

pendragon

Exclusive!

**A first-hand account of
life on the inside**

A photograph of two tamarins on a dark branch. The tamarin on the left is looking towards the right, while the one on the right is looking down. Both have long, shaggy fur with a mix of brown and white. The background is dark, making the animals stand out.

**“There’s no D in Tamarin”
and other primate anecdotes**

Also: Grooming Tips from the Experts

Issue 3, Volume 1, November two thousand thirteen

INCLUDED IN THE ISSUE...

pendragonzine.us

Letter from the Editor	3
Fables by James Abendroth	4
The Steel Beetle by Tim Rodriguez	5
The Sky is Falling...News at 11 by James Abendroth	6
It's a Boy By Tim Rodriguez	7
Empercorp's New Corporate Culture by James Abendroth	10
Top 100 Business Leaders by Tim Rodriguez and SPAM	12
Singularity by James Abendroth	13
Contributors	20



pendragon e-zine is Copyright (c) 2013 its individual contributors, as described on the end page.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

pendragonzine.us

I get asked sometimes (not actually) where I get the ideas for the themes of each 'zine. More accurately, it's usually "what's the deal with that cover graphic?" Last month's was a photo of Amsterdam's canals, on which I overlaid an ugly trophy cartoon. And the conversation went something like this?

"Why did you use a photo of Amsterdam?"

"Because I had the photo of Amsterdam."

Repeat ad nauseum.

Gaudy, "fake" magazine covers are great fun to make, actually. And that's the most important thing to me. I don't ever bill myself as someone who is talented at doing visual design. I can certainly tell when I'm doing it badly...which is pretty much most of the time. So this is mostly to have fun and I don't worry about it being "good." It's done¹. So there.

So, about this month's theme of "The Zoo."

My wife Lisa and I tell the story of how we met always beginning the tale "At the Zoo." It's a fun jolt to add to what could, over time, become a tepid redundant conversation. We've made a secondary anniversary out of that fateful date. In many ways it changed our lives more than the wedding proper. So to celebrate, we take a trip to a Zoo. We've done The Bronx Zoo (twice), The National Zoo in Washington DC, The delightful small Brooklyn Zoo, the adorably dated Central Park Zoo, The Honolulu Zoo, and Staten Island Zoo together. I like our Zooiversary because it's playful, brings up memories that don't have a lot of stress attached, and it's unique, which means that it also not beholden to existing tradition. It's freedom to forge our own path, and meet new animals along the way.

- Tim Rodriguez
<facehole@pendragon.us>

Recent favorite twitter noise

@inkysugar

Dear Fellow Meeting Participants, You don't know it, but under this business formal skirt suit ... are Thundercats Underoos. #ThankYouEbay

@oed

Mallemaroking: a rare nautical term meaning 'the boisterous and drunken exchange of hospitality between sailors in extreme northern waters'

¹ And as we know, the perfect is the enemy of the done. Which is quoted seventeen ways from Tuesday, and pretty much always quoted incorrectly. I'm not even convinced that there is a "correct" original version in the English language. At least in part because it was originally written in French.

FABLES

by James Abendroth

pendragonzine.us

Once upon a time, there was a hungry cat. He found a fish one day on the edge of a stream and was very happy. But the next day when the fish was gone and he was hungry again and grew sad. A passing otter saw how sad he was and offered to teach him how to fish when he found out the reason. The cat was very grateful and learned quickly. Now, his belly was full every day, but he quickly tired of the work involved in catching fish. So, he traded a bunch of fish for an uzi. Then he was happy and full because he made other people catch his fish.

Once, there was a flat-chested bunny who was unhappy with her appearance. She worked hard and saved her money and got a boob job. Then, she married an 85 year old millionaire. Then, she was very happy, though her new stepchildren were not.

There was once a zebra with 2,200 Facebook friends. He spent all day chatting and tweeting and e-mailing with them. Then, he had to move and no one showed up to help him, even though he chatted, tweeted and e-mailed all of his "friends".

An ant worked for a grasshopper. The job was easy at first but, the ant was good at it so the grasshopper gave him more and more work and more and more duties until the ant could no longer do all of them. So, the grasshopper laid him off and hired three fleas in another to do the same work for half as much.

A raccoon started playing an MMO. He began to enjoy himself so much that he started skipping work so that he could play more. Of course, it was not long before he was fired from his job. Such was his passion for the game that he continued to play rather than seeking out a new job. Without an income, eventually he could no longer pay for his MMO. On the day that his account was cancelled, he cursed the game. The game had millions of others of players, so his absence was hardly noticed.

For decades a donkey worked for the same company. He loved the company and believed in it whole heartedly and gladly invested the entirety of his 401(k) and savings into stock in the company, certain that the company would never fail to take care of him. Two years before it was time for him to retire, the company went bankrupt, depriving the donkey not only of his life savings, but also his income and such was his age that no other company wanted to hire him. The donkey had no choice but to become a greeter at a big box store.

THE STEEL BEETLE

by Tim Rodriguez

The Steel Beetle was a foe encountered in a Silver Age Champions superheroes RPG. He had been an entomologist who developed a robotic exoskeleton and an antenna that permitted him to speak with and manipulate/control insects. The antennae he built also came with the nasty side effect of making him slightly bonkers from being in contact with so many bizarre minds.

He's an awesome bad guy, who delivered full-on cartoonish swarms of insects who formed into HUGE insect amalgams.

A+++ would fight again.



THE SKY IS FALLING... NEWS AT 11

by James Abendroth

Once upon a time Fox and Colorful New Nightingale were idly watching the goings on in the farmyard. As they watched, an acorn fell and hit Chicken Little on the head.

Always a rather excitable creature, Chicken Little immediately fled, scurrying all over the farmyard shouting that the sky was falling. All the other animals in the barnyard were terrified and came to Fox and C.N.N. to find out what really happened.

Fox insisted that terrorists were responsible for the falling sky while C.N.N. insisted that it was caused by global warming. For the next 24 hours they each called in experts who supported and expounded on the views each held while the barnyard animals paid a great deal of attention to whichever one they already agreed with.

Then, a royal calf was born and everyone forgot that the sky was ever falling.

#MAKE
w/
MOTO



IT'S A BOY

By Tim Rodriguez

pendragonzine.us

Prologue.

That night when we arrived home, she said the three words that strike fear into men's hearts... I missed my period. It's a joke, see? Not a funny one, as I was quickly told. You don't joke about pregnancy, rape, or really anything that is specific to girls as far as I can tell. It's frustrating, since you kinda get used to that kind of joke in an all-boys environment.

She was genuinely concerned, wasn't ready for this. She was on the pill, still insisted we use rubbers, and hell, we've even been married for two years. Accidents like this just don't happen, she said. Never mind that the math says they do, the math is never the point—if I could have ever offered one piece of advice to myself that I would remember... it's this: never mix math with emotions, it only leads to the kind of trouble that makes you want to cut your own balls off. The point is, she's late, and I need to be supportive because this never ever happens. Even when it does.

The funny thing about biology is that entities like to be LIKE other entities. It's not really something that's rationally explicable, but we see it all the time. Stem cells become fully differentiated, based on some kind of mysterious signals from other nearby cells. And, in what may very well be the worst metaphor ever, Women sync up when they are around each other. Maybe someone smarter than me knows why, but when you have two women come into contact with each other for some period of time (the joke is there again... sorry, I can't help it!) on both of their very next cycles, one will tend to be a day late and one a day early, and NOBODY IS EVER HAPPY ABOUT THIS. Makes one wonder how we managed to survive in civilization after husbands largely stopped traveling for quite so long at a stretch.

Anyway, I'm being supportive. I go buy a pregnancy test (and now I'm actually getting scared), some vitamins with Folic Acid, and some cupcakes. Her favorite kind. I've always found it a little weird that emotional support so often requires edible treats. Same thing as my binkie, I guess. I get a big bottle of Gatorade too, just in case she needs some extra help peeing. I know I always get a little shy when I'm on the spot like that. I get home and she's alternately cleaning and shopping Amazon for Air Filters, phosphate-free laundry detergent, and probably about a million other things I didn't see in her shopping cart. As soon as I opened the door she started crying. Again. I give her the Gatorade and

the cupcakes, and tell her I've got the tester whenever she's ready.

* * *

She's crying again, and I have just spent eighty dollars on tests, cupcakes, more Gatorade, tissues, and we still haven't gotten a clear answer. And don't even get me started about how the tests aren't particularly reliable until three weeks after you miss your first period. So I'm starting to get desperate. My gut is telling me that this is probably a bad plan, but my gut also stands to win big if this goes well...Here goes.

"What if we made this into an adventure?"

Sobbing, "what? How can you even say such a thing? My life is over!"

"Wait wait wait, hear me out. First of all, we haven't even gotten a solid response yet. Second of all, if your life is over, why not go out with a bang? Third of all, since when did you need an excuse for an adventure?"

"But everything is different now!"

"Everything what? I've just spent eighty dollars and the tests haven't said ANYTHING."

"Well..."

"Well what?"

"Well...I'm in. But I'm going to eat right, and take vitamins, and wrap my ankles so they don't get fat."

"Sure... whatever makes you happy."

"And... and this sounds awesome."

"Really?"

"Really. I love you."

"Great. So here's the plan. Starting in three days, we've got a new month. So in those three days, we'll make plans for a nine-month adventure. And if there's a baby at this end, great! Your life is over, having gone out with a bang! And if there isn't, we still get an adventure out of the deal."

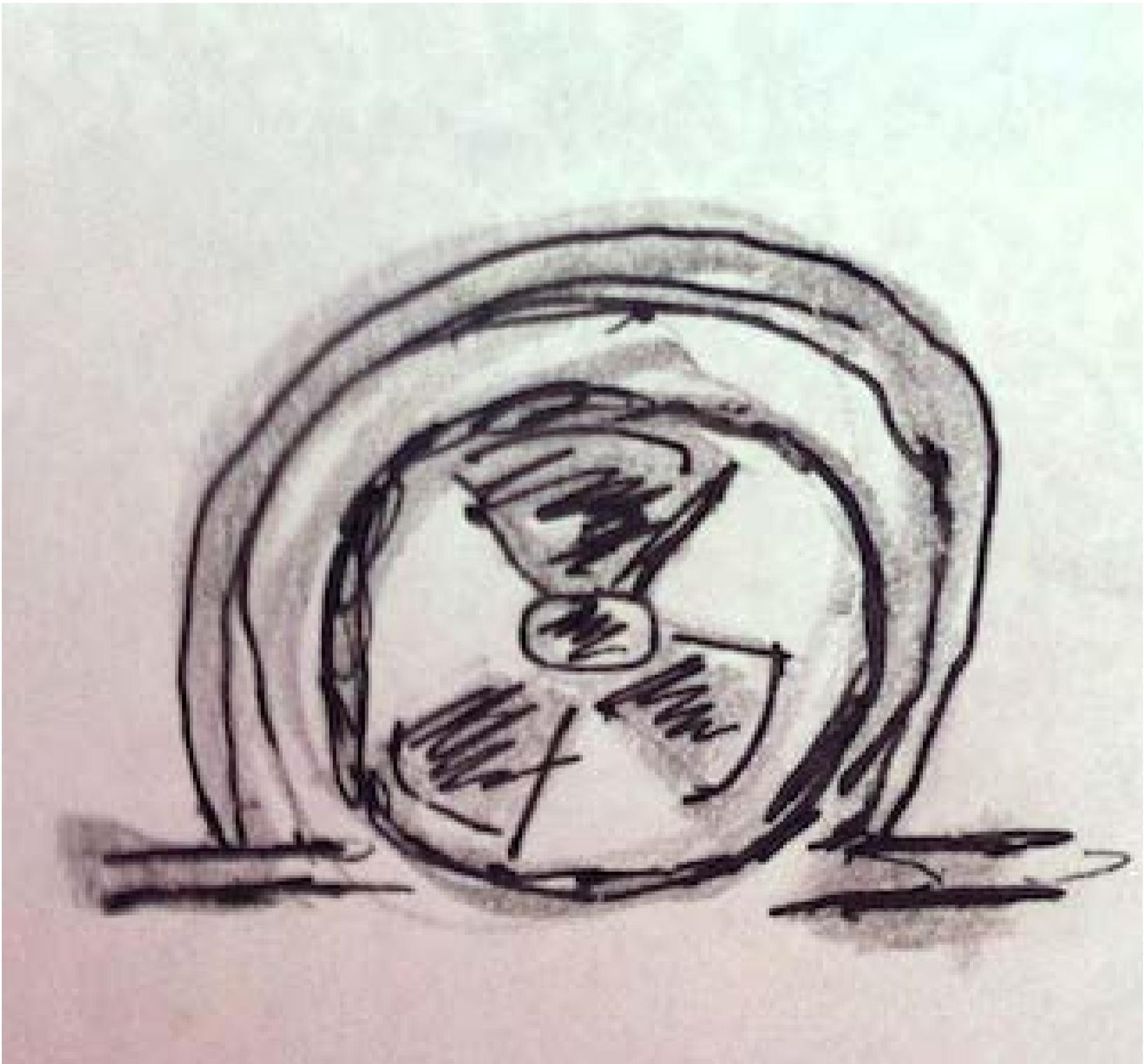
And with those words, all the grief disappeared (the cupcakes had already made their exit, to no avail), and the planning mode had begun. Thank god I've only got three days of this. I mean, yes it's better than the irregular sobbing and unbelievable mood swings that would have been there instead... But still, three days of planning-mode Susan is something to fear.

* * *

Luckily for me, the three days passes quickly and without further incident. I have a vague memory of saying something to the effect of "yes dear" a lot, but it's the randomized thesaurus version that keeps me out of

trouble. The plan starts in South America: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile; then Scandiavia: Denmark, Finland.. And I don't mention at this point that she has clearly started at one end of the travel section of the book store and progressed in alphabetical order. But I did notice.

For my part, I'm pretty excited. I think we've both had good enough recent years that we can afford it. Nine months though... That's a lot of adventure. Especially with Schrödinger on the way. That's what I'm calling the this quantum-state conception until she starts showing or get some other confirmation that she is actually pregnant. I'm also kinda freaked out that it hasn't really sunk in for me yet. We're planning an adventure and Susie might be pregnant. Nope! Still not there. Not a day I'm looking forward to experiencing right now, maybe in a few weeks, a month or two, possibly six if it stays small and she gets regular-fat on the road. It's the inside thoughts that count, boys and girls. They count, even (especially) when you don't say them.



EMPERCORP'S NEW CORPORATE CULTURE

pendragonzine.us

by James Abendroth

Once, there was a moderately successful company known as Empercorp which made modest profits every year. Of course, "modest" profits and "moderate" success were not good enough for the board of directors, president of the company and the CEO. After all, they were very important people and how were other people going to know how important they were if they each only had 3 mansions and 1 private jet apiece?

So, Empercorp hired Tailor Consulting VLLC (a Very Limited Liability Corporation) to help them make more money. Tailor Consulting VLLC took a great deal of the money Empercorp had in return for their expertise and spent several months creating investigative teams, internal and external surveys and focus groups to tackle the problem of Empercorp's acceptable success and profits.

After going over budget and missing their deadline, Tailor Consulting VLLC provided Empercorp a number of exciting innovations. The board of directors, CEO and president of the company knew that they had paid a great deal of money for these innovations and, because they knew anything they paid a lot for must be good, they were certain that this advice was very, very good.

In a big presentation, the entire company was notified of the dynamic ways that they were going to leverage their synergies and capitalize on their paradigms.

Everyone was very excited and agreed that the dynamic way they were going to leverage the company's synergies and capitalize on their paradigms were just what the company needed except for one man. Chylde had been with the company for 20 years and was a very skilled, diligent worker. When the question and answer portion of the company wide conference call came around, he could not wait to ask a question. "What does that mean? Those words do not seem to go together they way you are saying them."

Both the CEO of Empercorp and a representative of Tailor Consulting VLLC explained everything again, reviewing key slides in their power point presentation but Chylde still did not understand. He was told to speak with his supervisor offline before his question could derail their momentum. The meeting ended with almost everyone very excited.

Chylde was soon fired, under the assumption that he must be incompetent if he could not understand such basic concepts as dynamically leveraging synergies and capitalizing on paradigms.

The rest of Empercorp was very excited and for several months everyone went to great lengths to leverage synergies and capitalize on paradigms and some really innovative employees even tried leveraging paradigms and capitalizing on synergies. But eventually, everyone realized that they were doing different things and that they were not telling each other. Disagreements arose on whether leveraging synergies were more important than capitalizing on paradigms or vice versa and the CEO promised to provide them more guidance but had to go back to Tailor Consulting VLLC to find out. They were unresponsive as they were concentrating on helping their newest clients.

Soon, it became evident that Empercorp was no longer doing the things that made them moderately successful and profitable and no one could quite figure out how to make leveraging synergies and capitalizing on paradigms profitable. Inevitably, Empercorp started to lose money. The Board of Directors, CEO and President were certain that it was the fault of the employees. After all, they were the most important people in the company a fact made evident by the fact that they were the highest paid so it could not be their fault. To solve the problem, they laid off all of the employees, replacing them with people without any experience or knowledge of what Empercorp did but who would work for very little, thus saving them a great deal of money.

Even with the new workforce in place, however, they were not able to leverage their synergies or capitalize on their paradigms and the new employees were unfamiliar with and incapable of doing what had made them profitable and successful before.

Empercorp soon went bankrupt. Fortunately, they were too big to fail so the government bailed them out. None of the company's officers lost their jobs, incomes or bonuses and it was only the non-important lower employees who were laid off. Empercorp has promised their shareholders to find a new way of doing business and are now incorporating synergizing their paradigms into every aspect of their processes.



Dearest Friends,

I'm pleased to announce that top100businessleaders@inbox.com has recognized ME in the most exclusive, comprehensive category there is. "Accomplished professionals in allmajor industries and professions."

Pretty cool right?

I figure that they've been around a long time, since they have a network of 250,000 and I'm top 100. Even if that means 100 per day, that's almost seven years. That's only about ten years less than Web 2.0 and its glossy buttons. This is much fancier, too.

Anyway, I'll remember you all fondly when I'm gone.

-Tim



The Top 100 Business Leaders

Dear Tim,

It is my pleasure to inform you that your 2013 membership has been approved in the **Top 100 Business Leaders**, the largest network of professionals in the World.

The Top 100 Business Leaders highlights and profiles the world's most accomplished professionals in allmajor industries and professions. We provide an exclusive and powerful networking forum for our valued members to communicate and achieve social and career success.

[Yes! I want to learn more about how I can be a part of the Top 100 Apply Now.](#)

Visit the link above or below to secure your place in our network of more than 250,000 like-minded professionals. Upon receipt of your registration form, you will be highlighted among thousands of accomplished top-tiered professionals. Membership enrollment is limited, so please submit your application within five business days. There is **no fee to apply**.

On behalf of the Top 100 Business Leaders, congrats on your membership.

Sincerely,
Top 100 Business Leaders Membership Services

[Yes! I want to learn more about how I can be a part of the Top 100 Apply Now.](#)

SINGULARITY

by James Abendroth

Dear Resident,

Please note that your lease has ended. Due to rising demand, our rental prices have increased since your current lease agreement was created. Your rent next month and each month following will be at the new rate. All other portions of our agreement remain in place. The new rates are listed below for your convenience and information. We are pleased to have you as a resident and look forward to your continued patronage.

*Sincerely,
Sentience Resource Management*

The message hung in Jasper's inbox like the Sword of Damocles. The prices on the attachment were almost double the current rates. That fact would have made his blood run cold, if he still had blood, that is. As it was, being a disembodied consciousness existing only in cyberspace, he knew that the shiver that ran through him was just the memory of an actual physical response. It did not seem any the less real for all that, perhaps because all of his "physical" responses were only representations based on his memories.

As things were, he could barely afford to pay his rent at the current rate. There was no way that he would never be able to afford the new monthly price. He did not have to because he knew exactly what the contents were but he checked his bank account, anyway. It took only a few moments for him to do the quick calculations that told him that even with supplementing his income with what was left of his savings; he would only be able to pay the new rate for a few months.

He did not linger over that fact for long, knowing that the lingering bitterness he felt would only build if he considered how small those savings were. They had been triple the size before the Crash. And he had been building it back up for almost a decade since. He'd been almost completely wiped out by the Crash, the nest egg that he'd depended on to see him through his platinum years disappearing like so much electronic smoke. Another quick calculation told him that if he still had his pre-Crash amount, the interest off of it would have almost covered the increase in price.

Before the knot in the place that he thought of as his stomach could grow, he told himself there was no use



crying over spilt milk, especially since he could no longer cry or drink milk. Instead of lingering on impossibilities, he tapped the corporate skills that had served him during both of his employed lives and moved on to thinking of other possibilities. The most obvious option, of course, was moving to another server with more reasonable prices.

A sigh escaped him, though where it came from and where it went in the ether space of the internet was impossible to determine. A cursory search of that space was enough for him to decide that anything that he could afford he did not want to live in. Any place that he did want to live was even more expensive than the SRM servers.

The places he could afford had worse security and worse reliability guarantees than where he was. There had already been a handful Troll incursions on his current servers and he felt like they were getting ever more common. It seemed that there were an increasing number of corporeal people who found it hilarious to bypass the firewalls and security programs that protected the disembodied and directly alter their programming and memories or leave viruses that would do the same thing. Even more shocking was the fact that some of the disembodied did the same things out of any number of sociopathic drives.

He remembered how George was after he'd been infected by one of the viruses left by a Troll. For a while, no one had known what was happening. At first it had just been odd inability to remember random words and a steadily increasing inability to understand what was going on around him. Then there were the obvious and growing gaps in his memory.

By the time Network Integrity and Security realized what was happening and did something about it, it was already too late. Even after a 3 month and scrub and quarantine, George was not the same. Jasper, and most of the other disembodied on the SRM servers avoided talking to him when they could. Seeing the poor way he processed things and the gaps that still existed in his memory was both depressing and terrifying, not least because, even with NIS's assurances, they all feared that he was still infected and might pass it on to them.

Jasper turned away from George's problems and back to his own. There was always the possibility of moving to one of the public assistance servers. There were several charitable organizations that ran servers where space was free or highly reduced and even some government funded ones. He knew that they were even worse than the less expensive private servers, though. The only reason Trolls did not raid them more was because there was no challenge in getting into them. Only amateurs bothered, using them for practice before trying the better secured servers. Their ham-handed activities could be even more destructive than the more elegant methods of experts, though. Rather than impairing a disembodied, they as often as not obliterated them.

It did not take long to decide that moving had to be a last resort. He wouldn't feel safe anywhere other than where he was. He would have to find the money to pay for his current server somehow. The idea of contacting his living relatives was more than a little repugnant for various reasons, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

His daughter had been less than pleased when he'd decided to have his conscious-

ness uploaded at the time of his death. She had claimed to be a Naturalist, one of those loons who believed in a soul and that he had died with his body. They'd argued extensively as his physical life was drawing to a close and her angry tears had come close to making him change his mind. In fact, the only contact he'd had with her after being uploaded ended with her calling him a mockery of himself and an abomination. The fact that she had not had herself uploaded upon her physical demise lent credence to her dedication to her beliefs. Despite himself, he had admired that in her. There were any number of people who claimed to share her beliefs but who jumped at the chance to upload themselves when the time truly came.

He couldn't help but think that her anger over the issue had something to do with her inheritance, or lack thereof, though. Jasper had always known that he would need money to continue his existence as a post-physical being. The Transition Councilors at SRM had been very thorough in explaining the costs involved and pointing out that forever was a long time. So, when his physical body had ceased functioning, he'd ensured that his will liquidated all his assets and bequeathed them to his digital self. For more than a decade, he'd been able to live on only the interest he accrued, giving him plenty of time to enjoy the freedom of his new life. But that was before the Crash.

He'd been fairly close to this grandson when they were both corporeal beings, despite his differences with the boy's mother. Even now, he often chatted with Cody and for a while they'd been regular and efficient partners on EternaQuest. Unfortunately, he'd had to drop his subscription to the MMO sometime ago to afford his storage space the last time SRM had increased his rent. Now, he had to content himself with watching videos and playing public domain games for entertainment.

Unlike his mother, Cody had uploaded his consciousness when he'd died, following in his grandfather's footsteps. It was likely he was feeling the same crunch Jasper was. Server prices went up every year as more and more people uploaded themselves and put more demand on the capacity than could be easily met. He suspected his grandson was just as desperate to keep his server space as Jasper was. He doubted Cody could spare anything to help him.

His granddaughter, despite how offended she would have been by any such suggestion, was very much like her mother. Those similarities included the fact that both were Naturalists. She, too had foolishly let her consciousness expire with her physical body under some strange delusion that there was something wrong with



living forever. She had stopped having contact with both her grandfather and brother when they'd started their digital existences.

His great-grandchildren had truly been only children when he died and they knew him more as his digital avatar than as their physical ancestor. Besides which, he'd never been able to relate very well to Ariel, Jade and Jacob. The things that interested them were just...weird.

Besides, there was a very good chance that they were feeling as much economic pressure as he and Cody. Perhaps even more. With an ever increasing number of disembodied people and an ever larger population of living people, the job market in both the corporeal and digital world was increasingly competitive and the line between the two was getting ever more blurry. Most people had to work longer hours for smaller pay. Most experts suggested that the disembodied made things even worse as they could produce as much skilled labor in many fields as a corporeal person but consumed far less.

Still, he was desperate and they were the only people who he had any ties to. He spent almost an hour perfecting the verbiage of his e-mail before he sent it to Cody and his great-grandchildren. Given how little trust he had in their capacity to assist him, he knew that he had to move on to other options to increase his chances.

There was always the possibility of earning the money that he needed to cover the difference. At least theoretically there was that possibility. He'd never thought that he was going to work after shedding his corporeal form. In fact, he had enjoyed his post-corporeal retirement for many years without working, but eventually grew bored and listless, especially as he looked at the possibility of an eternity of doing nothing that contributed to society.

He'd originally taken his job as an analyst more for the structure it gave his days and weeks and the feeling of accomplishment he received than for the pay. When he'd first started, the number of hours he worked every week was barely in the double digits. That all changed with the Crash. What was previously little more than a hobby became a necessity he could not escape. And as inflation crept up, so too did his hours, making that necessity ever more onerous.

The last time his lease had ended, there had been a similar jump in rates on the new contracts. He'd gone from what was the equivalent of a part time job to a full time employee. And, even though he got paid the same rate as a corporeal employee, he knew that paying him the same rate for the same number of hours was actually cheaper for the company. For one thing, the company did not have to give him health or life insurance and other perks like matching retirement account contributions. After all, matching the 401(k) contribution for a person who was already retired was meaningless.

He'd spent five decades of his corporeal life working hard and saving up for his retirement. Then, he'd had the good fortune to enjoy almost five decades of his golden years in physical retirement. His "platinum" years began upon his death and, at the time, he could not argue with that assessment of his incorporeal life. After all, he got the benefit of all the money he'd earned and saved over the years but "physically" he felt the way he had in his early thirties. Of course, medical technology was advanced enough that he'd been healthy and active up until almost

a decade before his death. Nothing could entirely stop the steady decay of the machine made of flesh that had housed his consciousness and every year that he'd had a body seemed to bring a new ache or loss of ability.

But now, he not only had to work again, but it seemed that he would have to have to work more. Somewhere along the way, his platinum years had turned to lead. Hot on the heels of his e-mail to his family was an e-mail to his boss requesting additional hours.

He was hopeful that his boss would be amenable to his request. Another benefit of hiring disembodied employees was that they were legally nothing more than programs so no employment laws applied to them.

No matter how many hours a week he or any of his fellow disembodied workers worked, they were not entitled to overtime. For that matter, they were not entitled to the minimum wage. They were generally skilled enough that that wasn't an issue, though. They were generally paid well for their expertise though not as well as a person who had a physical body doing the same job. That part stung the most since he knew that he could do things much faster than a person still limited by the need to direct their limbs to do something instead of just thinking it.

Those types of laws and the discrimination they were symptomatic of were, perhaps, the most frustrating and terrifying part of his post corporeal existence. Simply because he no longer had a body he was treated as though he was no longer a person.

It was even more infuriating because he had fewer rights than people who were on life support with no brain activity. They could contribute to society in no way yet they were considered more human than he was. It was as though living people thought their very existence revolved around their bodies and not their consciousness. He found it all baffling and hideously simplistic.

While laws giving disembodied equal rights were making progress, it was very slow going. Though they almost outnumbered the living, they were no longer considered citizens, and thus could not vote. For that matter, there were arguments about where they would be able to vote if they were citizens. Given the rather nebulous nature of the internet, it was all but impossible to determine what geographic area any particular disembodied person occupied and therefore which person representing an arbitrarily defined patch of earth represented them. Most believed that it would be based on where the server that housed each consciousness was located but it was all too easy to move from one to another and he knew of at least one disembodied person who had their consciousness scattered over many servers as a way of ensuring that some of her would remain if any one system crashed.

Beyond their lack of leverage in the system, they were fighting against a very powerful, very vocal group. The religious conservatives were dead set against disembodied. Apparently, their idea of eternal life did not involve anything digital. Any time a politician came out in favor of disembodied rights they were immediately attacked by a horde of lunatics shouting about the sanctity of the soul and man meddling with things that were beyond him. Any arguments that the disembodied only wanted the same rights as any other person were shouted down under the force of religious texts that were written thousands of years before man ever conceived the possibility of a computer.

Jasper wondered where their moral indignation was when corporations were declared "people" and given many of the rights of living citizens. At least he could claim to have a soul, if he believed in such things. He'd never heard of a corporation contemplating its existence or seeking meaning beyond a bottom line. But, he suspected few corporeal people considered the implications of a company being considered more of a person than individuals who were born and were arguably still living only in another form.

For that matter, it was becoming ever more likely that Artificial Intelligences were soon going to be declared citizens, as well. After decades of debate, and rabid protests by conservatives, they had recently been deemed sentient. It was only a matter of time before the philosophical debates around that decision were settled and then it would be a moral imperative for "Entities of Non-Organic Origin" to be given all the rights and privileges of real flesh and blood humans. And more rights than humans who happened to lack flesh and blood.

He knew it was pointless to rage against the machines. He honestly believed that they had as much right to equal treatment as the people who had been fortunate enough to be created by the flesh and blood process instead of in a factory. They were simply fighting for the equality that all sentient beings deserved.

He knew sending the e-mail to "his" congressman and "his" senator was equally pointless. They did not consider him their constituent since they could not shake his hand since he had no hand to shake, of course and the server he was on wasn't even located in their districts. But they were the representatives of the districts he'd lived in when he was alive and he still considered that place his home.

Jasper tried not to think of the last two options he had. Yet, they had to be faced. He could become a vagabond. He would have to leave his server before they disconnected his access, an act that would effectively destroy him. And since he was not alive, they could do so without it being considered murder.

If he didn't have another server when his service was deactivated, he would have to wander around the internet, finding space for himself wherever and whenever he could.

It was an incredibly dangerous existence. Even with the massive amount of storage capacity commonly available, a human consciousness was a large piece of data. Large enough that people didn't want to store it for free or have it crowding up their memory. Most companies and individuals with computers large enough to contain a disembodied sentience treated the ones who squatted there uninvited like viruses. There was plenty of software available that would either run off or destroy him if he settled in one place long enough to be noticed. The most common software, "Exorcist" was spoken of in bitter whispers by the disembodied and they all knew a friend of a friend who had been erased by it.

But as the most common, Exorcist was not the best, or worst, depending on your perspective, example of such software. Jasper feared GhostKiller far more. Whoever had designed that bit of code possessed a sadistic malice toward the disembodied that verged on the psychopathic. Exorcist was fairly slow and was easy to avoid once a disembodied person was aware of it. They could easily move to another

space though the program made a location uninhabitable by them. GhostKiller included protocols that attached the software to any disembodied that it contacted so that, even if they fled a location that it protected, they would be slowly erased no matter where they went unless they could find someone or something to purge the program.

Jasper knew that once he became a vagabond, there was little chance he would ever be anything else. Once he left his server, he would have to try to do things like send e-mails and access his bank accounts by proxies because without a permanent address, there was no way for the government to establish that he existed. He might lose access to his accounts for months at a time while finding a safe place. Not to mention the fact that, when he worked, he would have to pause regularly to find a new hiding place and digital employers were more than a little wary of employees who bounced from place to place like that. For one thing, it made a trail that was hard to follow and hackers often used such tactics to gain access to sensitive information, masquerading as an actual employee and using the move from server to server to hide their deception.

For another, most companies considered it professional courtesy to make life as hard for vagabonds as possible. After all, they did not want their own space taken up by freeloaders and they knew that other companies felt the same way. It was an unwritten, unspoken rule that they would find some reason to fire anyone they suspected of being a vagabond and none of them would employ a disembodied who didn't have a confirmable, stable address.

So, even if he couldn't find any way to pay for his space and decided to become a vagabond, chances were good that it would only lead to his final option: erasure. It was simply a question of time and whether he would make the choice himself or have someone else make it for him.

He'd known quite a few disembodied over the years that had made the choice. Some had simply grown bored with their eternal existence. Others had come to a similar place that he currently found himself. They had nowhere to go and no way to continue where they were. Rather than take any of the less than desirable options open to them they had simply decided to surrender to their ultimate fate.

The very idea had once offended him. He'd never been able to understand anyone who'd voluntarily made that choice. He couldn't imagine giving up the chance of eternal life that being disembodied provided him. The people who hadn't clung to that existence with every fiber of their being had earned only his disdain.

Now, he was so weary of the effort of grasping his eternal life that an ever growing portion of him was ready to let go. Now that he'd done all he could to retain his current existence and he could only wait to see if any of his attempts would come to fruition, he sent one final e-mail.

*To: Naturalist Transition Counselors
Please send me further information on your services.*

CONTRIBUTORS

Tim Rodriguez is honestly too busy to actually edit another project like this... But he's doing it anyway because otherwise his brain would claw free and learn to type with its stem and it would still happen—it would just take a lot longer. He sometimes writes fiction, non-fiction, rare pieces of poetry, rap songs, book reviews, games of all sorts, Ruby, Javascript, HTML, and Perl code, and could probably go on and on. He also makes silly graphics like the cover image when people are feeling mopey about what they're doing.

- "The Steel Beetle"
- "Top100BusinessLeaders"
- "It's a Boy, prologue"
- Illustration, p9

James Abendroth is a lifelong Texan and has been interested in books and role-playing games for almost as long. He has recently tried his hand at crafting the latter two. To see (and buy) the results, please visit blackguardpress.com

- "Fables"
- "The Sky is Falling...News at 11"
- "Emperorcorp's New Corporate Culture"
- "Singularity"

Lisa Aurigemma enjoys Hawkguy comics, playing the mandolin, making things look good, and watches Project Runway to keep her boss happy.

- Cover Photo
- Letters to Editor Photo

Other Illustrations were found around my office. I don't know who drew them.