

## Whyte Boyz Jay Lake

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[Insert Pic whyteboyz.jpg Here]

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“Steve Barnes once said that science fiction is about white people and their imaginary friends. That struck me very funny, very true, and rather sad all at once. This story came to me as a voice, really, implying a tale, and somehow that got twisted into Steve’s comment. In a very real sense, it’s also been influenced by John McLoughlin’s long-neglected novel *The Helix and the Sword*, which deserves far more attention than it ever got. At its heart, like most of what I write, it’s a story about a boy.”

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### *HAPLOID COMES THE FUTURE*

Blood arcs, the flight of a gutshot bird. Obsidian-weighted piano wire sings a bright-mad death song as the boyz dance through the flails of one another’s arms, threshing and harvesting the cullz. Smartroad bounces beneath their feet, so much foam now that the wits and money have departed for warmer, darker climes beyond high orbit. There is little left for these boyz save the dance which is in and upon their blood.

They are whyte niggaz in the Darkman’s world.

Somewhere the Darkman laughs, thunder rolling off his lips in an echo of pristine granite valleys lost to both access and imagination. Somewhere the Darkman’s eyes glimmer beetle-winged and shadowed, pools of power set with rolling bounds of epicanthic fat. Somewhere the Darkman thinks a wish and his wish is brought to truth in the electron rush of a gleaming moment, his steel-honed and mirror-sharp world bent to the devices of his desire.

Somewhere trees shiver with the wind of his passage and the very soil fountains forth. Somewhere is peace, the simple architecture of contentment, even perhaps justice.

But not here, not where the boyz dance.

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Gayan would be a scavenger, he thinks, save for the larger, older, paler ones that push him to the margins. His is an ancient resentment, festering in the hearts of

generations of the poor, a universal virus of need and deprivation. Even the ragged must have someone to hate, to hurt, to turn away from in disgust—that would be Gayan.

He does not mind. He knows nothing better than the delight of crisp, new rinds rescued from the top of a camp midden. Even the scantiest curl of melon can be sucked for juice and sugar, and makes the walking better for holding between tongue and cheek.

Gayan slinks along now, hidden in the rhododendrons and dripping ferns behind an embankment that once served some iron leviathan of another age, bedding its wheels like the motherz bed the boyz. That's the story, anyway, and Gayan hasn't made the age yet where he stops believing stories. He imagines the metal beast, some great brass-bound worm inching through the cold forests, spindly arms waving outward to strip leaves and branches like a deer damned for its faunal sins, shitting out an endless berm of clay and gravel and rotting spike-bound wood.

He also suffers from an excess of vocabulary, most of it bereft of context, beneficiary of a thousand stories told at a hundred campfires while the Darkstars glimmered in the mountain nights.

But now the embankment is his friend, shield and armor from the noisy party of boyz and girlz—future motherz, those, even Gayan is wise enough to note, though he doesn't quite understand why yet—who scavenge and frolic through the firs and pines to practice mothering to shouts of encouragement and laughing advice. It is not that they will beat him, or worse. It is that Gayan does not wish to be swept up into the brittle passage of their days. He has too recently fled the casual oppression of his own camp, the tyranny of the same against the different.

So Gayan conceals himself behind the ghost tracks of an old roadrail and listens to the laughter and tries to imagine where their food is. Have they dropped a sack or package in their careless ramble? For this is his talent:

Gayan can see that which is concealed.

He can even see that which is not there.

The Darkman himself would reach down from orbit for such powers to be inside his head instead of subrogated to flocks of machines.

Gayan, unknown and unknowing one of the most powerful boyz in the world, sees a sack of precious *naranjas* off some Hispano boat from the distant south, memory of the sun still warm upon the fruits' bright skin, and he imagines their sweet, sharp juices in his throat stinging like blood, cloying like honey, flowing like a better kind of wine than anyone lets slip to children.

Inspired, he stalks the unseen feast.

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The boyz dance harder now, an *abrogato* of violent motion mimicking the larger rhythms of weather, climate, continent, the very spheres of Heaven. Eyes hidden and hooded watch, placing bets in smoky gaming parlors under one sixth of the gravity understood by evolution and biology. Boyz bleed themselves and one another in celebration of rites for which they have no comprehension, in which they play no meaningful part, for which they die to no purpose.

Whyte is the color of expendability, a casually roiling reservoir of potential, wild genes in wild dances recombining outside the bounds of taste, breeding, and predictability. Lines of dark heredity in orbit are managed across a dozen generations to ensure the right hair, the most noble brow, the perfect beauty, but nothing can substitute for the brimming, boiling caldera of the race upon its own land—wild, fast life and bloody, swift death pushing the genes and their meat-wrappers ever closer to an edge of reality, competition, a hairsbreadth further away from failure, death, and species-crash.

So the Darkman and his folk celebrate, carousing away their undying centuries while down the gravity well the pot boils. Sometimes something crawls out of the pot, lifts its head, and looks like more potential than trouble.

Here is the Darkman's agent: Wire, a whyte long recovered from the festering pit of the high-gee surface and retooled to live a life of near-acceptability in the dark, glittering places where deep-toned melanin and brown eyes ensure longevity and successful breeding. Wire is a mule, a thing made and remade half a hundred times by the Darkman's machine-flocks as purposes shift, tastes change, fashions blanch and burn through their cycles of fancy.

Wire, a made thing who knows he is a man.

Wire, a man who knows he is a made thing.

Wire, a whyte lifted into the Darkman's world.

Wire, a thing of the Darkman's to be exiled once more to the whyte world.

Wire, who understands nothing, not even himself, but can kill with a casual ease that should frighten even his master, and call lightning from the summer sky when the need is upon him.

(They'd long since taken his genes, up there in orbit, for Wire had no more need of them. He was repaid with his life, which should have been enough for any pale-haired savage.)

So now he falls screaming from orbit, because it pleases the Darkman that Wire should do so, spinning starfished out through the upper atmosphere, leaving trails of ionized particles and flickering flame, his none-too-precious self protected by the vaguest, half-remembered skin borrowed from the Darkman's machine-flocks, though they made no wrapper for his mind and in the smoky halls of Luna nuzzling couples and triples and clusters paused to chuckle at the pale distress of a courageless, craven savage who couldn't even stand the sight of heights.

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The *naranjas* were right where Gayan had seen them, of course. He was never wrong. It had yet to occur to him that anyone could not know where something was—when he thought about such things at all, he just assumed folk had their reasons for holding back. Gayan slithered through the blackberries, a painful process at best but nearly invisible to the capering boyz and girlz, until he found the bright-netted bag with the glittering trade tag. Smell promised, rising above even the vague, pervasive green-brown rank of the forest.

With a scoot and a snatch he was off, his routes and paths visible before him like so many brilliant futures, pursued by laughter and shouts and few paces' worth of thumping feet before skin games and the smell of damp pubic hair drew Gayan's pursuers back to their own ends.

Though his pursuers did not care, in his hand Gayan knew he held more value than he'd ever touched before. *Naranjas* were a feast of gold in their own right, but they also bought pot-meat and mother-nights and even small tools when offered in trade. Gayan craved the crowding taste and sweet flowing juices more than he craved those things that could be bought with his treasure. So he found himself an old deer wallow, ferns and stems trampled to a soft nest invisible from just steps away, and curled there to rip pebbly rinds free from fleshy gold and eat everything, every wisp and fiber and scrap of skin to boot, to make the *naranjas* one with him, until his gut screamed with the pleased pain of the feast and the sugars made his bowels rumble.

Somewhere in the long fall, Wire had passed from terror to senselessness. He was surprised, then, to find himself lying facedown on the stretched, livid surface of a decaying smartroad. The copper-meat tang of blood filled his nostrils, but he was pretty sure it wasn't his own.

Wire didn't bleed much anymore.

Despite the blood-and-meat reek that filled the air, nothing moved nearby. His sensorium picked up no electronics or traces of machined metals. So he was safe enough. And Wire knew why he was there. Nothing was wrong with his memory.

He was treasure hunting for the Darkman.

Wire cocked his head and looked around.

Bones. Everywhere were bones. Recently used bones, from the pink-stained, flesh-scraped, tooth-gnawed look of them.

It was an ugly scene, even by his standards.

He sprang to his feet, circling rapidly in case of subtle enemies, but in fact Wire shared this place only with the freshly-butchered. The failed smartroad stretched away through a towering forest of mossy firs, losing itself in green shadow in both directions though he was in a pool of sunlight, some old clearing guaranteed by long-ago fire or perhaps soil toxins.

The pattern of the bones was clear to him now, arrayed in a fractal spiral from knucklebones and the miscellanea of the foot all the way up to femurs and pelvises. He estimated twelve to fifteen dead.

He realized after a moment's thought that the boyz had recently been dancing here. The bones were scored with the slash of wireknives, gnawed with hunger of the rite-starved survivors.

Even beneath all his programming, Wire felt a stir against the Darkman. Not disloyalty, for that was no longer possible for him, but something more akin to distaste. It was such rebellion as was permitted by his redesigners.

Why had the Darkman chosen to land him here, Wire wondered. Directional clue? Warning? Reminder?

He'd been one of the boyz once, back when his personal world was young. He literally could not count the years which had passed since, so many of them spent in vats, comas, or varying states of medically-induced death, but Wire knew that lifetimes upon lifetimes had passed since last he danced with a wireknife.

He knew none of these boyz. Could not have known them. Would never know them. But Wire was something of an ecologist, as any long-term habitat dweller must needs be. The waste gnawed at his spacer's thrift. The suffering disturbed his long ago memories, of his first life.

"I am sorry," Wire told the bones, though he had no idea what he was apologizing for.

Maps flickered into his consciousness, directions distorted according to probabilities assigned by quantum intelligences lurking in high orbit. Called back to his tasks, Wire set out following the strongest bulge, downhill, where verdant valleys

dozed in the mist-wrapped western distance. His feet scattered the careful array of bones like so many clods of clay.

He barely registered their disturbed clatter, though with no thought at all, he scooped up an abandoned wireknife to carry with him into the world.

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Gayan woke to a clenching in his gut and a sour taste in his mouth. Even as he crouched around the misery, he laughed—silent, shaking, body vibrating like a power drill, until his breath came in frightening whoops.

“I done gone ate all the *naranjas*,” he finally whispered to the broken ferns of his deer wallow.

Then he realized that he could not see the next path. Or rather, all paths were open to him, each future equally weak, equally strong.

He had run away, escaped the life of scavenging and casual beatings.

He had found his own route through the woods.

He had feasted on the *naranjas*.

Gayan had no more plan than this. He’d wanted to be free, he was free.

With that thought, he became frightened. He tried to imagine what to do next, where to go now. He was vaguely aware that somewhere people had commerce. Somebody unloaded the boats that came from the south. Somebody went mining for the metals and plastics that turned up for trade. Somebody tracked the value of the trade tags passed back and forth.

But he had no idea who. And there was only one place to find out: Up in the sky.

The higher you were, the more you knew. Everybody understood that.

Gayan smiled at the light-mottled branches above him. That was where oth the secrets and the power lay. He had a path now, too. He could see where to go.

It lead east, uphill.

Which wasn’t precisely skyward, but then he could hardly climb air.

Gayan stood, brushed the dirt from his leather leggings and his linen shirt, then headed east toward the mountains—up—watchful for a stream or pool at which to

pause. He would never have to run from anyone again, he promised himself.

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Wire strode through the viridian woodlands, contemplating rebellion. Not his, of course, for he could not rebel. But the idea of rebellion. A *gedanken* experiment. How a machine bound by the strictures of programming, logic and the Darkman's law could possibly rebel.

It was an old and fruitless game of his.

Familiar birds flitted through the brush around him, feathered similar to those that had haunted the woodlands of Wire's long ago youth. Tiny flowers bloomed in the moss he crushed beneath his feet, barely registering in his sensorium as smears of color at the periphery of his defenses. Bounding deer, the wailing bugle of a distant elk, the rustle of the fox—Wire walked through the sounds and scents of nature, everything the habitats above sought to imitate wrought in the endless fractal imperfection of reality.

The Darkman's world was a continuum of planes and angles and seals and secured hatchways, always braced and coiled by vacuum. Wire moved among those strictures, an electromechanical spider sent out to prey and stun and kill at its master's bidding. But here, here was the random veining of leaves and the ghostly drip of mist on twigs and the churn of mud and the curl of sand in the stream.

The biosphere wrought its own changes in any man. Deep inside, Wire was still a man. A machine might not rebel, but a man always harbored secret thoughts.

Wire was never certain his thoughts were his own.

The flickering maps in his head strengthened, satellite intelligences driving him onward. Wire's stride lengthened as he moved preternaturally fast, as mighty and mechanical in his way as the roadrails of ancient days with their screaming steam and clattering computers.

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Gayan's path was broad as a river now, bright as the morning sun. He scrambled up the ruined road he'd found peeking from beneath the moss roses and the clumped ferns. The *naranjas* still sat sour in his stomach, though he remembered the taste as a sip of colored glory.

He'd never seen so great a path, not in his life. All the world was calling him forward. All the future, every hidden thing peeking out at him, so many frogs in the pond of his life. Every buzz of bees, every colored flight of butterflies, every circling hawk, urged Gayan on. The very ground at his feet rippled forward, pushing him. He

couldn't yet see what was hidden. It was like looking for himself.

He had never felt so free.

Gayan scrambled up the rotting curve of a shattered Douglas fir, nurse log now to an entire narrow, horizontal forest of its own, blocking the road in a green-tinged bark wall. He balanced at the top, looking into an old fire-scarred clearing punctuated by a temple of blackened trunks. The ancient smartroad ran between the scorched trees, and coming toward Gayan was a preternaturally tall man, thin as a skinning knife, glowing with the power of found things and the strength of time.

Arms spread wide, Gayan smiled and stepped forward to welcome his fate.

When the newcomer shot him, Gayan collapsed forward in shock at the impossible betrayal of his gift.

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### *The Diploid Now*

:: memory ::

:: a boy runs in the woods ::

:: vines lashing ::

:: wire knife swinging ::

:: fir scent filling his lungs ::

these things are not his own

time has been stolen from him

but a different boy has brought it back to him.

\* \* \* \*

Climbing out of a gravity well was ever a different problem than dropping into one. The energy gradients ran entirely the wrong way. Wire had access to at least three forms of retrieval courtesy of the Darkman, but as a loyal servant—or faithful machine—he also had considerable latitude for judgment.

Which he was abusing mightily.

His objective, this boy, had entrained decades of *gedanken* experiments. Thin. Ragged. Wild-eyed.

Free.

Familiar.

*You could have been me*, Wire thought. *I could have been you.*



It took no imagination to see this boy gene-sampled, cored out and retrofitted, cortex remapped and augmented. A made thing like Wire. No imagination at all. Just reasonable knowledge of the future.

That the surface was a massive gene reservoir was no mystery to anyone with a functional intelligence. But Wire had not been sent down the well to retrieve an *individual* in decades. Perhaps a century or more. Wire himself had become too valuable to spend on such trivial harvesting.

Clearly this boy was not trivial.

Even now, this shadow-echo from the distant path breathed, ragged and pained, his face twisted in some emotion Wire could not quite recall any more. The child's eyes darted beneath half-closed lids, while his feet twitched.

The boy dreamed.

Of what, Wire wondered. What was this child's value? Somewhere distant a wolf yipped, breaking into full cry. Wire looked up to see dusk staining the sky. It was past time he called for orbital pickup.

Somewhere distant a machine rebelled. Wire gathered the boy into his arms and walked into the woods, thinking on the experiments of the Darkman.

What had he come here for? Not merely to claim another pale-skinned life, worth less than a bar chit in the warrens of Luna.

The latitude of Wire's judgment stirred like an eel in a recycling tank.

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I am not dead, Gayan thought. Mostly he was surprised. There were no paths leading into the future. No possibilities. Just a dark sky with slivers of moonlight through the treetops, and a thin face with an edged nose and shadowed eyes.

He was being held, carried as he had not been since before his memory began.

Were there no paths because he was not walking? He was lost, Gayan realized, lost. Tears started in his eyes, that would have earned laughter or a beating in any camp he'd ever lived at.

"No," croaked the man who carried him.

The man who had shot him. With what? Something that had glowed ghostlike and painful as best as his memory could report.

Gayan tried to turn his face away, but found only his captor's chest. He looked back up instead to see the shadowed eyes each glowing with a pinprick of brilliant green.

"No." The voice was what rust would have sounded like, if it could talk.

Then Gayan saw the future in the green glow of those eyes.

"Yes," he said.

With that word, paths branched out, filled with things he did not understand, yet—puffs of fog under black skies and machines fighting in narrow metal halls; forests burning across miles and mountaintops: a road paved with pink-stained bones—but Gayan was no longer afraid.

\* \* \* \*

:: memory ::  
:: once was a boy ::  
:: one of the boyz ::  
:: same as this ::  
:: different ::  
:: different as this ::  
:: how? ::  
:: why ::

Then the Darkman came for him.

\* \* \* \*

Slivers of identity shoaled beneath Wire's constructed personality, anonymous silver fish moving through deeper, darker waters. The child was pulling them from the matrices embedded deep within his skull, wetware ghosts of the long ago human past, multiple erasures and reprogrammings and reformattings and edited restorations.

A machine might not rebel, but the *genius* of any *locus* could drive a piezomechanical heart surely as any hormone surge in a graysponge brain.

Slowly, without rancor, he was coming back to himself.

What was this boy, he wondered?

"Where *are* we going?" he asked his burden, not realizing he had even spoken.

“Up to the sky,” the boy said with the complete confidence of the sanctified. Or the insane.

One of the anonymous silver fish breached for a moment, impinging on constructed consciousness.

Sometimes, thought Wire, the greatest rebellion is obedience. He looked into the pale-skinned, gray-eyed face—the face of a slave, a gene-breeder, the garbage from which the civilized human world had turned its handsome dark regard—and considered what the Darkman would do with this child. Without this child.

“I can see you,” said the boy. This time he was almost wondering.

Social simulations stirred within the matrices of Wire’s personality. “Of course.”

“No. You don’t get it. You’ve been lost for, for a long time. I see things that are lost.”

“I am never lost,” his simulations replied, aware as always of mean sidereal time, universal coordinated time, the solar year, the lunar year, orbital precisions to a confidence of thirty five decimal places, surface and ecliptic coordinates and a thousand other forms of locational awareness.

*You have always been lost*, a fish whispered before vanishing.

Above them, though there were no clouds in the dusk, thunder rumbled as sparks followed the two through the dripping forests, dropping one blazing finger at a time from the clear sky.

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Gayan had never before met anyone like this man.

“Man” was not quite the word, but tall and strange as he was, the newcomer had arms and legs and eyes and a mouth.

He wasn’t afraid any more. Not since he’d seen inside. He didn’t usually look for paths within people, though a few times he’d seen someone dying. But Old Maria had been old, and coughing blood. Everyone saw that future. Finnagail had tumbled into a pit hours later, that no one had known of, and Gayan wondered for weeks why the older boy hadn’t seen the path for himself.

But this one. This man. He was a future and a past and a lost treasure, all at once, all on two feet.

Gayan was entranced. He wondered if this stranger were his father. In time they came to a tree-bald hill, shattered dark stone interspersed with grass and bushes. The tall man climbed it by moonlight, his eyes still gleaming that cold green, continuing to cradle Gayan close as any broken-backed hunting dog. The night air was still, heavy with pine sap and pollen and the musk of distant deer, while the moon and her sisters sailed fat and lazy over the mountains towering to the east.

He stopped there, in the cup of rocks that was more or less the peak, and set Gayan down.

“Are you well?”

The words came in that same creaking voice, an old hinge long past oiling. Not just the voice, but the sentence itself, seemed strange to this man.

Gayan nodded. “Yes. Hungry.”

“Tell me now.” The long, narrow face contorted, a mummery of careful thought, silver moonshadows chasing with the shifting curves of cheek and jaw. “What are you?”

“My name is Gayan. I am a boy.”

The tall man stared a moment, as if summoning new words from some distant armory. “What are you, that someone else should want you?”

Gayan shrugged. “A boy.”

“—but you saw me.”

“Everyone sees.”

“No. Not inside.”

And of course that was true. It had always been true, he’d just never thought it through. “I see—paths. Sir.”

“Paths.”

“Into choices. Into the future. Where the lost things are. Who might die tomorrow.”

The tall man tilted his head back impossibly far, his neck creaking, until the plane of his face was level with the endless night sky. His jaw cracked open and a scream leaped out, sharp, quick, vanishing so high that Gayan barely heard it at all, save for the buzzing in his bones and joints.

“Now we wait,” the tall man said as his head returned to a normal state. His voice seemed ordinary too, in that moment. “They come.”

Gayan shivered. “Who?”

“The Darkman. His people.”

“They are?”

“Me. You. Everyone.”

Gayan considered that.

“You may call me Wire,” said the tall man, and a flicker of an expression chased across his face, a shadow lost among the shadows of the moon.

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“—evolutionary equivalent of a fish trap. High orbit, cis-lunar space and beyond are too harsh for long-term genetic stability—”

Wire realized one of his social simulations had taken over his voicebox. It seemed to have gone into teaching mode, responsive to the boy Gayan’s generally inquisitive nature, or perhaps his politeness.

“—drift turns into something more analogous to a crevasse, uncrossable ruptures between populations too small to—”

Silver identity fish whisked through his words.

“—number of solutions were CAN YOU HEAR ME BOY but without significant—”

Gayan nodded, eyes large with moonlight and fatigue, but engrossed in Wire’s words.

“—by the time of the Second WHEN THEY COME STAY WITH ME over two million died—”

*How does a machine rebel?*, he thought, almost smiling for the first time in over a century. It does not, but the man within might.

His lecture nattered on a while before being overtaken by the nerve-grinding whine of a Higgs-inert Fermionic matter drive. Wire looked up into the night sky, but saw nothing until he’d shifted his vision to tap the Darkman’s private nanosphere.

There was an atmosphere flyer almost directly over them, the pilot working a surveillance pattern before dropping his stealth and landing.

Wire gathered Gayan once more into his arms, and clutching the future tight stepped atop the highest of the little crown of rocks to be lifted into the night to meet the Darkman.

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### *Gestation Outside Time*

“Consider,” said the fish, “the problem of perfect knowledge.” It was an abstract shape, slipped from some gnostic flag of the ancient Orient, pale blue veined with throbbing red. It flicked back and forth in an invisible, imperceptible space. “One cannot measure both position and momentum. One cannot hold on to both the future and the past. One cannot know both where one is going and where one has been.”

Arrant nonsense, the once and future boyz thought. Errant common sense.

“What profit it a man to know the location of every credit in the solar system if he cannot project their trendlines?” Quantum mechanics is not macroeconomics, they told themselves smugly.

“A man sits in high orbit, grotesque as any orb spider raised in microgravity, his tentacle tendrils reaching into every life, every hull, every habitat, every mind.” The fish flickered into and out of phase, a stuttering trail of piscine probability. “His knowledge is perfect. Almost.” Another stutter, a blazing smear of identity. “If only he could see the future.”

We know nothing, thought one of the boyz, but see everything. We know everything, the other one thought, but see nothing. As halves we are whole.

Elsewhen, a H-iF drive whined, one of the focus fields slightly out of tune.

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### *Parturition In a Moment*

The Darkman was everywhere. This was a profound truth in Wire’s existence.

Omnipresence wasn’t a literal sort of vastness, but a wide-ranging intrusion of telepresence, surveillance, independent micro- and macro-agents, avatars—extension of consciousness, knowledge, awareness, into a nanosphere enveloping both old, broken Earth and the shiny colonies and habitats that ranged from Mercury’s dark obverse to the amino ice rings of Niburu.

Yet there were times when the Darkman wished to grasp for his own something of great value. Usually that was an outpouring of sentiment. Sometimes it was a deeper motive.

This day it was the boy Gayan.

“I have fetched the prize up from the Earth-well,” Wire told an ancient mesh-balled microphone. It pleased the Darkman to have his archaic jokes, here among foam-panelled hallways with drifting fogs of smart security and self-cleaning floors that squinted at passing feet as if they were the enemy. Wire and Gayan stood before an oval door painted in an abstracted pattern of vines.

A clattering mechanical eyeball on an articulated stalk emerged from an iris-hatch to poke at Wire, then at Gayan standing next to him. Servos whirred.

“Pass,” said a mechanical voice, though Wire had been authenticated long before he ever set foot in this corridor, this habitat, this orbital path. Gayan was simply cargo.

The oval door slid into its own rim, solid panel going to some gas-plasma state with a hiss of pumps. Wire stepped through into the Darkman’s waiting room, the boy Gayan close at his side.

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Gayan had accepted the ride into the sky as a sort of giant rope, lowered from above. His path had blazed in the head of Wire, the lost man. Their little soft-walled room was just a step on the way, as were the mysterious series of doors and passages and unquiet spaces, until they passed the oval door and he found himself in the presence of the entire future in one blazing halo around a man seated at a desk.

The Darkman was slim, narrow shoulders, narrow body behind the dark, lacquered wood of his desk. Naked, his skin was a deeper brown even than forest loam. His head seemed slightly larger than ordinary, face fleshy with heavy folds of skin around the eyes, which blazed almost as bright as Wire’s, but with an inner energy alone.

The space around him was, well, space. Though Gayan and Wire stood on a small square of carpet, and the Darkman sat at a desk that could have come out of almost any era of history past the invention of paperwork, everything else was Luna and Earth and distant Mars and the outer planets, their distances foreshortened to a perspective-challenged visibility. Swarms of motile lights moved everywhere, fireflies on a summer night, connecting the worlds and the bright habitats that drifted between and among them.

“You have found it,” the Darkman said.

Gayan was surprised to hear a voice ordinary as rainwater. Wire shifted, unspeaking. Something passed between him and the Darkman as the Darkman turned to stare at Gayan with narrowing eyes.

“I am Gayan, sir.”

“I know.”

With the Darkman’s words, the halo of future paths twisted. Gayan had never seen anyone like this. His every breath seemed to shift the fate of thousands.

The Darkman finally spoke again. “You see things.” Light exploded over his head, the paths falling as if in coruscating battle.

*Where am I going*, Gayan wondered. He stayed with Wire, trusted the lost boy he’d seen deep within Wire’s head. But the Darkman’s power dwarfed Wire the same way Wire’s power dwarfed Gayan.

They were both boyz together before this man who controlled everything.

With that thought, memories cascaded into Gayan’s head. The uncertainty of perfect knowledge. Two halves of a whole. A fish of light, lecturing in some timeless space or spaceless time between Earth and here. “Paths, sir,” he said, baiting the trap Wire had not quite intended to set. “I see paths into the future.”

“Ah.” The Darkman steepled his fingers, nodding slowly. “What lies upon those paths, little man?”

Gayan looked into the light and spoke the truth. “Attack ships, burning off the shoulder of Mars. Pale men running through metal hallways, blood on their tongues and teeth. Vacant cities deserted as a dead man’s heart.”

“Enough.” The Darkman glared at Wire. “Does it do more than parlor tricks?”

“Where is his weapon?” Wire asked Gayan.

He could see it then, beneath the Darkman’s chair, bright as an ember in a woodland night. “Under your left buttock, sir,” Gayan told the Darkman. “And in your head,” he added softly, reporting what he really saw.

“Stupid,” said the Darkman. Wire stiffened. A smile ghosted on the Darkman’s face, then he leaned forward. “Where is the solar machine code key?”

Gayan could see that, whatever it was, as a bright, coiled spark glowing inside



the heart of nearby Mars. “There.” He pointed.

“How?” the Darkman demanded.

“I don’t know.” Gayan shrugged. “But—” Two halves, he thought. It was time for Wire’s plan, whatever that was. “I can—I can—” His voice slowed with the lie, to this man of all people. “I can give it to you.”

*Perfect knowledge*, he told himself, reaching a hand all unknowing toward the Darkman.

But they were boyz, he and Wire, and in the Darkman’s world the whyte niggaz dance. Even as he reached, Wire spun his wireknife and they danced.

GOOD

Then Gayan knew how to give his power to the Darkman. He could pick Wire’s path and his own, even as hidden weapons began to fire and energies crackled in the infinite yet small space of the Darkman’s office.

So the boyz danced into the future.

\* \* \* \*

*Maturity Endless*

:: memory ::

:: always was a boy ::

:: running free beneath brilliant skies ::

:: orbit flaming in brilliant chains ::

:: two boyz walk in the light of a summer sun ::

:: forever free ::