

# *Divorces In Paradise*



A Drake Cobalt™ Novel by  
**Doug Crowder**

**TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE, BOOK 3**

# **DIVORCES IN PARADISE**

**(Formerly entitled THE COBALT CHRONICLES)**

**Episodes 1-29 of a Work in Progress**

**By Doug Crowder  
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**TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE, PART 3**  
**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**Episode 1: A USUAL DAY AT THE OFFICE**  
**By Doug Crowder**  
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*(EDITOR'S NOTE: This issue starts a brand-new serialized novelita, featuring a brand-new character, never before appearing in any of this author's works. Meet DRAKE COBALT, an obscure attorney who thinks he's a Science Fiction writer. Or, sometimes portrayed as an obscure Science Fiction writer who thinks he's an attorney.*

*This story takes place during the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, on an obscure planet called "Earth," in the small fictional town known as "Los Angeles."*

*A few of you may be thinking to yourselves, "Part III? What became of Part II? I remember Part I, JUDGE HANGMANN RULES, which was presented in this newsletter over a series of 9 or 10 episodes. But how did I miss Part II?"*

*The answer is that TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE PART II: A BROUHAHA AT BOSO, has already been written -- and may be available upon request -- but the management determined that it was too graphic to be appropriate for a law office newsletter.*

*Don't be alarmed. You should be able to follow Part III without having read Part II, since all necessary elements from earlier episodes will be provided in this tale.*

*We now join Drake in his law office somewhere on the imaginary street known as "Wilshire Boulevard." (That really narrows down Drake's location and identity, since only about half the attorneys in Los Angeles are on Wilshire.)*

*Three or more of you are probably wondering, "How can Part III be taking place in present time California, when Part I took place some 500 or more years in the future on the newly risen (or re-risen) Continent of Atlantis, and Part II took place in an undisclosed time and place?" Well, read on, and all will make perfect nonsense!*

*DISCLAIMERS AND THE FINE PRINT: This story is entirely FICTIONAL, and any similarity to any existing persons, places or events is totally coincidental and should be immediately disregarded. This story is for entertainment only. Any other use is strictly prohibited by law, and may be hazardous to your health!)*

It started out as a usual day at the office. But, as you may have already guessed, it soon turned not-quite-so-usual. Otherwise, I wouldn't be writing about it.

I arrived at approximately 10:17 a.m. It's not that I'm a late starter, but if I don't have an early morning court appearance, I often work at home for a few hours until the morning rush-hour traffic dies down a bit.

Claudia, who works for the firm I rent from, and serves as receptionist for the rest of the lawyers in the suite, greeted me in her usual cheery fashion.

"It's about time you got here! Your 10 a.m. appointment has been waiting for half an hour."

"What appointment?" I asked. "I don't have anything scheduled this morning."

"Well, you sometimes forget to put things on the calendar," she reminded me. "And she didn't give her name. Said she wanted to surprise you."

“OK, I’ll see her now.”

“I put her in the conference room and gave her some coffee already,” said Claudia, demonstrating her efficiency. “Oh, and try to keep your eyes in their sockets. She’s a good looker.”

“Thanks for the warning,” I said.

When I entered the conference room, a woman smiled and rose to shake my hand. Without going into great detail, let me just say that she was in her late 20’s or early 30’s, with long auburn hair, bright green eyes. Wearing a dark gray business suit with a green scarf. About 5’6”, and maybe 132 pounds. But that’s all I noticed. Oh yes. And that Claudia’s assessment wasn’t far off base. All right, it was an understatement.

“Remember me,” she asked?

“You look familiar. And your name is on the tip of my tongue,” I replied cheerfully, if not honestly.

She didn’t look familiar at all. I was 82% certain I had never seen her before. And yet I had the sinking feeling that here was someone I knew very well and should recognize immediately. And I also had the feeling that I didn’t want to know. But that was no longer an option.

“I’m Urma,” she said. “Urma Understanding.”

“Of course,” I said enthusiastically. “How could I forget?”

How, indeed could I have forgotten? This was not a former mistress now reappearing to claim vengeance. Nor a daughter from an illicit relationship coming to stake her claim on my meager estate! But instead someone even closer to me, and even worse to encounter. One of my creations! One of my fictional characters!

I had written several stories about a young attorney, matching her name and physical description, practicing some 500 to 700 years from now, on the newly risen or maybe re-risen Continent of Atlantis. What was she doing here, in the flesh, in Los Angeles in 2019?

*(EDITOR’S FOOTNOTE: The stories he’s referring to may include some that have previously appeared in this newsletter: the 5-episode ESCAPE FROM TRANQUILITY, the 16 episode, A TOWN WITHOUT LAWYERS; and of course, one of the prequels to this tale; the 9-episode JUDGE HANGMANN RULES – all of which are available from the author upon request!)*

This sort of disorienting incident had been happening with increasing regularity lately – where a real, live person shows up, having the same general physical appearance, and claiming to have the same name, as one of my fictional characters!

If I were paranoid, I would be thinking that someone was trying to play a cruel joke on me by hiring actors to mimic my creations. However, much as that would make an interesting story-line, I didn’t have any enemies to speak of, and especially none who would take the time and effort to pull off something like this. So I decided to play along.

“So, what can I do for you, Urma?”

*(EDITOR’S NOTE: Why has Urma traveled 6,000 miles and 600 years to see an obscure attorney in Los Angeles? The answer to that question, as well as the answers to a number of other questions you haven’t yet asked, will be unveiled in the next episode, hopefully within the next 30 days.)*

**TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE, PART 3**  
**THE COBALT CONUNDRUM**  
**Episode 2: THE BLAZING EMERALD**

*SYNOPSIS. Since I'm the narrator, and the main character, I'm going to give you my own summary rather than leaving it to the Editor. I'm DRAKE COBALT, an attorney practicing on Wilshire Blvd. in beautiful Los Angeles. I'm also a science fiction writer. Lately, I've had several disturbing incidents where a character from one of my stories shows up in real life – or at least a person who fits the physical description of the character, and claims to have the same name. That happened again this morning, when a surprise appointment showed up claiming to be URMA UNDERSTANDING. This also happens to the name of a young attorney featured in several of my stories about the future Continent of Atlantis, which is not scheduled to rise from the ocean until several hundred years from now. I decided to play along. There. Now you know all you need to from Episode 1.*

"So, Urma, to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?"

"I came to one of your seminars a few years ago, and I must say that without your encouragement I might not be practicing law today."

"Glad I could help out," I said. Then I decided to pose a few questions to see how well she knew the story-line.

"Are you still working with Peace & Love?"

"Peace, Love & Understanding, now. They made me a partner."

"Congratulations. And your main office – don't tell me – it's in South Atlantis City, right?"

"Close. That's where I come from. And we have a satellite office there now. But our headquarters are still in Tranquility Town."

Whoever this lady was, she was scoring 100% on my questions so far – she had at least read some of the stories.

"What brings you to L.A.?" I asked.

"I've got a meeting with a potential client out in the Valley. If you're available, I'd like you to come along – and maybe work with me on the case. I know from your seminars that you like to think outside the box, and sometimes gamble on a long-shot. This case is definitely not your ordinary one. But it should be right up your alley -- especially since you claim to be a science-fiction writer."

Not only did this woman know how to play a convincing Urma, but she knew how to arouse my curiosity!

"What's this case about?" I asked.

"Let's talk while we're driving. We can take my car."

I followed her to the parking garage.

"Guess which car is mine!" she said as soon as we got off the elevator.

I looked across the sea of cars, mostly painted in brilliant shades of black, white and gray. There was one that didn't fit in. A late model bright metallic green Chevrolet Camaro, fresh from a recent waxing judging from its shine.

"Offhand, I'd say the green Camaro."

"Close," she said, as she led the way in the direction of that car.

When I got closer, I noticed the emblem in the middle of the rear panel, and realized that something was horribly wrong! Instead of the familiar Chevy logo,

which was sort of a slanted rectangle, there was an upside down skinny triangle – an emblem I hadn't seen for years! The Pontic symbol! Walking to the front of the car, I saw it had the distinctive Pontiac grill, rather than a Camaro's grill, and also that the hood sported a decal of a stylized bird, soaring with open wings and surrounded by flames.

"This is a Firebird!" I exclaimed.

"Of course!" said the woman claiming to be Urma. "Her name is The Blazing Emerald, and she's deeply offended that you mistook her for a Camaro."

"My apologies, Emerald," I said patting her on the hood.

Somehow this woman had also discovered my propensity to assign names and human characteristics to my cars, and was using this to make her Urma character more realistic – even though none of my stories mentioned her having this trait.

"What year is this?" I asked, as Urma started her up.

"A 2018. I got her on sale just before the new models came out."

"That's impossible," I replied. "The last Firebird was made in 2002, and no Pontiacs of any model have come out since 2010."

"Haven't you heard? They're making a comeback!"

This was making me even more uneasy. Someone was spending a lot of money to play this joke on me. It couldn't have been that cheap to make this Camaro look like a Firebird – but the car soon became the least of my concerns. I asked her another question.

"Why are you taking a case in California at all? I thought you were only licensed in Atlantis."

"Haven't you heard about the reciprocity?"

"Reciprocity?"

"Atlantis and California have a reciprocity agreement. Any lawyer licensed in Atlantis can become licensed in California by filling out a short application and paying a \$100 fee – and vice-versa. Haven't you gotten Atlantis bar card yet?"

"No, but maybe I will."

"It was bound to happen sooner or later," she continued. "And it only makes sense, since the California laws are based on those of Atlantis."

"No," I responded with a slight chuckle, catching her in the first mistake she had made. "Don't you remember that when the Continent of Atlantis rose from the ocean, one of the few books that survived the Decade of Chaos was the California Code – and the early Atlantean jurists took that as a sign from their Twelve Gods that they should base their court system on the laws of California?"

"It's just like the Californians to claim credit for something much older than their state," she said, joining with the laugh. "I'm sure you remember that the Continent of Atlantis was a great civilization thousands of years before California was ever settled. Those who drafted the California laws were doing so from their ancestral memories of the Great Atlantean Jurisprudence."

I now had the sinking feeling that this woman knew Urma even better than I did.

As we continued driving northwest on the U.S. 101, better known as the Hollywood Freeway, nothing else seemed out of the ordinary. The traffic was relatively light – about what you'd expect for 10:35 on a Tuesday morning. The buildings and landscapes were just as they always seemed. All the cars on the freeway seemed normal – other than this Firebird.

We were now approaching the Cahuenga Pass, which divided the Los Angeles Basin from an area known as The San Fernando Valley. At 745 feet above sea level, this hardly merited being called a “pass” at all – but still, it towered above the highest elevation in at least four other states.

I suddenly had a sense of foreboding that as soon as we went over that pass, something would be horribly wrong. And then, my worst fears were realized when I saw a huge sign that read . . .

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Sorry, folks, that's all we have space for in this episode. To be continued.*

**TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE, PART 3**  
**THE COBALT CONUNDRUM**  
**Episode 3: SINISTER SHADOWS SHIMMER ABOVE SHERMAN OAKES**

**Synopsis.** *We are following the adventures of Drake Cobalt, an obscure attorney who thinks he's a science fiction writer. Lately, some of the characters from his stories have been coming to life and showing up in the real world. But now, he's having his most severe experience yet. During the two former episodes, he met with a woman claiming to be URMA UNDERSTANDING – the same name as the character in a series of stories he had written about a young lawyer from the newly risen Continent of Atlantis some 500 year in the future. This mysterious woman, who also matches the physical description of the fictional character, invited Drake to accompany her to meet a potential new client with what she described as a challenging case. Always one to take a dare, Drake accepted her invitation and they are now riding in her bright green 2019 Pontiac Firebird, heading from downtown L.A. to the Valley. We will re-join them as they head north on the 101 Freeway past Hollywood.*

I had a feeling that as soon as we went over the Cahuenga pass, things would be different. My worst fears were realized when I saw an enormous brightly lit billboard reading, "Welcome to Atlantis Valley," and near that, a huge flag featuring a maroon heart shape atop a field of blue and white stripes. This was not the San Fernando Valley that I remembered from just a few days ago when I was there last.

As we approached what used to be Universal City, a road sign told us that the next 3 exits were to "Atlantis City West." Urma looked at me with a slight smile on her face, evidently sensing my surprise.

"That's right, she said, we're not in California anymore. Or even America. This is Atlantis Valley."

"Ah yes," I replied, as I saw another one of my storylines coming to life. "The area which Angelinos affectionately knew as 'The Valley' is now considered a colony of Atlantis -- even though it is separated from the rest of the Continent by thousands of miles and totally surrounded by California."

"It's not just a colony anymore, she said. The Valley has now been given full status as part of the nation of Atlantis. They even have a new branch of the Court of Appeals that meets here."

As we drove past where I remembered the skyscrapers of Universal City to be, I saw two large gambling casinos, with garishly lighted signs advertising musical acts I had never heard of. The first casino proudly bore the name of "The One-Armed Bandit," and the second and larger of the two proclaimed itself the "Megabucks Resort and Casino."

"Remember that name," said Urma nodding in the direction of the Megabucks. "It will be significant before the day is over."

As we descended from the Hollywood Hills into the flatlands of the Valley, I noticed that the 101 Freeway still followed the same path it had centuries earlier, heading northwest, then turning left, almost due west, as it split off from the 170. Even stranger was that these two freeways still had the same numbers they had been given centuries earlier when this area was still part of Los Angeles -- although now their numbers were no longer circled by the ice-cream shaped



emblem depicting California state highways, but by the dark red heart-shape that identified Atlantean freeways.

The natural scenery of mountains, hills and flatlands was about the same as I remembered, but the cityscape was a lot different. There was more empty space. The structures weren't packed as close together as they had been in 2019 – and there were more single-family homes and not so many multi-story apartments and office buildings. Overall, I guessed that the population of the Valley was about a quarter of what it had been in my day.

As we continued our westward trek, Urma was describing a challenging case she was working on. During a slight pause in her monologue, I changed the subject with an unrelated question – giving her one more test of her knowledge of my storyline.

“Let me guess where we're headed – to Van Nuys?” I asked.

“Why do you think so?” she retorted with a question of her own.

“Because Van Nuys has the Valley's main governmental center and courthouse, and is considered its unofficial capital. I figure your potential client probably works close to where the action is.”

“Well, you're right again,” she said. “Close anyway. It's called West Utopia now.”

She was still scoring 100% on her knowledge of my fictional future universe. What was a little bit unnerving was that I had not yet published any stories about Atlantis Valley. Was she hacking into my computer somehow? These speculations shortly ceased, when I noticed something even stranger.

Though it was a bright, sunny day, we were in the shade. There were no clouds overhead to block the sun, and I didn't hear any airplane or helicopter above. This Firebird was not equipped with a sunroof, so I couldn't look directly up to see the source of the shadow, but looking at the shadow on the ground, I could see that our car was the only one not in the sun, and that the shadow was not the shape of a cloud, but had giant wings, like an enormous bird! Since it was about 10:48 in the morning, and we were headed west, the sun was behind us and to our left – as was the mysterious shape blocking its rays – in other words, in the exact position where I wasn't able to move my head around to see it. Whatever this flying creature was, it seemed to be intentionally staying in a position to cast a shadow on the car – meaning that it was also matching our speed exactly – which was about 67 miles per hour.

When Urma slowed down to take the next exit, the creature flew past us, and I could see it through the front windshield. It was dark grey, with a long neck, and an enormous wedge-shaped head – and a wingspan of at least 50 feet! Or about 7 times that of the largest eagle I had ever seen!

“What's that?” I asked.

“Looks like a pterodactyl,” said Urma. “You're lucky to see one. They're on the endangered species list.”

“That's impossible,” I said. “Pterodactyls couldn't fly at 67 miles per hour.”

“Who are you to say something's impossible?” she quipped. “You're a science fiction writer.”

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *Will the pterodactyl play a particularly prominent part in the progression of the plot, or was it a cameo for comic relief? Who is the client Urma is taking Drake to meet? Why is Van Nuys now called West Utopia? At least one of*

*these questions will be partially answered in the next episode coming your way in 29 days, or thereabouts.*

## THE COBALT CONUNDRUM

### Episode 4: THE BEST VIEW IN VAN NUYS

**EDITOR'S NOTE.** *We now continue the adventures of Drake Cobalt, a Los Angeles attorney who thinks he's a science fiction writer.*

Do you ever enjoy seeing the world from a high vantage point? Well, I do! I like to drive up into the mountains and stop at viewpoints along the way and look at the fatlands down below.

When I'm in an airliner, I sit by a window when possible and, unlike many passengers who spend the flight sleeping, talking, or playing with their mobile devices, I look at the wide world passing beneath. It's like a roadmap that's several hundred miles wide and missing the labels, where you face the challenge of identifying the cities, mountains and other landmarks below.

However, as I was soon to discover, seeing the world from far above is not always quite as enjoyable as one would hope. But then, I'm getting ahead of myself, and telling the story out of sequence.

This had not been a typical day, so far. At least three things out of the ordinary had happened so far: (1) I was riding in a bright green 2019 Pontiac Firebird, although the last Pontiac was built in 2010, (2) What used to be called the San Fernando Valley was now Atlantis Valley, and stranger still, (3) For the last few miles on the freeway, a pterodactyl with at least a 47 foot wingspan had been flying above the car, keeping me in its shadow.

But all of these were about to pale compared to what happened next.

The driver of the Pontiac, a red-haired lady in her late 20s or early 30s, claimed to be a lawyer named Urma Understanding (the name of a character I had featured in several science-fiction courtroom dramas). She took an exit from the westbound 101 Freeway onto what used to be called Van Nuys Boulevard, but was now West Utopia Way.

The great winged creature, which had been flying above her car in just the right position to cast a shadow on us, soared past, and I was able to recognize her as a pterodactyl. Not that I had seen pterodactyls in person before, but I had seen them portrayed in movies and had built models of them as a youngster. For reasons unknown, I immediately thought of this beast as a "she" rather than a "he." I hoped the PCP (Politically Correct Police) wouldn't issue me a citation. She then circled in a wide arc, flying directly over the Firebird so low that I could almost count her long, sharp teeth as she seemed to smile at us. I had the feeling that she was definitely more interested in our car than any of the others on the road. Then she did another low altitude fly over and gave her first speaking lines.

"SQUAWK!"

At least, that's the best that I can describe her call. It was sort of like a cross between right-wing raven ranting in religious rapture, and the number of fingernails scraping across a chalkboard – all with the volume turned way too high. Unlike one or more of the characters in my stories, I was unable to translate what she was saying. But I imagined it to be something like:

"I AM WATCHING YOU, MR. DRAKE ATOM COBALT, ATTORNEY AT LAW. ARE YOU AFRAID YET?"

"I think that pterodactyl is coming after me," I said.

"Don't be paranoid," chided Urma.

“Why not?” I countered.

When Urma stopped at the next traffic light, my paranoia was proven correct. The pterodactyl landed next to my door, and using one of its talons, managed in a few graceful moves to open the car door, grab my jacket, and pull me out.

Even though, according to scientific speculation, the creature should not have been able to lift a 170 pound man, let alone fly with him, she seemed to have no trouble, as she headed toward the sky.

My first thought, as I was dangling in the air being held by the collar of my jacket was: This was my best suit – the medium gray one with the faint pin stripes – and I had just gotten it back from the cleaners, and now it would at least need pressing again, if not some serious tailoring.

My second thought, as we reached what I estimated to be an altitude of 200 feet, was that I hoped the jacket was well enough constructed so that it wouldn't just rip open, leaving me to plummet to the pavement below.

My third thought – when we were about 500 feet above the valley was – why am I even thinking about my suit at a time like this?

Overall, I hate to admit, I was not enjoying this unprecedented experience as much as I should have been. Rather than marveling at the exceptional view, and trying to pick out landmarks on the real life road map below us, I was worrying about being dropped -- or even worse -- being taken back to her aerie and fed to her young ones.

When we were at what seemed like 8 miles high, but was probably only a thousand feet, she spoke again.

“SQUAWK.”

Once again, I could not translate this, but I imagined her to be saying:

“IT WAS NICE TO MEET YOU, MR. COBALT. SO LONG.”

Then, she let go. And I was falling like a bag of cement toward the landscape below. You may have heard that when someone is falling from a great height, their whole life passes before their eyes. If that was the case, I would be able to tell quite a number of my stories. In fact, I could make a whole novel out of someone's long fall. However, since the editor only allows me about 1,000 words per episode, the only real thought I had was:

“AAAHHH!!”

**EDITOR'S END-NOTE.** *This drama is detouring into a decidedly drastic direction for Drake. We are fairly safe in predicting that one of three things will happen: (a) By some miracle, Drake will survive the fall, and continue to tell the tale. (b) He won't survive, and the tale will be continued with a new narrator, or (c) This was the last episode. Well, Dear Readers, you will find out in about 30 days, when we will either have another newsletter -- or we won't!*

## THE COBALT CHRONICLES

### EPI SODE 5 - THE MAN WHO DOESN'T EXIST

*EDITOR'S NOTE: We now continue the adventures of Drake Cobalt, an obscure attorney who thinks he's a science fiction writer. In the last episode, while riding in a 2019 Pontiac Firebird, he was snatched by a pterodactyl (an enormous winged creature from the age of the dinosaur) and carried to a height of maybe 1,000 feet above the floor of the San Fernando Valley (now called Atlantis Valley) then unceremoniously dropped!*

I could go into great detail as to what I was thinking as I plummeted toward my probable demise. I could describe how my whole life passed in front of me. I could tell you of my wild ideas, hare-brained schemes and pipe dreams. I could talk of stories left unfinished, of plots yet to hatch. Yes, I could tell you all these things, and more. But none of it would be true. All I really thought while I was falling was: [explicative deleted].

Fortunately, I did not have to think that for very long. Shortly after I was dropped, I hit something soft, bounced around a bit, and wondered if I had survived or just started the first day of afterlife. I soon concluded that I had fallen onto an inflatable stunt bag, and was on the roof of a fairly tall building. I worked my way off the bag and stood on the hard surface below.

The pterodactyl responsible for my abduction and terror was standing not far away – but now she was now paying attention to another man.

I estimated him to be about 6 feet tall and 195 pounds. He seemed like the kind of fellow who might have played center for the Atlantis State University football team a decade ago, and made it a point to stay in trim physical condition. I couldn't tell his hair color since he was wearing a leather flight helmet like a World War I pilot might wear – except that it was a bright, Kelly green, matching his flight suit.

"Good Girl!" he said, patting the pterodactyl on her long beak, and confirming my suspicion that the creature was female. I made a mental note to warn this fellow that he was opening himself up to a sex discrimination suit by referring to her as a "girl."

He then pulled a fish out of a bucket of water, and tossed it into the air. The pterodactyl leapt skyward to gobble the fish down, then, as she flew away, said: "SQUAWK!"

Once again, I didn't know exactly what she meant, but I could only surmise it was something like:

"I RISK LIFE AND WING FOR YOU, AND ALL I GET IS A STINKING FISH?!?!"

The man walked toward me, and smiling broadly said, "Hey, dude, how's it going?"

Then he looked at me more closely, seemed a bit puzzled, and said, "Oh, sorry. I thought you were someone else."

My previous terror now turned into indignation and rage.

"What!" I demanded. "Your pterodactyl kidnaps me, and drops me from a thousand feet, traumatizing me, no doubt taking a number of years from my lifespan, and all you can say is, 'Sorry, I thought you were was someone else?' I'm going to sue your [explicative deleted] for intentional infliction of emotional distress!"

“Go ahead,” he laughed. “I’ve got a good lawyer.”

Our pleasant conversation was suddenly interrupted when an indignant lady wearing a military uniform, also a bright Kelly green, suddenly appeared on the scene. She glanced only slightly at me, and said to the man,

“What the [explicative deleted] are you doing? Why are you bringing a civilian up here? Don’t you know this is off limits to anyone below a Security Level Seven?”

“It’s ok,” said the man. “He’s a lawyer.”

“And what are you still doing here? Here you are playing with your Little Birdie and forgot that you have a meeting with the Committee?! Remember what happened the last time you stood them up? They cut our funding by 20%. If you miss this one, they may cut our funding altogether!”

“Remind me when and where this meeting is supposed to be,” said the man.

“12:00 noon, at our new Bakersfield office. That’s 100 miles away. It’s 11:15 now. It will take you two hours to get there if you leave now. You’d better call and tell them you’ll be an hour or more late.”

“Nonsense,” he responded. “I can make it to Bakersfield in half an hour. I’ll stop and have coffee on the way.”

Then he held his hand up to his mouth and shouted, at the top of his lungs, “SQUAWK!”

I didn’t know what he meant by this, but assumed it was something like, “LOOK AT ME. I’M CRAZY. I THINK I’M A BIRD.”

My supposition was immediately confirmed when he ran at top speed toward the edge of roof and jumped off! I went to the edge myself, and looked down, expecting to see him splattered over the pavement below. Instead, I saw that he had landed on the back of the pterodactyl, who was now circling back over the top of the building for a quick farewell fly-over. She flew only inches above the green-uniformed lady, who had hit the ground to avoid being pummeled.

When the lady got up, she glared in the direction of the rapidly receding winged creature and rider, saying, “And a great day to you as well, Little Birdie.” Then she went toward a door that no doubt led to lower levels of the building. Sensing that I wasn’t following, she turned around and said, “Well, come on.”

I followed her down the stairway and asked, “Who was that guy? And what is this place?” I thought I already knew the answers, but it seemed only appropriate to ask.

She turned to look at me briefly and said, "The man you THOUGHT you saw on the roof doesn't exist. Nor does this building. Neither will you if you tell anybody anything you saw or heard here. So, you had better remember to forget everything when you leave here."

"Remember to forget?" I said. "Why don't I just forget to remember?"

"Just like a science fiction writer to try to make a joke out of everything," she snorted derisively. She took me into a conference room, said "Wait here," and was gone again.

After I got over the indignation over the very bad manners and poor hospitality, I realized that three more of my fictional characters had just manifested themselves in the physical universe – and realized that they were more fun to write about than to meet in person. They should be treating me with a lot more respect, since I was their creator!

***Editor's End Note.*** *Who was the man who doesn't exist? What is the name of his Little Birdie? Will Drake be treated with a little more respect? The answers to one or more of these questions will be included in the next episode.*

**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**EPI SODE 6 - A CALM AND CASUAL CUP OF COFFEE**

**EDITOR'S NOTE.** *We now join our narrator and protagonist, Drake Cobalt, an attorney who thinks he is a science fiction writer, in the late morning of a somewhat unusual day. Starting at his law office on Wilshire Blvd., in downtown Los Angeles, he met a young attorney named Urma Understanding, who also fit the description of one of his fictional characters by that name. She wanted him to come with her to meet a potential client in the Valley. He assumed she meant the San Fernando Valley. But when they crossed the Cahuenga Pass, they were in his fictional land of Atlantis Valley, a colony of the future Atlantis of several of his science fiction stories. When they reached the area that used to be Van Nuys, he was snatched out of Urma's Firebird by a pterodactyl, carried to a great height, and dropped. Fortunately, he landed on a big air bag atop a several story building rather than on a hard surface below. After a brief, but totally unsatisfactory, conversation with two people who apparently worked in the building, he was informed that neither they nor the building existed, and he was taken to a conference room and told to wait.*

The conference room wasn't too different from what you'd expect in any modern high-rent high-rise. A rectangular marble table with 8 comfortable chairs. A presentation screen on one wall, a large whiteboard on another. But I was most interested in the window. From the shapes of the distant mountains, I could tell that the window faced north. This was consistent with my internal direction sense. A good sign that I was still somewhat oriented despite my recent traumatic tumble.

The mountains were about the same as I remembered. But greener. To the east, the Verdugo Hills smiled down upon Glendale and Burbank. To the northwest, the Santa Susana Range was topped by the 3,747 ft. Oat Mountain. To the west loomed the low, rocky Simi Hills. However, the flat expanse encircled by these ranges was a lot different from the San Fernando Valley of my day. Fewer high-rises and factories. More empty space – though I should say more spaces filled with trees, crops and vineyards.

After enjoying the view for a minute or so, I noticed that the room was missing one crucial element. A pot of coffee!

I decided to go down the hall in search of the blessed black beverage.

But the door was locked! I had been locked into this accursed room! Now, I was definitely going to sue for false imprisonment. If I ever got out of here.

I banged on the door. No response. I banged louder and shouted. Still silence.

I reached for my cell phone. Amazingly, it was still in my jacket pocket despite my dramatic descent of a few minutes ago. But any signal was sorely lacking.

Then I saw something old fashioned. A landline phone on the credenza along one wall. I picked it up and dialed "O" for Operator.

"Hello?" I demanded.

A strange, asexual voice jabbered back several words at me in a language I'd never heard.

"There's no coffee in the conference room," I explained.



Several more incomprehensible words, ending with one I recognized. “Kaw-Phee?”

“Yes! Coffee,” I anxiously agreed.

“Kaw-Phee!” said the voice, and the line went dead.

In a couple of minutes, the door opened. In came a little fellow balancing a large silver tray holding a hefty coffee carafe, flanked by a creamer and sugar bowl and encircled by several white porcelain cups. I realized that although I thought of him as “little” his estimated 4’2” height might be considered tall among his kind, and the 68 pounds I judged he weighed might be brawny.

I also realized that I was thinking of him as a “fellow” with no real proof of his or her gender. I looked closer for a clue. His pale green skin had no hint of facial hair, and there were no brows or lashes above his enormous yellow eyes. But the heavy gold ring he wore in the lower point of his over-sized left ear definitely seemed masculine. The deciding factor, however, was the bright blue L.A. Dodger cap, with two little holes carefully cut to allow his antennae through.

He set the tray down on the table and said several more incomprehensible words ending in “Kaw-phee.”

“Si, Señor,” I said. “Muchas gracias.”

I poured myself a steaming cup of caffeine juice, relaxed in one of the plush chairs, and enjoyed the view of the Valley some more. Then it hit me. Like a ton of bricks! I got the sort of cold, prickly feeling you might get when something seemingly supernatural happens. I had just been served coffee by a little green-skinned man! This was an historic occasion, proving that humans weren’t the only intelligent life in the universe! Or that I was hallucinating.

But then, this was no stranger than driving through a time warp, or seeing a man who doesn’t exist flying away on the back of a pterodactyl. And definitely not as strange as riding in a 2019 Pontiac Firebird!

The door to the conference room opened again. This time, I was happy to see a normal-sized human entering. It was Urma Understanding! Or at least the woman who claimed to have that name, and who seemed to know the character even better than I did. She seemed in a good humor, and poured herself a cup of coffee, adding cream and sugar.

“How did you enjoy your pterodactyl ride?” She asked.

“ENJOY is not exactly one of the verbs I would be using,” I responded.

“Well, you should feel honored. Not many visitors here get the red carpet treatment.”

“What is this place anyway?” I asked.

“You tell me,” she said.

I wasn’t sure I liked this turn in the conversation. When we had started out, I was asking her questions to test her knowledge of my storylines. Now it was like she was testing me. But I played along.

“Offhand,” I said, “I would guess that this is the headquarters of BOSO.”

“Did you say BOZO?” she demanded with pretended indignation.

“No. I pronounced it right. BOSO.”

“And what does that stand for?”

“The Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Operation, of course,” I replied.

**EDITOR’S ENDNOTE:** *What is the mission of BOSO? And why were Drake and Urma summoned to its headquarters? Will they be able to get a refill for their*

*coffee pot? One or more of these questions will be answered in the next episode, so stay tuned!*

**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**EPI SODE 7 – AN INTENSIVE INTAKE INTERVIEW, INTERRUPTED**

*EDITOR'S NOTE. We now join, in progress, the adventures of DRAKE ATOM COBALT, an obscure attorney who thinks he's a Science Fiction writer.*

I was either having a major, long-lasting, very realistic hallucination -- or quite a number of people were paying quite a bit of money to play an elaborate joke on me.

It had all started at 10:17 this morning. Less than two hours ago. Though it seemed like decades. A young attorney named Urma Understanding met me at my office in downtown Los Angeles, and asked me to accompany her to the Valley to meet a potential client. Now, she and I were waiting in a conference room in a high-rent high-rise building in what used to be Van Nuys, which I had just discovered was the headquarters of the Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Operation, or BOSO for short.

Before Urma had much opportunity to fill me in about the potential clients, the conference room door opened again, and in came two women. The first was the one who had brought me to, and locked me in this conference room. She wore something resembling an Air Force or Navy dress uniform except that it was a bright, vivid green. Her hair was a cross between dishwater and bleach, worn in an unattractive bun. I guessed she was a Major by the gold oak leaf on her shoulders.

Next to her was a younger, more striking woman, whose age I would guess as late 20s or early 30s. Her long blond hair was woven into two long braids, and topped by a round leather helmet with two golden horns. Something like a Minnesota Vikings fan might wear. She wore a short purple dress, partly covered with body armor. Around her waist was something like a tool belt, but holding only one accessory – a wooden croquet mallet.

As the Major walked briskly into the room, Urma quickly rose, as if standing at attention. I followed suit. The Major stood behind the chair at the head of the table, motioned the younger woman to stand to her left, and the two attorneys to the right side of the table.

"Be seated," she commanded. We were. She wasted no time in beginning the conversation, if you could call it that.

"Since we all know each other, we will dispense with the pleasantries and get right to the point."

I started to say, "Wait a second. I don't know either of you." But I only got as far as far as the first "W--" when Urma kicked my left ankle with a sharp pointed shoe. I assumed this was her concise way of telling me, "Shut up and let me conduct the interview."

While the Major glared at my aborted interruption attempt, Urma interjected brief introductions for my benefit.

“Drake, you remember Major Matilda Hunter, and her sister, Hildegard Armstrong?”

“Of course,” I readily agreed. How could I forget them since they were prominent characters in a story I’d written recently?

Major Hunter continued. “Our two fine lawyers here are going to be filing a multi-million dollar lawsuit against Megabucks Studio.”

I remembered how, in Episode 3, we drove past the Megabucks Hotel and Casino, and Urma told me that name would be significant before the day was over. She was right.

Urma replied, “We would love to sue Megabucks. But first we need some grounds for a lawsuit.”

“You’ve got plenty of grounds. My little sister, Hilda, has been taken advantage of by Megabucks. Big time. They owe her at least 10 million. That’s in American dollars.”

“But why?” asked Urma.

“You’ve seen their latest blockbuster, DEATH AND DESTRUCTION, I assume.”

I hadn’t seen it myself, but kept quiet.

Urma said, “I’m not a fan of high-budget action movies, myself. And I especially wouldn’t waste my time or money to see one about JUDAS ARMSTRONG. But I’ve heard it’s doing well at the box office.”

“Setting records,” said Hildegarde.

“Well,” continued the Major, “Megabucks has been using Judas Armstrong’s name and likeness and events from his life to make millions from their movies, without paying him a penny.”

“But Judas Armstrong is just a legendary character from a number of old folk tales. He’s part of the public domain, and anyone can use him in a story.

“He’s real,” said Hildegarde. “And I married him.”

“That’s right,” agreed the Major. “And all the royalties that he’s owed from Megabucks are community property – meaning Hilda’s entitled to at least half of them.”

“That’s going to be hard to prove,” countered Urma.

"What are you talking about?" replied the Major. "There were at least 100 people at the wedding. You were one of the guests."

Then she paused, looking at me piercingly. "You were there too," she said, pointing an accusing finger. "You volunteered to be his best man."

Before I had the chance to say, "I wasn't there, and have no idea what you're talking about," Urma adroitly continued the interview.

"Yes, I'm aware that Hilda married a man who claimed to be Judas Armstrong. But anyone is free to make that claim, or even use the name. What makes you think that he's the one that the legends were made from?"

"He's the one," Hilda insisted. "He has a magic sword that can slice holes through time and space. He's unsurpassed at martial arts. And he saves planets."

"Not to mention that he's an irresponsible drunkard and a womanizer," added the Major.

"That too," agreed Hilda. "He said I was the only woman in the world for him. And maybe it's true. But when I found out he has several other women on other worlds, I decided to call it quits."

"Finally you made a good decision, little sister," said Major Hunter. Then she looked at Urma and me. "So not only are you going to file a multi-million dollar lawsuit against Megabucks, you're also going to file a multi-million dollar divorce action against Judas Armstrong. Can you get these filed this afternoon?"

Urma gave the impression of thinking hard. "I need to confer privately with my co-counsel before we decide how to proceed."

"Of course," agreed the Major. "We'll give you five minutes." She and her little sister briskly left the room.

Urma looked at me with a slight smile. "So, what do you think?"

"These are they type of clients we should avoid like the plague," I said. "They have unrealistic expectations and a probably unwinnable case. Matilda wants to control the litigation, and thinks she knows more about the law than we do. So, if this were real life, I'd say let's get away from here as quickly as we possibly can."

"And if this isn't 'real life' -- as you put it -- then what would you say?"

"If this is all a fictional story, then we have no choice but to take the case. Otherwise, it would ruin the plot."

*EDITOR'S END-NOTE. Will Drake and Urma take the case? Will Hildegard use her croquet mallet? What is the next Judas Armstrong movie that Megabucks*

*plans to release? One or more of these questions will be answered in the next episode, so stay tuned!*

*EDITOR'S END NOTE # 2: For those of you who missed Episodes 1 thru 6, all previous episodes are available upon request, at no charge.*

## **THE COBALT CHRONICLES**

### **EPISODE 8 – REVELATIONS REGARDING RELATIVE REALITIES**

Hello, out there in newsletter land. This is your narrator and your main character, the incomparable Drake Atom Cobalt, a well-known attorney practicing on Wilshire Boulevard, in or close to downtown Los Angeles. Also one of the world's top five writers of Science Fiction Courtroom Drama Musical Comedy.

There! Doesn't that description beat my previous one – “an obscure attorney who thinks he's a science fiction writer?”

You should always put the best possible spin on things, right? Especially when everything you've blandly accepted as real for the last several decades is about to come unglued, crumble into pieces, and get washed away by the rain. But I'm getting ahead of the story again.

Here's a quick synopsis for those who joined us late. I'm in the conference room of a high-rent, high-tech, high-rise, which happens to be the headquarters of the Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Operation (or BOSO for short. Their mission, as implied by their name, is to investigate bizarre occurrences and sightings).

With me is a younger attorney, Urma Understanding, who invited me along to meet a potential client. After we got a quick rundown of the client's case, Urma wanted to meet with me privately. I told her that this is the type of case we should avoid like the plague. Then I decided it was time to level with her.

“But first,” I asked, “Is it safe to talk here?”

“What do you mean?”

“Don't you expect that this room is bugged? And that they're listening to what we're saying?”

“Probably so, but there's not really any way around that. They have probably already planted a bug in my car, and if we went to a restaurant, they could send in an insect size drone to watch and listen.”

“Okay, let's take our chances, and go ahead and talk. But first, is this covered by attorney-client privilege?”

“If you ask me for legal advice, yes.”

“Assume that I am. Sit down.”

“I'm already seated,” she responded.

“Well, then, have a big swig of coffee. This isn’t going to be easy to talk about.”

She had a sip of coffee, and waited for me to continue.

“I hope I don't offend you. But I already know all of the people we've met today. You, and all the others, are characters that I created for my science fiction stories. Somehow, you're all coming to life. Or seeming to. But none of this is really real.”

I wondered how Urma would respond to finding out she was a fictional character. Better than I expected.

“So, you write fiction?” she asked, with a slight smile.

“Yes. Mostly in the genre of Science-Fiction Courtroom Drama.”

“And what are some of the stories you've written about these characters?”

“Starting with you, Urma, I've written several stories about a young attorney in the distant future, on the newly risen Continent of Atlantis. These include ESCAPE FROM TRANQUILITY, TULIPS FOR THE TYRANT, A TOWN WITHOUT LAWYERS, and JUDGE HANGMAN RULES.

“You haven't written TULIPS FOR THE TYRANT yet,” she said. “You wrote part of the first chapter and an outline of the rest. But you've lost what you have written so you'll have to start up from scratch when you start writing it again.”

“How did you know that?”

“Never mind that, what about the other characters?”

“The man that Matilda claims doesn't exist. The guy on the roof who flew away on the back of the pterodactyl. That's Colonel Harmony. When you were growing up in South Atlantis City, he lived next door, and was best friends with your older brother Urnie. Now he is the director of BOSO. I invented him as a back in about 1994 or '95, as a minor character for my first novel, LORD OF THE CONSTITUTION. Since then, I've featured him in several stories, including POKER IS FOR THE BIRDS, A BROUHAHA AT BOSO, and HIS LAST DAY ON EARTH.

“And his little birdie?” she asked, jokingly referring to the pterodactyl.

“I'm not sure what her name is, since I've used different names for her in my stories. Let's call her Tara for now. She's just as intelligent as Harmony, maybe more so. At least she's better at chess and poker than he is. In one storyline I've started on, she is going to become the first female world chess champion.”

“These tales sound entertaining,” said Urma. “What about the two ladies we just met?”



“Major Matilda Hunter is second in command of BOSO, although she more or less runs the place, since Harmony is mostly a figurehead. It’s ironic for her to be working here, since she automatically discounts any supernatural or extraterrestrial occurrences, and always comes up with some totally outlandish explanation that’s “logical” or “scientific.” Her younger sister, Hilda, did marry Judas Armstrong at the Grand Canyon. Her wedding was a planned-on-the-spot epilogue to the main wedding, which was Colonel Harmony and his bride, Cayenne.”

“How did Harmony and Cayenne meet?”

“Haven’t they told you?”

“Maybe, but I want to hear the version from your story.”

“This is from another of my many stories in progress, THE AMAZING ORIGIN OF ATLANTIS. In order to save the New Atlantis, Harmony must discover what happened to Ancient Atlantis. He travels back in time – first to the early 2020s, to consult with a great god who can easily answer any question any human could pose. The god’s name is N-Tur-Net. Then he goes further back to visit with Plato, who wrote the first recorded story about Atlantis. Then, after a meeting with Zeus, King of the Greek Gods, he travels to a much earlier place where he rescues Cayenne from a great flood. Then, he brought her back to the future. To your time. To the time period we’re in now. They fell in love and got married.”

“A great love story,” said Urma. “You mentioned that Hilda got married to Judas Armstrong. And Matilda said that you were his best man at the wedding.”

“I don’t remember that at all,” I said. “But it sounds like something I would have volunteered for. Judas is my favorite fictional character. The one I have written the most stories about. He starred in THE SECRET OF THE SAUCE, LUNCHTIME OF THE GODS, SOFT LANDING ON THE SUN, ARIZONA AMBUSH, and several others I haven’t written yet.”

Then, I suddenly realized how ludicrous it was to be describing my stories to one of my fictional characters. “Why are you quizzing me like this?” I asked.

“Sit down,” she said.

“I am seated.”

“Well, then, have a big swig of coffee. This isn’t going to be easy to talk about.”

EDITOR’S END NOTE. What will Urma say that won’t be easy? Will Drake be glad that he is already seated? Will he wish he had taken a big swig of tequila rather than coffee? One or more of these questions will be answered in the next episode!

EDITOR'S END NOTE # 2. Most of the stories referred to in this episode are available from the author upon request. But did Drake really write any of them?

## THE COBALT CHRONICLES

### EPISODE 9: MORE REVOLTING REVELATIONS

By Douglas A. Crowder

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: We now join the continuing adventures of our narrator / protagonist, Drake Atom Cobalt, a lawyer in downtown Los Angeles in the early 2020s, who thinks he's a science fiction writer.*

Where were we? I should probably fill you in, though I've had a hard time keeping track myself.

Over the last 8 episodes, I've described:

First, meeting with a younger attorney, Urma Understanding, who claimed she knew me, and that she had attended one of my seminars.

Second, going with her to meet a new client. We were now in a conference room in a high-tech, high-priced high-rise overlooking an area formerly known as the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. Significantly, the building is also the headquarters of BOSO (the Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Operation).

Third, the initial interview with our potential client, Hildegard Armstrong, and her older sister, Major Matilda Hunter, the Deputy Director of BOSO.

Then, in the last episode, while Urma and I were having a private conference to discuss whether to take the case, I decided it was time to let her know that she, the clients, and everyone else we had met since leaving my office, were all characters in my science fiction stories.

Her reaction upon hearing that she was but a figment of my imagination was better than you might have expected. She listened patiently, interjecting questions in appropriate places, then told me to sit down (though I was already seated) and have a big swig of coffee. (I wish now I'd had a big swig of whiskey instead).

"I'm an author as well as a lawyer," she began. "I've published two novels under the pen name Lizzie Slerg."

"That's a name you can legitimately use as your own," I interjected. "Since your middle name is Elizabeth and your former husband was Johnny Slerg – yes, the musician – you can call yourself Lizzie Slerg."

"Right," she said, seemingly unimpressed by my knowledge of the storylines she starred in. "I write speculative historical fiction. Specifically, about the period of time shortly before, and leading up to the Decade of Chaos."

"By which you mean the turbulent time when the human race lost all of its written history, most of its technology and the majority of its members."

"Yes," she said, still seeming unimpressed by my encyclopedic knowledge, and also a bit impatient at my interruptions.

"For one of my novels, I picked a setting in the early 2000s in the legendary city of Los Angeles, before it sank beneath the sea."

"Say," I interrupted again, with a sudden epiphany, "That's one thing that Ancient Atlantis and Legendary Los Angeles have in common. They both disappeared beneath the waves, as possible punishment from the Gods."

"That's right," she agreed, "Which has led some scholars to speculate that the legends of Atlantis and of Los Angeles are about the same city. But now, back to what I was telling you. One of the characters in my novel was a fairly typical attorney, except that he thought he was a science fiction writer. He was named Drake Adam Cobalt."

"The middle name is Atom, not Adam," I gleefully corrected, overjoyed to catch her in a mistake.

"No," she contradicted calmly, "You misspelled it." Then she continued. "Recently, while I've been drafting my 3<sup>rd</sup> novel, some of my characters have been coming to life and actually appearing in the physical universe."

She paused, apparently to take a sip of coffee, but probably to let what she was telling me sink in.

"I hate to tell you this, Drake, but I've got good news and bad news."

"Let's have the bad news first," I said.

"Good choice," she agreed. "The bad news is that you aren't a science fiction writer. Your stories have very little science in them – they're more like future fantasy legal soap operas. But more importantly, most of them aren't even fiction. You're just writing down events that have already happened to me. Or that I've heard about or read about. Even though, most of the time, you don't get them quite right when you put them down on paper."

"I've had worse reviews for my novels," I replied. "What's the good news?"

"If I said there was good news, I was misquoted. But there's even worse news. It's what I've been trying to tell you that you just don't seem to be getting. You're one of my fictional characters. You aren't real. I just imagined you."

I laughed long and loud. Not because I was particularly amused, but because it seemed like the appropriate thing to do when everything you've accepted up to that point has been suddenly contradicted.

"Let me get this straight," I blustered. "One of my fictional characters – and not even my main one, I might add – is now claiming that I'm one of her fictional characters?"

"Or vice-versa," she replied.

"You're my creation," I insisted. "Now, you're imagining that it's the other way around. Not that you have any evidence whatsoever to support that illusion."

"You don't need any more evidence than what you know and can observe," she said. "Just look at the world around you. Is it your world? Does your world have pterodactyls or an agency called BOSO? Or 2019 Pontiac Firebirds, when the last Pontiac was built in 2010?"

"No," I admitted, "But my fictional world does. Everything we've experienced since coming over the Cahuenga Pass is part of one or more of my stories. And I'll bet that the supposed novels you've written are just what you've picked up from me – and not gotten quite right."

What might have turned into an entertaining philosophical discussion was suddenly interrupted by two loud bangs on the conference room door, followed by the door bursting open too soon to have even allowed for a possible invitation to enter. In came

our two potential clients. Or more specifically, our potential client, Hildegarde Armstrong, and her older sister, Major Matilda Hunter, who seemed to be in charge of hiring her attorneys.

“Well,” said the Major. “You asked for five minutes to confer. You’ve taken seven. Are you ready to take the case yet? You’ve still got four hours to get the complaint filed.”

*EDITOR’S END NOTE: Will either or both of our lawyer protagonists take on the case? How much retainer will they collect? Which one is real and which is fantasy? One or more of these questions will be answered in the next episode, so stay tuned!*

## THE COBALT CHRONICLES

### EPISODE 10: NEGOTIATING THE FEE AGREEMENT

By Douglas A. Crowder

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: We now join Drake Cobalt, a totally fictional attorney who practices in a faraway and mythical land known as Los Ankalees, in the distant year of 2020.*

Drake: It's hard to believe we're already on Episode 10. I'm going to try fill you in quickly with what you need to know to follow this installment. If I lose you, I apologize in advance. If you'd like to read the first 9 episodes to catch up, I'm sure the Editor will send you a copy on request.

I'm with a younger attorney, Urma Understanding, who (for reasons yet unknown) wanted me with her when she interviewed two potential clients with a somewhat unusual case. She and I were having a private conference to discuss whether to take the case (and some other things) when the clients interrupted our meeting, demanding to know whether we would take the case, and if so, could we have the complaint filed this afternoon. Since these were Urma's potential clients, I let her take the lead.

"We will take the case," she said. "We can get the complaint filed before the court closes at 4:30 p.m. We will need a \$50,000 retainer. That's American dollars. Cash."

Hildegard (an attractive young woman dressed like a Minnesota Vikings fan) who was going to be the actual client, maintained a poker face, without seeming startled or upset.

Such was not the case with her older sister, Major Matilda Hunter (wearing a bright green military uniform) who seemed to be giving the orders. She responded with something between a snort and a laugh.

"\$50,000! You're going to take this case on a straight contingency of 20%. With nothing down. You should be paying us for the opportunity to represent us. You're going to make millions in attorney fees, not to mention the book rights after trial!"

I'm sure that any attorneys in the audience will immediately realize that this was the ideal client we are all hoping for. But I kept my mouth shut.

"This case is not going to be as easy as you may think," said Urma. "In case you hadn't realized, Megabucks Studios isn't exactly the easiest party to sue. They have their own in-house legal team, as well as the most obnoxious outside attorneys that money can buy. They're going to run us ragged with perpetual discovery demands and any types of motions you can think of. If we win at trial - assuming we can get to trial - they will keep the case tied up in appeals for the next several years. We will take the case on a combined contingency and hourly rate. But we will still need \$50,000 to start."

"You've got to be joking!" replied the Major. "What makes you think we could come up with anything near that much money? Hilda is unemployed with two small children, and no support from her deadbeat husband - a third rate actor with a drinking problem!"

"Maybe so," conceded Urma, "But I know that you, Major Matilda Hunter, have hundreds of thousands of dollars at your disposal. Dollars that you managed to obtain thanks to your position as Deputy Director of B.O.S.O. Dollars that the Committee doesn't know about."

In case I lost you there, B.O.S.O. is short for the Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Operation. The Committee she is referring to is The Joint Oversight Committee for the Evaluation of Extraordinary Research (J.O.K.E.E.R.), which is responsible for BOSO's funding, or lack thereof. See TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE, Book 2, A BROUHAHA AT B.O.S.O. for full details.

For just an instant, I sensed that Major Hunter was shaken up a bit, and about to lose her composure. She recovered quickly with a laugh that didn't sound quite convincing.

"That's a bizarre accusation! I don't suppose you have any factual basis for it!"

"A little birdie told me," responded Urma calmly.

"A little birdie?" repeated the Major, showing a little bewilderment, which turned quickly to anger. "A little birdie! Colonel Harmony's pterodactyl! I should have known better than to have trusted that stinking, prehistoric mutant monstrosity!"

Hilda, who had been quietly listening to the foregoing colloquy without much reaction, suddenly spoke up.

"I know what you can use for a retainer payment, Urma."

"What?"

"Three of the twelve diamonds that Judas Armstrong gave you. Those would net more than \$50,000."

Let me fill you in a bit more. Judas Armstrong was the name given by a defendant charged with resisting arrest and assaulting peace officers. Urma represented him in an arraignment, but he disappeared before trial. See TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE, BOOK 1 -- JUDGE HANGMANN RULES, for full details. Judas Armstrong was also a legendary character about whom Megabucks Studio had made several blockbuster action movies.

"You mean the diamonds that she didn't report as income?" chimed in Major Hunter, suddenly regaining her confidence. "Or share with her senior partners, Archie Peace and Hieronymus Love?"

Now it was Urma's turn to lose her cool just a bit. She hid it well and quickly recovered at least the appearance of complete self-assurance.

"Diamonds? From Judas Armstrong? Who would believe a story like that?"

"Maybe the IRX," suggested Major Hunter, "Since you didn't pay taxes on them!"

I hadn't heard the abbreviation IRX for a while. But I knew that it stood for the Imperial Revenue Exchange, one of the oldest and most cherished institutions in the Empire – which played a big part in my play from many decades ago, APRIL 15TH - TAX FREEDOM DAY.

"What's your source of information?" demanded Urma. "I suppose some little birdie told you."

"No," said Hilda. "My husband did."

Did I forget to tell you that Judas Armstrong was also the man Hilda claimed to have married? And who was the basis her possible lawsuit against Megabucks for using his name and likeness in their movies without paying him a commission?

"Alright," said Urma. "We'll take the case for a 33% contingency fee, plus one quarter of our usual hourly fee, with a \$20,000 retainer."

"Agreed," said the Major, apparently speaking for her little sister.

*EDITOR'S END NOTE: What sort of litigation morass did Urma just commit herself to? Will Drake play along? Will they get a complaint filed before 4:30 p.m.? Will the pterodactyl reappear and take offense to Major Hunter's description? There's no guarantee that any of these questions will be answered in the next episode, but you should nevertheless await it eagerly!*



**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**Episode 11 – THE BEGINNING OF THE END? OR THE END OF THE**  
**BEGINNING?**

By Douglas A. Crowder  
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*EDITOR'S NOTE: Don't believe a word of what you're about to read. It's totally fiction – if not fantasy. Most of it, anyway.*

I'm Drake Atom Cobalt, an attorney practicing in downtown Los Angeles. I'm also a science fiction writer. Or at least I thought I was until a few hours ago. Now, I wonder how much of it was really fiction?

At 10 a.m. this morning, a young attorney came to my office asking me to go with her to meet some potential clients. Her name was Urma Understanding. Which is also the name of one of my science-fiction characters. Then, she introduced me to Major Matilda Hunter, and her younger sister, Hilda Armstrong. Two more of my characters.

In the last episode, Urma negotiated a fee agreement with the clients. That's all you need to know to follow this episode. If you want to hear about how we entered another world as we drove into what used to be the San Fernando Valley, or my stomach-churning encounter with a pterodactyl, you'll just have to ask the Editor for the previous episodes.

Major Hunter opened a thin leather briefcase I hadn't noticed her carrying before, pulled from it a desirable stack of bills, and quickly counted out the down payment she and Urma had agreed upon. Oddly enough, despite the fact that we were in the Nation of West Atlantis (and no telling how many centuries in the future), the bills still bore the scowling face of Benjy Boy Franklin, rather than a more modern face such as Barak Obama, Donald Trump, or Bill Gates.

"Here's your retainer. In American dollars," she said, "Time to get to work now. You've got just over 3 hours to get the lawsuit drafted and filed before the court clerk's office closes at 4:30."

(Apparently this was before the days of electronic filing).

"No problem," said Urma. "Drake will be handling the first phase of the litigation."

"Huh? What?" I responded intelligently. This wasn't something I remembered agreeing to.

"Can Urma and I have another private conference?" I asked.

"You just had one a few minutes ago, why do you need another?" demanded Matilda.

"We don't," responded Urma. "Drake, you should have no trouble getting the documents drafted and filed in the next 3 hours."

"What am I supposed to be drafting?"

"Haven't you been paying attention? You're going to prepare Hilda's petition for divorce along with a motion for a temporary order giving her the right to control any community assets."

"Don't we need to get a written attorney-client agreement first?" I asked.

"I'll draw it up while you start working on the documents," she said.

I had a number of concerns about this recent turn of events. All I'd agreed to do for Urma was accompany her to meet some potential clients – not to get involved in a potentially explosive divorce case. (if you want an example of just how explosive this couple's relationship could be, ask the Editor for a copy of TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE PART II). My logic told me to get as far away from these people as quickly as I possibly could. But I had just been given a challenge to prepare and file a batch of documents with stiff deadline. My instinct to meet the challenge overrode my logic.

"Well, where's a computer I can use? I didn't bring my laptop."

"They haven't rediscovered computers yet," said Urma. "You'll have to use a typewriter."

While I was still coming to grips with this horrifying revelation, she handed me a folder.

"Here you go, Drake. Here's all the forms you should need."

"These are California Judicial Council forms!" I exclaimed. "I thought we were in the Nation of West Atlantis."

"West Atlantis uses the California forms," she explained. "Remember that the Atlantean legal system is based on California law."

"Where are we going to be filing this action?" I asked.

"In the Van Nuys Superior Court – only a couple of miles from here."

"I thought this area wasn't called Van Nuys anymore."

"It isn't. But they kept the name of the courthouse."

"All right," I said. "Where's my typewriter?"

"It's on the way."

"And I could use another cup of coffee, too."

"Also on the way. I know you always demand more coffee when starting on a new case."

The door to the conference room opened, and in came the little green-skinned man who had brought coffee earlier, still wearing his blue Dodgers cap with little holes for his antennae. He was quite agile, and amazingly strong for his size – balancing, in one hand, a serving tray with coffee, cream, sugar and more white porcelain cups, and in the other, what appeared to be an IBM Selectric Typewriter. The suction cups at the ends of his tentacle-like fingers no doubt made this task easier for him. He placed the coffee in the center of the table, put the typewriter in front of me, then plugged it in.

"Gurgle, gurgle, gryptoff ghee," he said.

Your idea of the language and meaning of this sentence is as good as mine, but I responded with what seemed appropriate at the time.

"Muchas gracias, señor, por la tipeadora." This last word was my guess for the word "typewriter."

"Máquina de escribir," he instructed.

"Of course," I conceded, as he bounded away.

I ran my fingers over the keyboard, becoming reacquainted with an archaic artifact I hadn't used since my first decade as a lawyer -- and which many of my younger associates had only heard about in bedtime stories, but never seen.

"I'm glad this culture is at least advanced enough to have electric typewriters rather than manual," I commented to no one in particular.

"Naturally," responded Matilda indignantly. "Do you think we're in the dark ages?"

That was a question I decided would be better to avoid.

"Well, let's get started," I said. "Can Hilda and I meet privately?"

Hilda was one I was representing, though her older sister was paying the fee and doing most of the talking. I wanted to get information directly from the client, rather than someone else. Matilda started to object, but Urma knew what I was thinking.

"Come on, Matilda," said Urma, "Let's go work on the second phase of the litigation, and leave Drake and Hilda alone for awhile."

When Hilda and I were alone, I felt it appropriate to introduce myself again, since we hadn't had much direct interaction yet.

"Hello. I'm Drake Cobalt."

"I know who you are," she responded. "We've met before."

"When and where was that?" I asked.

"At my wedding," she said, seeming a bit impatient. "You were my husband's best man, remember?"

*EDITOR'S END NOTE: Now we have the makings of a real legal soap opera. Isn't it a conflict of interest for a best man to file a lawsuit against the groom? Will Drake get the papers ready to file by the clients' self-imposed deadline? Who is the little green man wearing the Dodgers cap? One or more of these questions may be answered in the next episode.*

**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**EPI SODE 12 – OUT OF THE FRYING PAN**

By Douglas A. Crowder  
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*EDITOR'S NOTE. We now join the continuing adventures of Drake Cobalt, an attorney who thinks he's a science fiction writer.*

Let's see. Where were we? Oh yes, I was telling you about how I had just started interviewing Hildegarde Armstrong, a lovely young lady for whom I was going to file a divorce (technically speaking a "Dissolution of Marriage," under California law – and also under the law of the Nation of West Atlantis, where we happened to be at the time.)

Let me describe her again, if you don't remember episode 7. She seemed about age 27, five feet seven inches tall and about 129 pounds. Blond hair woven into two long braids, and topped by a round golden helmet with two horns. Her short purple dress was partly covered with body armor. Around her waist was a sort of tool belt with a loop holding a croquet mallet (which is sort of like a wooden sledge hammer, if you aren't familiar with croquet). I wondered why she was carrying this. I was soon to find out.

I started out the interview by introducing myself, since we hadn't formerly met. She responded that we had already met – at her wedding, no less.

"You were my husband's Best Man, remember?"

I had no recollection of attending her wedding, let alone standing beside her groom in the ceremony. But I quickly decided to avoid the issue of my recollection or lack thereof. This raised another concern of greater importance.

"If I was his Best Man, are you comfortable with me representing you in a divorce case?"

"Sure, why not?"

"If I'm a relative or a good friend of your husband, there might be a conflict of interest for me to represent you in a divorce case against him."

Before she could answer my question (yes, it was sort of a question, though not phrased as such), we were interrupted by a loud repetitive clanging accompanied by flashing orange lights – like you might expect in an action movie where the world's about to end.

She pulled her croquet mallet from its belt loop and the alarm stopped.

“Someone’s in danger,” she said. “I’ll be back.”

She stood up, faced the window, held the mallet above her head with both hands, and chanted something like, “Spirit Guides awaken. To afar we must be taken. Where distant dangers beckon -- It is there that we must reckon.”

A small green glowing circle formed above the mallet, then hovered briefly near the ceiling before starting to move downward. It grew in size, surrounding Hilda. Then I noticed that I was also inside the circle. I debated briefly as to whether I should attempt to get outside of it or not. I debated too long, and the choice was taken from me. The circle continued downward into the floor.

Then things changed.

That’s an understatement.

The floor was gone. So was the whole high-rise office building we had been in.

We were floating. Somewhere. But not really “floating,” which implies something pleasant. More like falling. But “falling” implies moving downward. It felt like I was falling down, then up, then sideways, then two or more directions at once.

This was worse, if you can imagine, than what happened earlier today when I was dropped by a pterodactyl from what seemed like thousands of feet. At least then, I knew which way was down.

Hilda was floating / falling about 10 feet away from me, and didn’t seem disturbed at all. Until she saw me, that is.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded.

“I should ask you. I don’t know where your green circle is taking us.”

“I thought you would have had the sense to stay out of the circle.”

“Now you tell me.”

Somehow she managed to get closer. “Hang onto me, and don’t let go,” she ordered.

I complied, grabbing her shoulder, then asked, “Why?”

“Otherwise, you’ll drift away and never make it back. And close your eyes.”

“Why?” I asked again.

“You’ll be less likely to go stark staring mad.”

Again, I followed instructions.

I don't know how long we were falling / floating / tumbling, but it was longer than I would have liked. I kept my eyes closed, but my other senses were getting a lot of input. Sounds I didn't recognize. Winds blowing from different directions and speeds. Smells I don't want to describe.

Then, something hits me. Literally. Or I hit something. I must go partly unconscious for at least a few seconds. The next thing I remember, I'm taking an inventory of my situation, wondering whether I'm still alive, deciding I probably am, then speculating as to where I am. If anywhere. I'm lying face down on what seems to be a mixture of dirt, leaves and pine cones. It's soft enough, if a little lumpy. I decide to rest there for a bit while I'm recovering. But the temperature is starting to get a little warmer than I like. And the pleasant smell of smoke from a distant campfire is getting a little too strong. Then, I let out quite a yell as something hot hits the back of my neck. I brush away a burning ember, and stand up rapidly.

A wall of flaming trees to my left about 50 yards away! Another wall of fire to my right! Behind me the face of a sheer cliff. What seemed like a possible exit route straight ahead is just lighting up as the flames to the right and left join forces. No way out.

I'm not alone in this shrinking circle of safety. A dozen or so hikers are nearby -- rightfully disoriented and jabbering appropriately.

They all become quiet, when Hilda commands them loudly and authoritatively, "Get behind me. Stay close."

*EDITOR'S END NOTE. Will the hikers get to toast some marshmallows and sing some campfire songs? Will Drake's legal training be of use in this situation? How will this affect Hilda's divorce? Join us in 30 days, more or less, as the saga continues.*

**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**EPI SODE 13 – VIOLATING THE NO SMOKING RULE**

By Douglas A. Crowder  
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***EDITOR'S NOTE.** We now join the completely fictional adventures of the totally imaginary attorney Drake Cobalt, who practices in the mythical land of Los Ankalees. In the last episode, an interview with a divorce client suddenly took an unexpected turn when . . . well, we'll let Drake tell you himself.*

Have you ever felt trapped in a job? Like there was no way out? Like your dreams of a fulfilling and rewarding career had to be put on hold while you earned money however you could? Be honest now. I have to admit I've felt like that a few times myself.

But take my word for it. You don't know the meaning of the word "trapped." Not until you find yourself in a small clearing in the forest with a group of a dozen or more hikers. And you're the only one wearing a suit and tie.

But the fact that you're dressed inappropriately is not the most important thing. That's relatively unimportant compared to the fact that the forest is on fire. Flames to the right. Flames to the left. And what you thought was an escape route has just caught fire. You'll have to admit that this is a little worse than being trapped in a career that lacks personal achievement.

How did I get here? You could say that this was a divorce case gone horribly wrong.

But there's at least one person who hasn't given up. A young lady who is dressed as inappropriately as I am but in the opposite way. She's wearing a gold pointed helmet with two horns, atop her blond braided hair, with golden body armor over her purple dress.

This is Hilda Armstrong, the divorce client I was interviewing a few minutes ago in a high rise office building in Van Nuys. Or what used to be Van Nuys.

"Stay behind me," she loudly commands the hikers.

They obey, not necessarily because they trust her, but because there aren't any other options. She holds her wooden croquet mallet high above her head, and begins chanting, something like:

"Spirit Guides take heed. With your help we will be freed. Though deadly flames surround us, great magic will astound us."

A bolt of lightning came from the sky, striking her mallet. The mallet began to glow with a pulsating bluish light. Another lightning bolt struck, and another. Hilda's whole body was glowing.

Now, clouds were gathering above us, and there were claps of thunder louder than the roar of burning trees. Then the sky seemed to open up, and rain came down in a torrent. But only for a few moments. Then the rain quit, the clouds blew away, and the sky was blue and sunny again. The smoke from the trees was replaced by small clouds of steam. The fire was now a thing of the past. The hikers would be able to watch the evening news, enjoy breakfast the next morning, and maybe even play a game of tennis. Better yet, I was going to have a chance to argue in court once again.

The hikers jubilantly gathered around Hilda, showering her with praise and gratitude, and throwing questions at her like who she was and how she did that. Hilda didn't answer. She seemed tired, as if a little thing like summoning up a thunderstorm had taken lot of energy.

But I figured something should be said to the hikers. So, in the deepest, most authoritative voice I could muster, I said:

"Yes, we are angels, and we came from afar. Enjoy the extra time you have been given. Live each day to its fullest. Make us glad that we saved you."

Then, I stood next to Hilda, and held her shoulder, knowing what was coming next. She still seemed too tired to talk, but glared at me as if to say: "Just like a lawyer – to take credit for something he didn't do."

Then she again held the mallet over her head, and a green circle started glowing above. The circle came down and enveloped us, and we were gone. Or maybe I should say that the hikers and the mountains and the remains of the forest were gone. We were sort of falling / tumbling / drifting in the same vague inter-dimensional nowhere land we had come through minutes earlier. I knew the drill. Hold on to Hilda's shoulder so I don't go drifting off into the netherworld. Keep my eyes closed to improve my chances of staying sane.

Then, I feel something beneath my feet. Something reassuring. Something flat and a little soft. Like the carpeted floor of a conference room.

I open my eyes, and sure enough, we're back where we started from, on one of the upper floors of a several story office building where I was beginning to conduct the initial client interview to begin Hilda's divorce proceedings.

Sitting in one of the posh chairs surrounding the marble table is a slightly older woman, with short reddish hair, wearing a bright green military uniform. This is Hilda's older sister, Major Matilda Hunter, who also happens to be the deputy director of B.O.S.O. (the Bizarre Occurrences and Sighting Office), the agency whose headquarters we happen to be meeting in.

She didn't greet us with "Welcome back," or "Congratulations on your successful mission," or anything similar.



"I smell smoke. You've been out for a cigarette. Don't you know that there's no smoking allowed on these premises?"

"There was a forest fire," explained Hilda. "A group of hikers were trapped. I had to save them."

"Of course you did, Little Sister," Matilda said. "In case you'd forgotten, we have a lawyer here, over-charging for his time. I think we can do without your little displays until he's gone."

"But there really was a fire," I said, imprudently stepping up to Hilda's defense. "And trapped hikers. She teleported us there, and put out the flames with a rain storm."

"Please!" said Matilda. "You shouldn't be encouraging her fantasies. Now, let's get back to business. Drake, do you have the divorce petition ready yet?"

**EDITOR'S END NOTE.** *Well, now. This divorce case got off to a stormy start, didn't it? Will things heat up from here? Who is the lucky (or maybe not so lucky) man that Hilda's going to divorce? Join us again in 30 days or hopefully less for our next episode!*

**EDITOR'S END NOTE # 2. CONTEST ANNOUNCED! \$500 CASH PRIZE!** *I don't know how many more episodes there will be, but I just recently figured out how this story is going to end! You don't have any idea. Or maybe some of you do! Whoever makes the closest guess wins a \$500 prize! It's possible that one of you, dear readers, will come up with a better ending than what I had in mind. If so, I may use your ending instead of mine! If so, you'll get an additional, as yet unnamed prize. To participate, just email me your idea of the story's ending.*

**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**EPI SODE 14 – CONFOUNDED BY CONFUSING CONFLICTS**

By Douglas A. Crowder  
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I'm not going to tell you what happened in the last 2 episodes. You wouldn't believe me. Of course, you aren't supposed to believe any of this anyway, since it's fiction. But the last 2 episodes were even more so. We'll take up from where we left off about 3 episodes ago. I had just been hired to file a divorce petition for a fine young lady named Hilda Armstrong. I'm in a conference room in the office of her older sister, Matilda, who happens to be paying the legal fees and doing most of the talking.

Normally, I like to talk to clients privately, without their friends or relatives sitting in. But Matilda seems insistent on being there and Hilda doesn't seem to object. Besides, I'm having second thoughts about taking the case – and Matilda should hear what I have to say.

"Before we go further," I began, "we have to clear up some things. I'm not sure I can take this case, because of some potential conflicts of interest."

"Why do you say that?" asked Matilda.

"Well, as Hilda said, I was her husband's best man at the wedding." (Please note, Dear Reader, that this is what Hilda said. I had no recollection of it myself).

"So how's that a conflict?"

"If I'm a relative or good friend of your husband, I might not be able to give my undivided loyalty to your cause."

"No, I'm confident you'll do a fine job," replied Matilda. "You volunteered to stand beside him at the wedding, but you aren't really close to him. In fact, that was the first time you met him."

"How do you know that?"

"You forget," said Major Hunter smugly. "We're BOSO – the Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Office. If it's bizarre, we investigate it."

I couldn't very well argue this point. But there was another reason that I didn't want to take the case. Can I confide in you, Dear Readers? I make my living as a lawyer – but at heart, I'm a science fiction writer. Or at least I thought I was. But lately, many of my characters had been coming to life and appearing in the physical universe. Everyone I had met today had previously been a character in one or more of my science fiction stories. The two I was talking to now, Hilda and Matilda, had only made one

appearance, which was in Twilight of Justice part 2, A brouhaha at both so. Which I'm sure the editor will be happy to give you a copy of upon request.

But Hilda's husband, Judas Armstrong, the guy I was supposed to be filing divorce proceedings against, had starred in more stories than in my other characters combined – and (although I hate to play favorites) would have to confess that he was the favorite among my creations.

Despite the fact that Matilda said that I wasn't close to him, I felt like we were good friends – he almost seemed part of me. I sort of hated to be filing a lawsuit against him. Besides that, if he existed in real life, he is not someone that you would want to antagonize.

As you can imagine, I was having a hard time deciding how to explain this to Hilda and Matilda. Fortunately, I didn't have to.

Matilda seemed to be reading my mind, and interrupted the uncomfortable silence.

"I know what you're thinking. You have the idea that since Judas Armstrong is your favorite fictional character, you don't want to file a suit against him, or to get on his bad side, knowing what he is capable of."

I just nodded.

Matilda laughed. "That's not something you need to worry about. Judas Armstrong is not one of your made-up characters. In fact, you're not a science fiction writer at all. You haven't written any stories about Judas Armstrong, or about Hilda and me, or about anything else for that matter. You haven't written anything. Except for some legal briefs, and a book about Lawsuit Survival."

"Wait a second," I objected. "Earlier today you said I was a science fiction writer."

"I said nothing of the sort!"

"Yes you did, in episode 5."

"If I did, I was misquoted. You just have the delusion that you are a science fiction writer."

"How do you know that?"

"First, you haven't published anything. We can't find any science fiction books or stories by you in print. Next, we searched your office and your apartment, and didn't find any books or manuscripts."

"You did what?" I demanded.

She ignored my question and continued her tirade. “Third, we’ve hacked into your computer, and haven’t found any evidence of any stories you have written.”

“How did you manage to hack into my computer?”

“We’re the Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Office, remember? Don’t you think we’d have access to the best computer hackers money can buy?”

“Probably so,” I conceded, “but what I meant was how did you manage to get a court order allowing you to access my computer?”

“We don’t need a court order. We’re not a government agency!”

“You mean that you operate above the law?”

Hilda, in a rare act of interrupting her older sister, answered for her. “Not exactly ABOVE the law. But sort of in a parallel universe to it.”

I took a few seconds to digest these less than palatable revelations. There was something else that didn’t quite make sense. The fact that I’d been given an IBM Selectric – one of the most popular electric typewriters – with which to prepare Hilda’s divorce papers.

“How could you hack into my computer, if computers haven’t been rediscovered yet?”

“BOSO has computers. They aren’t available to the general public yet.”

“So, why do I have a computer that you can hack into?”

“You need to get back to work,” said Matilda, looking at her watch and avoiding the question. “You’ve only got 2 and a half hours to get the divorce petition prepared and filed. I’ll leave you two alone now.”

With that, she walked briskly out of the room.

“OK,” I said to Hilda. “Let me get some information from you. Name?”

**EDITOR’S END NOTE. CONTEST UPDATE.** *After our last episode, we announced a \$500 cash prize for whoever gets the closest to guessing the end of this story. I’ve figured out the ending, but not how many episodes it will take to get there. That’s the joy of starting a serialized novelita with no good idea where it’s going! There have been several entries since the last episode, but no one has gotten very close yet. The contest is still open! To submit your entry, just email me. Then, join us again in 30 days or so, when we bring you Episode 15!*

**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**EPISODE 15 – THE TERROR IN THE TYPEWRITER**  
**By Douglas A. Crowder**  
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For those of you who haven't been following the previous episodes, let me introduce myself and tell you a little bit about what's happening. I'm Drake Cobalt, an attorney practicing in downtown Los Angeles. I thought I was also a science fiction writer. But in the last episode, I had just been given the day's second explanation as to why I'm not. I've had my own doubts, too. But those aren't really necessary to follow what's happening in this installment.

I'm now in the headquarters of BOSO (the Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Office), in a tall building in an area formerly known as the Van Nuys district of Los Angeles, as a guest of its Deputy Director, Major Matilda Hunter. I have just been hired to file a divorce proceeding for her younger sister, Hilda, I'm just beginning to get from her the information I need to get her case started.

Let me warn you that the interview I'm about to describe is realistic, if not all that exciting.

"I need to get some information from you," I said.

She nodded.

"Your name?"

"Hildegard Armstrong."

I wrote that down. Some attorneys like to type information directly onto the form as they interview a client or a witness. I usually prefer to write down the answers onto a legal pad and then input the information into whatever form or program I'm using later on, when the client isn't watching. Now, I especially wanted to use that method, since I didn't have access to the fillable PDFs I usually download from the Judicial Council forms website. In fact, I didn't even have access to a computer, since they had not been re-invented yet. Instead, I had been given what was no doubt the current state-of-the-art in electronic typewriters – the IBM Selectric.

"Your maiden name?"

"Hildegard Hesperonica Hunter."

"What name do you want to use after the divorce?"

"What are my choices?"

“You can keep your current name, go back to your maiden name, or keep your former married name.” [See Family Code Sec. 2080 and 2081, for those of you who are interested in such things.]

“I like the name Armstrong. I’ll keep it.”

“All right. Husband’s name?”

“He’s known by a lot of different names in different places. I think we should call him Judas Quincey Armstrong.

“Date of Marriage?”

“You were there, remember? It was on Tax Freedom Day.”

“April 15, you mean?”

Hilda nodded.

Here was yet another reference to one of my stories. A-15 was about an idyllic time in the indefinite future when April 15 had been made a national holiday to commemorate the repeal of the income tax.

“Which year?” I asked.

“This year. 220.”

“2020 you mean?”

“No, 220. You have the illusion that you’re from an earlier time before the Decade of Chaos, when the years were numbered differently. Your years are about 1800 more than ours are.”

I didn’t want to argue the point – what she was describing was not as strange as many other things that had happened so far today. But I was curious about the numbering system.

“That’s 220 years since when?”

“Since mankind started keeping a recorded history again, of course.”

“OK. Date of Separation?”

“What does that mean?”

“That could be when you started living separately. Or when one of you decided that the marriage was over.”

“That was 2 days ago, when I found out he was being untrue to me. He claimed that I was the only woman in the world for him, but neglected to tell me that he had a few other women on other worlds.”

[Footnote: I discovered later that the definition I’d given for Date of Separation wasn’t entirely accurate. But close enough for this case. See California Family Code Sec. 70. If I turn this story into a Continuing Legal Education article, I’ll include a discussion.],

“OK. No children, I suppose.”

“No, we have two children.”

“Two children? In 3 months?”

“That’s 3 months Earth time. We lived together for 5 years on another planet.”

“Which planet?”

“It was just called ‘The Planet.’”

“What are their names and dates of birth?”

“Gregory Zeus was born on Roquetober 39, 14532. Alice Arizona was born on Elgorafe 41, 14534.”

“I don’t quite follow those birthdates.”

“Those were the dates and months on the Planet. I don’t know what they’d translate to here.”

I didn’t have any idea how I would put this information onto the divorce petition, so I decided to go back to that point later. Meanwhile, I realized that there was another question I should have asked first. In California, one can only request a dissolution of marriage if one of the spouses has resided in California for 6 months, and a resident of the county where the case is filed for 3 months. [California Family Code Sec. 2320(a)]. I assumed the same rules would apply here, in West Atlantis, where I was going to be filing the divorce, since I’d been told I’d been told this jurisdiction followed the California laws. We were even using the California Judicial Council forms.

What’s your residence address? I asked.

“1204 Brilliant Sunrise Drive, Tito Lake, Westonia 135791

“That’s in West Atlantis?”

“No, it’s on The Planet.”

"I'm afraid that we can't file a divorce for you here in West Atlantis. Either you or your spouse must have been a resident of this state . . ."

"Nation," she interrupted.

"A resident of the Nation of West Atlantis," I corrected, "for at least 6 months before we file the petition."

"We can say that I was living here with my sister."

"Everything you say in the petition has to be truthful," I said. "After all, you will be signing it under penalty of perjury."

"That's true enough. She was keeping my room for me. She didn't expect the marriage to last, and assumed I'd be coming back to her place in a few days or weeks. I hate to say that she was right."

"All right. What's her address?"

"6066 Lovecraft Lane, Blurp-Angk, West Atlantis."

"And you lived there for at least the last 6 months?"

"For the last decade, at least."

"Well, I think that's good enough to make you a resident of West Atlantis."

Now, I had enough information to start on the forms. Earlier, I'd been given a folder with several of the California Judicial Council forms. I pulled out FL-100, the Petition for Dissolution, and carefully lined it up in the typewriter. Now, I was ready to start typing!

Or I was, anyway, until the very first question threw me for a loop!

**EDITOR'S END NOTE.** *What question could possibly discombobulate the cool and confident Drake Cobalt? Stay tuned.*

**CONTEST UPDATE.** *A few episodes ago, we announced a \$500 cash prize for whoever comes the closest to guessing the surprise end of this story – which will happen no telling how many episodes from now. Some of the entries have gotten close, but none have quite hit the mark. The contest is still open. To submit your entry, just email me.*



**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**EPISODE 16 – NOBODY’S MOUTHPIECE**

By Douglas A. Crowder

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**EDITOR’S NOTE.** *We now join the adventures of Drake Atom Cobalt, a totally fictional attorney practicing in the fictional land known as Los Ankalees, sometime during the fictional year of 2021. In the previous 15 episodes – well, we will just let Drake fill you in.*

DRAKE: Where were we? Oh yes, I was describing an ordinary day in the life of an ordinary lawyer. I realize that I’m foreshadowing the ending here, by letting you know that the time period covered in this story is a day or less. But you had probably already guessed that. I’ll give away even more of the story. The day started at 10 a.m. It was now about 2:30 p.m. The story will be over by 7:00 p.m. Pacific Time.

If you want a synopsis of everything that’s happened so far during the day, that won’t fit into the 1,000 or so words I’m allotted per episode. But I’m sure the editor will be happy to email you all the previous episodes. If you ask nicely.

Here’s all you need in order to follow this episode. I’m interviewing a divorce client, Hildegard Armstrong, and I was ready to start typing in the information into form FL-100, the Petition for Dissolution of Marriage. For reasons described earlier, I was not using a computer to fill in a PDF document, but was instead using a typewriter (a state-of-the-art IBM Selectric) to fill in a paper form. The technology here had not yet advanced to the point of re-discovering the desk-top computer, let alone the laptop.

Now, I had the form lined up in the typewriter ready to start typing -- but the very first blank threw me for a loop. Hilda apparently sensed that I was uncertain about something.

“Is there some problem?” she asked.

“It’s asking for my bar number. I’m not licensed here.”

(Did I forget to mention that the action in this story is taking place a few hundred years from now, in the Nation of West Atlantis – which seems to be centered in the area formerly called the San Fernando Valley – although, oddly enough, their courts apply California law and even use California Judicial Council forms?)

“That's OK,” she said. “You can just use your California Bar number since California and West Atlantis have a reciprocity agreement.”

“All right, but what do I put for my address?”

“Just put your office address,” she said. “The same one you always use.”

“But my old address can't be right anymore,” I protested. “This morning, my office was on Wilshire Boulevard in downtown Los Angeles. Now, I'm in a different nation, no telling how far in the future, after no telling how many cataclysms have resulted in a brand new numbering system for the years. It's unlikely that my old address will still exist.”

Hilda sighed. “We're in sort of a time crunch here. Remember that we have to get this petition filed before 4:00 p.m. This is not the time for you to be living your illusion that you come from some earlier time. Just use your current West Atlantis address.”

“What are you talking about? I don't have an office in West Atlantis.”

“You've forgotten your address again? Well fortunately I have one of your cards.”

She handed me a high quality business card, off-white with thick, textured paper, and raised letters. In the middle was my name “Drake Atom Cobalt,” (fortunately, the middle name was spelled correctly, though most people spelled it “Adam”) followed by “Attorney-at-Law.”

Below was an address and phone number that I didn't recognize. I wondered how much rent I was paying. But with deadliness approaching, this was not the time to ask unnecessary question. I just typed in my California Bar Number, and the contact information listed on my business card.

Those of you who want to see the form I was filling out can go to <https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/fl100.pdf>.

The next entry I had difficulty with was the box identifying the court where we would be filing. “What county is this?” I asked.

“We don't have any counties. The Nation of West Atlantis is small enough that it's all one county.”

On the form, I used the X's to change the line from "Superior Court of California, County of" to "Superior Court of West Atlantis."

"What's the address of the court?" I asked.

She opened a phone book that was conveniently nearby (A phone book! Maybe some of you are old enough to remember such things!) and read the address to me – which I dutifully copied onto the form. The address seemed strangely similar to that of the Van Nuys Courthouse in 2021, when West Atlantis was part of Los Angeles, but again I didn't ask questions.

I filled in the names of the parties, checked that this is a Petition for Dissolution (Divorce) of marriage. For Question 1, I checked that the parties are married. For Question 2, I put that Hilda met the residence requirement of being a resident of West Atlantis for the last 6 months (though that was debatable). Answering Question 3, I put in the dates of marriage and separation that she gave me in the last episode. Only a period of 3 months.

Question 4 asked for the names, birthdates and ages of any minor children. Though the marriage was only 3 months old, Hilda claimed that they had had two children during this time. I had a gnawing suspicion that she was making up the two children so she could request child support.

"Are you sure that you want to mention the two children in this Petition?" I asked.

"Why not?"

"Well, it doesn't make sense that you and Judas were able to have two children during only a 3 month marriage."

"I explained that to you," she said. "After our honeymoon, Judas took me to The Planet (yes, that's what they call it – no stranger a name than 'Earth' if you think about it). We lived blissfully together for five years and I had two children by him. But then, when I came back to Earth, only 3 months had elapsed here."

"A judge may have difficulty believing that," I said. "Maybe we could just leave the part about the children blank for now."

Hilda seemed a little impatient. "You're my mouthpiece," she said. "You'll put down what I tell you to."

“Actually,” I corrected, “I’m nobody’s mouthpiece. I’m obligated to be truthful in any court proceeding. California Rules of Professional Conduct 3.3(a)(3) provides that “a lawyer shall not knowingly offer evidence that the lawyer knows to be false.”

Hilda glared. “After what you’ve seen today, you have the nerve to accuse me of lying?” She was probably referring to the events of Episodes 12 and 13. I went through a quick mental debate. Which did I fear more? A potential ethics violation, or Hilda’s wrath?

“OK,” I said. “I’ll put down the children’s names you gave me.” I didn’t mention that I left the birthdates and the ages blank -- the birthdates she gave were using months and years that made sense on The Planet, but were gobbledygook here.

I had now completed page 1 of the 3 page petition. But guess what? It wasn’t going to get easier from here.

**EDITOR’S END NOTE.** *Will Drake get the Petition (and other necessary documents that he hasn’t mentioned so far) completed in time to file with the court before 4pm? And what will he face on pages 2 and 3 that could be more horrifying than page 1? Stay tuned.*

**CONTEST UPDATE.** *A few episodes ago, we announced a \$500 cash prize for whoever comes the closest to guessing the surprise end of this story – which will happen no telling how many episodes from now. Some of the entries have gotten close, but none have quite hit the mark. The contest is still open. To submit your entry, just email me.*

**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**EPI SODE 17 – THE PROFITS OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION**

By Douglas A. Crowder  
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**EDITOR’S NOTE:** *Drake Cobalt is a totally FICTIONAL attorney practicing in a MYTHICAL land called Los Ankalees in the IMAGINARY year of 2021. He also thinks he’s a science fiction writer. Or at least he thought so before today! Now, several of his science-fiction characters are coming to life and becoming less fictional. As this episode begins, he’s in the process of preparing a divorce petition for Hildegarde Armstrong, a character he created fairly recently, who made her first and only prior appearance in this novelita’s prequel, BIZARRE OCCURRENCES AND SIGHTINGS. And her husband? Well, we’ll now let Drake tell you the rest in his own words.*

DRAKE: Where were we? Oh yes. I was describing how I was filling divorce documents for my new client, Hildegarde Armstrong. I had just completed page 1 of the California Judicial Council Form FL-100, the Petition for Dissolution.

Now, I put page 2 into the electric typewriter I had been loaned to draft these forms – a state-of-the-art IBM Selectric. (If you wonder where the computers are, I’m sure the Editor will send you the previous episodes).

I came to Question 5, asking for the grounds for divorce. I typed an X in the “Irreconcilable Differences” box.

“Why are you checking that?” Hilda demanded, looking over my shoulder as I typed. “I told you the reason I want a divorce is adultery. He’s cheating on me.”

“Sorry,” I said. “Adultery is perfectly legal in California, and is not a ground for divorce. The only grounds for divorce are irreconcilable differences and permanent insanity.”

(See California Family Code Sec. 2310).

Question 6 asked for the type of child custody and visitation arrangement that we were asking the court to order.

“I assume that you want custody of the two children?”

“Yes, and I want a restraining order preventing him from seeing them.”

“That’s not likely to happen,” I explained. “It is very rare, and only for extreme circumstances, that a court will deny visitation to one of the parents. Do you have any reason to believe he would be dangerous to the children?”

“Not really,” she said. “But he might take them to another planet to keep me from seeing them.”

“If he can take them to another planet, a restraining order is not likely to stop him. To my knowledge, California doesn’t have any extradition treaties outside of this solar system.”

“All right, she said. “Let’s skip that part.”

“OK,” I said. “I’ll just check that you want legal and physical custody and he gets visitation.”

Question 8 asked for the requested spousal support (alimony). I checked that we were asking him to pay spousal support to her and that the court not award him any spousal support from her. Since the marriage was only for 3 months, it was unlikely that she would get much, if any, support, but I went ahead and requested it to be on the safe side.

Question 9 asked for separate property, meaning that which belongs to just one spouse, as opposed to community property, owned by both of them. Hilda wasn’t looking over my shoulder right at the moment, so I typed in my usual answer that each party would keep whatever they currently had in their possession.

Now, I had completed page 2 of FL-100. I rolled that page out of the typewriter and inserted the 3rd and final page.

Item 10 asked for community property.

“Since the marriage was only 3 months long, I don’t suppose there’s any community property to speak of?”

“What’s community property?” she asked.

I gave a simplified explanation. “Community property is any property acquired by either of you during the marriage. Separate property is property acquired before the marriage, or after the date of separation, or during the

marriage by gift or inheritance. Generally, each party gets half of the community property, and keeps his or her own separate property.”

(See California Family Law Sections 760, 770 and 2550 if you don’t believe me, or want a more thorough explanation.)

“Why are you saying that we have no community property?” demanded Hilda. Don’t you remember that DEATH AND DESTRUCTION came out shortly after we were married?”

I didn’t quite know what she was talking about, as she evidently gathered from my blank expression.

“Where have you been?” she demanded. “Haven’t you heard that DEATH AND DESTRUCTION has been setting new box office records?”

I briefly considered explaining that I was in a normal universe until about 10:30 this morning, but I decided it would be easier to continue with my blank expression.

Hilda continued. “DEATH AND DESTRUCTION is a blockbuster movie released by Megabucks Studios. A high budget action thriller. And you know who’s starring, of course?”

I just shook my head.

“Abner Eastgate.”

The name didn’t mean anything to me. I didn’t say anything, but that wasn’t necessary, as Hilda continued.

“And you know, of course, the name of the character he’s playing?”

“Can’t say as I do.”

“JUDAS ARMSTRONG!” she exclaimed. “Does that name sound familiar to you?”

Of course it sounded familiar. He was my main fictional character. I had written a number of science-fiction pieces about him, including ARIZONA AMBUSH, SOFT LANDING ON THE SUN, and LUNCHTIME OF THE GODS. But for some reason, everyone here seemed to get upset when I told them that they were just characters in my stories. So I didn’t say anything, knowing that Hilda was on a roll.

“My husband! The one you’re helping me get divorced from! Megabucks studios is making millions by making movies about my husband! Without paying him – or me – a dime! Does that seem right to you?”

I didn’t have a chance to explain that as a lawyer, I don’t get into questions or right or wrong. She continued.

“Under California law, he has the Right of Publicity.” She opened up a book with the California statutes and began to read.

“Civil Code Sec. 3344 (a). Any person who knowingly uses another's name, voice, signature, photograph, or likeness, in any manner, on or in products, merchandise, or goods, or for purposes of advertising or selling, or soliciting purchases of, products, merchandise, goods or services, without such person's prior consent, . . . shall be liable for any damages sustained by the person or persons injured as a result thereof. . . and any profits from the unauthorized use that are attributable to the use and are not taken into account in computing the actual damages.”

She finished reading, and continued her analysis.

“So, here’s Megabucks Studios, using Judas’ name and likeness to sell movies, action figures, video games, T-shirts, lunch boxes and all sorts of other merchandise. And not paying him anything for it! And you know what’s worse?”

I could probably think of at least 17 things that would be worse, but I kept quiet, knowing that Hilda would quickly answer her own question.

“Judas doesn’t care that he is losing millions of dollars! He’s totally irresponsible when it comes to money. Money that he could be using to support his wife and children.”

I wasn’t surprised by this last revelation. The Judas Armstrong in my stories had a totally nonchalant attitude about money, partly because traveled a lot, and money on one planet wasn’t worth much on others. For example, if you took One Million American Dollars to Orion 14, you’d be lucky to get 3 Greenbacks for them.

“OK,” I said, then typed onto the form: “Respondent has control of substantial assets, some of which were acquired during the marriage and are thus community property. The exact nature and extent of these are unknown at this time.”



“Don’t we need to make a list of all the assets?” she asked.

“Not at this time. Remember that you’re in a hurry to get this divorce action filed before 4pm today. We will need to get a list of all the property before the divorce is over. I’m just going to list it in general terms now.”

I quickly completed section 11, Other Requests, by requesting that he pay her attorney fees.

Then I filled in her name and my name next to the signature lines at the bottom.

And, lo and behold, I was done with FL-100. Only 4 more documents to go before we could leave for the courthouse.

But then, Hilda asked something that I wasn’t expecting at all.

“Do you find me attractive?”

**EDITOR’S END NOTE:** *Why is Hilda asking such a question? How will Drake answer? Will his decades of courtroom experience and Toastmaster speeches enable him to give to give a coherent answer? And one that is safe? What are the 4 remaining documents needed, and will Drake complete them in time to get them filed with the court before the looming 4pm deadline? At least two of these questions will be answered in the next episode, coming in 30 days or whenever the author writes it.*

**CONTEST UPDATE.** *The author has worked out the ending to this story, but hasn’t worked out exactly how he’s going to get there – or how many more episodes it will take. Whoever makes the closest prediction of the surprise ending wins a \$500 cash prize! The contest is open until the final episode or until someone wins the prize, whichever happens first. To enter, simply email us your prediction. Or, if you want to see any or all of the previous episodes, just send an email request.*

**THE COBALT CHRONICLES**  
**EPISODE 18 – A WORKABLE, IF NOT ENTIRELY ACCURATE ANSWER**

By Douglas A. Crowder  
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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *We now join the continuing adventures of Drake Cobalt, a totally fictional attorney practicing in the mythical land named Los Angeles, in the far distant year of 2021. In previous episodes – well, let's have Drake tell you himself.*

DRAKE: When I'm not playing lawyer, I'm writing science fiction. Or thought I was until today.

It was now about 2pm, and since 10am this morning, I've met no fewer than 6 of my fictional characters who came to life – all of whom were more fun to write about than to meet in person.

One of the characters I hadn't met yet was the one I've written the most stories about. Judas Armstrong. A happy-go-lucky adventurer who uses his magic sword to teleport through time and space fighting bad guys, rescuing damsels in distress, saving planets from destruction – that type of thing.

Judas was criticized (by one or more of my other characters) for having a different girlfriend in each movie or adventure.

Then, I decided it would be entertaining to have him get married – as against his nature as it was. In one of my more recent stories, I introduced his wife, Hildegard. She took offense when Judas disappeared on another adventure the morning after the wedding. Then she went in search of him, using her enchanted croquet mallet to traverse the multiverse.

Sounds like a good story so far, eh? Well, this whole storyline took a horrifying turn for the worse about noon today – when I was hired by Hilda to start divorce proceedings against Judas!

Hilda and her older sister, Matilda (who was paying the fees), both insisted that the divorce petition be filed with the court no later than 4pm that day. Imprudently, I didn't ask why.

My instinct to meet the challenge of a rapidly approaching court deadline got the better of my common sense which told me that I should have gotten as far away from this drama as possible.

My first thought was that I couldn't take this case due to a conflict of interest – seeing as how both the partners were my fictional characters, and I had

put them into this mess. But I hadn't represented, or acquired any confidential data from either of them, so technically there was no conflict.

So I had started preparing Hilda's divorce documents. In the last episode, I had completed the first of five documents needed to start

Hilda's divorce proceeding, the California Judicial Council form FL-100, also known as the Petition for Dissolution.

Before I started on the next one, Hilda threw in a totally unexpected question: "Do you find me attractive?"

Of course I did. Who wouldn't? But I wasn't going to admit it!

If she wasn't dressed in such a crazy fashion, she could easily pass for a movie star. Actually, even with her gold armor, purple dress and pointed helmet with two horns, she could still be starring in some superb-hero movie.

A jumble of thoughts swirled through my mind. Why was she asking? Was she somehow interested in me, even though I was 3 times her age? And anything but athletic? Was she seeking any sort of male approval after her husband had left her?

I couldn't think of any safe answer to the question. But I came up with one that I hoped would work.

"Under the Attorneys ethics rules, I'm not ALLOWED to find a client attractive," I said.

Technically, this wasn't true. California Rules of Professional Conduct, Rule 1.8.10(a) provides, in part, that "A lawyer shall not engage in sexual relations with a current client who is not the lawyer's spouse . . . ."

Finding a client attractive wasn't specifically prohibited, but I figured I'd expand the rule a little bit.

The uncomfortable silence that followed gave me the idea that she didn't particularly like that answer. But this gave me the opportunity to work without interference until she got over it.

I put the next form into the typewriter. Number two of five I'd have to prepare before starting her divorce. The FL-105, the DECLARATION UNDER UNIFORM CHILD CUSTODY JURISDICTION AND ENFORCEMENT ACT (UCCJEA).

This is required in any divorce case where the parties have minor children. The purpose is to any other custody proceedings regarding the children, so that the court can determine if California is the proper state to exercise jurisdiction over the children.

For each child, I had to fill in the name, place and date of birth, and place of residence for the last 5 years.

I still didn't quite believe that Hilda had any children. She and Judas had only been married about 3 months previously.

But Hilda insisted that after the wedding, they had lived together on another planet (called simply "The Planet" by its inhabitants) for 5 years during which time she had borne their 2 children, now aged 3 and 5.

At least, 5 years had elapsed on The Planet, while only 3 months had gone by on Earth.

Crazy as this sounded, I didn't want to argue with Hilda, so I put down the name she had given for their first child, Gregory Zeus Armstrong. For Place of Birth, I wasn't going to put down "The Planet," and I didn't want to put the Date of Birth Hilda had given me, which was Roquetober 39, 14532 – a date that might make sense on Planet but not here. So for Place of Birth and Date of Birth, I put "unknown," as I did for the length of residence.

For the address, I didn't want to put down the address on the Planet she had given, which was 1204 Brilliant Sunrise Drive, Tito Lake, Westonia 135791. So I checked the "confidential" box.

The next box was the person child has lived with. I put Hilda's name and the West Atlantis address she had given me – which was her sister's place, where Hilda said she rented a room.

For the second child, Alice Arizona Armstrong, I likewise didn't want to put the birth date Hilda had given, Elgorafe 41, 14534. So, I just put "unknown" again, and checked the box that the residence information is the same as for the first child."

The rest of the form was pretty easy. There weren't any other court proceedings relating to custody or visitation, there were no domestic violence orders in effect, and no one else other than the parents had or claimed to have custody or visitation rights.

Then I just typed Hilda's name next to the bottom signature line, and voila, I had now completed the second out of five needed to get the divorce

proceeding started. Two of the remaining ones would be easy – but the last would be the most difficult of all.

**EDITOR'S END NOTE.** Will Hilda ask Drake more embarrassing questions? What is the last and most difficult form that Drake will be filling out? Will the papers get finished in time to get them filed before 4:00 p.m.? One or more of these questions may be answered in the following episode.

**CONTEST UPDATE, AND HINTS.** *The \$500 cash prize contest rages on! The prize goes to whoever comes the closest to guessing the dramatic ending of this novelita. Entries will stay open until either the last episode or someone gets it. Here are some hints – 3 ways the story does NOT end, so that you can narrow down your speculations. (a) Drake does NOT get swallowed by a whale. (b) West Atlantis does NOT sink into the ocean (at least not in this story!); and (c) Hilda does NOT take a job as a flight attendant with Ostrich Airlines. So, if one of those was your choice of endings, sorry, but you can try again!*

**DIVORCES IN PARADISE**  
**EPISODE 19 – THE NEW OLD WAYS**  
**By Douglas A. Crowder**  
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**TIME FOR SOME SCIENCE FICTION COURTROOM DRAMA**

Now, it's time to continue with our serialized novel, DIVORCES IN PARADISE. Some of you may say, "Hey, didn't that novel have a different title last time?" That's true. In the previous episode it was titled THE COBALT CHRONICLES, after the narrator, Drake Cobalt.

When you're writing a serialized novel, you don't always know where it's going to end up when you start, and the title may change once or twice along the way. Here, the author decided that DIVORCES IN PARADISE is a better title, since the divorce proceeding has become the featured event. The Nation of West Atlantis, where most of the action is taking place, isn't really a paradise. But it's a little closer than the mythical city of Los Ankalees in the imaginary year 2020, where the first two episodes took place – and also where Drake hopes to return before the story is over.

Rather than give our usual synopsis of what's taken place so far, we're going to give you descriptions of the main characters, which will give you an idea what the story is about.

	<p><b>HILDA ARMSTRONG</b></p> <p>HEIGHT: 5'7" WEIGHT: 127 AGE: 27</p> <p>OCCUPATION. Housewife. Adventurer. No steady job, but seems to have some unspecified position with BOSO, the Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Operation.</p> <p>SPECIAL ABILITIES. Has a magic croquet mallet, the capabilities of which are unknown. In Episodes 12 and 13, she used it to transport her to a blazing forest then summon a</p>
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	<p>rainstorm to rescue a group of trapped hikers.</p> <p>RELATIONSHIPS. Wife of Judas Armstrong. The younger sister Major Matilda Hunter, the Deputy Director of BOSO</p> <p>WEAKNESSES. According to Matilda, she can't hold a good job, and the guys she gets attracted to are always the worst possible losers you could imagine, totally shiftless and irresponsible (which, in Matilda's estimation, describes Judas exactly.</p> <p>APPEARANCES. She first appeared in this story's immediate prequel, TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE BOOK II, A BROUHAHA AT BOSO. It is predicted that she will be one of the main characters in BOOK IV, THE ULTIMATE TRIAL.</p>
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## JUDAS ARMSTRONG

Has not yet appeared in this story, and there's no telling whether he will make an appearance or not. He does seem to be the focus of attention, however, since he is the one that Hilda is divorcing.

HEIGHT: 5'10"

WEIGHT: Between 110 and 125 pounds

AGE: Appears to be 35, but is believed to be much older.

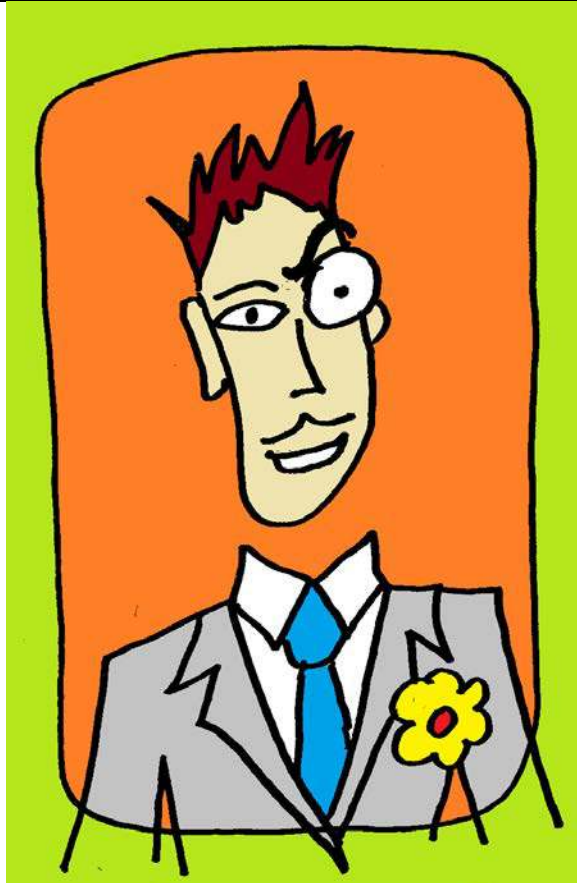
OCCUPATION: Adventurer, Superb Hero. In one story, he was employed as a tour guide.

SPECIAL ABILITIES. Adept in various forms of martial arts. Has a magic sword with which he can slice through time and space.

RELATIONSHIPS. Husband of Hilda Armstrong, who is "the only woman in the world" for him. However, he may have other women on other worlds.

WEAKNESSES. Often seems confused and disoriented, as a possible result of his rapid time travel (or from too much tequila).

FAMOUS FOR: Several hundred years from now, he will be a legendary hero for having saved what was left of humankind from the Decade of Chaos. He will be portrayed, by several different actors, in several films produced by Gigabucks Studios, including DEATH AND DESTRUCTION, KNIGHTS OF





<p>THE SUN and THE OPOSSUMS OF OPPRESSION.</p> <p>APPEARANCES: Drake Cobalt claims to have written a number of sci-fi stories featuring Judas Armstrong, including SOFT LANDING ON THE SUN, ARIZONA AMBUSH, and THE ANIMAL LOVERS, to name a few.</p>	
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## **DRAKE ATOM COBALT**

**OCCUPATION:** Although he has been narrating this tale, he has said very little about himself, except that he is a lawyer practicing in downtown Los Ankalees, who claims to be a science-fiction writer. So far in the story, he has been given 3 different reasons by other characters why he's NOT a science fiction writer (and he will be given at least 1 more reason before the story is done!) Here's some information we've been able to get from other sources.

**HEIGHT:** 6'4"

**WEIGHT:** 178 lbs.

**AGE:** Unspecified, but probably between 40 and 70.

**SPECIAL ABILITIES.** None to speak of, except being able to prepare legal documents fairly quickly. He is strikingly handsome for his age.

**RELATIONSHIPS.** It's presumed that he has no wife or significant other at the time of this story, since no mention has been made. He claims to be one of the children of Zeus, King of the Greek Gods, which means he has a great number of half-siblings he's never met, including Hercules, Athena, Helen of Troy and Wonderful Woman.

**WEAKNESSES.** Takes on clients that he should get as far away from as possible. His instinct to meet the challenge of a stiff deadline overrides his logic.

	<p>APPEARANCES. His first, and so far only appearance in a published story is in this one; although he has starred in the drafts of a few unfinished works, including THE GREATER AMERICAN NOVEL and THE WEST ATLANTIS MANIFESTO.</p>
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**DIVORCES IN PARADISE**  
**EPISODE 19 – THE NEW OLD WAYS**  
**By Douglas A. Crowder**  
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**EDITOR’S NOTE:** *We now join the continuing adventures of Drake Cobalt, a totally fictional attorney. He’s in a conference room on an upper floor of a modern office building which hosts the headquarters of B.O.S.O. (The Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Office).*

**DRAKE:** I’m Drake Atom Cobalt, an attorney practicing in Los Angeles in 2021. But since about noon today, I’ve been practicing in another jurisdiction – and another year. Confusing? To say the least.

I’m hoping I’ll be back in L.A. in time to see the sunset. The challenge I now face is to get a divorce petition filed with the court by 4pm today, leaving about an hour and a half. In the last installment, I completed the second of five forms needed to get the divorce started.

For the next, I chose the easiest – the FL-110, the SUMMONS, which tells the party being sued that they have 30 days after being served to file a response with the court, or will be held in default – meaning that whoever is filing the suit can get whatever they are asking for.

I filled in the names of the parties. My client, Hildegard Armstrong, is the Petitioner, her husband, Judas Armstrong is the Respondent. Next, the name of the court, which was the Superior Court of West Atlantis, Van Nuys Branch.

If you’ve been following the prior episodes, you know that this story is taking place in a period of time not telling how far in the future when the San Fernando Valley area of Los Angeles is now a separate nation – the Nation of

West Atlantis. However, they apply the law of California that was in effect in 2021, along with the Judicial Council Forms.

The last bit of information to fill in was the name and address of the attorney – me.

I didn't remember having rented an office space in West Atlantis, but my client had one of my business cards that had my local address and phone number. Now I was done with document number three. Two more to go. For the next one, I selected another easy one. Not a Judicial Council form, but a Los Angeles County Superior Court local form, LASC FAM-020, called the "FAMILY LAW CASE COVER SHEET AND CERTIFICATE OF GROUNDS FOR ASSIGNMENT TO DISTRICT."

As the title implies, this form gives the reason that a case should be assigned to a particular courthouse.

I again filled in my name and contact information, and the name and address of the court. Then Hilda's address. Not the address on the far distant planet where she claimed to have lived for 5 years after the wedding (though only 3 months had elapsed here) -- but her local West Atlantis address where she rented a room from her sister.

For the Respondent's address, I didn't want to use the other planet's address, so I just put "unknown." Then I filled in the date of marriage and separation, and the number of minor children.

Then I checked that the action was being filed in the Van Nuys branch since Hilda lived in that district. (I didn't actually know whether West Atlantis had any other districts, and I wasn't going to ask right now).

There were a few other boxes that are too technical and not interesting enough to describe here.

One more form to go; and I'd saved the best (or at least the most challenging) for last: the FL-300, REQUEST FOR ORDER. This form isn't needed in all divorce cases -- only if one of the parties wants to obtain some temporary relief. "Relief" here means whatever the party bringing the legal action hopes to obtain, such as an award of money or an order requiring the other party to take a particular action. "Temporary" means during the time between when the divorce is filed and when it is final (which must be a minimum of 6 months in California).

Typically, the temporary relief requested would be child or spousal support, child custody, visitation, or temporary use of community property – i.e., who is going to live in the family home.

This was the most important form we were going to do today, at least from what Hilda said she wanted.

If I was back in my L.A. office, I'd be using a fillable PDF on my laptop, and it would be easy enough to go back to correct a mistake. But now I was in a future nation that was just recovering from a technological dark age. The laptop was still no telling how many years from re-discovery, and fillable PDFs might follow in a few years after that. Now, I was using the current state-of-the-art technology, an IBM Selectric Typewriter. I didn't want to go back and paint the form with white correction fluid if I made any errors.

I decided to do things the way I did before I had a computer. (Yes, I may be giving away my age.) I'd fill out a draft of the form in pencil before I started typing it.

I only had one copy of the form, so I asked Hilda, who had been sitting there looking over the previous forms I'd prepared, if she could make me another copy. I was assuming that they had photocopy machines since they had electric typewriters.

Instead of leaving to make the copies herself, she lifted the phone, and buzzed someone on the intercom, saying, "Can you come here, please?" Who (or what) should appear but a 4 foot tall green-skinned fellow wearing an off-white robe and a Los Angeles Dodgers cap?

**EDITOR'S END NOTE.** *Who is this little green-skinned man and what's he going to do? (If you've read the former episodes, you may be able to guess his name!) Will Drake get the FL-300 completed in time to get the divorce filed by 4pm? Will he make it back to Los Angeles by sunset? One or more of these questions will be answered in the next episode!*

**CONTEST UPDATE, AND MORE HINTS.** *The \$500 cash prize for whoever comes the closest to guessing the dramatic ending of this novelita is still open. The editor estimates another 10 episodes before the grand finale, and the contest will stay open until the end or when someone gets it. Here are 3 more hints of how the story does NOT end, so that you can narrow down your speculations. (a) Drake does NOT join the law firm of Sneer, Scoff & Scorn; (b) The Nation of West Atlantis does NOT send a manned flight to Mars; and; (c) Hilda does NOT win the Tri-States chess championship. So, if one of those was your predicted ending, sorry, but you can try again!*

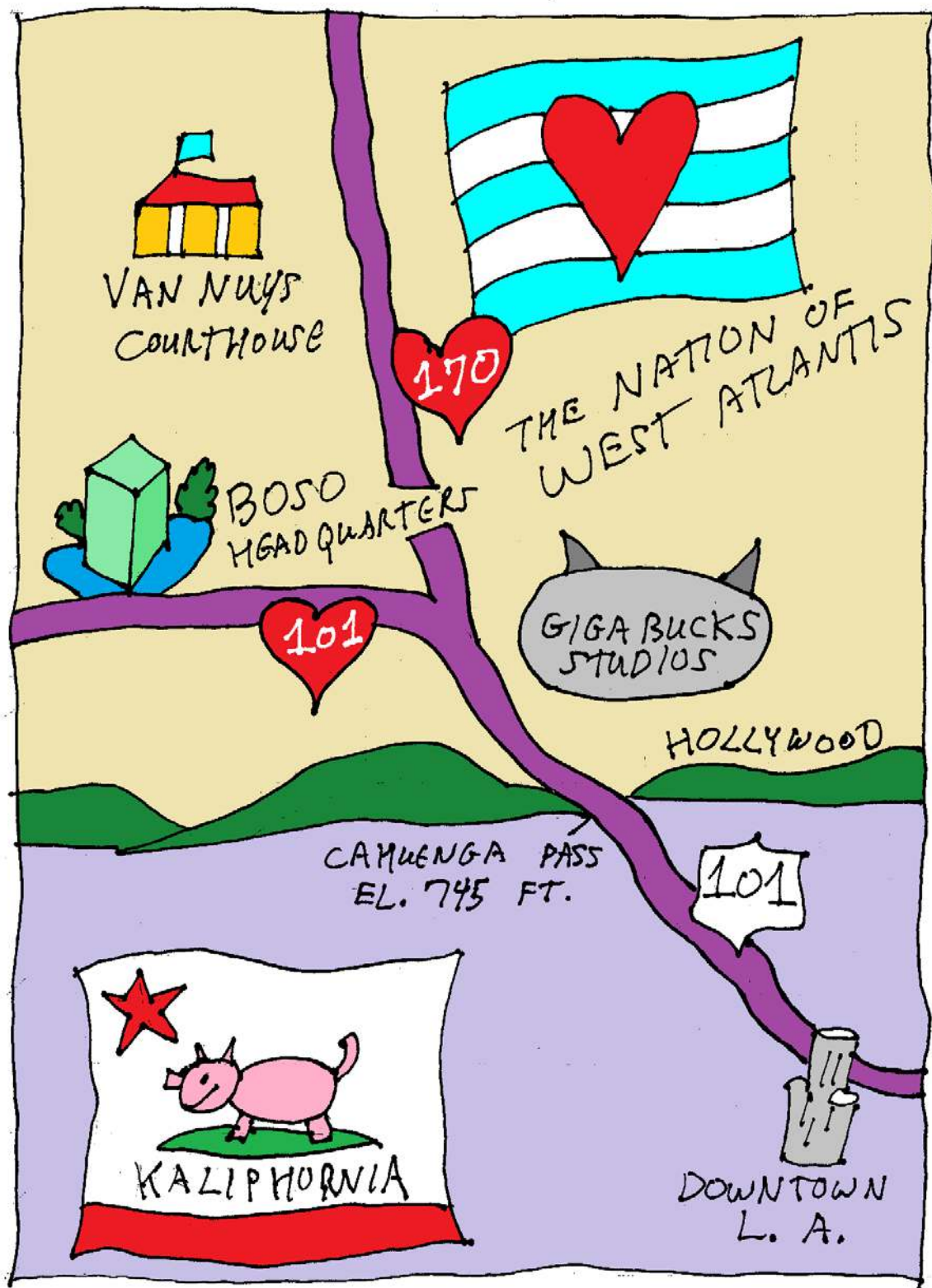
**DIVORCES IN PARADISE**  
**EPISODE 20 – THE END IS NEARER**  
**By Douglas A. Crowder**  
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**EDITOR’S NOTE.** *This story is fiction, but also educational. Though it takes place hundreds of years in the future, in the distant Nation of West Atlantis, it is “legally correct” in that the laws, forms and procedures described herein are the same that you will find under the California laws of 2021.*

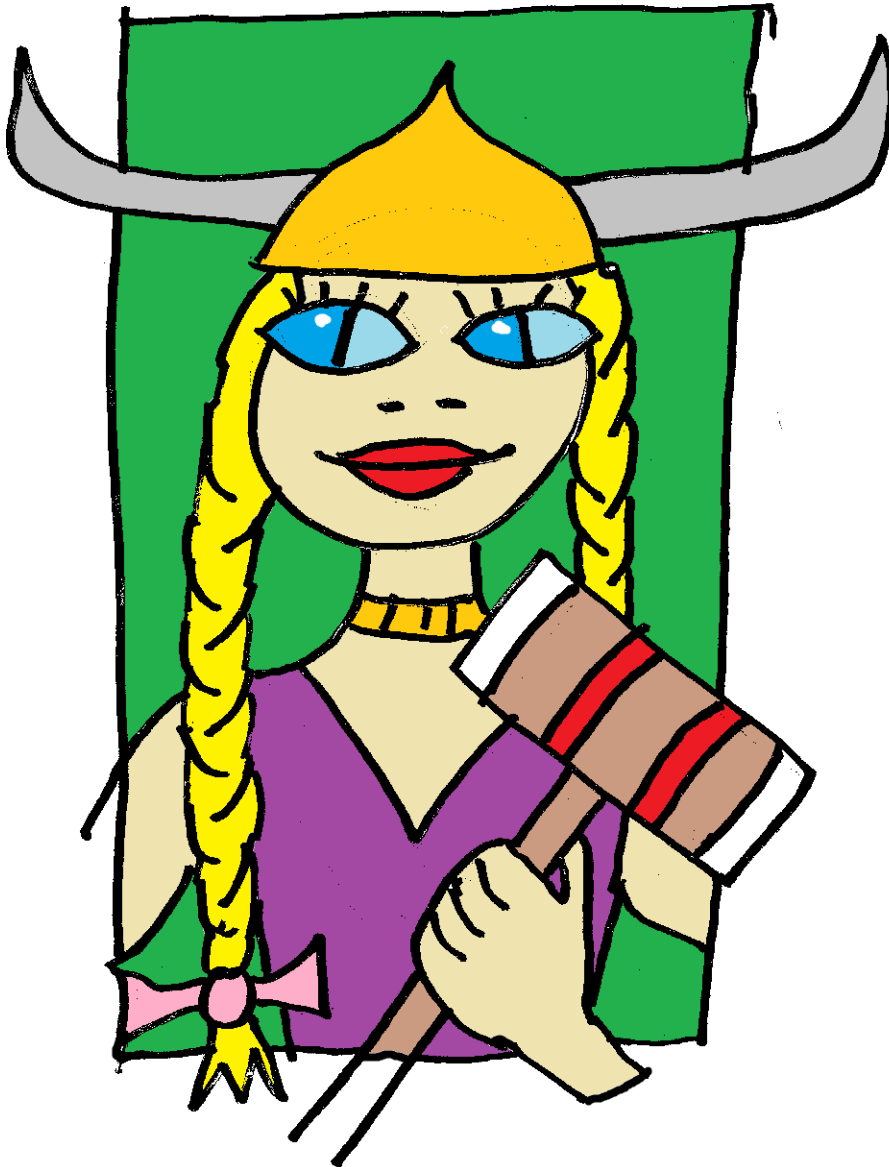
*The narrator and lead character, Drake Atom Cobalt is preparing to file a divorce for a client and has been describing in painstaking detail how he has filled out the first four of the forms needed to start the proceeding. He is now on the fifth and final form he needs to get the divorce filed. We join him and his client, Hilda Armstrong, in an office building in the Nation of West Atlantis, in an area that used to be called Atlantis Valley.*

DRAKE: I’ve just been informed by the editor that I only have 7 more episodes – of about 1,000 words each -- to complete this story. I was hoping for at least 20. So, I’m going to have to be very succinct, terse and directly to the point (all without redundantly repeating myself again).

I wasn’t given a limit on pictures. Here’s one that’s worth 1,001 words. A map of where I’ve been today, and my final destination for this story, the Van Nuys Courthouse (I’m foreshadowing the ending again!) The day started at my office in beautiful Downtown L.A., Then, crossing the Hollywood Hills through the Cahuenga Pass (elevation 745 feet), I should have been in the San Fernando Valley area of Los Angeles. But instead I was in the Nation of West Atlantis, in some future reality.



Next, here's my client.



**HILDA ARMSTRONG**

HEIGHT: 5'7"  
WEIGHT: 127  
AGE: 27

OCCUPATION. Housewife. Adventurer. No steady job, but seems to have some unspecified position with BOSO, the Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Operation.

SPECIAL ABILITIES. Has a magic croquet mallet, the capabilities of which are unknown. In Episodes 12 and 13, she used it to transport her to a blazing forest then summon a rainstorm to rescue a group of trapped hikers.

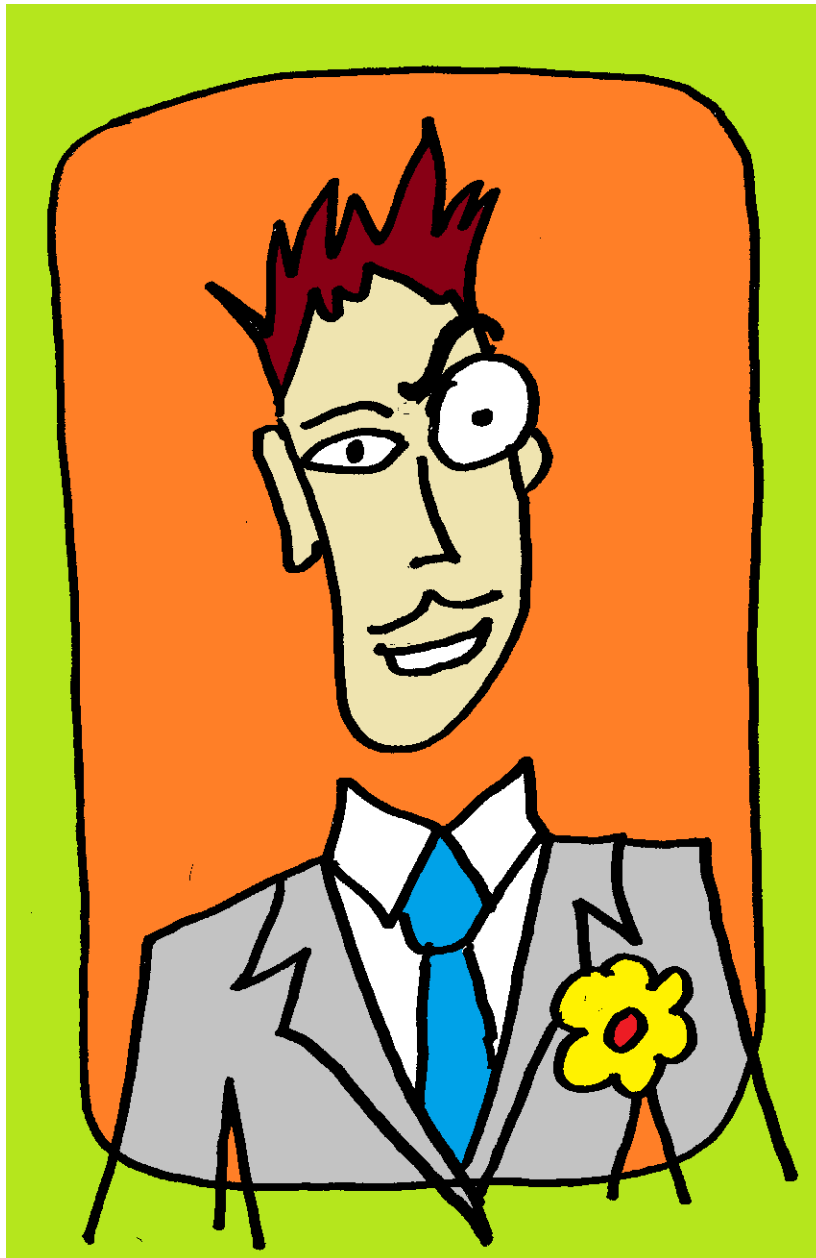


RELATIONSHIPS. Wife of Judas Armstrong. The younger sister Major Matilda Hunter, the Deputy Director of BOSO

WEAKNESSES. According to Matilda, she can't hold a good job, and the guys she gets attracted to are always the worst possible losers you could imagine, totally shiftless and irresponsible (which, in Matilda's estimation, describes Judas exactly).

APPEARANCES. She first appeared in this story's immediate prequel, TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE BOOK II, A BROUHAHA AT BOSO. It is predicted that she will be one of the main characters in BOOK IV, THE ULTIMATE TRIAL.

She's getting a divorce from this man.



## **JUDAS ARMSTRONG**

Has not yet appeared in this story, and there's no telling whether he will make an appearance or not. He does seem to be the focus of attention, however, since he is the one that Hilda is divorcing.

HEIGHT: 5'10"

WEIGHT: Between 110 and 125 pounds

AGE: Appears to be 35, but is believed to be much older.

OCCUPATION: Adventurer, Superb Hero. In one story, he was employed as a tour guide.

SPECIAL ABILITIES. Adept in various forms of martial arts. Has a magic sword with which he can slice through time and space.

RELATIONSHIPS. Husband of Hilda Armstrong, who is "the only woman in the world" for him. However, he may have other women on other worlds.

WEAKNESSES. Often seems confused and disoriented, as a possible result of his rapid time travel (or from too much tequila).

FAMOUS FOR: Several hundred years from now, he will be a legendary hero for having saved what was left of humankind from the Decade of Chaos. He will be portrayed, by several different actors, in several films produced by Gigabucks Studios, including DEATH AND DESTRUCTION, KNIGHTS OF THE SUN and THE OPOSSUMS OF OPPRESSION.

And least, but not last, here's your beloved narrator – me.



### **DRAKE ATOM COBALT**

**OCCUPATION:** Although he has been narrating this tale, he has said very little about himself, except that he is a lawyer practicing in downtown Los Ankalees, who claims to be a science-fiction writer. So far in the story, he has been given 3 different reasons by other characters why he's NOT a science fiction writer (and he will be given at least 1 more reason before the story is done!) Here's some information we've been able to get from other sources.

**HEIGHT:** 6'4"

**WEIGHT:** 178 lbs.

**AGE:** Unspecified, but probably between 40 and 70.

**SPECIAL ABILITIES.** None to speak of, except being able to prepare legal documents fairly quickly. He is strikingly handsome for his age.

**RELATIONSHIPS.** It's presumed that he has no wife or significant other at the time of this story, since no mention has been made. He claims to be one of the children of Zeus, King of the

Greek Gods, which means he has a great number of half-siblings he's never met, including Hercules, Athena, Helen of Troy and Wonderful Woman.

WEAKNESSES. Takes on clients that he should get as far away from as possible. His instinct to meet the challenge of a stiff deadline overrides his logic.

APPEARANCES. His first, and so far only appearance in a published story is in this one; although he has starred in the drafts of a few unfinished works, including THE GREATER AMERICAN NOVEL and THE WEST ATLANTIS MANIFESTO.

HILDA: Who are you talking to?

DRAKE: Huh? Well, the readers, of course.

HILDA: Don't tell me you're having delusions again. This isn't a science fiction story, and the rest of us are not your fictional characters. We're running short of time. Are we about ready to get these take these documents to the court yet?

DRAKE: We're on the last one now.

HILDA: Which one is this?

DRAKE: California Judicial Council Form FL-300, REQUEST FOR ORDER. This is to ask the court to grant some temporary orders that will be in place until the divorce is finalized or until further order of the court.

HILDA: Why do we need this?

DRAKE: From what you've told me, this is the most important thing you're trying to get done. (Hilda is looking over Drake's shoulder as he types the information onto the form – using, by the way, a brand of electric typewriter not seen in modern day Los Angeles for many decades).

HILDA: Why aren't you checking the box for TEMPORARY EMERGENCY ORDERS

DRAKE: Under California Rules of Court, Rule 5.151(c), we would need an "... affirmative factual showing of irreparable harm, immediate danger, or any other statutory basis for granting relief without notice or with shortened notice to the other party." In this case, I don't see it.

HILDA: OK. What's that you're putting down for custody and visitation?

DRAKE: I'm requesting that you have full custody of the two children and that your husband have reasonable visitation.

HILDA: Why not request a No-Visitation order?

DRAKE: Visitation with a child can only be denied if there is a risk to a child's physical, mental, or emotional wellbeing. You haven't told me anything about him being harmful to the children.

HILDA: Well, he could kidnap them and take them to another planet.

DRAKE: If so, then an order from this court isn't going to stop him.

(Hilda looks sort of disappointed, but doesn't say anything. Drake continues typing).

HILDA: What does "Property Control" mean?

DRAKE: It means that we are requesting that you be given temporary control over certain items of community property. In this case, I put that you should have control over "Any intellectual property rights to which either party is or may become entitled, including but not limited to rights, royalties and other proceeds from books, movies, TV shows or merchandise."

HILDA: And what does all that mean?

DRAKE: Let's go back a bit, and I'll explain it. Remember the reason that you said you wanted to get this divorce?

HILDA: Because my husband is cheating on me?

DRAKE: Yes, there's that. But remember you also said that you wanted to sue Gigabucks Studios?

HILDA: Right. For using my husband's name and likeness in movies without paying him anything. Also, he wrote the stories that several of those movies are based on. Like, for example, *SOFT LANDING ON THE SUN*, and the new movie that Gigabucks is planning to release, the remake of *LUNCHTIME OF THE GODS*.

EDITOR: These stories, and many others, are available upon request.

DRAKE: Well, from what you've told me, your husband isn't likely to sue Gigabucks.

HILDA: That's true. He's totally financially irresponsible and doesn't care about money at all.

DRAKE: Right. But whatever rights your husband might have to sue are also your rights under community property law. (At least to the degree that the rights were acquired during the time you were married).

HILDA: They were. In fact, I saw him writing some of those stories, and I even helped him write *THE OPPOSSUMS OF OPPRESSION* and *THE WIZARDS OF WESTONIA*.

DRAKE: All right. Now, if you want to sue Gigabucks for using your husband's name and likeness, or the stories that either of you wrote, you're going to need a court order saying that you have the right to enforce those rights.

HILDA: And that's what you're asking for?

DRAKE: Yes, I'm asking the court to give you temporary control over any intellectual property rights either of you have. Meaning that you would have the right to sue Gigabucks.

HILDA: Great! How much do you think we can get from Gigabucks?

DRAKE: I have no idea. Intellectual property is out of my area. Another attorney is going to represent you in the suit against Gigabucks. All I'm doing for you is the divorce, so you will have the right to sue.

HILDA: Now, I understand.

DRAKE: All right, I'll have this document ready to go in a few minutes, then you can sign them. We can make copies and take them to the courthouse to file them.

HILDA: Well, it's 3:30 now, so we have an hour before closing time.

(Hilda and Drake are now outside of the Van Nuys Courthouse, which looks amazingly like it did in 2021 when it was part of Los Angeles. Like most courthouses, it has several police cars parked closed by. Drake notices the emblem on one of the cars and looks surprised).

DRAKE: Something doesn't seem right.

HILDA: What's that?

DRAKE: I thought you said that West Atlantis is an independent nation?

HILDA: It is.

DRAKE: Then what are all these LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department) cars doing here?

**EDITOR'S END NOTE.** Why, indeed? Is this some sinister plot by the Los Angeles City Council to occupy the peace-loving land of West Atlantis? Are the L.A. Cops coming here for a vacation? And more important, are Drake and Hilda going to be admitted into the courthouse? One or more of these questions will be answered in the next episode!

**CONTEST UPDATE.** *The \$500 cash prize for whoever comes the closest to guessing the dramatic ending of this novelita is still open. There will be 6 more episodes after this, and it's anticipated that the contest will close after episode 25. So, there's still time to enter. Send your entries by email.*

**DIVORCES IN PARADISE**  
**EPISODE 21 – THE DOORS OF JUSTICE**  
**By Doug Crowder**  
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(DRAKE COBALT, a tall, fairly thin man, strikingly handsome for his age, wearing an attorney's costume of a navy blue pinstriped suit, a white shirt and a bolo tie, is seated in what could be an attorney's conference room – an expensive wooden table, with rows of law books in the background. He is facing the camera, talking directly to the audience).

DRAKE: This may be the last serialized novel I write. It's tough when I'm only allowed a thousand or so words per episode, and have to start each episode reminding you what happened previously. Well, I'm only going to tell you what you need to know to follow this particular episode.

EDITOR'S NOTE: To get a copy of the first 20 episodes, click [here](#):

(Now, Drake is walking is walking beside his client, HILDA ARMSTRONG, approximate age 27, height 5'7", who is wearing a fairly short sleeveless purple dress, a gold pointed helmet with two horns, and a leather tool-belt type apparatus which has a holster for a wooden croquet mallet.

Drake faces the camera, talking confidentially to the audience, which Hilda apparently doesn't hear).

DRAKE: This is my client, Hilda Armstrong. We're headed to the courthouse to file papers for her divorce. Then I notice something strange about the police cars that are parked nearby.)

(Drake stops and looks at the emblem on one of the cars).

DRAKE: (to Hilda): I thought you said that West Atlantis is an independent nation?

HILDA: It is.

DRAKE: Then what are all these LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department) cars doing here?

DRAKE: (Confidentially to the audience): That's where we left off last episode.

HILDA: Nothing strange about that. West Atlantis is a small country. It doesn't have its own police force, but hires the LAPD to provide police services.

DRAKE: I see.

(They enter the courthouse and approach the security screening area, consisting of a walk-through metal detector and an x-ray machine for bags and belongings, which is attended by three police officers. Drake, being a true gentleman, motions for Hilda to go first. Just before she reaches the table, a loud alarm sound that's sort of a cross between a beep and a buzz goes off.)

ALARM: Honk! Honk! Honk!

(The officers, whose first thought is that something has set off the security equipment, look around for the cause. They seem alarmed, since this is not the sound they are used to hearing when something sets off the metal detector. It soon becomes evident that the sound is not coming from the screening machines, but from Hilda's wooden croquet mallet, which is also flashing with a bright orange light. She takes it out of its holster and holds it up. The sound and the orange light stop.)

POLICE OFFICER 1: Hey lady, drop that hammer.

HILDA (Ignoring the officer): Spirit guides, give us your ear. We must travel far from here.

(There's a bright green flash of light, and Hilda and Drake are nowhere to be seen).

POLICE OFFICER 2: Wow! What was that?

POLICE OFFICER 1: I guess they didn't want to go to court after all.

(Hilda and Drake are falling through some sort of nether dimension with all sorts of strange images floating past).

HILDA (to Drake): Sorry, but there's a little emergency that we need to handle first.

(With a flash of green light, Hilda and Drake are now standing on solid ground again. It could be Arizona, with a number of scenic red rock formations in the background. Except that the plants and trees are more like you'd see in a jungle instead of a desert. And the sky is lavender instead of blue. There's a tour bus stopped by the road and about 15 passengers standing in a row with their hands up. Two robbers are pointing automatic rifles at the passengers while a third is going past the passengers one at a time, taking their valuables and putting them into a large bag.)

HILDA: (to Drake): Stay out of the way, and stay invisible.

DRAKE (seeming frightened): Sure.

(Hilda goes to the two men who are pointing guns at the passengers)

HILDA (loudly): What do you think are you doing?



ROBBER 1: What does it look like we're doing? We're robbing a tour bus.

ROBBER 2: After which we're going to kidnap some of the female passengers to have fun with.

ROBBER 1: Say, you look like you'd be fun to play with.

(Robber 1 notices the horns on her helmet).

ROBBER 1: Nice horns, lady. Does this mean you're horny?

(The 2 robbers laugh, and Robber 1 reaches out to touch Hilda's horns, but stops when she glares and holds her mallet up).

HILDA: What you should do is drop your guns, return the items you've taken, apologize, then ride away.

ROBBER 1: And why should we do that?

HILDA: Otherwise I'll get angry.

(The 2 robbers laugh again.)

ROBBER 1: Do you think we should be afraid of your wooden hammer?

(Hilda seems to change her attitude a bit, looking a little sad and disappointed.)

HILDA: No, you shouldn't fear the mallet.

(She puts the mallet back in its holster).

HILDA: But you should fear me.

(The scene goes into slow motion as Hilda kicks the knee of Robber 1, who falls down screaming in pain, dropping his gun. She then grabs Robber 2's hand, twisting his wrist into an obviously uncomfortable angle, causing him to drop his gun and shout in discomfort. Meanwhile, Robber 3, who was taking valuables from the passengers, turns his attention toward Hilda, pointing his gun at her.)

ROBBER 3: Hold it right there, lady. Put your hands up.

(Hilda turns to face Robber 3. Instead of putting her hands up, she puts them on her hips, standing confidently, smiling broadly. She speaks quietly and slowly to Robber 3.)

HILDA: Drop your gun or die.

(Robber 3, after briefly considering his options, drops his gun and raises his hands.)

HILDA (to the passengers who were being robbed): Who's in charge here?

(A nice dressed lady, probably the tour guide, steps forward).

TOUR GUIDE: I am.

HILDA: Take their guns and put them under arrest.

(Now that the danger seems to be over, Drake walks boldly into the picture, standing beside Hilda.)

DRAKE: And enjoy the rest of your vacation.

HILDA (to Drake): Didn't I tell you to stay invisible?

(Hilda holds up her mallet, there's a bright green flash of light, and now she and Drake are in the courthouse again, close to the security screening area. Needless to say, they are noticed by the three police officers attending the machines).

POLICE OFFICER 1: Hey, it's the hammer lady back again.

POLICE OFFICER 2: (to Hilda): I'm sorry ma'am, you can't bring that hammer in here.

HILDA: Why not?

POLICE OFFICER: No weapons in the courthouse.

HILDA: OK, I'll make it disappear.

(There's a brief flash of green light, and the mallet is nowhere to be seen. The officer seems a little startled and looks around for where it might have gone to).

HILDA: It's nothing to be concerned about.

POLICE OFFICER # 1: It's nothing to be concerned about.

(Hilda and Drake go through the metal detectors without incident, and are now in the courthouse).

*EDITOR'S END NOTE: So, our heroes have successfully made it through the doors of justice. Are their difficulties over? Or just beginning? What new terrors await them now? Join us for our continuing saga in 30 or so days.*

**DIVORCES IN PARADISE**  
**EPISODE 22 – A SURPRISE AT STARBUSTER’S™**  
**By Doug Crowder**  
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EDITOR’S NOTE: Welcome to Episode 22. For those of you who are just joining us, or for those who don’t remember the first 21 episodes, we should give you some sort of synopsis. However, thanks to a talkative court clerk our heroes are soon to encounter, this episode will tell you all you need to know.

To get your copy of the first 21 episodes, [click here](#).

(Drake and Hilda have just entered the Van Nuys Courthouse, which seems amazingly similar to the Van Nuys Courthouse of 2020. Hilda has already made it through the security screening area and is waiting for Drake, who is wearing a navy blue business suit, with a white shirt and a bolo tie featuring a silver dollar. Drake empties the contents of his pockets into a plastic tray, which he puts on the conveyer belt. He walks through the metal detector. It buzzes.)

POLICE OFFICER: Your bolo tie, sir.

DRAKE: Of course.

(Drake takes off his bolo tie and put it in a plastic tray to go through the screening machine. He walks through the detector again, this time with no buzz, then puts his items back in his pocket, and puts his bolo tie back on.)

POLICE OFFICER: Nice looking tie.

DRAKE: Thanks. This is a 1921 Morgan Silver Dollar.

(Drake walks into the clerk’s office, which is conveniently located on the first floor, just down the hall from the entrance, Hilda follows).

DRAKE: I forgot to tell you about the filing fee. If we were back in L.A., it would be \$435 for the petition and \$60 for the motion.

HILDA: I got it covered.

(The next available clerk, a slightly heavy woman in her 40s, completes waiting on a customer, then looks at Drake and Hilda, indicating that they can come to the counter.)

CLERK: (with a slightly southern accent): Welcome to the Van Nuys Courthouse. How are you all doing today?

DRAKE: We’re doing great, how about yourself.

CLERK: Just fine, thanks for asking. How can I help you, Mr. Cobalt?

(Drake, carefully hiding his surprise that she knows his name, hands her the papers, which she reviews briefly).

CLERK: Another divorce! Don't you just think it's terrible, the great number of divorces in paradise?

(The clerk doesn't wait for an answer to that question, but facing Hilda, asks another.)

CLERK: You must be the unlucky lady.

(Hilda nods.)

CLERK: I'm so sorry that your marriage didn't work out. Did he leave you for a younger woman?

HILDA: How did you know?

CLERK: Men! They're all alike! You can't trust any of them.

(Clerk pauses briefly, then addresses Drake).

CLERK: Sorry, no offense intended to you, Mr. Cobalt.

(Clerk looks over the papers some more).

CLERK: You're married to Judas Armstrong? The movie star? Don't you just love his latest movie, "Death and Destruction?" I've seen it twice already. Well, actors are the worst of all, they're always finding young actresses.

HILDA: No, he's not the actor. He's the real person that the actor is portraying. And the one who wrote the stories that the movies are based on.

CLERK: Well! Writers are even worse than actors! Especially Science Fiction writers. Sorry, Mr. Cobalt, no offense against you. I know you like to write Science Fiction in your spare time.

(Clerk looks at papers more as she continues talking.)

CLERK: Let's see. We have the Petition for Dissolution. The Summons. The Statement of Location. And a Request for Order. What are you asking for? You want custody of the two children? I bet they're just little darlings. And you want temporary control of any intellectual property? You're talking about the stories he wrote for the movies?

HILDA: Among other things.

CLERK: Well, I hope you get lots of money from him!

HILDA: Trust me, I will.

CLERK: Alright. That will be \$495 total.

(Hilda hands five \$100 bills to the Clerk. Oddly, these are adorned with the face of Ben Franklin, and are the same color as what you would see in present day America. The Clerk gives her a \$5 bill for change, featuring the face of Honest Abe Lincoln.)

CLERK: Thank you ma'am.

CLERK (To Drake): Is El Cinco de Agosto at 8:30 all right for your hearing date?

DRAKE: Just fine, thanks.

(The clerk finishes stamping the papers, returning two copies to Drake).

CLERK: You all have a nice day, now, you hear?

DRAKE: You too, thanks.

(Drake and Hilda walk outside the clerk's office.)

HILDA: What happens now?

DRAKE: Let's go sit down and I'll explain it to you.

(They are now sitting in a coffee shop across the street from the courthouse – probably a Starbaster's, judging by the distinctive logo on the wall.)

(Drake has a small cup of plain black Atlantiano coffee and a small ham and cheese crescent sandwich sitting in front of him, while Hilda has a Mucho Grande El Supremo Mocha Latte with whipped cream and a cherry on top. Drake organizes the papers he's holding, separating them into three stacks. Then starts explaining to Hilda).

DRAKE: Here are the documents that you're going to have served on your husband. First is the Summons. This tells him that he has 30 days to file a response with the court, or else you may get what you're asking for by default.

(Drake takes it from Hilda, puts it in another stack, turned upside down so that it will be the top document when she turns it over. He hands her the next document).

DRAKE: This is the Petition. This tells what you are asking for, which is basically to dissolve the marriage, to award you custody of the children, and to divide whatever community property you have.

DRAKE: This is the Statement of Location, which explains why we are filing this action in the Van Nuys Courthouse – because you reside in this district with your sister.

DRAKE: This is the Request for Order. This informs him that there is a hearing at the date specified, and that if he does not file a response within a certain period of time and appear at the hearing, that the court may grant the requested relief.

HILDA: And what is it that we're requesting again?

DRAKE: That you be given temporary control over any intellectual property rights that either of you have. Meaning that you will have the right to sue anyone who is profiting from any stories that your husband wrote.

HILDA: Yes. Like Gigabucks Studios, with their upcoming movie, LUNCHTIME OF THE GODS. So, can we go ahead and start that lawsuit now?

DRAKE: Not until the court grants your motion – which is set for hearing on Agosto Cinco. Before then, you will have to get your husband served with these documents.

HILDA: What do you mean “served?”

DRAKE: That means to deliver the documents to him so that he has notice about the upcoming hearing and the divorce proceeding.

HILDA: So, I have to give him these documents?

DRAKE: No, it has to be done by someone who is over 18, and not a party to the lawsuit. Meaning someone who isn't you. You can hire a professional process server, or get a friend to do it. They can either hand the documents to him directly, or leave a copy with someone at this home or business. And then mailing a copy to him.

HILDA: And this has to be done sometime before August 5?

DRAKE: Earlier than that. He needs time to prepare a response, if he's going to. If he's served personally, it has to be done at least 16 court days before the hearing, which will be approximately July 11. If he's served by leaving the documents with someone at his home or place of employment, you'll have to add 10 days to the notice, so that would have to be done about July 1.

EDITOR'S NOTE: See California Code of Civil Procedure Sections 414.10, 415.10, 415.20 and 1005(b) if you don't want to take Drake's word for this.

HILDA: He's going to be served today.

DRAKE: All right. Do you have someone lined up to do the service?

HILDA: Of course. YOU are going to hand him the documents.

EDITOR'S END NOTE: Was Drake expecting that he would be requested to serve Hilda's husband? Will Drake cheerfully agree to this task? Will Hilda's husband, who has been talked about but unseen throughout the story, finally make an appearance? One and a half of these questions will be answered in the next episode.

**DIVORCES IN PARADISE**  
**EPISODE 23 – QUIET AS A MOUSE**  
**By Doug Crowder**  
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(Drake Cobalt, an attorney who appears to be in his late 50s or early 60s, wearing a navy blue pinstriped suit, a white shirt and a bolo tie, is sitting at a table in a coffee shop, with a small cup of plain black coffee in front of him. He looks at his watch, then looks directly at the audience).

DRAKE: 4:47 p.m. Time to call it a day, and head home. But somehow I feel like the day's just starting.

(Drake has a sip of coffee, then continues.)

DRAKE: I've been telling you about a usual day in the life of a Los Angeles attorney who thought he was a science fiction writer – until encountering several of his characters and fictional settings in what appears to be real life.

It started about 10:30 this morning when I was northbound on the 101 Freeway from Downtown L.A. to the Valley. As I went over the Cahuenga Pass (Elevation 745 feet), I was suddenly in the future Nation of West Atlantis. Around noon, I was hired by Hilda Armstrong, one of my characters now come to life, to file a divorce against her husband, Judas Armstrong, another of my fictional characters.

(Drake holds up a wedding photo of Judas and Hilda. Judas is very skinny, only about 3 inches taller than Hilda. He's wearing a black tux, with a white shirt and gold Bolo tie. She's wearing a white wedding gown, and also her gold helmet with 2 horns, and holding her croquet mallet.)

DRAKE: For some reason that I didn't ask about, she was insistent that the papers be filed that day. After working diligently for a few hours, I was able to prepare the five documents needed to get the divorce started and got them filed at 4:27 p.m., with 3 minutes to spare before the courthouse closed.

(The scene now includes both Drake and Hilda sitting at the table in a coffee shop. Drake still faces the audience, with Hilda not apparently hearing him.)

DRAKE: Then, Hilda and I went to the Starbaster's™ across the street, where I explained what happened next in the procedure, which was that her husband had to be served with the documents. I told her that she couldn't deliver the papers herself, but could hire a professional process server or get a friend to do it. And then she says . . .

HILDA: You're going to be the one to hand him the documents.

DRAKE: (to the audience) This wasn't something I'd bargained for.



DRAKE: (to Hilda): Me? Why me?

HILDA: You're allowed to serve him, aren't you?

DRAKE: Yes. I'm not a party to the action, and I'm over age 18. Attorneys often serve papers. But in this case, no thanks. I'm not going to.

HILDA: Why not?

DRAKE: I don't like to serve papers in divorce cases. Divorces are sometimes highly emotional, and husbands don't always react favorably to getting served. Some process servers have been assaulted. Like I said, you should hire a professional process server.

HILDA: (smiling, like she wants to laugh): You aren't afraid of Judas Armstrong are you?

DRAKE: Me? Afraid? (laughs) Why should I be afraid? (becomes serious). Of course I'm afraid! Why shouldn't I be? He's adept in several forms of physical combat, and has a magic sword that could easily slice my head off.

HILDA: But he's not a violent person.

DRAKE: Except when he's destroying a fleet of Devil's Alliance ships or intervening in a fight between Great K'thulu and the Sun God.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: As described in more detail in THE BATTLE OF PINE RIDGE and THE SUN GOD SAGA. Normally, we would offer you the opportunity to obtain these stories but they haven't quite been written yet.)

HILDA: But he wouldn't hurt YOU!

DRAKE: Why not? He might blame me for the fact that you're divorcing him. He might even think that I'm the other man. Just because he's been cheating on you doesn't mean that he's not still possessive.

HILDA: He can't do anything to you, remember? Didn't you say that he's just one of your fictional characters?

DRAKE: That's what I thought this morning. But several of my supposed fictional characters have come to life today. And all of them have been a lot more fun to write about than to meet in real life.

HILDA: I don't know why you'd say something like that.

DRAKE: Well let's see. So far today -- I was kidnapped by a pterodactyl, dropped a thousand feet to my apparent doom, trapped in a forest fire, and taken to a gunfight where I could easily have been hit by a stray bullet.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: See Episodes 4, 5, 12, 13 and 21 for full details. [Click here](#) to get a copy of all previous episodes.)

DRAKE: I don't think I'd like to meet Judas Armstrong, let alone be the one to tell him his wife has filed for divorce.

HILDA: I think you'll enjoy meeting him. After you hand him the papers, I'm sure that the two of you can have a good talk.

(Drake raises his voice a bit and some of the other patrons are looking at the drama unfolding at their table.)

DRAKE: Maybe I didn't make myself clear. I'm not going to be your process server.

HILDA (staying calm, talking quietly): And maybe I didn't make myself clear. I'm not offering you a choice in the matter.

(Hilda stands, holding up her hands. There's a flash of flames, followed by a small cloud of smoke, and she's now holding her magic croquet mallet, which has appeared from nowhere.)

HILDA: Spirit Guides Arouse! We beg you take us to the house. Where Drake can serve my cheating spouse. And take us quiet as a mouse.

(With a brilliant flash of green light and a loud bang, Hilda and Drake are nowhere to be seen. Some of the remaining patrons look around, startled. The store manager goes to their table, looks around for them, decides they're gone.)

MANAGER (to a Barista): If those two come back, just give them decaffeinated coffee.

EDITOR'S END NOTE: Where have Drake and Hilda gone? Will Drake enjoy giving the divorce papers to Judas Armstrong? Will Judas have a speaking role in this story? One of these questions will be answered in the next episode, so stay tuned!

CONTEST UPDATE. We are approaching the end. The contest will be open for at least 2 more episodes. Whoever comes closest to guessing the surprise ending gets a \$500 cash prize (which will probably be paid by check or electronic transfer, but "cash" sounds better).

**DIVORCES IN PARADISE**  
**EPISODE 24 – THE EMERALD PYRAMID**  
**By Doug Crowder**  
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(Drake faces the audience, giving his usual opening monologue. Behind him are various scenes and pictures, going past in different directions, all in a jumble. Some recognizable scenes include the Grand Canyon, the Statue of Liberty, and Mt. Rushmore, all seen at various angles.)

DRAKE: You may wonder how I got here. And what “here” is. Here’s a quick summary of my day so far.

I’m an attorney, representing Hilda, who’s getting a divorce from Judas.

(Drake holds a large, framed wedding picture of Judas and Hilda together).

DRAKE: Hilda’s the one on the right. Earlier this afternoon, I prepared the documents needed to get the divorce started, then filed them with the court. After I explained how the next step was to get Judas served with the documents, Hilda insisted that I be the one to serve him. I politely declined. To which she responded . . .

(Now, Drake and Hilda are sitting in a Starbaster’s coffee shop, each with a cup of something representing coffee in front of them.)

HILDA: I don’t recall giving you a choice in the matter.

(Hilda stands, holding her magic croquet mallet above her head. The mallet lights up with a brilliant flash of green light and there’s a loud bang. Drake and Hilda are nowhere to be seen.)

CUSTOMER: Wow!

STORE MANAGER: They should have had decaf.

(Now Drake is back in the tornado of confusing images, talking to the audience.)

DRAKE: So that’s how I ended up here – wherever “here” is. I presume Hilda’s taking us to wherever I can serve the papers on her husband.

HILDA: Didn’t I tell you to close your eyes when we’re going through a dimensional vortex?

DRAKE: Yes, but I don’t remember why.

HILDA: To reduce the chances of you going insane.

DRAKE: Too late for that. I had to be crazy to take this case.

(Hilda ignores his attempt at humor. Suddenly, they are out of the vortex, and on solid ground. Hilda manages to land upright, but Drake falls face down, fortunately on a soft area. He gets up slowly, seeming to do an inventory of his body parts to establish that they are all still there and functioning. The front half of his nice navy pinstriped suit is covered with dust and a few pieces of grass.)

DRAKE: Why does this always happen when I'm wearing a new suit?

(Drake looks around at the landscape. The sky is light green, rather than blue. A few creatures fly overhead that aren't birds, but are sort of like long, bright red bats, with 2 sets of wings. In the distance is a group of pyramids - not ancient, decaying stone pyramids, but modern, shiny ones, made from glass and steel.

DRAKE: I guess we're not in California anymore.

HILDA: Welcome to "The Planet."

(Hilda walks along a pink concrete walkway toward the pyramids. Drake follows. There is a group of 5 pyramids – a large gold one in the center, about as tall as a 4 story building, surrounded by four smaller ones, of red, blue, green and silver, each a little taller than an average 2 story house.)

(They head toward the green one, which is covered with shiny glass, with no apparent doors or other openings. As they approach, a panel slides open, as if inviting them in.)

HILDA: Here's "The Emerald Pyramid," where Judas and I had four and a half years of happy marriage and a half less happy.

DRAKE: But you've only been married for three months.

HILDA: That's in Earth-time.

(They enter as the panel door closes behind them. They are in what seems like a luxury apartment, with couches, chairs, a dining area, and what's probably a kitchen off to the side. But this isn't something you'd see in any modern Earth city, unless you're visiting a mad abstract artist. The bizarre colors, patterns and wall hangings are literally "out of this world.")

HILDA: I'd like some water – you?

DRAKE: Sure.

HILDA (talking a little louder): Bartholomew! 2 glasses of cold water!

(A small robot floats in, holding the glasses of water in its claws. Drake, a little surprised, hesitates, then takes the one offered to him.)

HILDA: Have a seat and make yourself at home.

(Drake sits in an easy chair.)

HILDA: Would you like something to eat? Some tea or coffee?

DRAKE: Thanks, but I'd just like to get this over with and get back to L.A. Is this where I'm going to serve your husband?

HILDA: Yes, as soon as he gets home.

(A slight pause as Drake continues to look at the unfamiliar surroundings, and Hilda does something in the kitchen. Hilda returns to the living room).

HILDA: It's been a hard day. I'm going to take off my helmet, if you don't mind.

DRAKE: Not at all.

(Hilda reaches for her golden helmet adorned with two horns. She starts to take it off. Drake is expecting to see her long blond braided hair beneath. Instead, the hair and the helmet seem to be attached to each other in one piece, and the hair comes off as well – revealing a bald, shiny head. Drake is obviously surprised, but hides it well.)

HILDA: It's been a hard day. I think I'm going to take a shower now.

(Hilda takes off all her clothes, standing naked in front of Drake. The camera is placed at such an angle that the viewers only see Hilda's back side and not the most interesting parts of that, but it's obvious that Drake is getting a good view.)

HILDA: Would you like to join me?

EDITOR'S END NOTE: Is this something you were expecting? Be honest now! Was Drake expecting it? Will Drake take Hilda up on her offer? Will Drake have the opportunity to deliver the divorce papers to Judas? Will Drake make it back to Los Angeles before sundown? One or more of these questions will be answered in our next installment. Stay tuned!

# *Divorces In Paradise*

A Drake Cobalt™ Novel by  
**Doug Crowder**

**DIVORCES IN PARADISE**  
**EPISODE 25 – THE GOLDEN PYRAMID**  
**By Doug Crowder**  
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We now join episode 25 of the adventures of Drake Cobalt, a totally FICTIONAL attorney practicing in the IMAGINARY city of Los Ankalees, during some unspecified time that resembles the early 2000s.

(For no logical reason, Drake is walking along a trail atop a mesa with the red mountains of Sedona, Arizona in the background. He seems to suddenly sense a camera pointed at him, so he sits on a rock, takes a drink of water, and faces the audience).

DRAKE: Time for my usual opening monologue, where I give you a synopsis of what's happened so far in the story. I've just been informed that I only have 4 more episodes to wrap this story up. So, I'm going to have to leave out a lot of parts to speed things up. I'm not going to tell you about the little green-skinned man who took my measurements and then presented me with a new suit in a few minutes. I'm leaving out the part about meeting the Great God, Zeus. I won't describe how, just after we got to Hilda's place, she took off her clothes and asked me to take a shower with her.

(Drake pauses, as if listening to comments from an audience that we can't see or hear).

DRAKE: Oh – you'd like to hear that part? Well, I had just filed the necessary papers to start her divorce from Judas Armstrong. Then I explained to her how she needed to get a professional process server to deliver the papers to him. She said that she wanted me to do the serving. I didn't especially want to, but she persuaded me. Then, she takes me to her home, and I'm presented with two surprises.

(Now the scene is inside Hilda's luxurious home, The Emerald Pyramid. Drake is seated, Hilda standing.)

HILDA: I'm going to take off my helmet, if you don't mind.

(Hilda takes off her helmet, and with it her long blond braided hair, revealing that she's perfectly bald.)

DRAKE: (to the audience): That was the first surprise. The next was even better.

(Hilda takes off all her clothes, standing naked in front of Drake. There are two black strips on the picture, preventing the audience from seeing the interesting parts, and preserving this story's G-Rating.

HILDA: I'm going to take a shower. Care to join me?

DRAKE: That's where we left off in the last episode.

(Drake faces a different direction in the chair, so that Hilda is not in the picture.)

DRAKE: (Aside to the audience): Much as I was enjoying the view, I knew that I now in three types of grave danger. First was from the State Bar, since any type of sexual involvement with a client is strictly prohibited by ethics rules. Second, was from her husband, Judas Armstrong -- the type of guy that could show up unexpectedly at any time -- who might object to another man in his house with his naked wife. The third, and biggest danger was from Hilda herself. If you've followed some of the previous episodes, you'd have some idea what she could do to an aging, out-of-shape lawyer with no combat skills whatsoever.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This must be during a period of Drake's life when he was unmarried, or he would have listed his wife as the fourth and biggest danger.

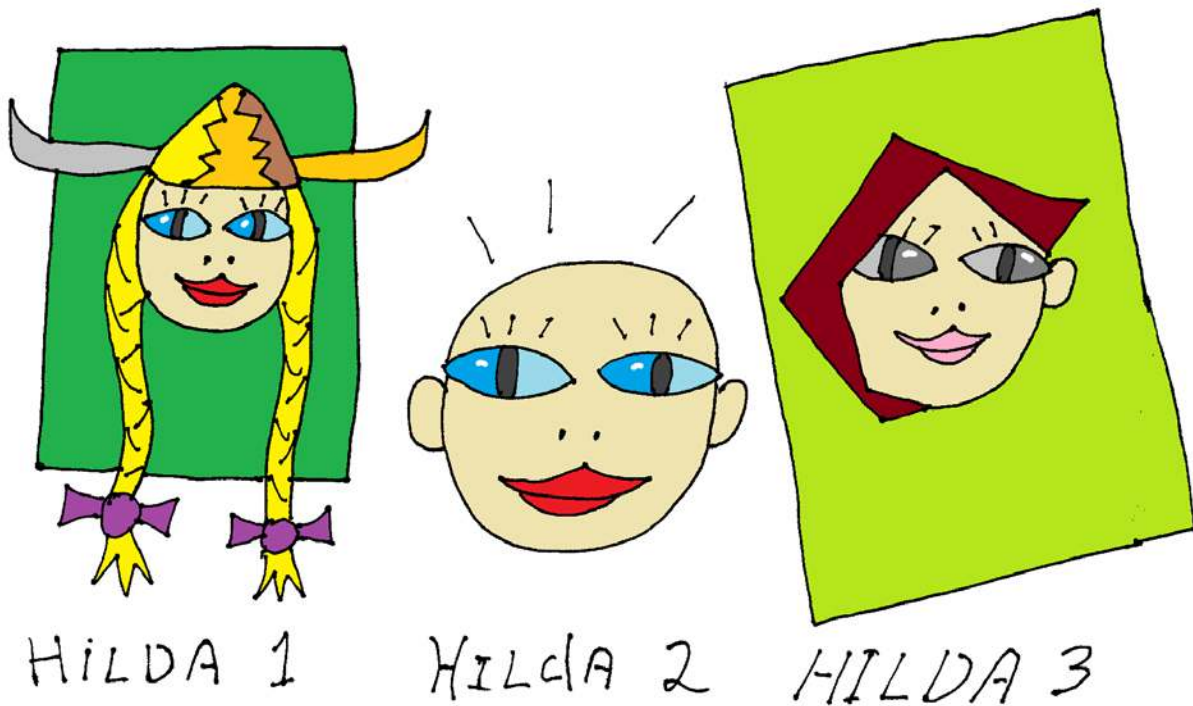
(Now we are back to the live action between Drake and Hilda. Drake holds up the manila folder of legal papers that he's been carrying, in such a way that he can see Hilda's face but not her private parts.)

DRAKE: Thanks for the invitation, but no. Remember I told you that as a lawyer, I can't have any type of intimate relationship with a client. I'll wait in the living room until you've gotten dressed.

(Drake turns away, without looking at her, then sits in another chair, and picks up a magazine from a coffee table. Hilda goes off to the shower without saying anything else.)

(A few minutes have passed, and Hilda reappears, now with a completely different look. Instead of long blond braids, or the bald look, she now has short black hair, in a stylish asymmetric look. And her bright blue eyes are now light gray. To top it off, she's wearing a not-too-revealing plain gray dress.)





DRAKE: (to the audience): I started to complement her on her change of appearance, but didn't want to encourage any possible attraction she might have toward me.

DRAKE: (to Hilda): So, when can I get your husband served and head back to Los Angeles?

HILDA: He should be here soon. Would you like to watch my wedding video while you're waiting?

DRAKE: No thanks.

(Drake returns to his magazine. Hilda's cell phone rings in the background. She answers it).

HILDA: (to phone): Hello? (Pause). Ok, we'll be over shortly.

HILDA: (to Drake): He's going to show up next door in a few minutes. Let's go.

(Drake follows Hilda as she heads toward the front door, which slides open apparently of its own accord when she approaches. The sun is still shining in the light green sky outside, with some puffy white clouds in the distance. They leave Hilda's home, the Emerald Pyramid, walking down a pink tiled walkway toward the larger Golden Pyramid, surrounded by three other pyramids the size of Hilda's, which are red, blue and silver.)

DRAKE (to audience): I had a feeling who we were going to meet.

DRAKE (to Hilda): We're going to visit your landlord?

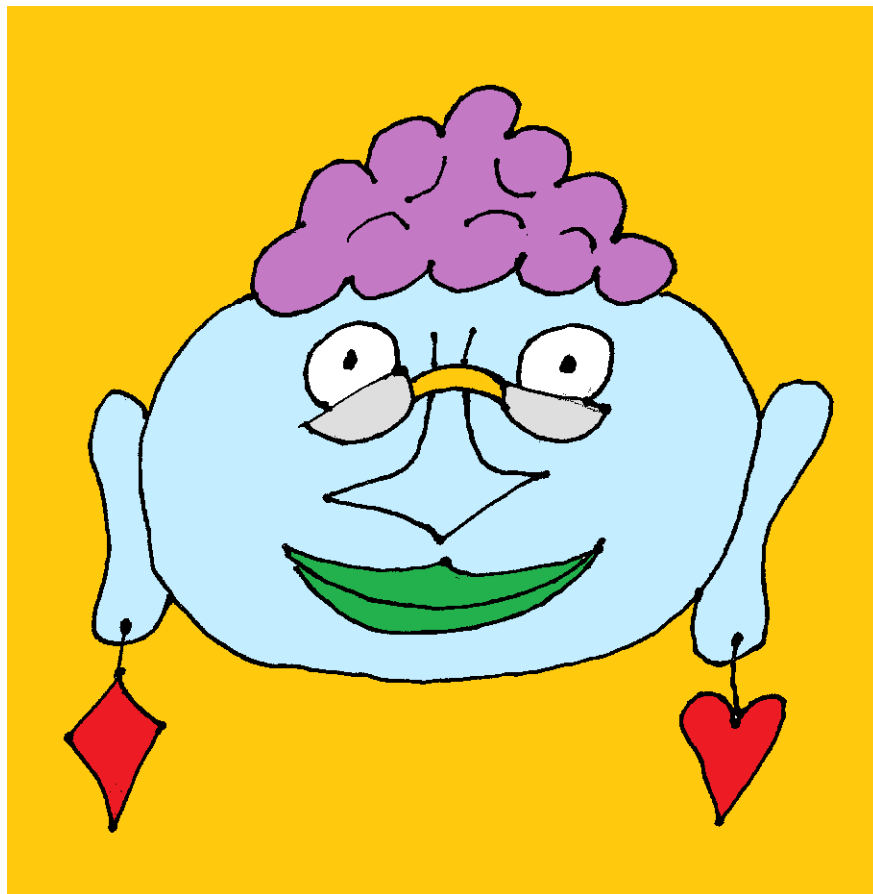
(Hilda just smiles slightly. The door of the Golden Pyramid slides open and they enter into a luxurious foyer. Within seconds, they are joined by a middle aged man dressed as a stereotyped British butler, with a long-tailed tuxedo and bow-tie.)

BUTLER: Good afternoon, Madam Hilda, Mr. Cobalt.

DRAKE: Hello Chives, how are you doing?

CHIVES: Very well, sir, thanks for asking. Madam will see you now, come this way.

(Chives leads them into what most people would consider a large, ornate dining room, but in this mansion, is probably a breakfast nook.) Seated at the table is an older woman, exquisitely dressed with a perfectly combed light blue wig, and – oddly enough – light blue skin.)



LADY: Hello, Hilda. Good to see you again, Drake.

DRAKE: Likewise, Aunt Agatha.

EDITOR'S END NOTE: I bet you didn't expect this, did you? Who is Aunt Agatha, and why do she and Drake apparently know each other? Even though they're on a different planet in no telling what part of the universe? Will Judas Armstrong get served with his divorce papers? Will Drake make it back to the lovely green hills of Los Angeles? Two or more of these questions will be answered in the next installment.)

CONTEST UPDATE: We are still offering a \$500 cash prize to whoever comes the closest to guessing the surprise ending of this serialized novelita. Some of the entries have been close, but none have been completely accurate. Yet. If you want to participate, you'd better email your entry soon. The contest closes after the next episode!

**DIVORCES IN PARADISE**  
**EPISODE 26 – YOU’VE FORGOTTEN SOMETHING**  
By Doug Crowder  
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EDITOR’S NOTE: We now join the TOTALLY IMAGINARY adventures of the TOTALLY FICTIONAL character, Drake Atom Cobalt (an attorney who thinks he’s a science fiction writer) from the MAKE-BELIEVE land known as Los Ankalees, in a MYTHICAL time period resembling the early 2020s. Drake will give you enough information to follow this episode. If you want to know what happened in the first 25 episodes, you can click here [HERE](#) to get your copy of the complete story up to now.

(Drake and Hilda are sitting in a very lavish tea room of a large mansion, at a wooden table with an older woman who was introduced as Aunt Agatha last episode. Drake turns to face the audience, while Agatha and Hilda apparently can’t hear him).



DRAKE: I'm on another planet. It's simply known as The Planet. I'm here to serve divorce papers on Judas Armstrong, the husband of my client, Hilda Armstrong. We're now in the home of Aunt Agatha, who has apparently been renting a pyramid to Judas and Hilda. I've been told Judas will be showing up here any minute.

AGATHA: Drake!

(Drake seems a little startled that his monologue to the audience has been interrupted. He turns to face Agatha, who continues, now that she has Drake's attention).

AGATHA: It's been awhile since we've talked, Drake. How have you been?

DRAKE: Things have been exciting today.

AGATHA: I know that you like to call yourself a science fiction writer. How's that been going?

DRAKE: A little too realistic, lately. Several of my fictional characters come to life today.

AGATHA: Including me?

DRAKE: I'm afraid so.

AGATHA: That's ok. I know that you have the idea that other people are just your fictional characters. I'm not offended. What I am offended about is that you haven't written anything about me lately.

DRAKE: Well, maybe I am right now.

AGATHA: Maybe so. Why don't you tell the audience who I am?

DRAKE: What audience?

AGATHA: Don't play dumb. I know you think you're a writer, and that you're just narrating one of your stories. And that there's some audience watching you. And you like to talk confidentially to them when you think the other characters can't hear you. So, go ahead tell them who I am.

DRAKE: All right. (To audience): Aunt Agatha is one of the recurring characters in Judas Armstrong stories. Judas has had a number of adventures on a distant world known by its inhabitants only as "The Planet." He seems to stay with Agatha whenever he's on the Planet, and Agatha often plays a small part in the action. Why he calls her "Aunt" is never quite explained. It's some sort of nickname, since they probably aren't actually related.

AGATHA: But you were going to explain it someday, weren't you?

DRAKE: I sort of give the impression that Judas somehow helped you become rich, so you sort of adopted him, and claimed he was a nephew.

AGATHA: That's good enough. Now, tell me -- what brings you here?

DRAKE: I'm on a mission as an attorney. But I can't say too much. Under California Business & Professions Code Sec. 6068(e) (1), it's the duty of an attorney "To maintain inviolate the confidence, and at every peril to himself or herself to preserve the secrets, of his or her client."

AGATHA: I know that Hilda wants to file a divorce against Judas. I wanted them to work out their problems, but it's her decision. She told me that she was going to hire you for the divorce. And my guess is that you've filed the documents with the court and you're here to serve Judas.

DRAKE: Like I say, I can't reveal any confidential information.

HILDA: Aunt Agatha already knows all about me and Judas. You can tell her anything.

DRAKE: But if I tell her anything, that would waive the attorney client privilege, and she could be required to testify about anything you and I discussed in confidence. See Evidence Code sections 912 and 952.

HILDA: It's ok. No one from Earth is going to be able to find her to make her testify.

AGATHA: Do you have the papers with you?

(Drake looks at Hilda, who nods for him to go ahead. He hands the folder to Agatha, who goes through it.)

EDITOR'S NOTE: To our knowledge, this is the first courtroom drama that actually has a copy of all the court documents prepared in the case. To get your copy, [click here](#). Here.

AGATHA: Let's see. Here's the Summons, which tells Judas that he has to file a Response within 30 days, or he may lose. Here's the Petition, which gives a summary of what Hilda's asking for. Here's a Notice of Hearing. There's a hearing set for August 5. It says, "The court may make the requested orders without you if you do not file a Responsive Declaration at least nine court days before the hearing .and appear at the hearing."

AGATHA (looking up at Drake briefly): And what order are you requesting?

(Agatha reads some more).

AGATHA: You checked the box showing that Hilda is requesting "The exclusive temporary use, possession, and control of the following property that the parties own." And here's what you filled in. "Any rights regarding intellectual property or use of name or likeness to which either party is or may become entitled, including but not limited to rights, royalties and other proceeds from books, movies, TV shows or merchandise."

(Agatha sets the papers down.)

AGATHA: You told me, Hilda, that on your planet, someone is making movies about Judas.

HILDA: Right. Gigabucks studios.

AGATHA: Like these?

(Suddenly, it's like there's a big screen TV on the other side of the table, but it's floating in the air, with no physical apparatus – just images. It's positioned so that Hilda, Drake and Agatha can all see it.)

(The screen now shows the head and shoulders of a man wearing a mask and costume. The mask is mostly a bright yellow, with a red and green “W” on his forehead. His eyes and mouth are seen through openings in the mask. He's wearing a pencil thin mustache. His costume, at least the part we can see, is bright yellow covering the chest and torso. The left sleeve is bright red and the right sleeve bright green. Oddly, he's wearing a pink carnation flower on his lapel – or at least the area where his lapel would be if he was wearing a business suit. Behind him is an indistinct dark blue background. He faces the audience and says):

MASKED MAN: The air was crisp and clean. I was looking at one of the best views I'd ever seen – mountains, deserts, lakes – and probably an ocean off in the distance.

(It becomes apparent that he's facing into the wind, as his mask is moving in the breeze. The wind becomes stronger and he squints his eyes).

MASKED MAN: Then, I noticed it was kind of windy. And a little colder than I like. But the view of the mountains and desert was becoming even better, with some of the lakes and rock formations becoming more distinct. But the wind was getting even stronger.

(Now it seems like he's standing in a hurricane, with his mask and costume flapping in the wind. He holds a hand in front of his eyes. Oddly, the carnation in his lapel, which should have blown off long ago, doesn't seem to mind the breeze.)

MASKED MAN: I suddenly had the feeling that something was wrong. But what?

(Now, he is seen in a wider angle, and it's apparent that he's falling through the air. The desert scene, still miles below, is getting closer. The bottom half of his costume is about like the top – except that the legs are the opposite colors from the sleeves, with the left being green and the right one red).

MASKED MAN: Then it dawned on me. I was falling – at no telling how many hundreds of miles per hour.

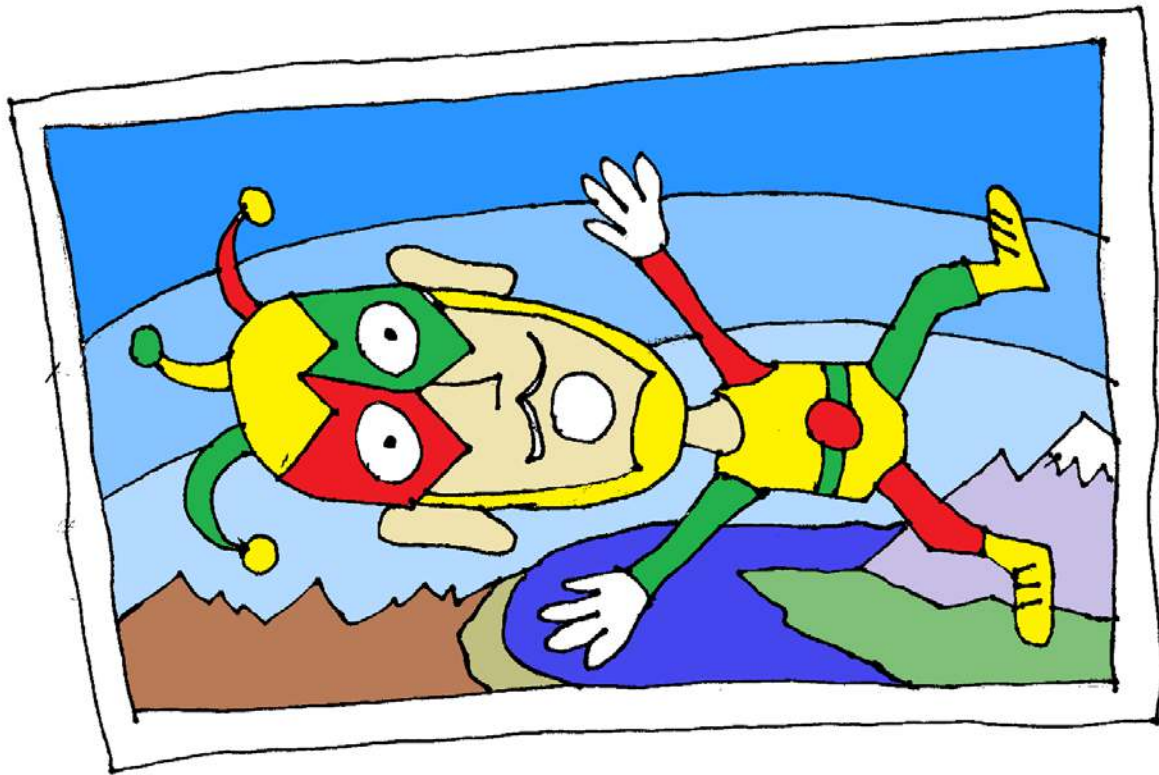
(He moves his arms to feel his back, and there's nothing there but his wildly flapping costume).

MASKED MAN: And no one had bothered to give me a parachute.



(The picture of man falling toward the desert floor disappears, to be replaced by a black screen with bold yellow letters that say "Captain Westonia – The Day Before Tomorrow."

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE: Captain Westonia – The Day Before Tomorrow. In theatres August 15.



(The big screen floating in Aunt Agatha's tea room disappears).

AGATHA: Here, we call him Captain Westonia.

DRAKE: What does Westonia mean?

AGATHA: You should remember that. Westonia is the nation we're in right now.

DRAKE: Of course.

AGATHA: Let me see those papers again.

(She picks up the folder, looks through it).

AGATHA: (to Drake): You've forgotten something!

EDITOR'S END NOTE: "You've forgotten something!" Those may be the 3 words that any lawyer dreads hearing the most. What has Drake forgotten? What dire consequences will his omission have? Will Captain Westonia land on a soft cactus? Will Hilda be there for the opening night of "The Day Before Tomorrow?" Two of these questions will be answered in the next episode.

CONTEST UPDATE – AND CLOSING! We are still offering a \$500 cash prize to whoever comes the closest to guessing the surprise ending of this novelita. Some of the entries have been close, but none have been exactly right. The contest closes 1 week from today. No more entries will be allowed. The winning entry will be announced after the last episode.

## **DIVORCES IN PARADISE**

### **EPISODE 27 - CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'VE BEEN SERVED!**

EDITOR'S NOTE: We now continue with the adventures of Drake Cobalt, a totally fictional attorney from an imaginary place called Los Ankalees during an unspecified time similar to the early 2020s. He also thinks he's a science fiction writer. But today, he has met a number of his fictional characters in the real universe.

If you'd like a copy of the 26 previous episodes, send us an email request. Meanwhile, Drake will tell you what you need to know to follow this installment.

(Drake and Hilda are sitting in a very large and luxurious living room area of a large mansion, at a wooden table with an older woman who was introduced last episode. as Aunt Agatha. Drake turns to face the audience, while Agatha and Hilda apparently can't hear him).

DRAKE: I've been hired by one of my recently introduced characters, Hilda Armstrong, to file a divorce against my oldest and most-used character, Judas Armstrong. After I got the documents filed in the Van Nuys Courthouse, Hilda insisted that I be the one to serve the papers on Judas. I'm now on another planet, simply called "The Planet," in the mansion of Hilda's landlady, Aunt Agatha, (another one of my fictional characters) where Judas is supposed to show up any minute. I'm hoping that I can just hand him the papers and get this over with, and then return to the green hills of Los Angeles. In the last episode, I showed the papers to Agatha, and I heard the 3 words that any attorney dreads hearing the most.

(Aunt Agatha looks over the papers quickly, and looks at Drake).

AGATHA: You've forgotten something!

DRAKE (continuing to audience): But what? Then it dawned on me. In my haste, I had left out 2 crucial documents that could make my efforts to serve Judas pointless, meaning that we'd have to start over again with getting him served.

DRAKE (to Agatha and Hilda): Yes. There are a couple of blank forms that we need to serve. A blank Response form, FL-120 and a blank Responsive Declaration, FL-320. I guess with all the trans-dimensional hurricanes, gunfights and forest fires, I forgot these.

EDITOR'S NOTE: See Episodes 12, 13, 21 and 24 for full details.

AGATHA: Is there something else?

DRAKE: Well, we don't have the Disclosure documents. But those don't need to be served now – they just need to be served before the divorce can be finalized.

AGATHA: Isn't it a better practice to serve that on the Respondent at the same time as summons? So you don't have to serve him twice?

DRAKE: Yes. But Hilda wanted the petition filed today, before the court closed at 4:30, and if I'd taken the time to get the prepared today, we wouldn't have been able to get her petition filed with 3 minutes to spare before closing time.

AGATHA: I also see that you aren't making any request for an order requiring Judas to pay child support or alimony.

DRAKE: That's for the same reason. Making a request for payments would have required completed financial documents – which we just didn't have time for. Besides, I didn't see any reason to ask for an order requiring Judas to pay anything. There wouldn't be any way to collect.

HILDA: Can we amend our request to ask for payments now?

DRAKE: Not unless I prepare some amended documents and take them to court sometime tomorrow.

HILDA: Ok, I agree not to ask Judas for payments. But could we get the Disclosure documents prepared now so that we don't have to serve Judas again. He'll be hard enough to serve once, let alone finding him a second time.

DRAKE: Sure, we can prepare the Disclosure docs – if you take me back to my office in Los Ankalees, where I have access to the California Judicial Council forms.

(The big screen TV, which isn't really a TV, suddenly appears again, floating in the air above the table. It's sort of like a TV, with only the images and no physical devices.)

AGATHA: What form do you want to start with?

DRAKE: Let's do the easier ones first. How about the FL-120.

(A blank FL-120 appears on the screen.)

DRAKE: How is that your computer has access to court forms from another distant planet?

AGATHA: Are you kidding? The legal system of our planet is based on the laws of California -- which are commonly recognized as the most ideal set of laws in the known universe.

DRAKE: Of course! I knew that! Well, with this form, we don't need to put anything on it, we just need to give the Respondent this blank document.

(A small laser jet printer floats in silently and hovers in the air close to Drake. There's a whirring sound, as it quickly prints up the blank document, then a bell makes a loud ding when the document is ready. Drake picks up the document and looks it over.)

DRAKE: I'll put this in the packet right after the summons and petition. Now, let's see the FL-320.

(The blank form appears on the screen.)

DRAKE: This is the blank responsive declaration that Judas would fill out if he wanted to oppose Hilda's request.

HILDA: How do you know he won't?

DRAKE: I know him better than you do, remember? He's a character I created for my science fiction stories. He doesn't care at all about money or legal proceedings.

EDITOR'S NOTE: An example appears in Book I of this TWILIGHT OF JUSTICE Series, JUDGE HANGMAN RULES.

DRAKE: Let me scroll thru this form and make sure it's all there. It is. Now, let's print that.

(There's a slight whirl as the floating laser jet printer spews forth the blank document, followed by a ding when it is complete. Drake looks at it).

DRAKE: I'll put this in the packet behind our FL-300. By the way, this system really beats the IBM Selectric Typewriter I was using earlier today. I've gone from a low-tech planet to a high-tech one in one afternoon.

AGATHA: These latest advances in computer technology have been developed here just in the last 10 years or so. Which is about how long it's been since you've featured me in a story.

DRAKE: Right. Now, let's go to the Disclosure documents.

(Form FL-140 appears on the big screen).

DRAKE: No, let's start with the FL-142.

(Form FL-140 disappears from the screen, replaced with the FL-142).

HILDA: Shouldn't the FL-140 come first, since it's a lower numbered form?

(The floating big screen image turns a bright yellow for a second, then replaces the FL-140 with the FL-142).

DRAKE: Yes, when we're serving these forms, FL-140 will come first. But it's basically just a cover sheet for some other forms, so it's easier to start by preparing that one first.

(The big screen image turns bright red for a second, then shows several fireworks exploding, then shows the FL-142 again).

DRAKE: It starts out, of course, with my name and contact data, then the court information and the names of the parties.

(This information appears almost immediately in the appropriate blank spaces in the document).

DRAKE (Facing aside to the audience): I won't bore you with all the details of this form, or the next two we prepare.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is probably the first Science Fiction Courtroom Drama that will also have a copy of all the legal documents referred to in the story. But they aren't ready yet.

DRAKE: (Still to the audience): Now we're going to fast forward to the point when all the docs have been prepared.

DRAKE (to Agatha and Hilda): Well, everything's ready for me to serve Judas now. When do you suppose he's going to show up?

AGATHA: Let me take one last look at everything.

(Drake hands her the folder, which she looks through).

AGATHA: And these can be served by anyone who's over age 18?

DRAKE: Yes, and not a party to the action. Meaning not Hilda.

AGATHA: So, I could serve Judas?

DRAKE: Sure, if you wanted to.

(Agatha hesitates a few seconds, thinking).

AGATHA: I think I'll give these back to you.

(She hands the folder of documents back to Drake).

AGATHA: Congratulations, Judas. You've been served!

EDITOR'S END NOTE: Was this what you expected? What does Agatha mean? Is Drake actually Judas? Or is Agatha just having a "senior moment?" Will Drake deal with this with his usual laid-back calm and collected style? Join us next episode – if you dare!

## **SECOND CONTEST STARTS**

Contest One closed after Episode 26 because we thought that Episode 27 would make it too easy to guess the ending. But since none of the entries were very close, we're going to have a NEW contest starting now. With slightly different rules – so listen up! This contest closes May 20. Between now and then, whoever makes the closest guess to the ending is the winner. If there is more than 1 correct entry during that time, whoever made the FIRST correct entry wins the prize. Email your guesses. More than one per household allowed.

## **DIVORCES IN PARADISE**

### **EPISODE 28 - BE CAREFUL WITH THOSE CREDIT CARDS!**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: We continue the adventures of Drake Cobalt, a fictional attorney from the imaginary land called Los Ankalees. This is the next to last episode of this novel. Drake will tell you what you need to know to follow this episode, but if you want the previous 27 episodes, click here. [Here.](#)*

DRAKE: I'm on a different world, known by its inhabitants simply as "The Planet." It's similar to the Earth. Except that the sky is green. And all the homes I've seen so far are pyramid shaped. And the only native I've met here has blue skin.

Why am I here? It's a long story – at least 27 episodes so far. I was hired to file a divorce for Hilda Armstrong, against her husband, Judas Armstrong. I managed to get the documents filed in the Van Nuys Courthouse shortly before closing time, then explained to Hilda that she needed to have Judas served – either by enlisting a friend or hiring a professional process server. For reasons that I don't know (but expect that I'm soon to find out), she insisted that I be the one to serve the papers. I didn't agree, but she told me I had no choice in the matter. Then took me through a trans-dimensional vortex to this place, where she says her husband will be showing up any minute.

In the last episode, I had shown the legal documents to Hilda's friend and landlord, a somewhat elderly blue skinned lady who lives in a gold colored mansion, known as Aunt Agatha. She looked at them, asked me a few questions, and handed them back to me.

Then she said, "Congratulations, Judas. You've been served!"

I immediately came up with a witty rejoinder! "Huh? What?"

"You were wondering when you were going to be able to serve Judas. Well, I saved you the trouble. I just did it for you."

Now, I suspected she might be a little senile. So I explained the best I could without telling her I thought she was crazy.

"There must be some misunderstanding. You can't serve Judas Armstrong by serving me. He has to be personally served. Giving the documents to an attorney doesn't count. Especially since I don't represent Judas. I represent Hilda."

"There's no misunderstanding," she replied calmly. "I just served Judas Armstrong. You ARE Judas Armstrong."

Hilda was watching this drama, not saying anything, but sporting a Mona Lisa style smile.



"No, I'm not Judas," I explained. "I'm a science fiction writer, and I've written a number of stories featuring Judas. But you can't confuse a writer with his character."

"You're not a science fiction writer," she replied, smiling. "You just write about your own experiences."

This was at least the fourth different explanation I'd heard so far today as to why I'm not a science fiction writer. I wasn't going to argue that particular point, since whether I'm a writer or not depends on the viewpoint of the reader. But I wasn't about to agree with the concept that I was actually one of my own characters.

"I can't be Judas Armstrong," I explained. "I don't even look like him. I depict him as 5'10" and very skinny, weighing between 110 and 130 pounds. As you can see by looking at me, I'm 6'4" and weigh 181."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Remember that Drake Atom Cobalt is a totally fictional character, not to be confused with Douglas A. Crowder, though they have the same initials. This proves that there's no similarity between the two -- Drake is an inch taller and about 10 pounds heavier than the latter.

DRAKE: Agatha's response was simply to join with Hilda in giving me an annoying slight smile. I continued my logical argument.

"Besides the fact that I don't look like Judas, I can't be him, because we've been seen at the same time and place together. According to Hilda, I was Judas' best man at the wedding. I don't have any recollection of that, but Hilda says she has the pictures to prove it. How could I be him if I was standing next to him?"

Agatha and Hilda continued to smile, letting me continue with my argument.

"Not only are we different sizes, we have completely different facial features. I'll admit that we are both strikingly handsome, but in different ways. Besides that, he's always depicted as appearing to be somewhere in his 30's. And he doesn't seem to age. Since his father is 9 million years old (or according to his detractors, not a day over 900,000), he's probably going to have an unusual lifespan. But as you can see by looking at me, I've aged. Granted that I'm in exceedingly good shape for my advanced years, but I age at close to the same rate that most Earthlings do."

Hilda came up with another unexpected statement. "Would you like some coffee, Judas?"

"Of course," I responded. Then I realized she had thrown me a trick question. "Yes and no," I corrected. "Yes, I'd like some coffee. No, I'm not Judas."

Hilda handed me a cup on a saucer. She and Agatha and Hilda continued being quiet, letting me continue my brilliant analysis.

“Oh, I get it,” I said. “You have the idea that I’m an older version of the comic book hero. As he aged, he got tired of fighting bad guys and saving planets and that type of thing, so he gave up being a Superb-Hero™ and took up a law practice. And in doing so, somehow gained about 6 inches in height and 50 pounds in weight. And acquired a new face.”

They didn’t respond, not verbally anyway.

“Is that it? You’re thinking that I was Judas Armstrong in my younger years, and then somehow forgot all about that, but remembered some of my experiences and wrote them down as science fiction stories?”

I sipped on my coffee. Now it was my turn to be quiet while I waited for one of them to respond. They didn’t. I continued.

“That would explain why Hilda has been throwing herself at me. Which still makes no sense to me, since I’m three times her age and not her type. You think I’m an older version of your husband.”

“No, not an older version,” said Hilda. “A younger version.”

“What? Now that’s even more impossible. So somehow the aging lawyer loses 30 plus years, 6 inches and 50 pounds, finds a magic sword, learns martial arts, and starts saving civilizations?”

“That’s right,” said Hilda. “Now I have a chance with a younger version of my husband. Before he decides that he needs a number of other women.”

She reached her hand out and took my hand. I let her hold mine for a couple of seconds and then withdrew.

“I’ve had enough of this nonsense!” I said. “The real Judas Armstrong is going to show up any minute, and slice my head off.”

I stood up, and said, “Well ladies, thanks for the coffee and the conversation. I think I’ll be leaving now.”

I walked out the door, and looked around at the shiny pyramid shaped buildings silhouetted against a bright green sky. And I remembered that I wasn’t in California any more. I was on a different planet, no telling how far away from the nearest city. If they had cities here. So, wandering off on my own wasn’t such a good idea. I went back into the living room and sat down again.

“OK, I’m not going to just walk out on you,” I said. “But I do need to be getting back to my own planet – my own time period – my own office – home, you might say.”

“Maybe you are home,” said Agatha.

I didn’t have any witty responses.

Then she said something else I wasn’t expecting. “Do you have your credit card with you?”

*EDITOR’S END NOTE: What? What does a credit card have to do with anything? Has Agatha decided that she wants to charge Drake for the coffee and donuts? Does she want to verify that he still has a decent credit rating? Join us in 25 days or so, for the final (you heard me correctly – final, last, ultimate) episode in this story.*

## **DIVORCES IN PARADISE**

### **EPISODE 29 – THE GRAND FINALE**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Here we are at the 29<sup>th</sup> and final episode of this serialized novel, featuring Drake Cobalt, a fictional attorney from the mythical land known as Los Ankalees. For a copy of the first 28 episodes, click here. [Here](#). Drake will give enough background to follow this story. Since this is the last episode, he's going to give you a more detailed synopsis of the prior events than usual.*

DRAKE: I've been telling you about a routine day in the life of a lawyer who thought he was a science fiction writer.

Actually, I'm only going to tell you about 9 hours of the day. The story began at 10:17 this morning, and it will be over before 7:00 p.m. – or at least what would be 7:00 p.m. if I were back in L.A.

Shortly after arriving at my office this morning, I met with a younger attorney (most attorneys are younger than me, but this one was at least 30 years younger) named Urma Understanding, who asked me to accompany her to meet a potential client in the Valley. I could hardly refuse, since she was one of my fictional characters now existing in the real universe.

We rode in her late model bright green Pontiac Firebird (she told me that General Motors had recently resumed the Pontiac brand). I assumed she had meant the San Fernando Valley region of the L.A. area, but as we drove over the Cahuenga Pass, we went through some sort of time-reality distortion (which I think I'll call "The Cahuenga Effect") and we were no longer in California, but in the new Nation of West Atlantis.

I'm going to leave out my terrifying encounter with the pterodactyl and the meeting with the little green man. We arrived at a modern skyscraper which was the headquarters for B.O.S.O., (The Bizarre Occurrences and Sightings Office). There we met with at least three more of my fictional characters who had come to life – one of whom was our potential client, Hilda Armstrong, who wanted to get a divorce from my favorite imaginary character, Judas Armstrong -- and then sue Gigabucks™ studios for using her husband's likeness and storylines as a model for several of their movies. Urma suggested that I handle the divorce, after which she would file the suit against Gigabucks.

Hilda insisted that she wanted to get the divorce petition filed by 4:00 p.m. that day, before the Van Nuys Courthouse closed. (Yes, we were in a different nation now, but they still called it the Van Nuys Courthouse.)

My logic told me I should have nothing to do with this case. But my logic was overruled by my instinctive desire to meet a stiff filing deadline. I then met privately with Hilda (with occasional interruptions from the little green skinned man). Urma just seemed to disappear from the story completely, not to be mentioned again until just now.

*(EDITOR'S NOTE: Urma will have a major role in the sequel to this story, MIDNIGHT OF JUSTICE – THE LAST TRIAL. Drake may or may not make an appearance.)*

DRAKE: I got Hilda's divorce documents filed in the court with minutes to spare. Then I explained to her how she needed to get a friend or a professional process server to deliver the papers to her husband. She insisted that I do the serving.

I refused. But I didn't tell her the reason why – that I was more terrified of meeting Judas Armstrong than I was any of my other imaginary (or formerly imaginary) characters. He was my favorite and most used protagonist. But all of the fictional characters I had met today were a lot more fun to write about than they were to meet in person. I had a strange foreboding about encountering Judas, and definitely wanted to avoid doing so.

My objections were overruled by Hilda, who used her magic croquet mallet to take us through another Cahuenga Effect, landing us on a distant world known only as "The Planet," where she said Judas would show up so I could serve him. We met with yet another of my creations – Aunt Agatha – a trusted friend of Judas – and apparently Hilda as well.

Two episodes ago, Agatha looked at the papers I was going to serve on Judas, then handed them back to me, saying "Congratulations, Judas. You've been served!"

I spent most of the immediate past episode explaining to Agatha and Hilda how I shouldn't be confused with one of my characters, and I couldn't possibly be Judas, since we had no physical resemblance and had even been seen together at the same time. They didn't seem convinced. At the end of the last episode, Agatha threw me another apparent non-sequitur.

"Do you have your credit card with you?" she asked.

"I have several credit cards on me," I responded. I opened my wallet and pulled out few cards of different colors to show her.

"Not those," she said. "The one in your front pocket."

Have you ever had the feeling where you suddenly get cold all over? Like when you think you're encountering a ghost or a flying saucer? You haven't? So, I'm the only one who gets this frigid feeling of apprehension like you're about to find out something you don't want to? Well, whether you can identify or not, that's how I felt.

I never kept a credit card in my front shirt pocket. I wondered why Agatha would ask. I had conflicting feelings of dread and curiosity. The latter won out, as I reached into my front pocket – and immediately pulled back with a sudden jerk, as my finger touched something unexpectedly cold. I slowly reached back into my pocket, and felt something

hard and cool, about the size and shape of a credit card. I pulled it out of my pocket and looked at it. It was hard to describe. If I had to pick a color for it, I'd call it black. But it was more than black. Like it didn't reflect any light at all. Sort of like you couldn't see it, but you knew it was there because it was in contrast with the rest of the surroundings which you could see. I looked more closely at it, and felt a bit disoriented. I thought I could see distant galaxies floating in the blackness beyond it.

I knew from my stories what was going to happen next. The card started unfolding itself until it was the shape of a sword, about 3 feet long and 2 inches wide – but thinner than a sheet of paper. I was holding it by a handle that had formed by the bottom 8 inches or so of the sword rolling into a cylinder shape that fit my hand perfectly.

I felt energy flowing through my body, and knew that my physical characteristics were changing. I was a few inches shorter, quite a bit skinnier, and had a pencil thin mustache. I felt an urge to find a flower to put in my lapel, but figured I could do that later.

I also felt quite a bit older – and younger at the same time. Older in that I suddenly had years' worth of memories that I didn't have moments ago – not just years, but centuries! And I had experience and knowledge that was previously lacking, including a great number of fighting skills, languages, and ways to steal spaceships.

I also felt younger. As energetic and limber as I had been in my 20s. Or more so! Like how I imagined a professional athlete would feel right before a game. And my mental outlook was more like that of a teenager than of a mostly sedentary lawyer in the October of his years.

Hilda and Agatha were both smiling, apparently enjoying this sudden transformation, and the new identity I was assuming.

What should I do now?

On the one hand, I was apparently married to a very good looking women, who obviously wanted me back despite my lack of fidelity. I could stay with her in a very nice, comfortable home. I was on The Planet, which was always one of my favorite places to spend some time. And here was Aunt Agatha, someone who would always give me a free meal and a place to spend the night when I was down on my luck or had forgotten who I was. I could just stay there and enjoy life for awhile.

On the other hand, I had responsibilities awaiting me back in Los Ankalees – a number of clients who had paid me to handle their legal situations. If I was going to give up lawyering to be a planet-hopping adventurer, I needed to get those cases completed or turned over other lawyers.

I was only briefly torn between these two courses of action, when the sword dictated a third to me. It suddenly lit up with a bright orange flash, and the handle, normally cool to

the touch, had a sudden surge of heat. This was the sword's way of telling me that there was a dangerous situation somewhere that required my attention.

I tried to come up with something witty or touching to say, such as thanking Agatha for the tea and crumpets and the new identity; such as thanking Hilda for believing in me and explaining that I wasn't unfaithful – that the other woman I was involved with was from centuries before Hilda was born; that I would return as soon as I handled whatever crisis needed my attention.

But I wasn't in the mood for long good-byes, and Hilda and Agatha had no doubt seen Judas's abrupt departures many times before. So I simply said, "Somebody needs saving. See you later." Then I stood up, sliced a hole in space, and stepped through.

The End.

*EDITOR'S END NOTE: Well, that's all folks. Thus ends Book Three of the Twilight of Justice Series. There will be at least two sets of sequels to this story. Hilda's adventures will continue in Book Four of the Twilight of Justice Series – Midnight of Justice – The Last Trial. The adventures of Judas Armstrong and/or Drake Cobalt will continue in a sequel which is, as of yet, unnamed. This newsletter will continue to have fictional pieces, but the next one will be a stand-alone story.*