

On·Spec

The Canadian Magazine of Speculative Writing

WINTER 1994

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KINSELLA**

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AURORA AWARDS





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ON·SPEC

The Canadian Magazine of Speculative Writing

FICTION

<i>Things Invisible to See</i>	W.P. Kinsella	10
<i>Parthenogenesis in Apt. 707</i>	Alex Link	14
<i>Whose Lifeboat?</i>	Keith Scott.....	20
<i>Dragon Pearl</i>	Alison Baird.....	32
<i>Paper</i>	Marcel G. Gagné	40
<i>Making History</i>	Christopher Brayshaw	54
<i>Artificial Sweeteners</i>	Brian Panhuyzen	64
<i>Gwendolyn Lynette</i>	Roma Quapp	72
<i>Gone to Earth and Ashes</i>	William Southey	80

POETRY

<i>Future Nostalgia</i>	Jocko	71
-------------------------------	-------------	----

ART

<i>ON Art: Aurora-Winner Robert Pasternak</i>	48
---	----

NONFICTION

<i>ON This Issue</i>	Jena Snyder	3
<i>Aurora Winners</i>	6	
<i>Worldcon Report</i>	Cath Jackel	8
<i>Ask Mr. Science</i>	compiled by Al Betz	47
<i>Red Rover, Red Rover...</i>	Jena Snyder	52
<i>ON Cons</i>	Canadian Convention Listings	90
<i>ON Our Contributors</i>	92	
<i>How to Order Back Issues</i>	94	
<i>ON SPEC Information, Subscriptions & Merchandise</i>	95	

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ON THIS ISSUE

by Jena Snyder, *ON SPEC* Production Editor

THE LYDIA LANGSTAFF MEMORIAL PRIZE

*Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-browed night;
Give me my Romeo; and, when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun.*

"Take him and cut him into little stars..." What incredible power there is in those lines, to bring tears to my eyes every time I read them, every time I hear them! A family friend had them read at her memorial service years ago: I think of her every time I pass the Shakespeare section of the library, every time I hear someone massacre the "wherefore art thou Romeo?" soliloquy, every time I read *Romeo and Juliet*.

Words are a writer's epitaph, and more solid than any granite headstone. I hope, when I die, I'll have a book or two on a library shelf, shining down like those "little stars."

Lydia Langstaff, a former *ON SPEC* contributor ("Bogey," Spring 94), will never get the chance to see her first novel, an historical fantasy set in twelfth century Scotland, in print. A young writer with a promising future just beginning to open up before her, Lydia died suddenly on July 10, 1994, after suffering a heart attack. Born with serious heart problems and never expected to live for more than six months, Lydia was, in the words of Eileen Kernaghan: "...a remarkable young woman, with astonishing courage and strength of will" who "worked harder at her writing—under more difficult circumstances—than anyone I've ever known." A member of the Burnaby Writers' Society and the Helix Writing Workshop, Lydia had seen her work appear in publications such as *Testament of Lael* and *The Poetic Knight*, and she was a regular contributor to the *Celtic Connection* newspaper. When she died, Lydia was only 28.

Her husband Jeff hopes to get Lydia's novel published for her, and wrote to ask if we'd let our readers know about a new anthology, *The Magic Within*, which features one of Lydia's short stories. Of course we're happy to do so; please see the ad on page 31 to order.

Thinking of Lydia, of the future she had, the books and poems and

stories left unwritten, I wondered if *ON SPEC* could do something more, if not for Lydia, at least for other promising writers like her. I'm sure that in every issue of *ON SPEC*, we publish at least one writer's first sale; many of these writers are, like Lydia, under 30. I thought, *Why not offer a prize to the best new talent we see each year, and name the prize after Lydia, in her memory?*

And so, starting this year, with the blessings of Lydia's husband Jeff, we're going to award the first "Lydia Langstaff Memorial Prize." At the end of each year, the *ON SPEC* editors and one outside judge will choose, in their opinion, the best story or poem published in *ON SPEC* per year by a young and/or upcoming author, and award a prize of \$100. To qualify, the author must be 30 years or less at time of publication of his or her work in *ON SPEC*; and must have no novels published, and must not have sold more than 3 short stories to semi-pro or pro magazines. In this way, we can help give a new author an extra boost, maybe even that little nudge that helps convince them: *I can do this.*

Shine on, Lydia. You're an inspiration to us all.

WHO'S IN THE NEWS?

We neglected to credit PETER RENAULT, the photographer for our last issue's cover (Tim Hammell's "Ride 'em, Dinoboy!").

ROBERT J. SAWYER's story "Just Like Old Times" must be nearing the record for most awards in a year—in September it won the Aurora for best short form work in English (see page 6 for a full list of Aurora winners), and we just heard that the story was an Honorable Mention in both *The Year's Best Science Fiction* (ed. Gardner Dozois) and *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* (ed. Ellen Datlow and Terry Windling).

Other well-deserved Honorable Mentions (and *ON SPEC* alumni) in *Year's Best F&H* include ROBERT BOYCZYK's "Falling," JASON KAPALKA's "Godeaters," DIRK L. SCHAEFFER's "Three Moral Tales" (all from our Spring 93 Over the Edge issue) and J.R. MARTEL's "Saints" from our Winter 92 issue.

TIME TO BRAG...

In *The Year's Best SF*, Gardner Dozois called us a "best bet" and Ellen Datlow (in *The Year's Best F & H*) had this to say: "*ON SPEC*...is a consistently good digest-sized perfect-bound magazine. The fiction crosses over between SF, fantasy and horror. Most of the covers are excellent, particularly those by ROB ALEXANDER and KENNETH SCOTT. The spring "over the edge" issue was full of the best fiction I've yet seen in the magazine. Such a theme is always a gamble; in this case it paid off." 🖱

ON SPEC DEADLINES

Nov. 30/94, Feb. 28/95
 May 31/95, August 31/95

Submissions received after a deadline will be held for the next deadline.

Submissions must be in COMPETITION FORMAT: no author name on manuscript. Enclose self-addressed, stamped envelope with sufficient postage to cover return of manuscript (or mark "Disposable" and include SASE for reply only), and covering letter with name, address, phone number, story title and word count. More details, page 95.

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AURORA WINNERS

The 1994 Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Awards were presented in Winnipeg in September at ceremonies held during ConAdian (1994 World Science Fiction Convention). The host organization for the 1994 Aurora Awards was SF Canada. Congratulations to all the winners!

Best Long-Form Work in English

SF or Fantasy in published novel or fiction collection, released in 1992 or 1993

Nobody's Son, Sean Stewart
(Maxwell MacMillan)

Meilleur livre en français

SF or Fantasy in published novel or fiction collection, released in 1992 or 1993

Chronoreg, Daniel Sernine
(Québec/Amérique)

Best Short-Form Work in English

SF or fantasy novella, novelette or short story published in 1993

"Just Like Old Times,"
Robert J. Sawyer
(*ON SPEC*, Summer 1993)

Meilleur nouvelle en français

SF or fantasy novella, novelette or short story published in 1993

«La Merveilleuse machine de Johann Havel», Yves Meynard (*Solaris 107*)

Best Work in English (Other)

SF or fantasy activity in English not encompassed by the previous two categories (i.e. critical writing, media presentation, anthologies, poetry, translator)

Prisoners of Gravity,
SF/comic TV series
(TVOntario)

Meilleur ouvrage en français (Autre)

SF or fantasy activity in French not encompassed by the previous two categories (i.e. critical writing, media presentation, anthologies, poetry, translator)

Les 42,210 univers de la science-fiction, Guy Bouchard
(Le Passeur)

Artistic Achievement

Work or body of work produced during 1993

Robert Pasternak, illustrations, covers
(*ON SPEC*, *Aboriginal SF*,
Amazing Stories)

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)

Canadian fanzine or fannish newsletter relating to SF and fantasy fandom produced at least once in 1993

Under the Ozone Hole
Karl Johanson & John Herbert, eds.

Fan Achievement (Organizational)

Canadian convention and club activities during 1993

Lloyd Penney
Ad Astra

Fan Achievement (Other)

Canadian fan activity not encompassed by the previous two categories

Jean-Louis Trudel
promotion of Canadian SF

**AURORA-WINNER:
BEST LONG-FORM WORK IN ENGLISH**

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- Robert Charles Wilson, author of The Harvest and A Bridge of Years.

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ON SPEC GOES TO WORLDCON

(or: "We came, we saw, we schmoozed...")

by Cath Jackel

- A sixteen hour drive, boxes of back issues & brochures and T-shirts farmed out to 4 other vehicles...
- Setting up our brand-new display board and trying to artistically arrange all of our merchandise on a table in the back corner of the dealer's room...
- Talking ourselves hoarse but selling piles of magazines and 50 new subscriptions over 5 days...
- Meeting face-to-face for the first time many of our contributors from all over the country...
- Hosting our "ON SPECtacle" party in the Canadian Publishing Suite and making 150 visitors wear silly plastic glasses. Watching them get their first taste of Alberta Big Rock Warhog Ale...
- Sitting in the courtyard of the Winnipeg Public Library applauding the Aurora winners...

*Barry Hammond
and Cath Jackel
in front of the
ON SPEC display
at Worldcon*



*Photo
by Randy Reichardt*



*Robert J. Sawyer
(blindfolded)
makes the draw for
the set of ON SPEC
back issues while
Michelle Wilson
(center)
and Cath Jackel (right)
look on*

Photo by John Herbert

The whole trip was a roaring success! And it couldn't have been done without the following volunteers and *ON SPEC* staffers:

Alison Baird
Adam Charlesworth
Lynne Taylor Fahnstalk
Steve Fahnstalk
Kern Goretzky
Barry Hammond

Marion Hughes
Tim Smick
Bryan Quinn
Randy Reichardt
Diane Walton
Michelle Wilson

Thank you all! (Now I'm trying to figure out how we can afford to go to Glasgow next year...)

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS OF OUR WORLDCON DRAW:

- ALLAN YEATS of Calgary won the complete set of back issues
- FRANCES HIGGINSON won the 3-year subscription
- KEVIN STREET won the color T-Shirt



THINGS INVISIBLE TO SEE

by W.P. Kinsella

illustrated by Laurie M.Z. Armstrong

On a Saturday morning I reported to the waterfront for two days of work that had been advertised by a two-line newspaper ad: Intelligent person for weekend work. Pier 64, Sat. 8:00 a.m.

Most of those who applied were stevedore types, built like walking oil barrels. A man in a business suit walked down the line of us, exchanged a couple of words with those of us who appeared capable of replying verbally to a question, and chose me.

"It's a simple job," the man said. He stared at me, nodding, indicating by the vertical bobbing of his head that he considered me capable of doing a simple job. A freighter was docked at Pier 64, and over a hundred Japanese automobiles were being driven off the *Maegashira Maru* by a hatchet-faced boy with a sullen look, a sunken chest and brushcut hair. These were some of the first Japanese cars to arrive in North America. The sullen-faced boy created three rows on the parking lot. After he parked each car he opened all the doors, the trunk and hood, then walked sullenly back aboard the *Maegashira Maru* to take another vehicle for a short spin.

The cars were of identical make and model, only the colors were slightly different but not much; they were all street colors, shades of beige, of tan, concrete-gray, several benign blues ranging from bruise to twilight. The cars, wide

open as they were, had a nakedness about them, a vulnerability, like half-dressed people waiting in line for medical treatment.

I was supplied with a vacuum cleaner, which was connected to electrical power by an apparently endless succession of extension cords, some black, some orange, some white, that stretched off toward the dock like knotted snakes.

"You vacuum out each car," the man in the suit went on. "Very carefully. You vacuum the engine, the interior front and back, the trunk." He might have been part oriental, Hawaiian possible. He was taller than average, with blue-black hair and orangish skin. His ill-fitting suit was as colorless as the cars he was supervising.

"But the cars are new," I said. They all looked showroom clean. "They don't look dirty," I added, sticking my head inside one, smelling the delicious odors of newness.

"You'd be surprised," said the man. "Just do your job. You can take up to ten minutes per car. I want you finished by Sunday evening. Work overtime if you have to, but be thorough. You must understand that there are some things invisible to see. Most men don't understand that, they get careless, skip a trunk or back seat because it appears clean. I chose you because you look like you have an imagination. Imagine muddy footprints and cracker crumbs everywhere and you'll get along fine."

I was calculating the hourly rate over two eight-hour days plus a little overtime. I'd be able to pay Mrs. Kryzanowski the rent, perhaps afford

some takeout Kentucky Fried Chicken.

"You empty the vacuum bag after every seventh car," the man continued. He was smoking a slim cigar. "Here's a supply of vacuum bags." He handed me a package that must have contained fifty, all folded cleverly together like Kleenex. "You deposit the full ones in that incinerator over there," and he pointed to the far corner of the chainlink-enclosed lot, where the incinerator sat, a smoke-stained hulk of blackness that looked like armor for a rhinoceros.

I didn't say anything, but it seemed to me that the residue from all one hundred-plus cars would be lucky to fill even one bag. Looking serious, the man repeated his last instruction in such a manner that I decided to humor him.

I set to work. It was an easy job. I vacuumed the shiny unused engines, the floor mats which held only slight traces of dust, the back seats and trunks which couldn't even offer up a tuft of lint. After the seventh car I dutifully opened the vacuum cleaner and extracted the bag, which, to my surprise, appeared to be full. I carried it to the incinerator, where a banked fire burned, and deposited it. The flames hissed and flapped, a few tendrils of ash drifted off from the smokestack.

It was after the twenty-first car that I made my mistake. I carried the vacuum bag to the incinerator. Curious as to what actually filled it, I took my pocket knife and slit the bag lengthways, intent only on having a glance at what gave the receptacle weight.

It was as if I had unleashed a confetti storm. I tried to close the long nar-

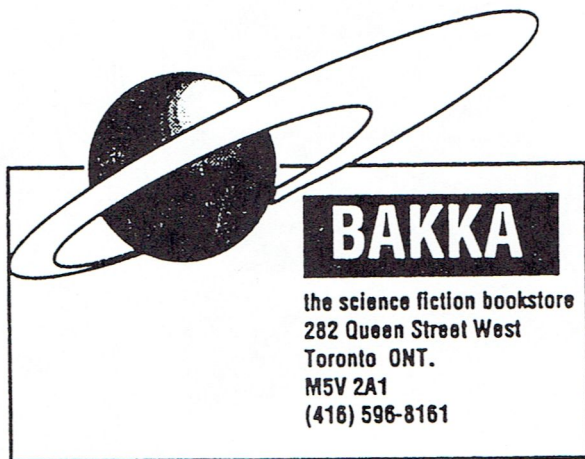
row wound with my hands, but failed miserably. What I unleashed were thousands of words. Many were so tiny they might have been cut from the fine print of a newspaper column. The paper was gossamer light, thousands of very small fragments drifted on the breeze, while I chased after them like a cat leaping for butterflies. I had set the bag down, intent on capturing as many as I could. When I next looked in its direction I saw more thousands of words were rising like gnats from the gash in the bag.

I raced frantically about the lot, capturing only a few, while the remainder floated away on an inland breeze. I was more concerned about losing the job than in what I might be unleashing on North America. Knowing that because of my curiosity I had betrayed a trust, I

snuck off home, never put in for the three hours work I had already done. Most of the words I captured were strange to me, though many have become second nature to Americans over the past twenty-five years: *Mazda*, *Toyota*, *Datsun*, *Mitsubishi*, *Suzuki*, *teriyaki*, *sushi*, *tekkamaki*, *gyoza*, *oshidashi*, *haiku*, were just a sampling.

When I got back to the castle, when I removed my shirt in preparation to shower, I discovered in among my chest hairs, skulking like a large louse, the seven-syllable middle line of a haiku: *Mist lies soft as a blanket*.

When I turned my socks inside out, the word *sashimi* scuttled across the carpet. I stomped after it as if it were a cockroach but, like a cockroach, it eluded me. •



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PARTHENOGENESIS IN APARTMENT 707

by Alex Link
illustrated by Richard Leggatt

"Tulsi Das, alone in his cell, fell to meditating, and from his meditation came Hanuman and his monkey army, who broke open the tower, and freed Tulsi Das."

— Sir Richard Burton

And it happened again. Clara rubbed her forehead, steadied herself, winced at all twelve floors of Crosskey Manor, the building seeming more like a huge brick oven in this summer heat. As usual, Clara had avoided coming home for as long as possible. She'd walked to the park, then around it. Then through the Eaton Center where she stopped to play some Galaga, still affordably priced at a quarter; but this was always her one and only final choice: to return to a cave of an apartment seven floors up. She would open the door and the place would swallow her back into its limbo of dirty dishes and daytime TV.

She had cut today's combination walk/job search short because she wasn't feeling so well. Just now and at other moments today flashes of blue had, just for a second, obliterated everything, or at least threatened to. Would tear at the edges of her vision like a migraine hovering just out of sight, like celluloid about to burn. It was strange, new, and painful, and Clara tried to convince herself that she wasn't particularly frightened, that it was just the heat.

Nothing in particular seemed to bring it on. She would just be walking along, or not, or talking to Justin, or not, or sipping an Orange Julius juice, or not, or asking a prospective employer if she could work only four days a week so she could stay eligible for mother's allowance, or not, and then out of nowhere:

blue

and then back again. Just like that. Blue like the halo on a struck match.

Multiple images of Clara in her Shopper's Drug Mart uniform followed her along the mirrored lobby. The place was an exercise in cracked plaster and green-carpeted poor taste. She walked carefully past the dry fountains and randomly dispersed lobby chairs, not wanting to wake Justin. His breathing kept time with Clara's step as he curled asleep in the harness on her back. As she pressed the call button at the elevator the superintendent emerged from an apartment behind her. With her slender body, tightly bunned hair and long, slightly cleft nose, the fortyish woman reminded Clara of a hammer.

"Hi," says Clara.

"How is the apartment?" In thick Spanish accent.

"Good. Hot, though."

"Tell me about it. Whole city's that way, I think. Baby's asleep? He's sweet."

"Yeah."

That was always the extent of their conversation. Clara would have loved to have discussed the July heat or the inconvenience of always carrying

Justin's fifteen pounds up the paved hill to Crosskey Manor. Would have discussed lottery results in detail, the local election, anything. But the Hammer was silent.

The elevator door slid shut as she selected number 7. She placed the day's harvest of junk mail in her uniform pocket. She enjoyed reading the stuff—it helped kill time—even though most of them shot for a market that was old enough to vote or had a "man of the house."

The elevator sat on the lobby floor when she came home as if it hadn't moved since she'd left it. Apart from the super, she hadn't even seen anyone else in the place since she'd moved in, months earlier.

Today, though, was different. Emerging from the elevator, she stopped short when she saw an older woman dumping stuff down the trash chute across from Clara's door.

"Uh...hi," said Clara.

The answering "hello" sounded nothing less than hunted.

"How's it goin'?"

"Fine." She half-ran back down the hall to her door at 706.

Clara tried not to hear or count the half-dozen locks as they clicked, slid and twisted shut like an elaborate bear trap. Then: silence, as usual.

She slides her key into the lock at apartment 707, pauses for a moment, looking at Justin, turns the knob, and pushes:

Blue. No walls. No floor. Not a sound. Blue replaces apartment 707 and its ideograph patterns of shower

stall mildew. Instead of her cockroach butlers, it is blue that confronts her. Where she expects to see the second-hand crib or the window with the sweater stuffed into its jagged hole, she drowns in blue. It is all there is: a glaring, consuming stream of blue without source, without end. Flickering.

Perhaps she throws her hands to her head, ensnaring fingers in her black, stringy tangle of hair, possibly screams. She is never sure, afterward. Whatever Clara does, it ends in an oblivion that lasts anywhere from x to x squared.

Consciousness is a slow realization, not an event. It is a gradual awareness of the hard floor's sharp cold.

Her clothes are gone. So is Justin.

Her first thoughts upon waking are blue. Seascapes where the horizon line blurs. The bad acid trip she had with the smurfs. The blue curaçao adventure in the back of a van which had ultimately led to, well, Justin. Every single gift she received, which was exactly three, when Justin was born. The dress her mother had worn when Clara found her sprawled in their sputtering '81 station wagon in the garage. Justin's socks. Bluebottle flies. Carnations. Rain.

Gradually everything blue, from glaciers to receipt paper, proceeds through her mind, has its moment, is forgotten. She falls asleep, and when she awakens the blueness has given way to black. Getting her back to stand up straight along with her takes painful coaxing. And, yes, Justin is gone. Her clothes, too, though she still holds

her keys.

Feeling about her in the dark reveals nothing but cool air and a smooth floor. She slaps her bare foot on the floor and there is no echo, so she seeks the walls and any door. The first steps forward are timid then, encountering no obstacles, are more sure of themselves. Clara walks for a long time. She throws her keys into the air and they strike no ceiling that she can hear. Nor do they strike the ground. She makes a mental note to avoid jumping. She turns right and after some time begins running. She calls Justin's name.

Clara runs until she is out of breath. She hasn't opened her eyes in a long time. Peering at the dark only confuses her, and she can't understand why the child she had protected, first encircled by her body like a vault and defended by her voice from those who would have her get rid of it or give it away, could just be gone. Not even taken away; just gone. The one thing that had ever been hers, that she had curled her whole life around like thorns on a rose. Gone. Leaving only a wanting big enough to swallow up the world and this absolute emptiness, besides. There is no explanation offered.

She sits down, waits for anything to happen.

"When I walk do I even move?" she says to the nothing in a hoarse whisper perhaps two days later. She is never hungry. Her universe, then, has been reduced to the sound of her heart, and of her breathing. The feel of the floor. The ghostly feel of her fingernails, growing.

Something crashes to the floor next

to her and her ears ring for an hour. Reaching out, she grasps keys—two for the Drug Mart hatchback, one for the apartment building, two for her own door, one for the mail. If any of all that still exists.

She crumples on the floor like paper, not knowing if she's lost everything or if everything's lost her.

Some days later Clara invents a companion who at first remains without shape, without name, without species. She tells it jokes and laughs for both of them.

After some time her new friend evolves into a man with rheumy eyes and a soft, half-familiar drawl. He likes to pull at his beard. He has a name: Spun Crybaby.

"Spun," she says one day, "I want you to do me a favor."

anything baby

She pauses for a while. He's a patient fantasy.

"Spun."

yeah?

"Can you get out of here?"

you always ask me that...i always say yes

"Can you tell me where Justin is?"
sure baby...be back soon

He flits off, further into the dark.

His usual dry cough announces his return maybe a minute, maybe a week later.

he's in a foster home...the woman taking care of him sells coke just—

"like my foster—"

mother did, baby yeah

"Spun?"

yeah?

"Did you see me out there at all?"

A pause.

no baby, i didn't

"Good."

Clara is fairly sure that Spun is just a creation of her mind, is afraid that the rest of this might be, too. As she begins to need him more and more, she tells herself he's just a way of getting by. Then one day something quietly beautiful happens: his hand brushes hers. She *feels* it, doesn't pass through it. Her flesh and nerves have to make accommodations for its presence.

"Lucy! I'm home! You got some 'splainin' to do!" he cries in a bad Desi Arnez voice. She hears the words with her ears, not her head. He laughs quietly like it's no big deal and, out of nowhere, kisses her. She tries not to think of other possibilities: he's real. She's sure.

After this the rules change completely. Clara tries picturing herself back in her uniform, the rough polyester scratching her breasts, her dangling nametag wrongly spelling out "CLAIRE." She imagines the too-short pants gripping at her thighs, the polyester *whisk-whisk* when she walks. The smell of fabric softener and menthol cigarette smoke. After hours of this Clara no longer has to try and sustain an illusion. She can slip her keys into pockets that are there. She feels warmer.

The watershed comes when Clara imagines that the blouse is cotton. She pictures the pants a little more comfortable and the nametag with her name spelled right and voila.

"Presto-changeo, baby," says Spun. When they embrace now, there

is cloth between them.

She pictures Justin in her arms, feeling his gentle and warm weight.

"Spun," she says, "can you do me a favor?"

"Anything, baby."

"Can you tell me where Justin is?"

"He's right here with you, baby. Sleepin'."

"And where am I?"

"...Here. Of course."

"Good."

Slowly, Clara begins to bring the rest of the world she's lost into her void. Her universe extends a piece at a time: a crib, some food, the apartment. She wonders what Crosskey Manor must look like now, a hole where apartment 707 used to be.

What the hell, she thinks, and brings in the whole building.

She fixes it up. She gets herself some neighbors.

Eventually, she erases the apartment building and replaces it with a brownstone.

"But maybe Justin would be happier in the country. What do you think, Spun?" So she creates, well, country: a quiet cottage, a lake. The lake is tended by loons and purple martins and warm breezes. Fish jump in the rain. Clara still returns to the city at times, a city strewn with palaces made from butterfly wings and where she has carved houses into the shapes of letters. Whole streets form love notes to Spun, or to her son.

Sometimes they live in the forest where she'll toss a dinosaur into the

works. Sometimes underground.

And now and then this new omnipotence, this total union with her child, with her universe sets her head spinning. Laughing, she designs giant pink fluorescent walking sunflowers to give to the people she has brought in. Or with a playful wink to her friends she makes Spun's navel or his penis disappear for a week. Or creates birds that roost in the throats of old women.

She brings her mother back from the dead.

She changes her name.

Eventually her home, her creation, begins to grow beyond her ability to grasp it as a whole. It stretches beyond the horizon of her skull. She can forget a tiger and it will continue to play with Justin, as real as ever. Her far-off oceans erode her mountains. Her skies stretch out in every direction and sometimes she can feel her nerves taut between stars like harp strings. The creation begins to create itself. And it happens again.

And she continues to create for Justin, the child who will sit with her on the throne she occasionally chooses to use. The child who will keep the keys to the cities in Clara.

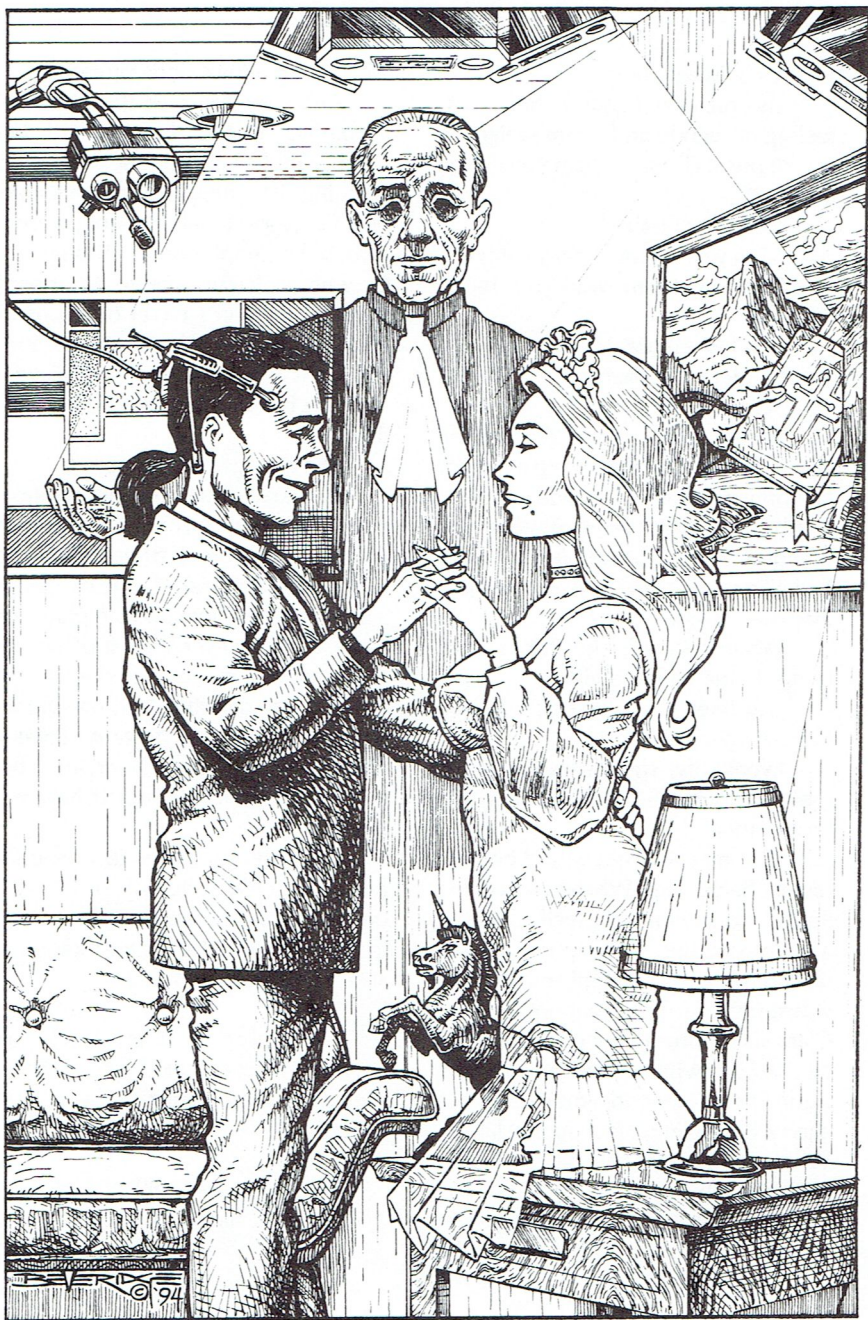
And once in a while, in an eyeblink moment of doubt, when it seems to maybe matter:

"Spun?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm here, aren't I?"

"...Sure. Baby." •



WHOSE LIFEBOAT?

by Keith Scott

illustrated by James Beveridge

Marilee, my ex-wife, says that I can never admit to a mistake. When Steven Gonders stumbles, she told the court, he simply redefines success and motors on. "It comes naturally to him," she told them, "along with the lying."

Then she said a lot more about Steven Gonders, namely me, and the court listened attentively as Marilee is a very persuasive person and she knows how to work a holoscreen for all it's worth—because, above all else, she is an actress.

It was a magnificent performance. Definitely two thumbs up.

Still, I think Marilee was totally unfair. So was the court. I started out by pleading temporary insanity, citing several old precedents, when the head judge stopped me abruptly. "Temporary insanity?" she asked. "Does that cover your month of planning, Mr. Gonders?"

"Well...yes," I said, a bit lamely.

I could tell she didn't believe that for one single nanosecond. She was a spare old thing, somewhere out of sight age-wise, and she had this funny habit of chewing her words before delivering them, almost like a rabbit. My hopes sank.

I admit that I had prepared myself for some sort of a mild reprimand, perhaps to be flamed from the nets for a time. That plus a healthy fine, I had thought. Idiot me.

Marilee made some additional remarks as the hearing droned on. I classed these as distinct overkill but nobody else seemed to notice. In fact, the other two judges contributed little throughout the proceedings except primly tight lips.

Finally the head judge reached her sentencing.

"We find you guilty of narcissistic sociopathy, Mr. Gonders," she said after a moment of fruitful chewing.

"Yes, ma'am," I said doubtfully. What the hell was narcissistic sociopathy?

"By unanimous decision," she went on, "your holo-marriage will be nullified as of this date."

"Is that what Marilee—?"

"I'm not finished yet," the head judge said, her face winging about in her square of holospace. "This court also sentences you to be offlined—"

"Offlined?" I said unbelievably. "For how long?"

"Indefinitely."

"But you're dog meat when you're offed."

"Exactly, Mr. Gonders," the judge agreed as her sim image faded from the center of my living room. Marilee was the last to go. She didn't say anything, but she smiled at me as she went, smiled sweetly.

That was one month ago.

Oh sure, out of some great sense of compassion I was still allowed to scan the world and its events—news, journals, sports, theater, films—all strictly on a read only basis. Incoming *seulement*. Absolutely nothing two-way. Incommunicado. Locked into an electronic Coventry. In an Apart world? *Jesus*.

Plague3 was the final touch, a tidal wave that very nearly swept us off into extinction. Dear God, but it was savage. I can clearly remember my parents, faces all aglow with pride and excitement, telling me at age eight that Plague2 had finally been stopped. "We are poised," my father said, "on the brink of a new age."

I never really had time to discuss this new age with him. Suddenly, he and my mother, and at least two billion other people weren't there anymore because Plague3 hit with such shattering force that the old world came unstuck for ten years and society had to be remade.

Like everybody else, I live apart in a holo-world to escape infection. Everybody, that is, except the Nons. These are the diseased, the homeless, the non-conformers, the sweep-ups of our society. We had to cut the Nons adrift. It was a hard decision, but one we had to make.

Living apart, in my case, takes place in a cluster of prefab modules, perched on the side of a mountain in the Laurentians near Ste-Agathe, Québec. I had the units dropped in by nulgrav lifters two weeks after my company offered its first shares on the NYSE.

My initial brush with Marilee came a short time later, while I was doing some fine tuning on our new hologram overlay. My group has developed a tactile overlay which we market under the tradename of SimTouch and it's been going like netbusters.

I must admit to being perennially lax about reading my E-mail, particularly the unsolicited shit, but one epochal morning while checking the

Internet, I met Marilee. There tucked in with the usual yakpoop on the wallscreen was a terse one line zinger.

— *SimTouch...like all "great" ideas, this one's got balls on it! M.M.*

I didn't get it at first but then it came through to me and I laughed myself into incipient psychospin. I'd been getting some shitty cracks from fembo Apartniks who didn't think much of SimTouch; cracks such as, Apart is to be Forever, Keep gender in its place or it's back to Neanderland, etc., etc. Other times it has been messages from the outside, from Nons who have cracked the entry codes. These I ignore completely.

But this message grabbed my interest and I voiced in a quick reply to the board.

— *M.M. SimTouch doesn't have to be only about sex. Perhaps we should discuss this further? On viz? S.G.*

My answer came an hour later.

— *S.G. No viz. And if SimTouch isn't all about sex, I'll eat my ruby rhinestones. M.M.*

I laughed again. Now I was really hooked, particularly as I was certain now M.M. had to be a woman. Her edict about no visual made it even more challenging. Of course, the Privacy Amendments protected her against any uninvited intrusion, made it a serious offense in fact. Still, she'd know, as the wicked electronic wiz of the North, I might be able to crack any defenses she could throw up. But she wouldn't know I had her "fingerprint" on autofile already, standard Gonders *modus operandi*. I answered her immediately, in case she was still on her wallscreen.

— *M.M. What goes with the rhinestones? S.G.*

Then I quickly probed the net for any listening echo with her print on it. There was absolutely nothing. I sat back and gave the whole thing some heavy thought. And it did call for serious evaluation, beginning with whether the exercise was worth it. I reminded myself how seriously the authorities viewed intrusion.

But I love to gamble. I knew I could park a scan in the board and remove it before getting caught by any sweep. Nine times out of ten, I figured. Irresistible odds. I'd done it before—and besides, I was halfway there already by having her print. The secret is not to stay in too long with your scan; in and out quickly, go lightly, like fly casting to catch a trout.

I caught my trout on the seventh cast.

— *S.G. So you're having a depressing childhood. M.M., the wallscreen read and my scan zapped in and locked on it. Flags lit up as the distinctive electronic pattern of her computer matched the earlier print I'd caught and the readouts began.*

I did the geography first. She was located on a tiny island off Montserrat in the Caribbean. That would put her exactly 4,462 kilometers and four weather zones from my mountain eyrie in Ste-Atathe.

Minutes later I was snooping around her guard program, carefully dismantling it, disarming three sets of AT4 alarms, soothing any peripheral SUKI dislocations—all done without leaving the merest whiff of my presence. It was a good hack.

I often wonder about the hacker

urge, often enough to conclude that hacking flows from some pretty primal needs, all basically sordid. The prime allure, I've decided, lies in its cozy privacy because you are always alone when you hack and this means you are the sole judge of the morality of your action.

Result: There will always be a lot of hacking.

So it was with the usual delicious twinges of conscience playing up and down the spine of my mind that I pulled in a visual on my target in Montserrat...and presto, *wunderlady* blossomed on the wall before me.

I felt instantly that I should know her. That great mane of coppery blonde hair and the strong, high-cheekboned face rang all sorts of memory bells in my mind, but try hard as I could, I couldn't put an instant name on her.

To be honest I was thinking about quietly backing the hell out of it. That's how intimidating this lady first appeared, glaring directly at me, contempt pulling at the corners of those full expressive lips.

She was talking, still looking straight at me. "I don't know how," she said, "but I know you're out there, S.G. Call it an actor's intuition."

Actor? I gulped, sudden recognition flooding me.

Of course. My catch was none other than Marilee Moody, the rising new soap idol. Now I knew that I had really bitten off a hell of a lot more than I wanted to chew. Confirmed. I reached for the quit button.

"I'm going to nail you," she was saying, "for intrusion and everything else it's worth. I think you're a scumbag for hacking me. But first, let's have a

look at you."

I told you that I was intimidated. Maybe it was something a lot more with Marilee. My hand seemed to sleepwalk past the quit choice and went on to click on viz. It was as though those great hazel eyes held me in thrall, as though I'd do anything this creature told me to do. Really stupid...when what Steven Gonders wanted to do was to get the hell out.

She gave me a long visual check-out and I wished that I had taken the time that morning to put on more than my ragged 1998 Blue Jays T-shirt. Anything to cover my awkwardness, all those splintery corners. Stringbean. I knew I looked ridiculous.

"I'm surprised," she said at last. "You're older than I thought...and that high hairline, those brown eyes and glasses. Tell me, can you give me one redeeming feature for this touchy-feely toy of yours?" Her directness caught me, raised me to a level that I don't often reach on these net meetings. "Sanity," I blurted out, "SimTouch can bring us all sanity."

It was a good answer. I saw her pause, perhaps even soften at the edges, but then she hardened again. "Oh, so very well said," she mocked me. "And how will it do this?"

I could have continued on the higher plane and told her that human bonding depends on touch, that true love cannot develop without tactile interaction, that the addition of this sense to our simholos might even bring back the family...

What I said was, "Let's face it. We can't really get it on without touch and feel." It was perverse, it showed a sad lack of class. But what the hell...

Marilee Moody? All I wanted was to get it done and over with.

"Jesus, you're unbelievable," she said.

"You asked for honesty."

"Yes. But I wasn't expecting it."

It was my turn to be surprised. That's when I decided I might have a chance, that I should enter the game, play it out. Who knows where it might go?

"I could have told you," I said slowly, "that SimTouch will bring unbelievable reality to theater."

Her eyes widened and I felt a surge of triumph. I always look for the leveling flaw, the inevitable chink in the armor, the touch of venality. Marilee Moody's flaw, her Achilles heel, was her professional pride. I began to feel a lot better.

"Cut the crap, Gonders," she stopped me. So she knew my name. Interesting, I decided, but puzzling. She went on, "How can your porn toy do anything for theater?"

I smiled back at her and launched into the introductory pitch for SimTouch. Standard holo is a midair intersection of laser projections without substance or solid form, I reminded her. You can pass your hand through a holo image, can't you? She nodded. I went on: Our tactile overlay SimTouch gives "body" to the image. You touch, you feel, you interact fully—

"So actors could touch and feel each other?" she interrupted me impatiently.

"Absolutely," I said. "So can families. Mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters."

"How do you do this?" She was gorgous when she was excited.

"We start by reversing the polarity of your sim to get interaction. Then we project normal galvanic and neural skin responses to it. The mind does the rest—"

"You mean, the "feel" seems real?"

"That and a sense of body."

"My God. What this can do for theater!" she said.

"My God. What this can do for personkind!" I chided her.

That was the start of it. Our relationship flowered very quickly. It was surprising how many intersects we shared, once Marilee got over the fact that I had hacked her, and once I got over the fact that a loose loop like me might even dare to dream. I began thinking the unthinkable. *Holo matrimony*. Even under the rigid confines of Apartness. Why not?

It's hard to put my feelings for Marilee into meaning making terms, then and now. Perhaps because I don't understand these feelings myself. Obsessional? Maybe that's a key word here. Try besotted. That's even closer. I was besotted by Marilee. She was a constant memory circuit in my head, with me every breathing moment of my life, running through my mind...

Anyway, back there in the beginning, things moved very quickly and we announced our marriage plans and Marilee talked it up on her netshow. Her plans, she announced to her adoring and growing audience, even included *in vitro* children. The world was delighted. I was delighted.

My SimTouch colleagues showed less enthusiasm at this turn of events, worrying about Marilee's possible mo-

tivation. I couldn't imagine what they were driving at, but I cut them in for one third of the company because I needed them. This action seemed to quieten their fears, particularly as we had our first stock split two weeks later. As a wedding gift, I gave Marilee another third of the company. What the hell. *Whatever it takes.*

SimTouch brought Marilee and me a great deal more than wealth. We spent hours "together" in our Apart world, reveling in its heightened intimacy, discovering and exploring ourselves.

I don't know why, but I was the one that did the holo-jump most of the time. To her Caribbean islet. Maybe I do know why. I couldn't keep away from her. It was that simple. Marilee would stop me now and then.

"Steve," she'd say, "I'm an actress. I've got lines to learn."

"I'll help you—"

"No. That's not my way," she'd laugh. "Go home."

Marilee's sim spent far less time in the Laurentians than my sim did in the Caribbean. I should have read the signs.

For me, it started with watching Marilee in *Loving Apart*, her new top-rated show on the nets. I had never paid much attention to these soap operas before I met her, but I watched this one with growing unease.

It wasn't jealousy. I don't think I'm capable of something as caring as jealousy. Simply stated, I don't like sharing, I crave possession.

Marilee's holo partner in *Loving Apart* is a hewn-from-rock idiot named Hamilton Axby. Ham's sole acting credentials seem to be that he has good

teeth, massive triceps and a room temperature IQ.

Marilee should have known better. I had been in and out of her electronics enough times to set up a complete copy of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Maybe she knew and didn't really care.

She did question me one languorously shared afternoon in her bedroom in the Caribbean. "You do trust me, Steven?" she asked running her hand lightly down my holographed spine. The effect on the real me, back in Ste-Agathe, was devastatingly electric and sensual. I arched myself like a cat, attempting to prolong the SimTouched caress of her fingers, savoring their sleepy slide down my back to the divide of my buttocks.

"Why would you ask that?" I choked out finally.

"Your dirty hacker past," she said with a laugh and then she slapped me sharply across the ass. "With your record, why should I trust you?"

I rolled away from her, searching for the right words.

"We'll do a sweep," I said huffily, "that'll give you your answer." I even got to my feet and started to dress, as though I was on my way that very instant to take care of it. She watched me carefully for a minute or so and then called it all off.

"Get back into bed, Steven," she said.

I let my breath out carefully and slid my holo image back between her sheets. It seems, I told myself, that I had survived some sort of test. Which was just as well. I'd spent considerable time and smarts in setting up a full array of snoops in her netware. It would have

been a pity to dismantle them all. The snoops logged all messages, screen times, holo interacts, Marilee's pulse and breathing rates; and especially, they copied all interacts using SimTouch.

I had Marilee covered six ways to the moon.

My smugness was shattered two weeks later.

I had just finished watching the latest soap episode of *Loving Apart* in which Ham and Marilee reached a new level of erotics. The realism that SimTouch brought to the show was unbelievable and it was breaking all rating records worldwide.

But I was startled by the steaminess of this particular episode. In fact, it pissed me, right up to my eyebrows.

I pulled in a visual on Montserrat. Marilee had a *Do Not Disturb* hung on her access and I also noticed a SimTouch flag flying in the icon row. This wasn't particularly surprising since it would be the usual mode for her "work" periods when she and Ham cut an episode in their soap series.

I went around the DND to see what was going on. We had set up holo projectors in most rooms of her beach house complex so that the network could use it as a set for their episodes. First I checked the living-dining area, then down the hall...

And there they were.

On the floor of Marilee's bedroom, their great golden bodies interlocked, interlaced, inter everything...scaling the heights of a SimTouch orgasm. I saw it all as a blinding flash before my eyes.

Automatically I checked the bio

readouts for the final and leveling insult. Marilee's heart and respiration rates were registering at least a third higher than anything I'd recorded before.

My plan developed rapidly. It began by studying the schedule of the delivery drones. I knew that the drones came out of secure warehousing centers near the city centers, areas surrounded by the Nons' territory. I'd been into Toronto, Montreal and New York on several occasions, riding in the tiny passenger compartments of one of these drones. Passenger trips required clearances for health and security purposes, and then a medical series after any trips because of inevitable contact with the Nons.

Through the beneficence of nul-Zgrav energy, the labor content in most work has disappeared, workers are not needed, so Nons play no role in the organized world. Their sole contribution seems to be that they form the last breeding pool for Plague3.

I was dressed in airtights as I walked into the passenger compartment of the latest drone to park in my delivery bay. The flat tank slung across my shoulder blades bled air quietly into my suit and program began to "walk" across my helmet visor via a full interconnect to the DeskCray in my office module.

My first impression of the transfers in New York and Miami were that there were far more Nons about than on my last trip out. Many seemed to be disease-free and actively occupied in pursuing some sort of life. I found this puzzling but I gave it little thought as I stepped off a moving sidewalk in the unsecured part of the Miami airport. I

began to relax.

That was a mistake. Letting down my guard that is. I had only taken a few steps when I was surrounded by a ragged group of hideously diseased people of all ages. They grabbed and pulled at me with surprising strength.

I didn't argue with them. I reached into the pocket of my airtights and pulled out a handful of Protec, the partially effective anti-plague drug, and threw them around me. The capsules were worth ten credits each and there was a wild scramble for them, under chairs and tables in the waiting area.

"Don't let him go," a tall scarecrow with livid Kaposi's on his face shouted. "He's worth far more than these goddamn pills."

That turned them back to me and I went down in a swarm of arms and legs and shoeless feet, pinned to the grimy terrazzo floor of the terminal. Hands pulled at my visor and I knew that only an instant separated me from losing the integrity of my suit. I prayed fervently the Protec I'd taken in the morning might cover any exposure I was now facing.

Suddenly the pressure on my chest eased off and I was able to see the terminal ceiling again. A hawk-nosed man with a full thicket of beard was staring into my visor.

"You all right in there?" he asked and offered me his hand. I took it and climbed stiffly to my feet, looking curiously at my savior. He was a small man, round and well muscled, with brightly intelligent eyes peering at me from each side of that great beak of a nose. He still held my hand. "Chad Kravitz," he introduced himself.

"Sorry," I apologized, "I'm travel-

ing without—"

"Understand. Understand fully," Kravitz waved me silent. He turned to the ring of muttering Nons surrounding us. "Can Mr. Incognito get by with five thousand, my friends?"

I paid up quickly and the crowd disappeared as fast as it had formed. Chad Kravitz seemed to enjoy some special relationship with them. "I better stick with you," he offered. "Where you off to?"

He smiled at my hesitation. "Look, I'm out of the loop," he said. "You can tell me everything...or nothing."

"Montserrat," I told him.

He showed mild interest. "Nice place," he said. "I'll take you to the Caribbean warehouse."

We crossed the massive airport area by a series of moving sidewalks and escalators, some broken down, others functioning. Chad Kravitz kept up a running commentary as we passed other groups of Nons. He seemed to be known to them all. At one point he dropped the information he'd held a research post at an eastern university. I tried to fit the picture of an academic to this rolling buccaneer figure beside me and failed.

Two or three times we passed other airsuted figures, like myself, hurrying to unknown destinations. We did nothing to recognize each other's presence, almost as though coming face-to-face brought up a sense of guilt. It was an unease I had seldom experienced before.

"How did you get into this?" I finally asked Kravitz.

He laughed. "I got offed. I wouldn't drop the research I was doing."

"But what about...?"

"Infection?" he finished my question. "I took Protec for a time, then I just stopped it. Nothing happened. That's the research field I was in. Immunity."

"You're immune?"

"Seems like," Kravitz said. "Maybe being gregarious is the antidote."

"Maybe," I agreed wishing I'd never brought the subject up. Talking about the plague always depresses me, it leaves me feeling strained and uncomfortable. Kravitz was watching me closely. "A lot of us Nons are immune," he said. "About half. You know what this means?"

I shook my head.

"We can start again," he said seriously.

He must have seen it in my eyes through my visor. I was stunned by his suggestion, choked nearly to the point of bringing up. Nons? A fresh start from this mindless stinking rabble?

"It's a question of whose lifeboat to use," Chad Kravitz said. "Why should we always think in terms of your lifeboat?"

"But the plaguers are going—"

"To die?" he finished. "Only half of them. By natural cleansing. Meantime, half of you *Apartniks* will still be plague prone. Don't you see? This means it will simmer on, still be with us, always be with us. Cheddi's curve of probabilities shows we'd be rid of the plague far faster if we all climbed into the same lifeboat. Our lifeboat."

"You're insane."

"Am I?" he said. "You people have invented a twisted life. Aberrant, unfulfilling, an abomination. Jesus, now you even got this SimTouch thing to dig you in deeper—"

"Hey! I know something about SimTouch."

"Great. It's nothing but more bloody reality distortion."

I was stung. "Maybe you earned being offed," I said.

Abruptly Kravitz stopped and looked at me. He must not have found what he was looking for because, finally, he just pointed toward a departure gate in front of us. "Okay, asshole. You'll find your drone for Montserrat in that secure area," he said.

"Well...thanks," I muttered and reached for my credit pouch.

"Stuff it," Kravitz said and walked away.

I had time to think in the next two hours.

The drone skimmed along in complete silence at two hundred meters above the sun dappled waters of the Caribbean. The only sound was the steady whisper of air over its metal skin and the monotonous beat of my heart.

What more should I have said to Kravitz? That Apartness was the lifeboat of choice? Hard choice, perhaps, but the only choice under the circumstances. Faced with the threat of extinction, you save your best, your brightest, the movers and shakers. And you make adaptations to suit circumstances. Like SimTouch.

No. Kravitz was wrong. I looked out below me.

Marilee's islet shone like a jewel in the setting sun. I had never seen it from this vantage point before and I found it breathtakingly beautiful. I put all thoughts of Kravitz and lifeboats firmly out of my mind. After all, I was about to reach for the brass ring, to scale my

mountain top.

We landed effortlessly in the delivery bay. I moved quickly into the entry module before the decontamination radiation flooded the drone. This was an area of the beachhouse I was not familiar with, but I found a cloakroom where I was able to strip off my helmet and airtights.

I wasn't prepared to meet Marilee so soon but I did meet her coming out of the spa room. She was wrapped in a large towel and she was drying her coppery gold hair. Seeing her in the flesh for the first time took my breath away.

"Steven!" She smiled—a bit tightly, I thought. "You're here already."

I kissed her carefully, holding my breath, not wanting to betray myself, made heady by the sheer *presence* of the contact. It was all so screamingly *more* than a holo interact. God! Could I really carry this off?

"I finished up a bit early today," I said lamely.

"No matter. I haven't seen you for days. What have you been up to?"

What have I been up to? Watching you and Ham doing the old ins-and-outs. Reading your bios. Slowly dissolving in a vat of acid envy. Watching you and Ham doing...

"I've been pretty busy," I said aloud with complete truth. Then I started to lie. "We've finally licked the olfactory problem."

"Really!" She seemed vastly interested. "And you've got it working now? This instant?"

"Yes," I lied.

"You mean I can smell you?" She leaned forward and sniffed at me. "Oh,

my God. I *can* smell you." And Marilee laughed that hormone stirring laugh known and loved throughout the viewing world. I began to feel better.

What happened? To each of us is given one pinnacle, one transcending physical moment when the world stands still, when hearts are stopped and become one, when we reach for perfection.

I reached that night in the beachhouse. I reached and I had it in my possession for one fleeting moment—before it all came down and shattered into ten thousand sharp-edged splinters.

"Steven," Marilee was screaming in my ear. "You bastard!"

"Whaaat—?"

"Look at your ear."

I put my hand up to my ear and brought it away. There was blood on my hand—liquid, substantial, incriminating. Marilee had bitten me. *That transcending moment and its sweet pain. That crashing Beethoven crescendo.*

She ran from the room.

Was it marital rape? That's what Marilee calls it.

The court didn't quite agree. Particularly when she admitted to leading me into the bedroom, by the hand, enthusiastically. No, the whole area of consensual consideration would be fraught with legal pitfalls, it was decided. After brushing aside my plea of temporary insanity, the court classed me as a self-loving schemer and charged me with a dangerous intrusion. Under the privacy amendments.

It made little difference, the penalty was the same.

Marilee moved quickly. She merged her third of the company with the third held by my colleagues and I was voted overwhelmingly out of the CEO chair of SimTouch Inc.

I learned a great deal in a very short time. I had gone fishing for trout, Marilee went fishing for sucker. She had set me up right from the start, planned it all, her interests began and ended with her career alone, and any illusions about possessing her were just that. Illusions.

I sulked for two whole weeks. Then I got off my self pitying ass and busted the one-way NoGo they'd put on my net, busted it in one day. Some NoGo!

Screw Marilee. There's bigger fish than Marilee Moody.

I didn't dare contact anyone in the Apart world. But I looked up Chad Kravitz in the Non world and we agreed to bury the hatchet. I needed him.

"Could you," I asked him, "gather me a group of wired techos from your

offnik buddies? Real mind stretchers?"

"No problem," he said without a blink.

Then I started feeding him my idea about recapturing energy emanations to bring back sim images from the past. There are a gazillion photo-reactive surfaces in the world that have witnessed events, passages of great people. Lift off these mega exposures, one at a time...

Chad got very excited. "When do we start?"

I knew what he was really asking me.

"You still got room in that boat of yours?" I asked.

He smiled broadly. "Welcome aboard. You going to take Protec for a while?"

"Nope," I said. "I'm going cold turkey on this."

Chad laughed. "How can you lose with even odds? Right?"

"Damn right," I agreed.

I leave Ste-Agathe tomorrow. •

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D.A. RIKKONEN '94

DRAGON PEARL

by Alison Baird

illustrated by Dory A. Rikkonen

Spring Flower gazes up at the roiling storm-clouds above her, and thinks, *The dragons have returned*. Always at this time of the year, when the peach blossoms unfurl and the winds grow warm again, they emerge from their winter lairs on the river-bed and sport among the clouds, making thunder. This her grandmother told her long ago, along with many other tales of the *lung* dragons, who live in the lakes and rivers of China.

She continues to gaze into the clouds, fascinated. Here in this province of low rolling hills and flat loess plains the prospect is always dominated by the sky. A storm is a terrifying thing here, making all beneath it seem small and vulnerable: the very hills seem to be crouching low beneath the thunderbolts, like frightened animals. Yet there is something in Spring Flower that finds pleasure in this storm, the energy and drama of it; and as the grey clouds shred into tatters and drift away she steps out into the rain-wet meadow, watching them pass.

She walks, as always, with difficulty. When each girl in her family turned six her feet were bound in bandages, bent and crushed small so that they would be more attractive, the "lotus feet" of a lady. Of all of them Spring Flower has suffered most cruelly, for unlike her sisters she once loved to run about the fields and play by the river. She has been taught to hobble about the house on her ruined

feet, swaying from side to side to look graceful. This was ten years ago, and it is still like walking on knives. As always, when she is walking out of doors, she keeps a careful eye upon the ground, so that her tiny feet will not stumble or catch in a hole.

And so it is that she notices the light: the strange light that comes, not from above her, but beneath.

In the grass at her feet is a pale glimmer, coming from an object the size of her fist. Parting the long grass-stems she sees a milky globe like an enormous pearl, the still-leaping lightning of the ebbing storm filling it with a fitful fire. As the rising moon shows through the cloud-tatters, its light too fills the pearl, and when she picks it up Spring Flower sees her face reflected in it, gazing back at her with wonder. Her breath catches in her throat now, as she realizes what she holds.

Her late grandmother's words come back to her. "When the dragons fly up into the air, they fight a little among themselves, making thunder and rain. And then, sometimes, one of the dragons will drop his thunder-pearl: the magical shining ball that is the seat of his powers. Down it will fall to the land below, bringing good luck to the one who finds it."

Spring Flower cradles the shining sky-thing between her palms, and from that moment she is resolved to keep it. If she gives it to her parents it will be sold for what money it will bring, and somehow Spring Flower has known instinctively, since she took it in her hand and saw her face in it, that the thunder-pearl is hers. It may indeed

have fallen from a dragon's claw, high in the roiling clouds, but it has fallen to the earth for her and her alone.

*

"Third Daughter! Third Daughter, where are you?"

That is her mother calling. No one in her family uses her name: always it is Third Daughter, in tones of reproach and contempt. "Third Daughter, fetch your father some more rice," "Third Daughter, go help the servants in the kitchen." She slips the pearl into her sleeve and hobbles back to the house.

All her family is gathered for the evening meal: her mother Autumn Moon, as First Wife, is supervising the servants in the kitchen. Her father and brother are already at the table, being attended by Second Wife, who makes impatient signs that Spring Flower should join her. Spring Flower bends her head submissively; as always, no words are wanted from her, only obedience.

She misses her two elder sisters. Both of them are gone now, married off to wealthy men in other villages. Their dowries have taken a heavy toll of her own family's wealth, and she knows well that when her turn for marriage comes there will be little left. A Third Daughter cannot expect much from life.

There was a Fourth Daughter, once, but she is not to be spoken of. She was born when Spring Flower was four, and Spring Flower can still remember the shrieks coming from her mother's bedroom—cries not of pain but of lamentation. After all that labour, a girl, another girl has been born, still

not the son that her husband desires of her. Spring Flower catches only one glimpse of the despised daughter, the cause of all this misery: a little, round, white head emerging from a bundle of swathing-cloths, delicate and perfect as porcelain. It is strange that anything so beautiful should not be wanted. But she is not wanted, because shortly after that she disappears. When Spring Flower asks Grandmother what has become of the new baby, Grandmother looks away and says that it has died. Only in later years does Spring Flower learn the truth from the servants. Her father commanded them to take the infant to the river's edge in the night, and leave her there to die. The river would have been in full flood at that time, brown and angry and lashing its banks with white-edged waves. When the servants returned in the morning to check, the baby was gone, swept away by the waves.

After learning this Spring Flower has nightmares, dark dreams of the baby's porcelain head and bundled body surrounded by angry waves. Later she wonders if Fourth Daughter (so she calls her, the baby never having been named) was not better off after all. The river at least wanted Fourth Daughter, took her when she was offered and folded her to its dark bosom, and never gave her back. No one, Spring Flower learns, wants Third Daughter.

She now looks wistfully at her younger brother, who is scowling down at his rice-bowl as though it is beneath his contempt. He has been spoiled and petted from the first, named Son of the Sky because he is Heaven's

gift to his parents. His feet have not been bound, he has not been given to the river. When he was very small Autumn Moon dressed him as a girl, and would say loudly while he played at her feet: "Ai, ai! Another worthless girl! I must be cursed to have such bad luck!" This, Grandmother explained, was so that the demons would be deceived, and not try to snatch the precious boy away. No demon would ever steal a mere girl. The knowledge that she is worthless, is something that even a demon does not want, comes as a revelation to Spring Flower, and explains much in her life.

Slowly the evening deepens into night. Alone at last in her small bedroom Spring Flower takes out the dragon's pearl and gazes into it again. She will keep it hidden, she decides, and tell no one of it: it must always be there for her, safe and secret, the one thing in her life that no one else can touch or take. She will remove it from its hiding place sometimes, when she is sure she is alone, and look into it to see her own face looking back. The pearl is also smooth and soothing to the touch—like the balls of polished stone one can buy in the market to roll about one's palms, healing the hands. She climbs into bed and is soon asleep with the pearl clutched in her hand.

In the early hours before dawn a dream comes to her, another dream of the river, only not the terrible nightmare this time. She is beneath the river's surface, in its green and restful depths, swimming effortlessly as small fish dart away from her in startled silver arcs. Slowly she rises, up toward the light,

bursting through the glassy surface into the light of day.

And then she is flying through the air, swooping and soaring high above the fields. Often before has she dreamt of flying, but this seems more real: she can feel the coolness of the air on her face, the tingling thrill as she rides the cresting waves of wind, while beneath her the fields are spread out flat, as though she is looking down at them from the top of a very high hill. A light rain is falling, and she follows it to its source in the grey-bosomed clouds, sporting through misty caverns veined with lightning, revelling in the gong-like rumours of the thunder. Never in her waking life has she known such freedom, such soaring ecstasy. And her feet for once do not pain her, for they never touch the ground at all.

Down she darts once more, over the tapestried fields. The river flows beneath her, like a bolt of pale wrinkled silk, and as she sweep back over it she glimpses in it a serpentine form, gemmed with flashing scales, winding in long coils like the river itself. A *lung* dragon! But only when she passes low over the wondrous apparition and it rises to meet her does she understand that it is her own reflection. A fierce joy fills her.

And now someone, far away, is calling her name: not *Third Daughter*, but *Spring Flower*, *Spring Flower*, a voice as gentle as a breeze whispering through bamboo. It comes, she thinks, from the river, but as she dives toward the water the voice suddenly changes, becomes harsh and strident. "Third Daughter! Third Daughter, wake up at

once!"

It is the voice of her mother, summoning her to her morning chores. She rises with a sigh, slipping the pearl back into its hiding-place.

Her mother is waiting for her in the hall. "Third Daughter, I must speak with you."

Guiltily Spring Flower tries to think what crime she must have committed, what deed done or left undone, to merit the stony look in Autumn Moon's eyes.

"Third Daughter, it is high time for you to be married," her mother says.

"Married!"

The word bursts from her mouth, unthinkingly, and she starts at the sound of her own voice, so seldom used.

"Of course. Did you think you would live off us forever, you foolish girl?"

Spring Flower closes her eyes briefly, remembering that day seven years ago when she was first taken to meet her husband-to-be: taken and paraded before him and his family, like a horse at an auction. Suddenly in her mind she is there again, swaying and hobbling on her lotus feet. Her chosen husband is a fat young boy, spoiled like Son of the Sky, with a downturned mouth and eyes like cold obsidian. When their mothers' backs are turned he pinches her and hits her, and when she cries he says, "Be quiet. You're mine, I can do anything I want to you."

His family is not wealthy or aristocratic, but a Third Daughter cannot expect such things. She has seen her husband only once since that first meeting, a brief glimpse at last year's Moon

Festival. He is a grown man now, plump no longer, but with eyes that are just as cold as before. She shivers, remembering. She is looking at him where he stands in the glow of a festive lantern: an instant later their eyes meet, and though he says nothing his cold black glance says all that is on his mind. *You are not all I hoped for*, it says to her, as plainly as words. *You are poor and not pretty enough. I will punish you for that.*

"Must I be married?" she pleads now. "If my dowry will make you poorer, what good will it do? I will find work of some sort, somewhere."

But her mother looks askance at her and tells her only wicked women do not marry.

As the days pass filled with busy preparation, Spring Flower reflects ironically that perhaps she should be grateful to be the centre of attention for once in her life. But she knows the smiling faces around her are happy only at the thought that she will soon be leaving, and will no longer be a burden to the household. She tries not to think of her coming marriage, but it looms in her mind like a storm-cloud seen across the flat plains, dark and terrible and approaching with inexorable swiftness.

Desperation fills her. Could she run away? She laughs at herself without humour. *Run*—on her wretched little feet? And what would she do in the wide world alone—without money, without friends?

On the eve of the wedding Spring Flower retires early, pleading exhaus-

tion, although she lies awake for most of the night with her dragon pearl clutched in her hand. She wonders if it will be possible to keep her treasure safe and secret in her new home. More likely her husband will find it, and take it from her. In the dim hours before dawn she finally slips into a doze and dreams again. Once more she flies above the river, seeing in its surface the dragon that she has become; once again she hears the beckoning voice. This time she makes haste to plunge into the river, before her spirit can be recalled to the waking world. Meeting her mirrored self at the surface she dives downward, into the green dimness below. And there, impossibly, are the lighted windows of a great house, glowing through the murk as if through a mist. Someone in the river-palace is calling her name: *Spring Flower, Spring Flower!*

She wakes with a start. Her room is filled with moonlight, and in the east the dawn she dreads is fast approaching. Spread over a chair nearby she sees the wedding gown, its scarlet folds grey as ashes in this light, and beside it the heavy embroidered veil behind which she must go blindly to her new husband. A sob rises in her throat: the dream seemed so real, the escape it offered so near. And now she has come back—to the wedding, and to another home that does not want her.

She limps to the window, and stands there gazing out at the river. It calls to her, as it called in the dream, gentle yet insistent. And now she thinks that at last she understands the dream, and knows what she must do. A tear

slips down her cheek.

Clutching her pearl to her breast, she goes softly downstairs and out the front door, hobbling toward the river-side. She is thinking of the green restful dimness and the soft voice that summoned her: perhaps it called to Fourth Daughter also, when she sank into the green deep. In the dawn the river looks less like silk than silver, coldly gleaming. She stands, trembling, at its edge. Can she call up the courage to cast herself into the dark, cold water?

But before she can do so the river begins all at once to churn and froth, like a pot on the boil. As she stares, she sees great shimmering arches rise up out of the foam, all covered in gleaming fish-scales: the looped coils of some huge water-creature. And then a high horned head breaks the surface, its great eyes blazing upon her like lanterns.

It is a dragon!

She stumbles back in terror as it surges toward the shore: her little feet slip and she falls her length upon the ground. The great fanged jaws spring open: but out of them comes a small, sweet, bell-like voice. "Sister, do not be afraid!"

Spring Flower stares, frozen with amazement. As she watches the dragon begins to fade, like a mist when the sun shines through it: only instead of the sun's pale disc there shines through the dragon a pale radiant figure. In an instant the dragon has vanished, and in its place there stands a girl. She is younger than Spring Flower and delicately beautiful, with features like finest porcelain. Her feet are long and

slender, feet that have never known binding bandages.

"Fourth Daughter," breathes Spring Flower.

"So you do know me."

"I—I thought that you were dead, all these years—"

"I was taken by the dragons of the river," she answers in her sweet voice, "to the palace of the Dragon King that lies upon the riverbed. The dragons claimed me for their own, and raised me as a beloved daughter. They gave to me an enchanted pearl, that turned me into a dragon." She takes from her sleeve a glimmering globe, the twin of Spring Flower's.

"But—you look like a girl now—"

Fourth Daughter laughs, a light silver sound, carefree as a bird's call. "Dragons can take any form that they please—beast, bird or human being. You see me now as I would have been, had I lived all these years in the human world."

Spring Flower looks sadly at the slim, unbound feet. "I am glad you did not. You were spared—much."

"That is true. In the world of dragons there are no sorrows, like those which men make for themselves. I was happy with them, but always I longed to know where I came from, who my own people were. It has taken me so long to find you, Sister! I sent you the pearl as a gift, so that if ever you grew weary of the world of men, you might join me in the dragon world. Come with me now, if you wish, and be one of us!"

Spring Flower raises her eyes to her sister's face then, and gives a long

wordless cry of joy—a cry that deepens and grows in power as it rises into the air. She can feel the change coming over her, the scales that spread rippling over her body, the new unaccustomed height from which she looks down on river and fields. She is becoming a dragon. Or perhaps, she reflects, the dragon was always there: deep within her, inside her silence. Waiting for the pearl to call it forth.

As the sun climbs the sky it finds the village in an uproar. By now all

know that Spring Flower has fled her own wedding, and alone in the world will no doubt come to grief as just payment for such unheard-of wickedness. Amidst the clamour one voice strives to be heard. It is the voice of an elderly farmer who declares that, as he worked his fields at dawn, he saw two dragons rise from the river and go soaring skyward, free as the winds they rode. But the villagers want only to hear of the scandal, and no one pays him any heed. •

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PAPER

by Marcel G. Gagné
illustrated by Linda Dunn

Fascinated, Daniel followed his grandmother's old fingers while they deftly wove magic in their mathematical dance. Wrinkled folds of skin draped almost casually over their old bones, moved in ways that mocked his own taut fabric of youth. Every motion was elegant choreography, each fold an artful rendition of an exact science. Two days of insistence had finally convinced her to share her secrets. This was the initiation. Her price was his rapt attention.

Displays of her handiwork were everywhere. A veritable menagerie including birds, fish, flowers, and sometimes entire scenes spread throughout the house. One shelf displayed a barnyard diorama complete with pigs, horses, chickens, and a farmer watching over them all. On another shelf, she had gathered an entire orchestra. Before the assembled musicians, the black-clad conductor stood on a podium, his baton held high. Other objects were strictly decorative in nature, strange boxes and shapes of various colors. She, herself, wore a pair of earrings from which dangled two identical deep-purple birds.

This week of forced confinement with his grandmother was turning out to be interesting after all. Daniel could almost forgive his parents for abandoning him here while they took a holiday without him.

The paper opened briefly and collapsed again under her fingers as she worked the crease into a point that had not existed before.

"That's called a petal fold," she said. "This point could just as easily be one of the bird's wings as its head and tail. In a somewhat more complex model, it could become the head and tail of a dinosaur."

A smile of wonder crossed Daniel's lips as a breathy "Yeah?!" escaped. The lumbering crash of a great beast sounded in his mind, the mental camera panning up and up to catch the terrible gaze of the prehistoric monster. Heart-pounding music rolled in the background as the ear-splitting roar tore into the score.

"Will you do the dinosaur, Grandma?"

"That's a little bit harder than what we are working on here. You have to walk before you can run," she said.

The smile turned to a frown. "Aw, c'mon, Lorraine!"

Lorraine put the model down and pierced Daniel's eyes with her own. "What did you call me?"

The old woman held a great deal of power in those eyes. Daniel shrank beneath the steady gaze.

"That's what Dad calls you," he explained.

"You father is thirty years older than you are. When you get to be forty, then you can call me Lorraine, but right this minute, I am Grandma to you. Understand?"

Daniel nodded soundlessly.

"Now, where were we?" She carefully picked up the paper model.

"We were going to build a dinosaur," Daniel attempted.

Lorraine gave a small laugh. "Nice try, but first things first. This particular fold will become the classic Japanese

crane."

"But a bird is so boring. A dinosaur at least looks like it could do something."

"Birds look like they can fly. That's something. Let's finish this and then you can tell me if it was boring. Until then, observe."

She finished one side, turned the model over and stopped halfway through what she called a kite-fold. She looked at him and smiled. "You try it."

The boy shook his head, an uncertain smile crossing his lips. "No, I couldn't do it like you do."

She took his hands and directed them to the paper before her. "Yes, you can. Just follow the pictures in the book," she said tapping the open volume on the table before her. The book was at least three inches thick and contained thousands of step-by-step diagrams to hundreds of papyrus creations.

Daniel ran his fingers over the paper. The multicolored sheet had a cloth-like texture. He smiled and looked up.

"A friend who taught me like I am teaching you now sent them to me." She tapped the package and a faraway look entered her eyes. "These are special papers. Very special."

"What makes them so special?"

She reached out to touch his chest with her index finger. "Whatever is in your heart. That is why your heart must be filled only with good thoughts and beautiful things. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.*" The finger moved to his head. "Remember that."

Daniel looked questions at her. "Remember what?"

"Evil be to him who evil thinks. King Edward III of England said that a long time ago when he felt a lady in his court was being insulted."

With a shrug of his shoulders, Daniel let the quiet wisdom slip away. He played with the paper, looking back and forth between it and the pictures in the book, then with a sigh, pushed it away.

"You better do it, Grandma. I'll try one after you finish this one."

With a disappointed shake of her head, Lorraine quickly finished the last folds. The head and tail came down, followed by the wings, then a squash fold of the center point to hold the wings in place. "There." She held the bird up to the boy's glowing eyes and turned it over in her hands.

"Wow!" The word came out nearly a whisper.

Lorraine smiled. "See how easy it is? Like magic."

In a blur of sight and sound, the paper bird in her hands was transformed into a brightly colored beating of real wings that quickly took to the air. The avian guest grew larger and larger as it rose to the cathedral ceiling whereupon it disappeared as though it had simply passed through an open window.

"Grandma!" the boy shouted. "How did you do that?"

She laid the book down in front of him and passed him a package of square papers of various flat colors. "Everything you need to know is there. Just follow the steps—" She waved a hand over the line drawings. "—and you'll make your own bird just like I did?"

"Will it fly like yours did?"

She gave him a quizzical look. "Fly? Humph. Only in your imagination." She paused. "Which is more than enough." She rose to her feet and started to turn away. "I've got things to do now. Practice that one just like I showed you, then we'll work on something more complicated."

"But you saw it fly away!" he protested.

She smiled, amused. "Nonsense. I'll check on your work later."

She turned and headed up the stairs, taking her cloth-paper sheets with her.

Daniel's first attempts were disastrous. The results of his efforts resembled badly folded road maps and not graceful birds, but he was determined to achieve the magic he had witnessed with his own eyes. After two and a half hours of folding and throwing away failed experiments, he managed a respectable imitation of his grandmother's crane.

With a toss, the bird was airborne only to tumble ignominiously back to earth, never having beat a single wing; not even in Daniel's imagination. He picked up his bright pink creation and repeated the failed experiment with equally negative results. Applying a little scrutiny, he decided that the model was really fairly shabby, and tried his hand at perfecting the fold.

There were seven birds on the table when he finished his prize. The black bird was a masterpiece of sharp lines and rapt attention to detail. Proudly holding up the model, he tossed it into the air, and watched it

tumble to the ground.

A scowl of grim determination distorted his face as he tried desperately to figure out what the difference was between his creation and his grandmother's. He had followed the instructions step by step and his black beauty was perfect in every detail.

The rainbow aviary remained on the table as he got up to fetch his grandmother. It was time to ask her. Besides, she had to be proud of what he had achieved.

She was in her back yard garden, planting some purple flowers when he spied her through the double glass doors. He put his hand on the door to open it when his memory filled in the missing piece. Quietly, surreptitiously, he stepped back from the door and ran upstairs.

The tension was almost more than he could bear. The package of cloth-paper was not sitting out in full view as he had hoped. He had needed to search through all but two of her dresser drawers before locating it under a liner that smelled of roses.

His heart was racing by the time he had completed the bird base. "From here," he recited silently, "you can make a bird or a..."

Like waking from a dream, his hurried panic faded. He picked up the book and searched the pages for the object of his new purpose. There were several dinosaurs, but he passed over the first few with detached interest. He turned one last page. Finally, standing on its hind legs with two little arms up front, was a real dinosaur. The name was unpronounceable to him and he

would have preferred a T-Rex, but this looked enough like one. The others reminded him more of lizards than the terrible beasts of his imagination. Real dinosaurs were fierce, frightening creatures that tore through flesh with razor-sharp teeth. The others were just vegetarians.

"Begin with a bird base," the instructions read. He had a bird base. He was ready.

Each fold that followed was increasingly difficult, but with a perseverance born of a real goal, he pushed on, doing and re-doing folds as needed. This project was important and substantially more interesting than a stupid bird.

When he sat the finished figure proudly before him, it took only the sound of the table cracking under the rapidly increasing weight to make him understand that he had made a terrible mistake.

By the time the creature stood at what Daniel could only hope was its final height, Daniel was running for the stairs up toward the bedrooms. Nearly ten feet tall and full of primal fury, this dinosaur was everything he had hoped for. Now he hoped pessimistically that his creation wasn't hungry.

A snarl was followed by a short growl as the beast sensed his presence. The tail swung about and collapsed what remained of the table sending the chairs sailing across the room.

From the stairs, Daniel caught sight of his grandmother running back toward the house. The crash of chairs and table had not gone unheard. Behind him, the beast was already mak-

ing for the stairs and, an instant later, Daniel felt his leg being jerked back. His pant leg was pierced by one of the lethal teeth. The monster bashed his leg repeatedly against the stairs as it shook its head furiously in an effort to get the uncomfortable and annoying material out of its teeth. Daniel screamed in pain. A tearing sound signalled his release just as his grandmother entered the room.

"What in the world is going on here?" she asked surveying the damage. Then, her answer turned on her with a growl. "My God, Daniel! What have you done?"

Forgetting the boy on the stairs, the dinosaur spun its leathery head with lightning speed to face her.

Lorraine stepped back slowly, calculating her odds of making a run for the back door.

Daniel suddenly felt the full weight of his actions. "She's going to be eaten," he thought. "And it's my fault." He took off his shoe and threw it at the beast's head. The creature stopped suddenly, momentarily confused at the new disturbance, then looked straight up at the ceiling to find the source.

"No!" Lorraine shouted.

The other shoe followed the first and this time the animal swung around fully, its tail catching the old woman and sending her crashing among the debris of her dining room furniture. She lay there motionless while the monster set its attention back on the boy. Instead of running, Daniel stood there and looked at his fallen grandmother.

The creature moved slowly. The prey wasn't running anywhere. Size and strength were evidently on its side,

but it was suddenly wary. Daniel sat, waiting for the end. Perhaps his grandmother would forgive him when she saw him again. A moment of panic washed over him then. Surely, he would wind up in a very different place from her.

Something stirred from within the debris.

"Daniel." The boy turned, startled.

Confused, the beast also turned toward the sound.

Lorraine started fumbling for her earrings, taking each one off in turn. She carefully tore the hooks from the backs of the twin birds and threw both into the air. Upon leaving her hand, the birds breathed life, and took on an olive-brown color. By the time they reached their evolutionary ancestor, screaming and tearing at the animal's eyes and face, they had grown nearly a foot in length.

A great roar shook the house as the deadly carnivore tried to shake his attackers. Lorraine rose painfully to her feet and carefully approached the screaming, thrashing beast. Her hands weaved mysteriously over the animal's skin, and seconds later, she was holding a relatively harmless-looking model of a prehistoric raptor. Her avian helpers, a pair of mourning doves, alighted on the banister and stayed there, cooing softly. Meanwhile, she quickly and deftly unfolded Daniel's creation.

"You did good work, Daniel, but you didn't follow directions. Furthermore, you did not use the paper I gave you, and worst of all, you went snooping in my room."

Tears started flowing. "I'm sorry, Grandma. I almost got you killed."

"Not to mention yourself." She was surprisingly calm. "You forgot the king's lesson, and you did not follow mine."

She walked over to where the boy sat on the steps and bent down to encircle him in her arms. Suddenly, she did not seem so old or frail.

"I really am sorry," he sobbed.

"Yes, I'm sure you are. The question now is, how will you pay for the damage you have caused and make up for all the trouble you have made for me?"

"I'll work," he said through the tears. "I'll get a job and..." His plans for retribution were lost in a well of tears.

"Oh, stop this nonsense," Lorraine

said, getting up. She walked to the debris of her former dining room and retrieved the origami book from the rubble. When she returned, she flipped quickly through the pages until she found what she was looking for. "I still have work to do out there and you have a mess to clean up. When you get this room back in order, I want you to work on these." She pointed to the diagrams on the page.

Daniel wiped his eyes. The words he read forced him to look around the house once more and wonder.

"Table and six chairs," the heading read.



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A S K M R . S C I E N C E

Do you have a question concerning life or the true nature of the universe? Mr. Science can answer it! Send your question to: Ask Mr. Science, c/o ON SPEC Magazine, Box 4727, Edmonton, AB T6E 5G6

Mr. SF of Coquitlam, BC, asks:

Q : How does such a small kernel turn into such a big piece of popcorn?

A : Popcorn is currently manufactured by compressing pieces of flavored styrofoam-derivative with a hydraulic press, and surrounding each piece with a coating that is soluble in hot fat. When heated in oil, the coating dissolves and releases the imprisoned material inside.

Mr. KJ of Victoria, BC, asks:

Q : If a big earthquake dumps California into the sea, could we go surfing in Nevada?

A : Certainly, but you will have to wait a while. Tectonic processes are indeed going to separate southern and central California (from San Diego to the middle of the Golden Gate Bridge) from the rest of North America and move it to the north. In about forty million years you will be able to wave to your American friends as California travels northwards to join Alaska. It will take almost one million years for California to move far enough out of the way for decent size waves to beat against the Pacific shores of Nevada.

Ms. DM of Vancouver, BC, asks:

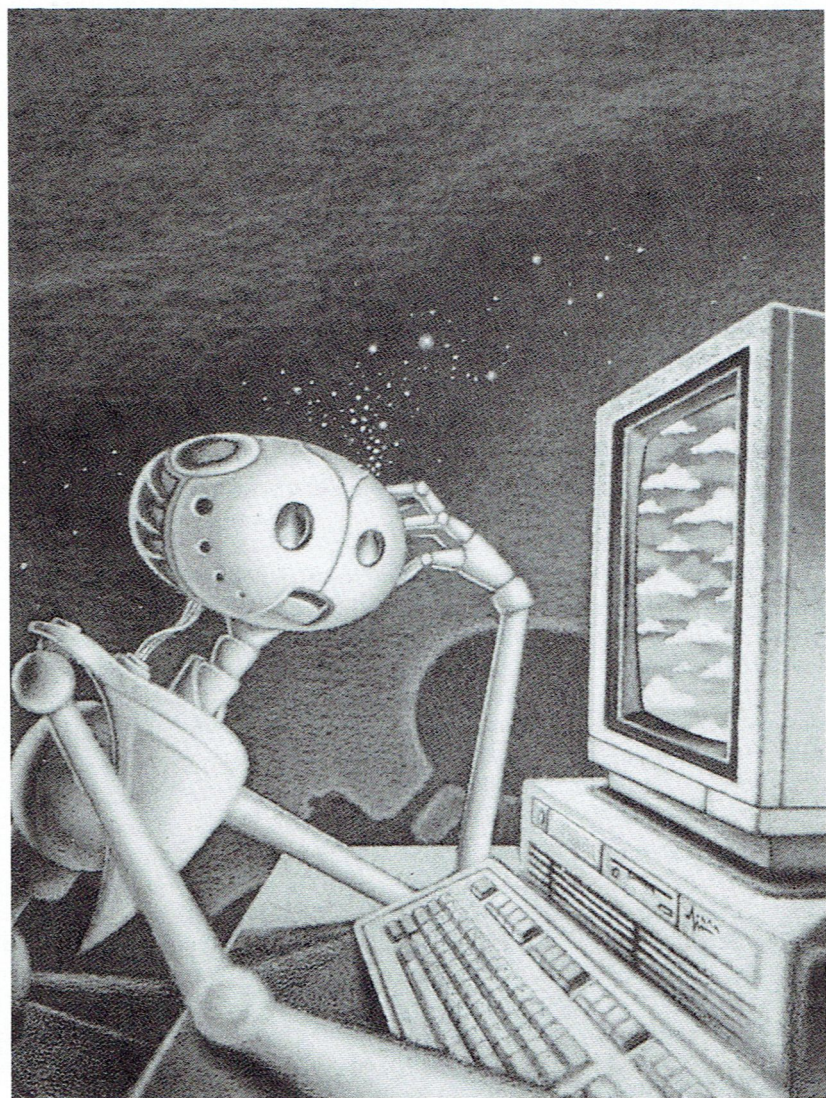
Q : Why are tornados always attacking trailer parks?

A : The real question here is: why are trailer parks always constructed over very large deposits of meteoritic iron? It is, of course, the distortion of the Earth's magnetic and gravitational fields caused by these massive deposits which attracts tornados. What drives people to build trailer parks in these locations is currently at about the same level as understanding as the behavior of lemmings.

Mr. AM of Vancouver, BC, asks:

Q : Why do leaves change color in the fall?

A : Boredom. Wouldn't you want to do something different after being in one place, unmoving, except for the vagaries of the wind, for perhaps eight months? \times



Art feature on this year's winner of the Aurora Award for
Best Achievement in Art, Robert Pasternak

ON ART: ROBERT PASTERNAK

This year's Aurora-winner for Artistic Achievement is Robert Pasternak, who is no stranger to the pages of *ON SPEC*. His amazing artwork has been featured on three covers—Fall 89, Spring 90, and Winter 93, and he has illustrated stories in twelve of our nineteen issues since Spring 89.

Comics were a big influence in Robert's artistic career ("I remember copying page after page of *Road Runner* comics, later in life realizing I was honing my eye/hand coordination."), as was the sword and sorcery art of Frank Frazetta. Comic book superheroes, Salvador Dali and the record jackets of Roger Dean opened the door to the world of the fantastic. Death was an enduring but ironic theme in his early work: he found it funny that the birth of his artistic realizations were spawning images of death, since they reincarnated his abilities to see life.

When Robert began painting in 1980, he found a new dimension to his imagination: color. His surreal images, produced with paintbrushes and pencil crayons, are so refined, so vivid and deeply colored, they are often mistaken as airbrushed.

A student of Forum Art Institute, Robert also studied painting under Nicola Bjelajac, figure drawing under Richard Brown at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, screen printing at Omniscreen under Jan Boning, and paper sculpture with Jack Butler. His work has been exhibited in such diverse places as the Winnipeg Planetarium, Gas Station Theatre, Ace Art, and in far too many galleries to list, from Winnipeg to Calgary to the Ukraine. He has illustrated for *Prairie Fire*, *ON SPEC*, *Aboriginal SF*, *Amazing Stories*, *Interzone*, *Color Lover* and many more magazines, and designed CD and record jackets for Greg Lowe and Harlequin. Recently, he did the front and back covers for a young adult fantasy novel, *Call of Two Minds* (Bain & Cox), by Carol Matas and Perry Nodelman.

"My science fiction art is different from the mainstream, compositionally," he says. "Traditionally, illustration has to be simple, to have that singularity of impact. My illustrations are a bit more involved, but I think people are capable of absorbing more." 🌀





Red Rover, Red Rover...

The theme for our Spring 1996 issue will be "X-F," or Cross-Genre SF, a theme we hope will inspire writers to explore some wild new frontiers. From now until the deadline (May 31/95 for the Spring 96 issue), we'll be looking for stories that are *combinations* of common (and uncommon) SF themes. Some, like crime/horror or dark fantasy/romance, are pretty common crossovers. What we'd like to see are some really off-the-wall combinations: crime/hard SF, horror/romance, ghost/magic realism, ET meets King Arthur—okay, okay, I take that one back! What we DON'T want to see is any form of "cute"; any kind of punchline or shaggy-dog story ("Guess what! He's an alien!"); splatter for no good reason; stories with no attention paid to character, motivation, plot (all those things that make a good story good). As always, we ARE looking for tight, well-constructed fiction with an emphasis on character. Oh, and did I mention that the cross-genre aspect has to be intrinsic to the story? It has to *work*.

Come on. I dare you. Take a walk on the wild side...or two. ☹️ 😊

Call For Papers

The Society for Canadian Content in Speculative Arts and Literature invites submissions for their multi-disciplinary conference to be held at CAN-CON in Ottawa, Ontario, May 12-14, 1995.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to, the influence of speculative fiction on the development of technology, social patterns, or public opinion; the uses of leading edge technology in the genre; gender roles and sexuality in speculative fiction; the existence or possibility of a uniquely Canadian speculative fiction; differences in the dominant motifs of French-language and English-language speculative fiction...where speculative fiction includes such genres as science-fiction, fantasy, alternate histories and worlds, much utopian/dystopian fiction, and some of the more literary forms of horror.

Presentations comprehensible by both learned colleagues and members of the general public are encouraged. Please submit an abstract of your proposed paper, not to exceed 300 words, as well as a more detailed, two page proposal and a SASE to: S. L. Reid, c/o Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Room B750 Loeb, Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 5B6.

There will be three sessions over the course of the weekend. Sessions will be roughly two hours in length, with four papers per session.

Deadline for receipt of proposals: December 31st, 1994

For more information, including information on how to attend, please write to the above address, or e-mail: slreid@ccs.carleton.ca



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MAKING HISTORY

by Christopher Brayshaw
illustrated by Peter MacDougall

At first glance, the beach at Skedans is littered with driftwood, kelp bulbs, and fragments of clamshell and bone. Only a longer look reveals the clumps of oil clinging stubbornly to the rocks, the pieces of styrofoam and plastic debris, the swath of brown foam along the high tide line. Sunlight floods between the clouds, leaving rainbows in the sea.

At the horizon, the light is so bright it hurts to look at it. Peter Becker cups a hand above his eyes to block the glare. He stands on the crest of a hill above the beach, where the film shoot he has come as part of is winding down at last. Tiny figures move among the sprawl of trailers and mobile homes with insectile determination. They carry crates and boxes to a seaplane waiting at the end of a dock; they drive forklifts and front-end loaders; they take down the containment barrier dividing the inner harbor from the polluted outer sea. The walkie-talkie clipped to Becker's belt buzzes with conversation, jokes, bursts of music: the sound of people happy to be going home. The production schedule has meant rising early, and spending long days with the same small groups of people. Now, with just one scene remaining, these groups are beginning to mingle. Just this morning, Len Strickland, the director, had coffee with the set dressers. Later, actors were seen helping the camera crew pack up video equipment. This thaw in relations is strictly temporary; the helicopter ride to the mainland will be enough to re-establish all the old

divisions. But for now, the novelty of these new acquaintances remains.

Rockets striking Cairo, says Becker's walkie-talkie. Someone has tuned in Anchorage radio. Now, every hour on the hour, rumors of war flood in from the world outside. There is a grim intrigue to the way the radio describes them. *Strategic repositionings, defensive initiatives, soft targets*. War seems inevitable, but no one can explain why.

Becker walks slowly down the hill and into camp. The buildings are hung with steamers and colored paper lanterns, decorations for a wrap-up party yet to come. Between the buildings, old Haida longhouses rise from the gloom. Their wooden facades are weathered a pale, silvery grey that gleams through the failing light. Becker stops to run his hands across the pitted boards, tracing the outlines of the house crests with his fingers. Eagle and raven, sea grizzly, killer whale, the intertwined figures suggesting a cycle of constant renewal.

In his twenties, he stumbled on an exhibit of Haida art in Vancouver: room after room of masks and drums and decorated cedar boxes. In the middle of the exhibit was an enormous wooden statue of a raven perched atop a clamshell. Tiny human figures spilled from the halves of the shell, and the raven spread its wings protectively above them, as if pleased with these new things it had found.

Becker was captivated. He stood there, motionless, while tourists with video cameras moved all around him. Their fat faces and hurried expressions revealed how they saw each object as

a challenge, something to mechanically digest and spew back at leisure. He resolved to understand the objects before him better than these intruders.

Len Strickland exploited Becker's idealism from the moment the two men met. Becker had been shaving; when the doorbell rang, he nicked himself. He pressed a bit of tissue on the cut and went downstairs. Standing there was a broad, balding man with a flushed red face and pale, straw-colored hair. "Dr. Becker?" said the director. "Len Strickland. We spoke on the phone."

"Please, come in." Becker led Strickland down a narrow hallway and up a flight of stairs to a living room overlooking the adjoining rooftops and the North Shore mountains. Books and papers were stacked everywhere; the walls were lined with wooden carvings, silkscreen prints, and paintings.

"Nice place," said Strickland, sliding a pile of books off a chair and sitting down. "That bentwood box in the corner—it's an original?"

"Carved by Charles Edenshaw in 1896. Now, what do you want?"

The director spoke quickly, leaning forward to make his points. "I'm with I.C.A.—International Creative Artists, a video producer down in Tacoma. Last week we won a U.N. contract. A one-hour documentary, on one of the protectorates."

"Which one?"

"Skedans, Queen Charlotte Islands. We want you along as an advisor." Strickland kept talking, but Becker had stopped listening. Unbidden, his mind reached back nearly fifteen years, to the first U.N. commercials. Stock footage of figures in radiation suits

walking scarred hillsides. A green circling globe. And the words, UNITED NATIONS BIOLOGICAL PROTECTORATES—PRESERVING WHAT REMAINS.

The U.N. didn't consult the countries whose wilderness it annexed, just moved right in on the grounds of *protecting biodiversity*. A move designed to placate groups with names like *Gaia!* and *Green Fire*: groups opposed to militarism in principle, but more than willing to turn a blind eye to troops deployed on behalf of the rainforests, or certain endangered animals.

Initially, the protectorates were hailed as an environmental breakthrough. The whole world wanted to visit, or, failing that, to rent the U.N. sanctioned video documentaries made by groups like Strickland's. But in 2019, war erupted in Kenya and the Baltics, and the U.N. called its troops home. Nearly bankrupt, and caught between the petty squabbles of its member nations, the U.N. allowed private corporations to "sponsor" the protectorates, thus ensuring the wild lands' survival, if only as commodities to be packaged and sold to those who could never visit in person.

Holographic plaques of Haida Gwaii. Sacred symbols selling audio cassettes, T-shirts, trading cards.

"Oh, I share your concern, Dr. Becker," said Strickland, showing teeth. "Some of our previous educational efforts have been—well, lacking. This time we thought, *Do it right*. Come to an expert like yourself, show us things we might miss. What do you say?"

Ever idealistic, Becker said, Yes.

He's aware of the irony here: young Becker escaping the tourist cameras, only to return, later, as intercessor for a more insidious kind of tourist. Still, it took him several months to realize his interest in Haida culture concerned a past the film did not intend to recount. The screenwriters conflated the real and the imaginary, changed dates, left deliberate gaps in the historical record.

He went walking, counting the film's deceptions. Because he said little, the other crew members talked freely around him. War was their constant theme. Immersed in his studies, he had not realized how quickly the small conflicts around the globe had grown. *First strike*, said the camp shortwave. *Air burst*. *Kill ratio*. *Fire storm*.

"Nowhere's safe these days," said the crew's animal handler, a big, burly man with a blunt square face. He and Becker stood on the dock, feeding pellet food to the animals. "You catch the news this morning? Someone bounced a mortar round off Heathrow."

"Any suspects?"

"Are you kidding?" The man pried a lid off a plastic bucket and began tossing chunks of frozen herring to the seals and otters. "Someone builds a bomb in his basement, blows up the World Trade Center, London *Bridge*, they can't count the groups could have done it."

They stood watching the seals. Sleek black heads looking up out of the water.

"I don't like it here," said the man. "If anything ever happens I want to be on the mainland. You could do something, get away quick. Here all there is to do is wait." He tamped the lid of the

bucket down with his hand. The suppressed violence of the gesture startled Becker; he took a step away.

"Sorry," the man said quickly. "Just edgy, I guess."

"I think we all are," said Becker, and that was the end of it. But the memory of that conversation persisted through the weeks to come. Almost against his will, Becker found his attention drawn to the fears that plagued the crew. Half the time the signs were almost subliminal: the jarring clash of plates in the canteen; fingers playing nervously with coffee cups and cigarettes.

Now, crossing the field beyond the camp in the steadily failing light, he found his thoughts drawn back to the man's face and his quick nervous voice. If only—

"Mr. Becker!" A woman's voice, though at this distance, he can not make out her face. She has a flashlight with her; he watches the small circle of light bob across the field toward him. Then she draws nearer, and he recognizes her. Emily Patton, one of the lighting engineers. An older woman, with long grey hair and a kind, wrinkled face. "Did you hear the news?"

He shook his head.

"A bomb went off in the Kenyan parliament. It looks like civil war."

"I was wondering where everyone had gone."

"They're all in the canteen, watching TV."

"But not you?"

"I had to get away. I can't stand it, just sitting there and watching. You feel so *useless*."

"Where'd you go?"

"Just out to the point."

"And now?"

"To bed, I think. I don't want to know what's going on. It's not like I can make any difference."

"Safe night, Emily."

"Goodnight, Becker." He watches her walk off toward the camp. Its lights are yellow in the dusk.

He takes the walkie-talkie from his belt and turns the volume up. Static at first, then voices. The evening news is on. *Mobilization*, says the radio. *Fall-back strategy*. *Full saturation*.

He wishes he could turn it off. But he can't. And slowly, relentlessly, the war draws him in.

The following morning dawns grey and cold. Becker, waking late, shivers out from under blankets. The other bunks are empty. No one else is around. He pulls on a sweater and track pants and goes outside. He walks past the generator and the editing trailer and turns in at the canteen. The small room is packed: the entire crew, thirty-seven men and women, sit watching a portable TV propped on the bar. There is a thickness in the air, a palpable tension. He squeezes in at a table beside Strickland and Emily Patton. "What's going on?"

"Africa went nuclear," says a dry-mouthed Strickland. On the TV, a great white light blooms on the horizon. The image is rough and cut with static. Becker sees, in quick succession, columns of tanks and armored cars rolling through the desert; the explosion again; then a shot from space, the blast fading to a dull red glow beneath the

clouds. Then the camera cuts away, and someone reaches over to turn the TV off. No one in the room objects. After all, Africa is far away: something regrettable, but also something no one can do anything about. And there is still work to be done.

Today's scene is straightforward:

EXT - SKEDANS HARBOR - DAY
SEALS and OTTERS frolic in the waves.

NARRATOR (V.O.): Pollution and the destruction of their natural habitat once brought these animals to the brink of extinction. Now, a new U.N. captive breeding program is bringing fresh hope to future generations.

A lie. The animals the crew is to film were flown in last week from California. No one talks that much about it; Africa is on everyone's mind. Becker, as per usual, is lost among the crowd. He ends up with a group who are coaxing otters into cages and carrying them to dockside. Somebody has tuned a radio into Anchorage: bursts of music and news updates filter in through static. Tanks are rolling north through Kenya. Tel Aviv was hit an hour ago by long-range missiles. No one knows who's attacking who, or why.

At the end of the dock, the animal handler Becker's spoken to before lowers a caged otter into the water. Strickland and his crew lean in to get the shot. But the animal begins to snap and bite. The handler jumps back, mindful of bitten fingers.

"What's going on?," demands Strickland, made anxious by the shoot

and the radio news.

The handler indicates the sea, the telltale rainbow sheen. "They took the containment barrier down last night. Otters won't go near the oil."

The radio says, *Long-range missiles now deployed.*

"Just get them in the water," snaps Strickland. Becker can see his jaw jumping. Everyone seems ready to burst. "I don't care how you do it."

The radio says, *Cairo, Yokohama and Auckland.*

The trainer unlatches the cage and picks the otter up by the scruff of the neck. But quicker than the eye can follow, the animal turns on him. There is the bright flash of blood. Then the handler throws the otter to the deck and comes at it fast, kicking hard with his workboots. There is the snap of broken bone. The handler shouts as he kicks the animal, but his voice is raw and his words make no sense. Becker hears the dull thump of the blows, the animal's screams hitching off, until with one final kick the handler shatters its skull. And stands there out of breath, cradling his bloody, bitten hand.

There is a squeal of static from the radio.

A moment of utter silence.

And high in the sky, a flash of light.

Everyone's talking at once. *What was that? Did you see? I don't think—*

Light in the sky again, hundreds of separate points, like stars coming out at twilight.

No power, Mr. Strickland, says a cameraman. My unit's dead.

Electromagnetic pulse, thinks Becker. Stars burst wildly above: orbital

satellites targeting how many missiles? The crew are backing off the dock, some of them running, as if the forest trees might shelter them from the spectacle overhead. Strickland stands motionless, his hands dangling at his sides. *Wait*, he says, *wait, wait*. His voice is thin and lost in the silence that spreads above the islands all the way to the mainland. And beyond? Becker can't think that far, can't get his mind to grasp the concept. Each point of light a missile, powerful enough to wipe an entire city from the earth. The light of the TV screen, multiplied thousandfold. The first flash in the sky must have been Anchorage; he vaguely recalls a sub or missile base there. He imagines the bombs digging deep in the earth, lifting unimaginable tons of rock and soil into the air, to be swept across the earth on the jetstreams. Even now the sky has paled. Thin lines of grey-brown cloud pass across the sun, and great swathes of sea and islands are darkened in their path.

He makes his way off the dock past little groups of people staring up at the sky. He walks back to the camp alone. He finds a corner bed in a bunkhouse, far from any windows, and creeps beneath it. He lies there quietly, waiting for the sound of the others' voices, but time passes, and they do not come.

At some point he falls asleep. When he wakes it is darker. The radiation must be all around him now. He imagines the rays and particles, dissolving invisibly under his skin. Accumulating there. He even thinks, irrationally, of rescuers in contamination suits

crossing the room to peel back sheets and mattress and find him beneath, curled up like a stillborn child. Then a wave of disgust rises in him, and he forces himself out from under the bed.

He goes across to the window. It has begun to snow outside. Thick grey flakes sift down in the early twilight, drifting across the roofs of the trailers, the paper lanterns and dry brown grass.

He goes cautiously outside. There are voices nearby, and the sound of a chainsaw. Strickland and a few others have gathered around a pile of boards and broken mortuary poles. The men have pulled the totems down; two cameramen work quickly, cutting them up with axes and a chainsaw.

"What are you *doing*?" shouts Becker. Before he knows what he's doing he's running forward to grab at the cameraman holding the chainsaw, knocking him off balance. The saw slips and plunks between them in the snow.

The cameraman seizes Becker by his jacket. Becker lashes out at him, pummeling wildly with his fists. One of his blows glances off the man's jaw. He grunts in surprise, lowers his shoulders and charges, catching Becker around the waist and knocking him to the ground.

They freeze there, puffing, sizing each other up. Then Strickland steps between them. The director's eyes are wide and red; Becker can see the bulge of a half-empty bottle in his jacket pocket. "Please," says the director. "Please. Let's not fight..."

"Do you know what it is you're *doing*?"

"Power's off, Becker. Fried by the

pulse. Nobody wants to freeze."

"But you—you're..." The words rise and catch in Becker's throat. "The poles—you can't—"

"Do you want us to die in the cold?"

Becker shakes his head; he's almost in tears. His whole body's shivering with cold and radioactive fever. "There'll be nothing left. You see that, don't you? You see?" He glances from face to face. The men's expressions are slow, dull-eyed, too close to that of the man who killed the otter. "All right," he says, barely loud enough to hear, and walks quickly away.

Night now. He must have slept again; time is starting to slip away from him. From the window of the bunkhouse he can see the bonfire. Figures stagger drunkenly round its flames. He recognizes Strickland, a cameraman, one of the cooks. Dirty snow whirls against the glass; when he can next see, the men are indistinguishable, reduced by snow and darkness to capering silhouettes in the firelight. There are a few shouts, the sound of breaking glass, the steady crackle of the flames. Becker turns his head away. He moves slowly through the building, navigating by touch alone. His breath comes in short freezing clouds. He has reached the door and is about to step outside when he hears, very clearly, the sound of a piano. And a human voice.

Back inside the building he follows the sound to its source. He ends up in a doorway opening into one of the dormitories. Firelight fills the room with warm yellow shadows. Emily Patton sits crosslegged on a bunk with a tape

recorder in her lap. A plastic Japanese model, that somehow survived the pulse. From it come piano notes and a man's hoarse voice. An oddly named, older British singer. Piano and voice together now, ringing out to fill the general dark.

The song's over in minutes. Becker and Emily don't speak. They don't need to. He slips out quietly and makes his way down to the harbor. Ash-colored snow has drifted across the boats along the dock. The snow covers the dock, the otter corpse and abandoned equipment. He stands back among the trees, watching the snow fall silently into the still black water. All around, the tall grey shapes of totems rear toward the sky. He moves carefully among them, brushing snow from wooden beaks and noses and ears. He can't help but contrast the totems' interlocking images with the crew, so hopelessly divided by the blast, each individual cut off from every other, separate and alone, like islands in the sea.

When he returns to the bunkhouse, Emily and her tape recorder are gone. The fire outside has died down. The room is dark and still. He covers himself and sleeps. He dreams.

On the plane up the coast he saw, through the clouds, a flash of light; he thought of sun on water. But the ocean itself was on fire, an oil slick burning out of control all up and down the coast, a pall of thick black smoke trailing west across the sea. Fireboats ringed the blaze; the silver spouts of water cannons rising and falling in slow motion.

He rolls over, sliding deeper in the dream. He is walking through a ruined

building in the rain. The walkway underfoot is slippery and wet with moss. In the middle of the building is the raven statue he saw years ago in Vancouver. But now, the figures inside the shell are struggling to free themselves. Their bodies are slick with blood; their hands leave huge, oozing marks on the outside of the shell. The raven flaps above them in panic, trying to force the halves of the shell together. It is no use. At last, the bird flexes its wings, and, croaking despairingly, disappears into darkness. *Pharmakos*, it croaks, *pharmakos*, *pharmakos*.

He wakes with the cry ringing in

his ears. He puts on his boots and jacket and goes out in the darkness. Down the beach trail in the hail and dirty snow, a crackling of ice hangs heavily on the leaves all around. There is no sign of the totems through the thickly falling snow.

Pharmakos. No blame.

He stands by the shore a long time, listening to the waves come in, the sound in the darkness like the slow measured beat of enormous black wings. •

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HOW TO GET THE YEAR'S BIGGEST ANTHOLOGY OF NEW CANADIAN SPECULATIVE FICTION

Maybe you've already heard of the speculative fiction issue of *Prairie Fire* magazine from friends who got their copies at ConAdian. Maybe you'd like to buy a copy of this 256-page extravaganza for yourself, but don't live near a bookstore that carries *Prairie Fire*. Well, here's your opportunity! You can now order a copy of this special issue by mail while supplies last.

HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL GET: The issue (Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer, 1994) comes in two versions. The ConAdian version features a colourful wraparound cover by acclaimed artist **Eleanor Bond**. The newsstand version features a startling front cover by Aurora-winner **Robert Pasternak**. The content of both versions is the same and features stories by **Jean-Louis Trudel, Keith Scott, Teresa Plowright, Elisabeth Vonarburg, Heather Spears, Andrew Weiner, Peter Watts, Ursula Pflug, Yves Meynard, Derryl Murphy, Paula Johanson** and many more. Other features include an article on Canadian versus American SF by **Robert Runté**, an interview with, and new work by, **Christopher Dewdney**, and an essay on A.E. van Vogt, as well as poetry, art and book reviews. The issue is edited by **Candas Jane Dorsey**, who contributes an introduction.

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ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS

by Brian Panhuyzen
illustrated by Mitchell Stuart

Melly gasps through her nose as the view unfolds before her, a vast plain of hissing grass, golden, endless. She shifts the bulging pack from her shoulders, drops it to the ground, and sits on it, panting. The cold mountain is behind; now her pale skin will brown and dark hair bleach on the brilliant yellow savannah below. A hot breeze fills her face.

She had mistaken the rumbling of the last few hours for the sound of rock slides. A distant thunderhead towers over the plain, its texture like white clay, a grey mezzotint of rain issuing from its belly.

She rests for ten minutes and checks her liquid compression pack. It contains ten days of water. She takes a gulp, locks it back into the bundle, and heads down the slope into the green foothills.

Two days into the grasslands she catches a honeybee. Bees have been extinct for six hundred years.

Its anger is white hot; it buzzes furiously, abdomen pressing into Melly's closed palm. She ducks into the tent and uses one hand to unleash a flap on the back-pack. From a pouch she extracts a flat disk which she raps on her knee and opens into a half-liter specimen container. The bee's agitation increases and a tiny bolt of fear forces Melly to open her hand. The bee bounces deliriously against the tent's

fabric, searching for an exit. She zips the door shut and stands ready with the flask. The insect's wings are a blur as it purrs through the air, testing the walls before finally coming to rest on her forearm. She slaps the bottle down, flicks it sideways, and bangs the lid into place.

When she exits the tent she is sweating, not just from the heat but at her own annoyance. Why did she release it? She holds the bottle against the low sun. The bee ceases its frantic buzzing and rests on the bottom, its abdomen pulsing. Melly brings the bottle closer and notes a tiny hairline ridge, a seam, snaking along its breast.

An hour later the insect lies on a collapsible workbench, deactivated, trapped in a web of test leads and sensors. Melly reads the displays, pumps the sensor streams into RAM modules. The bee is composed of organic polymers. It has a protoplomic brain with a behavior program written in MIMIC-18, a biomock language. It is an utterly illegal construction.

The encyclopedia displays a short entry on honeybees, species *apis mellifera*, which met extinction when a viral hormone designed to destroy another species known generically as the killer bee was released by an explosion at an insecticide plant.

She skims the entry and finds reference to "a sharp organ of defense and offense often connected with a poison gland": the stinger. She sits back, unconsciously stroking her palm; this explains her reaction to the angry bee, triggered by instinctive memories deep in the reptilian brain. Yet this bee has

no stinger.

She sets up her EM scanner and finds an emission source twelve kilometers to the southeast. This corresponds to the location of a dwelling on the satellite map. She punches a code into the communicator, sending an infringing alert to headquarters in Victoria.

She reassembles the bee and locks it into an evidence cube, then prepares a light meal of soypods and water on the gas burner. She skips her evening tea and goes to bed while the first stars are emerging across the vast sky.

It is late afternoon the following day when she arrives at a modest dwelling surrounded by several hectares of irrigated land upon which cattle are grazing. They eye her silently as she passes, seem to nod a little before returning to their feeding.

"Hello there," a voice calls as she approaches along a path of gravel. She glances around but sees no one.

"Up here!" An old man is standing on a branch in a sycamore tree twelve meters away. He is holding a bird's nest which he drops into a pouch in his blue coveralls. "I'll be right down." With surprising agility he scrambles down the gnarled trunk and extracts the nest to examine it. Melly walks towards him.

"Robin's nest. The pair didn't return this year so I thought I'd grab the souvenir," he says without looking up.

"Are you making simulisms?" Melly asks briskly.

"They were real robins," he says, his eyes meeting hers. His face is dry

and sunburned, the eyes deep-set but pleasant. Sprigs of white hair peek from under his cap and a small tuft of white fur grows below his lower lip. "You're from the agency, right? The SCA."

"The Simulism Control Agency," she says professionally, handing him a plastic card.

"The cows are real. The rooster is real. Those cats are real," he states without looking at the card.

"What about the bees?"

Now he examines the card. "Melanie Judduck. Why don't you come inside for a drink?"

"No thank you."

"You must be thirsty. That pack looks heavy. Anyway, my wife's expecting me inside." He hands the card back, turns, and heads towards the house. Melly stands for a moment, watching him pet a cat and enter the wooden building, then follows.

The house is dim after the sunlight and smells of onions and tea. The walls, trim, and furniture are made of dark wood, rough hewn, banged together with pegs. Melly follows a hallway back to a small kitchen. Sunlight spills through a window above the sink and dazzles on a silver thermos, an anachronism, clutched in the man's hand. He is pouring black tea into a china cup.

"Hello there," greets a woman's voice, soft and birdlike. A smiling woman is sitting at a heavy table, her hands around a teacup. "I'm Avera. If I know my husband he didn't introduce himself. His name is Aristophanes." The man turns to her and scowls.

"But he likes to be called Fan. I

don't know why."

"Because I was once fantastic. At making things. Worked for you people once," he says, handing Melly the cup.

"I don't understand."

"The rigid thinkers. The blank looks. The false replies. The cheaters. The government."

"We like to think of ourselves as a moral agency," Melly replies softly.

"As in, 'What's the moral of the story?' Don't let fools make decisions for you. Every fool should make his or her own decisions." His face is flushed now but his eyes refuse to lose their friendly glow. He looks away as if he realizes this.

"Sit down, Fan. Drink your tea."

He obeys without hesitation, burns his lip, looks stricken. Melly sets her pack on the floor and her cup on the table and takes a seat.

"You've made honeybees?" Melly asks, nudging a switch on her belt to start the recorder. The Agency insists on complete evidence to ensure brisk and simple convictions.

Fan begins to defend himself when Avera interrupts, "Well of course we did. For the alfalfa. It doesn't pollinate on its own, you know. I'm sorry, I should've asked if you wanted milk and sugar."

"Black is fine."

"Oh, but we have fresh milk." She gets up and goes to the fridge, her actions quick and precise, removes a tin pitcher and places it on the table. "It's there if you want it."

"Thank you. The bees will have to be destroyed." Melly puts some milk in her tea; it is thick, almost cream. She

considers asking for a cup of it to drink by itself. Her ration pack contains nothing but preserves. She decides against the request, adds, "And there is a fine."

They say nothing, sip their tea, look away. The light from the window seems to increase by increments. Melly looks down at her cup and sees her own face quivering in the pale liquid.

Now she should say something professional, something with resolve that will close the case cleanly, instantly. Say it and leave, let the break team drive in and finish the job, move on to the next dwelling. She has a taped confession; any physical evidence she collects is secondary.

"Can I see where you make them?"

Fan illuminates and she knows it was the wrong thing to say. He drains his cup, stands, and leads her out of the kitchen. Avera brings up the rear carrying Melly's half finished tea.

They enter another door and are suddenly cast into a world frozen in transformation. The walls are rough wood, dark paneling. There are halogen lights, an oaken work table, sophisticated tools and displays. The room is neat; parts are stacked in drawers, tools are laid out or hanging. Avera sets the teacup on the table and activates an IBM IntrinsicCube programming station. Holograms of code ripple across its surface as Avera manipulates the cube's faces.

"Avera writes the code. It's in MIMIC-18, with a twist. Someone assembled the base code of honeybee DNA just before they were wiped out. We've extracted segments of brain development instructions and extra-

polated code genetics for instinctive behavior. They think like bees. Their holographic brains use protoplasmic engram coding. They learn like bees."

"They are bees," Avera says.

Fan spreads some of the bee parts onto his palm and as a demonstration begins to assemble them.

"Do they make honey?"

"Not yet," Avera says, running some new code on the cube, "Well, not quite. They don't need it so I suspect their hearts aren't in it. Each bee is powered by a nitrox cell; we have a prototype sucrose converter which Fan is testing. But the main thing is they don't reproduce. There is no queen, no drones. We suspect that if we created the true dynamics of a beehive with honey as a necessity, honey would be made."

"And none have stingers."

Fan snorts. "Nope. Nothing to harm them around here. Most birds and spiders extinct. If they were reproductive I'd add stingers. Never know what's out there. In fact, we could put anything we want in their venom sacks. They can get angry; that's in the program. But they can't sting. It was a bit of extra work I didn't think was necessary."

"You have to consider motives of authenticity," Avera adds, partly engrossed in the code flowing before her. "Are you reproducing features for the sake of nostalgia, or are they necessary in the real world?" She is adding new lines to the program, altering others, running simulations.

Melly bites the inside of her cheek. "I've seen enough."

"Come see the hives!" Avera says suddenly, leaping up and hurrying out.

Melly forgets to protest, picks up her tea and follows.

Daylight is like a solid wall as they exit the house and mount a small hill past the sycamore tree. Avera opens a gate and makes for a series of white crates beneath another tree, this one a maple. Melly hears the drone and sees the bees flying to and from the hives. A thin whine of fear begins in her gut, but she suppresses it. They have no stingers.

Avera is engulfed in a fog of buzzing insects. Some are landing on her, pressing their abdomens down. She pulls the lid off the crate and reveals thousands of bees, the noise deafening, flitting around on honeycomb racks.

"These hexagons, the combs, are synthesized beeswax. If the bees made honey they could combine that with pollen and make their own," Avera cries over the noise. Melly feels bees on her, feels their impotent tails, a hundred pressing fingertips.

"It would've been nice to have honey," Fan muses, looking inside. "You read about it in books. 'Sweet as honey.' 'The sun pours down like honey.' 'The land of milk and honey.' We have milk. We could have honey."

They close the lids, head back to the house. A bee has landed in Melly's tea, is buzzing around in it, sending a fine mist of liquid against her hands. Avera lifts it out tenderly, brushes off its wings with a handkerchief. The insect sits on her finger for a moment, drying in the sun, then lifts lazily off, drifts in a shaky arc, and heads for the hives.

Avera watches it all the way in, then takes Melly's teacup. They continue to the house's shaded porch.

"So this is what you do. Search for machines and charge the people who have them?" Fan, who has been watching her, asks.

"Yes. I have two more months of it. Then I'm being promoted to an office job, a supervisory position in Victoria."

"You have seen our bees, how they are made and how they live. They are harmless!" he says.

She watches his furrowing brow. She remembers the trek across the mountains in search of unlicensed machines, reporting them, having them destroyed. She found them everywhere. The engineers, the builders, they were the ones who caused the Plague and survived it, and yet they cannot stop designing and constructing their machines. It is in their blood. It is their way.

She looks at them both, sighs deeply. "The bees are not bad. They are wonderful. But they are illegal." She brushes the hair from her face, gazes out onto the prairie.

"Damn the law!" Fan shouts. "Damn it! Paranoia and fear. Machines didn't cause the Plague. It was people. It was people who didn't know to respect life, who tried to improve—"

"Fan!" Avera hisses. "Melanie, you can help us. You can see that the bees are good. You know what we've done here. You must have faith in our ability to learn from our mistakes." Avera touches Melly's wrist, then squeezes it softly. She looks at the old

woman, at the cracks radiating around the eyes. A little egg of sadness trembles in her throat, threatens to crack.

Avera continues, "We have evolved to depend on our machines. You have to see the bees as a replacement for something that we destroyed!"

"I know! I know! I know!" Melly shouts, pressing a fist to her eye. "I know." A tear slides along her cheek, a tiny, salty sphere, which slips between her lips. "But the call has gone out. I have already sent for the break team. In a few months they will come. You can escape. Go north or south, get away from here. Leave the bees."

"We can't," Avera replies solemnly.

"They will be destroyed anyway!"

"We live here," Fan adds. "With our bees."

The builders and their stubbornness, Melly thinks. Why does this obstinance touch her, make her feel like dropping her pack and joining them? A lovely young man in Powell River. Two middle-aged women near Banff. Avera and Fan and their bees, their incredible, illegal bees.

"I have to go. You should at least prepare a defense for when the SCA team arrives."

"We will," Fan says. His eyes have dimmed and his body looks smaller, more frail.

"I'll get your pack," Avera says, entering the house.

Fan looks away, touches his throat, coughs, and presses his sleeve to his brow.

Avera returns with the pack and a tin cup full of milk. "Drink this before you go. It's good for you."

Melly takes a sip, savors it, drains the cup. She hands it back, turns, and walks out of the green and back into the gold of the prairie. The next dwelling is two hundred kilometers.

Three months later a truck rolls in beside the sycamore tree, a great steel machine with giant balloon tires. Painted on its side in block letters are the words "Licensed Machine." Six people climb out, each in the red coveralls of the SCA decontamination team. Tomo, a tall man with white hair, heads for the hives, unhitching a plasma torch from his belt.

Berna is a young woman, perhaps twenty. She squints at the haze overhead, sees the thunderheads piling over the horizon. They should finish the job before the storm breaks. She approaches the front door, bangs on it. No answer. She signals the rest of the team to start unloading the equipment, electron scramblers, a plasma smelter. A few approved machines to eliminate the illegal ones.

Sharl and Pete miss her signal; they are brushing each other off. Berna feels a pinch in her neck, close to her ear. The pain becomes unbearable. She smacks it away and a large insect rolls into her palm.

"Hey," Sharl calls out. "These things sting." Just then, Tomo returns from over the hill, screaming.

A tiny distant humming grows suddenly intense as the haze descends. •

FUTURE NOSTALGIA

by Jocko

With the arrival of the time machine
Nostalgia became the dominant mode of transportation.
Companies and workers who had been running out of time
Spent an hour a day improving past performance—
The past becoming the only way to get ahead.
Nobody made any bad investments any more.
Lovers visited childhood sweethearts, made mixed marriages
Between time periods, giving birth to children sometimes
En route, between eras. Business and tourist companies
Sprang up, saying things like, "Don't put off
Till tomorrow what you can do yesterday."

Of course, the time pollution got pretty bad
With people and things so easily mobile
And some days you couldn't tell what year it was.
Scientists said that the time disruption by tourists
Was creating a new present every second—
People and things, time machines, the earth itself
Not always existing from one instant to the next.
But, as usual, nothing they said had any danger
Of being provable because future travellers
Had as many tales to tell of monsters and lands as sailors
Home from the dragon-laden seas.

Soon there were more possible futures than people to live them.
Stories lost their beginning-middle-endness.
Syntax disappeared. People became nostalgic
For past ideas about the future—something no one knew how
To look forward to any more. Era bigots and eternity fascists
Fought over time's nebulous territories.

So much had happened and yet
While people put the concept of time and history behind them
Nobody noticed how little anything had changed. •



GWENDOLYN LYNETTE

by Roma Quapp
illustrated by Linda Dunn

A rocking motion draws me from my dreams. My mind slips over all the possibilities, discards them just as quickly. Cat? No, he's lying here asleep. Ghost? But the movement is too great. Next-door neighbor blow his house up? Could be, but I heard no big bang. Earthquake? Must be. The Capital does lie on a fault line, after all. And no end of faults to fill it with. Right, Gwendolyn Lynette?

Two thirty-six on the clock; earthquake number 23 and counting. That's how many there have been this last while. Meaning since they removed all but their Newtritious Lab-Gen Food from supermarket shelves. Since they implemented the ban on cats. Since I left the papers, left the newsroom pandemonium to wreak its own destruction, started my Awareness and Assertiveness Course at the Women's Center. Since Mr. came back from the Western Desert and moved in next door with the old crone and Gwendolyn Lynette.

This is the first time I've awakened, mind you, to the trembling of my bed. The first 22 quakes played their tremors on my mind: a stirring of sleeptime vision, a tumbling of thought. Cracks opening, fissures forming. I dreamt of rock grown restless beneath its skin of concrete and steel, soil teeming with chaotic organisms chafing for life, seeds seeking air and light and room to sprout. I tossed and turned, dreaming turmoil, agitation, mindless writhing waiting for a certain

force to form. Never waking, until tonight. The earthquake's strength must be increasing; the Earth shuddering into awareness to shake off her shackles. I shift beneath my down-filled covers; a tendril of dream still holds me, a root reaching through darkness, promising completion.

Perhaps it's my new-found sensitivity makes me dream this way—that's my Awareness and Assertiveness course paying off, although not the way they intend. Be Aware of the Rules, they say, Be Aware of your Rights, Assert your Place in the Pleasurable, Plentiful, Protective Popular Plenum. Instead, as the relaxation tapes roll over my hearing and the drone of doctrine dribbles into my brain, I am aware of life beneath the concrete, of an awakening under our very feet. Do the others in the class feel it? If so, they are being coy, as coy as I am, roting the answers to the Societal Readjustment questions, never letting even a glimmer of distress show in our bright and cheerful eyes. As coy as this cat, lying there oblivious at my feet. As if he didn't know that cats are illegal now.

I've told him many a time: Cats, Animals of Prey Prone to Wander Uncontrollable, are Henceforth Not to be Housed in The Capital, by Decree of Council MMMDCDLXVII. But he refuses to go. Crazy Pippin, curled up with the sinuous ease of youth. He barely perks an ear, only looks at me and yawns, his steel-grey fur rippling under the thread of snow-filled streetlight that cuts across my bed. A midnight-mad kitten, he marched through the door the day after the Pro-nouncement of Decree MMMDCDLXVII

and hasn't looked back since. My friend, my familiar. As if he knew my house was a haven, a place he could help out. Pippin's even woven his web of bewilderment around our Mr. friend next door.

For his part, that man marched in in spring a mere nine months ago. Fresh from the Popular Plenum's Agri-biochem Labs in the Western Desert, the Perfecter of their Newtritional Food and newly appointed Alimentary Inspector, he pulled up a truck and unloaded, paraded the old crone and Gwendolyn Lynette into the house and painted his horns on the door. The house had stood empty the previous three years, in blatant disregard of the Rule of Maximum Use of Habitation—the yard beginning to teem with life, the concrete crumbling and bugs and worms and beetles crawling through. Seeds from my sowings had blown over, found hold in tiny crevices, sunk their spreading roots down deep; wild grasses, dormant so many years, shooting up with slight but steady power, twisting away from barriers but always pushing on. The Earth reclaiming her own. But he quickly put an end to that, tamed the wildness, reframed the yard in accordance with the Rule of Governance of Unwanted Nature, repoured the crumbling concrete, reboxed the regulation 10% groomed and chemfed lawn at the farthest end of the lot. Pulled up the life, covered the chaos, imposed control.

The old crone watched from the side, her angular, stooped frame wilting inside her flimsy cotton dress, too flimsy for the burning sunrays and cool

spring air, her silver hair wild and waving in the wind like the leaves on a tree. As though waiting for water to reach her roots, as though yearning to sink her feet into the soil slumbering somewhere beneath her soles, as though waning, weary, aching for the time of rebirth. Watching, even once it was done and the Mr. went back through the door hung with horns and hooves. Then the moonchild Gwendolyn Lynette would creep onto the grass, cautious, opposite my carefully neglected triangle of lawn, play with Pippin and listen to my prattle.

Right, Pippin? You little lump, curled up against these winter nights. A hot water bottle would be a safer means of keeping my feet warm—no danger it had eaten any radioactive mice. Sure, yawn in my face, I can see you think a lot of the Alimentary Inspector's reasoning.

I nudge him with my toes; one touch is enough to get his motor running. How come you're so calm? Don't the earthquakes arouse primal, fear-filled memories in your cat-family brain? Or do you, too, dream destruction, wait patiently for that day? Just like you wait, patient, for Gwendolyn Lynette, let her pet you gently, staring at her with your glowing green eyes. Her father could report us if she so much as said a word, have you terminated and me jailed, our bastion of disarray battered down. But you crouch down, melt into the short-cropped grass and all eyes pass over you, unseeing. And I stand watching, waiting for the day when the Inspector's eye will pick you out and our lives will explode,

unless the earth decides to swallow us all first. That would be material for the headlines.

The headlines are getting crasser and crasser these days, you can't believe them anymore. Fantasy-maker papers, they print only what advances the social cause, or what appeals to the psychotic ego gaining satisfaction from others' pain. *Lab-Gen food eliminates dependence on poisoned Earth. Man beats wife to death with pressure cooker over unwashed socks. Scientists cheer birth of first en-gene-ered child. Suicidal dwarf attacks school bus, 26 children dead.* They screamed it in my ears every day until I was almost deaf. "Florence, where's the city editor, I've got a hot one. Hey, Florence, this'll knock their socks to Mars!" I listened, impassive, kept everyone's business in order, calmed down mad reporters, jimmed reluctant computers until they agreed to work. Florence the miracle-worker, they called me, the one who could fix anything. Power outages, late buses, engine failure, press breakdowns. But I lived through it in a daze, as though asleep, waiting for something to happen. Then Gwendolyn Lynette and the old crone moved in, and I felt new life, wholeness, imminent completion. I left the newsroom, started my Awareness course, and began to feel the earth rumbling beneath my feet. Began to feel alive.

Ah, Pippin, I can't sleep; I might as well make myself a cup of coffee, for all the difference it will make. Two fifty-two on the clock and I'm half awake and restless. Still snowing outside, if the dull quality of the streetlight is any in-

dication. That's what makes my steel-gray room glint so ghostlike, makes Pippin a warm blue icicle on the bed.

He rises and stretches, his green eyes glowing hugely under the diffuse streetlight, kneads the blankets briefly, then jumps down and stalks into the hall.

The housecoat drapes like a legless, headless person over the hanger in the closet and falls limply into my hand. I shrug into it, slip on my slippers and pad down the hallway to the kitchen.

Pippin's there already, sitting shadowlike on the windowsill, flicking the tip of his tail from side to side. He knows he's not supposed to be there, but he looks so bewitched I don't insist. I fill the kettle with water and plug it in, scrounge around inside a dark cupboard for cup and coffee filter. Just enough light glows through the window to guide my night-sensitive eyes. This latest snow has pushed the accumulation to over a meter deep, and it's only midwinter. My silver birch stands naked, drooping under its fluffy mantle. Alone she grows, in solitary defiance of the Rules, the only tree remaining in the city.

But perhaps alone no longer. A sapling shot up, this spring, in a corner of the Mr.'s chemfed lawn. After he'd torn out all wild things, set out the Approved Grass panels, that's when it chose to poke its brazen head above the surface of the lawn, in a far corner from my birch. Strange how he doesn't see it. No doubt Approved Procedures are supposed to be good Once and For All, no need to double-check. But there

it grows, the sapling, and across from it my silver tree, drawing her sustenance from deep within the earth, rising tall and green and spreading her roots below the surface, beyond all boundaries. I'll let no one in to cut her down. My guard is up, around the whole yard—there, no one else can penetrate. No one but Gwendolyn Lynette and the old crone, listening to me talk of life; no one but Pippin, my protector, patrolling the borders of my paradise to keep me blind from hostile eyes.

The kettle whistles long and shrill through the silver air, and I pour the water into my mug and retreat from window to table, eager to huddle into the warmth of the rising steam. My ankles are absolutely freezing; this housecoat is far too short. I warm my hands over the warmth, breathe in the dark aroma. And brace my arms against the table, stiffen my neck, to keep from meeting the liquid with my nose as the earth again shakes beneath me. Look at the coffee swirling, Pippin, as though stirred by a spirit. I can hear the grinding, this time, hear the earth shivering under her blanket of snow, shifting in her grogginess, aching to stretch her cramped arms and legs. Everything is swaying, the table and chairs rock lightly on the white vinyl floor, Pippin lists stupidly, a mystified expression on his face. The walls creak; the window cracks; I hear the yawning of the earth and a rumor of crumbling, shattering, echoes of fear.

Ah, there we go, Pippin, the rocking seems to have subsided and the walls are still standing. Three thirty-nine

on the clock. Not long, a mere flexing of muscles in sleep. Relax, pussycat, the coffee's still hot, the snow is still falling, I'm still sitting here half-asleep dreaming my tremulous dreams. *Awakened by the earthquake, Gwendolyn Lynette stirred restlessly, unable to sleep. She could feel an uneasiness in the air...* Yes, Gwendolyn Lynette, moonchild, what do you make of all this?

Moonchild, I call her, because of her round, shining face and straight black hair. She lay on the grass opposite my solitary birch tree, let the cool prickliness poke into her arms, her face, let the renegade ants and flies walk over her bare skin. Listening to the earth's heartbeat. I talked to her where she lay, gently petting Pippin; described the great expanse of leaves that used to grow in a neighboring ravine, leaves by the millions on towering trees, endless in my imagination, although by the time I was four the trees had been razed and the exposed creek covered with a twelve-lane highway to take the thousands of cars pouring in from poisoned points south.

She listened, and the old crone stood and listened, too, as I told my tales and knelt by my coldframes to tend the plants inside. No concrete in my back yard, despite the Rule Concerning Appropriate Coverings for Contaminated Land. I cover the land, but not with concrete—I use coldframes to keep the naked earth at bay and hide the greenness she produces. I showed Gwendolyn Lynette the plants as they blossomed, explained how the flower swelled into *real* food, the fruit contain-

ing seed for further life. She sat quietly, absorbing my words like water, eager and attentive, growing into awareness, although always on edge, waiting for the sound of the door opening and Mr. her father coming out. Waiting, her head hunched between her shoulders, turning repeatedly toward the door. Too young yet to throw off his domination, too powerless, too alone. Alone as we all are, taught to believe the Rule of Absolute Rights of Each & Every Individual, any power we might have made impotent by petty spats.

But perhaps not alone. Because I was there, telling stories, and Pippin playing along. I talked of growth, of birth and death and the lives of many beasts. I told her her own story, gave her a future of possibilities: life walking freely under trees, life with the smell of sea-spray in the air, life in a castle by the sea, with silver and orange tigers to hunt for food. I showed her worms, beetles, and grasshoppers, and we once watched a caterpillar transform into butterfly, watched the cocoon break open and a new creature, winged and beautiful, emerge where only creeping ugliness had been.

He caught us unawares that day, the day the butterfly emerged. Entranced, we watched it struggle, even the old crone bending near. And then his voice: a single word—"Get." The spell shattered and I feared he might have seen through us: Pippin leaping on his lawn and me under the silver birch, an intimacy of words spiralling from me to the girl and on to the old crone. Gwendolyn Lynette scooted onto the concrete in a flash; the old

crone straightened, as impassive as ever; and he turned, wordless, face contorted, and re-entered the house.

Our response was automatic, actions based on fear, even though it's they who should be frightened. Who are frightened at anything they can't control. War and destruction, those years of my early childhood, chaos, conflict, conflagration, men seeking dominance and control. Now the victors exercise control, or think they do, build Rules to guide our lives, to keep all things in hand. Build Rules to keep us safe from the earth they have contaminated, build islands of concrete where people can live, while the earth writhes in torment all around. Or so they say. I see no torment here. My silver birch rises high in the sky, reaching for the clouds, and my tomatoes and zucchini and beans, none of them have withered yet from the earth's supposed malady. And the earth will not be cloistered. She lies, sleeping, though lately she has been growing restless, fretting at her chains.

She will be reborn, as the butterfly was that day. We waited, in suspension, finally redrew our triangle and the spell reformed itself around the whole. The cocoon broke; slowly, laboriously, the butterfly emerged. Triumphant, brilliant, red and orange and black, it spread its wings into the sun and flew away free.

Gwendolyn Lynette, our back yards are deserted now, I don't see you anymore. The winter here is too long to be without a friend. Where are you now? *Restless, Gwendolyn Lynette glanced around the room, looking for*

the source of her unease. You do well to feel uneasy, living with that man.

When I talked to her, her face would brighten, her smoke-blue eyes would sparkle, her black hair shine and a smile flicker on and off her mouth. That smile turned to anger, the day he broke our spell. Fierceness flared in her eyes, and anger that he dared interrupt the butterfly's birth. A latent fierceness, despite the fearfulness of our response. Yet it was his face that held the expression of fear, fear of contact with the unclean, fear of losing control. Fear, perhaps, that she didn't immediately drop dead, a touch of anguish at this brief encounter with inevitable death?

Gwendolyn Lynette, I am eager for this winter to be over, for the long months of whiteness to give way to life. To see green again, the color of a newborn leaf. To let down our guard, see and be seen, walk freely upon open earth. Gwendolyn Lynette, the old crone, and I.

Ah, but I am drunk on my dreamings, Pippin; the coffee is gone, the mug is cold and my ankles are fairly shivering. Four-twelve on the clock. Pippin is back up on the windowsill, his green eyes huge in the snowlight. What are you thinking of, puss? He's staring towards the birch tree, entranced, as if in memory of that night six months ago. Cats do not remember, so I've read. But I know better. Pippin-cat, what are you looking at? Let me come see.

I stand, then my knees give way and the floor tilts; there is a crack of glass and a grinding of rock deep below my feet. The earth is tossing more

violently now. She is set to throw off her covers and arise.

I stumble forward a few steps, cling to the counter and watch Pippin, hackles raised, staring out the window, which is split through its center by a fine black line. Behind me come groans of floors creaking, walls shifting, books falling, and the distant slide of rubble. Am I the only one awake to hear, or is the whole city wrapped in snow-muted fright, scrambling to escape? I stand there an interminable moment, fixated on the cat, the crack in the window, the noises all around, until I realize I am standing, knuckles white against the countertop, inside a spell of silence. It has passed.

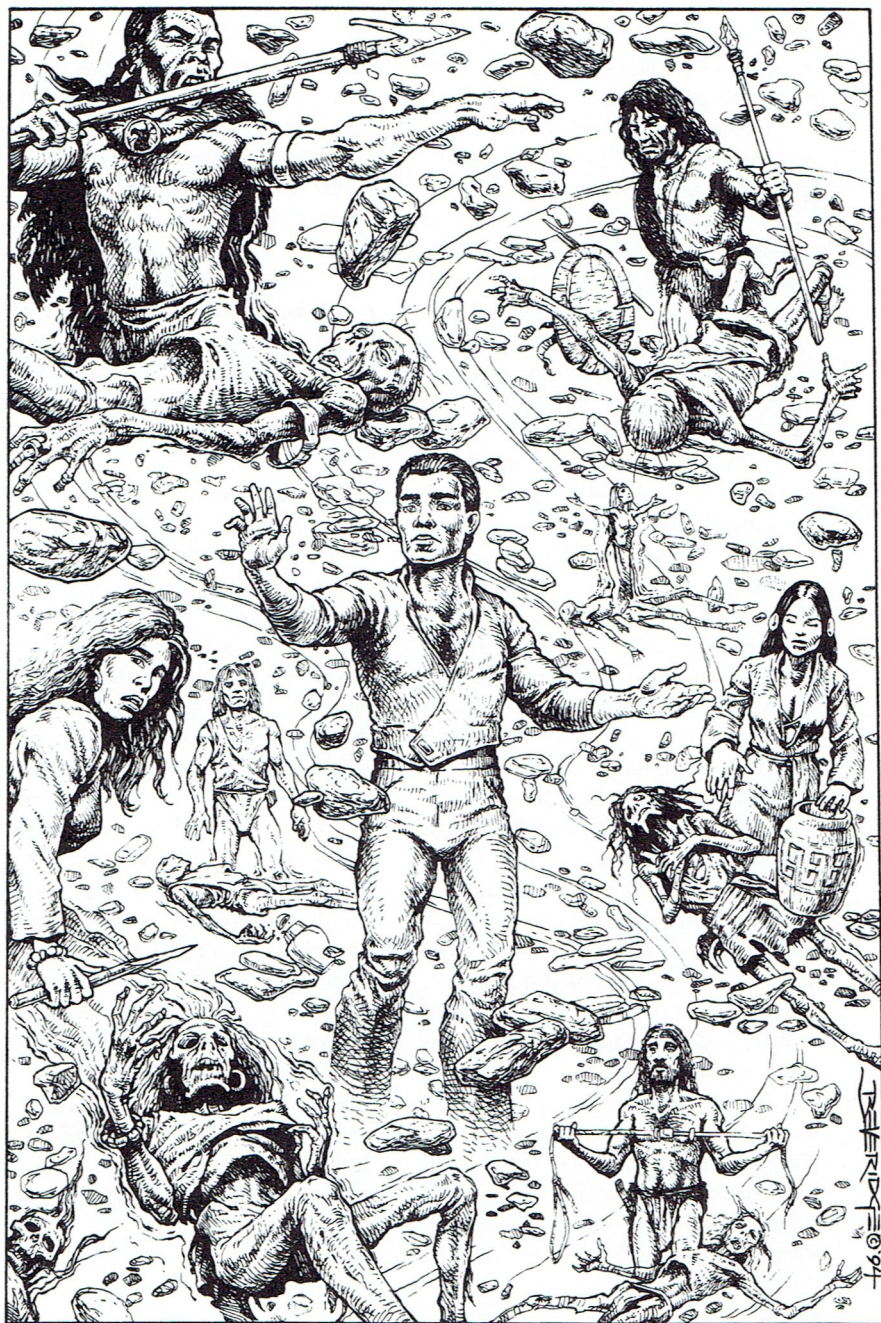
It was about this time, wasn't it? Four twenty-one on midsummer's night. The northern sky still glowing, a trace of dawn appearing in the northeast. I woke up and went outside; it was a frosty morning. Pippin pranced out with me; you were sitting, the old crone standing beneath the silver birch, watching the stars grow dim. As the full-grown sun burst over the capital's towers, Pippin grabbed my hand and bit me, then ran over to you and did the same. The old crone held our hands, she too old for bleeding, and our blood flowed over her hands, sank into the Earth, and made us one.

Tonight is midwinter's night. I can see no trace of dawn, but there is a shadow beneath the silver birch. I follow Pippin to the door; he scratches furiously and the sense of urgency draws me outside, too impatient for

coat and boots despite the blowing snow. The snowdrifts are high but the wind has packed them thoroughly so I don't sink in too far; Pippin runs lightly across the top. Beyond the porch I look up: the Mr. house has crumbled. Where are you, Gwendolyn Lynette?

I clamber close to the tree and pause for breath; eddies of snow swirl around me but here I do not feel the cold—my exertions have warmed me. The shadow has disappeared. Or has it? I peer through the snowlight and see Pippin poke his head up from a hollow by the trunk. All right cat, I'm coming. I take two steps towards him and suddenly slide through to my hips.

It is as I struggle to extract myself that I see him: the Mr., or rather his body, head askance, legs skewed, where he tried to cross the barrier into my yard. Running from our rumblings, seeking shelter from the destruction of his world? Or pursuing those who hold the powers of the Earth? I rock myself forward until I find solidity under my knees, then step towards the silver birch. By the base of the tree she stands, Gwendolyn Lynette, barefoot, in only her nightgown, snowlight glancing off her face like off the face of the waxing moon; beside her the old crone, equally barefoot and unclad. I move into the apex, completing the triangle, the way in and the way out, while Pippin dances around us; we groan and strain in labor, casting off chains of concrete, steel, and glass, birthing a new sun. We are fully awake now. •



GONE TO EARTH AND ASHES

by William Southey

illustrated by James Beveridge

They keep my father in a freezer in the museum near where they found him. For a few ECUs you can go and gaze down at his impassive, inscrutable face. There isn't any glass or anything. It's like one of those coffin freezers at the grocery store, the kind they keep the frozen fishsticks in. You can lean out over and there isn't anything between you and him but a meter of cold air and a silent alarm. Nearly everyone begins to reach into the tank to touch him, but a vibrating alarm goes off in the guard's pocket and he comes to shoo you back. You clasp your hands behind your back and bend over again and peer down. A meter of cold air; a silent alarm; and three and a half thousand years.

There isn't really all that much to see. God knows I've spent enough time trying to see it. He lies there, on a bed of artificial ice sculpted to look like the crevasse where he was found. A copy of his leather knapsack, his few tools, and his pouch of barley and wheat. They have grown some of the grain. You can buy a loaf of "authentic" bread, or a bottle of "genuine Celtic" beer in the gift shop. They say they isolated a culture of prehistoric yeast in his stomach, though it doesn't talk about his stomach on the label.

After you've looked long enough at the remains you can go over to the displays. There's one on the Celtic culture of fifteen hundred BC, and one on how the frozen wanderer came to be found. "...He was so perfectly preserved that at

first we thought he was a hiker. I mean, somebody modern. I yelled for Hans to radio the ski patrol..."

You can read about how they germinated the seed and grew the grain. And how they reconstituted the yeast for the beer and bread.

Maybe you can figure out what I'm setting you up for, but it's not really my fault. The consultant who designed this gallery thought of it before I did. The last display in the gallery is how they made me.

You see, the old fishstick there isn't really my dad. He's me. Or maybe I'm him.

If you stopped and asked someone in the street to tell you what a clone is like, you'd probably get told of an adult, an identical copy of a person, grown in a few months, with all the memories of the original and none of the willpower.

It's not really a clone that they're talking about at all, but a doppelganger. That's what people respond to, but it's alchemy—magic, and not any kind of science.

I don't know what the guys who made me thought they'd get. You could look it up in their research proposals I guess. PhDs all round. I'll bet though, that even though they all knew better, somewhere in the back of their minds they had that magical model of cloning. They must have been disappointed. I didn't wake up and whisper the secrets of a lost age into their ears. I didn't wake up at all.

I slid out feet first covered in blood and slime and was held upside down

and had my butt slapped. I mean, I think. I don't remember that part either.

Oh, they all got their PhDs and research fellowships anyway. Over forty of them so far. I contributed plenty to the sum of world knowledge. The medical people got the most out of me, and the physical anthropologists. There was furious speculation about how tall I'd grow with a modern diet and all. I ended up about 175 cm—just like first time. It's right on the average, so I don't know what it proves. There were four doctorates here alone.

They argued a lot about what to do with me once they got the cells dividing. One group was pretty adamant that I should have a host mother with the closest possible genetic match. It still kills me what they discovered. After extensive testing, in the "Celtic" parts of Europe, they couldn't find anyone with any distinctive "Celtic" genes at all. In fact, one of the closest matches was with a black woman from Philadelphia. I'll bet that really pissed off the racial inheritance guys no end.

I wonder how long it took when they held the news conference to announce my birth for the significance to sink in on all the various fascists and Nazis floating around Europe and North America. You know, that I was probably the most racially "pure" guy in the world. Hell, I can trace my lineage back three and a half thousand years. There aren't too many other people who can say that, unless they're the Emperor of Japan, and maybe he's lying.

So being the whitest guy in the world and all, I get lots of people after my time. I mean, I've had personal

appeals from liberation fronts that I've never heard of. That no one's ever heard of. There are an awful lot of people in the world who are pretty obsessed with purity. Sometimes I think that it's kind of ironic that here am I, a minor celebrity, and with people pestering me all the time, and I can't extract much in the way of benefit 'cause all of my groupies are scum. It also turns on a lot of people to think that they are maybe sleeping with somebody from an ancient culture. People confuse me a lot with the fishstick. They think I'm him. Even I sometimes think I'm him. The problem is that it's absolutely impossible to know who he is. I mean, I know as much about the frozen Celt as anyone else. More than anyone maybe. I've had to. I could teach a graduate level course on the subject if I had to. The point is that I learned all of it. I read it, or someone told me. It could be a pack of lies and I wouldn't know the difference.

I've started to dream that I'm him. I wake up and I've had these absolutely realistic dreams that I'm him; or rather that I'm me, and I'm doing something absolutely and certifiably Celtic. Getting those tattoos that are on his chest. Wearing a torc. Building a lake dwelling. Or a passage grave. Not all the time; sometimes I'm doing ordinary things. Just living. But I'm still the Celt. What torments me though, is that lots of times the dreams contain wild inaccuracies; anachronisms, or details that support exploded theories. Sometimes I wake up and I know that something about my dream was dead wrong. Like I'm wearing a winged helmet or some-

thing. I figure what it is and two days later I have the dream again and that detail has changed. My helmet will be okay, but something else will be wrong, and I'll lie there asleep. Dreaming. Only I'll start to get anxious, waiting to discover the new flaw. When I find what I'm looking for it's no relief. I just wake up. I bet if I was transported back to that time it would be so unlike the theory I've learned that I wouldn't know where I was.

So I don't know what the back of my head is trying to tell me. Sometimes I try to imagine that somewhere deep inside, hiding in my backbrain or at the base of my brainstem there's a bunch of neurons that's him. That would talk to me if only I could understand.

•

Of course we encouraged him to take an interest in his heritage. We knew that being who he was, he'd always face the same questions, so he'd be better off if he had the answers. We never tried to hide much from him. One of the things we insisted on when we adopted him was complete authority to raise him as we saw fit. I think if we had it all to do again, we wouldn't stay here. It's very much a university town; everyone knew who he was, so we couldn't have hidden anything even if we'd wanted to. The other kids at school used to tease him unmercifully. He'd come home crying and it would just about tear my heart out. We never really knew what to tell him. I sometimes used to feel so cruel sending him back to school day after day.

We didn't try to tell him everything

all at once. At first we just told him that he was adopted. I think he'd tell you that he knew that before he knew what it meant. Later on we told him about the ancient man found frozen in the glacier, and we told him that that was his father. I remember he was still quite young then. He looked up at me, and his eyes were sad. "But how, Mom?" he asked. "How did he freeze to death?" After that we used to take him to the museum every now and then "to visit his other dad." He got to be a favorite of the museum staff, and they practically let him have the run of the building.

We put off telling him the last part, about the body in the museum not being his father, exactly, until we thought that he would be more likely to understand it. In the end though, we never did tell him. I don't know how he found out. One day he said something that made it clear that he knew what was what. I suppose he read it somewhere. I suppose we should have explained then that the body in the museum was just like his neolithic twin brother, but we just let it lie. I was rather dreading trying to explain genetics and the mechanics of reproduction. It was rather a relief that he already knew.

I used to worry about all the different father figures he had. There was his dad; my husband, and the body in the museum. Dr. McQuillan of the anthropology department was his great friend at the museum. I think Bob McQuillan was the only member of Project Rebirth who had any idea what kind of a person grew out of their work. He used to take my son with him when

he went on digs. I always wondered if he'd become an archeologist or work in a museum or something like that—he certainly had the background for it. That made three fathers already, and something he said one day made me realize there was still a fourth—the one that was absolutely unknown, his biological sire, thirty-five hundred years dead.

I was seventeen when old Bob McQuillan died. For a couple of years I think that the museum had been trying to ease him out. They'd put a new guy in as curator of the department—a human evolution guy, who really excelled in office politics. They gave Bob an office, and the title of Curator Emeritus. I began to think that he couldn't become emeritus fast enough for the new administration. Once he became ill and stopped going to work I stopped going to the museum as well. He didn't have much in the way of family, just a sister in Chicago and some nephews. They all sent wreaths. After the funeral his lawyer called me and told me I was Bob's heir.

McQuillan wasn't rich, by any means, but he did have his house, and the money he'd saved from fifty years as a professor. He was pretty comfortable, I imagine. Nonetheless, I found myself in an odd position as father, having a son with more money than I. Not that he threw his money around, or blew it. But when he turned eighteen, and the executor let him have control of the money, he abruptly left school and

went travelling. I know he wasn't happy in that school, but he had only a few months left before graduation, and I know he'd always planned to go to university.

He went to odd places, like Dublin, Stockholm, or Vienna. We'd get cards and letters, and he'd phone. We always knew where to find him. I wasn't very happy about it, but what could I do? He was of age enough to do as he pleased, and had the money to indulge his fancies. In a way I suppose I envied him.

•

I think I know why he went to the places he did when he left. I realized one day when I was reading an old *National Geographic* in the lawyer's waiting room. All those places were places where there were the remains of ancients. Bodies found in peat bogs, or glaciers, or pickled in the salt mines. I pictured him standing above them, as he used to do when he was quite small, as if he was scouring that frozen face for clues. I pictured him visiting the scant half-dozen others, as if to ask each of them why him, and why not one of them. Or all of them, maybe. It made me sad, and I began to cry, and I hurried out of the office and went home. Those were trying times. With just the two of us in the house, my husband and I came to realize that our marriage was over, and we broke up. I think my son was well out of it, in Helsinki or St. Petersburg, or wherever he was.

•

I found those great northern capitols

immensely depressing, but still I had to visit them. I lived in each for a few weeks, or even months, and I went to the museums and universities, and the bars, and I just walked around. Usually the corpse I'd come to see was available for public viewing, so I could just slip in and do what I had come for. Once I had to identify myself and talk my way past a suspicious museum director. I don't know what he expected me to do. I'd come to see a girl of about sixteen who had died two thousand years ago and ended up in a peat bog, only to be dug up a few months before I arrived.

I just wanted to look. I ended up taking the museum director and the head of the research team to lunch, but there was nothing I wanted to talk to them about. I was bored with answering the questions they wanted to ask, and the questions I had weren't for them.

In a way these people—these anonymous Celts and Latts and Finns and Slavs—were my family. Like the fishstick my father, they were washed up out of time. I wondered how they felt about it. For them the wheel was still. From dust they had come, but to dust they hadn't returned. I imagined them feeling that they had two or three thousand years of unfinished business. I wondered at the irony that I, of all of them, was the only one who had returned to the ranks of the quick, and I had forgotten what they wanted me to do. I felt like a messenger who has forgotten his charge. Like there was nothing that I could do but go and stand helplessly in the same room as my silent relatives. Stand and wait.

•

We called our son Brendan, after the travelling Irish saint. While neither of us has much in the way of Irish blood, we felt it was a name we both liked, and it was as Celtic as any other. And in a way he was very much a traveller, from the deep past.

I remember his nineteenth birthday with tremendous sadness. It is difficult for me now to determine whether the sadness I felt came from me or from him. I took a few weeks off from my job at the library and flew up to spend some time with him in Copenhagen. He came to meet me at the airport, and I can still conjure up a picture of him walking toward me from across the taxi-stand in the rain. He was wearing an old canvas raincoat, and his wet hair dripped into his eyes. He looked forlorn. By the time he came up to me though, he was smiling, and I was delighted to see him.

I was still in the thick of my divorce, and I leaned pretty heavily on him for support. I think we were both pretty determined to have a good time of it.

So I never did find out what was troubling him then. If he could even have told me.

•

One night I sat bolt upright in my bed in the middle of the night. It was her. I'd been dreaming, and once again I was back in another time. Threshing grain with a flail, and winnowing it by tossing it into the air from a cloak. Tossing it with the same motion that today you'd shake out a sheet you were folding. What woke me up though, was the

shock when I realized that the girl at the other end of the cloak from me was the young girl from the Irish bog.

What in hell was she doing there? Was this the first time? I couldn't remember if I'd seen her before. I mean, I know I'd seen her at the museum but I couldn't tell if she'd appeared before in my dreams.

A few nights later I recognized two other figures from my dreams—a Salzburg miner and an old man from a Finnish bog. This time the shock didn't wake me up so quickly. She was there as well. None of them did anything. They just looked at me, as I suppose I stood and looked at them. They all seemed motionless, and horribly, horribly out of place. Trapped. Like me their family, friends and lovers were gone to dust and ashes, and they remained.

I woke up filled with resolve. I closed up my room and flew back to Dublin. Now that I had seen her I had to get another look at my bog-girl. There were moments when I couldn't tell what, really, I was doing. When I'd stand back from myself and try to tell myself that all this was a product of the back of my brain. That I didn't even start noticing faces until I had seen them in the universities and museums. After a time it got so that I began to recognize all the faces that appeared in my dreams. There were less than thirty that appeared regularly. All the bodies I'd been to see on my tour were there, a total of seven. Who were the others?

•

Almost as soon as he entered his twenties, Brendan started to settle down. I

still hoped that he'd enter university, and I went so far as to have a word with the registrar here. After all, Brendan's roots at this university run pretty deep, with both his mother and I working here. But when I told Brendan what the registrar had said, that he should write a letter of application, he just smiled and said that he'd think about it, and I knew that he'd no intention of writing anything.

Instead he took a job as a helper on a American dig in Ireland. It angered me that he was content to work as a laborer, when after the training Bob McQuillan had given him he was probably an archeologist to equal the grad students who ran the place.

I enjoyed working on the dig. The site was really run by a doctoral candidate in her late twenties. Nancy hired, trained, and organized the crew of professionals—people like me—and volunteers, archeology students from American universities. It quickly became clear that I knew what I was doing on a dig, so after a time she assigned me to show some of the new students the ropes. Archeology is one of those disciplines, like classics, which are in transition. Although the vast majority of the people who run it are men, probably about eighty percent of the students coming in at the bottom are female. The funny thing is, it's been like that for more than a generation, and I'm not going to speculate why. Anyway, three out of the four students were women, and the five of us got to be pretty tight. I didn't mind teaching them.

It was an upland site we were digging, a neolithic passage grave, although not a very exciting one. The Professor had two other sites going that summer, and he didn't come round much. Brendan fit in well with the crew. He was clever and careful, and he worked hard. I put him in charge of working beside the four novices we had on the dig, and he did a good job with them. I think the girls all tried to work their way into his tent, but he didn't seem interested, and once that was settled there was no more disruption. Most of the site had been dug in 1975 and the tomb had been entered, so most of what we were doing was mapping the stones. We didn't really expect to find anything exciting.

One morning I happened to be working near him when he suddenly raised his head from his square and announced, "They've found a body in the peat."

Well, you didn't need to be an archeologist to know that. It happened two years before, and we'd all trooped off to see her. It was the biggest story of the season.

"No," he said, "Another. Just now. Who wants to come?" Brendan was one of the few on site who had an old car of his own. He seemed absolutely certain of what he was saying, and at the same time he looked scared to death. I don't know if you've ever had an experience where someone you think you know fairly well suddenly does something totally out of character, as if he had literally taken leave of his senses. Well, Brendan seemed like that.

I could see that nothing was going to keep him from driving off somewhere, but I didn't think he should be driving. He looked ill. In the end I volunteered to drive him and some of the others in our rented van. He sat in the passenger seat and said "right" and "left" in a calm voice. He led us down on a fairly direct route to the peat diggings. Wherever he was going, it wasn't all that close to where we were camped. It might have been fifteen miles as the crow flies, but we took about forty minutes to get there. I have a fairly good sense of direction, and I was paying close attention to where Brendan was leading us, in case he had gone mad, and I was going to have to find my way home. From what I could tell later, the route we came on was winding but pretty much the most direct.

I got goosebumps when Brendan suddenly said "There," and pointed to where a cluster of men stood around a fresh peat cutting. We all got out, and followed him over across the long field. We were practically running now to keep up. Brendan jumped straight down into the trench and knelt beside the figure at the bottom. The men had spread a sack across the face, and something made me keep my eyes on Brendan as he reached over to pull the sacking aside. He turned as white as a sheet.

I think Nancy told the papers that we were just driving by when we noticed a disturbance. They didn't say much about me, and anyway, I was in no shape to talk to anyone. I had a full-scale breakdown then, and I think I

spent the afternoon in the back of the van hugging my knees and shivering. I pulled aside that muddy sack and my whole world crashed in on me. I looked down on a face that no one had seen for thousands of years, and I knew it. I'd seen that face dozens of times.

Brendan never did return to the dig, so we never got to ask him the questions that we were all burning to ask. We had to help him to the van, and he sat huddled in the back looking shaken and shaking. Catherine came with us as we drove to alert the *Gard* and the Board of Antiquities. I dropped Brendan straight off at the doctor's, who prescribed a double whiskey and a warm bed. I felt guilty about leaving him, but he was in good hands, and I had to get back to the others waiting at the bog. I never saw him again. His mother came for his things.

It was the season after I'd last seen Brendan that the news came. Another neolithic body found in the Swiss Alps. What caused all the outrage was that by the time the find was reported it had been vandalized. Doused with gasoline and burned, almost beyond recognition. It was weeks I think, before it was clear that it was an ancient corpse at all, and not modern. There were all kinds of dismayed and outraged editorials about it, and not just in the *Journal of Antiquaries Research*.

Oddly enough, I thought of Brendan when I heard the news. I remembered his face as I saw it through the drizzle, when he knelt and pulled aside the sack and saw that girl for the first time. I wondered how he'd take the

latest news. I was in Ireland again, preparing for a new digging season, and I almost wrote him with an offer of a job.

The next was only a few months later, I think. Dragged from a bog in Denmark and buried at the edge of a farmer's field, where his dog dug it up within days. It was barely damaged at all, although of course from a scientific point of view all the contextual evidence was destroyed. I don't imagine we'll ever find where it spent the last few thousand years.

There was nothing more until the next spring when a rambler found a skeleton picked clean and scattered about a Scottish mountainside. There were a few more found that spring. Ancient remains found burned, or buried to rot, or somehow exposed.

By this time the press had become involved. The story was mysterious and eerie, and fascinating. It was clear that the most successful archeological diviner in Europe was systematically destroying his finds.

How many, do you think, were dug up and removed from those conditions which preserved them, and never found again? No member of the archeological community could help but see it as anything but terrorism. We all had identical feelings of impotent fury. Someone or some group was destroying absolutely irreplaceable artifacts, and destroying them before anything had been recorded. What made it all the more frustrating was the ease with which the unknown malefactor turned up

bodies. Any one of these finds would have made an archeologist's career, and yet one after another were being dug up and destroyed. It was heart-breaking.

The first few times I tried to say something, or do something, or think up some kind of ceremony, but I always felt mostly ridiculous. After a couple of tries I gave up. I decided that nothing I could say would have any significance at all. Memory, after all, weighed on the dead more heavily than ice or earth, and what they wanted was to forget. To cease. The only important thing was what I was doing, and that was enough. None of it was very hard. It took some determination to overcome my archeologist's instincts, but the digging wasn't hard. The secret, as Bob McQuillan would say, is in the research. Know where to dig, and I did.

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ON CONS — Canadian Convention & Reading Calendar

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

CONVENTIONS:

- **FEB 16-20 – ONOCON '95**

Stampeder Inn, Calgary. GoHs: Robert Runté, Cath Jackel. Art GoH: Richard Bartrop. TM: Eric Tilbrook. Memb: \$20 to Feb. 10 1995, \$25 at the door. Info: 5300 - 40 Ave. NW, Calgary AB, T3A 0X4.

- **FEB 17-19 – CON-VICTION 95**

French only. Info: CP 252, Succ. St-Martin, Chomedey, Laval PQ, H7V 3P5.

- **MAR 31-APR 2 – S.T.CON '95**

Marlborough Inn, Calgary. GoH: Mark Lenard. Fan GoH: Nancy Taylor. Art GoH Chris Bridges. Memb: \$35 to Mar. 23 1995, \$40 at the door. Info: S.T. Con Society, PO Box 22188, Bankers Hall, Calgary AB, T2P 4J5.

- **MAR 31-APR 2 – CON•CEPT '95**

Holiday Inn Crown Plaza Metro Centre, Montreal. GoHs: Spider & Jeanne Robinson. Art GoH Vincent Difate. Memb: \$24 to Mar. 15 1995, \$29 at the door. Info: PO Box 405, Stn. "H," Montreal PQ, H3G 2L1.

- **MAR 31-APR 2 – FILKONTARIO 5**

GoH: Dave Clement. Info: 302 College Ave. W, Unit 20, Guelph ON, N1G 4T6.

- **MAY 12-14 – CANCON '95**

Also Convention for 1995. Talisman Hotel, Ottawa. GoH: Dave Duncan. Memb: \$15 to Mar. 31 1995, \$20 at the door. Info: PO Box 5752, Merivale Depot, Nepean ON, K2C 3M1.

- **MAY 19-21 – KEYCON '95**

Memb: \$30 to Apr. 30 1995. Info: PO Box 3178, Winnipeg MB, R3C 4E6.

- **MAY 26-29 COSTUME CON 13**

First time in Canada. Memb: Supporting \$25, attending \$35. Info: PO Box 784, Adelaide St., Toronto ON, M5C 2K1.

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.

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Toastmaster	Eric Tilbrook
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ON OUR CONTRIBUTORS

ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

ALISON BAIRD (*Dragon Pearl*) "Dragon Pearl" is Alison Baird's third short story to appear in *ON SPEC*. Her juvenile fantasy novel, *The Dragon's Egg*, was published by Scholastic this summer.

AL BETZ (*Ask Mr. Science*) is the social secretary for Mr. Science.

CHRISTOPHER BRAYSHAW (*Making History*) lives in Vancouver, BC. His work has appeared in *The Comics Journal*, *Canadian Literature*, *Artichoke*, and the late, lamented *Horizons SF*. (Editor's note: just in hibernation, or so we've heard.)

MARCEL G. GAGNÉ (*Paper*) lives and works in Kitchener with his incredibly beautiful wife, Sally. He has had various diversions in lieu of a writing career, such as getting his pilot's licence, working as a top-40 DJ, and currently being a senior systems/network something or other. All in all, he leads a pretty ordinary life unless he is playing writer or amateur astronomer. This is his first published story.

JOCKO (*Future Nostalgia*) has recently appeared in *The Antigonish Review* and *Vintage '92*. He would like to be on the first manned mission to Mars if it will exempt him from all earthly taxes for a few years.

W.P. KINSELLA (*Things Invisible to See*) of White Rock, BC, has published some 20 books and over 200 short stories. He is best known for his multi-award winning novel, *Shoeless Joe*, which became the hit movie, *Field of Dreams*. His latest book is *Brother Frank's Gospel Hour*, published in June 1994.

ALEX LINK (*Parthenogenesis in Apt. 707*) has published in *Blood & Aphorisms*. He buys bondage gear for his cat.

BRIAN PANHUYZEN (*Artificial Sweeteners*) is a Toronto writer and actor. He has written for Montreal's *Just For Laughs* comedy festival and his work has appeared in *Blood & Aphorisms*. He earns his bread by doing page layout and design. This is his first published SF story. E-mail him at: brian_panhuyzen@sbe.scarborough.on.ca

ROMA QUAPP (*Gwendolyn Lynette*) lived in Ottawa for the past five years where she ran a freelance editing and writing business, and now resides in Winnipeg, MB. Recent publications include stories in *Transition* and *Winners' Circle*, the anthology of winners of last year's CAA (Metro Toronto Branch) contest. Another story will appear in *The New Quarterly*. She is currently working on revisions to a novella and has completed a collection of short stories.

KEITH SCOTT (*Whose Lifeboat?*) lives in Toronto where he is a member of the Cecil Streeters writing group started by Judy Merrill. His story, "Pseudoforn," appeared in *Prairie Fire's* special ConAdian edition last fall. "Whose Lifeboat?" is his third story in *ON SPEC*.

WILLIAM SOUTHEY (*Gone to Earth and Ashes*) says: "I was disgusted to learn that in Canada if you want to open a cemetery you have to line the soil and seal it off from ground water 'cause all the crap embalmers pump into us constitutes toxic waste. That's one of the things 'Gone to Earth and Ashes' is about. I'm adopted and I used to work in a museum. That's another. I was born and raised in Toronto but I've lived for most of the past decade in Montréal. That has nothing to do with the story."

ABOUT OUR ARTISTS

JEAN-PIERRE NORMAND (*COVER*) lives in Montréal, Québec, and works as a freelance illustrator. He has always been interested in SF and has done magazine and book covers. He shows his work regularly at conventions in Canada and the US, where he has won numerous prizes.

LAURIE M.Z. ARMSTRONG (*Things Invisible to See*) works in Hogtown as an actor for Young People's Theater, touring two shows throughout the province. Between performances she somehow manages to jump from the stage to the page to illustrate, paint, and design from the sanctity of her studio/home in Brantford.

JAMES BEVERIDGE (*Gone to Earth and Ashes* and *Whose Lifeboat?*) was weaned in Windsor, Ontario, and is now maturing in Edmonton. He is working in line, color and pixel. His abiding adoration of visionary prose and image is rooted to the core of his being. Hey, it's also a lot o' fun.

LINDA DUNN (*Paper* and *Gwendolyn Lynette*) is an Edmonton, Alberta, artist with a day job which is also a night job. She keeps busy with freelance assignments: illustration, graphic art, furniture re-creation, and mural painting.

RICHARD LEGGATT (*Parthenogenesis in Apt. 707*) Richard Leggatt / rit' rd leg' at / 1 n. a freelance illustrator working in Toronto. 2 n. part of FEARFUL SYMMETRY, a group of illustrators having their first show after the new year. 3 n. an aquatic wood louse found in rotting portfolio cases.

PETER MacDOUGALL (*Making History*) The Peter MacDougall is a strange bird known to migrate, not north to south, but from coast to coast (i.e. he recently moved from Nova Scotia to Vancouver). While not migrating, he illustrates, designs, writes, and occasionally tries to pass himself off as a doctor.

ROBERT PASTERNAK (*ON Art: Aurora Winner*) See page 48.

DORY A. RIKKONEN (*Dragon Pearl*) does illustrations in pencil, ink, acrylics and on the Mac in Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. In the mundane world, she designs layouts, posters and a wide variety of other print projects, as well as writing TV and radio commercials for a retail store. She's originally from "the center of the universe" (Toronto) but has made her home in Calgary for the last dozen years.

MITCHELL STUART (*Artificial Sweeteners*) is a freelance artist running PANGAEA Illustration and Design, based in Sherwood Park, Alberta. He is currently creating murals for some well-known Edmonton shops, illustration images for local movies, as well as being sucked into the world of computer animation and digital media. •

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Theme: Youth Writing & Art – Nicole Luiken, Peter Tupper, Bryn Brysse, Cory Doctorow, Rhonda Whittaker, Christine Gertz, Cairo & X, Jeb Gaudet, Marissa Kochanski, & Monica Hughes. Cover: Deven Kumar.
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- **Vol. 3, No. 3** (#8) Winter/91. *Theme: Humour* – Michael Skeet, Diane Mapes, Hugh Spencer, Hazel Sangster, Carolyn Clink, Allan Goodall, A.J. Axline, Beth Fogliatti, Jena Snyder, Alice Major, Donna Farley, & J. Nelson. Cover: Nancy Niles.
- **Vol. 4, No. 1** (#9) Spring/92
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- **Vol. 4, No. 2** (#10) Fall/92
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- **Vol. 4, No. 3** (#11) Winter/92
J.R. Martel, Cheryl Merkel, Preston Hapon, Jason Kapalka, Linda Smith, Catherine Girczyc, Robert Baillie, Sean Stewart (excerpt from *Nobody's Son*), Tim Hammell. Cover: Marc Holmes.
- **Vol. 5, No. 1** (#12) Spring/93.
Theme: Over the Edge – Erik Jon Spigel, M.A.C. Farrant, Lyle Weis, Robert Boyczuk, Jason Kapalka, John Skaife, Michael Hetherington, Dirk L. Schaeffer, Eileen Kernaghan, Tim Hammell. Cover: Kenneth Scott.
- **Vol. 5, No. 2** (#13) Summer/93.
Robert J. Sawyer, Jason Kapalka, Bill Wren, Marian L. Hughes, Alison Baird, Bruce Barber, Nicholas de Kruyff, Hugh A.D. Spencer, Barry Hammond, Colleen Anderson, Tim Hammell. Cover: Rob Alexander.
- **Vol. 5, No. 3** (#14) Fall/93
Leslie Gadallah, Jason Kapalka, Dan Knight, Bruce Byfield, Alison Baird, Robert Boyczuk, Keith Scott, Preston Hapon, Rand Nicholson, David Nickle & Karl Schroeder. Cover: Robert Boerboom.
- **Vol. 5, No. 4** (#15) Winter/93
Derryl Murphy, Catherine MacLeod, T. Robert Szekely, Robert Boyczuk, Ivan Dorin, Luke O'Grady, M.A.C. Farrant, A.R. King, Wesley Herbert, Dave Duncan (excerpt from *The Stricken Field*). Cover: Robert Pasternak.
- **Vol. 6, No. 1** (#16) Spring/94
Theme: Hard SF. Karl Schroeder, Leah Silverman, Jean-Louis Trudel, Cory Doctorow, Phillip A. Hawke, Jason Kapalka, Wesley Herbert, Lydia Langstaff, Leslie Gadallah. Cover: James Beveridge.
- **Vol. 6, No. 2** (#17) Summer/94
Peter Watts, Harold Côté, Karin Lowachee, Bonnie Blake, Kate Riedel, Wesley Herbert, Hugh A.D. Spencer, Brian Burke, Jocko, Catherine Girczyc. Cover: Jean-Pierre Normand.
- **Vol. 6, No. 3** (#18) Fall/94
Charles de Lint, Mary E. Choo, Lesley Choyce, Marianne O. Nielsen, Braulio Tavares, Rudy Kremberg, Michael Teasdale, Michael Stokes, Spider Robinson, Alice Major, Jocko, Barry Hammond, *Art Feature*: George Barr. Cover: Tim Hammell and Peter Renault.

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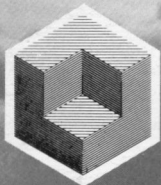
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