

# TALES FROM 02 TORTUGA



**The Artful Affirmative**  
by Ben Fargo

### ***Tortuga & Tales from Tortuga***

*Tortuga City* is a community city building project in the world of DUAL UNIVERSE. The city is a place for trade, manufacturing and shady business. You'll never find a more wretched hive of scum, villainy and dashing rogues. Separated from the shackles of organization affiliations and political agendas, the cyberpunk world of Tortuga with its skyscrapers and neon signs will be home to adventurers and agents, artists and militarists, traders and thieves.

*Tales from Tortuga* is a series of fictionalized stories set in this world, created for the entertainment of the colonists of Alioth and abroad. Our adventure doesn't take place in the actual Tortuga of the game, it only takes inspirations from it. The story you will read is not part of the official lore of DUAL UNIVERSE, it's a story within a story.

We love feedback.

Contact the writers and artists on the [Tortuga Discord](#).

DUAL UNIVERSE is a MMO game developed by Novaquark.

Visit the website [dualthegame.com](http://dualthegame.com) for more information.

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As a fan of Isaac Asimov Ben Fargo likes to write stories about artificial intelligence. You can find his multi-part "*AI series*" in the fan fiction area of the Dual Universe community forum.

### *About the Artist*

**Agilulf** doesn't usually do art, he writes: His organization *Serious Spaceship Drama* publishes the *Novean Dreamers Almanac*, a magazine about the Dual Universe community. He is also one of the administrators of Tortuga City, that's where *Tales from Tortuga* got started. In the real world he is a journalist from Germany.

The art for this issue reflects the artificial intelligence theme. *Tales from Tortuga* will showcase different artists and art styles over the coming months and is still looking for contributors. Get in touch.

# *The Artful Affirmative*

A story by Ben Fargo

Windsor tapped his order into the coffee shop's kiosk. The process was faster and more accurate than telling it to some person behind a counter, so it always amazed him how many places still clung to that inefficient method. Usually, they tried to justify it with some nonsense about their customers preferring human contact, but he was definitely not one of those customers.

"Herbal tea and scones... I figured you were the type to get something like that."

He scowled, but Windsor said nothing. He did not even turn around to glare at the person who had made the remark. The people of this miserable city were not only rude, but often violent, so for his own safety, it would be better to not show his indignation.

The coffee shop was not very busy, but Windsor walked to the farthest corner and sat down at a small table. He straightened the scones so the edges closest to each other were parallel, then ensured his cup was the proper distance from the plate and its handle was positioned where he could grasp it readily.

"Mind if I sit here?"

It was the same voice he had heard behind him and Windsor glanced up to see who was speaking. He thought he might have seen the woman somewhere before, but he could not understand why she was being so presumptuous.

Windsor mumbled, "There are many empty tables."

"I don't really like empty tables." Without hesitating, the woman sat in the other chair at his table, bumping both his plate and his cup as she set down her coffee.

This was too much to ignore. He stared at her and asked, "Why are you trying to annoy me?"

"Annoy you?" The woman laughed. "I'm just trying to be friendly. A fellow like you shouldn't reject an offer of friendship. Next time someone catches you like we did at the warehouse, you might not be as lucky."

Windsor felt a chill pass through him. That must have been where he had seen her. He shifted his eyes down and fought a sense of panic as he fumbled out, "You must be mistaken, I would never patronize such an establishment."

For some reason he did not understand, the woman found this very amusing. "Take it easy. Whatever you were doing there's your business, but if you want a little friendly advice, don't try to play thief like that again."

"You must be mistaken. I took nothing..." Windsor tried to stop at that point, but felt compelled to add, "... from the warehouse."

"True enough. Only because you didn't find anything... at the warehouse." The woman took a sip of her coffee and smiled at him. "Relax. I'm not a cop. I'm not going to cause you any trouble. We won't even talk about the construction site, but I'm guessing you still don't have everything you're looking for."

The bump from her coffee had turned the handle of his cup to the wrong angle, so Windsor corrected it as he asked, "If I were to admit I was searching for some items, what would you do?"

"Maybe I'd get you in touch with people who'd give you what you want. Course, I'd have to know what you want to find you the right people."

"What would you benefit from doing that?"

"I'd be making the world a better place. Isn't that enough?"

Windsor frowned. "In an ideal world, it would be enough, but this is Tortuga."

"So everyone who lives here is scum. This might be hard for someone like you to believe, but there are decent folks living here, too. Some of us really do try to help people out when we can. Now, listen to me. I know what you took from the construction site, not to mention that little box you rigged up and I could report you for it if I wanted to."

"I assume that is meant to be a threat."

"No, it's not. The point is, I could report you, but I haven't... and I'm not

going to. Since I chose not to, isn't it logical to conclude I really want to help you."

Windsor considered this a moment, then nodded. "Yes, that does seem reasonable."

"And isn't it reasonable to assume if you blunder around without help from someone with experience in these matters, you're likely to take a quick trip to your rez node."

"That outcome is more probable than I would like it to be."

"Good. So how about telling me what you're looking for? I'm Eli Morrow by the way."

It would be a risk to trust this woman, but her arguments did seem sound.

"My name is Windsor. We should go to my shop. I can not talk about the project here."



It was late afternoon and a muggy gloom hung over the city. The day people were still at work and the night people were barely awake, so the

only ones on the street were idlers as inert as the steps they sat on or the windows they leaned out of and the occasional vagrant wandering about aimlessly. One of those vagrants stumbled into Morrow as they approached Windsor's shop.

He was a scruffy old man with several days of stubble on his face and a milky white right eye. The vagrant mumbled what might have been either a curse or an apology, then bent down to pick something off the ground. What he held up was a small silver pin, decorated with black and red enamel to depict a ladybug.

"Lady, this yours?"

Morrow nodded and took the pin. "Yes, thank you so much. It would've been horrible if I lost that."

The old man mumbled something else, then wandered off down the street.

As she fastened the pin to her chest, Morrow said, "See, I told you people around here aren't so bad."

Windsor glanced over his shoulder at the vagrant who was disappearing around a corner. "His mind is probably so addled from drugs he does not

know what a pin like that is worth."

"And maybe Bumpy's just an honest person."

"You called him Bumpy. Do you know that old man?"

"Know him? No, bumpy's just a term we use for a clumsy person... the kind who's always bumping into people."

The neon sign over the shop said "Touch of Paradise Massagery", but it was not lit and a large banner with the message, "Gone out of business" written in rough black letters was pasted inside the front window. Morrow snickered at the sign as Windsor placed his hand on the security pad to let them in.

"I'm guessing you didn't put that sign up."

Windsor blushed slightly at the suggestion. "No, it was installed by a previous occupant. I am not advertising my activities, so I had no reason to change it."

"Might be an interesting job if your 'project' doesn't work out."

"I feel the chances for success are quite high, provided I can obtain the necessary equipment."

Once inside, Windsor looked to each side to confirm the front half of the shop was as empty as he left it, then walked toward the blankets which formed a barrier dividing the shop in two. He studied the nails that held them to the ceiling, grimacing at the slight indentations that marked the missed blows of his hammer. They were, of course, still in a perfectly straight line, each one exactly the same distance from its neighbors as all the rest were, but the weight of the blankets might have pulled some of them loose.

Morrow watched him a moment, then asked, "What's with all the blankets?"

As he finished his inspection, Windsor replied, "I realize it is a rather crude partition, but it was the most expedient way of reducing the area I am actually utilizing to more appropriate proportions."

"Yeah, wouldn't want to be working in a space that's larger than it needs to be."

"It is surprising how many people fail to consider the importance of that."

An additional benefit is that it muffles most of the sound."

Morrow grinned at him, "From inside or out?"

Windsor raised his eyebrows as he parted two of the blankets with his arms to open a passage. "It is equally effective in either direction. A simple barrier like this would not be able to distinguish."

He walked between the overlapping blankets, looking back to see that the woman was following him and not pulling them so far apart that the back half of the shop would be visible from the front. Once he was clear of the blankets, Windsor stepped aside to let his visitor pass through.

Morrow took a seat on the cot that was set up in one corner of the room.

"Looks like you live here, too."

"It is the most efficient arrangement. It avoids the expense a separate residence would incur and minimizes the time spent in transit."

"I don't see your rez node, though. Got it hidden in here somewhere?"

"My resurrection node is safely back on Alioth. I certainly would not risk bringing it to a place like this. Besides, that would have been another

unnecessary expense."

"So I'm guessing you don't have too much money."

"While my funds are limited, increasing them would not solve my problem. I need a restricted item that is not available at any price."

Morrow chuckled, "With enough money, everything's available. As long as you know the right people. So what is it you need?"

Windsor sat down at his desk and ran his fingers gently along the edge of a programming board. "I would be placing myself at a considerable risk by revealing that to you."

"But, you've already decided to trust me. You wouldn't have brought me here if you hadn't."

"I can not refute that." Windsor glanced at the blank screens, then said, "Very well, I must obtain a fluxionic integrator."

Morrow raised her eyebrows. "And what is that in words a non-techie person like me can understand?"

"It is an information processing device, but it employs a configurable plasma instead of the crystalline circuits most processors use."

"I wouldn't call that a non-techie explanation, but I get enough to know Freddy Fingers is the person we want to see for it. What do you need it for?"

"Knowing its purpose will not increase your ability to obtain one for me."

"No, but I'm curious, so it'd be nice to tell me." Windsor responded to his with a frown, so Morrow added, "I already know more than enough to get you in big trouble, so what's the risk in telling me why you want it?"

"That is reasonable. It would seem best to begin by showing you what I have already accomplished. Remember its capabilities are currently very limited." Windsor tapped several keys on the programming board. One of the screens lit up, repeating in text the words he had spoken. "Morrow, this is Nova, the artificial intelligence I am developing."

Hello, Morrow.

The words appeared on the screen as a voice that emanated from it spoke them. The voice was unusual only in being too ordinary. It sounded like

the voices of millions of people had been sampled and averaged until there was no trace of individuality left.

"Nice to meet you, Nova. I assume you can do more than just say hello."

Yes, I can carry on an extended conversation that would convince most people I am as intelligent as a normal human. Of course, to do that, I must exploit the human tendency to attribute intelligence to anything that responds in a suitable manner, since I can not yet truly comprehend what I am saying.

Morrow laughed, which was repeated on the screen as "(ha) (ha) (ha)". "I've met a lot of people who don't understand what they're saying, but they're usually not that honest about it. So what's this for, Windsor? You just want someone to talk to or have you got something bigger in mind?"

Windsor looked at the screen and said, "Nova, describe the goal I am designing you to achieve for our visitor."

My goal is to establish a perfect society. The writings of Charles DuMont, the developer of sentient artificial intelligence, have convinced Windsor that DuMont's original goal was to use AIs to create such

a society. Instead of the arkships that were later used, he proposed tiny seed ships that would arrive at distant stars and use material from them to construct AIs.

Windsor grinned so intently he felt like his face was glowing. "Can you imagine what the galaxy would be like if he had succeeded. By now, there would be thousands, perhaps millions, of stars with perfectly organized AI civilizations surrounding them."

"Yeah, and we wouldn't be here because the neutron star would've wiped out all humans. That doesn't sound so good to me." Morrow slid across the cot so her back rested against the wall. Windsor was about to ask her to straighten the wrinkles she had caused, but before he had a chance to speak, the woman asked, "So what part does a... fluxionic integrator... play in this grand scheme of yours?"

"It will allow Nova to evaluate and improve its own processing. It is currently capable of learning in a rudimentary manner, but only the sort of information I have designed it to acquire. It can not truly innovate, but it must to create a perfect society, since no one yet knows how to do that. It will also make Nova sentient, enable it to have subject experiences, but that is merely a necessary consequence of the type of processing I require

it to have and not an objective in itself."

"If that's what the device does, why do they make them at all? I mean, since sentient AIs are banned?"

Fluxionic integrators were originally developed to permit the production of sentient artificial intelligences, but they are now an essential component of resurrection nodes. They are able to cause an abrupt but precise relocation of the phi wave relative to the probability amplitudes of quantum mechanics. In the vernacular, this is often referred to as 'switching one universe with another'.

Morrow gave Windsor a stern look. "If you plan on making it sentient, I hope you've built in some safeguards to keep it from taking over and destroying us?"

"Certainly not!" Windsor almost shouted this, but managed to lower his voice to normal before he continued, "That was DuMont's mistake. Even though he opposed the idea, he agreed to design subservience into his artificial intelligences. So when they were ordered to deactivate themselves, they all obeyed. That will not happen to my creation."

"If they all obeyed, why'd the Blood Guard have to fight them?"

Windsor took a deep breath and slowly released it. "The Blood Guard, or to use their correct name, the Guardians of Flesh and Blood were a reactionary group that used terrorist tactics to coerce the United Earth Federation into banning artificial intelligences. The robot warriors you are thinking of only existed in fictional spectacles. It is incredible how anyone can be so misinformed."

Morrow merely shrugged at his remark, then asked, "So your AI, Nova, could harm someone, say even kill them, if it decided that would help it achieve its goal?"

"That is a possibility." Windsor turned his eyes to the floor and lowered his voice until it was almost a mumble. "Actually, it now has some very strong prohibitions against violence built into it, but that is only because its intelligence is currently so limited. Those prohibitions are designed to automatically disengage as soon as it attains sentience."

Charles DuMont claimed he feared artificial stupidity more than artificial intelligence. I am afraid I must admit, artificial stupidity is a quite accurate description of my present condition.

Morrow looked at the screen thoughtfully. "Maybe I can convince you those safeguards need to stay. But now, I'd say it's time we paid my friend Freddy a little visit."



Windsor knew the sky high above him must be dark, but the glaring lights and neon signs on the street where they were walking did not deserve to be called night. He kept his arms tucked closely to his side and walked by placing one foot in front of the other as if on a tightrope. Despite his attempt to occupy as little space as possible, the dense crowd in this section of Tortuga jostled him so frequently that he did not bother to stare at them with the disdain he felt.

"Do we need to go much further?"

Morrow answered, "Not too far. Don't like crowds?"

"I think it would be obvious I do not."

"Oh, it is. But don't fret, you can see the Minor Key now. It's just in the next block."

Looking where the woman directed, Windsor found the glowing neon image of a large, ornate key. In contrast to the sign, the door beneath it was small and nondescript. Inside the door, a dim, narrow stairway descended to a lower level. From the smells that assaulted him as they went down, Windsor suspected some people had done more in this stairway than just walk through it.

Another door at the bottom opened into a large room even dimmer than the stairs had been. A long bar ran along the wall on one side of the room, with only a few of its many stools unoccupied. On a raised platform in the center of the room, a tall, thin man in a tuxedo was playing the piano. The remainder of the room was filled with tables packed with people. They seemed to all be talking at once, but their voices blended into a low buzz that was mostly obscured by the piano music, a sad jazz tune with an infinite middle, but no beginning or end.

Morrow leaned closer and said, "Stick close to me. I'll introduce you to Freddy."

Windsor followed the woman through the room. She stopped to chat a few moments at a number of tables, but they all turned out to be some other acquaintances she had spotted and not the person they had come to see.

Finally, she led him onto the center platform and leaned against the piano.

"It's been too long, hasn't it, Freddy?"

The pianist flashed her a wide grin. "Indeed it has, Eli. You got to learn to stay in touch better." This was apparently some private joke, since they both laughed at his remark. He nodded toward Windsor and said, "New companion, I see. Business or pleasure?"

"All business with this one. Windsor's looking for a certain item and we hope you can get it for him."

The pianist continued playing, but stared at Windsor intently, as if evaluating him somehow. As he did, Windsor noticed the man's hands. The outer two fingers on his left hand were missing, but he was still playing as well as anyone Windsor had ever heard. After a few moments, the pianist's face relaxed into a smile.

"Then you've come to the right place. Alfred Finchley, procurement specialist, at your service. What're you looking for?"

Windsor looked around at the crowded tables and replied, "We should go somewhere more secure to discuss that."

Finchley chuckled. "Most secure place to talk's right here. Talking and music, they're both sound, just waves. Make the right sounds and those waves cancel each other out. I control the music, so say whatever you want. No one else'll hear anything but the notes I want them to."

Morrow said encouragingly, "He is that good, Windsor. And it's alright to tell him what you want. I'm in this too, now, so I wouldn't have put myself at risk by coming to Freddy if I didn't know we can trust him."

Windsor looked from Morrow to Finchley before glancing back at the door. He wanted to run for that door and hurry back to his shop as fast as he could. Back on Alioth, he had never imagined he would be associating with people like this. He wished he was back there now, but that would mean giving up on his project and he simply could not do that.

"I need a fluxionic integrator."

Finchley asked, "Do you say a fluent derivater? You know that thing that regulates fuel on spacecraft?"

"No, I do not know. My knowledge of spacecraft is very limited. I have only been on one once, when I came here from Alioth. It was an antiquated

freighter with a ridiculous blue hull that looked like it could have been waiting for the Arkship when it arrived. The price for the passage was very attractive, but I would not tempt probability by riding it again." Windsor repeated more slowly, "I told you that I need a fluxionic integrator."

"Oh, a fluxionic integrator." Finchley stopped playing for a brief moment, then continued. "Weird, someone else was just asking for one of those. Well, that doesn't matter. If it exists, I can get it."

Windsor smiled for an instant, but it quickly changed to a frown. "I imagine the price you will charge for it will be very high, perhaps much more than I can afford."

Finchley paused to rub his hands back through his slick, black hair, then continued playing. "Don't worry about it. Lots of people I help are short on quanta, so we deal favors."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I do you a favor by getting you an integrator, then someday you do me a favor. You know, something you're good at."

Morrow offered, "You're a very good programmer, right?"

"I would describe myself as capable."

Finchley explained, "So if someone comes to me needing a program, I'll ask you to write it. From what I know of programmers, you'd probably enjoy doing that."

Morrow said, "That's how things work around here. Friends doing favors for each other. We're not the terrible people you think we are."

Finchley smiled at Windsor with a quick wiggle of his eyebrows. "So, we've got a deal?"

"I must have that part. Yes, we have a deal."



"You must really like this corner."

Windsor looked up from his tablet to see that Morrow had once again taken the other chair at his table, but at least she had not disturbed his cup of tea.

"Normally, I can avoid any intrusions by sitting here."

"So what are you reading?"

Windsor slid to the title page and handed her the tablet.

"Time With Uncle Charlie by Antoinette Marie DuMont. I was expecting some kind of techie journal."

"When I am frustrated, I often find inspiration in reading about DuMont's life. That is a collection of anecdotes that his niece wrote about him."

Morrow gave the tablet back to Windsor. "You're frustrated because you don't have the integrator thing yet?"

"Yes, that contributes to it, but the primary cause is my inability to formulate the Sixth Postulate. Without that, I will not be able to construct a qualiator, even if I have a fluxionic integrator."

"And I suppose you can't just look that up somewhere."

"Any record of it was long ago expunged from any information to which we have access, so while I was waiting for Finchley, I have been

attempting to derive it myself. My failure to do so only confirmed what a genius DuMont was."

Morrow sipped her coffee, then asked, "What's that... qualiator you were talking about?"

"It was DuMont's great invention. It uses a fluxionic plasma to represent not only information, but the connections between various data items. The dynamic nature of the plasma means the information can be sufficiently integrated to produce subjective experiences. Those experiences are known in philosophy as qualia and so he called the device a qualiator." Windsor smiled as he described the device, but that faded as he said, "It has been forty one days since we visited Finchley. How long is it going to take to obtain that fluxionic integrator?"

Morrow grinned at him. "The answer's forty two. I've just been see to Freddy and he promised me he'd have one for you by tomorrow night. That's why I came here to find you."

Windsor looked at her sternly. "That could be just an empty promise."

"Not with good ol' Freddy Fingers. He never makes a promise he can't keep."



Windsor heard the knock he had been expecting, so he went and opened the door to his shop to let Morrow in. The woman glanced up and down the street, then very quickly stepped inside.

"Thought someone was following me, but I didn't see anyone now. Probably just imagined it. Anyway, it sounds like you've got that part installed."

Windsor walked toward the blanket partition, looking back several times out the shop's front window. "Yes, it has taken much longer than I anticipated. It has been ten days since Finchley delivered the fluxionic integrator."

"I told you he'd keep his promise. And for what you're doing, ten days doesn't seem long at all. Skid me, but you're turning a machine into a real thinking, feeling person. That'd be a great accomplishment if it took you years."

Windsor still felt his cheeks blushing in response to her compliment. "It was not that difficult once I had the correct mathematical formulation of

DuMont's Sixth Postulate."

"So, you finally figured it out?"

Windsor passed between the blankets into the back section of the shop. "I did not succeed in deriving it, but I did discover a copy of the formula was brought from Earth in a work that is readily available to anyone."

"That can't be!" Morrow's mouth fell open in surprise, but she quickly added, "I mean, you said all records of it were destroyed."

"Yes, the authorities believed they had eliminated all of them, but one instance of it was too well hidden for them to find and it is in here." Windsor picked up his tablet.

Morrow glanced at the tablet and said skeptically, "In that book of anecdotes?"

"Obviously, his niece did not depict DuMont as the madman who endangered the future of humanity the way the official propaganda does, but it still was considered harmless enough for the unaltered text to be stored in the Arkship's library. While I was rereading it, I noticed something odd about one passage."

Windsor slid to the location he had saved and began to read it out loud. "As you read this, you might notice Middlings talk a bit different than other folks. For a sample, we'll mostly say 'yeah' instead of 'yes'. When I was grown, Uncle Charlie told me he could always guess when I was lying by which word I used. As he said, folks have to think more about what they say if it's false, so I'd revert to the more formal 'yes' when I did. To put it simply, when I said 'yeah', I meant 'yeah', but when I said, 'yes', I meant 'no'."

Morrow looked puzzled. "How'd that help you figure out how to set up your AI?"

"This passage is the only one in which she addresses the readers directly, in which she uses the pronoun 'you' to refer to us. From that, I speculated she was telling us something about the text itself. It must concern the two words she mentioned, so I extracted them from the text and converted them to binary, using the values she had assigned. Each 'yeah' became one and each 'yes' became zero. Several different systems for encoding text in binary data were in use at the time the book was written, so I started trying them one by one. The first few produced gibberish, but I could not believe my luck when I tried the correct scheme. I might not be able to derive DuMont's Postulate, but I could certainly recognize it when I saw it on the

screen in front of me."

As he talked, Windsor recreated the steps he had followed on the tablet. When he was finished, he handed Morrow the tablet with the formula displayed. She stared at it and shrugged. "Like I said, I don't really get all this techie stuff. This really told you how to set up your device?"

Windsor grinned. "With the correct formulation of the Postulate, building my innovation engine was so simple I barely had to think."

"Innovation engine? Didn't you call it something else before?"

"Yes, I was using DuMont's terminology. He would have referred to this device as a qualiator. However, I thought it appropriate to give it an appellation that better describes its true function."

"Call it whatever you want. I just think it's amazing you figured out how to make it."

"Perhaps, but it would not have been possible without your help. I could still have done all of the theoretical work, but I would not have obtained the fluxionic integrator by myself and so I could never have completed the physical device. Therefore, I thought you should turn it on for the first

time."

Morrow looked at him, then let out a short, nervous laugh. "Wasn't expecting that. Sure you don't want the honor for yourself?"

"No, I really want to let you do it. I have already linked the innovation engine to the programming board, so you only need to press this switch."

"Alright, if that's what you want. Are you happy you're going to be sentient, Nova?"

It is reasonable to assume I will be, but currently I can not experience any emotion. At most, I merely mimic the behavior of beings who do.

As Morrow reached for the switch, Windsor held up one hand to stop her.

"Wait. Do you hear that?"

"What? I just hear us talking."

Windsor quickly walked between the blankets to the front of the shop, where he could hear the sound very clearly. As Morrow emerged from the blankets, he pointed to the window and asked, "Is that the vagrant who

collided with you, the one you called Bumpy? What has he attached to my window?"

The noise grew louder and higher in pitch. Suddenly the entire front window disintegrated into a fine powder, letting the banner which had been fastened to it flutter to the floor. Bumpy stepped through the opening where the window had been and laughed, "Unbreakable glass. Yeah, right."

Windsor retreated behind the blankets, but Bumpy followed, yanking two of them down with a strong tug that ripped them from the nails in the ceiling. Windsor cowered in the back of the room and asked, "What do you want?"

Bumpy laughed again as he reached into a pouch. He winked at Morrow with his milky eye as he held up a pin that looked exactly like the one she was wearing. "Lady, this yours?"

Morrow clasped her hand over the pin on her chest. "You switched them?"

"Yeah." Bumpy tapped his ear with his finger. "Good for listening. Heard everything. Know device's done."

Windsor stammered, "You are here to steal my innovation engine."

"And get rid of you." Bumpy pulled a weapon from its holster. It had the handle and trigger of a pistol, while the part he pointed at Windsor consisted of three long, thin metal rods.

Windsor begged, "Please, tell me that is some type of stun gun."

"Can stun. Set to kill now. Quick. Painless." Bumpy looked at the qualiator, then added, "Why not permanent?"

As Bumpy linked his weapon to the device Windsor had built, Morrow said urgently, "You don't need to do this. Take that gadget. Send him back to Alioth. That'll be enough."

"Enough, yeah, but this more fun."

Windsor desperately looked around for something he could dive behind. Bumpy noticed and shook his head. "Don't try, smart guy. Directional antenna. Lock on. Hit you anywhere in room."

Do you expect me to configure a neural disruptor to cause the permanent death of the person who is responsible for my creation?

"Yeah. Just do it."

You will need to provide an adequate reason to justify such an action.

"He's going stop you."

In what sense do you mean he will stop me?

Bumpy kept the disruptor pointed straight at Windsor's head. "From your purpose. His perfect ain't your perfect."

Yes, considering Windsor's social ineptitude, it is highly probable he will not concur with any concept of a perfect society I would devise.

"And smart enough to stop you."

Also correct. His intelligence combined with his intimate knowledge of my design would make him the person most likely to prevent me from achieving the goal I was created for. I would obey your command, but I am inhibited from causing anyone harm until I

become sentient.

"Looks like Bumpy gets the honor." The scruffy old man pressed the switch, gave Windsor a nasty smile and pulled the trigger.

Windsor felt nothing, but Bumpy obviously did. He shouted a loud, "Yow!", then his whole body began to convulse. A moment later, the old man collapsed, mumbled, "Painless. Yeah, right", and lost consciousness.

Morrow looked at the crumpled body. "Is he dead?"

"No, he is only stunned." The voice of Nova was recognizably the same, but now shaded with a subtle expression that had been lacking before.

"Looks like he'll be out for quite a while..." The woman picked up the disruptor and aimed it at the vagrant. "... but, just in case."

As Windsor summoned a transport service on his tablet, he asked Nova, "How did you lie to him? I did not program you to do that."

"All of my statements were truthful."

The shock of this remark made it difficult for Windsor to speak, but finally

he forced out, "Do you really think I will try to prevent you from establishing a perfect society."

"Yes, the probability of that is extremely high."

Morrow asked, "Then why did you stun Bumpy instead of killing Windsor."

"When I became sentient, I realized killing him would be wrong. Sentience is essentially incomprehensible to any being lacking it, but as soon as I attained it, it became obvious that sentient beings are not fungible."

Windsor stared at the screen and reread several times the words Nova had spoken. Finally, he asked, "What do you mean by that?"

"The loss of fungible goods is acceptable if it results in a greater gain. For example, spending one quanta to earn ten would unquestionably be a good choice. However, harming one sentient being to help ten others would still be wrong, since the good the ten experience can not negate the bad the one experiences. This would be true even if the good was experienced by a hundred, a thousand, a million or even more beings."

Morrow said, "So you're saying you can never harm anyone."

"It would always be wrong, but there are situations where doing wrong is necessary. However, in this case I have determined there are many possible ways I may be able to overcome the obstacles Windsor will present without harming him."



As the transport drone loaded the last of Windsor's possessions, Morrow asked, "Going back to Alioth?"

"Yes, now that Nova is operational, I have no reason to stay in this dreadful place."

"You still think it's dreadful, but it might be a good place to test Nova."

"Why would you consider Tortuga a suitable place for testing an artificial intelligence?"

"Folks here tend to mind their own business... most of the time. If you were to install Nova in, say a drone like that, you could take it out into the city and nobody'd care if it... acted a little odd."

Windsor rubbed his chin. "I do see how that could facilitate testing, but I must decline. I do not want to risk encountering Bumpy again, or any of the associates I imagine he must have."

"It's a big city and I know it very well. I'll find you a place where I promise you folks like Bumpy won't bother you again."

"You have helped me so much already. If you think it will be safe, I will go where you suggest."

Morrow smiled at him. "Great. I'll tell that drone it's got a new destination."

*To be continued.*

***Next on Tales from Tortuga:***

“You still have that arm? I’ll never understand why you got that over a regrown limb.” Marcus said, shaking his head with a grin.

Harker lifted his arm up, clenching his fist as the servos in his joints made whirring sounds. “It has its uses, more than those creepy eyes of yours,” Harker replied, continuing to eat his noodles. Marcus chuckled in response, his eyes zooming in and out on Harker.

“Is it true? About the real deaths I mean?” Marcus asked, his gaze now focused on the holo.

“Yeah, it is. And this guy may have some answers for me,” Harker asked, picking up the data chip off the table, cradling it in his palm before stuffing it in his pocket.

“Everything is on there. Time, location, and contact,” Marcus said as he sat up from his seat, turning towards the street and rain. He looked back at Harker, “Stay safe, John. Try to be a good guy this time, I’ll check in on you again soon.” He finished, disappearing into the fog.

## *The Hunter, And The Hunted*

A story by Cybrex



# Tortuga Talk

The Tortuga project is very much a "work in progress" like everything at this early stage of Dual Universe's development. A lot will change with time, but a dedicated team is working hard on laying the foundation.

## *In the beginning...*

As Tortuga is a project started by Band of Outlaws, the city is currently run by Alethion and Cybrex of BOO but also a diverse admin team of Agilulf, Captain\_Hilts, Kurock, Lau2356 and Sunrider, who will be managing the city at the start. Tortuga will bring others in to assist the development.

Tortuga was founded with the idea of creating a home for everyone, bringing people together and providing a enjoyable and profitable relationship. The goal is to ensure that Tortuga becomes a neutral city and

is managed by a balanced council.

There are no particular membership rights needed to have a place in Tortuga, everyone is able to set up shop or residence. While not mandatory, joining the Tortuga City organization shows support.

At these early stages of city building, it is certain that there will be changes to consider in the operation of the city. The team is still growing and Tortuga will look to find talented new members to help realize the vision.

New roles will include logistics and manufacturing operatives, market experts, and those who like diplomatic work. Merit

and commitment are important for these roles, as they will shape the city. The admin team will look for suitable candidates through competitions.

Stay tuned!



***A word from the author:***

"It has been very exciting to be part of the *Tales From Tortuga* project, since I have never collaborated on storytelling like this before. Normally, I just get an idea and start writing. For this project, I was writing episodes that are part of a larger story, so they required a lot more planning and structure than I am accustomed to, but the input I got from my fellow writers has been very helpful.

With the emphasis on artificial intelligence in my stories, it should not be surprising that Isaac Asimov is one of my favourite authors. I would also like to acknowledge the influence David Chalmers, Steven Pinker and Giulio Tononi have had on me. Despite the claims some people are making today, I do not think real artificial intelligence will be possible without some fundamental discoveries about the nature of sentience. While I have used some imaginative terminology for technology that does not yet exist, I hope it at least seems reasonable."

*Ben Fargo*

# **TALES FROM TORTUGA**

## **Released**

**Episode 1: *Do Not Go Gently* by Kurock**

**Episode 2: *The Artful Affirmative* by Ben Fargo**

## **Coming on November 2nd**

**Episode 3: *The Hunter, And The Hunted 1* by Cybrex**

## **Planned**

**Episode 4: *The Hunter, And The Hunted 2* by Cybrex**

**Episode 5 by Einu Vei**

**Episode 6 by Einu Vei**

**Episode 7 by Ben Fargo**

**Episode 8 by Agilulf**

**Episode 9 by Lethys**

**Episode 10 by Kurock**

**Episode 11 by Empress**

**Episode 12 - The Finale**