

Don't Stop Believing

HUMANITY DIDN'T KNOW IT, but they had watchers out there in the cosmos. These were concerned parties that took a genuine interest in human welfare and who did whatever they could to make sure mankind succeeded in joining them in the galactic community. It wasn't an easy job for the caretakers though, for humanity was a young species and quite reliant on the animal instincts that valued survival over longterm prosperity. Then of course there was the occasional breakdown in the equipment used to guide them towards more benevolent paths.

One particular solar cycle, when the interstellar winds were strong and broke into Earth's solar system, the local Confidence Booster donated by the galactic community was compromised, and as temporary replacement a newly constructed intelligence containing the essence of raw confidence was sent to Earth. Above the atmosphere it dwelled,

The Best Kind of Drug

> **QCPD Secure Archives**

> *********

> **Password accepted. Welcome, detective.**

> **Audio Logs**

> **Protection Requests**

> **SEPT. 14, 2150**

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Officer Santiago: “For the records. Please speak slowly and clearly into the console, sir. Name?”

Protectee: “G-give me a second... wew. Okay. Um, Rajesh Khanna.”

Officer Santiago: “So you’re looking for police protection until the riots disperse, no?”

Heavy Anchors

THE YEAR 2200. Trian Cato, praefect of the United Nations Division for Global Unity (UNDGU), sat in the backstage of the 2nd decennial State of the World Summit. From the mainstage, the current speaker -- the tribune assigned to the American League -- was addressing the crowd, regaling them with progress reports of the megastructure projects underway in the American continent. Trian had read up on those projects. Very impressive stuff: weather-controlling skyscrapers, hundred-mile deep mineshafts, volcanic energy stations. Taken in a vacuum, each one could have been considered the greatest scientific achievement of mankind; and yet Trian knew none of them were. He smiled.

He was just being patient now. Everything the tribune of the American League was saying, and by extension everything said by all the tribunes prior, was all just part of the program. They were

Diminishing Returns

3 days after the Three Legions Massacre

JOS'TEN PANTED AS HE climbed yet another hill. His legs ached. His heart threatened to give out. The last of his hope was being torn apart by the doom and gloom of the battlefield. Ten thousand corpses lay strewn all around him. He alone survived, and only because the enemy was so sure of their victory that they'd decided to leave. Understandable. A hundred square miles of land stretched out before him, and the only movement was from dust blowing up into the breeze. If any others had survived, by now they would have shown themselves. It had been three days. He wanted to stop looking. It was too painful to hope and find... nothing.

He shambled forward, half driven to continue the search, half consumed by despair and exhaustion. Every charred vehicle

Crossing the Rubicon

VITALLION DOWNED ANOTHER glass of Roman wine. Excellent stuff, of course, if a tad overpriced. The empire didn't make the drink easy to acquire outside Roman space. He called for another glass, and the barkeep extended his slimy appendages up a tall shelf to pull another bottle out. He was a Glorbin though, one of those gentle-giant slugs, which meant he was *so slow*. His slimy mass crept up the shelf with the speed of... well, a slug. Vitallion's inebriated amusement slowly turned to bored observation. It was like watching paint dry.

Just as well. This place was meant to let people forget, not to kill them with overdosage. The former legionary turned around in his seat. The sudden movement left him light-headed, and he had to shut his eyes as the bar's lights shone in his face. When he could see again, he beheld the diversity of the patrons present. You had some non-Roman humans in a corner on the second floor,