

Floppy Squared

I loved this scene! So why did I cut it? I decided, reluctantly, that it slowed down the ending of the story too much. Peter and Tara have just returned from the past, the book is nearing its close; they just want to get home... So, what are they doing, sitting in a teashop in Cambridge, going punting and being tourists? Well, why not?

We soon arrived at the teashop and sat at a table outside, overlooking a large church with a high tower. Sleepy lay contentedly at Professor P's feet and he stroked her gently.

"This is so exciting!" he said. "Time travel really is possible! It proves the Many World Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics – alternative worlds do exist. It's incredible."

"Professor P, can you explain exactly what's happened," Mary asked, "in simple terms."

"I would if it were simple," he replied.

"What's the complicated explanation then?" I asked, smiling.

He paused thoughtfully. "The real universe is much bigger than you might think!"

"Well, I thought it was pretty big," I said and Professor P smiled.

"It's much more than just big like this," he continued, holding his hands wide apart. "There are no words to describe it. What we see around us, the earth, space, stars and galaxies, they're just a tiny, tiny part of the real

FLOPPY SQUARED

universe.”

“So what else is there?” I asked.

Professor P looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes and said, “The universe contains every possibility of everything that could ever happen.”

He paused dramatically. I looked at him puzzled.

“Hmm,” he said shaking his head. “Let’s see if I can make it simple.”

Professor P took a coin out of his pocket.

“Heads or tails?” he asked, flipping the coin.

I looked at Tara. She shrugged. What did this have to do with alternative worlds? I wondered. “Heads,” I answered.

“Correct,” he said as he revealed the coin.

Professor P saw the puzzled look on our faces. He laughed and then continued, “When I tossed the coin, there were two possible outcomes, or, if you like, two alternative worlds, a head world and a tail world. When the coin was in the air the two worlds were like shadows, possibilities of what could be. When it landed you saw just one of those worlds, the head world. But the other world, the tail world still exists, you just can’t see it.”

“Why not?”

“It’s a bit like when you tune your radio into a particular station. The air is filled with radio waves but your set picks out just the station that you want. That’s the way your mind works, it focuses on just one world and ignores the rest. That’s what the Many World Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics says. I know it seems strange. I have difficulty understanding it myself. If it’s really true the consequences are amazing.”

“Like time travel?” Tara asked.

“Exactly,” Professor P nodded. “If we can re-tune our minds to a different reality then time travel is possible. The time machine sent you into a different reality, which you believed to be ‘the past’. Then it returned you here, to

PROFESSOR P DELETED SCENES

another alternative world, ‘the present’, very similar, but slightly different from the one you left.”

“So, why are you living here in Cambridge in this world and not with us by the sea, Professor P?” Tara asked.

“That’s something I’ve been wondering about too,” he replied. “Something must have happened in your world to cause me to leave the University and move away. But I can’t imagine what. I’m very happy here, I certainly don’t intend to move, at least not until I retire.”

“Do you think you can get us home, Professor P, to our own world?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” he replied thoughtfully. “It certainly won’t be easy. Finding the right world is a bit like trying to find a needle in a haystack, actually, an infinite haystack.”

“That’s what Floppy said!” I laughed.

“Floppy?” Professor P asked in surprise.

“He’s a supercomputer,” I replied. “He was another one of your inventions. Look, I brought him to show you.”

I took the small silver sphere out of my pocket and put it on the table.

“He got so excited on the way here,” Tara explained, “that he switched himself off.”

“Floppy!” I said and tapped the sphere lightly. “Wake up!”

There was a popping sound and Floppy appeared as a grey fluffy owl. He flew around in delight when he saw Professor P.

“Professor P,” he cried, his eyes lighting up. “How, how wonderful to see you again! It’s been so long. How are you? We’ve been on the most amazing adventure! And I’ve been working on the Theory of Everything for you. So much has happened. I can’t wait to tell you everything.”

“Hello, Floppy,” Professor P said smiling. “I am delighted to meet you. I would love to hear your story. But first, I’d like to show you something.”

FLOPPY SQUARED

He reached into his pocket and pulled out another identical sphere. He placed it on the table next to Floppy's and said, "Floppy, I'd like you to meet..."

With a pop another slightly larger owl appeared.

"Floppy," he said with a grin.

The two owls looked at each other, first in astonishment, and then suspiciously, obviously not sure how to respond.

"Oh, er, hello," our Floppy finally said. "I'm Superbrain 4.0, but you can call me Floppy."

"But I'm Superbrain 4.0!" the other owl said in annoyance. "And my name's Floppy too! So you'll have to call yourself something else."

"I will not!" Floppy said indignantly, puffing himself up to the size of the other owl. "You'll have to change your name!"

"Won't" the other owl said stubbornly.

"Now, Floppy," Professor P said sternly.

"Yes," both owls answered together.

"There's no need to argue," he continued. "I will call the one who has been back in time Floppy I and the other Floppy II."

"But I want to be Floppy I," said Floppy II in a rather sulky voice. Professor P looked at him intently and he went quiet.

Our Floppy looked rather pleased with himself. He turned to Professor P and said in a quite voice, "Professor P, would you like to hear my Theory of Everything now?"

"Yes," he replied, smiling. "I would like that very much."

"Well..." Floppy said, clearing his throat dramatically.

"But I've worked out the Theory of Everything too," Floppy II interrupted loudly, "and a lot of other very important things too."

"Let's hear Floppy I first, shall we?" Professor P said

PROFESSOR P DELETED SCENES

kindly. "I'm most interested in what you have to say."

Floppy I flapped his wings, coughed once and said. "I think therefore."

Professor P leant thoughtfully back in his chair and said nothing.

"I'm not absolutely sure," Floppy added timidly, obviously unnerved by Professor P's silence.

I looked at Tara and I could see she was thinking the same as me. Floppy looked so worried, we both desperately hoped that Professor P would not laugh at the poor little owl.

Finally Professor P spoke, "So this is your solution to the basic problem in quantum mechanics, i.e. that a continuous wave function collapses on observation to give a discrete result."

Floppy looked completely lost and scratched his head. The other owl looked on smugly, enjoying his discomfort.

"It is," Floppy said finally, trying to sound confident.

"That is an interesting solution," Professor P said, his eyes twinkling. "You are proposing that the observable universe arises as a result of our thoughts. Thought creates reality. *I think therefore.*"

Floppy puffed himself up and said proudly, "Yes, that's right, Professor P."

"Well done," Professor P declared. "That is an excellent answer."

Floppy was delighted by the praise. He beamed from ear to ear. I looked at Tara in astonishment. Had Floppy really come up with a sensible answer?

Floppy II was not at all pleased. He snorted loudly and flew into the air.

"Well, I have a much better solution," he cried haughtily. "The answer is," he paused dramatically, "*I therefore.* My solution is far simpler and more elegant!"

"Your answer is also good, Floppy II," Professor P

FLOPPY SQUARED

replied thoughtfully. “It shows that consciousness rather than thought is the basis of our perception of reality. Both answers are excellent.”

As we continued to talk, a crowd of people gathered around our table. They looked at the owls in amazement and took photos.

We laughed when a little boy ran up to us, pointing to the owls and said, “Look mum, they’ve got owl post!”



PROFESSOR P DELETED SCENES

“Talking owls!” a man exclaimed in amazement.

The waitress knocked into a table and almost dropped the tray that she was carrying as she stared at the owls.

“Floppy II,” Professor P continued, ignoring the onlookers, “and you too, Floppy I. There is another task I would like you both to work on.”

“Of course, Professor P, what is it?” Floppy I said.

“I can do it quicker and better than Floppy I,” Floppy II added.

“Your task is this,” Professor P looked at them seriously. “I would like you to make friends with each other.”

Both Floppys looked surprised, then horrified at the idea. Floppy II disappeared in a puff of smoke. Floppy I blinked twice and vanished too.

A girl in the crowd pointed at us in astonishment. “Did you see that?” she said, turning to her friend. “The owls, they just vanished!”

A little boy ran up to Professor P. “Are you Professor Dimbledore?” he asked excitedly.

“Sorry,” Professor P replied looking puzzled. “I’ve never heard of him I’m afraid.”

The little boy ran back to his mother and said disappointedly, “No, he’s not!”

Gradually the crowds disappeared and we were left in peace.

“Now, what were we talking about?” Professor P mused, turning towards us. “Yes, of course, Peter, Tara, you want to get back to your own world.”

“Yes,” we replied eagerly.

“Well to have any chance of that we must recover the time machine from the cliffs,” he said thoughtfully. “I’ll need to find out how it works and make the necessary repairs.”

“Can you come back with us now?” I asked.

FLOPPY SQUARED

“Yes, we can give you a lift if you like,” Mary added.

“No, thank you, Mary,” Professor P replied. “I need to get all my tools and equipment ready. I’d rather come tomorrow if that’s all right with you.”

The waitress eventually arrived with our meals, giving us a rather curiously look. During lunch Tara and I told Professor P and Mary about our adventure back in time. They listened in amazement as we described the island and all the prehistoric creatures we had seen.

When we had finished lunch Professor P asked us if we would like to spend the afternoon sightseeing. “It won’t be as exciting as fighting off dinosaurs,” he said with a smile, “but it would be fun to go punting along the backs of the colleges.”

“Good idea,” Mary said enthusiastically, “I’ve always wanted to go punting.”

“Punting?” I asked. “What’s that?”

“You’ll see,” Professor P replied with a smile.

We left the teashop and walked to the river past Kings College. When we arrived at the boatyard Professor P pointed to the punts. They were long flat-bottomed boats with seats in the middle and at the front. People stood at the back, pushing themselves forward using long poles.

Professor P climbed on board the punt first and steadied it as we all took our seats. Mary sat at the front; I sat with Sparky and Sleepy in the middle and Tara in the back. Professor P stood at the back confidently holding the punting pole and pushed off.

The river was crowded with people trying unsuccessfully to punt. Professor P effortlessly steered us through all the boats and we went under a wooden bridge.

“Well, it’s nice to be punted by an expert,” Mary said as we set off.

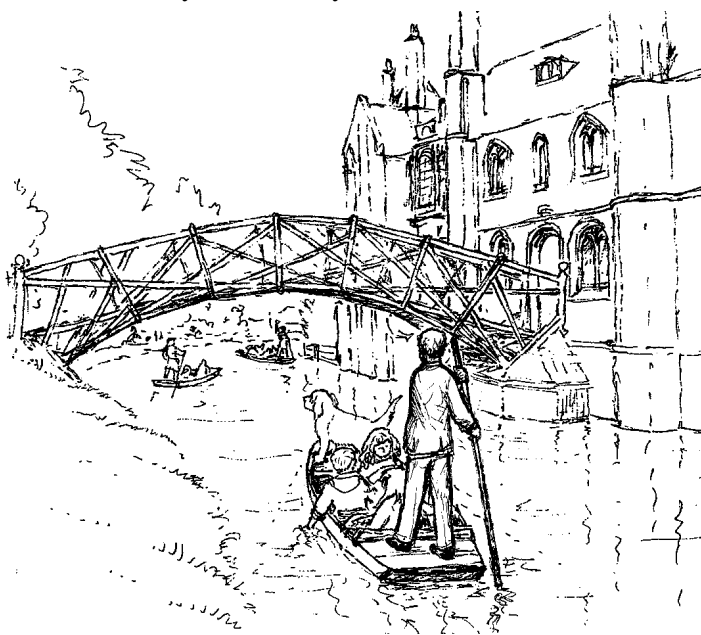
“My pleasure,” he said proudly.

As we approached a small wooden bridge Professor P

PROFESSOR P DELETED SCENES

pointed to it and said, “This is the famous Mathematical Bridge. It’s part of Queens College. It’s said that Newton built it without using any bolts. Then when some mischievous students took it apart they couldn’t get it back together again so they had to use bolts!”

“Is that really true?” Mary asked.



“No,” he chuckled, “it’s just a story for the tourists. It was built 22 years after Newton had died and it was originally bolted together.”

As we glided peacefully along the river Professor P told us about the colleges we were passing and their history.

“This one’s called Trinity College,” he said. We looked over to a large old building on our right with a wide lawn surrounded by trees to our left. “Newton’s old college. They say the apple tree outside the college gate is descended from the tree which dropped an apple on his

FLOPPY SQUARED

head, and led him discovering the theory of gravity.”

“Really?” Mary said.

“I doubt it!” Professor P chuckled.

On the way back we all had a go at punting. I could hardly lift the pole, let alone punt with it! Tara nearly fell into the river when she tried and Mary went round in circles a few times before she finally gave up. As we approached the boatyard Professor P took over and expertly guided us into the docking area.

It was late afternoon now as we walked back to the car, chatting away happily.

“Thank you for a lovely afternoon, Professor P,” Mary said as we reached her car.

She kissed him on the cheek. He turned bright red.

“Good bye Professor P,” Tara and I said together.

“Goodbye Sleepy,” I added.

“See you tomorrow,” Professor P called out as we set off for home.