



THE
LAST
HOLIDAY

FRANK MARTIN

Story of the Month Club Edition – 2016

Copyright © 2016 Frank Martin

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the express written permission of the copyright holder, except where permitted by law. This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination, or, if real, used fictitiously. This book is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Final Art and Design by Sandra Wheeler
Stock art provided by Dollar Photo Club

Published by
Story of the Month Club

The Last Holiday

By Frank Martin

Even though it's been this way my entire life, I still find it strange that the workday begins when it's pitch black out. But then again, that's what happens when your clock is dictated by an alien world.

Despite the dark sky above our heads, the city is full of life and lights. I've walked this route to work so much that I've pretty much gotten numb to the commute. But today there's a hop in my step. Today is special. And it's filled me with a new appreciation for the story of humanity written throughout the city's streets.

After being partially destroyed during the war, the majority of buildings were repaired using Lazorkin architecture. The weird mixture of décor and styles makes it obvious what's human and what's not. Most consider the old, primitive look of bricks ugly and archaic. But I like it compared to the scaly Lazorkian spires that spiral into the sky. After all, there's not much of our past that our masters allow us to keep. And I'm sure they would've gotten rid of all the old buildings ages ago if they weren't so expensive to replace.

Underground historians say that before the invasion this was the greatest city on Earth. It used to be called New York...or something along those lines. Now the Lazorkin gave it a name in their language that most humans can't even pronounce.

I don't know how long it's been since they arrived. No one does, really. It's kind of hard to keep track of time when calendars are illegal. Human calendars at least. Everyone now lives by Lazorkin years. Lazorkin days. Lazorkin seconds.

It's hard to know exactly what happened since written history is illegal, too. Everything we know has been passed down to us through stories. Generation after generation telling the tale of the Great War humanity lost against the invaders from another world. Lizards with laser weapons and shape shifting abilities. Once they conquered the planet they began their reconstruction. Destroying our history. Our culture. Our time.

Legend has it that a handful of oral historians kept calendars in their heads to remember the days. There were those who laughed at them. Why would someone care about a stupid calendar when there's so much else that needs saving like history and art?

But I get why they did it. Because time is the one constant that every living thing experiences. And to measure time gives you a sense of power. A sense of independence. The Lazorkins can force me to abide by their clock. Force me to honor their holidays. But deep down I know what month it truly is. A human month called December.

Of course, I would like to know the old holidays, too. But it's hard enough keeping a whole calendar in your head without trying to remember which days were special.

But there's one holiday which nobody could ever forget. Why? Because every calendar has it. It's an anniversary of time itself. A holiday that exists for the sake of existing. A jubilee the historians refer to only as New Year's Day.

And today I'm going to do something strictly forbidden under Lazorkin law. One of the most heinous crimes a human could commit punishable by death. Today, I'm going to celebrate it.

Even with the unusual hop in my step I still arrive to work at the same time I normally do. Unlike the others, my office building was left untouched during the war. It's mainly built from glass and shiny stones, so it couldn't have been that old when the Lazorkin arrived.

I don't know what it was used for back then, but now it's an information processing center. Tons of worker bees like myself sit in tiny cubicles all day and enter data in a computing system. That information is then translated to the Lazorkin language and sent back to their homeland.

Riveting stuff, I know. But at least it allows me the chance to work and live my life.

As usual, the elevator on the way up to my floor is packed with others like me. Drones who serve our oppressive masters for a steady stream of rations and safety. Members of the resistance call us traitors to humanity. But I've seen what fighting the Lazorkin gets you. Imprisonment. Death. Or worse.

Of course I wish this wasn't the world we live in. Every night I dream of what it would be like to live truly free on a planet run by humans. But that time is over. So I'm happy enjoying the small bits of contraband I keep hidden in my dormitory. Relics from the golden age of humanity. Moving picture stories and recorded melodies. Simple things that remind me of my history without drawing much attention.

Staying out of trouble has been a code I've lived by that's gotten me this far in life. Yeah, I know. Today I'll be breaking it just a little. But it's a special occasion! I gotta!

When the elevator opens up I get lost in the flood of people that pour out into the hall. They crisscross in every direction, and I eventually find my spot in the human wave on its way towards my cubicle.

The entire floor is efficiently laid out to maximize the number of small desks that could fit for a single worker. Our Lazorkin bosses told us this was the way humans used to work back in the day. That our overlords benevolently chose this setup so that we could feel a connection to what life would have been like before they arrived. But I highly doubt it. They designed this cruel system to turn us into nothing more than mindless, obedient robots.

I look around at the slaves typing away at their tiny little screens and pity them. They're just tools. Trudging along from one day to the next. Well, not me. Because today I have something to live for. And it can't come soon enough.

Upon reaching my cubicle I look over and see my neighbor's empty chair.

Mol must not be in yet. I'm not worried, though. She promised she was coming in today, and I know she wouldn't miss it for the world.

I plop down in my own seat and begin the start of the day like any other. Screen on. Boot up server. Receive daily assignment. Then its time go get some Coffee.

The worker lounge is crowded as usual. They only call it that because of the sign on the door, but the room is never really used for lounging. Mainly because there isn't any place to sit down. What they do have is a large supply of plastic bottles lined along the counter; each one filled with the clear liquid we call Coffee.

That's what everyone's here to get. It's basically caffeinated water touched with a little flavoring. Priva tells me that they had Coffee before the war, too. Only it was made from ground up beans. Sounds disgusting. One part of the old world that I most certainly don't miss. The Lazorkin make this version to keep us energized, but I've heard people say that it's addictive. Who cares, though? It's not mandatory to drink, and besides, whatever helps gets me through the day is fine by me.

I grab a bottle and immediately begin drinking. One gulp. Two gulps. But on the third I'm suddenly grabbed from behind. "What do you think you're doing?!"

I choke on the water still stuck in my mouth, and turn around to see Trev's ugly mug staring me in the face. He lets out a loud, boisterous laugh, and the

lounge's other occupants stare at him, all of them repulsed by his unseemly behavior.

I lower the drink from my mouth and brush off the small droplets of water hanging onto my waterproof shirt. "Is that the new protocol for morning greetings?"

With the smile still stuck to his face, Trev answers while his wound up energy bounces him up and down. "Only for this one day of the year, you silly little..."

I instinctively lean in and grab him by the shirt, cutting off his stupid remark with a strong whisper. "Shhh!"

Then, after a quick look around, I pull him by his shirt back through the crowded lounge. He comes along like a little puppy, but I hear one of our colleague's offer her opinion of his conduct. "You're lucky a floor manager didn't see you do that."

Despite being led towards the door like a scolded child, Trev still manages to snap his head back at the woman. "Well, I thought maybe it was you. But no lizard-head would ever shift into a face that ugly, now would they?"

I hear a series of muffled laughs from inside the lounge and turn around just quick enough to catch a glimpse of the woman's face on the verge of tears.

We finally exit through the door and I bring Trev to an isolated spot along the wall. "What's the matter with you?"

From a full head's length above my own, Trev's wide eyes silently stare

down at me, refusing to blink or look away. It's an odd sensation having them on top of me like that, and I try my best to hide that his glare's making me feel uncomfortable. "How many Coffees have you had this morning? Five?"

He rapidly answers, still without blinking his eyes. "No. Only three."

I couldn't tell if he was joking. Not that it would matter much anyway. Trev had always been an overly energetic guy. It was one of the reasons I enjoyed hanging out with him outside of work. He was usually able to keep it under control at the office. Otherwise, a shape-shifted floor manager hidden among the workers would have reported him long ago.

But it's obvious that the holiday excitement is starting to get to him. That doesn't make it acceptable, though. "You trying to get us caught?"

Finally relaxing his deathly stare, Trev simply rolls his eyes and waves off my concern without a care in the world. "Oh, come on. Nobody has any clue what day it is."

"That doesn't mean you should go shouting it from the rooftops."

Once again, he shrugs off my anxiety by changing the subject with an almost childish enthusiasm. "I got the stuff you asked for."

I want to lecture him some more, but his eager energy is starting to rub off on me. I'm, admittedly, getting excited too. "Good. I want it to be like they would've had it back then."

"What time is it supposed to happen, again?"

I look down at the standard issue Lazorkian watch on my wrist to make

sure its set exactly right. “At fifteen, seventy-four, three o’clock.”

“Awesome. I’m gonna set up early and only let in people who use the knock.”

I open my mouth to speak but notice a woman approaching us holding a stack of papers. I catch myself before speaking and give her a friendly smile as she passes by. She smiles back, but I wait for her to take several more steps before resuming our conversation. “What people? It’s just us and the girls.”

Using his bottled energy to exaggerate his anger, Trev jokingly takes offense to my comment by getting in my face. “What? You don’t want to use the knock!?”

Caught off guard by the attack, I take a step back with my hands innocently up in the air. “Fine. I’ll use the stupid knock.”

Then, as if he had just flipped a switch, Trev’s mock anger turns to girlish excitement as he clenches his whole body with an ear-to-ear grin across his face. “I can’t wait!”

He then walks off into the busy office floor doing his best to keep his composure and hide the intensity bubbling under the surface. But Trev’s contained emotions are causing his body to tense up as he moves. His legs are taking silly little steps in unison with tight, balled up fists at his sides. It’s almost funny to watch. I just hope no one else is noticing.

When I get back to my desk I notice Mol has finally gotten in. She’s

already hard at work in the cubicle next to mine, typing away without a single thought or distraction. She doesn't need any Coffee like the rest of us weaklings. She's always up at the crack of dusk, ready for whatever boring workload the day might bring. But when it's time to kick back and relax, she's right there waiting with an open hand and a warm smile. Mol really is a special girl.

I can only barely see her face, buried in the computer screen and hidden behind her long, straight blonde hair. But I don't need to see it to picture how beautiful it is. Since she started here two years ago I've been dying to ask her out. It's not like I haven't had any chances sitting next to her every day and all. But we just have so much fun together. Laughing and cracking jokes. I haven't had the courage to risk losing all that by telling her how I feel.

But again, today is different. And I'm hoping a little holiday magic can finally bring us together.

I sit down and lean over the divider between our desks with a smile I just can't seem to shake off my face. "Morning, sunshine."

With her face still buried in the screen, she answers my greeting as her fingers continue to jump around the keyboard. "You ever wonder the point behind that expression?"

"Huh?"

Once again, she elaborates without ever looking up from her work. "I mean, the morning's at night. So why call people 'sunshine'?"

I guess with the only logical explanation that comes to mind. "Because it

sounds more endearing than ‘morning, darkness’?”

She pauses just long enough to ponder my response before shrugging her shoulders and resuming her non-stop typing. “Fair enough.”

Mol continues on with her work expecting me to do the same. But I don’t. Instead, I just keep on staring at her with the same goofy smile glued to my face. She eventually senses me being a total creep and slowly turns with a cautious expression.

But upon seeing my overly anxious smile, Mol giggles with an awkward grin of her own. “What is it?”

“You excited for later?”

She doesn’t nod her head like I expect her to. In fact, her eyes drop to the floor instead, as if she was dreading the thought. “Yeah...I’ve been thinking and...”

“And what?”

After a deep breath, which I assume is to build up courage, Mol lifts her eyes to meet mine with an embarrassed grimace, almost like she’s afraid to disappoint me. “I don’t think we should be doing this.”

From the way she’d been acting, I assumed something was up. But the words still surprise me. “What do you mean?”

“It’s too risky. What if we bring in a shape shifted Lazorkin? It’s not worth getting caught.”

Her fears are legitimate ones, but I’ve been planning this day for so long I

can't help but laugh off her concern. "Oh, please. The only other people who know are Trev and Gala. Both of whom are too stupid to be spies."

"But look at us. We're not rebels. We don't go against the Lazorkin."

"Of course not."

"Then why do this? It's breaking the law. You really think it's worth it?"

I can relate to the fear in her voice. Sometimes while planning our little party I felt the same way myself. How could you not? I know deep down that Mol's excited, though. We've been talking about this day for months (humans months, that is) and she's been anxiously waiting for it just as much as me. But now that it's close the jitters are starting to set in. I feel them, as well. And that's how I know our celebration is worth it.

"Look. I know you're scared, Mol. I am a little, too. But we're not picking up a gun and joining the resistance. We're celebrating our humanity the last way we know how. This is the only holiday we have that's connected to the old world. And I just want to feel a part of it. Even if it's meaningless. Don't you?"

She takes another deep breath while keeping her eyes locked into mine. And after pausing for another moment, allowing time for my words to set in, she gives a reluctant smile with a quick nod of the head. "Ok. If you say so."

Once again, it's not the response I'm expecting. But she had clearly accepted the party invite. There's not much left to say, though, so I smile back and return to my side of the divide.

Although I have to admit, Mol's hesitance concerns me. If she's

apprehensive about New Year's then is she also apprehensive about me? No. It's just nervous energy. That's all. Once we get into the party she'll realize just how great celebrating our humanity is. And more importantly, celebrating it with me.

For a while I'm concerned that my excitement will keep me from working. I tell myself to just forget about New Year's for the time being and concentrate on processing data. I don't know why I'm worried, though. Once I fall into the mind numbing procedure of typing the same meaningless garbage over and over again I completely forget about the party.

Until, of course, the alarm on my watch starts vibrating.

I look over the cubicle's divide and find Mol still typing like a madwoman. I remain silent, hoping that she'll sense my presence. But she's too locked into her work zone to notice me. I give her a slight tap on the shoulder and she turns around slightly startled.

It's cute how seriously she takes her work, and I can't help but smile at her shocked expression. "Are you ready for the new year?"

She forces a smile onto her surprised face. It's a look of joy, but there's still a slight feeling of uneasiness within her. At least she's willing to go ahead with our plans, which is really all I need. Once she steps into the party every shred of her doubt will evaporate, and she'll finally realize how incredible a guy I really am.

I subtly take her by the hand and make sure no one else on the office floor

is paying any attention. We then swiftly walk over to the far wall opposite the elevators. There are not many cubicles on this side of the building, which makes it fairly easy for us to approach an isolated storage closet inconspicuously located in the corner.

Once again, I scan around to be extra cautious of prying eyes before giving the door three quick knocks. A moment later, the door barely creeps open and Trev's weary face is peering out at us through the crack. After taking notice of our presence, he then darts his eyes back and forth to make sure no one else is around. All the while I can feel Mol's hand tighten around my grasp. The suspense must be killing her. I silently leer over into Trev's face while nodding my head as a signal for him to hurry up.

Finally, he opens the door a little more, just enough so that Mol and I can slip inside.

For a brief instant I feel overcome by the potential for regret. Maybe it was a mistake leaving the decorating duties in Trev's unskilled hands. What if he did a terrible job and the product of all our hype turned out to be nothing more than a lackluster display of homemade flare?

My concern, though, is immediately quenched upon stepping into the tiny storage closet. Trev and Gala both have on silvery top hats, but Gala's outfit is more complete with a pair of large, silly sunglasses that cover a large part of her cheeks and forehead. A wide assortment of colorful streamers, endlessly twisting in circles, hangs from the ceiling. Shiny tinsel is draped sporadically throughout

the shelves, carefully weaved in and out of the mundane office supplies. A swarm of brightly colored balloons gracefully bounce around the room. And along the back wall a painted banner is pinned up that reads “HAPPY NEW YEAR” in different shades of dazzling glitter.

It’s still a small storage closet. There’s no denying or hiding that fact. But even still, I’ve never been in an area with such glitz and glamour. Even knowing the materials Trev had beforehand, I’m still surprised and impressed by the display. But Mol, utterly entranced, is completely taken off guard. It’s an absolutely majestic moment.

And of course, Trev has to ruin it by whining like a baby. “You got the knock wrong.”

We are on the verge of committing a capital crime and these are the things he focuses on. “Then why’d you open the door?”

“I knew it was you. Who else would be knocking on a storage closet?”

Then why have a special knock in the first place? I only think the question rather than say it, though. Trev and I can go ‘round in circles all day on the stupidest things, but right now there are more important matters to worry about.

And then, feeling “victorious” from our pointless squabble, Trev abruptly changes the subject. “Oh, yeah. I almost forgot.”

He reaches into a bag on the floor and pulls out the special New Year’s clock I gave him earlier. “We were waiting for you guys to set this up. You want the honors?”

Trev holds out the device and I graciously take it before placing it eye level on a shelf in front of us. On the front display are red numbers in some strange array. It reads eleven, fifty-six. Not that I know what that means. But I'd been told enough to explain it to the others. "So when the second number reaches sixty it will revert back to zero while the first number will go to twelve. And that signifies a new day and, in our case, a new year."

I look at the three faces around me and can tell they are just as confused about the concept as I am. But their ignorance to the ancient ways of telling time is hidden behind smiles of joy. They each know how special this moment is. And I can feel the magic in the air as we all silently stare at the clock in anticipation.

A few long seconds pass us by and Gala is the one to break the silence. "It would be nice to know what year we're celebrating."

I answer her question the same way she asked it, without taking my eyes off the clock in front of us. "Yeah, but my source says she doesn't know. Her history collective lost track of the year centuries ago."

Mol is the first of us to break eye contact with the sacred device by turning to face me. "Who is this person again?"

"Priva. The crazy old lady who lives in my building. She hides historical documents for the resistance. Has some interesting stuff, too."

"And you trust her?"

Mol must be worried, so I finally turn to face her with a reassuring smile. "Absolutely. She's told me stories about how they used to drop a ball of light

from the sky in this city's square of time. Our ancestors must've been magic or something. Too bad those days are over."

"She's the one who told you to decorate like this?"

"Yeah. It's how they celebrated back in the day."

I wait for another question, but she just looks up at me and smiles before turning back to the clock, which now reads eleven, fifty-nine.

I'm sure she expects me to look at the numbers with her, but instead my gaze remains focused on the innocent, blonde beauty before me. "Oh, and one last thing."

This time all three of them turn in my direction. "She also said that when it happens..." As the suspense builds, I move my eyes between them until I feel their anticipation hits its peak. "...it's tradition for couples to kiss."

On queue, Trev grabs Gala by the waist and pulls her in close. "I'm all for that."

Gala tries to contain her girlish giggles, and Mol turns to me with a small, bashful smirk of her own. Together we stare into each other's eyes, almost as if we're silently carrying on a deep, intimate conversation. We remain there for what seems like an eternity. Until our focus is broken by the soft beep of an alarm coming from the clock.

We both turn and see the red twelve shining back at us from the screen. Trev and Gala immediately waste no time laughing and locking their lips together. But Mol and I merely return to our peaceful moment. We share a pair

of warm, genuine smiles, and I can feel the connection between us growing with every second. It's a force that pulls me in towards her, and I stop just short of placing my mouth against hers.

I can feel her hot, heavy breath caress against my skin. She remains there for a moment, her eyes transfixed into my soul, and then firmly presses her lips against mine in a kiss more passionate than I could've ever imagined.

Lost in the sensation, I close my eyes while wrapping my arms around her waist. I can feel myself falling down a hole of spinning emotions. And I never want this moment to stop. It's a new year. And right now it's the start of a whole new relationship.

Both our mouths remain entwined, neither one of us willing to let the other go. And I'm content staying just where I am...until the soft, supple texture of her lips begins to fade. Slowly I can feel the skin against my mouth grow rough and scaly. At first I think I'm imagining it, until her lips finally part and unleash a thin, slimy tongue that gently brushes against my pallet.

My eyes instinctively shoot open and are welcomed by the skinny, green slit pupils that I've come to fear my entire life. I back away in disbelief and Mol's gorgeous complexion slowly morphs into the coarse scales of Lazorkin flesh right before my face. Trev and Gala, having broken off from their make out session, also realize what our friend has become.

And together we look up in shock at the fully transformed humanoid lizard as its forked tongue slithers out of its mouth. "You're all under arressst for

violation of section V-seven-three-sixxx of the human assimilation code. Please surrender at once.”

The three of us stand speechless, dumbfounded, and completely lacking any ability to comprehend the seriousness of our predicament. We can't even look at one another. All we can do is gawk at the monster that'd been hiding in front of us.

Mol, or whatever that thing is called, doesn't do much either. It just stands there, patiently waiting to see how we will react.

Suddenly, Trev breaks the awkward stalemate by screaming out and charging forward. “Die you lizard sc...ugh!!” But his battle cry is cut short as the creature swiftly shoots its arm out and latches its claw around his throat.

With complete ease the Lazorkin lifts Trev off the ground. My friend starts frantically kicking his feet and wiggling his body in a desperate attempt to break free. His hands futilely pull and scratch at the sharp talon like nails digging into his neck. He struggles to gasp for air when his attacker carelessly flicks its wrist, snapping his neck like nothing more than a twig.

Trev's body instantly slumps lifeless, suspended in the air, and Gala unleashes a loud horrific scream at the sight of her dead lover. With a soft toss to the side, the Lazorkin dumps Trev's corpse into the shelves, sending piles of shiny tinsel to the floor.

The creature then stands stoically strong and unphased by the murder as it issues its next threat. “Ssubmit or suffer a similar fate.”

Even though Gala is standing next to me in utter despair, the creature's piercingly insidious eyes are looking in my direction. Almost as if it's stern command is meant specifically for me.

And then, in what seems like an illusion, the alien's reptile like features seem oddly human as its face sinks down into what looks like a frown. It's an uncharacteristic show of emotion that lingers when the lizard opens its mouth to speak, again in my direction. "I'm sssorry."

At first I think there's a mistake. That this terrible Lazorkin must be confused or disoriented. But then, when its devious, alien eyes actual express real guilt, I realize what's going on inside that small, primitive lizard brain. She...or it...has feelings for me and regrets what it's about to do.

But this monstrosity is not my friend. The Mol I sat next to for two years is a fiction. A fabricated façade used to lure me in and ultimately betray my trust.

I liked her. Hell, I might've even loved her. But all that is gone now. Along with my friends. My job. My whole life.

I've tried to keep my head down. To stay away from the resistance and be a law-abiding citizen. All I wanted was one moment of humanity. To feel what it's like to celebrate just once in my life. But they won't even allow me that.

Now it's a new year. A new chance to make things right.

So what do I do? I look up at the disgusting, sorrowful alien in front of me and do something I should've done a long time ago: I fight back.

About the Author

Frank Martin is a comic writer and author that is not as crazy as his work makes him out to be...seriously.

Since his writing career began he's had multiple short stories published in horror anthologies by both Burning Willow Press and Stitched Smile Publications. Frank has also had comic shorts appear in the "fluff noir" anthology series Torsobear and the all-ages horror anthology Cthulhu is Hard to Spell. Frank also wrote and produced the comic anthology series Modern Testament, which featured a wide ensemble of artists throughout its four volumes. His novels include the YA sci-fi thriller Predestiny published by Crossroads Press and the zombie horror Mountain Sickness published by Severed Press.

Frank currently lives in New York with his wife and three kids. To hear more about his work you can sign up for his mailing list at www.frankthewriter.com or follow him on Twitter/Instagram @frankthewriter.