

Galileo 2

JUDGMENT DAY

LAMENTATIONS
of the
FLAME PRINCESS
ADVENTURES

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GALILEO 2: JUDGMENT DAY

Galileo Galilei was an author, teacher, and scientist, the most famous astronomer of his time, if not all time. He also shredded on the lute.

At one time, he and Pope Urban VIII were very good friends. Galileo enjoyed his support and patronage until Galileo wrote a book that promoted heliocentricism and, worse, criticized the Catholic Church's opinions and stance on matters astronomical, through a thinly veiled insult aimed at *Il Papa*: a character named Simplicio (Italian for "simpleton" or "idiot").

Because of this heresy, the Inquisition imprisoned Galileo and debated whether they should torture him, or even put him to death, unless he recanted. For political reasons more complex than we have space here to detail, the Inquisition commuted his sentence to house arrest for life in his *Villa il Gioiello* (or Jewel Villa), just outside of Florence.

Despite the sentence, Pope Urban VIII continued to harbor a deep-seated resentment toward Galileo and decided to make him feel as betrayed and humiliated as he had because of Galileo's public mockery of him—a punishment intended to last for the remainder of the astronomer's life.

To accomplish this, the pope commissioned a genius inventor to create "the Automaton", a mechanical man with the half-tonne steel body of an Olympian. At 6'2", it towered over Galileo, a detail intended to make the old man feel small and weak. It was

dressed exquisitely in high leather boots with the collar rolled down below the knees, with black velvet skirt trousers tucked inside, a finely embroidered doublet with gold trim, a wine-coloured cape of brocade about its broad shoulders, and a kingly ruff around its neck. Perched atop its head was a wig of thick black curls and a floppy wide-brimmed hat topped with a peacock feather—no expense was spared to remind Galileo of the prosperity he had cast off when he had criticized his wealthiest patron. To complement its noble dress, the Automaton wore an expression of slight contempt frozen on its painted rubber-like face with red-tinted eyes that tracked Galileo's every move. Its rigid face only moved when its strange mouth flapped like a puppet's, ceaselessly mocking him with the pope's voice recorded on a phonograph-like device installed inside it.

The pope ordered the Inquisition to place the Automaton in Galileo's villa as his new and pitiless companion. Making the old astronomer miserable was its sole mission, haunting Galileo wherever he went, sitting with him at every meal and even standing over him as he slept.

"Simplicio! Where are you?" it would call out to him as Galileo moved about the villa. "Simplicio, will you read me a story?" it would say to him, tearing any book the astronomer might hold in two. "Simplicio, have more pepper!" it would cackle as it seasoned Galileo's breakfast with mouse droppings.

Each time “*Simplicio!*” echoed throughout the halls of the villa, in the pope’s gratingly cheerful mechanical voice, despair rooted itself more deeply into the old man’s heart. He dreamed of shoving the barrel of his flintlock pistol into its marionette’s mouth and splattering its clockwork brains over the wall, but at the sound of the heavy footsteps approaching him, Galileo lost courage. A desperate thought gave him hope: although the Automaton was infinitely stronger, Galileo knew his was the superior intellect. It would take only one brilliant idea to triumph over the mechanical abomination that made his life a living Hell.

The astronomer observed the habits of the Automaton and took note. It had its own routines for when it awakened, how long it remained active, and when it would retire to its chambers. In secret, Galileo wrote his observations down as marginalia within a book of John Milton’s poetry.

As the years passed, the constant torment kept him exhausted and unable to think. He had come to believe the Automaton wasn’t just a machine but a demon imprisoned within a metal body, venting its rage at the old astronomer while taking great pleasure in doing so.

One day, as the old man made himself breakfast, the Automaton lurked behind him, plucked hair from the old man’s head like a daisy, sing-songing “Simplicio loves me, Simplicio loves me not!”

Galileo finally snapped. He spun around with a ferocity that surprised him, raised an iron skillet above his head, sliding his omelette to the floor, and cracked the pan on the skull of the machine — *bonnnngggg!* It bounced

off the Automaton’s forehead with the harsh clang of metal on metal and rattled Galileo’s hand painfully.

At first, the Automaton stood there with vacant eyes. Then its mouth twisted into a horrible grimace as it broke into a shrill, metallic screech of laughter, a sound that drained all the courage from Galileo and paralyzed him with abject terror.

“Excellent, Simplicio! I am pleased! I was beginning to think I’d already broken you!”

It is no machine, a dreadful realization pierced the fog that clouded his brain, *the Automaton lives!* It laughed as it reached for him. Galileo dropped the skillet, clattering against the stone tiles. His heart raced, his hands shook, and he raised his arms to ward off the metal demon. The Automaton snatched Galileo by the wrist, and slowly squeezed and twisted the old man’s fragile arm, further and further, with an unnerving grin on its face. Something popped. A sharp stab of pain jolted Galileo out of his shock, and he screamed. The mechanical man laughed with terrible joy then threw him to the floor.

The old astronomer laid there, his face pressed to the tile, waiting for his head to be smashed under its iron foot. But nothing happened. Seconds passed like an eternity. The machine stood in contemplation, its gears ticking and spinning. *Why doesn’t it just kill me?* Galileo wondered. Then it left, stomping down the hall with loud thuds, filling the villa with its horrid laughter.

“See you soon, Simplicio! Try not to miss me,” it said as it closed itself off in the guest suite.

That night it stormed violently. Standing in the courtyard, soaked, Galileo clutched his mangled arm. Black and blue fingerprints wrapped around his wrist, his muscles sprained, and bones aching. He reached his injured limb up to the sky and yelled, "God, I beseech you, show me how to defeat this demon!"

Lightning flashed overhead., followed by a deafening roar of thunder. In the silence afterward, his ears still ringing, Galileo had a vision of how he might defeat his mechanical oppressor. A grin broke across his face and then boisterous laughter as he looked upward at the stormy skies.

In the library, hidden in a secret book, he crafted blueprints from his vision for a machine that would generate artificial lightning and fire it like a gun. He called it *The Wrath of Zeus*. He gave the book to his daughter, Sister Maria Celeste, a nun who shared his brilliance. She enlisted the aid of Vincenzo Viviani, a genius protégé of Galileo's (who, historically, would become the astronomer's most famous assistant).

Together they built the machine in a nearby farmhouse and tested it on a scarecrow. Viviani turned a hand crank until the device crackled with electricity. Sister Maria aimed a gun-like device connected to the machine and slowly pulled the trigger. Lightning crackled out of the pistol and arced across the room, obliterating the scarecrow and leaving nothing but acrid smoke and ash.

As the machine wound down, Sister Maria turned to Viviani and simply said, "Cheers."

During the hours the Automaton rested, Sister Maria and Viviani smuggled the device into the villa, piece by piece, disguised as food and

supplies, over the course of several weeks. Hidden in the cellar, stocked amongst the preserves and candles, they slowly assembled *The Wrath of Zeus*, hiding it under a canvas cloth.

When the machine was completed, the time had come.

That night Galileo crept into the cellar, drenched in sweat from terror and a nun's habit he wore overtop a suit of plate mail. His daughter wouldn't let him attempt escape with anything less than a suit of armor, as if the Automaton couldn't crack it open like a crab and eat his innards. The gun hummed and vibrated in his hands—if he missed, he knew he would not live long enough to regret it.

The clock chimed, echoing throughout the quiet house.

Midnight.

The mechanical man awoke. *Thud, thud, thud* — its footsteps echoed as it searched for him throughout the house. Each second passed like an eternity as Galileo suffered the agony of waiting. *Thud, thud, thud* – his heart skipped with every footstep.

With a rusty screech, the cellar door opened, and the iron-shod feet of the Automaton slowly descended the stairs, its voice chiding, "Simplicio, why are you hiding? I am coming for yooooou." It turned the corner to the cellar and stood in the stone archway. They gazed at each other. Its lips twisted into a grimace. "This is a new look for you, Simplicio," it said with a laugh. Then its voice deepened to a pitch Galileo had never heard before. "Love Program Activated," it said as it extended a rubber claw toward Galileo and rushed toward him.

Galileo shut his eyes and pulled the trigger...