

Economics in Popular Film

Dedicated to the memory of Sequoia C. Myers

Crossing the Boundary

A Sci-fi/Social Science Web Novel

by Satya Gabriel

Chapter One: Overdetermination

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The compu-band on my left wrist tingled slightly and I touched it with my right hand. I received the message from Sequoia as a sensory image. I could see Sequoia speaking to me, as if she was a transparent image in front of my eyes. She informed me that I had been chosen to be one of the three students to work with her on the transtemporal-ethnographical research assignment (TERA). The TERA was an extraordinary project, funded by the International Science Foundation (ISF), and when I had applied I considered the probability of being chosen to be much closer to zero than to one. So I could not help but smile at my good fortune. It was an extraordinary opportunity. I accessed my internal transmitter and sent a reply via the compu-band: an image of me smiling and saying that I would be honored to participate.

The Transtemporal-Ethnographical Research Assignment or TERA had only become feasible in the past year with the completion of the final tests on the Quantum Temporal Transporter (QTT) at the New University of Bangalore. The testing had proven that time travel was both feasible and safe, if not completely predictable. Some people remained skeptical, despite the rigorous testing and the successful completion of the first three transtemporal research assignments. The QTT allowed observers to cross temporal/spatial boundaries by the creation of a path into fifth dimensional space (outside the boundaries of normal space-time). This opening to the fifth dimension allowed travel to the past, although with limitations. Observers could not change past events because they existed in the target location in a dimensional space that is neither observable to those who lived in that space/time (a presumption that was not completely proven) nor did it afford the observers sensual access to the primary four dimensions of that other

space-time (another presumption that was not completely proven, although physicists generally agreed that the alternative violated such a large body of theory that the probability was very close to certainty that such was the case). In other words, the observers were assumed to be like unobservable "ghosts" in the target space-time.

I am not a space-time engineer so I can't really explicate all the details of how the machine works. However, it has opened up the possibility of direct observation of events and social processes that had only been available to us in indirect ways, through the observations of human beings from the past, often human beings who were not themselves direct observers. Often these past histories were seriously incomplete in important details and even more often the observers deliberately or unconsciously distorted the historical record or their descriptions of events and other human beings. Direct observation would answer a great many questions, as well as pose new ones that could not even be anticipated in advance. Sequoia had already begun this process. She was on the first team of researchers to make use of the device and she had published a controversial paper related to that research assignment, which had taken the team to Nanjing, China during December of 1937. When a second QTT was constructed, the ISF was looking for innovative approaches and Sequoia proposed that she be allowed to create a team comprised of students, arguing that students would be able to bring fresh and unexpected perspectives to the TERA. I suppose she must have considered the odds of that proposal being accepted to be similar to the odds I had applied to my getting selected. Nevertheless, the TERA was funded --- the first to use the new QTT --- and I would be part of it.

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My selection for the TERA meant that I would first participate in a two-day seminar with Sequoia, in and of itself this would have been a valuable prize. Sequoia had revolutionized ethnographic work in the social sciences by simultaneously developing a new theoretical framework and a set of groundbreaking techniques for gathering and analyzing data from cultures, including making use of videography (films and other visual media).

The two day seminar was to be held at Mount Holyoke University, a school with a long and rich history, and the site of the second QTT. It was also one of the most beautiful college campuses on Earth. It had retained the charm of a pristine wooded campus, even as the surrounding community of South Hadley had become a thriving and tree-starved suburb of Boston and New York City. It was night when I arrived on the campus via hover car, rather than the high speed monorail that many chose as their way to get to South Hadley from New York City. The one hour monorail ride might have been a quaint reminder of the past, a fitting introduction to the TERA, but I preferred the speed of the automated hover car, as well as the privacy. I wanted the privacy so that I could read and think without the background noises of other people's conversations. I removed the book chip from

the compu-band (I don't know why they call it a chip, since it is really a tiny metallic pin that holds about 1 terabyte of information) and put it in the small carrying case that I always kept in my sidepack. The car landed on a pad surrounded by multi-colored lights atop the Mary Lyons Tower near Lower Lake. The dark waters of the lake were illuminated by levitating light spheres. I stepped out onto the pad and was greeted by another student.

"Lakshmi?"

I nodded. "And you're Terzah?" I had seen her image file over the internet. She appeared thinner in person, her hair falling in tendrils of auburn brown curls around her face and shoulders.

"Yes," she smiled broadly. "Your trip was pleasant?"

"Very much so, thank you," I replied. We hugged and held each others arms and smiled. "It is an honor to work with you," I said.

"And with you," she said. Then, less formally, she told me about how excited she had been upon finding out that she had been chosen for the TERA. I told a similar story. She had worked with Sequoia for the past two years at Mount Holyoke University, focusing on the sub-field of economics. She told me that our TERA would be focused on economics. "Sequoia says that there is no way to narrow our focus to only one sub-field but that she believes this first TERA should be used to clarify certain economic relationships from the past. She believes that economics was particularly subject to distortion in past social scientific work because the subject was considered sensitive by those who were most privileged in society. It was considered dangerous to educate people about certain economic concepts. Economists, when the study of economics was segregated as a field, spent most of their time playing mathematical games and obfuscating economic relationships, rather than making these relationships more understandable. Other than that Sequoia says that she chose economics for no particular reason, just thought it tasted good." She laughed after that last phrase. "Can you imagine, she said that economics tasted good?"

I smiled. "When can I meet her?"

"In the morning," she said. "She is not on campus at the moment. She is in Shanghai at some sort of meeting and will be back late tonight. She said that we will all meet in the morning for breakfast. But knowing Sequoia, she won't get one bite in between the lectures and questions."

That night I met the third member of our team, Gibran Harris. Gibran, a student at the Sorbonne, and someone who seemed unfamiliar with smiling, joined Terzah and I for a late dinner at the *Windows in the Sky* restaurant atop the Mary Lyons Tower. Gibran had a noticeable presence. As he walked towards our table in the restaurant, people turned to stare. Maybe it was his quick, but silent walk. Or maybe it was his intense look. But what I noticed most of all was his golden brown skin and dark brown eyes. His jet black hair was slicked back as if he was fresh out of the shower and was complemented by his crisp black tunic jacket. We talked about our work and our lives while looking out the circular windows that ran the

length of the restaurant. From this vantage point we could see the campus, the illuminated lakes, and even the bright lights of the surrounding community of South Hadley.

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The next morning we met with Sequoia for breakfast in the same restaurant. The fall foliage around the lakes was brilliant. And Sequoia was just as vibrant. Although she appeared a slight figure, her voice was deep and authoritative. Her gentle round face was brightened by her smile which she never hesitated to reveal while she talked to us. Her brown oval eyes were highlighted with flecks of green which echoed the colors of the fall foliage. And her shoulder length black hair was cut in a style reminiscent of an ancient Egyptian queen. She talked to each of us about our families. She said she wanted to know more about our histories before beginning the adventure. If we were interested, she offered to talk more about herself later. Of course, I was interested and would have liked to hear her story right then and there. But Sequoia wanted to begin our preparation and while we ate blueberry pancakes with hot maple syrup, she talked about the concept of overdetermination.

"Each of you are trained to look at the world from the standpoint of overdetermination only because there has been general agreement on this epistemology and ontology for much of the past century. It was, however, not always the case. Instead of the epistemology of overdeterminism, in which we understand concepts and theories (ideas) as interdependent with the physical reality of which we are an integral part, social scientists of the past were mostly empiricists or rationalists. While we view ideas and the physical universe as mutually effective and mutually constitutive, the empiricists believed that the physical universe was an objective raw material from which all ideas are discovered. The rationalists, on the other hand, believed that it is only through objective ideas and logic that we can come to understand physical reality. For the rationalists, logic is a disembodied force driving all human knowledge. In the rationalist world, we can only understand the universe by the intellectual process of working out the logic of the universe. For the empiricists, the physical universe is a disembodied force driving all human knowledge. In the empiricist world, we can only understand the universe by observing it and then using these observations as the basis for all our ideas. Of course, we are now of the opinion that all observations are shaped by ideas and that all ideas are produced in the context of the physical universe, of which the ideas are a part. But try explaining that to an 18th century or 19th century or 20th century social scientist."

"How does this effect what we will observe?" Gibran asked, holding a forkful of blueberry pancakes in his hand.

"You tell me," Sequoia said, picking up a cup of steaming java.

"Rationalism is the basis of a great many prejudices," I said. "Racism, for example,

was grounded in a belief that there was something supernatural about skin color or certain other physical attributes. People used to believe that if they knew a person's race, then they knew just about all there was to know about a person. This is a form of rationalism. A rationalism that shaped a lot of social scientific work and every day behavior." My research interest in the role of racism made it easier for me to say this than you might think. It was sometimes hard to get me to shut up about the topic.

"Agreed," Sequoia said. "However, are you arguing that racism is an example of rationalism?"

"Yes."

"What about those who argued that race was an *obvious* phenomenon because of *observed* phenotypical differences between human beings?" When I hesitated in my response, she continued, "As you know, racism is a name given to a wide range of theories about the nature of humanity. Some forms of racism depended upon the rationalist epistemology, as you argued. In those forms of racism, it is presumed that there is a racial logic to humanity's existence, a logic that is often gleaned from past intellectual works, books or myths. Racial categories are created as thought-concretes and their significance specified in theory. In other forms of racism, however, the epistemology used is empiricist. These theories about humanity begin by isolating certain physical attributes that are then assumed to have behavioral or ontological significance. Social scientists operating in this way believe they are simply cataloguing a real and obvious difference between homo sapien sapiens. Great care was taken to describe generalizable differences. This empiricist movement from descriptions of observed physical difference to the theory of race is no less important as a route to racism than is the rationalist road. But, as I'm sure you can now clearly see, rationalism and empiricism are simply two sides of a single coin, as the old cliché goes. The empiricist racist depends upon the prior construction of the concept of race (a rationalist moment for sure), and the rationalist racist depends upon the observation of physical differences (an empiricist moment)."

"Doesn't the idea of race necessarily come first?" Gibran asked. "In other words, isn't rationalism necessarily the parent of empiricism?"

"How can there be an idea of race without observing physical differences?" Terzah asked.

Sequoia smiled. "This is the dilemma of empiricism and rationalism. Empiricists and rationalists were in disagreement over the nature of Truth, yet they ultimately depended on each other. The rationalist can discover the Truth about race only if agreement exists about which of the many physical differences between humans has significance, as well as which of the *perceived* similarities has significance. Agreement about physical differences depends critically on concepts of the physical and of difference, as well as of similarity. The one-sidedness of these arguments was glaring. Today social scientists have abandoned both rationalism and empiricism, in part, because they recognize that it is not possible to separate ideas from the objects that are being theorized and vice versa."

"What comes first, the chicken or the egg?" I asked, speaking as if to myself.

Terzah frowned, putting down her fork. "What?"

"An old saying," Sequoia replied for me. "In our social scientific work, the answer is neither. We cannot construct theory without concepts that are grounded in an agreed upon interpretation of physical reality. Changes in theory result in changes in our agreements about that reality. Changes in our agreements about the nature of reality result in changes in concepts, logics, and the large toolboxes in which we place concepts and logics, namely theories. Now shall we answer Gibran's question of how any of this affects what we will observe in the TERA?"

"Most of the people we observe will be rationalist or empiricist," Terzah said.

"And most of the work that we have available to us about the past is based on rationalism or empiricism."

"Why does this matter?" Gibran asked. "Most people weren't even conscious of rationalism or empiricism, including most social scientists."

"That may be," Terzah said, "but whether conscious or unconscious, a person's view of the world is influenced by her epistemology."

"How?" Gibran was skeptical.

Sequoia looked at me, but I shook my head. I did not have the answer. "In our preparation for the TERA," Sequoia said, "we shall have a look at some of the cultural products depicting the various periods of historical time and/or certain social processes that will be of interest to us. Each of these cultural products is subjective and objective. Why?"

"They are subjective because each cultural product is a creation of particular persons," I said.

"Yes, but why are they also objective?"

My mouth felt dry, despite the pancakes and the hot steaming cup of java.

She looked at Gibran, who shook his head, then at Terzah.

"A person does not create in isolation," Terzah said. "People are shaped by the culture of which they are a part. Every cultural product is a reflection of the unique way the social totality has shaped the person who created it." Both Gibran and I knew that Terzah's prior work with Sequoia gave her an advantage in these Socratic exercises. "Objectivity cannot refer to anything except the way a cultural product reflects the social totality."

Sequoia nodded. "Thank you, Terzah. As Terzah indicated, people produce out of their understanding of the world. This understanding must necessarily come from the larger social totality. For instance, a mid-20th Century film from China would be the product of the *subjectivity* of the film's creators, the script writers, director, actors, etc., but also the *objectivity* of the surrounding culture that shapes the way the creators think and approach their art. This objectivity is what creates

agreements about the nature of reality. To be within a culture is to be shaped by that culture. Yet each and every person is unique. Each human being has a unique relationship with the world, including the other humans they come in contact with, learn from, teach, and so on. It is not surprising, then, that the person can be both shaped by the culture, a culture shared with many other humans, and yet be a unique person, because she has interacted with that culture in a unique way. The person's creative product comes out of this unique interaction with the social totality. This is not only true of film makers, it is also true of the architect or the social scientist or the teacher."

Gibran frowned. "I'm afraid I still don't see the connection to our project."

"We have to try to understand the social totality in order to make sense of the uniqueness of each of the subjects we observe," I said, feeling around at the edges of understanding. "At the same time, we can try to understand the way individuals shape the social totality of which they are a part."

"Yes, that's certainly part of it, an important part," Sequoia said, smiling. "Now I think you should all finish what's left of your pancakes and we'll continue this conversation at the morning session at 10."

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The morning session was held in a conference room of Montgomery Hall, a circular building constructed of transparent steel and manufactured titanium located near the geographical center of campus and fronted by an open area of green. The conference room was well-lit and the air was so fresh that it had a pleasant effect on the disposition. In the center of the room was a round table with a smooth marble-like surface. In the center of the table was a diamond shaped holographic projection. We all sat around the table.

"At breakfast we talked about epistemology," Sequoia said. "Let's now take up the issue of ontology."

"Cause and effect?" I asked.

"Ontology is knowledge of how things come to be, to exist. I suppose one way of thinking about this is cause and effect. Indeed, when we look at the debate over ontology, we find two basic approaches, each of which can be described in terms of cause and effect: reductionism, sometimes called essentialism, which argued in favor of explaining all events in terms of certain finite and identifiable causes, and overdeterminism, which argued in favor of explaining all events in terms of the unique influences of other factors, recognizing that the entire social totality is implicated in every event. In other words, in reductionism, we only need to find the set of causes in order to understand why an event comes to be. In overdeterminism, it is impossible to find all the causes for any event, since everything is significant. The best that we can do is to find out the unique ways in which *particular* causes shape the event. In overdeterminism, all social and environmental processes interact to shape each and every event."

"This is the meaning of overdeterminism I'm more familiar with," Gibran said.

"Yes, the ontological concept of overdeterminism is taught in elementary school physics," Sequoia said. "But you must realize that this concept was not as popular in the past as it is today. As recently as the early 21st century social science, as well as popular belief, was dominated by reductionism. This morning Lakshmi introduced racism as an example. I indicated that racism can be grounded in either a rationalist or empiricist epistemology. Racism is, however, unambiguously reductionist. While there were many forms of racism in human history, all these manifestations shared a reductionist logic. In each form of racism, certain physical traits or genetic origins are classified as identifiers of racial membership and racial membership was associated with behavioral or spiritual consequences. Human beings were placed into various hierarchies based on racial membership. Sometimes racism provided the basis for genocide or enslavement. When we go on the TERA, we shall encounter numerous cases where racism is an obvious influence on events. In other cases, we may have to do more work to find the role of racism. Either way, this and other reductionisms will be important factors in our research."

"Is it correct that our first research trip will focus on economic processes?" I asked.

"Yes," Sequoia answered. "However, one of the reasons I began our conversations with the concept of overdetermination is to remind us that in our focus on economic processes, we must be concerned about the way economic processes are shaped by other social processes and vice versa. In other words, we must be ever aware of the way economic processes are overdetermined within the social totality. No social process exists in isolation. As we explore various economic processes, we will make clear some of the ways other social processes shape the economic. In turn, we will show the role of economic processes in shaping other social processes."

"Such as racism?" I asked.

She nodded. "Of course, in the past racism was so common that it permeated all human interaction. In a reductionist ontology, it is possible to either see racism as the cause of everything, and there were a small number of such thinkers, or to see racism as simply the outcome of some other social process, with no autonomous effects on society. This latter way of thinking was quite common among social scientists."

"Including economists?" I asked.

"Especially economists," she said, emphatically. "To be exact, most economists ignored racism. You won't find many references to racism in most ancient texts on economics. In the past, the study of economics was dominated by a form of reductionism in which a peculiar and simplistic behavioral assumption, called utility maximization, was posited as the core explanatory concept. Utility maximization was supposed to explain human decisions, including buying and selling decisions. Most of the neoclassical economists of the 20th century focused exclusively on these buying and selling decisions, which occupies a good deal of the work of 20th century and early 21st century economists. But few of these economists recognized the role of racism in decision-making, much less all the

other complex factors that shape decision-making."

"But didn't the sub-field of psychology already provide a more complex explanation of human behavior, even in the 20th century?" Terzah asked.

"Yes," Sequoia replied, "but these neoclassical economists ignored the rich body of research and theory in psychology and other sub-fields of social science, which, by the way, were not sub-fields back in those days. Economics and psychology were distinct and separate fields, not simply specializations for social scientists who were more broadly educated."

"It makes no sense that economists would base their logic on a crude concept of psychology and completely ignore all the more sophisticated work done by psychologists," Terzah said, frowning.

"Agreed," said Sequoia. "Nevertheless, that was the state of social science in the 20th and early 21st century."

"This contradicts the basic mission of science," Gibran said. "Science should always seek to incorporate the best of new ideas and abandon those that have proven inferior. A crude psychology of human behavior, such as utility maximization, could hardly have been superior to the work of Freud or Lewin or Jung, to name only a few examples."

"Your point is well taken, Gibran. However, can you be so certain about the basic mission of science, as you call it?"

"If science is not about advancing knowledge, then what is it about?" He asked.

"Defending the status quo," Terzah said.

"What does that mean?" Gibran asked, frowning. "The role of the scientist is to be objective."

"Objectivity is grounded in a specific social totality," I said. "Social scientists are part of that social totality."

"I understand that," Gibran said, sounding a bit frustrated. "What would be the point of arguing that people are simple-minded? It is obvious that human behavior is one of the most complicated phenomena in the known Universe."

Sequoia looked at him and smiled. "Even today science is not completely autonomous from political, cultural, and economic influences. In the past, these influences were often less subtle than they are today. Scientists who made unpopular arguments or supported unpopular theories, even when such theories could have positive impacts on social life, were less likely to be heard and sometimes were severely sanctioned. In such an environment, ideas that might have a positive impact on society as a whole could be easily suppressed and ideas that had a detrimental impact on the advance of human society were often promoted. Remember that science is just as overdetermined as anything else. The fact that the neoclassical notion of utility maximization led to negative consequences for individuals --- selfishness became a sort of religion, especially

for those who studied economics --- and for society as a whole --- public policy was directed away from communal interests, such as the environment --- in no way impeded the predominance of neoclassical economic theory. The problem that we have been discussing is that often inferior ideas, from a societal perspective, were selected because of the particular way in which the social totality functioned. Various forms of racism, to return to that example for a moment, were often introduced into environments where more socially beneficial ideas about the self and humanity were already present. In the case of the science of human behavior, the neoclassical notion of simple utility or pleasure maximization (to be more exact) prevailed in economic analysis, even though more beneficial notions, such as Freud's use of the concept of an overdetermined self, were already present. This poses an interesting problem for us, as we enter the TERA. In our explorations, we might try to understand why the social totality would have pushed economists to a more inferior logic of human behavior than that which was readily available in psychology."

It was then that I realized that Sequoia was trying to prepare us for the irrationality of past human behavior and culture. We would observe, she wanted us to know, behavior that would be at odds with everything we had learned. I nodded unconsciously and this caught Sequoia's eye. She looked at me and smiled knowingly.

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Chapter Two: Exploitation

We were assigned to Porter Hall. It was one of the original dormitories on campus, or so I had read somewhere. Even if I had not read it, it was obviously not a replica building but the real thing. I had settled into my room the night before, but had forgotten to contact my mother. It had been late when I got back from dinner with Terzah and Gibran. My head had been aching from all the excitement and conversation. I had promised my mother to let her know I had arrived safely. And knowing her, she was worrying intensely. I connected to the internet and contacted my mother. I told her about Sequoia, Terzah, and Gibran, the campus, what we had discussed the first day, and my excitement about the TERA. She had trouble getting any words past my babble, but was finally able to tell me that my father had been to the hospital to get his artificial lung replaced. My heartbeat quickened when I heard this, but she assured me that he was fine. "It was a minor glitch with one of the microprocessors," she said. "The new lung is working just fine." Fine, I thought, how could everything be fine when father had to go to hospital and have his chest opened up. She said that he was sleeping or she would put him on the net to tell me himself. I wanted to go home immediately. "That's not necessary," she said. I was not so certain. Sometimes I forget what is important in life. Maybe too often. But I must tell you that when my mother told me that my father had been in the hospital, I knew what was important. I'm sure it has always been the same among humans. Those you love are the key to giving meaning to life.

Normally I would have relished the silence of the dormitory room, but not tonight.

I thought about my father. In all probability, he really was fine. It was unusual for artificial organs to fail. But then again, it wasn't that common for them to have "glitches" either. I sighed. I had briefly talked to Terzah about this and she had told me that her uncle had an artificial heart and kidneys and was one of the healthiest people you could hope to meet. She said that he had only recently given up playing competitive racket ball in his native Israel. This had been somewhat reassuring.

I lay in bed listening to a symphony by Daozhen, a beautiful multi-dimensional piece -- evocative of Stravinsky and Miles Davis. I usually fell asleep to this music, but not tonight. I did not fall asleep until it was almost time to get up again. When the gentle alarm wave rippled across the room, I awoke feeling groggy, with sore eyes.

At the morning session, I was far too tired, despite having gulped down a strong cup of java with breakfast. I sat down at the conference table between Terzah and Gibran. Sequoia watched me as I took a seat. I felt self-conscious, and must have had a rather idiotic grin on my face.

After exchanging pleasantries with the class, Sequoia proceeded with the day's topic: the economic process of exploitation. She explained that the social scientific definition of exploitation was very different from the polemical use of the word. "I do not intend to replay the moral debates of the past three hundred years," she said. "We will use the term exploitation in its strict social scientific, economic definition --- as simply the process by which the surplus products of human labor are appropriated" She leaned forward on the conference table. "But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. Exploitation can only exist as an element in a social relationship. Social relationships can be understood as comprised of social and environmental processes, one of which *may* be exploitation. Of course in current society, exploitation has become a rare phenomenon, so it may be difficult to see how important it was in the past." Sequoia noticed that Terzah wanted to speak and acknowledged her.

"If exploitation means that one group of people takes the fruits of labor of another group of people without giving something equivalent in return, then how can that not be immoral?" Terzah asked. "We've all studied history. It was common for people to work hard their entire lives and the wealth they created go to someone else."

"The French philosopher Louis Althusser argued that individual human beings were structural elements in a larger social system," Gibran said. "In such a world, no one can be blamed for his actions. Even if you define exploitation as immoral, as is implied in popular discourse, the Althusserian notion of human beings allows for blamelessness. The slave master, for example, cannot be blamed for slavery."

"Oh, so he was just doing his job?" Terzah sounded somewhat bitter. I guessed this statement struck a nerve.

"Yes," Gibran responded without hesitation. "Morality can only exist in context. A slave master is not immoral for being a slave master in a society where slavery is moral."

Terzah shook her head. "Or the concentration camp supervisor for just doing his job"

"Althusser also had the concept of relative autonomy," Sequoia said, "which allows for individual responses to the structural influences. In an environment where there were alternative responses, the individual was still responsible for his choices."

"If the individual is overdetermined, then aren't his choices overdetermined as well?" Gibran asked.

"Yes, but that is precisely the point. He has choices, not a single choice. The individual is a *relatively autonomous* element in the social totality. The individual learns from his environment. But the environment, both physical and social, is complex. It pushes the individual in different directions. And the individual is himself a part of that environment. Therefore, the actions of the individual, while shaped by the social totality, are also determinants of that social totality. When we explore different cultures, we will be able to identify these complex social determinants and the choices available to the human beings we will observe. But again, we may be getting just a bit ahead of ourselves. In order to better understand the complex social relationships that constitute the social totalities of the past, we will need to clearly define *distinct* social processes. We will be able to use these defined social processes to distinguish slavery, feudalism, capitalism, self-employment, and communal relationships, among other aspects of these past social totalities. One of the economic concepts that we will make use of in our research is that of *class process*, which we need to define in order to understand the *social scientific* meaning of exploitation." I wondered if her stress on social scientific meant that she agreed with Gibran.

"Class process," she continued, "which was neglected by mainstream economics in much of the period of time that we will be researching, is of critical importance to distinguishing slavery from feudalism and feudalism from capitalism, and so on. Class processes are also of importance to understanding the social dynamics of the historical periods we will witness firsthand. Another social process that will be of importance to developing our economics-centered analysis is that of exchange relationships. In the past, these relationships were often called 'the market,' where *the market* was an almost mythical embodiment of the buying and selling behavior of specific human beings, working either in isolation or as part of a larger institutional setting. It was these exchange relationships that took up much of the intellectual labor-time of the mainstream economists of the 20th Century. Unfortunately, even the study of markets became seriously detached from the complexity of actual exchange relationships and starting in the early 21st Century there was a serious crisis in the economics profession. The crisis, which escalated when French students began to protest the dominance of neoclassical economics in teaching, helped to push forward our present day approach to the social sciences, in particular the reintegration of the various social science disciplines into one social science discipline with many sub-fields." I thought for a moment that Gibran was going to smile at this last statement. His eyebrows went up and his face visibly brightened. "Hopefully," she continued, "in our work we will be able to take

advantage of the fruits of this period of opening up of the social sciences. As part of this, we must simultaneously understand the narrow use of economics in the past, in particular the neoclassical paradigm, and make sense of how the two related economic concepts, class process and exchange relationships, one ignored by the 20th Century mainstream, the other embraced by it, interact to produce a rich story of how specific social totalities were constituted and functioned."

"Will we be observing slavery?" Terzah asked.

Sequoia nodded. "Yes, as a matter of fact we will have an opportunity to observe slavery in our first day of observation. The initial settings of the QTT should place us in the Caribbean during the late 19th century."

"Why did you choose to focus on economics, instead of politics or culture?" Gibran asked.

"Taste," she said. "I don't mean to imply by our focus on economic processes that such processes are more important than politics or culture or the environment. All these categories of processes are determinants of the social totality. The choice of economics as focus is purely a matter of taste."

Gibran lifted an eyebrow arrogantly and said, "Isn't the TERA too important to make a choice based on taste?"

"What better method of narrowing our analysis would you suggest, Gibran?"

He frowned. I could imagine that he wanted to say that she should have chosen the concepts most likely to get us to the Truth, but he knew better. Over the past fifty years, relativity had spread from the physical sciences to the social sciences, the arts and literature, and even popular culture (as best epitomized in holo-cinema).

"Then let us proceed," Sequoia said, taking Gibran's silence as agreement (although I think temporary surrender might have been more accurate). "What is the concept of class process?"

Even sleepy I could answer that one. "The appropriation and distribution of surplus labor," I said, almost too automatically. I thought I sounded like one of those antiquated automated messages that I had recently listened to on one of the internet encyclopedias. I couldn't imagine that anyone could have heard those messages without laughing.

"And what does that mean?"

This was a more difficult question than you might imagine. The world was now dominated by robot manufacturing. Exploitation --- the extraction of surplus labor from living human beings --- was a rare process these days. Our discussions in primary and secondary school about surplus labor were always a bit too abstract. And I was too tired for subtlety.

Thankfully Gibran spoke up. "It means that in the past some people got something for nothing by cheating the people who did the work of producing new products."

"Cheating?"

"Yes," Gibran said, and I was afraid he wasn't going to elaborate. I didn't know him well enough yet. "A few people were in social positions that allowed them to take control of the products that the vast majority of people were creating. This is cheating."

Terzah was frowning. "Why do you call it cheating? If society is set up so that some people could pump out surplus labor from other people, then in the context of that society this behavior was completely honest. Cheating means breaking the rules, being dishonest."

"I'm being objective," Gibran said.

"Objectivity must necessarily be grounded in . . ."

"The social totality," Gibran finished Terzah's sentence. "I know, I know. But does this mean there is no definition of cheating that can be applied across cultural contexts? It seems to me that we do not need to get the agreement of the society we're studying in order to define our terms. Otherwise there would be no transtemporal social science."

He had a point. And if I could have had another cup of java, maybe I could have even elaborated on it. As it was, when Sequoia turned to me and asked my opinion, I really had nothing coherent to say. "Cheating is a relative term because it applies to rules set by a specific society," I said. "I don't think cheating is a social scientific term."

Sequoia nodded. "Perhaps," she said. "Certainly we would think it relevant if, in a given social totality, rule breaking was taking place. Nevertheless, your point is well taken, as is the point made by Gibran. We do need a transtemporal definition of exploitation --- the appropriation of surplus labor --- which means we need a transtemporal definition of surplus labor."

"Can you have a transtemporal definition of surplus labor?" I asked. "Isn't surplus a relative term?"

"That's an excellent question," Sequoia said and I couldn't help but smile. My eyes were actually starting to glaze over. It was a consequence of over active tear ducts, trying to lubricate my sore eyes.

Terzah leaned forward and said, "The definition of surplus labor time and necessary labor time are both relative, in the sense that the necessary portion of labor time depends on the cultural mores of the society in question." I smiled at the way she said 'the society in question.' Sometimes Terzah sounded like a textbook. She continued, "In any given society, we can determine what was necessary to get a worker to do certain types of labor by examining these cultural mores and the compensation workers got so that they could consume in accord with those mores."

Gibran shook his head. "You don't agree?" Sequoia asked him.

"It sounds like circular logic," he said. "We know that necessary labor is based on what is necessary to get the workers to do certain types of labor? What kind of social scientific definition is that?"

"How do you know when a person is hungry?" She asked Gibran.

His forehead crinkled. "What?"

"How do you know when a person is hungry?"

"You observe his physical condition," he said.

"What is hunger?"

"Hunger is the need for food," he said. "The presence of hunger indicates that a person is suffering physical deterioration caused by insufficient fuel."

"Are the conditions that generate hunger the same for every human being?"

His frown deepened. "No, it's a relative condition. Some people can go without food longer than other people."

"Does this mean that hunger is a concept outside the realm of social science?"

"No, I wouldn't say that."

"Then you accept the validity of a concept defined in relative terms?"

He sighed. "Yes. I withdraw my objection to the definition of necessary labor," he said.

"Well, don't give up so easily," Sequoia said. "In any event, I think we will proceed with our current and relative definition of necessary labor. We recognize that what is necessary to motivate human beings to perform certain types of labor depends on social influences and material conditions that are variable across time and geographic space. Thus, what is necessary to motivate a worker to perform a particular sort of labor in 20th century France would not be the same as what would motivate similar activity in 19th century France, and the same can be said for comparisons of 20th century France to 20th century Mexico." She turned back to Terzah. "Would you like to continue?"

Terzah nodded, although you could tell from the look on her face that she would have been just as content to listen to Sequoia. "Surplus labor is the extra labor that workers perform beyond what is necessary. In other words, if the worker would have satisfied all her needs by working for four hours, but she works eight hours instead, then the extra four hours is surplus labor time."

"Why would someone work the extra four hours?"

My head felt full of mush. I was glad that Sequoia didn't look at me when she asked that question. I could sure use a soft bed.

"Because society is arranged in such a way that if they don't work these extra

hours, they don't work at all."

"That's one possible explanation," Sequoia said. "Any others?"

"Religious beliefs could compel a person to work longer hours," Gibran said.

Sequoia nodded. "Excellent," she said. "We could go on outlining various motivations, economic, political, cultural, environmental. The point is that the performance of surplus labor, like the definition of surplus labor, is overdetermined. The question of why a person performs surplus labor and how they are able to gain the fruits of necessary labor --- that which is necessary to their social survival --- is one of the questions that must be explored in any attempt to understand social dynamics. People need to consume certain products in order to survive. They need to make available to their dependents certain products in order for these dependents to survive and, I must add, in order to survive themselves, since survival is a social, not simply physical, phenomenon. Exploitation is defined simply as the appropriation of surplus products created by surplus labor.

Therefore, the existence of exploitation was always a relative phenomenon. The processes involved in getting a person to work beyond what is necessary for social survival are going to be varied. We will see, in the TERA, a fascinating diversity in forms of exploitation and forms of consumption, just as we will see a wonderful diversity in the ways people express emotions, nurture children, play games, and so on. Differently arranged societies produce different economic, political, and cultural systems. We will focus on the economic only because the diversity is so great that only by focusing can we hope to find some small measure of clarity."

She paused and looked at us. I hoped she could not tell how sleepy I was. It took all my will power to keep my eyes open. I knew that if I closed them I would forever change her opinion of me. That was motivation enough to keep the lids locked in place. "And even in economics, we cannot hope to look at every process. But we will look at the different types of exploitation and the different types of exchange relationships in order to draw contrasts between different societies. For example, in some societies we will encounter feudal exploitation and in others we will witness capitalist exploitation. What is the difference between feudalism and capitalism? What is the difference between capitalism and self-employment? How are these differences consequential?" She walked around the table, stopped next to me and said, "In the TERA, we will begin to explore some of those differences. As I indicated earlier, we'll begin with an exploration of slavery."

Economics in Popular Film

Dedicated to the memory of Sequoia C. Myers

Crossing the Boundary

A Sci-fi/Social Science Web Novel

by Satya Gabriel

Chapter Three: The TERA

1

Sequoia had activated the holographic projector by the time I slid into my seat. It was as if no one noticed that I was late again. They were looking at the image floating just above the conference table: children toiled away at rolling leaves into what I recognized as cigarettes. I had seen cigarettes in old videos and picture files. It was hard to believe that at one time humans had placed these rolled up leaves into their mouths and then lit them on fire, inhaling poisons into their bodies and expelling poisons into the surrounding air for others to breathe, but I guess culture has produced many strange phenomena over the many years that humans have dominated the planet.

"Are these children slaves or serfs?" Sequoia asked.

"There isn't sufficient information to make that assessment," Gibran replied quickly.

"What do we need to know?"

"Are the children the property of the person who owns this workshop," again Gibran replied quickly and with confidence.

"Why is it necessary for them to be the property of the owner of the workshop? Why could they not be the property of their parents, who rent them to the director of the workshop, a workshop that could be owned by a third party?"

Terzah smiled. "Slavery doesn't require that the slave be owned by the person who exploits them," she said, "only that they be owned by someone as a condition of their employment. It is possible that the children could be rented to the director of

the workshop. It is also possible that the workshop could be owned by a third party, even the government, and this would still constitute slavery."

"Slavery is both a state of being and an economic process," Sequoia said. "Terzah is quite right that these children *could* be slaves, even if they are not the property of the director of the workshop we are observing. As a state of being, slavery is simply the state of being chattel, of being property, in the same way inanimate objects are property. Slavery as an economic process is the exploitation of a person on the basis of this person's status as property. Are these children owned as chattel? If they are, then is that the basis for their performing this labor? If this is the basis for their performing this labor, are they working long enough to produce a surplus that is being appropriated by the director of the workshop? If so, then it does not matter that the director is not the owner of the children, you would still be witnessing the economic process of slavery."

"It doesn't matter who owns them? Does that mean these children could be involved in the slave class process even if their parents own them, but are not the ones who make them work?" Gibran asked.

"The answer to your first question is no and to the second the answer is yes," Sequoia replied. "Indeed, the parents could rent them to the directors and by so doing receive a portion of the surplus extracted from the children by the director of the workshop. However, there is no requirement that such be the case."

"Aren't feudal serfs also property?" I asked. I hoped the question was not naive. I felt very uncertain of the definition of feudalism and had a hard time distinguishing it from slavery and sometimes had a difficult time distinguishing either slavery or feudalism from capitalism.

"If an individual is chattel property," Terzah replied, "then she must be a slave, not a serf."

"If I understand correctly," I said, "serfs can't leave the economic space within which they are bound to serve a feudal lord. Is that not correct and if it is isn't that slavery?"

Sequoia waited for someone else to respond and when no one did, she spoke, "This is where the state of being is a critical condition of definition. Slavery, as a state of being, is a complete obliteration of the individual's control over her body, her life-time, her identity. This control exists in someone else's will. In many cultures and for a long time in human history, children *were* the property of their parents and/or the state. Children, as legally defined, had no control over their destiny or their physical selves. They were property, and, as such, they existed in the state of being of slaves. Their identity was inseparable from that of their owners, who also had the social and/or biological status of parents. This was also the state of being of women in relation to men in a wide range of human sub-cultures at given historical moments. The feudal state of being is one of being contractually bound to the service of a particular individual or individuals or institution. As an economic process, this contract grants the feudal director the exclusive rights to the surplus labor of the serf. Is that the same as slavery?"

"Not as you've described it," Gibran said.

Sequoia smiled. "Have I poisoned the well?"

Gibran frowned, not understanding the reference. I, on the other hand, had the advantage of an obsessive interest in history, including the history of languages. I knew the phrase. "Every definition poisons the well," I said, "in the sense that to define a concept is to determine the identity of the concept, how it is like or unlike other concepts. By defining slavery in terms of a unique state of being that involves the individual's loss of control over her body, her life-time, and her identity, you separate it from feudalism, which is defined in terms of losing only one freedom, the freedom to work for oneself or for an institution of one's choosing, rather than for this feudal lord."

"The feudal lord holds a monopsony over labor," Terzah said. "He is the only buyer of the capacity to do labor in the community. This forces workers to serve his interests or exit the community."

"What do you mean the lord is the only *buyer*? As I understand it, feudal lords didn't pay the serfs. They owned the serf's output and allowed him to keep some of it as subsistence."

"That is a form of payment," Terzah insisted. "It doesn't matter if you pay a worker in money or in kind. Whether payment is gold coins or bushels of corn, it comes to the same thing."

"If that's true, then why not just define the feudal lord as someone who can collect monopoly rents from workers? There is a long tradition of monopolists being in a position to overcharge for the commodities they buy. The same could be true for those who are the sole buyers, or monopsonists, as you called them, of labor."

Sequoia smiled. Terzah shrugged. "I don't have a problem with that statement. Feudal lords do extract a monopoly payment. If the payment to the worker is in kind, then the monopsony position of the lord allows him to pay a smaller portion of the workers output than if he did not have this monopsony. And, of course, if he didn't have the monopsony over all forms of labor, then he wouldn't exist as a feudal lord."

"A monopsony over certain types of labor," Sequoia corrected. "Feudalism does not require that the lord control *all* forms of labor. Some people could very well escape the feudal lord's control by possessing skills that could be utilized in certain vocations outside of the sphere of the lord's domain and the right to practice such skills."

"Why would the lord allow anyone to escape his control?" Gibran asked.

"Feudal directors may be very powerful," I said, "but that doesn't mean they are all powerful."

"What does that mean?" Gibran asked.

"Why should we assume that the fact that feudal directors have come to control

certain types of labor means they have the power to control all forms? Maybe their ability to control certain types of labor requires that they allow other places where skilled laborers can work outside of feudal control."

"Why?"

I didn't have an immediate response, but thankfully Terzah did. "Coalition building," she said. "The lord's position in society depends on a wide range of activities. These activities are carried out by a diverse body of people. Some of these activities may require the labor of highly skilled artisans who have a tradition of working outside of the lord's control, perhaps as self-employed workers. I read a long piece about these sorts of coalitions. The author made the argument that self-employed workers, who he called *ancients* because he defined the process of self-employed workers producing and keeping control over their surplus the ancient class process, were willing to cooperate with feudal lords in reproducing feudalism only so long as the feudal lords were willing to cooperate with them in reproducing their self-employment." I could not believe that Terzah had been able to say that last sentence without running out of oxygen. She continued. "He also gave examples of cases where lords violated unwritten agreements to respect ancients and the result was the growth of social dissent, even revolutions that overthrew the lords."

"That's very well put," Sequoia said. I suspect this statement may have short-circuited Gibran's next line of attack, although I can't be certain. I'm not sure he was all that sensitive to Sequoia's opinions. It may simply have been that he did not have a rebuttal. In any event, he was still the next to speak, although he turned our attention back to the holographic images.

"These children could be feudal if they are personally bound to roll cigarettes for a master or they don't get food and water," he said. "If they can refuse to work then they're not slaves. I assume feudal serfs always have a choice, even if it is the choice to starve, but slaves are bound to do what their masters say no matter what."

Terzah seemed to immediately reject this notion. "No," she said. "If the children are, as you say, contractually bound to roll the cigarettes or they don't eat, then they *are* slaves. Having the freedom to die is no freedom at all. Besides, slaves had the freedom to die. They could refuse to eat. They could commit suicide. A lot of them did."

"I thought the slave didn't have the freedom to refuse work or the freedom to die," Gibran said. "Doesn't the slave's body belong to the master?"

"What does that mean?" Terzah asked.

Rather than have this become a dialogue between these two alone, I chimed in. "Slaves could be harshly punished for not working, even killed in some instances. The slave was supposed to do the bidding of her master without question. The serf has the freedom to refuse to work, although the consequences may be that she has no livelihood or she gets harassed by the lord. Feudal directors or lords didn't have the legal right to kill or do bodily harm to their serfs for not working. If they did have these rights, then they were slave directors, not feudal directors." I looked at

Sequoia, hoping for some affirmation that I was correct or at least close to being so.

"Interesting." I waited but Sequoia did not elaborate.

"I think that the difference is one of degree," I said. "In feudalism the serf has the freedom to refuse to work. The serf makes a choice about working for the feudal director or starving. In slavery the slave does not have the right to make this choice."

"If the serf doesn't work," Gibran said, "I'm sure the feudal director or lord would have sent his henchmen in to make them work. Doesn't sound like any more freedom than the slave had."

"Capitalism wasn't any different," Terzah said. "Workers had a choice of who to work for, but they didn't have a choice not to work. If they didn't work, they didn't get money and without money they couldn't buy food, clothing and shelter."

"That's not the same thing," Gibran said. "In capitalism, workers could start their own businesses or go on the public dole."

"Neither of those things has anything to do with capitalism," Terzah said. "The only ingredients you need for capitalism are workers who must sell themselves on the market in order to buy their socially determined necessities and the freedom for those workers to sell themselves to more than one employer. If the workers have only one choice of employer then you have feudalism. If the workers have no choice because they are chattel property --- and therefore can't sell themselves because they do not possess rights to their own bodies --- and they work for whoever their owner says to work for then you have slavery. In all three cases, the workers don't have any choice but to work for someone else under conditions outside of their control. All three class processes are without certain freedoms."

"You make it sound as if it doesn't matter whether an individual is a worker under slavery, feudalism or capitalism," Gibran said with a certain contempt.

"No," Terzah responded emphatically, "that is not what I mean at all. It does matter. Degrees of difference are very important. A domesticated cat and a mountain lion have many features in common, but the difference can be quite significant if you are alone with one of them."

"This is a point," Sequoia intervened, "worthy of detailed examination. When we leave for the 18th century Caribbean tomorrow, we will certainly keep in mind this issue of the significance of these matters of degree."

"Then you believe that slavery and feudalism are, indeed, distinct processes; that slavery is not simply a special case of feudalism?" Gibran asked.

Sequoia smiled. "Let's examine the actual societies before answering that question."

The holographic image of the children working now changed as an adult female entered the picture. The children stopped working and stood up. The woman gave

each of the children money from a large purse and one by one they exited the workshop, disappearing as they went through a door at the edge of the holographic image. Once the last child had gone, the holograph itself disappeared. Sequoia turned off the projector.

"Capitalism?" Terzah asked.

"If they were being paid wages, then it must have been capitalism," I said.

"We still don't have enough information," Gibran said.

2

The dream seemed all too real. I awoke in it feeling nervous. I remember my hands shaking. I held them in front of me and watched them shake, like they were someone else's hands. I felt that sick feeling in the pit of my stomach, like a child on the first day of school. I looked out the glassless window at a sky bluer than I had ever seen and smelled strange cooking smells winding their way to me from a short distance away. When I got out of the hard bed I realized that my joints ached. I looked at my hands again. They were blotched and old. I realized in that instance that I was old. It came as a shock to the system. I nearly collapsed back into the bed. I heard an old man speaking to me from a doorway. At first I understood him and then realized he was speaking some form of demotic French. The man's face was black like the night that had now passed. His eyes seemed sunken in, more bloodshot than any eyes I had ever seen, and surrounded by bags of sagging flesh. What was he saying to me? I don't know because I woke up at that moment and realized that it was still night, that I was still in my bed in Porter Hall, that I had been selected for the TERA, and that the next day we were going on the first journey into the past. My heart racing, I laid back in the bed and tried to fall asleep.

3

The QTT was in the Browne Science Building, a relatively flat shiny circular building made of platinum tinted transparent steel. The building was much bigger than it appeared because, although the surface area was one story, the building went four stories underground. The room that housed the QTT was on the lowest level, near the center of sub-four, surrounded by a circular corridor with intersecting corridors leading to all other parts of sub-four. The location of the QTT was testament to its importance. It was not possible to enter sub-four without security clearance. In order to ride the special elevator to that level you had to pass a retinal scan. When I exited the elevator I walked down a corridor, passing laboratories on the way to the QTT room. I knew that Sequoia had an office on sub-four, although if I had tried to find it I most certainly would have ended up lost.

I was relieved to see that I was not late. In fact, Sequoia had not yet arrived.

Instead, there were two technicians and Terzah. They were talking away when I entered the brightly illuminated room. I smiled at them, and briefly glanced beyond them to marvel at the bubble shaped QTT.

Further away, beyond the QTT was a glass enclosed room that housed the entire tech staff. I could see about seven technicians working at controls.

"This is Lakshmi," Terzah told the man and woman, who she introduced as Renjun and Sarah, respectively. They were the senior technicians. We exchanged greetings. Later, after Sequoia and Gibran arrived, Renjun and Sarah explained how the machine worked. Each of us had viewed a holographic presentation of the QTT in operation, so we were familiar with much of what he had to say.

"This is it," Sequoia said. "Anyone want to resign?"

We all indicated that we were ready and Sequoia led us into the QTT. Inside the bubble the room seemed distorted, both larger than it was and oddly shaped, rather than round. I could hear the Sarah's voice marking the countdown. "10 . . . 9 . . . 8 . . . 7 . . . 6 . . . 5 . . . 4 . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . Initiating Quantum wave." The surface of the bubble seemed to change colors, from transparent to dark blue and then whirling rainbow colors. Terzah looked at me just before the entire inner space of the bubble distorted and it became difficult to make out anyone's bodies. It was as if we were flowing together. I felt dizzy, disoriented. And then it was gone. There was no bubble, only the four of us standing in a field of grass, the sound of the ocean in the distance. The odd thing was, I could feel the earth beneath my feet. I frowned. That wasn't supposed to be. We had been warned that we would be weightless. Everyone who applied for the TERA had first passed weightlessness training for this reason. I looked at Sequoia. She seemed almost as puzzled as I was. Then I saw what can only be described as a flicker of terror in her eyes, something she seemed to instantly gain control of. Then she said each of our names and gave us a stern look. "It is very important that each of you stay relaxed." This can't be good, I thought. "There has been some kind of malfunction," she said. "It is not supposed to be possible, but we are not in fifth dimensional space." When I looked at Gibran I thought for certain he was about to turn and run. He seemed on the verge. Sequoia seemed to notice, as well, and she looked directly at him. "We need to remain calm, above all else. Do you understand?" I saw Gibran nod his head. I did the same, and so did Terzah. But I have to tell you, I don't think one of us was a bit calm. I didn't know what this meant, but I had a feeling that the TERA had just changed from a research assignment to something a lot more serious.

Economics in Popular Film

Dedicated to the memory of Sequoia C. Myers

Crossing the Boundary

A Sci-fi/Social Science Web Novel

by Satya Gabriel

Chapter Four: Henri Francois

1

Sequoia led us along a muddy road. Unidentifiable smells filled the air with such power that I feared it all might overwhelm my lungs and they might stop functioning. We had walked far enough from the sea that the comforting breeze had diminished substantially, blocked by the mangrove forest that sided the road, and I was beginning to feel the sun's heat with much too much clarity. I wiped perspiration from my brow and tears from my eyes. To make matters worse, I had to constantly wave flies and mosquitoes away from my face. I had forgotten that female mosquitoes used to take human blood as sustenance. Genetic engineering had long ago eliminated the worse traits of both mosquitoes and flies.

"This doesn't make sense," Gibran said, finally, after a long silence. "How can this be possible?"

"What do you think this is an optical illusion?" Terzah sounded annoyed.

"Maybe we're just in some other part of Earth during our own time."

Sequoia stopped and turned and faced Gibran. I stood next to Terzah, happy to take a break from walking. My feet were getting sore.

"I think I know where we are," Sequoia said. She was calm and she even smiled at Gibran. "I know that our being in the past is inconsistent with most theories of time travel. Our presence here violates the timeline we were born into and lived our lives in. However, it is not inconsistent with the theory of multiple timelines."

"We're in a different timeline than our own?" I asked.

"I believe that is a likely probability," she said. "The moment we exited the fifth dimension, we caused a divergence in the timeline, creating the one we are now in."

Gibran shook his head. "I can't accept that. It doesn't make sense."

Sequoia touched his shoulder. "Well, we will find out soon enough," she said. "In the meanwhile, I suggest that we see where this road leads." Gibran's frown slowly melted away and he took on a more stoic expression. "And I suggest we should be careful what we say to anyone we happen across," she added.

Personally, I didn't have a problem with the suggestion to not talk to strangers. Whether we were on some unknown island on Earth or in the 18th century or anywhere other than our own timeline and place, I had no intention of saying anything until I was sure it was safe.

As we walked further along the road, I could see another question or comment building on Gibran's face. "You say you know where we are," he said to Sequoia's back. "Where is that?"

"Exactly where we're supposed to be," she replied, without looking back.

He frowned and sighed, then stepped in a particular large mud puddle. If I'm not mistaken, he seemed to growl at that offense. I think Gibran had the attitude that this entire debacle was directed at him alone.

"Where are we going?" He asked.

Sequoia pointed ahead. "Where ever this road leads," she said.

"Why is that better than just staying put where we first . . . landed? Maybe they can get us back."

Terzah shook her head. "How?"

"I don't know," Gibran said, "but it makes sense that if they could get us back then it would be better to stay put."

"It could also be a very foolish thing to do," Terzah said.

"Why?"

"Two reasons: food and shelter."

Gibran shook his head.

The area where we had started was relatively barren, rocky, and exposed to the elements. I thought that perhaps this was the first lesson of economics on the TERA. If human basic needs, for food and shelter, were not met, then there was no need to talk about any other economic or social processes. Under different circumstances, I might have smiled at this insight. I slapped a mosquito away from my nose.

"They used to carry a dreaded disease called malaria," Gibran said to me.

I frowned at him, but felt a bit more squeasy than before his comment.

"Don't worry," Sequoia said, "the malaria parasite is no match for the antigens in your system."

"If we really are in the past, how do you know the omega vaccine can protect against the bugs of this timeline?"

"The omega vaccine is not designed to fight a specific pathogen or parasite but to provide our bodies with the ability to fight off any alien invader," Sequoia replied.

"If we're really in the past," Gibran repeated, "then I don't see that anything is impossible. Maybe the omega vaccine won't even work in this timeline."

I didn't see the logic in that, but it scared me all the same. The mosquitoes now seemed like tiny assassins making their way through my meagre defenses.

In the distance, a figure on a white horse was approaching at full gallop. I swallowed my throat. We stopped moving.

As the figure came closer, I could see that it was a small boy. The boy wore only ragged trousers and rode the horse without a saddle. The boy's bare dark brown skin glistened with perspiration.

The boy pulled up in front of us. When he spoke it was as if he was speaking a language I had never heard and it was only after a long ramble of words that I recognized something and realized he was speaking French, one of the languages I had tested fluent in.

Sequoia spoke to the boy in what sounded like the same patois as the boy was speaking. The boy understood her and pointed in the direction we were traveling, then said something about Cabaret. I was beginning to translate more words as he spoke, but then without much ado, he waved to us and sped away.

"Was that supposed to be French?" Gibran asked, apparently annoyed at not understanding a version of a language that was second nature to him.

"Yes," Sequoia replied, watching the boy rapidly covering ground that we had just labored to leave behind us. "He says that we are about five hours walk from a hamlet called Cabaret, but that a farmer is not far from here."

"Are you sure we should go in that direction?" Gibran asked. "He seemed in a hurry to get away from something."

"You have a better suggestion?"

I raised my eyebrows. Was that annoyance in her voice? Had Gibran finally gotten an emotional response from Sequoia. If so, it would have been more than justified.

Gibran looked down and shook his head.

On the road to Cabaret, we came across a wooden shack and a skeleton thin old man standing on a rickety makeshift platform working with some crude tools repairing the roof, or so I assumed. The roof seemed to need more than repairing. Indeed, it seemed no small marvel that the shack itself was standing. Sequoia said that this must be the farm the boy had spoken of. She approached the man, who grinned a nearly toothless grin. They conversed for a bit and then the man came down from the platform, put his tools on the ground, and waved us all inside the shack.

We sat down on hard wooden stools at a small but beautiful and solid looking dark wood table. The elaborately carved and smooth table seemed out of place in this ramshackle one-room structure. The windows were no more than holes cut out of the planks that passed for walls. You could see the sunlight through the gaps between the planks, so in addition to the windows there were plenty of entrances for the mosquitoes and flies. I began to think that there would be no respite from the bites, each of which announced its presence with a fire of itching. I understood the man to say his name was Henri Francois, but not much else.

Sequoia explained to us that the man had told her that the land and house belonged to a "mulatto" slave master named Rosalvo Bobo, who had inherited Henri Francois from his father. "Henri Francois used to be one of Bobo's slaves, but he was able to buy his freedom. It seems that while Bobo allowed him to spend some time as a self-employed artisan, making furniture that he sold in the Cabaret market. He paid Bobo for the materials and gave him a large share of the profits, but got to keep some of the profits for himself. He did this for over twenty years and was able to pay the price of "affranchissement" Bobo had set. Now he is a free man and allowed to stay on Bobo's property as long as he agrees to work the land. He receives a share of the crop determined by mutual agreement with Bobo."

I saw Gibran's face grow grim. "Mutual agreement," he muttered. He had the look of someone who has just been told of the death of a friend. "I guess that confirms it. We are in the past." He said this almost in a whisper and did not look at anyone in particular.

Sequoia turned to Henri Francois and asked him for the date. I understood both the question and the response. It was, according to Henri Francois, May of 1793. I sighed. I guess I too had held out some small hope that this was not what it seemed. I was going to learn more about history than I could have imagined when I applied for the TERA.

"Is Henri a feudal serf?" Terzah asked.

Sequoia asked Henri Francois if he had to share his crop with or pay anyone other than Bobo. Henri Francois shook his head. I understood him to say that he would starve if he had to pay someone else in addition to Bobo. He laughed a hacking coughlike laugh and said that Bobo owns the land and anything that comes out of it. He said that he was grateful for having a share of the crop, otherwise he would

starve. He grinned at us and asked if we were from one of the English islands. It was clear that he recognized that we were speaking English to each other. Sequoia told him that we were indeed English and had been shipwrecked on Saint Domingue. This was the first mention of the name of the island. Obviously Sequoia really did know, all along, that we were exactly where we had intended to be (only in fifth dimensional space, not on solid three dimensional ground and sharing the timeline of our subjects). I thought the look on the old man's face indicated some skepticism at this shipwreck story. Nevertheless, I was impressed at Sequoia's inventiveness.

Sequoia started to tell Terzah what Henri Francois had said, but Terzah indicated that she had understood. Unlike the boy, Henri Francois spoke with more of the provincial French we had studied in preparation for the TERA. Nevertheless, he still sprinkled in a liberal amount of the patois and Terzah was catching on to it faster than either Gibran or I (at least Gibran gave no impression that he was understanding). "I would guess he is a serf, then," she said. "He doesn't own the crop and therefore seems to be turning over his entire surplus product to Bobo."

Sequoia nodded. "Anything else we need to know to make that conclusion?"

I asked if Henri Francois had any other choices of work. I knew that if he could opt out of working for Bobo and still make a reasonable living, then he was hardly in the sort of bondage contract that is associated with feudal exploitation. The feudal director/lord has to maintain a monopoly over the workspace required for the serf to meet his socially determined needs. I noted that, from the surrounding, those socially determined needs were rather minimal in this place and time.

Sequoia talked to him for a few minutes. I picked up only a little of this conversation and waited for her interpretation. "He cannot work as an artisan without a workshop," she said, "and he has no money for a workshop. He is too old to apprentice to someone else. Besides, that would put him into a feudal relationship with a master artisan. There is no capitalist labor market in the rural areas and not much of one in the cities. Given his age, he has zero chance of such employment in any event. His greatest fear is that he might offend Bobo and be evicted from this property."

"So he has no choice but to work as Bobo's serf?" I asked.

"It would seem so," Sequoia replied.

3

Although he had very little to offer, Henri Francois had shared beans, rice, and foul tasting water with us and offered to let us sleep there for the night before we departed for Cabaret. He warned against being on the road after sunset. Sequoia had accepted his offer of hospitality for all of us, although Gibran protested that he would rather go on to what he thought would be more comfortable accommodations. In any event, we slept on the floor of the one room shack. The man had offered his bed to Sequoia, saying that he would be happy to sleep on the floor, but she had

refused. I don't know what she had to say to him to get him to accept this arrangement. He had been very vociferous in insisting on her sleeping on the bed, which I must say did not look much more comfortable than the floor.

That night it rained very hard for about two hours and then stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

"It seems strange that he would have no choice but to stay and work for the man who had enslaved him." I said to Sequoia, who slept on the floor next to me, as the rain pounded the rooftop of the shack.

"Well, you heard that he didn't have much choice," Terzah said, from the other side of Sequoia. "If he doesn't work for Bobo, what can he do?"

I felt the tears welling up again. It was dark and no one could see me, so I did not try to hold them back. I don't really know if I was crying for the old man, for myself, or for all of us.

"I certainly wouldn't have continued to feed the man who put me in chains," Gibran said, confidently. "I would find some alternative."

"Even if the alternative is starvation?" Terzah asked.

"I just would not do it." Gibran, who was sleeping crosswise at our feet, sounded quite firm in this opinion, although I doubted he would be so strong if he was in Henri Francois' position.

"I think we'd better go to sleep," Sequoia said finally. "We are robbing Henri Francois of one of his few possessions, the tranquility of a good night's sleep."

And with that we said our goodnights and the sound of the rain took sole possession of the darkness. At last I was left with only my tears, thoughts, fears and the consoling knowledge that Sequoia was nearby.

Economics in Popular Film

Dedicated to the memory of Sequoia C. Myers

Crossing the Boundary

A Sci-fi/Social Science Web Novel

by Satya Gabriel

Chapter Five: Anacoana

1

I found it difficult to fall asleep on the hard, cold floor (amazing how the day could be so hot and muggy and the night so cold and moist). The mosquitoes were unrelenting. My face and arms were afire with itching. I imagined all manner of creepy, crawly things clambering about on the floor and over my body. I had imagined that I might just stay awake until the sunlight came through Henri Francois' paneless windows. So it was with some surprise that I found myself being awakened by Gibran. He was tapping my foot. Groggily I tried to see him in the darkness.

"Are you awake?" He asked, as I struggled to sit up.

"Yes," I whispered. "What is it?"

"Yes," Sequoia asked, "I'd like to know the answer to that question, too."

"The old man is gone," Gibran said.

I could hear Sequoia moving. "Gone?" She asked.

"Yes, he left several minutes ago. I thought maybe he was going to the outhouse, but he never came back. I think he would have come back by now."

There was silence for a moment, then Sequoia said, "Well, I doubt that it means anything, but I think we should be cautious all the same." She explained that she was going to the outhouse to check on Henri Francois.

"What if he isn't there?" I asked.

"Then I suggest we leave."

"And go where?" Gibran asked.

"We try to make it to Cabaret."

"In the dark?" I asked.

"In the dark," she replied.

When she had gone, I moved over and tried awakening Terzah, who had slept quite soundly through all our talking.

"What's wrong?" Terzah finally asked.

I explained that Henri Francois was missing and that Sequoia had gone hunting for him outside. Terzah seemed disoriented and said something incoherent. "You can remain here," I said firmly. "The rest of us are going."

"In the rain," she said, although it was no longer raining. I might have said "Yes, and in the pitch dark, as well" but instead I simply said, "It's not raining."

We all struggled to our feet in the dark. Terzah was now wide awake and obviously not willing to remain behind. I looked about but could make out nothing except the points of color that comprise pitch darkness, the illusion of light where no light exists. I don't think I've ever seen it so dark.

"How are we going to know where we're going?" Gibran asked. "Sequoia is crazy if she thinks we can make it to Cabaret in the dark. How will we even find the road?"

"We could visualize the walk from the road to the house," I said, and gave no further explanation of how we were to navigate in such blackness.

I had thought the darkness frightening, until I saw the light. The light was multicolored, bright, and to my right. It was coming from the window, I realized. It was flickering. And then we heard voices.

It felt very strange, in those moments before the door burst open, realizing that the relative calm was about to be shattered and that we were trapped inside the house with no knowledge of who was outside. Where was Sequoia? That was the last thought I had before the door burst open and the torches entered.

2

I did not understand any of what was said to us as the men took hold of my arms, tied my hands and stuffed cloth into my mouth. They then pulled us out of the house. The men who held me, one on either side, had big, rough hands and strong body odors. We made our way with only the torchlights tossing illumination here and there. Among the objects illuminated were the harsh ghost-like faces of the men. When they looked at me, it was without compassion, to say the least. It seemed like a long walk, made all the longer by the lack of understanding, the fear of what might happen. To be completely honest, I could barely walk I was so weak with fear and the two big men nearly carried me the full distance to a road. I could feel the flatness of the earth, the rocks underfoot. I thought it was the road to Cabaret, but it was not. Instead we finally came to what had to be a mansion, lit by lanterns in the front and the light flowing out windows of various rooms on the first, second, and third floors. It was at the entrance that I finally could see the others, including Sequoia. We were gathered together at the base of stairs leading up to a long porch. I looked at Sequoia and she shook her head. Then our attention turned to the man who stepped out of the house and onto the porch.

"What is this?" The man asked in impeccable French. As he stepped forward, I could see that his skin was the color of bronze and his hair curly black. I knew in that instance that this must be the mulatto, Rosalvo Bobo. "I asked you to bring them to me, not to abuse them. Untie them at once." And with that the men moved post-haste to take the ropes from our hands and the gag from our mouths. "I must apologize," Bobo said. "Let me introduce myself." I was not mistaken about his identity. He said his name as he came down the stairs and moved directly to Gibran. He extended his hand.

Gibran looked, wild-eyed, at Sequoia, who nodded, then turned to Bobo and said his own name.

"Gibran Harris," Bobo repeated. "It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance." He turned to Sequoia. "And you, my dear, may I have the privilege of knowing your name?"

Sequoia smiled. She rubbed her wrists and said, "Sequoia . . ." And she hesitated a moment and added, "Drexel." I frowned at hearing this fabricated last name, but immediately decided to lie when asked my name. I was certain that "Lakshmi" would not be a readily accepted moniker on this island. As Bobo took Sequoia's hand and kissed it gently, I ran through a number of possible pseudonyms. Bobo went to Terzah next, giving me even more time to narrow my choices. It seemed that Terzah had also gotten the message because she introduced herself as "Barbara McClintock," who I recognized as a 20th century geneticist. I immediately made a decision about who I would be. After kissing Terzah's hand, he came to me. He looked at me with narrowed eyes, as if squinting to see me better. "And you, my dear?"

"Florence Nightingale," I said.

He nodded, taking my hand and kissing it. "Please forgive these petite blanc who were a bit overzealous in carrying out my orders. I assure all of you, you are welcome guests here at Anacoana."

My heart had quieted somewhat and I felt relief at not being murdered in the woods. I was happy to be in Anacoana, whatever it was, so long as it was a refuge from all the horrors in my imagination.

3

We were led by Rosalvo Bobo into the mansion. "I could not let you spend your night in Henri Francois' hovel," he explained. "I have plenty of room here in Anacoana for all of you. Here you shall have your own rooms, your own beds, and servants to meet your needs." A tall, dark-skinned man walked into the expansive center hall. "This is Bernard," Bobo said. "He is my right hand. If you need anything whatsoever, just ask him. I will leave you now, but I will meet all of you for breakfast and we can talk at length." He smiled, bowed and walked away, moving up a long winding staircase to the second floor.

Bernard showed each of us to our rooms on the second floor. First Sequoia, then Terzah, then me. I walked into the room, briefly watching as Bernard walked away with Gibran. I closed the door to the bedroom. It was a large room that smelled of flowers. Candles burning in three candelabra provided illumination. The bed looked very inviting. I did not realize how tired I was until I went to the bed and sat down. I don't remember anything else until the next morning.

4

In the morning we had breakfast at one end of a long table, underneath a crystal chandelier, in the dining room. Bobo sat at the head of the table, of course. Sequoia sat to his right and Terzah to his left. I sat next to Sequoia and opposite Gibran. Before the rest of us had arrived, Sequoia was already at the table talking to Bobo. As I entered the room, they were discussing our clothing. He said that he had never seen such fabric and Sequoia was explaining that it was from India.

"I hope you slept well," Bobo said, as Gibran, Terzah, and I joined them at the table. We all agreed that we had. "Sequoia has told me a little about you and I want you to consider Anacoana your home for as long as you desire it to be so. It was tragic that your ship would have wrecked upon our shores. It is not uncommon, I assure you. I am only glad that you survived."

"We are lucky to have found someone like you, Monsieur Bobo," Sequoia said graciously.

He smiled. He looked at Sequoia for a bit longer than one might have expected. "Well, the British have been of some service to our cause and I am happy to be of service to you," he said, finally turning his attention to the rest of us. "We live in difficult times here on Saint Domingue. I don't know if you are aware of this, but we are having some trouble with our blacks. In several parts of the island, there are renegade bands of blacks rampaging, killing civilized people, burning plantations. It is a very dangerous time."

"Why do you think the *blacks* are doing these things?" Gibran asked.

"Ignorance," Bobo answered immediately. "These people are savages," he elaborated, if you can call it that. "They do not respect property or the advantages we have afforded them. And they are being instigated by the God-less Jacobins in France."

"Have you had any problems with *your* slaves?" Terzah asked.

Bobo looked at her for what seemed a long time, then said, "I have no problems. My slaves are well behaved. Isn't that correct, Bernard?" I had not noticed Bernard come into the room.

"Yes, it is quite correct," Bernard responded. After a moment, he asked if we were ready for breakfast to be brought in.

Bobo waved his hand, "Yes, yes. I'm sure our guests are quite hungry by now."

Bernard rang a tiny bell and three slave women, dressed in white dresses and head scarfs, entered the room carrying trays of food. On one tray were slices of various melons surrounding a carved pineapple. On other

trays were slices of French bread and pastries with little bowls of honey, chocolate, and fruit preserves to spread on them. And finally there were trays of delicate cuts of meat surrounded by boiled eggs and green leaves.

Bobo continued on the issue of the "problems" with slaves. "The most serious trouble is in the North. Indeed, two summers ago an alliance was formed between the mulatre planters and the grand blanc planters to put down this trouble in the North. In exchange for our participation, the grand blanc had to agree to accept the decree from Paris that we were to be admitted to the franchise. Thus, you see, the Blacks accidentally helped us." He laughed. "Even from bad things, good can sometimes come, yes?"

"The grand blanc are the white planters?" Terzah asked.

"Yes. They are the old aristocrats. We hommes des couleur are the new aristocrats."

"The hommes des couleur and the grand blanc have a common interest in maintaining the status quo ante," Gibran said.

"Of course," Bobo said. "It is not so different from the situation of the landed aristocracy in France, which has been forced to seek broad based alliances to survive. Is that not in the nature of maintaining an elite? One must forge alliances of convenience. Indeed, we have had to teach the petite blanc that it is in their interest to, as you say, maintain the status quo."

"How have you achieved that?" Terzah asked.

Disgusted by the meat, I nibbled at the fruit and then tried the wine and nearly choked. My throat seemed to involuntarily shut off the flow of air and I felt tears forming in my eyes. I tried to die quietly, so as not to disturb the others. If only I could have had a glass of water . . . a glass of clean water. I accepted that I would have to adjust to the taste of the wine.

"On this island, color and aristocracy have become intertwined," Bobo replied, not noticing my discomfort. "In France, the petite blanc are the lowest of the low, but here they can be above the blacks. This is their reward for supporting the goals of the aristocracy."

"Divide and conquer," I said.

"Yes," he agreed. "Exactly correct, Mademoiselle Nightingale. Slavery produces the wealth that sustains the aristocracy and slavery would not be possible here or anywhere else without the cooperation of the petite blanc."

"As I understand it," Sequoia said, "the new government in France has declared all men free. Is that not the intent of the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen' which was royally assented to on Oct. 5, 1790 by Louis XVI? How does that effect you?"

"This Declaration has been a boon to my people."

"But not to the slaves," Gibran added.

"Monsieur Harris, if I am not mistaken then you are hommes de couleur, a mulatre, as I am. It is my understanding that the British are not quite as enlightened as the French on the treatment of such men as us. By the way, how did you come to have your freedom?"

"Gibran was born free," Sequoia answered for him. "His parents are both teachers in London."

"I see," Bobo said, looking first at Sequoia, then at Gibran. His eyes indicated some degree of suspicion or so I surmised. "Your parents would find little work on Saint Domingue. We have no schools on the island."

"No schools?" Gibran frowned.

"Education has no value on Saint Domingue. The labor is simple. Management is simple. Education would be a waste of time and resources. It would add precious little to the output of the slaves if the managers were educated and everyone knows that educating the slaves themselves would be disastrous."

"Why?" Terzah asked.

The look he gave Terzah was one that would have been appropriate for an adult looking at a child who has asked a comical question. "Educated slaves are discontented slaves," he said. "Whatever troubles we have currently would be magnified by a great factor if the slaves were educated."

"You seem very well educated," Terzah said.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle. Those, such as myself, who must obtain the education of a gentleman, must go to France. This guarantees that education is restricted to a small portion of the population who are deserving. Widespread education, on the other hand, can only ruin the simple life we have here."

Terzah continued to stare at Bobo, which I must admit made me a bit uncomfortable. "You said that you are a mulatre." she said.

"That is obvious enough, my dear. In any event, my mother was a slave from Guinea and my father was her master, a very wealthy planter named Raymond Blanchard. I was the favorite of my father's bastard children. I was even sent to France to be educated since, as I've said, there are no schools in Saint Domingue, even for white children. "

"You seem very wealthy for someone who is not grand blanc," Gibran said.

"You are not acquainted with the conditions on Saint Domingue, I can see. On this island, the hommes des couleur have acquired a good deal of wealth. As for me, I acquired my first landholding as an inheritance from my father. My own industriousness and good business sense has allowed me to transform Anacoana into one of the largest plantations in this part of the island. It has not been easy, I assure you. Slaves are lazy and need constant attention. I expend a good deal of resources on the management of the slaves. This draws resources away from more fruitful uses, such as more land or new equipment and buildings. The problem of getting work out of slaves is a constant worry of my overseers." He turned and looked at Bernard. "Bernard was, for a time, one of my field overseers. He was particularly efficient at getting work out of the slaves. It was with some difficulty that I decided to bring him to the main house to work beside me. I feared that I might be losing a good deal of output by doing so." Bernard did not smile or otherwise show any emotion. Bobo turned back to us. "Bernard keeps things running in this house. He is very stern with the house slaves, but understands that they require a more delicate touch than those working in the fields. And he manages the field overseers for me. It frees me for more intellectual pursuits."

"It is very hot in the fields," Terzah said. "How do your slaves take the heat and humidity . . . and the mosquitoes?" Yes, I thought, how do they take the mosquitoes?

"They are born to such work," Bobo replied. "They are hardier than Europeans. Nevertheless, many of them die prematurely, leaving me with the need to find replacements. That is not, however, much of a problem. The supply is plentiful. We import thousands of Africans every year. I think perhaps that is part of the problem in the North, too much supply has resulted in problems."

"Perhaps," Sequoia said, "the oversupply has only resulted in overseers working the slaves too hard, realizing that they are easily replaced. This overwork may cause slaves to revolt."

Bobo nodded. "That is a theory," he said, thoughtfully.

"What will happen if the slaves prevail?" Gibran asked.

"Impossible," Bobo responded immediately. "Without Saint Domingue, France's economic progress would be severely crippled. Our slaves produce two-thirds of the export earnings of France. They produce most of the coffee and sugar used in Europe. The dye stuffs and precious woods our slaves make available are now world renowned. France uses the earnings from our slaves to increase industry, to build new mansions for the French aristocrats, to put in new roads and harbors, to fund schools and universities, and to pay the legions of civil servants and soldiers needed for Imperial France. French prosperity is founded upon the labor of our slaves. No, the slaves cannot prevail. If we cannot stop them, then France will stop them." He leaned back in his chair. "I do not believe it will come to that, however. I am confident that we can eliminate this threat to civility on Saint Domingue." He smiled. "I am certain that your country will do what it can to help us in this endeavor."

Sequoia nodded agreeably.

"Why are you not married?" Terzah asked.

"I *was* married, to a French woman named Marie." He smiled and looked away for a moment, as if in deep contemplation. "Before I married Marie, I bought a letters-patent which certified my whiteness." I thought he was about to laugh, but then he looked serious and stared at Gibran. "Again, this is not something available to you Gibran. The British are far too rigid on such issues. Even if you are free, you can never be certified white in Britain."

"Yes," Gibran said, "it is tragic that the British have not been more enlightened on such issues."

"Where is Marie now?" Terzah asked.

Bobo looked surprised at the question. "Ah, I failed to mention that Marie died. She could not adapt to the climate, I suppose." I sensed that he was hiding something, but was not about to ask any personal questions for fear he would also ask such questions of me. "You have so many questions," he continued, then smiled. "Are you sure you are not British spies?"

"I assure you, Monsieur Bobo, we are not spies," Sequoia said.

Bobo nodded. "Yes, I am quite certain that you are not a spy," he said directly to Sequoia. "The British may be smart, but not quite that smart."

5

After dinner we were taken on a tour of the plantation. Only Sequoia was able to ride a horse, so she and Bobo rode while the rest of us climbed into a one-horse drawn wagon driven by Bernard. The ride was uncomfortable and I thought I would get motion sickness. Nevertheless, I tried to pay attention to the surroundings. The plantation was large with numerous buildings. The starting point of our tour, Bobo's mansion, was surrounded by elaborate gardens full of lemon, orange, and banana trees. We also observed vegetable gardens tended by African women in thin dresses. The lifeblood of the plantation was the sugar cane fields that surrounded the center portion of the plantation where the mansion was situated. The Africans working in the fields ---men mostly bare-chested and women in the same thin dresses as we'd seen near the plantation house---were covered in perspiration, even though the worst of the heat was yet to come. We watched as one of the overseers yelled at one poor woman who had collapsed in the heat. The man was about to hit the woman with a whip until he noticed our little tour group. Bobo told Bernard to talk to the man. "Bernard," Bobo said, "please remind him that we have guests." And to us Bobo said, "Sometimes they become a bit overzealous in their efforts. As I've said, it is not always easy to get the slaves to work. They tend to work very slowly unless a bit of incentive is added."

The heat and humidity were intense, even in the morning. And the mosquitoes were no less active in the day than they had been the night before, or so it seemed. I wondered if the slaves were ever given water. I could not imagine working in such conditions without lots of water, but I never saw anyone stop to drink.

The slaves had cabins and small patches of land surrounding them to raise vegetables for their own consumption. The slaves were responsible for feeding themselves in the little time they had after working Bobo's fields. We were also shown buildings for processing the sugar cane and making rum. "Tonight I shall see to it that you have plenty of rum to drink," Bobo promised, although I cannot say I looked forward to this. There were also buildings for workshops to build things necessary for the plantation and repair machinery. Terzah asked if the Africans were allowed to learn skills, such as Henri Francois had demonstrated, and to buy their freedom. "Henri Francois was a special case," he said. "My father allowed him to construct furniture. He had a gift for it. Normally we do not allow slaves to perform crafts. It is not their place. The petite blanc are hired to perform wood work, metal smithing and other such trades. It is important for the petite blanc to feel that this plantation is vital to sustaining their families."

"The creation of loyalty," Sequoia said.

"That's correct," Bobo said.

"Caste," I muttered, mostly to myself, although Bobo heard the comment.

"What is *caste*?" He asked.

"It is a term from India," I said. "It means to assign individuals certain types of work based upon their . . ." I hesitated, not sure of the word to use, realizing that I could not use genetic heritage.

"birth," Sequoia completed my sentence for me.

Bobo nodded. "We are all born to certain rights and responsibilities, yes? This is as it should be. Like in Plato."

"*The Republic*," Sequoia said.

"You've read it?"

"Yes," Sequoia replied.

He nodded. "You constantly surprise me, Mademoiselle."

We watched as the overseer and Bernard ordered a couple of male slaves to pick up the sick woman and carry her to a cart designed for transporting sugar cane.

"What are the things that make us human?" He asked, watching this event. "It has been a question that I have asked many times, starting in my childhood."

"And do you have an answer?" Sequoia asked.

He shook his head. "Sadly," he said, "no."

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