

**Beta Books**  
**A Taste of My Work**

**Joe Rover**

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# The Wizard of New Town (Beginnings)

## A Literary Journey

The name is Max. Though I imagine you don't care about the tall, unassuming 29-year-old walking down East 42nd Street.

I come from Newton, a thriving city of 3,000,481. Sorry, just got a text: the Johnson's had twins. Newton is a thriving city of 3,000,483.

I am a writer by trade. You might have read some of my books, but probably not. My latest project is going...not well.

"Look at this place," I said to my life-long friends, Trent and Duke. "Pollution, grime, crime, and noise. Lots and lots of endless noise. Everyone running around not really going anywhere. And everyone is so busy with their smartphones they don't even notice the person next to them."

"Did you say something?" Duke said. "Ashley just sent me this funny cat video."  
\*sigh\*

"Got writer's block again?" Trent giving me "the look."

"No! What? Why do you ask?"

"You always get testy when you are struggling. You get distant and reflective and start longing for days long since passed."

"You become a downer," said Duke. "Seriously, I don't even know why we hang out with you."

Our friendship started about the second grade when Duke and Trent were being bullied. I came to their rescue one day and we've been friends since. Soon afterwards I retired from the "being a hero" gig; it got me nothing but trouble. Anytime I try to help someone, I get smacked in the face (and in the case of the school bully that was literal...nearly broke my nose). I ended up with detention for fighting and the bully, Troy, got a warning. I believe it was his fifth one that day, and it was only ten in the morning.

Trent was always the smart one. He won the spelling bee three years in a row. He won the national science fair; got straight "A"s; and went to Harvard. He graduated with a degree in computer science and went on to help program a social media app.

Duke, on the other hand, was street smart. He was fast; knew the best hiding places; and could spot a con or trick a mile away. But he wasn't smart enough for an academic scholarship. He did play sports, but he wasn't good enough for a scholarship. He ended up as a trash collector.

I kept waiting for the day that jealousy would destroy the friendship, but they had their ways. Trent always made Duke feel valued. "Thank goodness you guys came," he would say. "My neighbors put something really rotten out; I was about to pass out from the smell." Trent understood that he needed Duke as much as Duke needed him. Duke got his chances to rib Trent though. Smart as he was, Trent lost at games of chance and could be conned; it was one of the few times Duke felt smart.

"Well, this is my stop for the day." I stopped before the stone lion statues that guarded the public library. Why these lions decided to protect a library was beyond me.

"Research and inspiration?" said Trent.

"Here's hoping," I said with a fake cheering motion.

"I hate research," said Duke.

"Necessary evil," I said.

"Like my union," said Duke.

"Or debugging code," said Trent. "Which reminds me," he and Duke continued towards the bus stop, "just yesterday, I had to debug a 50,000 line program...and it didn't have comments. Why is it so hard for coders to leave notes?" Duke looked back at me. "Help me," he mouthed. I shrugged and gave a little wave.

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My footfalls echoed among the nearly empty halls. In an age of streaming and e-books, the library was all but abandoned.

Obviously the stone lions were not doing their job.

The librarians didn't help either. They continually tried to promote the fact you could use the library's website to rent books, music, and videos, as well as research from home. The librarians also had a tendency to promote the self-check counters and the ability to renew your library card online. Where they being helpful or putting themselves out of business? The jury's still out.

Most of the people here were older or those who preferred print to the cybernetic world. Other patrons were those who, for whatever reason, did not have online access.

I came to the library for three reasons. First, I blame Trent. He is always talking about how easy it is to create a virus or to hack into a system. He *loves* to show Duke and me, in excruciating detail, how vulnerable our computer network is. I have enough problems without worrying about someone hacking into my computer just because I checked out *Ancient Societies*.

The second reason I blame on Duke: coming here makes me feel like I've *done* something. This is one reason I'm jealous of Duke. At the end of the day, he can say, "I kept the east neighborhood clean for another week." But what about me? My work is all in some cybernetic realm. Does what I do exist or is it just ones and zeroes? Also, I'm a writer. It reminds me of the old saying: If an author writes but no one reads it, did they really write?

Third, as a writer, I spend most of my time on a computer or in front of a notepad. If I did everything online that I could, I'd never leave my apartment. I can rent movies and books online. I can order food and clothing over the Internet. I can pay bills and check my bank account. I can talk to friends or promote my books through social media. So now and then it is nice to have an excuse to be offline.

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I was about three hours into a book about medieval culture when I yawned. My eyes were getting heavy and I soon fell asleep.

Hey! Don't judge me! I doubt you never fell asleep while studying.

## **The Castle in the Dark**



Moor Manor...wow, what a place. The owner obviously never heard of a maid or discovered a little thing called electricity. The manor looked to be falling apart. The manor, like the owner, has been around for a long time. Rumor is that the owner is immortal, but I think he's just old (very old). The manor is lit by either torches or fire from the fireplace, and the occasional flash of lightning from the storm that never seems to dissipate. Cobwebs adorn the place though you could search for hours and never find a spider; it is as if the spiders' made the webs, decided that the place was too spooky even for them, and hightailed it outta there.

"Minion!!" a voice rang through the hallways.

"Coming Master," said a short man as he came through the door panting. "And the name is Min-yon."

"I don't care," said the master of the manor. "Now go to the shelf and get me a jar of eye of newt."

Min-yon limped and shuffled over to the bookcase. Min-yon did not have a hump or a limp but did have to pretend because he was, after all, only a minion. "Sorry Master," Min-yon said with a lisp, "but we are all out of eye of newt. I can order more from the Internet, and with their drone technology, it will be here by tomorrow."

The master shot Min-yon a look that could peel wallpaper. The master rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Minion, I am trying to rid the world of science and technology, do you honestly think I want to use it!!"

"...Um...no?"

"Go to the newt farm and get the eyeballs the right way."

Min-yon had to hold back the feeling of vomit as he thought about the "right" way to get eyes out of a newt. "Why must we destroy technology, Master?"

"Because, slave, science is destroying magic. With this spell, I will bring the world back to its proper time; a time when magic ruled. There will be no more smog; no more noise..."

“No more telemarketers,” Min-yon said.

The master seethed for a moment then calmly said, “There will be peace and harmony. New ideas will flow and mankind will finally evolve to its full potential.” He went silent for a moment. “Now, go, and fetch me some eye of newt. And make sure it’s fresh.”

“How could it not be?” Min-yon mumbled suddenly gaining a New Jersey accent.

“What was that?”

“Nothing, my lord and master,” Min-yon said regaining his “minion” accent. The master returned to his cauldron (being careful not to let his impressively long, white beard dip into the liquid) and began chanting as Min-yon continued to mumble, “I never should have answered that henchman ad I saw on the Internet. ‘Be a minion,’ Mom would say. ‘You’ll travel and meet interesting people.’ Bah.” Min-yon then slammed the door behind him.

### **What Just Happened**

I snorted awake. I stretched and yawned. Boy, what a good nap. I then noticed the people staring at me. I chuckled softly, smiled, and closed the book. I stood and began inching away from the library patrons. Once I was far enough away, I turned and scurried to the shelf to put the book back.

The book hung inches from its spot as I realized something: there were people in the library; more than the 10 to 20 that loiter around. Much more.

“Is there a sale?” I said aloud.

The extra people was strange but nothing to worry about; maybe it was a lunch hour or something. \*grumble\* *Speaking of food*... I thought as my stomach continued to protest; I was getting hungry. Luckily there was a diner not far from here.

The library door clanged behind me. “Was the library door always made of iron?” I shook my head and took a deep breath. The air smelled fresh and seemed to rejuvenate me, a nice change from the smog. “Can’t remember the last time the library was that full.”

I descended the stairs. A groaning, kind of crumbling noise, made me stop. It sounded kind of like stone moving. I turned but only the stone lions stood near me. I continued down the stairs and heard the noise again. I turned once more but there were only statues. I shrugged and took a couple more steps and heard the sound again, but this time it was joined by a low growling noise. I started taking the stairs two at a time. Once I reached the bottom, I turned again, but there was still nothing.

“Excuse me, young Sir,” a voice said. I twisted in a surprised half jump-half turn that would put figure skaters to shame. In front of me now stood a knight on horseback. “Could you point me in the direction of Wilber’s Court?”

“Two blocks that way, turn right, go three blocks, and take a left.”

“Thank ye kindly Sir.” The horse snorted a “thank you” too. The horse and rider began their journey down the street.

“Must be a renaissance fair.” I put my hands on my hips. “And they didn’t invite us. But in all fairness, Duke was kicked out after winning the pie eating contest three years in a row.” I checked around me. “Why am I talking to myself?”

Continued in [\*The Wizard of New Town \(Beginnings, #1\)\*](#) available to buy at Barnes & Noble.

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# The Life of Ace Journeyman (Journey to Neo-Geo)

## Neo-Geo Mountain



February 16, 2012, 10 miles outside of Newton City...

Wow, 2012, I was only 18 at the time. Fresh out of high school and on my way to my internship at Neo-Geo Mountain. I had zero interest in the world of geology or archeology but the internship was college credit nonetheless while I figured out what I wanted to do. Besides my best friend, Glen, was into that stuff, sort of. He was more interested in the romantic side of archeology, you know, exploring caves, finding ancient treasure, solving the mysteries of the past. He was in for a rude awakening once he found out how dirty, and exhausting, real archeology work was.

Upon disembarking the bus, we were greeted by the site supervisor, Dr. Richter. "Welcome to the Neo-Geo base camp. This is where you will eat, sleep, and categorize. You will be spending eight hours a day out in the field or in the lab, but don't worry, you'll be able to go into town on Friday nights."

"Whooo!" someone shouted. "Party!"

The crowd tried to suppress a laugh with varying degrees of success.

"Yes..." said Richter, putting his hands behind his back as if he was a military general. "We'll start today with a brief history of Neo-Geo."

That brief history lasted five hours. I'll give you the short version. The mountain was formed the normal way of lava and plate tectonics over millions of years. The city of Newton (originally called New Town) was founded in the 1800s (give or take) as settlers moved west from the East trying their hand at ranching or gold mining. Newton was close to a river, before the water treatment plants and dams and such, and Neo-Geo housed many precious gems such as gold. But soon the residents found that Neo-Geo wasn't your typical mountain. The gems were...different. A mixture of ruby, quartz, emerald, and lapis lazuli stone created strange effects, according to legend of course.

The story goes that these gems caused people to act differently and gain abilities beyond normal people. Then one day everyone in town simply vanished. But people didn't stay away too long, the temptation of new land and gold was more powerful than superstition and Newton became the booming metropolis we know now.

Over time scientists discovered the strange properties of the ruby, quartz, emerald, and lapis within Neo-Geo, which is how it came to be called Neo-Geo (as in new geology, and it also rhymed really well). Science admitted that there was something odd about the mountain but Science still will not admit to anything supernatural. And that is basically why we are there: to study the rocks and figure out why they are different and maybe reproduce it. Richter is also curious about why the original settlers just vanished.

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I plopped heavily into the cafeteria seat and stared at the bubbling glop on the tray for a moment. A few seconds later Glen joined me. He had a smile bigger than his face. "Wasn't that great?! How interesting! Wow!" I noticed that his tray was filled with potatoes, steak, and green beans. I glanced back down at the glop on my tray. How did that happen?

"Yeah, it was...something."

"Like getting your head drilled by a screwdriver?" said a pretty redhead sitting down next to me.

I laughed nervously. "Yeah. It was pretty dull. That Richter guy needs a personality upgrade."

"My father is known to drone on."

I choked on my glop. "F-f-father?"

"Oh relax, I'm not going to tell. I know he's as interesting as paint drying on a hot day. He can be odd; he named me Sandy after all."

"Your geologist father named you Sandy?" I said.

She finished her bite of salad. "Sandy Onyx Richter to be exact. Parents can be cruel."

"Yeah," I aimed for sounding like I was sympatric. "I was named Ace."

"That's not so bad," Sandy said. "Was your father a World War II pilot?" she joked.

"Actually, I don't know. Mom doesn't talk much about him."

She looked at her tray. "Oh. I'm sorry."

"Not a problem."

"Anyhoo..." Glen said (thankfully) changing the subject, "I'm looking forward to starting tomorrow. It should be great fun."

Sandy stood. "Oh it is," Her smooth face shined a mysterious smile. "It is until Dad gets hold of you."

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I stared at the ceiling of our cabin as Glen finished in the bathroom. The cabin wasn't the greatest but at least it had lights and running water (not to mention a bathroom, I was not looking forward to trekking across the camp in the middle of the night to use the toilet). I'd been watching the ceiling for so long that the wood was starting to make a pattern...one of Sandy's face smiling at me.

Glen then came in babbling about something; it took me a second to come out of my daydream. He was using some kind of green-tipped brush on his hair. "You're doing highlights again?" I asked.

"My roots were beginning to show." He pointed at his brown hair. His mixture of dyed green and natural brown hair always made me think of a meadow. All he needed to do was plant some flowers. "Gotta make a good impression." *Dr. Richter seems like the guy who'd appreciate a green and brown haired kid. And elephants love to have dinner parties with mice,* I thought. Glen said a quick "good night" before literally jumping into bed. As soon as his head hit the pillow, he was out...and not long after that, snoring.

Years of campouts, sleepovers, and the like had made me immune to his snoring. I took one more look at the Sandy pattern in the ceiling, rolled on to my side and turned out the light.



## Into the Light

"Go towards the light," a voice said. It sounded a lot like Glen's.

I was in a long corridor. It had a pattern of thin rays of lights that ran along the sides, floor, and ceiling. At the other end of the tunnel was a bright light.

"Go towards the light," the voice instructed again.

I started towards the light. The light got brighter and brighter until it covered me. I saw flashes of rubies, quartz, emeralds, and lapis. "Flxintaoajcsldsfot," the voice said. It was trying to tell me what the strange mixture of minerals was but it came out as gibberish. The light then faded and I stood in space. It wasn't the boring old space you see from a telescope; this was the kind of space you see from like NASA satellites with all the colors and lights. The strange voice continued to speak in gibberish. Suddenly it was as if a trap door opened and I began falling through a tunnel of strobe lights.

I then fell out of bed.

I stood up and rubbed my head. Glen was still sound asleep. It was light outside. "Sleeping in, Glen?" I said. "So much for a good first impression." I opened the door and walked out into a lush land of plants, animals, and colors. This was not the dusty desert that I'd been in hours before. The place was completely transformed. If it hadn't been for

the massive mountain nearby, I would think I was in OZ or something. In fact, Neo-Geo was the *only* thing I recognized.

The colors seemed brighter, cleaner than normal. The sounds were like music as if everything was singing a song in harmony. The sound seemed to be coming from everything. It was like everything had its own song but that song harmonized with the big/main song.

“Journeyman, Ace Journeyman,” a voice said softly, like a summer breeze. “Ace.” I then felt someone shaking me and the voice become more urgent.

“Ace!” Now it was Glen.

I gasped as if I’d been holding my breath for ten minutes and sat up. I was back in the cabin. Glen and some guy were there. “About time,” said Glen. “Thought I’d need to get a bucket.”

“Dr. Richter wants to see you,” the other person said coldly.

## Richter

“Just keep me posted,” Dr. Richter said to his daughter.

I poked my head into the office. “You wanted to see me.” Sandy issued a small gasp once she saw me but quickly recovered with a sunbeam of a smile. She nodded towards me as she left.

Richter offered me a seat. “I’m a no nonsense type of guy, Ace,” he said, “I’ll get right to it. I’m surprised to see you here.”

“Excuse me?”

“I knew your father.” *Whoa.* “I was shocked to see your name on the pre-selection tests everyone took in January. And I’m kind of surprised your mother would let you come within a hundred miles of this place...after what happened to your father.” He must have noticed a confused look on my face. “She never told you?” He went to the window and looked out. He looked like an old soldier who’d seen too many battles. “I was Samuel’s friend, much like you and Mr. Otero. We did everything together; except for archeology.” Richter shook his head. “Samuel never had much use for it. You take after your father in that department. And I suppose in other areas too...”

*What’s that supposed to mean?* “What happened to my father?”

“I finally talked him into joining me at Neo-Geo. I was so close to uncovering its secrets. Not long after he arrived, he...changed. Started acting differently. I contacted your mother; you and she left to come here. You probably don’t remember, you were three at the time.” He paused for a moment as if he was trying to fight back some personal demons. “It was too late. By the time she arrived...Samuel was gone.”

“Gone?” I asked. “Dead?”

“No. Gone. Vanished, like the settlers. Just poof. I turned for a second to pick up a stone tool. When I turned around, he was gone. No footprints, no drag marks, nothing.”

Suddenly this internship was a lot more interesting.

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“I don’t trust him,” Glen said flatly. “And quite frankly, I don’t trust his daughter.” This is serious. Glen trusts everyone. I was far from convinced. “Think about it. She

shows up out of nowhere and sits next to you at lunch. No offense, but she's out of your league."

"How is that not offensive?"

Glen studied the rock he was holding and sat it gently into the pile marked limestone. After almost a week of working the site, we were settling into a routine. "You know what I mean. Dr. Richter knows more about your father than he's letting on...if he even knows anything. He could be lying to you."

I looked at the rock I was holding and tossed it behind me. I have no idea where it landed. "Why would he do that?"

"How should I know? He could be some creepy stalker." I put my hands on my hips. "Yeah...OK, probably not that, but you get my point."

"Hey you two!" shouted an assistant. "Stop talking and get to work!"

"I tell you, Ace," Glen shook a rock in my face; he then realized what he was doing and carefully put it into its proper pile, "that Richter rubs me the wrong way."

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Three more hours of looking through rocks had reduced me to just looking at the rock, saying "rock," and throwing it into a pile. Glen had returned to his normal jovial self, going on about how "awesome" and "exciting" all of this was. "Oh my gosh!" he said, "Is that basalt!?" With each iteration of how "amazing" categorizing rocks was, I yawned bigger and more frequently until I...couldn't...\*yawn\*...take it...anymore...and fell asleep.

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Someone started tapping on my forehead. I opened my eyes. A person about my age stood there. I didn't recognize him from the orientation. "We're here," he said as if he was just announcing that a meteor the size of Texas was about to hit the Earth. That was when I noticed we were moving. We were in the back of some kind of transport. There were others about my age, maybe a little older, with us. They were all dressed in military fatigues and armed. That's when I noticed I was wearing fatigues too.

"Come on, David," said the one that woke me; he nudged me towards the exit. "We need to report in."

"David?" I said.

Continued in [\*The Life of Ace Journeyman \(Journey to Neo-Geo, #1\)\*](#)  
available to buy at Barnes & Noble.

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# Dogboy Reborn (Rebirth)

## **It All Started Out Normal**

“Our top story this morning is that the International League of Super-Transbeings has been called in to deal with the rouge hurricane,” said the holographic female TV anchor. “This is the third such rouge hurricane this month. The leader of the ILOST Delta Team, Ace Journeyman, stated that they are looking into the cause of this strange phenomenon.” The reporter paused as the camera angle changed to a two-shot.

“Whew,” said the male anchor, “that looks like a tough one. Glad I’m a reporter and not a superhero. But at least we have some good news today.”

“That’s right, Jason,” said the female. “This Friday is the five year anniversary of the Dark Matter Event. I’ve been looking forward to this.”

“So have I,” said Jason. “Five years ago this Friday, the Earth was invaded by the Xacians [Zac-z-ans]. They plotted to mine all the Dark Matter in the universe. Now I’m no cosmic scientist, but according to Dr. Wilber Wells, Dark Matter is what keeps our universe together. The more the Xacians mined, the more unstable our universe became. Luckily we had Dogboy, right Janet?”

“Yes, Dogboy, or as we now know him—Joe Rover. He sacrificed his powers and almost his life in stopping the crisis. Unfortunately, Mr. Rover was unavailable for an interview...”

My phone began to ring. I gave the voice command for the Omni-Cuff to pause the holographic video and answer the phone.

“How’re you dealing?” came the sweet sound of Sally’s voice. I grunted a “fine.” “I know how hard this time of year is...especially with it being the fifth anniversary.” She paused for a moment. “Any flashbacks?”

Even though I’d lost my powers five years ago, I still wasn’t use to how...human my voice sounded. “No,” I lied. It was the same every year, the closer it got to the anniversary the more flashbacks I would have. It was as if my subconscious was trying to tell me something, but everyone just said it was part of the healing process.

I heard Sally sigh. “Joel Tobias Rover, I know when you’re lying to me. We are dating, you know.”

“I’ve got to go, Sally. I don’t want to be late for class.”

I took one last look in the mirror and headed out.



(I know I'm no artist, but the rules of time travel state that if I show you the real me or anything "unfiltered" from the future, it'll cause a paradox...and I'd rather not destroy the universe. So get over it.)

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I could just plug into the virtual net and take my college classes that way, but it was time for my required offline time. Since just about everything can be done online now, we are required by law to take a certain amount of time offline in order to keep fit and healthy. This law came to pass because of our alien friends the Grays.

The Grays once looked human but after spending all their time online, they'd become the stereotypical alien. They became very slender and short because they didn't exercise and all their food was delivered through needles in their VR Pods. Their skin became gray because they didn't get any sunlight. Their fingers had become long and slender so that they could use their touchscreens without "fat fingers." Their heads grew because of all the knowledge; their eyes became huge so that they could see their screens better, and their mouths, ears, and noses became smaller because they talked online and their oxygen was feed into them by their pods.

The Grays have been visiting Earth for a long time. They've been abducting people to learn more about us so that they could be prepared for when they finally revealed themselves; they didn't want any misunderstandings (and they wanted to make sure we were friendly). Now, they weren't being mean or evil by abducting people, they just didn't have any social skills since all their interactions were online.

And they aren't the only aliens. In fact...

"Hey, what's up, Joe?" said a guy with purple skin, four arms, and antenna. He gave me a high-five.

"Not much Blerg," I said. "On my way to class."

He said I should message him later for a meet up in the virtual world. I gave him a nod then passed some firefighters trying to get an alien pet cat out of a tree. The cat's

sonic screech ended up knocking the firefighters and ladder over sending them all crashing to the ground. The cat laughed a hissing-meow and jumped down landing on a firefighter. It laughed again and took off.

“Man, I hate Flexian cats,” the firefighter said.

As I waited at the bus stop for my hover bus, I overheard a couple teenagers.

“I hear they’ve got an earthquake scheduled for ten today in Paris,” one said.

“Remember when we were kids and we’d dare each other to see who could stay in the epicenter the longest?”

Even though we’d developed the technology to end hunger, disease, and natural disasters, we still schedule them in thanks to a warning from the Blobaton [Blob-ah-ton] race. The Blobatonians [Blob-ah-tone-knee-ons] had been human too, but once they eliminated all disease, stress, and other strife from life, they’d evolved into blobs. No resistance/stress, no muscle. No pain, no gain. And all those other clichés.

“Those were the days,” the other said with a longing sigh.

“How about we play hooky and hop the next warp portal to Paris? I bet you can’t last two minutes.”

“That’s childish...I bet you five credits that a piece falls off the Eiffel Tower.”

“Are you crazy? They reinforce landmarks, stupid. But it’s a bet anyway.”

The bus pulled up; its ion engine making a slight whirling noise. The driver grunted as I placed my hand on the scanner. The signal traveled through my arm and into the Omni-Cuff placed next to my ear. It got the information it needed for the transaction and travelled back to the scanner. A holographic green checkmark appeared. The driver grunted again. “Stay behind the yellow energy shield.”

## Megaton University...

Since classes were online, the university was about the size of a medium sized house. It probably had two classrooms and an office.

Some of my classmates were talking about the upcoming Awesome Comics superhero movie. It was the story of the Dark Matter War. The “characters” would be played by actors, of course, but the actors would be transbeings. No special effects required. All the fire, flight, and fighting would be real. It’d have some of the biggest names in acting. Tickets were selling fast.

Normally class would be quick. The lesson would be downloaded straight into your brain via the Omni-Cuff. Once you needed the information, the Cuff would simulate the area of the brain and you’d remember. But since we were in offline time, we had to do the class the old fashioned way: reading, writing, taking notes, and listening to lectures.

The door opened and our instructor, a fairy transbeing, entered. She was a little shorter than most people with pointed ears and wings. She, or her ancestors had just been another failed experiment done by the Xacians.

“Open your textbooks to chapter 3,” she said and class began.

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After class I headed to the headquarters of the Paranormal and Weirdness Specialists, or PAWS. The building was designed to be distorted to baffle any intruder.

After making my way through the security checks and various tricks and traps, I found Brain's lab.

Brain helped me to navigate the world of superheroes, back when I was a superhero. He provided me with gadgets and trained me in strategy. Once PAWS learned that he was the brain behind Dogboy's technology, he was hired on the spot. In just five years, Brain had advanced PAWS and the world at large in ways we didn't think possible. He perfected the 3D fabricators, invented the magnetic-ion drives, and created the Omni-Cuffs, and much more.

Brain was at the holographic whiteboard muttering to himself. On the screen was some kind of formula that probably not even a room full of geniuses could figure out.

"Take a seat, Joe," he said without turning.

"How did you know it was me?"

"It is Monday at 3:15. You always visit me at 3:15 on Mondays. Also, the squeak of your shoes could only be made by your size. You are also the only person who waits at the door for a moment before completely entering. And finally, security told me." I sighed as I sat down. "Let me guess, you are thinking about the upcoming anniversary."

"How?..."

"You always get a little down at this time of year. It does not take a genius to figure that out."

I rubbed my face. "I don't know. I guess I just find it...annoying that they are having a parade and a movie about the Dark Matter War."

"Event," said Brain. "No one likes to call it a war."

"Whatever," I huffed. I looked at my hands. "It feels like they are making light of it."

"Joe...they need to. *All* of us need to. It is how we heal. People need to celebrate, tell stories, and make fun of what happened or we would go insane. But I have a suspicion that is not the entire reason you are feeling a sense of depression."

I exhaled some air sounding slightly like a horse. "I think part of me misses it. Being Dogboy, I mean. The adventure, the mystery, the feeling of purpose. Not the 3 am training sessions, those I can live without."

"Understandable." Brain turned to the whiteboard. "I miss it too. Why do you think I agreed to my current occupation?" He turned back. "But is that the only reason? There

is not...something else.” He gave me that knowing looking of his: a raised eyebrow and a smirk.

“Sally called you, didn’t she?”

He seemed a little agitated. “Of course she did. She is your girlfriend. We are all worried about you. Every year, like clockwork, you start having flashbacks of that day.” I looked at my feet. “It is nothing to be ashamed of. You were 16 at the time. Anyone would be terrified. And though technically you are alive, a large part of you died that day.” He put his hand on my shoulder. “Joe, that is what they are: flashbacks. They are not a vision of something to come.”

I suddenly stood. “What?! Where did you hear that?!”

“Danny told us.” I was steamed. “He is worried just like the rest of us. You will never heal if you do not accept the fact that your gifts are gone. If you keep holding on to some notion that they are returning, you will never overcome this.”

“I don’t believe this! I told Danny that in confidence for this very reason. I knew you’d try to analyze it. How do you know that they won’t come back?!”

“Because I tested you. You are 100 percent human. There is no trace of Sirian DNA in you.”

“When did you do that?!”

“When you were still fighting for your life. I had to. You were dying. I needed to find out what was wrong.”

I waved him off. “I’m outta here. I need...space.” I stormed over to the door. “Later,” I said, softly. I then slammed the door.

Dust fell from the ceiling and on to Brain. Some cracks had also formed around the door. “Hmm?” said Brain glancing at the ceiling.

## **It Gets Weird**

My mag-cycle whirled under me. The magnetic energy kept the vehicle hovering while the ion engine propelled it. The ion engine allowed it to reach incredible speeds, but I kept it somewhat slow.

The soft *whoom, whom, whom* of the engine made my thoughts drift.

**2022...**

**“This is madness!” I shouted at the leader of the Xacian army, Joey. Joey was actually a clone of me but implanted with the conscious of the Xacian leader who’d been killed. “Harvesting the Dark Matter is disrupting the fabric of the universe.”**

**Joey, aka Jackal, stood before the crack in space with his hands out stretched. “Nonsense! The Xacian Empire will have the Dark Matter. We will once again rule the galaxy.” He turned to look at me. It was kind of like looking in a distorted mirror. His face looked like mine but he had black hair and yellow eyes instead of my blonde hair and blue eyes. He was also more muscular and a few inches taller. “Those weak alien races thought they could hide here, but they will see *no one* escapes the Xacians.”**

**The world around us sounded like paper tearing. The crack was getting bigger. Pieces of ground were beginning to float into the air.**

“Dark Matter is the glue that keeps the universe together,” I said. “Without it the cosmos is coming apart. Look around you.”

“No! You look around! This is all your doing!”

I looked around. I saw the other members of the Delta Team of the International League of Super-Transbeings. Sportsgirl tried to fight off a Xacian warbot with her plasma baseball bat, but it was too much for her. She had been fighting for a while now and was exhausted; she finally fell to the ground, unconscious.

Turbo, the Xacian experiment to fuse parts from different beings to create the ultimate weapon, fell to his knees as his power source began to fail. The witch, Daphne, and the gremlin, CyberCypher, had also fallen. CyberCypher had managed to take down a warship before he was beaten.

La-Zar, the alien marksmen/bounty hunter, was still standing. He (at least we think it's a he—it's hard to tell with that mask on) blasted a couple soldiers with his duel ion pistols and then slashed a warbot with his plasma swords. He planted a fusion grenade on a downed warbot and kicked it back at a group of soldiers. The explosion caused the crowd to go flying but a warbot shot him in the back and he was out too.

Glop, the swamp monster, had sprayed the ground with some acid. When the tanks ran over the spot, they fell in. Glop then got hit by some kind of heat ray and fell to the ground. He tried to crawl to some water to heal, but he passed out before getting there.

Ace Journeyman had been put in some kind of stasis field that prevented him from falling asleep thus making it so he couldn't travel to the Astral Plane and help us. Agent Zee, a zombie (not a mindless one), had been knocked apart and was trying to get his pieces back together but one soldier was sitting on his chest. And Quintessa, an elemental, had passed out from exhaustion. She had tried to use her powers to seal the crack but it was beyond her capabilities.

The giant, Zero, and Brood, the vampire, were the only ones remaining. Zero was about 50 feet tall and swatting at fighter ships like they were flies. Brood dashed through the horde of soldiers shifting from human to bat and back as needed. He threw one soldier and smashed his fist through one warbot. But it wouldn't be long before they couldn't fight.

“This,” said Jackal waving his hand across the battlefield, “is all because of you. If you would have left well enough alone and let us rule this world, we would not have to harvest more Dark Matter.” His claws then came out. In one fluid motion, he slashed at my face and then kicked me to the curb. “And now you can *die* with this world.” He held his hand above me ready to strike.

**CRASH!!**

The sound woke me from my flashback. A vehicle had spun out and was now stuck on the tracks for the magnet train. The crossing signal warned us of an oncoming train. There was no way that the driver could escape in time. I had to help him.

I got off my cycle and started towards the accident. I then stopped realizing something: my powers were gone.

Still...I had to do something.

I charged forward towards the vehicle and began pulling at the door. It wouldn't budge. The driver was still half unconscious. I kept pulling at the door. The train was getting closer by the second. *Stupid rocket trains*, I thought. *Come on, come on.*

Something then began to happen. My hands started to glow with a golden aura. The aura then spread into the door. If I remember correctly, Brain said that I was somehow quantum entangling my hands with the door. What I did, the door had to follow. I pulled back and the door had no choice but to brake free. I pulled the man out but the train would get here before we could get away.

I picked up the man, took a couple steps, and vanished in a burst of sparkle-like dust. I then reappeared by my mag-cycle.

"Whew," I said laying the man down. I then realized that if the train hit the vehicle, the train would most likely derail. I ran at the vehicle and vanished again. I reappeared; my speed plus my strength rammed into the vehicle. The vehicle skidded away with an ear-splitting *screeeeech*. In the process I stumbled into the path of the train.

"Uh-oh," I said.

***WHAM!!***

The train hit me and then ran over me. Of course it had to have 20 cars to it too.

"Ow," I said when the train was finally gone and I was flat on my back. As I sat up, I could see the golden retriever fur vanish back to...wherever it goes. The fur had protected me like armor. I stood up and cracked my back. The fur had *mostly* protected me.

I glanced over at the man, who started to wake. I looked back at my hands; my nails were longer and sharper than normal. My knuckles were also hairier.

"Whoa," I said. My powers were back.

\*\*\*

I stumbled into my apartment. My powers were coming back and they were coming back with a vengeance. My vision pulsed as my head throbbed. I was thankful that it waited until I got home before causing this pain.

The world turned to various shades of gray and became blurry. There was still some color but not a lot. I could feel and hear my bones as they transformed. My body began to itch like crazy as the fur began to sprout. Why it had not hurt earlier I don't know.

I could hear the squishy noise as my tail began to grow. I could hear the crack as my ears and teeth became sharper. I caught my reflection as my face morphed into that of a golden retriever. I felt as if my blood was boiling.

Sounds and smells came to me in an instant, but not as you'd normally think of sounds and smells. I could *sense* the traffic. I could "smell" the hot dog vendors. I could "hear" children laughing. Busses rumbled. I could hear the hum of the Internet as people logged on and off, on and off. Water running. Cats meowing. Alarms. Traffic. More cats meowing. I could smell things in the wind. Perfume. Wood burning. And the unpleasant odor of cats. The smell of the ion engines like lightning. People. I could smell their confidence, their fear, their hunger.

Finally it was too much and I collapsed.

Continued in [\*Dogboy Reborn \(Rebirth, #1\)\*](#) available to buy at Amazon.com.

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# Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to read these samples. It is much appreciated.

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