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The Celestial Librarian

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In the earliest days of the universe, the lords of creation sought to have an accounting of all the activities of those they had fashioned and the worlds they had shaped. So, the librarian was tasked with this enormous undertaking and a great host, veritable legions of underlings, were assigned to do his bidding. At first these beings were merely observers, recorders of events, knowledge and portents. Yet as the eons passed, the beings of creation learned to become more secretive; they hid their activities from the prying eyes and ears of the librarian's minions. The realms of men, in particular, engaged in intrigues and subversions, hiding their intent, not only from the librarian, but also from each other. Still charged with their task, the collectors' activities then evolved to more aggressive means of obtaining information.

This involved more interaction with their subjects. But it was difficult to remain hidden when one takes such an active role in collecting material. Humanity grew to fear them, as well they should. Yet men, being a clever sort of lesser creature, found ways to imprison, banish and even remove them. When this happened, their numbers grew less as minion after minion failed to return from their appointed gathering tasks. Until only the librarian and few of his most powerful followers remained.

The main doors of the Sands Electronics Computer Store in San Diego slid open. The doors displayed cheerfully decorated glass panels with the store logo. They parted, gliding to the side as he entered. Deep gray mists rolled across the floor like a wave of sinister dry ice clouds marking his approach. He wore a long, leather-like black coat that appeared moist and dripping. His legs could not be seen, as they were covered in a flowing inky, draped skirt, the bottom of which, like the bottom of his coat, appeared as if it had been violently pulled out from the inside of a paper shredder and then fought over by the ripping jaws of wolves. Extending from his sides, his menacing hands were covered in a loosely fitting pair of gloves made of similar wet, animal skin material. Yet the gloves flowed, crawled and danced over his unseen skeletal digits, giving the impression, they were more a living symbiont than a mere article of apparel. His tattered and sodden coat, or perhaps the dark cape that fluttered behind him had a high, stiff collar overlaying a murky scarf that covered the lower part of his face. On his head he wore a dusky hat with a huge brim, the back of which almost touched his collar. The only part of him that was truly visible were two glowing red eyes.

The room was alive with numerous customers and salesmen, yet he moved, without deviation, toward a lone salesman standing by a prominent electronics display.

"Nice cosplay outfit," the man chuckled, "Is there a convention in town?"

"No play," the stranger replied, his deep contra-base tone made the large carbon-arc lights in the store ceiling appear to vibrate and flicker, "I am the Seeker of Knowledge, the Writer-Scholar of the Impenetrable Universe, the Master of Untold Centuries of Ceaseless Toil for the Lord Creators of Worlds, Overseer of the Guardians and Collectors of all Knowledge ... the Celestial Librarian."

"That's quite a mouthful." The salesman tried desperately to keep from giggling, with little success. "You wouldn't happen to have a less wordy handle, would you?"

"I do have a given name," he announced, his heavy tone reverberated in the crowded store.

“Great,” the salesman said as he adjusted his store-logo tie, “Let’s go with that. What’s your uh ... uh ... given name?”

“Phil,” he replied.

“Right,” nearly overcome with racks of laughter, he managed to get out, “What can I do for you today, Phil?”

As the salesman choked back spasms of hilarity, he saw the floor of the store widening, the very tiles of the establishment expanding, flipping and moving like a special effect escalator. The rest of the store moved and vanished into the far distance. His coworkers and their displays now appeared as distant figures, as far away from him as the parking lot of the Super Deluxe Mega-Mart at the end of the street. Yet the building still appeared intact.

The strangely dressed man leaned forward slightly and in a menacing tone demanded, “Explain this device.”

Fidgeting, the salesman fought to get out, “This,” he said, indicating the legal pad sized computer on the pedestal next to him, “is the Lenticular - Yogi 950 2-in-1 14.9 inch, 8K Ultra HD Touch-Screen Laptop with an Intel Core i7, containing 160GB Memory, a 512TB SSD with built-in Platinum support.”

In a flash, the salesman was no longer in the store, but found himself on a moving plain of vast, shifting plates riding on a lake of glowing red molten material. His mind couldn’t fully grasp the concepts it was perceiving. The very existence of his surroundings resisting such orderly concepts as definition. In the distance appeared flowing cliffs, topped by jet black towers rising to impossible heights higher than any on earth. In an instant, his clothes burst into flame, his skin blistered and blackened and he felt unbearable pain. Breathing became impossible. He longed for death, but it eluded him. Around him fought hideous creatures whose violence made the clash of human empires seem like the bickering of playground children. They tore at him and dismembered his body in unspeakable ways, then watched as his form reassembled, so they could repeat the process.

He was only gone for a few seconds, but he would now remember each tick of those seconds as if they were the passage of a century ... or more.

He found himself back in the store, his physical body unharmed, but the same could not be said of what was left of his ability to reason. He stared blankly at Phil ... or whatever the entity was that called itself Phil ... and choked out, “Why?”

“I am the Celestial Librarian,” he whispered ominously, “and I will NOT be deceived. When I said explain this device, I did not give you leave to babble or obfuscate in obscure code words. I do not accept gibbering and incomprehension. Treat me with deception again and your fate will be far worse than what you just experienced. Now, explain this device clearly or that is how you will spend eternity and beyond.”

“Look,” The salesman said, desperate to avoid a return to the horrors he had just experienced. “It’s a machine that stores information ... any kind of information: text, images, sounds, movies, you name it. It can all be stored in here. You can use it to capture any kind of idea, concept or creation. But it also has

great speed. What once took people hundreds of years to write down, this can record in seconds. This baby has enough space to store every book in every library ever created.”

The creature’s intense eyes glowed with interest.

“All that in an object no larger than a folio?” the red eyed entity said, picking it up in his gloved hands.

“Yes,” The salesman gasped, loosening his collar.

“And you sell this to humans?” the dark one asked.

“Take it,” the salesman gulped. “Take anything you want. Take them all.”

Phil snapped his fingers and two small, oil-black crab-like creatures appeared on either side of the hapless sales associate, they grabbed his arms painfully with pincer-like claws that sank deep into his yielding flesh.

“What are you doing?” He cried out.

“Sending you back to the infernal regions.”

“But I told you everything,” he stammered, not understanding where he had failed. “No megabytes or incomprehensible acronyms that no one understands. I didn’t even mention the multi-core RAM processor!”

“It is true that I have treated others with far more leniency. I’ve released megalomaniacs who have started world crushing wars. Allowed others who created weapons of mass destruction to escape and even those who tortured fellow souls for gain or profit. Con men and vile deceivers. Creatures whose minds would burn yours to cinders with their indiscernible hate,” he explained, his black cape appearing to twist in a non-existent wind, “but I find *your* transgressions to be beyond forgiveness.”

“What?” The salesman yelled in panic, “I didn’t invent the thing, I just sell it.”

“Precisely,” he explained calmly, “You put this in the hands of mere mortals without giving them the understanding to use it. For that, I find myself beyond my capacity to grant you a pardon.”

The salesman disappeared as if he had never existed and the store returned to its former dimensions. Taking the laptop, the black clad man strode intimidatingly over to a checkout register and placed it on the counter, “I’ll take four of these.”