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Harper Collins spawns an Angry Robot

Last month Harper Collins announced they were launching a new SF business. Wearing its heart firmly on its sleeve, it was christened *Angry Robot*. The Angry Robot website has now gone live, and there are a few interesting tidbits there. Head on over to www.Angry-Robot.co.uk for more details.

We Are Living In The Future, But Those Promises Are Unfulfilled by Ellen Allen

Today I finally went to Disney. We went to the Magic Kingdom and to Epcot. And I have to say, it reduced me to tears.

sigh I'm sure I know what the more cynical of you are thinking, but no. That's not it.

It was one ride. Mission to Mars. The 'orange' lane for 'more intense training'.

Now, some of you are aware that there is one disappointment which runs so deep that it defines my entire life. At the age of, ooh, around 12, I finally realised that, despite all the books I read and all the films and TV shows I watched, I wasn't going to get my own spaceship. I was never going to go into space. And I honestly believed I was over it. I'd come to terms with it.

Nuh-uh.

I got into that simulator, and the instrument panel closed down, and we went for launch. DAMN but that ride is well-done! They actually rack up some g-force - yes, the restraint pushes down on your chest, but I still felt it tugging at my face! By the time we were going for a slingshot around the moon, I had tears sliding down my face. In fact, I'm hard-put not to burst out crying now. FFS! I got off that ride and went straight back on. And it took most of the waiting in line to get myself back under control.

Why aren't we in space? Where's my spaceship? What the fuck do we think we're doing staying earthbound, huh?

It makes me so angry. I feel cheated. And at the same time, every little scrap of news that might someday mean I can see my great-grandneices and nephews go into space fills me with so much excitement! The Japanese (or is it the Chinese?) are building a space elevator. The UK has dropped our objection to a manned space program. There's a private company in the US which has reached orbit on their 4th launch which is aiming to supply cheap, re-usable earth-orbit launch capsules. And there's even Virgin Galactic.

So. Thank you, Douglas Adams, Douglas Hill, Nicholas Fisk, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov. ET, Star Trek, Star Wars, ~~Bounty~~ Space Hunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone, Firefly. Now hand over my sodding spaceship, will you, before I get too old? This is the future you guys sold us. It turns out that a big part of me is still waiting for the world to deliver, and gorravit, hope hurts.



By Eugie Foster

Sitting next to me at the movie theater was Aphrodite's daughter. Her name was Missy Anneger. She didn't know she was descended from divinity, but every guy with a drop of testosterone spiking his veins could tell it. Missy's hair was a buttery-yellow, brighter than a summer afternoon, and it fell in a wave of playful curls down to her plump, round derriere. Her skin was the same creamy white you see in classic portraits painted by famous people who make people look more perfect and beautiful than real people ever are. Except for Missy. And of course, her mom. They really looked like that.

I'm not normally lucky enough to date goddess daughters, but two months ago my great Aunt Serenity died and willed me her collection of antique silver spoons. I wasn't particularly close to Aunt Serenity, and I sure as hell didn't give a flying leap about some old spoons, so I sold them to a dealer, the first one I came across. Found his card wedged in with all the spoons Aunt Serenity left me. His eyes got shiny and excited when he saw the gleaming metal in their velvet case, like other guys get when they're talking about the best sex they've ever had. His silverware fixation netted me enough money to buy a new, cherry-red, Firebird T-top, and that car was my pass into heaven. Missy was just getting out of Art Appreciation class. She took one look as I was tooling by and got in, almost without me having to ask her. We'd been dating serious-like ever since.

That evening was our two-month anniversary. Missy and me watched one hundred and twenty-one minutes of flashy special effects, shoot-em-ups where the bad guys always miss and the good guy usually doesn't, women with inflated bosoms wearing black vinyl bounding around on wires and kicking the crap out of more bad guys, and true love triumphing in the end. And then we watched eight minutes of interminable credits where even the names of the caterers were given a second of recognition on the big screen.

I wanted to leave after the first twenty seconds, but Missy put a hand on my knee and stopped me.

"There's more at the end," she said.

Being descended from the goddess of love, she had that effect on me, the kind where I was both standing up and not moving at the same time. So I settled back and watched the seven minutes and forty seconds of the rest of the credits.

The extra that Missy was so eager not to miss was a teaser trailer of the final movie of this second-in-a-trilogy we'd just seen. Another two plus hours of flashy special effects, shoot-em-ups, bouncy women, and true love *really* triumphing this time. It wasn't worth the seven minutes and forty seconds, in my opinion, but it wasn't my opinion that counted.

"Wasn't that great?" Missy breathed. Her breasts weren't covered in black vinyl; they were sheathed in the lavender yarn of a Gap sweater from the mall. But they were more fascinating when she sighed like that than the movie starlet's.

"Yeah," I said. I'm not sure if she meant the trailer or the movie, but as a guy, I was hardwired to

agree with anything she said.

Didn't hear a word after that, all the way to the parking lot. She could've been gushing about the taxes in Zimbabwe for all I knew. But I was in one hundred percent agreement with her.

I drove her to her parent's house. Aphrodite and her husband, Missy's dad, were out. I tried for two hours, twenty-two minutes, and thirteen seconds on their living room couch to get Missy's jeans off and myself into the portal to heaven.

Missy didn't let me in her jeans, but she was a considerate girl. She unzipped me and pulled me out, stiff and aching since twenty seconds into the credits, and we pretended that her soft, white hand was as good as heaven's gate. It almost was too. Except she kept snapping her gum. And once when I opened my eyes, I caught her checking her watch. I would've been discomfited except I was too busy appreciating her generosity.

I was catching my breath, and she was in the kitchen, washing up, when the phone rang.

"Don't answer that," she called. The sound of the kitchen sink spluttered off. "It could be my folks checking on me."

So I waited for two more rings as she dried her hands and listened as she picked up the extension.

"Hello? Yes, this is Missy Anneger."

I stuck myself back into my pants and zipped myself up.

"What? No, that can't be. They were fine just a few hours ago--"

There was the crash and bounce of heavy plastic hitting kitchen tile. I heard Missy moan. I ran in to see her crouched against the refrigerator, both her hands covering her mouth.

"What is it? What happened?"

The phone made squawking noises on the kitchen floor, dropped from Missy's hands because she'd needed them to cover her mouth.

"Don't answer it," Missy whispered. "It might be them checking on me."

The part of me that obeyed anything she said was dormant, probably for another fifteen minutes, so my brain was actually chugging along. Usually it doesn't get much say, the poor thing. But this time, it said: *Something's wrong, and it has to do with whoever's on the end of that phone, so you'd better answer it.*

"Hello?" I said into the mouthpiece.

"Hello? Who is this?"

"This is Gary. Who is this?"

"Gary? Are you Miss Anneger's brother?"

"Missy doesn't have a brother. Who is this?" I felt like I was playing tennis over the phone. But on his turn, instead of asking "Who is this?" again, I heard him exhale.

"Do you have a way to get to the hospital?"

"I got a car." Thank you, Aunt Serenity. "Why?"

"This is the St. Joseph's ER. Can you bring Miss Anneger down? Her folks are in the trauma center. They were in an accident."

I understood why Missy needed her hands to cover her mouth. Against the refrigerator, her eyes were wide with too much white showing.

"What happened?" I said.

"They were on I-285. The police said it looks like another car forced them off the road. They hit an embankment and flipped over."

"The other car?"

"No sign of it. Looks like a hit and run." I heard another sigh. "Can you bring Miss Anneger? Is there any other immediate family?"

"Yeah, I can. And no, she's an only child."

I drove Missy to St. Joseph's. She relocated her hands from her mouth long enough to buckle up but put them back for the whole drive. She even walked into the emergency room with them there.

"Don't leave me," she mumbled behind her hands. Seeing as I was the only one she could lean on, I told the ER people I was her fiancé. That way, I got to stand by her side when she saw her dad.

He looked pretty bad. They had him in a neck brace, and where his skin wasn't covered in cuts and nicks, it was big splotches of purple and red. Clear, plastic tubes ran into both arms, and white bandages wrapped like a turban around his head. A big blue and silver machine hissed and gasped beside him. Every time it took a breath, so did he.

"Daddy!" Missy flung herself at him. A couple hospital people in white lab coats and blue scrubs tried to catch her, pull her back. But she was, after all, the daughter of a goddess.

She threw herself over her dad, sobbing fit to wrench the beating heart out of every male within hearing distance. It made me all misty-eyed and dejected all right.

Did a total whammy on her dad too.

His heart monitor produced a huge squeal. The crests and peaks that showed his blood was still pumping skipped and hopped like they were trying to buck something off. Then they were gone, and the only thing left was a steady green line.

Missy screamed. The doctors and nurses all jumped and remembered their job was to stop that little line from staying a line.

I pulled Missy away and held her as they brought out a defibrillator and shot a bunch of meds into the valve of one of his IV cords. But that line didn't change, just stayed flat and even, no matter what they did.

When they'd finished shouting at each other and pumping different things into his IV, they remembered we were still there.

"Get her out of here!" I wasn't sure who said it. I tugged Missy, who'd put her hands back over her mouth, out the door.

Aphrodite was in the next room. She'd fractured three vertebrae in her spine and had a concussion. She was breathing on her own without a machine to hiss and gasp for her, but she was doing it unconscious.

Missy didn't dash herself at her mom. Maybe she'd learned from the incident with her dad. She did creep to her side, and she even took her hands down from her mouth so she could clutch them around her mom's senseless fingers.

I left her sitting like that while I went to find the doctor.

He was a severe fiftyish-I-wish-I-were-still-thirtyish looking man: lots of thinning up top, lots of graying around the sides. I wondered what sort of car he drove; he wondered who I was. I guess they're always real concerned about that sort of thing in hospitals.

"I'm Gary Creasy," I said, "Missy Anneger's fiancé."

"Mr. Creasy, my team wasn't able to revive Mr. Anneger. His injuries were too extensive." The way the doctor said it, like he wasn't so much sympathetic as put out, made me think he was the kind of doctor who had his nurses and receptionists do all the schmoozing and smiling while he did all the cutting.

"Mrs. Anneger is in a coma," he continued. "We don't know when she'll wake up. It could be this hour, or it could be never. We need to put pins in the three fractured vertebrae. She probably won't be able to walk when she wakes up, but if we don't put the pins in, she certainly won't."

"When are you going to operate?" I said.

"We need consent forms signed by next of kin for the procedure. Then, as soon as possible."

"Oh. I'll talk to Missy."

Missy signed the forms without reading them. I read them for her. They said medical science was inexact so you can't sue us if someone dies, and where do we send the bill?

Her mother had the surgery. But she never woke up from her coma, so I guess it didn't really matter if she'd had it or not.

Missy dropped out of school and took a job selling lady's shoes at a store in the mall that only sold shoes from one designer in Italy. All the shoes were leather, all of them had spikes for heels so women who wore them tottered like circus clowns on stilts, and all of them cost more money than Missy made in a week. Not that she spent her money on shoes; she was too busy spending it on hospital bills. She got a letter from the insurance people. It said they'd paid everything they were going to, so she was on her own, sorry.

I helped how I could with the money I made part-time at the college bowling alley, and I drove her back and forth to the hospital, the church for her dad's funeral, and back home again.

One night, one of the rare times when we both had the same night off, she let me into her jeans and showed me what heaven really looked like.

It was every bit as nice as I'd thought it was going to be, even though I caught Missy checking the clock by the bedside as I explored it. But at least she'd spat out her gum.

The phone rang when Missy was in the shower. I picked it up.

"Don't you wish you'd kept the spoons?" It was a woman's voice, full of gravel and cracks, like she was really old or had smoked a lot of cigarettes. Maybe both.

"Huh?"

"Do you have any idea how long it took me to collect all those spoons?"

"Aunt Serenity?" But no, it couldn't be. Her funeral had been open casket. They'd made her up so she looked waxy and unreal, shinier than she'd ever looked in life. I'd watched them put her and it in the ground.

"Idiot. Thought you, of all that bunch, had some common sense. Guess I was wrong. Hope you're happy with what you got." The phone buzzed, the connection severed.

When you get a phone call from beyond the grave you're supposed to feel wiggled out or something. What I felt was horny. So I got out of bed and joined Missy in the shower and got her to let me see heaven again. This time, there wasn't any watches or clocks for her to check.

I proposed to her when we got out, showing that I hadn't fibbed to the nice doctor at the hospital. With one towel wrapped around my waist and my hair dripping water in my eyes, I got down on one knee on the fuzzy, yellow rug and asked her to marry me. She said "yes" and laughed when my towel came undone.

I moved in with Missy into her parent's house with the master bedroom we didn't sleep in. We didn't have a lot of money, so I traded in my Firebird for a used Geo hatchback. With the difference I got back, I bought her a shiny, gold ring. It had a sliver of diamond caught between a set of four, claw-like prongs.

Missy cried when I gave her the ring. Then she scolded me, saying I shouldn't have spent the money on something so frivolous. She didn't mean it, though. She opened up heaven's gate to me again, so I knew I'd done good.

One day, after we came back from visiting Missy's mother, something we did a lot, I found a spoon wedged between the cushions of the passenger-side seat in the Geo. It was bent and black with tarnish.

Moving into someone else's home is like living in a treasury full of household items. I kept finding domestic trinkets that it would've taken Missy and me years to stockpile on our own: a pile of extension cords, two sets of china (everyday and formal), a closet full of bath towels, unopened boxes of tea, and a whole tub of silver polish.

When Missy was selling Italian shoes to American women, I shined up that spoon and worked at bending it back into shape.

It was an old thing. Don't know how it could've gotten in the Geo. Under all the tarnish it was really fine, like someone had woven a lace spoon and then dipped it in molten silver. I worked with a Q-tip to get all the nooks and crannies clean. I figured I'd need to protect it from the air or it'd get tarnished again, so I wrapped the spoon in a bit of oiled rag and stored it in an old humidor of Mr. Anneger's.

The next morning, Missy couldn't go to work. She spent it hunched over the toilet, heaving up whatever was left from the popcorn and Oreos we'd had for dinner.

We knew what puking in the morning could mean, so I went to the corner drugstore and bought one of those pink sticks that girls are supposed to pee on so they don't have to kill a rabbit. While I was waiting for Missy to pee on the stick, I found another spoon in the bag the boy at the drugstore had put the pink stick box in.

It was pretty crooked, but I could tell that once it had been a leaping rabbit with the long ears streaming back over the body and the bowl part shaped like a full moon.

When Missy came out, the stick said she was making a grandkid for comatose Aphrodite. I got the silver polish while she called her doctor to make sure the stick wasn't lying.

I had the spoon all shined up and pretty by the time we got the official word. Yup, she was baking a cake.

The next day I drove her down to the county clerk's office and picked up a wedding license. We were in a hurry 'cause we didn't want people who were good at math calling junior a bastard. The clerk handed me another spoon when he gave us the license.

The license was stamped with the state of Georgia's seal of approval. The spoon was shaped like an oak tree. It was in perfect condition except for a dusting of tarnish. A trunk with spreading branches formed the stem with a round acorn being the part you stick in your mouth. I didn't bother putting the silver polish away when I was done shining it. I did have to buy more oilcloth, though.

I got a fulltime job at Lowe's, helping folks with questions about weed killer. I said I had a lot of experience with gardening and landscaping, and the bored-looking guy who interviewed me took my word for it. Even though I'd lied to get the job, it wasn't that hard. I just read the directions on the Round Up bottles.

In the first week, my new place of employment gave me an orange apron, twenty hours of minimum wage time on the clock, and another spoon jammed into the envelope with my paycheck. This one was mostly shiny, but it made up for it by being plain. It had a single curlicue design that slinked up the stem and framed the bowl. Compared to the other spoons, it wasn't much of a looker, but I liked the simplicity of it.

Next thing I knew, I started finding spoons everywhere. One jabbed me in my ribs under the covers as I lay in bed with Missy when she was asleep and I was showing myself a good time--not as good as heaven's gate, but still respectable fun. And I found one in the tool shed on top of the lawn mower, one in the room we were going to turn into a nursery, and three in Mr. Anneger's alcohol cabinet. I polished the ones that needed polishing, un-dented the bent and pitted ones, and stored them all in Mr. Anneger's humidior.

Before long, the humidior was brimming with lumpy oilcloth rags that held silver bones. So I got some of the wood that Mr. Anneger had stockpiled for some unknown future project and built a case. Lined it with blue velvet that was in a basket next to the sewing machine in Aphrodite's sitting room.

Aunt Serenity called again when Missy was at the doctor's. I picked up the phone on the second ring.

"Hello?"

"You're getting some spoons back."

"Aunt Serenity?"

"What're you going to do this time?"

My brain was having one of its moments where it could speak up and I'd pay attention, since Missy wasn't around to turn the white noise on. Although to tell the truth, the way she was plumping up, eating Snickers bars and ice cream, she wasn't hitting the whammy button as hard as she used to. So I said: "What'd *you* do with them when you had them?"

"Traded them, of course. It's what you're supposed to do with them."

"Traded? With who? For what?"

"I can't believe you dumped them all for a car."

"It was a brand new, cherry-red Firebird. T-top."

The line buzzed.

Another phone call from beyond. At least it didn't make me horny again. But I didn't know what to do either. I ended up calling Lowe's and getting Stan, the other guy in the gardening department, to work my shift for me. Told him I'd work a double for him on the weekend in return.

I took one of the spoons and drove to the antique shop where I'd sold Aunt Serenity's bunch. It was a big serving spoon I'd found in the backyard, sticking up between the holly bushes. The handle part was smooth, but the bowl was gilded--real ornate so if you ever were to stick it in your mouth, you'd jab yourself with the curvy edges.

I recognized the old guy I'd dealt with before. He smiled real wide and stopped talking mid-sentence to the young couple eyeing a wicker rocking chair. Didn't seem to care when they huffed and left.

"Mr. Creasy, isn't it?"

"Yup. Got another spoon for you. But this time I don't want to sell. I want to trade."

A funny look passed his face, like he was thinking about sneezing, and it confused him. "Let me see it."

I handed him the oilcloth rag and watched his eyes glitter when he unwrapped it, like it was a candy bar and he was starved for chocolate.

"This is a lovely piece. What do you want for it?" He swept a hand at his store to show what he had: dusty furniture, a whole case of ugly costume jewelry, flatware to go with the silver, a hollowed out elephant's foot for umbrellas.

"I'm not big into antiques," I said. "Got anything else?"

He frowned. Taking off his glasses, he rubbed some streaks into them with a grimy cloth. "This piece in itself isn't worth what I think you might be interested in, but since we've done business before, I'm inclined to make you a deal." Reaching under the counter, he pulled out a pewter paperweight in the shape of a scroll, like the kind important announcements are written on.

"This is cutting me a deal, how?" I said.

"It's a representation. The real thing comes when you agree to the transaction."

I turned the pewter scroll in my hand.

"So, is this acceptable to you?"

"I guess."

A second later, the paperweight disappeared, and things got weird. Part of me remembered I worked at Lowe's, lying about herbicides. But it was as if someone had thrown a drop cloth over that and stuck a sign up: *Nothing to see here. Just move along.* The rest of me knew I was fresh out of college with a bachelor's degree in Chemistry from Georgia Tech.

I don't remember leaving the shop, but I must have driven myself home. When I walked through the door, I saw the answering machine blinking. Three messages: two from Missy, telling me to bring home some salsa-flavored Doritos and shortbread cookies and one from the medical center in DeKalb, offering me an intro-position as a lab tech paying three times what I made as a weed killer expert. Except I'd never been a weed killer expert, had I?

Sure enough, when I looked in the closet, the orange Lowe's apron wasn't there. But the simple, curlicue spoon was. I took it and the rest of the spoons back to the antique shop. By my figuring, a spoon for a college degree and a high-paying job was a pretty good trade.

A skinny lady with a knotted nest on her head was chatting with the old guy in the store. Up close, I saw the nest was supposed to be a hat. I plunked my box of spoons on the counter and shooed her out the door.

"You're back," the old guy said. "I presume you found our previous transaction to your liking?"

"Yep. I got more spoons," I said.

"You understand last time was special? You have to select what you want this time."

"Okay by me."

"So, what will it be?"

"I want to be rich and famous," I said. "How many spoons for that?"

The old guy chuckled. He was probably some kid's grandfather. "It doesn't work like that." He lugged up a wooden bowl from under the counter. It was filled with pewter figurines of different shapes and sizes--some little as Monopoly tokens, others as big as the college diploma paperweight.

"You can choose one large one or two little." He opened the spoon box and picked out half a dozen. "In return, I'll take these. When you've played out today's transaction, we can do more business, if you're so inclined."

"You don't want to trade everything now?"

He shook his head. "That would be tempting paradox."

Whatever. I passed over a big pewter statuette of a metal hottie with huge tits. I had Missy, didn't need another babe to confuse things. I let a charm-sized top hat, apple, and miniature horse dribble through my fingers before hanging on to

a little movie camera. Maybe that would make me a famous movie star or a big-time director. Then I found a small dollar sign wedged between a four-leaf clover and an oriental dragon.

"Okay," I said. "These."

"An interesting selection," he said. "Are you certain?"

"Yeah."

The figures in my hand disappeared, and I waited to see what the drop cloth would cover up and door number two reveal.

What it revealed was crap.

I was in debt bad. I'd blown all the money Missy and I had playing blackjack. The drop cloth-me wasn't big on gambling; the new me liked it better than rolling through heaven's gate. I was also seeing some girl behind Missy's back. She was an actress at the local community theater, but wanted to be a movie star. The new me was planning to break up with Missy, pregnant and everything, and hooking up with Bonnie. The old me was disgusted by the idea, but in a distant, covered-up-by-a-drop-cloth sort of way.

The antique dealer guy made to put the wooden bowl away.

"Wait!" I grabbed his hand.

"No returns."

"I want another trade."

"Too risky. Come back next month."

"No deal." I squeezed his hand until he dropped the bowl. "Now."

"If you insist."

"What can I get for the rest of my spoons?"

"Two big or six little."

Screw the little ones; I was going for big this time. I rummaged, passing over a charm-sized boot, a shovel, a stapler, a mug, and what I think was a goat. I was getting impatient, so I dumped the whole bowl on the counter. The old guy frowned, but I didn't care.

Gleaming on top of the pile was a paperweight of a Firebird T-top, just like the one I'd sold. Aunt Serenity hadn't been too pleased by the original, but I'd really loved that car. Next to it was a big pewter spoon.

I'd always thought the stories about folks getting three wishes and blowing them were lame. I mean, if I had three wishes, I'd wish for more wishes. I grabbed the spoon.

"These," I said.

The next thing I knew, I was driving full speed down the interstate. I remembered the dashboard, the bucket seats, the wheel beneath my hands. Here was my baby, my cherry-red Firebird T-top.

I revved her up, really letting loose. I couldn't wait to tell Missy, or maybe Bonnie, that I'd traded a bunch of spoons for my Firebird. I could sell the Geo and pay back some of my debt. If I was careful, I could stretch my paycheck from my new job and pay off the rest of it.

I saw the exit, the one that would take me back to Missy. I swerved, not bothering to slow down, and saw the silver beemer toddling along at the speed limit. I veered, clipping the other car and pushing it off the road. It hit the embankment and flipped upside down.

I jammed the brake and skidded to a stop on the gravel shoulder. Didn't notice until then that I knew the car. Missy's parents had driven a silver beemer--that silver beemer. And it was Missy's parents who were trapped under all that bent and twisted metal. I ran over the glass shards strewn across the road.

"Mrs. Anneger! Mr. Anneger!" The door was jammed. Mr. Anneger was half-in, half out of the broken, driver-side window. That's when I saw it: the spoon. It was clutched in Mrs. Anneger's bloody hand, dangling out of the car like she was trying to hand it to me.

I took the spoon. On it, a grinning man in a sports jacket leaned on a golf club. The bowl was the ball.

I stuck it in my pocket, and then I didn't know what to do. But they'd never caught the hit-and-run guy, had they? I got back into the Firebird and drove home.

Missy didn't say anything about the Firebird, and she wasn't wearing the ring I'd got her either. She acted kind of unfriendly. Maybe she'd had a bad day. Or it could've been hormones. She was also a lot bigger than I remembered, ready to drop her load at any second.

Sure enough, her water broke in the dead hour of the night when the owls are on break and the bats are punching their timecards to go off shift. I grabbed the bag we'd packed (I sort of remembered packing it) and bundled her off to the hospital like we'd planned.

She was in labor for fifteen hours. Strands of her butter-yellow hair escaped the shower cap they'd put over it and plastered themselves to her face. She didn't look like the daughter of a goddess anymore; she looked exhausted and miserable. I decided then to dump Bonnie.

I stuck by Missy's side, telling her to breathe and pant like the Lamaze folks had taught us, while she gouged grooves in my arms with her fingernails. At last, I saw the crown, all shiny and wet, poking out from heaven's gate, and it came out smooth as you please a couple heartbeats after.

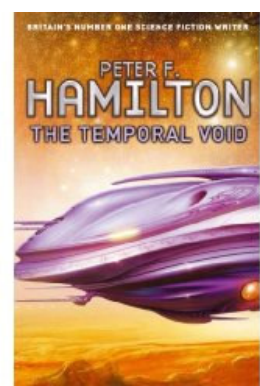
I don't rightly know if I should call it a boy or a girl. Once the nurse rubbed the birthing blood off, it gleamed brighter than stainless steel, brighter than a new nickel, a big, silver spoon. The bowl was shaped like a newborn's bald head; the stem was carved like a curled-up baby's body. The doctor needed a wire cutter to saw through the umbilicus.

They bundled it in a blue blanket so the bowl was sticking out, stretched a blue cap over that, and gave the whole thing to Missy. She cooed, happy as could be. She wanted some stuff we hadn't packed, so I told her I'd go home for them.

Walking through the hospital, I kept seeing spoons. They twinkled in the corner of the elevator, hung from the walls like silver insects, and poked out of the floor like strange flowers.

At first, I gathered them all and stuck them in my pockets, but before I made it to the parking deck, my pockets were overflowing and my hands full of silver. The Firebird's back seat was heaped high with spoons. They rattled and clanked as I careened around curves and over potholes. The road was paved with spoons, like the yellow brick road in the *Wizard of Oz*, but with silver brick spoons. When I got home, our house was made of spoons--drywall, wood, paint, all spoons.

I stood on the walkway--speckled with spoons--my hand on the doorknob (a big spoon bowl), and saw my reflection in the gleaming backs of all those spoons. I was a long, slender stem, silver and shiny, with etchings of shirt, pants, and shoes. My face was a convex bowl, the features engraved. My arms sealed to my stem, then my legs, and I fell over, nestled in among all the other spoons.



REVIEWS

The Temporal Void reviewed by Mark Chitty

The Sarah Connor Chronicels reviewed by Lee Harris

The Temporal Void by Peter F Hamilton

UK: Macmillan, HB, £18.99, out now

US: Del Rey, March 2009

The Centaurion Station, the base of the Void observation for countless millennia, is torn apart as the Raiel machines move to counter the Void's expansion. Justine, who is at the station as it is destroyed, makes a decision that will affect the whole of humanity; to enter the Void in an attempt to negotiate with the Skylord. Will the Second Dreamer be able to get her safe passage, even if it means exposing herself?

After rejecting the Skylord's offer Araminta now comes to the full realisation that she is indeed the Second Dreamer, the one Living Dream say is destined to lead them into the Void and the life they so desperately wish. However, along with this discovery Araminta now knows she is the target of everyone who wishes to use her to their own advantage. But she will not bow to the pressures put on her and is on the run, unsure where or who to turn to.

Paula is continuing her mission to track down Troblum who holds crucial information about the Accelerators and their plans. Desperate to get hard evidence, Paula tracks him down and comes to the very harsh realisation of how far the Accelerators are prepared to go to fulfill their plans. Meanwhile, the Ocisen Empire are on their way to Commonwealth space to enforce the threat they previously issued: cease the pilgrimage or face the consequences.

After his spectacular display of power and unwavering belief of what is right, Edeard now faces increasingly difficult obstacles in his bid to bring peace to Makkathran. With the gangs planning to undermine the Waterwalker he must stand for what he believes, even if it means unwanted political manoeuvring, and the events that take place in Makkathran lead down the path that will reveal the full potential of the Void.

Continuing from *The Dreaming Void*, *The Temporal Void* picks up events immediately following the revelations and keeps the sense of wonder and urgency we were left with. This helps in keeping the story going at a strong pace and it feels that all the groundwork laid in *Dreaming* is really starting to pay off.

The Commonwealth sections are particularly impressive. We still know what we were told in *Dreaming* - the Void is expanding, the Ocisens are on their way to stop the pilgrimage, the Second Dreamer knows she is communicating with the Skylord and many other things. What we are given is a situation that reached a climax and now the after-effects are being felt. Throughout the whole of *The Temporal Void*, the Commonwealth sections are consistently entertaining with a couple of nice surprises in there. There are also even less detours this time around which means we get a very nicely focused story.

The Void sections are just as enjoyably and Edeard's story continues in glorious fashion. We are now treated to a more confident Edeard and one who has gained both popularity and notoriety within Makkathran. His ideas are not something the council are used to and his stance against the criminals results in some interesting and page turning action. The powers within the Void exhibited by Edeard, both the ones he discovers and the ones he learns of through others, are amazing and go to show why so many Living Dream members want to pilgrimage to the Void.

This comes to the main revelation of the book: the true nature of the Void. Without giving anything away, the Void becomes a very appealing place to go to. It also effectively ties up that main sub-plot, although I fully expect to see more of the Void in the last book with some very interesting things left hanging.

The characters carry through from *Dreaming*, but the Commonwealth ones do suffer a little in this volume, simply due to the short time most of them are on the page. Where *The Dreaming Void* was around a 60/40 split in favour of the Commonwealth, *The Temporal Void* is 70/30 in favour of the Void. This gives a great follow through for Edeard and builds on what I think was the strongest element in *Dreaming*, and probably the strongest in *Temporal* too.

It's already been confirmed by Peter Hamilton that *The Evolutionary Void* will return more to the Commonwealth, and with promises of it being larger again than *Temporal* I can barely wait the 18 months or so until its release. The setting up for Edeard's story done in *The Dreaming Void* paid off very well in *The Temporal Void*, but it feels that we're still awaiting that payoff for the Commonwealth and all the dangers now facing it.

There are a couple of bits that I wasn't entirely convinced about, but without giving away spoilers it's very difficult to put them into words. Nevertheless, these are small concerns that didn't affect my overall enjoyment. The format also follows the same principle of *The Dreaming Void* - we get a chapter in the Commonwealth followed by another of Inigo's dreams of the Void. It works again this time around, although the size of the Void chapters can be huge, one coming to over a hundred pages.

The Temporal Void delivers a lot of what space opera is good for, just not in huge amounts. Who will enjoy it will depend very heavily on what they thought of Edeard's story in *Dreaming* - if it's something they loved (like me) then *The Temporal Void* will make them very happy indeed. But if it was the plot they least enjoyed then *Temporal* may not live up to their expectations. Either way, the stage has been set for an action-packed and very promising conclusion. Another highly recommended novel.

Overall rating: 9/10

The Sarah Connor Chronicles: Season 2, Episode 1

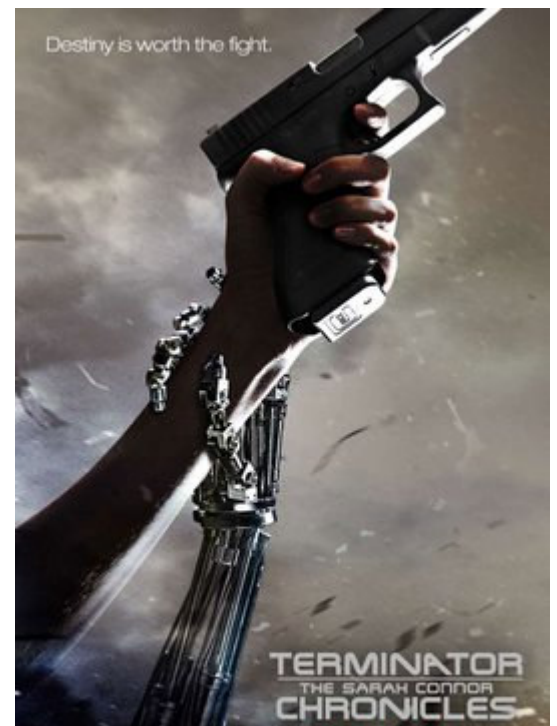
Starring: Lena Heady, Summer Glau, Thomas Dekker, Richard T Jones, Brian Austen Green, Shirley Manson

Following a major explosion and vehicle accident, Cameron (Glau) becomes damaged, and her original programming kicks in – to terminate John Connor. This makes for a high-octane start to the new series, as the show acknowledges what we already knew from the films – extended chase sequences are a Terminator staple. Heady continues to prove that her casting was spot-on, and Dekker finally comes into his own, and we begin to see a glimmer of the man he must become.

In another plot strand, Agent Ellison (Jones) – the only survivor of the massacre inflicted upon the FBI by Cromartie (the excellent Garrett Dillahunt) is forced to take extended leave from the bureau. He comes across Cromartie again during the episode, and Cromartie lets him live.

In an unusual piece of (what could be seen to be) stunt casting, Shirley Manson appears as the CEO of a technology company. At a department meeting she informs her department heads that she is to form a new technology division named “Babylon”. Her character is interesting (and becomes ever more so during the closing moments of the episode), but Manson is currently not a good enough actress to live up to the standards of the otherwise excellent episode. She is certainly the weakest link in this episode, though some fanboy-pleasing CGI partially helps to make up for this.

All in all, a solid season opener, though one which could have been upgraded to ‘superb’ with a slight change of cast.



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