

Real Time Clock

by H. W. Moss

**“Do you have any idea how much
you do not know about the future?”**

One -- Virtual Trust

The interviewer had an annoying habit of poking a finger into the side of his face in order to chew his inner cheek while he studied the resume. He made comments as he scanned Frenwin's credit list. "Yes. Top of the class, excellent. Majored in finance with an emphasis in insurance law. That's good. Yes."

At last the interviewer (Frenwin had to glance at his own EA to get the name which he had, once again, quite forgotten: Ah. Lindgate, Woolen Lindgate) looked beyond his eye panel at the well-dressed young man seated in the room with him. "But you realize you start at the bottom, don't you?"

One could stay home and Zone which meant subsidized housing, subsidized income, subsidized spending with no responsibilities. That also generally meant the cheapest, lowest quality pay per view.

Or one could seek employment. The young man nodded. He would take what was offered.

Lindgate continued: "We operate on the standard 23 hour work week here and we stick to it. However, you will be a salaryman. Therefore, you are expected to put in at least 28 hours and that means take the work load home with you. Spread out the day, as they say." Wide, supercilious, condescending grin.

Frenwin was well aware of the statistics. New lawyers were literally the most common product stamped out by a university and, since they were so ordinary, entry

level legal commanded the lowest pay. Only the medical profession boasted worse income over a lifetime and arguably more appalling working conditions. Frenwin often kicked himself for not having gone into sanitation or culinary as his father frequently suggested.

Lindgate continued: “You get the crap jobs, you know that, being the new guy. But look at the bright side: you also get to be on partnership trajectory. Here’s an account no one wants, a virtual trust that requires one hour a day every day of the year to maintain.”

The files suddenly showed up in Frenwin’s personal memory without Lindgate having asked permission, which Frenwin took to mean he had the job. Gloryanna Grandma!

“You start today. Share cubby 37 with, um, let me see, ah. Brandywine, a little cutie.” Insincere leer. “I’m sure you two will get along just fine. See admin about a gate code today. Before you leave for lunch is best.”

The firm had several hundred employees and occupied seven floors in a downtown high rise. It was not hard to locate the primary room where he was assigned, but the cubby proved difficult to enter. His code failed twice and he was reduced to kicking against the hollow metal frame which dented but rebounded. The pocket door finally slid aside and Frenwin faced his cubby mate for the first time. She did not rise as she looked up at him from her chair. She must be twenty pounds above normal, overweight in a skinny world, he thought grimly.

“Sorry ’bout that,” the woman said pleasantly enough. “Leaning against the panel. Forget sometimes. Help you?” When she smiled she revealed a gap-toothed grin in an otherwise perfect orthodontic world.

“I’m assigned this cube to share with you. Frenwin.”

Dismay crossed her features. “Yes, well, uh, in I guess.” She stood and drew her seat away from the entry. “Brandywine. Beth.” Her hand extended, but he was unable to shake what with his armload of gear.

Frenwin entered, looked around, could not decide which part of the desk was his. All of it appeared to be in use at the same time. The woman named Beth took in his gaze, realized his quandary and began to pick small plastic items, personal tidbits and work related utensils up off one area, deposited everything on the other side, presumably her side. She wore a fashionable (and probably expensive) eye panel, not the plain pane EA he favored.

The cramped work space had barely enough room for Frenwin to turn around. He was burdened with his own set of unique items which he carried in a disposable container. His music was in there as were several memory boards including the prized encyclopedia set he won in a high school essay contest. He had personalized the boards while in graduate school and intended to install them before settling in with his client base.

An all weather smock was draped over Frenwin’s forearm and in one hand a tempermeal containing lunch. He did not believe he could afford the luxury of entering even the least elegant downtown eatery.

He dumped everything unceremoniously on the now cleared surface.

“Share and share alike,” Beth said with genial candor. Frenwin flopped down into the only available chair and promptly rolled backwards half a meter. “Sorry. Didn’t warn. Got a slight glide so I don’t use. Want to replace?”

“I can get used to it.” Hands extended this time in perfunctory shake. “I was hired about an hour ago. So tell me, Beth. Do you always talk in incomplete sentences?”

She did not know if this was an ice breaking joke or a pointed barb aimed at her head. “Should I duck or is that supposed to be funny?”

“Joke. Just a joke.” The response was enough to set them at ease with one another. “Now maybe you can give me a few pointers about office life in this large legal firm.”

Beth explained they were on the clock and clients were billed not only by how many hours were spent on a case but also how many times a case was accessed. “Therefore, we try and open as many as possible every day. But your ‘open rate,’ as it’s called, will probably be slower since you’re new and I bet you got the NetNovels account.”

Frenwin’s eyes grew large and his mouth opened in surprise. “How could you possibly know that? It was just assigned.”

“Little secret. Let you in on. Everyone gets that as their first assignment. It’s rote and boring and anyone who gets it dumps it on someone else soon as possible. I had it for five weeks. New record.”

“For holding or dropping?”

“Dropping. Usually takes months to find a patsy. Guy named Woolen had it last I heard. ”

While she talked he did an easy access to the site and examined the opening frame. The headline was in written English, not his strong suit. “Fifteen hundred pages of FREE fiction,” his lips formed the syllables in each of the words. “What was this guy? A writer?”

“Now you get the video. Never sold a thing while alive. Been dead since the 40’s. But his epics endure. All part of his trust. Clever in his own small way. First person ever, I believe. To create a virtual trust.”

“Did you EA any of this guy’s work?”

“Of course not.” Defensive. “Can’t. Not user friendly. Way too early. Never upgraded.” Her strong reaction surprised him. “Take me for?” she continued. “Who actually reads anymore?” She conveyed a haughty sense of class distinction that was at once recriminatory and accusatory. He hoped her questions were rhetorical and wisely chose silence as a response.

Fren’s attention was split between the site and her complaint about it. “There is a lot of material here. You’re right, though, it is archaic. Some really old program formats if you look at the source code. Here’s one: WordStar. Never heard of it. Looks like none of ’em have ever been EA’d. Anybody who lands here actually has to read the text if they want to absorb the content.”

At that moment the puter clock on her desktop chimed. Brandywine lifted a silk sow-ear purse no bigger than a micro credit card off her chair back and slung the slender strap over her shoulder. “That’s it for me. Gotta go. See you tomorrow Frenwin. Same time, same station. By the way, that your first or last name?”

It was his only name, he said, but did not have time to explain as she slapped the wall and the door slid out of its slot and closed behind her.

He remained seated and began a careful study of his first but, hopefully, not his last or only client.

Two - - Extended Life Certificate

The EmDee was emphatic. “There are five items on your list I will not be able to select for.”

The client frowned. “Certainly it’s not ethics that stand in the way of my request.”

“Ethics were part of my training,” the response was diffident but contained a hint of pride.

“Not love or money will change your mind? How about a little blackmail?” Haroun al-Madison was in no mood to mince words. He wanted his way and planned to get it.

Clearly, the EmDee did not like that last remark and shifted uncomfortably. “There is nothing in my past that could possibly be used against me. Besides, I made a promise.”

“You refer to the hypocritic oath you took?”

“That’s Hippo-cratic,” the EmDee enunciated. “However, that is not the only reason I cannot comply. Frankly, what you have applied for verges on the illegal and nothing you can do or say will make me perform these alterations.”

“Are you giving me your own peculiar brand of need based ethics?”

“Actually, no. Inexplicably I retain some of the idealism that drove me to this profession in the first place.”

Al-Madison sent a note with a number. The EmDee received it immediately but gave no outward indication although the number was a substantial amount of Numony bank credit. In the body of the message al-Madison asked if that swayed the EmDee.

“Hardly. I have a wealthy family to fall back upon.”

Al-Madison was ready to deal and would not allow mere economics to block him. He had a few ways to play. “It all boils down to power or money, isn’t that right doc?

Still, the social fabric cannot sustain more than a pre-determined quantity of people.

Thus, you need at least one thing which I am able to offer: an extended life certificate.”

The EmDee was suitably impressed by this revelation, but managed to hide his interest behind a placid, well rehearsed bedside companion facial expression. It was a friendly mask he turned toward the man who wanted too much. “The world’s a mean and nasty place,” the EmDee intoned.

“But none, I think, do there embrace,” al-Madison filled in the verse.

“Now that’s good. Did you just make that up?” The EmDee was not trying to change the subject, merely to divert attention from his growing interest. Did this government official really have something to offer after all?

“No. I stole it. Andrew Marvell. Now, may we return to my request?”

The EmDee exchanged magnanimity for professional candor. “You want me to genetically modify the donor cells, one half of which are yours I presume, to create a bedridden dwarf. Is that about the size of it?”

Al-Madison winced. “Don’t be so harsh in your assessment, doc. I have my reasons.”

“I’m sure you do. However, most of my customers want their children enhanced, not reduced in ability. I select for improvements, not handicaps. People want their children to have increased height, intelligence, coordination. They want specific hair and eye color, facial characteristics and skin tone. They do not, as a rule, want degenerative genetic codes, recessive genes left in the helix.”

In the silence that ensued, al-Madison realized he would have to justify his desire, but he remained unsure how his explanation would be received. Which, of course, did not

really matter now. Obviously the EmDee wanted a longer life certificate. Who didn't? Still, al-Madison was not used to explaining himself and it troubled him to have to give his reasons to this stranger.

“Ok, here's the situation. I've procreated six times and all the little brats grew up and left me. I don't want that to happen again. This time I want to select for dependence on parent, clinging to the fold, fear of leaving home. Hell, I don't care if it's a cripple so long as it doesn't fly away as soon as it becomes legally emancipated.”

“You are single, un-nupt?”

“At the moment, this is true.” There was a twinge of discomfort in his reply. “But that has not always been the case.” Al-Madison was ill at ease discussing this subject as well; his previous nupts numbered eleven. All had ended in acrimonious court battles, the women wanting his continued economic support and, yes, the promise of extended life certificates he always dangled in front of them at the first coupling, then reneged upon at the end of the affair. In courtroom after courtroom he had to deny he ever said such a thing. Admitting that he used the ploy would probably have resulted in his indictment for abuse of power.

“I have twenty eggs from my first nupt. They're frozen. That was part of our post-nupt agreement. I got twenty of her eggs. Don't ask what she got from me. Always liked her voice. We're going to shoot for that as well.” He paused to separate the next statement from what came before. It was the same classic line he had used on nearly all his former nuptmates. “Didn't you check my status bar? Highest order. I can give you the one thing no rise in social eminence, increased wealth or power can supply. I can give you what everyone wants, but none receive, to have more than 95.”

The blank stare which greeted this news was an exercise in absolute feature control and al-Madison was impressed.

“Yes, and how, exactly, can you accomplish this for me?” the EmDee finally asked.

Few of al-Madison’s nupts had been so inquisitive. They just took it for granted he could make good on his promise. This guy might be cagier than he thought. “Easy. Let me explain. We fool the Population Puter. Your life certificate gets renewed early and we simply come back with a later arrival date. I see to that.”

It sounded plausible enough. Someone with access might be able to re-write a life, make the records reflect a more recent appearance.

“You’re in the Rapture Generation, am I right?” al-Madison continued. “You still look good, could be mistaken for a Loner. But I’m offering you a chance to become Strange Gen or even a No Namer. However, I don’t advise you try and pass for One of Them. I can practically guarantee nobody would buy it.”

Modern medicine had fulfilled mankind’s dream and there was no longer any reason why humans could not live two centuries or more. Except for the fact the planet could not support these multitudes. A worldwide government age limit was set, and re-set until it rose to a disagreeably finite length of four score and fifteen. Upon achieving this dubious distinction, age 95, a citizen’s life certificate was withdrawn and with it the age halting drugs. “Overnight” was the word most often used to describe how fast the change occurred.

“Just look at me,” al-Madison persisted. “I’m Gen Yes and I don’t do Overnight! That’s right, I was born in eighteen, that’s two-oh-one-eight, and passed Overnight a couple decades ago.” Truly, the man did not appear to be anywhere near the 115 years he

claimed. But then, no one looked their age anymore except the Baby Boomers who had arrived too late to retain their good looks but in time to receive the medical benefits. Boomers were an exception to the Overnight rule and were allowed to stay around as long as they could. Trouble was, the drugs did nothing to reverse the aging process, merely stop it in its tracks. If you had already progressed to the deterioration stage of baggy skin, sunken cheeks and no hair, you continued to look like an octogenarian. By law, no one was allowed to start taking the drugs until they were 29 and most people chose to begin immediately upon arriving at that age.

A few late born Boomers remained, but not many. At around age 175 they invariably said, "Time to check out." The phrase had come into common parlance to describe the deadline year everyone faced, birth plus 95, but no one knew why Boomers chose to go somewhat below the two century mark. Everyone hoped it would not turn out to be a universal decision humans tended to make when they reached that age.

Of course, there was another choice because there were actually two departing options: Either leave this life or leave the earth and go to some other planet in an off-world settlement. Anti-aging drugs would be renewed for another 95. Although some still believed in an afterlife, dying or departing were both risky ventures. No one had returned from either. Every EmDee and anyone who did not Zone more than a few hours a day knew these facts, but few had the opportunity to take a third alternative, the one which was being presented to the EmDee now.

There was no way to be certain al-Madison's boast was true, but the EmDee wanted more than anything to believe what he was told. This was a rare opportunity and all he

was being asked to do was his job, something he did five days out of the week, four point six hours a day, only this time with a slightly new twist.

Al-Madison was in a game mood. He knew he had the Em by the genitals.

“One more thing,” al-Madison began. “I checked with your pharmacy. You’re ordering but not scripting. So I assume you are consuming large quantities of Againcon.” He could tell from the Em’s suddenly flushed face he had struck a bull’s eye. The reaction disappointed al-Madison. The Em did not have as much self-control when confronted with his own clandestine transgressions. “I’m in the government, remember? We look for this sort of thing and that’s one of the first signs, you know. What we look for. Trying to think hard, aren’t you doc?”

Againcon was not available to the general public. It was one of many longevity drugs, but this one affected brain cells. It warded off age related degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s, bipolar mania, dysthymia, other forms of mood disorder and dementia. It also had only one known side effect. Like serotonin, if you did not need it there was no response except you thought deeper and harder and more clearly. Againcon was known as the thinking person’s pill.

“You use in order to abuse. Very common, believe me. You want to think your way out of the trap you seem to have found yourself in and one of these days you will be caught by someone other than me. Unless you quit, of course. I can help you do that by giving you the peace of mind that comes from knowing your life certificate will be renewed.”

The Em was momentarily speechless. Did this person know everything about him? Were his best kept secrets an open file to al-Madison? Surely he did not know the

EmDee's actual age, one of the more private and personal pieces of knowledge anyone could have.

"You have exactly four years, five months and seven days left before Overnight, Doc. You're 91 and scared."

Astonishment flowed like a river out the EmDee's open mouth. It took a moment to collect his thoughts. Then: "You said you want to select for voice as well?" he inquired as he began filling out the order form.

"Yah, and I want it accelerated to be born aged ten. None of this diaper/toddler crap. I've had enough of that."

The EmDee continued to enter data into the contract.

"And while you're at it, give it a decent prep school education. Boy or girl, doesn't matter. Just make it love me. Can you get it to me in a week?"

Three -- Background History

By the second month Frenwin was into the swing of things at work. His open rate was above average for a newbie and he had learned how to clear NetNovels in an orderly fashion.

The problem was the incoming which amounted to, he checked the statlist, 30 million pieces daily. About half were excised by a spam filter, but that left a tidy number to be hand evaluated. Not "by hand," exactly, but certainly using human hands to direct the sort. He reduced the workload and the time constraint by devising a robo-clone to take care of these and, ultimately, almost all the incoming turned out to be garbage. On a per diem basis there was an average of about four legitimate downloads, which was surprising considering the fact that reading was no longer taught except as an elective to

English majors. He had taken a reading survey course on a whim which allowed him to hack his way through a few lines of text.

But the more Frenwin investigated this account, the more interested he became. As Brandywine said, it was one of, if not the first ever, devised to persist in virtual reality long after the maker expired. This was common practice now, but in those days? Whew! Was this guy prescient or what? Ahead of his time, but he was working with some very archaic tools.

Which explained some of the site's many short comings. For one thing, it was nothing but inanimate text. There was no flash, no action, no sound or fury. It relied purely on readers who were required to take the time to do just that. There was no compression to speed up the process, no EA or any other modern downloading shortcut Fren could find.

However, in a very real sense this site had spawned an industry and his firm owed it a huge debt of gratitude. This site was the precursor to the many cenotaphs they administered. The cyber world was cluttered with perpetual testimonials to the human ego and these days it was big business. Many a law firm paid its bills from trust accounts of exactly this type.

The popularity of the cyber trust spawned many other industries. Hosting services offered to keep your character active long after you were not, depending on how many nucredits you were willing to throw at the project. You could put entire feature films up if you thought someone might be interested in sitting through the story of your life. In fact, numerous companies specialized in making dramatic interpretations from scripts based

on the highlights in your life. If you didn't have any highlights, the story might be a tragedy.

Unfortunately, since the turn of the last century the NetNovels site had become hopelessly outmoded. The parameters of the trust failed to take into account changes that occurred in cyberspace. For example, until Frenwin came along, none of the trustees had done anything to filter out incoming adverts. They left it all up to the ISP and finished the job by hand. This was what Woolen meant when he said it took an hour a day, every day of the year. With approximately 30 million offers every 24 hours it had to be cleaned out or it clogged up. And if you skipped a day, it could take more than two hours to make it run smoothly again. Frenwin dared not let it go an entire week until he implemented several techniques to make the site run at optimum.

But there were other problems as well, chiefly the way the trust had been constructed. A trust is a legal device to hold property in some manner and to pass it to others in some manner. The manner depends on the wishes of the person setting up the trust, known as the trustor. The person handling the trust is the trustee. Those who receive something from a trust are known as beneficiaries. In this case, the only beneficiaries were the trustees, the bankers and the ISP which received payment to keep NetNovels on a server.

The author at NetNovels placed all his writings in cyberspace and directed his assets be locked in a trust with no proceeds disbursed until conditions x, y and z came to pass. In effect this limited the use of the funds because nowhere did it say "hire a script doctor" or "find a director and do a shoot" or even "upgrade to EA when that comes into existence." After all, no one can foresee the future and the potential upgrades from which

On the other hand, Frenwin mused as he worked his way through the original terms of the trust and painstakingly turned every line of text into EA, nowhere were these enhancements prohibited.

Another thing missing was an incentive. All trusts these days demanded periodic upgrades and paid handsomely for attention to detail. He could find no such clause in the NetNovels.com account.

Thus, the trust did not make adjustments for technological change and no instructions were left to adapt any of the work to a modern style or format, to follow a zeitgeist or mode of the moment. Nor did it make any provision for virtual existence on any other world. As a result, NetNovels could only be accessed on the mother planet and none of the near colonies and certainly none of the extra-galactic communities one heard about but could not prove existed without actually going there.

As trustee (Frenwin smiled at the thought he had a new title) he did not really have to do much more than oversee payments to various interests. These included the bank's management team which received a smooth seven percent of annual gross right off the top.

Frenwin located the bank account, flipped through decades of summary until he understood the management style which was conservative to say the least. Initially set up with funds generated from the sale of assets in the author's estate, the cash had been converted into Numony credits which generated a substantial income stream because of the large beginning balance.

There was the ISP, which had changed several times over the years. Frenwin glanced at the hosting history, muttered to himself, “ISP’s come and go. Let us not talk of Michelangelo”

However, the trust paid his company rather well. The Numony appeared to be growing despite an unadventurous, some might say lackluster, investment strategy and management style.

There was one glaring error which caught Frenwin’s attention. His background in economics was assailed by the fact that many items on the site were free. There was no supply and demand curve because there was no price component. There were five novels, at least 20 short stories, dozens of essays, a smattering of journalism and some very outdated film reviews that were all free. What income there was derived from a banner advertisement, very old school, and the invested principal. In addition, one still had to read, which was a problem unto itself.

Frenwin did a few calculations, decided the firm was giving the account short shrift. In sum, the site could easily become a cash cow that would more than pay his annual salary if he turned the writings into EA format and stopped giving them away. The firm should consider this a valued customer despite inadequacies in the way the trust had been constructed. Maybe he could make some changes without defeating the original intent.

At last Frenwin turned to the author bio. He was born August 4, 1947, and died in 2040. Ripe old for that day and age. Very nearly what you get with a life certificate, Fren thought. So the site has been up since 2040, a little more than 93 years.

Just then Brandywine entered. Generally, it was considered impolite to read files on someone else’s screen, but they sat so close together and he didn’t really care.

“Haven’t dumped NetNovels on someone? Thought for sure you would by now.”

“I’m intrigued. And I think we have something here. You realize this was a brand new idea when the site was created? The guy had no heirs, but instead of leaving his money to a cat or a charity he created a way to give his work away. For the next thousand years.”

Brandwine was not impressed. She withdrew a collapsed emery from her tiny purse and began to buff a nail.

“It’s something of a challenge. I mean, it has a healthy income without selling much of anything. I bet I could turn it into one of our biggest income producers. Other firms rely on assets alone. In addition, this account could generate Numony from the author’s work. All we have to do, really, is convert it all to EA and put a price on everything, maybe give away the first 50 pages of a novel, and promote the hell out of it. I like the idea it was the first of its kind. Tag line might be ‘Writer Returns from the Dead.’”

“Firm won’t support that. Nope. They’d rather let sleeping ketchans doze.”

“I think I’ll put in a little overtime, just in case I can convince someone.”

“Go ahead. You get to spend your days until Overnight any way you please.”

Four -- Nativity

The child was in his early teens but his body remained shrunken and smallish. He was full of energy and leaped at al-Madison’s feet while the parent held a device in the air above his head, far out of reach of the boy.

“Here ya go, Tintam. When you get a little older I’ve got an old Monster set for you to try on. In the mean time you can play with this.”

The child had the face of a pixie which had come to repulse its parent. “Can’t believe I ever thought that would be cute,” al-Madison muttered. He enjoyed teasing Tintam like one would a house pet. At last he lowered the eye set which the boy snatched out of his parent’s hands. Tintam put the ear clip in place, switched the transceiver into the “on” position and was immediately connected. It was not his first time to plug, but the child was excited by the gift, his first personal eye ware with EA. There were no interactive features on the set because Tintam was still too young. However, the set was programmed for continuous entertainment. Childish entertainment, al-Madison grumbled. “That’s all you get for now.”

Just then the comm link drew his attention from the domestic scene. “Yes,” al-Madison said with a greeting that smacked of irritation. The caller code identified the incoming as from the EmDee. “Ahhhh. Yes, herr doctor. It’s been some years.”

The EmDee appeared haggard. He was no longer the robust clinician with whom al-Madison had done business.

“Something on your mind? You have a question?” al-Madison asked. “But if I may say so, you look like hell.”

“I thought we had a deal,” the EmDee said through clenched teeth.

“But of course we did. What seems to be the problem?”

“They won’t refill my Hallatain. Say it’s too close to Overnight. But you were supposed to have changed my arrival date. What happened, dammit, to my new arrival date?”

“I have no idea what you are talking about.” Wide, passive smile. “I paid you solid nucredits. Now you say I suggested we could somehow alter your Overnight? I don’t think so.”

The EmDee was absolutely astonished by this response. His face remained fixed, his mouth grimly shut without comment as al-Madison broke the connection. Al-Madison’s next act was to place the preceding caller in deny for all future contact.

“Fear death?” he said to the faded image on the screen. “I was ever a fighter.”

Five -- Numony, Nusite

Frenwin was comfortably seated at his own private desk in an unshared room that actually had a window overlooking the Bay. He no longer occupied a tiny cubby with an office mate. In a very real sense he had arrived.

“Take a look at this. It’s called ‘My Last Tenants’ which has something of an enigmatic ending,” he explained to the air around him. Actually, he was in a conference call with three senior partners in the firm. They had arranged the round table discussion after he caught their attention. One of his accounts was generating a substantial amount of Numony. His name began to appear in their financial reports. “On the other hand, you may prefer something more dramatic like ‘Insured’ which really is a paranoid’s view of society.”

Without getting permission from anyone, Frenwin had gone ahead and paid several puter people to work on upgrading the site. All the stories on NetNovels were converted to EA and soon enjoyed wide popularity on eye ware around the globe. That was the result of another risk Frenwin had taken when he ordered a worldwide spam campaign using the tag line, “Writer Returns.”

This played on the universal knowledge and subjective fear that no one had returned.

“If you like West Coast historical fiction you might want to acquire ‘In the Shadow of the Pyramid’ which the author constructed using an interesting technique. It takes place in the past and the present. The even numbered chapters are in the 1800’s, the odd numbered in what was the author’s present day San Francisco.”

While he spoke, two of the partners must have accepted his advice because they were abruptly lost in a trance-like state that was a sure sign of a large EA download at work. They broke out of their distant gaze in seconds at almost the exact same time with smiles on their faces.

“Now that was a good story,” one of them remarked.

“Well, there were at least ten separate tales going on at about the same time,” the other replied. “But overall it was a nice piece of history. How much of it is true?”

Frenwin had not anticipated that question. All he had done was pay to have 350 pages of what he thought was a rather pedestrian work of historical fiction converted to EA so it could be very nearly instantly absorbed. He had not researched it or sorted fact from fiction. He assumed some parts really happened, but had no idea which. His hesitation did not go unnoticed.

“Never mind, Fren. We like what you’ve done,” the third partner chimed in on the conversation. “Even if the trust had no specifications for upgrades. We are talking to you because you hinted strongly at a plan to increase the income stream. Can you give us an idea of how much you want to spend and how you intend to pump it up?”

Fren was prepared for this moment. He had spent five years living with this domain and now it was time to exploit NetNovels to its fullest.

“Frankly, it has nothing to do with the site. I believe we have a potential licensing fee here.” He could see from their reactions the idea of licensing was most agreeable to them. “And I believe it could be retroactive for very nearly the last century.” This caught their unwavering attention. “If you will bear with me, I can give you the logic. It has to do with the First Premise Rule which is also known as the Clarke Decision after Arthur C. Clarke. I am sending that along with an executive summary. Basically, Clarke published the principles of satellite communication using geostationary satellites in circular orbits around the earth in ‘Wireless World’ in October, 1945. However, he was never compensated for being the first to propose the idea. His was a vacuum tube, pre-IP, hard wired world and no satellites could get off the planet to put his plan to a test.”

From the looks on their faces Frenwin decided they had not made the same legal leap he had.

“Bear with me if you will. The Clarke Decision is meant to rectify a wrong, the failure to be compensated for intellectual property which achieves status in the public domain. In this case, the author of NetNovels was the first to create a virtual estate. All others follow. Thus, this estate conforms to the First Premise Rule which states that all who copy may be charged a user fee. It’s not unlike the SCO case of the early 21st Century where a small company claimed the rights to the basic Unix source code. All others pay cash.”

His three listeners were attuned to license fees and paid keen attention. They must have realized at almost exactly the same instant the potential of earning more Numony than they ever imagined.

“Ladies and gentleman, I wish to allow you time to think my proposal over. I will get back to you in a week with what I believe should be an appropriate user fee. In the mean time, take an instant to EA the essays on the site as well. One that’s quite humorous is called ‘What Alias Do You Use?’. I believe your legal minds will enjoy it. Then there’s ‘Excess Body Parts’ which, among other things, talks about the fact no one needs two kidneys. That explains why so many transplants were initially done on living kidney donors.”

Six -- The Endowed Estate

“What made you go into law in the first place?”

Timtam thought this over. It was a reasonable question. Did he have a reasonable answer?

“I think I always wanted to get back at my father for having created me as I am. I want to change the eugenics laws to prevent backward selection from ever happening again.”

Frenwin smiled at the noble goal. Altering the legal code could take a lifetime of work. “Have you ever told him how you feel about this?”

“Not really. He did Overnight before I could express my contempt for making me look freakish.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter to us what you look like,” the newest partner in the firm said as he poked a finger into his face and chewed the inside of his cheek. The young

man opposite was short of stature with three fingers on one hand, a thumb missing from the other. He had a voice like a set of airbrakes and would never be a rock star. The fact he had no hair whatsoever, not even eyebrows, did seem a little creepy. Frenwin overcame his queasiness. “You surmounted all obstacles to become the most brilliant graduate in your field this year. You scored at the very top in both categories. Therefore, a job is yours if you want it.”

Timtam had no illusions about what kind of job that would be. “As I understand it, being the newbie I’ll get the crap at first. But the bright side is I get to be on partnership trajectory.”

“You’re a quick study,” Frenwin said with true admiration in his voice. “That’s exactly what the personnel guy who hired me said. Only it took me ten years to figure out he was telling the truth.”

Fren sent a download which Tim EA’d. “Yah, sure, I know this guy’s work,” he said in response to the site.

Fren explained why it was being assigned to Timtam. “No one wants this account because it generates so much traffic even as a modern virtual trust it requires one hour a day every day of the year to maintain. It’s an old account, very old, and I used to have it. Maybe you can find something new to do with it.”

Timtam said he would do his best. But, then, that’s what Fren heard from every No Namer he interviewed.

#

Human Generation Calendar

Assumptions:

1. There are 25 years between human generations.
2. The name given to a generation will avoid using Z.
3. Maximum age allowed is 95 from date of birth.

Generation Name	Inclusive Years	Final Check Out Date
Baby Boomers	1945 -- 1970	
Generation X	1971 -- 1996 + 95 =	2091
Generation Yes	1997 -- 2022 + 95 =	2117
The Rapture	2023 -- 2048 + 95 =	2143
Loners	2049 -- 2074 + 95 =	2169
Strange Gen	2075 -- 2100 + 95 =	2195
No Namers	2101 -- 2126 + 95 =	2221
One Of Them	2127 -- 2152 + 95 =	2247