

# If Wishes Were Programs

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Substitute the appropriate character for `_at_>`

Rated: G

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Summary: When Tempus and Mxyzptlk meet, what could possibly go wrong?

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The 19<sup>th</sup> century was grimy and deadly. Tempus wished he could be out prowling the streets, but he was stuck here in Wells' flat, killing time waiting for the author to finish the latest repairs on the time machine. What he wouldn't give to be watching some twentieth century TV show – even an inane comedy!

While he waited, he picked up and examined the various curios and mementos from Wells' travels. A Legion flight ring here, a carved elephant there. What hideous taste! Why, just look at that oil lamp. The only thing handsome about it was his own reflection. But the lamp was too tarnished for Tempus to be able to see himself clearly. He picked it up and started to buff it with his sleeve.

His eyes widened when he saw the lamp emit a puff of smoke from which appeared a small man with a funny hat. (There seems to be a bumper crop of small, funny-hat men here now.) The man took off his hat and bowed. "Mr. Mxyzptlk at your service."

Entertainment in the twenty-second century had been reduced to the drivel of fairy tales, and so Tempus had an inkling of what might be happening.

"Oh, goodie. I get three wishes."

"Three wishes? No, that's genies. Wait – you think only genies live in lamps? Nah, lamps are prime real estate. Now, old lady Dfxqnsfg tried to sell me the shoe she and her kids live in, but her place had no sole. But a lamp like this – it even comes with a built-in fireplace. A perfect place for an imp like me."

A few minutes earlier, Tempus would have said that he had seen it all and been bored with everything, but this was indeed something new; his sardonic veneer slipped.

"Really?"

The imp's eyes gleamed. "No. Actually, I cracked wise in a Fifth Dimensional no-joking zone and this here is my punishment. Judge Kcsvkjht ordered that I have to grant the lamp's bearer one wish."

"Only one? Not three?"

"Get it through your skull – I'm an imp, not a genie. Imps: one wish. Genies: three wishes. Simple. See?"

Well, one wish was better than none.

Tempus rubbed his hands gleefully. "Oh, I wish I could see old Blue Jammie's face when he sees what I have in store for him!"

The imp sneered. "Really? That's your wish? Are you galactically stupid?! I gave you a golden opportunity for us

both to get even with Stuporman, and that is what you wish?"

Tempus opened his mouth to take back the wish. Before he could get anything out, the imp said, "Ah, ah. No do-overs. That's part of the fine print of my sentence."

Mxyzptlk granted Tempus his wish; he conjured up a hologram showing Clark grinning while watching the events of the past few minutes as depicted on the "I Dream of Mxy" television program.

Tempus thought of his earlier desire to watch a show; he did NOT appreciate the irony.

THE END