

# SPEC

THE CANADIAN  
MAGAZINE OF  
SPECULATIVE  
WRITING

Volume 2, Number 1  
Spring 1990  
\$5.00





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**ON**  
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**Editorial**

by Marianne O. Nielsen

Welcome to *On Spec's* second year of publication! It has been a rewarding, though strenuous, adventure to date, and of course the adventure is continuing — with ram jets blasting. This year we are putting out a special Youth Issue in conjunction with The Alberta Speculative Fiction Association (TASFA), we are putting out a special Youth Issue in addition to our two regular issues.

The majority of writing and art produced by young adults (ages 12 to 18) is in the speculative genre. Last year at ConText '89, TASFA acknowledged this fact by holding a short story contest for high school students; since the quality of entries was exceptional, TASFA is holding another contest this year. We at *On Spec* are proud to announce that we will publish the winning entry in our Youth Issue. We also hope to present works by two talented Canadian writers for young adults — Monica Hughes and Nicole Luiken, who will be writing stories especially for this issue. The remainder of the stories will be chosen from those submitted to the magazine by young writers between now and June 30, 1990. The special issue will be adjudicated like a regular issue, with our Advisory Board making final selections. It will be illustrated by young artists — and if you know of any who might be interested, tell them about us. All contributors will be paid at the going rates for a regular issue. If you are interested in writing by and for young people, our special issue is a must-buy. Since it is not included in the regular subscription, we recommend you reserve your copies today (see p. 88).

Our next special issue will be a Humour Issue, purely in a speculative vein, of course. If you have any punny vampire stories or horrific tribble satires, we are offering you a potential market. It has been said that writing good speculative humour is a feat beyond most writers. From the quality of submissions we have been receiving, we beg to disagree. And let us not forget Canada's own Spider Robinson. Send your stories as they ooze off the typewriter; this is going to be fun.

Due to time constraints (an unnamed parcel service took eight days to deliver Rob Alexander's lovely illustration for "Rocket to Oz" in the issue #2), we were unable to squeeze in Rob's biography. Here it is: "Rob Alexander is a Calgary artist who recently married and moved to Seattle to attend art school. His work has appeared in *On Spec* # 1 and numerous SF convention art shows in western Canada and the USA."

On a business note: we are very aware that in order to be an attractive market for Canadian writers and artists we must offer rates competitive with the American magazines. We've decided that by this

fall we will pay contributors by the word, starting at not less than 1¢ per word. However, even though all work for *On Spec* is done by unpaid volunteers, all money brought in by advertising and sales still must go toward production costs. At this point in time, the magazine is a break-even proposition, nothing more. The only way we can pay our contributors more is to sell — and therefore print — more copies of the magazine. With this goal in mind, we've embarked on a major promotional campaign, hitting radio, magazines, and newspapers. We're actively and aggressively seeking advertisers. If you have any suggestions on how we can get *On Spec* better known (and distributed) in your community, don't hesitate to drop us a line. If you are willing to act as a liaison for the magazine in your community, we can offer you a year's subscription, acknowledgement in the magazine and our undying gratitude. Do let us know what you can do to help. ♦

ADDRESS CORRECTIONS —

- Apologies to PHOENIX COMICS for scrambling their postal code in issue #2. Their address is: 2523A - 17 Ave., SW, Calgary, AB, T3E 0A2.

- Apologies also to the Speculative Writers Association of Canada. SWAC can be reached: c/o TASFA, The Wordworks Building, 10523 - 100 Ave., Edmonton, AB, T5J 0A8 (Attn: Robert Runté, Secretary).

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Thanks

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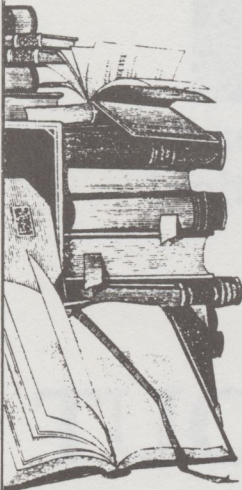
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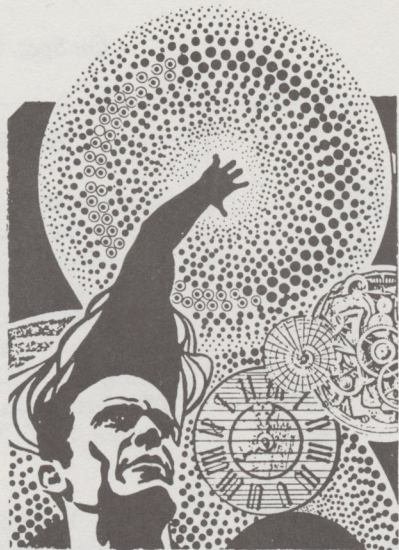
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# Venerian Vector-Transit Tales\*

PRESENTS  
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## THE FEATURED SELECTION

... Gently he expanded his carapace and she flowed eagerly under its edge. There, tentative tentacles intertwining, they lay secure, oblivious to the swirling, scouring, fluorescing mists about them.

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... With one deft movement he sheathed his scilzor and looped an unfiltered narstik to his upper orifice. Firing it up, he flicked his eyestalks over the unjointed carcasses strewn around him. "You won't have to worry about their kind again for at least an eon," he teled. "But if you're ever in trouble again, just image my aura."

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— by **H. A. HARGREAVES**

# Spring Sunset

by John Park

illustration by Nancy Niles

**T**hat wavering fleck of dark on the other side of the river was a bat, she realized, the first of the evening. On the path to the falls, the woman paused and rested on her stick. Around her, trees and tree shadows seemed to blur and shift as sunset faded into moonrise. There was a bench ten paces behind her, but she was afraid that if she went back and sat down, she wouldn't have the will to straighten her knees again and finish the climb. Then she would have to call Armand on the intercom, and he would bring the carrier and make a fuss, and remind her of the things they could do with artificial joints these days.

But they could do things with eyes too. She could still see the bat flickering among the branches on the far side of the river. Ten years ago, even with her vodka-bottle spectacles, the scene would have been a roaring purple blur. Now she could see the loom of the moon beyond the bat, and knew that, if she chose, she would be able to pick out the orange pinhead of the planet rising beside it. The eyes were good at seeing, all right. But like all new things, they had their deficiencies.

She started up again, moved through a net of tree shadows. The river was loud, swollen with spring. Its roar covered the creak of her breathing. A tree trunk rolled past her, and the water glittered darkly around it. Back up at the island, the bank must be crumbling. The waters were tearing at the milestones of her life and carrying them away. She felt the new anger ache, like a life stirring within her. Ahead, the tree reached the edge of the falls. It hung there a moment, and one of its limbs twisted into the air. Then it tilted and slid out of sight.

At the top of the path was a cleared area, with three wooden





benches overlooking the falls. She intended to sit there and think, until she had to go back. But when she reached the place, she was not alone.

Standing, he was taller now than she had realized, and thin. Even furled in those dark, protective bundles, he was thin. She thought for a moment of rose bushes wrapped in sacking against the frost.

The lower part of his face was hidden by a respirator to let him breathe the air that was alien to him. His eyes were protected by lenses that caught the moonlight like silver coins.

"I thought you'd come here," he said, and though his voice came through a machine from alien flesh, it was still a young man's.

"I came here to be alone," she said. "You ought to know that. This place is full of memories. My memories."

"I wanted to be sure of finding you before I go back finally."

"I wish you hadn't," she said. "I don't like being reminded I'm sand in an hour glass." She leaned on her stick and coughed. "I saw another tree go over the falls just now. Every spring it happens, and they can't stop it. They can't stop things being worn away and washed over the edge."

"But something always replaces them."

"Now the replacements push their way into our lives, push us out of their way, before we're ready. And even if we resist, they get into our bodies; they change us. You don't believe in a soul, but I know — when you change a body, you change more. And they won't stop. They give us new eyes, these marvellous eyes, but they won't stop — rebuilding, always something new, always pushing — pushing."

He had not moved, but now the moonlight tilted and slid from his eyes. "It's just one modified chromosome," he said, "and some prosthetics." His voice had gone cold. "You're being melodramatic. It's just enough to let us live and breathe there. We're not a threat; we'll be too busy living our own lives, but we'll remember where we came from. We're something new, a new possibility — nothing more or less. The world has gained something through us."

"I have lost," she said, and wondered if her voice would hold. "I have lost my son."

"If you feel you have."

She stabbed her stick into the ground. "You have so much faith, don't you, in your new marvels? Let me tell you what I found out about these eyes they gave me. I found it out quite recently, something I never expected to discover. They're wonderful optical instruments — I don't doubt much better than the originals ever were. But the tear glands don't work properly. Did you know that?"



They don't respond to the sympathetic nervous system. That's why I can look at you now, and see you clearly. Even now, like that. Like that —" Then her voice failed her and she turned away.

Moon shadows wavered across the earth in front of her. When he moved at last, he rustled in his protective clothing like dead leaves in the wind. There was a brief touch on her shoulder, and then, after a while, the sound of leaves again, fading.

The shadows turned and darkened as the moon rose. At last she lifted her head and faced it — and the orange speck that was rising beside it. She stared at that ancient, rusty world through those marvellous eyes that would not weep, until she could imagine she saw the markings on its surface. An owl drifted across the moon, hunting.

"Be careful," she whispered, but heard only the roar of waters.

→

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# What Happened to the Girl?

by Wade Bell

illustration by Joel Sinclair

I said, 2:12 pm, March 15, 2012. That's all I said. She asked me the time and I told her. I threw in the date for the hell of it, because it was there on the face of my watch. There's no law against that, is there?

I didn't think so, though you have to admit it's hard to keep up. Other than that? No, not a word.

No, I did not see her go in. No, I did not see her come out. No, I had nothing to do with it. No, I tell you. I'm hungry and I want to go home.

No, I had no particular business here. No, I was going to meet no one. No, I do not usually find myself in this neighbourhood. No. I was with no one.

That's right, I had no business here.

No, I did not know the girl in question. Yes, I would say she was a stranger to me, yes, an absolute stranger.

No, not a pretty girl. Common looking would be more like it.

Of course I was aware that she was beside me on the bench. What do you think, I have no eyes to see, or ears to hear or nose to smell?

Her perfume.

Yes, she was wearing perfume.

Well, if you like, yes, I did find it odd. But I am of another generation, girls of that age now, who knows?

A good perfume, an expensive cologne.







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Not eau de cologne, no.

No.

Because you didn't ask me before. It was a sensation that was there and then gone. Do you think I wanted to make a memory of it, to hold on to it and then take it out and use it later on?

I mean take it out and use it for my own purposes. Private purposes.

No, her legs were covered by loose trousers.

I didn't look at her.

I didn't look at her that way.

She was a form. A young female form on the bench beside me in the park in the sun on a warm Friday morning in March. What do you think, that she was dressed for the beach? It is March, after all.

A sweater. A heavy sweater. Brown.

She was too young.

I don't know. I didn't notice.

Hardly developed at all, then, if that's what you want to hear.

A glance. One glance. Two. She carried a paper bag. A small paper bag. It could have been her lunch. It could have been popcorn or something else to feed the pigeons.

I don't know what else. What sort of stupid question is that? Whatever else pigeons might like.

No, I don't feed pigeons. No. I have other things to do with my money than buy food for pigeons. Would I get points if I did?

A pension.

Yes, that's all. And a small one at that.

I have no criminal record.

I have no criminal record.

No, I am not in the habit of loitering. I have things to do with my time. Some of them even you might consider worthwhile.

I was not loitering.

No. I do not loiter.

Even the word is ugly and offensive. I do not do ugly and offensive things.

I find that question offensive. You have no right to be offensive with me.

I would not say she was pretty, no. I would say she was plain.

A bag in her hands, yes.

No, she did not feed the pigeons. No. She did not open the bag.

I would have heard the paper rustle.

No, I did not hear her clothes rustle. What sort of question is that?

Well, maybe I did. Do you hear my clothes rustle if I shift my body? Do you hear me move? And if you do, will you remember that you did five minutes from now? I think you are being very



stupid, you know. You're wasting your time and mine.

No, I would not say I lack respect for authority.

No, I would not say I lack feeling. Perhaps I am more upset than you think by what happened to the girl.

I did not see her come out of the alley, I tell you.

I know, because I can imagine that something dreadful must have happened to her. Why else would you be interrogating me?

A yellow sweater.

Brownish yellow.

Only slacks. Shapeless. Plain. Ordinary. What else can I tell you?

One glance. Two. Maybe three.

Blonde.

I have no sexual habits.

Prove it? How can one prove one has no sexual habits? If you found photographs in my apartment, certain books, you might prove otherwise, but how can you prove I'm celibate? And I mean celibate in both mind and body.

Once, yes. Long ago.

No, no children.

Children are fine. I have no thoughts about them one way or another.

Could it not be a coincidence that we shared a bench?

Blood? Are you joking? Of course they would find no blood on my clothing. Was there blood?

I'm not thinking anything. I'm just being silent for a moment. After all, if you say there was blood...

Well, *you* indicated there was blood. You brought up the subject of blood.

Then there was no blood.

No, I know I have no right to be told. I am neither a relative or a friend of hers.

I said I was *not* a friend.

Oh, shit, here we go again!

No, I am not in the habit of using foul language. Sometimes I do, of course. Who doesn't?

No, it indicates nothing about my character. You are being stupid.

Age gives me the right to call you stupid.

No, age does not give me the right to be uncivil. I apologize.

No, I do not have a violent temper.

She said nothing to me.

Nothing. Nothing.

No.

I told you. I was not acquainted with her.

No, I did not see her on the street. I did not follow her to the

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park. I was sitting on the bench before she arrived.

I did not lure her. I did not even see her until she sat down.

Fourteen, thirteen. The way they dress these days...

She was dressed plainly. I meant others, other young girls. They all look older than they are.

Of course I notice young girls. It would be impossible to be alive and not notice young girls.

Fifty-eight. Soon to be sixty. Soon to lose more points just because I've grown old.

August fourteenth, nineteen fifty-two. It's right there on my driver's licence.

Yes, I got up and left shortly after she did.

A minute, maybe two.

Yes, maybe less. Maybe half a minute. Do you think I looked at my watch?

Because I wanted to leave. The sky was clouding over. It was obviously going to rain.

Perhaps we both noticed the clouds at the same time.

No, no comment at all, no remarks, not one word.

If I followed her, it was unwittingly.

I clearly couldn't make it home before the rain started. I thought I would spend some time in the department store there.

I didn't know I was following her.

I did not catch up with her.

To the department store.

Underwear, socks. I needed some things. I hadn't planned to shop, but if a rain shower was going to delay my walk home, I thought I could put the time to use by buying a few things I needed.

No, I did not go into the store immediately.

No, I ducked into the alley.

Perhaps I saw something there. I don't know. I don't think so.

No, I can't explain what I saw. Movement, perhaps. Perhaps nothing.

Boxes, garage bins, a couple of parked cars. Maybe a van. I'm not sure.

Yes, I had a moment to look.

No, no people.

Well, if there was movement, then it must have been people because the vehicles and the garbage bins didn't move.

White. Dirty. A dirty white delivery van, some years old.

No, don't ask me why.

Because I had to go to the bathroom.

It happens sometimes.

Because I couldn't recall where the bathrooms were located in the department store, I didn't know how long it might take me to find



them...

Yes, it was sudden. My bladder works that way now.

How could I have known she went into the alley ahead of me? I didn't see her. How can you say I followed her if I didn't see her go in?

Then I went into the department store.

Ten minutes, twenty.

I didn't like the price.

Seventy-nine dollars for a pair of cheap socks. If you want to talk about a crime, talk about inflation.

No, I am not being flippant.

But I don't know what happened to her. If you say it was serious, then it was serious. I *have* to believe you, don't I?

Yes, I came back out. Of course I came back out. I didn't buy anything so I came back out.

I walked across the street.

Yes, to the park again.

I suppose I passed the alley. Yes, I must have.

No, I didn't go into it again. I had no reason to.

The same bench, the same bench as before, yes.

The storm clouds seemed to be passing. I wanted to consider whether I should walk home or take the bus.

Yes, I was sitting there when the police vehicle arrived.

Yes.

Why *should* I have run?

If there are witnesses who saw me go into and out of the alley, that is because I went into and came out of the alley.

No, I saw no one in the alley.

I don't care what you think. You have no right to assume anything at all about me.

I even have the right to lie to you. Do you know that?

The human right. The human right to lie.

Uncooperative, yes.

Antisocial, no. Asocial, yes. I've never really thought about it.

Ask what you like. I won't guarantee the truth of my answers anymore.

Not a word.

No, not one word.

I have no idea.

Never.

No. Never.

That's right. Two hundred and fourteen points. Do you know yet how many the girl had?

Why not? Are the computers down? I thought information like that was at your fingertips.

Because in the end that's what it will come down to, won't it? The weight of the law will rest most easily on whoever has the most points, isn't that right?

Everybody knows that's the way it works. Have you ever known a man with a thousand points or more to even be tried for a crime, let alone punished for one?

Of course I agree with the new system. How could any sane person not?

Two hundred and fourteen, I said. The computers will confirm it. An average count.

Barely average, then. Only fourteen points above the shadow category but still officially above it.

I lost points for the divorce, for one thing. That's automatic.

A few points for causing rows when my wife and I were in the fighting stage. The apartment block warden was very alert to our troubles. Neighbours complained about us.

Five or six points. We weren't that bad.

The quality of my education. They say it doesn't matter but it does. A dentist or a doctor or an engineer has to do a lot to lose points, a college dropout, well...

Of course I'm speculating. In the absence of public information about the administration of the system, everyone speculates.

They only tell us what they want to. One year you've got X number of points, the next year X minus so many. Sometimes they add points, but again, rarely for the average person like me.

Average, I said. As far as I know I'm still in the average category.

Last year? Three hundred and fourteen.

Drunk driving. A hundred friggging points off right there.

I thought you meant arrested for other things. I paid for that one, a hundred points off.

Because I hit another vehicle and injured a man who had more points — a lot more points — than I had. If it had been the other way around, if he'd been the one to hit me, he would have lost only five or six points.

For not finishing my university program. That hurt. That set me back right at the start.

No, I'm not bitter. Of course I'm not bitter. I'm not complaining. It's a good system. Everybody knows that. It's solved a lot of society's problems. I voted to put the system in place. Baseness is part of human nature. We are not all perfectable. Some people are better than others. The truth of that has always been known; acknowledging that truth in our legal system was a huge leap forward.

Of course I'm not saying that to get on the good side of you. I probably know the system better than you do because I was around



at the very beginning of the debate about it. I heard all the arguments not only for it but against it as well. You were scarcely born then.

Well, you were pretty young.

The rating system? Yes, sometimes the simplest ideas are the most effective. And the idea of keeping an individual's rating strictly confidential, the idea of giving it out to us each year along with the verification of our income tax return, now that was brilliant. The man who thought that up was given an Order of the Nation, you can be sure of that. Two thousand points. An untouchable. Do you know you can't even sue somebody with an Order of the Nation. They're gods.

Don't worry. I'm not blaspheming. I'm just envious of those types. Who wouldn't be? Two thousand points and they get more each year just for being alive! They say it's for service to the country, but I'm sure it's just for being alive, for being such good people. I'm sure it is. Bloody right, they're untouchable. Untouchable by the likes of you and me! But maybe you're a hero or something. Maybe you saved the lives of a gaggle of school kids.

I know I'm not supposed to know the girl's number, but when it comes over the radio I'll hear it, won't I?

Don't worry.

You know as well as I do that the ratings are not as secret as they're supposed to be. People have ways of finding out their neighbour's number. Everyone is corruptible. Otherwise we wouldn't need our system, would we?

No, I wouldn't say I was a cynic. A realist, perhaps, but I don't think a cynic.

For fighting with my boss and quitting my job.

All right, for getting fired.

And a few points off before that because the workplace warden decided I wasn't getting along well with my fellow employees.

Asocial, yes. I must be asocial.

That's all I can think of. The divorce was the worst.

No, there was nothing else.

No. I've told you everything.

The divorce, the divorce. That took off a lot of points. How many times do I have to tell you?

Why are you pushing me? Why can't you leave me alone until we hear what the girl's point count is?

Is it any of your business? Is it really relevant to the fact that by accident I shared a park bench with a girl, a child, who later got into trouble, the nature of which you will not tell me?

No, my wife never had an abortion. At least not while she was married to me.

No, I have never molested children.

No, I have never knowingly put another's life in danger or run away from the opportunity to save someone from harm.

Drugs? Good God, no!

If I go to court. And that's a big *if!* You don't go to court for sitting on a park bench! Or for pissing in an alley! And if I don't go to court my record remains private even from you.

Look, it's not illegal to swear. *You* may not like it but it isn't illegal.

For collecting charity from the government while I was unemployed. All right? It takes a long time to regain those lost points. You have to work at your new job for years and get into no job-related trouble before they hand those points back to you. I got ill and had to take my pension early, before I'd had the chance to earn those points back. What could I...?

Listen!

Don't worry, I'm waiting, I'll shut up.

See? Two hundred and fourteen points! Just as I told you!

What? Eighty-nine points? Did I hear right? Only eighty-nine points for the girl? Is that what they said? Unbelievable!

Amazing, yes! An undesirable! An authentic, official undesirable!

What could the poor kid have done in her short life to have lost so many points?

Yes, I know, it is sad. It's truly sad.

I wasn't laughing. Really, I wasn't laughing.

I know that does it. I know I'm free to go.

I will, I'll go. I was just thinking about that poor girl. I'm stunned. Really, I'm stunned. At her age, already less than a hundred points. What could she possibly have done?

Yes. I'm going.

Goodbye, then. And remember, most of the time I cooperated with you fully. Right? No points off for bad behavior.

Right?

Don't worry, I'm going.

No, you're wrong. I'm not lucky. I was telling you the truth. Whatever was done to her, I didn't do it. Even if she'd been the daughter of an Order of the Nation you couldn't have proved I did anything to her.

No, I promise. You won't catch me around this part of town again. Really, I promise.

Goodbye, then.

Yes, goodbye.

You stupid moron. It was popcorn in the bag. We did feed the pigeons. ♦



# Muffin Explains Teleology to the World at Large

by James Alan Gardner

illustration by Marc Holmes

I told my kid sister Muffin this joke.

*There was this orchestra, and they were playing music, and all the violins were bowing and moving their fingers, except for this one guy who just played the same note over and over again. Someone asked the guy why he wasn't playing like the others and he said, "They're all looking for the note. I've found it."*

Muffin, who's only six, told me the joke wasn't funny if you understood teleology.

I never know where she gets words like that. I had to go and look it up.

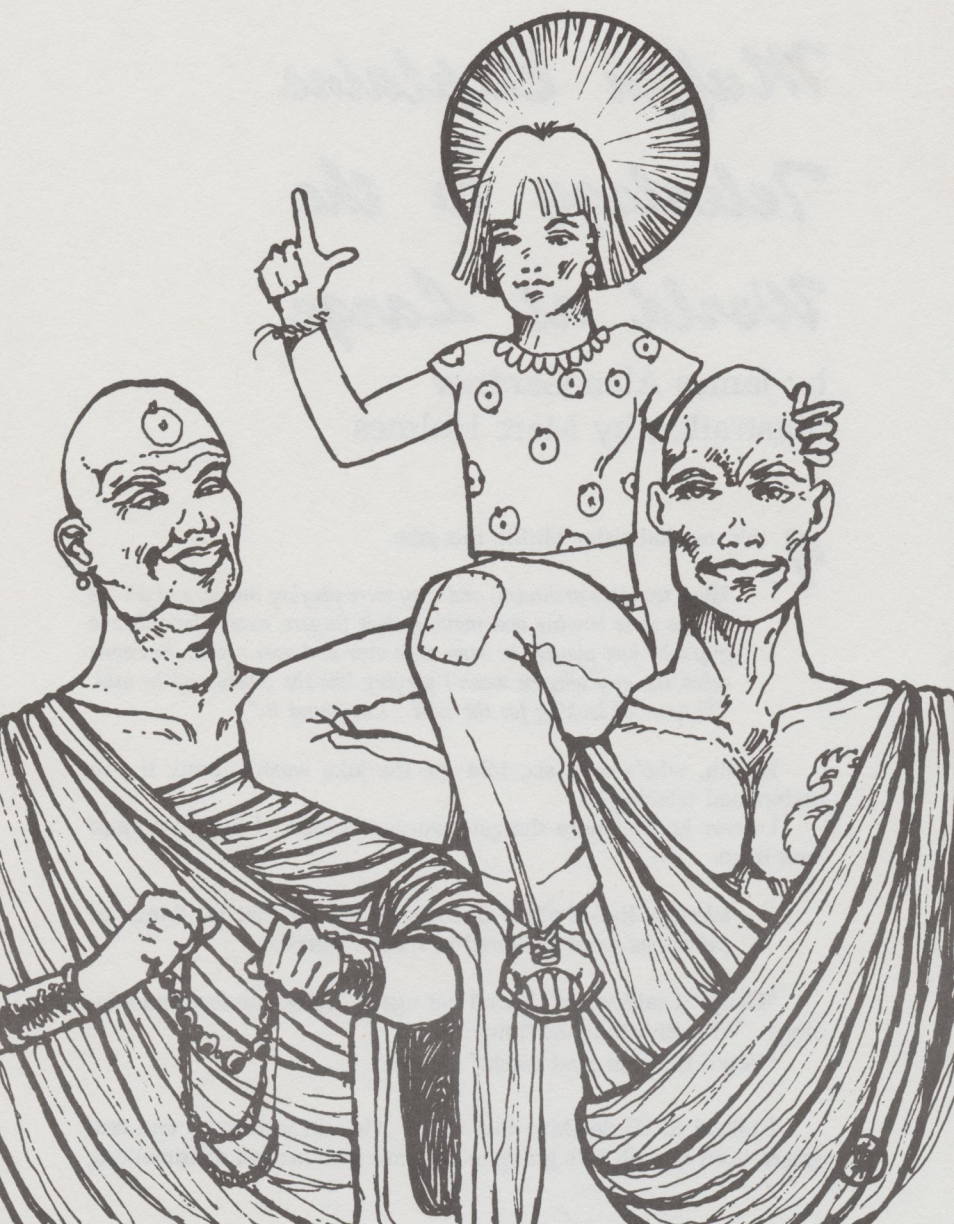
*teleology* [teli-ol-oji] *n* doctrine or theory that all things or processes were designed to fulfil a purpose.

"Okay," I said when I found her again, "now I understand teleology. Why isn't the joke funny?"

"You'll find out next week," she said.

\*

I talked to Uncle Dave that night. He's in university and real smart, even though he's going to be a minister instead of something





interesting. "What's so great about teleology?" I said. He looked at me kind of weird so I explained, "Muffin's been talking about it."

"So have my professors," he said. "It's, uhh, you know, God has a purpose for everything, even if we can't understand it. We're all heading towards some goal."

"We took that in Sunday School," I said.

"Well, Jamie, we go into it in a bit more detail."

"Yeah, I guess."

He was quiet for a bit, then asked, "What's Muffin say about it?"

"Something big is happening next week."

"Teleologically speaking?"

"That's what she says."

Muffin was in the next room with her crayons. Uncle Dave called her in to talk and she showed him what she was working on. She'd coloured Big Bird black. She has all these crayons and the only ones she ever uses are black and grey.

"What's happening next week?" Uncle Dave asked.

"It's a secret," she said.

"Not even a hint?"

"No."

"Little tiny hint? Please?"

She thought about it a minute, then whispered in his ear. Then she giggled and ran upstairs.

"What did she say?" I asked.

"She said that we'd get where we were going." He shrugged and made a face. We were both pretty used to Muffin saying things we didn't understand.

\*

The next day, I answered the front doorbell and found three guys wearing grey robes. They'd shaved their heads too.

"We are looking for her gloriousness," one of them said with a little bow. He had an accent.

"Uh, Mom's gone down the block to get some bread," I answered.

"It's okay," Muffin said, coming from the TV room. "They're here for me."

All three of the men fell face down on the porch making a kind of high whining sound in their throats.

"You know these guys?" I asked.

"They're here to talk about teleology."

"Oh. Well, take them around to the back yard. Mom doesn't like people in the house when she's not here."

"Okay." She told the guys to get up and they followed her around the side of the house, talking in some foreign language.

\*

When Mom got home, I told her what happened and she half-ran

to the kitchen window to see what was going on. Muffin was sitting on the swing set and the guys were cross-legged on the ground in front of her, nodding their heads at every word she spoke. Mom took a deep breath, the way she does just before she's going to yell at one of us, then stomped out the back door. I was sure she was going to shout at Muffin, but she bent over and talked quiet enough that I couldn't hear from inside the house. Muffin talked and Mom talked and one of the bald guys said something, and finally Mom came in all pale-looking.

"They want lemonade," she said. "Take them out some lemonade. And plastic glasses. I'm going to lie down." And she went upstairs.

I took them out a pitcher of lemonade. When I got there, one of the bald guys got up to meet me and asked Muffin, "Is this the boy?"

She said yes.

"Most wondrous, most wondrous!"

He put both hands on my shoulders as if he was going to hug me, but Muffin said, "You'll spill the lemonade." He let me go, but kept staring at me with his big, weepy, white eyes.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"The culmination of a thousand thousand years of aimless wandering," the guy said.

"Not aimless," Muffin cut in.

"Your pardon," he answered, quickly lowering his head. "But at times it seemed so."

"You'll be in the temple when it happens," Muffin said to him.

"A million praises!" he shouted, throwing himself flat-faced on the ground. "A billion trillion praises!" And he started to cry into our lawn. The other two bowed in the direction of our garage, over and over again.

"You want to pour me a glass of that?" Muffin said to me.

\*

The next day it was a different guy, wearing a red turban and carrying a curvy sword almost as tall as me. When I opened the door, he grabbed the front of my T-shirt and yelled, "Where is the Liar, the Deceiver, the Blasphemer, the She-Whore who Mocks the Most High?"

"She went with Uncle Dave down to the Dairy Queen."

"Thank you," he said, and walked off down the street. Later, I heard on the radio that the cops had arrested him in the parking lot of the mall.

\*

The next day, Muffin told me I had to take her down to the boat yards. I said, "I don't have to do anything."

"Shows how much you know," she answered. "You don't know anything about teleology or fate or anything."



"I know how to cross streets and take buses and all, which is more than I can say for some people."

"I have ten dollars," she said, pulling a bill out of the pocket of her jeans.

That surprised me. I mean, I maybe have ten dollars in my pocket twice a year, just after Christmas and just after my birthday. "Where'd you get the money?" I asked.

"The monks gave it to me."

"Those bald guys?"

"They like me."

"Geez, Muffin, don't let Mom know you took moneey from strangers. She'd have a fit."

"They aren't strangers. They're the Holy Order of the Imminent Eschaton — the Muffin Chapter."

"Oh, go ahead, lie to me."

"You want the ten dollars or not?"

Which wasn't what I ended up with, because she expected me to pay the bus fare out of it.

\*

When we got to the boat yards, I thought we'd head right down to the water, but Muffin just took out a piece of paper and stood there frowning at it. I looked over her shoulder and saw it was torn from a map of the city. There was a small red X drawn in at a place about a block from where we were. "Where'd you get that? The monks?"

"Mm-hm. Is this where we are?" She pointed at a corner. I looked and moved her finger till it pointed to the right place. "You should learn to read some time, Muffin."

She shook her head. "Might wreck my insight. Maybe after."

I pointed down the street. "If you want to go where X marks the spot, it's that way."

We walked along with sailboats and yachts and things on one side, and warehouses on the other. The buildings looked pretty run down, with brown rusty spots dripping down from their metal roofs and lots of broken windows covered with plywood or cardboard. It was a pretty narrow street and there was no sidewalk, but the only traffic we saw was a Shell Oil truck coming out of the Marina a ways ahead and it turned off before it got to us.

When we reached the X spot, the only thing there was another warehouse. Muffin closed her eyes for a second, then said, "Around the back and up the stairs."

"I bet there are rats around the back," I said.

"I bet there aren't."

"You go first."

"Okay." She started off down an alley between the one warehouse and the next. There was a lot of broken glass lying around and

grass growing up through the pavement.

"I bet there are snakes," I said, following her.

"Shut up, Jamie."

\*

The back was only a strip of weeds about two yards wide, stuck between the warehouse and a chain link fence. Halfway along, there was a long flight of metal steps like a fire escape leading up to the roof. They creaked a bit when you walked on them, but didn't wobble too badly.

On the roof we found a really weird looking airplane. Or boat. Or train. Or wagon. Anyway, it had wings and tail like an airplane, but its body was built like a boat, a bit like the motorboat up at the cottage, but bigger and with these super-fat padded chairs like maybe astronauts sit in. The whole thing sat on a cart, but the cart's wheels were on the near end of a train track that ran the length of the roof and off the front into the street.

"What is this thing?" I asked.

"The monks made it for me," Muffin said, which didn't answer my question. She climbed up a short metal ladder into the plane and rummaged about in a cupboard in the rear wall. I followed her and watched her going through stuff inside. "Peanut butter. Bread. Kool-Aid. Water. Cheese. Diet Coke. What's this?" she said, handing me back a roll of something in gold plastic wrapping.

I opened one end and sniffed. "Liverwurst," I said.

"Is that like liver?" she made a face.

"No, it's sort of like peanut butter but made from bologna."

"Weird. Do you see any hot dogs?"

I looked in the cupboard. "Nope."

"I should phone the monks. We need hot dogs."

"What for?"

She ignored me. "Is there anything else you'd want if you knew you were going to be away from home for a few days?"

"Cheerios and bacon."

She thought about that. "Yeah, you're right."

"And Big Macs."

She gave me a look like I was a moron. "Of course, dummy, but the monks will bring them just before we leave."

"We're going on a trip?"

"We're on a trip now. We're going to *arrive*."

\*

Early the next morning, Dr. Hariki showed up on our doorstep all excited. He works with my dad at the university. My dad teaches physics; he works with lasers and everything. Dr. Hariki is in charge of the big telescope in the top of the Physics Building, and he takes pictures of stars.



"What's up?" Dad asked.

"You tell me," Dr. Hariki said, spreading out a bunch of photographs on the coffee table.

Dad picked up a picture and looked at it. Turned it over to check out the date and time written on the back. Sorted through the stack of photos till he found whatever he was looking for and compared it to the first. Held the two together side by side. Held one above the other. Put them side by side again. Closed his right eye, then quickly closed his left and opened his right. Did that a couple of times. Picked up another pair of photos and did the same.

Muffin came into the room with a glass of orange juice in her hand. "Looks more like a dipper now, doesn't it?" she said without looking at the pictures.

Dad and Mr. Hariki stared at her. "Well, it was a bit too spread out before, wasn't it?" she asked. "Don't you think it looks better now?"

"Muffin," Dad said, "we're talking about stars... suns. They don't just move to make a nicer pattern."

"No, but if they're going to stop moving, you might as well make sure they look like a dipper in the end. Anything else is just sloppy. I mean, really."

She walked off into the TV room and a moment later, we heard the *Sesame Street* theme song.

After a long silence, Dr. Hariki picked up one of the photos and asked, all quiet, "Something to do with entropy?"

"I think it's teleology," I said.

\*

That night Uncle Dave was over for Sunday supper. Mom figures that Uncle Dave doesn't eat so good in residence, so she feeds him a roast of something every Sunday. I think this is a great idea, except that every so often she serves squash because she says it's a delicacy. Lucky for us, it was corn season so we had corn on the cob instead.

After supper we all played Monopoly and I won. Uncle Dave said it made a nice family picture, us all sitting around the table playing a game. "Some day, kids," he said, "you're going to like having times like this to remember. A perfect frozen moment."

"There are all kinds of perfect frozen moments," Muffin said, and she had that tone in her voice like she was eleventy-seven years old instead of six. "Right now, people all over the world are doing all kinds of things. Like in China, it's day now, right Dad?"

"Right, Muffin."

"So there are kids playing tag and stuff, and that's a perfect moment. And maybe there's some bully beating up a little kid, and punching him out right *now*." She banged her Monopoly piece (the

little metal hat) when she said "now." "And that's a perfect moment because that's what really happens. And bus drivers are driving their buses, and farmers are milking their cows, and mommies are kissing daddies, and maybe a ship is sinking some place. If you could take pictures of everyone right now, you'd see millions of perfect little frozen moments, wouldn't you?"

Uncle Dave patted Muffin's hand. "Out of the mouths of babes... I'm the one who's studying to appreciate the great wonder of Life, and you're the one who reminds me. Everything is perfect all the time, isn't it, Muffin?"

"Of course not, dummy," she answered, looking at Uncle Dave the way she did when he tried to persuade her he'd pulled a dime from her ear. She turned around in her chair and reached over to the buffet to get the photograph they'd taken of her kindergarten class just before summer holidays started. "See?" she said pointing. "This is Bobby and he picks his nose all the time, and he's picking his nose here, so that's good. But this is Wendy, with her eyes closed cuz she was blinking. That's not perfect. Wendy cries every time she doesn't get a gold star in spelling, and she knows three dirty words, and she always gives Matthew the celery from her lunch, but you can't tell that in the picture, can you? She's just someone who blinked at the wrong time. If you want someone who should be blinking, it should be dozy old Peter Morgan who's fat and sweats and laughs funny."

Uncle Dave scratched his head and looked awkward for a bit, then said, "Well, Muffin, when you put it like that... yes, I suppose there are always some things that aren't aesthetically pleasing... I mean, there are always going to be some things that don't fit properly, as you say."

"Not always," she said.

"Not always? Some day things are just suddenly going to be right?" Uncle Dave asked.

Muffin handed me the dice and said, "Your turn, Jamie. Bet you're going to land in jail."

\*

Next morning, Muffin joggled my arm to wake me up. It was so early that the sun was just starting to rise over the lake. "Time to go down to the boat yards."

"Again?"

"Yep. This time for real." So I got up and got dressed as quietly as I could. By the time I got down to the kitchen, Muffin had made some peanut butter and jam sandwiches, and was messing around with the waxed paper, trying to wrap them. She had twice as much paper as she needed and was making a botch of things.

"You're really clueless sometimes," I said whispering so Mom and Dad wouldn't hear. I shoved her out of the way and started



wrapping the sandwiches myself.

"When I rule the world, there won't be any waxed paper," she sulked.

\*

We were halfway down to the bus stop when Uncle Dave came running up behind us. He had been staying the night in the guest room and I suppose he heard us moving around. "Where do you think you're going?" he asked, and he was a bit mad at us.

"Down to the boat yards," Muffin said.

"No, you aren't. Get back to the house."

"Uncle Dave," Muffin said, "it's time."

"Time for what?"

"The Eschaton."

"Where do you pick up these words, Muffin? You're talking about the end of the world."

"I know." The first bus of the day was just turning onto our street two corners down. "Come to the boat yards with us, Uncle Dave. It'll be okay."

Uncle Dave thought about it. I guess he decided it was easier to give in than to fight with her. That's what I always think too. You can't win an argument with her, and if you try anything else, she bites and scratches and uses her knees. "All right," Uncle Dave said, "but we're going to phone your parents and tell them where you are, the first chance we get."

\*

"So talk to me about the Eschaton," Uncle Dave said on the bus. We were the only ones on it except for a red-haired lady wearing a Donut Queen uniform.

"Well," Muffin said, thinking things over, "you know how Daddy talks about everything moving in astronomy? Like the moon goes around the earth and the earth goes around the sun and the sun moves with the stars in the galaxy and the galaxy is moving too?"

"Yes..."

"Well, where is everything going?"

Uncle Dave shrugged. "The way your father tells it, everything just moves, that's all. It's not going anywhere in particular."

"That's stupid. Daddy doesn't understand teleology. Everything's going to where it's supposed to end up."

"And what happens when things reach the place where they're supposed to end up?"

Muffin made an exasperated face. "They *end up* there."

"They stop?"

"What else would they do?"

"All the planets and the stars and all?"

"Mm-hm."

"People too?"

"Sure."

He thought for a second. "In perfect frozen moments, right?"

"Right."

Uncle Dave leaned his head against the window like he was tired and sad. Maybe he was. The sun was coming up over the house-tops now. "Bus drivers driving their buses," he said softly, "and farmers milking their cows... the whole world like a coffee table book."

"I think you'd like to be in a church, Uncle Dave," Muffin said. "Or maybe walking alone along the lake shore."

"Maybe," he smiled, all sad. Then he looked my sister right in the eye and asked, "Who are you, Muffin?"

"I'm me, dummy," she answered, throwing her arms around his neck and giving him a kiss.

\*

He left us in front of the warehouse by the lake. "I'm going to walk down to the Rowing Club and back." He laughed a little. "If I get back, Muffin, you are going to get *such a spanking...*"

"Bye, Uncle Dave," she said, hugging him.

I hugged him too. "Bye, Uncle Dave."

"Don't let her do anything stupid," he said to me before heading down the street. We watched for a while, but he didn't turn back.

\*

Up on the warehouse roof, there was a monk waiting with a McDonald's bag under his arm. He handed it to Muffin, then kneeled. "Bless me, Holy One."

"You're blessed," she said after looking in the bag. "Now get going to the temple or the airport or something. There's only about ten minutes left."

The monk hurried off, singing what I think was a hymn. We got into the plane-boat and I helped Muffin strap herself into one of the big padded seats. "The thing is," she said, "when the earth stops turning, we're going to keep on going."

"Hey, I know about momentum," I answered. "I mean, Dad is a physicist."

"And it's going to be real fast, so we have to be sure we don't run into any buildings."

"We're going to shoot out over the lake?"

"We're high enough to clear the tops of the sailboats, then we just fly over the lake until we're slow enough to splash down. The monks got scientists to figure everything out."

I strapped myself in and thought about things for a while. "If we go shooting off real fast, isn't it going to hurt? I mean, the astronauts get all pressed down when they lift off..."

"Geez!" Muffin groaned. "Don't you know the difference be-



tween momentum and acceleration? Nothing's happening to us, it's everything else that's doing weird stuff. We don't feel a thing."

"Not even wind?"

"The air has the same momentum we do, dummy."

I thought about it some more. "Aren't the buildings going to get wrecked when the earth stops?"

"They're going to stop too. Everything's just going to freeze except us."

"The air and water are going to freeze too?"

"In spots. But not where we're going."

"We're special?"

"We're special."

\*

Suddenly there was a roar like roller coaster wheels underneath us and for a moment I was pressed up against the straps holding me down on the seat. Then the pressure stopped and there was nothing but the sound of wind a long way off. Over the side of the boat I could see water rushing by beneath us. We were climbing.

"Muffin," I asked, "should one of us maybe be piloting this thing?"

"It's got a gyroscope or something. The monks worked absolutely everything out, okay?"

"Okay."

A long way off to the right, I could see a lake freighter with a curl of smoke coming out of its stack. The smoke didn't move. It looked neat. "Nice warm day," I said.

After a while, we started playing car games to pass the time.

\*

The sun shone but didn't move. "If the sun stays there forever," I asked, "won't it get really hot after a while?"

"Nah," Muffin answered. "It's some kind of special deal. I mean, it's not the same if you set up a nice picture of a park full of kids playing and then it gets hot as Mercury."

"Who's going to know?" I asked.

"It's not the same," she insisted.

\*

"How can we see?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, is the light moving or what?"

"It's another special deal."

That made sense. From the way Dad talked about physics, light was always getting special deals.

\*

The water below us gradually stopped racing away so fast and we could sometimes see frozen white-caps on the peaks of frozen

waves. "Suppose we land on frozen water," I said.

"We won't."

"Oh. Your turn."

"I spy with my little eye something that begins with B." Right away I knew she meant the Big Macs, but I had to pretend it was a toughie. You have to humor little kids.

\*

We splashed down within sight of a city on the far side of the lake. It was a really good splash, like the one on the Zoomba Flume ride when you get to the bottom of the big, long, water chute. Both of us got drenched. I was kind of sad there was no way to do it again.

Then I thought to myself, maybe if we were getting a special deal on air and water and heat and all, maybe we'd get a special deal on the Zoomba Flume too.

We unstrapped ourselves and searched around a bit. Finally, we found a lid that slid back to open up a control panel with a little steering wheel and all. We pushed buttons until an inboard motor started in the water behind us, then took turns driving towards shore. Every now and then we'd see a gull frozen in the sky, wings spread out and looking great.

We put in at a public beach just outside the city. It had been early in the day and the only people in sight were a pair of joggers on a grassy ridge that ran along the edge of the sand. The man wore only track shorts and sunglasses; the woman wore red stretch pants, a T-shirt, and a headband. Both had Walkmans and were stopped mid-stride. Both had deep, dark tans, and as Muffin pointed out, a thin covering of sweat.

I wanted to touch one to see what they felt like, but when my finger got close, it bumped up against an invisible layer of frozen air. The air didn't feel like anything, it was just solid stuff.

Down at one end of the beach, a teen-age girl was frozen in the act of unlocking the door into a snack stand. We squeezed past her and found out we could open the freezer inside. Muffin had a couple of Popsicles, I had an ice cream sandwich, and then we went swimming.

\*

Lying out in the sun afterward, I asked Muffin what was going to happen next.

"You want to go swimming again?" she said.

"No, I mean after."

"Let's eat," she said, dragging me back towards the boat.

"You can't wiggle out of it that easy," I told her. "Are we the only ones left?"

"I think so."

"Then are we going to freeze too?"



"Nope. We got a special deal."

"But it seems pretty stupid if you ask me. Everything's kind of finished, you know? Show's over. Why are we still hanging around?"

"For a new show, dummy."

"Oh." That made sense. "Same sort of thing?"

"We'll see."

"Oh. Where do *we* fit in?"

Muffin smiled at me. "You're here to keep me company."

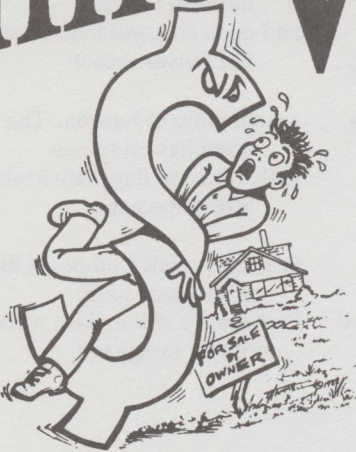
"And what are you here for?"

"Everything else. Get me a sandwich."

So I reached down into the basket we'd brought and pulled one out. It was inside a plastic sandwich bag. "Didn't we put these in waxed paper?" I asked.

Muffin smiled. ♦♦

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from the collection

## *Whatever it is Plants Dream...*

by Richard Stevenson

illustrations by Lynn Taylor Fahnstalk

### *Bunny Ears*

(*Opuntia microdasys*)

Innocent-looking plants,  
painful to touch —  
plainly, not much  
like any plush toy  
with cute button eyes,

or Raggedy Ann or Andy  
either; their pads poke out  
— limbs akimbo —  
spiny kilroys peeking out from  
behind the cartoon cutout

of rock outcropping and  
gong of sun. Grizzled hombres,  
not root-a-toot-toot ricochet  
rabbits shooting Disney sixguns  
from our window sills.

Stonehenge of plants;  
it is their oddness that  
appeals to, amuses us.  
So we place them in the light,  
pot them, arrange their awkward

symmetry like the limbs  
of dolls with soft, quilted  
breast buds and rubber jigglers.  
Watch their ears or noses twitch.  
Watch them perform their kinky  
sex.

### *Devil's Backbone*

(*Euphorbia curinata variegatas*)

"Redbird slipperflower," "Red-  
bird cactus":  
see how the branches twist  
semantics at every node!

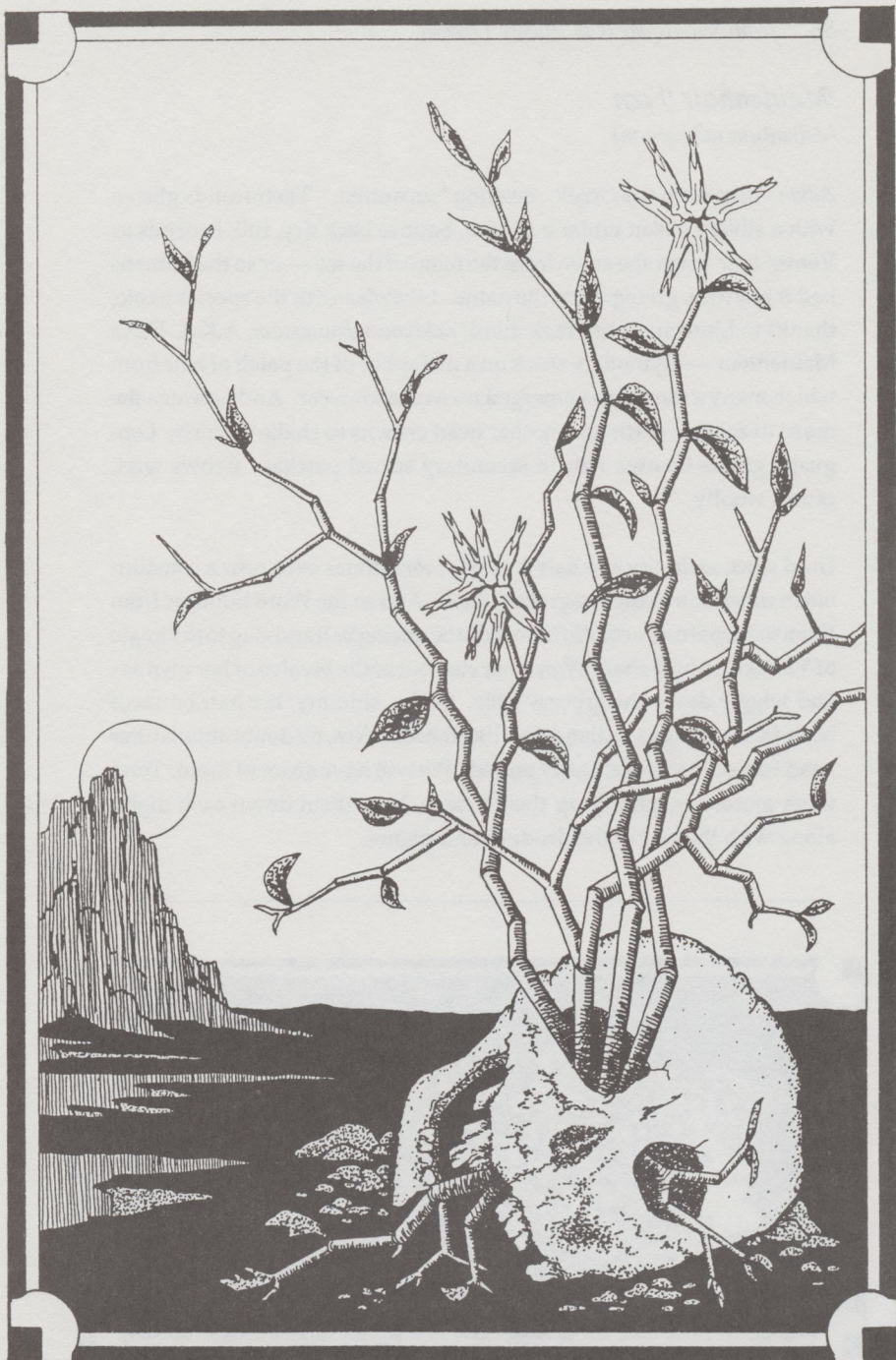
Now this way, now that: their  
variegated leaves  
are coy with the very sun that  
feeds them.

Their acrid sap is especially  
harmful to eyes  
and open cuts, yet their small  
red flowers boast

a stepladder to heaven. The  
plant has no spines  
with which to flagellate itself or  
justify the name.

See now: a new bud poses like a  
dove about to fly.  
Perhaps we will make a warhead  
of that image too.



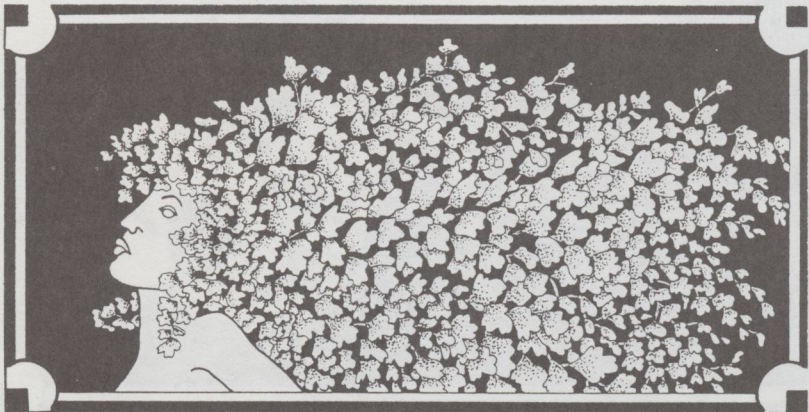


## *Maidenhair Fern*

(*Adiantum raddianum*)

*Adian - tum*: from the Greek, meaning “unwetted.” Their fronds glisten with a silvery sheen under a stream, bounce back dry, full, lustrous as Venus’ hair when she arose from the foam of the sea — or so the Romans had it anyway, giving them the name. Likewise with the species name, thanks to Linnaeus’ one-track mind: *raddianum/cuneatum*, A.K.A. Delta Maidenhair — etymology stuck on a metaphor of the patch of hair from which many a mortal has emerged no worse for wear. And between the mons of mother earth yet another head crowns to shake its curls. Language grows its own hair in secondary sexual patches. Grows wild, grows woolly.

Used since antiquity as a hair tonic too; sometimes even now a constituent in rinses found on any grocery shelf. And so the Word bounces from Eden to herbal essence. We follow the bouncing ball and sing to the jingle of Venus on a half-shell. Watch her step out of the bivalve of her own sex and wiggle down the grocery aisle. Shake, shimmy; her hair bounces back, boomerangs a radiance just like the fern. Yes, no doubt about it: her head too is detachable, easily potted. We will have aisles of these. Tend them gratefully, plump up their foliage, hose them down each night, along with the rest of the produce and plants.





*Lipstick Plant*

(*Aeschynanthus lobbianus*)

"... even when the flowers are gone  
the plants are still good looking."

From buds that resemble  
lipsticks  
they tumble pendant promises  
along their trailing stems.

Red, orange flowers — these lend  
credence  
to the name — long familiar from  
starlets,  
the harlots of Hollywood, *cine  
noir* fame.

But yellow, brown? What  
insouciant  
charm have these to lend a shape  
snicked home in the breach of  
our eyes?

Forget Betty Boop, forget hobble  
skirts.

Their stems are not legs; their  
anthers refuse  
anthropomorphic male  
metaphors of our

red come-fuck-me pumps poised  
atop  
shapely stamens. The wide-on  
innuendo  
of our tulip wineglasses is a lie  
we've told.

They leave nothing on our lab  
frocks or white collars  
but blood. Old blood. The  
yellow bruise  
of circumorbital hematoma.  
Their petals don't pout.

*Moneywort*

— *Creeping Jenny*

(*Lysimachia nummularia*)

To grow  
Rapunzel-like  
toward  
the light

to drop  
right down  
from the ivy tower  
to the ground

to creep  
with such fairness —  
one leaf for you  
and one for me

and build bilaterally  
a kind of title  
if not  
a deed

cede  
a head  
to the  
prehensile  
tail.

---

*Moth Orchid*

(*Phalaenopsis amabilis*)

Melting on their tongues  
white disks of unleavened bread;  
in their hearts and minds  
white petals, moths  
spiral, ascend the stalks.

*Tiger's Jaws*

(*Faucaria tigrina*)

Like so many unweaned pups with needle-like teeth they leap over each other, stumble and fall into the light. Jaws keel-shaped, swing wide on their hinges; they snarl and tussle, clamp on tight to the swollen dug of the moon. Only three inches high, and then their petals lay limp as wreathes heaped on the raised hackles of their need; they bay beneath the corolla of each sunburst flower, would as soon rend them as grow them, or fight for them the way any two opposing dogs would over a hank of flesh or a rag. And yet, really, their teeth are soft, end in drool-like threads of attenuated chlorophyll. They're plants after all, and do all of this for show. Those that would eat them — wayward insects — are not impressed. No, it takes one of our kind — human, rapacious bipedal homonids of another century — latex and polypropylene; in twisted Dobermans and beartraps. For that is their lot: they grow; we name them, and naming them, see ourselves in their image; pot them; sell them as ornamental curiosities. Something to remind us of the multifoliate rose that springs eternal from the questing radule of the scoliotic spine. Something of the horning green Eden of natural selection we keep. A premature foetus in a jar.

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# Reinach's Watch

by Jamie Findlay

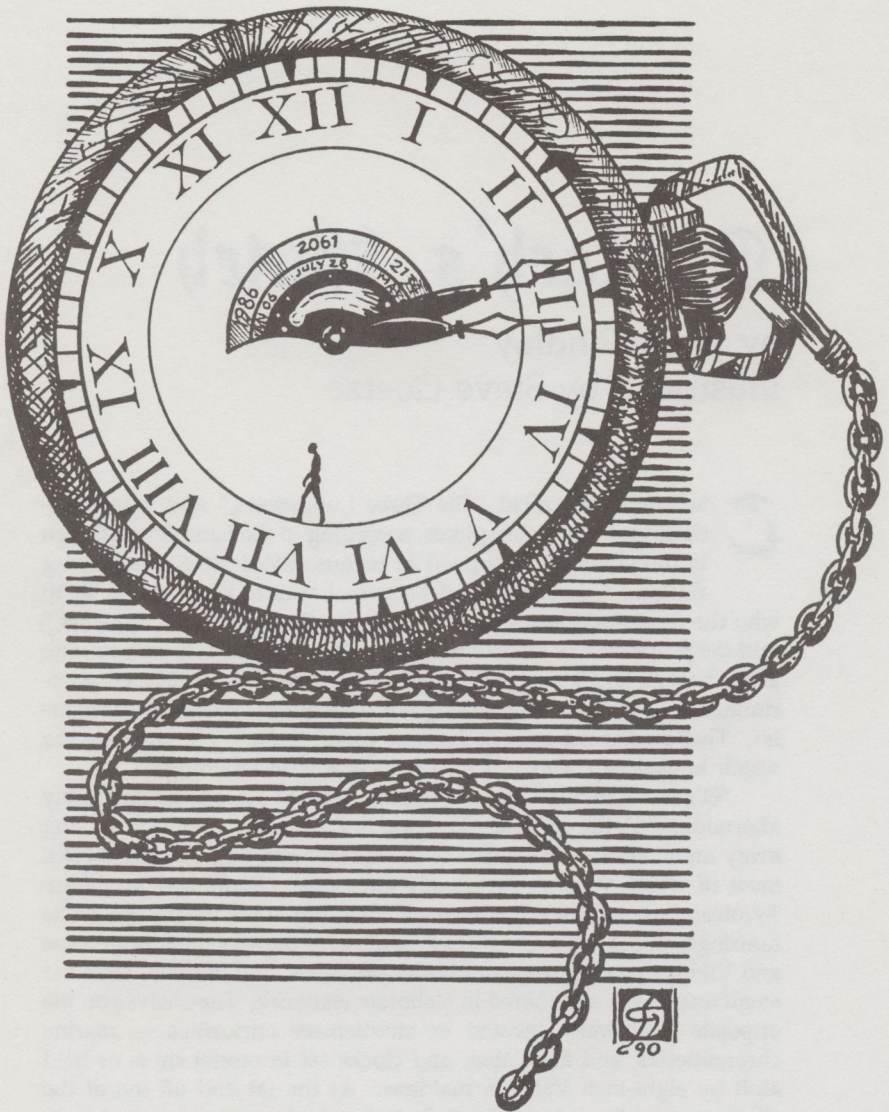
illustrated by Steve Goetze

The shop was called "The Three Luminaries," and it sold antique and exotic timepieces, according to the hand-lettered sign in the window. I stopped in because the drizzle was making walking unpleasant, and because I was mildly curious as to who the three luminaries were. "The sun, the moon, and the stars," said the proprietor, in answer to my question. He sat behind a counter at the back, a small man with a wispy voice and old-fashioned wire-rimmed spectacles. "The three great time-givers, the three luminaries. That's what the ancient Chinese called them." He set aside the watch he was repairing. "Can I help you with anything?"

"Oh, just looking," I said. It was a pleasant place to be on a rainy afternoon, with the smell of old wood in the air and the clocks ticking away on all sides. One entire wall was covered with cuckoo clocks, most of which were extravagantly Germanic. Some had miniature Tyrolean lads or lasses on swings, dangling rhythmically from the housings; others had carved stags' heads over the apertures, or gnomes and Vikings peering out from under the eaves. All of them, even the small ones, were smothered in elaborate leafwork. The shelves on the opposite wall were devoted to mantelpiece curiosities — marine chronometers, and astrolabes, and clocks set in model ships or held aloft by eight-inch Valhalla maidens. At the far end of one of the shelves sat an hourglass, about six inches high, made of some lovely dark wood. The powder inside it — a deep sulphur blue — flowed into the bottom chamber at a curiously slow rate, as if it were falling against an updraft. Emma would love this place, I thought.

But what really caught my eye was a collection of beautiful pocket watches, laid out on green velvet inside the glass-topped counter.

"Some nice ones in here, if I do say so myself," said the proprietor, opening the case. "They're out of style now, these old pocket



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watches, but if you ask me they're a lot better deal than wristwatches. Much more space inside them for extras."

I had never seen watches like his. One had a tiny star chart inside it. Another could give you the date according to the old Julian calendar. Yet another could give you the cycles of the moon for the current month. Most of them had three or four hands, and small mysterious dials on their faces.

"And this," said the proprietor, holding up a small, silver-edged pocket watch. "Made by Philippe Reinach, the greatest clockmaker and engineer of the late nineteenth century. Fought all his life against time, poor man." He handed it to me. "That little dial on the face will give the return dates of Comet Halley."

"Comet Halley?"

He nodded. "For some reason that used to cheer him up."

The watch was about two inches in diameter, with a face of cream, delicate hands of some sort of bluish steel, and a face lid of silver-gilt. I turned it over. Engraved on the back was a stylized "G."

"That stands for Gizelle, his second wife," said the proprietor. "He put her initial on all his later work." He was silent for a moment. "Without her I think he would have died much sooner."

It was the most beautiful watch I had ever seen.

"Just out of curiosity," I said, "how much would you want for this?"

"Well," he said vaguely, "I always try and fit the price to the customer." He took the watch and gazed at it. "It's — er — rather a tricky piece to use..."

I am fond of antiques, in my ignorant way, and have picked up a few interesting (and cheap) artifacts in my travels, but I was never so taken by anything as I was by that watch. It may well have been a fake — I had my doubts about the comet dial — but it was such an exquisite piece that I couldn't pass it up. "I have about two hundred and fifty dollars in cash," I said, taking out my wallet. "You don't take credit cards, do you?"

He continued to gaze at the watch, evidently debating with himself whether to sell it. "The comet dial still works, anyway," he remarked, more to himself than to me. At length he gave me a quick piercing look and set the watch down on the counter. "All right," he declared. "Two hundred and fifty it is." I gave him the money and he took several minutes to explain the mechanisms. The comet dial did indeed seem to work — at least as far as I could understand it. Finally he closed the face lid with a nod of satisfaction. "Set it by the tower clock in the square," he said. "It's been accurate for the last century. I checked it myself this spring."

"But don't you have the correct time here?" I asked in surprise. "What about all these clocks?"

"Oh," he said, "a lot of them don't keep track of our time, and I've forgotten which ones do." Before I could get him to enlarge on this remark he put the watch into my hand with a smile. "If you have any problems with it," he said firmly, "come right back."

That was the only time during our entire conversation that he sounded the least bit like a merchant.

When I left the shop the rain had stopped, and the sun was just beginning to show through the clouds. I wound my way through a network of small lanes to the town square. The tower clock said three o'clock. Emma would be back at the hotel soon. She had been planning to leave today by train, but I had no doubt that I could persuade her to stay another day or two, once she had seen the watch and heard about the shop. I took out the watch, set it, and tucked it carefully inside my breast pocket. As I turned from the tower I fancied I could feel it ticking against my heart.

At once I came to a stop, astonished. Every sound, shape and colour in that old square had suddenly become magnified. The rain-drops glistened on the cobblestones; the air was full of curious drawn-out noises; a fire hydrant across the way gleamed an unusual red; and I could see every crack and blemish in the limestone buildings near the square. Then a pigeon came into view on my right, and I blinked. It was moving in *slow motion*. I could make out each wingbeat as it drifted down towards the cobblestones in front of me. From the thick, echoing sound of its wings it might have been a pterodactyl. Slowly it righted its body and stuck its legs out, and with my strange hyperaesthesia I could hear the scrunching of gravel as it alighted.

Dazedly I took a step forward, and realized at once that I too was moving in slow motion. I didn't feel constricted, as if I were walking under water; my foot simply took ten seconds to reach the ground. I took another exploratory step, and another. Then I walked as quickly as I could to a bench and sat down. It took me nearly a minute. I closed my eyes for a moment, and when I opened them there was the pigeon in front of me, pecking away in slow motion. A low wavering moan — vaguely like a ship's foghorn — came to me, and I realized it was cooing.

I decided that the sensible thing to do would be to close my eyes again and wait for this fit, or hallucination, or whatever it was, to pass.

But the sounds in the air made me open my eyes. Around me a slow-motion tableau was unfolding. An old car was creeping down the street, the sound of its engine completely unrecognizable. A knot of children ran by me, laughing and shouting, their voices several pitches lower than Boris Karloff's. Across the way a young woman was traversing the sidewalk, her purse swinging lazily by her side, her high heels sliding across space and alighting with a curious echo,



her dress making swishing noises like a sail in a wind. I turned to watch her disappear, and it was then I became conscious of the weight in my breast pocket.

I whipped out the watch — the gesture took about ten seconds — and opened the face lid. A quarter past three.

I looked back at the clock tower. Two minutes past three.

I am not a drug-using man. Not now, anyway; I gave it up soon after I left college. But I used to experiment rather heavily in my younger days, and I remember one occasion when I took something particularly expensive, and subsequently entered just this sort of slow-motion world. I spent an entire evening, as far as I can recall, watching drops of water running down a window pane. It was actually one of the few drug-induced states that I would care to re-live. I was acutely aware of time passing, and passing at a deliciously slow rate. Each drop took hours to run its course, and I had plenty of opportunity to reflect on the shape of the drop, on the quality of the light playing on it, on the properties of water in general, and on a thousand other topics that slipped into my hyperconscious brain. That was the state I found myself in now, only it was far more unnerving. For it was no drug that doing this, but the watch.

Of that there could be no doubt. When I had taken out the watch I had noticed a subtle conjuncture, a barely perceptible change in the rhythm of things. On a hunch I put the watch down on the bench and stood up. At once I felt the world speed up slightly; the effect was so disorienting that I almost blacked out. I wavered for a few seconds, then took a few steps back. The pigeon was definitely pecking faster. I moved farther away. A car's horn sounded in the distance — sounded normally. Then I approached the bench and the world slowed down, astonishingly and quite beautifully. Sensory details welled up as before; I became conscious of my beating heart, the scarred and chipped surface of the bench, the slow scratching of the pigeon on the ground. I sat down on the bench and picked up the timepiece. So this was Reinach's watch.

It was a strange and often unnerving journey I made that afternoon to my hotel, less than a mile away. My thoughts and perception seemed to be moving at the regular speed, but the rest of the world — including my body — was moving ten times more slowly. At one point I was startled by a low, monstrous grinding sound coming from a shop window. When I got closer I saw that it was an air-conditioner. I suppose I must have looked pretty dazed most of the time, for the people in the streets would sometimes give me a sharp look as I passed.

When I reached the hotel, the clock in the lobby said three-thirty. I got out the watch. Almost five-forty-five. Evidently it kept track of *my* time. I had lived over two and a half hours since I left the village

square, but the rest of the world had only lived about twenty minutes.

Wait till Emma hears about this, I thought.

I went up to our hotel room, opened the bottle of gin, and poured myself a good shot. It was a treat to watch the gin pouring in slow motion, and equally pleasant to feel it sliding down my throat. I sat down on the sofa, carefully. I was feeling a bit dizzy, and I wasn't sure how alcohol would affect my brain in its new state.

A step sounded on the stair and Emma came in. I saw at once she had highlighted her hair.

"Emma!" I burst out, and nearly dropped my drink. I had not been prepared for the sound of my own voice — low and distorted, much worse than a record being played at the wrong speed.

"What's up?" said Emma, kicking off her shoes. Her voice was slightly higher than mine, but still grotesquely low; I had to strain to understand her. In hearing it, I was suddenly struck by the fantastic absurdity of the whole situation. I started laughing, and the resulting sound was so bizarre — like the laboured coughing of an old car when you're trying to start it — that I laughed all the harder.

Emma stared at me for several seconds, then came over and sat down. "What on earth is the matter with you?" she asked.

Okay, I thought, get a grip on yourself. I wiped my brow. "Emma, I said, "you won't believe what's been happening to me." I took out the watch and opened the face lid. "Look at this."

She drew in her breath and I could tell she was as struck by the watch's beauty as I had been. "It's fast," was her only remark.

"Yes, I know," I began, and stopped. This wasn't going to be easy. "Okay," I said steadily, "I realize this is going to sound crazy, but I swear to God it's true. This watch *slows time down*."

She adjusted her glasses. This was her usual response to anything even mildly sensational from me.

"I'm telling you, it slows time down," I said. "I am living right now in a slow motion world. My mind is working normally but everything else is slowed down. It's so weird, I can't describe it. I can see everything happening in slow motion, I can see you *blinking* for God's sake, I can see your lids going down — "

"Hold on," she said evenly. Her eyes hadn't moved from mine throughout my garbled explanation. "I can't make head nor tail of what you're saying. Start from the beginning."

So I told her about the shop, and the odd proprietor, and Philippe Reinach, and my experiences after setting the watch, and my bizarre journey home. She didn't say a word. When I had finished she looked at me, then at the watch, then back at me.

"You don't believe me," I said.

"Well, what do you expect? A watch that slows time down?"



"Okay, I'll prove it." I put the watch into her hand. "Hold it. No, even better — hold it against your heart. *Hold it.* Okay."

As I drew away from her I could actually feel the world speeding up, like a film being run faster. I closed my eyes.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yes, yes." I took a breath. "Now, does anything seem different?"

"No."

"Does my voice sound funny?" I waved my arms. "How about that?"

She sighed and put the watch down impatiently. "What is the matter with you?" Her voice was starting to acquire an edge.

I took the watch from her tentatively, and sure enough, the world slowed down as it had in the square. I sank down into the sofa in despair. Did this watch work only for me? Or was I going crazy after all? I gave Emma a weak smile. "That's why it's running fast, Em," I said. It's keeping track of *my* time. The shopkeeper told me this guy Reinach — "

Suddenly I stood up. The proprietor knew about this watch, I was sure of that. "Let's go back to that shop," I said.

"I think we should forget about that shop — " she began, but I yanked her to her feet.

"He knows about it, Emma," I said. "That shopkeeper knows about the watch. He told me it was a tricky watch to use — God, that's the understatement of the year." I hustled her to the door. "Come on, come on. It won't take that long."

We walked there in silence. I could tell that Emma was torn between anger and complete incomprehension. For the first time that afternoon I chafed at the slow rate of time, and after a few blocks took out the watch, gave it to Emma, and walked ahead of her, enjoying the feeling of release. When we finally arrived at the shop I took the watch back and banged open the door. The proprietor was in his usual place, working behind the counter.

"You!" I said. I was ready to blast him, to vent all the anger and frustration that had welled up in my wrangle with Emma, but seeing him sitting there like some prematurely-aged child, as dusty as his clocks, all I could say was, "What is it with that watch?"

The proprietor held up his hands. "My apologies," he said. "I should have told you about it before you bought it. You wouldn't have believed me, of course, but I should have tried anyway." He got to his feet and smiled at Emma. "No doubt you have been hearing about the strange qualities of this watch, madam. It's all true, I assure you. The watch does indeed slow time down."

Emma regarded him coolly enough, but I could tell by the way she was standing she was a bit taken aback by this development.

"It also distorts the geometry of space," added the proprietor, "but you probably wouldn't have noticed that."

"No, that went right by us," said Emma, with a glance at me. I guess she thought that the proprietor and I were both trying to take her for a ride.

"A genius made it almost a century ago," continued the proprietor. "He was desperately in love with his young wife, but he was dying of tuberculosis. Poets rail against time, call it an insatiable monster, but this man did something more. He made a watch that would slow time down. With it he was able to stretch out the hours with his wife and savour to the full his last days on earth." He paused reflectively. "He finally found some sort of release in those final years, after a ravaged life. And the clocks he made then! You can always tell one of Reinach's last pieces — they're incredibly vivid and alive. They look like they were made in an opium dream." He gestured to the shelves. "I have a few of them here."

Emma was regarding him frostily with her arms folded.

"I see you don't believe me," said the proprietor mildly. "That is understandable." He sat down.

"Hold it!" I said in agitation. "Don't just let it drop like that. You got me into this, and you're going to get me out of it. How do I *prove* it to her?"

"You can't prove it," he said, "so I wouldn't worry about it." He picked up the pocket watch he had been repairing. "But I can tell you this: as you continue to use the watch, people who know you well will gradually notice — er — psychological changes in you. I suspect you will find them very pleasant, in general. You will be able to read a novel in half an hour and compose a letter while waiting for a red light. Do you play chess? Then I imagine your game will start to improve. A short walk from your house to the street will leave you with a huge fund of sensations. Each day will seem like a week in your memory. Your dreams will become more vivid and easier to remember. Your mental life, in short, will expand like a balloon. And of course, if you want to live life at the normal speed, you need only leave the watch in a drawer. Reinach himself used to do that, when his pain was bad."

"But why won't it work for her?" I asked unhappily.

"Because you chose it and you bought it," he replied. "It will work only for you until the day you die. That is the way it goes, in my shop."

Emma was scowling. I guess all the fantastic claims had finally reached a critical mass in her no-nonsense mind. "Well, I'm glad *that's* all cleared up," she said. "I'd love to hear more, but I'm afraid I have a train to catch — if I haven't missed it already."

She turned to go, but then her eye fell on the hourglass I had



noticed on my first visit to the shop, and she stopped short.

The proprietor smiled. "It's beautiful, isn't it?" he said. He walked over to the shelf, picked up the glass, and brought it back. "I've never been able to figure out why it flows so slowly," he continued. "But you know, most of my pieces here contain some quirk that is beyond my understanding. I don't dare take them apart, in case I destroy the quirk." He turned the glass over and set it down on the desk. The blue powder hesitated for a fraction of a second, and we watched the individual particles begin falling languidly, like snowflakes, and then blend together to make a small column of blue. "It is another of Reinach's last pieces," said the proprietor.

As it turned out, Emma missed her train that evening after all. ♦♦

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# solar faces

by Barry Hammond

Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter  
Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto  
we've known their names since grade school  
seen their paintings and pictures in the books  
they're like film actresses  
or certain women  
into whose faces  
you can read whatever you like

from a distance

but when we get to know them better  
I suspect they'll be much more difficult  
hard to understand  
like that small patch of deep blue sky  
glimpsed from the bottom of an abandoned chimney  
now a school cloakroom  
rubber boots, scarves, mittens and winter coats  
stacked two deep  
the child contemplating  
his punishment  
and the great mystery.



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# Transference

by J. Brian Clarke

illustration by Adrian Kleinbergen

Gresham asked, "Have you ever thought that perhaps we all die in a different world than the one in which we were born?"

Oh boy. Here we go again. I sighed and looked at him over the rim of my coffee cup. "I beg your pardon?"

He was using the edge of his fork to draw circles on the tablecloth. "Consider an infinite series of worlds co-existing in a greater continuum, each separated from the other as signals of different frequencies are separated in a conductor."

"Parallel worlds," I said promptly. "Old hat."

"You think so?" He had that absent smile on his face, a warning sign I knew of old. Though I had known Jack Gresham for years and considered him my friend, his stop-start musings were an irritant I could do without. I had heard that the kids in his high school science class did well, though for the life of me, I could not understand how his unorthodoxies fitted in with the regular curriculum. I wondered how many of his students had been in that crazy basement laboratory of his; a sort of pig pen with wires.

"Old hat," I repeated firmly.

He roused. "Sure, if you read science fiction. Which you do and I don't. Robert, I am talking fact!"

Another silence, interrupted only by the decorous sounds of the restaurant. At the next table, a lush brunette and her equally endowed friend were eyeing us speculatively. Normally I would have reacted to that hint of pleasant dalliance, but not with present company. Not that there was anything wrong with Gresham; his shaggy, down-at-heel vulnerability seemed attractive to women. But I knew he was still carrying a torch for his estranged wife, and I do not deliberately invite embarrassments.





Talking about wives...

In his usual rabbit-out-of-the-hat fashion, he asked, "For instance, have you ever arrived home one evening and found your wife somehow... ah... different?"

I laughed. "I'm not married."

"Oh. Say, that's right." Other people would have been embarrassed, but not Gresham. Instead, he persisted. "OK, let's talk about someone you see reasonably often. Your boss, for instance."

"I happen to be a freelance writer," I reminded him. "But I get your point. Now I have known you for a few years..."

"Exactly!" He beamed. "So let's talk about me. Has there been any time when I seemed to change? Some quirk of personality, perhaps? A habit?"

I thought for a moment. "Keyos Laboratories. When you got that job, you were like a dog with two tails. Next thing I knew, you had quit and gone back to teaching. Never did like that place, you said."

"If you knew that idiot director..." He blinked excitedly. "My point! The Jack Gresham who liked that job was not me!"

I regarded him doubtfully. "No?"

"Damn right. He is now in the next subcontinuum; replaced by me, as I was by the next man down the line. Countless Jack Greshams, Robert. All moved one continuum at precisely the same instant."

I tried to keep a straight face. "When did it happen?"

He shrugged. "Who knows? It's a subtle transference that can happen to any of us. At any moment."

Though I wanted to laugh, I was able to suppress the urge behind a strained smile. "Somehow I find it difficult to believe that I am being bumped from world to world without being aware of it. That an infinite series of 'me' is being barged around like a cosmic set of dominoes."

Lapsed again into silence, Gresham was inscribing another circle on the abused tablecloth.

"In fact, I think it's a most unpleasant idea." I looked around the restaurant at the busy, pleasant, and above all, familiar surroundings. I looked again at my friend, Jack Gresham. Or one of my *friends*, Jack Gresham? Oh Lord, I thought. Now he's got me doing it!

"How often," I asked, "is this thing supposed to happen?"

He shrugged. "Every hour, once in a lifetime, perhaps not at all. Haven't you met people who always seem surprised at the rate things are changing? For them, transference happens so often, they never have time enough to adjust to the slight but cumulative changes that happen as they pass from frame to frame."

I scratched my head. Using logic against this man was like shadow boxing. The target was just never there. "Look, I have heard you

expound on some screwy ideas, but this one definitely takes the prize. Frankly, I'm only too glad you can never prove it."

"But I can!" Before I could stop him, he grabbed the check and headed for the cashier. He looked back over his shoulder. "Get a cab," he called. "I'll see you outside."

Instead, I went to the phone near the door and called my agent. "Bob Kevinsky," I announced. "Ed, do you really need me this afternoon?"

I heard a regretful sigh. "Blonde or brunette?"

"He's a brunette!" I snapped, and hung up.

When I got outside, Gresham already had a cab waiting at the curb. He sheepishly let it go when I pointed to my car across the street. "Your place?" I asked as I eased into the early afternoon traffic.

He nodded. "It's in the basement."

What "it" was I did not know. But however spectacular its nature, I knew I would need his help to identify it within the thirty-by-forty junk heap he called a laboratory. Gresham was not only a tinkerer, he was a sloppy tinkerer, and his conglomeration of half-finished projects probably violated every electrical and fire code in the book. It was also, I suspected, one of the reasons his wife had walked out on him some two years before.

His bungalow was in an older, more stately part of town. Fortunately for the peace of mind of his neighbours on the quiet, tree-lined street, Gresham had a contract with a local landscaper who kept the lawn and hedges trimmed, and the bugs down. So, as he opened the front door with the comment, "You won't recognize the place," I knew he was not referring to the suburban exterior. When we clattered downstairs, however, his meaning became astonishingly clear.

The basement was no longer a disorganized chaos. The junk had been removed, the floor and walls painted, the workbench sanded and varnished. There was a computer on the workbench, a filing cabinet and a few loose papers. In the center of the floor, about the size and dimensions of a shower stall, was a wire cage.

"What do you think?" Gresham asked proudly.

I rubbed my eyes. "I've heard of people turning over a new leaf, but this is ridiculous."

He opened a collapsible chair and had me sit down. He began to pace back and forth in front of me: the teacher about to lecture the student. It didn't bother me. I knew he was most comfortable in that role.

"Does the name J. W. Dunne mean anything to you?"

"British aircraft designer," I replied. "Had some success before the first world war."

Gresham nodded. "Very good. Anything else?"

"He wrote a book that got him some notoriety. An oddity he



called *Experiment With Time*."

Gresham was as surprised as I was pleased with myself. I grinned at him. "I'm not so dumb."

"Have you read it?"

"As a matter of fact, I haven't. But I have the feeling you are about to enlighten me on some of the more salient points."

He stopped and looked at me suspiciously, not sure if I was making fun of him. I was, of course, but was not about to admit it. He resumed his pacing.

"Dunne had a theory about the nature of time. In his book he describes it as an infinitely elongated medium extending from the past to the future, with events represented as intertwined threads set more or less rigidly in the medium. The present is a fluid plane which rides along..."

"A moving cross section of time, you mean?"

Gresham frowned at my interruption. "I suppose it can be thought of that way. Anyway, events change only because their locations in the cross section are changing."

"That denies the existence of free will, doesn't it?"

"Sure it does. If there is only *one* time stream." It was then Gresham became excited. "But what if there are an infinite number of time streams, all intersected by the same travelling 'present'? What then?"

His pacing had become irritating; four steps one way, four steps back. So as he passed in front of me for the umpteenth time, I grabbed his arm and pointed to another chair. "Dammit, you're making me nervous. Sit down and quit treating me like a classroom."

"Oh. Yes." He opened the chair but he did not sit on it. Instead he leaned against it with one hand and gesticulated with the other. "You see, the boundaries of the time streams are not as restrictive as, say, the walls of a pipe. Instead they are semi-permeable, allowing, under certain conditions, the unwitting transfer of individuals who literally 'slide' across the present to what you science-fictioners refer to as the next parallel universe." Again he looked at me suspiciously. "Are you getting all of this?"

"Oh, I'm getting it all right." I pointed at the wire cage. "Except for that. What is it?"

"My transport."

"Your what?"

"There is very little energy involved, theoretically less than seventy watts. Instead of drifting across the time streams like a bit of chaff riding the current, I can now go where I want. I will be able to see my other selves as they go about their affairs. *Your* other selves, Robert. Just think of it. The possibilities are literally endless!"

I mused, "I wonder if your motives are entirely scientific."

Gresham frowned. "What else could they be?"

"I think you are looking for your wife."

It was a long shot and it produced results. His jaw dropped. "How did you know?"

"You and I have known each other for a long time. I also knew Wilma. Though you pretend she's coming back some day, I think we both know the break is clean. Only her Catholicism has prevented her getting a divorce."

Gresham's fists were clenched. I knew I was treading on dangerous ground, but for his peace of mind as well as my own curiosity, I had to get it into the open. I did not look into his face as I continued, "So what about the Wilmas in all those other worlds? I bet at least one of them still likes living with her husband. Right?"

After a moment, his hands relaxed. It was then I realized my own fists were clenched. Embarrassed, I folded my arms and looked up. He was smiling. "Damn you, Robert," he said without malice. He turned away and walked over to the computer. After tapping something into the keyboard, he went to the wire cage and stepped inside. "Stay clear," he warned as I stood up. "The field will activate in thirty seconds."

I hurriedly stepped back a pace. "How often have you done this?"

"Never," he admitted cheerfully. "But don't worry. It will work."

"You're crazy!" I don't know where my skepticism had gone, but I felt as if the universe was closing in; that suddenly this suburban basement was the focus of forces beyond comprehension. I ran to the workbench and looked helplessly at the computer. On the screen was:

39 AQ 7

# ACTIVATE

I turned back to the cage. "Get out of there," I pleaded. "Use a test animal."

Gresham shook his head. "Sorry. Anyway, this is only a reconnaissance. By the way, retrieval is set for exactly fifteen minutes, so don't—"

I did not actually see him go. Either I blinked or looked away for a moment, but suddenly the cage was empty. There had only been a strange little whisper as air rushed in to fill the space that had just been occupied by a human body.

For a while my mind was in stasis. I had just witnessed a scientific miracle, yet all I could think of was that hell could freeze over before I would apologize to Gresham for my doubts. I looked again at the computer display. The message was gone, replaced by the numbers 13:33. As I watched, it became 13:32.

*Countdown.*



Of course. He had said fifteen minutes, and now the computer was counting down to the moment when he would reappear. I walked to the cage, touched a metal corner post and then delicately walked my fingers inside. Nothing happened. Feeling silly, I took a deep breath and stepped into the cage. Still nothing. The field, or whatever it was, had dissipated as completely as the man himself.

The display flickered to 12:25.

Presuming I was supposed to wait, I went back to my chair. Was Jack Gresham a genius? Or, in the sense that a million monkeys pounding at a million typewriters might eventually produce the complete works of Shakespeare, was his accomplishment merely a statistical accident? In any case, would a genius — or any person in his right mind — go chasing through alternate universes just to regain his estranged wife? A poet might make a beautiful legend out of it. But not, I decided, twentieth century logic.

10:00. Ten minutes.

Suddenly I was incredibly thirsty. There was no logical reason for it; I had eaten and drunk my fill less than an hour before. But the mind is a creature of whim, and especially under stress can stimulate an unnecessary need — such as thirst. So after a quick glance around the basement, I trotted upstairs to the kitchen and helped myself to a can of beer from the fridge. A large fly cruised noisily by and alighted on the can. With exaggerated care, I took aim and flicked my index finger at the offending insect. He took off like a sub-miniature rocket, orbited crazily a few times, and then vanished into the living room.

I wanted to laugh. I had seen a man wink out of this world like a snuffed-out candle flame, and here I was chasing flies and drinking his beer. Yet by some obscure psychological alchemy, the exercise of these inconsequentials had given a needed boost to my somewhat deflated ego.

I carried the beer back with me into the basement. Where was he now? I wondered. I tried to imagine what it was like to watch one's other selves all doing the same thing like a series of endless reflections.

The same thing...

They'd have to be, at least in the neighbouring time streams. Otherwise, the instantaneous transference Gresham had described would be impossible. Imagine a deck of cards, twisted into that artistic spiral known as a gambler's rose. Adjacent cards are almost — though not quite — in one to one correspondence. Edge to edge. Face to face. But further down the deck, the cards become increasingly twisted out of phase. Far enough down, they are twisted a full one hundred and eighty degrees.

Far enough down, Jack Gresham's wife still loved him. But how far down? How many time streams removed would Jack find a loving

Wilma? And how would he substitute himself for the Jack Gresham who was already there — who obviously had no reason to explore the time streams?

"Oh my God," I whispered as the can of beer slid from my slackened fingers to the floor. The can clattered and rolled, spilling its contents in a dark pool across the concrete. In my shock I did not notice the mess; only the countdown on the computer display.

3.01

As I watched, it changed to three minutes.

I glanced at the keyboard, wondering if I could change the countdown or even stop it. But I did not know enough. Instead of stopping the inevitable, the odds were I would simply thrust myself into the middle of it. There was only one thing I could do.

Get out.

*Fast!*

I ran upstairs and out of the house. The car started easily, but even as I began to back out of the driveway, I realized I was not the only one in jeopardy. I slammed to a halt, got out, and ran across to the bungalow next up the street. I hammered on the door almost hard enough to break my hand, but there was no response. Hopefully because no one was home. I sprinted back across Gresham's front yard to the house on the other side, lifted my hand to bang on the door —

"Hello there. Anything wrong?"

I turned around. A gray-haired lady was advancing towards me with a pair of shears in one hand and a determined expression on her face. It was obvious I had to explain in a hurry.

I pointed at Gresham's house. "We have to get away from here! Jack's done something stupid; the place will blow at any moment!"

She blanched. "My husband!" And before I could stop her, she rushed past me towards a small greenhouse on the far side of the property. After standing helplessly for a moment, I ran back to my idling car and roared it back into the street. By now I had lost count of the time, but my racing imagination had it down to the last few seconds as I came to a gravel-spattering stop at the woman's driveway. To my horror, she appeared pushing a wheelchair. Its occupant was a legless curmudgeon with a loud voice. "Damn you, woman, what the hell are you doing? Take me back before I swat you right where —"

I would rather have tangled with an angry cougar than with that incomplete bundle of geriatric fury. But despite his flailing fists and vividly descriptive cussing, I hauled him out of the chair and into the car. As his wife scrambled in after him, I got behind the wheel and for the second time that afternoon, threw gravel. As we left the curb I prayed there was still time. If I could just get around that corner



before —

The sky flared, there was a monstrous sound, and then the ground heaved — lurching the car off the pavement into a shallow ditch. We covered down as pieces of wood and masonry showered around us. There was a loud crash and the car shook. I looked up and found myself eyeballing an ominous bulge in the roof.

Finally it was over. I pulled myself out of the car and somehow wrenched open the rear door. Both my passengers were caked with dust but otherwise seemed okay. All three of us were shaking. The old man stammered, "...Wh...what was it?"

I shook my head as I stared at the column of smoke writhing above the ruin of what had once been a house. "I guess Jack Gresham came home," I said dully.

\*

What happens when two bodies abruptly occupy the same space at the same time? Most scientists would dismiss the question as an academic curiosity, not worth the effort of solving. In his innocent genius, however, Jack Gresham had made it a terrible reality.

I remember him as a friendly, talented individual with a scrap-book knowledge of even the most obscure subjects. He could have conducted himself passably well in a discussion with any Nobel physicist, argued plausible economics with a bank president, even played chess against a Grandmaster without being slaughtered. But asked his own phone number, he would stammer helplessly until handed the directory.

Such a man can easily overlook the glaringly obvious. When Gresham separated himself from the natural flow of events, he undoubtedly assumed he would be the only explorer of the parallel worlds. He had forgotten the major point of his own theory — that his duplicates in the adjacent time streams would be doing exactly the same thing! He and countless of his alter-egos had been wandering free, separated from the forces which normally act uniformly on all.

The apparatus in his basement had been programmed to retrieve him at a pre-set instant in time. But if countless Jack Greshams were within range at the moment of retrieval, what would it do?

Bring back one?

Or none?

*Or more than one?*

Re-phrase the question. What happens when one hundred and fifty kilos of mass tries to occupy the space normally occupied by only seventy-five kilos?

Something, I suggest, that is violently unstable.

A catastrophic release of energy that brought three people within a hairsbreadth of eternity.

An explosion, at the core of which, at least two other lives were

instantly annihilated.

Too bad Jack didn't find his Wilma.

\*

The next day.

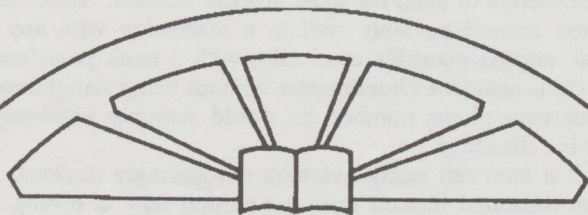
Yesterday, I thought I had completed the story of Jack Gresham. But what I thought was the end may now only be the beginning...

As Gresham had pointed out, most of us are subject, at one time or another, to a lateral time shift.

It has happened to me, for instance. I know it happened within the last few hours, since I typed that last page. I know, because five minutes ago, the phone rang. I picked up the receiver.

"What happened to you?" cried an excited but familiar voice. "Robert, you idiot, you could have been present for one of the greatest science-scoops of all time!"

At least one Jack Gresham has made it. ♦



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# Never Say Diet

by Diane Mapes

illustration by Kevin Kurytnik

Excuse me," I said, eyeing the half-eaten éclair at the table next to mine, "but are you going to finish that?"

The gentleman behind the newspaper smiled at me, his charcoal eyes amused. "Go right ahead, miss. Help yourself. It's nice to see a woman with a healthy appetite."

"Some say a little too healthy," I answered, delicately sliding the pastry onto the remains of my cottage cheese salad. Vanilla custard peeked out from a bed of baked ecstasy. Chocolate icing draped the top like a coverlet.

"I skipped breakfast," I said and chomped into the decadent morsel.

"Of course." The man smiled widely, watching me eat. His teeth were a bit on the canine side. "Napkin?"

"Yes, thanks." I wolfed down the pastry, scanning the back of the restaurant for Mark's lanky form. As he came around a partition, I surreptitiously wrapped the last bit in the man's napkin and slipped it into my jacket pocket. Grease stains I could live with, but the éclair was another matter.

"All ready to go?" Mark asked, pulling my chair away from the table with exaggerated effort.

"Mmmm hmmm," I answered, sucking the chocolate from my teeth with the tenacity of a Hoover.

The gentleman at the next table rose also and leisurely slipped his fingers into elegant gray gloves. He was a short man, slightly plump, dressed in a pinstripe suit and spotless wingtips. As I watched him bend to retrieve his cane, he glanced up at me and winked. I winked back.

"What's that smell?" Mark asked, draping my jacket around my

shoulders. The man next to us lingered over his table, perusing his newspaper.

"What smell?" I mumbled, searching my purse for Clorets.

"It smells like chocolate," Mark said, leaning closer. I saw his nostrils flare as he smelled my breath. "Mary." His tone was the same one he used with his fifth-grade students, the one I refused to stoop to with mine. "Have you been cheating again?"

"Cheating?" I asked, avoiding his eyes like an adulteress. The man at the next table paused to light a dark thin cigarette. The smell was acrid, but not unpleasant. Sweet. Sensual. Chocolatey, in fact. I seized the opportunity.

"It's just this gentleman's cigarette," I said. "You saw what I had for lunch. In fact, you ordered it for me. Cottage cheese salad, melba toast. Look, there's even a piece of pineapple left on the plate."

Mark leaned over the table, staring at the pineapple. Horrified, I realized it wasn't pineapple at all, but a glob of custard filling.

He straightened and gave me one of his looks. I closed my eyes and groaned.

I hated those looks: disappointment, disgust and pity all rolled into one. You're weak, those looks said. You're a victim of your body's uncontrollable desires. Mark had conquered his body years ago, back in college. At the time, I'd appreciated the lean rippling thighs and hard flat stomach; I was in awe of anyone who could eat as much as he did without gaining a pound. But that awe had diminished over our last three years and my last five dress sizes. Now all I could see was the smugness behind Mark's sinews.

"Mary, I don't know what to do with you." He shook his head, sizing up his audience. The man at the next table paused to tap his ashes and Mark caught his eye.

"She's supposed to be dieting, supposed to get down to 123 before our vacation in August. But look at her!" He picked up the plate and examined it closely. "Must have bribed the waitress."

The man glanced at me and I saw amusement in his eyes along with something dark, like smoke from a burning tire. He turned back to Mark and I held my breath.

"Your wife is stunning, sir. You should be proud to be with such a creature."

I lowered my eyes demurely. I liked this dapper little man, even more than I liked my "husband" at the moment. My eyes spotted a piece of chocolate icing hiding beneath a lettuce leaf. My fingers crept forward.

Mark went ahead unfazed. "You should have seen her in college. Tall, thin. No muscle tone, of course, but a real looker." He turned back to me just as the chocolate icing brushed my lips.

"Mary." The Look again. The voice. I dropped my hand and



glanced apologetically at the plump little man. Three years of living with Mark had not been without effect. The man held up his hand and shook his head slightly as if to say 'Don't worry, no judgment here.' I smiled at my new-found benefactor.

Mark handed me a napkin to wipe my fingers, then stood impatiently by as I squeezed between the tables, his eyes on an anorexic blond across the room. We paid for lunch, picked up a copy of *New Body News* and *Non-Fiction Fortunes*, then headed home, Mark bouncing article ideas off me like he bounced balls off the backboard at the gym. Mark fancied himself a freelance writer; he'd been published in *Flexed Thews Today* and *Go For The Burn Bulletin*.

It wasn't until he was back in his office writing a how-to on liposuction that I had opportunity to reacquaint myself with the éclair in my jacket pocket. But it wasn't the only tidbit I found wrapped amid the folds of the napkin. Inside, there was a slim gray business card as well.

It was sticky with chocolate and custard wet, but I could still make out the print. *Never Say Diet, it read. Satisfaction Guaranteed.*

\*

I didn't call, of course. The last thing I wanted was to be on another stupid diet; living with Mark was bad enough as it was. I liked to eat; I always had. It was only a quirk of fate that I'd happened to meet him the one time I'd been below 120 pounds. More specifically, it was a broken jaw. Of course, I'd never tell *him*. He thought I'd been born thin, thought the burgeoning weight over the last few years was some kind of freak shift in my metabolism. I let him believe it: I was no fool. Otherwise he might suspect the false back I'd installed in the starch cupboard.

It was the party at his sister's that finally changed my mind.

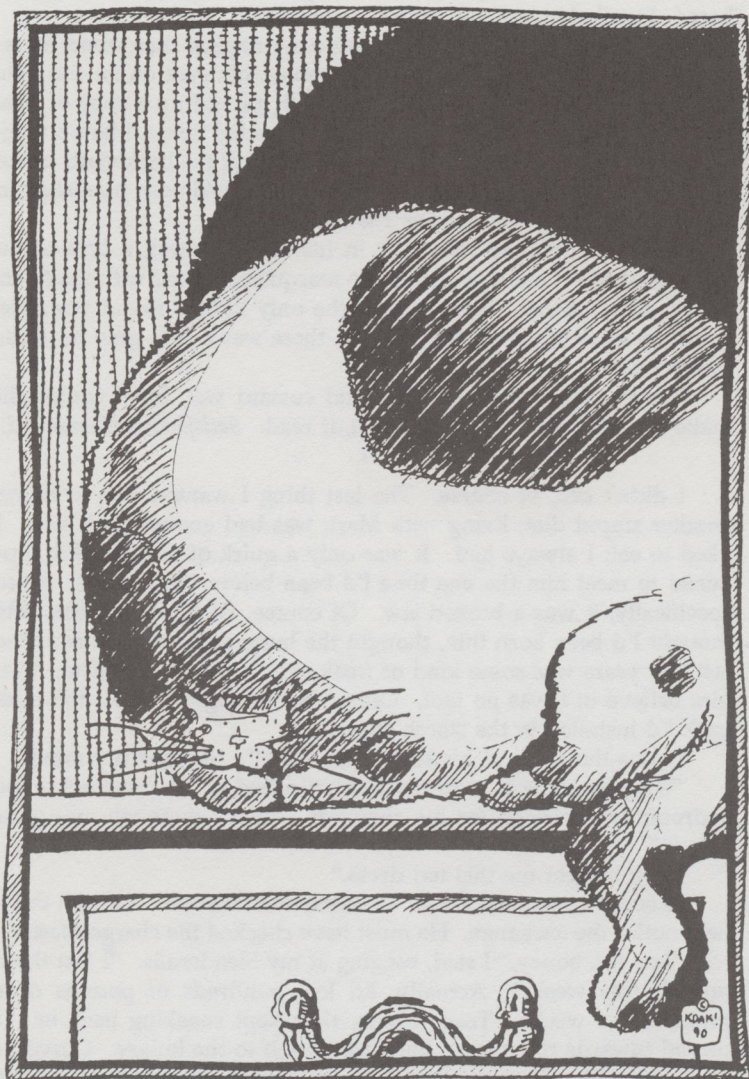
"Are you going to wear that?" Mark asked as I stepped out of the bedroom and twirled for his approval. "Red's definitely not your colour."

"You bought me this red dress."

"I bought you *a* red dress. Certainly not that one." I didn't think he'd notice the exchange. He must have checked the charge receipts.

"Lay off, honey," I said, tugging at my Slenderalls. "I lost three pounds this week." Actually, I'd lost hundreds of pounds over hundreds of weeks. Trouble was, they kept sneaking back on. I turned towards the mirror, blinding myself to the bulges. Curves, I said repeatedly. They're curves. I wondered if Mark had noticed the adjusted scale as well.

"Why not the black sleeveless?" he asked after a moment. His voice sounded sincere, but I saw a cruel glint in his eye. He knew the black sleeveless didn't fit.





"Because I want to wear this."

"Black is more slimming."

"Oh, go start the car."

His sister wasn't much better.

"Mary, I think it's positively outrageous ... I mean courageous of you to wear that dress. I know I couldn't do it."

I ignored Shibette and her white Lycra tights and moved to the buffet table, loading my plate with raw veggies. The celery sticks and cherry toms were only a decoy, though. It was the chocolate cheesecake I was after. Unfortunately, the dress seemed to suspect my plans and opted for a quick suicide instead. As I leaned over the buffet table, my fingers closing around the silver serving spatula, I heard a horrible rending.

I called the little man the next day.

\*

"It's a process of metabolics," he told me when we met.

We sat in his office, a pale gray cakebox affair lined with prints of rare birds. There was a cat sleeping on the credenza in front of the window. It was the fattest cat I'd ever seen.

"Don't give me the details, I've heard them all before. All I want to know is, does it work?"

"Most assuredly," the man said with an amiable smile. "But it's rather tiring for those around you."

"Mark's seen me on diets before. In fact, my whole relationship with him has been one long diet."

"Well, this process is *not* a diet, just as our name implies. It's more of an... adjustment of sorts."

I sat forward in the chair, interested. "You mean I don't have to stop eating?"

"Oh, by no means."

"So it's exercise, right? Jogging, aerobics?"

"Not unless you want. There's hardly any need for that sort of thing."

I looked over at the cat, then back at him. "No diet, no exercise." I narrowed my eyes. "Is this process illegal or something?"

The man pursed his lips. "I prefer to think of it as ... exclusive," he said.

So that's it, I thought. He's using drugs. Speed, cocaine, Vitamin E shots, enhanced caffeine. It wasn't a new approach, I'd tried them all myself.

"Would you like to see some of the results?" he asked, standing.

"Before and after's? Sure."

I followed him out of his office to a set of filing cabinets behind the reception area. A willowy Japanese woman got up from her desk

and smiled hesitantly.

"Good morning, Mr. Edwards. Can I get something for you?"

"Yes, thank you, Helen. Pull the Anderson file for Miss Woodruff, please."

The secretary opened one drawer, looked puzzled, then opened the one below. After a long moment, she pulled a file and handed it to Edwards.

"Thank you, Helen. You're doing very well."

"Thank you, Mr. Edwards."

I followed Edwards back into his office and sat opposite him as he fanned open a manila file folder. The cat hadn't moved. I wondered if it could.

"I hope you'll forgive the slight delay, Miss Woodruff. This is Helen's first day on the job."

I shrugged. "No problem, Mr. Edwards. Your secretary seems very efficient."

"Oh, she is, she is," he said wistfully. "Just like all the others." He sighed and returned his eyes to the folder in front of him.

"Now this is Miss Anderson, who came to us with quite a serious weight problem."

He handed me an 8 x 10 glossy of an older black-haired woman in a tent shirt and jeans. She looked about my height but weighed at least twenty pounds more. Her face was blotchy and flabbed; her pants had those white wrinkle lines radiating out from the crotch. She didn't look very happy. I recognized that look.

"And this is Miss Anderson after just a few weeks using our process."

The photo he handed me was of a stranger: a young black-haired woman in muscle T and tights smiling at the camera from a sidewalk cafe. I looked closer at the photograph. She was wearing the same black Nikes as the woman in the other picture. And she had the same eyes.

"How many weeks did you say?" I asked, holding the two photographs side by side.

Edwards glanced at some notes, then looked up. "Seven," he said and folded his hands in front of him.

I nearly choked. "Seven weeks! That's impossible. It must have been longer than that."

"We pride ourselves on fast results."

"Seven weeks," I whispered. "It must cost a fortune."

"Our fee is competitive," he said. "And we do offer a one-week trial period at a cost of \$100 dollars. Our clients have found it quite conducive."

"Seven weeks," I whispered again. I could buy Levis, tuck in my shirts, wear horizontal stripes. I didn't care if they were using drugs;



it couldn't be any worse than what I'd tried on my own or been subjected to under the guise of Mark's good intentions. And if it worked. If it worked... That would be worth any price.

"Perhaps you'd like some time to think it over, Miss Woodruff?"

"Who do I make the cheque out to?" I asked, digging through my purse.

"We have a stamp," he said, and smiled.

I leaned over the desk, scribbling furiously. "There's just one thing I'm curious about, Mr. Edwards," I said as I signed my name. "If this process works so well, why haven't you used it for... I mean, I don't mean to be rude, but..." I glanced pointedly at his belly.

"Oh, this?" He patted his stomach and chuckled. "This is only temporary. My wife recently left me."

"Oh," I said, suddenly uncomfortable. "You must miss her very much." I knew what he was going through. I ate when I was lonely. Or happy. Bored. Asleep.

"Indeed, I do," he said with sincerity. His gaze went to a framed picture on his desk, a slim gray-haired woman. "But I've been through these periods before. She wasn't the first to leave." He sighed, then reached over and patted the cat's fleshy back. "And in the meantime, I have my Miranda." The cat yawned and stretched, then settled back into slumber.

"Pets are pretty good that way," I said. "I don't have any cats. But I have Mark."

"Yes," he said, tilting his head to the side. "You have Mark."

\*

The process took only a few minutes. A couple of wires, some electrodes, a few horse-sized pills.

"Come back in a week and let me know your final decision," he said, leading me to the door. "This treatment will last until then."

"Okay," I said, excited. I felt giddy already, as if my body had been charged with electricity. Maybe it had. I tucked the pills into the envelope he gave me, waved my goodbyes to Edwards and his new secretary, and was off. Macy's, I thought. I'd always wanted to wear clingy knits.

\*

Mark was home when I burst through the door. By the smug look on his face, I knew he'd been badgering editors again.

"You're looking chipper," he said as I waltzed into the kitchen. "Sale at Häagen-Dazs?"

"Very funny," I said, brushing his cheek with a kiss. Mark was still gorgeous, even if he did act like a jerk. And I was feeling more generous than usual. On the way home, I'd even decided to let him stick around a little longer. "You'll never guess what I did today."

"You're right," he said, biting into a bologna sandwich. Triple layer. With cheese. "So tell me."

"I bought this."

I opened my shopping bag and unfurled the dress. It was black and red knit, with sculpted black buttons all the way down the front and a slit nearly halfway up the back. It was fitted, it was *hot*. And it was a size seven. I'd decided to start out my weight loss program out on a positive note.

"Shibette will love it," he said through a mouthful of meat and mayonnaise. "But her birthday's not till September."

"Shibette will never get her grubby little paws on it," I said, holding it up to my shoulders. "This dress is mine."

Mark nearly choked on his sandwich.

"I signed up for a new weight loss program today," I said. "I think it's really going to work."

"We've talked about this before," he said, shoving the rest of the sandwich into his mouth. He washed it down with milk, then reached for the Doritos. "The only way to lose weight is to eat less food and burn more calories. Exercise, Mary. Self control. It's the only way." He punctuated his sentence with a loud crunch.

"This is a new program," I said, swinging my hips from side to side, the dress whispering around my calves. "No diet, no exercise. It's some kind of adjustment process, that's all. It's different."

"There's no such thing as different," Mark said, holding the open bag of chips in front of my face. I automatically reached for one and he pulled the bag away, leveling me with *The Look*. "There's only willpower, Mary, and you know it."

\*

At the end of the week, I knew Mark was dead wrong.

Twelve pounds! I ran singing through the house. I lost twelve pounds!

Mark looked up from his typewriter and *Building Your Baby's Biceps*, annoyed.

"I lost twelve pounds!" I shouted at him through his office door, my chest bursting with energy. "And I didn't even have to try!"

"I'm trying to get something written!" he shouted back, slamming the door. Mark had been a tad crabby lately. I figured he'd accidentally thrown his jock strap into the dryer again.

The black and red dress didn't fit, of course. It wouldn't for a few more weeks.

Seven weeks, I whispered all the way in to the bank as if it were an incantation. Seven weeks, seven weeks, I chanted as I trotted through the glass front door to Edwards' office.

"Here's the rest of it, Mr. Edwards," I said, plopping down our



vacation money. The hell with Hawaii, I didn't want to go if I couldn't wear a bikini.

"Then you're pleased with the results?" Edwards asked, blinking up at me.

"Couldn't be happier," I said, doing an impromptu pirouette. "Twelve pounds. Twelve pounds in one week." I held out the front of my pants to show him the gap.

"Quite normal for our process," he said, smiling. "You'll need to fill out a few more forms. And of course receive the full treatment."

"The full treatment," I echoed. Helen came in with a file and I nearly grabbed her by the shoulders. "The full treatment, Helen!" I wanted to shout. "I'm getting the full treatment!" But I maintained my composure. On her way out of the office, I noticed Helen was not as willowy as I'd at first thought. She was, in fact, a bit beamy around the backside. Then I realized it wasn't Helen who'd changed at all. It was me. I was starting to think like a thin person.

"What papers do you need me to sign?" I asked. "I want to get the treatment done as soon as possible."

"A bit anxious, are we?" Edwards asked, a twinkle in his eye.

"You said it."

"There are a few points that should be addressed beforehand," he said, leaning back in his chair. "So that you fully understand the ramifications of your participation in this process."

"I don't care about the pills," I said. "I've tried speed before myself. And even cocaine once, too."

"Yes, well, there still remains the —"

"Look, Edwards," I said, picking up the cash and waving it under his nose. "Do you want my money or not?"

"Without question," he said, plucking the bills from my fingers. "I do, however, feel a certain responsibility to inform my clients of the consequences of this process. It's not without its side effects."

"So I've got tons of energy!" I shouted. "So I only sleep five hours a night. Really, Mr. Edwards, don't worry about me. I'm fine."

"Yes, I'm sure you are, Miss Woodruff. I just hope that those close to you—"

"Mark couldn't care less. He's all tied up in himself. He hasn't even noticed how much weight I've lost."

"And your co-workers?"

"I'm off for the summer. I teach grade school, remember?"

"Of course," he said. "I remember now. You and your... Mark are home together all summer." He studied the inside of the manila folder for a moment, then snapped it shut. "Then if you'll just follow me..."

The second treatment took a little longer than the first, but essentially it was more of the same. After it was over, he handed me a stiff

envelope of pills and told me to come back when I'd reached my desired weight.

"It's vital you return for that final adjustment," he said. "Otherwise you could just go on losing and there might be health problems."

"Fat chance," I said and laughed. On the way out I nearly tripped over a cat, a different one than I'd seen before, a kitten. I turned around and saw the empty credenza. Edwards looked up at me expectantly.

"Was there something else, Miss Woodruff?"

I started to ask about Miranda, then decided I'd better not. Might be too painful for him, losing both his cat *and* his wife. I noticed he'd taken off some weight. Funny, how grief affected some people.

"It's nothing, really," I said, lingering in the doorway, watching the kitten. Then something changed my mind.

"Well, there is one thing."

"Yes?"

"Where does it go, Mr. Edwards?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"The weight," I said. "Where does it go?"

"Where does all weight go?" he answered with a shrug. "It's an exchange. For energy."

"Energy," I whispered. That was it, of course, just as Mark had said a million times.

"And you?" I asked, reaching down to pet the kitten wrestling at my feet. "You're using the treatment, too?"

"Of course," he answered with just a hint of a smile. "Have for years."

\*

I felt vibrant. I felt alive. I felt like running all the way home, but finished my errands and drove the distance in a restless euphoria instead. It almost seemed as if I were losing weight right there on the freeway, dropping an ounce with every car I passed.

Mark was pacing the living room when I walked in, a dark brooding look on his face. Somebody wants a rewrite, I thought at first, then my gaze rested on something I couldn't quite comprehend and my mind reeled.

There was softness along Mark's waist. Full, fleshy softness.

"Well, you don't have to stare," he said, his voice thick with emotion. He hugged his arms around his middle protectively. His cut-off T-shirt had stretched, actually stretched.

"Why, Mark, whatever's wrong?" I asked, setting down my purse and starting for the kitchen with the pink box I'd picked up on the way home.



"I don't know what's wrong!" he cried, running his hands along the pudgy mound that was his stomach. I stopped to watch him, fascinated. I'd never seen Mark so uncontrolled before. He looked at me, his face distraught.

"I've played basketball four times this week, jogged at least twenty-five miles. I'm just so tired all the time. I don't understand. I just..." His voice drifted off, confused.

"Hard to figure," I said, carrying my package out into the kitchen. I pulled a knife from the knife rack and opened the cupboard wide. Mark slunk around the corner and leaned against the refrigerator, watching me.

"How much weight have you gained?" I asked, taking down two plates.

"Thirteen pounds," he said quietly. "Maybe more."

I looked down at the two plates, then put one back into the cupboard.

"Then I guess you'd better not have any of this." I lifted the chocolate cheesecake out of its box, cut out a hefty slab, and tipped it onto my plate. Mark watched me hungrily as I dug in with a fork. I thought I heard a low moan.

"Don't worry, honey," I said, glad I'd decided to keep Mark around after all. I really couldn't do that to a cat. "I'll eat a big piece just for you." ❖



## Siege Perilous Folios

# A Better Weapon

by Alan Barclay

illustration by James Long

**I**n the old days," Tek said, "machines like this were used for a lot of things, tilling the fields, pumping water, lifting things... Don't know how to make them any more, but I can still fix them." He leaned under the hood of the jeep, and unscrewed the distributor cap. His voice came muffled, almost a mumble. "It's been like that since my great-grandfather's time; the Chief rides it, and the Tek fixes it." Tek stood up and showed the cap to the boy beside him. "Jim, you see how the dirt has caked on?"

"Un-hunh."

Tek picked the handleless shaft of a screwdriver from his workbench and handed it and the cap to the boy. "Clean it up. But be careful not to scratch the contacts."

The boy bent over his work, his smooth forehead crinkled, blue eyes focused on his work. The flesh of his lower face looked as if it had been melted, then hardened in mottled lumps and irregular bands. The tip of his tongue slipped between the lipless gash of his mouth.

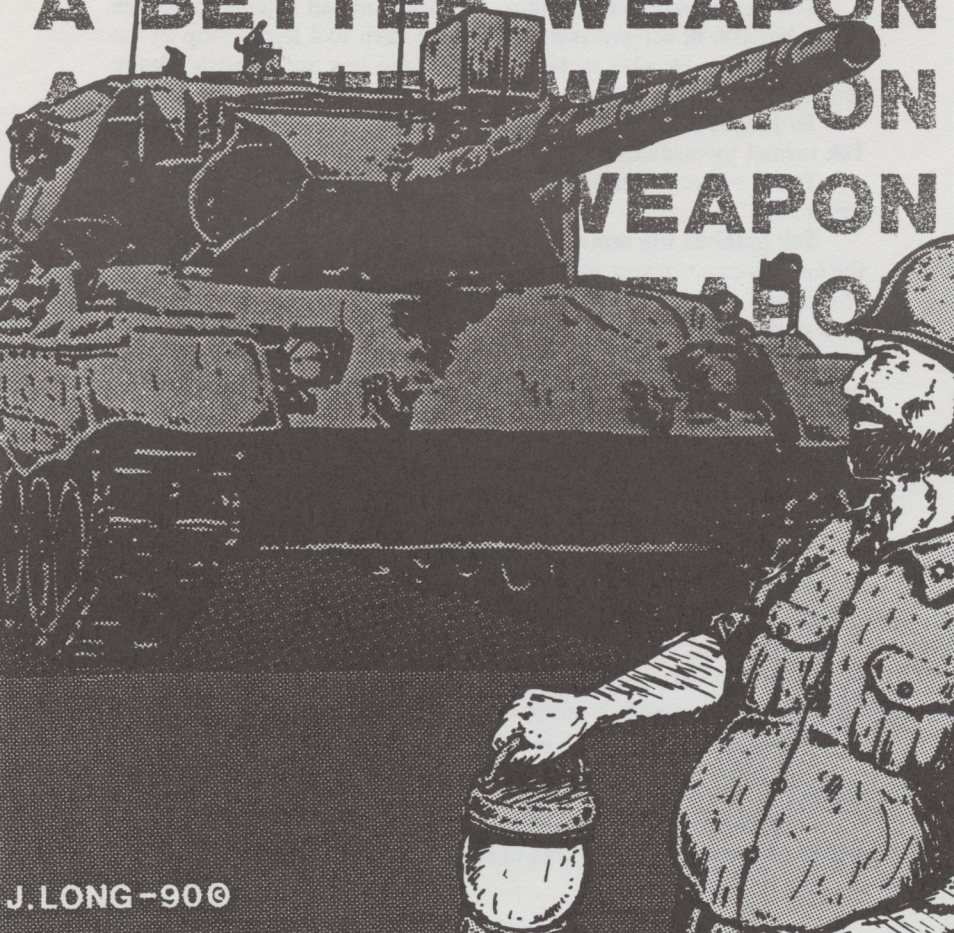
Tek watched the boy scrape the flat of the screwdriver against the cap for a moment, then turned to his workbench. A motion caught the corner of his eye. He turned and looked out the open front of the shed.

A man rode towards them, along the edge of a field. Behind the field stood the earthen mound wall and wooden spikes which surrounded the village.

Tek rolled his lips between his teeth. He turned back to Jim. "Better pack up," he said, "looks like Chief sent someone to get us."



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A BETTER WEAPON



"Roger, Tek." The boy placed the distributor cap on the bench and looked out over the field. He reached for a rag and drew the screwdriver shaft over its grey surface.

"Tek!" called the horseman.

Tek stepped out into the sunlight and walked towards the trotting horse and rider.

"What is it, Tom?" Tek shouted.

Tom reined in his horse and leapt off as it clopped to a halt. He ran to Tek and, two strides away, touched the side of his open hand to his cap. Tek nodded back.

"Tek," he said, "Chief wants you ay-sap. One of the civs found another room in the bunker. There's a war machine!"

Tek's eyes widened. "Has anyone touched anything?"

"No. Chief beat the civs back. He's jumping around. Wants you to clear it for him."

Tek jogged back to his toolbox. He picked out an adjustable wrench and a handful of screwdrivers and thrust each tool into a loop in his leather apron. He also stuffed a palm-sized box and a black plastic sack into his baggy pockets.

To Jim he said: "Bring the rest with you when they're packed." Tek turned towards the village.

Tom stepped forward holding out his reins. "Here," he said, "you better ride."

Tek grabbed the reins and scrambled into the saddle. He kicked the horse into a trot and arrived at the village gate at a gallop. A crowd of civs had gathered outside the entrance to the bunker. Tek reined in and swung off his mount, landing hard as his foot slipped from the stirrup. The women at the edge of the crowd grabbed the hands of nearby children and backed away. Warriors and farmers backed away, too. The crowd parted as Tek advanced.

The maw of the bunker protruded from the ground, four man-heights in width and three high. Five warriors in green khaki stood before the entrance, each holding a long white baton in one hand. All five saluted Tek as he hurried between them.

A steep cement ramp led down. Ten or twelve strides down, the ramp opened onto a large room. A blue-white gas lamp sat on a barrel on the other side. Its light illuminated a new opening in the wall.

Chief, a tall, heavy-framed man with a black beard, stood in the new doorway with Sarge, Medic, and another warrior. He was leaning over the threshold, holding a lamp out into the darkness. As Tek approached, he lowered the lamp and turned around.

Tek saluted. His eyes probed the dark opening. "Who..." Tek paused, mouth open. "How was this found?"

Chief laughed and hit Tek on the shoulder. He pulled a little card out of his breast pocket. "One of the civ kids found this," Chief said.



"He tried it in that slot in the wall over there, and *whoosh!* the whole wall rolled up into the ceiling." He shook Tek by the shoulder. "I don't think we'll be needing you much longer if the little ones can do things like this."

Tek frowned at the card, and reached for it. But Chief pushed it back into his pocket.

"I want you to clear out the radiation, Tek," Chief said. He swung the lantern into the newly found room.

An enormous cannon, mounted on a tracked platform, loomed in the lamplight. Tek's eyebrows lowered. He leaned forward.

"A tank," he whispered.

"What did you call it?"

"A tank. There are pictures in the holy books, but nothing quite like this." Tek pulled the palm-sized box from his apron pocket. The needle on its dial was higher than usual, but still to the left of the first red line. Tek looked up at Chief. The older man thrust his lantern at Tek.

"Here," said Chief, "get your hocus pocus done." Tek put the little box back in his pocket, and took the lantern. Chief turned to one of the others. "Mike, go get a couple more lamps."

Tek reached into his pocket and pulled open the plastic sack. From the sack he drew a handful of white powder. He sprinkled the powder into the new doorway, muttering: "Plutonium, Uranium, Cobalt Isotope... radiation fade away. I call upon Halflife to leech the poison from this place."

Tek stepped into the room, scattering the powder before his feet. The tank cast an enormous black shadow into the back of the chamber. Tek pivoted slowly, casting white powder at every corner of the room. Then he pulled out the little box again. The needle quivered higher when pointed at the tank, then dropped back.

"It's Nominal," Tek said.

Chief grabbed the remaining lantern and crossed the threshold. While Chief circled the tank, Tek explored the chamber. The concrete floor on one side of the tank was empty. Tek noticed old tire marks, and faint dirt outlines of tank tracks. Stacks of red barrels filled the back half of the chamber and a large bench, strewn with old tools and machine parts, stood against the wall. Three machines, like the engine in Chief's jeep, sat on wooden platforms on the floor.

I can make something with these, Tek thought. He touched one of the cold metal blocks.

"Hey, Tek!" Chief called, "come over here." Chief, with Sarge and Medic, stood on the sloped front of the tank. Tek walked back to them, and put a hand on one of the hard track links.

Chief slapped the barrel of the huge gun beside him. "Looks like a lot of killing," he said. "Think you can make it work?"

Tek looked the machine over. The dark green surface was clear of rust and flaking, and there was no wear on the tracks. The machine looked unused.

"I'll have to see the inside," Tek said. He climbed up to the open hatch on top of the machine, and lowered himself into it. There were four seats, each in front of a strange collection of switches, dials, and levers. One of the seats was raised up inside the turret. Below it, a rack of huge bullets led into the machinery.

Tek shifted closer to the bullets and squinted.

Each of the big shells had a little round symbol painted on it in purple and yellow. The same symbol had been tattooed on Tek's forehead when he became Tek: a circle with three equally spaced pie slices taken out of it. It meant power. It also meant death.

Beside the symbol was a block of little yellow letters; they said:

WARNING: this is a HALF KILOTON nuclear fission device.

DO NOT detonate at ranges less than 5 mi. (8.3Km)

Tek massaged a stubbly cheek with a greasy hand. Chief stuck his head into the turret.

"Well?" Chief asked.

"I don't know yet," Tek said.

Chief's left eyelid flickered halfway over his eye. He frowned.

As Tek looked up at Chief, his hand brushed against the curved surface of one of the shells. He jerked it away. "The shells for this gun have the holy symbol on them," Tek said. "They must not be used."

Chief's lower face dropped. He squinted at the rack of shells. Tek reached out to the shell again. He said, "In here is part of the anger of god, the holocaust which ended the Golden Age. These must be carefully guarded."

Chief grunted, then nodded. "You can make new shells for it," he said, "like the ones you make for our rifles."

"Maybe," Tek said.

Chief's left eye flicked again.

"Chief!" someone called from outside. Chief clambered off the tank. Tek climbed out after him. At the back of the chamber a group of men stood. Mike was among them, a crowbar in his hand, the lid to one of the red barrels in the other.

"Chief," he said, "this is gas! There must be hundreds of barrels here."

"That's good," Chief said, "we won't have to pay those stinking southerners for fuel any more."

Then he turned back to the tank, hands on hips. "The civs will love this," he said.



Curved surface. Silver with swirling rainbows. A drop of oily liquid falls, the seed of fire. It hits grey coarse asphalt. Small flying fragments of the drop explode upward. A spark of flame. White bursts from its heart. White which dissolves matter and spirit. Hot white. Dead white.

A muscle on Tek's jaw folded in on itself, a little ball of hard pain. His pupils rolled down from under his eyelids. His breath was fire and his eye-sockets ached.

The boy beside him grasped the thick leather strap between Tek's teeth. He worked the strap up and down once to free the deep-bitten leather. Tek closed his eyes, and pressed a thumb against the knot of muscle below his jaw. Jim wiped drool from Tek's chin with a rag.

"You had a vision, Tek?" the deformed boy asked in a whisper.

Tek sucked the briny taste of old leather out of his tongue. He spat. "Yes," he said. The word was a rasp in his dry throat.

The boy held out a battered tin cup to Tek, who grasped the cool handle with a shaking hand. The boy steadied the cup with his own hand as the man sipped.

Tek raised his lips from the cup. "Yes," he said, "I had a vision." He leaned back against an engine block. The corners of his eyes crinkled inward. "I don't know what it means yet." Tek gulped down the remaining water.

The boy took the empty cup, and put it down beside a battered canteen. Tek still clenched a curved disc of metal in one grease smeared hand. When he frowned at it, the holy sign tattooed on his forehead slipped down almost to the bridge of his nose.

"What was I doing before?" Tek asked.

"You were feeding the machine gas."

"Oh?" Tek craned his head around to look at the engine.

A metal tube protruded from the side of the machine. Tek covered it with the metal disc, and screwed it tightly into place. Then he pulled himself up beside the engine block. The boy stepped forward and gripped Tek's upper arm.

"I'm okay," Tek said. The boy let go.

"People think the old machines are cursed," Tek said. He bolted a cable onto the battery they had taken from Chief's jeep. "They think machines caused the holocaust. It wasn't machines, it was the men using them." Tek attached another cable to the battery. "But people blame the machines. That's why the outcasts become Tek — no one else will do the job.

"When I had my first fit, the Medic — who was this Medic's mother — declared I would be good for nothing." Tek fixed the loose end of a cable to a terminal on the engine block. "Old Tek took me in. His apprentice was killed in a raid on Blackhill. Old Tek taught me everything he could before he died."

Tek picked up the other cable.

"Now, let's hope he taught me enough to get this machine working," he said. He touched the end of the cable to a contact. Little blue sparks crackled as they touched. Jim jumped back, raising an arm before his face.

There was a pop. Something inside the machine rolled ponderously. Hot, acrid white smoke puffed out of a tube at the bottom, and the shaft which stuck out of the engine began to spin.

The machine roared.

"Ha, ha!" Tek danced a few steps. He looked back over his shoulder, mouth pulled up in a wide grin. But the grin dropped to a closed-mouth smile. Behind Jim, Chief stood, his eyebrows drawn together and his mouth a little O.

Tek pulled the cable away from the contact. The machine rumbled to a stop.

"What are you doing?" Chief asked quietly.

Tek saluted him and said: "I hope to get this machine to turn a water pump. It'll move ten times as much water as the horses can. We can irrigate the whole south field!" Chief's left eyelid blinked. "If you could detail six men to help me get the engine out of this bunker, I could—"

"No," Chief said. "I want you to make the tank work. I want to take it when we go raiding."

"You wouldn't have to go raiding if..." Tek saw the Chief's brow grow gnarled and red. He looked down and pressed his tongue against his upper front teeth. "The shells are taboo," he said, looking up.

"The old stories say that the ancients used the Atom as a weapon against their enemies." Chief stared hard at Tek as he spoke. "They say that the holocaust happened when both friend and enemy used thousands of such weapons. But we only have a few, and—"

"No, Chief, I won't allow it!" Tek dropped his chin, and watched Chief from under a lowered brow. "It is my right to declare a machine taboo; you will not use those shells."

Chief's face reddened again. He clenched his right hand, then unclenched it. "Fine," he said. "But get the tank moving. Just the sight of it will scare the hell out of whoever I point it at." Chief turned to leave. "And you can teach my son how to drive it."

Tek looked at the floor. "Roger, Chief."

\*

Jim held the lantern close to Tek's shoulder. Tek leaned over the front of the jeep, working on the engine in the blue lamp light.

"Tek, why did Chief send all those men back with the wagons?" the deformed boy asked.

Tek tightened a bolt. "He's afraid that somebody will try to steal them," he said. "He doesn't want to lose his loot." Tek sighed. "I



don't know why we don't all go home; we've got more loot than I've ever seen."

"I think he just likes seeing people run away from him when he's in the tank," Jim said.

Tek chuckled. He straightened and slipped the wrench into a loop on his apron. "Well, the tank may be little use for anything except burning gas, but it does scare people. Scared people give up sooner, so fewer get killed."

\*

Mid-morning of the next day, the tank trundled over the broken asphalt of an old road. It towed a wagon which was stacked with red barrels and bags of grain. Behind the wagon, twenty horsemen paced along the road. Jim drove the jeep at the rear of the procession.

A walled village sat on top of a gentle rise. The road led up to it. Chief climbed half out of the tank. He signalled to the horsemen with a wave of his hand. Half of them trotted up and formed a line on one side of the tank. The other half did the same on the other side.

In the back of the cabin, Tek peered past the driver's shoulder. Chief's son stomped on the clutch and brake at the same time. For an instant, the gears growled.

Tek clenched his teeth.

The tank came to a jerky halt, and the engine whined as it spun too fast. Chief climbed the rest of the way out of the hatch. His boots thumped on the metal above Tek's head.

"Yo, Ganterville!" Chief's voice boomed from above. "We have come to collect a tithe! Bring out your produce and valuables so we can take our half."

Someone yelled in response, but Tek could not hear clearly. Chief's boots clunked.

"If you don't yield, we'll take it by force!" Chief said. There was another yell.

Chief climbed back into the tank, down to the main cabin. His face was deep red and creases showed in his forehead like lightning bolts.

"They taunt me!" he said. He turned to Tek. "They are not impressed by your tank. Three other villages surrender at the mere sight of it, but they taunt me!" He put a hand on his son's shoulder. "Forward. See if they're bluffing."

His son released the clutch and the machine surged forward. Tek watched through the gunner's periscope as the tank rolled closer to the mud-brick stockade.

"Damn," Chief said. He climbed half out of the tank again, and waved the horsemen forward. The riders unsheathed their rifles and kicked their mounts into a trot. Spears and arrows rained down before them. When the horsemen fired their rifles, bodies fell from the wall.

From one tower on the wall, an explosive hammering sounded. A

line of dirt-spurting holes exploded on the ground. Tek jumped out of his seat and scrambled up to the hatch. Chief made room for him to look.

The hammering burst out again. A whole line of men and horses collapsed to the ground. The surviving horsemen yanked at their reins, kicking the horses' flanks with their heels. They galloped from the wall. Chief vaulted out of the hatch.

"Come back, you yellow bastards!" he shouted at his retreating men.

Tek pointed to a large gun mounted on a tripod on one of the towers. "That's a machine gun!" he said. "They've found a better weapon than ours."

Chief turned to look down at Tek. "Better weapon!" he shouted. His brow lowered and his eyes bulged. "We could unleash your precious holy holocaust on them!"

"No!" Tek shouted.

The machine gun sprayed bullets a few feet from the tank. One ricocheted off the armour with a high-pitched whine.

"Out of the goddam way, Tek!" Chief said, leaning to go back down the hatch.

"No," said Tek. Chief stared at him.

The sick emptiness of a fit jellied Tek's brain. His hands clenched the ladder rungs. His eyelids quivered around slits of milky white.

The machine gun sounded again. "Out of the goddam way!" Chief stomped on Tek's head. Tek's rigid fingers did not let go of the ladder. Chief hit him again, and Tek fell, limp and unmoving, to the floor of the tank.

\*

Wind yanked at his hair — even the roots hurt. The inside of his head pulsed with pain. Tek opened aching eyes and touched the side of his head. It was swollen and hot. He closed his eyes and rubbed the throbbing balls with his thumb and forefinger.

"Tek!" Jim said. He had both hands on the steering wheel of the jeep. The jeep jolted over a bump in the road. "Chief threw you out of the tank. He told me to take you home. What happened?"

Tek tasted hot salt on his tongue. His jaw ached when he opened it. "I — "

Searing light reflected off the windshield. Then a colossal explosion burst behind them. Jim slammed on the brakes. As hot wind whipped his hair and shook the jeep, Tek pulled his body around and squinted into the light.

Halfway to the horizon, a glowing cloud billowed up into the sky. Tek closed his eyes.

"Chief's dead," he said. "He used a better weapon." ➡



# *The Walker*

by Janet P. Reedman

He died in winter  
when the ground was too hard  
to cut a grave in.  
Instead they heaped a cairn  
with a little stone chamber  
in which he lay,  
closed eyes facing  
the setting sun,  
knees curled to chest  
like a fetus.  
And they left him,  
the empty shell  
of one who had been a friend.

In the still gloomy months  
before the first thaw,  
a young shepherd  
reported sighting  
a ragged man on the hill.  
A walker, he swore,  
seeking blood.  
Sad, they took torches  
and wooden stakes  
to the barrow-tomb.  
But the stones were riven,  
the crypt loomed empty —  
it smelled of newness  
and the spring.

# COALS

by Susan Sharpe

illustration by Andrea Baeza

Sitting at the patio table under a wide shade umbrella, Hannah glanced up from her reading. Philip was standing on the other side of the patio, his back to her, getting the barbecue ready.

She watched him shake coals from the bag into the fire bowl and sprinkle them with lighter fluid. Once the fire was started, he went off to work in the garden, and Hannah returned to her book.

Twenty minutes later she heard him come back and curse softly. Apparently the coals had gone out. Hannah looked up to see what he would do. When they'd first bought the grill, Philip had instructed her never, never to squirt fluid on coals that already had been lighted. She thought it would be safe if they had gone out, but he'd emphatically said no, not even then.

As Hannah watched, Philip moved the coals from one side of the grill to the other. One by one, he laid down three rows of briquettes, each one resting on its belly, its edges touching the sides of the coal beside it. When they formed a neat grid, he doused them with lighter fluid and began a second layer. When that was complete, Philip doused it too with fluid, and did the same with a third. The completed pyramid, Hannah thought, must contain enough lighter fluid to ignite a funeral pyre.

Hannah was fascinated to see that when Philip finished, he casually set the fluid bottle down beside his right foot: he also had instructed her always to carry the bottle back to the garage before lighting the coals. She thought it would be safe to set the bottle down on the patio, a meter or so from the grill, but he'd said, no, it must go all the way back to the garage to be safe. Hannah thought his caution was excessive, but had not argued. She had followed the steps, quite willing to demonstrate her love by going out of her way to keep herself alive. She assumed he would do as much for her.



She was surprised, therefore, to see this violation of his own protocol. Apparently he intended his instructions to apply only to her, not to himself. That meant, she reasoned, that his caution had not, after all, reflected a simple desire to ensure that they lived long together.

No, his instructions must have sprung from something else. From a lurking suspicion, perhaps, that she could not be trusted. From a belief that he must, like a parent, lead her past the potential to do harm. Did he think—had he always thought?—that she was at risk from herself while he was invincible? That he had good judgment where she did not?

Hannah's anger flashed high and hot, then dropped down to seep through her like the fire through the coals. She watched Philip reach for the matches, and in her mind saw him explode with the sulphur on the match-tip.

\*

Philip blazed with light. His arm served as a pipeline to carry flames from the fire bowl to his shoulder. There they split off from each other and darted down his chest and back, marshalling to consume him from all directions at once.

Hannah heard the *whoosh* of the fire's explosion. Then she heard nothing. Nothing at all. She could see his skin sizzling and bubbling; she could see the terror in his eyes and the scream-shape of his mouth. She could see him moving across the grass in a macabre, slow-motion dance with the flames at his breast. She felt the heaviness of stillness on her eardrums, but the weight leaked no sound to her brain.

Joining the slow-motion dance, Hannah rose from her chair and went to Philip. She opened her sweater and brought him inside it as best she could, embracing him and the fire that danced between them. She turned round and round and round with him and pulled him to the ground, dizzy. She rolled onto him.

Feeling the pulse of a soundless rhythm, she moved her body up and down on his, grinding herself against him to smother the flames. Rocking her hips back and forth on his, her own body shuddering and smoldering, she beat her fist against the grass under his head.

Then they lay quiet. Hannah felt her body move slightly up and down with the pulse of Philip's shallow breathing under her. She shifted, fitting her face into the curve between his head and shoulder. Soon she felt his breath stabilize and strengthen into longer spans, and she raised up on one arm to look at him.

Philip was motionless, unconscious. Torment had given way to peace. His expression was the same as in any morning's sleep. His body radiated the soft heat that warmed her when she crept into bed on cold nights.

But his skin was raw and oozing, blisters rising to meet her.





Hannah saw what she had wrought, and wept for having hurt this one she loved so much.

She wanted to leave, to return to her book and pretend this had never happened. But if she left him here in the grass, he would be scarred forever. She and he would take up their barbecue, would chat about the day's events, would touch each other lovingly. But later, her eyes would remember the seeping blisters and see them again on his chest. Her hands would come to taut and banded skin, rippled with keloids, and her fingertips would read the raised-up signature of the flames she had invoked.

Hannah saw that the image she had created could not be simply wished away. She would have to stay inside it with him if she were to change its outcome.

Hannah carefully positioned herself over the raw places on Philip's body and continued weeping, moving over him inch by inch to drop her tears on blistered and skinless tissue. She summoned healing power, and licked his wounds with long, slow motions of breath and tongue.

Hannah worked long and patiently, unaware of dusk or of the growing chill. She rolled Philip over to inspect each part of him. Methodically, with ceaseless care, she moved across the wide expanses of back and belly and into small, protected folds. Alternately she cried and licked and kissed, everywhere imagining the soft and healthy skin that had been there before she looked up from her book.

Finally she was through. She let her fingers trail lightly over Philip's chest, and bent down to place a soft kiss on his forehead. She stood up, rubbed her hands over the sore muscles in her own arms and thighs, then walked back to her patio chair and sat down.

Soon Philip sat up. He touched himself gingerly in places, then stood up and shook out his arms and legs before walking back to the barbecue.

\*

"The coals are ready, Hon," he said with his good-mood smile. "Will you be ready to eat pretty soon?"

"Sure," Hannah answered.

She watched as Philip headed into the house to get the steaks, and knew she should help him get things ready. But she sat a while longer, watching the dusk settle over the yard. She felt too tired to get up just yet. ♦

## BIOGRAPHIES

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Alan Barclay**, an Edmonton writer, is currently working on a fantasy novel revolving around intrigue and power in a theocratic empire. "A Better Weapon" is his first professional sale.

**Wade Bell** has published one collection of short fiction, *North Saskatchewan River Book*, and two more collections are one the way.

**J. Brian Clarke** has published numerous short stories in *Galaxy* and *Analog*. His first full-length novel, *The Expeditor*, is now available from DAW Books. One of the members of ON SPEC's Editorial Advisory Board, Brian lives in Calgary.

**Jamie Findlay** is an Ottawa science journalist working for *Saturday Night Magazine*. "Reinach's Watch," which grew out of Jamie's intermittent restlessness with writing "the straight facts," is his first published short story.

**James Alan Gardner**, a graduate of Clarion West '89, is the first place winner in the Writers of the Future Contest's 1st quarter for 1990. His winning story will appear in the anthology, *Writers of the Future Volume VI*. He currently works in Waterloo as a technical writer. "Muffin Explains..." is his first published short story.

**Barry Hammond** has a novel, *Cold Front*, and a collection of poetry, *Moral Kiosk*, to his credit. His recent poetry has appeared in *Tabula Rasa*, *Poetry Halifax Dartmouth*, *the Prairie Journal of Canadian Literature*, and *Secrets from the Orange Couch*, among others.

**H. A. Hargreaves**, who teaches English at the University of Alberta, has written radio plays for CBC and ACCESS Radio, and has been published in *NeWest Review* and Alberto Manguel's *Blackwater* anthology. His science fiction short stories are collected in *North by 2000*. Later this year, look for his new book, a translation of Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*.

**Diane Mapes'** work has been published in *Asimov's*, *Weirdbook* and *Argos Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Presently living in Alabama, she is revising a novel, writing about her experiences as a misplaced Yankee and learning about southern delicacies. Diane is a 1988 graduate of Clarion West.

**John Park** has been a research associate with the National Research Council and is presently a partner in a scientific consulting firm in Ottawa. His short stories have appeared in *Galaxy*, *Far Frontiers*, *Kopernikus 11* (translated into German), and *Tesseract 2*. His story "Software Plague" will be appearing in *Solaris* later this spring. He is currently working on a novel.



**Janet P. Reedman** has been published in about 200 small press magazines such as *Mythic Circle*, *Beyond* and *Bardic Runes*. She is currently working on two fantasy novels.

**Susan Sharpe** lives in Edmonton where she enjoys summertime barbecues with her husband.

**Richard Stevenson**, one of the editors of *Black Apple* from Lethbridge Community College, has three books of poetry in print, his most recent entitled *Horizontal Hotel*. *Wiser Pills* and *Whatever it is Plants Dream...* will come out this year. A third book was recently accepted by Cacanadadada Press.

### ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Andrea Baeza** participated in the 'Realms Beyond' gallery show of SF art in Calgary. She is a student at the University of Alberta. This is her second appearance in *On Spec*.

**Lynn Taylor Fahnstalk** is new to *On Spec* and to Canada. A former U.S. resident now living in Edmonton, she has shown at SF cons for 10 years and has been published in *Dragon*, *Dungeon*, *Fantasy Tales* (England), *Westwind* and numerous others.

**Steve Goetze** is a Brantford, Ontario artist who has done promotional art for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Alf*, *Ghostbusters* and other films. This is his first appearance in *On Spec*.

**Marc Holmes** is a Calgary artist making his third appearance in *On Spec*. He was also featured in the 'Realms Beyond' show.

**Adrian Kleinbergen**, yet another 'Realms Beyond' featured artist, has moved to the warmer climes of Calgary and is creating much interest with his 3D SF artworks.

**Kevin Kurytnik** is Calgary artist with an off-the-wall sense of humour and a unique style. He keeps himself busy creating "subversive" underground comix.

**James Long** is an Edmonton artist making his first appearance in *On Spec*. Look for his work in a soon-to-be released issue of Robert Crumb's *WEIRDO COMIX*.

**Nancy Niles** is another veteran of the 'Realms Beyond' show. She wants to avoid being typecast as doing "cute" art, hence the more serious story illustration this time around. She lives in Calgary.

**Robert Pasternak** of Winnipeg returns as our cover artist. He was featured in the 'Realms Beyond' art show in Calgary and is currently making inroads into the U.S. book publishers' illustration market. He also proudly reports that he recently became a father.

**Joel Sinclair** is a young, self-taught artist making his first appearance in our pages. He lives in Edmonton.

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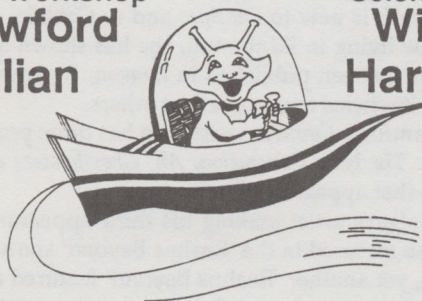
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ON SPEC is published twice a year by the Copper Pig Writers' Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing a market and a voice for the Canadian viewpoint in the field of speculative literature.

Final selection of fiction and poetry is made by the ON SPEC Editorial Advisory Board, all of whom are professional speculative writers. Board members are Douglas Barbour, J. Brian Clarke, Candace Jane Dorsey, Pauline Gedge, and Monica Hughes.

Deadlines for submission of fiction and poetry are December 31 for the Spring issue (published in April) and June 30 for the Fall issue (published in October). Manuscripts must be submitted in contest format: author's name should NOT appear on the manuscript. All details such as name, address, telephone number, word count, and title should be on a separate cover page. Please address your submissions to: *Marianne Nielsen, General Editor.*

All artwork is commissioned; please send PHOTOCOPIED samples of your work to: *Tim Hammell, Art Director.*

From time to time we produce special issues, such as our Youth Issue, due out in the Fall of 1990. These issues are NOT included in subscriptions. Please send in the form on the back of this page to reserve your copies.

We offer attractive advertising rates, with discounts for multiple insertions of ads. Deadlines for advertising are Feb. 20 for the Spring issue and August 20 for the Fall issue. Ads should be provided to size in camera-ready form for offset reproduction. Graphic design and layout services are available upon request.

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