



Erimem: Auld Acquaintance © Iain McLaughlin

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Auld Acquaintance

ERIMEM

AULD ACQUAINTANCE

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
and never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
and auld lang syne?*

‘Are you ready?’ asked Andy. She wandered across to the edge of the cliff from which Erimem was peering down into the water below.

‘It’s hard to believe that the water is several kilometres deep,’ Erimem answered. ‘There is no beach. Just a drop of kilometres.’

Andy pulled in a deep breath of cold air. She knew that snow was coming. The weather control station had announced that the snow would begin at seven thirty local time and continue, growing heavier until it was a full-on blizzard by nine. The temperature in the north of the area would drop as well and the cold would spread south. There was a good chance that the waters would freeze close to the shore.

She peered over the edge at the waters that had so intrigued Erimem. ‘Mars will be cold and frozen again in about two hours,’ she said. ‘At least this bit will. That’s the bugger with Mars being such a small planet. The weather systems really cover big chunks of it. Anyway, we better get back to Earth or we’ll be stuck here freezing our very cute asses off.’ She pointed over the edge. ‘Much as I’d love to see the Valles Marineris iced up, there’s a New Year’s Eve party waiting for us back home.’

Erimem nodded her agreement. ‘Why is the university

having a Scottish party?’ she asked. ‘There are not that many Scottish people on the staff, and the Scottish students all went home for the holidays.’

‘It’s called ceilidh,’ Andy explained and it’s...’ she puffed her cheeks out. ‘New Year was always supposed to be a big deal in Scotland. I spoke to a couple of guys from Edinburgh who says it’s not nearly so big up there now other than in Princes Street or at the other big street parties. They both said their parents go to bed and ignore it. “To avoid the bloody awful telly,” according to one of them.’

Erimem frowned slightly. ‘The more time I spend in your century, the more it confuses me.’

‘Me too,’ Andy admitted. ‘We’ll be listening to music they usually don’t listen to in Scotland and doing dances hardly anybody under thirty in Scotland knows how to do for the sake of being traditional when we’re not sure if there’s any basis in the tradition at all.’

‘Then why do it?’

‘Because it’s fun?’ Andy suggested.

That seemed to be good enough for Erimem. ‘All right,’ she said. ‘Let’s go home.’

Both of the friends reached for the time travel rings they wore. They each twisted the central band on their ring and were engulfed by the expected spitting ball of energy which they expected to transport them home. However, instead of the cold but familiar plain blue and white ball of energy, green and purple flared among the electric blue.

Even as they disappeared, they knew something was wrong.

Erimem had been nauseous on the first few occasions she had used the rings to travel through time. Since then, however, she had grown accustomed to the process and barely felt any disorientation from her journeys. This time it was worse than even the first journey. Her knees buckled and she fought hard to avoid vomiting. After a few seconds the spinning in her head slowed and her retching stopped. Forcing herself upright, Erimem was confused to find her villa in darkness. More worryingly there was no sign of Andy. Erimem had expected to

find her friend on the reception platform by her side. Instead, Andy simply wasn't there.

Leaning on the wall for support, Erimem hurried through into the main living area of her villa. The living room was dark and cold. The shutters covered the windows and the curtains at the great glass doors leading out onto the terrace were closed. The air in the room felt stale. No, it felt *dead*, as if nothing had lived in the room for a long time.

Pulling the curtains at the door, Erimem reached for the door handle. To her surprise the catch wasn't locked.

Outside, the sun was settling on the horizon. It wasn't a real sun, she knew that. Andy had programmed the Habitat's artificial environment to look as it did... a villa overlooking the Nile. Andy had also programmed the grounds to host a herd of woolly mammoths. The herd was in the lower pasture of the grounds by the side of the river. The size of the herd shocked her. When she had seen the mammoths the previous day there had been around thirty of the friendly giants. Now the herd numbered over a hundred, occupying both sides of the river. Despite the herd's size the meadow stretching from the villa's terrace down to the river was overgrown and untended when just a few hours earlier it had been neatly cut.

'Something must have gone wrong with the programme,' she murmured quietly. She turned to go back inside but as she did she saw a movement in the meadow away from the herd. A single figure was slowly walking back towards the villa, though she appeared to be staring at the mammoths. Erimem started down the meadow's slope towards the figure. She had been taught by Antranak, her dear old friend and mentor, to study the way a person moves. Each person's gait and posture and the set of their shoulder added all together to make them immediately recognisable. The identity of the figure in the meadow evaded Erimem. There was something familiar but not instantly recognisable.

'Hello?' she called.

The figure turned and then froze. It stood completely still.

Erimem moved closer. 'Hello?' Erimem repeated. 'Can you tell me why you are here? And can you tell me what has happened?'

‘You?’ The woman’s voice was old. ‘It can’t be you.’ The woman squinted and peered closer. ‘You’re... gone...’

Erimem didn’t hear the words. She was staring in surprise as she recognised the woman. Under the grey hair, the wrinkles of many decades of life the face was undeniably Andy’s. At a guess, Erimem would put her friend’s age at sixty or perhaps seventy. ‘Andy?’

The older woman’s hands reached out to Erimem. Her knees buckled and Erimem had to catch the woman to stop her from falling.

‘Come with me,’ Erimem said, easing the woman back into an upright position. ‘We will talk when you sit.’

It took a few minutes for them to reach the terrace, where Erimem settled the elderly Andy in a lounger, which creaked with age and age. ‘You *are* Andy Hansen?’ Erimem said. She tried to hide her concern but was unable to cover her confusion.

Old Andy nodded. ‘How can you be here?’ she croaked.

‘I live here?’ Erimem answered.

Andy shook her head. ‘More than fifty years ago.’

‘What?’

‘New Year’s Eve,’ the old woman said. ‘2017, I’m sure it was. You just disappeared.’

‘How?’

‘We don’t know.’ Andy looked as if tears threatened to fall. ‘We were coming back from Mars. Something went wrong. It was green and purple instead of blue. I got back but I was unconscious. Helena brought me round. You just didn’t get back at all. We went back to Mars to look for you. We tried to analyse the machinery and the rings... we never found you. The computer said you were most likely dead, disintegrated, scattered in time and space.’ The tears the old woman had held back began to flow. ‘We lost you.’ She caught the younger woman and clung on tight. ‘We lost you.’

‘Fifty years?’ Erimem whispered. ‘Are Ibrahim and Helena still alive?’

Andy couldn’t look at her. The silver hair shimmered as she shook her head. ‘Ibrahim died a few weeks after we lost you. Somebody thought they’d seen you in Shoreditch. He was driving there... it was winter, the car slid on ice. He died

instantly.'

'What of Helena?'

Another shake of the head. 'She left not long after the funeral. She went with *Doctors Without Borders*. She needed to save lives. We stayed in touch for a year but... tragedy can kill friendships. And the world has seen a lot of tragedy in the past fifty years. We needed you. Where were you?'

Erimem was at a loss. 'When we left Mars on that New Year's Eve, before the Scottish party... that was today. I came here. I don't know why or what went wrong but I went from there to here.'

'That doesn't make sense,' Andy sounded equally bemused. 'We left together.'

'Then we will find out what happened,' Erimem said, practical as ever.

'How?'

Erimem waved a hand around, indicating the entire Habitat. 'The computer in this place is the most powerful in the world.'

'It's not in the world,' Andy corrected automatically.

'Does that matter?' Erimem asked. 'What is important is that you understand how it works and how to find answers in it..'

'Once, maybe,' Andy said thoughtfully. 'Long ago. I haven't used it in over forty years. I don't remember any of it.'

'You know machinery.'

'I did,' Andy argued. 'Life changed. The world changed.'

'What happened?' Erimem asked.

'Earth got noticed,' Andy sighed. 'Not everybody was friendly. Not everybody from Earth was friendly, either. Some of it we could have stopped if... just if things were different. I couldn't take risks anymore.' She looked up from the floor. 'Olivia and me, we adopted kids. At least until the authorities somehow found out Olivia was from the past. They took her away...' Andy's voice broke.

'Where is she now?' Erimem asked. She already knew the answer would not be a pleasant one.

'They didn't hold her for long,' Andy said in a hollow voice. 'She developed cancer and they wouldn't treat her unless she told them everything about how she got here... she didn't say anything. They'd taken Olivia, they took our kids so I had to

run.'

'Why didn't you just tell them?' Erimem asked. 'About this place.'

Andy shook her head. 'So they could weaponise time travel? The world – especially politicians – aren't ready to have the responsibility of time travel yet. Olivia knew that. She died for it.'

'I am sorry,' Erimem said. There was nothing else she could think to say.

'It's not your fault,' Andy said gruffly. 'If you had been here, though. If you had been here we might have stood a chance. But you weren't.'

'Perhaps,' Erimem said, 'if we can find out why I was brought here instead...'

Andy cut her off. 'I'm too old to deal with this stuff now. I can't remember any of it,' she said in a cold, bitter voice.

'Do you remember how to try?' Erimem demanded. 'Andrea Hansen never gave up.'

Andy's reply was blunt and gruff. 'Well, times change.'

'For you, perhaps,' Erimem answered. 'Not for me.'

'Good for you,' Andy said bitterly.

Erimem had no interest in arguing with her friend... in truth she had no idea how to talk with this old version of her friend. 'If you will not help, I will deal with this myself.'

'You don't know how the equipment really works,' Andy said in a sour voice. 'You never did. It pissed me off that you never learned.'

'It irritates me that you never saw fit to teach me,' Erimem retorted.

Andy snapped back, 'You never asked.'

Erimem tried to stamp down on her irritation at Andy's bitterness. She was as confused as her friend but she wanted answers and that meant she had no time for Andy's resentment. 'I am sorry for your suffering. I am sorry that I was not here to help you when you needed me but I will not accept blame for it.'

'Fine.'

That single word pushed Erimem to anger. 'Tell me. If you are so angry with me, why are you here?'

'Because,' Andy answered, 'Just... because.'

‘That is not an answer,’ Erimem snapped.

‘After fifty years it’s all I have.’

Erimem honestly had no idea how to argue with her friend, and so decided not to try. ‘I do not have time to deal with this now. First I must find what happened.’

‘What happened to you?’ Andy asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Not what happened to *us*. To *me*.’

‘I cannot change that,’ Erimem snapped.

‘But it’s about *you*.’

‘I will not argue with you,’ Erimem said with exaggerated calm. ‘You are my friend.’

‘It hasn’t felt like that for a long time,’ Andy said quietly.

‘Then why are you here?’ demanded Erimem.

‘What?’

‘Why are you here?’ Erimem repeated. ‘You are hiding. Why come here to hide in my home?’

‘Where else could I go?’ Andy answered simply.

‘I know where I must go.’ Erimem turned and walked back into her villa. At the doors she threw the curtains wide open to let light in. ‘Open all curtains and shutters,’ she said. The computer running the Habitat’s environment reacted and the curtains and shutters over the windows slid open, letting the late afternoon sun brighten the room. ‘Lights on,’ she added, and the room’s lights instantly brought the illumination up to the expected level.

Crossing to the chamber which housed the time travel mechanism, Erimem activated the computer and called up the details of her journey back to the villa. The screens displayed streams of data, some of which she understood but much of which might as well have been randomly chosen numbers and letters. It was meaningless. Erimem racked her brain, trying to find a way to filter the information. There seemed to be some kind of interference but she couldn’t find any way to isolate it or find its source.

‘Scan the ring,’ came a voice from her shoulder. She turned to see the elderly version of Andy beside her. She was pointing to the time travel ring on Erimem’s thumb. ‘The ring must have been affected by something. If there’s a residue on it, and you

can find some kind of synchronised harmony you might be able to track down the source.'

Erimem frowned and shook her head. 'I recognised many of those words but the sentences made little sense to me.'

'I mean... ' Andy looked at the younger woman for a long moment then sighed in resignation. 'I mean get out of the damn way.'

Erimem stepped aside and allowed Andy to take control of the computer. Her hands moved at a far slower, more considered pace that she had been the young woman Erimem knew.

'There,' Andy said. 'It's scanned.'

'I didn't feel it.'

'It's done anyway,' Andy answered. She screwed her eyes up and stared at the screens. She shook her head and fished a pair of spectacles from her pocket. She pushed the glasses onto her face. 'Eyes aren't what they were,' she complained. She ran her finger across the screen, searching for information in the scrolling data. 'Got it.'

Erimem moved to Andy's shoulder. The older woman's finger was pointing at a line of text picked out in orange. 'What is it?'

'You read it,' Andy muttered. 'Your eyesight's better than mine.'

Erimem did as she was told. 'A small compound outside New York, December 31st, 2017. There is an address as well. It appears to be quite remote'

Andy's grey eyebrows rose. 'That's the day we travelled but where are we in the display?' asked Andy. 'And is there a time?'

Erimem's fingers ran across the screen. 'There we are.' Her finger moved on. 'And that is when we were returning.'

'There it is again,' Andy said, pointing at earlier lines of text. 'And there... and there, and there. It's a regular pulse.' She sucked her lip. 'The interference was being transmitted regularly to catch the next time the equipment was used.'

'It's deliberate?' Erimem asked before quickly answering her own question. 'Of course it was. It stopped after I was diverted.' She tapped the screen. 'Can you programme the machine to send me to this place?'

'You want to go there?' Andy sounded surprised.

‘Of course.’

‘You just arrived here,’ protested Andy.

‘Yes,’ Erimem answered patiently, ‘and now I am going there. Come with me.’

Andy shook her head automatically. ‘I’m too old.’

Erimem shook her head. ‘The Andy I know would say that is “bollocks”, I believe.’

Her friend snorted. ‘The Andy you know left the room fifty years ago.’

‘Don’t you want to know why?’ challenged Erimem.

‘You’re damn right I do,’ Andy replied, ‘but I’m old.’ She sighed. ‘Give me five minutes to go to the loo then... okay.’

Erimem collected a pair of *khopesh* fighting daggers from a wall where they had hung on display and returned to the travel room. Andy rejoined here a few minutes later. Erimem smiled at her friend. ‘Send us there.’

The sparking energy of the transit through time deposited Erimem and Andy into darkness.

Before the energy faded Erimem had caught sight of walls. She guessed it was a large room perhaps ten metres by fifteen. ‘I can’t say,’ Erimem answered, ‘but the room is large.’

‘Sounds metallic,’ added Andy, ‘or plastic, maybe. The echo is a giveaway.’

‘Wait.’ Erimem fished in her pocket. A moment later the light on the back of the phone sent a dull light into the room. Banks of machinery and computers filled a sterile-looking white room.

‘There’s big money behind this,’ Andy said quietly.

‘See if you can find what these machines do,’ Erimem said.

Andy glared at her. ‘A “please” wouldn’t hurt. You’re not the bloody Pharaoh now.’

Erimem bit off a retort. What *her* Andy would call a “snarky reply” would only slow them down. ‘I know,’ she said. ‘The simple fact is that you have more knowledge of these machines than I do. You can find answers I cannot.’

Andy didn’t answer. Instead she shuffled to the nearest control panel. ‘It’s bloody dark in here. I need more light to see in these days. See if you can find a switch or something.’

While Andy inspected the controls, Erimem began feeling

her way around the wall, searching for light controls. They needed to see what was happening before whoever was running the place arrived to... she stopped and turned to her friend. 'Why is no-one here?' she asked.

In the gloom she saw Andy's head turn. 'What?'

'We are here to find out who diverted our travel,' Erimem said. 'If we came here when they did that, why is this place empty? Why are they not operating the controls? Where are they?'

'I was wondering when you'd ask that,' Andy said.

'Well?' Erimem demanded.

'We're here two hours before they actually operated this stuff to interfere with our transport,' Andy said.

'Why?'

Andy took a breath. 'To stop the interference from happening.'

'We can't do that,' Erimem said automatically. 'We must not change time without knowing...'

'They changed time,' Andy howled. 'They interfered with our transport back from Mars and stopped time following its path.'

'And ruined your life?' Erimem asked gently.

'Yes,' Andy replied bitterly. Fifty years of loss and anger poured from her. 'It wasn't supposed to be like this. We were young. We were having fun. I was in love and I had found a family in you and Helena and Ibrahim and these bastards took it all. They took Olivia and my kids. That can't have been what was supposed to happen.'

'Life is not always fair,' Erimem said gently. 'I lost my family, too.'

Andy punched a few buttons and operated several controls. 'And you'll lose another family unless I do this.'

Andy's words concerned Erimem. 'What have you done?' she asked.

Before Andy could answer, the lights in the room flared into life and an alarm blared.

Andy shrugged. 'One thing about having lived the last fifty years – I've learned some shit on the way.'

The doors behind Erimem opened and two men ran in. One

wore a white lab coat, the other was clad in black combat gear and carried an automatic rifle.

‘What have you done?’ the technician called.

The security guard didn’t wait to speak. He was raising the rifle and Erimem saw his thumb flick off the gun’s safety catch. Her hand flashed and a *khopesh* flew through the air. It smashed through the guard’s protective goggles and tore through his eye deep into his brain. She was yanking the dagger free before the dead man had hit the floor. She swung the blade at the technician, spraying his coat with blood and bits of brain and eye.

‘Who are you?’ Erimem demanded. ‘Why did you interfere with our travel?’

The technician cowered backwards. ‘I... don’t kill me.’

Andy shuffled towards him. ‘If you don’t tell her I’ll be the one that kills you.’

The bloodied *khopesh* pressed against the technician’s throat. ‘Tell us,’ Erimem said coldly. She pressed the blade hard against the skin and saw a red line appear on the man’s throat. ‘I swear I will open your neck to the air.’

‘I did as I was told,’ the technician babbled quickly. ‘I don’t know who funded the experiment, but they said they’d seen my paper on matter transportation and wanted to finance experiments. They didn’t start changing things until I was well into the process and by then... it was too late. I couldn’t say no. They would have stopped my work.’ A second alarm sounded and the technician’s eyes widened. ‘No.’

‘What is it?’ Erimem demanded.

‘The building’s on fire,’ the technician whimpered.

‘And locked down,’ Andy added. ‘I don’t want the Fire Service getting in to save anything.’ From inside her coat she produced a disc the size of half a dozen CDs stack on top of each other. ‘I had the Habitat make these explosives before we came,’ she told Erimem. ‘They’ll reduce this entire place to ash.’

Erimem thought briefly. ‘Very well,’ she said. ‘Where do we set them?’

Andy nodded. ‘I know where.’

Erimem shoved the technician towards the door. ‘Go. Get your people out of here. Have...’ she looked questioningly at Andy.

‘Six minutes,’ her friend supplied.

‘You have six minutes,’ Erimem repeated. ‘If you are still here after that, your death is on your own hands.’

‘But we’re locked down,’ the technician protested.

Erimem pushed him towards the door. ‘Then you should be more careful whose money you take.’ She pushed him out of the door. A roar of gunfire filled the corridor and the technician juddered as a spray of bullets tore into his body. He dropped to the floor, his eyes wide, staring and lifeless.

Erimem hurried to the guard she had killed and scooped up his rifle. She swung it out around the door and released a burst of fire to discourage the technician’s killer from coming closer. ‘I think we are trapped in here,’ she said before releasing a second spray on bullets.

‘Doesn’t matter,’ Andy replied. ‘The heat of these explosives will take the building down even if they’re all in this room.’

‘Can you change the timing down from six minutes?’ asked Erimem. ‘I don’t think I can hold them back for that long.’

Andy’s old fingers moved on the discs. ‘Done. Thirty seconds on each.’

Erimem fired another burst of fire and heard a squawk of pain from, she gauged, about ten metres along the corridor. Gunfire came back. ‘There is more than one,’ she said.

‘There would be,’ Andy said, and for the first time Erimem heard her friend in this old woman’s tone. ‘You never did find the easy way.’

‘So says the woman who was brave enough to have a relationship with a girlfriend three hundred years in the past.’

Andy smiled. ‘That was something, wasn’t it?’

Erimem took two of the discs from Andy and skipped to the other side of the door. ‘I will slide two of these along the floor out into the corridor. You send one in the other direction. The fourth can have this room.’

‘Done,’ Andy agreed.

On Erimem’s nod they both moved. Andy skidded one of the discs along the floor into the corridor while Erimem sent two sliding in the opposite direction. Andy pushed the fourth towards the centre of their room.

The numbers on top of the discs had reached **0:03** when

Erimem and Andy twisted the central bands on their travel rings and disappeared in a flash of energy. A moment later, the countdown reached **0:00** and the discs exploded. The heat turned the building and the surrounding compound to flames and ash. The blaze was hot enough to keep the Fire Service at bay when they arrived some time later. When they finally did move into the affected area, there was nothing left of the building, its contents or of the people who had worked there save for fine grey ash.

The ball of energy deposited Erimem back onto the reception platform in the travel room of her villa. Andy was beside her. For just a fraction of a second, her friend flickered between old and young before as Erimem blinked, Andy was young and vital as she had been when they had left Mars.

Andy's mouth opened. She appeared confused and disoriented. 'That was... something.'

Erimem led her friend from the platform through into her living area. 'What do you remember?' she asked her friend.

Andy was still confused. 'We left Mars and...' she shook her head again. 'There's something, you know how sometimes you remember that you had a dream but you don't actually remember the dream itself?' She shrugged. 'I don't remember what it was but I know it wasn't good.'

'I believe you,' Erimem said. Impulsively she pulled Andy into a hug.

'What's that for?' Andy said. 'I'm not complaining. I like a hug as much as the next girl but I didn't expect this one.'

'I am just pleased you are all right,' Erimem said with a smile, 'and pleased I am here with you and the rest of my family.'

'You're getting sentimental awful early this year,' Andy said. 'Isn't there some rule that we only get emotional after midnight?'

'I will take your word for this,' Erimem laughed. They started towards the exit from Erimem's villa out onto the landing of Ibrahim and Helena's house where the newly married couple should have returned from a last supply run to the supermarket on which they had been accompanied by Andy's partner, Olivia. Being from over three hundred years in the past, Olivia was

increasingly fascinated by the Twenty First Century and more confident in spending time there.

‘Before you take Olivia back to her own time we should make efforts to ensure that nothing can interfere with our progress when we travel through time.’

A surprised expression flitted across Andy’s face. ‘That’s... I’m not sure what it is, but I think it’s a belter of an idea. I’m not exactly sure why but I do.’

‘Good.’ Erimem nodded again. She linked her arm through Andy’s. ‘But first we should celebrate with those we love.’

‘Good call,’ said Andy.

‘Completely destroyed?’ The woman’s voice was cold and spoke of old American money. ‘Any survivors?’ She paused for the answer. ‘Good. At least we’re spared cleaning them up. None of the equipment survived?’ Another pause for a reply. ‘That is disappointing. Do we know what caused the fire? No matter.’ She hung up and stared out of the window at the skyscrapers beyond. Her office towered high over most of them. ‘No matter at all. We’ll find her some other way.’

Auld Acquaintance

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THE LAST PHARAOH

by Iain McLaughlin and Claire Bartlett

Foreword by Caroline Morris

After a freak electrical storm that seems to happen indoors, a young woman is found in the Egyptian exhibit of a London museum, and she seems to look exactly like the face on the death-mask of the uncrowned Pharaoh Erimem...

What is she doing inside the exhibit? How did she get there? Is she really a Pharaoh from 1400BC? And just who is willing to search time and space to find and assassinate her?

THE LAST PHARAOH is the first in a series of novels, novellas and short story anthologies taking Erimem, a former companion of the 5th Doctor, on a new set of adventures travelling to the past, the future and into deep space.

THE LAST PHARAOH takes Erimem and a group of 21st century students far into the past, to Actium in Greece where Erimem meets the famed Cleopatra VII on the eve of a vital battle which could end Egypt's existence as a free country and condemn it to life as a Roman province. Two great rulers of Egypt come into conflict over what Egypt needs to do in order to survive, and both Erimem and Cleopatra face their own personal battles for survival.

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THE BEAST OF STALINGRAD

by J^ain McLaughlin

Looking at her timeline, Erimem is intrigued by evidence that at some point in her life, she visits the Nazi-besieged city of Stalingrad in 1942. Against the advice of her friends, Erimem travels back through time to discover what happened in Russia during those terrible times in the war.

Erimem's friends all have the same question - why is she suddenly so obsessed with visiting Stalingrad at this most brutal time?

With German forces relentlessly bombarding the city, the people are freezing and starving... and worse, there are stories of a demon or a beast, stalking the ruined streets of Stalingrad, devouring anyone it meets.

When Erimem arrives she finds a city under attack both from the invading German armies and from a dark force in the shadows..

Also contains THE ONE PLACE, a bonus short story by Claire Bartlett.

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From her new home in 21st Century London, Erimem is keen to explore the universe now that she has acquired technology that can transport she and her friends through space and time.

Curiosity drives them to explore the past, the future and far off distant worlds, discovering new friends and new dangers everywhere they go...

...INTO THE UNKNOWN.

A collection of short stories by a mixture of experienced and first-time authors including Jim Mortimore, Ian Farrington, Claire Bartlett, Kaitlin Moore, Iain McLaughlin and Julianne Todd.

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PRIME IMPERATIVE

by Julianne Todd

The deep-space probe ship Clinton has been out of communication with Earth since its encounter with an interstellar comet.

Erimem and her friends arrive on a space station high in Earth orbit just before the almost derelict Clinton is due to dock.

Very soon it is the space station and its crew who need to be rescued, but that would certainly mean the end of all human life on Earth.

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by *Jain McLaughlin*

Erimem travels centuries into the past in search of her friend, Andy, who is lost in a dangerous era of pirates and Highwaymen.

While Erimem, Helena and Ibrahim find themselves on a Caribbean island which comes under attack, Andy takes to the roads of England behind a mask before encountering the most deadly pirate terrorising the Caribbean...

As they all battle for survival, Andy is drawn into a far more unusual and surprising adventure...

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by Jain McLaughlin

In 276BC, a slave is beaten half to death by a demented princess...

In 1884, a woman calls upon the legendary explorer Allan Quatermain seeking passage to a lost city...

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The link between all three is Helena, the woman just days from marrying into Erimem's family in 2017. What is the link and how can Erimem save her family?

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