# ASCII THROUGH THE LOGIC GATE
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[An epic in 32K words]

**Block 3  (The Inter-Block Gap)**

[Cleo has engineered Hex's release from captivity in Sprocket's Hole by hashing Bill Bootstrap's dope vector. Hex has hooked up Ascii over an asynchronous serial interface and is driving him by remote control for fear that his own logic circuits have been damaged.]


As they veered and swerved their way from the log cabin, Hex several times turned Ascii in the wrong direction, bumping into Cleo, and once sent him charging full astern,  breaking the data link and causing a costly delay while he ran back to retrieve the dog.

"It's not very easy steering him," Hex said defensively. "He navigates by polar coordinates, whereas I'm a Cartesian myself."

Cleo just rubbed her bruises in silence.

"This is not going very well," thought Hex.  "I was supposed to be riding to her rescue on my shining charger but instead she rescued me, and now it looks as though I'm holding her back." Unfortunately the split-second lapse in concentration caused by this thought was enough to send Ascii plunging off the path again. He careered wildly across the uneven ground and then juddered to a halt buried nose-deep in some loose gravel. Hex tugged at his tail while Cleo went round to his head and helped push. With some effort they managed to extricate him and roll him back onto the path.

Gradually Hex began to get the knack of controlling Ascii's four-wheel drive; and once they were out of sight of Sprocket's Hole he turned on the headlamps so that they could at least see where they were going. Their progress, which had been extremely erratic, began to pick up, and the tension between them eased. When he felt he had mastered the technique, he offered her a lift on Ascii's back.

"All right," she said, climbing aboard, "I'll try anything once."

"Ready?"

"Chocks away!"

Hex revved Ascii up to full throttle, then let go of the brake. Ascii leapt forward, his wheels churning up a spray of dirt. Cleo hung on with one hand, waving the other above her head. She seemed to be enjoying her ride. Thus, with Hex cantering alongside, they bumped and jolted their way through the night.

As dawn was breaking they came to the crest of yet another hill. They had now attained a height of 2903 metres and on both sides the mountains of the southern Sierra Nueva (New Range) towered even higher. In front of them stretched out in the sunrise, was a magnificent view over the fertile plain. Cleo dismounted and shook the dust from her dress.

"Where do we go from here?" she asked.

"That's what we had better decide now," said Hex. "I think we should first find some shelter and maybe try to get some sleep. We're going to have to travel mainly by night so we might as well get used to sleeping in the daytime. We also need to devise a plan of action."

They moved off the trail and climbed a short distance into the hills. Hex had hoped to find a little cave or at least an overhanging ledge where they might be safe from observation, but before long they were met by a sheer wall of almost vertical rock. Hex shrugged and, admitting defeat, began the difficult manoeuvre of turning Ascii through 180 degrees. But the dog's wheels bedded down into the scree, spinning uselessly. Hex wedged his shoulder under Ascii's chin and his legs firmly against the rock face and heaved for all he was worth.

Cleo heard a sharp crack then a loud grinding sound. She spun round to see Hex and Ascii disappearing beneath the surface of the earth. She rushed over and peered down into the hole into which they had vanished so suddenly.

"Are you all right?" she called.

Hex's answer echoed back: "Yes, come on in.  It's just what we were looking for."

She lowered herself cautiously into the opening. Soon she too was sliding headlong down a long dark chute. Then she burst out into the light again at the mouth of the tunnel. Hex and Ascii lay spreadeagled on a bank of soft moss just ahead of the point where she had come to rest. They were enclosed in the bowl of a small circular crater, possibly volcanic, with steep rock walls all round and a tiny lake, looking unnaturally blue, in the middle. Much of the crater's bed was covered in a bright green moss, and a single monkey-puzzle tree grew by the side of the pond.

Hex's eyes met hers. "I think I found an inter-block gap," he said, smiling.

"Not a bad little hiding place," she replied.

They rolled Ascii out into the sunshine to re-charge his solar cells, then went down to the water to drink. Cleo gulped it down greedily, though it was ice cold, for she was very thirsty. Having slaked their thirsts, they returned to the side of the crater near the entrance tunnel and sat down.

"What shall I call you?" asked Cleo out of the blue.  "We're never been introduced. I know you're the Hexadecimal Kid; but it's a bit of a mouthful."

"Well, my friends call me Hex, but my real name is Samuel Synapse."

"I'm going to call you Sam then," she declared with deliberation.

"That suits me," he replied. "And what's your full name?"

"My full name is even fuller than yours, I'm afraid. My father was half Greek, you see. The part most people can pronounce is Cleopatra Calculus, but I'd prefer it if you'd just stick to Cleo. Now, if you don't mind, Sam, I'm going to get some sleep."

She turned over and curled up. Hex took off his greatcoat and spread it over her. So fast had she fallen asleep that she just mumbled a groggy thank-you without opening her eyes.

Sam. Hex turned it over in his mind. A new name seemed as good a way as any to start a new role in life. But he was too sleepy to pursue that train of thought, and drifted off into unconsciousness.

- Our three have found a resting place, but will they be able to get out again?
- More thrills and spills next week.