

Leo Vader
11/16/10
Creative Writing, 4th hour
Short Story

Frank sighed. "I don't know if Lewis ever understood me. He was the smartest guy I ever knew, and I know most of you feel the same way. But he never really understood any of us, did he? Us with our boring jobs, and our D pluses, and our inexplicably upset girlfriends." He tapped the podium rhythmically, pausing. "But he listened to me when I really needed him to, gave me advice, and always offered to go get more fruit snacks when I invariably ran out." The crowd did one of those quiet laughs, the kind that is all exhaling through the nose, no real vocalization. Lewis hated that. Frank started to tear up.

"Because that's the kind of guy he was. He could brighten any one's day, so long as they just got to know him. He loved his work, but he would put it aside in a second to help out a friend." Frank put his hand over his mouth, trying to control himself. "I used to be that friend. And now..." The room sat in silence. "I miss you, Lewis."

Lewis spoke without hesitation. He had been thinking of the right words since a date for the funeral was set. "Frank never quite got why I did the things I did. Why I would get so wrapped up with my equipment instead of talking to girls, or getting a job, or playing a sport. But he was just glad to see me happy. Because that's the kind of guy he was." Lewis paused to stare at his friend's quiet, lifeless body. The crowd waited.

"I may never know if there was a grand meaning in all of this beyond appreciating absolutely every second you have with the people you're closest to." Lewis backed away from the podium. "I know I did."

To Frank, every moment since Lewis' death was all about Lewis. He couldn't focus on

anything else, and he didn't want to. He had to check in on his parents, help plan the funeral, do everything he could to provide Lewis a somber, respectful exit from this world. But this drive home from the funeral parlor was the beginning of a new stage in Frank's life. From here on out, it was about moving on. He turned on the radio.

"...do you think about all of this?" said one radio personality to another.

"I think it's absolutely ridiculous! People don't just appear in the middle of Times Square!" Frank smiled weakly. *Urban Legends* was on.

"But we're beyond that. We've all come to terms with that. The real questions that are making our phones ring off the hook are does this machine work, and what are the implications of using it."

"Okay, slow down. Let's keep it to the first question: does this thing function in the manner intended, as a way of traveling between parallel dimensions. It relies entirely on the theory that there are an infinite number of parallel universes, each containing a possible outcome of every situation, past, present or future. So far we've seen no proof of that." Frank eyed the clock. Strange, this show wasn't supposed to be on for over an hour.

"Are you kidding me? The guy is saying that he used it to get here, and I definitely believe him. Because, you know, he appeared out of thin air in the heart of New York City!"

"Hey man, I'm holding out until the team investigating it gets some results. But I can at least respect the idea of going through an infinite number of dimensions where the device does not exist and making a ton of cash off suckers like us."

"See, I don't think suckers is the right term. Anybody would have a good use for this. This technology could be extremely beneficial to people who have lost a loved one, for example, and want to visit them in a version of our world where they never died."

This hit Frank, hard. He sat and thought, tapping the steering wheel rhythmically.

Lewis sat in the passenger seat, completely silent for the duration of the drive home. Being able to speak his mind at the funeral had made him feel a bit better about Frank. But he wasn't over it. And no one expected him to be, least of all his dad. That's why instead of making conversation he simply turned on the radio.

"...do you think about all of these diet pill recalls?" said one radio personality to another.

"It's really too bad. Lots of people got good use out of those pills, and it's a damn shame that a few weak-hearted individuals had to ruin this for them."

Lewis groaned. When was mankind going to do something useful.

"These are expired!"

Frank opened his eyes, just enough to see the aggressive, portly customer across the checkout counter. "What?" he sleepily muttered as he began swiping items over the scanner.

"These Cheez-Its are past their sell-by date!" the man said as he put them on the conveyor belt.

Frank groaned. "Sir, you're disturbing the other customers," he said, gesturing to the thoroughly weirded-out line of people following the patron.

"Good!" the man exclaimed. He turned towards the crowd. "He's selling expired Cheez-Its!"

"Yeah, and he's buying expired Cheez-Its, so who's the idiot." Frank said, to the amusement of the other customers. He then felt a familiar tap on his shoulder.

"Frank? A word?" inquired his manager. They stepped away from the counter. "Could someone ring this man up, please? So sorry, sir."

Frank was not in the mood to have this conversation again. "I know, I'll try to get more sleep and come to work with a positive attitude."

"No, that won't be enough this time. We're going to have to let you go."

A million thoughts hit Frank at once. He needed the money. He should apologize. It's too late. His first job didn't pay well enough. Maybe he could get another one. He could still apologize. God, he needed that money.

They gave him his last paycheck on the Friday of that week.

"Lewis, this isn't healthy. I know how hard it must have been to lose Frank, but it's been two months. You can't keep hiding from everything." Lewis' dad stepped back from the door, praying that his son would finally come out.

He gave up. He slowly walked back to his room and shut the door.

Lewis' door inched open. A hand slid out for just a moment, only to place a paper sign on the door. Hastily scrawled in black ink was "DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME."

Frank had to balance opening the box carefully, as to not damage the \$50,000 piece of equipment inside, and tearing the box open like a little kid on Christmas. He had worked so hard for this.

In addition to the stereo-sized inter-dimensional teleportation machine advertised on the box, there was an instructional DVD inside. He hastily popped it out and put it in his player.

The video faded in to images of beautiful lakes and parks. It showed a happy couple, staring out at the landscape. A laughing old man, scratching his dog behind the ears. A family of four, the father holding his baby daughter in the air. A pleasant voice narrated. "Hello, and thank you for purchasing what we're sure will be the most life-changing device you will ever own. So let's not waste time. Let's learn how to calibrate the device to get you to your perfect world."

Frank was ready.

Lewis' house was quiet, as most are around 4 AM. He figured it was safe to sneak out of

his room and get some food without having to talk to anyone. This time, his dad was waiting for him at the fridge.

“Do you want me to cook you something?” he asked, trying to keep the situation casual. Lewis kept to himself until his dad forfeited and headed for his room. Then Lewis called out.

“Listen dad, I really do appreciate that you care. But I’m fine. More than anything, dad, I want you to not worry about me.”

“How am I not supposed to worry?” he walked back towards Lewis. “You spend all day in your room. You don’t talk to me, you don’t talk to your friends. Just how the hell am I supposed to be all right with that!”

“Things are gonna change!” Lewis tried to explain, exasperated. “Things are gonna change soon, and they’re going to change the way that I want them to! So don’t worry about me!”

Frank wasn’t worried. He had all of his affairs in order. His friends and family understood what he was doing and why, and he couldn’t wait to do it. Regardless, he was savoring these last moments of this life of his. It was about to change in a way it hadn’t since Lewis died all those years ago. And he was ready for it.

He pushed the button and disappeared.

Lewis sat in his room as he had for so long and put the finishing touches on his machine. All the research he’s ever done, every project he’s ever worked on, all culminated in this unprecedented feat in engineering. He was extremely proud of himself. Things were going to be very different. And he was ready for a change.

He pushed the button and disappeared.