

# The Great Scientist

“Have you ever wondered,” said the Boffin one day, “why we have never met ourselves?”

“Hmm, you mean when we are visiting other spaces, I’d guess?”

“Yes, that’s what I mean. The best theories say that all the spaces are splitting all the time, every time someone makes a choice, or even when someone tosses a coin. So there should be many, many spaces with a Mage and a Boffin. Some just like us, and some similar but different. Maybe with light skins and blonde hair.”

“Well, we don’t tend to visit nearby spaces, do we?” He thought for a bit. “Though I imagine that our favourite spaces, like dragon space, would be popular with Mages and Boffins from nearby spaces.”

“Yes, exactly.” She paused for thought too. “Maybe there’s an exclusion principle involved. The powers that we have may mean that we can’t coexist in the same space as another Mage and Boffin?”

The Mage pondered. “You may have a point. It could be that there is only so much power in each space, and a Mage and a Boffin are given a lot of that power and so there is not enough left over for another Mage and Boffin, but that doesn’t feel quite right. What do your equations say?”

“Well, it’s frustrating. There’s so many unknowns that I can’t tell. I can’t even formulate them.”

The Mage wound back the conversation in his head. “Where did this question come from? I don’t think it is one that either or both of us can answer easily.”

“Well, one of my alarms went off. When I queried it, it referred me back to ‘Mage and Boffin’. You haven’t felt anything recently, have you?”

The Mage scratched his head. He’d recently shaved it, and wasn’t sure if he was going to keep it that way. The Boffin kept kissing it which was annoying.

“Actually, there is something. Like someone needs help. It’s so faint I hadn’t really registered it until you mentioned it. Yes, it reflects back to us. You think it’s about some other Mage and Boffin?”

“Well, we’re not calling for help, are we?” She kissed his bald head.

He pulled her onto his lap, so she couldn’t do it again. “Let’s look at your data.”

She projected it on the wall, and the Mage studied it. “Yeah, it looks like it’s a long way away, but not distance-wise. It’s across the spaces.”

He pulled out a globe and passed his hand over it. “‘The Great Scientist’? What’s that all about?”

“A variation of ‘The Boffin’ I’d guess.” She tapped her wristband device a few times. “Yes, that agrees with my data. Though there are anomalies. We’d better take a look.”

“Yes, tomorrow. And can you please stop kissing my head!”

“You know, I’m not keen on you bald. Why don’t you grow it again?”

The Mage sighed. "Why didn't you just say so?"

"It's more fun this way!" The Boffin ran her fingers through his newly grown hair. "That's much better."

The next morning they reviewed what data they had.

"The Great Scientist is a long way off through the spaces," said the Boffin, "but I don't get a sense of the feelings side of things. There's no Great Magician. Do you have the same?"

"Well, I do sense a focus for the Magical side of things, but it is weak, very weak. For that matter, the focus for the Scientific side of things is also weak. Suppressed maybe?"

"Maybe. Yes, if I concentrate, I can see them both."

"OK, shall we go?"

"Yes, though I've a feeling that this won't be fun."

The Mage gestured and they flew through the spaces. This wasn't like stepping to the dragon space, and each space that they passed seemed like a slap in the face.

"Phew! Not fun is right," said the Boffin. "Where are we? It stinks!"

They were standing on a ledge jutting out into a deep valley. Down in the valley the lights of a city glimmered in the gloom. The sun was just rising and the sunrise lit up the undersides of angry purple and red clouds. The waters of the harbour somehow looked unpleasant, even from a distance.

The Mage knelt down and pulled some leaves of grass out of the ground. "Oily," he said and showed the Boffin.

"Hmm, yes, nasty. And the grass is yellowish too. Shall we walk down to the city?"

The trail down the mountain was steep and loose, making it difficult to descend. They passed several trees, most of which were dead.

The Boffin broke a small branch from a tree. "Pollution," she said. "What sort of a space is this?"

The sun started to fill the valley with a murky light, revealing the buildings down in the valley. Many of them were great blocks of buildings with few windows but with one or more chimneys, all of which were belching smoke and steam. The buildings themselves were grimy with pollution.

"What a horrible place," said the Boffin. She coughed. "Ugh! Sulphur. Who would do this? If it is a person of my calling, well, then I'm disgusted with him or her."

"I sense the person in charge is a 'him'," said the Mage. "How come the person of my calling didn't do something about all this?"

They started to pass houses, though shacks would be a better word. They were mostly, it seems, made of reclaimed materials, a plank of wood here, a window frame there, with sacking covering the most obvious gaps. Most had a hole in the roof through which smoke was allowed to escape.

As they passed one small shack, one which was in worse condition than the rest, they heard crying. The Boffin poked her head into the open door. Inside a woman was leaning over a man who was lying on a bed, coughing, obviously sick.

“What’s wrong? What’s wrong with him?” the Boffin asked.

“He’s got the coughing disease, and today it’s so bad that he can’t go to the factory and work. We will be kicked out! We’ll be sent out into the desert!”

The Boffin ran her instruments over the man, but the woman jumped up in fright.

“No magic, please, no magic! We will be executed.”

“It’s OK dear, this isn’t magic,” said the Boffin, and directed a glance at the Mage. Her instrument buzzed and she looked at it.

“Hmm, chronic pulmonary disease. He seems to have been breathing pure poison for years. I’ll see what I can do.”

“It’s the gasses in the factory. They get to everyone in the end.”

“How old is your husband, dear?”

“Thirty five,” said the woman. “He’s quite old.”

The Boffin looked grim. She’d expected the woman to say sixty or more.

The machine buzzed and clicked again, and suddenly the man coughed and sat up.

“Thank you, thank you,” he said. “I have to get to work or we will be cast out. I’m sorry, I have to go.”

The Mage and the Boffin looked after him in astonishment as he dashed out of the door.

“Oh, thank you so much,” said the woman. “But I can’t pay you! What with Walter being sick we haven’t any money.”

“You can pay us with information,” said the Mage grimly. “What sort of space is this? Why all the pollution? Who is looking after the environment?”

The woman looked blank. “Environment? What’s that? The pollution is something that we have to put up with for a while, until the Grand Plan works. Where are you from? Everyone knows about that.”

The Boffin got up and reached into her backpack and pulled out a thermos flask. “Do you have cups? This might take some time.”

The woman produced cups and the Boffin poured each of them a drink from the flask.

“What is this?” asked the woman. “It tastes so good.”

“It’s coffee. Do you not have it here? What do you usually drink?”

“Well, water, when it is not too full of poisons. Even the rainwater has some poisons. Also, there’s a root that we roast and grind and steep.”

The Boffin made a face. “What do all the factories produce? Apart from smoke and pollution, that is.”

"I don't know exactly. Whatever the Great Scientist decides. It all goes into his Grand Plan. When the Great Scientist's Grand Plan succeeds, then there will be no more pollution, and there will be food for everyone. It will be an Ideal World."

"It doesn't look like that to me," said the Mage.

The woman gasped. "Don't say that, sir, or we will be executed. Are you spies of the Great Scientist?"

"No, of course not. We are not from round here. When will this Grand Plan come to fruition?"

"No one knows. Soon, we hope."

The Boffin snorted. "And when did it begin?"

"About two hundred years ago, I think. They taught us that in school, before they shut down the schools."

"Shut down the schools?" muttered the Mage, outraged.

"Yes, it started when the Great Scientist took over, they said. He formed the Grand Plan and started building the factories. He cast out the Magicians, whose tricks were preventing mankind from creating the Ideal World."

The Mage looked grim. "We need to talk to this Great Scientist. Where can we find him?"

The woman looked worried. "He will execute you or cast you out. Pleased don't go and see him."

"Don't worry. We're not as defenceless as we might seem. Where is he?"

"He's in the Palace, under the Dome, down in the city. Please don't go."

"We have to. We'll take care. You take care too."

The Mage and the Boffin walked down the track into the city.

"Look what she slipped me when we left," said the Boffin. She pulled a small stone with a hole in it from her pocket. It had a thin leather strap threaded through the hole.

"Mmm, a charm. Does it have any power?" He touched it. "Yes, but not much. Defensive. I've given it a touch more power. So there is magic here. It's suppressed but not eliminated. There's no sign of a High Wizard or anything, but there must be a focus, a nexus."

The Boffin slipped it over her head and under her clothes. "I've got a feeling that I should keep it hidden."

They rounded a corner and the city was spread out below them. All the buildings were dark, dingy and depressing, except at the very centre of the city where the Dome could be seen, glowing brightly in stark contrast to the rest of the city.

They hopped on a bus to the city centre. The Mage paid the bus driver with coins which appeared to the driver to be the dark metal currency in use in the city. The bus driver would be surprised when he looked at the coins later and found that they were really pure gold.

‘Tsss,’ said the Boffin. ‘We have to change our clothes. The men all wear trousers and the women wear long dresses. I’m wearing jeans and you are in your robes.’

She ran her instrument over them both and their clothes conformed to the local norm. ‘I hate dresses,’ she said.

‘Why do you have so many in your cupboard then? On second thoughts, forget that I asked that question.’

They hopped off the bus close to the Dome. It glowed a bright blue, like a snow globe, which only served to show up the filth on the neighbouring buildings. The building inside was bright and clean, contrasting strongly with the dark and dirty buildings outside. They circled round and found an entrance with a large sign over it that read ‘Authorised Personnel Only’.

‘That’s us,’ said the Mage. ‘Authorised troublemakers.’

They passed through the entrance to the Dome and up the steps to the doors of the Palace. Two pages opened the doors for them.

‘Mmm, it’s almost like we were expected. That’s a bit of a concern,’ said the Mage.

They were directed to the Throne Room where the Great Scientist sat on an ornate throne decorated with images of test tubes, flasks, and Petri dishes. On one side of him was a three foot high model of a microscope, and on the other a similarly sized model of a Bunsen burner which shot out a ball of flame every minute or so.

The Great Scientist was a medium sized balding man, dressed in a white coat and wearing wrap around safety goggles. He held a clipboard.

‘Greetings,’ he said. ‘I don’t know where you have sprung from, but from the way that you tended to that worker, I’m sure that you are here to interfere with my Grand Plan. I won’t allow it. In another three hundred years or so, I’ll be able to expand the Dome to cover most of the city and then the world.’

‘So, until then,’ said the Mage, ‘Your citizens suffer and die prematurely in the terrible pollution out there.’

‘What of it? Most of them are ignorant believers in Magic. When Science triumphs they will not be necessary and most will die. I will gather the scientists into the Dome and will have created the Ideal World. But until then they will be useful.’

He rang a small bell and a girl brought him a cup of tea. ‘I’d offer you a cup of tea too, but I’m going to have to imprison you until I decide what to do with you.’

He clicked his fingers and two large men moved forward to drag them away. The Boffin gestured and a glow surrounded her and the Mage, but the Great Scientist pressed a button on his throne and the glow faded.

‘I won’t allow you to use your magical tricks in here, my dear,’ he said. ‘Science will always win in a contest with Magic.’

‘Why should it always be a contest?’ asked the Boffin as they were led away.

The Boffin and the Mage were taken to adjoining cells below the Palace.

“Why does he need cells in his ‘Ideal World’,” wondered the Boffin. “It was interesting that he thought my barrier was magic. Somehow I don’t think that he is as ‘Great’ as he thinks he is, although that nullifier was a reasonably good trick.”

She stepped into the Mage’s cell. “Hmm, he doesn’t know about stepping, it seems. We could leave now if we wanted but let’s stay and sort this out.”

“I agree. If he is the focus of Science in this space, I wonder who the focus of Magic is?”

“He’s not the focus of anything, I believe. He’s just a scientist with delusions of grandeur, I think.”

The Mage gestured. He normally liked to hold something when he performed magic, but he didn’t even have a stick. “Yes, you are right. There is a nexus of Science, and it’s close, but it’s not him. There’s also a nexus of Magic, and that’s close too. And getting closer.”

Down the stairs to the cells came the serving girl and a boy in a white coat. The girl seemed surprised to find them in the same cell, but came up to the bars.

“Are you OK?” she asked. “We need help, and I sense that you can give it to us.”

The boy had been fiddling with a security camera and joined her at the bars.

“It’s already been disabled,” he said. “I wonder who did that?”

“Oh, that was me,” said the Boffin. “I didn’t want him spying on us. All he is going to get on his monitors is my husband and I lounging around in our cells.”

The boy nodded approvingly. “Looping I suppose?”

“Yes, on a two minute cycle. It will take someone a while to notice. Now, what do you want us to do? Do you have a plan?”

“Well not really,” said the boy. “I can disable most of his weapons, but his throne has a special circuit that I can’t get at.”

“Give me your hand,” said the Boffin, and the boy put his hand in hers.

His eyes opened wide. “Oh, **you’re** the Scientist, and **he’s** the Magician! We don’t have female Scientists, or male Magicians.”

“And you’re the Scientist and your wife is the Magician. That’s been clear from the moment we met you.”

The girl blushed. “We’re not actually married. We’re not allowed to get married as Terry is a scientist and must marry the girl that the Great Scientist picks for him. But we’ve been together since we were kids.”

She smiled at Terry and he smiled back.

“Are the scientists all behind the Great Scientist?” asked the Boffin.

“No, most of them think that what the Great Scientist is doing is a perversion of their calling. Many of them, especially the Biologists, think that he is a disgrace, but no one is prepared to stand up against him.”

“You two have a little power,” said the Mage, “but we will loan you some more. Let’s all join hands. Science is learned, young man, so it won’t make much difference to your power immediately, but it will reinforce what you already have. Young lady, Magic is feeling, and your powers will be boosted immediately. What’s your name, by the way?”

“Kitty. Well, Catherine, really. We have powers? Really? Oh, I feel it! Can you feel it, Terry?”

He nodded. “It’s a clarity and a sense of connectedness, but, sir, you’ve given me some power of feeling too. I can feel the cables in the walls and the power in them!”

The Mage nodded “There’s always a crossover. No one is completely on the side of Science or of Magic. Learn to use your feelings, young man, and you, my dear, learn to use the clarity and sense of order that you’ll get from your husband. Well, husband to be, that is.”

“OK, let’s get out of here. Stand clear, kids,” said the Boffin, and blasted the door of the cell which fell to the floor in a tangle of bent metal.”

“Are you a bit tetchy, dear? That was definitely over the top,” said the Mage.

“Just a bit. I don’t like being locked up. Even if I could easily step out.”

The Mage and the Boffin led Kitty and Terry up the stairs and towards the throne room. Two large men moved to stop them, but the Mage gestured and the guards froze in position, and the four of them entered the throne room.

Behind them, one of the large men found that he could talk.

“Can you move, Jones?” he asked.

“Only my head, Smith. You too?”

“Yes. I hope that this wears off soon. This is an uncomfortable position.”

“Yeah, me too. When it wears off, let’s walk out of here. I’m definitely not going to run. Definitely not.”

“Is a fast walk OK by you?”

“Definitely.”

In the throne room the Great Scientist turned in surprise.

“How did you get out? Oh, those kids must have let you out.”

“It’s over,” said the Boffin. “You must step down immediately and leave the city.”

“You dare...” said the Great Scientist, and pressed a button on his throne. A line of fire shot out and hit the Boffin, who staggered. A glow surrounded her.

“You’re strong, aren’t you?” she said. “Thank goodness for that little amulet.”

The Mage sent a line of fire back at the Great Scientist, and a glow surrounded him also. A stalemate developed with the Mage and the Boffin probing the Great Scientist's defences, and the Great Scientist probing back. Power beams and force fields rocked the room, and projectiles smashed windows and singed upholstery.

Kitty and Terry were ignored for the moment.

"Can you hit the red tile to the left of the throne, Kitty?" asked Terry.

Kitty formed a ball of fire and hurled it at the tile, and the air filled with the fragments. Terry dived forwards under the beams of power and pulled loose a bunch of cables which had been covered by the tile. The Great Scientist's weapons died.

"Nice move," said the Boffin approvingly.

The Great Scientist leapt from the throne and ran towards the door. He turned around, said "Vengeance!", pulled a gun and shot at the Boffin. The Mage stepped forward, plucked the bullet from the air and showed it to him. The Great Scientist disappeared through the doors.

"Nice going, kids. We would have beaten him eventually, because there are two of us, but that helped immensely, and reduced the amount of damage that would have occurred," said the Boffin as she held both of Kitty's hands. "Are you ready for the responsibility of your new roles?"

She briefly filled their minds with a feeling for what the jobs entailed, the responsibilities and the benefits. She reflected that she and the Mage had had to work it out for themselves. Kitty looked at Terry, who put his arm around her.

Terry nodded. "Yes, we will do it. We're ready. But how do we start?"

"Well, firstly tell everyone. That you are the foci of the two powers. Draw in all the raw power of Magic and Science that is out there, and gather it to yourselves. Then you can start to work out how to undo the mess that the Great Scientist has left behind. You can't just shut the factories, as that will throw people out of work and created more chaos, but you can change what they make and how they are making it."

"I can put temporary filters on all the chimneys," said Terry.

"And we can make bricks and things, to fix up people's houses," said Kitty.

"Good ideas. But get some experts in. Get their opinions. I'm sure that there are good people out there. Is there anything else we can do before we go?"

"Go? Can't you stay for a while? Please!"

"We'll stay for a day or two, but you need to stand on your own two feet. Feel the needs. Work out the solutions."

They were still very young and lacking in confidence, and in the end the Mage and the Boffin stayed a week. Kitty and Terry opened up the Palace to everyone and everyone came. The Mage or the Boffin were always at their side and passed them occasional little notes like "waste of time" or "seems good value". People began calling Terry and Kitty "The Chief Scientist" and "The High Magician", and Terry and Kitty didn't deny it. Their confidence noticeably grew as time passed.



They called back Smith and Jones to help control the crowds, and started to set up councils and committees. They delegated some tasks to others.

So the Mage and the Boffin were there at the end of the week when the Chief Scientist and the High Magician were married, surrounded by old friends and new. By chance, as they were exchanging vows in front of the celebrant, a hole appeared in the dark clouds and illuminated the open air setting that they had chosen. The Mage looked suspiciously at the Boffin, but she shook her head. It was natural. Pure chance.

When they took their leave Kitty hugged and kissed them both.

“What if we screw up? What can we do?” she asked.

The Boffin held both their hands and told them to step after her. They appeared in front of the Boffin’s house.

“Welcome to our space. Welcome to our home.”

“Is that your house? It’s so nice!” said Kitty, and Terry nodded. Then they all stepped back again.

“Oh, that’s so easy! I didn’t know that we could do that.”

“Yes, when we came here first we had to go by way of many other spaces, and that was not nice. Now we have been here once, it’s so much easier. You’re welcome at our place any time, but we may be away. If so, just drop a letter in the letter box, and we will know immediately, where ever we are. Oh, and one piece of advice. You should step down as rulers as soon as you can. Find a nice cottage like ours somewhere, where you can raise your children in peace. Only interfere if you have to, as interference often makes things worse.”

Kitty looked at Terry. “We were saying the same thing earlier. Should we step down or do we need to be in charge? I’m glad that you mentioned that, as neither of us want to rule.”

“You will still be important people, with a lot of influence. One more thing,” said the Mage. “We have a space that we go to for a bit of peace and quiet. Our private space has no people but does have dragons. You should find your own quiet little retreat.”

The Mage said privately to the Boffin later “I think that they will do well. There were plenty of good people that visited the Palace, all suppressed by the Great Scientist. I’m optimistic about this space. I think we’d better find out where the Great Scientist ran off to, though.”

On a crag overlooking the city sat a man dressed in a tattered white coat. He’d lost his safety goggles and clipboard somewhere. Revenge and despair filled his mind. The Mage looked down on him from higher up the mountain and asked the Boffin “What are we going to do with him?”

“He’s more pathetic than evil, isn’t he?”

Suddenly the Great Scientist stood up, roared at the sky, and threw himself off the crag. The Mage and the Boffin both gasped and reached for him with all powers that they had, but to no avail. They stepped down to where his body had landed.

“What a sad end,” said the Boffin.

“He had some powers after all. He fought us off all the way down. Maybe it was for the best, as I couldn’t see him being happy anywhere.”

The Mage and the Boffin had a few visits from Kitty and Terry in the early years, with the youngsters seeking advice. Mostly they just let the two young ones talk until they had worked out a solution for themselves. Sometimes they inserted a suggestion. They liked the two youngsters who reminded them of themselves when they were just starting out. Then Kitty and Terry started bringing their children along, and the visits became more social than business.

The Mage and the Boffin visited their home space, and the changes were amazing. The dark dismal clouds were often replaced by fluffy white clouds in a blue sky. Even the grey rain clouds were an improvement. Terry, the Chief Scientist, had had filters installed on the chimneys and developed a spray to remove most of the grime, and instead of dingy darkness, the brickwork on the house and other buildings was bright and gleaming. Many of the hovels had been replaced with functional, if not beautiful, state provided housing for those who needed it.

There was a long way to go, but Kitty, as High Magician, was pleased. Almost everyone approved of the changes, and the man in the street was happier and more optimistic than when the Great Scientist was in charge. People began to feel proud of the city, which, stripped of its grime, was a striking place. The harbour now looked appealing and people had taken to walking on the beaches and sailing yachts on the water. Unfortunately the water wasn’t completely clean yet but it wouldn’t be long before people were swimming in the blue green waters.

“Do you think you have an answer to your question, dear?” the Mage asked the Boffin one day, after a visit from Kitty and Terry.

“You mean when I asked why we hadn’t met ourselves?”

“Yes, that’s what I meant.”

“Mmm. Not really. Terry and Kitty remind me of us, but they aren’t the same as us, are they?”

“They’re really nice, but they’re definitely different. The baby is cute, isn’t she?”

“So is their little boy. He’s, what, three?”

“Yeah, I almost feel like a grandfather. Yes, I know, I’ve been a grandfather so many times over the years.”

“I know what you mean. But we’ve never met any Mage and Boffin close to us. Terry and Kitty are a long way away.”

She sighed. “I guess we may never know. I’m not too unhappy about that. I think that it would be strange to meet myself.”