WOODGOLD DISAPPEARS

Fiction by Rolf Auer

For The Hackers & Phillip K. Dick

May 22, 2011

It was the start of the Rein of Terror — marked by the worldwide war on terror. It was a stupid, neverending, unwinnable war designed to boost false patriotism and military budgets.

As in any totalitarian regime, the intellectuals were the first to begin disappearing. They were picked off singly at first, so nobody noticed right away. But some people did.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

"Have you seen Woodgold lately?" said one of the hackers into the air.

"No, why?"

"I don't know. I'm just used to seeing his unshaven face darkening our doorway from time to time."

"Where do you suppose he's gone?"

"I'm not sure, but you know what? I've seen stories buried deep in the Net about poets and the like disappearing."

"Isn't Woodgold a poet?"

"An obscure one."

"Think he was snatched? And if so, what for?"

"Well, he *was* political."

"Should we try to find him?"

"Why not? *He's* helped *us* before."

The hackers settled in to what they do best; they went at their computers like purebred thoroughbreds hitting a fresh track. Their first objectives were the government and military computer systems.

<center>*   *   *</center>

Over at the Fraser Institute Ministry of Truth, in a secluded lab in the depths of the building, Woodgold was wired up like a Christmas tree to some kind of skullcap mesh of electrodes. He was in an induced coma-state. Some technicians were attending to him.

Bending over a nearby monitor was Supreme Leader Protend Sphere, peering intently at the screen.

"So what am I looking at here?" he asked the Chief Technician, who was standing nearby.

"Well," said the Technician, "you know how poets are more sensitive to certain things in the space/time continuum?"

"Yeah, so?" Sphere despised poets. In fact, he despised *all* artists, but especially writers.

"We've got him in a man/machine feedback loop that amplifies any dreams he might have of the future."

Sphere glanced up. "So I'm seeing the future? The future of what?"

The Chief Technician paused, unsure of how to proceed in the presence of such power. "The future of whatever concerns a poet the most. In this case, since Woodgold was a political poet, we're looking at the future of the war on terror."

Sphere seemed interested now. "Really. And what are we supposed to learn from this?"

"Troop deployments. Directed military spending. Where to deliver armaments. Everything we need to know about how to win the war on terror."

Sphere turned to go, then stopped. "How long can he last like this?"

"Not long. But we can always replace him."

"Keep me apprised," commanded the Supreme Leader, striding out of the building.

<p style="text-align:center">*　　　　*　　　　*</p>

"Got him!" exclaimed one hacker.

"Frick!" expostulated another. "Why'd it take so long?"

"Because he's being held in the Fraser Institute Ministry of Truth. Place is a fortress."

"So how do we get to him?"

"Very simple," said the discoverer, grinning an evil Woodgoldean grin. "It's lights out at the Fraser Institute."

"Ah. A night raid, during the day, no doubt?"

"Exactly. And we have to get to him fast. They're burning through him like a candle lit at both ends."

The hackers began planning.

<p style="text-align:center">*　　　　*　　　　*</p>

"Woodgold! Woodgold!! Wake up!" said the hacker who had originally discovered his whereabouts, shaking Woodgold vigorously.

"Wha—?" said Woodgold, sitting up and shaking his head groggily. "What the frick happened to me?"

"No time. We have to get out of here."

"Yuh, sure thing," said Woodgold.

Just then, they heard voices.

"Shhh!" hushed one hacker. "It's the Supreme Leader and some of his minions."

"Oh good," said Woodgold, picking up the future-monitor. "I have a present for him." He went over and stood inside the doorway. He motioned the three hackers who had saved him to stay put.

Sphere came through the doorway first, looking at the hackers, puzzled.

"Oh, Supreme Leader?" said Woodgold behind him, softly.

"Yes?" said Sphere, turning.

Woodgold smashed the monitor full force into Sphere's skull, splattering bits of brain, blood, and bone everywhere. The Supreme Leader's dead body fell to the floor; oddly, the monitor somehow ended up in one of his hands.

"Like what you see now?" said Woodgold to the body.

The minions, thoroughly freaked out by this madman, ran off.

"C'mon men" said Woodgold. "Let's get out of here."

$$* \qquad * \qquad *$$

Back in the hackers' underground totally guarded private meeting place, the hackers and Woodgold were conferring.

"Of course," said Woodgold, "we'll have to find the others if we can."

"No problem." said the hackers. "Now that we've done it once, it's just a party trick, to us, that is."

"Hey thanks." said Woodgold. "I didn't even know what hit me, it happened so fast."

"You're welcome." said one.

"And the next project is to take down the rest of the government?" asked Woodgold.

"We can do that." said the hackers.

"Yeah, I know I could depend on you guys." Woodgold turned to slouch out of the room.

"Hey Woodgold," said one of the hackers, tossing him a comb. "Comb your hair."