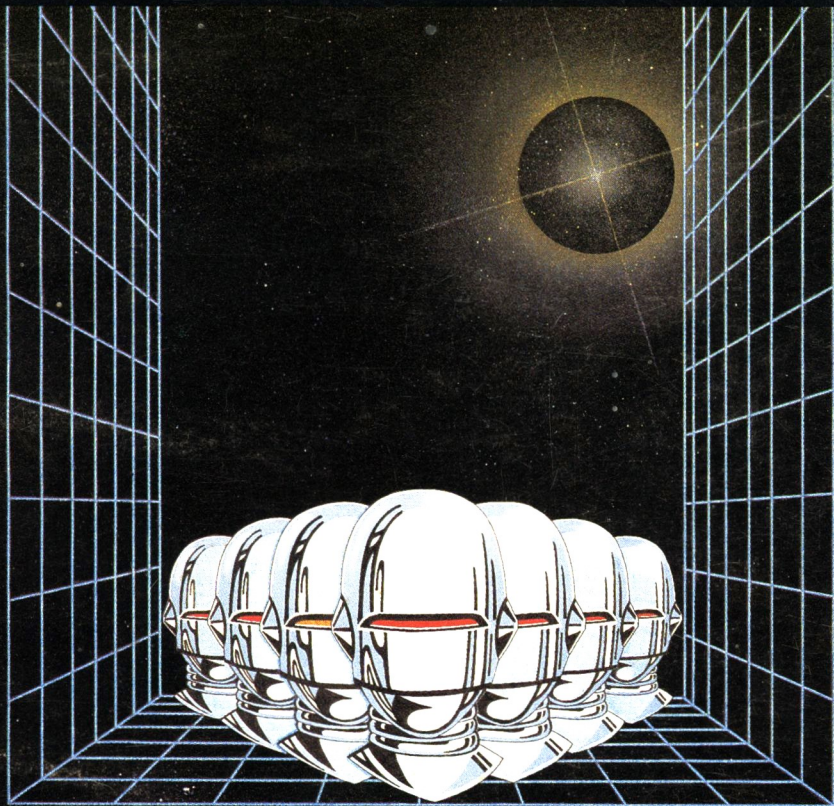


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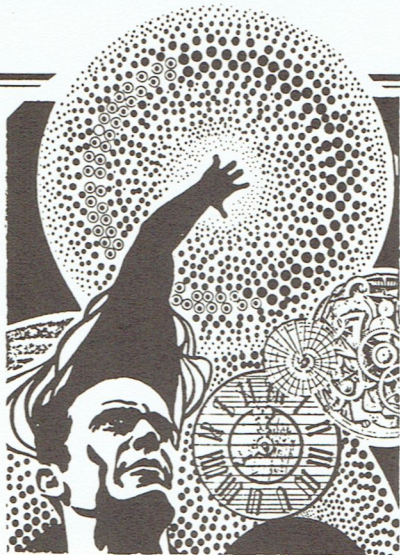
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THIS ISSUE

by Jena Snyder

My fellow editors—Barry Hammond, Susan MacGregor, Hazel Sangster, and Diane L. Walton—join me in welcoming *ON SPEC*'s new art director, LYNNE TAYLOR FAHNESTALK, who is probably wondering what ever possessed her to get in with a crazy bunch like us. When TIM HAMMELL decided to step down as art director, Lynne was a natural and more than capable choice to take over.

Winner of the 1991 Aurora Award for artistic achievement, Lynne has participated in SF conventions and illustrated professionally for over twelve years. She has served as art director for a printing firm and two national magazines in the US, and was co-owner of Northwest Fine Art Press for five years. Her artwork has appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, *Dragon* and *Dungeon Magazines*, *Pulphouse Fiction Magazine*, *Science Fiction Review*, *Fantasy Tales*, and, of course, *ON SPEC*.

Looking to the future, we're pleased to announce we're going quarterly in 1993, beginning with our special "OVER THE EDGE" issue in the spring. We'll be offering Letters to the Editors (and welcome yours!), as well as guest features such as "Editorial Shoes" by Lorna Toolis and Michael Skeet, the editors of *Tesseract's*⁴ (see page 6), and more from the inimitable Mr. Science (see "Ask Mr. Science," page 75. •

ON SPEC

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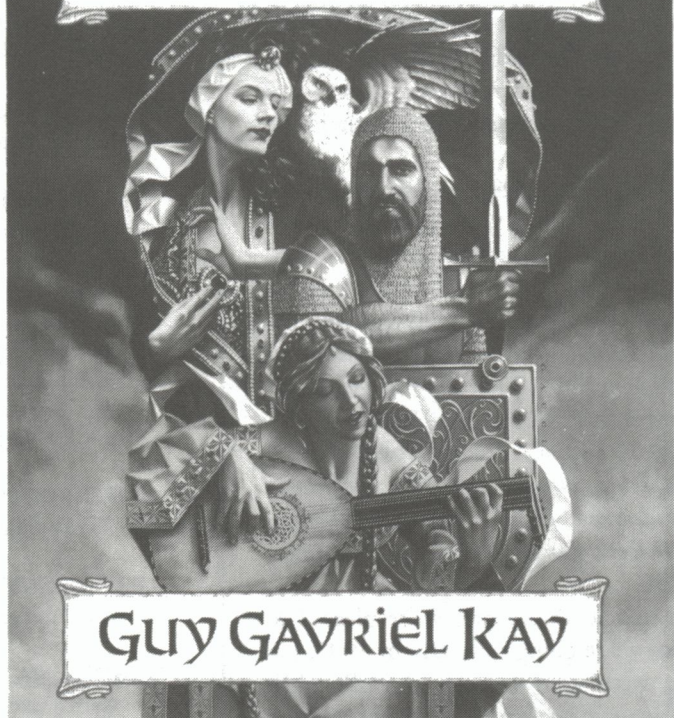
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"Until the sun falls and the moons die..."

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THE RECORD — Editorial Shoes

by Lorna Toolis & Michael Skeet, Editors of *Tesseract*⁴

We have a confession to make. We have, from time to time, allowed ourselves to become vexed with the inexplicable inability of science fiction editors to respond to submissions with suitable dispatch. We have even been known to utter the occasional word of disrespect concerning the possible non-human origin of said editorial persons. Nothing really scabrous, you understand—the sort of thing you're likely to hear from the better class of stevedore.

This is a habit in which we will never, ever again indulge, cross our hearts and hope to die. And all it took to achieve this new degree of enlightenment was to become editors ourselves, even for the brief (in the geologic sense) period involved in editing one of the *Tesseract* anthologies from Beach Holme Press.

Former editors of the *Tesseract* series comprise one of the most exclusive clubs on the face of the planet: there are at this point only five of them. By our good fortune, all of them are friends of ours—or at least they seem to be. Oddly enough, when we agreed to take on the job of editing the fourth *Tesseract* anthology, none of these good people came forward with advice, or even veiled suggestions. We wondered at the time why this was so.

We're no longer curious, and for much the same reason we're now so sweet-tempered about the editor-as-species. Had they told us what editing is really like, we likely would have run screaming in the other direction when Guy Chadsey approached us with the contracts. Either that, or we'd have refused to believe that anything could be that . . . interesting. (As an aside: have you ever wondered why "anthology editor" is never one of those careers touted by the kinds of correspondence schools that advertise on matchbooks? You're about to find out.)

This is not to suggest that it wasn't an absolute unmitigated joy to read all 300-odd (some very odd) manuscript submissions. But we discovered almost from the beginning that there's more to editing an anthology than just tossing stories into the air and then publishing the ones that fall last, in the reverse order of their falling.

There's the whole shape of the anthology to consider, for example. When you agree to edit any project, you have to ask yourself why you are doing this. Without a focus, the project will lurch from side to side like Frankenstein's monster; and, like that creature, it will prove to be an error in judgement on the part of the creator. It is important to get it right; too much time is invested

in an anthology to make a muddle.

It seemed redundant to us to have yet another anthology that exhibited the diverse regional nature of Canadian writing. We also felt that Canadian collections have a tendency to err on the sensitive side, overlooking any humorous stories. Of course, science fiction as a whole tends to take itself very seriously even when it isn't Canadian. We thought we would like to provide some balance in this area.

So we'd achieved our first task, and it wasn't that hard: we'd decided we wanted an anthology full of well-written, entertaining stories. We weren't collecting stories on any particular theme; we had no axe to grind other than the enjoyment of the readers. There are X many ways to tell a tribal lay, says Kipling, and all of them are right. All of them are right, that is, so long as the reader enjoys the tale. An acute understanding of this rule explains the continuing popularity of genre fiction.

Our purpose firmly set in our minds, we opened the first box . . . and found: several dead rats? Well, not literally, perhaps, but some of the manuscripts were of a distinctly deceased-rodent-like nature. Reading the first batch of submissions was a learning experience, as people used to say of going to jail in the 1960s. The lesson: original anthologies require wading through large numbers of manuscripts by would-be writers.

We were not expecting this to be a problem. Even operating with malice toward none, it must be admitted that not all manuscripts submitted to a project like *Tesseracts* are going to be publishable. We had been assured by those editors to whom we turned for mentorly advice that the not-quite-up-to-it stories would identify themselves fairly quickly. Unfortunately, we had, by virtue of our good intentions, painted ourselves into something of a corner. We had decided to read *all* of the manuscripts *in their entirety*, and to then critique them to the best of our ability. The chronic complaint of the new writer is the form letter containing a vaguely worded paragraph which upon deciphering is found to mean that the editor is not buying your story, plus (by way of half-hearted compensation for the rejection) a check-list of reasons why your story isn't up to snuff. ("Pick one excuse from Column A and one from Column B; with six you get advised to take up lawn maintenance instead of writing.") Invariably, these reasons are about as relevant to the story in question as the aphorisms found in fortune cookies are germane to the reader's real life. Having received a few of these in his time, Michael was determined to do this to none of the writers submitting to *Tesseracts*. Oh, well. It was a noble intent, anyway.

Right off the bat, other editors were flabbergasted at our naiveté. Judith Merrill assured us that no professional editor would dream of doing such a

thing. A.J. Budrys assured us that he could be put off a story (and be correct in his reading) by the first sentence, let alone the first paragraph. We were strongly advised to save ourselves the pain of doing all that reading. Did we follow that advice?

Let's just say that some people learn from the experience of others; others learn the hard way. Guess where we fit on the curve.

We were sufficiently worried about our inexperience that we decided to spend extra time reading the entire manuscript rather than miss a good story that merely had a weak opening that could probably be fixed. Little did we know . . .

The office and living room in our typical Toronto home (which is to say our glorified closet-with-bath) began to fill up with stacks of manuscripts, marked "Critiqued-His" and "Critiqued-Hers"; occasionally, "Critiqued-Both." Our cats took to lounging between these stacks, resting their chins on the piles.

As another aside here, we'd both like to doff our metaphorical caps to the person who invented Post-It notes for the 3-M company. These stickies are a great thing (Lorna's favourites have dancing penguins on them). We should probably be ashamed at the fact that we were quickly able to reduce the complexities of somebody's painfully sweated-over manuscript to a couple of pithy sentences on yellow paper stuck to the title page. We should, we suppose, but we aren't. One thing we've learned about editing: you soon become hardened to the cruel realities of existence.

Incidentally, Lorna found the best place for reading manuscripts was in the bath, where there was no conceivable distraction. One simply sits in the middle of the rapidly cooling water, calling off particularly good or bad bits down the hall to the other editor, who is meanwhile reading another stack of manuscripts while lying on the bed.

We can hear hordes of infuriated readers mumbling, "Well, how long can it take you to read a manuscript, anyway? Times three hundred and there you go! Why the infernal delay in responding? That's not so hard, is it?"

Well, yes, it is. When assessing the workload, we had factored it at our standard reading speed, then doubled the estimated time required, to allow for critiquing. What we had missed because we didn't understand was the emotional exhaustion which mounts up steadily when reading one's way through an apparently never-ending stack of stories, exhaustion that breeds further exhaustion until you feel that if you read one more manuscript your mind will bleed, your eyes will go blind! At this stage we found ourselves forced to put the manuscripts aside for a while. We found ourselves eyeing them warily, picking our way every day past stacks that grew steadily more accusing, until

finally the guilt of not reading became worse than the exhaustion induced by another 50 manuscripts or so, and we started reading again.

Yet another aside here, and a bit of advice to would-be writers: Submitting more than one manuscript is unlikely to be productive. If the editor likes your writing, your best piece—which is of course what you have submitted—will be an immediate hit. If the editor did not care for your best piece, sending in multitudinous other submissions is unlikely to produce any responses, other than derision, exhaustion, and hostility.

Another bit of advice: Do not attach cover letters longer than your story. The editor does not want to know you as a person, not until after the book is done and s/he's had a stiff drink and a bit of a lie-down, at any rate. The editor wants to read your story and toss it in the . . . never mind. We're obviously still in shock here. But back to our advice: Both of the above situations happened with *Tesseracts*⁴, and far more frequently than they should have. Our advice, then, boiled down to its essence: Learn proper submission style, and follow it rigorously. Any deviation from the standard style puts your story on a fast track to the nearest recycling project. Before taking on the project, we would have been surprised at how quickly an editor tires of looking at, much less trying to read, improperly prepared manuscripts, or excessive quantities of manuscripts from the same writer. We would have been surprised before; now we're lean, mean editing machines, and nothing surprises us anymore. We hope.

Eventually, the story piles started to shift character. The piles changed from "Critiqued" to "Definitely Yes," "Definitely NOT" and "Maybe." The "Yes" pile was always the smallest; the "No" pile the largest. In the middle was a no-man's land, where lightning did not strike, but where the stories were still too good to be discarded. This pile was weighed against the contents of the other boxes of manuscripts as they were shipped from the publishers. This pile is where the real work of the anthology lay. And here is where our discussion of this work will, with your permission, become a bit more serious for a moment. (Just a bit; we promise.)

Tesseracts is traditionally co-edited, to allow for a certain disparity in taste between editors. One editor may loathe stories written in dialect; the other may not consider this a problem. These are the "negotiable" stories, as in, "I will reluctantly cope with that slick piece that you like if you will give my choice a chance at the 'maybe' pile."

Why is one story selected, another passed over? Before we answer that question, we feel honour-bound to comment on the generally high quality of the submissions. We know we've been smart-alecky in this piece; our mothers

despair of ever making us presentable. But the fact is that the notorious Sturgeon's law ("90% of everything is s**t") took a pounding here. While the "No" pile may have, by virtue of the law of the jungle, been the largest, we found ourselves sweating as our deadline approached, with simply too many good stories to choose from and not enough space in the anthology. This is a problem that every *Tesseracts* editor has had to deal with, and it's one we're confident some other suckers (sorry; we mean "noble volunteers") are going to have to deal with in future.

As to how we made our choices: this is a simple question whose answer is actually revealed in layers, not unlike the peeling of an onion. The outer layer is the basic one of grammar and plot. Blessedly few stories failed in this regard, though we did find a few whose plots involved the (we hope unintentional) re-invention of the wheel. (We actually received one story whose first line was word-for-word identical with one of the classics of the '40s.)

Most of the stories we rejected were for the most basic of reasons: they began too soon or ended too late. We have been led to the conclusion that prolonged beginnings are the most common mistake writers make. This explains the advice of more experienced editors: Read the first three pages; if you are still interested, read the last three pages; if you are *still* interested, read the middle three pages; if the story is still hanging in there after all of this, then—and only then—consider reading the entire story. It's unfortunate but true: You usually *can* tell within a few paragraphs whether a story is going to work.

It is a truism that science fiction reflects the concerns of the culture that produced it. Our story stacks contained a lot of "after the eco-disaster" stories, a tiring number of cyber-vampires, and a sad number of "the men are all dead and we are very happy now" submissions. A little of this sort of thing goes a long way, especially if the editors don't like that kind of story. Some of the stories we sent back were perfectly publishable—by someone other than us. (We're the editors; we're *allowed* to pick what we want!)

As time passed and the stacks were winnowed down, the anthology began to take shape. A certain similarity in tone had developed by this time, reflecting the editorial taste we just told you about. For instance, this particular *Tesseracts* is going to be notably short of gross-out-the-middle-class horror stories because such stories bore both the editors.

At this point, frantic calculations began to take place. We'd been told in no uncertain terms that our anthology was not to exceed in length the previous book in the *Tesseracts* series. (We're sure this injunction has been delivered to every set of editors since Judith Merrill; likewise, we're sure it's been violated by everyone.) We drew up lists of stories—fine so far—and word-counts—oh no!

We found ourselves several tens of thousands of words over the limit, with more worthwhile material to publish than the most benign publisher would even begin to consider.

With so much good stuff and so little space in which to print it, we became crazed with desperation. All of the stories that required even minor modifications were rejected out of hand. Still there were more good stories than there was room for. Long brooding silences filled our evenings as we conspicuously ignored the still-too-large "Yes" stack. From silence we would suddenly lurch to frantic reviews of everything already accepted. The "Maybe" pile endured the literary equivalent of being flayed alive until it was down to a dozen or so stories that we didn't want to part with—and couldn't conceivably find room for.

Accepted stories were reviewed for any kind of flaw at all, now a hanging offence. Previously acceptable stories were discarded as not fitting in with the shape of the anthology; stories where one of the editors had a minor reservation were ruthlessly sacrificed. Still not enough room.

Frantic meetings with the publisher followed, where all concerned haggled, camel-trader-in-the-bazaar style for another 10,000 words. We promised to write a very short introduction and afterword. We offered to forgo the introduction and afterword entirely if it meant getting another story in. After nearly six months of complaining about this horrible job that no lunatic in or out of his/her right mind would take, we had suddenly come to the realization that we were in fact very fond of this creature in whose birth we have taken a part. We each found the other secretly admitting to having enjoyed the process. A little, anyway.

Until, that is, we contemplated meeting the writers whose perfectly good work we have callously rejected.

Postscript: When the courier came to pick up the final shipment of manuscripts back to Victoria he asked how much the contents of the box were worth. Lorna froze and met his eyes with all the sincerity (not to mention force of character) she could muster. "I am sending these by courier so the issue will not arise," she said. "You won't lose them, will you?"

"Yes, but what are the contents worth?" he asked, not unreasonably.

"I don't know. They're original manuscripts submitted to an anthology. Financial value would be hard to assess."

"Oh, manuscripts," he said, immediately comprehending. He cheerfully ticked the NO VALUE box and shoved off into the sunset. •



Crossroads

by Wesley Herbert

illustrated by Mike Jackson

Scatter the highway.
The world all went to hell.

The sand grows over the black asphalt like spider webs. When I drive over it I crush the highway. Sand melts under the tires, gets kicked up in the air behind my tail fins. The skin on my left arm wants to shed, a snake on a rock in the summertime. I've left it hooked out the window too long.

Kat's asleep in the front seat, seen sideways out of the corner of my eye. The faded blue-jeans with too many holes. Yellow fingers of hair occasionally slip into a fast-forward twitch across one cheek. One strand looks for the pink tongue inside her mouth, which is half open, ready for the kiss a lover would give. Lips have no makeup but they're red. I want to kiss her, or laugh.

I smile and keep driving. It's a stretch but I reach over and take the cigarette case from the dash. It's hot from being in the window. I light one of Kat's herbal cigs with the tarnished Zippo lighter. My thumbnail follows the words on it: *Live to Ride, Ride to Live*. It and the case get left on the seat beside

me. The landscape beyond the window bends away. One shadow by the side of the road gets bigger, grows into the rotting skull of a car: headlight sockets dull and empty, gap-toothed smile of a broken grille.

Over the baffle of the wind through the open windows, Jezzy's small voice tells half the words of the song she's mimicking. She'd taken my Walkman and Kat's card deck in the morning, trying to lay out the tarot and listen to my music alone in the big back seat. In her way, she wants to understand how both work. Jez is nineteen today. An imitation of me.

The derelict car slides by, an arrow in the passenger door, a long red scrawl of spray paint written on it.

"REPENT"

Goddamn Christian fundamentalist crazies.

You see everything on Route 66.

That's why we're here.

The interstate took most of the traffic from old 66. Somebody had left the gas station from the fifties. It had the lines of a Flash Gordon ray-gun emplacement. Pitted chrome and radiating fins in faded red paint would fit on the cover of an old *Amazing Stories* fanzine. The spaceman with his neutron pistol would be jet-packing over the building against the eerie backdrop of foreign stars. Unfamiliar planets with green and blue rings hover menacingly close. The '62 Mercury is a small starship drydocked to fill up its tank on Premium Leaded Hydrogen.

I get out, stretch every muscle. From my fingers down to my ankles. There's a middle-aged guy in greasy jeans near the giant ray-gun. I can smell the hot beans in the plate settled on his lap.

"Fill her up yourself. If you don't mind," he adds the last like an apology.

He's got the brittle. Crystal brittle. Not as bad as ones who went over the day the earth stood still, but if I hit him hard, he'd shatter. I ruffle at the smell of gasoline, put the nozzle in the tank's mouth anyway. Bits of sand give me eyelash kisses against the skin of my arms, my face. I buy a Coke with some change and lint from my pockets. The sun is getting real low, taking the New Moon with it; both burn in red frost. I pay for the gas.

Kat's in the driver's seat, fiddling with the radio. Slide guitars sing in and out over the speakers. Jez has her elbows spread on the front seat headrest. The headphones around her neck a fixture of junk jewelry.

"*Hola!* Kursey, can I have some?" Jez sticks a skinny arm out to take the can.

"Where are we now?" Kat looks back over her shoulder.

"Bout an hour into Arizona. You drivin' now?"

She nods, experimentally holding her hair back in one hand.

"It's close now."

"It?" I sit down to eye level, my boots making gravel noises. "You gonna tell me before we get there?"

Jeze gives me back the pop can, her white arm snakes back inside. She takes a red elastic spread around three fingers like a cat's cradle to tie up Kat's hair. Huh, Kat's cradle. I wait for an answer.

Kat looks out the windscreen, at the sun.

"You should get in the car," she says, "Don't worry, we won't be there tonight."

I have heard this before, Kat evading questions, I know I'll get no answers. I get in the car. Have a drink. Kat is watching the long muscles in my throat work. Gulp, gulp. Maybe she doesn't know how much I see and hear. I reconsider. She knows.

"How long does this desert go on?" I settle into the same corner Kat had slept in.

"You've seen the map, you know." Kat shrugs.

"No deserts in Panama," I smile, a row of even teeth. I am missing only one.

My time is coming.

Panama was a while ago.

My eyes pop open. Jim Morrison. The luminescent dash leaves glow trails burned across my vision till I adjust. I push out from the shirt I'm sleeping under. Lots of big noise. Kat bobs her head, green light catching on her chin, her lashes, her ears that are a bit too long, a bit too sharp towards the end. Outside it's black, only I can see the Old Moon putting a gilt edge on the highway. I yawn from my jaws to my toes. The radio.

"Katja, what the hell is this?" Jezzy complains. She was sleeping too.

"Hey, it's the Doors," Kat grins, "You don't get music like this anymore."

The elaborate prophecies of Morrison keep me awake until my eyes get heavy. My chin hits my chest and I close them.

I go back to sleep.

In the morning we'll be at the crossroads.

•

I wake up in a different landscape, my eyes lidded down with sleep. The car rests on an angle, on the soft shoulder of the gravel road. Jez and Kat are gone, the yellow light bulb of the rising sun has woken me. I get dressed in the front seat, jeans and my leather jacket, open the doors and rest my toes on cold, prickly gravel. I stomp my feet into my cowboy boots. The boots are more worn and scarred than the jacket, but younger. The creases around the ankles are the deep lines of an old man's face.

We aren't in the sun-bleached land of the cold desert; we drove all night. There are shaggy heads of trees and gently lapping waves of long-stalked grain. Farmers' country. Farmers have the earth in their veins like chocolate syrup. When the Goddess came back, farmers just met an old friend. I think. Think twice. I open the glove compartment, scatter a lot of odds and ends. The plastic gun is near the back. I pull it out, a cool heaviness under my fingers. A leather thong has been wrapped around the trigger guard, at the end is a small ebony cat. I remember it now, bought from a half-Indian jewelry maker in Utah. I hold it up to the sun and squint with one eye to make out black on black nose and ears. Its lines are unintentionally Egyptian. Bast. The goddess of cats. I smile; it creeps up on one corner of my mouth, breaks my whole face into a grin. I unwind the thong and put it around my neck. The automatic I leave sticking out of the belt of my jeans at the spine. Clint Eastwood. Bang, bang!

I have never fired this gun.
Kat and Jezzy came back.

We walk up the road. The dust seems cleaner in the new morning light. I maneuver a thick slice of fresh bread, warm butter and honey running between my knuckles. The bread is good enough just to smell. I wish I had a small room to set the bread down where I could digest my breakfast nasally. I have apples in my pockets, a glass bottle of milk tucked cold and smooth under one arm.

"This farmer was generous," I say.

"Si, generous," Kat mimics me, "He did not even have a gun." She gives me a harsh sideways look, a disappointed mother.

I give my best disarming smile.

"Not everyone respects your talents. I like to be careful." I am remembering the Christian graffiti of yesterday. "What happened anyway?"

"He had bad *sidhe* in his garden patch."

I consider. "It couldn't be rabbits?"

"No, it's *sidhe*," she says.

Jezy is licking a thumb. "What's *sidhe*?"

"Pixies," Kat explains, "Manitou, Brownies, Tengu, Faeries, Elves. Mischievous spirits. I made a stone altar and left bread and cider to the Goddess—"

"You said Brigid and Demeter before," Jezy interrupts again.

"They're all Mother Earth," Kat says, maybe annoyed. "I marked the soil so the spirits would play somewhere else."

Jezy is younger today, her mid-teens. Perched on the end of her nose, the matte-black sunglasses are too big around her eyes. Her clothes all fit like a girl in her mother's old dress. She is blonde with a smooth round face. Different from yesterday's long black hair. She smears honey out of the corner of her mouth with one hand. I wonder what her real age is. At times, like now, she is almost a child. I imagine her as one of the cherubs from an old fabric softener commercial. I can't make it last long. Perhaps Kat sees her true nature, as she does all others. Old enough for Kat to love, anyway.

I see where we are walking. Nothing in the sky moves. Hot wind pulls up orange soil and sings it past us. It's at my back, around the gun, in the fine hairs at the nape of my neck. It kicks up its heels, dust-devils waltz into the middle of the road. Katja kneels to open her bag in a movement so gentle I don't notice until she is standing again. She's in the centre of the two dirt roads, they rise to meet each other. A square post leans outwards in age. I guess it used to have some sign. I feel a reluctance to follow Kat, a fear of being run down by traffic that is hidden behind the next bush. It is the crossroads speaking. Someone with no ears could hear it.

Kat stops and holds out her arms palms up, tan with white on the insides. I reach to my neck, trickle the wood cat into her left hand. In her right, Jezy puts a green braid of three side road daisies. Kat draws a circle around herself with one bare foot. Inside her protection, she dangles a small iron arrow formerly of a weather vane. It's held by the center, a line of frayed leather and coloured string. Wound up in her fist with the narrow line are the cat and flowers. A true fey couldn't hold so much iron, but Kat wasn't born in Eire of a Sidhe princess. She was suckled on LSD and the Sex Pistols; television and the greenhouse effect; Starhawk and LeGuin. Magic doesn't work the same way now as it did for Taliesin.

Kat stands alone, says the words. The arrow spins on its tether. At places, iron finds magic like true north. It points at right angles to the wind. It's an arrow pointing down the road.

•

We follow the arrow.
It is not the last crossroads.

Seven kids squat around dice and a circle gouged in the concrete. My eyes swing over once, count. Seven. They are like children in the feria, in rags of denim and cotton T-shirts. More and more of those kids in Wondrous America than ever used to be; not so much the difference between rich and poor, but between lost souls and survivors. The Chicago slum smell of boiling laundry, roast chicken from a nearby restaurant, rotten garbage. I sit on the corner of the car fender, one tone darker in the shade. One leg swings, the heel of my boot spurring the steel flank. The kids pick up the idle movement, one cat watching another cat twitching tail. My hands move over the pistol I have. Gunmetal green plastic a quick toy in my fingers. I look at it. Smile. I rub it with a red bandanna. It has *Glock-17* stamped in the side. A brand name. A dead Columbian had it when it came to me. One hand had been sawed off, something I hadn't seen before. With the guerrillas in El Salvador, I found out. He'd had a briefcase manacled to his arm. What was in it was much more expensive than the gun. I eject each bullet by hand, heavy lead pills drop into my palm. It can hold seventeen. I count. Only eleven. There are always eleven.

One of the kids is watching the gun. I reload it. They bob and cluck over the dice. Jezy sits beside them, younger again today. Her bare knees are up almost to her shoulders. The dice scatter and kick. Nobody has touched them. Manna Ferals, the first to be born fey, grew up with it. I hear the *chick chock* of big plastic dice and Jezy betting odds. Something hot presses between my shoulders, like someone staring at me. This city stabs at me. The bricks and steel trees supporting floor upon floor are all glass inside. The brittle. The cities went bad, science atrophied, technology became a shrivelled apple. I hate the city. I can feel the casket closing.

Kat has a brown paper bag open on the hood. The bag is so crumpled it's soft. One of the kids, pre-pubescently scrawny, is rolling a peyote bud across the palm of his chalky hand. Kat is selling to keep us rolling. The air is cool under the shelf of the parking garage. The blacks of my eyes sink and widen quicker than most. Quick as the old man.

He comes in with a gun waving. In my eye he's pushing through amber. His arm is still frames of a movie; advance, click, advance one more. Slow. Spit rolls out of his scraggly mouth, slow. Kat is speaking, words she hasn't taught me before. His hands flare up like matchheads. His feet stop running under him. The skid of steel when his gun hits the ground. The hoots of the kids bouncing off the ceiling, out into the heat, and they're all over him. They pin

his old, but whole, hands to the ground. White magic. Kat's illusion.

"Bastard children," he screams out of syphillated lips. "Satan's spawn risen again from hell! The end is near, abominations. God shall not permit your presence in heaven or earth. You are doubly damned, you who worship not the one True God!" He is sweating in fanaticism, or fever. Eyes rove in his head, searching for the bolt of lightning to strike us down. "The end of the world is nigh," his voice scrawls out.

"No, old man." Jezzy is almost kneeling on his chest, a sea of laughing Ferals around her, "It's only just begun."

Relic of the old world.

They told us about the movie.

I watch. The movie is old, a midnight show, but the lot is full. A tent and RV city around the big screen. It's funny, the things that came back. When their brave new world died, people turned to the icons of the past. Drive-ins, for instance. I pick at a hot dog Jez left on the dash and watch the film. It is a story of humanity and God and destiny. Where did we come from? Where are we going? How long have we got? The questions of the crossroads.

From where I sit on the dash, I have a perfect view of the movie. My eyes slit open wide. I take it all in. Jez is straddled on Katja in the back seat, both hands cupped around the small, perfect breasts of her lover. Jez's features do a slow photo-dissolve. For a moment she is all races and none. She changes. Her nose is shorter, broader, her cheek bones delicate and sculpted, hair fuller and more yellow; the morph extends along to the tips of her ears, longer, more angular, pointed. Change ripples down from her shoulders. The rest of her body becomes longer and curved, her breasts the same roundness as Kat's.

Katja opens her eyes and looks into a mirror of herself. Jez feels for the first time how far she's given over to her lovemaking. She grins sheepishly.

"Sorry, I wasn't concentrating."

Katja, the true Kat, laughs. Slow at first, but she lets herself into it until tears are rolling down her cheeks. Jezzy starts too, in the same voice. That last is too much for me. I jump to the car seat and out the open window. Outside, nobody notices me, a dark-haired cat on darker ground. I wait under a nearby car, cool asphalt under padded feet. My ears reel back and I can hear Jezzy's voice.

"Hey, watch this!"

Both girls howl in laughter that even humans could hear this far away.

It's late. The movie is almost over and I can hear the rain coming. I have roamed too far, to the concessions stand. I make the trip back fast. In the day I can see from the height of a six-foot tower. By night the movie lot is an endless range of hills. I wear no talismans and have no voice to petition the wind. Hold a little longer, I say.

The rain is streaming down. I think the Trickster is sitting on the clouds with a garden hose, pissing on my head. I take pride in my cat-ness. I cut a nice figure, even among cats, but my fur has turned on me. I walk the rest of the way to the car. Even whiskers droop with water. The windows traditionally steamed up, I can find no way in. I parade along the trunk of the car with my pitiful routine. One step, raise a paw and shake it. Two steps, then shiver. I check with the corner of my ear. They talk softly to each other inside; they haven't noticed. The hell with this.

I howl. I howl a song learned from every city tom and alley cat opera star in twenty states and six countries. I have learned, also, that it's fun. I pour my soul, my heart into a symphony of despair and longing. Should a cat someday understand it, he would love Beethoven, and the Blues.

A rear window squeals downwards. "Kursey, c'mon boy!" I jump in the back window, landing in Jezzy's lap. I shake a layer of mud and wetness around me. Kat and Jez jump back like I'd brought a dead groundhog with me. Hey, I've learned since then.

Kat smiles, "Sonofabitch, I bet you planned that."

I force a smile onto carnivore jaws reserved for bird-ripping and crunch-mousing. So maybe I did.

Blade Runner was a good movie.

Kat does love us both.

At the border there isn't even a guard anymore. No gates, not a fence. Like there never was one. They used to burn a hundred-foot path along the 49th parallel with Agent Orange. Used to. There's nothing but the trees and the road now, always the road. The forest takes back its own but leaves the frozen tar slick. The front doors of the car are open like a beetle's shell pinned inside a glass case. The ground is cold through my jeans, my elbows rest on crossed legs. Eyes closed. I feel the cold mist out of the ground, the wet combed trees, the sun cutting its space in the sky from the clouds. It reminds me of the jungle. Except the cold. This day is good, it's like the dark. The sun is too hard, it cuts the line too clean; at night there's a softer edge, everything is grey again.

There is a knife in my boot strapped around my leg. I open my eyes, reach

and pull the knife out; a rubber grip and 8-inch blade for diving. Softgrind out of the sheath. The box is dirty but sort of new. Peeled leather still mostly on. It's what the Columbian had been missing, a briefcase. I compare the blade to the lock's mouth. Serrated steel edge like a shark's smile before his eyes roll back. I put it away, find the complicated smallness of the Swiss Army knife instead.

I play with the combination lock a few times but one number is frozen up. Each adapter on the knife takes its turn to pry it open. Jez comes from the car, older than me today, and different. She wears a skirt long enough to reach her ankles, almost, and her boots and my jean jacket. Nothing else. She stops across from me and sits. Her boots drag dirt. I continue with each blade. Nothing works. Jez is still waiting but bored. There is a chubby fullness to her hands, her face, the curve of her breasts down the open front of the jacket. The tightest long ringlets of hair collect around her shoulders, the colour of red wine.

"You could spell it open." Her voice, at least, is the same as yesterday's.

I don't look up, "That's not the point."

"You could open it but you won't?" She knits pale eyebrows.

"Kursey's sleeping, Jezzy." Kat's voice. She sits on the car seat, turns over yellow hair with her hand.

"He sleeps with his eyes open then," Jezzy shrugs.

"He's the Sleeping Giant, Jez. He could've opened it when you found it, but he only works as hard as he has to." Katja's voice is smiling. A professional joke. There is a crooked curve to the side of her mouth.

I collapse my army knife. "Patience is a virtue of the crossroads, Kat. You should know that as well as I do." I take the leg knife and put it between the lids of the case. When my hand comes down, the blade goes through the weak point and it opens.

Satisfied, the knife goes away happily. Jez is already inside the box. She pulls out what she wants. I watch. Each treasure has less to do with the items before it. A pen, gloves, a diaphragm, garden shears, a coffee mug, men's underwear, a glass eye, some dominoes, a dog collar, a crab fork, a faucet, postcards, a bow tie, a bicycle pump, gauze, T-pins, a light bulb. She spreads a semicircle of them around herself. It's like a puzzle. She waits, switches the places of two. Squints to see. She turns one sideways and watches again. Funny. How she learns. Benefits of a crossroads education.

It's got no sense to it until I see the last thing rolling at the bottom of the case. I pick it up with a thumb and forefinger, roll it back and forth. I blow on it like a birthday candle and the dust comes away. The imprint reads in a

circle, 9 mm.

"Watcha got, Kursey?" Jez watches my hand.

I reach into my pocket, take out the red bandanna and the gun. I polish the bullet; when it goes into the clip, it's like it always belonged. Waiting for me to find it. Twelve. I count. There's always twelve. One day there'll be all seventeen. That'll be the last day. Count Zero, Ragnarok. Kat is singing to herself. Janis Joplin or Patsy Cline, I can't tell which. There's a red apple in her hands; she cuts it in half through the width.

"Jezzy," she says, now only humming the tune. Jez switches attention, looks to her. "When Lilith came to Adam, she knew the apple, she knew its magic and knew the woman's spirit inside her. Because of this, Adam and the sky god, Yahweh, wouldn't have her. Yahweh made another first woman and told her the magic was bad, but the Goddess was smarter than he was and made sure even Eve found the magic in the apple. Long before, she'd taught Shaytan, the serpent, the wisdom of the moon's blood and set him to guard the knowledge and always test the judgment of his father, Yahweh. Shaytan told Eve what Yahweh didn't want her to know was in the apple." Kat opens the halves, shows the star on the wet background. Magic symbol long before the Christians were born. "And that's part of the reason Christians followed Yahweh's war against the Goddess, that's how they almost won by burning out Mother Earth." Kat puts her eyes on me. "That's why Kursey wears so much leather; he thinks that in the back of everyone's head is a fear that he'll shed his skin like a big snake."

"That's Carl Sagan and Thunder Lizards," I shake my head, "not the Midgard Serpent."

Kat gives half the apple to Jezzy, goes back to singing. Lesson over. If I asked, Jezzy could tell me the whole thing, word for word. She's fast, Kat's apprentice. Kat hums again while she chews.

Jez holds the apple in her teeth, sits over her pathway spread of debris. Her eyes get funny and half closed. A patchwork of light bounced off shiny bits hits her face. It's calm but I can smell her magic working. Her head turns sideways, considering. Listening. A wind is coming at our backs; it's how they speak to us, the wind spirits, it's how we know. Change is coming.

"It was a man," Jezzy tells me. "This was his." She licks her lip, head turns even steeper, "He had two children and he talked to them on a wire from far away—"

"Telephone, Jez," Kat corrects softly, but the seer has no hearing. She talks like no one's there.

"He was small and he had no world but his work. He talked with com-

puters more than he talked to people." She rubs her hands on the grass, to get them clean.

"That's how things used to be," Kat says.

"You'd like to think those days gone, Kat. It's still a long way off." I lift the gloves from the pile of odds and try them on.

"What?" Jezzy looks up.

"You see, Kursey, you've scared her now." Kat sits next to her and sweeps the junk into a pile with her hands, "Don't sweat it, Jez, things are different now."

I've seen the things done with computers, some good, some bad. Not so much the problem with the machines as the times they got used in.

The wind has arrived. Mist and grit push us on. Jezzy and Kat wait in the front seat, engine running. The last fingertips come off the thin leather gloves. I reach back and toss the ends at the sky. Wind dogs pick them up and chase them through the air. Gloves on, I pitch the garden shears. Underhand throw lets them bounce and roll like a pinwheel. Kicking up dirt and flecks of peeling brown paint to blow away. I don't wait to see them stop and close the door behind me. The car pulls away.

The briefcase was waiting for us.

We have come the right way.

Time. Time enough. I am young; my life measured in cat-naps. Kat is older. She has always been Kat, always will be; even I can only guess at when she truly comes from; after all, she and I are only the most glorified kind of hitchhiker and traveller. And Jezzy, she is what she feels. There are leftover mountains in Ontario. Not the big mountains of the west, but the oldest rock in the land, so old they've been worn down to hills. Clean cuts of valley and stands of slope hills. Even some trees. I remember some of the fey that roost hereabouts, piecing together what the Old World left of clear-cut deserts. I could never do it, stay put and heal the land, but I respect the ones who do. Selfish maybe, to want answers instead, but I do.

The road runs ahead. Heat spirits sway off the blacktop. There are miles before I can meet sleep again, but the gloves make me feel like a racer. One eye on the road, I give the radio tuner a random twist. Sure must be something better than so-called CBC. I can't see the dial for all the talismans on the dash. More hanging from the rear view mirror. Empty brass shells click with a gold pocket watch. Strings of copper pennies with holes knocked through. Caribou

and gecko bones with bleached driftwood. Mistletoe and garlic. Tiny Chinese lanterns with silky tassels and string ties with steer skulls in pewter. A plastic Buddha is glued squarely in the middle of the dash. I smile back at him. Kat slaps my hand, turns off the radio.

"We can stop here."

The arrow pointed the way.
It was close enough to walk.

The trees around the crossed roads have a heavy green leafiness. Kat walks first, dappled in blue shadows of leaves. We hear our footsteps on gravel, the end of the road is only a spill of stones into long grass. But there is the church. Kat bends her back to see the spire above the trees. Funny how it's not there from the road. It's old and stone, ivy digging its long fingers into the walls. Wooden door broken or gone with just an arch of pitted stonework.

Jezy whispers, "It's so old."

"No," says Kat. "Acid rain."

Our legs take us to the low steps. Light falls through the spread of trees to make a drapery of pale yellow around us. It's a small country church, not like the burned-out cathedrals I walked in Central America. Broken-out and falling-apart pieces of stained glass litter the front step. Kat walks in first. I forget, until glass snaps under my boots, that Kat has no shoes. My mouth pops half open to warn her but she's fine. She looks above and around. Steps make no noise. I close my mouth. Shrug. The Christian god of love could walk on water, couldn't he?

The air is thick and hot; only a cool whisper dips from the broken windows above. Pale half-light shows the inside. The floor is swept clean. Only drifts of dirt and leaves pile in the corners. My eyes click around the room; top to bottom, side to side. No crosses. No censers. No holy regalia. Only the stubs of beeswax candles, ashes of charcoal incense and sprigs of oak.

"This isn't a holy place of Christians," I say.

Kat almost shakes her head. "But it is holy to someone."

Kat blinks. I listen and hear it outside. Sniff. Whoever she is, she is good to get so close before I can tell she is there.

"You guess right, do you want to know what you've won?" the woman says.

Kat smiles but keeps studying the altar. Only Jezy turns to see her right away. I speak without looking.

"You should clean up the glass on the front step. If this is your place."

"I've been thinking of it." Her voice is kind. A polite pause. "My name is Karen. If I knew yours, we could have some tea."

Sometimes we find what we look for.
The best gifts are ones we don't expect.

The light is low in the trees. More orange than yellow. Inside I feel the contented ticking of my fey; it will be the time of cats soon. The tea is good; some herbal relaxer culled from the wild, and Karen dishes out rice and beans onto plates. There's ham for those of us who eat meat. Mainly me. Karen is a truer version of Jez's redhead. Pale and earthy and in her thirties with a delicate headful of long redbrown hair. She's a curandera. A witch, like us. Drowsy insects hang in the air around the courtyard, swim by me in the hazy air. I eat, but the sleepiness creeps up on me.

"Tell me about your crossroads," Karen says. The bells at the hem of her Indian cotton dress make little noises.

"The destinations aren't important," Jezzy pipes.

Karen folds her hands in her lap. "Yes. But why?"

Jez shifts and tucks her legs under her skirt. A moment of silence before Katja speaks up.

"There are places," Kat begins, and that silence falls heavy, "and times where the roads come together. I've heard him called Maître Carrefour, the Lord of the Crossroads. Everyone with a little piece of the crossroads in them feels it. It's a need to move on, and find where the road ends. All roads lead somewhere."

"Rome, maybe?" Karen laughs.

Kat sniffs. "I thought of that. It doesn't fit."

We all eat for a while, and Jezzy keeps looking to Kat for an answer. I know Jez and I know Kat; one is worried there is no answer to Karen's question.

"They used to bury vampires at crossroads," Karen says, "and it used to be the spot to meet the devil, make a deal."

"The death card doesn't mean death," Kat counters, "it means change. The crossroads are sacred to Hecate too, the magic of different paths, some taken, some not. Crossroads are change, are chances."

Karen smiles, a genuine smile. "I thought you knew about the real magic. I had to be sure."

Kat blinks, then laughs with her. A teasing at the corners of her mouth. Jezzy's the only one who seems upset; she's learned to trust more than I have,

but she doesn't read intentions so well yet.

The sun is on the edge of the world. In the dusk, the devas and hobs slip out from shadow to shadow. I spot two twig men and a pixie with a paper cup hat moonwalking. No sense of style, those little people.

"I'll tell you something," Karen pours cups of hard cider, "because I think it's what you need to hear. Mother Earth channels powers across the lands. Those ley lines are a good way to find answers, but the important part is, they don't always follow asphalt."

Karen's eyes rest on me. I stare back and she blinks first.

"And what about you, Sleeping Giant Kursey. What do you think?"

I consider. " 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' "

"Now why," Karen laughs again, "do I think you might just be lazy? You'll have a chance soon, I bet, to prove me wrong."

We moved on a long way.

Only the ocean stopped our tires.

After it all, I wondered if the answers wouldn't be out there. One afternoon one long day ago the '62 Mercury found me and I drove out of Panama for the road, and to find something. Find someone. I thought it was Katja when I met her; the way she dropped down in the front seat with nothing but her ripped-open jeans and bag full of medicine. "Just drive," she said. And later, after our first night together, I made the change back to human and she kissed me and said, "Let me tell you about the crossroads." But it wasn't Kat, and it wasn't Jez when we picked her out of a den shooting tarantula venom.

Only one person has the answers. It's the journey that's important, not where you go.

The waves crash up on the big beach, split on rocks and jump for the sky. Gull sound away overhead and the slow tick of the car engine while it cools. The sand gives and spreads under my heels. Kat is crouched over the wet sand, water runs up the beach and over her bare feet and ankles, then slides away. It brings the turtles up with it, to crawl up the beach. Even the wind has a cold wet feel, deep with salt smell.

"So, genius," Jezzy sits on the hood of the car and keeps a sand crab from slip walking off the edge of the car. Short kid today: teenage, brown hair, Vitiligo spot on the side of her neck. On days she's bored, this is the shape she takes, and I wonder if maybe it isn't her true shape. "Now that we're here, how you gonna get us across?" she puffs. "Rainbow bridge? You gonna part water,

Sleeping Giant?"

Kat walks back up the beach, curved wet footprints in the sand behind her, careful to walk around the she-turtles and mounds of dirt over fresh eggs.

"Let me tell you something," I say, "about spawning season."

Jez rolls her eyes, but Kat smiles a sympathy smile.

"Get in the car, we've got to drive over to that peninsula, there," I point. It's a mound of rocks on the edge of the shore; barely a finger of land connecting it to the mainland and covered in green trees and brush and birds.

I manage the car up to the crest of the rocky outreach and we get out again. Now with the view of the shore spread out behind, a sandy beach with rocky mound studded into the sand and nearby islands of rocks. I pocket my sunglasses.

"Just watch," I nod.

For a moment, nothing, then one of the islands moves. Up, onto the beach. I send out my fey to touch the ground under our feet, and she talks back to me. Old, so much older than any of us. The land tilts slightly, water brushes off her shores, and slowly the whole grassy rock drifts out to sea. Just below the water, the shadow lines of barnacle-cruled green fins sweep through the shallows, and somewhere far ahead, the gleam of an eye.

Jez breaks into a smile and she melts down from the top of her head, changes into someone who could be my sister. "Way cool, Kursey!"

Kat puts an arm around me and slides her hand into my pocket. "The giant woke up today," she whispers.

"Well," I say, "we're all just adrift on Turtle Island, anyway. I figure, why don't I hitch a ride for a change, with one of her grandchildren."

The island rocks gently and a flight of birds wheels overhead, to land back in their nests. A couple of goats poke out of the brush to take a look, then go back to grazing.

"Where to?" Jez asks.

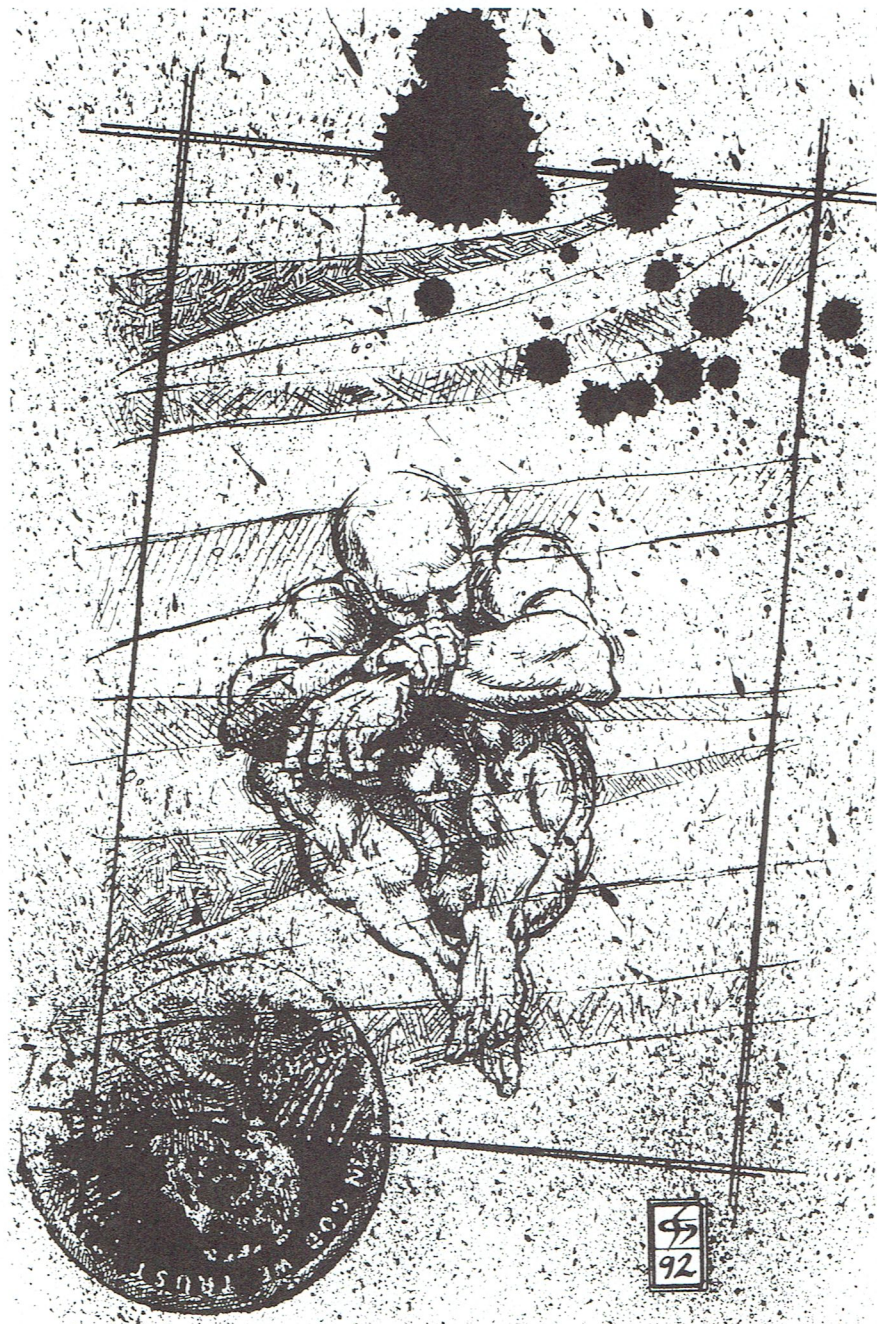
"She knows better than you or I," I say. •

ON SPEC Deadlines

Nov. 30, 1992; Feb. 28, 1993; May 31, 1993; and

Aug. 31, 1993 (Theme TBA)

See Guidelines, page 95 for details.



The Ten-Million Year Beach

by Michael Teasdale
illustrated by Steve Goetze

He woke up half a hundred feet underground, but that did not bother him.

What bothered him was the sand. The surface climate had been all wrong for desert and yet there was sand everywhere. His lungs were full of the stuff, and so his tired sigh went unuttered, and he used its energy to begin digging himself out instead. His arms and legs could only move by tiny degrees, enough to let sand grains trickle from above to below, but that was progress, however slow. The sand grated against the inside of his nostrils and across the corneas of his eyes, making it difficult to concentrate on the digging.

His ascent took almost a year.

Eventually, one hand broke out through a thick, crusty shell of rain-cemented sand and into air. He pushed hard and felt himself, in one motion, borne out onto the surface of the sand as though out of a womb. Released from their strain, his arms and legs trembled. Little muscle spasms rippled across his back and shoulders as he rose into a crouch to rest.

The sand still irritated his lungs, so he broke down the silicates. He

dismantled the molecules and split the atoms, then stuck them together again to make nitrogen and oxygen. He coughed out debris still hot from the reactions.

Acidic saline flushed out his tear ducts and dissolved enough of the grit on his eyes for him to rebuild clean corneas. When they were complete, he clinked away the mineral residue and took his first look around.

It was dark. The landscape was full of shadows, blacks on deeper blacks with neither sunlight nor moonlight to relieve them. The clouds overhead were dark and thick, black beyond the obscurity of water vapour, blocking out the sun except for a handful of the more powerful cosmic rays. They burned his skin, forcing him to alter his melanin and grow new skin in patches under the old. The unprotected layers flaked away to reveal protected ones, leaving him black, only one more shadow in a world full of them.

He released the old sigh that sand had held down inside him and his shoulders slumped. The temperature was so low that he could feel his throat icing, and the air smelled of sulfur and methane.

Gamma rays left behind minute UV flashes as they struck floating molecules and popped into electron-positron pairs. It was no light to see by, but he reconstructed his eye-cones to detect their glow.

He saw the world by its own radiation.

A grey plain rolled off in every direction where gales and acidic rains had sculptured dunes between jagged spires of rock.

Rock.

Rock and metal and concrete and asphalt.

There were bits and pieces of it everywhere, broken and shattered, melted and frozen into drips.

He rose, took his bearings, and started off toward the western seashore.

There were a lot of other ruins along the way. He passed through them slowly. The animals were gone, the plants, the buildings and monuments, even the memories had somehow dissolved and blown away on the acid wind. He poked about at the bits of detritus that remained, but the most he ever uncovered was a single coin gone green with age and hardship. After a while, he stopped looking and concentrated on examining the stones that had not yet been worn down by the wind. Sand had etched them deeply, and he stopped before one or another to read the inscription it had left. The stories cut there never varied, and so he stopped looking for them as well and concentrated on mucking with the air.

It was a mess.

It was full of sulfur and nitrates, ammonias and dioxides. Each breath brought him a nostril full of ozone, which should have been locked up in the

stratosphere keeping out the worst of the ultra-violet.

A mess.

In each lungful, he juggled molecules and fused atoms into more acceptable forms before breathing out. It made little difference: the world was too big and he was too small, but he did it anyway. Once he reached the sea, he would begin the process in earnest.

The ocean, he found, was thick. The water was almost lost in oils and solvents, additives and derivatives, a slick of toxins so dense that he almost vomited with the first mouthful. It tasted like burnt metal, but he filled his lungs and stomach with it as he walked out onto the continental shelf and climbed down into the depths.

The deepest trench he could find was choked with rusting barrels and sterile corals. He made a seat of a broken hull and, in his belly, started twisting molecules and testing them and twisting them again.

Simple DNA did not work. Even with miles of water between it and the surface radiation, that delicate spiral fell apart long before replicating.

He tried many alternatives before he found something both sturdy and adaptable, utilitarian but not too exotic, to take its place. He built a few billion of them and brought them up to spread through the water, then built some more and brought them up. He repeated that cycle as long as he could take the taste and then went back up onto the beach.

Those molecules would spawn others, and begin to diversify. In time, the viruses and microflora evolution produced would begin the slow process of breaking down atmospheric and oceanic poisons into usable molecules. When things were a little more hospitable, he would replace them with proper carbon biota and no one would ever know the difference.

He sat down and examined the coin he had found, scraping away the verdigris.

E Pluribus Unum, it said.

From Many, One.

He turned it over and read the other side.

In God We Trust.

He thought about the *Upanishads*. He thought about the *Gospels*. He thought about the *Visuddhi-magga*, about the *Qur'an*, about the *Tao Te Ching*, and the *Torah*, and all the others, then he threw the coin as far out to sea as he could.

It plunked down into the murk, and he sat down cross-legged to begin drawing ugly little shapes in the sand with his finger. "Sure," he said to the empty world. "You trust, but you don't listen." •

Heaven's Above

by Lyn McConchie

To the Complaints Department,
From N. Samuelson,
Farm at Crossroads.

Dear Lord,

It is with great regret that I must write to complain about the recent service as regards to our weather here. It has now been six months since the last rain and the fields are badly parched. The stock is suffering and our neighbours are pointing out that if we, who are special in Your sight, are unable to obtain assistance, who can? My sons and I have studied the situation most carefully and hereby request that we are provided with four days (4) of rain over the entire area as soon as possible.

I don't wish to appear importunate, but You have always led us to believe that if we ask, it shall be ours. This is Your World, made by Your own hands and the upkeep of it is Your responsibility. Should it not be possible to obtain the required weather at once, could we please have it prior to the end of the current year, as by then our position will be desperate.

Yours faithfully,

N. Samuelson

(Mr. N. Samuelson
Shepherd & Patriarch)

•

MEMO TO MAINTENANCE
DEPARTMENT FROM HEAD
OFFICE.

Please find enclosed a copy of a letter from one of My people. I am deeply displeased that he should have found it necessary to write directly to Me, and suggest that this is rectified immediately. Are you trying to damage My people's faith in Me?

— *HHWH*

MEMO TO HEAD OFFICE
FROM MAINTENANCE
DEPARTMENT.

We are deeply sorry that this problem should have arisen. In no way do any of our workers wish to damage the abiding faith Your people have always shown in You. However, owing to a logistics difficulty, we are unable to supply the requested weather until the suggested later date. Please rest assured that at that point in time it will be available to the member of Your flock as per request.

— *Gabriel*

MEMO FROM HEAD OF
MAINTENANCE DEPT. TO
SUB-DEPT: WEATHER
PROVISION SUB-SECTION 3.

Note all attached letters and memo copies. Arrange generous supply of precipitation over entire continent for

requested period, days 40. Inform petitioner well in advance so he can take full advantage of projected results. Execute!

— *Gabriel*

•

To the Complaints Department,
From N. Samuelson,
No Fixed Abode.

Dear Lord,

Several months ago we requested a period of rain. The time span needed was stated to be four (4) days. I am writing to point out that it has now rained for forty days and I and my family are in deep trouble! Owing to an Angelic visitation I was able to build an ark in time to save my immediate family and most of our beasts. However, my wife hasn't stopped complaining ever since her cousin drowned. The hens don't like being wet all the time, and my sons will keep playing noisy games and waking the cows.

I feel that it is possible an error has occurred and would like to request a review of the case as soon as possible. I don't wish to appear importunate, but this is all very inconvenient to an honest farmer, Lord.

Yours faithfully,

Noah Samuelson

(Shepherd & Patriarch)

•

HEAD OFFICE DIRECT TO
WEATHER PROVISION
SUB-SECTION 3.

What in His name have you done to our client Noah? He requested four days of rain and has received forty to date. Explain!

— *J. C.*

WEATHER PROVISION
SUB-SECTION 3 DIRECT TO
HEAD OFFICE.

The memo we received from the Maintenance Department appeared to request 40 days of precipitation over entire continent. We have ascertained that the zero after the four was in fact a typing error. We feel that in no way are we responsible for this occurrence and would point out that it originated in another Department. All we can suggest is that the client Noah should receive a binding promise that such an error will not arise again. Possibly an illuminated apology/promise will suffice to allay his distress in some small way.

— *John*

MEMO HEAD OFFICE
TO MAINTENANCE
DEPARTMENT.

Arrange rainbow as apology. Assure you that He is not seriously inconvenienced by destruction of several lines in recent deluge. It appears that most

were regarded as unsatisfactory and scheduled for termination anyway. Do not distress yourself too greatly.

— *J. C.*

MEMO MAINTENANCE
DEPT. TO HEAD OFFICE.

Your assurances gratefully accepted. Question remaining is, however—if we have now promised never to cleanse unwanted lines with flood, how on Earth are we to manage next time? I wish you could persuade Him to consult other departments before making these blanket agreements.

— *Gabriel*

P. S. Am overstocked on locusts, do you have any ideas?

•

To the Complaints Department,
From Noah Samuelson,
Slopes of Ararat farm.

Dear Lord,

In reference to Your illuminated apology and solemn promise not to flood our lands again: the sheep are all suffering increasing blindness as a result of gazing at the blazing rainbow each time it rains. Would it be possible for this to be toned down a few degrees, now that we have Your word?

Yours faithfully,

Noah Samuelson

(Shepherd & Patriarch.) •

Swift Days in the Black Hole

by Amber Hayward

More helpless than children
because we hold no hope of their improvement
the old people fall to the gravity of time.
We don't shout them back from their deafness
or shame them back from their incapacity
but grease the skids of our indifference
with stoic acceptance of the inevitable
as we wish them a speedy passage

beyond the event horizon. •



Children in Boxes

by Sally McBride

illustration by Jim Beveridge

My neighbour is building boxes to put his children in.

He doesn't know I watch him late at night; I'm sure he believes that I, a respectable widow-lady, am safely tucked in my narrow bed, tummy full of cocoa and head full of nothing.

He doesn't know that I watched him back his station-wagon up close to his garage last Saturday, watched him unload sheet after sheet of smooth blond plywood, two-by-fours to use as reinforcements, bags of nails. Or perhaps they were screws—how could I tell? Actually, screws would be better because children could push and pound at the inside of the box and loosen nails. Charlie, my late husband, would have agreed with me. Yes, screws they probably were.

Arlen Griswold is a single father. He had a wife, Sherri, until six months ago when she up and ran off with her childhood sweetheart who came back into her life and rekindled all the feelings that had been smoldering during her 20-year marriage to Arlen. At least, that's what she told me while I helped her pack. The kids, three teenage girls, were at school and Arlen was at work; she

was taking off while the coast was clear.

I could see nothing wrong with Arlen Griswold, but I guess Sherri could. As I said to Charlie, who was still with us at the time, it's not for any of us to see into the heart of another person's marriage. Everything seems to go along just fine, and then suddenly it all falls apart and you're left with a neighbour who needs help with the shopping.

Not that I mind. I love to be helpful. I helped Charlie all the time until he finally fell off the roof and stove in his skull. Now I hire handymen out of the classified section to come and do things around the house. It's amazingly inexpensive if you get a student or a fellow who's really desperate. And you don't have to stand at the bottom of the ladder, trying to keep it steady amid a constant stream of criticism.

"Doris," he would have said, "screws are the thing."

Poor Charlie.

"You'll keep an eye on Arlen and the girls, won't you, Mrs. Muir?" Sherri had asked, breathless with stuffing clothes and makeup, framed photos and little ornaments into suitcases and cardboard cartons. I was helping her wrap her figurine collection in tissue.

"Of course I will, dear."

"I'll write to them. I'm not just going to disappear—I'm not completely irresponsible, no matter what anyone might think."

"Of course you aren't."

"I just can't stay. I just can't! I'm forty-two years old," she said, bursting into tears.

"We all do what we have to. Don't you worry about a thing. I'll keep an eye on them for you, I'll come over with cookies, and vegetables from the garden. I can't possibly eat all that I grow." I put my arm around her. She was thin; I could feel the tennis-playing muscles in her shoulders. She trembled like a puppy. "There, there."

"Oh, God!" she sobbed. "What am I doing?" She grabbed her suitcases and hauled them to her little red Japanese car, tossed them in and ran back for the cartons. She knew what she was doing, all right.

And I have done what I said I would. I keep an eye on the Griswolds.

If I stand on a chair in my bedroom with the lights out I can focus my binoculars through the window of the workshop Arlen has behind the garage and see just about the whole place, lit up like a stage. And from my kitchen I can see Angela Griswold's bedroom. It takes almost no time for her to say goodnight to her father, hop into bed, hop out again, quietly climb out her

window and slip away into the night. She's a bad girl. I know what sort of mischief a girl can get into, believe me. I slipped out the odd window in my day, though you'd never guess it now, would you? It makes me feel all hot and ashamed to think of what a dreadful girl I was. Meeting a good, dependable man like Charlie Muir was the best thing that could have happened to me.

Yes, I sympathize with poor Arlen. Amber and Alisa, the two youngest, share a room on the other side of the house, so it's harder to keep an eye on them. And those names! Why aren't girls named Sue and Mary any more? Nobody calls their daughters Doris these days. Doris Hunt I was, before I married. "Doris Hunt is a big fat c—" Children can be so cruel. But that doesn't matter. It was long ago and I'm a good girl now. The past is gone and done with.

I wonder if it could have been I who gave Arlen the idea about the boxes. He came over one Saturday morning and after some hemming and hawing confessed that he'd caught Angela sneaking in at 4:00 a.m. He hadn't said anything to her, for the reason that he didn't know what on earth he could say that she would listen to. I poured him coffee and put a plate of muffins on the kitchen table.

"She climbs out her bedroom window," I said, sitting across from him. "I've seen her do it several times, Mr. Griswold."

He looked up sharply at me. He probably wanted to say "Why don't you mind your own business, you old biddy?" But here he was eating my fresh baking and drinking my coffee. And I know how to look motherly, even though, as everyone knows, Charlie and I had no children.

"If you scold them for bad behaviour, they can just take it into their heads to run off permanently. Oh, dear! I'm so sorry, Mr. Griswold. I didn't mean to remind you of—you know."

"Oh, that's all right," he said glumly. "Sherri keeps in touch, you know. She's living in Oregon somewhere." He sat there looking like bread dough that has been punched down once too often and isn't going to rise again.

"It's the same old story, isn't it?" I remarked. "If you set limits on your kids like the psychologists say, they simply defy you and misbehave anyway. And if you don't, they run even wilder, perhaps get in trouble with the law. Either way you end up in a constant battle."

He nodded morosely, clanking his spoon around in his coffee cup.

"Can I warm that up for you?"

"No, thanks. I should be going. Got laundry to do, vacuuming. Decide what to have for dinner."

"Never you mind. It will be all right. Wouldn't it be simple if we could just shut the little darlings up in boxes and let them out when they've grown up?" I laughed sympathetically.

And next weekend there he was, sawing away in his workshop.

I lowered my binoculars and stepped down from the chair, holding the bureau for balance. I'm not as lively as I used to be. The moonlight sifted into the room and gleamed on my little things: my silver-plate brush and mirror set, the clock-radio, the picture of Charlie with his forty-pound salmon.

I stood there for the longest time. I honestly didn't know what to do. Those children of his would be put into boxes. Should I go over and try to talk him out of it? After all, his girls were quite big now. Alisa, the youngest, had just turned thirteen. Only a few more years and he could breathe a sigh of relief as they got married or went off to college or jobs. His job would be done! I drew on my robe and stepped into slippers, picking up the flashlight I keep under the bed in case of power outages. In a moment I had shut my back door behind me and slipped across the lawn to the gap in the row of chest-high cedars that marks the boundary between our properties.

Arlen jumped guiltily at my tap on the window.

"Mr. Griswold!" I hissed.

He came around to the door and opened it, sticking his head out curiously. "What's the matter, Mrs. Muir? You hear a burglar?"

"No, no! Let me in, Mr. Griswold!"

"If it's that toilet of yours I'll get my plunger and be right over."

"No! It's these boxes you're building. I want you to stop and think twice. Nothing is gained by hasty action!"

I must say he did a good job of looking baffled. I'm sure he thought I wasn't aware of what he was planning. Poor man! Poor, desperate man!

"I can tell you that nothing good will come of it!"

"What the hell are you talking about? Come in here and sit down." He moved some tools and a bag of screws—*screws!*—off a wooden stool. I was glad to sit down; my heart was pounding. I know what it's like to set your mind to something, and it might take all of my persuasive powers to get him to see reason.

"I know what you're up to, dear man. It's impossible. Impossible! Just think for a minute. Why, all children these days are headstrong. Spirited! There's nothing you can do to stop it—" I had to pause a minute and catch my breath. I felt as if I'd run a mile. I hoped he wouldn't take my comments as interfering with his prerogatives as a parent.

"Now just slow down, Doris. Er—Mrs. Muir."

"Oh, call me Doris." Being formal in the middle of the night seemed silly.

"I am not building boxes," he said. "I'm building a desk for Angela and bookshelves for the rec room."

"Why are you doing it in the middle of the night, Arlen?"

"Jesus, it's only 10:30." He ran a hand over his face and took a deep breath. "Look, I don't mind you dropping in with cookies for the kids. I don't mind your bringing in my mail even though I'm perfectly capable of reaching into the mailbox myself. I don't even mind your snooping through my closets. I've got nothing to hide, Mrs. Muir. You can do your worst."

"You're building boxes to put your girls in, to keep them from climbing out their windows and running off!"

"Jesus Christ Almighty. Look, Doris," he said, his voice softening. "You probably had a bad dream. Why don't you just trot on home and go back to bed? I promise you I'm not building boxes to put my kids in. Everything will be fine in the morning. You'll laugh about it."

"I just want to tell you, *Mr. Griswold*," I said, emphasizing the *Mr.* because I had heard a definite tone of condescension in his voice, "that putting children of your girls' age into boxes is not worth the trouble. They are simply too big and strong. Use all the screws you like." I stood up, brushing the sawdust off my robe. If he refused to listen to reason, so be it. He thought he knew better than I.

"Just go home to bed, please."

"I intend to do just that. There will come a time when you will look back on this conversation with regret."

With that I left.

The moon had risen higher during my little visit and was casting black shadows across the silvery lawn. I have always liked the night. The air is cool, the streets empty. It makes me feel like running, like racing the moon through the clouds—but of course I'm too old for that now. Too old and fat and stiff in the joints. I guess no matter how old a woman gets, she's still a girl inside. A dreadful, bad girl.

The cellar door, in the kitchen between the fridge and the china-cupboard, creaks a little as I open it. Time to hire a handyman to do a bit of fixing-up around the place. Fall is coming, and the storm windows should go up soon. I can't reach the fixture over the stairs to replace the bulb, so the cellar is as dark as pitch. The handyman can take care of that too. My flashlight leads me down the wooden stairs.

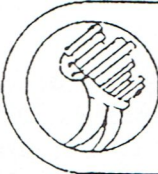
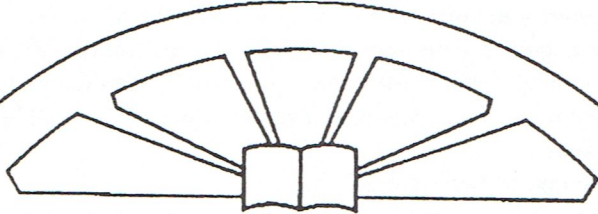
In the storage room, under the shelves of pickles and preserves, sits the box. My little box. Something poor Charlie never suspected. It was all over well

before I met him. Tucking the flashlight under my arm, I pick up the box. Though made of good solid wood, it's actually quite light. I give it a shake. The beam of light bobs around, glinting off glass jars of pickles and fruit as the bones inside the box rattle. I, fortunately, put my child in young enough. He's been with me all these years, through, let's see—how many moves? Five, yes. What a good boy.

Arlen Griswold has his work cut out with three. As I'm sure I tried to tell him, he'll have a hard time cramming those strapping big girls of his in, screws or not. It's simply too late.

And my Charlie, with his big talk about a man needing a retirement hobby. Carpentry, ha! Well, he would have had a fight on his hands with me. No, you have to get them young. I hate to say this, but it was a blessing when poor Charlie fell out the window. Or was it off the roof?

That Arlen. Does he think I'm senile? Shelves and a desk, my eye. •



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PETER WATTS for "A Niche" (*Tesseract's*)

Best Work in English (Other)

PRISONERS OF GRAVITY (TV Ontario)

Best Long-Form Work in French

ÉLISABETH VONARBURG for *Ailleurs et au Japon* (Québec/Amérique)

Best Short-Form Work in French

YVES MEYNARD for "L'Enfant des mondes assoupis" (*imagine . . . 55*)

Best Work in French (Other)

SOLARIS

Artistic Achievement

MARTIN SPRINGETT

Fan Achievement (Organizational)

JOHN MANSFIELD for chairing the Worldcon in '94 bid

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)

SOL RISING, edited by Larry Hancock

Fan Achievement (Other)

DAVID W. NEW for editing *Horizons SF*

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NEW RELEASES

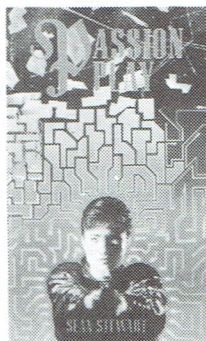
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ART— Martin Springett

1992 Aurora Award for Artistic Achievement:



Martin Springett was born in England but has lived in Canada since 1965. After an earlier career in music as a guitarist and songwriter, Martin has since achieved growing fame as an illustrator.

Influenced early by books with mythic or fantasy themes, he first gained international prominence for his cover artwork for *The Fionavar Tapestry*, Toronto writer Guy Gavriel Kay's fantasy trilogy. The medieval, tapestry style of art demanded by the Kay stories enabled him to "throw out all the rules about perspective and style" and paint imaginatively.

In addition to continuing with fantasy themes such as the cover of *ON SPEC* Volume 3 Number 2, Martin has also illustrated album covers, posters, and children's books. Most recently, his collaboration with Lydia Bailey on *Mei Ming and the Dragon's Daughter* earned the book a CLA notable award and it was chosen as one of 1990's ten best children's books by the Canadian Children's Book Centre.

Martin lives in Toronto with his wife and two young daughters, where he is currently at work on three more children's books: *Witch What and the Wye of Time*, *Who*, and *The Old Woman and the Seven Impossible Tasks*.

ON SPEC is proud to present this feature on Martin's work.



Martin Springett
cover for *The Owl Service* by Alan Garner



Martin Springett
album sleeve illustration for *The Gardening Club*



Martin Springett
interior textbook illustration

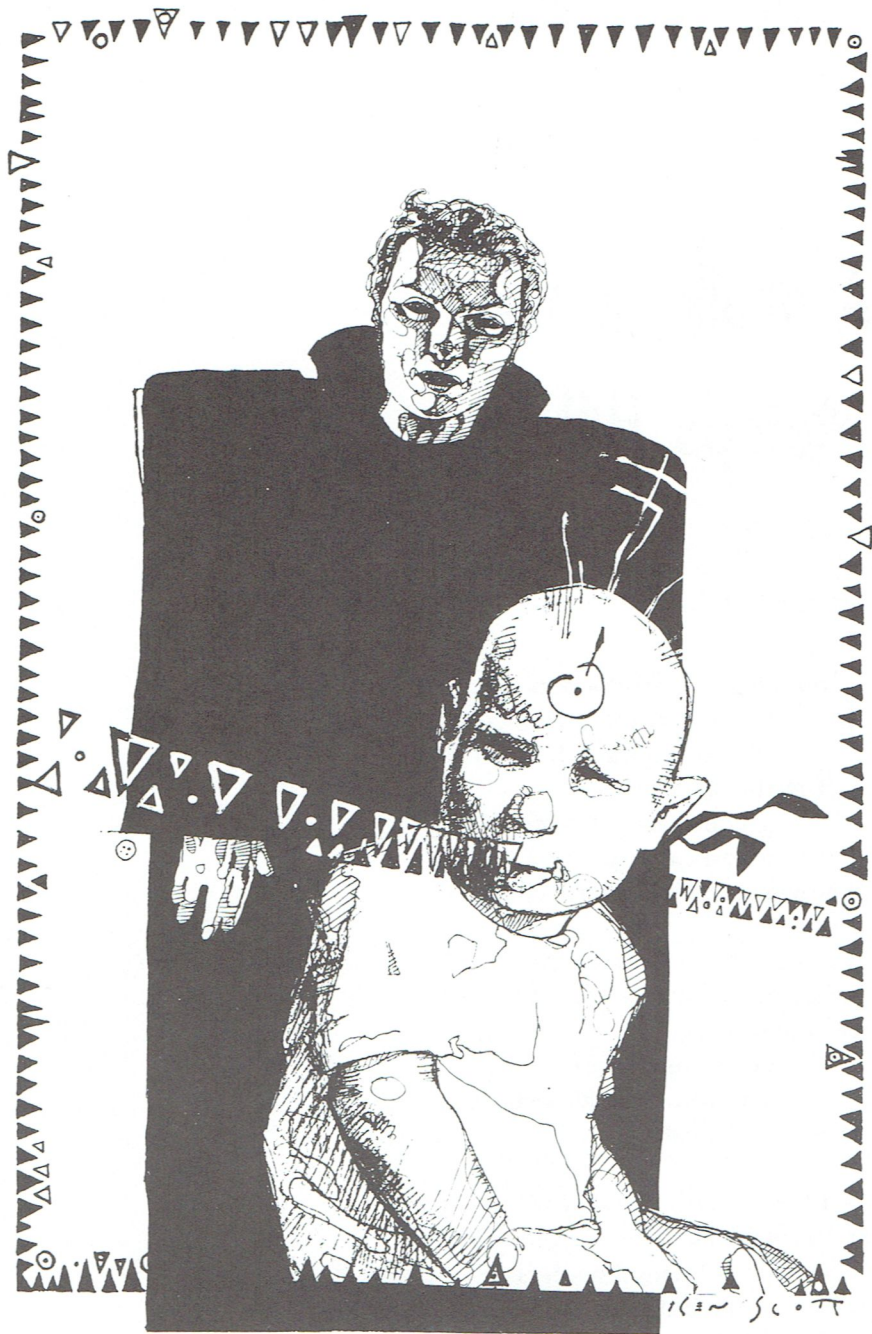
A Walk in the Matapo Hills

by Amber Hayward

You tell me it's forbidden
to point at these rock-crowned hills
and as we walk, I watch shadows
shift in the stark light
granite faces change
shapes appear
gone when I turn toward them.

You tell me tales of witchdoctors
while vast statues of mythical beasts
rear above us,
ochre flanks ease
into comfortable positions
when I look away.

You tell me how to ward off evil spirits
and I watch shadows carve significance
from tawny boulders
while out of secret blacknesses
eyes watch me. •



1832 S.C. 11

The Coat

by Bruce Taylor

illustrated by Kenneth Scott

Little Nicholas Jackson was born into his father's heavy black coat. Those were the first memories of Nicholas, struggling and wearing that ill-fitting dark coat and trying like hell to love it even though he hated it. But his father, Nicholas Senior, saw that not only was his coat good enough for him and his name, but if it was good enough for him, then everything he had would automatically be good for his son, and of course, the son, young Nicholas, hereafter called Nicholas Junior—how could he know otherwise? So, of course Nicholas wore his father's heavy black coat—it was all he knew for it was all his father ever knew, for it was all *his* father knew. And that's all there was to it.

And it really *was* a ridiculous coat. What strange first memories young Nicholas had—a strange mixture of a world of sunlight and bees, and blue sky and yellow sun and the coat—that immense, huge, suffocating, black heavy coat.

Honest to God, how absurd. The only place where he could feel the wind was on his face. No other place—save his hands and his feet when he tried to go barefoot (except he kept stepping on the coat). Nicholas Senior saw Nicholas Junior at times uncomfortable but simply said, "My father had to wear it. I had

to wear it. I don't know what *your* problem is, but I'm sure you'll get used to it, just like I did."

By which Nicholas Junior knew his father meant there wasn't anything he was *going* to do about it because if there was, he might have to do something about *his* own coat that he had to wear—and for whatever reason, wasn't about to do *that*.

Oh, how absurd, but at the time, Little Nicholas didn't have the faintest idea that he could change anything and no one realizes that until they are many years along and then decide that the coat really isn't their style and then make a decision to take it off and drop or shred it, and leave it neatly at the parent's feet or sometimes throw it back in their faces.

Ah, would it not be wonderful to decide one's wardrobe so early in life? But not so for Nicholas Junior. Not so for him at all.

Now, you might wonder, where was Nicholas' mother in all of this? Did she not realize that Nicholas was wearing too heavy a coat for the occasion? Any occasion, actually. Did not she wonder when Nicholas was just a baby what that dark aura was about him? Didn't she wonder when he, in the baby carriage, kept getting lost in the heavy black coat—that something was wrong? Didn't she ever say, "Nicholas, my baby and darling Nicholas, that coat will make you ill. That coat is much too heavy for your constitution"? Now, how was it that the mother did not see? How could she be unaware that when Nicholas went swimming, he stayed and struggled beneath the surface of the water for really too long periods of time? (After all, such a heavy coat simply became water-logged so that swimming was no fun, and was certainly just a struggle.) And where other children glided like pale fish through the sun sparkled water, Nicholas just floundered and gasped like a fish *out* of water. Or how was it that on those lovely hot days, Nicholas, with face beaded and shining in sweat, almost suffocating in that black coat—how was it that she did not see Nicholas' discomfort?

That is indeed a good question. Perhaps she didn't really want him, and by him being miserable, that way she could justifiably love him. Doesn't misery always bring out the caring in people? But maybe that wasn't it at all. For whatever reason, she did not see and Nicholas, wearing that black, heavy coat, got his mother's love. Time moved on and even though Nicholas knew the coat was somehow the very worst thing he could wear, well, not knowing any better, perhaps he wore it anyway. And he grew into it. Sort of. Now just because you grow into something doesn't mean it fits any better. It just means you distort your body enough to fit the form—what else can you do? Poor little Nicholas, growing up, wearing a heavy dark coat that was anything but his own. But what

can you do when you're a day old? Two month old? A year or so old? What choices have you about certain clothes that you have to wear for the rest of your life and no matter how ill-fitting, the only advice you can possibly get, given that it is given with love as it is known (which isn't really love at all but unconscious tyranny), is that, "You'll learn to love it as you grow into it for there are no other alternatives that are love-defined in *this* family for *you*." So what are you to do at age two? Shove off the coat and risk rejection? Even Nicholas Junior, minutes after birth, knew the folly, the impossibility, the ludicrousness of *that*.

The black and heavy coat stayed in place, ah, sad, sad, anchored by survival need and quest for love, the coat stayed in place.

It stayed in place in spite of the admonishments of his best pals; Kenny for one, who wore clothes of bright colors and whose parents always respected his tastes and asked him what *he* wanted to wear, and so Kenny was quite the individual with a trust in his tastes and his own sensibilities and he always looked at Nicholas and said, "Gee, don't you ever get tired of wearing that coat? Look how black it is and how frayed the sleeves. The buttons are coming off and it's way too large. Don't you have other coats you can wear? Or other clothes? I can see this in winter when it's dark and gloomy and then everyone can't help but wear coats like this—but *all* the time?"

To which Nicholas replied, hurt and defensive, "But what's *wrong* with it?"

And Kenny asked, "Is that really *your* coat?"

"It's the *only* coat I know."

"But is it *your* coat?"

"Yes."

"And you choose to wear it?"

Desperately, Nicholas said, "Yes."

Kenny looked puzzled, unsure as to what to say, for he saw the desperation, didn't know how to talk about it or much less what it meant, and finally said, "Oh," but really meant, "I don't know what's going on with you, but that black coat you always wear is a *mean* looking coat and I have a hunch you're wearing it for the wrong reason and it's not even *your* coat—what do your clothes *really* look like beneath that old coat? What are you really wearing? Polyester? Cotton? Wool? Plaid? Blues? Greens? Reds? My friend, what are your clothes and true colors beneath that black coat?"

Ah, poor Nicholas, what was he to say? For everyone's worst fears are such that if they have been taught that they must wear a dark coat, it must be because that which is beneath the coat is so worthless or so second-hand, or so colorless, that if they showed their wardrobe to the world, their clothes would

be found to be utterly rejectionable; therefore, your worst fears about that which is beneath the coat are thereby confirmed.

So the coat remained in place. Nicholas wore it at school dances and while everyone was showing off their glorious but (of course) adolescent wardrobes, Nicholas just assumed that once the coat was in place, it would always be in place and that was the only wardrobe he had, there were no other clothes to wear. But oh, how hard it was to dance in an ill-fitting black coat that enshrouded Nicholas like a great black sack of space. Nicholas might try to turn but the momentum of the coat simply made him ungainly. He'd try a new step but the coat got in the way and he'd end up falling. He'd reach out to touch hands but the coat sleeve flopped over his fingers and the only touch anyone ever got was a fistful of fabric and a handful of darkness. And where everyone else danced and as they danced, their new wardrobes became more lively in color, more solid in hue, poor Nicholas; it was as though his coat became heavier, the fabric denser and darker and what, what, what was poor Nicholas ever to do? What a strange sensation to be wearing a coat that was one's own but did not fit or really belong to one at all. Oh, what a strange sensation that was. To make it even worse, whenever he went home, his father always said, as he sat unconsciously distorted and destroyed by his own coat, "My, my, what a fine looking coat that is. You should be grateful that I gave you that coat. Why, if it weren't for me, you'd not have that wonderful coat at all. Wear it well and make proud of you."

His mother, still, for what ever reason, unable to see that black coat even now, did notice his discomfort and always gave him much loving concern.

Who can refuse? Ah, that parental love is the strongest there is. Who can refuse? To such overwhelming love and concern, of course he said yes, and yes, and every time he said yes, it was as though the coat became darker and fit closer or like tender meat crammed into a shell, he made the coat fit as best he could, but oh, the pain, was always there. Nicholas could only guess that was the way it was—but his friend Kenny appeared very happy and Melissa, she always wore bright colors and had gay and happy parties and his other friend Jackie, my how he loved reds and yellows and on the dreariest of days, he wore the brightest of colors as if defying the clouds, the very dark side of the moon, the unending dark and deep well of space, to try, just to try to snuff out that blaze of bright fire known as Jackie.

At what point does one make a decision to remove one's coat? At what age? At what time? How is that decision made? Perhaps it was when Nicholas was sixteen. Perhaps it was because of Meredith that things began to change.

Now Meredith MacKenzie was as sweet a young lady as you could find

anywhere, with long blond hair and delicious smile and she liked Nicholas and Nicholas could not figure out why.

Now all this came about because she was in his art class and tremendously enjoyed the sketches he drew; although, to him, they seemed of small consequence, even though everyone else liked them, too. It was the only thing he could do without the coat getting too much in his way, but the long sleeves did make it hard to draw, and frequently the vast folds of the coat made it difficult for him to sit and be comfortable, or draw without smudging the lines or colours. But in spite of the coat, that at least, was one place where Nicholas could accept a little colour into his life, though how colorful it really was, as yet, was rather beyond him.

But one day while sitting in the lunch room, sitting in his vast coat and trying to be as comfortable as possible in that dark and thick hand-me-down, Meredith came over and said, "Hi, I really like the sketch you did."

Nicholas, almost choking on his cold corned beef sandwich said, "Uh, oh, gee, uh, thanks—it wasn't really anything all that good—"

Meredith smiled. "Everyone liked it."

Nicholas smiled a grim little smile. It was though somehow the coat felt closer and bigger than ever before.

"Uh, well, gee," he said, "um, thank you—"

"May I sit with you? Can I join you for lunch?" Her look was gentle and patient.

"Oh, uh, yeah, sure," said Nicholas.

And she sat.

He did not have the faintest idea what to do and he seemed to lose himself in that coat even more.

"Don't you ever get tired of wearing that coat?"

"Huh?"

"That coat. That heavy black and dark coat. Why do you wear such an awful coat?"

Nicholas looked at her with a mixture of shame and guilt as if there was something terribly wrong with the coat and not only was the coat wrong, but what was beneath it was also wrong. He did not know what to say—so, he sat there, but with very dry mouth eating his sandwich and feeling very unhappy indeed. But she was patient. She kept smiling. She dug in her brown bag and brought out a tuna fish sandwich, a big red apple, and a small bag of potato chips. She ripped open the top and offered them to Nicholas. "Care for some?"

Guilty, Nicholas accepted.

"It's okay," she said.

"Thank you." he said.


"You know," she said munching a chip, "my father used to wear a coat just like yours."

Nicholas stopped eating and stared at Meredith.

She crunched another potato chip. "It took a lot of work for us to help him take it off. He just couldn't believe that the natural clothes he wore beneath the coat were actually okay." *Crunch*, another potato chip, and she offered him some more. From the depths of his coat, he looked at her, comprehending but no, not comprehending at all.

"Of course," she said, "the hardest thing for him to realize was not only that he was *wearing* a coat in the first place, but that he could take it off." She sighed. "He just did not understand. But after you've known someone who wears such a coat, you see it on others."

Nicholas shrank further into his coat. "I know you probably don't understand," she said. "My father didn't either, not for a long, long, time. But finally he let us become close to him because he finally saw that he was okay—" Before she knew it, she had her hands up to her face and began to cry. Right then, without even thinking, Nicholas, in spite of the heavy and dark coat that he wore, reached through all that fabric and touched Meredith on her arm. As he moved, his coat pulled away from him, oh, just enough for him to look down to see a shirt he was wearing beneath suddenly become a blaze of colors; reds, yellows, greens and blues; Meredith, suddenly looking at Nicholas, looking through her own tears, said simply, "Thank you, Nicholas," and then softly, "and what you just saw in yourself—it's just a sample of all the colour beneath that dark coat." •



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The Children Do Not Yet Know

by M.A.C. Farrant

illustrated by Dory A. Rikkonen

The children do not yet know what goes on beneath the bed covers. We, of course, visit there regularly because that is where the airport is located and, as you get older, the flights you can take there become more and more appealing.

Right now, the children believe that something titillating goes on beneath the bed covers, although they don't know this for sure. Grave gropings, perhaps, or the warm sponge of torsos, buttocks and breasts. They are still at that stage in their development when the words "Get laid" can cause them days and days of overwhelming laughter meaning, as it might, something much ruder than the activity of chickens.

We do not plan, as yet, to tell the children about the airport because we feel that they should wait their turn. After all, they have a fair amount of youth ahead of them and will not be interested in flight until they are done tramping about in the mud of concrete things: mortgages, income tax returns, and the

like.

Our friends feel the same way about this as we do. It is a favorite topic with us at our backyard Bar-B-Q's: when to tell the children about the airport. We are all in favour of waiting until the children are fully adult and then presenting the airport to them as a kind of consolation prize for responsible, middle-class living.

We first found the entrance way to the airport by accident, under my husband's pillow, and a welcome discovery it was. I banged my head on it—my husband trying to squeeze new life out of an old situation—and, well, I would say that since we found the airport, a new intensity has entered into our marriage.

We spent weeks just trying to pry open the solid oak door which serves as the entrance (much grunting, much straining) and then several more clearing the descending wooden staircase of debris, and repairing loose planks.

When we finally reached the airport we were enchanted. A white-washed tarmac stretched for miles towards a distant horizon, a flat mega-canvas dotted here and there with the shining forms of silver aircraft. Overhead, a cloudless sky. And not another person in sight. We immediately ran in different directions. My husband to a B52 Bomber and I to a sweet, twin-engined Cessna with wings decorated to look like the wings of a butterfly, yellow and orange, much like the fabric design on our patio furniture.

The best flights, we have since found, occur at night, although we have been known to slip down for a quick one on a hot, sleepy afternoon.

Very often the children will be out building something in the back yard, a Stadium say, out of old boards and up-turned flower pots or a vast city complex out of empty margarine containers, cookie boxes and GI Joe tanks. I might be in the kitchen doing up the lunch dishes and my husband might be standing at the kitchen window looking out at our children and their absorbing activity.

Very quickly he might say to me, "Feel like a short flight, Barbara?" and I, smiling coyly and glancing towards the window, might reply, "Well, all right, Raymond, if you think there's time . . ."

We have found that we have many flights to choose from. There's the *Run Away From Home Flight*, the *Adulterous Affair With Gummy Genitalia Flight*, the *Chorus Line And the Businessman Flight*, the *Rescue Flight* (a sea of heaving red jello), and the *Vampire With Enormous Penis Flight*. These are some of our favourites.

Our friends like to visit our airport and we like to visit theirs. Our airport is, they tell us, a nice airport, one they admire, one uncomplicated by crowds

of strangers, quite restful. We have a great many friends and they are all, like us, unremarkable in the general silence of things. Many times when I am driving through the city and see the crowds of unremarkable people going about their business, I wonder what it is that keeps us all like-minded. TV was my first thought, but now I realize it is the airport. Having an airport beneath our bed covers is the best-kept secret amongst unremarkable people like us.

My husband continues to be quite definite about waiting to tell the children about the airport. Every time he returns from a flight he tells me this. You see, he has spent a great many hours away from his sales job and sitting in the corner of our living room reading books on magic to impress the children but they remain unimpressed by the fantastic. Faeries, splendid castles, secret doors are a solid bore to them; they want the full dose of palpable reality. Fantastic to our children is the existence of the San Francisco Giants, or the World Atlas with its peacock display of nation flags, or the black garbage truck that prowls our streets on Mondays, or discovering the thrill of commerce, having their own garage sale. It is only unremarkable, middle-aged adults like us who are lured by the fantastic; you spend half your life trying to dominate the physical world and the rest of it trying to forget what you know.

So we are very happy to have found our airport. And before long, when our children have become unremarkable adults themselves, they will be able to experience the airport, too. At that time, a final mystery for them will be solved. They will understand why, for all these years, their father and I have been so eager to go to bed in the evenings. Why we must have our Ovaltine at nine. Why our reading material must be arranged on the bedside table just so. Why the pillows must be plumped and the feather quilt made smooth. These are all preparations which my husband and I regularly take so that when all is quiet in the household, we can join hands and descend the long wooden staircase to our airport and the purring FA117 Stealth Bomber we know is waiting for us there. •

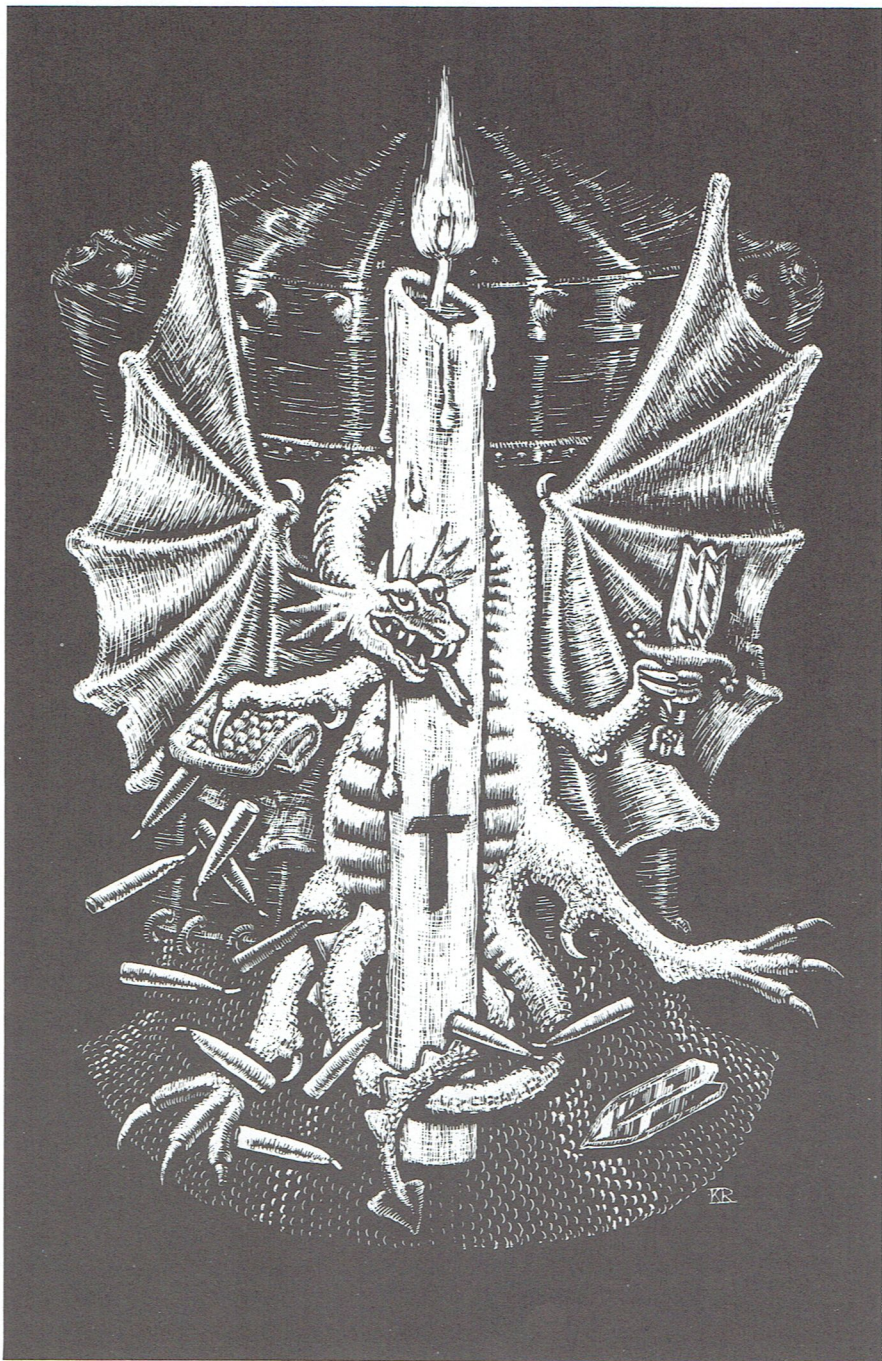
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Light One Candle

by Donna Farley

illustration by Kurt Reichel

There was just too little comfort to be had in the world, John Chandler thought as he swung his last kettle of tallow onto the fire. Sweat rolled off his brow, as God had promised Adam in the beginning. God had said nothing, however, about good Englishmen like John's father leaving a wife and twelve-year-old son, and the foundations of promising new trade, to go off on the crusade led by a French king.

That was what his father had done, though, more than eight years ago now. For the last year, since his mother died, the chandlery had become nearly too much for John. Straining his back lifting the kettles while he boiled up mutton suet, spinning wicks like a woman because he was too poor to get himself a wife, contending with the lazy mule to get the candles to market—if he had wanted a life of ascetic labour, he could easily have chosen it for himself, and become a monk like his mother's brother. It rankled that most of all that his misery was none of his own, but all his father's fault.

Now checking the wicks draped over their rods between two chairs, he swore at his latest adversity, the death of the mule just yesterday, which left him no transport for his wares. And it was at this moment that the crusader knight

who was to change John's fortunes came to the door.

"You be John Williamson?" the dishevelled man asked.

John saw the chainmail armour and cowl, the cross sewn on his surcoat: he knew this must be one of King Edward's knights, home from crusading in the Holy Land. "I am the son of William Chandler, sir, just minding shop—"

"Not any more," said the knight, and tossed John a large leather wallet. "There's your inheritance, as he begged me to bring you. Died of a fever in Acre, he did."

And that was all the knight had to say. He was gone before John could speak a word. *These beastly, self-important gentry!* thought John. *They are all the same!*

John left the tallow kettle to bubble on the fire, the undipped wicks on the rods, and took the wallet to the table. Though he deplored the knight's thoughtless manner, John did not bother to weep for his father—dying in the desert was no more than he deserved for his monstrous desertion.

He looked at the leather wallet for a second before opening it. Could he dare hope his father's war wages would be enough to replace the mule?

But they were not. Inside the wallet he found one silver coin, three coppers, and a dozen candles. John regarded his meager inheritance with dismay and a mounting anger. Then he spat on the floor and said, "That for honouring my father!"

The impulse welled up in him to throw the candles into the fire, but John stayed his hand. He was too poor to indulge in such a fit of rage.

Then one candle among the rest caught his eye; it was wrapped about with a small piece of paper of vellum and tied with a string. Curious, he slipped it off and found writing on one side. Laboriously he dredged up the minim of schooling acquired in his childhood to sound the words.

"Thisse candel beareth a grete blessinge, for that its wick hath twined into it an haire which is an holy relicke of Saint George. Keep the candel withinne its wallet, and thereby thou shalt find the wallet never empty of candelles."

"Saint George in sooth!" John exclaimed. John's grandfather had once told him that he had it from his father that hardly a body in England so much as heard of Saint George until King Richard came back from a crusade and began building chapels in his name. Slew a dragon somewhere in Outremer, did Saint George, but he had plainly done no good for William Chandler, to leave him dead in fever in Acre.

John returned the candle to the wallet. "Never empty of candles indeed! Of

course it will never be empty if I leave this one candle in here! What a credulous horse's ass my father was!"

He examined the other candles; they were of fine yellow beeswax, not tallow, and might bring some good coin. He took the "miraculous" candle out again for a second look; it was distinguished from the others by bearing, embedded in the side, a cross of palm leaves. He might do even better by that, but not likely as much as his father paid for the damn thing. John sighed and put the candle away again. He would do better, he suspected, to keep it as a monument to his father's folly.

But the next day the miracle happened. John bundled up the eleven beeswax candles, which he had left on the table all night, and went to put them in the wallet with the other. But the wallet was already full of candles.

He emptied the wallet onto the table. Eleven more candles, plus the one that incorporated Saint George's hair, if he were to believe it. "By'r lady!" he exclaimed softly.

Three days later he was on the road in search of customers, the Saint George candle in its wallet and fifty others in a sack. He stopped in each of the neighbouring parishes (where no one would wonder where he got the wax to make his wares), sold a few candles to each local priest and, in less than a week, had a plump purse jingling at his belt.

Each morning he transferred eleven more candles from the wallet to the sack. He could have sold more than the miracle produced, but at this he did not grumble; John was not greedy of gain, only of a measure of comfort. He was well pleased, indeed, to contemplate purchasing a new mule before long, to lighten the load presently on his back, and after that, well, what was to stop him from wooing any girl he liked? A girl to take away the spinning chores that made his hands raw, and to cook him pleasant and filling meals. A life of just enough comfort to avoid jealous attention from his neighbours, and he might even be able to forget the wicked desertion of his father.

So he went whistling down the road, eventually finding himself in the next shire, where he had never been before. He sold three mornings' worth of candles to a large abbey, and came away with plenty of coin. John congratulated himself on his cleverness in avoiding competition with local chandlers and waxmakers by his speedy travel, and planned his route to make a circle west and south to the coast, where he heard there were two more abbeys, and at last back to his shop in Winchester.

But before he had found himself a suitable mule, the dog days came on

with the suddenness of the Last Judgement. The sun pounded on John's head, laying his sandy locks against his forehead, lank and sweaty, and his gay mood turned to distress. The candles—they would melt into one another!

"Must take to the shade," he muttered. There was a wood ahead but it did not overhang the road—he would be forced to retreat from the route that lead toward the abbey of Beaulieu, and hold over in the shade of oak and beech until the evening brought cooler air.

The shiver that ran down his spine was from more than the cooling shade as he made his way in under the canopy of the wood. He knew well from last night's drinking acquaintances that all the land hereabout was royal forest.

"But really," he told himself, "I am not intending to poach, and have nothing more than a dagger on me. If I should meet one of the king's verderers, all I need to do is show him my stock of candles to explain and excuse my presence here."

John very carefully did not think about highway robbers or outlaws, for that would not have been conducive to comfort, and without comfort, it would have been difficult to sleep. Perhaps he should have thought about such things; but by the time he was kicked awake from his noonday doze, it was rather too late to do anything about it.

A big hefty fellow with a bushy black beard laughed at John as he sat up in alarm. The robber had cut the purse from John's belt with a well-honed knife that now glinted in a shaft of sunlight falling through the beech-leaves above.

"Ere, Bob," he said to one of the two companions who were inspecting the candle sack. "Why, this 'ere purse is fat as a cow's udder before the morning milking!"

John felt his heart fluttering against the wallet that held the Saint George candle inside his shirt.

"Purse that 'eavy, 'e might 'ave someone as would pay ransom for 'im," one of the others suggested as he heaved the candle sack over his shoulder.

"Nar," said the other, "too risky. Look, we ought to 'ave cut 'is throat while 'e were still asleep."

John felt faint. He had an impulse to cross himself, something he had resisted ever since his father went off on crusade, but he held back, fearing the robbers.

"Hold, villains!" cried a voice. John twisted to look over his shoulder, and there, a stone's throw distant, saw a mounted knight, resplendent in glittering

mail and a white surcoat emblazoned with a blood-red cross. Through the slit of his visor the knight's eyes blazed like twin candles in a lantern—*A trick of the light through the branches, surely?* thought John.

"Scatter!" yelled the burly robber, and ran. His henchmen obeyed. The knight drew his sword and spurred his mount, thundering after the ringleader.

In a few moments John found himself alone. But the robber did not get far through the wide-spread trees; John could hear the horse's pounding hooves off to his right, then the robber's pleas for mercy.

"Churl!" came the knight's powerful voice. "If I grant you your life, what will you do with it but waylay some other unfortunate?"

The robber went on begging, and at last the knight had mercy, having extracted a promise of penance and reformation. Whether or not this could be depended upon at all, the knight sent the villain off and came trotting his horse back through the wood to John.

"Your purse," said the knight, and handed it to him.

John stammered out his thanks, bowing awkwardly.

"A pity the other two have escaped with your goods. And you with no victuals, I'll warrant."

"No, my lord," John said.

"Then follow me," said the knight, and wheeled his charger round, starting into an easy walk.

He was headed into the forest, not out to the road. But John dared not disobey him.

At first he had little difficulty tagging along at the horse's heels, but the time wore on and on. He no longer had his sack of candles to worry about, and the Saint George candle seemed safe enough in its wallet. Yet as they passed through the wood, the trees seemed to draw closer together, and instead of only the grey-barked holly, ferns and brambles gathered in attendance on the great old oaks. Branches arched together overhead, shutting out the fiery summer sun.

John found himself trying to pick his path through the thorny undergrowth, and yet the knight's charger marched on like a steed of iron. John stopped, cursing, to pull his coat away from a prickly bush. "Wait, I pray, sir knight!"

The knight reined in the horse, turning in the saddle to watch as John extricated himself from the tangle and caught up to him again. Then he extended a gauntleted hand to the young chandler.

John took up the hand, bracing one foot in the stirrup the knight left open for him, and put his free hand on the saddle. But he scarcely needed to boost himself; the knight hauled him up effortlessly, like a fisherman with a catch of small fry. John settled himself behind his benefactor, astonished at his manifest strength.

The knight was a local lord, John supposed, and knew a shortcut to his own manor across the royal forest here. No doubt he would leave John to spend the night at the cottage of one of his vassals. John could take his morning's candles up to the manor house as a gift of gratitude to his deliverer. It was certainly the first time any noble had ever done John Chandler a favour.

But no manor house appeared. At every bend the wood grew darker and more maze-like. John began to fear that the knight, with the typical overconfidence of the high-born, had lost his way. John dared make no such remark, but at last he was so sore and weary that he could not keep silent longer.

"My lord, on your mercy, will you not tell me where you are taking me?"

The knight was silent a moment. Then he said, "I am taking you inward. Coming out again, that depends on you."

John swallowed, his grip on the knight's belt tightening. He had been a fool not to see it sooner—his benefactor was a madman, or a fiend! But how could he escape now, out of this trackless forest? Could he slip away when the knight slept, perhaps, and find his way out of the wood along the banks of a stream somewhere?

After a time the knight said, "If you hunger, fear not. Soon we will come to our night's shelter, and there you may be fed."

John was not able to put much hope in this promise, and he grew more and more apprehensive as the filtered light melted into the forest gloom. But to his surprise, just as he thought night had really fallen on them, a clearing opened ahead, where stood a tiny stone church like an unexpected island in the vast sea of trees. Heaven smiled upon it from above, the branches seemingly forbidden to block the sky here. The day had all but faded, and at the very moment John alighted from the horse's back he looked up and saw the first star of the night wink at him.

"Into the chapel, at once!" barked the knight.

John turned, startled at the urgency in his voice, and stared wide-eyed at the knight's face. He had not imagined it before—there was real fire in the eyes behind the visor!

Terror took hold of him all at once, but his feet stayed rooted to the

ground. The knight stood before him, holding the horse's bridle, waiting for obedience. John's racing heart urged him to flee into the woods; the woods themselves seemed to beckon him—wild animals, robbers, anything was better than what awaited him in that chapel!

He tore himself from the spot, made a dash for the trees. But the knight lunged after him, catching him by the arm. John gasped and squirmed, trying to free himself.

"Look at me!" said the knight.

John looked. The eyes were still fiery, but the fire struck him once more as it had when the knight first appeared—like candle flames, steady and quiet, a light in a window to lead the traveller home on a dark night. Not, as he had thought for a moment, the unquenchable flame of hell.

Then the knight let go of his arm. "You have been a fool all your life. Do not be a fool now."

Out around the clearing, a rustling ran in a wide circle through the undergrowth, as if the wood had taken a deep breath.

The knight glanced into the trees. "It comes," he said in a low voice. "Only in the chapel will you be safe."

He drew his sword, but it was not at John he brandished it. The woods fell silent again. Every bone shaking, John picked up his feet and ran. He ducked through the open doorway, half-blind with fear and threw himself on the stone floor before the altar.

A moment later the knight came in, leading his horse by the bridle. He shut the door and dropped a heavy bolt across it. John's blood pounded in his ears, and his breathing slowed only gradually to something like normal.

The first thing he noticed about the chapel was that there was light. It came from a single small lamp suspended before a statue off to the left in front of the altar. Another lamp hung above the altar itself, but it was dark, and the two candlesticks upon the altar stood empty. The rest of the chapel was empty too, as if unused for countless years.

The knight stepped toward the light, and tested the weight of the bowl in his hand. "I would judge the oil sufficient to last until midnight. After that, well, we must see what provision God will vouchsafe us."

John supposed they would have no need for any light after midnight, both being soundly asleep, but he said nothing.

And then the knight revealed for the first time something, other than his voice, of the man beneath the armour. He drew off his gauntlets, laying them

on the floor, and then lifted off his helm. John's gaze went at once to his eyes; but surely, the light he saw there was nothing but the reflection of the little votive flame?

Next the knight pulled off the ring-mail cowl, placing it with the helmet and gauntlets. A striking mane of gold hair tumbled round his shoulders, and John thought of the tale of Achilles and Troy once told him by his mother's brother, who had studied it as part of his monastic education. The "golden-haired Achaeans," the heroes were called. This knight could have been one of their company. A well-trimmed beard, somewhat darker than the hair, adorned a face that was youthful, yet with the lines of suffering upon it. But even those did not destroy the serenity of the features.

"Here is the refreshment I promised you," said the knight, and sat down cross-legged on the stone floor beside John.

John blinked. Where it had come from he had not seen, but the knight was holding out a little tray with a cup and a loaf upon it. It reminded John at once of the wayfarers' dole, the bread and ale provided to travellers by the Hospitallers of Saint Cross in his own Winchester. But when he tried the drink, it proved no ale, but the sweetest wine he had ever had the fortune to taste.

They shared the simple meal, and though there was not much of it, John sat back when he had done, satisfied, to listen to the silence in the chapel. Even the horse made no sound, nor so much as switched its tail. Its master had left it, strangely enough, still saddled and bridled, as if it might be needed at any moment.

John felt the ache ease out of his weary muscles, and almost thought he might sleep, hard though the stone floor was. But then the knight said, "Now." And though his voice was mild as milk, John suddenly went on his guard again.

"We have until midnight. Do you want to tell me your tale?"

It was not possible to say no. What the knight could want with a chandler's tale John had no inkling, but he began dutifully to recount his misfortunes. It occurred to him as he spoke that no one had ever asked to listen to his troubles before—not even the inkeep down the road from his shop, much less a knight.

"—and as for my father, if he spends eternity in Hell, I will not shed even one tear!" As the words came out, John realized they might well offend the knight's too-obvious piety. Still, he had said nothing when John poured out his rancorous account of his father's departure on crusade. When John ran out of words—he said nothing about the miraculous candle that was his inheritance—the knight stood and began to pace. He stopped before one of the small side

windows and stood with his arms folded, peering out into the darkness.

"Fathers are but men," he said, "and share the fault of our first father, Adam. Yet they, like Adam, are formed in the image of the Heavenly Father."

"Mine left me," John said sharply. His heart beat uneasily against the candle in his shirt. He did not like the knight to excuse his father, and now he recalled that the knight had called him a fool as well, and he did not like that either. A fool was something John Chandler had never been—on the contrary, he was the very picture of prudence. Had he not forborne to throw the candles in the fire, despite his burning wrath?

Outside, something like a winter wind suddenly seemed to wrap itself around the chapel. The hair on the back of John's neck rose, and he wound his arms around himself against the sudden chill.

The knight turned slowly from the window, the reflected oil-lamp flame shining in his eyes again. "It comes," he said, and took his cowl once more from where it lay and drew it on over his head.

John started to his feet. "What comes? You said we were safe in the chapel!"

The knight gave a little toss of his head as he settled his helm on over the cowl, a gesture that led John's eyes to the lamp. "As long as we have light. Without light, there is little hope."

John went to the lamp, tested its weight as the knight had done earlier. His breath caught as the little flame wavered at his gentle movement of the bowl. He released it again, trembling, but it did not go out. Yet how long could it last?

Then the thing in the night outside took on form and weight. John could feel it out there, coiling round the chapel and drawing tight like a rope round a post. His mouth went dry.

For the first time he looked at the little statue illuminated by the lamp, preparing to dip into the depths of his memory in search of long-disused prayers. To his surprise, the image was not, as he had expected, of the Virgin, but of a military saint, his helm surmounted by a gilded halo. He held a long, thin lance in one raised hand, its point down and threatening the tiny dragon that lay cowering under the crush of his booted foot.

Saint George. John's hand went to his breast, where the candle still lay in its wallet.

"I will do what I can to help you," said the knight, standing at John's shoulder as he put on his gauntlets. "But to make light for you without any means is beyond me."

John avoided the fiery eyes. A stubborn vision of his comfortable, carefree future, made possible by the daily appearance of the candles, kept his hands from the wallet, and his lips sealed. He held his gaze on the statue, and remarked, "Where's the great feat in slaying a dragon of that size?"

He could feel the knight's eyes on him, and knew what a foolish thing it was to say. Something gave a violent rattle to the door of the chapel, and John's heart leapt into his mouth. The horse whinnied.

"Do you think," said the knight, "that the dragon was so small at the *beginning* of the battle?"

He turned and went clinking across the stone floor in his mail. The horse greeted him eagerly as he leapt into the saddle.

The thing outside battered the door again, as resoundingly as any ram ever did a besieged castle. The knight crossed himself and drew his sword.

As the charger took up its position before the door, John cowered by the statue of Saint George. "Surely—surely," he choked, "no wicked thing can come in here, this is a holy place!"

The knight glanced at John over his shoulder, but gave no answer.

Again the night creature pounded against the door, this time setting up a shudder that ran through every stone of the chapel. The tiny flame in the oil lamp flickered alarmingly. John reached inside his shirt and drew out the leather wallet, but hesitated to bring the candle itself out of hiding. To do so would mean something irrevocable, he knew, though he was not sure what, nor whether it would be something worse than the thing that was battering the door. His thoughts, indeed, were so clouded that when the door at last flew inward before the force of the thing's attack, he still stood gazing at the lamp like a snake-charmed mouse.

The charger reared, neighing loudly, and the knight lifted high his sword, crying, "Halt! While I guard him, you shall not approach!"

In through the doorway the beast thrust its gigantic, obscene head. The oil flame grew smaller, but John could see well enough. His innards heaved, and his shaking hand dropped the wallet. "Merciful God," he whispered.

Tall as the door, with bloody eyes and a gaping mouth full of teeth like Saracen blades, yet John recognized it at once. It was his father's face.

The nightmare creature slid into the chapel, snaking its huge coiled body past the mounted knight who stood in its way. The knight turned the horse quickly, and stood once more between John and the beast. "No!" His voice shook the roof-beams. "He will not face you until he is ready!"

John fell to the floor, fumbling for the wallet. The oil lamp flickered. With sweaty hands he took the candle out and leapt toward the lamp.

"John!" the monster called. Its voice was like thunder, and the icy tone of it stabbed him to the bone. He stood frozen before the lamp, unable to lift the candle and place its wick in the flame.

"John." It was the knight who spoke now, his voice urgent yet firm. "I can do no more for you. This is your dragon, not mine. Light the candle, John."

John tore his eyes from the thing with his father's face and dipped the candlewick into the dying flame. Not a moment too soon. Even as he lifted it upright, shining brightly, the oil lamp sputtered and went dark.

John clutched the candle before his breast, but his relief was short-lived. The knight lowered his sword and made the horse sidle away, allowing the thing with his father's face to advance towards John. Grinning, it reared backward and lunged toward him.

"No!" he screamed, and lifted the candle high. The monster fell back, whimpering. Encouraged, John jumped forward, thrusting the candle in the creature's face.

The candle flame surged suddenly, and again a horror of recognition washed over John. How could he have thought this was his father's face? It was not. It was his own.

It was a bland, soft face, the face of a worm and not of a man. And it had shrunk as he held the light upon it. A pitiful, complaining moan issued from its throat, and John, startled, drew back the hand that held the candle.

"Steady!" said the knight, and John held the light out toward the thing again.

The face that was and was not his own grew puffy, the lips pouting in protest against the injustice done to it. The vast quivering body dwindled and melted like a lump of suet in the kettle, until it was no larger than John himself.

"John," said the knight, and John turned to see him offering his sword.

John looked from the thing to the knight and back again. "But surely it's harmless now!" he said.

The thing turned its head in a pleading fashion, as if to demonstrate the truth of John's words.

"Perhaps," said the knight. "But when the candle is burnt out, will you be able to stop it from growing again?"

John swallowed. But, oh, to thrust a blade into his twin! Perhaps he could have done it cheerfully enough if the face had remained that of his father...

But what a face it was. The more he looked at it the sorrier he was ever to have seen it. It was undeniably his own face, and written in every lump of the flesh were cowardice, selfishness, pettiness. Feeling sick, he shifted the candle to his left hand and accepted the offered hilt from the knight with his right.

The small nightmare was crying like a kitten now, begging him without words for mercy. But John held the candle above it while it squirmed, and watched it shrink to the size of a cat. Then he set his left foot firmly upon its back, drew back his sword arm and plunged the blade into its soft flesh with all his strength.

Whimpering, it went stiff and rolled over. Its maggoty flesh melted, pooling on the floor, and then, with a hiss like an extinguished candle, evaporated into wisps of smoke.

With a sob of relief, John dropped to his knees before the altar, and there he stayed, the knight at his side, until dawn, when the candle breathed its last.

The knight helped him to his feet, and led him out into the morning. A spring bubbled in front of the chapel, and John drank from it gratefully.

"My lord—" John began, but the knight shook his head.

"I am not your lord. A fellow warrior, only."

John could not look at him, thinking, *That thing in the night, that was how he saw me all along.* "I—I do not know what to do now. Perhaps—perhaps I should go on the crusade, as my father did." It was with wondering relief that he realized the thought of his father no longer burned his soul like spilt hot tallow.

"Not by my advice," said the knight. "The crusading days are nigh done, and there was ever more evil than good in them. Still, there has been many a soul saved along the way to them. Perhaps your father was among them."

Then the knight mounted his horse and brought John out of the wood by a short route. When John jumped down he found himself looking downhill over a vineyard that nestled up against a stately abbey. Black-robed brothers stooped amongst the vines, singing as they worked, and the sun washed the whole valley with its blessing.

He turned to look up at the knight. "Please do not forget me."

The knight smiled. Behind his visor, his eyes shone brightly.

John made his way down the hill, turning at the bottom to wave. The knight raised his arm in reply, and then he was gone.

John strode into the vineyard, and hailed one of the monks. "Greetings,

brother! I beg of you, take me to a priest, so that I may make my confession. And then, I think I should like to speak to your novice master."

The monk, an old man with the leathery skin and keen eyes of lifelong asceticism, looked up from his labour. Sweat streamed down a brow furrowed with sceptical lines. "If you hope to escape the ills of the world within our walls, young man, let me warn you, the only comfort you'll find here will be the spiritual sort."

John smiled. "Comfort! The truest comfort is the light of one candle on a dark night. Yes, that sort will be enough for me." •

ASK MR. SCIENCE

ON SPEC is pleased to introduce a new feature, "Ask Mr. Science," which first appeared in *BCSFAZINE*, the monthly newsletter of the BC Science Fiction Association. "Ask Mr. Science" (compiled by Al Betz, the social secretary for Mr. Science) won the 1991 Aurora for Fan Achievement (Other). Although this piece has been previously published, Mr. Science is looking forward to answering new questions. Send YOUR questions to: "Ask Mr. Science," c/o *ON SPEC*, Box 4727, Edmonton, AB T6E 5G6.

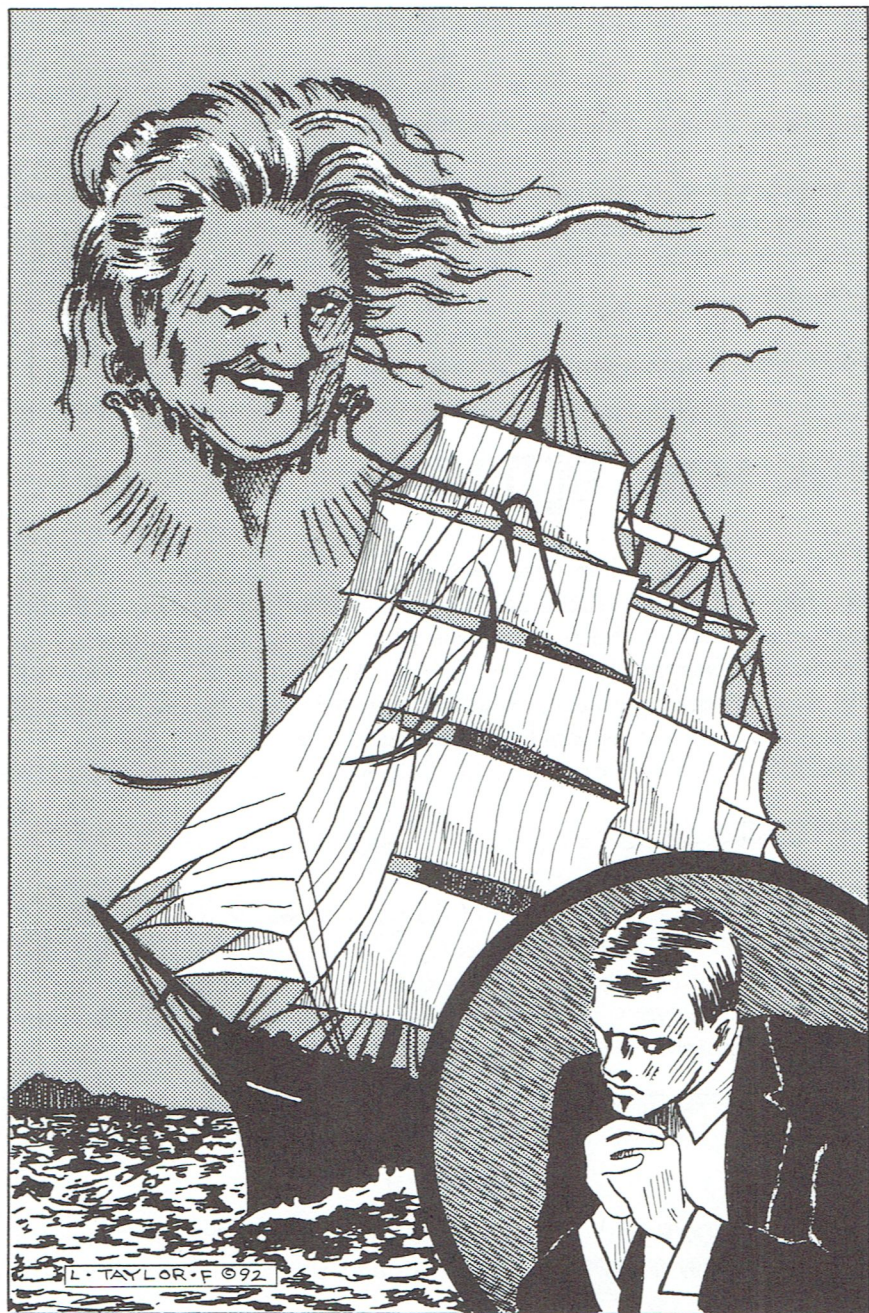
QUESTION (Ms. LB of Surrey, BC): *Why is the sky blue?*

ANSWER: The present colour of the sky is caused by an accumulation of the traces of blue aniline dyes produced by the burning of tobacco in cigarettes. As the foul habit of cigarette smoking is stamped out, and photo-destruction of these insidious dyes takes place in the upper atmosphere, the sky will slowly return to its normal, beautiful salmon pink colour. •

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Mrs. Leakey's Ghost

by Alice Major

illustrated by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk

Mrs. Leakey's coffin. She lay
in polished oak, satin lining. Handles
gleamed on the dark wood, ornately plump
as the pudgy candelabra in her parlour.

Mrs. Leakey's face. In repose.
Mouth a straight staple, clamping white
flesh. Ladies guard their skin
from outdoor elements, go nowhere
without careful paraphernalia—veils
and parasols.

Mrs. Leakey's hands. Clasped firmly.
Locks of hair bound in a brooch
on her bosom. Bosom bound
in a corset.

Mrs. Leakey. Going nowhere
but the grave. To lie beneath
the same stone carapace that hid
her husband, former ship owner, now
a pale bony cargo in his last hold.

Son Francis, a Victorian top hat
fluttering tails of crepe.
He rode to the graveyard, grieving
properly. He mourned less for his mother
than for something else, something

inarticulate, slain before his birth, locked up in ledgers. Something gone forever. Something that had never gone anywhere.

Mrs. Leakey, going nowhere but to doubtful glory. So she astonished Francis, by reappearing late one night in a corner of his study. Her hair was straying slightly from its iron-gray bands. Her skin had darkened, as if exposed to peat in some flesh-pickling bog. His hand trembled on the ledger and she disappeared.

But then another night, with the ship *Eliza Leakey* full a fortnight late and telegrams reporting storms around the Cape of Africa—with the very furniture worrying, with the gas lamps wavering in their faith—there she was again. Now her bosom flopped as he had never seen it, uncorseted. The braids around her head a horsehair straggle, as if the sofa stuffing had burst its bounds.

And then again. This time in the hall barring access to the parlour, baring her teeth at the maid and hissing like a harridan at her daughter-in-law. Who had hysterics, packed her bags, and went to live again in her mother's drawing room.

Mrs. Leakey, coming from the grave sat on the steep-pitched roof and out-meowled all the cats of London. Always just above the room where Francis sat, scraping pen on paper. "Out. Out. Out!" she wailed, worrying the furniture more deeply still. But leaving the creditors who filed up to the doorstep strangely undisturbed. Francis heard them

whisper in his dreams. "Pay. Pay. Pay."

The captain of the *Mary Leakey* sent a confidential letter from his last port of call. "Dear sir . . . beg to inform . . . sailors are a superstitious lot. Claim to see your mother of most blessed memory capering in the crow's nest. . . . Hesitate to mention . . . indelicate . . . the apparition lifts her skirts. No pantaloons. Most strange occurrences. Suggest you contact Lloyds, investigate insurance re: effects of supernatural."

Shortly after leaving Curaçao, the *Mary Leakey* dove to the bottom of the sea and Mrs. Leakey capered with the fishes. The voices of the creditors rose like wind in the spars. The silver candelabra sold. The solid wooden furniture now worried about new owners.

And Mrs. Leakey cursing still on the rooftops. "Out. Out. Out." The house sold off at auction. Notices of bankruptcy in all the papers. Ledgers opened to the supercilious gaze of strangers. Until the day when Francis stood embittered at his parents' grave. "Well, mother, you've brought ruin on me. I'm off for North America. I'll not be back."

The granite stone absorbed his curses indifferently, like blows from feeble fists. The ground lay quiet. Mrs. Leakey lying in her grave at last.

At last, long last,
he turned and walked away, a free
man. •



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by Amber Hayward

illustrated by Adrian Kleinbergen

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Sister Sun

by Lorina J. Stephens

illustrated by Richard Bartrop

If he didn't find shelter soon he'd freeze. He hazarded one last glance around their observation post. A skin of ice had already formed on Lisa's tea. She'd even left her notes behind.

He sealed both hers and his in a pouch, shrugged into his parka and turned his back on six months. There was nothing left for him to do but survive until she forgave his sin and fetched him back to the present through the gate.

But, then, she might not. Why else would she have sabotaged life support?

He stepped outside. A monochrome landscape was before him, the sky too open, the stars too bright. The Inuit have over twenty names for snow. There was no subtle meaning in the snow for him. Cold. Killing cold. This was all it could ever mean.

At least the winter village was close. He'd head for the dance house and hope he wouldn't miss the mound of turf that was its roof. The girl might be there.

•

Man and woman—they work together well. They have to. The one called

Lisa glances over at the one called Yukio, her fingers hovering over the keyboard.

"I didn't expect their language to be so evolved," she says.

Yukio grins and sets aside the pen. He dives through his holo of the whalebone spear, lands on his haunches and grunts. Lisa laughs, shrieks when he sets to pawing her.

"Oh, enough!" she says.

He stares at her closely, doing his best to imitate Neanderthal.

"Wrong time, dummy."

Yukio grunts again and lays his head against her breast.

"Poor Yukio. Too much time spent in the past."

He makes a meaningfully pathetic noise and snuggles closer. Her breasts yield. She stiffens.

"We better get back to work," she says.

He withdraws, but she senses his reluctance.

For a long moment he watches her the way he would when they were children. "You're right," he says. "Ten months isn't a lot of time."

•

Warmth. He could only stand there and luxuriate in warmth. Vaguely, he sensed someone pulling the flap closed on the dance house, shutting this subterranean room from the long tunnel to the outside. There had been singing the moment he entered—a chant like a wheeze, the vibrating sound of a drum.

Now there was only warmth.

He opened his eyes.

Lisa would have been in raptures. There were eighteen adults here, three obviously elders, seven couples, a single man—perhaps recently come of age, perhaps a visitor from another village on a suit of marriage. The girl was here. He wondered if the boy had come for her.

Already the children tugged at their parents, demanding an answer to the question of his presence.

He stumbled around a few words. The elders slid glances to one another. Question there. Fear. He felt the sensibility of things tilt. The chant resumed. He sat near the tunnel door, dismissed, accepted. He might as well been off-planet for all their interest in him. Typical. Likely they thought him either a far-away hunter or one of the malevolent spirits that stalked their world. From the way the children watched him he suspected it was the latter.

That brought his attention back to the girl.

The girl paid him no notice. She knew already what kind of demon he was. Demons were best ignored. Her world was all for the young man. He'd be

hunting with her family for the next two years if he was successful. Yukio had no doubt the man would be. The furs he wore were luxurious. The attention he gave the girl was encompassing. The deference he showed her parents was exemplary.

The hunter would have her under his robes soon enough. And then his friends'. It was so easy for them to be promiscuous.

The story-chant ended. The girl bent to the old woman who led the last song. Whispers exchanged. The old woman nodded, sliding a worried glance to him. A drum vibrated once more and the girl danced, the old woman chanting. It took a few moments for the words to hit him. When they did that riot of emotions returned. Part of him bolted. Part of him sat there in horrid fascination while his sin transformed to legend before his eyes.

Yukio finds the girl on infrared—a fluke, a dot in a blizzard, lost no more than ten metres from the dance house tunnel.

“She’ll die,” Lisa says.

He mumbles in agreement.

“We can’t just let her die!”

He turns to Lisa, frowning, watches the way light from the screen catches her cheek, the ends of her eyelashes, her upper lip. “We can’t interfere. You *know* that.”

“But she’ll die.”

He glances back at the screen, the dot that represents a fast-freezing life. Yes. The girl will die. Why does it matter to Lisa?

“We’d have to check with the department—”

“There isn’t time,” Lisa says.

He feels her move away. He turns. She’s zippering into down coveralls. Panic jolts him. In the next moment he’s beside her, his hands on her shoulders, his fingers dimpling her arms.

“You can’t go out there.”

She wriggles unsuccessfully, glares at him, brown eyes as cold as the wind outside. “I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself.”

“If you were you’d realize going out in zero visibility is foolish.”

“I’m a big girl. I don’t need your help anymore.”

This is part of his panic, he knows: She doesn’t need him anymore. *Yukio, push my bike. Yukio, help me with this equation. Yukio, hug me.* All those years of friendship. Growing together. Loving each other.

Loving her.

She stiffens, pulls away, something almost frightened in the way she looks

at him.

He longs to draw her back, let his palms explore her. "Lisa, I—" "Don't—"

Is that fear he sees? "I'm sorry, I—"

She backs to the wall.

"Lisa, I thought we—"

"It would be incestuous," she says.

His hands hang impotent at his sides.

"We're like brother and sister."

Anger takes him. "I'm not your brother."

He ignores the apologies she sputters, jams his legs into coveralls, yanks the zipper closed, slaps the velcro tab shut. She implores him to listen, to understand. All he can understand is the years he's grown with her, known her, loved her.

The Arctic is unrelenting in its punishment when he steps outside, alone.

He was mesmerized by her dance, the way she moved, the way she mimed. The grandmother behind her chanted the tale well. It was all there. The girl had refined his sin to an art. He could do nothing but drown in legend: *a girl in the dance house, the lamps blow out, darkness wraps and darkness hides, a man a man a man between her legs, a girl in the dance house, hands blackened, the lamps blow out, darkness wraps and darkness hides, a man a man a man between her legs.*

She lay on the floor. He could feel the heat of his face, memory overlapping this scene. And still the legend fills his ears, defining why they'd accepted him so readily in the dance house, why they'd never bothered to question his presence.

A brother's back black, betrayal, betrayal, she cuts her breasts and throws them at him, Sister Sun hides from Brother Moon.

He could hardly breathe when she mimed the last scenes, hiding her face from an incestuous brother, a sun forever running from the moon. At that moment she stared at him, accusation and triumph.

He bolted. The chill air did nothing to freeze what he felt.

She sees him only as a blip that sketches a haphazard course on the screen to the other blip that is the freezing girl. Lisa guides him over the ear-transmitter and he can hear her, disturbingly intimate as compared to the howling wind. Already his face is numb. There's nothing to see but a cloud of snow. It's as if movement doesn't occur. He clings to the rope he attached to the

observation post. Drop it and he will die. Like the girl, he could become lost within feet of shelter.

"Just a few more steps," Lisa says. "A little east."

She watches the blip shift. She has been unfair to him, she thinks.

"Right there," she says.

He hears her urgency.

"You should be right on top of her."

He is. His boots collide with a pliable mass. His balance skews. He pitches forward. The girl groans. In his fall he's lost the rope.

"Yukio," Lisa says. "What is it?"

He says nothing. To tell her he's lost the rope would be to tempt fate. For a moment he senses the malevolence of the Arctic—all those spirits that torture the Inuit. He feels through the snow for the rope, his eyes filled with whiteness.

Lisa calls to him again. Her panic rises.

"Have you got her?"

"I'm with her."

"Come back," and she fears, for a moment, he won't, that he's lost the rope, that he's too cold already. What would she do without him? Yukio, who has always been there?

He thinks, where is it? where is it? and finally finds it, loops it around his wrist and knots it, which is what he should have done in the first place, he knows.

"I have her," he says.

Lisa relaxes only slightly. He still has to carry the girl back. She watches two blips become one and then trace a laboriously slow path back to home.

When at last he stands within the outer lock he is iced with snow, the girl flung over his shoulder. Lisa feels the coldness of him as her arms close around him. He is safe. The girl is safe.

He turns from the holo when Lisa walks in. Her hair is towel-wrapped, her small figure swathed in a robe. He watches a bead of water slide round her neck, catch in the hollow of her throat and then slip, effortlessly, between her breasts.

"She's bathing," Lisa says.

"That wise?" he asked, a little rougher than he intended.

She sits on the chair next to him. "It's the best way I can think to get her body temperature up."

"She looks like you."

"Nonsense."

"Same eyes, same mouth, same cheekbones. She's even tiny like you." Strange twist of nature, cruel coincidence.

"Some scientist."

Very scientific in fact. Ice bridges. An exodus of people who in the future would trace their lineage back to the oriental lands. "We should notify the department," he says. "Time interference—"

She leans toward him, touches his arm. "Please, Yukio."

He watches the trail that drop left, the way her robe parts as she leans toward him. His finger traces the dampness. He sees the woman now, not the girl, her mouth untasted, her skin so warm.

Her lips are cool beneath his, full. It amazes him how easy it is to bend to her, to taste. For a moment he relishes this thing he's waited to have. It is no more than a moment. A breath. She jerks back, anger rising.

"I'm not your brother," he says, and stalks from the room.

He finds himself at the bathroom of their small enclosure. Lisa's clothes are strewn across the floor, her bra dangling from the sink.

The girl lies in the tub, ivory against white, steaming water to her chin. Her breasts glisten where they are exposed, the nipples dark and swollen, jet hair like ribbons. She does nothing. She only lies there in the steam, the dark sea goddess the Inuit fear so greatly.

He fears her. She resembles Lisa very much.

He steps into the room. His heart beats so hard he wonders why it doesn't echo from the walls.

Her eyes open. She stares at him. There is nothing of fear in her. She watches him, her eyes moving slowly, slowly, down his length. Her arms rise, hands rippling over the water and then cup her breasts. She smiles. Accusation and triumph.

He thinks only of Lisa when he kneels beside her and sucks upon one of the breasts she offers him, slides his hands into the heat of the water, lifts her, dripping. He lets her go long enough to strip. Her body is slippery, hot to his touch when he presses himself, naked, against her. She makes a little leap when he lifts her buttocks into his palms, her legs around him. She moans when he enters her.

Lisa. Lisa like this, tiny, wet, breasts fleshy against his chest, thighs firm around his waist. Lisa with whom he's grown. Lisa to whom he makes love. Lisa . . .

. . . who finds them fucking, his fingers biting deeply into the girl's ass, her head hung back and dripping, moans in her throat, Yukio in her body. Yukio. She hurls her bra at him. "Eat this, you bastard!" And flees.

•

For four days Lisa has not spoken to him. And for four days the blizzard has prevented him from releasing the girl back into the primitive cold that is so much a part of her life.

Finally the blizzard does abate, enough that he can let the girl out, be sure she will find her way back to the winter village. He watches her go on the screen. She turns back to look. He punches in the camouflage code. A look of surprise crosses her face. She turns. She runs into a world of twilight white.

For awhile he listens on audio. Such quiet out there. And then the wolves howl.

Lisa, who sits beside him, speaks.

“How could you?”

What should he answer, he wonders, and says nothing.

The wolves continue to howl.

•

He wakes with a start, aware that he is cold, shivering. He swings his legs over the cot.

“Lisa,” he calls, and then feels the quiet.

He rises, pulls on trousers, sweaters, pushes his feet into shoes.

When he enters the workroom he knows where Lisa is. The environmental controls have all been sabotaged, his link to the department back in the twenty-first century destroyed.

Heat shoots through his chest—adrenaline. The word marooned jumps in his mind.

His gaze moves to Lisa’s cup. A skin of ice is forming on the tea. If he doesn’t find shelter soon he’ll freeze.

•

He has no idea how long he has walked. Sister Sun rose and set in two hours, chased by Brother Moon who shines pale and cold upon an Arctic night. The gate is close—an inukshuk older than any legend the Inuit remember, a cairn of rocks over twenty feet tall.

He reaches the granite rocks that resemble a giant man, sets his back to the inukshuk and slides down. The transmitter in his parka spews out a stream of static. He bites off his mitten, flicks the switch off, shoves his hand back into cover.

If they are to find him he will have to depend on Lisa.

Wolves howl in the distance. The first glimmer of an aurora waves on the horizon, flashes and then erupts into curtains of green, blue and red.

He lifts his head and howls. The wolves answer. •

CONS—CANADIAN CONVENTION CALENDAR

When contacting conventions for more information, include a Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope for their reply. Abbreviation code: GoH = Guest of Honour, TM = Toastmaster.

• **OCT 8-11 — BOUCHERCON XXIII** (World Mystery Con) Royal York Hotel, Toronto. Memb: \$60. Info: P.O. Box 23, Station S, Toronto ON, M5M 4L6.

• **OCT 9-11 — MEMeticON 92**
Skyline Plaza Hotel, Calgary. FanGoHs: Phillip&Michael, other GoHs TBA. Memb: \$15 until Oct 1 1992, \$20 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 20004, Bow Valley Postal Outlet, Calgary AB, T2P 4H3.

• **OCT 17-18 — CON*CEPT 92**
Ramada Renaissance-Hotel du Parc, Montreal. GoHs: Roger Zelazny, Gregory Benford, TM: Larry Stewart. Memb: \$20 until Sept 18 1992, \$23 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 405, Station H, Montreal PQ, H3G 2L1.

• **OCT 30-Nov 1 — MAPLECON 13**
Chimo Hotel, Ottawa. ComicGoH: Gabriel Morrisette, FanGoH: Keith Braithwaite, TM: Lloyd & Yvonne Penney. Memb: \$25 until Sept 30 1992, \$30 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 20225, 790 Rideau St. East, Ottawa ON, K1N 9P4.

• **NOV 6-8 — NOVACON VI**
Holiday Inn, Halifax. GoH: Dave Duncan. Memb: \$20 now, \$25 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 1282, Dartmouth NS, B2Y 4B9.

1993

• **MAR 12-14 — S.T. CON 93**
Ramada Hotel, Calgary. GoHs: Margaret Wandler Bonanno, Tanya Huff, Ronald Moore, Michelle Sagara. Memb: \$25 now, \$30 at the door. Info: 44 Scenic Road NW, Calgary AB, T3L 1B9.

• **MAY 21-23 — KEYCON 10**
Marlborough Inn, Winnipeg. GoHs: Roger Zelazny, Fred Saberhagen. Memb: \$30 to Apr

30 1993, \$40 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 3178, Winnipeg MB, R3C 4E6.

• **MAY 28-30 — V-CON 20**
Totem Residence, UBC, Vancouver. GoH: TBA, ArtGoH: Rob Alexander, TM: Michael Coney. Memb: \$24 to Oct 31 1992, \$30 to Apr 30 1993, \$35 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 48478, Bentall Centre, Vancouver BC, V7X 1A2.

• **JUNE 4-6 — AD ASTRA 13**
Sheraton East, Toronto. GoHs: Anne McCaffrey, Dave Duncan. ArtGoH: Robin Wood. Memb: \$20 to Nov 7 1992, \$26 to May 15 1993, \$32 at the door. Info: P.O. Box 7276, Station A, Toronto ON, M5W 1X9.

• **JULY 16-18 — CONVERSION X**
Marlborough Inn, Calgary. GoHs: L. Sprague & Catherine de Camp, others TBA. Memb: \$30 to Jan 31/93, \$35 to June 30/93, \$40 at door. Info: P.O. Box 1088, Station M, Calgary AB, T2P 2K9.

• **OCT 15-17 — I-CON 3** (*postponed from 1992, all 1992 memberships will be honoured*). Harbour Towers Hotel, Victoria. GoH: Dave Duncan, ArtGoH: Julia Lacquement, ScienceGoH: Dr. J.G. Cramer, FanGoH: Betty Bigelow. Memb: \$25. Info: P.O. Box 30004, #104 - 3995 Quadra St., Victoria BC, V8X 5E1.

1994

• **SEPT 1-5 — CONADIAN** (Worldcon)
See Conadian's ad, opposite, for info.

ON SPEC would like to print your Canadian convention and author readings information. Send us details of your event at least 5 months in advance (to Box 4727, Edmonton AB, T6E 5G6), and we'll run it free of charge.

Most information in this column is courtesy of *CONTRACT*, the Canadian convention newsletter, available from 321 Portage Ave, Winnipeg MB R3B 2B9 (subscriptions \$7.00 for 6 issues). Send convention info directly to them, as well. •

52 World

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CONVENTION

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Author Guest
Anne McCaffrey

Artist Guest
George Barr

Toastmaster
Barry B. Longyear

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Robert Runte



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*until December 31, 1992

the INNER MIND:

Seen the nightmares
haunting for other
poor souls.

i have walked
the streets
of dream
many
times.
many
years.

horrid things.
none have haunted me
since childhood but
tonight i
feel uneasy.

Afraid

WAKE
UP!

▶ DON'T BE AFRAID OF US.
WE'RE NOT TO GIVE YOU FRIGHTS

▶ NO, INDEED, NOT US. WE CAN'T
HELP WE LOOK. WE'RE NOT
YOU R NIGHTMARES...♥

▶ WE ARE THE EATERS
OF YOUR NIGHTMARES

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MIRAGE





OUR CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION/POETRY

Donna Farley (*Light One Candle*) is the wife of an Orthodox priest and mother of two daughters. Her most recent SF publication was in the Silverberg anthology, *UNIVERSE 2*.

M.A.C. Farrant's (*The Children Do Not Yet Know*) collection of short fiction, *Sick Pigeon* (Thistledown Press, 1991), was shortlisted for both the BC Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for 1992. She lives in Sidney, BC.

Amber Hayward (*Amazing Automatic T.V. Rifle, A Walk in the Matapo Hills, Swift Days in the Black Hole*) is a writer living at Black Cat Guest Ranch in Hinton. Recent publishing credits include *CV2*, *Dandelion* and *Rampik*. She has just joined the editorial collective of *Other Voices*.

Wesley Herbert (*Crossroads*) is a York University student, married, with cats. He has recently submitted a slogan to Weston Bakeries Quality Awareness contest, once received an A on a surrealism paper and hated every English class he's ever taken.

Alice Major (*Mrs. Leakey's Ghost*) is an Edmonton poet and novelist. Her first collection of poems, *Time Travels Light*, will be published this fall.

Sally McBride (*Children in Boxes*) just married fellow writer Dale L. Sproule. She recently sold "Softlinks" (first published in *ON SPEC*) to a San Diego computer magazine with a circulation of 80,000. Her novel is still half finished.

Lyn McConchie (*Heaven's Above*) owns and lives on a small farm in Southern Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. She breeds spotted and coloured sheep and often gets plot ideas from her animals.

Lorina J. Stephens (*Sister Sun*) lives in Orangeville, Ontario. She has published several short stories, and her new book, *Niagara Escarpment: Touring the Giants' Rib*, will be out this fall.

Bruce Taylor (*The Coat*) has just chaired the Sharon Baker memorial award in SF and Fantasy for the Pacific North West Conference. Two of his latest works are *Kafka's Uncle* and *Edward Dancing on the Edge of Infinity*.

Michael Teasdale (*The Ten-Million Year Beach*) was born in 1966 and has been kept alive since then by chronic optimism and the constant support of his wife and two cats. "The Ten-Million Year Beach" is his second sale, but the first to see print.

NONFICTION

Ask Mr. Science — Al Betz is the social secretary for Mr. Science, who would be pleased to address your questions on matters scientific. Write to him *clo ON SPEC*.

Editorial Shoes — Lorna Toolis is head of the Merrill collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy. Michael Skeet is a Toronto writer and broadcaster. They

have just finished editing *Tesseract*⁴.

ARTISTS

Cover Art — Lynne Taylor Fahnstalk, *ON SPEC*'s new art director. See "ON This Issue," page 3, for an introduction to Lynne.

Jim Beveridge (*Children in Boxes*), a career freelance illustrator with a scientific bent, comes armed with an airbrush and a fertile imagination. He has designed and illustrated works including logos, posters, comics, album jackets, etc.

Richard Bartrop (*Sister Sun*) is a Calgary artist whose work can be seen in local convention art shows as well as in previous issues of *ON SPEC*.

Steve Goetze (*The Ten-Million Year Beach*) is an Ontario animator and illustrator. This is his third appearance in *ON SPEC*. If he can muster enough courage, he might even submit some of his writing.

Tim Hammell (*The Inner Mind*) in collaboration with Marc Laurie, did the cover for the current *SF Chronicle*. He was awarded second place in the photo re-touching category for *Airbrush Action* magazine's airbrush competition. Tim recently ran away to Calgary.

Mike Jackson (*Crossroads*) is a megalomaniac who plans to achieve world domination through messages hidden in science fiction artwork. So far, *Horizons SF*, *Challenge* magazine, *ON SPEC*, and various games from GDW and FASA have fallen prey to his mad schemes. We can only hope he'll be stopped before it's too late.

Adrian Kleinbergen (*Amazing TV Semi-Automatic Rifle*) is a Calgary artist whose work has appeared many times in *ON SPEC*, including the cover of the Spring 1991 issue.

Kurt Reichel (*Light One Candle*) was born in Austria and came to Canada at the age of nine. He received his schooling on the West Coast and graduated from art school in the Kootenays. He lives in Invermere, BC, with his wife and dog.

Dory A. Rikkonen (*The Children Do Not Yet Know*) works as the Broadcast Media Coordinator in the advertising department of a local Calgary retailer, working on a range of projects including TV and radio commercials. She also does freelance illustration for commercial storyboards, posters (Calgary's First Night Festival) and magazines.

Kenneth Scott (*The Coat*) Having witnessed the birth of mankind, Kenneth Scott reports his social development is not what it should be. This "artist with a political agenda" lives in Calgary with his girlfriend and two cats.

Martin Springett (*ON ART*) See pages 45-48 for our gallery feature on Martin's work. •

GENERAL INFORMATION

ON SPEC is seeking original science fiction, fantasy, horror, ghost or fairy stories, magic realism, etc. Strong preference is given to submissions by Canadians. Send your short stories (max. 6000 words), short short stories (under 1000 words) or poetry (max. 100 lines) to the *ON SPEC* address below.

All submissions **must** include a Self Addressed Stamped Envelope (SASE) with sufficient return postage. **Do NOT send originals.**

Submissions must be in **competition format** (author's name should NOT appear on manuscript). Enclose separate cover page with your name, address, **phone number**, story title and word count.

Please send SASE for complete guidelines before submitting.

Deadlines are November 30/92, February 28/93, May 31/93, and August 31/93 (Theme TBA).

Art guidelines and advertising information are available. Please send SASE.

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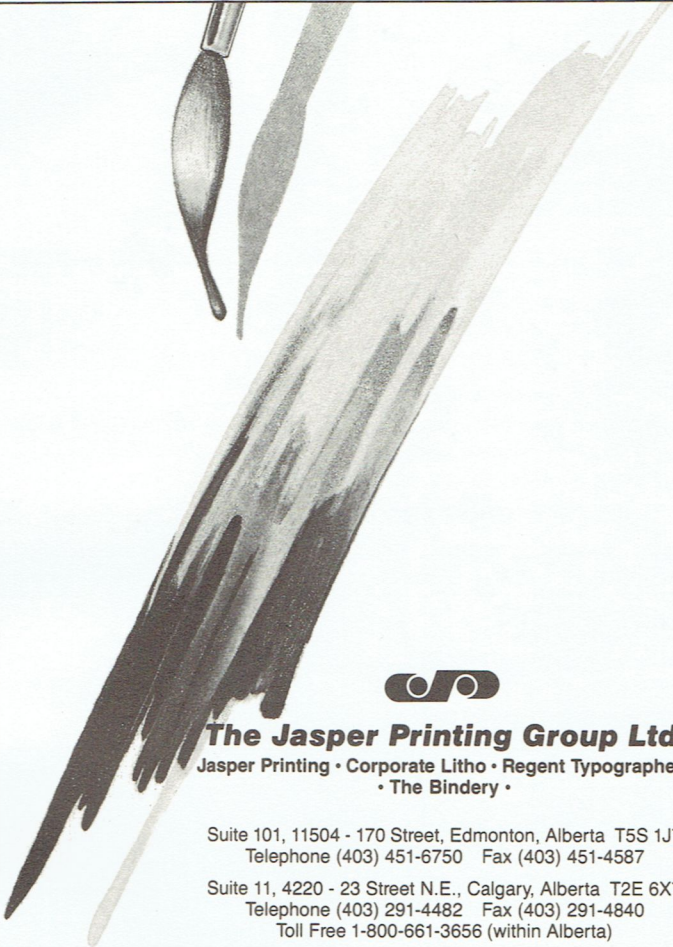
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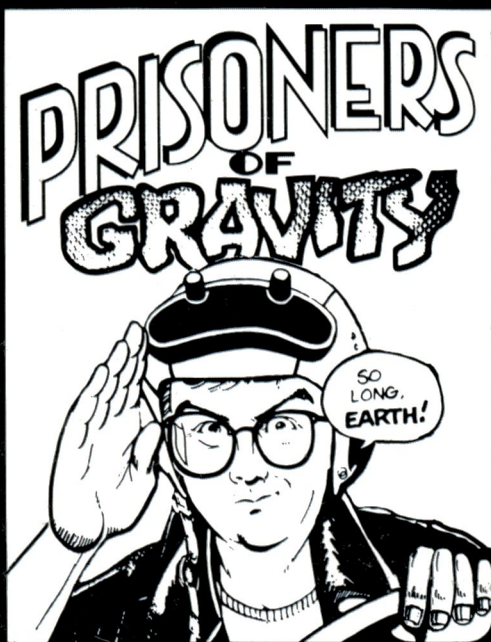


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