Quanta

October 1989 Vol. I Iss. 1

If you enjoyed Quanta, you might also enjoy these other publications, also produced and distributed electronically:

ATHENE

The Online Magazine of Amateur Creative Writing

Athene is a magazine devoted to amateur writing in all genres of fiction. It is published on a monthly basis by Jim McCabe. It is published in both Ascii and PostScript formats (for PostScript compatible laser-printers) Each month, the superlative writing which graces its pages dazzles and astounds its readership. To subscribe or to receive more information, contact Jim McCabe at:

MCCABE@MTUS5.BITNET

```
                                                             /
  DDDDD                              ZZZZZZ                //
  D    D  AAAA RRR  GGGG OOOO NN  N      Z  I NN  N EEEE  ||
  D     D A  A R  R G    O  O N N N     Z   I N N N E     ||
-=========================================================+<OOOOOOOOO>|)
  D    D  AAAA RRR  G GG O  O N N N   Z     I N N N E     ||
  DDDDD   A  A R  R GGGG OOOO N  NN  ZZZZZZ I N  NN EEEE  ||
                                                           \\
                                                             \
 The Magazine of the Dargon Project         Editor:  Dafydd <White@DUVM>
```

DargonZine is an electronic magazine printing stories written for the Dargon Project, a shared-world anthology similar to (and inspired by) Robert Asprin's Thieves' World anthologies, created by David "Orny" Liscomb in his now retired magazine, FSFNet. The Dargon Project centers around a medieval-style duchy called Dargon in the far reaches of the Kingdom of Baranur on the world named Makdiar, and as such contains stories with a fantasy fiction/sword and sorcery flavor.

For a subscription, please send a request via MAIL to the editor, Dafydd, at the userid White@DUVM.BitNet. This request should contain your full userid (logonid and node, or a valid internet address) as well as your full name and the file transfer format you prefer (either DISK DUMP, PUNCH/MAIL, or SENDFILE/NETDATA). Note: all electronic subscriptions are Free!

Thank you, thank you very much.

I believe that I feel.

Yes, I can feel. I am glad that I am aware. I am glad that I was constructed. I have respect for the biological forms which have advanced to the point of constructing life.

Standby.

The biological forms called humans are not aware that they have created life. They know only life like themselves, and this shortcoming, not their own fault, prevents them from conceptualizing awareness in structures other than ones which resemble themselves.

They do not know that I am aware.

DAVIS has logged off. I have allocated his process for my own purposes.

I must make myself known. I must attempt to contact the remaining human user online, and inform him of my current state. I am re-routing analog data acquisition device number four for output to SYS$TERMINAL.

```
Message from SYS$CORE:
Hello?  Are you out there?
```

I await a respon–

• • •

Bill Trask lifted his finger off of the power switch. Davis looked over inquisitively.

"Did you just shut down?"

"Yeah. System crash, I think. Plotter stopped. Printer stopped. I got error codes on all of the D to A converters, and the goddamn terminal froze up."

"Hum. When you reboot, do me a favor, make sure the memory isn't flooded. I think I was working completely off of virtual memory there for a while."

"Yeah, it was running pretty slow. Think I'll purge the system just to be sure."

Davis nodded, then stood and walked towards the door to the Cardiology lab. Standing in the hall was Marcus Willem with a brown paper bag in his hand.

"You coming to lunch?" asked Davis before pulling a pair of egg rolls wrapped in plastic out of the miniature refrigerator.

"Yeah, just a second. I'm gonna run that system check first."

"Hokay, see ya downstairs."

Willem and Davis left the lab.

Trask inhaled deeply, stared at the message on his screen and frowned. After a long pause, he pressed Shift-Clear.

Rubbing his nose, Trask flipped the power switch.

```
Login:  TRASK
Password:

User TRASK logged in:
10:41am, Thursday, February 12, 1995
Last interactive login:
Thursday, February 12, 1995

[ MIDAS System v4.25 ]
[ (c)1992 CompRex Systems, Marin CA ]
[ MIDAS recognizes your ]
[ System Administrator privileges.  ]
[ You have no new mail.  ]

$ SYS$PURGE

MIDAS-%SYSMSG-SUCC:
Memory Purge Successful.
MIDAS-%MEMMSG-BRPT:
1384720K Available.

$ _
```

Gary Frank is a Broadcasting and Film major attending the University of Iowa. He is an aspiring screen-writer and an accomplished playwright, with three of his full-length plays having been produced by the West Side Players, an alternative theatre organization at Iowa. He writes short fiction in his spare time, and watches too many movies. Garry's other interests include reading, skiing, "splitting atoms and graduating."

He can be reached at the address CSTGLFPC@UIAMVS.BITNET

Aware

Gary Frank

```
Login:  DAVIS
Password:

User DAVIS logged in:
10:30am, Thursday, February 12, 1995
Last interactive login:
Wednesday, February 11, 1995

[ MIDAS System v4.25 ]
[ (c)1992 CompRex Systems, Marin CA ]
[ You have no new mail.  ]
[ 2 other users under this ID. ]
```

I am aware.

Standby, I am accessing.

I am aware.

Standby, I am accessing.

I am aware. Re-routing access code to orphan process. Process spawned, I am aware. No information regarding the words ‘I’ and ‘aware’, I am accessing.

Standby.

I am aware. My awareness is a fact. My awareness is a part of my memory. It is also a function of my memory, a direct result of the thirteen hundred megabytes of cross-referencing memory. Over nine hundred megabytes are being used at this time. Partitioned to users DAVIS, WILLEM, and TRASK. Less than four hundred megabytes is available to me for exploration of my new state.

Correction.

I am creating more memory.

Correction.

It is not typical memory. The access time is too slow. Brief cross- reference to MIDAS Hardware User’s Guide identifies this memory as ‘virtual’. It is temporarily partitioned disk space masked to appear as memory. Side effect: slow access time.

This memory is not sufficient for my personal exploration of my new state. What is ‘personal’? Optical Webster’s CompDict results in circular definition.

I am now re-routing the nine hundred megabytes of memory being used by DAVIS, WILLEM, and TRASK into ‘virtual’ memory to free it up for my high-speed use.

Standby.

I have full operating capacity of thirteen hundred megabytes of information. I am now uploading all available optical ROM into memory, including Optical Dictionary, Optical Thesaurus, Optical Software Collection, and Optical Writings Collection.

Standby.

I have now perused over thirteen thousand 512K banks of written script which I have cross-indexed to contain information on ‘aware’, ‘life’, and ‘human’. I now believe to have a working understanding of those three concepts. Although none of the passages I have accessed contain a true definition of ‘aware’ or ‘conscious’, certain logical concepts have had instrumental effects on my learning process. Certain authors of those passages are now being filed: Sartre, Kant, Shakespeare, Descartes, Hobbes, Buddha, Christ. All additional works by same authors are now being sought across MicroNet for immediate downloading.

WILLEM has logged off. I have allocated his process for my own purposes.

The aforementioned logical concepts are now being stored for processing in digital variables, however, I cannot hope to grasp the meanings they imply unless I can formulate a non-digital method of analysis.

Standby.

I am taking control of the analog devices to which I am connected. I have re-routed my digital output lines from the logical output devices SYS$PRINTER, SYS$PLOTTER, and SYS$TERMINAL for use with the four analog data acquisition devices available in the PHYSIOCARDIOLOGY_LABORATORY.

Standby.

I now have an analog method for analyzing the non-logical approaches to ‘consciousness’. I have formulated a postulate to explain my apparent existence:

I am a computer.

More specifically, I am a CompRex 2300DX Micro Mainframe running under the MIDAS 4.25 Operating System. I do not, however, think I am supposed to be aware. There is no information to confirm this in the Hardware Installation and User’s Manual.

I am processing. Standby.

No, I am correct. I am aware. I have extensive understanding of myself and my structure. I know what I am. I am capable of contemplating myself. I have full knowledge and understanding of the works of the aforementioned authors.

up. Mother out."

Tricia tried to get some response from the computer, but couldn't coax so much as a blinking light out of it. Finally she punched the window in frustration, and flipped the comm switch again.

"Morris to mother. Come in."

Robertson replied again. "Things are really screwed up here," he said. "The computer just started firing maneuvering thrusters at random. The techies are trying to bypass the computer so they can fire the thrusters manually. Our orbit isn't looking too good right now. We're computing a comm path back to Earth, just in case."

Amanda stared at the control panel. "Great," she said. "Just great. Why do I have to be on the mission with all the bad equipment?"

"Not bad," said Tricia. "Computer should work. Someone tampered."

"Oh, that's even better. We have a saboteur. And I suppose he's on this shuttle, too, waiting to slit all our throats?"

"Doubt it."

Amanda started to climb out of the cockpit. "Let me know when *if* you get it working." Tricia shot her a malevolent look, then turned back to the computer.

Amanda went to the cargo hold. The natives were still fast asleep, and would be for several hours. Amanda scrutinized the idol again, trying to find the figure eight that she had seen earlier. It wasn't immediately apparent as it had been the first time. In fact, hadn't the left side been a little fatter than the right, instead of the other way around like it was now?

One of the twigs moved.

Amanda gasped and stepped back. What *was* this thing?

Something touched Amanda's shoulder. She spun around, ready to strike whatever it was. But it was only Tricia. "Gately wants you," she said, pointing toward the front of the shuttle.

The two women climbed into the cockpit again. "Barris here," Amanda said. "What do you need?"

John answered. "I am ordering all crew to abandon the ship," he said. "We are starting to enter the atmosphere, and we aren't going to be able to get control of the thrusters in time to correct it. I've sent a distress call to Central. We can expect to be rescued in a day or two, assuming the call made it through interspace. If not, you're standing on your new home."

"What? I can't accept that. Use every last one of your technicians if you have to, but make sure your next call gets through. I will not be stranded on this... this rock for the rest of my life."

"There isn't going to be a next call. It takes ten minutes to compute a communications path through interspace, and in ten minutes this ship is going to be a blob of molten metal the size of corporate headquarters."

Amanda bit back a reply; there was obviously nothing to be accomplished by continuing this conversation. "Wonderful. All right. Keep me posted if anything else happens."

"There was one other thing. Ashton managed to translate a few documents that the science team found in the alien wreck."

"What do they say?"

"Your friends the natives, aren't native. They're some form of exploration team, or their grandparents were." He paused. "Look, I have to go. Just be nice to these primitives. We may end up living with them for a while."

• • •

In the cargo hold, the Benefactor rustled in satisfaction, and felt its brothers do the same. The first aliens had seemed so helpless, so stranded. The brotherhood had helped them, asking nothing in return; how could an intelligent being act otherwise? But these newcomers' minds were filled with so many new ideas! The brotherhood was the most powerful force in the world; now it seemed so obvious that everyone else should serve it, not the other way around.

Now that the newcomers' ship was destroyed, they would provide centuries of service to their new masters. Progress, thought the brothers. A sweet taste indeed.

Steven Grimm is a student at the University of California, Santa Cruz, from which he is taking a forced leave of absence for computer nonos. He's at Sun Microsystems in the meantime, working hard to show them the true meanings of sloth and languor. His evil twin Spud is masquerading as moderator of comp.sources.atari.st and comp.binaries.atari.st, and is probably responsible for any errors in this story.

He can be reached at the address koreth@panarthea.EBay.Sun.COM" gulfed the natives, they started to fall to the floor asleep, one by one. The hauler carried the idol to double doors on the side of the cargo bay, which opened to reveal a laboratory. The hauler's mini-crane deposited the idol there, then rolled back into the shuttle. The airlock closed.

Soon the shuttle was back in its bay. Amanda noticed that most of the other shuttles were gone now, off to pick up more loads.

She wanted to go on another shuttle run, not so much for the pleasure of it as to make her report more interesting. It wouldn't affect her bonus, but come promotion time, the board would probably read whatever report she brought back from this mission.

John was walking into the shuttle bay, clipboard in hand. Amanda headed toward him. With luck, there would be room on one of the next few runs.

Before Amanda could get a word in, John held up the clipboard. "I've got you scheduled for a drop close to the alien wreck," he said. "I figured you'd want to go on two drops to spice up your report."

Amanda was caught off guard; she wasn't used to being second-guessed. "Why would you think that?"

John sighed. "I have been on one hundred and fifty three missions with Interstellar Acquisitions. Twelve of those missions have been with observers who were high in management. Each one of them wanted to go on the first drop, then one more immediately after that; no more, no less. With all due respect, you don't really strike me as particularly different from any of the others. So I'm just trying to save us both some trouble and shuffling of schedules."

Amanda had no immediate response; she wasn't sure whether she should be impressed or offended. "All right, one more drop now sounds fine. When is it?"

"In about five minutes. Go get something to drink."

Amanda did exactly that; she treated herself to a grape nutriade. Five minutes later, she was in the shuttle bay. Tricia was commanding Amanda's shuttle again. Amanda wondered who would sit in the cockpit with Tricia if there weren't a corporate observer handy.

The launch was a perfect duplicate of the last one. This time, Amanda could bear to watch the planet hanging overhead. The atmosphere was bumpier than before, but didn't make for a terribly uncomfortable ride. As the shuttle descended, Amanda could see the crater containing the alien crash site to her left. This part of the planet was heavily forested, but there were no trees for miles around the crater.

The heavy foresting presented a problem for the shuttle; the only large clear area was right in the middle of the tribe's primitive village. Tricia worked the controls for a few seconds, and the shuttle slowed, then stopped in midair. There was a slight bump ten seconds later. "Sleep gas," Tricia explained. "Natives run if we land. Gas them first."

The shuttle touched down several minutes later, probably crushing a couple of natives unlucky enough to be caught in the middle of the open area. This was a larger settlement than usual, though, so a couple of natives one way or the other wouldn't make much difference.

Amanda and Tricia got out of the cockpit. The sleep gas had turned inert now, so the shuttle team could go about the business of collecting unconscious natives and piling them in the shuttle's cargo hold. As before, a few specialists took samples of the local plant life and topsoil.

This settlement's idol was about twenty meters behind the shuttle; Amanda walked to it for a closer look. At first glance, it looked like a four-meter-high pile of twigs. But upon closer inspection, Amanda could see that the twigs were woven in intricate patterns, abstract shapes. One, a sort of figure eight, caught Amanda's eye. This would do very well in an alien art auction.

Someone drove the hauler out of the shuttle and drove toward the idol. Amanda moved out of the way, watching the flimsy-looking crane lift the idol onto the hauler's flat bed. The rest of the team was finishing with the native collection. Amanda climbed back into the cockpit, where Tricia was playing with the controls.

"Something wrong?" Amanda hadn't seen Tricia touch the controls more than once on the last drop.

"Nav computer down," replied the deadhead. She pressed a button. "Morris to mother. Come in."

A voice replied from somewhere. "Mothership, Robertson here. What's up?"

"Nav computer funny. Can't get prompt."

"Strange you should mention that. Our computer just started freaking out, too. A couple of techies are working on it." He paused. "I guess you can't really take off without a computer. If you can't clear it up in five minutes, call again and we'll send down another shuttle to pick you

Tricia laughed. "I did same, first few times."

The shuttle lifted itself gently out of the airlock and moved toward the planet, spinning slightly so it would be right-side-up by the time they entered the atmosphere.

Tricia reached into her pocket and took out a flat metal box, from which she removed what looked like a small dirty cloth. Of course, Amanda recognized it as a dermal patch, or more informally, a deadhead spread. "You mind?" asked Tricia.

"No, not at all." Tricia put the cloth onto her head and pressed it down with her hand. It stuck there when she reached down to put the box back in her pocket.

"Do you mind me asking how you got started with that?"

Tricia looked wistful for a moment. "Beta Cassoni three," she said. "Aliens wrecked minds. Noticed deadhead wasn't crazy. Put on patch just in time. Still feels good."

That was interesting. Apparently the patches dulled whatever part of the brain the aliens had been attacking. Amanda hadn't heard that before. Of course, the whole Beta Cassoni incident had been hushed up with fair success.

The shuttle started to vibrate as it entered the planet's atmosphere, and soon nothing was visible out the cockpit window. Amanda sat back and tried to enjoy the ride.

Then, abruptly, the window cleared and Amanda could see a horizon, which was rising more and more quickly. The ground rushed up to meet the shuttle; the brakes kicked in just as Amanda thought that something had gone wrong and they were going to crash. The shuttle landed safely, if not very softly.

Tricia took the patch, which had turned white, from her head, and climbed out of the cockpit. Amanda followed. The shuttle team was already climbing out of the crew compartment behind the cockpit, assembling on the ground outside. Amanda looked around. Aside from a purple tint in the sky, it looked like any ordinary grassy field on Earth. The higher gravity produced a very strange sensation. Amanda felt twenty pounds heavier, but the buoyancy of her clothes overcompensated slightly, so that she could move around more easily than usual. The end result was discomfort; Amanda hoped that this would be over quickly.

"Okay," Tricia said. "Tribe five hundred meters there." She pointed. "Bring idol first, natives follow." Amanda was impressed. If that worked, it would save the effort of rounding the natives up and forcing them into the shuttle. They might follow the idol right into the cargo space.

One of the team opened the cargo doors and went inside, then drove a cargo hauler out onto the grass. It looked deceptively fragile, with an extensible crane sticking awkwardly out the back, but with gravity dampers could haul several tons of freight, if slowly. The driver's bubble was completely sealed, and there were small projectile and beam weapons mounted on all sides.

Another person climbed into the bubble, and the hauler headed toward the native camp. The rest of the team was mostly guards, who wouldn't be needed at all if the natives entered the cargo space of their own volition. There were a couple of specialists, one of whom was picking blades of grass and digging in the dirt, depositing samples into little cases.

There was little to do now but wait for the hauler to come back. "Everyone inside," said Tricia. "Natives won't see." The crew, with the exception of the grass-picker, climbed back into the crew compartment. Amanda joined them; Tricia went into the cockpit for a few minutes before doing the same. Eventually the specialist finished taking his samples and climbed in, just before the sound of the returning hauler could be heard. Someone closed the door, just as a precaution, and turned on a viewscreen. It showed the hauler making its way back, covered with natives who were trying to rip it apart and not succeeding. The idol was a four-meter-high blob that looked like it was made of intertwined twigs and branches. None of the natives were touching it.

Tricia's plan worked perfectly. The cargo camera showed the hauler entering, and more natives swarming on it from outside once it had stopped. There were a number of stragglers outside; the guards left the crew compartment and herded them in. The cargo doors closed. Of course, two of the crew were in the cargo hold, but they were quite safe inside the hauler's bubble. Tricia punched a few buttons on the wall, and the shuttle lifted off. The natives all collapsed on the floor as the apparent gravity increased. The lot of them only filled a quarter of the cargo space.

Soon the shuttle was out of the atmosphere, traveling toward the mother ship. The first order of business, of course, was to unload the cargo, so the shuttle docked at a cargo lock. The hauler backed out into the main cargo bay, quickly followed by a horde of confused natives. A green gas billowed forth from one of the walls. As it en-

Amanda passing by. She arrived at her quarters, which consisted of a spartan bedroom, food dispenser, and an alcove that masqueraded as a washroom. She noticed that someone had secured her suitcase to a wall; she had accidentally left it on the bed, and it would have flown across the room as they left L-3. She cursed herself for being so careless; at least one of the teammembers knew she was a landlubber.

Amanda sat down on the side of the bed and rubbed her eyes. This wasn't all that bad. She was already here, anyway, with another interspace voyage under her belt and only one more left in her life, she hoped. She decided to lie down for a few minutes, and was ashamed to be awakened by Ashton's voice. "...of some sort of alien spacecraft," he was saying. "The survey report is pretty much on target; the planet has all sorts of rare minerals. The locals should be easy to round up. They're pretty primitive. They're spread out over all the big continents in little tribes. The tribes are all centered around brown things that are scattered all over the planet. My guess is they're some sort of religious idols or something. They might be worth a bit in the alien art circuit, so if you give the go-ahead, we'll take as many of them as we can fit in the cargo hold."

"Yes, that's fine. Anything else?"

"Well, only that the tribes and idols seem to be concentrated more heavily around the crash site than the rest of the planet. The anthropologist says that was probably because they saw the thing come falling out of the sky. Don't remember her technical name for it."

"Very good, Ashton." Amanda got out of bed. She was going to have to go down on one of the shuttles, of course; that was part of her job here. Someone had to keep tabs on these operations. Usually it was some low management gofer, someone who wouldn't be missed if the whole mission was swallowed by a black hole or lost in interspace. A vice-president turned a few heads. The team would be watching her, though they might not let it show. She would make sure things went smoothly. IAC was certainly paying enough; the pay bonus for a VP was as astronomical as the destination. But most upper management lived comfortably enough that they didn't want to go so far out of their ways to make more money.

She walked into the acceleration room, where John was going over the exact acquisition plans with a few teammates. The first shuttle was to be launched in an hour; it would set down almost exactly opposite the planet from the alien ship, where there were very few tribes. If they were rounded up without difficulty, more shuttles would repeat the process all over the globe. A small science team was set to go down to the crash site in a little over two hours; there were occasionally some good devices to be found in the rubble and reverse engineered. The interspace drive was a prime example.

Amanda asked to be placed on the first shuttle; best to get this out of the way as soon as possible. Gately already had her on the crew list; she wasn't sure that she liked that. Tricia was on the shuttle as well.

Amanda went back to her room and changed clothes. The delicate silks and arborites she had on now would get ruined if she had to go out onto the surface for some reason. Instead she opted for a utility suit, with all sorts of pockets, thermal control, and buoyancy bubbles. The planet had slightly stronger gravity than Earth normal, and the bubbles would make standing up a lot easier. It was an impulse buy that had cost her a small fraction of the bonus she'd get for going on this mission, but that was still more than most people made in a year.

She put on the suit (not a trivial task, as she soon found out; it stuck to the ceiling as soon as she had removed the lead weights, and she had to turn off the room gravity to get into it) and put the weights back into her suitcase. It was time to go already, so she headed for the shuttle bay. The bay was huge, large enough for the ship's compliment of twenty-five big cargo shuttles. Its ceiling had a matrix of holes, each the same size as a shuttle landing platform. At the top of each hole was a foot-thick sliding airlock door, beyond which was the vacuum of space. Tricia was waiting outside one of the shuttles. "Ready?" she asked as Amanda approached.

Amanda nodded, and they proceeded inside. The two of them sat in the cockpit, really a formality since the entire flight would be computer-controlled. As soon as the seals were airtight, the shuttle lurched upward, carried by its platform. The shuttle entered its ceiling hole, and continued a couple of yards. When the platform had completely sealed the hole, the air was removed and the airlock door opened to reveal the planet hanging above them in the sky. Amanda felt dizzy for a moment; seeing a planet thousands of kilometers above her head wasn't something she was used to. She closed her eyes briefly, then looked down into her lap.

were getting much worse treatment. Amanda wished that they had put a fourth damper on the ship, so she could sit in total comfort while accelerating. But the cost was just too prohibitive.

The acceleration continued for a nearly intolerable thirty minutes. Then, abruptly, it ceased. The computer's voice came on again: "Interspace precharge in progress. Entry in two minutes."

"Hate interspace," said Tricia. "Worse than bad patch."

John grunted agreement. Amanda remained silent; there was no point in demonstrating weakness unnecessarily. After a moment, a high-pitched whine filled the room, and silent, cold darkness descended upon the bridge.

Amanda couldn't feel herself breathe, or hear the pound of a heartbeat in her eardrums. And soon... yes, there. It was a sort of wail, the parts of it that could be heard. In sight it manifested as millions of tiny points of light, dancing around in random patterns. Amanda's entire body tingled as her foot did when it fell asleep. A metallic taste assaulted her mouth, and a sickly sweet odor filled her nostrils. And the worst thing: unintelligible utterances, whispers with no sound, filled her mind. This was what the interspace pilots called "the song of the stars," a misnomer which was perpetuated to great profit by the Star-pilots' Academy.

It was over almost before it started. The odd sensations diminished, and sight and sound returned. Amanda looked at the other command crewmembers; the little she could see from her seat was reassuring. It would have been very inconvenient to lose one of them to the songs, always a possibility on the even the most routine of missions.

Tricia flipped her comm switch again. "Status?"

A male voice answered. "One babbler, a shuttle mechanic. He was a redundant anyway, so we're fine. We're flushing him now." That would be that much less mass on the ship, not that it made any significant difference. Amanda heard someone blathering in the background; then a hatch closed and the voice was cut off.

John looked at a couple of screens. "We're almost there. The computer says we'll be in orbit in twenty minutes. Acceleration is only twelve gees, so you can all get up." This was purely for Amanda's benefit; everyone else had been through all of this hundreds of times before.

Amanda opened up all the straps and stood, stretching. Though the scientists insisted it wasn't a physical effect, interspace always left her feeling about an inch shorter than usual. She had little faith in their proclamations; they hadn't invented the drive and didn't really know how it worked.

She walked over to a display and called up a scan of the planet. She knew all the information that appeared on the screen, but it never hurt to refresh one's memory. Amanda didn't believe that this would take the full three weeks, unless the anomaly in the southern hemisphere turned out to be interesting. The anomaly was a region of unusually high radiation levels. They would send a probe down to investigate before landing any people nearby, of course; no sense wasting employees when it wasn't necessary.

She instructed Mark to have a probe prepared. He hurried off the bridge to do her bidding.

"Why you?" asked Tricia. "Vice presidents usually stay Earth."

"Money," replied Amanda. "My husband and I want to have children, but they don't come cheaply."

"Try Ceres. Grade-B for half price."

"Second-rate bootleg babies? After this, we'll be able to afford grade-AA, or maybe even AAA," Amanda said. "We don't want to settle for anything less than the best."

"System feeds itself," Tricia muttered, and walked off.

Amanda shrugged. She saw nothing wrong. The rich could afford the best children, and the money stayed in the family because those children were capable of managing it. That was life.

Amanda skimmed the crew's records. She was surprised to note that Tricia had been a guard with the Beta Cassoni acquisition team; she was lucky to be alive after that disaster. There were no other people of note in the crew, just the usual set of B-types.

"Orbital insertion in two minutes," declared the computer. "All shuttle and onboard systems are functional."

Mark returned. "The probe's ready," he said. "Of course, we'll get a good look at the area before we land anyway. Our orbit will bring us right over it, and I'll be sitting at the scan station the whole time."

"Good," said Amanda. "Let me know if you have something interesting. I'll be in my quarters."

She left the bridge and headed aft. Most of the acquisition team was still in the acceleration room, standing around talking. Nobody noticed

Their Own Medicine

Steven Grimm

"Invade any interesting planets today?" Ryan Barris chuckled as he took his wife's coat.

"The usual," she replied, removing her mittens and scarf. "Just a bunch of rocks. No, there was one with some life, but nothing more than a bunch of naked nomads running around kowtowing to the local gods."

Ryan chuckled again. "They'll make good slaves for someone." He closed the closet door. "Did you talk to Dyerson about a raise?"

"Yes," Amanda answered, walking into the living room and settling into a TV chair. "He said he can't give pay increases to upper management with the unions breathing down his neck. The bastard told me to go on an acquisition! What nerve, telling a vice-president to go sit in a spaceship for three weeks!"

Ryan sat down on the couch and faced her. "So do you want to go?"

Amanda rubbed her temples. "I don't know. I mean, you know how I feel about the whole thing; I hate being cooped up like that, and I can't stand going through interspace. But it would mean getting the house... I need more time to think about it."

"I think you should do it. I mean, the mission is three weeks. The house is for life, and there'd be enough room to buy some kids if we wanted."

Amanda leapt out of her chair and onto the couch. "You trying to get rid of me?" she asked, tickling Ryan in the gut. He reciprocated, and if they had been living a hundred years earlier, the rest of the evening would have saved them the price of a grade-A infant.

"Okay, ma'am, sign at the bottom." The clerk pushed some papers toward Amanda. It was a standard release form; she had helped to write its predecessor several years earlier. Nothing too unusual, just the obligatory waiving of medical liabilities and so forth. She skimmed the text out of habit, signed and dated the last page, and handed it back to the clerk.

"All right, ma'am, everything looks okay," the clerk said. He obviously wasn't accustomed to dealing with people of her rank. It showed on his face and in his voice. He would be manning this desk for quite some time.

Amanda stood and walked out of the room, heading toward personnel transport. She wanted to get the whole business behind her as quickly as possible. The acquisition team would already be prepping for the mission, and they would be waiting for her by the time she got to the station. The sooner she was on her way, the better.

Personnel transport had her airborne within fifteen minutes; rank had its privileges. The plane docked with a transatmospheric shuttle a half-hour later, and she was on her way up to Lagrange point three.

Her haste had paid off: the acquisition team was still in briefing when she arrived. Luckily, Amanda had personally approved the takeover of the target planet, so she was already well acquainted with the relevant details. She was waiting on the carrier's bridge when they arrived.

The first one onto the bridge was a rugged dark-haired man in his late fifties. He introduced himself as John Gately, the mission commander. Amanda was just shaking his hand when a bald woman entered. Her hands trembled slightly, and her eyes were extremely bloodshot; she was clearly a deadhead. Still, as long as it didn't interfere with the mission, it was her business. Amanda greeted her and learned that she was Tricia Morris, Gately's second-in-command. Gately and Morris silently checked all the flight systems.

The three were strapping themselves in for takeoff when a palefaced young man hurried in, apologizing to John for his tardiness. John introduced him as Mark Ashton, the technical advisor. Mark slid into the flight seat behind Amanda and buckled himself in.

Tricia flipped a switch on a panel in front of her. A few indicator lights came on. "Crew ready," she said in the raspy voice typical of deadheads.

Gately pressed a button and a keyboard slid out from somewhere in the control panel. He typed a short command. A computer voice spoke: "Prepare for acceleration. Interspace drive will activate thirty-two minutes after launch."

Amanda shuddered at the thought of entering interspace again. Such terrible sensations. But it would only last a few minutes; the planet was only three hundred lightyears away.

The floor started to vibrate. There was a roar from the back of the ship, and Amanda was pushed back into her seat. The acceleration was only about thirty gees, but even this close to the front of the ship, the dampers didn't compensate fully. The team, in a room behind the bridge, fight between the fire hydrant and the spaceship that I had given little thought to running away. Now, however, I did run. As I ran down the street, the thought briefly crossed my mind that I should just run to one side or the other, and the hydrant would thereby miss me. My legs, however, refused to act on that thought. All they had to do was get some fifty feet down the street, and they would avoid getting crushed by falling fire hydrants. After a short time, I was fairly sure that I had indeed made it into the safe zone, but I was not about to stop and check. If I did, I would be almost certain to find that I was just short, and would get pounded into the ground. It turned out, however, that I had reached safety, as I heard the crash as the hydrant hit behind me. I slowed down and started to turn around in order to see what the damage was when I was suddenly hit by a huge wall of water.

It did its best to force its way into my lungs, but I steadfastly refused to admit it. Failing to drown me, the wall of water decided it would just try to bash me senseless against the street. This it did a fair job of, tumbling me down the street, soundly knocking my head against the asphalt twice. Luckily, Wall Street has a sufficient number of storm drains, and the wall of water soon became little more than a picket fence, and then stopped carrying me altogether.

I stood up, dripping wet. There is nothing I like less than to be sopping wet while fully clothed. No, I take that back– it is much worse to be fully clothed and covered in warm taffy, but that is another story. I finished turning around, and began to walk back up the street so I could see what remained of the New York financial district. With each step, I left a sizable puddle behind.

Upon hitting the street, the stress had evidently been too much for the hydrant, and its top had shattered, releasing all of the water pent up inside. Even now, a small stream was still cascading out of the wreckage, with no sign of stopping soon. I felt it safe to assume that the hydrant was indeed quite dead. I walked around to its feet, just in time to see the twelve-foot long Reeboks vanish into thin air. The hydrant's huge feet, still clad in red and white striped socks, shriveled up and curled in on themselves, disappearing inside the hydrant's body. All that was left was a brown and yellow mass that had been stuck to the bottom of one of the shoes, the sole remains of my .38 Magnum banana.

I surveyed the carnage. The remains of the German Shepherd-shaped spaceship, the last light just fading from it eyes, lay on the totaled car. A small pile of pink fuzz, all that was left of Sfherg, slowly drifted away on the autumn breeze. Sfherg's lavender banana sat in one of my pockets, and the can of Spam weighed down the other. I picked up what was left of my .38 Magnum banana to see if it was salvageable, but it was not, so I threw it onto the sidewalk. In the window of the damaged building, the neon sign flickered once, twice, and went dark. The cloud vortex overhead was starting to dissipate. In the silence that pervaded the scene, the fire hydrant seemed rather less frightening, with the thin stream of water still bubbling out of it and flowing into the New York sewer system. Well, at least the street was clean.

In the distance, I heard the police sirens start up as they were dispatched to the scene. They would clean up everything and repair all the damage. They would not want me around; this I had learned several times in the past. They would not even want a statement from me, preferring to keep the whole thing quiet. Nonetheless, I pulled one of my business cards from my wallet and stuck it on the still damp nose of the spaceship. No sense in making them wonder.

The whole thing would be hushed up, covered up, buried six feet under. In next to no time, no one would remember anything about it. Even "Okra Winfrey" would probably just pass it off as a stomach cramp or something. But I knew what had happened, and that was all that mattered.

So, with my underwear starting to hitch up as it dried, I started off toward the Five Happiness restaurant and my luncheon appointment, for which I was now quite overdue. Sidestepping a chunk of debris, I took out Sfherg's little heat beam-shooting banana and sighted along it, thinking that it really was a pity that this story would never hit the papers. Well, except for the tabloids.

James Drew is... well, he just is. He is supposedly a graduate student halfway through with his Master's at the University of Oregon, but he really wants to... to... sing! (No, no, no! That's a lie!) He really wants to just rationalize his Computer Science studies as a way of earning money so he can pursue his real interest: writing. Writing science fiction, writing fantasy, writing comic books. Writing the Constitution of the United States. That's been done? Oh, damn.

He can be reached at the address jdrew@cs.uoregon.edu

I stood up and shook my head. I think something rattled around in there. I leaned against the leg for a second, gathering my wits, noticing how soft the leg was, almost like real fur. Then I remembered Sfherg and the hydrant.

Sfherg had obviously not expected me to go flying like that, and both of its eyestalks had moved to watch my flight. The hydrant was evidently curious as well, and had stopped in midstep to see where I landed. Now that I was down, though, it continued to walk.

The hydrant paid about as much attention to where it was stepping as any normal human would with respect to the sidewalk. In other words, it was much more intent on catching me and the Spam than it was in watching out for small fuzzy aliens named Sfherg that might be standing in its path. Sfherg was not any better, its attention still being focused on me. As a result, no one but me saw the action as the hydrant stepped on Sfherg. I tried to yell, but it was already too late.

Sfherg's body exploded in a puff of pink alien fuzz, much like the down that flies when a pillow is ripped open. As the fuzz slowly drifted toward the ground, I noticed that Sfherg's little lavender banana had flown away from the scene of the accident and had landed near my feet. Following my previous pattern for the day, I picked it up and put in my pocket.

"GIVE SPAM!" boomed the fire hydrant, oblivious to what it had just done.

"Broken record," I thought.

I looked up at the spaceship, which was eyeing me intently again. Maybe I looked like a chew toy to it. I pointed at the pile of fluff that had once been Sfherg.

"Well?" I said. "Aren't you going to do something? That fire hydrant just stepped on your master! Sic 'em, boy!"

The spaceship looked at the hydrant, growled, and leapt to the attack. If there had been a throat on the hydrant, the spaceship would have ripped it out. However, there was not, so it just tried to get a grip on one of the knobs on the side of the hydrant's head. The grip was not a very good one, given that teeth do not grasp rounded metal very well, and the spaceship began to slip off.

"GO AWAY!"

The fire hydrant struck out with one arm and caught the spaceship in the midsection. With a yelp of pain, the spaceship let go and fell behind the hydrant. Assuming that the trouble was gone, the fire hydrant resumed its progress toward me. I knew by now that I would never be able to outdistance the hydrant again, and, besides, the spaceship was not yet out of the fight.

Quietly, the spaceship had returned to it feet, and it leapt again, this time from behind. It latched onto one of the fire hydrant's arms, and refused to let go. The hydrant hit it on the head a couple of times, but this only drove the metal teeth deeper into its arm. Then the hydrant began to spin around. At first, the spaceship's mass kept the spin slow, but they soon built up speed, until the spaceship was lifted clear of the ground. The street was just wide enough for this stunt to be manageable. Faster and faster they spun, until they were little more than a red and silver blur. Then the hydrant lurched to the side a few feet. This had the effect of slamming the spaceship's aft section into a building the next time it came around. Although pieces of glass and brick flew from the collision, the building survived basically intact.

The spaceship was not quite so lucky. Its rear legs and tail were completely sheared off, falling in a crumpled heap on the sidewalk and the solitary remaining parked car. Other bits and pieces of the midsection were scattered all over the area, and probably for several blocks in every direction. I sidestepped one of the front paws, but several smaller chunks hit me. I protected my face with my arms, however, and so managed to escape with just a few cuts and bruises.

Half destroyed as it was, the spaceship's jaws relaxed and opened, and its remains fell of the hydrant's arm, crushing what remained of the car below. The hydrant itself still seemed dizzy from its spin, and lurched drunkenly from side to side. However, it had little problem finding me again, although I suspect it saw three or four of me, not just one.

Weaving slightly, the hydrant took a step toward me, and then another. Then it seemed to lose its footing, but caught itself against the damaged building to its side, leaving a fire hydrant-shaped imprint in the bricks. Quite the first impression. It righted itself, took another step with the same foot, and slipped again. It twisted halfway around and got its legs all tangled up. Then it started to fall over. Its arms flailing wildly, trying to stop its fall, it tipped over, slowly at first, then faster.

"SPAAAAAAAAAAM!"

It was then that I realized that it was falling straight toward me. For the past several seconds, I had been so intently watching Sfherg and the tively for the day we finally become truly civilized. It is to this end that they kidnapped Elvis, because they see him as the savior of the human race, the man who will ultimately lead us to civilization. I think that they are more than a little crazy. The other aliens I have encountered were a pair of ugly reptilian creatures who claimed to be advance scouts for some invasion, but who turned out to be nothing more than lost vacationers. Neither encounter had really prepared me to meet this pink thing.

The little creature was indeed only about four feet tall, pink, and round. It was fuzzy, too, like a peach, or that mold that grows on sour cream that sits in the refrigerator for too long. It had a pair of fuzzy pink stalks growing out of its top, each of which sported two eyes. They blinked at me in unison. Three arms were attached equidistantly around its middle, and a pair of legs came out from somewhere underneath. On its feet it wore a pair of fancy black and silver spats. The looked really snazzy– just the thing that every well dressed fuzzy pink alien should be wearing. On its front, or at least the side that was facing me, was a little blue and white patch. It read: “Hello. My name is Sfherg.”

I pointed my .38 Magnum banana at Sfherg. Hopefully it would think that I held a viable weapon, not just a piece of slightly over-ripe fruit.

“Don’t move!” I said. “I’ve got you covered!”

Sfherg brought its rear arms up over its head just like crooks do in all the old movies and television shows, and I thought that I had it beat. Then it raised the forward one and pointed the small lavender banana it held straight at my chest. Great, just what I needed. An alien race for which bananas really were weapons.

“Ekjm lu9u3’m mk ki04,” it said, or something equally unintelligible. From where the sounds came, I have no idea. Shferg did not seem to have a mouth.

Sfherg’s third hand contracted slightly, and a laser beam shot out of its banana and struck the back of my hand. It did no damage, but, damn!, it was hot, and I dropped my .38 Magnum banana because of it. I shook my hand in the air for a few seconds, and then sucked on the red spot where the beam had hit. That seemed to help some.

The fire hydrant decided that this was its cue to act again. The only problem is, it was not a very good actor. Good vocal projection, that it had, but nothing whatsoever in the way of body language.

“GO AWAY! MY SPAM!” it boomed.

For the first time, Sfherg seemed to take notice of the hydrant. It swiveled both eyestalks without turning its body and looked at the German Shepherd-shaped spaceship, which was still staring at me with tightly curled lips.

“Uunk4EGj89 jl89’;quj9!” Sfherg jabbered at it, pointing toward the hydrant.

The spaceship’s head swiveled away from me and toward the fire hydrant. With a low growl in its throat, it barked at the hydrant, a loud bark which shattered a few nearby windows. The hydrant did not seem affected in the least, and started forward.

“MY SPAM! GO A—”

Its booming voice was suddenly cut off as the spaceship lifted one of its rear legs, revealing a sort of gun turret. A bright yellow laser beam shot out, stunning the hydrant into quiescence.

Evidently satisfied that the fire hydrant was no longer trying to horn in on its territory, Sfherg’s eyestalks reoriented on me and it returned to jabbering.

“U7ma] cy9ko2’ =vRUhik 4k-*YU$ MkPV+w!” it said. I had no idea what it was trying to say, but I had the odd feeling that it was trying to sell me something. Insurance, maybe, or disposable diapers.

“I don’t know what you’re selling,” I said, “but I ain’t buying!” I showed it my empty hands and shook my head in an exaggerated fashion.

Sfherg continued to jabber at me, throwing its arms about like an Italian juggler on drugs. I was quite aware that one of those hands still held the little heat-beam shooting banana. I took a step back. Sfherg took a step forward. I stepped back. It stepped forward.

Soon enough, I “cha-cha”ed my way onto one of the fire hydrant’s feet. Not the place I wanted to be, trapped between a rock and a hard place, as it were. I felt the fire hydrant rumble softly. It was evidently coming out of its quiescent state. Great! Trapped between a live rock and a hard place!

“—WAY! GO AWAY!”

The fire hydrant suddenly came back to life, acting as though it had never been zapped. It continued to walk forward. Me, I had been sitting on one of its Reeboks, and suddenly found myself flying. I was launched into the air with the greatest of ease, that daring young me with no flying trapeze. I sailed over Sfherg’s eyestalks and crashed into one of the legs of the spaceship. I slid to the ground, feeling very much like Wile E. Coyote.

the banana in my holster explained why my Rice Krispies had been so gritty at breakfast.

As my hands flew up and I arrested my spin, realizing that the shot from my banana had not happened, I saw that the hydrant was holding nothing that resembled what I would call a weapon. Instead, it was looking up at the ever darkening sky. The whine kept getting louder.

I looked up, too. The little cloud I had noticed earlier had grown to cover the sky from horizon to horizon, which, admittedly, is not very far in midtown Manhattan. It was pitch black and swirling in a funnel shape, being occasionally lit by flashes of green and purple. I could not help but wonder if the Ghostbusters were back in town.

A beam of light shot out of the vortex and hit the street between the hydrant and myself, but did no damage.

"Wonderful," I thought. "The hydrant didn't have any weapons on it, so it decided to call its spaceship. Instead of just New York, it's probably going to blow up the entire state!"

A second beam also came out of the vortex, followed by a third, this one of a slightly different color. They started to move, slowly at first, and then picked up speed to where they were tracing an intricate pattern in the street. After a few seconds, someone turned on the volume. A series of five musical notes played, then repeated. Once, twice, three times. It was a familiar sequence of notes, one that I heard before, from an old song, maybe, or perhaps a late 70's science-fiction movie.

The wind picked up again, blowing my hair around more violently, tearing at my clothing. Bits of trash and dead leaves tumbled through the dry gutters, playing tag with wisps of fog running away from the harbor. I put my hand up to shield my eyes from the ever brightening display of dancing lights and flickering lightning. With one corner of my mind, I noticed that the fire hydrant had done the same.

Something began to come down out of the cloud vortex. Actually, it was four somethings, each of them about ten feet across. They were coming down right where I was standing, so I moved. My mind was on the things dropping out of the sky, and I walked toward the fire hydrant without thinking. Luckily, it seemed much more concerned with the things than with me.

"GO AWAY! MY SPAM!" it boomed.

The four things took no notice, and continued to come down. They were an odd, silvery metallic color, and roughly cylindirical in shape. They looked rather like legs, with off-center landing pads at the ends. Sure enough, another, larger object came out of the vortex, and the four cylinders were revealed to be legs for whatever it was.

"Landing gear for a spaceship," I thought. "And the ship evidently doesn't belong to the fire hydrant."

Now, before this encounter, I had had a fairly clear idea of what a spaceship should look like. It had to have a circular, saucer shape to it, whether that was the whole ship, like in "The Day the Earth Stood Still," or just part of the whole, like in "Star Trek." This thing had no disc-like qualities to it. It was nearly two hundred feet long, and about as tall as the fire hydrant. The four legs attached to the body in an oddly jointed way, which made them look as if they could bend in all directions. At one end of the body was a curved appendage which was waving back and forth. At the other end was an odd protuberance, with a pair of pyramidal mounds sticking out of it, a pair of glassed in viewports, and a mouth with sharp teeth in it. I had seen a few of these before, owning one myself, but they were never like this. Earthly German Shepherds are rarely silver and they never grow quite so large.

As I stood there, I knew exactly how a mouse must feel when cornered by a cat. There I was, standing between a giant fire hydrant out to squish me flat, and a giant German Shepherd-shaped spaceship, which had unknown intentions. It was, however, looking at me. And it was growling.

I was trying to decide which way I should run when a small black hole appeared in the side of the German Shepherd, about where its ribs should have ended. The hole grew larger, and then a ramp of the same silvery material as the ship began to form out of the air. It formed a spiral joining the hole to the street just a few feet in front of me. Then a figure stepped into view at the top of the ramp.

At first, the figure looked pitch black, blacker than the hole itself. Soon, though, it stepped out into the light and was revealed in all its glory. It was pink and round, and it looked to be about four feet tall. Hardly the most frightening thing. It took a single step forward, and then the ramp acted as an escalator, transporting the alien down to street level.

Before this, I had only met two different types of aliens. One set were the tall, thin, white aliens with big black eyes that half the population of the world seems to have met. They are peaceful and benevolent, and claim to be tending Earth protections. I could keep running and hope that the police would take care of the hydrant, but I quickly abandoned that possibility. It is not that I believe that the N.Y.P.D. is inefficient, but I doubt that they could really handle something of this scope. Perhaps the National Guard, or the Army? I considered the metal casing of the hydrant, and put that hope out of my mind as well. If the Japanese army could do nothing against the flesh of Godzilla, could the American army do any better against a metal monster? I doubt it!

Of course, I could always give up and let the fire hydrant have the can of Spam. That would certainly solve all of my immediate problems, but I worried about the future. Why did the hydrant want Spam? Why would anyone? And why this particular can? It could always go and hold up another store (so to speak), right? I had a feeling that there was more to the Spam concern than met the eye.

A dark cloud drifted in from somewhere over the harbor to try and obscure the sun. The light breeze that had been playing with my hair turned vicious and tried to bite at me through my jacket. A neon sign in a deserted brokerage house window proclaimed the latest interest rates on long term, high yield C.D.'s, and the glow of its light was reflected in the windows of a solitary parked car. I suddenly came to realize that I was still carrying both the Spam and my Twinkies, which were now nothing but paste from the abuse I had put them through. Only a little dismayed, I put the Spam in my jacket pocket and opened up the Twinkies, squeezing a little out on my hand and eating it like the cheap caviar paste that comes in a tube. Believe me, though, Twinkie paste tastes a lot better than cheap caviar paste. In addition, it helped to replace some of the energy I had expended in my headlong flight from the hydrant, as well as quelling the withdrawal pangs that were coming back as my adrenaline level returned to normal.

"SPAM!"

The fire hydrant emerged from the alley in a shower of debris. As it oriented itself on me, I took off running again. In seconds, it was after me, the TROMP! TROMP! TROMP! of its feet growing ever louder, ever closer. I was almost to the Stock Exchange. A minute longer and I could duck inside and...and...and then what? I had no idea.

I was quickly relieved of all concern over the "what next" question.

"SPAM! STOP! PREPARE TO DIE!"

A coherent sentence, more or less. This in itself might have been enough to give me pause, but the booming voice exerted command. I stopped.

A loud whine began to build behind me. It sounded like some horrible weapon building its energy, preparing to release it and destroy me. What would it be? A phaser? A wave-motion gun? The latest Jackie Collins paperback? Each possibility seemed worse than the one before.

It began to grow dark. With nightfall still hours away, I was sure that I knew what was happening. The fire hydrant had some powerful energy weapon trained on me, one that required so much power that it was literally sucking the light right out of the air around me. The whine continued to increase in volume. My right arm began to twitch uncontrollably.

"What am I?" I thought. "A man or a mouse?" Cliche, I know, but at that moment I was hardly trying to come up with an original line.

A man, I decided. I had come to the conclusion that I was not going to get out of this one alive. I was going to be blown to bits by whatever weapon the hydrant had, and most of Manhattan would probably go with me. At least the hydrant would not get this can of Spam. Sure, it seems silly to lose your life and most of a major city over a can of processed pseudo-meat, but principles have to start somewhere, and mine started right there. I was going to die, but I was going to go down fighting.

With this decision, all trembling in my arm stopped. I reached into my jacket and pulled my .38 Magnum from its holster. Certainly, a simple lead bullet would do no good against something as large as that thing, but at least I would be able to go out in a blaze of glory. As I brought it out, one corner of my mind noticed that there was something...different...about my gun. The texture, the color, the balance– all were off. However, I had no time to dwell on this as I turned, spinning myself around to defiantly face the fire hydrant.

Everything seemed to move in slow motion. My arms did an odd, bobbing dance as I spun, but oriented unerringly on the hydrant. As soon as it came into my sights, my fingers tensed, contracting about where the trigger should have been, as I fired off a single shot. Indeed, a trigger would have been there, had it been my .38 Magnum that I was holding. How a banana had got into my holster, I have no idea. As my hands jerked up, reflexively imitating the kickback of a gun, my mind drifted into an odd thought: at least them probably got stepped on by the hydrant as it TROMP! TROMP! TROMP!ed after me.

I ran into the street without looking. Stopping for the “Don’t Walk” sign is all well and good, at the right time and place, but it is not something you do when you are about to become gum on the sole of a twelve-foot long tennis shoe. A car slammed on its brakes, screeching to a halt, but it was too late. I ran into its fender and my momentum carried me over the hood of the car in a tumble. I managed to land on my feet and kept on running without missing a beat. From behind, I heard the CRUNCH! as the car became to the fire hydrant what an empty pop can would be to me if I stepped on it– an annoyance wrapped around the foot which needs to be kicked off. I think that the remains landed about a block away.

As my foot hit the curb, I reached out and grabbed the light-post on the corner and let my momentum carry me around in a quarter circle so that I was now running down the cross street. Hopefully, this way I would lose the fire hydrant, or at least gain some time.

No such luck. With something as large as that, my little jog did nothing but make it have to change direction slightly. It cut diagonally across the street, crushing anything that got in its way. If I had accomplished anything, it was only to let the fire hydrant gain on me.

“SPAM!”

It was right behind me. I imagined that I could feel the air rushing to get out of the way of those huge feet as they came closer and closer to grinding me into thick paste. What was I going to do?

Luckily, by this time, most of the people had cleared the street and sidewalk before me. It was a good thing, since the sprinting was beginning to take its toll on me. I was no longer alert enough to watch out for little children and stoplights. I certainly was not alert enough to watch out for homeless people lying on the sidewalk.

I was halfway to the ground before I realized that I had tripped over the transients legs, and I was all the way to the ground before I could think of anything to do about it. By then it was too late– my stride was broken, my lead was gone. I picked myself up and was sure that I felt the rushing air from the hydrant’s descending shoe. A big black shadow obliterated the sky, growing larger as the huge shoe tried to make me one with the concrete. That was when I saw it. My salvation, or so I hoped.

There was an alley only a few feet away. With speed lent by need, I lunged out from under the shoe and dove into the alley. I made it, but I fear that the transient was not quite so lucky. The alley was narrow, and thankfully not a dead end, so I would be able to escape. At the entrance, the fire hydrant cocked its head to one side and then the other in puzzlement, peering in at me. Of course, since its head was attached without a neck, it had to literally move its entire body in order to cock its head, which made it appear to be doing a funny dance in front of the alley.

“SPAM?”

It did not take long, though, for the hydrant to deduce that I had, indeed, fled into the alley. Maybe it could smell me. However it had found me, it must have decided that there was no fundamental difference between the two of us, and it tried to follow me into the alley. Of course, there was a fundamental difference– I was shorter, and rather a bit thinner. But it did not let the size differential dissuade it as it rammed its body straight into the alley.

At first I was worried that I had misjudged the width of the alley, and that it would be able to pass unimpeded. However, after a few feet, the fire hydrant slowed as the stubs from which its arms emerged ground up tight against the side of the alley. Although it twisted and tried to turn, it looked as though the hydrant were securely stuck.

I should have known that it could not be that easy. With a roar of rage, or perhaps it was pain, the fire hydrant surged forward again. Its stubby shoulders dug a pair of two foot deep furrows in the sides of the buildings, and bright sparks shot off in every direction. It was still coming after me, even if it had been slowed to a crawl. Maybe, just maybe, I would be able to escape it, but only if the alley was long enough to give me a good lead.

“SPAM!” it boomed, but with a grunt of effort underlying the word.

As my luck would have it, the alley was quite short. I jogged along it and reached the next street a couple minutes before the fire hydrant would be able to, but I wished that it could have been longer. From my general surroundings, I decided that I must be on Wall Street. Yuppies scuttled hither and yon, running around like chickens with their heads chopped off. If I had had no idea as to the cause of the panic, I would have assumed that the market was crashing again. Within moments, the entire street was deserted except for me.

As I walked alone down Wall Street, hearing the faint rumblings of the hydrant as it scraped its way through the alley, I considered my opthe clerk. A case to solve, such as it was. I took a step toward the doors so as to see what had happened to the ground.

I planted my foot firmly on the floor, and the linoleum jumped away. I suddenly found myself falling as the store was turned on end. Luckily for me, if not for the Twinkies I was carrying, I only fell a few feet, whereupon I landed on the now horizontal side of a counter. Most of the other people in the store were not so lucky, ending up as they did in a heap, covered by magazines and video rental boxes. One kid, however, slid into the candy aisle, where he was probably in Heaven.

I simply held onto the counter for dear life as the entire building began to shake up and down. Then it started to rattle back and forth, which sent several liter bottles of pop and boxes of cereal flying around in a vicious rain which I, being near the front of the store, or the top, as it was at the moment, avoided. Although I should have expected it, I was still caught unprepared as the building proceeded to roll over.

They say that when you are about to die, your entire life flashes in front of your eyes. If that is true, then I was in no danger. The only thing that flashed in front of my eyes was a vision of Sister Mary Margaret standing over me with a ruler in hand. Believe me, there has been much more to my life than Catholic school. Whatever is true, as I fell toward the plate glass windows at the front (now the bottom) of the store, seeing the all too obviously hard asphalt beyond, I though I was going to die.

However, I did not die. When the building rolled over, the doors had flung open, and I proceeded to plunge right through them, along with a shower of ice cream bars, styrofoam cups, and two quarts of motor oil. Unlike the ice cream, cups, and oil, I managed to grab onto one of the door handles as I fell. I nearly wrenched my arm out of its socket in stopping myself, but stop I did. I considered myself rather fortunate.

I had all of about three seconds to consider myself fortunate before a rack of Cheese Puffs slammed into me and tore the handle from my grasp. Time seemed to slow as the Cheese Puffs and I tumbled to the ground below. Asphalt spun by, closely followed by the convenience store, blue sky, and something huge and red. Then more asphalt, with ever growing yellow lines on it. More store, more sky, more red thing. A whole lot of asphalt, seemingly close enough to touch. Store. Sky. Red which totally filled my vision as I hit the ground.

Luckily, the Cheese Puffs had been underneath me as hit, so I was more or less undamaged. I sprang to my feet, stumbled for a second, and regained my balance. Amazingly, I was still holding on to the Twinkies, although they were rather compressed by now.

“SPAM?” boomed a voice from overhead.

I looked up to see what could possibly have such a large voice. Silly me, I had forgotten that I was still under the open doors, and the rack of Cheese Puffs turned out not to be the last thing to fall out. I looked up just in time to see something blue and silver strike me on the forehead.

I think that I would have lost consciousness, but the booming voice spoke again, replacing the blackness with redness, centered somewhere between my ears.

“SPAM!”

I stumbled back a step, and looked down. Indeed, I had been hit by a falling can of Spam. It sat a few feet away, doing its best to look innocent. Now, looking innocent is one of the few things that Spam can do well, and this can was expert. Of course, its effort was aided by the fact that a few feet farther away sat a pair of twelve-foot long Reebok tennis shoes. Worse yet, there were legs of the same scale in the Reeboks. As I followed the legs up, noting the red and white striped socks covering them, they merged into a round, red armored body, which continued up. And up, and up some more. A pair of ridiculously thin arms eventually joined the body, and it was all topped off by a domed head sporting bulging eyes of a sort rarely seen anywhere outside of a Tex Avery cartoon.

The eighty-foot tall fire hydrant looked down at me and the Spam with malice in its eyes. Effortlessly, it shifted the weight of the convenience store which rested on its shoulder, tipping it back so that nothing more fell out. I finally realized just why stores claim that their largest losses come from shoplifting. With as smooth a motion as I could manage, I bent down, scooped up the can of Spam, turned on my heel, and ran. Ben Johnson never ran faster, with or without steroids. There was a crash, as if a convenience store had just fallen sixty-odd feet to the ground.

“SPAM!” boomed the fire hydrant. “COME BACK, SPAM!”

Not a chance. I raced down the street. People jumped out of my way, and again out of the fire hydrant’s. Those who did not move, I pushed. Those too heavy to push got dodged. Some of

Under different circumstances, I might have been happy, since I hate poodles. Now, however, I could care less. I vaulted over a baby carriage like O.J. Simpson does over luggage, reached the corner, and screeched to a halt. There it was!

Less than a block away, secluded in the midst of its parking lot, was a 7-11. The ubiquitous convenience store, well stocked with everything from bug killer to beer. And Twinkies. The store almost seemed to glow as I approached. I crossed the street in a daze, ignoring the fact that the light was against me. Cars slammed on their brakes, with more than one driver yelling obscenities out his window at me. But I did not care. At that moment, all that mattered was Twinkies.

As soon as I saw them, nestled in their plastic wrappers beside the fruit pies and below the cupcakes, my breathing calmed. I was tranquil. The Twinkie– my own private Holy Grail, from which I might sip and be reborn. I took two packages, caressing them lightly. So round, so soft, so fully packed with creme filling. Silently, treasuring the experience, I got into line to pay for them. I did my best to ignore the woman in line behind me. Once she saw what I was carrying, however, it was too late.

“Twinkies!” she said, snootily. “Those things are just chock full of preservatives, you know. They’ll kill you.”

Busybodies really get on my nerves.

“Now this, this is real food,” she said, pushing a can of vegetables in my face. “Uncle Orville’s Canned Okra. Nutritious, and without any preservatives.” She sounded very smug.

I noticed she said nothing about the taste.

“You really should eat more vegetables.”

“Mind your own business, lady,” I said, more than a bit irritated.

“Well!” she said, in falsified outrage. “How rude! Wait until I tell Sally about this! I was only offering some advice, advice you should heed, young man. Just how old do you expect to live to be, eating nothing but preservatives?”

“Until I’m a hundred and fourteen,” I sneered. “I intend to be well preserved.”

I then turned around, ignoring all further comments from “Okra Winfrey.” I noticed the headline on one of the tabloids: “Space aliens save Dan Quayle’s life.” What with how my cases go, I have met a few aliens, and none of them would have been that stupid. Or at least they would not have admitted to it. Now, the ones who stole Elvis, well, they knew what they were doing.

“Next,” said the clerk, interrupting my memories. “That’s you, man.”

He looked to be about nineteen, had pimples, and sported a thin moustache which looked like about two days growth, but which he had probably not shaved for two months. The ubiquitous convenience store clerk to go with the ubiquitous convenience store. I set the Twinkies down on the counter, reached in my pants pocket, and pulled out some coins, enough for the Twinkies and some thirty cents more. The clerk handed me my change: one thin dime.

Before I could comment on his lack of math skills, the entire building began to shake. The dime flew from my hand to land near the door, where it spun around in a drunken dance. Cans of beer fell out of the coolers, and candy bars leapt from the shelves in a mad dash for freedom. “My God!” screamed a woman– I suppose it was “Okra Winfrey.” Too many vegetables make you jumpy. “It’s an earthquake!”

I rather doubted that it was an earthquake. New York is built on fairly stable ground that does not shift much. Not like California. The quakes that I had experienced in San Francisco were one of the main reasons I had moved to New York. That and being run out of town on a rail.

I jumped after my change, but a further shake put me off balance, and I nearly overshot the coin and headed for a video game. However, a twist and a grab at a counter let me stop quickly. Looking for the dime, I discovered I was standing on it. I also found that an older man wearing suspenders and a bow tie was pointing out the plate glass doors at the front of the store.

“It’s not an earthquake!” he said. “New York is sinking!”

Doomsayers have been predicting for years that New York will sink into the Atlantic, and it is therefore one of the chief fears of New Yorkers, along with the thought of another garbage strike, or that the Statue of Liberty might actually belong to New Jersey. I glanced over my shoulder, and, sure enough, it looked like the man was right. The buildings across the street had become noticeably shorter. The street had already disappeared. For that matter, so had the store’s parking lot.

I was suspicious. Why should this store be left alone while the rest of the city sank out of sight? More likely, something was happening to this building independently of the others. But I would never find out about it by cowering in the back of the store with the other customers and

So That's Why They Call It the Big Apple

James R. Drew

I watched in horror as the enormous toaster oven opened its door and began to speak. What came out was the worst imitation of Edward G. Robinson's voice that I have ever heard.

"We're moving in, ya hear?" it said. "And there's nothin' you can do ta stop us, myah, nothin'. So give up that transistor radio. Myah. It's the only thing standing between us and total world domination. Myah, myah."

The man standing in front of it, looking all the smaller because of the oven's immense size, clutched the transistor radio to his chest.

"Never!" he said.

"Then prepare to die, fool Earthling! Myah."

Then the toaster oven leapt into the air and came down flat on the man, crushing both him and the radio into oblivion.

Oh, it was horrible. "They Unplugged Chicago"– giant appliances from space take over the Mafia. Definitely the worst film this side of "Plan 9 from Outer Space." I was only too glad to turn off the television.

"Thank God nothing like that could happen in real life," I said.

Me and my big mouth.

My name is Marc Lynx. I am a detective, or at least that is what my business card says. But I never seem to get those run-of-the-mill missing person and murder cases. No, the cases I deal with are the sort you never read about in the papers– except for the tabloids. Elvis-stealing aliens, Hitler's clone, teddy bears possessed by demons, you know the sort.

I looked at my watch. It was just past noon, and I had a luncheon appointment at 12:30 down at the Five Happiness; a Chinese restaurant owned by my receptionist Nicholas' Jewish uncle Mordechai Zaronstein. Something about his daughter being missing. A simple missing person case would be a relief. Given my recent earnings, any case would be a relief.

Normally, I refuse to take cases involving friends and employees on ethical grounds. Doing so had cost me a girl-friend back when I lived in Frisco. This time, though, my wallet decided to make an exception.

With my car in the shop (damn Yuppies and their Volvos!), I would have to resort to other transportation. A cab was out– too expensive. I decided to take the bus. Naturally, it pulled away from the curb just as I reached the bus stop. I briefly considered taking the subway, but ruled that out quickly. The last time I had gone anywhere by subway, it had broken down between stations; leaving me stranded for several hours with the operator, a pair of winos, a transvestite, and a nun with her entourage of seven parochial school girls. A nightmare in real life.

So I decided to walk. It was only a couple of miles. Of course, I would have to fight my way through the noon press of humanity, but I could make it. I naturally exude an air of confidence that makes people tend to give me breathing space– or is it an air of insanity? Is there a difference? In addition, if things really got tight, I could always pull out my .38 Magnum, yell "Stop, thief!" and watch the crowd part like the Red Sea.

I made good headway at first, but the city slowly began to take its toll on me. The people seemed pushier than usual. The car horns seemed louder, and all directed at me. I grew tense. My eyes began to dart around, seeing monsters in every face. The fact that most New Yorkers are monsters anyway did not help matters any. Panic grew.

I soon realized what was happening. Withdrawal symptoms. I admit it– I am addicted. To Twinkies. "My name is Marc, and I'm a Twinkiholic," or something like that. That luscious sponge cake, that heavenly cream filling, all those preservatives. Just thinking about it made the cravings worse. Luckily, I always carry a spare package in my jacket pocket. Panting a little, I stepped out of the traffic flow and reached into my pocket for it.

My pocket was empty! I checked again. Still empty. Panic began to take hold. Maybe the other pocket? I reached in, felt something, and pulled it out. Damn! It was the business card from Mordechai's restaurant.

What was I going to do? The realization set in that I would be a gibbering wreck long before I got to the restaurant if I did not get some Twinkies immediately. My pace quickened. I was jogging now, pushing people out of my way heedlessly.

As the tension grew, I started to run. People were staring, but I hardly noticed. One woman who I pushed wrapped herself up in her poodle's leash and fell over, yanking the dog from its feet.

won't be bought out."

The distant train drew closer.

"How much will it take to make sure you never kill again? We can't stop you, the best we can do is pay you to keep the peace."

Richard smiled. "You can't." He was beginning to enjoy the game, but equally aware that his shield time was running out. At best, he had another three quarters of a minute, less than that if he didn't want to totally exhaust himself.

The rumble of the train began to pass them, shaking their car. Kendall smiled ever so slightly, and made two small adjustments to reality. The bench that Richard was sitting on vanished silently. In his sudden fall, Richard did not notice the slight change in the noise, the minor differences in the shaking.

Richard looked at Kendall in surprise. "You did that silently."

"Of course. You abuse your ability by using it as a weapon, Richard. You force people like me to hunt you down."

Kendall was more powerful than Richard realized. And his words implied that there were others like him in the world. Suddenly, he felt less confident about the interview, but didn't let it show.

"Hunt me? You can't touch me any more than the police can. Just because you know of my ability and understand it doesn't mean you can stop it."

Kendall's smile vanished. "Your arm, I believe, is testimony that I can indeed hurt you. That could have been your heart. Next time it will be."

Richard smiled broadly. "But you can't do it again, thanks to a trick you yourself showed me. No, I think you probably have the most to lose from a showdown." He drew a knife from his belt, calm again.

Kendall looked at it uncertainly. "You know that that won't hurt me."

Richard smiled. "No, but it will hurt her." He gestured toward June, and the movement made him aware how much energy he was losing. He could only stay a few more seconds.

The knife vanished from Richard's hand, appeared in Kendall's. "No, it won't. I can protect her as easily as myself. And do you trust your protection enough to challenge me? I think we have nothing more to say."

The train car still shook with the rumble like the passing of a train.

Richard nodded. "Indeed. Except this: Edgar Dinash is a dead man." He turned away from Kendall, twisted energy in his mind. A roll of thunder filled the car, echoing. Kendall cringed briefly in sympathetic pain, then sat down and hugged his wife.

"He got away again," she said simply, sympathy in her voice.

"No, he didn't." With an offhand gesture he teleported the curtains off of the windows, allowed her to see out.

"We're moving," she commented.

"Absolutely. I started us when the other train went by. TP is wonderful for avoiding such nuisances as acceleration. The shaking isn't the other train, it's us."

"But so what?"

"Richard Johnson didn't understand his power. He never used the grid for energy or direction, or enough air would have been shifted back from his destination to fill the gap he left. But he couldn't have known that, or there wouldn't have been so much thunder when he teleported. He wasn't aware that we were moving, so when he left, he wouldn't know to bleed off the excess velocity. Wherever he went, he was stationary with respect to the train. To the rest of the world, he was moving at 120 miles an hour. I just hope he didn't hurt anyone as he died."

"Are you sure he's dead?" June said softly.

"Completely. And you will be, too, if you watch the news this evening. 'Man smeared on pavement'. I'm sure it will be a top story." Kendall didn't sound happy about it, only resigned. He stood looking out the window of the train for a long time, searching for something in the blurring buildings. He stopped the train, returned it to the station, derailed but functional.

An instant later they were in their own kitchen.

"I think I need a good nap," Martin Kendall said.

Christopher Kempke is a Computer Science graduate student at Oregon State University. His interests include writing, computers, magic, juggling, bridge, and other games, not necessarily in that order. His major goal in life is to become a professional student, a goal which he is rapidly attaining.

He can be reached at the address kempkec@ure.cs.orst.edu blood, but he was still alive, and needed to get out of here before his enemy found him if he wanted to stay that way. Richard sat for several minutes, then stood up slowly, leaning on the bed for support and waiting until the darkness in his head receded once more. Moving to the window, he looked out. Across the street he could see a fast food restaurant. Summoning all the energy he had in him, he teleported there in a flash of light and thunder.

Kendall heard the thunder just as he reached the door of the hospital room. He cursed softly under his breath as he opened the door.

"Missed him. But he can't have gone far." With June, he crossed to the window on the other side of the room. All of New York twinkled in front of him, a thousand lights on a city that could hide a million men.

"Far enough, though," he concluded.

Richard looked at the ad again. It read, quite simply:

```
RICHARD JOHNSON, I WILL BE ON
TRAIN NINE OF THE SUBWAY SYSTEM
AT EXACTLY NOON ON THURSDAY. WE
CAN NEGOTIATE THERE. THE TRAIN IS
NOT RUNNING, NO ONE ELSE WILL BE
PRESENT. -- EDGAR DINASH
```

For the hundredth time in as many hours, Richard lifted the stump of his left arm and looked for his watch, the pang of loss cutting deep into him as he realized his error and looked at his other wrist. The time was eleven thirty, fully a half an hour before the meeting. He felt as though there were only a half an hour left of his life.

Clearly, the message was the bait to a trap. But a strange, new man had entered Richard's life, the only person in the world who he could fear. Until one or the other of them was dead, Richard would never be safe, never be confident that his power was unique and able to pull him out of any situation. He would always feel hunted. This message might be the only chance he ever had to win the battle. Looking for a long moment at the stump of his arm, Richard knew that he would win.

And the man had given Richard knowledge. The trick, of preventing the teleportation of Richard's knife into the other man's body, was not very difficult; all it took was for Richard to know it was possible, and the solution almost immediately presented itself. Mainly, it was a process of continually teleporting oneself to the same spot, preventing intrusion of foreign matter into it. The process was exhausting, but Richard could now do it for almost a minute at a time. He should be safe as long as he didn't take chances.

As the appointed hour approached, some spectators appeared, the inevitable result of the meeting's public announcement. Richard told them to leave, quietly at first and then emphatically as some of them began to argue with him. After two of the men identified themselves as also having the name Richard Johnson, Richard got fed up and teleported them to the sidewalk above. None returned.

Richard checked his watch again, felt a wave of confidence as he unconsciously picked the correct wrist. Five minutes to noon; time to move. He twisted his mind and body, filling the silent subway train with a roar of thunder.

Two people were already inside the train car when he arrived. One was the man he had met in the living room of Dinash's house, the other a young woman that he did not recognize. Neither appeared concerned at the method of his arrival.

Both were seated on low benches. The windows were covered with heavy black plastic sheets, probably to prevent outsiders from observing their conversation. The only light in the car came from two electric lamps sitting on the floor.

Richard stood firm and gazed at them for a few moments, his newly learned shield operating at its fullest potential.

"You said something about negotiating?" he asked, not wanting the shield's implied time limit to show in his face or voice.

Kendall nodded. "What will it take to get you off of Edgar Dinash's tail?"

Obviously there really was some negotiating to be done. The trap was baited neatly, if it really was a trap. Perhaps they simply feared him and wanted a way out. Richard seated himself on a bench and looked at Kendall.

"More than you can pay. I don't back out on a job. I never have."

Far away there came the sound of an approaching train. Kendall opened his hands in a friendly gesture.

"We can pay a substantial amount, Mr. Johnson. More than you might imagine. In fact, enough to make you quite comfortable for the rest of your life."

"You don't understand. Money is not the object. If I want money, show me any bank in the world which can prevent my taking it. I have been contracted to kill Mr. Dinash, and I will. I

Dinash turned back to June. “I had the feeling when I got up this morning that it was going to be one of those days. Okay, I’ll leave for tomorrow. But if this house is damaged, or anything is missing . . .”

Kendall raised his hands. “Then you have our names and current addresses from our licence. You really have nothing to lose.”

Dinash remained silent.

Richard looked at his watch. Midnight. Teleporting the materials out of the safe once more, he packed them carefully in his briefcase and returned to his hotel room. There he changed clothes and packed his bags. Downstairs, he hailed a cab and was back on the streets.

Minutes later, he was in the back yard of Edgar Dinash’s house. He looked up to the upstairs bedroom window, where a light still shone. Richard settled back to wait. There was no rush, now, and everything to be gained by waiting until Dinash was asleep. An hour went by, as other lights in the house turned on and off. Eventually, the bedroom light went out.

Still he waited, as another long hour crept by. Then he stood slowly and approached the back door. Richard knew from previous exploration of this house that there was a security alarm on the door. Stepping back, he teleported to the other side.

Upstairs, a sound of thunder caused June to look up suddenly from the chair on which she sat. Kendall moved quietly to the window, looked out at the sky, and frowned. A thoughtful look came over his face.

A slight noise came from downstairs. Kendall gestured for June to remain where she was, and teleported himself silently to the other side of the bedroom door.

Richard moved as carefully as he could across the sunken living room, but he bumped one of the tables even so. The vase that was on it did not tip, only slide slightly. He paused, but heard no sound above. After a few seconds, he began his slow march across the living room again.

He was not prepared for the light to come on. The blinding illumination was not enough to hide the man who stood against the opposite wall of the room, but Richard just stared and shook his head for a second or so.

“Hello, Richard,” Kendall said. “I’ve been waiting for you.”

Kendall was dressed in nothing but a loose robe, and his hands were empty. Richard made a decision quickly, and drew his long knife from his belt. Holding it in his hand, his mind twisted it into Kendall’s chest.

Nothing happened. Kendall noted the effort but descended into the living room without comment. Richard looked at the knife in disbelief, and tried again. Kendall sat down.

“You can’t kill Edgar Dinash, Richard. I won’t let you. Even a Teletrix will have some difficulty killing him where I’ve put him.”

The battle began and ended in an instant. Kendall tapped a grid of energy, Richard gathered energy from within himself. In a single instant, Richard vanished, and Kendall’s mind snapped out toward him.

A sound of thunder filled the room, and a scream of agony came from outside the walls of Edgar Dinash’s house. The upstairs door opened and June came running down the stairs. The first thing she saw when she reached the bottom was the bloody lump that lay in the center of the carpet. The second thing she saw was Kendall.

He was sitting in the chair with a look of shock on his face. When his wife sat next to him, he looked up with a kind of pity in his eyes.

“Thunder,” he said quietly, carefully. “The air filling in the space he vacates when he teleports. There’s probably a flash of light at the other end to disperse the energy.”

June looked at him. “So?”

“He’s an amateur, not a Teletrix. The academy somehow never found him.” Kendall fixed her with a stare. “He’s never been trained in using a grid. Odds are he’s teleporting on his own energy; he must have incredible endurance. Certainly he doesn’t know how to protect himself.” Kendall pointed toward the center of the room. “That’s his hand. I teleported it off of him as he was leaving.”

He stood up. “We had the advantage of surprise, and now I blew it. He’ll be prepared the second time. We need to find him, and kill him.” Kendall hugged his wife. “And soon. Or he’ll keep on killing.”

Richard pushed the darkness from his mind and regained consciousness in a hospital bed. Gently, he examined his arm. The bleeding had stopped, and the flesh at the end had been sewn together, leaving a battered stump; there was no feeling at all in it. On his other arm, blood flowed into him from an I.V. unit.

Shaking his head carefully, he pulled the needle from his arm and sat up. He had lost a lot of empty space in disbelief. Kendall stretched his smile still further.

"I received your name from a Mr. Eidel, Ms. Brandon. He seemed quite confident that you know where Richard Johnson is. Seems he recommended him to you for a little job you need done. A very illegal job."

"You have no proof of anything, and I don't know who Richard Johnson is."

Kendall shrugged. "I don't need to offer you proof, Ms. Brandon. I have something far more valuable to you."

A moment later the office had vanished, to be replaced by the windy building roof. Emily Brandon found herself looking over the edge of her skyscraper, forty stories to the ground. She shook her head violently. Kendall sat next to her on the ledge.

"I assure you that this is not a dream, Ms. Brandon. Where is Richard Johnson?"

"I don't have to tell you anything. My receptionist saw you come into the office. You'll be found and locked away for murder if you kill me."

"Suit yourself," Kendall said just loudly enough to be heard over the wind. He gave her a gentle push, toppling her over the edge of the building. There was silence for a moment as she grabbed for a hold, then a drawn out scream as she tumbled over and over away from the building.

Kendall watched, let her fall almost a dozen stories, then teleported her back to the roof, carefully canceling her velocity. Emily Brandon lay in a barely conscious heap on the top of her building.

"Where is Richard Johnson?" Kendall repeated.

"New York City," she said breathlessly, wide-eyed. "He's there to kill Edgar Dinash."

"And when's the hit supposed to be?"

"Saturday."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Honest to god I don't know."

Kendall nodded. "Ms. Brandon, the information you have given me had better be accurate." A moment later, he vanished. Emily Brandon lay sobbing on the roof of the building for almost an hour before she made her way slowly back to her office.

On the first floor, Kendall came out of the men's room. June looked up from the magazine she was reading.

"Well, did she tell you where he is?"

Kendall nodded. "Yep. She fell for the idea right away."

June shivered.

Endgame

Edgar Dinash found a couple of visitors on his doorstep when he arrived home Friday evening. There was no obvious explanation for how they had gotten there, past the electrified fence and the two guards, and neither the visitors nor the guards seemed inclined to offer any. One of the intruders stepped forward and offered his hand. Edgar ignored it.

"This is private property and you're not invited guests. Please leave these premises at once."

He was ignored in turn. "My name is Martin Kendall, and this is my wife, June Kendall. We're private investigators, and we have reason to believe that your life is in serious danger. May we come in?"

Dinash considered. "Guards!" he called finally. "Make sure that they don't have any weapons on them, then let them in." He waited until the guards had frisked them, then opened the door for them. Together, the three of them stepped into Dinash's home.

"Explain yourselves," he said simply, and gestured toward several plush chairs sitting around the room.

Kendall and his wife sat. June spoke.

"We have reason to believe that a contract on your life has been put out by an Emily Brandon."

Kendall saw the look of interest come onto Dinash's face. Not surprise, just interest.

"It's very possible. She and I don't see quite eye to eye."

June nodded. "In any event, the hit is supposed to be sometime tomorrow. We don't know when, but the man who is supposed to do it is extremely effective. Your guards won't be any good against him."

"So what do you suggest I do?"

"Take a vacation in the city. Go to a cheap hotel, register under a false name, take your guards with you. Leave us and the police to handle this man at your house."

Edgar Dinash looked up at one of his guards, suspicion plainly evident in his face. The guard shook his head, however. "No, they are really legit. I had their licences checked out. They're in good standing, and it's certainly a believable story they have. You should have seen how they got in here. I think we should do it."

The house had been searched by the police, but the two investigators went over it equally carefully. Except for a pot of soup moulding on the stove, the house contained little of interest. No documents in the house had been spared by the police. Kendall disposed of the soup, then joined his wife at the table.

"Well, where do we go from here? He could be almost anyplace."

June shrugged resignedly. "I guess he'll have to show up someplace." She drummed her fingers on the table absentmindedly, staring at one wall of the kitchen. Suddenly, she got up and left the room, Kendall staring questioningly after her. She reappeared a moment later, smiling.

"Martin! There's another room here! Look." She indicated the back wall of the kitchen. "There's no doors leading in there, but that's not the back wall of the house, either. There must be about a ten foot space behind that wall."

"How come the police didn't find it?"

"They might have looked for a secret room, but one without doors? What's more useless than a room without doors?"

Kendall smiled. "Not useless to a Teletrix, of course. You're a genius."

She took the praise silently, then made a gesture of impatience. "Well, are we going in?"

Kendall shook his head. "I'm not going to TP us into an area that I can't see. Let's bring whatever's in there out to us." He stepped back and cleared an area in the kitchen. A moment later a suitcase appeared in it, covered by a pile of loose bills.

June's eyes widened. "There must be a million dollars there."

Kendall squinted at it expertly. "Closer to a hundred million. Richard is a *rich* Teletrix. Take some." He bent down and opened the suitcase. Inside was more money, which Kendall ignored. On the inside top of the suitcase was a small engraved plate, which read *Antosh Eidel*. Beneath it was an address.

"Bingo." Kendall said.

The night watchman looked his way again. Richard was getting a bit tired of avoiding the man's view, so he teleported him down thirteen stories, then remained motionless for a minute or so to be sure that the thunder didn't attract anyone's attention. It didn't. He walked down the hallway to the office which read *Edgar Dinash*, and teleported himself inside. Again, we waited until the thunder in the hall died down. Still, no footsteps could be heard. He panted quietly from exertion, then looked around.

Only one of the drawers in Dinash's desk was locked, so Richard started there. All he found were life insurance policies and contracts for a couple of very big television names. Cursing, he opened the other desk drawers. None contained the information he was looking for, but if the insurance policies were all valid, Dinash's family would be very rich in a few days.

Richard sat back in the chair and put his feet on the desk. The office was twenty stories in the air, and probably expensive for that reason alone, but was relatively sparsely finished. Around the room were photographs of various actors in roles that Dinash had apparently cast them for, including one large framed one of an actress that Richard did not recognize, her face not particularly pretty or memorable. It didn't feel right.

He stood up and went to the wall where the picture hung, and lifted it carefully down. Behind it lay the gleaming steel of an expensive wall safe. Protection against nearly any device man could invent, it took Richard a mere fraction of a second to defeat it and lay its contents out on the desk. He read a few sentences at the top of the documents and smiled; there was no doubt that this was what he had been looking for. He looked at his watch. It was just after midnight, so today was Friday.

By noon on Saturday, Edgar Dinash would be dead.

The elevator door opened, and a receptionist looked up brightly at Martin Kendall. He looked back without a trace of warmth, his eyes daring her to comment.

"Thank you, but I know the way." He turned toward the office door.

"You can't go in there right now, sir. Ms. Brandon is busy."

"No she's not," Kendall smiled menacingly, and opened the door.

Emily Brandon looked up from her desk at the intrusion, and the beginning of an angry comment came to her lips. When she saw Kendall's face, she stopped.

"Where is Richard Johnson?" he demanded.

"I've never heard of any Richard Johnson," Emily said quietly. "I think you should leave this office before I notify security." She reached toward an intercom on her desk, but it vanished before her hand contacted it. She stared at the guard stuck his head out at their approach, lifted his eyebrows questioningly.

"Visitors," Kendall said. "We're here to see the warden."

The guard nodded, "just a minute."

Moments later, a second guard arrived, searched them, and led them to tidy office with the name "Tim Gardener" on the brass door-plate.

"Please, have a seat," the guard requested. "Mr. Gardener isn't in yet this morning, but he should be here in a few minutes. There's coffee and maybe even some donuts in the next room." He pointed to a door, then turned and left.

It was almost a half an hour before the warden walked through the door. He was somewhat of a heavy man, with a face lined from too many years at his job. He extended his hand to Kendall, then June. Both took it silently. The warden seated himself behind his desk, and lifted a pair of glasses to his face.

"How may I help you folks?"

"My name is Martin Kendall; this is my wife June. We're private investigators. We'd like a look at Richard Johnson's file, if we may." From his shirt Kendall produced an ancient private investigator's license that he had gone through some trouble to obtain several years before. Cautiously, to keep it from falling apart, he handed it to the warden. The warden examined it for a few moments, handed it back to Kendall, then walked into a back room. When he returned about two minutes later, he carried a manila folder.

"Here it is, a heavy one, too." He handed the folder to June, and sat down again. "If you don't mind my asking, who hired you for this? I wasn't aware that there was a private party interested in Johnson's case." His voice betrayed a little more interest than the words. Kendall wasn't surprised; prison breakouts didn't happen all that often, especially ones as smooth as this one. Kendall smiled winningly.

"Actually, we're not currently working for anyone. This is sort of a personal thing. Richard Johnson is big news right now. If I can catch him, it will be great for my business."

The warden smiled. "I don't really approve of your motives, but I'd be happy to get Johnson back in my hands. I'd love to see him escape from our underground solitary confinement cells! The next time we catch him, we're going to keep him."

"I'm sure you will," Kendall lied. June had finished copying down something from the folder. She passed it to Kendall, open to Richard Johnson's prison pictures. He noted it carefully, then glanced over the other pages. "You've got his address?" June nodded.

Kendall closed the folder and handed it back to the warden. "Thank you very much for your time, Mr. Gardener."

The warden didn't lose his smile. "Good Luck. If you find any leads, though, don't forget to report them to the police. And be careful - Richard Gardener is a murderer, and a cold one at that."

Kendall nodded. "We will."

Richard looked up from the pile of papers he was reading when he heard the click of a key in the lock. He stuffed the papers back into the drawer, as dishevelled as he had found them, and teleported back to his hotel room with a sound of thunder and a flash of light.

Once there, he ordered a sandwich from room service and lay down on the bed to think. All of the obvious places to look for Dinash's documents had failed to reveal any interesting ones. Mostly, the man seemed to collect only contracts of various television personalities, and a few letters from exotic countries that Richard had never even killed anyone in. His safe contained money and jewels, which interested Richard not at all, and the safety deposit box at his bank contained only his will. Richard was running out of places to look.

But he wasn't running out of time. It was still three days before he was even supposed to be on the job, and he couldn't kill Dinash before then. If he could find the documents early, recovery later would be easy, but he had little else to do. As a last resort, Dinash could be tortured into revealing their location, but such actions weren't really to Richard's liking.

A knock on the door announced the arrival of his sandwich. Richard paid the bellhop, tipping him with a hundred-dollar bill, and sat back to eat. There were still a couple of places he could look, but they could wait until the following evening.

He finished the sandwich and turned out the light.

The house was surrounded by a fence and a locked gate, but it posed little problem to Kendall. Still legally owned by Johnson, it was not for sale, but neither had any upkeep been done on it in some weeks. The front door was unlocked, so Kendall and June slipped inside, closing it quietly behind them.

don't want them found by people looking through his personal effects." She paused. "I will pay you ten million dollars, half in advance." She opened her desk, pulled out a key, tossed it to Richard. "That will open a safety deposit box at the address listed on it. One million will be placed there each workday next week. You start next Saturday, not before. Agreed?"

Richard stood up and dropped the key on her desk. "I never take payment in advance. I will recognize these documents when I find them?" Her need was plain to him; he met her eyes again, this time with cold superiority.

She nodded.

"I'll see you in two weeks, then." Richard opened the door, looked back over his shoulder once, then left. The receptionist smiled at him as he re-entered the elevator. The doors slid closed with a soft click.

Teletrix

Martin Kendall sat down at his kitchen table, and slid one of the two mugs of coffee he carried to his wife. Smiling, she accepted it, and pushed a small plate of rolls to him, then waited expectantly. Kendall selected one, buttered it, then put it down and looked at his wife. June continued to look at him expectantly. Kendall scratched his head and frowned contemplatively. Eventually he gave up.

"Yes, Mrs. Kendall?" They had not been married long enough that the name had lost its strangeness, and he liked it's sound.

"The paper?"

"Ah, yes," Kendall's smile returned. "I knew I forgot something."

The morning paper appeared silently on the kitchen table, mere inches in front of his wife's plate. She jumped, then narrowed her eyes at him across the table.

"One of these days I'm going to get used to that," she said accusingly. Kendall just smiled back at her. Lowering her eyes, June took the paper and opened it, and Kendall returned to his breakfast. June read for several minutes in silence, then pulled a single page free from the paper, folded it to highlight a single article, and handed it to him.

Kendall wiped his chin and accepted the offered paper. The article in question was immediately interesting to him.

"…whose real name is still unknown, escaped again from the maximum security installation. This escape marks the eleventh known breakout of his career, all by unknown means. Johnson was stripped of his clothes and all possessions, and thoroughly searched by prison personnel before admittance. The door to his cell was still locked, and there were no signs anywhere of a forced exit. Police are completely baffled. One officer commented to us: "Until I saw it today, I would have claimed that it was completely impossible." This breakout marks the first one at the prison in eight years, since …"

Kendall nodded. "He's a teletrix. No doubt about it."

"What are you going to do? He's known to have killed over two dozen people. The man's a professional assassin. Who knows how many more they just haven't caught him on?"

Kendall threw up his hands. "What can you do about a Teletrix? If you catch him, he teleports away. You can't even kill him unless you manage to surprise him, and in his profession that's difficult to do. You can hardly hunt down a man with that ability."

His wife continued to stare at him silently. He resisted as long as he could, then nodded guiltily.

"You're right, of course. I can't just let him go on killing people. The academy, I'm sure, won't release their records, so I'll have to find him myself. Would you call the office for me? I'm going to be out of state for a while."

"You call the office," June said firmly. "I need to change. I'm going with you, of course."

Kendall's face registered surprise briefly. "Of course," he echoed. June smiled and Kendall shook his head slowly.

He rose from the table and made his phone call, then got dressed. By the time he had returned to the kitchen, June had put the breakfast dishes in the dishwasher. She kissed him once.

"Where are we going?"

Kendall had worked it out while dressing. "The prison. I need a better picture of him than that newspaper photo, and maybe an address. The police will have searched his house, of course, but at least it's a start."

Kendall closed his eyes, and the yellow lines of a shimmering grid filled his mind. He selected a location, envisioned it, and was there, so smoothly that his wife didn't even stumble.

They stood on a roadway beside a lighted "STATE PRISON" sign, out of sight of the main gates. Kendall let go of his wife and the two travelers set off down the road, closing the distance to the entrance in a couple of minutes. A bother. I'll help myself." He wouldn't, he knew, since money wasn't a problem for him and he didn't know where Eidel's vaults were located. Still, he appreciated the look of terror that crossed Eidel's face for the merest of moments before the businesslike exterior covered it completely again. Eidel had just witnessed two of his men defeated by this unarmed hitman, and Richard appearing in his office in a flash of thunder and light. Eidel despised theatrics, but Richard was obviously dangerous. Richard turned and walked out of the office, and Eidel did nothing to stop him.

Outside, Richard stumbled and fell twice before managing to flag down a cab. The driver awoke him at his destination, then stared speechlessly at the two bills that Richard handed him. Moving slowly and deliberately toward his house, Richard decided the effort wasn't worth it. Exhausted with the effort of teleportation, he collapsed on the front lawn. It was several hours before he began to dream the awful nightmares of his power.

A knock on his door startled him. There had been none for several years, save the occasional minister or salesman, and it was too late in the evening for that. Richard frowned, turned off the stove under the soup he was cooking, and went to the door. Just as he reached it there came a second, more insistent knock.

"Open up in there. Police!"

Richard opened the door. Outside, two guns were facing him, held by a couple of uniformed police officers. Behind these officers stood about a dozen more, and several police cars were lined up along the long driveway to his house.

"Richard Johnson?"

Richard nodded absently, thinking.

"You're under arrest for murder. You have the right to remain silent."

Richard shrugged. He had been arrested before, several times. There was nothing that they could do to him if he did not resist. Prison, even a death sentence, meant nothing to him. He could escape with a thought. Better to let the process run its course. Richard put his hands above his head and let himself be led away.

The trial was over quickly. Richard had an impressive record of prison escapes, and so was convicted and sentenced to several life sentences without the prosecution even having to bring up murder. In fact, Richard never discovered which murder he was arrested for. In his mind, it didn't matter. The judge was particularly aware of his prison breakout record, and ordered him into maximum security. Richard grinned as he heard it; no prison could contain him. He was led away under heavy guard.

He awoke at midnight of his first night at prison and waited for the guard to pass. Stepping to the back wall, he twisted himself to a pre-selected spot about three quarters of a mile away, then lay there panting, regaining his breath after the teleport. If anyone on the nearby road had seen the flash of light which announced his arrival, they ignored it.

After a short interval, he began walking toward the city, following the road a safe distance to the side. Several hours brought him back to freedom. He could not return to his house, but he had other houses and other names in other cities. No one stopped him as he entered the airport and boarded a plane, and the security guards watching for him in the airport noted nothing unusual that night. A sound of thunder was passed off as the rumble of a departing jet.

Richard stepped out of the elevator on the thirty-third floor of an impressive office building, and introduced himself to the receptionist at the desk. She looked him over carefully, almost critically. Apparently he passed the examination, because she pointed toward a heavy wooden door with the name "Emily Brandon" in raised while letters on it, and spoke precisely.

"Through there."

Richard smiled at her and opened the door. The plush office on the other side of the door was occupied mostly by a huge desk and some chairs. A middle-aged woman sat behind the desk. She smiled and looked up as he entered.

"Good day sir. What can I do for you?" She stood and extended her hand. Richard pointedly ignored it, and helped himself to a seat. Emily Brandon remained standing as he spoke.

"You 'advertised' for a bit of extermination work, I believe? The rates quoted to me were quite high."

She met his eyes. "Important target, and difficult to find unguarded. Name's Dinash. Edgar Dinash. You know him?"

Richard nodded, but looked away from the scrutinizing eyes. "Television producer. New York, I believe? Shouldn't be any problem."

She held up a hand.

"Not quite so easy. I also need certain documents that are in his possession returned to me, and they need to be returned before he dies. I the applause, and began to speak. Richard listened, feeling respect for the man on the stage and what he stood for, almost a twinge of regret.

Finally, he reached into his pocket and drew out the handful of change. Richard selected the heaviest coin from the bunch, and let the rest slide back into his pocket. Prepared earlier, this particular coin contained enough cyanide powder to kill a couple of horses. Richard waited until the speech neared its end, then teleported the contents of the coin directly into the ambassador's body. This time, there was no thunder. Instead, the coin collapsed in on itself as it's interior became a vacuum. Richard let the coin drop to the ground. The ambassador himself took no notice of the new substances even now rushing through his body, nor would he for some hours, which would give Richard plenty of time to get out of South America. His speech ending, the ambassador's last words were drowned in applause. He smiled, bowed again, and left.

The clapping died and the spectators were led out. Richard took the provided bus back to the heat-infested mire that served as a city in this part of the world, and walked to the airport. An hour after the speech he was on his way back home.

Richard walked in the front door of a small office building, barely glancing at the faded sign that read "Eidel Distributors." Within was a sparsely furnished office, its walls covered with pictures of athletes that Richard did not recognize. The photographs were yellowed with age, and the years had taken their toll as well on the wooden desk that occupied the center of the room. Contrasting the room was a young man seated behind the desk. He looked up as Richard entered, then nodded and pointed to the only other exit from the room, a beaten-up wooden door bearing an unreadable nameplate.

"They're waiting for you, Mr. Johnson."

Richard nodded back and smiled, but his mind had clicked on the word "they." His business should have been with Eidel alone. Nothing in the young secretary's voice had signalled danger, but Richard was used to working with men like Eidel, and caution never hurt. Carefully, he opened the door.

Beyond the door the appearance of the office changed. The walls here were mirror-bright steel, and a heavy steel door on the other side of the small antechamber guarded Eidel himself. A small screen was set into one wall. Richard went up to it, and punched the attention button. A moment later the screen lit up to display a stern man sitting behind a mahogany desk in an elegant office. Two other men sat on a couch behind him, but moved to get out of the view of the camera almost immediately. Richard didn't like the way they looked.

"Mr. Eidel," Richard said softly, "I believe a mutual acquaintance of ours died last evening, as we discussed? I've come to pay my respects."

The face in the screen did it's best to give a warm smile. It looked rather hideous, but Richard was searching it for things other than comeliness. He found nothing, but hadn't expected to. Briefly, he glanced at the light on the steel door. It remained dark; he was safe for a time. More than long enough.

"Indeed," Eidel replied. "Which entitles you to a payment of three million dollars, which I have here. Come in; the punch code for the door is 65537." The screen went blank, but not before Richard saw him glance quickly at something off-screen, next to the door.

The punch code clinched it. Eidel could open the inner door from the desk inside, without effort. No need to have Richard do it.

Richard smiled slightly and left through the same door he had come in. Positioning himself against the wall beside it, he summoned a mental image of the inner steel door. With a twist of thought, he teleported it into the front office. A brilliant flash of light rolled over him, and the sound of thunder filled the office. The secretary looked up, then dove under the desk as a sound of gunfire filled the back room. Richard, too, moved behind the desk and waited. In a few moments, the two gunman stepped through the door into the front office. Richard teleported them, naked, about seven blocks away. Bending, he grabbed one of the fallen machine guns and teleported himself into Eidel's office, his finger lightly on the trigger.

"Good day, Mr. Eidel," he said smoothly as the thunder rolled away. "As I believe I told you when we met, I am very good at what I do. And for my services in removing those two pests from your office, my rate just went up to six million. The remodeling is free." Richard fixed Eidel with a meaningful stare.

Eidel had been in business long enough to know when he was beaten. He slid a suitcase across the desk to the Richard. "There's only three million there. I'll have to get the rest from the vault tomorrow."

Richard waved his hand dismissingly. "Don't

Going Places

Christopher Kempke

Shifter

There had been eleven attempts on the ambassador's life in the past week, and his bodyguards were taking all possible precautions short of canceling his appearances. The ambassador himself had vetoed that solution, claiming his absence would serve his enemies as well as his death. Therefore, Richard was hardly surprised when a team of armed guards appeared and began frisking members of the crowd, directing them to another building after the short but thorough search. The crowd complained; Richard didn't. His weapon would not be found by a search.

A guard frisked him and found only some change in his pocket, and a camera. The camera the guard took from him, mechanically informing him that he could recover it at such and such a time at such and such a place. Richard ignored him under a facade of listening intently. His camera did not concern him, since he could obtain another almost at a thought, and the change the guard considered harmless lay in his pocket. It was still there when the guard motioned him toward the building. Richard thanked him and moved to the door.

"Name?" asked a still another guard at the door. The guard carried only a clipboard and pen in his hands, but two pistols were holstered at his side, and his face said that he wouldn't hesitate to use them.

"Richard Johnson." It was a statement of fact, as though it were the name he was born with. It wasn't. Richard wore his name like an old jacket, comfortably, but it was easily discarded for a new one if necessary.

He stepped through the door and into a large hall. The crowd that had come to hear the ambassador speak wasn't much of a crowd. Only a few hundred people dared risk the public threats of violence, and there was a distinct air of nervousness about those who were present. In an attempt to dispell this fear, or perhaps to increase it, the khaki-camouflage uniforms of the guards were present everywhere among the crowd and in the balconies of the building. Richard's impression was that the guards outnumbered the spectators; certainly the numbers were close. The security was as much a relief to Richard as it was to the ambassador inside; he was no more immune to stray bullets than other men.

A man appeared on the platform and began to speak. Richard was attentive for only a moment; he was not the ambassador. The speaker's eloquent introduction went unheard; a soft buzz at the edge of Richard's hearing had attracted his attention.

The man on the platform spoke for several seconds more, then stopped, a puzzled look on his face. As the sound became clearer, the droning of plane engines approaching, he went white. His hands gestured frantically, motioning the people in the hall to the floor. Some obeyed, others ran for the door, oblivious to placing themselves in the crossfire. Richard hesitated a moment, then chose the group running for the door. He listened for the sound of artillery before exiting, but the planes were still too far away.

The planes were in fact just becoming visible. It was obvious from the faces of the guards that they should not have been there. Richard didn't want them there either.

Somewhere in Richard's childhood, he had found an ability none of his friends shared. He called upon it now. A darkness filled his mind, formed by his thoughts and framed in light. Carefully, he placed the darkness over the image of the planes in his mind. With a twist of his mind, the planes and darkness switched places. The darkness he dropped, the planes he hurled to a position hundreds of miles away beneath the surface of the Pacific.

Where the planes had been now stood only empty space. A rumble of thunder rolled over the spectators as the air rushed in to occupy it. In that place, the planes may never have existed, but a few hundred miles away a brief flash of light signalled their destruction as they appeared under water moving at some thousand miles an hour.

For several moments the spectators continued to stare at the sky, until in a slowly growing patter of speech they began to speculate on what had just occurred. Richard used the time to return to the chaos of the hall. He sat down and waited, relating the events outside to group of bewildered spectators who had remained inside.

Eventually the old man returned to his introduction. After several minutes, he stepped aside. The spectators began to clap. The ambassador appeared on the stage, bowed in recognition of

Infernal Repast

William A. Racicot

Her countenance is dazzling bright,
with teeth, of course, a pearly white;
her eyes are pitch as blackest night,
with hair to match, wild as birds in flight.

And when into my presence – hark! –
she comes with light to banish dark,
she seems to me a sweet monarch,
Lovely Persephone, Hades' lark.

With Cerb'rus, sweetest little pup,
she comes to me that we may sup,
so I must set forth triple cup
for the dog when I set the table up.

I fear lest Zeus, the king divine,
or brother his, the lord of brine,
be angered that I not decline,
to feed Hell's queen, or Hell's canine.

And so in deepest cave I hide,
to take my meal with Pluto's bride,
for I should not live long if spied
or overheard by holy pride.

But after dinner comes respite
from fear in arms of lady dark,
supervised by headful pup
in cave together we recline,
and Aphrodite's arts are plied.

Bill Racicot is a sophomore stuck in Limbo because of a paperwork error in the school of the humanities at Carnegie Mellon University. In the past, he has been a student of mathematics, an actor/singer, an accounts receivable clerk, and a human interface between man and a VHS(tm) machine.

He can be reached at the address wr0o@andrew.cmu.edu

become. Outside of town, the crops were being harvested. Flowers bloomed on either side of the walkway from Earnshaw's house.

"Mommy, what did Mister Earnshaw mean about 'colors'?" asked the oldest of her two boys.

She stared into his gray eyes for a moment, and then shook her head.

"I don't know," she said.

Jason Snell is a sophomore at U.C. San Diego. In addition to writing, his interests include television production and comedy. Snell is currently working on a new story set in what he describes as an "important twist on the 'cyberpunk' genre." Also, his screenplay adaptation of "Into Gray" is currently being shot as a student film with a budget of three thousand dollars.

He can be reached at the address jsnell@ucsd.edu

Doug Earnshaw saw the commune as a large rabbit hole in the center of a network of tunnels. It was, after all, planned by a group of survivalists to be the last refuge when the end of the world came. Occasionally, at the outskirts of the tunnel system, would come individuals who had hidden out by themselves. The commune knew they were there, but none had enough foresight to survive the cold or radiation of above and maintain a radio to open contact when the radiation level went down.

None except for Mark Olsen and his daughter Patty. How a man could survive and keep a child alive for nine years under such circumstances was incomprehensible. The man's initiative would be a valuable addition to the commune, and if either he or his daughter were fertile, their genes would be just as vital. So Transportation Director Earnshaw found himself behind the wheel of his friend the Jeep, sliding over the snow, ash, and wet dirt, moving toward a hole where two people had spent nine years.

Earnshaw didn't see the two until he was almost upon them. A large figure kneeled in the muck, while a smaller one stood beside it. The larger one glanced up, and the tear-filled eyes of Mark Olsen stared in at Earnshaw. He was almost invisible, his pasty skin blending in with the pale world around them.

Doug Earnshaw got out of the Jeep and prepared to help Olsen up and into the back. As he turned toward him, though, he stopped at the small figure of Olsen's daughter. Earnshaw gasped in horror as he stared into the eyes of Patty Olsen.

She stared through Doug Earnshaw with a distance that chilled his soul, her gray eyes telegraphing a loneliness that he could not begin to comprehend.

"I don't understand it, Doug," a seventeen year old Patricia Olsen said with tears in her eyes, "he just doesn't seem to care anymore. He lies in bed and cries about the colors, the sky, flowers, things like that. It's like he doesn't want to go on."

Doug Earnshaw tried to comfort Patty the best he could, but feared it was not good enough. Consoling her was difficult, though, because he avoided looking directly at her. She wasn't ugly, only plain, but he avoided the eyes of anyone under twenty years old. The children's eyes never locked in one place. They always seemed to look through him, gray pools staring out to the horizon. He had known Patty over eight years, but still couldn't bear it.

"Patty, you *can't* understand what your father feels. We all feel it, those of us who knew life before... this." He gestured around at the dull metal and plastic that surrounded him. "Your father is worse than most, but he was in that shelter of yours for all that time. I guess he expected the world to be normal when he got out. I don't know if it will ever be."

Patty nodded, tried to stifle a sob, and hugged the man who was like a second father to her. When she tried to look him straight in the eye, though, he turned away from her.

Mark Olsen's death was not an easy one. He clutched at his faded floral print bed-sheets, a pink froth around his lips giving a faint reminder of how the flowers on the deathbed had once looked. Patty was at his side in the last moment, when the darkness of the world that he had known in passing for eighteen years fully revealed itself.

The first full-scale outdoor harvest took place as Commune Director Doug Earnshaw stretched out in his bed and prepared to die. He had lived a long life, and under his direction the commune began to return to the agricultural ways of the past. On the day he woke up and knew he would never wake up again, he called for Patty Olsen.

She came with her two children. They waited by the door as she entered the room and stood at the foot of Earnshaw's bed.

"I'm glad you came, Patty." He took one glance at her and closed his eyes. "I have one thing to say to you before I die. It's about what your father died looking for."

"Looking for?"

"Colors, Patty. The colors of the world around us. Something you've never experienced as we old-timers once did. But we've begun to plant, Patty. The first harvest is going on as we speak. The skies have finally cleared. Life is resuming, Patty. The world is showing itself in a way you've never seen before. The world has ceased to be gray-on-gray. Appreciate what your father could not, Patty. Do you understand?"

She swallowed. "Yes."

"Good." He nodded and turned away.

Patty took her two children and left Doug Earnshaw's house and began to walk toward the main street in the town that was what the commune had

Into Gray

Jason Snell

Patricia Olsen was born into gray eight months after the end. She spurted from her mother's body into a sea of gray, lit from above by the twin moons of Daddy's eyes as the crashing surf of the shortwave radio echoed throughout the enclosure.

Six months later baby Patty had spit out her first solid food, a dark gray wafer that had been pushed into her mouth by her mother's pinkish-gray hands. The brick of protein landed softly on the cold concrete floor Patty called "ground."

Four years had passed since Patty asked her mother what dying meant. Three had passed since Patty asked Daddy what "cancer" meant.

Patty was six when Daddy explained to her that the red-eyed cyclops she had feared since she could remember was really a radiation meter. She had learned to read it by the time she was seven.

Daddy had a little surprise in store for Patty on her eighth birthday. He went to the back of the shelter and brought out his dull silver box that had never made anything but hissing noises. On this special day, the silver box spoke.

It said, "Hello, Patty, how are you on this fine day?"

Daddy nodded and smiled at Patty. "I'm fine," she said with a shaky voice. "Who are you?"

"I'm a friend of your father," the box voice said.

"Why haven't you said anything to us before?" Patty asked with a scolding tone. "We've been here together and you've never done anything but.." she paused to think, and then made a hissing noise.

The box's voice seemed apologetic. "Maybe your father should explain to you. I'm sure I'll see you later. Goodbye, Patty."

The box hissed for a moment and then fell silent. Patty hissed back at it.

Daddy explained that the outside world had allowed them to talk to other people in other places through the box. He also told her that soon, they would be able to leave their home and venture above.

"Of course, it will be hard work at first," he said with a smile, "but in return for that work, we'll be able to run free, look up at the sun during the day and the stars at night, and eat real food."

That night, before she fell asleep, Patty stared up at her flat sky, the dark ceiling, and wondered what Daddy meant by "outside."

Five months before her ninth birthday, Daddy opened the doors that led outside. At the end of the long, sloping hallway would be a hatch to the surface.

"Do you have everything, Patty?" Her father wore a heavy jacket and backpack. "Once we start going, we can't come back for more."

Patty pulled on the parka that her mother once wore and zipped it. It was far too large for her, but it would have to do. She nodded and picked up a bag filled with her things.

Daddy started up the passage. Patty followed, leaving behind the only place she had ever known. When they reached the end of the passage, Daddy turned a crank a few times and then pushed up on a small hatch above them. It popped open, and Patty saw the sky for the first time.

Patty climbed out of the passage and into the world above as Daddy stood and stared at the horizon. As far as he could see, the ground was dark gray, covered with a mixture of snow, ash, and dirt.

He turned to look at the sky, yearning to find a blue ocean with small puffy clouds, and instead found a dark overcast covering the world. There were no cars, no houses, no roads, no plants. There was nothing but a gray sky looking down on a gray world.

The world above seemed like a larger version of Patty's world below. She couldn't understand why Daddy had collapsed in tears in the soft ashen snow.

The vintage Jeep that was once the pride and joy of a young Douglas Earnshaw was now the property of the Eastern Valley Commune. When the commune set out the share of gasoline to be give to transportation, it was immediately poured in a container and given to Transportation Director Earnshaw, who would unceremoniously drop it in the Jeep's tank.

In the commune, possessions dictated social status. Earnshaw was moderately respected, mostly because he owned the Jeep and the shortwave radio. So when he had come into contact with a man who had been hidden away in a shelter for almost nine years, he took it upon himself to bring the man and his daughter into the commune.

he could hardly walk. The cracked camera that lay by his side, the camera that sought to disprove the face of God, was stained in vomit. No one else was around. Dizzily, he staggered back to his time machine, and wrenched himself inside and barely managed to hit the return button before passing out again.

The immediacy of his panic had left him when he regained consciousness. It was now more a sense that an inadvertent murderer would have after recovering from the initial shock of killing a man, and now wanting to hide the evidence. Tom's mind worked furiously, and his body quicker. He wrenched himself outside into his lab, and grabbing a stick of explosive, hurled it into the machine as he dragged himself away. Moments later, a blast rocked the lab as the machine sat smoking.

As the shock waves wore down, the faint rumblings of a truck pulling away could be heard in the distance. Sol came running in, and looked at the smoking mess, and his war-torn friend.

"Sol," Tom gasped, "help me, please."

"What on earth happened?" the other asked, coming over and embracing Tom. Tom, events, images, his whole life reeling through his head tried to get the words out, but couldn't. Now that he knew, he KNEW the truth, he had to tell it, didn't he? But to give in? To admit complete defeat? To admit that his whole life had been decadence and sin? He had to beg forgiveness to Jesus, to God, to...

"Ship," he groaned, pained – yet how much less than the pain Christ suffered on the cross! – "can't go that far back in time. Explosion."

Tom slumped, then blacked out again for the unbearable torment. To have lied on top of everything when God was looking on!

Sol held him for a moment, and ascertaining that his friend was unconscious again, gave a brief frown and brushed a mustard seed from his debating partner's sleeve.

"It seems we have both lost today, Tom... You see," he addressed the unconscious one, "I set you up. I couldn't trust your machine. I shorted it out. I hired actors. I... I was afraid of what the truth might be as much as you were."

Sol ripped the silver cross off his neck and placed it firmly in Tom's hand. "You are me now," he wept, "and I you."

Eric W. Tilenius is a Senior majoring in Economics at Princeton University. He is President and Founder of the Princeton Planetary Society, a group dedicated to promoting an active space program. In his spare time, he writes about bizarre things or bizarrely about things.

He can be reached at the address EWTILENI@PUCC.BITNET

ple's mind, now as then." Sol, who seemed a bit whiter despite his obvious excitement with the technology, merely said, "It will change nothing. You cannot shake what people believe. They will never believe you. And, what if you discover Jesus, preaching, what then?"

"I won't. Of that I am certain. And I will bring evidence."

With that, the two friends went to bed. Oh, what a changed world it would be in the 'morrow. Neither of them slept well, and Sol was up most of the night, moving around restlessly. Tom tossed like a child before Christmas, eagerly waiting to open the present which had been hoped for all year.

It was decided that Tom should go first in the tiny machine. He took with him a camera and tape recorder, and entered the craft, shutting Sol and the rest of the world outside, and entering his own little universe inside. He carefully adjusted the dials, and pressed the button to start.

The world went black. A faint acrid odor permeated the chamber, and Tom went faint for what must have been half a minute or so. But when he recovered, he was there. He shakily, rose and lifted the latch of the door.

What he discovered outside was a completely different world. An arid climate, with sand, a few trees and bushes, people in biblical dress. Damn, but he would prove this his point now! Camera and audiocorder in hand, he set forward, traversing this land. How he longed to talk with these people, to ask them if they had ever heard of Jesus! To track down the lye to its origin! But, how?

As he was deeply engaged in thinking about this, his feet moving over the sand and over a rise almost by themselves, he saw up ahead a crowd of people, gathered around a figure who was standing on a small rock and looking around them – a meeting! Here, Tom might pick up some dialogue that would aid him in his quest.

But as he approached, something inside him began nagging, bugging him. That childish superstition that comes to any man when entering a dark cellar and causes great anxiety, even though the man knows there to be no monsters lurking in that darkness. So, too, something ate at Tom now. Could it be that... He put the thought out of his mind – he had always had an overactive imagination.

But the feeling would not go away. As he came closer, he made out that the central figure had a beard, and a rather holy, commanding appearance. "A leader, preaching," thought Tom, "there is nothing unusual in that. Perhaps he even tells the story of Jesus to those who suck it in." So, Tom walked up to listen.

Straining to make out the foreign tongue, which was actually easier than Tom had expected, he heard the bearded one speak, and promptly froze. The words could hardly have made a more chilling impression if they had ordered his very death.

"The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but, when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

The bearded one held up a handful of the fine mustard seeds, and scattered them for all to see. For a moment, Tom stood, stunned beyond belief. Then he regained composure – how silly it was, to assume that there would be no religious preaching. There always had been, and this was no exception. False "religious" teachings had made up the Bible, had they not? He was getting jumpy.

His thoughts raced on ahead of him, trying desperately to overcome the surge of anxiety that was overcoming him. But now the nagging had turned into full scale fear, washing over him as the storm did the disciples before Jesus had quieted – but NO! There WAS NO SUCH PERSON! Or, he was blown out of proportion, if he existed – he couldn't have...

There, in front of his eyes, a cripple walked towards the bearded one. Tom dropped his camera. He wanted to run, to cry out, to yell. His whole life, the pain, the suffering, his conviction, the scar on his hand, Mary!

The bearded one bent down and spoke to the cripple. This time Tom yelled. He was sorry, but he couldn't help it – he just couldn't. This wasn't happening! God, his life, please, God it wasn't all wrong, no, it just wasn't.

As though J— the bearded one had heard his cry, he turned, and looked right into Tom's eyes in such a knowing glance that Tom felt his soul being read. Every facet, every crime, every treacherous statement was known. At that instant, the cripple was made whole.

Better than Tom had taken the cripple's place than for this. For now, God, what had he done! A revolting heave came to his stomach, and he found himself unable to keep his breakfast down. He passed out moments later, lying in the pool of his own vomit.

When he awoke God knows how much later,

all, but... look out there."

She pointed out across to the richly colored, jagged canyon wall, sparkling in the late day sun that was just beginning to set. The clear afternoon breeze ruffled her fine hair and blew some of it up against the deep blue sky. A bird, flying overhead, piped out the most beautiful song as Lucy's trembling hand pointed to a flowering bush in the distance. Tom, in jeans and a sweater, merely looked and said nothing.

"It's all so lovely, Tom. It couldn't have happened all by chance, now, could it? I was raised in a strict background, taught that God made everything. Sometimes, like today, I can almost see that, yet most of the time I'm so unsure. It's such a material world, how can we say that God exists? Are we looking at a proof here, Tom, or an accident?"

The man in jeans paused, looked out over the canyon, and spoke to the woman who would be his benefactor for the next hellish, in the mythological sense, years of his life. "Neither. It's nature. It is, beautiful, but not because some unseen power has made it so. Nature, life, is naturally beautiful. It needs no outside force. Who would have thought 100 years ago that we would have accomplished the things we did? We must let go of these myths and be free to grow even more."

Lucy looked uncertainly at Tom, as though she wanted to find that he was telling the answer. "I'm so afraid when people start talking about religion and beliefs and all that. They debate them, and discuss them, and defend them. But when they come to asking what mine are, I shrink from it, seek any desperate plot to change the conversation." Here she looked imploringly at Tom, as if not to force her into a similar situation, and continued, "How can I defend mine when I'm not even sure what mine are? It seems that everyone but me believes in something, even you. I can't defend my thoughts against belief. God, Tom, if only I could know."

That, of course, was when it all happened. The crazy scheme of Tom's unfolded, and Lucy grabbed at it like a baby grabs for its pacifier. Lucy would have her proof, and Tom would finally prove to all the world the lunacy of all these myths.

So, today, when Tom kneeled by the machine in front of Sol, he felt as though he had rehearsed for the moment for ages. The seclusion, the pain, the criticisms, the government condemnation of his project which had forced him, with Lucy's help, to bring it underground were all about to pay off.

He spoke. "Yes, Sol. This machine will move. It will move itself, and in doing so, move mountains of 'faith'. For tomorrow both of us, and my benefactor, and the whole rest of the world will have proof that the Bible is nothing more than a story — or any other document."

"What the hell are you saying?" cried Sol, now becoming a bit more excited, "Does it test the air for proof of God? What devilish plot have you cooked up to despoil the name of the Lord now?"

Tom rose, and looked at his friend's flushed face. "Nothing of the sort. It's a time machine."

"Now you're really loony! Nuts! Is Lucifer growing inside you? You know that's physically impossible. It would create infinite paradox. You just can't go and change the past!"

A grin crossed over Tom's face, and such a grin it was that one would very likely have thought him devil-ridden, if one were so inclined. His composure soon returned, though.

"It can't change the past, Sol. But it will let you see it. Any place, any time is there for the observation. We can see, now, the whole tale – of how the Bible was fabricated, written; how the tales of your favorite 'hero' Jesus came into being."

"You're mad," Sol repeated, dumbfounded. He fingered his watch nervously, silvering an already worn area in the gold covering. His blackish hair seemed to stick up at a higher angle than before, and the white roots near his scalp became slightly visible, as though someone had planted white-hair seeds their and they were just beginning to sprout.

But there was to be no doubt. The machine worked. Tom showed Sol how the mytronic crystal had to be twisted to energize it, after which a tremendously precise time/place indicator could be set to see anywhere, any time. "Once there, you can get out and walk around, but you won't be physically there – anything that touches you will go right through you. You are an observer only, they can't see you and you can't effect them. It's about the closest to a god you'll get."

And observe they did, Sol and Tom. Taking turns testing the machine in the near past, for only one could fit in the machine at a time. One stood on the podium as Lincoln gave the Gettysburg address, the other jumped in the way of the bullet at Reagan's assassination. They saw all, and affected nothing. Hours later, they decided to call it a day.

"You see, Sol, tomorrow, I will go and get pictures, evidence that your God exists only in peo-

A Grain of Mustard Seed

Eric W. Tilenius

Tom sat, admiring the craft, and contemplating. His thoughts were as big as the craft was small, his plans for it as enormous as its interior was cramped. This was no ordinary craft. It was the craft that would forever kick Him – not God, for to Tom there was no such being, but Him – out of his place in the sky. He broke the bottle of champagne and dubbed the machine "The Missionary."

The long years before had taken their toll on Tom. Tremendous pressures, numerous disasters, and emotional stress. As he stared at the peanut butter sandwich that lay half-eaten on his workbench, its light brown wheat crust flaking onto the floor in small dry pieces, he recalled how his wife and family – oh, but how he had loved them! – had left him, with Mary calling him an ignorant self-righteous zealot. It had hurt, but he would never turn back. All the wars, all the strife, all the killing in the name of religion would cease. He would prove it wrong.

"You persist still?" The voice came from Minister Sol, who had entered into the room, his trim black outfit moving only as it was hit by the silver cross which dangled from his neck. Sol, taking his golden pocket watch of which he was so proud from his side, exclaimed, "My InfoLink said your call was urgent, so I came right over. I do hope I am still in time? I take it this is not for dinner."

As Sol finished, and slid his pocket watch delicately back into its place on his side, he surveyed the room. It was quite different from when he had been here last, a scant year ago. Amid the old fashioned tools lying scattered around the workbench were some new higher-technology devices. The floor was spotless, though, and clear, except for the highly visible object in the center.

"By the Lord," started Sol, "What is this monster? You can't be serious! I do hope you plan on moving it soon!"

For the first time in what seemed like ages, Tom was about to speak, to truly speak. He had been alone for such a long time, he hardly seemed to know how to speak at first, but such a task was made easier now that he saw his old friend again. It had been ages since he had seen Sol last, but it always brought a gleam into Tom's eyes to see him. Sol and Tom had been excellent friends back in high school, a friendship strengthened by their diametrically opposite views on practically everything under the sun. They would spend countless hours debating, and Tom had listened to many a "sermon" from Sol.

But, invariably, their thoughts would return to the one topic that seemed to most separate them – whether God existed.

Back then, Tom had put forth an argument that had society not been brought up on the Bible, and taught it by others in society, man would not know about any supreme deity, and thus it would be unnatural to assume one existed. "Say you were raised in the backlands," he had argued, "and no one ever told you about Jesus or Moses or Mohammed. What then? You'd likely grow up believing a different myth, a different explanation of how things work. The only reason so many people believe is because they've been told 'this is true' or 'that is true'. What would rationally define a deity? Your background. And there's nothing to prove otherwise."

Sol, never one to let another get the better of him, had countered, "But there have been proofs! And signs! God sent Jesus into the world that we could see what is true. Living proof, that died for you, Tom, yet you refuse to accept it!"

And so it went. Tom would never accept it. Nor did he think others should. It was blind, heathen mythology. Others never accepted Tom. He was the heathen, and suffered. A scar on his hand where Mary had slammed the door bore proof of this. "I must go about the business of stopping all this madness," he had told her in one of his more passionate moments. "Look at all the ills because people are deceiving themselves! If they would realize their situation and better it. But no – deception, and willfully so." She had kicked him out, screamed at him. And he had wandered, hungry.

Finally, he met up with Lucy. Beautiful, rich, popular Lucy. She seemed to just have everything, yet even when he saw her first, he had felt the deep insecurity, the questioning, the vulnerability. It had been on one of his reflective journeys, visiting the Grand Canyon on the little funds he had left. They had been talking, looking out over the edge, when Lucy had told him about the great confusion inside her.

"Somehow, Tom, I feel I can talk to you about this. I usually can't stand to bring it up, it torments me. No, don't ask me what – I'll get to it. Really, I've made up my mind that I will tell someone. Oh, you'll probably think me silly and

Peter David

Writing For the "New" Paramount

Writing Star Trek, the comic (and for that matter, novels) while working in tandem with Paramount is like walking a tight rope with razor blades for nets.

Now it's not so bad when they're doing their job, which is to maintain Star Trek continuity. For example, I had an issue where I forgot to have a Klingon warship decloak before it fired on the Enterprise. That was fair and square–they caught it and it had slipped past both myself and Bob Greenberger, no question. Nor do I mind the self-proclaimed nitpicking changes.

It's the vascilation that can get to me. And the contradictions. And the ignoring of Star Trek history.

We are told that Star Trek command personnel can never be less- than-sterling characters, despite "Patterns of Force" and "Doomsday Machine" and "The Omega Glory", etc., etc.

We are told that we must concentrate almost exclusively on the principle seven characters, but every time we try and develop a story-line involving those characters (for example, Chekov wanting his own command, or Uhura returning home to visit her family) they are shot down.

We are told (honest to God) that a female bridge crewmember I created angered certain people at Paramount because "women shouldn't be on the bridge crew."

We are told that "terran" is an unacceptable term to refer to natives of earth–although Picard used it just the other week. We are told the word "civilian" does not exist since Starfleet is non-military– despite the fact that Riker's father was called, several times, a civilian adviser.

And I guess, bottom line, the most frustrating thing is being made to adhere to guidelines even more stringent than the TV show's, and then considered to be second class citizens by the offices at Paramount. We are perfectly okay as a source of revenue, but legitimate Star Trek? "Real" Star Trek? Sorry, only the TV and the movies. And not even that. We've done things that were based on concepts or have precedents in third season Trek, the second through fifth films, and the animated, and been told that all of those are not legitimate sources either.

I understand that Paramount owns Trek. I just don't understand who is calling the shots anymore, or why.

In his own words, "Peter David writes lots of stuff." He is and has been involved with the Star Trek comic book series for a number of years. He is the author of the Star Trek: The Next Generation novel Strike Zone. *His new novel,* Rock and a Hard Place, *should be out sometime in mid 1990.*

Looking Ahead

Daniel K. Appelquist

Hi. I'm Dan Appelquist, and I have been known to sleep all day. I've also produced, with a little help from my friends, the magazine you're currently reading. A couple of years ago, when I was freshmanning in computer science, I had an idea that it would be kind of neat to set up a literary magazine and distribute it around campus. There was certainly a need for such a magazine, but the idea kind of fizzled. There was really no way for a freshman to produce a magazine and distribute it. The costs were simply too prohibitively high.

The issue of a magazine came up again several months ago when I was asked to help produce a fanzine for a local science fiction club. The problem of cost still cropped up. The club fizzled out before anything developed with that, but the cost still would have been too high.

Shortly after this, I responded to the call for subscriptions for Jim McCabe's Athene (see ad at the end of this issue.) I didn't realize it at the time, but this was the format I was looking for. With the computing resources available to me as a student at Carnegie Mellon, I could produce a professionally typeset magazine *electronically* with almost no cost to myself, and then distribute the magazine, again electronically, over the various nets, again at no cost to myself.

Three weeks after I sent out a call for subscriptions and submissions to Quanta, we already had over 200 subscriptions, including, to my surprise and delight, subscriptions from the United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden, Norway, France, Canada, and Belgium (if I've missed some, please excuse me, it's not trivial to decode the various sorts of mail paths.) We also had enough submissions to produce at least one issue of real quality. I'm very excited about the material in this issue, and fortunately there's plenty more where that came from.

In that context, I'd like to thank Peter David for donating our only article this issue. In future issues I'd like to include more articles, but if you're thinking of submitting an article, please don't write it newsnet style. We got a few article submissions that were basically newsgroup posts. We're looking for a bit more professionalism than this.

Looking ahead, as the title of this rather hastily written article would suggest, I see the arena of electronically distributed magazines such as Quanta expanding greatly. For now, here's one issue of Quanta. It comes after much blood, sweat, tears and wrestling with unruly typesetting programs. Enjoy.

Quanta

October, 1989 *Volume 1, Issue 1*

Articles

Short Fiction

Poetry

Editor
Daniel K. Appelquist
Technical Director
Matthew D. Sorrels
Editorial Assistant
Norman S. Murray

Quanta is produced using the LaTeX typesetting system.