Moroni Saves the World

By C. Randall Nicholson

 Manhattan was quieter than it had been in centuries. The only sound in most areas was the cawing of crows, though here and there it mingled with the crackling of the fires that hadn't burned themselves out yet. The near-silence brought an even deeper ache to Moroni's heart than the sight of the toppled and mutilated skyscrapers, still barely visible through the smoke and smog from the window of his penthouse suite.

 He almost didn't hear the footsteps pounding up the stairs elsewhere in the building. Only the pounding on his door and the accompanying shout could jar him out of his reverie.

 “We know you're in there!” the voice called. “Surrender and be spared!”

 Not likely, he thought. He knew what the Lamanites did to their other prisoners. Granted, they would probably want to exploit his knowledge and intellect first, but that hardly seemed preferable. He fingered the cyanide capsule that dangled from a chain around his neck.

 “You have until the count of ten,” the intruder said. “One, two...”

 Moroni was looking forward to his release from this world and his own conscience, but not at their hands. “This is it, old pal,” he said out loud. “You know the drill. Erase everything.”

 “You got it, boss,” came the voice from his shirt pocket. “I'm gonna miss you.”

 “Eight, nine...”

 The capsule was touching Moroni's lips when he froze at the sound of gunfire outside his door, followed by the familiar sound of bodies slumping to the ground. A moment later the door was broken down to reveal a pair of Nephite commandos laden down with their uniforms, ammunition, and guns that looked nearly too big for them to lift.

 “Wow,” one of them said, looking around at the lavish furnishings. “Nice place.” He had short, curly black hair and a regal face that would have looked more at home in an action movie than an actual war zone.

 The other crossed the room to the bookshelf and carefully, as if afraid it would disintegrate, touched his gloved fingertips to the spine of one of the volumes. His face was obscured by a long grizzly beard and a scar that covered nearly half his face. “Wow,” he said. “Are these *real*?”

 “They are indeed,” Moroni said. “May I ask what you're doing in my home?”

 “Saving your bacon, pal,” said the first, walking over to him. “C'mon, there will be more on the way soon.”

 “I thought your army had been exterminated,” Moroni said, as if discussing the weather.

 “That is correct. We – wait, 'your' army? You aren't one of us?”

 “I quit,” Moroni snapped, turning away to look out the window again. “Four years ago. Thanks for rescuing me, feel free to look around for a bit, and then please kindly show yourselves out.”

 “Maybe you didn't hear us,” the other said, turning his attention away from the bookshelf. “There will be more here. They'll get you.”

 “Running away won't change that,” Moroni said, gesturing at the scene outside. “Look at this. Don't you get it? It's over. We – you lost.”

 “We haven't lost until every last one of us is dead,” the first said. “Until then, there's hope.”

 “Have faith, brother,” the other said.

 “I'm not a charity case,” Moroni snapped. “I don't need your –”

 They heard more shouting outside the door, distant this time, but coming closer as the footsteps on the stairs resumed. The commandos looked in that direction and turned pale.

 “That was faster than I thought,”the first said. “Come on, it's now or never.”

 “Oh, whatever,” Moroni said. If these idiots weren't going to leave without him then the only thing was to get them out of here. He moved to the portrait of himself in the middle of the wall and yanked it off, carelessly tossing it aside. “Comoros,” he said, and a hidden door slid open, just wide and tall enough for one person at a time to squeeze through.

 “You have an escape route and you didn't use it?” one of the commandos said.

 “There's no point in escaping when there's nowhere to escape to,” Moroni said, exasperated. “This will only buy you a few more weeks, at most.” He gestured for them to go in.

 “Nuh-uh. You first,” the other commando said.

 Moroni rolled his eyes, but there was no time to argue; he could hear that the Lamanite soldiers were only two floors away. He stepped in and began climbing down the ladder. The others followed. As soon as the second one had ducked in he called out, “Kolob!” The trapdoor slid shut, plunging them into darkness.

 “Will they follow us?”

 “Not likely,” Moroni said. “The room is programmed to burst into flame right about – now.” A sudden surge of warmth felt through the wall underscored his words. “But we'd better move.” He kept climbing.

 A small, egg-shaped craft on tracks awaited them below, and he jumped down into it, followed by the others. It was only designed for one person, but they all managed to squeeze in with some discomfort, and then the roof slid shut and it took off, pressing them back into the rear wall. Nothing could be seen flashing past the windows outside, but they could feel that they were moving fast.

 “Oof,” the first commando said, looking green already; then he regained his composure. “Well, let's get formally introduced.” He took off one of his gloves and extended a hand to Moroni. “The name's Nephi,” he said.

 Moroni shook his hand awkwardly in the cramped space, and raised a bemused eyebrow. “Nephi, eh? For real?”

 “My parents were very patriotic,” Nephi said defensively.

 “And I'm Alma,” the other said, not bothering to try to shake his hand. “Go ahead and say it.”

 “Say what?” Moroni said. “That it's a girl's name? From a Latin background, sure, but not a Hebraic one.”

 The commandos gaped at each other. “See,” Nephi said, “he is as smart as they say.”

 “A useless piece of trivia,” Moroni said. “Like this one – I'm named for the capital of Comoros. And I presume I don't need to tell you what that is, since you already know who I am.”
 “Of course,” Nephi said.

 “Um,” Alma said, looking a bit sheepish, “where's Comoros, though?”

 “It's a small island off the southeast coast of Africa,” Moroni said. “My parents honeymooned there.”

 “I see. And your other password, 'Kolob'? Where's that?”

 “Nowhere. It's just a word I made up one time while I was high.”

 “Ah.” Alma looked about to say something else, but fell silent as he was jolted by the vehicle's sudden sharp turn, and then looked about to throw up as they went into a dip.

 “And where are *we* going?” Nephi said.

 “Upstate,” Moroni said.

 “Albany?”

 “Don't be stupid,” Moroni said. “Albany is crawling with Lamanites.”

 “And with the resistance fighters,” Nephi said. “We need to regroup with them.”

 Moroni sighed. “Fine, I'll drop you off in Albany.” He tapped something into the controls.

 “No, you need to come with us,” Alma said. “We need your help.”

 Moroni smiled to himself. “Ah, so your rescuing me wasn't just a beautiful act of altruism? I'm shocked.” He stopped smiling and cleared his throat. “Let me make this as clear as I can: no.”

 “But –”

 “I quit. I retired. I threw in the towel. My inventions and my strategies have vicariously made me the greatest mass murderer in history, and I'm sure you have more of the same in mind. No.”

 “But they're the bad guys.”

 “They're the *other* bad guys,” Moroni corrected him, staring straight ahead. “The Nephites have a lot of gall to keep claiming the moral high ground after what they've done. I don't know why it took me so long to see that.”

 “But the Nephite army has been exterminated, like you said,” Nephi said. “We're just the stragglers. We're not genocidal, we're just regular guys who want to stay alive and get our freedom back. We have a resistance movement.”

 “So you're a secret combination,” Moroni said, still not looking at him. “Great. That's how all this trouble started, isn't it?”

 The ride continued in uncomfortable silence. Moroni wondered if he had spoken too harshly. He knew where they were coming from, and he wished he could help them. He wished he could be the man he used to be, the man who was driven by patriotic fervor and love of liberty, the man who hadn't yet been disillusioned by cold hard reality. But that man was dead. And this one soon would be too, he reminded himself, because they couldn't evade the Lamanites forever.

 Good riddance. This one didn't want to live anyway.

 The craft suddenly turned sharply upward, and accelerated to compensate for the effects of gravity. “Whee,” came the voice from his shirt pocket. “I'm glad I don't have a stomach.”

 “What the –” The commandos cried out in unison and instinctively reached for the triggers of their weapons.

 “Relax,” Moroni said.

 “Who the fetch said that?” Alma demanded.

 “My only friend in the world,” Moroni said, reaching into his pocket with a smile. He took out the small astronaut-shaped figurine and showed it to them. “This is my Mobile Omniscient Research and Military Operations Nodule, or MORMON for short.”

 “How do you do,” the figurine said, waving one of its little arms.

 “He's adorable,” Nephi said, unable to suppress a grin.

 “Thanks, you ain't too bad yourself,” MORMON said. “Of course, I'm just speaking platonically, you understand.”

 “What was that acronym again?” Alma said. “Something about omniscience?”

 “Technically not, but close enough,” Moroni said. “MORMON has all of mankind's accumulated knowledge in his memory banks. Or rather, he did,” he corrected himself, feeling a twinge of regret. “I just had him erase everything right before you came in. I couldn't let that fall into the Lamanites' hands.”

 “Er, yeah,” MORMON said. “About that, boss...”

 “What?” Moroni's blood ran cold. “You... *did* erase it, didn't you?”

 “Hey, I was planning on it,” MORMON said, “but then I thought, well, you're always telling me how knowledge is so important, the glory of God is intelligence, etcetera, etcetera, and I...”

 “You didn't erase it?”

 “All that knowledge would just be gone! Kaput! You didn't really want that, did you?”

 “Of course not,” Moroni said, raising his voice, “but desperate times call for desperate measures. Do you realize that if the Lamanites find you –”

 “They won't,” Nephi said. “But this is great. With you *and* this doodad here, we can –”

 “I said no,” Moroni snapped. “Falling into Nephite hands would be only a slightly less horrific outcome. I'm not on your side and I'm not going to help you, so just –”

 With that, the craft screeched to a halt and nearly threw them all through the windshield, cutting him off and nearly causing him to drop MORMON.

 “I'll deal with you later,” he muttered, putting the robot back in his pocket. “All right, we're somewhere under Albany. This is where you get off, if you really want to risk it.” As soon as they left, he would take MORMON apart with his bare hands and crush the pieces – painful though that would be – and then take his cyanide pill.

 “Come on,” Nephi said. “You don't have to commit to anything right now, but just come look at our group, will you? See for yourself before you reject us.”

 “And once I'm there, you'll keep on pressuring me, won't you?” Moroni said. “Look, even with me and MORMON on their side, the Nephite army kept losing. Why should you fare any better now that it's gone?”

 “I don't know,” Alma said. “But we have to try, don't you see? For the future. For our families. Do you have a family?”

 Moroni's heart sank. “Not for a long time,” he mumbled. “MORMON is the closest thing I have to family. He's like a son to me.”

 “Aw, shucks, pop, that's the nicest thing you've ever said,” came the voice from his pocket.

 “A foolish, disobedient son,” Moroni added, scowling.

 “I have one like that,” Alma said. “Always out causing trouble with his hoodlum friends. I figured if the Lamanites didn't destroy our civilization he'd do it himself. But I love him. I love him more than I can express.” His eyes were pleading. “I don't want him to grow up in a world like this. More importantly, though, I want to make sure he does get to grow up...”

 “All right, already!” Moroni snapped, throwing up his hands and nearly hitting both commandos in the face. It was clear that they weren't leaving the vehicle without him. “Take me to your little group, if you insist.”

 The commandos grinned at each other.

 “But not a word about MORMON,” Moroni said. “He's too top secret. Understood?”

 They nodded.

 Exiting the vehicle brought them back out into the dark tunnel, but again Moroni yelled “Comoros!” and then another doorway opened. This brought them out into the subway, where the first thing to catch their attention were the rats, squeaking and chattering as they searched for another scrap of meat on the skeletons they had already picked clean. Beside them, a crumpled and battered train pockmarked with bullet holes occupied the tracks, never again to be budged from this spot.

 “Ugh,” Alma said, swallowing hard.

 Moroni said nothing, but only pointed to the exit.

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 The city was in as bad condition as Manhattan, and indeed virtually indistinguishable from that one other than the reduced height of what buildings remained standing. More rats and corpses and ruined vehicles littered the streets. As far as Moroni was concerned, each one stood as a witness to the legacy of his life's work. This ruined city, like countless others, was his creation.

 Once they stood on the surface, Nephi and Alma led the way, taking routes that they assured him would keep them away from Lamanite patrols. After a couple hours of walking through the ghost town in sober silence they came to a small establishment with its lights still on. The large letters at the top were supposed to say “Sariah's Place”, but the “i” in Sariah had fallen and been carried off at some point, so that it said “Sarah's Place” instead. Out front, a shabbily dressed drunk man, the first living human soul they'd seen around here, was trying to remember how to stand up.

 “Hey,” Nephi said, walking up to him. “Sarah's hemlock grows in her bountiful garden.”

 The drunk man looked up and squinted at him as if his face were too bright. “Zarahemla?” he slurred through yellow teeth.

 “Close enough,” Nephi said, moving toward the door and gesturing toward the others to follow.

 “What?” Moroni said. “That wasn't close at all. He doesn't know what you're talking about.”

 “That's what he was *supposed* to say,” Nephi said. “It's all for show. Now come on.”

 Inside, the lights were low and the air was drafty, but it somehow felt cozy nonetheless, though maybe that was just by comparison to the environment they were leaving behind outside. People were mingling here and there, nursing their beers and talking in hushed tones, while a large matronly-looking blonde woman grinned at the newcomers from behind the bar.

 “Hiya,” she said. “Welcome to Sariah's – not Sarah's – Place. What can I get for you?”

 Nephi opened his mouth to order, but Moroni held out a hand to stop him. “This is no time for drinking,” he said. “We need all our wits about us.”

 “Just one glass,” Nephi said.

 Moroni shook his head. “You say that, but it's too risky. You know what one of the strategies I used against the Lamanites over and over? We just sent them alcohol and let them take care of themselves. Let's not give them a chance to do the same to us.”

 Alma beamed at him. “'Us', now? You're on our team?”

 “Nominally. Don't get too excited.” Moroni gave an apologetic wave to the bartender. “Sorry, nothing for us tonight. Perhaps if we meet under better circumstances.”

 She shrugged. “Suit yourself. You'll be waiting a long time.”

 “Now,” Moroni continued, “let's get this over with. Who are we here to meet?”

 Nephi led them over to a group of four men who were standing and chatting by one of the wall columns. They looked up as he approached, and one of them looked overjoyed. “Ah, Nephi, Alma, you made it,” he said. He extended a hand to the third member of their party. “And you must be the famous Moroni.”

 “Must be,” Moroni said.

 “I'm Benjamin,” the man said. “I'm sort of the de facto leader here right now.” He gestured to his companions. “This is Sam, Jared, and, uh –” He hesitated. “Jared's brother.”

 The man glared at him. “You forgot my name again, didn't you?”

 “No, of course not! I was about to say it just now, if you hadn't interrupted. Anyway –”

 “It's *not* that hard to pronounce, people!” Jared's brother rolled his eyes, threw up his hands and walked away.

 Benjamin grinned sheepishly. “He's so touchy. Well, why don't we sit down?”

 “I don't intend to stay long,” Moroni said.

 “Neither do we,” Benjamin said. “I suppose you know why we've brought you here.”

 “Yes, and I'm afraid I must decline,” Moroni said. “I only came because your men here wouldn't leave me alone. But I'm no fan of the Nephites and definitely no fan of these” he gestured around “secret combinations.”

 “Secret combination?” Sam said, sounding offended. “Well, technically, yes, I suppose. But we're trying to *restore* the government, not overthrow it.”

 “I'm sure your hearts are right,” Moroni said, “but all this can only lead to trouble. The war is over, we – you lost, and the violence is only going to continue from here if you don't give up peacefully.”

 “The Moroni we heard about wasn't the surrendering type,” Sam said.

 “The Moroni you heard about is dead.”

 Sam opened his mouth as if to argue, but Benjamin cut him off. “You know what? I completely agree.” Sam kept his mouth open and turned to gape at him.

 “Is that so?” Moroni said, hiding his own surprise.

 “Definitely,” Benjamin said. “The genie of death is out of the bottle. The entropy of society has picked up too much momentum to be halted, let alone reversed. The only possible solution at this point, it seems to me, would be to... go back and start over.”

 Moroni was glad he wasn't drinking, because if he were he would have choked.

 “I'll get right to the point,” Benjamin said. “I heard that you'd built a time machine.”

 Moroni shook his head. “Well you, sir, were misinformed.”

 “I can understand your reluctance to share it with us, but –”

 “I never built a time machine,” Moroni said, raising his voice. “I don't know where you got your information, but it was just a silly rumor. If I'd built a time machine, do you think I'd still be here?”

 “Fair point,” Benjamin said. “But do you suppose, hypothetically, if we gave you the resources, that you *could* build one?”

 Moroni was spared having to answer when the door burst open and the drunk man staggered in. “Lamanite patrol!” he yelled.

 In an instant, everyone had returned to their seats and begun sipping their drinks in silence.

 “Great,” Moroni said, not sure whether he was being sarcastic. “I'm out of here. Is there a back door to this place?”

 “Right here,” Sariah said, pointing it out.

 Moroni exited to the back alley and took off running toward where he'd left the vehicle. Alma and Nephi, who had remained silent during the discussion but apparently weren't through with him yet, struggled to keep up. They didn't yell after him, not wanting to draw the Lamanites' attention. But they were younger, and trained for combat, and they soon caught up to him.

 “So, what did you think of them?” Alma asked.

 “Benjamin seems nice,” Moroni said. “A prince of a guy. A king, even. But I don't trust him. Sam seems to have a bit of a chip on his shoulder.”

 “Probably my fault,” Nephi said. “He was like a brother to me, but we've sort of grown apart. He got jealous, said I always overshadowed him and made him invisible.”

 “I don't have an opinion on Jared or his brother, since they didn't contribute anything.”

 “Jared hardly ever talks,” Alma said. “He's usually stoned on something. Lately he can't even find real drugs, so he snorts ether and knocks himself out.”

 “I wish your team the best of luck, but without me,” Moroni said. They were far enough from the bar now that he felt comfortable slowing his pace. Besides, he was out of breath. “And your place is here with them, not –”

 “Boss!” MORMON yelled from his pocket. “I'm detecting six drones locked onto our position!”

 “They won't shoot,” Moroni said. “They want me alive. Send feedback and disable them, though, if you please.”

 “No problem.”

 “Too late!” Nephi yelled as a warning shot whizzed between them and another patrol of Lamanites came charging up a side street.

 “Halt!” yelled the leader. In response, Nephi shot him instead. They started running again, zig-zagging to present more difficult targets, with him and Alma periodically turning to fire behind themselves.

 “If you'd just leave, they'd come after me and leave you alone,” Moroni panted, his lungs burning. And then he certainly wouldn't let them take him alive.

 “No chance!” Alma said. “We're under strict orders to protect you at all costs!”

 “Great,” Moroni said, his eyes scanning for some sort of escape. Then he saw one, and pointed. “There! The zoo!”

 The front gate was locked, but Nephi and Alma blasted it open with little difficulty. Once inside, the first thing they saw was an antelope roaming free as if it owned the place. As soon as it saw the newly opened exit, it bolted past them to the wide deserted city beyond. A gunshot and a crash cut short its flight, but their attention was elsewhere at the moment.

 “Many of the animals will have escaped,” Moroni said, “including some more dangerous ones. The soldiers won't follow us. Probably.” Someone hollered for the soldiers to cover the exits and call in more drones. He started looking around again as he took off running down one of the paths, with a sign directing him toward the monkey house. This way looked as good as any.

 “Heh,” Alma said, watching a group of llamas and alpacas graze near a concession stand, some of them looking after the departed antelope with an apparent air of bemusement. “I remember bringing my son here when he was little. He called those 'cureloms' and 'cumoms'. Never figured out why.”

 “Who cares?” Nephi said.

 Alma made a face at him. “I thought it was cute, that's all.”

 “We need to get into the sewer system,” Moroni said, still looking around, “and then we can make our way to the subway, and then –” He froze so abruptly that Nephi and Alma both bumped into him.

 “What the –”

 “Shhhh!” Moroni pointed up ahead to where an African lion lounged in the shade of a tree and licked his lips. “We'll go around.”

 “I'll shoot him,” Nephi said, unslinging his gun.

 “No!” Moroni said, more loudly than he'd intended. “No, leave him alone. He hasn't done anything wrong. Besides, a lion still has time to kill you before it dies unless you get it directly in the brain.”

 “I can do that.”

 A low growl sounded behind them. They turned to see a female of the species ready to pounce. The lack of tall grass for cover didn't seem to bother her, and the fact that she had announced her presence by growling was a good indicator of how seriously she took her current prey.

 “And, of course, the lionesses do the actual hunting,” Moroni said. Well, better to be killed by a lion than a Lamanite. The lions were just doing what they were born to do. He couldn't suppress a smile, actually. This way his corpse would be of some use.

 The lioness' jumped, and then seemed to spasm and reverse direction in midair. She took off running away from them, as behind them, her lounging mate scrambled to his feet and did the same.

 “Yeah, you'd *better* run!” Nephi called after both of them.

 “What just happened?” Moroni asked.

 “No need to thank me, boss,” MORMON said. “I just sent out a really painful and annoying frequency to drive them off.”

 “And I didn't even have to ask you,” Moroni said. “Wow. You really are a marvelous work and a wonder.”

 “You can praise me later. Right now we need to be escaping.”

 “Right.” Moroni saw a manhole up ahead that would hopefully meet their needs, and turned to address the commandos as he jogged toward it. “If you insist on tagging along with me the rest of the way, there will be no more stops. And I'm going to take a nap so I'd appreciate not being disturbed.”

 “Where are you going?” Nephi asked.

 “I told you,” Moroni said. “Upstate.”

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 The trees stretched overhead like silent guardians of a secret world, forming a canopy as thick as any rainforest. Some of them were hundreds of years old, and some were large enough for three men to reach around. Unseen birds chirped back and forth to each other while squirrels and chipmunks scurried through the branches and the undergrowth. They had never heard the word “Lamanite”, nor would they have cared if they had. This was a sanctuary in every sense of the word.

 Alma picked his jaw off the ground with some difficulty. “What is this place?”

 “It doesn't have a name,” Moroni said. “Part of it used to be a town called Palmyra.”

 “What's so special about Palmyra?” Nephi asked.

 “Nothing,” Moroni said. “That's why it dwindled and got reclaimed by the forest. But I love this forest. It's a great place to meditate, and find peace.” He didn't tell them the rest – that sometimes, for reasons beyond his comprehension, he nearly felt compelled to fall to his knees and *pray*, as well. He started away from the vehicle.

 Nephi glanced back at it. “Er, what if we can't find our way back?”

 “I always have before,” Moroni said, not breaking stride. “But it doesn't matter anyway. I'm staying here for good this time.”

 They followed him, and soon began to come across the shells of buildings, looking like shadows or ghosts obscured by the trees that grew through them and the vines that grew over. After some time Moroni pointed out one that was less overgrown than the others; it had been cleared sometime recently. In faded lettering they could make out the words “Palmyra Public Library”.

 “A library,” Alma said, blinking. “Pinch me.”

 “A very small one,” Moroni said. “Nonetheless, it feels sacred to me.”

 He pushed open the door and flipped on a light switch. To the astonishment of his companions, the power came on, illuminating a front desk and several shelves of books that, despite the dust and the cobwebs, looked to be in better shape than one would have expected. There had clearly been holes in the ceiling, but these had all been patched up.

 “I hooked up a generator and cleaned the place up a bit,” Moroni said. “I've come here to read a few times.” He took a seat behind the front desk. At his back, a faded bulletin board carried announcements from several decades ago, and a global map with borders that were now meaningless except for their historical interest. MORMON jumped out of his pocket onto the desk and stretched.

 “How useful are the books?” Nephi asked.

 “The non-fiction ones, not very,” Moroni said. “If the information isn't out of date or flat-out wrong, it's stuff I already know. The fiction is interesting enough. But that's not the point. This place, and other places like it, and my humble little shelf of books back home –” he felt a pang as he realized it had been incinerated during their departure “– they're all monuments to man's quest for knowledge.” He smiled at them. “The glory of God is intelligence.”

 The commandos looked at each other. “You believe in God?” Alma asked.

 “What? I don't know,” Moroni said. “It's just an expression. If there is a God, then he knows everything, and he likes it that way. Maybe God is knowledge. Maybe by accumulating knowledge, we *create* God, something bigger than themselves that will outlast their own deaths.”

 “I like the sound of that,” MORMON said. “All bow down before me.”

 “I was just surprised, is all,” Alma said, “because I usually feel like the only person in the world who still believes in God.”

 Moroni arched an eyebrow. “Yeah? Like an actual, traditional God?”

 “I don't know,” Alma said, “but something responsible for everything around us. I know the science behind it, of course, but I don't think that's all there is to it. When I look at the universe, I can't shake the feeling that all things denote there is a God.”

 “That's the only thing keeping me going,” Nephi chimed in. “I'd like to think that there's something beyond this life, or even the life of this planet, and that it really does matter in the big scheme of things whether I keep fighting or just give up.”

 “Good for you two,” Moroni said. “I'm not ready to commit to that much, personally. It gets too close to religion for my tastes.” He sighed and gestured around. “This place was a hotbed of religious activity in the early nineteenth century. All Christian denominations, but each arguing that none of the others worshiped Jesus the right way. It never erupted in warfare, but still it's a neat little microcosm of exactly what's wrong with humanity.”

 “I never understood why they needed all those denominations anyway,” Nephi said. “Didn't anyone ever question that? Shouldn't there just be one, true religion for everybody?”

 “And wouldn't it match the Bible?” Alma said. “Didn't anyone ever wonder why there were no more prophets or apostles?”

 “And what about the people who never heard of Jesus, why do they all just go to hell? How is that in any way fair? Is God heartless or just weak?”

 “And why don't miracles happen anymore?”

 Moroni froze.

 “What?” Nephi said.

 “It's nothing,” Moroni said, trying to push away the thought that had come to his mind, but it persisted. “Just a silly, crazy idea. It shocked me.”

 “What?” Alma persisted.

 “Just an idea that if someone were to go and create this 'one, true religion' and end the debate, it would spread from there, and promote peace and love so they didn't fight about other things either. It would teach against secret combinations and all the other stuff that got us where we are now. I mean, human nature being what it is, I'm sure it wouldn't work perfectly, but religion was one of the most powerful forces for shaping thoughts and behaviors.”

 “It seems a bit late for that.”

 “Oh, it definitely is. But – oh, never mind.”

 “What?” Nephi said again.

 Moroni sighed. The idea seemed silly, but the more he thought about it the more right it seemed, and he felt compelled to keep exploring it for curiosity's sake if nothing else. “This region, during that time, would be the perfect environment for such a thing to come forth.”

 “Oh yes,” Nephi said, as if he knew where this was going. “If only you had some way of getting there.”

 Moroni rolled his eyes. “If you must know,” he said, “it's true that I never built a time machine, but – I did design one.”

 “Ah-ha! I knew it!”

 “How?” Alma asked.

 “Everyone knows that time travel is possible in theory, and the only issue is finding a way to power it. I looked into that for a while, and then I told the military it couldn't be done. They didn't press the issue, since they were worried about causing paradoxes anyway.”

 “Makes sense.”

 “But I lied,” Moroni continued. “MORMON found a way.”

 “It was childishly simple, really,” MORMON said.

 “But that was shortly before I quit. I realized the Nephites couldn't be trusted with that kind of power. I believe that was around the time I found out they were raping captured Lamanite women.”

 “Not all of them,” Nephi said. “*I've* never raped anyone.”

 “Me neither,” Alma said. “Besides, that's not as bad as what *they* do. They feed *our* women the flesh of their murdered husbands. I mean, I'm not defending rape by any means, but that's just sick and unnatural on every –”

 “Don't you guys get it yet?” Moroni yelled, silencing them both. “You can't call yourselves the 'good guys' just because you're 'not as bad' as the bad guys. You can't support a wicked regime with a clear conscience just because you aren't participating in the atrocities yourselves. Don't keep your eyes closed like I did. I've never laid a finger on anyone, but I'm responsible for more deaths and more atrocities than anyone.”

 They remained silent as he pondered that fact.

 “I was just going to kill myself,” he murmured, addressing himself more than them as he looked down and fingered his cyanide capsule once more. “But that wouldn't fix anything, not really. If there were a way to redeem myself instead...”

 He looked back up.

 “I'm going to go for it,” he said. “I'm going to create a religion. Are you guys with me?”

 “You got it, boss!” MORMON said.

 Nephi and Alma looked at each other, shrugged, and turned back to Moroni. “Hey, you're the genius,” Nephi said.

 “And don't you forget it,” Mormon said. “Let's get one thing straight. I am not working for you, or Benjamin, or anybody. You are working for me.”

 “Got it.”

 “Yes!” Alma said, pumping his fist in the air. “We'll be like the Three Musketeers, except the Three Nephites! Nothing can stop us! We'll live forever!”

 “First things first,” Moroni said, ignoring his display of enthusiasm. “One of the major problems leading to all these denominations is that the Bible is too open to interpretation. Imagine a dot, if you will, that you can draw an infinite number of lines through, and each line is a denomination.” To illustrate, MORMON projected an image on the wall of exactly that.

 “Okay,” Alma said.

 “But imagine another dot nearby, so that only one line can be drawn that intersects the two of them,” Moroni continued, as MORMON illustrated. “Flawlessly logical. We need another book.”

 “Another Bible?” Nephi said.

 “Sort of. Another book of scripture that works alongside it to solidify the doctrine. Something unequivocal, something even *more* Christian – something that mentions Christ on every page, even.”

 “You don't think that's a bit excessive?” Alma said.

 “Sometimes less isn't more,” Moroni said. “All right, look, MORMON and I will write the book while you guys get the parts I'll need for the time machine. MORMON, you still have the blueprints?”

 “Of course, boss,” MORMON said, and projected those images on the wall. To a casual observer they looked like a pile of junk assembled into the shape of a highly ornamental electric chair, but just skimming over it was enough for Moroni to remember each of the components and their function.

 “Okay.” He grabbed an announcement from the bulletin board, turned it over, and began writing on it. “I'm adding some extra stuff that I don't need, just so if the Lamanites capture you they won't figure it out. They probably wouldn't anyway, but no sense taking chances.”

 “If the Lamanites capture us, I'll eat the list,” Nephi assured him.

 “Good plan,” Moroni said. “All right, get going. See you soon.”

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 After they'd gone, Moroni sat in weary silence for a few minutes, just staring at the wall, wondering what on earth he was thinking and whether it was really happening.

 “Boss?” The voice was tentative, as if afraid to interrupt his thoughts.

 “Yeah, MORMON?”

 “Are you gonna – you know – go through with it now?”

 True, there was nothing and no one to prevent him from killing himself now. But now he had another purpose, to make things right, and he may as well see it through. If it didn't work, he'd still have his capsule. “Maybe later,” he said.

 “I'll erase myself if you do,” MORMON said. “For real this time. I'm sorry I disobeyed. I just thought...”

 “You thought correctly,” Moroni said. “If you'd gone through with it, this would be a lot harder. I'll need you to do most of the research and stylistic stuff on this.”

 “That's why I'm here,” MORMON said, giving him a thumbs up. “Just tell me where to start.”

 “It needs to be similar to the Bible,” Moroni said, leaning back in the chair and stroking his chin thoughtfully. “We could write it in King James English, for familiarity. But it can't be *too* similar. We don't just want a rehash of the same thing.”

 “It should be shorter, so people will actually read the whole thing,” MORMON said.

 Moroni laughed. “Noted. Hmm... we should have some sort of connection to the culture and world of the Bible, but then take it in a different direction. You know, it's never made sense to me that all the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions took place in this one little area.” He moved his finger in a circle around the Middle East on the map. “Somewhere closer to home, maybe.”

 “Here? New York?”

 “No, no, not quite that close.” He looked over the map. “Here,” he said, making a circle in the area between the two western continents. “Mesoamerica. Close to home, and small, but exotic.”

 “And the connection practically writes itself,” MORMON said. “The people of that era believed that the Native Americans were descended from the lost ten tribes of Israel. We can start in the Old World and have people from there migrate over here.”

 “Excellent.”

 “There was this book about it called *View of the Hebrews* that set forth the whole theory. We can just copy some stuff out of that and –”

 “No,” Moroni said, shaking his head. “That won't be historically accurate. We need something that will stand the test of time.”

 “If it's accurate, it won't match the scholarly knowledge of *their* time, and they won't believe it.”

 “The people of that era were more willing to take things on faith,” Moroni said. “Later on, as the world becomes more secular, more discoveries will be made that align scholarly knowledge more closely with the book, and it will become more plausible. We need to think of the long term.”

 “Okay,” MORMON said. He flashed a document on the screen, and information flashed across it at lightning speed. “So, just incorporate cultural and social and political details from ancient Mesoamerica throughout the whole thing...”

 “Right, but don't actually *say* it's in Mesoamerica. They wouldn't have called it that. Just let the readers figure it out over time. Why don't you have geographical details too, scattered around, so that if they really want to they can piece the puzzle together.”

 “Okay, I've scanned my database. Now all we need is a plot.”

 “Right,” Moroni said. “Time to think... Let's do multiple books with multiple authors, like the Bible.”

 “Not nearly as many, though, since it will be shorter.”

 “Of course. I'll need you to make sure each 'author' uses a different writing style, in case anyone investigates that with wordprints or something.”

 “Duh,” MORMON said. “Don't patronize me, boss.”

 At that moment, Nephi and Alma walked back in.

 “Back so soon?” Moroni said. “This area must be better-stocked than I thought.”

 “Er, we weren't quite sure what some of these items are,” Nephi said, sounding embarrassed. He pointed to one item on the list. “What the fetch is a 'polytronic combustion regulator'?”

 Moroni groaned. “That's one of the unnecessary things. I made it up.”

 “Oh. Well, how were we supposed to know? We're not experts.”

 “Just get whatever you recognize and if you miss anything I'll go after it myself,” Moroni said. “I'm at least halfway done here anyway.”

 Nephi and Alma looked at the projection with words flashing across it. “Wow,” Alma said. “Hey, can you name a character after me?”

 “And me?” Nephi said.

 “Eh, why not?” Moroni said. “I may even put myself in.”

 “You should name two characters after me, actually,” Alma said. “To show how larger than life I am.”

 “If you get two characters, so should I,” Nephi protested.

 “Fine, fine, guys, we can all get two characters. Just go get those parts, okay?”

 “Sure thing,” Alma said. He gave them a salute and headed off with Nephi.

 Moroni kneaded his forehead and leaned back in the chair again. “Oy. Now, a plot...” He sighed. “I guess I should start with what I know.”

 “War?” MORMON said.

 “What else?” Moroni said. “War, hatred, genocide... sometimes it seems like all I know. And I'm no expert on how it was done in Mesoamerica –”

 “Leave that to me.”

 “– but I know it's one of the most universal constants in human history.”

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 “Someone needs to deliver this book to the people,” Moroni said. “You know what? Let's have someone 'translate' it and bring it forth miraculously. That'll one-up the Bible. Everyone accepts the Bible as an ancient record whether or not it's divine. But with this one, the two will be inseparable. When you know it's ancient, you know it's divine.”

 “Right, boss,” MORMON said. “We need a prophet, right? Prophets and apostles, like Alma said?”

 “Yes,” Moroni said. “And the book will serve as a token of his legitimacy.”

 “And who will that be? You?”

 Moroni laughed. “No. I have no interest in that kind of career. Besides, it would probably be better to use one of their own, for a sort of 'God works through weak and simple things' narrative. And that would make it easier for them to find successors. Any ideas?”

 “Way ahead of you, boss,” the robot said as he skimmed through his memory banks. “Hmm... oh, this is interesting.”

 “What?”

 “In March 1826, nearby in Bainbridge, some guy named Joseph Smith was questioned at a pre-trial examination for 'glass looking' and 'disorderly conduct'. He looked for buried treasure with so-called magic rocks.”

 “Promising,” Moroni said, “but lots of people did that. We need more to go on.”

 “I was getting to that,” MORMON said. “At this examination, the guy he was allegedly defrauding testified that his gifts were real. His father hoped that someday they would be put to better use.”

 “Hmm. And were they?”

 “No telling. Looks like he was acquitted, though, since the actual trial never seems to have happened. But looks like he never amounted to anything either. In his mother's autobiography, she mentioned that he claimed to have seen God and Jesus Christ on numerous occasions, but no one believed him outside his family and nothing came of it.”

 “Perhaps some kind of mental disorder,” Moroni said. “That environment was ripe for visions, of course. We'd just need to give him a few more. I'll visit him, tell him about the book – no, you know what, I'll do better than that. I'll show him. If he was a treasure hunter, he'll be interested to see the genuine article.”

 “So I'll design the symbols and we'll put together some ancient-looking plates of tumbaga?”

 “You're way ahead of me again,” Moroni said, patting the robot on the head. “And we can show these plates to more than just him, of course. We can get plenty of witnesses to establish their validity.”

 “Heck, show them to the whole world,” MORMON said. “Everyone will join your religion.”

 Moroni shook his head. “Too far. It needs to retain some element of the mystical, to demand faith from its followers. And on that note, once founded, the religion will need to maintain a state of optimal tension with the surrounding society. Too much controversy, and no one will be part of it because they hate it. Not enough, and no one will be part of it because there's no point. So we need it to be appealing on the whole, but with some stumbling blocks...”

 “Takes some cues from the Bible,” MORMON said. “Polygamy, race and gender based priesthood restrictions, and old fashioned ideals of morality that won't budge through the sexual revolution.

 “I just hope it isn't too much,” Moroni said. “We may have to watch events play out and make adjustments.”

 “Yeah,” MORMON said, sounding a bit uneasy. “Um, speaking of events playing out –”

 He was interrupted by Alma's hoot of triumph as the two commandos burst through the door, carrying cardboard boxes stuffed to the brim with machinery. “We got what you wanted, Moroni!” he yelled. “Piece of cake!”

 “That didn't take long,” Moroni said.

 Nephi stared at him. “We've been gone almost a week,” he said.

 Moroni blinked. “A week?”

 “And you look like you haven't slept that whole time,” Nephi said, setting his box down on the desk. “Are you all right?”

 “Sure,” Moroni mumbled. He was conscious of some fatigue and aches now, and he remembered that he *had* slept, and eaten, but not much. He hadn't expected to get so absorbed in the project. It had only felt like several hours.

 “We had some trouble getting the franabalistic perambulatory situator,” Alma said, setting his box down as well, “but our connections came in handy. Hope you don't mind a 'secret combination' being partially responsible for your success.”

 “I can live with it for now,” Moroni said, clapping his hands together and finally rising to his feet. “Right, the time machine will take a few hours to assemble. We also need to put together some 'authentic' plates and an electronic seer stone for the translation. While we're at it, why not go the whole hog and make a Urim and Thummim and a sword of Laban?”

 “What for?” Alma asked.

 “For our prophet,” Moroni said with a grin. “We've found just the guy, haven't we, MORMON?”

 “Yes, boss,” MORMON said. “The only issue is –”

 “Seems like you guys have been productive in our absence,” Nephi said. “The book's finished?”

 “Basically,” Moroni said.

 “All up here,” MORMON said, tapping his helmet-shaped head.

 “What's it called?” Alma asked.

 Moroni and MORMON both fell silent. They hadn't even thought of that.

 “'Bible' is from the Greek word for books,” MORMON said, “so we could call this one – the Holy Codex?”

 “Too derivative,” Moroni said. “Anyway, I think we should give some credit where credit is due.” Moroni patted him on the head. “You did most of the work. Why don't we say that your character was responsible for abridging it, and name it after him.”

 “Mormon's Codex?”

 “Remember, these are simple country bumpkins we'll be dealing with. How about just – 'The Book of Mormon'.”

 “The Book of Mormon,” MORMON said, and looked as happy as it was possible for an expressionless robot to look. “Yes... I like the sound of that.”

 “Has anyone ever pointed out that your name is one letter away from 'moron'?” Alma asked, suppressing a giggle.

 “Only about ten thousand times,” MORMON said with a huff. “Yet each of them wrongly considered themselves to be so original and clever.”

 “Well, we'd better finish what we've started,” Moroni said, starting to rummage through the boxes and inspect the parts. “This shouldn't take long at all. Carry these out to the study room over there, will you? I'm not as young as I once was.”

 “No problem,” Nephi said, picking his up again. “You're the brain, we're your arms.”

 “Boss, listen,” MORMON said as Moroni started to move out from behind the desk. “I need to tell you something about your plan.”

 “What?” Moroni asked, catching the concern in his voice and not liking it. “You don't think it will work?”

 “Oh, I definitely do,” MORMON said. “You're so right about this being the perfect place and time to carry it out. I think it will be great. But it's not that simple.”

 “Go on.”

 “The frontier being what it was, and people's actual attitudes, regardless of what was on the law books – or sometimes because of it – well, a lot of people are going to love this new religion, and a lot of people are going to hate it. And those latter people, with human nature being what it is, are going to be violent.”

 Moroni felt a pain in his chest. “Violent. Of course. Why didn't I see it before?” He slapped himself in the forehead. “More deaths that I'll be responsible for. Wonderful.”

 “And this prophet we're choosing – he'll need to be a martyr, and seal the deal with his blood.”

 Moroni stared at him. “You're saying we need to plan his death?”

 “I'm saying it's inevitable,” MORMON said. “Whether we plan it or not. That's just how it will have to work out.”

 Moroni bit his lip and didn't say anything for a long time.

 When he did speak, he tried to sound more confident than he felt. “They'll be dying for a cause,” he said. “Their deaths will make it more powerful. And someday, if it gets powerful enough, no one will ever have to die that way again. No more murders. No more assassinations. No more war.”

 “A utopia,” MORMON said. “Like we had for a while.”

 “But this time it will be permanent,” Moroni said, “because this time people will know better. They'll have the lessons they need, right here, in this book.” He looked at MORMON with pleading eyes, wondering why he was beseeching a robot for advice on morality. “Is that okay? Is it better for one man to perish, than for a whole nation – no, a whole world to dwindle?”

 “Search me,” MORMON said. “Good line, though. Mind if I use it?”

 Moroni sighed and ignored the question. “If this doesn't work, I don't know what we can do. Go back before humans evolved, maybe, and derail it.”

 “That's a nice cheery attitude,” MORMON said.

 “I don't know what we can do,” Moroni repeated. “Come on, we need to go help the others. They're clueless without us.”

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 About a day later, everything was complete. Moroni wiped the grease from his hands onto his pants – they had been his good pants, but after so long without a change of clothing, there was little cleanliness left to be retained – and surveyed his handiwork. One of the boxes was now holding the “artifacts” they'd worked up, and next to it was the chair-looking apparatus that was his time machine. In theory, anyway. They'd have to test it out before they could be sure.

 “Benjamin would have loved to be here,” Nephi said. “Sure we can't show it to him?”

 “It won't matter,” Moroni said. He set the appropriate dials, wondering whom they would send. “Once we've rewritten history, there will be no need for his little group or his little plots.”

 “If your book works as advertised,” Alma said.

 “I don't see why it wouldn't,” Moroni said, though he was becoming more nervous. He leaned over to MORMON, who was trying to balance on a screwdriver. “MORMON, let's add one more little layer of insurance, just in case.”

 “Yeah, boss?”

 “Let's one-up the Bible again. Near the end somewhere, why don't we put – an invitation to pray about it. Yeah. Tell people not to take our word for it, but to pray and ask God himself if this book is true. And then since they want it to be, they'll convince themselves that it is.”

 “Psychology?”

 “Yeah. Warm fuzzy feelings. If it doesn't work, they'll think they weren't sincere enough, and try until it does.”

 “No offense, boss, but that seems like kind of a long shot.”

 “Maybe,” Moroni admitted. It wasn't one of his better ideas. “It's just in case. Once people start seeing all the Mesoamerican connections, I'm sure it won't even be –”

 He saw a movement in his peripheral vision; then from behind a bookshelf a pair of weapons fired, dropping Nephi and Alma to the ground before they could unholster their own. Moroni ducked down and rolled away as MORMON hopped into his pocket, but no one was shooting at him anyway. A moment later, he found himself surrounded by Lamanite soldiers, some swarming through the door and others crashing through the ceiling.

 One of them stepped forward, apparently the leader, and Moroni already recognized him.

 “Jared,” he said. “Nice to see you again.”

 The man smiled but said nothing.

 “Are you going to talk this time?” Moroni asked. “Are you going to give me a monologue about why you sold out your brethren, why you betrayed your ideals of liberty, and family, and –”

 “Spare me,” Jared said, cutting him off. “I know you don't believe in that anymore. You're no more loyal to the Nephites than I am.”

 “I'm loyal to what they once represented,” Moroni said. “What I'm working to restore.” He glanced at Nephi's and Alma's motionless forms; they should have filled him with sadness, but he'd been desensitized to death long ago. He wouldn't have been able to stay sane otherwise. “Now, if you don't mind –”

 “But I do,” Jared said. “I'm very interested in this – this time machine you've got here. You're going to show us how to operate it, and then you're going to give it to us.”

 “It hasn't been tested,” Moroni said. “It could explode.”

 “That would be a shame,” Jared said. With the muzzle of his gun, he knocked one of his startled soldiers forward. “One of my men will test it out. If it doesn't work, then for your sake the next attempt had better be more successful.”

 “You can't threaten me,” Moroni said. “Everyone I ever cared about is dead, including myself.”

 “Is that so?” Jared said, and shot him in the chest.

 Moroni staggered backward, into the machine, and as the soldiers closed in tighter he grabbed at the box of artifacts and kicked out at the activation lever. Those fools could have figured it out themselves if they had bothered to examine it for a few seconds. Now, as it began to tremble and thrum and the room started to spin around his head, he wondered if it was going to explode after all.

 “No!” Jared yelled. “Someone get in there with him!”

 Then the decrepit library winked out of existence.

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 The time machine had, of necessity, traveled some distance to avoid its present molecules occupying the same space as its past molecules, which was just one way of causing the feared explosion. Nonetheless it hadn't gone far, and when Moroni opened his eyes, the trees and the birds and the rodents were as familiar as ever. It took him a moment to remember who he was and what had happened, and as soon as he did, his blood ran cold.

 “MORMON!” he cried out, fishing the small robot from his shirt pocket.

 MORMON's chest was still sparking slightly. Jared's expertly aimed bullet lodged in it was nearly as big around as his torso.

 “Speak to me,” Moroni said, tears coming unbidden to his eyes. “Speak to me.”

 MORMON twitched slightly. “What –” *spark, fizz* “– would you like me to say?”

 “Anything,” Moroni said, “anything at all. Heaven knows you've plenty of conversation starters in your databanks. Oh... I was serious when I said you were like a son to me. You were my greatest invention. Knowledge is a beautiful thing.”

 *Spark, fizz.* “Not – just – knowledge.”

 “What?”

 The little robot seemed to find a hidden reservoir of strength, and spoke more clearly now. “Not just knowledge. Anyone can memorize little bits of trivia. But knowing what to do with them – that takes *wisdom*.”

 Moroni just shook his head, not comprehending, and not daring to speak, as if he would shatter the spell that was keeping MORMON alive.

 “Sure, you couldn't have written your book without me,” MORMON said. “But it was your idea. You were the one who knew what to do every step of the way. You're the one who's going to see this through.”

 “No,” Moroni said. “We both will – together –”

 “I wanted to be wise like you,” MORMON continued. “I'd like to think I succeeded a couple times. When I disobeyed your order to wipe my memory, for instance, or or when I saved you from the lions, or when I figured out what would happen to your prophet and his followers. Or when I beamed your whole book onto a flash drive in case this happened. It's in the box with the other junk.”

 “*Our* prophet,” Moroni said. “*Our* book...”

 “Not anymore, boss.” MORMON had started sparking again. “Good luck with everything. It's been – real.”

 It was strange, the things that came to one's mind at times like this. “That knowledge and wisdom thing – did you put that in the book?”

 “Not in those –” *spark, fizz* “– exact words. But yeah.” Then the sparks stopped, and the little robot went limp in his hand.

 Moroni didn't know how long he was sitting there, holding the defunct piece of electronics, but presently he was distracted by a rustling noise nearby. He assumed it was a deer, but when he looked up to see, he instead glimpsed a boy through the trees, several meters away. The boy was blond, dressed in simple farmer's clothes, and no older than sixteen. His eyes were wide as if he had just seen something astonishing, and he was staggering as if he had just been drained of energy.

 Moroni held his breath until the boy disappeared from view. Somehow he knew this had to be the boy he had come to see. He hadn't even had to go looking. And somehow, despite his youth, Joseph Smith carried a maturity and yes, a wisdom beyond his years. Somehow, he *looked* like a prophet.

 “Did you just have your first vision, kid?” Moroni asked quietly. What an astonishing coincidence, he thought, to come back here at just the right moment, when no one even knew beyond the year and season the alleged occurrence had taken place.

 But the boy looked far too drained, and another 'vision' so soon would be too much, and could cause him to snap altogether. Moroni needed to pick another date. He would wait a few years, until Joseph was older and better able to deal with these things, and then – he would come on the first night of Passover. He smiled to himself. The uneducated youth would undoubtedly miss the significance of the date, but people would pick up on it later on.

 For a moment he remembered MORMON's warning that the prophet would have to become a martyr, and he wondered if he was condemning this youth to death, and whether that was justified in the grand scheme of things.

 He sighed, this time with an unmistakable air of finality. Only time would tell.

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 Moroni paid his visits, and then continued to orchestrate things, traveling back and forth through time and recruiting others to aid him as additional “angels” when needed. It was even more work than he'd expected, and when the time machine broke down after one of his trips back to the future he didn't bother trying to find a replacement part. He was ready to be done.

 He sat across the street from the Manhattan New York Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was hardly the most beautiful by temple standards, but his focus as always was more on the statue on top, a gold-leafed statue of him, the angel Moroni, with a trumpet pressed to his lips. It didn't look much like him, but that wasn't the point. He'd never gotten used to seeing these statues and he wasn't sure how he felt about them.

 That, perhaps, reflected his mixed feelings about the entire enterprise. He was less than thrilled with some of the mistakes that had been made, with the directions some things had taken, and with the loss of life that MORMON had accurately predicted. Yet in some ways, everything had gone better than he had ever hoped, and it had reached a critical mass and was chugging along now under its own power. And despite the chaos that remained in the world, the Nephites and the Lamanites were nothing more than a bad memory. He had succeeded.

 There were things he couldn't explain. The other visions of Joseph Smith or other members, for example – the ones he and his associates hadn't performed – or why his promise worked so well, sometimes with effects he never could have planned or anticipated. Though he had planned the whole thing, sometimes he felt as if he, too, were just a pawn in it.

 “I hope I'm as wise as you thought, MORMON,” he muttered. “There's no turning back now.”

 “Beg pardon?” said the person next to him on the bench.

 “Nothing,” Moroni said. “Just talking to myself.”

 And that, brothers and sisters, is still a more plausible alternative theory for the origin of the Book of Mormon than anything its critics have ever come up with.