

## Correspondence

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Dear Reader,

At this point there is a dearth of published written records on our topic. Other matters seem to have pressed the story we have been following clean out of the media. However, there is such a large gap between *A Templar Explains* and the next published article that some form of information is needed. I thus present a series of letters written between Plug and Sam. Please note that I cannot vouch for the authenticity or chronology of these messages; however, I believe them to be accurate enough for the casual reader.

I do not know exactly how these letters were transported; some clues are found in the letters themselves, but you will see them as easily as I.

—The editor.

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Master,

Hi.

A lot has happened that I can not begin to tell you. The giant and I are in a jungle someplace outside the sphere, or at least that's what Templar Grey told me. I assume you got a copy of the article we wrote about templar Grey? If not, let me know and I'll try to summarize it for you. She banished us—well, sort of. But if I tell you the whole tale I won't have time for the news I need to share.

We are in a jungle, as I said, that seems to be inhabited only by animals. There's this sort of 2-banded pink armadillo creature that the giant thinks might be intelligent, and so we are following them as best we can. Every once in a while we'll be walking along when suddenly he'll shout "Turbo-pink armadillo!" and take off at a sprint, crashing through the trees in the direction he thought he saw them go.

I'm not sure how long we'll be here. There's no obvious way back to the sphere that I know of. The giant says he thinks he might be able to pull the sphere out, if only he can find the neck, but I don't really know what he means.

Say, do you have any orders for me? I've been going off of an off-the-cuff request for a long time now, and wondered if there was anything you actually wanted me to do.

Regards,

Plug the imp.

Dear Plug,

Hello.

Sorry it took me a while to reply to your message. We've been pretty busy with the lazer slugs lately. Corky and I have been spending every spare minute trying to figure out why the lazer seems to rip the smaller devices to bits, and haven't even stopped for meals very often.

Yolk went up to the city a few weeks ago to train some artisans in the art of pipod construction. We had a long fight about it earlier, but he pointed out that they needed smord anyway, so we didn't have to worry about loosing funding. Hope we made the right decision; otherwise we may have to join you in the jungle.

Do the turbo-pinks talk?

As far as instruction goes, you know as well as I that I can't give orders except in person. Its part of the code of the imps, canonized by Skee BoRumpu. It wouldn't do to have Kabeous write you a letter as if from me telling you to do such-and-so-forth for her.

Keep well and happy,

Sam

Most kindly overlord,

How are you doing?

I sit a corrected imp. How could I forget, even for a moment, my own canon? It is shameful for me to contemplate the shameful way I contemplated shaming it.

The giant and I were sprinting after a turbo-pink armadillo the other day (no, I don't think they talk—at least not to us) when I noticed the glint of pipods weaving through the trees. After some effort, I convinced the ol' bag-o-bones<sup>goo</sup> that we ought to track them down and next thing you know we are talking with this trio of annoying boys. We haven't been able to get rid of them since; they go everywhere with us, and when I think maybe they just piped off into oblivion one of them comes whooshing up

and gives us a “haloo!”, completely spoiling my peaceful reverie.

They claim that you sent them to Sock town, and expressed surprise that we didn’t see the article, even though by their own admission they sent it in only three days before we came to this place with them.

Did you really send Tim, Tom, and Gordon to Sock-town? If so, I can only think it was to get them out of your hair; more annoying boys I have never met.

In the name of all that’s funny, why are you letting other people build pipods at all? It’s not like you couldn’t keep up with the work, I shouldn’t think; they are cake to build, and I can’t imagine you didn’t learn how to do large-scale productions when you introduced lazer eggs. Is there some compelling reason why you need more pipods than you alone can make?

May your hair be replaced with something more lovely,  
Plug  
.....

My undeserving peon,

Fine, thanks. How are you?

Yes, I did send them to Sockville on a vital mission, which they executed to full effect. They may be vapid and fun-loving, but not more vapid nor more fun-loving than your most estimable self, I should think. Maybe that’s why you don’t like them—to similar to your impress.

Still, they have had a rather large hand in things; for example, if they had not published their little mimir scriblings we would not have had to outsource the pipods. You knew that the Boots and Socks have started gathering allies? Basically, the whole globe is getting involved. Our nation has sided with the Boots, of course, because Maliutka said that the Socks would win and Viz. K. B. D. doesn’t like Maliutka. Yolk doesn’t really care; he’s never been a politiker, and Corky thinks M. M. is cracking in her old age, so she tends to be with the Boots too. I haven’t made up my mind yet. After all, I like the motens....

K, so Corky and I have found that there are three pseudo-separable energies in lazer. Corky calls them pink energy, green energy, and mettle energy—pink because “I’ll bet it’s what makes those turbo-pink armadillos so fast;” green because “it makes you sick, and green is a good ill color;” and mettle because... um, yeah. The pink causes a variety of instabilities, so we are trying to get a way to

extract it before the braiding process; maybe we can get Yolk’s active-braider idea to work if we can.

As I was reading your last missive to Y&C, they asked a very good question. What on <sup>other place</sup> earth are you doing? There you are, in a jungle with a giant, three boys with pipods and lazer slugs, and a handful of turbo-pinks you can’t even catch. It doesn’t sound like exactly the busy lifestyle you’ve come to expect, and yet you don’t mention being bored....

Could you ask the giant the theoretic basis of space-resonate heart pumps? I think we may need that idea here in a few weeks.

As if there were *anything* more lovely than my hair....

Remember to wash behind your ears,

Miss Smoot

.....

She whom I delight to serve,

I’m fine.

What are we doing, you ask? We are building a city. Please don’t ask me why we are building a city; there is no one here to live in it, and it seems quite bizare (to me) to go into uninhabited wilderness and start clearing land, raising walls, paving streets, etc. But the giant seems convinced that we are soon to have a city worth of people, and he says we have to establish good patterns or else this place will be just as messy as the last place.

The motens came by a few days ago and we traded whistling pineapples for smord. Oh, so much smord! The motens are really strange; they just sort of fly around in their moten ships and collect smord; then, whenever they see people on the ground they fly down and ask if they have any pineapples. We have been cultivating them on the roofs of all the houses we build, so we had lots of them to give, and we now have more smord than we can possibly use.

The giant gave me the following; he said it will answer your question:

**Defn:**  $S$  is the set of all points in space.

**Defn:**  $x \in S$  is **margin of error reachable** from  $y \in S$  iff  $0 \in \|x - y\|_p$  for all metrics  $\| \cdot \|_p$ . Then we write  $\|x, y\|_0$ .

**Lemma:**  $\|x, y\|_0 \iff \|y, x\|_0$ .

**Prop:**  $\forall x \in S \exists y \in S$  such that the following are all true:  
•  $\|x, y\|_0$

- $U_x < U_y$
- $\Delta U_{x \rightarrow y} = 0$

I hope that helps; I also hope I copied it down correctly. Oh, the giant also wants me to send you this sketch. Says it will help you remember us. . . not that you can remember him, whom you have never met. . . .



Do you know anything about what smord is? I always knew it was strange, but we have a LOT of it now, and it is weirder than I thought. For instance, it has such high surface tension that its droplets are somewhere over two feet across. Also, I am fairly certain it has no viscosity at all. Gordon and the giant have been playing with it a lot lately; if they come up with anything useful, I'll let you know.

With never-failing obsequy,  
your imp

.....  
Little one,

When Yolk got back from the City and saw the gist of the work Corky and I have done with the pink force he started tinkering and fixing things and the next thing we knew he detonated the ceiling with a fractured energy ray. It was really strange looking; all sort of spiky and flat, but straight as an arrow. He decided to call it a "frap-ray", and is trying to find a way to generate it without destroying the frap-ray producing device.

I asked him why "frap" and he said it just looked like a frap ray. Whatever. We'll test and see what it does once he gets the thing fixed. Hopefully Corky and I can convince him to change the name.

Meanwhile, Corky has also been working with the pink energy. Sure enough, it does have some tie to speed. She put a pink-force filter into the neck of her pipod and found she could barely top a walking pace. We don't have any

good mettle or green filters, but we are working on them as best we can.

Your description of smord fits my observations, though as you mention we've never have very large balls before. We knew it was a liquid because we could break it into little balls and then merge the balls back together again. If you really have too much, try burning it; it burns with a bright white light, but doesn't feel hot, nor does it produce flame or smoke. Corky assures me it burns "on the inside," whatever that means, so you have to light it but you can't put it out once ignited.

We knew about the zero viscosity, also, and use smord for light-weight bearings, though it smashes into smaller balls too easily to be used in most applications.

Thank the giant for his most helpful instruction and tell Tim he's going to have to eat more; he's looking a bit thinner than I remember him. Also, it's not a request or order, but if you have time, might you try taking over the chef duties? I think I may want you to be a good cook by the time I come and give you another job.

A lady named Sam.

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Milady,

Well, Tim is eating less than ever because I am a horrible cook. Tom flashed a bird-thing the other day and gave it to me to cook; the first attempt was so bad, I decided to make it into meat-loaf to try and cover the taste, but I burnt all the loaves to cinders. Still, I plug gamely along!

You were right about smord as a lamp! Such a bright, clear light there never was at night before. The giant wears a ball of burning smord in a little wicker cage on his head and builds all night long.

You should see the giant build, too! He'll go to the quarry and hurl boulders at the cliff face till he had a huge pile of broken rocks; then he grinds some of it up into powder, mixes it with water, and trucks it off in a great hollow log. He stacks the broken rocks wherever he wants a wall, slopping them together with his rock dust paste, and then smears more paste on the outside to make the walls smooth. He can erect the shell of a house every few days; it takes the lads a lot longer to get the roofs put on, so the city is becoming a land of roofless homes.

The night after I sent my last missive, or possibly the night after that, a moten ship passed above us in the middle of the night and released a dump of this almost-invisible slippery stuff that I think will interest you

greatly. It acts mostly like a liquid, like quicksilver or something, but appears to be indestructible. You can't break it in two; you can't even force it any thinner than one of my fingers. This makes it really hard to hold; the moment any part of it crosses the rim of a cup, the whole thing just up and slithers out.

Anyway, we have lots of them. The lads call them hardsmords, because they are weird liquids from the motens and they seem to be harder than steel.

Speaking of the lads, they were out piping the other day and came across a huge ruined city. It's been deserted for ages, but it certainly used to house humanity. I'll keep you posted, but I thought you'd like to know.

Plug the Little Loaf Burner

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Plug,

And it's war. Total, full-out bloody conquest and destruction. Kabeous Kohg showed up the day before it broke out and told me that she's bored it because no one has any business for her anymore. I mentioned there was this little tension and wouldn't that provide her business, but she said she'd have nothing to do with it. Never could figure that lady out.

Kohg did mention that Malkh might know something about your ruins; I had no idea Malituka Malkh even knew about the other place. She's a mighty funny dragon, our little empress.

We succeeded in making a device that only emits mettle energy; we don't know what it does, exactly, but it makes smord vibrate. Experiments are ongoing.

I'm sending Corky to come get a few of those hardsmords. She should be there in a few days.

So, what exactly is being built? Cemented rubble walls built in a haphazard way don't sound like the "good patterns" the giant was so keen on establishing. Also, why does he think there will be people to inhabit the place?

Would you tell Tom that his brother died in the first battle of the Boot-Sock war? Why do people fight wars?

Sam

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Miss Samantha Smoot—

It was mighty fun having Corky stop by; how'd she find us so easily? She didn't stay more than a few minutes,

but she's a real spunk.

We found two more ruins, none of the three even slightly like the others. One of them had a whole slew of turbo-pinks in it; I am now quite certain they must talk somehow, but I still haven't heard them do it.

I guess it's the layout, where the streets go and how many parks there are and how far away the littler towns and villages are that the giant is so intent on planning. Most of the lots are empty; it's just a few key buildings he's making, as well as paving many of the streets.

—Plug

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Dear Plug,

Pardon the long break. First we figured out how to make clean lazer with only traces of pink and mettle in it, and taught the SIGS enterprise companies to make lazer slugs in abundance; then we got the frap-ray blaster working. Frap-rays appear to only effect ridged materials like stone and some metal; when we get blasted it merely tingles, but it can split whole chunks of stone off a cliff face with each blast. We made a half-dozen of these and gave three to each side; when they found we had given some to the other side, both sides got really mad and we had to run for it.

After we had settled in a new, more neutral environment I went to see Malkh. What a palatial cavern that dragon has! I visited her for longer than I strictly wanted to, because her... bulters... make it a little awkward to leave early. But what a story she told! I don't know if I believe it or not, but it certainly is worth investigating....

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Here is where the other documents pick up again. Sorry for cutting off most of the rest of Sam's letter, but it is just a rough summary of an article that appeared about a month later, so it is best to not duplicate information.

It is worth noting, which was not noted in the letters quoted, that lazer slugs and pipods became staples of the Boot-Sock war. Pipods never replaced more conventional transportation, for they are very vulnerable to various assaults, but they made large long-distance troop and supply movements possible. Similarly, lazer slugs never became major battle mainstays, since the "corpses" they produce have a bad habit of waking up again if the front doesn't move fast enough, but they did play a major role in a number of surprise assaults, being fast and silent.

—The editor