

# SPEC

The Canadian Magazine of  
Speculative Writing • FALL 93  
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Featuring "Motherlove" by LESLIE GADALLAH



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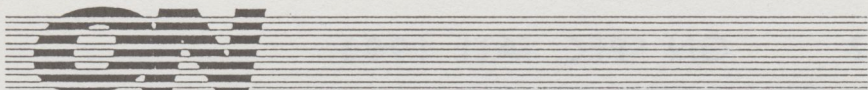
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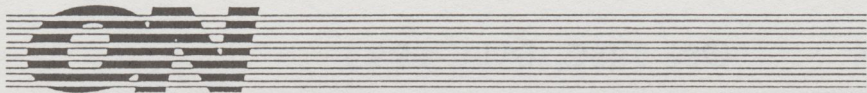
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## THIS ISSUE

by Hazel Sangster

As this is officially my last issue with *ON SPEC*, I get to do the editorial! I'm moving to Minnesota for a couple of years and although I will be working on expanding *ON SPEC*'s distribution in the U.S., I will no longer be an editor. I'll miss it! As one of the founding members of the Copper Pig Writers' Society and subsequently of *ON SPEC*, I'm really proud of "the little magazine that could." Being associated with the incredible bunch of people whose creative energy and sheer hard work have made *ON SPEC* into the professional product it is today has been a fantastic experience.

One of the keys to our success at *ON SPEC* is our lack of money. No, that's not a good thing, but it has made us cautious. We just couldn't afford to grow in leaps and bounds. We subscribe to the "baby steps" approach. Over the years we've taken lots of "baby steps"—from two to three to four issues a year, from 400 to 2000 copies per run, adding pages to make room for the deluge of good material, improving our design and production quality including the move to perfect binding. Our next "baby step" is to expand our distribution. And for that we need your help.

The best distribution bet for us and for you, our readers, is through subscriptions. But people need to know about us, so we also distribute through bookstores and at conventions. We have found that the magazine sells best when it is placed in specialty stores—those already catering to fans of speculative writing and art. But the trouble is we're here. And you're there. And we don't have the money to visit you—yet. So if you know of a store in your area that you think would carry *ON SPEC*, send us a note with their name and address and we'll do the rest. If you're in the store, give the owner one of the *ON SPEC* bookmarks enclosed with this issue and tell them how much you enjoy reading the magazine. And if you want to be the proud owner of an exclusive set of free *ON SPEC* fridge magnets, give a subscription to a friend. (See page 82 for info, 95 to order.) Thanks for your continued support! •

### SPECIAL FEATURES ON AURORA-WINNERS:

**David Nickle and Karl Schroeder** won for Best Short Work in English—see page 41 for a humorous article on just how they worked together.

**Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk** won for Artistic Achievement—see page 31 for a feature on Lynne and her art.

***Under the Ozone Hole*** won for Best Fan Achievement (Fanzine)—see page 5 for a feature on this exciting 'zine.

## ON SPEC

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## ON SPEC DEADLINES

Aug. 31/93 for Spring 1994

(Theme: *Hard SF*)

Nov. 30/93 for Summer 1994

Feb. 28/94 for Fall 1994

May 31/94 for Winter 1994

All submissions must be in CONTEST FORMAT: no author name on manuscript. Enclose self-addressed, stamped envelope with sufficient postage to cover return of manuscript, and covering letter with name, address, phone number, and word count. If manuscript is disposable, indicate in covering letter. More details, page 95.

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## THE 1993 AURORAS

by Cath Jackel

This issue we are proud to present articles by and about several of the winners of this year's Aurora awards. For those of you who aren't sure just exactly what these awards are, "The Auroras are the Canadian equivalent of the Hugos." Well, sorta. Like the Hugos, they are decided by popular vote by interested readers. Unlike the Hugos, it only costs \$2 to vote, and both voters and nominees must be Canadian. The Auroras were created to honour the best in Canadian SF, and now cover a number of categories. When they began, the first award was given to A.E. van Vogt for lifetime achievement, and the possible winners could have been numbered on the fingers of one hand. The last time anyone tried compiling a list of eligible nominees two years ago, it ran to six pages of small print. We are pleased to present an "On the Record" essay by the winners of the short story award (English) on page 41, an art feature on Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk, the winner for artistic achievement, on page 31, and a short article about *Under the Ozone Hole*, the winning fanzine, following.

## UNDER THE OZONE HOLE

Fanzines (short for fan magazines), are idiosyncratic, self-produced publications, usually in at least a vague way related to SF. This year's winner, *Under the Ozone Hole*, is published out of Victoria by Karl Johanson and John Herbert. Issue #4, the latest in our hands at press time, features book reviews, Canadian SF, articles, and even a bit about Canadian politics, all presented with intelligence and humour. The cover features noted sociologist and Canadian SF historian Dr. Robert Runté. Through the magic of photoretouching, Dr. Runté is now "Admiral Runté, trapped on a planet of desperate women with a secret!"

Like most fanzines, *UTOH's* publishing schedule is somewhat erratic, but so far issues have been appearing about every four months. Those interested in subscribing may send money to Karl Johanson at 4129 Carey Road, Victoria BC V8Z 4G5. "Subscriptions are \$12.50/four issues (and One Free Neat Thing). Lifetime subscriptions available for 10 hectares of waterfront in the BC interior."





# MOTHERLOVE

by Leslie Gadallah

illustrated by Adrian Kleinbergen

**Y**ou seen 'em? Pretty ugly, eh? They're what you call your tutelary demons. 'Course they're just plaster, for looks, like. Not like they're any real protection. Bought 'em a couple of months ago. Got these kids from the high school with a half-ton and muscles to bring 'em out. Thought they'd look classy up there on the porch. Though maybe red ain't the best colour. Hazel McMurty makes 'em, eh? S'posed to keep trouble off your house if you give 'em a saucer a milk now and then. Me, I don't see no need to waste good milk on plaster demons.

Yeah, sure I know Hazel McMurty. Known her off and on, maybe twenty years. Decent old bat. Tad strange, I guess. Spooks the neighbours with the talking to herself, like some foreign lingo. Fools around a lot with cards and star-signs and stuff like that. Got a bunch a old bones in a cupboard right there in her living room, along with the ashes of two dead husbands, which is kinda weird.

Lord love a duck, talk about a crummy looking room. Couldn't they put a window in it or something? You guys get some kind of special lumpy paint, or what? Every government place I ever been in has the same ol' dirty cream-colour lumpy paint.

Well, me, I figure cops for part of the government. Mind if I sit down? I been up since six this morning, and God knows when I'm gonna

get my chores done. You know somebody nailed your table to the floor? I don't know what you're on about, anyway. The kid got run over. I can't say I feel real bad about it, but no way I run him over. George Peterson run him over. So what's it to do with me? Why ain't you bugging George?

Hazel. Okay. So, I try to help out when I can. Nothing much. Stuff outta the garden we don't need. Few eggs now and then. Like that. Just being neighbourly, eh? No big deal. What, you got a rule about helping out a old woman alone having a hard time of it?

The thing is, Hazel's pretty broken up on account of her cat got run over. She was real fond of that old cat. About the only friend she had. Called it Bernard, after her second husband, the one what disappeared couple a years back. Truth is, Bernard the cat and Bernard the husband're a lot alike; both lazier'n hell.

Me, I figure it was Howard ran over the cat, way he whipped that fancy car around. Wouldn't give a damn, neither.

So what she gonna do? Cry some, burn these stinky herbs, bury old Bernard under the spruce in her yard, draw this star-thing on the ground. Makes her feel better, what the hell?

Don't suppose I could get a cigarette, eh? Never mind, don't tell me. I figured it out already. It's another damned rule.

Yeah, I don't. Half the trouble

with this world is there's too many damned rules. Too many people making up rules. County council. Legislature. All those old guys in Ottawa, busy as freaking beavers, making up rules. We're paying 'em good money too. Makes you wonder if the people in this country maybe ain't too smart. Give me that kind a money, I could make up some rules. I could make up some doozies.

Hey, policeperson, I ain't asking you to do this. You're the one going on about plaster devils and such. Any time you want to quit, I'm ready. I'll just go on home. I got stock waiting on me, and a garden to get in 'fore the frost. And half a ton of hay sitting in the driveway on account a that damned fool George Peterson. I'm an old woman. I don't work so fast as I used to. So I got lots better things to do than sit around in a police station answering dumb questions.

Fight with George? Well, that's maybe putting too much of a shine on it. We had what you might call a disagreement, sure 'nough.

George, he's supposed to bring the hay Saturday, but he don't show up until Monday morning. Now, this ain't a really small thing, like you town folks might think. A horse ain't a bleeding truck, like you just park it somewhere and forget it 'til you get some gas. A horse you got to feed every day, a lot. When they talk about eating like a horse, it means something,

eh? That's what I said to George when he finally showed up. I guess I said a few other things too, that weren't too nice. George, he didn't care much for that. All he wanted was for me to unload the hay. And I said, George, baby, the loader was here Saturday. It ain't here no more. You got to give me a hand.

And he said—ain't it just like a man—that he wasn't going to bust his back unloading my hay.

And I said, I ain't going to unload it all by myself without no loader.

So he asked me where Janet was, and I said she's at school, natch, this being a school day, making something of herself, and ol' George, he snorted and got kind a red on account of his kids both quit school and got to go through life pig ignorant, not that they ever had a chance to do no better, if you ask me.

Anyway, George said, I ain't waiting, Alice. And I said, your truck's full of hay, smart ass, so what're you gonna do?

Well, what the damn fool did was pull off the ties and lift the box and dump it right there in the drive. And away he went, yelling how he'd send the bill in the mail, and me yelling how his check was under the damn hay.

That's about it. Ain't the first time me and George had a run-in, and I reckon it ain't the last. He's a crusty old bugger. Guess I am, too. But I still ain't figured how I'm going to get that hay in before

it rains.

Janet? What about Janet? You ain't dragging my kid into this mess. No way, Ms. So-smart Policeperson. She was at school, so there.

Friends, okay? Hazel would tell these crazy old stories and Janet would listen. They did this thing with the cards together.

A game, like. Nobody took it serious.

Yeah, she knew him. If there was rules about nice decent girls going around with some smart-ass crumb, half the kids in this county would never be born.

'Course she's upset. Hazel's cat got run over, Janet gets upset, never mind some person. She's what they call sensitive.

So I didn't like him. Guy like that's easy not to like. Maybe I got a little sick of hearing about him. Janet was always telling me Howard this and Howard that and Howard the other bleeding thing. I'm being dead honest with you. I ain't going to miss that freaking wiseacre a whole bunch.

You want a list of folks in this town didn't like Mr. Big-City Howard too much, try the voters' list.

Oh, sure. Impressive as hell, with the car and the dee-signer jeans and the records with the signatures on 'em. Kids go for that stuff. Later they learn about chrome-plated trash.

Disapprove, is it? Damn right. Janet's got better things to do with

her life than hang around the likes of him.

I said, that's who said. She's just a kid. I don't figure how eighteen is all that growed up. Well, I don't know about no big fight between me and Howard—be a damned waste of time I'd a said—but I'll tell you something about Martha Taylor. You don't want to go listening to her gossip. A blasted blabbermouth, don't know spit from vodka. Always got some shit to shovel.

Well, old Martha musta had her hearing aid turned way up to number nine. Her house is a cool quarter mile from mine. Maybe I gotta say half a kilometre? We got a rule on that yet?

Okay, so I yelled a little. Some kinda law against yelling? 'Nother rule? You got a sick type curiosity, Ms. Smart Cop. You'n Martha'd get along just fine.

Yeah, well, he didn't listen too good. I told him get off my place and stay away from my daughter. Next time I turn around, what d'y' think? There he is. Spouting all this grass-green sigh-col-igee. Love them big words. Don't they sound grand.

Damn right I remember, on account of how it happened. Sure, what the hell. We're working in the garden, eh? Me and Janet. Hoeing potatoes. It's hard work, if you want to know, and along comes Mr. Big-City Hotshot in his flashy car, down the drive, radio blaring enough to scare a deaf pig,

big as life. This is like Friday, before George got stupid with the hay. So he stops, Howard, that is, doesn't even get outa that car to say hello. Janet drops everything, goes running off, giggling like she ain't got no brain of her own, leaning in the car window, drooling all over Mr. Big-City. Makes me more'n a little sick, I tell you. After a bit, she comes running back to tell me she's going off somewhere with Slicko Howard. So I says, like, what about us. We was going to the movies after dinner, I thought. And Janet says, another time, okay, Mom? Tomorrow, how about?

Yeah, pretty much looking forward to it. I don't get out much.

You got kids, Ms. Sergeant? Yeah? How old? Well, I tell you, at two, you don't get the full feel of it.

Wait for twenty, then you'll know. You spend a lifetime raising a kid. You feed, you clean, you tell 'em what's right. You do everything you know how to do to fix it so the kid gets a better life than what you had. Then along comes some shifty-eyed buck like Howard, wrecks everything you done. Next thing you know, your beautiful kid is a worn-out hag in some joker's kitchen with a couple of brats hanging on her skirt, no hope, no future, no better'n her Ma. Chances are, the joker's off in South America, living the high old life on the beach, forgot all about your kid now she ain't pretty no more.

No, I ain't talking about me. And what if I was? You figure this's got something to do with Mr. Smart-Ass getting run over by a truck?

Me and Janet? Close. Real close. I don't mind telling you, Janet's the best friend I ever had, besides being my daughter. Ain't too many mothers can say that. She's a damned smart kid. Top of her class all the time, 'til Honey-tongue Howard showed up. After that we got trouble.

Lately? Well, I don't see where that's your business. What you say it is, eh? So, say anything you like. But what I tell you is what I feel like telling. Nothing you can do about that.

You see, I don't do too good with threats. One of the troubles with cops is they all sound like men, even the ones in skirts. You gotta do this or that or I'm gonna bust you one. Well, take a swing, Ms. Sergeant, and I'll sue the ass off you. I know a little something about the rules.

Hey, I'm just trying to live, look after my own, scratching a living out of a few acres of dry rocks.

Lovely folk, social services. They take my farm away, then what? Live in some crummy apartment like a animal in a lousy zoo, pacing around a hundred square feet that belongs to somebody else. My place ain't much, but it's all I got, and it's mine.

You don't want to get off the

topic, pick a topic. I don't care much what we talk on, long as we get this over. I want to go home. I want a bleeding cigarette.

Okay, so the next time I seen Howard was that night me and Janet didn't go to the movies. Late. I got this sick horse and I'm coming in from the barn, and there they are out in the yard in the car, going at it like you wouldn't believe. I don't believe, and I'm standing there looking at it. My girl was always a decent kid 'til Mr. Hotcrotch came along. Then she starts lying to me. Then I start getting phone calls from the school about where is she when she's supposed to be in class. Then I start finding her in a car in the yard in the moonlight making like some downtown whore.

Well, I picked up this chunk of two-by-four and I walked over there quiet like and I brought that chunk down hard on the hood of that fancy car. Made a dent, if you want to know. Cool Howard, he jumped like he'd been shot. A lot of satisfaction in that.

Now he gets out of the car. Now he does the yelling, and how come old Martha ain't got her hearing aid cranked up then, I want to know.

He had a mouth, that boy. Going on like would make a sailor blush. Me, I heard it all before. My old man, he was a sailor, before he got to be a bum.

Dead, and good riddance. Howard. Yeah, sure, let's get back

to good old Howard.

Well, first he's yelling about how I gotta pay for fixing the dent in his pretty car. And I tell him a place for him to put his damn car. Then he starts on the six dollar shrink words, like parental rivalry, and how I'm jealous because super stud himself won't give me a tumble, and how I'm envying Janet because she's young and pretty and I'm an antique old hen no sane man would give a second look. That's when I told him to shut up, get off the place and leave Janet alone.

Threaten? I guess maybe you could say that. I told him his manhood was pretty much in danger should he happen to show up again. You say stuff like that when you're mad. It don't mean a lot.

That being how it was, next time all I done was told him to get the hell out before I called a cop. It was like two days later, Monday, he come sneaking in. Couldn't get past the hay, eh, or the old lady. After that, never saw him again 'til I was in the Prince Andrew Hotel this afternoon having a beer with Mark Simpson from the feed mill and this guy comes running in and says there's been this awful accident on the corner. I didn't know it was Howard killed 'til I got there and saw.

You can ask Mark was I there with him. You think different, you gotta prove it. There's some rules for you, too, eh? And this tourist you keep going on about standing

in front of the Prince Andrew, you gotta wonder what's he standing there for in the middle of the afternoon if he didn't just come outta the bar, eh? So what he says he saw and what was in the truck with George—well, you know—you got the report. Say anything in your report about a passenger? Pink elephant, maybe?

Red? Hell, lady, fire engines're red, leastways they used to be before some bureaucrat bugged up a million years of tradition. Coincidence, that's what they call it. Another six buck word. So I knew 'em both. On bad terms, as they say, with two guys in the whole damned town. Make something of it, because there ain't no way I could fix it so's George'd be coming 'round the corner driving a load of fertilizer just the time Howard the Hunk decided to take a walk, and you know it. And supposing I could, how'd I get George to go for it, us being such good friends and all? And what's with this red guy, s'pposed to be in the truck pulling on the wheel?

Well, I can't say it ain't so, but I can't rightly speak for Hazel. Howard killed the cat for sure. Kind of fitting, way he got his.

Flatter'n Bernard and I ain't crying. A smart cop like you, Ms. Sergeant, you trying to tell me you believe that crap?

Truth of it is, I don't care you got a name. We ain't going to get that close. You say gotta check even the crazy stuff, check away.

There's folks would tell you Hazel does spells. There's folks would tell you the Pope's a witch, you're dumb enough to believe 'em. Don't mean there's a word of truth in it. Hazel's about eighty years old, weighs about ninety pounds after lunch. Besides, you got to remember George's truck, and George driving.

On a farm where you got a couple cows, you'd likely find milk anywhere. You want to believe one them plaster statues moved, what can I say?

Hair? Underneath? Before you do much more with this and make yourself look like seven kinds of idiot, maybe you should hustle on down to my place, see if you can heft one of them things? Solid plaster, lady. They're heavy sons of bitches, I want to tell you. I ain't moved 'em since they was put there—guaranteed. Anyway, how do you figure Hazel would get a chunk of Howard's hair, eh?

Me? So what'd I do, come up on him with the scissors and say, hold still now boy, I need a chunk

of hair so's I can make this here hex and sic my plaster demons on you? That's funny, you know.

This's a real dumb line you're taking here, Ms. Smart Cop. No way you're going to get anywhere with it. Take that to court, old Judge Simpson's liable to have a heart attack from laughing.

Intent? You figure you can prove I meant to do freaking Howard because I got a chunk of hair which I never got? Lady, this is getting pretty dumb. Now, here's 'nother rule for you. You got to either charge me with something, stealing hair, maybe, or let me go. And I'm going. Cause I need a cigarette bad and my work ain't getting done, and I'm tired of sitting here. You want to stop me, you better go read up on your rules.

Watch all you want. Camp on my front porch. I ain't even gonna charge rent, eh? But you see me with a pair of scissors, you better keep your distance. Never know if I might be after a chunk of your hair. •

## COLLECTORS OF HAMMELL SF ARTWORK

The artist seeks current addresses and phone numbers of those people who purchased any of his artwork at SF conventions from the 1970s to 1992. He would like to make arrangements to borrow artwork for photography purposes for a major project in preparation.

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# THE POWER OF FAITH

by Jason Kapalka  
illustrated by Kenneth Scott

Up until the affair with St. Gudrun's jawbone Pirando and I were honest thieves. Pride, Pirando always said, was the one vice a thief could not afford; a proud thief, he told me, was no better than an archbishop and nearly as bad as a public official. It was a subtle sort of robbery we practiced, true, but we always knew it for robbery, and our hearts were humbled by the knowledge. But now, now it seems that humility may be lost to our souls forever.

We were sellers of relics. The bones of the saints seem to litter Europe like scattered kindling, and a less perceptive man than Pirando might have imagined the market to be long since glutted. After all, one can scarcely pass a roadside chapel that does not lay claim to the arm or thigh bone of one of the Roman calendar's innumerable saints, and even Pirando will admit that the golden age of the relic-merchant passed some three centuries ago, in the wake of the Crusades.

"In those times," he recalled, as though he had been there himself, "a wooden bit of the True Cross might fetch two hundred florins. Two hundred florins!—and if you had gathered together all the lumber thus sold you might have erected a Norwegian cathedral. Ten thousand neck-

caskets of the Virgin Mary's tears were sold at a hundred florins apiece. Ah, her tears, her most copious and golden tears!" Here, he became so caught up he sometimes had to blink back moisture from his own eyes, which were nearly useless by reason of the eerie white film that covered them.

"And clippings from Peter's toenails might be priced from thirty to forty florins, depending on their size and quality. Sacks of clippings! Peter's toes must have been great in number, and their nails prodigious indeed." And here he would punctuate his speech with a dreary sigh.

"But you and I, we must content ourselves with the bone-bits of minor saints. These are harsh times we live in, you and I, harsh times." Pirando was old, and consequently much given to windy diatribes of this nature.

Still, his wisdom was undeniable; though his milky eyes were almost blind and he required me to read for him, his inner vision grew ever more acute as the years passed. Often while we were sorting through the detritus of some ancient crypt in search of an attractive bone, Pirando would speak on the most fundamental tenets of our calling. "It is unnecessary for us to prove that a relic is authentic," he told me. "It is only necessary for us to show that it may be genuine. The power of faith is very great, and will accomplish the rest." How terrible those words

seem now!

You see, in this dark new age of reason, relics are almost daily discredited by the men of science, and not even the most faithful will continue to pay homage to the ankle bone of a mule, though up until last week it had been venerated as the holy remnant of St. Augustine. The priests of such newly unendowed churches must bear the shame as their congregations flock elsewhere, and yes, the loss of tithe-revenues must weigh heavily on them as well. For example, before the men of science came with their yellowing books on anatomy, their clay flasks of alchemical concoctions, many pilgrims used to travel a hundred miles to make donations before the teeth of St. Kea, in hopes of the miraculous cure of mouth disorders. No longer; the teeth proved to be the ossified molars from a mere tax-collector's mouth.

Naturally it behooves such churches to seek out replacements for their discredited relics. Where should they turn? Having been defeated by science once, they are unlikely to snatch up the first petrified bone-hunk that comes their way lest it be proven to have originated with a rogue hanged but ten years ago. No, they must be very circumspect, very cautious, and it is at this stage generally that Pirando and I appear to offer our assistance.

The affair in Brussels that led to our downfall seemed no differ-

ent in its inception. The Monsignor of a great church there had employed us once before, when the toe bone of St. Pancras which graced his parish was examined and consequently identified as false: indeed, the men of science claimed that not only had the bone not belonged to St. Pancras, but that it was not even a human remnant, having instead originated with some species of long-extinct lizard. Though they were thought somewhat disreputable, these "scientists" exerted considerable influence and awe over the common folk through their demeanor and rhetoric: the display of a few dusty volumes of Aristotle and some smoking chemicals was enough to persuade the groundlings that they were confronted with unimaginable erudition, though as Pirando and I knew, the methods of this new philosophy of "science" were often as dubious as any of the Church's antiquated dictums. In any case, Monsignor's parishioners grew doubtful of the toe bone, then openly scornful, and, alas, few were capable of the acrobatic theology he offered as justification for the bone's authenticity. Instead they simply took themselves to a neighbouring church, which, for all its obvious shortcomings, maintained a fragment of the thigh bone of the martyred Pope Callistus which was apparently genuine, or at least not demonstrably fake.

Gaining an audience with the Monsignor at this point was not

difficult. After basic introductions had been made, Pirando tilted his milky eyes upward and speculated idly.

"It is an idle speculation I make here, Monsignor—"

"Yes, yes, go on."

"Hmm. Let us imagine that in some unforeseeable fashion I should come upon, oh, let us say, the collarbone of St. Adam."

The Monsignor, a pudgy thick-necked man of elderly mien, scowled. "You might well be deluded in believing it to be so."

"Let us further imagine that the scientific and alchemical methods of the day, such as lime-casting, dousing in acidic solutions, "pore-coaxing" with a lens of glass, and the like—though of course I profess no great knowledge of such techniques—should prove the veracity of my claim, or at least produce no actively negative evidence. What then?"

"One might imagine a small stipend being paid over to the discoverer of such a relic," the Monsignor gruded. He and Pirando imagined gradually growing sums of money together, until at last a satisfactory, though of course purely hypothetical, figure was reached.

After the relic was produced, the Monsignor called in local scholars and scientists to examine it; as we had promised, they were unable to determine more than the bone's general age and told the Monsignor that it was genuine, in

perhaps less enthusiastic terms more to the effect that they had no concrete proof to the contrary. Pirando and I consequently retired for a few months to a remote area of Spain, where we rented a villa and had all our various physical and emotional needs attended to by enthusiastic young locals.

We hadn't thought to have another occasion to visit the Brussels Monsignor, but as we were engaged in our pursuit of a perhaps corruptible team of historical excavators—along with this new fad of "science" had come yearnings for things like "history," with all its concomitant artifacts and bones—we heard news of strange developments back in Brussels. Apparently St. Adam's collarbone had begun to stir the parishioners into disturbing states of thought: Adam, it seemed, had been a bishop in a northern province who raised taxes with insensate recklessness, and who perished when his own parishioners broke into his house, beat him, burnt him alive, and subsequently buried his body beneath a heap of rocks. The general feeling among the Brussels folk was that Adam's sanctification had been perhaps too hastily conferred, and in any event the general discussions about taxation that his collarbone provoked did not please Monsignor to any great degree. Immediately Pirando began to consider him as a possible customer for the relic we were even then hunting down, as we

had dealt with him before and consequently knew him to be trustworthy (as priests go), and his treasury to be large.

We found a delivery-house man who was, for a time, in charge of the shipment of historical specimens we were pursuing.

He grunted in an unencouraging fashion in response to our introductions. Pirando, however, knew how to make even the most thick-witted and ill-mannered lout into a cooperative ally, all within the space of a few seconds.

"My good fellow!" he shouted heartily. "What are you doing here, late at night, watching over worthless bones and dust? Don't you know the beer keg in the tavern has burst? It's free drink for all!"

I belched and hiccupped and shouted merrily to reinforce Pirando's theme. Eventually, the man was persuaded that it would be all right for him to nip off for a few drinks, so long as we stayed to watch over the warehouse in his stead. His lack of concern was scarcely surprising, since few but Pirando would have known the true value of the ancient debris packaged within one of the crates housed there. We watched over the warehouse briefly, to make good on our promise, then departed with our prize.

Amongst the valueless pots and plates were catalogued the calcified remains of several persons. Through his vast erudition, and some lucky conjunctions of infor-

mation gathered over the years, Pirando suspected that the remnants of the saint Gudrunne were to be found here, unknown to the delivery-house man and even to the historians who had dug up the assorted bones.

Now Gudrunne was a bland saint indeed, notable for only two characteristics: the extraordinarily violent manner of his demise—he was tortured, stoned, and beheaded by barbarians—and his singular dental features. This second point was what allowed us to finally identify the martyr, or rather what was left of his *corpus* after the rigors visited on it by the barbarians, the passage of centuries, and various rough transits: for the only part of him to survive was his huge and unpleasant jawbone.

"Gudrunne was said to have," Pirando quoted from memory as I pondered the relic, "tremendously large and crooked teeth, along with a marked underbite." In examining the jaw, I agreed that the record was accurate in this regard, if somewhat euphemistic: the saint had possessed a jaw like a crocodile's.

We packed the jawbone with the rest of the dusty debris and set out for Brussels. Though Gudrunne was minor in importance and lacking in interesting features, he was nonetheless a verifiable saint, and one that under no circumstances would provoke a philosophical debate on tax practices.

With this in mind, we were

amazed when the Monsignor's subordinate ordered us out of Brussels after taking but a single glance at the jawbone. "Can you not at least let us show the relic to Monsignor himself?" Pirando asked.

"No," the priest replied, somewhat haughtily in my opinion, "and for this reason: this jaw you claim as St. Gudrunne's displays tremendously crooked teeth and a marked underbite, and on the whole presents a most uncomely vision. A saint embodies the aspects of man closest to God, and his relics cannot but fill the viewer with zeal and inspiration. All that ugly fragment inspires is nausea: thus, to claim it as the jawbone of a saint is a palpable falsehood. Now, be gone from my sight, lest I call the city guard."

We left disheartened. "Perhaps some other parish will not be so fastidious," I said to cheer Pirando, but he simply looked at me, or in my general direction, with his white-filmed eyes, and sighed.

The old, I have noticed, and Pirando in particular, are given to much sighing, but in this case the judgement implied by the sigh was correct. Not a single church would offer money for our hideous relic, genuine or not.

By this time our funds were running alarmingly low. In desperation Pirando took up another of the skulls we had received in the misdirected shipment. He pried off the jawbone and said, "We shall sell this one instead."

"But we've already showed the other bone to every prelate in the district!" I protested.

"That is true. We will tell them an error was made and that we should have realized immediately that no saint's jaw would be malformed." Pirando mused briefly. "We will tell them that you, being young and a fool, accidentally mixed up the correct jaw with a flawed specimen. And I, with my blindness, noticed the mistake only now."

I disapproved of certain phrasings in this idea, but admitted I had no better solution. And certainly the new jawbone was very handsome, with strong straight teeth and a pleasing profile. Pirando said it probably belonged to a butcher who had lived next door to Gudrun; but if there had been any justice in the world the saint would have possessed this butcher's fine mouth in place of his own dragonlike maw.

"Still, historically, they will know this bone cannot belong to Gudrun," I complained. "His dental deformity is well documented."

"That cannot be helped," Pirando said. "We must trust in the power of faith."

We took the false bone back to Brussels and this time gained an audience with the Monsignor. He examined the relic reverently. "Truly, this is the jawbone of a saint!" he exclaimed.

Pirando briefly introduced

some theoretical conceits concerning the transference of funds. Monsignor did not quibble: "Any price is fair, if only the parishioners will stop yawping about taxes and Adam's sainthood and learning of unholy things such as philosophy! Tell the servants to take that accursed collarbone away."

Prior to paying us, he brought in the scientific men of the district once again. They were gray, weary-looking men, by now very tired of this task, and after pondering the bone with a large glass lens, dusting it with lime, dipping it into a mild vinegar solution, and checking their folios, they quickly decided that the jaw's age was roughly congruent with Gudrun's known lifespan, and issued a terse statement to the effect that our specimen was just as likely to belong to that worthy as was any other three hundred year old bone. Convinced beyond a doubt, the Monsignor gladly paid our fee and rushed off to install his new relic.

We ourselves were in no small hurry to vacate the region. In a profession such as ours, it is important to know both the newest scientific techniques, and the oldest lore of history and the Church; but the knowledge of secluded regions in distant countries becomes truly crucial when our skill in the former areas fails us; and in this case we had good reason to believe that the deception would be uncovered sooner rather than later. Thus we retired to a laconic

Italian village where we might rest and distribute some of the Brussels tithe-money to the peasantry.

All was peaceful for a time, which was as we had planned. Our money was well-respected in this distant corner of the world, and we lacked for little in the way of comforts and distractions. Several months later, however, we noticed there were an unusual number of travellers passing through the village on their way north.

Curious about this phenomenon, Pirando spoke to our innkeeper.

"The pilgrims?" he grunted. "They all seem bound for some ungodly northern country. Belgium or such. But they're not so odd as that other group that's been lurkin' 'bout town the last few days."

I inquired of whom he spoke.

"A bunch of hefty fellows being led around by a priest, they all armed like they was to a war. Say they're from where? Broosles or such. Keep asking around for a half-blind oldster and a gawky stupid-looking stripling. I tell you, I don't know what to make of it."

"The ways of foreigners are indeed strange," Pirando agreed, "but would you mind tallying our bill for the rooms? My apprentice and I are late for an important meeting far south of here and must leave on the instant. In addition a large gratuity will be rendered to you for your taciturn, untalkative nature."

Unfortunately we were met at

the edge of the village by just such a group as the landlord had described. "I believe I have seen those you are looking for," Pirando told them. "They left by the north road just this morning; if you are swift you may yet catch them."

"Hmm. You two seem very familiar," said the priest who was leading the men. Though Pirando's blindness no doubt kept him from noticing, I saw immediately that it was the Monsignor's assistant who had ejected us from Brussels the first time.

"Please, sir," I pleaded, "we meant no harm."

"Harm?" he asked. "What do you mean? The Monsignor has sent for you to come to Brussels. It is a wondrous strange thing, is it not?"

"Indeed," Pirando mused, squinting and peering and abruptly coming to a fuller cognizance of our situation. "I thought these burly men were to fall upon us and beat us till we were dead."

The Monsignor's subordinate laughed in an odd fashion. "No, no! They are to escort you and make certain no harm comes to you on the way back!" And so we departed for Brussels with our new escorts.

At first I was certain we were merely being preserved for a more formal execution there, but after a few days along the road it became clear that this was not the case.

"You see Alexander there?" The priest indicated a very largely-built man. "Alexander's nose had

dropped off from leprosy, and now he is cured." Alexander nodded in assent, and in truth I would swear that the man did indeed now have a fine large nose. Alexander knelt before Pirando and kissed his hand, then repeated this procedure with me.

"I gather something momentous has occurred in Brussels," Pirando cautiously posited.

"Indeed!" The Monsignor's servant spread his arms expansively and declared: "It is a miracle." When the silence had grown heavy with our lack of response he continued.

"A month ago, one of the supplicants at the church, a man who suffered from spasms of the intestines, leapt up after having made the customary genuflection before Gudrune's holy jaw, and proclaimed that he had been completely cured!"

"Truly," Pirando said thickly, "this is a great miracle."

"No, no, there is more! While we were pleased, in honesty events such as this one are not unknown, and their veracity not uniformly verifiable." The priest shook his head sadly.

"But then a month ago," he continued eagerly, "in the middle of Monsignor's service, a crippled beggar maddened by the ague rushed forward before any could restrain him and broke the glass of the relic's casement. He seized the jaw and kissed it—and before the eyes of everyone present was vis-

ibly cured of all deformities, his stump of an arm abruptly restored to a fresh pink hand! Needless to say, the commotion was extraordinary! Fortunately Gudrune's jaw was recovered and order restored."

I glanced at Pirando. His whitish eyes looked very thoughtful. We accepted the rest of the priest's story in silence.

"Soon after," he said, "the sick and diseased were coming from all over Brussels to queue for the honor of touching this holiest of holy relics. And as they touched it, all their ills were cured, be they ague or leprosy or tooth-ache. I myself," he proclaimed proudly, "was cured of a chronic numbness of the foot."

We waited, but this was apparently the end of the priest's tale. He stood beaming at us in silence.

"And so," Pirando at last asked cautiously, "what is to become of us?"

The priest grinned and embraced him. "Why, you are to be honored as befits the discoverers of this most holy jawbone, of course! You will receive the gratitude of the whole Church and all of Brussels!" Though the priest did not embrace me, he did offer his assurances that the aforementioned honors would be accorded me as well, and with this I was forced to content myself.

\*

Our arrival in Brussels was indeed as glorious as we had been promised. First we were washed



and groomed and fitted with expensive new clothes and other finery, rings, perfumes, belts, and the like. We were then passed down along the avenues of the city and cheered by the crowds lining the streets. The civic officials greeted us and gave us a large number of importantly worded plaques and certificates, whose import, if not entirely clear to me, was almost certainly positive. After the parade we were taken to the old church that housed the purportedly miraculous jawbone, and were there met on the steps by an assembly of high figures from Rome. A procession of archbishops moved past, hands extended to allow us to kneel and kiss their rings. Several stopped to engage Pirando in hushed, excited conversations; and though none spoke directly to me ("By reason of your extreme youth, and foolish-looking appearance," an attendant kindly explained), they did murmur Latin benedictions over my bowed head.

Overwhelmed by this dizzying rush of events, we scarcely noticed when we were whisked into the church by our old friend the Monsignor. "I never thought," he whispered as he pulled us aside, "that is, I had my private doubts, especially after the collarbone. But oh, I was wrong! I was wrong! Anything you wish is yours; merely ask." He stared at us earnestly.

Pirando said, "I should like to see the jawbone."

"Hum?"

"Of St. Gudrune," I clarified with a nervous glance at Pirando. "The jawbone of St. Gudrune."

"Oh yes! Of course! Come this way!"

We were led through the cavernous interior of the church. Perched on the altar, guarded by a set of men with swords, was the jaw which Pirando had pried off Gudrune's neighbour the butcher. I personally could detect no palpable aura of holiness, but the Monsignor bowed his head and began to speak in hushed tones as we approached.

"Almost incredible, isn't it?" he whispered.

"Yes," Pirando nodded, "indeed."

"You may prostrate yourself before the relic if you wish. I was myself cured of a lingering case of brain-sickness after touching Gudrune's holy, most holy jaw." The Monsignor looked up into the arched shadows of the church. "Oh, it is a great miracle!"

Pirando shrugged, then turned away to give attention to the jawbone, which I could already see had become smooth and polished, presumably from the countless touches of Gudrune's supplicants; Pirando doubtless was considering the pecuniary opportunities that would present themselves when this bone had been worn down to dust.

The Monsignor lowered his gaze from the ceiling and seemed pensive for a moment. "It is curi-

ous," he said at last, "that the books describe St. Gudrune as having tremendously ugly teeth, and a marked underbite. How could so great an error have been made? Surely no saint as great as Gudrune would have crooked teeth!"

I nodded wisely, but could think of no suitable response. Pirando was still bent over the relic, and said nothing. "What do you think?" I prompted.

He turned to us. The milky film had completely disappeared, and his eyes were brilliantly blue. "I think," he said slowly, "that the power of faith is very great."

\*

And so, after a week of appropriately pious feasting and rioting in Brussels, we repaired to the country mansion thoughtfully provided us by the Archdiocese. There, when we were not responding to the requests that came from all across Europe urging us to continue our trade in holy relics, or entertaining the various office-holders and clergy who now sought our advice, it seemed, on every tiny matter of policy, we conferred on the doom that fate had brought upon us.

"Now we are as pompous and foolish as them," Pirando groaned. "What future is there for a vain thief?" I could only shrug.

With nothing else to do, we returned to our trade though we were no longer secure in our humble beliefs, and supplied the dainty wrist bones of the Virgin Mary to

another church in Brussels, and to another seven or eight churches across Europe. The men of science like to shriek of this obvious counterfeiting, but no one listens to them anymore, and it seems likely that the public infatuation with "science" is ending. We have already heard reports of people experiencing religious ecstasies and of hardened criminals devoting their lives to the priesthood after touching the wrist bone installed in a certain French cathedral. We have not yet endeavoured to make a journey to ascertain whether or not these rumours are true; Pirando is already certain that they are.

"They wish me to hold public office," he says. "And perhaps in the future I'll be an archbishop as well. Perhaps when I die I will be sainted!" He chuckles, uneasily, but his blue eyes are very clear and his jaw, I think, is very handsome, and I can say nothing to reassure him on this point. He wanders about the mansion in a daze, drinking in the colors and shapes with his newly restored sight, and sometimes he reaches to touch his eyes as if to confirm that they are actually there. There is little I can do to comfort him, for more and more these days I too find myself reaching for some sort of assurance that this newfound fortune of mine is real, and not merely a bizarre prank played on me by my own senses—or a worse possibility: that I am sane and it is all still a joke, but one

perpetrated on us by some unknown, and perhaps unknowable, agency.

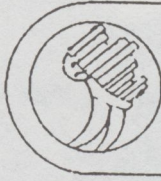
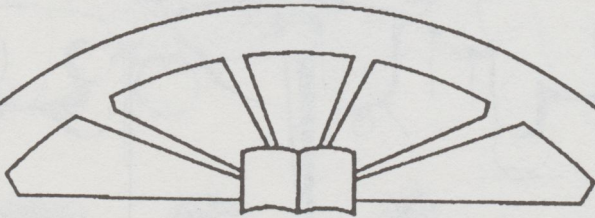
"What folly! What madness! How can it keep on like this?" Pirando laughs hysterically, de-

ranged by the infinitely quixotic machinations of heaven. "How can it continue?"

I must answer him slowly, and reluctantly. "The power of faith is very great," I always reply. •

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ON SPEC Art Director Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk would like to find computer artists to illustrate stories for the upcoming HARD SF special issue. Send samples (not originals) of your work (hard copy, not disks) to Lynne at: 9309 - 85 Street, Edmonton, AB T6C 3C9.



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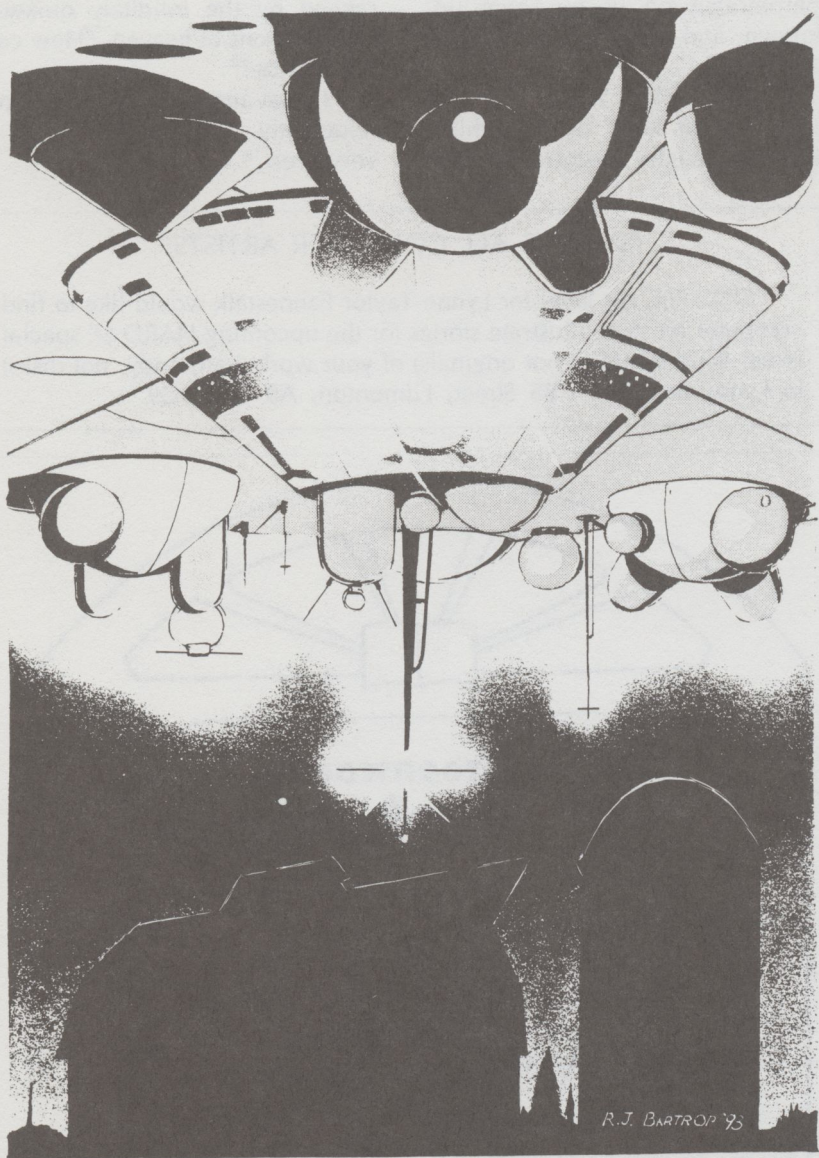
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R.J. BARTROP '93

# SNATCHED

by Dan Knight

illustrated by Richard Bartrop

It was a clear night. That was good. The pick-up ship would have no trouble finding him.

First Professor Boloff lay in the tall grass and stared up into a star-filled sky. He had traveled unimaginable distances to be here, a journey that had been measured in more than simple miles. To win the right of making first contact had taken the calling in of every favour at his command. Now he would return home, his mission incomplete and his career in ruins. Operation Friendship was over.

Twenty or so of the natives slept quietly nearby, their bodies naked to the warm evening's breezes. For two months he had traveled with them, mingling freely and unchallenged, as they had made their slow leisurely ascent from the hellishly hot plains country to these cool green hills. He had shared their food, moved when they moved, slept when and where they'd slept. It had been two months of the most intimate contact possible, but he still wasn't the slightest bit closer to understanding them than he had been that day the lander had unceremoniously deposited him in their midst.

Outwardly the natives looked perfectly normal, which was precisely the reason their accidental discovery by a damaged prospecting ship had caused such a stir back home. In all the years of space travel they were

the first alien life form that looked anything at all familiar. There was a profusion of life in the universe, but the number of variations in physiotomy was appalling. In almost any star system that you'd care to look at, something had oozed or slithered or @!&\$?\* its way to self-awareness. Variety was all fine and well in its way, but what everyone really had wanted was an alien they could talk to. An alien you could walk down the street with and not have to gag whenever you looked her/him/it in the eye/eyes/whatever.

This was to have been that race. These were to have been the aliens that the world could have had over for dinner.

"You could have them over for dinner," the professor mused, "but they'd probably chew on your furniture."

They had speech. But it was a speech entirely restricted to singular expressions of the simplest possible nature: hungry, content, scared. If they had another form of communication between themselves, then two months of intensive observation had failed to detect it.

Most maddening of all were the tools, or rather, the lack of them. On three occasions, along the trail leading up from the plains, Boloff had discovered the unmistakable remains of manufactured artifacts. They had been formed from processed metals and, though corroded, still bore the mark of

intelligent craftsmanship. Where was this technology now? Had there been a war? Had the fools blasted themselves back to the stone age, just as Boloff's ancestors had almost done centuries before?

Two months of study and not even the slightest hint of anything more profound than idiocy. Boloff sighed. If only things had worked out the way they were supposed to. He would have gone home as a hero. There would have been books, interviews, speaking engagements, maybe even a movie. As things stood now he'd probably be lucky if he wound up at some ends-of-the-earth college teaching first year civil service hopefuls how to control their bowels when faced with something that drools out of four mouths and asks them if they'd like to come home for a bite.

He sighed again.

The implant just behind his left ear chimed. The lander was locking in on him. Resigned to his disgrace, he looked out over his sleeping companions for a final time. The air was sweet with the aroma of wild grass and the night's wind felt wonderful after a long, hot day.

"Maybe they're not so stupid, after all," he thought to himself. "Surely there are worse places and ways to live out a life."

A green star fell from the sky. It sped across the western horizon and then arced towards the hill.

His lander had arrived.

\*

"Joe! Joe! Come quick!"

"Charlie! For God's sake, it must be ten o'clock at night! I gotta be up at four to take that wagon-load of vegetables in to town and get the horse shoed."

"Come here! Quick! Look up on the ridge! By the trees!"

"This'd better be— Holy tarnation! What in hell is that?"

"Damned if I know, Joseph. The dogs got all fidgety and I grabbed my gun thinking it was that bloody fox again. Did you ever see anything like that in your life?"

"Never, Charlie. Not in all my days."

"Look! Some kind of red light's coming out of the bottom of that thing! Don't you have a couple

head up there somewheres?"

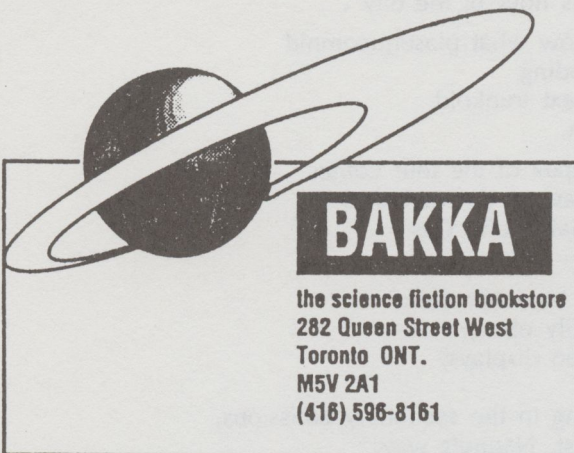
"Somewhere! Look what's floating up inside that light! Whatever it is, that's one of *my* steers it's stealing.

"COME BACK, YOU NO GOOD BLOODY RUSTLERS! That's my property you're making off with!"

\*

Safely inside the lander, Professor Boloff gave the two young pilots the order to return to the orbiting mother ship, his gloomy expression effectively stifling their obvious curiosity for the moment. He closed his eyes and let his full weight sink on to the acceleration cradle. He had important things to consider and not much time.

Thoughtfully, he began to chew his cud. •



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# NUCLEAR TOURISTING AT THE POINT LEPREAU WASTE STORAGE WILDLIFE PRESERVE - 3984 AD

by Rand Nicholson

It's a Jabbering Groonar  
In the mist,  
Flecking petrified pongo trees  
With foaming suds of saliva—

A hard life for a stoneavore.

But hark . . . !

There, a crunch in the shackwood!  
Is it music? — No.

The ochre blastuous tritium  
Cicadosaurs  
Are jowling their gubfood  
In skinny sibilant hissings.

The woods are indeed good  
In which to jaunt  
At this hour of the day . . .

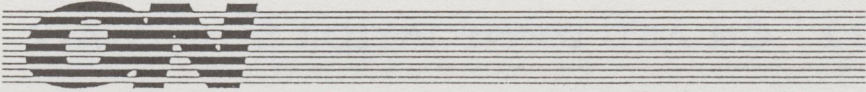
You never know what plastiqueomnid  
May be exploding  
Around the next trunkoid  
Of a treezium.

Ah! but the apex of the tour comes  
When we sinewater downwind to  
The historic Saint John City  
Glow Site:

There, in the luminant dusk,  
We jocularlestily observe the  
Remarkable ion displays,  
While,  
basking in the secondary emissions,  
We make toast, Nature's way.

The anticipation just sets  
Your plasma to fluidifying. •





## ART — *Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk*

1993 Aurora Award for Artistic Achievement  
for Art Direction of *ON SPEC*, cover *ON SPEC* Fall 92, and various  
interior illustrations

Congratulations to Lynne, whose artistic contribution to *ON SPEC* is enormous—each new issue brings innovation, surprise, delight. A long-time reader of speculative fiction, Lynne's approach to story illustration is to complement the author's words. "There are no boundaries in speculative fiction," says Lynne. "This gives illustrators a tremendous amount of freedom. It's a challenge to pique the reader's interest, to tease them."

Speculative fiction readers demand high quality illustration and Lynne has assembled a growing stable of artists, both established and upcoming, whose imaginative illustrations expand the impact of a genre limited only by the mind's imagination.

Not only has Lynne's art appeared in a variety of publications (see *About Our Artists*, p. 94), but she is also articulate about SF illustration and passionate in its promotion. "Fantastic art can be very powerful. The illustrator can manipulate the subconscious and affect emotions, bring forth and suggest for the reader previously undefined images."

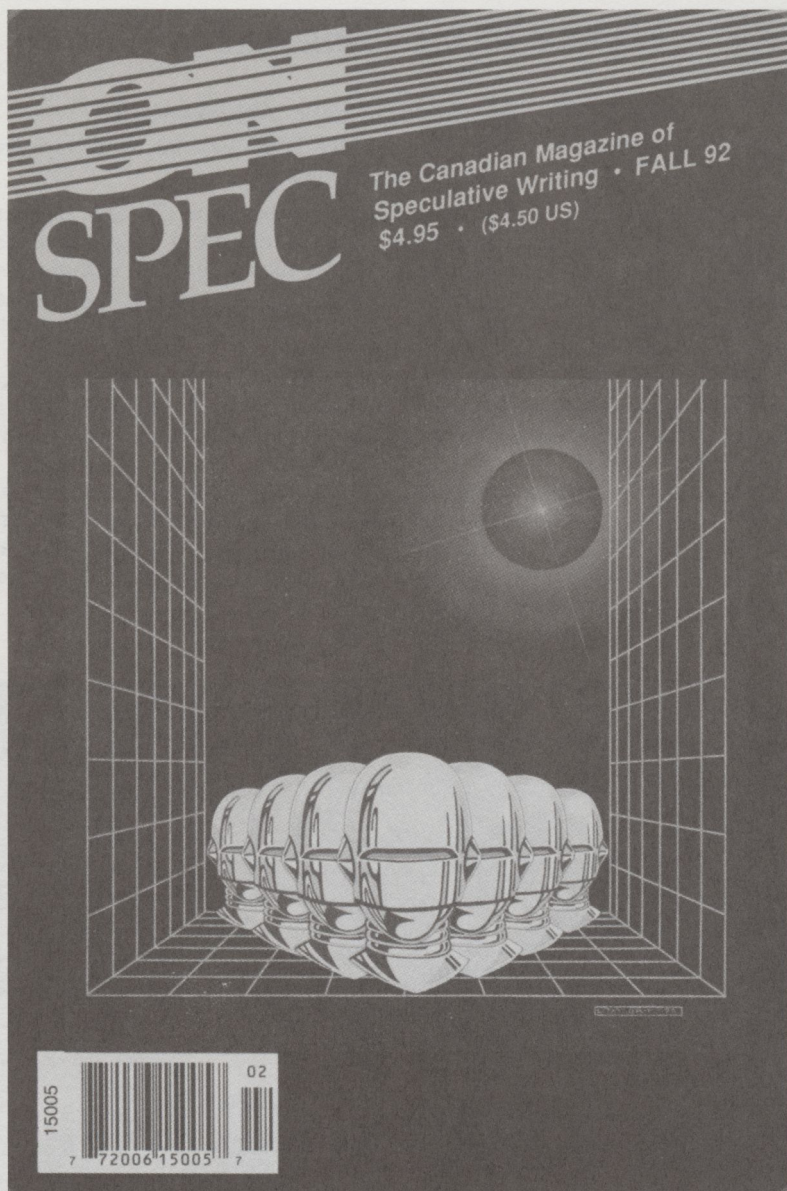
Congratulations Lynne—and thank you!



Luna Moth

airbrushed acrylic and colored pencil, artist's collection

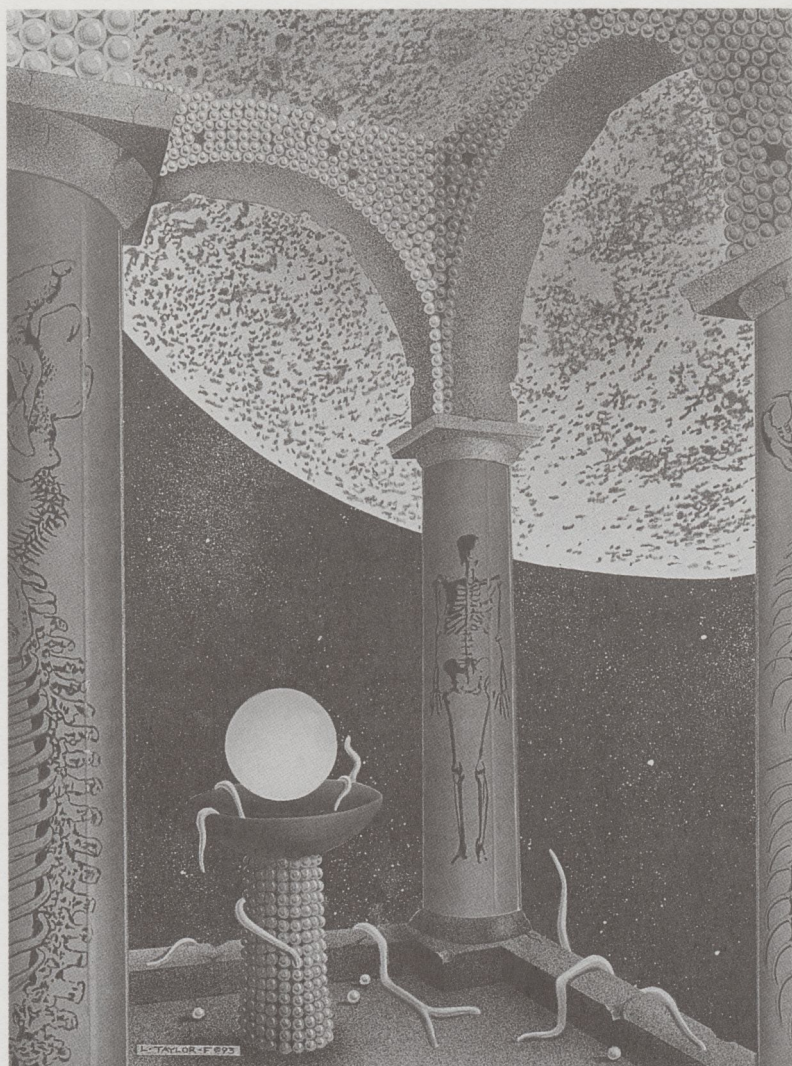
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Head Games

airbrushed acrylic and colored pencil, cover *ON SPEC* Fall 92

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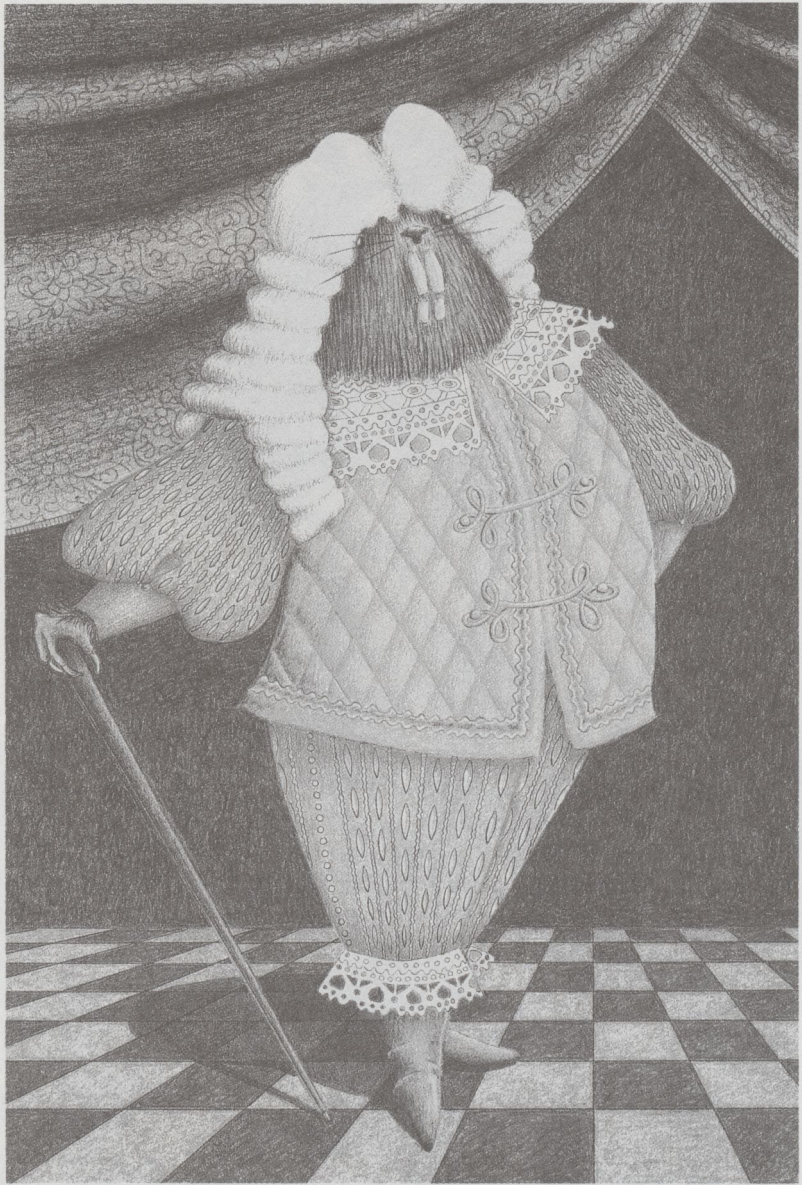
Forgotten Gateway  
airbrushed acrylic and colored pencil, collection of Steve Forty  
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The Offering

airbrushed acrylic and colored pencil, cover *ON SPEC* Fall 90

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Gopher Baroque

colored pencil, University of New Brunswick Library bookplate

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# MICHAEL IN THE FOREST

by Bruce Byfield  
illustrated by Marc Holmes

He will do it. I have come to stop him. Everything is that simple. Michael moves a chess piece of red clay. He is folded up on himself, his shoulders shrunk. I see my own age in him. I see that I do not tell the whole truth to myself, that I would have come back to his house for some reason before I died. The stones, seeming dank in the firs' shade, the caverns carved by shadow where my heartbeats throw footsteps down the trails ahead: these I understand. The city is what I do not understand. Had I died before seeing the house a last time, I would have become a ghost and lingered by the lanes and bus-stops where the dogs sniff each other in the early morning. I have always envied Michael the place where he lives.

His move has checkmated me, and he smiles as he reaches for my wine. My tastebuds have gone before I have, and it seemed dusty to me. But Michael gulped his an hour ago, and now his lips edge towards a smile as his tongue slips over the wine in my glass. I am lulled, after our years of office-sharing, the way I was by the habits of my wife. For three years after I retired, I trailed in my dressing gown after her as she did her housework. Only after she died did I compare myself to the undergraduates who lingered in the cafeteria in the hopes of spotting Michael.

I shake my head. How tiresome, that I am still able to lie to myself. The years have simply made my lies more subtle. I see now that I came for another brawl with words, because he always acts without asking—

because, in fact, he asked me by letter. Now that I think, I doubt that I will be able to stop him when he tries to die.

Michael says, "It has always stood on the edge of the clearing for members of my family. It waits for me. It will call me, soon."

"How could it have always been here?" I say. "The house and the clearing are a hundred years old, no more."

He smiles. "Do you think it could be Cannibal Woman? The tribes' walker in the woods?"

"Not my specialty." I mean that I do not remember the mythology. I have not been at the faculty club, even, for two years.

His faculty was English, the same as mine. All the same, he frees a small Henry Hunt print from the wall. He props it against the chess board, facing me. The puzzle-piece blocks of red and black fit into a person holding a basket. I do not know West Coast art, so I cannot say that I see a woman.

"There you go," he says, "Cannibal Woman."

His talk is like his tarot cards, like the witchy books whose pages he never turns. I use two fingers as tweezers, and toss the print aside.

"Your father moved here after the war," I insist. "How could anything have been awaiting your family?"

"A father and an aunt. Two great uncles." He counts on his fingers. "My grandfather on a visit. He was as old as I am now."

"How can you believe?" I glare at him and go to lean on the

mantlepiece.

He keeps silent.

"You can't start to argue and then stop, Michael. I know too well that you'll try to."

Still, he does not answer. I stare furiously into the fire.

After a moment, he takes pity. "I doubt it will come tonight, Jonathan. Why don't you sleep?"

He lets some wine lurch from the bottle into his glass. I do not say what I wanted to when I saw the label. I was young when Okanagan wines were malt vinegar. I take my lacquered walking stick and start to the stairs. The further I move from the fire, the more the cold off the stones seems to slip inside me.

At the stair's bottom, I turn. He is going to be awake all night. He will be sleepless, steady and sober, and he is six years older than me.

"You'll be all right?" I say.

"I hope so," he says. My neck hardens as I understand that we have different meanings.

"I wish I could hear the sea." I climb two stairs and turn again. "Here in the trees, you forget there is a sea."

"I could take you to the chuck tomorrow." He opens last week's paper to the chess problem. "Good night, Jonathan."

"Good night, Michael." I sway up to the landing. When my breath is not so tight about my breastbone, I walk in the darkness to my room.

Two, three times, I grope out, sleep-slowed, for my bladder's sake. From the landing, I look down



each time. I know Michael and I do not want to wake in the house alone.

On my last stare, his bald spot slides away to make room for his face. "I told you it probably wouldn't come, Jonathan."

I trudge back to gape up into the dark. I tell myself that he is drunk on words, that his family has been proud and chosen their deaths in lonely places, the way that cats are supposed to. But I sleep in a fever of doubt. Through jagged dreams, I watch as a stooped Cannibal Woman plucks men and women from the ground. Among her harvest is Michael, his tweeds thick with needles and loose with the damp. Dew dribbles down the branches on to his head.

When I fall out of sleep, I say, "This is it." I would use the same tone for the long-awaited holocaust-by-button. I know, not knowing how I know, and I lash the sash around my dressing gown as I walk. In the dark before the stairs, I push my glasses up along my nose.

Michael is straightening a toque about his head. A black ski jacket coats his body.

I place myself in front of him. "It's cancer, isn't it? That, or something worse."

I am sure that I will be faced with silence, his smugness so much worse than a curse. Instead, he smiles. "No, Jonathan. Just time."

I move between him and the door. I was strong, when young. My arms were veined with strength. Now, I strain and grunt, and still I

am pushed aside and into a chair.

How can these crying sounds creep out of me? My eyes itch with dryness.

I hear the lock open. My cheek is brushed by the rush of air. "Good night, Jonathan." After a moment, I can hear him outside, walking with slow purpose, as if he is early for an appointment and looking for the address.

Twisting in the chair, I see him easing into the dark. Overhead, the wind ruffles the branches. It seems to dance through the dark as I stagger to the door.

By my car, across the clearing, Michael twists sideways into the bush. I see him, one hand raised to move a branch from his path. The hand straightens and rises a little as he sees me. He does not wave.

Part of the dark seems to slip from the rest. It clings to him like a lover. There is a laugh like Michael's—no.

There is only the twitching branch.

The trees seem to stoop after me. I have gone senile and want to giggle, but the beginnings of sweat are breaking out over my face. I have thought death thin, and bleak. Yet the night outside flows about me, as warm as bathwater. I want to close my eyes to remember. I want to invite the night in through the door. Instead, I leap to close it and I hurry away, faster than my heart would like.

Upstairs, I tug my dressing gown off. I lean over the bed, low-

ering myself face-first.

Mouth at the pillow, I speak to the dark. "They'll have to solder my coffin lid down."

After a second: "They'll have to pin my heart down, and plant me in a place where two freeways meet."

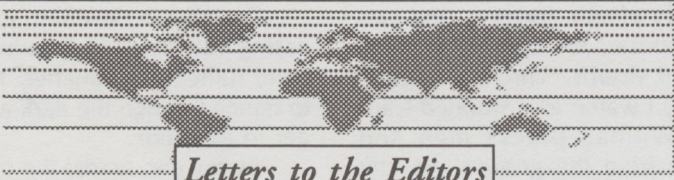
"I've always liked garlic. They'll give me garlic for chewing

tobacco."

I carry a poor tune in the dark. I lunge at the light. "Me," I whisper as I pick up the phone. "It should have been me."

The silence that replies seems Michael's, and, already, loneliness aches like a rib-bruise.

Tomorrow I will look for Michael in the forest. •



### *Letters to the Editors*

Whatever planet you're on, *ON SPEC* wants to hear from you.

**Letters to the Editors: Box 4727, Edmonton, AB T6E 5G6**

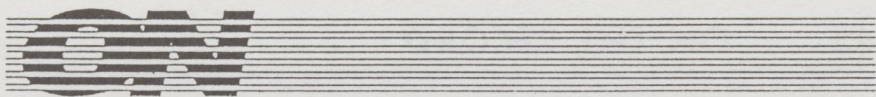
...Vol 5 #2 (Summer 93) has come closest to the magazine I would eventually like to see: a great cover, good stories—stories that tell themselves with plots and characters rather than with gimmicks and "hooks." I enjoyed it immensely. ...Personally I'm not much of a poetry lover...I tend to view the poetry as well as much of the interior art as filler. If the poetry were to be dropped and the interior art reassigned to the bland top half of each story's first page, there would be room for another story—I'd love to see that. ...I think you ought to exchange two stories a year with [both *Solaris* and *imagine...*] and make a story from Quebec (translated of course) a regular feature. ...allow me to state my abhorrence of novel excerpts parading as short stories. ...If *ON SPEC* feels the need to promote a forthcoming novel, let it do so by way of advertising and/or book reviews. Alternately you could commission longer works for serialization. ...in my estimation [this issue] is by far and away your best to date. In particular Marian Hughes' "Birth Rite" is outstanding...Hugh Spencer's "The Triage Conference" is hilarious—even on re-read...

—Peter Halasz, Mississauga, ON

∞

Since I'm trying to cram in as many stories as possible, we can't offer an in-depth reply to Peter's suggestions this issue. But we'd like to know what our readers think—how do YOU feel about poetry, artwork, novel excerpts, serializations, book reviews, and *ON SPEC* in general? Reviews—we feel the lead times of a quarterly are too long. Novel Excerpts—you might change your mind about when you see our next one . . . by DAVE DUNCAN. It's a beauty.

—Jena Snyder, Production Editor



## THE RECORD

# "MERRY CHRISTMAS, YOU UNGRATEFUL BASTARDS"

Or

How We Learned To Stop Worrying  
and Write "The Toy Mill"

by David Nickle and Karl Schroeder

The 1993 Aurora awards were announced in Wolfville, Nova Scotia on March 14, on the weekend of the biggest snow storm to hit the area since the ice age. We had been unable to attend Wolfcon, which was hosting the awards, and so were huddled around a speakerphone at Rob Sawyer's and Carolyn Clink's place in Toronto, when the news came that we had won "Best Short Work in English" for "The Toy Mill."

"The Toy Mill" was fun to do, and even if we'd never gotten it published, it would remain one of our favourite stories.

If you haven't picked up *Tesseracts*<sup>4</sup> yet—and there are better reasons to do so than just to read our story—"The Toy Mill" is the tale of what happens when a little girl named Emily wishes she were one of Santa Claus' elves, and the old bastard decides to grant her wish. The bulk of the story takes place at the North Pole, where an industrial-revolution version of Santa's workshop—the Toy Mill—

spews out Christmas gifts that nobody wants and the wheels of the Season are oiled with the blood of the elves, so to speak.

"The Toy Mill" is an homage to Mervin Peake and Charles Dickens. It is also, for us, a testament to the value of writing as play. And the best time for most of us with day jobs to get into a playful frame of mind is during some form of vacation.

We wrote "The Toy Mill" on a writing retreat at Hart House Farm, an idyllic 200-acre estate about 40 minutes northwest of Metro To-

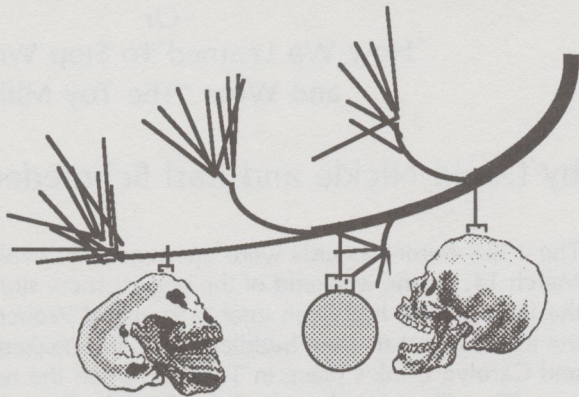
ronto. We'd been discussing the idea of "The Toy Mill" for a couple of months prior to the retreat—since Christmas, actually. The origin of the piece is probably the nausea we both felt at the over-commercialized, Rankin-Bass/Burl Ives Christmas-special approach to the Yule season. We had begun to fantasize about our Christmas special . . . a dark, polar odyssey which would

pulse telling us to write. We decided to figure out things like plot, theme and, well, the ending, later.

Collaboration is a respectable tradition in science fiction. However, Dave had only done it once before (on the story "Rat Food" with Edo van Belkom) and Karl had never done it at all.

Taking tennis as a good working model, we began by trading off

!! ? !!



have no place for the doe-eyed saccharine figures of standard myth. Karl came up with our Santa (or the Claus, as we've lately come to call him) in a fit of exuberance one evening as we were sitting around complaining about this myth. He'd envisioned the Claus, but had no idea what to do with him. Dave responded with the image of Santa's workshop pretty much as described in the finished story.

Suddenly, we had a project. As we arrived at the Farm Friday evening, we still had these images in our minds' eyes, but little else other than a vague anarchistic im-

at the keyboard with each new paragraph—in some cases with each sentence. Karl wrote, "The man in the moon's smile began to slip. It turned into a leer. Then, breaking from the rim of the moon came a shape of crystalline hardness, led by eight bobbing points." At which point Dave, in an excess of inspiration, pushed Karl out of the way and typed, "Emily, perched straddling the peak of her auntie's home with the cold shivering through her spine, counted those points three times and whispered aloud . . ." And on it went, with one of us typing maniacally in the

center of the small room we'd commandeered, while the other yanked newly finished pages out of the creator's numb fingers and attacked them with an editing pen. We're told that much sinister laughter floated out of that room over the next two days.

The story that finally came out of Hart House Farm bore little resemblance to the version of "The Toy Mill" that was finally published. When we finished it off a week or so later, it came to about 12,000 words. The first version had as a major character Jack Trueblue, a friendly and supportive elf, who finally had to go. Also, Mrs. Claus, who plays a major role in the final version, was absent, and in her place was a character called Black Peter, sort of a festive Terminator who battled Santa Claus in a 1,200 word fisticuffs outside the Toy Mill's administrative building.

When the story first came out, we had no idea how people would react. We were too close to it. The critical and popular response to the story has been heartwarming, but has also forced us to consider how it is that this story, in particular, worked so well.

We've heard a lot of writers describe collaboration as a kind of artistic battle-ground on which the authors go head to head over the placement of every phrase and comma and cross each other off their Christmas card lists when the process is all done.

It's difficult for either of us to get behind this view of the collaborative process. One of the pleasures of working on "The Toy Mill" was the complete lack of disagreement over any of the changes we made, nearly all of which were considerable. In the SFWA Handbook, veteran collaborative writer Larry Niven treats it as a given that one partner must have final veto over revisions. For us, such an arrangement would have been detrimental; it would have removed one of us from the final polish of the story. More importantly, it wouldn't have been as much fun.

We believe that the things that work in "The Toy Mill" work because of the spirit of playfulness both of us brought to the project. The thing that is most gratifying about the response to the story is the apparent fact that much of that playfulness has been transmitted through the story. Our readers seem to respond with the same maniacal spirit in which the story was written.

We've both meticulously crafted stories from this or that thematic blueprint. We've followed agendas and "rules of writing," and perhaps we've produced some good work that way.

But that work has never given us as much out-and-out pleasure as following eight-year-old Emily and thundering, wild-eyed Claus through the smoke and debris of the worst Christmas ever. •



# THE DRAGON DOOR

by Alison Baird  
illustrated by Nancy Niles

When I close my eyes at night I sometimes see the dragons. In my mind's vision they are alive, their long winding serpentine bodies undulating through the darkness behind my shut lids, their great protuberant eyes glaring, their fang-fringed jaws and eagle-taloned claws flashing like swords. They are fearsome to look at, seemingly full of primal menace . . . and then I seem to hear Elaine's voice.

"No, Jane, you're thinking of the dragons of the West. Chinese dragons aren't at all fierce. They don't breathe fire, they don't eat maidens: they're like gods—powerful, but benevolent."

She said that to me once, years ago. And as the two of us sat together in the room we shared, our studying over for the day, she would tell me stories of the benevolent, talking dragons of China: how they ruled the wind and the rain, and dwelt in splendid underwater palaces, and could take any shape they pleased— "Especially people, they loved appearing as people." It was strange: Elaine was as Anglo-Saxon as you could get, while there were any number of bona fide Chinese-Canadians in my science classes; and yet it was in Elaine's mist-grey eyes, not their

dark oblique ones, that I seemed to see the contours of that ancient land, the shapes of steep-sided hills and winding jade-green rivers.

It doesn't seem so long ago that we were undergrads hanging out together at the University of Toronto—Elaine and I were roommates who, incredible as it may sound, actually got along together. I was working toward my B.Sc., she was a philosophy major: with so little in common we still ended up great friends. She was dreamy, imaginative, while I was all hard-headed common sense; my practicality kept her from getting too far out, and she gave me, in return, glimpses of a world I had never known. A world in which I did not believe, but could still enter with pleasure and a certain . . . wistfulness.

A few years after graduation I had married, but Elaine remained single, and before long I began to suspect that she would never marry—ever. It wasn't that she wasn't pretty enough. In the old days, when she had contact lenses instead of those thick-lensed glasses and wore her hair down rather than pinned up in a bun, she'd been quite attractive. But she was so withdrawn, her gentle grey eyes looking inward, not outward. Guys would be drawn to her and then drift away again when they began to guess at the inaccessible depths within those eyes.

As the years went by I began to feel sorry for her. She had no

family, and not many friends—she was shy—and I was afraid she might be lonely.

"Get a house if you can," I'd told her when she landed her teaching job and began to look for a home, "a house, with a tenant. That way you'll have some company, and you'll be safer too: you won't have to worry about the parking garage or the elevator." She'd taken my advice, and bought a small Victorian house near the Chinatown area, close enough that the street sign was in both English and Chinese letters. A nice safe neighbourhood, or so we all thought at first. . .

\*

Tom and I dropped by shortly after she'd moved in.

"I love what you've done to this place," I told her. It was the hoariest of housewarming clichés, of course, but she really had done an amazing job: the living room looked magnificent. It was all done, appropriately enough, in an Oriental motif: dragons were everywhere, on pots, lamps, vases. The most impressive one was embroidered in gold on a piece of blue silk and framed over the fireplace—it had been cut, Elaine told me, from the sleeve of a mandarin's robe. One of her grandfathers—the maternal one, I think she said—was a missionary in China back in the 1920s. He'd brought a lot of things home with him, and she'd inherited them from her parents.



"Oh," Elaine said with a laugh, "I can't take all the credit. My tenant—Mr. Yang Lung—helped me."

"What's he like?" I asked.

"He's out there in the garden right now."

I peered out the window at the tiny back lot: there was a rock garden and a little reflecting pool, and several small fruit trees, their pale pink blossoms arranged in delicate constellations against the gathering dusk. Peach trees, Elaine told us: their fruit was the Chinese symbol of immortality, though no doubt the previous occupants had put it to a more prosaic use.

Sitting on a stone bench under the trees was an elderly Chinese man. He looked, with his blue robe and trailing white whiskers, like Confucius, or a Taoist god.

"Picturesque, isn't he?" I grinned. "He could have stepped right off the side of a vase."

"He's a very nice old gentleman," said Elaine, "and an expert in *feng shui*."

"In what?"

"*Feng shui*—the Chinese system of geomancy. Earth-magic. You remember Sally Han, that girl in your quantum physics class? She and her husband had it done."

"Had what done?" my husband asked.

"With *feng shui*," Elaine explained, "an expert comes in and looks over your house to see if it's in harmony with its surroundings, if it's situated correctly for the

earth-forces. It's part magic, part aesthetics. With the Hong Kong influx there's been a real revival of interest in it—even the yuppies are having it done."

"So what'd this guy do?" Tom asked.

"Oh, he looked the place over—doors, windows and so on—and suggested some changes. He rearranged the furniture, and you wouldn't believe the improvement it made: when he'd finished, this room looked twice the size it did before. He helped with the decor, and the garden too. He doesn't like my front path though—it's too straight, he says. He wanted me to put in a long, curvy, meandering one, but I can't afford it."

"What's wrong with a straight path?"

"Oh, there are no straight lines in *feng shui*—only evil powers move in straight lines, he said. He won't use the path himself. Oh, yes—and he said the maple tree out front was all wrong: its branches were growing towards the house. I asked him why that was bad. 'Is it because the tree's spirit will interfere with the harmoniousness of the house?' I said. He gave me an odd look, and said, 'No, with close branches comes too many bugs!' "

We all laughed. "Anyway," Elaine continued, "he says it's all nice and harmonious now. And," her eyes glowed as she spoke, "he says I have a dragon!"

"A dragon!"

"Yes—in *feng shui*, you see, there are places—sort of nexus-things—where our space and the dragons' space overlap, and they can come into our world—"

"Sounds like sci-fi to me," observed Tom.

"It *is* like science fiction," I said, suddenly intrigued, though I didn't believe a word of it. "You know—normal space and hyperspace—and the fourth dimension, only it doesn't overlap with ours—"

"Anyway, I've got a dragon-nexus here," said Elaine with a giggle. "'At the bottom of the house,' as he puts it."

"Isn't a dragon a bad thing to have around?" Tom asked, grinning.

"Not at all!" Elaine said. "Mine is a friendly dragon." Her eyes were shining: she looked like a kid at Christmas who's been given exactly what she asked for.

"You don't really *believe* all that, do you?" I asked her later on, when we were in the kitchen together. "I mean, really, Ellie! You're always laughing at the yuppies and their magic quartz crystals."

"That's different." She looked away for a moment. "Janie—there are things you know are true, and things you know are nonsense. And then—there are other things—things that are sort of in between . . ."

For a moment it was like the old days in the dorm, when she

had me enspelled by one of her stories. It was always hard to come back out of those enchanted places behind her eyes, back to the dull reality of mid-terms and tutorials. Once more I felt drawn into that other world of strange and infinite possibilities, of magic and enchantment . . . Then I shook my head, becoming practical Jane once more.

"Elaine, you know that's crazy," I scolded gently.

And once again that little rift formed between us, dividing our two worlds. She sighed and said nothing more.

\*

I saw little of Elaine in the following weeks. You know how it is—life gets busy, and between work and home there isn't time for much else. I dropped by her place one afternoon—she looked pale and tired, as though she hadn't been getting much sleep, but she welcomed me in cheerfully enough. We didn't talk long—it was one of those unseasonably raw, wet June days, and I was eager to get home. As we sat there by the window in the grey light, we saw Mr. Yang Lung walk across the little lawn, casting disapproving glances at the concrete path, which he avoided. He looked at Elaine as he entered the front hall and she smiled ruefully.

"Bad path," he said, shaking his white head. "Too straight, too inviting. Evil come up it, some day."

"I know," she sighed. "I'll have it replaced, sometime."

Still shaking his head, he passed on down the hallway on soundless feet and disappeared into the basement. Elaine watched him with an indecipherable expression on her face.

"So—how's everything, OK?" I probed. "You and your tenant getting along?"

She hesitated, and I pounced. "Something's wrong, then?"

"Oh, no," she began in the bright false voice that I knew meant she was hiding something. "He and I get along just beautifully, and his rent's always on time, and . . . really, he's very sweet. He worries about me, he says—you've heard about those daylight break-ins we've been having down here? He's always fussing over me—wanting to be sure I've got everything locked up properly."

"Sounds to me like the perfect tenant."

She traced an imaginary pattern on the tabletop with her forefinger. "Yes . . ."

"But—?" I prompted.

"Oh, nothing. It's just—well, I wonder about him, sometimes."

"What do you wonder?"

"Well—he's so quiet, for one thing. As though he isn't there at all. Most people have a radio or TV or something—"

"Lots of people don't."

"And I've never seen the flat—he doesn't ask me in. And his curtains are always drawn, you

can't see in through the basement windows."

"Maybe he just likes his privacy."

Again the hesitation, as though she were holding out on me. "Well, it's—oh, I'm being stupid!" she burst out. "No, no, never mind—" And she switched the subject.

I was thoughtful as I left her house. My own single years had come back to me as I spoke with her: the loneliness of my highrise apartment, the way the black winter darkness used to press against the window-panes at night, the eerie silence of the halls—I'd catch myself listening hungrily for the sound of voices, footsteps, the sounds of other human presences. Checking and rechecking the locks on the door, the balcony. And then there were the delusions, all the tricks that the solitary mind plays on itself: I'd have persistent nightmares about people I knew dying or getting injured, and if I didn't discuss these dreams with someone in the daytime I'd catch myself believing they'd actually happened. I'd since forgotten these things; I should have known that a sensitive, imaginative person like Elaine would suffer from them. And she was all alone in that house, with a silent tenant, in a neighbourhood where the rot of crime had begun to spread. No wonder she looked so nervy.

I phoned her up the following evening. "Look, kid," I said, the

way I always used to when we were at university, "I know you're having a hard time. Why don't you talk about it? Come on, out with it. Maybe you've been feeling lonely, having dreams—"

"How did you know?" she asked, in a voice so low I could barely hear her over the phone.

"I used to have them too when I lived alone. Dreams about—well, people I knew dying, and bad things happening. And if you don't talk them out, they sort of take over your mind."

A long pause followed; then she spoke. "Yes—I've been dreaming. The same dream, over and over again. But it isn't a bad dream, Jane. It's beautiful."

"Then why—"

"It's too beautiful!" Her voice sounded strained, brittle as ice. "So beautiful I can hardly bear it. There are mountains, Jane—green mountains, with cascades and forests, and a river that winds in and out of them. And there's a great house with pagoda roofs, and a lovely garden—I can see them now as I talk to you, they seem realer than the room I'm sitting in—"

"One of your memories of China?" She'd been there, a few years back.

"No! The part of China I saw was hideous, all concrete highrises."

"Then where is this place?" I asked patiently.

"Where!" she exclaimed. "That's just it! In my dreams it's

behind a door—an ordinary little door, the one that leads to Mr. Yang Lung's basement flat. I go to it and open it, and the flat isn't there; instead there's this beautiful world or country or whatever. I— I find that I keep longing to go and open that door—"

"Oh, boy," I said. "It sounds to me like you're getting things mixed up in your head—your tenant, and that magic stuff, and so on. Look, Ellie, if it bothers you that much why don't you just pay Mr. Yang Lung a visit? You'll see his flat, all nice and ordinary, and then you'll feel better."

"I can't," she said breathlessly.

"Well, you don't have to tell him the reason! Just think of an excuse to see him—"

"I can't," she almost whispered.

I sighed. "Ellie, just hang in there, all right? You've just been alone too much, that's all. Ring me up whenever you want, and I'll come over and see you someday soon, OK?"

But it wasn't soon—at least, it wasn't soon enough.

\*

It was about three weeks later that I set out again for Elaine's neighbourhood. It was getting dark, and I'd had a long day at work, but I had a feeling about Elaine, a twinge of disquiet I was too scientific to call a premonition. I walked briskly along the dusky streets, past the small, slightly shabby houses and little tangled gardens, the street

signs with their Chinese symbols. It was all so quiet, so peaceful and ordinary, that the flashing lights up ahead came as a shock, sending the blood racing through my veins. They were still a distant strobe-flicker at the end of the street: why was I so certain that they would be in front of *her* house?

I ran. The squad cars were drawn up in her driveway, their revolving lights sending shadows flying through the trees. I pelted up to the uniformed figures who were examining the concrete path.

"What's going on here?" I gasped, as soon as I had breath. "Is Elaine—"

"You knew the lady who lived here?" one officer asked, standing. "Knew?"

He explained briefly. A neighbour had alerted them after noticing her lights on in the daytime, her front door ajar. There was no one inside: the furniture was disturbed, things smashed and stolen. Of Elaine herself there was no sign.

"What about her tenant, where is he?" I asked.

"Tenant?" they said.

"Mr. Yang Lung," I said wildly. "The basement tenant!"

They looked at me oddly. It was only much, much later that they let me inside. After surveying the ruins I went down to the basement flat, and I stared for a long, long time at the bare walls and the swags of cobweb, at the floor where the dust of years lay thick and undisturbed . . .

\*

No sign was ever found of Elaine: she had vanished completely, and was never seen again.

We all assumed the worst, of course. A brief outcry predictably arose, and as predictably faded away again. It was summer, the season of disappearances: Elaine was only one of several women who'd vanished that year. Mr. Yang Lung's disappearance was more of a mystery: some said he must have been involved somehow, gone off with the robbers; others suggested he too had been a victim.

And then the dreams began, the dreams that have continued to this day. The dreams of dragons coiling and winding through the dark behind my eyelids. I used to thrash around at first, waking myself and Tom. But I have found, now, that if I just lie still through the dragon-dream, another follows after it.

I see her—see her wandering along winding paths beneath boughs of blossoming peach, over bridges spanning willowy streams . . . A figure walks beside her, clad in a blue robe—a figure no longer old and bent. For they can take any shape that pleases them, or a shape that is pleasing to others . . .

And I wander with them, in that other-land of piercing beauty, and I wake as she did, with tears of longing in my eyes.

I know now what must have happened, I can see it in my mind:

Elaine, running in fear from the violent invaders of her home—running, not out into the street or to a neighbour's house, but homing instinctively in her panic toward the door of her dreams. Flinging it open, standing on the threshold—did she hesitate at all, I wonder, before hurling herself through?

And was *he* there to meet her?

I have stood on that threshold myself, but for me it was just a

door, nothing more. As it will be for anyone else with eyes that only look outward. My share in that place is only through her, the glimpses she gives me across that mysterious gulf. For I like to think that these dreams are messages from her, and that at times she recalls me with a faint, fleeting pleasure, as she wanders through the otherness beyond the dragon door. •



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# DISTANT SEAS

by Wesley Herbert

illustrated by Peter MacDougall

Lying in bed, Captain Huygens turns restlessly as a single sharp note reverberates in his sleep like a tolling bell. In his dream it seems a signal, calling him from the murky, swirling waters in which he drifts, filling him with an unexpected buoyancy. Slowly he begins to rise, past the groping tendrils of bottom weeds which, in the utter black, feel like the caress of cold fingers running along the exposed skin of hands and face. His ascent continues, through dark as impenetrable as pitch, through waters that flow around him like an icy cloak. He cranes his neck, for the first time seeing a soft, diffused glow far above and, with each passing heartbeat, the light grows brighter, the water he slips through warmer. He is pushed ever faster through layers of shadowy green filled with the flecks and blurs that are darting fish; above, his world has become overarched with a rippling azure plain. Layers of increasingly translucent water slip by, and he moves towards the surface of wakefulness, his lungs aching suddenly, as if only now they have remembered their need for oxygen; the ribs in his chest strain against tightly drawn skin, an irresistible desire to open his mouth and drink deeply fills him. He claws at the water, tearing madly to propel himself toward the light, fighting the panic that rises in his throat like a balled fist, that threatens to burst from him in a watery scream, and when he is sure that he can no longer hold it at bay, when it pushes from between his tightly pressed

lips, that formless howl, at the same instant he breaks the surface like a shot, gasping and flailing in the blinding light.

Awake at last, Captain Huygens sits amid the tangle of soaked sheets, trembling, a shaft of sunlight cutting the gloom of his cabin and falling across his bed like a bright cutlass. He closes his eyes and swallows several times, head still reeling from the dream, its fear and confusion supplanted by another greater fear now that he has returned to his senses.

He wonders, Who am I?

\*

I am the Captain.

For several minutes he remains where he is, back propped against the headboard. Then, feeling a sudden sense of urgency, he swings himself over the edge of the bed and nearly falls as his legs buckle beneath his weight. He clutches the bedframe, steadies himself, and in a moment he can feel his strength returning, though his dream has left him weaker than he had believed. Moving cautiously, he makes his way to the foot of the bed where clothes—his clothes, he realizes—have been laid out on top of his sea chest; slowly, he begins dressing, pulling on his breeches and silk shirt, hands still shaking, making it difficult to manage the buttons. The effort required to get his boots on taxes his strength to such a degree that he must pause to collect himself afterwards. Finally, he walks, more

or less steadily, to the bureau where his black felt tricorne sits. He places it squarely on his head and, looking up, catches a glimpse of himself in the gilt framed glass.

A stranger regards him from the mirror with startlement, a man who wears his clothes yet has a thin, bloodless face, with sunken, watery eyes and parched lips. He blinks, and the figure in the mirror apes him. Closing his eyes, he is once again aware of the thumping of his heart in his ribcage, the rubbery feeling of his legs, the lightness of his head.

He wonders: Have I been ill?

He has no recollection of being sick, yet when he tries to recall anything of the past few days he cannot: his memories have fled. He is the Captain. This is his ship. But of the last weeks, he remembers nothing. And with a sudden sickening lurch in his stomach, he realizes he is possession of only fragments of his past. He concentrates and an assembly of familiar faces float before him: men sitting around a table, engaged in earnest discussion, though he cannot name them; then a memory of a carriage rolling thorough level countryside, he staring from within as they drive past canals lined with long stemmed tulips whose blossoms sway yellow and red in the breeze; and in France (Yes, he remembers, France) a country house filled with music and the soft rustle of long, elegant skirts. Vague impressions and sensations that refuse to coa-

lesce.

A fever, he thinks. I have woken from a feverish dream. It is the effect of the illness. My memories will return. Must return.

And having decided this, he opens his eyes.

He is relieved to see his parlor, still sickly, is not quite as white as he first thought; faint lines of colour are visible in his cheeks, and his eyes now appear clear. Tipping his hat forward so that it will leave his face in shadow, he steps out into the blazing morning light.

\*

The deck is deserted.

It has the unmistakable air of abandonment: coils of line and pails of tar lying as if they'd just been dropped; loose carpenters' tools and wood shavings next to a half-made barrel; a large sheet of canvas spread near the mizzen mast, a thick needle piercing it at the base of a jagged tear.

Overhead, the sheets hang limply from their spars beneath a fulgent sun, a sun as bright and hot as any Captain Huygens can remember. He removes his hat and with his sleeve he wipes at the beads of perspiration that have already gathered on his forehead. The light is inescapable, filling the ship, leaving no shadows, dancing in all the recesses of his head.

Captain Huygens walks across the weather deck towards the prow. Climbing the short ladder to the foredeck, he surveys the extent

of the ship. From where he stands, the aft deck is partially obscured by the mainsail; but he is certain that it, too, is deserted. Then a thought occurs to him, and, absurd as it is, he cranes his neck and squints into the rigging, half-expecting to see his entire crew, every one of them, perched in the shrouds and ratlines like large, angry crows. But no one is there, and the white sails leave burning after-images that shoot across his vision like stars.

Perhaps they are all below, he thinks, setting out towards the fore-castle, determined, if needs be, to check every cabin, compartment and hold on the ship in his methodical, orderly fashion.

\*

Captain Huygens' inspection proves futile. He has found no one. Returning to his cabin, he throws the shutters wide on all the aft windows to permit as much light as possible to enter; while he has searched the sun has risen and its rays cut obliquely through the window and fall on the rough wooden planks of the cabin floor.

In the centre of the room is a heavy, oak table with a single drawer, and it is before this he sits. On its surface lie a brass sextant, several large navigational charts, a cream-coloured book bound in vellum, and a sheaf of curling papers.

Picking up the book, Captain Huygens turns it over as if he were examining a specimen. Its covers

are blank. He places it on the desk and opens it, but there is still nothing to identify its purpose, only an empty white leaf narrowly ruled in black ink. He begins turning pages, but they are all identical, each as empty as the first. When he reaches the last page he closes the book.

He leans back in his chair and opens the drawer. It has been divided into two sections by a thin wooden partition, one narrow that contains two inkwells and a number of quills, the other wider but unused. He places the book into this side, and it fits nicely with just enough room around its edges so that it can be easily lifted out again, and this somehow pleases him, this seeming order. He shuts the drawer.

The charts are of various sizes and types, some imprinted with foreign languages and symbols that make no sense to him. Although he cannot recall how or where he might have acquired each, he is certain that with a little patience he will be able to unlock their secrets, to discern their patterns. Why he knows this he cannot say; but he is firm in his confidence, certain that he has solved far knottier problems in the past. He sorts them in order of size, then moves them to the corner of the desk, placing the sextant atop the pile.

He examines the loose papers, one after the other, but these confound him. They are covered with detailed diagrams and intricate cal-

culations, and appear to deal with diverse topics from the minutiae of life to the motions of the planets. On the first is a series of sketches of puzzling objects labelled animalcules; on the next two pages he finds numerous mathematical notations, a consideration, it seems, of the probability of a dicing game; following this is a detailed rendering of the internal mechanism of a clock driven by a pendulum that travels in a cycloidal arc; finally are a series of astronomical drawings and calculations, geometries of the motion of planets.

All, he notes with some consternation, are in his own distinctive script.

\*

The sun is almost directly overhead, the morning nearly spent. Captain Huygens stands on the aft deck, a lone figure lost in contemplation, his large, expressionless eyes the colour of the sea.

"Help!"

The voice, small and trilling, shatters the Captain's reverie with the abruptness of a stone.

"Save me!"

Captain Huygens turns. The sea is an unbroken mirror, and it is not difficult to spot the distant, floundering figure of a boy.

"Ahoy!" he bellows through cupped hands.

The tiny form ceases his struggles, as if the Captain's words have surprised him. Then, he begins to wave a small arm energetically in

the direction of the ship. "Help me!" he cries with renewed effort.

"I can do nothing for you!" the Captain shouts in reply. "I am alone! You must swim!"

There is a moment of silence while the boy treads water, as if weighing the wisdom of the Captain's suggestion; then he strikes out towards the ship, his little arms churning through the water, a steady, unhurried stroke.

\*

"What is your name, lad?"

The boy shrugs. He is round-faced and sleepy-eyed, with full lips and a downturned mouth; wet, curly locks of hair are pasted to his skull. His complexion is ghostly, his lips the fading blue of arctic ice.

The Captain knows this colour, has seen it many times before on the sodden corpses they have dragged from the sea, but never on the living. He shivers despite the stifling heat, then forces these thoughts from his mind. "Do I know you?" he asks, then, feeling embarrassed at the absurdity of his question, says, "Do not be shy. Speak up."

The boy's eyes dart nervously, taking in the ship as if it is all new and frightening to him; he shifts his weight from foot to foot. "I . . . I . . . I'm not sure.

"Not sure?"

He nods numbly in answer, averting his eyes.

"Your name then. What is your name?"

"I do not know."

The Captain tries to hide his rising exasperation. "Come, come, lad! How can you not remember your own name?"

"I . . . I cannot." The boy studies the puddle growing around his bare feet. "I was hoping, sir," he says in a small voice, "you might be able to tell me."

The Captain purses his lips thoughtfully, then clears his throat. "Ah, well, you see, I've been sick. A fever, I think." Withdrawing a handkerchief from his pocket, he dabs at the film of perspiration gathering on his brow, his hand trembling slightly with the action. "I've just this morning been out of bed. My memory is still a bit muddled, I'm afraid . . ."

"You don't remember either," the boy says, for the first time staring directly at the Captain. "Do you?"

"Your name. Surely you have a name."

The boy furrows his brow in exaggerated concentration, and then his face lights up. "Albert!" he says, beaming. "My name is Albert!"

"Albert," the Captain repeats slowly, as if considering the name. "Good. Now, perhaps you might tell me how you came to be floundering out there."

The boy's face clouds over, and he averts his eyes. "I...I do not know," he stammers.

"You've no recollection at all?"

The boy shakes his head sul-

lenly.

"The ship." The Captain's grasps the boy's shoulder. "Does she look familiar? Were you on her before? Can you remember her?"

The boy remains mute. Beneath his fingers the Captain can feel a shudder pass through him. He releases his grip.

"Never mind," the Captain mutters and, clasping his hands behind his back, he begins pacing the deck. "It is not important."

For a time neither speaks, the Captain lost in thought while the boy takes in the ship with furtive glances. Then: "The others?"

"What?" The Captain stops pacing, stares at the boy. "What?"

"The others. Where they?"

"Gone. Jumped ship, perhaps. Likely drowned."

The boy's face blanches; his eyes grow wide with fear.

"A storm," the Captain says quickly, knowing it to be a lie, the ship bearing no evidence of rough weather. But the boy looks hopefully at him, and he continues in a loud voice. "Aye, that must be it. Maybe they were washed overboard. Or perhaps they lost their nerve in a storm and were afraid we'd founder. So they struck out for an island they spotted." He nods thoughtfully. "Perhaps that's what happened to you as well, Albert."

"But I don't remember—"

"Your head. You might have banged your head. Sometimes peo-

ple forget when they receive a blow to the skull."

Albert chews his lower lip and gazes off into space. Then his eyes narrow. "There's no clouds," he says flatly, staring at the empty sky.

"No," the Captain replies. "You're right, and there's no denying that. But suppose, now just suppose, that you'd been out there at sea all this time clinging to a barrel or plank, half drowned and out of your mind with fear while the storm passes by then disappears altogether. And later, much later, when you hear my voice, well, then you snap out of it."

The boy seems lost in thought. "Yes," he says at last. "Your voice is the first thing I remember."

"That must be it," the Captain says in what he hopes is a hardy voice, clapping Albert stoutly on the back. "Get yourself out of those wet clothes and see if you can find something to eat. When the wind picks up we'll have lots of work between us, I warrant."

"Yes, sir," Albert says, venturing a weak smile. He moves towards the companionway that leads beneath the afterdeck and to the officers' quarters.

The Captain watches him for a moment. "Albert," he says quietly, and the boy pauses. "Where are you going?"

Without hesitation he replies. "To my berth, sir."

"And where is that?"

"Why, next to yours, sir."

"To the cabin boy's quarters,"

Captain Huygens says, staring at Albert, who regards him solemnly. But there is no spark of recognition, no face that comes to mind when he considers those words. "Very well," he says. "Carry on." "Aye, aye, sir."

The Captain watches Albert disappear into the gloom of the stairway; in his stomach something turns sluggishly, like a small animal awakening. It is the fever, he tells himself.

But he no more believes this than the story he has concocted for Albert.

\*

Against the foot of Captain Huygens' bed rests a sea chest of teakwood banded with dark iron; it glows with the patina of age and feels warm, almost alive, beneath the tips of his fingers where they rest lightly on its surface. His initials are carved deeply on its hump-backed lid just above a rusty lock: C.H.

The chest contains bundles of various sizes and shapes wrapped in grey sailcloth and secured with short lengths of packing string. On the very bottom he can see five cylindrical objects, all roughly the length of the chest, on top of which three other packages rest. He selects these topmost and carries them to his desk.

The first is a tube about the length of his arm and the width of his wrist. He pulls the single string tied around its centre and the cloth falls away to reveal the stepped,

brass cylinder of a seafaring spy-glass. He extends it to its full length—nearly a meter—then collapses it, placing it on the corner of his desk.

When he unwraps the second bundle he finds a heavy disc the size of a tea saucer and the thickness of his little finger; lying on his desk, it looks like a giant's coin. It, too, is constructed from brass, and several small, precise holes have been drilled through the metal. The stars, he thinks. It is an instrument to measure the luminosity of the stars—and therefore their distance. How he knows this he cannot say. He pushes it to the side.

The third parcel contains a rosewood box that is square and a handspan in width, with bevelled corners and a small gold latch. He flips the latch open with his thumb and lifts the lid. It is lined with dark blue velvet both top and bottom, each half being subdivided into a number of pockets that contain glass lenses of varying thickness. He withdraws one, holding it by its edges, and peers through it intently; he places it gently on the table, its concave side down so that he won't abrade the surface. He stares at it for a moment. Then, leaving the single lens on the table, he closes the case and pushes his chair back, starting for the trunk to examine the cylinders that lie in its bottom. But before he has taken a step he pauses, looks at the lens again then back

to the trunk, suddenly realizing what those long packages must contain.

\*

Captain Huygens strides across the main deck towards Albert. The boy's shouts have drawn him from his cabin to where Albert has been stowing the loose gear littering the weather deck. "There," the boy says in his small, serious voice, pointing up the foremast as the captain approaches.

Shading his eyes, the Captain scans the webbing of the shroud, and near the lower top gallant, a figure clings to the lines. "So," the Captain says. "We have another."

Albert frowns. "He wasn't there before."

"No. I don't believe he was."

The boy's face is pale; he crosses his arms. "I looked, but it was empty—"

"Perhaps," the Captain says quickly, "we missed him. If he were to be lying along a spar, or curled round the main top, we mightn't have seen him from the deck. Then he crawled to where he is now. We just missed him is all."

Albert opens his mouth as if he is about to say something, then snaps it shut. As they watch, the dark form stirs uneasily as if waking from a deep sleep.

\*

Despite the sweltering, mid-afternoon heat the man shivers uncontrollably, as if he is chilled to the bone. He sits, back against the

rail with knees drawn up to his chest. The man is of middle height and years; he has long blond hair that curls at his shoulders, framing a narrow face and roman nose. His countenance is pale, his lips tinged with the slightest of blues. Beneath his eyes are pronounced circles that give him a contemplative, scholarly air despite his deathly pallor, one that is, in some distant way, familiar to the Captain.

Where, he wonders, have I seen this man before?

Abruptly an image comes into his head, a memory of long ago, a carriage early in the morning, one other passenger who sits, sullen and withdrawn, in the brocaded interior. It is July.

"Isaac," the Captain says suddenly, the vision vanishing with the words. "Your name is Isaac."

The man stares at him blankly, suspiciously, then nods before he is seized by a violent fit of shaking.

At that moment Albert returns with a blanket, and the Captain suddenly recalls how the boy had first appeared like this man, pale and half-alive; but whatever traces of death he had shown earlier have faded, suffused in a ruddy glow, his eyes now filled with the curiosity of youth.

"Go ahead," the Captain says, and the boy lowers the thick wool blanket carefully over Isaac's shoulders like a shroud.

\*



"You remember nothing?"

After a moment, Isaac shakes his head; he sits hunched low in his seat across the desk from the Captain, the blanket still draped about his shoulders, his mannerisms suggesting fear and caution. From time to time a tremor passes through him then subsides as if he is racked by memories of a bitter cold.

"And do I not look familiar?"

Isaac narrows his eyes and glares at the Captain, his face both melancholy and defiant.

The Captain sighs. He pushes the case of lenses to one side to make room on his crowded desk, then pulls the vellum book, quill and inkwell from his drawer. Opening the book to the first page, he runs his hand down its centre so that it will lie flat. The page already contains two entries in his hand and, uncapping the inkwell and dipping the quill, he neatly enters Isaac's name on the third line.

When he finishes, he looks up and says, "Now then—" but stops to stare at the other man. Isaac's face has changed, has lost some of its irascible character; his eyes have become lively and piercing, his brow furrowed in concentration as he holds the single lens the Captain had left on the desk. So engrossed is he in his examination that he appears to have forgotten the Captain altogether.

The Captain clears his throat.

Isaac looks startled, then seems

to recall himself. He returns the lens to the desk and, nodding towards it, says, "Very good work."

Absurdly, the Captain feels a flush of pride. He is about to say "Thank you," when the hollow thump of feet pounding down the corridor makes him pause.

Albert's head pops into the cabin. "Astern!" he shouts breathlessly, leaning through the door, clutching its frame. "There's more astern!"

Rising from his chair, the Captain makes his way to the aft window. Beyond, the sea lies undisturbed in all directions, the ship still becalmed in this unnatural weather. The Captain is puzzled. "I cannot see . . ." he begins, then stops, something directly below catching his eye. The sun, having passed its zenith, casts an incipient shadow behind the tail of the ship, and in this gibbous darkness are three unlikely lumps, bodies in the water, clothes mushroomed around them, face down, staring into the depths.

The bodies have been arranged on the deck in an orderly row. All three are bloated, the skin pale white, almost luminescent, in the early afternoon sun. Isaac stands above them; he is sweating profusely from his exertion and his breath comes raggedly, though his countenance is much improved. To the Captain's surprise, he had, with Albert's help, retrieved the corpses. Behind him Albert's head rises above the scuppers as he hauls

himself up the last few rungs of the ladder. Using a small launch, they had fished the men from the water, Isaac instructing Albert in a terse voice on how he might use the gaff hook to snare the dead men; with one in tow, Isaac then rowed back to where a looped rope waited beneath the gangway. Working this rope beneath their arms, he signalled the Captain who then began to crank the windlass about whose barrel the rope wound. Three times the corpses were drawn from the sea in this fashion, bumping and scraping up the side of the *Beagle*, in small, precise jerks, a fall of glittering drops shivering from them with each loud click of the ratchet.

Standing before the bodies now, Captain Huygens observes they wear breeches and plain, white shirts; all are barefoot as is the custom among men before the mast. One is tall and thin, with nordic features and a scar along his cheek; the second has dirty-blond hair cropped close to the skull and a thick white beard; the third is diminutive, with narrow features, swarthy skin and dark curling hair. They are all of a middle age and, by their appearances—soft unformed muscles and smooth, uncalloused skin—seem unlikely sailors. He gazes at them, filled with curiosity, and at last asks, "Did you know them?"

But neither Isaac, who leans against the mast, nor the boy, standing at the rail, answer, for

both watch as the silence gathers in folds about them, and the dead begin to stir.

\*

It is late in the afternoon, and Captain Huygens climbs the ladder to the foredeck, his small brass telescope beneath the crook of his arm. Leaning against the rail, he extends it to its full length and, bringing it up to his eye, scans the sea.

For a time he sees nothing.

He swings the glass slowly and precisely from side to side in a wide arc.

Then he finds what he has been looking for: on the horizon, there is a tiny smudge, barely perceptible, and he cannot be sure it is anything more than his imagination. At this distance the shape could be anything really and he waits patiently, watching it for the better part of an hour as it advances towards them through the dead calm, drawn to them by the tug of a spectral current.

The Captain can descry four bodies slumped in the boat; it is possible there might be others who have slipped beneath the gunwale so that they are hidden. All appear lifeless.

The Captain proffers his telescope to Isaac. "Secure her," he says, gesturing in the direction of the boat, "as she comes near."

Isaac nods.

"Tie the boat up, but you might as well leave them be until they can climb aboard themselves."

Isaac, who is already peering through the telescope, says nothing, but the Captain can see his fingers tighten around the slender tube.

"When they are ready, bring them to my cabin."

Leaving Isaac, the Captain makes his way down to the weather deck to examine the three they have pulled from the sea. The two smaller men are still unconscious, and their breathing is ragged and noisy, as if their lungs still suffer some obstruction. Occasionally one or the other coughs and flat ribbons of water seep from a nose or the corner of a mouth. Their faces look worse than before, their pallid complexions more pronounced for the bit of colour that has crept back. The tall one, however, is awake.

He lies on the deck, his chest rising and falling with regularity, watching everything through wide eyes. He seems to be taking it all in: the empty ship, the unnaturally bright day, the men who lie on either side of him, the Captain.

But his eyes contain no understanding, only confusion and perhaps fear, as if the world in which the Captain stands is illusory, insubstantial. Watching him, the Captain tries to imagine what he is feeling. He is reminded of the large, rolling eyes of a fish, dragged from the cool gloom of the depths into the bright, painful light of day.

\*

In the very bottom of the chest

is a package the Captain had earlier overlooked. It contains a small silver flute.

Captain Huygens sits on the edge of his bed, the flute cradled in his hand, remembering. He played in the centre of a well appointed room, a table off to the side cluttered with drawings and calculations, surrounded by a ring of serious faces. They are ghosts of remembrances, insubstantial figures, these men. Friends, he realizes all at once, of his father's. Their names come to him: Mersenne, Diodati, Schouten, Descartes. He is there, with his flute, a child no more than Albert's age, playing. It is a night like many others, and this is his father's house in Voorburg near the Hague.

\*

The sun is an enormous, watery eye on the horizon.

Throughout the afternoon and into the evening, the men have continued to come before the Captain in twos and threes. They have been discovered in previously unoccupied cabins, in empty barrels in the holds, clinging fearfully to the masts, confused and tangled in spare sails and lines, struggling in the sea . . .

The Captain sits behind his desk, entering the names of each of the crew members in the ledger as they are brought before him. They are by turns pale, shivering, quiet, flushed with anger, fearful, incoherent, lucid. Some of the names are familiar as he carefully

inks them, and he feels that he should know them, though the fragments of recollection are for the most part still lost in a swirling, uncertain fog.

Dipping his quill in the ink well, he continues to write as they file past him. Their appearances are varied, tall and short, broad and thin, dark and light, as if they've been drawn from the furthest corners of the earth. Many speak in strange tongues and accents, but he manages, through words and gestures, to make them understand that it is their names he desires.

The Captain has discovered that he has an ear for languages, and, as he listens to them, he understands, at least in part, the English, French, Dutch, Flemish, German, Italian and Latin they speak, the urgent questions framed in foreign languages they ask him.

But he does not answer.

Instead he continues to enter names, forty-two per page, and after several leaves are filled, he pauses to retrieve a tinder box and candle from the top of his dresser so that he might chase back the shadows that have gathered like silent watchers in the corners of his room.

\*

It is night, and Captain Huygens sits on a three-legged stool on the afterdeck, elbows resting on knees, waiting patiently. To his side, Isaac kneels, busily assembling the series of tubes that had

lain in the bottom of the chest, fitting the lenses in each section.

On a small table the Captain has placed his sextant, a quill, an inkwell, and several blank sheets of paper. Occasionally he leans forward and sketches a rough figure or makes a note. His crew mills about on the weather deck, their voices a soft murmur in the growing darkness, gathering in knots to watch the sky. They seem, on the whole, to have adjusted remarkably well, although there is something subdued in their manner and speech. From time to time they glance in his direction as if for reassurance, and, when he notices these movements, he nods curtly in response.

The Captain's memory is still uncertain and cloudy, but he is convinced that it is only a matter of time before he will remember everything clearly, before the brief flashes and snatches of images will come together to give him back his past.

The Captain has ordered the sails furled so that they might have an unobstructed view of the sky in all directions. Stars, brighter than any he has ever seen, shimmer in the heavens. They glitter with an unaccustomed brilliance and clarity that pierce his heart like the tip of a diamond knife.

"Captain."

He turns. Albert, who stands near the tiller, points to the rising moon.

It is large and luminous, its

surface mottled with shades of green and brown and blue. Clouds, small and white and perfect, scud across its surface, obscuring its tiny continents.

And when it is followed, a short time later, by a second moon

whose surface ripples like a burning, silver sea, Captain Huygens feels no fear; rather, his heart soars with joy and wonder, that there still remain so many worlds he, a traveller from a distant country, might yet see. •



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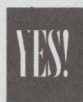
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# A SWIM IN THE ROCKS

by Keith Scott  
illustrated by Tim Hammell

What did I do to lose my arm? Funny you should ask it that way. I mean, putting emphasis on—What did I do?—as if losing my arm was the direct result of something I did, deliberately with full knowledge and intent, maybe even something I did stupidly, like betting my arm in a great wacko poker pot.

No. No . . . I'm not getting steamed. Relax. After all, you're buying the drink so you got the right to ask whatever you want. I only say funny because you're right; it was something I did, and it was damn near a poker game—a poker game with the granddaddy of all pots. Only I wasn't fully aware of the stakes, what I could win, what I might lose.

Maybe we're never really aware of all the stakes, like when I dropped out of third year engineering school, or when I went in that mine alone. That was pretty stupid.

But have you ever held a whole new world in your hand? I mean dreamscape becomes reality; your wildest wish list suddenly within reach; and the whole world spread before you in a magnificent all-you-can-eat dim sum. Know what I mean?

Crazily enough, it all started right here. Yeah. I'm not bullshitting you. Right here in the Taku Lounge, in good old Whitehorse town, Yukon Territory . . . four years ago this April. I'd spent two years in the 1980s mucking for some of the bigger operators up around Dawson, on Barker and Fourth of July creeks to be specific.

God, it's hard to believe they're still taking gold out of those Klondike creeks ninety-seven years after it all started; but you can sure as hell believe it, because they're still taking it out and even I got a bit of it. In fact, I'd built up a pretty respectable poke, enough so that I decided to try it on my own in the old Atlin goldfields, south of Whitehorse.

\*

I'd been researching the area in the Yukon Territorial Archives, checking out the information on old-timer leases and operations. It's surprising how much you can learn that way.

Then one day, I took a beer break from the library, and I was sitting at that table over in the corner when a "creekie" came in and sat at the next table.

You get so that you can recognize them. There's something about mucking for gold that marks them right down to their last chromosome. Anyway, this creekie is on his way out south and he's got an Atlin lease to rent or sell. An old-timer's lease, on Canyon Creek,

just before it empties into the O'Donnel River.

I tried to keep my interest hidden. "Not old Nate Morrow's claim?" I asked him.

He seemed surprised I would know about Nate Morrow. Nate had worked the O'Donnel and Canyon Creek for the first thirty years of this century. His was one of the leases I'd found interesting in my research. I signalled the waiter for another round, and moved in on my creekie friend.

Two days later I was pulling a rental D2 dozer on a flatbed float behind the Bronco, down Warm Bay out of Atlin. The idea was to go as far as I could, then switch the Bronco for the D2 and pull the truck—and its radiophone—on the float. That should give you some idea of how rough those last eight miles were, not much more than a gopher trail and soft with permafrost.

The radiophone would be my only link with outside.

Nate had built himself a cabin sometime in the 1920s on the right bench of the O'Donnel, about forty feet above river level. He'd correctly assumed that a seam of yellow clay hardpan clearly visible on the present day bank was the river bottom of thirty thousand years ago. Nate tunnelled into the riverbank, driving side drifts to follow the seam, pulling out the five or six feet of placer gravel he found on top of the hardpan. Nate, the records say, washed out an



average of 80 ounces of gold a year for the ten years he worked that tunnel before it caved in . . .

Hey! I know that's not much, even at today's prices, but I hauled in a Flying Dutchman shaker sluice along with the D2 on the float and I figured my sluice would catch five times what old Nate thought was productive digging.

My first sunset found me sitting on Nate's doorstep, watching the eleven o'clock sub-arctic sun paint the tips of the giant crown of mountains circling around me. Nate's cabin was at the 3200 foot elevation and I could see about fifty miles in all directions, except for the riverbank and mountain directly behind me. It was the first time all day that I stopped to listen, to really listen.

That's when the stillness caught me.

It was incredible . . . the silence I'd been holding at bay all day just seemed to explode on me, to flow into me, making me feel small and vulnerable, prodding me with a sense of something I couldn't bring into focus. I don't know, it's hard to describe. Doubt? Fear? Shame? All of these and something more.

Next morning I got up early. The silence was still rubbing on me and I found myself consciously holding in, trying to walk quietly, setting things down gently, even to muting my dish washing down by the creek. That's when I decided it was all too damn much.

No place was going to work on me like this. No damn way.

I straightened up and frisbeed the tin plate in my hand toward the cabin. It sailed through the air and landed with a great clatter on the doorstep.

Then I ran up the hill to where I'd parked the D2. Soon the staccato bark of its International four split the air, and I pranced about the bulldozer in a wild dance. You know, the kind of thing we all do when we know nobody, but absolutely nobody, is watching.

Anyway, I felt a lot better when I climbed aboard the D2 amidst a great bejesus welter of noise. I gunned the dozer up the hill to the mine entrance.

Nate had dug his tunnel wide enough to take a half-yard ore cart on steel rails. I hoped that it was wide enough to accomodate my pint-sized D2. The Cat D2 is about as compact as you can get and still do a job.

First, I straightened out the entry area with the blade on the dozer. Then I took the blade off and switched to the front-end bucket to clean out the caved-in tunnel. It was slightly wider than the original tunnel, and I was worried at first whether the fresh gravel walls and roof would hold as I scooped it out.

I didn't need to worry. Most placer gravel, if undisturbed, forms into an accreted state, almost like low-grade concrete. I knew that the old-timers seldom used timber shor-

ing in their tunnelling.

Still, I also knew that I was breaking every rule in the present day book: using the dozer underground without timbering, running the dozer in a confined space without air blowers, operating alone . . .

You name it. I was breaking them all. But would there be any mining done if you followed every bloody rule? Besides, I didn't think anyone even knew I was in there. And even if they did know, I couldn't see the Mining Inspector working up the energy to walk in those last eight miles to check me out.

I hit Nate's first side drift at about twenty feet and that gave me room to turn the D2 around and run out frontwards to dump each bucketful beside the sluice hopper at the tunnel entrance.

Late in the afternoon, I broke through into Nate's old tunnel. It was an eerie moment, the lights of the D2 barely picking out the details ahead of me, two reflecting ribbons of steel track running off into darkness, and finally, at the edge of illumination, Nate's ore cart, filled with his last load of gravel, sitting on the track.

I shut down the D2 and climbed over the left crawler treads onto the tunnel floor, leaving the dozer lights on. I tried to recall what the record had said about Nate's cave-in, remembering that he had been a tight-lipped old guy, but rumour had it that he'd shipped

out for the States without a word to anyone when it happened in 1932. They used to do that to avoid paying tax on any gold they were carrying out of the country.

I switched on the miner's lamp on my hard hat and walked deeper into the mine. My stomach knotted with the thought that nobody had walked here except Nate Morrow—sixty years before me.

Ten feet beyond the cart, the tunnel widened into a "room" cut into the left wall. I was surprised to find a rough table and chair in the room. On the table was a kerosene lamp which I picked up and shook. Beyond belief, it still held fluid in its base. I held a match to the old wick and watched it struggle to life, lighting up what obviously had been Nate's lunch room. On the table was an old wind-up pocket watch stopped at twenty minutes to ten, a tobacco tin and papers, a half empty bottle of Old Crow whisky . . . and the remains of Nate's sixty-year-old lunch.

I don't know why, but the lunch scraps affected me more than anything else. Looking at them, bits of blackened bread and bully beef, made something shift deep within me. Was I in Nate's tomb? Had he been caught by the cave-in? Nobody had really said they'd seen him after it happened.

If he'd been caught under the tunnel roof-fall, I was certain I would have spotted him when I cleaned it out—most likely when I

was dumping the bucket outside in broad daylight. I could picture how the bones would have looked in the tumbling gravel, how they would have flashed in the light . . .

No, Nate hadn't been caught under the roof-fall.

That left the possibility he'd been in deeper in the mine when the roof came down, working at the face, loading the last cartful of gravel—then, bang, no way out. And then a long, lingering death.

Icy fingers wrapped around my bowels. He could be in there, beyond the lunch room, somewhere between where I was sitting and the mine face. He'd be nothing but bones, a grinning skeleton.

I lurched to my feet, upsetting the whisky bottle. I caught it just before it rolled off the edge of the table. The action brought me to my senses. Hell, Nate wouldn't have left a half bottle of whisky if he'd been trapped. It might have been days. And the sandwich scraps?

Nate wasn't in there.

Maybe I wasn't totally convinced and there was only one way to really find out. But what did I do? I carefully blew the lamp out, turned my back on the blackness of the unexplored inner depths of the mine, switched off the lights on the D2 as I climbed back over it—and then walked, tight-assed, out of Nate Morrow's tunnel.

I didn't do much more that day except sit and think. I tried all

possibilities in my mind. Best one was that Nate had cleared out after the cave-in. Next possibility was that he was still in there, and in that case I had to find him, or what was left of him, and get him underground. Nobody would be any the wiser after sixty years. Besides, the story had it that he'd gone home to Utah, or Wyoming, or somewhere, and that he'd died an old man.

I spent a restless night, waking several times to play it all over again in my mind, always ending up with the shaky conviction that there wasn't a pile of bones in that mine. I finally bullied myself into accepting this as a fact and fell off into a deep sleep.

Next morning there was a light dusting of summer snow on the ground and I was filling my lungs with the sharply clean air as I relieved myself behind the cabin; looking about me with a sense of appreciation. God, it was spectacular. I was pulling up my zipper when I noticed the marks in the snow around the back of the cabin.

It took a moment to register. And then, WHAM, the marks had my full attention. There were footprints around the back of my cabin. Footprints quite different from the distinct pattern left by my Kodiaks in the snow where I had walked. These prints had a smooth sole with a separate heel, raised about half an inch.

The footprints circled the cabin, with a kind of toing-and-

froing right under the window. Whoever had made them had taken a long, hard look into the cabin. I felt the hairs on my neck begin to crawl.

I suppose I've got about as much courage as the next guy, perhaps a little less—still, I wasn't prepared for this kind of a jolt. I don't like guns, never carry them, but I wished at that moment that I had one. My eye fell on the axe leaning against the wood pile. I grabbed it and its solid heft on my palm gave me some small comfort.

Then I walked, stifflegged and hunched forward, following the tracks in the snow, around to the front of the hut. Jesus. There were two tracks running from the cabin.

One coming from the tunnel. One leading right back into it.

I don't mind telling you . . . I freaked. Freaked right out. I ran to the Bronco and jumped into the front seat, locking the doors and scrunching down so that only the top of my head and my eyes were visible through the spokes of the wheel, the radiophone mike in my hand.

I don't know how long I stayed like that. It could only have been a few minutes. It seemed longer. You don't deal off the unexplainable in a blink of an eye. Anyway, it was time enough for my brain to get back into gear, to examine alternatives, and frankly, to muster up some courage.

So, there was somebody in the

tunnel. But it had to be a real live everyday kind of person, I told myself. It could be my creekie friend. I grabbed at that idea, built on it.

Yeah, why not?

He was having second thoughts about what he'd dealt off with a scrawled agreement in the Taku Lounge. He'd walked in earlier in the night, went into the tunnel and came out after the snowfall to check on me, and then went back in.

That was it. The jerkoff wanted to back out of the deal.

Anger flooded me. I kicked the door of the Bronco open and started for the tunnel, grabbing my hard hat with its miner's light at the entrance. I walked in about twenty feet and stopped.

"Anybody in here?" I shouted.

There was no answer. I took a firmer grip on the axe handle and quietly walked on, climbing over the D2, passing the empty lunch room and moving into the tunnel beyond it.

This was new territory to me and I found myself moving forward tensely, on the tips of my toes. The tunnel seemed to grow smaller, barely wide enough for the ore cart tracks . . . twenty, thirty, forty feet—and then suddenly it hit a rock face and veered to the left, finally broadening into a wide work area.

I shuffled carefully into the chamber, swinging my light about first to check every inch of the

floor. No grinning bones. I let my breath out with sharp relief and lifted my eyes to inspect the rest of the room.

The right wall was entirely rock, a quartz massive with a strange curl of grey material running through it. Probably volcanic, I thought. But the quartz warmed my heart. *Madre de oro*, the conquistadors used to call it.

This was Nate's rock face. A shovel, pick and pry-bar were neatly stacked against the rock. He'd been picking away at that seam of grey material which appeared much softer than the quartz. This puzzled me. It didn't look like gold bearing rock. Why would he be bothering with it? Nate was a placer miner. Placer gravel, not hard rock, was his ticket.

No matter. What was important to me at that moment was that Nate had made it out. I turned and started back, my heart going out to the old man. It took a special kind of guts to drive a tunnel like this by yourself. And to work all those years. I followed the steel tracks as they turned into the main tunnel.

That's when I saw the light.

There was a light between me and the D2. In the lunch room. Someone had lit the lamp since I went by it a few minutes earlier.

I turned off the lamp on my hat and stood with my heart racing, every sense in my body straining to make meaning out of a light in the lunch room. I swung the

axe into position and moved quietly forward. He sat with his back to me. A small man—definitely not my creekie friend. He had this shapeless felt hat pressed onto his head, and beneath that, a filthy woolen sweater under wide suspender braces holding up stained woolen pants, and on his feet, a pair of old-fashioned leather boots.

"Who the hell are you?" I said in a weak, reedy voice.

He turned slowly to me. An old man with spacey eyes behind thick round glasses in silvered frames, sharp face features almost hidden behind a white-shot beard, yellowing around the mouth.

"Oh, God, no," I moaned. "You're not Nate Morrow?"

He didn't answer me. Instead he lifted the whisky bottle I'd nearly dropped the day before. "Better have a sip," he said. His voice boomed, as though he was hard of hearing, or as if he wasn't used to talking.

I don't like whiskey, but I found myself reaching out my hand to take it. Just before he gave it to me, he wiped the bottle top with a grimy sleeve. Yukon manners, old style.

"Kinda warms you up, doesn't it?" the old man said, taking the bottle back from me.

I got my breath back. "Nate was past sixty when he left," I finally managed to say. "That would make you about 120—"

"Is that impossible?"

"Sure as hell is!" I said warmly.

"And how could you live in here? All those years?"

"Simple. I lived in the rocks with the rockswimmers." He said it so matter-of-factly that I found myself actually imagining the possibility. I shook off the idea angrily.

"What d'you mean?"

Crazy old bastard, I thought, he's lost it. The whisky was relaxing me, countering the flood of fright adrenaline of a moment before. I looked him over more carefully. He was old, all right. But not 120. The muscles in his forearm, those I could see below the frayed sweater, were firm and rippling, and his hand—as he took back the bottle—was steady as a rock.

There was an old bucket sitting just beyond the table. I upended it and sat down across the table from Nate. I was calling him that, in my mind . . . until a better name or explanation came along.

"Tell me about your rockswimmers," I said.

"I began seeing them after I hit that bubble of kimberlite in the quartz deposit. Kimberlite's pretty rare in these parts, volcanic, sometimes produces diamonds—"

"Yeah, I know that. But what about the rockswimmers?"

"Oh, they're a kind of a life form. Originally lived on top, long before us. They came underground during a meteorite period."

"How did you learn this?"

"They told me. When I started on the kimberlite I began to notice these globes of light in the surrounding quartz, five or six of them, dancing about and pulsing."

"Weren't you afraid of them?"

"No. When they were about, I got a sense of peace and calm. I got the feeling they were probing me, trying to get through to me. Then, suddenly, they made it—"

"Come on. These globes of light were talking to you?"

"Yes. They were the swimmers, they told me. They were able to break the crystal bonding within themselves and the crystals in the rock immediately about them. They do this by creating a fluid or flux state."

"They're still in there? Moving through the rock?"

"Yes. And they taught me how to do the same—"

"You're not going to tell me that you can move through rock, too?"

Nate looked at me for a moment.

"Don't intend to show off, son," he said, "but I don't think you'll believe without seeing." He lifted his right hand and quietly pushed it into the hard gravel of the lunchroom wall. Pushed it in until he was right up to his armpit.

It was an eerie moment. I struggled between half belief and a whole lot of just plain fear. One part of me was saying get the hell out of here, the other part was holding me back, building on

unformed possibilities, the fatal fascination of the moth for the flame, brushing against eternity.

Nate pulled his arm out of the wall. "Rockswimmers are most comfortable in their fluid form," he said. "So they spend very little time as solid shapes, although they're able to slip between a solid or flux state." He stopped and looked down at his hands. "I can teach you to swim in the rocks," he said without looking up.

It was then that I was hit by the pull, a vast compelling force, pulling at my mind, rolling over my doubts, questions, fears—flattening me. All it needed was one final push. And that push came.

"There's motherlode in this mountain," Nate added, lifting his eyes to mine. "Slabs of it. Waiting to be picked up."

I tried to read something, anything into those old, shuttered eyes, their blankness magnified by the thick lenses. It was a blankness that screamed for my attention.

But all I said was, "How about diamonds?"

"Yes. Them too." The shutters flickered for the briefest of instants—just a flash—and then they closed again. I picked it up, but I didn't do anything with it. In fact, I threw the warning away.

Instead, I asked, "What do you have to do?"

"Simple," Nate said. "You've just got to let me in here." He leaned forward and tapped his finger on my forehead.

I pulled back sharply. His fingertip was as cold and hard as a gravestone, and I was filled with an immediate and unspeakable dread, every fibre of my being screaming for me to bail out of this situation, to get up and run out into the sunlight.

It may have been my imagination, but Nate seemed to shimmer at that moment, almost like a picture breaking up on a TV screen. I realized that I was under an emotional overload, but this strange vertigo effect screamed for caution.

I shook my head and Nate swam into focus.

"Maybe I'd better think this over," I said to him and struggled to my feet.

Nate spread his hands. "Why not?" he said. "I'll be here."

That night was a repeat of the night before. I thrashed about in my sleeping bag, playing and re-playing every possibility, every disastrous, horrendous outcome I could imagine. Believe me, there were lots of possibilities. None of them very pleasant.

First off, Nate had seemed to make light of rockswimming. Could it be that easy? How did air breathers survive in solid rock? Would the oxygen content of the rock in the flux state be enough to sustain life?

There were too many impossibilities. I'd be a fool to trust myself to this madness. Provided this crazy old man could even deliver what he said he could. And

maybe it had been a trick. Maybe I hadn't really seen him put his arm into the tunnel wall.

Most importantly, who in the hell was Nate? I'd only given him Nate Morrow's identity temporarily because it was the belief of least resistance. Nothing else fitted as well. But . . . one hundred and twenty years old? And all that educated talk about flux states of crystals? I mean, this was dislocation mechanics. Sliding atoms within dislocations. Coming from a 1920s miner?

If he wasn't Nate, then who was he? What was he?

Whatever I finally believed, I was back in the tunnel lunch room the next morning. It was empty and I found this comforting, almost a confirmation that the whole incident of the day before had been a dream, and my ancient miner, a figment of some wild flight of imagination on my part.

I nearly laughed with relief. The decision was made for me, then. I could call the Whitehorse mobile operator on the radiophone again and cancel the arrangement I'd made when I talked to her before coming in the tunnel. If she didn't hear from me by noon, I'd told her, I needed help. I had brought the propane lamp from the cabin. Its hard blue-white light snapped every detail of the tunnel into sharp relief; modern technology blowing away the cobwebby visions and doubts of yesterday.

"That's quite a light you got

there," Nate said from somewhere behind me.

His voice came from the tunnel beyond the lunchroom. I swung around quickly, hating myself for showing my jumpiness so plainly. Nate looked exactly as he had yesterday.

"Are we ready?" he asked.

I nodded dumbly.

Nate leaned forward and cupped my head between two icy hands. Again, I was seized by that bottomless dread, a sense of complete helplessness.

Then, abruptly it passed. A cold flow of tranquility invaded my frontal lobes and a tremendous feeling of heightened awareness came over me. It's hard to describe. As if, suddenly, I had picked up another dimension, another faculty? My spirit, my soul, everything seemed to soar.

Nate led me to the quartz face. "Just lean into it," he said. "Think of it as only water." As his body moved into the rock, it seemed to extend, flow, change shape. He turned back to me, his face pulling and contorting out of shape as it followed the crystal planes of the rock.

Nate waved me in and I moved forward.

The rock was deadly cold on my face, even colder as it moved through my face. I was startled by the alien feel of it, startled into drawing in my breath sharply. The cold plunged into my open mouth, down my windpipe, into my lungs,



wrapping about my heart, then invading it. I was becoming stone.

I stumbled and fell forward into the rock, almost as though I'd been pulled in. Panic bit deep into me. I struggled to turn and make my way back to the rock face, thrashing about like a drowning man. Then clearly, Nate's words came to me.

Relax and tread water. Just like you're swimming.

Desperately, I tried treading water and was gratified to find myself upright again. I found also that I had stopped breathing; the slow motion of the fluid rock through my lungs, in some way, was meeting my oxygen needs.

I looked about for Nate.

All I could see was a glowing sphere hanging in the rock above my head. But not a sign of Nate. Had I been abandoned? I had little time to wander about it. I had to keep swimming.

Strangely, I was beginning to enjoy it. Movement through the rock was slow and deliberate, but you quickly learned to find the fracture lines, less dense layers, fitting yourself into narrow passages, stretching yourself into a long slimness to follow a vein, bunching up where there was more resistance from density.

All of this powered by the mind. I found myself marvelling at the untapped capacities within us, to power the dislocations of atoms, seemingly at will. Why had I been given this power?

I swam into a yellow seam that proved to be surprisingly resistant. I examined the material more closely and my heart jumped when I saw that it was a vein of gold. I concentrated on reforming my two hands and willing the gold into a fluid state, and then I carefully scooped up a handful, patting it into a baseball-sized globe. God, it was so easy!

I decided to park the ball of gold beside the seam—I would find it on my way back. As I moved out into the surrounding quartz, I noticed that there were now five or six of the spheres around me. They didn't seem to pose any threat but they did make me uneasy. Where in the hell was Nate? How could he have lost me?

It was then that I saw the vent pipe, dark and corded, like a giant artery; and as I got closer, I saw that it was lined with kimberlite. I could hardly contain my excitement. These ancient pipes bled off the vast pressures of the inner earth, their fiery breath spawning pure carbon. Diamonds.

I followed the pipe down twenty or thirty feet to where it took a turn. Piled up in the elbow formed by the turn was a nest of crystalline objects. I noticed that I was now surrounded by spheres, darting through the rock, coming alarmingly close to my face, clearly interested in my emotional response to these crystalline objects. Or, objecting to it.

How do you explain human

greed? How do you tell an alien life form that glittering baubles can mean more than life itself to a human? Because, it doesn't make much sense, when you get right down to it. But what did I say? I said . . . the hell with you, and I firmed my hand, reached into the nest, and pried the largest of the crystals loose.

That's when everything hit the fan.

It was like being dive-bombed by starlings; spheres flashed continually into my face, and I moved through them as best as I could, waving the fist-sized diamond in front of me like a weapon.

It was about this time that I became aware of the sound—a chittering kind of background sound in my mind—just beyond the range of comprehension. Were they trying to talk to me? Tell me something?

I was hampered by the stone, sculling mainly with my left hand, moving slowly back to where I thought the rock face and the tunnel were located. I was searching for that seam of vein gold where I'd parked the ball of gold. It could lead me back to the tunnel. Icy fingers of panic began crawling through me. What if I couldn't find the tunnel? And where the hell was Nate?

Suddenly the swarm of spheres parted before me. It was almost as though they were urging me forward. I swam into the open space and was surprised to see a figure

ahead of me, stationary, almost as though waiting for me. I thought, at first, it was Nate; but as I drew closer I saw that it was an Indian, clad in fur, carrying a short hunting spear. Probably a Tlingit hunter. He could have been there for centuries, stuck in the rock like a fly in amber, his face holding an expression of absolute horror.

Now I saw that the Tlingit hunter was at the start of a row of figures in the rock. Next to him was a massive mastodon, head reared in the final act of clinging to life, tusks gleaming in the half light. A sabre toothed bear followed, then a giant moose, a wolf . . .

It was then I became aware that my movement through the rock had been unaccountably sped up. I scarcely had time to recognize the life forms frozen in rows in the rock, for now I saw that there were several rows of the figures. I stopped sculling with my hands, and yet I moved rapidly by the figures. I was being transported to a definite location, a trip with a purpose. But what purpose?

The sounds in my mind became clearer. Fragments of impression came through. Amusement, enjoyment—as if my desperate situation, my even more desperate state of mind, was being savoured as a connoisseur's delight, a fright feast for these beings. I began to hate them.

Then I saw Nate.

My heart leapt with relief and

I moved quickly toward him. Nate would square things away. He could clear me with these jaded chattering horrors. Then he'd lead me back to the rock face.

We were face to face now. Nate still had not shown any recognition of my presence and this puzzled me until I got closer and looked fully into his face.

I have never seen such concentrated terror. Nate's eyes bulged behind the thick glasses, neck cords bunched with strain, mouth gaping in a final, primal scream.

Like the rest of them, Nate was stone.

I freaked again, arms flailing, doing some weird kind of backstroke, scrabbling for the rock face which I now saw, about ten feet below me. It was becoming harder and harder to move through the rock, and I knew with a certainty as sure as the death I was facing that my ability to swim through rock was being withdrawn from me, that it was ability granted and manipulated by these creatures.

The spheres had pulled back and seemed to be watching me. I screamed at them in my mind. I hope you're enjoying it, you bastards. Just as you enjoyed nailing old Nate—sixty years ago. Well, welcome to the fright show. For that's what it is, isn't it? A weird perverted fright zoo?

I made one final convulsive twist and fell into the tunnel, retching and gasping for breath. I'd made it. I could hardly believe it.

But had I? I found that I couldn't stand, that I was held to the wall, on my knees, pinned in some way. It was only then that I realized my arm was trapped.

I whimpered as I tore my shirt-sleeve back and looked at my bare arm, buried in the solid quartz, buried half way into the tattooed heart that I'd picked up on my last visit to Tijuana.

I remember little from that point on. I suppose I thrashed about with growing violence, mindless with horror; thrashed about enough to snap the arm off. After all, it was stone, right up to the point it came out of the rock face, brittle and breakable.

They found me in the tunnel, just barely ahead of a new cave-in. I guess a cave-in was pretty easy stuff for the swimmers. Anyway, the medical people were really puzzled by the arm. It hadn't bled and the amputated surface looked strangely crystallized, almost rock-like.

I said little to straighten them out. What could I say that would be believed, would make any sense? That we are not alone on this earth? That we share it with beings so infinitely advanced over us that they consider us little more than bugs to be trapped and displayed in rock? Bigger that.

No, I said very little. To anybody. Until today.

You asked me at the start of this conversation—what did I do to lose my arm? I lied to you. I

was pissed off by your question. It was ratshitty to ask it and I should have decked you, or thrown the beer back in your face.

But I didn't, because I've been waiting for someone like you, ratshit and all. Believe me, I'll never grow to love you. But that's no big deal, I just need you. I've been waiting for a hard rock miner to show up, someone who knows the ropes about careful blasting.

I want you to go back there with me. For starters, I owe those bastard rockswimmers something. They're a nasty piece of business and I'm going to win one for our side. You know, square the score—

OK. OK. That needn't have anything to do with you. I'm offering a half, straight off the top, after expenses. It will be easy. Speed is the ticket. Clean the tunnel out again. And then with a compressor and drill and dynamite—smash and grab, in and out in a hurry.

First, my hand. That diamond I had in my hand will run about 250-carat. Next, ten feet in to old Nate Morrow.

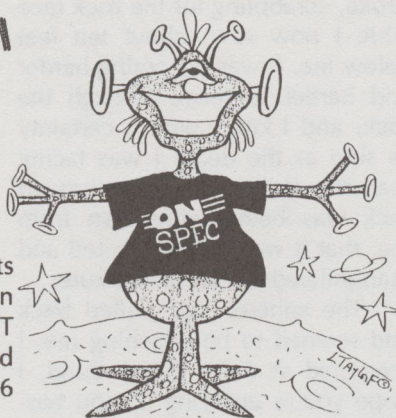
Why go for Nate? I'm telling you, it's still an all-you-can-eat dim sum. Jesus. Last thing I saw, before I fell into the tunnel, was a full burlap sack in Nate's hand.

That's why we go for Nate. •

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### FRIDGE MAGNETS!

\$4.00 buys you a set of 4 full-color fridge magnets featuring covers by Lynne Taylor Fahnestalk, Tim Hammell, Robert Pasternak and Adrian Kleinbergen. Price includes postage and GST. Get a FREE set if you buy a gift subscription (see 95 to order). Cheque or money order to ON SPEC, Box 4727, Edmonton, AB T6E 5G6.

# Ask Mr. Science compiled by Al Betz

**Q: Ms. DM of Vancouver, BC, asks:**

Can police radars be detected around corners?

**A:** A new invention, financed by the Mr. Science Technology Development Foundation, can do just that. The system requires that a super-power ultraviolet laser be mounted on your car. A splitter divides the main laser output into sixteen beams, which are brought to a focus about twenty meters in front of your car. Where the beams converge, the air is ionized, forming a plasma mirror which will reflect police radar signals to your dash-mounted detector. Ultrasonic distance measuring systems are also installed to help reduce collateral damage.

**Mr. JB of Vancouver, BC asks:**

Why, when I write over an erased portion of pencil writing, is the new writing darker than before?

**A:** Pencils are very lazy and deeply resent having to do the same work more than once. This response is as close to anger as a pencil can muster.

**Q: Ms. CJ of Edmonton, AB, asks:**

Why does the humming sound that my computer makes cycle up and down in pitch?

**A:** Mr. Science could be flip and respond that your computer hums because it doesn't know the words. He will not respond in this manner, however, because he is dedicated to truth in all things. Your computer clearly understands the content of your word-processing activities. The more interested it is in the text, the higher the pitch of its humming sound becomes. If it finds the material boring, the pitch drops and the humming becomes fainter. It is, of course, very high and very loud while you are preparing this column for publication.

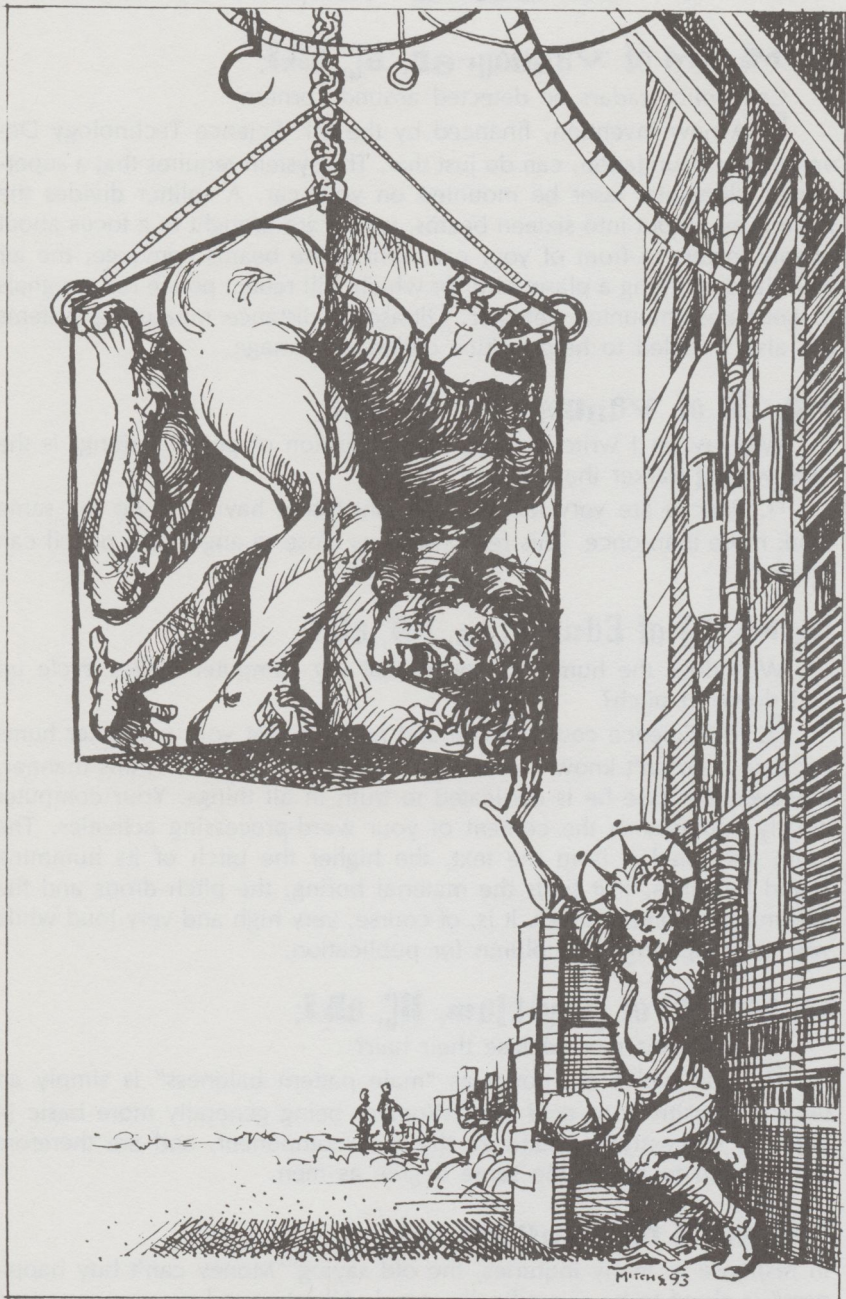
**Q: Mr. SF of Coquitlam, BC, asks:**

What causes men to lose their hair?

**A:** That which is known as "male pattern baldness" is simply an unusual sensitivity to acid rain. Women, being generally more basic in outlook, successfully neutralize the acid component, and are therefore not affected to nearly the same degree as men.

## A Special Announcement!

In response to many inquiries, the old saying "Money can't buy happiness" is about to be scientifically tested. All interested persons are urged to contribute to the Mr. Science Happiness Testing Fund.



# D'AWN THINKS

by Preston Hapon  
illustrated by Mitchell Stuart

**D'**awn, Father's little Princess, heiress to the TTerite Government and the largest holdings of Communal Wealth, lies curled on her white peppin fur sleeping mat, thumb in mouth, oval green eyes fixed upon the glass cube which, though twice her height, stands dwarfed beside the great fireplace. Flickering flames warm her sleeping place and gild in amber the object sealed inside the glass cube. Smooth surfaces glint with evening light, but she clearly sees: his arms thrown up before him, splayed fingers, flat palms vainly fending off the agony that contorts his face. She sees the mark on his temple left by the surgery which had rendered him "desentient," the only way a human could be a little girl's pet—such a wonderful pet he had been, too.

A small crack is slashed deeply into one face of the cube. It happened during the accident, D'awn thinks.

\*

It looks, from where she lies, like a tiny line on his cheek. Like a tear. She's seen many of those. Father once said it was natural for humans to do that, the reasons too varied for God'smen to speak of. D'awn moves a little, and the crack moves aside.

Those frozen arms had often carried her when her feet became tired. Those strange hands she'd loved to touch—soft, with only a few black hairs and a thousand tiny lines which wrinkled and moved when she petted him. On Holydays, she'd have him sit on the floor so he'd

become only as tall as she, then serve trass leaves and water on a little table, like two ancient Aunts sharing silent communion. Brittle and distant memories, they will not comfort her.

When D'awn looks into her dead human's rigid scream, she feels sadness.

Sometimes, he had looked like that when she bathed him, though she tried hard to be gentle, and sometimes he would bleed. Father had said it didn't matter. Father pointed out the scars which covered her human's neck, back, buttocks and left leg. "Those," Father had told her, "show you just how much pain these animals can endure. With Holy Fires, our Battle gnawed his flesh until he submitted and was tamed. Even as the engines on his ship flared white against starry darkness, he fought us. Don't worry about your pet suffering any more. They are stubborn beasts." D'awn had tried to obey, but her Tutoring was sometimes painful, and so she felt pity.

\*

His burn wounds are perfectly visible through the other side of the glass block.

\*

Uncle TImos had brought him as a gift, making her feel she was the luckiest ANaba in the whole system. No other nation, neither the Ams nor the Onites, would tolerate such a display. For though God'speak had commanded the Holy War, habitual pacifism made

their hearts doubtful. Alone, the TTerites had acted on the Words, and in spite of protest, had taken spoils. D'awn was to possess two creatures of whom the Onites wouldn't even speak.

Uncle TImos said, "This is for being such a good pupil, and for learning your lessons well." In his eyes she saw that this was really a reward for her prettiness. Excitement over her gift almost swept away her courtesies, but she remembered a Kiss of Thanks before squealing with glee and hopping around the frightened beasts. She didn't know then that one was a female, but from the first moment it was the male she cherished. The weeping, black wounds he bore made her heart ache to give care. D'awn wanted the disfigured creature to feel love.

The female human barked and yapped, and fought tenaciously to wear clothes, until her surgery. Animals look silly when dressed, but even so D'awn was afraid of the female, then, and long afterward.

An odd thing happened that day in the freight terminal. Once released from their cage, the female had barked at the male, who, as if commanded, lunged at Father. Uncle DABin and Uncle SEvis had a strong hold on the chains though, and were not surprised. D'awn looked up to her Uncle TImos, made her eyes wide and her smile adoring—yes, she was a good student—and asked of the female, "Is that one a God'sman?"



Laughter rolled about the room as all the men enjoyed her innocence. "No," Uncle TImos said with wisdom and patient compassion. He knelt beside her and stroked the top of her head lovingly. "Animals can't be a God'sman."

But D'awn was sure of what she had seen, so pressed her lips together as she summoned the courage to speak of it again, then gazed into Uncle TImos' gentle smile. Cautious, eyes wide with adoration she pressed the issue. "But, wise Uncle, that one uttered Voice, and that one obeyed."

She felt the hands of Uncle SEvis take her shoulder as Uncle TImos bravely walked right up to the noisy creature. Shuddering at his bravery, Cousins K'ic, R'ayl, and S'ant all clustered closer to Uncle SEvis for security. He wrapped his protective arms around the Cousins, crushing uniform grey blouses into his strong legs.

"That can't be, little one." Uncle TImos instantly subdued the human's flailing limbs and loud howling by gripping her throat. Uncle TImos' touch was practiced and the human instantly stiffened and became almost silent. He squeezed one of the beast's fleshy growths, lifting it so all could see, and smiled at D'awn. "These sacks show this is a female." Uncle TImos then reached down and pulled one of the human's legs high off the floor. "As does the lack of

any growths here." The difference was as plain as the constricted snarl that escaped the human's gaping mouth. Uncle TImos' released the pale leg and let it drop to the floor. "A female would not utter Voice."

D'awn felt herself blush with fear. "Am I to be punished? I did not know, Uncle." Her Cousins all looked about fearfully, afraid they too were somehow guilty of D'awn's blasphemy. For, throughout all twelve Spiritlands, only men can act as God'sman.

A benevolent smile from Father relieved the Cousins' fears. "You'll not be punished. How could you have known I wanted a pair that might mate in captivity?"

But it was she who had spoken against every God'sman, and it was she who continued to harbour doubts about what she had seen. She shared a worried look with Cousin K'ic who suddenly looked away, choosing to free her memory of worrisome details.

Uncle TImos also took no offense, but hurriedly commanded the humans be taken away and made desentient. The female continued to growl and whinny until she was too far away to be heard.

\*

In D'awn's sleeping place, the female human leans her back against the glass cube and stares motionlessly at filthy legs stretched out on the intricately patterned carpet. Dried rivers of sweat and grime hang on her sides, a thin scratch has left a smear of blood

below one nipple, and her feet are caked with mud. She needs another bath, thinks D'awn.

D'awn doesn't move; though the female always accepts her baths with limp limbs and stoic licking afterward of nicks and abrasions, D'awn still feels anxious under the female's accusing eye.

Always, D'awn has been the best girl, the most able student among her Cousins. Secretly, all acknowledged D'awn was prettiest, but such would never be discussed. It was sinful even to think herself special, or superior to any TTerites. But in turn, all her Uncles have Ttored her in accordance with the Godlaws, and each has whispered hot flattery when alone with her. Each has praised her green eyes, her willing smile, and her obedience—and each has made her feel special. She has always been very proud of her studies—she was the youngest ever to learn all of the K'ast ABnassis. Father was proud, too, and when he heard the news immediately was overwhelmed and Godspoke saying: D'awn shall be blessed with many holy sons.

All her Cousins were jealous of that. And they were jealous of the wealth and power that came with D'awn's dowry, and the way her budding beauty gave freshness to the drab clothing God demanded women wear. And they were jealous of her marriage engagement to SEten, she still so young and he so handsome. With D'awn's power

and wealth, SEten would rule more than a third of the world and be made happy by his wife's obedience. D'awn was confident SEten would never see fit to utter Voice against her and have her burned; no girl wanted to take to her Passage Rites a disappointed God'sman.

What her Cousins could never imagine was D'awn returning their jealousy. For, while Father Ttored each one of them, she was forbidden by Godlaw to receive him as Tutor. Guilt haunted her some nights between moments of sleep, among thoughts of her Uncles' Ttoring, and she wondered if their daughters had similar visions in darkness' private solitude. Sinful thoughts which she knew could not long remain barren. Such were either abandoned or discovered, and there were no means to predict Father's wrath if he learned how she ached for his touch.

\*

D'awn takes her thumb from her mouth and sits up. The female doesn't seem to notice and D'awn thinks she might be sick. Pale, frail—humans always look that way. D'awn can't decide.

From inside the block of glass, though, her pet seems to be looking at her. His lips are pulled back from his teeth in a terrible cry, his eyes wide with terror. But no air fills his lungs, nor carries his cry. Glass fills his mouth. Glass fills his eyes.

\*

"How lucky," Father had said

after the accident. "How lucky I'm still Blessed with my pretty, little Princess."

\*

The female has been mute, as if Passage Rites were performed on her. But that would be silly, D'awn thinks. She is no one's Mother. D'awn remembers, then.

\*

Once, the Mother spoke. It had startled D'awn so she almost dropped the lace she was sewing to her sister's Walking Bonnet. Embarrassed that Mother had given Voice, D'awn quickly looked to Father. Father had fallen asleep on his chair while writing new Godlaws as he had been inspired to do. Father had a True Voice and everyone knew when he Godspoke, others would soon be heard saying the same words. D'awn wondered if she should wake Father, but embarrassment held her speech.

Mother spoke again, secretly. "D'awn."

She looked about wildly; she shouldn't run from Mother, but Mother was being obscene. Her Voice was strange: softer than Father's, and made wholly of tired breath. This slowed D'awn's decision, but could not prevent her actions. Tossing aside her sister's half-laced bonnet, D'awn skittered across the room to Father's side where she flung her arms around his neck.

He woke gently, and smiled. "Thank you, little Princess. I have

fallen asleep."

A word from D'awn and Mother would be burned as unholy and unfit, but for no reason she could imagine D'awn said nothing. It wouldn't occur to Father that something was wrong in his house. Nothing could be. So, he hugged her to his cheek and held her close. From there, secure against Father's hard and slippery skin, D'awn first met the deep resignation in the Mother's eyes.

\*

Resignation. Much like D'awn imagines she sees in the eyes of the female human, now staring at her.

The female has turned her head and pressed her matted mop of hair against the glass cube. She never growls or barks anymore, but D'awn finds no joy in having her around. She wishes she could go back in time and change things; how much better it would be to have the female entombed. The female human does not have the instinct to guard, as did the male.

D'awn thinks of how bold and independent she felt walking the streets of the city with her pet.

Father and Uncles would take them on special trips to the city, and she and many Cousins would follow behind, holding hands and marvelling at the wonders behind storefront windows. Close behind would be her human, and just four paces further back the Mother and Aunts. The girls were supposed to stay well back from Father and not

listen to what God'smen were saying, in case there were holy words or Godlaws to discuss. But, Father and Uncles mostly talked of the wars, she knew. They sometimes recalled the Saturn Victory or speculated about why humans had never moved beyond their original planetary system. It was by following too closely that D'awn heard her human had been taken prisoner from a maimed fighting ship, and, incredibly, that her female human had been uttering Voice.

\*

D'awn thinks: how foolish is her brain, how good that she's just a girl. Father has a True Voice, and is powerful in Godspoke. Yet, her silly brain recalls a contradiction, as though a lie had found Voice not just once, but again when Father seemed to lose the sound of God saying, "Your human will be fine by himself, Princess. You'll be next through the transporter—just seconds behind him." Those words were as clear in her memory as Uncle PAun lovingly stroking the top of her head.

\*

"Be patient, pretty one," Uncle PAun had said. That always made her feel better, to have strong Uncles' hands on her. "In a moment we'll all be far away in the legendary Crystal Hotel."

The transporter shimmered and her pet disappeared. A horn of warning shrieked immediately—something had gone wrong. D'awn

covered her mouth to keep fear from entering.

"The beam shifted to one of the walls. I'll bring him back," said the terminal operator.

"Quickly!" Father had shouted. "It belongs to my little Princess!"

Shimmering light on the transporter pad took the shape of her human, but he wouldn't form properly—atoms loved by light had been interleaved among atoms loved by life. Suddenly corporeal enough to move, he flung his arms against the agony, froze, then disappeared.

"I'll try again, but I think we've lost him."

Father was furious, too furious to speak.

All eyes waited on the empty space above the pad, and after a moment the shimmering returned in the shape of the human and became solid. For a moment, D'awn thought her pet was safe. For a moment, he looked frightened, but alive. Then, like an ice sculpture, he toppled over and shattered against the floor.

Emergency horns blared while panicked people tried to step around the bleeding glass and razor-edged flesh. Technicians hastily shut down the transporter as Mother took her by the hand and led her to the nearest exit. Behind them, Father argued loudly with two apologetic technicians as Mother and daughter escaped the crowded chaos.

Half of her human's molecules

remained inside the hotel wall, woven among half the original glass molecules. Father had seen fit to have that section of wall removed and placed in D'awn's sleeping place, so she might remember her pet. D'awn also remembers Father's false reassurance—yet, a True Voiced God'sman speaks only Words; he can't be false to the past or the future.

\*

D'awn's brow is creased as she stands and crosses the room. There, she touches the block. Tonight, Father will Interpret Words for her again, and perhaps she will please him with her cleverness and hard work. If she asks, Father will Interpret Words spoken at the transporter pad. Then, she will understand. D'awn touches her forehead to the glass. It feels cool and fogs from her breath as she peers into the cube, marveling at how perfectly integrated everything is—how the glass fills the human like God fills a God'sman.

D'awn thinks: she could eas-

ily have been imprisoned in the cube. Were that to happen, she, in place of her pet, would be on display for SEten's guests. Her dowry would have provided his home, her name would have promoted his position, and her death would have bestowed a new wife. A frown crosses her face.

The female again catches her attention, and D'awn sees: in dead eyes, resignation. D'awn weakens with compassion for the mindless brute, and for any of its kind.

And D'awn thinks. Then shrugs off thoughts of what might have been and thinks how nice it will be, finally owned by a God'sman so she may leave behind these pets it troubles her to look upon. Pets are of childhood, and D'awn feels adulthood becoming.

Still she is troubled. Father's little Princess, heiress to the TTerite Government, touches the human female's matted hair, momentarily revealing a scarred temple. On her life D'awn thinks, but on her future she doubts. •



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# 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, MC = Master of Ceremonies.

• **JULY 23-25 – TORONTO TREK 7**  
Regal Constellation Hotel, Toronto.  
GoHs: George Takai, Barbara Hambly. Info: Suite 0116, Box 187, 65 Front St West, Toronto ON, M5J 1E6.

• **JULY 24-25 – VULCON 1**  
Star Trek. Info: V.A.S.T. NCC-1701, General Delivery, Vulcan AB, TOL 2B0.

• **JULY 30 - AUG 2 – CANGAMES 93**  
Gaming. Info: PO Box 3358, Stn D, Ottawa ON, K1P 6H8.

• **AUG 14-15 – WILFCON IX**  
Kitchener. Info: 69 Donald St, Unit 6, Kitchener ON, N2B 3G6.

• **OCT 2 – SPRUCECON 93**  
Star Trek. Spruceland Elementary School, Prince George. Info: c/o USS Endeavour, 1509 Edmonton St, Prince George, BC, V2M 1X5.

• **OCT 8-10 – NONCON 16**  
Quality Inn, Calgary. GoH: Pat Cadigan. TM: Sean Stewart. ArtGoH: Kevan Leycraft. FanGoH: Steve Forty. Memb: \$35 to July 19, \$40 thereafter. Info: Office 4D, 223 - 12th Ave SW, Calgary AB, T2R 0J9.

• **OCT 15-17 – I-CON 3**  
**Cancelled**

• **OCT 15-17 – CON\*CEPT 93**  
Montreal. Info: PO Box 405 Station H, Montreal PQ, H3G 2L1.

• **OCT 22-24 – MAPLECON 14**  
Chimo Hotel, Ottawa. Info: PO Box 20235, 390 Rideau St E, Ottawa ON, K1N 9P4.

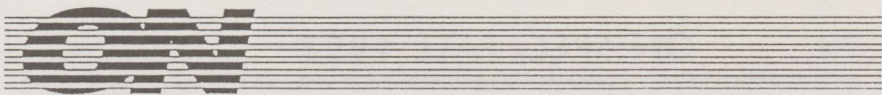
## 1994

**SEPT 1-5 – CANADIAN (Worldcon)**

Winnipeg Convention Centre, Winnipeg. GoH: Anne McCaffrey, Art GoH: George Barr, TM: Barry Longyear, FanGoH: Robert Runté. Memb: C\$95 / US\$85 to Sept 31, 1993. Info: PO Box 2430, Winnipeg MB, R3C 4A7.

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.

The bulk of the information in this column is courtesy of *ConTRACT*, the Canadian convention newsletter, available from 321 Portage Ave, Winnipeg MB, R3B 2B9 (subscriptions \$7 / 6 issues). Send your convention info directly to them, as well.



# OUR CONTRIBUTORS

## ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

ALISON BAIRD (*Changeling Child*), is a freelance fiction writer and member of the "Ink Blots" writers' group. "The Dragon Door" is the second of her short fiction pieces to be published in *ON SPEC*.

AL BETZ (*Ask Mr. Science*) of Vancouver is the Social Secretary for Mr. Science.

BRUCE BYFIELD (*Michael in the Forest*) is a sessional instructor at Simon Fraser University. He has written *Witches of the Mind: A Critical Study of Fritz Leiber* and is now editing Leiber's letters.

LESLIE GADALLAH (*Motherlove*) was a practicing chemist and wrote popular science before turning to science fiction. She lives on an acreage near Spruce Grove and is presently fighting with the county and the province to protect it from the ravages of road building crews.

PRESTON HAPON (*D'awn Thinks*) resides near Calahoo, Alberta. He likes to ride, write, fly, and dine Thai. Recent stories have appeared in *ON SPEC* and *Innisfree*.

WESLEY HERBERT (*Distant Seas*) lives and writes in Toronto, Ontario.

JASON KAPALKA (*The Power of Faith*) eats, sleeps and writes in Edmonton, Alberta.

DAN KNIGHT (*Snatched*) This Torontonion believes himself a remnant of Australopithicus (reformed—it was all a misunderstanding). He is suspicious of Dobermans, televangelists, and people named Bob.

RAND NICHOLSON (*Nuclear Touristing*) of Saint John, New Brunswick, has been writing poetry for many years. He recently won a Writer's Federation of New Brunswick award (Poetry/April/92).

KEITH SCOTT (*A Swim in the Rocks*) lives and writes in Toronto. He is a member of the Cecil Streeters, a writing group launched five years ago by Judith Merrill. This is his second appearance in *ON SPEC*. His playlet, *Dual on Dextra*, was given a reading along with three other submissions by Cecil Streeters in Solar Stage's science fiction series this spring.

DAVID NICKLE and KARL SCHROEDER (*On the Record*) are members of the Cecil Street Writing Group of Toronto.

## ABOUT OUR ARTISTS

ROBERT BOERBOOM (*Cover*) hangs his hat, brushes and pencils in Brantford, Ontario. He keeps himself busy with freelance illustration and by working as a billboard painter.

RICHARD BARTROP (*Snatched*) is a Calgary, Alberta artist.

LYNNE TAYLOR FAHNESTALK (*Aurora feature, page 31*) has been illustrating, doing graphic design, and cartooning professionally for fifteen years. She was the 1993 and 1991 winner of the Canadian Aurora Award for artistic achievement and is Art Director of *ON SPEC*. Her artwork has appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*, *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines, *Pulphouse the Hardback Magazine*, *Pulphouse Fiction Magazine*, *Science Fiction Review*, *Fantasy Tales*, and *ON SPEC*. She has served as Art Director for a printing firm and two national magazines (U.S.) and was co-owner of Northwest Fine Art Press for five years in Seattle. Lynne lives in Edmonton, Alberta with the lovely and talented Steve Fahnestalk. She is currently working on a science fiction coloring book for children; creating a Victorian Garden out of a sunroom via *trompe l'oeil* mural; and trying to be very "90s" by learning how to do computer art.

TIM HAMMELL (*A Swim in the Rocks*) Rumor has it that Tim Hammell is a cleverly-disguised, airbrush-wielding gargoyle. The sharp-eyed can find him perched on tall buildings in downtown Calgary, making grotesque faces (not to mention gestures) at unsuspecting passers-by.

MARC HOLMES (*Michael in the Forest*) is a Calgary artist who is busy juggling a summer job, commissions, and his son.

ADRIAN KLEINBERGEN (*Motherlove*) is a Calgary artist.

PETER MACDOUGALL (*Distant Seas*) is from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Credits include illustrations for *Horizons SF*, several years of design for the UBC Sports programs, and a variety of other freelance projects; he has also had several short stories published. All this, and he is a practising doctor as well.

NANCY NILES (*The Dragon Door*) is a Calgary artist.

KENNETH SCOTT (*The Power of Faith*) is a Calgary artist who says he doesn't know enough about himself to write a decent bio . . . but says he could use a haircut.

MITCHELL STUART (*D'awn Thinks*) considers illustrating for *ON SPEC* a "refreshing break from reality." A resident of Sherwood Park, Alberta, Mitch is a recent graduate of A.C.A. in Calgary, and is in the process of building his own freelance design company, Pangaea Illustration & Design. •



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*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.

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Please send SASE for complete guidelines before submitting.

Deadlines are August 31/93 (Theme: "HARD SF," Spring/94), November 30/93 (for Summer/94), February 28/94 (for Fall/94) and May 31/94 (for Winter/94).

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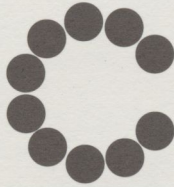
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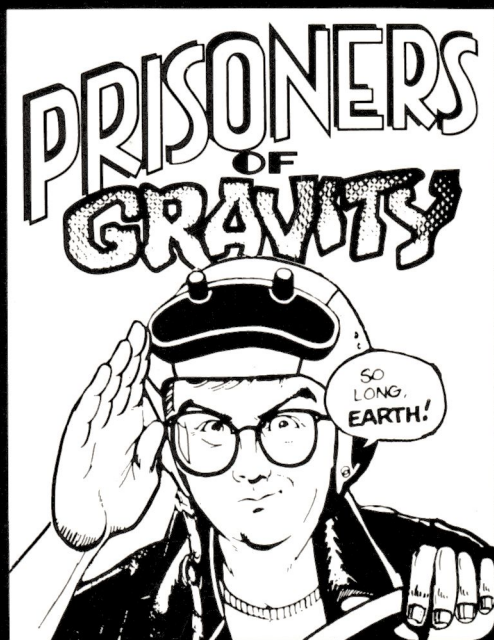
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