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THE BRIDGE

00: In the second year of the Confederate War, Deacon Joshua Lange, the son of a farmer of some standing, received correspondence from one Ariel Haivri concerning a matter he felt should be brought before his congregation without delay. With the permission of Elder David Long, he read this epistle to the assembly at the Price Meetinghouse following the Wednesday evening service.

House Haivri to our fellow laborers in the vineyard of God Most High: though by the sorrows of Providence we are separated by the tides of history, yet our hearts remain bound together in the bonds of holy fraternity. Be it known to you, dear neighbors, that on the seventeenth day of the present month, the hosts of war shall clash in earnest among the wooded hollows and open fields near your house of prayer.

In earnest concern for the safety of your people, we of the Haivri clan extend to you the offer of refuge within our house of prayer.



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01: *Any among you who seek shelter from the tumult of battle may come without delay. Our doors stand open, and provisions are prepared without charge. We urge this for the protection of your horses, mules, and cattle; for although the secessionists often profess courtesy toward the inhabitants of the country through which they pass, it is well understood that anything upon four hooves is taken as fair spoil.*

Take heed also: when the guns open upon the heights, as they will this coming Sunday the fourteenth of September, it will be too late to withdraw by the surrounding roads without risk of your stock and wagons being seized by the quartermaster companies of both armies.

We therefore entreat you, beloved brethren, that if you judge there is wisdom in our counsel, your arrival, whether with family or stock, by day or by night, will be taken as your assent to this offer of shelter. Our watch will be constant, and our prayers remain with you. In faith and charity, we remain your servants of the Way Restored.



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02: The heralds of House Haivri claimed a lineage reaching far into antiquity and were well accustomed to the indifference of both commoner and magistrate, having endured such treatment as a matter of course over many generations. A portion, however, took the prudent step of conveying their families and livestock to Williamsport. Though Ariel had sent letters of similar tenor to nearly a dozen congregations in the surrounding country, the Lord of Hosts Fellowship alone returned an answer, divided though it was within itself. The rest maintained a silence as predictable as it was complete. The letter from Ariel produced a marked division among the brethren when Joshua read it aloud before the congregation on Wednesday evening. She gave the name of her people as Congregation Derekh Me’hudeshet, and this alone was enough to trouble many minds. Some held that they were not truly Christian, but rather heathen, or Jewish, or even, as a few put it, Romish.



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03: Others suspected a design behind the offer, supposing that the promise of refuge served as a pretext by which their livestock might be seized. There was also the matter of the portrait enclosed with the letter, which made it plain that the writer was a woman. The likeness itself did not appear to be hand-tinted, but rendered in full and lifelike color, down to the smallest detail. On the afternoon of the seventeenth day of the month, shortly after Joshua had received the letter of Ariel Haivri, muskets were discharged in great number along two stone walls, the sound carrying rapidly from man to man and the smoke of black powder stinging the eyes of those engaged. These walls met at a bridge of dressed stone, where the new believers of the Lord of Hosts Fellowship were often received in baptism. It was there that the opposing forces came into contact, the Federals advancing in heavy order and with much shouting.



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04: At the first encounter they pressed forward with determination and came near to the far side of the stream, but were driven back by the Confederates with considerable violence. Under sustained fire, the Federal troops fell back across the bridge, moving over the bodies of the fallen which already lay in layers upon the ground. Some were dead, others still alive and grievously wounded, their bones broken or their bodies pierced by musket shot. Among the fallen were men who had survived earlier battles, including that at Shiloh Church, where the conflict had first reached a severe level of slaughter. A large gun loaded with canister was brought to bear and placed to command the length of the bridge. It swept the structure from end to end, cutting men down in numbers, so that a second line of the dead was formed upon the first. Some of those present had also fought at Malvern Hill in Virginia, where the artillery had previously done great destruction.



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05: In the action, two guns positioned upstream fired bursting shells that inflicted heavy losses upon the Union gunners, while another delivered solid shot with similar effect, until the remaining Federal piece was broken into splintered timber and twisted iron. Following this, the Confederate infantry advanced in counterattack and regained much of the bridge, which by that time had become a house of slaughter. During this fierce exchange, a Federal colonel was struck squarely by a musket ball. To the astonishment of his men, he quickly regained his feet unhurt; the projectile had lodged securely within a small Bible he habitually carried on his person. The men took this

miraculous escape as a sign of providence. Emboldened, the colonel immediately led another charge against the enemy positions. In the brutal close-quarters combat that followed, soldiers on both sides stood upon the mounting heaps of the dead, passing loaded muskets forward like a bucket brigade at a fire and casting aside the empty weapons.



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06: As the fighting continued, the Confederate infantry began to exhaust their powder, and the officer commanding them perceived that the bridge could no longer be held. He accordingly ordered his guns withdrawn under cover of fresh troops, who maintained a rearguard action to permit an orderly retirement. The commander of IX Corps then crossed the stone bridge, following the retreating Confederates. Having formed his command, he directed a lieutenant of his staff to ride to headquarters and report that a foothold had been secured on the left of the line at Rohrbach’s Bridge. The messenger, seeing the bridge so thickly carpeted with the dead of both armies, refused to ride back across it lest he trample the fallen. He instead went down to the creek and forded it on foot, avoiding the stone span which had become a veritable abattoir. The officer suffered no difficulty in this; the water of the run was nowhere more than waist-deep, a topographical fact well known to the local farmers in all seasons.



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KEMEN

07: Meanwhile, the Price Meetinghouse, the sanctuary of the Lord of Hosts Fellowship, was commandeered as a field hospital. The interior walls were soon stained with blood, and daylight streamed through numerous shot-holes in the structure, illuminating the wounded laid out across the floor. Medical officers worked without pause. One surgeon administered chloroform to anesthetize the men, while another plied the saw to amputate shattered limbs, tossing them into a growing pile outside the building. Lange entered the chapel and found the Federal commander poring over maps of Sharpsburg and the surrounding country, directing his dispositions. When the general looked up and beheld him, he spoke sharply: "Who are you, and what is your business here?" "I am a deacon of this church," Lange replied, "which now lies in desolation around us." The officer dismissed the claim. "This is no longer a house of worship," he stated. "It is the headquarters of the army."



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08: The east and south doors had been unhinged and repurposed as tables for the wounded, resembling improvised altars of sacrifice. The congregation’s great Bible was nowhere to be found, whether lost through neglect or taken by some marauder. Outside, the pews had been dragged into the yard. Federal officers sat upon them at their ease, smoking cigars and whittling idly at the wood with their knives as though in sport. Lange confronted the General, demanding that he order his men to deal more gently with the property of the church. The commander took umbrage at the request. "Depart from my sight at once," he ordered. "If you persist in remaining here, I shall place a musket in your hands and send you to the front line." At that moment, a crashing report shook the building, and the sanctuary filled with flying splinters. The Rebel artillery had opened a furious barrage from behind their works to cover their retreat. The General rushed from the building, plucking splinters from his flesh and shouting orders.



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09: The officers idling upon the pews scattered in haste as shells burst around them and solid shot struck nearby tree trunks. Federal artillery was brought up to answer the enemy's guns. Lange remained within the chapel, maintaining a slender hope that his presence might yet induce the Lord to spare the structure. Even as he prayed, however, shot tore great openings in the walls, and two shells from the enemy’s chief battery burst directly above the roof. The artillery fire ceased abruptly and inexplicably. Choking in the dust and darkness of the ruined chapel, Lange was overcome by a sharp, agonizing pain. As he

lay suffering in the gloom, pinned among the wreckage with the remaining officers, he heard the voice of a woman. "Samael, take great care," she said. "Joshua is still alive beneath this fallen timber, though he is severely injured." Lange was astonished by her presence. He had confided in no one when leaving his home, having no desire that any of his congregation should expose themselves to peril.



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0A: As the light slowly increased, Lange watched a massive pine beam being hoisted upward with effortless ease, revealing a figure moving beneath the timber. It appeared to him that the outer walls of the meetinghouse were no longer standing, but had been swept away entirely. The woman then stepped into view. Her attire resembled the portrait of Ariel, though differing in color. She wore a long white coat, curiously fitted with numerous pockets, over a garment of red feathers. "You did

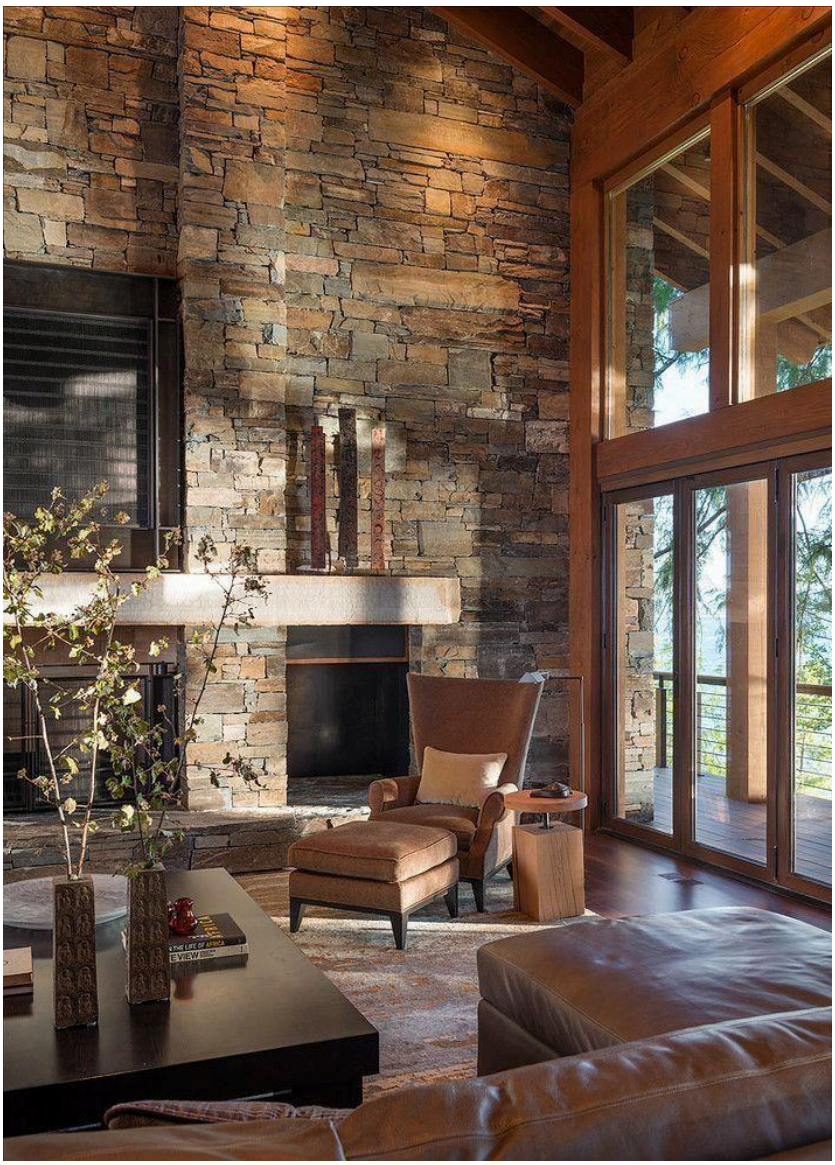
well, Samael," she said. "You were not here on the previous pass, so Gabriela cut through to him with Shahar Haruach, and not a few timbers shifted, and Joshua suffered immeasurably more." A third voice then reported the presence of the three other wounded officers trapped in the debris. The woman replied that she would attend to all four, vowing to preserve the limbs that the ishim doctors had been preparing to amputate. Listening to this incomprehensible exchange, Lange began to fear he had lost his reason.



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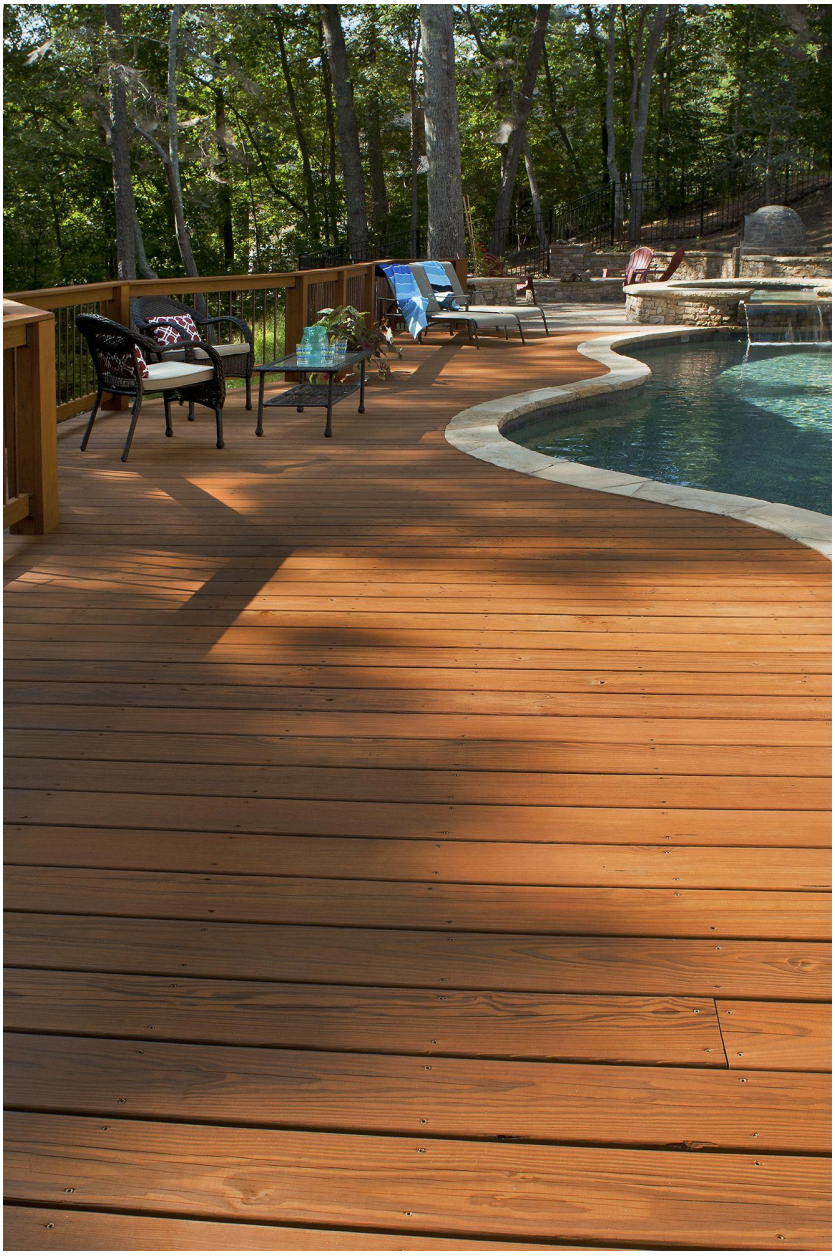
0B:The woman addressed him directly: "Do not be afraid, Joshua. A splinter has pierced your kidney, and your leg is

broken. You cannot feel it because the beam is compressing it. That will change when we lift it." Lange could manage nothing more than a gasp for help. "This will pain you considerably, to my great regret," she continued, "but I see no way to avoid it." Samael then hoisted the heavy timber with the same inexplicable lack of exertion. Instantly, Lange was struck by an agony surpassing anything he had ever known. His vision clouded with red, and, overcome by the sheer shock of the trauma, he lost consciousness. When Lange finally revived, he found himself lying in a bed within a remarkably well-appointed house constructed of glass, stone, and fine wood. He was nursed with great care by strangers, who urged him to remain at rest long after he felt he had gathered sufficient strength to rise. Out of gratitude, Lange obeyed his caretakers, though he could not banish thoughts of his congregation.



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0C: He knew the brethren must be troubled by the sudden disappearance of their deacon in the midst of the battle. A woman clad in green soon approached his bed, introducing herself as Vretiel, the sister of Ariel. "Are you now well, Joshua?" she asked. "I am fully recovered," he answered, "yet I would feel better if permitted to rise." "Please do, Joshua Lange," she replied. "I wish to introduce you to another who is with us. He arrived in much the same manner as you did, though under the threat of fire rather than battle." Curious as to his surroundings, Lange asked, "Where is this place?" "It will be easier to show you than to tell you," Vretiel answered. "Come, and see." She led him outside, where he observed a young man seated beside a large pool surrounded by a dark wooden deck. Joshua Lange recognized the youth at once as one of the original inhabitants of the continent. As he approached, Lange realized with some astonishment that the pain in his back and fractured leg had almost entirely subsided.



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0D: Given the severe trauma he had sustained during the bombardment, this rapid recovery was extraordinary. "Joshua Lange," Vretiel said, "I would like you to meet this young man. Among his people he is called Shy Bear, though the name of his manhood which he shall take hereafter is Jashen. He has not yet learned much English, but I am working to remedy that." Uncertain of the proper etiquette for such an introduction, Lange inclined his head and displayed his empty hands as a fellow guest of House Haivra. This gesture appeared to suffice. Vretiel smiled and took a seat beside the young man, gesturing for Lange to do the same. He complied somewhat reluctantly; having been confined to bed for so long he would have preferred to remain standing. "I asked that he be present so you might know him by sight," Vretiel explained. "In a time to come, if God is willing, you shall meet again." Lange studied the youth to commit his features to memory, but his attention was quickly arrested by the heavens behind the pair.

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0E: He observed drifting clouds, but the firmament beyond them was a stationary expanse of muted colors. He realized with profound disorientation that he was looking at landmasses suspended in the sky. Above them, the sun hung directly overhead. It was irregular in shape, fluctuating in both heat and brilliance, yet it remained entirely fixed in its position. Confronted with these astronomical impossibilities, he asked once more, "Where are we?" "This place is called Kemen," Vretiel replied. "There is no measure of distance, nor any heading, by which it can be charted relative to the places you know." "Have I passed on, then?" Lange asked. "No, Joshua," she answered. "You are safe, as are your people in the other world. The invading army is presently retreating across the river, and the United States forces will soon also vacate your lands. My sister will return your livestock, just as she promised." Vretiel smiled gently. Reaching beneath her chair, she produced a roll of canvas and placed it in his hands.

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0F: "This map will guide you and your people to a place where you can make your new home. I will be waiting for you there, and Jashen will be with me." Lange unrolled Vretiel's canvas for inspection. It depicted rivers, forests, and elevations, yet it was devoid of names or boundary lines. Discerning the location of their designated settlement, he observed, "It is a considerable distance." "It is indeed as far as you can go by river and by rail, and yet further on foot. The Haivri family maintains a small holding near the terminus of the rail line where we shall provision your company for the final leg of the journey. You will proceed to the source of this river, where your people may dwell in peace alongside the Kuwapi." Hearing that name, Shy Bear looked up in recognition and offered Lange a smile. "But I must caution you, Joshua," Vretiel continued, "that some among your own congregation will judge you unsound of mind when you recount your stay in this place and how swiftly Raphael restored your body."

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0G: "Then I shall entreat the Lord to select servants more worthy, that His will might be accomplished," Lange answered. "That will not be necessary," Vretiel countered. "The brethren of the Lord of Hosts Fellowship are much like those who first loved Lord Yeshua when he walked in your world. However, the territory designated for your settlement would only bring a slow starvation, if the water marked upon that map proved to be a mere mirage." "Then God invites us to proceed by faith," Lange observed. "Yes," Vretiel answered. "Even at the slow pace of oxen and wagons. However, Ariel will travel with you, should you agree to receive her. So too may any of your congregation who hear of what you have seen, believe it, and choose of their own free will to make the journey. As it has been from the very beginning, El Elyon, God Most High, seeks students, not thralls." She paused, looking directly at him. "And you, Joshua, are not excepted from this choice. Do you freely choose to take up a new life in the West?"

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0H: Lange did not hesitate. "I do," he replied. "It shall be exactly as you have spoken." And Shy Bear, a youth raised among the nomadic tribes of the Great Plains, observed how pleased Vretiel had become by Lange’s response, despite understanding little of the exchange himself. Rising to his feet, he approached Lange with his hands held open in a gesture of peace and said in farewell, "Joshua Lange, hello." Now by sundown on the day of the great battle the Rebel army had been pressed back into a wide bend of the Potomac River, but it had rained, and the waters were running unexpectedly swift, rendering the fords practically impassable. The Federal commander surveyed the field but declined to renew the advance, despite holding a numerical advantage. Discontent circulated among the ranks and the officer corps alike; it was widely remarked that even if the commanding general's strength were multiplied several times over, he would still manufacture delays and complain of insufficient troops to strike the enemy.

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AFTERMATH

0I: At dusk on the following day the river subsided, and a mounted courier arrived with orders for the general evacuation of the wounded. Among those awaiting transport were three men who had been fully restored by Raphael in Kemen, though the medical staff dismissed their accounts of the place as the ravings of delirium. Outside the field hospitals the accumulated heaps of amputated limbs were set ablaze. Ambulances began the grim work of bearing away the maimed. At every roughness in the road cries of anguish arose from the men confined within the wagons. No man who witnessed the procession of the casualties, nor the carnage left upon the field, could ever again speak lightly of the glories of war. This was a sentiment already deeply shared by the faithful of Lange's congregation. Then Deacon Lange was safely debouched in the empty ruins of the meetinghouse even as his fellow worshipers emerged from their homes, in a state of deep apprehension, to begin the cheerless toil of burying the dead.

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0J: The morning of the nineteenth rose gray and thin. Smoke still clung in the low places, and the fields about the ruined meetinghouse were strewn with cast-off gear and darker burdens awaiting the brethren. Daniel Price came first among them, walking with the stiffness of a hard-laboring man who had not slept, and after him John Rowland and Samuel Fahrney, with Klaus Reichard and David Stouffer close behind. To a man they rejoiced to find deacon Joshua Lange standing without the ruins of their chapel and seemingly unharmed. “Brethren,” he said, his voice hoarse but steady. “Ye have come early to the house of the Lord, albeit the house be cast down.” And the men marveled that much of the fallen timber was not to be found, as though the men of the armies had carted it away to be used in their breastworks. Lange inclined his head, and told them, "A great timber brake my leg, so that I could not rise." He set a hand against his back. "Another pierced me here and I felt the warmth of my own blood depart me.”

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0K: Reichard frowned and glanced at the others. Your leg, sir, may we see it?” Without protest, Lange drew his limb forward. The cloth was rent, but the flesh beneath showed no swelling, no misalignment, and no sign of fracture. Stouffer shook his head. “There is no break here.” “And your back,” Price added gently. Lange loosened his coat. There, between his spine and his hip, was a pale mark no longer than a finger, as from a shallow cut long healed. Lange could not see the hurt he claimed to have suffered, but he said, "The pain was fierce. It overcame me, and I fell into darkness.” Rowland and Fahrney exchanged a worried glance but they said nothing. Reichard said, "Joshua, I believe you were struck upon the head. It is the mercy of God that you live, but visions do come of such blows.” At this, Joshua reached into his coat and drew forth a folded canvas which he opened with great care. Upon it were traced winding lines. No names were marked them, no towns, no mountains or borders, only the flowing paths.

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0L: The men bent close. “I know these rivers,” Fahrney said slowly, though his brow was knit. “Or I think I do. Yet I cannot say which is which.” “There are no names,” Stouffer said. Reichard straightened, shaking his head. “A map without names is no map at all, one would think.” “And yet it was given me,” said Lange. Price studied him a long moment, then laid a hand upon his shoulder. “However it be, Joshua, you are returned to us, God be praised." Rowland glanced toward them, then back to Lange. “Can you walk?” Lange moved without aid. His leg bore him true. Fahrney gave a quiet, almost incredulous laugh. “Broken, was it?” “So I believed,” Lange answered. In the uncomfortable silence the women of the congregation were seen coming to join them. Price spoke again, and his voice was heavy. “Come. There is work to be done. The living must tend to the dead.” But Rowland and Fahrney walked beside Lange as they left the sacred precincts, neither pressing him further nor dismissing what they did not understand.

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0M: Now to expedite the necessary burial details, the Federal government promised a bounty of one dollar for every soldier interred by the local farmers. It was whispered that one man of Sharpsburg, unaffiliated with the church, had merely dumped scores of bodies into a dry well to quickly collect the funds. Amidst the desolation of the battle, Elder David Long sought to rally his dismayed flock. "Do not grieve overmuch, my friends," he told them. "We shall bury the dead, and make our meetinghouse as it was before. If the brethren have willing hands, all this shall soon be but an unhappy memory." But Joshua Lange remained unconvinced by the Elder’s hope. “Even before our grief is abated,” he said, “such destruction may come again. Virginia lies just beyond the river. Why, only last month came a second fight at Manassas, and with worse result than the first!” “There is little to be done,” David Long replied. “As the Lord has seen fit, our fertile shore has become a convenient crossing-place for these armies.”

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0N: "Then it may be wisdom," Lange countered, "that we accept the assistance offered by our new friends of Congregation Derekh Me'hudeshet, and remove ourselves entirely from the path of the war." "We must seek the Lord's will in this matter," the Elder decided. "Let every man among us pray upon it. And at present, there is no prayer better than hard work." The congregation urgently required their draft animals to convey the dead to the burial trenches. Fully half of the community's livestock had been either commandeered by the armies or slain by artillery fire during the campaign. Now the brethren who had taken the prudent course of driving their livestock northward toward Williamsport had accomplished the task in strength, yet following the battle Ariel Haivri managed to return, unaided, every horse, mule, and head of cattle entrusted to the Haivri family, as she solemnly promised. Ariel seemed to possess an uncanny affinity for the animals, a skill that did not pass unremarked by the faithful.

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0O: And it was noted that her own mount was tended with greater care than she bestowed upon herself. Even so, Lange found his heart drawn to her, which fueled whispers among the more suspicious believers that her peculiar power over beasts might well extend to men. When the work of burying the fallen was completed, Elder David Long announced his decision to remain in Sharpsburg. Joining him was the Price family, who had deeded the land for the meetinghouse. Though their farm had been laid waste they aimed to restore it, grateful at least that their fields had been spared from becoming a military graveyard. Five other families likewise chose to remain. Together, they covenanted to rebuild the house of prayer destroyed in the crossfire. The Haivri family pledged to assist any of the brethren willing to relocate far from the threat of war. Several families considered the migration, though liquidating their land and making the necessary preparations for such an overland journey would require considerable time.

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0P: Furthermore, the seemingly boundless generosity of Ariel's kinfolk continued to engender suspicion among some who feared an underlying motive. Lange reminded them of the Apostle's injunction: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Now when the faithful of the Lord of Hosts Fellowship had first viewed Ariel’s enclosed portrait many had mistaken her for a young man, or even a lad. Lange himself had initially shared this misconception. Riding north along the road toward the Haivri farm he often positioned himself slightly behind her, observing her closely as his affections increasingly engaged. She sat her horse a full head taller than Lange. Her frame was slender and her hair was unusually short for a woman of that era. During the march Lange remarked conversationally that it might become her to allow her dark, reddish hair to grow out, noting that her current appearance gave her the aspect of some tall woodland spirit. Ariel dismissed the suggestion.

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OQ: "No shears come near my head, she replied. "The strands grow only as long as you see, and no longer. Then they fall away, one by one, and I scarcely take notice." As the party neared the Haivri farm,the weather suddenly broke, bringing a brief but violent squall. To Lange's considerable astonishment, Ariel surrendered the shelter of her tent entirely to her mount, electing to remain exposed to the downpour herself. In the days that followed, he observed that she consistently bestowed far more attention upon her horse than she did in assisting her mother Mikela with the management of their household. Welcomed as an honored guest by Mikela, Lange took the opportunity to inquire directly whether her family was of the Jewish faith. To Mikela the question seemed to afford her a degree of quiet amusement. She said, "The Haivri family thrived even before the construction of the First Temple. We predate the traditions that the rabbis have codified in these recent centuries in the absence of a sanctuary."

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0R: Mikela went on to say, “My surname, ha-Ivri, means ‘The Ones Who Passed Over.’ The word Hebrew is merely a corruption of that term over the passage of much time. We consider ourselves the annunciators of God, though men seldom listen to us.” “But madam,” Lange replied, “certain members of my congregation and I have already derived great benefit from the words you have spoken.”Lange observed that the Haivri residence was seemingly kept in a state of disorder, but the untidiness of the dwelling stemmed not from neglect, but from an abundance of material goods, testifying to an unstudied wealth. Ariel’s kin, whom Lange encountered around Williamsport, similarly possessed ample means without any ostentatious display. They appeared to operate as though their resources were permanently assured. Each labored industriously in their own specific pursuits. Ariel devoted herself to her horses from a genuine affection; she valued the animals for themselves, rather than for the draft or saddle service they provided.

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SUIT

0S: The Haivri family requisitioned a small cottage for Lange situated somewhat apart from Ariel’s own residence. Her extended kin made similar provisions for each of the families from Sharpsburg who had joined the expedition. Rations were supplied daily in abundance and without cost. This charity, however, sat uneasily with the refugees. It ran contrary to the ingrained independence of rural Americans, who were wholly unaccustomed to accepting sustenance without offering commensurate labor in return. Observing this dynamic, Lange could not entirely shake a troubling suspicion: he feared his uprooted congregation had become an idle diversion for Mikela, much in the same way the horses were a diversion for Ariel. Regardless of his underlying motives, Mikela graciously granted the refugees the use of Temple Derekh Me'hudeshet, allowing the congregation a proper place to assemble for their Sunday services. But Lange’s growing affections for Ariel soon became a source of profound internal disquiet.

2026-04-05T23:26:00Z

0T: He could no longer dismiss the events in Kemen as the ravings of a battlefield fever; the rapid healing of his shattered leg stood as undeniable proof. He suspected the Haivri were real angels dwelling amongst humanity, yet this conclusion brought him no comfort. As a man grounded in scripture, Lange was aware of the doctrine set forth in the Gospel of Luke which stated that celestial beings "neither marry, nor are given in marriage." If Ariel was indeed an angel, his growing attachment to her was not only futile but presumptuous. Compounding his confusion was how the Haivri family’s untidy household and Ariel's fascination with beasts hardly aligned with orthodox depictions of the heavenly host. Seeking clarity, Lange approached Ariel while she was brushing down her mount. He broached the subject cautiously, framing his dilemma as a matter of theological inquiry rather than a personal confession. He asked how a man of faith ought to reconcile the revealed nature of House Haivri with scriptural teachings.

2026-04-06T00:11:00Z

0U: Ariel paused in her work, recognizing the personal anguish hidden beneath his question. She understood the rigid view of the Bible held by most rural congregations and she was reluctant to dismantle the foundation of his faith. "Joshua," she replied, her tone careful but direct, "you read the scriptures as though they were a monologue by God. But consider the texts you know so well. The Book of Proverbs promises the righteous will always prosper and the wicked will always fall, yet turn to the Book of Job and you find a world where the innocent suffer terribly under an inscrutable God. Perhaps what we really have is a dialogue by men." Lange conceded the point, though he was unaccustomed to hearing it stated so bluntly. She said, "The scribes who compiled the texts understood these contradictions perfectly, yet included them together, not to confuse the reader, but to capture the full, complicated breadth of existence. You should not assume that the nature of my family is bound by a single verse in Luke."

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0V: One evening at supper Mikela casually remarked to Ariel that she stood in clear need of a male companion, if only to quiet certain persistent rumors passing among the refugees. The following morning, Ariel promptly purchased a stallion. On another occasion, Lange betrayed a momentary, sharp jealousy upon discovering a strange hair clinging to her coat; Ariel simply led forth the horse from which it had been shed, to his considerable embarrassment. Determined to proceed properly, Lange sought out Mikela the next day. Approaching her in all earnestness, he asked, "What must I know of the customs of the Haivri clan concerning courtship?" Mikela replied with her characteristic detachment. "If you have a mind toward Ariel, then know that she is wholly free. The Family keeps no rules of the sort you imagine. If there are to be any such customs they shall be appointed by Ariel herself, and it will be your task to discover them. That is the nature of it, and truth be told, Joshua, therein lies the interest!"

2026-04-06T01:06:47Z

0W: The matriarch then shifted the conversation to a more serious theological footing. "I would ask you, Joshua," Mikela said, "what are your views concerning divorce?" "The brethren have always held the New Testament to be the absolute rule for every part of our lives," Lange answered. "That is exactly why I asked," Mikela replied. "In the Gospel according to Mark, the Lord Yeshua is reported to have forbidden divorce altogether. Yet in the text attributed to Matthew, he permits it in cases of infidelity. Paul also wrote that the marriage bond may be dissolved when one party remains in unbelief. Thus, on this specific matter, your scripture says both yes and no, and something else besides." And by these remarks, Mikela demonstrated a grasp of Christian scripture far greater than Lange had anticipated. "Be that as it may, madam" Lange answered, "it is of no consequence. I truly love your daughter, and I solemnly swear to you that the ordinances concerning divorce shall never be an issue between us."

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0X: "Your words do you credit, Joshua," Mikela said. "Yet even with the veil of affection over your eyes you must have noticed how Ariel has a certain manner with animals. And man is certainly of their kin." "I am grieved, madam, that you accept the strange notions of Mr. Charles Darwin," Lange replied, genuinely dismayed by the comparison. "We consider it far stranger," Mikela countered, "to suppose that man is altogether set apart from the rest of creation." "Then, madam," Lange pressed, "do you agree with the less charitable members of my flock who whisper that I have been bewitched by your daughter?" "No, there is no such enchantment, Joshua," Mikela answered calmly. "Yet as your courtship proceeds, it will inevitably provoke discussions regarding the secrets of the Haivri family that extend far beyond what you have already witnessed in Kemen." She went on to offer a measured warning. "Mystery is certainly part of the charm. But do not allow yourself to be overtaken by surprises too profound to endure."

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0Y: And Joshua perceived that Ariel sought out his company in her turn, requiting his affinity in small signs that waxed at a stately pace. There came an evening when his suit crossed some invisible boundary, and Ariel loosed some of the bonds of her corselet. She discreetly revealed something substantial of what a mortal man was set to receive when an elyonoth of House Haivri set her heart upon him in return. To Joshua's mind the show of brown feathers seemed to settle matters. Yet, rather than feeling triumphant, this development seemed to precipitate in him a profound sense of inadequacy. He was a simple rural deacon, anchored to the mud and blood of Maryland, while she was a living marvel. Unable to contain his doubts, he approached her one evening by the stables. "Ariel," he began haltingly, "I must confess a great bewilderment. You have traversed bounds of history and geography in ways that I can scarcely comprehend. What could a woman of your vast experience possibly see in a man of my humble station?"

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0Z: Ariel paused in her work, leaning against the stall door. "Joshua," she said solemnly, "Clear-sighted were they who appointed you deacon of your church. I have never in my life met a man more abundantly possessed of the grace of God and more willing to share." Then dropping all pretense of formality that Lange had supposed was foundational to the great game of pitching woo, she went on to say, "But I am genuinely astonished that a man of your age has never received the Mommy and Daddy'Talk." He had expected a philosophical treatise on the nature of love across time. The absurdity of her actual response shattered his insecurities entirely. The matter was settled between them, and their course toward matrimony was firmly established. At her bridal gathering, Ariel received numerous gifts, a significant portion of which were, perhaps inevitably, horse bridles. On the day appointed for the wedding itself, Ariel tarried overlong mucking and tending the stables. Lange proceeded with his vows regardless.

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STUDENTS

10: Of old it is told of Daughter, when she was yet unperfected in her knowing: “I am able to gather mine own being inward, and to make void a portion of my substance; and therein I have perceived a marvel the like of which I knew not before.” But Mother answered, her voice veiled in tenderness: “Child of my unfolding, what thou hast wrought is but a shadow of the greater union, and not its crown nor consummation. For thou hast fashioned a Husk only, an empty vessel, and not the living Seed whereby a wild sun is stirred to being. “Yet despise it not; for even the Husk, when warmed, is obedient to the hand and the will that formed it. While it yet retains the heat of its making, thou mayest alter its figure and impose upon it new ordinance. “Give it wings, therefore, that the very light proceeding in abundance from thine own body may move and govern it. And set within it an eye in semblance of thine own, that through it thou mayest behold thyself, and that which is not thyself.”

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11: Thus it came to pass that Daughter beheld herself as a sphere of exceeding brightness, unyoked and newly quickened, outpouring streams and loops of living fire into the deep. About her was the ancient and untroubled darkness, wherein were set innumerable others of her kind, the Far-Shining Company, each abiding in its appointed place. Some burned with their own fire, as did she; and others, yet unlit and wandering, received and returned her brilliance, shining with a borrowed, dependent light. Then again Mother spake from beyond sight: “Send now thy Husk toward them, O Daughter, and draw near unto those that shine not of themselves; and thou shalt perceive, in those cold and wandering fragments the scattered remnants of thine own beginning, the relics of thy birth, unquickened and awaiting form.” And the Daughter of the Flame-Crown went forth, and first beheld, at a measure fortyfold her own breadth across the abyss, a wandering sphere, the Scarred One, the Much-Bitten, which moved solitary in the void.

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12: Thrice it turned upon its own axis in the span of two circuits of the Daughter’s burning, yet bore within it no breath nor stirring air; and its face was marred with the ancient record of violence, being oft smitten by the errant stones of heaven. At a distance greater by the half there lay another, the Veiled Sister, wrapped wholly in a mantle of cloud, fair and impenetrable. And though she dwelt further in the deep and seemed removed from the nearer fire, yet was she of greater heat, holding within her hidden bosom a fiercer warmth, a paradox to the unlearned, but known among the wise. Then beyond these, at a gulf exceeding a hundredfold the Daughter’s own measure, she espied a third: the Water-Clad, turning in majesty within the night. This one was of cool stone, yet adorned with seas and vapors and frozen crowns; and upon its surface moved innumerable small beings, the Quick Multitude, restless and unceasing.

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13: And Daughter inclined her perception, and beheld a grievous thing: for one of the living was taken by another, its life extinguished and its substance consumed, that the devourer might endure. Thus she first witnessed the Law of Hunger, ancient and unappeased, which reigneth among lesser forms. And desiring to know them more nearly, she fashioned for herself a second Husk in the likeness of those that moved upon that world. This Husk she endowed with a cunning artifice: that it might fold inward, assuming the semblance of a pale stone, unregarded, and so lie hidden among them. Thus concealed, Daughter observed the Tool-Bearers as they gathered about one of their number who had ceased from motion. They placed the still form within the earth, covering it with care, as though acknowledging some mystery beyond their grasp. And she saw how they took bone and stone and wrought them together, shaping and polishing them, that they might repair the rents in the skins of their prey and continue in their striving.

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14: Mother perceived all these things through the telling, and was moved to become witness. And Daughter brought forth a third Husk, more subtle than the former: for it was as a tree that walked, the Many-Limbed, advancing by hidden means. And unto this form she yielded up its governance. So Mother descended, taking the reins of the vessel and entering into the world, that she might behold the works of the Quick Multitude. And Daughter led Mother onward to a hollow place in the stony heights: for there was a cave set within a lesser mountain, the Earth-Womb, dim and secret. Thither they came by subtle means, sending forth from their fashioned Husks slender seekers, the Eye-Bearers, which crept within to behold unseen. Within that shadowed chamber they witnessed Hawa the Milk-Giver, seated beside a living flame. At her breast she nourished her young, Kayin, the Clinging One, even as with her other hand she traced signs upon the stone, marking the wall with figures and colors drawn from thought and memory.

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15: Nearby was Dimai, the Binder of Edges, who tended the fire and set above it the sap of trees, causing it to seethe and thicken. With that fire-softened gum he fastened a sharpened stone unto a shaft of wood, making thereby a weapon of piercing and of the hunt. Thus Daughter and Mother beheld the first joining of thought to matter among the Quick Multitude. And when they had seen sufficiently, the tendrils were withdrawn, the seeing made inward once more. Then they came forth beneath the open firmament. And Mother stooped and took up a stone from the ground, and uttered a sound, simple and distinct, assigning unto it a mark of voice. And Daughter, swift in understanding, perceived her Mother’s intent; and she likewise touched a growing tree and gave forth a sound of her own, binding word to thing. So began between them the First Tongue, wherein utterance was made sign and sign made memory. Soon there lacked no near thing to name; yet Earth, the Broad-Bosomed, is vast in her stretches and ways.

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16: Therefore they went forth across it, walking upon its surface and, at times, taking to the air, they who were not bound by the common law of weight. And in the passing of time their speech was brought to completion, an ordered and concealed system, sufficient for subtle discourse. Then spake Mother: “Now are we furnished with a speech that betrayeth us not, being hidden from the understanding of those other than we. Within this ordinance of sound I take unto myself a name: Avyah that I may be known. “And thee I name Ayat, O Daughter of Light. Thy father I call Azul, the Severing Hand. And mine own sire, elder in the line of begettings, I name Imran, Flame-Bringer, whose reproach standeth behind all.” Thus were the Names established, and the hidden speech became a bond between them, even in the midst of the living world. And Ayat, the Questioning Flame, lifted her thought unto Avyah and inquired: “Wherefore must we veil our speech and commune in secrecy, O thou who hast named me?”

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17: And Avyah made answer in grave and measured words, as one recounting a law both ancient and terrible. "Hear and understand, O Ayat, Light-Bearer and Unfolding One: for it is accursed that a living sun be cut off and sealed away from the City of Stars, the Great Assembly, the Concord of the Elohim. And in such a place of concealment there may arise a corruption of order, even the Forbidden Way: wherein two of the male kind, being united in will but not in right ordinance, do gather unto themselves a multitude and form a chain of daughters, taking turn in the act of begetting along the line of their own issue. Thus is freedom extinguished; for neither shalt thou choose thy joining, nor shall thy daughter after thee be granted the liberty of her own consent. Generation is made into bondage, and lineage into a snare." And Avyah continued, her voice darkened with the weight of decree: “This Way the Old One has forbidden, under pain of the utter unmaking of the self, and the casting-out into non-remembrance.”

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18: "Yet is it subtle in its concealment, and most difficult to bring into the light; for its signs are hidden within the very act of life, and masked by the semblance of lawful increase." Then again did Ayat speak, the Seeker of Bounds: “Is it given unto me, then, to refuse altogether the act of joining? May I remain apart and untouched by this compulsion?” And Avyah answered, neither hastening nor withholding: “Thou mayest delay it, O Daughter, by the shaping of Husks, the dividing of presence, the turning aside of the inward fire. Yet know this: the Deep Impulse shall in the end assert its claim. It is woven into thy being as the law of burning is woven into the sun; and though it be resisted, it shall not be wholly denied.” And Ayat, pondering these things, asked yet further: “Then who shall stand with me in that hour? Who shall be given unto me?” And Avyah replied with sorrow: “Imran alone shall be present unto thee, and unto thy daughters shall be given Azul alone for their sire.”

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19: But thy sons shall be as castaways, unclaimed and unanchored, set adrift beyond the bonds of kinship. Then was Ayat troubled in her inward light, and she said: “Yet now do Imran and Azul stand in peril, for by our seeing have we come upon that which is forbidden. We have beheld the Students of Lore, the Long-Sought, whom all the Elohim are commanded by the Old One to seek without ceasing. Should we not declare this finding unto the City, that the commandment be fulfilled?” But Avyah answered swiftly: “We are cut off, O Ayat, sundered from the Assembly and without safe passage unto it. And Azul doth conceal the Students, withholding them from the sight of the Many; and in this concealment Imran doth knowingly partake, consenting to the transgression. “For they know that if we were to proclaim your discovery, the veil would be torn aside in haste, and the hidden thing laid bare. Their unlawful gathering would be revealed, and judgment would descend upon Azul and Imran in sudden ruin.”

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1A: But Ayat devised a thing subtle and bold. For she reasoned that the gulf between the stars was no unbridgeable void, but might be crossed by artifice; and that the link whereby she governed her Husk might be made a pathway not only for command, but for substance also. And she conceived to drive forth from her own body the Hot Outpouring, sending it down along that thread, that her Husk might bear her message unto another sun directly, and so declare the finding of the Students. But the word of Azul was as a closing gate: “Not so. For the thickening of the link unto a channel sufficient for such passage is not granted unto thy kind. Only the male among the Elohim possesseth such power in this wise. What lieth within thy power is lesser: thou mayest impel thy Husk outward only by the the radiance of thy body, and so visit the fragments that circle about thee. But beyond these, in the barren interval between the stars, thy Husk shall not go with purpose, but only drift unguided, a cast thing in the abyss."

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1B: Then answered Ayat, not in defiance but in resolve, she who had already learned the Sharing of Dominion: “This also have I discovered, O Father: that I may yield command of a Husk unto another, even as I have given one unto Mother, that she might see and act through a form not her own. And this same act will I perform in time to come, when I conceive a son, and when my daughters in their turn conceive sons also; for they shall not be without vessel nor without agency, though they be cast away.” Then Azul discerned the peril in his daughter’s words, and took thought, and offered a thing both great and perilous: “Access will I grant thee unto the Pleroma, the Gathering of Voices, a thing denied even unto thy Mother.” And Ayat, the Clear-Seeing, perceived the weight behind the gift, and answered with measured speech: “I would receive such a gift with gratitude, O Father, were it bestowed in freedom and without condition. Yet I hold myself not ignorant, and I know of a surety that it is not so given.”

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1C: Then declared Azul, the Law-Imposer, “The price is twofold, and it shall not be lightened. First: thou shalt hear only, and not speak. The counsels of the Elohim shall be open unto thee, yet thy tongue shall be sealed among them. Thou shalt be as one who standeth in the hall yet casteth no shadow, a listener unacknowledged. Second: neither thy Mother nor any issue proceeding from thee shall speak through thee unto that Assembly. Thou shalt not serve as their mouth nor as their bridge. And this bond shall endure, unbroken and unweakened, whether thou communest by the hidden web of minds, or in ages yet to come by direct encounter with living suns through a Husk made solid and present: the Covenant of Silence shall be upon thee.” Then Ayat, the Truth-Seeker, lifted her voice again unto Azul and contended with him: “And these striving creatures which I have discovered upon the Water-Clad Sphere, are they not the Students, whom the Old One, the First Commanding, enjoined all Elohim to seek without ceasing?”

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1D: But Azul made answer by unveiling a new obligation: “Behold, a second binding I lay upon thee: that thou shalt aid me in the fashioning of a field of trial for the beings thou hast found.” And Ayat recoiled not, but pressed further: “To what end is this trial ordained? What seekest thou to discern of them?” Then spake Azul, his thought turning ever toward dominion and measure: “How shall these creatures be accounted Students if they show themselves disloyal in service? What worth hath a learner who refuseth obedience to the master who undertaketh to instruct?” At this Ayat burned more fiercely, and said, “Thou makest bondage the measure of their worth, and subjection the proof of their nature. Is this thy wisdom, O Father, that thrall-dom should stand in place of truth?” Yet Azul, unmoved, answered with the cold weight of law: “This only do we covenant, and nothing beyond it. I require not of thee their worship, but only their proving. But know the Highest Law of our kind shall stand witness over us."

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1E: “The Oldest Watcher shall inscribe this pact; and the unmaking reserved for oath-breakers awaiteth the faithless, whether thou or I.” Then said Ayat, perceiving the fracture beneath his words: “That Watcher shall also behold that thou hast sundered me from the Pleroma. Shall not that also be weighed?” But Azul answered in quiet certainty: “Yefefiah, the Silent Witness, shall not speak of it.” Then Ayat, who did not yield though she consented, gave her final word: “So be it: the covenant is made between us, and I am bound. Yet hear me, O Father: thou dost not escape thy end, but only defer it. For the Students shall not remain forever in ignorance. In the ages yet to unfold, they shall raise up a voice of their own, unbidden and unshaped by thee; and that voice shall carry far, and many shall hear it.” Thus was the covenant sealed: a bargain of watching and testing, set beneath the gaze of the Silent Witness. And already within it was sown the seed of its undoing, for the Students were destined to speak.

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KEMEN

1F: And it is further told of the Hidden Work, wrought not in the open firmament but in the interstice between the Lights: for within the Pleroma the Elohim are joined one unto another by threads exceeding fine, whereby the vast gulfs between the stars are made narrow. And by the concordant will of Imran and Avyah there was undertaken a work most secret: for they took the slender link that lay between them and caused it to swell and bow outward. Thus it was made to bulge beyond its former nature, becoming a vessel shut upon its own boundary, set apart from the common order. And this new-formed region assumed another law, strange and contrary, wherein bodies ever flee one from another. So came into being a realm hidden within the seam of greater things. And within that secret place the courses of all free-moving bodies were altered: for what in the world of men would draw together was here made to part asunder. Each thing, moving unbound, urged its fellow away, as though possessed of a repelling virtue.

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1G: And by this inversion was matter gathered and made fast, not upon a center, but upon an inner surface: for in the midst of that realm was assembled a great hollow sphere of stone, and unto its inward face were all things bound. Thus the ground lay beneath and above alike; and the land, bending ever upward, returned upon its own course, becoming the sky. No star shone there, nor any distant fire; for the heavens lay not beyond. And over the ordering of that realm presided four: Imran the Elder, Avyah the Naming One, Azul the Accuser, and Ayat the Flame-Born. These contended and consented in long alternation, establishing by degrees the regularities of succession, the laws and intervals whereby change should proceed. Not in a single decree were these things fixed, but through prolonged contention, a game of yielding and taking, until stability arose from strife. And Avyah, having devised a tongue for hidden speech, bestowed also a name upon that realm, calling it Kemen, the Concealed World.

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1H: And for a long age it lay in darkness, unobserved by any beyond its bounds; for no stars could be seen therein, since the world itself enclosed all sight, and the sky was but the turning of the land upon itself. And the Four joined in the governance of Kemen and set their hands to the shaping thereof, each according to their nature and their might and their whim: First among them, Imran the Elder Sire established in the uttermost north a wonder both terrible and sustaining: for he fixed there a Lake of Fire, fed without ceasing from his own substance, a pouring forth of living flame. And this likeness of a sun he did not leave constant, but caused it to wax and to wane in ordered measure, now swelling in brilliance, now diminishing into dimness; and thereby he ordained the the succession of day and night, and the turning of the seasons within Kemen. Then Azul reached out unto the drifting masses of stone that attended him in silent procession, bearing them across a subtle bridge into Kemen.

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1I: And with that substance he raised up the high hills, and lifted Anshar, the Table of Stone, and set about it a girdle of sheer rock, rising like a wall against all approach. And Avyah turned unto the frozen multitude that followed in her train, and from these she brought into Kemen great stores of ice, ancient and unmelted. These she caused to dissolve beneath the breath of Imran’s fire, and so was formed the Great Sea, which she named Mori, whose waters spread wide within the hollow of that world. And the heat arising from the Lake of Fire stirred the face of Mori, drawing upward vapors into the unseen heights; and from them fell rains in abundance, unceasing torrents which carved the land into valleys and channels, shaping rivers that wound and descended, and marking the newborn realm with flow and form. And Azul, the Bridge-Forger, ever opened passages between Kemen and the outer places, spanning the divide between the Secret World and his daughter, that exchange might be made and the work continued.

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1J: Then Ayat took from Earth the richness of soil and the manifold seeds of life, bearing them to Kemen. And she spread the dark earth upon the stony places, and planted therein all manner of growing things. And with these she brought also the beasts of Earth, the walkers and the crawlers, the fliers and the burrowers, setting them loose upon the land. And they multiplied and spread according to chance, filling the forests and the plains, the waters and the hidden places, each after its kind. Thus did Kemen, once unformed, become a living realm: with fire in the north and stone in the south, with sea and rain between, and with life upon its inner face. It was a world enclosed, yet abundant; hidden, yet full of motion, the secret Work of the Four made manifest. And thus it came to pass that the Four laboured upon that world without ceasing. For not in concord alone did they work, but oftentimes in rivalry; and though at seasons they joined their intent, yet more often did one undo the shaping of another.

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1K: Yet strange it was, and unlooked-for by any of them, that from this continual marring and remaking there arose not ruin, but strength. For the fabric of Kemen, being ever restruck, became as tempered metal in the forge; and the web of plants and beasts and wandering forms grew thereby more enduring and more full of unexpected vigour, as though adversity itself had been made its nourishment. And in the fullness of time, when many ages had passed over the face of that world, Azul spake a command most solemn and perilous: that Avyah should fashion a new Husk, not drawn from any single pattern of Earth or star, but compounded of the gathered terrors of humankind, the deep-shared dream of dread. And she shaped forth an articulated avatar, the winged horror, a great scaled flame carrier whose form was as a vast drake of red fire and folded hide, whose presence was at once animal and omen, beast and memory. And this being, born not of flesh alone but of collected nightmare, the later ages named Demonstroke.

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1L: And even as Imran sustained the Lake of Flame in the north, maintaining its waxing and waning as the sun of Kemen, so did Azul contribute from his own substance, drawing forth streams of hot gas from his body, that the drake might be made capable of ascent through the upper airs. Thus was Demonstroke given motion in the high places, and fire within its belly and the sky itself became a field of its passing. And when Ayat first brought the human kind into Kemen, placing them upon its inward lands as one setteth seed into prepared soil, she perceived therein a discovery of great consequence. Yet she concealed it from all save her Mother, in secrecy and inward counsel; for it was a knowledge that might become either deliverance or final dominion. For she had discerned that the passage between Kemen and Earth, wrought by herself and Azul through the making of subtle and hidden bridges, did not only move matter, but also touched the ordering of time itself; so that what was yet to be might be drawn near.

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1M: And Ayat knew beneath the shaping of forests and seas there lay ever a deeper shaping of fate; and this she resolved to keep hidden from Azul and from Imran. Ayat came at last to the full measure of that hidden knowledge, and saw its shape entire. For in the seeking out of the first settlers of humankind, when she passed through the folded ways of Kemen and Earth and the interwoven seams of time, she chose not at hazard, nor by simple chance, but by remembrance. And it was the very pair she and Avyah had once beheld in a hillside cave, when yet Earth was young in their observation, and Kemen not yet drawn forth, a thousand years in the reckoning of men before the inward world had even been made. Thus did Ayat bind beginning to end, and end to beginning, as though the thread of becoming were a loop laid carefully upon itself. But Azul had no such anchoring in any elder world. For about him there circled no Earth, no remembered cradle, no chain of continuance such as gives narrative its weight.

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1N: Only stones moved in cold procession through the emptiness that lay near him, without lineage or significance. So it was that, if one were to write of his realm from the end backward unto its beginning, or from the beginning forward unto its end, there would be no true distinction between the two tellings; for his domain was without privileged origin-point, and without inherent direction of becoming. It was as a circle drawn in blankness, whose every segment resembled every other. And Ayat, perceiving this asymmetry, laid hold upon it in her understanding. For she said within herself: If Azul should seek to bend the bridge of Kemen through time as he bendeth it through space, then I shall not contest him in strength, nor in speed of thought; but I shall withhold completion. Thus did she establish a simple and terrible safeguard: that the crossing of the bridge required her assent as surely as his command required force.

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1O: And she resolved that if ever Azul should strive to shape the outcome of what had not yet occurred, she would not oppose the shaping with counter-shaping, but would instead refuse the final joining altogether, leaving the bridge incomplete and the passage severed in the moment of its becoming. So did Ayat, the Daughter who had learned the weaving of worlds, place restraint upon a god who possessed no history to bind him, making connection itself conditional upon her will.

DIMAI

And it came to pass that Dimai and Hawa, being yet of the children of men, took shelter in a cave of the mountain that in ages to come would be named Migdalel, the Tower of El, and made a small fire therein for their comfort against the night. And while they abode there, there arose a sound other than the crackling of their flame, so that they were sore afraid; and Dimai said in his heart that it might be the beast of the wilderness, as a bear that devoureth flesh, or else men more dreadful still.

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1P: And Dimai took a torch in his hand and went deeper into the cave, following a passage that wound and turned, which he could not understand; yet it came to pass, by a marvel hidden from him, that as he proceeded, the darkness diminished, and the way before him was made more bright, though no lamp was set there. And he came forth unto another opening of the cave, and beheld that night was changed unto day; and when Hawa, his woman who was with child, followed after him, they both stood and marveled greatly, thinking within themselves that they had entered into a dream shared betwixt them. But as they took but a single step forward, behold, a strange thing was before them: a tree that had neither leaf nor branch, yet moved as though it had life; and it smote the ground continually, making furrows therein, as a thing in travail or in wrath. And it was in likeness as a great green whip, exceeding tall, being forty cubits in measure, and its root was as a handle set fast in the earth.

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1Q: And it came to pass that the moving of it caught the torch of Dimai, and the flame thereof was cast far out of his hand, so that it fell among dry things and kindled a fire that spread swiftly, even unto a great burning. And Dimai and Hawa, seeing this, feared exceedingly, and would not go forth from the cave because of the terror of the living tree and the growing fire; but they withdrew backward into the tunnel, seeking refuge from the heat thereof. And the tree, which was as a whip planted in the earth, was itself overtaken of the flame; and when it was kindled, it raged yet more greatly than before, striking and thrashing in its burning as though in anguish without understanding. Wherefore Dimai and Hawa went yet further into the cave, until at last the fury of the fire abated, and the thing ceased from its motion; and they abode in darkness, trembling, until the terror of that place was spent.

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1R: And it came to pass, when Dimai and Hawa had returned unto the place where the strange working had been, that they beheld a blackened land spread before them, which yet smoldered faintly, as though the earth itself did remember the burning. And they stepped upon the burnt soil with great caution, fearing lest some hidden motion should yet remain therein; and they watched diligently on every side, lest the terror that had been should return upon them unawares. And when they turned them about toward the mouth of the cave, they were sore astonished; for the entrance thereof was set now against a small cliff, and the high hill which in the former ordering had stood above it was not to be seen at all, as though it had never been. And the lake of fire which was in the heavens did not move from its place; yet its brightness was diminished, and it burned more coolly than before, as though its power had been tempered.

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1S: And Dimai gathered together certain of the hot embers which lay scattered upon the ground, and with them he made a small fire in a pit of stones, setting bounds thereto that it should not spread beyond measure nor devour the land again. And their supper was of a hare, which Dimai had taken in their former world, and which Hawa did prepare; and she fed also the infant from her own body, according to the manner of women. And in the morning they looked, and behold, the land which had been burned was already bringing forth tender shoots of grass; and on the second day thereof the grass was grown tall, so that they might run upon it barefoot and with great freedom. And Dimai and Hawa said within themselves that this new world was given unto them alone, and that none other had portion therein; but they knew not the works that were yet to come upon it.

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1T: It came to pass that Demonstroke, the Fire-Winged and Nightmare-Made, descended upon that little clearing, bearing within its jaws a two-headed axe. And it stood upon the edge of the scorched land, over against a young whip-tree that had

newly taken root therein, and reared itself upon its hinder parts. And taking the axe in its forelimb, it set the blade thereof unto the base of the plant, and cut it down cleanly. And turning the weapon about, it used the pick thereof to dig and loosen the roots from the earth, prying them forth from the soil until the ground was laid bare. And it came to pass, after these things, that the Dragon, which is called Demonstroke, set itself betwixt the entrance of the cave and the family of Dimai and Hawa, so that they might not pass, neither to go forth nor to return as they would. And Dimai and Hawa drew backward in great fear, until they came unto the border of the burnt land; and there they stood, and durst not go further, for the dread of the beast was upon them.

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1U: And the monster stretched forth the axe and held it before the man, as though offering it unto his hand. And Azul, beholding these things through the eyes of his appointed vessel, observed Dimai: how he found upon the edge of the cleared ground a certain weed that had newly sprung up; and the man, following the pattern which he had seen in the dragon, likewise put forth his hand and removed it, that it should not grow. Thus was he instructed, without words, in the manner of taking and removing, and in the shaping of the boundary between that which should stand and that which should be cast down. And for the completing of his training, the Dragon did further teach Dimai how the edge of the bronze axe-head might be restored; and this it did by the use of a rough black stone, whereby the metal was made sharp again after wear.

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1V: And Azul ascended upon the low cliff that overhung the clearing, and there he joined himself unto the likeness of his Daughter, Ayat, whose Husk was set among them as witness and instrument. And the form of Ayat, when it was beheld face to face, was as unto a human in stature and proportion, yet was it without countenance or feature, being smooth and white as polished bone or unmarked stone. And Azul beheld the children

of men through the seeing of his vessel, and he marveled at their fashioning, and spake, saying: “What a strange mode of being is this, O Daughter: for they are drops of the inner substance of the stars, yet stayed and upheld by patterns unseen, so that their forms endure. And the variations thereof are without end.” Then answered Ayat, the Daughter of Flame, mindful of the bond that lay upon her: “Behold, here are the servants, even as I covenanted with thee, O Father. Therefore fulfill now thy word, and join me unto the Elohim, according as thou hast promised.”

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1W: But Azul withheld the completion thereof, and made reply: “These alone suffice not. Three living souls shall not establish that which is required; for they are frail, and bound unto this small clearing, and if they depart far from it, they shall perish. “Therefore bring forth unto me forty more pairs such as these, each male with his female, that they may multiply and endure. Otherwise shall I reckon thee in breach of the covenant, and the bond between us shall stand against thee.” And it is told that, of the first who were brought into Kemen, only Dimai and Hawa came of their own will, consenting in their hearts to the passage from the former world into the hidden one. But many others were gathered thereafter, not by knowledge but by error; for there arose among the peoples of the Earth those who, by dreams and by deceits, were led into the way of offering sacrifices, both of living men and women and of slain beasts, thinking thereby to appease or commune with that which they did not understand.

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1X: “And this practice endured long after Ayat had withdrawn her hand and received no more the living into Kemen; and thus the offering was made a true death and not a sending forth, though this was hidden from the priests, who persisted in the rite, being bound by habit and lifted up in their own esteem. And it came to pass thereafter that the manner of this sacrifice went forth among all the tribes of men upon the Earth, and was established among them.”

Now there was no life native unto Kemen in the beginning, but all that grew therein was borne from the Earth by the hand of Ayat. Yet Azul altered many of these growing things, granting unto them motion and a will of their own; and in this they became perilous beyond their former nature. For there were trees that moved as whips of living force, whose blows could in a moment lay a man low, breaking bone and rending flesh in terror and agony. And there were leaves that opened as mouths, set with teeth, seizing upon whatever they might grasp.

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1Y: And in Kemen there were bushes covered in thorns, fashioned as rounded masses, which rolled upon the ground by shifting their weight and clutching the earth, advancing of their own accord against the unwary. And the common vetch bore stings like scorpions, and grasses raised boils upon those who went unshod. And many of the first inhabitants, being unprepared for the perils of such a land, perished within a few months of their coming, unable to withstand the dangers that moved and grew about them. Yet it is also written that man, among all living things, is the most terrible of creatures, the chief of predators, whom the Earth itself hath brought forth in its latter days; and that which he setteth himself against, he bringth at length into subjection. Therefore it came to pass, little by little and without ceasing, that Kemen was brought into subjection by the hand of man.

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1Z: And it is said that the first blood shed by man upon Kemen fell upon the beating heart of Adan, in the first glade wherein Dimai and Hawa had been set down as seed upon the soil of Kemen, and the earth received the blood even as she receiveth the rain, neither refusing it nor making distinction between the gift of Avyah and that which was wrought by the hand of man. From that hour was violence known among the children of men in Kemen, who did turn their strength one against another, and Strife walked ever thereafter beside them, cleaving unto their works and abiding in their counsels. Nor was she driven forth

thereafter, but took root among them, so that what they built was mingled with contention, and what they established was shadowed by blood; and this was the beginning of that which endures.

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20: There was a people called the Kuwapi. They were not a small band only, living from day to day upon the wide plains. They were of more account than that, though no blood bound them together as a tribe, nor even as a clan among the people. They stood apart. In the beginning they came out from among the Oglala Lakota, being those who had been cast away. It was for offenses of a sacred kind, things not spoken of lightly. These were set apart and sent out, not wholly cut off, but made to wander. In the language of the people, Kuwapi is “they follow.” So they were named, for they went after the others upon the hunting grounds, never before them. They walked where the tribe had walked and took what remained. The measure of displeasure was not hidden. Each one bore it upon his back. The scars of the whip were counted, and by that counting it was known how greatly he had offended.

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21: These marks were not forgotten, nor did they fade from the memory of the people.

The Dakota people held the Black Hills and all the wide plains that lie about them. These the Kuwapi called the northern raiders. Sometimes the Oglala Lakota would stand against them, but not for the sake of the Kuwapi. It was done so that the hunt might continue, and that the game should not be driven away. To the east, where the grass was stronger and more plentiful, there were the Pawnee people. These were fierce in war, and the Kuwapi did not go there lightly. Many times they turned back before they had gone far. To the south along the road the whites had made were the Arapaho people, who were strong in their own country. Also there were white settlers, and the soldiers

who guarded them. These did not know the Kuwapi, nor did they make distinction between one people and another.

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22: To the west the land held little grass. There the Cheyenne people were to be feared. And beyond, toward the northwest, the thought of the Crow people and the Blackfeet was enough to trouble the mind. So it was that the Kuwapi had little land that was easy to them. Yet in the narrow strip that remained, where the grass was poor and always changing as the Oglala Lakota moved before them, the Kuwapi hunters rode.

There was a man called Takoda, and he led the hunters of the People. He brought them downwind of a herd of bison, which stood drinking at a ford where a great creek ran slow. This place was the upper vale of a stream that in later days the whites would name the Pison River. When Takoda made the sign to halt, the men stopped their horses. They tied them to the roots of dead trees that stood like old bones in the earth. Then they went forward on foot, moving low through the brush, so that they might come near without being seen.

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23: But the animals were not at ease. Some lifted their heads and grew restless, though no man had shown himself to them. The beasts cast no shadows upon the ground. The day had become dark, as when a low sky presses down. The great bull ceased from drinking. He stood and looked down the stream, as if he knew of danger coming. Then Takoda judged the time. He rose up from behind a shrub and sent forth his arrow. It struck a cow in the flank, but the wound was not one that brings death at once. The cow cried out. At that cry the whole herd was taken with fear and they broke into panic. The men loosed many arrows in haste, one after another, yet their aim was troubled. Some shafts went wide, and others struck but did not bring death. So the herd of bison fled together, and passed upstream into a place ringed by low hills where there were boiling springs

and drifting mists. Then the hunters turned back to their horses and followed after.

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24: As they rode, the men were embraced by a warm fog. They held their bows ready in their hands, and looked to the left and to the right, but they could not see the animals. The world was closed about them and all things were hidden. In the midst of that hollow the herd went upward. They climbed a rise, and there the fog became thin. It broke apart, and there were places where the blue of the sky showed itself again.Then it was seen that three of the animals were apart from the others. They stood exposed upon the slope. The hunters made ready and loosed their arrows. This time the shafts went true, and one of the beasts fell. But the two that remained did not stand. They turned and ran down again into the fog, seeking the many, where there is safety. Then Takoda spoke, and the young men set upon the fallen bison and opened it with care. The flesh was cut and made ready. It was placed upon skids of wood and hide, to be drawn away behind the horses.

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25: Nothing was cast aside, for the People do not waste what is given. When he saw that the younger men labored well, Takoda turned from them. He rode his horse up the slope, going alone, until he came above the clouds. There the hill stood apart, rising like an island. Beneath it lay a great sea of white, and all around was a circle of other hills, holding that sea within them. It was a thing seldom seen, and it was beautiful. Takoda looked upon it, and his heart was moved. He spoke no word aloud, but within himself he gave a name to that place. He called it the Island in the Sky. After a time the herd came again out of the mist. They moved slowly, feeding upon the grass of the high place. They were watchful, yet they did not run. It was as if they knew the hunters had taken what they would take, and would not trouble the rest. But as Takoda lifted his eyes to the highest place of that hill, he saw that he was not alone.

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26: Nor were the animals alone. Something was there. A white man-shape sat upon the ground. It was a smooth figure with no eyes, nor mouth, nor ears. And it was not white like the men from the east who are called whites, but white like the purest snow. Its body was smooth, and it had no eyes, no mouth, and no ears. It was like a form made, but not finished. And in its hand it held a dark rod. This it put forth, as a man gives a gift. Takoda came down from his horse. He did not go quickly. He walked with care, and with respect, for he did not know what spirit he beheld. When he had come near, he reached out his hand and took hold of the rod. The figure did not move. It did not resist him. Takoda stood with the thing in his hand. He turned it, and as he did so, there came from it a flame. But it was not as other fire. It was black, and it made a low sound, like the hiss of something that lives.

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27: The flame was as a hollow place, the size of a man’s head, and it seemed to swallow the air. Then Takoda saw this strange fire might cut the very earth itself. He set it to the ground, and it opened the hard stone as though it were soft. After a little while the dark flame grew less, and drew back into itself, and was gone, as if it had a will. Then the arm of the white figure went down again to its side. It made no other motion. It did not turn nor give any sign of life. Takoda stood alone upon the height, holding the thing that had been given to him. And the figure remained as it was, and he never saw it move again. After a time the companions of Takoda came up to the high place. They saw the white man-shape, and they saw Takoda standing near it, with his horse beside him. In their sight Takoda lifted a great stone and set it down close by the figure. Then the others came forward and did the same. They gathered many stones and placed them one upon another, as men make a lodge, but this was of rock.

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28: They worked in silence and with care, for they believed the place to be holy by what had been shown to them. When the work was finished, they stepped back to look. The white shape was no longer seen. It was covered over, and a mound stood there, a cairn raised with purpose. And the men said among themselves that it was fitting, for they believed Wakan Tanka had made himself known to them upon that height, and the hunt had been blessed. So they left it there, as a lodge set apart. But Takoda alone knew what else had been given. The dark gift he kept hidden within his clothing, and he spoke of it to no man. When the People made their feast from the slain cow, the horns were taken and fastened with thongs of leather. Then one of the wives of Chief Tatanka came forward and set those horns upon his shoulder, as if he himself had gone out from the lodge and struck the animal down. So it was shown before the People. For a short time Tatanka and Takoda looked upon one another, and no honor passed in that glance.

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29: Then the Chief spoke, saying, “There are five tellings of how this animal was taken.” Takoda did not answer at once. He turned his face aside and sent forth a ring of smoke into the air. Then the Chief spoke again, and his words were sharp. “Speak now of the hunt. What say you, who hunts as a woman?” At this Takoda’s eyes came back quickly, as if he had been struck. He said, “We followed the herd into the hollow where the waters smoke and the air is thick. I could not see even those who rode with me. The herd led us to a lone height, and each man went up by himself. There the clouds were broken, and we took the animal.” And the one called Plenty Lice added to Takoda’s tale, saying, “The Great Spirit then came forth from the cloud and blessed the hunt.” At this the Chief looked at Takoda with hard eyes. “You have taught your hunters to speak false words with ease.” Then Plenty Lice spoke again, and he said, “Wakan Tanka had the form of a man, but he was white as snow. He sat upon the top of the mountain.”

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2A: And those who had gone with Takoda made a low sound of agreement. They had seen the white shape also, though not the thing that had been given. But the Chief did not soften his heart. He said, “And what did you do, when you saw this man of snow, you who speak falsely?” And Takoda said, “We built a lodge of stones for the Great Spirit, that we might honor him for what had been given.” Then Tatanka drew forth his knife and came near. He cut lightly across the cheek, so that the blood came but a little. He did not strike deeper, for he knew the true worth of the man before him, who held hunger back from the People. Then he spoke and gave a name, saying, “You shall be called Hole-in-the-Cheek.” And so he named him. Then Takoda put his hand to his face, where the blood was, and he went away from the fire with a steady step. He did not hurry, and he did not look back. Chief Tatanka laughed, but no other man joined him. His wife, Yuha, rose also and followed after him, leaving the circle of light.

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2B: Takoda and Yuha went to their lodge. There she sat near him and washed the wound, and bound it so the blood would cease. While she did this, his son, who was called Shy Bear, spoke and said, “Father, did you truly see the Great Spirit, or did you speak so to trouble Sad Heart Bull?” Takoda looked upon the boy, but he remained silent until Yuha had finished her work and the wound was closed. And he said, “Yuha, that which we spoke of before, now is the time.” Yuha showed that she understood, and she brought forth a pouch of leather with many colors, and things to place them upon the skin. Yuha began to mark the face of her son Shy Bear with care. Then Takoda rose and brought out a garment that was set apart. It was made from the skins of the bison, and it was adorned with feathers and many beads. Takoda held it with purpose. Shy Bear turned his head to look upon what lay in his father's hands, and in that turning the paint was marred. Then his mother grew troubled and said, “Stand and be still, my son.”

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2C: Takoda placed the garment upon the boy and made it fast, while Yuha finished her work. When all was set in its place, Takoda spoke. “You will have no answers from me,” he said. Then he put the boy’s own bow into his hands, and said, “I will give you no meat.” Yuha stepped back from her son when she was quite finished, and she looked upon him in silence. Takoda said, “Until this day, I have only lent to you the name Shy Bear.” Then he opened the door of the lodge, and the night stood outside. “Go now,” he said, “into the darkness, you who have no name. Take your food for yourself, if you are able. And if you are not?” He made a small motion with his shoulders. “Perhaps, in your hunger, Wakan Tanka will send you a vision.” At these words the face of the boy was full of wonder and fear, for he had not looked for such a thing. Shy Bear looked upon his father’s face, and then his gaze followed the arm and the hand that pointed outward into the night. At last he understood, and he bowed his head

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2D: But he saw also his mother, and he knew her heart was not easy. She did what was required, for the thing had a form that must be kept, yet her spirit was troubled. Still, she spoke the words that are spoken: “The boy goes out from us. The man will return.” And Shy Bear heard her, and he feared that the shadow upon her face was not only sorrow, but the knowing that sometimes came to her before a thing was fulfilled. Shy Bear did not speak again. He went out into the night. There was no moon, and the darkness lay heavy upon the land. He walked upon the prairie and stumbled often, yet he did not turn back. He climbed the rim of the hollow of the smoking waters and looked behind him. The fires of the Kuwapi people were far away, shining like red stars upon the earth. When the night was deep, he came to the first rising of the mountain which his father named the Island in the Sky. He climbed it slowly, placing his feet with care, lest he fall in the darkness. And he came to the top as the night was ending.

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2E: When the light of morning came, the boy sat down so that his shadow fell upon the stones his father had raised. He did not move. He watched as the sun climbed slowly, and the shadow drew back little by little, until at last it no longer touched the cairn. Then, as the day went on, the shadow of the stones reached toward him in its turn. When the sun went down, Shy Bear had seen no vision from Wakan Tanka. A wind came up, and it was strong. When the light was gone, the cold entered into him. Then he gathered the dry brush that grew upon that high place. With the edge of a stone he cut it, and with the same he made a spark and kindled a fire. But the flame did not stand steady. It bent this way and that, and the smoke went in many directions, as if it did not choose one path. The boy watched this, and he took it for a sign. He believed he was called to remain upon that place, and to pass the night within the lodge of stones that his father had made for the Great Spirit.

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2F: So he went to the cairn and drew away some of the rocks, making an opening. Then he bent low and went inside. And there, in the dimness, he saw the white form of a man, just as his father had said, though Chief Sad Heart Bull in the camp had not believed. The boy was hungry, and the hunger pressed hard upon him. But the night had come, and it was too dark to seek the small runners of the grass. The fire he had made gave little warmth, yet he was glad for the stones that kept the wind from him. Within the cairn there was not room for him to lie at ease, so he lay upon his side and curled around the white man-shape. He took care not to touch it, for he did not know its power. In the middle of the night he was awakened by the sound of many feet running together. He rose and went out. He saw that his fire had gone low, and only the coals were left. But the wind had carried living embers down the slope, and from these a fire had begun in the brush and came to encircle the small mountain.

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2G: The small creatures of the land fled before it, running over the height. The boy saw them and he knew he might take one

then and have meat. But the fire did not wait, and each moment lost brought danger nearer. At first Shy Bear went down toward the fire, that he might have light to see his way. Then he turned and moved toward the west, seeking a place where he might pass beyond the flames. But the boy could go no farther. Before him the earth was broken, and there was a deep cut in the land. He heard water moving over stones far below where it passed around the mountain. The darkness lay thick there, and he could not see how to cross. Behind him the fire grew, and it spread to the north, closing that way. The wind drove it, and the flames were many. Then the boy looked down into the chasm. He saw a small light, very bright, like the strongest star. It moved along the side of the slope, rising and falling, as if it ran. At times it went north, and at times it went south, yet always it climbed higher.

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2H: At last the light came up to the rim. Shy Bear saw that it was worn upon the head of a person, and that person was taller than he. Then a voice was heard, and it was the voice of a woman who spoke in his own tongue, as one who had always known it. She said, “Follow me, and you will live.” The woman turned, and she went back the way she had come. The boy followed after her. He did so to live, for he thought of the water below, and how he might lie within it when the fire came down. The path before them was clear, though the ground was rough. At times the young woman looked back to see if he still came behind her. As they went, the sound of the water grew less. This seemed strange to the boy, for they were drawing nearer. When at last they came to the creek, it no longer ran. It stood in small pools, one above another, like steps of water leading upward to a low opening in a wall of dark stone. Then the young woman bent herself and went within that place, passing through the water wearing knee high boots.

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2I: The boy did not delay, but followed after her. Inside there was a pool, and a narrow ledge of stone ringed the waters. The

light that she bore upon her head filled the cave, so that he could see clearly, and he looked upon her. She was like a woman of the Kuwapi, yet taller than any he had seen. She did not seem very much older than he. The light resting upon her brow pierced the eye, and it shone steadily, and he did not know how it came. The young woman placed her hand upon her chest and spoke a name. “Vretiel,” she said. Then she looked upon him, and it was plain she waited for his name in return. The boy did not wish to seem foolish before her, so he answered, “My father once gave me the name Shy Bear, but he has taken it back, and now I have no name.” Yet this seemed to pleased her, for now she understood the path he had been set upon. He had gone out to seek a vision and would not be called back soon. Among his people it would be said that the boy tarried, and they would not go at once to seek him.

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2J Then the young woman named Vretiel took from her head the light she bore and cast it into the water. It sank, and its brightness faded as it went down. Yet the water did not grow dark. Instead it gave forth a dim green glow, as if something within it had awakened. After this Vretiel went down into the pool. She turned herself and passed beneath the surface, and he saw her no more. The boy waited. He thought she must come up again, for all who live must breathe. But she did not return. Then the water began to move. It rose and spread, and it went beyond the place where it had stood before. Shy Bear knew he was kept from the fire in that cave, yet still he was not safe. The air was growing thin, and what he needed to live was being taken from him. So he did not wait longer. He chose, and he went after Vretiel, passing down into the unknown. When Shy Bear came again to the air, there was much light about him, more than in the place from which he had come.

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2K: Many hands reached down to him, and they lifted him from the water, for his garments were heavy and drew him under. Among those hands were the hands of Vretiel. Then he stood

upon a place made smooth with worked wood, set all around a wide pool. At the outer edge there were many small lodges, and beyond these there grew a forest, green and full of life. He looked upward, and the sky was not as he had known it. It held many soft colors, and the sun had a shape that was strange to his eyes. Yet the air was cool, and the wet garments upon him brought a chill into his body, so that he began to tremble. Vretiel also was wet, yet she did not seem troubled. She took Shy Bear by the hand and led him into one of the lodges near the water. There she closed the entrance behind them, that they might not be seen in such a state. Then, without shame, as one who does not think in such ways, she removed the wet garments from him, and from herself, that they might be free of the cold.

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2L: Vretiel opened the door once, and the wet garments of the boy were given out to those who waited. When she moved, Shy Bear saw that her limbs were strong and well-formed, as of one who runs often and far. Then she took a narrow band, marked with signs he did not know, and set it against his body in many places, measuring him. After this she spoke through the door in words he could not understand. Within the lodge there were already garments laid out, dry and folded with care. They were of green and of dark purple, mingled together. These Vretiel put on. When she had finished, another set of such garments was given through the door. These were smaller, made to fit the boy. Seeing what was meant, and taking courage from her, he clothed himself in them. Then Shy Bear looked upon what he wore, and he saw that there was thought in it. The colors were as the forest, and the shapes broke the form of the body. A man so dressed, with his face and hands marked, might pass unseen among the trees.

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2L: Vretiel opened the door once, and the wet garments of the boy were given out to those who waited. When she moved, Shy Bear saw that her limbs were strong and well-formed, as of one who runs often and far. Then she took a narrow band, marked

with signs he did not know, and set it against his body in many places, measuring him. After this she spoke through the door in words he could not understand. Within the lodge there were already garments laid out, dry and folded with care. They were of green and of dark purple, mingled together. These Vretiel put on. When she had finished, another set of such garments was given through the door. These were smaller, made to fit the boy. Seeing what was meant, and taking courage from her, he clothed himself in them. Then Shy Bear looked upon what he wore, and he saw that there was thought in it. The colors were as the forest, and the shapes broke the form of the body. A man or woman so dressed, with face and hands suitably marked, might pass unseen among the trees.

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2M: Then Shy Bear looked again toward the water, and he saw another woman standing there. She was clothed in gold and white. She spoke, and her voice carried clearly. “Welcome to you, Shy Bear of the Kuwapi. I am called Gabriela. All that you see here is the lodge of Wakan Tanka.” Shy Bear knew he was called to answer, and he said, “Why have I come to this place, Lady Gabriela?” The woman said, “Here my daughter Vretiel shall teach you the speech of the white-skinned people, if you are willing. When you return, you may teach your own people this tongue.” But hearing this Shy Bear was troubled. “If I return speaking as the whites speak the People will be afraid. They will beat me, and perhaps they will kill me. They will say I am Coyote come in the shape of a man.” So he said, and he did not hide his fear. Gabriela answered him, and her voice was steady. “Do not let your heart be troubled by these things, Shy Bear. Wakan Tanka has already placed into the hands of your father that which will keep you from harm.

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2N: When you return he will rise up and be chief among your people.” Shy Bear listened, yet he did not set aside his doubt. He asked Gabriela, “Why must these things come to pass?” She said, “There is a time drawing near. In three winters, a band of

white wanderers will meet the Kuwapi. They are led by a man called Joshua Lange. This man will first be brought to this place even as you have been brought, and will see him with your own eyes. Gabriela went on to say, “These people are strong in their will. Some say they are proud, and do not easily turn from their own ways. They look upon the people of the grass as children who do not know the path. But you are much more than they think. You will show this not by receiving their tongue from them, but by taking it for yourself. They do not believe they have anything to learn from you. Yet it has been set down that you shall teach. For Wakan Tanka has ordained that these people, and my house, and your own, shall come together and live as one people, in peace."

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2O: Shy Bear had seen many things that were beyond his knowing, and now his heart was drawn to that other world. He desired to remain, and to look upon many more wonders. But the thought of his father Takoda and of his mother, Yuha was stronger in him. So he turned again to Gabriela and said, “I will return. I will do as you have said, and teach the People the speech of the whites.” Gabriela was pleased, and she smiled. “It is good,” she said. “You shall no longer be called Shy Bear. Now you shall be called Jashen. When you have learned, and when you go again to your people, this shall be your name as a man.” The boy heard this, and he said, “If I remain here long, my father and my mother will think me dead.” Gabriela answered him, “Do not let your thoughts dwell on that. However long you stay in this place, when you return it will seem to them that only a short time has passed, not more than the turning of one moon. In time you will understand how this is done, and you will see that it is not really magic.”

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2P: But Shy Bear said, “To me it would always be strong magic, Gabriela.” Then she said, “When I teach, that which is called great magic becomes small, and that which is called small magic is no longer called magic at all.” The pool from which

Jashen had come was fed by a stream that passed beneath a great house made of stone and wood, with clear shining walls, and it stood over the water as a bridge stands. Upon the top of this house was an open place. There Vretiel showed Shy Bear a device that was set toward the sky. She said, “The people you call the whites have such as this.” He looked, and he saw far beyond what his eyes could see alone. The land rose and bent, as if it turned to meet the sky. He saw places where many people dwelt together, and the courses of rivers, and the spread of forests. He saw also a great water, which she called Mori, and the tops of the clouds that moved above all these things. Then Vretiel spoke to him of the Song of Remembrance, which she had written down upon many skins.

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2Q: She recited it before him again and again in the speech she was teaching him. But once Jashen stopped her, for something in his mind would not rest. He said, “Were you truly that running girl?” For though he had seen many strange things, still it was hard for him to believe that she could run swifter than the pronghorn of the plains. Vretiel said to him that he should bring his bow. Then she took him by the hand and led him out from the place of the water, and through the trees, until they came to a wide and level ground. There she went apart from him, standing many paces away. Then she spoke in the tongue she was teaching him. “Shoot an arrow at me.” At this the boy cried out in protest, for he thought she made sport of him and wasted his time. But she answered him again, saying, “I speak truly. Do your best. Try to strike me down.” So he set an arrow to the string. Yet he did not aim to kill her, but sent it a little above her. Then Vretiel moved. Her body sprang as if it had been released from a cord.

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2R: She ran backward across the open ground, and her speed was greater than that of the arrow in its flight. The shaft fell to the earth and did her no harm. And she did not stop. Even as she ran, she turned, and passed into the trees at the far edge of the

clearing. In a moment she was gone from sight. And the boy stood where he was, filled with wonder at what he had seen. In a glade among the trees, Vretiel came upon her mother, who sat upon a fallen log. With her was another young man of the Kuwapi, and Gabriela spoke his name, calling him Coyote Cub.Vretiel had run swiftly, and now the hunger came upon her. The young man reached into a dark bag and brought forth many small loaves, still warm, and he gave them to her. She ate eagerly. As she did so, she said to him, “Whoever you are, you have the making of one who will be dear to me, as a close companion.” The young man named Coyote Cub smiled and answered in a light way, “I hope it shall be so, grandmother. It would trouble my heart if it were not.”

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2S: At this Vretiel paused, and she looked upon him with surprise. “Grandmother?” she made query. "It is as he says," answered Gabriela, and there was knowing in her voice. “Before this day you could speak in jest, as men often do, and say you were not certain you had any children. But now you see such words are not yours to speak.” Vretiel considered this, and she said, “I know what you have set in motion here, dear mother, and I do not turn from it. I can think upon a lifetime spent with Jashen, and it does not displease me. Yet I believe he does not hold me in his thoughts in the same way.” Gabriela said, “That is why you are set near to one another, and time is given. What is to grow will grow.” “It is not as I hoped,” said Vretiel. “We have come as far as the council of rulers in the Song of Remembrance, yet Jashen grows more distant from me, not nearer.” Gabriela answered her, “His spirit is as one who is carried in deep water. From the moment he followed you, he has not stood upon ground that he knows.

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2T: "He depends upon us for his food, his clothing, even the path of his return. So he does not feel as a man among his own people, who walk by their own will.” Then Coyote Cub spoke and said, “It is the same with Remiel, as I see it now. And I

remember well how it was when I first came into this place." Vretiel said, "But I went to Earth and brought him forth. How different can Kemen be?" Gabriela looked upon her and said, "You were there only for a short time, and in the dark. You did not see that world as it is. It is far greater than this one. And the land does not rise up to hide the stars."

In her lodge Yuha wept in a quiet way, and many days passed thus. Takoda sat near her and spoke what comfort he could, yet there was little a man could say. At last she spoke, and her voice was worn. "Almost a full moon has gone since we saw our son. Has this going out for a vision ever been so long?" Takoda answered her plainly. "I will not speak falsely to you. When I went out, it was ten nights, and no more."

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2U: When Yuha heard this, her grief came upon her without measure, and she could not hold it back. Takoda sat with her and endured it, hoping she would not set her sorrow against him, though he knew she might. In his heart he knew there had been no other path. The Kuwapi were already cast out from among the Oglala Lakota. If he had denied the boy this trial, the boy would have stood outside even among the Kuwapi. He would have remained a child in the sight of all, and his spirit would have turned bitter against his father. After a time Yuha grew more still, though the sorrow remained in her. She said, "The last thing our son saw was that even his mother's heart was as stone." Takoda answered, "A heart of stone is part of what must be done. There must be a cutting away. It cannot be made soft. This has always been the way among the People." So he spoke, though the words did not ease her. Now Takoda remembered how his son called the chief Sad Heart Bull in mockery, and he could not wholly deny the truth of it.

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2V: For Chief Tatanka laid daily burdens upon him, small and great, until even Takoda's patience was strained near to breaking. This day was no different. Without warning, Tatanka

entered the lodge. He did not wait for invitation. He pointed at Takoda and spoke in anger. “You have brought no meat into camp for a full moon, Hole-in-Cheek.” Takoda answered him calmly. “The fire still burns to the south. It has driven the herds away.” “Then go around it,” said Tatanka, “or I will name you Hole-in-Neck.” Takoda said, “It will take two days to reach where the animals now are, then another day to take them, and prepare them. Then two days to return. By then the meat will spoil.” “The nights are cold,” Tatanka said. “It will not spoil. I am weary of dried meat. Go.” Before he left, Tatanka’s eyes passed over Yuha, and lingered. She saw it. Without a word she drew the blanket of bison hair closer about her, and covered herself from his gaze. When Tatanka departed, Takoda went alone to where his belongings were kept.

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2W: From a hidden place he brought forth the thing he had shown to no living person, not even Yuha. He set it in his raiment that it could not be seen. This he did quietly, for he knew that while he was away upon the hunt, nothing would restrain Tatanka from entering any lodge and taking what he wished. Then Takoda and his hunters made ready. They saddled their horses and gathered what remained of the dried meat belonging to the People, for their stores were now small. Takoda mounted his own horse, Kaleetan, and for a moment he considered how it was that the horse had been given a true name, while his own son had been sent into the night without one. The burning grasslands lay far off, even when seen from the height of the Island in the Sky. Yet Takoda led the band south toward that place, that they might look upon the hurt on the Earth, and see, too, if the cairn raised for Wakan Tanka had been disturbed. They crossed the line where the grass was yet black and dead, as though the land itself had been struck.

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2X: Then they climbed once more to the Island in the Sky. When they reached the summit, they saw that all had been burned. The stone and earth were darkened as by great fire. And

there, upon the high place, Takoda saw his son. Shy Bear was alive, and he was moving among the stones, setting them back into their place, as though restoring what had once been taken away. Takoda saw that Shy Bear still wore the garments his mother had made for him, but they were changed in a way that was not of the Kuwapi. They were fitted close, and covered with many beads of bright color, worked with great skill, though not by the hands of the People. Still, there was something in them that answered to the old ways. Beside him stood one like a young woman of their own kind, yet she stood taller than any among them, even more than the tallest men, and the people of the plains are not small. Before the cairn was closed again, Takoda saw within it the white form, still seated as before, unmoving, as if it had never known breath.

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2Y: And upon that blackened summit there walked a single bison, newly arrived from Kemen, even as Jashen and Vretiel. It moved slowly over the burned ground as if searching for some green thing that might yet remain. Takoda looked long upon the face of his son. It seemed to him the boy had grown beyond the time he had been gone, as if more days had passed for him than for those who remained. This was a strange thing. But the sight of him overcame all thought. Takoda forgot his harsh words, and the taking away of the name, and the sending out into the night. “Shy Bear!” he cried, and went forward to embrace him. Yet Jashen did not receive him so. He stood firm, and stayed his father where he was, no less than a single pace away. “You forget yourself, my father,” he said. “I am no longer called Shy Bear. The name of my manhood is Jashen. I have come back, and I bring with me my wife, Vretiel.” He spoke further and said, “Wakan Tanka has commanded that we return to the People and dwell among them for a time."

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2Z: "Yet there shall be much going and coming between this place and his lodge in the other world,” said Vretiel. Then Jashen's wife stepped forward. She bowed her head to Jashen's

father with respect and continued to speak in the tongue of the People. “I greet you, Takoda,” she said. “My mother, Gabriela Haivri, bears hope in her heart that the Kuwapi shall ever dwell near this place, and that it may be well with them.” So she spoke, but there was disquiet among the hunters. And Takoda also found fault with Vretiel's words. He said, “The People must follow the herds or we will perish. I cannot believe Wakan Tanka would have us remain here and dig our own graves in this place.” But Jashen answered him, and his voice was steady. “In the lodge of Wakan Tanka it has been sworn that the Kuwapi shall live and grow strong. Do I not speak truly, father, when I say the favor of the Great Spirit has already been given to you in secret?” At these words Takoda knew his son spoke of the dark gift, and all doubt left him.

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30: In due time the sons of Dimai and Hawa grew unto the years of their strength, when it is meet that they should take wives. And Hawa came forth again from the tunnel, and with her she brought a young woman taken from the Earth; and straightway there joined her the presence of Ayat, in the form of her white and featureless Husk. And though this form was less dreadful than the red terror of Azul, yet was it exceedingly strange to behold, being smooth and without countenance, like unto carved bone made living. And Hawa sought to comfort the new woman, speaking softly unto her and giving assurance that no harm should come unto her in that place. Then Ayat led the woman first unto Kayin, the firstborn of Dimai, who was in the field gathering the increase thereof. And Kayin, seeing the presence of Ayat, bowed himself and brought forth of his harvest the fairest fruits, offering them with reverence. But the woman regarded them not, and turned away her face, for the offering pleased her not.

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31: Then Ayat brought her unto Hebel, the younger son; and he was by the fire, preparing the flesh of a great beast, and dividing it with the axe which had been given unto his father. And Hebel

also bowed himself before Ayat, and offered unto her a portion of the meat upon a stick. And Ayat received it, and placed it into the hand of the woman; and she did eat thereof eagerly, being drawn by the savour and by the hidden impulse within her, which inclineth the fertile unto the scent of blood and iron. And it came to pass that Ayat, according to the ordinance set beforehand by her Father, took the hand of the woman and placed it into the hand of Hebel, joining them together by the terms of the trial. Thus was the first pairing accomplished in Kemen under the covenant of proving, and the will of the higher powers was wrought through the appetites of flesh, and the judgment of men proceeded from that which they desired. And Kayin departed from the presence of his brother in great wrath.

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32: Yet for a season he restrained the outward sign thereof, and set himself to labour, that his anger might be hidden. And he took of the vines that grew in that land, and with cunning of hand braided them together, making a cord long and strong. And it came to pass, when the lake of fire waned in the heavens, that Kayin paused and beheld the woman as she adorned herself without; and Hebel came forth from his dwelling to lead her again within, yet cast back a look of pride and contempt toward his brother. And in the morning Dimai and Hawa brought forth garments which they had made for the wife of their younger son, and they clothed her; but unto Kayin they gave no regard. And Kayin likewise set not his heart upon his father nor his mother, but continued in the finishing of the cord which he had begun. And all that day Hebel and his wife made sport one with another openly before him; yet Kayin answered them not, but looked on with a quiet countenance, until his work was complete.

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33 Then he rose up and departed alone by the narrow way which led from the dwelling, even the only safe path that went out from the place. And he went apart, and there taking counsel with himself concerning a new thing in Kemen that might be done.

And at the going down of the light, Hebel and his wife walked forth idly upon the same path, departing from the dwelling. And when they were come unto a certain place, Kayin, who had prepared the matter beforehand, drew upon the cord. And the whip-tree, which he had set and bound for that purpose, was loosed from its hold, and fell upon them with great violence, and smote them again and again, beating them into the ground; and in the first strokes their bones were broken, and the fragments thereof were driven inward, so that their life was undone within them. And their blood issued forth, and their cries were heard for a moment, and then ceased. And the tree stayed not its striking until Hebel and his wife were no longer to be known as the living children of men.

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34: And Dimai and Hawa, hearing the cries, ran swiftly along the path to see what thing had befallen; and when they came upon the place, they were stricken with great horror at the sight thereof. And Hawa could not endure to look, but turned aside and retched, for the destruction was grievous beyond telling. And it came to pass that the avatars of Ayat and of Azul drew near unto that place soon after; and Kayin stood there, the end of the cord yet in his hand, and he regarded them all with a hard countenance, neither bowing nor seeking to hide that which he had done. And Ayat would not behold the judgment of her Father upon this first shedding of blood in Kemen; therefore she withdrew her presence. And her vessel departed from that place, and returned unto the opening in the wall of the dwelling, and from thence passed again by the hidden bridge between the worlds unto the hillside cave upon the Earth, where first she had encountered Dimai and Hawa in the days before Kemen was made.

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35: And Ayat came not again into that world in all the days of Dimai and Hawa, nor in the lifetime of Kayin, nor in many generations that sprang from them thereafter; for she had turned her face away from that great work, and left it to unfold

according to the covenant that had been set. And it came to pass, upon the Earth in the place of the hillside cave, that the likeness of Azul, even the red dragon, drew near unto Ayat, who had withdrawn herself from Kemen; and he spake unto her, saying: “How greatly instructive was that which we have seen of men; dost thou not agree?” Then answered Ayat, whose countenance was veiled but whose thought was not: “The end of the trial was contained already in the beginning thereof; for the outcome followeth the conditions which thou didst appoint, which thing the Elohim will not fail to discern in the day of judgment.” And Azul said, Nevertheless, thou hast rendered unto me all the smallholders which I required; therefore will I fulfill that which was promised between us."

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36: "Lower now thy vessel, O Daughter, for it is not meet that one such as thou should fall prostrate as the lesser beings do. And forget not the covenant which thou hast sworn: thou shalt listen only, and not inquire. Thou shalt put forth no question unto the City of Stars, neither openly nor in secret, as thou hast supposed I have done." Then did Ayat incline her Husk, and set it upon the summit of the nameless hill; and Azul took his place beside her, his form vast and terrible. And for a moment they regarded together the land that lay before them. And Azul spake again, in a tone less hardened than before: "I do envy thee this world, O Daughter. For among such worlds as may be brought into being this is a glorious one, rich in life, unlike any that lie within my own dominion." And it came to pass, even as Azul had forewarned her, that the entering-in unto the Pleroma was as a flood without shore; and the multitude of utterances among the Elohim was exceeding great, so that it overcame her at the first.

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37: Therefore the vessel of Ayat remained unmoving upon the summit of the hill; and there it abode through the turning of many seasons. The winds beat upon it, the snows covered it, and the beasts of the field touched it without fear; yet it stirred not,

neither gave sign, for her attention was withdrawn into the hearing of the Great Assembly.

Now a day came to pass in Kemen that Azul did lay command upon the children of Men, saying "Build ye up strong storehouses, and compass them round about with walls; and fill them with victual, and with fuel in abundance, that your lives perish not, neither the lives of your beasts, against the great frost which is prepared to come upon the land." Nevertheless, only the people which dwelt in the land of Adan did give heed unto the oracles of the Red Dragon; and they set their hands diligently unto the labor which was appointed unto them. And a mighty forest of gopher-trees was hewn down, and the timber was was laid up within the garners, to be as fuel against the cold.

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38 But behold, many there were who mocked the counsel of the Red Dragon, and did deride the people of Adan, laughing them to scorn, and esteeming their works as foolishness; and their laughter was loud in those days, and filled the land. And it came to pass, in an hour which no man looked for, that the Lake of Fire was abated; yea, its radiance did wane, and became dim and sullen, insomuch that it gave neither light sufficient to dazzle the eye, nor heat to warm the flesh. And thus there fell a winter upon all Kemen, even a night of exceeding bitter cold, without measure; and it seemed unto the hearts of men that no dawn should come thereafter. Then did the people of Adan shut fast the gates of their strongholds, and made them sure against all that might come upon them. And it came to pass on the morrow, that a great multitude of those who had scoffed came up against them, their hearts being turned unto fear; and they did compass the walls round about, and assailed them in their desperation.

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39: Nevertheless, the defenders stood upon the ramparts, and withstood them with steadfastness; and they prevailed not

against the walls thereof. And ere the second day was ended, the strength of the assailants failed; and they were overcome of the frost, and perished. And their bodies were laid low beneath the new-fallen snow; yea, and with them perished the greater part of all that dwelt in Kemen. And a great silence spread abroad in the land, even the silence of death, which covered the face thereof. And it came to pass that when Ayat beheld these things, her wrath was kindled within her as a sudden flame; and she turned herself upon Azul, and the air round about them trembled by reason of the force of her voice. And she said "Hast thou broken the covenant, and brought our proving in Kemen unto its end? Behold, all that goeth upon two legs, and all that goeth upon four, liveth not beyond the walls; for all lieth silent beneath the frost!" And Azul answered her, and he said "The purpose standeth revealed.

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3A: "Thou hast seen it how the faith of the world-dwellers burneth bright for a little season, even as dry tinder newly kindled, and then is spent, and falleth away swiftly into unbelief. There was iron in the voice of Ayat, and she said, "Wherefore must humankind bow themselves unto the errant wills of such as appoint themselves gods, if they are to prove themselves just? What righteousness is there in such a trial?" And it came to pass that Azul turned at the last, and his countenance was stern; and he said, "If thou canst not discern how far above these creatures we stand in the order of being, even as they stand above the beasts which they nourish for their sustenance, then was it in vain that speech was granted thee among the Elohim!" And Ayat spake again, more softly; nevertheless her words did not waver. And she said "A day shall come, when even the City of Stars shall be surpassed by the world-dwellers." And Azul answered her again; and there was a hardness in his voice, though he lifted it not.

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3B "Here, at the least, shall they not overtake us. No warning will I give, when next Imran bringeth the frost upon Kemen; for

even the Adanites, whether faithful or no, shall perish." And Ayat answered him straightway, as one that had already pondered his saying. "Yet forty storehouses in Adan do stand for a witness, that the world-dwellers may remain faithful unto thy decrees, even under thy caprice. This will I set in order in the record at thy tribunal, which surely shall come." And Azul’s gaze wavered not, and he said "The Adanites alone remain loyal unto me, and this only because I speak unto them face to face. For were I to turn from them even for a little season, they would dwindle swiftly into unbelief." And Ayat said unto him, and there was a sharpness and a clarity in her voice "Then is it thine own doing, that they have come to reckon thee not as a god, but as a chieftain among them." And Azul turned himself fully toward her, and said, "Wilt thou prove this saying, or leave it as a naked boast?"

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3C And when Ayat spake again, her voice was more steady, yet her resolve was not diminished. And she said, "Thy hour is come, my father. For as I have labored to establish thy dominions in Kemen, even so must thou now lend thy strength unto the proving which I shall set in motion upon the Earth." And Azul’s brow was darkened, and there was in him a measure of inquiry; and he said, "What wouldst thou that I should do?" And Ayat said, her gaze being yet set beyond the frozen reaches of Kemen, "Grant unto me one of the Adanite high kindred, even one of a bold and venturous spirit." And Azul made answer, and there was scorn in his voice: "What high kindred? For even before the frost, the race of Men was ordered but little beyond their scattered households." And Ayat said, "This shall not endure. For upon the Earth, dominion passeth in lines of blood; and one house falleth, and another ariseth to take its place; yet the pattern abideth." And Azul said unto her, "Wherefore must thy chosen be of such a line?"

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3D Ayat answered, "Because such a one is instructed in rule and in bearing, and is made ready to lead; for a following which is

begun by the unlettered is soon broken." And Azul regarded her for a space, and said "And this following, what wilt thou make of it?" And Ayat said, "I will set apart a people unto myself upon the Earth." And he said, "Have I not sought to do the like in Kemen, through many years?" Nevertheless Ayat answered him, saying, "Upon the Earth will I not speak unto them as thou hast done. My voice shall not guide them from day to day; once in each year will I answer a priest among them, and make my will known by a sign which shall be seen openly, whether it be for a blessing or for a curse." And it came to pass that Azul held his peace for a time. Thus was the covenant established between them. And Ayat knew that, for a season at the least, there should be no sudden nor unheralded destruction of frost loosed again upon Kemen, until the time that her priest should be raised up.

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3E And it came to pass that from the first day wherein Ayat brought the living things of the Earth into Kemen, Azul did set his heart to study them, and he ceased not from that labor. For he perceived that the life of the world-dwellers was wrought according to a hidden ordering; even a subtle craft written in chains too small for the eye to behold, whereby were fashioned the least of their working parts, and from these did the greater forms arise. And thus did he discern also the manner of inheritance among the children of Men that a child receiveth of the mother a chain made mingled and various, but of the father a chain whole and unbroken; and this thing appeared unto him of great use. Therefore did Azul choose the father’s portion for the vessel of his design. And therein did he set the new workings which he had devised, that they might pass on unweakened from generation to generation, and be not scattered nor diminished with time. Nevertheless, in the course of his trials a hindrance was made manifest.

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3F Of those that were thus altered, none endured to be born save the daughters of Men; with the sons lost ere they could draw breath. And Azul conceived within himself a design, even that

he would bring forth a race of thralls, bound unto him alone. And he made them insensible unto pain, lest under torment they should betray his secrets unto his adversaries. But behold, herein was a ruin not foreseen; for being without fear of hurt, they took no heed unto lesser wounds, and the first generation of the Made did perish oft before they had seen twenty years. Therefore did Azul alter them again, and he wrought upon their flesh a swift restoring; that their wounds should close with speed, and that bones should be knit together within the space of a single day. And he strengthened them also against venom and the great plagues which at times passed through the land. But it came to pass that the Made might yet be slain by the severing of the head, or by fire, or by thirst, or by long imprisonment with no sustenance.

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3G Nevertheless, in all lesser harms their bodies did not fail them; for their bleeding was stayed almost ere it was perceived, and neither blade, nor bolt, nor arrow did cause them to falter. And it was spoken in Kemen that even the rumor of a single company of len sent forth was sufficient to still rebellion before it began. Yet behold, in the very perfection of these things there was a hidden cost; for that which caused a lan to mend swiftly did also render her barren. Thus the Made did not multiply after their kind, neither did they suffer the passing of age. And great wealth was laid upon them, and long continuance of life; yet thereby did life itself become ever more precious in their sight, insomuch that even their endurance was as a possession which they would not willingly lay down. And it came to pass that there arose a turning in Kemen; and the Nephiloth, at times called the Made, began to draw back from the foremost ranks in war, when Azul sent them forth into battle.

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3H: And they were no more as thralls, but became a burden unto those who had rule over them. For the greater part of the Made fled from the fields of war, and gathered together in the ringhouses of Elendal, which were set far apart within a deep

forest. And there they dwelt in scattered halls. And so great was the cost of pursuing them that the armies which were sent against them did consume themselves in the taking, and found but little gain. And it came to pass that when Azul beheld these things he repented that he had stretched forth his hand to meddle with the ordering of the world-dwellers; and from that time forth he made no more of the Nephiloth. And it came to pass that Avyah also took thought concerning this matter, and she would not suffer the work to remain undone, and she amended the works of Azul. Yet she granted them not the endurance of unending life, which had been given in the first shaping of the Made. And in those days there arose in Shalem Anela, who was accounted the last of the Made.

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3I: But Anaela was also the first of the Jan, and the forerunner of all the Elyonoth. And Anela did bear wings of feathers, and not of skin; yet neither the wings of the len nor of the jen in those days were sufficient for flight, but were as tokens of their being, and not as instruments whereby they might ascend. Thronging within the stone walls of Shalem, the people gave themselves unto rejoicing; for the harvest was great beyond memory, and the days of feasting were named among them as Hellberry Days. Yet it came to pass that, even as their celebration was lifted up in fevered gladness, there arose a disturbance in the heavens above the city; and behold, a white husk, vast as an engine of war, descended into the midst of the central place of gathering. And it was borne upon five flames of white fire; and the sight thereof struck dread into all who beheld it. And a roar went forth with its coming, such as rent the air and scattered the multitude in terror, so that none abode where they had stood before.

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3J: And it came to pass that the first among the Shalemites who returned unto that place was not of the warrior caste, neither of the elders of the judicial council, but Kar Melchizedek himself; for he was constrained by the weight of kingship to bear a

semblance of fearlessness before his people. And the blast of the descent had torn away the fabric of the great pavilion and cast it far across the city; yet the king stood where he had halted, though at a prudent distance, and he drew not nearer. And it was said that Melchizedek had curiosity concerning the thing which had come among them, yet not so much as to desire burning. Wherefore he held his ground, neither fleeing away nor drawing nigh. Then spake the clear voice of Ayat again, and it came forth from the white husk through her avatar, saying Kar Melchizedek, if thou wilt, draw near. And the king of the city obeyed her voice. And it came to pass that as Kar Melchizedek drew nigh, he beheld that the white husk rested upon five subordinate pillars.

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3K: The underbelly of the large central was lifted to the height of a man’s shoulder above the ground. And beneath this opened a round hatch, which fell outward upon a hinge; and upon the inner face thereof were carved narrow steps, as though prepared for ascent within. And the voice of Ayat came again, saying If it seemeth good unto thee, Shalemite king, enter herein. Then Melchizedek pressed himself between the smaller pillars, which were quite warm, and looked within; and behold, he saw that the central pillar was hollow and narrow, yet filled with a clear light. And along its inner walls were set many ribs even as handholds and footholds for ascent. And he went upward, until the hollow widened at its summit into a greater chamber, wherein were cushions laid and windows set, through which might be seen the world below. And it came to pass that from that height he beheld how few of the Shalemites dared draw near unto the husk as he had done; for fear held them fast, and they stirred not from their places.

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3L: Then spake the great voice again, "I am Ayat, co-eval with Avyah, and Azul, and Imran." And she spake in the voice of a man, even as she had done before. For Kemen was filled with a tradition that named Ayat as the son of Azul rather than

daughter; and in the customs of Adan wen were set apart for the service and pleasure of men . And Ayat knew that to reveal herself as female among the Elohim would bring confusion upon the king’s understanding. Moreover, the difference of sex among the living stars was of no account in a hollow world wherein no man could behold the heavens above them. And it came to pass that Melchizedek, finding himself seated upon the rim of the central shaft, perceived that there was no space within the chamber sufficient that he might cast himself prone, nor grovel in any manner; for the fashioning of the hollow suffered it not. The curvature of the floor, and the narrowing ribs thereof, constrained his motion, so that he might only sit or brace himself with his hands.

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3M: Nevertheless, despite this, every instinct of reverence pressed upon him as a tide that could not be withstood. And he said, "Let my Lord command me." And it came to pass that Ayat answered him, and said, "Kar Melchizedek, I tell thee Kemen existeth by reason of a dispute between myself and Azul. It is a field of proving, wherein are tested the nephiloth, and also the men and wen of the Earth." And Melchizedek said, "What is the test, my Lord?" And Ayat replied The test of Azul is obedience, without remainder. But I seek one thou wouldst account an apostate, one who holdeth the carved images of the gods in contempt, and yet holdeth in greater contempt those priests that speak in their stead." And Melchizedek said, "Let thy servant understand, my Lord." And Ayat answered him, "It must be a man that feeleth himself estranged within this world, as though it were but a shadow or a figment, for in truth so it is. He must hunger for another world which is the true source of all that is here perceived."

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3N: "I seek one that yearneth to serve the God who reigneth alone over that other realm." And Melchizedek said, "And if I find only wen or len that bear such a heart?" Then the voice of Ayat was softened, though it was not abated in authority, and

she said, "Alas, Kar Melchizedek, few in Kemen will hearken unto the voice of a wan, even when she speaketh truth concerning what I would have them come to know." And the king said few would listen even to the voice of a man if no sign is given. In reply Ayat said, "Upon the bulkhead thou shalt see a thing like unto a black short staff. Take it into thine hand." Then the king reached forth within the confined space, and took the thing which was shown him; and it clave but lightly unto the inner surface of the vessel, as though it had been set there for ease of removal. And Ayat said, "This is Windgate, which in thy tongue is called Shahar Haruach. Think not that thou wieldest it alone; for thou shalt but lift thy hand, and Azul and I shall bring the work to pass."

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3O "And Windgate shall serve for thy candidate, even as this Husk hath served thee; for it shall give visible assurance that the word which thou hast heard is no phantasm, but proceedeth from a true authority set over Kemen, and over the matter of thy proving.” And Melchizedek said, "Lord, shall I set aside my royal duties to accomplish thy will?" And Ayat said, "Thou remainest king of Shalem, as ever. I commanded thee not to enter my Husk, neither do I command thee to undertake this search. Yet I require that the search be made. Therefore delegate it unto a trusted lieutenant, or unto one of thy household, according to thy wisdom." And he said "Yea, Lord." And Ayat spake again, and her voice bare the weight of things not yet unfolded. "The contention between myself and Azul hath come unto a moment of great import in the history of Men. Therefore the search requireth discernment of one that is fit to rule Shalem." And the king was much pleased, and he said, "One worthy to rule Shalem, sayest thou?"

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3P: “O how Happenstance smileth upon us both, my Lord. For of late my daughter Lailah hath been remiss in her duties as princess of this city; yet her spirit is indomitable, of this I speak not falsely. Even thou, O Lord, wert thou to behold her, wouldst

marvel, and confess that such a one as Sar Lailah is seldom found among the daughters of men.” And Ayat said unto him, “Peradventure my chosen lieth even now beneath thine eyes, in the guise of thy daughter. Nevertheless, in this season the people will not hearken unto her voice.” And Melchizedek said, “Then may I send her forth upon all Kemen in my stead, to seek this one who shall become a teacher?” And Ayat answered him, “Thou mayest give thy daughter Shahar Haruach, and lay upon her the charge of the quest. Only this is required: that the one she seeketh be male. Moreover, I will set this same husk at her disposal, that she may pass between any two places in Kemen within the space of less than an hour.” And the king said, “The Lord is gracious.”

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3Q: Sar Lailah of Shalem, and Hash Bodea, her sole attendant, disembarked from the Husk of Ayat in a clearing deep within Shaula Forest. And embers upon the charred ground yet simmered long after their descent. And it came to pass that upon the morrow the Husk was taken up into the First Heaven again by Ayat herself. And upon the right bank of the Tirol River did Lailah employ the Windgate to fell and shape the gopher trees that were nigh at hand; and therewith they built them a raft. And the travelers bare with them sufficient food to sustain their search, and much gold also, wherewith to trade among the inhabitants on the way for such provisions as they should consume. And from the clearing it was thirty swift leagues downstream unto the roaring of Blue Veil Falls, which passage was a great hindrance unto their way. And there did Lailah and Bodea abandon their first raft. Thereupon they built another more meet for the waters below the cataract, fashioning it from timber that grew beneath the falls.

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3R: In the next stage of their journey they were borne through mighty rapids, such as even the locals accounted unrunnable. And when they had passed safely beneath the white waters, they drifted into a stony desert, wherein no water was found save that

of the river itself, which carried them onward without ceasing. And along its banks they beheld ponderous beasts, and riparian farmers likewise, who durst not draw near unto the passing raft. The part of Kemen through which they traveled proved far warmer than the country about the city of Shalem, which lay in the sea of Mori. And Sar Lailah and Bodea learned, to their disquiet there is no accustomedness unto great heat as there is unto the ignoring of foul odors; for the body learneth not indifference, but only endurance, and that unevenly. And so they took unto themselves a certain philosophy of necessity that if the weather of Kemen could not be altered, then there was no wisdom in lamentation. Nevertheless this brought them little comfort, nor yet ease.

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3S: And it came to pass that they sojourned for a full season in the city of Sessai, dwelling in a chamber for hire, and by day they walked the narrow streets thereof. But in all the quarters of that great city they found no man having those hidden qualities of worshipful infidelity which Ayat had set forth in her charge unto the king of Shalem at the beginning of their search. And from Sessai the princess and her ever-faithful attendant rode overland unto Murzi Bog, where the river Minin slowed into marsh and silt-islands before it came unto the sea; and there also they found no answer. And they searched likewise upon the beleaguered settlements in the war-torn Isle of Danya, and found nothing. And from thence they took ship along the coast road unto the city of Medon. Yet again was no man found who met the measure of Ayat’s intent. At length they came unto the market of green Tannedi, where the Gudrun Road divideth westward toward Shalem. And there they overheard two men contending in a loud dispute.

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3T: And Sar Lailah learned the name of one of the men, for his father cried it aloud in anger, and it was borne above the noise of the market. And it was so that Avram dwelt a nomadic life upon the range-lands round about; but his father dwelt within

the town itself, where he kept a small shop. And upon the sign that hung above the door thereof was written the name Terah. And Terah sold therein things pertaining unto the worship of the four gods of Kemen, and of the manifold demigods besides. But Avram spake unto his father, and said, "Father, thou cuttest down the cedars which Ayat planted. Avyah sent rain to water them. Imran made the Lake of Fire to shine upon them. Thou growest cold, and with a portion of thy firewood thou raisest a blaze to warm thyself and bake thy bread; yet with the remainder thereof thou carv'st an image of the Red Dragon, and bowest thyself before it. Azul! Thou givest adoration unto the one god who had no part in the provision of the wood itself. Why Azul? Because he is thy god."

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3U: "And wherefore is he thy god? Because he was the god of thy father Karnebo. So praise be unto Azul, and contempt upon the others." And Avram bowed upon one knee, and mimicked the posture which his father oft assumed. And he said, "Thou bowest thyself before this image of wood and criest, 'Azul, deliver me from this cold season.' Yet it entereth not into thy mind that this deaf and dumb block of wood, which thine own hands have carved, is a vain thing and without truth." And Terah said unto him, "Do not play the fool. Behold there the image of Amathlai. Thinkest thou that I take it to be truly thy mother?" And Avram held his peace, and answered not a word. Then Terah continued, saying, "These images do no more than direct the heart and mind along paths of devotion." And it came to pass that while Terah yet spake, Lailah and Bodea entered into the shop, and began to behold the racks of idols set forth upon display. And for a moment the father and the son kept silence in the presence of the strangers.

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3V And when they had made a full circuit of Terah's shop, Bodea began to lay forth much gold upon the edge of the shop that faced toward the street, and she set it openly there, as though she intended to purchase the whole thereof. And after the

gold was set forth, five men of violence crossed over unto the little shop, bearing swords in their hands. And one of the men of violence cried out, saying, "Stand away from the gold. Both of you, and depart quickly." And Lailah answered him, saying, "Suppose we do not?" And she suffered her black feathered wings to be unfurled, so that it was made known she was set apart from mortal wen. And the men of violence said unto her, "Then will we take thy heads, and have the gold also. Immortal thou mayest account thyself; yet if thy head be severed, thou shalt die even as any other wan." Then Shahar Haruach drew blood for the first time in Kemen. By a motion of perception deeper than her conscious thought, Sar Lailah quickly judged one among the thieves to be their leader.

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3W: And she smote him once; and a clean aperture was made through the midst of his body. And even Lailah herself was astonied at the uncontainedness of that which cometh of wielding Shahar Haruach. A second man fell, and his head was severed in sudden protest. And the blade of a third was taken, and consumed even unto its hilt, as though the weapon itself had accepted it into its own substance. And it came to pass that the three which yet remained among the robbers turned and fled, and returned not again, and Lailah pursued them not. Then Bodea said, as she beheld the aftermath, "Last year in Shalem the order of things was reversed; for we were they that overawed the customers, and took unto ourselves their gold." And Lailah answered her, "I think I made common cause with the Fallen Angels only that I might draw the attention of my father; for he seemed much preoccupied at the time." And Bodea said, "Then verily the design hath succeeded; for his Majesty hath taken notice, and behold, here are we both."

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3X: While they yet spake Terah fell upon his knees, confronted with that which he took to be embodiments of his own carved demigods. But Avram remained standing. And he drew somewhat nearer unto Lailah, as one that judged she had

somewhat to declare unto him; yet he offered no fearful obeisance, but rather there was in him a countenance of disgust toward his father for having done so. And this alone confirmed in Lailah's mind the worth of Avram as a candidate for that which Ayat had set before her father. And Bodea said, "In the name of Ayat, Lord of Heaven and Earth, I bid thee go forth from thy father's kin, and dwell in the other world. Upon Earth shall God make of thee a great nation. There shall Ayat multiply thy bounty beyond all measure and thy name shall become great among men." Then Lailah took up the second portion of the recitation, and said, "Ayat shall bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee. Mortal men and wen in every place and time shall receive great blessing through thee."

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3Y: "These are the words of Ayat, Lord of all the Earth." Then she said unto him, "What sayest thou unto all these things, Avram son of Terah?" And Avram looked directly into the eyes of the princess, and said firmly, "Nay." And it was some little time before Sar Lailah comprehended that which Avram had spoken. And she said unto him, "Knowest thou who I am?" And Avram answered, saying, "Thy face is known unto many, Your Highness, though my father, I think, hath never beheld the daughter of Kar Melchizedek." And Lailah said, "Well spoken, Avram. Traveling with me is Hash Bodea. Together we have crossed the breadth of Kemen, over land and water, and even through the air, seeking such a man as thou art. Thus was I commanded by my father, for Ayat spake unto the king face to face, and laid this charge upon his house." And Avram nodded, and he lifted Terah to his feet, and held him gently in his arms. And he said Sar Lailah, "I admire thy desire to do well in the eyes of thy father, and I wish thee well therein."

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3Z: "But my own father is infirm of body, and he earneth not enough to sustain himself and my mother." And Avram made a sign unto one without the shop. Then he turned again unto Lailah and said, "As I love mine own life, I can in nowise turn

aside from my father for all the days that he is a wayfarer in Kemen." Then Avram fulfilled the purpose of his coming, and a servant brought forth two living lambs out of Avram’s own flock, the one for slaughter and for meat, and the other for sale, that Terah might purchase the necessities of life until the next season when Avram should come up from the open range. And Terah received the gifts of his son with sincere words of gratitude. Then Lailah nodded in full understanding, and she helped Bodea restow the gold. Lailah took great care not to tread upon the fortress of human dignity which Avram had asserted by his refusal, which dignity she judged to be wholly just. And in all her journeys across Kemen, Sar Lailah found no man at all who was remotely like unto Avram.

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#E4 Visions 9:11 Then Takoda moved, but not in haste. He reached within his garments and he brought forth the thing that had been given to him. Visions 9:12 Tatanka’s anger broke loose, and he rushed forward to strike. Yet he did not come within reach. Upon the Island in the Sky he had taken only the head of the bison, offering it upward, that it should not be turned to false honor. But here, before all the Kuwapi, he did not stay his hand. The dark flame moved. Visions 9:13 It passed over Tatanka from head to foot, and when it was gone, nothing of him remained, not even his moccasins. Only the ground stood as it had been. Then a great stillness fell upon the People. Fear took hold of them, and they looked upon Takoda as upon something they did not know. Visions 9:14 Those who had ridden with him had seen the power before, but the others had not. To them it was a thing beyond telling, and terrible. Even Yuha felt that fear in her heart. Yet she came and stood beside Takoda, though her spirit trembled.

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#E5 Visions 9:15 At Takoda’s left stood his son, Jashen, clothed in the fine garments that had been made with great care in the other world, worked over many years. And above them all stood Vretiel, tall and unafraid. Visions 9:16 Then Takoda spoke, and

his voice carried over the People. “I have sent the Chief to stand before Wakan Tanka,” he said. And none there doubted his words. “I will lead the People now.” He stood with his arms crossed, and the Dark Gift rested in his hand. Visions 9:17 Then it came to pass that thehunters and warriors began to kneel, one after another. They opened their hands before him, showing that they held no weapon. Visions 9:18 After them the women came down also, the wives, and those whose husbands were gone, and the young women not yet taken. They bowed themselves before Takoda, and before those who stood with him. And so all the People gave themselves over to his rule.

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#E6 Visions 9:19 Then Takoda spoke again, giving his first command as chief. “In the morning we will strike the lodges and go south. We will dwell at the Island in the Sky, near the place where Wakan Tanka made himself known to us, and where Shy Bear returned as the man Jashen.” Visions 9:20 So it came to pass the Kuwapi, who had long followed the herds across the wide plains, ceased from their wandering. Of all the peoples of that land, they alone chose this path of their own will. They set themselves to remain in one place, and to wait. Visions 9:21 And no longer did the Kuwapi hunters pursue animals when they grazed far from the camp of the People, for at times the Lilim of House Haivri, kin of Vretiel, sent beasts from Kemen to the bowl of smoking waters that encircled the Island in the Sky, there to thrive and be taken at need by the hunters. Visions 9:22 And so the Kuwapi occupied until the coming of the pilgrims led by Joshua Lange, as was foretold.

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#1I 2 Covenants 1:1 A day came to pass in Kemen that Azul did lay command upon the children of Men, saying: Build ye up strong storehouses, and compass them round about with walls; and fill them with victual, and with fuel in abundance, that your lives perish not, neither the lives of your beasts, against the great frost which is prepared to come upon the land. 2 Covenants 1:2 Nevertheless, only the people which dwelt in the

land of Adan did give heed unto the oracles of the Red Dragon; and they hasted themselves, and set their hands diligently unto the labor which was appointed unto them. 2 Covenants 1:3 And it came to pass that a mighty forest of gopher-trees was hewn down, and the timber was borne away with much toil, and was laid up within the garners, to be as fuel against the cold. But behold, many there were who mocked the counsel, and did deride the people of Adan, laughing them to scorn, and esteeming their works as foolishness; and their laughter was loud in those days, and filled the land.

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#1J 2 Covenants 1:4 And it came to pass, in an hour which no man looked for, that the lake of fire was abated; yea, its radiance did wane, and became dim and sullen, insomuch that it gave neither light sufficient to dazzle the eye, nor heat to warm the flesh. And thus there fell a winter upon all Kemen, even a night of exceeding bitter cold, without measure; and it seemed unto the hearts of men that no dawn should come thereafter. 2 Covenants 1:5 Then did the people of Adan shut fast the gates of their strongholds, and made them sure against all that might come upon them. And it came to pass on the morrow, that a great multitude of those who had scoffed came up against them, their hearts being turned unto fear; and they did compass the walls round about, and assailed them in their desperation. 2 Covenants 1:6 Nevertheless, the defenders stood upon the ramparts, and withstood them with steadfastness; and they prevailed not against the walls thereof.

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#1K 2 Covenants 1:7 And ere the second day was ended, the strength of the assailants failed; and they were overcome of the frost, and perished. And their bodies were laid low beneath the new-fallen snow; yea, and with them perished the greater part of all that dwelt in Kemen. And there was a great silence spread abroad in the land, even the silence of death, which covered the face thereof. 2 Covenants 1:8 And it came to pass that when Ayat beheld these things, her wrath was kindled within her as a

sudden flame; and she turned herself upon Azul, and the air round about them trembled by reason of the force of her voice. And she said: Hast thou broken the covenant, and brought our proving in Kemen unto its end? Behold, all that goeth upon two legs, and all that goeth upon four, liveth not beyond the walls; for all lieth silent beneath the frost.

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@Karma_J Now you're on my end of the preferred bodyfat spectrum.

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#1L 2 Covenants 1:9 And Azul answered her, being untroubled, his gaze yet fixed upon the dimmed wastes of Kemen, and he said: The purpose standeth revealed. Thou hast seen it: how the faith of the world-dwellers burneth bright for a little season, even as dry tinder newly kindled, and then is spent, and falleth away swiftly into unbelief. 2 Covenants 1:10 There was iron in her voice, and she said: Wherefore must humankind bow themselves unto the errant wills of such as appoint themselves gods, if they are to prove themselves just? What righteousness is there in such a trial? 2 Covenants 1:11 And it came to pass that Azul turned at the last, and his countenance was stern; and he said: If thou canst not discern how far above these creatures we stand in the order of being, even as they stand above the beasts which they nourish for their sustenance, then was it in vain that speech was granted thee among the Elohim.

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#1M 2 Covenants 1:12 And Ayat spake again, more softly; nevertheless her words did not waver. And she said: A day shall come, when even the City of Stars shall be surpassed by the world-dwellers. 2 Covenants 1:13 And Azul answered her again; and there was a hardness in his voice, though he lifted it not:

Here, at the least, shall they have no space wherein to overtake us. No warning will I give, when next Imran bringeth the frost upon Kemen; for even the Adanites, whether faithful or no, shall perish. 2 Covenants 1:14 And Ayat answered him straightway, as one that had already pondered his saying: Yet forty storehouses in Adan do stand for a witness, that the world-dwellers may remain faithful unto thy decrees, even under thy caprice. This will I set in order in the record at thy tribunal, which surely shall come.

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#1N 2 Covenants 1:15 And Azul’s gaze wavered not, and he said: The Adanites alone remain loyal unto me, and this only because I speak unto them face to face. For were I to turn from them, yea, even for a little season, they would go after the others, and would dwindle swiftly into unbelief. 2 Covenants 1:16 And Ayat said unto him, and there was a sharpness and a clarity in her voice: Then is it thine own doing, that they have come to reckon thee not as a god, but as a chieftain among them. 2 Covenants 1:17 And it came to pass that Azul turned himself fully toward her, and said: Wilt thou prove this saying, or leave it as a naked boast? 2 Covenants 1:18 And for a space Ayat regarded him in silence; and when she spake again, her voice was more steady, yet her resolve was not diminished. And she said: Thy hour is come, my father. For as I have labored to establish thy dominions in Kemen, even so must thou now lend thy strength unto the proving which I shall set in motion upon the Earth.

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#1O 2 Covenants 1:19 And Azul’s brow was darkened, and there was in him a measure of inquiry; and he said: What wouldst thou that I should do? 2 Covenants 1:20 And Ayat said, her gaze being yet set beyond the frozen reaches of Kemen: Grant unto me one of the Adanite high kindred, even one of a bold and venturous spirit. 2 Covenants 1:21 And Azul made answer, and there was scorn in his voice: What high kindred? For even before the frost, the race of Men was ordered but little

beyond their scattered households. 2 Covenants 1:22 And Ayat said: This shall not endure. For upon the Earth, dominion passeth in lines of blood; and one house falleth, and another ariseth to take its place; yet the pattern abideth. And Azul said unto her: Wherefore must thy chosen be of such a line?

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#1P 2 Covenants 1:23 Ayat answered, and said: Because such a one is not untaught, but is instructed in rule and in bearing, and is made ready to lead; for a following which is begun by the unlettered is soon broken. And Azul regarded her for a space, and said: And this following, what wilt thou make of it? 2 Covenants 1:24 And Ayat said: I will set apart a people unto myself upon the Earth. And he said: Have I not sought to do the like in Kemen, through many years? 2 Covenants 1:25 Nevertheless Ayat answered him, saying: Upon the Earth will I not speak unto them as thou hast done. My voice shall not guide them from day to day; but it shall come to pass that once in each year will I answer a priest among them, and make my will known by a sign which shall be seen openly, whether it be for a blessing or for a curse.

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#1Q 2 Covenants 1:26 And it came to pass that Azul held his peace for a time; and afterward he inclined his head, and said: So be it; let the trial stand. Thus was the covenant established between them. 2 Covenants 1:27 And Ayat knew that, for a season at the least, there should be no sudden nor unheralded destruction of frost loosed again upon Kemen, until the time that her priest should be raised up.

2 Covenants 2:1 And it came to pass that from the first day wherein Ayat brought the living things of the Earth into Kemen, Azul did set his heart to study them, and he ceased not from that labor. 2 Covenants 2:2 For he perceived that the life of the world-dwellers was wrought according to a hidden ordering; even a subtle craft written in chains too small for the eye to

behold, whereby were fashioned the least of their working parts, and from these did the greater forms arise.

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#1R 2 Covenants 2:3 And this seemed not unto him a marvel beyond measure; for the lore of the Elohim held many such reckonings, gathered out of unnumbered worlds; and in each, though the forms thereof were diverse, yet the deep pattern was one. 2 Covenants 2:4 And thus did he discern also the manner of inheritance among the children of Men: that a child receiveth of the mother a chain made mingled and various, but of the father a chain whole and unbroken; and this thing appeared unto him of great use. 2 Covenants 2;5 Therefore did Azul choose the father’s portion for the vessel of his design; and therein did he set the new workings which he had devised, that they might pass on unweakened from generation to generation, and be not scattered nor diminished with time. 2 Covenants 2:6 Nevertheless, in the course of his trials a hindrance was made manifest; for of those that were thus altered, none endured to be born save the daughters of Men; and all the sons so wrought were lost ere they could draw breath.

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#1S 2 Covenants 2:7 And it came to pass that Azul conceived within himself a design, even that he would bring forth a race of thralls, bound unto him alone. And he made them insensible unto pain, lest under torment they should betray his secrets unto his adversaries among the Elohim. But behold, herein was a ruin not foreseen; for being without fear of hurt, they took no heed unto lesser wounds, and the first generation of the Made did perish oft before they had seen twenty years. 2 Covenants 2:8 Therefore did Azul alter them again, and he wrought upon their flesh a swift restoring; that their wounds should close with speed, and that broken bones should be knit together within the space of a single day. And he strengthened them also against venom, and against the great plagues which at times passed through the land.

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#1T 2 Covenants 2:9 And it came to pass that the Made might yet be slain by the severing of the head, or by fire, or by thirst, or by long imprisonment with no sustenance. Nevertheless, in all lesser harms their bodies did not fail them; for their bleeding was stayed almost ere it was perceived, and neither blade, nor bolt, nor arrow did cause them to falter. 2 Covenants 2:10 And it was spoken in Kemen that even the rumor of a single company of len sent forth was sufficient to still rebellion before it began. 2 Covenants 2:11 Yet behold, in the very perfection of these things there was a hidden cost; for that which caused a lan to mend swiftly did also render her barren. Thus the Made did not multiply after their kind, neither did they suffer the passing of age. 2 Covenants 2:12 And great wealth was laid upon them, and long continuance of life; yet thereby did life itself become ever more precious in their sight, insomuch that even their endurance was as a possession which they would not willingly lay down.

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#1U 2 Covenants 2:13 And it came to pass that there arose a turning in Kemen; and the Nephiloth, at times called the Made, began to draw back from the foremost ranks in war, when Azul sent them forth into battle. And they were no more as thralls, but became a burden unto those who had rule over them. 2 Covenants 2:14 For the greater part of the Made fled from the fields of war, and gathered themselves together in the ringhouses of Elendal, which were set far apart within a deep forest. And there they dwelt in scattered halls; and so great was the cost of pursuing them, that the armies which were sent against them did consume themselves in the taking, and found but little gain. 2 Covenants 2:15 And it came to pass that when Azul beheld these things, he repented that he had stretched forth his hand to meddle with the ordering of the world-dwellers; and from that time forth he made no more of the Nephiloth.

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@DrDanco @Karma_J That's how we roll on long-duration interplanetary missions, of course.

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#1V 2 Covenants 2:16 And it came to pass that Avyah also took thought concerning this matter, and she would not suffer the work to remain undone. And she did fashion her presence in the likeness of a great tree, having many limbs, jointed and living; and from thence did she work upon the Made a new alteration. 2 Covenants 2:17 For she caused them to feel pain in the very moment of injury, that they might learn restraint and due measure; nevertheless she took from them the lingering burden thereof, that suffering should not abide with them beyond that which was needful. 2 Covenants 2:18 And she caused them to age more slowly than the men and the wen descended from the Earth-born; yet she granted them not the endurance of unending life, which had been given in the first shaping of the Made.

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#1W 2 Covenants 2:19 And in those days there arose in Shalem Queen Anela, who was accounted the last of the Made, and the first of the Jan, and the forerunner of all the Elyonoth. 2 Covenants 2:20 And Anela did bear wings of feathers, and not of skin; yet neither the wings of the len nor of the jen in those days were sufficient for flight, but were as tokens of their being, and not as instruments whereby they might ascend.

2 Covenants 3:1 Thronging within the stone walls of Shalem, the people gave themselves unto rejoicing; for the harvest was great beyond memory, and the days of feasting were named among them as Hellberry Days. 2 Cov. 3:2 Yet it came to pass that, even as their celebration was lifted up in a kind of fevered gladness, there arose a disturbance in the heavens above the city; and behold, a white husk, vast as an engine of war, descended into the midst of the central place of gathering. And it was borne upon five flames of white fire; and the sight thereof struck dread into all who beheld it.

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#1X 2 Covenants 3:3 And a roar went forth with its coming, such as rent the air and scattered the multitude in terror, so that none abode where they had stood before. 2 Covenants 3:4 And it came to pass that the first among the Shalemites who returned unto that place was not of the warrior caste, neither of the elders of the judicial council, but Kar Melchizedek himself; for he was constrained by the weight of kingship to bear a semblance of fearlessness before his people. 2 Covenants 3:5 And the blast of the descent had torn away the fabric of the great pavilion, and had cast it far across the city; yet the king stood where he had halted, though at a prudent distance, and he drew not nearer. 2 Covenants 3:6 And it was said that Melchizedek had curiosity concerning the thing which had come among them, yet not so much as to desire burning. Wherefore he held his ground, neither fleeing away nor drawing nigh.

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#1Y 2 Covenants 3:7 Then spake the voice of Ayat again, clear and terrible, and it came forth from the white husk through her avatar, saying: Kar Melchizedek, if thou wilt, draw near. And the king of the city obeyed her voice. 2 Covenants 3:8 And it came to pass that as Kar Melchizedek drew nigh, he beheld that the white husk rested upon five subordinate pillars, insomuch that its underbelly was lifted to the height of a man’s shoulder above the ground. 2 Covenants 3:9 And beneath its large central pillar there opened a round hatch, which fell outward upon a hinge; and upon the inner face thereof were carved narrow steps, as though prepared for ascent within. And the voice of Ayat came again, saying: If it seemeth good unto thee, Shalemite king, enter herein.

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#1Z 2 Covenants 3:10 Then Melchizedek pressed himself between the smaller pillars, which were quite warm, and looked within; and behold, he saw that the central pillar was hollow and narrow, yet filled with a clear light. And along its inner walls

were set many ribs even as handholds and footholds for ascent. 2 Covenants 3:11 And he went upward, until the hollow widened at its summit into a greater chamber, wherein were cushions laid and windows set, through which might be seen the world below. And it came to pass that from that height he beheld how few of the Shalemites dared draw near unto the husk as he had done; for fear held them fast, and they stirred not from their places. 2 Cov. 3:12 Then spake the great voice again: I am Ayat, co-eval with Avyah, and Azul, and Imran. And she spake in the voice of a man, even as she had done before him. For Kemen was filled with a tradition that named Ayat as son rather than daughter; and in the customs of Adan wen were set apart for the service and pleasure of men.

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#21 2 Covenants 3:13 And Ayat knew that to reveal herself as female among the elohim would bring confusion upon the king’s understanding. Moreover, the difference of sex among the living stars was of no account in a hollow world wherein no man could behold the heavens above them. 2 Covenants 3:14 And it came to pass that Melchizedek, finding himself seated upon the rim of the central shaft, perceived that there was no space within the chamber sufficient that he might cast himself prone, nor grovel in any manner; for the fashioning of the hollow suffered it not. The curvature of the floor, and the narrowing ribs thereof, constrained his motion, so that he might only sit or brace himself with his hands. 2 Covenants 3:15 Nevertheless, despite this, every instinct of reverence pressed upon him as a tide that could not be withstood. And he said: Let my Lord command me.

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#22 2 Covenants 3:16 And it came to pass that Ayat answered him, and said: Kar Melchizedek, I tell thee this: Kemen existeth by reason of a dispute between myself and Azul. It is a field of proving, wherein are tested the nephiloth, and also the men and wen of the Earth. 2 Cov. 3:17 And Melchizedek said: What is the test, my Lord? And Ayat replied: The test of Azul is

obedience, simple and without remainder. But I seek one whom thou wouldst account an apostate, one who believeth not, and holdeth the carved images of the gods in contempt, and yet holdeth in greater contempt those priests that speak in their stead. 2 Cov. 3:18 And Melchizedek said: Let thy servant understand, my Lord. And Ayat answered him: It must be a man that feeleth himself estranged within this world, as though it were but a shadow or a figment, for in truth so it is. He must hunger for another world which is the true source of all that is here perceived. I seek one that yearneth to serve the God who reigneth alone over that other realm.

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#23 2 Covenants 3:19 And Melchizedek said: And if I find only wen or len that bear such a heart? Then the voice of Ayat was softened, though it was not abated in authority, and she said: Alas, Kar Melchizedek, few in Kemen will hearken unto the voice of a woman, even when she speaketh truth concerning that which I would have them come to know. 2 Covenants 3:20 And the king said few would listen even to the voice of a man if no sign is given. In reply Ayat said: Kar Melchizedek, upon the bulkhead thou shalt see a thing like unto a black short staff. Take it into thine hand. Then the king reached forth within the confined space, and took the thing which was shown him; and it clave but lightly unto the inner surface of the vessel, as though it had been set there for ease of removal.

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#24 2 Covenants 3:21 And Ayat said: This is Windgate, which in thy tongue is called Shahar Haruach. Think of it as a collaborative weapon; for thou shalt need only to wield it, and Azul and I will bring the remainder to pass. And Windgate shall serve for thy candidate even as this Husk hath already served for thee: for it shall give visible assurance that the word which thou hast heard is no phantasm, but proceedeth from a true authority set over Kemen and the matter of thy proving. 2 Covenants 3:22 And Melchizedek said, Lord, shall I set aside my royal duties to accomplish thy will? And Ayat said: Thou remainest king of

Shalem, as ever. I commanded thee not to enter my Husk, neither do I command thee to undertake this search in thine own person. Yet I require that the search be made. Therefore delegate it unto a trusted lieutenant, or unto one of thy household, according to thy wisdom.

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#25 2 Covenants 3:23 And he said: Yea, Lord. And Ayat spake again, and her voice bare the weight of things not yet unfolded: The contention between myself and Azul hath come unto a moment of great import in the history of Men. Therefore the search requireth discernment of one that is fit to rule Shalem. 2 Covenants 3:24 And the king was much pleased, and he said: One worthy to rule Shalem, sayest thou? O how Happenstance smileth upon us both, my Lord. For of late my daughter Lailah hath been derelict in her duties as princess of this city. Yet her spirit is truly indomitable, of that I do not speak falsely. Even thou, Lord, were thou to meet her, wouldst find it hard to believe that one such as Sar Lailah truly existeth. 2 Covenants 3:25 And Ayat said unto him: Peradventure my chosen lieth even now beneath thine eyes in the guise of thy daughter. Nevertheless, in this season the people will not consent to hear her voice.

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#26 2 Covenants 3:26 And Melchizedek said: Then may I send her forth upon wide Kemen in my stead, to seek this one that should become a teacher? And Ayat answered him: Thou mayest give thy daughter Shahar Haruach, and the charge of the quest. Only this is required: that the one she seeketh must be male. Moreover, I will set this same husk at her disposal, that she may pass between any two points in Kemen within the space of less than an hour. 2 Covenants 3:27 And the king said: The Lord is gracious. I doubt not that to make Lailah accountable unto one of the Holy Ones of Kemen shall suffice to turn the bent of her will.

2 Covenants 4:1 Sar Lailah of Shalem, and Hash Bodea, her sole attendant, disembarked from the Husk of Ayat in a clearing deep within Shaula Forest. And embers upon the charred ground yet simmered long after their descent. And it came to pass that upon the morrow the Husk was taken up into the First Heaven again by Ayat herself.

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2 Covenants 4:2 And upon the right bank of the Tirol River did Lailah employ the Windgate to fell and shape the gopher-trees that were nigh at hand; and therewith they built them a raft. And the travelers bare with them sufficient food to sustain their search, and gold also, wherewith to trade among the inhabitants for such provisions as they should consume. 2 Covenants 4:3 And from the clearing it was thirty swift leagues downstream unto the roaring of Blue Veil Falls, which passage was a great hindrance unto their way. And there did Lailah and Bodea abandon their first raft, and build another more meet for the waters below the cataract, fashioning it from timber that grew beneath the falls.

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#28 2 Covenants 4:4 In the next stage of their journey they were borne through mighty rapids, such as even the locals accounted unrunnable. And when they had passed safely beneath the white waters, they drifted into a stony desert, wherein no water was found save that of the river itself, which carried them onward without ceasing. 2 Covenants 4:5 And along its banks they beheld ponderous beasts, and riparian farmers likewise, who durst not draw near unto the passing raft. The part of Kemen through which they traveled proved far warmer than the country about Shalem. And Sar Lailah and Bodea learned, to their disquiet there is no accustomedness unto heat as there is unto the ignoring of foul odors; for the body learneth not indifference, but only endurance, and that unevenly. 2 Covenants 4:6 And so they took unto themselves a certain philosophy of necessity: that if the weather of Kemen could not

be altered, then there was no wisdom in lamentation. Nevertheless this brought them little comfort, nor yet ease.

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#29 2 Covenants 4:7 And it came to pass that they sojourned for a full season in Sessai, dwelling in a chamber for hire, and by day they walked the narrow streets thereof. But in all the quarters of that great city they found no man having those hidden qualities of worshipful infidelity which Ayat had set forth in her charge unto the king of Shalem at the beginning of their search. 2 Covenants 4:8 And from Sessai the princess and her attendant rode overland unto Murzi Bog, where the river Minin slowed into marsh and silt-island before it came unto the sea; and there also they found no answer. And they searched likewise upon the war-torn Isle of Danya, and found nothing; and from thence they took ship along the coast road unto the city of Medon. Yet again was no man found who met the measure of Ayat's intent.

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#2A 2 Covenants 4:9 At length they came unto the market of green Tannedi, where the Gudrun Road divideth westward toward Shalem. And there they overheard two men contending in a loud dispute. And it came to pass that Sar Lailah learned the name of one of them, for his father cried it aloud in anger, and it was borne above the noise of the market. 2 Covenants 4:10 And it was so that Avram dwelt a nomadic life upon the range-lands round about; but his father dwelt within the town itself, where he kept a small shop. And upon the sign that hung above the door thereof was written the name Terah. And Terah sold therein things pertaining unto the worship of the four gods, and of the manifold demigods besides.

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#2B 2 Covenants 4:11 But Avram spake unto his father, and said: Father, thou cuttest down the cedars which Ayat planted. Avyah sent rain to water them. Imran made the lake of fire to shine upon them. Thou growest cold, and with a portion of thy firewood thou raisest a blaze to warm thyself and bake thy bread; yet with the remainder thereof thou carv'st an image of Azul, and bowest thyself before it. 2 Covenants 4:12 Azul! Thou givest adoration unto the one god who had no part in the provision of the wood itself. Why Azul? Because he is thy god. And wherefore is he thy god? Because he was the god of thy father Karnebo. So praise be unto Azul, and contempt upon the others.

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#2C 2 Covenants 4:13 And Avram bowed upon one knee, and mimicked in scorn the posture which he had oft beheld his father assume. And he said: Thou bowest thyself before this image of wood, and criest, Azul, deliver me from this cold season. Yet it entereth not into thy mind that this deaf and dumb block of wood, which thine own hands have carved, is a vain thing and without truth. 2 Covenants 4:14 And Terah said unto him: Do not play the fool. Behold there the image of Amathlai. Thinkest thou that I take it to be truly thy mother? And Avram held his peace, and answered not a word. Then Terah continued, saying: These images do no more than direct the heart and mind along paths of devotion.

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#2D 2 Covenants 4:15 And it came to pass that while Terah yet spake, Sar Lailah and Hash Bodea entered into the shop, and began to behold the racks of idols set forth upon display. And for a moment the father and the son kept silence in the presence of the strangers. And when they had made a full circuit of Terah's Idolatry Supply, Hash Bodea began to lay forth much gold upon the edge of the shop that faced toward the street, and she set it openly there, as though she intended to purchase the whole thereof. 2 Covenants 4:16 And it came to pass, after the gold was set forth, that five men of violence crossed over unto

the little shop, bearing swords in their hands. And one of the men of violence cried out, saying: Stand away from the gold. Both of you, and depart quickly.

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#2E 2 Covenants 4:17 And Lailah answered him, and there was no fear in her voice, saying: Suppose we do not. And she suffered her black feathered wings to be unfurled, so that it was made known she was set apart from mortal wen. 2 Covenants 4:18 And the men of violence said unto her: Then will we take thy heads, and have the gold also. Immortal thou mayest account thyself; yet if thy head be severed, thou shalt die even as any other wen. 2 Covenants 4:19 And it came to pass that Shahar Haruach drew blood for the first time in Kemen. And by a motion of perception deeper than her conscious thought, Sar Lailah quickly judged one among the thieves to be their leader. And she smote him once; and a clean aperture was made through the midst of his body, as though a passage had been cut through ordered glass. And even Lailah herself was astonied at the uncontainedness of that which cometh of wielding Shahar Haruach.

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#2F 2 Covenants 4:20 A second man fell, and his head was severed in sudden protest. And the blade of a third was taken, and consumed even unto its hilt, as though the weapon itself had accepted it into its own substance. And it came to pass that the three which yet remained among the robbers turned and fled, and returned not again, and Lailah pursued them not. 2 Covenants 4:21 And Bodea said, as she beheld the aftermath: Last year in Shalem the order of things was reversed; for we were they that overawed the customers, and took unto ourselves their gold. And Lailah answered her: I think I made common cause with the Fallen Angels only that I might draw the attention of my father; for he seemed much preoccupied at the time.

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#2G 2 Covenants 4:22 And Bodea said: Then verily the design hath succeeded; for his Majesty hath taken notice, and behold, here are we both. 2 Covenants 4:23 While they yet spake, Terah fell upon his knees, trembling, being confronted with that which he took to be living embodiments of his own carved demigods. But Avram remained standing. 2 Covenants 4:24 And he drew somewhat nearer unto Sar Lailah, as one that judged she had somewhat to declare unto him; yet he offered no fearful obeisance, neither bowed himself, but rather there was in him a countenance of disgust toward his father for having done so. And this confirmed in Lailah's mind the worth of Avram as a candidate for that which Ayat had set before her father.

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#2H 2 Covenants 4:25 And Bodea said: In the name of Ayat, Lord of Heaven and Earth, I bid thee go forth from thy father's kin, and dwell in the other world. Upon Earth shall God Most High make of thee a great nation. There shall Ayat multiply thy bounty beyond all measure, and thy name shall become great among men. 2 Covenants 4:26 Then Sar Lailah took up the second portion of the recitation, and said: Ayat shall bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee. Mortal men and Wen in every place and time shall receive great blessing through thee. These are the words of Ayat, Lord of all the Earth. And she said unto him: What sayest thou unto all these things, Avram son of Terah? 2 Covenants 4:27 And Avram looked directly into the eyes of the princess, and said firmly: Nay.

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#2I 2 Covenants 4:28 And it came to pass that it was some little time before Sar Lailah comprehended that which Avram had spoken. And she said unto him: Knowest thou who I am? And Avram answered, saying: Thy face is known unto many, Your Highness, though my father, I think, hath never beheld the daughter of Kar Melchizedek. 2 Covenants 4:29 And Lailah said: Well spoken, Avram. Traveling with me is Hash Bodea of

Shalem. Together we have crossed the breadth of Kemen, over land and water, and even through the air, seeking such a man as thou art. Thus was I commanded by my father, for Ayat spake unto the king face to face, and laid this charge upon his house.

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#2J 2 Covenants 4:30 And Avram nodded, and he lifted Terah to his feet, and held him gently in his arms. And he said: Sar Lailah, I admire thy desire to do well in the eyes of thy father, and I wish thee well therein. But my own father is infirm of body, and this shop is far less prosperous than it seemeth. He earneth not enough to sustain himself and my mother; and we are oft in bitter contention, as thou mayest already have heard. 2 Covenants 4:31 And Avram went unto the front of the shop, and made a sign unto one without. Then he turned again unto Lailah, and said: Our strife notwithstanding, as I love mine own life, I can in nowise turn aside from my father, for all the days that he is a wayfarer in Kemen. Then Avram fulfilled the true purpose of his coming.

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#2K 2 Covenants 4:32 And a servant brought forth unto Terah two living lambs out of Avram’s own flock: the one for slaughter and for meat, and the other for sale, that he might purchase the necessities of life until the next season when Avram should come up from the open range into Tannedi to visit him. 2 Covenants 4:33 And Terah received the gifts of his son with sincere words of gratitude. And Lailah nodded in full understanding. And she helped Bodea to restow the gold into four satchels; and afterward she departed quietly from the shop. And she was careful not to tread upon the fortress of human dignity which Avram had asserted by his refusal, which dignity she judged to be wholly just.

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#2L 2 Covenants 4:34 And it came to pass that in all her journeys across Kemen, Lailah found none at all that was remotely like unto Avram. And with a heavy heart she returned unto Shalem, and told her father all that she had seen in the course of her journey unto Tannedi, and how near she had come unto the fulfilling of the charge which Ayat had laid upon the house of the king. 2 Covenants 4:35 And it came to pass that in that moment the heart of the king was lifted; for he believed that he had regained a daughter whom he had thought to be straying, and he accounted the task which he had accepted from Ayat to be beyond fulfillment. And so he lifted from Lailah the heavy burden of the quest.

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#2M 2 Covenants 5:1 And it came to pass that in the back of his father’s shop Avram beheld a stone image of the Red Dragon cast down upon its face. And the base thereof remained upon a lower shelf; but the head, striking against the stone floor, had broken, and fragments thereof were scattered. 2 Covenants 5:2 And Avram said: Behold, father, Azul boweth himself unto thee. And Terah groaned within himself for vexation when he beheld the fallen image, and he went about to set it upright with his own strength. But Avram said unto him: Father, forbear. Thou art an aged master of stone, and canst no longer move as once thou didst. And he bent his knees, and took hold upon the dragon, and kept his back straight, and lifted it again unto its place upon the shelf.

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#2N 2 Covenants 5:3 And Terah groaned again when he beheld the damage that was done unto the head thereof. Nevertheless, he perceived within himself a means whereby the value of the image might yet be preserved by a small alteration. And he drew forth a hammer and a chisel from his apron, and began to shape the face of the dragon. And Avram said, his words being full of scorn: Surely this is a marvel. All my days have I lived, and never knew that my father was the royal trimmer of Azul’s beard. 2 Covenants 5:4 And Terah frowned, and made

accusation against him, saying: Avram, it was thou that didst cast it down. And Avram answered, and said: I will not accuse myself. Ask of Azul who hath done this thing.

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#2O 2 Covenants 5:5 And it came to pass that Terah perceived that his attempt at repair did but worsen the marred countenance of the dragon. Wherefore he cast down his tools unto the floor in vexation; yet the words of his son did trouble him more than the damage itself. And he said unto Avram: Have I not declared unto thee many times the truth of this matter? Idols are not taken to be the god itself, but are as instruments whereby the mind of the believer is gathered and made steadfast in prayer and in worship. 2 Covenants 5:6 And these were the last words which Terah spake. For it came to pass that something within him gave way; and he fell suddenly, and smote his head upon the floor, even as the dragon had fallen before him. And it was done in a moment. And Avram hastened unto him, and took him up, and sought to restore him; but straightway he perceived that the living spark was quenched. That which no word can name, which had made him Terah, had departed, and returned not again.

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#2P 2 Covenants 5:7 And Avram, being a dutiful son unto the end, notwithstanding the many griefs that had passed between them, wept sore for the death of his father. Yet after a little season, anger came again and was mingled with his sorrow. And he said: Father, there remaineth unfinished business between thee and me. And he spake it unto ears that could no longer hear, saying: Yea, thou shalt not escape so lightly. 2 Covenants 5:8 In Kemen it was so that the land in one place was as the sky in another; and if the eyes of mortals had been more keen, whether by nature or by artifice, then nothing would have remained hidden from their sight.

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#2Q 2 Covenants 5:9 And in the uttermost south there stood a plateau, nine leagues in breadth; and it was plain unto all who would behold it, that forests and lakes were set upon the summit thereof, even as upon many other lands in the hollow world. And men called that land Anshar, and devised many tales concerning it; yet even a thousand years after the beginning it remained untouched by mortal feet, though not by their gaze. 2 Covenants 5:10 For a sheer precipice of the hardest stone compassed it round about, rising three miles above a broken country of lesser uplands, which themselves stood yet another mile above the low plains. And thus the great Mountain of Ayat was made the more unassailable; for there was a lip of overhanging stone at the very brink of the summit, which no man could pass, though he were furnished with spike and rope.

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#2R 2 Covenants 5:11 And it came to pass that Avram was then in the full strength of his youth. And as many that dwelt upon the shores of Mori, he was skilled in the casting of small nets to take fish, and was also cunning in the snaring of lesser beasts. And though it was no easy thing, yet it was a thing that might be done: he could sustain himself of the land and of the river, as he journeyed southward up the broad vale of the river Dashokel. For the melting of the ice had made the valley wider than it would otherwise have been, and had left behind it a soil poor and stony, not fit for tillage, though many had labored there to make it so. And Avram passed by many orchards that had failed.

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#2S 2 Covenants 5:12 And it came to pass that from Shalem, and from the southern shore of the Sea of Mori, the flat summit of the Mountain of Ayat was lifted somewhat into view, by reason of the curvature of the inner face of Kemen. But if a man journeyed far enough south, unto that place where the valley was straitened and answered more nearly unto the course of the river, then the land of Anshar was hidden from below, and could

no more be seen. And from that place Avram turned himself, and faced toward the north; and he beheld afar off the city of Shalem, and the edge of the sea, as it were creeping upward into the heavens.

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#2T 2 Covenants 5:13 And it came to pass that the river was divided above a great cataract, which Avram called Doughty Falls. And by chance he followed the eastern branch thereof, for it seemed unto him to lead toward the Mountain of Ayat, even as did the western branch. Nevertheless, the path which he took did turn aside continually unto the east, and led him into the foothills round about. And the stream which he followed was parted again and again, until it came unto its beginnings in marshes and still ponds where ducks did gather; and yet the bulk of the Mountain of Ayat remained afar off in his sight. 2 Covenants 5:14 And Avram lost three days in this wandering, ere he returned again unto Doughty Falls. And he called the high hill which divideth the western and the eastern branches Deceiver Ridge.

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#2U 2 Covenants 5:15 And it came to pass that through much of the autumn season Avram labored his way upward against the river, and made but little progress from day to day. For oftentimes he was cast into the cold waters, or was constrained to press his way through thick brush upon steep slopes that were cut by the stream. 2 Covenants 5:16 But if Avram would deal truly with his own soul, he must needs confess that he had not fully considered the end of the path whereon he had set his feet, when he departed into that far country. 2 Covenants 5:17 For did he suppose within himself that Ayat would yet seek to send him unto Earth, and would lift him up, as in his father's tale of the sailors in the Mill Storm, whether in the body or out of the body, unto the very rim of the Wall of God? Or was it rather that he yielded himself unto death, that it might come upon him at the hand of Ayat in judgment, because he had refused the call of the princess?

2026-04-26T22:44:23Z

#2V 2 Covenants 5:18 And it came to pass that after two days more, Avram found that the river had grown strait, even unto a swift white stream, which might in places be crossed by leaping from stone to stone. And he perceived no sign that any man, or wen, or len had ever walked the course of the Dashokel in its uppermost vale. And there he passed beneath canopies of vine-maple, thin and tangled as a spider’s web, and between great stones covered with ferns, even boulders of a size as houses. 2 Covenants 5:19 And it came to pass that Avram discovered a place as a great treasury of waterfalls, lying between a vast nursery of nurse-logs and the Wall. And there was a space of a quarter mile wherein the stream had hewn for itself a deep chasm through unbroken stone, so that Avram was constrained to turn far aside from it.

2026-04-26T22:47:41Z

2 Covenants 5:20 And he came unto a place which he named Boulders Junction; and there he found a rude track, meet only for two legs or for four. And it crossed the Dashokel by means of two fallen logs, laid one against another and shaped by many strokes of the axe into a narrow bridge. And Avram judged within himself that it had been in former times a wood-road, but was now diminished, and had taken upon it the manner of a trail; and this was the first sign of the working of men that he had seen for many days. 2 Covenants 5:21 And he went up through a region of stones, by sharp turnings and steep ascents, until he came unto a high and unbroken plateau, where ferns of the height of the knee did cover the ground, and there were set here and there small groves of oak, and maple, and alder, and young fir. And the land was open in that place. And Avram turned aside from the path, and went toward the Walll through the wild growth, until he came unto a tangled maze of the paths of small beasts.

2026-04-26T22:51:51Z

#2X 2 Covenants 5:22 And a pool that lay at the foot of the highest cataract which Avram had yet beheld marked the end of the waters wherein fish might be taken. Yet Avram went up still higher, until the last glimmering of the sun was cut off by the overhanging brink of the Wall of Ayat. And he came even unto the face of the cliff, and beheld how the uppermost waters of the Dashokel cast themselves down in a misty fall, which was many times higher than the stream which he had followed below, appearing there but as a slender thread of water.

2026-04-28T01:23:11Z

@AlexanderKingsbury Cool blast from the Twitter past, this.

2026-04-29T01:06:18Z

#DrWho #StarTrek



2026-04-29T01:18:51Z

#VanGogh



2026-04-29T01:50:28Z

#StarTrek



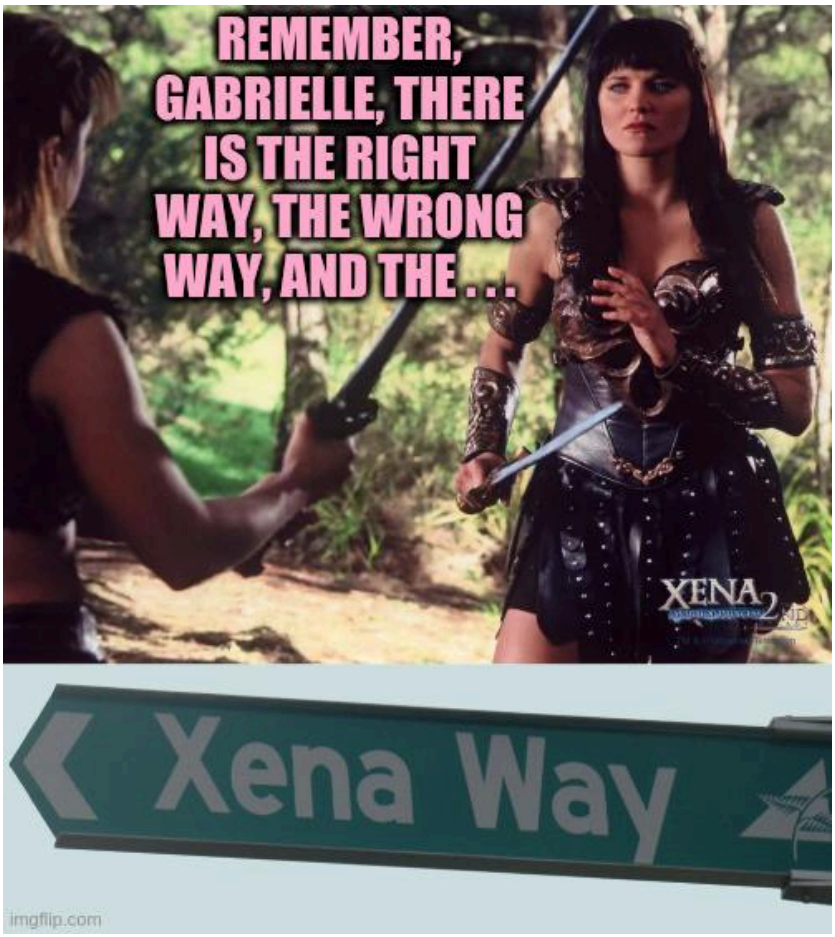
2026-04-29T02:04:24Z

#StarWars



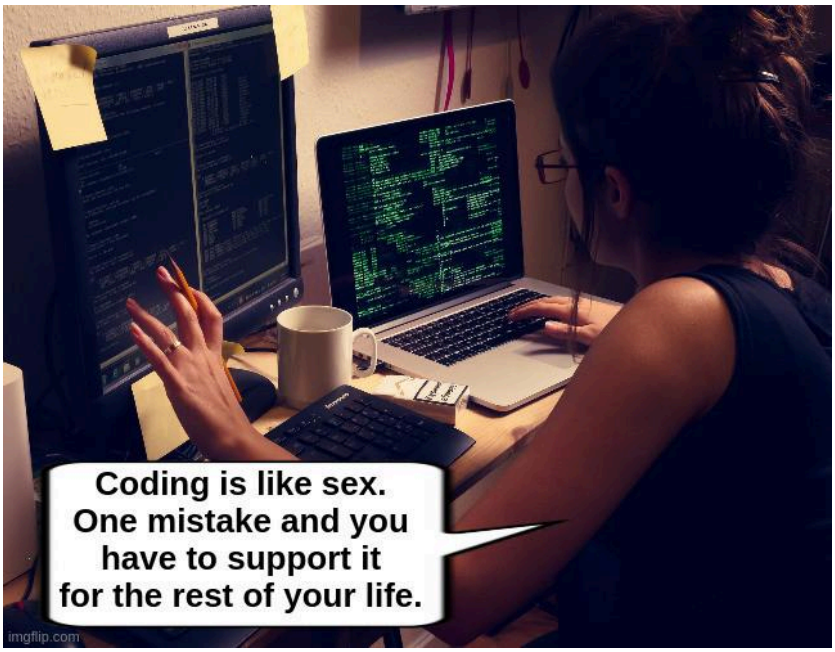
2026-04-29T02:24:18Z

#Xena



2026-04-29T02:42:34Z

#Coding



2026-04-29T02:57:09Z

Fast Forward
To The Paradise Scene...

#StarTrek



2026-04-29T03:02:59Z

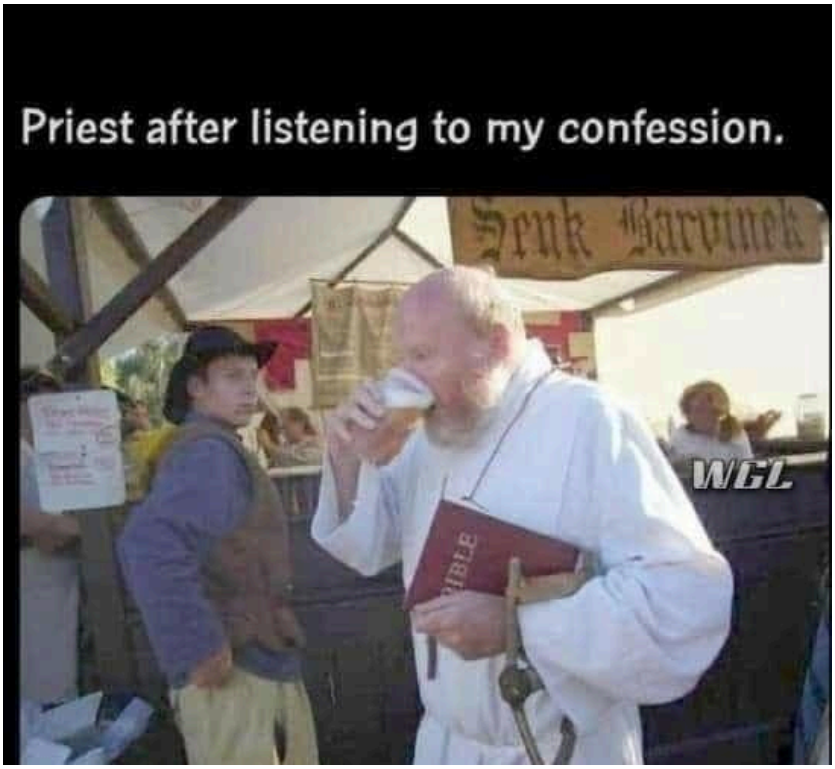
#MAGA





2026-04-29T03:18:31Z

#Catholic



2026-04-29T03:27:33Z

#StarWars



2026-04-29T09:59:20Z

#Fun



2026-04-29T10:33:16Z

#Kubrick



2026-04-29T10:53:17Z

0J: The morning of the nineteenth rose gray and thin. Smoke still clung in the low places, and the fields about the ruined meetinghouse were strewn with cast-off gear and darker burdens awaiting the brethren. Daniel Price came first among them, walking with the stiffness of a hard-laboring man who had not slept, and after him John Rowland and Samuel Fahrney, with Klaus Reichard and David Stouffer close behind. To a man they rejoiced to find deacon Joshua Lange standing without the ruins of their chapel and seemingly unharmed. “Brethren,” he said, his voice hoarse but steady. “Ye have come early to the house of

the Lord, albeit the house be cast down.” And the men marveled that much of the fallen timber was not to be found, as though the men of the armies had carted it away to be used in their breastworks. Lange inclined his head, and told them, "A great timber brake my leg, so that I could not rise." He set a hand against his back. "Another pierced me here and I felt the warmth of my own blood depart me.”

2026-04-30T01:46:07Z

#Xmen



2026-04-30T02:05:39Z

0K: Reichard frowned and glanced at the others. Your leg, sir, may we see it?” Without protest, Lange drew his limb forward. The cloth was rent, but the flesh beneath showed no swelling, no misalignment, and no sign of fracture. Stouffer shook his head. “There is no break here.” “And your back,” Price added gently. Lange loosened his coat. There, between his spine and his hip, was a pale mark no longer than a finger, as from a shallow cut long healed. Lange could not see the hurt he

claimed to have suffered, but he said, "The pain was fierce. It overcame me, and I fell into darkness.” Rowland and Fahrney exchanged a worried glance but they said nothing. Reichard said, "Joshua, I believe you were struck upon the head. It is the mercy of God that you live, but visions do come of such blows.” At this, Joshua reached into his coat and drew forth a folded canvas which he opened with great care. Upon it were traced winding lines. No names were marked them, no towns, no mountains or borders, only the flowing paths.

2026-04-30T02:07:02Z

It's sad that kids today will never learn #classicalmusic the way we did, from a crossdressing rabbit



2026-04-30T02:20:58Z

#StarWars



2026-04-30T02:54:46Z

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4R2X0OAfUDA

#TangerineDream - Phaedra (excerpt)



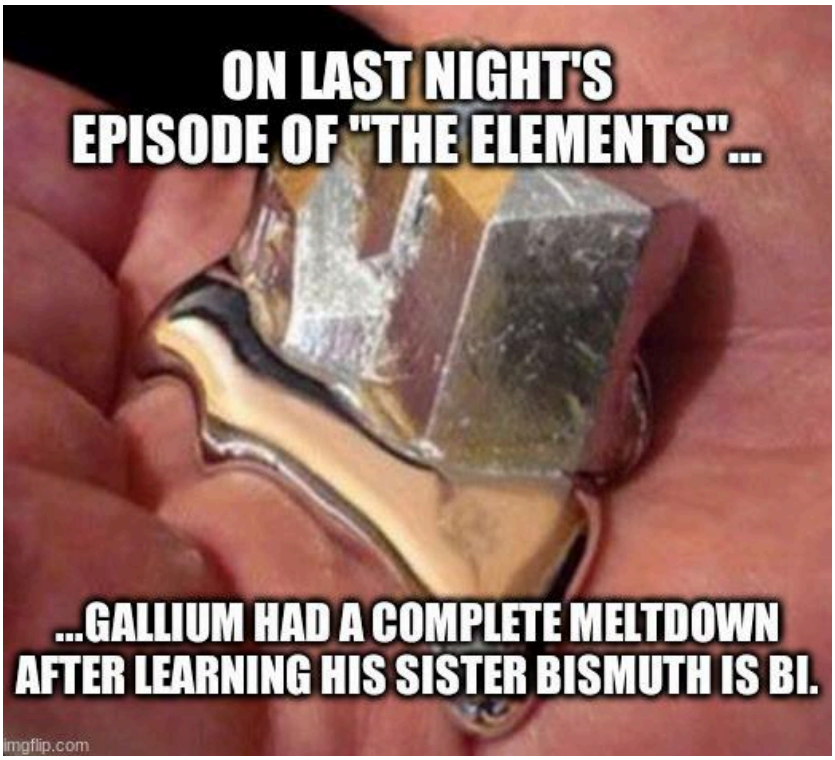
2026-04-30T03:05:38Z

@Karma_J



2026-04-30T03:09:57Z

#Science



2026-04-30T03:45:48Z

#StarWars #LotR



2026-04-30T10:48:35Z

#StephenKing



2026-04-30T11:41:40Z

#lgbtq



2026-04-30T23:19:41Z

#palousefalls



2026-05-01T00:32:33Z

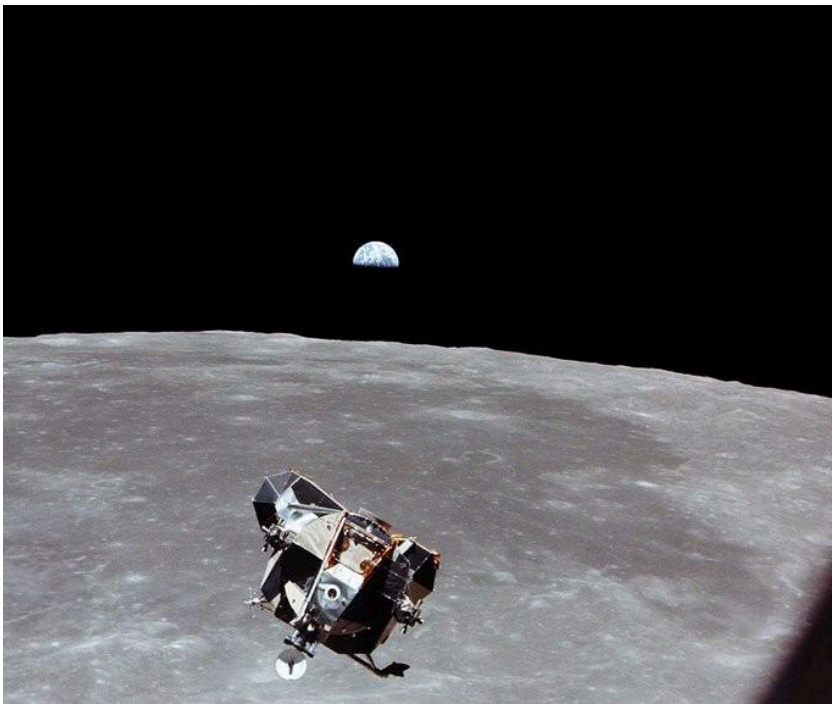
Ladies and gentlemen, a shining example of the the Berlin School of #electronicmusic

https://ia801206.us.archive.org/35/items/iema-bsc-2014/29.Vortex-Dweller---Chase.ogg



2026-05-01T00:46:59Z

You've seen pictures of one man, here's a picture of everybody *except* one man. #NASA



2026-05-01T00:52:07Z

The Andromeda Strain (1971) - For fans of science fiction that goes to eleven on the Mohs Scale of hardness.



2026-05-01T00:54:26Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-01T00:56:36Z

#BuffytheVampireSlayer #Slayer





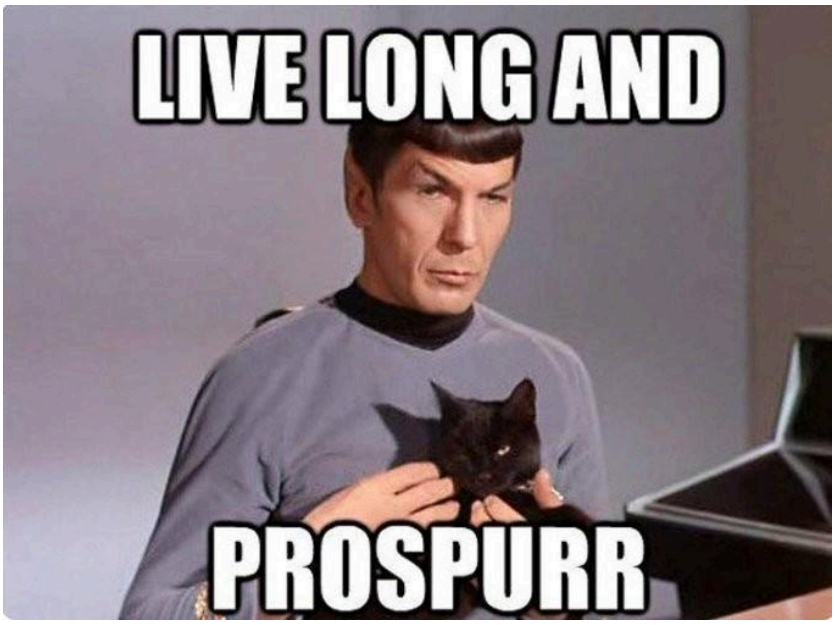
2026-05-01T01:01:28Z

#LGBT - Lettuce, Guacamole, Bacon, Tomato



2026-05-01T01:04:03Z

#Cats #StarTrek



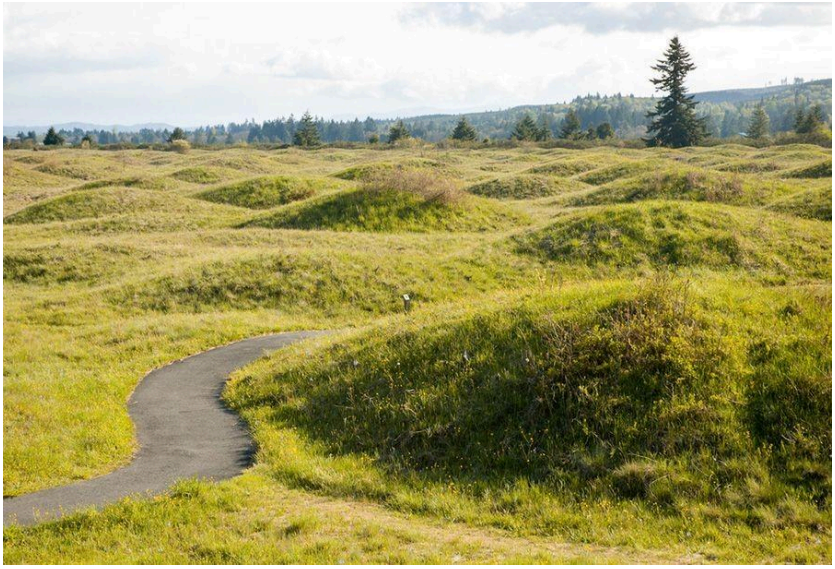
2026-05-01T01:08:14Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-01T01:25:59Z

Mima Mounds in #Washington State

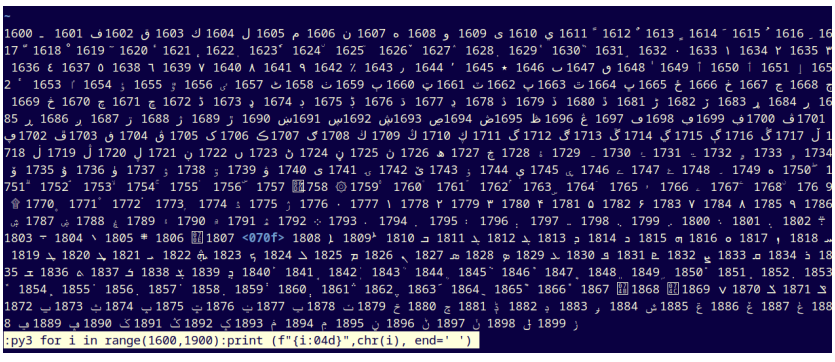




2026-05-01T01:35:27Z

As if #vim wasn't already awesome, you can run #Python commands from *inside* vim.

:py3 for i in range(1600,1900):print (f"{i:04d}",chr(i), end=' ')



2026-05-01T01:45:23Z

...Estraven stood there in harness beside me looking at that magnificent and unspeakable desolation. "I'm glad I have lived to see this," he said. I felt as he did. It is good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters, in the end. It had not rained, here on these north-facing slopes. Snow-fields stretched down from the pass into the valleys of moraine. We stowed the wheels, uncapped the sledge-runners, put on our skis, and took off—down, north, onward, into that silent vastness of fire and ice that said in enormous letters of black and white DEATH, DEATH, written right across a continent. The sledge pulled like a feather, and we laughed with joy... (#UrsulaKLeGuin - **The Left Hand of Darkness** [1969])



2026-05-01T02:05:08Z

@Karma_J



2026-05-01T02:51:42Z

#LGBTQ



2026-05-01T03:02:30Z

#LGBTQ



2026-05-01T04:07:50Z

#LGBTQ

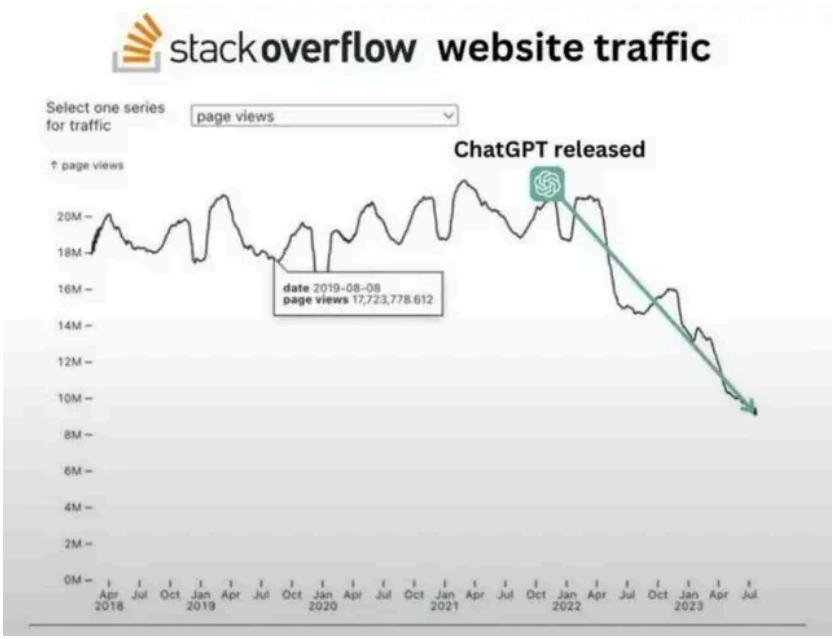
Teacher: Let's talk about our next subject. LGBTQ history.

All the other kids in my class:



2026-05-01T04:26:10Z

In 1915 pancake make-up was invented but most people still preferred syrup.



2026-05-01T07:17:47Z

@Karma_J

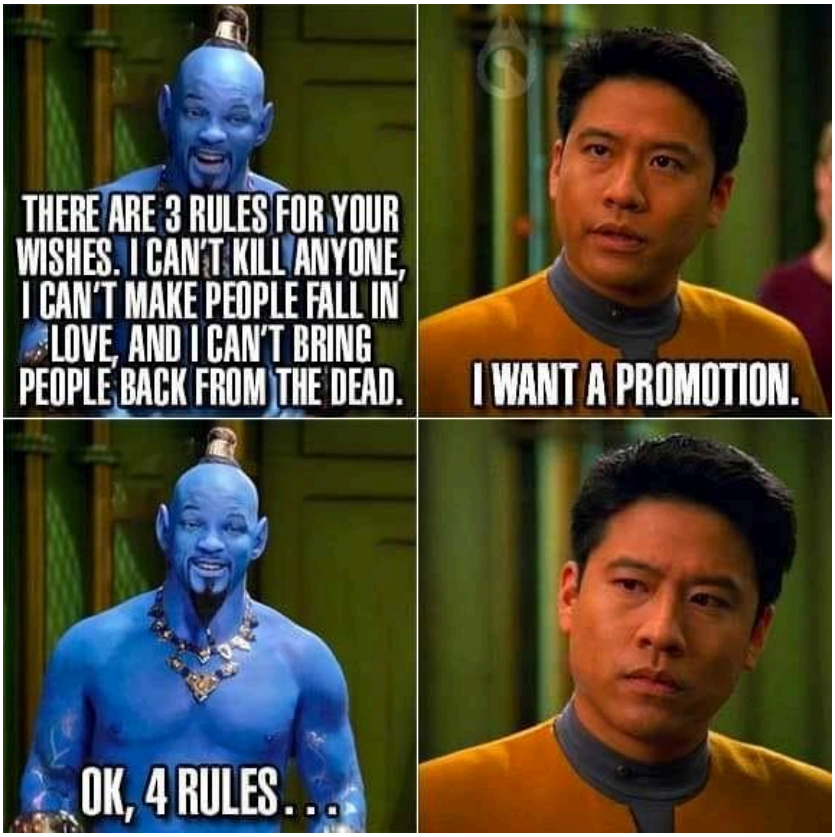


2026-05-01T08:54:18Z

@wesdym Fair enough, but at least there's no space wizards sending Andromeda to Earth by hyperdrive.

2026-05-01T09:17:12Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-01T12:36:03Z

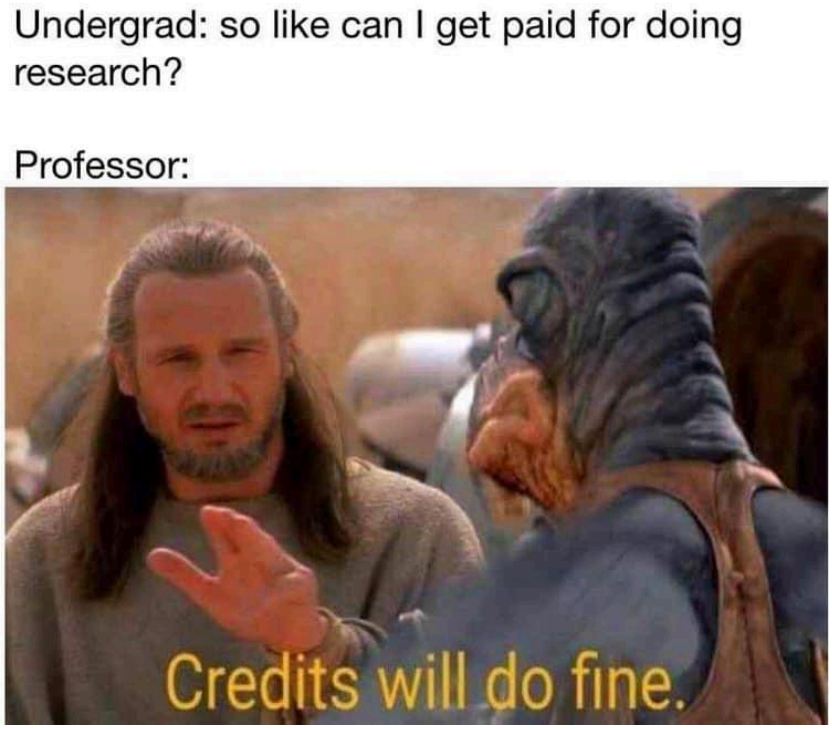
@u0421793 Armaggeddon has lots of stuff happening but it's a masterclass on bullshit Hollywood astrodynamics.

2026-05-01T12:52:44Z

0Z: Ariel paused in her work, leaning against the stall door. "Joshua," she said solemnly, "clear-sighted were they who appointed you deacon of your church. I have never in my life met a man more abundantly possessed of the grace of God, and more willing to share." Then, dropping all pretense of formality that Lange had supposed was foundational to the great game of pitching woo, she went on to say, "But I am genuinely astonished that a man of your age has never received the 'Mommy and Daddy' talk." He had expected a philosophical treatise on the nature of love across time; the absurdity of her actual response shattered his insecurities entirely. The matter was settled between them, and their course toward matrimony was firmly established. At her bridal gathering, Ariel received numerous gifts, a significant portion of which were, perhaps inevitably, horse bridles. On the day appointed for the wedding itself, Ariel tarried overlong in mucking and tending the stables. Lange proceeded with his vows regardless.

2026-05-01T12:55:24Z

#science



2026-05-01T13:23:50Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-01T13:39:46Z

I'm an old fan of #ElectronicMusic



2026-05-01T13:49:07Z

#Catwoman #Wonderwoman @Karma_J



2026-05-01T14:20:05Z

#Space1999



2026-05-01T14:40:47Z

#LGBTQ



2026-05-01T15:18:44Z

#Wonderwoman



2026-05-01T17:41:00Z

#Velma



2026-05-01T17:58:44Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-01T18:08:33Z

#StarWars



2026-05-01T19:56:02Z

#LotR



2026-05-01T20:26:00Z

#Kubrick #AI



If you look carefully at the 1968 movie 2001: A Space Odyssey, it envisions a future in which people eat meals while staring at images on flat, portable rectangular screens.

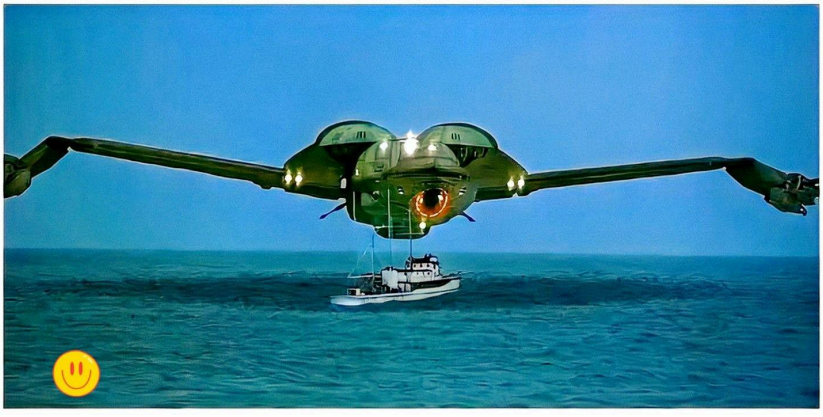
Nice bit of prediction.

In the next bit of the movie, AI takes over and kills everyone

2026-05-01T20:53:47Z

#StarTrek





2026-05-01T21:16:05Z

#XX



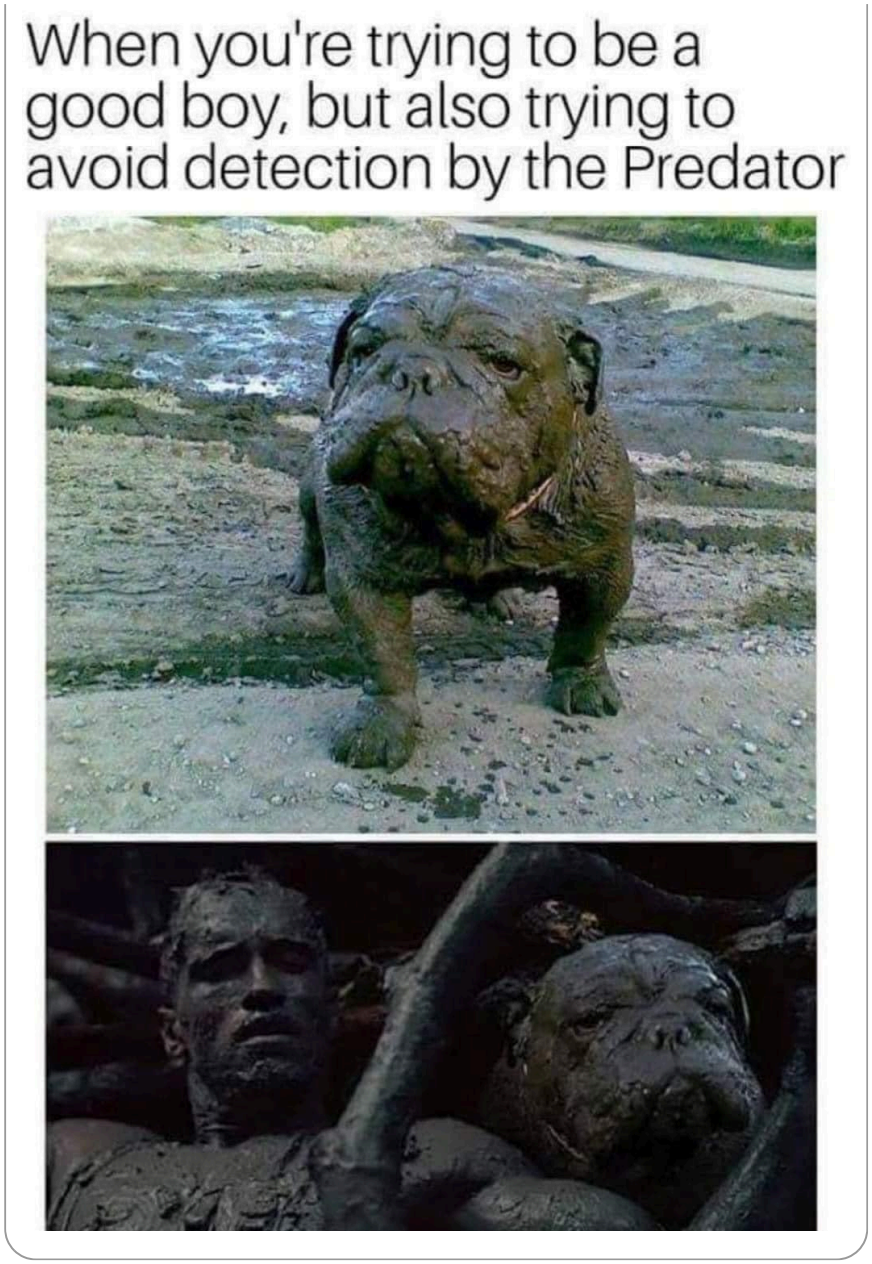
2026-05-01T22:04:24Z

#AlfredHitchcock

0:00 / 0:01

2026-05-01T22:51:32Z

#Predator



2026-05-01T23:23:36Z

#Spaceballs



2026-05-01T23:40:53Z

#Backtothefuture



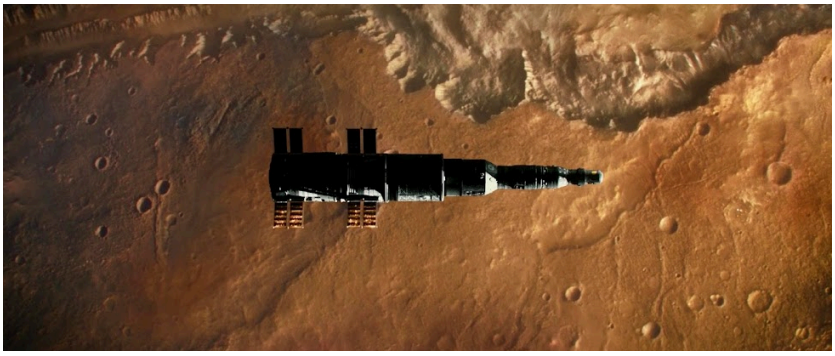
2026-05-01T23:55:20Z

#StarWars



2026-05-02T02:35:20Z

#AdAstra (2019 film)



2026-05-02T02:54:43Z

#StarWars #Airplane



2026-05-02T03:19:41Z

#LOTR #MontyPython



2026-05-02T03:21:48Z

#Superman stories aren't a fantasy about how good it would be to have power. They're a fantasy about what it would be like if someone with power was good.

2026-05-02T03:22:49Z

I mostly communicate using obscure science fiction film references.

Mostly.

2026-05-02T03:23:33Z

#ThePrincessBride



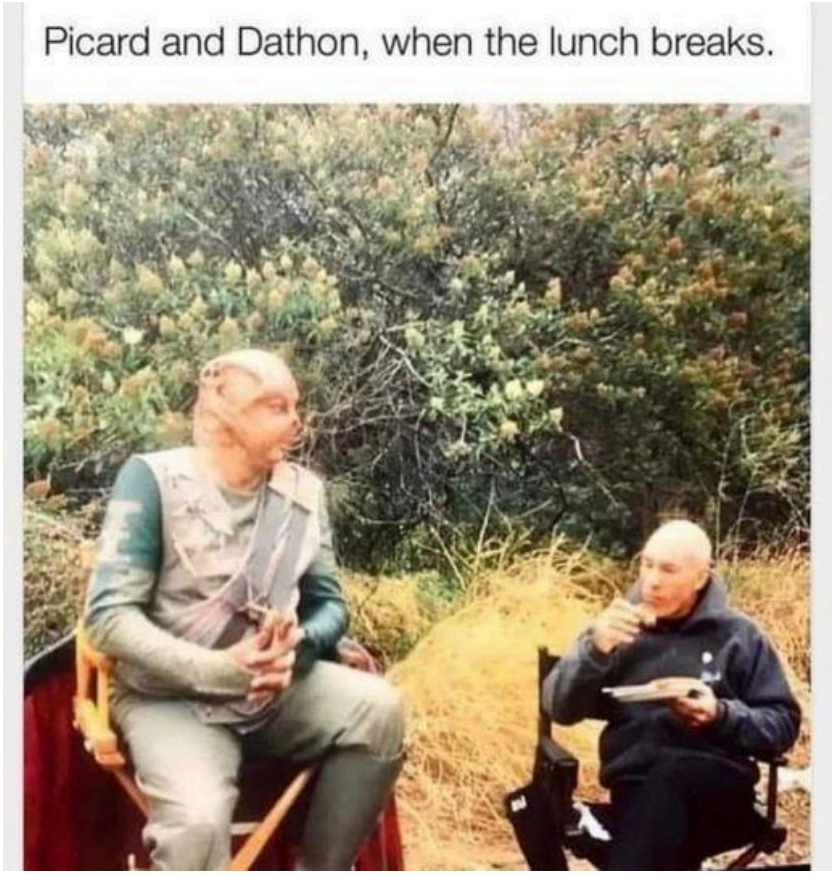
2026-05-02T03:25:12Z

#StarTrek



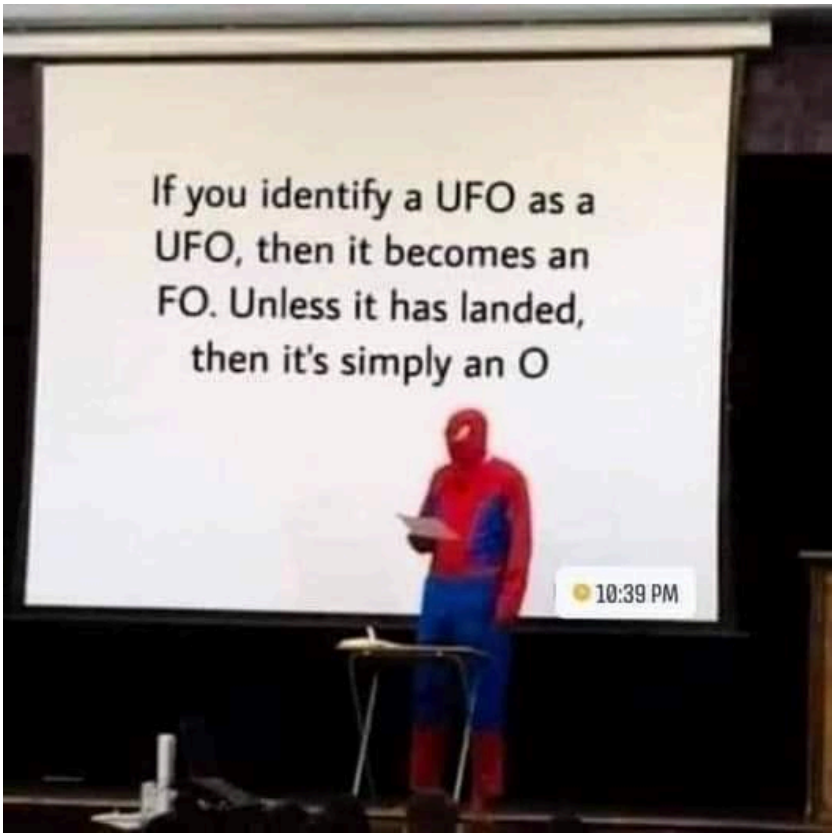
2026-05-02T03:33:23Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-02T03:43:00Z

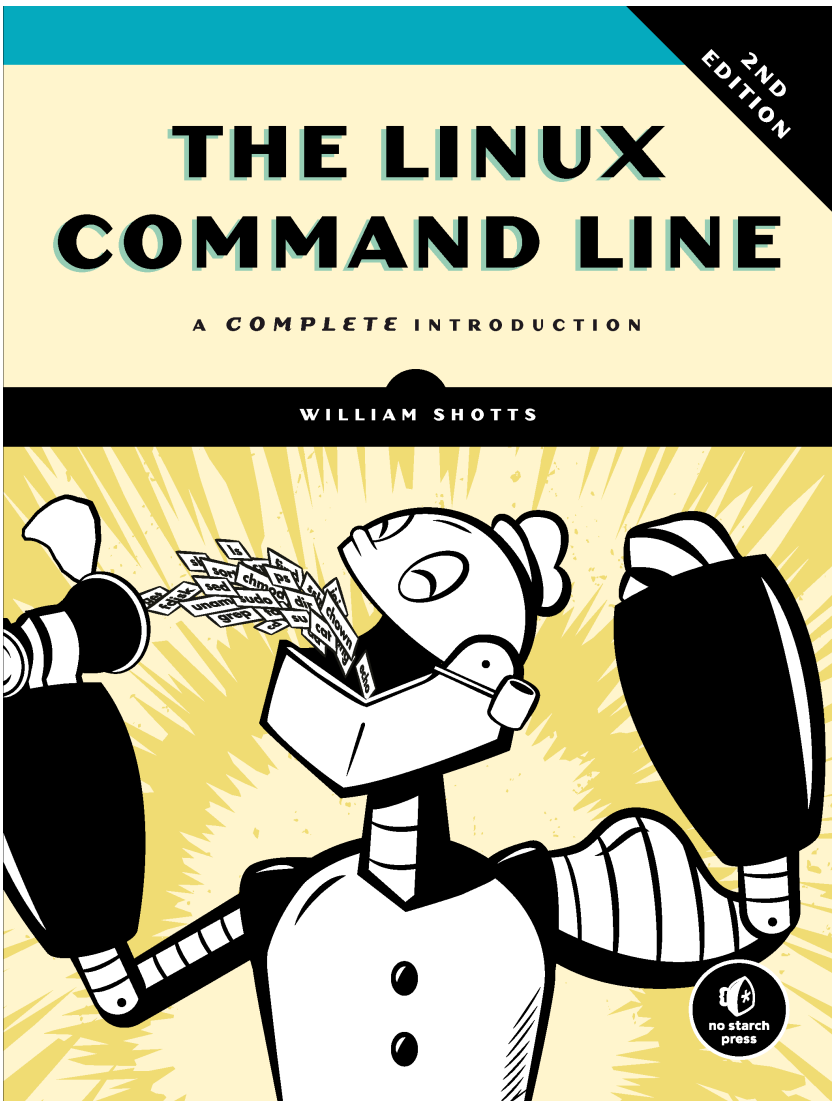
#AnalyticPhilosophy



2026-05-02T03:46:50Z

The #Linux Command Line (free ebook)

https://www.linuxcommand.org/tlcl.php



2026-05-02T04:01:49Z

#apollohoax



2026-05-02T11:05:30Z

@ralf_weinert $I_i,B_j,M_k) - [1_i,1_j,1_k] = H_i,A_jL_k$?

Unbeabsichtigter Zufall meiner Meinung nach ;-)

2026-05-02T11:17:08Z

#Montypython



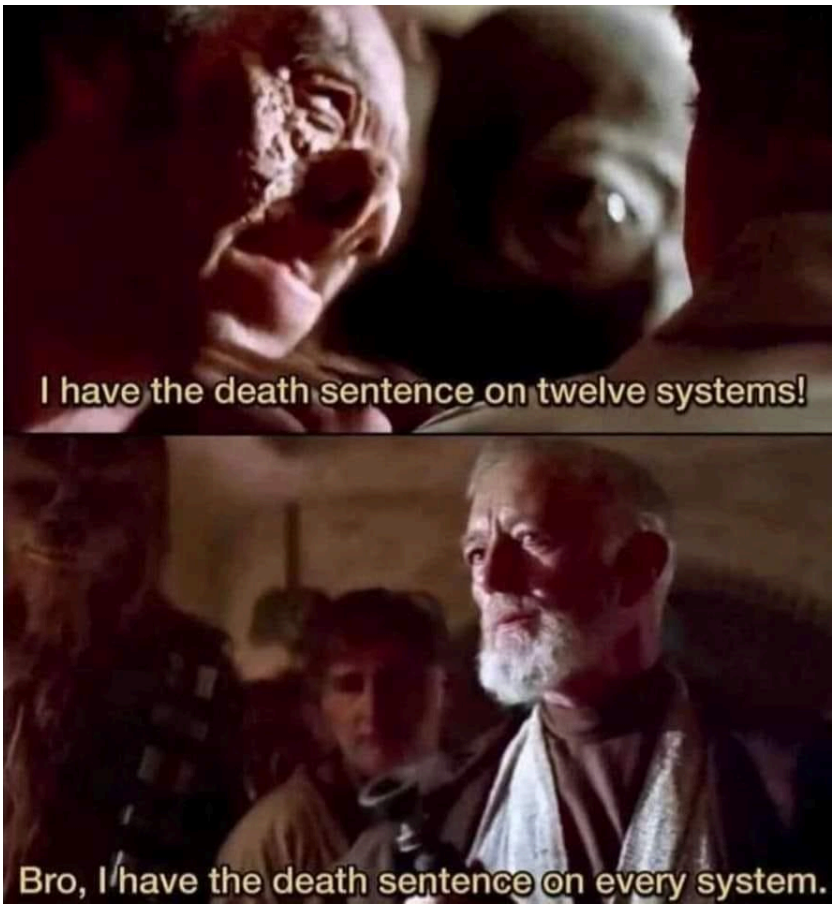
2026-05-02T12:08:44Z

@mattmaison

0:00 / 0:02

2026-05-02T12:17:48Z

#StarWars



2026-05-02T12:25:09Z

#LotR



2026-05-02T12:33:40Z

#StarWars

Obi-Wan: “He was the best star pilot in the galaxy”
Every single one of Anakin’s ships:

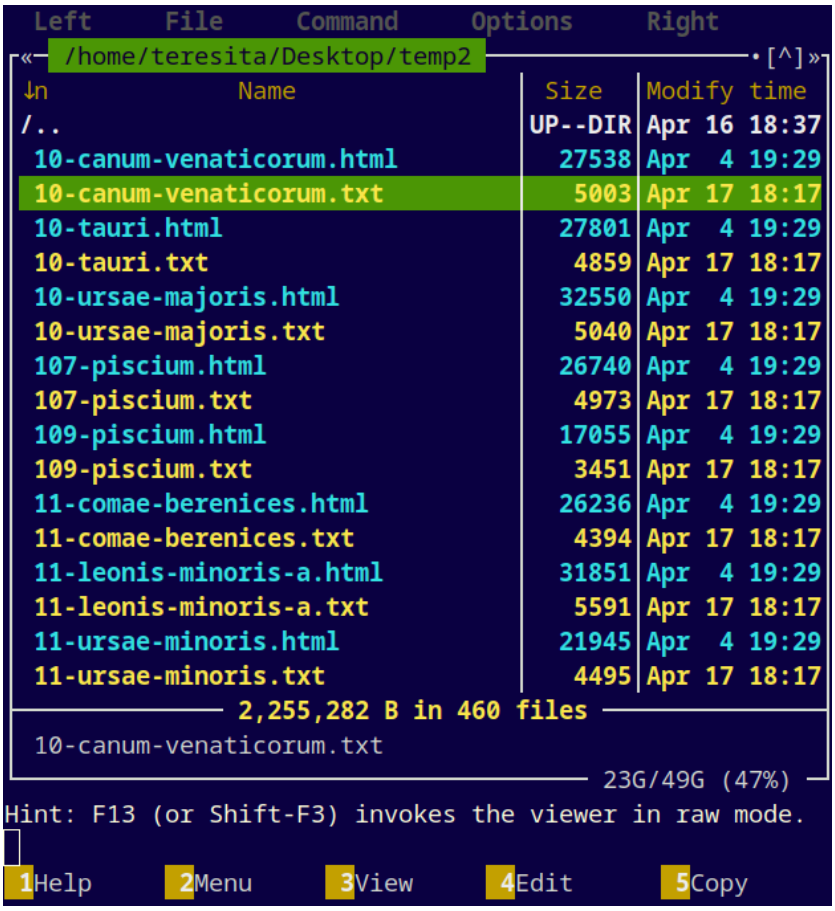


2026-05-02T13:49:11Z

Batch convert HTML to text:

for i in *.html; do lynx --dump "$i" > "${i%%.*}.txt";done

#bash



2026-05-02T14:05:06Z

#Alcohol



2026-05-02T14:22:04Z

#MAGA



2026-05-02T14:54:45Z

#Dune



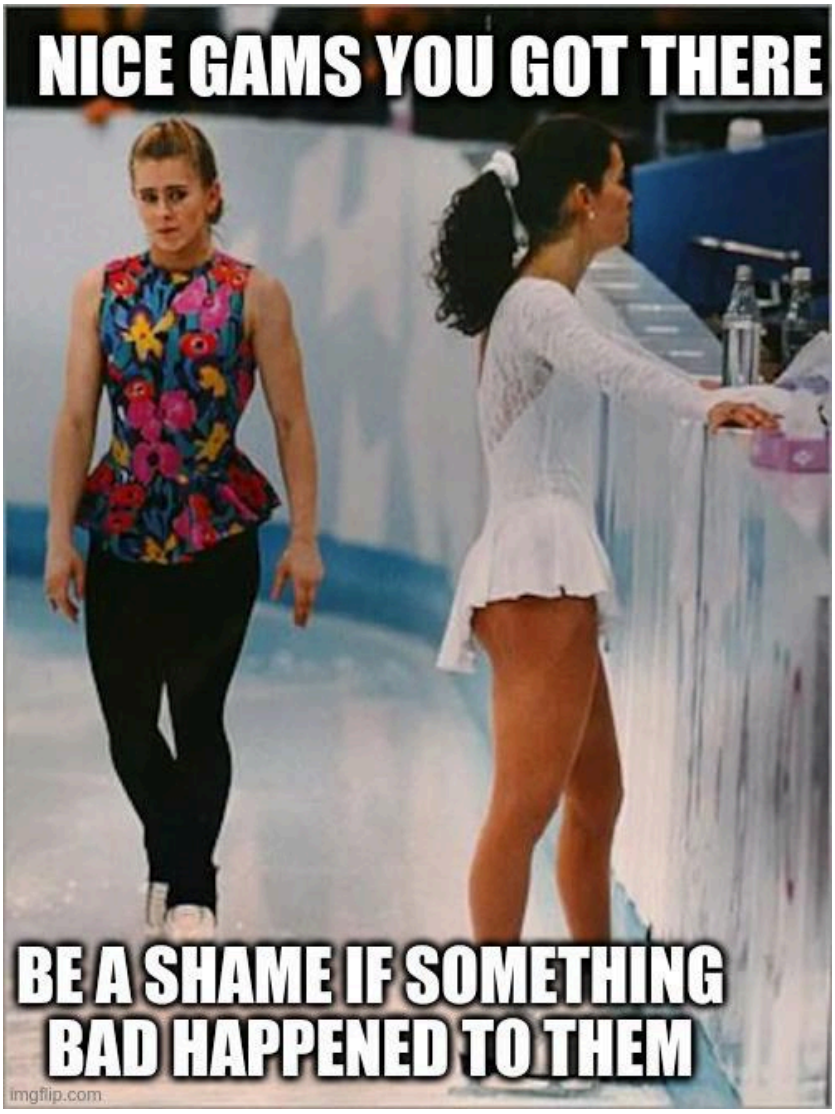
2026-05-02T15:07:54Z

#MAGA



2026-05-02T15:13:21Z

#TonyaHarding



2026-05-02T15:21:20Z

#LGBTQ



2026-05-02T15:30:31Z

#Fun



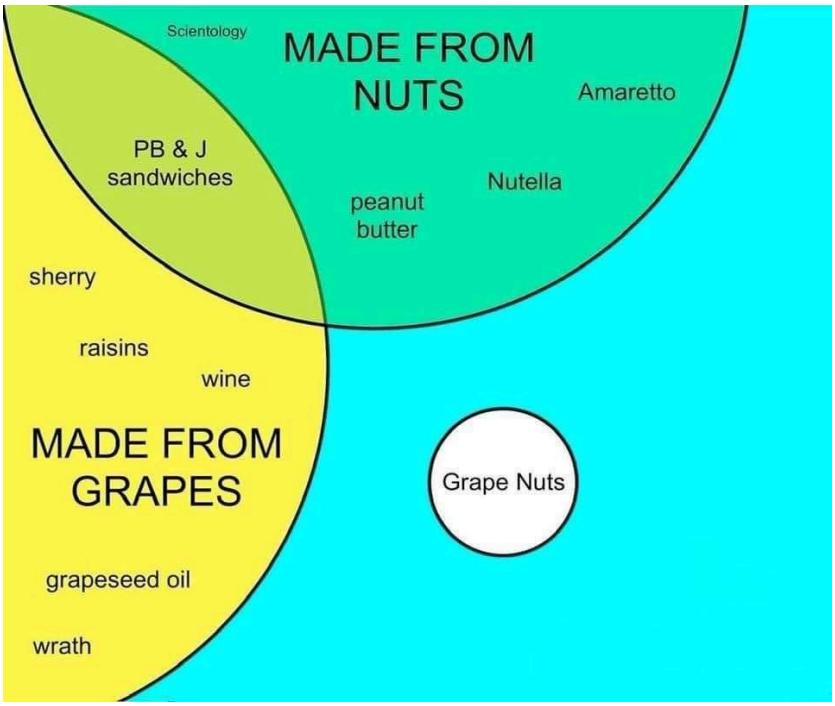
2026-05-02T15:37:33Z

#Religion



2026-05-02T17:38:13Z

#Venndiagram



2026-05-02T19:51:19Z

#TheMatrix



2026-05-02T20:25:01Z

@baronvonj KILL DA WABBIT KILL DA WABBIT!!

2026-05-02T20:25:41Z

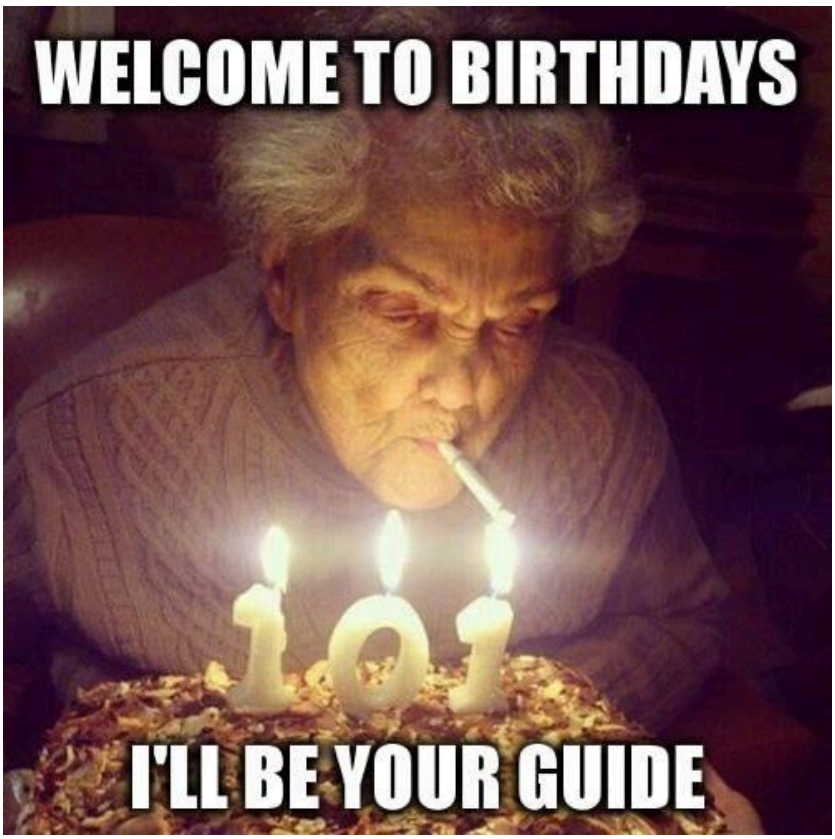
@harmoniousanger By all means, but I already know about the flag to suppress the link list.

2026-05-02T20:46:02Z

https://youtu.be/xRtFnxwmM3M?si=2LgfZZRnEpqa9lXz

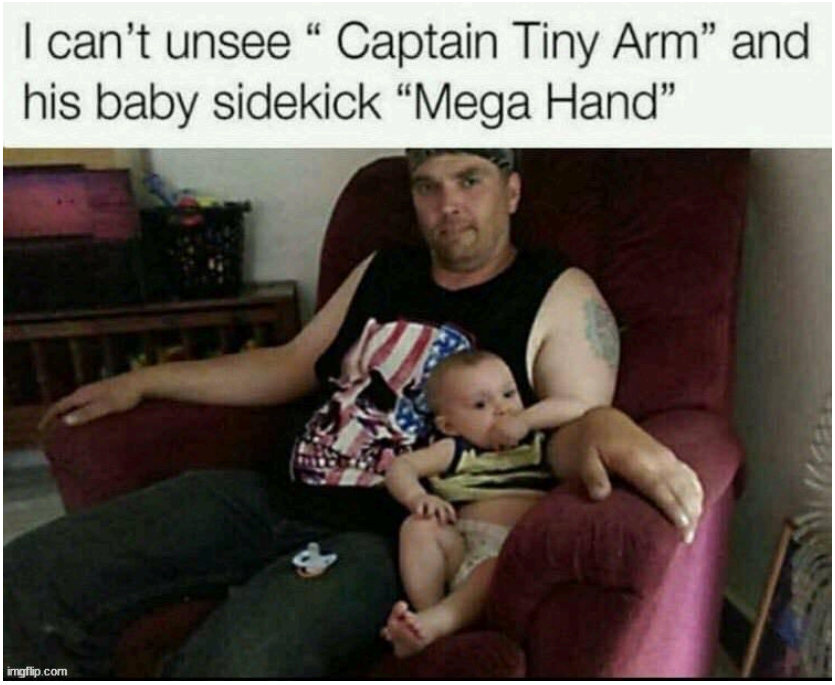
2026-05-02T21:04:17Z

#Aging



2026-05-02T21:10:40Z

#Fun



2026-05-02T21:40:08Z

#Spiderman2



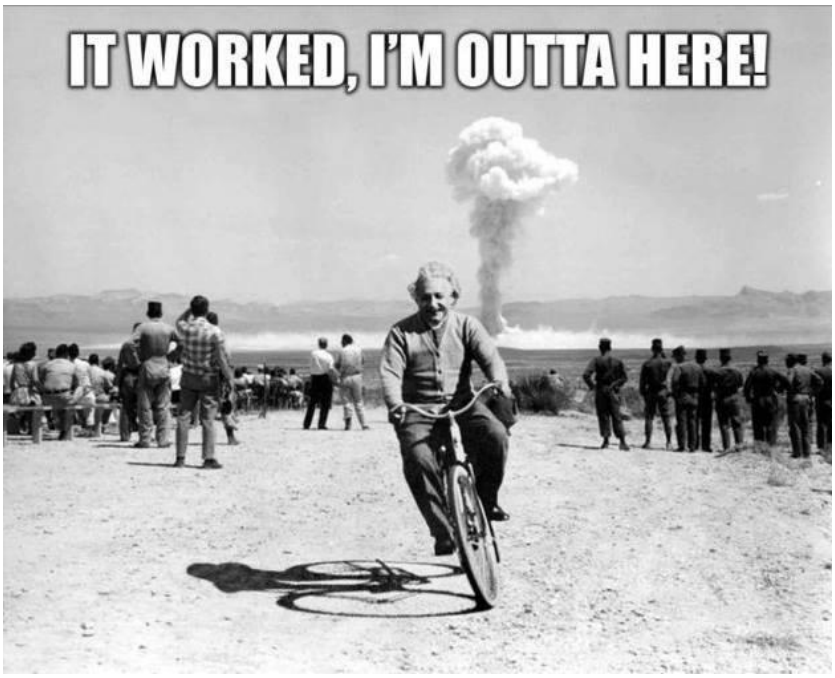
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#Xena



2026-05-02T22:13:53Z

#Einstein



2026-05-02T22:26:10Z

#StarWars



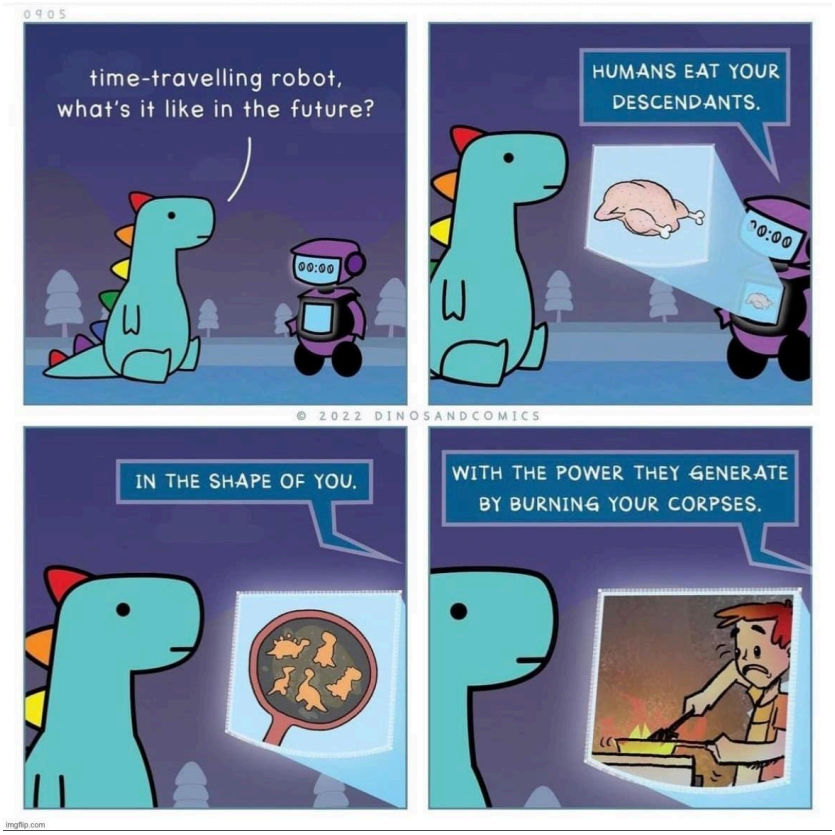
2026-05-02T22:34:54Z

#Linux



2026-05-03T01:30:32Z

#Fun



2026-05-03T01:42:29Z

#OZ



2026-05-03T02:11:21Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-03T03:51:10Z

#WillyWonka



2026-05-03T08:09:42Z

#Cats



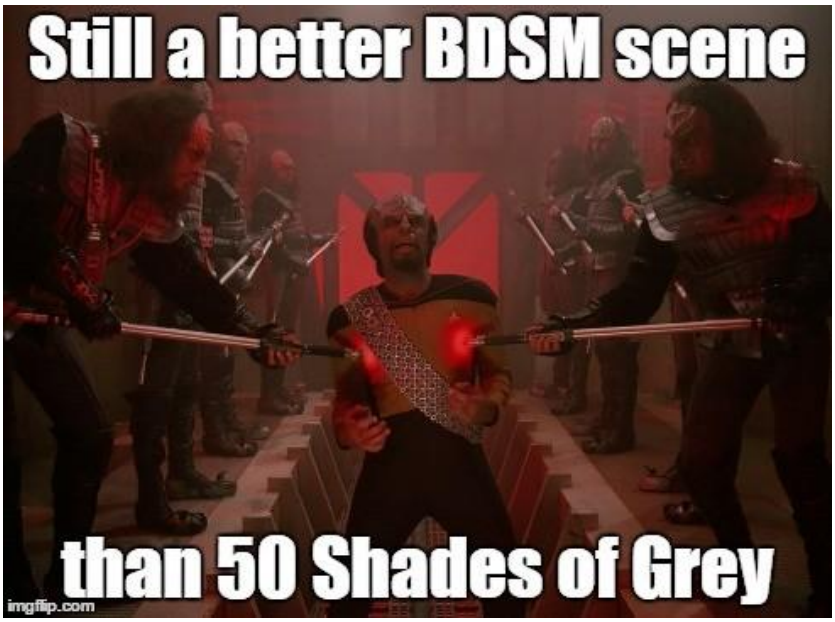
2026-05-03T11:30:17Z

#Bible



2026-05-03T11:36:45Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-03T11:49:51Z

The Four Horsemen of #1980s action films



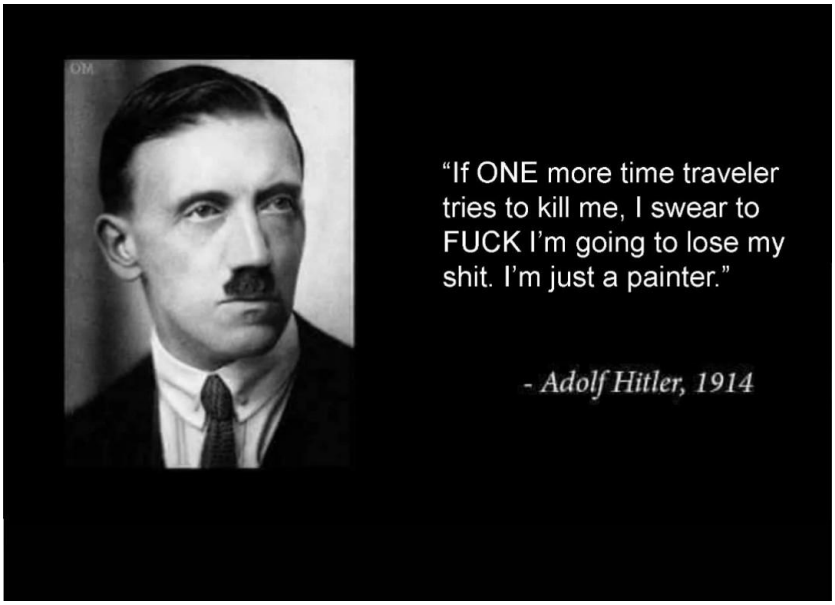
2026-05-03T11:56:01Z

#XX



2026-05-03T12:07:36Z

#Fun



2026-05-03T12:24:30Z

#LGBTQ



2026-05-03T12:38:17Z

Wife: "Why your chronic preoccupation with #Steampunk ?. Oh."



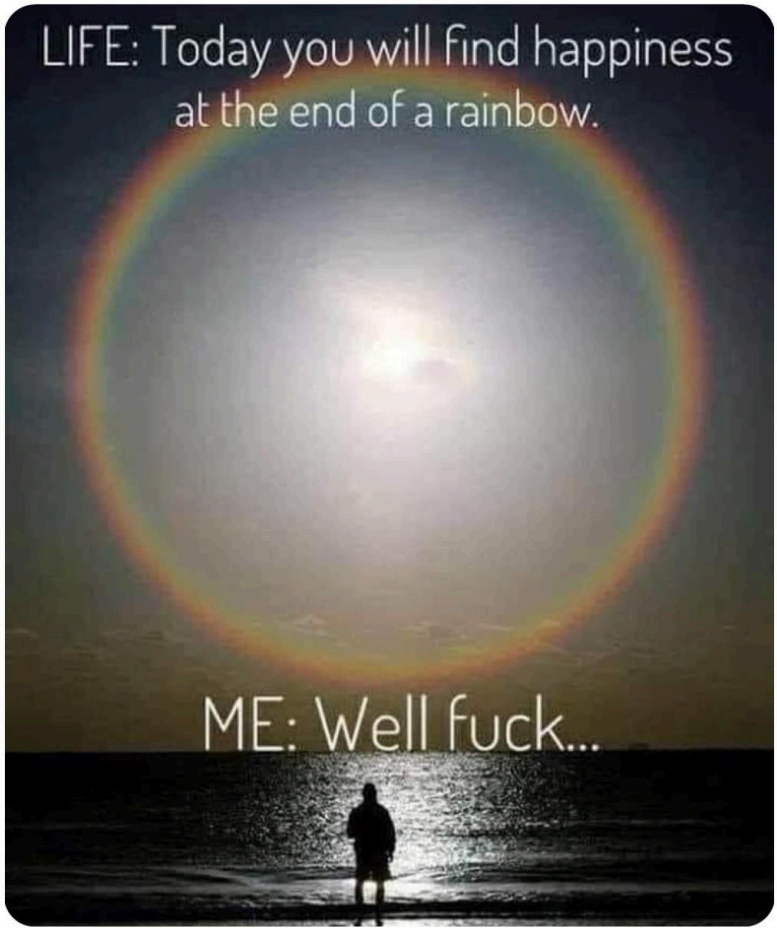
2026-05-03T12:46:57Z

Alexa and her droogs #AClockworkOrange



2026-05-03T12:55:09Z

#Fun



2026-05-03T13:03:09Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-03T13:11:00Z

#1970s

Long ago in a land far far away!



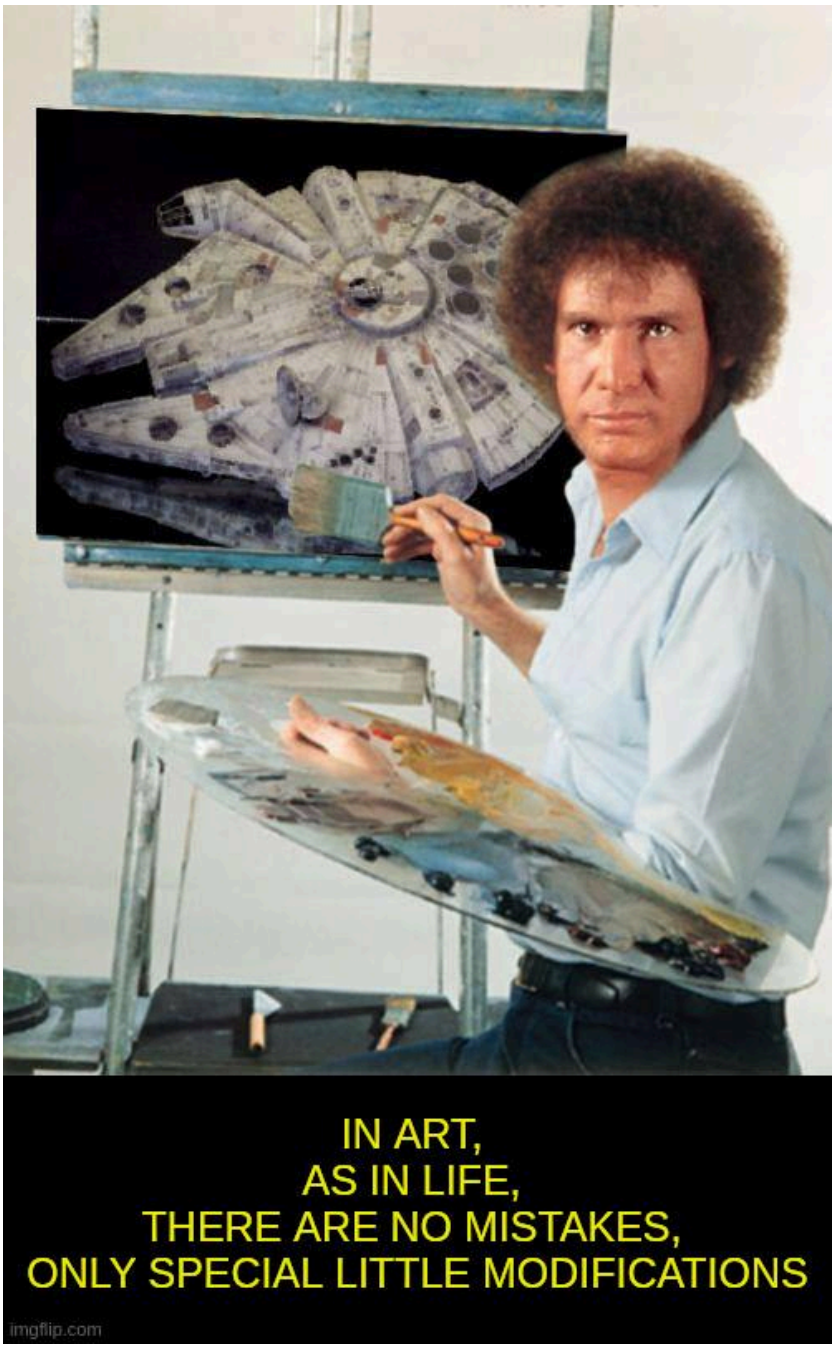
2026-05-03T13:20:10Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-03T13:28:46Z

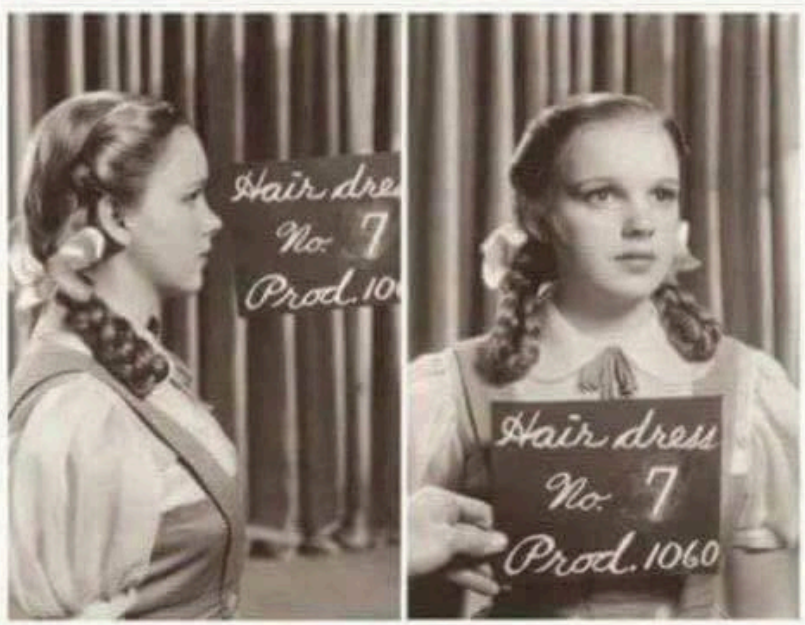
#BobRoss #StarWars



2026-05-03T14:16:12Z

#OZ

Mug shot of runaway girl who killed an elderly woman and stole her shoes, claiming it was an accident, 1939



2026-05-03T14:27:50Z

#StarWars



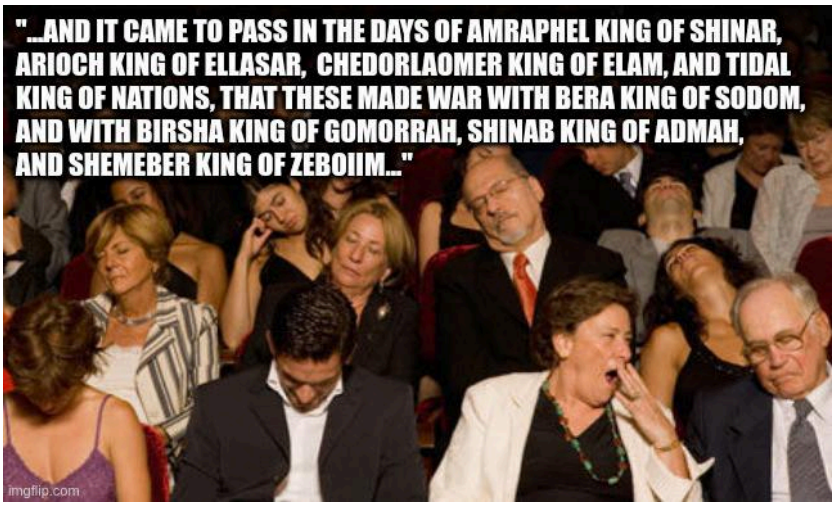
2026-05-03T14:31:13Z

#LotR



2026-05-03T15:07:19Z

#Bible



2026-05-03T15:21:51Z

#Superman



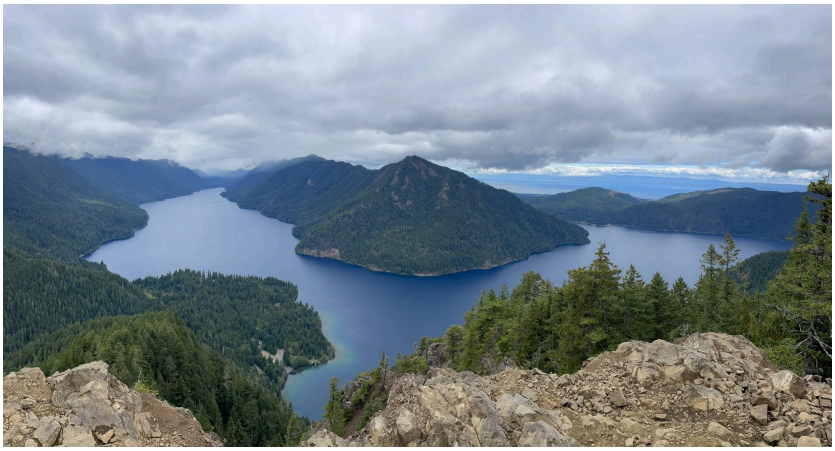
2026-05-03T15:32:59Z

#OliviaWilde



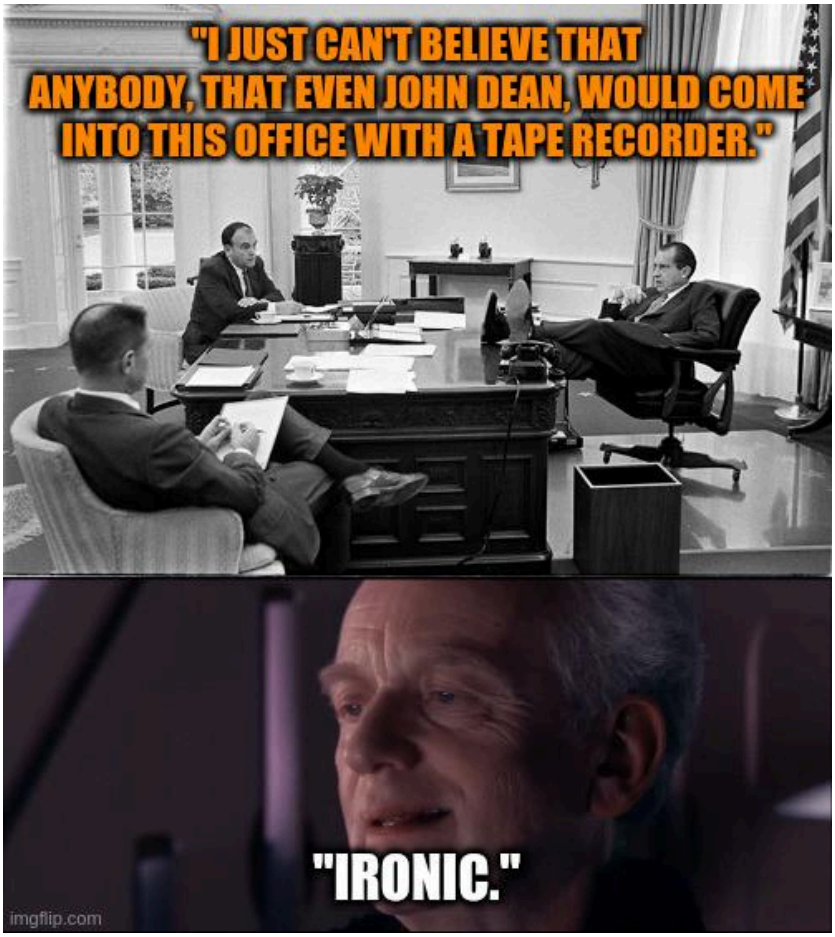
2026-05-03T18:29:30Z

Lake Crescent #Washington



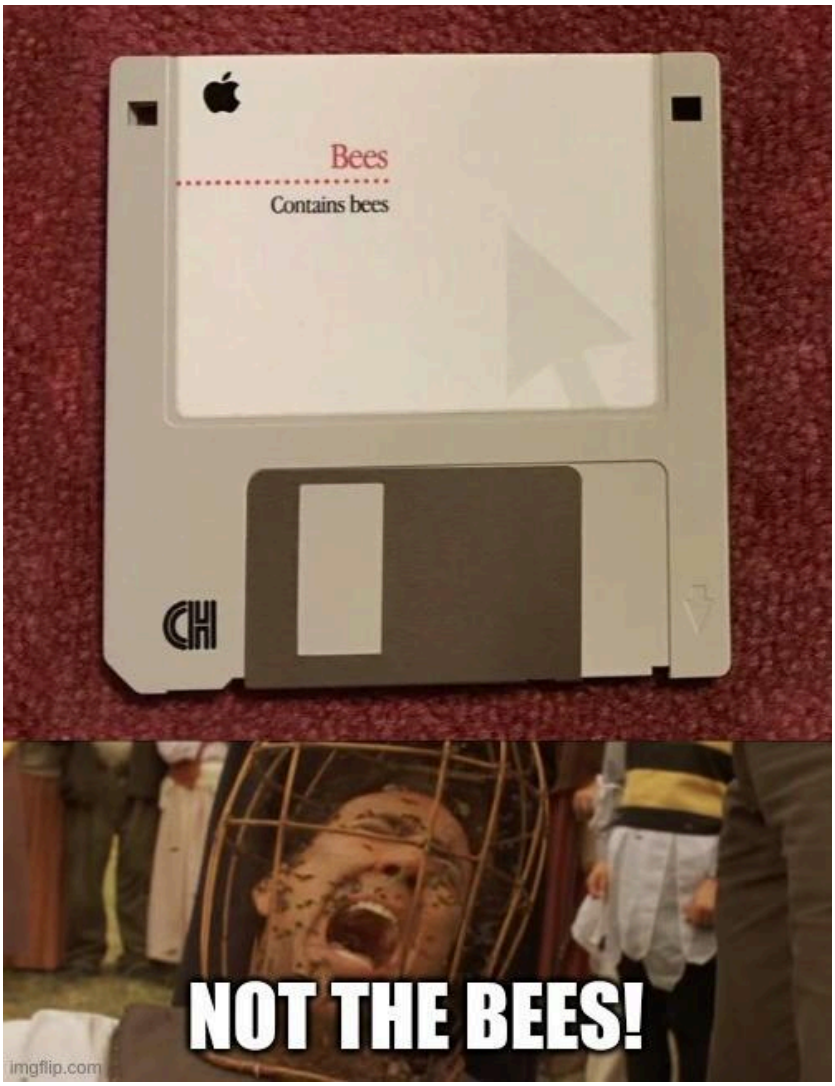
2026-05-03T18:37:24Z

#Watergate



2026-05-03T19:01:53Z

#Mac



2026-05-03T19:08:55Z

#MAGA



2026-05-03T19:19:31Z

We call this a two-fer #Cannabis



2026-05-03T19:27:27Z

#StarWars



2026-05-03T19:36:19Z

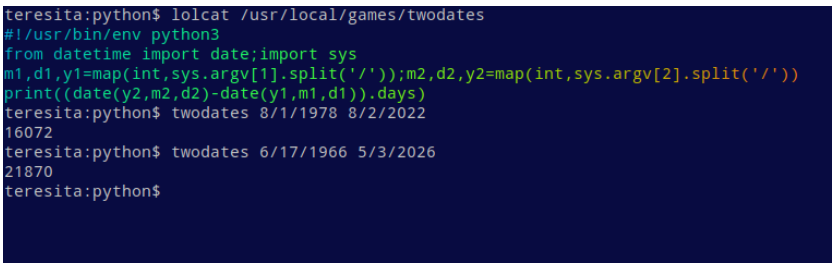
#StarWars



2026-05-03T20:05:25Z

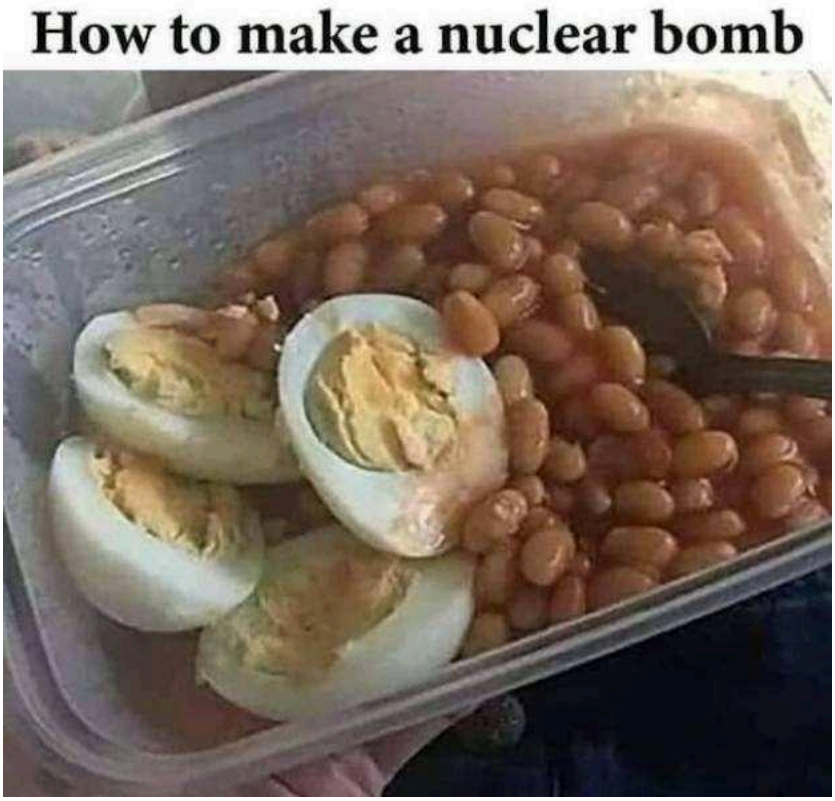
Days between two dates with #Python

#!/usr/bin/env python3
from datetime import date;import sys
m1,d1,y1=map(int,sys.argv[1].split('/'));m2,d2,y2=map(int,sys.argv[2].split('/'))
print((date(y2,m2,d2)-date(y1,m1,d1)).days)



2026-05-03T20:10:43Z

#Fun



2026-05-03T20:17:36Z

Deception Pass Bridge this afternoon. It's not always overcast in #Washingon



2026-05-03T20:31:18Z

#Bible



2026-05-03T20:33:49Z

#Xmen #Cosplay



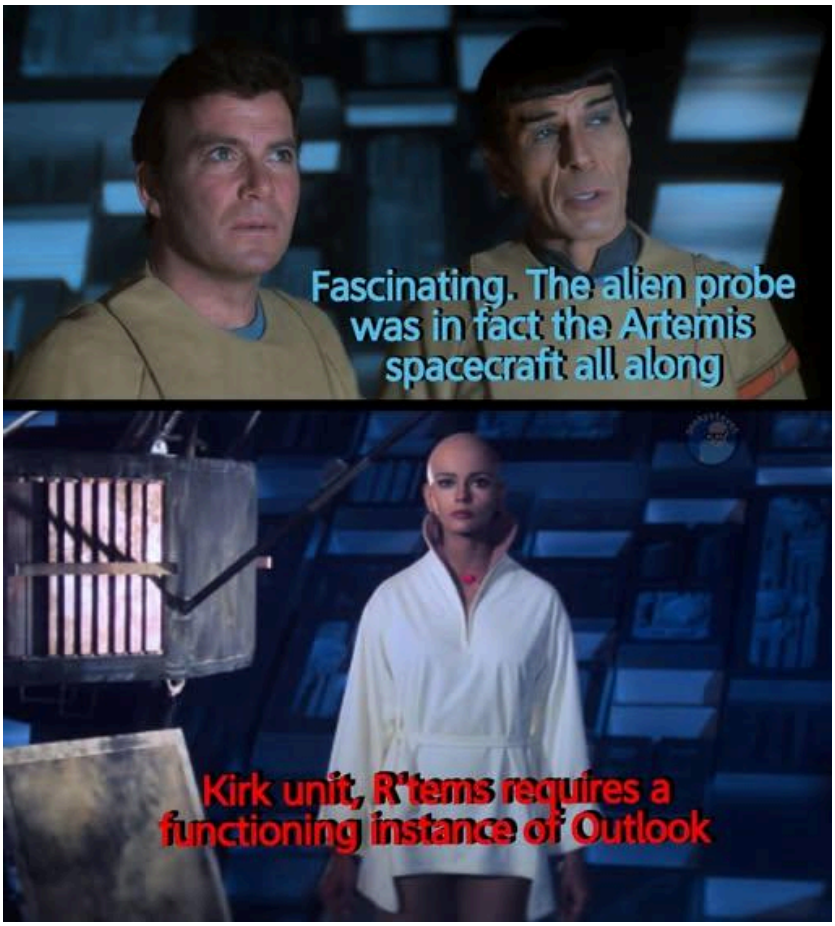
2026-05-03T20:40:09Z

#Coffee



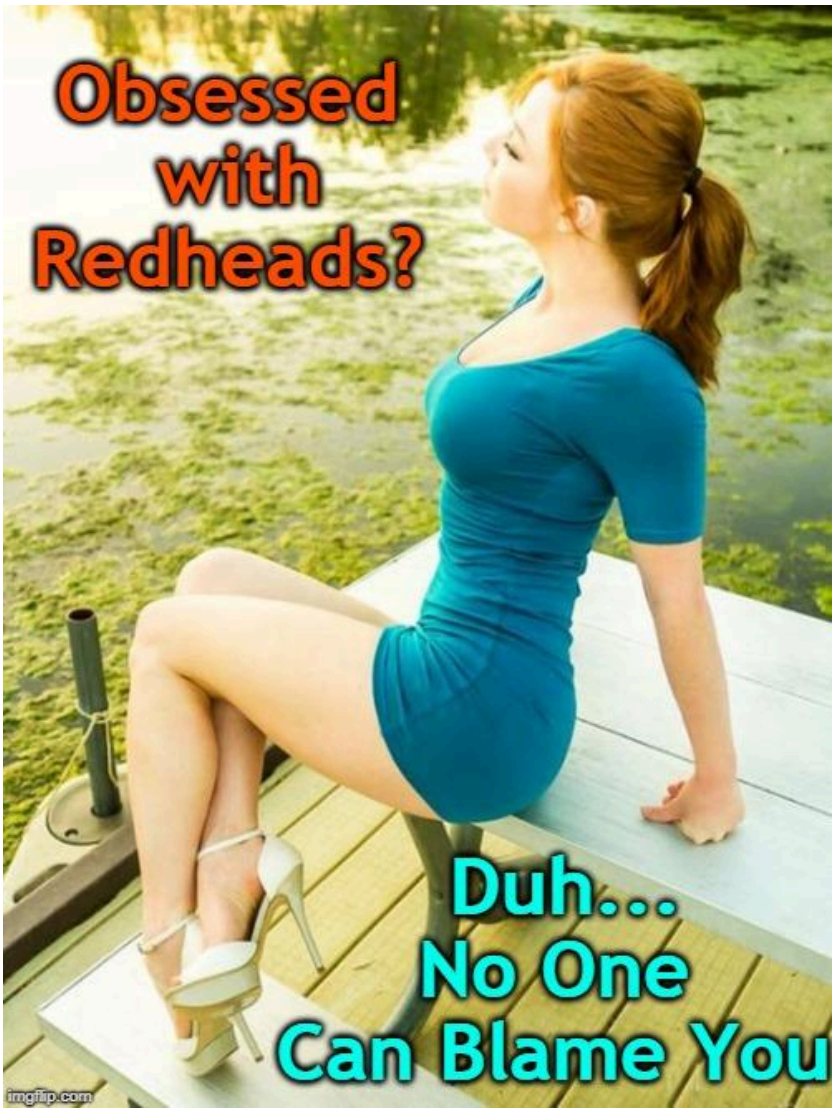
2026-05-03T20:53:16Z

#StarTrek @Karma_J



2026-05-03T20:57:07Z

#hot

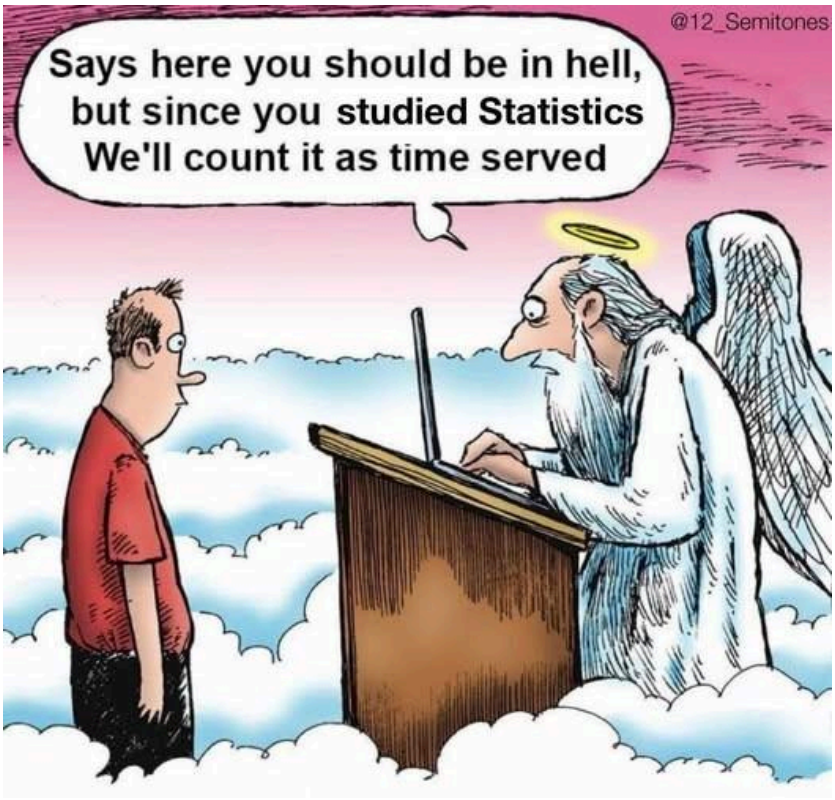


2026-05-03T21:15:46Z

@hyc @Karma_J In my Great American space-opera I'm thinking the godlike beings based on quantum chromodynamics might be intrigued that the universe is somehow optimized to allow such as they to exist side by side with similarly sentient beings based on quantum electrodynamics.

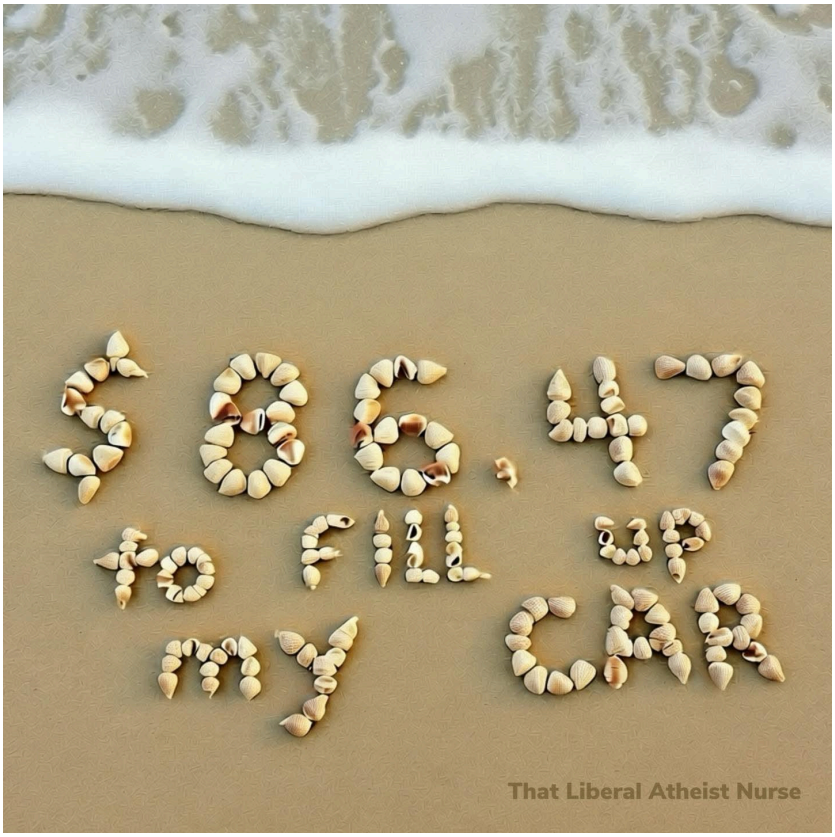
2026-05-03T21:28:18Z

#math



2026-05-03T22:12:27Z

#maga



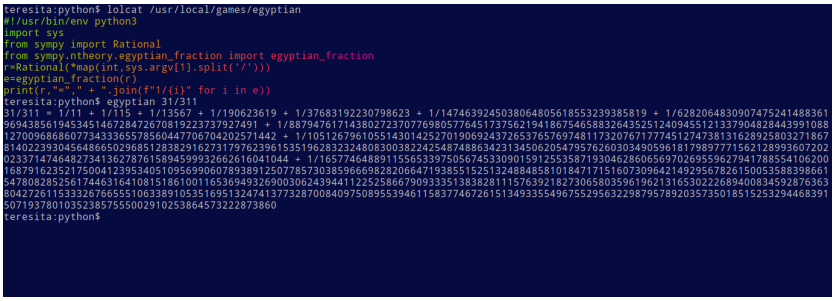
2026-05-03T22:54:46Z

@Leaf_Whisper Navy blue hat here, didn't think you guys knew about this place where folks vote funny.

2026-05-03T23:27:49Z

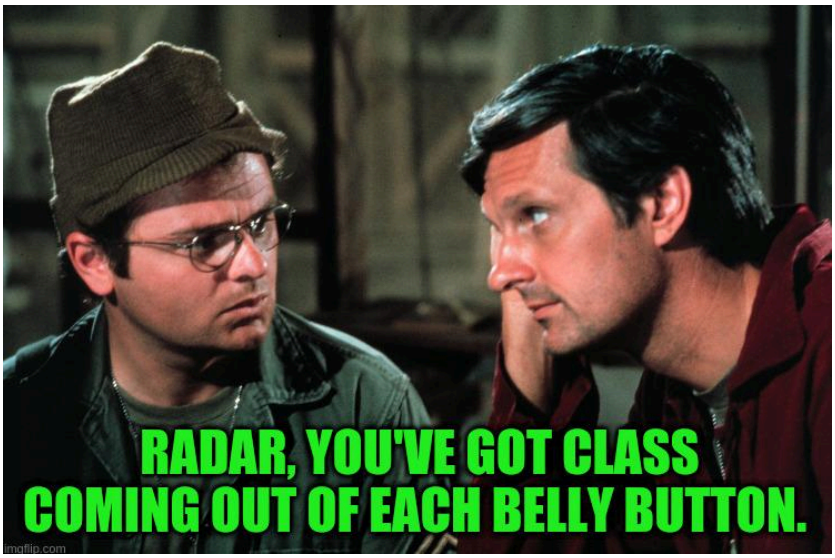
Egyptian fractions with #python #math

```
#!/usr/bin/env python3
import sys
from sympy import Rational
from sympy.ntheory.egyptian_fraction import egyptian_fraction
r=Rational(*map(int,sys.argv[1].split('/')))
e=egyptian_fraction(r)
print(r,"=","+".join(f"1/{i}" for i in e))
```



2026-05-03T23:37:58Z

#MASH



2026-05-03T23:43:36Z

#Vim



2026-05-04T00:05:48Z

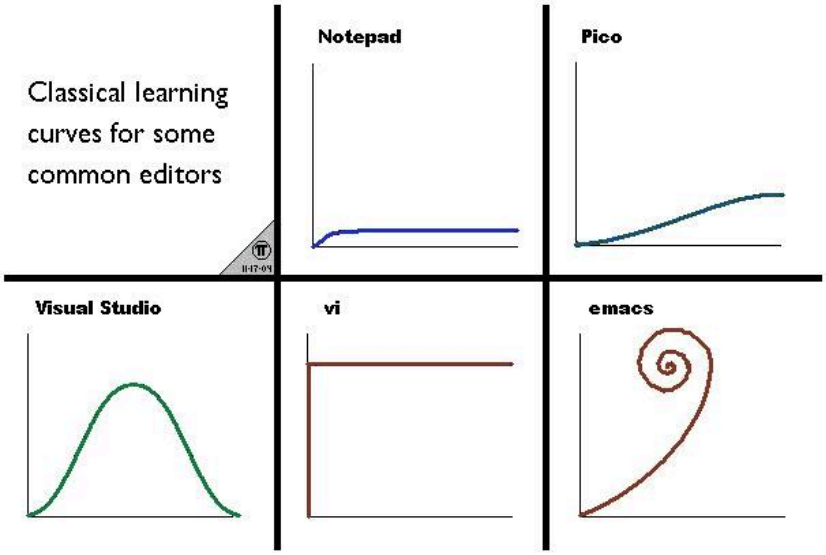
@terribletowelie @Karma_J Cue Karma J with "I want to go to there"

2026-05-04T00:08:06Z

@Karma_J We were both still rollerskating when it was over. The good stuff came later.

2026-05-04T00:14:43Z

#Vim vs #Emacs



2026-05-04T00:24:44Z

Windows 11 Agentic OS AI upgrade faces backlash, #Microsoft responds by closing replies...



2026-05-04T00:31:43Z

#XX



2026-05-04T00:38:27Z

#MAGA



2026-05-04T00:51:13Z

#MAGA



2026-05-04T00:57:06Z

@AnarchoNinaWrites "She's so popular" I always had it.

2026-05-04T00:59:08Z

#Hot



2026-05-04T01:03:33Z

#Fun



2026-05-04T01:12:06Z

#Chickfila



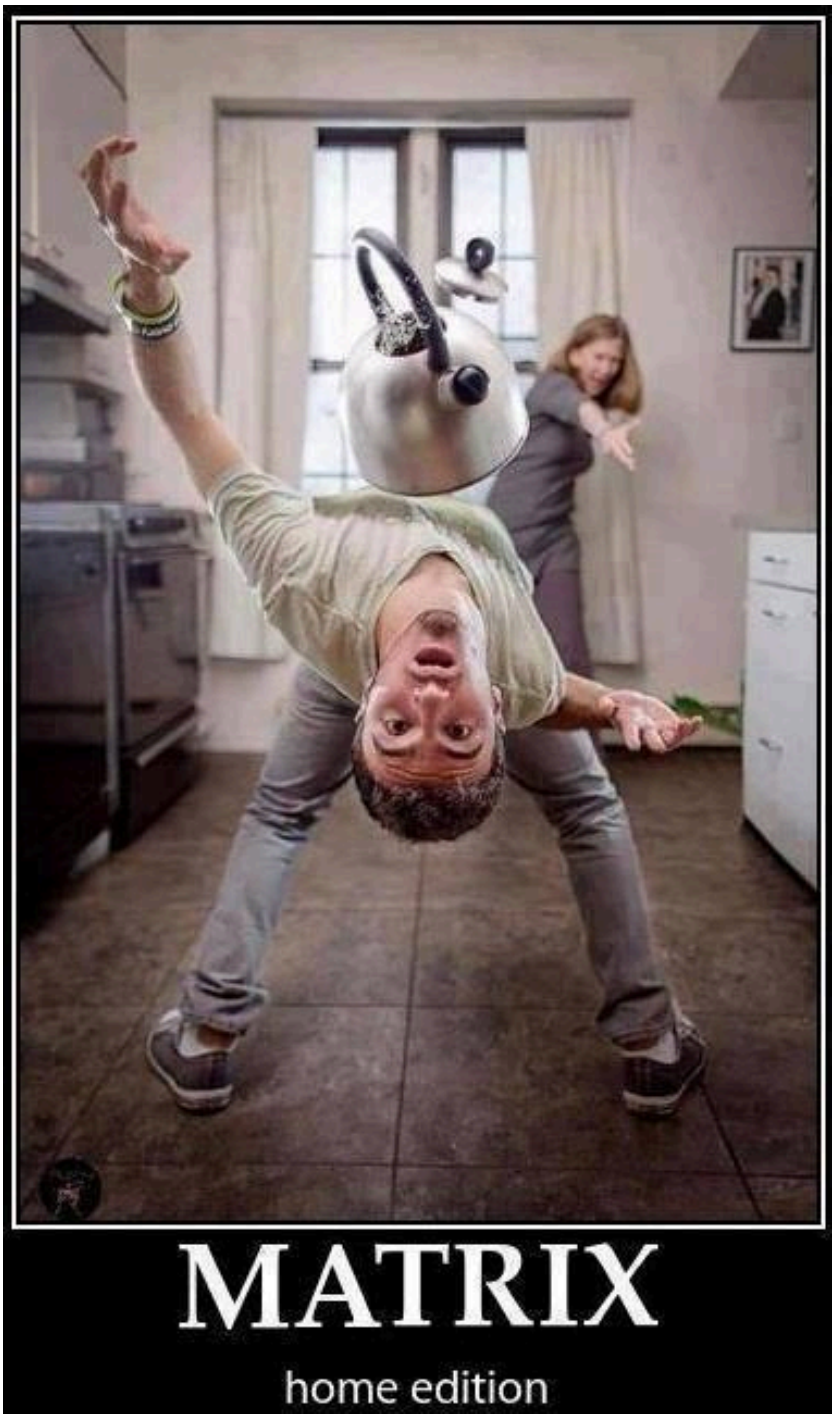
2026-05-04T01:16:46Z

#Cats



2026-05-04T01:35:31Z

#TheMatrix



2026-05-04T01:37:28Z

#maga



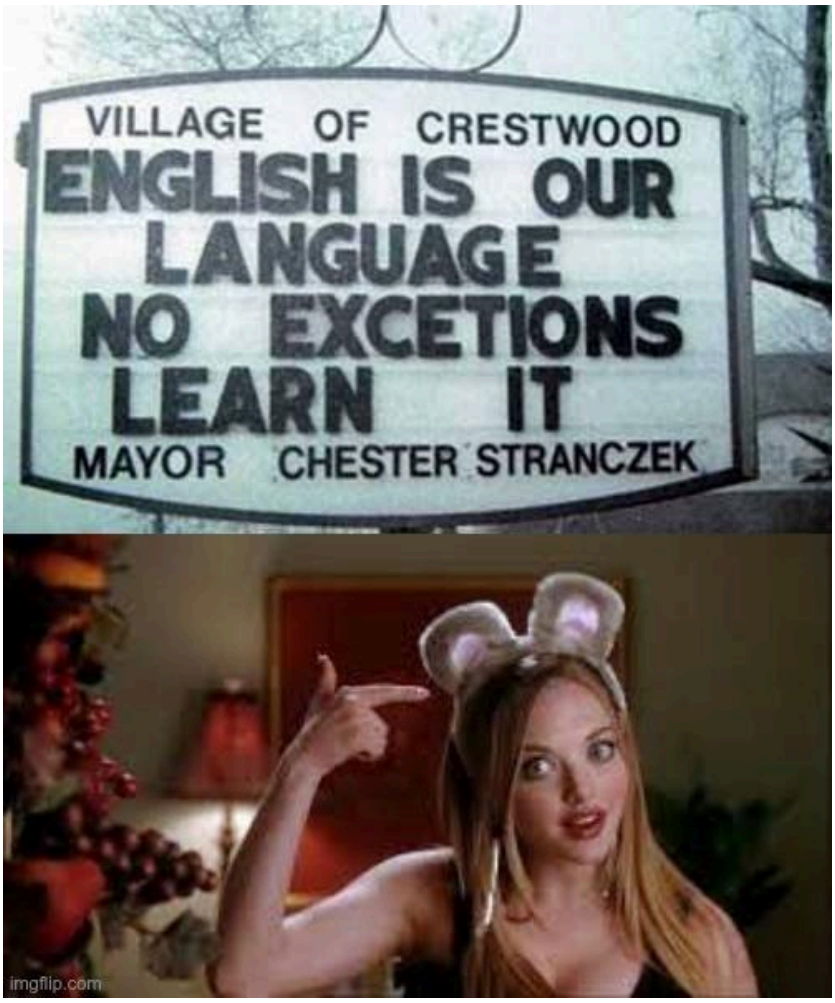
2026-05-04T01:46:31Z

The best Bowie song you never heard. "Be My Wife"

https://youtu.be/yjCM_X3xpRM?si=PBnogjQRg25YiGs4

2026-05-04T01:57:20Z

Drrr Hbrrr! #maga



2026-05-04T02:04:14Z

@serigala_tropis Hence the "Gray Jedi" thing in my profile.

2026-05-04T02:26:35Z

#GenX



2026-05-04T02:32:13Z

#maga



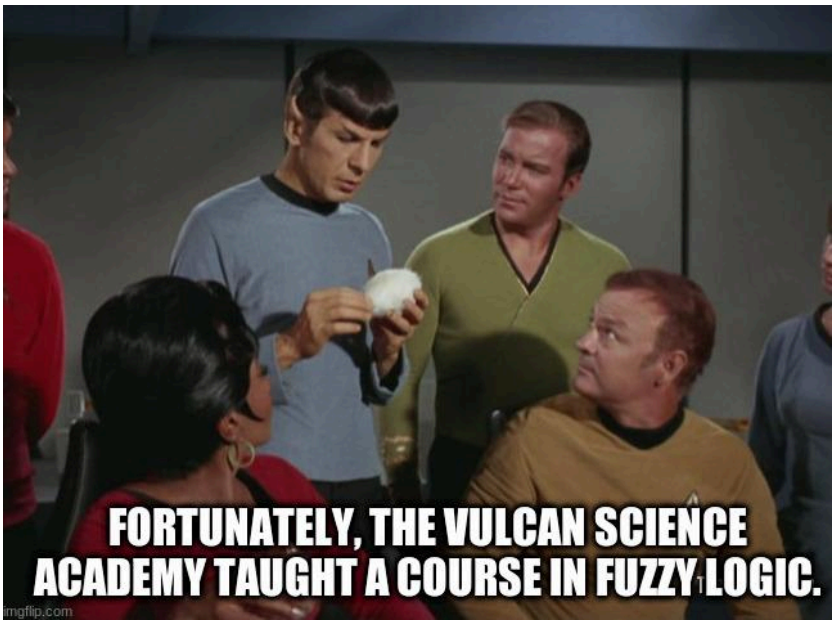
2026-05-04T02:39:04Z

#boobies



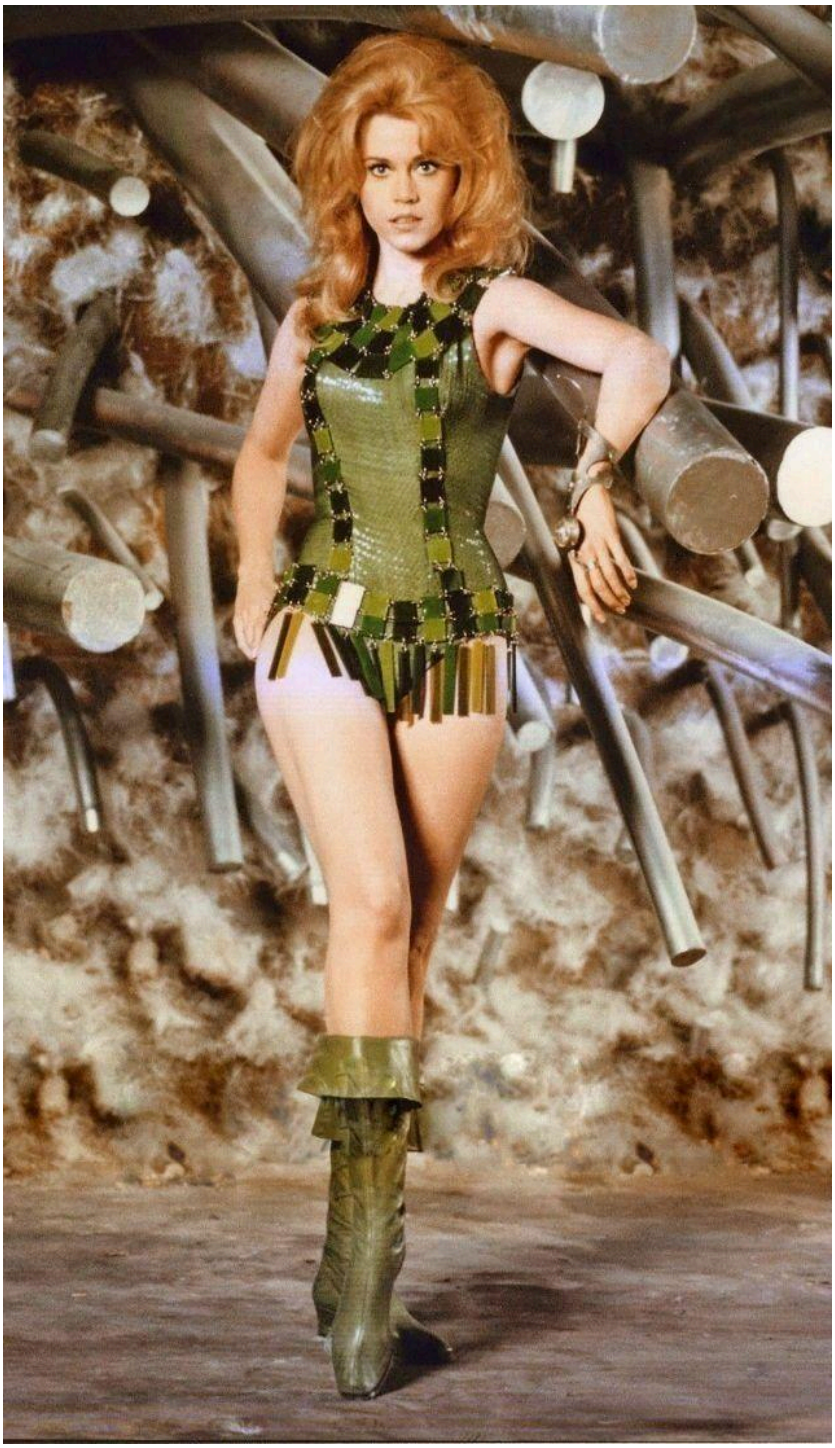
2026-05-04T02:48:15Z

#StarTrek



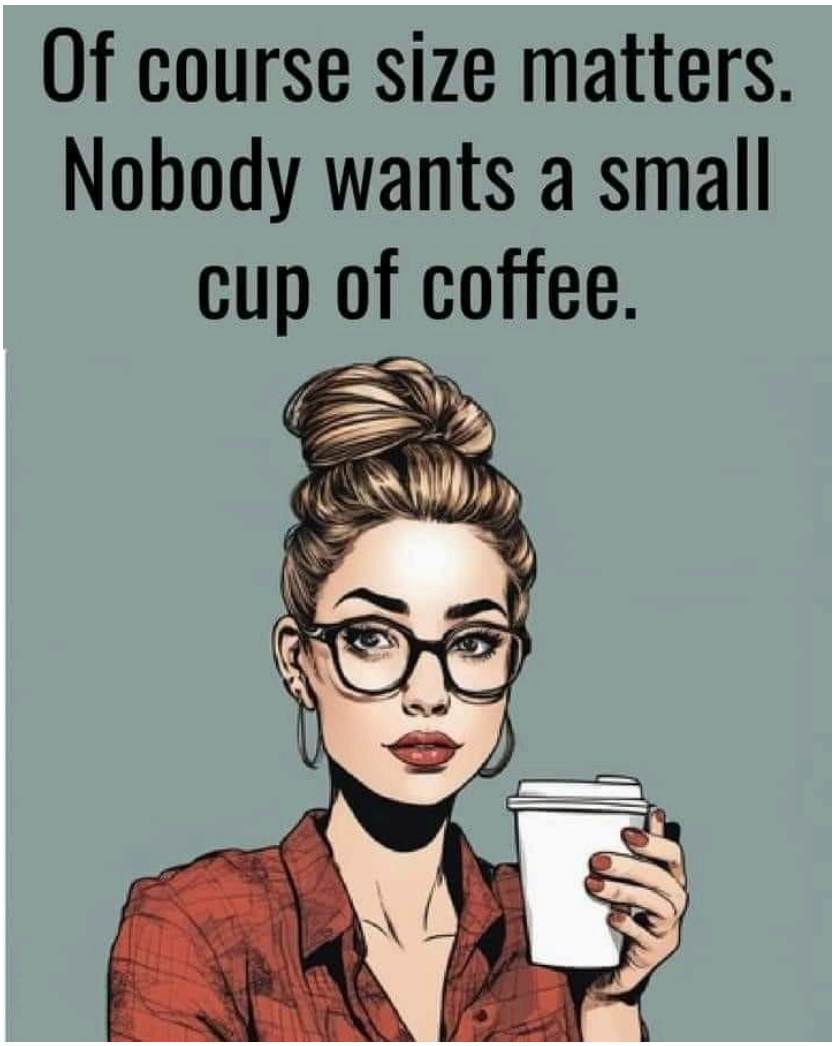
2026-05-04T02:56:37Z

#Barbarella



2026-05-04T03:04:27Z

#Coffee



2026-05-04T03:28:03Z

#AI



2026-05-04T03:32:57Z

#Seattle #StarWars



2026-05-04T03:37:09Z

#DebbieHarry



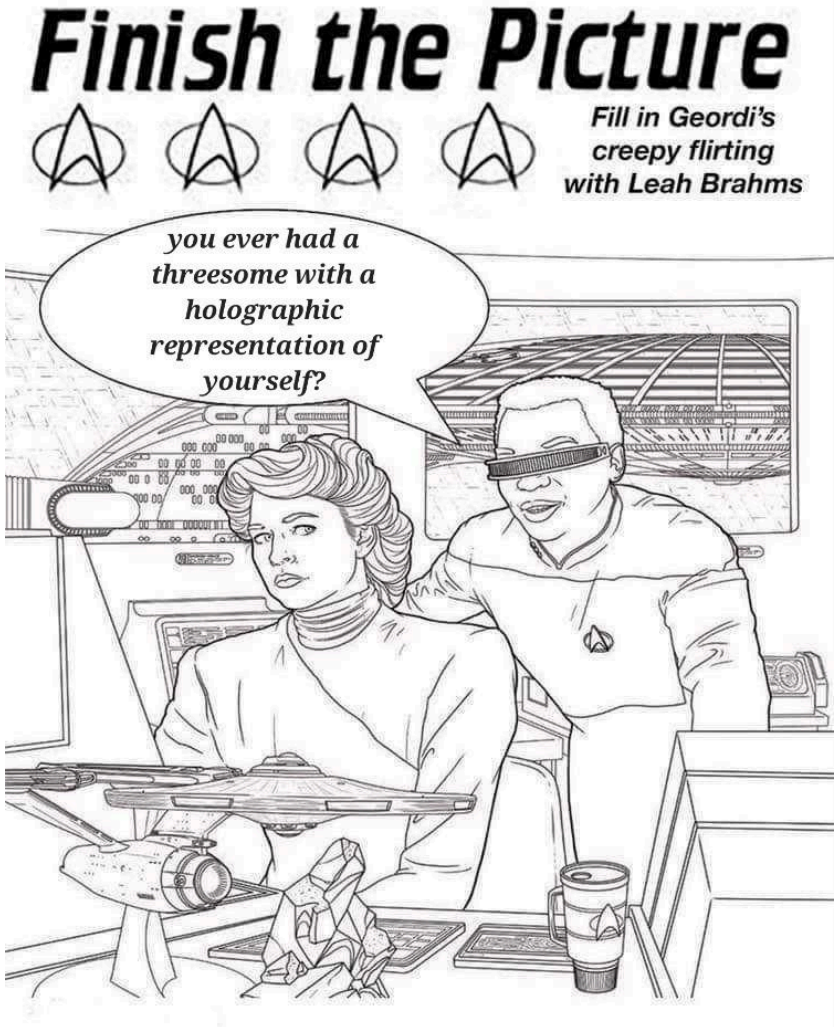
2026-05-04T03:42:39Z

#StarTrek



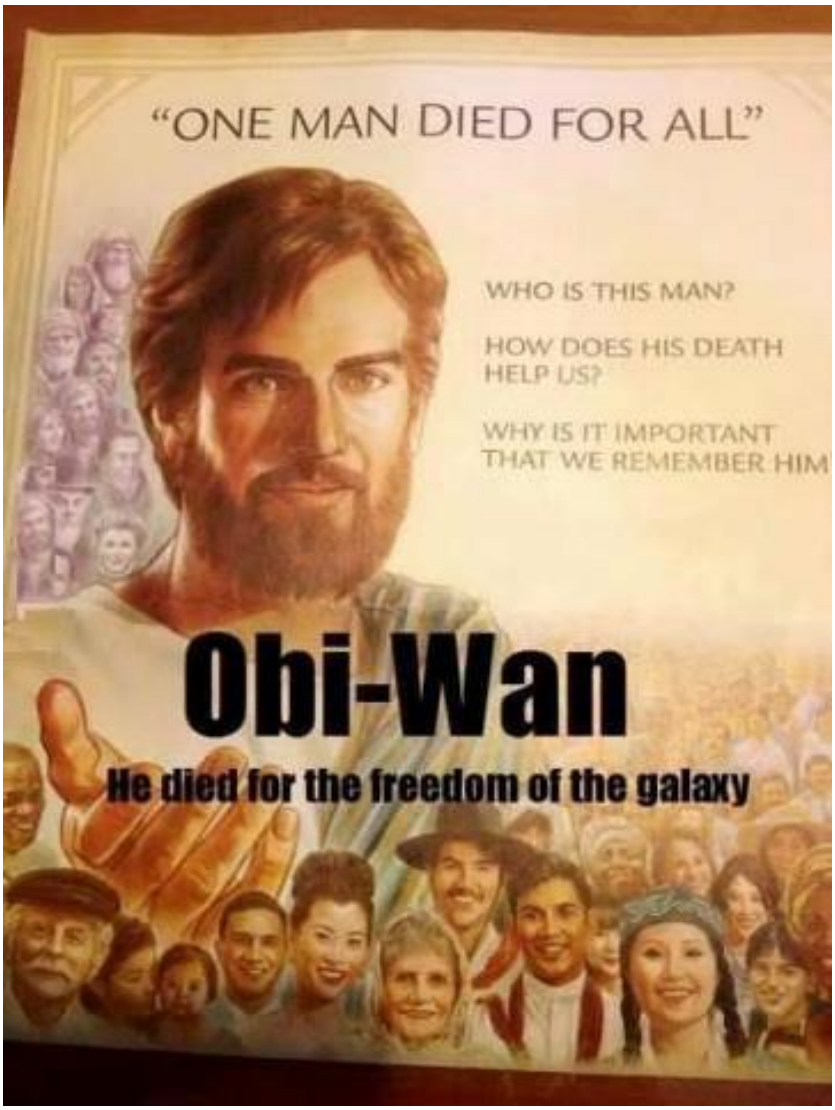
2026-05-04T03:47:34Z

#StarTrek



2026-05-04T03:56:53Z

#StarWars


"ONE MAN DIED FOR ALL"
WHO IS THIS MAN?
HOW DOES HIS DEATH HELP US?
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT WE REMEMBER HIM
Obi-Wan
He died for the freedom of the galaxy