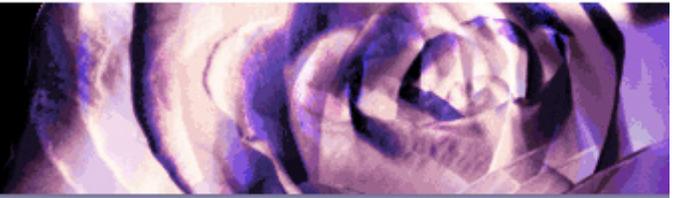
I said: "Did you have fun?"

He said: "Yup."

"Well then," I said, "we'll have to do it again sometime."

And I wished him goodnight and went up to my apartment. Alone. In case you were wondering.

Oh, and the answer is that a whole crew worked in the original production, but the person who specifically finished it for Earth was Cyrus Quinton. He was, by all accounts, something of an oddball himself.



Wednesday, February 8, 2006

Saving Kurt

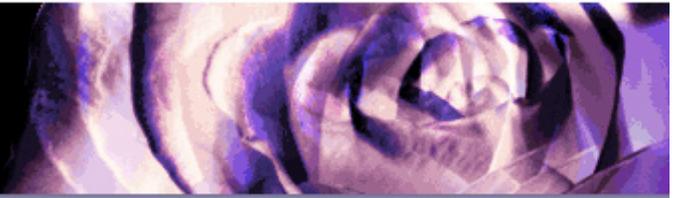
Category: me

Time: 05:26 PM

Yeah, I've had a long chat with Kurt and it seems like you guys have been having long chats with each other. I've taken a look through the scriptures I have access to here at the library - they are long, tedious and complicated. They contain many references to star signs, and Gyvann's largely unintelligible thoughts on what they might mean. So, if the answer's in the holy books, we're going to need more information. But I guess you knew that already, because I see you're going to be having a chat with Alejo tonight. Good luck with that, I hope you get the information we need to help Kurt out of trouble. And, if you have a chance to tell Alejo I love him... actually, perhaps don't. I'm having enough trouble with musicians these days.

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Thursday, March 9, 2006

The past month

Category: me

Time: 05:43 PM

Well. It's been a month. I haven't felt much like blogging lately - the atmosphere in the library has been really weird. They haven't appointed a new head librarian yet, not even an interim head, so we just go on with the projects we had running, taking care of the daily business of the library, with Cymbalistry's office still closed and locked since the police came to look around. I think Anna Heath's due to come and pick up his personal possessions sometime soon. She hasn't come yet.

So, I've been trying not to spend too much time in the library. I come in, I do my work, I meet a friend for lunch, I leave on time. It's weird, too - just a couple of months ago the friend I would have always seen for lunch would have been Kurt. But he and Miranda have lunch together almost every day and, although they're always really nice and ask me if I'd like to join them, I don't want to do that too often. Third wheel, you know?

I suppose this is no secret: I miss Kurt. I guess that's only natural, though. And I'm happy for him and Miranda. Things between them seem to be going really well. She has turned out to be exactly as sweet as she seemed, always bringing in cookies and bagels for the guys in the library, helping out without being asked. She's good for Kurt too, so thoughtful and kind. It just makes me wonder... ah, it doesn't matter.

So. Instead of Kurt I seem to have been having lunch a lot with Caine. You know, when we're both free, if we don't have anything else on. And I'm not commenting on that. Except to say that he's funnier than I thought, but seems to have an aversion to washing dishes which does not improve the atmosphere of his apartment.

I've also been having lunch with Jason quite a bit. With whom, may I say, nothing is going to be happening. He's a nice guy, and very attractive, but there's just not that click, you know? We talk a lot about work - he knows a huge amount and it's always interesting to let him talk. It was talking to him today, in fact, that reminded me again about the final page of the Granier diary, which we never got to see. Jason asked about it - he'd been fascinated by

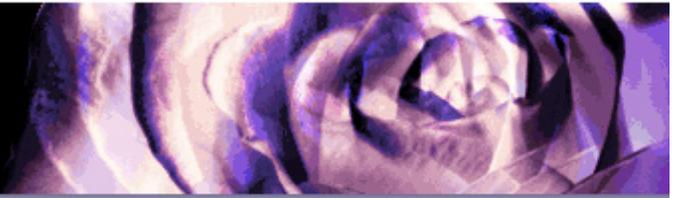
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what we'd found earlier and wanted to know if we'd found out how the story ended.

I know it's heartless of me but I haven't been able to stop wondering what's on it. Hopefully the police will be releasing it soon. It's weird. I'm both excited and nervous to see it - I can't help but think that after all that's gone on it might not be safe to look at that piece of paper. But maybe I'm just being paranoid.



 Friday, March 31, 2006

The last Granier page

Category: me

Time: 03:11 PM

I know, you've been clamouring at me to get that last page of Anthony Granier's diary, and I've been quiet about the whole thing. My personal life is getting complicated, so you'll just have to live with it. (No, I do not want to talk about it.)

You all told me that Anna put that last page back into Cymbalistry's office; not sure why the police would've given it back to her, but maybe they weren't aware it was Academy property. Not like it's got stamps on it or anything. Unfortunately, I don't have a way to get into that locked office, and my usual means for that kind of trick is too busy being cow-eyed over a girl to talk to me, much less to help me. So I did what came naturally, and enlisted the help of the girl, instead.

Miranda really is a very sweet person, and she understood quickly how much I'd like to finish reading that last page. She hardly needed convincing at all, honestly. She didn't have access, either, but she spoke to my dad, and made a good case about needing to retrieve items in the office important to the continued smooth running of the library. (He'd never buy it from me, he knows me too well.) At any rate, he agreed and got the security people to put the right authority onto her key.

So Miranda's been letting me peek in at the page the last few days. It's slow going without Cymbalistry's expertise. Granier had terrible script, for starters, and of course the document isn't in terrific shape. I had to do a lot of research in my off-hours to work it out. I never thought I'd miss Cymbalistry as much as all this, but he really was a clever sort.

So without further ado, here is the page. Not that it's anything but a huge disappointment.

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29 April 1736

At last, stole several minutes with Edwina in the great refectory at about the third hour after dawn when my lord's men had broken their fast and gone on their way. She, sighing mightily, declared that she did not wish for my company. I would not brook this and held her fast demanding she should explain to me why she had disdained my society and my bed these past days.

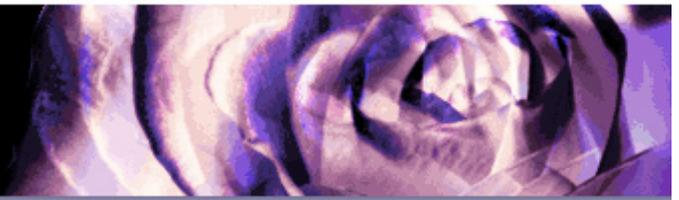
She, sighing again, said: "I cannot speak the words. For then, surely, you would disdain me."

I assured her that this could never be. She, smiling, asked if I could not let the matter bide, pretend that all that had been between we two had never been. I declared that I could not. "Then," she said, "I will confess the matter to you, and you will no longer wish for my society."

So saying, she made this speech:

"My lord," she said, "I am with child. I did not know for certain these few days but now the matter seems to me right clear. The child is yours, my lord."

I could not conceal my horror and alarm at this. Ah, wanian. That such things should be. I wished to look upon her but could not. I cast my eyes downward and muttered some words of consolation but made my good-byes sharply. I must think on this and these pages are no longer secure enough to do so.



Thursday, April 6, 2006

Wave three cards

Category: me

Time: 12:00 AM

Wave three of the Perplex City puzzle cards is about to break over the heads of the people of Earth! At least, this is the content of the message I've received from Mind Candy and which my father would like me to publicise. I said: "Why can't you ask Scarlett to do it?" He said something about how her communications are patchy while she's in Tanraga. (Which, they are. I don't understand why, though - they just installed new transmitters three years ago. I remember the environmental protests.) I said: "Can't it wait until she's home?" He said no and muttered something about 'gracelessness'. So I said fine.

Here's the low-down then: Mind Candy are about to release Wave Three cards on Earth. Most of the packs will be mixed, with Wave One and Two cards as well as Wave Three. But Mind Candy have a limited number of Wave Three-only packs you can buy. They've asked me to make it a little tricky, though, so here's a quick riddle for you to solve - you'll need the answer before you can buy any Wave Three-only packs:

My first may be one thousand but my second comes to naught
My third's a buzzing thing. My fourth? Myself, I should have thought.
My fifth and sixth make up one word, another name for 'we'
Or the initials of that famed 'sweet land of liberty'.
My whole's a strip, a twist, with its upper and lower station
I am pronounced as if I said: "I, public transportation".

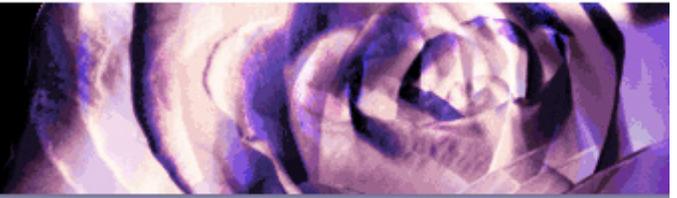
Once you know the answer, enter it below.

The riddle's answer:

And what is the password?

I'm Violet, so you don't have to be. I'm a history geek. I neither cook nor sing. I love my city to the point of obsession. I do not suffer fools gladly. I have a soft spot for Alejo, even though I know he's sold out. You don't want to play poker with me. I'm fond of words, the more unusual the better.

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 Saturday, April 8, 2006

Paternal affection

Category: me

Time: 09:37 PM

I'm starting to really look forward to Scarlett getting back, because I sorely need someone to take my father's attention off me and my personal life for a while. I've been enduring the occasional sour looks at our Saturday dinners, presumably because I "let Kurt get away," but until just tonight it was pretty easy to smile sweetly and sidestep the issue. I mean, it's no secret my dad has always thought Kurt and I are exactly perfect for each other, but it's just not in the cards. Even if it weren't for Miranda.

You know I've been spending a bit of time with Caine, and I have now discovered that the tongues of certain people have been flapping on that count. Apparently, at some sort of CRT meeting yesterday, my father was talking to Caine about some trivial fact or other regarding the history of the city, and said, "You know, you may not be so familiar with my daughter Violet, but she's really quite an expert on this. Perhaps you should take some of your questions to her."

And Aiko, who we all know is not my biggest fan, arched her eyebrows high in the air and said, "Oh, don't worry, Caine is very familiar with everything about Violet." You may not have seen it for yourself, but I'm sure you can just picture the storm clouds gathering in those eyebrows of his at that.

Well, apparently the meeting was ended somewhat abruptly so that Caine could have some sort of man-to-man discussion with my father, the details of which Caine has not divulged to me. And then Caine cancelled our plans together. And at dinner tonight with my dad, I was subjected to a lengthy diatribe on how very unsuitable it would be for Caine and I to be together. I have a reputation to uphold as a part of a prominent public family, not to mention my own future to think of, and hadn't he raised me better than that? I think he might have forbade me to socialise with ruffians or some such thing, but by the time we got there the blood was pounding in my ears so hard I couldn't really hear what he was saying.

So I asked him what he'd rather I do, try to seduce Kurt and make him my love slave? You've never seen a man turn so many shades of purple. It's a bit

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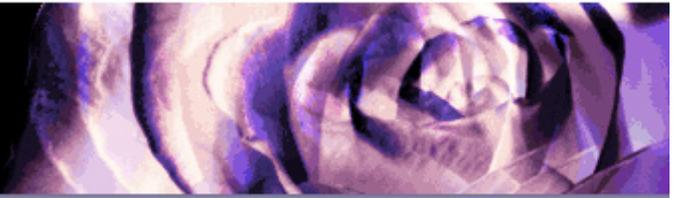
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surprising he didn't have some sort of seizure, really. After that I got out pretty quickly. But honestly, I'm an adult, and free to live my own life, so this whole thing is utterly ridiculous.

And the most irritating part is that just because Caine and I have been going out lately - as friends, I mean - everybody is assuming there's some sort of relationship happening. Because really, there's nothing going on between us. At all. And if there were, it certainly wouldn't be anything serious.

Anyway, I've never missed Scarlett so much in my life.



Thursday, May 4, 2006

Enjoy the silence

Category: me

Time: 03:26 PM

There's a lot to be said for library life. It may be repetitive, uneventful, tedious, repetitive, uneventful, tedious and repetitive but a certain amount of routine is reassuring sometimes. Things are orderly and peaceful.

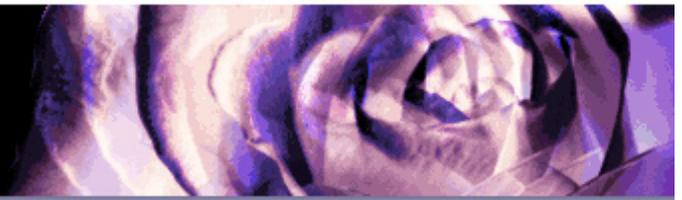
In the past few weeks, I've settled back into life as a librarian. That might sound like a big yawn to you, but I've had all the excitement I can take recently. Cymbalisy's absence isn't so obvious now - it's like the edges of the world have healed over the space where he used to be. Having Scarlett back is, though I hate to admit it, pretty good too. Even though she seems to have spent most of the past couple of weeks asleep (exhausted from her travels, I suppose) I can tell my dad's glad to have her back in the house. She even gave me my boots back.

One result of this monotonous tranquillity has been a lack of entries here. Sorry if you feel like you've been missing out, but I guessed my trips to the stack and back wouldn't make for riveting news. I've had a few poker nights and made a steady profit. My dad seems to have stopped growling about Caine. Kurt has been off in his own little world again. Life has been beautifully unremarkable.

I guess the only slightly strange thing has been Miranda. After being chummy as anything, she seems to have stopped talking to me lately, just the past few days. I asked Jason if he knew what was up but he thought she was just being extra-super quiet and efficient. Frankly, I'm wondering if Kurt and Miranda are about to make some kind of big commitment (he did take rather a lot of interest in some of her recent furniture purchases) and they think I might not take the news well. But really, tact and diplomacy are one thing, but blanking me in the indexing room is quite another. Perhaps she's busy thinking of how she could redecorate Kurt's living room. In any case, she dashed out just now without a word to anyone. I'd contact Kurt to ask him if I'm supposed to take over her afternoon slot at returns, but I don't think he'd take that well, somehow.

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Friday, May 5, 2006

Urgent

Category: me

Time: 04:02 PM

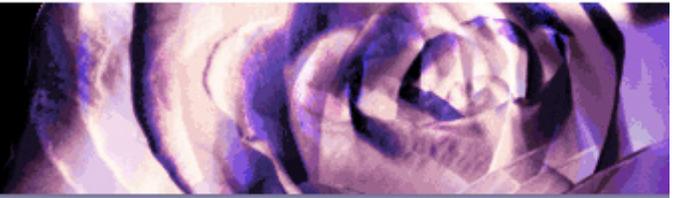
I won't riddle you around - Kurt almost died getting hold of this note, so it must be important. And as long as Miranda's on the loose, he isn't safe.

We need to track her down fast, and a thousand minds are better than one. See if you can figure out what all this means. I'm working on it, but if you get a solution, contact me on violet@quirkyacuity.com.

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 Friday, May 5, 2006

A matter of life and death

Category: me

Time: 05:57 PM

This is what happens when I say that things have been quiet.

Kurt is alive. That's about the only piece of good news. They've cleaned him up now, but when I saw him in Emergency, he was lying on his front, covered in gauze, red with burns and blood. They'd cut his clothes off, but it didn't look like they'd had much to cut through. They'd shredded his favourite jacket. I've kept it for him but really, it's totalled. Maybe it'll act as a reminder for him to stay out of trouble.

That was this afternoon. Just a couple of hours ago, apparently.

When I heard the news about the explosion, I headed straight to the building, only to see Kurt getting loaded into an ambulance. I took the subway to Phuah - they have a bunch of new puzzles up in the carriages and I kept thinking how Kurt would enjoy irritating me by racing through them and then I wondered whether he'd be able to see them and then I had to stop thinking about that at all. I caught up with him just as his jacket was hitting the floor. That's when I noticed the note, scorched around the edges. I just knew. Kurt. Typical.

I must admit, you guys are sharp. Within an hour of that image going live, my key started lighting up. The shapes matched up with four buildings in the city: Tanhill Botanical Garden, the Hausam Ampitheatre, Scott Young Memorial Plaza and the Triple Wheel Stadium. The point between them was probably the location we wanted.

I checked my map. Augur Park station.

There wasn't much I could do for Kurt - the hospital had called his parents and there's only so much hanging around bedside uselessly I can take. So I went to Augur Park. Two stops away. They have rows and rows of lockers there, and one of them was number 7196.

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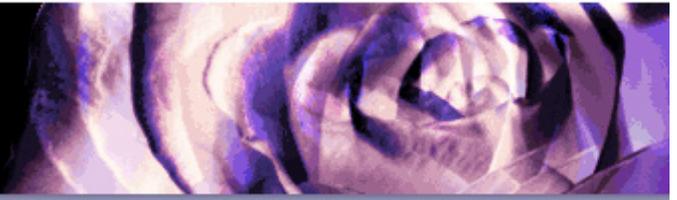
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I just stood there staring at the lock, wondering what the combination might be, when out of the corner of my eye I noticed another figure stop short on the concourse. Miranda. With red hair, but definitely Miranda. She'd spotted me a moment before I noticed her, and was already turning when I looked up, but I knew it was her. She started to run, and I started after her. This was the moment when I started to regret that Kurt and Miranda spend their time running and I spend mine in late-night poker bars and at gigs. She was quicker than me. But, I was thinking about Cymbalisty, and about Kurt, and about the note in Kurt's voice when I spoke to him yesterday, and I ran a little faster as she ducked back into the subway station. I almost had her, she was just a few paces ahead of me, but as we rounded a corner in the station, she just vanished, must have disappeared into the crowd. I was so close. But not close enough.

I walked back to the locker. And, it transpires that although Miranda is quicker than me, she isn't all that smart, because the locker combination was 7, 19, 6. Inside, there was some kind of supply package: a new key, some clothes, provisions. Things she would have needed.

It's not revenge yet, but it's satisfying to know that we've hurt her.

I'm going to check on Kurt again now.



 Tuesday, May 9, 2006

Shadow of a Girl

Category: me

Time: 04:06 PM

I assume you will not fall over dead of shock when I say Miranda didn't show up to work on Monday morning. Jason asked me if I had any idea where she could be, so I made up a delightful story about Miranda's dear great-uncle falling ill, and she needing to go attend to him. I'm not one to cover for her, you know that, but how do you suggest to your co-worker that the nice girl we both work with seduced your friend, murdered your boss, blew up an apartment building and skipped town? And I just don't have the time or patience to spend all day walking him through it.

I've also been trying to cough a bit and seem a little green whenever Jason was around to see it. My priority just now is making sure Kurt doesn't do any fresh idiotic things to add to his collection, and I have the feeling that could involve a bit of 'falling ill' myself. The boy is certain to hare off clear to Allerdun if he thinks he might find Miranda there, and when he does, I can't very well let him go unsupervised, can I?

To pass the time, I've been quietly looking into Miranda's personnel files here at the library, comparing and cross-checking contact info, addresses, employment and education history, whatever I could find. Everything comes up blank one or two hops away. I even called her employment references again, on a hunch, and none of those numbers is even active anymore.

I've also been looking into this 'HG' persona; Helen Gale, the Ceretin 6 outlier. I found a little snake in the library's personnel system that hijacked queries about her to go against Miranda's data, so when Cognivia was trying to confirm 'Helen's' information, it gave Miranda's file instead of coming up 'no such employee.' I would never even have noticed if I hadn't been using a little unauthorised authority in the system myself, and very carefully looking for a reference to a Helen Gale.

And then there's the marathoner Kurt just told me about, Jean Morgan. I've found one reference that seems to be the same person; a junior gardener for the public parks system a good while back. I couldn't come up with any more information that that, though. No family, no address, nothing, like the data had

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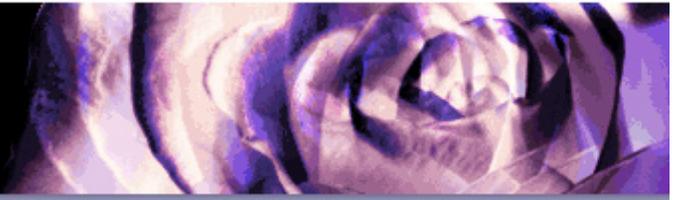
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been wiped clean.

That's enough to convince me that Helen and Jean don't really exist, except as a shadow of Miranda, who may well be another shadow, too. It's funny, I can still taste the divine almond squares she brought in for the Builder's Celebration, and now I wonder who precisely it was that baked them.

And to be very frank, I'm not exactly right in the head after all of this. Not about Miranda, not about Kurt, not about anything that's happened. I know Kurt and I haven't been as close as we used to be, but he lied to me, too, and I'd never have expected that. Never after everything we've been through together. I'd grown used to relying on Kurt, and trusting him more than myself. If I can't even trust him anymore, what do I have?

Continued »



 Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Dead ends

Category: me

Time: 02:12 PM

This is, without doubt, the most excitement Drowsington has seen in a long time.

Kurt told me what happened at the pharmacy so I walked up the gangway from the quay onto the ferry and waited. I think I was pretty calm about it. I had this icy sense of righteous anger. Bring her on.

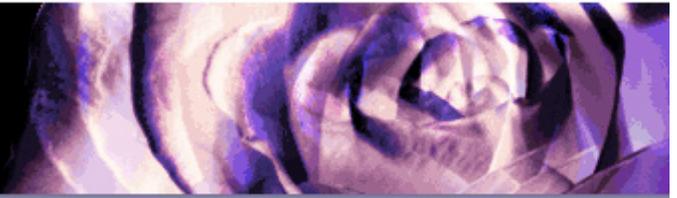
I know the idea was to stop her getting on the ferry, but I felt kind of disappointed when she reached the quay and pulled up short. I stood at the top of the gangway, and she just looked at me, calculating, assessing - wondering if I was worth the fight.

She ran. She had a fifty metre head-start on me and she ran round the marina, heading west. I tried to keep pace with her but... you know the rest.

Kurt's on his way. A fine pair we are. At least we've kept her north of the river.

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Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Personal

Category: me

Time: 08:14 PM

So she got away. I tried, I really did, but she was too fast for me. I say 'she' because neither of us knows what to call 'her' anymore. She doesn't deserve a name.

Kurt caught up with me at the quayside. He looked exhausted. The hospital gave him some painkillers for the burns, but I don't think they expected him to be chasing fugitives. When he saw me, he tried to hobble faster than he could comfortably go, and somehow his stick got caught up under his foot and he tumbled over. He went down hard on the damaged leg, and I heard his gasp even though I was still quite far away. It's just not right - Kurt has always been faster than me, always teased me for not wanting to train with him. It's not right that he should be slower now.

I ran over and helped him to sit up. There was blood on his ankle, by the brace, and I pulled up his trouser leg to take a look even though he kept saying "it's OK, it's fine". He'd managed to tear open one of the smaller gashes on his leg. I pulled a handful of tissues from my bag and held them there to stop the bleeding. I looked up, and Kurt was looking at me, but when he caught my eye he looked away, out across the harbour.

I said: "We could stop now. Before you... before either of us gets hurt more."
He didn't answer. After a few moments, he pulled my hand away. His leg wasn't bleeding anymore. He rolled down his trouser leg and, leaning on his stick, got to his feet again.

We hailed a taxi and drove up and down the road out of town, between the river and the ruins. No sign of her. There were fields of maize all along one side of the road, so she could have been standing ten feet away from the verge and we would never have seen her.

Eventually we told the taxi to take us back to Kurt's boarding house. The local police were waiting for us, and Kurt gave them a statement about how 'troubled' she's been, and how she's obviously just distressed. It's taking all

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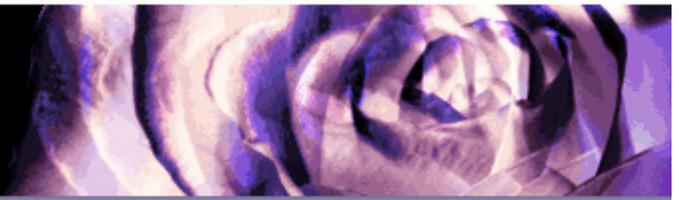
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my self-control (and you know how limited that is) not to shake him by the lapels and tell him to turn her in - I mean, we know she killed Cymbalisky, and today just proved that we shouldn't be tackling her on our own. But I've seen Kurt stare at a puzzle for 36 hours straight, and he's got that same look about him now.

According to the map, she could stay in the fields and in the woods all the way to Stone Mills without breaking cover. It would take her a day or two, but she's horribly light on her feet, so I wouldn't put it past her. She'll be back at top speed again, too - she did get her supply of Oxxypro from the pharmacy.

We've been keeping an eye on the ferry this afternoon in case she doubles back. I'll stay at the boarding house with Kurt tonight, after the ferry service stops.

Under other circumstances, this might even feel like a holiday - a day by the river in a chintzy little town. I wish I could enjoy it.



Friday, May 12, 2006

Home again, home again

Category: me

Time: 06:40 PM

Well. I guess you could say I've abandoned my post. I gather from my email that Kurt mentioned I went back home on Thursday, but not why. Well, in short, it's because he's an obsessed idiot who won't take care of himself, and won't let anyone else do it, either.

You might guess Kurt's not sleeping so well at night. It's partly his own fault; his key is constantly chirping at him with new alerts and updates, and more fool him, he's always snapping up to check it immediately. The dark hollows under his eyes are so deep by now, the city should send in spelunkers to check for mineral deposits.

I woke up before him on Thursday, and just looked at him sleeping for a while. I never thought before how fragile he is, you know? And I saw him with his eyes closed and his mouth open, and still his eyebrows tight together like he can't allow himself to relax even when he's dead asleep. I thought of how badly he needed the rest, and looked at his key lying on the floor (clearly dropped from his fingers when he fell asleep.) So I did what any reasonable, caring girl would do, and I took all of the extra pillows and blankets, and then all of my spare clothes, wrapped the thing in them and put the bundle into the wardrobe to muffle the tweeting and buzzing and give him some well-needed rest. And then I went out to bring back breakfast.

The day was a little misty and grey, and the air felt wet on my skin, but the river was amazingly wide and still. I think it was the most peaceful time I'd had in a week. I went to a bakery - wasn't sure what Kurt would like, so I bought one of everything they had - and headed back.

It's funny. Just before I came back into the room I thought I'd heard Kurt talking to someone. I thought he must have found his key, have called someone back in the city, because I'm sure I heard him saying "I miss you." Just that. I miss you. I wondered if he was talking to his parents, but it didn't seem likely. And I can't think he was talking to me because he jumped when I walked back into our room. Well, not jumped exactly, but his shoulders shook and he blinked as if he was surprised to see me there. Or maybe he was surprised to find himself

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there, sitting on the window seat, his cane on the cushion beside him. After a moment his eyes refocused, he frowned and his mouth became hard.

“Oh,” he said, “it’s you.”

I smiled.

“I’ve brought breakfast. Would you prefer a cinnamon bun, an apple danish, or they’ve got these flakey things with...”

“Where is it?”

I looked at him. With the walking and the river and the bakery I had actually forgotten what he was talking about.

“Where’s what?”

He took a breath in slowly and let it out.

“Don’t do that to me, Violet. I know you too well and we’ve been through too much. Where’s my key?”

“Oh,” I said. “Well, yes, it’s here. But, you know, couldn’t we have breakfast first?” I waggled my paper bag of delights. “I have banana-chocolate muffins...”

Kurt’s face became even harder. He pulled his walking-stick from the chair and, leaning on it, stood up.

“Violet,” he said. “Where. Is. My. Key?”

Maybe if I were some other kind of girl I would have done something different here. Something more compliant. But, you know, he was swaying slightly even as he stood up. He needed rest, he needed to take care of himself, he needed breakfast.

I said: “Kurt, it’s OK. I have your key. Nothing’s happened to it. But you should eat breakfast first.”

“No!” He shouted at me. Kurt never shouts. He kept on. “No breakfast, no talking, nothing! I know you’re trying to stop me from finding her, but it’s not going to work, none of this is going to work. Violet, give me my key now, or I swear I’ll...”

He paused, swaying.

I looked at him. I kept my voice calm.

“What, Kurt?”

He stared at me, those deep frown lines cut into his forehead. His voice was quieter.

“Don’t think there’s nothing I can do, Violet. You can’t stop me.”

We looked at each other. I wanted to shake him, or slap his face and tell him to stop being so ridiculous.

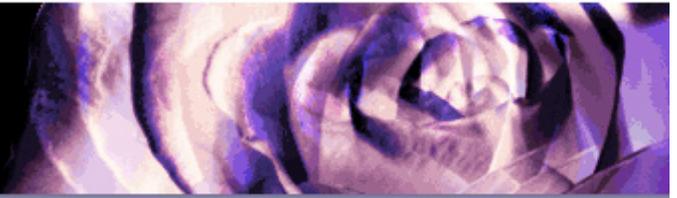
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He said: "Violet, I want you to go home."

I gave him back his key, but we didn't eat breakfast together - instead I was packing my things to leave. I tried to argue with him, but he wasn't listening. As much as I tried to tell him that he couldn't do it alone, that he isn't fit enough (I didn't say that he isn't in a good mental state either - didn't think it would be too helpful), he just kept that stoney expression on his face. I tried to hug him goodbye, but he was stiff in my arms.

And now I'm back in the city. I can't keep on travelling with Kurt if he doesn't want me there, but I can't stop thinking about him, about where he is and what he's doing. I called Caine up to come over, but he complained I was being "too miserable" for him, so he left again. And now I'm in my apartment, by myself, thinking about Kurt, wondering if he's OK. He's not answering any of my key-mail but I'm so worried that sometimes I almost think that if I talk to him out loud, maybe he'll answer.

[Continued »](#)



 Tuesday, May 16, 2006

News of the traveller

Category: me

Time: 06:42 PM

Hey, sorry if my last post left some of you with the impression that I was going a little crazy. I guess worrying about a friend will do that to you, but I'm doing a lot better now, especially since I managed to talk to actual Kurt as opposed to imaginary-in-my-head Kurt on Sunday. He called me, in fact, since he's been blocking my messages from his key since I left him on Thursday. I was out for dinner at Conundra with Caine when he called - I think Caine was a little miffed that I dropped both my cutlery and the puzzle we'd been working on as soon as my key lit up. Still, I'm sure he'll get over it.

I took my key outside and answered it.

I said: "Hey."

Kurt said: "Hey."

I'm sure you'll want to congratulate me for the various things I did not say at this moment. Things including: a) are you still crazy? b) how was I supposed to know you were even alive? c) do you know I've been lying to your mother for you these past three days telling her I've been getting regular updates from the spa retreat you've gone to? d) I'm so angry with you I wish they'd perfected those "solid-gram" keys so I could punch you in the face and e) I'm really worried about you.

Instead, I said: "How's your leg?"

"Fine. Better. Getting better."

"Where are you now?"

"Ryefield."

"Sounds nice. How's the weather there?"

"Good. Sunny."

"Sounds nice."

I realise I was repeating myself, but there's a limit to the amount of smalltalk I can come up with when the majority of my brain is taken up preventing

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myself from saying 'tell me what you're doing, let me come and help you, I want to know you're safe'.

"Yes," he said, "it's nice. Listen, Violet?"

"Mmm-hmm?"

"I'm sorry about how we left things on Thursday." He paused. I said nothing. He continued. "It got a little intense. I didn't mean it to go that way."

"No," I said, "nor did I. I'm sorry too."

There was another silence. This one felt more relaxed, though.

He said: "I have to see this through. I think I'm getting close."

I took a breath. "Do you want me to come and meet you?"

"No." He spoke over me.

"Right. OK."

"This will be over soon," he said. "I'll be home soon. But I need to finish it myself."

Another pause. A silence. I thought about Caine back in the restaurant and how much I wanted to just run to the train station and go to Ryefield and how Caine'd probably think it was funny as hell if I left him there alone so there wouldn't even be any consequences.

"OK, I'm glad you're safe. Keep it that way, OK?"

"OK," he said, and I could hear the smile in his voice.

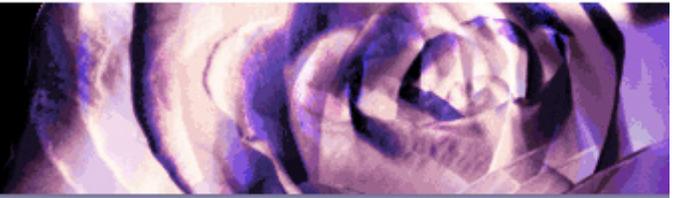
"And you'll let me know if there's anything I can do to help, won't you?"

"Yup," he said. But I got the feeling he was already thinking of something else.

"Bye then."

"Bye."

I didn't tell Caine who I'd been speaking to. It made him crazy not to know, which was another bonus. And, since then, I've been resisting the urge to jump on the train to Ryefield oh, about every ten minutes or so. But I've thought of something else to do - I'm going to do a little more digging into Miranda's background here, pull in a few favours, see if I can find any scrap of information that might help Kurt. And, yeah, I know it's probably useless, but it feels better than doing nothing, and that's as good a reason as any.



Thursday, May 18, 2006

I've found something interesting

Category: me

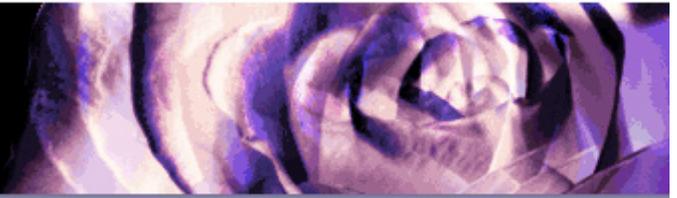
Time: 04:28 PM

So, I had this amazing brainwave yesterday and decided to look up all Miranda's library borrowings and information requests for the past few months. This information isn't even particularly hard to find - you just have to be a member of library staff - and I'd almost expected that she'd have deleted it all. Which, she had. The record was blank. But, then, another astounding brainwave (two in one day - must be all the exercise I've been getting lately). For some holdings there are still, yes, still in this day and age, paper-based records. Books which are more than 100 years old have to be signed out using an actual pen and paper.

So instead of going out to poker last night, I spent several hours combing through the sign-out logbooks from various areas of the library. Luckily, they're not too enormous - most of the books which are set for graduate work are available as key downloads, so there were only, oh, 7,000 entries or so to go through. Anyway, I struck paydirt. Miranda has not, as I anticipated, been perusing books on "1001 exciting ways to break the heart of a decent and honorable person" or, indeed, "Murdering your boss: legal issues to bear in mind" but instead seems to have been interested in local history of some of the regions around Perplex City. She's recently looked at books about the Coram Caves, north-west of the city, the old Silburn-Griggs mines to the south-west and the Dedant ridge, due south of here. I've called up all the books she's looked at, but I haven't sent a message to Kurt yet - don't want to get his hopes up. Still, I'm hoping to have something worthwhile to report sometime soon.

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Friday, May 19, 2006

Delving into Silburn-Griggs

Category: me

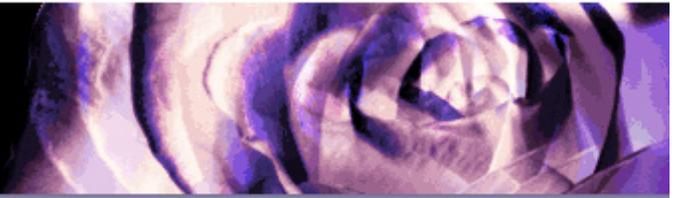
Time: 02:25 PM

It's strange, handling the books that I know Miranda was only recently perusing. It's a little like holding objects that belonged to the dead. The object remains but its significance has gone and has to be reconstructed from what you remember of the person. As I've read through these volumes on local history (and I think you're all right, by the way, the Silburn-Griggs mines are logically the only ones that could be relevant) I've found myself examining any place that there's a folded-down corner or a spot or a stain in the hope that it'll give me some insight into what Miranda's up to. However, unless she's in the habit of marking important passages with cocoa, I think it might have been rather wasted effort. (Of course, if she does mark important passages with cocoa, apparently she's about to form a local folk-dancing society to re-create the miners' traditional equinox-day clog dances. Who knows, it could be the start of a whole new conspiracy.)

What I have discovered, however, is that the Silburn-Griggs mines go on for miles underground, that they're almost entirely abandoned now and that no one ever goes there. Do I see the words "perfect place for a secret hide-out" scribbled in pencil in the margin of the book? Well, no. I think it's just where someone dropped some linguine in 1898. I have waded through a history of the mines' finances, which yielded nothing of interest whatsoever, but the geological survey proved much more useful. Apparently, the mines' mineral deposits cause some strange electromagnetic disturbances which can interfere with keys and other electrical equipment. The miners themselves used a device called a "ferrogramatograph", which is specifically designed to work down there, to navigate safely. In fact, the book took great pains to point out that normal compasses don't work down there, and that the only way one can guarantee to find one's way is by using one of these ferrogramatographs. So, what do we do? Construct a ferrogramatograph? Steal one? Ignore it and hope for the best? Nope. It turns out that the Academy Museum has a collection of "several fine working examples of these ingenious devices". I'm off there now to use all my powers of persuasion to encourage them to lend me one, just for the weekend.

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 Saturday, May 20, 2006

Got it!

Category: me

Time: 03:46 PM

That took some doing and a little more use of certain connections than I would have liked.

Went to the museum last night to persuade them to lend me one of their collection of ferrogramatographs. The assistant I spoke to was very pleasant, said that yes of course if I was a member of library staff intending to use the item for educational purposes this would be no problem only the request had to be approved by a senior museum administrator and unfortunately they were all out this afternoon so perhaps I could come back Monday?

I explained, politely at first, that I certainly could not come back Monday.

The assistant, a mousey-haired man who had at first seemed so friendly and helpful displayed an astonishing lack of initiative by refusing to bend the rules even a little bit for me.

It perhaps did not help my case that, after trying to be polite, I eventually pointed out his astonishing lack of initiative to him.

He got quite cross with me then and indicated that if I didn't stop harassing him he might have to call security to have me escorted from the building.

That did it.

I took a deep breath and used the words I have always vowed never to use in dealings with anyone at the Academy.

“Do you know who I am?”

The assistant did not know who I was.

I enlightened him.

He stared at me for a little while.

Then he said: “I'm not sure how this changes anything.”

I pursed my lips.

“I have been sent here on a special request by the Master of the Academy. Surely that is better than any stupid approval by a museum administrator?”

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He narrowed his eyes.

“Of course, approval by the Master is perfectly acceptable. You won’t mind my calling him to confirm that, will you?”

“No no,” I said, thinking privately that he’d never get through to my father and that his assistant, Patrick, who’s always been up for a laugh, would back me up and ask his questions later.

But instead of Patrick, my father answered the call.

“Ah, Master Kiteway,” said the assistant. “I have your daughter here about your request?” A pause. “For the ferrogramatograph?”

He listened for a moment, then passed the key to me.

“He wants to talk to you.”

I connected my earpiece to the key.

“Violet,” said my father, “I presume this is urgent?”

“Yes.”

“Are you in trouble?”

“No,” I said. “Not me.”

“Are you going to do anything dangerous?”

“No.”

“We are going to have a talk very soon aren’t we, Violet?”

The assistant was still watching me.

“Yes,” I said.

“And you promise me there will be no danger?”

“Yes,” I said. “I promise.”

“Then hand me back to that gentleman.”

My father spoke to the assistant for all of about 15 seconds before his eyes widened, he looked at me, hung up the call and scurried off to fetch the keys for the ferrogramatograph case.

Within 10 minutes I was holding the device - surprisingly heavy, made of brass and dark wood, with a dial face and two swinging needles. I’d have to learn how to use it as I travelled.

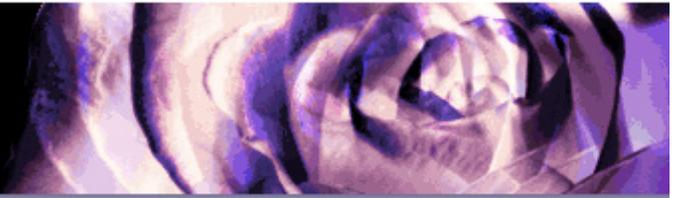
So, I had the ferrogramatograph. But how was I going to get it all the way to wherever Kurt is now? I could hire a car but there are rules about those things, regulations and time was ticking away. I could take the train but it would be too slow, much too slow. And it was then that a little message beeped through on my key. It was from Scarlett. Just two lines of text.

Continued »

-- Dad mentioned what happened in the museum. He's hopping mad. I wanted to say. If you need a car, I've got one parked a few miles outside the city. --

I didn't ask Scarlett any awkward questions as we travelled to the outlying town where her car was parked. I didn't say anything but "thank you" when she handed me the keys and showed me how to work it. I didn't comment on the battered exterior and the camping gear piled in the back. But it seems to me that maybe Scarlett and I need to have a talk when I get back home from the Silburn-Griggs mines. (Which, incidentally, appear to have a rather hideous website which you can take a look at, should you so desire.)

In the meantime, I'm driving south and west on old, empty roads, with a device of polished brass and wood sitting on the seat beside me, hoping to get to Kurt in time.



 Monday, May 22, 2006

Safe

Category: me

Time: 01:56 PM

Where to start? I guess with this: I'm safe, Kurt's safe, Miranda (or whatever her name was) is dead.

I arrived too late. Or maybe just in time - maybe I wouldn't have wanted to know whatever those two had been talking about. It had been a long tiring drive through rough country in Scarlett's beaten-up car and in one of those fine, misty rains that makes everything wet and slippery without ever being quite enough to justify an umbrella. I went as fast as I could, but what with the attempting-not-to-end-up-dead-in-a-ditch it wasn't as fast as I would have liked. I lost key contact with Kurt at 4pm and from there on every minute felt too long, much too long not to know what was happening to him.

I got to the mines at about 6.50pm, expecting to waste more time trying to work the ferrogramatograph. But it was easy. I looked at the map in the history of the mines book I'd borrowed from the library, chose the deepest, darkest, most hidden-away area shown, set the brass dials to the navigation points listed and followed the direction of the needle. Instead of leading me in the main entrance of the mine, it took me slightly to the side - for a moment I thought the thing was malfunctioning, but then I noticed an iron ring set into the stone wall - one good tug and the door pivoted on some hidden mechanism. Say this for the miners: they built long-lasting secret doors. Inside, I had to activate some of the security systems to let me in, and then find my way to Kurt.

It was simple: a long, smooth passageway - the ferrogramatograph's face lit up with some natural phosphorescence so that even if I hadn't had a flashlight built into my key I would have been OK - three turns and another smooth rock-face with an iron ring in it. I pulled.

The first thing I saw was Kurt. He was sitting on a chair, next to a table, resting his head on one hand as if he were just pondering some particularly tricky bit of puzzle design in his Academy office. He looked up at me and his face was calm, really calm. Apart from the blood on his hands and his shirt, he looked perfectly normal.

I'm Violet, so you don't have to be. I'm a history geek. I neither cook nor sing. I love my city to the point of obsession. I do not suffer fools gladly. I have a soft spot for Alejo, even though I know he's sold out. You don't want to play poker with me. I'm fond of words, the more unusual the better.

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And the second thing I noticed was Miranda. She was dead, crumpled on the floor with one leg bent under her in a way that would have been uncomfortable if she hadn't been, well, dead. It's weird - in films people always rush over and feel for a pulse or try to pull the knife out or say "is she dead?" But it was obvious. She was dead and there was nothing more to be done about that.

I looked around the room: bare rock floor, two chairs, a table, bare walls, apart from three large metal cabinets, one of which was open. Inside, I could see some communications equipment, flashing lights, an electric hiss. I don't know much about coms tech, but I knew what that meant.

"Come on," I said to Kurt, "we have to go."

He looked up at me and blinked, as if he'd just remembered that I was there.

"Miranda," he said, "Caroline she's..."

I pulled at his arm and hauled him to his feet.

"Come on. We have to go now."

He shook his head a little. I couldn't tell if he was disagreeing or trying to wake himself up.

I took his arm and turned him to face the comms cabinet.

"Look," I said. "Kurt, Miranda called someone. They'll be coming for her. We have to go."

Kurt took a couple of paces toward the cabinet then stopped.

"Yes," he said. "She said she'd called someone, said they'd be coming but," he frowned, "the route is too complicated. It'll take hours to get out of here."

"Nope." I held out the ferrogramatograph. "10 minutes tops."

And Kurt smiled. That was a good thing to see.

And the comms suddenly erupted with a burst of static, and then a voice:

"Two seven," it said, "two seven, we are eight minutes away from your location, confirm."

Silence. Kurt and I looked at each other.

"Two seven, confirm your position, two seven."

And we ran. Back down the long smooth passage, using the ferrogramatograph to guide us, out of the pivoting doorway, closing it behind us, and racing down the hillside, stumbling but managing to remain upright. I never thought I could run that fast.

It was only when we were getting into the car that I noticed that Kurt was holding a satchel in both arms. It's not his, I didn't recognise it. "What's that,

Continued »

Kurt?”

“Miranda’s,” he said, and I didn’t ask anything further.

I barely looked back as we drove away from the mines, but I thought that I saw, in my rear-view mirrors, three men dressed in black running up the hillside we’d just run down. In fact, I’m sure I saw them. I didn’t say anything to Kurt - not then, anyway.

He’s slept most of the way - we’re about 4 hours from the city now and taking a break for food before resuming the journey. He’s been talking in his sleep, but I couldn’t make out any words. I’m not sure I’d want to know what he was dreaming about anyway.

He’s only said one thing about Miranda, and I don’t want to question him any more just now. It was when we took a quick break for a hot drink and some food at dawn this morning. I put a cup of hot chocolate into his hands. He took a sip and stared out across the flat moorland around us.

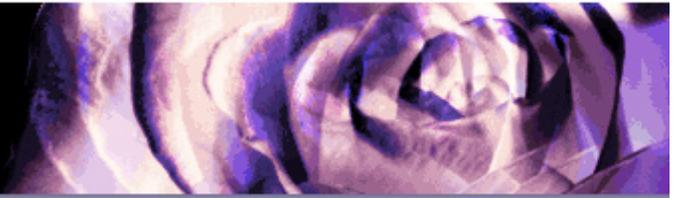
He said: “I didn’t mean to kill her. She had a knife. I tried to get it out of her hand. She fell toward me, onto the blade.”

I nodded. That’s really all I need to know. I just want to get us both back home safely now.

Kurt, despite being in a semi-catatonic state has checked the security of my blog, making doubly sure that it’s ultra-secure, visible only from Earth. And, though I haven’t spoken to Scarlett yet, my impression is that we’re going to have to do the same for her.

Meanwhile, Miranda’s bag is sitting on the back seat of the car. I know, the moment you read this you’re going to email me to say “open it!” “look inside!”, but I can’t just now. We’ve done a sweep to make sure there are no tracking devices and that’s all we need to know. I’ll open it soon, but not just now.

One thing occurs to me, though. We’ve taken the bag, so they, the people who were coming for Miranda, will know we were there. Of course, given that Miranda (I’m sorry, I can’t start using new names now) is dead on the floor, they’ll know someone was there anyway. I hope they won’t know it was us yet. But we can be certain of one thing: they’ll be looking for us.



 Tuesday, May 23, 2006

Yes, yes, alright

Category: me

Time: 12:40 PM

So, excuse me for having made sure that my severely traumatised friend was back at home, had been given the once-over by a doctor, had a fridge full of goodies from the Alchemy Bay Provisions Company and me installed on his sofa before sorting through the belongings of his dead ex-girlfriend who, oh yes, he happened to have killed. Somehow I just didn't think he'd take kindly to seeing me rifle through her bits and pieces instead of driving him away from the potentially homicidal agents who are probably looking for us right now. And, yes, if I sound a little stressed myself, I expect it's just the emotional and physical exhaustion talking.

Right. Deep breath. As far as I can tell there's no one trying to kill either me or Kurt right now, and he's asleep in the next room so I have taken the opportunity to go through Miranda's bag. Which, as I anticipated, does not contain a map with a big cross on it and the words "Cube buried here". It's mostly clothes. There's some lightweight, high-tech camping gear and intelligent fabric garments that will have been useful to her on her travels. Forgive me if I don't immediately go and show all this to Kurt. There are a number of bits of paper identification: they're not so much use in the city, but out in the sticks people will still accept paper ID. They come in half a dozen different names: Caroline and Sarah, Emma, Persephone, Gail and Amelia. There's a key as well - I very gently asked Kurt to scan it but he says it's completely empty. It's probably one she picked up at the drop-point in the mines and was intending to use later.

And, finally, there's an extremely familiar-looking piece of weathered paper. Familiar looking because I could have sworn I'd worked on exactly this document, except that I know that the document I worked on is safely lodged in the Academy museum. It's a page from the Granier diary - the last page, in fact - and the writing is almost identical to the page I've already deciphered, apart from about two sentences which look quite different. And yes, before you ask, I've already given Anna a call. We're going to work on translating it together later on today. And yes, this will entail some further explanations on my part. And yes, my father has been calling. And yes, I'm going to have to talk to him sometime soon too.

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 Wednesday, May 24, 2006

Deja vu

Category: me

Time: 04:49 PM

Grabbed hold of Anna at lunchtime today and convinced her to spend some time working on this new Granier page with me. I'm posting the text now so you can chew on it. Anna and I are a little stunned, really. Not to mention worried. What have we found here? Are we in danger because we have it?

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29 April 1736

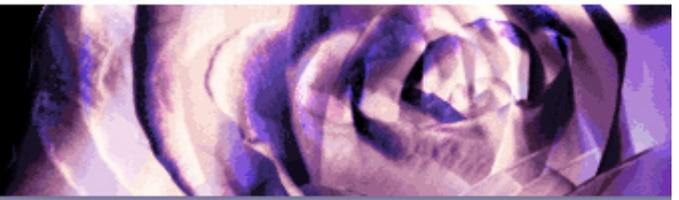
At last, stole several minutes with Edwina in the great refectory at about the third hour after dawn when my lord's men had broken their fast and gone on their way. She, sighing mightily, declared that she did not wish for my company. I would not brook this and held her fast demanding she should explain to me why she had disdained my society and my bed these past days.

She, sighing again, said: "I cannot speak the words. For then, surely, you would disdain me."

I assured her that this could never be. She, smiling, asked if I could not let the matter bide, pretend that all that had been between we two had never been. I declared that I could not. "Then," she said, "I will confess the matter to you, and you will no longer wish for my society."

So saying, she made this speech: "My lord," she said, "I know only a little, but what I know I can no longer hide, with all that has been between us. Your master..." she paused there and tears started in her eyes. "Your master I believe does not wish that our experiments here should benefit only the city. To be blunt, my lord, I have been sent here to ensure that certain matters, certain elements of knowledge should be kept only for her, and for the group of loyal scholars she has formed. She wishes the power for herself. To do what, I know not."

I could not conceal my horror and alarm at this. Ah, wanion. That such things should be. I wished to look upon her but could not. I cast my eyes downward and muttered some words of consolation but made my good-byes sharply. I must think on this and these pages are no longer secure enough to do so.



Wednesday, May 31, 2006

The Talk

Category: me

Time: 01:34 PM

So, I finally had to stop putting off the inevitable and spoke to my dad on Friday. We met up for lunch - I thought this would be good, lunches have a natural endpoint, after all, unlike dinners which could go on all night. I went round to his office at the Academy - Patrick had set up lunch for us at the meeting table and when I arrived my father was just finishing off some paperwork.

“Ah, Violet,” he said, “good to see you. I have to finish something here, but I’ve cleared the whole afternoon for you.”

“Oh good,” I said, and sat down at the table, staring at the lobster salad.

Now, obviously I’d had time to think quite carefully about what I was going to say. My thinking went like this. The likelihood, it seems to me, is that Miranda’s death is never going to be reported to the authorities. Whoever she was working with, I don’t think they’re about to call the police and expose themselves, or her, to investigation.

Kurt and I have decided between ourselves to rely on a very simple story that sticks as closely to the truth as possible if ever any questions should be asked. Miranda and Kurt broke up. She went off to the countryside. He was upset and followed her. We thought, from something she’d said, that she might go to the Silburn-Griggs mines, but when Kurt went, she had either never been there or had left before we arrived. We don’t know where she is. The end.

I launched into a version of this as soon as my father had finished with his paperwork, and while he was pouring out the Mint Alchemies - a traditional Academy summer drink, supplied by Patrick to ease the awkwardness, presumably, since that man thinks of everything.

“So you see,” I finished, holding my plate out for some salad, “there really wasn’t any danger. Except that poor Kurt’s heart has been broken.”

My dad sat down and took some bread.

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He said: “HmMMM.”

I hate it when he does that.

There was a silence long enough for me to have recited a few of the Varkin sonnets my father taught me when I was a child.

“So,” he said, spearing a piece of lobster with his fork, “you needed the ferrogramatograph to navigate the mines?”

“Yes. Kurt mentioned she’d always been interested in them and we thought she might go there.”

“You know they’re not open to the public, don’t you, Violet?”

“Yes.”

“It seems an unlikely destination for a librarian hoping to find some privacy after an unfortunate love affair.”

I left that one hanging in the air.

“And the urgency in getting the ferrogramatograph was because...?”

“Kurt didn’t want to miss her.”

“Ah. Yes. But you didn’t find her there.”

“No.”

“And you know she’s not there now because...?”

“Well, ummm,” I took a mouthful to give me some thinking time. I swallowed and said, “We’re not sure. But I think that Kurt’s finally realised it’s pointless to chase after her.”

“Yes,” my father said. “Pointless. I see. Some more Mint Alchemy?”

I held out my glass gratefully.

After another few mouthfuls, my father said:

“It’s been a rather... difficult time for the library recently.”

“Yes,” I said.

“I suppose it’s put you all under a great deal of pressure.”

“Yes.”

“It must have been difficult for Miranda as well.”

“Yes.”

Continued »

There was a pause. My father seemed to be expecting something more from me. "I suppose," I said at last, "that might be another reason why Miranda ran away. All the pressure. She probably had some kind of breakdown."

He nodded and smiled.

"Yes, that's precisely what I thought. I shall put this in my briefing note to the Senior Fellows Council, emphasising how important it is to find a new Senior Librarian swiftly."

Another pause. At last I was relaxed enough to notice how truly excellent the lobster was.

"That type of breakdown can be very serious," my father said after a few moments.

I nodded.

"It would be surprising if Miranda were to return to the Academy after an incident of that sort," he continued.

I nodded again.

"I shall tell the SFC not to expect her return."

I nodded. I couldn't work out if what I thought was going on was really going on, or if I was just being weirdly paranoid.

We ate a few more mouthfuls.

After a little, my father reached down to his case and pulled out a few sheets of paper.

"Oh yes," he said, "I have something here that might interest you."

"Hmm?"

He handed me the papers. "You'll see that I received some unfortunate news yesterday. It seems that an unexpected explosion has cracked the mine wall, and the Silburn-Griggs mines have been entirely flooded. The preservation society are most upset by this turn of events, but it couldn't have been predicted. It was probably caused by some blasting devices left down there by the miners.

I do hope you and Kurt didn't leave anything down there. It could never be recovered now."

I leafed through the documents - correspondence between my father and the

Continued »

Silburn-Griggs preservation society. They were asking him to support their request for an enquiry into the “unexplained explosion.” He was writing to Camryn Scott to explain that this was completely unnecessary, backing up his thoughts with a lengthy essay on the geological weaknesses of the mines written by one of the Junior Fellows.

“This is interesting,” I said.

“It was very fortunate you weren’t in the mine when it was flooded. I hope I can rely upon you not to visit such dangerous locations again?”

I nodded. “Oh yes. Strictly home-with-vids for me and Kurt now.”

“Very good.”

And my father turned the conversation to other things. He asked about poker, and about the city Historical Society. He even, miracle of miracles, asked about Caine, to which I was only able to respond in monosyllables: “He’s fine.” “It’s good.” “Yup, great.”

I asked him about his work, about the paper he wrote last month on logic gates in self-repairing security systems, and his plans for the summer. It was just normal father-daughter chat over a lobster salad and some excellent cocktails.

It was only as I was about to leave, later in the afternoon, that he dropped his final surprise into the conversation. I was nicely toasted by that point, so perhaps didn’t respond with quite the I-don’t-know-what-you’re-talking-about finesse I should have done. I was leaving when he said: “Oh, Violet?”

“Mmm-hmm?”

“Perhaps you could tell Scarlett that I’ve arranged parking for her car in town. No need to stow it in the suburbs.”

I blinked and nodded.

My father smiled.

I really can’t work it out.

But, speaking of Scarlett, I called her this afternoon.

“Scarlett,” I said. “Let’s have lunch. Come round to my place and I’ll order in a lobster salad.”



 Tuesday, June 6, 2006

Concatenation

Category: me

Time: 10:45 AM

Concatenation (n) a series of links united; a series of things depending on or resulting from each other

Example: "As I said to Kurt on Sunday, it is clear that a concatenation of events has brought us to this point."

Most of what I feel I ought to tell you, it transpires, you know already. That's good, I suppose. It means I can keep things brief. I'm not sure I even mind that you knew things about my sister that I didn't know. She's safe home now, and it's not like any of us could have done a great deal when she was several thousand miles away hanging out with potential psychopaths. I'm saying words in my own mind like "high spirits" and "girls will be girls", whilst at the same time working out with Kurt how we can put a trace on her key, her clothes, heck even into her bloodstream to make sure it doesn't happen again. And, yes, I sound like my father. But he's not so stupid so I'm not sure I mind that either.

In any case, after I had a lengthy chat with Scarlett, I decided to call a meeting. Me and Scarlett and Anna and Kurt. (He's doing much better, by the way, was even fiddling around with some puzzle ideas over the weekend.) It seemed to me that each of us held a piece of this puzzle but that we hadn't been able to put them together yet, not properly, calmly, turning each one to see how it might fit with the others, spotting where a piece was missing and where the others might point to.

We sat in my apartment for about six hours on Sunday, scribbling things on pieces of paper and making charts and diagrams. Kurt and I told Scarlett what we know: about Monica Grand and Pietro Salk, about the Granier diary, about Cymbalistry's death, about Helena Frye and the clean room at Gillit Road, about Hesh records and the mysterious Cyrus Quinton, otherwise known as V. Scarlett started at the mention of the name V.

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She told us about Viendenbourg, about the mining there and about how she found it through Pietro's note mentioning the Reynolds ionizers. She told us about the Castille family, about the military involvement and about the link to my father. And even though I'd heard it before, it still made me shiver. Kurt checked the security of the room again. We're all getting paranoid.

So, this is how it seems to us. There is a secret organization - the Third Power - working in this city, perhaps more than one. They tried to steal the Cube. And they're willing to kill again and again to achieve their aims. Miranda might have said those aims were noble, but we're agreed that the way this group goes about things makes that claim highly suspect. In any case, we're evidently on the wrong side of them now. And they go broad, and they go deep across the city. And we can't be sure who to trust anymore. And we can't discuss it with my father because, well, we don't know if he's one of them.

Even writing that last sentence was difficult. He's my father. I can't believe that he'd ever, ever....

But we're trying to be careful. We have to be careful.

So we're going back through our old leads, trying to find anything that will lead us to more information about the Third Power, about V and about what they're planning to do - because they're obviously planning something. It's become clear to all of us that we're not going to be safe until the Cube is back in the Academy where it belongs; we need to get it back soon, before more lives are put at risk.

We've identified three main leads to follow up:

- Alejo Jackson said, in a webchat with you on Earth, that he'd worked with Cyrus Quinton on the day after the Cube was stolen and that Quinton had telephoned someone in the Academy. It's a long shot, but we're going to try to see if the information about who he telephoned is still stored somewhere in the Hesh systems. The others have agreed that I can ask Caine to help with this, but we're not going to tell him too much - we don't want to put him in the same danger we're in.

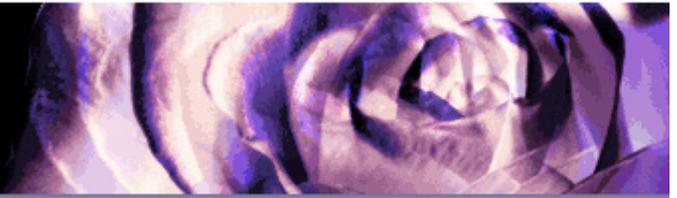
- Items of extremely esoteric kit stolen from the Academy were found in

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Bernardo Holyoke's bar after he died. We need to know what else has been going missing from the Academy, and where it might be going. Anna's going to make some preliminary investigations into that.

- Helena Frye obviously knows more than she's told Kurt. He's going to try to talk to her again, to find out as much as he can about the clean rooms in the tunnels.

I'm sure it'll come as no surprise to any of you that we're going to need your help pretty soon. We'll keep you posted.



Thursday, June 22, 2006

Spiders and Flies

Category: me

Time: 09:57 PM

I remember vividly the week we spent studying spiders in biology class. It was amazing to me that one spindly creature could weave such a giant net and then be content to stay in the centre, motionless. It seemed like magic that, just by sitting there so quietly, the spider could know everything that brushed against its web, and know precisely when to take action to get what it wanted.

I think that's me right now.

I've spun a web; Caine and Anna are the wind blowing unsuspecting prey in - and soon Kurt will be, too - while I sit here in the centre digesting all of the information and doing not much else but avoiding notice.

I'm working, of course, and going out in the evenings to play for my rent, but everything has taken on a surreal normality. At the library, we don't talk about Cymbalistry or Miranda anymore; we just get on with our work. And dad has evidently stopped his madcap game of I-Have-Spies-Everywhere-Don't-Forget, and returned to his lovely old routine of needling me to take admission to the Academy and "live up to my fullest potential," coupled with the occasional oddly thoughtful suggestion for a book I might find interesting or a lecture I might like to attend.

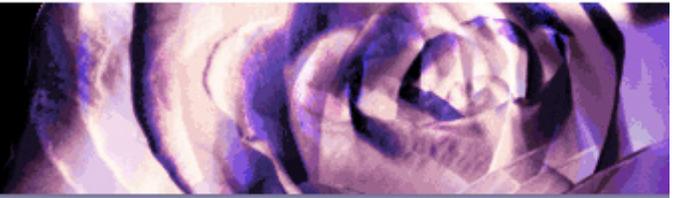
Yesterday for the holiday he even had an afternoon barbecue, with the CRT and a bunch of senior fellows in attendance, though Scarlett was in a sulky mood over something or other and curled up indoors with her key most of the day. Still, it was all so pleasant, it felt like it could have been three years ago, before any of this happened, before I knew anything about this world of secret conspiracies and hidden motivations about to pull the ground from under my feet.

During a lull in the chatter, I heard my dad's voice carry across the garden as he spoke to Uncle Sanjean: "Oh, I complain, but of course I'm very proud of both of my girls," he said. And he caught my gaze from clear across the party, and gave me just a tiny smile and a nod, like he meant me to hear it.

I still can't shake the feeling, though, that he's doing the same thing as I am. Sitting in his web. Waiting to see what he catches.

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 Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Tick, tock

Category: me

Time: 03:23 PM

Kurt's been complaining to me about how he's got nothing to do now but wait for someone else to do something. I'm sure you can understand why I'm not all that sympathetic.

To be honest, the last few weeks have been a little hard for me, watching the others do useful work while I do my best Harmless Librarian Who Is Not Part of a Vigilante Group impression and trying to make nice with my dad. I've even come to view the old days when we were searching for information on secret society symbols with some nostalgia. Though really, it all seems so quaint now. Was there really a time when my biggest concern was getting research credentials?

So, yeah, Kurt's been over at my place fussing and fidgeting and checking his key every twenty seconds to make sure he didn't miss something. Finally, last night, I kicked him out and went out with Caine for a grand tour of the Strip, which I've not done enough of lately. Just because you're waiting doesn't mean you can't have a little fun, right? And besides, there's a fantastic Levenay bag I needed the winnings for.

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 Thursday, July 27, 2006

Anna

Category: me

Time: 04:31 PM

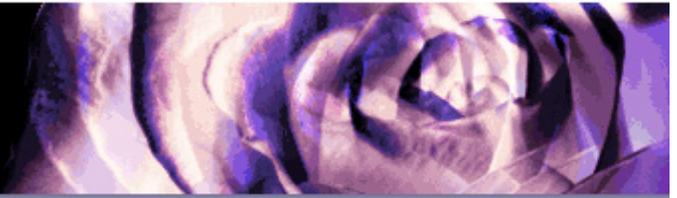
I've just heard from Kurt. Apparently Anna didn't show up to work this morning. Fleming has been calling him - she stepped out last night, didn't mention why, and never came back again.

I don't suppose any of you know anything about this?

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 Saturday, July 29, 2006

Empty

Category: me

Time: 01:18 PM

A lot of people have died by now, people I knew and people I didn't, and you'd think by now it would feel like familiar territory. Really, though, it feels like little pieces of me keep getting chipped off, and I keep wondering whether it's all worth it, whether one stupid chunk of metal is worth the lives of Fran Mendling and Pietro Salk and Monica Grand and Isaac Cymbalisty. I don't know if I should count Miranda or not.

And now Anna, too.

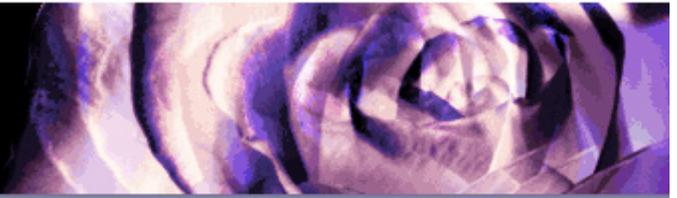
Caine told me he posted a bit about how we found her. It was horrible, and I don't think I want to talk about it. I'm lucky that Caine was there with me, he practically carried me home and then poured a bottle of whiskey down my throat to calm me down again. I knew that all of these people had died before, but I'd never really seen... death, I guess. I'm thinking about writing to Sylvia Salk - just to see how she is, and to say (without really saying it of course) "you were right, it is awful, I'm sorry I thought you were a bit wet."

I spoke to Fleming today - he's told the children but he doesn't know how well they understand, and the thought of them makes me so angry I feel like I could punch through walls. I keep thinking that this is my fault, that I got everyone involved in this stupid crusade, but I know that's not true really. It's not my fault. I didn't kill anyone. It's the fault of whatever psychotic scumbag did this and, like Caine said to me, there's no point my blaming myself.

I know one thing: this can't go on. It has to be over.

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Thursday, August 3, 2006

Not one

Category: me

Time: 08:51 PM

Today was rough. Beyond rough. Today was so rough I ended up having a long heart-to-heart about feelings with Scarlett.

I think Anna's death has brought up a lot of stuff for both of us. Because we lost our mum when we were so young, just like Anna's children. Because we know what it's like to look at your dad as a child and, even though you love him and even though you trust him, you know he's never going to be your mum. And you know that there's a way your dad is never quite going to understand you, because your mum won't be there to explain. Or, I don't know. That's how it was for me. Maybe Fleming's a bit more accessible than my father.

I spent part of the day with Caine - I don't think I've ever seen him this visibly upset. Before this, the high-water mark of emotion was when one of his bandmates called to say that he'd put his heel through one of Caine's drums when practising a particularly energetic guitar solo. He always has this cool nothing-ever-bothers-me veneer, but not today. When one of the twins (Caine can tell them apart, but I can't) asked where the peanut butter was "because mummy always puts it away", I thought he might actually shed a tear. Or, well, no, of course it was just dust in his eye.

We had family dinner tonight; I think dad wanted to see us even more than usual. He asked me if I'd like to bring Kurt and for once I didn't pout and make a face and explain that duh, we're not dating. Because Kurt's had it pretty rough these past few months too, and if he wanted to talk - which he doesn't often - it's not clear to me he'd have anyone to talk to. Sometimes it seems to me that Anna was the glue that held us all together, and now she's gone we're spinning apart faster than I can pull us back in.

Kurt and I went for a walk this evening in the park. I linked my arm through his as we walked, because it felt right and friendly and it's not that my life is overly complicated, no not at all.

After a while, he said: "Do you feel guilty?"

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I shook my head, which was a big lie because I do but I couldn't say it just then.

He nodded, as if that was the right thing to say.

After a little while longer, he said: "I don't feel guilty about Miranda. I never have."

I wondered if that was the first time I'd heard him say her name since the week she died.

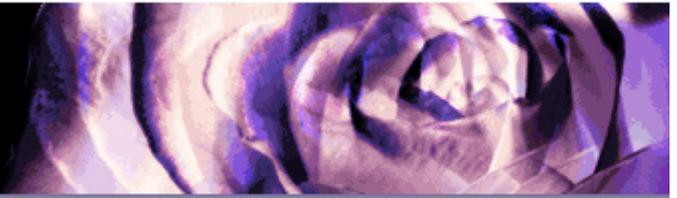
"But," he said, "we can't lose any more people. Not a single one."

I nodded and repeated his words.

"Not a single one."

"Is that a deal?" he said. "Whatever happens, we won't waste a single other person?"

And there, in the park, we shook on it. I'm not really sure what it means, but it felt important. Even if Kurt and I have to do everything it takes to solve this, we can't risk any of our friends' lives anymore.



Monday, August 14, 2006

Blackout

Category: me

Time: 09:47 PM

When the power went out, I was in Kurt's office trying to persuade him that really, truly, the world would not end if he stepped out of the office for half an hour and actually, you know, ate something, lunch being long since overdue. He's been working very hard since Anna's been gone. I think he's trying to work off some sort of self-imposed penance since Anna covered for him when he hared off after Miranda. Anyway, I was citing all kinds of research showing how lowered blood sugar and lowered productivity are inextricably linked, when the overhead lights flickered out, to be replaced by a symphony of beeps and alarms as all of Kurt's gear at once panicked at him.

He silenced it all pretty quickly and starting shutting things down to conserve emergency power. Then Von came in and asked if we'd noticed the Earth data link had failed. Kurt rolled his eyes and speculated that some critical routing system in the building had failed.

We only found out the scope of the problem when we ducked out to find someplace to eat. I mean, we don't have power failures in the city very often, and I honestly don't remember ever being in the middle of one myself before, but it's part of the canon of disasters-you-should-be-prepared-for, so why would we think it was important? We were sure it just the building. But then we found a milling crowd outside, comparing information from calls to other parts of town, and found out that the problem was with the whole Academy - or the whole Old Town - or the whole city, depending on who you asked.

Before long, we had confirmation that it would be hours in fixing from somebody with a cousin that works at the Electrical Authority. The subway and car systems were down, so Kurt and I walked together to my dad's official house to try to wait it out. We mostly sat in a swing the garden with some bottles filched from the important-guests-only wine cellar, watching the sun set, and then watching the stars - so much brighter than usual - and in general not talking very much. In a technological world, you get used to the soothing hum of machinery working behind the scenes to make everything smoother, faster, more comfortable. The quiet in the city was positively eerie.

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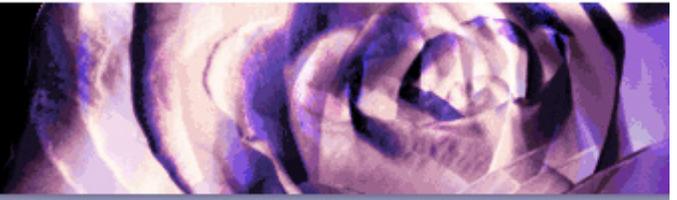
Kurt got a call at around 2 in the morning summoning him to the CRR. That was when we learned that all of this was no accident.

I think they spent all of Friday and Saturday trying to fix the old link, obviously with no success. I'm not clear on the details, but I gather you guys pulled together and managed to kick open the new link in San Francisco just before the carrier wave vanished. Thank you for that. I should be used to saying it by now - it looks like we owe you. Again.

As for what exactly happened... I'm still trying to put it all together. Everyone I know who has any hard information has been in nonstop crisis meetings or emergency sessions or strategic all-nighters or other important-sounding things that mean "too busy to fill you in, Violet, so go play with your toys and leave us alone."

I've picked up a few bits and pieces, though, and the more I think about it, the queasier I become. It sounds like there was a synchronised strike, and the Third Power cut the data link and opened some sort of wormhole to Earth at the same time. And it sounds like the Third Power succeeded in sending people to Earth.

I keep thinking about that list of names: Fran, Pietro, Monica, Cymbalisty, Anna. I really hope you all keep your doors locked at night.



 Friday, September 8, 2006

Bleh

Category: me

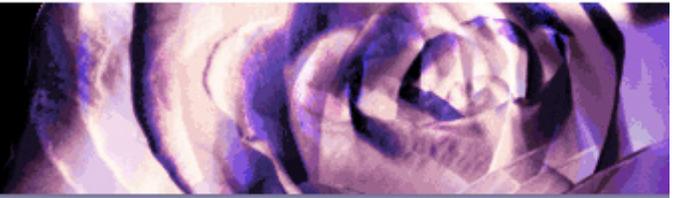
Time: 05:16 PM

So I think Caine and I broke up. Or not. It's hard to tell. I called him names, he called me names. Someone may have said they couldn't stand the sight of someone else. The person who said that may have been me. It's hard to tell. Anyway, he's gone off to some music festival for a few days and hasn't been in touch. But then, we often go for a week or so without being in touch. And we weren't really "together" to begin with. So. It's hard to tell.

In any case, Scarlett has kindly provided something to take my mind off wondering whether or not I've just broken up with my non-boyfriend. What do you know but that Anthony Granier apparently scattered pages about his life all over the city! After all that work on the diary pages earlier in the year, I felt pretty confident in working on this one by myself, and have done a transcription that Scarlett's going to put up for you. I'm going to find someone to check it with on Monday though, just to be sure about those difficult characters. It seems like everyone who works on this with me ends up dead, though. Oh well. Maybe it'll turn out Caine's an expert.

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Monday, September 11, 2006

Not good

Category: me

Time: 04:55 PM

It's never a good sign when you wake up and can't remember what you did the night before. It's an even worse sign if you can't remember where you are, or who you might be with. Fortunately, as an unfamiliar room swum into view this morning I realised that it was, in fact, both alone and in a very familiar room. My own bedroom. Only I was lying the wrong way round on the bed. In my clothes. With the faint but noticeable sensation that something had crept into my mouth and died during the night. Possibly after having clawed its way out of my skull. My key beeped. I wondered when I'd set it to "stun".

"What is it?!" I shouted across the room.

The irritating calm peaceful voice of my calendar program replied: "Meeting with Professor Sedgewick in 10 minutes time."

On a morning like this, falling over while putting on my boots and discovering that Scarlett had made off with my current favourite jacket were really the least of my problems.

I'd made the appointment with Professor Sedgewick on Saturday morning - intending to ask her about Scarlett's thrilling new piece of the Granier mystery. Of course, that was before I went to poker on Saturday night and won a rather nice number of Lecks. And before I decided that I should celebrate on Sunday night, non-boyfriend be damned. And before I lost all motor control, along with all memory of the previous evening.

I was 20 minutes late by the time I was striding through the courtyard towards Professor Sedgewick's office. Well, maybe striding is the wrong word. What's the word for the kind of walking where every step causes a rictus of pain to travel through your entire body, ending with an explosion at the top of your skull? Perhaps it would be better to say I was "wincing" toward her office. I'd taken some Ceretin and some Tetracodamine but they didn't seem to be doing much good. And I was beginning to feel some rather ominous nausea. I tried to remember if there were any bathrooms within sprinting distance of Sedgewick's office.

And, as I knocked on the door I was still racking my sore and tender brain to tell me what on earth I'd done the previous evening to get into this state. I

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remembered... celebrating. Yes, I'd definitely decided to celebrate my big win. And I'd called... Kurt. Yes. I remembered that. Called Kurt in the early evening, and he'd suggested going out for dinner with a couple of friends and I'd said... had I said I had a better idea?

"Ent-ah!" came the voice from the other side of the door. I went in.

I'd decided to show the note to Professor Sedgewick on the basis that I don't want to get any more members of the Languages department killed if I can possibly help it, and she, I thought, would be sufficiently dotty to believe my story without questioning too hard and putting herself in danger.

"You are late, my dear," she said, looking at me over her half-moon spectacles.

Before I could reply, she continued "no matter, no matter, please, look at this magnificent specimen and tell me your reaction. Immediately, no hesitation please!"

I had time for only mild trepidation about what she might want to show me before she pulled up a holographic image from her key of a large white flower with a slightly alien look to it. I glanced at Sedgewick's face.

"It's... er... beautiful?" I hazarded.

She beamed. "Precisely. Pre. Cise. Ly. But why can't the council see that, eh, eh? They want to destroy one of the last 50 habitats for this species of giant orchid in the city region."

I shook my head, trying not to let the pain show on my face.

"Terrible," I said, "terrible."

She grabbed my hand "ah, my dear, I knew you would think so - I'm sure you won't mind if I add your name to the Bankside Rescue Union for Natural Orchids, will you?"

"Ummm..."

"Excellent! BRUNO will be delighted."

Bruno! Suddenly, a portion of my evening swum into focus. I had had a marvellous idea. One of Caine's band members, Bruno, was playing a solo gig at a club downtown. And I had thought it would be a super idea to go and see him. With Kurt and some of Kurt's friends. For some reason. Yes, that was it, we'd gone to a club and I'd drunk...

"Can I do anything for you, my dear?" Sedgewick's voice summoned me back.

"Oh, er, yes," I said. "I was wondering if you'd look at this," I handed her a copy of the note Scarlett found in our uncle's house. I hadn't brought the puzzle

Continued »

with me - I didn't want her to start investigating it and either a) tell my father or b) meet a sticky end. "It's, um, a sort of joke. A friend made it for me and I, er, wanted to find out what it means. It's written in this old style, for, er, fun, and yeah, he's a linguistics expert and..."

This was not coming out as coherent as I'd imagined when I first thought of the plan. Luckily, Sedgewick was too intrigued by the paper to notice my stuttering. Or the small army of gnomes intent on mining the inside of my skull for mineral deposits.

"Ah," said Sedgewick, looking at the paper "a love puzzle? A little trinket from a young man, perhaps? I remember when Morris and I were courting, he would often make little treasure hunts for me of this sort..."

She drifted on for a while. It was all I could do to nod from time to time in a not-moving-my-head-very-much sort of way.

"It's rather beautifully done," she said. "Your beau must be rather an expert in the field. I shall have to keep it for a few days to make sure I have understood every element correctly. I hope that will not inconvenience you?"

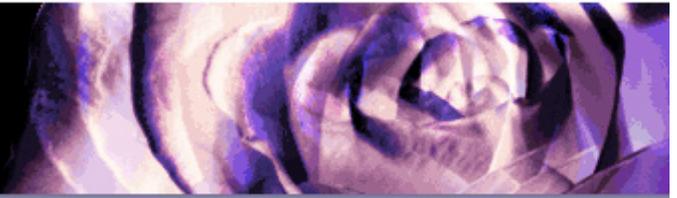
I made a non-committal noise to indicate that that would be fine.

"Yes," she said, "it's rather lovely, is it not? So many tiny touches which indicate fine penmanship. This glyph here, for example, one might think it was simply part of the border, but in fact it is a navigational symbol representing a rotation, starting at due North, and circling 360 degrees clockwise. This young man must be rather taken with you to go to such trouble."

I nodded again, squirrelling away the information to pass on.

"Youth," she said, "it makes everything it touches sublime."

And as I stumbled out into the hallway all I could do was stutter my goodbyes. Because I had finally remembered what it was I'd done last night. The details aren't relevant. I did a thing I shouldn't have done, with a person I shouldn't have done it with. Believe me, you don't want to know. Seriously. I don't want to know. Do you think, if I beg hard enough, I can get Cognivia to make some memory-erasal tablets?



Thursday, September 14, 2006

Light House

Category: me

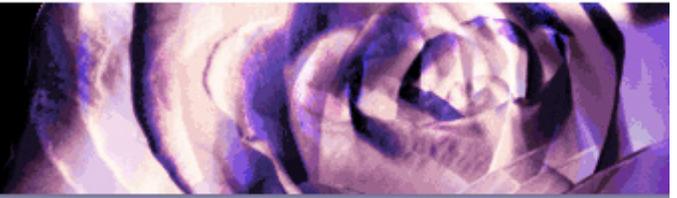
Time: 11:32 AM

A few of you guys have written to me and Scarlett saying that we should “go to the lighthouse” or “look from the lighthouse” or “start our journey at the lighthouse in Viendenbourg”. I think the lighthouse must be important, but unfortunately since all I have is a small 300-year-old painting of it and not a detailed survey map, set of directions from the city or handy satellite navigation marker, we don’t actually know where it is. Maybe when we solve this puzzle we’ll work it out. Also, Viendenbourg is several hundred miles inland, so unlikely to have a lighthouse. Lighthouses being more common at, you know, the coast.

I popped over to the Academy this morning to see if Sedgewick had made any progress, but apparently she was out at some conference on ancient languages. Still, I stopped by Kurt’s office and set him on this puzzle. After he’d asked the standard ‘why don’t you go to the lighthouse then?’ question and I exasperatedly told him that the traces and the letter were all we had, he got the message. Within a few minutes, he was busy drawing circles on bits of paper and moving them around with his classic ‘furrowed-brow’ look. I tried asking him what he was doing but he evidently wasn’t responding to any verbal stimulus by that point, so I decided my presence was no longer required and headed out.

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 Tuesday, September 19, 2006

Avast

Category: me

Time: 03:37 PM

A two-day sea voyage is not absolutely the best time to discover that you seem now to suffer from sea-sickness. I never used to suffer from sea-sickness. In fact, now I come to think of it, I suppose it's possible that it's not really sea-sickness but the inevitable effects of having spent this Saturday night trying to forget how I spent last Sunday night.

In fact, when Scarlett turned up at my apartment on Sunday morning wearing my jaunty Levenay sailor-stripe top from last season, I'd completely forgotten that I needed to talk to some Cubeheads of my acquaintance to find out what they know about the Lancewood Archipelago. Of course, she was intensely curious about how I came to know some religious fundamentalists (and she does talk awfully loudly when she's curious) so I told her as much of the story as I could manage in between her excited squeals about the upcoming sea voyage.

I don't think she'd ever known about the part I'd played in getting Aiko arrested all those months ago - it's not something I'm particularly proud of. Especially as I had that rather strange experience at the compound. I didn't really want to talk about it then - I don't really want to talk about it now. All I can say is that they gave the impression of knowing rather more about me than I was entirely comfortable with (although, you know, not enough to foil my dastardly-yet-pointless plot). I've wondered a lot about it since then, whether they could really have some kind of mystical powers after all that time meditating on the Cube or whether it was just an elaborate trick to induce awe in the faithful. Anyway, they were pretty friendly at the time, if freaky. And when I finally managed to raise Brother Hans on their antiquated key system he greeted me like a close personal friend. In fact, he called me "Sister Violet!". Which made Scarlett snigger. Which did not help me to keep a straight face.

When I explained our plans to visit the Lancewood Archipelago, he beamed and said:

"Ah, the Isles of Gyvann are most blessed. If it is enlightenment you seek there, sister, you will surely find it."

"Er. Yes," I said. "Enlightenment. That's what we're going for. It's what we

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need.”

“We all need enlightenment, sister. But the Cube blesses where it lists. We can only hope to receive its bounty.”

“Yes,” I said. This conversation was not going as I’d hoped.

“And your own meditation, Sister Violet, how is that...?”

I interrupted him. “Actually,” I said, “we’re not sure we’re going to be able to make it to the Holy Isles without some guidance. A few of the islands are difficult to navigate, they say, and you’re the experts I think.”

Brother Hans beamed again.

“You wish for our assistance on your holy quest?”

“Um. Yes.”

“You wish us to bring you guidance, as the Cube guides those who are in doubt or fear?”

“Yes, that would be...”

“I am transmitting the map of the treacherous sands to you now. Although, Sister Violet?”

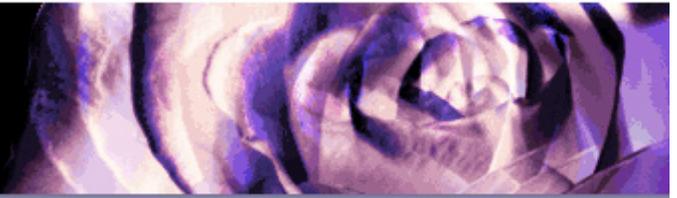
“Yes?”

“We would greatly appreciate a visit from you upon your return.”

I just smiled at that. The file was already on my key.

Unlike me, Scarlett has been loving the whole sea expedition. For some reason, although we’re travelling on a super-modern three-hulled schooner she’s been insisting on talking like, well, like in her words “a scurvy sea dog”. I never knew Scarlett had quite such a whimsical side, but something about leaving the city on “another adventure” has brought it out in her. She’s been charging up and down the deck asking the ship’s crew if they’re about to “splice the mainbrace” and calling everyone *knaves* and *curs*. I don’t even know where she picked up these words. She started telling me that Von had been teaching her something and then wisely left that one where it lay.

We arrived late last night, later than expected due to some bad weather on the way over, so this morning was our first sight of the islands. We are very far away from anything else - the port town here is tiny and we’re going to have to charter another boat to pick our way through the smaller islands to our destination. It’s beautiful, in a windswept bleak way. And the island we’re supposed to go to has apparently been abandoned for the past several hundred years. There should be nothing there but some puffins and perhaps a tretretre skeleton or two. Something tells me we’re not going to be quite that lucky though.



Thursday, September 21, 2006

Advancing

Category: me

Time: 03:55 PM

I wonder how long I can go without hitting Scarlett? It's getting to be sort of a game with me now. Seeing how long I can go without hitting Scarlett, (or, you know, telling her to fortheloveofGyvannbequiet) and then trying to beat that number. Why is she so chirpy all the time? Why? I've been spending a lot of time chatting to Kurt on my key just to be able to talk to someone who doesn't think that everything is either "sooo cute!" or "sooo pretty!" I'm sure she never used to be this bad.

We've made quite a bit of progress with the room we found in the lighthouse foundations. Kurt's been talking me through it every spare moment we've had. I can't help wishing I could have left Scarlett at home and brought him with me. This morning we went back to the concrete room with a couple of detectors Kurt had "borrowed" from the Academy for me and hooked in to my key's systems. We were looking for traces of metal first of all. We found them everywhere, all over the stone walls and floor of the room, running in a grid. This was, to say the least, suggestive.

We found one place in the wall which contained a much higher concentration of metal, and which seemed to have some residual electric currents. Then it was just a question of working out how to get into it, short of taking a pickaxe to the wall. (Scarlett wanted to take a pickaxe to the wall. That girl has got a little too comfortable with the whole gung-ho adventuring thing.) Kurt had to go off to a meeting, so we fiddled with the stonework, and any odd depressions or marks we found in the wall but to no avail. Eventually, Kurt had us use an electro-magnet we'd brought with on the boat which released a catch and a panel fell open. A control panel.

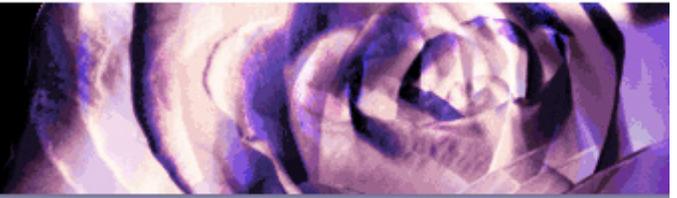
Kurt's jerry-rigged up an interface with the systems in this building to his key - you can see it here. He's also put a messaging system into his interface, so that we can talk to each other. The scans we've done indicate that the building may extend a little way underground which could make key comms difficult. Plus, it's easier for Kurt to talk to us doing work time this way. The lighthouse systems aren't like anything we've ever seen before. In some ways they're antiquated, and Kurt's had to write a quick operating system to allow them to communicate. But in some ways they're advanced, much more advanced

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than anything we've ever seen before. Even that magnetic catch to the panel is more technologically sophisticated than I would have expected. It can only mean one thing, really. The tech here was created during the war.



Monday, September 25, 2006

Squid for breakfast, squid for lunch

Category: me

Time: 01:11 PM

Who would have thought that Scarlett was such a squid fiend? I always thought she found them, well, a bit squelchy, but she's thrown herself into archipelago life with reckless abandon. First there was the squid roast, then the squid charming contest, the squid-bobbing, squid-decorating, squid-sucking, squid-singing and, of course, the marinated squid cook-off.

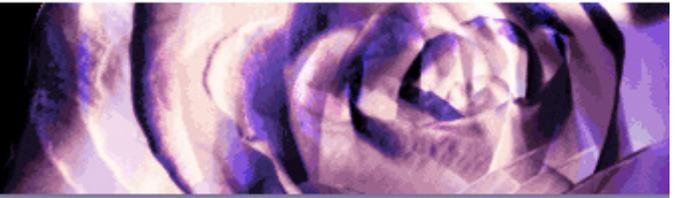
Still, with all this enthusiasm for local life she does seem to have made herself a couple of friends. A rather sweet local boy called Tam followed her home on Friday night - I left them eagerly discussing this year's new squid baits in the lounge of our little guesthouse while I went to bed. And then yesterday she seemed to have befriended an rosy-cheeked girl called Molly who had introduced her to some new squid-diving method.

After all this seafood excitement, Scarlett has actually managed to extract some useful pieces of information. The archipelago natives never go to Hobbs Island, mainly because the sandbanks there are so hard to navigate and it's such a barren rock that there's simply no reason they'd want to. But Scarlett's also heard there are odd local legends about the place. For one thing, the place is supposed to be particularly sacred to Gyvann - perhaps because of the Brotherhood retreat that was there about 5-600 years ago. For another, well, apparently there are ghosts.

No one could be particularly specific. Tam mentioned "howling shadow men", and Molly talked about the "half men". It's just not a place one should go to, and Molly seemed very worried that Scarlett was even thinking of it. My suspicion is that these were rumours started by the Lancewood research team to keep people away from their labs. All of which seem like excellent reasons to go back there this afternoon. As ever, you can follow our exciting adventures live online at 4pm today, and see what we got up to on Thursday and Friday.

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 Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Awkward

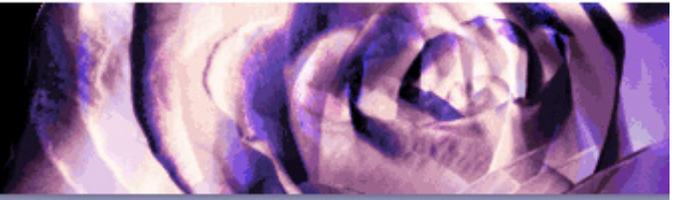
Category: me

Time: 06:00 PM

We've discovered some interesting pieces of historical information in our investigations of the labs under the ruined lighthouse. Yesterday's is here and this is today's if you want to check out our conversation. And if awkward conversations between possibly-ex non-boyfriends and girlfriends do not make your eyes bleed.

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Thursday, September 21, 2006

Advancing

Category: me

Time: 03:55 PM

I wonder how long I can go without hitting Scarlett? It's getting to be sort of a game with me now. Seeing how long I can go without hitting Scarlett, (or, you know, telling her to fortheloveofGyvannbequiet) and then trying to beat that number. Why is she so chirpy all the time? Why? I've been spending a lot of time chatting to Kurt on my key just to be able to talk to someone who doesn't think that everything is either "sooo cute!" or "sooo pretty!" I'm sure she never used to be this bad.

We've made quite a bit of progress with the room we found in the lighthouse foundations. Kurt's been talking me through it every spare moment we've had. I can't help wishing I could have left Scarlett at home and brought him with me. This morning we went back to the concrete room with a couple of detectors Kurt had "borrowed" from the Academy for me and hooked in to my key's systems. We were looking for traces of metal first of all. We found them everywhere, all over the stone walls and floor of the room, running in a grid. This was, to say the least, suggestive.

We found one place in the wall which contained a much higher concentration of metal, and which seemed to have some residual electric currents. Then it was just a question of working out how to get into it, short of taking a pickaxe to the wall. (Scarlett wanted to take a pickaxe to the wall. That girl has got a little too comfortable with the whole gung-ho adventuring thing.) Kurt had to go off to a meeting, so we fiddled with the stonework, and any odd depressions or marks we found in the wall but to no avail. Eventually, Kurt had us use an electro-magnet we'd brought with on the boat which released a catch and a panel fell open. A control panel.

Kurt's jerry-rigged up an interface with the systems in this building to his key - you can see it here. He's also put a messaging system into his interface, so that we can talk to each other. The scans we've done indicate that the building may extend a little way underground which could make key comms difficult. Plus, it's easier for Kurt to talk to us doing work time this way. The lighthouse systems aren't like anything we've ever seen before. In some ways they're antiquated, and Kurt's had to write a quick operating system to allow them to communicate. But in some ways they're advanced, much more advanced than anything we've ever seen before. Even that magnetic catch to the panel is more technologically sophisticated than I would have expected. It can only mean one thing, really. The tech here was created during the war.

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[15:38] This is Kurt, testing testing

[16:14] Hi Kurt, this is Violet

[16:15] Kurt: There's a setting here that will open up the entrance to the facility. Better stand back in case it opens up the floor or something

[16:16] Violet: OK

[16:16] Kurt: Trying it now

[16:16] Kurt: Anything happening?

[16:17] Violet: Some clicking...

[16:17] Violet: Yeah, a part of the wall beside the control panel just slid to one side. Very impressive.

[16:17] Kurt: Thanks

[16:18] Violet: I was talking about their tech, but whatever

[16:19] Kurt: So what's happening now?

[16:19] Violet: It's pretty dark inside, we're using our torches. Scarlett's going to look for some power switch or something. The place must have power if the control panel's still working, and the wall mechanism

[16:20] Kurt: By the way, for everyone watching on Earth, you can see the plan of the lab by clicking on 'Level 1'

[16:21] Kurt: I've set up a display so you can see which areas have been explored and which have power

[16:21] Kurt: I got the plans from the lab's computer systems, which, by the way, are very odd. Hundreds of years old, but still very sophisticated in some ways

[16:22] Scarlett: I found a power switch for the first room, just turned it on!

[16:23] Scarlett: Looks like an unloading bay or something, I guess

[16:25] Kurt: Tagged first room as Unloading bay

[16:27] Violet: Nothing terribly interesting here, it's all mostly empty

[16:29] Violet: Some heavy duty empty boxes here, checking the labels

[16:30] Violet: Says 'First mass material shipment - Viendenbourg September 1736'

[16:32] Scarlett: We're going into the corridor, the unloading bay is boring

[16:33] Violet: There's a plaque on the corridor wall

[16:34] Violet: It's commemorating the opening of the lab in February 1732. According to this, the Master of the Academy, Vianne Adamek, was present

[16:34] Kurt: 1732... that's 5BC then

[16:36] Violet: We're heading into the room south of the unloading bay

[16:37] Scarlett: Found the power switch. This place is full of electrical equipment, that sort of stuff

[16:37] Violet: That's not really surprising when it said 'Radio Transmissions' on the door, is it?

[16:38] Kurt: Is any of it on?

[16:38] Scarlett: No, I only just turned the power on

[16:38] Kurt: I wonder if we can use it to boost the key signal or something

[16:40] Violet: I don't think so, I've never seen equipment like this before

[16:40] Violet: I'll turn the equipment on anyway, in case you figure out a way to interface with it

[16:40] Kurt: Thanks

[16:41] Scarlett: All of the paper here has been shredded!

[16:41] Violet: Yeah, the people here were obviously careful

[16:42] Scarlett: There's some stuff on the walls. Lab notices, memos, rotas, photos of old Perplex City

[16:42] Violet: Interesting...

[16:42] Kurt: What's interesting?

[16:43] Violet: There's a memo dated June 1735 saying that power restrictions on the radio equipment are over, since Lancewood is 'now self-sufficient in power'

[16:44] Kurt: Odd. Did you see any signs of solar panels or turbines on the island?

[16:44] Scarlett: Nothing like that

[16:46] Violet: There's something else here about Viehattle

[16:46] Violet: There's a bit of paper with a transmission from the Academy, December 1736, about Viehattle ending the cease-fire and declaring war on Perplex City

[16:47] Kurt: I guess they removed the solar panels or whatever, the lighthouse is gone, after all

[16:48] Violet: Next room now

[16:48] Kurt: What is it?

[16:48] Violet: It's amazing... incredible!

[16:49] Kurt: What?

[16:49] Scarlett: Toilets!

[16:49] Kurt: Honestly guys, this is supposed to be serious

[16:50] Violet: It is! You're just a savage, Kurt, you don't appreciate good facilities

[16:50] Violet: I'm just going to be a minute

[16:52] Kurt: Sigh

[16:53] Violet: Okay, okay, I'm done

[16:53] Scarlett: There's a generator in the next room

[16:54] Kurt: What sort of fuel does it take?

[16:54] Violet: It doesn't say. Doesn't seem to have an inlet, either - it's hooked up to some big cables to the side

[16:56] Violet: Kitchens are next

[16:56] Violet: Wow. Know you won't appreciate this, Kurt, but the kitchen is amazing. Don't see this stuff outside the history books.

[16:57] Kurt: I hate to tell you this, but you can see one in your apartment as well. I know you don't use it, but...

[16:57] Violet: Very funny. But the stuff here... canned

foods with paper labels, dehydrated foods to mix with boiling water.

[16:57] Violet: My old history prof would kill to get a look at this.

[16:58] Violet: All a bit drab though. I suppose it was wartime.

[16:58] Violet: Kitchens lead into dining room. Makes sense.

[16:59] Scarlett: This place has a lot of seats! I think at least 100 people would be able to fit in here.

[17:00] Violet: Wonder what they used for light. It's pretty gloomy in here. And why did they have to be below ground?

[17:00] Kurt: Good point. Safety maybe?

[17:00] Violet: Could be

[17:00] Scarlett: Hahahah!

[17:01] Scarlett: Menu on the wall!

[17:01] Scarlett: This week's specials: Artichoke soup, Trout a la Grecque, Tansy pudding

[17:02] Scarlett: Mmmmm. I am getting hungry.

[17:02] Kurt: I wouldn't try any of that stuff in the kitchen, by the way, even if it is canned or dehydrated

[17:02] Violet: Dormitories through here.

[17:03] Violet: All very neat, military style. Bunk beds, lockers. Some of the beds are made.

[17:03] Violet: We could sleep right here. But that'd be weird.

[17:03] Scarlett: For all we know someone died in these beds...

[17:04] Violet: For all we know they died happily in their homes surrounded by grandchildren. No need to be morbid.

[17:05] Violet: The place does have an atmosphere though. It's quite cold, and the sound of our feet seems to be - I don't know - deadened somehow? Maybe I'm imagining it.

[17:05] Scarlett: Wooooooh

[17:06] Violet: Stop that

[17:06] Violet: /me finally gives in to temptation and smacks Scarlett

[17:07] Scarlett: Stop that

[17:07] Kurt: Heh

[17:08] Violet: Not much in the next room, it's just a waste storage area

[17:08] Scarlett: I'm going to have a look back in the dining room again

[17:09] Violet: There's a lift here, in the northwest of the floor

[17:09] Kurt: Yeah, I was wondering what that was

[17:10] Violet: Can't open it, it's locked shut

[17:11] Kurt: It should be receiving power

[17:11] Violet: I'm pressing the 'open' button and it's not working

[17:12] Violet: Okay, there's a manual override here, but it's pretty stiff. I'm going to find a crowbar or something and look over this place again

[17:13] Violet: Spotted something in the waste room

[17:14] Scarlett: All sorts of interesting old menus in the dining room, but not much apart from that

[17:14] Violet: There are a few papers on the floor here

[17:15] Violet: Man. Half a 300-odd year-old newspaper

[17:15] Violet: If we were in the city, this thing'd be under glass

[17:15] Scarlett: Bo-ring

[17:15] Violet: /me rolls eyes

[17:16] Violet: There are a few hand-written papers as well

[17:16] Violet: I'll need to take them back to the camp to check them out.

[17:16] Violet: Hand-writing now is not what it used to be

[17:16] Kurt: Hand what?

[17:17] Scarlett: Yours isn't. I've seen your shopping lists. "Buy two firglenoogles."

[17:18] Violet: Well, that's about it, unless there's something in the lift

[17:18] Violet: Bloody Granier, dragging us out here

[17:20] Violet: I'm heading out to get some fresh air

[17:20] Scarlett: Yeah, can we leave now?

[17:21] Violet: any thoughts about getting into the lift Kurt?

[17:22] Kurt: I can't open it from here, so it's up to you. Crowbar is as good an idea as any.

[17:22] Violet: OK, so we'll head out.

[17:22] Violet: I can look through the hand-written stuff with my reference materials.

[17:23] Violet: Just heading back now

[17:23] Scarlett: Aw, are you sure we can't try some of this delicious dried suet?

[17:23] Scarlett: Look at the packet, it's now got extra crunch!

[17:24] Violet: Come away from that

[17:25] Scarlett: Or, ooh, cheese in a can! Now 20% more fat content!

[17:25] Scarlett: /me hears her tummy rumbling.

[17:25] Violet: If you want something high-fat and very bad for you I think we have some motor oil on board the boat.

[17:25] Violet: Let's *go*.

[17:25] Scarlett: What's this Vi?

[17:25] Violet: What?

[17:26] Scarlett: No, really, I think I found something useful.

[17:26] Violet: Actually, yes, maybe that is useful.
[17:27] Kurt: Another toilet, perhaps?
[17:27] Violet: It's a docket pinned to the wall.
[17:27] Violet: From October 1733. Electrical hookups for new anti-air battery have been delivered safely.
[17:27] Scarlett: What's anti-air?
[17:28] Violet: How am I supposed to know. Maybe it explodes on contact with air? K-man?
[17:28] Kurt: Don't call me that.
[17:28] Kurt: I think it's a surface-to-air missile battery, in case any planes tried to bomb the labs
[17:28] Scarlett: What, out here?
[17:29] Kurt: Yeah, it's a bit odd, but they must've wanted to keep this place safe
[17:30] Violet: Right, we're outside now
[17:30] Kurt: So, what's the plan?
[17:31] Violet: Unless there's a shop selling crowbars here, we're going to have to head back to the port town
[17:32] Kurt: Fair enough
[17:33] Violet: I think it'll be too dark to head back once we've got it, so we'll probably wait until tomorrow morning before coming back and trying the lift
[17:34] Violet: You know, I think it's the annual squid-hurling festival this evening.
[17:34] Scarlett: Squiiiiiiiiid!
[17:34] Violet: We are not going to the squid-hurling
[17:35] Scarlett: Bah. I wanted to hurl a squid of my very own.
[17:35] Kurt: I have to get back to work here, I've got a meeting with Garnet about the data link in a few minutes and I need to read up on the agenda
[17:36] Kurt: When will you be back at the lab tomorrow?
[17:36] Violet: I don't know, maybe 10am, 10:30am?
[17:37] Kurt: And the squid?
[17:37] Violet: OK then. Scarlett, if I can take a picture of you hurling and send it to Iona, then you're welcome.
[17:37] Scarlett: Grump.
[17:38] Violet: Or *Brede*.
[17:38] Scarlett: Or Von.
[17:38] Violet: Right, we're off.
[17:38] Violet: Come on Scarlett - we'll be back tomorrow morning K-meister, maybe 10.30am?
[17:38] Kurt: Don't call me that. I'm heading off as well. Talk to you tomorrow.
[17:39] Kurt: At 10am
[17:39] Violet: Fine, fine

[10:07] Kurt: Morning all
[10:07] Violet: Good morning Mr. McAllister!
[10:07] Violet: So I have a crowbar
[10:07] Kurt: From the crowbar shop?
[10:08] Scarlett: *Something* like that...
[10:08] Kurt: Okay...
[10:09] Violet: I'm heading to the lift now to try this out
[10:10] Violet: Prising open lift doors, it's just what I like to do on Friday mornings
[10:10] Scarlett: I thought you were trying to work the override
[10:11] Violet: Alright, yes, but the other thing sounds better
[10:11] Scarlett: Well, that was easy
[10:11] Scarlett: Have you been working out or something, Vi?
[10:11] Kurt: Violet? Working out? Hahaha!
[10:12] Violet: That's quite enough, thank you
[10:12] Violet: There's a button for level 2, which I presume is going further down underground
[10:13] Violet: I'm trying it out
[10:13] Kurt: OK, the lift must've done something to the system, I can see a Level 2 now
[10:14] Kurt: Where are you guys?
[10:15] Kurt: Guys?
[10:16] Violet: Nothing to worry about, just that the lights aren't on
[10:16] Violet: OK, I'm heading east now
[10:16] Scarlett: You'll like this room?
[10:17] Kurt: I will?
[10:17] Violet: It's a computer room
[10:18] Violet: I know that you're probably beside yourself with excitement, but I can't figure out these computers at all. Apart from the fact that there are big screens, they're just very different
[10:18] Kurt: Yeah, it's not very surprising, the components and operating system are probably completely different. A bit like divergent or convergent evolution I suppose. Hmm.
[10:19] Violet: We'll come back to this room later
[10:20] Violet: Next room is just called PR1
[10:20] Violet: It looks different, I think it's a lab. Heavy duty doors... practically an airlock, actually
[10:21] Scarlett: OMG! That's so weird!
[10:21] Kurt: What?
[10:21] Scarlett: My ears just went pop
[10:21] Kurt: Did you go down a level?
[10:21] Violet: No, nothing like that. It happened to both of us. We came into the room and our ears went pop.
[10:22] Scarlett: I don't like it, this PR1 place is creepy.
[10:22] Violet: I'm going to take a look around in here
[10:23] Violet: Basically, it's a lot of very complicated-looking equipment
[10:24] Kurt: Can you describe it to me in more specific terms?
[10:24] Violet: Why yes, K-man, I can
[10:25] Violet: There's a central space in the room, with an empty specimen box. Lots of things leads from it, like what look like optical and electrical cables, and lots of things surrounding it and *pointed* at it
[10:25] Kurt: What sort of thing?
[10:26] Scarlett: This one says 'Class 5A laser'... there's another thing here that's a 'Magnetic Micromanipulator'
[10:27] Violet: Aha. There's a label on the specimen box
[10:27] Violet: 'Vbourg, arrived March 4th 1732'
[10:28] Violet: It's all very high tech, like the labs you showed me in the Academy, but even more sophisticated
[10:29] Scarlett: I found some microscopes here as well! And some machines that look a bit like the scanning machines they have in hospitals, but smaller
[10:29] Kurt: Hmmmmm
[10:29] Violet: I can tell you're intrigued
[10:30] Kurt: I am. I wonder what they were doing there. The specimen must've been extremely valuable, since they went to the effort of pressuring the room
[10:30] Scarlett: Why's that?
[10:30] Kurt: Well, it's what they do with all samples like that. See, ... actually, never mind
[10:31] Violet: Moving on to the next room
[10:31] Violet: This room has a window into PR1... must be an observation room
[10:33] Violet: Empty like the rest, but there's a photo pinned on the wall
[10:33] Scarlett: I think it was taken through this window!
[10:34] Violet: Yeah. It has a bunch of geeky-looking people standing alongside the specimen case - and no, I can't see what's inside it
[10:34] Violet: Caption says: "March 12th 1732 - max coherence 0.2s achieved"
[10:34] Kurt: You know what that means?
[10:34] Violet: No. Do you?
[10:34] Kurt: No, I don't either
[10:35] Violet: Heading south to next room
[10:36] Violet: It's like PR1, but bigger. And so it should be no surprise that it's called PR2
[10:37] Violet: My ears popped again when I went into this room
[10:37] Violet: Actually. I have to agree. It is creepy.
[10:37] Violet: You know what's weird about this place?

[10:37] Scarlett: Everything?

[10:37] Violet: Well the facilities are superb, right, better than stuff we have in the academy?

[10:38] Scarlett: I bet Kurt has an ears-go-pop room, don't you Kurt?

[10:38] Kurt: I believe they are called pressure rooms, but yes, the Academy does have them

[10:38] Violet: But where's everything else?

[10:39] Violet: There are labs but no showers.

[10:39] Scarlett: Why would there be showers?

[10:40] Scarlett: Maybe they're on another floor.

[10:40] Violet: Look, they were obviously working with some kind of chemicals here, right?

[10:40] Violet: It'd just be weird not to have decontamination showers nearby. It's standard procedure.

[10:40] Scarlett: Maybe they had some more advanced version of shower. Like using photons or something.

[10:41] Violet: Photons? Do you even know what a photon is? What do they teach you at Marmalejo, anyway?

[10:41] Scarlett: They're particles of light. Or a wave, if you look at them in a different way. So there! And they use UV light to decontaminate food.

[10:42] Kurt: Touche

[10:42] Violet: What's that?

[10:42] Kurt: Some obscure Earth language. Anyway. PR2. Tell me what you see.

[10:43] Violet: It's like PR1. Empty specimen case in the centre, lots of cables

[10:44] Scarlett: But less scanning stuff. No lasers or anything.

[10:44] Violet: More computers, more electrical equipment and micromanipulators

[10:44] Scarlett: Let's go into the observation room

[10:46] Violet: Just like the PR1 observation

[10:47] Scarlett: Empty, but there are some notes here. One of them talks about coherence again, like PR1

[10:47] Kurt: What does it say?

[10:47] Violet: "June 2nd 1732 - max coherence to 1.3s, but power spikes. Change silicon doping?"

[10:49] Violet: I'm going to look through these notes for a bit, be back in a few minutes

[10:54] Violet: I can't make sense of most of this, but it seems as if they need to reach 'coherence' to do anything interesting with this material.

[10:54] Scarlett: So more coherence is better?

[10:54] Kurt: Apparently so

[10:56] Violet: Next room is a Meeting Room

[10:56] Scarlett: Mmm, lots of comfy chairs

[10:56] Violet: And nothing else, apart from that

[10:57] Violet: Then we have the Physics Labs

[10:57] Violet: I know less about this than the computer room, to be honest

[10:58] Violet: I think they're repairing or calibrating the equipment they use in PR1 and PR2

[10:58] Scarlett: No ear popping here. I guess they weren't doing experiments.

[10:59] Kurt: Or at least, not the same sort of experiments

[10:59] Scarlett: Electronics Labs next

[11:00] Violet: Same old story here

[11:01] Violet: You'd love it here, Kurt. It'd be like heaven for you.

[11:01] Kurt: Right. I bet that as soon as you walk out, the whole thing blows up, as well.

[11:01] Scarlett: Kurt!

[11:01] Violet: Haha

[11:02] Violet: And finally, the generator room

[11:02] Kurt: The generators have been bugging me. You're telling me that they have no fuel inlet?

[11:03] Violet: Nope. This one is like the last one. It looks like it used to take fuel cells or something, but not any more.

[11:03] Kurt: The problem is that they were obviously running a huge amount of power-hungry equipment down here.

[11:03] Scarlett: Like the lasers?

[11:04] Kurt: Yeah. And solar cells or wind turbines just can't provide that.

[11:05] Scarlett: I'm going to take some photos of the computer room for Kurt

[11:06] Scarlett: Hey, there's something that looks like an Academy crest here! A really old one

[11:10] Scarlett: It's on a present. "From the Academy Computer Science Division, looking forward to a fruitful collaboration with Lancewood on the Material Research and Control Project." It's not dated exactly, but I guess it must be from the end of 1732.

[11:11] Violet: Interesting

[11:11] Violet: That's pretty much level 2. Let's head up.

[11:12] Violet: Oh!

[11:12] Scarlett: Hah, that's cool.

[11:12] Kurt: What's going on?

[11:13] Scarlett: The other two walls of the lift also open.

[11:13] Kurt: Yeah, I see it now. You've triggered something in the system

[11:13] Scarlett: It's a bit... dusty in here.

[11:13] Violet: It's a second zone or something

[11:18] Kurt: Adding the other zone has changed the map here... if you're watching on Earth, you have to click on the Level 2 button again

[11:19] Scarlett: Ew ew ew! Spiders! Ew!
[11:19] Violet: It's OK, they won't hurt you.
[11:19] Scarlett: Ew ew!
[11:19] Scarlett: Spiders in my hair!
[11:19] Violet: There aren't any poisonous spiders in this part of the world, right Kurt?
[11:20] Scarlett: *Poisonous* spiders?
[11:20] Kurt: On Lancewood? I don't think so.
[11:20] Violet: One thing - it must mean it's stayed bone dry down here. Spiders don't like the wet.
[11:20] Scarlett: OK, now we *really* need to find the showers.
[11:20] Violet: Aaaand, here they are. Just as I predicted.
[11:21] Violet: What, is no one going to call me brilliant?
[11:21] Scarlett: Seriously, I'm just going to rinse my hair really quickly.
[11:21] Violet: /me rolls eyes.
[11:21] Violet: We shall be hanging out here for a while then, Mr K.
[11:24] Violet: Dum di dum di dum
[11:24] Kurt: You had me set up a secure invisible link from my place of work for this?
[11:24] Violet: Ooh, snarky this morning.
[11:24] Violet: Fine. Shall ping when S is finished washing webs out of her hair.
[11:24] Violet: Pretty impressive that the water's still running here though.
[11:28] Violet: OK. We're back. Scarlett's complaining about lack of hairdryers, but otherwise we're good.
[11:28] Scarlett: Honestly, why do you always make me sound like an idiot? I know they don't have hairdryers. A towel would be nice though
[11:28] Violet: Sigh. We're going on.
[11:29] Violet: The next room's an office.
[11:29] Scarlett: Don't think much of the decoration. What's that eagle doing on the wall?
[11:29] Violet: I doubt that's important.
[11:29] Violet: Hmm. Actually. It seems to be some sort of memorial.
[11:30] Violet: Photos of a man and a woman. Dr Kennard and Dr Cook.
[11:31] Scarlett: Has both their dates. They both died on the same day in December 1736. All it says is "they soared higher and saw further".
[11:31] Scarlett: Hang-gliding accident?
[11:31] Violet: Seems unlikely.
[11:31] Scarlett: I know, I know. Weird spooky experiments, scientists dying.
[11:31] Scarlett: There's one thing I don't understand
[11:31] Violet: One thing?
[11:31] Scarlett: Very funny.
[11:31] Kurt: I thought it was.
[11:31] Scarlett: Why hasn't anyone found this place before?
[11:32] Scarlett: It's been here for centuries.
[11:32] Violet: Maybe they have.
[11:32] Violet: There are probably loads of war-era facilities that the city government knows about but isn't in any hurry to turn into heritage sites, or even explore themselves
[11:32] Violet: "Come and visit the places where we plotted the deaths of millions!"
[11:32] Scarlett: But no one's even tidied up down here.
[11:33] Violet: True, and there's a lot of equipment left. I suppose no-one wants it changed.
[11:33] Violet: Ah, but there is still a memo here
[11:34] Violet: A memo from Edwina Mountling, Head of Lancewood, to Vianne Adamek
[11:36] Violet: Let's see... fairly technical and political. They've been working on increasing the coherence of the material into the multiple-second range, so they can "extend its capabilities". Apparently doping the material with other compounds has been helpful.
[11:37] Violet: Also says that they had a breakthrough in late 1732 to do with programming, which extended coherence to almost 10 seconds. Edwina requests more programmers from the Academy, says they need to be on site. Hmm.
[11:39] Scarlett: Let's move
[11:40] Scarlet: Yay! The Rec Room!
[11:40] Scarlet: Bleh, they've removed most stuff apart from the tables and chairs
[11:41] Violet: There's an old newspaper here.
[11:41] Violet: It's the Vanguard! A pre-war Vanguard! Wow. Do you have any idea what this is worth?
[11:41] Scarlett: Enough for us to leave the city forever and make new lives for ourselves in Xia-Hifa?
[11:42] Violet: Not quite that much
[11:42] Violet: It's from 1736. Ceasefire with Viehattle is holding, but there are rumbles along the border.
[11:42] Violet: The problems from April continue. I don't even know what that's about.
[11:44] Violet: Next room is toilets
[11:44] Violet: Then Meeting Rooms
[11:45] Scarlett: Completely empty
[11:45] Violet: Whizzing through here now... water tank
[11:46] Violet: Ah, store room
[11:47] Violet: How weird.
[11:47] Scarlett: Look! Fenlon's Fine Tea and Coffee Emporium. "Healthful and refreshing."

[11:47] Scarlett: "Mr Turniwig's Excellent Relish. Makes any meat a treat!"

[11:47] Violet: Just don't try tasting it, OK?

[11:48] Scarlett: Yeah yeah. I'll save it to put on my squid.

[11:48] Violet: Look at this - Academy stationery with the old insignia.

[11:48] Violet: Academy branded *soap*? You know what Dad would say about this, right Lettie?

[11:48] Scarlett: Is it "we must focus around our core mission. Soap is not one of our objectives"?

[11:48] Violet: Damn straight.

[11:48] Kurt: How is this relevant?

[11:48] Violet: We've just been well trained.

[11:48] Violet: Moving on...

[11:49] Scarlett: Wow. More offices. Wonderful.

[11:50] Violet: They're pretty big, and it looks like some stuff has been left behind

[11:50] Violet: Just checking the drawers in the filing cabinet here.

[11:50] Violet: A couple of things have fallen to the bottom.

[11:51] Violet: What do we have here....?

[11:51] Scarlett: Well? What do we have?

[11:51] Violet: Just a moment - the print's not too clear.

[11:51] Scarlett: It's a report, signed by a Dr... Kestrel?

[11:51] Violet: Kennard

[11:51] Scarlett: Oh! The man in the hang-gliding accident!

[11:51] Scarlett: Why have they put his report up on the wall and framed it?

[11:51] Violet: They must have been pleased with it.

[11:52] Kurt: What is it about?

[11:52] Violet: Let's see

[11:52] Violet: It's from April 1733

[11:53] Violet: "Site survey and inspection. By Dr. Malcolm Kennard, Academy Exploratory Research Scientist and Military Liaison."

[11:53] Scarlett: It's about the site of the Lancewood Lab!

[11:53] Kurt: Makes sense

[11:54] Violet: I'm going to see if there's anything else

[11:54] Violet: Wow

[11:55] Violet: There's another memo here, from Adamek to Mountling.

[11:57] Violet: "December 1736: Following the report of the accident involving Dr. Kennard, I am appointing Anthony Granier to act as Government Liaison for the Lancewood Labs. Granier is to have full administrative authority, and will report directly to me."

[12:00] Violet: I'm summarising this here, translating it into modern English, but hopefully I've got it right, because it's important

[12:00] Violet: It goes on

[12:01] Violet: "Naturally, I do not wish for him to interfere with the good scientific progress you are making, and you will still retain authority over that sphere. However, this 'General Purpose Self-Contained Material System (Cubic)' that we authorised will consume an order of magnitude more resources than anything we have done before, and involve many more people outside of Lancewood. Therefore, and in addition to the safety lapses at Lancewood, I feel that Granier will play an essential role when he arrives in January."

[12:01] Kurt: Ah

[12:01] Violet: Indeed

[12:01] Kurt: Well then...

[12:01] Violet: I think I need to get outside for a moment

[12:02] Scarlett: They were working on the Cube?!

[12:02] Violet: It seems like they might have been, yes

[12:02] Kurt: There's something else

[12:03] Kurt: I've been getting to grips with this operating system a little better now, and I think there's more of a power draw than Levels 1 and 2 account for

[12:03] Violet: There are more levels?

[12:03] Kurt: Yes

[12:03] Violet: We didn't see anything in the lift

[12:04] Kurt: Right, but I think you need some sort of computer authorisation to reach them. I'll have to work on it, but it'll take time. The system is... bizarre. More advanced than anything we have in some ways, less advanced in others

[12:04] Violet: OK, so you need some time to work on the interface here?

[12:04] Violet: We can leave one of our keys in place to maintain the link.

[12:04] Scarlett: If there's nothing else for us to do here, we might as well head back to the port and think about it there

[12:05] Violet: Yeah

[12:05] Kurt: Are you OK?

[12:05] Violet: I'm just a bit dazed, I think

[12:05] Kurt: I know how you're feeling

[12:05] Violet: But yes, we might as well head back

[12:05] Scarlett: Hurrah, we'll be back in time for the squid roast!

[12:05] Violet: It's rather a squid-based culture here in the archipelago.

[12:06] Scarlett: I like squid!

[12:06] Violet: Fine. You want to move here? Make a special squid costume for the squid parade?

[12:06] Scarlett: Hee. Actually. No.

[12:06] Violet: OK, I still have some documents to work on, and we'll stock up on supplies.

[12:06] Scarlett: Also, I still think it's weird if *no one* from the islands has ever been here before.

[12:06] Violet: You make a good point.

[12:06] Violet: (at last)

[12:06] Violet: We should try to talk to some of the people in town about Hobbs Island, find out if they know anything about it.

[12:06] Scarlett: I can do that! At the squid roast and traditional folk-dancing this evening!

[12:06] Violet: Fine. I shall be washing my hair.

[12:07] Kurt: We'll talk later by key then. And you'll be back at the island when?

[12:07] Violet: Sometime on Monday I expect.

[12:07] Kurt: OK. Hmm. Hesitate to raise this but...

[12:07] Violet: What?

[12:07] Kurt: Caine's back next week. He's bound to ask me if I've heard from you/spoken to you/why you've left the city. Want me to lie?

[12:07] Violet: I'm not sure he's bound to ask. And if he does - I guess. Hmm.

[12:07] Violet: OK, look, if he asks, you can put him in touch.

[12:08] Kurt: Right.

[12:08] Violet: Sorry to leave you with the dirty work.

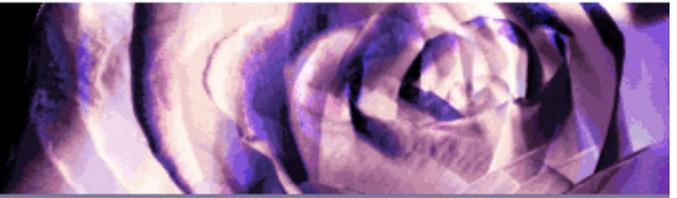
[12:08] Kurt: It's fine.

[12:08] Violet: Bye then! We'll be back on Monday at some point, I'll let you know here or on my blog

[12:08] Kurt: See you then

[12:08] Scarlett: See you!

[00:31] Violet: Hi Kurt, just a quick note before I head to bed. Scarlett and I will be back at Hobbs Island around 4pm on Monday. Will explain tomorrow. Bye!



Monday, September 25, 2006

Squid for breakfast, squid for lunch

Category: me

Time: 01:11 PM

Who would have thought that Scarlett was such a squid fiend? I always thought she found them, well, a bit squelchy, but she's thrown herself into archipelago life with reckless abandon. First there was the squid roast, then the squid charming contest, the squid-bobbing, squid-decorating, squid-sucking, squid-singing and, of course, the marinated squid cook-off.

Still, with all this enthusiasm for local life she does seem to have made herself a couple of friends. A rather sweet local boy called Tam followed her home on Friday night - I left them eagerly discussing this year's new squid baits in the lounge of our little guesthouse while I went to bed. And then yesterday she seemed to have befriended an rosy-cheeked girl called Molly who had introduced her to some new squid-diving method.

After all this seafood excitement, Scarlett has actually managed to extract some useful pieces of information. The archipelago natives never go to Hobbs Island, mainly because the sandbanks there are so hard to navigate and it's such a barren rock that there's simply no reason they'd want to. But Scarlett's also heard there are odd local legends about the place. For one thing, the place is supposed to be particularly sacred to Gyvann - perhaps because of the Brotherhood retreat that was there about 5-600 years ago. For another, well, apparently there are ghosts.

No one could be particularly specific. Tam mentioned "howling shadow men", and Molly talked about the "half men". It's just not a place one should go to, and Molly seemed very worried that Scarlett was even thinking of it. My suspicion is that these were rumours started by the Lancewood research team to keep people away from their labs. All of which seem like excellent reasons to go back there this afternoon. As ever, you can follow our exciting adventures live online at 4pm today.

I'm Violet, so you don't have to be. I'm a history geek. I neither cook nor sing. I love my city to the point of obsession. I do not suffer fools gladly. I have a soft spot for Alejo, even though I know he's sold out. You don't want to play poker with me. I'm fond of words, the more unusual the better.

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[16:04] Kurt: Hello all

[16:04] Scarlett: Hey Kurt

[16:05] Kurt: How are you guys?

[16:05] Violet: Yes, we're good. I think Scarlett still has that squid smell to her though....

[16:06] Scarlett: Blech! I do not!

[16:06] Kurt: Incidentally, I noticed a power glitch in the level 1 unloading bay over the weekend

[16:06] Kurt: Can you guys have a look?

[16:06] Violet: Well what do you expect eating nothing but seafood all weekend?

[16:06] Scarlett: At least I'm entering into the spirit of the thing.

[16:06] Kurt: Guys?

[16:07] Violet: Okay, no problem, K-man

[16:08] Violet: I expect it was the fell forces of Hobbs Island.

[16:08] Violet: Did you see, Lettie and I are doomed for coming here? Doomed, I tell you.

[16:09] Kurt: It's a terrible fate

[16:09] Scarlett: We might just get our faces eaten off by ghosts. Do you think they can graft faces these days?

[16:09] Scarlett: I could ask to look more like Joya!

[16:09] Violet: There will be no face-eating.

[16:10] Violet: We're in the unloading bay now

[16:10] Kurt: See anything weird? Lights still fine?

[16:10] Violet: Seems like it

[16:11] Kurt: Okay. Maybe it's just my end then. Try turning the power off and then on again.

[16:11] Violet: No problem, give me a minute

[16:11] Violet: So, erm, just while we wait. Have you spoken to C today

[16:12] Kurt: Haven't seen him yet. Think he's catching up.

[16:12] Kurt: Do you want me to find him for you?

[16:12] Violet: No!

[16:12] Violet: I mean, er, no, don't put yourself to any trouble.

[16:13] Violet: I expect he doesn't want to talk to me anyway.

[16:13] Violet: Not that I really care one way or the other.

[16:13] Scarlett: You still loooove him.....

[16:13] Violet: Power's back on!

[16:13] Kurt: My system is registered that power change fine. Odd.

[16:14] Kurt: Probably just a glitch, nothing to worry about.

[16:14] Violet: It's the ghosts. Must be.

[16:14] Kurt: *Anyway*

[16:15] Kurt: I programmed an interface to a virtual access panel for Level 3

[16:15] Kurt: I've done pretty much all of the hard work

decrypting their systems, there's only a simple access puzzle to enable the lift to access L3

[16:16] Violet: So solve it already

[16:16] Kurt: I thought I'd give it to the guys watching on Earth

[16:17] Kurt: So here's the link for the panel to access level 3.

[16:17] Kurt: Just in the interests of promoting interworld harmony

[16:18] Kurt: As soon as someone solves it, L3 will also become visible on the interface

[16:19] Scarlett: You sound very responsible like that, Kurt

[16:19] Kurt: Well, you know, I have to teach students at the Academy, I guess that's where it comes from

[16:19] Scarlett: Let's have a walk around, see if there's anything we've missed

[16:21] Violet: Anyway, I don't particularly care for 'C' any more.

[16:21] Scarlett: You do. You love him and you think about him all the time.

[16:21] Violet: You're not too old to be sent to your room, you know.

[16:21] Violet: Your room in Perplex City

[16:21] Violet: Or possibly a room I shall rent for you in Xia-Hifa.

[16:21] Scarlett: OK, I'll keep quiet. But sisters know these things, you know.

[16:22] Scarlett: She goes all squishy when she talks about him, Kurt. And then she realises she's gone squishy and she tries to pretend she was joking.

[16:22] Kurt: Do I really need to know this?

[16:22] Violet: I believe Scarlett has been infected by the blight of the archipelago: squid fever.

[16:22] Violet: Tragic really, but I'm going to have to shoot her. It's the only way.

[16:23] Kurt: It's best that she doesn't suffer too much.

[16:23] Scarlett: Hey!

[16:23] Kurt: By the way guys, you have to click on the 'Activate' button on that puzzle when it's done

[16:24] Kurt: Ah, someone got it

[16:24] Violet: Hurrah!

[16:24] Violet: Those kids on Earth eh? What will they do next?

[16:25] Violet: We're heading back to the lift now. Scarlett, leave that food alone.

[16:28] Violet: Hit the L3 button, K-meister

[16:28] Kurt: Doing so now

[16:28] Scarlett: Woo!

[16:28] Violet: Wow. Do we know how deep this thing goes?

[16:29] Scarlett: Hmm. It's not even too dusty in here.
That's weird.

[16:29] Violet: There's a plaque on the wall

[16:30] Violet: Lancewood level 3, excavated June 1733

[16:30] Violet: They worked fast

[16:30] Violet: Can you imagine the amount of resources that must have been put into this project?

[16:30] Kurt: And on an island in the middle of nowhere...

[16:30] Violet: Okay, we're at the first room east of the lift

[16:31] Violet: Looks like it's completely empty... wait...

[16:32] Kurt: What's happening?

[16:32] Scarlett: OMG. That is so freaky.

[16:32] Scarlett: I don't even know how to describe this.

[16:33] Violet: For once I have to agree. This is freaky.

[16:33] Violet: Seriously, Kurt, I really don't think you have anything like this in the Academy.

[16:33] Scarlett: It's the light.

[16:33] Violet: Yeah.

[16:33] Kurt: What about the light?

[16:34] Violet: Well, it's...

[16:34] Scarlett: It's not normal.

[16:34] Kurt: Please try to make some sense.

[16:34] Violet: OK, so the light is coming from the centre of the room, right? Not just the centre of the ceiling, but the centre of the room.

[16:34] Violet: Except there's nothing there.

[16:35] Violet: It's as if there's a lamp in the middle of the room.

[16:35] Scarlett: But there's *nothing* there.

[16:35] Scarlett: Like, if I put my hand into the light...

[16:35] Violet: Don't do that!

[16:35] Scarlett: No, look, it's fine.

[16:35] Violet: I don't think you should do that again.

[16:35] Kurt: Look guys, seriously. It must be a hologram or something. There must be a projector somewhere.

[16:36] Violet: I'm telling you. This room is totally empty, and I know what a hologram projector looks like. Plus there's no hologram that can do what's happening here.

[16:37] Scarlett: There's just nothing there. Just light.

[16:37] Violet: Seriously, K-meister. What could make this happen?

[16:37] Violet: And is it likely to eat our faces?

[16:37] Kurt: Well...

[16:38] Scarlett: Well?

[16:38] Kurt: Probably not.

[16:38] Scarlett: It's really pretty.

[16:38] Scarlett: The light is kinda... twinkly.

[16:39] Violet: I may regret saying this but, just to prove the point, I'm going to close the door.

[16:39] Violet: It's a blast-door. No light source could pass through it.

[16:39] Violet: There, see. There's light in the middle of the room.

[16:39] Scarlett: I feel like I could just pick it up and take it with us.

[16:39] Violet: I think we should move on.

[16:40] Scarlett: Hmm. Radiation lab.

[16:40] Scarlett: Is there some cool, fun, non-lethal kind of radiation to which this could be referring?

[16:41] Kurt: I doubt it

[16:41] Violet: I think we're going to give that whole room a miss.

[16:41] Violet: No point solving one of the foundational mysteries of our civilisation and then dying slowly of wasting diseases.

[16:43] Violet: Energy lab here

[16:43] Scarlett: Sounds exciting

[16:43] Violet: Unfortunately we can't get in this one either, it's sealed shut by blast doors with very scary glyphs on them.

[16:44] Violet: There's a bunch of cables leading off from here to the other floors.

[16:44] Kurt: I suppose this is the thing that could be powering the facility

[16:46] Violet: Finally, a room which we can actually enter: the offices

[16:47] Violet: Cleaned out again, no papers.

[16:47] Scarlett: There's a picture on the wall.

[16:47] Violet: Oh! I recognise them! Or at least, I recognise two of them.

[16:47] Scarlett: Hey, I know her.

[16:47] Violet: Yup.

[16:47] Violet: That, dear Scarlett, is our distant ancestor, Vianne Adamek herself.

[16:48] Scarlett: She looks nothing like mummy.

[16:48] Violet: Oh well.

[16:48] Violet: And that's Rifa Woad of the Perplex City Defence Forces.

[16:49] Scarlett: We learned about her in conflict history I think.

[16:49] Scarlett: Who's the third one?

[16:49] Violet: According to the inscription, that's Mountling.

[16:50] Scarlett: Huh. That's her.

[16:50] Scarlett: She's quite pretty!

[16:50] Violet: Because yes, Scarlett, that's how we should be judging one of the most brilliant minds of her generation.

[16:50] Scarlett: I was only *saying*.

[16:50] Scarlett: What's this written here? I can't make it

out.

[16:51] Violet: It's a quotation from Adamek

[16:51] Violet: "This isn't just a magical peephole, ladies and gentlemen. A device that can transmit light from any point to any other can do anything."

[16:52] Violet: So, Kurt. Is everything becoming clear or just getting more confusing?

[16:52] Kurt: I think it's a bit of both.

[16:53] Kurt: Clearly they were investigating the properties of this 'material' that makes up the Cube... and it sound like its capabilities are vast

[16:53] Violet: Hmm

[16:54] Violet: Moving on for now...

[16:54] Scarlett: Vacuum lab

[16:54] Scarlett: I wonder what that means

[16:54] Scarlett: Apart from there being a vacuum inside, obviously

[16:55] Violet: Well, we can't get in here either. Same old blast doors. But there's damage.

[16:56] Scarlett: Yeah... it's blackened all over, and some bits look newer than others.

[16:57] Violet: There's a little sign here, on the side.

[16:57] Scarlett: They like their signs, don't they?

[16:58] Violet: "In memory of Cook and Kennard, who reached the stars"

[17:00] Scarlett: How sad.

[17:00] Kurt: I wonder who this Kennard was... there's a family of old pre-war Kennards, but not much about him.

[17:01] Violet: The last room in this zone is the computer room.

[17:01] Violet: Even weirder and more sophisticated than the ones on the other levels.

[17:01] Violet: And of course, there's a corridor here.

[17:02] Violet: So, K-dog, you know what we were saying over the weekend?

[17:02] Kurt: Violet. I am neither a dog, nor a meister. I am a man, yes, but not a 'K-man'

[17:03] Violet: Sorry, I couldn't see that last message. But about the floor plan.

[17:03] Scarlett: What about the floor plan?

[17:04] Violet: We were saying how much it looks like... well. It looks like the 3rd Power symbol.

[17:04] Scarlett: I think I just got a chill down my spine.

[17:04] Violet: Either that or the shadow men are coming for you.

[17:04] Scarlett: Don't say that!

[17:04] Scarlett: That's really creepy.

[17:05] Violet: The question is, what does it mean?

[17:05] Kurt: Could just be a coincidence.

[17:06] Violet: Right. The floor plans of the Lancewood

Lab, researching the Cube, being identical to the group who claim the Cube is theirs?

[17:06] Kurt: Okay, maybe not, then.

[17:07] Violet: But did the 3P steal the symbol? Did they build the labs? Was the Academy the same thing as the 3P before the war?

[17:07] Scarlett: And if the 3P built the Cube, was it them who used it to destroy the city? While they were safe here at Lancewood?

[17:07] Violet: What makes you think it's a weapon?

[17:07] Scarlett: I don't know. Adamek said it can do anything.

[17:08] Scarlett: I think I'm scared.

[17:08] Violet: You know. I'm sure "anything" doesn't mean "everything".

[17:08] Violet: Can it create chocolate milkshake? Probably not.

[17:08] Violet: Can it turn back time? I shouldn't think so, given that this lab wasn't actually built in a day.

[17:08] Violet: Can it mend a broken heart?

[17:09] Violet: OK, now I'm sickening even myself.

[17:09] Scarlett: It's OK. I think I feel a bit better now.

[17:09] Violet: Right. Onward.

[17:10] Violet: The stores are at the other end of this corridor.

[17:11] Scarlett: Mmm, Academy chocolate

[17:11] Scarlett: We should tell dad to make this stuff.

[17:12] Violet: And we've got a computer room... no, looks like a server room... to the east

[17:13] Violet: Room to the west of the stores is the workshop

[17:14] Violet: All sorts of high tech machining tools. And weapons.

[17:14] Scarlett: I don't think I've ever seen a gun in real life.

[17:14] Violet: I suggest we *don't* touch them.

[17:14] Violet: Last thing we want to do is let off a centuries-old weapon of unknown power.

[17:15] Violet: Scarlett, that means you. No touching. Not even a little bit. Save your curiosity for the squid.

[17:15] Violet: We're moving on.

[17:15] Scarlett: The infirmary's next.

[17:16] Violet: How appropriate. Next to the weapons.

[17:16] Violet: Various kits, labelled: radiation exposure, burns, frost damage.

[17:16] Scarlett: Suicide pills.

[17:17] Violet: Where?

[17:18] Scarlett: Here. In a nice tin box with a neat label.

[17:18] Violet: One presumes they didn't have to use them, then. If they're still here.

[17:18] Scarlett: Can we go on?
[17:18] Violet: These seem to be administration offices.
[17:19] Violet: Granier and Mountling have offices next door to each other. How sweet.
[17:19] Violet: There's even a connecting door! Wait, you don't think they used that for...?
[17:19] Scarlett: Doesn't your office connect to someone else, Kurt?
[17:19] Kurt: Caine. And this line of thought stops here
[17:20] Violet: So there are a few papers in Granier's desk. Do you think this is what he meant his children to find?
[17:20] Scarlett: Look at this. "The Viehattle Group."
[17:20] Scarlett: Jonathan Sikander, executed on Granier's orders following his leaking of information. Mary and David Ward were confined and 'aggressively questioned'.
[17:21] Scarlett: Happened in December 1736, and the report says that Viehattle formally broke the cease-fire against Perplex City and joined Anjsbourg at that time.
[17:21] Scarlett: Execution. Ugh.
[17:22] Violet: I suppose he did want his children to "forgive" him.
[17:23] Violet: There are a lot of papers here, it'll take a while to go through them.
[17:23] Violet: Let's have a look at Mountling's office first.
[17:23] Scarlett: Nice.
[17:23] Violet: Very plush indeed.
[17:24] Scarlett: And look, some sort of work journal!
[17:26] Violet: Sigh
[17:26] Kurt: What's that?
[17:27] Violet: This writing is tiny, plus Mountling's using an odd dialect.
[17:27] Violet: Let's see...
[17:28] Violet: March 4th. First sample arrives in PR1. Intense optical and - I think - magnetic observation, using resonance imaging.
[17:29] Violet: March 10th. Coherence = 0.17s. Must increase - exponential effects.
[17:30] Violet: July 1732. Doping began last month... increases coherence time, easier control.
[17:30] Violet: It's hard to tell whether I'm translating this right... the terms are very different from what I learned in college.
[17:31] Kurt: Makes broad sense to me so far, keep on going.
[17:32] Violet: November - Breakthrough! Molecular processors. Must interface with own systems to dampen loops. Coherence at 9s.
[17:33] Violet: A later entry has something about requesting more authors... no, sorry, programmers, for Lancewood.
[17:33] Scarlett: I can't believe you can read that stuff.
[17:33] Violet: Hey, remember, this is what I do!
[17:34] Scarlett: Except when you're not playing poker or moping around.
[17:34] Kurt: Ahem.
[17:34] Violet: Indeed.
[17:35] Violet: There's a big stretch of stuff which is just indecipherable... I can't make out anything until three years later. November 1735.
[17:35] Violet: Researchers require more material; beginning to reach physical limits.
[17:39] Violet: Also, "Received proposal for combining material with facsimile thought. Even optical connects are too slow - material needs embedded reflexive controller."
[17:40] Scarlett: What's that supposed to mean?
[17:40] Kurt: Sorry guys, mislabeled some of the rooms. Fixed now.
[17:41] Scarlett: Honestly Kurt, what would Dad think?
[17:41] Violet: Ach, this is just too frustrating.
[17:41] Violet: I'll try one last bit.
[17:43] Violet: Next entry is in December. "Have proposed Northern Expedition to Adamek. Must discover method to mine and safely transport more material. Request political support."
[17:43] Violet: That's it, I'm done. I can't read this right now.
[17:44] Scarlett: Yeah, it was getting boring. Let's head out.
[17:44] Scarlett: This is another office. Administration.
[17:44] Violet: Nice and empty. No obscure diaries.
[17:45] Violet: Big room full of generators and electrical equipment, but mostly all mothballed.
[17:46] Kurt: I suppose if the Energy lab is powering everything, there wasn't any need for the generators any more.
[17:46] Violet: Makes sense.
[17:46] Violet: Finally, meeting room and toilets.
[17:47] Scarlett: I'm just going to dash inside, sorry.
[17:49] Scarlett: OK, I'm back. I was thinking...
[17:49] Violet: I thought I could smell the wood burning.
[17:49] Scarlett: Do you think we should, you know, tell someone about all of this?
[17:50] Violet: Who would we tell?
[17:50] Scarlett: I don't know. The police maybe?
[17:50] Kurt: Even Helena Frye's not sure we can trust them. They hardly seem to know what's going on themselves.

[17:50] Scarlett: The government?

[17:59] Scarlett: See you!

[17:51] Violet: Well we *know* we can't trust them.
Remember Karen Moro?

[17:52] Kurt: Yeah, her handler must have had some sort of governmental influence, given the way they used her dad.

[17:52] Scarlett: What about Dad?

[17:52] Violet: ...

[17:52] Scarlett: Yeah

[17:52] Violet: I'm sorry.

[17:53] Scarlett: Maybe we should tell, you know, everyone.

[17:53] Violet: In a leaflet-drop?

[17:54] Scarlett: No. I mean, we take everything we've found to the press. If we don't know what the government would do with it, and we can't trust the police and Dad is, might be.... Maybe telling everyone's safer than only telling a few people.

[17:54] Violet: I don't think we're there yet.

[17:54] Kurt: Yup. This isn't really news. It all happened centuries ago.

[17:54] Violet: But it's worth thinking about.

[17:54] Violet: K-bird, you and I could perhaps spend some time this evening collating everything we've found into some chronological order?

[17:54] Scarlett: What about me?

[17:55] Violet: Didn't Molly say she and her sister are squid-munching this evening?

[17:55] Scarlett: I'm not sure I'm in the mood.

[17:55] Violet: You should go. You'll enjoy it once you've got going.

[17:55] Scarlett: Yeah, maybe.

[17:55] Scarlett: OK then. We're going back to the port.

[17:55] Violet: Maybe you can keep an eye on the power overnight Kurt, see if you can spot where that outage started. I might be able to fix it.

[17:56] Kurt: I'm not staying up all night for that. But, OK, if I spot something I'll let you know.

[17:56] Violet: I figure we'll come back around the same time tomorrow to have a look at Mounting and Granier's files a bit more.

[17:58] Kurt: Can't you take them with you?

[17:58] Scarlett: Uh, I don't think so, Kurt.

[17:58] Violet: They're huge. Plus, we're in no hurry right now.

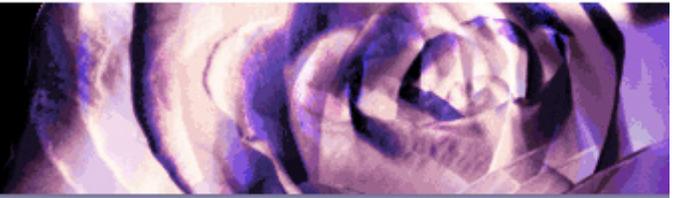
[17:58] Kurt: Fine, fine.

[17:58] Violet: Plus, you're not here to carry them for us.

[17:59] Kurt: Ah, so the real reason comes out!

[17:59] Violet: Hah, yep. See you tomorrow, Kurt!

[17:59] Kurt: Bye!



 Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Awkward

Category: me

Time: 06:00 PM

We've discovered some interesting pieces of historical information in our investigations of the labs under the ruined lighthouse. Yesterday's is here and this is today's if you want to check out our conversation. And if awkward conversations between possibly-ex non-boyfriends and girlfriends do not make your eyes bleed.

I'm Violet, so you don't have to be. I'm a history geek. I neither cook nor sing. I love my city to the point of obsession. I do not suffer fools gladly. I have a soft spot for Alejo, even though I know he's sold out. You don't want to play poker with me. I'm fond of words, the more unusual the better.

-  [Words](#)
-  [About Me](#)
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-  [XML/RSS](#)

[16:04] Violet: Kurt, you around?

[16:06] Scarlett: He's probably off reconfiguring the discombobulator or something

[16:07] Violet: Or hacking into the Academy's secret orbital weapons platform

[16:09] Scarlett: I bet he's stuck in a meeting with Garnet again

[16:10] Kurt: Sorry I'm late guys

[16:10] Kurt: I was stuck in a meeting. With your dad, actually.

[16:10] Violet: Oh yeah?

[16:12] Kurt: It was one of those open-ended meetings where I wasn't entirely sure what he wanted to know

[16:13] Kurt: But I think he's coming under a lot of political pressure, and he's concerned about Garnet's apparent expansion of authority

[16:13] Scarlett: Usual stuff then

[16:13] Scarlett: So are we going to go in, or what?

[16:13] Kurt: Go ahead

[16:15] Kurt: Could you check something for me though?

[16:15] Violet: The electricity again?

[16:15] Kurt: Yeah, more power glitches overnight.

[16:16] Violet: Want me to try the power again in the unloading bay?

[16:16] Kurt: Yeah, thanks.

[16:16] Violet: Just turned it off

[16:16] Kurt: Okay, I'm going to run some diagnostics

[16:17] Scarlett: What do you think the power glitches are?

[16:17] Kurt: I'm not sure.

[16:17] Kurt: I suppose it's hardly surprising from a facility that's almost 300 years old and has, apparently, been running constantly

[16:18] Kurt: But it just strikes me as being odd. Maybe there's something running on a timer or some power draw I don't know about yet.

[16:19] Kurt: Could be something interesting, could be nothing.

[16:19] Kurt: Can you turn the lights back on again?

[16:19] Violet: Done.

[16:19] Violet: So...?

[16:20] Kurt: So I'm not imagining things, there really was a power glitch last night, and it went farther into level 1 than before.

[16:20] Scarlett: Is it because we're here?

[16:21] Kurt: Maybe, but for all we know, it's been doing this every day for the last couple of centuries.

[16:21] Violet: Well, it's just speculation at the moment, so let's get on with it.

[16:23] Violet: I want to check out those files from Granier and Mountling again.

[16:23] Scarlett: Down to level 3 again. Fun.

[16:24] Kurt: Wow, I didn't know your key could transmit sarcasm.

[16:24] Violet: Yeah, it was an automatic upgrade when she turned 16.

[16:24] Scarlett: Very funny.

[16:25] Violet: See, it works so well!

[16:25] Violet: Okay, Mountling's desk. Time to get stuck in.

[16:26] Scarlett: Mind if I have a look around while you read through this stuff?

[16:26] Violet: Go ahead. I guess we won't be doing much exploring today anyway.

[16:27] Kurt: Are you trying Mountling's journal again?

[16:28] Violet: Yeah. I think I should have more luck today, I looked up some resources last night about the quirks of her particular dialect.

[16:29] Violet: Right. June 1736.

[16:30] Violet: "Targeting range and precision vastly improved today. Problem: horizon is still unstable, and functioning is highly susceptible to ... fields."

[16:31] Kurt: What's ... ?

[16:32] Violet: Electromagnetic, I suppose.

[16:34] Violet: It goes on: "Engineers have informed me that the facsimile thought processors are so small they can be overwhelmed by the material's functions."

[16:34] Violet: Then it just gets way too technical. All sorts of sketches and untranslatable scientific terms.

[16:35] Violet: I'll go forward a bit.

[16:35] Violet: February 1737. Aha.

[16:36] Violet: "Construction of GP-SCMS began this week. Some scientists are already calling it the 'Cube'. Have tried to discourage this line of thought, but it seems that old traditions die hard."

[16:37] Kurt: Any indication what she means by that?

[16:37] Violet: The traditions? Not sure; there's still a lot about pre-war history we don't know.

[16:37] Kurt: Humanities students, typical.

[16:39] Violet: "Our last attempt at compensating for EM interference failed, so I had no choice but to authorise construction of the Quiet Room. Woad will not be happy, but Adamek assures me she can deal with her."

[16:41] Violet: I can see the Quiet Room mentioned again further along in her journal, but it's not clear where or what it is, except for that Adamek visited it the next month.

[16:43] Violet: The writing here is more... irritated.

[16:43] Kurt: Really.

[16:44] Violet: Yes. If you actually read any books, Kurt, then you would be able to notice how handwriting varies

depending on the writer's mood.

[16:44] Violet: Evidently the Adamek visit wasn't all that fun.

[16:45] Violet: She's written down a bit of dialogue here.

[16:46] Violet: "It has thought?"

[16:48] Violet: "Nothing that you would call thought, Master Adamek. It has intelligence, of a sort, but it can neither talk nor think."

[16:48] Violet: "What exactly is it for, then?"

[16:49] Violet: "It needs a weak intelligence to govern the trillions of material processors inside it, but you have no reason to worry. It has no capacity to disobey than any of your lackeys."

[16:50] Kurt: Ouch.

[16:50] Violet: I take it you don't speak to dad like that?

[16:50] Kurt: Not if I want to keep my job.

[16:52] Violet: I wonder what their relationship was like... Chief Scientist of Lancewood, and apparent creator of the Cube, and the Master of the Academy.

[16:53] Kurt: Unstable, clearly

[16:55] Violet: I wonder where Scarlett went off to

[16:56] Scarlett: I'm in the rec room

[16:57] Scarlett: I found a bunch of old newspapers

[16:57] Kurt: Anything else from Mountling?

[16:58] Violet: Yes, but not that I can read. Her writing gets very frazzled in the months after that entry. Not very surprising, given the catastrophe wasn't far off.

[16:59] Violet: I'm going to switch over to Granier's papers, I can read his stuff easier.

[17:01] Kurt: I forget to mention.

[17:01] Kurt: A certain someone came back from his wildly-extended holiday.

[17:02] Caine: Hey.

[17:03] Caine: Is this a private secret mission, or can anyone watch?

[17:03] Violet: Hey

[17:03] Violet: You know we have an audience, right?

[17:03] Violet: Although, Scarlett and I were saying we might stay here tonight to check up on the power glitches, so it's not like there's another way to say, you know, "hey".

[17:03] Caine: I'm not planning on getting involved. Just saying hi. Or "hey".

[17:04] Caine: Where's Lettie?

[17:04] Scarlett: I'm here! Hello!!

[17:04] Scarlett: /me waves

[17:04] Caine: Hey, cutie.

[17:04] Violet: Erm. Yeah. Maybe you could give us a moment?

[17:04] Scarlett: Sulk. Not like it's private anyway.

[17:05] Caine: Nothing ever is.

[17:05] Scarlett: And hello cutie yourself ;)

[17:05] Violet: Hmmm

[17:06] Caine: Listen to your big sis now :)

[17:06] Scarlett: Yawn. All she says is "don't touch that, don't eat those, put down that squid."

[17:06] Violet: So, Caine, how are you?

[17:06] Caine: Intrigued. Amused. You?

[17:07] Violet: I think there's a spider in my hair but I'm trying not to make a big deal about it.

[17:08] Caine: Mind it doesn't bite.

[17:08] Violet: Chance'd be a fine thing.

[17:08] Caine: Getting lonely out on that barren rock?

[17:08] Scarlett: She is! She is! She keeps on talking about you!

[17:09] Violet: Scarlett. You know if you disappeared down here no one would ever find your body, right?

[17:09] Caine: Funny. People keep talking about Violet round here.

[17:09] Violet: Hah. Well. Scarlett and her new squid-fetish aren't proving the *best* company it's true...

[17:09] Violet: I suppose that's a yes.

[17:10] Caine: You should be more careful with your flapping tongue. You're getting a reputation round the CRT, you know. Garnet reckons he's next in line.

[17:10] Violet: Huh?

[17:10] Violet: Oh for the love of Gyvann.

[17:10] Violet: ...

[17:10] Caine: Bruno told me about your night out.

[17:11] Violet: /me is struck dumb

[17:12] Scarlett: That's a first

[17:12] Caine: I'm enjoying the silence.

[17:12] Violet: You can tell Garnet he has nothing to fear from me. I know he's spoken for.

[17:13] Caine: I'll be sure to pass that on.

[17:13] Violet: I don't mean that otherwise I would...

[17:13] Violet: Oh ("&()!!&£"

[17:13] Caine: Don't you have adventuring to do?

[17:13] Violet: Yeah. Look.

[17:14] Scarlett: Go on, say it.

[17:14] Violet: Just. Sorry. For saying that stuff about the thing, you know?

[17:14] Caine: It's okay. Just go. Go and risk your neck.

[17:15] Kurt: If you're *quite* done, you two, let's get back to work.

[17:15] Violet: Yeah. OK. Look. Maybe we can have an awkward and embarrassing chat again sometime in the future?

[17:15] Caine: You know where I am.

[17:15] Violet: I can always send the K-man to fetch you.

[17:16] Kurt: Or maybe you couldn't.

[17:17] Violet: So, Granier's files.

[17:19] Violet: There's a big bunch of papers from December 1736, which would be around when he got first arrived here, at least according to this chronology one of the guys on Earth, Rose, I think, sent me last night.

[17:20] Violet: The first one is a communique from the military, saying that Viehattle just broke the cease-fire against Perplex City.

[17:21] Violet: There's some analysis from the military's intelligence officers suggesting that it might have been connected to the material research programme.

[17:22] Violet: Basically, Viehattle may have found out more about what was going on at Lancewood than they should've known.

[17:24] Kurt: Perplex City certainly didn't have many friends back then.

[17:26] Violet: Ah, something interesting from only a couple of weeks after he arrived.

[17:26] Violet: "21 December 1736. The solstice of the cube was celebrated this day, but it was a fell fete indeed."

[17:28] Violet: "The Viehattle spies are convicted from out their own mouths."

[17:28] Violet: "Sikander went before the rifles proclaiming that victory should be theirs afore the season turns again."

[17:28] Violet: "A most distasteful spectacle. The men of Viehattle, if men they be rightly called, have none of the honor of a Plexian-born."

[17:30] Violet: "I have ordered the Wards confined, although the chances that they have obtained vital knowledge is slim indeed."

[17:31] Violet: "The men have made a joke of the matter. "Who shall ward the Wards?" they ask merrily."

[17:32] Violet: "There is a wariness now, though, about the place. Each man looks to his fellow and wonders if he, too, might plot our end."

[17:33] Scarlett: Check it out!

[17:33] Violet: Check what out?

[17:34] Scarlett: One of the newspapers I found in the rec room is about Viehattle taking Viendenbourg

[17:34] Violet: Huh

[17:35] Scarlett: "Fierce fighting sees Viendenbourg fall to Viehattle - August 1737"

[17:35] Kurt: Hmm

[17:35] Violet: Interesting how this all fits together. I've got more from Granier as well.

[17:36] Violet: "1 May 1737: Dread news from our spies in Viehattle. I can scarce keep my cry of "wanion" locked in my breast."

[17:36] Violet: "Their foul work continues, bringing with it the terror of evil rains upon us all."

[17:37] Violet: "The Master has perused the reports. She is certain that they now have set objects in the firmament."

[17:37] Violet: "These weapons defy all natural law. We must now live in constant fear of what may drop upon us from the very skies."

[17:38] Kurt: Wow. I had no idea they were that advanced.

[17:39] Violet: There are a bunch more administrative records, but there's another journal right at the end.

[17:40] Violet: "13 July 1737: At last, a triumph worthy of all we have dreamed!"

[17:41] Violet: "My time here draws to a close - EM and I debated long into the night whom I should take with me to the city of the stout-hearted men and women of Lancewood."

[17:41] Violet: "I shall be sorry to bid her farewell, for we have been excellent companions to one another."

[17:42] Violet: "But we shall surely meet again when this dark horror is at an end. As it shall surely be, since our creation dwarfs all others."

[17:42] Violet: And that's it. That's what Granier did.

[17:42] Kurt: The question is, of course, what happened after he left?

[17:42] Violet: Yes...

[17:43] Violet: There might be more around the labs, or in Mountling's files, I suppose.

[17:44] Violet: But that'll have to wait. We're off to set up our camp here before it gets too dark outside.

[17:44] Violet: We have to get supplies from the boat.

[17:45] Caine: You're camping outside?

[17:45] Scarlett: It's going to be like a slumber party!

[17:45] Violet: You're still there?

[17:46] Caine: On a rock. In the ocean.

[17:46] Caine: (The slumber party, that is.)

[17:46] Violet: Kurt, you haven't got, like, my dad and my college boyfriend there too?

[17:46] Scarlett: Well, I wanted to go back to the port for more squid fun with Molly!

[17:46] Caine: Don't blame him. I've tunneled in from next door.

[17:46] Scarlett: But Vi won't let me.

[17:47] Scarlett: /me pouts

[17:47] Caine: Let the girl have some fun, Vi.

[17:47] Violet: You don't have to *see it*.

[17:47] Caine: A mouthful of squid never hurt anyone.

[17:47] Violet: We're not all such squid fans as you are.

[17:48] Caine: Ah, of course - you prefer a helping of

tongue.

[17:48] Violet: OK, time for us to go then Scarlett.

[17:48] Caine: Look after her, Lettie. She tends to go wandering.

[17:48] Scarlett: What does he mean when he says... *oh*

[17:48] Scarlett: :)

[17:48] Scarlett: We'll just be braiding each other's hair tonight and eating marshmallows.

[17:49] Caine: Well, you take what you can get, I suppose.

[17:49] Violet: Yup. We'll probably look around some more about 3pm tomorrow?

[17:49] Violet: But Kurt, you'll wake us up if that power fluctuation happens again?

[17:49] Violet: So we can check it out.

[17:49] Kurt: Yeah, I'll be keeping an eye on it.

[17:49] Violet: Cool

[17:50] Caine: Sleep well. Mind the ghosts.

[17:50] Scarlett: Don't worry. Vi can just eat their faces.

[17:50] Violet: Enough now.

[17:50] Caine: G'night.

[17:50] Violet: G'night

[17:50] Kurt: Bye all

[17:51] Scarlett: Bye Caine and Kurt!

[23:15] Kurt: Hey

[23:17] Violet: I just got an alarm from you

[23:17] Violet: What's up?

[23:19] Violet: What happened?

[23:19] Scarlett: It's probably a mouse

[23:20] Kurt: I'm double-checking this, but it looks like the power is out in two rooms on L1

[23:20] Violet: Hmm. Shall we go and check it out?

[23:20] Kurt: That'd be helpful

[23:21] Kurt: It's the radio room and unloading bay

[23:21] Scarlett: Midnight adventure!

[23:21] Violet: I'll take the crowbar, just in case.

[23:21] Scarlett: Did you hear something?

[23:22] Violet: What?

[23:22] Scarlett: Just then? A door opening?

[23:22] Violet: I didn't hear anything. Where do you think it came from?

[23:22] Scarlett: Don't know. Maybe I'm imagining it.

[23:22] Kurt: Where are you?

[23:23] Violet: Just walking through the main corridor now.

[23:24] Violet: Heading for the control panel - the one interfaced with the key

[23:25] Violet: If there is someone here, it's probably just one of the kids from the town on a dare.

[23:25] Scarlett: I don't like it.

[23:28] Kurt: How's it going?

[23:28] Violet: Everything here looks intact.

[23:28] Violet: Key's still functioning.

[23:29] Kurt: That's good news

[23:29] Scarlett: So why aren't the lights on?

[23:29] Scarlett: /me flips switch back and forth.

[23:29] Violet: Probably just a dodgy connection.

[23:30] Violet: Can you turn the power back on from there, Kurt?

[23:30] Kurt: Does it look like any of the lights are blown?

[23:30] Violet: We checked coming through, couldn't see any damage. Although we wouldn't be able to see the wiring of course.

[23:31] Scarlett: Is it dangerous to turn the lights on again?

[23:31] Kurt: Shouldn't be. Just a moment.

[23:31] Scarlett: Hurrah!

[23:32] Kurt: Can you try switching the power on and off from there again?

[23:32] Violet: Sure.

[23:32] Violet: Seems to work fine now.

[23:32] Violet: It is weird though.

[23:32] Violet: Maybe the labs are on a power cycle of some kind. But why would they be?

[23:33] Scarlett: Could it be a power surge in old wiring? Like in Uncle Sanjean's house?

[23:33] Violet: Hmm. Maybe.

[23:33] Violet: We're not going to sort this out tonight though. We'll go back to bed and look again tomorrow.

[23:34] Scarlett: Good night Kurt! Thank you!

[23:34] Kurt: No problem. I'll be sure to wake you up if there are any further oddities during the night. See you tomorrow otherwise.

[15:56] Kurt: Hi guys

[15:56] Violet: Hey Kurt

[15:57] Violet: I've been down in Mountling's office for the past while trying to make sense of her journals

[15:57] Kurt: Any luck?

[15:59] Violet: Not really

[15:59] Violet: I'm coming to the conclusion that some of it might be about her lunch.

[16:00] Violet: Or when she and Granier had their trysts.

[16:00] Scarlett: What's this bit, with the exclamation mark?

[16:00] Violet: Oh yes, that one's relevant.

[16:01] Violet: From when Viehattle took Viendenbourg.

[16:01] Violet: She says: mining has begun again under V.ht. The city cannot brook this.

[16:02] Scarlett: They were mining at Viendenbourg when I was there, I thought.

[16:03] Scarlett: Can there really be anything left to mine?

[16:03] Scarlett: Do you think that stuff, the stuff they were mining, is what they unloaded in the unloading bay on L1?

[16:04] Violet: Could have been. How dangerous do we think it was?

[16:04] Violet: What's next to the unloading bay? Not the labs?

[16:04] Kurt: Let me check

[16:04] Kurt: Radio room

[16:04] Kurt: Hold on

[16:05] Kurt: Power is out in three rooms on L1

[16:06] Scarlett: What's happened?

[16:06] Violet: Kurt, can you see what the problem is?

[16:06] Kurt: Same as yesterday, but even more widespread

[16:06] Scarlett: Is it the same power outage?

[16:07] Kurt: Could be.

[16:07] Violet: Did you work out what was going on last night?

[16:07] Kurt: Nope, didn't have time. Can you go up and check it for me?

[16:07] Violet: Hmm

[16:07] Scarlett: I'll go.

[16:07] Scarlett: I don't have anything to do here anyway.

[16:08] Scarlett: Since Vi's got her nose in an old book again.

[16:08] Scarlett: She needs to learn about the joys of squid.

[16:08] Kurt: Thanks, Scarlett

[16:09] Violet: OK, take the torch.

[16:09] Violet: I think I'm going to have to bring these files back to the city you know.

[16:10] Violet: There are so many - I really need to cross-reference.

[16:10] Violet: How's it going Lettie?

[16:10] Scarlett: I'm at the lift, about to go up.

[16:10] Violet: Also, Mountling had really bad handwriting.

[16:10] Scarlett: All you ever think about is cross-referencing.

[16:10] Scarlett: OK, arriving at L1

[16:11] Kurt: So what does it look like?

[16:11] Scarlett: It's dark, just like yesterday.

[16:11] Scarlett: I'll go to the control panel, see if I can see anything.

[16:12] Kurt: Check for signs of damage

[16:12] Violet: Careful you don't trip over.

[16:12] Kurt: Another room's just gone out - the generator

[16:12] Scarlett: Oh!

[16:12] Violet: What?

[16:12] Kurt: What?

[16:13] Scarlett: I thought I just heard something.

[16:13] Violet: I'm sure it's nothing Lettie. Want me to come up?

[16:13] Scarlett: No, it's fine.

[16:13] Scarlett: Uh oh.

[16:13] Violet: What?

[16:13] Kurt: What?

[16:13] Scarlett: Um.

[16:14] Scarlett: I don't think the control panel looked like *that* yesterday.

[16:14] Violet: Like what?

[16:14] Scarlett: Well, I don't know. It looks kinda, a bit... melty?

[16:14] Kurt: What do you mean, melty?

[16:15] Scarlett: The colours aren't the same, looks like they've bled into each other. Like something's broken inside.

[16:15] Violet: The equipment here is quite old.

[16:15] Violet: Can you see anything else?

[16:16] Scarlett: OK, I *definitely* heard something that time.

[16:16] Scarlett: Like someone howling?

[16:16] Violet: OK, now I *know* you're imagining it.

[16:17] Violet: I should never have let you eat all that squid. Dad always said nice girls don't eat squid.

[16:17] Scarlett: Yeah, maybe.

[16:17] Scarlett: Look, is it OK if I go outside for a few minutes, just to clear my head?

[16:17] Violet: Sure.

[16:17] Violet: Go back to the boat for a bit if you like, or have a walk.

[16:17] Kurt: Something is definitely going on

[16:18] Kurt: The kitchen and dining room power is now out

[16:18] Scarlett: Thanks

[16:18] Scarlett: Oh no.

[16:18] Scarlett: no no no

[16:18] Violet: What?

[16:18] Kurt: What's happening?

[16:19] Scarlett: The door's locked. I can't get out.

[16:19] Kurt: How can it be locked? It doesn't work that way. The magnetic lock should open fine from inside!

[16:19] Scarlett: I don't know how!

[16:19] Scarlett: How am I supposed to know!

[16:20] Violet: Are you sure you didn't just forget how to open it? Try pushing not pulling, sweetie?

[16:20] Scarlett: I am! I am pulling, and pushing!

[16:21] Scarlett: It won't open!

[16:21] Violet: OK, I'm coming upstairs.

[16:21] Scarlett: I'm scared.

[16:21] Scarlett: Is there anywhere with light on this level, Kurt?

[16:22] Kurt: All power on L1 is out, and I can't restart it

[16:22] Scarlett: I can definitely hear something now.

[16:22] Scarlett: There's someone here!

[16:23] Kurt: Scarlett, try and find a place to hide

[16:23] Violet: Kurt. The lift's not working.

[16:23] Violet: I need to get up there *right now*.

[16:23] Kurt: I don't know how anyone could break the power like this

[16:23] Violet: *Right now*, Kurt.

[16:23] Kurt: I can't move it!

[16:23] Kurt: Someone's already in the lift, they've blocked control or corrupted the systems or something.

[16:23] Violet: Scarlett, sweetheart, listen to Kurt.

[16:24] Kurt: The lift's stuck on L2 now

[16:24] Violet: Stay in the storage room

[16:24] Violet: Remember the big crates?

[16:24] Violet: Hide in one of those.

[16:25] Scarlett: I could hear someone. There was someone here, at least one person but maybe more.

[16:25] Violet: OK. I'm going to the workshop.

[16:25] Kurt: For what?

[16:25] Violet: Weapons.

[16:25] Caine: Hey.

[16:25] Violet: Scarlett, it sounds like whoever's inside is on Level 2 now - I need you to work out how to get the doors open honey.

[16:26] Kurt: See if there's anything blocking the doors. Take your time.

[16:26] Violet: Have you still got the crowbar?

[16:26] Violet: Caine. WTF?

[16:26] Caine: Hold on. I'm going to read back.

[16:26] Violet: OK. I have a gun. Or something that looks like a gun. In fact, I have a couple of them.

[16:27] Violet: If all else fails I can throw them.

[16:27] Kurt: Do you even know how to use a gun?

[16:27] Caine: Lettie, are you still there?

[16:27] Violet: It can't be that hard.

[16:27] Kurt: It also happens to be very dangerous

[16:27] Violet: Scarlett, sweetheart, what are you doing?

[16:28] Violet: What's the situation on L2 Kurt?

[16:28] Kurt: Four rooms are out. Seems to be in a linear order.

[16:28] Caine. Whoa... Vi, are you safe with those things?

[16:29] Scarlett: I'm OK.

[16:29] Scarlett: Things up here are... smashed.

[16:29] Scarlett: I don't think there's anyone left up here.

[16:29] Violet: OK, that's good.

[16:29] Scarlett: The door's still locked. Can you open it Kurt?

[16:29] Kurt: It's not registering on my system, it's like it doesn't exist. Something has screwed up my interface to the Lancewood systems.

[16:30] Violet: Can you try forcing it with the crowbar?

[16:30] Caine: What have you girls been up to over there?

[16:30] Violet: Oh, you know, the usual.

[16:30] Caine: I was afraid of that.

[16:32] Kurt: The power outages on L3 are spreading... guys, this is very bad. I think it's causing electrical surges, and there's some very powerful and dangerous equipment down there.

[16:32] Kurt: You really need to find a way out.

[16:32] Violet: Kurt, is there any way out of this level that doesn't involve the lift?

[16:32] Violet: I don't know who's between me and Lettie but I don't particularly want to find out.

[16:32] Kurt: I'm checking, but I don't think so

[16:32] Scarlett: I'm trying to use the crowbar but it's not working!

[16:32] Scarlett: I'm not strong enough, or the door's jammed too tightly shut.

[16:32] Caine: Vi. Listen carefully. Look for the safe catch on those guns. It should be at the back, near the heel.

[16:32] Scarlett: I'm scared, I'm scared.

[16:33] Violet: Yup, got it.

[16:33] Caine: It will be okay, Lettie.

[16:33] Violet: How do *you* know so much about guns?

[16:33] Caine: Summers at the funfair.

[16:33] Scarlett: What else can I do?

[16:33] Scarlett: Wait! Maybe I can use the radio room to

call for help?

[16:34] Violet: That's a very good idea.

[16:34] Kurt: You'll have to figure out a way to restore power there

[16:34] Caine: Was there any night-vision kit in the armoury?

[16:34] Violet: I think we saw some spare batteries there, didn't we?

[16:34] Violet: You could try hooking one of them up to the radios, like we did in school.

[16:34] Kurt: It should be fairly straightforward

[16:35] Violet: Don't know. What am I looking for?

[16:35] Scarlett: OK.

[16:35] Scarlett: A lot of the radio stuff is smashed too.

[16:35] Scarlett: I don't understand. What do they want?!

[16:35] Caine: Goggles, binoculars - anything that looks like it's a powered visual device.

[16:35] Kurt: Are any of them still intact?

[16:36] Scarlett: I think so.

[16:36] Violet: OK, focus on hooking that up to the battery.

[16:36] Kurt: About two thirds of the power is out on L2 now

[16:37] Violet: Nothing like that.

[16:37] Scarlett: Whoever it is is still on L2, right?

[16:37] Scarlett: Maybe they're just going to leave.

[16:37] Kurt: Yes, but they'd have to come back up to L1 again, Scarlett

[16:37] Caine: You need to find yourself a strong defensive position, Vi. Maybe a corner room.

[16:37] Violet: Um. The lights here just flickered.

[16:37] Violet: There they go again.

[16:37] Scarlett: Vi! Be careful!

[16:38] Violet: I'm OK. It's OK.

[16:38] Kurt: How's it going with the radio?

[16:38] Scarlett: The radio's not working! All I get is static!

[16:38] Kurt: Try changing the frequency or using the presets - the buttons on it.

[16:39] Scarlett: I still can't get anything!

[16:39] Violet: If I go to a corner room I'm too far from the lift.

[16:39] Violet: I might get trapped.

[16:39] Kurt: Damn, the radio might be damaged then

[16:39] Scarlett: Maybe I could try repairing it? There's a lot of parts and wire here.

[16:40] Caine: Is there anywhere to hide? I mean securely.

[16:40] Violet: Old schoolgirl hiding-place? Standing on the loo?

[16:40] Caine: Vents. Trapdoors. Boxes.

[16:41] Kurt: I don't know whether that's a good idea, it might be too difficult

[16:41] Scarlett: I thought you were supposed to know these things Kurt!

[16:41] Violet: We're underground - perhaps the radio needs more power than we can give it.

[16:41] Kurt: Look, I'm trying! But I have no idea what's going on there!

[16:42] Violet: I'm going to head for the light lab.

[16:42] Violet: If all the lights go out, maybe there'll still be light in there.

[16:42] Violet: Whoever it is obviously likes the dark.

[16:42] Scarlett: I'm going to try the lift again.

[16:42] Caine: Don't walk into the light, Vi. Not now ;)

[16:42] Scarlett: If it's working now, maybe I can get out.

[16:43] Violet: Kurt, please slap Caine for me.

[16:43] Violet: That's a good idea Lettie.

[16:43] Violet: If you have the chance to get out, Lettie, *get out*.

[16:43] Violet: OK? No coming down for me.

[16:43] Scarlett: OK.

[16:43] Violet: I can hear the lift moving. Lettie, is that you?

[16:44] Violet: I told you *not* to come down.

[16:44] Scarlett: That's not me.

[16:44] Scarlett: Run, Violet!

[16:44] Caine: Vi. Go.

[16:44] Violet: Oh no.

[16:44] Violet: That sound.. it's...

[16:45] Scarlett: Run!

[16:46] Violet: It's like someone talking, or wailing...

[16:46] Caine: Stop hanging around.

[16:46] Scarlett: Kurt, you need to tell me how to open this door!

[16:47] Violet: I can hear him behind me

[16:47] Violet: Him, or it.

[16:47] Caine: Are you sure there's just one person there?

[16:47] Violet: I'm in the generator room.

[16:47] Violet: I think.. I think I saw something.

[16:48] Violet: The generators just died.

[16:48] Violet: Just, cut out.

[16:48] Scarlett: What did you think you saw?

[16:48] Violet: A shape, like a man, but... fuzzy. I don't know.

[16:48] Scarlett: Kurt, come on!

[16:48] Kurt: I don't have any ideas! If the lock has failed...

[16:48] Violet: I'm going to try to get back to the lifts.

[16:49] Caine: Is he armed?

[16:49] Scarlett: Wait! I'm going back to the radio room!

[16:49] Scarlett: You said the locks were magnetic, right?

[16:49] Violet: No, don't go back!

[16:49] Violet: I don't know, I couldn't see.

[16:50] Violet: I think, I think he/it/they know I'm here.

[16:50] Kurt: Yeah, which means you won't be able to get at them, they're embedded in the door

[16:50] Violet: And words again. Something about... drowning? It's hard to tell, just shrieking.

[16:50] Scarlett: But I can make an electromagnet!

[16:51] Violet: I'm just coming through the workshop.

[16:51] Violet: Wish I knew how to destroy them.

[16:51] Violet: Any ideas on how to locate a grenade, Caine?

[16:51] Violet: Too late.

[16:51] Violet: I'm at the lift..

[16:51] Kurt: What do you mean?

[16:51] Scarlett: There are some big batteries here, and a whole lot of wire.

[16:52] Kurt: A coil!

[16:52] Caine: Get winding, Lettie.

[16:52] Violet: It's not working!

[16:52] Violet: Kurt, I'm running out of options here. I need to get out..

[16:53] Caine: Keep moving, Vi.

[16:53] Violet: I don't want to think about what happens when all the lights go out.

[16:53] Scarlett: What should I wind the wire around?

[16:53] Kurt: You want something thin - use the crowbar

[16:53] Violet: Oh no, that noise.

[16:53] Scarlett: I know, it makes your bones shake.

[16:53] Kurt: Violet, I think I've found something

[16:53] Kurt: I'm turning the emergency lights on

[16:54] Violet: Over and over again about drowning. Like muttered words, and then howling.

[16:54] Scarlett: OK, I'm winding

[16:54] Violet: I can see them.

[16:54] Violet: There are lights in the floor.

[16:54] Violet: Little arrows.

[16:54] Scarlett: I don't think I can do it fast enough!

[16:55] Kurt: You can. Just be calm.

[16:55] Caine: Keep the coil tight, Lettie. You can do this.

[16:55] Violet: I'm following them, they lead past the energy lab.

[16:55] Violet: And into the radiation lab.

[16:56] Kurt: Damn

[16:56] Violet: ...

[16:56] Violet: I don't know what to do.

[16:56] Kurt: I'm looking up the readings on the radiation room

[16:56] Scarlett: Radiation won't kill you as quickly as a shadow man, will it?

[16:56] Kurt: The good news is that it won't kill you instantly

[16:56] Caine: Concentrate, Lettie.

[16:57] Kurt: The bad news is that you have a maximum of five minutes in there before the damage to your body is irreparable

[16:57] Caine: Kurt, get a move on.

[16:58] Kurt: What do you mean, get a move on? There's nothing I can do here.

[16:58] Violet: OK, I'm in.

[16:58] Violet: It's dark in here.

[16:58] Violet: Just the light from the arrows on the floor.

[16:58] Kurt: 4 minutes

[16:58] Violet: Pointing the way to... the filing cabinet?

[16:58] Violet: It's hot, too.

[16:59] Violet: Trying to move the filing cabinet.

[16:59] Scarlett: I think I've got it, I'm hooking up the coil to the battery

[16:59] Violet: Is there any power left on this level?

[16:59] Kurt: Two rooms left, including yours

[16:59] Kurt: 3 minutes

[16:59] Scarlett: I'm waving it by the door but it's not working!

[16:59] Kurt: You need to add more coils. Unhook the wires from the battery.

[17:00] Scarlett: OK, OK!

[17:00] Violet: I hear that noise again.

[17:00] Violet: I can't move it.

[17:00] Violet: How much time have I got?

[17:00] Kurt: 2 minutes, and the only room with power left is yours.

[17:00] Violet: I'm pulling out the drawers of the cabinet.

[17:01] Violet: There's someone outside the door.

[17:01] Scarlett: OK, I'm trying it again now

[17:01] Violet: I can hear that sound again. Horrible low moaning.

[17:01] Kurt: Violet, you've only got 1 minute, you have to get out of there!

[17:01] Violet: OK! I'm moving the cabinet!

[17:02] Scarlett: I think it's working, I can hear something moving in the door

[17:02] Violet: The door's shaking. I locked it but it looks like that's not going to stop them.

[17:02] Violet: There's a door behind the file cabinet!

[17:02] Kurt: Get out of there!

[17:02] Violet: He's coming in!

[17:02] Scarlett: The door's opening!

[17:02] Violet: Oh no no no!

[17:02] Violet: I'm out!

[17:02] Caine: Go! And block that door behind you!

[17:03] Violet: There are stairs, I'm coming Lettie!

[17:03] Violet: I can hear him behind me.

[17:03] DROWNING
[17:03] DROWNING
[17:03] DROWNING
[17:03] Kurt: What the hell is going on there?
[17:03] DROWNING
[17:03] DROWNING
[17:03] DROWNING
[17:03] DROWNING
[17:04] Kurt: Which of you is saying that?
[17:04] Violet: I'm on Level 2!
[17:04] Scarlett: I'm outside, and I'm trying to figure out a way to block the door once we're both out!
[17:04] Violet: Is that door open Lettie?
[17:04] Scarlett: It is!
[17:04] DROWNING
[17:04] DROWNING
[17:04] DROWNING
[17:04] DROWNING
[17:04] Violet: OK, I'm at L1
[17:05] Kurt: What's happening!
[17:05] Violet: We're leaving - Kurt can you lock the door behind us?
[17:05] Kurt: No, I can't!
[17:05] Scarlett: I'm using the crowbar to wedge it shut
[17:05] Violet: Lettie's OK
[17:05] Scarlett: I think that worked
[17:06] Kurt: OK, I've put an override on all systems, that should slow whoever it is inside down.
[17:06] Violet: We're OK, we're OK.
[17:06] Scarlett: I think I'm going to be sick.
[17:06] Caine: Just. Don't. Again. Ever. You hear me?
[17:06] Violet: You know, I. Yes.
[17:07] Violet: We're going back to the boat now.
[17:07] Scarlett: I really think I'm going to be sick.
[17:07] Violet: Caine, I. Thank you.
[17:07] Violet: But not in a sappy way.
[17:08] Violet: See, Scarlett, I told you you shouldn't have eaten all that squid.
[17:08] Scarlett: We left all our stuff in there.
[17:09] Scarlett: And your key.
[17:09] Violet: We're not going back for it. Not today anyway.
[17:10] Kurt: I'm going to keep monitoring the systems as best I can tonight.
[17:10] Kurt: You heading back to the port?
[17:10] Violet: Yes.
[17:10] Violet: But you know
[17:10] Violet: This isn't over.
[17:10] Caine: Vi...
[17:10] Violet: Yes?

[17:11] Caine: You should get yourself checked out. The radiation, you know.
[17:11] Violet: Hmm. Yes.
[17:11] Violet: I'll go to the doctor on the island in the morning.
[17:12] Caine: I think you should go now.
[17:12] Violet: Ok then
[17:12] Caine: Make sure she goes, Lettie.
[17:13] Scarlett: I will.
[17:13] Scarlett: Are those really guns, Vi?
[17:13] Violet: Yeah, I think so.
[17:13] Caine: You can put the safety back on now. Don't want you blowing a hole in the boat.
[17:14] Violet: Good point. You know. I think I might be in shock.
[17:14] Violet: Can you be in shock and know you're in shock?
[17:14] Caine: Lettie, I mean it: make sure she gets to a doctor. Now.
[17:15] Violet: Or is it like being mad, where if you think you are it means you're not?
[17:15] Violet: What *was* that thing down there?
[17:15] Scarlett: Yes.
[17:15] Scarlett: We're going to go now.
[17:15] Caine: Start moving her now.
[17:15] Scarlett: And if we decide to come back, we'll let you know.
[17:16] Kurt: Keep us updated. I'll keep watching the systems overnight.
[17:16] Caine: Don't forget to get yourself checked over too, Lettie. It's been a rough day for you both.
[17:16] Violet: OK, bye then.
[17:16] Violet: And thank you Kurt. And thank you Caine.
[17:17] Caine: Bye, Vi. Take care.
[17:17] Scarlett: Bye!
[17:17] Kurt: See you for now.

[16:11] Violet: Hello

[16:11] Violet: So.

[16:11] Violet: I have new blood

[16:11] Kurt: Hi guys.

[16:11] Kurt: You feeling okay?

[16:12] Scarlett: She does! New blood and new... bone marrow I think?

[16:12] Violet: Yeah. Bleh. It's odd to be walking round entirely filled with someone else's blood.

[16:12] Violet: But they reckon I'll be OK.

[16:12] Kurt: The fact that you're back here suggests you're the same ol' Violet.

[16:13] Violet: They fed me some anti-viral, anti-sense drugs, and did something with some ES cells and as long as I don't spend my next vacation inside a nuclear reactor I'll be fine.

[16:13] Scarlett: And we have weapons!

[16:13] Violet: Not 300-year-old ones this time.

[16:14] Kurt: Who gave *you* guns?

[16:14] Violet: They're surprisingly free with them out here in the sticks.

[16:14] Scarlett: We said we were going after The Big Squid!

[16:14] Kurt: I don't want you getting into a firefight.

[16:14] Violet: We also have high-powered arc-lamps.

[16:14] Violet: Look, we've agreed all this. We have to find out what's going on.

[16:15] Violet: And, apart from giving us a fright, all the whatever-it-is seems to be able to do is turn off the lights.

[16:15] Kurt: Okay, okay. Just be careful.

[16:15] Violet: Which, well, even Caine can do that.

[16:15] Kurt: I haven't seen him around this afternoon. I think he's stuck in a meeting with Garnet.

[16:15] Scarlett: And say DROWNING.

[16:16] Violet: Yeah. It's not nice. But we're going in to get the files, see what we can discover, and if it all looks much too dangerous we'll get out again, OK?

[16:16] Kurt: Agreed. Now unblock the door.

[16:16] Violet: Yup. Looks like it hasn't been disturbed since last night.

[16:16] Violet: How's your connection to the systems here looking?

[16:16] Violet: Can you unlock it from your end?

[16:16] Kurt: Not bad...

[16:17] Kurt: Door unlocked now...

[16:17] Kurt: Going to see what I can do with the lights...

[16:18] Violet: Oh, that's better.

[16:18] Scarlett: Maybe it's gone? The whatever-it-was...?

[16:19] Kurt: Hmm...

[16:19] Scarlett: It doesn't look any different in here to how it looked yesterday!

[16:19] Scarlett: Here's my electromagnet :)

[16:19] Kurt: One sec...

[16:19] Violet: What?

[16:20] Kurt: One of the lights on L3 is flickering. Might just be a loose connection but... I doubt it.

[16:20] Violet: Hmm.

[16:20] Violet: Yes.

[16:20] Kurt: Server room, by the looks of it.

[16:20] Scarlett: The lift's not working though.

[16:21] Kurt: It should be.

[16:21] Kurt: What floor is it on?

[16:21] Scarlett: It's not here. But nothing happens when I call it.

[16:22] Scarlett: And the inside of the panel by the lift looks all melty.

[16:22] Kurt: Okay... are the stairs still accessible?

[16:22] Violet: What's going on in the server room?

[16:22] Kurt: It's not just the lights... I'm picking up some kind of power fluctuations... very slight.

[16:23] Scarlett: Yes, nothing else has been damaged. We could go down the stairs.

[16:23] Scarlett: But won't we get all frazzled by radiation?

[16:23] Kurt: Just don't hang around in that room, Scarlett. A few seconds should be okay.

[16:24] Violet: OK then. We're going down.

[16:24] Kurt: I think our friend is trying to work the servers.

[16:24] Violet: We're running down the stairs now.

[16:24] Kurt: Quietly!

[16:24] Violet: And then, Lettie, as fast you can, I'm going to open this door and we'll run through the radiation room, OK?

[16:24] Scarlett: OK.

[16:24] Violet: OK, one, two three!

[16:25] Kurt: Are you through?

[16:25] Violet: Yep, we're here.

[16:25] Violet: No new blood required today!

[16:25] Scarlett: Did you hear that?

[16:25] Violet: Yes.

[16:26] Kurt: Is he there?

[16:26] Kurt: What's the light doing?

[16:26] Violet: Can't see anything.

[16:26] Violet: But we can hear the same sound.

[16:26] Scarlett: It's weaker though.

[16:26] Kurt: Maybe he's getting tired.

[16:27] Kurt: The light's still off in the server room.

[16:27] Violet: OK, we're in the corridor by the vacuum lab.

[16:27] DROWNING

[16:27] DROWNING

[16:27] Scarlett: I don't like that noise. It's scary, just by itself.

[16:27] Scarlett: Did you hear that?!

[16:27] Scarlett: Can we go now, Vi?

[16:27] DROWNING

[16:27] Violet: I...

[16:28] Violet: We can't just run away again, Lettie. We need to find out what's going on.

[16:28] Kurt: Just don't get yourselves killed.

[16:28] DROWNING

[16:28] Violet: We'll be fine. We know how to get out...

[16:28] Kurt: He's trying to access the systems...

[16:28] Violet: But that sound... it's terrifying.

[16:28] Violet: Can you tell what he's doing?

[16:29] Kurt: He might be trying to reroute the power somehow, but he isn't getting very far...

[16:29] Kurt: I don't think he can access the power substation here...

[16:30] Scarlett: How do we know he's even doing anything sensible at all?

[16:30] Scarlett: Ghosts don't have to be sensible.

[16:30] Kurt: He'd have to create some kind of low-level interface using a fallback console...

[16:30] Scarlett: Wait, what was that?!

[16:30] Scarlett: He's moving!

[16:31] Kurt: I don't know if I can block that from here.

[16:31] FALL BACK

[16:31] Scarlett: He's coming this way!

[16:32] FALL BACK

[16:32] Violet: OK, now we run!

[16:32] Kurt: Did he just say something?

[16:32] Kurt: Go!

[16:32] Violet: No? What? Nothing, just that moaning again.

[16:33] Scarlett: It's OK, we're hiding round the corner now, just by the vacuum lab..

[16:33] Kurt: What's he doing? Is he chasing you?

[16:33] Violet: No... he's... no.

[16:34] FALL BACK

[16:34] Scarlett: I can see him.

[16:34] Scarlett: He's...

[16:34] Scarlett: It's not normal.

[16:34] Violet: No, it's really not.

[16:35] Kurt: What?

[16:35] Kurt: What's going on? Talk to me!

[16:35] Scarlett: He was carrying some kind of tech, I think.

[16:36] Scarlett: But he really doesn't, he's like, almost, fuzzy...

[16:36] Kurt: Like how?

[16:37] Kurt: He's back on the servers... oh hell...

[16:37] Violet: It's hard to tell. Could be just like we're looking round a corner of a corridor so we can't see properly.

[16:37] Violet: What?

[16:37] Violet: Look, this doesn't seem that dangerous, you know?

[16:38] Kurt: He's creating a TTY emulation...

[16:38] Kurt: Over-riding the substation...

[16:38] Violet: Maybe we should just go and point our guns at him.

[16:38] Kurt: I don't like it - stop him if you can.

[16:38] Scarlett: And ask him nicely to stop?

[16:38] Scarlett: What does all that mean, Kurt?

[16:39] Scarlett: What's he trying to do?

[16:39] Violet: OK, we're going back up the corridor.

[16:39] Violet: It's horrible though, the closer we get the more that screeching noise is in our ears.

[16:39] Kurt: I don't know, but he knows what he's doing and he doesn't have your best interests at heart.

[16:39] Violet: It's really hard to ignore.

[16:40] Scarlett: It's like it gets right inside you and

[16:40] Kurt: Be careful.

[16:40] Scarlett: I don't want to! Can't we just leave him?

[16:40] DROWNING

[16:40] Kurt: Try reason before force.

[16:40] DROWNING

[16:40] Kurt: Vi - you know what to do.

[16:40] Violet: I can't describe the sound, Kurt, it's like too much information in my ears all at once.

[16:40] DROWNING

[16:41] Violet: OK, we're going in! I'll fire one shot into the air, and that'll get his attention.

[16:41] DROWNING

[16:41] DROWNING

[16:41] DROWNING

[16:41] Kurt: ...

[16:42] DROWNING

[16:42] Kurt: What happened to the lights?

[16:42] DROWNING

[16:42] Kurt: Vi?

[16:42] DROWNING

[16:42] Kurt: Scarlett, are you okay?

[16:42] DROWNING

[16:42] Violet: Stop!

[16:43] Kurt: What's going on? For Gyvann's sake...

[16:43] Scarlett: No, don't! He's got Vi!

[16:43] Scarlett: He's going to kill her!

[16:43] Scarlett: He... he's got Vi!

[16:44] Kurt: What's he done, Scarlett? Where is she?

[16:44] Scarlett: He smashed her arm against the bench!
[16:44] Scarlett: I'm going to, I have to..
[16:44] Scarlett: Get out of the way, Vi!
[16:44] Kurt: Scarlett?!
[16:45] DROWNING
[16:45] DROWNING
[16:45] WAKING
[16:45] Violet: I, uh, he...
[16:45] Kurt: Lettie...?
[16:46] Scarlett: She's OK, I think. I... everything's dark here.
[16:46] Kurt: I can't get the lights back on.
[16:46] Scarlett: Kurt, are you there?
[16:47] Kurt: Use the arc lights.
[16:47] Scarlett: Yes, yes I...
[16:47] Kurt: Vi - let me know you're okay.
[16:48] Violet: Where is he?
[16:48] Violet: I'm, uh. There's blood.
[16:48] Scarlett: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean...
[16:48] Kurt: What happened?
[16:48] Scarlett: I think I... shot him.
[16:49] Violet: But where is he?
[16:49] Kurt: I can't see anything on the -
[16:49] Kurt: Hold on.
[16:50] Scarlett: He didn't even notice! He just carried on what he was doing!
[16:50] Kurt: I think he's under you.
[16:50] Violet: I... he broke my watch.
[16:50] Scarlett: I think you have concussion.
[16:51] Violet: What do you mean, under us?
[16:51] Kurt: Scarlett - listen. There's a new level opened up.
[16:51] Violet: I... I don't feel right.
[16:51] Scarlett: A new level?
[16:51] Kurt: L4.
[16:51] Scarlett: What's there?
[16:52] Kurt: I don't know. Nothing...
[16:52] Scarlett: Vi, can you stand?
[16:52] Kurt: It's just a big, square room around the lift shaft...
[16:52] Violet: Yeah, I think so. I'm... he broke my watch.
[16:53] Kurt: Looks like there's some kind of airlock or blast door.
[16:53] Scarlett: What shall we do now?
[16:53] Violet: Can you see what he's doing down there, Kurt? Is he connected to the system?
[16:54] Scarlett: Are you sure you're OK?
[16:54] Violet: It's not my blood, is it?
[16:54] Kurt: I don't know. I don't even know if he can access it from down there.
[16:54] Violet: He's only a man.
[16:55] Violet: I mean, you shot him Lettie.
[16:55] Violet: I think...
[16:55] Violet: Kurt, how do we get down to this level 4?
[16:55] Kurt: The energy lab is open... was that you?
[16:56] Violet: No, the door was closed when we came past.
[16:56] Kurt: I think he went that way.
[16:56] Scarlett: I don't know, Vi.
[16:56] Kurt: Tread carefully.
[16:56] Violet: There's blood everywhere, Lettie. That's his blood, not ours.
[16:56] Kurt: You know what they say about wounded animals. Especially when cornered.
[16:57] Violet: He didn't try to take our guns.
[16:57] Scarlett: Perhaps he knows he doesn't need them.
[16:57] Violet: You shot him. Come on. We're going down.
[16:58] Kurt: Scarlett - are you okay?
[16:58] Violet: Hmm. Yes. The door to the energy lab is open.
[16:58] Scarlett: I think so. I. I've never shot a gun before.
[16:58] Kurt: You did well.
[16:59] Violet: He's losing a lot of blood.
[16:59] Violet: It's pooled here at the door - must have been while he opened it.
[16:59] Kurt: The lights are still off down there.
[17:00] Violet: And here, through the lab, there's more blood.
[17:00] Scarlett: Did I do well? Is that well?
[17:00] Violet: You did what you had to do Lettie.
[17:00] Violet: And here's a door, leading to a stairway downward.
[17:01] Violet: You've got your gun, Lettie?
[17:01] Scarlett: I can't hear anything. That moaning, it's stopped.
[17:01] Scarlett: Maybe he's...
[17:01] Scarlett: Yes, I've got it.
[17:01] Kurt: You should still be careful.
[17:02] Violet: The only way we'll find out is by going down.
[17:02] Violet: OK. We're going down the stairs.
[17:02] Scarlett: It's very quiet.
[17:02] Scarlett: I can hardly even hear my footsteps.
[17:02] BREATHING
[17:02] Violet: Can you hear that?
[17:02] Violet: A sound of breathing?
[17:03] Scarlett: Yes.
[17:03] Violet: There's some sort of airlock here.
[17:03] Violet: A reinforced door.
[17:03] AIR

[17:04] Kurt: Does it have an interface?
[17:04] Scarlett: Just a big metal wheel..
[17:04] Scarlett: What if he's waiting on the other side?
[17:04] Kurt: Keep that gun steady, Scarlett.
[17:04] Scarlett: OK, Vi's turning the wheel.
[17:04] Scarlett: I'm scared.
[17:05] BREATHING
[17:05] Violet: It's OK Lettie. It's alright. We've got him cornered.
[17:05] BREATHING
[17:05] BREATHING
[17:05] Violet: OK, we're going in!
[17:05] No!
[17:06] ?: Stop... please...
[17:07] Violet: Oh
[17:07] ?: Please... just let me... breathe...
[17:07] Kurt: What's going on?
[17:07] Violet: It's, he's, it's... it's a man.
[17:07] ?: Stay back...
[17:08] Scarlett: It's just a man.
[17:08] ?: Shut the door... please.
[17:08] Scarlett: He wasn't like this before.
[17:08] Violet: What? Why?
[17:08] Kurt: Who is he?
[17:08] DROWNING
[17:09] Scarlett: It's the man from upstairs but now he's not... fuzzy.
[17:09] ?: Shut the door!
[17:09] Violet: OK then...
[17:09] Violet: Close the door, Lettie.
[17:09] ?: Thank you...
[17:10] Scarlett: It is quiet in here.
[17:10] QUIET
[17:10] Kurt: Who is he?
[17:10] Violet: Who are you?
[17:10] Violet: What's going on?
[17:10] Violet: Why are you here?
[17:10] ?: ...everything...
[17:10] Violet: Why did you attack us?
[17:10] Violet: What?
[17:10] ?: ...the everything...
[17:11] Violet: The what?
[17:11] Scarlett: What do you mean?
[17:11] ?: ... i came through everything...
[17:12] ?: ...then through the waves...
[17:12] Scarlett: He's bleeding.
[17:12] Scarlett: A lot.
[17:12] ?: Stay back!
[17:12] DROWN
[17:12] DROWN

[17:12] DROWN
[17:12] Violet: I. We. You're bleeding.
[17:13] ?: ...waves everywhere - even here...
[17:13] Violet: What waves? What do you mean?
[17:13] ?: ...I hear them and see them...
[17:13] ?: ...they fill me...
[17:14] ?: ...overflowing...
[17:14] Violet: What do you mean about "everything"?
[17:14] ?: ...i saw it all...
[17:14] Scarlett: I don't understand.
[17:14] ?: ... between there and here...
[17:15] ?: ... the everything in between everything...
[17:15] Scarlett: But who are you? Why are you here?
[17:15] ?: ... i couldn't control it...
[17:16] Violet: Wait a second.
[17:16] Violet: You travelled here?
[17:16] Violet: By a power you couldn't control?
[17:16] ?: ... air... waves... landed...
[17:16] Violet: Kurt, what are the properties of the room we're standing in? Can you tell?
[17:17] ?: ...a second...? days...?
[17:17] Kurt: The walls are thick. Might be reinforced. A bunker?
[17:17] Scarlett: Do you understand him?
[17:17] Violet: I'm starting to get an idea.
[17:17] ?: ... fell...
[17:18] Kurt: What are the walls made of?
[17:18] ?: ... couldn't handle...
[17:18] Scarlett: Some sort of metal maybe? Wait, I'll use my key to scan them.
[17:18] ?: ... landed in the waves ...
[17:18] DROWNING
[17:18] Scarlett: Key's just scanning.
[17:19] ?: Turn that off!
[17:19] DROWNING
[17:19] Violet: What?
[17:19] WAVES
[17:19] DROWNING
[17:19] Violet: Scarlett, turn your key scan off.
[17:19] Scarlett: It's not finished yet!
[17:19] ?: ... that... the...
[17:19] Violet: Turn it off.
[17:20] DROWNING
[17:20] ?: ... too powerful...
[17:20] Violet: Waves, huh?
[17:20] ?: ... it controlled me...
[17:20] Violet: Waves everywhere?
[17:20] ?: ...swept me away...
[17:20] ?: ...into the everything...
[17:20] ?: ... now they are everywhere...

[17:20] ?: ... except here...

[17:20] BREATHING

[17:20] BREATHING

[17:21] Violet: EM waves.

[17:21] Scarlett: Look at his leg.

[17:21] Violet: Yes.

[17:21] Kurt: It must be lead-lined

[17:22] Scarlett: Look, is it OK if I tie something round your leg? To stop the bleeding?

[17:22] Kurt: A quiet room.

[17:22] ?: Back!

[17:22] Scarlett: Hey!

[17:22] WAKING

[17:22] Scarlett: I'm just going to tie my jacket round his leg, to stop it bleeding.

[17:22] ?: ... field dressing...?

[17:23] Scarlett: Look, I'm only trying to help.

[17:23] Scarlett: I... I'm sorry I shot you.

[17:23] Violet: I don't think he wants you to do that, Lettie.

[17:24] Scarlett: But he'll...

[17:24] DROWNING

[17:24] Violet: Maybe that's what he came here for.

[17:24] ?: ... just... stay back... please...

[17:24] Violet: We need you to tell us where you're from.

[17:24] Violet: What happened to you?

[17:25] ?: ... lucky...

[17:25] Violet: Who did this?

[17:25] ?: ... through everything...

[17:25] ?: ... further than the others...

[17:25] Violet: Tell us who did this to you.

[17:25] Violet: What do you mean, lucky?

[17:26] Violet: You were lucky?

[17:26] ?: ... thorpe, in the wall...

[17:26] Violet: Oh Gyvann.

[17:26] Scarlett: What does he mean?

[17:26] ?: ... jackson, into steam...

[17:26] Violet: No.

[17:26] Scarlett: What's he talking about?

[17:27] ?: ... we could still hear him, screaming...

[17:27] Violet: No. Oh no.

[17:27] Scarlett: I don't understand. Who was screaming?

[17:27] ?: ... i landed...

[17:27] Violet: Do you remember those experiments we read about upstairs, Lettie?

[17:27] Scarlett: But I don't... that was centuries ago?

[17:28] ?: ... but the waves...

[17:28] Violet: And perhaps more recently too.

[17:28] ?: ... the waves stayed with me ...

[17:28] Violet: Who did this?

[17:28] Violet: Was it here, on the island?

[17:28] Violet: In Lancewood?

[17:28] ?: ... far away...

[17:28] ?: ... there ...

[17:29] ?: ... not here ...

[17:29] ?: ... the 487th...

[17:29] Violet: 487?

[17:29] Violet: Listen! Did you say 487?

[17:29] ?: ... so many lost...

[17:29] ?: ... Choi... Stephens...

[17:30] ?: ... I wasn't the best...

[17:30] Violet: What happened to them?

[17:30] ?: ... vapour...

[17:30] ?: ... dust...

[17:30] ?: ... the one-way trip...

[17:31] Violet: I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

[17:31] ?: ... i made it...

[17:31] Scarlett: Wait, is he talking about...?

[17:31] Scarlett: Is this about the Cube?

[17:31] ?: ... peace...

[17:31] ?: ...the dead zone...

[17:32] Scarlett: Have you seen the Cube? Did you steal it?

[17:32] Scarlett: He's getting weaker.

[17:32] ?: ... ha...

[17:32] Scarlett: What? Why are you laughing?

[17:32] Scarlett: Vi, I think maybe *he* stole the Cube!

[17:33] ?: ... did you...? Ha...

[17:33] Violet: That's not important Scarlett. Tell us about 487.

[17:33] Violet: What is 487?

[17:33] ?: ... my unit...

[17:33] ?: ... the project...

[17:33] Violet: Special project 487?

[17:33] Violet: What are they doing?

[17:33] Violet: Where are they?

[17:34] ?: ... bourg...

[17:34] Scarlett: Viendenbourg?

[17:34] Scarlett: You were at Viendenbourg?

[17:34] ?: ...Vienden...

[17:34] Violet: Was that it?

[17:34] Violet: But how can we...?

[17:35] SLEEPING

[17:35] Scarlett: I've been there. There's nothing there.

[17:35] Scarlett: What can we do? We can't get in there!

[17:35] ?: ... dead room...

[17:36] ?: ... could feel it...

[17:36] Scarlett: No, don't!

[17:36] ?: ... perfectly dead...

[17:36] Vi: Lettie, bind his wound now!

[17:36] Violet: No, look, you have to tell us about 487.

[17:37] ?: ... perfect...

[17:37] Scarlett: His pulse is very weak.

[17:37] ?: ... shhh...

[17:37] ?: ... listen...

[17:37] Violet: No, look, you can't.

[17:38] SLEEPING

[17:38] SLEEPING

[17:38] SLEEPING

[17:38] Scarlett: Wait

[17:39] FLYING

[17:39] Scarlett: No

[17:39] Scarlett: No

[17:40] Violet: He's gone.

[17:40] Violet: You there, Kurt?

[17:40] Kurt: Yeah.

[17:41] Kurt: Could you hear him...?

[17:41] Violet: Hear what?

[17:41] Kurt: Sleeping?

[17:41] Scarlett: I killed him.

[17:41] Scarlett: It was me. I...

[17:41] Violet: It's OK, Lettie.

[17:42] Kurt: You did what you had to, Lettie. He was hurting Vi.

[17:42] Kurt: You did the right thing.

[17:42] Violet: He came here to die.

[17:43] Scarlett: I just...

[17:43] Violet: Shhh, it's OK.

[17:43] Kurt: What does he... look like?

[17:44] Violet: He's wearing a black jumpsuit, ripped at the knees and elbows.

[17:44] Kurt: Any insignia?

[17:45] Violet: Unshaven, looks to be late 20s early 30s maybe.

[17:45] Scarlett: We didn't even know his name.

[17:45] Kurt: Any ID?

[17:46] Violet: Oh. Yes. Dogtags.

[17:46] Violet: Major Jake Maine.

[17:46] Violet: There's a serial number too.

[17:47] Scarlett: Can I keep them..?

[17:47] Violet: Maybe we can find his family and return them.

[17:47] Scarlett: I'd like that.

[17:48] Scarlett: What do we do with the...

[17:48] Violet: I think maybe we should leave him here.

[17:48] Violet: We're very deep underground.

[17:49] Violet: And this was where he wanted to be.

[17:50] Scarlett: I want to go home.

[17:50] Violet: Yes, so do I.

[17:50] Kurt: I think you should. Both of you.

[17:50] Violet: OK. We're heading up the stairs.

[17:51] Violet: You know. My arm really, really hurts.

[17:51] Violet: I think it might be broken.

[17:51] Scarlett: We'll go back to the hospital.

[17:52] Scarlett: Vi, I...

[17:52] Violet: Yeah, me too.

[17:52] Kurt: I've got the lights back up.

[17:52] Violet: Thanks.

[17:53] Violet: OK, one final dash through radiation for old times' sake?

[17:53] Scarlett: Smile.

[17:53] Kurt: As you're on the way to the hospital anyway.

[17:53] Violet: What's two blood transfusions in two days?

[17:54] Kurt: An excellent cure for a hangover.

[17:54] Scarlett: We're through.

[17:54] Violet: Heh.

[17:54] Violet: You're spending too much time hanging out with Caine.

[17:54] Kurt: One could say the same for you.

[17:55] Scarlett: OK, we're heading up to L1 now.

[17:56] Violet: And... we're out.

[17:56] Kurt: The world still there?

[17:56] Scarlett: Has it really only been two hours?

[17:56] Violet: Yep. Still here. I think we'll say goodbye now, OK?

[17:56] Kurt: Sure.

[17:56] Kurt: Scarlett - you know the way to the hospital.

[17:57] Violet: /me hugs Kurt.

[17:57] Kurt: Hugging you back.

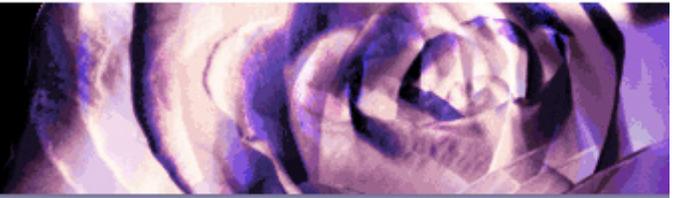
[17:57] Scarlett: Yes I do.

[17:57] Violet: Bye then.

[17:57] Scarlett: Bye Kurt.

[17:57] Kurt: Bye. Call me later.

[17:57] Scarlett: We will.



 Friday, September 29, 2006

The shock of the new

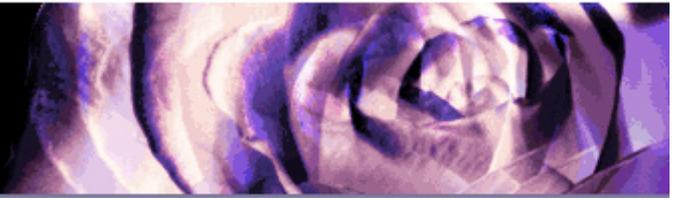
Category: me

Time: 03:40 PM

Well. If you've been following our recent adventures on Hobbs Island (which you can catch up on here and here), you'll know that, among other things, I have all-new blood, some new bone marrow and a broken arm. Scarlett meanwhile has a new emotional problem to contend with, but I'll let her talk about that in her own time if she wants to. Both of us also have some new information about the history of our world, and a newly-formed desire to visit a place called Viendenbourg. We're not going to be doing any more exploring in the ruined lighthouse, so there won't be any more hilarious squid-based chat for you to read. We're taking the weekend to rest and recover and then early next week we'll decide what do to with all these many new things.

I'm Violet, so you don't have to be. I'm a history geek. I neither cook nor sing. I love my city to the point of obsession. I do not suffer fools gladly. I have a soft spot for Alejo, even though I know he's sold out. You don't want to play poker with me. I'm fond of words, the more unusual the better.

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Friday, October 6, 2006

Back on the road again

Category: me

Time: 09:20 AM

One week on and my arm seems to be healing nicely. The cast should come off over the weekend and hey, at least now Kurt and I both have exciting broken-limb stories to share.

Arriving back in the city with a visible injury wasn't as difficult as I'd expected. I'd already primed my father with the old "exploring archaeologically-significant island, fell down cliff, look aren't I lucky to have got off this lightly" excuse. He didn't ask any more questions.

It's weird though. I have this feeling, given past events, that he might just know everything and not want to tell us that he does. I just don't know. Maybe he has access to all my medical records and knows that I had to get a complete change of blood due to my dose of radiation. Maybe he knows where the radiation came from. And maybe he's just my dad, who loves me and who doesn't want to seem uncool by fretting too much about a broken arm.

Scarlett, Kurt and I (and, yes, Caine too. On occasion. When he happens to have time. And I happen to want to see him. Which may or may not have been "quite a bit".) have spent the week poring over the information we extracted from Lancewood. We've come to a few conclusions. Some pretty nasty experiments were done there, and extensively recorded. They were experiments connected to the construction of the Cube. It seems clear that, when the experiments at Lancewood were finished, the Cube had been made.

Another set of things is clear from our encounter with Major Jake Maine. He was wearing modern clothing, with a set of modern dog tags. None of the names he mentioned: Thorpe, Jackson, Choi or Stephens matched up with names in the Lancewood experimental records. While I don't want to rule anything out at this stage, it doesn't seem likely to me that he was a 300-year-old ghost who happened to clothe himself in military clothing made of advanced modern polymers. We think that whatever happened to him happened recently.

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This still leaves a great misty cloud of things that are completely uncertain. Who or what managed to do whatever had been done to Major Maine? Why did they do it? What is Special Project 487 or “the 487th”? What does all this have to do with the Cube? Or the Third Power? Could Maine have been part of a group who stole the Cube?

All of which leaves us with only one road forward. Or rather, backward. It seems that everything starts and finishes at Viendenbourg. So Scarlett and I are going back. We'll travel over the weekend and aim to arrive there at the start of next week. We think, at last, we might finally find some answers.

Continued »



Thursday, October 12, 2006

A tale of mystery and wonder

Category: me

Time: 12:33 PM

Come with me now on a journey of intrigue and mystery. A journey that will chill your very marrow and thrill you to the core. Come with me now on the journey.... BACK TO VIENDENBOURG! Or, in my case, "to Viendenbourg" since I've never been here before.

Imagine, if you will, the scene. My sister - daring, plucky Scarlett - and I equipped ourselves with the finest military-grade consciousness-protecting tech the boy genius Kurt McAllister could rustle up. We stalked through the woods by hidden pathways, staying far from the beaten trails we knew the sinister denizens of Viendenbourg might take themselves. We skulked, lurked, and when we passed through the unseen barrier of the "confusion field," we were wary, lest either of us should fall foul of its dread powers of obfuscation.

We had a dangerous mission to fulfill. To break into a secure military compound and rob it of its secrets, to lay bare the truth of whatever-it-is-they're-doing-there. We had prepared ourselves for a fight, though I can't say either of us was looking forward to it. We hid a cache of weapons in the woods because we didn't want to go in all guns blazing, but we wanted to know we could if necessary. We had planned and we were prepared. Prepared for everything except what actually happened.

Our first hint that things weren't going quite according to plan was the strange preponderance of people we noticed walking through the woods as we got close to Viendenbourg.

"Odd," I said to Scarlett. "Why aren't they inside, guarding their terrible secrets?" (Or words to this effect.)

"Hmm," said the plucky redhead. "Perhaps they're taking exercise?"

The second matter which caused us momentary confusion was the lack of what one might call 'military uniforms' among these people.

"Strange," I said to Scarlett. "They're wearing casual slacks and T-shirts with hipster slogans."

"Hmm," said the girl detective. "Perhaps they wear 'civvies' on their day off?"

We were then rather startled to notice the presence of children among the

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happy throng.

“Peculiar,” I said to Scarlett. “Does the army employ children these days?”

“Hmm,” said the young journalist, “that can’t be right.”

But all became clear to us as we rounded the corner and came to the ridge above Viendenbourg base. Which was clearly labelled with a sparkling new notice. “Viendenbourg base,” it read, “a great day out for all the family.”

A rather attractive young man in an army uniform was standing by the sign.

“Hi,” he said, “are you here for the tour?”

We took the tour. It cost 40 Lecks. I have a copy of the glossy tourist brochure. The front of it says “Welcome to Historic Viendenbourg, where modern technology meets the past.”

Now, obviously this wasn’t part of the plan. We had, as I say, been planning to scout the location, observe the comings-and-goings and devise some sneaky plan for getting in unobserved and looking around properly. As it was, we were wearing bright yellow hard hats emblazoned with the words “Visitor to Historic Viendenbourg: handle with care” and being driven through a maze of buildings in an open-topped electric wagon along with several sets of tired-looking parents with children behaving like they’d taken some of their parents’ Ceretin by mistake. The wagon stopped at a building marked “Visitor’s Centre”, we all got out and trooped into a room lined with graphical displays of what looked like sedimentary layers, each neatly labelled.

“As I’m sure you’re all aware,” our tour guide said, “Camryn Scott is committed to Open Government, and the Viendenbourg facility is just part of that commitment. The pass you have purchased today is also good for one trip to the Tanraga Animal Sanctuary and a free coffee at the visitors centre at the pre-Hausam land art, OK?” We all nodded and smiled. “Now,” he turned to one of the children, “who can tell me what ‘archaeology’ means?”

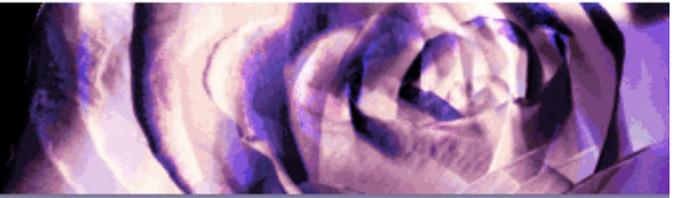
It went on like this for a bit. I pulled Scarlett to one side and we examined some of the displays. They weren’t too hard to understand: they celebrated the “rich history” of the region “which we know from historical documents was the site of an ancient fortified city”. They say that the ancient city of Viendenbourg was destroyed during the war, and that a joint project between the Academy and the Perplex City Defence Forces are now excavating it. Why the Defence Forces? Well, because “there may still be some dangerous objects lurking in the ruins of Viendenbourg - like an unexploded bomb! The Defence Forces are here to keep everyone safe.” It may just be my natural cynicism, but I didn’t

Continued »

feel we were getting the full story.

We passed through to the “reconstructions of life in Olde Viendenbourg” - static displays and holographic projections where the merry-looking fishwives mingled with tired miners and street urchins. “We know that there was extensive mining in Viendenbourg”, our guide told us, “probably for the rich veins of tin which are quite close to the surface in this region.” Further on, we oohed and aahed at the spectacle, through reinforced glass, of real scientists working on dating some pieces of blue glass jewellery recently found at the dig.

All too soon, it was over. At the end of the tour, the children hooked their keys up to the Viendenbourg system to download some worksheets and vids to watch at home. Scarlett bought a “Historic Viendenbourg” T-shirt. I got some of their branded chocolate; it was fine. We went back to our tent but frankly now we’re wondering why we didn’t just get on the bus to Tanraga with the other tourists and spend the night in a comfortable hotel. I think perhaps we’re hoping that the discomfort will spur on our thinking. I mean, unless Scarlett spent last autumn and winter having a particularly vivid set of hallucinations, none of this adds up. State of the art security systems to protect an archaeological dig? Doesn’t make a lot of sense. Still, we’re thinking about how to get to the bottom of it all. Watch this space.



Friday, October 20, 2006

The End

Category: me

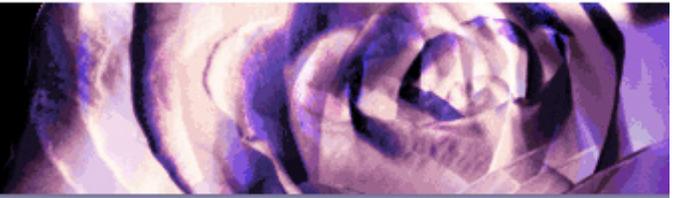
Time: 05:24 PM

I think I have reached what Kurt calls “the limits of system tolerance”. I think this is it, actually. I have no more room in my mind for useful or coherent thought about any of the things that are going on in the city. This could be the last uncensored message to come from Perplex City, and perhaps I ought to be giving you an in-depth political and sociological analysis, but I can’t. Caine wants to talk about mounting a demonstration, Kurt wants to talk about making a formal protest within the Academy, the Sentinel want me to make a statement, and I... I find myself staring into space, thinking about my family. Scarlett hasn’t been out of the apartment for a couple of days now and shows no sign of wanting to leave. She flicks through the key news channels, and cries, and sleeps, and sits and stares out of the window at the street below, and cries some more. She hasn’t even changed out of pyjamas today. Of course, the fact that there are reporters crowded round the door to my building doesn’t make her keener to go for a walk.

My dad’s not doing much better. Scarlett and I watched him make a statement on the news last night and we could tell he hadn’t slept, his eyes were red and puffy. She wondered if he’s going to have to resign, and I wondered if he’s going to go to prison but I didn’t say that to her. She started crying again anyway. And she’s not eating. I order takeout and she pushes it round her plate and chews a couple of mouthfuls but it’s not good. My father wants to come over and talk to us but I’m afraid that’ll just push Scarlett over the edge. And, in the strongest way I can ever remember, in the deepest sense I’ve ever known, I miss my mother. I want someone else to come and put all this right, and look after my family because I just don’t know what to do.

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Monday, January 15, 2007

Resumption of service

Category: me

Time: 02:44 PM

Hello again. Did you miss us? We missed you. I shouldn't think anyone else will mention that, wrapped up as they are with their own stuff. I, of course, think only of you guys, because frankly it's more pleasant than thinking about the people of Perplex City. It's been a hell of a few months. For the city, for the Academy, for the Kiteway family, for me, my sister and my well-yeah-maybe-he-is boyfriend.

So. In the beginning, there was Earlywine, great and holy and filled with renewed promise for an invigorated city giving up this stupid obsession with Earth. Except, you've still got our Cube so that plan was hardly likely to last a thousand years, was it? Plus, the Earth shoe fetish still shows no signs of losing ground. Polls have showed Earlywine's popularity steadily declining over the past six weeks as more and more people come to this unavoidable conclusion. And now the link's been re-opened because, well, I guess Kurt will fill you in on the finer points of security breaches. That is, when he's finished clearing out his desk after his suspension. I said: "look on the bright side Kurt, time for a little holiday!" He gave me his 'you've just said something so stupid I'm not even going to dignify it with a response' look. Or it could have been his 'I want some dim sum' look. They're easily confused.

The rest of the CRT hasn't had a particularly happy few months either. Garnet's been promoted to head up the team and has been walking round with a permanent scowl on his face. Aiko's got even more secretive and defensive about her incomprehensible projects, Tippy's regularly stopped turning up to work for days at a time without letting anyone know where she is leaving us all to fear (or hope, depending on perspective) that she's finally collapsed under the weight of her own ego and won't ever be coming back. Poor Von's suffered the worst fate of all; after the thorough 'investigations into the behaviour and actions of the CRT' it was decided that employing him when he was only 17 had 'breached his rights as a young Perplexian' and he was strongly encouraged to 'pursue an academic route for the time being'. Of course, all the colleges fought over who should get him, and he's apparently got the largest scholarship grant ever given by Edyta College but he really wants to be back on the CRT. Kurt says that Von still turns up at the office most days, bag full of work he could do blindfold, kicking the tables and looking like a proper moody

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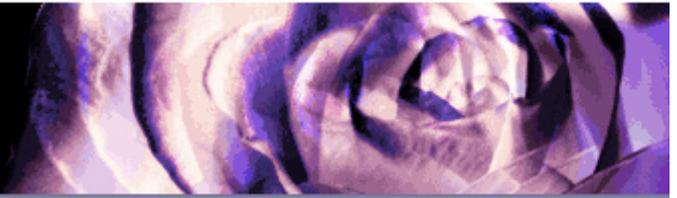
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teenager. Which is slightly amusing, since that's pretty much how Kurt looks now too.

Caine's been spending much of his time over at my apartment. Which, apart from anything else, I'm grateful for because he's been great with Scarlett. Scarlett has been... not so great. She rises and falls, rises and falls. One day she seems fine, back to her old self, gets out her books or calls a friend. And the next day I find her crying in the shower. Or waking up in the middle of the night screaming. To be really honest, I just can't take it anymore. We've made peace with my father, some sort of temporary truce anyway - he had us over for dinner a couple of weeks ago with Camryn Scott, another person at more of a loose end than she used to be - and Scarlett's moving back in there today. I don't know if it'll help her, but I just need a break.

And as for my father... he's held onto his job, just about. The 'investigative team' has been working on his office particularly hard. Patrick, my father's secretary, has a scowl to match Garnet's - it's been down to him to provide the investigators with all the information they need and, well, we still don't know what's going to come out of all of this. I expect I'll see them all at the ball this evening and get as much info as I can. I can't help feeling it's going to be a bumpy night.



 Tuesday, January 16, 2007

Cursed

Category: me

Time: 02:57 PM

Why? Why am I cursed with an entirely useless group of people as my supposed 'backup'? Why will no one ever listen to anything I say? Why can't the world organise itself according to my convenience? Why doesn't everyone understand that I am almost always right?

Damn and blast. In fact, hellfire, damnation and zounds. This is the sound of a woman who has spent all night in the company of the Perplex City Police, trying to persuade them that the most senior academic in Perplex City is not a flight risk, that he isn't likely to tunnel his way out of the holding cells using a penknife, and that he really doesn't need to be physically restrained. They wouldn't listen, of course, but that didn't mean I stopped trying, as I'm sure you can imagine. Time was when I could have phoned Camryn Scott in a situation like this and got things sorted out - of course, at that time I didn't like to use it, didn't think it was proper somehow. And now, well, calling Scott would have been as useless as calling Skip Applebaum and getting him to read to the police from his most recent dull and rather charmless book. Although, as the evening wore on, don't think I didn't consider it.

Instead, I phoned Kurt. My old, dear friend Kurt. Kurt on whom I can always rely for assistance and for succour. Kurt who has never failed to provide me with a shoulder to cry on or a leg up when needed. It was about 3am. This was how the conversation went.

"Hi Kurt it's Violet. Listen, I need your help."

"Vilet... Vye-let, Vilet I'm in a bar."

"Um, right."

"S'called the Missing Link, I think? S'great they're all rilly friendly, s'great here Vilet, you should come down."

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“I can’t come down, Kurt, I’m in the police station. I need your help.”

“Noooooooooooo.....”

“...”

“S’not the Missing Link! S’the Missing Piece! Vilet they have a tretretre head on the wall! I want to wear it. Come here and help me get it down from the wall.”

“Kurt. I can’t come down. I need your help. Get in a cab, come to the police station, we’ll get you some coffee and some Saptivan, you’ll be fine.”

“But the Missing Piece! Is awesome! S’awesome!”

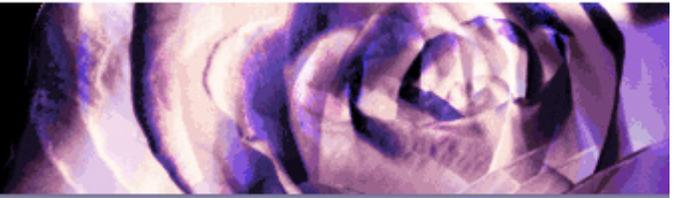
“Wait, how did you even get into the Missing Piece, Kurt? Teri’s not really friendly to... well... and wait, don’t they have a puzzle lock on the door? How could you possibly open it in that condition?”

“I’m a genius, Vilet, I’m a genius and no one ever remembers... you never remember, Vilet.”

“Yes, fine. Just. Get a cab. Come here.”

“A geeeeeeeeeeenius. Ingenious. A genius. And they’ve supen... they’ve suspin... they’ve fired me! They fired me Vilet and I’m a genius.”

It was at this point that it became clear to me that Kurt wasn’t going to be any help at all. I can’t raise him on his key now, nor can I find Caine, and Scarlett’s got a ‘Do Not Disturb’ on hers, so I presume she’s still asleep. But Kurt, though - I’m going to pull in every favour I can from every techie I’ve ever met to make his key sound a foghorn in his ear at regular intervals for the next, ooh, year or so.



Wednesday, January 17, 2007

Unbearable Urges

Category: me

Time: 05:37 PM

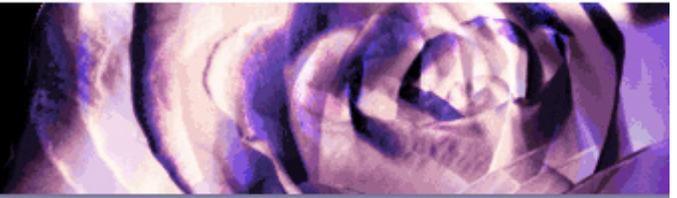
Do you know what no one else can ever give you? Well, since you ask, or since you simply look blankly at me wondering where I'm going with this, I'll tell you. The one thing no one else can ever give you is solitude. For a social animal, not to say a party girl (and, really, you're not to say 'party girl', it's not wise) like me, the desire for solitude isn't something I experience very often. I often experience the desire for this particular person to leave me the hell alone, but not often the desire for everyone in the world to just... go away.

But, who knows, perhaps it's the experience of attending an exciting party only to see my father led away from it in police custody, combined with several months spent tending to my increasingly irrational and depressed sister that have led me inexorably to one conclusion: I want to be alone. So Caine's going to 'sit' Scarlett tonight. Actually, I think he's probably better for her than I am; unlike me, he seems to be able to make her laugh. Unlike me, he never gets angry with her and never appears to experience even the momentary desire to tell her to pull herself together. He's even got her talking about the Sentinel and her love of journalism again; with all that's happened to her over the past few months I thought she'd developed a loathing of reporters that would never leave her.

Which means, for the first time in forever, I'll be spending tonight alone. Utterly, entirely, blissfully alone. I've been back and forth to the police station today; still no joy other than a five minute conversation with my father in which he told me not to worry. He looks about 10 years older than he did on Sunday. But, I can't do anything about it now. I'm having a night in, reading some favourite Earth literature, doing nothing at all. Have a peaceful night; who knows what tomorrow will bring?

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Thursday, January 18, 2007

Saddle Up

Category: me

Time: 01:24 PM

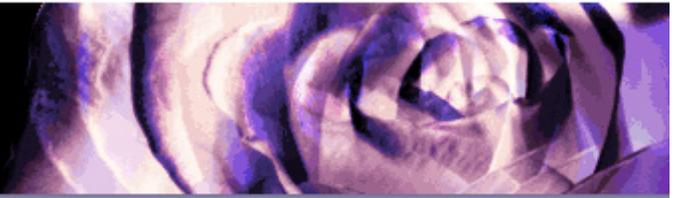
See, this is what happens when I take a night 'off'. The moment I turn my back... well, OK, nothing really bad seems to have happened except that out of the three most important men in my life, one's still in jail, and the other two seem to be angry with me for no particularly obvious reason. Oh yeah, and some journalist turns over my dad's house. Of which the most critical outcome will probably be a recurrence of Scarlett's agoraphobia. What's the betting she decides that she's never going to leave Caine's apartment ever again, under any circumstances?

So, today I repair some bridges. I am, in fact, refreshed and rejuvenated after a night spent doing not very much. Today I take my maybe-boyfriend Soupery lunch at his desk to thank him for looking after my exhausting sister. Today I wait for my best friend to take his Saptivan and then cheer him up with tales of how incredibly badly the increasingly-inaccurately-named Cube Retrieval Team is doing in his absence. Today I make yet another attempt to communicate with my incarcerated father. And today, well, I have a little plan about how Scarlett might make herself useful - and we all know how being useful makes you feel better about yourself, right? I'll talk it through with Caine - they're developing some kind of sympatico, so he'll probably have an idea about whether it'll tip her over the edge or not.

And, oh yeah, I guess someone should be looking for the Cube at some point. I'll get right on that just as soon as I sort out everyone else's lives.

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 Friday, January 19, 2007

No need to panic

Category: me

Time: 02:56 PM

The library's not really the best place to have a full-on freak out. It's: a) quiet, so everyone can hear you fret, b) calm, so your fretting energy quickly spreads around the building causing everyone to turn and stare, and c) when you come to think about it, the place of work of two recently-murdered people, so, when you come to think about it, a place that really encourages fretting. Which is my way of saying: Scarlett hasn't called me like she was supposed to, and she's not answering her key.

I'm sure she's fine. She's probably fine. I was a bit concerned that she seemed so happy and bouncy this morning, off on her little mission, but hoped that maybe, somehow, she's turned a corner. And now I'm just fretting. What happened at the Sentinel? Is she still there? Did they tell her something that made her retreat back into her curled-up ball again? Is my little sister sitting on a bench somewhere crying?

I called Caine just now. He was all "don't panic, she's fine, you need to give her some space". I'm sure he's right. I haven't called Kurt yet because, I suppose, I don't know how he'll respond. And I don't need him yet. Lettie's fine, I'm sure she's fine.

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 Friday, January 19, 2007

Need to know

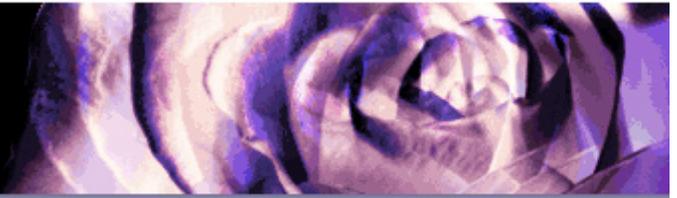
Category: me

Time: 03:51 PM

I can't take this anymore. I've left five messages for Scarlett, and still haven't got hold of her. I know I shouldn't be trying to keep hold of her every minute of the day, I know she can take care of herself, I know, as Caine keeps telling me, that she's a big girl now. But I really can't take it anymore. I'm going to call Kurt and get him to search for her key. Just so I know where she is.

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 Friday, January 19, 2007

Hearing is believing

Category: me

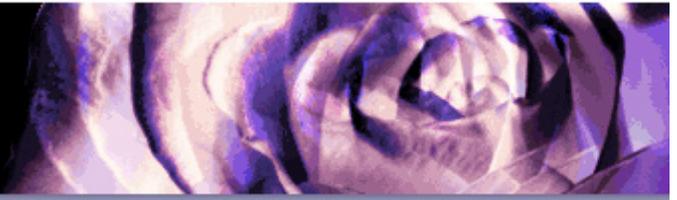
Time: 04:10 PM

I'm usually pretty good at controlling my emotions, or at least controlling the appearance of emotion. That's how I make the money which keeps me in my rather nice apartment in a rather swish part of town, after all. So I'm not hyperventilating, or fiddling with my pencils, or scratching my upper arms in a telltale way. But I'm going to have to leave the library soon because otherwise my carefully-controlled veneer of calm will peel off and I'll just start screaming or hitting things. Scarlett is not OK. I know she's not. She left me this message, and all it does is convince me even more urgently that she's not OK. And you know and I know how very many kinds of not-OK are available for consumption in Perplex City these days. Someone's taken Scarlett. And my dad's in prison, and I can't see the police believing me, and I just don't know what to do. But I'll think of something.

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Hi Vi it's me, it's Scarlett. [pause] I've, well, I've I've found something out and I need to [pause] look I'm gonna investigate something OK? I'll be away for a while [pause] don't worry Lettie, everything's fine, I'm fine [phone-down tone]



 Tuesday, January 23, 2007

Fear and loathing in Perplex City

Category: me

Time: 03:10 PM

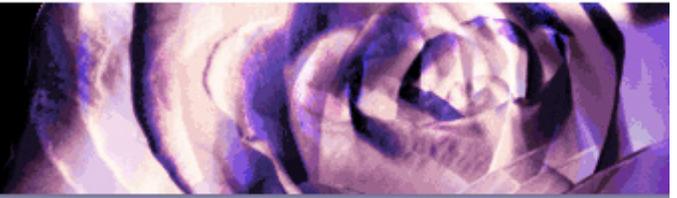
I hate this. I hate this more than I hate losing at poker, or talking to morons, or being forced to take part in loathsome puzzle karaoke. Scarlett likes puzzle karaoke. I hate that I'm worried about her and there's nothing I can do. I've spoken to Iona at the Sentinel, of course. They had lunch together, apparently Scarlett was in good spirits, there's nothing suspicious to report. I don't know if I can trust her but what choice do I have right now? While we were talking, I found that my hands had bunched into fists under the table while my face was going on being charming, my voice being pleasant. I hate that I can't just wring the truth out of someone.

I hate that Kurt has more to do now than I do. I hate that he gets to go off and be Mr Action Hero and all I can do is wait around for him to do his thing. Sometimes, I mistake this thought for hating Kurt but I try not to let him know that. Instead, I focus on hating Caine for everything he's ever done. He keeps trying to tell me not to worry. Even if Scarlett's been kidnapped, he says. Which we don't know, he says. Which we can't be sure of. Even if that's the case, they wouldn't just take her and kill her would they? I don't know, I say, they've done it before. I think of Anna and I'm so afraid it feels like my heart will beat right out of my chest and flop, bleeding, onto the floor.

People are beginning to hear that Scarlett's missing. Not what we think has really happened to her, not that. But one person mentions to another, mentions to a third that she hasn't been home. Probably the only person safe from the news is my father, and that won't last for long. I'm afraid of what's going to happen next. And I hate that.

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Thursday, January 25, 2007

Peripatetic

Category: me

Time: 06:02 PM

Peripatetic: walking about, wandering from place to place.

“In the absence of anything useful to do, Violet’s life rapidly became anxiously peripatetic.”

Something’s happened, but I still have nothing to do. I hate this marginally less than I hated ‘nothing happening and I have nothing to do’. So, thank you. Scarlett’s in Ascendancy Point, it seems. All the transmissions lead there, everything indicates that it must be the place. I have been informed in the strongest possible terms that I must not go to Ascendancy Point, must not indicate by anything that I do that Ascendancy Point is of any greater interest to me than it was a few days ago. So there’s a window of my apartment where I can see the tip of the Point, if I crane my neck to the right. That’s where I’ve been standing a lot recently. Craning my neck to the right, looking at the Point, wondering how Lettie is.

Other than that I have been mostly: wandering the city and ignoring calls from my now-more-than-ever-not-quite boyfriend. There’s nothing he can do anyway, and even though he seems concerned about Lettie now it doesn’t help. And trying to fend off questions about why I keep walking to the window, staring at the Point, is getting harder and harder. I’ve been ignoring all calls, in fact. I’ve had supportive little key messages: from Aiko and from Garnet and from Patrick and from, I can’t bear it, Fleming Heath. I can’t reply to them, especially not that one. Fleming said he wanted to talk to me but what could I say to him? What would he say to me?

I have picked up my key and made one call, though - I spoke to Helena Frye today. Kurt was wary about giving me her personal contact details, but I twisted his arm. Not literally, although I probably would have gone there if he hadn’t given in. She answered with a barked-out “Frye.”

I introduced myself.

“Ah,” she said, “McAllister’s friend.”

“Not just that,” I said, “Scarlett’s sister.”

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“Yes.” She paused. “Well, what can I do for you?”

“Listen,” I tried to work out what it was I’d been planning to say. This already felt like it wasn’t going so well. “I want to help. Scarlett’s my sister, and I’m sick of feeling useless, and I just... I want to help.”

“I quite understand that.” She didn’t sound unkind. “But as I’m sure you’ll appreciate, we’re strongly opposed to involving family members in our work in these cases. For obvious reasons.”

I’d known she’d say this. What else could she say?

“But I...”

“Yes?”

“I know a lot about the Third Power,” I blurted, “a hell of a lot, maybe even more than Kurt. We’ve been working on this together all this time, you know. I’ve seen the mines at Lancewood and the works at Viendenbourg. I’ve looked through secret documents about the Third Power. I know Ascendancy Point, I’ve even tracked down a Third Power agent working there. I just think... I think I could be useful,” I finished, lamely.

“I appreciate your interest, Ms Kiteway, but that seems very unlikely.”

“Look, can I at least... can I just come in and talk to you?”

“I’m not sure what that would accomplish.”

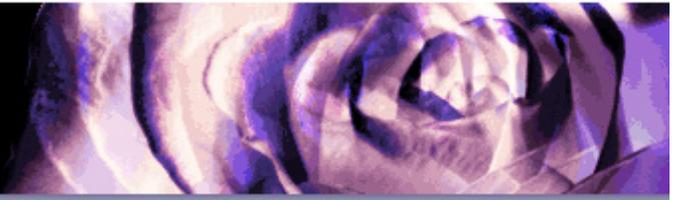
“I just. Look. Please.” That’s not a thing I hear myself say very often.

She paused. I could hear her thinking.

“Very well then. You can have fifteen minutes of my time this evening, after 9pm. But I very much doubt it’ll change anything.”

So, between then and now I need to find a way to convince Helena Frye that I could be useful to her. Or at least that I could make things difficult for her if she doesn’t let me in. I’m sure I’ll think of something.

And in the meantime I keep asking myself: can it really be true, what the Third Power seem to think? Could Scarlett really be the one behind the theft of the Cube? It seems unlikely, but I when I stand back I have to admit it’s possible. It’s not like she’s not resourceful, plucky, determined. It’s not like she hasn’t lied to me, to all of us before. But somehow it doesn’t quite add up. If it’s true, it’d mean she’d been lying to me, to all of us, for the past three years and I can’t see that from Scarlett somehow. I just hope I soon get to ask her myself.



Friday, January 26, 2007

Inside out

Category: me

Time: 03:21 PM

I'm in. I'm here. The 'nerve centre'. Such as it is. The 'overcrowded, slightly smelly set of rooms filled with exhausted people who've spent too long without taking a shower and are probably all about to succumb to gastroenteritis caused by poorly-reheated ready meals' would be a more accurate description. It's not that I'm ungrateful to be here. I'd say I get snarky when I'm nervous, but since you'd know I was lying I'll just say that, instead of being only snarky I'm currently both snarky and nervous.

I met up with Helena last night and managed to convince her, using every means at my disposal, to let me in. I explained all the research I've done into the Third Power, how I'm the one that Scarlett has discussed her adventures with most thoroughly, how I'm extremely cool under pressure and how I really won't get under anyone's feet, honestly. I'm not sure which bit did it, or if she just decided that I'd be less trouble in than out, but she finally agreed. I'm giving the group a talk on the History of the Third Power later this afternoon. Which is how they apparently relax around here.

Kurt's probably told you, we're gearing up for the attack. We know where we're going and what we have to do. My role, when it comes to the day, will probably be just to go along, try not to get hurt, and be there as a friendly face for Scarlett when (I can't let myself think 'if') we find her alive. It's better than sitting around at home waiting for news, anyway. Our key access has been severely limited - as far as anyone in Perplex City knows we've just vanished for a while, and that's the way it'd better stay. It won't be for long; one way or the other this'll all be over soon.

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Thursday, February 1, 2007

Over

Category: me

Time: 03:42 PM

Do you ever think about how your life turns on just a few crucial decisions? What your life might have been if you hadn't gone to that party, met that person who became your dearest friend, whose thoughts and ideas became as close to you as your own? If that picnic hadn't been moved from the Saturday afternoon to the Sunday, you'd never have gone, and never heard about that job that ended up changing your life? If you'd gone home when you intended instead of staying at work that extra hour, you'd never have seen that accident that made you rethink the way you were living? Do you ever think about those things?

My key, which Kurt has souped up to cross-reference every note I ever make, every random audio thought-catch, every book I read, informs me that two nights ago was a year to the day since I decided, on a whim, entirely by myself, to invite Caine along to a Hesh Records party to help me out with some investigating. At least, it felt like I made that decision all by myself. Things that have happened recently have caused me to wonder how much I was being influenced. Was it a coincidence that he's a musician and I needed to investigate a record label? Was it a coincidence that Kurt was otherwise engaged with Miranda? Why did I even think of inviting him in the first place? I can't remember quite why I suddenly 'got the idea'. I'm starting to distrust myself.

So this is how it went. We saved Scarlett. You know all about that, you were there. Thank you. It's not even enough to say that. If I could tell each and every one of you individually how grateful I am, it wouldn't be enough. Scarlett is alive and that's all the win there could ever be. Thank you.

And, I'm alive, Kurt's alive. Helena Frye's alive but injured. Several of her people have been killed, though. The police liaison who's been assigned to me tells me not to blame myself or Scarlett for this, that this was a dangerous operation but they think they've broken the lines of the Third Power and that all the sacrifices are worth it for that. And he's right. I don't blame myself, and I certainly don't blame Scarlett. I blame Caine.

I keep asking myself when I should have spotted the truth, what I should have done differently. I should have wondered why he was hanging around at Ascendancy Point station so conveniently. Of course, he said he'd been looking for me, for Scarlett, had been wandering between his apartment and the Milamont house. The Point is halfway between. It made a sort of sense.

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And I was so hyped up and nervous I didn't stop to think. Didn't ask who he'd been trying to call on his key when Kurt and I spotted him, and one of Frye's watchdogs smashed it to smithereens. And when I heard that he'd launched himself at some guards, I thought, well, maybe he was just trying to be brave. And when I saw he'd been captured, I thought... well, I didn't think much of anything really. I saw what they'd done to Lettie and I couldn't think of anything at all. Kurt keeps telling me that fingernails grow back but I can't think too much about it or I think I'll start screaming.

Lettie was rambling and woozy when we found her. She kept saying: "I don't know, I don't know where it is." And my heart broke into a million separate pieces. The medics arrived faster than I would have imagined - I guess they had them waiting. And when they'd given her shots and strapped her to a gurney, she reached out and grabbed my arm. All I could see was her fingers, I couldn't stop looking at them, but her grip was really strong, surprisingly so, and she pulled me down and said: "Caine, Caine kept asking me where the Cube is. But I don't know." And even then, I didn't really think. Because, it appears, for all my alleged people-reading skills I am a 24-carat moron.

I got back home around 4am on Wednesday morning and slept for about 17 hours. When I woke up it was dark and my key was flashing its "urgent messages waiting" light, illuminating my bedroom in milisecond-long bursts of red. I picked it up and held it between my palms, remembering everything that had happened over the previous few days. Outside my window, the mosaic of city lights demonstrated beyond doubt that the world hadn't ended, that despite everything that had happened, the city still proves indestructible. This thought made me smile, just a little.

"How many messages?" I said.

My key responded in its usual calm, level tone "You have 1,754 messages."

Hmm.

"How many voice messages?"

"You have 58 voice messages."

"How many unique message-leavers?"

"You have messages from 17 unique sources."

"List the top three message-leavers."

"You have 5 messages from: Caine Johannsen. You have 7 messages from: Kurt McAllister. You have 12 messages from: Fleming Heath."

Twelve messages from Fleming?

"Play messages from Fleming Heath."

He'd left a lot of messages. His voice, usually so strong and humorous has cracked since Anna died. Sometimes he was barely audible, but I got the

Continued »

idea. "It's Faberling," he said, over and over, "Caine Johanssen called a song Faberling. It's not, it can't be a coincidence. It's not a real word. It's a made-up word, Anna and I... She used to call me Faberling. It was our secret and she swore, she swore never to tell a living soul. She wouldn't... You have to ask him why he called the song Faberling. She wouldn't have told him."

Fleming's hoarse voice died away. My room was still dark. I didn't want to turn the lights on. I watched the cars racing along the coast road outside.

"Call Caine Johanssen," I said.

My key brought up a holographic display of Caine's face - a goofy pic I'd taken one day when we'd gone out to the Marina together and I'd managed to catch him without a scowl on his face.

"Hi Vi, how's tricks?"

From the sound of his voice, I'd woken him up.

"Yeah," I said, "just woke up. Knackered."

"Add a side order of 'in pain' and you've described me too. You want me to come over?"

"Maybe in a bit? Anyway..." I tried to work out the most natural way to draw the conversation round. "You can hardly leave your house without bodyguards, can you? Now that you're a rock star."

He chuckled, a low rumble in his throat.

"Oh yeah. Nearly forgot about my mega-stardom."

"I heard about the concert. Sounds like it went well. Especially that song you wrote... Faberling?"

I tried to make my voice sound casual. My heart was beating so loudly I thought he must hear it.

"Oh that old thing. Just something I threw together."

"Cool word, though. Where did it come from?"

A pause. A breath. My heartbeat in the hollow centre of my throat and fear constricting my vocal cords.

"Actually, it was Anna. It was the name she called me."

"Really? What kind of name is that?"

Another pause.

"I dunno. From Earth, maybe. Belgian or something. Why do you ask?"

"Nothing. I just keep humming it. It's catchy."

"Sure you don't want me to come over."

"No," I said, "don't do that just yet. I'm just... I want to be by myself just now, OK?"

[Continued »](#)

“Well that’s typical,” he said, laughing.

“Yeah. Just, typical me. Bye.”

And I sat in the dark, thinking. Either Caine and Anna had had the most unlikely torrid office romance known to man - in which case, why would Caine have made the mistake of revealing anything she’d told him secretly? - or Anna had told him the word for another reason. In a desperate moment, when all hope was gone and she’d known she wouldn’t survive. She’d given him a message for us. I felt fear like acid in my stomach. Every part of it made sense. Every single thing. From the fact that Caine and I got together just as Kurt was being preyed on by Miranda, to his helpful curiosity about everything we do. And the way that he was so near to Anna when she vanished. And that I’d left Scarlett with him, so he’d know just where she was, just when she could be snatched. I didn’t have a lot of mental energy left over for self-loathing about that, but when I get a moment there’ll be quite a quantity to get through.

The police, who are better at this stuff than I would have given them credit for, have appointed a liaison officer for me and Kurt, whilst Frye’s out of action. He’s called Ranjit, Detective Ranjit and frankly he looks like Frye could eat him for breakfast and still find room for extra crispy bacon, but since Frye told me I could trust him I know he’s a good guy. He’d given me all his details at the hospital, told me to call if I needed anything, given me a meaningful look in the eye and told me we’d “talk again very soon”. It was 10pm at night by this point, but he answered his key after just one ring.

“Ms Kiteway,” he said, “I hope you’re feeling a little better?”

“Yup. How’s Scarlett?”

“She’s resting comfortably. We have a 24-person team guarding her at all times.”

That sounded good. I wondered if I could persuade them to keep a 24-person team guarding her forever. With particular reference to any man I ever sleep with.

“Listen,” I said, “I have something to tell you.”

And I told him, and he listened. And at the end I said: “Do you think I’m crazy? Is it just the effects of trauma, shock, whatever?”

And he said: “No, Ms Kiteway. You’re not crazy. We’ve suspected for some time that there must be a mole in the CRT, or close to it. We thought Solitano might be it but some things still don’t make sense. What you’ve told me... that makes sense.”

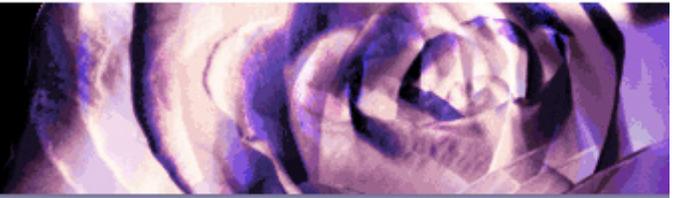
I hadn’t realised until then how much I’d been wishing that he’d tell me I was being ridiculous. But I’m not being ridiculous. I’ve been dating a murderer for the past year. I guess that’s just one more thing Kurt and I have in common.

Things moved quickly, while I sat in my darkened apartment, watching the

[Continued »](#)

traffic from my window seat. I drank some coffee. After a while I put on some clothes. In the meantime, things happened. Detective Ranjit called to fill me in. I called Kurt. He offered to come over but I said no. I didn't cry, because that's not what I do. I thought a lot, and drank more coffee.

Caine was in police custody within an hour. Which is a good thing. Because otherwise I'd kill him. People say that kind of thing all the time, don't they? "I'm so angry I could kill you." "I wish you were dead." But I find that, whatever I'm doing, wherever I am, a part of my brain is thinking it through perfectly logically. Who do I know who knows people in prison? He's likely to end up in Fletcher or Stanwood. How could I get to him there? I find that I'm making plans. I know I won't carry them out, don't worry. I wouldn't want to risk myself or my family, not even a whisker, for that piece of scum. But, I guess this means we're definitively over.



 Tuesday, February 13, 2007

Reversioned

Category: me

Time: 02:07 PM

I'm trying to do something. It's a little tricky. It might take some time. I'm trying... to become one person again. Because I'm fractured now and that's as clear to me as it's ever been. Clearer, now that I see myself from all around. A 360 view.

Because, I've been two people. For a long time, too long. I've been walking and talking and acting and projecting charm in public. And I've been hiding and afraid. And I'm trying to write this as if I'm just... me. Integrated. And it's hard to know. I flip between the two. It's not dishonest. It's two different kinds of honesty.

I stole the Cube, and I tried to find the thief. I slept with Caine, and I shared my private self with Kurt. I was bold and I was cowardly. I was surrounded by friends and I was alone. I tried to help and I did harm. I love my sister and I brought pain to her as surely as if I'd.... She's going to be fine.

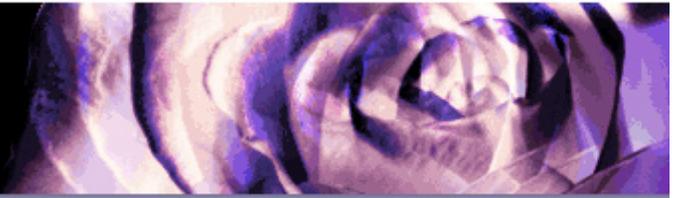
And now my secret's out. The me I've tried to hide. The me I've worked so hard to protect. (The me I am, the me that other me has kept safe.) In the paper. On the airwaves. Real and hard and in the world. Just like I always was. No different, but everything's different. I'm in the Sentinel. But I read the words and they're not me. Words go on and on, one after another but no words can ever be enough to describe a person, to delineate their space.

Sometimes I think, no one should travel as far as I've travelled. Sometimes I think I left myself behind when I went. That it was the distance that split me in two. That when I came back it was already done. And sometimes I think no, foolishness. It was the lying, and the hiding and the fear. I don't know. Both explanations seem equally coherent to me. But I can't let the two parts touch for very long. It hurts too much.

This was supposed to be a happy ending. An end to wandering. The translation of the Library of Babel. Nothing that ends can be happy, though. So it doesn't end. I'll feel better in the morning. I'll go on being me. Whichever of me it is.

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Friday, February 23, 2007

The Cube

Category: me

Time: 06:38 PM

One thing we learn: everything changes and nothing remains the same. Nonetheless, because some things repeat themselves, even if differently to the time before, there was a party at the Academy last night to celebrate the safe return of the Cube.

It was one of the grand affairs the Academy does so well. My father in his dress suit, presiding over the Ball, made a speech welcoming the Cube back to its home. There were white roses on the tables and Aiko's glittering sculptures of ice and chrome in the corners of the room. The cream of Perplex City society was there, from Walter Cove-Houghton to Michiko Clark, Helix Hesh to Aurora Belle. Someone told me Joya and Alejo were due to turn up at some point, although I never saw them. Even Camryn Scott and Nathan Earlywine were there, studiously ignoring each other at opposite ends of the room.

Scarlett was there, with a group of her friends from college. They hung tightly together in a pack, making sure Scarlett was never alone. I waved at her from across the room. She waved back and smiled. I suppose that's a sort of progress.

Fleming Heath was there too, accompanied by a beautiful woman I didn't recognise until she introduced herself.

"I'm Sylvia," she said, "do you remember me? Sylvia Salk?"

All at once, her face resolved into familiarity. Of course. Sylvia Salk. She looks different now; not so thin or so pale.

"Oh!" I said, "yes! Are you and Fleming...?"

She shook her head, brown curls bouncing. "No, just friends. It's good to talk to someone who understands."

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I nodded. I looked over at Fleming; he was deep in conversation with one of Anna's colleagues from the Languages department.

"Should I...?"

Sylvia looked at me, squeezed my arm.

"Probably best not to. He's not ready to talk to you yet."

I walked through the party, noticing the reactions to me as I went. Some people smiled. Some came over, pumped my hand up and down and told me I was a hero. Some frowned and turned away. Some whispered to the person standing next to them, pointed and pursed their lips.

I ended up, as I so often do, at the bar. I swirled my martini in the glass, watching the happy couples on the dance floor. Among the crowd, Patrick and Garnet were dancing slowly, Patrick's head on Garnet's shoulder. I was surprised; they're not usually so public about their relationship, worried that someone would think it unprofessional for a member of the CRT to be involved with my father's aide. Still, the Cube's back home now. The CRT has become Special Projects again. Everything's different. I tipped my head back, swallowed the rest of my drink, and turned round to the bar intending to order another when I felt a hand on my shoulder.

I looked up.

"Hey," said Kurt.

"Hey."

"So, how are you enjoying the party?"

"Hmm. Not much, really."

Kurt nodded. Then reached down and took my hand.

Continued »

“Come on then. I’ve got something to show you.”

And, without anyone really noticing, we left.

I didn’t realise where we were going until I saw the unmistakable silhouette of the Academy Museum, its round cupola black against the stars. Kurt led me to a side door, stopped and fiddled with his key.

“Wait, what are you...? We’re going to get into trouble.”

“Nah,” he said. “I’ve got clearance. Just for tonight. Anyway,” he grinned, “I pointed out that if I really wanted to get in they wouldn’t be able to stop me.”

“Always logical, Kurt.”

“You know me, Violet.”

We walked through the silent, empty museum, our footfalls loud on the marble floor. All this, I thought, has happened before. But it’s better this time. We walked past the prehistoric displays, past the Anjsbourgian hangings, through the Hausam gallery until we reached, yes. I hadn’t seen the Cube room for a while.

The Cube was there, back on its plinth, in the quiet room with the slight background hum. A thousand extra-sensitive bespoke security systems were watching every atom dance around it and within it. And that sense of peace that I always get, if I look for it, in the room with this object. This piece of my own history, now. The two of us intertwined.

We stood together for a long time, just looking at it.

At last, Kurt said: “What do you think? Did we do the right thing?”

I smiled, examined my fingernails and said: “Well, it wasn’t all bad, right? You extended your technical skills, I got to travel and Scarlett... discovered squid.”

Continued »

“HmMMM.”

“Yeah, I know.”

A silence.

“There’s no way to know,” I said at last. “We can’t go and have a look at the parallel universe in which we did something different, and compare the two results, can we? Unless...” I grinned “you could invent something like that? In your copious free time?”

Kurt smiled and said nothing. I wondered what he was thinking.

After a while, I said:

“Do you forgive me?”

He frowned. “Forgive you for what?”

“For getting you involved in all this. For making your life hell. For making you notorious. For everything that’s gone wrong for you over the past three years. For,” I dropped my voice, “for Miranda?”

“Yes,” he said, simply. “There’s really nothing to forgive.”

I didn’t think that could be true. I didn’t say so.

Kurt put his arm around my shoulders and hugged me, just for a moment, before letting his arm drop to his side.

“Kurt, I...”

“What?”

Continued »

I paused. Looked at the Cube. Thought a great number of thoughts which I find difficult to enumerate even now.

“Nothing.”

Kurt nodded and smiled. I never know if he’s really understood. I think he does, though.

We walked back together through the quiet halls and out into the museum courtyard. I hugged him, wished him good night. We parted at the steps of the museum and each went home alone.



Friday May 4, 1:42pm

Drips

Key-generated Transcript:

Right. I'm officially closing the file on the Missing Piece case. It's over. It's time to move on. And a particularly juicy mystery is-

No, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I can't work like this. This is ridiculous. This supposedly luxury pad is dripping! Just look. It's ridiculous! I know I'm not actually paying rent, but someone is! And they're not paying for these conditions! This has been going on for days now. I called the building supervisor, but he can't do anything because my name's not on the lease.

And it's not just the drips. The water pressure is low, and my morning shower has turned into a morning trickle! Gah!

Look, I know this is hardly the high-octane sleuthing you signed up for, but.. could you help me out with this? Kurt had found a plan of the building's plumbing. Can you please find out where these drips are coming from?

Oh, go on... please?

Oh, and there are a number of things related to the Hausam-era plumbing that you might find it helpful to know:

* The building's main entrance is on West Caldera Street. It's got four floors and a basement. My flat is the one on the corner overlooking the Park, which means I get to look at joggers sweating their way around the trails in the morning, and feel grateful for another hour in bed.

* There are people in the flats directly above and below mine, but none in the basement - just the caretaker's office in there. You know, the one who won't listen to me? Anyway, yes, two flats on the ground floor, and four on the other floors.

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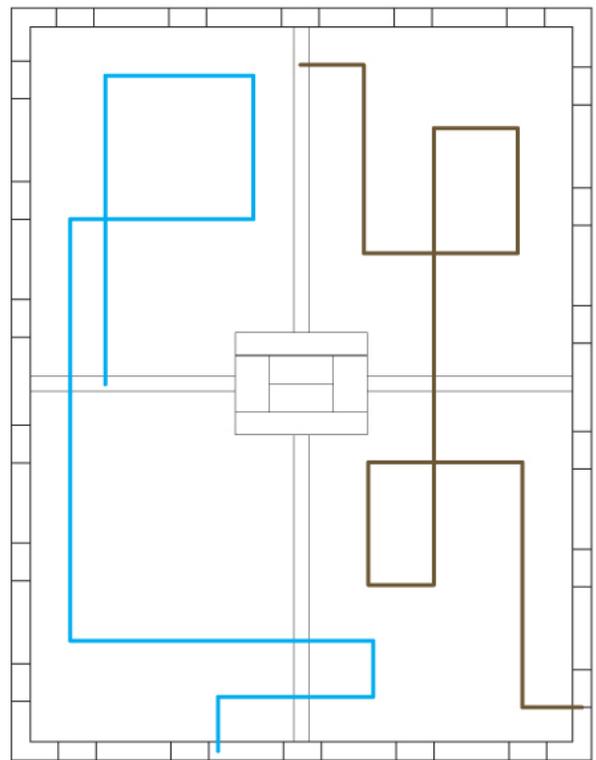
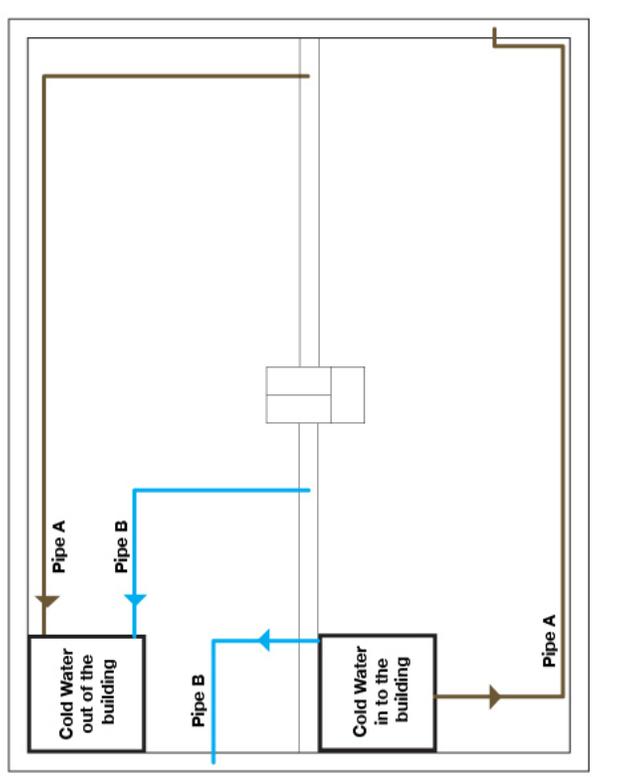
* Flat #1 is the flat to your left when you're standing at the entrance on the ground floor, which makes Flat #2 the one on the right! On the floor above, Flat #3 is the flat on the left nearest to the entrance, and then they're numbered clockwise going from there.

* The building has two sets of water pipes, all with fresh cold water. Kurt says it's to stop water pressure issues. My money is on incompetent plumbers.

* Each flat receives its water from under the floor boards, so the leak can't be coming from my own water supply - according to the ceiling, the water is clearly coming from above me someplace. I wanted to use the other water supply to address my pressure issue (there's nothing like being itchy all day from shampoo you couldn't rinse out), but it apparently doesn't run through any of the walls or floor of my flat.

* Kurt tells me the leak is coming from the flat that receives its water 12 flats before mine, based on some sort of necromancy he conducted involving water pressure. I guess we'll just have to trust him on this one.

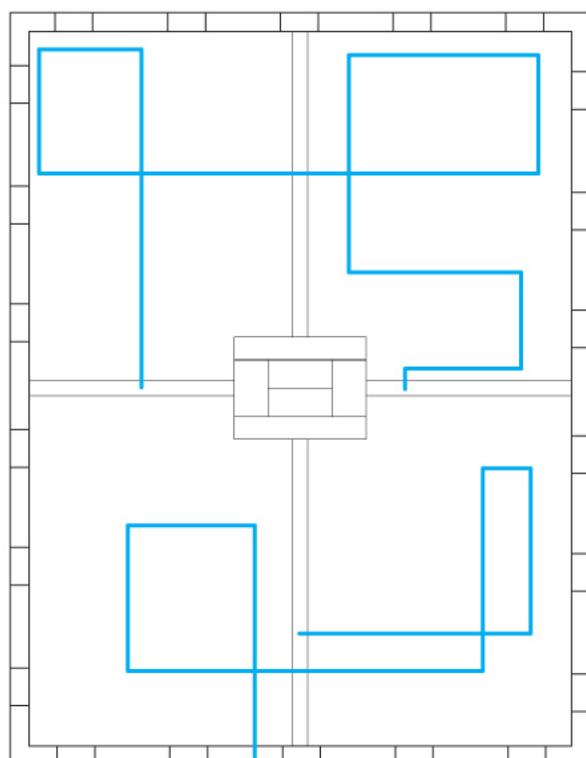
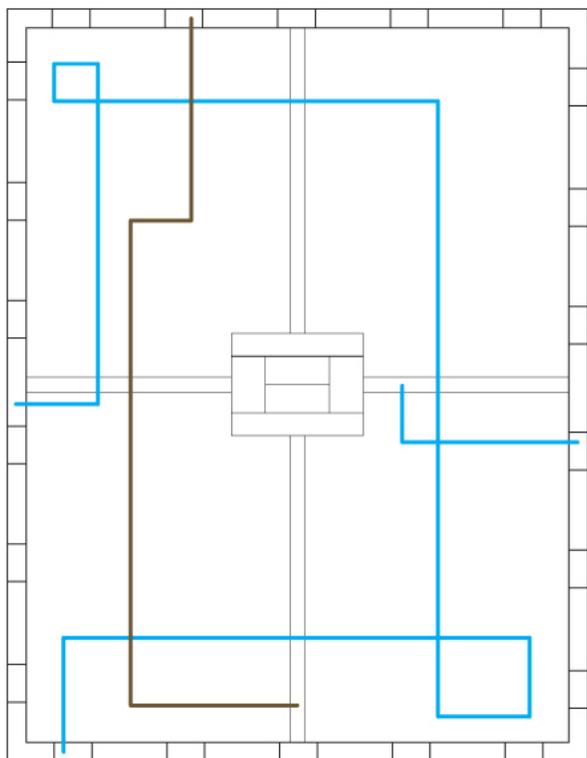
And here's the messy part. I bring you plans 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11.

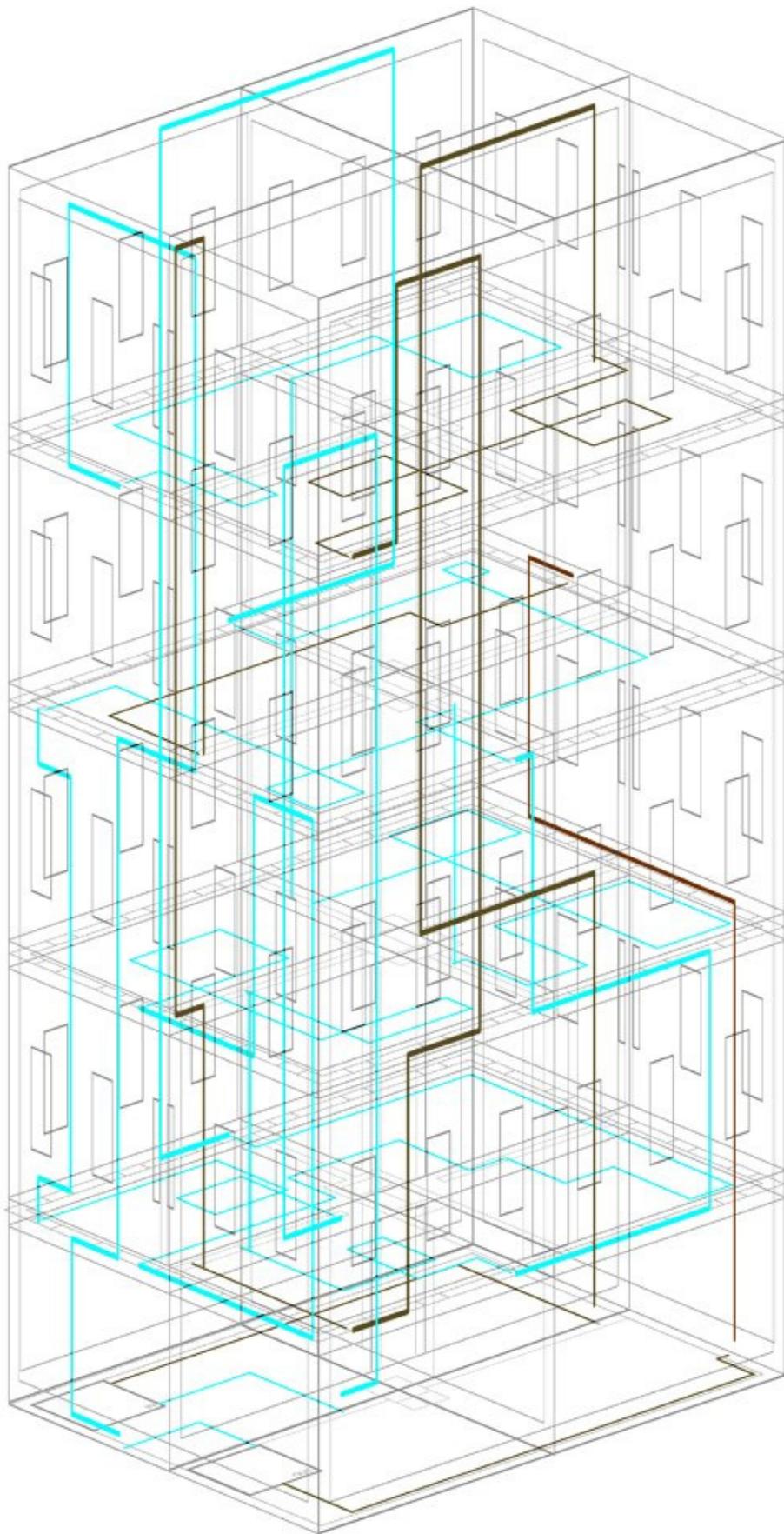


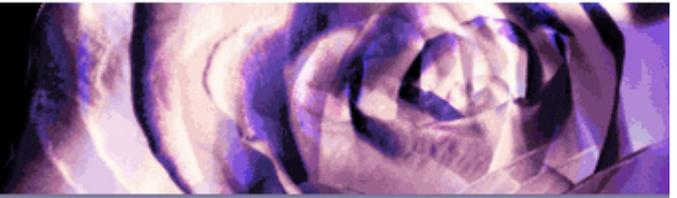
Basement 2nd Floor

(1st Floor plan is missing)

3rd Floor 4th Floor







Monday May 7, 3:19pm

The Leaker

How can I ever thank you enough? The drips... have stopped. I can think again.

Which is good, because there's quite a bit to think about. Not just that juicy mystery I mentioned, but the utter bizarreness of the man whose flat was producing the drips. I'll get back to both of those in a minute.

Kurt has, in fact, worked more of his magnificent mojo and found me proper plans of the building. But before he managed to do that I'd already received a host of emails telling me to go have a talk with flat #13, first from Jason R Miller (aka Milkman), and then Ben Harris, Justin Peeples, David Waring, Lizzie Colclough, and on and on. Thank you, all of you, for your aid and support in this trying time for me.

So I went up to the flat you sent me to, #13. Knocked on the door several times. No response. Shouted. No response. Took my boot off and hammered on the door. At last it was opened, by a man dressed in a battered tweed suit, wearing two pairs of glasses at the same time and sporting the most enormous beard I've ever seen. I introduced myself, explained the problem. He blinked at me.

"Yeeees," he said eventually. "The new supercoolant might produce that effect. I suppose it's possible," he giggled, "it's possible I shouldn't have used it in a residential area."

It was my turn to blink at him.

"Come and see," he said, beckoning.

It turns out that this Gustaffsen has been using supercoolant intended for a new high velocity aircraft to... run his refrigerator. The thing was sitting in the centre of his living room, juddering like a PCAG hopeful hopped up on Ceretin, looking pretty likely to explode at any moment. Fortunately, he was a friendly fruitcake and was quite willing to turn it off to stop the drips. I can't help feeling that I've also prevented a blast which would have taken out most of the Old

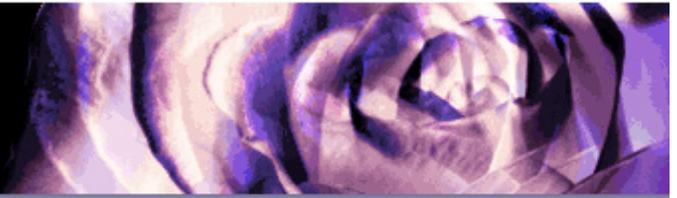
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Town but, as ever, The World Will Never Know.

Gustaffsen's definitely on the more harmless side of eccentric. He insisted I stay for a cup of tea (there were beard hairs floating in it, so I politely 'left it to cool') while he told me about his terrible postal problem. All his parcels are being delayed, he says. Now, everyone always complains about the postal service, and we've all had a parcel take 30-40 minutes more than expected to arrive. But he reckons his parcels have been delayed by up to a day. Which would be, in my experience, unheard-of. I haven't had that problem in this building yet but I'll be watching out for it.



 Wednesday May 9, 5:23pm

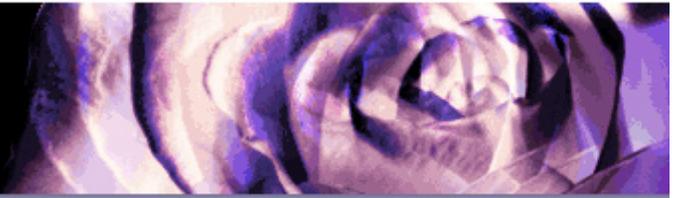
More Delayed Parcels

Get this - Cassia, one of the new scribes at the Academy, has also been having problems with delayed parcels. The Perplex City Post Office guarantees that all post anywhere in the city will arrive within five hours of being sent. So this is weird. Cassia says she doesn't have time to pursue it, but I want to find out what's going on. Is it just this part of the city? Is it just one kind of parcel? Am I just procrastinating?

I tried calling up the Post Office but they - probably truthfully - said that everything is statistically normal. So the problem's obviously a subtle one and will need some teasing out. If we can run a series of experiments, we should be able to isolate which part of the system isn't working properly. Of course, doing that will involve getting inside the Post Office. So... since you guys are so good at persuading people, can you find a contact in the Post Office who might be happy to help us out?

I'm Violet, so you don't have to be. I'm a history geek. I neither cook nor sing. I love my city to the point of obsession. I do not suffer fools gladly. I have a soft spot for Alejo, even though I know he's sold out. You don't want to play poker with me. I'm fond of words, the more unusual the better.

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 Thursday May 10, 5:45pm

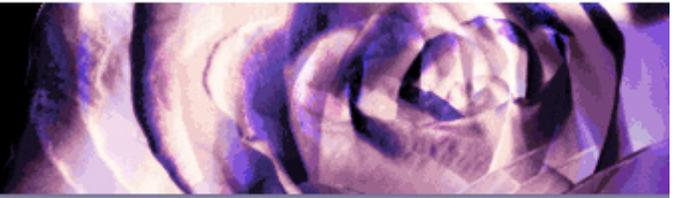
The Post Office

Hey, good work. I emailed Ralph Kerrigan from that Sentinel letter you all spotted, and he's just given us access to the Post Office's testing systems, so we can start to work out where these parcel delays are coming from. This is an internal testing system - the Post Office lets important clients use it to make sure that the delivery times are as expected. So, we're going to be sending real parcels, variously weighted (I like to imagine they use water-filled balloons) around the city.

If we send a lot of random packages around the city, we'll never get anywhere. It seems to me that we're going to have to work methodically and eliminate possibilities. We can vary the parcels by destination, size, weight, speed and additions. We're trying to find out if any of these variables lead to a parcel being delayed. So, you need to get organised and work together to cover all the available options. And we don't know how long we'll have access to this system, so work fast.

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 Saturday May 12, 3:55pm

Apolyton Institute

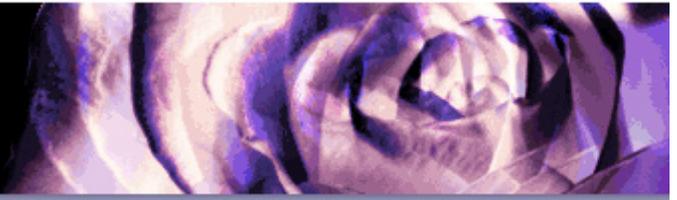
Interesting. A number of people told me that they were finding delays but hadn't sorted out a specific pattern, and then I received a message from Chris and Jen Cook that made it all fit together. Someone, for some reason, is delaying parcels that are associated with the Apolyton Institute. And also parcels that look like the kind Apolyton use: large, heavyish parcels sent express or priority and with a signature or delivery confirmation required. Someone's clearly very keen on reading Apolyton's mail. I wonder why.

The Apolyton Institute is one of the more mysterious organisations in the city. There are always rumours flying around about the things they do: when the Cube went missing quite a few people thought it was an Apolyton stunt. There's quite a bit of cross-pollination in staff between Apolyton and the Academy, but the Apolyton ex-staffers are always so firmly NDAed that they'd get sued if they even muttered 'Apolyton' in their sleep. Looks like someone's interested in penetrating that impregnable fortress.

I called up the switchboard at the Apolyton, but they're stonewalling. "No," they said, "we have had no postal problems, no we have not heard of any, no we are not interested in your findings." So, for now, I'm stumped. Stumped but intensely curious.

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 Saturday May 12, 9:18pm

Apolyton, Again

Sometimes it really does come in handy to be 'kind of well-known.'

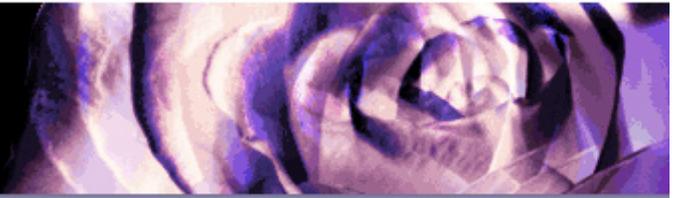
Just had a tip-off. Got a call through my key. Anonymous, untraceable - really untraceable, Kurt's taken a look and he has no idea how they did it. The voice was anonymised too - just one of the standard voices keys use when they're reading out text. It said this:

"Ms Kiteway, I work for the Apolyton Institute. I can't tell you who I am. I can tell you this: we know about the parcel delays. Someone has been reading our mail. We don't know who. Internal investigations here are under way. We will find the perpetrator eventually. But it may be too late. I had to speak because I believe the danger of these security breaches has been underestimated.

"The postal delays first began several months ago. They coincided with the disappearance of the plans for some extremely sensitive technology, developed by Apolyton purely as a theoretical exercise. The use of this technology is illegal in Perplex City, due to the extreme risk to human life. The stolen plans are for a "neural override" device. The danger is real, Ms Kiteway, though not to the people of Perplex City. We have learned that the plans were sent to an IP address on Earth - BBC Radio 1."

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Monday May 14, 3:17pm

Like a Bad Leck...

Cyrus Quinton. Sound-engineer-slash-mass-murdering-psychopath. The first time we heard his name it was attached to an audio file of a woman being brutally killed, and we know he's responsible for several other deaths. He's also known as Vadik - like the evil wizard in Perplex City fairy tales - or just V. Which I resent, frankly. He's stolen my initial and used it for evil: that's not something you can just forgive.

The last time we heard from Cyrus, he'd gone through a briefly-activated portal and travelled to Earth in search of the Cube. We managed to get there ahead of him, but I suppose it was too much to hope that he'd disappear forever.

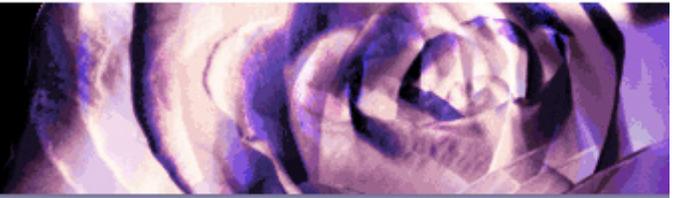
So, what do we know? Having followed a lead which started with my upstairs neighbour complaining about delays in the postal service, we discovered that the mail from the shadowy Apolyton Institute was being tampered with. I looked into it, but was met by a brick wall until I received an anonymous tip-off that the delays started when plans for some illegal technology had been stolen and sent to an IP address on Earth.

Now we know that someone from Apolyton sent Cyrus the plans for this extremely dangerous device. We don't know exactly what it does yet, but the words "neural override" don't make me feel warm all over. Part of what Cyrus is doing involves subliminal messaging: he's planning a huge test of this technology this coming weekend at a big music festival on Earth: Radio 1's Big Weekend. And like I say, an enormous crowd of people all having their neurons overridden... well, at the very least they're going to want their money back.

A lot of you have emailed me - thank you - and put me in touch with a video producer in London, Paul Denchfield, who's been investigating this independently, and is also trying to stop the test this weekend. My main task now is to find out more about the subliminal technology and the neural override device: to learn what it does, how it works, and most importantly how to stop it. I know someone who used to work at Apolyton, so I'm going to start there. I'll update as soon as I know anything.

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 Tuesday May 15, 6:03pm

Layers Within Layers

Ah, the Apolyton Institute. I wouldn't be surprised if they turned out to have no function other than stopping anyone finding out what they actually do. Unsurprisingly, no one at the institute was prepared to answer any of my questions. But I did have lunch with my super-secret contact Cassia, one of the new puzzle scribes, who spent several years doing mysterious things at Apolyton.

She's a funny one, Cassia. I always get the feeling when I talk to her that there's a lot more going on under the surface than is visible to the naked eye. She pauses before she speaks, as if she were taking care to choose every word with incredible precision. So, after my long-winded explanation of the whole neural override/Apolyton/parcels/Earth/music festival connection, she paused, took a sip of mint tea, and said:

"I never worked on any device of that sort."

This wasn't, you notice, precisely what I'd asked.

"OK, but did you hear anything about it? Do you know who might have worked on it?"

Another pause, another sip, a thoughtful air.

"There were rumours. But in a place like Apolyton, you learn not to listen too carefully to rumours."

Right. This time I decided just to wait out the silence.

After another few moments, she said:

"Yes. I'll help you."

"You know what it does, how it works?"

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“No. I’ll find out.”

And then, without quite knowing how it happened, I found we were debating the merits of the Perplex City Ballet Company’s most recent shows, and not talking about Apolyton at all.

But she was as good as her word. Early this evening, I got a short note from her with the plans attached. Who knows what she did to get them, but whatever it was, it seems to have done the trick. Of course, nothing’s ever quite that simple. Unless you’re using an Apolyton key, the files are fragmented. So, we’ll need to reassemble them. Can you help?

And if you’re stuck for something else to work on, Paul Denchfield on Earth is trying to decipher a timetable which will tell us when Cyrus is planning to air the primer. If we can stop that, we’ll be in a much better position.

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Project Scherhat drawed (code E-22)

Dealing D

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Satellite

Operation - an introduction

The highly complex system with multiple modified in order to override internal controls. for the Neural Override to be used for harmful presence of failsafes and checkpoints such are fully aware and consenting of the process. the Neural Override to target individuals preparation.

Satellite

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multiple areas that must be al controls. In addition, the for harmful or illicit purposes points such that target f the process. Therefore, ividuals requires multiple

Expanding Suggestibility

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The technology operates by exposing ta individuals to a complex audio 'code' (su similar to white noise) for several hours. theoretically possible to embed this code other sounds (e.g. music) but a practical for accomplishing this has not yet been

long. Once primed, the Override requires at least 24 hours to develop before activation via the Neural Override Activation System.

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Neural Override F
Current Status: Archiv

Neural Override Activation System (L)

All components must be placed within 230m However, the calibration period and integrat for a large degree of flexibility regarding sp here is merely diagrammatic.

Satellite
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Max distance
230m

Neural Override
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These trigger words (by default,
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individual to be aware of the process,
and can be conveyed via sound or
written text.

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Satellite

The Neural Override Project was initiated in 264
Breakthrough Research Division, with multiple
overriding and controlling high-level cognition
large, heterogeneous populations. The target
conducted in 268, and the Neural Override
successfully used for the first time in early
then, the project has been archived pending

atics v0.94 (overview)

The NOAS is highly
redundant. Up to 3 (three)
satellite speakers can be
inoperable and the
activation signal will rem
coherent, although it will
operate at a reduced
efficiency.

NOA integration speak

Stage 3: Primer

Following Stages 1 and 2, the
Neural Override is essentially
complete, and now requires
priming. Unlike the trigger words,
the primer is a complex, custom
sound, normally a few seconds

Stage 4: Acti

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Stage 2: Trigger Words

Throughout and following Stage 1,
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Neural Override tech
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Satellite

NOA integration unit

The Neural Override Project was initiated in 2024 by the Breakthrough Research Division, with the goal of overriding and controlling high-level cognition among large, heterogeneous populations. This first test was conducted in 268, and the Neural Override was successfully used for the first time in early 269. Since then, the project has been archived pending review.

Neural Override Activation System (pictured)

All components must be placed within 230m of each other. However, the calibration period and integration speakers allow for a large degree of flexibility regarding layout; the layout shown here is merely diagrammatic.

Satellite

Max distance
230m

Satellite
0.001Hz -
30kHz

NOA integration unit
NOA integration speaker

Satellite

Stage 3: Primer

Following Stages 1 and 2, the Neural Override is essentially complete, and now requires priming. Unlike the trigger words, the primer is a complex, custom sound, normally a few seconds long. Once primed, the Override requires at least 24 hours to develop before activation via the Neural Override Activation System.

Stage 4: Activation.

Once in place in a controlled environment, the NOAS requires 24-36 hours for calibration. After calibration, the system will emit the high ultrasonics in a relatively simple but precise code, thus activating the Neural Override in any primed individuals nearby. Following activation, commands may be transmitted via any method detailed in Section 3.

Neural Override Operation - an introduction

The brain is a highly complex system with multiple areas that must be carefully modified in order to override internal controls. In addition, the potential for the Neural Override to be used for harmful or illicit purposes require the presence of fail-safes and checkpoints such that target individuals are fully aware and consenting of the process. Therefore, introducing the Neural Override to target individuals requires multiple stages of preparation.

Stage 1: Expanding Suggestibility

The basis of the neural override technology is to rapidly - and massively - expand and focus that suggestibility by altering synaptic strengths on existing neurons.

The technology operates by exposing target individuals to a complex audio 'code' (superficially similar to white noise) for several hours. It is theoretically possible to embed this code into other sounds (e.g. music) but a practical method for accomplishing this has not yet been achieved.

Stage 2: Trigger Words

Throughout and following Stage 1, target individuals must be consciously exposed to trigger words that will advance the development of the Neural Override in the relevant neural circuits.

These trigger words (by default 'Frozen Indigo Angel') allow the target individual to be aware of the process, and can be conveyed via sound or written text.

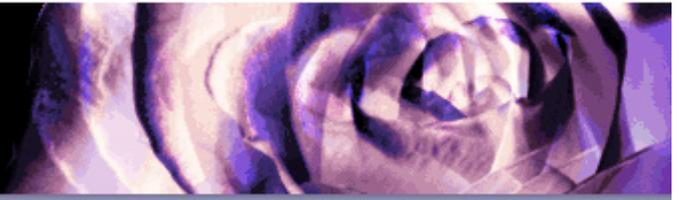
The NOAS is highly redundant. Up to 3 (three) satellite speakers can be inoperable and the activation signal will remain coherent, although it will operate at a reduced efficiency.

Wireless terabit channel

ApolytonInstitute

Neural Override Project Schematics v0.94 (overview)
Current Status: Archived (code E-22)

Dealing D



Wednesday May 16, 5:14pm

Five Easy Steps

Wow, that was fast work. Thanks to you it looks like we might be able to get just a bit ahead of Cyrus on this one.

So let's take a look at what we've got. Apolyton have developed technology to "transmit commands" to human beings. They call it "neural override", but a better phrase is "mind control". And let's just pause for a moment to allow the shuddering to subside after thinking about that. Apolyton wanted to shelve the technology, but it's fallen into the wrong hands, as such things are wont to do, and Cyrus and the Third Power are planning to use it.

Fortunately, the implementation of the technology is quite complex: 1) increasing suggestibility via coded white noise signals, then 2) introducing the trigger words (Frozen Indigo Angel), then 3) sending a primer signal. The final stage is 4) activation, by a 24-36 hour signal broadcast only to people who are near the specially configured speakers. Of course then there's stage 5) issuing orders. But we don't want to get anywhere near there.

So, the bad news is that stages 1) and 2) have been completed. Taking Apolyton's work forward, Cyrus has figured out how to use a normal radio broadcast as a carrier for stage 1. This took much longer to transmit, but meant he could do it unobtrusively. He's also inserted the words Frozen Indigo Angel enough times to develop the override in hundreds of thousands of listeners.

The good news is that his first attempt to broadcast the primer signal didn't work. This means we've still got a chance to stop it. The signal's due to air sometime tomorrow, and I think Paul Denchfield has a plan to stop that happening - we need to do whatever we can to help him.

The other good news is that, despite the ominous words "the NOAS is highly redundant", it's still a pretty fragile system. If we don't manage to stop the primer, we can still stop the signal by disrupting just three of the five transmitters.

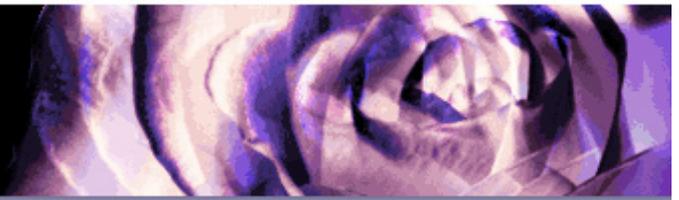
Also, Kurt and Helena Frye, the police detective who's helped us in the past,

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have picked up cross-world chatter suggesting that Cyrus will need help to set up the hardware at the Big Weekend. He's going to give instructions to his agents using a series of symbols at the festival; the symbols will be recognisable because they'll have the trigger words on them. By finding those symbols, we can find the transmitters. But, let's hope it doesn't get to that stage. If we stop the primer now, we can all rest a lot easier.



Friday May 18, 2:24pm

Angel Hunting

Well, unfortunately it looks like we were unable to stop the primer signal going out. This is bad news, but all is not lost. If we can interfere with enough of the transmitters, we should be able to stop the final activation signal from being broadcast at the Big Weekend itself. Obviously I say “we,” but I mean “you” - this is a job for people on the ground at the festival.

Now, this is a bit complicated, so pay attention. Kurt and Helena Frye have intercepted some chatter which has given them information about how the transmitters work and, more importantly, how to take them offline. The Third Power have hidden five transmitters around the festival area. Their locations are being provided to collaborators by means of unique symbols scattered around the area. So, all around the festival there will be symbols, along with either the words “Frozen Indigo Angel” or the angel symbol. Every time you see one of these symbols, take a picture and send an email or MMS to Paul Denchfield at photos@pauldenchfield.com to show them to everyone (or just go and find him, he’s going to the festival too).

Each symbol will have four different attributes: a colour, a shape, a number and a gradient of shading. Each symbol will also have a unique four-letter word with it. In order to find the transmitters, we have to find sets of three symbols which are either all the same for each attribute, or all different. To put it another way, to make a set of three, you can’t have two of them being the same and one different in any of the four attributes.

OK, yeah, that didn’t make sense to me when Kurt tried to explain it, either. Let’s take an example. Suppose you find a Red Half-filled Square with the number 2 in it, a Green Empty Triangle with a 3; and a Blue Solid Circle with a 1. That’s a set, because all the attributes are different in each one. But this is also a set: Red, Half-filled, Square, 2; Red, Empty, Triangle, 3; Red, Solid, Circle, 1. And this would also be a set: Red, Solid, Square, 2; Green, Solid, Triangle, 2; Blue, Solid, Circle, 2. Because, for each attribute, the items are either all the same or all different. Get it?

Making sets with the photos will be a job for those of you who can’t make it to the Big Weekend. Once you’ve got a set, you need to go to the Silburn Griggs mining site and input the three unique words. If it’s a correct set, you should get a piece of the map of the festival, helping you to find the location of the

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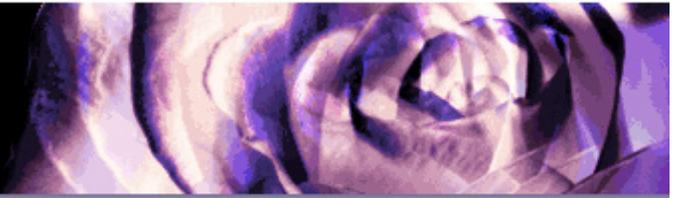
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transmitters.

It seems that the Third Power's collaborators have each been given the unique 4-letter code words to assist them in placing their transmitter - but in case there are any hiccups, other code words have been hidden in plain sight as a backup. They're relying on the public not to notice them, and not to know what to do with the code words if they did. So, we're just half a step ahead now. If we're able to put together the whole map, we should be able to destroy the transmitters entirely.

Keep up with Paul Denchfield over the weekend. He'll be posting progress reports, and of course all of the photos of the symbols that need assembling into sets.

So, good luck. I know you guys can do it. See you on the other side.



 Saturday May 19, 10:27pm

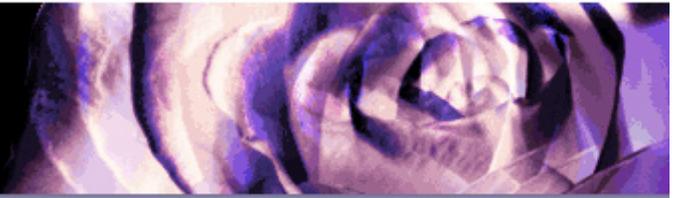
Success

Wow, I hope you've been checking out Paul Denchfield's site to see what's going on at the music festival. It looks amazing there; the crowds look huge, and Paul says he's finding people who know about Frozen Indigo Angel wherever he goes. It makes me think of getting tickets to some of our summer music festivals here in the city. Always providing we save the world, of course.

On the subject of which, awesome work piecing together the map. It looks like we know where the final locations of the transmitters are, but we don't yet know when they'll be placed there. If we can disable them in time, no one's brains will be washed, so that's pretty important. Kurt and Helena Frye have been working together, looking through the chatter they've intercepted. (They do seem to be spending a lot of time together. Hmm.) They're trying to find some more clues about when the transmitters are being moved. Don't know if they'll find anything, but if they do, I'll let you know.

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 Sunday May 20, 2:57pm

Faster and Faster

Things are really speeding up at the Big Weekend. Paul and the guys at the festival have destroyed the first transmitter. Kurt and Helena are analysing the Third Power chatter between Cyrus and PXC as fast as they can. As soon as we know that a transmitter's in place, I'm letting Paul know.

I'm not going to be able to blog fast enough to keep up with this. Sign up to Paul Denchfield's Twitter feed and destroy the transmitters as we find them!

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