



10

SECRET TREASURES



JCR





A long time ago in the future, after many trials and adventures, The Traveller conquers the ten secret gates of the Glass Pagoda and recovers the Ten Treasures: The Osforth Legacy, Surande's Light, Box Dolmlof Xob, the Projection of Ixorb, the Ligomancer's Bands, Oglof, the Orauro Mesh, Galaver's Prize, Agaxa's Promise and the Skins of Fylgrade. No longer is it recorded by man or machine why The Traveller seeks these Ten Treasures. The powers abroad in the world's young age may recede, but they do so like retreating glaciers, slowly and leaving small fragments of magic everywhere, waiting to be rediscovered.





The tenth Moon-King's first son is heartless and headstrong, the second son is guileful and able to change his appearance at will, and the third son is perspicacious and deft of hand. Ten tourists thoughtlessly bring to the Moon-King's domain a bull they slew, but alas the animal is the Moon-King's second son who temporarily transformed into the form of a bull. The tourists are imprisoned, portpasses confiscated. They will not be set at liberty until they provide a ransom of neutronium that covers the hide of the slain bull, which automagically stretches out to an enormous size. One of the ten tourists is permitted to go in search of the precious neutronium, although strictly upon pain of death for his fellow tourists should he fail in his quest or take the knave's course of failing to return. He journeys to a planet in the orbit of a raging pulsar, where dwells a medium-sized giant known to manufacture neutronium. After many battles the brave tourist compels the medium-sized giant to disgorge his entire treasure, although the giant bitterly curses whoever should come to hold his wealth. Hardly consoled at the loss of his second son by the valuable radioactive hoard, in a scant few months the Moon-King is treacherously usurped by his heartless and headstrong firstborn son, who also succeeds in driving away his brother. The Moon-King's exiled third son spends many years devoting himself to learning all that he wishes to know; how to sow and reap, how to make contemporary art, how to navigate the skies, to hack, to build, to weave and to sew. Meanwhile, throughout all these years the Moon-King's eldest son clasps his cursed prize close to his horrible heart until he is deformed by greed and mutated by neutronium into a most loathsome monster.

OSF●RTH





SURANDE

A runner whose body and face are boyish for a girl, yet girlish for a boy, causes much sorrow and has this oracle proclaimed at the Temple of Playsatan: “Never be one thing or the other for anybody, for it will be your ruin.” Withdrawing from men and from women, the androgyne imposes upon all suitors (of which there are many) a condition which generally deters them: “I shall be the prize of he or she who shall conquer me in the race. But all who try and fail should beware, for they will be cast into the glowing well.” In the same domain at the same time there lives a person whose face and body are too girlish for a boy and too boyish for a girl; the Council ordains this individual to adjudicate the races. This person determines to themselves win the race and win the runner, addressing a prayer to Aunty Agony: “Help, Aunty, for you have led me to this with your dating column.” Aunty Agony hears the chaser’s wish and thus, unseen by anyone else, Aunty Agony teleports to the chaser an iridescent ball and simultaneously wetloads to the chaser’s procedural memory the method by which the sphere is to be deployed. The cries of the spectators cheer the chaser, but it is doubtful whether the chaser or the runner hears this encouragement with greater hope and pleasure. As the runner picks up the sphere with fascination, the chaser dashes ahead to cross the finish line and so is defeated at last the runner.





In a certain obscure village near a mighty mountain range, a boy and a girl are found whose bodies are akin to all other humans, except only that they differ in the colour of their skin from all the known or unknown people of our planet. Foods are set before them but they will eat nothing though they are tormented by great hunger, as the girl afterwards acknowledges. At length a looking glass in the house happens to reflect a plate of food; to the great amazement of those who saw it, the boy and the girl reach through the mirror, take out the reflected food and eat. The boy is always lethargic for reasons that nobody understands, however, and to everyone's grief he fades away and disappears within a short time. The girl enjoys continual good health and in time she loses completely her original colour. Being frequently questioned about her people and after long effort and study at last able to make herself understood, the girl explains that all her folk are of the same unusual colour as she once was, as was the light in the sky and everything else in her dimension. On the subject of how she and the boy came from their home, she asserts that from the summits of the mountains there could be seen a bright and (to them) queerly coloured place on the other side. When they emerged on the other side they were struck senseless by the golden light of our sun, so different from their own. When their terror had subsided, they realised that they could no longer find the the way back to their native realm. The girl lives for many years afterwards, but is never able to find her way home.

DOLML●D



IXORB

There is a neuromancer's son and he is afflicted with Nanomaterial Fever at the age of thirteen, compelling him to stay in a darkened room for three years. He becomes a manic collector of boxes and enclosures of all kinds—music boxes, wrapping paper— but he especially loves to wear a box over his head. Not just a claustrophiliac but also an insomniac, the young man wanders the streets of the moonscraper district at night, knocking on the door of any person who stays up late, though few of them welcome him. From his failure to communicate with ordinary people develops his belief that most people are too stupid to understand much at all. To assist this race of idiots, as the young man sees it, he creates the great masterpiece of his life: Basic OS, a way of programming humans by using conversation and persuasion stripped of all but its most fundamental structures. For a while it appears that Basic OS will sweep the entire planet and make its inventor a very wealthy man. But he makes himself a laughing stock on antisocial media as he comes and goes from his dwelling during telepresences, each time sporting a new box on his head. When at length he dies from Malignant Tech Assimilation, it is thought by most to be poetically appropriate that he leaves behind only a large number of mysterious containers for his friends to poke around in, still wondering what the purpose of them all could possibly be.







From some unknown star a lady comes, bringing with her a foreign gentleman of great beauty. Many affirm that the lady by her enchantments and her outsourcing of modular manufacture to developing economies, and the lord by the spell of his voice, compels the spirits to rear an enormous moonscraper in but three nights. Her voice rolls through the corridors louder than the surging waves which beat against the foundations below, disembodied intelligences replying like the roar of thunder. The lord watches carefully, and whenever the strife becomes too serious his harpsichorus makes the sweetest, softest music. Long do this strange pair inhabit the lonely moonscraper; but although the lady frequently rides abroad on a most magnificent hovercycle, yet never does she make the slightest acquaintance with the neighbouring gentry. Ten years pass, and the citizens somewhat accustom themselves to their strange neighbours even if their understanding never increases by a single quanta. One day a man with a face made of wire and string arrives in the city, and that night the moonscraper is seen to be on fire. Afterwards not a vestige of furniture, books or anything belonging to the enchantress can be found, let alone any trace of the lord or lady. They and everything belonging to them has vanished and the stranger with the face of wire and string is never seen again. A few of the most telepathic people of that region can be heard declaring that when the flames were at their peak, two men and a woman were drifting in the midst of the fire, and that they ascended on black threads through the collapsing and molten steel girders and the broken glass, then passed through the air like lightning to vanish with a clap of thunder.

LIG●MANCER





There is a young man who leads a careless and profane life, ordering things from the etherfield regardless of his duties to shareholders and man. One day, having been thus engaged, he finds to his horror and dismay that instead of the particular unwanted item he bought on impulse, his domestic digifabricator has downloaded and printed a creature of most disturbing appearance. Abandoned by the young man, the monster remains for ten years unharmed and unheeded in the sewers until at length it outgrows them and bursts forth. Having laid waste to the gentrified areas formerly occupied by immigrants and artists, it crosses the river and seeks the place where the young man had formerly worked three days a week at a tech guild, before going on a year long sabbatical. Much is said to little purpose, until the CEO- a woman of age and experience- advises that one of the interns should be immediately placed outside to carry out public relations. It is discovered that if an intern is not waiting in the lobby every day ready to be devoured, the thing breaks out into a violent, destructive and lethal rage. After a year, however, the young man who ordered the thing from the etherfield returns, a sadder and wiser person. At first all the commenters do nothing but troll him, or dox his avatar for having brought such a scourge upon his neighbourhood. But when some of them perceive that he is indeed penitent, they advise him to paint himself with poison, take the sacrificial intern's place, and meet the enemy in the reception area. This he duly does and the creature leaps upon him, as if to smother him, but the tighter it grips him the more it is poisoned.



There is an archosaur whose eyes shine with ferocity and cunning beyond the common run of all other beasts, as tall as a etherfield mast and as massive as a farm mecha. The Council of Ten resolves to shackle the beast, but their stoutest electromantium chains merely enrage the archosaur when it feels the cold touch of metal through its feathers. And so a quantum artist is commissioned to make a net as light as spidergoat silk and yet stronger than electromantium. “It has strength the eye cannot discern,” says the artist, “Because I have forged it from secret and impalpable things: the footstep of a cat, the uncertainty principle, the roots of a cloud, the breath of a fish and the spittle of a bird.” By this time the archosaur is at the Council’s very own door, and they know that they can waste no more time in debate. The archosaur eyes the ten councillors hungrily as they approach, and announces that if the fetter is as insubstantial as it looks then he will gain no likes from his followers by snapping it. The ten councillors reply that if the archosaur cannot escape from so flimsy a net, they will fear it no longer and allow it to do as it wishes. The archosaur consents- provided one of the councillors places a hand between its teeth, as a sign of good faith and a security for the archosaur’s freedom. The net is wrapped again and again around the archosaur until it resembles a piece of furniture. At last the brave councillor pays the price of tricking the archosaur as it savagely snaps shut its teeth upon her hand. But the archosaur is bound beyond all hope of escape, and never again does it bother the colonists.

ORAURO







GALAUER

In a far-off dimension is born a fine boy whose name does not matter to this story. Ten genetisisters each grant a gift to the boy. The first gives him heroism; the gifts of the others are compassion, curiosity, love, rebellion, creativity, wisdom, telekinesis, and humour. The tenth and youngest genetisister is arrogant and enamoured of the child. Her gift, therefore, is herself. She vows that when the time comes, the boy will join her in her secret tax haven and live as her husband. The boy grows to manhood and his long life is distinguished by valour and adventure, but at last he begins to grow old. The genetisister's genomebots are so advanced that she has hardly aged at all through all the years of the hero's life. She causes a hoverfly on which he travels to crash near her secret tax haven. He loses consciousness. When he awakes he is in the genetisister's clinic, and she is still as fresh and beautiful as the dawn of the day he was born. She injects him with nanomachines and his crooked back straightens, his aged eyes clear, until he becomes once more the youth she had always desired. As finally she places a golden crown upon his head, every memory of his previous life is erased, and thus he becomes a willing prisoner of the genetisister's adoration. And for all that any mortals know, he lives there still, imprisoned in the timeless and perfect worship of the tenth genetisister.





One day a coolhunter on a trip to a certain forest in a mountainous region finds to his dismay that his positioning globe has shrivelled. After being lost in the forest all night he finds a group of women attending a festival. They are all exceedingly beautiful and muscular, circling around with smooth and easy motions, making some sort of performance art of which the coolhunter cannot understand the meaning. Among them is a woman who exceeds all the others in upper body muscle development, at the sight of whom his heart is inflamed with love. When the other dancers attack him, she feels pity and decides to carry him off as her captive. Says she, "You will enjoy health and plenty as long as you do not reproach me on account of my ten sisters, or the alternative performing arts and music festival from which I snatched you away. For on the day when you do so, you will lose both your lover and your good fortune." The coolhunter pledges to the warrior woman by all that is sacred to be ever faithful and constant in his love for her. Ten years pass happily by, until one evening the coolhunter returns late from a psychometry session and cannot find his love. At last she appears. "Why do you have to see your sisters so often?" begins he, with angry looks, "Are they more important than me?" The rest of his complaint is addressed to the air, for the moment her sisters are mentioned she vanishes. He seeks the place where he found her years ago in the forest, but she is not there and she has blocked him so that no laments or bitter, sarcastic chirps can call her back. At length he pines away and dies of a punctured ego, as the warrior woman foretold long before on the third day of their acquaintance.

AGAXA



FYLGRADE

A galactic knight dares to publicly scorn the affections of a woman who has witching powers, and so she transforms him into a reptilian creature, leathery and inert. Trapped in the loathsome body, the galactic knight huddles under the branches of a dying tree for many months. On the eve of that time of year when the lunar panels shine most brightly in the light of the rising full moons, the pitiful monster hears distantly the sound of drums and trumpets. It raises its heavy snout and sees the glittering Perlite Court as they process through the fields of lunar panels, blessing the farmers' electrons. All across the countryside the radioactive company wanders and so at last comes to the place where the space knight wallows in his bestial form. As their music fades into the distance, the Perlite Queene sits on the grass, strokes the monster's leathery skin and softly sings. Then this tough skin that covers the knight splits and falls away, so that the young man emerges clean and whole again. He starts to thank the Perlite Queene for his kindness but before the handsome galactic space knight can speak, the Perlite Queene fades into the light of dawn, returning via the nearest magic gate to the etherfield from whence he came.







No longer is it recorded by man or machine why The Traveller ever sought the Ten Treasures—the Skins of Fylgrade, Agaxa’s Promise, Galaver’s Prize, the Orauro Mesh, Oglof, the Ligmancer’s Bands, Box Dolmlof Xob, the Projection of Ixorb, Surande’s Light and the Osforth Legacy. Nor is it known where The Traveller goes upon leaving the Glass Pagoda. The truth cannot be determined and it does not matter. What matters is that The Traveller, like those who travelled before, is eventually lost to stories and rumours but does not die. All the great wizards departed, vanishing into a silent limbo, to wait for the time when they would be called again. The powers abroad in the world’s young age may recede, but they do so like retreating glaciers, slowly and leaving small fragments of magic everywhere, waiting to be rediscovered.



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