

The Magical Properties of Everyday Objects

Cosmologists confirmed today: the universe is now 2.997% magic.

The level has fallen below the Fong-Bishop Ratio, long considered a crucial threshold in the decline of enchantment that began almost a decade ago.

"Below three percent, the equations are non-linear. To put it in simpler terms, the world is like a gyroscope: enough angular momentum and you have an extremely stable system. As it slows down, it wobbles, predictably at first. But once the rate of spin declines below a certain level, we observe a phenomenon all children are familiar with—a spinning top is most chaotic just before it tips over. And then, in its new state, what do you have? A world turned onto its side."

Professor Helen Fong¹

We all know magical worlds, rich with illusion and impossibility. But what about a world only slightly magical, with that quotient decreasing day by day? A world in which magic is made even more valuable by extreme scarcity?

A world in which magic is controlled by large corporations. Productized into **Wishes™**, the easier to package, to market, to sell. The manufacturing of each Wish™ having become the province of lawyers: a state-of-the-art-wish, an actual piece of American-grade contemporary magic, hard to distinguish from a legal document, a bond offering, a complex debt agreement. A Wish™ nowadays drafted by a team, every word carefully chosen, running well over three hundred pages in length (including appendices, exhibits, service level agreements). Every word in a Wish now pre-litigated between two large corporations, the aggregate output of dozens, if not hundreds, of people. Every clause, proviso, exclusion and limitation the subject of endless linguistic, semantic, rhetorical and financial grappling.

¹ Co-Chair, Department of Magical Theory, University of California, Berkeley

Each condition, precedent and subsequent, the result of a thorough analysis of potential worlds, possible or otherwise, an attempt to obtain a precise outcome. Wishes™ funded by powerful interests, implemented with the force of law and money. A lot of money.

Corporations are in control now, and **there is no bigger corporation than M Co.**, an international conglomerate dominating all global-level wishes with close to seventy percent of the known supply of raw magical materials. Multi-billionaires remake the world on a regular basis, spending immense resources in an ongoing battle, the world as whiteboard, as conceptual battleground, each new Wish™ not undoing its predecessor wishes, but laying on top of them all. Powerful interests shape the world according to their own market-driven imaginations. What they believe they're fighting for is nothing less than the future of the realm. And, amidst all of this, a mystery, a catastrophe-in-the-making: where is the magic going?

Some speculate that it's being hidden by the corporations, vast stores of it stored offshore, underground, in space. Others believe the intense concentration of the magic itself is somehow causing the rapid decline, a violation of some undiscovered law of magic.

And still others suspect something even more troubling: the magic really is disappearing, leaking out of this universe and into another.

This is the hypothesis of **Dr. Helen Fong**. In her early career as a promising graduate student, Fong did groundbreaking research with her advisor and mentor, Dr. Stanley Bishop, laying the foundation for much of our understanding of the magical nature of the world, their theoretical insights eventually contributing to numerous practical and industrial applications, which have since been exploited by the magic industry; Dr. Fong's guilt over these contributions leading to her ending her partnership (and personal relationship) with Dr. Bishop, and subsequently becoming an outspoken advocate against commercial magic, and against M Co. in particular.

A few weeks ago, on national television, Dr. Fong shocked the public with a startling accusation: that M Co. had in fact lost control of magic and compromised the structure of the universe itself. Ripped a hole in our reality, through

which magic is escaping.

"The corporation started in motion a chain of events that will lead to the end of the world as we know it," she said.

Three days after the interview, Dr. Fong was reported missing. She has not been seen since.

One person may hold the key to finding out what happened to her. His name is Harold Chen, 25, single, living alone on Slurpees and gas station burritos. A former math prodigy who dropped out of MIT his first semester (he was brilliant but sheltered, and when he got to college, cracked under the intense pressure spending all of his time holed up playing Call of Duty), Harold is now trying to rebuild his life, one community college course at a time.

At night, he works the graveyard shift at Cash-4-Magic:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.):

Bills piling up? Cash-4-Magic
pays top dollar for your
items.

(jingle)

*Cash-4-Magic! Clear out the
clutter, and collect your
cash today.*

When, one night, a young woman walks into Cash-4-Magic with a journal that belonged to her mother, Helen Fong, Harold recognizes it for what it is: a book which might hold the key to understanding what is happening to the magic in the world, and what happens when the magic is all gone.