

The Box of Illumination

By

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The study of Mycroft Manor, stinking of must and mold, is thick with cobwebbed-laced dust that floats in the warm and arid air. It's cluttered and nearly impassable, not with trinkets and garbage but old books. Not just a few, but tables upon tables of them, strewn about and stacked ten or more high. The wood floors, once pristine and straight, now sag from the weight of the leaning towers of pulp and stock.

DING! DING! DING! sounds a series of tiny bells strung in the corner. Jolted awake, Dr. Cornelius Stupe sits up from behind a table. A leaf of parchment, covered with scientific runes, is stuck fast to his face which cover, ever so slightly, his gold-rimmed glasses which sit askew. His hair is a salt and pepper mix mussed at all the wrong angles. Confused, he looks around. *Did I hear those infernal bells?* he wonders. He scratches his face, finally noticing the parchment stuck to it. Grunting, he peels the page from his cheek and looks at it as though it were a vexing puzzle which had insulted his mother. He slams it to the table with virulent obstinacy. The books, once carefully stacked, collapse, creating an avalanche of words as they collide into more books. Stupe watches with an odd fascination. *I'll need to pick those up later, I suppose.*

DING! DING! DING! the bell sounds again. Stupe, with his sweat-stained natural linen shirt poorly tucked into the waist of his brown tweed slacks held up by lopsided and loose suspenders, finally stands with the expediency of a sloth. Once again the bells sound and aggravation creeps upon his face. "I'm com-ING!" he shouts to whomever may be outside his door. *I may have to rethink those damnable bells,* he ponders, leaving the confines of the table.

Not fully cognizant of his limbs, or their relative proximity to anything around him, he stumbles into another stack of books. They teeter and sway, nearly collapsing until Stupe, with the reflexes of an African cat, steadies the pile with both hands, placing them on top. Once certain he's safe from being buried alive, he eases his hands away and removes himself from the area at a snail's pace to avoid any other potential catastrophes. Maneuvering around the remaining clutter, he reaches the front door as the bells sound again, startling him. He opens the front door without delay, fully expecting to confront the trespasser. Instead, he's greeted by a vacant porch. He observes the area within sight for naught as it's a veritable wasteland of nothingness. "Now listen here! I'm a very busy man! Very busy!" He takes one more glance around the vicinity of the porch. "Bratty, mischievous children," he mumbles.

As he's closing the door, the bells sound once again. Startled, he slams the door shut. Minutes pass until the solid wood door creaks open on ancient hinges. His right eye pressed against door and jamb, he peers out of the crack. Then he notices it, sitting on the space where a welcome mat should be but never was: a box. It's nothing special. In fact, it completely lacks uniqueness. The cube is only approximately two square inches, the color and grain of raw pine, with no markings or seams. Stupe turns his head like a dog examining something foreign. Then, like a hawk snatching up a rodent, he seizes the box and returns to his sanctuary, slamming the door behind him with such force the bells in the foyer sound.

He holds the box under his arm as he makes his way back to the study, stopping as something catches his eye in the room adjacent. The formal living room is full of Victorian furniture which has been pushed to the walls to make room for all of the chalkboards. They are lined up like some scientist's twisted firing squad of grey matter. Each board is covered with

papers affixed to the surfaces overlaying cryptic mathematical writings in chalk, some erased and written over multiple times. Upon entering, Stupe places the box in a small bin close to the door.

He stares into a dark corner at a chalkboard lurking in the shadows like some ghoul. It's plastered with multiple sheets of parchment full of scientific symbols, mathematical equations, and plenty of lines, scribbles, and expletives along the margins. Lowering his spectacles, he scrutinizes each sheet. His twig-like index finger tracks each section line by line with immense speed and fluidity like a maestro leading a grand orchestra. His eyes squint as his gnarled finger levels on one sheet and starts poking it with ferocity. "No, no, NO!" he shouts. "All wrong!" he says, snatching it off the board and crumpling it into a ball and tosses it behind him into the void of other lost papers. Fed up with his own shortcomings, he shambles out of the room taking the box with him.

The box, resting in the center of the table, has developed a fine layer of dust over its surface. Stupe paces, staring at this most vexing and perplexing object; his hair longer, scraggly, and face bushier. *Why would anyone leave me a stupid wooden cube?* he thinks while running his nicotine-stained fingers through the unwashed mop on the top of his head. "It's been two weeks. I've conducted every test I can on this infernal thing!" he shouts, picking up a book and throwing it into a stack of more books which domino into another stack and into another and another until terminating at the entryway of the study. "Dammit all! He shouts, frustrated with both fists clutched. "I don't understand. I can't-" He moves closer to the cube, his bespectacled eyes just visible over the event horizon of the top of the box. "Could it be?" he wonders out loud.

He places his hands over the box and mutters imperceptible words under his breath. A thunderclap shakes the home, sending books to the floor. The façade of the box shivers as if

phasing in and out of reality. It changes, before his eyes, into a magnificent box of metal overlaying a clear material. The box hums slightly and pulsates a soft blue in a slow rhythm. Stupe stands erect and moves away from the box.

Laughter escapes Stupe's mouth. He collapses to the floor, sobbing. After a few moments he's able to collect his thoughts and stands, wiping the snot from his face. "Okay. Time to get out of this infernal place," he says, placing a hand on the top of the box. His body shimmers and within moments he's pulled into the box.

A cold and sterile room with a hospital bed. Stupe abruptly sits up. He's shaven, hair trimmed, clean, and wearing a hospital gown. He blinks heavily, wiping away the cobwebs. He swings his legs off the bed and plants his bare feet onto the cold floor. On spaghetti legs, he stands. "Did it work?" he asks, voice raspy.

A squawk, as if from an intercom, sounds, "Total success. Full immersion in the dimensional construct."

"How long was I gone?"

"Ten minutes."

"I was in that dimension for a decade! Amazing." Stupe sits on the edge of the bed and laughs wholeheartedly, pleased with his achievement. He alone has crossed the threshold of the real and imagined. For years, he theorized the energy put forth to create different worlds – in text and art – literally created new dimensions outside of our own.