

"To Mr. Wells..."

by

Tad Russell

PROLOGUE

An orgy of colors - soft and provocative - slowly ebb and flow, mingling and merging with ordained order in a kaleidoscopic dance of ethereal beauty.

"Who would have believed, that from the blackness of deep space, our affairs were being watched, keenly and closely, by intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, who regarded our world with envious eyes, slowly and surely drawing their plans against us."

The colors gradually run dry, melting away, slowly crystallizing into...

DAY 1

A futuristic city street somewhere in our distant future. Streamline, clean, a Utopian dream; no billboards, street signs, power lines, garbage bins, fire hydrants... Civilization has obviously come a long ways, but...

The streets are deserted; sterilized; not a living thing in sight. The wind whips around the smooth, radial corner of a mottled-blue building, raising not so much as a Post-It note of litter in its wake. This tiny slice of Utopia suddenly becomes quite unsettling.

Riding upwards along the warm urban thermals, the pastel buildings rush by; aesthetic, Art-Deco, plastic-smooth and monolithic, as if the entire city block was sculpted out of one giant mold.

Rising beyond the arched apex of low-rise rooftops, hundreds of small plumes of smoke billow up across a vast urban horizon. Distant concussions and flashes of light dot the landscape like twinkling lights on a Christmas tree. But this tree is in ruins; charred black and hacked to pieces as if by the vengeful swings of some giant axe. If this isn't armageddon, it should be.

The comatose streets below twitch with life as two sentient apparitions sweep across the scorched facades, moving with quick stealthy steps. Their forms fade in and out through a soupy mix of ash and shadows.

The two soldiers - donning streamlined, blue-gray-camouflaged uniforms with matching helmets conspicuously embossed with the familiar United Nations insignia - crouch down at the corner of a six-way intersection.

Small flames flicker skyward in the distance, shrouded by milky veils of smoke that float down the deserted avenue like the sails of a ghostly armada.

The legs stride with eerie, spider-like grace before crashing heavily into the ground. Murky alien shapes scamper around the giant feet as they push towards the two soldiers.

The Soldier drops his visor into position.

SOLDIER

Bloody illegals.

He nods confidently to Comrade.

SOLDIER

They ain't crossin' this border!

The Soldier unloads on the oncoming visages; plasma pulses from his helmet and Fire-arm, hitting their mark time and again with reckless precision. The aliens vaporize into gaseous, crimson facades that slowly drift onward, shape-shifting into grotesque, ghostly caricatures.

Comrade, lost in the frenetic arcade-paced game of death, hesitates to join in. The Soldier glances over,

SOLDIER

Fire dammit! It's us or them!

Comrade triggers his lasers; the air doubles up with fire and light and shrieks of death.

The Soldier rises as a rush of adrenaline saturates his nerves, numbing any last vestiges of fear or humanity. He screams maniacally, firing at everything that moves; several rounds bounce errantly off one of the ambling smokestacks. The Soldier stops firing, craning his head skyward to the cloud bank above the legs.

A deep, oscillating hum charges the air in response. The cloud ignites with light, flickering off the Soldier's visor.

SOLDIER

(murmurs to himself)

Bloody hell...

Comrade grabs him from behind -

COMRADE

It can't see us -

- just as a ragged-green, sizzling stream of electricity rages down from the heavens, ripping across the building, just above the soldiers; a torrent of rubble crumbles downward in a deafening onslaught, instantly swallowing Comrade in its wake.

The Soldier deftly sidesteps death, then makes a break across the street. A tidal wave of smoke and ash sweeps out from the blast, clipping at his heels, before engulfing him in a murky void.

He runs blindly, haphazardly through a chaotic maze of fleeting shapes and shadows. Plasma blasts from his helmet plow comet-like through the smoke, vaporizing one after another of the advancing ink-blot aliens. He pushes through their gaseous red remains, sucking up mouthfuls of their molecules with every panic-stricken breath.

Another dark shape takes form just ahead and above. As the Soldier takes aim -

Boom!! A titanic foot crashes down right in front of him; he makes an athletic cut to the left, barely avoiding a fatal collision with the steel wall. He glances skyward as another leg swishes turbulently through the air from somewhere above; just as he looks back down -

Bamm! His helmet flies through the air as he careens backwards onto the ground. Half conscious and face bloodied, he vainly lifts his head just in time to see two massive, iridescent eyes glaring back through the haze.

Mesmerized with repulsed wonder, he stares blankly as a long, gray tentacle reaches out across the void.

He struggles to raise his Fire-Arm... Smoke swishes turbulently from above... The tentacle inches closer... The Soldier steadies his aim... A dark shadow washes over the Soldier from above... He looks skyward as the steel foot crashes downward...

Booomm!!! A thunderous, pitch-black echo implodes on itself, reverberating inward, spiraling downward, growing ever fainter, fading toward a diminuendo of nothingness, into... nothing... nothing... nothing...

LATER

Something... faint... voices... from the ether...

A Helter-Skelter-soup of screams, chaos and static filters out of a U.N. helmet that lies partially buried in a groundswell of sleepy rubble.

HELMET

The city is evacuating! Keep ranks
and fall back!!

A bloody, dust-covered hand rises out of the rubble, in response.

It reaches into the air as if gasping for a life-giving first breath. The rubble shifts and slides near the hand, revealing the battered, ashen face of Comrade. Dried blood, caked and crazed like a dehydrated lake bed, covers the left side of his forehead and face.

He reaches for the helmet; it totters precariously at the touch of his outstretched fingertips before tumbling down the pile and bouncing off the street. A tiny explosion cries out from the helmet, then - silence; the headset shorts out.

Comrade's eyes flicker and roll back in his head. His hand falls limp as he passes out.

DUSK

The muffled drums of war, opaque and vague like a T.V. turned down low, mumble and groan in the background with relentless ambition - boom, boom, shriek, bang! The colors of war, quick and hypnotic, flash angrily across the twilight skyline in vibrant red, white and green glory.

Comrade sits on the corner, next to the rubble, surveying the stagnant boulevard with shell-shocked awe and bewilderment.

He picks up his helmet from the street and studies it with child-like curiosity as he turns it over in his hand. He inches the helmet over his head, wincing in pain as it scrapes across his bludgeoned brow. He feigns throwing the helmet into the rubble out of frustration, but thinks the better of it. He considers the intricate and mangled Fire-Arm bandaged around his arm with indifference, before ripping it off and tossing it away.

Rummaging through his pack, he takes stock of his provisions: food packs, canteen, first-aid kit, poncho, a weathered book, an orange hockey-puck shaped device and a ubiquitous, pencil-thin tube. He puzzles momentarily over the silver tube, then, with the unexpected twist of a switch, a concentrated beam of magnesium-rich light streams out into the approaching nightfall.

He revels in the assuring ray - in a primal, discovery-of-fire kind of way - flicking it waywardly through the air.

The beam crosses a row of windowless windows of a nearby building; two massive, luminescent disks peer back from within one of the dark, oval orifices, then abruptly disappear as the flashlight falls from Comrade's trembling hand.

COMRADE

(chiding himself as
he scoops up the helmet)

Dammit!

He slashes the beam back to the window: the "disks" have vanished.

COMRADE

(reassures his shaken nerves)

If they were ever there at all.

Gathering himself, he guides the torch across the remaining windows, and is greeted with a succession of blank, sinister stares. The beam penetrates into a dark, semi-oval void that serves as the main doorway into the building; a large luminescent disk reflects back from within.

Comrade carefully steps around the rubble, keeping the beam locked on the quivering eye as he moves quickly across the open street.

COMRADE

(meekly to the door)

Hello...

A blinding shaft of light radiates mutely from the door's nucleus, in response, growing in intensity as he approaches. Comrade raises his hand the last few steps to shield his eyes, before stopping at the lip of the door.

He slightly shifts the angle of his beam; the eye shifts slightly in response. He looks on - transfixed - as though held in the grip of a mesmerists' spell.

With a twist of a switch, he douses his torch; the spell is broken; the eye vanishes.

Comrade steps through the fractured doorway into the shadowy room, moving intently to the triangular wedge of a broken mirror which hangs lopsided on the wall directly facing the door.

Comrade and the mirror stare back silently at one another for a moment, then -

REFLECTION

Who the bloody hell are you?

Comrade considers the question, long and thoughtfully...

His reflection grins back motioning to Comrade's gashed head.

REFLECTION

Don't know, do ya, mate?

Comrade snaps back.

COMRADE

And who the bloody hell's asking!?

His reflection loses its grin.

COMRADE

(mockingly)

Don't know, do ya, 'mate.'

Comrade turns his back on himself, then steps outside.

He rifles through his pack pulling out the haggard book. His fingers glide across the faded title...

COMRADE

War of the Worlds, by H.G. Wells.

He hesitates momentarily, as if waiting for the words to spark some hidden memory... but can only shake his head in puzzlement.

He straddles the pack across his back, grabs his helmet, kick-starting his light frame into gear. He stops and yells back into the doorway.

COMRADE

The name's 'Wells,'

(then under his breath)

... at least for now.

He continues on across the street, when the ground suddenly vibrates under his feet from a series of nearby concussions. He stops, listening intently, silently drawn to the booming timpani that plays out like the haunting notes of some long forgotten melody.

He hones in on the source with the obedience of a slow-spinning compass needle, then takes several resolute steps forward before his boot sinks slightly into a sticky, viscous puddle. Goey, fibrous strands cling to the sole as he lifts his boot out.

Wells flicks on his torch and kneels down for a closer, lurid inspection. Embedded in a large shallow depression, the gray gelatinous residue of an Alien mingles with the blood-stained remains of the Soldier's blue U.N. uniform. The hoary blob of organic jello quivers in the wake of the advancing booms.

The faintest flicker of unease flashes across Wells' face as he tries to interpret the meaning: he rises, shaking his head once more in frustration. He presses onward with a sense of curious urgency toward the thunderous rhapsody that is his destiny.

LATER

The timpani beckons no more; a fragile silence fills the air. Wells struggles to maintain a double-time pace as he navigates on edge through the middle of the street. He rounds a corner, and dives for the ground just as a huge metal foot swishes through the air, mere inches from decapitating his head. He watches in lilliputian horror as the towering smokestacks glide over his body before landing on terra-firma with uncanny, premeditated delicacy and silence.

Wells follows the legs skyward as they meld into the base of an oval, saucer-shape hood. Green glowing orbs illuminate the top and bottom of the silver disk, bathing the immediate sky in a dusky cauldron of vaporous mist.

The War Machine moves with swift stealth to a nearby building. It stops, lingering indecisively in front of the unscathed facade, sniffing the air with what untold instruments, with what untold intentions.

Suddenly, like the unwinding eruption of some fantastic mid-way amusement ride, the Tripod begins slamming its feet in rapid succession into the ground, running in place. The building trembles uneasily as surely as if it were made of blood and bone and fear.

In all respects, the otherworldly ritualistic spectacle would arouse the flavors of unexpected delight to the curious mind... but Wells quickly intuits the deeper, darker meaning.

WELLS

(he utters under his breath)

My God, it's trying to flush them
out... like bloody pheasants.

The Tripod suddenly freezes, then leans in close to the building. A dozen worm-like appendages spring out from the base of the hood. The long, segmented tentacles writhe wildly through the air before snaking their way into the building with coordinated stealth; one worm for each opening.

Time takes a deep long breath as the worms burrow into the unseen labyrinth of corridors, cavities and hiding places within - searching, probing, flushing - setting their heinous traps.

Wells swallows hard in silent anticipation as time exhales with fury!

Fleeting blue arcs of electricity race across the hood converging into agitated streams of liquid energy that surge along the appendages.

The building ignites and flashes from within; a chorus of blood curdling shrieks pour out through the windows as solemn last rights! Then -

A fatal silence. The worms obediently retract back into the hood. The Tripod seems to hum with satisfaction as it swivels its streamline hood in Wells' direction.

Anticipating the move, he silently steps back, in sync with the hood, back into the safety of darker shadows. The Tripod looms over the intersection in quiet deliberation before turning to move onward. Just as Wells exhales with quiet relief... A tiny voice cries out across the intersection...

HELMET

Pull back... pull back!

Wells looks to his helmet which lies inverted in the street; laser blasts, explosions and screams sizzle out of the headset. The ever vigilant Tripod stops dead in its tracks. Its shiny hood slowly swivels back toward the commotion.

With three graceful strides, the Tripod plants itself in front of the helmet. The worms beat a path out of their respective burrows, converging on the tiny human voice.

HELMET

Somebody cue up U-N-One-Niner...
we're taking friendly fire - I
repeat, friendly fire!

The worms rise in unison, every one of them peering in the direction of Wells; there is nothing but the muted, distant pattering of frightened footsteps.

MOMENTS LATER

Wells runs for his life, guided by the thin beam of his torch, as the advancing crunch of metal pursues from behind. He slides out of control around a darkened corner, just before -

The bottom drops out beneath his feet. His body plunges into an enormous black chasm, falling blindly - down, down, down - before striking the dank, moist earth with a fleshy thud. He immediately scrambles to his feet, clawing and kicking blindly across a slow, oval incline even as the Tripod turns the same corner and slams to the edge of the crater.

The air grows suddenly mute. Wells pauses under darkness, under foot, like some helpless rodent, in silent anticipation... until...

Metal crashes heavily all around him in a succession of clanking, crunching, earthy thuds. The black earth comes to life - sifting, flinging, shifting - as the Tripod dredges deep into its soily skin. The immediate night sparks into a fountain of light as the worm-like appendages writhe skyward with rabid, Medusa-inspired fervor, hissing and spitting their electric venom into the air.

Wells' fingers claw savagely into the earth, rung after rung, as he rises piece-meal toward the rim: two rungs up, one back down. Sparks fall in a sizzling shower across his back, rolling off the ionically-grounded uniform like liquid mercury as he pulls himself to safety.

He peers into the illuminated pit below as the hapless Id-become-reality struggles in vain to free itself from the vengeful grip of wounded earth.

He utters to himself with a cold shudder of realization -

WELLS

It's war then...

He pulls the yellow, hockey-puck device from his backpack. Without thought or hesitation, the Id inside his own subconscious mind intuitively turns the requisite switches, arming the otherwise mysterious object. He tosses the puck into the crawling grave, and slowly walks away.

A thin brilliant lip of crimson light eclipses the horizon of the crater. It hangs for a fiery half breath... and then, like the closing of a coffins' lid, night falls over the immediate city. The million dark shadows of day merge into one omnipresent, omniscient tar-bleached iris, darker than death itself...

And Wells finds himself swallowed in the vortex of its deepest abyss.

DAY 2

The darkness springs a leak as faint rays of dusty light sprinkle in through a shot-gun mosaic of cracks, holes and crevices. The rays sweep ever so slowly, ever so softly across the floor of a crumbling kitchen, wiping away the shadows of the early morning.

Water drips steadily into a large, shallow basin situated next to the fractured remnants of a doorway. As the rays slowly creep over the basin, Wells' body - obscured under a blanket of carefully placed rubble - takes form; but oddly enough, he remains mostly in shadow.

And a strange, grotesque shadow it is! Shriveled, squat and mishappen like a prone prune, the silhouette hovers over his body in silent meditation.

A fleshy, slick, gray tentacle glides down to Wells' midriff, gently probing upward toward his neck. The examination is cut short by the sound of heavy hammering from outside - Wells wakes with a start - the shadow melts away, melding into a darkened hallway.

Disorientated, and blinded by the morning light, Wells struggles to gain his bearings. He subconsciously turns his attention towards the hallway, and is greeted with a sinister, black silence.

The heavy commotion continues from outside, shaking and stirring dust throughout the room. Wells hesitantly takes his eyes off the hall, sneaking a peak outside through a small crack in the door. He watches in wonder as one Tripod stands prone over the crumpled figure of second Tripod.

WELLS

Capital... now there's two of them.

~

The shadows have shifted from early morning to mid-afternoon. Wells sits slumped over, staring at the hallway, struggling to remain awake. His senses suddenly become alert from a series of strange, familiar noises. His ears tune themselves toward the hallway, straining to filter out the heavy clanking that drones on outside.

Feeble, melancholy whimpers, like the blind cries of a newborn puppy, drift out of the hallway. Wells rises and steps decisively toward the insistent pleas before stopping at the cusp of darkness that bleeds thick and dank and ominous into his imagination. He peers intently into the abyss as another whimper cries out for charity.

Steadfast, he crouches down, holding out his hand.

WELLS

Come 'ere boy... come on out...

(He whistles softly)

I won't hurt you -

Something large shifts in the darkness. Wells takes a sudden reflex-step backwards.

WELLS

Must be a bloody mastiff...

He swallows hard as he gathers his nerve back, and pushes his head into the black void, allowing his eyes to slowly adjust to the darkness. His pupils dilate with dread as a pair of massive, luminescent eyes materialize from the dark tunnel like the muted headlights of two oncoming locomotives.

Wells jerks his head out, and glances back nervously to the commotion outside; a realization dawns across his face. He scrambles downward onto the floor frantically searching for something... He rises, brandishing a blunt twisted club.

The massive eyes, sensing the bad vibes, whimper back in response.

WELLS
(whispers threateningly)
Shut up, damn you!

The creature retaliates with a series of loud, urgent cries, as if calling for help.

WELLS
So help me...

Wells swishes the club through the air like a deranged Neanderthal.

WELLS
You'll go down with me, mate.

The eyes shift beyond the threshold of darkness into the dusty light of the kitchen. Wells trembles with the onslaught of adrenaline; the fire drains from his eyes and is slowly replaced with a sickened revulsion. The Thing - carved in deep, convoluted, lateral fissures of moldy-gray, Play-Doh-thick skin - struggles to breathe through its tiny lips. Short, muscular legs and long slender tentacular arms round out the grotesque mass. Its hub cap-sized baby-blue eyes quiver like wind-blown water, staring back piercingly in liquid wonder at Wells and the doorway beyond.

Wells hunkers down in front of the covered doorway, daring the creature to advance with a shaky wave of his club.

WELLS
Forget about it, handsome.

The creature reaches out with its tentacles across the room, first towards Wells, and then veering off towards the basin of water. Wells follows its line of sight and quickly appraises the meaning.

A long moment of deliberation passes as Wells contemplates the fork in his road: let it pass, or bash its brains out?

The creature cries out loudly, forcing the issue; the clanking outside suddenly stops.

WELLS

Alright... alright!

He slowly steps back to give the Alien more room to maneuver.

The creature wastes no time, as it scurries with surprising speed toward the pool. It stops at the lip, then - topples face-forward into the water creating a helluva commotion!

Wells jerks back to the opening; his eyes search and stare in wonder.

WELLS

I'll be damned...

From outside, the Tripods have vanished. A young, hazy sunshine has taken their place.

Wells lifts himself up with the confident air of a man reborn. Quickly gathering his things, he rummages through the kitchen with military efficiency looking for provisions, but it's been stripped clean. He pauses at the edge of the darkened hall. He pushes his hand into the void, as if testing its tepidness. Something in the stillness paralyzes his volition; he hesitantly backs away.

He glances back to the basin before leaving, and is greeted with a truly alien phenomenon: almost all of the water has disappeared from the pool; the once shriveled and repulsive Alien is now a plump, smooth, repulsive Alien. It lies dead-still in the basin, like some hapless beached whale.

Wells loses the grin.

WELLS

Poor bastard. Gets left behind by his mates, then drowns of thirst.

~

Wells squints his eyes, grinning back eagerly at the bright, smiling sun above. He sets off with a satisfied, happy-go-lucky whistle, quickly passing by a window at the end of the house; he stops abruptly, then steps back to the window for a double take.

The Alien - crimson and plump as a fresh picked plum, water trickling down its slick glistening skin, thick viscous drool dripping like tears from its tiny quaking mouth - stands at the doorway, peering in at two lifeless shadows sprawled out across the floor.

Wells quickly appraises the vulturous implications before looking away in disgust. Rage and revenge well up in his breast -

WELLS

I'll bash the bugger's brains out!

But... but the mere thought of the dank hallway seizes his resolve. He shrinks away from the window.

WELLS

There's nothing to be done for the poor souls now.

With that, he turns and walks away with brisk intention.

Back inside the room, the creature glares out through the window, watching the strange alien disappear around the corner.

DAY 3

Gigantic tentacles - twisted and demented, frozen in dark repose - reach out two hundred feet or more toward the sky. A strange brew of rotting compost and smoldering wood permeates the air.

Wells stands at the fringe of a once mighty stand of ancient trees - a forest of wood and peace, moss and leaf, surrounded by a forest of steel and burned-out streets - now nothing more than a mangled and charred, burned and murdered remnant of an indifferent war. A swath of cracked limbs and fallen trees clearly demarcate the pyro-manic path taken by the merciless Tripod.

Wells looks upon the destructive handiwork with disdain.

WELLS

Damn them... damn them all.

A lone orphaned giant, a matriarch of centuries old cellulose - cultivated, barked and carved from the ground up - stands unscathed, on guard over her dead progeny.

Wells steps reverently to the mighty sentinel's feet. He reaches out and touches her thick gnarled skin. His eyes grin from a distant buried memory as they rise up, up, up the noble trunk...

WELLS

(reverently)

Long live life...

A voice, or merely his eroded imagination, gurgles back in laughter from somewhere deep within the dead trees, as if in protest to his plea. Wells reaches down and picks up a crooked charred club with a devilishly knotted head, for reassurance.

The forest stares back indifferently as the first cooling drops of a coming shower lick its smoldering wounds. Wells steps back, hesitantly retreating back into the eve of dusk and civilization lost.

LATER IN EVENING

A thick black downpour falls oppressively from the ether; the droplets pelt the ground like onyx marbles shot from God. Wells trudges down the street under the shelter of his full length poncho. He stops and looks back, peering into the watery abyss with strained, wary eyes as unseen rivulets of collecting, flowing, bubbling water gurgle back from all directions. Some seem to advance, only to retreat - each time threatening to pass from the veil of imagination into what untold vulgar shapes. Wells weighs the knotty club in his hand in warring contemplation.

He sloshes onward across a shallow river of gray ash that trembles down the street, continually glancing over his shoulder as he makes his way to the threshold of a dark, uninviting doorway.

He glances back a final time; the flash and roar of thunder rumbles nearby -

WELLS

(he imagines to himself)

Or was it a War Machine... ?

His imagination overrules his fear, goading him through the doorway.

DAY 4

Clandestine voices, faint and indistinct, spill out into the pre-dawn darkness. Wells - hunkered down in the shadows of a large second-story room, scrutinizes the whispers drifting up from the floor below. He rises and steps to the threshold of a ramp that leads down to the voices.

DOWNSTAIRS

Wells' helmet, carelessly abandoned next to his poncho and backpack, lies inverted on the ground in deep silhouette. The tiny speakers crackle with urgency to all who would hear -

HELMET

All remaining units fall back to
New London...

A spindly gray tentacle reaches down to the helmet, fondling it cautiously with its inquisitive suckers. Something snaps underfoot from behind... The startled tentacle drops the helmet, which crashes to the floor, abruptly shorting out.

Wells rushes into the room waving his club like a deranged Neanderthal, driving the creature deep into the shadows.

He picks up the helmet -

WELLS

Hello!

He smacks it against the club, staring at the silence, despondently.

He forces the helmet over his head, cursing in pain as it slides across his swollen brow; the helmet obediently beeps and flashes to life in response.

WELLS

Hello! I am a U-N soldier. Where is
New London?

The helmet promptly responds -

HELMET

Roger that. State your unit and name.

WELLS

(pauses in thought)
Are they talking to me?

HELMET

I repeat, state-your-unit -

WELLS

I don't know my bloody unit or my
bloody name! I've been injured...
my head... I can't remember!!"

The Alien cries out from the shadows at the sudden shouting.

After a short pause, the helmet crackles back -

HELMET

All units, switch frequencies to
Baker-Charlie-Baker... the line has
been compromised... I repeat...
line has been compromised!

WELLS

Wait! You don't understand... I'm
not one of them! I'm one of -

Monotone static drones out in his head. He calmly removes the hissing helmet... then violently smashes it against the wall. The helmet cracks in two before settling to the floor.

He slams his club into the wall, right above the Alien, still huddled in the shadows. The club rises over its head - a feeble whimper cries out for mercy as the creature shifts into grayer shadows of recognition.

WELLS

(astonishment)

You... ?

The Alien from the kitchen slowly takes form.

WELLS

You've been following me!

Wells surveys the room with heightened awareness, as if expecting demons to reach out from the darkened shadows.

WELLS

I should have bashed your brains
out when I had the chance.

The creature stares back placidly with its calculating blue eyes.

WELLS

I don't know what's going through
your head, handsome...

(raises the club over
his head)

But I'm about to open her up and
find out...

The club rises once more over the cowering Alien...

WELLS

No.

(The club relaxes downward)

That would be too fast... too
humane. And there seems to be a
shortage of humanity going round
right now... or haven't you noticed?

Wells surveys the heinous creature head to foot with disgust.

WELLS

No, I guess you haven't... but you will when I'm finished with you.

DAY 5

Wells cranes his neck skyward to the ceiling of a large airy hall - ivory-white and austere - reminiscent of an ancient greco museum. A sparse collection of space-related artifacts are impressively displayed along the single oval wall. He stops to check out a faithful mock-up of the Voyager 10 probe - complete with charred, mottled and scratched exoskeleton - set in a deep-space diorama, quietly gathering dust.

The Alien follows closely, attentively scrutinizing the craft.

WELLS

You slugs aren't the only explorers.
 (Wells grins malignantly)
 Maybe one day we'll pay your world
 a little visit, eh?

He pushes onward, turning into a small room immediately to his right. His eyes gravitate to a myriad of brightly colored papers neatly arranged across the floor - like a classroom with no desks. He reaches down and picks up one of the sheets, marveling at the vivid playful design.

WELLS

Finger painting...
 (he reflects)
 I remember finger painting.

The Alien shifts silently behind his back as he reminisces upon the fleeting memory.

The room suddenly erupts into a kaleidoscope of sparkling colors.

Wells slowly turns around... and freezes; his eyes radiate like handfuls of diamonds.

The creature holds one of the finger paintings in its tentacles, as its skin flashes with a psychedelic facsimile of the abstract art.

Wells loses himself in the hypnotically organic portrait.

WELLS

My God, it's art... like... Picasso.

'Picasso's' body morphs into an oscillating daisy-yellow hue, in response.

And, as if on cue, a tremor from somewhere outside vibrates the room; the familiar drum roll of a nearby War Machine snaps Wells out of his brief infatuation.

The Alien begins flashing ruddy-red, in rhythmic time with the precise timpani as it shifts and hones on their location.

Wells steps to the window. The Tripod grows closer, as if honing in on their location. Wells glances back to Picasso; uttering a thought -

WELLS

Flashing...

He glances back outside.

WELLS

Signaling...

The Creature flashes green, in response.

WELLS

Turn it off, Picasso...

Picasso continues to flash, defiantly.

WELLS

Now!

Picasso cools down to a static pale-blue.

Wells crouches by the window. The room shudders as the titanic footsteps approach - Boom! Boom!! Boom!!! Boom!! Boom! - then pass by into oblivion.

Wells picks up one of the finger paintings, mindfully crushing it in his hand. He glares at Picasso -

WELLS

No more finger painting.

DAY 6

The oppressive hot breath of the midday sun shimmers off the street, radiating upwards in opaque space-bending waves. Picasso squats in the open-air oven, looking upwards into the lucid blue sky. Its eyes - dehydrated and gray - watch longingly with liquid hunger as Wells unscrews his canteen and takes a long quenching drink. A feeble whimper croaks out from its tiny dry lips; its tentacles reach out in thirst.

Wells stares coldly at the sickly, shriveled feelers.

WELLS

You don't look so good, handsome.

He offers his canteen, tauntingly.

WELLS

How about a taste?

Much to his ire, the creature's skin blooms into an oscillating, daisy-yellow hue.

WELLS

What have I told you about lighting up!?

(Wells waves his club threateningly)

It's not good for your health.

The creature flashes green, in response.

Wells, ever observant, contemplates the flashing... and gets an idea. He raises the canteen; the Alien flashes yellow; he raises the club; it flashes green. He continues the systematic pattern of offerings, silently deciphering its meaning:

WELLS

Yellow equals pleasure, green equals pain... good... bad...

And finally, the revelation, which he utters in disbelief -

WELLS

Yes... no.

The creature flashes green, then yellow, then green, then yellow.

WELLS

It's not signaling... It's trying to communicate.

The Alien flashes yellow - "yes" - in response, as it reaches out for the canteen.

Wells pulls the canteen back, just out of reach of the writhing tentacles. He studies the hideous creature as he contemplates the implications of his discovery.

WELLS

Well, I guess it makes sense... If you could build those bloody machines, there must be more too you than your good looks.

The tentacles stretch out in agony for the bottle. Wells slowly relents.

WELLS

Just make sure you're lips don't touch it. You got that!?

Picasso flashes, "yes."

Wells hesitantly hands the canteen over; the tentacles greedily snatch the bottle with their nimble suckers, raising it close to its alien lips as if to drink...

WELLS

Damn you, I said no lips -

... then proceeds to pour it over its body.

Wells watches in dismay as the creature's thirsty skin soaks up the last drop, like a parched sponge.

WELLS

No, I didn't want anymore...

He snatches the canteen from the 'popping' suckers.

WELLS

But thanks for asking!

The creature's eyes sparkle with satiated equanimity. Their color has a subtle, but marked aura of peace to it; pleasure perhaps, or something more profound? Whatever, it only serves to enrage Wells all the more.

WELLS

Like it, do ya...
(maniacal)
Think we're mates now?

He steps face to face with the Alien.

WELLS

Well, before we bust out the bubbly and get naked, let's clarify our relationship.

Wells lashes out, waving his hands wildly across the skyline.

WELLS

Take a look around, chum! This isn't exactly an encouraging first impression, now is it!

Picasso's eyes dilate as its body flashes green.

Wells regains some composure, and coldly offers something far more threatening for the Alien to chew on.

WELLS

Remember this... if I have a family,
which it only stands to reason that
I do, they're out there somewhere -
dead, alive, suffering... maybe worse.

Picasso scans across and beyond the boulevard and buildings in contemplation.

WELLS

Remember... cause I'm sure as hell
not going to forget it.

Picasso flares into a ruddy-red hue at the prospects.

Wells quickly reads the inference.

WELLS

And wipe that color off your face!

Picasso meekly cools down into a neutral blue.

DAY 7

Wells is propped up against a wall - sitting down, standing guard, sound asleep. He coughs repeatedly, half rousing from his slumber; just enough to hear whimpers drifting out of the darkness. His eyes blink open, shaking off the Sandman, slowly adjusting to a surreal flickering light - like that of a late night T.V. - slicing out of the creases of a closed doorway.

He carries his charred club to the threshold of the door and cracks it open. Picasso squats in the middle of the darkened room with its back to the door, sound asleep. The adjacent wall flickers reflectively off a portion of Picasso's body as it twitches with light.

Wells steps lightly to the opposite side of the room for a better view; his face flickers in breathless amazement.

A photo-realistic montage of moving images ebb and flow over Picasso's torso, oscillating in size and radiance, in vivid, subconscious reverie. Many of the visions include Picasso and other aliens interacting with intimate affection.

Wells kneels to one knee in stunned homage, as if weighted down by some great revelation, and reaches out to the images.

As his fingers glide over the dream-world effigies - just above the microscopic delineation of touch - faint auralstatic discharges mingle from fingertip to torso in playful, blue surges. Wells breaks into a child-like grin as his fingers begin to glow.

The images begin to mutate into new forms, new faces, new memories, flickering across Wells' searching eyes. He loses the grin, then steps back, suddenly spooked and very unsettled.

He starts to cough, straining to muffle the sound as he steps swiftly out of the room, and out into -

- the middle of the vacant street, as he clears the heavy congestion from his throat. The sights and sounds of war - the rumbling, concussions and flashes - have died down considerably. The stars twinkle and wink mischievously from their heavenly balconies at the *drama* unfolding below.

Wells looks down at his primitive club with disdain, then tosses it rudely to the ground. He shivers in the wake of a sudden breeze that whips across the warm Summer night.

WELLS

Odd...

(he muses to himself)

But, the cold isn't really cold. It only feels that way. And it only feels that way because you feel that way. And you only feel that way because...

From deep within the dark minions of imagination, where dwells the fertile, lurid seeds of insanity, a dread - as old as fear itself - takes root. It rises like a virulent weed, choking the senses of reason, robbing the soul of peace. And no ordinary dread... but *the* dread. The one that builds fires to gather round, and languages to whisper 'hello' across the flames; the one that raises houses to shelter in, communities to commune in, towns to trade in, and mile-high cities - for those most afraid - to hide in; each sheltered by the nameless mass facades of so many strange, familiar faces; each sheltered from the sting of isolation.

A sudden and violent urge to flee kidnaps his reason. His body lunges forward, step after step, as he coaxes his limbs into motion; faster and faster, slowly building steam, until his whole frame shakes and rattles like some living, breathing, locomotive boiler.

His heavy labored footsteps ring out like gunshots, ricocheting back and forth, building to building, domino upon domino, until the air fills with a machine-gun revelry of panic and fear.

He fades into the night, poncho fluttering wide and bat-like; a madman ready to take flight.

200 METERS LATER

Wells races into the next intersection, then comes to a hard stop. His footsteps reverberate onward down the boulevard, fanning out into the granite-hard darkness that was civilization, leaving him more and more and more isolated with each fading echo.

His face - chiseled like weathered stone - stares intently at a small fire that glows off the soft green veneer of a nearby building. He approaches cautiously.

His fingers sweep reverently with newfound hope across the smooth facade, methodically tracing along the familiar, nuanced lines and curves of the English graffiti conspicuously scrawled across its face in bright red glory: "Welcome to New London." And hastily scribbled underneath, "a good place to die."

His poncho catches the breath of a swift gust of wind, flapping wildly at his sides, forming a large gothic shadow against the defaced building.

Laser blasts suddenly rip across the side of his head which melts and melds into the red graffiti; Wells crumbles head first into the ground.

Shuffling footsteps approach cautiously from behind. A heavy labored breath hovers over Wells' contorted body.

ATTACKER

(sighs out)

Oh Christ...

A blood-saturated cough splatters across Wells' back, then...

Thud. The Attacker collapses into a frozen repose next to its inadvertent victim.

DAY 8

A warm soft morning draws Wells from his deep, near-death sleep. Sunlight sparkles from the slits of his sensitive eyes. He raises his hand to screen out the stinging rays, allowing his vision to gradually adjust under the sheltered light. He gingerly pats the side of his head where his ear has been vaporized, and fortunately, cauterized to the bone.

An obscure outline shifts beyond his hand, forming a shadow around the shadow of his hand.

He lowers his hand. An angelic, golden halo wraps itself around the grotesque silhouette of an Alien. The creature clutches a long slender rod that it swings threateningly in front of Wells' face.

Wells looks up the barrel of the rod indifferently.

WELLS

Well... what are you waiting for?

The Alien stares back, mute and golden-blue.

WELLS

What's the matter, not monster enough see it through?

The creature's skin flashes green.

Wells lip-synchs the math: "yellow equals yes, green equals..."

WELLS

No... ?

The Alien flashes yellow.

WELLS

Can't make up your mind, then? Well, why don't you just hand 'er over and let me show you how it's done.

The creature obliges, jabbing the rod forward: 'take it.'

Wells reaches for the rod; his hand hesitates - a mere hairs breadth away - as if expecting death to spill out into his body at its touch... then grasps it resolutely; the cold, smooth, tempered shaft hangs freely in the air as the Alien relinquishes its grip.

Using the rod as a crutch, Wells pulls his body upwards, grappling with vertigo as he rises off the ground. He promptly launches into a violent hacking attack at the sudden change in orientation.

A tentacle snakes its way toward his legs...

Wells looks up, and steps back in defense. The surprise in his eyes is as brief as it is subtle; he manages the queerest of smiles.

WELLS

Now there's a sore sight for sore eyes.

Picasso looks on, ruddy-red and troubled. Its eyes are locked on the ground, just behind Wells.

Wells turns and looks down at the blue-gray-camouflaged body laid out at his feet. Blood, dust and grime cover the body and clothes making it impossible to tell where he is - was - fatally wounded. He kneels down and slowly turns the body over.

The glassy, cavernous eyes of a once beautiful woman stare back accusingly from some other world. Caked blood paints her cold lips violet-black. Wells brushes the dark strands of hair off her delicate face, then waves his hand across both eyelids, closing them for the final time; rivulets of collected tears overflow from her dead eyes, spilling out across his fingers. He jerks his hand away as if the tears burned of acid, vigorously wiping the imagined sting across his uniform.

Wells suddenly becomes conscious of his fate as he takes stock of his surroundings. 'New London' is not much different than 'Old London' except that there's a lot less of it. Signs of a ferocious battle are written in volumes across its landscape; the castrated building tops, the crater-paved streets, the sour breath of decaying flesh; all spelling one simple truth:

WELLS
(quiet resignation)
We're licked...

He takes a moment away from the harsh reality that is closing in, searching for some common thread to satisfy his curiosity about his strange companion.

WELLS
I still don't get you... your angle,
I mean.

He looks back to the dead woman.

WELLS
You could have taken me out more
than once.

He muses, in jest -

WELLS
Either you're some kind of galactic
roving reporter trying to make the
six o' clock, or a bloody insurance
salesman trying to make the mother
of all sales, or...

A glint of inspiration lights up his pale visage.

WELLS

My God... of course... of course...
It must be. What a blind fool I've
been!

He points accusingly at Picasso -

WELLS

You... you are a deserter.

Picasso stares back, indifferently.

WELLS

Sure... AWOL! Maybe you don't wanna
be here anymore than me."
(warming to the idea)
Maybe there *is* more to you than
your looks!

Picasso responds to Wells' enthusiasm with a happy tapestry
of colors. Wells smiles back, tosses down the rod, and
sticks out his hand.

WELLS

In that case, put 'er here.

Picasso stops flashing, dubious of the sudden, newfound
friendliness. Wells pushes his hand forward -

WELLS

It means 'friend... no more war.'

Picasso stretches a tentative tentacle toward its human
counterpart. Wells swallows pensively as the slick, mucousy
appendage closes in, then coolly pulls his hand back at the
last moment before contact. He smiles, nodding assuringly to
Picasso.

WELLS

Alright, now we're mates.

Picasso stares doubtfully at its limp tentacle.

WELLS

(quickly covering)
You don't actually touch hands,
just uh... just auras. Yeah, it's
an 'aura-shake.'

Picasso stares doubtfully at Wells.

The awkward silence is shattered as Wells clears his throat,
spitting out a piercing cough that resonates down the
boulevards in a growing, growling chorus.

The Alien's skin turns gray and pensive as its attentive eyes follow the echoes. It shuffles towards a darkened doorway, insistently motioning with whispering tentacles for Wells to follow.

WELLS

What is it?

Wells pauses, surveying the street for himself; there's nothing... nothing... nothing... Something... a familiar sound... swishing nearby... teasing his eardrums - and legs - into action.

MOMENTS LATER

Wells rounds corner after corner, quickly navigating through a dimly skylight-lit corridor.

Picasso lags behind as it stops, nervously glancing to its rear. The sound of Wells' footsteps fade. A low droning hum vacillates from somewhere close behind. The creature's eyes peer into the darkness, dilating with fear.

From somewhere up ahead -

WELLS(OS)

That's just capital.

Picasso presses forward around a corner and through a doorway where it finds Wells scrutinizing the dark recesses of an exterior wall. He turns back to Picasso,

WELLS

So much for happy end -

Wells freezes; his mind races with fear. Picasso looks on, perplexed, it's body radiating with a warm red glow.

Wells lunges savagely at Picasso... knocking it out of the way as he slams the door shut! The room is swallowed in darkness; no way in... and no way out. The only sounds: Wells' labored breathing, Picasso's shuffling footsteps, and -

Bamm! The worm wails and crashes fiercely from the other side of the doorway; the door burps open, then slams back under Wells' weight.

WELLS

Help me damn you!

But the Alien is occupied, its tentacles silently fondling and probing the invisible back wall.

The worm blasts into the door knocking Wells flat on his back. The room warms under a red glow as the worm thrusts its metallic head through the jarred door - Wells wedges the door against its head with his feet.

WELLS

For God's sake, Picasso -

A tantalizing hint of yellow light suddenly slices into the room, painting the adjacent wall with the outline of a distinctive oval doorway. Wells glances back to the source; Picasso, its tentacles sucking, stretching, straining from the pull of a heavy load, struggles to open a latch-less exterior door. Its grip loosens as sucker after sucker begin to peel away; the sliver of salvation grows dim and razor thin.

Wells pushes off the interior door, slipping and kicking his way toward Picasso. His fingers grope frantically for a finger hold... just as the door slams shut... closing the room into a momentary hush of darkness.

WELLS

Capital...

He and Picasso turn and look up in unison. Their bodies blush scarlet-red as the worm hisses its electric venom into the air above their heads. Fleeting, fairy-dust sparks charge the air, sizzling into oblivion mere inches from their faces.

The room hums and vibrates and shudders and then -

Like an anchor ripped from its mooring, crashing violently into the sea, the worm is jerked out of the room, slicing through walls and floors with the ease of a hot butter knife. A baroque symphony of slashes, tears, cracks and crashes wail out from all over the building as worm after worm is torn from its burrow.

A sudden, climatic refrain of slow-motion silence, before -

A thunderous crash from outside rocks the building. Wells and Picasso listen to the dust as it rattles downward in silent wonder.

LAST DAY

Across every octave - every pitch and register - silence strikes a deafening chord. The air, warm and gentle, seems to sigh with relief in the sudden calm. Wells stands at the entrance of the building, staring in disbelief at the scene across the street.

The fallen Tripod, its legs crumpled and contorted back on themselves, leans half-mast against the low-rise facades in a precarious, drunken stupor. Its limp, mutilated appendages - now shredded and frayed husks of wiry flesh - dangle freely round the hood like the tassels of some demonic lampshade.

The metallic groan of fatigued metal snaps out from amidst the twisted legs, and with that, the great silver hood collapses downward toward the ground; sparks fly out in a Forth-of-July parade as it scrapes along the side of the building before smashing into the pavement.

Like the malignant last breath of some giant, mythological monster, a thick wave of smoke and ash washes across Wells' face in the wake of the impact. He drops his head, coughing profusely in the onslaught.

He trudges forward across the street with labored step, as a man might wade through a viscous swamp, running on physical, mental and spiritual fumes. He stops at the threshold where the giant lip of the hood kisses the fractured sidewalk.

A small seamless slit opens from the bottom of the hood with slow, hydraulic precision. A misty green light spills out with increasing intensity from within as the slit reaches for the ground, forming a smooth, metallic rampart. Wells reaches down, never taking his eyes off the opening, and picks up a chunk of rubble. He tosses it into the opening: something stirs from within.

Entranced in the moment, he picks up another chunk of rubble - ready to finish the job - oblivious to the subtle shifting of shadows and shapes from the dark window, door and alleyway recesses all around him, as the sleepy city slowly awakens from its nightmarish slumber.

A scratching, shuffling noise creeps down the rampart. Wells leans forward, placing his free hand on the Tripod's cold shell for support, and peers up into the opening; he shrinks back in revulsion; the stone-age weapon falls from his shaking hand.

A sickening wave of molten, lead-heavy loathing wells up in his gut - chilling the veins, arresting the heart, seeping through every twitching, tearing pore till he can smell it in the air, taste it on his lips, feel it prickling the hairs on the back of his neck.

He watches and waits against his will as the decrepit, blood-stained fingers inchworm their way down the rampart.

Wells reaches out to the shivering hand. They grasp, molding themselves into an ancient, symbiotic bond of kindred brotherhood. Wells marvels at the hand - a near replica in size, shape and complexion of his own. On the cuff of blue sleeve, he sees the United Nations insignia. The hand squeezes its last breath before flopping listlessly in Wells' grasp.

A subtle commotion stirs from behind. Sensing the intense gaze boring into his consciousness, Wells turns slowly into the sea of massive eyes that gleam back with unerring, indecipherable equanimity from all directions.

He falls to his knees. The air fills with flecks of blood as he coughs uncontrollably, doubling over into a small small ball.

The alien hordes converge in silent anticipation. Picasso emerges from the masses, leading the way; its body, gray and melancholy, hovers briefly over Wells before reaching out with its tentacles.

Wells, too weak to resist, watches the spindly fingers probe across his feverish, wet brow. The tentacles ignite with kinetic bolts of stormy light that slowly gather strength, sparking from fingertip to forehead. Wells closes his eyes in anticipation. His head glows faintly as if a hundred-trillion cellular households suddenly turned on their front porch lights.

His eyes flash open, lit from within, as an avalanche of memories come crashing in - sweeping, clearing, scourging - washing away the folly of things imagined with the reality of things realized... things remembered; beautiful things; a buried treasure chest of everything honest and real.

Picasso's body flashes and oscillates in a "kaleidoscope of color." Like shifting sands, the colors swirl into abstract forms; the abstract forms into familiar shapes and recollections; and then, as if suddenly dialing in to an old familiar program on the Telly, photo-realistic images begin to parade across Picasso's torso.

Wells watches with feigning breath as his life flashes before him across the Alien's skin:

"A young boy dances with his mother... a teenage boy poses for his prom... a young man receives his diploma... marries... has children..."

Wells' eyes sparkle warmly as they soak up the memories, wave after wave, fast forward, faster and faster until... *"being blown apart by the apocalyptic nuclear explosions of war... on Earth..."*

WELLS

No... that's not real...

But it is real, and as his life continues... *"Wells is alone now, dressed in military fatigues, boarding a huge military spacecraft filled with the implements of destruction... The mighty armada of ships sail across the blackness of deep space, docking themselves along an orbit around a strange, alien world..."*

Wells watches in horror as the War of the Worlds unfolds... *"the Earthmen unleash a massive coordinated attack... countless aliens, flushed from the safety of cover, are trampled underfoot by the giant War Machines... Wells plays out his own part in the madness as he and the Soldier blast away with their Fire-Arms, just before being pummeled by friendly fire from the obscured Tripod..."*

WELLS

(pleading)

Stop it...

But it doesn't stop as... *"Picasso stands at the threshold of a bedroom doorway, tears dripping like drool from its quaking lips, staring at two lifeless shadows - alien shadows - sprawled out across the floor ..."*

WELLS

Stop it... stop it... stop it.

Like the granting of a final request, one last and worthwhile thought is pulled from his past, calming the stormy panic raging within, as the epilogue of his life plays out over the Alien's torso... *"Wells leans over the sleeping body of Picasso. His hand reverently sweeps across the dreaming images of Picasso and its family..."*

Wells, his eyes bloodshot with raw emotion and tears, reaches out to touch his own mortality, lightly tracing his fingers across his image on Picasso's torso, even as... *"his image traces its fingers across Picasso's image..."* in a surreal, peaceful, mirrored finality.

All is quiet now; Wells, Picasso, the other aliens, the Tripod, the streets and buildings - everything still and silent and two-dimensional like a hyper-clear postcard.

The frozen, final scene is framed upon the living torso of an Alien that stands perfectly still at the threshold of a small gathering of fellow Aliens. They all watch, spellbound, as the fleeting images *"begin to blur and fade into obscurity."*

The stunned audience pauses in reflection, then erupts into an effervescent tapestry of color and flashing applause.

Myeor raises a tentacle, then takes a dramatic Shakespearean bow.

EPILOGUE

The discussion following the fanfare of applause and good natured back-flashing was immediate, literary and, as always, quite lively. Some thought the characters too "three-dimensional," and lacking that intuitive fourth dimension to effectively round out their telepathic characters. Others complained that Myeor's inclusion of himself, as 'Picasso' no less!, was, "self aggrandizement at it's worst."

On the whole, the greatest revolt, in numbers and voracity, came along the pretenses that, "three thousand years of peace should not preclude the necessity nor the willingness of our people to defy their natural instincts by waging war in defense of their civilization."

Myeor remained silent and contemplative as the discussion played itself out, only once taking the opportunity to flash a response to a question regarding the logic of the plot: "How on Wylort did the Earthmen succeed in locating a planet inhabited by beings, long since evolved into silence, whose only means of mass and personal communication was by means of ocular and telepathic perception?"

Myeor calmly takes three Wylorian steps to his right, and with a wave of his tentacle, motions to the real Voyager 10 Probe proudly displayed in its deep-space diorama. "Voyager Ten, guised as an innocent bearer of goodwill and knowledge, and so hastily retrieved in our thirst of knowledge, became both probe and beacon, enlightening them to both our ways, and the way to our world."

The members of the Wylort Literary Society flicker amongst themselves in acknowledgement.

"A reminder," Myeor concludes, "that next week, Dayelyo will be displaying his adaptation of 'Othello'."

With that, the meeting seemed adjourned. But upon rising to leave, a most large - most moist - elder statesman, feebly, but articulately, flashed the most pertinent of questions, "And what of the real Voyager probe, and the Earthmen who sent it... what is their true intentions, and why include such a malignant tale of calamity and destruction within an otherwise amicable anthology?"

Myeor contemplates the question carefully before answering. "A warning perhaps... to other worlds... to be vigilant and constitutionally prepared to defend themselves against such an onslaught."

The room dims as Wylorian flesh turns pensive and gray at the implications.

"Or perhaps..." Myeor adds assuringly, "a warning to those who might have designs of invading planet Earth."

The room flickers a sigh of relief at the improved prospects.

"In any event, I think we are indebted to our literary contemporary for a tale well told." Myeor raises his glass. "A toast is in order..."

The room slithers with life as tentacles reach for their glasses.

"To Mr. Wells... May his soul rest in greener, redder, bluer pastures."

Glasses are raised, and drink after drink is unceremoniously doused atop each of their respective heads.

With that, the procession abruptly shuffles out of the hall, past the Voyager probe, leaving Myeor and Dayelyo alone in their thoughts.

Myeor steps to the probe - an encyclopedic repository of all things Earth and planet man, retrieved so many years ago during its historic, fateful flyby of the Planet Wylort. Myeor studies the probe closely; a sound, or merely his fanciful imagination, whispers back from within the charred, scratched shell.

"Is anything the matter," Dayelyo flashes.

"I wonder..." Myeor flickers back.

"Yes, my good fellow, that you do ... that you most certainly do!"

Beyond the vibrations of their diminished hearing, the Voyager beeps ever so softly from within - measuring, calculating, signaling, beckoning? And somewhere, painted invisible in the blackness of deep space, a planet listens, contemplating the messages, with what unknown designs.

THE END