The Princess

And The

Monster Hunter

**By**

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There’s Something Out There

Do you believe in monsters?

Neither did I,   
until they seeped through the crack in reality  
- called Twilight

Luke entered the park with his black trench coat, large-brimmed black hat, and sword across his back. It was past dark, but the street lights shed plenty of light. The full moon added to the ample light.

“Excuse me sir, but you’re not allowed to carry swords in public,” a police officer called.

Luke turned around and bowed to the officer. “You may remove it if you wish,” he said.

The cop nervously placed his right hand on his revolver and removed the sword with his left hand. Only the handle came off.

The cop looked at the sword handle in surprise. “What is this? Why is it so heavy? May I please see your ID?”

Luke handed his driver’s license to the cop. “It’s a flashlight. Press that button there. I am an author and get inspiration by role-playing,” he said calmly.

The officer pressed the button and was surprised by the intensity of the light beam.

Satisfied by the response, the cop returned the sword hilt and driver’s license. “I see you’re new to town. What brings you here?”

“Work,” Luke replied. “I was hired by Alvin Illusions as a special effects artist. I design and build movie props.”

“This is a dangerous park, especially at night. Please be careful,” the cop said. “And welcome to L.A.”

“Yes sir,” Luke said and watched the cop walk away. He then returned the handle to its scabbard and ID to his wallet.

Luke thought about the cop’s warning. Should he enter the park and possibly get attacked by thugs, or leave? His trench coat was bulletproof, but his face wasn’t. On the other hand, drama was always good for the creative spirit.

“AAAAA…” a woman screamed from inside the park. Luke dashed in and spotted the woman. She was surrounded by vicious-looking gremlin-like creatures. One gremlin gnawed on a dead man’s face. Another with a foot in his mouth turned demon-like eyes at Luke and growled.

Luke was terrified beyond words. Writing about monsters and building fake monsters for the movies was vastly different than seeing the real thing.

No. They weren’t real monsters. That was impossible. Monsters don’t exist.

The creatures charged Luke. He whipped out his sword and pressed the power button. The sword hummed as the piezoelectric motor vibrated the blade at 20,000 RPM.

One monster jumped at Luke’s face and he sliced it cleanly in two. Green slime sprayed everywhere. That enraged the creatures. They charged him en mass.

Luke swung his sword like a lunatic, slicing and dicing the creatures. One jumped on his back.

Panicking, Luke swung his sword overhead and behind him. There was a scream as the creature was sliced in two.

Moments later three military type guys entered the area and finished the remaining monsters off with their machine guns.

Luke switched off his sword and waited. The leader approached Luke and said, “I suppose you want to know what these creatures are.”

A truck pulled up and people in contamination suits emerged. They brought out an industrial strength vacuum cleaner. They began cleanup.

“This is a movie set,” Luke said with a shrug. “I messed up your animatronics. Sorry about that.”

The leader opened and closed his mouth several times, confused by the response. People don’t normally fool themselves so easily.

A worker took Luke sword and another said, “Hands up please.” Luke did as instructed and they hosed him down. Within seconds he was clean, but wet. A dryer took care of the wetness.

“This is a movie set?” the huddled woman asked in surprise as medics examined her. “But it seemed so real.”

Luke removed his business card from an inner pocket and gave it to the woman with a shaking hand. “I design and build movie props for Alvin Illusions.” He handed another to the leader.

“May I have my sword back? It will come out of my paycheck if I lose it,” he said to the leader.

“Yes sir,” the leader said uncertainly. A worker returned the cleaned sword to Luke and he put it away.

“If you’ll excuse me, I have work to do for an alien movie,” Luke said, turning away. “I’ll try not to steal your IP,” he added as he walked away.

“Who was that man?” the leader asked.

“I’ll run a background on him sir,” a subordinate said and entered an unmarked van.

The subordinate entered the data on the business card and Luke’s profile appeared. “Luke Callahan is a twenty-four-year-old man who currently works for Alvin Illusions. They specialize in movie props. His background seems to be nondescript. He is the author several fantasy and horror novels, including *Blood over the Moon*, which was made into an alien horror flick. It did well, considering its low budget. I especially loved the cool gadgets the hero came up with to fight the aliens.”

“So he made some big bucks,” the leader mused.

“Lieutenant Jane, what does facial recognition say? Is he associated with our organization?” The business card could have been a fake.

“It says the same thing sir,” Jane said. “According to these records, he is a civilian.”

“I hate other departments interfering with my work,” the leader grumbled.

“Major Rogers, cleanup is complete,” a subordinate said.

“Thank you Sergeant Higgins,” Rogers said. “Okay everyone. Let’s return to base.”

MC900065312[1]~

Feeling shaken up, Luke wandered back to his car. He could have died. Just what were those creatures and who were those Men-in-Black characters? He couldn’t believe a custom built sword would save his life from monsters.

The cleaners did a good job cleaning him, but there was some slime around his neck. He needed a bath.

Luke went to his apartment and undressed. Sure enough, there was monster blood on his neck. He carefully removed it and placed it in a test tube.

The blood looked like green toxic sludge and gave of a rank odor.

He debated taking a shower first but changed his mind. There was a good chance that the Men in Black would take his sample when his head was turned. They were known for doing that.

Luke put a drop of monster blood on a slide and placed it under the microscope. He looked at the image on his computer screen. There were some scary creepy-crawlies on the slide and they were multiplying. The contents of the slide and the nearby test tube bubbled and smoke emerged.

A moment later, Luke fell to the floor…

A demon sat in a throne made of human bones. Behind him was the Washington Monument. Surrounding him were creatures from nightmares and bad horror movies.

“The time of man’s mastery upon this earth is drawing to a close. Soon the twelve Pillars of Creation shall be destroyed and this Newtonian prison I hate shall be no more.”

The vision faded and Luke found himself back in his apartment. That was freaky.

Getting groggily up, Luke looked at the test tube. The monster blood was gone from both the test tube and under the microscope.

Unfortunately, everything happened too fast and Luke forgot to press the record button – typical.

Not knowing what else to do, Luke took a shower.

While lying in bed Luke pondered the words of the demon lord. More importantly, it gave him ideas for movie monsters and weapons to fight them.

What happens when the twelve pillars of creation break? Someone presumably built them in the first place, so obviously they could be rebuilt. How do you build pillars of creation? How do you break pillars of creation? How do you fight creatures that don’t obey the Newtonian laws of physics – that is, use magic?

Luke got up and went to his computer as ideas overflowed his brain.

The Men in Black

What goes ‘Bump’ in the night?

Where do nightmares live during the day?

Only the Men in Black know

Two months passed by and Rogers forgot about Luke – Almost.

“We have another outbreak, Major Rogers,” Jane said. “A bunch of trolls are rampaging in Elysian Park.”

“Okay, send Team Cool,” Rogers said.

“They haven’t returned from Edward Vincent Junior Park,” Jane replied.

“Damn it,” Rogers swore. “I have six teams and still I can’t keep up. Lieutenant Jane, Sergeant Simons, you’re with me. We’ll deal with it ourselves.”

Rogers’ team arrived at the park and found piles of dead trolls. They were diced by a sword and the area was splattered with monster blood.

“Major Rogers, the bodies are still fresh,” Jane said. “It can’t be more than five minutes old.”

“Damn that man,” Rogers swore. “Just who is he anyway? Call for a cleanup.”

“Yes sir,” Simons said.

Returning to base, another subordinate called. “Major Rogers, you have to see this. This was taken last night.”

Luke appeared on screen. However, he wore a Zorro mask. This time he fought a giant spider. At first he attacked with his sword, but it seemed useless. The spider’s armor was too tough.

Luke jumped in front of the camera and faced it. He made a dramatic pose. Behind him the spider exploded, engulfed in a red cloud.

“Who does he think he is, the Power Rangers?” Rogers asked to no one.

“The explosions were caused by pyrotechnics bought at a local fireworks store and are as dangerous as firecrackers,” the subordinate explained. “They couldn’t have killed the creature.”

“And yet the monster was killed,” Rogers mused.

Luke dripped a smoke bomb and disappeared. When the smoke cleared, Rogers noticed Luke disappearing around a corner.

“That fool thinks he’s a super-hero,” Rogers laughed. He got serious and added, “He knew he was being watched.”

MC900065312[1]~

Luke sat in front of his computer and watched late night anime. Aliens from another dimension invaded the earth by sending monsters. The scene showed the hero sitting in front of a computer when the military barged in.

“Freeze,” a voice called as guns were pointed at the hero on the screen.

Luke nearly jumped out of his skin as he realized that real guns were aimed at his head in real life.

A gloved hand pressed something against his neck. There was a hiss as a needleless syringe injected an unknown drug into Luke’s body.

Feeling dizzy, Luke collapsed in his chair.

Rough hands placed a bag on his head and carried him away.

Unable to concentrate or move, Luke just waited as the thugs placed him in a van and drove away.

Twenty minutes later the van stopped and the thugs took him out and carried him. After a walk they entered an elevator and headed down and down and down. It felt to Luke as if they were entering the bowels of the earth.

Finally the elevator stopped. Another walk later and the thugs strapped him onto a chair. They removed the hood and injected Luke with another drug.

Feeling groggy and unable to think, Luke just stared blankly at the people in front of him. He recognized one man as the leader of the Men in Black, whom he saw after killing his first cryptid.

“Just who are you?” the man asked.

“Luke,” Luke replied as he stared at his questioner with a glazed look on his face.

“What are you?” another man asked.

“Human,” Luke slurred.

“This isn’t getting us anywhere,” a blond woman grumbled. “He’s answering too literally.”

“What are your name, rank, and serial number?” the first man asked.

“Luke Callahan, Male, 356-45-224,” Luke replied.

“Dam it,” the man cursed. “I know you’re male, and I didn’t ask for your social insurance number. He’s resisting. Inject him again.”

The man waited impatiently and asked, “Who do you work for and what do you do for them?”

“Alvin Illusions,” Luke replied. “I build props for sci-fi, fantasy and horror movies. I also train actors to be more realistic when dealing with aliens and monsters.”

“Do you know what these are?” the woman asked and showed pictures of some of the monsters Luke killed.

“No,” Luke replied.

Rolling his eyes, the first man asked, “What are these creatures?”

“Cryptids the government has secretly either captured or have genetically engineered in one of its genetic engineering labs,” Luke replied.

“What’s a cryptid?” someone behind Luke asked.

“In cryptozoology, a cryptid is an unidentified mysterious animal or UMA. Described in folktales and legends, they are said to populate the mysterious places of the world,” Luke replied in his robot-like voice. “Examples include Big Foot and the Loch Ness Monster. Fairies, elves, and unicorns are also included, as well as the chupacabra…”

“That’s enough,” the woman commanded. “We know that you’ve been attacking and killing these cryptids. Why is that and how did it come about?”

For the next hour the questioning continued. The only thing they found was that Luke was a science fiction and fantasy junkie. He viewed the creatures as dangerous government experiments gone out of control and he was fighting them because he didn’t want civilians getting hurt.

“Do you believe in magic?” the first questioner asked.

“There is no such thing as magic in this evil Newtonian world we live in,” Luke answered with a dull anger.

The questioner looked at a medic and she said, “He’s still under.”

“Why do you hate this world?” the questioner asked.

“Because this world is a prison,” Luke again replied with increasing anger. “Everything has to be done according to the Newtonian laws of physics. Telekinesis is impossible and all who claim to have psychic powers have proven to be charlatans.

“I exist. I am a real being but this world denies my existence and claims that I’m nothing but a chemical reaction in my brain. I am but a fly trapped on the cogs of a giant machine that is grinning away without meaning or purpose.

“As for quantum mechanics, that’s just a trap designed to torment us.”

Luke sighed and added, “I guess muggles like you wouldn’t understand.”

“Are you the demon king?” a guard asked in a frightened voice.

“Of course not,” Luke replied in disgust. “I don’t even have the power to move a speck of dust, much less the power to summon monsters or destroy pillars of creation.”

“H-how do you know about the pillars of creation?” a woman stammered. “We’ve been trying to find them but so far have failed.”

“On the first night, I found monster slime on my neck,” Luke replied, again talking in his zoned-out voice. “I hallucinated that I saw the demon king sitting on a throne of human bones. In front of him was an endless demon army. Behind him was the Washington Monument. He cackled as he plotted to destroy the twelve pillars of creation, and free himself of this Newtonian prison.”

“So the Washington Monument is one of the Pillars,” the first questioner guessed. “Do you know anything else? Where are the other pillars?”

“I don’t know,” Luke replied.

“How can the Washington Monument be one of the Pillars,” the woman asked. “It’s not ancient.”

“You really are stupid, aren’t you,” Luke said in a voice edged with disgust.

The woman jabbed Luke with the syringe.

“Please don’t do that again,” the medic warned. “Another dose might kill him. His heart rate is already erratic.”

Luke was sweating profusely and his limbs were twitching.

“Lieutenant Jane, calm down,” the first questioner commanded. “Some people are just naturally resilient.”

“Yes sir,” the lieutenant said.

“Okay Luke, explain to my colleague why the Washing Monument is relevant. This time watch your language.”

“Theoretically speaking, the physicality doesn’t matter. What matters is the symbology,” Luke said.

“The monument symbolizes the ideals that the United States was founded on. This includes religious and ideological freedom, the rule of law where even the president must obey, comfort and security, where materialism is the norm…”

“That’s enough,” first questioner said. “How do I get more information?”

“Read my blog or watch my YouTube channel,” Luke replied in a slurred voice. His head was slumped down. Only his restraints prevented him from toppling over. He twitched violently.

“Sir, his heart rate is dangerously low,” the medic warned. “He’s in danger of going into cardiac arrest any moment.”

MC900065312[1]~

Luke groggily opened his eyes. He felt nauseous and pain shot through his limbs.

“Man what a horrible dream,” Luke muttered to himself as he reviewed his dream sequence. The Men in Black kidnapped him, pumped him with truth serum, and then questioned his dealings with the monsters. Unfortunately most of the conversation was lost. Luke wrote his dream down on his iPad as best he could.

Luke headed for the washroom. One pit-stop later he was back in bed. Last task to do was phone the office, to request the day off.

Luke expected that the *Powers That Be* would eventually question him about his monster killing. The question was, did they actually do so or did he just dream it? Puzzling over the question, Luke drifted to sleep.

Luke woke up at 3:00PM and got out of bed. He was feeling much better. For the next three hours he worked on his computer, catching up on work. At sundown he headed out on patrol.

Luke passed several parks when he heard monster noises coming from Elysian Park. He stopped his car and entered.

This time the victims weren’t people but…

Luke blinked his eyes to make certain that he wasn’t hallucinating. Sure enough, the rejects from a monster movie were fighting anime characters. The group consisted of elves and animal people. Tails wagged and ears wiggled as they fought monsters.

One thing caught Luke’s attention. The elves and animal people all had red blood. The wounded were in the center as the others valiantly fought off the monsters.

Whatever monsters were, they weren’t normal life and Luke had no compunction about killing them. However, seeing red blood upset Luke.

Luke whipped out his sword. He then pulled a charging cable from his jacket and plugged in his sword.

With the lithium-ion battery on his back, he could swing his sword all day, or until his arms fell off.

It was awkward using a cable but he didn’t have a choice. The battery in the sword hilt was too small and useful only in emergencies.

Luke charged into the fray and hacked at the nightmare creatures. Out of the corner of his eyes Luke noticed that the anime people had better swordsmanship than him. However, they were hampered by the monster’s armor.

Monsters’ armor was less effective against Luke since his sword worked like a chainsaw. Also, for some reason, the monsters were far weaker when attacking him than the fairytale people. It was as if their fantasy world was being diluted by his reality field.

The unreal factor of the battle increased when an old guy dressed as a wizard began shooting fireballs from his hand. The jewel at the top of his staff glowed red every time he fired.

*Was that real magic? Could these creatures be real monsters from a fairytale world?*

Fear overwhelmed Luke. Above, clouds rolled in. The street lights flickered and dimmed to a dull glow. The motor in Luke’s sword stalled.

The darkness gave the monsters an upper hand. They sliced through Luke’s armor and he felt intense pain as his body was sliced.

Luke’s sword was now only as effective as the anime character’s swords, except his swordsmanship was crap compared to the defenders.

In desperation Luke shouted out, “This is not happening. Everyone knows that the heart of magic is lies. These creatures are just genetic experiments gone out of control, some government conspiracy that I’m protecting this town from. I’ll wake up tomorrow and everything will be back to normal.

“E = MC2. The 3 laws of motion. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction…Pi is approximately 3.14157. The square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is the sum of the squares of the other two sides…”

The fear receded along with the pain. The street lights brightened and the clouds rolled back.

Feeling strength returning, Luke renewed his attack. Power returned to his sword and again he had the upper hand.

A nagging thought entered his head. How long could he keep up? He checked his sleeve display. The main battery had 87 minutes of charge left. Why was it draining so fast?

Luke held back fear by will power alone and by focusing on his breathing. Bodies piled high as he fought against the army of monsters.

Luke continued his mantra. “The boiling point of water is 100 degrees centigrade, but only at sea level. Electricity flows in a circuit according to Norton and Thevenin’s laws. Force equals mass times acceleration. A Joule is a unit of energy, but so are calories. Except calories taste better…and jewels can be turned into jewelry.”

At first Luke had problems pulling random equations out of thin air, but the more he spoke, the easier it became – And with it his confidence rose.

After what felt like an eternity the tide of monsters let up and then stopped. Feeling bone weary, Luke turned to the fairytale party.

The group was badly injured but thanks to his intervention no one seemed to have died.

In the center of the group, a fairytale princess stood in an adventurer outfit. She held a long bow in her hand and a full quiver was strapped to her back.

The princess looked like a sixteen-year-old cat girl complete with tail. She had an incredibly sexy body with the cutest face he had ever seen. She was totally his type.

Feeling the intense urge to do this and that to her, Luke stepped towards the cat girl.

The girl looked at Luke with terror and revulsion and cringed.

Luke staggered back from the princess’ reaction. That was much more painful than the damage inflicted by the monsters.

Turning, Luke ran off.

“Wait a minute, I want to thank you for your help,” the wizard called.

Luke ignored the wizard and the others. He didn’t need their thanks. He headed for his car.

Driving through the quiet streets of Los Angeles, Luke tried to figure what happened. Throughout his life he had struggled to find evidence for psychic phenomena. Every psychic he met proved to be a charlatan. Stories abounded where magic existed, but everything pointed to the fact that people were just gullible fools.

According to Carl Gustav Jung, there is a class of phenomena that are neither imaginary nor physically real. They were called psychoid.

Psychoid phenomena couldn’t be proven to exist using scientific means and strange thing happened when investigating them. For instance cameras would malfunction when they showed up and all proof would vanish.

It’s hard to capture an image of a ghost when the camera falls down the moment a ghost appears or when someone blocks the camera’s view by accident. UFOs fell into that category since the pictures were always just blurred images or clear fakes.

Never the less, highly credible people would observe these things, so it was unlikely to be the ravings of lunatics.

The book, *When the Impossible Happens: Adventures in Non-Ordinary Reality,* by Stanislav Grof explained the phenomena well.

Luke entered his apartment and undressed. His body was uninjured and his clothes were undamaged. Even his sword was clean and shiny. The battery pack was at full charge.

“Oh man, I’m going crazy,” Luke said to himself. He wished desperately that magic existed but he knew only fools believed in such things.

It was just too bad that the cute cat girl was a delusion as well. Then again she thought he was a pervert, so being friends was impossible, even if she was real.

Luke got on his computer and began drawing an image of the girl entitled *Annie the White Tiger Princess*.

The next day Luke entered the office but found no one there except for the boss and he looked angry.

“Luke, your little vacation threw off our schedule,” Billy growled angrily. “Come into my office, immediately.” He turned around and stormed away.

Heart in his mouth, Luke said, “Yes sir,” and followed behind.

The boss stood at the entrance of his office and frowned at him. “What are you waiting for, and invitation?”

Heart beating fast, Luke opened the door and entered – and had the fright of his life.

Everyone in the office was there. They threw confetti and blew whistles. “Congratulations,” everyone screamed.

“I bet you thought I was going to fire you for taking a sick day yesterday,” Billy laughed.

“You scared the snot out of me,” Luke admitted. “Why is everyone congratulating me for taking the day off?”

“That’s not why silly,” Luke’s assistant Rita laughed.

“This is why,” Billy said and handed Luke an envelope. “Congratulations on being nominated for the Oscars for best visual effects.”

“We got the news day before yesterday, so we decided to surprise you,” coworker John said. “But then you took the day off.”

“It seems your work with CGI to make super-jumping more realistic was recognized, in addition to the various effects in *The Dark Academy*,” Billy said happily as he thumped Luke’s back. “Our studio is getting a major award.”

The news overwhelmed Luke. Like everyone, he was proud of his contributions, but he didn’t expect so much recognition.

*Maybe this is my reward for rescuing the princess*, Luke thought to himself. That of course was impossible since the notice came before the rescue, and he didn’t believe in time travel.

The Princess

Princess are like mirages -  
not quite real, but bigger than life

Luke nervously sat in his seat at the Dolby Theatre. He wasn’t used to standing in front of a large audience and getting awards. He adjusted his sword on his back to make himself more comfortable and waited.

Luke briefly considered wearing a tuxedo but discarded the idea. His hat, trench coat and sword were his iconic trademark and he always felt naked without them.

Finally the announcer said, “Nominations for best visual effects are Bill Smith for ‘*As the Stomach Turns*’, Amy Williams for ‘*Shooting Fish*’, and Luke Callahan for ‘*The Dark Academy*’. And the winner is Luke Callahan for ‘*The Dark Academy*’.”

Amid applause Luke got up and hurried to the stage. Accepting the award, Luke said, “I want to thank my mother, father and my coworkers.”

Luke raised his iPad for the audience to see. It showed a picture of his parents. A moment later it showed his coworkers.

“I also want to thank my beautiful wife for supporting me in my endeavors.”

There were murmurs in the audience. Everyone who followed the Oscar winners knew that Luke was single, so the announcement confused everyone.

The next few pictures on the iPad showed the cat girl in various poses. Each had the title, *Annie the White Tiger Princess*.

In one scene Luke was on his hands and knees. Annie sat like a princess on his back. Annie had the back of her hand near her mouth and she was laughing haughtily.

The next scene had Annie standing on a mountain of monster copses, holding an ornate sword and dressed like a warrior princess.

The third scene had Annie in a one-piece pink swimsuit and on her hands and knees. Tail in the air, she stared down a terrified Luke dressed in a mouse costume.

The audience laughed. Luke put his iPad away, bowed to the audience and walked off the stage with his trophy.

Luke returned to his seat and waited for everything to finish. He couldn’t believe he did what he was planning to do without making a mistake. Almost – he wanted to draw his sword but forgot.

Stepping out of the Dolby Theatre, a reporter greeted Luke. “Congratulations Luke on your win,” the reporter said. “You’ve only been in the business for five years and now you have won a major award. How does it feel?”

“It feels incredible,” Luke said as he held up his trophy. “This is my manager, Billy the boss.”

“I wish you wouldn’t call me that,” Billy grumbled in embarrassment.

The reporter laughed. “Is that a real sword?” she asked.

“Of course,” Luke replied and took out the handle. He pressed a button and a tube extended to three feet. It glowed brilliant red. “I am after all a Jedi knight.” He put it away.

“So you’re Luke Skywalker,” the reporter laughed. “So tell us about your wife,” she asked.

“Actually I’m Luke’s evil twin brother, the one who ate too many Deep-Fried Nuna burgers.”

Luke showed more pictures on his iPad and explained, “Princess Annie comes from a faraway magical world currently plagued by monsters. I saved her life and as reward the king gave me her hand in marriage.”

The reporter laughed again. “You’re so funny, but I guess geniuses are like that. Thank you for your time. This is Judy, signing off.”

Luke bowed and headed for the reception hall with Billy.

The reception hall buzzed with activity. Reporters with cameras ran everywhere as VIPs basked in the spotlight.

A man with a kingly appearance approached and said, “Congratulations Luke on your award. My name is Arthur.”

“Pleased to meet you, Majesty,” Luke greeted with a flourishing bow and a smile.

“This is my wife Arial. This is Henry, Annie, sixteen-year-old Jessica, and fourteen-year-old James,” Arthur introduced.

Annie looked like a fairytale princess in terms of beauty. Arthur didn’t mention her age, meaning she was legal, he hoped.

Luke grabbed her hand and kissed it. “Pleased to meet you Princess Annie,” he said with a smile.

Annie blushed and looked away.

*Score,* Luke said to himself in triumph. It’s not every day you can make a beautiful woman blush.

Luke then turned to the others and bowed. “Pleased to meet you Queen Arial, Prince Henry, Princess Jessica and Prince James.”

“Please forgive Luke, he can be a little eccentric,” Billy apologized.

“Stop being a wet blanket Billy the Boss,” Luke scolded. “Just because magic doesn’t exist doesn’t mean we can’t have fun. As everyone knows, the heart of magic is lies and that’s what the movie industry is all about. It’s our job to hide the truth from the public.”

“And what truth is that?” Author asked with a raised eyebrow.

“The truth that life has no meaning and we are just cogs in a dead uncaring universe,” Luke said darkly. He then gave a grin and added, “Just joking.”

The family looked worriedly at Luke.

“Don’t listen to him,” Billy laughed in embarrassment. “You know how geniuses can be eccentric. Just look at his outfit.”

“I need to change your name from Billy the Boss to Billy the Wet Blanket,” Luke grumbled.

“Are you a genius?” fourteen-year-old James asked.

“You know what they say. Genius is 10% inspiration, 60% perspiration, and 80% insanity,” Luke said with a smile.

“That doesn’t add up,” Henry objected.

“That’s the nature of genius,” Luke said with a shrug.

“Can I see your sword?” James asked.

Luke handed James the sword hilt and said, “Press that button and try not to kill anyone.”

“It’s so heavy,” James said in surprise. He pressed the indicated button and a plastic tube extended. It glowed bright red. He then swung the light saber around and whacked people on the head with the plastic blade.

“James, stop that,” Arial scolded. “You’re not a kid anymore.”

“That’s so realistic,” Author marveled. “I forgot to mention I am the president of Hasbro. I would love to sell that. Come sit with us. I would like to discuss other toy ideas.”

“That will need to be redesigned,” Luke said as they sat at a table near the main doors. Luke quietly maneuvered himself so he could sit next to Annie without anyone noticing.

“Why do you look so nervous?” Luke asked Billy as he took a sip of wine.

“Don’t you know, Author Pen-Dragon has over a hundred billion dollar’s worth in assets?” Billy whispered. “He also has major holdings in Disney and Warner Brothers and is a major player in the movie industry. This is our big chance.”

That explained why Billy was nervous. However Luke had no interest in politics.

“Who cares? I got 800K for *Blood over the Moon* last year and you’re already a multimillionaire, with an amazing property. So what’s the big deal? Besides, we’ve already sold him,” Luke whispered back.

Luke turned to Author and said, “Your name is Author Pen-Dragon. That’s so cool. Will you show me Excalibur?”

Author just laughed.

From the corner of his eye he saw Annie taking a sip of wine and knew she was of legal age. That meant he could flirt with her, even if she was dating someone.

A thought entered Luke’s head. He expressed it by asking, “Princess, how come your boyfriend isn’t here?”

“Are you hitting on my daughter?” Author asked with a smile.

“Of course not,” Luke denied hastily.

“I approve of you,” Arial said. “I know you can protect her.”

Luke looked at the mother in surprise. That was a strange thing to say. He then looked at Annie in the eyes for the first time. They looked like the cat girl’s eyes, in human form. Her platinum blond hair and pale blue eyes added to the effect.

“Mother,” Annie screamed. “I’m not interested in dating.”

“That’s right,” Jessica agreed, defending her sister. “She’s too busy protecting the Pillars of Creation.”

That sent a shiver down Luke’s back. It was one thing to be delusional. It was another to have someone talk about it.

“Jessica,” both Author and Arial shouted at the same time.

Jessica covered her mouth in embarrassment and said, “Sorry.”

“What are the pillars of creation?” Billy asked.

The parents looked at each other, not sure what to say.

“It’s just an old legend that says the world is supported by twelve pillars,” Luke explained. “Jessica is saying Annie has a lot to deal with and doesn’t need the hassle of dating.”

The parents nodded, happy at the explanation.

Feeling restless, Luke looked at his watch. He should be out there fighting real or imaginary monsters.

“What are you working on now?” Author asked.

“I have an idea for a book where an eco-terrorist group releases biologically engineered monsters into the world. It’s up to a secret government organization to fight these monsters,” Luke said.

“Do these monsters have green blood?” James asked.

“Of course,” Luke replied. “They have the appearance of trolls, ogres, giant spiders and other mythical monsters. The government agency fights them with elite soldiers and then a cleanup crew mops up the bodies and alters the memories of people – It’s similar to the Men in Black, except there are no aliens. The hero is a civilian who fights with a sword.”

“Are there any cute girls?” Arial asked with a smile.

“Of course,” Luke replied. “The hero comes across a group of elves and animal people. They are protecting a beautiful white tiger princess. But she’s no defenseless princess. Instead she aids in the fight with her trusty bow and arrows. Here’s my rendition of the girl. Unfortunately the first encounter with the princess doesn’t go well.”

“What’s the matter? Did she think you were a pervert?” Jessica asked slyly. “Were you imagining doing this and that to her?”

Luke’s face turned red in embarrassment.

“Why are you blushing?” Billy asked. “That was just a story isn’t it?”

Luke was saved from answering when the doors burst open and a horde of goblins entered. They stopped at the entrance and looked around. The attendees likewise just stared in surprise at the intruders, not knowing what to do.

“Holy crap,” Billy exclaimed. “What’s going on?”

“James, I need my sword back,” Luke said and grabbed the handle. He dethatched the light-saber toy part and tossed it to the table. He returned the handle to the sword on his back.

Thinking fast, he called out in a booming voice, “Attention everyone. We have prepared some entertainment for you. It’s part of an upcoming movie sponsored by Alvin’s. It’s called *the Monster Hunter.* For your convenience, please move away from the monsters so your clothes won’t get dirty.”

Having clear instructions, the attendees did as instructed.

Luke got ready and waited, wondering why the goblins weren’t attacking. The mystery was solved a moment later when a woman screamed, “Those things are real.”

Others realized the woman was correct and panic flooded the room. Terrified people charged the doors, but every door was locked.

The hall lights dimmed and flickered. A few of the lights spat electricity and hummed loudly as they struggled to stay on. A damp mist swirled around the tables and chairs as a chill descended upon the guests.

The goblins let loose an ear-splitting screech as they charged.

Luke swung his sword, hoping to protect everyone. Within moments green slime sprayed everywhere.

Henry, James and two other people joined the fight. Just like Luke, they fought with swords. Annie and Jessica shot monsters with bow and arrow.

Wondering where they got their weapons from, Luke gave a commentary. Speaking in broken sentences, he narrated, “The hero –discovers – one day – that – monsters – are real. He then discovers –other monster hunters. Together – they fight – these creatures. The only question is – where did these monsters – come from and why are they attacking? – Just who are his parents – and who is that – mysterious girl with – pale blue eyes?”

Babbling on, Luke continued fighting. Finally the monsters stopped coming and all was quiet.

Moments later a group of people in black suits and dark glasses entered. They bagged the monsters and hauled them away. Cleanup proceeded.

“What would a monster movie be without the Men in Black?” Luke asked the audience. “People, if you got splattered, please come forward so that the mysterious Men in Black can clean you up. There is a danger that your clothes might get stained. Also, this stuff can smell if you don’t wash it up immediately. The monster props are proprietary. I hope you understand.”

One of the agents whispered in Luke’s ear. “Okay,” Luke replied.

“Attention everyone, since you have all been such a marvelous audience, our beloved Men in Black will be giving each of you a delicious treat. This will help steady your nerves,” Luke announced.

The Men in Black distributed candies to the audience and made sure everyone ate them. Luke watched Billy eating the candy.

Cleanup completed and Luke put his sword away.

“Everyone give the Men in Black a big hand,” Luke said as the secret agents were about to leave. “Remember, these people are the ones that protect us from things that go bump in the night.” Luke clapped and everyone joined.

The Men in Black looked around in embarrassment. Moments later they exited.

The mist dissipated and the lights returned to full strength.

Feeling exhausted, Luke took his seat.

“What the hell is going on?” Billy whispered angrily. “How come I didn’t know about it?”

“I’ll explain everything later,” Luke promised.

“Can we talk in private?” Author asked Luke.

Luke nodded and they went to a corner.

“Luke, this stuff is dangerous,” Author warned. “Telling too much to your boss can put him in danger.”

“What can I do?” Luke said defensively. “I couldn’t think of a better excuse than a monster movie. If only I had gone hunting instead of accepting stupid awards,” Luke added guiltily.

“It’s not your fault Luke,” Author consoled as he patted Luke on the shoulder. “Normally the mind candy blocks the formation of long-term memories, especially of things of a supernatural nature. However you sold them on the idea of a movie, so they will remember that. The good news is they will forget the details and more importantly their fear.”

He pondered for a few moments and then said, “I have an idea.” He headed back and Luke followed.

“Mr. Tussle, don’t get angry at Luke,” Author said to Billy. “I requested that this be kept secret. I like the work Luke has done and have decided that I will use your studio for my next production.”

“Really?” Bally asked excitedly.

“I will contact you in the next few days to finalize the arrangements,” Author promised.

“Thank you,” Billy said excitedly as he pumped Author’s hand. “This means so much to me.”

“It’s a pleasure,” Author said with a smile. He turned to Luke and said, “Luke, I would like to meet you this Saturday at my place. I have stuff to discuss with you.”

“Okay sir,” Luke said.

“You know where he lives?” Billy asked.

“I’ll look it up,” Luke replied. “That should be a simple web search.”

“No need,” Arthur said. “Here’s my address.”

MC900065312[1]~

Luke arrived at Arthur’s home at 9:52AM. The home turned out to be a kingly mansion on a multi-acre plot of land. Row houses surrounded the property.

The iron gates opened and Luke drove through. He parked in a spot at the front and walked up the steps. A butler opened the door and Luke stepped into an atrium with a grand stairway.

“Luke, everyone is in the living room,” James called by way of greeting.

Following James, Luke arrived in the living room. The rest of the family was there, as well as the two people who fought with him in the reception hall. Other people were there as well, who seemed familiar.

“Thank you for coming Luke,” Author said as he shook Luke’s hand. “Please have a seat and be comfortable. What would you like to drink?”

“I’ll just have a coke,” Luke said.

“Luke, please tell us what you know about what’s going on,” Author said.

“I know you,” Luke said, recognizing a face. “I met you in the park when I first encountered those things.”

“I’m Major Rogers, in charge of protecting Los Angelis,” the major said as he shook hands. “We did a background check on you, and do you know what we found?”

“You found I was a hot sexy dude who loves eating,” Luke replied, patting his ample gut.

“Not quite,” Rogers replied and pulled out a file and read. “Luke Callahan, age 26, born in Seattle, went to various schools, had lousy grades…”

“They say that geniuses usually have bad grades,” Arial noted.

“I didn’t have bad grades because I was a genius. I had them because the subjects they thought in school had no value,” Luke defended. “Who cares about dead presidents and other stupid subjects? As for math and English, that was a complete waste of time.”

“But those subjects are important,” Author argued.

“My spell checker can correct my grammar and my phone can do math,” Luke argued.

“The most important thing is having a clear path in life.

“After that is knowing how to learn, learning where our strengths and weaknesses are, and instilling within us the desire to grow beyond our limits.

“Above all we must be independent thinkers, who can use strong principles to see beyond the bullshit of others

“Knowing where we came from, where we are going and the important things in life is true education.

“The worst part is that schools don’t teach essential skills such as social integrations, finances and economics. Dealing with bullies, social pressure and false news is essential.”

“Says here you never made any friends in school and people thought you were weird,” Rogers said.

Red faced, Luke said, “You secret agents have way too much spare time.”

“It’s okay to be weird,” James said. “Sister Annie is weird.”

“Am not,” Annie denied. James just giggled.

Author cleared his throat and said again, “Luke, please tell us what you know about what’s going on.”

“I don’t know anything about what’s going on,” Luke confessed. “I came here two months ago because of my job and found cryptids that night in the park. I pretended I entered a movie set because I didn’t want to be questioned. I’ve been bumping into these cryptids every time I entered a park or deserted alley, but only at since. The time at the banquet was an exception.”

Luke paused but no one said anything, so he continued. “I’m certain that these creatures are some sort of terrorist plot or government conspiracy involving biologically engineered life forms.”

“Is that even possible?” Author asked.

“Of course,” Luke said. “Scientists have already created fully custom organisms. It’s only a matter of time before we can become immortal with superior bodies.”

“Incredible,” Author said. “I didn’t know science was so advanced. What if I told you that those were actual monsters, and weren’t created by science?”

“I would say that’s impossible,” Luke said. “Monsters don’t exist. Alternatively, they could be similar to slime molds that form large structures, hence the green blood.”

“What about the twelve pillars of creation and the demon king?” Arial asked.

“Fairy tales,” Luke replied. “Those science rejects seem to have a hallucinogenic substance in their blood.

“I should know, since I hallucinated about meeting the Demon King, after smelling the green goo.

“I’ve been searching since the age of twelve for proof for the supranational. All I found was charlatans and delusional people.”

“What about the white tiger princess you rescued?” Author asked.

“H-how do you know about that?” Luke asked, shocked.

Luke’s vision blurred and the appearance of half the people in the room changed. Annie turned into the white tiger princess.

“Oh man, I’m hallucinating again,” Luke said with a sigh.

“I assure you, you’re not hallucinating,” Arthur said.

“So are you going to marry my sister?” Jessica asked.

“No he’s not,” Annie declared. “He just took it onto himself that he would marry me.”

“Well, are you?” James asked.

“It doesn’t matter, since I’m not ready for kittens,” Luke replied.

Annie threw a pillow at Luke.

“Does magic exist?” Luke asked Author. “What exactly is it?”

“You’re familiar with the regular world, aren’t you?” Author asked. “It’s controlled by definite laws. However, that world isn’t absolute. It was created long ago as a prison.

“In the beginning there were only the prisoners. Later on, souls migrated here for various reasons of their own and the human race came into existence. However, other realities do exist in parallel.

“This mansion is slightly offset from the mortal world and has more flexible laws,” Arthur said, waving his hand around the room. “Magic is the creative spirit of the One, channeled into results through imagination, expectation and emotions. Spells and ritual are essential since we are creatures of habit.”

“In other words, spells are real,” Ariel said. “Magic can work in the mortal world, but only when the veil is thin and under limited circumstances.”

“But it can’t be logically proven to exist,” Luke noted.

“That is correct,” Arthur agreed.

“That’s because of the twelve pillars,” Luke surmised with a frown.

“You don’t like those pillars, do you?” Rogers asked; more a statement than a question.

Luke paused a minute before answering. He didn’t want to admit he hated them, since that would make him look like a jerk and an enemy.

Luke hunted for an analogy and said, “This world is like a coral reef. It protects and nurtures life. Therefore it has value. However, I wish there were more signposts for people like me who wish to know the truth of existence, and understand a greater reality.”

“Signposts do exist. There are everywhere for those with eyes to see,” Arthur said. “All those so-called charlatans have had glimpses. Why do you think you’re here?”

“I know of a case where a man thought his wife was a hat rack,” Luke said. “Another man thought his wife was an imposter and tried to kill her.”

Arthur nodded. “That happens when the other reality intrudes and the person is unable to assimilate.”

“People exist in this world for a reason,” Ariel said. “It is necessary for them. You are here because you are ready.”

“For those who are ready, there are shamanic practices, dream exploration, as well as spirit helpers such as Ayauhasca,” Arthur said. “However, the Demon King is a being that has caused endless suffering throughout the multiverse. We cannot allow him to escape.”

“Do aliens exist?” Luke asked.

“Yes and no,” Arthur said. “Aliens are intrusions from other realities and are not what people think they are. As for flying saucers, they are just vehicles for soul exploration.”

Luke looked at the major.

“I have no interest in such things,” Rogers stated. “You may not think this world is important, but I do. I will do whatever it takes to protect both it and the United States of America from all treats, both domestic and external,” he finished, sounding like an army drill sergeant.

Luke had the unexpected urge to stand up and salute. Instead he said, “Why am I here?”

“Because of the activity of the demon lord, more and more civilians are getting wrapped up in this,” Arthur said. “In the dark, people die of mysterious causes. In the day, the deaths are fully explainable. However, we know the truth.

“You, by combining magic and technology, seem to exert great power to protect this world.”

“We need you,” Rogers said. “My forces are stretched to the limit.”

“But I don’t know magic,” Luke objected.

“Can you please explain to me your sword?” Arthur asked.

“Here take the sword,” Luke said and bent over.

Arthur pulled on the hilt and the hilt came off.

Luke returned the hilt and withdrew the sword. “The hilt locks onto the sword’s base when it detests the RFID chip in my hand. Meaning only I can draw the sword. The handle has a motor that vibrates the blade like a chainsaw. The blade was forged by a Japanese master sword smith.

“I call it the Midnight Sun. Inlaid in the cold iron are gold, silver, birch and oak, protection from evil supernatural creatures.”

“Can I see?” James asked.

<Image of the sword>

Luke was about to say, ‘Be careful’, then remembered James knew how to handle a sword better than him.

“‘That which cuts nothing, that which shines in the dark. The world shuns it, yet it is more precious than gold’. What does that mean?” James asked.

“You can read Rune?” Luke asked, surprised. “It’s just something I made up. Those decorative lines of silver and gold along the blade are various quotes that have left an impression on me. It’s hard to read, since the text is only 1mm in height.

“A nonsense one I made up is, ‘The spirit is One, but from the One comes the All.’

“And of course, Midnight Sun represents the light that shines in the darkness, dispelling evil.”

“Can you help us improve our weapons?” Arthur asked.

“That’s easy. Start by using a compound bow instead of a recursive bow. Those things are rather hi-tech. You can get them at a hunting store or online, along with metal arrows. Swords are trickier to mechanize.

“Remember the trick is to keep you grounded in reality. However – Major Rogers, what kind of ammo do you use?”

“Standard military issued ammo,” Rogers replied. “You can buy it at any gun store.”

“That’s no good at all,” Luke said. “You need silver bullets for evil werewolves, wooden bullets for vampires.

“Silver plating should work, so the cost should be minimal.”

“Isn’t silver plating expensive?” James asked.

“No,” Luke replied. “The process is simple and available on YouTube. Yes, silver isn’t cheap. However the amount used is minuscule. A few grams will go a long way. The fact you’re using guns helps.

“Also, ultraviolet or full-spectrum light should help also, since it’s simulates daylight. My mistake. Ultraviolet light doesn’t do anything. The important thing is lighting that makes us feel it is day.”

Luke paused, realizing how ridiculous he sounded. He blinked and ordinary humans were sitting in front of him.

“Remember your fairy tales,” Luke continued. “When making a movie, I always go for authentic. By the way, Major Rogers, what do you see when you see Arthur and his family?”

“What kind of question is that?” Rogers asked, confused.

“I mean, do they look different? I mean, do they look like a typical American family?” Luke clarified.

“What would they look like, aliens?” Rogers asked.

“Luke, think of what we are dealing with, as that which lies between the crack between sleeping and wakefulness, the imaginary that seems more real than the real,” Arthur said.

“Carl Gustav Jung described this in his writings and described these phenomena as psychoid,” Arial added.

Luke blinked again and the family returned to being animal creatures. Arthur the regal lion smiled.

“I will design the equipment and post the plans on my blog,” Luke promised.

“Well it’s time to go,” Rogers said and got up. “Good day folks,” he said and exited.

“It was a pleasure meeting you,” Luke said and headed for the door. He turned to the cat girl and said, “Annie, you may not have time for dating. However, going out every now and again is good for you. Perhaps we can train together.”

“Hitting on my daughter again, are we?” Arthur asked with a smile.

“One can only try,” Luke said, returning the smile. He exited the room. Within moments Luke was back in his car. He drove away.

MC900065312[1]~

Luke reviewed the past events and decided they were fun. On a whim he decided to turn around. He wanted to see the mansion again.

Within minutes Luke was back at the address. However the mansion was gone, replaced by row houses.

Confused, Luke drove around the neighborhood. You can’t just misplace a monster mansion. *‘Excuse me Your Majesty, but Buckingham Palace is missing, replaced by row houses.’* No good. It was gone.

Luke checked Google maps. The area only showed row houses. There was no 3-story apartment building-sized mansion to be found.

Luke screamed in frustration and spewed out a stream of profanity. The world was back to its muggle self, where existence had no meaning. He was certain he had found the crack in reality that exposed real magic. He had the urge to go to Washington, DC and blow up the Washington Monument with a stick of dynamite.

Calming himself down, Luke headed out into the Topanga State Park.

Luke stopped in a secluded canyon where non-documented workers toiled. They had completed the 100-foot wide geodesic dome and were now backfilling the dome with excavated dirt.

The dome was easy to construct. First, you pour a foundation for the dome to anchor into. Then you inflate an air form. After that, you spray shotcrete on the form, with rebar for strength. The process took hours to complete, once preparation was complete. That was good, since his construction project was illegal.

Eventually planted native shrubbery would blend everything, making his fallout shelter and work area look like just another part of the terrain.

Luke’s original goals for the shelter was modest. However, his Oscar win allowed him credit for an 8-million-dollar loan. He used this to redesign his hideout with his architect. It was surprising how much you could build if you left out the luxury stuff, and just kept ugly concrete.

Luke stared at the workers and felt sorry for everyone in the United States. Fear had stripped everyone of their ideals. Local citizens could only think, “Oh my God, they are stealing my job,” even though immigration increased wealth. Other people clung to arbitrary roles, thinking they were absolute.

The only way forward was for people to step boldly on the unknown path, embrace the unknown, and reinvent themselves. Instead, people just put up walls. Then the barbarians come and everything gets torn down.

Luke thought of the people who were trying to protect the Pillars of Creation. It seemed like a futile effort. Or at least it would be, if the Pillars of Creation and monsters were real.

Of course the Pillars weren’t real. They were symbolic of one’s desire for security in a world of shifting sands.

Likewise the demons and monsters were also symbolic.

Luke drove back home and worked on developing weapons for imaginary heroes.

That night he went monster hunting. This time there was a difference. The monsters weren’t doing anything but just waiting. Luke walked up to a goblin and stared at it.

“Do you exist?” Luke asked it. The creature just stared back at him.

“You don’t exist, do you?” Luke said sadly. The creatures faded out of existence, leaving Luke alone.

MC900065312[1]~

Next day Luke went to a local health clinic.

“How may I help you?” the receptionist asked.

“I need a general checkup,” Luke said. “I’m new to the area and need a family doctor.”

Luke filled out papers and waited. He was finally called in.

“Doctor, last week I was hiking and hit my head,” Luke said, making up lies. “I want to make sure my brain is okay.”

The doctor gave Luke an examination and booked an appointment with the hospital for a MRI scan.

Shattered

In times of stability, we all crave excitement,

Then we regret it when we get it.

2 months passed and the shell of Luke’s redesigned bomb shelter, with its multiple connected domes, was complete. One even had a dirt floor for future expansion.

Sandwiched against the canyon walls, the opportunity for tunnels was limitless.

The construction was nerve-wracking, but Luke knew how to deal with pesky authorities. It was just a matter of disguising the worksite from prying eyes and using psychology to manage people who got suspicious.

It was surprising how easy it was to manipulate people when you go extravagant with bullshit stories.

Building in the most out of the way location also helped avoid tourists.

Luke set up a training area with spinning manikins just outside a secret entrance of the bomb shelter. The workers couldn’t be seen from this location.

Rogers looked at Luke as he swung a massive solid steel sword that was bigger than him. He blocked and parried as the manikins moved unpredictably. Back and forth he went through the obstacle course.

“That’s an interesting training regiment he has,” Rogers said to his lieutenant. “That sword must weigh 30 pounds at least. Perhaps we can adapt his training for our needs.”

“Yes sir,” Jane said and lined Luke up with her camera.

Just then Luke turned around and stared directly at her. Startled, Jane dropped her camera and watched Luke get pummeled with his rotating manikins.

“Good grief, he saw us sir,” Jane exclaimed.

“No he didn’t,” Edwards assured Jane. “However he did feel someone watching him. He’s an interesting man. No wonder General Arthur is interested in him. Did you find anything interesting about his bomb shelter?”

“It cost him over three million dollars to build just the shell, not including quote legal fees,” Jane said, making air quotes. “It has multiple rooms and levels, a well, two large water storage tanks, fuel depots, and multiple escape tunnels. The solar panels are disguised to look like boulders from ground level and those cactuses are disguised wind turbines. According to his plans, with his custom room-sized fridges and storage rooms, he’s ready for doomsday.

“He took out a twenty year loan, since he didn’t have enough cash. Why would he go to so much expense?”

“He likes wrapping himself into his work,” Rogers said. He got up and headed to his jeep. Jane followed.

“But a normal person would have built a luxury mansion with the loan he took out,” Jane objected.

“He’s no ordinary human, despite our intel,” Rogers replied with a shrug. “He’s as mysterious as General Arthur.”

“What are you looking for sir?” Jane asked.

“Over the last two months, he’s been able to seal the holes in Reality with amazing ease. We can finally keep up with demand,” Rogers said with admiration. “I want to find out how he does it, so we can replicate it.”

They drove to Luke’s training area.

“Luke, what is this thing?” Rogers asked by means of greetings.

“I’m working on a possible prop for a movie,” Luke said. “This is a variation of the training Shaolin Monks are supposed to do. This is so far out of the way I figured that no one would mind.”

“How does it work?” Rogers asked.

“The manikins are connected with drive chains. Spinning one spins all,” Luke said. He walked to a box and opened the lid. “These mechanical switches control the gearing. By randomly moving these I get a random horde every time. I also control timing here. Would you like to try? I can lower the speed.”

“Did you build anything else?” Rogers asked, ignoring the offer.

Luke glanced around and said, “What you see is what you get.”

“What about the…,” Jane began.

“Lieutenant,” Rogers said sternly, cutting her off. He turned to Luke and said, “I saw the plans for the military equipment for fighting monsters on your blog.”

“They are cool, aren’t they?” Luke said. “Too bad monsters don’t exist. It would be fun testing them out on real monsters. Of course, creating MMORPGs would be fun as well.”

“What’s a MMORPG?” Jane asked.

“It’s short for Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game,” Luke replied. “Some are crap. Others are rather addicting. How may I help you?”

“I was driving by and spotted you,” Rogers said. “I figured I should say hi.”

“You’re a military guy, aren’t you?” Luke asked. “Do you have ideas for futurist wars?”

“I’m not into fantasy or sci-fi,” Rogers said.

“Then I guess you aren’t interested in the movie, *The Doom Bringers*,” Luke said. “It will be out next year.”

“I don’t know if you know this but the area is suffering from a strange fungal blight. They are producing gasses with hallucinating effect,” Rogers said.

“I had no idea,” Luke marveled. “Does it center around parks, dark alleys, and abandoned places, and only after dark?”

“I see you encountered it,” Rogers said. “How would you counter it?”

“That’s simple. Just realize they are not real,” Luke said. He pointed and added, “Like those behind you.”

Rogers and Jane spun around in fright. Both pulled out guns.

“Relax. I’m just pulling your leg,” Luke said. “Besides, monsters can’t come out in the daylight.”

Rogers put his gun away and said, “I guess you got me there.”

“Remember always, there is no such thing as monsters,” Luke admonished. “Not just believe it. Know it down to your very core. When you do that the hallucinations will go away on their own.”

“Thank you for your assistance,” Rogers said.

“See you later,” Luke said and turned to go.

“Wait a minute,” Rogers said.

“Sorry. I thought you said good bye,” Luke said.

“Have you met Mr. Arthur recently?” Rogers asked.

“I’m scheduled to fly to Florida tomorrow morning,” Luke said. “Alvan’s is working on props for a Halloween horror movie called, *Mommy, don’t leave me*.”

“That’s creepy,” Jane said with a shudder.

“I know,” Luke admitted. “The props are giving me nightmares, and I’m the one designing them.”

“Don’t you work on anything that’s not scary?” Jane asked.

“As a matter of fact, yes,” Luke said. “It’s called *The Ancient of trees.* It’s about two kids who wander into a magical world where the trees talk. The boy and girl twins have to fight to protect that world from human exploitation.

“As with all Walt Disney movies, good always prevails and the world is preserved.” Luke frowned and added. “Humans are then forever banned from that world. I don’t know why people like creating magical worlds, which are then forever lost. I guess people like replaying the trauma of our own banishment.

“I bet, if a greater world of potentially hostile entities existed, the government would hide it.”

“Don’t you think people aren’t ready for such things?” Rogers asked.

Luke turned glaring eyes at Rogers and screamed, “Who the hell gave you the right to decide what I’m ready or not ready to see?”

Before Rogers could react, Luke switched topics and said, “By the way, I’m also working on props for a spy movie set in the future called, *The Venusians cover-up*. It’s about a brewing war between Mars and Earth.

“Can the agent find the secrets buried in an abandoned Venus floating mining city, and can those secrets prevent a war that could spell disaster for the human race?”

“You’re quite busy,” Jane noted.

“Don’t you ever work on props for regular movies?” Rogers asked.

“No way,” Luke objected. “That’s boring. There are two types of story tellers – Those who entertain people and put them to sleep and those who awaken people to new worlds of possibilities.”

“It was a pleasure talking to you,” Rogers said.

“Visit anytime,” Luke said.

Luke watched as the two drove away. He headed into his bunker and down to his workroom. He had work to do. More importantly he needed a shower. His training regiment was exhausting and he was soaked with sweat.

MC900065312[1]  
Friday June 2~

Luke arrived Friday morning, 8:54AM at the West Palm Beach, Florida studio. He greeted Arthur with a yawn.

“Good morning Mr. Penn-Dragon. Sorry but I can never sleep on the plane,” Luke apologized. “Princess, I didn’t know you worked for the industry.”

“I work on clothing and choreography,” Annie said.

“With your fashion sense, I’m not surprised,” Luke said with a smile.

Annie rolled her eyes but said nothing.

“Annie will show you around,” Arthur said. “I have an interview scheduled at 1:00PM.”

“Have fun with the interview,” Luke said.

“You’re the guest of the interview,” Arthur said. “Sorry about not warning you.”

“But I didn’t have time to prepare,” Luke complained. “More importantly, why would people want to interview me?”

“They interviewed you at the Oscars, didn’t they?” Arthur asked.

“That’s different,” Luke argued. “Everyone is interested in the lives of celebrities and Oscar winners. But that’s old news now.”

“Believe it or not but people have taken notice of you,” Arthur asked. “Think of Avatar. More people went for the special effects than the story. Alvin’s will have to pay you more if they expect to keep you.”

“That’s interesting,” Luke mused. “A week after the Oscars, I talked to my bank and discovered my available line of credit had increased.”

“Precisely,” Author agreed. He turned to Annie and asked, “Annie, please show Luke around.”

“Yes dad,” Annie said reluctantly. “Come Luke, I’ll show you around.”

The tour went through the kitchen, offices, social areas, and ended at the workshop.

The shop was an organized mess of half complete projects. People worked hard to meet deadlines.

“Luke, this is everyone,” Annie said. “Everyone, this is Luke.”

“Thank you Princess for that marvelous introduction,” Luke said with a sideways smile. “As always, your eloquence is superlative.”

Annie blew him a raspberry.

Luke returned the raspberry with an air kiss.

Annie frowned and walked away.

“I’m Sam Jones. Why did you call her princess?” Sam asked.

“Because her father’s name is Arthur Penn-Dragon,” Luke explained. He paused and then said in annoyance, “Haven’t any of you heard of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table?”

“Oh yes, now I understand,” a woman said.

“Everyone, remember, our job is to create illusion,” Luke said. “The only way to do that is if we can visualize a different reality, one filled with flowers and unicorns, as well as evil monsters wanting to destroy everything, and occasionally a carnivorous unicorn.”

“Show me what you’re working on,” Luke asked the team.

Before he knew it, Luke was interrupted when movie crew entered.

“And here is Luke Callahan, Oscar winner for best special effects,” a Japanese reporter said. “Luke, may we ask you a few questions?”

“No problem Hadaka San,” Luke said.

“Where do you get your inspiration from?” Hadaka asked.

“From my dreams,” Luke replied. “I’ve been journaling them faithfully since I was twelve. Everyone should record their dreams. All the greatest geniuses get their inspiration from there. I’m no exception.”

Luke waved his arms frantically and said hastily, “Hold it. I didn’t mean to sound arrogant. I’m just saying I use dreams to make myself creative, and so can everyone else.

“Of course, you need to prime your subconscious,” Luke added. “Each of the great dreamers immersed themselves in the subject so greatly they felt like puking.

“But still, dream recall is essential.”

“What are you working on now?” Hadaka asked.

“I’m just helping out,” Luke said. “You need to ask Sam our project lead about the details. Sam, come here.”

“We are working on a superhero movie,” Sam said. “I can’t tell you the details, but I like Luke’s ideas.”

Just then Luke freaked out. The camera captured Luke half-running, half-staggering back and forth, screaming, “Earthquake.” He collided with a wall and fell on his ass.

“Oh my goodness, are you okay?” Hadaka asked worriedly. She grabbed an arm and pulled, but he wouldn’t budge.

Luke blinked and stared at Hadaka with a confused look. He then said, “You can’t pull me up. I’m too heavy. Too many burritos, not enough exercise.” He patted his ample stomach for emphasis.

Luke got up and said with an embarrassed laugh, “Sorry I scared you. I wanted to demonstrate my acting skills. Don’t say anything. I know what you’re thinking. I shouldn’t quit my day job.”

“No, that was a good impersonation of being in an earthquake,” Hadaka assured. “It was just unexpected.

“I have been wondering, aren’t you hot in that coat of yours? Also, how come you always wear a sword?”

“This is my image of being a mysterious character. Although some would say a shady character. Others, such as Annie Penn-Dragon would say I’m just a big fat slob,” Luke added with a laugh. “As for the heat, I have solid state air conditioning.

“My sword is the Midnight Sun. It won’t hurt you. It can cut No-Thing.”

Luke pulled out a toy sword with a foam blade.

“Don’t you mean it can’t cut anything?” Hadaka asked. “Thank you for your time. This is Hadaka Kato signing off.”

The interview ended and Hadaka and her crew left.

Luke sighed as he reviewed his recent psychotic episode. It was one thing to have a delusional attack. It was another thing to embarrass himself in front of who knew how many people.

Arthur approached Luke and said, “I need you to meet me at my place tomorrow. Is that okay?”

“Yes sir,” Luke replied.

“I’ll email you the directions and time. Excuse me,” Arthur said. “I have a meeting.”

Luke turned to the others and said, “Excuse me everyone, I need to write down some inspirations before I forget it.”

He pulled out his iPad and began writing.

Friday June 2, 11:27AM, Hadaka interviewed me.

I suddenly experienced what felt like an explosion and a shattering. The whole world shook and trembled as if all of existence was about to ~~fall apart~~ ~~shatter~~ disintegrate. As if one of the pillars of ~~the world~~ creation had shattered. Of course no one else noticed.

That proved I was being delusional again. However, I did notice that Arthur looked terrified when the episode ended. I wonder if he experienced the same thing. Unfortunately, Annie wasn’t in the room at the time, so I couldn’t see her (non) reaction.

Arthur asked me to meet him at his place on Saturday, and he looked worried. We shall see…

Luke put his iPad away and joined his new coworkers.

That night Luke dreamed of the Demon King.

From the vantage point of the generals, Luke could clearly see the Demon King gloating over the destruction of the Washington Monument.

All about him riotous laughter echoed.

MC900065312[1]~

Saturday June 3, 9:50AM.

Luke drove up the driveway of Arthur’s mansion. The mansion was different in appearance but no less imposing. He was a little nervous. The last time was a weird experience. This time he was determined to enjoy the experience.

The door opened as Luke approached.

“Come in,” James called as he dragged Luke in. “We need to talk about the remaining eleven pillars of creation.”

James’s comment caused Luke’s brain to switch. Luke felt as if he was stepping through a barrier as he crossed the threshold of the house.

Luke blinked and standing before him was the young fox spirit in human form. In appearance he had a human form with fox ears, fox features, and a fox tail.

They entered the living room, where the family was assembled. This time, the wizard Luke saw on his first meeting with the White Tiger Princess was there.

“Thank you for coming Luke,” Arthur said. “As you know, the Washington pillar was destroyed. Did you get any new insights?”

“I got a strange dream where His Royal Ugliness gloated on his throne of bones. He then placed his sight on the Berlin Victory Column,” Luke said.

“Just who are you human?” the tall elfin wizard asked.

“Why do people keep questioning who I am?” Luke asked, annoyed. “Can I question who you are? Do any of you even exist? If I’m dreaming, then can I have a date with Annie?”

“Why would I want to date a fat, overweight pot-bellied pig?” Annie asked in disgust.

Luke rubbed his stomach and laughed. “Don’t make fun of pot-bellied pigs.”

“I don’t think I introduced myself to you,” the wizard said. “I am Melvin, court wizard.”

“Don’t you mean Merlin?” Luke asked.

“Merlin was my grandfather,” Melvin said. “I am the youngest of five. Arthur is, as you can guess the descendent of the great King Arthur. We no longer have the great sword, since it was returned to the Lady of the Lake.”

“Why don’t you ask for the sword back?” Luke asked.

“That’s easier said than done,” Arthur replied with a sigh. “We have no way of contacting her.”

“If the Lady of the Lake wanted you to have it, she would have given it to you,” Luke reasoned. “Then again, maybe I have it. Just joking.”

“You asked if we exist. The answer is yes, we do exist,” Melvin said. “Ultimate existence is unknowable. There are two types of realities: Consensual realities and nonconsensual realities.

“Non consensual realities are like dreams and are unique to the individual. Consensual realities are realities that multiple people have agreed on.

“The mortal world is one such reality. It allows for souls to evolve. Wizards are just people who study the laws of reality, for the purpose of controlling reality.

“Souls exist and evolve over eons of time, eventually having the power of gods. Unfortunately gods can and do fall from grace. The Demon King is one such being. He broke the cardinal rule of non-interference and that corrupted him.

“He became a terror to the lesser races. Eventually a local council of elder gods decided to create a prison for him and his generals.

“There was an unintended consequence of that action. Being so restrictive, it became the ideal place for developing souls. And so the Earth Plane came into being.

“We must stop him and his demon lord generals, or the mortal world will be destroyed, disrupting the lives of billions.”

“We are all at the same spiritual strength as the generals,” Arthur added. “Unfortunately they and their legions outnumber us.”

“Perhaps I’m one of the generals, who needs just one little kiss to turn coat. Just joking,” Luke added with a wink.

“This is not a laughing matter,” Annie scolder. “Do you have any idea how many people will suffer?”

“Look Annie, for the last two months I’ve been seeking out these creatures,” Luke admonished.

“And you’ve been fighting them. I know,” Annie admitted.

“No,” Luke denied. “I would look them in the eye and deny their existence. They would then fade away like the nightmares they are. So far it has been working flawlessly as my confidence has increased.

“My point is that you must not take them too seriously, or you will give them too much power. Melvin, what did you see when we first met?”

“It was almost pitch dark, with angry clouds overhead,” Melvin said, recalling the incident. Then I saw a beacon of light approaching. He fought with amazing power and the tide of battle turned. Then something happened and his light faded.”

“That was when I saw you throwing balls of fire, and realized magic was real. At that moment my battery pack died, along with the streetlights. And then thunder clouds rolled in. The monsters then started to rip me a new one.

“Then what did you do?” Arial asked, fascinated.

“I focused on the fact that the heart of magic is lies,” Luke explained. “I then intoned some mantras.”

“You don’t seem like the person to pray,” Arthur noted.

“I didn’t pray,” Luke refuted. “As a matter of fact, I didn’t think of asking for external help. This is the mantra I used.”

Luke pulled out his phone and played a recording. The group heard Luke reciting scientific equations in a monotone.

“I always knew the answer, but some how I forgot in the rush of events,” Melvin admitted. “Thank you for the reminder. With this, we can block the effects, even if we lose another two pillars.”

“You mentioned the gods,” Luke said. “Can’t they do anything about this? They created the prison, didn’t they?”

“They said they cannot interfere in the internal matters of this world,” Melvin grumbled.

“It figures,” Luke grumbled. “However, these pillars are external to the mortal world. Their preservation will not affect humans, only their destruction.

“Better yet, why don’t they just move the prisoners?”

“What marvelous questions,” Melvin praised. “Unfortunately moving them will disrupt the world. They also can’t directly oppose the demons, since that is a violation on the demon’s freedoms. Within the prison the demons are free to do whatever they want. That’s why people like us exist.”

“You yourself are involved in this, but we don’t know how,” Arthur said.

“There’s more to you than meets the eye,” Melvin said.

Luke leaned forward, steepled his fingers and made an evil expression. “Maybe I’m one of the evil demon lords, here to infiltrate your ranks. Maybe I’m just posing as a harmless fat guy just to fool you,” Luke said in using an evil voice. “Wha-ha-ha-ha-ha.”

“You’re scaring me,” James exclaimed, looking terrified.

“Sorry kid,” Luke said gently. “Truth be told, I was born into a normal family and grew up with normal people. I don’t have fancy powers. My abilities are the same as all humans.

“The only reason I’m here is because I’m a good actor and enjoy role-playing too much. I fooled the Men in Black, which is why I got to keep my memories, and now I’m useful to both them and you.

“I’ll help you if I can, but don’t expect miracles.”

“I’m sorry for putting you in such a spot,” Arthur said. “We just assumed since you were so good with your sword.”

“What style do you practice?” Henry asked.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Luke said, incredulously. “My only style is hack and slash. I’ve always liked swords. So I practice with spinning practice dummies. I assure you every one of you is better than me in terms of skill.

“Here I’ll show you,” Luke said and pulled out his iPad, and accidently dropped a can of coke.

“Sorry about that,” Luke said.

“Do you always carry coke with you?” James asked.

“Sure,” Luke said. “You never know when you will get thirsty…or when you’ll need a kazoo – toot.” Luke blew the kazoo and put it away.

Luke put the coke away and pulled out a hamburger. “Damn I forgot to eat this. It’s still fresh.” Luke put it back.

“Interesting,” Melvin mused.

“You keep hamburgers in your pocket?” Annie exclaimed, startled. “You really are a pig.”

“Thank you my dear,” Luke said with a bow and a smile. “Join me and we can be two pigs in a blanket.”

The iPad showed Luke battling his practice dummies as they whirled around with their multiple arms and wooden swords.

“The only electronics I use is to score points when you hit the orange targets. Avoid the red targets or you lose points,” Luke explained.

“I could have made the counters mechanical, but I was being lazy. The plans for this are on my blog,” Luke said as the sword slingers looked at the practice dummies with amazement.

“Dear, I heard you were going to teach an acting class to high-schoolers,” Arial asked.

“Yes, Ma’am, it starts one week from Monday,” Luke replied. “Speaking of which, James, you’re in the correct age group. Why don’t you join? We will play dress up and every day a new teacher will come and show you how to play different roles. It will be fun.”

Paradigm Shift

Our worldview can shift like a flash,

But preparation can take a lifetime

James was eager to participate in the classes Luke had set up. He liked Luke and thought it would be fun to have him as his brother-in-law. The only question was how to get his sister to marry Luke?

James stepped into the office and saw several people ahead of him. In front of him, behind a desk, sat a grumpy old man.

“Damn kids are always so noisy,” the man grumbled. “It’s not going to kill any of you to be quiet.”

James waited as the man monologue about the past. Finally he asked, “Sir, shouldn’t Luke be here now? It’s almost 9:30AM.”

“It’s clear to me you haven’t learnt anything. Too much social media, not enough brain power. Fine, fine,” the man grumbled.

The man left the room. Five minutes later a plump middle-aged woman entered. She was pushing a huge cart filled with scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, jam, orange juice, and other breakfast items.

“Hello dears, would you like some breakfast?”

“Excuse me ma-am,” James said. “Do you know when Luke will arrive?”

“Classes have already started my dear,” the woman said with a smile. “Now have some food while it’s hot.”

James wasn’t sure what the woman meant by the classes had already started. Not sure what to do he approached the huge cart and grabbed a plate.

“That’s right dears, have plenty to eat,” the woman encouraged. “It’s good to eat, but you must exercise. Otherwise you will get sick and bad things will happen.”

The woman was a sweet lady, but James was eager to meet Luke. He wanted to know what Luke would teach them.

“See you later kids,” the woman said and walked out of the room.

After awhile people started getting restless. “Where the hell is that stupid Luke?” a large teen named Ricky asked angrily.

Just then a sheet of paper slipped under a door.

A girl picked up the page and read, “How long are you going to stay in that room? Aren’t you all bored?”

Ricky said, “Let’s go” and opened the door.

James entered a corridor and followed it. Near the end was a room with a young woman sitting on a stool and playing a guitar.

“Come in all of you,” she said. “I really need an audience.”

“No thanks,” James said. “We are looking for Luke Callahan. Do you know where he is?”

The woman began strumming and sang, “I do indeed know where the man stands. He’s closer than the door and father than the floor. He’s here to teach you some moooore. So be glad and learn what you can.

“Come on everyone, sing with me. How can you become singers, if you don’t sing?”

“Please miss,” an Asian girl said. “Just tell us where Luke is.”

“I told you where he is,” the woman sang again. “If you can’t see him, then you don’t know acting. So go. There is a bus outside.”

The woman then shooed the gang out of the room.

Not knowing what to do, James followed the gang out of the building. As promised, there was a school-bus outside.

“Howdy partners,” a large Texan bellowed as he approached.

He tweaked his handlebar moustache and boomed, “Isn’t this a marvelous day to learn acting. You know, in Texas, this bus would have been twice as big. Everything is big in Texas.” He laughed at his own joke.

“Where the hell is Luke?” Ricky, the self-appointed leader demanded.

“He’s here,” the Texan said with a laugh. He then raised a device and pressed a button.

“Okay kids, reach-around will end when you find the answer to this question,” the device in the Texan’s hand said. “What is acting, and why haven’t you found Luke? And now get aboard and discuss that answer among yourself.”

James got aboard and took a seat. While they were driving, he tried to share his ideas with the others. Everyone had their own idea of what acting was all about.

The driver offered ideas as the trip progressed. Eventually they arrived at a private beach and the driver parked.

“Stay here awhile and I’ll be back.”

A few minutes later an attractive woman police officer entered the bus and said, “Kids, my name is Officer Jane. Do you know where the driver went? He and an older gentleman are accused of taking kids your age on strange rides and doing unspeakable things to them?”

For the next ten minutes she took statements from James and the other.

“Okay kids, don’t stray too far. Don’t worry. Your teacher is closer than you realize.”

The officer left and James wondered what the hell was going on.

Suddenly there was a scream and several gun shots.

A moment later, an overweight man with a grizzly white beard approached. He was covered with blood and held a riffle in his hand.

“Okay you snot-nosed kids, get into the warehouse if you know what’s good for you. This will end if you can find your teacher.”

Terrified, James and the others did as instructed.

Inside, the room was prepared for lunch.

A woman in a kimono entered and said, “Okay kids, sit down. It’s time to eat lunch.”

“But what about the murdered?” a girl named Terri asked, terrified.

“There is no murdered dear,” She said. She paused and then said, “Do you still not understand the power of acting?

“Answer me this question? How many people did you meet today?”

After awhile the consensus was 7 people.

“I’m sorry but the number of people you met is just one,” the woman said sweetly. “Please identify who that person is. Bye.”

James pondered, but drew a blank. He then opened his mouth and said, “The one person is Luke Callahan.”

The woman smiled and then walked out of the room.

There was much argument, since everyone had met Luke and they all knew he was a man with a huge gut.

The group was interrupted by clapping. Luke in his iconic trench-coat stepped into the room.

“Your acting lessons started this morning at 9:00AM sharp when I greeted you as that grumpy old security guard.

“That old lady who served you breakfast was also me.”

“What about that woman who was playing the guitar?” Bobby asked.

“Me too,” Luke said. “The Texan, the cop lady, the scary killer and finally the Asian woman were also me. I gave you all plenty of hints I was nearby, but none of you believed me.”

“But you’re a big fat slob,” Ricky the angry teen accused.

“You only assumed I’m fat because of how I dress,” Luke said. “That’s by design.”

Luke removed his coat, accessories, and platform shoes and showed himself in an Elvis costume.

“Okay all you hound dogs, it is time to have lunch,” Luke said. “During this time I want you to contemplate what you have learnt today. After lunch you will discuss.”

“Annie will be surprised when she discovers you aren’t fat,” James said.

“Don’t tell Annie or anyone,” Luke warned.

“Please,” James begged. “I’m sure she will like you if she knew the real you.”

Luke sighed and said, “Fine. However, let’s do this the correct way…”

MC900065312[1]~

Annie leaned back on her chair and looked at Luke. James was sitting next to Luke, talking about nothing. She couldn’t understand why James was constantly bugging her to date Luke. Why did he like Luke so much?

“You really need to exercise,” Annie finally said.

“No way,” Luke denied. “Exercise is for losers and fitness fanatics. Besides, it’s my fat that makes me strong.”

“Why don’t we go the beach?” James suggested. “Luke, can you swim?”

“I can float,” Luke said.

“Like a whale,” Annie said. That got a laugh from both Luke and James.

“Mum, dad, can we go?” James begged. “We don’t have anything scheduled today. We can have lunch at the beach.”

“Okay dear,” Arial said.

“Yeah,” James shouted. “I’ll get my bathing suit and go with Luke.”

James ran up the stairs to his room. Moments later he returned wearing his bathing suit. “See you at our usual place,” James said and dragged Luke out of the front door.

“You’re coming dear,” Arial said in no uncertain terms.

“Yes mother,” Annie said with a sigh and headed for her room. There she took her time and eventually changed.

“Took you long enough,” the father scolded. “Bernard has already prepared lunch.”

“What are you thinking about dear?” Arial asked as they headed to the front door.

“I’m thinking, I’m hoping Luke doesn’t change into a Speedo,” Annie replied. “That would probably scare the kids on the beach.”

They step through the front door and walked to a side gate.

“Why didn’t they come this way?” Annie mused as they walked a short distance to the beach.

In the distance Annie saw James with a muscular man. James sat cross-legged on the man’s back while the man did pushups. What stood out about the man was his purple hair.

They arrived and Annie asked, “James, who’s your friend?”

“This is your boyfriend, the manliest man this side of Manitoba,” James replied.

“I don’t have a boyfriend,” Annie said angrily.

The man turned to her face her and realization dawned. “No way. That can’t be him,” she exclaimed.

James got off and Luke got up, removed his wig and bowed to Annie.

“Hello Princess, you look great in that bathing suit,” Luke said, greeting the shocked Annie.

“You can’t be Luke,” Annie insisted. “The Luke I know is a butterball turkey.”

Luke laughed and said, “That’s harsh Annie. You shouldn’t make fun of butterball turkeys.”

“What exactly are you?” Arial asks. “How can you transform so completely?”

Luke sighed. “This again? I haven’t transformed at all. I just changed my clothes. I would like to think of myself as a good makeup artist and a good actor. James, tell everyone about your week at the acting camp.”

Everyone listened as James orated.

“Luke, you joked about being one of the demon lords,” Melvin said. “If you could choose, what demon would you be?”

Luke paused and said, “I wouldn’t know. I never bothered with religious texts. I think the stories from the past are rather boring. No one really had an imagination, and so they retold the same stories.

“But in the present. The only demon I can think of is Dantalion. He is popular in Japanese Anime,” Luke said.

Luke looks around and said, “Damn, my iPad is in my rental.” He took out his phone and typed.

“Okay I have something. Here is an article from genies.fandom.com/wiki/Dantalion.

In demonology, Dantalion (or Dantalian, or Dantaylion) is a powerful Great Duke of Jinnestan, with thirty-six legions of demons under his command; he is the 71st of 72 Spirits of Solomon. He teaches all arts and sciences, and also declares the secret counsel of anyone, given that he knows the thoughts of all people and can change them at his will. He can also cause love and show the similitude of any person, show the same by means of a vision, and let them be in any part of the world they will.

He is depicted as a man with many appearances, which means the faces of all men and women. There are also many depictions in which he is said to hold a book in one of his hands:

Here is a quote from The Lesser Key of Solomon.

"The Seventy-first Spirit is Dantalion. He is a Duke Great and Mighty, appearing in the Form of a Man with many Countenances, all Men's and Women's Faces; and he hath a Book in his right hand. His Office is to teach all Arts and Sciences unto any; and to declare the Secret Counsel of any one; for he knoweth the Thoughts of all Men and Women, and can change them at his Will. He can cause Love, and show the Similitude of any person, and show the same by a Vision, let them be in what part of the World they Will. He governeth 36 Legions of Spirits; and this is his Seal, which wear thou, etc." - The Lesser Key of Solomon

“That’s interesting,” Arthur said.

“This guy is a teacher and can mess with people’s heads,” Luke said. “I can’t cause love or do such things. I just like creating props and exploring acting.

“Hey look at this.

The original sense of "demon", from the time of Homer onward, was a benevolent being, but in English the name now holds connotations of malevolence.

“So this person was probably a good person. Or at least wasn’t malicious.”

“By the way, how do you change your height if you’re not using magic?” James asked.

“Platform shoes,” Luke replied, lifting the bottom of his sweatpants. “As you see, my height could use improvement. And my muscles are compact.”

“But why the fat disguise?” Melvin asked.

Luke shrugged and said, “Even as a child I’ve been obsessed with pockets. Later, I created my custom clothes with plenty of pockets. In time it evolved to my current costume. You’d be surprised how much stuff I can store. And no, looking fat was never my intension. It just happened.”