

# **Holographic Ecosystem - World Collection 2021**

Release V of *WindySilver's  
World Collections 2021*

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# Holographic Ecosystem - World Collection 2021

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## About this collection

*Holographic Ecosystem* (as it is currently titled) is a sci-fi world set into the future where the Earth's environment has been destroyed so bad that humanity has left it aboard massive colony ships that host those people, animals and plants that still remain *and* a massive ecosystem of holograms. The stories so far have focused on the colony ship *Aegis I*. While some stories feature random people aboard *Aegis I*, a major part focuses on the technomancers chosen by the *Aegis I*'s holographic familiars.

Two protagonists have been featured so far: a currently unnamed person who has yet to become a technomancer — [\*Holographic Stalker\*](#) and [\*Mysterious Hologram\*](#), with a side role in [\*Ways to Recruit a Dummy\*](#) — and Zenona, one of the newest technomancers — [\*Holographic Familiar\*](#), [\*Follow Me\*](#), [\*A New Encounter\*](#), [\*Next Up in Hologram Gossip\*](#), [\*Ways to Recruit a Dummy\*](#) and [\*What A Malfunction Can Do\*](#).

The last story of the world, [\*A Different World\*](#), is a spin-off set millennia after the events of the main story. What happened along the way, I don't know, but I feel that this is where the millennia after the end of the story will lead even though that story predates the actual hologram storyline.

# Holograms Everywhere

Currently uncollected

Challenge: Make a story using the haiku poem's 5-7-5 syllable format.

We lost our planet.

Holograms are everywhere.

This is our home now.

# Holographic Nature

Collected in [Past Mistakes](#)

Prompt: *Outside isn't real anymore. The trees are hollow, are holograms.* by [Tsuuretsu2Unabara](#) (Year 2012).

Outside isn't real anymore. The trees are hollow, holograms. So are the bushes and the grass, not to mention the animals.

The actual soil underneath us is metal.

The only real plants anywhere near us are sequestered in the greenhouses under the supervision of preservationists and botanists alike, producing oxygen for our smallish refugee band. The rest will have to make do elsewhere with the technological variations. As for animals, the preservationists and zoologists took care of them at contained areas of the greenhouses while the rest of us, again, had to make do with technological variations. Namely holograms.

I took one last look at the destroyed Earth before leaving for the bridge. Someday, someday I would return and fix what my ancestors managed to destroy.

# Hate

Currently uncollected

I hate holograms.

I hate this bucket that we now call our home.

I hate my parents.

I hate my grandparents.

I hate everyone who took part in destroying Earth.

Was it really too much to ask them all *not* to destroy our planet?

I hate you.

...I hate everything.

# Good Times

Currently uncollected

A personal prompt inspired by a good WhatsApp group chat and reminiscence the day I wrote this: *Good Times*

My personal window showed me Earth today. It's still far from the beautiful blue orb it was before the humankind destroyed it, but it's still our home, no matter what.

~ ~ ~

The tea up here can never rival Earth's own. However, I can always sit back with a warm mug of it and reminisce the good old times.

~ ~ ~

"Ah, *good times.*"



# Not The Same

Currently uncollected

Prompt: *Tea Time*

I'm grateful for the botanists who managed to make tea — let alone my favorite type, green tea — thrive in our artificial environments. Don't get me wrong, I'm absolutely grateful that I can enjoy tea like I did before the stupid apocalypse.

It's just not the same, ok? I've compared it with what's left of my pre-war stash and the tea up here isn't the same. I don't mean that it's bad. It's just... different. It's not my tea.

I know I sound ungrateful, I know, but... after I heard of the tea that the botanists started growing here, I got my hopes up that at least one thing, *one small thing*, would be the same. And it's not. And it feels so bad.

I just have to accept it and drink my tea without sugar.

If I close my eyes, lean back and think of the good old tea, my tea with one well-stirred sugar cube, it almost tastes the same.

When I imagine the fresh wind and the grass on the hill my love and I used to have picnics on, it actually tastes the same...

...but that's just because my new tea has tears in it now...

# Holographic Stalker

Currently uncollected

[Flash Fiction Friday's 2020, Week 1](#). Write less than 1000 words. No inspirations used.

It was watching me again. I knew it was the same hologram. It kept watching me, following me, being in the same places as I was no matter where I went and when. It was as if it had digested the data of my whereabouts and had the algorithm (frighteningly accurately) determine where I was most likely to be at this hour. It always kept its distance, but it was clear that it was following me everywhere I went.

That hologram... was stalking me. As insane as it sounded, a hologram was stalking me.

***A hologram was stalking me.***

I knew no one would believe me, though. They'd just laugh in my face, call me paranoid and say that it couldn't possibly be the same hologram, that holograms weren't capable of such a thing, that their AIs were programmed only to imitate their real-life counterparts, nothing more, nothing less.

However, I am certain of what I'm seeing. It *is* the same hologram and it's following me *everywhere* on this ship.

And I don't know what to do about it.

# A Mysterious Hologram

Collected in [Hunting Inklings](#)

The challenge: the story must take place on or in a vessel where escape is an impossibility, there must be at least two characters who are in conflict with one another and it must feature an event utterly outside a character's realm of expectation.

The hologram was still following me. I ducked into a storeroom where there should not have been any hologram projectors aside from the ones allocated for assistant holograms only; it should be a safe space away from it.

It wasn't. The hologram stalked between the shelves and disappeared behind one of the colony ship's many computers.

That was it. I was heading to the hologram control room. They had to know about this and they had to be able to do something about it.

The hologram followed me to the bridge, so I could point at it while explaining what was going on. "It seems to be acting normally," the operator I had been directed to mused. He sounded like he couldn't care less. "Tigers are known to stalk their prey." "Why is it stalking *me* and literally no one else everywhere, even to the storerooms?!" I yelled. The operator scratched his chin. "I'll look into it." He started to type something on his interface. "I see nothing wrong with this specimen. Are you sure you are not just imagining it?"

"Yes!" I half-shouted, exasperated. "Why else would I be here?"

The operator turned to look me dead in the eye. "Do you have any idea how many times a day we hear complaints about the holograms?"

"I... No?"

"The average is five times an Earth cycle," the operator told. "I know these things. The hologram works perfectly. It is not dangerous to you, so please, do everyone a favor and ignore it. It cannot eat you, after all."

I wanted to complain because the hologram — tiger, was it? — unnerved me. However, I didn't have a leg to stand on, so I nodded, murmured my thanks and left, trying to ignore the hologram even when it stared at me.

A few hours later, I turned to look over my shoulder when I was in an area with only one hologram projector. That one was meant for showing preloaded graphs and such, none of the system that holds our ship's holographic nature together.

Yet there it was. The tiger. It was skulking around, looking at me.

Something was wrong with it, no matter what the hologram operator had said. I just didn't know what or why, and with so many complaints around I would never get through to them. I'd only look more paranoid if I tried.

If only there was someone who took me seriously about this hologram...

Or was I actually paranoid, perhaps imagining it? Were there one or more tiger holograms I just happened to run into without hearing about or seeing them stalking other people?

No, it didn't make sense. That tiger shouldn't have been here of all places, and not in the storeroom either.

What was going on around here and why was I the only one noticing all of this?

# Holographic Familiar

Collected in [Past Mistakes](#)

Flashback prompt: *Nightmares during daydreams by [SurrealCachinnation](#) (Year 2012).*

It felt like I had seen it before, like a nightmare during a daydream long gone. The hologram stared into my eyes like a ferocious beast, hunger in its eyes. Had it been a real being and not a hologram, I might have soiled my suit. Even now, when it was a mere hologram, I was terrified, an ancient "fight or flight" mechanism activating deep within my brains.

It felt familiar, as if I'd seen it before, even though I was sure I had never encountered this hologram in the colony ship before.

It walked closer to me, like a beast trying to smell me. The feeling of familiarity was intense and, knowing that the hologram could not hurt me, I reached out to touch the creature's head.

When I came into contact with it, I heard a voice say, *I knew you would come here someday.*

*I always knew.*

# Follow Me

Collected in [Birbs](#)

*Follow me.*

The beast hologram walked past me. I was numb with fear, but I followed anyway. Whatever was going on — was I dreaming? Or hallucinating?? — I might find out soon.

I did not dare to ask anything aloud, especially not when we returned to the more public areas. I felt looks on my back as I followed the hologram.

While we were waiting for an elevator — where the hologram wanted to go with it, I had no idea — a group of penguins huddled around my legs. "Wha-"

*African penguins. They went extinct long ago.*

I looked at the beast hologram. *And what are you?*

As if it had heard my thoughts, it replied, *I'm a Snow leopard.*

I blinked a couple of times. *Can you hear my thoughts?*

*Yes.*

The elevator opened and the Snow leopard walked inside as humans — solid, tangible humans — walked out. I followed it, and so did the African penguins.

*Where are we going?*

*Level 11.*

*The preservation area?*

*Yes.*

I pressed the button for 11 and wondered what would happen once I would try to get inside. How could I explain

that a hologram was talking to me? They'd probably haul me to the nearest medical bay.

At level 11, I followed the Snow leopard out of the elevator and the African penguins followed me. I got looks from passersby, yet no one said anything, let alone stopped me.

I had to shield my eyes for a while when I entered the greenhouse and was blasted by vivid colors I had not seen in ages. I could swear that the Snow leopard was purring. *Come.*

I did not exactly have a choice. I'd probably be hauled to the nearest holding cell if I left without the hologram that had led me there. Thus, I followed the Snow leopard deeper into the greenery.

Eventually, the Snow leopard led me to a bench deep inside the greenhouse. There was already someone sitting there. I was definitely going to get in trouble now.

The African penguins were still following me, for whatever reason.

The person on the bench looked at us. They should have looked alarmed, but instead it looked like they had been expecting us. "Ah, Yeshe, you brought them."

The Snow leopard purred. *Yes.*

I looked from the hologram to the person and back, trying to understand what was going on.

The person stood up and spoke to me, "Welcome to the greenhouse. I'm Elsie, one of the technomancers here."

My mouth was dryer than the metal of the ship, but I asked anyway, "Technomancers?"

Elsie nodded. "Indeed. You've never heard of us?"

I shook my head.



"I suspected as much. When described in one sentence, we technomancers commune with the local holograms and make sure that both the ship and the preservation area stay in perfect condition."

"Isn't... aren't those jobs for, like, engineers and the botanists and whatnot?"

The Snow leopard — was its name Yeshe? — made a snort of some sort. *You can be both, you know.*

"Yeshe is correct. Most of the ones responsible for maintaining the *Aegis I* are technomancers. It's the same on our sister ships, wherever they are."

Sister ships? We have sister ships?? No one's ever spoken of any other colonies or colony ships as far as I know...

Then again, just minutes ago I did not even know these... technomancers existed or that they were apparently maintaining our ship (ships?) and... talking with the holograms?

Elsie continued, "I suppose you're confused by all of this."

"You could put it that way."

Yeshe snorted again. *At least this one came willingly. Talib has had trouble with reaching his choice.*

I turned to the hologram. "His choice?"

*We recruit new technomancers whenever we come across someone who has enough affinity for technomancy.*

*Usually, we pick younger ones since the generations born among us tend to have more affinity, although that also means we might choose dummies — those who are hard to approach since they think they know all about us. Talib has picked a dummy this time. An usually troublesome one at that. I figured that an Earth-born like you would be easier to handle, and I was right.* Yeshe purred and pressed her head against — through — my hand.

I froze at the overwhelming sense of connection. When Yeshe retreated, I asked, "What do I need to do?"

"Learn our ways and go about your life. It's no grand adventure out here, but technomancy will help you with your work and spot any potential trouble wherever you are before the others. Plus, you'll never be without

someone to talk with when you can talk with the holograms." Elsie grinned. "Yeshe is one of the *Aegis I*'s familiars, but you'll see that many of the non-familiar holograms are *very* talkative."

I chuckled. "Alright. Sounds good, I guess."

"Don't worry, you'll get used to it." Elsie's smile faded all of a sudden. "Wait a sec, I never asked for your name!" My smile faded as well. "It's Zenona."

"Zenona." Elsie nodded. "Nice. I like it."

An embarrassing blush came on my cheeks. "Th-thank you."

Yeshe purred. *Elsie, don't flirt with xem.*

Elsie scratched her neck. "Haha, sorry."

"It's fine." I was sure that Elsie noticed my tensed shoulders. Hopefully she wouldn't mind.

"Good, good...." Elsie looked around herself. "Do you want a tour around the preservation area?"

"Um... I-I'd like that. I've never been here before."

"Most haven't. I work on the cold biome, so you can be sure that you'll hear a lot about penguins once we're there."

I looked at the African penguins at my feet. "Is that why these are still with me?"

Elsie giggled. "Perhaps... I may or may not have adopted some of the penguin holograms around here." She winked. "Come on, this way!"

With penguins at my feet and a leopard by my side, I followed her deeper into the preservation area.

I guess I am one of the technomancers now, wherever that leads me?

## A New Encounter

Collected in [Birbs](#)

*I hear that you're a new technie.*

I looked up from my dinner and saw an avian hologram perched in front of my tray. *Technie?*

*'Tis faster to say than technomancer.*

*...Oh.*

*Must be wild, hearing us all of a sudden.*

I chuckled, trying to ignore the looks I got. *I haven't talked with many holograms yet. A lot of them seem to ignore me.*

The hologram cawed. *'Tis just that the news take some time to get around the ship. Y'know, the new technies need to be pointed out to everyone. Takes time to have everyone run into you, y'know.*

I hummed. *Makes sense... So, what are you? Yeshe and Elsie said that I should learn to identify holograms' species whenever I can. Helps with relations, apparently.*

The hologram cackled. *I'm a night parrot. Koori's the personal name. Don't expect to learn to know everyone anytime soon; the hologram database is, y'know, made from all the records of Earth's species, even the extinct ones. 'Tis so huge the ship cycles the holograms that aren't familiars or technie pets every so often.*

*I don't know whether or not I should be relieved about that.*

*I'd say relieved. Everyone knows that there's way too many species to know them all, so no one will be offended if a technie misidentifies us. Even the zoologists don't know everything, although they try really hard not to miss a mark.*

I sighed. *Relieved it is, then.*

"Hey, Zenona," an actual voice called out next to me, attracting my attention. "You good?"

I gave the person — it appeared to be one of my coworkers, Niklos — a wry smile. "Yeah, just figured I'd have a staring match with this night parrot."

Niklos's eyebrows shot up. "Huh. Didn't know you knew birds."

I shrugged. "Happened to come across this species."

Koori cawed and flew to my shoulder. *More like it came across you!*

I couldn't help laughing aloud, but at least it looked like I was simply laughing because the hologram had landed on me.

Niklos chuckled. "Seems like it likes you. Too bad it's not real."

Koori puffed its chest. *Mind you, I am very much real! You just dunno that 'cause you aren't a technie!*

I kept laughing. "I think you just offended it. You know, the hologram system probably makes them understand us more than we think."

*You bet that's exactly right!*

Niklos shook his head. "Doesn't make them real."

*Well aren't you a dense dummy!* Koori shook its head and returned to the table. *Come on, mate, leave 'im be and talk with me! No use wasting energy on dummies!*

I chuckled and gave Niklos one last look. "Don't worry about me. I'm fine. I've got a hologram to keep me company."

Niklos rolled his eyes but said nothing about the hologram. "Whatever keeps your ship in the air." With those words, he left the table.

Koori waved its wing at Niklos's back, as if it had wanted to show him a rude hand sign. *So long, dummy!*

I shook my head. *He just doesn't know. I'd have reacted the same way two days ago.*

*Then why didn't you explain that you're a technie?!*

I shrugged. *It was easier to just go with the flow.*

*Y'know what? Next time, do tell 'im.*

*No promises.*

*Hmph! You gotta find dinner friends from the technie circles. Y'know, I could introduce you to a couple of technies on this level.*

*Maybe some other day. I like eating alone.*

I think Koori would have rolled its eyes if it could have.

*Whatever. 'Twas good talking with you, though. Until next time.*

Koori took off and flew away, leaving me to finish my no-longer-lukewarm dinner.

I should probably ask Yeshe about the lack of knowledge about technomancers when I would run into her again.

## Next Up in Hologram Gossip

Collected in [Birbs](#)

The emperor penguins — actual emperor penguins and not holograms — were huddled around the zoologists as they made sure every single one of them was healthy. Most of them stood or knelt, but Elsie was sitting cross-legged on the artificial snow. Her pet holograms were chatting with the emperor penguins around her while she checked her share of the animals.

Once she was done and the penguins — physical and holographical alike — were still huddling around her, she sighed, "Xe's pretty, you know."

There was chattering and giggling among the holograms. Someone called out, *Elsie's got a cru-ush!*

Elsie made a face at the holograms, unable to discern which one it had been. *No, I don't!*

*Elsie's got a crush!* another voice — one that she did manage to recognize — called out in her headspace.

*Not helping, Anouk! Drop it, all of you!*

The holograms did drop the subject, but Elsie knew from the continuing giggling and chattering that she was not going to live this down just yet.

## Ways to Recruit a Dummy

Collected in [Birbs](#)

*That's the guy Talib has been trying to recruit. A full-blown dummy. He even went to the maintenance and of course talked with one of the only non-technies there. Koori, who was once again perched on my shoulder, cawed something to a flock of passerby birds . The birds chirped back in a nearly deafening cacophony, then turned to flock around the dummy Koori had just talked about. *Let's see if these green rosellas can help. Prepare for explaining stuff.**

*I did not like where this was going. *Why me?! Can't, I don't know, a more experienced technie do that?**

*Nope.*

# What A Malfunction Can Do

Collected in [Birbs](#)

A pauraque's alarmed call echoed somewhere within the woods. Zenona walked deeper, each of xeir steps rustling something. Had xe not had Koori on xeir shoulder, chattering away about the area as if there was not a severe malfunction on *Aegis I*, xe would have been terrified of what may be out there within the jungle greenhouse.

Nevertheless, xe had to find Elsie and fast. Every technomancer was needed now more than ever.

Xe did find Elsie, but it was too late. She was already gone, crushed under a fallen tree. She must have been there when the malfunction had shaken the whole ship like an earthquake.

Zenona's anguished cry startled even the predators that lurked near the body.



# A Different World

Currently uncollected

The prompt: the visual prompt, [Happy life](#) by [SaFram](#).

You and I have only heard of stories of times when we could breathe oxygen and walk in the vast forests without vacuum-proof suits which supplied us enough carbon dioxide for months.

If humanity truly had once required breathable oxygen to live instead of dying because of coming to contact with it, those days were millennia away.

Ever since I was a child, I've been drawn to these forests. I don't know why. The lush colors, the greenery, the giant trees that reached far into the sky, the butterflies and other animals... I've just always loved them. Everyone jokes that perhaps I'm an oxygen-breathing human reborn into a wrong body, but I don't know... Perhaps I can just appreciate it in a way many of us can't in our exile from our origin planet.

Who knows?

There were many times when I descended on Earth and took in the beautiful scenery, wondering how fresh the air would feel to oxygen-breathing humans after the millennia of Earth being uninhabited and thus taken over by its wildlife. I explored ancient ruins, wondering what their original purpose was and how many people had visited them during their prime. I took in what I could of this wonderful world, knowing just how dangerous it was to me. I gathered flowers, admiring their beauty, but after

a while I learned not to bring them back home; they did not survive in the atmosphere I needed to survive.

It was heartbreaking, really, to yearn to be in such a lovely, natural world instead of a world of metal when I knew that the world I wanted to be in would kill me in mere seconds if I took my suit off.

Funny. Perhaps I really am an oxygen-breathing human reborn into a wrong body after all.

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