

My Science Fiction Story

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To most of the Chinsupians, the vicious black Korindee'l was a constant nightmare. How could any poor son of Car Ellinden escape this various evil? Ellinden was not known for his courage, unlike the Shi-Kellons.

For seven thousand and three "feruga" (about ten years), the Pha'erictians and the Shi-Kellans waged in fearious wars. It seemes like that is a long long time but in all actuality, that period of length is actually a duration that is quite long. Rumours began spreading that in the distant galaxy of Silleste, an unnamed warrior called "Roraand the Murky" was training under his mentor Syhke. So the Chinsupians (wariours of the South) began to celebrate with heavy bread and ale that night. Tomorrow the village would be saved from the robotic overlords of TinTinBeboopBap.

Perhaps some exalpanation is for the cause of the armies tactics. A managing chief named Liz'zo del-Perakhsh was in charge of the northern fleet of Kiddles, which fled from the ravenous Birdulas. "Strike through them while they are weak!!!! Screamed Syke. So, when Liz'zo was busy not being at the guard, the Korindee'l of Psarysagie took command of the mechanical dirigibles. When he blew his long trumpet until his pink cheeks turned gray, the charge began and later ended. Or it kept going.? Really the whole thing was a decoy so that TinTinBeboopBap could enjoy tea with her majesty Princess Ulundaria. Death ensued promptly, until morning.

I believe the fight continued until they surrendered. Several years later the main Yllabriguti circuit exploded, so the Chinsupians sprinkled the rubber from their shoes into their hair to protect themself from falling electric sparks, as was the custom, or just for fun...

Walter groaned. The *Chinsupians* (whatever THEY were) sprinkled shoe rubber into their hair? Please. Could this story be any lamer?

It wasn't just the awkward phrasing or the horrendous character names, or even the poor choice of font (Papyrus? Really?). The plot itself – if it could even be called a plot – was just an assortment of randomly selected glimpses into some sort of battle with an impossibly confusing timeline. This was probably the worst story Walter had read all day, and considering the sheer number of utterly ridiculous tales he had looked through so far, this was certainly saying something.

The life of a successful, high profile science fiction author is not all fun and glamour. Of course, it's always exciting when a new book is published: there's a lot of action surrounding the release, with book tours and signings and publicity stunts and more. But by far, most of the time is spent actually writing the books themselves, a task that isn't nearly as thrilling or motivational. Sure, it's dull pounding through pages and pages of text one slow paragraph at a time, but even then, as long as there is some subject to write about, it isn't completely terrible. It is always better – much better – than to sit idly in front of a computer with a mind as blank as the screen, at a complete loss for what to type.

It was one of these unfortunate situations that Walter Scott now found himself. His most recent book, *"The Silver Ladder"*, had achieved worldwide acclaim as one of the most haunting tales of courage and integrity of the contemporary age. As the second book in a four part series, it had succeeded in attracting millions of fans worldwide – fans now anxious for the release of the third instalment of the saga. Unfortunately, while Walter had a complete plan for how the story should end in the final book, he was at a complete loss for how to fill the gap in the dreaded Book 3. His agent had assured him he would think of something, after expressly forbidding him from cutting the series down to three books from four: "Your readers will never forgive you for denying them the treat they so eagerly anticipate!" However, after months of brainstorming, pondering, reflecting, and staring aimlessly at clouds, Walter was no closer to devising a new plot for his book than when he began. Life grew drearier day by day as he idled his time away in his small, untidy apartment room, and Walter naturally grew frustrated at his total stagnation. It came as no surprise that he therefore jumped at the opportunity to judge stories for a national science fiction writing contest when the organizers offered him the position.

It had certainly seemed like an excellent idea at the time. Perhaps by reading through the works of other authors, Walter himself might gain some inspiration for his own novel. It would also give his name a healthy boost in publicity – with no new book in sight, he stood the risk of being forgotten by the masses, but acting as judge a large-scale contest was a great way to keep his image in the science fiction community intact without the pressure of actually writing anything. Furthermore, judging this contest would at the very least give him something to DO, rather than just sitting around in front of a blank screen all day. It was perhaps this reason that Walter found most tempting of all. At any rate, he agreed to do the job, and a few weeks later, he received the large stack of contest submissions waiting for his critical appraisal.

But now, Walter was seriously regretting having accepted the job at all. The vast majority of these stories were absolute trash. Walter often wondered whether the pain these budding “authors” inflicted upon him was intentional, because it seemed absurd that anyone could possibly produce such awful writing in earnest. Typos, plot holes, ridiculous names, lacklustre plots... occasionally some utter rubbish, like the “robotic overlords of TinTinBeboopBap”...

Walter sighed and shook his head, absentmindedly scratching the back of his hand. There was no way he could continue reading this pathetic excuse for a story. He cast one more disdainful look at the clumsily typeset page, and tore it up into shreds. Officially, he was not supposed to modify or destroy any of the original works, since any one of them might be chosen for publishing, but Walter felt that this case was an exception; no one could possibly want to read this story again in the future. In fact, Walter felt he was probably doing posterity a favour, by not letting this embarrassment to human ingenuity survive.

The pile of remaining stories stood solemnly on Walter’s cluttered desk, taunting him with its height. Scowling, Walter snatched the top one from the stack and began to read.

During the remainder of the afternoon, Walter made it through seven more stories. Not all of them were atrocious; there was a mildly interesting one about an alien fleet that was prepared to destroy an opposing universe, only to be stopped at the last minute by a love-stricken captain (aside from the sappy ending, Walter thought this story was reasonably passable). However, as expected, most of the stories were patently absurd. After reading a tale about a robot that swallowed a teacup and had flying saucer children, Walter decided that he had had enough for the day and went to bed early.

The remainder of the week followed in a similar manner, as Walter slowly and painstakingly made his way through the pile of stories to judge. Finally, late on Saturday evening, Walter put aside the last story in the pile (about a Martian that mistook a space gun for his mother and correspondingly began the destruction of the solar system) and breathed a huge sigh of relief. The difficult part was done; he had a vague idea of the stories he felt would be winners, and all that was needed now was a quick review of the notes he had made in order to confirm his decision. With fingers itching to end this affair once and for all, he had an email sent to the organizer of the contest (one Jerry Pang, an old friend of Walter and an enthusiastic science fiction fan) announcing his verdict within the hour.

At least one good thing had come out of this whole harrowing experience: reading through the awful work of others had inspired Walter with a renewed sense of determination. Although Walter still did not have a clear idea on what he wanted to write his third novel about, he was intent upon making it a stellar masterpiece – something to show the world how sci-fi writing was meant to be. A good piece of science fiction writing was becoming a rare thing to find in today’s world, as Walter so painfully witnessed, and he felt it was his duty to do the genre the justice it deserved. As a result, when he resumed his brainstorming the following Monday

morning, it was with significantly more enthusiasm – or at least, significantly less reluctance – that began jotting possible plot element ideas.

By Thursday afternoon, Walter still didn't have an idea for his next book, but he had grown so restless that he decided that he just had to write *something*. But what? The first thing that sprang to mind was the horrible experience of reading through those dreadful contest entries. Well, that seemed like a start: Walter would write a memoir describing his painful week. No, a better idea: he would transform that experience into a story of his own. A real science fiction story; something better than anything one of those inadequate contestants could produce. A science fiction story worthy of the genius of Walter Scott. Yes, that would get some creative juices pumping nicely. As for the title? Walter grinned mischievously. He would call his piece "My Science Fiction Story", of course. It would only be fitting that a tale describing such awful stories should have an absurdly horrendous title – it was dripping with irony just the way Walter loved it. Plus, it had the advantage of describing exactly what Walter was aiming for: a science fiction story of his own creation. He was sure that his name would be enough to attract readers, despite the jaw-droppingly mundane title.

Walter flexed his fingers and began to type. Words flew onto the screen as Walter's hands raced over his keyboard; he was being more productive now than he was in ages, and he loved every second of it. In a matter of minutes, he already had pages of text: delicious, funny, plot-driven content.

Walter had reached the middle of his fourth page, pausing to decide what would happen next, when the phone on his desk began to ring. Walter picked up the receiver absentmindedly, twirling a pencil with his free hand, and it took a few seconds for him to register what the voice on the other end was talking about.

"... so we need them back right away!" came Jerry's anxious voice from the other end.

"Need what back?" Walter asked, frowning.

"The stories, the stories, haven't you been listening?" cried Jerry. "You still have the stories from the competition, right?"

"Yeah, I do!" Walter said, glancing at the stack of papers he had unceremoniously dumped in the corner of his office. "Please, feel free to take them off my hands, I've no use for—" Walter paused in mid-sentence, realizing that perhaps some of those stories could be useful for ... research ... when writing his own little piece. "Wait a minute. Why do you need them back? I already sent you my decisions last weekend, and you told me that you don't return submissions to the contestants."

“This isn’t for the contestants!” said Jerry impatiently. “There are these guys, cops, apparently, wearing suits and everything. They won’t tell me why they need the stories back, but it seems extremely important that they get them. They look legit, Walter. I’m sending them to your place now!”

Walter groaned. “Since when do cops wear suits, anyway?” he grumbled.

“Walter!” Jerry sounded exasperated. “Seriously, these guys freak me out, okay? Just give them the papers and they can leave us alone. What do we need them for, anyway? From what you told me, none of the entries were all that spectacular anyway.”

“Understatement,” muttered Walter under his breath. “Fine, if they come over now I should still be in the office. What time did you say these ‘suited cops’ will be coming?”

“Oh, they actually left quite a while ago... I just called to give you a heads up... they should be there anytime around—”

“Now, perhaps?” came a cold, high voice from the doorway.

Walter spun around and saw two burly, suited men wearing shiny black sunglasses standing in the doorway of his tiny office. The taller one, looking slightly embarrassed, cleared his throat. “I mean, we’ve arrived now,” he repeated in a much deeper, gruffer tone. “My name is Kevin and this is Leon. Now why don’t you put down the phone and invite us into your – uh – closet?”

Walter rolled his eyes as he hung up the phone. “It’s not a closet, it’s an office,” he snapped. “Now, Jerry says you two are police officers, but I won’t believe it until I see badges. Unless you can prove you actually are the police, I’m going to ask you to two to kindly leave.”

The two men looked at each other for a moment, then back at Walter. “We can’t show you any badges,” the Leon confessed.

“Surprise, surprise,” Walter said coldly. “Now there’s the door –”

“But we can show you these,” interrupted Kevin, and in one fluid motion, the two of them drew out sleek, black guns from their waist holsters, and pointed them straight at Walter’s forehead.

“We’re coming in,” said the Leon firmly, taking a step inside.

“And we’re taking the document from you,” added Kevin, following his companion.

“Then we can leave, and no one will get hurt!” finished Leon cheerfully.

“Hurt!” Walter snorted. “Not with those toys, surely,” he said scornfully. “Yes, I know a real gun when I see one,” he added, as the two exchanged shocked glances, “and those, my friends, are certainly not real.”

The two men lowered their plastic toy guns helplessly. “I told you, he wouldn’t fall for it,” Kevin hissed at Leon.

Leon, however, turned to Walter. “Please, sir,” he pleaded, “please, Mr. Scott, will you give us the document?”

Walter raised an eyebrow. “What document? I thought you wanted to pick up the short stories that were submitted as contest entries. Why on Earth do you want them, anyway? I assure you, you’re better off without them.”

Leon chuckled nervously. “All of them? Of course we don’t want all of them... we only need one in particular.” He fished into the pocket of his suit, and pulled out a small, folded piece of paper.

“Don’t show that to him!” Kevin piped up. “He doesn’t have to see—”

“Oh, I think I do,” Walter said, snatching the paper easily as Leon was glaring at Kevin. Walter unfolded the sheet to see two black and white photographs copied onto the page. He let out an involuntary gasp.

The first picture showed a youthful boy, maybe fourteen or fifteen years old, with short black hair and thick rimmed glasses. He was lying on a wooden floor in a large puddle of blood, clearly dead. There was a gun in his left hand, and Walter knew that unlike the plastic fakes he had just been threatened with, this one was authentic.

The second photograph was of a short letter, untidily handwritten. Walter brought the page closer to his eyes so he could read the writing more clearly.

“I’ve had enough,” the letter began. “This world has been nothing but mean to me, and it’s time I left this place for good. I’m tired of being picked on by Collin and Emily, and I’m tired of always being ignored. Tonight, I’m going to take a gun and let it kill myself.”

Walter could not help but roll his eyes – “let it kill myself”? The typo on “mean” was bad enough. One would hope that a person would put a little more care into something as important as a suicide letter... But there was more to be read.

“Before I go, I have one last thing to tell the world. I have long been convinced of the existence of extarrestrial beings. After months of effort, I have succeeded in hacking into the official goverment alien detection agency mainframe, and my beliefs have been fully confirmed. In order to share the truth with everyone, I have secretly encoded the hacking instructions into my submission to the National science Fiction Short Story contest. I heard the judge will be the

great Walter Scott, I know he will understand the message and propigate it. Hopefully the sci-fi community will benefit from my research. Goodbye.”

Beneath the letter, in awkward cursive writing, was the name “*Terrence Choi*”.

Terrence Choi? Walter racked his brain, but that name didn’t ring a bell. Then again, he didn’t pay attention to the names of authors on the submissions... And what was this about a secret message encoded in a story?

“Aha! I found them!” called Kevin’s triumphantly, standing over the pile of stories in the corner. Apparently, he and Leon had been hunting the office while Walter had been immersed in the two photographs. Leon hurried over to Kevin eagerly. “Do you see it? Is it there?”

Kevin flipped through the papers rapidly, then again more slowly. After the third run through and still no results, he narrowed his eyes at Walter. “Are you sure this all of them?”

“Yes, yes, they’re all there,” said Walter, “you must be overlooking it. Look again, carefully this time.” Kevin handed half of the papers to Leon, and the two of them shifted through their piles one story at a time.

“So, tell me.” Walter sat down in his chair, and surveyed the two busy men intently. “How did you know Terrence Choi? Where did you get these photographs from? And why are you so interested in hacking into the government system?”

“It’s none of your business where we get our information from,” Leon answered curtly, not taking his eyes off of his pile. “As for why... I thought it would be clear to someone like you. This boy has found confirmed proof of the existence of alien beings! Something humanity has been hunting for centuries, kept hidden from the public by a bureaucratic and self-interested government association!”

“If you think we’d give up our chance to see this information,” murmured Kevin, “the opportunity to see for our own eyes some of the creatures that live on other planets – that may have even landed on Earth – ”

Walter, in his line of work, had plenty of experience with alien fanatics, and didn’t need a passion rant now. “My friend Jerry told me you two were cops,” he interrupted. “How did you convince him of that?”

“Well, unlike you,” Leon tearing his eyes away from the stories to shoot Walter a dirty look, “he seems quite willing to trust people without demanding evidence.”

“Plus, we could make him feel real uncomfortable. We can be very intimidating, you know,” Kevin added.

Walter raised an eyebrow at the two grown men kneeling on his dusty hardwood floor, plastic toy guns dangling aimlessly at their waists, flipping through pages of “Cindy the Unicorn’s Atlantis Adventure”.

“It’s the glasses,” Leon assured him. “The shiny glasses would make anyone nervous. Nothing upsets an insecure sci-fi fan more than the constant image of his own reflection. Anyway, Terrence’s story is definitely not here, I’m certain.”

“How can that be?” wondered Walter. “Perhaps he used a fake name, or . . .” His voice trailed off as he read through the note in the photograph again. That spelling was atrocious . . .

“Oh,” Walter said softly, a wave of comprehension washing over him.

“Oh?” repeated Kevin suspiciously.

“It’s not there,” Walter announced. “Terrence’s story is gone.”

“Gone?” echoed Leon faintly.

“Gone,” assured Walter. “I tore it up and threw it out.” He pointed at the trash bin.

“You threw it out?!” Kevin shrieked, his voice turning high again.

“You didn’t even recycle it?” Leon asked indignantly.

Walter resisted the urge to roll his eyes. “Yes, and I’d do it again! It was the most horrific thing I’ve ever read. I mean, why bother typing at all if you’re going to keep the spell checker off?”

“Okay,” said Kevin, after taking a deep breath, and peered into the now empty trash can. “When did you last empty this?”

“Earlier this morning,” Walter replied, “the trash is usually collected on Thursday afternoons. Which means that if you hurry—”

“It might still be waiting at the curbside,” breathed Kevin. “Leon, let’s go! No time to waste!” He sprang to his feet and bolted out the door, Leon close behind him.

Walter waited a few minutes for the two men to completely exit the building. When he was sure they were gone, he slowly turned around and returned to his desk, pulling out a small key from his shirt pocket. He reached down and unlocked the drawer at the bottom of his desk.

It was true that Walter had torn Terrence’s story to shreds out of disgust. However, like many writing contests, Jerry had asked each author to submit two copies of each story, one

named and one unnamed for the convenience of the judging. As Walter had no reason to bias any author over another, he had read through the list of named entries during the judging, and ignored this second pile entirely. However, now it might prove to be quite useful, Walter thought, as he removed the neat stack from the drawer.

Terrence's name would not be on his entry, but Walter was confident he could pick out of the pile by memory; some scars don't fade, after all. Sure enough, here was the unnamed copy of *Flight of the Korindee'l*, as fresh and ridiculous as it had ever been.

It didn't take long for Walter to decode the secret instructions Terrence was referring to; he simply had to look at the first letter of each sentence to read the code. The computer was still running from before, Walter quickly opened up a web browser and started entering passwords. A few minutes later, he pressed the final button, and was granted access to a secure file entitled "*Known Extraterrestrial Species Living Among Us*".

Heart pumping, Walter opened the file. It was quite long; Walter skimmed through it quickly. There were details about a variety of different species of aliens, each of which had managed to land on Earth and reside among humans unnoticed. The information included estimated origins, visual descriptions, behavioural characteristics, and predicted danger levels posed to human society, as well as a photograph next to each description.

"Skartle," Walter read, "*canine creature from Jupiter. Looks like a normal dog but with highly radioactive stomach acids. Danger level: 3/10. Avoid if possible.*"

"Jopian, intelligent aquatic serpent, believed to be from Neptune. Existence confirmed but none obtained for further research. Danger level: 7/10. Terminate if encountered."

"Tumpus, humanoid being of unknown origin. Looks and behaves exactly like a human being, except with missile-equipped talons in the place of hands. Powerful and intelligent, angered easily. Danger level: 9/10. Slay at all costs."

"Kiddle. *Flesh eating flatworm...*"

Walter shook his head. This couldn't be real. With shaking hands, he typed in a few commands and hit Enter to confirm his decision. A small beep indicated that his action was successful; the entire file was permanently deleted from the entire system mainframe.

"We got the scraps!" a voice called happily from the doorway, shocking Walter out of his intent reverie. Instinctively, he spun towards the door, tugging at his wrists...

Kevin and Leon were just entering the office, waving a few bits of paper in their hands. "It was so close, we almost missed— oh," Kevin stopped in mid-sentence. His eyes widened, and he fell to the floor, dead, a split second before Leon's corpse fell as well.

Walter froze, staring at his talons, where the fatal claws had flown from just seconds earlier. He hadn't meant to kill the two of them, but he was so surprised by their unexpected early return that his defensive instinct kicked in. Heart still beating hard, he bent down and picked up his skin-coloured gloves from the floor, quickly pulling them on before anyone else might see his murderous talons. Regrettable; the gloves always made his talons so itchy, but they were necessary for his cover. The bodies would have to be moved too, of course...

Walter collapsed onto his chair, mind racing about how close everything had just been. Humans had found out about the Tumpus... and the Skartles, and the Jopians, and probably many more as well... and although that knowledge was restricted to a few privileged individuals for now, it was extremely close to being revealed to the entire country... perhaps soon, the entire world.

For now, though, he had the upper hand. Walter had just deleted the collective information of the most secretive agencies on the planet, sending humanity effectively back to square one in terms of alien species awareness. He would manage his way out of this mess somehow, and everything would go back to normal. Walter sighed in relief. Everything would be okay. All was well.

Todd groaned. "*All was well*"? What a terrible way to end a story that was otherwise so perfect.

As judge for a science fiction writing contest, Todd had seen his own share of poorly written sci-fi stories, which was why this particular entry related so well with him. Not only was it a clever choice of topic, but it was also funny, captivating, and well-written. The plot had some holes, granted, but there's only so much you can do with a word limit. As for the ending! Todd always loved endings that were completely unexpected, and here was an excellent example. No one would ever guess a priori that Walter himself was an alien, so the final revelation and violent climax would blow everyone away.

And then... the author had to go and end it with a sentence as lame as "*All was well*". What a shame, to end so great a story with such a tired, meaningless, three word sentence. Todd sighed as he moved the story to the side, feeling sure that it could have been a winner if it had just ended off more carefully.

He began to read the next story, but his mind was still on the previous one. The entire story was about a person judging stories for a science fiction writing contest, very much like Todd himself. Yet that judge turned out to be an alien...

Todd laughed out loud, trying to convince himself of the absurdity of what he was thinking. "Absolutely ridiculous," he assured himself aloud, "Just because Walter was an alien doesn't mean I am one too. I am most definitely not an alien. I am not, and I know for sure, because unlike Walter, I'm not just a character in a science fiction story!"