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1

2667. It had been the strangest year, and so far it was only three months old. Weather patterns, never the easiest things to predict, had gone mad; the annual polar storms hadn't materialized in the Northern Hemisphere and ravenous wolf packs had moved south out of the Saharan taiga forests, creating havoc; Australia was in the grip of a monsoon season the like of which had never been seen and the Japanese ice cap had begun to melt – with disastrous consequences to the Stilt Cities.

As if that weren't enough, the San Andreas coastline (all that was left of the west coast of America after the Great Quake in 2110 had finally done what it'd been threatening to do for centuries) had gone critical again when a string of dormant volcanoes unexpectedly erupted.

Spenzer Timor was at his workstation, scanning the dozens of hypertext screens that surrounded him, trying to make some kind of sense of the flood of information cascading in front of his eyes. It was his job, as head of Central Data Control, to keep the President up to speed on what was going on in the world outside the United Southern States.

He worked on the top floor of the 50-storey Integrated™ Building in downtown Johannesburg, the USS capital, and sometimes felt as if he was actually a physical part of its complex computer network and not the man supposed

to be in charge of it. Sometimes days went by when he didn't see a real human being, just faintly ghostlike holocasts of people virting in and out of his space.

You didn't really have meetings any more, VirtualContact had made them unnecessary, but sometimes Spenzer missed the real thing – the smell of another person, the tiny details of weight and size that a virt session never gave you.

He was deep in thought, puzzling over the latest dataset – evidence of a curious shift in the earth's magnetic field – when the red light flashed on. For a moment he thought he'd imagined it, that he'd blink and it wouldn't be there any more, but it was. Then a holocast of the President's Secretary-General, Garston Pyce, flicked on.

"Timor," he said. "We need an eftee-eff, as of now!"

Pyce was well known for his use of street slang, he thought it made him appear a man of the people and it took Spenzer a moment to click that he was being asked – ordered, really – to come to the Palace for an urgent face-to-face meeting.

"I'll call a shuttle, sir," he replied.

"There's one waiting for you at the flight deck on your floor," said Pyce, his holocast disappearing without another word.

Spenzer sat back in his chair, pulling at his lower lip. What was going on? Why the sudden urgency – why the need to actually see the President? Frowning to himself he logged in with his staff, telling them he'd be away for at least a couple of hours, and left for the flight deck.

It was midday, and even though he probably wouldn't

have to walk in the open he put on his UV-mesh gloves and white solar helmet, flipping its tinted eye shades down. Better safe than sorry, as even black skin was no protection against the rad levels at noon, and Spenzer had no wish to go blind in his mid-twenties.

A Palace shuttle was hovering by the deck exit as he walked through the doors, its charm-drive motors burbling quietly to themselves. It was pre-programmed, so all he had to do was get in and sit down.

Johannesburg seemed to go on for miles. It had long ago swallowed up Pretoria, but the old capital, now merely one of many districts, was where the Presidential Palace was still located. It was madly inconvenient, but historical reasons were always given for not moving the ceremonial home closer to the central tech-hub.

The shuttle's heavily tinted window allowed Spenzer a magnificent view of the capital. From this vast megasprawl – the word "city" couldn't describe it any more – came the rule of law that governed everyone and everything south of the 20th Parallel. And for the first time in his life, he was about to meet the man at the very top of the power pyramid.

Spenzer Timor couldn't say he was really looking forward to the experience. Something, somewhere, had gone wrong and he had a nasty feeling in the pit of his stomach that he was going to get the blame.

2

Spenzer was led into a relatively small, beautifully furnished room with a long wooden table running down the centre of it. Ten other people were there, most of whom he recognized and a couple that he'd actually met in person. The President hadn't yet arrived, and there was no sign of Garston Pyce either.

A woman stood up and walked towards him. "You must be Timor from Central Data," she said, holding out her hand.

"Yes," said Spenzer, nodding as he shook it.

"I'm Cardoza from Scientific, out in Maraisburg," she went on. "Any idea what this is all about?"

"None at all. I was told to come here by Pyce."

"I think *asked* is a better way of describing it, Timor."

Spenzer swung round to see Garston Pyce walking into the room. Before he had a chance to say anything else the Secretary-General strode past him and went to the head of the table. "The President has asked me to brief you before he arrives, so, if you'll all sit down, I'll get started."

Pyce began speaking in that annoying way most politicians have of treating their audience as if they were very young children. "You will, of course, all know the name Simon Tellkind," he said, pausing. "The man who discovered the Charm Principle some six hundred years ago . . ."

"Six hundred and sixty, to be precise," said an older man opposite Spenzer, the head of Psychic Research – if he remembered correctly.

"Thank you, Parmar." The Secretary-General made his mouth smile. "To continue . . . It cannot have escaped the notice of all present here that there have been some exceedingly odd things happening on a global, as well as a local level – I need not go into detail now. Suffice to say, every one of the Nation States has been monitoring these, shall we say, *bizarre*, occurrences.

"We received a coded hot-link call from the Pan-American Union capital in Buenos Aires late last night, President-to-President." Pyce waited for a moment, as if to let this fact sink in. "It was alarming, to say the least, and we need your joint input before we can reply."

"Cut the speech-making, Garston," said a woman whom Spenzer knew to be the head of Inter-Planetary Activity. "Tell us why we're here."

"I was just coming to that." Pyce looked annoyed, but carried on. "PAU scientists up in the Dallas Cold Zone, researching sub-zero molecular grafting, have apparently discovered some disturbing facts – the reason, so they say, for what's going on. They've called it the Scattering Effect."

"Called what the Scattering Effect?" said Parmar in a gruff, annoyed voice.

"They say that their research shows there's a hidden by-product – one of them referred to it as a 'subatomic exhaust' – from charm-drive engines," continued Pyce, while behind him the wall restructured itself into a

number of screens covered with complex formulae. "It's so small it can hardly be measured, in fact no one has until now . . . no one's bothered to look because they didn't know it was there."

"And what does this so-called subatomic exhaust do, Garston?" asked Parmar.

"To put it crudely," the Secretary-General glared at the head of Psychic Research, "it randomly unglues atomic structures, and has been doing so – as you so kindly pointed out a moment ago – for six hundred and sixty years. The universe is literally falling apart."

"Impossible!" snorted Vena Cardoza. "The Science Agency would have noticed before!"

"We're noticing it now," said Pyce, pointing at Spenzer. "Ask him. Timor, you've got the most up-to-date information: is there *anywhere* on the planet that's not got problems?"

"It's worldwide, Secretary-General, and we've also had some very strange data from out-of-system satellites, as I-PA can verify." The woman from Inter-Planetary Activity nodded in agreement.

"The Dallas experiments have apparently been duplicated at the Arecibo laboratory," Pyce went on, picking up the file. "The Pan Americans only released the information when they were sure it was accurate."

"Is the situation reversible?" asked Cardoza. "Can we halt this . . . this Scattering Effect?"

"As far as I know, the answer to both those questions is no," said Pyce. "But that's why you are all here today – the President wants to hear what you have to say about the

matter; he wants to know what you think can be done."

"And just how long do we have to save the world?" said Parmar, sarcastically.

"The President will be here in an hour," replied Pyce, ignoring Parmar's comment and getting up. "Do what you can."

There was a moment's stunned silence as they all watched Pyce leave the room, and then all hell broke out. Arms waved, voices were raised and tempers flared – if Garston Pyce had tripped the counter on a null-bomb, dropped it on the table and walked out, the reaction to what he'd done wouldn't have been any different.

Spenzer felt numbed. He couldn't quite take in what the Secretary-General had said – partly because he'd said it in such a matter-of-fact way, but mostly because the idea of the universe falling apart was a concept that had the effect of seizing up your ability to think straight. If at all. Looking round the room he could see everyone else was feeling much the same way.

3

Vena Cardoza was the first person to get a grip on herself. Standing up she moved round to the head of the table, where Pyce had left the file. Opening it, she scanned the first few pages of megafiche, tapping a couple of information matrixes to activate them. She read some of the scrolling text, switched the page off and then rapped the table with her knuckles.

"We have fifty-five minutes to come up with something sensible to say to the President," she said as people turned to look at her. "I suggest we start by looking at the file the Secretary-General has left behind – I, for one, want to check those figures."

"You can check all you want, Vena," said a grey-haired man, his white face so lined it looked like it'd been drawn on. "I know both those research teams – Dallas and Arecibo – and they're the best there is. Let's not waste any time checking facts when what we need is ideas."

The room had calmed down now, the tension bubble had burst and people were focusing back on the problem in hand.

"How can something that's been around for so long have such an appalling side-effect, and no one noticed?" said Spenzer. "It's like suddenly finding the *wheel* causes cancer!"

"The wheel's just an object," said the old man. "It

can be fatal if you put one at each corner of a box and hurtle down a steep hill with no brakes. We've known for centuries that for every action there's a *re*action, we just assumed that, with Tellkind's Charm Principle mankind had found the answer to all its prayers – an incredibly cheap, totally clean and completely unlimited source of power."

"And nothing's ever that easy, Barron?" said Vena.

"Precisely," said the old man. "And for over half a millennium we've cheerfully ignored the fact. We did it with fossil fuel, we did it again with nuclear power – why change the habits of so many lifetimes?"

"That's the problem, isn't it?" sighed Spenzer. "We can't change anything in the past – once Pythagoras had conceived his Theorem, and Einstein his Theory, they were there. They couldn't be *un*thought."

"They could have been changed," said Vena as she pored over the file. She was now looking at some encapsulated vid-clips running on the page she'd turned to. "If they didn't work properly."

"$E = MC^2$ works fine," said Spenzer. "It's just a very *dangerous* idea, and nothing can change that."

"Unless . . ." Barron stood up and went to look out of the window.

"Unless what?" Vena glanced across the room, frowning.

"Unless the thought never happened, or it wasn't completed," said Barron. "The eighteenth-century poet Coleridge never finished 'Kubla Khan', one of his most famous poems, because someone interrupted his train of

thought – the ending was lost for ever, all because of a knock at his front door."

"Unfortunately we can't knock on Simon Tellkind's door, can we, Barron?" said Vena, going back to the file. "And even if we could, and we made him forget the Charm Principle, think what catastrophic damage *that* would do to our time-line – everything would change!"

By now everyone in the room had stopped what they were doing and was listening to this conversation. Questions started to fly back and forth, but Spenzer noticed that the old man, Barron, wasn't paying much attention. In fact he'd gone over to a meta-comp screen and was playing with what looked like an extraordinarily complex algebraic maths problem. He went over to talk to him.

"I don't think we've ever met," he said, "not even in virt – I'm Spenzer Timor, head of Central Data."

"Nice to meet you," said the old man, eyes still glued to the screen. "I'm Stave Barron, from Tech-Genesis."

"The research and development outfit in Cape Town?" Spenzer looked surprised. "How did you get here so quickly?"

"I was up, visiting Ms Cardoza," explained Barron, making a note on one of the many sub-screens. "Pure luck I was here, really."

"What are you doing?"

"Checking Tellkind's formulae."

"For what?"

"Mistakes, anomalies and – the more I look at it – possible areas for improvement," said Barron, standing back and

scrutinizing his work. To Spenzer it looked like nothing more than a senseless jumble of letters, numbers and symbols, but his speciality was information: mathematics was an unintelligible foreign language to him.

"There's a phrase I've heard used in old vids," Barron went on. "How did it go? Something like 'If it isn't broken, leave it alone'?"

"It's 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it'," said Spenzer, whose hobby was collecting pre-millennium vids.

"Right," smiled Barron, "and I think that's the attitude everyone's had towards Tellkind's work . . . this may be the first time *any*one's really scrutinized it. Mr Timor, I wonder if you'd mind . . ."

"Of course," said Spenzer. "Carry on."

Spenzer left the old man to his work and went back to the table to join Vena Cardoza as she flicked through the megafiche pages, the thin, circuit-coated paper seeming almost alive with information. And very depressing reading it made, especially as there was less than an hour in which to come up with some kind of solution to the cataclysmic problem they all now faced.

A quarter of an hour later, as he stood with a small knot of people discussing the possibility of devising exhaust traps or maybe subatomic filters, Spenzer saw Stave Barron wave a hand at Vena Cardoza, asking her to come and look at something on the screens.

Vena detached herself from the group she was at the centre of and came to join the old man. "What's up?" she said.

"Tell me what you think." Barron pointed at one particular area on the main screen. "I'd say *that*'s where the problem is, but you'd only know it well after the event. Tellkind would have had no reason to suspect, none at all."

Others in the room had begun to gather round the meta-comp screen, a low murmur filling the room.

"And if you make this *small* change," Barron inserted a slug of data from one of the sub-screens on top of a dense jumble of calculations – "you harmlessly vent what the Dallas boys called subatomic exhaust, yet the Charm Principle still works perfectly."

"Amazing!" Vena shook her head in admiration. "A stunning piece of lateral thought, Stave . . . but how can it help us now? I mean, this innovation of yours is just a tad too late to be of any use. Six hundred and seventy years too late."

"But at least we know *why* it's happening," said Spenzer excitedly, "and now we can stop the process carrying on as well!"

"I'm not trying to undermine what Stave has done," said Vena, raising her hands to calm the rising babble of animated chatter in the room. "It's a quite spectacular mental leap, but it's *not* a solution. And we're running out of time . . ."

She looked around the room at the faces staring back at her, the hope Barron's discovery had given people fading fast as they all realized she was right – knowing what was wrong, and how to put it right, wasn't going to help them now.

"Ordinarily I'd say you were correct," smiled Barron, seemingly unperturbed by Vena's comments. "But I do believe Mr Parmar might have some useful input here. Josh? Could you tell them about the TRiP project?"

The head of Psychic Research reddened slightly as everyone turned to look at him. "Now, Stave?" he said. "Are you *sure*?"

"As good a stage in the proceedings as any, Josh."

"Right . . ." said Parmar, nervously. "I'll try and explain this as simply as possible. TRiP, or Temporal Ribbon Placement, is a process which allows us to remove the electrical essence of a living thing – its soul, if you will – and transmit it along the time-line and into a host mind.

"Our experiments have shown that the host mind is completely taken over by the TRiP subject," Parmar continued, "but the process has only been done successfully – and over *very* short distances, maximum a couple of days – with lower life forms . . . mice, cats, etc. We do, though, *appear* to have made a phenomenal breakthrough."

"For those of you who haven't quite grasped the full import of what Josh is saying," said Barron, looking round the room, "what Temporal Ribbon Placement boils down to is – time travel. Only backwards and, so far, only in tiny jumps, but time travel nonetheless. As he so rightly says, a phenomenal breakthrough . . ."

"You've sent a *cat* back in time?" said Vena.

"We've sent the binary electrical *essence* of a cat back," replied Parmar. "Put it into a mouse, actually!"

4

Josh Parmar – Professor Parmar, to give him his full title – looked like he wanted to find a convenient hole in Time to disappear into. He was unused to being the centre of attention and was discovering very quickly and that he didn't like it at all. The questions were flying at him, nineteen to the dozen, and everyone was talking at once.

"How opportune," said Vena Cardoza, as she once again took command of the increasingly fractious and unruly gathering. "Just when we need it someone's invented time travel. What a coincidence, I don't think . . . How long have you had this thing under wraps, Parmar?"

"It's been a classified project, President's Eyes Only."

"How long?"

"A year, maybe fourteen months," admitted Parmar.

"Incredible! You find what amounts to a scientific Holy Grail and keep it a secret for over a year? But . . ." Vena stopped and shot a frowning glance at Barron. "Wait a minute . . . so how did you know about it, Stave?"

"The idea came from us in the first place," the old man replied, smiling broadly. "That's what Tech-Genesis is all about – having ideas. Once we've had them we pass them on to the relevant Directorate to see if they can actually do anything with them, whether they'll work in the real world. Put this down to synchronicity, Vena."

"The right idea at the right time?"

"It happens," said Barron. "In fact, *as* it happens, this project was about to get closed down."

"Why?" asked Spenzer, who'd been watching events unfold with fascination.

"Because it worked too well." Barron turned to look at him. Seeing his puzzled expression he went on: "Time travel is probably the most dangerous thing ever invented. In the wrong hands, as you yourself said, Vena, the results could be catastrophic."

"You must've known this from the outset," said Vena, "so why go ahead?"

"You're a scientist, Vena," smile Barron, his lined face creasing like old leather. "You know we're in love with concepts, not consequences. It was pure research until Parmar and his team proved they could do it."

"So if this hadn't happened," Vena indicated the meeting in general, "the project would have just disappeared, like it'd never existed?"

"That's a very naïve comment, Vena," tutted Barron. "History is littered with ideas that were too dangerous for their time, as you well know – Copernicus, Galileo . . ."

"But their ideas surfaced *eventually*, Stave," said Vena, "so you couldn't have hidden the TRiP project for ever."

"Maybe not," nodded Barron, "but believe me, we were going to try."

"You're taking this whole affair in an incredibly calm fashion, Stave," said Vena. "We're told the world is falling apart and you coolly figure out why, not to mention how to fix it, and then you cap it all by announcing the invention of time travel!"

"I've never been one for getting over-excited; experience has taught me it tends to muddy the waters," said Barron. "And anyway, I'm a pragmatist at heart – think, then panic, has always been my motto."

"I hate to break up this fascinating philosophical discussion," said Spenzer, looking at his watch, "but the President will be here in ten minutes – is time travel the solution we're going to tell him we've come up with?"

"Unless anyone has some other bright ideas?" Barron glanced round the room; no one, it appeared, did. "Then I'd say we don't have any choice *but* to suggest it."

"We haven't yet tried to send a *lower* primate back, Barron," Parmar shook his head. "We've no idea what will happen to a human being – don't even know if it'll work!"

"Looks like now's the time you're going to have to find out," said Barron.

Spenzer Timor had thought his involvement with the project, code named Take-Over, would end with the close of the presidential briefing. He wasn't a scientist, and he knew nothing about the technical aspects of anything, so he assumed he'd be out of the loop from now on. Of no further use.

At 7.30 the next morning, as he came out of the lift, he'd thought it odd that the polarized glass walls of his cubicle were completely darkened – didn't remember leaving them that way the night before – and was taken aback to be stopped from using his voice key to get in by someone he'd never seen before.

"ID," said the man, holding out a small sensor pad.

"What?" Spenzer was confused. He hadn't seen the man sitting at a nearby desk and couldn't work out what was going on.

"Security check, sir," he said. "Just a formality."

"To get into my own office?"

"You have a visitor, sir."

Now even more confused, Spenzer forgot what to do for a moment; he saw the security guard point at the sensor and then he placed his thumb on the pad, watching an indicator light go green. "May I go in now?" he asked. The man nodded and Spenzer told the door to unlock and pushed it open, wondering as he did so how his visitor had managed to override his personal security.

Secretary-General Pyce was sitting in his chair, which explained everything. There was nowhere he didn't have access to.

"Knowing you are an early starter," said Pyce, "I decided to get this meeting out of the way before any of your staff arrived."

Spenzer glanced at his virt console and Pyce caught the look.

"I prefer an eftee-eff in this case, Timor." Pyce waved at Spenzer's other chair. "Sit down."

Spenzer was now an integral part of Project Take-Over. His deputy had been put in temporary charge of Central Data Control and he'd left his 50th-floor office not knowing when he'd return.

Along with Vena Cardoza, Stave Barron and Josh

Parmar's team, he was now working out of a nondescript building somewhere in the Pretoria sprawl. Working *and* living. Security was so tight you could hardly breathe.

Spenzer's first job was to find the man they would send back in time – or, more accurately, the man whose "electrical essence", to quote Parmar, would be transmitted back down the time-line to completely take over the mind of some unsuspecting member of the general public. His second job was to find the right unsuspecting member of the general public.

He began by scouring the information meta-banks – vast organic computers that detailed every living person in the continental USS – for possible candidates to go on this bizarre and dangerous mission. While he did that, the others started brainstorming the real problem. Finding out if doing it was actually possible.

It took Spenzer 72 hours, almost non-stop, to come up with a short list. Once he'd devised the dossier of special qualities each person had to be matched against – intelligence, psychological profile, personal background, professional record, security rating, etc., etc. – he wrote a match-and-compare program. Name after name was run through the algorithm at a blinding speed until, finally, he had a file of seven people who fitted the bill.

Reading it as he went to give the document to Pyce, there was one person who seemed to him to be perfect. Line Sgt Dachron Amok, 2445619/T. Single, 25 years old, no living relatives; First Class degree in Tech Engineering, with honours; trained in unarmed combat, anti-terrorist tactics and guerrilla warfare. Also described

as mildly psychopathic. You would, thought Spenzer as he knocked on Pyce's door, need to be a bit mad to go on a mission like this.

Dachron Amok had no idea why he was sitting in this characterless room in some stupid building in the boondocks of Pretoria. He'd been summarily hauled off the search-and-destroy mission up north and flown straight back to the capital. No reasons given, but then he was a soldier first and a person second – as he was always being reminded. It was what he disliked most about his job.

As he paced the room, not even bothering to look out of the window (there was absolutely *nothing* to see, so why waste the time?) he constantly snapped his fingers. *KLIK-KLIK-KLIKETY-KLIK*. It was like a mantra: it calmed him down and kept his thoughts from racing away, becoming confused and making him angry. *KLIK-KLIK-KLIKETY-KLIK.*

Dachron Amok didn't like losing his temper, unless he positively had to – to get his own way. Flying off the handle was always his last option, but if someone didn't come and get him and tell him what the *hell* was going on he was going to have to use it pretty soon. *KLIK-KLIK-KLIKETY-KLIK* . . .

"He's the best?" said Garston Pyce as he watched a screen showing Dachron Amok prowling about the room like a caged animal.

"According to the Psych people," said Spenzer. "He's the

only one who doesn't really seem to care what happens to him; got no real sense of fear."

"Have the others seen him?"

"Not yet," said Spenzer. "I wanted your approval before I told them we had a pilot."

"Pilot?"

"That's what they're calling the person who'll go back."

"How soon?" asked Pyce.

"As soon as I find the recipient – the host he'll take over," replied Spenzer wearily. "If you OK him I can start on that right away."

"Tell them we've found their man," said Pyce. "He will agree to go, won't he?"

"Apparently he's the type that relishes a challenge."

"Well, he's certainly got one on *this* mission." Pyce switched off the screen and walked to the door. "Don't let me keep you from your work, Timor."

The USS databanks, huge though they were, didn't hold the kind of information Spenzer needed for the next part of his job. Simon Tellkind, the scientist who devised the Charm Principle, did so sometime in the year 2007 – according to the history books. He needed to find out about someone who lived over 600 years ago in England.

And to all intents and purposes England didn't exist any more as a power-base. All records had been moved to Madrid in 2450 and the island abandoned by the two per cent of the population that actually owned and governed it. Spenzer contacted the European State Records

Department, UK Division, and requested a complete download on Tellkind.

When it arrived he found there was precious little in the file about the man who had given the world such an amazing discovery as the Charm Principle. Born in 1960, he'd had an ordinary enough life – for a genius. Educated at Oxford and in America, he seemed to have been a very lonely person, completely dedicated to his work. Everything seemed quite ordinary until the year his incredible invention was announced, when Tellkind just disappeared from view.

There were no signs of any public engagements; no tax, social security or health records, in fact nothing to show that he hadn't died. In a world, even then, when governments were almost more obsessive than they were now about keeping tabs on people, one very important man's slate appeared to have been wiped clean from the age of 47 until an official death announcement in 2045.

Spenzer began taking his professional life apart, bit by bit, examining every part of it. The more he looked the more he was sure that what he was reading was a carefully edited rewrite. Spenzer remembered a book he'd scanned once – George Orwell's *1984* – where history was constantly revised and amended to make it the way it *should* be, not the way it actually *was.*

Why they'd found it necessary to do the same kind of thing to Tellkind he had no idea, but it was obvious that someone somewhere had wanted the man to become invisible. Which made his job even more difficult.

His initial idea had been to locate a co-worker or close

associate and use him as the target for Amok, but he could find no names: there was no information on who Tellkind had worked with, or where. Spenzer had hit a spectacular dead-end.

Sitting in front of his screens he idly scrolled through the decade before Tellkind "vanished", eyes flicking over the information as his mind tried to figure out what to do next. He was just about to go and have a word with Stave Barron when a date caught his attention: 31 January 1990. Tellkind had become the godfather to the son of someone called Richard Anthony.

Spenzer stopped the scrolling and brought up the detail. Amongst all the dry academic and professional information it was the one piece of social interaction he'd seen. Just out of interest he grabbed the name "Richard Anthony" and saved it to a new file. This man had to be someone special, someone who could be of use to them, and he needed to find out more about him . . . and the only place to do that was in America.

Deep inside the Wasatch Mountains in Utah, under 200 metres of solid rock, the Mormon Church still operated its huge microfilm and computer-based Granite Mountain Records Vault. This was an archive of everyone who had ever lived. Well, almost everyone; since 1938, when the Church began to systematically collect records, researchers had scoured the world for information to add to their database and they now had the details of billions of people stored. Finding out about someone who lived in the last half of the twentieth century shouldn't be such a problem.