

The Power of a Ring

(titled after everything was said and done)

By Mark, Sarah, Chris, Denice, Ferl, Matt, Cheryl, Connie, Karen, Brandon, Cindy, Kim, Tom, and Cheyne.

(Brandon) Destiny Lighthouse landed on the lonely, forgotten planet. If her data readings were correct, there was a powerful relic out there, somewhere.

(Karen) As she prepared to open the hatch, she paused. Years of preparation had gotten her this far, but would it be enough to see her through what might lay ahead?

(Tom) Her heart pounding, her breath still, trepidation and excitement flooded her trembling body. Then, remembering to breathe, she pressed her hand against the hatch release with complete abandon.

(Matt) Destiny suddenly snapped out of her daydream at the sudden sound of woooshhhh! It wasn't a hatch release she pulled, it was the toilet handle!

(Cheryl) Every dream, every vision she ever had flushed away just like that. But wait, a blue mist began to emerge from the porcelain throne causing her to scream like monkeys fighting over a banana!

(Cheyne) Blue Ocean Toilet Bowl Scent Release! It just had to be that exact scent that took her back all those years.

(Brandon) Those years, she thought she had recovered, she thought she had escaped that life.

Whatever memories still plagued her mind, she was never going back to the streets of Mars.

(Karen) As her head cleared, she returned to her desk, or what served as the makeshift work area holding years of research, calculations, random thoughts and old coffee cups. She was going after the artifact – it was only a matter of time.

(Ferl) What was wrong with the time machine, 1 second she's about to open the hatch and 1 second she's back at the academy...one last safety latch, yelling to Solo to check the main, and just then...

(Sarah) The world goes white, and her head swims. Being the test subject for this new tech is for the birds, she thinks.

(Tom) Destiny's elbows suck into her knees, fists to face, as she crouched forward over her cluttered desk. Her hair, fading blonde to silver, started to cloud the top of her head as a halo as it inched slowly out of her loose ponytail.

(Denice) Destiny knew she would never be the same after she found this relic, but would this be worth risking all she had and all those she cared for the most? As she runs her fingers through her hair she hears a thud against her wall....

(Brandon) Her neighbors were banging nails into place, hanging another painting, if that could even be believed. How ever important art could be, it was time to have a conversation with Big Bert about hanging paintings at two in the morning.

(Connie) As she stood contemplating what to do she knew she had to be ready for the unknown! She then grabbed her gear which included her weapon and headed out on the lonely planet with confidence. God was with her!

(Cheyne) Her crusader spirit never let her down, and with an axe in hand, it wouldn't let her down as she had her "talk" with the Big bad Ol' Bert.

(Kim) Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! she knocked. Slowly the door opened and without thinking Destiny swung her axe right into the heart of old Bert. She had had enough of the late-night furniture hangings. But wait, something was wrong!

(Mark) How could she be so careless, it wasn't Bert, it was Elmer J Crudd, millionaire, who owns a mansion and a yacht. What a huge mistake!!

(Matt) Elmer was not all amused by being smacked by a foam axe in the chest, "What is it now?" he growled.

(Brandon) "I'm just trying to make the point that you are making a ton of racket," said Destiny, "It's two in the morning, a time for peace, a time for serenity, and while you're over here hammering away, I am heavily invested in unraveling some big problems."

(Karen) "Problems?! What problems? Are you daydreaming about that outer space foolishness again? When will YOU wake up and realize that was a dream...or maybe a drug induced hallucination?" Elmer shoved her into the hall and slammed the door in her forlorn face.

(Cheyne) "I must stop these distractions and get back to my work. There was never going to be any reasoning with that man from the very start," Destiny said to herself.

(Cindy) She slowly approached her desk with the ever-present cup of hot coffee, "Now, where was I?"

(Brandon) The port cities on the oceans of Mars, the cruise ships at the port cities, the parties with the pirate lords on the cruise ships, she had escaped all that to arrive here, the lucky neighbor of the eccentric Elmer Crudd. But, hopefully, with the deal she had made with Section Eleven, with the technology they were "providing" her, she'd achieve her goals, grand though they may be.

(Karen) Okay, enough fooling around. Her fatigue and frustration had dissipated and it was time to press forward.

(Matt) Destiny began looking again at the schematics on her desk. Section Eleven was almost too quick to share the technology, she thought to herself, and it was getting harder to tell the difference between memories and daydreams.

(Mark) Her mind wandered and she couldn't help thinking how hungry she had gotten. All she could do at this point was make a pastrami sandwich on some seeded Jewish rye with mustard, raw onions and of course thickly cut swiss cheese.

(Brandon) Her mind kept wandering, her crystal-elderyme ring—which was an Action Sequence Modulator from Section Eleven—had turned her double-sharpened silversteel battle axe to foam. She took a delicious bite, wondering if the technology was compensating for her mental instability, or if the radiation from the materials was driving her insane.

(Cheyne) She may soon need to bring in a second pair of eyes to monitor her progress before she fell too deeply into the abyss, but who could she get in these early hours of the morn, and how could she keep them safe from the ring's effects?

(Karen) Eterine! That incorrigible rascalion was her best bet, as frustrating as that would be.

(Cindy) But she hadn't been seen in at least a century! Where would she begin to search?

(Brandon) Destiny had a principle—with making a sandwich, or researching vacuum cleaners, or buying a car, or commandeering a ship, or acquiring a magic sword—always get quality, go for the most expensive. The last time she talked with Eterine, she had barely been able to afford it.

(Mark) She barely had enough money even to buy her next sandwich, how could she come up with the money? She thought and thought and came up with a brilliant plan, to hold up the local Kwik-E-Mart.

(Cheyne) Now, she knew, this ring had some strange effects. Nothing makes a cashier's drawer loosen quicker than when the world turns to literal Chaos around them.

(Karen) It's not like she hadn't used the ring like this before, but Section 11 was watching more closely these days and those uptight bureaucrats could be a royal pain in the axe! No, she couldn't risk it, not when she was this close.

(Brandon) Ugh, wracking her brain, she knew Eterine valued other things more than money...like...like...scorpion venom. Never bothered to ask her what she used it for, not good to ask those kinds of questions, but giant scorpions were known to haunt the wasteland outside the city.

(Chris) The sandwich complete, she took her familiar, scalpel-sharp knife and, with perfect precision, bi-sected this creation. The mustard oozed out with the invasion, like lava from an eruption. The crisp onion snapped, like a rebellious force broken into submission. The bread, however, was compliant with the action, willing to be parted. Action complete, she stared at the divided source of fuel...especially the layers of unlike things now forced into enantiomer existence...Perhaps there was a direction for finding Eterine in this??

(Cheyne) Fueled up and ready to go, transit was easy, getting from her apartment to the edge of town. The next step was getting past the guards at the gate with as few entangling lies as possible.

(Karen) Licking her fingers, Destiny smoothed a few loose curls back from her face and straightened her jacket as she stepped from the platform. She relaxed her jaw and strode confidently toward the checkpoint. Story time!

(Mark) As she approached the guards, they tell her the only way she can pass is if she cuts down the mightiest tree in the forest with a trout!

(Brandon) Like the layers of a sandwich with its mustard, onions, and cheese, like the layers of her story with just a few too many rotten tomatoes, there would be layers to this interaction: charm, deception, and a touch of just enough truth.

(Cheyne) “Ha, that was a Monty Python reference you just made there,” said Destiny, “but what you don’t know is...Look, over there! Someone is trying to escape!”

(Karen) The chatter amongst the guards let Destiny know the mood was light tonight, and this would be easy. Sucking in a deep breath, she strode forward purposefully, and greeted the first guard with a casual, “Howdy soldier!”

(Brandon) Eying her suspiciously, the guard asked, “How did you know we were talking about the immortal Monty Python? Are you also a secret member of the order of Juglug the Jolly Jester?”

(Mark) She was surprised at their comment and contemplated deploying the heavenly hand grenade. Instead she said, “No, but I do come from a long line of The Knights Templar.”

(Cheyne) Profoundly petrified in awe and fear of the revelation of such an ancient and dangerous weapon, the young guard smiled gently as he slowly reached for his radio stating, “M-my Sergeant is a tremendous fan of such weapons; I’ll call him o-over so he can enjoy this also.”

(Karen) Great, just what she needed, a fan! Okay, if she played this right though perhaps she could get some help with this mission after all!

(Brandon) “While even with humankind’s many accomplishments thermal detonators remain a thing of science fiction, I hold at my fingertips the power of awesome devastation,” said Destiny, “So why don’t you take the night off and join me in the unrivaled fun of some giant scorpion slaying?”

(Cheyne) “L-look, Lady. My name is Kyle, and I have a family to provide for and a duty station to h-hold down. I don’t have the t-time or inclination to go hunting after some s-scorpions.”

(Karen) “Well, excuse me!” exclaimed Destiny, “I thought a secret member of the Juggling Jester....Jolly JugmeisterWHATEVER....would want in on this, but I guess I misjudged you.”

(Tom) Destiny saw the conflict in Kyle’s eyes, like a doe contemplating her safety, whether she should rest or run. “Okay, look” she sighed, “if you slay some scorpions with me and go with me to deliver the venom, there will be bountiful compensation for you and your family.”

(Brandon) “If by venom you mean the acidic green syrup that melts through flesh and bone, I think I’m going to miss out on the fun tonight,” said Kyle, “But my buddy Brian here will join you.”

(Karen) The smirk on Brian’s face sent a slight shiver down Destiny’s spine, but desperate times called for desperate measures. She smiled widely, “Well, whatcha say Brian? Shall we show this amateur juggler how it’s done?”

(Cheyne) Brian made some quick and enthusiastic hand gestures to Kyle, who translated emphatically, “Well, it appears he’s been dreaming of it,” said Kyle. At this moment it finally dawned on her that Brian hadn’t said a word up till now not because he was shy, but because he, like so many on this planet in their early twenties, had suffered through the Plague that had scorched their voice box and left their mouths soundless.

(Brandon) Destiny knew the relic she pursued was rumored to possess magical healing powers, and if Section 11 had a monopoly on that kind of restorative ability, they'd be filthy rich. But, to the matter at hand, Destiny tried to employ her most refined hand signals, giving Brian a thumbs up "yes" and a motion to "let's go."

(Karen) Since it was nearly shift change anyway, Kyle swung the gate open and hustled Brian and Destiny out of the secure zone. As the concern about crossing the checkpoint vanished, the weight of what lay ahead settled upon Destiny's shoulders like a 75-pound python.

(Cheyne) Brian, however, was overly exuberant and making his hand signals with increasing speed. "My apologies, Brian, I never learned sign language," said Destiny.

(Brandon) Destiny, internally more frustrated than her words admitted, resolved not to allow a minor communication problem to hinder the night's progress, since killing a giant scorpion would take both of them. She made her right hand creepy-crawl in the palm of her left hand, and then formed her left hand into a handgun, pointed her index finger at her right hand, and lowered her thumb, effectively pulling the trigger.

(Karen) Brian's eyes grew wide, though whether from fear or excitement Destiny did not know. But never in a light year could she have predicted what he did next!

(Mark) She suspected it was fear as she noticed Brian had peed himself a bit. But then something even more amazing happened, Brian spoke, and not just one or two words; she was confused!

(Cheyne) "Serve Me" came out in what appeared to be a harsh and grating scream as his eyes rolled back, and he ascended off the ground ever so slightly. Destiny was so transfixed by this sight that it was the heat of the light engulfing the ancient ring on her hand that she noticed before the now all-encompassing light itself.

(Brandon) As the dark presence manifested through the passive body of Brian, Destiny let a smile touch her lips, “Look Cthulhu,” she said, “we both know as long as I’m wearing this little sparkle (she held up her hand) I’m immune to your unique persuasions, so why don’t you chill out, relax, and let Brian have his own mind back for a while?”

(Karen) The atmosphere around her shuddered as light pulsed before blinking out again. Brian crumpled to the ground, a dazed look slowly fading from this face.

(Tom) “That...was too easy,” she said, “He’s never just given up like tha—” HSSSSS... Six green lights appeared in the distance. Thrusting closer they appeared to be eyes. Scorpion eyes.

(Brandon) Destiny was aware of two things: she knew giant scorpions usually had red eyes, and in that one troubling vision that one time Cthulhu definitely had angry, green eyes. She reached the only conclusion—giant mutated angry Cthulhu scorpion—and drew her magic sword Quinthyra, ready to defend the unconscious Brian.

(Matt) Quinthyra’s faint gold glow made a soft humming noise as Destiny held it out in forward battle pose. Curiously it seemed as though the approaching eyes had slowed in their approach.

(Karen) “My precious, Destiny, do you really think you can end our relationship so easily?! You do understand that if that were MY intention you and the mute would already be subatomic matter right now, don’t you my little pet?!?”

(Brandon) “Look,” said Destiny, “I need to kill that scorpion you’re using as a mouthpiece and take its venom, but as if that wasn’t a big enough problem, you had to come stalking around. All I can say is, I’m working on it, so as long as you keep allowing me, and Brian, to exist, I’ll keep getting you what you want.”

(Cheyne) “I will be a guarantee of your safety and the success of your quest on this terrible tundra,” the voice growled in her head. “But you must answer me three questions.”

(Karen) "These riddles are not complex ...once you have the key. One you possess, but the others will have to be discovered on the journey ... or the consequences will be most ... uh ... unfortunate!"

(Brandon) "Yes," said Destiny, "I know I have time, that's always your first question, some riddle about this thing devouring all other things, like trees, kings, and mountains. Do I have to answer the other questions right now?"

(Tom) "Destiny, my child, you are not Beyoncé, so stop acting like a diva! Answer the other questions!" the voice commanded.

(Karen) "Fine, if you're going to be all pissy about it! Number two, yes, I have the fortitude to go forward with the mission ... I'm here, aren't I?"

(Cheyne) "And finally," said Destiny, "the flight speed of an unladen pigeon is 31-40 mph." Somehow the voice humphed psychically, and said, "Not waiting for questions is a sure sign of insolence."

(Brandon) "Next time I'm sure you'll stump me with some obscure reference," said Destiny, "This just boils down to the fact that, you've spent so much time inside my head, you haven't realized I'm inside yours."

(Karen) If it had served no other purpose, the egotistical interchange had at least allowed Brian to collect his scattered wits and regain a modicum of composure. That would have to do, thought Destiny, because, as confident as she appeared during the interchange, she really was concerned about time...outside the secure zone time was not on her side.

(Mark) Just then she remembered the immortal words of that famous oracle Mick Jagger, "Time, Time, Time, is on my side, yes it is!"

(Cheyne) "Don't fret for you are safe around me," the voice slithered through her mind. "I'll start the questions... What do you believe you will accomplish with that ring?"

(Brandon) "I wear this ring as an experiment to further explore the side effects that emerge from extended exposure to its materials," said Destiny, "As one of the few who would risk so much to acquire such critical knowledge, which may prove a great good to humanity, it may be the most altruistic thing I've ever done."

(Karen) Of course, it would likely also be the most foolish thing she'd ever done. Wait, make that second most ... there was this whole scorpion "adventure" which she really needed to get on with!!

(Cheyne) "Altruism, you say," the voice humphed into her skull. "Who are you to be altruistic with such power when mastery could make you a mighty queen for the worlds to behold and despair?"

(Brandon) "As I'm thinking about it," said Destiny, "There's the whole 'I'll remain Galadriel' option, but on the other hand there's the 'civilizations kneeling at my feet.' At the moment, I'm on the fence, but, if this conversation goes much longer, all my lovely scorpions are going to burrow out of the morning sunlight."

(Karen) As confident as Destiny had been when she answered Cthulhu's first question, time was not, technically speaking, on her side. Now outside the powered shell of the city, she could no longer bend it. And while the nights were challenging enough, if she didn't secure the scorpion venom before sunrise, surviving the daylight in the wastelands would bring challenges she did not want to consider at the moment.

(Brandon) At this point in the story, Eterine Lighthouse looked up from the computer and realized it was around 2 in the morning. She saved her work, closed her word processor, and shut

down her computer. As she got ready for bed, a glance at her wedding ring slowly filled her mind with memories, all the adventure that ring stood for. She took her meds, turned out the light, slipped into bed, and let her memories fill her dreams. She was so thankful for her husband Brian.

The End