

A Taste For Music

by Harris Tobias

Harris Tobias
harristob@gmail.com

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"Before you can save your world, you have to save mine," the voice said. A few seconds before I had been noodling around with mom's old cell phone and the inside of my new Play Station. Like everyone else on Earth, I had never even heard of the Lumi and then there I was conversing with them as if it was the most normal thing in the world.

I'm a kind of a gadget freak, always fooling around with electronics just for the heck of it. When I plugged the cell phone into my game machine, the screen got all fuzzy and weird. Suddenly there they were, talking to me like we were old friends. The image was indistinct. The Lumi appearing as fuzzy blobs on the edges of the screen. If you weren't looking for them, you wouldn't notice them at all. Even being aware of them as I was, I could hardly make them out. Speaking to them was easy though and the sound quality was pretty good..

"This is not what we look like, you realize," said the Lumi. "You appear the same way to us— a rather dim, foggy blob on the edge of the screen. It must be an effect of the trans-dimensional shift. In our respective realities we might look very much alike." I had no opinion on the matter. To me the Lumi looked like smudgy blobs and that was that.

"You want me to save your world?" I asked almost laughing out loud at the preposterousness of the suggestion. "Why me? I'm just an ordinary kid from an ordinary family in an ordinary town. I go to Mt. Clemmon's Middle School. I'm in the seventh grade for Pete's sake. Saving worlds is not something I have a lot of experience with.

I play trombone in the school orchestra and not too well at that. I have English homework."

"Why you is a fair question," the Lumi said. "Naturally you wouldn't be our first choice but, then again, we don't have any other choices. You are, in fact, all we have. Communication across the dimensional divide is quite rare and yours is the only receiver we could find. I don't know how long this connection will last so please listen carefully, the fate of both our worlds depends on it."

"What makes you think your world even needs saving?" I asked.

"Oh, that's easy. The Eaters are here now. They've already eaten the moon and they have begun devouring our world. Our continents are shrinking. When they're through with us they'll eat right through the dimensional barrier and start on your world next."

"Isn't there anything they can't eat? Something to poison them or contain them?"

"Nothing we have here can stop them," the Lumi said, "We were hoping there might be something in your world we might try."

"Even if we had something, how would I get it to you?"

"We are working on that, in the meantime, will you help us?"

I said I would do what I could but I really did have homework and my mother was calling me to walk the dog so I said goodbye rather abruptly and went down stairs.

When I got back on line, The Lumi were there waiting for me. Boy were they angry. "I hope this isn't the way you're going to treat us. This is not some prank you know? Just leaving us like that was rude. You don't seem to appreciate how desperate our situation is."

"I don't know what you expect me to do. I can't just stop my life because your world is in trouble. I have a hard time believing you are even real. What are the Eaters anyway?"

"Let me see if I can explain it to you. Many years ago we developed nano-technology to a high degree. We built microscopic machines to do our bidding. They made our world a paradise. We could have anything we wanted, all we needed to do was desire it and the nano-bots would make it for us. Want a new house, the

nanos would scoop up the raw materials and construct it for you. Want a fancy meal, a new car, no problem, the nanos will do it. Overnight there was no more hunger, no more poverty, everyone lived well, drove fleets of cars, had boats. There was no end to our wanting and the nanos provided."

"Sounds great," I said. "I wish we had some of that here."

"No you don't," the Lumi said. "After a few generations, our greed used up our resources; our world was stripped clean of every usable thing, Every tree, every mineral, every animal and plant. Our beautiful world was turned into a desert. At the same time, the nanobots began evolving. They began using the things they had built for their own purposes. When we realized what they were doing, we rounded them up, packed them into a spaceship and sent them to the moon. I think you can guess what happened next."

"They ate the moon and found a way to get back to Earth..er your world. What do you call your world anyway?"

"We call it Lumi and once it was the most beautiful place. Now it's wasteland filled with useless things. If we don't stop the nanos we'll lose what little we have left."

"What are they doing with the stuff they are eating?" I asked almost afraid to hear the answer.

"They are making more nanos and building a huge machine powerful enough to cross the dimensional barrier. When it is finished they will be coming for your world next."

"I don't know what you expect me to do. I'm just a kid," I said.

"There must be a reason we made contact. Maybe you have the answer and you don't even know it. Tell me something about your world. Maybe you have a weapon we can use."

"Even if we had something, how would I get it to you? This is useless."

"Please," the Lumi said, "you are all we have. You said you went to school. We have schools in our world. You said you were in the orchestra. I don't know what that is. And you play a trombone? What is that?"

"You mean you don't have music in your world?"

"We do not know the word "music".

"Well. Stay right there and I'll show you." I ran and got my trombone from the closet and put it together. As soon as it was assembled, I played a simple tune.

The Lumi clapped for joy. "That's wonderful," they said. "That noise you made, that is music?"

"Well I'm not very good but if you wait a second I'll play some real music for you. Here's what an orchestra sounds like." I turned on my CD player and blasted a few minutes of whatever I had in there. I think it was the Beatles. When I stopped the recording, the Lumi were very excited.

"That was amazing. I think we can use that. The nano-bots won't know what to make of such complex sounds. It might scramble their tiny brains and change their destructive behavior. We would like to copy some of your music, maybe amplify it and see what effect it has on the nanos. This is very exciting. Music, ha! We knew there was a reason we found each other."

I spent the next several hours playing CD after CD. The Lumi were transfixed. I went through my music collection playing everything from Mozart to Metallica. I felt good that I could be of service. The Lumi sounded positively up beat about the prospect of cleansing their world of the eaters.

I didn't hear from the Lumi again although I tried to contact them many times in the weeks and months that followed. My Play Station communicator remained blank and silent. I hoped the Lumi triumphed but if they did you think a thank you would have been in order. As the days wore on and the school year drew to a close, I thought less and less about the Lumi and their problems. When I did think of them I tended to think the entire episode was a hoax. Some internet prankster who some how managed to hack into my game box.

The last week of school was the big concert. Our orchestra had been rehearsing for it all year. It was a sellout crowd. I took my place on the horn section and took out my trombone and warmed up a bit with the rest of the kids. When we were all ready, Mr. Thiery,

the music director, tapped his baton on the stand, we raised our instruments and waited for his signal to begin. But it never came. First the baton dissolved in his hand. Then the instruments began disappearing one by one. I watched as my trombone vanished before my eyes dissolving away from bell to mouthpiece. At first there was a stunned silence in the hall then Marion Allen, our first violinist, screamed as her instrument and bow disappeared completely. That scream set off a scramble for the exits in which several parents were injured. No one could figure out what was happening, but I knew. It was the eaters. They had crossed the dimensional divide. They were on the Earth and they had developed a taste for music.

