

Future Past

By Michael Brachman

*If you took all the girls I knew when I was single
And brought them all together for one night
I know they'd never match my sweet imagination*

From "Kodachrome" by Paul Simon

FUTURE PAST

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Also by Michael Brachman

The Rome's Revolution Series

Rome's Revolution
The Ark Lords
Rome's Evolution

The Vuduri Universe Series

Tales of the Vuduri: Year One

*Tales of the Vuduri: Year Two (not yet in publication)

Part 1: The Adventure Begins

I was leaving a client meeting in downtown Philadelphia; it was a Friday, I think. Things had gone exceptionally well and I was out of there a full hour sooner than I expected. I took the elevator down to the ground floor and stepped out of the high-rise building to get my bearings. Off to my left, I saw a small sign on a stand stating “New Reality Show – Open Auditions – July 9 @ 11AM.” I looked at my watch and saw that it was 10:50AM. Today was July 9th. I normally didn’t have the free time to just indulge a whim and it would never occur to me to try and get on a reality show but here it was, staring me in the face. I was intrigued. I wandered into the doorway, which led to a flight of steps. They were broad, made of marble and it seemed like the lobby was designed to force people to go up the steps. So I did. Poised at the top was a line of about three people, speaking to some other people seated behind a pair of tables with red velvet liners. I figured I had gone this far; why not find out what it was all about, so I moved up to stand behind the last person.

When it was my turn, I was greeted by a young woman who handed me two sheets of paper. I asked her what it was all about and she told me I would find out when the audition started. She said that I could fill out the forms in the auditorium and she pointed to her left toward two men dressed in blazers. I walked up to them and they waved me past into a room with sixty or seventy people. The room didn’t have nearly enough chairs and some people were sitting on the floor, others were leaning against the wall and a lucky few were seated in hotel-style wingbacks. As I wandered in, off to my left, a pair of double doors opened, some words were uttered and en masse, the herd arose and began to stream into the next room. I just moved along with the crowd and went into a ballroom with row upon row of narrow tables and folding chairs. At each position was a glass, a water pitcher, a tablet and a pencil. I filed in along with everyone else and took a seat about five rows from the front.

After everyone was in and settled, they closed the double doors and a group of well-dressed people entered from a doorway near the front. A young woman stepped up to the podium and tapped into the mike. She was quite pretty with dark hair and bangs. Her hair was so perfectly cut that I thought it might even be a wig. She was wearing a bright blue business suit and had on lots of rings and some gold bracelets that sparkled in the spotlight that was shining down upon her.

“Hello everyone,” she said, “and thank you for coming. I know it’s quite a mystery but all will be revealed to you shortly.” She waved over at her colleagues and said, “My name is Beth Amante and these are my co-workers, Bob Warnowski...” one fellow with a goatee waved, “Lawrence Slovak...” the other fellow, somewhat balding, half-saluted the crowd “and Susan Lord” the final person, a stunning blonde, tall and really well-built, nodded. “We work for a company called Soulmate Productions and we are getting ready to cast for what we think will be a great reality TV show.”

The crowd murmured a bit which the woman acknowledged then she continued. “While every reality show has behind-the-scenes footage, no one has ever seen all the preparation, the work that goes into producing one. So we’re making a show about making a reality show. I know it sounds confusing but follow along here.”

“First, we’ve invented a game show, called Future Past where a contestant comes on and we’ll try to hook them up with a member of the opposite sex who’s a perfect match. I know you’re thinking to yourself that this is just another dating show and to some degree it is. But we want it to be real. So we’re going to pick one person and put them together with real people from their past.”

“Consider this: we’ve all had so many relationships over our lifetime, some that we remember clearly and some that have dimmed with the passage of time. We always think back and wonder if somebody we had met, someone we had dated, somebody we had loved a long time ago was really the right person for us, or at least would be today. The game show will be our attempt to give one lucky person the chance to go back and talk to all those people, to spend time with them; to see if you should have been together. So, in one sense, it really is a dating show. It’s for a single man or a single woman starting out with a group of the opposite gender. Through the course of several days, the main character will whittle down the group until only one is left. You’ll determine where it goes from there.”

“But the real focus is how to create a reality show... the hard work that goes into setting it up, tracking down the candidates, the taping, the editing. Our crew will be an integral part of the show.”

She pointed to the back.

“As you can see, we’re taping this, the audition process. Every step of the way will be recorded, warts and all. We’re going to let the audience see every element of what it takes to put together a reality show.”

A woman in the front row was waving her hand wildly. Beth put her hands on the two sides of the podium and said, “Yes?”

The woman stood up and said, “How is this show any different from one that was on a few years ago? It was called The One That Got Away – I think it was on NBC?”

“Good question,” Beth remarked. “Remember, the focus of this show is the ‘making of,’ not the game show itself. We want it to be really, well, real. It’s more like a documentary, just spread over several nights. Using your specific example, The One That Got Away was about a handsome bachelor who dated seven gorgeous women in high school. They locked him in a spectacular mansion with these women and forced him to choose one, all within a two-hour span. Did anybody here see that show?”

She waited but nobody else indicated they had. “Maybe you should consider The Bachelor, the standard for this type of show. Each woman is more beautiful than the previous. Where does a guy go in real life, even a handsome, rich one, to meet such women without lifting a finger?” Again, nobody stirred.

“We’re going to use one of you, not ‘Charlotte’s most eligible bachelor,’ with real people from your whole life, not aspiring actresses or models. That’s going to be as real as it gets. Let me tell you what we’re looking for and maybe it will be clearer.”

She turned and pointed to a large screen above her.

“Obviously, you have to be single to participate.” Behind her, a projector lit up and on the screen appeared a bullet point, which was just one word: Single.

“Those of you currently married or in a committed relationship that you would not be willing to give up, we thank you for your time but you may leave now, this show isn’t for you.”

She turned to her colleagues and said in a quieter voice, “Although I can think of at least one network that might copy us and try and break the couples up.” The others laughed.

About half the crowd stood, many of them shaking their heads, and walked back to the double doors which were now open. My preferred state of existence was to be married but since I was currently “between wives” I figured I’d stay and listen some more.

After they were gone and the doors were closed again, Beth continued, “We would like to have nine or ten potential mates of the opposite gender. This means that you’ll have to be able to supply us with that many candidates. If you don’t think you can, now would be the time to leave. We don’t want to waste your time or ours.”

Above her, the next bullet point read: 9 - 10 Candidates – Opposite Gender. Two women, who obviously came together, got up and walked out, as did several men in the back. As they were leaving, the woman at the podium nodded to her co-workers who started fanning out, handing a pile of papers to one person on each aisle. The stack got passed down each row and when they came to me, I took one and handed the remainder to the person on my left.

“You’ve already received your background form plus a release. You’ll need to fill these out before you leave. The packet of papers being passed out is the candidate list. If you want to be considered for our show, you’ll need to take these papers home and fill them out using one for each person you want us to contact and why. Feel free to make as many copies as you need. We also have a web site. The URL and your unique user ID and password are at the top of your packet so you can fill them out on-line if you’d like. We’ll select the most promising lists from people across the country and start tracking down the names using the information you provide...”

A few hands went up in the air. Beth pointed to a guy with red hair in the second row and said, “You, sir, what’s your question?”

The guy stood up and asked, “Is it required that we actually dated these people? What if we just knew them casually?”

Beth said, “Good question. No, it isn’t required that you actually dated that person, only that they give their consent to appear on our show. I’m sure that nobody here dated in elementary school, but there still might be a name from that part of your past that you’ve thought about from time to time. Please be sure that the people you list have at least heard of you. No sense in putting down Tom Cruise or Britney Spears if they don’t know you.” A few people laughed.

The same woman from before stood up and said, “I don’t see how this could work. The logistical problems are...insurmountable. Even if you had met your, your soul mate at one point, if they’re dead or married now, your show won’t work.”

Beth nodded. “That’s certainly true. That’s why we’re having this screening process. We’re conducting auditions in all the major cities. We’re collecting hundreds of names. We want the inner show to be as realistic as possible so we’re going to spend a lot of time making sure the people that appear have a good chance for success. Our thinking is very simple: the dating part of the show will appeal to anyone who has ever loved and lost. We don’t think it can fail to pull at the hearts of just about everyone.”

She shielded her eyes with her right hand and surveyed the audience. “Does everyone here understand this?”

The woman standing looked around her and behind her then sat down.

I raised my hand. Beth pointed to me and said, "Yes?"

I said, "What kind of information are you looking for? Do you want our best guess as to who we think we should have ended up with?"

Beth said, "It's all in the paperwork. You decide what information to provide. We'll read it over. That's it. If we don't understand or don't think it'll work, we won't go on."

I said, "OK" and looked at the stapled papers. Each one was the same. Each page was divided into two sections. The top part was for details about the person you wanted them to track down, a phone number or last known whereabouts. The lower section was for an essay on why you wanted this person to appear.

A large, rather hairy fellow stood up in the back. "Even if we don't use your web site, can we use a computer to fill out a form? In other words, do we have to use these actual forms?" he asked.

Beth said "No you don't need to use these exact forms, but if you use a computer, just make sure that the information you provide follows the format we've laid out."

There were a few other trivial questions but mostly nobody knew whether the idea would work or where to go with this.

In a tone that indicated she was wrapping things up, she said, "OK then. If you want to participate, you have two weeks to fill out the forms. If you're picked to move on, we'll fly you out to our studio in L. A. You'll get the rest of the details then. We'll shoot a day's worth of interviews with you and then we'll run some of the interview by a focus group. After we get our top choice, we'll make arrangements to begin filming the show. We want to air during November sweeps."

She leaned closer to the mike. "Who knows? If you're very, very lucky, you might come out of this with somebody special from your past. Good luck to you all and thank you for your time today."

The final bullet point appeared over her shoulder with the words Good Luck. I looked down at the paperwork and thought to myself, "*What the hell?*"

It didn't take me even a week. When I was done, I had well over 20 essays written. I pared it back to the best candidates plus two, sent them in and then bided my time.

Part 2: The Paperwork

Future Past

Contact Page ID.... P040709-0107

Tell us about you

Name----- Lee Linsky
Gender----- Male
Age----- 49. I will turn 50 in the fall
Education----- BS University of Michigan
----- Ph.D. Syracuse University
Emphasis of Studies- Sensory Science: Audition
Marital Status----- Divorced (twice, sigh)
Children----- 2
Smoking----- Never
Drinking----- Occasionally
Drugs----- Are you kidding? Who'd admit that?
Height----- 5' 6"
Weight----- 185 lbs (I know, I know)
Hair Color----- Brown (or used to be)
Eye Color----- Blue
Grew up in----- Philadephia, Havertown, PA
Employer----- Altair Software Development
Occupation----- Computer Programmer
Income----- Do I have to say?
Religion----- Jewish

Health Information

Information suppressed due to Health
Information Portability and Accountability
Act (HIPAA) of 1996

Part 3: The Essays

Essay 1: Debbie Perlish

Time: Kindergarten

This is first person I remember, who was a girl, who befriended me. At the time, we lived in Overbrook Park, which is at the western edge of Philadelphia. Debbie lived down the street from us and we went to the same elementary school. I was only 4 years old when I started Kindergarten, turned 5 not very long thereafter. I was a bit younger than most of my classmates but that was how they assigned grades back in those days. This was an age, for me, when the difference between reality and imagination wasn't as strong as it is today. I could take a couple of pencils or pipe cleaners, tie them together, make an airplane and play for hours making airplane sounds, diving in and out of the clouds. At this stage of my life, I was really living what was inside my head. My strongest memory of those days was flying. Whether it was Commando Cody, Superman or Mighty Mouse, I put myself there and I could fly.

Commando Cody was my all-time favorite childhood hero. He was a fellow who strapped a jet pack on his back and flew around chasing bad guys. What made him special and what let me relate to him was that he was ordinary. He wasn't a superhero, just a hero with some really cool technology. He had no special powers, just his wits and fists. In theory, with that jet pack, anybody could fly like him. I spent countless hours imagining just that. I would build little models of him out of plastic building blocks that came long before Legos. I'd fly them around. I built replicas of his spaceship and I'd fight aliens and bad guys in my mind.

Back in Kindergarten, my mom had bought me a Mighty Mouse T-shirt, complete with sewn-in red cape and I thought nothing of wearing it to school; after all, Mighty Mouse was also one of my heroes. If you ran around fast enough, the cape would flap in the breeze, just like on the cartoon. Because I was so young and rather shy, I didn't go out of my way to make friends. I was perfectly happy flying around my classroom by myself, imagining myself above the clouds. One time, Debbie Perlish wore a Mighty Mouse T-shirt the same day as me and love was born, or at least something like it. We would fly around the classroom in perfect synchrony oblivious to the process of socialization that underlies the concept of Kindergarten. We had a wonderful time together but in the end, I don't think her gender was relevant. I think had it been a boy who showed up in his Mighty Mouse T-shirt, I would have been just as interested. Debbie Perlish just happened to be a girl and it taught me early on that girls weren't so bad. Later in life, all of my best friends were female. It's kind of embarrassing to talk to males about matters of the heart. With girls, it was never a problem. Maybe it started here.

My memory of Debbie Perlish has faded to the point that I would not recognize her even if I saw her. But I have always been curious as to what happened to her; how her life turned out. I would love to see her again and find out if the connection we shared back then was as important to her as it was to me. To this day, I wonder if it was just my

imagination or whether it was something more. I think back to those days with great fondness. They were simple and happy. And I could fly.

Essay 2: Stephie Calisto

Time: First Grade

Once I moved into the first grade, life became more regimented. Whenever you were ready to enter the school, whenever you were ready to go to recess, whenever it was time to come in for recess, they had you line up. You didn't line up by gender or by alphabet, you lined up in size order. What were they thinking? I was short for my age. I couldn't help it. It was genetics. Why rub it in? Was it the aesthetics of heads going on a gradual slope from small to large? If not, then why line up in size order at all? It was embarrassing. At the time, it would never have occurred to me to challenge such a concept. To this day, I have a thing about my height and I know it all started in first grade. I have no clue as to whether teachers still follow this practice today. If they do, I wonder, in the modern age of constantly trying to build youngster's self-esteem, if they realize the damage it inflicts on a child.

Thank goodness there was this very short girl, named Stephie Calisto, who was even shorter than me and as such, always had to line up in front of me. She liked dinosaurs and that was the age where they fascinated me as well. My mom and dad had bought me a cheap set of plastic dinosaurs but to me, they were real. Whenever we had Show and Tell, I'd bring in one of them and tell the class what I had learned about these fantastic creatures. I single-handedly made my parents take us to the 1964 New York World's Fair just so I could see the life-sized models of these beasts. To this day, I still love dinosaurs.

So even though I wasn't particularly attracted to Stephie at age 6, I liked her and I liked playing dinosaurs with her. I lost track of her a year or two later. When my parents decided to make the move and take us out of the city of Philadelphia and into the suburbs, Stephie and a select few from the old neighborhood were already there. By the time I graduated High School, there were seven of us. Even though we weren't the best of friends, there was always an unspoken bond between us that had come from our Elementary School. There was Stephie Calisto, Molly Talbot, my friend Rick Buchanan and others. We quietly and subtly looked out for each other on a level that was never spoken of. I think if you asked these people down today, you'd be hard pressed to get them to admit the bond was there at all. Yet every time I sit down and look over my High School yearbook their pictures jump out at me and I remember them, not as they were in High School, but from my very distant past. I'd love to know if they remember me the same way.

I looked over my High School yearbook recently and looked at Stephie Calisto's picture. She was actually rather cute. I wonder why I never tried to hook up with her in High School. I am most curious as to what she looks like now. I look to you, the producers, to find out.

**Read more in
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