

Something had gone wrong. Something had gone drastically, terribly, utterly wrong. Something had gone wrong, indeed, and God didn't know what to do about it.

He had been having his fun, toying around with the sanity of Cain Baxter, but now He was in a jam. As a final little game, God had decided to change the texture of Cain's house to look completely normal, yet feel distinctly like a sponge. He'd stepped up to His limit long ago, jumped well across it, and landed into the 'ludicrous' area, but He didn't really care anymore. He hadn't had this much fun since the whole Apollo 13 thing.

God was certainly not a vengeful omnipotent deity by any means but, contrary to popular belief, He did enjoy a good laugh, even at the expense of someone else. He was practically in tears when Delilah cut Sampson's hair. Obviously, God had a sense of humor – look at Canada. But the important thing about God's practices was that nobody ever got hurt. In the spaceship incident, He knew long before anything ever went askew that everyone would be returned safely.

He did not know, however, if Cain Baxter was going to be safe. This sort of thing usually didn't happen. Not to God. God knew everything. God was omnipotent. Except for how to override a syntax error of this great a magnitude.

Now, stepping into his house, Cain Baxter was about to go beyond God's powerful boundaries. Infinite possibilities existed. He prayed for a minute for Cain, and proceeded to turn Calvin Baxter's dishwasher into a lawnmower.

•••

Cain was whirled around haphazardly in grotesque circles. Cain was jolted badly. Cain was whipped forward at magnificent speeds, and then stopped altogether very suddenly. Cain was twisted. Cain was thrown. Cain was contorted, distorted, and shuffled quickly, only to be reshuffled seconds later.

Suddenly, Cain, despite the absurdity of it, fell directly in the middle of someone. Upon closer inspecting, that someone was a golfer. But, checking again, Cain was pretty sure that he was actually in him. Surprisingly, the golfer did not seem to mind this sudden protrusion or even pay him any notice. Rather, he simply took his swing and landed his ball rather effortlessly on the green, mere feet from the hole. This astounded Cain; not that the golfer hit a beautiful shot – golfers are paid to do just that. Cain was more amazed that the golfer was physically able to swing a club, what with a 180 pounds of person through him. The golfer nonchalantly walked away, following his ball.

The voices of the commentators soon caught Cain's ear, and he casually walked over to the booth after brushing himself off to see what was going on.

"Ah, Perry Adams had a lovely tee shot on this beautiful fourth hole, but apparently, there was a man in him at the time."

"Yes, we're going to have to check the rule book on that one."

"While we analyze that one, we're going to take you live to the seventh fairway where 'Stumpy' Fernandez is lining himself up a long right to left birdie putt."

Hesitantly, Cain was about to ask the announcers something when they carelessly brushed him away without even bothering to look. After Stumpy took his shot, they resumed their dialogue.

"Ah, so the rumors are true!"

"Yes, Harvey, it seems that, beyond any considerable doubt, Mr. Adams is a hologram."

"We'd attributed his tremendous winning streak to sheer brilliance, but it turns out he's nothing than a computer generated graphic."

“I’m afraid Perry’s winnings are going to be reclaimed by the government and distributed to the other players.”

Cain listened intently, trying to comprehend how the government and golf could possibly be used in the same sentence coherently.

“So, now, with Perry Adams disqualified from today’s play, it seems that the amateur of the group, young Billy Porter, will take the lead with a score of -4. Now you just don’t see that every day, do you, Tunsis?”

“That you don’t, Reg. That you don’t.”

Finally, Cain decided to slip a note to the two announcers, hoping it would distract them from their intent commentary. He wrote, 'I’m the guy who was in the guy who was disqualified,' and passed it to the nearer commentator. Tunsis read it, glared up at Cain, and tapped his cohort. Together, they gazed up in awe at Cain. This made Cain quite uncomfortable, of course, not only because this is action normally makes one feel uneasy, but because the commentators were both dressed like stereotypical golfers. They wore the dumb hats, the goofy pants, and even the uppity shirt/vest combinations. Reg even had a matching tee tucked behind his ear.

Quietly, one of the commentators covered his microphone and whispered to Cain, “The President would like to see you. Please step into his office.”

This had to be a record, thought Cain. Five minutes in a totally unfamiliar place and he’d already gotten a call from its president. That’s actually a claim many people can’t bear with pride, or at all. Hesitantly, he inquired, “Where is the President’s office?”

Again, awestruck, one announcer looked up in sheer disbelief. “You don’t know? This is the President of Albatross we’re talking about, and you don’t even know where he lives?”

Cain hopelessly shook his head.

Nearly bordering on anger, the announcer grunted, “It’s by the next course. Right behind the clubhouse,” while pointing to an enormous edifice not even a quarter mile away.

Two golf courses right next to each other? The designer of this area obviously didn’t rank that high in the common sense department. The presidential palace was by all means a large building, much larger than the White House of Earth. Evidently, building expenses were not a concern on Albatross. Cain began to wonder what Albatross was, aside from the obvious answers of ‘a bird’ and ‘a terrible necklace’. Cain strode over and knocked on the front door firmly.

“Come on in! It’s open!” came a voice from inside the house.

What Cain saw from the moment the door was ajar came as such an immense surprise that he had to close the door and reopen it. It was nothing he hadn’t seen before. In fact, it was nothing he hadn’t seen only seconds before. It was *absolutely* no different than outside, except for the walls placed adjacently on all four sides of the immense room.

Quite plainly, the President had moved several holes from outside, inside, trees and sand bunkers and all. Perhaps he had holes constructed in the building itself, which could have been a warehouse at one point. If one were to try to accomplish this himself, it would pretty immediately be deduced that a) the entire ordeal just isn’t worth it and b) he’s pretty dumb for trying.

Cain stopped dead. In fact, he would have stayed immobile if not for the President’s cry of ‘fore’ alerting him to the fact that a golf ball was flying at incredible speeds towards him. It smacked against the far wall, behind Cain, and bounced onto the green, just trickling off the green and onto the fringe. Seconds later, a golf cart came moseying along a path that had been inserted between the fairway and the kitchen. In it sat a man who, by clothes

alone, looked no different than anyone else Cain had seen since being mysteriously plopped here. From the facial expression that this man bore, though, Cain could immediately tell that this was the president. He had the type of smile that could talk the scales off a mackerel.

“Howdy, sir! What can I do for you?” he said while offering his right hand in a friendly shake. He would have offered his left, too, had he not been carrying a putter in it.

“Uh,” Cain began, trying to keep up with the President’s tenacious grip, “a couple of golf commentators told me to go see you.”

“Do you remember which tournament?”

“Excuse me?”

“Which commentators? I mean, there were upwards of sixty-two tournaments scheduled for today. Which two commentators?”

Cain was baffled, which was rapidly becoming the norm. “I don’t know! All I know is I just tried to walk into my house, which was somehow turned into a bunch of big letters. And I land here, in the middle of a golf tournament of all places, inside some guy—”

“Oh, *you* were the one, eh?” the President began. “I watched you on my monitors. Surprised I didn’t recognize you actually, wearing those silly clothes. No, sorry, I didn’t mean that the way it sounded.” He paused. “So *you’re* the one who proved that Perry Adams was a holographic projection, huh? We’d had our doubts, but your bravery was all the evidence we needed.”

“Look, I didn’t mean to make any trouble.”

“Oh, on the contrary mister...”

“Baxter. Cain Baxter.”

“As it turns out, Mr. Baxter, Perry Adams committed one of the no-no’s of golf here on Albatross. You should know that.” Suddenly gathering up the pomp and circumstance that Cain was sure he would later regret, the President announced, “Rule 1: Every participant in an official tournament must write down his scores exactly according to the number of strokes he took, adhering to all penalty stroke rules. Rule 2: Every participant in an official tournament must be properly attired. Any deviations from this will result in a lessening of that person’s handicap. Rule 3: Anyone operating a cart must be conscious. Rule 4: No persons partaking in an official tournament are allowed to be either computer generated graphics or holographic projections or most certainly not really good drawings. And, finally, rule 5: In the event of a tie, a spelling bee will determine the winner. So, as you can see, Mr. Baxter, Mr. Adams could not go on, continuing his blatant disrespect for the laws of the land—”

“The *laws* of the land?”

“Well, technically, we’re not allowed to call them laws because the Chief of Police won’t actually arrest anyone for violating them. But they are punishable by a stiff fine and, if the prosecutors are found to be repeats, the ramifications could be very severe.” The President was the only person who could say that without sounding threatening in the least.

“So, what you’re saying is that these rules of golf are laws here? Wherever here is?” Cain was having a hard time absorbing all of this.

Putting his putter back into his bag, the President continued, “Of course. Don’t think that, just because golf may be a game, that you can break the rules. If you hadn’t already guessed, golf’s pretty big here on Albatross.”

“Where?”

“Albatross. Tell me you’ve never heard of us!” Seeing that Cain hadn’t, he continued. “We’ve been the undisputed Intergalactic Golf Champions for the past fourteen years. You must be new around here.”

“I am and, with any luck, I will be new somewhere *else* very soon.” With that, he walked off of the fifth green, out the door, and directly onto the eighteenth green.

What he needed right now was a place to rest. This was something he hadn’t done since immediately after his Seventeenth Birthday party, of which he still had vividly upsetting memories. Much had happened since then including, but most certainly not limited to, the elapse of around thirty hours. Cain needed sleep.

Along his travels, he passed numerous motels, all located on the outskirts of some golf course. Some of the more tempting motels he passed included *The Putt-Putt Place*, *The Nineteenth Green Motel*, and, his favorite, the *Why-The-Hell-Didn’t-That-Go-Inn?* Finally, though, he found a motel with no catchy name or slogan – only a ‘vacancy’ sign. Those were good odds, he concluded. He checked in at the front desk, found his room and, exhausted from being in a perpetual state of confusion, barely made it to his bed before collapsing.