

Electronic Edition

**THE DAY
THE PRIMING
STOPPED**

**A
Dr. Primstein
Adventure™**



The Day the Priming Stopped: A Dr. Primestein Adventure™

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Life is one big priming experiment...

—Wray Herbert

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Chapter 27

The Publishers

“Take my arm!” Youngest reached down to help Dago clamber out of the mud pit. With Youngest’s assist, Dago heaved himself onto the berm. The setting sun told them they had been working for six

Acknowledgment: We would like to thank Ingo, whose body of work built bridges essential to our success.

gruelling hours, and they now stood at the base of a massive wall: five stories tall, smooth as glass, and deepest black. Behind the wall stood the Fortress of the Publishers.

They turned and scanned the area they had crossed.

“Four moats, six razor-wire fences...alligators...” Dago recounted.

“...and the spike pit. Poor Ingo,” Youngest mused. “I think he might have been alive when we walked over him on the spikes.”

Dago put a hand on Youngest’s shoulder. “He was a good research assistant, who sacrificed everything for Science. But!” Dago smiled and gripped Youngest’s shoulder. “You — my new eldest student — are now the *first author*.”

Youngest felt comforted by the thought. *First au-*

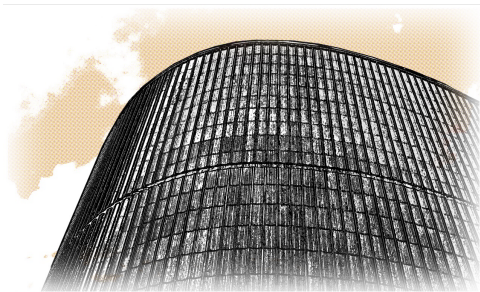
thor! He clutched his backpack containing the notes he had kept for weeks. *Ingo's sacrifice will not be in vain. There will be a publication!*

Dago pointed across to the spike pit. “Now that you are the first author, let me teach you your first lesson. First authors *acknowledge* those who have helped them. When you write about this day, remember Ingo.”

Youngest nodded in silence, his gaze fixed to Ingo's resting place. *We will acknowledge him.*

“But why are we here?” Youngest asked, peering up at the massive walls of the Publishers' Fortress. “And why do the Publishers want to keep us out?”

Dago pulled a torn fragment of paper from his bag and handed it to Youngest. “Do you know what this is?” Youngest examined the fragment. On one edge were the letters ‘PNAS’; along the other, in large letters, read ‘The prime mover: a comprehensive theory



of priming in hum—’ The rest was torn off.

“Is this...a journal article?” Youngest guessed.

“Exactly! I think it holds the key to restoring the effect of priming and setting the world right. But we need to read the article. The Publishers own all the world’s knowledge, so we must ask them for a copy.”

Youngest was still confused. “Why the moats...and the walls?”

“When the Methodologists started spreading the anti-priming virus, the Publishers used their combined access to all the world’s scientific knowledge to understand The Happening. They acted quickly and built this fortress to protect themselves. The Publishers were the only ones who remained unaffected.” Dago ran his hand across the surface of the wall. “Solid carbyne,” he admired. “Must have cost a fortune...”

Dago threw his pack to the ground. “Now, we rest. We’ll meet The Publishers first thing in the morning.” As the last sliver of sun disappeared over the horizon, Dago and Youngest settled next to wall for the night.

The next morning, Dago and Youngest set off around the fortress perimeter toward the doors they had spotted from afar two days previously. There was no chance they could miss them; the doors were twelve feet tall and stainless steel, glinting in the early morning sun.

After a half-hour, they found themselves at the foot of the imposing doors to the Publishers' fortress. Above the doors, in towering gold-leaf letters, was the Publishers' credo:

SCIENTIA VOSTRA EST VIRTUS NOSTRA.

At eye-level a small sign was hung on the left door: *Please shout your institutional credentials.* Dago looked around for a window, or a portal, or maybe a bell, but found nothing. "Institutional credentials...?"

He cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled: "There are *no more* institutions! Please, we need to find an article! I think I can reverse The Happening!"

Silence.

"I was an academic...surely I must have institutional access!"

Still silence.

Dago and Youngest waited several minutes for a

sign — any sign — that someone was listening. Dago decided to try one more time.

“Maybe we should we walk to the Thieves’ Hub? Perhaps they can help us, if you refuse! It’s only two days nor—”

“DO NOT GO TO THE HUB.” The deep, woman’s voice seemed to come from nowhere, resonating in the space before the doors. There was a long pause, then the voice returned. “We will hear you. What do you want?”

“We are looking for a particular article. Let us in and I will give you the details.”

“Why did you come to us? Can you not find what you need in the open access journals?” Dago, Ingo, and Youngest had passed the smoldering mountain of open access publications — what remained of the so-called open-science movement after The Happening — several days ago.

Dago scrunched his face in annoyance. “Do you think I am a fool? I know what you do to *your* articles. I know about the *stellarium*.”

Youngest looked over at Dago. “What is a stellarium?”

“A stellarium is where the magic of Science really happens,” Dago explained. “It—” He was interrupted by the doors opening, revealing a woman in her mid-60s dressed in business attire. Strangely, her eyes seemed much younger than her body’s apparent age. “Be on guard,” Dago whispered to Youngest. “Something is not right here.” The woman beckoned them inside, and they followed.

As the doors shut softly behind them and their eyes began to adjust to the low light indoors, Dago and Youngest found themselves surrounded by men and women in uniforms. The woman who led them inside stepped away and motioned toward the pair. “Taylor! Francis! Search them!” she commanded two

guards.

The team patted them down and rifled through their packs. One of the men pulled the PNAS fragment from Dago's pack and handed it to the woman.

"Where did you get this?" she asked accusingly. "Do you see this watermark here? It clearly says 'Confidential Reviewer Copy'. Leaving this in your possession would be unethical." She neatly folded the fragment and slipped it in her pocket.

Dago took a small step forward, causing several men to move between him and the woman. "That's a fragment of the article we want to find. Can you help us?"

"Who *are* you?"

"I am a Psychological Scientist. They called me Daniel before The Happening, and this is my student, Youngest. I think I know how to reverse The

Happening, but I *need* the information in that article.”

The woman turned to the guard next to her. “Did you find anything else?” He shook his head. “A jackknife, but its blade is steel. I left it in the pack.” She nodded and guards returned their packs. “Follow me, Daniel and Youngest.” She motioned the guards away. “My name is Elsa. Perhaps we can help you; but first, let me show you what The Publishers have built.”

The trio walked along the dark hallways, each lit only sparsely with torchlight and apparently no windows. Dago saw words etched in the walls above the doors, but with his eyes not completely adapted to the low light, he could not quite make them out.

Elsa pointed through a large entrance to their left. Beyond heavy bars blocking the way were row upon row of paper journal, as far as the eye could see in the dimness. “In these rooms, The Publishers have collected the world’s scientific knowledge. You can

see we keep it safe; no torches, no fire...no light.”

As they started walking forward again, Dago examined the word etched into the wall by the door. *TEENAGER*, it read. *Odd...* The three continued past many doors similar to the last, behind which there were vast rows of journals.

The trio turned into a small room that was empty apart from what appeared to be a rodent cage in one corner. “Welcome to our copy-editing department,” Elsa explained. “This is Binky, our copy-editor. Hello, Binky!” Binky the hamster was furiously running in his wheel. “Such a hard worker, Binky! We cut most of the other staff some years before The Happening.”

Elsa took Binky out of his cage and gave him a small hamster treat. “Oh Binky, what would we do without you?” Binky sat on Elsa’s hand and stuffed the treat into his cheeks as Elsa scratched behind his ears. She nosed Binky once before placing him back in his wheel. “Binky has a backlog of copy-editing.



You can do it, Binky!”

Elsa closed the door to the copy-editing room as they re-entered the hallway. She sighed. “Binky’s work has deteriorated since we laid off his partner, Cookie,” Elsa explained somberly. “I think one of the alligators got her on the way out. We’re trying to keep his spirits up, but lately his work has been riddled with errors. At Binky’s price, though, we can hardly complain.”

They continued their walk down the long hallway,

past myriad, dimly-lit passageways and empty rooms of all sizes. Suddenly, Elsa stopped in front of a large wooden door and turned around.

“In the next room is our proudest invention. Normally, we would not show it to outsiders, but...Daniel seems to know about it already...” She pushed the door open, revealing a cavernous room filled with all manner of shining brass machinery: gears, wheels, tubes, chains, mirrors... At the center of the room was a small platform, encircled by four large lenses set in tubes that extended to the ceiling 20 meters above them.

Dago audibly gasped at the sight. “The *stellarium*! Youngest, this is how Science was made before The Happening!” He hurried into the room, followed by Elsa and Youngest.

“Where did you hear about the stellarium?” asked Elsa, obviously pleased at Dago’s reaction.



“It was a thing of legend among university administrators and scientists on hiring committees. We knew it existed, but...” Dago admired the polish of a large brass wheel near the platform.

“Would you like to see it work?”

“Can we—?” Dago’s eyes grew large with excitement.

Elsa pulled a stack of unformatted pages from a pile on a nearby table. “Youngest, put these on the

platform in the center of the room.”

Youngest took the pages and read aloud the title at the top of the first page. “Failure to prime: null results in three social priming paradigms.”

Dago looked worried. “Youngest, wait. This could initiate another Happening! Elsa, can we use another article?”

Elsa pointed to a dusty slot by the door labeled *RETRACT* that looked as if it had never been used. “Don’t worry; we’ll immediately send it to retractions. It will have no effect on us.”

Youngest placed the article on the platform, and Elsa pointed to the wheel next to Dago. “When you turn that wheel — not yet — the four tubes connected to the ceiling will bring in the light of four very special stars.” She checked her watch. “The stellarium moves with the sky to catch certain stars at specific times of day or night. Right now, the stars are aligned

for *Nature*. Now, Daniel — turn the wheel.”

Dago leaned on the wheel, which moved surprisingly easily for its weight. The sound of chains and pulleys filled the room as the glow of the sky’s light on the manuscript pages grew. Elsa motioned him to stop. As he let go of the wheel, it reversed itself, closing the tubes on the ceiling and shutting off the light to the manuscript. A minute later, the room was quiet again. Dago sprinted to the platform and gathered the manuscript.

“Youngest, do you see? If the author of this manuscript were still a scientist, the blessing of the four stars would make their career. This manuscript is now *good science*.” Dago walked over to the RETRACT slot and tossed in the manuscript. “Oh well; *Nature* never would have published three failures to replicate anyway.” Dago and Elsa laughed.

Dago took one last look at the stellarium as they left the room. While Elsa locked the door, he scanned

the nearby walls for inscriptions. Across the hallway one caught his eye: *CHILDHOOD*. He squinted in the flickering torchlight. *What does it mean...?*

Elsa turned back to the pair. “Come with me to my office; we’ll see if we can find your article. For your sake, I hope it is not under embargo...” As they walked along wide, dimly-lit hallways, Dago tried to make out more inscriptions, but every one was just below the limit of perceptibility. After a seemingly endless silent journey, they reached the end of a hallway and a large wooden door onto which Elsa’s name was etched. Before entering, Dago quickly scanned the hallway for another inscription. Above the door — *YOUTH*.

Elsa closed the door behind them and lit several torches around the room. Dago and Youngest looked around the strangely-decorated room. Near the rear of the room was a large cherry-wood desk with a leather top; along one wall, a fireplace with a waist-tall pile of high-denomination US bills next to it;

along the opposite wall a long, wooden box with a removable lid.

Elsa saw Dago staring at what for all the world looked like a casket. “You like it? I believe it helps me *think outside the box!*” She laughed.

Suddenly Dago put everything together: the fortress, the words in the hall, the casket. “The Publishers are undead! You’re using *youth hyper-priming* to unnaturally extend your lives! If anyone on the outside ever found out...”

Elsa tossed Dago’s article fragment onto the her desk and sat down. “I don’t think that will happen...at least, as long as no one reverses The Happening...”

She’s been toying with us the whole time! Dago stepped toward Elsa’s desk. “Give us the article, or —”

“Or *what?* You can have it. For \$35.99.”

“But you’re literally burning money in the fireplace.”

“That’s my money, not yours.”

“No one has any money since The Happening —”

Elsa laughed. “Then I guess the Publishers can’t help you.”

Youngest ran back to try the door. *Locked*. He was beginning to think Science was not the right career path for him.

Dago turned with his shoulders square to Elsa, his feet a shoulder’s width apart, with his clenched fists on his hips. “You *will* get us our article, and set us free!” he thundered.

Elsa was unmoved. “Fool! Do you think your ancient power pose will work on me? While you have been mindlessly wandering in the woods, we have been studying the *entire literature* on power poses

locked in our vaults. The Publishers have more power than you could *ever imagine*.”

She's bluffing, Dago thought. *I always got my power pose news from the New York Times' editorial pages.* Elsa's eyes narrowed to slits as she fixed her gaze on Dago. She slowly stood up behind her desk. “Can you stand — ” She leaned over the desk, full weight against her clenched fists on the desk. “— against *this* power pose?”

Elsa's stance hit Dago like a sandbag. He staggered back, outmatched by the strength projected in Elsa's posture. He had to think quickly or —

“Youngest! A bundle of dollars!” Dago shouted. Youngest jumped to the fireplace, grabbed a stack of bills, and tossed it to Dago. He caught the stack in his right hand and lifted it in a triumphant power pose from one of his never-published manuscripts before The Happening.

Elsa's eyes grew large and her elbows began to buckle as the power of Dago's pose broke her own. She collapsed into her chair, defeated.

Dago relaxed, walked over to Elsa's desk, and tossed the stack of bills in her lap. "The Publisher, beaten by the file drawer. How ironic." He picked up his article fragment. "Now, shall we find a copy of this article?"

Elsa tentatively stood up. "I will help you, on one condition. If you *do* manage to put the world back the way it was, will you publish your power pose in one of our journals?"

Dago laughed. "I wouldn't have it any other way. It's a four-star sort of pose, don't you think?" Elsa smiled and nodded. "I think it would be a nice fit for *PNAS*. Even after The Happening, its impact factor is still 9.33 — repeating, of course."

Youngest stepped next to Dago. "Can I be an author

too?”

“Are you kidding? The entire clan can be authors. Even poor Ingo.” The trio laughed and walked out to begin their search for Dago’s article.



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