

GOING VIRAL

Gavin Scott



FROM THE HARD DRIVE OF HUNTER GRACE

They don't teach you anything about dealing with Doppelgangers in High School. They don't teach you anything about dealing with Rebel Angels. Or Pit Demons.

There are two reasons for this. One is that teachers are too dumb to know anything useful about this stuff anyway, and two is that when they drew up the syllabus – they had NO IDEA about the Singularity.

Boy, did they not see that coming!

The day after the President went on TV and told us about the Hadron Collider going bust and the Dark Energy coming through I asked Mr. Lazard in Science what Dark Energy was and he just blanked. He made some dumb joke about it being what was always getting me in trouble, but nobody laughed. Some of them were going to laugh, especially Eileen Struthers, but I gave her The Look and she shut right up.

Good call.

But when I went online it turned out to be one of those things they REALLY don't want to teach you about in High School because it shows that most of the other stuff they've been telling you is a total crock. Turns out all the atoms and molecules and all that boring stuff in the Periodic Table that they keep banging on about are like *ten percent* of the real world.

Ten per cent! Maybe fifteen.

All the rest is Dark Matter. And Dark Energy. You can't see it, you can't feel it – but it's the only reason the whole universe doesn't fly apart, like, yesterday.

And nobody knew it was there, especially Mr. Lazard.

Until the President went on TV.



**TELEVISED ADDRESS
BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES**

“My fellow Americans, two weeks ago an experiment with accelerated particles at the Large Hadron Collider accidentally punctured a hole in the membrane which separates us from other universes, and unleashed a force known as ‘Dark Energy.’

Please do not panic!

Throughout human history there have been other times when the membrane between us and other worlds has been thin and our ancestors have had glimpses into other realities.

In fact, there are those who say this is the origin of much of our religion, mythology and folklore!

But I must warn you: if you encounter such mythological entities *do not speak to them or interact in any way.*

Instead, just log on to www.usgov.singularity.com and report it.

I'm setting up a task force of highly-trained Singularity Investigations Officers who'll be responsible for dealing with Dark Energy Intruders (DEI's).

You should also know that some areas of the country may "go dark" and lose all contact with the rest of us. Please do not enter those areas, or to try to telephone people living there.

This may sound worrying, but there's no need for most of us to be concerned in any way. Normal life will go on. Most Americans will go to work, go to school, go to the supermarket just like we always did.

There will just be – a little more unpredictability than there was before.

But I give you my personal guarantee the link between us and other universes will be shut down, the Dark Energy Intruders will be removed, and both the Senate and the House of Representatives will conduct a thorough investigation to bring those responsible to account.

My advice to you, my fellow Americans, is, in the words of Winston Churchill, to keep calm and carry on.

God bless you - and goodnight.

[The official broadcast ended at this point, but technicians then recorded the following words]

What's that thing in the corner of the studio? It has horns! And it's red! Get it out of –

[Recording ended]



**FROM THE HARD DRIVE OF HUNTER GRACE
CONTINUED**

How scary was it when the President said that stuff? Well, I remember looking at Hannah and knowing she felt just like I did.

Which was like the bottom of your stomach had just dropped out.

Hannah is my sister, and probably the best person I know. She's been there for me ever since the day Mom and Dad - disappeared, went missing, died, whatever you want. Nobody knows. All I know is that they weren't there for me any more and Hannah was.

She's been studying to be a psychologist, but she gave all that up, came back home from college, helped us get into this little apartment on Woodman, started looking for a job - and couldn't get arrested. But she never complained, never.

Sometimes I kind of wished she would. I wanted to tell her she didn't need to, that I'd be alright on my own, but I couldn't say that really.

Because it wasn't true.

And then one day I came home from school and there she was in the uniform, with the gun belt and the two way radio and the taser and she hugged me and told me her country had finally realised it needed her.

For a minute I was scared out of my mind that she'd joined the Army and was going off to Iran or some crap place like that and then she told me no, it was okay, we'd still be together, because she was now ...

A Singularity Investigations Officer for the San Fernando Valley Division of the Department of Homeland Singularity.

That night we went to P.F. Chang's and had all the Orange Shrimp we could eat and the next morning Hannah started work and a couple of days later I wrote an e-mail to my pen-pal Wellington Wong, who lives in South East Asia, telling him what went down on the first day I visited her office.



Subject: VISIT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SINGULARITY

From: Hunter S. Grace

To: Wellington Wong

Date: February 1st

Dear Wellington,

I will skip all the How are you and I hope the weather is fine in Kuala Lumpur stuff because it is boring and I will just tell you what has been going on here, which is pretty amazing.

Probably amazing things have been happening as well in Kuala Lumpur since the Singularity and if so you can tell me about them. But I bet you don't have a sister working for the Department of Homeland Singularity, and I do, and today after school I took the bus down Van Nuys to the Sherman Oaks Galleria on Ventura Boulevard, right

next to the 405 Freeway, which is now the headquarters of the San Fernando Valley Division of the Department.



In the olden days Sherman Oaks Galleria was this cool shopping mall where they invented Valley Girls and made movies like Back to the Future and Terminator. Then the '94 earthquake whacked it and it wasn't cool anymore and all the stores moved out and for a while it was mainly a big kind of pointless space full of mortgage brokers. Now there's a multiplex and lots of escalators, including one that leads up near the roof, where if they give you the code a big airlock kind of door slides open, and a camera looks at you and something scans you and if you pass the test you go through.

Hannah was in this huge room with a giant map like the ones they have in police precincts, except that where the cops' maps show things like "Homicide", "Armed Robbery" or "Kidnapping", Hannah's board has things like "Interdimensional Vortex in progress" on Lankershim, "Demon Eruption" in Chatsworth and "Aztec Manifestation" on Laurel Canyon.

When I arrived they were having a training session, so I sat quietly at the back and listened. The guy talking was a woofly old Professor type with a worn old leather briefcase that looked about a million years old. “The crucial thing is persuasion,” he was saying. “Because the powers of these manifestations are unknown, the best approach is to attempt to convince them to go back where they came from, instead of using force.”

“We are authorised to use force, Professor,” said a big man with a false smile and some thin hair combed over his pink bald head. He was Hannah’s boss, Caspar Bell and the minute you see him you know he’s a complete weasel. I have never actually seen a weasel but I knew he was one when he clapped me on the shoulder and said what a great KID my sister was and how he had HIGH HOPES of her and then went back in his office and started filing his nails. “We are authorised to use deadly force, in fact,” said Caspar Bell to the Professor. He clearly liked the idea of this.

“The problem is,” said the Professor gently, “we have no idea what effect a bullet may have on a Ghoblin, or a Doppelganger, or a manifestation of the God Vishnu.”

“Who is the God Vishnu when he’s at home?” said an officer called Brent Stanford, who looked as if he should be modeling Calvin Klein underpants. “Maybe we could use a taser on him.”

“Vishnu is the Hindu deity representing the cycle of universal creation and destruction,” said the Professor. “He’s been described as The Destroyer of Worlds – so trying to taser him would probably not be a good idea.”

“But how do you talk to a Hindu God? Or a Ghoblin for that matter?” asked Hannah. “I mean, how do we communicate?”

“Good question,” said the Professor, “but am I rightly informed you all have tablet computers?”

“The Department has all the latest technology, Professor,” said Caspar Bell pompously.

“Good,” said the Professor. “Then I’m going to send you some texts you should be studying, starting with a book called “The Golden Bough”, by Sir James Frazier, followed by “The White Goddess” by Robert Graves, and culminating in “A Directory of Supernatural Creatures”, by Jack Smiley.”

I looked over at Hannah’s i-Pad, which was filling up with page after pages of pictures of creatures you really did not want to meet up with.



And some that looked kind of interesting.



“Are these for real?” I said, more to Hannah than anybody else, but the Professor must have thought I was part of the team.

“Since the Singularity began, young man,” he said, “We’re having to re-define the concept of what is real and what is not, because our reality has now been contaminated with the realities of other universes. What we’ve got to do now is work out how to deal with these manifestations face to face: which, I urge you, is with tact and respect, using strong-arm tactics only the last resort.”

“What if neither of them work?” said Hannah.

Caspar Bell jumped to his feet. “It doesn’t matter,” he said, “Because our main job is to make the American people feel everything’s under control. The Department isn’t really set up to deal with Aztec warlords or Scandinavian Shape-Shifters: we’re there to convince people the government has it covered.”

“But isn’t that totally dis – ” began Hannah, but Caspar rode right over her.

“The key thing is to nod sympathetically when members of the public complain, and take plenty of notes,” he said. “Write it all down and tell them we’ll be in touch. And

then come back and file your reports. I set a lot of store by paperwork, as you know.” He turned to the Professor. “Thank you, Professor,” he said. “You’ve been a great help.”

“Well -” said the Professor: but Caspar had already forgotten him.

“Tomorrow we’ll have a lecture from a specialist exorcism,” he said, “and the day after that from one of Hollywood’s best stunt-men.”

“Stunt men?” said Brent.

“There may be times,” said Caspar, “when you want people to think you’ve done something, even if you haven’t. Hollywood knows all about that.”

I looked at Hannah. Hannah looked at me. Neither of us said a word, but we both knew this was bullshit.

As was proved the first time we came up against Pit Demons.

But I have to do my homework now, so I will tell you about the Pit Demons tomorrow.