

The Know-It-All
By Paul Dailing

What bothers Henry the most about his omniscience is the absolute and total uselessness of it.

Sure, he has the power to do anything. He knows the words that would have allowed him to creep into the hearts and beds of any model or actress; he knows which lotto tickets are winners; he knows every answer to every test; and he knows how to build a rocket ship that could get people to Mars in about fifteen minutes.

But omniscience is like Windows 98, full of built-in flaws.

He omnisciently knows that using his gift to fulfill his substantial lust for Natalie Portman would make him feel sort of sleazy and then she would never run off with the man she'll meet fifteen years from now. And they're going to make a cute couple. He knows that the winning Powerball ticket for next week's \$250 million drawing will go to a poor trucker out of South Carolina who could really use a break. He knows that if he builds the rocket, Mars will become an over-built, congested dump by the 23rd century.

As you may have guessed, Henry's a good guy. Nice to his neighbors, even the lady who killed her first husband in 1942 and got away with it.

He has a good job and no close friends. He's clean, well-behaved, and every day marvels that for thirty-eight seconds in 1984 absolutely no one on earth was thinking about the Beatles – and this is the strange part – not even the surviving Beatles.

Henry doesn't do much. He's not out there raking it in in Vegas or laying Ms. Portman. He mostly just goes around his business and knows things that people have spent their lives trying to discover or avoid.

Henry knows there was a godforce, a faceless prime mover of the universe. He also knows that, as an example of supreme love for its creations the godforce decided to take on the forms of one of its creatures and live among them. It chose a small, brown field mouse and God was eaten by a housecat named Pansypie.

Henry knows the name of the man who wrote the joke about the chicken crossing the road. He also knows that the man was a terrible lover who often could not maintain an erection.

William Shakespeare had high cholesterol and Demi Moore once had a dream in which she had webbed feet. Sean Kenneth DeAngelo and Misae Nohara would fall madly in love should they ever meet, which they won't. The nose of a man in Ireland is itching. Six of the atoms that once helped comprise Napoleon Bonaparte's hat are currently part of a shoe drifting in the middle of the Indian Ocean. The first word spoken by homo sapiens meant "ouch." There is no intelligent life on other planets, but there will be.

Henry knows what Joan of Arc looked like naked. He's not impressed.

He should be curing AIDS and lecturing the UN on his foolproof plan for world peace. He should be doing everything in his power to introducing Sean DeAngelo to Misae Nohara.

Don't judge Henry. Henry simply can't do that. The minutiae are too overwhelming. He's in over his head and, of course, he knows it.

He knows how to introduce a clean-burning fuel, but he spends his time being boggled by the Beatles thing.

Henry knew where to find the one mutant dandelion whose extra chromosome could be cultivated into a cure for cancer, but on the way to get to the park he spaced out thinking about the time Marilyn Monroe dialed a wrong number and spoke to Albert Einstein. Neither realized who the other was. Dazed by the sheer surrealism of their five-second conversation, he missed his turn. By the time he got to the dandelion, it had already been pulled up and eaten by a small child whose grandson will become a senator and be arrested on Capitol Hill after attempting to pass controversial legislation re-legalizing slavery.

The worst part was that Henry knew he was going to miss the turn.

Henry's problem is that he is unbearably human. Being Henry is like watching a car accident where someone gets pinned under a Chevy Malibu. You *know* what you should do, but there aint no way you're going to lift that car.

He knows how to build a device allowing people to teleport to a habitable planet orbiting one of the stars in the Pleiades, but the materials needed to build that device are only found on that planet.

He knows time travel is impossible and grandma cheated on pappy. A lot. He knows he was almost aborted. He knows his teachers didn't like him. He knows that the

only creature who could have ever possibly understood what it was like to be him ended up lining the digestive tract of Pansypie.

Henry's not alone though. When he's not harping on the Beatles thing, Henry devotes his time to waiting. Waiting for July 17, 2011.

On July 17, 2011 at 3:05:41 pm central time, at the exact same moment a star in the Ptolemy Cluster will nova and Kwan Li of Singapore will sneeze, Henry will step out of a car.

A small child on a training wheeled bike will ride through a puddle and splash 386 droplets of water and 18 mosquito eggs on Henry's slacks. Henry will be momentarily annoyed, but then he will hear an embarrassed laugh behind him. Henry will turn and see the child's mother, Kara Ann Smith-Watkins, age 32, weight 131 lb. 2 oz. Henry knows how the flush of heat rising through his body will feel. He knows the number of photons reflecting off her radiant smile as she nervously apologizes for her son (who will become quite a prominent cardiologist). He knows the precise location of the quaver that will be in his stomach when he sees that smile. He knows what the cup of coffee she will buy as an apology will taste like. He knows the path the conversation will take and the exact position of the sun at the moment she casually mentions that she is indeed single.

He knows exactly which synapses in her brain will fire the first time they make love.

He knows the name of the caterer.

Henry knows the exact saline ratio for each of the tears he will cry when Kara passes on at age 84 years, two months, six days, nine hours, seventeen minutes, forty-five seconds, 304 milliseconds, and 8 picoseconds. He knows the little boy who splashed him 52 years earlier will cry and hug him and call him Dad.

Henry's life won't be without magic. He's just having his memories a little early. He knows the boy will do well in college, but he'll still feel that nervous churn in his stomach when he packs off that last crate. He knows the outcome of each argument with Kara, but he'll still hotly flush with anger each time. He knows it'll turn out well.

In 942 BCE a plowman felt the purest of loves for the daughter of a baker. In fractured Illyrian he told her of this in a form that, had he known how to write or had any

interest in doing so, would have been universally acclaimed as the greatest love poem of all time.

Exactly 78,906,214 snowflakes will fall in a blizzard over Montreal twenty-five years from now.

Gorbachev never liked his feet.

Henry knows you're reading this. He knows which of you liked the story and which of you are still thinking about Natalie Portman. Henry knows what you had for lunch yesterday. Henry knows everything.