



BLACKBERRY ISLAND

A Short Story About an Alternate 98040 Universe in 2020. You may smile reading this. Blame the Golden Pineapple.



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Figure 1. Blackberry Island and Connected Gondola System



2 HOURS NORTH

THE GONDOLA EMERGED FROM THE DENSE FOG OVERHEAD as The Paddler pulled away from Groveland Beach and made for the Bailey Peninsula on his way to Denny Blaine Park. The gondola cables and the Seward Park Relay Tower disappeared to the west in fog.

Eight people per gondola. 30 miles an hour. One gondola every 30 seconds. About 3 minutes point to point. Relays in Seattle's gondola system could get you downtown in 20 minutes, even in a snowstorm.

The Lake was calm. A dozen Canadian geese flew past in formation, honking loudly.

Daunted by high hills and Lake Washington, the transportation planners in the region had constructed a series of innovative cable gondolas in the early 1900s. The high hills of Seattle were left intact and connected to 2nd Avenue by gondolas at James, Madison and Pike.

The Paddler reached the center of the deep Lake and eased his kayak around. He peered at the sun rising over Blackberry Island to the east. The light pierced the fog, resembling a scene from the River Styx.

In 1939, the first cross-lake gondola connected Blackberry Island's upper Brookbay with Seattle's Seward Park relay. That relay in turn connected to Boeing Field. Brookbay connected to First Hill in 1940. First Hill also connected to Seattle's Mt Baker in 1942. Medina and Madrona were connected in 1943. South Blackberry Island and Renton's Skyway were spanned in 1955. South Blackberry was connected to the Kenneydale highlands in 1962. A gondola from West Seattle to downtown Seattle was finally started in 2020 after a bridge failure.

Voters had rejected proposals to build pontoon bridges across the Lake half a dozen times. A floating bridge was said to be folly. Surely it would sink during a winter storm. One time, the state legislature decided to proceed, but pushback from Island populace prevailed and the project was cancelled.

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The residents of Blackberry Island argued that the natural beauty of their Island would be despoiled if a highway connected them directly to Seattle. The Gondola system paid for itself and remarkably reliable. It ran on hydro power from Snoqualmie Falls.

The Islanders, as they called themselves, considered themselves to be far more liberal and enlightened than their ultra-right conservative counterparts in Seattle. Blackberry Island was called the Berkeley of the North. The Islanders liked their social distancing from the uncivility of Seattle.

The Paddler continued onto the north point of Seward Park and from there to Denny Blaine Park. A northwest wind picked up as he traveled north. Two hours later he arrived, came ashore and surveyed the situation.

About 40 people. Half men. Half women. A few in between. A few children. All naked, enjoying the sun and the bright blue sky. Swimming. Tossing a soccer ball around.

The Paddler sat and snacked on water and nuts. The wave-chop from the last half hour had been brutal, soaking him thoroughly. His arms ached. He disrobed, hung his clothes up to dry and swam. Nudity was legal and accepted in Seattle; and, on Blackberry Island for that matter.

As he watched the beachgoers, The Paddler contemplated the course of the earlier 2003 Pandemic.

That virus raged over every corner of the planet. One in fifty died. Virtually undetectable in many; lethal to others. It had reincarnated lately.

This time, however, the Deposit Protocol had been initiated. Rapid mass identification kept this virus in check on Blackberry Island. Not so in Seattle, which opted out of the protocol.

The Deposit Protocol was the brainchild of President Gary Johnson.

The Deposit Protocol worked like this: Sanitary Stations resembling a Port-O-Potty were deployed at each corner of the various Island Ways, at Condos, and at Senior Care Facilities. Every day, small stool samples were collected from each family member and deposited in the neighborhood's collection station (sarcastically derided as 'Giving A Shit').

The collection stations were mixed, sampled and cleaned every day. If the sample tested positively, then someone in the cohort had the virus. If negative, it was like winning the Lottery, in Reverse.

The first time US President had refactored the US Government to run smarter and leaner. Modern CRM principals were applied to citizens, immigrants and other

guests. Everyone in Country had an account and an advocate. Many previously ignored problems came to light. The idea of Government by the people, For The People materialized.

After his clothes dried, The Paddler put his kayak in. He turned his gaze upwards towards the newly upgraded Medina Gondola. The cars had been upgraded with active wind stabilizers after one fell into the Lake during a windstorm (fortunately it was designed to float). A new UV system had been installed in all the gondolas to mitigate spread of the virus, even during transit.

He had been following the development of the high-speed gondola system that connected San Francisco and Los Angeles. Following Seattle's innovative approach, low speed gondolas had been deployed in the Bay Area. The new California cross-state gondola system had just clocked 120+ miles an hour and was predicted to carry passenger traffic by the end of 2020. The delightful passenger experience said to be like riding a wave for 3 hours from LA to SF. Some gondolas exited the system to Fresno and Modesto stations; some entered.

The Paddler tried turning southeast towards Groveland, but the wind came on strong from the northeast now,

putting him sideways to the wind. Not good. He decided to head southeast along the shore, passing the gondola line at Leschi.

His mind wandered. Two hours of paddling provided time to contemplate the recent body politic.

President Johnson had legalized Cannabis on his first day in office in January 2017. The resulting 1% increase in GDP and reduction in unemployment was later viewed as a Masterstroke. He was later awarded a Nobel Economics Prize.

The President had also championed a Secure Authentication & Messaging initiative that broadly curtailed intellectual theft, foreign interference, spam and cybercrime. Sending Official Authenticated Email to a stranger now cost 50 cents, 5 cents going to each recipient. The newly renamed ePost Office was profitable.

The Paddler passed the dock for the Electric Car Ferry that ran past the S Massachusetts St dock. He remembered he needed No 4 coffee filters. No coffee, no good. He made a mental note to visit the Trader Joes next to the Bowling Alley at SE 29th before he forgot

again. Islanders were naturally cheap, and they appreciated the Trader Joes fare.

That in turn reminded him of the line he had seen at the Tesla Store next to the Rite Aid. Apparently, Islanders were ogling the new BoatTruck prototype. The Tesla Store was across the street from the old Farmers building, now occupied by REI.

He turned the kayak towards the north end of Seward Park. The wind had kicked up again, and the sun was hot. Boat traffic and the wind had kicked up a wicked set of waves. Some with whitecaps.

As he fought the water going south at 1pm, he remembered the splendid lunch he had recently at the Blackberry Chalet Restaurant next to Groveland Park, adjacent to a 100-tree cedar grove. It was the perfect brew pub. They served a tasty Tegrity Burger along with fried cauliflower rice. It had a killer northerly view of the Lake and the kayaks, sailboats and waterski boats transiting it. It did well given its short distance from the busy Brookbay Gondola Relay. The cannabis shop across the street also did a good business.

There was another restaurant on the water at Luther Burbank. More of a wine place. More about getting a

buzz on and meeting people you didn't necessarily know. Fun. A great place for a breakfast business meeting.

To his relief, the Paddler finally reached the north end of Seward Park. Two people drown around here last Sunday he remembered.

The wind had died down. He could see people with masks sitting on the beach. A nice sunny day. Just then a 50-foot Yacht came up on him and passed close to port. Four deep scary troughs. He passed it without taking on water.

He recalled how the police had handled the recent riots. Seattle had continued to use force in the form of Flash Bangs and Tear gas. But when the riots moved to Blackberry Island's Central District, the Public Safety folk instead deployed Flash Bongs of potent Eating Sleeping Indica Cannabis. Then served pizza. Everyone sang We Shall Overcome and the local AME pastor prayed for peace and justice. God listened.

The business district survived without a scratch. People were fed. Love won.

The Paddler headed south to the tree-jump perched 15 feet above the water at the east end of Seward. Seven teenagers took turns jumping off it.

He turned his boat west and made for Groveland.

He came upon an empty PowerAide container bobbing in the waves. It was made of thin gorilla glass and had a screw top. Consequently, it was floating. Plastic containers had gone out of style in the 1990's when scientists determined that systematic water pollution was occurring from small bits of plastic.

Fifteen minutes later he was at the brook outfall where he spotted a cluster of the ever-present blackberries hanging over the waterline. Sweet. Nothing better.

The Island's name came from the indigenous peoples who harvested the blackberry and deer and rabbit that populated the Island. The blackberry grew ferociously all over the Island. Hence, Blackberry Island.

Also, very abundant: psilocybin mushrooms. After the heavy October rains, they appeared overnight like magic. This tended to raise the consciousness of the locals, who harvested them and froze them.

Sated from the blackberries, The Paddler pulled into Groveland Beach, filled with about 100 people. Mostly local families and young teenagers, sitting in distanced groups, wearing nothing but masks. "Glad I live nearby,"

he thought, as a smile crossed his face. Total transparency felt so 21st century.

He pulled out his homemade kayak roller, pulled it over the front and pushed it all up the steep hill.

It was time to stop for a liter of fresh beer and two liter snifter of Golden Pineapple at the Chalet. Nothing quite like life on Blackberry Island.