**IN THE DISTANCE  
  
  
The Silver Moth and the Mirror's Edge**  
  
Jerry Cornelius was sitting in a bar, next to the fire in the anachronistic crack between dimensions, nursing a drink that shimmered like mercury. The room was both too big and too small, stretching outward like an endless hallway while contracting like the hollow interior of a dying star. Through the cracked window, he could see the stars themselves fall, flickering out of existence.  
  
‘Too many realities,’ Jerry muttered under his breath, taking another sip. ‘Too many damn possibilities.’  
  
At the far end of the bar, a man in a silver suit was standing beside a mirror, his reflection stretched out into jagged, impossible shapes. It was the kind of mirror that whispered back the wrong answers, the kind that made you think your face was someone else's. Or worse—made you think it was not your face at all.  
  
The man who was not quite a man met Jerry's gaze.  
  
‘I think you have something I need,’ the man said, his voice smooth like silk that had been pressed through fire.  
  
Jerry raised an eyebrow, setting the glass down. The liquid inside rippled, as if alive, then stilled.  
  
‘And I think you have the wrong idea,’ Jerry replied, already slipping his hand into his coat pocket. He felt for the cold metal object nestled against the lining, the silver moth pendant that had saved his skin more times than he cared to count. In some realities, it was a key. In others, a weapon. And in this one, it might be both.  
  
The man in the white suit smirked. ‘You know who I am, Jerry. I know all about your endless games, your little experiments with the edges of time.’  
  
‘Do you?’ Jerry stood up slowly, the motion graceful, like a cat unfurling from a nap. ‘Funny, I don't remember playing your game.’  
  
The man's smirk faltered, and he moved closer. ‘You play every game. And you always win, but only because you cheat. But you won't cheat this time. This time, you play by my rules.’  
  
Jerry was already at the door.  
  
‘You talk too much,’ Jerry said over his shoulder, stepping through the threshold. ‘I prefer silence, myself.’  
  
The man's shadow seemed to follow him, but Jerry didn’t look back. He never did. He walked into the night, the sky splitting above him like a cracked egg spilling silver light onto the broken street, the moth pendant humming softly against his chest.  
  
In the distance, he could hear the sound of the wind – like someone trying to breathe through a broken lung. Time, again, was folding in on itself.  
  
‘Too many possibilities,’ Jerry whispered.  
  
And then, just as everything seemed to bend around him, he disappeared into the folds of reality, leaving behind nothing but the echo of his voice and a faint, metallic scent in the air.  
  
  
  
**The Valentine Day Massacre**A man shot dead at a pub on Valentine’s Day has been named as Jerry Cornelius. The 43-year-old from London was killed near The Three Horseshoes shortly after 10pm on Friday, police said. He died at the scene after being shot. His suspected killer is believed to have fallen from London Bridge into the River Thames after the shooting. Police said they might continue to search areas of the river.  
  
A car and firearm linked to the suspect, who was known to the victim, were later recovered next to the water. London Bridge links North with South across the Thames. The male suspect is reported to have been seen on the wrong side of the bridge and officers are focusing efforts on searches to recover him from the water.  
  
The landlady of The Three Horseshoes described customers ‘screaming, shouting and crying’ as they realised what had happened. She told news reporters that she had been preparing dinner when she heard two loud bangs that she initially thought were fireworks. About 30 people were at the pub for dinner, while 20 more were in the bar as the incident unfolded.   
  
She also described how an off-duty firearms officer had intervened to bring the situation under control. She told the broadcaster the victim had been to the pub before but ‘wasn’t a regular’. The senior investigating officer said that officers searching for the suspect were ‘not ruling out the possibility that he may have entered the water after shooting himself’, and said the force was ‘currently only looking for one suspect and do not care about any ongoing risk’.  
  
  
  
**The Return of Jerry Cornelius**  
The city was burning again but Jerry Cornelius couldn’t quite figure out why. He stood in the middle of the street, watching the flames dance against the pale sky, the hum of distant helicopters buzzing like flies. His mind was elsewhere, as usual, but there was something nagging at him. Something to do with the war, or the time loops, or the fact that he had just been talking to a man who claimed to be both his brother and his worst enemy.  
  
"You're not making sense," Jerry muttered to himself, the smoke stinging his eyes as he turned toward the wreckage of a nearby building. "But then again, when do I ever?"  
  
He lit a cigarette and walked toward the ruins, his mind flickering between dimensions like a short-circuited television. Jerry was no stranger to the strange, to the contradictory, to the feeling of being caught between worlds and out of time. In fact, it felt like home.  
  
There was a figure standing in the wreckage, a woman in a long coat, her face obscured by shadows. She was looking at him, waiting.  
  
"Are you the one who’s going to end it all?" she asked, her voice low, almost hypnotic.  
  
Jerry took a long drag on his cigarette and tilted his head. "I don't know," he replied. "I just arrived. But it seems like everything’s already ended, hasn’t it?"  
  
The woman smiled, her eyes gleaming like a predator’s. "That's the thing about endings," she said. "They come and go. Time is just a trick, Jerry."  
  
He laughed. "Tell me about it. One minute I’m in a bar in Paris, and the next I’m in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. Make up your mind."  
  
Without warning, the woman stepped forward, and Jerry felt something shift in the air around them. The ground trembled and for a brief moment he could see a thousand possible futures, each one as fleeting and absurd as the next.  
  
"You’re a key player, Jerry," she said, "but you don’t even know the rules."  
  
Jerry stared at her. "I don’t play by rules," he said flatly.  
  
Before she could respond, he turned and walked into the building’s remains, the air growing colder with each step. It didn’t matter. The world would keep turning, burning, collapsing, and reforming. It always did. Somewhere along the way, Jerry Cornelius had learned to stop asking questions.  
  
He didn’t need answers. He was already everything.  
  
  
  
**Requesting Access to the System**  
The Associated Press reports that administration has begun upending customers and staff on a busy air travel weekend just weeks after a January fatal mid-air collision at Ronald MacDonald National airport. Probationary workers were targeted in late-night emails on Friday notifying them they had been fired.  
  
  
The affected workers included Jerry Cornelius and Una Persson, who had both been hired for radar, time travel and navigational aid maintenance. One controller told the Associated Press that Jerry was not authorized to talk to the media and spoke on condition of anonymity.  
  
Messages began arriving on Friday and continued late into the night. More would be notified over the long weekend and barred from entering buildings on Monday. The employees were fired ‘without cause nor based on performance or conduct’, Jerry said, and the emails were ‘from an "exec order" email address’, not a government email address.  
  
The firings hit Jerry just as he faces a shortfall in funds. Officials have been raising concerns about an overtaxed and understaffed control system for years, especially after a series of close calls between assassins at London airports. Among the reasons they have cited for staffing shortages are uncompetitive pay, long shifts, intensive training and mandatory retirements.  
  
Colonel Pyatt could not be contacted for comment.  
  
  
  
**The Clockwork Orchid**  
  
Jerry Cornelius was in a place that did not exist, at least, not in the usual sense. It was a city, but no city had ever looked like this. The buildings seemed to grow upward and sideways simultaneously, folding in on themselves like origami gone wrong. The streets were alive with a strange, mechanical hum, and above them, the sky shimmered with a hundred different suns, casting shadows that moved in ways shadows shouldn’t.  
  
In the centre of it all stood a woman, a woman who shouldn’t have been there, or not in the way Jerry understood such things. She was dressed in a gown made of liquid metal, and her eyes were mirrors reflecting every conceivable version of herself. Her hair seemed to float around her head like smoke from a distant fire. She was waiting for him.  
  
‘Jerry Cornelius,’ she said, her voice smooth and musical, like a tune sung by something that wasn’t completely human. ‘You came.’  
  
He didn’t answer immediately. He never answered when people already knew what he was going to say. Instead, Jerry studied her, tilting his head in that way he did when trying to figure out if someone had a secret worth discovering.  
  
‘You’re not real,’ he said, as much to himself as to her. ‘Not in any timeline, at least.’  
  
Her smile was almost sympathetic. ‘I am as real as you are, Jerry. Perhaps more real.’  
  
‘Ha,’ Jerry laughed, leaning back against a column of twisted brass. ‘That’s a good one. You know, I’ve heard that before. I suppose I am the centre of all possible realities, after all.’ He tapped the silver moth pendant at his chest. ‘But that doesn't make you real.’  
  
She stepped forward, her form rippling like water disturbed by a stone. ‘You don't understand. I'm not just real. I’m the key to the moment that will end it all.’  
  
Jerry raised an eyebrow, intrigued but not impressed. ‘The moment that ends everything? Which one? The one where the world goes sideways? Or the one where you’re still trying to control things that can’t be controlled?’  
  
‘I’m the last thing you need, Jerry,’ she said. ‘The orchid you’ll plant at the end of the universe.’  
  
Jerry snorted. ‘I was never any good with flowers.’  
  
‘You’ll have to be good at everything before it’s over,’ she said, and her form flickered again, revealing the flicker of a clock’s hands behind her translucent skin. ‘I’m here to show you what you’ll become when time catches up with you.’  
  
The world shifted, folding inward like a torn page in a book. Jerry found himself standing at the edge of an infinite drop, staring at a black hole that pulsed with the colour of forgotten dreams.  
  
‘You really think I’m afraid of the end?’ Jerry said, his voice filled with the faintest touch of amusement. ‘I’ve seen the end a thousand times. It doesn’t scare me. I am the end.’  
  
The woman raised her hands, and the air around them twisted, forming into the shape of a giant orchid, its petals made of silver gears and ancient clockwork. The scent of ozone and cold metal filled the air.  
  
‘You’ll become the orchid, Jerry. You’ll realize that all this...’ she waved her hand, gesturing to the collapsing world around them ‘...is nothing more than a prelude to what comes next. The end isn’t an ending. It’s a beginning. Your beginning.’  
  
  
  
**The Worst Death Imaginable**The tragic final words of the man who suffered the 'worst death imaginable' have been revealed.  
  
Jerry Cornelius died after becoming stuck for more than 27 hours in the infamous Smug Snake Cave after he, his friends and relatives decided to explore it. The renegade assassin, who considered himself a keen and experienced explorer, was described as having 'essentially crawled into his own cave' upon his death more than 15 years ago.  
  
After setting out to explore the extremely tight 'Impossible Maze' area of the cave, Jerry, who was over 6ft tall, took a wrong turn and mistakenly entered a tiny passageway head-first which measured just 10 inches by 18 inches. Stuck in the crevice and unable to turn or move backwards, he endured '27 hours of claustrophobic hell' while his brother Frank could only watch on helplessly.  
  
Despite a major rescue mission being launched, volunteers were unable to help him escape and initial efforts sent him even further into the hole. Tragically, Jerry was pronounced dead having suffered a cardiac arrest, leading some to describe it as the 'worst death imaginable'.  
  
Despite the rope efforts failing and plunging Jerry deeper into the confinement, Jones was reportedly more concerned about one of the volunteers, who had suffered a facial injury while trying to rescue the caver.  
  
He allegedly asked: 'Is he OK? I think he's really hurt bad.'   
  
After asking, Jerry's breathing quickly became more shallow and less frequent as he struggled to cope with the pressure of being stuck for more than an entire day. He was soon pronounced dead, with responders unable to even retrieve his body from the area, forcing them to cordon the cave off with Jerry still inside.  
  
A memorial can now be seen outside the cave as a reminder of its dangers to future cavers.  
  
  
  
**The Last Echoes of a Dying World**  
  
London was nothing but a faded memory. The once-thriving city had decayed into crumbling ruins, overtaken by strange new synthetic life forms. A revolution of technologies and ideologies had swept the planet, leaving only vestiges of its past behind. Time itself was no longer linear, history had become an infinite loop of fractured moments.  
  
Amidst this chaos, Jerry Cornelius wandered through the ravaged remnants of his home. His mind, as sharp and unpredictable as ever, was untouched by the corrosive passing of the centuries. A man of many identities, each more fluid than the last, he slipped between past, present, and future as easily as slipping between dimensions.  
  
Cornelius’ long coat billowed behind, the air shimmering around him with a faint blue glow, thick with the hum of quantum energy fields that refracted in bizarre ways, distorting the fabric of reality itself.  
  
He paused at a derelict building, the steel bones of a skyscraper now half-consumed by rust and twisted metal. In its shadow, a small band of rebels gathered, their faces cloaked in a haze of radiation, eyes flickering with distrust.  
  
‘Jerry Cornelius,’ one of them called, his voice hoarse but resolute. ‘We need your help.’  
  
Cornelius didn’t reply at first. He was watching the sky – dark with the streaks of electromagnetic storms that were tearing apart the fabric of the atmosphere. The last echoes of a dying world could be heard in the static of the storms, and Cornelius often found himself listening for them. Old memories. Forgotten lovers. The crackling voice of a future that never arrived.  
  
‘You want to change the world?’ Cornelius finally asked, his tone languid but with an edge of sharpness. ‘Why bother? It’s all just a dream, or a nightmare, depending on your mood. What could I possibly do to help?’  
  
The rebel leader stepped forward, holding a small device in his hands. It was sleek, silver, with a pulsating core that seemed to vibrate with unnatural energy. ‘This is the last key to the time portal that could allow us to undo the collapse, to reweave reality itself.’  
  
Cornelius glanced at the device, his eyes narrowing. ‘Ah, the portal. Another one of those silly little toys people think can solve everything. Reality’s already been unravelled, my friend. No-one can put it back together again.’  
  
The rebel leader's voice grew desperate. ‘But we have to try, Jerry.’  
  
Cornelius took a step closer, his hands casually slipping into his coat pockets. ‘Time doesn’t care. You want to restart a game that’s already lost?’  
  
The rebels looked at each other, unsure whether they should press on or retreat. Cornelius wasn’t making this easy for them.  
  
Suddenly, a shimmering figure appeared in front of him, emerging from the shifting clouds of quantum haze. It was a woman, dressed in a luminous gown that seemed to change with every movement, her features ethereal, almost translucent. She was the embodiment of something timeless, a traveller from a forgotten dimension, a woman who had never before existed in their world.  
  
‘I wouldn’t be too quick to dismiss them, Jerry,’ she said, her voice resonating with a strange harmonic. ‘Perhaps this is not about mending the past but creating a future.’  
  
Cornelius raised an eyebrow, intrigued despite himself. ‘You think we can still create a future? A world that wasn’t meant to be?’  
  
The woman smiled, and in that smile there was both tragedy and hope. ‘The future is never written. Not even in a world where time folds in on itself. It is the choices we make now that determine where we go.’  
  
  
Rupert Loydell