

## QUEST

### The Traveller's Quest for The Immortal City by Andrew Lim

#### *A Re-Imagining of Pilgrim's Progress*

##### Stage 1 – Leaving The Mortal City

I had a dream.

I saw a man wearing second-hand clothes, a Gideon's Bible in his hand, a heavy backpack on his back.

He was reading the book. And as he read, he cried out and screamed and tremors racked his body. He crumpled to his knees in the street. In despair, he lifted his trembling voice to the heavens, "What do you want me to do?"

With all the self-control he could manage, he stumbled home to his wife and children. For days, he continued in mortal agony, but they didn't notice. One day, he reached his limit. He called his wife and kids, and in an anguished voice pleaded with them: "We have to leave this house. We have to leave this city. Today! This great city we live in is going to burn. Fire will fall from the skies. Everyone's going to die. We have to escape!"

They looked at him like he was mad.

"Honey, you should lie down. I'll call the doctor," his wife replied in a level voice.

"No! I'm telling you, we have to leave NOW!! Take the kids. Let's go!"

"Now, you listen. We're not going anywhere. You're sick. You're stressed. You need to rest." His wife's voice sounded cool, even harsh.

"Yeah, Dad. Get a grip!" His son's voice came back with disdain.

"Daddy's lost his marbles. Daddy's lost his marbles." His young daughter's voice in mocking sing-song.

They all laughed. Chillingly.

(Ever had that feeling like when someone reaches into your chest, grabs your still-beating heart out, shows it to you, and then tosses it into a blender? The man felt it.)

He hurried out through the front door. Started walking down the street, fast. Everything looked different now. His family sounded different. The street looked different. The neighbours looked different. Something had changed. "C'mon!", he thought to himself. "Have **they** changed? Or have **you** changed?"

He looked at the Bible in his hand. It had scarcely left him since that first day. That day when that stranger had handed it to him at the train station. He'd been reading it ever since.

He stood at the corner of his street. Where was he going to go? What was he going to do? He had no idea.

A man approached him. The man's name was Evangelist. "You alright, mate?"  
 "No, I'm not alright! This book says that I'm going to die. Then God's going to judge me. And he's going to judge this city."

"Then run!", Evangelist said.

"Where?"

"Look over there," Evangelist pointed. "Do you see that light on the edge of the city?"

The man looked. There was a light, unlike any light he'd ever seen. Funny how he never noticed it before. His street being on a hill, he could see the city in front of him. On the far side of the city was a point of indescribable light.

"Keep that light in your sights and head towards it. When you get there, you'll find a door. Go through the door. And follow the signs to the Immortal City. God-speed to you."

The man ran. The Traveller's Quest had begun.

The Traveller was two suburbs away before a car pulled up next to him. "Oi!! Where do you think you're going?", yelled the passenger. There were two men in the car – his drinking buddies Pig Head and Plastic Man. (They were the nicknames they had: Pig Head was stubborn as hell, and he had a pig's gut to match his drinking capacity. Plastic Man changed his mind at the drop of a hat, and looked like a stiff wind would bend him like a bow.) The Traveller's wife must have called them to talk some sense into him.

He kept running.

"Come back with us!", continued Pig Head.

"We all have to get out of this city. This whole place is going to be destroyed. Come with me! Evangelist has shown me the Way. Come with me."

"Are you crazy? And leave our families and friends and this great life behind? Everyone is dying to live here and you're dying to leave?!"

"What are you looking for anyway?", enquired Plastic Man.

"Life. Real life. The kind of life this book talks about," said the Traveller, holding up his Gideon's Bible. "Join me, my friend, and we'll find it together!"

Plastic Man wavered, then pulled the car over, got out of the car, and started running with the man.

Pig Head yelled at their backs, “Idiots!”

“Where are we going?” puffed Plastic Man.

“The Immortal City,” replied the Traveller. “Where people live forever, where there’ll be no more crime or cancer or cursing or crying, where everyone walks with God.”

“Sounds good”, Plastic Man said. “Let’s give it a go.”

They ran and ran and ran.

The two men suddenly fell face-first into a boggy marsh. “Where has this come from?”, the Traveller thought. The two men had been so deep in conversation, they didn’t realise they had run into the city’s tip, where all the city’s garbage was collected and dumped into the marsh into which they now stood up, filthy and stinking of the population’s refuse. They could hardly move, and the man even started to sink a little from the weight of his heavy backpack.

Plastic Man cursed. “Well, what the \*\*\*\* are we supposed to do now?!” He continued angrily, “Is this the happy life you told me about, stuck in this \*\*\*\*?! I’m outta here! You’re on your own.”

He struggled to the edge of the marsh, a look of disgust and pity on his face, leaving the Traveller to sink, and heading back where he came from, cursing some more from the filth that covered him from neck to toe.

The Traveller struggled forward, but the weight on his back was too great, and he continued to sink.

“Help!”, he cried out. “Can anyone help me?”

Another man appeared in my dream. An H.E.L.P. Worker. The letters H.E.L.P. were printed in gold on his work van. Underneath, also in gold lettering, they were explained: Here and Everywhere for the Lord’s Praise. The H.E.L.P. rushed to the edge of the bog.

“Hang on!” he said, throwing a lifeline to the sinking man, and pulling him out.

“Thanks for your help”, the Traveller gasped, lying exhausted.

“What were you doing there in the first place?” asked the H.E.L.P. Worker.

“I’m on my way to the Immortal City...and I wasn’t looking...and fell in here. Why don’t they fix this...so it’s less dangerous?”, replied the Traveller.

“This city’s tip, or pit as I like to call it, can’t be fixed that easily. When anyone in the city is convicted of their rejection of the Lord God, the scum and filth of their

conviction runs here into this bog. Anyone caught in it drowns in despair and depression when they realise their lost condition. Now, fix your eyes on the light you're looking for, and also watch your step! God-speed to you."

The Traveller thanked the H.E.L.P. worker for his help, and renewed by his words, hurried off, running hard towards the light on the edge of the city.

He was now approaching it swiftly, only a few hundred yards away. The Traveller could hardly wait, so close he now seemed to his goal. A smile started and grew to lighten his face.

Suddenly, a black SUV roared from his left and pulled up next to the Traveller. Inside was one Mr Lifestyle.

"Quite a load, you're carrying there," Mr Lifestyle said, pointing to the Traveller's backpack. "Where you heading?"

"To the light and door at the edge of this city."

"Ah-hum...listen...", Mr Lifestyle continued smoothly. "Can I give you some advice? That backpack. Gotta get rid of it. It clashes with your clothes, and that dirt! You must have come through the city tip! You know, I was like you once. I wanted to head to the light too. But, let me tell you. That bog you were in? It's just the beginning of your stresses. Keep going, and there's pain, and hunger, and danger, even death."

He paused for dramatic effect.

"Now, how did you get that backpack in the first place?"

"It suddenly appeared when I was reading this book," said the Traveller, holding up the Gideon's Bible.

"I thought so", said Mr Lifestyle, rolling his eyes. "Damn Gideon's...", he muttered. "Let me tell you a secret. I can get rid of that pack off your back. There's a town near here called Morality, and there's a legal firm run by Mr. Conformity and his son Mr. Law Keeper who can help guys like you with their burdens. Let me introduce you. Hop in. I'm heading that way now. I'll give you a lift."

The Traveller hesitated.

Mr Lifestyle's promise seemed almost irresistible. A legal cure for his burden. No need to run further. And who knows what lay beyond the light and the door? Perhaps Mr Lifestyle was right about the dangers ahead.

But Evangelist's words rang in his ears - "Keep that light in your sights...go through the door...follow the signs to the Immortal City..."

Mr Lifestyle now pulled up in front of the Traveller, motioning for him to get in the car, pointing his car towards the town of Morality. But just at that instant, the light from the edge of the city shone **through** Mr Lifestyle, and for a moment, the

Traveller could see the man's true form – hideous and corrupt. And his form was Liar, Cheat and Hypocrite.

Startled, the Traveller leapt back as if electrocuted, scrambled around the car in fright, and started running full tilt towards the light, not daring to look back, shutting out Mr Lifestyle's shouts and the roar of his departing car.

The Traveller now approached the door, and who should be standing there but Evangelist.

“What was THAT?”, asked the Traveller, pointing at the speeding car of Mr Lifestyle and still troubled by the vision he saw.

“Liar. Cheat. Hypocrite,” replied a worried-looking Evangelist. “He lied to you about how to relieve your burden. His friend Mr Law Keeper would have cheated you out of eternal life. His hypocrisy is that he considers himself religious, but his religion is pious moralising. No wonder he finds it easy to live in the town of Morality. But come, let's talk of happier things.”

Evangelist pointed to the door. The secret of the light was now solved - The door itself shone the light! It bathed both men in its glow. It was a narrow door with an ancient inscription written in red over the entrance: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

The Traveller lifted his hand and knocked on the door.

“Who's there?”, a grave voice intoned.

To be continued...