

“Perspective 9”

By Dave McClain

A driving instructor learns there are more perspectives to traffic accidents – and many other occurrences in life than he could have possibly imagined. That knowledge comes from a most unlikely source – and could cost him everything.

“My name is Ricardo Ponce. I’m a driving instructor in Boston, Massachusetts. Two days ago, at approximately 9 a.m., I was driving south on Mass Ave... Massachusetts Avenue... approaching Tremont Street in Boston’s South End. In the passenger seat was a 16-year-old girl named Edith Walker, who was at the beginning of her first driving lesson. As I began to make a left turn, a driver coming from the opposite direction on Mass Ave was speeding through his left turn, but took it way too wide and crossed into our lane. I was able to slam on the brakes and turn the car just enough so the worst that the other driver could do was sideswipe us. He sped past our car, narrowly missing us. I didn’t see any other cars coming. I cautiously drove out of the intersection and headed for an open parking spot I saw beside the Corner Café. I needed to see how Edith was doing and we had to catch our breath. The next thing I remember... I was here.”

Ricardo inhaled and exhaled deeply, looking down at the metallic floor. His large frame was trembling, but he was relatively calm. He looked back up at the small square piece of glass in the center of the 6-inch orb floating in the air in front of him. About the same size as the orb and just above it, there was a hologram of his own face looking back at him. The hologram also seemed to be floating. The image turned to Ricardo’s right, mirroring his movement as he turned to look into the three teaspoon-sized dark blue eyes with grey pupils looking back at him.

Ricardo steeled himself and spoke in a measured tone. “Is that good e... Is that alright?” he asked.

Ricardo’s ears heard a few random clicks and squeaks, but somehow, his mind simultaneously also understood the words, “Yes. For the present.”

“I’ve done everything you asked.” Ricardo steadied his deep voice. “I’ve calmed down. I recorded a statement for your... archives. Now, will you please tell me why I’m here?”

Ricardo was still trembling slightly, but his gaze remained fixed on those three eyes, although he had to tilt his head up slightly to do so. This... creature looked basically human to Ricardo. Two arms. Two legs. The clothing had no discernible design, but featured various shades of brown, and looked like it was made of some sort of plastic-nylon hybrid. The gloves matched the suit and the boots were gray. The skin on the neck and head looked human, except for a subtle blue-green tint. The face had the same features as Ricardo’s face, give or take an eye, but those features were spread out length-wise more than on any face Ricardo had ever seen before. There was no forehead to speak of and only a small patch of black hair on top of the head.

The thin lips made a variety of shapes and the throat vibrated as the clicks and squeaks resumed. “Will you not ask me my name?” Ricardo understood the creature to say.

“Your *name*?”

“Yes. Is it not customary on this planet to request the name of a new acquaintance?”

“*This* planet? THIS planet. So, we’re still on earth?”

“You are on my galactic transport. We are currently hovering above what you call Boston Harbor. My craft’s masking technology is actively engaged. We are invisible in every way imaginable and we are at an altitude that will not allow sea or air vessels to detect our presence.”

“When can I return to earth – Boston... when can I... go home?”

The creature stared at Ricardo for a moment, then turned and began walking out of the small, oval-shaped room and towards a large, rectangular opening leading to a hallway. After the briefest hesitation and a short stutter-step, Ricardo began walking beside this emotionless being and those same sounds began emanating from its mouth once again.

“My name is such that your vocal chords would be unable to render it correctly. You may refer to me by my title. In your language, it would be best understood as The Delegate. I have a high position in my planet’s government, which has sent me here on... a fact-finding mission.”

Ricardo began breathing a little more heavily. His mouth began to form the first word of a question, but he couldn’t decide what to ask. He continued to walk with The Delegate down the nondescript silver/gold metallic hallway. The pace was leisurely, but Ricardo’s mind was racing.

“I come from a planet similar to earth,” the Delegate continued. “I belong to a species much like your own, but much older. Our leaders have suggested improving our quality of life by altering certain variables, possibly leading to social progress for our race. I have traveled here through a wormhole on the other side of the galaxy to begin testing our specific ideas on a small scale.”

Rapidly filling with a combination of anger, fear and indignation, Ricardo couldn’t remain silent any longer. “You’re trying to take over our planet.”

“No. We mean you no harm. My mandate is to observe and archive. Nothing more.”

“What does this have to do with me? Why am I up here?”

“Your handling of that traffic accident was impressive. Accident scenes provide an ideal setting for my experiments. Your first-person perspectives would enhance my observations.”

Ricardo hadn’t even noticed that they had entered another oval-shaped room, similar to the room where he had given his statement, but much larger. He saw a row of nine tables at the far end of the room. The tables were 8-10 feet apart, each with a thick center support, a thick, flat top and a transparent sphere, slightly larger than a basketball, floating just above the center of each table.

“This should look familiar to you,” said The Delegate. He approached the table on the far right and used the sensors on his glove to draw the sphere closer to himself, then expanded it to twice its original size. The Delegate then placed his hands back at his sides. The transparent sphere continued to float, roughly at Ricardo’s eye level, and the image of a cityscape took shape in the center of the sphere.

“That’s where I almost had that accident!” said Ricardo. He removed a notepad and pen from the pocket on his blue jeans and began to make notes. “That’s some surveillance system,” he said.

“That is not surveillance,” said the Delegate. “This is happening as you see it.” He moved his right hand behind the sphere from left to right, and then reached inside. The scene was still. He used the tip of his finger to move one of the parked cars over next to another parked car and placed his hands back at his sides. “Here it is again, slightly altered.”

Ricardo stared with concern at the new version of the accident scene. “But that would cause...” Ricardo was interrupted by the sight of the speeding car involved in the original near-miss jumping the curb and running over two children waiting at the corner for the light to change. “That didn’t happen. That *can’t* happen. Please tell me that what I just saw wasn’t real.”

“The perspectives that you just saw play out were completely real. Both of them.”

“What are you talking about? Did we travel back in time?”

“We did not. But your accident scene did. No one can send themselves either forward or backwards in time, but we can reverse time, alter conditions and observe outcomes. Repetition allows me to change variables and conduct my experiments.”

“Experiments?!? One of your so-called experiments just killed two little kids!”

“These outcomes are inconsequential. The perspectives are simply recorded for further analysis.”

“Fine. Then just set it up like it was before and replay it!”

“No. Nine perspectives is the prescribed limit for my experiments.”

“Nine? I only saw two! Replay the scenario!”

The Delegate’s clicking and squeaking turned into thumping and squealing. “You are watching me COMPLETE this set of experiments! We always run multiple perspectives. Why do you think that so many eyewitnesses give conflicting statements at accident scenes?”

“I don’t understand.”

“My particular experiments are being carried out for the first time – but my forbearers have been manipulating variables in life on earth for millennia! Car accidents, military skirmishes, even the course of people’s lives! Have you ever had the sensation that you humans call “*déjà vu*”? Well, NOW you know why that happens!”

Ricardo was dumbfounded. The implications of what The Delegate revealed were overwhelming his ability to think clearly... yet, one question emerged that Ricardo could not avoid. He asked it slowly. “Now that you have told me all this... what are you going to do to me?”

“Your personal timeline can still be reversed. You will experience a sensation of falling and find yourself in your bed. Your body will twitch and you will briefly awaken. It will be the night before this scenario plays out. Our encounter will not have occurred and you will have no memory of our conversation or my craft. You simply have one more function to perform first.”

The Delegate again swiped his hand behind the sphere floating in front of them. The corner of Mass Ave and Tremont Street again appeared, exactly as in the last scenario. The Delegate’s clicks and squeaks had returned to their previous levels of coolness and moderation.

“THIS is now the ninth perspective of your accident. I can still reverse it to the night before this moment and give you your life back, but that would bring us back to this scenario in which the children die. If I moved that additional car out of the way and play the scenario from this point, the children would live, but you would be forced to remain here to help me with other experiments involving your planet. Either way, this perspective will give me valuable data for my study. This time the variable I am testing is the choice you will make. What will be the outcome, Ricardo Ponce? Choose! CHOOSE!”

Ricardo tightened his grip on the pen that was still in his left hand and jammed it deep into the neck of The Delegate, at the same time, grabbing his right arm and thrusting it into the sphere. The gloved hand shoved the double-parked car out of the way. As The Delegate staggered and began falling to the floor, Ricardo forced that right hand behind the sphere and yanked it from the left to the right, spinning his timeline backwards just as he lost his grip on The Delegate’s arm. The Delegate’s lifeless body fell to the cold, metal floor with a crash. His eyes remained open, staring at nothing. Red blood pooled under his neck. Ricardo turned his head and closed his eyes. His own heart was beating somewhat slower now, but he had a sinking feeling in his stomach. He wondered if those who had sent The Delegate to earth would know that he had assassinated one of their leaders. That sinking feeling intensified and seemed to consume his whole body.

Suddenly, Ricardo’s leg twitched and his entire body jerked. He opened his eyes. He was able to focus on the midnight sky outside his bedroom window just in time to see a flash of light coming from the direction of the harbor. He heard a noise that sounded like a plane taking off, but more high-pitched. He wondered what it was, but he was too tired to get out of bed for a better look.

As Ricardo began drifting back into a deep sleep, he didn’t know why, but he felt a peaceful smile spread across his face.