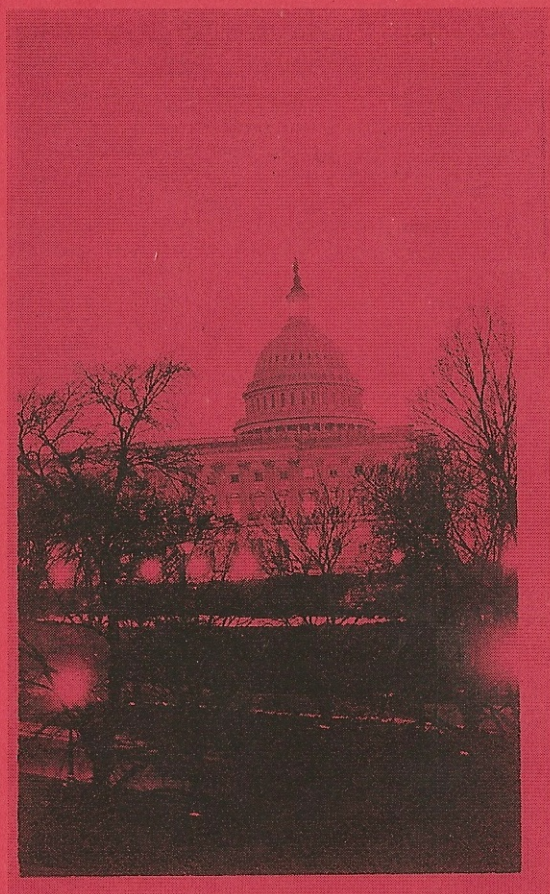


# BETA DECAY



NUMBER ONE

BETA DECAY  
#1

by ANDREW JACKSON KING



# Take It Easy

The man on the stoop slipped off his glove and knocked on the door of the two-story brick rowhouse.

“Somebody’s at the door, honey,” a woman’s voice floated from the second level of the house down to the first.

“All right, I’ll get it, Liz,” a man said as he got up. Taking off his glasses, he walked down the hallway of the house, stopping in front of a mirror to run his fingers through his brown hair. He tucked his shirt into his pants and opened the door.

“Hey, Alan!” he said as he opened the door and saw a man standing on the front steps. He was wearing a long black overcoat with a dark red scarf. “It’s been a while. How are you doing?”

“Good, good, Jeff. I was just in the neighborhood and was wondering if you wanted to grab something to eat. I probably won’t have too much time once work starts up.”

“Yeah, sure. Come in for a second, let me get my jacket on. Hey, Liz, Alan is here!”

The two men walked down the sidewalk amidst the gnarled, leaveless trees. The wind rattled metal trashcans in the alleys as they passed.

“Jane wants us all to get together soon,” Alan told Jeff. “Go out to dinner or a show.”

“That sounds great. Have you been out much lately? A lot of the downtown has been redone. It looks nice.”

“We took the kids down to the big toy store there. They loved it. It’s been tough for them growing up in the city these past few years. They always want to go south.”

“Oh, I know. It’s a never-ending battle to keep the family together up here.”

“I think they’ll appreciate the experience when they’re older. There’s a lot of history to be made. Hey, speaking of, I probably shouldn’t tell you this, Jeff, but we just found it tucked

into a Freedom of Information Act release that some reporter requested. Even I wasn't in on this info until now." Alan paused for dramatic effect. "Did you know they've still got one of the cherry blossom trees? They dug it up and saved it as some sort of symbolic national pride thing. It's kept out west now to bring back when everything gets fixed up."

"Wow, what other secrets do you all have tucked up your sleeves? Is the Capitol cornerstone in a White House closet?"

"Nah, nothing that momentous. There is a new space plan in the works, though. Have you heard about that?"

"Didn't they get some new head, a Turk, right?"

"Yeah, he got out of the country before it completely collapsed. There were some things they were doing over there that were covered in the wire that are just amazing. The president said he's ready to sink a lot into new research and launches. Should be very exciting."

The two men crossed the street to a small park on the corner of a block. Covered by a steel frame and massive glass windows, the bright green grass and slight humidity in the park was a respite from the dry, bleak landscape outside. Jeff sat on a wooden bench as Alan pulled out a camera and began taking photographs.

"What has the publisher got you doing? Are you working on a new book?" Alan asked Jeff, splitting his attention between his friend and the settings on his camera.

"Yeah, I'm researching one now on territories that fizzled out before becoming states, regions that tried to break off on their own, things like that. I'm thinking about skipping more well-known places like Texas or California and covering the Sabine in Louisiana or Franklin in the Carolinas. There's a piece of land in Delaware called The Wedge that was fought over due to problems with surveying, which left it outside of any state. Then you've got everything in Appalachia, the upper Midwest, the early Southwest, a bunch of others."

"That's interesting. People will snap that up with the Cascadian movement going on and repackage it as some neo-



Manifest Destiny lean.”

“Yeah, I’m hoping the publisher will be able to send me to some of these places. I haven’t been able to afford a plane trip in years. When was the last time you flew?”

Alan thought for a minute. “Oh, it was that time Senator Reynolds needed to meet with the Auxiliary government. I went along as part of a diplomatic envoy.”

“What was it like? I mean, the people. How is it out there?”

“Well you’ve seen the photos and reports from there. But, I guess...it’s just destitute. None of the reforms they wanted were ever put into place. Most everyone’s poor. Farmers or just scavengers. Lots of mining still. Utah is really the only place that is like it used to be.”

“What a shame.” Jeff quietly stared off into the distance. Alan had forgotten that Jeff’s family was from the Willamette; he kept an early surveyor’s map of it on his living room wall. “Hey, is that flower place still down here on D?” he asked Alan.

“I think so. There’s not too many areas left in the city where you could make enough money selling flowers.”

The men left the refuge, bracing themselves for the cold as they opened the park door. A few blocks away, they arrived at a corner townhouse with a carved flower hanging above the doorframe. Jeff rapped on the wooden door with a taut rhythm. A heavy bar could be heard moving behind the door. A woman, stooped over from age and wearing a heavy canvas apron, opened the door. Her eyes lit up as she recognized Jeff in the afternoon sun.

“Wait, is that a hot dog truck?”

“Yep. They just started issuing permits last month.”

“How have I not heard about this? Having a hot dog truck was always my dream. We gotta get some. Remember that one that used to hang out by the old Turing Machine club?”

The two men walked up to the gleaming, bright red truck. Despite the cold, the side was lowered as a counter. “Two dogs, mustard and onions, some fries, and two Cokes,” Alan ordered.

“All right, that’ll be fourteen dollars,” the truck owner said. Alan handed him the money, and put the leftover dollar in the tip cup after the cashier handed him his change.

“How is it working out here?” Jeff asked.

“It was a little slow at first. A lot of people are just afraid to leave the buildings unless there’s a crowd out. The news pieces have helped drum up interest. There’s definitely a reiver problem, though. They’ll take anything that’s left out around the truck if I’m not watching. Crates, bottles, trash, whatever. They usually don’t come out until dusk and they’re never violent, but it’s not good for business.”

A woman stepped to the counter from the inside of the truck. Her black hair was pulled tight into a ponytail and her blue eyes shone brightly through her thick glasses. “Here you go,” she said through a smile, handing Alan the food.

Jeff and Alan were sitting on a bench, looking out across the river. Slabs of blue ice floated across the surface before joining up with the larger body of water. Wisps of vapor rose from the coffee cups the men held between their hands as makeshift warmers. Jeff looked at Alan for a minute before speaking. “You’re sick, aren’t you?”

“How’d you guess?”

“You always had much more color when we were younger.”

“It’s throat cancer.”

Jeff looked at Alan. “Damn. That’s terrible. How long have you known?”

“About two months now. I started having problems swallowing and put it off until Jane finally twisted my arm to go. They operated on what they could – that’s why I took off work the other month – but it’s spread pretty far.”

“Do you think it’s from The Pulse?”

“I don’t know. I don’t try and think about what could have happened or what I could have done differently.”

“You know, they have a few class action suits going around. You could see if you can get anything from that. I heard

it's not that hard to have an illness be associated with it."

"Yeah, but if I die before everything gets ironed out, then that leaves Jane with another problem on her hands. Who knows, maybe I would have got it, anyway."

"Did they do a search for a match?"

"They ran a DNA swath on the three closest worlds, but didn't find anything. Nothing even close, not my parents, my sister, anything. There's a window opening up in a couple weeks to a new one, but we just don't have the money."

"Elizabeth and I can give you wha—"

"No, no. I'm fine. It's fine. I'm going to try and fight it first. I honestly don't know how I feel about using other worlds anymore. It's not right."

"Elizabeth's aunt got her liver that way. Elizabeth was furious. She still hasn't talked to her since the operation."

"Even if they had found a match, I don't know if I would have taken it."

"Yeah, I understand. We always thought this would be the best time for those sorts of things, but it's been hard these past few years." Alan sipped his coffee. An orange cat, tail ragged from a lifetime of fighting, crawled out of a storm drain and walked to the water's edge, looking to the other shore with a simple gaze that belied the animal's hard-won perception.

The sound of metal and glass tearing apart ripped across the street, bouncing between the building fronts and shooting down the alleys. Jeff and Alan could hear the discord and turned around the corner to see what was going on. In front of them, a car had wrapped around a power pole, creating a mess of twisted steel, charred fabric, and shattered glass. The orange flames licked upwards, but stayed low to the body of the car. The driver had managed to get herself out of the wreck before the two men arrived. She lay there, unmoving.

Alan ran up to the woman and picked up her head. Her red hair was streaked with even darker rivulets of blood. Alan looked her over, her white shirt beginning to absorb the blood from her abdomen. Her jeans were fairly undamaged, but covered



a leg bent too far to one side.

“You need to stay still,” Alan told her. Jeff had already pulled out his phone.

The woman’s eyes stared into Alan. She attempted to talk, but spit out blood first. “You don’t have an asset,” she said in amazement. Alan ran his fingers over his neck. The cell brushing had made the deep surgical scars unnoticeable. He had received an asset card as a stopgap until his operations were over. “What chance I found one,” the woman managed to get out.

She reached into her pocket, pulling out a small wooden box. “Take this, it needs to get to a small bakery on Constitution, near 6th.” Alan impulsively took the box, before thinking about her words. “Tell them you’d like a blackbird pie.”

“What is this for?” Alan asked. He could see the blood pooling up on the asphalt.

“You’re either going to do it or you’re not.” The woman looked up at Alan, blood beginning to pour from her nose. They could hear the sirens getting closer. The woman pulled Alan towards herself. “I’m Auxiliary. Shhhh...” She trailed off, smiling to herself, as the police cars and an ambulance stopped a few feet away. One of the paramedics rushed out and pushed Alan to the side.

“This is crazy, Alan. You told those cops that she didn’t say anything.”

“I lied.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“I probably don’t have much time left. And didn’t you ever think that maybe the Auxiliary was right, just a little?”

“This is crazy.”

“Maybe.”

Alan opened the door of the building, its window lettered with the name Sixpence Bakery, and was hit with a gust of warm air and the smell of fresh sourdough. A woman behind the counter welcomed him. “Pretty cold out, right? What can I do for you?”

“Um,” Alan paused, “is there a manager here?”

“Nope, just me,” the woman said with a smile. Alan looked at Jeff, who shrugged his shoulders.

“This is a nice building. Are there any...auxiliary structures on it?” Alan asked, fairly amused by his cleverness.

“Nope, we just own this main building. Hey, I don’t mean to be rude, but we’re closing soon. Is there anything you’d like? We have food fit to feed a king.”

Alan’s mind turned over. *Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye. Four and twenty blackbirds, baked in a pie. When the pie was opened, the birds began to sing. Wasn't that a dainty dish, to set before the king?*

“Do you have blackbird pie?” he nearly shouted out.

“Blackbird pie?” The woman looked at Alan.

Jeff waited at a table, pulling apart a fresh slice of sourdough. The woman from the front had shut and bolted the door behind her as she led Alan down a corridor behind the ovens.

“She was dead, I’m pretty sure. I mean, she wasn’t exactly dead, but I don’t think she survived,” Alan told her.

“And this was all she gave you?”

“Yes. And the...codeword, or whatever. What is this thing? What’s it for?”

“Exhilarating, isn’t it? Seeing the Auxiliary in action?”

“I suppose. I shouldn’t be here.”

“Why not?” The woman turned from Alan and knocked on a steel door. It opened a crack and a man’s hand stuck out. Alan could see quavering blue light seeping from its edges. The woman placed the wooden box into the outstretched hand. They continued walking as the door shut. “You were saying?”

“I work for the government.”

“What a shame. A bright, capable individual such as yourself.”

“I could send them here. I could tell any number of people.”

“But you won’t.” The woman pushed open a door. They were back in the bakery. Alan looked at Jeff, who stopped moving mid-chew, a puzzled look on his face. “Cancer, right?”

“What?”

“You have cancer, right? The doors are laced with sensors.”

“Well, yes.”

The woman went to the counter and pulled out a large wooden drawer below the cash register. “Take these and you’ll be fine.” The woman handed him a lucite box with small, metal hinges filled with chalky, pastel blue tablets. They’re from a sideworld. Perfectly normal there. The sensors, too. A shame for us here, right?”

Alan stood in silence. The woman continued. “About your friend, though, hmm.” She opened another drawer. She lowered her voice to a whisper. Pulling out a similar box but with yellow tablets, she leaned in close to Alan. “He’s balding. Give these to him. That should stop him from saying anything.” The woman stood up, clapping her hands. “Come back soon, friends!”

The street leading up to Jeff’s townhouse was lined with wrought iron-enclosed yards. The brick sidewalk was scrubbed clean and the overhead lightwires had begun to slowly build in luminosity as twilight approached the city.

“So you really think you’re going to take them?” Jeff asked.

“What have I got to lose? Might as well.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Jeff paused. “What a day, Alan.” The two men laughed. “I’m not sure what else to say, but it was wild and it was great to see you again.”

“It definitely was a lot to process. We’ll have to talk soon.”

“You get yourself fixed up, Alan, however you choose to do it. I know the summer session is coming up, but try not to work too hard.”

“Hah, I’ll try not to. Take care, Jeff.”

“You too.”

Alan turned from the door and tucked his face into the collar of his coat. Pulling out his gloves, he slipped them on and stared off at the glowing white dome in the distance. It was starting to get cold.

# The Future is Not Heavy

“We could really be making history here, Paul.”

“Yes, but it could also be nothing.”

“I think if we pull this off, we’re gonna be rich. I’m gonna buy a new car, one of those big Fords. Hey, you think Ford might want to even put one of these in their cars? No more traffic!”

“I think that’s further down on the real world applications of what we’re doing here.”

“My parents are going to be so proud. I’ll have them set up in Florida. Get my sister a house, too.”

“Well, let’s see how this test goes first, Markus. There are a lot of things that could go wrong.”

“We did the math, we did the smaller experiments. We’re going to be on the TV, I bet.”

Markus bent over and gently placed the cardboard box he was carrying on the ground. The two men were standing in the alley amongst garbage cans, an old couch, scattered pieces of wood, and a stack of metal milk crates. Markus took his bag off his shoulder and opened it up. Pulling out a camera and a tripod, he screwed the camera to the base and extended its legs. He attached a remote shutter trigger to a small box and turned a black dial on it. “This should capture a picture every three seconds, so we’ll get the first two minutes on this roll.”

Paul knelt before the cardboard box. Taking out his pocket knife, he sliced open the tape securing the top flaps of it. Slowly, he pulled a metal and wood object out of the box and placed it on the ground. The center of the device was a block of aluminum, studded with holes and two red lights. Attached to the sides were larger steel plates with polished wood centers. Metallic wire connected rivets on the panels to the main body.

Paul used a piece of chalk to draw a three foot circle on the street, inscribing it with two lines to form a point in the center.

He inspected the device closely, carefully moving pieces back and forth, checking the strength or give of each attachment. He flipped the cardboard box over and placed the object on top of it. Studying it, he stood up. “Do you think the Brown measurements we did were right? I mean, the theory was right, but what about the variables?”

“Paul, we went over this a hundred times. I know these formulae backwards and forwards. If it doesn’t work, then the whole damn theory is wrong, because our math is right.”

Paul nodded his head, easing into an understanding of the situation. “Yes, it does look good, Markus.” Paul let a smile slip onto his stark facade. “It certainly does look good,” he said again, before trailing off. Bending over, he took off his sweater and repackaged the device, taking care to fold its wings over top of itself.

Markus was pacing along the alleyway, lost in his own world. “I can see it now: Edison, Tesla, Oppenheimer...Wozniak & Zajec! Our names in lights.”

“How long did you charge the Cavor plates for?”

“Two hours! Everything is good to go.”

“Did you file the edges for coronal discharge?”

“Yep. Measured it to the thousandth. It’s perfect, Paul.”

“Okay, okay.” Paul tucked the flaps of the box lid into each other and stood up. He walked around to the front of the brick building and walked into the vestibule. Looking over the tenant list on the wall, he ran his finger down the names before coming to “BENISH.” He pressed the button to buzz the tenant.

“Hello?” came the voice over the intercom.

“Ralph, it’s me Paul. I gotta get up on the roof. Buzz me up.”

“What’s in it for me?”

“Ralph, I’ll get you some beer later tonight.”

“It’s Sunday.”

“I’ll get you a pizza, then! Come on, Ralph.”

“All right, all right.” A hum shot through the building and Paul heard the front door lock pop open. “Mushroom and sausage,” buzzed the voice from the intercom.

Even though the building was only five flights, its location on a hill allowed Paul to see for blocks across the city. He could see the Roman Catholic church over on Louise and the Eastern Orthodox one at the corner of Decatur and Main. Smoke from the factories to the southeast carried over the river. To the north, town hall rose like a Greek temple. Maybe this was history, Paul allowed himself to think.

“You two better not be breaking anything in this alley again!” a voice yelled from the street. Markus looked over and saw an elderly woman in a long blue dress approaching from the street. The woman was nearly consumed by her giant hat with a fake red flower pinned on to the top.

“Mrs. Koharsky, you have nothing to worry about,” Markus called back. “We’ll clean everything up, and with any luck, we won’t break anything at all this time.”

“Hmmpphh,” Mrs. Koharsky grunted back to the boys, mumbling about electricity and the two boys as she walked off.

“All right, we’re good,” Markus called up to Paul, giving him a thumbs up.

Paul looked down at the machine. One of the bolts was troubling him. He pulled out a micrometer, measuring the gap between the nut and the frame. It was a hair off. Tightening it with a wrench, Paul was glad he caught the discrepancy between their plans and the prototype.

“Okay, I’m ready,” Paul called down, placing the device on the ledge of the building. Markus readied the camera, aiming it down at the chalk circle. Paul edged closer to the ledge and stuck the device over the lip, holding it there for a few seconds. He closed his eyes, releasing it. Markus stared up as Paul’s hands moved away from the metal and wood contraption, holding his breath for what seemed like an eternity.

As it fell, three regular clicks were emitted from somewhere deep inside the body of the device. Knowing the rhythm of the machine’s timing by heart, Paul yelled “now!” down to Markus. A fourth click sounded and Markus pressed the button on the shutter trigger attached to the camera. The descending object began to emit a low hum as the trigger box



connected to the camera initiated the shutter to begin snapping photographs.

Paul kept his eye on the device as it plummeted towards the ground, the chalk circle a bull's-eye for their prototype to be smashed to pieces upon. Markus' eyes followed the object the forty feet it had to fall, its metal and wood panels spreading as its imminent crash grew nearer. A foot and a half above the ground, slightly off-level, but still right-side up, it stopped.

The camera continued to click as Paul and Markus silently looked on. The device leveled itself and hung in midair, two feet off the ground, with a barely perceptible bobbing up and down. The almost infinitesimal motions of the device and the low drone emitted by it mesmerized the two men as the sun glinted off the side panels. The camera had stopped snapping photos when the device began to slip off its horizontal axis. The hum sputtered out as the device crashed the last few inches to the ground. Paul and Markus continued staring at the chalk circle and the slightly damaged prototype.

"Woohoo!" Markus yelled up to Paul.

"Well, it worked, but it didn't work for long."

"But it worked! It floated there for two minutes!"

"Yes, that it did. We'll have to figure out what went wrong. Let me come down."

Markus was packing the device into the cardboard box by the time Paul came around the corner of the building. "Can you believe it? We did it, we did it. Two city kids changing the world!"

"We need to fine-tune it, but I'm surprised it did so well the first time."

Markus barely heard Paul as he took apart the camera and tripod, loading it into his bag. "Millionaires! Billionaires! Are those a thing, billionaires? Who cares! Time Magazine, Walter Cronkite, the Tonight Show. I bet Hollywood is great this time of year." Markus' eyes were alight with the possibilities of the device.

"Let's get this back to the basement and work on it."

"Come on, let's go get the photos developed!"

“We’ll do that tomorrow. Besides we have to go get that pizza.”

Paul picked up the cardboard box and Markus slung his bag over his shoulder. The two men walked out of the alley, their steps a little lighter than an hour before.

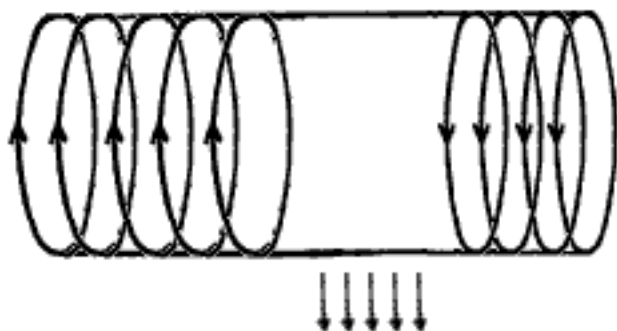


FIG. 115. Theory of modern forces

# Ne Plus Ultra

I, William Prescott, am writing this account of the 1847 Whaling Expedition of the ships *Bennett* and *Charity* as a true and accurate portrayal and account of the events that transpired therein and which, I believe, created an unnatural exchange between God's earth and some other place. While the voyage happened some years ago, the events are as fresh and clear in my mind as the air which we found over the Antarctic regions. It is a fact that Captain John Longcamp's account, published in pamphlet form under the title Reports and Discussions of New England Whaling in the Antarctic, is the most widely disseminated tract concerning the return of the *Bennett* to her home and the loss of the *Charity* in the South Atlantic. However, it is precisely the strange and interesting events in the life of Captain Longcamp in the years following the voyage, which have catapulted him to worldwide fame, that have prompted me to put forth into the public realm my account of the true experiences of all hands aboard those two damned ships.

As an American, I feel some pressure within the national sphere to support Captain Longcamp in his recent scientific achievements that he has, in the public's view, graced the world with by freeing telegraphic communications from the umbrage of wires which formerly hindered the industry. Many lives and much damage have been saved as a result of these wireless devices. However, as a Christian man, I cannot turn away from what I believe to have been the unsettling acquisition of his oscillators, the so-called "magic boxes." It is this belief that has forced me to tell my side of the story, long repressed in the public record, and let the great people of this nation decide how John Longcamp should be judged.

The beginnings and middle portions of the cruise concerning whaling are well-documented, so I will not waste time retreading common ground. While Longcamp certainly

embellished his proclivity for entertaining the crew while downplaying the camaraderie of the mates and crewmembers exclusive of him, in the main events of the pamphlet's account I will find no major fault. The portions that I have come to write this letter about concern the last leg of the journey, including the time spent near the coast of Antarctica and the grim discovery of the *Charity*, torn asunder on the rocks of a small volcanic island's icy shores.

While comprising only a day or so, the events henceforth that I shall describe are conspicuously absent from both Longcamp's description of events and any publication or discussion by the other whalers on the crew. It is with this heavy weight on my shoulders, and the terrible fear that has consumed me having contemplated said events for several some odd years, that has prompted me to put forth into the public realm the true and accurate events of the voyage of the whalers *Bennett* and *Charity* in 1847.

As I have stated, the months leading up to the Antarctic push are well-documented, and despite a few fluffings of the Captain's feathers, I feel no need to argue the points that have been covered in the newspapers or other sources. After working the newly discovered South Atlantic whaling grounds, southeast of the Orkneys and southwest of both the Georgias and Sandwichs, both ships were fully loaded with the profitable oil our towns and livelihood rely upon. With provisions running low, we began to sail northwest and head home, believing the worst portions of the trip, including the unbearable cold and ice, to be nearly over with.

The night we began our sail back to America, a storm pulled up from the south and all hands readied themselves. The storm beat with such intensity that the *Charity* was lost to the southeast of us for the rest of the storm. As the storm broke, we again began sailing north for home, with an arranged meeting point at the aptly named Inaccessible Islands, the westernmost portion of the South Orkneys.

By noon the next day, we were some hundred miles from the Orkneys when Beauregard, the watch on duty, climbed down

from his perch. He yelled that the *Charity* was spotted in the north. This was strange due to the loss of the ship to our southeast, but many believed that the storm had been so violent that it could have been able to propel the other ship ahead of us. However, we were unable to catch our brothers and followed behind until the ship pulled sail and began to slow down. By sundown, we started to gain ground on her and eventually both ships pulled beside each other. A great rousing was raised by both ships' crews. All hands were ecstatic to see the others alive and relieved to find both ships in fine condition.

At this juncture, and probably to raise the morale of a crew freezing on the edge of the world, Captain Longcamp allowed us to have a small celebration. Spirits were high as we cracked open two casks of Madeira picked up earlier in the voyage. Despite not being aged long since we picked it up on the first leg of our voyage, the wine was still pleasantly sweet and numbed us against the cold of the higher latitudes. A Greek aboard the *Charity* produced a mandolin and accompanied his haunting voice with it as he sang songs of faraway lands and lost loves. This jubilation of the doomed voyage would not hold for long.

Breaking away from the larger party, I found my good friend on the ship, Alistair Wilson, watching from the edge of the deck. He desperately missed his new wife back home and wished to begin sailing as soon as possible. We began to walk towards one of the mates' rooms to discuss with him how long we would be anchoring when we passed by one of the other cabins and caught a glimpse of the *Charity's* carpenter, Evan Stenwick. To our surprise, Captain Longcamp and the *Charity's* first mate Hutchinson were there as well. Alarmed that there may possibly be some damage to the ships that would require the captain and his first mate to interact with the carpenter at this point in the night, we stood outside his door and attempted to overhear the conversation.

It was at this point that Stenwick pulled out what I would now describe as a crude form of what the world would later know as the frequency oscillator. Somewhat bearing resemblance to a box chronometer and later iterations of the perfected machine, the

device was roughly six inches square on each side with a glass dial on the front. I could not make out precisely what notations were inscribed therein, but Stenwick could move an arm inside the face with a smaller dial located to the left of the crystal. Two metal wires extended out the back and were attached to a glass jar with a stopper inside. Looking back, I wish I had been able to remember more, but the carrying-ons around the deck combined with the slight fear and awe at Longcamp's presence there did not permit intense study.

Peering through edge of the small porthole window in the door, we could see all three men huddled around the box. Stenwick was casual in his use of the device, as Hutchinson made grand movements seemingly to explain the exotic contraption to Longcamp, who was seated on the edge of a crewmember's bed. I overheard Hutchinson state to the captain that he would be able to check the weather from anywhere: Valparaíso, Rio de Janeiro, or even Cape Town.

Sitting down, Hutchinson turned the knob on the box clockwise from the 7 o'clock position to 2 o'clock. A faint glow began to emit from the crystal on the device and a soft crackle emanated from it, loud enough for us to hear through the door. Hutchinson made some hand movements as Longcamp got up to inspect the device. As we tried to watch on, a sailor began to walk down the hall. We left the doorway as to not draw attention to the captain as a more steady stream of sailors began to walk down the hallway. Our chances of seeing any more of the magic box were dashed.

Wilson was the first to speak about what we had seen. He had been an amateur scientist in his early years and believed that the device was somehow tapping into an electrical source, but aside from that, nothing else was recognizable about its use or design. We walked up to the second level and over to the edge of the ship to clear our heads and get some air. From the upper deck of the *Bennett*, we could see the doorway from the hallway to the cabins. Hutchinson exited and made his way to the edge of the ship aside the *Charity*. Calling to his mate, the Massachusetts native Summerfield, the two men spoke for a minute before



Hutchinson returned to the cabin.

Several minutes later, Longcamp emerged from the cabin and called all hands on deck. He ordered us to transfer a quarter of our whale oil to Hutchinson's ship. He said that the *Charity* had hit an iceberg and damaged a hold of their oil. Reluctant to lose what we had worked so hard to gain over several months, we obliged due to the harsh rule of Longcamp aboard the ship. He stated that we would be able to hit a few more pods several degrees north on the return trip, despite us having seen none on the way south. The rest of the crew, much like Wilson and I, suppressed grumbles for fear of flogging, or worse, desertion in the deathly Weddell Sea.

As we, the crew, began to work on the oil transfer, I had little time to observe any of the interactions between Longcamp and the men of the *Charity*. While the captain stayed aboard the *Bennett*, I was able to examine our sister ship in the small time I had between trips lugging the oil to her. It was on these trips that I began to notice a definite difference between the *Charity* we had set sail with and the *Charity* that had produced Hutchinson and the magic box. Running all throughout the entire ship were an abundance of wires. True, they were hidden and most of my shipmates from the *Bennett* surely did not even see them while on board the craft. But in the corners, along the beams in the ceiling, through holes in the floors and walls were most certainly wires, bundles of them, leading to and fro throughout the ship. Never before had I seen anything like it on a whaling ship. Certainly, in 1847, I had seen very few wires in my entire life. A feeling of dread began to overtake me as I wondered who the crew we had just celebrated with truly were and what had happened to the real *Charity* during the storm. But what could I do? Slipping some wires into my pockets would have proven nothing.

I met up with Wilson during the final trips to and from the ship and he corroborated my feelings that something was amiss on the *Charity*. I told him about the wires and he agreed that the ship was beyond doubt not the one we had left with months ago. Wilson, the hard worker that he was, had taken a minute on the deck of the ship and had snuck behind some rigging to smoke his

pipe. Directly beneath the aft cabins, Wilson stated that he heard an unknown member of the crew conversing with another voice. However, this voice carried itself with a flat disposition to his ears, with a crackling sound between the sentences of each speaker, like far-off lightning. I surmise now that the shipmate was using one of the magic boxes to talk to someone...somewhere. As we boarded the *Beckett*, Wilson and I made a pact that we would expose that night's events to the world at large no matter what it would take.

After the oil transfer was complete, Longcamp again ordered another cask of Madeira to be opened. To all outward appearances, the captain was celebrating more in these few hours than he had even cautioned to smile during the entire cruise. The men, most seemingly none the wiser to the powerful forces that had begun to play with the voyage, caroused until a gale was spotted approaching from the west. At this, it was decided by the captains that the crews should prepare to weather the storm. Sailors from each ship began to make their way back to their homes. I could see Longcamp shaking hands with Hutchinson as each made his way back to his cabin. We crews busied ourselves as another storm, this stronger even than the one we had just dealt with, tore into the ships. As the wind and snow blew and lightning crackled, we again lost sight of the *Charity*.

The storm continued for some time before Longcamp ordered the staysails to be pulled in. Wilson was unfortunately working the deck at this time and as the wind caught the sails' ropes, he became twisted in them and was hanging by his legs some thirty feet in the air with us unable to get to him. The ropes could not be cut or we would be in serious trouble should we need to run them up again. As Wilson slammed against the oaken spire, Cuñha, a Portuguese member of the crew, climbed up the mast to free him. Though small in stature, Cuñha was enormous in heart and braved the elements to free my friend.

I rushed Wilson to the doctor, but could see that he was severely hurt during the episode. As we laid him on the doctor's cot, he grabbed my shoulder and pulled me close to him, whispering in my ear, "William, where are we? Are we here or

there?" I looked on puzzled, not sure what he meant. His eyes were full of fire, but as I glanced up, I could see the doctor shaking his head at me. Wilson's grip slowly weakened and his eyes closed. My friend and confidant, the only one on the ship I could trust to corroborate the awful story, was dead.

The storm continued on for some hours until relieving in the early dawn. Upon exiting my cabin, one of the boatsteerers informed me that the second rudder had broken during the storm. We sailed and limped along solo for two nights until Longcamp consulted his charts and decided to dock at an abandoned anchorage on Bird Island, the westernmost point of land in South Georgia. As we approached the island from the south southwest, we saw what we believed to be small icebergs, what we call growlers, blackened from earth and exposure.

As we got closer, we made the grim discovery. This debris field was not made up of icebergs, but of flotsam from the *Charity*, pieces of her live oak hull ever identifiable. The storm had destroyed the ship beyond recognition and many of the hands stood aghast, looking down at the wreckage. As we pulled into the anchorage, we could see more fragments of the ship and cargo on the beach, if such a word could be used to describe the barren stretch we disembarked upon as a beach.

Some of the men, including myself, used one of the smaller boats to go ashore and catch some of the plentiful wandering albatrosses for our ship's cook. At the waterline there were a few pieces of the ship, but we had yet to find any bodies until we came over a small hill about thirty feet from the water. As we crossed the mound, we spotted a small lean-to built from two of the ship's doors. Inside was the frozen body of the *Charity's* steward, a man named North. He had evidently been strong enough after the storm to pull the boards that far inland. We could even see the ashes from his attempt at starting a fire. The beach was so barren that the fire could not have lasted long.

We began to pull apart the lean-to to get North's frozen body out in order to bury it when I made a startling discovery. In North's left hand was a Bowie knife, which he had used to carve into the walls of his makeshift hut. One the north-facing panel, he

had used the knife to carve:

TERRIBLE THING.

NO HOPE.

02/17/1847.

FW NORTH - ONLY

LOVE DSN

We tried to make sense of what North had been able to write in his last moments. We assumed the first two lines referenced the great storms we had been through. The use of 'only' had indicated that he was the only survivor to his knowledge. Some of the crewman knew North and said that the last line was for his wife, Dauphine. What we could not figure out was the date. The seventeenth had been two nights ago, only one day after the *Charity* appeared out of the storm and we crewmembers celebrated together.

There was no possible way that the ship could have covered that distance after we broke off in the storm, even despite our broken rudder. One of the men in the party suggested that North was just disoriented and confused the dates, with his ship crashing perhaps a day or so before us. The frozen state of North's body prevented us from gauging how long he had been there. Apparently, this was enough to sate the curiosity of the men and we took North's body to the shore to be buried.

We left the doors and carving atop the dune, but I remembered the engraving clearly and wrote it in my journal upon reboarding the ship. Longcamp had taken to the deck and informed all hands that the the *Charity* must have been weakened during the last storm, broken apart on some volcanic outcropping, and that all aboard were lost to the sea, except for North. I kept my mouth shut concerning the dates, which, added together with the events during the meeting of the ships, put my mind under a great strain that contributed to several sleepless nights on the return journey.

The rest of the cruise was fairly uneventful, except for the increased seclusion of Captain Longcamp in his cabin. He exited very rarely those final weeks and passed much of the day-to-day commanding to his mates. Most of the crew was relieved at not

having to deal any longer with his variable moods and his penchant for stern punishment. Returning to Adamstown several weeks later, we unloaded the ships. I returned to my family and rejoiced at being with them after having been at sea for so long. But there were a great many questions weighing on my mind for months afterward.

Captain John Longcamp's life after the voyage is a matter of public record. Some years after returning from the rough cruise, he joined with the esteemed German telegraph inventor Werner von Siemens and displayed an early version of the Longcamp oscillator at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. The ability of the device to send telegraphic messages without wires was quickly seen for its importance on the world stage. The two men awed crowds by sending short voice messages from different ends of the park.

Siemens later deployed the oscillator to great acclaim for the German side during the First Schleswig War, which cemented its strategic usage in global affairs. By the 1853 Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations World's Fair held in New York City, the pair had split, but Longcamp used his magic boxes to send signals between the major cities of the eastern seaboard to popular fanfare. On the final day, Longcamp was able to send a signal between New York and Paris. The Longcamp oscillator is now becoming a fashionable device in the major cities of the world, but the development of it has been a mystery to several in the academic world.

Before the voyage, Captain Longcamp had shewn no interest whatsoever in the scientific arts, least of all telegraphy or electricity. The negative reaction to his appointment as commander of the cruise is well documented; many believed he could barely use a sextant correctly. However, upon returning to the nation's shore, he was quick to move on development of the magic boxes with little question raised by those outside of certain discerning circles.

It is my belief, knowing the voyage and the events therein and having pondered them for several years now, and knowing the sheer absurdity and possible heresy of which I now write, that the

*Charity* we met that night in the South Atlantic was not the same ship we left home with at the beginning of our voyage. It seems that this ship was from a providence nearly identical to our own, however, possessing a more advanced technological base. It was at this meeting that Longcamp was able to procure his first box, which all others were later designed from, thereby eschewing the difficult invention and experimentation stages other inventors grapple with.

The two worlds must have been so nearly similar that both ships in each world were afloat in the same area, thereby rendering the crews unaware that much was different. At some point, however, Longcamp must have realized the differences, such as the wires crisscrossing the body of the *Charity*, and begun to bargain for the oscillator. As time passed, I've come to realize that the oil must have been important to this other world due to the increasing energy demands commensurate with technology usage, as we've seen with the amount of coal necessary to run the nation's railroad services. The box was worth little to them compared to some one thousand barrels of oil from our world.

In my eyes, all the pieces of my narrative fit. The supposed reappearance of the *Charity*, the differences in the ships, Hutchinson and Stenwick demonstrating the device, the wreckage of the original *Charity*, and North's carving are all incontrovertible proof that the original *Charity* was destroyed not long after our celebration with its impostor. It was this celebration that allowed Longcamp to obtain the wireless telegraph machine, which he had no basis for before the voyage. The crews' inability to comprehend the events can be attributed to the general mood of a whaling crew in the South Atlantic for several weeks combined with the disparate nature of the clues. The only other man to understand all that was going on – Alistair Wilson – was buried at sea towards the end of the return voyage. It was my unique position in the voyage's events that allowed me a certain scope in piecing together the true events I have laid out.

Exactly how we interacted with the ship, however, was still a mystery to me for some years. Similarly, the weight of Wilson's final words were heavy upon me since the moment his



eyes closed. I had often sat and pondered what he meant, trying to fish out whether he knew something I did not or if these were the deathly delusions of a man approaching Heaven's gate. During the summer of 1849, while vacationing in the Appalachians, my wife and I were drifting lazily on a small lake when my mind made a mental leap and I was able to unravel the conundrum.

As we sat on the lake, I noticed that the water was far more turbulent than a usual inland body of water. I noticed that there were not one, but two rivulets that entered from the east and southwest of the pond, thereby contributing to the increased activity in the water. I realized that this must be how the exchange between worlds occurred; that spot in the South Atlantic, whether amplified by the storm or not, I do not know, must have acted as a sort of nexus point, allowing for a mixing, so to speak, of our two worlds.

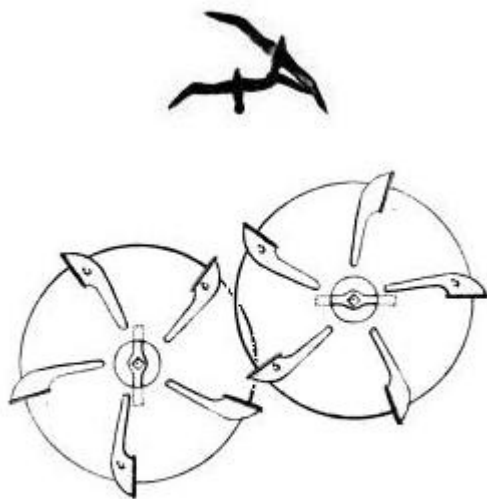
This random connection created a situation that let the *Charity* double meet with our ship in our world. This is why when Stenwick first used the magic box, there was only static. We had built no stations for him to receive from. They had simply drifted away from our doubles on the alternate *Bennett* and saw our ship, most of the crew not knowing the difference. I suspect that something more sinister may have appeared from their world, the "THING" alluded to by North's carving, but on this, I can venture no further information.

But as I pondered it over I came to the terrible realization of what had happened later on during that fateful night and it is this knowledge that has driven me, in some measure, to divulge what happened to our ship. It is true to me now that the *Charity* met us on our side of the nexus as there were no signals for the wireless operator to receive. But in the back of my head, I could not get over the fact that Wilson told me he had heard an unknown crewmember of the *Charity* having a conversation with another voice interspersed with electrical crackles. While he could not have known then, that is the precise way the Longcamp oscillators now sound when sending messages between stations.

While the *Charity* certainly came into our world and couldn't pick up signals earlier, it is clear to me that we eventually

passed into their world where communication was possible with established land-based stations.

This is what Wilson was trying to tell me in his last words. Faced with the reality of death's siren call and perhaps keen to some intuition one gains near the end, my good friend realized the implications of his eavesdropping. While I can say for certain that he was buried at sea in our world, in terms of his soul, it very well could have been put to rest and now trapped for all eternity in that other world.



TWO CROSSINGS

## Mr. Babbage, Also Ran

“Hey, Mr. Charles, did you check those tickets?”

“Ah, no, Tommy. Thanks.” Charles bent down over the railing to pick up the discarded stubs of paper off the raw dirt. He steadied himself with his free hand as he leaned his entire body over the side. His hat fell in a puff of dust, allowing him to use it as a basket for the tail ends of the race tickets.

Pulling himself back over the railing, Charles checked the stubs. Nothing, he thought to himself, all losers. He walked over to a large red metal trashcan and threw the paper inside. Wiping the dirt from his forehead, Charles placed his grey hat atop his head. He checked his pockets. Nothing. He checked his watch. It was 4:32. He had to be home by six, and he had to have money.

Charles walked past the line of haggard old men and young dabblers to the barred window. “Back again, Mr. Babbage?” the woman behind the counter asked. Her black hair was piled on top of her head along with her reading glasses.

“Uh, yeah. Who’s good for the 5 o’clock?”

“Pascal’s Wager is the sure thing. Sunday Driver and Grosvenor are next up.”

“Let me get Pascal’s Wager then.”

“Notes or years?”

“Check my note balance, could you?” Charles fidgeted at the window.

“Sorry, Mr. Babbage, you’re in the red. If you want to go in on the 5 o’clock, it’s going to have to be in years.”

“Okay, thanks. Let me think about it for a minute.”

Charles turned away from the window. He picked up a newspaper off the bench. Unfolding it from the horse races, he looked at the front page. Unemployment rises another two percent, he read to himself. “Great,” he said, looking around for a look of reassurance from the other men. The ones that noticed

just shrugged their shoulders.

Reaching into his pocket, Charles pulled out some change. He walked over to the bank of telephones along the far wall from the counter. Putting in some coins, he dialed a number. He hadn't lived there long, it was difficult to keep all the numbers straight.

"Hello," came the voice from the other end.

"Hey, honey."

"Hi, Charlie. Where are you? You said you'd be home at 3."

"Had to stay a little late at work, honey."

"Don't lie to me. You're at the track. You're always at the track."

"It's just a couple races, honey. We've gotta cover rent this month. You know how it is."

"It seems like we're always losing more at the track than you take in."

"There's a big score coming, babe. I know it."

The voice on the other end of the phone began to sob. "They took the car, Charles. And the fridge."

"I'm sorry, Nancy. I don't know what to do. I can't get any hours, there's no work anywhere."

"I'm going to stay with my mom for a while, Charlie. There's a plate of food in the oven for when you come back. I'm sorry."

Charles held the phone for some time after the click on the other end. He walked over to the counter. "Let me get all my years on Pascal's Wager, then, Susie."

"Are you sure? Once we scan you, there's no going back."

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Okay, Mr. Babbage. You'll need to sign this waiver." She slid a carbon-copy form through the slot. Charles took a pen out of his jacket pocket, signing his name in a flourish of blue ink. The woman opened a ledger, writing down the information. Charles placed his arm through the slot in the window, which she grabbed and passed a blue light over.

"Good luck, Mr. Babbage."

Charles rubbed his wrist where the light had hit. He

always hated that feeling. Suddenly, he was gripped by the reality of his situation. This horse has to win; I'm too young, he thought.

He looked across the track. Exiting through the front of the lobby, Charles cut across the parking lot. All the cars he passed were junk, the last possessions of gamblers on the edge. A new Cadillac was nearly glowing on the far end of the asphalt. Mr. Toussaint's, he thought.

Charles walked down the dusty dirt path to the stalls. He nervously looked around, waiting for the janitor to head back to the track. There was no use trying to get past the lock. With the coast clear, Charles climbed up the iron gate and flung himself over. He made his way to the stalls. The horses were facing away from him, onto the track. He looked at his watch. It was 4:47. Glancing at the numbers atop the stalls, he stopped at number 7. He walked up and undid the latch.

"Hey, Pascal, hey boy." Charles grabbed the horse by the reins, leading it out into the open of the waiting area. "Hey, boy, you've got to do good for me today, you've got to do real good for me today." Charles stroked the horse's mane. The horse looked past him to the open door.

"Things have been real tough, Pascal. I don't got a dollar left to my name. I put all my years on you. I may not have a day left to my name if you don't win." Charles ran his hands along the muscular back of the black stallion. "But you're gonna win, right? There's no question about that, right? Pascal's Wager, fastest horse in the West. Heh."

Charles led the horse over to the wall and grabbed a brush. "Hey!" yelled a voice at the door. Charles dropped the brush and turned around.

A tall man in a dark suit stood in the doorway. "You can't be back here. We ain't allowed no people in the stalls in years."

"Uh, sorry. My mistake. I got turned around out there."

"Likely story." A smaller man appeared from behind the tall man.

"Hey, that's Mr. Babbage! He owes a lot of money to the house. You watch him, Mike. I'll get Mr. Toussaint." The smaller man pulled out a walkie-talkie and stepped outside the stall room.

The taller man grabbed Charles by the arm. “Oh, yeah, Babbage. You’ve got the wife that’s the, uh, what’s the proper term, dancer, no, entertainer, right? We boys got some good looks at her the other night down at the Scottish Times. That shock of red hair drives me wild.”

“That’s enough,” Charles yelled, wriggling himself free and punching the tall man in the jaw.

The tall man rubbed his face. “You’re making a lot of wrong moves today.”

“Mr. Charles Babbage,” announced a voice from the doorway. Charles looked over and saw the squat man enter the room, so obese that he was more waddling like a grand penguin than walking like a man. His black hair was slicked tight against his head, his hands glittering with gold rings. He pointed at a pile of hay and the tall man threw Charles into it.

“Eddie, this is a misunderstanding,” Charles stammered out.

“Édouard,” the fat man sputtered. He pointed to the horse. The smaller man grabbed the reins and led it back into its stall. It watched Charles on the ground.

“Right, sorry, sorry, Mr. Toussaint.”

The man pulled a paper from his vest pocket. “Looks like you’ve got a lot riding on this one. It would make sense for you to sneak back here and try to interfere.”

“No, it wasn’t that at all. Let me explain—”

“You owe us a lot of money, Mr. Babbage. You’ve been late on your notes recently.”

“Right, yes, I know, Mr. Toussaint. I’m out of notes right now, but I’ve got all my years riding on this race, on ol’ Pascal here. We’ll be square after the race, I know it.”

“For your sake, I hope so. About these notes, however. We’ve been forced to repossess some of your things. Your wife was not too happy.”

“I heard.”

“Yes, it seems she’s going to have to work overtime.” The three men laughed as anger filled up behind Charles’ eyes.

“She might do pretty good tonight, boss. I just got my



raise!” howled the taller man.

“She got a sister?” the short one jokingly asked.

“That’s enough!” Charles yelled. The horses brayed in their stalls.

“Fine, fine. Hell, it’d be embarrassing to collect your money and give it right back to her tonight. We might as well just be allowed to watch her for free and save each other the time splitting dollars and cents.” The shorter man and taller man were nearly bowled over laughing and patting each other on the back.

Their eyes diverted, Charles leaped up off the ground, grabbing the iron horseshoe puller off its wall hook. He swung it as hard as he could into the tall man’s head. The man fell backwards against the wood slats of the building, blood pouring from his ears and nose.

Charles threw the puller at the smaller man, hitting him in the chest. The small man fell to the ground, yelling at Charles and Mr. Toussaint. A loud ring shot through the stallroom. The men could hear the metal latches on the horse stalls unlock. The heavy hooves of the horses dug into the ground and the crowds at the track began to cheer. Charles looked towards the door and made a run for it.

As he began to round the corner, Mr. Toussaint pushed aside his suit jacket and reached into his vest. Pulling his black steel French-issued Modèle 1935A from his pocket, he fired one round at Charles, who collapsed onto the straw floor.

A crowd grew quickly around the scene. Men stood watching, their muffled voices questioning the motives of all involved. A small girl let out a shriek as she saw Charles on the ground, a pool of blood underneath his grey suit. Her father held her hand, unsure what to tell her.

Susie, the bet taker from behind the counter, took the child into her arms and consoled her. “Honey, it’s okay. Mr. Babbage there gambled a lot and had ran out of money. His last resort was to bet against the years left in his life. He had put them all on that black horse right there.”

The woman looked up at the stalls. Pascal’s Wager, black as the pistol Mr. Toussaint had fired, was still in his stall. His eyes

fixed on the lifeless body of Charles Babbage, he had never even begun the race.



BETA DECAY HOUSE