

## The Man Who Has Everything

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As my secretary reminds me—though I do not need reminding—today is the one-year anniversary of the future. Now that the future has arrived, all that was predicted has come to pass, and everything is true. There is scarce little to wonder about because I have all the answers, or, rather, all the answers are mine. There are no more questions. I am complete. I am Biggs.

Today is Wednesday. As decreed, it is always Wednesday, equidistant from weekends. There are no vacations, furloughs, or holidays to complicate and confuse the calendar. The weather is always November: cold, damp, and sooty. Even if you have just eaten, you are still hungry. This is the world as I have ordered it. I do not want anybody getting comfortable. As my grandfather Biggs remarked, “Comfort is tantamount to lassitude.”

It is with deep respect and admiration that I call my grandfather to mind. I owe him and, to lesser extent, my father, everything I possess. But, since both are deceased, I owe them nothing whatever. I am Biggs. I am the richest man on Earth, the only man on Earth who owns anything.

In the time of my grandfather, corporations and oligarchs, museums and churches, industrialists and governments bought and sold pieces of themselves to one another, jockeying for that First Place: the biggest richest mostest on the whole entire Earth. He called it a dance of microbes in a Petri dish: gobbling and belching and incorporating and divesting, leaving investors the *merde*.

My father became the CEO of the last remaining company, the Vorax Corporation, the one that bought out and bought up all the others, employing everyone in the world, owning them body, mind, and soul, if there was such a thing. When my father first became President of Vorax, Inc., there were still two other players, the Vatican and Russia, the former owned and run by His Holiness Pope Sean John II and the latter by His Unholiness Czar Putin IV, the second richest man on earth. My father played a close hand. His steely eyes betrayed nothing; his demeanor never varied and conveyed no secrets.

As my father explained it to me when I was yet a student, both the Pope and the Czar thought himself the only honorable man, thoroughly despising his opponent. In point of fact, neither was an honest man, and this blinded them to the truth about themselves. As my father, who was under no such illusion about his own character, put it, “If you do not know yourself and the lengths to which you would go to become the winner, how could you possibly know your enemy?”

Following the execution of my father’s daring moves, bluffs, and counter-maneuvers, both the Vatican and the Kremlin feared being left in the dust. They formed a hasty and ill-devised union called the RA-Pax Company, and thought they would bury my father. But each

had doubts about his ally's honor, as I mentioned, and thus each was eager to align his wealth and influence with my father in order to outflank his opponent. My father, also named Biggs, had no intention of allying himself with anybody. He encouraged both Sean John II and Putin IV in the belief that their nemesis had been chosen to merge his holdings with the Vorax Corporation in exchange for stock options and the title and honors of Omnipotentiary for Life.

Putin IV allied all his forces and influences against a merger of the Vatican with the Vorax Corporation, signing up every tinhorn despot and religious lunatic he could muster when bringing his case before the International Court. But my father had been stacking the Court for years with his judges while Putin IV merely huffed and snorted against this judiciary body in The Hague with a string of insulting memoranda. The Czar had not a single friend outside of Russia. And he was no longer the second richest man on Earth. He was, simply, dead last.

The pieces of Putin IV's Empire collapsed like interwoven highways of dominoes, each setting off another collapse in some other direction. The Czar might have seen this coming but for the fact that he had imprisoned, and later executed, the daring mathematician who predicted how it might all unfold. My father, also named Biggs, had put the last elements in place just before his death. I watched it happen as, piece by piece, I inherited it all, the Whole World.

An enthusiastic understudy of mine, eager to please, construed my remark about wishing the Pope would make an expeditious exit as a direct order to dispatch him. Sean John II consumed a polonium-laced communion host and expired three days later, taking the last remaining Christers with him.

I missed having an adversary, even an unworthy one. The Church could have been a formidable force for good in the World—and a truly worthy opponent—if they had put right before rite even just once in a hundred times, or put the words of their prophets before their profits. The Church had been in steep decline as a force for good since the time of Constantine's conversion. Nothing allied with the State could possibly be a force for good. I am now both God *and* Czar. I am Biggs.

Oh, how I weary of this retelling what used to thrill me so as a young man. I wish anything would thrill me again. I wish there were something still to be acquired that I did not already possess, some official I might bribe whom I did not already own, some miserable clerk whose life I could make still more miserable.

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My secretary reminds me that my Chief Astronomer is scheduled to see me this afternoon. I hope he is not one of those self-important eggheads with multiple wristwatches. This silly custom began a couple of years ago among those who forgot the fact that I own everything, even the fillings in their teeth. Every horologe and chronograph in the World is mine, every gear and sprocket, every hairspring and escapement. I own Time itself. The World is well-regulated and everyone always knows where he should be at what hour. I am Biggs. There is no other.

Dr. Ennis Cabriole, my Chief Astronomer, wore but a single wristwatch, but he outdid himself with the number of capital letters after his name. It was clear he did not know how to address me and I decided to let him squirm.

“I am pleased to inform Your... Your...”

“‘My Omniscience’ will do.”

“I am pleased to inform Your Omniscience that the Department of Interstellar Law has had no correspondence with any entities or bodies contesting Your claim to ownership of the entire Universe. Therefore it stands.”

“Good,” I replied, though I did not know what to do with the Solar System, much less all the rest of the crap. Such a burden. Such a bother.

“The other news, Your Omniscience, is of a more disturbing nature, I am afraid. Do you know what a Wolf-Rayet star is?”

I motioned for him to have a seat, a gesture he wisely refused.

“A Wolf-Rayet is a star many times more massive than Sol: more than twenty solar masses. They burn five times hotter and when they go hypernova they emit a gamma ray burst that obliterates all life within tens of light years distant. WR 104 is such a massive star and it is but eight light years from Earth. Since the GRBs are directional, the burst must be ‘aimed’ at us to be worrisome. Earth is within fifteen degrees of a bull’s-eye hit: close enough to wipe out all life within many light years of us.”

“What does this mean in plain language?”

“My department astronomers require another ten years for a wider parallax in order to determine definitively how close Earth is to being hit by the GRB. It might miss us. But if WR 104 has already gone hypernova, we may have but a few years.”

I tented my fingers and glared at Dr. Cabriole from beneath my eyebrows.

“It was rumored that this event was predicted in an ancient almanac, an almanac of cloud formations, but the book had not been seen in two hundred years. It would have told us whether and when this will happen.”

“Are you telling me that the best my astronomers can do is to consult an astrologer?”

“The two disciplines were once one and the same, Your Omniscience.”

“Yes, I know that,” I said, smiling. I was brightening to the prospect that everything would be destroyed. It was exciting. My heart pounded. Everything destroyed!

“A survey of The Mind indicated that the information contained in the *Catalogue of Clouds* was lodged in a lobe of some underling’s brain, though The Mind was not sure how it might have gotten there. He survived the procedure and had to be referred to the Department of Redundancy Department.”

I ordered a red-flavored drink to be brought to the professor. Wisely, he did not touch it, though he seemed to want it after so much jaw-boning.

“The Departments of Mathematics and Meteorology have analyzed the data and consulted the *Catalogue of Clouds* several times to be certain the results could be replicated. We are ninety-nine percent certain the calculations are correct.”

The good doctor of astronomy was clearly nervous, shifting from foot to foot and twisting his eyebrows as though they were a pair of mustachioes. I had a second drink brought to him, doubling his unease.

“Our best prediction is that the World will end on nineteen November next at 6:19 in the morning. A Wednesday, as it turns out.”

“I see. You will excuse me. I need to use the Royal Wee,” I told him.

His expression informed me he did not understand.

Hallelujah! The world was going to end! I did a jig in the washroom and shouted my joy, which echoed from the five-story vaulted ceiling. I did not care if that pointy-headed astronomer heard me. He could not possibly be trusted with such knowledge. In fact, Polonium Primavera was about to be added to the menu of the faculty cafeteria. Any one of them might have talked—or listened. But every last one of them will be sadly missed. Hallelujah! Destroyed!

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I found Herr Professor in the exact position and posture as when I left him two hours before, as though he were on the verge of going somewhere but could not decide on when to take that necessary first step. I had myself a sandwich and a nap. It is one of the ways in which I teach politeness and decorum to tedious dolts.

“So what will you do with the Whole World about to be destroyed and only three months to live?” I asked. I doubted he had lived a single day in his entire miserable chinovnik life.

“A small point, Your Omniscience.” He raised an index finger as though about to lecture me. “The World will not be destroyed, only all life. True, the WR 104 system will be vaporized

and its cosmic neighborhood rocked by shock waves for a considerable period. But those effects will be negligible by the time they reach the Earth. It is the gamma ray burst that will do the damage, obliterating *all* life, but sparing our apartment blocks and cubicles and Persian carpets.”

“All the things that matter!” I shouted. “All the things I own!”

“Yes, that will all remain intact, though the gardens and landscaping will quickly begin to wither. The oceans and lakes and rivers will be covered with dead creatures. Not a single bacterium will live, but the microscopes under which they were studied will continue to function perfectly. All the World’s computers will still work, though not a thought or an idea will remain anywhere.”

“Oh, this is just too exquisite! I will still own everything, but there will be no one I’ll have to share it with!”

I grabbed hold of Dr. Cabriole’s shoulders and danced that pointy-headed astronomer out of my office and sent him in a spiraling orbit down the hallway. My final remark to him was, “Bon appétit.”

Not a word about Armageddon leaked. It was most unfortunate: everyone in the Astronomy and Mathematics and Meteorology Departments met untimely ends. Must have been the potato salad. Maybe I should have added the Dept. of English Literature for good measure simply because I could.

I did not feel bad about these extreme measures. All were fated to die soon anyway, even without my intervention—and probably far less quickly. It was best no one knew about what was coming. Panics grow ugly very rapidly. It is certainly no way to spend one’s final days. I did them all a favor. The only truly unfortunate aspect in all this is that there will be no chronicler to wax rhapsodic over my humongous magnanimity. I am Biggs, after all. First and Last.

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Just another three days and I can emerge from my leaden underground chamber, the Last Man on Earth, the Man Who Has Everything.

The worst will be over by Wednesday. I expect to last at least two weeks topside before succumbing to the residual radiation, much longer if I restrict my visits. My air-sled can take me anywhere I wish to travel. I will survey My Kingdom, My Planet—just Me, Myself, and I—destroying as much of it as my limited time and my access to unlimited firepower permits. My first shots will cause St. Peter’s Basilica to pancake to the bottom of a large crater and the turnip towers of the Kremlin will topple into one another. Yippee! Yahoo! Everything destroyed!

At last I am content. I am Biggs.

## Epilogue

“Wealth consists not in having great possessions, but in having few wants.”

— Epictetus

“I don’t need money; I got me.”

— Joe Dallesandro

“The Gods from above the mad labour behold,  
And pity mankind that will perish for gold.”

— John Dryden