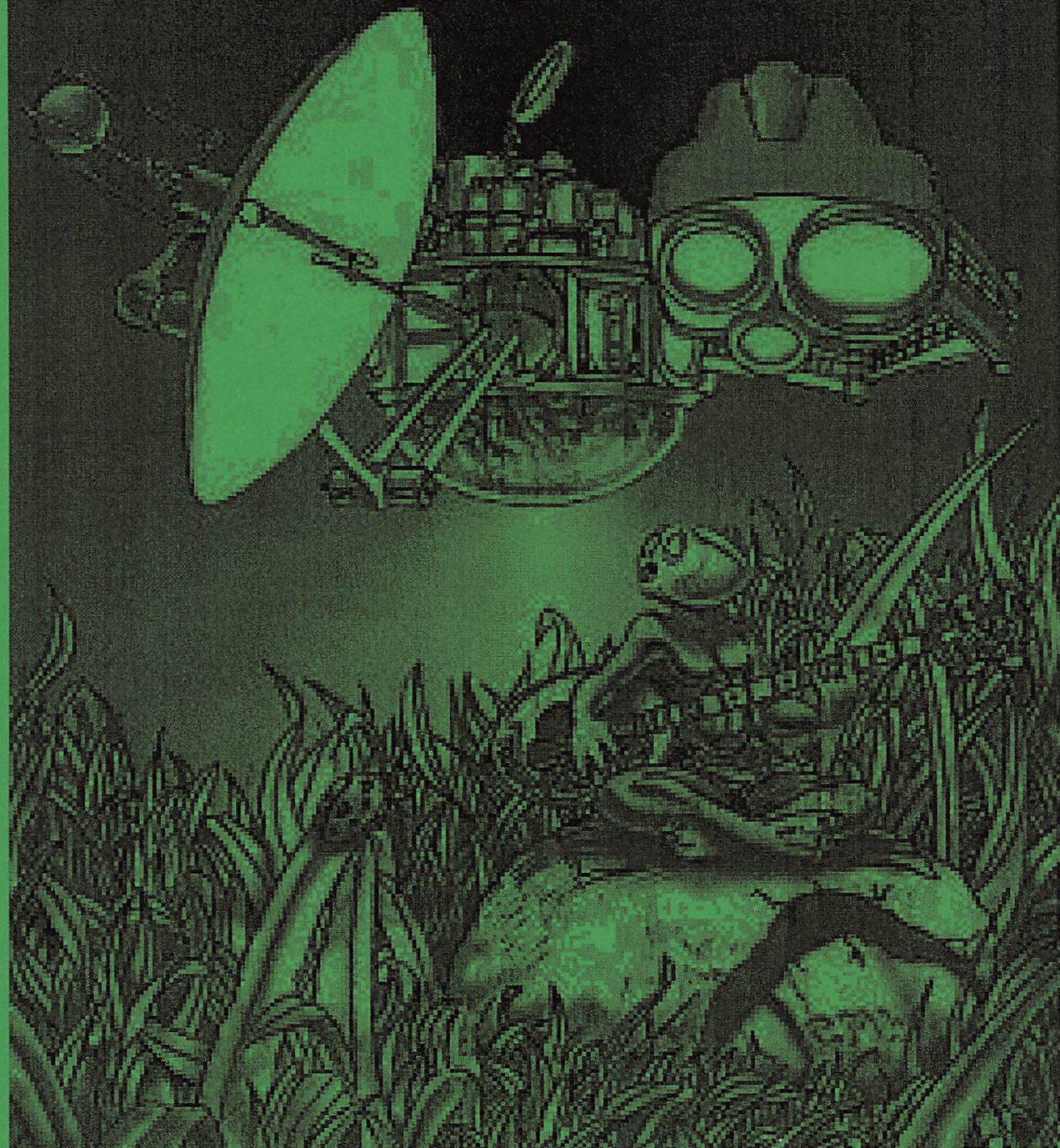


TWILIGHT ZINE

#44



About us

just what you've always wanted to know
but never bothered to

Twilight Zine (as in *magazine*) is a publication of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Science Fiction Society (MITSFS), which is a member of the MIT Association of Student Activities.

Neither *Twilight Zine* nor MITSFS is in any way connected to "The Twilight Zone" television series or anything else that has *Twilight Zone* in its name, and the JourComm does not actually know anything about "The Twilight Zone," so don't ask.

This issue, *Twilight Zine 44*, was published in May 2000. Unless otherwise specified, everything in this issue is copyright © 2000 MITSFS; all rights revert to the contributors.

Any opinions that are expressed (or appear to be expressed) in this publication are not necessarily those of MITSFS, or of particular members of MITSFS, or of anyone at all.

If for some reason you would actually like to know more, or want to contact us, MITSFS can be found at:

MIT Science Fiction Society
Room W20-473
84 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

(617)258-5126
mitsfs@mit.edu
<http://www.mit.edu/~mitsfs/>

Any correspondence about *Twilight Zine*, including submissions and subscription requests, should either be e-mailed to jourcomm@mit.edu or labeled "Attn: JourComm."



Twilight Zine 44: Spring 2000

Table of Contents

4	We have a <i>Twilight Zine</i> ! (editorial) by Yevgeniya Nusinovich, JourComm
5	State of the MITSFS Address by Jenwa Hsung, Thunderbunny
6	A taste of the minutes
8	Commentary on some new books by John Carr
8	Sturgeon's Law does not apply here by John Carr
8	A book review by John Hawkinson
10	The Tale of Dr. Jasper and Mr. Hatz by Shailesh Humbad
13	Incidental Beauty by Elizabeth Werbos
18	The Dreamer by Ora Matushansky
21	It Happened Again by Anna Murphy
22	Human Xeroxing by Glenn Berry
23	Reflection by Andrea Humez
24	Fool's Rock by Patricia Fish
32	So, how are we feeling today, Mr. Whitaker? by Anna Murphy
38	The V Virus by Leann Arndt

Art

Front cover:

Inside front cover:

p. 4, 5, 12, 17, 40 :

Back cover:

Chris Whitlow

Ariel Segall

Jade Wang

Yevgeniya Nusinovich

Star Chamber

President and Skinner:

Vice:

Onseck:

Lady High Embezzler:

Jade Wang

Yevgeniya Nusinovich

Meredith Peck

Stephanie Fried

JourComm

JourComm:

Yevgeniya Nusinovich

We have a *Twilight Zine*! (editorial)

by Yevgeniya Nusinovich, JourComm

"It's a bird! It's a plane! No, it's a *Twilight Zine*, issue number 44!"

"But wait a second, aren't those extinct?"

"Apparently not... So how did this miracle happen?"

"Just sit down and let me tell you a story..."

There was a MITSFS, and it remembered having this thing called a *Twilight Zine*, back in the good old days... Except there was no longer anyone daring enough to tackle the publication, beat it into submission, and publish the next issue. And so it went for six long years...

Then one day, a little innocent prentice called Yevgeniya happened to come along. The once-again-hopeful Skinner pounced on her (via e-mail only, don't worry), and asked if she would consider being JourComm. Not knowing better, she agreed...

And so began the dark days of submission hunting. Posters decorated the walls of the Institute, with Moties accusingly grinning at potential contributors. Tempting e-mail was sent out to all sorts of people. Eventually submissions trickled in, slowly and painfully...

Finally, critical mass was reached, and the time of reckoning came. It was time to assemble the publication... Piece by piece, it was connected together, as the JourComm tried to juggle a number of problems sets, exams and presentations, wrapped up into one large ball of pre-finals confusion. Eventually, she managed to emerge from this tangle victorious, with a complete *Twilight Zine* and a final presentation following politely on a leash.

Now, having survived this ordeal, and having gradually absorbed a sufficient amount of clue, she is actually willing to publish the next issue too!

So goes the fable of the brave JourComm..."

The moral of this story:

If you want to get something done, find a nice little enthusiastic and clueless 'prentice. If they're sufficiently enthusiastic to start with, you're all set. Even as he/she gradually becomes disillusioned, the inertia should be enough to last until the end of the project.

Oh wait, I don't think that was the point...



State of the MITSFS Address

by Jenwa Hsung, Thunderbunny

It is true that all through my reign I had been hoping for a miracle. While the Twilight Zine finally being published again was not the miracle of more space for which I had truly hoped, it is definitely a miracle. At this point I'll take what I can get. My impression is that my contribution to the TZ is supposed to be a rant of some kind, or perhaps a State of the MITSFS address. The obvious course would be to rant about the space crunch and the donation tax codes, as that would fulfill both. But damnit, I'm tired of ranting about those issues. The question then becomes what to say instead. Perhaps if I ramble on long enough something will come up.

It still puzzles me why the Library owns some things and not others. Take, for example, Diana Wynne Jones, who writes fantasy and science fiction books that I adore. Before I decided to rectify the situation, we had a vastly small percentage of her books because most of them are "young adult novels" which we don't buy, as a general rule. And it is true that if we bought every children's book that could be considered fantasy or sf, it might become ridiculous. But to dismiss them all out of hand and yet buy most of the media tie-ins? It puzzles me. Diana Wynne Jones is absolutely not the only "children's fantasy" author who we've maligned this way, whose complex and brilliant works are not available to our members because of a line drawn arbitrarily in the definitions of the genre. Yes, an individual (like me) can crusade for an author or two. But must it require this special effort for each case?

Then there's Jonathan Carroll, for another example. He writes amazing surreal novels for adults of which we own a fair number, but by far not all and not the most recent. Or take Gabriel Garcia Marquez or Toni Morrison, who write mainstream literature with surreal or supernatural or combination thereof. Speculative fiction, if you will. We own nothing by either of these authors, because they are not strictly in the fantasy or science fiction genre. And yet we own multiple copies of every Piers Anthony novel in existence. It just seems like sometimes we're concentrating too much on the centre of the genre, on the popular, on the traditional forms and keys. Because it's easier, because it's what people expect us to have, because it's what we know.

Hmm. I appear to have come up with a semi-coherent rant after all. Not sure how it happened. Do me a favor and don't take this all too seriously, please. But do think about it. And maybe, if you're feeling brave, pick up a book by Diana Wynne Jones, or Jostien Gaarder, or Francesca Lia Block, and see what good a "children's book" can do you.

Jenwa Hsung
Thunderbunny



A taste of the minutes

by the Onseck, of course (or actually, Pseudo-Onseck)

MITSFs meeting called to order, 17:00 SST, March 3, 2000

Jenwa Hsung, President and Skinner, presiding

John Carr, Pseudo-Onseck (Natasha claims to be away for the weekend)

The minutes of the previous meeting were read. Towards the end, a copy of *Editorial Humor* landed on the minutes.

Motion: approve minutes as fluttering copies of *Editorial Humor*.
Fails 6-13-Spehn.

Committee Reports

Walletcomm[WDS]: Bill Starr's wallet is full of cruft.

Theftcomm[AMU]: New "What's New" poster is going up on our bulletin board.

Jadecomm[JFC]: Jade went pant...grunt...wheeze this week. There is a new shelf in Damnation Alley.

Natashacomm[JFC]: Natasha is away for the weekend.

JM: We expect a full, accurate, *juicy* report. Juicy is more important than accurate.

Jourcomm[YN]: Submit work for TZ by end of March if you promised, or even if you didn't promise, and especially if you can draw. Yevgeniya will draw if necessary to fill in space. Why should we contribute then? Because she will draw badly.

JM: Put recent minutes in TZ.

JFC: How about this meeting's minutes?

JM: Say really funny things.

BING!

Old Business

Old donations still need to be processed: the Shultz donation (20 boxes), the Sprague donation (6), and the Tuttle donation (19 boxes). Some of these have been partially cataloged.

Jade becomes older next week. Remember to embarrass her. Maybe buy her a present. Is she 22? Probably not. Is Natasha 22? Maybe. Natashacomm votes no but isn't sure.

Motion: censure Natashacomm for not knowing how old Natasha is.
Passes 12-1-2+Spehn.

Usual motion. Usual result. What about the usual debate?

New Business

A wave of emptiness that had been moving around the P's is damping out. Some foreign magazines have been boxed and a new wave of emptiness will be launched as the vacant shelf is allocated to store paperbacks. (Should we resurrect the Committee to Overdamp the New Wave?) The P's have been decompressed, and when the wave dies out there will be 6.3" of empty space per three shelves. This should last a year.

Connie Willis and another [ed.: Nalo Hopkinson] are doing a science fiction reading at MIT on Monday. Discussion follows about whether she is good, and how popular she is, and someone wonders whatever happened to Connie Hirsch and whether she is popular.

JM: Don't let Connie Willis sign anything. Why not? Because then the book would be valuable and we would have to move it into Special Reserve.

There is discussion about *Ashes Of Victory*. Jhawk has a copy, but JFC can't remember if it is a MITSFS copy or not.

Future Business

We didn't get any space in rerooming. There is a small chance that we might get some of LSC's space.

A moment of silence drags on.

Motion: make something happen. Chickens 0-1-2+Spehn.

JM: Damnation Alley will be respaced.

Motion: Strangle Marty with a banana. Chickens 2-0-3+Spehn.

Miller Motion. Fails! BING!

Miller Motion. Passes! BING!

Meeting adjourned 17:30 SST.

Commentary on some new books

by John Carr

A Very Strange Trip, Dave Wolverton, story by L. Ron. Hubbard.
ISBN 1-57318-164-1 (\$25.00)

When I was 14, I read Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth*. It was a great book for a teenage boy. So is *A Very Strange Trip*, a story by Hubbard that Dave Wolverton turned into a novel. It has all the ingredients to please an adolescent male. Our fast-driving hero has adventures in exotic places and times while playing with fantastic gadgets and being chased by naked women. There are some funny moments, and I can't imagine that it was intended to be taken seriously (at least by Wolverton--who knows about Hubbard), but it doesn't work as a comedy or a satire of a genre and it doesn't work as a serious story.

Sturgeon's Law does not apply here

by John Carr

The collected stories of Theodore Sturgeon:

The Ultimate Egoist

Microcosmic God

Killdozer!

Thunder and Roses

The Perfect Host

Baby Is Three

...and more to come

North Atlantic Books, ed. Paul Williams

This project aims to collect the complete short fiction of Theodore Sturgeon, who died in 1985 after a long and productive career. Several stories in these volumes have never been published before, and others have not been published since their original appearance. Extensive research and Sturgeon's own words explain the history and context of the stories, while contemporaries of Sturgeon add commentary.

These are not all SF stories. Sturgeon was a sailor and construction worker, and some stories come from that background. Many of his early work was written for popular audiences and published in newspapers. While some stories seem dated today, the quality is excellent. The non-genre work is worth reading, and the rest--from a (then) high-tech insurance scam, to a man receiving radio signals from Mars in his basement, to a bulldozer possessed by an alien power--is classic science fiction.

A book review

by John Hawkinson

The Sarantine Mosaic (Sailing to Sarantium, Lord of Emperors)
Guy Gavriel Kay

Wow! Guy Gavriel Kay's *Sarantine Mosaic* is quite a lot of fun. Set in the same world as

The Lions of Al-Rassan, Kay takes us to the Sarantine Empire (modelled on the Byzantine Empire), and leads us on a marvelous journey of character, geography, and plot in this two-volume chronicle.

Sailing to Sarantium starts with a lengthy prologue detailing the death of Emperor Apius and the rise of Emperor Valerius I; the prologue is a bit slow-going, but well worth getting past. Kay's focus, for me, is his characters, and the prologue's third-person style fails to instill any sense of identity of those characters--intentionally so, I think. But once past the prologue, the wonder truly begins.

The narrative, flitting from character to character, takes us west from Sarantium to the fallen city of Rhodias (from Rome), once the seat of the Rhodian Empire, now ruled by the Antae and their young and competent Queen Gisel, who is precariously situated upon her throne, only by playing three competing factions against each other. The well-renowned mosaicist Martinian is summoned to Sarantium to work on Valerius' new Sanctuary. As it happens, Martinian's co-worker and friend, Caius Crispin, undertakes the journey in Martinian's stead, accompanied by his not inconsiderable temper and wit, distinctive Rhodian red beard, and some assistance from Martinian's good friend Zoticus, the local alchemist.

Mosaic plays an integral role in this work, both literally and allegorically. Mosaicists are skilled artisans who do more than simply create pictures from glass on walls; optimally, a mosaic is applied to a dome and the mosaicist takes great care in the placement of tesserae to reflect light and on the angle of said reflection viewed by observers below, as well as the effect of sunlight, moonlight, and interior man-supplied light.

Sailing to Sarantium is the story of Crispin's journey east to Sarantium and his interactions with the city; the idea of "Sailing to Sarantium", as Yeates' "Sailing to Byzantium", betokens a change of life and outlook. For Crispin, it is a significant uprooting and change, as well as a reluctant departure from his despondency over the plague-induced deaths of his wife and daughter two years previous. Due to delays on the part of the Imperial Courier, who satisfactorily receives just rewards, Crispin does not sail to Sarantium, but journeys overland.

By virtue of his Permit signed by the Imperial Chancellor, Crispin makes use of the Imperial Posting Inns on his travels, encountering a wide spectrum of people, concepts, and customs, as Kay introduces us to the Sarantine Empire and how lives are conducted and destructed there.

Arguably, the two foci of the Empire are Jad, the Sun god, and the chariot races at the Hippodrome. The Jaddite religion is recovering from schism concerning Heladikos, The Charioteer and Jad's son, who brought the torch of flame to mankind. Eastern religion has held that Heladikos is not to be worshipped, unlike western philosophy in Rhodias, where Heladikos is deified. Further complicating the situation is the devout faith in Heladikos held by the Sarantine Charioteers, who devote their very existence to him.

As Crispin crafts his mosaic with Valerius' Sanctuary, so Valerius engineers his empire, both building something truly great, as magnificent as either of them have the capability to produce.

Unwittingly, Crispin becomes a focal point for much political tension within Sarantium. Four women's lives revolve around Crispin: Kasia, a serving girl for whom he did a kindness on his journey and brought with him to Sarantium; Gisel, Queen of the Antae, who dispatched Crispin to bear a vital message to Emperor Valerius; Alixana, Empress of Sarantium and wife of Valerius, an extremely intelligent woman, yet a former prostitute and actress; Styliane Daleina, the tall and intensively attractive woman who now heads the Daleinoi, a powerful family who lost their bid for the Golden Throne to Valerius, and now the wife of Leontes the Golden, Strategos of the Imperial Army.

A blunt yet likeable man, Crispin succeeds in surviving the politics of Sarantium with a combination of extreme cleverness and remarkable luck.

"Lord of Emperors, Uncrown!" is the phrase uttered by Jad, and said to be heard by

Emperors as they die. *Lord of Emperors* begins where *Sailing to Sarantium* left off, and tells of Crispin's life in the city, and his ultimate return to Rhodias.

Much turmoil takes place in the Sarantine Empire before the book is complete, but much satisfaction was had by this reader in the feeling that ultimately, all of the principals received what they merited. It is difficult for this reviewer to provide too much information about {Lord of Emperors} for fear of giving away too much plot. Unlike much recent genre fiction, though, Kay has resisted the temptation to produce Yet Another Trilogy, and has managed to keep this a two-volume set. This works well, providing enough space for significant depth to be reached, without droning on forever.

Fans of Kay will enjoy *Sailing to Sarantium*, and those who do not know his work should find it a pleasing introduction.

The Tale of Dr. Jasper and Mr. Hatz

by Shailesh Humbad

The pivotal moment arrived. Dr. Henry Jasper quaffed the stale liquid and depressed the button on the silvery transmitter. His heart was beating fast, but he could not tell if it was due to nervousness, the drug, or both. He could feel the warmth of the liquid permeate his throat and down to his stomach. As the liquid absorbed into his body, suddenly he felt a tingling sensation run through him from tip to toe. It quickly changed to a gripping pain, as of a million ants crawling on his nerves. He watched in groggy horror as his hands turned into putty and transformed into a grotesque ape-like shape. Suddenly, his head cleared and he shuffled to the mirror. He screamed in delight and awe for what he beheld was so shocking that he knew it must remain his secret. His visage had an insidious evil but belied no deformity. A black strength and vigor flowed through his veins. For a brief moment, he truly felt free.

Dr. Hastie Lomax chided, "Your head's filled with nonsense, my dear Jasper. Such a thing would be outrageous - the medical community would never accept it."

Jasper could no longer be disturbed by this oft-heard comment from his closest friend. His recent successes had refreshed his confidence. Yet, at a deeper level, he reviled the slow, dogmatic gait of his peers. After all, the year was 2053; four hundred thirty-three years of the scientific method as proposed by Francis Bacon had not awakened these men's minds to enlightened ways of thinking. Jasper diverted from his usual explanation of the merits of his work and tried to convince Lomax of his ideals. "You're too old-fashioned, my friend. Why should we limit ourselves when the possibilities of man are truly unbounded? There is no right and wrong, Lomax. Man creates his limitations and can set himself free."

"I'm quite satisfied with the way things are now. There's no sense in upsetting the status quo, especially if society will suffer for it." Feeling the lack of the usual response, he added, "What you speak of is technically infeasible because ..."

"Because of what?" interrupted Jasper. "We have everything we need: nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, DNA reconstruction," said Jasper as he counted on his fingers. "We have but to put these things together." "But for what, I say? I know you've already told me, but I still don't believe you," responded Lomax.

"I will tell you till you believe, Lomax. We are burdened by a duality in our natures. Evil lurks in our minds at all moments and is only constrained by our higher self and society. Our higher self is tainted by these constant battles with the lower. Why not separate the natures? Let the lower breathe free, and the higher will aspire to heights to reach the sun!"

The awe and disbelief quickly left as the realization of his freedom took hold. He immediately had the urge to satisfy all his desires. The Virtual Reality visor became his escape and the

illicit worlds of cyberspace were his playpen. He was the marionette of that reckless puppeteer, emotion. Craving more, he furiously exited his desolate lab to find mischief in the city and the night was long indeed. But in his haste, he left the transmitter behind.

It was fear of the authorities that made him come back for it. The transmitter was the key to getting back, for it signaled the million or so micro-robots in his blood to revert him to his normal state. His normal state and his transfigured state were stored as binary data in the transmitter. The instructions for his transformation were beamed to the micro-robots that then set to work rebuilding his DNA and physical makeup. Not only was he physically altered, but also his mind was made keener. He did not necessarily become more intelligent, but craftier and more devious. This was exactly his state of mind as he planned his way back into his lab to retrieve the transmitter.

He had exited by a back door and the only way in was the front door that required him to pass a retinal scan. The microscopic machines in his blood had no doubt altered his eyes and hence there would be no way to bypass this security. It was nearly morning and he had already crafted his plan, but the uncertainty involved was racking his mind. He would take his chances. He took out his videophone from his coat pocket, spoke a message into it, and hit 'Send.'

Dr. Lomax parted with his friend Jasper with an air of unease. He had known Jasper for many years, as they had been classmates in the School of Tele-medicine. They had learned together their art of treating patients via special apparatuses that allowed them to sense their patients from remote locations. Jasper had always insisted, though, on using his real voice through the tele-screens, and not the quirky voice of the Universal Translator. His patients couldn't understand him and his instructors were dismayed, but still Jasper wouldn't change his mind. It was this strong-headedness that worried Lomax because it conflicted with the people who couldn't understand him, sometimes literally.

The comfort of sleep dispelled the unease Lomax felt. He dreamt of his planned vacation to the moon and the grand scenes of tranquility he would see from the transport ship. A beeping sound invaded through the mists of his dream and called him to awaken. The dream forgotten, Lomax turned on the tele-screen beckoning him from his dresser. In the brightness of the flat panel, Lomax squinted his eyes and said, "Hello?" As his eyes adjusted, he saw that he had received an urgent message and not a live video call. He played back the message and as the quirky voice of the Universal Translator echoed in his ears, the unease he had felt earlier magnified into a tremendous fear; for here is what the message said:

My dear Dr. Lomax,

Please excuse the oddity of this message and the time of sending. But you must not fail me now, in my hour of greatest need. Take the time to notice that this message has been digitally authenticated by my signature and is not a fake. With the utmost urgency, I ask that you do one favor for me whose need outweighs it by oceans. In my laboratory is a small, silver transmitter with the label, "Transformer." At exactly 6 am, a man will present himself at the front door as Mr. Hatz and you are to give this transmitter to him. Rest assured that this man has my permission and you are to treat him as a friend. Again, the transmitter labeled "Transformer" is to be handed to Mr. Hatz at 6 am. In my distress, I fear that the slightest misinformation may cause calamity so I must be doubly careful. Serve me, my dear Lomax, and save

Your friend,

H. J.

Jasper scurried up to the front door at the appointed hour. His friend was waiting there with a grave look upon his face. As soon as he saw him, his face turned pale as if he had seen the devil himself. Jasper approached him carefully and introduced himself as Mr. Hatz. The doctor derided this small, evil looking man but swallowed his revulsion and said, "If you are who you say you are, follow me inside."

Once in the laboratory, to which the doctor had access, Mr. Hatz immediately said in a hoarse voice, "Well, where is it?"

"Have patience sir. I would like to know the whereabouts of Jasper and his condition first," replied Lomax, his skin crawling at the sound of Hatz's voice.

Hatz's rage inflamed and only with an incredible amount of control was he able to respond, "I assure you that your questions will be answered. He mentioned an item of business that was to be given to me, a silver transmitter..."

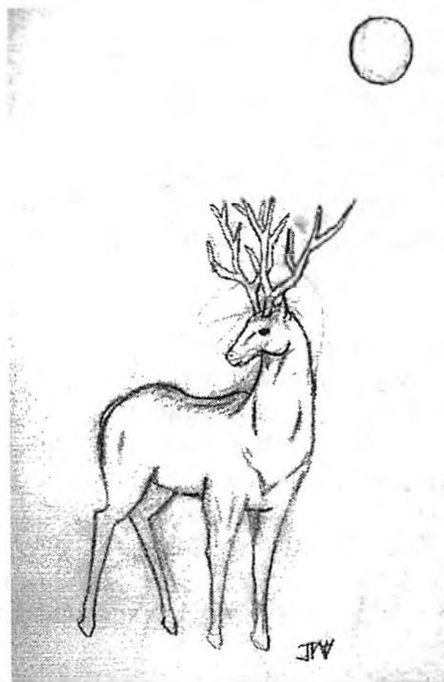
Relenting, Lomax said, "Yes, here it is."

Hatz grabbed it and was about to push the button before he said, "Lomax, I must ask you to leave now and keep your sanity, for what you are about to see will boggle your mind. I urge you, leave these questions unanswered and live in bliss."

"I have come too far to not see this to its end."

"Suit yourself," said Hatz, and he pressed the button on the transmitter.

Lomax watched in horror as he saw Hatz fall to the floor in a sudden convulsion. He could not hear the silent sound of tiny insect-like machines splitting apart Jasper's strands of DNA and rebinding them into their original configuration. He could not see the electro-magnetic radiation carrying the blueprint of Jasper's life back to his body. He could not feel the gnashing and churning of elementary compounds, structures and chemicals in the cells of Jasper. What he saw was only the morphing of Hatz's seemingly solid body into the form of his friend, Jasper. A trickle of metallic, stale liquid crept out of the ears of the unconscious Jasper. The micro-robots had done their job and were exiting his body, signaling that the pivotal moment had passed.



Incidental Beauty

by Elizabeth Werbos

On the day I was born, the soil was rich with flavor and color. I stretched out my fingers and touched it, and my fingers hummed with its vibrancy. And so it went. I followed twisted crimson trails of my mother and my father, and they buffered me from the most violent sense-storms. My thoughts crystallized to the dense whorl of the sun and to the pulsing flows of the ground beneath me.

And in the course of things, it became night and my enthusiasm waned. The writhing paths I followed pooled into shallow tepid puddles. I loitered there, sucking what I could from them and forcing the slick taste to overrule the dry touch of my comrades about me.

As we passed into full-dark, my skin hardened with the passing of the largest pools. There were but dusky lights around me and it came to where I started at any dribble of daytime rainbow flows.

Maraidor was cold, lonely, and for the most part unremarkable. Mira was not disappointed; it was her first off-Earth trip, but no one had led her to expect anything more than a depressingly lifeless place. And Maraidor had enough quirkiness to supply her with at least one memory.

And in the course of things, it became dawn and I stirred, creeping east in the turbulence of a burgeoning river. I watched the sedate outer ripples of the fireball plume as I approached over the horizon.

I stopped. It loomed before me, and I could see the sun peeping out from behind it.

When they first landed, the more scientific members of the crew had to spend a day surveying for the most profitable mineral deposits; Maraidor was well-charted at that point, but independent miners came through daily and it was important to be sure that one of them hadn't stripped your spot since the last time you landed. Mira, as an equipment specialist, had very little to do.

It outshines the sun; it is brighter than a glow new-formed. Comrades fear and I fear.

Everyone was up early on the first day. Mira slipped out of bed ten minutes before her alarm sounded, and she had time to shower and put on her first boot before it started ringing. She hopped across the room and pressed her palm to the softly glowing circular pad, assuring the computer that today was another one of those days when she'd be on time. The light on the pad switched off and the bell stopped.

In fear they hide, returning down to safety. I am here, too close to the glimmering whorl, and cannot retreat.

Mira sat down on her bed and pulled her last boot on, then bounced up and out the door. It clicked behind her, and she half-skipped down the first hallway to her office. It was early, and she was the first one there. She verified that there was no work for her until the next day, and left quickly.

Alone in the bright false-dawn, I shudder and push, to escape and to descend.

The scientists were using some of the suits, but there were plenty to spare for selfish outdoors expeditions like the one Mira was about to embark upon. She headed down the hall to the equipment bay and checked a suit out of the locker. The room remained empty as Mira changed quickly in the shadow of the drills.

She stuffed her helmet, the only obtrusive element of the thin suit, under her arm, and stepped around the massive machines to the airlock. She opened the inner door, stepped in, and called Control to notify them of her jaunt.

Softness and warmth, over and about me, but only a bit; the fireball is bright.

"Okay, Mira," Terrell, the operator, blipped back to her. "Just don't go more than a mile out and be careful, but I guess you know that."

"Yeah," Mira grinned, "Just taking a look around."

A green light popped on over the outer door and Terrell clicked off the line. Mira put on her helmet, closed the inner door, and activated the outer one.

I huddled down, and through my comfort the strange thing grows brighter for a moment. I am nestled against the ground beneath me, and it pounds with me in the rhythm of fear.

Maraidor was darker than she had expected, confronted face-to-face. The atmosphere was heavy and unbreathable, and looked that way. Rich in heavy metals, the planet was covered with stunted black rock formations powdered with volcanic dust.

A long, glittering shape undulated out and bounced towards me.

Mira moved a few steps into the ground rock surrounding the ship and stopped, finally making out the most famous characteristic of Maraidor's surface--a collection of dimly yellow-glowing rocks scattered over the surface. Each one was either half-buried in the lumpy gravel or nestled into a hollow in the rock like they had grown there. She could tell from the ones near-by that they were oblate palm-sized disks. Mira picked one up and rubbed it between her hands. People had long ago stopped taking the glowing rocks away with them; supposedly, they glowed more brightly in an earth-like atmosphere, and that they disintegrated too quickly to be worth the watery mess that they made when they were gone.

It is near. Purple and gold, moving like the waters of our thought, it is coming.

Swinging the rock in one hand, she continued on, and began climbing a short rock outcropping. It, too, was covered with small round rocks. At the top, there was a small pit of gravel, and she sat down in it, crossed her legs, and looked out across the light-spattered landscape. She flung the rock she carried out like a frisbee.

It was alien enough to make her a stranger, and she closed her eyes. Holding herself as still as she could, she let the weirdness seep in through her simulated calm.

So bright, it glitters. Intricate whorls are in it and over it, fierier than day and pulsing like nothing ever does. Blue seeps slowly from it to the colder coverings above me and I am cold too.

Her hands were on the ground by her sides, and she felt a large round rock underneath one. Picking it up, she noticed immediately that it was a deep red. Almost-imperceptible sparks crackled over the surface.

It shrunk into a gleaming ball by me, and I was wrenched upwards. I was disconnected from everything but the weird bright feel of the bouncing beast pressing me on each side.

Gouts of rainbow beneath me, above me; nothing-air and full-creature and I rest.

Mira felt the rock grow rapidly warm in her hand through the glove of her suit. It was far faster than she would have expected or what she had noticed in the other rock. She stared at it and clasped it convulsively; it seemed subtly softer than a normal rock.

I am dissociated and I am lost, and I must follow and I must find.

Mira touched her fingertips to the smooth surface and quickly pulled it inward to her chest. She stood up, and hurried back to the airlock.

I was drawn with it along the bright blue thread that the small burst had cast over the cool landscape. We swept towards it, past the steadily gleaming shield into a stuffy mayhem of imperceptible intricacy. I was wrapped in a cocoon of tiny multicolored threads which arched around me in all directions. Now resting upon it, I still felt vaguely disconnected, struggling to maintain my internal equilibrium and the sluggish effect of my strange resting place.

She pulled a radio from her belt and activated it. "Control, this is Mira," she said, holding it in front of her. "I'm back at the airlock."

"Gotcha," Terrell replied, and the door clicked open.

Mira went in the airlock, closed the outer door, activated the inner one, and stepped back into the cargo bay. She changed out of her suit, keeping the rock close by her as she did, and went back to her room.

She sprawled on her belly on her bed and set it down in front of her, folding her hands under her chin and watching it. It was sparkling far more brightly than it had in the outside atmosphere, jittering rainbows obscuring most of its surface.

I lay still, absorbing what I could and watching the incessant twinkle of the web around me. The steady brightness behind it grew dull and duller. I perceived large blobs wrapped in its twinings far away, bobbing about in incomprehensibly erratic patterns.

And it was brighter than the day of my birth. The threads were mere flickers over the luminance that burned behind them. They swept aside before me, and I was swallowed.

After staring at the rock wonderingly for almost fifteen minutes, Mira started, noticing that it was significantly smaller than it was originally, and getting smaller as it exuded a slimy puddle into the middle of her bed.

Hot shivers arced over my skin. Colors blurred, all of such a fearful intensity that I could barely differentiate them. I was disintegrating in the oppression of the air around me.

I grew comfortable on the brink of oblivion.

Mira watched it, unmoving, for a moment more, then heaved herself up off her bed. She took a plastic plate from her trunk and put the rock on it, then opened the door and crossed the hall and tapped on a door.

It opened, and Eyria looked up and smiled from her console across the room. Eyria had been around for the company's first excursion to Maraidor, and had been one of the ones who had tried to take the glowing rocks home before it was found useless.

"You found a glittering rock!" Eyria swung up from her console and leaned towards the plate that Mira held.

"I didn't know there was anything here like them." Mira held the rock out towards her.

"Well, sure." Eyria touched the rock with her fingertip and pulled back quickly, smiling a small smile. "I don't think they found any of them at the other sites that came before ours." She took the plate and set it down next to her console. "Here, let me show you what we found out about them."

Eyria sat down and Mira peered over her shoulder.

Violet and gold and silver. Strange and active whirlings.

"We never found them here after our first trip, you know," Eyria said, glancing up from the console.

Mira glanced away from the screen, at Eyria, then quickly at the plate. The rock was gone, and it was covered in a layer of runny opaque fluid.

Mira stared at it for a moment. "I... Uh... Think I'll take it back outside now, Eyria."

"Outside?" Eyria looked up. "Oh." Mira was still looking at the remains of the rock. "Well, whatever you want."

Picking up the plate carefully, so as not to spill any of the fluid, Mira returned to the airlock, put on her suit, and got herself cleared as quickly as she could.

As soon as she was outside, Mira stared out towards the hill where she had found the thing. Good children, when visiting a park, always left every stone and leaf in place; even miners sometimes felt odd taking something they didn't need.

Mira started making her way carefully back in her original direction. When she got to the foot of the rock formation and started climbing, she realized that trying to carry the plate upright put her slightly off balance, and she almost slipped several times. Even when she swayed most precariously, though, the fluid, which she had observed to be so runny, still managed to avoid slipping away.

Carefully holding the plate level out in front of her, Mira prepared to pour the rock back into the soil from which she had taken it. As she watched, a point of orange light burst out in the center of it.

I am white and cold and flowing-tired.

It was bubbling now, and clear. She could see crimson and gold burbling out of its tiny depths.

Cool, soft deep blue flows; below and near me now. The creature holds me, but I am free and near to home. I curl around, I caress its lavender light; I return.

It was red-hot. Mira tried to let go, but it melted through the plate and around her fingers, searing through her suit and her skin before falling to the ground in a burning spherical drop. She stifled a screech and pulled her hand to her chest.

It was coalesced, and the colors had cooled a bit. Mira got up, cradling her hand, but with her eyes still intent upon the rock. It rolled a bit, rubbery in its movements, before sinking into the barren ground as if it sat in the softest quicksand. She stared a moment more, drew her hand even more fiercely to her stomach, and bolted.



The Dreamer

by Ora Matushansky

They sat across the aisle from me, a blond woman in her late forties and a slender young man with a yarmulke on his dark curly hair. They spoke American English, but the youth had inquired about the fee to Beer-Sheva in bad Hebrew. He was very handsome, and the driver inquired about his age, even though he was clearly over eighteen. Air-conditioning was humming too loudly for me to hear the answer, but from his smile, the young man was conscious of the effect he produced.

The bus pulled off from the Central Station and in the white sun of Tel Aviv streets. I rolled down the sleeves of my shirt, lowered the blind and tried to fall asleep, when they started arguing about hotel fees and the tip to the maid. I did my best not to listen, when the woman said, "Teddy, let's not do it again, I'm tired of quibbling," and the youth said, "Nathan, not Teddy – for Chrissake, Hannah, can't you remember?"

"Nathan," she said, "Natty."

He smiled and drew her close to him, and she looked up with adoration in her eyes. I couldn't go to sleep, so I watched them inconspicuously. Immigrants often change their names when they come here, yet why Nathan, if he had been called Teddy? And what is the point of trying to look more Jewish if you mention Christ in the next sentence?

Then they began arguing again, this time about renting a car, and other passengers watched them with disapproval. Hannah ended up in tears, and Teddy forgot his starched obstinacy and started consoling her. In five minutes they were embracing again.

I went to sleep then and woke up only when we arrived. The bus to Kfar-Adon wasn't due for another half an hour, but the bus stop was in the shade and I bought a pita with falafel to pass the time. It was unfortunate that the traffic had been cut to two buses a day in each direction, so now, when I went to see my mother in Tel Aviv, I had to leave two hours after my arrival or stay for the night.

I had finished my pita when I saw the American couple again. Holding hands, they walked towards my stop, and the woman's cloth bag kept sliding off her shoulder. Then she would hook the strap with her thumb and raise both their hands to put it back on.

"Excuse me," she asked in Hebrew when they had reached my bench, "is this the stop for the bus to Kfar-Adon?"

"It's due in twenty minutes," I replied in English.

They sat down on the other end of the bench and hugged each other as if both were sinking and keen on drowning the other. Then the woman turned to me.

"Excuse me," she said again, "does Miriam Ben-Ezra still live in Kfar-Adon?"

I reflected that I could have easily been taking the bus to the next settlement or – but as the matter of fact, I did know. "She does. Or at least she was there this morning."

"She's my sister," explained the woman.

I said nothing and she turned to her lover again.

Although small, the bus was air-conditioned, and the driver was a fellow-settler from Kfar-Adon. The three of us boarded and we trundled off. Soon long stretches of orange sand lay in all directions and the sun sped towards the horizon. I sat next to the driver and we talked about the last war. He had lost his father to one of them and his brother to another, but this hadn't made him

bitter. He always said he still had a son for the next war. He was a very famous commander, well known for his disdain of death.

Then the bus shuddered and stopped.

Frowning, the driver climbed out and went to check the engine. Teddy followed, and I had to yell at him to close the door. The woman moved closer to the front and watched them as they hunched over the hood.

"Nothing can be wrong with the engine," she ventured, "air-conditioning is still on." The driver had probably arrived to the same conclusion and crawled under the bus to check the wheels and the brakes. Teddy came back inside, complaining of the heat. Then the driver returned too, a smudge of black on his cheek.

"I don't know what the problem is," he said in English. "We must wait."

"Wait for what?" asked Teddy.

"In the settlement, they will know something is wrong if we don't arrive on time. They will come."

In the heavy heat of the afternoon, walking the few miles that separated us from Kfar-Adon seemed silly. The engine was running and we cranked the air-conditioning to the max. The driver went to the back seat and lay down to sleep. The woman took out a paperback with a half-naked girl on the cover.

"You're from Kfar-Adon, are you?" asked Teddy. "I saw you on the bus from Tel Aviv."

"I saw you too."

He was unabashed. "Hannah's sister lives in Kfar-Adon. I merely want to see the synagogue."

I nodded. Plowing a settlement field, a worker had stumbled upon the ruins of an old synagogue, and now archeologists came to examine it. Needless to say, the field was lost to agriculture.

"I have read some publications," he continued, "and I have the impression that the mosaics from it relate to transmigration of souls."

I replied curtly that such a doctrine indeed existed in Judaism, but was commonly thought to have arisen in a later epoch.

"I know," he said, "I have studied this."

"In the States?" I asked politely.

He blushed. "No, here. I am sort of a neophyte."

"Teddy is an archeologist," said Hannah, "in his opinion, the older something is, the better. Religions included."

"Women too," snapped Teddy, unabashed. "And my name is Nathan, remember?"

"Some people," she told me, "change their names and hope to change themselves."

"This is also part of the doctrine," I said, "it is related to numerology."

Teddy nodded eagerly. "I'm studying this, too."

I asked him where he studied, and he told me the name of a yeshiva in Jerusalem. I knew the rabbi, and told him so.

"He is the one who told me about the synagogue, he believes in reincarnation."

"I don't."

"Why not?" asked Teddy, and I replied, "It has no room for God."

Teddy raised his eyebrows. "Indeed? What about God the Creator?"

"I have badly expressed myself. There's no room for God in the present tense."

Teddy leaned back in his seat and uncrossed his long legs. "I would hypothesize that souls are our extensions into past and future. Under such an approach, each reincarnation is linked to the previous one by the chain of cause and effect."

"You're speaking of Karma," I said, interested despite myself.

"Indeed. The place of God in this scheme of things would be to decide upon what would happen to an individual during his next life."

"You told me that before it was unnecessary," remarked Hannah, "you said our very lives bear the brunt of our previous existence. You said our sins were visited upon us..."

"I wonder," he said furiously, "for what sin of mine you were visited upon me."

"You'd rather think God is punishing me!"

I looked back at the driver, but he was asleep.

"To return to our discussion," said Teddy, "true human beings, from God's point of view, would be the totality of such reincarnations."

"Then I," said Hannah, "am only a part of some supernatural being?"

"You are merely one day in a life," Teddy confirmed with a certain pleasure. "And a long day, too."

With a deprecating smile Hannah took his hand. Then Teddy drew her closer to him, and were it not for my presence, they would have probably started kissing.

"The most wonderful day in my life," he said.

She lowered her head on his shoulder, and I asked myself what held them together.

"I'm sorry," he told me, "you were saying?"

"No," I said, "it was you who said that God judges us by the totality of our existence, all incarnations summarized. But your lady friend is also right, because there would be no need for God's judgement. The laws of Karma could be programmed into our lives."

"See?" she exclaimed.

"If they were, there would have been no free will, because each new life would be an extension of the previous. If everything is determined, we can't make our decisions." He sighed.

"Even though the most important decisions are made for us."

"Again!" cried Hannah, and I realized that they were still fighting.

"Karma," said he, "would determine the shape of each next life, but not its contents."

Hannah looked at me for a counter-argument.

"There's no point to Karma," I replied. "If we don't know that it exists, how can we benefit from it? Why would God wish us to be good and yet deprive us of a way of judging whether we have been?"

"Not fair," protested Teddy with animation. "You presuppose that God wishes us to be good! Yet I will answer to this—suppose there's a space between reincarnations when we can reflect upon our lives."

"Then our lives—our conscious lives—really take place between reincarnations?" asked Hannah.

"Perhaps." He looked troubled. "Then you and I are not days in a life, but dreams. When the dreamers awaken, they remember parts of the dream and from this dream it will depend what they will dream of on the next night. You're right," he told me, "there's no need for God in this world, except in the beginning."

"This can't be true," said Hannah with conviction.

I had my own argument—"What about children dying in infancy?"

"The person asleep was suddenly awakened."

"What about cripples, and still-born, and cancer? Don't we generally dream of things we want?"

"What about nightmares?" he countered.

We fell silent. I was shocked, unable to find a hole in his reasoning.

"There would be some people who cannot sleep and hence cannot dream..."

"This we can't know," he agreed.

"That's a major flaw," I said, "why do people die when they wake up? Why dead bodies?"

"Why not? When you leave your bed, don't you leave an imprint, a trace of your body?"

"There's one problem with your theory," suddenly said the driver from the back seat, "it's impossible to prove."

Hannah nodded and laughed. "That's good. I wouldn't want to be just a dream."

Teddy jumped to his feet. "But there is a way. If I wanted to wake up."

Hannah glared at him. "You can't. In dreams, you never know it's a dream. You can't wake up."

"I can," he said stubbornly. "If there ever was a nightmare, it's called love!"

"Ted-," I said hurriedly, "I mean Nathan..."

"I want to wake up! I want to wake up!"

"Now calm down," said the driver, rising to his feet.

Teddy's handsome face had turned red and his voice became shrill, "I want to wake up! Someone wake me up!"

He took a step forward, clenching his fists, and suddenly fell down on his face. When we had reached him, he was dead.

The rescue party found us in an hour. Hannah, grief-stricken, stayed in the settlement to await the results of the medical exam, but the doctors never found anything. A month later, when they finally allowed her to bury him, I saw to it that the official cause of his death be marked as "suicide."

It Happened Again

by Anna Murphy

I rolled onto my side in my bed and saw that everything was the way it had been the morning before and all the other mornings for as long as I could remember. My clothes were in the same place, the dresser had not been moved, the chair was still angled to look out the window.

I knew there was no escaping it, this was my fate. I simply rose from my bed and put on the same outfit I had always worn and headed down to the kitchen. There I prepared the same breakfast, knowing that nothing about it would change. The toast would still burn slightly and the orange juice would be a little too sour for my taste, but this was how it had been for years.

After finishing my meal, I once again put the dishes into the dishwasher knowing that they would be waiting for me to wash them when I had eaten my dinner, and put those dishes alongside those from breakfast. I then arrived at work, struggling through the traffic and anticipating that a blue Geo would cut me off, as always, right at the intersection of Martin Drive and West Twelfth Avenue. After I pulled into the parking space that was a little further from the door than I liked, I took

my place in my cubicle on the ninth floor, and sat down to another day of the same work I had done the day before.

The day would again drag on until about eleven o'clock when, unexpectedly, the fire alarm would go off, and we would evacuate the building. By lunch time that would be the great topic of conversation, with people speculating on whether someone violated the "No Smoking" policy which the company strictly enforced. By the time lunch was over, things would again return to normal, with everyone going back to their separate working space and trying to meet the quota of productivity for the day. At five o'clock I would punch out and leave the building making the same trip out to my car, which was still too far away for my liking.

After work, I would go to the bar down the street, and speak with two people from the office whose names I did not know. They were so drunk, they did not care. Finally, at nine o'clock, I would leave the bar to go take a short walk, to make sure I would be able to drive home. When I got to the corner, I heard footsteps coming from the alley walking toward me, and growing louder by the milisecond. When I got to the alley, I saw a hand wrap itself around the side of the building, and I could see the shape coming out of the shadows. First the shoe came into the light, then the dark pant leg, next I could see the coat tails and finally the torso.

At this point, I would wake up in a cold sweat, breathing heavily and wondering who was coming out of the shadows toward me, and what I could possibly have that he or she would want. I shake this from my mind quickly, and roll over onto my side in my bed, and see that my room is exactly the way it had been the morning before...

Human Xeroxing

by Glenn Berry

Moralists look at researchers across a supposedly impassable rift;
Neither side seems to realize, this is another Promethean gift.

Let no man have any doubt -
The knowledge is forever out.
The question is what we will do
In the world of Dolly - duplicated ewe.
Some fear, and would make this a crime.
Wisdom says "It's just a matter of time.
Someone will see a path to wealth,
And claim, no doubt, 'twas done for health."
There is no way to turn back the world's clocks
So we must prepare for an attempted human xerox.

It is time for the fools we elect
To reearn our lost respect;
To guide the use of this invention,
And show us the right of the questions.

To clone a man, when is it right?
And when is it abhorrent in our sight?
We might get volunteer donors for a medical trial,
but could the clones be said to have had a right of denial?
Consent required -- your genes your property --
Or none needed -- they belong to society?
Would it make a difference if all humanity were sterile?
So why not now, when some couples are infertile?
If we can prove a clone committed a crime,
But not which one, who does the time?
If a cloned man dies intestate,
Who gets what portions of the estate?
When a clone reaches the age of maturity
Is he free, or the payer's property?

So many queries I can't really begin,
In lack of good answers lies the real sin.
So many ways to cause so much pain,
But if done right, so much to gain.
The genie can't be stuffed back in the bottle,
But we needn't open wide the throttle.
For more people the world has no pressing need,
So let's get it right ere we create this new breed.

Reflection

by Andrea Humez

What I remember mostly is the cold.
You'd think, being dead more or less,
I wouldn't notice chill,
but I've always shivered in evening clothes
and sat as close to the fire as I could
relishing the proximity
of deadly heat.

I remember voices (some) and
faces (very few)
and for some reason I remember
the little ivory fan I lost
when the boat tipped over in the middle of the lake
and my two companions (I've long since lost
their names) were drowned.
"How lucky they are," I thought,
as I let myself be hauled ashore
and prepared for the performance

of coughing my way back from near-death.

But death was never near - not
for centuries now.
I have survived too long
and like an ancient tree,
my bark is tough and hard to scar.
Even sunlight hasn't worried me for ages
(although I still burn easily,
my skin a shade too pale).
I wear silver and avoid mirrors
and wish that I could get up the initiative
to immolate myself,
assuming fire could even end me now.

My kingdom (if I had one) for a piece of wood
and a friendly hand to push it
through me, stop my long-dead heart
from circulating borrowed blood.
I don't have the will
for suicide
and keeping secrets is a habit so ingrained,
I find I can't betray myself.
So I continue, always out of context,
a shadow among solids
that have long since ceased to entertain,
looking for a cause to sacrifice myself
or a friend so true
that I could trust him with my death--
someone to kiss my lukewarm lips,
transfix me with wood,
and close my tired eyes
for the last time,
to erase me, leaving behind only
perhaps my face in his
silver-backed memory.

Fool's Rock

by Patricia Fish

"I just don't care for the tone of the thing, Mike. Can't you pep it up...make it go smoother?"

I sighed. Or course I could pep it up and make it go smoother. I could do anything the great Skip Passions requested. It was what I was paid, and paid handsomely, to do.

Skip wheeled out of the studio, waving his hand in the air like he does when forced to deal with the minions.

I held the script in my hand, red-marked throughout by the irritable Skip, and watched him roll down the hall. To this day, I still felt a pang at the sight. For as much as I resented, indeed, hated, Skip Passions, it was still my fault he was missing his legs. And although I had spent my life paying my remorse, I could not yet begin to imagine when my debt would be repaid to the man who will never walk because of me.

It was that conscience thing that was the problem. It was a problem when this whole thing started, and it continues to be a problem now. Although, I thought, I have been exonerated by the originator of my life-long nightmare, somehow I didn't feel any better knowing my life has been one big joke.

* * *

"Jerry, stay away from "Fools Rock". They have it roped off for a reason." My mother was calling this to me as I pulled my ten-year-old self up the hill to the edge of the cliff. Finally, I was going to see "Fools Rock!"

Most folks would scoff at our little town's "famous" landmark. But little towns sometimes don't have a whole lot going for them, and the small town of Rocks, Maryland had even less to offer. Except for "Fools Rock," located on the edge of a cliff in the town's Patapsco Park.

It was called "Fools Rock" because it would occasionally and sporadically become covered with some sort of oil that would ooze out of the very pores of the rock. In an earlier and less enlightened time, the "fools" would climb onto the boulder, all solid and sturdy, to suddenly find themselves slipping from the mysterious oil substance that would begin to ooze from the rock. There were, and oddly the little town of Rocks is quite proud of this fact, several deaths resulting from the "fools" who slipped to their death in the small canyon below.

At the age of ten, and the first time I laid eyes on the rock, the thing was all roped off lest some idiot attempt to defy the rock and end up as canyon wall decoration. I clambered up the hillside to see the rock that had made our town famous as far away as Baltimore. I was, my memory recalls, rather disappointed to discover it was only a huge boulder surrounded by string. Since the famous oily "weepings" of the rock occurred by no natural plan, I had never been witness to the event.

The nature guide explained that the ooze from the rock is really the result of some geological phenomena and scientifically explainable. For my youngster self, I cared nothing for the geology of the thing. I knew the moment my youthful eyes laid eyes on that rock that there was something mystical about it. While the tourists oohed and aahed over the guide's tales of tragic deaths and geological phenomena, I stared at the rock with special eyes.

"They say if you have a conscience, the rock will fool you." I almost jumped at this revelation from my father, not for the words but from the fact that he had crept so close to my mesmerized self while I had not a clue.

I asked my father what he meant.

Dad lit up a cigarette, took a few deep breaths to catch his wind from the climb, and squinted toward the rock.

"I heard a lot of stories about the rock over the years. Some weird ones too. Guy in my high school class supposedly got 'fooled' by the rock. We never did find out the whole story, but his girlfriend was killed in a car accident. Guy never got over it. There were whispers the rock had something to do with it."

I looked up at my Dad as he said this. I found I could not see his face for the shadow cast by the sun. I held my hand over my eyes as if a visor. I wanted to see if my Dad was serious, or just joking. He looked very serious.

* * *

"No kidding Jer...you going up to Fools Rock? It's a spooky rock all right. Aren't you scared?"

My best buddy Billy and I were huddled under my bed covers. We were both twelve and had a pile of comic books under our "tent" that was supposed to fool my mother to believe we were asleep.

"I want to get close to the rock," I whispered to Billy, who then pointed that dumb flashlight directly towards my eyes. Then I had to slap it away, causing Billy to shout in indignation. Of course, my mother heard it all and called for us to get to sleep.

We both waited a bit until Mom turned the television up. Then, I slapped Billy.

"Listen stupid. During the day you can't get close to the rock. The stupid guides won't let anyone near it. And yeah, I'm going to go up to the rock tomorrow night, right when the guides get off duty. It's only a couple of miles from here. We could walk up, climb up to the rock, and be back before either of our Moms knew where we were. I tell my Ma I'm over at your house...you tell yours you're over at mine. Then we sneak up to the park. What are you...a chicken?"

Of course, Billy Winslow was not a chicken. We met up by the corner grocery that morrow and began our climb to Fools Rock. Only Billy did chicken out at the last minute. I left his sorry behind at the base of the hill and climbed up to the rock. For the last two years, driven by some weird impulse, I had wanted to lay my hands on that rock. This after dark foray was the only time I would get a chance.

Within ten minutes after I climbed under the flimsy guard rope, I met up with The Fool. Only I thought it was Billy playing a joke on me. Only it couldn't have been Billy, because The Fool was

only about two feet tall and looked like the joker on a deck of cards. The Fool lives under Fools Rock. Only most people didn't know this. Most people still don't.

"You picked a fine night to visit," The Fool said.

I looked over this little fellow and wondered how on earth Billy had managed to get a talking puppet and store it just here, right under Fools Rock.

"I knew you would sooner or later. I can always spot the ones with a conscience. The ones with a conscience, they can't stay away from the rock."

I still had not said a word to this little person, because I still thought it was Billy playing some sort of joke. Only Billy was down at the base of the hill, probably wetting his pants and blubbering like a kid.

"Since tomorrow is April Fool's Day...and...since..." with this The Fool jumped to the top of the rock, "I am a Fool....well I get to grant a wish. A get-even wish. You got someone you want to get even with?"

The Fool sat down on the rock and placed his chin on his clenched fist, in some take-off on the famous "Thinker." Only I was too young to realize all this just then. All I realized was that Billy Winslow was smarter than I gave him credit for.

"Yeah. Skip Parsons. I want to get even with him." I shouted this to The Fool. This would show that stupid Billy Winslow. He was more afraid of Skip Parsons than of the rock. If he was going to play silly games with me, then I would show him.

Billy and I hated Skip Parsons. Not that Skip didn't deserve our hate. Sometimes it seemed as if he spent all of his waking moments just making our lives miserable. So of course, when The Fool asked, I offered Skip Parsons to the cause.

Suddenly, and startling me half out of my wits, The Fool leapt from the rock, using one arm as pivot.

"Here's what you do," The Fool said, standing his two feet tall, now at my feet, "write a note to Skip Parsons. Tell him to meet you at the railroad track tomorrow at 3:00 pm. Do ANY-THING...promise him something he can't resist...but get him to the railroad tracks at 3:00 pm. Then you shall get your revenge."

Before my 12-year-old mind could begin to absorb these words, The Fool disappeared. My conversation with him had, indeed, been so brief that I thought I had imagined the whole thing in my jitters of the night.

I ran down to the bottom of the hill where Billy Winslow awaited. I slapped him a few times for playing the joke of The Fool on me, when his blubbering registered. He sobbingly informed me

that he didn't know anything about any Fool and that he just wanted to get out of this place and go home.

"Okay, Billy. I am going to leave a note in Skip's locker. I am going to tell him to meet us down by the railroad tracks. I'm going to tell him that me and you are going to beat him up. And right after school tomorrow I am going to drag you down there by your ears. If you are telling the truth, and you had nothing to do with that stupid Fool, then nothing should happen to Skip. On the other hand, if the Fool is real...then we don't want to miss seeing what happens to him."

All of this common sense talk was almost wasted on the crying Billy. He said he didn't know about any Fool and that I would see just as soon as something terrible happened to Skip Parsons down by the railroad tracks.

And something terrible did happen to Skip Parsons, soon to become Skip Passions, talk show host extraordinaire.

As Billy and I watched hidden in a nearby copse of trees, Skip Parsons tripped as he ran across the tracks in front of a speeding train. Before this event could register, the train ran over his thighs, cutting off his legs from his torso.

There was pandemonium for several hours after this. It was an old game, and Skip had been, up till then, a grand master.

Just as soon as a speeding train could be heard rumbling down the track, a group of boys would line themselves up alongside the tracks. Up and down the line, one at a time, a boy would run across the track in front of the speeding train. As would be expected, the game got more exciting and dangerous the closer the train got. Everyone in the line was expected to take their turn. Many chickened out just as the train came upon them. Skip had enough time to take his daring run across the track before the train came. Only he tripped.

Billy and I ran just as soon as the train dissected Skip. I hoped no one would find my note left in Skip's locker that morning. Surely, everyone would blame me for enticing Skip down to the railroad tracks. How could I know he would bring a whole gang of his buddies and they would all play "chicken" with the train? More, how could anyone believe that the whole idea came from a little man who looked like the Joker in a deck of cards? A little man who lives under Fools Rock and grants "get- even" wishes on Aprils Fools Day?

Now it was Billy's turn to be strong. For in the days and weeks and months that followed Skip's accident, I could do nothing but fret and worry. Billy, to my surprise, took it all in stride. Eventually, he was even able to joke about the whole thing.

"If Skip Parsons wasn't such an asshole," Billy pontificated, "he would have his legs today. You didn't have anything to do with this, Jer. I'm sure you never met any little man living below Fools Rock. Jerk deserves to spend the rest of his life in a wheel chair."

But that day the train ran over and amputated Skip Parsons' legs, and for all the days thereafter, I could not get rid of the guilt. I HAD met a little man who called himself The Fool, and I HAD wished harm on Skip Parsons. I could not get beyond this.

Which is why I got Skip into my college. I tutored him day and night so he could pass the SAT's. I arranged for him to get a loan from the US government for tuition. I studied and quizzed him for the entire four years we attended college.

It was in our fourth year of college that I arranged for Skip to fill in for the local radio jock of our school. The college had its own radio station, just a little thing, not much of a bandwidth. It was popular with the students, though. There was a long waiting list of would-be disk jockeys. My affiliation with the radio station was as head writer. I was a journalism major. The skits and play-by-plays of the little radio station fell under my purview. It was a simple matter to arrange for Skip to fill in for our regular afternoon jock who had called in sick. Many others would have gladly given their right arm for the opportunity. Skip had already given his legs, so I thought he the proper person for the chance.

He took to it like a duck to water. No more than ten minutes into the broadcast, Skip had tossed away my carefully prepared text and was ad libbing. First thing he did was throw open the phone lines for discussion on the Kennedy assassination. Skip said he thought John F. Kennedy was murdered by the FBI and gave some reasons why he so thought.

Now our collegiate station was not a megawatt station that broadcast radio waves across the land. In fact, the station had exactly one telephone, and it had exactly one phone line. Still, to listen to Skip talk on the air, one would have thought a bank of phones awaited the dial. Even so, the one phone line rang and no sooner did that caller ring off that another called in. Skip kept that one phone line hopping for the entire four hours he was on the air. He was utterly outrageous.

"Don't you believe that JFK was murdered by Lee Harvey Oswald. Who is Oswald...this little wimpy guy? Or don't any of you listeners know about the manhole cover along the parade route?"

Of course the phone rang with a caller wanting to know about the manhole cover along the parade route and of course, Skip would explain. I was beside myself with Skip's impromptu show and was quite relieved when the four hour broadcast was over.

"What are you, some kind of nut?" I yelled to Skip when he exited the broadcast booth.

"Jer, they loved it. Look, the damn phone is still ringing."

Indeed, it was. And each caller wanted more of Skip. Reluctantly I agreed to let Skip have a two hour slot in the morning. The guy was a cripple, after all, and he was a cripple because of me.

The phenomena that was to become Skip Passions grew geometrically. The morning college broadcasts became wildly popular. Skip was a master at the craft. He could alternatively beguile or belittle a caller. Unbelievably, the callers loved it. In a short while, the local stations were

recruiting Skip and his loyal writer, yours truly. Finally, the national stations called. Eventually, Skip had his own TV call-in talk show.

I was swept along with the Skip Passions wave with no oar or lifejacket. On one hand, I was still a guilt-ridden mess over the injury I had caused. On the other hand, and I must say this tactfully, I was getting filthy rich.

* * *

It was almost twenty years after that train ran over Skip's legs before I met The Fool yet again.

I went up to Fools rock for just that purpose, as a matter of fact. And I went up precisely on the eve of April Fool's day. I went because I wanted to beat the crap out of the little man who had granted me a revenge that had ended with me in this life that I hated but could not escape for the guilt and the wealth.

And guess who was there just I completed my ascent to the rock?

"So....going slumming now, are you?" The Fool said. I reached out to slap him in the manner of Billy Winslow, but the rascal jumped straight up to land on the rock.

"Hey, what's the problem? You got your revenge on Skip Parsons."

"Passions. It's Passions now you little terd of an asshole. And I am Skip Passions' loyal lackey!"

Such was my anger that I jumped right up on the rock to catch the jerk. At just this time, the rock began its oozing thing. I slipped on the oily fluid and was hanging onto the rock, just barely, with both hands.

As I hung on for my life, The Fool jumped all around my trembling body.

"Recognize this?" he asked, holding a piece of notebook paper under my nose. Since living was more important to me than looking at the stupid paper, I ignored the thrust paper.

"Okay. Then let me read it for you. 'Skip, meet me and Billy Winslow down by the railroad tracks tomorrow at three o'clock. Billy says he can beat you up.' "

Even as I clung for my life, I lifted my head at The Fool's narration. The paper The Fool held in his hand was my own lined loose-leaf page, and the writing on it was my own childish scrawl.

"How'd you get it! I left it in Skip's locker. How'd you get it?"

The Fool danced around me, some sort of Irish jig kind of thing.

"Because it was never delivered, you nut. Skip Parsons' destiny was to meet up with that train in such a manner that would leave him with no legs. Of course, as The Fool, I know such things as

destiny. Stupid mortals like you are just playthings. I just direct you to some destiny about to occur....and don't you all think it is something you caused?"

I managed to grab a root of a nearby tree and was slowly pulling myself away from certain death in the canyon below. As I struggled, I remembered that little story my father had told me that first time we had come to Fools Rock. What was it? Something about a high school friend of his whose girlfriend died in an accident? I wonder how many other mind games this Fool had managed to play on some hapless mortal with a working conscience. Finally, I had freed myself from certain death and jumped down from the rock to safety. The Fool danced around the rock, his mocking laughter echoing off the canyon's walls.

"You silly, silly mortal. This is your life, you stupid fool. **THIS IS YOUR LIFE!** I didn't have a damn thing to do with it. **YOU** didn't have a damn thing to do with it. It was your destiny. Whether or not you ever met me, you would still be Skip Passions' lackey!"

The Fool danced around the rock some more while I attempted to regain my sanity.

"This couldn't be. Everything I did for Skip I did because I thought I had something to do with his accident. Everything would have been different if I hadn't met you and hadn't thought I caused the accident. Who knows what would have happened had I not been carrying that guilt burden around?"

The Fool was stopped by my outburst. He squatted down on the rock and squinted his eyes in my direction.

"Nothing....nothing would have been different. Listen to me Jerry boy...this is your life. What, you think you're different from anyone else? Wondering where they are and how they ended up here? The only difference, Jerry, is you lived your destiny thinking I caused it. Had you not met me, you would have lived the same destiny...but who knows, maybe you would have blamed your wife...your parents."

"You're nuts. Absolutely nuts." Now, I couldn't believe I was calling an apparition nuts, but how could he even begin to believe that my life wasn't fashioned by my chance meeting with him twenty years ago? With this, The Fool began to dance around the rock again.

"It's your life, Jerry boy. It's your life. It's what was going to happen anyway...just like Skip was going to lose his legs by a train. What?" The Fool asked, looking at my angry visage.

"Okay...so you are a little mad. Don't I have a right to play a little joke, Jerry? Because I did, that night you first saw me. I played a little joke with your life...although I didn't change your life, Jerry. Anyway, Jerry, since you are such a spoil sport about it, may I say....some twenty years too late....**APRIL FOOL!**"

So, how are we feeling today, Mr. Whitaker?

by Anna Murphy

"Come on, Mr. Whitaker, it's time for your appointment with Dr. Allister," the nurse whose name I could never think to remember said to me. "Oh my, is it that time already? What a pleasure," I replied rising from my chair.

We began the walk down the hall. It was quite an incredible feeling being allowed to walk again instead of being wheeled around in that ridiculous wheel chair when there was nothing wrong with my legs. Of course, the straight jacket is still a little binding, but I don't like to complain about such insignificant things when I'm given the privilege of walking to my appointments with Dr. Allister.

Once I got to his office, his secretary showed me in, and told me to sit and wait until he arrived. Considering that the office was in a mental hospital, there wasn't much to see. The walls were white and the only furniture there was a couple of chairs and a desk which must have contained files on me and the other patients. My thoughts were interrupted by the door opening and Dr. Allister coming in. I rose to greet him, as was customary. After all I still remembered my manners.

"I would offer you my hand, Doctor, but as you can see, there are some people in this place who feel I'm not quite ready to take this coat off," I said to him as we both sat.

"Mr. Whitaker, it is very nice to see you again. I am sorry about that straightjacket, but we must think of your safety first. I have made recommendations to have it removed, but as you know, bureaucracy has a habit of getting in the way. Even so, I think we've made quite a lot of progress in these sessions. In fact, I'm truly considering letting you go to work at the fast food restaurant down the street in a few months, if things continue this way."

"That is definitely nice to hear, Doctor. Thinking about that almost makes living in that room bearable."

"Yes, that reminds me, how are your accommodations?"

"Well, I suppose I'm lucky that white is my favorite color. But the walls are very comfortable. They make it so easy to sleep against them. I don't like to bother the nurses by asking for pillows since I know they aren't normally allowed in my wing of the hospital. That whole personal safety issue again I suppose."

"I am glad to see that your spirits are still so high, Mr. Whitaker. In fact, you seem to have a much better grasp on reality than many of the people I have seen come through my door."

"Yes, well, there's really nothing I have to be insane about. I'm simply dealing with this situation until you and the other doctors come to your senses about my mental state and then allow me to return to my job at Corigan & Williams. I know that my selling skills must be missed by them terribly, though they never showed any appreciation for them."

"Well, Mr. Whitaker, I think we're getting off the subject a little bit here. You have managed to show remarkable improvement since you first came to us six months ago. However, I am still not clear about some of the details behind the events leading up to your "visitation," so if it isn't too much trouble for you, I'd like you to tell me once more what happened that day, and with your permission I'll tape it for the record."

"All right. Although, I must admit that it is a little bit tedious for me to keep repeating things over and over."

"I am sorry about that, but research has proven that a victim can sometimes recall other details that they may have forgotten by repeating the story many times. So, if you don't mind," Dr. Allister said as he placed the tape recorder on top of the desk and motioned for me to begin.

* * *

I knew exactly what he was doing. He was checking my story for discrepancies. Not a single word of my story had changed since I began telling it to people. He tape recorded every one of my tellings, always using the excuse that I might remember something else or even forgetting to lie and simply putting it out as though it was part of every therapy session. I knew that it drove him mad that on every detail nothing changed, that every time he listened to all of them he could just put them on simultaneously and listen to me telling my tale in stereo. Even with that in mind, I chose to tell it again every time without much protest. One day he would listen to it and understand that my gift was real and that it came from somewhere beyond this atmosphere. Until then, I trudged through it every week, always using the same words, the same tone of voice, and the same descriptions. This is how my story goes.

It all started on January 4, 1996. It was supposed to be a typical business trip home. I had finished wrapping up a fairly large deal for my publishing house. We had been after the hottest young author around to sign with us for months, and finally I flew down to Washington, D.C. to get her signature on the last contract. I called the office as soon as I left, and told them the good news. In recognition of the accomplishment they said I could take the next flight home to New York. I was overjoyed, but not because I had a family to go back to. I never had time for that sort of thing and was not interested in a commitment to anything that could outlive a goldfish. No, I just needed to be back in the city where all my worries were justified. Of course, Washington, D.C. almost did that for me, but it still wasn't the same.

The company booked the flight for me and I arrived at the airport shortly after three o'clock. I got my ticket and looked at where I would be sitting. Coach! Those cheap bastards stuck me in coach! After I land the book deal that was quite possibly the biggest of my career, they thanked me by putting me in coach! However, that small detail was soon forgotten and I upgraded myself to first class and decided to use it as a business expense on my tax return. After numerous delays the plane finally boarded and took off at almost five o'clock.

Since it was a short flight we were only given snacks, which were enough to last me for a while. I thought that I was not going to be able to sleep on the flight since there was almost always a

screaming baby near me, but this time there wasn't and I soon found myself dreaming of being chased down the street by a giant dog. It was not very pleasant and I awoke with a start.

When I first opened my eyes I thought I was still dreaming. There was no one in the aisle across from me or in front of me. Then I remembered that there hadn't been anyone there to begin with, so that put me at ease, but then the stewardess came up to me and said that the pilot wanted to speak to me. That was fairly strange, but since the airplane was still flying and there were still passengers on board, I didn't think too much about it. It was when I got to the cockpit that things took a turn for the worse.

There was no light coming out of the cockpit and I didn't hear any of that "pilot to co-pilot" nonsense that you associate with planes. The stewardess opened the door and pointed to the chairs. I went toward them, and as soon as I was in the cockpit, the door shut behind me. There I was, alone in the cockpit with no light, not even from the control panel, when all of a sudden a voice spoke to me out of the dark.

"Hello, Mr. Whitaker, we've been expecting you," the voice said.

"How do you know my name?"

"We've been watching you for a long time and we're quite interested in you."

"What do you mean? And how did you know that I'd be on this flight? I wasn't supposed to leave until tomorrow morning," I said, feeling my heart leap into my throat.

"Now, calm down, Mr. Whitaker. There is nothing to be afraid of. We arranged this meeting right down to your company stiffing you with that coach ticket."

"Well, would you mind turning on a light so I can see? I like to know who it is I'm talking to."

"Of course. Where are our manners?" another voice asked and with that the cockpit flooded with light.

I couldn't speak at first, mostly because I couldn't see, but when my eyes adjusted, there standing before me were two aliens, or at least I guess that's what you'd call them. They were the height of an eight-year old and were totally bald, but the extra arm sprouting out of their shoulders is what truly gave them away. That and the fact that not many eight-year olds would be allowed to fly a commercial jet without some sort of adult supervision. For some reason, I still had an amazing sense of calmness since I did not find an eight-year old very threatening.

"I'm certain this will sound like a rather embarrassing question, but I just want some clarification in this matter. Are the two of you aliens, or is this just some kind of practical joke?"

"Oh, we can assure you this is no joke. We are beings foreign to your planet, though we have tried to assume a somewhat normal looking shape for our visits. Of course, someone misinterpreted the instruction manual when making our costumes, eh Trang?" the first alien said.

"I've already apologized, Neeble. What more can I do? Besides this is a lot closer to what they look like than what you wanted us to wear. But this really isn't the point, now is it Mr. Whitaker?"

"Quite frankly, I haven't got the slightest idea what the point of this encounter is."

"Oh, that's right. We never explained ourselves too clearly to you, did we? We are going to have to brush up on our earthling etiquette for next time, Trang."

"Yes, well that was your department, Neeble. But we shouldn't be fighting over such a trivial thing. Mr. Whitaker, the reason we are here to see you is to give you a gift. It's quite nice, and we think you are just the earthling who can use it for all its potential."

"This isn't going to involve an anal probe, is it? Because I've heard that that's what happens when aliens abduct people. And besides, I just got my prostate checked at the doctor's last week, so there's really nothing you could find that would be of any interest in there."

"Oh, no, Mr. Whitaker. We're not that kind of alien. What you do with your ass is none of our business."

"That comes as quite a relief. So, what is this gift that you'll be giving me?"

"Well, it comes in a long line of very famous successors. I'm positive that you've heard of Napoleon, Einstein, and Steven Spielberg?"

"Yes, of course I have."

"Can you tell us what they all have in common?"

"They were all great successes, at least Napoleon was until that Waterloo thing."

"Yes, we rather messed that one up didn't we, Neeble?"

"I'm afraid we did, but the point is that they're all commonly referred to in everyday society. "The Napoleonic Complex," calling a person an "Einstein" and well, Steven Spielberg could make a movie about toilet water and it would make hundreds of millions of dollars. The point is that Trang and I gave them the gifts that made them famous."

"Wait, you're telling me that Napoleon, Einstein, and Spielberg were all visited by aliens?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it."

"Then how do you explain why Napoleon went mad? or why Einstein flunked math as a child? or why Steven Spielberg made 'E.T.'? You see, they all received their own gift to make their mark on

history. We do this because as punishment many centuries ago our leader forced us to watch the Earth and its people develop. After a while, this got boring since our intelligence exceeds your own so far that you cannot possibly conceive of it. And, since that happened, we decided to choose people at random and give them a small amount of our intelligence. With Napoleon, he got his military strategies; of course we were just starting out, so that didn't work out like we'd planned. Einstein got to make the big bomb and make his hair look Tina Turner's. And Spielberg got to make movies. By the time we'd gotten to him, we thought we'd caused enough damage to the earth and should try and do some good. We even left behind the impression that we looked like that 'E.T.' so he could bring joy to millions of children around the world. Of course he really ended up traumatizing them, so that once again didn't do us a heap of good. And now, here we are with you. We have thought long and hard about this, and have come to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to let you predict the future. Well, it's not really predicting the future, it's more like we let you see visions of the future and you know what's going to happen before anyone else does."

"So this is like me getting to see the movie before everyone else does? Are there any responsibilities that go along with this gift?"

"Obviously we can't let you go around telling people what's going to happen before it does, without a purpose. You have to warn people about the big stuff like earthquakes and invasions into defenseless countries, but other than that you can just enjoy the gift and do what you like with it."

"Oh, I see. So, how do I get it?"

"That can be a little painful. We all have to hold hands and let just the right bit of our knowledge slip into your subconscious. If too much goes in, it has to be taken back. That's the painful part. We would have to open your brain and find where there was too much concentrated throbbing and remove that. If we did leave it in your head would explode within a matter of weeks. Unfortunately we didn't bring our surgical supplies with us, so we would have to use one of those plastic forks that comes with your meal. Otherwise, it is a perfectly safe and painless process."

With that bit of information I grabbed their hands and in less than a minute I could see things happening that hadn't been reported in the news yet. Things like how cheese spray can remove wrinkles, and how country music would be banned from being played because it will be proven that it causes inbreeding.

"This is incredible. I can't believe what I'm seeing. How do I turn it off?"

"That's something you'll master very soon. All you really need to do is concentrate on what is happening in the present."

"This is great."

"Our mission is complete, Mr. Whitaker. And remember, it's just the big stuff that you can let people know about. Don't go telling them about a surprise party for their birthday or anything like that."

"No, no. I'll be very responsible. Thank you again."

And with that I was back outside the cockpit faced with all the same people who had been there before. I headed back to my seat and slept for the rest of the flight. I was so excited that I now had this power I couldn't wait to land and tell my bosses what the next big bestseller would be. This was going to mean big things for my career. Even bigger than the deal I'd just landed a short time before. I de-boarded the plane at JFK and claimed my one piece of baggage. That was when I made my fatal mistake. I saw that a plane that was being boarded would crash just after take-off, and I began to raise hell trying to get people not to go on the plane. Finally, security was called in and questioned me. When the plane did crash they demanded to know who I was working for. I told them the story about Trang and Neeble since I didn't want them to think that I was going to do any one any harm. They did not seem to appreciate my sense of humor, so they sent me off to prison until my trial came. When they couldn't find any evidence that I knew about the crash beforehand, they sent me off to a mental hospital where I stay to this very day.

"That's my story, Dr. Allister. I'm sure you will be able to find that not a single word of it has changed since my first interrogation with the police in the airport."

"Yes, well, I'll look into that, Mr. Whitaker. The nurse will see you back to your room now."

"Have a pleasant week, doctor."

"That man is remarkable," Dr. Allister commented to his secretary as I left the office.

"How so? He seems like any other delusional patient we've seen here."

"Yes, but he's different. He seems perfectly sane other than this obsession with predicting the future. And the scary thing is that, I have never known him to be wrong."

"You mean the man who just left here in a straightjacket really knows the future? Maybe I should ask him about that cheating husband of mine."

"I don't know if can do that, but he was right about that earthquake in California making it fall into the ocean and about the Cubs making it to the world series and winning. I just can't help but think it's true."

"I guess we'll never know. Not until he stops living in that fantasy about "Trang" and "Neeble," but the annoying part is that his story truly hasn't changed since day one," Dr. Allister sighed and went back into his office, "Hold all my calls would you? I think I'll be spending the rest of the day sorting through his file trying to find some excuse to keep him in here until we can find somewhere else to put him."

As Dr. Allister closed the door to his office Trang and Neeble smiled at each other. They had just found someone to help break the monotony of watching the earth roll over, someone they could enlighten about their existence. Someone who wasn't a believer...

The V Virus

by Leann Arndt

"I believe that it was five years ago today that Dr. James Daniels discovered the virus."

"Lyssa, when was the V law passed?"

"Well, Carrie, it was only a short time after Dr. Daniels discovered that V was a cure for AIDS."

"Didn't the government care what the public thought about it?"

"Carrie, you have to understand. People were dying in huge numbers. If something wasn't done everyone would die."

"What about the people who didn't choose, the Outlaws? Was it fair to give orders to shoot them on sight?"

"The world had to do what it had to do. Besides, Carrie, the law passed and that is all there is to it. You know, you're very curious for a vampire."

"Lyssa, my mother has AIDS and if I could just convince her that the law is a just one I may be able to talk her into being saved."

"How long have you been one of us, Carrie?"

"I took V that first day. I could see what my mom was going through and didn't want it to happen to me."

"How does your mom feel about that, Carrie?"

"I don't know."

"I can imagine that she'd be quite upset."

"Is it true, Lyssa, that you are a natural vampire? Is it true that you and Dr. James Daniels were lovers?"

"Carrie, I can still see the look on his face when he announced the cure."

"James, why are you staring at me like that?"

"Lyss, your long blonde hair makes you look like an angel."

"I'm a vampire. How can I be an angel? You're such a wonderful man."

"Look at you, Lyssa. You have long, flowing white-blonde hair. Your eyes are ice-blue. Your skin is as pure and white as new fallen snow. What else could you be? Besides that, my darling, your blood is responsible for V. You are going to save the world!"

"Oh, James, will people really want to be like me?"

"Darling, if it'd mean doing without the horrors of this dreaded disease ravaging our world, they'd make a deal with the devil himself."

"James, are you comparing me to the devil? I know you have that boyish short black hair and those warm brown eyes but I can't let you get away with that, dearest."

"You're saying that not even my gigantic stature of 6'5" can sway your opinion?"

"Oh you wonderful, exasperating man, just compare away. I won't stop loving you for a moment. Look at you. You look like Christmas morning."

"I wonder how Lyssa is doing?"

"James, stop worrying about Lyssa and get packed and on the move."

"Geoffrey, do you honestly think the extermination squads have found me?"

"James, I know they've found you and I for one don't intend to let you die. You're very close to reversing some of the effects of V and we can't risk losing you."

"All I've figured out is how to change some of the characteristic physical changes of V. Why is that so important?"

"Well, my best friend Peter feels that it is the first step to a cure."

"Geoff, where is Peter anyhow?"

"Peter, stop right there! Where do you think you're off to!"

"Listen, Michelle, I need to go meet with my sister Carrie. She left me a message that she had something important to share and she needed to do it in person."

"But Peter, I want to make love again"

"Michelle, since I took V, making love hasn't been love. Don't you understand?"

"Peter, please, come back to bed."

"Michelle, I have to leave now!"

"Carrie, I'm a natural vampire. What bearing does that have? I know that the death squads are after Peter and after me. However, that'd be the case even if I weren't a 'natural'. I helped James develop V and that's more than enough to bring me final death."

"Lyssa, can you tell me how you became a vampire, how old you were?"

"I believe I was sixteen years old. It was long ago and my memory is getting faulty. I was a lady of the streets. The person who gave me this was a client. I'm still not sure that this was better than syphilis or one of the other things I could've been given. After all, we 'ladies' had Jack The Ripper to worry about. Oh yes, and there were also Lycanthropes."

"Werewolves! Werewolves are real!"

"Yes, they are. Why wouldn't they be?"

"Lyssa, ma'am, I hear Peter. He is about to come in! He needs us now!"

"Lyssa, my apologies. Carrie, did you understand what I just sent mentally?"

"Yes, Peter. James Daniels and Dr. Geoffrey Barbar are fending off a death squad right now! They need our help!"

"Carrie, Peter, isn't Dr. Geoffrey a trained fighter? How many are in this death squad? Geoff can't help James? Are you sure?"

"He could have a few months ago. However, that time is past. He has AIDS."

"Oh Peter, my brother, that is awful!"

"I know, Carrie. That is why they need our help now!"

"Peter, Carrie, for all of us, for your mother who needs V, for others like her, we have to save James and Geoff! Go!"

"Geoff, my dear friend, this may be it."

"James, I can't let them kill you! You are about to perfect the virus, get rid of the drawbacks of V!"

"Geoff, go, save yourself. I sent Peter a message. I'm sure he'll help."

"What if Peter can't help? Here we are, back to back, but if they bring the torches, we're toast."

"He will help. In fact, he just communicated with me and he is also bringing Lyssa and Carrie. They'll be here any second."

"James!"

"Lyssa, you came!"

"My dearest darling, how could I stay away and allow you to be killed?"

"Peter, look, Dr. Geoff is okay."

"I can see that, sister. Thank the lord for it!"

"Peter, Carrie, please be careful."

"Dr. Geoff, we are always careful with our father."

"Carrie, sweetheart, this is not a good time for sharing paternity issues with everyone. How do you and Peter expect us to get out of this?"

"James, darling, I still have some powers of persuasion. I will get this death squad to change their minds.

Gentlemen, yes, Dr. James Daniels created the V Virus. Yes, he obtained it from my "natural" vampire blood. Dr. Geoffrey Barbar does have AIDS and is an Outlaw. He also participated in the genetic engineering of Peter and Carrie, who took the V Virus to escape the fate of their mother with AIDS. All that and more marks us for extermination.

However, gentlemen, Dr. Daniels is in the process of fixing V so that you, or "natural" vampires such as myself, will never again have to do without the sun! We will eat normal food! In fact, other than Immortality itself, there will be nothing to distinguish us from ordinary human beings! Do you want to kill him and and kill our hope for our future?

Dr. Geoffrey Barbar is working with Dr. Daniels so that AIDS victims will not be forced to choose V! They can choose, of their own free will, to accept V. What would be wrong with that? You kill Dr. Barbar and you kill another hope for our future!

As for Peter and Carrie Daniels, they are our legacy. They are what we can all choose to become!

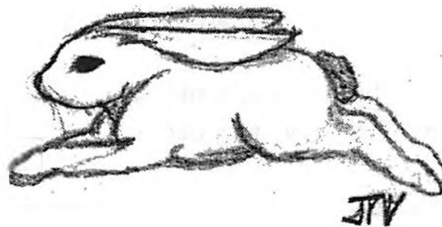
I ask nothing for myself unless I can ask for mercy.

Gentlemen, I beg you, don't kill our hopes and dreams."

"Lyssa, didn't I always say that you are an angel? You saved us all, darling! You saved our world!"

"James, shut up and kiss me."

THE END





You are getting this because:

- _You contributed _an article _art _a book review
- _We hope you will be inspired and contribute to the next issue
- _You paid for it! (everyone gasps)
- _We trade.
- _We'd like to trade.
- _We'd like to trade souls.
- _You're a filthy pro.
- _You're an even filthier fan.
- ✓_Your name is on a mailing list, so we took the liberty of assuming you exist.
- _Somebody likes you.
- _Somebody doesn't like you.
- _We found your name in a fortune cookie.
- _We found you in a fortune cookie.
- _We tried to put you into a fortune cookie.
- _You're the Skinner.
- _You used to be Skinner.
- _You're not the Skinner, but you're dating the JourComm.
- _You're not the Skinner, but you've been making fun of the JourComm.
- _We want you so we can practice our Wookiee torture techniques.
- _We want you to practice your Wookiee torture techniques on us.
- _We want to teach you to speak Wookiee.
- ✓_If you tell us why you got this, our pet Wookiee will give you a fortune cookie.

Published by the
MIT Science Fiction
Society

