

Three Wishes For Tomorrow (By Robert Bee)

A north easterly teased the sails as John Billton stood at the ship's bow, staring at a single star nestled against Arcturus in the constellation of Bootes .

It was an unexceptional fourth magnitude star. About twelve light years away he remembered.

Still, he stared at it.

The bow lifted gently. Rainbow Warrior III slid into the trough and rose to meet the next wave. Billton's lean body moved to the deck's rhythm, his eyes never wavering from the star.

An ordinary star amongst ordinary stars.

And still he stared.

A sudden shiver swept over him, despite the balmy summer air. He was surprised to feel a warm tear rolling off his cheek to meet the bristles of his new beard. He wiped it away with a sigh.

His previous unshakeable certainty was giving way to human doubt. If Einstein and the astronomers are right, we'll have confirmation in twelve years, he thought.

And then...?

And then we'll know if John Billton was a planetary hero or the world's craziest megalomaniac.

"How long now?" Angus 'Crocodile' McWhirter spoke through painfully cracked lips.

"About five minutes less than the last time you asked." John Billton was feeling the cloying heat, and his tolerance of McWhirter's manner was approaching breaking point. Three weeks ago on Rainbow Warrior III, when they planned this quixotic escapade, they had been on the best of terms. Close, mutually respecting friends who shared a common aim and thought they knew each other's minds better than wives or lovers ever could.

But ten days of physical inactivity, concealed in a cramped, fouled, bug infested hole in the ground with only cold rations to eat and each other's company for entertainment had brought that relationship to a dramatic end.

"How long, I asked, damn you," McWhirter spat. He would have shouted, so hard that Billton would be blown against the sandy wall, but then they would have heard him. And that wouldn't do. Not yet.

"How...?"

"Sixteen minutes," Billton forestalled him. He stared at McWhirter. The sudden uncanny resemblance to John the Baptist caught him by surprise. Wild tangled hair, bushy beard, a large hooked and crooked nose, not quite bisecting his large piercing eyes. Everything except the wolf furs and locust sandwiches.

"Sixteen minutes," McWhirter repeated, not noticing Billton's fascinated gaze. "This bloody heat." He wiped a sweat soaked rag across his grimy face. Then he slapped his ankle viciously, exterminating another local inhabitant. "Bloody insects. If it wasn't for the bomb, I'd let the Frogs have this stinking atoll with no arguments."

"Yes, at least then there'd be one thing that hopped rather than crawled." Billton hoped an injection of humour might lighten McWhirter's mood. It failed.

"But then, if it wasn't for the bomb, they wouldn't want the island," McWhirter continued, oblivious to Billton's comment.

"Catch vingt-deux," Billton said.

"What?"

"Catch twenty two. You know. If..."

"I know what catch twenty bloody two means. I may be a raving Greenie to you, but I can read. What was that 'vunk der' crap?"

"It was French," Billton said, exasperated.

"Thought as much. Look, we're here to spike their flaming H-bomb, not practise your schoolboy frog-speak. How long now?" McWhirter crawled to the cave entrance and peered through the screen of shrubs they had erected. He could see no sign of a search party, but surely there would be French troops out there looking for them. That was the whole point of the exercise.

"Fifteen minutes." Billton opened a water flask. "Look, we can't even be certain of that. How can we trust our information? The test mightn't be for days. God, we could be eaten alive or turn to coral before the bloody thing goes le-poof." He took a long swig, then poured water over his dusty balding head.

"Our mole's never been wrong before. He's part of the process. It's today. In... fourteen minutes." McWhirter turned from the entrance, slapped another bug from his chest and crawled back to Billton's side. "Look, you wanted this, remember? Publicity for your star hopper. Hot shot fusion drive inventor protests at the scene of the blast. 'H is for humanity – not holocaust' – God, did you really say that?"

"Angus..."

"You'll get your publicity alright. And it's me who'll get it for you, hiding on this atoll at ground zero, embarrassing hell out of the Frogs. You and your...what do you call it...Ogre...?"

"OGR...one gee ramjet."

"...whatever. Well, mister spaceman, here G stands for Greenpeace. You signed on, you're here, so make the most of it.

Billton bit his tongue. McWhirter was right...and wrong. Yes, he was here for the publicity. And with publicity...hopefully... would come fresh funding. Enough to cover the launch of the modified fusion plant to complete his dream. But it wasn't really a dream, was it? That fifteen hundred tonnes of high tech metal orbiting Earth, waiting for its heart to be inserted and brought to life, was as real as the scorpions in this damned cave. And yes, conspicuously and vehemently proclaiming his support for Greenpeace's protest at the renewed bomb tests would certainly help his cause.

But McWhirter was wrong...culpably wrong...if he thought that was the sole reason. 'H is for Humanity – not Holocaust.' Yes,

he did say that. Loudly and often. And he was as committed to stopping these tests as McWhirter was, though he wished it could be done from the cool sanitary bridge of Star Endeavour and not in this...

Billton silently cursed McWhirter, the bugs and the heat. Still, it could be worse. He stared at the cave roof, picturing the daylight moon shining in the sky above, an unsmiling witness to man's continuing folly. He could be hidden in a freezing crater up there, recycling his air and urine, waiting in an unforgiving vacuum for the Chinese to find him before they detonated their bomb. Or would they even bother to search? All in all, he decided, I'm better off in this stinking hole with the crazy Greenie 'Crocodile'. 'Crocodile'? Where on earth...oh, stuff it.

"I'd kill for a decent meal. I'm sick of dry rations and warm water." Billton rubbed his rumbling stomach.

"Bloody whingeing scientists. When the going gets tough..." McWhirter rummaged through his pack, then threw a muesli bar at Billton. "How you'll survive your ten years to that star on tooth paste and hydroponic cabbage is beyond me. Eat this, will you. That stomach will bring the Frogs from miles away." McWhirter crawled back to the cave entrance.

"Thanks, but first..." Billton grabbed the camp shovel and walked, half crouched, to the back of the cave. He selected what he hoped was an undisturbed patch of sand and began to dig.

McWhirter scanned the desolate surface of the atoll visible to him. The cave was well positioned on Sector Yvonne. He had a view of about 120 degrees, past the mutant coconut palms, down to the lagoon's edge. Across the doomed water he could see Sector Camellia where the main administration and science buildings hunkered into the ground for protection from their own diabolical creation.

The mission so far had been a complete success. Ten days ago, they had landed at night in the rubber duck, located the cave, unloaded their gear and sent the duck back. Then they waited. Twenty four hours before the next scheduled test, Greenpeace stunned the world with news that two protesters, the infamous 'Crocodile' McWhirter and the equally famous astro-pioneer John Billton, were hidden on the atoll, willing to risk the wrath of the submerged nuclear explosion. And this one was scheduled to be big. At least 300 kilotonnes.

The eyes of the world were once again upon Mururoa. Would the French carry out their threat to detonate the bomb regardless of the safety of two high profile non-nationals? Or would the searching Legionnaires find and drag them into the secure shelters first?

Either way, they'll have oeuuf on their faces. McWhirter smiled involuntarily at another of Billton's endless schoolboy puns. Serve them bloody right too, he thought viciously, erasing the smile as his scanning eyes caught the shadow of Rainbow Warrior II, lying broken in ten metres of clear blue water off Yvonne's shore. Four good men, friends, murdered. And Faye.

Few knew that it was Faye who had coined his famous nickname. But not for any reference to his thick skin, tenacity or cunning as the world supposed. During a rare tender moment in Wellington, looking across from her hair strewn pillow, she had affectionately commented on his 'crooked dial', and the nickname was born. Poor beautiful dead Faye.

Bloody arrogant Frogs. Once wasn't enough. After the tests in 2013, another small boating accident. But not before Faye had transmitted the location of the cave discovered during their covert survey of the atoll. Tears mingled with sweat as McWhirter stared, unseeing, into the lagoon's waters, remembering a cheap hotel room in Wellington.

His thoughts were interrupted by a surprised exclamation from Billton.

McWhirter had lost all patience with his companion. Their earlier firm friendship was but a distant memory now. Ten days in a hole leaves plenty of time for discussion. And heated argument.

McWhirter couldn't see the point of travelling to the stars...or more accurately, a star...when there's no guarantee of somewhere to land when you arrive. Helluva risky investment for trillions of dollars and a lifetime in one-way travel. "We're confident there's a planetary system," Billton had explained. "The star's perturbations indicate a Jupiter size planet at twice Jupiter's distance." They had argued through the night on the proposition 'where there are Jupiters, there will be Earths.' To McWhirter's debate stopper "send me a post card when you land," Billton had floored him with "you'll have aged two hundred years before I'm ten years older, Angus" and went on to explain relativity and time dilation at great and boring length. Two hundred years! What's the bloody point?

And Billton's passionate defence of the new fusion power stations. He actually supported their construction and believed they were the answer to Earth's energy crisis. Perfected containment fields be damned. Endless and clean energy my fungied foot. One failure of their triplicate protection systems, and a microsecond later...nothing but atomic dust. Madness! Hydrogen power and hydrogen bombs. They were all the same to McWhirter. All to be stopped. How could he have been so wrong about a man?

Ten thousand square kilometres his ramjet scoop would have to be, Billton had told him. His design was the "engineered realisation of Bussard's wild dream back in the 1960s." Whoever Bussard was. All to collect interstellar hydrogen to fuel the fusion rocket to maintain one gravity acceleration and approach near light speeds. Ergo, One Gee Ramjet. Or, as Billton had characteristically named it, the Relativistic One Gee Reaction Ramjet. ROGR Ramjet. God save us from punsters. All he needed was the fusion generator to power the scoop's field. "Impossible," McWhirter had said. And Billton had just given him one of those infuriating smiles and said, "Angus, nothing is impossible."

"What now, damn it?" McWhirter snapped.

"This." Billton held up an encrusted object about the size of a football boot. "It's heavy. Feels metallic." He crawled back to McWhirter, curiosity erasing the original errand from his mind.

"Careful. It may be an old shell. Or a mine." McWhirter backed away, but came up hard against the cave wall, only a few metres from Billton.

"At Mururoa? Don't be daft. There was no action here." Billton used his knife to scrape away the excess dirt and coral, exposing a dull coppery surface. Engrossed with his task, he continued scraping, until the object was completely free of detritus.

Both men sat back on their haunches and silently stared at the oil lamp Billton held in his hands. It had a dull finish but appeared to be covered with delicate filigree. Along one side, there was the suggestion of written characters.

"Are you thinking...?" Billton left the question hovering in the heat.

"Now who's being daft? You've been down this hole too long, mate." McWhirter reached out for the lamp. "It's obviously an old native lamp from before the '66 tests. Gimme. I'll clean it up a bit." He wet his sweat rag with some canteen water. Billton, his curiosity burning, did the same, and they both bent over the old lamp, cleaning its surface in unison. The pair's first co-operative act in

a week.

Their vigorous efforts were soon rewarded. The old copper surface began to shine with renewed lustre. Satisfied, they sat back to admire its lines. Then they noticed that the shine became a glow, taking on an iridescence like the tip of a blow torch. Its surface mottled, appeared to flow like molten metal, rippling through all the colours of the spectrum, and then some more.

There was a distinct shuffling noise in the cave. McWhirter and Billton watched astonished as all the creeping life forms on the ground, the walls and the ceiling made direct and hasty paths to the cave entrance, to disappear out into the forbidding daylight.

“Um...Angus...” Billton’s mouth was uncomfortably dry from a feeling he hadn’t experienced since his first shuttle launch.

McWhirter hissed him to silence. “Do you hear something?”

At first Billton thought he meant the insects. Then he listened harder. The insects had all gone. Now there was a new sound, like the approach of a distant locomotive. No. Like a rushing wind up a canyon, or a flash flood down a dry gully, just around the next bend. It grew louder as the lamp glowed a bright cherry red, blanking out the dim shadows on the cave walls. The sound was now so loud, Billton felt either the lamp or his ear drums must surely burst.

Silence struck like a guillotine.

Both men fell on their backs from the sudden release of tension. Their eyes kaleidoscoped with after-images dancing across the cobwebbed ceiling. A haze of mist... or steam... permeated the air. And the strong pungent smell of... incense?

“Masters.” A voice deeper than the Mariana Trench filled the cave.

McWhirter was the first to struggle upright. “Jesus!” he said. And stared.

Billton slowly shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

An apparition sat cross-legged before them. A huge silver turban, perched on an equally large black cherubic head, brushed the ceiling. An immense chest and belly were exposed beneath a gold trimmed ultramarine vest. In its navel sat a jewel to shame the Hope Diamond. Bulging purple pantaloons threatened to float him away, while the silver pointed slippers matched the turban for ridiculousness.

“You see it too?” McWhirter asked hopefully.

“Unfortunately, yes. Either we’re both mad or...”

“Masters. Your wish is my command,” the apparition intoned, while bowing impossibly from its sitting position.

“I wish it hadn’t said that,” McWhirter muttered. “Now I know we’re crazy.”

“You cannot unwish that which is already fulfilled,” the bass voice said.

“What? I didn’t wish anything, you... what are you anyway?”

“I am the Genie of the Lamp.”

McWhirter and Billton scurried across the sand to sit together, a team again, staring at the... genie. As professionals in their fields, they had seen many strange things. Things Aesop, Brothers Grimm and Disney could never imagine. But, eventually, all had been rationally accounted for. The Extraordinary was the Explainable. Sceptics ruled.

Now, a Genie from a Lamp, in a cave on Mururoa Atoll, with a 300 kilotonne fusion reaction only... ten minutes away?

“Um... our wishes, you said?” Billton broke the strained silence.

“Three wishes, Master.” The genie nodded its massive head.

“Get a grip on yourself, Billton,” McWhirter turned on him. “He’s an hallucination, a figment...”

“Maybe, let’s see how the figment cooks,” Billton said. “I’m famished. I wish for a baked dinner, roast beef and vegetables, for two, and chilled chablis. Chop chop.”

“Three claps and Kazaam,” the genie rumbled.

“Pardon?”

“Not chop chop. You must clap three times and say Kazaam.”

McWhirter’s sudden burst of hysterical laughter caused the genie to raise one devilishly pointed eyebrow. “This Master is ill?”

McWhirter struggled for breath. He slapped Billton on the back. “Oh, don’t mind me, mate. Kazaam away.” He collapsed into spasms of laughter again.

CLAP. CLAP. CLAP. “Kazaam.” Despite his determination, Billton mumbled the word, belatedly feeling very foolish and desperately hoping there was no candid camera to record his moment of embarrassment.

“Done. Two wishes remain, Masters.”

The delectable aroma of roast beef, potatoes and pumpkin, and steamed beans and corn filled the cave. McWhirter wiped his tears and stared at the golden plate heaped with juicy hot food at his feet. A gold chalice full of wine stood beside it, beads of condensation running down its sides. As in a dream, he lifted the chalice to his lips and sipped.

“Chablis. Tyrell’s ’17,” he pronounced. “Good year.”

“Close. ’18,” the genie said.

Without hesitation, Billton began to demolish his food. He quaffed the chablis like a man who hadn’t had a decent meal in two years, not two weeks. With a piled fork halfway to his mouth, his whiskered chin dripping juices, he stopped. McWhirter hadn’t touched his food since sipping the wine.

“Come on man. Eat. It’s real,” Billton prompted.

“I know it’s real. I don’t have time to eat.”

“Time?”

“What? Five minutes? Four?”

“For what?” Billton lowered his laden fork.

“To use the next wish. To stop the bomb.”

Billton stared at McWhirter with a mixture of awe and fear. “You’re going to Kazaam away the bomb? What makes you think he can do that?” Billton said, pointing at the silent genie.

“You’re eating the evidence.”

“Even if it works, you’ve only got two wishes. The French have hundreds of bombs.”

McWhirter smiled an old smile. "You know John, you could always think smart, but never think big."

Billton let the inanity of that comment pass. "What are you...?"

"This is our chance to stop it. All of it. Right here." McWhirter's eyes blazed with evangelical zeal. John the Baptist. "We can stop this bomb, all future bombs... even the fusion power stations."

"The power... No, they're beneficial. They..."

"What a crock." A fleeting smile, quickly erased. "They're Chernobyls and Jervis Bays waiting to happen. I can stop them all, present and future. With one well phrased wish."

Billton stared at McWhirter. "The bombs... alright. If he can do it. But leave the fusion stations out of it. Angus..."

"Genie," McWhirter said. "Can you do it? Are you that powerful?"

"All things are possible to the Genie of the Lamp." The deep voice was as cold and impassive as the waiting black face. "Your wish is my command."

"How long?" McWhirter turned to Billton.

Billton checked his watch reluctantly. "Two minutes."

"Shit. No time to be fancy." McWhirter closed his eyes and concentrated. "You're the rocket scientist. What's the most basic process in an H-bomb?"

"Hydrogen fusion. Conversion of hydrogen to helium."

"What about uranium?"

"That's fission, A-Bombs, atomic power stations."

"I'll deal with those next wish. First the H-bombs." McWhirter rubbed his hands, grabbed the chalice and chugged its contents. "There's Earth, the Chinese Moon base and... aren't the Yanks building a base on Mars?"

"Yes, but I doubt..."

"Just in case. I'm going to spike all their barrels."

"How?"

"I'm going to wish the permanent cessation of all fusion reactions on Earth, the Moon, Mars. For ever."

Billton's eyes widened. He felt a sudden tightening of his chest. "Who do you think you are? God? You're playing with a fundamental process of nature." He had a frightening vision of a fusionless world, clean energy gone for good. Then his brain clicked forward one frame. Star Endeavour. His dream, his life's work. Useless. "Damn you... you can't."

"Can't I?" McWhirter snarled. "Watch me." He turned to the watching giant. "Genie. This is my wish. I wish that..."

"Crocodile. In humanity's name. Stop!"

"...all fusion reactions, present and future, on Earth, Earth's moon, Mars... and everywhere inside the orbit of Mars... just in case they build any satellite bases... cease immediately and never more proceed." He raised his hands to clap.

"No!" Billton screamed, an iron hard grip of terror seizing his heart as the ultimate implication of McWhirter's wish dawned on him. "Madman."

CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! "Kaz..."

Billton's hurtling body hit hard, knocking McWhirter back against the cave wall. He jammed his right hand over McWhirter's mouth before he could complete the Word. Billton fought with all the desperation of a man battling to save his life, his world from a deadly threat. He shouted at the top of his voice, hoping to convince McWhirter by sheer force of volume where logic had failed.

"Don't. For God's sake. Don't."

Their struggle took them to the feet of the genie, who sat, arms folded, unmoving, watching his two Masters fight for supremacy. Waiting for the Word.

McWhirter sank his teeth into Billton's hand, but still Billton held on. McWhirter's flaying left hand found a hard object. With the cave growing dim, his breath failing, McWhirter swung the lamp with all his flagging strength. It struck Billton behind the ear. He swung again. Billton's crazed eyes rolled upwards, and he collapsed onto McWhirter.

Desperately, McWhirter's muffled voice shouted from beneath Billton's prone body.

"Kazaam."

"Done. One wish remains, Masters."

Cold chablis splashed Billton's face.

"Wake up mate." McWhirter's voice rang with triumph. "We won. We did it."

Billton sat up awkwardly, feeling the back of his battered head. "What? Win?" His eyes snapped open. "How long till...?"

"Four minutes ago. The bomb went le-dud four minutes ago. And I...we did it." McWhirter gazed out towards the sunken wreck. Faye hadn't died in vain. They found the cave. We found the lamp. The rest will be history. "The Pacific, Earth, will be safe."

"Safe? You bloody maniac. Don't you know what you've done?" Billton would have struck McWhirter, but despair robbed him of the strength. Doomed. All doomed.

"Done? I've saved the environment for future generations."

"What future generations?" Billton screamed. With an effort, he focused his eyes and checked his watch. "Five minutes since your wish. I've got... three minutes tops. What's that?" He turned towards the sound of voices outside the cave.

"I think we've been nicked. Too late for them," McWhirter laughed.

Billton crawled to the Genie's feet. "Genie, I wish you to reverse..."

"You cannot unwish what has already been fulfilled," the Genie intoned. Through his drowning despair, Billton thought he detected a hint of sadness in the Genie's rumbling bass. He studied its eyes, but saw nothing but black coals.

The voices outside were louder.

"Give it up, Billton. Leave me to..." McWhirter stared, horrified, as a stun grenade rolled through the cave entrance and stopped at Billton's feet. Without thinking, Billton scooped it up and hurled it back through the opening. Frantic Gallic shouts were followed by a flash of light and an ear numbing concussion. A shower of coral and sand fell from the ceiling. Then silence.

Billton coughed the choking dust from his throat. He...Earth...had only one chance and less than two minutes. Did he dare? Would they understand? He squeezed his eyes shut, searching for the right words. It all seemed so unreal. He could hardly believe what he was about to say. "Genie, I wish that the planet Earth, its moon and all its artificial satellites be instantly..." think man, think... "without loss of life, relocated to a stable..." God forgive me "... unoccupied orbit of life sustaining dimensions around the next nearest... single Class G star."

"Struth! You said I was mad. You can't..."

"Only one minute," Billton gasped. He raised his hands.

CLAP! CLAP!

McWhirter snatched at Billton's hands and held them clasped, as in a vice. "Bugger you. You're not sending my planet off to... out there."

With a sense of *deja vu* the two wrestled, their hands firmly enmeshed like a mirror mime.

"Arretez!" A French legionnaire burst into the cave, his sub-machine gun held at the hip. "Mon dieu, quelle diablerie?" He stood transfixed, eye to eye with the genie.

Billton, fearing time was up, used his best schoolboy French. "Gendarme, this man is Crocodile McWhirter. He sabotaged your bomb."

"Zut pour!" The legionnaire tore his eyes away from the genie and stared at McWhirter. "Crasseux greenie," he spat and swung his gun butt against McWhirter's head.

Poetic justice, Billton thought as he pulled his hands free and quickly clapped a third time. "Kazaam," he said strongly, as in a fervent prayer, then looked up at the genie.

Incredibly, the Genie smiled.

"Done," he boomed. "And done well."

With the sound like a passing express train, the Genie vaporised and funnelled into the lamp. Then, in the time it took the stunned legionnaire to blink, the lamp was gone.

"You can hardly tell the difference," he whispered.

"John?"

Billton turned. Joseph Masalehdani, the crew's physician was watching him carefully.

"Doc, any news?" Billton tore his gaze from the star.

"McWhirter's back with us. He's eating like a..."

"Crocodile?" Billton laughed.

"It was touch and go there. I thought he was gone. He'd suffered quite a shock."

"Well it's not every day you realise you killed a star. Your star."

"Where..?"

Billton pointed the Sun out to the doctor.

"A white dwarf, you say?" Masalehdani scratched his bald scalp.

"White or brown. They're arguing about that. Collapsed by its own gravity when its nuclear furnace died. But to us it will still look like a normal G class star for the next twelve years." He turned pained eyes on the doctor. "Then we'll see it...go out. Like that." The click of his fingers echoed across the deck. "Ironic, you know. It would have taken seven of Star Endeavour's years to get here, about twenty five years of Earth's time. Yet I'm here instantaneously by a wish. I've achieved my life's dream, to travel to the stars, but not exactly the way that I planned it. Now I'll never know if ROGR would have worked. Damn McWhirter."

The doctor turned to go, then stopped. "Of course. There's this. It came through from Siding Spring. All double Dutch to me. You'll undoubtedly be interested." He handed Billton a fax printout.

Billton scanned the data with a professional eye. "Initial identification of new sun as Tau Ceti confirmed. Single, Class G8. All closer G classes doubles with unstable planetary orbits. Genie certainly knew his astronomy. Let's see... cooler...closer. Orbit 0.91 astronomical unit...year equals 318 days... there go some birthdays. Local system..." He frowned, then lowered the sheet. "Looks like we'll have some adjustments to make. I'd better keep my head down when we hit port."

"Rubbish. If it weren't for you, we'd be back there orbiting an ice block."

"If it weren't for me, we would never have found the lamp."

"If, if... Magic lamps have a way of being found. Let's go below. I'll mix you a nightcap your genie would be jealous of."

"You wish." Billton winced. "Sorry. Lead on Doc."

They walked to the hatchway but Billton paused before descending. He looked up past the sails at the bluish-white light shining brighter than Venus once had.

He remembered the data sheet. Average orbit 1.3 astronomical units, evidence of water, continents. AM and FM radio transmissions. Artificial satellites. Damn, he thought, remembering the frantic wording of his wish. I knew I'd forgotten something. Then he recalled his debate with McWhirter about where there are Jupiters, there will be Earths. They'd overlooked the possibility that where there aren't Jupiters, there still could be Earths. Too late now, but the SETI people really ought to double check their data on Tau Ceti.

"Come on, Doc," Billton said. "I need that nightcap." With one last look at the bright planet overhead, he descended the stairs, wondering if their new neighbours had nuclear fusion and what they thought H stood for.