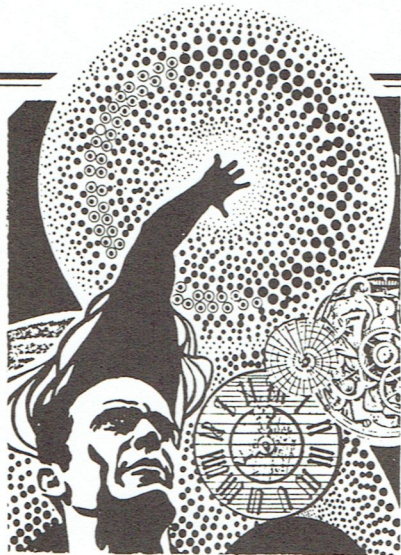


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The Canadian Magazine of
Speculative Writing • Spring 92
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THE CANADIAN
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EDITORIAL VOLUME 4 NUMBER 1

by Marianne O. Nielsen

This is my last editorial for *ON SPEC* and I must admit I am writing this with mingled regret and relief. As of May 1, 1992, the nature of the *ON SPEC* co-operative . . . so, what this means for you, is start all your letters "Dear Co-op," although "Dear Editors" will do nicely, as well.

As some of you may know, I am currently completing a Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Alberta. In fact, I have had to sneak away from Chapter 7 of a very ugly and jealous dissertation to write this. I hope to defend my research in June and be employed as an Assistant Professor somewhere — anywhere — in Canada by July 1. But that somewhere will not be Edmonton, and that means the end of my association with *ON SPEC*. Them's the breaks of the academic life.

(Continued on page 4)



I want to tell you how much fun I have had these last 4 years, and how proud I am to have been part of this strange and marvellous venture called *ON SPEC*. What started as a "Jeez-do-you-think-this-is-a-good-idea?" project turned into a two-time award-winning magazine read and reviewed across Canada and the United States.

I wanted especially to express my appreciation and joy at having sweated, cursed and drunk gallons of tea with Hazel Sangster, Jena Snyder, Cath Jackel, Diane Walton, Susan MacGregor, Barry Hammond, and, of course, Tim Hammell. With the exception of the latter, I shall miss you all dreadfully. (I'm not saying rude things about Tim — he's moving too.) I want to welcome new *ON SPEC* Board member, Gerry Truscott, Godfather of Tesseracts, and new editorial staff members, Dave Panchyk and Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk, who are walking into this with their eyes open (honest). You'll have fun, I promise . . . really.

I will also miss my contact with all the writers and readers of *ON SPEC*. You have given me many hours of happiness. I hope to keep in contact with you, and *ON SPEC*, wherever I end up (which depends on the whims of God and a dozen University hiring committees). Thank you for the party, I'll miss you . . . and keep the faith.

— *Marianne O. Nielsen, ex-General Editor*

Thanks to: NICHOLAS RUDDICK, Department of English, University of Regina, and SF critic, for filling in on the Editorial Advisory Board. If we ask on bended knee, will you do it again?

Apologies to: DUNCAN WELLER, not "Wells," whose art appeared in the last issue.

Editorial on the Editorial
by the ON SPEC Editorial Co-op

The rest of us at ON SPEC have mixed feelings about Marianne and Tim's move. While we're pleased that they are evolving to higher life forms (and it couldn't happen to more deserving/needy people), we will miss them dearly.

We'll miss Marianne as the catalyst for our energy — who else could complete her Ph.D., teach, write and edit professional papers and texts, write SF, all the while handling a huge slice of the ON SPEC work? — as well as providing one of our roving offices, and dispensing tea, slug, beer and enthusiastic advice.

We'll miss Tim's quiet (but warped) sense of humour, his unfailing patience and tolerance at the invasion of his space by a bunch of loud-mouthed writers who never let him get a word in edgewise — and of course we'll miss his art (well, we can still *get* it, but now we'll have to *pay* for it!).

Out of respect for Marianne's "passing," the staff has decided that the position of General Editor (a.k.a. General Figurehead and Shark Bait) will remain vacant; we all share the work anyway, and will continue to function/cope (*gulp*) without her(*sniffle*) as an Editorial Co-op. Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk, of course, will step into Tim's shoes as our new Art Director.

Goodbye, Marianne and Tim, and all the best in your new world!

Call for Submissions
"OVER THE EDGE"

For the next ON SPEC special issue, due out in the spring of 1993, the Editorial Co-op is looking for stories and poems which go "OVER THE EDGE." We want new, unpublished work that takes risks; explores unusual themes; or offers novel characterization, plot, setting and/or form.

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Volume 2, Issue 2 (#4) Fall 1990

Work by: Edo van Belkom, Bruce Taylor, Susan MacGregor, Sandy Robertson, Beth Goobie, Anna Mioduchowska, Sandra Hunter, Catherine Girczyc, Alice Major, & Cheryl Merkel. Aurora-winning cover art by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk.

Volume 2, Issue 3 (#5) Winter 1990

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Volume 3, Issue 1 (#6) Spring 1991

Work by Richard deMeulles, Herbert Steinhouse, Sally McBride, Humberto da Silva, M.J. Murphy, Edith Van Beek, Leslie Gadallah, Barry Hammond, Catherine MacLeod, & Michael Skeet. Cover art by Adrian Kleinbergen.

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Work by Keith Scott, Alice Major, J. Nelson, Jena Snyder, Barry Hammond, Cheryl Merkel, Anna Mioduchowska, Dot Foster, Diane L. Walton & Brent Buckner. Cover art by Martin Springett.

Volume 3, Issue 3 (#8) Winter 1991 — *Theme: Humour*

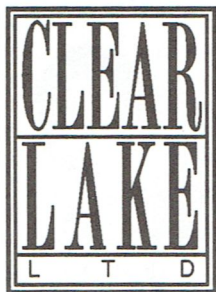
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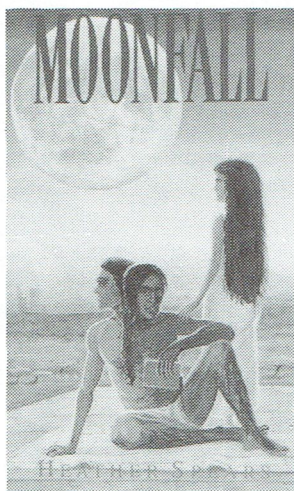
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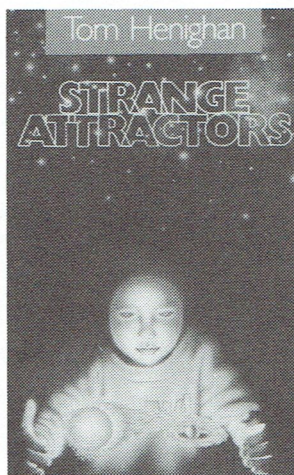
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ICARUS DOWN/BEAR RISING

by Hugh Spencer

illustrated by Nadra Chapman

Thoom. Thoom.

The sound of hollow bone striking taut hide.

Listen to me, Crazy-Man-With-Hair-On-Your-Face. You must listen.

This is the Telling of Tales. This is the telling of the Way.

Once, all was all, everything was everything else. Then the One was the Many. And the Many divided into the Spirits of the Air and the Spirits of the Earth.

And the spirits took the forms of the animals and the elements, but all were still brother and sister/mother and child.

This is the Core of the Way. You live among your brothers and sisters.

Thoom. Thoom.

This is the Telling of Tales. You must learn the Way if you are to live.

*

These are the facts.

According to Henderson, sometime in late November an experimental military satellite, *Icarus*, was undergoing tests in orbital space.

With some pride, Henderson told me how *Icarus* performed almost perfectly, directing a series of electrically-powered projectiles at its targets with precision accuracy. Then, apparently with no warning, the power-field overloaded and the satellite disappeared from their telemetry screens.

Presumed destroyed. Another 30 million gone, a few hundred more

cuts in pure research.

Then, around New Year's, they picked something up . . . heading toward the Earth at a considerable speed. The trajectory was all wrong, but the re-broadcaster insisted that this was indeed *Icarus*. NORAD had just enough time to project the point of impact.

As far as I know, Henderson had no background in classical mythology, so he was able to tell the story with absolutely no sense of irony.

A few hours later, I got a call from the Company. They wanted to pick up my consulting contract, and could I come on the next plane please?

Something had happened in northern Canada. In spite of the season, it looked like a good way to avoid term papers.

*

Thoom.

Listen, Hairy Man:

The Spirits of the Earth became many: the Beaver, the Bear, the Person. For a time, they all flourished. Then, after a time, they did not.

The Little Girl lay shivering in her sleep. A cold blast of air blew in from a shattered window. Her bedroom walls were covered with tiny pictures of strangely-coloured dancing animals from faraway places: Rhinopotomires, Giffarafasourus — the names confused her grandmother.

At the time, Mother wasn't thinking about the wall paper and she didn't know about the cold air. She had consumed a quart of gin and she, too, was unconscious.

It was not until morning that Grandmother found the Little Girl. Grandmother wrapped her in the warm folds of an old flannel blanket and held the child close to her body.

A few nights later, the Man smashed open the kitchen door. He stank of very bad wine and he screamed that "Daddy was home."

The Little Girl hid behind a door as the Strange Man grabbed Mother and threw her down on the hard kitchen tile. Then, like some monster from the VCR, he jumped on her and tore at her clothing.

Frightened by the monster, the Little Girl ran out into the winter night. She ran along the main road toward the forest. She ran until the houses looked like tiny tin blocks under the giant black curtain of the sky.

Once among the trees, she walked deeper into the forest. But Little Girl's spirit was only small and her lungs were made weak by the cold. She lay down to rest for a moment.

That morning, Grandmother looked in on her children. Her daughter was bruised but able to talk and walk. But no one could find the Little Girl.

Grandmother went looking. Sometimes children would stay with

another family for a few days, or they would stay together in one of the empty houses, or even spend the night under the steps of the old church. But the Little Girl could not be found at any of these places.

One of the men of the village did find her. The curled, spiritless body lay in a snowbank near a pathway leading deeper into the forest.

*

The Spirits of the Air . . .

The air outside was so cold that it looked like the chopper blades were slicing chunks out of the atmosphere.

Even with the helmet mike, I had to yell over the roar of the turbines: "We're coming up on the village of Bear Spirit. In the winter, you'll find only Cree down there."

One of the Recovery Team peered out the window. "Looks like a regular town to me."

"You won't find any igloos or tipis down there. They have all the conveniences: central heating, electric lights, plumbing, even television."

"So how come they still call them Indians?"

I sighed and leaned back in my webbing. Marking those first-year papers was looking better all the time.

"Thanks for the orientation, Professor," said Henderson. He addressed the rest of the team: "We brought along Dr. McAllister because there is a remote possibility of civilian contact on this excursion."

I liked Henderson; I guess that's why they chose him to lead missions. He was big, muscular, and incredibly polite and well-spoken.

"This is a zero-time scenario," he continued. "So this is all the briefing you're going to get. An unmanned spacecraft has crashed about thirty miles from that village—"

"Is this a contamination problem?" interrupted one of the non-military techs.

"We don't think so," replied Henderson. "But *Icarus* was one of our SDI probes. It's fitted with some state-of-the-art rail gun gear and its on-board computer has some of our best tactical software."

"So what?" said the propulsion specialist. "If it crashed from space, it's so much expensive kitty-litter."

For a military-type, Henderson really was easy-going; he just kept smiling. "According to the Canadian radar, the satellite didn't hit that hard. I know how dumb that sounds, but that's what they said."

The marines were lurching about the cabin, loading up their backpacks and combat parkas. I saw one of them slide a rocket launcher onto a carrying rack.

"Excuse me," I said to Henderson. "I think your men are carrying

some inappropriate equipment. There's nothing worse out there than the occasional bear. You don't need rocket launchers to shoot bears."

"If you civilian gentlemen would allow me to finish my briefing," said Henderson, "I will explain. NORAD also picked up some aerial anomalies over the Arctic Circle a few hours ago. It could have been Soviet stealth aircraft—"

This time, Henderson was interrupted by the sound of twisting metal. Out of the far porthole, I saw a cloud of steam and grey globules spray out into the subarctic sky.

The pilot's voice came in over the cabin speaker: "Uh, sir. We have a problem. My gauges say we just lost nearly all our fuel . . . must be a rupture on the main lines."

The pilot set us down, *hard*, on the only clear ground he could find on short notice. A gravel road in the middle of Bear Spirit.

Henderson continued to demonstrate his many admirable qualities as he stayed calm and cheerful making appalling decisions under pressure.

"Just as well we landed here," Henderson muttered as he surveyed the collection of corrugated tin from the chopper porthole. "I think we passed some fuel over at the northeast end." Henderson turned and faced the marines: "Men," he said in that voice he reserved for special military occasions, "we have to get airborne. Secure the village and keep the civilians out of the way until we can re-fuel."

In response, the soldiers kicked open the hatchway and bounced out of the chopper like so many hyperactive lunar explorers.

The rest of the Rec Team followed. As I climbed out, a sub-zero wind cut through my flannel jacket and jeans — ice immediately started to congeal around my beard while the blue-cold wind shot up my ass and turned the contents of my intestines to liquid nitrogen. I'd refused to suit up in the arctic combat gear out of sense of scientific ethics — I was beginning to regret my professional sensibilities.

I was still pissed off: "You can't do this, Henderson!" I yelled. "These are the last people on Earth you should be harassing!"

But my righteous indignation was as powerful as the little puffs of ice-vapor floating from my lips and nose. Henderson just shrugged amiably, while the techs and specialists, snug in their marine parkas, sneered at me, the jerk-off liberal freezing his ass off.

"I'm sorry, Dr. McAllister, but I just don't see any other options." Henderson continued in a compromising tone of voice: "Where would you suggest we keep them for the duration of this exercise?"

I walked stiffly up the main street — it felt like there was an icicle stuck up my rear — I don't know if it was the weather or my mood. To

my left I saw the gutted remains of a portable school room — the windows were smashed and the doorway singed by long frozen-out flames.

On my right was what was once the local Anglican church. The metal fire doors were frozen by a large sheet of ice — I could make out yellow streaks in the ice where somebody had urinated into the building. I saw a large prefab structure at the end of the road. The lights were on, but I couldn't see anyone inside. Turning around, I saw the marines herding about forty people around the chopper.

"There!" I spat out at Henderson. "Take them to the government office!"

*

All the people were very sad when they heard about the death of the Little Girl. But only her Grandmother seemed to see any meaning in it; she said that the girl had been "walking out" — searching for her proper place among the world of animal spirits and wind creatures.

Most people said that Grandmother was just another crazy-old-lady, but she didn't pay any attention. Which is what most people say crazy people do when they hear things they don't like.

One day, when she felt the time was right, the old woman decided to follow her grand-daughter's footsteps into the forest. When everyone else was watching TV, Grandmother put her favorite blanket around her shoulders and set out on her journey.

As she entered the forest, Grandmother felt like she was floating a few inches off the ground and that she was gliding down the trail as if the trees were made of mist. And she could feel the spirits, they were helping her, guiding her along the way.

After a time, and after many twists and turns along the path, Grandmother came upon an unexpected clearing in the forest. At the centre of the vast empty space was a twisted pile of dull and burnt metal.

With only the slightest hesitation, Grandmother set out across the scorched ground to approach the strange object. Then she felt a strong quickening of the spirit as she reached out to touch it.

*

There was great confusion among all brothers and sisters . . .

Under the fluorescent lights of the basement meeting room, the people of the village looked like museum specimens ready for dissection and display.

It was a very unhealthy situation. Even before we showed up. There were way too many young men in the village for this time of year. That meant almost no one was doing any hunting this winter — so they were going to be completely dependent on whatever the southern government felt like handing out next year. A very bad scene.

Henderson was more concerned about any diplomatic fan-shitting if the Canucks found out that we had occupied one of their government offices.

"Don't worry about it," I said sullenly. "They only use it three weeks every year to administer welfare payments. The rest of the time, the villagers use it for parties and blow-outs . . . because they don't have a Band Council office." I noticed an armed soldier standing at the staircase. I took Henderson by the arm, "Look," I said in my most reasonable voice, "don't you think we can dispense with the needless ritual display of weaponry? I don't think these people are going to rise up and beat us with their tractor hats."

To his eternal credit, Henderson seemed honestly apologetic: "I know this is very inconvenient, but we have to do this according to procedure, Professor. Some of these people might hurt themselves during the course of this exercise. Besides, they might object to having us requisition their fuel. We don't have time to reason this out with them. Although . . ." Henderson reviewed the rows of sunken, subdued figures slumped on folding chairs. "I agree with you, they really don't look up to much. What's wrong with them? They look like a bunch of refugees."

"They are," I replied. For a moment, I thought there was a remote chance that Henderson might at least let these people return to their homes. "There was a reason the Company's nervous about this village. Any other Indian band would have told us to piss up a rope."

"But that wouldn't stop us," replied Henderson.

"Probably not, but this particular band has had its share of problems. Their original territories were located near one of the larger uranium mines up here. There was a spill — mercury and radioactive byproduct. Their hunting and camping territories were contaminated. They had a one hundred per cent infant mortality level for three years; there aren't many facilities for caring for seriously deformed children here."

Henderson looked slightly sick.

I continued: "There isn't much training in hard science up here either; most of the people couldn't understand what was happening to them — virtually every aspect of their way of life had become toxic."

"You were there, weren't you?" Henderson asked softly. "That's why the Company sent you."

"I was doing field research in comparative mythology. I wasn't really involved, but I was around when UNESCO forced the Canadians to relocate the band."

"And their government built them an entirely new community." Henderson looked at the contents of the meeting room: an expensive set

of stereo speakers, an oversize VCR projection screen and a couple of Playboy pinball machines in the far corner. "It looks like a step up from chasing around in the bushes," he said, back in his amiable mode.

"But that's hardly compensation," I said urgently. "These people have lost their place in the universe. They have no identity!"

Henderson was starting to lose interest; he was looking over my shoulder and making small hand signals to one of the techs. I continued anyway:

"Bear Spirit is infamous among anthropologists. The village has one of the world's highest per capita rates for suicide, drug abuse, and family violence. It's like some black hole of disaster — groups keep pumping in the money and the problems just get bigger!"

Henderson was now just being polite, he really wasn't listening anymore. "I now understand that this is a very serious situation, Doctor. But I really can't see what else we can do. We can't be held responsible if these people insist on fouling their own nest."



This is the truth.

But I have to rely on what Henderson said to make any sense of what happened.

I was there when the radio link with the Rec Team said their scanners had located the impact point. Henderson must have decided I was right and that the Natives weren't restless; he called the chopper crew to check on the refueling and took off with the remaining men.

Leaving me to stand guard over the quiet residents of Bear Spirit.

Henderson and his men in their commandeered snowmobiles met the rest of the Rec Team at the crash site.

One of the Team cautioned Henderson that he was in for a bit of a surprise. That was not what Henderson wanted to hear — he felt that he had been surprised enough that day. Besides, he'd already ordered the chopper to the site.

In the distance, Henderson could see a few of the techs pacing through the debris. One of them bent over a shattered Plexiglas blister. Immediately, Henderson knew what the surprise was.

One of the men said that Intelligence must have been right, they had found a spy plane.

Henderson marched to the crash site and demanded to know what the techs knew. There was something very wrong — if the bogey had hit at anything approaching jet speed, the craft should have been spread out all over the subarctic. Why hadn't they picked it up on their scanners?

And what had brought the plane down? Henderson was never able to answer any of these questions.

A rec-tech swore and gave up trying to link his portable computer with the jet's black box — he couldn't jury-rig the leads in his combat gloves.

Henderson strode up to the cockpit, and stopped as he saw the charred body of the dead aviator. "What do you think caused it?" he asked.

"Must have been instrument failure," said the rec-tech. Which Henderson later explained was a professional way of saying that the tech had absolutely no fucking idea.

*

There was great confusion on the face of the Earth . . .

At this point, we are not sure just what did happen . . .

I looked deep into my cup of machine-brewed coffee and wondered what the "responsible anthropologist" would do in this situation. Not get into this situation.

The whole thing was too much like the last days of my doctoral research — the sky was falling — so I ought to be out there conducting interviews, taking pictures, making notes, keeping myself from thinking about how generally useless I was.

The people of Bear Spirit were starting to relax a bit; they were talking quietly among themselves and letting the kids wander outside to play. I can only assume that they had decided that I wasn't as dangerous as half-a-dozen combat-ready marines.

"Did you come from far away, mister?"

A woman stood in front of me. She was wearing a pair of jeans and a *Dynasty* T-shirt. There was a puffiness around the eyes and a slack physique that suggested chronic alcoholism. I used to spot the same symptoms at faculty parties.

"Did you see anyone?" the woman asked. "When you were up in the air?"

"Uh, I don't think so."

"I'm looking for my mother," she said. "I haven't seen her all day. She said she might go looking for the spirit of my little girl."

My professional instincts were aroused. "Could you explain that?"

The woman looked in the direction of some shouting that had erupted from outside the building. "It's nothing," she said absently. "I just thought you might have noticed her on your way here."

The shouting continued — the shrill voices of several children screaming in English echoed through the room:

"Old fucking bag!"

"Give it back, bitch!"

"You ugly cow!"

Cree children and elders usually have pretty friendly and relaxed relationships — when we heard the obscenities, the tension level in the room snapped up several notches. Suddenly, someone was out of their seat heading toward the noise. I, and everyone else, followed.

Outside, through the crowd, I saw an old woman facing a trio of boys, none of them more than thirteen.

The old woman held an open can of gasoline in her hand. She had obviously interrupted the boys in one of their common pastimes . . . sniffing gasoline.



Thoom. Thoom.

The sound of hollow bone striking taut hide.

Henderson assured me that the sound of the engines in the sub-zero air could create aural distortions that could be heard for miles.

The chopper was now airborne and the pilot said he'd sighted another impact point. Henderson was relieved. It had to be *Icarus*; the Soviets built their jets better than that.

But they were having difficulty setting up a rendezvous at the second crash site — the comm-link kept coming down with static. The comm-tech was working at the transmitter all the while insisting that something had to be wrong with the unit because the sky was clear as crystal.

The Rec-Team would have to do a visual search for the chopper. Henderson waved to the men still at the site. The men responded by starting to sprint the 300 yards to the snowmobiles.

Henderson noticed a thin stream of gas burst out from one of the men's backpacks. Less than a second later, the man's backpack was consumed by flames. The other soldiers stopped and tried to pull off the pack before it spread to the man's parka. Henderson heard a thin, pathetic scream — and as the faulty rocket launcher exploded, a wave of orange heat threw Henderson face-first into the ice.

Thoom.

The sound of earth striking heaven.



The Old Woman pointed to the boys. But she wasn't accusing them. Even I could feel a sense of charismatic power in the woman. Maybe that's what silenced the boys.

She spoke in a quiet, gentle voice:

"You are angry because your spirits are very confused. But your bodies and your voices are very strong for children with lost souls. As you grow older, your spirits will wander even further and your voices will grow still and your bodies will turn against your brothers and sisters."

As a field researcher, I never allowed myself to be sucked in by Native ritual beliefs. Once you started accepting these things on their own terms, you might as well hand in your scientist's union card. But the voice did have an undeniable power — even with my lousy Cree, I picked it up.

And when she spoke, I felt very strange, as if the ground beneath my feet was going to move and head off on some sort of journey.

"We became lost because we lost the Way. We lost our signposts. So we became as silly and confused as the Crazy-Man-With-Hair-On-His-Face lurking there behind you."

She had seen me.

"But I found the Way and it will be shared among us and we will then find our true destination. This is the first new telling of the Way: the World has been re-ordered."

The intense calm that the old woman had created was shattered by the approaching roar of the chopper turbines. It was closing on the village fast.

We all looked up and saw the chopper do something that didn't seem to conform to the laws of aerodynamics. The propeller blades snapped to an abrupt stop and the helicopter fell out of the sky like a cold rock.

It crashed on a row of houses at the outskirts of the village and exploded.

The sound of heaven striking earth.



The flames from the blast quickly spread to more of the plywood houses and the abandoned church.

It was the most intense fire I have ever seen; there was no sign of the survivors or even wreckage. And it looked like the flames were consuming every piece of the houses, right down to their component molecules. I must have been hysterical from the shock.

I returned to the government building and found the residents of Bear Spirit bundling themselves up and heading in the direction of the forests.

"Find your brothers if you can," one of the men said to me as he placed two toddlers in fur jackets onto a toboggan. "Then follow us into the bush."

I stayed behind. I waited for the Rec Team, hoping that the fire wouldn't reach the building, hoping that the light from the fire would signal that something had gone wrong.

Sometime in the night, a man bleeding from the burns of fire and ice staggered into my room.

Henderson didn't live past the next morning. He hadn't been too badly injured by the explosion of the rocket launcher, but the blast had

ripped open the insulation of his suit. He was killed by the cold of the subarctic night.

By the dim light of a kerosene lamp, Henderson weakly held up his portable scanner — it was broken.

"Ghosts," he whispered through blistered lips. "On the screen." The scanner was cracked, blank. "Millions of ghosts. First I thought it was some Russian decoy system. But there were too many of them. This place is being haunted by millions of ghosts."

We talked for a time. Later he died.

The sound . . .



So I was left to my own devices with very few options.

As for what happened in the village of Bear Spirit, there are different interpretations.

One is that the old woman was some new form of Native charismatic leader. There were quite a few of these in the early "cargo cults" in the South Pacific: some local visionary type would try to get his people out from under the colonial administration by urging the tribe to return to their traditional values. That's certainly what was happening in Bear Spirit — the people were cutting loose from their village and setting out to hunt and trap for the winter. Just as their ancestors had done for thousands of years.

The other explanation, I think, is less likely and more disturbing in its implications. Cree spiritual beliefs define a world view that is fundamentally different from our own. Our culture sees mankind as the master of a world of unfeeling matter that can be completely controlled and manipulated — as long as we have sufficient power and technology to pull it off.

But the Cree cosmology is based on the premise of a living universe of which humanity is only a small and relatively unimportant part. To the original Cree of the subarctic, humans are able to survive and grow only to the extent that they are able to adapt and show respect for the sentient animal spirits and supernatural forces that populate our tiny corner of the universe. I have to admit, there are some rather perceptive aspects of Cree cosmology.

Sitting around waiting to freeze to death can make you speculate about some outrageous things. The Cree interpretation of recent events is one of them: I could say that *Icarus* left our level of existence and returned as a harbinger of a realignment of the world. Therefore, we wouldn't be living in a mechanistic universe, governed by known scientific laws. Therefore fuel lines burst open, radios stop working, rockets explode, and jets

and helicopters forget how to fly. The consistent failure of our equipment, the slow disintegration of this pre-fab village is all part of a greater cosmic process where the laws of nature are changing as our reality is being relentlessly replaced by that of the Cree.

Greater cosmic process? Jesus. I could verify this theory by finding out what was going on in the rest of the world. Unfortunately, my range of information-gathering has suddenly shrunk to a radius of about one mile.

Which as a theory-maker puts me in a rather uncomfortable situation. As a scientist, I should be relying on the evidence of my eyes and the laws of probability to put the balance in favour of the Cree.

Regardless of what I can make myself believe, I have to find some of the people in the bush if I'm going to survive. Which means that the future Rec Teams, if there are any, will probably never find me.

✱

Thoom.

Thoom.

The telling of tales and the teaching of the Way is almost at an end.

Tomorrow, you will hunt bear with the Husband. He will show you the use of the spear, the bow, and the trap. But you must also show stealth and respect. You must silently pray to the bear and tell him that you are sorry that you must kill and separate him from his family. You must explain that you are also part of a family and all of them must be clothed and fed.

And when you throw your spear, you must promise the bear that his spirit will always hold a place of honour with your family.

I see that you do not yet accept these lessons, Hairy-Man. But I am not worried. You are very stubborn and a bit stupid, so it may take some time for you to learn the Way. But we have decided that you are still our brother. ✱

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HORIZONS

SCIENCE FICTION

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Action at a distance

by Alice Major

I watch your face across the table
(same table, same restaurant, different universe)
and realize how far
 apart our lives have spun

two particles, struck off
by a dissolving marriage

you are wearing a new sweater
and I am momentarily
 disoriented

as if you should not exist without
me to observe you,
certainly should not buy sweaters

I feel your life should hang
 suspended
 a cat in a
 conjurer's box
until I lift the lid and look

still, for all the arc of space
and time between us,
there is that click of recognition
Schrödinger's cat pouncing

you are wearing a new sweater
and only yesterday I chose
one just like it
 for myself ★



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A Perfect Match

by Steve Stanton

illustrated by Murray Lindsay

Ryin rattled the newsfax printout as he spoke, holding it up like courtroom evidence for a jury who might never read the fine print. "Did you see what they're bidding for kidneys now?" he called to his young wife across the room. "I wish I'd kept my spare like you. We'd be rich by now."

He shook long dreadlocks sadly and dropped into a stuffed easy chair that was covered with a grey blanket. He wiped at his sweat-pebbled cheeks with a burly black arm.

"Hot enough to fry cockroaches in here," he muttered under his breath, wondering how his wife stood the heat all day trapped in here like a hamster in a box.

Shyla peered deeper into the pot of lentil beans she was stirring on the hotplate. She was barefoot, wearing green dungaree pants and a sleeveless black mesh air-shirt.

"Kidneys have always been a good investment," she answered as she rubbed protectively at her belly, tracing the well-known ridges of scar tissue. She could feel Ryin's gaze on her abdomen without even looking up at his crystal blue eye and black eye patch. Sometimes she imagined that the missing eye could see her clearer than the real one, could view

right into her heart, into her brain, revealing all. She wished Ryin would simply put in a dummy, a deadball, and throw away the black plastic patch; but no: he was waiting for a custom implant with infrared and telescopic lens and he wouldn't settle for less. The eye patch was for him a symbol of better times ahead, an open door to a hopeful future. Poverty was only a temporary setback in the rat race, life's engine idling in the pits.

"Do you think it's time to sell?" Ryin asked with an air so deliberately casual as to be obviously feigned. He picked at the tattered blue denim around his exposed right kneecap.

"I don't think so," Shyla replied with an equally forced nonchalance. "Maybe when the market peaks."

Husband and wife smiled at each other and nodded, the ritual complete, their shared assumptions reinforced with unspoken eloquence. When you look desperation straight in the face you never dare mention his name.

Shyla spooned lentil stew into three red plastic bowls.

"Ready for supper?" she asked, and nodded with a cock of the head toward the bedroom archway.

Ryin set the newsfax slip on the packing-box table in front of him and ambled into the bedroom to get their boy Kitrel — twenty months old and already the family pride, already starting to talk, to understand.

"Hi, Daddy," the singsong voice exclaimed happily, innocently.

"Hi, Kit," echoed the elder, a trace of deadpan weariness behind the fatherly facade. "Supper."

"Flip, Daddy."

"Flip? Upside down?"

A vibrant squeal. "Daddy!"

"Howzat?"

"Again, Daddy."

"Again?"

"P'ease."

"Again upside down?"

"Daddy!"

Ryin came through the doorway carrying the boy as Shyla set the three bowls on the packing box and carefully poured bottled water into three plastic cups and fitted a non-spill spout onto one of them. She scanned the newsfax slip, the current quotes — prices had skyrocketed again, the aging grey population clamoring for scant resources. She set Ryin's blood-donor supplement beside his bowl and pulled their one easy chair closer to the table for him. The supplement was provided free to all donors who kept full schedule. Shyla, slightly anemic, could only sell blood once a

month and so was not eligible. She pulled her bare wooden chair over from the kitchen nook and sat down. She stared at the big red capsule and wondered how her husband ever managed to get it down.

Ryin set Kit on his stool and took the easy chair opposite him, both of them smiling now, father and son. The same smile, the same lips, nose, but Kit's skin was noticeably lighter, a cream mulatto like Shyla's. His hair was going to be thick and straight like his mother's, no dreadlocks. Good hair for transplant, she considered, and absently fingered the bare spot at the back of her head where the follicles had been removed. Grow the top hair long and you never see it, you never notice the absence — but you know, you remember, and still the bills block your path ahead like detour signs, forcing you to turn, to twist in search of an alternate route. Dance, woman, dance, and sing us a song, you cheap hussy.

The lentil stew tasted like water-soaked cardboard, as bland as the day itself, but no one chose to voice the obvious complaint, the sound of which could only create complications, perturbations, perhaps outright turmoil. In silence we swallow our problems, Shyla thought to herself, hoping they will digest in a quiet limbo where they cannot touch us, where they cannot turn suddenly and attack us. In silence she stared at the wallpaper as she ate, feeling guilty all the more, trapped in her quietness, for having run out of spices again. The wallpaper was grey with faded pink fuchsia blossoms and tangled coils of ivy. Above the easy chair was a scrawled blue crayon mark, a left-to-right upward diagonal that repeated itself erratically. Shyla had tried to wash it off at first, but the wallpaper pattern came off easier than the crayon, leaving a brownpaper aberration like a Rorschach blot. She had spanked Kit for the blue crayon and felt bad about it ever since. Now the reminder accused her anew — baby's first art.

"Get any painting done today?" Ryin asked as he contemplated the huge blood capsule beside his bowl.

"I finished another canvas for the *Dragons in Amber* series," Shyla told him with some pride. "Tobias wants to see it as soon as possible."

Ryin winced. "You know all that old geek wants is to get into your pants," he spat.

"Ryin!" Shyla exclaimed, and turned quickly to Kit. "Are you finished, honey? Want to go play with your Snugglebum babies?" She set the boy down and watched him toddle off.

"Well, it's true," Ryin said with a bold face betraying defense.

"Of course it's true, but at least he buys the paintings."

"You might as well be giving them away."

"Ryin."

"Okay, I'm sorry. But how long can you possibly string him along? He's not going to be satisfied with a bit of tit here and there forever. Sooner or later it's going to be put up or shut up."

"We talked this through ages ago, dear."

"I know, I know. It's just that I've kept you off the meat market this long." He picked up the red capsule and placed it on his tongue. He pulled a tall glass of water to his lips. He drank, choked, swallowed, drained the whole glass.

"Aaghh, tasteless stuff!" He slammed the glass on the wooden packing box. "We can't even afford good water any more."

Shyla nodded soberly at him, watching the scars on his arms move as his muscles flexed below. Exceptional bone marrow, the doctors had told him. He was DNA pure for his type. He was in the spermbank catalogue and had fetched a record price for his spare testicle five years ago. Lithe, muscular, not too hairy, he had a body built for pleasure.

"Want to step into the closet?" Shyla whispered with a smile. "At least we still have each other." She glanced over at Kit playing on the bedroom floor. The apartment had only two rooms with no door in between — and a walk-in closet with a toilet but no sink, husband and wife's only privacy until baby slept.

"I donated this afternoon," Ryin said gruffly. "Maybe later."

Feeling chastised, Shyla stood and gathered up the bowls and glasses, Kit's stubby baby fork and his purple cup with the plastic tongue sticking out the top.

"Don't run off so fast, sweets." Ryin gently took hold of her arm. He rose and wrapped his powerful arms around her. "I couldn't get any work at Temporary Services again today," he confessed quietly into her neck. "The line was hardly moving and the brokers were all crying the blues."

"I figured as much," she answered, content simply to be close and smell him again. Pheromones, some sort of chemical addiction, she considered. She was like a drug addict who needed a drop of sweat from her lover every day.

"The city's grinding to a halt, boiling in its own poison. There were even zoomers on the line today looking for work," Ryin told her.

"Something will come up," Shyla offered halfheartedly.

"I stood there all day like a peasant," Ryin continued, his voice beginning to choke, to break. Angry at his audible weakness, he continued louder, almost shouting, letting go the words from the deep manhole of his pride. "The government broker came out with his clipboard and plastic smile and I swear I would have wiped his ass with my high-school graduation diploma for a day's wage."

Shyla squeezed him tighter, feeling him tremble, the heave of his torso. She didn't dare pull back to see him cry again. Please, God, not now, not today.

"He's gonna die, Shyla. I'm not gonna be able to save him."

Instinctively her body stiffened. She let bowls and glasses clatter to the floor and pushed her husband away.

"Stop it! Don't you ever say that! For God's sake, he can hear us, Ryin."

Ryin quickly ducked his head down to wipe his one wet cheek on the ragged sleeve at his shoulder. His shiny blank eye patch stared hard and steely. A dichotomy.

Shyla lowered her voice and turned her back to the baby. "The doctor said he had lots of time before he'd need a transplant. Years," she hissed. "Maybe the price will come down," she added. Or maybe I'll save my own spare until he gets big enough to use it, she thought to herself — her secret consolation.

"We've got to get out of the city, sweets," Ryin muttered as he returned to a calm albeit precipitous balance. "Our guts are burning up in this chemical stew."

"If I could sell a few paintings," Shyla offered.

"Sure," Ryin nodded. He bent to pick up the bowls on the floor.

"I was looking at optics today," he said as he took the tableware over to an enameled washbasin on the wall. "Window-shopping for hardware like a zoomer. They had a sale at Future Vision."

Yes, Shyla thought to herself, the future was still out there promising solace, hinting at endless possibilities. Things could get better. Just hang on a little longer. Just hang on day by day.

"Does it bother you terribly, having just one?" she asked.

"Naw, I was just passing the time. You lose some depth perception, but it doesn't seem to make much difference unless you're an artist or something."

A pang of guilt for her stereoptic hobby. A wife who refuses to sell her spare eye and makes her husband sleep with the smell of turps and oils.

"Did they have blue?" she asked.

"Not my exact shade, but close."

"You might as well wait, then, for a perfect match. You've waited so long, another few weeks won't be too hard, will it?"

Ryin cocked his head quizzically at her, testing deep waters.

Shyla bit her lip.

He smiled. "I can wait forever for a perfect match, sweets."

A surge of emotion swept through her. She wanted to remember with him, remember how they'd agonized over that eye before signing the contract — how they'd cried, how she'd kissed his cool blue orb goodbye as he went under the anesthetic. If thine eye offend thee. If you're heavily in debt and need two months rent in advance to find some shelter from the storm. They'd been sleeping in a cardboard tent in a back alley downtown then, living with a gang of twenty in a filthy street commune — until Shyla was gang-raped by a roving band of warlords and a good friend bludgeoned to death trying to protect her. Now they had this private apartment, a secure home in a policed section of the city, and a black plastic eye patch. Don't look back, Shyla reminded herself sternly, and held her silence, held her tears tight in the wellspring of her heart.

Ryin ran some water in the sink and added a few drops of blue detergent as Shyla reached for a dish towel. He washed a red plastic bowl and passed it to her to dry.

"You're a good man, Ryin Cleary," she suddenly blurted, wanting to throw her arms around him, kiss him, melt into him, read his mind, share his essence.

He brushed dreadlocks away from his eye and stared at her face. His lips quirked into an uncertain smile. "I'm glad you've stuck with me, you and Kit. It's good to have something to come home to. Keeps me off the bridge at night."

Shyla smiled with him, though a chill shivered in her viscera. Was it that bad for him? Could he possibly be considering a quick dive to easy street? No, no, brush it away. Don't think about it. The idea itself is self-fulfilling. To talk about it would only give it substance, like a demon materializing at the sound of his name, pushing through a dimensional door into the cold clear light of day.

"Are we still planning on another?" she asked, her body like a cat ready to leap.

"Are you pregnant?" he replied with a grin.

He seemed pleasantly surprised, a little tense, Shyla considered, wondering, hoping, analyzing his every move. "I don't know yet. What would you prefer?"

"Hey, c'mon, that's what we've been hoping for. All those quickies in the closet." He arched his eyebrows at her suggestively, comically, playing it cute.

Shyla decided to swivel her guns pointblank. "Can we keep this one if I am?"

His smile froze into a caricature. "Keep it?" he asked.

"We were going to keep the next one," she reminded him.

"Well, sure, but that was when the line was moving, when I had a dollar in my wallet."

Shyla stood resolute. "We sold the first two and were going to keep the next two. That's what we decided."

Ryin stared as though noncomprehending, puzzling some great paradox. He turned and punched the pop-up plug with a lot more energy than it deserved.

"Are you pregnant or not?" he demanded. "I've had enough games for today."

Shyla swallowed and prepared her voice to meet the challenge. Time to stand up and be counted. "I told you I don't know. I'm not playing any games. I would say it's a distinct possibility, for heaven's sake." Talk to me, Ryin, she screamed without sound. I need to hear your voice. Make love to me. I need you.

"Then we'll discuss it when you find out for sure. It's about time we put Kit to bed." He wheeled and stalked off toward the bedroom, leaving Shyla to dry the dishes and worry about her doctor's appointment the next morning.

She stood and watched a vortex of dirty grey water swirl in the sink. It always circles in the same direction, she considered, always, like the spinning wheel of life from conception to death, the pattern fixed. Three weeks late, but no reason to get excited yet. It could be nothing. Most pregnancies aborted in the first trimester anyway. Embryos died in the womb or developed fatal abnormalities. The chances were slim, virtually nonexistent. A full-term baby was worth its weight in gold — just look at the latest newsfax quotes. The drain gargled air as grey dishwater headed for hell.



"Shyla. Good to see you. Come right in. You've brought the canvas. Superb."

Tobias always acted so sickly sweet in her presence. The practiced persona of an international art dealer. He was mildly effeminate without being gay, though he was the subject of more than a modicum of unrequited lust among "the community." Fifty-one years old and still sporting a thick stand-up bush of wavy brown hair, he was tennis trim and sprightly, a modern man on the move, on the make. He had quick hands, of which Shyla was well aware.

"You're looking well," he said. "The little one needs a kidney, I hear. Too bad. I know how expensive they are — I'm on my third pair myself. I must try to take up a collection among the sustaining patrons. You're so appreciated, you really don't know. *Dragons in Amber* has made your mark,

I daresay. And now another. Oh, let me take a peek."

Mutely Shyla handed her precious cargo to Tobias and dropped gratefully into a silvery plush easy chair opposite his desk. She hadn't said a word since leaving the doctor's office uptown this morning. She'd had to walk, for she couldn't risk the canvas on public transit, and she'd stopped only once to eat her bag sandwich on a cement retaining wall white-washed with pigeon droppings.

The little one needs a kidney, she mimicked to herself. You don't even know his name, you bastard. Take up a collection — you could do it in a day if it suited you — pretend compassion for a moment, like giving pennies to starving Africans. You don't know what it's like to pray that your baby might live another week, to clutch him to your trembling breast for fear that you both will fall, that you both might wither and break like dry reeds in the winds of change.

"Shyla, I'm a little disappointed. You shouldn't hurry your work like this."

"What?" She looked up in disbelief.

"Well, you see what I mean. The strokes are erratic. There's tension here. You're too tense. You're slipping."

A clamp tightened in Shyla's chest. Don't say it, she pleaded soundlessly. I can't believe it.

Tobias clucked affably and shook his head, his shaggy brown mane. "You'll have to give up the series if you're going to change your style. You can't debase *Dragons in Amber* like this. Important people have made investments."

His words lost all meaning for her then, as in horror she watched his mouth move, his slightly protrusive upper lip speckled with grey shadow. How easily life falls apart. It crumples like paper, like the first draft of a bad poem.

"You're not listening to a word I say," he told her. "You really are too tense." He stepped beside her, around her. His hands gripped her shoulders from behind. He kneaded her clenched muscles, muttering surprise at her rigidity.

Not looking at him, Shyla was able to rediscover her voice, some semblance of confidence. "It's just as good as all the rest," she whispered, daring it to be true.

"Now, Shyla, dear. Do you know how many young artists there are in the city today?" His massaging hands gripped her upper arms, rhythmically pushing her shoulder blades toward her spine, pushing against tension, against a brick wall.

"I can only turn the spotlight on three or four at a time, you under-

stand. Just the chosen few, those who show the most promise." His hands slid down her front and cupped her breasts, squeezed them with loving kindness.

"I like you, Shyla, you know that."

Oh God, I never should have let him touch me the first time, Shyla thought with alarm. He wants the main course now. He's come to collect my soul. She reached to pull a hand away but it froze like iron at her touch. Her nipples blossomed. She closed her eyes.

"Please, Toby," she murmured, feeling a flush creep up her throat, "the painting." Time seemed to stretch out around her, the continuum warped into a two-dimensional photograph, a fuzzy black and white with infinite shades of grey. You could fall forever from here, she mused, and never touch bottom.

Tobias sighed theatrically. His hands resumed a rhythmic massage. "I really don't know, Shyla."



At two o'clock Ryin decided to pack it in at Temporary Services. The main brokers had already filled their quotas and he was still high and dry. The line stretched ahead of him like a serpent, a parade of starving soldiers looking for work. A few uptown zoomers had camped out overnight, slumming it for a chance at a day's wage. Ryin grimaced with disgust as he kicked out of line. Another wasted day, the whole damn week a shambles. If he couldn't get on handbills down in the free zone this afternoon, there was not going to be any Sunday dinner, not even bread rolls dipped in grease.

He checked out with a few of his line buddies and exchanged the usual encouragements. The government broker took pity on him and came up with bus fare for the trip downtown. Ryin pocketed it and started walking, swinging his long dreadlocks, jingling the coins in his pocket. The bus went by and he ignored it. Only a few miles.

Things could be worse, he reminded himself again. He could be all alone in the city, a bug in a maze. At least he had Shyla holding everything together. Dear God, he'd die without her, just drop down cold on the spot. What a sweet bitch she was. What more could a man desire from a mate? He'd sell his heart for her if he had a spare.

Ryin tapped his black plastic eye patch as he walked, marking the rhythm of his movement with the hollow *pock* sound it made. The sun was hot, the sky cloudless, but in the shadows of the oblong mountains lay cool respite, a sanctuary. The asphalt made heat waves in the distance, giving back the noonday warmth to a gentle wind that sucked rather than blew, that eddied rather than gusted.

An honest man can always find honest work, Ryin reminded himself as he collected his handbills and began his route. That's what his father had told him years ago, his father who once owned a house, a detached dwelling, and had brought a baby son home to blue blankets and minced vegetables in little glass jars. Though Ryin's father was long dead, his generation lived on in the suburbs, the grey generation, a people leftover from a simpler age of clean air, green earth and health food, who still would not accept the new biotech transplants and demanded the real thing when body parts failed.

Not so the next generation, the zoomers, who vied for every technological advance and sensory upgrade. Most had traded so many body parts for computerized devices that they were infertile biotech mechanisms. The zoomers would not pay for natural organs, but were rapidly creating a lucrative market for newborn babies. Ryin glanced uptown to the suburban hills and wondered about his own two zoomer kids, Kit's older brother and sister, living in luxury with new names and faces. He wondered about Shyla. Could they possibly afford to keep another hungry mouth in the family?

He felt like a worthless excuse for a man as he delivered handbills in the free zone for loose change. The pimps charged him parking at every quadrant. The greysuits took him for a runner and dogged him all afternoon. He felt like giving up and getting hardwired to a factory computer outside the city. He could move up the ladder fast with a good implant, he could unplug on weekends to see Shyla and Kit, he could waltz down to Future Vision and zoom right into their credit computer — get his perfect match at last, with infrared and telescopic and a beautiful shade of blue. He could zoom to the moon.

He got home a bit late for supper and found the apartment empty.

He stood in the doorway like a marionette waiting for someone to pull his strings. No note. No sign of a struggle. No Shyla. No smell of fresh turpentine. He leaned against the door frame, noticed an icy electricity in his abdomen, tried to organize vague possibilities in his head. It all comes apart so easily, doesn't it?

First try Mrs. Hanover down the hall, he told himself calmly. And turned. And ran.

Kit was there. Mrs. Hanover had already fed him boiled turnip for supper. She was worried about Shyla. The doctor, the art dealer — she should have been home by two or three at the latest. Mrs. Hanover imagined street gangs and perverts — no good a pretty lady out by herself, and she never carried a gun, just a short stun blade in her purse.

Ryin gave some money to the sitter and took Kit home. They sat

quietly in the lone easy chair and stared at pink fuchsia on a faded grey background. A father and son. Two souls. Not much, really, in the grand scheme of things.

Kit slept.

Ryin waited.

The city raged around them.

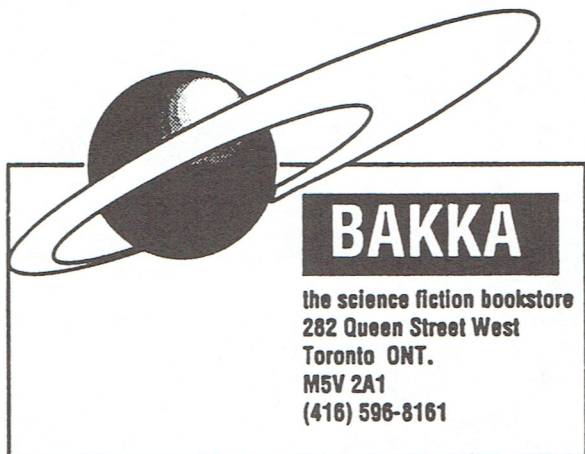
Darkness settled like a shroud, and Ryin put Kit in his crib and returned to his chair. He pushed it to face the door and sat down. He stared. He willed the door to open. He bargained. He pleaded with it to swing wide and bring Shyla back into his life, to restore the unity of their spirits.

He reran the events of the previous day in his mind, every word, every nuance. If he had said something different. If he'd had a few dollars in his pocket. A kaleidoscopic future shifted with each thought. Eventualities churned inside his head like thick brew boiling in a cauldron. If you imagine the worst that can happen then anything else becomes easier to accept. If you lose everything you are invulnerable to further pain.

His wife opened the door a few minutes before midnight.

"Thank God, sweets," he exclaimed as he bounded toward her. "I was so worried."

"Everything's fine now," Shyla told him with an unsteady smile. Her new pink eye patch promised better days ahead. >



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The Killing Way

by David Nickle

illustrated by Mike Jackson

January 18

I did not write today. At first thinking I might later, I stupidly ordered a printout of *The Killing Way*, Trevek's book. I had not yet read it, and as Trevek is due to arrive at the colony tomorrow I thought I'd take a look at his life-work. I intended only to glance through the book so that my lie at having enjoyed the thing might be easier to back up.

So instead of writing, I sat down by my window — the only window, the one that looks out across the forever daylit ice-death of Antarctica, a stark, minimalist view the Foundation says is good for the soul — and read Trevek's book. And didn't get any work done at all; the only words I wrote today are those I'm writing now.

The hell of it is, I can't even say I enjoyed the book. I finished it in the afternoon, which isn't as tricky as it sounds because the book is thin — in every sense of the word. The title, *The Killing Way*, is the tidiest bit of prose on the print-out (no, I'll be fair. The introduction by Claire Kosugi is a passably-good essay) and the action is repetitive and empty.

As an exercise, I'll summarize the thing. Don't worry; it won't take long.

"I remember my birthing only a short way, and my training in battle-

talk began too quickly after," it begins, and from there takes Trevek into a breakneck 20 K account of "basic training" in the Marine Domes on Luna. Really stunning prose. "We learned of our video-enhancements before the Commanders allowed us to clip on our laser targeting system. No live targets until later," writes Trevek in one of the more psychologically-revealing passages of the first chapter.

And it goes on. Chapter Two runs a record at 34 K, describing in detail the armour and armaments that Trevek has had installed into his genetically-engineered nervous system. The laser-finger; the tazer system that shot from his forearms; the microprocessor targeting system they'd plugged in behind his earholes; the lead injections into the sealed pockets of his scaled epidermis, keeping his simplified internal organs clean from any hard radiation he might encounter later in life; and then on to literally dozens of heavy weapons presented in the laundry-list style that eventually defines the rest of the book.

Which, as I said, is a pretty fast read. Trevek evidently saw action in the Titan uprising of 2049 (this is only made clear in one of the too-few end-notes supplied by Kosugi), and he breezes through that with barely a body-count. He spent seven years on board a starship, crawling across the gulf to help the brave colonists at Alpha Centauri find social order among themselves. Which took three months and another body-count (and twelve delightful chapters, at 13 K a pop), and then it was home again. The book (all 92 pages of it) was written on the way back.

Hmm. I'm reading over what I've just written and I'm overcome with a terrible *déjà vu*: didn't some journalist write words like these over *Samuel's Cart* when I opened it on the Net? I've called reviewers away from dinner parties to complain about kinder dissections than the thing I've just written down. Has it come to this? Am I descended to emulating my worst detractors?

If so, maybe I should forget about this novel-writing sham and concentrate on getting an interview with Trevek. That's what all the other journalists on the planet seem to be doing these days.

January 19

No luck at all in isolating Trevek this morning. I was at the hangar with some of the other inmates here — like me, unable to get a drop of story out of their processors this morning and curiouser than hell about our new house-mate — and we watched dutifully, shivering as the transport settled to the stained cement floor and the hangar doors rumbled shut. The outside temperature was ninety below I later learned, and the hangar was kept only minimally warmer. We wore our environment suits like

armour, further guarding our body-heat with tight-crossed arms and nervous-jiggling legs.

I think we all realized a meeting with Trevek would be a problem when the doors cracked open and the marine troopers stepped down. They weren't modified, just regular grunts in their arctic combat gear, but evidently the Pentagon thought twelve of them would be enough to keep those dangerous authors at Camp Antarctica at bay, keep them from breaking Trevek's concentration on this retreat.

The next person to step out was Kosugi. I guessed it at the time and had her identity confirmed a short while later. She wore a full-environment suit, her face contoured unrecognizably with thermal mesh, but her tiny frame was easy enough to place from the hundreds of tridee interviews and news reports since Trevek's book had been published. A striking little woman, even if she is completely bald except for the interface plug, dangling out of the back of her skull like a monastic tassel of hair. Necessary modifications, I guess, to pilot a starship. Gives me the creeps anyway.

Trevek, of course, stepped out into the sub-zero hangar naked. He was designed for cooler climes than this, and there was no reason for modesty either; like his "brothers" still on active duty, Trevek is a neuter.

He isn't much taller than the other soldiers (he still towers over Kosugi, but that's not a fair comparison, she's so little) and in parts he isn't much wider. His shoulders, for example, are surprisingly narrow (he's supposed to be able to lift 400 kilos over his head with ease, yet I am heftier than he up top). But by contrast, his hips are broad, rippling with muscle down to his knees. It's a different musculature, that's what Kosugi wrote in her introduction, and its aesthetics and proportions won't always agree with what our common sense tells us a strong man ought to look like.

But then, as Kosugi points out a few paragraphs down, it wasn't until Trevek's book appeared that anyone was willing to allow that the man-bred Marines were men at all. Different bodies, different brains, not of women born. Barely self-aware, right? Not even a normal face with eyes, nose and mouth. Just a gas-mask breathing orifice and a pair of lens-casings over the bio-enhanced optic nerves. An army of robots who happened to have wet insides.

Trevek's book changed that misconception, so wrote Kosugi. And as he was hustled past us, three of the marines holding us at bay with crossed rifles to make sure we didn't try anything, I wanted nothing more than to talk with him, to sit down and see just what this brand new man thought about his world.

Despite everything the critics have said, *The Killing Way* doesn't tell

me that. If I want to find out anything, I've got to talk to Trevek myself.

January 20

This afternoon I broke down and left my desk early. Too bright in there, the vibrations were too insistent on word-counts and productivity to be of any use to me. So I went down to Camp Antarctica's lounge.

The brochures say the camp is dry, which is to say no interesting beverages and no recreational pharmaceuticals are to be found therein. The brochures speak the truth on that matter, *effendi*, but the lounge is still a good place for avoidance even without the convenient chemical assists.

The nice thing about the lounge is its spaces. One wall is glass, with a humming thermal screen insulating it from the wrenching cold outside. And the other walls are cut out of the mountain-slopes upon which the colony rests. The bare rock, the high ceiling, the pine floors and supports and the soft, form-fitting chairs make the place a hell of a lot more attractive than my room. Particularly when I can't seem to write anything past my name, or this time-waster of a journal.

I won't lie and say that I wasn't hoping to meet Trevek in the lounge this afternoon; while I was hoping, though, I was by no means expecting anything.

What I was hoping for was to see Kosugi in the lounge. Introductions to robot death-novels notwithstanding, Kosugi isn't a writer. She's a starship pilot, enough of a professional to have her ship's hardware extended into herself. The only reason she was staying here and not on her way back to Alpha Centauri on another galactic milk run, was Trevek.

So she wasn't here to write, and I know from recent experience that the quarters here are hellish, empty places when the resident has no words in her. Or him.

My expectations, to get back to the tale at hand (the only tale around here, it would seem), were rewarded. It was about 3:30 when I made it down to the lounge, and Kosugi was there, sitting well back from a group of writers huddled around a low table and making vague suggestions about one another's work. Kosugi was nursing a mug of tea, looking out at the chunky ice plain.

I sat beside her, a polite distance off but not too far along the couch. And introduced myself.

"I've read some of your work," she said, smiling politely. Didn't say I enjoyed some of your work or I admire your work. Just read. I read a newspaper, once.

"I've followed your work, too," I replied.

And so the conversation went on, a mannered sparring-match in the

idleness of the frozen summer afternoon. Somerset Maugham would have written our chat more cleanly than I could hope to, but here goes my recollection of the debacle:

"How long have you been at the colony, Mr. Grey?"

"I've been here for three weeks actually."

"Have you found it to be helpful?"

"Not entirely. It was my agent's suggestion that got me here. It might be time for a new agent."

Another polite grin, a little nod in place of a laugh.

"I'm sure things will turn around for you."

And so on. Kosugi is good, a battle-scarred cocktail party veteran and infinitely more skilled in topic avoidance than am I at topic introduction. Maybe I should get out more.

Finally, I just asked directly. Felt like an ass, but there you are.

"What is Trevek working on here?"

Smiled, that's what she did. "A new book, Mr. Grey. Isn't that what you are working on too?"

And I'll be damned if that didn't shut me up altogether.

January 21

Ricardo came to see me today.

Ricardo is the Foundation's official liaison with the writers here. I met him my first day down. He is very tall, very thin, a gaunt-eyed Hispanic gentleman who visits me in my nightmares as a genteel Brazilian state torturer: "Anything you need, sir, and by the way we have ways of making you write!" *Bwah hahahaha!*

He knocked first, of course, on the off-chance that I might be actually making productive use of the facilities. He entered only upon my shouted invitation.

"How is your day going, Terrance?" He sat down on my bed and looked at me with those perky inquisitor eyes of his.

I told him. No point in lying; they've got a subroutine in the computer network that keeps tabs on your word-count, and while they say they don't monitor it, you can bet they'll check it every so often.

So I told him things were going shitty thanks, and Ricardo nodded; not contradicting, not reassuring, just nodding, gentle and solemn.

"Sometimes it is slow here as everywhere," he admitted in a great, mournful puff of his lungs. "The muses are not always so willing and supple, hey Terrance?"

Not always, no Ricardo, not every single day. Sometimes they just ain't in the mood.

"Claire spoke of you this morning," he said, coming out of nowhere.

"Claire Kosugi?"

Nodded again. "You were asking about Trevek."

I shrugged.

"He interests you a great deal, doesn't he?"

"Yes," I said. "Of course he does," I added needlessly.

"He's interesting a lot of people here," said Ricardo.

"I'd like to be able to meet with Trevek. The same way I'm free to meet with everyone else."

"Would you? From what Claire tells me, you'd like to do more than just shake hands in the dinner line-up."

"I don't understand." Although I admit, oh diary o' mine, I had a pretty good idea of what Ricardo was getting at.

"You were asking about his new project. Weren't you?" A raised eyebrow, inquiring.

And before you ask, no I didn't get indignant, ask him what the hell he thought he was suggesting; I demanded no apology, showed no outrage. I only shrugged. "Curious," I muttered.

Ricardo smiled then, the grin a benevolent, reassuring thing. Hadn't seen it — or appreciated it as much — since I first came here.

"We're all curious about Trevek," he said. "Me, I'm almost as curious about what your new book's going to be about."

I faltered around for a moment, sputtering and stuttering and embarrassing myself some more.

"Space marines," I finally said. Ricardo laughed, and so did I.

But I shouldn't have. It's the best idea I've come up with yet at this damn place. Maybe tomorrow I'll see what I can do with it.

January 22

This morning I went outside. I haven't been outside since I arrived here — not much inclination to freeze on the ice-plain, I'm sure you understand — but a writer's block is a writer's block and sometimes a change of scenery is the remedy. Which, of course, is just the sort of thinking that got me here in the first place. But I'll try anything twice.

In all, though, this change of scenery was a fortuitous one. By pure chance and a little design it gave me my second good look at Trevek.

Here's what happened; it makes a pretty good anecdote, so I'll go slowly.

I left to go outside after breakfast, which means I actually got there an hour before lunch. Apparently it's the same for everyone the first time outside; an attendant helps you put on the environment suit, and then

another one spends about an hour conducting a detailed survival review. Here's how to change the suit battery, Mr. Grey, here's how to access the nutrient solution, pay attention to the shelter activation, the lift pack works like this, and on and on. Not that it's not a good idea; but Christ, it takes its time.

And for me, it took longer still. My attendant had to excuse himself half-way through. One minute, we're reviewing the pack-ejection procedure, the next my mentor's pager is flashing and he's off with barely a "Won't be a second, Mr. Grey."

When he finally returned, his face was flushed and his mouth was incongruously twisted into a small grin.

"Sorry about that, Mr. Grey," he said. "A small crisis in the main lock."

I shrugged as best I could in the suit-assembly. "Marines causing a ruckus?"

His grin broke at that, and he laughed. "In a way."

"Well, good to see you've got it under control."

He grunted at that, then gave me a funny look.

"Something the matter?"

"No, sir."

"Does all this by any chance have anything to do with Trevek?" I remember cursing at myself; I wasn't going to think about Trevek today, such had been my plan.

The attendant hesitated, leaving enough of a lull for me to ascertain the answer. With some difficulty I waved a gloved hand in dismissal, and my attendant smiled, relaxed.

Trevek had gone out for a walk. I'd have bet on it then.

We got on with things. It took another hour, and by the time my better-living seminar was finished, I'd almost been able to put Trevek out of my mind again.

So it wasn't as though I was actually looking for him. But somewhere along the way, I'd resolved to keep my eye open.



I was finally dropped outside near the base of the mountain, a good mile away from Camp Antarctica. It's a brochure photograph from there, a creative monolith crawling up a slope of the South Polar Plateau, the eco-system domes shining like ball-bearings through the ice-air.

My planned journey took me to Devil's Glacier, a shorter leap at just over 100 clicks, not a problem for the lift pack they'd given me. I'd be back in time for supper.

I landed on the southern edge of the glacier, where the New Zealand tourist checkpoint is set up. Took me a moment to process through the

automated security systems inside the little dome (couldn't pay anyone enough to man that position in person, I imagine) and then I was off, for the moment alone on the giant tongue of ice.

It's a fine thing, polar solitude, not at all the same as the loneliness of my room here at the colony; that is a bleak and mundane sense, a suicide-inducing alienation that I could just as easily accomplish in my flat up at Sudbury, or in a Tucson hotel room, or in a Maine death-row jail cell for that matter.

Standing alone on the glacier, my eye tracing across the complex tumbles of ice-mountains, the flat plains of glacial snow, the solitude takes on a romantic, almost heroic flavour. Had the afternoon gone differently, I might have conceived a generation-spanning epic there, or an immense, Joycian stream of language that would cement my work's importance for ever more.

Instead, I saw Trevek.

If anyone is censoring this journal, this next part is the section that will most likely see the stamp. I checked the Net news services, the trideed tonight, and there was no report of it anywhere. If the events of the afternoon had been considered kosher for public consumption, it would have shown up. The journalists would have been all over it and then through it again, bugging around the geopolitical implications, getting a crew down to the South Polar New Zealand colony to talk to schoolchildren, interviewing economists and terrorism experts from linkups to their Washington studios.

Isn't that what happens when someone blows up a government installation?

Because that's what Trevek did to the tourist dome.

I was maybe four kilometres along the ice when it happened, so I didn't get a good look at the particulars of the first explosion. But I heard it, rumbling through the ice, and I saw the fireball clearly enough to pique my curiosity. It must have only taken a few seconds for me to fly back to the dome, because I was right there when the second explosion came, and the shockwave almost sent me spinning.

It didn't, though, and I was back stable again in time to see the gleam of Trevek's scales. He came out through the black smoke, stepping over the twisted, bubbling wreckage of the dome, twitching his head back and forth like a fly's. He saw me immediately, and if I'd had more time to think I might have been afraid that Trevek would take aim at me then. I should have been afraid. He had destroyed, he had seen me, he could have killed me easily.

But he didn't. Just fixed me with his two round lenses, checking me

over with his UV and IR and probably sonar-assisted vision as well, and stood there in front of the flames and smoke. I had my suit radio on, and set it to scanning the frequencies. But he made no attempt at communication with me, made no warning to get away even.

I tried to speak with him, though. I didn't say much; just introduced myself and commented on the weather and that was about it. I'd have said more, but there wasn't really time.

"Trevek," my suit radio said. "This is your commanding officer. You have exceeded your allowance. Repeat, you have exceeded your movement allowance."

And Trevek was off, his own lift belt carrying him fast above me, his globular eyes off again, flitting around the horizon while his head cricked around at impossible angles.

"Trevek!" My radio was shouting now. "Hold your position! You are ordered!" Then the transmission garbled into quick electric dots and dashes, the deadly shorthand of battle-talk.

Further north along the glacier, a pair of marines in lift belts were converging along Trevek's path. Too far away to see what kinds of weapons they had; I'm not sure what would have been effective against Trevek anyway.

Then I was grabbed, a control beam overriding my lift belt. An air controller's voice told me I was being brought back to the colony — "For your own safety, Mr. Grey," said the voice — and I was gently, firmly turned around and tugged away from the glacier. Couldn't twist back to see what happened to Trevek, but I got back to Camp Antarctica well before dinner.

January 23

No one else at the colony has heard about what happened to Trevek. I tried to get it out of Ricardo, and he was resolutely uncooperative; couldn't find Kosugi anywhere; and, as I've said, no one else has the slightest idea.

Oh, I've been discreet; when I spoke with Ricardo, it was very clear from his words and his tone that this was not something to go spreading around. So I did not, for example, knock on anyone's door and ask her if they'd heard anything about Trevek's act of war against New Zealand yesterday, and whether they knew if he was all right.

But I did spend more time than usual in the lounge this afternoon. And I did push my way into more conversations than is my habit, and introduced the subject of Trevek and what a lout he was into well more than half of them.

The fruits of my research were meagre. Plenty of agreement with my

basic assertion, lots of interesting extrapolation on where extra-solar colonialism is taking us, and no useful gossip whatsoever.

The good news being, I finally managed to get some writing done. Not a novel, but the beginnings of something shorter. Too early to see if the verdict will be short story or novella, and I'm too superstitious to say anything more about it at this stage, but it's there now, almost a thousand words and it doesn't look too bad, either.

January 23, 11:54 p.m.

I have to write this down. I am terrified. I've never had it like this before, you've led a sheltered life, Mr. Grey, and I have to write my fear away, spit it out through the keyboard. It will calm me, help me think straight, decide what I have to do. Diary as note-pad.

All right, from the beginning.

Claire Kosugi knocked on my door immediately after I filed the last journal-entry, about a half-hour ago. I wasn't wearing anything, so I pulled on my bathrobe and invited her in.

I'll transcribe our conversation now, while it's still fresh. Might be important later.

"I hope I've not interrupted anything." Kosugi closes the door quickly and sits at my desk. I settle on my bed.

"I was just locking up."

She nods abruptly. I can see a line of sweat on her upper lip.

"You were out on the glacier yesterday," she says. "Trevek told me."

"I was."

"And you were asking Ricardo about Trevek again."

"Wouldn't you?"

Kosugi gets up. "I might." She is more obviously agitated now, her hands gripping at one another in little spasms. "But I doubt that after such an event" — that's how she describes wanton destruction, an event — "I would be so stupid as to run towards the source and introduce myself."

I'm quiet for a second, impaled upon her glare. "I wanted to meet him," I finally say. "You certainly haven't given any of us much opportunity otherwise."

Kosugi explodes now, her glare spreading across and deep through her being. "Of course I haven't! You stupid, pretentious man! Do you think we are here simply to satisfy your curiosity? Do you view this as an exercise in publicity? Trevek is here to work, to write! Not to answer questions!"

"Why a writer's colony?" I am deliberately calm, trying amateurishly to seize the home advantage. "Why not some military installation where

Trevék's privacy can be monitored more closely?"

"Coming here was Trevék's choice." Kosugi is too clever for my school-boy debating technique and slows to an ice-quiet. "In spite of what you may have read, Trevék does make his own choices in matters concerning his life and work."

"Why did he choose this place, then?"

"He told us that he wanted to write, and that he wanted to do so here. Beyond that, he has not explained his rationale in detail to me. I presume he read about the camp." A nasty little grin here. "Trevék does read."

"So I'd gathered." I am getting irritated now, I want the conversation to end. "What's your point, Claire?"

An intake of breath. "Trevék remembers you. You told him your name. He called up some of your work. I think he has taken an interest in you."

"Great. When can we meet?"

I must be more irritating to Kosugi. She slams her fists down at her sides, glares at me anew. "Hope, Mr. Grey, that you and Trevék never meet. You are best left a passing fancy."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

And it comes.

"Mr. Grey," she says, slow and looking straight, "after you were pulled away from the fire, Trevék killed two marines. When he came back, he wrote 30 K, the first that he has set down since he arrived. He has become inspired again; the adventure on the glacier seems to be the elixir for his beginnings.

"When we returned to Earth, Trevék was easy to predict, easy to control. That is no longer so. I would like to take him away now, get him clear of this camp. But he will not go. He's not on my ship any more; he finally knows it.

"And now he has taken an interest in you."

Kosugi leaves at this point. I sit on my bed, I don't get up to show her out. I am still on my bed now. And no, I have no idea what I'm going to do next.

Oh, Jesus.

January 24

I spent the morning re-reading Trevék's book, and I find that I still dislike it. The story is pedestrian, uni-layered and almost mechanical. Trevék does not dramatize; he lists and lists and lists: "The missile struck the city. The first explosions killed only 32,923. A fuel depot was then hit. 428,446 were confirmed in the fire. I killed 92 with my hands that afternoon."

And always the lists are killings, or weapons. I'm trying to think of what in literature Trevek's work comes close to — the jacket quote that compares it to Julius Caesar's *Commentaries* is just as ridiculous as it sounds — and all I come up with is some of the Icelandic sagas. Although even *Egil's Saga*, which mustered quite a body-count itself as I recall, brings more humanity, more depth to its story, than does Trevek's autobiography of carnage.

But carnage may be the key. Trevek, after all, is a made man, a streamlined tool. He thinks, he feels, Kosugi was right in the general case, but for Trevek all is directed to his function.

Why is so much that is poignant to us in fiction concerned with love and procreation? There is violence, murder throughout, but romance, and be honest now Terrance, sexuality — Freudian or otherwise — is always there, always what matters. Perhaps that is our imperative.

Trevek, however, does not reproduce, needs no love, gives no affection. And his imperative is well-defined.

As I look this over, I find myself satisfied with this thesis. I have no desire to put it to the test. As soon as is possible, I hope to be out of this colony, back at home in Sudbury. I'll write my book there, and I don't care if I never meet Trevek.

I was speaking to one of the guards waiting with me in my room just now, and related these very sentiments. He laughed. A bitter, uneasy noise. The guard said he couldn't agree more. He said he'd like to visit me in Sudbury some day, when this is over.

In the meantime, though, the only thing to do is wait until they recapture Trevek.

And pray that Claire Kosugi's murder was enough to clear up his writer's block for the next book. I don't want Trevek back here looking to talk shop. I don't want that at all. †

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Presto

by Inge Israel

Singularities? . . .

They're tucked behind event
horizons. There's cosmic
censorship out there where time
will stop but not reverse.
On earth there's no such luck.
We're stuck with an ergodic past.

Tidiness above all things.

That's why from time to time
we pluck an unsuspecting second
out of space and, gloating,
ram it down our clockwork's throat.

But where light falls
fireflies in ten directions
tease till every quark
and lepton trembles. ♪



Once Upon a Primetime

by J. Nelson

illustrated by Robert Boerboom

Click.

God is on *Arsenio Hall*. He is wearing an Armani suit and has large hands. Jesus Christ is seated on the couch, at His right, toying with the holes in His palms. Arsenio leans close to God, grinning perversely.

"So how's your sex life?" he asks. "The tabloids say you have a thing for virgins." The audience barks. God blushes.

Phil laughs so hard he spits "Ding-Dong" across the living room carpet.

"Whatsamatter?" Linda asks, annoyed. They have separate televisions: she is watching *Knots Landing* in the bedroom. The music swoons through the open door.

"God's on *Arsenio*."

"God? Didn't He play George Burns on *The Burns and Allen Show*?"

"No. He's kinda obscure. I liked Him when I was a kid."

"Why don't you turn that crap off and come to bed?"

Arsenio breaks to a commercial. Phil clicks the channels through a

rapid barrage of commercials, like subliminal ads:

*mileage//Funforthewhole//YouDeserveA??!\$12.99*FREE
 WOW!We'vegonemadMAD!Blamthru-the—?rack&pinion5:30\$
 Liquidationclosing-out***three-outta-four//5-25%()
 SUPER-MAXIs-doesitfly?ROCKYIVguaranteee!!lowlowfat
 &sodium-800-YES! pleasefunfunfunFUNclickclickclick.*

Phil has a sudden, inexplicable desire to purchase feminine hygiene. Arsenio glares into Camera 3: "In a few minutes we'll be joined by our special guest, Dr. Ruth Westheimer, who will speak with Jesus about the over-rating of a second coming . . ." Phil does not like Dr. Ruth. Instead, he watches Godzilla battle Mothra in black&white until he falls asleep on the couch.

Click.



Phil works for eight hours at the office and then, at home, touches Linda's breast. It is as lovely as ever, he thinks, only lower. Linda is watching *The Young and the Restless* on the 36" Mitsubishi Phil bought as a twentieth anniversary gift. She doesn't blink.

On the screen, Danny kisses Cricket. He pulls her close. "Our love is like no other," he whispers. Music swells. They drive off in an MR-2. Phil loses interest in Linda's breast and settles before the 24"" Panasonic in the living room. *Click.*

*Smith to Kurri Kurri back to Smith a shot from—
 mating fowl indigenous to—
 six slashed in a brutal downtown crack—
 my hotdog has a first name oh-ess-see—*

Clickclickclick. Phil notices that with every passing day it becomes increasingly difficult to remain on one channel. Always he can feel the pull of the other channels. What if, while he watches the Ms. Swimsuit Competition on Channel 4, there is full frontal nudity on Channel 12? What if, while there is a small-time pile-up on the news, there is a hi-speed multi-explosion car chase on *The A-Team*? He is not a philosophical man, but he often lies awake at night, wondering whether the channels he chose that day were the right ones.



Phil works eight hours at the office, touches Linda's breast, watches Godzilla snap Japanese skyscrapers. The next morning, Phil drives to the office and works for eight hours.



Phil removes his tinted contact lenses and he slides under the electric blanket. He cannot sleep. He counts leatherback turtles on the Endangered Species wallpaper. He stares at the Mitsubishi's dead, black screen. Linda stirs.

"Are you happy?" he asks. "I want for you—for us—to be happy."

A pause, like the gap between commercials.

"Yes. I should be, shouldn't I? I bought an MR-2 today."

"An MR-2?"

"Yes. It has rack and pinion steering. I like that sound: rackandpinion."

"How did you afford an MR-2?"

"I sold a kidney."

Linda falls back to sleep but Phil cannot. He surveys the room, a claustrophobic closet of Linda's junk: tiger-striped pillows, a Baldwin grand piano, compound bows, Liberace silverware, copper Roman statues, Chuck and Di china-plates, knick-knacks and memorabilia like shiny rodents, always darting just out of sight.

Phil's eyes finally settle on her bronze Elvis Presley bookends. He despises them. They are Linda's favourites. She swears it was Elvis who repaired the cable hook-up three years ago, while Phil was at work. She has his autograph, signed "Norm Sorochuck." His alias, she insists. Phil smirks at her stubborn faith. Is her life that empty, he wonders, that she can't even let Elvis die?

Champagne wishes and caviar dreams. Linda watches *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. It must be Saturday, Phil thinks. He dresses in a Nike jogging suit and pedals madly on his stationary bike, in the living-room. He watches the much publicized Senate hearing: God is being reviewed on charges of real-estate fraud.

SENATOR LOCK: According to this brochure [holding up a *King James*], your shares in Heaven promised, I quote, "everlasting life."

GOD: "Everlasting" may have been an artistic embellishment.

SENATOR HOBBS: An embellishment? May I draw your attention to the passage pertaining to "streets paved with gold" . . .

God confers with his lawyer.

Phil watches the white dot on the TV fade to black with inexplicable apprehension. In the bathroom, he checks to see if his hair is still thinning. Linda is asleep, her face curled in a tight frown. The next morning, during a commercial, Phil says, "I think our marriage has lost its happiness."

"Where did you last see it?"

Phil thinks of their honeymoon in France, the sun warming the beaches like microwave dinners, the air and wine sweet as Aspartame. Phil touches Linda's breast. They eat tuna sandwiches without crusts for lunch and fly to France. They explore the southern countryside. It is Nice.

They picnic on the Mediterranean. Phil has packed sandwiches made with leftover tuna. Each sandwich is quartered into a convenient mouthful. Sitting on the shore, they watch the sunlight glisten on the jade water, listen to the surf gently break against the sand. Linda admits the sandwiches are quite good. The quarters, she says, are certainly convenient.

"*Notre amour est comme n'importe d'autre,*" Phil says. "Are you happy?"

"It all looks so familiar," Linda complains. "I don't remember it looking so familiar the first time we were here."

They dine in Paris. After, Linda is drawn to televisions in a shop window. She stands on the sidewalk for two hours. Phil buys tampons. Linda discovers she is violently allergic to caviar. She vomits three times on the return flight, and once out the taxi's window. The next morning, when Phil turns on his TV, the colour is faded: all the channels are black and white.



"As I mentioned before the commercial break," Oprah says, "there have been rumours circulating about Your death."

God laughs. He leans forward in His chair. "Oh, those rumours have been around for centuries. Who knows where these things start? Maybe it was Newton, or Yeats. That bloody Darwin bastard certainly didn't help any!"

The audience roars. God grins and spreads His arms.

"The point is, I'm no more dead than Elvis."



Lying beside Linda in bed, Phil picks his toe-nails and reminisces about his dead mother. Linda is watching *Another World* although it is past midnight. Phil notices soaps are playing increasingly on Linda's television. Her television's colour is breath-taking. Every shade is richer and brighter than anything in the real world.

It was Phil's mother who gave him stock in Heaven as a child. "No matter how badly you mess up your life," she said, "you'll always have this stock to fall back on." Phil was quite pleased at the time (this was long before the fraud scandal and subsequent Senate Review). But even then, his father, an atheist and stock-broker, secretly advised him to sell his stock as soon as possible.

"It puts a lot of pressure on a person's life," Phil says.

"What's that?" Linda is distracted. The music swells to a suspenseful crescendo.

"The Senate Review. It was nice thinking Heaven was more than just fancy advertising. Now every moment of my life seems so much more important. I find myself striving for perfection only to be frustrated by my failure."

"That's terrible!" Linda says. "Frankie's coming out of his coma! And he's the father of Vicki's child!"

Phil closes his eyes. The bright TV after-images float in the dark, beneath his eyelids, like dreams.



Work. Click. Supper. Click. Phil watches *The Wizard of Oz*. He anticipates the beauty of Oz, so colourful, like France. However, his television is still broken. Dorothy and Toto step over-the-rainbow into a dreary world of grey midgets. The Emerald City is off-white. Dejected, he clicks through the channels, all re-runs, until bed.

Linda is still awake, watching soaps. Her television, Phil has noticed, now receives only soaps, twenty-four hours per day, in brilliant colour. She is very distant, Phil thinks, almost catatonic. How can I make her happy? A gift, perhaps, of value between three and five hundred dollars? He does not know.

He touches Linda's breast. Behind him, the music vibrates warmly. He imagines the colours, the lovers, embracing. A bizarre warmth surges in his chest. He squeezes Linda's hand and then removes her clothes. The music soars. He enters her. A voice from the screen: "Jill, this caviar is splendidly dry." He gyrates his hips, trying to find a rhythm. The remote-control, still clenched in Linda's hand, digs into his thigh. The colours, he thinks, concentrate on the colours, the music. He feels numb and uncomfortable (concentrate on the colours). Despite his efforts, his thoughts dull (the music!). Drift. He realizes, with panic, there is no happiness, no pleasure. He thrusts faster. Faster. He is reminded of his stationary bike. He is reminded of the frantic, wide-eyed civilians scurrying in Godzilla's shadow. Screaming. He can no longer hear the music, only the monstrous footfalls behind, levelling city-blocks to rubble and dust. He runs. Faster. Godzilla's maw eclipses his sky. A rush of black and white scales. White teeth. Black.

He quits. He collapses on Linda. His hips are aching, and damp. By the light of the television, the entire room is grey.

Behind him, the TV clicks through soaps. ■



No Tricks

by Susan MacGregor

illustrated by Tim Hammell

“Now remember, Florrie,” Bea Smith warned, waving a finger in the face of her elderly sister, “while I’m gone, no nonsense. I’ll not have heavens-knows-what flying about the house by the time I return.”

Florrie didn’t appear to notice the finger within inches of her nose. Instead, her pale blue eyes wandered to the kitchen window. A dragonfly bumped into the glass, then buzzed off to somewhere in the vegetable garden. Florrie smiled. *Preserve me*, thought Bea. *She’s not even paying attention.*

She pursed her lips. It was getting to the point where she dreaded leaving the house for fear of what she’d find when she got back. The last time she went shopping, Florrie had conjured pigs — three pink ones, with golden hooves and white wings. How the creatures flew on those tiny pins was beyond understanding, but then, Florrie had always been one for whimsy.

“I’m going to the Food-Value,” she told Florrie. “I’ll be back within half an hour. I’ll bring you your favorite — Almond Roca, all right?”

“Almond Roca,” Florrie said, nodding.

"And no magic while I'm gone."

"No magic," Florrie repeated. Her eyes drifted back to the kitchen window.

Bea studied Florrie for a moment and then headed for the back door. The clean-up after the pig episode had left her tired for days. She was no longer young — although for a fairy godmother, eight hundred and sixty-four years was not exactly old. Florrie was well over twelve hundred — her mind, or rather, her good judgement was slipping.

"I need a rest," Bea told her Volks as she climbed into the driver's seat. "I'm tired of playing nurse-maid to Florrie."

She stopped at a red light. An elderly man and his nurse were crossing the street to Tintagel Lodge, an Extended Care Home for mortals. A sign near the front doors proclaimed:

"Day Programs Now Offered!

*Sign up for Dance Classes, Lawn Bowling, Bridge, and Much More!
Vacancies Limited, so Register Now!"*

Bea stared at the sign. The idea of anyone, any mortal, taking care of Florrie was ludicrous. Or was it? True, Florrie could not be completely trusted to refrain from using her magic, but on the other hand, she had always been good with mortals. Had always been drawn to care for them, as a mother to her children. Maybe this was the answer.

Florrie wouldn't have to live at the Lodge, just attend for the day. And she had always found ordinary people eminently more interesting than the magical ones.

The only difficulty lay in controlling her desire to help. Any fool with a problem, and Florrie was at his side. Which, of course, was to blame for her current state. Bit by bit and wish by wish, she had magicked most of herself away. "It all comes from caring too much," Bea sniffed, as she pulled into the Food-Value parking lot. She climbed out of the Volks and headed for the entrance of the store.

Just as she was comparing the price of tomatoes in Produce, and thinking how outrageous it was that she should have to spend so much on poor quality, she was overcome with foreboding. Florrie had done something — she could feel it. Bea jostled her cart to the check-out, threw her money at the cashier, and didn't bother to wait for change.

The house looked normal enough as she barrelled up the back walk. Except the kitchen window seemed clouded. She could see Florrie through it, tossing small round objects into the air, laughing and clapping her hands. Florrie turned, catching sight of Bea. A look of horror crossed her face, and she began to wave violently as if shooing something away.

Bea bolted for the back door. The house was filled with purple smoke and smelled of rotten eggs. A slimey mess lay scrambled on the kitchen floor. Florrie had plomped herself in a chair at the kitchen table. She was reading an empty egg carton as if this were the most natural thing for her to do in the world.

Bea counted to ten. The effort didn't help. "Where is it?" she demanded, her voice becoming shrill.

"What, dear?" Florrie asked, looking up from her reading.

"Whatever it is that you've conjured! You can't hide it from me, Florrie! I'll find it!"

Florrie frowned. "Now, how did that happen?" she asked, studying the eggs.

"Don't give me that! I told you not to fiddle, and you went and did something."

Bea pulled open the oven door. Nothing there. She slammed it shut then headed for the basement. Florrie rose from her seat. "Did you remember the Almond Roca, Dear?"

"It's down there, isn't it?"

"The Almond Roca?"

Bea shoved Florrie aside and yanked open the basement door.

At the bottom of the steps huddled a purple and green dragon. It was not large and looked rather mournful, as if unhappy about being shunted off to a dark basement. Seeing Bea, it sat up on its haunches and bawled a piteous "*bwaaaaah!*" A huge cloud of smoke billowed up the stairs, broke at Bea's feet and enveloped her in a smelly balloon.

The room stank of sulphur.

Bea gagged, slammed the door. Claws were heard on the stairs as the dragon clambered up, wanting to be let out. It "*bwaaaaahed*" again and scabbled at the crack.

"That's it!" Bea sputtered, fighting for breath.

"He's just a little dragon, Bea," Florrie insisted, "I don't think he likes the dark."

"What about me, Florrie? What about me, and what I do or don't like! I can't take this anymore. I can't take living with you. I need a rest. I need some relief!"

"What are you going to do, dear?"

"I'm going to take you to a place where there are those who can take care of you!"

"Will I like it there, Bea?"

"There are mortals there, Florrie. Lots of mortals. They play cards, watch television, have dances."

"It sounds nice, Bea. I like people."

"Get your coat!"

"Are we going there now, Bea?"

"We're going there now!"

"But what about Mortimer?"

"Put him out of your mind, Florrie!"

"He likes eggs."

Bea clenched her teeth. She reached for Florrie's coat which was hanging on a hook near the back door. "Put this on," she said. "Now." Florrie did as she was told.

They drove in silence. A Day Program would be a good thing, Bea thought, but one slip-up by Florrie and the whole Lodge would be in an uproar. There could be no incidents like dragons or flying pigs. She had to make that clear.

"Mortals are easily upset, Florrie," she began, calmer now. "These days, people don't understand about magic. They only believe in ordinary things."

"Like toasters?"

"Like toasters. But only ordinary ones. Toasters that fly or talk or dance would scare people."

"That's too bad," Florrie said.

Bea nodded. "Perhaps so. But do you understand what I'm getting at, Florrie? Do you understand that we're no longer living in the fifteenth century?"

"I forget, Bea. Where are we, now — the seventeenth, eighteenth?"

"The twentieth. The time of technology. Of toasters. Not magic. So no more tricks, Florrie, all right?"

"No more tricks, Bea," Florrie agreed. She stared with interest at a 7-Eleven they were passing.

So far, so good, Bea thought. Still, what I need is a way of watching Florrie when she's out of sight.

A fly was bashing itself at the windshield. Bea stared at it. *Stop that,* she said, forming the words in her mind. *You'll only knock yourself silly.* The fly paused in its head-butting, then landed on the steering wheel.

I have a job for you, Bea said.

The fly lifted its back legs and rubbed them together.

You'll get paid if you do the job right, Bea replied. *I want you to watch this lady. She's my sister. She can do things most mortals can't. She mustn't do any magic. You must tell me if she does.* The fly walked back and forth, hedging.

Don't push your luck, Bea warned. *Unless, of course, you'd rather deal with my Agent.* For a moment, the steering wheel resembled a huge web, with an enormous spider sitting at the centre. The fly zipped to Florrie's shoulder. *Wise decision,* Bea said.

They pulled up in front of the Lodge. The stone walk was bordered with cheery geraniums, and several elderly people were sitting on benches near the main entrance. They watched with curiosity as Bea helped Florrie out of the car. "Hello, my dears!" Florrie called. She waved. An elderly man waved back.

"They look very nice, Bea," Florrie whispered. "Not an evil Duke amongst them!"

"Yes," Bea groaned. "Come along." She hustled Florrie past the on-lookers and into the lobby proper. They walked over to the nurse sitting at the Admissions Desk.

"Good morning," Bea said to the nurse. "I've brought my sister here for the Day Program."

The nurse, a Nurse McNroy, frowned. "We filled our last spot yesterday. We don't have any vacancies at the moment. I'm sorry if the sign misled you. Maintenance was supposed to take it down."

"Perhaps you should check your records again," Bea suggested. The print on the nurse's Day Book shifted. "I'm quite sure you'll find that arrangements have been made for my sister to attend."

"What was the name?" Nurse McNroy asked, adjusting her glasses.

"Miss Florrie . . ."

"Lady Florence of the Waves," Florrie said grandly. She executed a little twirl. "At least, that's what they called me in Cornwall . . ."

"Smith," Bea finished, grabbing Florrie by the elbow.

"Well, isn't this something!" Nurse McNroy said, pointing to a line in her book. "Here she is. Miss Florence Smith." She shook her head. "I don't know how I could have missed it."

"You don't have tapestry sessions here, do you?" Florrie asked.

"Not tapestry. But we do have a group of ladies who enjoy cross-stitch. Would you be interested in joining them? I'm sure they'd be happy to include you."

"I was afraid of that," Florrie said. "I never held with the fact that because I was a woman, I had to use a needle and thread. I was always much better at archery. Won a silver arrow once, but had to disguise myself as a squire to get it."

Nurse McNroy's eyebrows rose, then she turned to look at Bea. "As you can see," Bea said drawing her to one side while Florrie wandered to the foyer window, "my sister thinks she's living in the Middle Ages. The fifteenth century, to be exact. She used to be something of an expert in the field."

"We have many people here who hold interesting notions," Nurse McNroy said encouragingly.

"Then I'm sure you won't be surprised by anything my sister might

say."

"Oh, of course not. We're very experienced in these matters. We're tolerant, but we find it better to insist that our charges live in the here and now."

"Then we are in complete agreement," Bea said.

The elderly man who had waved at Florrie on her way in to the Lodge was now standing behind her. He had changed his clothes and was wearing a get-up consisting of a worn scarlet cape and plumed hat. In one hand he held a black wand, in the other a tin of almond roca. Florrie turned. He bowed low. Florrie smiled delightedly.

"Sweets for the sweet," he said grinning. With a flourish, he offered her the candy.

"Oooh!" Florrie squealed, clapping her hands.

"That's nothing, Toots. Watch this! *Abacadabra* and *presto!*" A bunch of feathered posies sprang into his hand. He offered her the bouquet.

Florrie giggled. She curtsied and accepted the bunch — which promptly trembled into live roses. Smiling demurely, Florrie dropped a single red bloom at his feet.

"Goodness," said Nurse McNroy who had missed the exchange because Bea had blocked her view. "Mr. Carruthers seems to have taken a shine to your sister. Isn't that nice!"

"Yes," Bea grated. The last thing she needed was this old geezer hankering after Florrie. But on the other hand, with him around, Florrie wasn't likely to conjure any dragons. "Could we get my sister started with the program?"

"Of course," Nurse McNroy replied. "What would she like to start with? We have 'Elders in the Kitchen,' 'Willow Basket Weavery,' and 'Fifties Dance Class' going on at the moment."

Florrie had always loved to dance. "How about the dance class?" Bea suggested, pulling Florrie along. Mr. Carruthers picked up the rose, then followed as quickly as he could. Bea managed to outdistance him. Florrie turned and waved. Mr. Carruthers waved back, his face flushed with excitement.

"That knight," Florrie asked as they headed for the banquet hall, "who is he?"

"Mr. Carruthers used to be a vaudeville magician," Nurse McNroy said. "Today seems to be one of his better days. He's been living with us for quite some time."

"I wonder, does he joust?" Florrie mused. "I must ask him. Perhaps the King will allow us to sit together at sup."

Nurse McNroy smiled at Florrie. "I'm sure we'll be just fine," she told Bea.

After leaving Florrie in Nurse McNroy's capable hands, Bea went home. She dealt with Mortimer promptly. In spite of his attempts to be either pitiful or cute, no amount of whimpering or paw wagging kept him from being banished to his alternate space-frame. Bea felt a tug of guilt as she watched him fade, scrabbling at the air in much the same way he had scratched at the basement door.

"Well, I didn't call you," she told him as he paled into space. "You shouldn't have been pulled here in the first place. If I let you stay, you'd only get underfoot. You stink, and you'd be nothing but a nuisance."

The last she heard of him was a long and thin "bwaaaaah!" She spritzed air freshener about the room, cleaned up the egg mess, then lay down on her couch with a headache. It had been an exhausting day. Half an hour later, she was awakened by the fly battering her nose. As she opened her eyes, it zigged a series of excited spirals, then zoomed to the top of the drapes.

Bea frowned with annoyance. "I can't understand a thing you're saying," she said, wagging her fingers in its direction.

"Yo! Bozzzz!" the fly said. "We're even! Ya don't havvvtta dicker 'bout payment! The party your sizter'zz throwin' izz payment enough!"

"Party?"

"Yeah! There'zz people and dogszz, and the food'z outta thizz world!"

"Oh, no . . ."

The phone rang.

Bea picked up the phone. Nurse McNroy.

"Miss Smith," Nurse McNroy began. "I don't know what you are trying to prove, but I cannot allow this charade to continue. The Lodge is in chaos. Total chaos. I thought from our conversation earlier today that we understood each other. That you realized we do not coddle our wards' delusions!"

"What's going on?"

"You mean you don't know? I gathered from your sister's comments that you were responsible for this, this . . ."

"I'll be right there," Bea said, slamming down the receiver.

The Volks was already idling. Bea drove through two red lights. Traffic deferred to her as if she were on a mission of mercy.

"Park yourself!" she told the Volks as she leapt from its seat, which it promptly did in a nearby handicapped stall. Bea bolted up the walk and charged through the door.

The Admissions Desk was vacant. Lively "tootle" music could be heard coming from down the hall. Bea followed the sound.

As she entered the Banquet Room, she was nearly bowled over by two servants bearing a heavy wooden platter with a roast pig. A series of

pages scampered by, their small hands heavy with ewers of spiced wine. On a dais to one side, a trio of musicians, dressed circa 15th century, plucked lutes and piped horns — a lively Galliard which Bea still hated. Everywhere, at tables or standing in small groups, elders were talking, laughing, or eating. Every one of them was dressed for the period — half of whom seemed delighted with the tights, tunics, and codpieces, and half of whom didn't notice — they stabbed at their supper or spooned their soup as if nothing were out of the ordinary. Near the head table, Nurse McNroy was involved in a tug of war with two hounds that had helped themselves to a roast goose.

And in the midst of it all, danced Florrie.

She had gowned herself in gold brocade and red velvet; on her head bobbed an airy cone. Holding her hand was Mr. Carruthers, draped in furs, red doublet, and baggy-kneed hose.

"Stop it!" Bea shouted, striding to the centre of the room. The music picked up its pace to an even livelier Bransle.

"Hello, Bea!" Florrie gasped as Mr. Carruthers lifted her up. "Eeeek!" she giggled again. "Another leap like that, and we'll have the clergy up in arms!"

"Betcha didn't think I had it in me, did ya, Sweets? You're my fountain of youth! I feel like I'm eighteen again! *Wheee!*" he howled, lifting her high.

"Put her down!" Bea yelled.

"You wanna cut the rug, Sister?"

Mr. Carruthers tried to lift Bea, but her bulk was heftier than Florrie's. "Woooof," he said, staggering. He clutched at his chest for wind.

"Take your hands off me!"

"Have you come for some company, Dear?" Florrie asked. "How is Mortimer? I hope you didn't shut him away in the dark."

"Change everything back, Florrie! This instant!"

"But the feast's only begun, Bea. It would be rude to shut everything down now, with everyone having so much fun. And his Grace wouldn't like it."

"Have ya heard this one?" Mr. Carruthers asked. "A sailor walks up to this gorgeous doll who's got a run in her stocking an' says . . ."

"Do you mind?" Bea asked.

"No, that ain't it," Mr. Carruthers frowned.

"You're hurting yourself, Florrie!" Bea said, ignoring him. "You're wasting yourself on these mortals!"

"But that's my job, Bea! Everyone's having a wonderful time. And so am I," she looked at Mr. Carruthers and smiled. He grinned back and

reached for her hand. "Hubba, hubba, hubba!" he said.

"I won't have it!" Bea shouted. She threw her palms skyward.

Everything stopped. Everything but she and Florrie. The musicians were frozen at their instruments, Nurse McNroy and the dogs at their dueling. Florrie and Bea stood in the midst of medieval immobility. "Change it all back," Bea said.

"I won't!"

"If you don't, there will be questions. Nurse McNroy won't believe I didn't set this up. She might realize we're more than we seem."

Florrie said nothing.

"We don't want people to think we're different. If they discover what we are, we'll be subjected to tests, become a source of contention between governments. We wouldn't be revered like in the old days . . ." Florrie frowned.

"Florrie," Bea said, her voice taking on a pleading note, "I don't care so much about myself. But you don't have a lot of yourself left. If you throw any more of your magic away, I could lose you."

Florrie stared at her for a moment, then sighed. "You remind me of the Queen, Bea," she said. "Both of you worry too much. Haven't you learned by now that the more you give of yourself, the more you get? I'm a fairy godmother. I'm supposed to help mortals. That's my purpose. That's what I'm here for."

"You won't change this back?"

Florrie shook her head.

"Then you leave me no choice."

Bea took a deep breath. Her forehead furrowed with concentration. For a moment, everything in the room blurred, lost distinction. Then she lifted her head. The Lodge had returned to normal. Nurse McNroy straightened, looked momentarily confused, then headed for the Admissions Desk, nodding a friendly "hello" as she passed by. Mr. Carruthers dropped Florrie's hand.

"I'm sorry, your Grace," Florrie told him.

He looked at her dazed, no sense of recognition in his eyes. Eighty-five years settled heavily upon his shoulders. He shuffled toward the hallway leading to his room.

Florrie's fingers flew to her throat. "He doesn't know me!" she cried, turning to Bea.

Bea watched him reach for the wall railing for support.

"He doesn't know me!" Florrie repeated, following.

Bea felt faint. She was too drained to deal with this now.

I'll make it up to her later, she promised, heading for the main doors.

The second phone call from Nurse McInroy came that afternoon around 4:00.

"Are you coming to the Lodge?" Nurse McInroy asked. "Your sister has collapsed . . ."

Fear clutched at Bea's heart. "I'll be right there," she said.

She cast about for some sense of Florrie, that invisible link that had always tied the two of them together. It was still there, but weak. And changed. As if Florrie had spent her last . . .

"Dear Heaven," Bea whispered to herself. "She's finally done it. She's given away the last of herself. As sure as I'm alive, I know it."

She didn't bother to summon the Volks. This was no time for being frugal. She wished herself to the Lodge.

She arrived at the main entrance, just in time to see Mr. Carruthers being helped into a station wagon in the parking lot. A middle-aged woman held his elbow, while a man, probably the husband, held open the car door. "Isn't it remarkable, Jim?" the woman commented, "I can't get over the change in Dad! He's lucid, he remembers me, he's not lost in the 1920's anymore!"

"It's incredible, all right."

"He even remembers when we bought this car! The date and the year! Do you remember that? Do you?" The husband shook his head and grinned. "I can barely remember last week," he said.

Sick to her heart, Bea hurried through the front doors. Nurse McInroy met her in the hall.

"I had your sister checked over by our resident doctor," she said as they hurried toward the examination room. "He can't find anything particularly wrong, except that she's very weak and she seems to have aged very suddenly. I wish I could tell you more."

Bea stood framed in the doorway. Within, breathing shallowly and lying like a broken doll beneath pale bedcovers was Florrie. Her eyes were closed, her hair was white, and her skin almost translucent, like ivory. Bea felt her throat tighten, tears spring to her eyes.

"Leave us," she told Nurse McInroy.

"Very well. Call if you notice any change." Bea nodded, and Nurse McInroy left, closing the door behind.

Bea walked over to the bed and sat beside her sister. She reached for Florrie's hand. It seemed overly small, the bones as thin and brittle as a sparrow's. Bea stroked it once. Florrie did not stir.

"What have you done?" Bea asked, staring at the quiet face of her sister. Tears flooded her eyes. "You've squandered the last of it, haven't you? And now you're as mortal as any we cared for." Overcome with

grief, she allowed a sob to escape. She shook her head and fought for control, using her free hand to wipe away the tears.

"Damn you, Florrie," she said, growing angry. "Why did you always have to care so much?" Her hand tightened.

Florrie stirred. Her fingers trembled within Bea's grasp as if protesting the pressure. Then her eyes fluttered open. Weakly, she met Bea's glance. Her lips pursed several times to form words. She licked her lips and tried again. "No more tricks," she whispered softly.

The words struck Bea to her core.

How many times had she had insisted on no magic? And now Florrie was trying to tell her that she had been granted what she had asked for. In true fairy godmother fashion, she was telling her her wish had come true. "But not like this!" Bea cried. "I didn't mean this way!"

Florrie closed her eyes and patted Bea's hand as if the effort to speak was too much. As if she knew she was without magic, but it was all right. Bea shouldn't worry.

"It isn't all right!" Bea protested. Helplessly, she stared down at Florrie's hand upon her own, her eyes once again welling with tears. It was all her fault. If she had been a little patient, Florrie wouldn't have wasted herself in this way. If she hadn't lost her temper and brought her here, Florrie wouldn't have spent herself on some old gaffer, no matter how needy he might have been.

"I did this to you," Bea said hoarsely, "and so you are my responsibility, even more so than before. I am your sister, but I will also be your fairy godmother. I will do what I can to make your last days happy. It's time we went home."

She took a deep breath and concentrated. The outlines of the room blurred, then rearranged into the familiar lines of Florrie's bedroom. Florrie lay on her bed. Bea took a granny-squares afghan from the footboard and draped it over her sister. "Sleep now," she said, stooping down to bestow a kiss on her forehead. She paused before going downstairs to look at Florrie from the doorway.

Even though Florrie was in it, the room seemed empty. Florrie's lack of magic made the difference.

Bea felt her throat tighten. There had to be something she could do, even now. "What you need is some company," she said at last. "Company, with a few alterations."

She concentrated, and a mauve haze coalesced on the rug beside Florrie's bed. The cloud solidified, became purple with hints of green. A long snout opened and membranous wings unfurled.

"Bwaaaaah!" Mortimer whined. The room smelled of roses.

The dragon clattered over to Bea, whimpering with relief and delight. He jumped at her chin to bestow dragonish kisses.

"Get down," Bea said, pushing him away. "I didn't call you for me, I called you for her." She pointed at Florrie.

Mortimer cringed and tucked his tail between his legs.

"Oh, don't be such a baby," Bea said. "I'm not going to send you away. Go see Florrie. Stay with her until she wakes up. I'll check on you both in half an hour."

She headed for the kitchen.

A few weeks later, while Bea was in the garden pulling up carrots for dinner, she was divebombed by a fly. She swiped at it once, not paying it much attention.

"ZZZtop that!" the fly complained, landing on a sprig of dill. "Geezzzz! A bug triezz t'do itz job, and what thankzz doez it get?"

Bea stared at the fly.

"That'zz better," it said. "Your sizzter's at it, again."

"What?" Bea sputtered.

"Your sizzter. She'zz doin' it. Magic. Though it ain't the good ztuff she uzed t'do."

Bea ran for the kitchen door.

Florrie was nowhere in sight. Or Mortimer.

"Florrie?" Bea called. A startled "oh!" came from above.

Bea charged up the stairs.

"Florrie?" she asked again, breathing heavily at Florrie's bedroom door.

Florrie was sitting on her bed. Mortimer was at her feet. Both of them looked guilty. Florrie was hiding something in her hands. An egg. But no ordinary egg. This egg was mauve with pink spots. "You did this?" Bea asked incredulously.

Florrie nodded. "It was just a little treat for Mortimer. He looked so hungry. Don't be angry, Bea."

Bea felt a lump swell in her throat. Florrie had been right all along. All the magic she had ever spent was coming back to her. Magic and love.

"I think it's wonderful," Bea said, taking the egg and tossing it to Mortimer who swallowed it in one gulp.

"No more magic?" Florrie asked glumly. "No more tricks?"

"Of course, tricks," Bea said, hugging her. "It's what we were made for, what we do. We're fairy godmothers, after all." ☹

Hopscotch

by Karl Schroeder

illustrated by Steve Goetz

It was raining fish.

Linda gave a whoop of triumph which made him jump. Alan clutched the dashboard and stared. An absurd thought came to him: *lucky we're parked.*

The vista of marshlands outside was drawn in thatches of yellow grass under a perfectly blue sky. Yet, out of the clarity a steady downpour of fish was falling. They were no more than six to eight inches long, silvery and seemingly alive. Three were already flopping on the gold hood of the Honda.

"I don't know my fish," mumbled Alan.

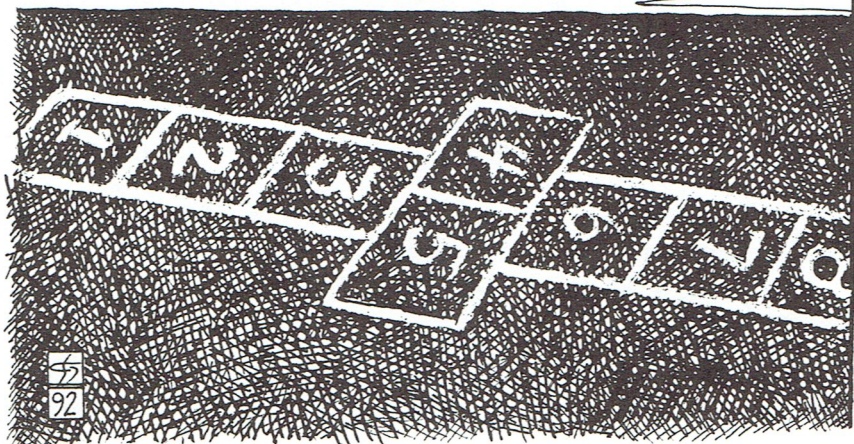
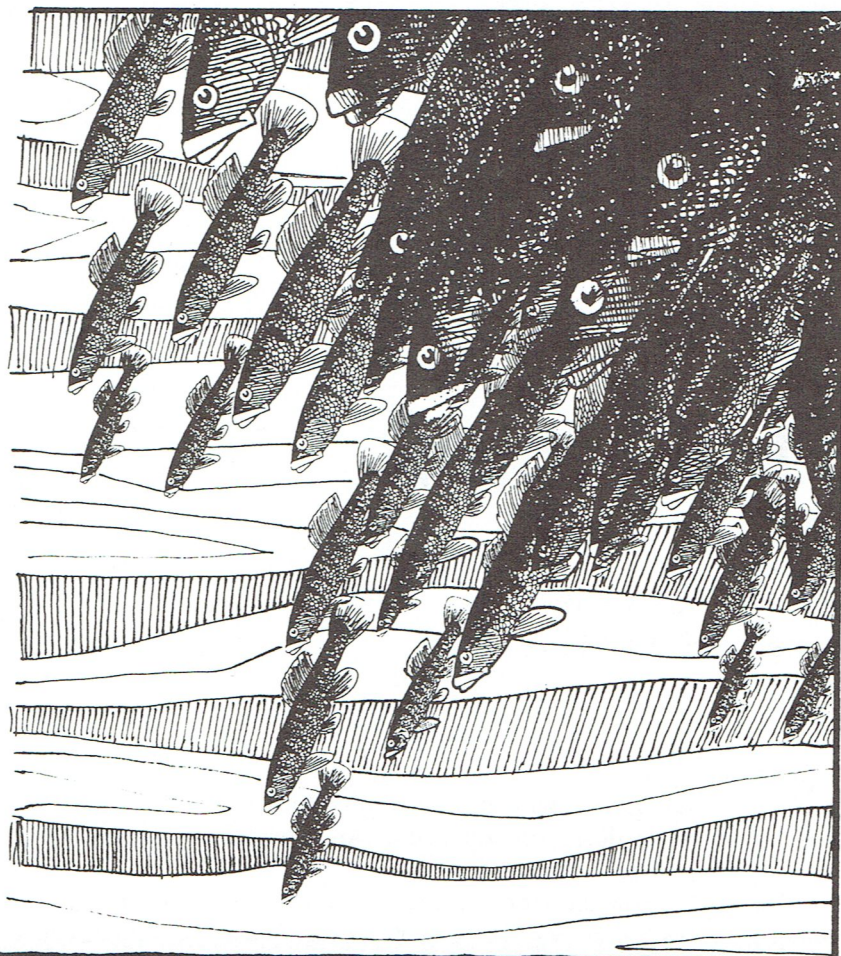
"What?" Linda, bouncing in her seat, turned to him. "Get the camera. It's in the glove compartment under the maps."

". . . what kind they are," he half-finished. He was reaching for the glove compartment when she opened her door.

Alan dragged her back and Linda fell across the stick shift. "Ow! What are you doing?"

"Don't go out there! It's crazy."

"The camera! The camera!" She fought past (knocking him in the chin with her bony shoulder) to get it. He made sure he had a good grip on her arm.



"You're not going out there."

"Let go of me." She hastily rolled down the window, and began snapping shots.

"Lens-cap!"

"Yeah-yeah." She popped it off and kept shooting.

Thud. Some little mackerel or minnow or other left a smear of ocean on the windshield. He watched it slide down over the wiper. "Jesus, this is weird, you know? I mean, *really* weird."

"I told you I expected it. What did you think, I was crazy?" He shrugged and she, not seeing it, looked back. "You like that in women?"

He gave her a shit-eating grin. Then he sprawled against the door with one arm along the seat-back. "You told me. People tell me a lot of stuff I don't believe."

"Good for you." She poked her head out. "It's slackening off." Before he could react she had the door open and hopped out. He followed with a curse.

Man killed by falling fish. "Christ, Linda. Get in the car. You'll be brained or something."

"Wow! Look at this!" She craned back to take a photo straight up. He banged the roof in frustration.

Then he did look around, and the reality of it finally hit him: the marsh flats, surprised birds huddling in the grass, and everywhere fish, flapping, bloody or dead, lying like the sticks of some fortune-telling operation thrown but never read.

He reached out to touch one of the fish which lay on the roof. It was very cold, with the slick feel of decay. He snatched his hand back. For a moment he was very afraid of Linda, as if she'd just *done* this or something, to impress him.

"We're on the trail of it, you know, Alan? The big *it*, the nameless dread everyone blames when something really *off* happens. We got its scent."

"Yeah." He tried to smile. "Like a fish market."

Later when they were driving back to town, his right leg started to hurt badly, mostly in the calf and knee. It took a bit of thought before he realized that, for a few moments when it all started, he had been pushing at the floor of the car with that foot, like he was trying to put on the brakes.

He lay with his face buried in her hair. Linda was asleep. He was on the comfortable side of awake, most likely to join her. He couldn't stop thinking, though.

About fish, for one thing. About the blank spaces on his bank state-

ment where there should be numbers. About the way summer liked to fall into autumn suddenly, just when he was getting used to things. And about Linda, whom he might never get used to.

Linda was always zipping off in ten different directions at once. Always talking, always thinking even during sex. He tended to be passive except when inspired, so together they evened out, he calming her down, she revving him up.

She was terrified of conforming. "If I got a normal job, Al, settled down, had kids . . . I'd disappear. Gone. Fade into the background. There's four billion people in the world, and maybe a couple hundred stick out." So she was on a constant hunt for the *outré*. She'd pore over the headlines of some lurid tabloid and crow when she found a particularly strange title. "Rhinoceros delivers woman's baby in zoo!" or "Apparition of Elvis appears on bingo cards!"

She'd get all excited: "What if it were *true*, Al! Say the universe is more twisted than we thought? No one's ever scientifically studied the really weird. Maybe it's real — like it's the natural equivalent of the Big Lie. Think about it!"

Well, he tried. They had met because they shared a love of practical jokes. He'd concluded lately that his jokes were just an attention-getting device. Her nonconformism went deeper than he could follow. Ultimately he still dreamed of a big house, a fast car and a gorgeous wife. Linda wanted to pop out of what she called the "programmed world" like a bubble, unique. He figured it was because her parents had started out as hippies and ended up as right-wing stock-brokers. That would confuse anybody.

Everything she experienced, she tried to re-experience in a new way, as different from the ordinary. They'd seen some kids playing hopscotch once. "That game is three thousand years old," she said as they walked past. "Each square represents a stage on your way to Egyptian heaven or hell. When you play it you're practicing for the afterlife." Simple as that, then she was pointing out the way the windows of the Faculty Club caught the evening light in rose squares, while he gawked back over his shoulder and the kids posed like storks.

But he was broke now and it was August. Linda had her grants and bursaries; whatever she did she was really good at it. Alan hadn't yet told her he didn't have the money to go back to school. The fact was, he was sponging off her, had been all summer, and he no longer wanted to be an engineer.

Linda had this grant and was doing her Ph.D. on statistical studies of irreproducible phenomena. He'd known in a vague sort of way that it had

to do with UFOs but he didn't believe in them and couldn't believe she would. When she said why didn't he come along for a couple of weeks while she went into the field, he'd jumped at it.

She went to strange places. Never holiday spots. But the fields in Ohio in July were surreal, faced by soft mists with the faint factory smell of distant cities, and they'd made love there to the buzz of insects and sigh of big trees. The Atlantic, in Maine, was unimpressive, slate grey, somehow unbelievable but he was paying more attention to her than it and even it got pretty romantic.

Alan was prepared to admit he was in love, but love was one of those things Linda didn't believe in — it was another "program" — so he didn't know what to say to her. Yes she cared for him, but she thought it was some kind of betrayal to express love in the normal fashion. While she believed they were freer this way, her attitude was coming between them; and his lack of money was also, and then this afternoon the thing with the fish, was like a wedge to pry her away from him

He didn't know where that had come from. Really. What was she up to? He didn't know and if he didn't know the really basic things about her, why she was here, how she could be looking for miracles and finding them, while he drowsed and whittled wood on the hood of the car . . . then, they weren't making it.

"You have to tell me how you're doing this."

In the car again. Hell. And it was dark this time. Linda draped herself over the wheel, staring across a cabbage field at a black line of trees. They had the windows open and a cooler of beer in the back but it didn't help. He was hot.

"Statistics."

"You say we're gonna see a UFO tonight."

She brightened. "If I'm right."

"Like we've graduated from falling fish?"

"Not exactly."

"So explain."

Annoyed, she turned to him, resting her cheek on the wheel. "You never asked before."

"Well, I'm asking now. Getting whacked by a mackerel from space got my attention, okay?"

She chuckled. "Sure. Anyway, I didn't want to talk about it because it was so off the wall and probably wrong.

"The thing is UFOs and things like that've been around since Moses. They're all part of one big stew — UFOs, apparitions of the Virgin Mary,

Bigfoot, poltergeists, even visitations by Liberace. You see, all these things appear in the same places, sometimes at the same time. And, say in 1880, they saw dirigibles, not flying saucers. When *we* build flying saucers, we'll be seeing something different, something new."

"How?"

She squinted at him. "Most people ask *why*, you know. They get obsessed with the details. When a UFO lands and gives somebody a starmap, it sets them off for years. But the guy from the UFO is just as likely to give you a plate of pancakes." He laughed, but she sat up and shook her head. "It happens. Scout's honor. The point is, these things are like TV. All form, no content. All picture with no message to it. Try and figure out the *meaning* as a way of getting at origins, and you're fucked. So I'm doing it differently."

"Shit. You really are chasing the things, aren't you?"

"You saw. Alan, you *saw* the fish." Uneasy, he was silent. She had that look in her eye again. "It's a matter of correlating the data on when and where, and ignoring the details of the individual events," she went on. "So I've been doing that. And I found an equation that matched up the incidences of things. I found a *pattern*."

"Like you know where they're from? Venus, or something?"

"No, that's not what I'm looking for, if it was I wouldn't have got this far. It's the raw pattern I was after. When fish fall in Virginia, something else is going to happen along a sort of line, a space-time line, a measurable distance away. You do the statistics, follow that line through space and time, and, in this case, it winds up here."

"Here. How do you know it's gonna be a UFO?"

"I checked the literature. They've never had fish falls here, but they do see flying saucers now and then."

"Simple as that? No reasons, no clue why?"

"Who cares?" She beamed at him. "That's the beauty of it. Like quantum mechanics, it lets you describe the workings of something without having to deal with the plain impossibility of what you're describing. It's crazy, but it works. A way of getting a handle on all of this without having to believe in the divinity of Liberace. See?"

Fireflies were coming off the fields. He stared at them. "Huh. An equation to catch Elvis? Flying tortillas and little-girl poltergeists? Ha!" He sat back, seeing nothing but the humor in it. He started to laugh.

"Alan!" Oh there she went, pissed off again. But Linda grabbed his arm and pointed, and there, rising behind the black line of trees across the field, was the mother of all fireflies.

And *bang*, she was out of the car again. Him still sitting with his jaw down.

But there, that vision of her as a silhouette, too thin, with this green light like an umbrella over the forest all seen past the rearview, the fly-specked glass and the hood; it froze him up. So she was twenty feet away before he could cut his hand finding the door handle and run after.

Cabbages everywhere. "Get back to the car! Get back to the car, God-damn it! Now!" but she ran away. Had the camera again. Alan went after but wanted to run the other way; he couldn't look at that big light or he'd stop dead. She was trying to take pictures and run at the same time so she tripped over a cabbage. Great. He did a dog-pile fall on her.

"Get off! Get off!" she shrieked.

Alan found the adrenaline rush astonishing. He was terrified and he'd never been before. She elbowed him in the stomach but he didn't even feel it. "You're not going in those trees," he shouted. "Get back!"

They rolled over and over and then she was up and on her way again. He caught snatches of words: "— see it, right up close — got to get close, catch it —"

It was all the places she was going where he couldn't follow. It was the University, and the corners of her mind where he couldn't fit, all in this green thing so maybe he was just as pissed off as scared now. He was jealous of it.

Wild idea. Funny what you thought when terrified.

He caught her again near the woods and they went down. This time they were both silent but he had her good. Now he was aware of a kind of hiss, more silent like the memory of a sound, but definitely there. They both looked up, her head under his. *We must look pretty stupid*, he thought, floundering in cabbage.

The light went out like it was blown out by a wind; it flickered away over the trees in shreds. For a long time they lay in the dirt, not speaking or even moving. Then she said, "You're heavy."



At a diner under a huge neon stetson, she fidgeted over a sundae and he glared at the camera. "Think you got it?" he asked at last.

"I don't know." She was pissed off but trying not to be. She looked at him, resigned. "You didn't have to knock me down."

"Just trying to keep you from getting killed."

"They're not dangerous."

"How the hell do you know? It's like the nineteen fifties: 'a little radiation never hurt nobody!' None of the people who said that are around anymore, are they?"

"Get this straight," she said tightly. "I know what I'm doing. I'm a scientist, and I'm trying to learn objectively about a phenomenon of nature."

"Nature, hell! We were in gunsights back there!"

She shook her head quickly. "No gunsights. No little green men. Oh, yeah, maybe there would have been some. But they're not *real* aliens. They're real like the Virgin Mary and Liberace. You honestly think Elvis lives in a UFO? Come on." She tapped her spoon on the table. "Christ, I need a cigarette."

"Then what was it, if it wasn't aliens?"

"I . . ." She stopped. "Don't know. Don't want to know. That's the point, isn't it? We can't lose our objectivity. Can't go flying off the handle like you did. Like you were Rambo versus the space gooks."

"Come on." But he bit back on the rest of his retort because he remembered so clearly the wild look in her eye when he had her down. Reason gone.

"You ran after it," he accused. "Like it *was* something."

Linda acted casual. "I wanted to get as close as I could. Doesn't that make sense? Have to study it."

"You wanted —" he stopped again. He didn't want to argue; this was where she drew the line, he knew. She would never admit to what she really wanted, and he couldn't think how to stop her wanting it.

But he was sure she'd wanted to be taken up in that flying saucer, if only so she could argue with the aliens.



The old man droned on over the tape recorder. Linda couldn't still be listening and Alan hadn't started out interested anyway. He was too busy thinking about the big two-letter word *us*. There were all these contradictory impulses he wanted to follow, most of them stupid and what she wouldn't laugh at she'd be insulted by.

Hell. He poked at the plastic over the window of this seething hot trailer, and glanced back at the old man, who was telling some incoherent story about hurricanes and walking radio towers. Linda had her eyes on the old guy so Alan's gaze drifted to her and stayed, locked.

A lot of men stayed away from her because she was "too intense." At moments like this she sure looked it, with all her attention going to something he'd given up on already. It was this *focus* that was scary.

It was great when you were the one focussed on, and he'd thought that, fundamentally, it was him. But right now she had her eyes fixed like searchlights on the old man, or rather on what the old man was telling her, and Alan was somewhere in the penumbra of shadow around her.

Originally he'd been able to get her attention back, with tricks and humor. Not any more. In fact, it would feel kind of like cheating to have to be dragging her back with neon signs, instead of letting her go where ever her quick blade of intellect cut.

Later at the car, while Linda unlocked the doors, Alan picked at the weather-stripping on the window then said, "I'm tired."

"Yeah, we're done. Let's go back to the hotel."

"No, I mean tired of all this. This . . . weirdness. What are you trying to do, anyway?"

She paused, continued unlocking and got in. He half-expected her not to unlock his side but she did. She watched him get in.

"You're scared."

"Bullshit."

"That bit with the UFO scared you. Admit it. It's okay to be scared."

"I'm *not* scared." He hopped a bit in the seat, waving his hands to start talking, getting nowhere. "It's — just — " Brainlock set in. He slumped back. "Just . . . not what I signed up for."

She stared out stonily, started the engine. "I think you're doing exactly what you keep telling me not to. You're acting out a script of some kind you've made up. 'Daring researcher makes blinding breakthrough.' You're thinking in headlines. Admit it."

"What?" She was getting heated up. "I *know* what I'm doing. I'm the first person to have a handle on this stuff! I've found the answer, this could be as big as discovering electricity, bigger than going to the moon!"

"Sure." He held up his hands. "Sure. You . . . got the figures. But I think you're turning it into a crusade. I saw you running after the UFO. You've fallen for the mythology, you're not just doing statistics now. You want to *get* the thing behind all this. I mean you believe there is something behind it now, don't you? And you want it."

Linda drove silently for a bit. Then she said, "What do *you* want?"

"I'm just an ordinary guy. I don't want to know what I want. It gets too complicated that way."

Despite herself, she smiled, glanced at him and jiggled her eyebrow. "Every time you say something like that, you guarantee you'll never be 'ordinary.' " She turned her eyes back to the road, pensive.

"What are you going to do next?"

"I know where the next anomaly will appear," she said. "Michigan. Are you coming?"

He thought it over. "No. It's not what I came for."

"Fine. I'll draw you a map, in case you change your mind." Her voice had gotten cold. "You want me to drop you off somewhere?"

"Don't chase it, Linda. That's what everybody else does, you said so yourself."

"You want me to drop you off somewhere?"

He wanted to kill something. Killing off a few beer was no substitute. Alan kicked about his friend Murray's apartment for a couple of days. The map she'd drawn, with her calculated date for the next appearance, lay on the kitchen counter. Murray was not happy about having guests, especially non-paying ones. Alan had two hundred in the bank and no idea where more might come from.

Of course, after a couple of days he decided it had been a stupid idea to run off the way he'd done. She needed him now more than ever. Now that things were happening. But she was such a pig-headed, insensitive bitch sometimes, when she got notions in her head . . . And this latest stuff was way out of his league. He'd drag her away from it if he just knew how. But it was too strange, he couldn't get a handle on it.

She pretended to be so objective. Ha. He'd held her when she cried over the stupidity of life, when they'd talked about what it would be like to win a lottery, just *make it* some day. She always came down on him for being too unimaginative, for plotting out his life and his relationships according to simple models he got from TV and movies. Linda went too far the other way; she thought she could keep it all up in the air, and some treasure would rain down on her someday. Like the fish . . .

Drunk and watching something safe — *Dallas* — he was worrying again about what might be waiting for her in Michigan, feeling futile about being unable to even *know* that, when he remembered something she'd told him. He got up to pace.

She'd said she knew the Ohio thing was going to be a UFO because UFOs had been seen in that area before. Bet she knew the fish would be fish for the same reason. He knew where she did her newspaper-morgue research, had seen her at it. That must be how she knew.

If he just knew what it was going to be, he'd feel better. He kicked the TV off and headed for the door, just as Murray came in.

"Christ, can't you do the dishes for a change?" said Murray.

"When I get back."

"Oh, you're coming back?"

He took the bus down to the newspaper. He hated buses, but they were it from now on. At least till he had a job. He didn't want to get onto that train of thought, better think about something more fun . . . like the fields at night, and the blanket she kept in the back of the Honda.

Shit. It hurt to remember.

They let him into the morgue and he sat down, feeling useless, at a microfiche of headlines. Thousands of them, fading away in a kind of miniature landscape he cruised over. After an hour or two of blue-grey figure and ground, he was getting nowhere, but somehow felt like he was doing something and so kept at it. It was late afternoon, they were going to kick him out soon, but maybe he'd be back tomorrow. Nothing else to do.

Then the headline popped out at him. The place was right. He stared. *Man vanishes before witnesses.*

The Honda sat in the middle of a broken, tilted concrete lot. Some ex-gas station, he figured as he drove up. This was the middle of nowhere. He couldn't see her at first and felt a pulse of anxiety. He got out of his rented car.

Linda had been checking her tires. She stood up from behind the Honda, surprised. For a moment neither of them spoke.

Then she sort of smiled, and tried to frown at the same time. "I was hoping you'd come, you know. And I was afraid you'd show up right now, just when things should start happening."

He went over. They embraced okay, just like before, and he started to relax. "You're crazy to go for this one," he said, and felt her tense. "Sorry. I was just remembering you're crazy all the time, so why should I object."

"Thanks. I'm glad you're here." She broke from the embrace and went to rifle the car for something. She came up with a battered notebook. "The numbers say a disappearance should happen. So I'm going to keep an eye on you."

"It's scary. That's all. I'd feel safer if you gave this one a miss."

"Can't. I won't know if I'm on the wrong track unless I verify this one." She scribbled something in the notebook.

Alan thought about it. "I don't buy that. If somebody vanishes, first off it probably won't be noticeable for days, and second it'll eventually make the papers. So you don't have to be here."

"Sure I do. This is science in action, Al."

"Now that is bullshit. You're hunting again, that's all. You want to actually be there when it happens. You want to catch the gremlins in the act."

She frowned at the notebook, squinted up at him, and shrugged. "So?"

"Aha! You admit it! You've fallen for the whole paranormal schtick after all."

"That's not it at all," she said hotly. "It's something else. It's something bigger than just 'psychic.' So okay, I admit I want to find out what.

Why not? I've taken the first step. I've proven it exists. And this is something I have to do for *me*. Because I know you, and I know you don't believe in any of it. Despite what you've seen. When you left I was thinking all kinds of things, things to say or do to make you stay. But I kept coming back to: *he doesn't believe me. Even after what he's seen.* So I let you go." She put a hand to her forehead quickly like a soap queen, and looked at him under it. "You see what I'm saying?"

Alan opened the driver's door and sat down on the edge. Heat wafted off the concrete. He smelled hot vinyl. She went around and opened the hatch of the Honda, and rooted around in the back of the car. He stared into the hazy distance.

"It's not you I don't believe in," he said slowly. "It's the idea that you're unlocking the secrets of the universe."

"Maybe that's what I'm doing," she said, her voice muffled. "You wouldn't believe it even if it were true. You have to play the role of the 'rational man.' So you're blind to the things I'm seeing. You don't really see me. Maybe I can't see your way either. We're different, Al. I guess we'll never see eye to eye."

Alan stared at his hands, depressed. "Playing roles," he said. "Like by falling in love. And worrying. And things like that?" He shook his head. "We all do that. We can't not do it. You do it too, you're doing it now with your obsession with these stupid incidents. There's only a few ways to live. I have to follow the way my life is laid out. Even if it's been done a million times before. I'm conventional and I think conventionally, I feel conventionally. You have to see that."

The sounds from the back had stopped. He looked over again but didn't see her. "You can't just break out and look down at yourself," he said more loudly, "to see what's really you and what isn't. —That's what you really want to do. Isn't it?"

But she didn't answer, and he stood up and walked around the car, and found she was really gone. Stepped through some door while he'd been looking the other way.

He walked the big square slabs of concrete calling her name, until it started to get dark. And then he sat down on the hood of her Honda and cried. 🐦

Conadian World SF Con

Tim Hammell is Art Solicitor for the Conadian 1994 World SF Con. He asks that artists submit 2 copies of their cartoons or spot illos to him at his home address, 7616 - 86 Ave., Edmonton, AB T6C 1H7, before July 1st.

ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

Inge Israel (*Presto*) writes in both French and English. Her work has been published in many anthologies, broadcast by the CBC, and set to music by Violet Archer.

Susan MacGregor (*No Tricks*) is an Edmonton-based writer who has previously been published in *ON SPEC* ("Mr. Moonlight"). "No Tricks" is dedicated to the Fairy Godmother/Sister/Aunts/Friends in her life — Pauline, Sharon, Wilma, Vic, Mary, Kathleen, Ann, Sue, Cathy, Brenda, and Jena, all of whom wield their own brand of magic and love.

Alice Major (*Action at a distance*) won Alberta Culture's 4th Write for Youth Competition for *The Chinese Mirror*, and has published poetry and short fiction.

J. Nelson (*Once Upon a Primetime*) lives in Victoria in a house of great writers who occasionally let him do their dishes.

David Nickle (*The Killing Way*) lives in Toronto, where he works as a political reporter for *The North York Mirror*, a suburban community newspaper. He is currently finishing his first novel, and "The Killing Way" is his first fiction sale.

Karl Schroeder (*Hopscotch*) is from Manitoba, but lives in Toronto. He's in his late twenties, and divides his time between writing, teaching, consulting, raiding the data nets, and café life.

Hugh Spencer (*Icarus Down/Bear Rising*) works with a museum consulting firm in Toronto. His thesis, *Transcendental Engineers*, is due out from U of T press this year.

Steve Stanton (*A Perfect Match*) is the publisher of Skysong Press and managing editor of *Dreams & Visions*, a literary quarterly. His articles and short stories have appeared in numerous publications in Canada, U.S.A. and Australia.

ABOUT OUR ARTISTS

Tim Hammell (*Cover* and *No Tricks*) is now our ex-art director (see his goodbye on page 3). He wants to thank all the artists who made his job easier over the last few years.

Robert Boerboom (*Once Upon a Primetime*) was born in Brantford, Ontario, and studied commercial art at O.C.A. in Toronto. He has exhibited his work in Brantford, Waterloo, Toronto, and Montreal. Robert currently works as a freelance illustrator in Montreal.

(Continued on page 82)

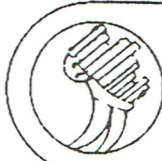
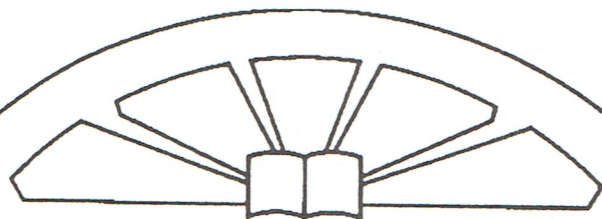
ABOUT OUR ARTISTS continued from page 81

Nadra Chapman (*Icarus Down/Bear Rising*) tries her hand at dramatic illustration for her second appearance in *ON SPEC*. She is still freelancing in Toronto.

Steve Goetz (*Hopscotch*) returns to our pages after too long an absence. He has gone back to school for a theatre technician course and will be applying for an internship at Industrial Light & Magic.

Mike Jackson (*The Killing Way*) is a Vancouver-based illustrator making his first appearance in *ON SPEC*. He has done art for *Horizons SF*, *Traveller's Digest*, *Eurosource Book* and other gaming books.

Murray Lindsay (*A Perfect Match*) is a new artist to *ON SPEC*. A freelancer in Calgary, he has sold work across Western Canada and in Britain and New York. 📖



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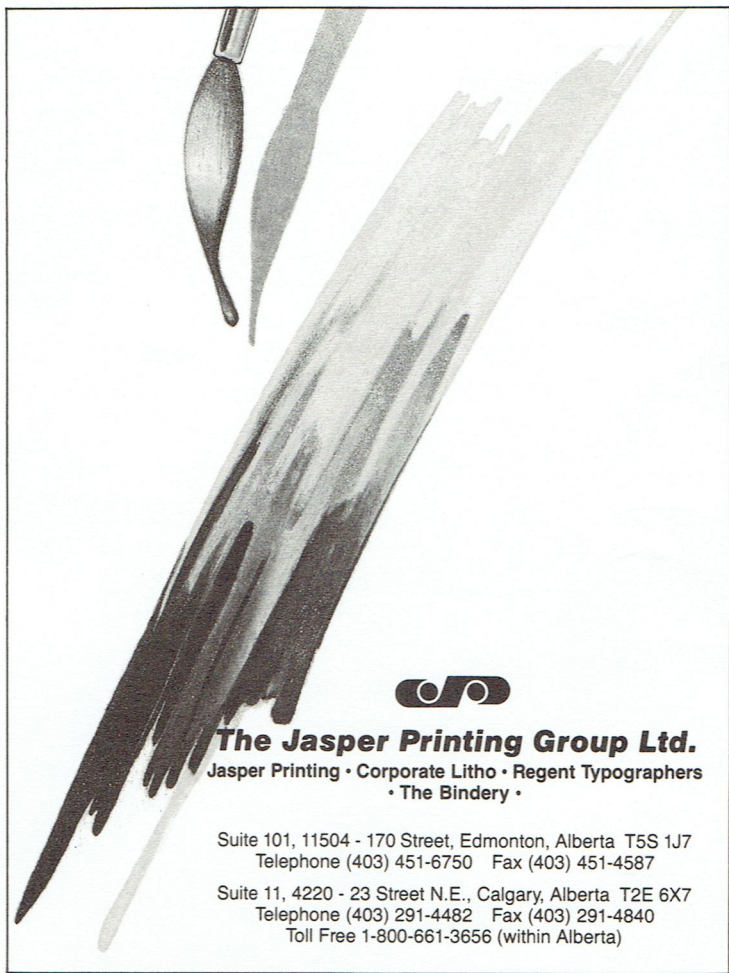
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