

The Gallows Playgrounds at The Sycamore Forest

“Is that the sycamore?”

“Exquisite eye you have. The sycamore it is. We ordered this specimen just a couple years ago and it’s done magnificently in our facility.” The technician turned their head toward the massive tank, where tree roots expanded and suspended in a hydroponic marvel of maple domestication. “It is one of our last platanaceae from the old south. They grew by the banks of riverbeds, from Texas all the way up to Michigan.”

The audience seemed perplexed at the mention of the old territories.

“Hm. Representation Zones Five and Six, as they’re commonly known.”

They seemed to discern that clarification. A small chatter of agreeable understanding arose from the politburo.

“Yes. The soil remained rich for several millennia until the Euro-descended degraded the land. They were unseasoned horticulturists and refused to listen to the native people about how to properly sew the soil.

“We were lucky to have reserved this specimen before the last contravene. Without doing so, it would have surely been lost.”

“Praise be to us, we are all we need,” murmured one of the attendees. And in unison response, the politburo echoed, including their technician, “Praise be, for we were all we had.”

The tech took ahold of the group again: “Follow me. I’ll take you to the branches.” The sycamore they sampled for visitation was the largest at this facility, although the tech had heard of larger sycamores and even taller redwoods by way of The Continent, where all superterraneous plant-life seemed to perform much better—and for good measure. Their carbon eliminating properties significantly reduced the earth’s surplus. The hydroponic tanks had worked, despite being viscerally discredited.

The lift would take their group nearly five-hundred feet in the air, where the sycamore displayed a magnificent structure of offshoots. Although a sycamore at heart, technicians had grafted a variety of different fruits to its limbs. Their tech explained, “This is the most successful attempt at multifunctional hydroponic resource in history. You may observe the plant and even sample the fruit, if you’d like. The lift is available to take visitors to The Gallows as well, if anyone wants to visit The Playgrounds.”

The group spread out as the tech stood watch. They took an apple and two bananas to eat while they waited for the group to finish their wandering.

“Excuse me, tech?” A mother and her son had surreptitiously sneaked upon them as they enjoyed their fruit.

“Yes, ma’am. I apologize, I was enjoying lunch.”

“Please, continue to enjoy, but could you send me and my son to The Gallows Playgrounds? We’d love to have a look around.”

“Of course, ma’am. Do you need an escort?”

“Oh, we should be fine. We will not remain there long. Could you send us using a time loop?”

“Most certainly. You will be returned in only a few moments more. Are you ready now?”

“Yes, of course. Jamal, grab an apple and some bananas for us as we travel down. The loops always bring me hunger... and cramps.”

“Can I get kiwi fruit, too,” the boy asked with a beaming set of deep brown eyes.

“Anything you’d like—just be quick.” Her son scurried away as she pulled the tech to the side. “Tell me, are the gallows a trigger for us?”

“I would surely hope not,” the technician replied almost jovially. “This facility was built by us for us. It is not a triggering experience. It is an accurate experience, one in which you and your son should derive strength and joy from. Many of us have visited before and have found great pride in it. And with the time loop, you should miss none of the tour, ma’am. I’ll make sure you’re back to be with the rest of us, where you and your son belong.”

“How kind. This has been an excellent experience thus far and you’ve comforted me, now. Thank you for that. May I ask, how much time have you spent at The Gallows?”

“Many, many stopgaps, ma’am. It is an unquenchable activity and has been described by others of us as having ‘endless satisfaction.’”

Her son hurried back with a bunch of fruit folded into his shirt like a makeshift knapsack. He handed the bananas and an apple to his mother, who deposited them in her satchel, then pocketed the kiwis, and gave a peach to the tech. “Here you go, Mx. Tech!”

“Thank you, Jamal. This is going to be a great dessert. I appreciate it—have fun at the playgrounds.”

“Ok let’s go,” his mother prompted, “I’m excited!”

“You will be back with us in only a few short moments. Have fun.” They marched into the lift as the tech set the machine to deliver the duo into a time loop at The Playground Gallows and return them, at their leisure, precisely in a moment’s time.

The time loop operates by placing a stopgap on the linearity of temporal progress, “looping” the precise moment experienced by the traveler. It’s a useful tool in the occupation of a docent-tech, allowing them to keep on task, in linearity, and to allow each person to do activities at their own leisure. In fact, the only reason linearity is favored is because it enhances togetherness and oneness, something the ancestors went without for so long. It was their most fervent wish for those of us who live now, that our ties would not be severed and that we freely experience this plane in harmony.

When Jamal and his mother, Editonia, reached the playgrounds, they were greeted by a large, arching sign which read, “The Gallows Playgrounds at The Sycamore Forest.” A holographic instructor informed them to leave their belongings inside the elevator and to follow her very quietly: “Welcome to The Gallows Playgrounds at The Sycamore Forest,” she stated at just above a whisper. “I’m so overjoyed that you are temporally safe, unfortunately not all of us are.”

“Are you from now?” Editonia asked, although she was certain how the docent would respond. Her clothing indicated that she did not exist in this instance of real time. “I am not. However, I will have to skip pleasantries for now. We have work to do. I have three tasks for the both of you. The first task will require the two of you to go as a pair. The second and third tasks will require that I separate you and your son. Is that alright with you ma’am?”

“Will he be returned to me unscathed?”

“Of course, ma’am. That is our guarantee. If you do exactly as I say, there should be no problem.” His mother nodded. In this Now, there existed an almost unprecedented level of trust within the group of us, enough to entrust the life of a child into the infinite jaws of time.

“Let us begin. There is a mob circling in on one of us in the time called 1895. You are to free the victim, bring him to me, and deliver justice to those who sought to take his life. Because we have the benefit of time, you may erect temporal stopgaps whenever you deem it necessary. To start a temporal anomaly, you’ll need these.” The docent handed them their tools, items which looked of pocket compasses. “Press the top button to start or stop a temporal anomaly, it will be extremely useful. When you are ready to return, both of you will need to double press on the top of the compass and it will return you to Now. Do you understand?” They both nodded their heads in agreement. “Remember, take no mercy. It is not to our advantage to be demure. Are you ready?”

Mother and son met eyes, and then faced their guide: “We’re ready.”

She smiled. "Be quick. Be wise. Bring us to Now." And with that declaration, the forest grew dark, and the sound of dogs barked somewhere near. The floor no longer composed of pristine moss, carefully designed by techs, but dry, thorny twigs and leaves of a natural forest floor. The victim they were there to save quickly rushed by them as they followed him.

"Wait!" Jamal screamed at the man. "We're here to help you!"

He stopped running for a second to speak, "You can help me later. We need to go, now!" And he turned to take off again, just as Editonia grabbed his arm.

"You don't need to be afraid. We're here to help. We will rescue you, just stick with us. How far away are they?"

"They can't be far now. I've been running as fast as I can—"

A dog lunged out of the darkness at the man, sinking its teeth deep into his arm. Editonia quickly initiated a temporal stopgap, pausing everything except their new friend, herself, and Jamal.

"How on earth did you do that?"

"We will explain later, but we need to get you to safety, right after we deliver justice to your attackers."

Jamal helped his mother remove the dog from the man's arm. The vicious creature looked petrified, as it froze in time unable to move or back. When they released the stopgap, it scampered away whimpering in terror.

"That should give them a warning," the man said. "But they won't heed it. They're determined to see me lynched!"

"We promise, you will not be lynched tonight," Editonia said. "We're taking you to Now with us."

"Shhhh!" Jamal warned, "I can hear them coming."

A light shone to their back as the mob arrived. "Where's the n*gger?!"

"You got the rope, Sarah?"

"Yep! A whole field of it! What's wrong with the dogs, huh? They seem frightened by something. Should we turn back?"

"Now, I don't want to ever hear you suggest that again. We are going to kill that n*gger for looking at you and then we're gonna watch until he's dead, you hear me?"

“Yes sir, I just thought—“

“Shut up and hold the damn light. We gotta find this n*gger without the dogs, now. Your cowardice has made them take after you.” He motioned to the rest of the mob, which followed in him in obedient pursuit.

Jamal, Editonia, and the man stood quiet in the dark night, waiting for the mob to get close. And when they could make out their faces and the texture of their clothes by their lanterns and moonlight, just close enough for their attack, they pressed their compasses and initiated the temporal stopgap. The three of them moved quickly, without hesitation and without mercy. The man took the rope from Sarah’s hands and looked her dead in the eye. “I wasn’t looking at you before, but I sure am now.” He could see a tear stream down her face. It was one of the only things the technicians had allowed to not be temporally paused. They took the ropes and divided them up amongst the mob so that all would face justice—right then and right there.

It was an easy task, being that none of them could fight back, no matter how much they looked like they wanted to. The techs were sure to provide that speech was also blocked by the stopgap, making certain that no savvy of the tongue would prompt empathy from us as justice was being executed. The words of the docent rang loud in Jamal’s head as they did their work: “Remember, take no mercy. It is not to our advantage to be demure.” And he continued to work until all the mob was suspended, with rope fastened around each neck, ready for the stopgap to end and for justice to be served.

The moon stood still, hanging bright in the night sky, watching. Jamal looked at his mom and they ended the stopgap, as life filled the mob’s bodies again and gravity pulled their cruel flesh toward the earth.

“We don’t have to stay around for this,” Editonia said. “Let’s go back to Now. We’ll let them suffer alone.” They did exactly as their guide had stated and, this time, double-clicked their compasses to return to The Sycamore Forest.

A quiet peace, full of warm light and the soft chirping sound of birds welcomed the heroes and their new friend back to Now. Their guide was overwhelmed by their success and greeted the newest member first.

“I have been watching over you, in the countless millennia of timetables, searching for the right moment to send help. Because you are a part of us, and we’ve always needed you safe. So, now, safe you are, Jeremiah. Do not worry. Take a moment to rest here. You are with us now, safe, in The Sycamore Forest.” She turned to Editonia and Jamal. “Thank you dearly for your help. That was not easy. But tell me, did you have fun? You don’t need to be shy about expressing your joy. This is a playground after all!”

Jamal piped up, “Are you kidding? That was the best time of my life! We won! We beat the bad guys! Can we do that again?”

His mother giggled and nodded along with him. “That was fun, I cannot lie. I understand why The Playgrounds are such a popular spot here!”

“Excellent to hear,” chimed their guide. “Before I send you two on your next quest, come with me, there is a small ceremony that we must attend too.” The guide led the three of them to another part of the sycamore where golden gallows, closed off at the knot, hung in glittering suspension. “This a remembrance site of all of the successful temporal rescues. We hang these ornaments as a reminder of justice, the victimless gallows which did not prevail in killing us. I am happy to show you, Jeremiah where yours is, because we knew you would arrive safely here today. Safety and togetherness are things worth remembering in pristine gold.”