

Rutherford Heidigens

And

The Fifth Planet

by

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Ruthermore Heidigens and The Fifth Planet

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Part One

The Ultimatum

The heavy, leather bound, cover made a satisfying 'thunk' as it shut on the large tome lying on the desk.

His hand smoothed the embossed leather lovingly while his eyes checked that none of the pages had curled up underneath it.

He read the title inscribed at the top again. It said '*Acronyms and Colloquialisms in ye Casting of Runes and Spells in ye Known Universe*'. Perhaps a little grandiose since the 'Known Universe' consisted of four planets of which Mok was the smallest.

Ruthermore Heidigens looked up slowly under his brows as he felt that this gave him the *gravitas* that his position as Senior Wizard (well, 'only wizard', really) in that Known Universe, deserved. Indeed, underneath the title there was inscribed 'by Ruthermore Heidigens, Wizard'.

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A tall, thin person, whose face had yet to come into the orbit of his vision, thrust a business card at him.

"Jil Oberquaye." Ruthermore read aloud.

The thin person sighed deeply, a feat that appeared to be beyond someone with, apparently, limited lung volume, "Jihul, actually, in fact," the voice was calm, soft and even; it did not match the body that produced it.

"You are not Mokkinese," Ruthermore made it a statement of fact now that he had seen the face. He kept his lids half lowered so as to appear discerning and analytical.

"No. It has become apparent that your success in wizardry has been, thus far, confined to making tax money from derived income disappear."

"Perhaps I shall make you disappear, Mr. Jil?"

“Mr. Oberquaye, please, or Jihul—Jil, if you must,” Oberquaye’s expression remained blank, “There is, outside your door, a very large and very wide, gentleman from Gule whose lack of cerebral activity makes him immune to your supposed spells or, indeed, any other form of pseudo-magic.”

“I have had no contact with any person from Gule and so it would not be possible to determine if he is immune to my magic, lack of brain function notwithstanding,” Rutherfordmore decided to slide past the words ‘supposed’ and ‘pseudo’ that he noticed in Oberquaye’s mini-speech.

“Against my better judgement,” Jihul continued as if Rutherfordmore had not spoken, “it has been decided by powers greater than mine to employ your services. The fee that shall come your way, should you be successful,” Oberquaye’s expression changed to one containing a hint of mockery tinged with a touch of cynicism, “is that the monies you owe to the Parliamentary Fiscal Committee in taxation from income received shall be waived.”

Rutherfordmore looked surprised, “Income? I have had income? From whence came this bounty of which I am unaware? I must write to my bank manager at once asking how is it that my cheques bounce when there is, seemingly, considerable wealth within his vaults that belongs to me.”

Oberquaye produced a briefcase from which he removed several sheets of paper. He placed the sheets carefully on the desk between the large book, which still occupied most of the free space, and the brass-mounted shrunken head of some, previously large, animal.

Rutherfordmore picked them up and scrutinised them, “These appear to be invoices. Paid invoices. Paid, in fact, to me. For large sums of money.”

“Indeed.”

“They are forgeries, of course.”

“And yet the people who paid you these exorbitant sums will be only too willing, in a Court of Law, to affirm that such sums were, for a certainty, remitted to your account at the Bank that you previously mentioned. We have, I should also mention, an affidavit from said Manager that these sums were available to you for a short period before they were withdrawn, under your signature. They now reside in a place not known to us.”

“Nor me,” Rutherfordmore glared at the sheets of paper, “Since these sums are

fictitious it can safely be assumed that they reside only in your own head.”

“Am I now able to assure the Parliamentary Committee that you will carry out this small undertaking on their behalf or shall I summon the presence of Iq Habso?”

“I am persuaded that this Iq Habso is the very wide gentleman currently blocking the outside of my door?”

“Indeed.”

“Regarding these fabled and fabulous numbers preceded by abbreviations that coincide with monetary symbols, it would seem unlikely that this is, as you say, a ‘small undertaking’. I am convinced that it is not only much larger than ‘small’ but could also be described as ‘dangerous’?”

“Ah.”

Ruthermore sighed.

“Shall I,” Oberquaye asked, “summon the Gulese, Mr. Iq?”

Ruthermore scanned the papers and sighed again, “I am a poor, innocent Wizard. I do no harm, I keep myself to myself and earn barely enough to keep body and soul together,” he shifted his considerable weight in his cavernous chair causing some measure of squeaking on the leather, “How is it that I have been chosen when there are so many undesirables out there who could be much more able to enter into a nefarious contract?”

“I am not privy to the workings of the Parliamentary Committee mind, Mr. Heidigens. My task is to see that the volunteers are set off comfortably in their duties.”

“Volunteer? I’m a volunteer?”

“Everyone has a choice, Mr. Heidigens.”

“But the alternative to accepting this ‘deal’,” Ruthermore allowed himself a small sneer, “is to be introduced to Habso the Gulese?”

“Indeed. You should, very likely, not be in his company for too long,” Oberquaye allowed himself the luxury of a faint smile.

“Nor anybody else’s, no doubt?”

“Oh, we should be in your company but it is unlikely that you would be aware

of being in ours depending upon your beliefs in the afterlife, of course.”

“Of course,” Rutherfordmore dumped the papers into his waste basket, “This would tend to confirm that the ‘little task’ you have for me is one from which I am unlikely to emerge with my life still adhering to my body.”

“Possibly.”

“You said, at an early stage of the conversation—if I may be so bold as to describe our dialogue as such, that my employment in this matter was ‘against your better judgement’. You are on the Committee?”

“I am not. Like you I exist only to do their bidding,” Oberquaye nodded almost imperceptibly.

“Which is to increase the contents of their coffers at the expense of everyone else,” Rutherfordmore observed.

“I have no opinion on such matters.”

“Do you possess any opinions at all?”

“Indeed. It is my opinion that I shall enjoy the outcome of this game whichever way fate decrees that it fall,” Jihul Oberquaye stated flatly as if disinterested in the outcome, that ‘enjoy’ was only a word he had noticed other people use.

Jihul’s voice remained flat, constant. Rutherfordmore found himself to be more irritated by that voice than he was by the demand on his time.

“Fate, eh?” Rutherfordmore glared at Jihul, “You are a Moirian. Game? My life—or potential lack of it, is something you regard as a ‘game’?”

“No and no. Just expressing an opinion and using an expression to describe it.”

The hefty wizard sagged a little into his chair, “What is it that you require of me, Jil? Try to be as concise as possible for I am a busy man with other appointments and other people to please.”

“I am acutely aware that your other appointments will wait and other people will be satisfactorily pleased by your absence. Should they be such people as to rely on your wizardry to help them out of some unpleasant circumstances, they will also be gullible enough to accept the notice pinned to your door.”

Rutherfordmore sat up sharply, “Notice? There is no noti... Oh. Of course. Obvi-

ously,” he slumped back down again.

Jihul Oberquaye surveyed Rutherford's room. He noticed the rumped cot over in the far corner behind the door where, he presumed, people were not intended to notice it. There were, he observed, no signs of cooking or eating; a small frown flickered across his scrawny, almost skull-like, features. Heidigens was, clearly, someone who appreciated food and required it in large portions.

“Perhaps you would care to sit down,” it came out as a flat statement rather than a question. Rutherford had given up; he was now resigned to whatever the State was going to throw at him. Certainly he considered that he was, to all intents and purposes, looking at the last period of his, up until now, interesting life.

“I shall stand. Thank you.”

Rutherford considered the answer. Crisp, polite, bland. No soul, no emotion; only rare displays of any expression. Perhaps the man was one of those new tank-bred mutants he had heard about. But, then, he had also heard that the mutants were all albinos for some reason.

“What do you eat and where do you eat it?” Oberquaye asked him suddenly.

Rutherford was shocked out of his considerations by the abrupt question, “Here. Usually. Food, invariably.”

“You do not cook? Clean up the dishes?”

“My daughter brings my food.”

The wizard sat up a bit. He had hit something here. The skinny man did not know as much as he thought he did.

“You have family?” stated flatly but with just the tiniest trace of a frown.

“Indeed,” Rutherford watched carefully for other signs, perhaps there was a weakness here to be exploited.

“There is nothing in the report about ‘family’,” Jihul relaxed perceptibly, “You are making it up. It is part of your stock in trade to deceive,” almost a brief nod.

“Wait ten minutes and you will see.”

“There is no record of any liaison between you and a female from any of the four planets,” Jihul persisted.

“Perhaps I have been elsewhere,” Rutherfordmore felt it was his turn to nod.

There is no ‘elsewhere’. There are only four planets within reach of each other.”

“To you. I am, you may now recall, a Wizard.”

Jihul could almost see the capitalisation. It went with a renewed self-belief and confidence that all will now be well. Rutherfordmore has seen, he thought, a flaw and will work at it. This should be snuffed out immediately.

“Well, Wizard. Whether you have a family or not will hardly impinge itself upon our situation. They are, should they exist, hardly dependent upon you and so their existence becomes not moot but irrelevant at worst and trivial at best.”

Rutherfordmore smiled a small smile, “She has certain charms that are beyond even my ability to conjure. But, of course, she does not possess the power that you, Agent of the Parliamentary Fiscal Committee Jihul Oberquaye, have, I am sure, in abundance,” he paused, the smile became marginally wider at the outer margins, “You were going to tell me what the task entails? You recall this task that requires my demise?”

Jihul was unmoved, “Special Agent. You are not required to die but it is distinctly possible that you will not survive.”

“There is a difference?”

“Indeed. The Committee, if I may make so bold as to abbreviate the full title for ease of communication between us?”

Rutherfordmore nodded, shrugging hefty shoulders. He wished to communicate that the reference to the Committee was of minor importance to him.

Jihul continued.

“The Committee has rented, at no small cost, a freighter that will transport you and such portable equipment as you may desire to take with you to your destination. I should recommend that your baggage should not exceed ten kilograms.”

“Enough, then, for a change of underwear.”

“Indeed; and possibly, a sandwich or two. In their generosity, however, I should point out that the Committee have seen fit to provide adequate provision for your viscera. Something that I, on a personal note, should have been loath to ac-

commodate.”

”To?” Rutherfordmore enquired, bushy eyebrows ascending.

”Two what?”

Rutherfordmore found it necessary to squeeze his eyes with the thumb and middle fingers of his left hand. He noticed that Jihul tensed slightly as his hand rose.

”Our destination?”

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