

PLANETARY STORIES

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FROM THE VIBRATING ETHER

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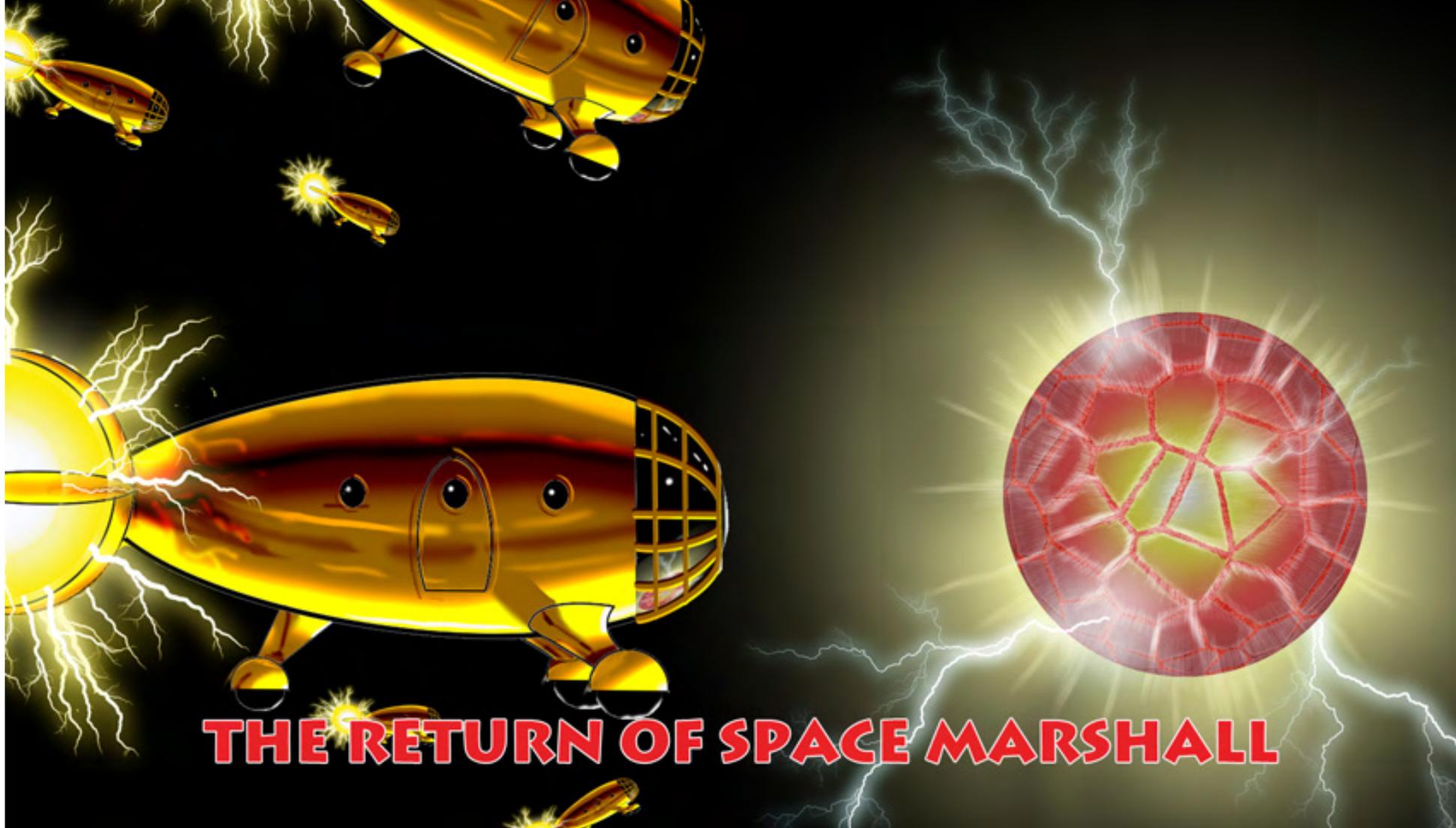
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PLANETARY STORIES

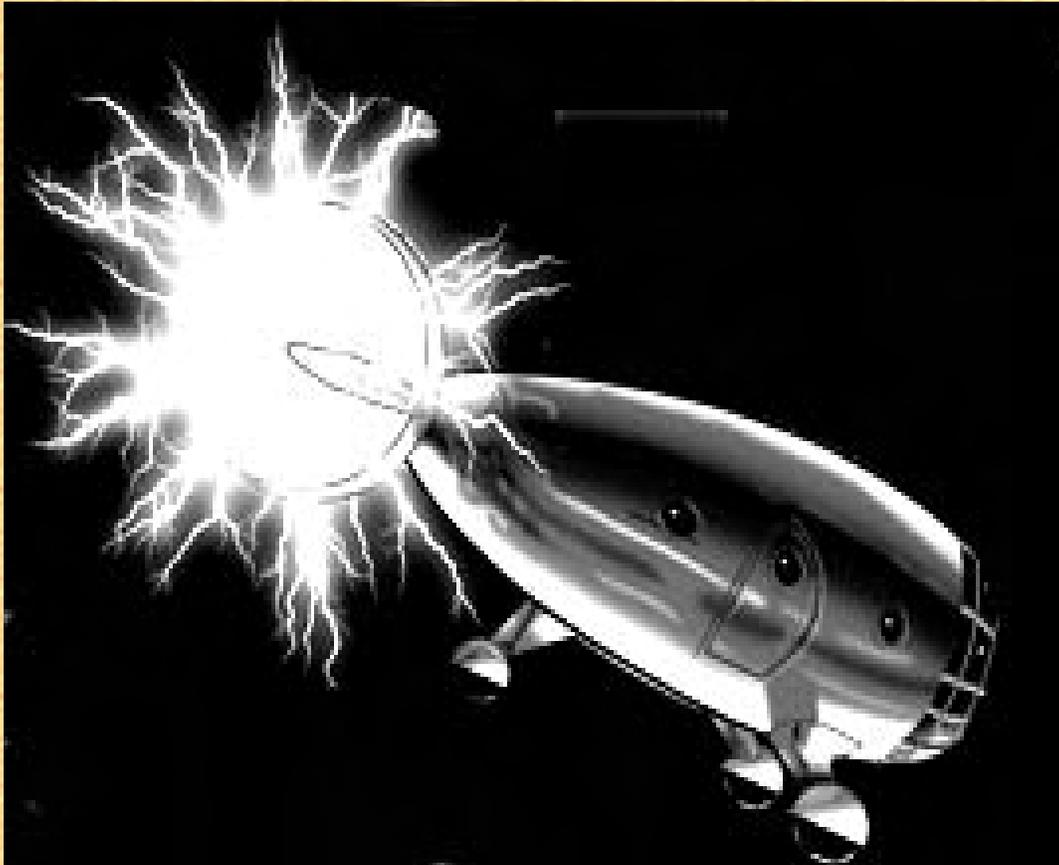
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THE RETURN OF SPACE MARSHALL

TIME WAS. . .

by Shelby Vick



Slade Marsten and his crew were seventeen hours away from Earth when the message from Crash Jones came in for Probot. Now, even tho their star drive moved rapidly, the radio was instantaneous. It was a relatively new device, perfected by Probot. The fourth member of their crew, BRITO, had previously provided transmission. BRITO's stood for Beltlike Remote Instantaneous Transmission Organism and was now in its usual location around Slade's waist. It had given the space marshal quite an advantage over others because of the quick transmission provided by the alien's form. Now, they used the radio which still gave them an advantage as most did not yet possess the instantaneous transmission radio.

The delay in response puzzled the space marshal. It had been over three hours since Probot had called their leader, Crash. Why, he thought to

himself, did the response from headquarters take so long? But he wasn't going to reveal his curiosity. . .and Crash's response answered the question anyway.

"Took a while, Professor," the head of Earth security said. (Sometimes he still referred to Probot as Professor; after all, Professor Ilyan Parkenson's brain was in the robot's body.) "But it's all set up, now; found everything you wanted.

"On Icarus?" Probot asked.

"Exactly!" Crash went on. "Icarus is rather distant from other asteroids, so it was easy."

Probot looked at Slade. "Is there any reason we can't go straight there?" he asked.

< "Not unless Crash has something he hasn't told me about," Marsten answered.

"Go!" Crash Jones said. "I'm anxious to see this work!"

"You'll be the first to know," Probot told Crash. "We've got about seventeen hours". He disconnected.

"You've told Crash, but you aren't telling us?" Jill Parkenson said, indignantly. Ilyan Parkenson was her grandfather. She looked at Slade. "Or did he tell you?" she asked, accusingly.

"He hasn't told me," the space marshal said. Then, looking at Probot, he added, "It's a matter of time, I'd say."

"Seventeen hours!" Jill snapped. "Too long a time when he could tell us right now!"

"As Slade said," Probot answered, "it's just a matter of time." He looked at Slade. Even tho his mechanical face was expressionless, there was the impression of a smile.

Jill looked back and forth between them, then stared at Slade. "You're holding back on me!" she accused.

Slade shrugged, and a smile was evident on his face. "You know all that I know."

"Oh!" Jill exclaimed, then turned and left the room, walking stiffly, head up and lips tight.

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In just under seventeen hours, they landed on Icarus. Slade, of course, made the approach and the landing quite successfully beside a small, golden ship. Two of Crash Jones' crew were outside, beside the airlock. They entered the ranger ship as Slade and the others left.

The four of them were beside the golden ship. "I have named her Trigger," Probot said, "as she is the trigger of a powerful weapon: knowledge!"

Probot needed no space suit, but Jill was wearing one and BRITO was protected by the one Slade wore. "What does it do?" Jill asked, as they entered the new ship.

Probot didn't answer until after the airlock door closed and, even then, his answer was oblique. "I'll turn that over to Slade," he said. "I think he has figured it out."

Taking off his space helmet, Slade said, "If I'm right, it travels thru both space and time," he said.

"Of course!" Jill said, taking her space helmet off. "You have developed your time-travel theory!" She looked at Slade, started to say something, then shook her head and continued removing the space suit. Finally, she looked at Slade again. "That's what you meant by it being a matter of time. I'm a drag; I knew my grandfather was working on time travel. That's what caused him to be put into the robot! I can't blame you, Slade."

"Blame me, if it'll make you feel any better," Slade said, smiling as he put

away his space gear. "Trigger is small but luxurious," Probot said, leading them out of the airlock, which opened to the rear of the ship. He faced forward and said, "The door to the right leads to your quarters, Slade; to the left, Jill's quarters. Crash got everything I wanted for my lab. Ahead, on the left is my lab and, on the right, our conference room. At the front, of course, is the control room."

"There is no way," Slade said, "that Crash's crew put this together in three hours. You've been working on this previously."

"Those 'committee meetings' you've been called to," Jill guessed, accusingly.

"You two are too sharp for me," Probot said, leading them forward.

"It's easy to be sharp after the fact!" Slade said. As they entered the control room, he added, "I would also guess that your time-travel supplies its own energy. This ship is too small to carry much power."

"Very good!" Probot said, approvingly. "It isn't perpetual motion, but the next thing to it. There is much unused energy in time; I simply channel it into Trigger!" He indicated the three seats facing the control panel. "I can operate it alone, but it will be easier for the three of us to work together. Slade, I designed the center control seat for you; Jill to your left and I sit on the right. In just a few minutes, I can show you what to do and we will be on our way!" He indicated what appeared to be a wraparound window in front of them. "That is not glass, but a viewscreen that shows all that glass would and more." He looked at Slade, expectantly.

"At the very least," Slade said, "it will magnify and shift angles, as well as filter damaging rays."

"Indeed," Probot said. He looked at Jill. "Anything to add?"

"It can probably show us views by radiation microwave, X-ray, heat and such," she said.

"And," Slade added, not to be outdone, "since this is a timeship, it can

probably speed up or slow down motion."

"My two star pupils," Probot said, with an approving laugh. "Now, let me explain your controls. . . ."

In seven minutes, Trigger was aloft.

"Now," Jill said, "you are about to demonstrate time travel." It was not a question.

"Indeed," Probot said. He turned a dial, typed some numbers on the console keyboard, flipped a switch, Trigger lifted from the asteroid, shot forward, and

Their trusty Ranger ship was ahead, to the left. "That's us ten hours ago. A look at the star positions can verify that," Probot told them.

"But. . . isn't there something in physics that prevents us from appearing in the same place at the same time?" Jill asked. "Conservation of energy, for example."

"I think I can answer that," Slade said. "We are not in the same time; I think we are just onlookers."

"Exactly," said Probot, approvingly.

"Then. . . we can't go back in time and prevent disasters?" Jill asked.

"Correct. Knowledge is all we gain. We can't prevent disasters, but we can tell what caused them, which could be important." Probot tapped the viewscreen. "Another ability this screen has is to record what it sees. We can solve many of history's mysteries, as well as reliving a crime in order to reveal the culprit.

"But if King Jorx sends his fleet against us, we can't go back in time and wipe his fleet out before it reaches us, Slade said. Then, brightening, he added, "Of course, using the time travel, in the present we can attack his fleet from as many directions as we want, with only a split second between attacks that might be a lightyear apart!"

"Right," Probot said. "In one minute, Trigger can be a fleet of one hundred ships. We have an unbeatable advantage over any evildoers."

"What physical effect does it have on our bodies?" Slade asked. "It took our bodies days to make the transfer in the ranger ship, but it seemed instantaneous on the return trip. 'Seemed'," he repeated. "I'm certain it had to have some effect."

"Minuscule," Probot reassured him. "We could travel millions of years without aging an hour. The bulk of the traveling is done by the screen."

The three were still seated at the console. "Right now," Probot said, "I'm trying to decide what great scientific mystery we can solve."

One of BRITO's tendrils slid under Slade's shirt and attached itself to the back of his skull. The effect on Slade was like viewing a dream.

"The biggest one of all," Jill suggested. "The Great Bang!"

"You keep reminding me you are my granddaughter," Probot said, approvingly. He touched the master dial. "To the beginning of time!"

"From what you said," Slade remarked, "this is one of those trips that will take more than an hour. Why don't I use the time to report to Crash? You did say we would let him know right away."

"Of course," Probot said. "There will be no way anyone can intercept your conversation! Next thing I have to do," Probot went on, "is add vision to our instantaneous radio."

Slade chuckled as he turned the radio on. . . to find out it didn't work! "It hasn't been adjusted for being out of time," Probot said. "When I work out a way to add vision, I'll have to fix that, too."

"I'll bet I can still use BRITO, Slade said. On BRITO, he called Crash.

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Not wanting to be part of the explosion, they took Trigger over it and straight to the totally black universe with the small dot of power that preceded it. "Since we are viewing the scene and separate from it, I would've thought we could view the explosion safely," Jill objected. "You might be right," Probot answered. "But there was a split second of time when the laws of physics didn't seem to apply. I thought it best not to risk it. "

"Like the old saying goes," Slade said, "Better safe than sorry.' "

"Exactly! In any case, we are here and recording it. Now," Probot said, leaning forward, "to return!"

During the lengthy return, it was decided that they would celebrate by eating something different when they got back. "Why not pick the first food sign we see when we land back on Earth?" Jill asked.

"Sounds good to me," Slade said. "Crash said he would pick up the ranger ship and return it, so we don't have to worry about that."

They were assailed by dozens of signs announcing the return of Kentucky Fried Chicken. They got a bucket and fries and corn-on-the-cob and took it to the lab.

"Hey!" said Jill, opening the bucket and looking around. "No Extra Crispy!"

They got in the ship and headed back to town. Probot said, "Where's Jill? "

She was not in the lab nor in the ship. "There's something wrong!" Slade said. "Don't ask me why, but I think we need to repeat our trip to the beginning of time."

"It sounds right to me," Probot said.

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When the return trip was completed, there were eighteen other Triggers waiting for them, and Jill walked out of the rear of the ship.

"I don't think we should stick around," Slade said.

"Agreed!"

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When they were again viewing the scene where the ranger ship was on its way home, the tendril detached itself from Slade's skull and slid down. Again, they were in Trigger's control room, wondering what time destination to try.

"We shouldn't go to the beginning of time," Slade said.

"How'd you know I was going to suggest that?" Jill asked.

"Because BRITO just showed me what it would be like," Slade said, rubbing his head. "Quite an experience."

"It's a shame we don't have better communication with him," Probot said. "I'd like to know more and I'd like to know how he knew!"

"I think he's had some experience in time travel," Slade guessed. "He brought up Kentucky Fried Chicken, which was one of the large fast-food chains back in the 21st century."

"How do you know he wasn't just picking it out of your mind?" Jill asked.

"For one thing, he brought up stuff I didn't know, like extra crispy being a variety of the way they served chicken. Besides, why should he use something from the past? No, I think BRITO is familiar with that time-frame, as well as advertising practices. . .but I don't think it's because he has lived up to now thru it; I'm betting he traveled there by some dimensional ability."

"More reason I wish he would allow detailed communication!" said Probot.

"It'll come. . .when BRITO is ready," Slade said. Then he looked at the

outside view and added, "But we have something of immediate importance. Look!" In the distance, King Jorx' ship had appeared.

"In any case," he added, "I think we should consider our testing of Trigger as complete. Let's go home!" Slade smiled, and added: "Without any fried chicken!"

"Home?" Jill asked, "when we just spotted King Jorx' ship?"

"Exactly!" Slade said. "He was headed that way! I want to find out what he's up to. We can return at exactly the time we left, so we'll get there around the time he does." He touched BRITO. "Crash!" he called.

The response was instantaneous. "I just hung up on you!" Crash Jones said.

Slade smiled at Crash's puzzled image. "That's one of the effects of time travel," he said. "Anyway, we just saw King Jorx' ship heading for Earth. I'm sure he's up to something."

"When isn't he?" Crash said. Then Slade saw him look away, in the direction of the office door. "Oh, here you are now!" Crash Jones' puzzled face turned back to Slade. "You. . .just walked in," he said, softly.

"Have him. . .it. . .call two guards in," Slade suggested in a low tone. "Don't get it suspicious."

Again, Crash looked away, forcing a smile on his face. "Hey. . .Slade," he said. "Ask a couple of the guards to come in."

"Retain him," Slade said quietly. "Have one of your medtechs take a DNA scan."

Crash nodded and looked at the two guards who entered. "Impound this phoney!" he ordered. The surprised imposter was hustled away. Crash looked back at Slade. "I'll have the medtech on it right away. Now what?"

"I'll land on the roof in five minutes," Slade said. "To prove I'm me, I'll say, It's about time'. See you!"

"What's Jorx up to, Slade?" Jill asked.

"Last time he captured me he must have gotten my DNA code," Slade said. "He probably thought he could trick Crash into giving him vital information." He looked at Probot. "Set the time so we'll land on the roof in five minutes. I want to see what's going on!"

The space marshal noticed many strange looks as he came down the hall to Crash's office. He smiled, opened the door, said to Crash, "It's about time."

Crash smiled. "You're number three, Slade."

"Good!" Slade said. "Either Jorx is really slipping, or that means he sent in a bunch of morons to do this."

"Why?" Crash asked.

"I'd say Jorx had everything lined up and then a last-minute interruption came up and he sent his crew in without him." He sat at Crash's desk.

"What did the mediscan turn up?"

"The first one had your DNA and so'd the second one. What gets me, Slade, is the second one they sent in. That was dumb."

"Maybe not," the space marshal told him. "It probably means they have some way of checking, and knew you had caught the first one. They hoped you'd think the second one was really me."

"Makes sense. The first one is dead! But how? All my staff is reliable, and we've got electronic sensors to be sure there are no bugs."

"Jorx would know that. So there had to be some way they could check that is build into the clones themselves! That's how they killed the first one. I want to take that mediscan back to the ship so Probot can check it out."

Crash raised his eyebrows. "Then what?"

"I'll take the place of one of the clones and get into Jorx' ship," Slade

announced.

"But if they have some way of controlling the clones. . . "

"They'll be able to check to be sure the clone isn't me!" Slade finished.

"That's why I want the mediscan." He grinned. "We'll have plenty of time for Probot to come up with something I can use to fool them."

Crash returned his grin. "That's right! Thanks to Probot's invention, you'll have all the time you need!"

Back on Trigger, Slade explained the problem to Probot. "Clever," the robot said. "Jorx won't know that Time is no longer a problem for us. It will take time, but now time is on our side!"

It took quite a while but, eventually, Probot announced, "I have analyzed the results from the mediscan." He held up a testube. "With this in your system, they will think you are a clone."

"But they were able to kill the first clone!" Jill objected. "Won't that mean they can kill Slade, as well?"

"Only if I give them reason," Slade said.

"But " Jill started to object, and Slade cut her off with a smile, saying: "If I can't out-think Jorx and his crew, I don't deserve to live!" He hoped his confidence wasn't ill-placed.

They landed on the roof above Crash's office just eight minutes after they had left. "Put me in with the last clone," Slade told Crash. "Put me in as if I'm another clone you caught. I'll take it from there."

When they locked the cell door behind him, Slade grinned at the clone.

"Going great," he said. "Even tho they caught me, I was able to learn their secret! I know what that professor robot has done. Now, we've gotta get outta here."

"Great notion," the clone said. "Any ideas how to do it?"

Slade pulled something from his pocket. "See this?" he asked. "It's our ticket to freedom. I not only got our information, but I got this, too! It can tell me when the way is clear, and then unlock the door!"

"Hey, that's good! King Jorx will be pleased with us."

"Of course!" Slade said. He looked at the instrument he was holding and punched a few buttons. The real purpose of the gadget was to tell Crash to clear the way and unlock the door when it was clear.

"Now what?" his clone asked.

"Shhhh," Slade cautioned. Then he heard the click of the lock. "There!" he said. "Let's go!" He pushed the door open to an empty hall. "Let's go to the roof," he said. "They can pick us up there."

"But the slider ship will be spotted"!

"Not with all the traffic on the roof," Slade assured him. "Come on!"

As arranged, several ships were coming and going as they reached the roof. "I'll hide," Slade said. "We can't have them spotting two of us here. You signal." Probot had explained how the doctored DNA could do the signaling, but Slade didn't want to take any chances.

The slider-ship touched down, and Slade ran out. They both boarded.

"Thought you was dead at least, one of you," the pilot said.

"I was," Slade replied. "Then I woke up and got the info we needed. Let's get out of here!"

In minutes, they landing in King Jorx' large ship. Upon entering, one of Jorx' aliens met them and demanded, "What is the secret? I understand you have it."

"I have," Slade said, "but my orders are to reveal it only to King Jorx."

The alien pointed to a nearby machine. "See this? It is the machine that controls you clones. I will kill you with it if you don't tell me!"

Slade shook his head. "King Jorx will kill me if I do. Take me to him."

"You know that Jorx is not here."

"We have a ship that will reach him," Slade said, looking around. He noted that the alien by the clone machine had a gun on his hip. "Surely you know what my orders are." He took a step closer to the alien. "Let's go!"

"Tell me the secret!" the alien demanded again.

"And disobey Jorx?" Slade asked, taking a step nearer. "You know that would not do." He spread his hands out in front of his body.

"Obey me!" the alien shrieked.

In one quick move, the space marshal stepped forward, his hand lashed out, and returned with the gun in it. "Back up!" he commanded. Instead of obeying, the alien plunged forward. . .into the beam from the pistol in Slade's hands. He spun around and beamed the two who had come up with him.

That was when King Jorx entered.

"You are not a clone!" he boomed. "You are the real space marshal! Get him," he commanded the three aliens beside him. Slade beamed them, and then bathed Jorx in the beam.

The three aliens dropped. Jorx was not affected.

Jorx, a grin on his reptilian face, stepped forward. "Do you think I would let my underlings have a weapon that could harm me?" he asked. "For you, Slade Marsten, I don't need a weapon." He bared his teeth and stepped closer, arms open. "You don't have a chance!"

Slade looked around. "Maybe I do!" he said, and turned the beamer on the clone machine. Sparks flew, a light flashed, something whined. . .and Jorx

collapsed. "Thought so!" Slade said. "Another clone."

Other aliens came rushing in and Slade aimed the pistol at them. "The trick didn't work," he told them. "Someone got the wild idea to bring in a Jorx clone for me to spill the beans to. Now, land this thing at the nearest spaceport if you want to live."

+ + +

Back in the cabin of the timeship Trigger, Marston told Probot what had happened. "You know," he finished, "this timeship of yours is going to give us a big advantage over Jorx, or any other threats that come up."

RELUCTANT HERO

by
Bob Bolin

Among the disturbing problems that had arisen lately, this topped them all. Hark Rain slammed the report down on his desk and ran nervous fingers through his spiked brown hair. As special advisor to the President, he wondered what he could say.

He picked up the report and read it again. This was incredible; no baby boys had been born for a year. Only girls! Something had upset the balance. He decided not to speculate too much. After all, the President had special committees for this. Beyond that was Congress. He thought about telephoning the President, but changed his mind. The top guy would contact him soon enough. Almost as if his thoughts had been read, the telephone jangled. Hark picked up the phone. "This is James Bentley, President!" a voice said over the wire. "Get over here to the committee room right away. We have a national emergency!"

"I'm on my way, Mr. President," Hark replied. He slammed down the receiver, grabbed his hat off a rack and darted out the door.

A taxi took him through crowded streets to the White House. Out of breath, he finally entered the committee room. President Bentley, General Gates, the Reverend Catlow, and several others sat around a conference table. He sat down in a chair with the group.

"Glad you came!" Bentley remarked, waving a cigar in his right hand. He turned to Mr. Jones, Secretary of IUP(Investigation of Unusual Phenomena) committee.

"Please continue!" he said. Jones cleared throat and said, "Gentlemen, this is a dire emergency! There hasn't been a male child born in over a year! We've checked with about every hospital in the country. Nothing seems to help! Scientists and other medical experts have been conducting all types of genetic experiments without any success."

General Gates spoke up. "I can see the point, Mr. Jones. If this situation continues, the entire population will eventually become female."

"What do you have to say about that?" the President addressed Hark.

"Well," Hark replied, "give or take a hundred years, there won't be any population at all. It takes both males and females to continue the human race."

"Fantastic!" Bentley commented quietly. "Can we import males?"

"Sure," Jones countered grimly. All the males you want! But they aren't babies! This is not just happening in America! It's world wide!"

"If this is true, we are doomed!" the President answered. The entire human race will perish unless somebody can come up with a solution."

"We need to form a committee to investigate, General Gates thundered.

Mr. Jones raised his hand in objection. "This has already been done," he said.

"My IUP has been all over the country. We've come up with nothing! It can't be a foreign power doing this either. It's a world wide event!"

A hushed silence fell over the room; a sense of doom. Finally the Reverend Catlow said, "Gentlemen, it's not in the hands of ordinary beings like us."

"What do you mean?" President Bentley objected. "This is a God fearing nation! We're not going to be let down from up there."

The Reverend Catlow continued in his best ceremonial voice. "I'm afraid Something happened in Heaven, Gentlemen."

"Hogwash!" General Gates roared. "God has committees to take care of little things like this. We need to send somebody up there to investigate. You can't win a battle by sitting on your haunches."

Mr. Jones smiled skeptically. "How are we going to do that?"

"Well!" said the General. "One of us in this room has to die and go up there. Someone may have fallen asleep at the switch."

President Bentley knitted his fingers together thoughtfully. "I agree!" he finally said. "Let's try prayer first. If that fails, we'll do what has to be done."

"The Reverend Catlow sighed and shook his head. "There have been prayers in every church in the land, Mr. President. In fact, world wide! We haven't received an answer."

President Bentley pondered the situation for a few moments, then said, "who would like to volunteer to be killed?"

An ominous silence fell over the room. The President frowned. "This is serious," he commented with quiet gravity. Very well, then! I'll have to call on my trusted adviser; the man who gets things done, both secretly and openly. I speak of none other than Hark Rain."

Hark gasped. He said, "do I have to, Mr. President? I will do nearly anything. But this?"

"Nonsense!" President Bentley answered. "I know you, Hark. You would do anything for the good of your country. Isn't that true?"

"True!" Hark answered hoarsely. "But would somebody kill me? I may not be able to do it!"

The president smiled graciously. "Why don't you do it yourself, Hark? There is no reason why any of these gentlemen should have your blood on their hands. Just remember. We are all behind you. Somebody hand Hark a revolver . After that, the meeting will be adjourned until we hear from Hark again."

Hark took a revolver that was handed to him, his fingers trembling and his eyes glassy. Could he even do this for the President.

"Come on, Hark?" General Gates ordered, scowling impatiently. "I've seen a lot of men die under my command, and not with such a noble cause. Surely you aren't afraid to carry out your duty?"

"Don't rush me!" Hark answered, his face turning white. He took a few deep breaths of wonderful American air, then pointed the weapon at his forehead.

"I knew I could count on you," President Bentley said cheerfully. "Just pull the trigger, will you, Hark? We've got other business to attend to."

"Certainly, Mr. President," Hark croaked with a swollen tongue. "I don't do this every day, you know."

He forced himself, then his mind went blank. The next thing he knew after the blast, he felt himself floating in the blackness of space. He drifted toward a great walled city that gleamed as brightly as the sun. There was no mistaking the pearly gates. He was floating right toward them.

Saint Peter came out to meet him, smiling in welcome. "My gracious!" he said. "You're early, Hark! What are you doing here?"

Hark quickly explained his mission.

"That so?" Saint Peter answered. "Well, we'd better get to the bottom of this. It could mean the end of the human race if we don't."

"Where do I go?" Hark wanted to know.

"Float south to that big building on the corner of the square," Saint Peter directed. "That is the Bureau of Vital Statistics Center. You can probably find out what you want to know there."

"Thanks," Hark said, then floated anxiously away.

He reached the building and floated inside. A secretary greeted him from a desk.

"Can I help you?" she said.

"I hope so," Hark answered. He explained his mission again.

"Oh, I see," she anxiously. "Just float over to the end of the hall and take a right turn. You'll find the Bureau of Baby control there."

"Ok" Hark said. "Does everybody float around here?"

"Only if they want to," she answered "You can also walk if you want to."

"Thanks again," he said.

He walked in the direction she had pointed, and spotted the entrance with the right sign over the door. He went inside.

"Hey!" an entrance guard said at one side of the room. "You're not allowed in here unless you've been assigned. It's not that we need guards here in Heaven. I volunteered for the job because I like it."

Hark quickly explained his mission a third time, feeling a little irritated.

"Larry was on that computer! He was reassigned to Earthly Weather Control over a year ago," the guard cried out in astonishment. "The angels may have overlooked it. For some reason they didn't send a replacement. Somebody slipped, I guess."

"So that's it?" Hark cried out in distress.

"Tell you what!" the guard said. "Let me call the Bureau of Assignments. I'll get to the bottom of this!" The guard waggled his fingers around his right ear. Soon he received a reply.

"We've got a real problem," he explained. "You angels didn't send a replacement for Larry here at the Baby Bureau. He went over to Earthly Weather control, you know. Now we aren't getting any male babies there on Earth."

"Who reported this?" a voice said back.

"Why Hark Rain, Sir! He's here on special assignment from the President of the United States."

"Well, if he's here he's also a spirit and can't go back. How's he going to manage to make his report?"

"I can take care of it," Hark said loudly. "If I can't report my findings to the President in person, I'll do it some other way."

"Sorry," the voice replied. "As far as the President is concerned, you're a dead duck. But if you think you can help him and the entire Earth, so be it."

Hark followed the angel to a large computer. "Have a chair," the angel said. "I'm going back to join the other angels."

"Sure!" Hark said. He shrugged in resignation.

He sat down at the computer and began studying keys and buttons. At least he could save the human race. Still feeling loyal to President Bentley, he punched the button that would give the President the first baby boy. The President would get the message.

The End

FAREWELL TO THE NADIR

By
Gerald W. Page

Her body swayed as she crossed the floor, causing her red silk hipwisps to undulate like palm fronds in a tropical breeze. Her breasts strained so that he thought they would burst their brass coverings. Her face was close to his now; he could feel the warmth of her breath, smell the subtle fragrance of her perfume, hear the pounding of his own heart. She said, "Take me. Take me here. Now."

Sweat beading his forehead, he said, "Golly gee, Captain Shivers, aren't you already here?"

She grabbed him roughly. "Don't play games, Urgus. That was an order."

"Oh, golly whillikers, Captain, golly gee goosebumps! Isn't that Unca First Officer Nadir McGuirk I hear calling me?"

"No, it isn't," she told him. "What do I have to do to get all your attention? Tear your clothes off?"

"Ebbita, ebbita, golly, ebbita gee, Captain Shivers. You *got*my attention."

"Excuse me," said McGuirk from the doorway. "You got a moment to approve the menu, ma'am?"

"Leave us alone. Can't you see Urgus and I are busy?"

"I got galley duty today," the mutant said, defensively. "The Spaceman's Manual says the skipper's gotta approve the menu. So fer frippin sakes, approve."

"Damn," she said.

"First Officer Nadir McGuirk, sir," said Urgus from the floor. "Could you please save me now?"

"Not now, Urgus. The captain and I are busy discussing lunch."

"What are the choices?" she asked.

"Cream chipped beef."

"And?"

"More creamed chipped beef."

"So what's to approve?" she asked.

"Well, you want it on toast or rutabaga?"

"Where I want it is out the airlock. Isn't there anything else?"

"We got lots of peanut butter."

"Peanut butter's fine."

"Then peanut butter it is. You want it should be on the toast or the rutabaga."

"The toast, McGuirk."

"Unca First Officer, sir?" Urgus called plaintively.

"Don't call me uncle,' McGuirk snapped, scribbling a note on his ship's chef's clipboard. "And don't bug me about any preferences. I know you like peanut butter." He shut the door as he left.

Captain Shivers smiled down at Urgus. "Oh, so you like peanut butter, do you?"

2

As he pulled a jar of peanut butter out of the pantry, McGuirk asked Ship's Technician Thurston, "Hey, you notice anything odd about Captain Shivers?"

Thurston gave it some thought for a moment then said, "She does have a body. That's pretty odd to a Smileyfacian from Dounbeat XIII such as myself. We have only faces, you know. Big, round faces with beady eyes and always-smiling mouths with no lips. Our arms and legs are attached to the edges of our faces. So to us, it's pretty odd to have bodies, especially one like hers with all those bumps and curves and stuff like it can't make up its mind. Oh, bummer, what a freak!"

"I don't mean odd like that," said McGuirk, puffing on his cigar and peering at the label on the jar.

"Of course you and Urgus got bodies, too, and frankly, yours may be the oddest I ever saw, what with the beak and wings and green feathers and all."

"Will you knock it off?" McGuirk snarled, shoving the peanut butter into the ship's microwave. "I mean like how she acts. Hasn't that seemed a bit odd to you lately?"

"She did compliment you on the way you swabbed the deck last week."

"It so happens I man a mean mop," McGuirk muttered. "No, I mean weird glubbin stuff." The bell on the microwave pinged and he took the peanut butter out and stared at it a moment before pouring it down the drain and poking into the larder for another jar. He found one behind several boxes of freeze-dried creamed chipped beef.

Thurston put a thoughtful finger to his temple, then said, "No-o-o, I can't think of anything. Unless you consider it odd that I caught her copping a feel of Urgus about an hour ago."

McGuirk snapped his wingtips. "That's it!"

"What's it?"

"I was just in the skipper's cabin, getting the lunch menu approved and I thought something was funny. I think I know

what it was, now," He started toward the door, then stopped. "Hey, Thurston, old buddy, old pal," he said. "Why don't you fix lunch while I check this out? See that jar? The stuff's called peanut butter. It's cuisine terrestrienne, tres chic. Ya just take a knife and spread it on this thing, which is called toast."

For a moment after McGuirk was gone, Thurston gazed into the jar. Then he took a knife and scooped out a glob.

"Bummer, bummer, bummer," he said after a moment. "I bet this stuff tastes just like it looks."

3

"Hey, Cap," McGuirk said, shoving open the door to her cabin. "I gotta talk to Urgus."

"You do, do you?"

She stood across the room, back to the wall, one leg bent, the booted foot against the bulkhead. Her arns were raised, the fingers of both hands tangled in her taffy blonde hair. Her nostrils flared like those of a wild animal sensing prey. Her scarlet lips parted in an almost smile and the tip of her tongue flicked back and forth between her teeth. Light and shadow played across her stomach. Then, as she pushed herself away from the wall, the shadows pooled and poured into the infinite cavern of her navel, and

on the longest, straightest legs McGuirk had ever seen, she walked purposefully toward him.

He felt her arm slide behind his neck. She looked straight into his popping, bloodshot eyes and said, "How the hell do you kiss a beak?"

"Beak? What beak? Oh, that beak."

"You do kiss, don't you?" she asked.

"Every chance I get and then some, just about."

"You can't prove it by me," she said. Her tone was amazingly sultry.

McGuirk said, "Of course I can. That is, I mean to say, Oh boy!"

She moved closer which was a surprise because he didn't think there was any space there. He felt her fingers running through his chest feathers. "McGuirk, I want you."

"You what?"

"Can the coyness, mutant. It's not like I have all day, so assume the position. Any one of them is fine with me."

"Position? Hey, wait a minute. Didn't I come here looking for Urgus?"

"You did? Then why don't you see if he's under the bed."

"Aha!" he said, brightly, bending down to peer under the bunk. "That sounds just like where he'd be ouch."

Grabbing his nether portions, McGuirk leaped into the air and whirled to see Captain Shivers smiling wickedly and brushing the end of a long green feather against her carmine lips.

"Hey," he said indignantly. "My tail feathers are personal."

"I'll cherish this one forever," she said, smiling and thrusting the feather into her cleavage. "See?"

"Ibbita, ibbita. Ibbita," McGuirk said.

She grabbed hold of him and bent him back against the bed. "This is an order, McGuirk. Undress me."

"Skipper," McGuirk said cautiously. "Doesn't something seem out of character here?"

"What was your first clue, Sherlock? Now get busy with those fasteners."

"This is ridiculous! I don't even know what kind of fasteners they got on a lady space captain's uniform!"

She said, "Pneumatic, what else?"

4

Like a voice from afar or the faintly played soundtrack of a very old movie, through the mists of his frazzled thoughts McGuirk heard: "Save me! Save me!"

"Is that Urgus?" he asked.

"And what if it was?" She was ruffling his neck feathers, now.

"Help me! Help me!"

With a super-mutant effort, McGuirk managed to extricate himself and rushed to the upright dresser near the door. Pulling open the top drawer, he found Urgus.

Urgus had been shoved headfirst into a pair of Captain Shivers' pantyhose. McGuirk was shocked. He hadn't known she owned any. Quickly, he yanked them off. Urgus gasped for air. McGuirk turned toward Ca

OUT OF THE DARK

by Shelby Vick

It was late at night. Phil DeHargis' voice was tinny over the computer phone. "I'm sure Dr. Xavier doesn't want to know about what you found." Three people were in the farmhouse office; a boy, a girl, and Rafe Austin, farm owner and father of the boy. The beige-walled office was well-lit. Austin said, "This Xavier is that new scientist the military brought in a few months ago, isn't he?" "Yup," Phil answered. "Took the government months to work out a way to get him here, over the devastation. Biotech's the only remaining functional genetics lab. Real secretive about what he's trying to do." The Biotech lab had been finished only days before war exploded upon the world. "So. . . ." Austin said, encouragingly.

"It's real hush-hush," Phil hedged. "But you know about it, don't you, Phil?" Austin asked.

"Well . . . some of it, kinda. It's not my field, what Xavier does. In fact," Phil added, humor in his voice, "I don't think it's anybody's field. Xavier's weird. But," he added, "he does get results."

"In what? Come on, Phil!"

"Transmuting dark matter."

"Dark matter? You referring to that undetectable stuff in interstellar space?"

"That's the stuff," Phil said. "Xavier has proven -- at least, to the government's satisfaction -- that dark matter is everywhere, and that he can reclaim it. Or turn what I call real matter into dark matter, and vice versa. Says that's how the Egyptians moved those huge blocks. Why? What's going on?"

It had started earlier that day.

Joshua Austin ran from the house, his face distorted in an attempt to keep from crying. This was his thirteenth birthday, and a thirteen-year-old boy, he felt, should not cry. Each step jarred a plaintive "No!" from his lips as he ran. His father came to the door, stood undecidedly, took a step to follow and then stopped. With a resigned sigh, he turned and went back inside.

Joshua ran into the woods, only two hundred feet beyond the modern farmhouse. 'Modern' in a relative way; it was built ten years earlier. In the following three years, world tensions tightened, and there was only military construction. Eventually, world war erupted.

Dried leaves crunched beneath Joshua's feet. In his mind he kept repeating, firmly, "Today I am a man!" For a moment, his thoughts were diverted as he tried to remember what culture the phrase came from.

"Israel! Jewish tradition!" he finally recalled.

It was only a momentary distraction; it didn't ease the pain.

Exhausted, he threw himself down on the brown and crispy forest carpet. Uncharacteristically, he ignored the translucent Indian Pipe in front of him, sprouting from the leafy floor, a white tube of fungus nearly three inches tall, the brown head that gave it its name leaning forward. Like most plants and animals in this isolated area, it had remained unaffected by the radiation and biological warfare that ruined so much of the world.

"No!" he said again. "No!" But the hard object in his hand contradicted his intense emotional plea.

Slowly he opened his hand. "Mom," he whispered. The small locket opened, and his mother's face looked out at him. "I love you, Josh," it said. In response, the tears he had been repressing gushed out.

"Mom!" he sobbed.

"I love you, Josh," the locket repeated.

"The war was a storm that swept across the world," his father had told him, years ago. "Like islands, several places went untouched. In our case, it was because we are far from any military complex, and because the hills around us make this area a big cup. Add to that the updraft from our many hot springs, and drifting radiation and biogenetic debris blew over us, leaving us relatively unaffected. Your mother had been off to college, and I think that area escaped as well. But there's only sporadic radio contact, and it could be years before travel outside these protected zones is considered safe." Joshua had seen pictures of some of the destruction. Giant buildings leveled, cars melted into puddles of indistinguishable metal, gigantic mushroom clouds signaling devastation. "People that survived wandered around, dying of radiation

poisoning,” his father had said. “Those who didn’t succumb to that, fought each other for scraps of food. The only thing that kept them away from our area was the extent of devastation around us.”

“How do you know all this?” Joshua had asked him.

“On rare occasions, radio contact was possible. Radio and television. Some from ham shortwave operators, but mostly from underground government bunkers. When they can, they make contact to let us know our government still survives.”

“We have telephones, radio, a computer hookup,” Joshua had said. “How do ours work?”

“Our own wiring system,” Austin had explained. “We can reach each other, just not outside. No satellite transmissions, except those irregular times I’ve mentioned. We get our power from geothermal and solar energy.”

“And . . . the enemy?” Joshua had asked.

“Same devastation,” his father had told him. “Still there, but too crippled to be any threat.”

That had been all Joshua knew, until his thirteenth birthday when his father had handed him a small box. Joshua opened it to find a locket. “Your mother bought this for your tenth birthday, just before war broke out,” his father said. “She later called me from college, when it looked like war might explode any minute. She asked me to keep it until she returned -- or your thirteenth birthday, whichever came first. While she was on the phone, she . . . well,” he went on, and then, taking a deep breath, finished hurriedly, “she screamed, the line went dead, and all hell broke loose.”

That was when Joshua ran from the house.

“Why did he keep it secret?” Joshua thought, fiercely and then, in passionate contradiction, “Why did he have to tell me?” A small, wet nose touched his cheek and there was an inquiring whine. Opening his eyes, Joshua saw a grey, skinny wolf pup. Snuffling in a breath, Joshua sat up. Wiping moist eyes with the back of his hand, he looked at the lupine waif. “You look lost, little fella,” he said.

Tentatively, he reached out a hand to touch grey-furred ribs. There was no objection, so he scratched behind the little animal’s ears. In response, the cub pressed its head against Joshua’s palm.

“What’re you doing out here, little guy?” The pup looked up at him without fear. Its tongue lolled out one side of its mouth, while the tail wagged once.

Joshua wasn’t afraid of wolves. At night, their distant howls appealed to him, resonating with a chord of loneliness within him. He was an only child, to whom loneliness was, at times, a dear friend. At other times it was a deep ache because it separated him from others and kept him distant.

He had no fear of wolves, but he had a respect for the danger they could present. Even a pup had sharp teeth. Worse, it had a mother and mother wolves were very protective.

“Where’s your mom, little guy?” he asked, keeping his voice low. If the mother wolf was near, he didn’t want to let her know he was here. But the cubs’ starved appearance made Joshua wonder, with a pang of personal loss, if the little thing even had a mother.

The pup whined and lowered its head, a movement that expressed sadness in some ephemeral way.

Joshua looked around. The bushes and scattered trees could not be a wolf’s den. He couldn’t imagine a mother wolf leaving a pup in such an unprotected place. “Are you lost?” he asked, leaning over the pup.

Slowly, he extended his hand. The little one looked up at him. The small tail wagged once. Joshua kept his hand extended, but motionless. The young wolf sniffed one finger and then licked it.

“You’re alone, like me,” Joshua said. Gently he picked the young wolf up and held it to his chest. It settled down at once, enjoying the warmth of the boy’s body.

Joshua took the pup home, talking comfortingly to it all the way. They came out of the woods near where Joshua had entered the forest on a desperate run. He stopped and glanced at all the buildings that made up the heart of the farm.

“See the buildings?” he asked the pup. “Bet you’ve never seen buildings before! Those long, low ones are warehouses, full of seeds, fertilizer, machinery, tractors and things like that. The big, round ones are silos; store grain there. That one in front of us, with windows and doors, is home.”

He started running again, but this time it was a happy run. “Let’s find Dad!”

His father was in the farm office. “Look what I found, Dad!”

The farmer looked up, trying not to show the relief he felt at the change in his son. He was sitting at the farm’s main computer. With it, he could control the water, fertilizer and pesticides that helped ensure a good crop. The program and the piping were expensive, but necessary. At first, it had been needed because salaries for farm workers were so high; now, after the war, it was because there wasn’t enough manpower left.

Austin saw what his son was holding, and smiled. “A young wolf,” he said. “Was it lost?”

Joshua nodded. “Seemed like it was just wandering around. Do you . . . do you think its mother . . .” Joshua couldn’t continue.

The farmer nodded. “Joshua, wolves have been known to kill livestock. Not many animals are lost that way, but a few. Livestock farmers don’t trust wolves. They get rid of them when they can.” He reached out his hands. “Let me see the pup.”

It went willingly, and submitted to a gentle examination. Joshua’s dad looked at him as he returned the pup. “She’s a little bitch,” he said.

Joshua knew his father was using correct terminology rather than a derogatory evaluation. “Maybe three, four months old. In human years, she’s a little younger than you, Joshua, which makes a good combination.”

“I thought dogs and wolves aged about seven years for every human year.”

His father nodded. “In their overall lifespan, yes. But they mature a lot faster the first year.” He looked at the pup. “Do you plan on keeping her?”

“If it’s all right,” Joshua said, hopefully.

His father rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “She’s starved. It will be quite a responsibility. . . . But,” he added, with a smile, “You’re thirteen, now. I think you’re up to it.”

Grinning his relief, Joshua said, “Thanks, Dad! Now I’d better find her something to eat.”

The pup followed Joshua around the house all day. He talked to her, explaining the different chores he was performing. Once it scratched at the door. Joshua thought a moment, then let her out. She found a suitable spot in the yard and relieved herself, then followed Joshua back into the house.

“What are you going to name her, son?” his father asked.

Joshua had already decided. “Lupe,” he said, “since she’s a wolf.”

“Short for lupus,” his father said, nodding his approval.

That night when Joshua went to bed, Lupe curled up beside him. Joshua kept his window blinds open. He liked to look out at the stars until he grew drowsy.

Tonight, sleep was more elusive than usual, partly because of the loss of his mother and partly because of his new companion. But sleep came eventually.

During the night, the sound of a loud “pop!” woke Joshua. It was followed by a series of other popping sounds. The full moon bathed his bed in light, fully illuminating Lupe. She was . . . growing. Changing. Her nose shortened, her limbs lengthened, human skin replaced the hair, and then she was a young girl, totally nude.

Shaking her head, she sat up and grinned. “You saved me, Joshua!” she said.

“You can talk!” Joshua exclaimed.

There was a puzzled look on the little girl’s face, and she said, “I don’t understand. Why shouldn’t I?”

Joshua’s mind was muddled, overloaded with too much surprise, too sudden an exposure to impossibilities. He shook his head, tried to focus on the werewolf, who had an expectant look on her face as she waited for an answer. “What did I say when I first found you?” he asked dealing with the language problem first.

She cocked her head, trying to recall. She finally said, “I don’t know. You talked and it sounded nice, but -- I don’t know.”

“What did I say when I showed you to my dad?”

“Your dad?” She paused. “Something about wolves and mothers and . . . that’s all I can think of.”

It was Joshua's turn to pause, then he brightened. "I talked to you!" he said. "All the time, I kept talking. The more I spoke, the more you learned. That's how you are talking to me."

The little girl grinned. "Yes! You named me Lupe," she said. Then she added, puzzled, "What are mothers?"

In pained dismay, Joshua realized he had avoided talking about mothers to the little wolf pup. It was too hard to think about, so soon after the shocking news his father had given him. He struggled inwardly, not wanting to reopen the fresh wound, yet repeating to himself, "Today I am a man!" as a guardian mantra.

While the werewolf patiently waited, he searched for mental/emotional equilibrium and, gradually, succeeded. Looking away, he replied, "A mother is the female that gives birth to you and takes care of you as you grow up." He swallowed a lump in his throat. "If they live. You and I both seem to have lost our mothers."

"All right," Lupe said, matter-of-factly. "Now what?"

"Doesn't it . . . bother you, that your mother is gone?" Joshua had trouble saying the words.

"Bother?" Lupe repeated, doubtfully.

"Worry you. Upset you. Don't you . . . miss her?"

Lupe nodded. "Sure. But I can't bring her back, so why talk about it?"

Joshua shook his head. "You're too young to be so smart," he said. With a deep breath of acceptance, he went on: "There's so much more. How did you turn into a girl?"

"Light," she said, pointing at the window. "Moonlight,"

Joshua mused. "All the stories talk about the full moon affecting a change. But they're just stories! Fantasy." He shook his head. "That's not enough explanation. It isn't scientific."

"Scientific?" she asked, tilting her head questioningly.

"There has to be a reason the full moon turns you into a person," he explained. "A

cause-and-effect scientists can define and duplicate.” After a moment, he added, “Have you changed before?”

“Oh, yes,” she nodded. “Every . . . what did you call it? . . . full moon. First time it happened, my mother was confused. She sniffed me, though, and recognized me, and then it was okay.”

“Did your mother ever change?”

Lupe shook her head. “Did you ever see other wolves change?”

“Last full moon,” she replied. “Most of the pack had gathered. One mother had a litter of three, and they changed. No one paid any attention; they must have seen it before.”

“Were the others about your age?” Joshua asked.

“All were about my size, so I guess so.”

“Nearly all the pack was there?”

“Two fathers were out hunting.”

“Then only two wolves have produced werepeople. No others ever have, I’d guess. Something happened.”

Lupe, bored, stretched her arms and Joshua suddenly realized the girl was naked. “Hey, we’ve got to get you some clothes!”

“‘Clothes’?” she repeated, and he realized he’d not talked about clothes before.

“I’ll show you,” he said, going to his chest of drawers. He rummaged around and found a flannel shirt he’d worn when he was younger. He had been fond of it, so he kept it even though it was now too small. “Here,” he said, handing it to Lupe. “Put this on.”

She held the shirt, turned it over, then looked at Joshua. “Put this on?” she asked.

“Oh! You’ve never done that before, have you?” he asked. “Hand it back and I’ll help.” He took the shirt and held it by the collar. He indicated a sleeve. “Put your hand through there.”

“Hand?” Another word he hadn’t used.

“This,” he said, touching her right hand. “Put it through that hole, then put the other one through the other hole.”

Lupe obediently did as he said, then looked at him, grinning again. “Now I have clothes on.”

The front of the shirt gaped open. Joshua smiled. “Not exactly,” he said. “You’re starting to get clothes on. Or,” he added, “what we call getting dressed.”

“Dressed?” Lupe repeated. “This is a dress?”

Joshua laughed. “No, and it’s too complicated to explain. It would be nice if we had a dress for you, but this is the best I can do.” He reached over and started buttoning the shirt. “Now I have to find you some pants,” he said.

Lupe opened her mouth and started breathing rapidly. “What are you doing?” Joshua asked.

“Pants,” she told him. “This is how I pant.”

Joshua chuckled. “More confusing language,” he said. “I mean the kind of pants you wear.” He went back to his chest of drawers. The pants were all too long; the best he could find was a pair of denim shorts with an elastic waist.

He started to hand them to the little girl, then changed his mind. “Sit on the side of the bed,” he asked. When she did, he slid them over her feet. “Stand up.” She did so, and the shorts fell to the floor. “Pick them up,” Joshua said, “grab the top edges and pull them up as high as they will go.”

She did, but it was obvious that, even with the elastic top, they were too big. Joshua tucked in the shirttail, but that wasn’t enough. He found a safety pin and pinned the shorts to the tail of the flannel shirt. “There,” he said.

“I am dressed?”

“Not great, but it will do.” He looked at Lupe. “When do you turn back,” he asked, “or do you know?”

“When big light comes,” she said.

“When the sun comes up,” Joshua interpreted. “Then we just have tonight to talk. Guess I won’t get any more sleep tonight! Lupe, I suppose you don’t know anything about that popping noise?”

Silence and a puzzled expression were his only answer.

“It happens when you are changing,” he said. “A big pop, and then lots of little ones.” He frowned. “They obviously have something to do with your change.” He thought a moment, then said, “maybe it’s your body cells growing, splitting, gaining mass.” He smiled at her. “You obviously weigh a lot more now than you did as a pup. Cells don’t ordinarily make noise as they grow and split, but maybe the suddenness of it causes a vibration loud enough to hear. Anyway --”

He was interrupted by a knock on the door. “It’s my dad!” Joshua exclaimed. “Listen, when he first talks to you, say ‘Hello, Mr. Austin.’”

“Joshua?” his father’s voice called.

“I’m coming, dad,” Joshua replied, going to the door.

“Why aren’t you asleep?” the farmer asked, when Joshua opened the door. He stepped into the room. “I thought I heard --” Spotting Lupe, he stopped abruptly, his mouth open. “Who . . . ?”

“Hello, Mr. Austin,” Lupe said, on cue.

‘Mr. Austin’ looked from Lupe to Joshua and then back at Lupe. “Do I know you?” he asked.

“You saw me before,” the little girl said. “Just not like this.”

He looked back at Joshua, who was smiling. “What does she mean, Joshua?” he asked.

“What’s she saying?” Joshua’s smile broadened. “Dad, this is Lupe.”

“Hello, Mr. Austin,” Lupe repeated. “It was nice you let Joshua keep me.”

“Wait a minute! Wait-a-minute! Joshua, what kind of trick is this?”

“No trick, dad -- honest! I saw the whole thing.”

“What whole thing,” his father asked, bewildered. “What are you talking about?”

“I saw her change,” Joshua said, eager to explain. “I saw her turn from a wolf pup into a little girl, right here on my bed. Saw it, and heard it. Lots of popping sounds, when her cells grew so fast.”

The elder Austin took a deep breath. “Joshua, you have always been levelheaded, never given to flights of fancy. But I can’t believe what you’re telling me.”

Joshua shook his head. “I don’t blame you, Dad; I have trouble believing it myself, and I saw it!”

His father went to Joshua’s closet and opened the door. “What are you doing, Dad?”

“Looking for the pup! I checked the computer security system before I came to see what was going on here, and you haven’t been out of your room. Where did you hide her?”

Joshua rolled his eyes in exasperation. “Dad, how many times do I have to tell you? This is no trick. I know it’s hard to believe, but can’t you just accept it as what you call ‘a working hypothesis’ until we can prove it to you?” Joshua was used to words like “hypothesis”; with his mother’s tutelage and his father’s encouragement, he had been reading since he was three.

“Hypothesis? You can’t have a hypothesis without a theory, and werewolves are fable, not theory!” “. . . Dad? How about this: You say the security system shows I haven’t left my room. That means no one came in, either. If you can’t find a wolf pup hidden here, what alternative do you have? Accept my story on faith, if you can’t find the pup. Okay?”

Austin, firm-jawed and unconvinced, looked at his son. He took a deep breath, then sighed. “I hate disbelieving you, Joshua; you’ve never tried to pull a trick on me before. This, however --”

“Dad, I know!” Joshua cut in. “I saw it and can’t believe it. Don’t call it a hypothesis; just, for want of any better explanation, go along with it. Please?” he added.

“All right’ All right! . . .After,” he added, “I look for the wolf pup.”

Joshua started to say something, then shrugged and stepped back.

There was no sign of the pup. Joshua's father straightened, stiffening his back in resolve. "Okay; I said I'll accept it, on just blind faith. But," he added, "we've got to find an explanation!"

"I'd like one, too, Dad. One thing is for sure; Lupe doesn't know what or how."

The little girl, who had been quietly standing by, said, "I know what, all right,"

Joshua and his father looked at her. "What?" they said in unison.

"I'm a girl tonight," she replied, grinning.

"She's right about that," Joshua said, with a laugh.

Austin looked at Lupe and back to Joshua. "Why is she wearing your clothes?"

"Well, the fur disappeared and left bare skin, so I had to find something for her to put on."

Lupe giggled. "People silly! All kinds of clothes. Wolves have fur, and it fits us all the time."

Austin looked at Lupe quizzically. "Fur is more comfortable?"

"'Com-fort-able'?" she asked.

"Nice. Easy to wear. Feels good," he explained.

Lupe grinned. "Yes! Comfortable!"

Joshua's father's face had a strange expression on it. "Lupe," he said, "you've almost convinced me. What you're saying sounds like a wolf pup. I don't think a little human girl would have said that." He looked back at Joshua, who was wearing a relieved smile. "Almost, I said," he told his son. "I think she believes it. I think you believe it. At least, I'll take that as a working hypothesis. Only because of what Lupe said, and you talking about the popping. That isn't like any werewolf story or movie I know of." He grinned. "It makes a weird kind of sense, and keeps it from sounding like you're fantasizing from fables." He looked at Lupe. "Do you like being a girl?" he asked.

Lupe looked at him, then at Joshua. "I think it's fun!" she declared.

“Do you want to stay like that for a while?”

When she nodded, he went over to Joshua’s window and pushed a button. The Venetian blind apparatus between two plates of glass closed, shutting out the moonlight. “Daylight turns you back, according to legend,” he said. “It isn’t dawn yet, but we shouldn’t take any chances.” He shook his head. “But I still need to know how it happened, why it happened. Wolves don’t turn into people; it’s genetically impossible!”

A sudden bundle of thoughts flooded into Joshua’s brain. “Genetics! Biotech! Phil!” he exclaimed. So much had occurred to him that the words erupted from his suddenly boiling mind.

“What?” his father said, and then, as his mind became attuned to his son’s, he understood. “Yes!” he exclaimed. “Biotech does genetic experiments! Phil works there!” He looked at his watch. “In fact, he has been on duty several hours. Quick, to my computer.”

They all rushed out of Joshua’s room. The boy and Lupe followed Austin to his office. In short seconds, he was busy at the keyboard. “He works the midnight shift,” he said. “I’m trying to raise him at work.” Soon the farmer and his friend Phil were talking via an internet phone.

“Wolves?” Phil asked. “Looks like our plant security isn’t as good as it should be. What have you heard?”

“Paydirt!” Joshua’s father mouthed to the two beside him. Joshua made an OK sign with his fingers, and his father nodded, smiling broadly. To the mike, he said, “Just tell me about it, Phil. What I got didn’t come from your plant; it came from a wolf,” he said, cryptically.

“Found one of them, did you?” Phil asked. Then he explained about Dr. Xavier and dark matter.

“Wait a minute,” Rafe Austin said, after the Egyptians were mentioned. He ignored Phil’s question concerning what was going on. “How did control of dark matter help build pyramids?”

“According to Xavier, the Egyptians could have set patterns for the huge blocks, then filled them in with dark matter. He also says that’s how people turn into vampire

bats.”

“And werewolves,” Austin said. “But why would the government want werewolves?”

“Not werewolves,” Phil corrected, “weresoldiers. Turn wolves into soldiers, so we can have a disposable army to take the world.”

Joshua and his father looked at each other, at Lupe, and grinned. “Soldiers?” Austin whispered to his son, with a soft chuckle.

“What?” Phil asked. “Never mind; family joke,” Austin said. “Tell me; why wolves?”

“Seems lots of wolves survived the war; not only survived, but bred fantastically. They’ve adapted to the new environment. Remember how, in the two thousands, a group of scientists, working for animal rights, genetically changed a couple of packs of wolves?”

“Vaguely. Made them smarter and able to resist disease.”

“That’s right,” Phil said. “Well, they released them. Seems like the new breed took over. Wolf packs can beat any enemy out there, with pack cooperation. They even have a high resistance to the effects of radiation. If they can turn them all into soldiers, we’d have a big army and no one would care if they died.”

Lupe’s mouth opened to object, but Joshua, seeing her, shook his head violently. Lupe gave him a hurt look, but said nothing. “The wolves would care,” Joshua said.

“And your point is?” Phil asked, sardonically.

“Never mind,” Austin cut in. “How could he do that? Soldiers are bigger than wolves.”

“That’s where the dark matter pops in,” Phil explained.

“Pops?” Austin asked, remembering Joshua’s description of the change he had witnessed.

“Pops,” Phil repeated. “When the dark matter comes here from -- from wherever it is -- there’s a popping sound, and apparently new matter is born -- or, according to Xavier, transformed from dark matter. I saw it, once. Part of his current experiment. Low solar radiation is the trigger. Trigger to what, I don’t know, but something Xavier sets up. Then he shines a brighter light on it, and it disappears.”

“So he was trying to make, I’d guess, some genetic change in wolves where they would change into soldiers,” Austin anticipated. “But what good are soldiers who turn into wolves in daylight?”

“One swift night strike can accomplish a lot,” Phil said.

“I suppose. How was he going to do the change?”

“If you were anyone else,” Phil said, “I’d deny everything! The lab is really embarrassed by it all. I mean, trying to mix magic with science!”

“Magic?” Austin said, incredulously.

Phil sighed. “Let me start at the beginning. Dr. Xavier was trying to find a wolf gene that was similar to a human gene, for experimental purposes. He took hair samples, skin samples, blood samples, saliva samples -- none were close enough. “Now. I can only tell you this because there’s no one at my station to hear me. Dr. Xavier has always been narrowly balanced between sanity and insanity. Some say that’s the way all geniuses are. I don’t know. Anyway, he slid over the edge with this wolf thing. He was determined! Next, he took a wolf gene and, even though it didn’t come close to matching, spliced it with part of a human gene and injected it into the wolves. When nothing happened, he started chanting!”

Rafe lifted an eyebrow. “Chanting?”

“Chanting!” Phil insisted. “Oh one, one oh, oh oh, one one, on off, off on, stuff like that.”

“Binary code,” Austin breathed, an expression of incredulity on his face.

“Yes!” Phil said. “And he did some kind of Indian war dance around the poor wolves, until he dropped of exhaustion! Dr. Xavier was put to bed and the wolves were returned to their cage. “When Dr. Xavier woke up, he said the experiment was over. Now,” Phil added, “don’t forget; you’ve never heard a bit of this.”

“Of what?” Austin asked. “Did you say something, Phil?”

“Just: ‘Goodnight,’” Phil said.

“Night, Phil,” Austin said, and turned off the computer. Leaning back in his chair, he

stared at Joshua. "I apologize, son," he said. "But it's hard to believe, even after hearing what Phil had to say."

Joshua Austin grinned. "I told you, Dad; I saw it, and it was hard to believe."

His father nodded. "And it's weird, the way the light works. Low solar power is, of course, moonlight -- but the only dosage that works is when the moon is full, just like the legends." "Do you suppose Xavier's trying to use magic had anything to do with it?" "Joshua, I'm ready to believe anything is possible! Where's Lupe?" he added, glancing around.

His son looked in the corner beyond Austin's desk, then smiled and put a finger to his lips. "She's asleep." Austin turned and looked. Lupe was lying on the floor, her head on one arm, knees pulled up. She was making small, regular sounds like light snores. "She's had quite a day," Austin said, softly.

He turned his attention back to Joshua. "Do you realize what she's had to adjust to? Coming from the wild into our house? Doors, rooms and windows is quite a lot, but add to that refrigerators, running water, electric lights --"

"Don't forget clothes," Joshua smiled. "Still," he added, "you've got to remember she first saw everything as a wolf pup. By the time she changed, she'd had a chance to get used to things."

The farmer nodded. "Good point." He looked at the changeling, and smiled. "In any case, she's a really fast learner, and she has been through a lot."

Joshua paused, a solemn look on his face. "I've been through a lot, too, Dad. I'd like to apologize."

"Apologize? For what?"

"For the way I acted today; running away." Joshua looked down.

"I gave you quite a shock," the farmer said, his voice low, understanding in his tone.

Joshua swallowed, remembering. "I hated you," he said, still looking down. "I hated you because you told me, and then I hated you because you hadn't told me before." He suddenly looked up and into his father's face. "I know it makes no sense, Dad! I just -- I just. . . ."

Austin put a comforting arm around his son's shoulders. "I know," he said. "It's the damned war; it messed up all of humanity. It ruined the planet and it ruined lives everywhere. Still," he added, "we were lucky, here in our cup of land. Lucky, but not without our losses."

Joshua looked at his father. "I just realized I've been selfish," he said. "Another thing to apologize for."

"Selfish?"

Joshua nodded. "You lost her, too," he whispered, and it was almost a sob.

The elder Austin squeezed his son's shoulder. "We'll make out all right," he said. "We'll survive." Then he looked at the sleeping Lupe. "With company," he added.

Joshua smiled fondly at the weregirl. "I feel like she's my little sister," he said.

Austin chuckled, glanced at the sleeping girl, then back to Joshua. "Another thing bothers me," he said. "How does she learn so fast? Genetically altered wolves are smart, but -- that smart?"

Joshua shook his head and turned his palms up in a gesture that clearly said, "Who knows?" Aloud, he said, "Dr. Xavier is the only answer I can come up with." "The big question is," his father said, " "Now what?" I don't just mean tonight," he added, quickly. "I mean the future of the werepeople in general. What will become of them?"

The next day, soldiers came to the door. When the bell rang, Joshua responded, Lupe close behind him. The door monitor revealed the identity of the callers. Pushing a button summoning his father, Joshua said to the door, "Just a minute, please."

One soldier looked at the door camera, and said, "Mr. Austin? I'm Sergeant Metcalf. We need to talk to you."

The farmer was there before the soldier finished his statement. Motioning Joshua and Lupe back, Austin opened the door. "Yes? How can I help you?"

"Mr. Austin, your farm backs the woods and wolves have been reported about. Have you seen signs of wolves?" Military politeness was in his voice, with a hint of steel. Two of the soldiers with him held rifles.

"They're sending the military after wolves?" Austin asked, humorous disbelief evident

in both his tone and manner. “After all the trouble our government went to getting you and Dr. Xavier here, is that the best use they can make of you?”

The sergeant’s only response was, “Can’t be too careful, Mr. Austin.” Looking into the room, he saw Joshua and Lupe. He pulled out a notebook, consulted it, then looked back at the farmer. “Our records show only you and your son living here, Mr. Austin. Who is the girl?”

“I fail to see how that is any of your business, Sergeant,” Austin said, then added, truthfully, “However, this girl is the daughter of a neighbor. She’s visiting us. Any rules against that?” His voice was cold.

“Need to keep up with things, Mr. Austin. Need to know if any strangers show up. Might be enemy infiltration.”

Austin laughed. “Sure; we’re being invaded by little girls! Be sure to report that.” He shook his head in disbelief. “Anything else, Sergeant, or can I get back to the business of raising food for our valley?”

“Well, you aren’t the only one doing that, Mr. Austin,” Metcalf replied. “I’ve seen lots of gardens around the place.”

“Gardens, yes,” Austin said, disparagingly. “But no farms. Now, is there anything else, Sergeant?”

Snapping his notebook shut, Metcalf said, “That will be all, Mr. Austin. But be sure to call if you sight a wolf.”

“I’ll call you an alarmist,” the farmer said. “Good day!” He closed the door. Since his farm provided most of the area’s food, Austin felt a certain sense of security.

Joshua put a protective arm around Lupe’s shoulders. “What’s up, Dad?” he asked.

“Sounds like Xavier has returned to his theory, Joshua. Something has happened to make him believe his methods worked. I’m certain no one has seen Lupe; maybe another wereperson was spotted. Or maybe Xavier has other ways of checking results. In any case, we have to be careful.”

Grimly, Joshua said, “You bet we do!” He squeezed Lupe’s shoulder. “We’re not going to let anything happen to Lupe.”

During the day, in spite of their efforts, there was a moment when Austin came in from outdoors and Lupe was nearby; sunlight fell on her. In seconds, a wolf pup was struggling her way out of clothes.

“Lupe!” he exclaimed. “I didn’t know --”

The pup came to him, tongue lolling out and tail wagging. He reached down and she licked his hand. “Guess it isn’t too great a shock for you, hmmm? You’re more used to being a wolf.” He scratched behind her ears. “Next time, we’ll be more careful.”

“Sun block,” Joshua explained when, a month later, he was rubbing a thick ointment on Lupe’s human face. “We’ll give you gloves, too. Dad bought a few things downtown, so these clothes fit you better.”

Lupe was wearing jeans and a long-sleeved shirt. Her feet were in tennis shoes and socks.

“Do I have to wear these?” she asked, rubbing her feet together. “Shoes?”

Joshua asked. “They do fit tighter than anything else, don’t they? You’re not used to wearing anything, much less stuff that binds you. But you’ll get used to it; all kids do.” He tilted his head in thought. “Wait a minute; you don’t need to!” He turned to his father. “Dad, don’t you think socks will do the trick by themselves, unless we take her downtown?”

“Absolutely,” Austin said. Lupe flopped to the floor and started undoing the shoes. “You guessed good on clothes’ sizes, Dad,” Joshua said.

“Figured she’d be about like an eleven-year-old, this time,” Austin said. “Then got the next size up, just to be safe. The real problem, in a small town like this, was explaining why I was buying them! The clerk knew you just turned thirteen.”

“What did you tell them?”

Austin gave a lopsided grin. “Best I could think of was that you had a project going, building a life-sized puppet. Told them it was one of those teenage things. They bought it, and here you are.”

“What do you want to do, Lupe?” Joshua asked. “Or have you thought about it?” he added.

“Uh-huh,” Lupe added, firmly. “I want to learn to read.”

Austin nodded with approval. “Makes sense,” he said.

Lupe, it developed, was an apt student. With the help of Austin’s computerized learning program, she was reading simple books before the day was over.

“I can read!” she said, happily, to Joshua.

“You’re off to a real good start,” the boy admitted, smiling with pleasure. “But you’ll need a dictionary for the bigger words.”

“Dictionaries are good,” Lupe said.

That night, Lupe disappeared. “What happened, Joshua?” his father asked, the next morning. “Did she leave on purpose?”

“I think so, Dad,” he answered, softly. “Her clothes are gone. It isn’t like she suddenly got caught in the sun.”

“Did she say anything?”

Joshua smiled. “She said dictionaries are good.” A speculative look on his face, he added, “I think she’s gone after the others.”

Two weeks later, the soldiers showed up again. As before, Sergeant Metcalf was in front, with two armed soldiers behind him. “Mr. Austin, I don’t think you’ve been cooperative.” There was both disapproval and a touch of threat in his voice. “There have been reports of wolves, but we have heard nothing from you.”

“Sergeant, I am not in the military,” Austin said, teeth clenched. “I am not obliged to take orders from you.”

“Then you have seen wolves?” the sergeant said quickly, like a cat pouncing on a victim.

Austin shrugged. “Not that it’s any of your business, but I did see a wolf pup. Not an adult, a pup.”

“When?”

“A couple of weeks ago,” Austin answered. “Are you afraid of wolf puppies?” he added, sarcastically.

“Where there pups, there are adults,” Metcalf said. “Next time, call me right away! You may not be military, but civilians are required to cooperate in wartime,” he added, steel in his voice again. “Call me!”

“I’ll call you, all right,” Austin said. “You’re an unthinking war robot, Sergeant Metcalf.” He closed the door.

“Dad!” Joshua said, unbelievably. “You said you’d call him!”

Austin smiled. “Already did,” he answered, putting a hand on his son’s shoulder. “I called him a war robot.” He chuckled. “That’s from an old classic,” he explained. “I’ve often wanted to copy it. Only in the classic, our hero called the other guy worse than that.”

Joshua grinned. “I’ve got to extend our house alarm system,” Austin mused. “I’d like a little advance notice the next time we have military action.”

The next full moon, Lupe reappeared with three other werepeople. The three were naked, all looking like teenagers. Lupe had squeezed herself into the clothes she had worn when she left. It was after ten o’clock at night when they knocked at the back door. Joshua, grinning, opened the door. “Thought you’d be back tonight,” he said, then he saw the others and a blush washed over the grin. Two of the newcomers were male; it was the female who caused his face to redden. She had long, brown hair and a figure that, though young, was full.

Joshua looked back over his shoulder. “Dad!” he shouted. “Lupe’s back, with company. We need more clothes!”

“Come on in,” Lupe told the others. “You should see what all there is!” To Joshua’s embarrassment -- he tried to deny to himself there was any pleasurable sensation -- the nude and nubile werewolf with the long, brown hair brushed against him as she entered.

“Dad!” Joshua shouted again, frantically. His father came in with four sets of coveralls. He glanced around, then grinned at his son. “Looks like you guessed right,” he said. “Good thing I took your word and bought clothes.”

He handed the coveralls to Joshua. “Might be a bit large, but it doesn’t matter that

much, with coveralls.” In turn, his son handed the coveralls to Lupe. “You know about clothes,” he said. “Take them into Dad’s office and show them how to get into these.”

With a happy smile, Lupe took the coveralls and handed them out. “Follow me,” she said to her companions.

Joshua looked away as they left. In a moment, Lupe called out, “Joshua!” He turned. Lupe stood in the doorway, naked. “See how I’ve grown!” she said. She cupped her breasts. “Soon, I can be a mother!” She said, proudly.

Pleased with her appearance, she spun around for him, so he could fully appreciate the change. She was as nubile as the other weregirl.

Feeling as if he had suddenly seen his sister naked, Joshua quickly turned away. “Get dressed, Lupe,” he said, desperately.

Austin, observing it all, smiled at Joshua. “They grow up quickly, don’t they?” he asked.

Reading classes began. Lupe’s three additions to the class took longer; although she had talked to them on the way, they were still far behind where she had been when Joshua started teaching her. Lupe sat in on the classes both to help her ‘cousins’ and to refresh her own memory. Then the alarm system pealed. “Everybody to the barn!” Austin said. “There’s a good chance that’s soldiers, even this time of night. Especially this time of night,” he added. “Stay there and keep quiet!”

The wereteens obeyed without question, revealing another difference between werepeople and humans. Austin was at the front door after the second ring.

“Where are they?” Sergeant Metcalf demanded.

“And a pleasant ‘hello’ to you, too,” Austin said. “How about a little explanation, Sergeant?”

“Four wolves were seen headed this way, Austin. You have been quite uncooperative. We’re certain you are hiding them. Where are they? Or should I have my men search the area?”

Austin laughed. “Search away! I’ll even help you. Promise not to shoot my new workers?”

A military eyebrow rose. “New workers?”

Laughter still in his tone, Austin said, “Yeah; some neighboring kids are in the barns, helping me inventory. Some of the fertilizer and insecticide seems lower than the computer shows it should be. With no idea when more supplies will be available, we have to be careful.”

Metcalf nodded and relaxed. “No problem,” he said. “Let’s go look.”

Inwardly, Austin breathed a sigh of relief. It looked like the military weren’t fully informed. He had counted on that when he took a chance and mentioned human visitors. Metcalf’s orders were simply to look for wolves, not werepeople, otherwise something in the sergeant’s attitude would have revealed his interest.

When the fruitless search was completed and the soldiers left, reading class resumed. There was no sleep that night. Once, when Joshua went outside to sit on the grass and admire the stars, Lupe joined him. “Taking a break from studies?” Joshua asked the weregirl.

“Break?” she repeated. “Nothing is broken.”

Joshua smiled. “Colloquialism. Or, maybe, slang is a better term. Anyway, it means taking some time off from what you were doing.”

“Yes,” Lupe replied, seating herself beside him. “I’m taking a break. I’m ahead of the others, anyway.” She pointed at the distant hills. “What’s on the other side?” she asked.

“Things are in a mess, on the other side,” Joshua said. “There was a big war, bombs blew up most everything. Dad says the hills protected us.”

“I’d like to see it,” Lupe said. “I mean, I really want to see it. It . . . calls to me.”

Joshua remembered what his father had told him about wolves surviving in the wastelands. “. . . You might like it,” he said, “but I think it will be rough going. Other wolves might fight you.”

Lupe looked at him. “There are wolves there?”

The teenager shrugged. “There might be. Dad says wolves adapted better than anything else, out there.”

“I want to go,” Lupe said, firmly. Then she got to her feet. “Break’s over,” she announced. “Back to the studies.”

Joshua stayed a few moments longer, staring at the distant rim and thinking about what Lupe had said.

Lupe’s reading class skipped sleep and stayed inside studying all day long. Before the day was over, Metcalf and his group paid another surprise visit. “I need to interview your temporary help, Austin,” he said, by way of introduction. “I told you before, we need to keep up with all people to avoid infiltration.”

Austin smiled. “But you forgot about it yesterday, didn’t you? I would hazard a guess that your superiors aren’t too happy with you.” He was rewarded with a reluctant pause as the sergeant tried to recover. Before the man could come up with a response, Austin went on. “Anyway, you’re too late. Inventory is over.”

“What are their names?” Sergeant Metcalf blustered. “Where do they live?”

Smile still in place, the farmer replied, “I don’t keep records of volunteer help, Sergeant. Didn’t even get their social security numbers.”

Eventually, frustrated, the soldiers left. Austin watched them go, smile still on his face. Inside, he was uneasy. “I shouldn’t have pushed them,” he thought. “They might not be too bright, but an angry idiot can be very, very dangerous.”

“It wouldn’t be safe for you to stay, Lupe,” Austin said. “They either want to kill you or take you to the lab.”

Suddenly, Lupe whirled around and faced the window. “What’s that?” she asked, sharply.

“What is -” Austin began, but then he, too, heard it; a distant series of popping sounds. All of them rushed to the door and looked outside. Crashing noises were now added to the pops.

“Look!” Joshua said, pointing at the woods. Huge trees were suddenly appearing, some twice as high as the tallest tree in the woods. Some neighboring trees were falling as the giants grew. “Xavier’s at it again!” Austin said, bitterly.

“They look like pine trees,” Joshua offered.

Austin nodded. "No doubt about it. Somehow, he has worked out a way to change them." The pines were three or four times larger than normal. Clusters of needles, silhouetted against the night sky, looked like frozen explosions of black.

"Pines. That's good and bad news," Austin said. "The bad news is their root system; instead of having a deep tap root, they have mostly surface roots. They spread out so much, they'll destroy trees around them. The good news is, there aren't a lot of pines out there."

"He's trying to wreck the forest," Joshua said.

"He wants to flush us out," Lupe put in, bitterness in her voice. "He'll ruin the woods just to get us." She looked toward the distant rim, beyond the giant pines. "He'll get us out of the forest, just not the way he wants," Lupe said. "We're ready to go."

"Go where?" Joshua asked, although he felt he knew the answer.

Confirming his suspicions, Lupe nodded toward the hills. "Out there," she said.

"But . . . it will be dangerous," Joshua objected.

Lupe nodded. "So will staying here. Besides," she added, "I have to go. We all feel it! I don't know why, but it's important."

"What about the rest of the wolves?" Austin asked.

"They're willing," Lupe said. She nodded to the other three. "My father and their father feel the call, almost as strongly. The others --" she shrugged "-- they feel it, too; enough that they're ready to go. They're ready," she added, "and the rest of us are eager."

"Their father?" Joshua asked, surprised. "I had thought. . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Made the same mistake myself," his father said. "Makes sense, however. One male can impregnate several females; spread the genes a lot faster, that way."

Lupe frowned her disapproval. "Wolves don't do that," she said. "Wolves mate for life. They are mon. . . mona --"

With a grin, Joshua said, "Monogamous, Lupe. You're doing great, but there are still

lots of words in our language.” “You’re right, Lupe, of course. But when a mate dies, the survivor can find a new mate, and the strain goes on. And, speaking of you and words, I bought something else when I bought the coveralls. Let’s go to my office.” The wereteens and Joshua followed.

Going to his desk, the farmer reached down and picked up a bag. Reaching inside, he pulled out a big leather pouch. It was rectangular in shape, and had a strap hanging from it. “This is yours, Lupe,” he said, handing it to the weregirl.

Curious, she opened the pouch, and pulled out -- “-- A dictionary!” Lupe exclaimed, pleasure lighting her face.

Joshua’s father retrieved three other identical pouches. “One for each of you,” he said. “Lupe, I’ll bet you know what the strap is for.”

The weregirl nodded. “Sure. When we are wolves, we can bite on the strap to carry the dictionary!”

“Exactly!” Austin said, approvingly. “Since it’s leather, it will last a long time. Also,” he added, “there’s a waterproof coating on the leather to protect the books from bad weather.”

Joshua looked at the excited Lupe. “I’ll . . . miss you,” he said. He had to force the words out over recent memories of the loss of his mother. It was difficult, but not as hard as he had feared.

Lupe impulsively threw her arms around Joshua and rubbed noses with him. Abruptly she pulled back, a puzzled look on her face. “That wasn’t a kiss, was it?” she asked.

Joshua laughed. “Maybe to wolves,” he said. “But that’s okay; I get the idea.”

“I’ll miss you, too, Joshua,” she said. “I’ll never forget you, and all you and your father did for me. For us,” she added. Then, with an apologetic smile, she said, “We have to go. Not long until daylight.”

“I understand,” Joshua said. “I’ll go with you as far as the woods.”

“Me, too,” his father added, and they left the house.

“Lupe, you’ve taught me a lot, too,” Joshua said, as they walked toward the woods. “I

can survive loss, now. You showed me that it's all a matter of attitude. I'll miss you, but I understand."

Lupe squeezed his hand. "I'm glad," she said, simply and sincerely. "Remember, though; I might be back."

Joshua shook his head. "I don't think so. You're moving on to a new life that will take all your time."

Lupe reached out and took both of Joshua's hands. "We'll remember you," she said, then turned and walked to the woods. "We will leave your clothes here," she told Joshua, slipping out of her coveralls. "There will be no connection between you and us." The other wereteens followed suit and then, nude, walked away.

Walking back to the house, arms full of bodywarm coveralls, Joshua gave his father a worried look. "The wolves might be escaping Xavier, but what about us?"

Austin smiled. "I don't think we'll have to worry about Dr. Xavier, after this. He cooked his own goose."

"What?"

The farmer nodded, smile still in place. "Because of the widespread devastation, timber is in short supply. Even Sergeant Metcalf will soon realize the importance of tripling the size of a tree." He chuckled. "Xavier failed at his weresoldier project, but succeeded in something else important. He will be kept quite busy growing trees."

Joshua chuckled, then looked back to the woods. "What do you think will happen to them, Dad?"

"While it's rough where they're going, I'm optimistic. Wolves work together. They're survivors. And these wolves, this Dark Pack, have the advantage of two pairs of very intelligent wereteens." At the back door of the farmhouse, he stopped, a grin on his face. "In fact," he said, "they have twice the chance legend gave mankind at the start."

"Huh? What legend?"

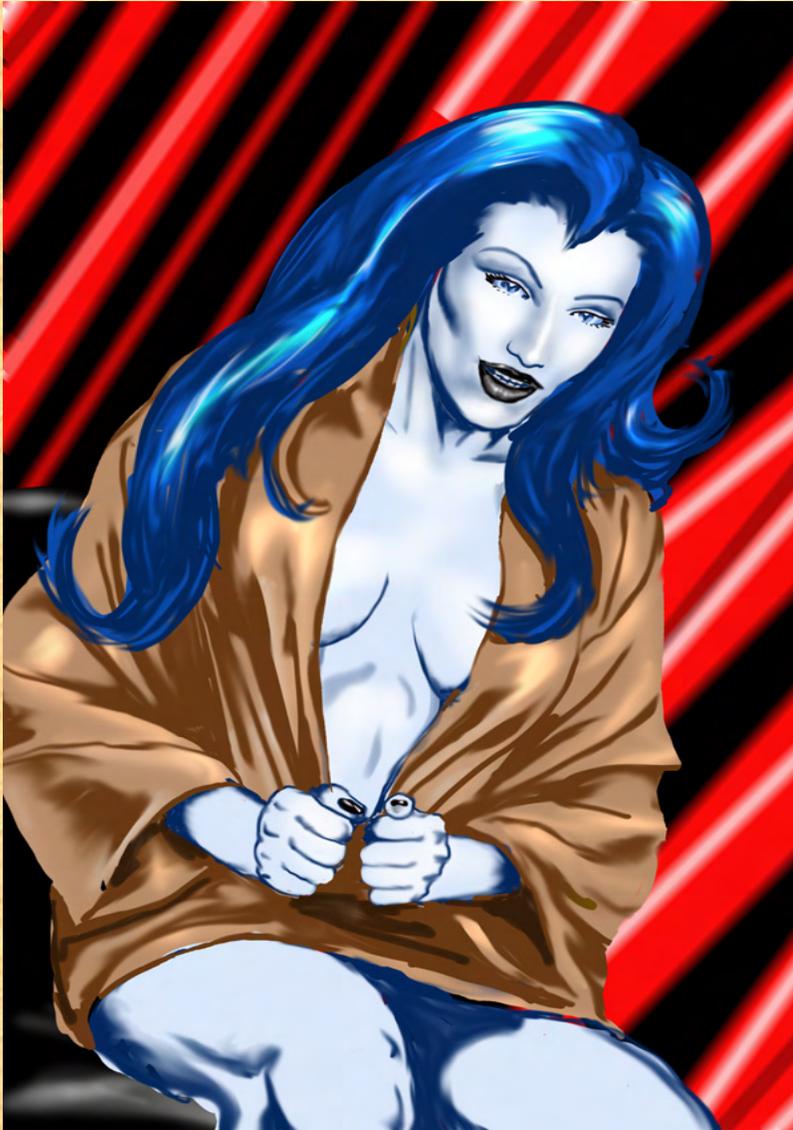
"It's said that Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden to fend for themselves. There are *two* pairs of wereteens going into the wilderness."

Joshua lay in his bed, staring at the open window. "I'll miss you, Lupe," he said to

himself. "I miss my mom. But I'll survive. My survival is a cinch, compared to what you're facing." He closed his eyes. Aloud, he added, "Good night, Lupe. Good night, Mom." From a small box atop his chest of drawers, his mother's muffled voice said, "I love you, Josh."

The End

THE STARS MY FORNICATION



by Ian Covell

A long while back, I mentioned writing a number of stories, including at least one "space opera"-type which was, er, much more "adult" than most. You asked to see it for the magazine... ..well, I found I did actually have it on disk [also found some others; can barely recall typing them in anywhere, of course] and I attach it. Whatever your decision about it and the magazine, I hope you enjoy it! ..and if you do wonder at the end, no, it isn't quite what it appears, I had a sequel planned using the same characters!!

Ian

She'd been drinking steadily, her last few drinks not steady at all; she

finished another and threw it across the cabin. The empty flask tumbled lazily in the reduced gravity of the spaceship and vanished into the disposal tube without touching its sides. She smiled: alcohol equalled accuracy. The smile flicked off as she glared at the video-screens, and cursed the alien for the hundredth time, or maybe the thousandth; then she cursed herself again for signing the contract. It forced her to disable her communication screens, so she could only receive messages from the alien - and for three days, she'd heard nothing. As courier, trader, surveyor, even thief, she'd always controlled her actions; now she obeyed the alien's command, a puppet on its strings. She imagined a cord round her wrist; watched as the invisible bond jerked her hand upward and swung it towards the next drink.. in that instant the large central screen began to glow.

She tilted her head to see the alien appear in one half of the split screen. In greeting, it erected a tentacle that glistened in the coloured mist of its atmosphere; her drowsy eyes lingered speculatively along its pliantly muscular length...the long, lonely trip ahead seemed suddenly endless.

" I have hired another guard," the alien's guttural voice informed her -and the other half of the screen grew bright. A human. Male. Her tipsy libido focussed, changing from a tremor of desire to quivering lust.

His arrogant eyes returned her appraisal with equal interest. She drew in a breath, deep and sharp, heightening her breasts; her nipples punctuated the tunic's thin fabric.

" Is this human known to you?" the alien's words were generated by machine: flat, monotonic.

She looked into the triangle of eyes above its black-coned mouth, and shook her head, "No.. but if he wants to know me, he can visit my ship. If he comes across. Do you want to come..?"

The man grinned, "Our multi-eyed employer had me sign a contract that I wouldn't leave my ship." His eyes explored her shadowed cleavage across five thousand miles.

She shivered, smiled back. "A pity. I signed the same contract. No

passengers or crew, just me giving protection all the way to Medith. I suppose it thinks we'd plot to steal its cargo if we met in private...and that's why we weren't allowed to meet before now, right?" The alien said nothing. She looked at the man again, "Right. I understand that - but any private meeting we had wouldn't be about grabbing its load."

"It'd be hard to grab anything on this trip." His warm grey eyes followed the movement of her hand as she stroked the slim column of her throat, fingers slipping under the shoulder of her tunic, and moving down..

Her hair was the natural blue of the Ambersky race, the thick mane framed her oval face: narrow eyebrows, aquiline nose, full and moist lips from which her agile tongue slowly licked the final drops of wine.

He stared into her wide emerald eyes, "It's a three hundred hour trip to Medith."

"Too long," she said, her mind rapidly flicking through ideas as she watched the man. Muscular, broad-faced, deep-set eyes: a typical bodyguard. Yet the eyes were intelligent, aware, and definitely responsive to her body language; could he respond as quickly to her verbal cues..?

The alien seemed determined to let them only see each other during the trip. It would be a shame if they could only look at each other for the next few months. Her mind flicked through ideas and discarded one after another. She looked again at the wary alien as her mind flicked through possibilities. A plan began to form. "Will you control all our messages?"

"Naturally. Both of you were hired to protect me, there is no need that you should speak of other things."

She touched tongue tip to her lips thoughtfully, ignoring the finality in the alien's remark. "Can we exchange greetings?" she said idly.

"Have you not done so?"

"Why no, that was only the beginning. Humans vary on different planets. We haven't checked we're both fully human yet."

The man arched an eyebrow, "We haven't?"

The alien's upper eye turned to watch him, "This is important?"

The man studied the woman's growing smile. " Sure."

"You may exchange greetings," the alien conceded.

Her grin was triumphant, "Problem solved. I'm called Ingus, Cunny Ingus.."

"I think I can get my tongue round that. I give great greeting. The name's Chein Bree, born on Ryan's Will."

"Not too hard to remember."

"You'd be surprised how hard it is. *Is* our problem solved?"

"I greet you," she said briefly, but did not continue in words, her hands began to speak for her. One drifted down the centre of her tunic, the fabric peeled open behind her fingers, her other hand controlled the viewing camera, made it move upward, still focussed on her. It revealed more and more until her whole length was on his screen. She lay on a yielding, contoured seat, that began to recline under her command. The tunic tried to reach her thighs, but failed magnificently. The cabin's light found her flesh as her slow fingers eased the tunic open. Shadows dripped from the inner slopes of full, taut breasts. As she bent forward, the tunic slid down her arms, her dark nipples stiffened under his stare. She cupped her breasts, narrow hands hiding the turgid peaks as her eyes met his.

"Understand?"

"I begin to see."

"What?" the toneless voice intruded. "What are you doing?"

"Exchanging information." She turned lazily under the camera, muscles shifted beneath her sleek skin. "We compare. It's courtesy for humans from different worlds to verify any possible differences."

"You have differences?"

Cunny massaged her aching nipples, words broke from her trembling mouth as her breath quickened, "Many. Pressure variations.. tensile strengths.. lubricity .. contour..." Her hands moved down her chest, across her mounded stomach to slide into her briefs..

"How long does this continue?"

"Hard.. hard to say," her hands massaged the hidden flesh. " We could.. could find differences that might take the whole trip to.. probe..."

"Will this affect the protection for which I hired you?" The question was fired at Chein Bree.

"We won't neglect anything, I'm sure. Of course, we could shorten these greetings if you'd let us meet -- "

"Absolutely not." The emotionless voice cut him off. There was a moment's silence.

"How long is it for you?" Cunny asked Bree.

He cocked an eyebrow, "It varies."

"I hope so. However, I meant, how long since you, uhm, compared differences?"

"Well, I had a full day of it yesterday - and I managed a quick frisk a few hours before we left.."

"Sounds strenuous."

"I'm a bit stiff here and there."

"Only a bit? Aren't you up to a full search? I've been in orbit for four days.. alone.. up here.. out of touch... Of course, I had a few friends," she looked at her left hand, wriggled the long, sensitive fingers, "but there's

nothing like a good check-up with someone else. Thing is, it's so long since I shared a physical, I've forgotten the exact routine - what comes first?"

His gaze was fixed on the gentle motion of her right hand under the taut briefs, " I haven't got x-ray eyes."

"There you are, confirmation number one!" She wriggled the briefs down her long legs. The violet triangle at her groin drew his eyes as she raised a leg, let the briefs hang from her toes for a second before she allowed them to float down into shadows.

She rubbed one thigh against the other, "Can you see any differences yet?" She touched her breasts, "On some worlds, these have gone out of fashion. Mine are fairly small, don't you think? I'm sure you could get one in your mouth if you could stretch your lips very wide.. This," she stroked a pebbled nipple, "would rest against your tongue. Naturally, if we were cold, or I wasn't stressed, and this was flat, you could suck and reduce pressure and bring it up like.. this." A finger traced the cherry tip, moved down her body, now beginning to glow with sweat, a bodyscape undulating under the soft cabin light. Then her languid eyes opened wide, and she looked at her hand in surprise. "A woman's best friend," the middle finger unfurled -slim, practised, purposeful. "I thought I'd be travelling alone, now I've got you.. and a few friends," the other fingers opened. She turned her palm to the camera, closed the hand to leave the middle finger erect, alone. "Magic," she assured him.

"It does tricks?"

She put the hand to her damp crotch, the finger bent, moved. "Look.. gone," she said, and moved again, " and now it's back. It's even a bit wet. Not all women get moist now, not warm and moist like this, like my magic place... You'll have to take my word about that since we aren't in physical touch but if I part my legs a bit, you can see the moisture.. If we were together, you could use your fingers - or mouth - to, to feel how deep the dampness goes. To move in there, move your finger all the, the way round the lips, then in, like this, feel the slick warmth against you, and move back slowly, then in, up, to me, to me, round, in there, in there, in there..."

Her finger blurred as it struck into the resilient depths, her palm slapped the hardened clit. She began to moan. The uncomprehending alien sought to hear words, a secret communication, but it was only a meaningless stream of breath broken by her spasming lips, her gulping throat. Cunny groaned, jerked forward to curl her body around her stilled hand, to gasp for air. She lay back slowly, her eyes wide and unfocussed, her finger still moving gently.

"I think," Bree said in a deliberately controlled voice, " I think I saw one or two basic differences we must examine in some.. depth."

She stroked, " We have three hundred hours."

"Fourteen days.. do you think it will be long enough?"

"I'll know in a minute," she answered quietly as he unfastened his tunic, ".. unless you want to tell me now?"

"And spoil the surprise?"

The alien trader watched both screens and only half-listened to the queries of its living ship. The human male wore only tunic and shorts. For a moment, when the male removed the lower garment, the alien wondered why Bree had concealed his third arm so completely.

The human female squealed, "Does it travel on a separate passport?"\~ Then, "My god, you go to any lengths, don't you?"

It was all very strange. Then it got weirder.

The days passed. This was the year in which the Veneris race had declared neutrality while they grew a new leader. They tended to vaporise any ship that trespassed into their spheres of influence. The three ships, Cunny and Chein and the nameless alien, curved along the very edge of the Venerian border. They were shadowed, and continually scanned by Venerian peacehips (the same as warships but they apologised after killing you) but were not challenged or attacked. They saw no other craft, even pirates

avoided Venerian planets. The Veneris Moons were even more dangerous.

The alien decided the two humans had some worth: they were alert, belligerent, yet not overly intelligent - their memory spans seemed very short. They had to check the physical differences between them almost hourly, and never seemed to tire of it. Why they didn't just commit the information to computer and let things be, was beyond its understanding.

They explained it was a difficult, cultural thing concerning such machines, although the tabu on computers didn't stop them using many supple and ingenious smaller instruments. These, endowed with a profusion of intriguing hollows and protuberances, hummed and chuckled with power as they slid over human flesh and skin and hair to investigate the minutest details of physique, a thousand responses to the same stimuli.

Their moans and sighs and gasps and sudden cries, they said, expressed the satisfaction felt as they once more learned a facet of the other's body.

The three ships were one day out from Medith when Cunny got a message, and in minutes she prepared to leave.

"Guild business," she told Bree.

"We have business too," he reminded her, eyebrows lowered.

"'Guild', I said. You know I can't ignore it, and I can't delay - and no, we can't go together. We contracted to escort our sharp-eyed friend all the way in, one of us has to stay."

"Nothing will happen this close to the planet."

"I would refuse payment," the alien interrupted. Bree cursed its image. Triple eyes regarded him steadily, "I will allow one to leave, not both."

Ingus frowned, then nodded, "If we must. Where shall we meet?"

"I'll have my payment sent to Dalcut, if you could.. come there?"

As they had not bothered with clothing since the first day, she studied his body with regret, "Can you wait?"

"No."

"So I see. I wonder what it will be like?"

"The best," he replied, in a hard-edged tone she did not detect.

They exchanged barely a dozen more words before Cunny's drive cut in, to whip her ship out of sensor range in seconds. Bree looked at the alien.

"One more day, and I vow I'll never see you again."

"Would you like to examine *my* differences while we wait?"

They landed on Medith. Bree offered to take Cunny's payment to her on Dalcut. He towered, six feet to the alien's four. The triple eyes looked up suspiciously; two of its minor tentacles brushed against, then clung to the skin of its ship; it balanced warily on the other four. "The money has already been sent."

Bree stepped forward, fists clenched. The ship growled. Bree looked upward, puzzled. The alien was absorbed into the ship before he could look down. He stared at the bulkhead, drew his foot back. The ship growled again. Chein spun on his heel, stalked into the city, got drunk, screwed, arrested, released, and left a day later.

Chein Bree and the woman Cunny Ingus began a series of near-misses. Cunny's ship was damaged by her own foolishness, the alien trader's payment just covered repairs. Without reserves, she had to hire out as a guide; she managed to delay her employers for half a week, but Bree had still not arrived before her small vessel rose into the aquamarine Dalcutan sky alongside the million ton bulk of the colonial freighter. She left a message that she was bound for Ostia, and would be gone eighteen days. Bree hit ground two days later, and a bar an angry hour after that.

He took a few fast, high-paying jobs: transporting a hunter android from Dalcut to Shiva's Rest, freighting drugs from Shiva to Heronsworld. He

queried Dalcut from both planets, but there was no further word from Cunny.

Ostia had undergone a rebellion. Its government had finally agreed to democracy...with the restriction any voter must own at least five per cent of the planetary surface. The rebels had imported a dozen espers, hidden in the bowels of the freighter guided by Cunny, who proceeded to separate all government officials into five per cent-sized chunks.

The Ostians had very broad limbs, seven toes to each foot, seven fingers to each hand, but that breadth wasn't repeated in every part of their bodies, and after Cunny had sampled two Ostian lovers, she concluded disappointedly that the stubby fingers should have warned her.

Heronsworld is the planet of the ice-yachts. Chein Bree was challenged to a race; he had never sailed, and took only a few hours instruction. By strict logic, he should have lost; but Bree was from Ryan's Will, and at the last moment he swerved his craft directly towards his opponent. Forced to veer away, the other yacht capsized with a scream of tortured metal, a spray of ice-shards.

Bree, unsatisfied by the victory, still furious at his near-defeat, took his challenger's near-human woman to bed, and waited to be caught. The door was blasted to fragments just as the female reached a bone-wrenching orgasm, her tail roped round his waist as she hammered his loins against hers, as her sharp-toothed mouth growled ecstasy. The smashing door made him roll from her, clawing for his other weapon...but the male in the doorway did not fire again, he ignored Bree totally, his eyes fixed on the moaning female as she twisted with unsatisfied desire on the rumpled bed. He took a slow step forward, then another, the gun fell unheeded as he pulled the jerkin and breechclout off his body, then launched himself...

Bree stared, mouth wide. As the male's penis erected, it split along its length .. he tilted his female's hips and plunged the twin spires into the *two* anxiously moist apertures. She keened acceptance. Bree shook his head, only now aware why his own thick phallus had seemed strangely angled inside her. He hadn't thought enough, or cared enough, to check.

On Ryan's Will, you went after the things you wanted. If you died in the

attempt, you hadn't wanted it enough. Yet, even on a world of winners, only a fool challenged someone with better equipment, or took a challenge beyond sensible limits.

Bree had wanted to humiliate his opponent, and prove himself better in bed - but there was no contest possible. The male was no longer a competitor. Bree could let him live. He left.

Cunny went to Tryle, Benedict, Yriah, and Hell. Without knowing, Bree and Ingus were on Benedict on the same day, hired by different companies and billeted half the world apart. Benedict's ruling race were intelligent plants. Bree and Ingus couldn't resist the idea...

The long leaves wrapped tight round Cunny's body, the hardened sepal had teased its way into her, spiralled up into her depths, its mildly electric field shocked a small orgasm from her with every inch it ascended; her pleasure-drugged body arched backwards into the welcoming foliage, her skin flushed almost as red as the leaves that stretched her legs wide for the invading, slick fronds as they stroked the walls of her shivering vagina, rocked and thrust her into unconsciousness, and seemingly endless climax.

For Bree, the alien incubus became succubus, its leaves and petals caressed each millimetre of skin, winding round his erection by slow degrees, gently moved him in huge arms of shrubbery, gripped and held his arms as he strove to assert control of the act, mentally denying his helplessness; they moved him faster and then faster still, until his Rynic control snapped utterly and he erupted, filled with anger.

Their messages accumulated on Dalcut. Bree's were abrupt, Cunny's detailed and conversational. To them both, lovers were temporary relief, but no more; their frustrated plans had become an obsession, a hard need. Then Cunny made a call to Dalcut, and Bree's recorded voice said he was about to lift off Yriah. She stared at the screen in dismay, then began to curse him, damning him to the worst hell she could conceive; the planet below her *was* Yriah. In her last message to Dalcut, she had told him she was on her way here.

The computer interrupted her stream of anger, indicating a contact

attempt. She snapped to transmit, "Ingus acknowledging. Repeat message."

In seconds, a face swam into focus. Bree smiled, " I delayed leaving. I'm in orbit now. Unhired. What about you?"

She returned the smile, " I'm not wanted either, I don't think. Any ideas?"

"Go down?"

"I want to be first," and her hands whipped to the controls, cutting the contact even as she shouted, "..meet you at the spaceport."

She didn't see the change in his face, didn't hear his sudden agonised demand. She accelerated out of orbit, down to the waiting planet, her small craft hurtling towards the spaceport. Bree, unprepared, was still only a second behind her in his movements, but he had to unlock orbit before he could join the race. The silver arrowhead of his vessel, driven as much by his fury as its rockets, smashed down through the atmosphere. With every frustrated moment, his anger grew.

Her ship settled into its assigned cradle. She beat him by almost a minute. She watched him land, feeling the anticipatory dampness of her groin, labia moist at the thought of his hands on her. She slipped on her tabard and slacks, thin and form-fitting to emphasise the curved promise beneath. She was standing on the ground before he had even opened his hatch.

Her long hair battled with the gusting breeze. He climbed down slowly, eyes fixed on her as she strode swaying to him, stood close and grinned, " Beat you that time."

"You did," he said tightly, his voice drained of emotion.

She turned slightly to look round, " Where to, first?"

His voice was curt and cold, " My world is Ryan's Will. Do you know what that means?"

"Does it matter?" she said, distracted.

"It does. On Ryan, we can only win."

"Not much fun, I know plenty of games where we both win." Her gaze became fixed. Yriah was a hot world, dry and humid, its people only needed to wear minimum clothing. Cunny watched a woman whose black hair and ruby skin gleamed against the pale orange of her dress; the dress reached her knees but was split up both sides to her waist. Her legs were slim and shapely, her naked breasts were cupped by the dress, nipples hard and prominent. The breeze changed direction, to snatch at the dress and display the nakedness beneath.

Cunny gasped as lust ripped through her, hand clenching on Bree's arm at the thought of the woman's supple curves tight against her as she rocked them both to climax, as she rocked all three of them --

She turned, not realising even now how she had infuriated him and challenged him and beaten him; in his eyes she had become a Ryan woman - and the sexes had reason to stay apart on that world. He could not stop his next action, programmed by half a lifetime on Ryan's Will.

"What a morsel! I could -- " Her bubbling words broke, smile fading, her bright eyes filled with dismay. Bree held a gun, its muzzle trained on her.

His stricken eyes flicked from the woman to Cunny, ".. even that," he murmured sadly.

"Why?" she asked him, bewildered.

"Competitor," he named her in a dead voice - the finality of destruction: what couldn't be beaten should be destroyed.

She barely managed to cross her wrists in front of her face before he fired.

CRASH CAMERON AND THE SLIME BEAST

by S. Dale

When Crash Cameron, Trouble-Shooter of Tomorrow, got back to the rocketship *Space Gas* with his prize -- a fist-sized chunk of *Unrealium XZ*, the precious radioactive substance with which he had intended to recharge his craft's depleted energo-battery cells -- his keen mind quickly sensed that something was amiss. The airlock doors were standing open. Pools of foul-smelling gray slime covered the ground around the spaceship and were to be found throughout the interior of the vessel. And Aula was missing.

All of the evidence could lead to but one chilling conclusion, Crash realized, his steely gray eyes flashing. Aula had once again been carried off by some sort of bug-eyed monster!

The Earthman sighed resignedly. Aula's talent for getting snatched was positively uncanny: no matter where they went or what they did, he was always having to drop everything at least once per adventure just to go rescue the girl from one or more of the invariably hostile and inexplicably lustful monsters of outer space. Aula could be a genuine pain in the main stern propulsion tube at times, Crash thought with a flash of bitterness. She was always loudly insisting that he never paid enough attention to her, always distracting him as he piloted the *Space Gas* through the ether between planets, always letting fly with fresh denunciations whenever he would patiently try to explain that there was no room in his life for mushy stuff so long as there was still the battle against Evil and Injustice to be waged. But he was used to having her around, and, despite all her shortcomings, he did not want anything *serious* to happen to her. Faithful female companions were hard to come by.

Crash Cameron checked his ray blaster to see that it was still fully charged and stepped from the airlock. The purple sand of Planetoid KM-12 crunched under the tread of his heavy magno-boots as he followed a trail of mucus which obviously marked the path taken by Aula's abductor. The light of the distant sun glinted on the Earthman's glassine helmet and gleamed on his ruggedly handsome features.

Crash knew that he did not really need to wear the bulky spacesuit and round helmet on Planetoid KM-12, since one of the myriad marvelous qualities of *Unrealium XZ* was its ability to generate a breathable atmosphere. Crash, in fact, had not even strapped oxygen bottles to his back. But he had never been able to feel completely clothed unless he was wearing both suit and helmet, and it was only by dint of

incessant harping that Aula ever got him to remove the latter long enough to brush his strong, white teeth. Aula herself, to the best of his knowledge, had never tried on her own spacesuit. She preferred bikinis and little tunics that accentuated, rather than concealed, her comely form.

The rolling expanse of purple sand soon gave way to a series of rocky hills. The slime trail led into the yawning black mouth of a cave in the side of a rugged cliff.

Ray blaster at the ready, Crash Cameron switched on the infra-light projecto-disk built into the big, round buckle of his belt. The infra-light bathed the interior of the cave and revealed a smooth, sandy floor, twisted masses of stalactites, and damp walls covered with strange graffiti:

TARS TARKAS SUCKS EGGS

GRAG LOVES OTHO

I LIKE GRILS

The Trouble-Shooter of Tomorrow entered cautiously and crept forward, soon noticing that the floor of the cavern sloped gradually downward into the heart or bowels, whichever, of Planetoid KM-12.

After fifteen minutes' stealthy progress, he emerged abruptly into a large, dimly lighted chamber. In the center of the room, on a crude stone dais, Aula, her smooth creamy globes straining at their silken prisons, writhed in the gooey clutches of a hideous monstrosity, the like of which Crash had never seen in all his travels throughout the solar system. The beast was massive and floppy and unspeakable, with patches of green mottling upon its corpse-gray skin. It had long, waving antennae terminating in enormous multi-faceted eyes, plus mandibles, tentacles, spines, spikes, bumps, warts, wattles, and a weak chin.

Cold rage settled over Crash Cameron as he heard Aula moan in the thing's loathsome embrace. The Earthman shot from the hip and had the satisfaction of seeing destructo-rays sear through the obscenely bloated mass.

With an inhuman wail, the slime beast turned from Aula, slithered off the dais to land with a wet plop on the sandy floor, and advanced upon the unflinching Earthman. Its loose, flabby lips drew back to reveal sharp teeth as long as a man's fingers.

A grim smile touched Crash Cameron's lips as he aimed his ray blaster straight at the creature's gross maw and pressed the firing stud. The death-dealing beams leaped from the ray blaster's muzzle and disappeared down the thing's gullet. The slime beast vanished noisily amid a cloud of stinking, oily smoke.

Her hands pressed tight against her heaving bosom, Aula slid her befouled legs over the edge of the dais as Crash stepped around the blackened spot where the monster had been atomized. Viscid slobber covered the girl from head to foot. Her bikini was in tatters. Her face was a mask of horror commingled with shock and disgust as she looked first at the scorched sand and then at the Trouble-Shooter of Tomorrow.

"Oh, Crash!" Aula sobbed. "You big, dumb lug! What did you have to do that for? The creature didn't harm me!" Crash, who had been moving forward to catch her in his outstretched arms, stopped in his tracks, utterly flabbergasted. "You ruined it! Jerk! And just when, for the first time in my whole life, I was beginning to *feel* like a woman!"

Crash Cameron shook his head in bewilderment. "What are you talking about, Aula?"

"The slime beast and I ran away together, stupid!"

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THE CITY IN THE SYRTIS

By Carleton Grindle

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He was called the Man Who Hunted the Canals. On foot or in tractor he wandered the deserts and mountains and ice fields of Mars searching for things men knew did not exist; for there was no intelligent life on Mars save that which rode the rockets from Earth. In the cities of the Earthmen he was a source of amusement for the men who told stories, some of them even true, about his exploits. He could not enter a tavern without hearing the stories about himself, could not pass a group of children without hearing derisive laughter. Yet still he searched. Through Elysium and Cebrena across Aetheria, Nodos Alcyonus, from Hecates to Chaos to Morpheos, Nosamon to Nelis. He walked through fine red sand, across plain and crater, over the hills searching for any sign at all that once there was intelligent life on Mars. It was a fool's search and he was called the Man Who Hunted the Canals because of it. His name was Golding and he at last came to a city deep within the Syrtis Major.

It was unlike any city any man ever saw.

Crystal spires rose from the desert like the tips of Christmas tree ornaments to catch the light of a distant sun and send it back in dazzling twinkles. Curving metal strips -- walkways or highways -- rose among the spires. Elaborate structures whose existence defied the laws of stress and gravity and perhaps even sanity, twisted and lifted themselves from their grave's covering of red dust. It was a half-buried city and possibly Golding was the first man to find it merely because the wind had shifted the sand away from it for the first time in centuries. But Golding did not wonder at that. The weak and insignificant wind of Mars blew around the spires and shapes of the city and played music on the alien materials.

As Golding stepped from the sand of the Syrtis onto the ancient strip of a road, a feeling ran along his spine to tell him that all around him were the ghosts of Martians come to welcome their first visitor from Earth. He stood for a long moment listening to the music of the suffocated wind, watching the glintings of transparent sunlight from the spires.

"O God," he said at last and went into the city.

It was said of Golding that he was insane. If so those grounds, those buildings, the

rooms and hallways, the furnishings, the works of art and science that he found -- all were equal to his madness.

Until at last he came to something that surpassed it.

He had no idea that it was that fantastic. It seemed to him just to be a room. In one of the tallest buildings of the city he rode a shaft of air, straight up as if invisible hands carried him to the uppermost level. He stepped out onto a platform and there before him was the room.

It was circular, the ceiling dark, the walls coral, the floor pale translucent gold. There were no windows in the wall, no furniture in the room. No seams where panels joined in the wall, floor or ceiling. In the center of the room was an opening in the floor.

From that opening, a light.

Golding walked slowly toward the opening, half expecting another gravity shaft. He stood on the edge and looked down.

Far below something glowed, pale and lambent with soft yellow light in the darkness.

It was a mystery but in the time he had already spent in the Martian city, Golding's sense of the mysterious had jaded a bit. For all its strangeness, the glow at the bottom of the shaft was just another puzzlement, just another wonder in a storehouse filled with wonders. He stared down at it, had not the slightest idea what it was -- and shrugged his shoulders. He turned away.

But deep within the shaft, something stirred.

Long serpentine tendrils shifted and twisted in the darkness.

A yellow glowing tentacle touched the smooth wall of the shaft.

Touched -- tried to climb -- could not.

An alien mind sent out a command to the walls about it.

The walls obeyed.

And in the room above, Golding did not know.

Nor really did he care. He was tired. Tired from a day of impossibilities, from a day of events past his imagining. The room was warm and rough it lacked furniture, Golding was a man used to sleeping in the desert. This was luxury enough. He folded his jacket for a pillow and went to sleep there in the room.

As he slept, he dreamed.

For the past twenty years his dream had been the same. He was walking through the desert. He climbed a low Martian hill and as he topped it he saw before him a canal. It stretched as far as the eye could see and in it blue water lapped against a barge wherein stood seven lovely pale faced women who wore no airmasks in the Martian atmosphere. It was an old dream, the one he fed on because he searched for something other men scoffed at. Now that he had found the city he would need new dreams.

In the night, something woke him.

He woke with a start. The room was darker now, the only light the glow from the central shaft. There had been a sound. Golding was sure of that.

"What is it?" he called.

For answer: silence.

For comfort: not even echo.

For his imagination --

Golding was not a morbid man but no man spends years wandering an alien desert with nothing to feed his spirits but raw hope, without his mind being affected in some way. Now, from Golding's memory there came a score of impressions long filed away and forgotten. Sounds made by small dry things blown across the sand; sounds made by living movement in the desert; sounds of strange insectile life forms, most of which were still unclassified. And sights. Mirages. Incidents coated with the dust of years suddenly vivid to him. And things he had imagined and then discarded as silly came back to him and seemed no longer silly.

He got to his feet and walked to the open shaft.

He stared down.

He saw only the pale yellow glow of the light. It was not so strong as to hurt his eyes, but he could distinguish no feature, not even a shadow, within or around the light. It seemed larger as if it were nearer the lip of the shaft. It was a puzzle, but only one more puzzle. He could not let it occupy his mind for long.

He returned to his sleeping place and slept dreamlessly until morning.

But he arose determined he would find another place to sleep if he spent another night in the city. Then he ate and went to resume his exploration.

During the day he toured a single building wherein were housed the records of the old Martians.

He saw their rise from savagery to civilization recorded in holographs that formed at their own command before his eyes and played out their tales with the skill of a great film maker back on Earth. There was much he could not understand, but surprisingly much he could. He saw the Martians' rise and the wonders of their civilization. He saw the building of the City and how it was intended to protect and care for its inhabitants. But he also saw something of the manner of their passing. When he had his fill the day was spent.

And like a fool, forgetting his promise to himself, Golding returned to the tower room where he had spent the night before.

He stared down into the shaft. And he noted two things.

First, the light seemed somehow closer to the top. Not brighter or larger. Closer. He assumed it was some kind of mechanism, glowing brightly, and moving in the shaft. Would it continue to rise or would it reach a certain point then start down again?

Secondly, he noticed that the wall of the shaft itself had changed.

Before it was smooth, like glass. Now it was rough and pitted. So pitted he believed it offered sufficient hand and foot holds for a man to climb down into it. But he didn't think it had changed for his benefit, but to accommodate the light. And that frightened him.

He turned to leave.

He never made the door.

It seemed to him that the air he breathed in his airmask grew sweeter and somehow richer, filled with too much oxygen. There was sound, too. It was as if someone or something were singing to him . . . though he knew there was perfect silence in that chamber save for his own rasping breath. He was suddenly very tired. The day had taken so much from him. He wanted to sleep and he saw no reason to find another place.

He made his way to the wall of the room and slid to the floor. He lay, his body slumped, his eyes closed . . . He thought about the Martians. Of what he had seen in their records. They were dreamers, like him. An odd time for such a thought? Yes. But now Golding was about to dream.

Across the room, a sound unnoticed by the man who was passing into slumber. The

wall of the shaft grew even rougher. Still far below the edge of the shaft something, not hands, touched the wall, found traction, and climbed. \u8230 \ '85 An alien mind reached out and saw that the man was asleep.

Asleep and dreaming.

Dreaming that he walked the desert.

Dreaming that he found the canal.

Water lapped the banks; cool blue water, its surface like moving glass: rough yet smooth at the same time.

And on the water there floated a barge.

The barge, occupied by pale-faced maidens serenely floated toward the place where Golding waited. In the bow of the boat one of the maidens stood. Her long skirt was made of a translucent material that did not conceal her long, slender legs. Her waist was supple and her bare breasts pale and strong with youth. Her hair was a pale, filmy red, and her oval face held the calmness of a desert with no wind. Her blue staring eyes focused directly on Golding, beckoning, promising. The barge moved slowly, the movement of it as it drifted toward him becoming a dream \f4 \ quotes eternity. But then the boat was pulling to the edge of the canal and eternity ended.

Golding did not move.

It was the same old dream. But did he really need a new one now?

The slender red-haired woman stepped from the barge and came toward him.

She stopped two yards away, holding out her arms. A smile played on her lips as she beckoned him.

"Come to me," she said.

Golding stepped toward her.

From the maiden there seemed to spread a light, pale yellow and lambent. Golding heard a sound.

And stopped.

She held out her arms to close around him. Again he heard the sound. Had he heard it before?

"Do not stand there, Golding. Come to me."

She knew his name.

He made as if to move, then stopped again.

"Come to me, Golding. Come to me as those others did so long ago. Those who built this city. Come to me."

Was this really a dream? He was standing there, gazing at a woman whose arms were stretched out for him. Or was it a woman? There was a light . . .

He said, "What are you?"

"Come here and I will show you." Her arms reached out for him.

He heard the sound again. A rasping sound suggesting breathing in an odd, unfamiliar way.

Not his breathing.

He stepped back, away from her. "You're not what you seem to be," he said weakly.

"I am everything I seem. Come here and I will show you. Come to me, Golding. It has been long. I am hungry."

"What are you hungry for?" he asked. "My dreams? You fed on their dreams, didn't you? Long ago, the Martian dreams. And now --"

"Come here," she commanded.

The yellow light flickered and shimmered, then frosted like a yellow pane of glass in winter. Then, as if the glass grew warm the frost cleared from Golding's sight and he saw. But he no longer saw the woman from the barge. He no longer saw her hands and arms held out for him. Instead he saw something else and that something did not hold out arms.

Golding whimpered. He turned and ran.

In panic, he ran to the lift shaft and rode it down to ground level. He fled the building. He reached the city's edge and ran into the desert beyond. Across the desert and how far he never knew: when at last exhaustion forced him to stop and he looked back, he could not see the city. Already the wind was carrying fine dust to and fro in small clouds low against the desert.

He made his way at last to an Earthmen's city and told his story. Most of those who heard did not believe him but they added the tale to their store of legends about him. They were not even impressed when Golding bought a ticket back to Earth and left Mars forever.

Still, a few souls did believe him and they continue searching for the city to this day. It has never been found -- at least not yet.

Still they search. They scour Syrtis Major and Elysium and the other Martian deserts, looking. The wind still blows.

Someday the wind might free the city once again.

THE UNKINDEST CUT OF ALL

Steven Utley

The Goo, as it was to be named (because no one ever figured out what else to call it), journeyed from Mars as a plum-sized blister of green gunk firmly attached to the hull of a spaceship returning to Earth.

After only four days on Earth, it attained the size of a bear and became the subject of much discussion, both due to the fact that it liked to eat.

On bleak, inhospitable Mars, of course, its kind had always had to get by on an unvarying diet of near-microscopic living things found living in the iron-rich topsoil of the arid Martian plains; the round green globs simply rolled across the ground, absorbing little life-forms and seldom getting much bigger than the average-sized acne blemish on an anchovy, though there were occasional specimens that stumbled onto inordinately food-rich pastures and consequently grew as large as baseballs.

On Earth, however (there being quite a bit more to eat: eleven and one half billion human beings and, not counting insects, at least eight thousand individual animals, according to the World Census Bureau Report issue in 2052), the Goo grew fat, successfully ingesting ninety-two field mice, ten rabbits, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree before the opportunity to sample this new world's dominant life-form presented itself. This came about when the Martian predator was found in a ditch by two International Guardsmen out for a weekend of mock-war in what passed for the countryside.

One of the Guardsman tried to pin the then-basketball-big Goo to the ground with his bayonet. The monster simply shot up the length of the rifle and enveloped the man. The victim's utterly appalled companion threw down his weapon, turned, and plied swift knees to his superiors, who naturally checked the man's gear for certain proscribed substances. When nothing turned up, the tale-teller was dispatched to talk to a psychiatrist and wound up being asked all sorts of embarrassing questions about his childhood.

It was not until a couple of days later, when the Goo barreled up out of a storm drain to attack sixty-five people tied up in a minor traffic jam and make off with two of them in full sight of witnesses, that the Guardsman's story was finally given consideration.

By this time, the Goo had grown very large indeed and was in fact so swollen with unassimilated foodstuffs that it at last elected to come to dead stop in the middle of a beautiful green meadow, one of the last on Earth, and finish the task of digestion.

Apprised of its whereabouts by a low-flying pleasure-jetter, the International Guard moved in with mortars, traser-beam projectors, and a battalion of riflemen, and surrounded the Martian, which did nothing the whole time but slush its insides around and dream its inconceivable Goo-dreams.

The officer in charge of the operation smiled confidently as he sent his riflemen in to take the first crack at the creature. The riflemen drew beads on the inert green balloon and opened fire, causing it to stir just long enough to eject the hot bits of metal.

The commander pursed his lips thoughtfully, moved the riflemen back out of harm's way, and ordered the mortars to smear the thing all over the ground. The mortars in short time made a total shambles of the beautiful green meadow, but, though knocked about during the bombardment, the Goo emerged looking not the least bit smeared.

Grinding his teeth at the obscene imperturbability of the creature, the commander next gave the nod to the traser-beam projectors, which cut loose with a deadly barrage of weird rays that served only to create a very pretty marbling effect on the Goo's taut surface.

The commander was reduced to chewing his gold braid.

"Let's try poisonous gas," suggested a lieutenant. They tried poisonous gas. Nothing came of it.

"High voltage!"

Again, nothing.

The commander sighed. "Get me Doctor Fredric Coslan," he said, and the great scientist Doctor Fredric Coslan was summarily got by jetcopter from his private laboratory, with time allowed for only the briefest of explanations and the most hurried of preparations.

A robust man in his early forties, Coslan arrived with a curiously wrought rifle under one arm. At his side hung a pouch from which came the occasional clink of glass upon glass. He studied the Goo through a borrowed pair of binoculars for several minutes before speaking to the fretting officers.

"It's as I surmised," he told them. "A bloated specimen, thanks to its recent repasts, but nonetheless nothing more than one of those desert-living predators found on Mars.

I came prepared to deal with it." Coslan reached into his pouch and drew forth a slim glass cylinder.

"Remember how H. G. Wells' Martian invaders got theirs in *The War of the Worlds*? The monsters in Wells' novel walked all over the armies of Earth but were ultimately defeated by common bacteria. I have here a hollow glass bullet containing a smear of just such a common bacterium, which I intend to shoot into that, uh, *goo* down there. The creature should fare very miserably indeed once impact breaks the tube within its body and releases the bacteria."

With that, the doctor placed the cartridge in the breech of his rifle and set off toward the snoozing Goo.

The Goo had almost finished breaking its last major meal down into basic components and was beginning to show signs of reanimation by the time Coslan came into position a hundred yards away. The Martian reactivated its various sensory organs and was immediately apprised of the presence of a warm living thing of some size within easy rolling distance.

Doctor Coslan brought the rifle to his shoulder and took careful aim.

The menace from Mars lurched forward. It traveled five yards before Coslan fired, covered another twenty after the glass bullet ripped through its skin, leaving no wound, and disintegrated deep inside, and then it began to wobble about erratically.

The bacteria started to do their deadly work almost at once.

They attacked the Martian's oddly contrived organs, turned semi-solid tissues into great hot pockets of noxious gas, and were in turn attacked and acted upon by alien secretions. Their normal rate of activity accelerated beyond belief as a result of this chemical stimulation, the bacteria proliferated and mutated in totally berserk fashion, spreading throughout the Goo, hollowing it out, putrefying everything in their path.

The drumhead-tight skin, normally translucent, turned opaque. A thin, tough, non-porous rind formed.

So died the Goo.

But within its puffball husk, driven to the inner surface of the rind by the mounting pressure of internal gases, the bacteria thrived on and begat and *evolved*. Within the space of human heartbeats, whole orders sprang up only to vanish completely, eaten by stronger strains which gave way in their turn to others deadlier still. Within seven minutes of the instant at which he had fired the glass bullet into the Goo, Doctor Coslan would not have recognized his common bacterium.

Exposed to it, he would not even have lived long enough to note the difference.

The deadly little thing could not penetrate the rind, however.

Thus was Earth saved.

At last satisfied that the Goo was truly defunct, Coslan called to the officers of the International Guard. As the commander and a handful of men made their way across the torn-up ground, the doctor reached into his pouch again and withdrew a small bladed instrument and an empty tube with a plastic stopper.

"Doctor Coslan, you did it!" laughed the commander as he trotted up. He watched Coslan approach the Goo and carefully place the razor-sharp blade of his scalpel edge-down on the rind. "What're you up to?"

"I want a tissue sample before you haul this thing away to have it atomized," explained the doctor. And cut.

Thus was Earth destroyed.

EDITORIAL

LAST ISSUE???

[Comment by emailing shelvy@planetarystories.com](mailto:shelvy@planetarystories.com)

Yeah, this might be our last issue! Contributions have been flowing in; it isn't that. In fact, we're LOADED with stories. The trouble is YOU! I have said, time and again, I want some feedback. What are we doing right? Equally important, what are we doing WRONG???

Do you, the reader, like what we are doing?

Not that it's been too much work. Oh, yeah, there has been work involved, headaches and worries. "Will there be enuf to fill our next issue?" "Where will I get my illustrations?" "Will I ever finish the next Space Marshal story?" Plus, of course, getting stories set up right to show them, checking for typos, layout, etc.

But, believe it or not, it's been fun. I'll continue doing it -- if I find out enuf people are enjoying what I do.

Don't misunderstand me; there have been lots of hits; over 1000 for ish numbers one and two, and we have passed 1600 on the last issue. But the FIRST issue brought in around a thousand hits and DOZENS of letters!

Yeah, yeah; the first issue was something brand new and attracted attention. I loved it! Loved it so much I brought out numbers two and three.

But it died!

Oh, some more letters came in, all right -- some good ones! But some of the

letters that showed up in Ether were phoney letters I put in just to fill space! Some were actually taken from comments in listservs, not sent directly to us. I enjoyed the comments -- but, if this is any good, can't you write planetarystories.com and tell us?

Don't misunderstand me. Whilst detailed letters are muchly enjoyed (even if they're taking us over the coals, like one letter in Ether this time) I'm really just wanting to know if you want me to continue. Like, in ish number three I asked for reaction to a short story taken from a novel I've been working on for years. Wanted to know if anyone thot I should continue the story about the Space Spectre.

No one mentioned it at all.

Further, every issue has carried the "Write!" feature, where I explain that the only payment I want for what I'm doing is -- comments.

Well, even tho I already have a little material for number five, (as I said, used most of it this time! Didn't want it lost if I stop) there won't be one if we don't hear from you.

[HOME](#)

Sensawunda

ShelVy (from **fictionmags**)

There was a discussion on fictionmags I thot readers might enjoy, concerning Sense Of Wonder - shortened to "sensawunda". I asked permission to use it in Planetary Stories. I'm by no means including it all, just the following highlights.

Taken from a letter by Ken Brown:

The point of such posthuman stories is that what the characters know or learn is not just in excess of what we readers grasp, it's by definition somewhat in advance of what **anyone** today knows (certainly including the story's writer), and then soars to some yet greater conceptual dislocation, astonishment piled on astonishment. **** In this light, one might see 'Conceptual Breakthrough' as a subset of 'Sense of Wonder': Conceptual Breakthrough the sensawunda you do -- at least partly -- understand, and a 'Conceptual Dislocation' the sensawunda you cannot -- by definition -- understand. The latter could be seen as transcendence -- a term Greg Egan hates, IIRC -- although I believe (pun intended) that there is a distinct difference in religious transcendence (knowledge brought to you by a Supreme Being), and transcendence by expanding one's knowledge mostly through one's own efforts. Damien's 'Conceptual Dislocation' would then be a frustrated form of transcendence because the required knowledge is too advanced, and therefore out of reach. Sense of astonished frustration, anyone? I agree there are lots of **other** forms of sense of wonder, but still, one way or another, it's the **possibility** of conceptual breakthrough, of seeing things in a different light, that powers sensawunda. I remain that they are closely related.

From: Rich Horton

David P. wrote: "Yes, I'm sure "sense of wonder" and "conceptual breakthrough" are one and the same thing (and I was surprised at Phil S-P seeming to make a distinction between them). I don't think I'd agree. My

understanding of the term conceptual breakthrough" " is that it applies to cases where the =character= suddenly understands the nature " of his or her world -- and thereby also the reader. AKA Cosmic Irony? Like dramatic irony - the audience know what the characters don't. " I think "sense of wonder" also applies to cases in which the " characters are completely aware of -- immersed in -- " their world, but the reader comes to understand its nature. " I don't see such stories as "conceptual breakthrough" stories. But "sensawunda" is more than that also less than that in a structural sense). Its also the reader realising something about their own world, the one the reader lives in. Or if not realising, roleplaying, allowing themselves to think that it might be. That something may be possible. Walking around on this earth as if It might be true, They might be out there. The canonical "sensawunda" is Nightfall. That star moment, which turns up in all sorts of sf. Its in Surface Tension. Asimov and Blish were both surprised that those stories were amongst their most popular. It works not because we now know that there are stars in the fictional subcreated world - we always did - or because we now care that the characters see that there are stars in their world - those are characters so hollow we have already forgotten their names - but because we are reminded that there are stars in *our* world. And we recall a moment when we saw them and wondered. It doesn't have to be good thoughts of course - Lovecraft does it regularly. As do worse writers. We Are Property. Mark S.Geston does a good line in paranoid Sensawunda. Anyone read The Day Star? And in non-sf of course. Its in the Bible. A big chunk of the book of Job is Gosh! Wow! Some of it is about stars. Right at the beginning, in Genesis, God speaks to Abraham and tells him to count the stars - if you can. Bronze age sensawunda.

Ian Covell wrote: " The _actual_ Sense of Wonder is not at all about "conceptual breakthrough", it's about being made to " feel there is Wonder in this universe, beyond the here and now; worlds and lands and times and peoples " and thoughts other than what we know.. Yes, that's it! Though ... " Look at the muddle Clarke (in the 2001 set) and Niven (in his desperate " attempts re Ringworld) have got into.in their attempts to display their " knowledge of "current science", both began to produce almost unreadable works " which barely existed as fiction. ... my 16-year-old daughter, not much of a hard sf reader, read and very much enjoyed Ringworld a couple of days ago. (And is now laughing at or with RA

Lafferty ;-)

" I find it extraordinarily revealing that so thorny, dialectically complex and hyper-theorised a reader of sf and fantasy as Fred Jameson should be driven to confess: "I am probably not alone in finding the latest hard sf based on informational processes (even by so estimable a writer as Greg Egan) relatively unreadable" (ARCHAEOLOGIES OF THE FUTURE, p. " 68).

I caught that sentence too, and was fascinated by it, especially as I'd just read something about Jameson which started by saying how difficult *he* was. I think I like Egan not because of the "informational processes" but because of the maths. In part he's a much more complex Edwin "Flatland" Abbott. Being much less than semi-competent in maths and geometry I find being asked to imagine what it's *like* to experience multi-dimensional space a mind-wrenching experience. Almost (and this is what surprised me about Jameson's comment) like being asked to imagine what it really *would* be like to live in a society radically different in *values* (as opposed to seeing modern social trends extrapolated slightly for satirical purposes). And that (a world which is physically *and* morally different) is what Egan is asking us to think about.

- Andy Sawyer

From: "Ian Covell" "Sensawunda"/Ringworld & Nightfall

I quote from:

"Shelby Vick"

"Recently re-read Nightfall and it still Grabbed me. (The writing wasn't that great, but The Concept!) Maybe it's becos I have a childish mind. . .

Shelby"

This is interesting, because it happens to me too.. and you'd have thought the "sense of wonder" would thin when you have nothing to "wonder" about [I mean, you _know_ the situation, it should be "familiar"] but somehow like you -- and maybe like "all" SF fans -- the talent I have is for

repeatedly enjoying the same thing again and again, and somehow the pleasure is either constant, or different, but in either case it exists.

-- "..and then you dig a hole and put this in it.. and then what do you do with the rest of your life.."

-- "..overhead, slowly, and without any fuss, the stars were going out.."

-- "..the shadow of the awning fell across his face like a cool drink of water."

-- "..When the great markets by the sea shut fast / All that calm Sunday that goes on and on: / When even lovers find their peace at last, And Earth is but a star, that once had shone"

-- the super spaceship breaking up "slowly, majestically" into its designed sections in THE STORM

-- "The doorknob opened an eye and blinked at him."

-- "and then it was night, under a sky of stratified sapphire.."

-- "night fell, even here"

-- "tenser, said the tensor,/ tension, apprehension and dissension have begun [RIFF]..."

-- "I AM THE LAND.."

-- the elements we are made of can only be created in the heart of suns, which live a billion years, then explode to scatter their remnants through space

-- "i am only a poor starveling indigent, sir, and i want to go home.."

-- "he made the choice we all would make.."

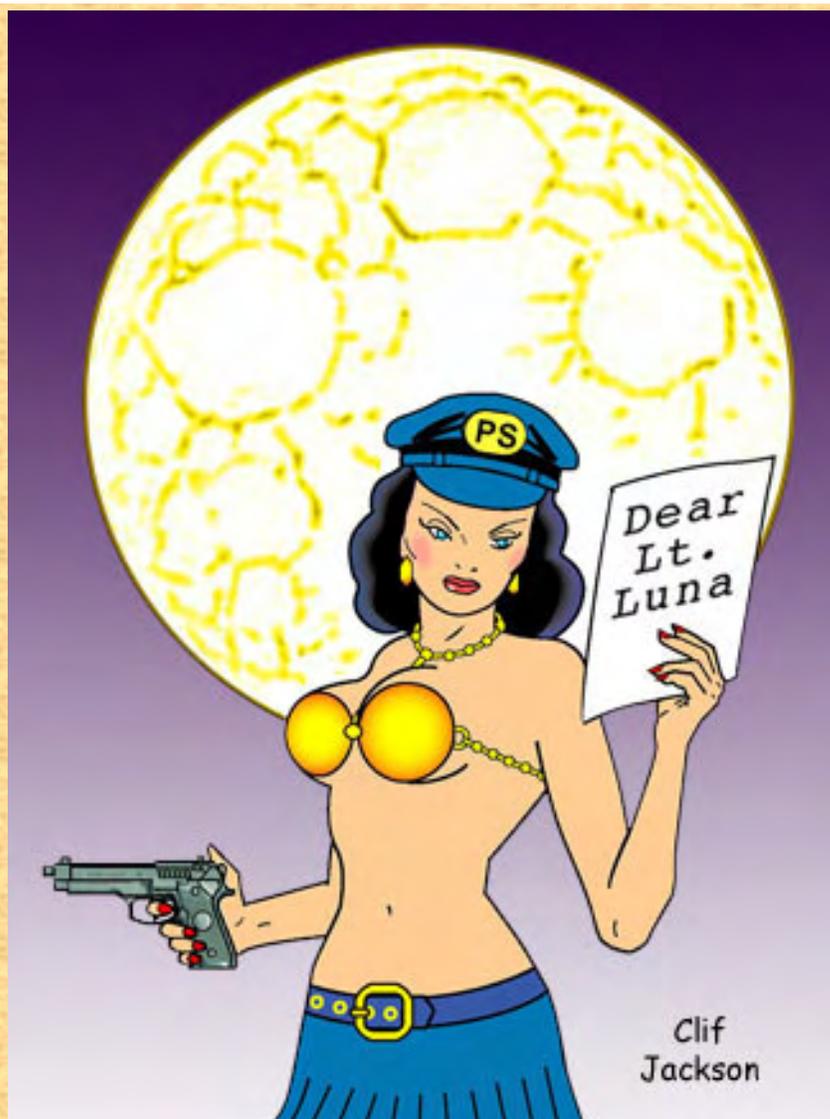
beloved stories, poems, wrenching you out of yourself, twisting you sideways and about, filling your ears with alien sounds, your eyes with alien sights, your mind with sudden, complete clarity, with a wild surmise, "silent, upon a peak in Darien Just Go With It" was essentially Asimov's reponse to the questionable science in "Nightfall". I met him a few times, and when he graciously signed my copy of Astounding in which "Nightfall" originally appeared, I asked him if he had actually framed a sun/planet series that would allow the events of "Nightfall" to happen. He replied that, no, he hadn't, and still did not know how such a system could be. Perhaps this is sensawunda fantasy -mystery/magic unsupported by science? When I first read it at 11 or 12, I just took it as bad science in a

not-very-good story. I am not sure that I have looked at it since, so I don't know what I would think now.

Mark Owings

Any comments??? --ShelVy

FROM THE VIBRATING ETHER



Dear Lovely Luna –

How 'bout this? I'm writing my own mag a letter! The idea behind it is that **SOME** people might not be aware of the importance letter columns had on fandom back in the pulp days. And others, like me, might have forgotten some details. I dug around some and, with a lot of help from Ted White and rich brown, came up with this:

In the 1940s, lettercolumns in pulp magazines –primarily Planet Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories and Startling Stories and CAPTAIN FUTURE –were the focus of sf fandom. Because of the war, there was a paper shortage which greatly reduced the number of fanzines available.

PLANET STORIES –The Vizigraph

THRILLING WONDER STORIES (hereafter TWS) –The Reader Speaks
STARTLING STORIES (hereafter SS) –The Ether Vibrates
CAPTAIN FUTURE –Under Observation

As many remember, Sarge Saturn ruled in TWS and SS, and was in Captain Future as well. He edited The Ether Vibrates, (in SS) which suggested our lettercol name. (I know, I know; then why is our name Planetary Stories? Good question. Someday, I might have an answer.)

The following taken from Timebinders. Began, I think, about August 5, 2005. Summed up in this letter from Ted White, August 8, 2005:

TWS also had a fanzine review column called "The Frying Pan." I broke down and went upstairs to my collection to research all this. First, Sarge Saturn appeared from the beginning of 1941 and lasted through the end of 1946, and a short bit into 1947 (going by the dates on the magazines). Specifically, he makes his first appearance (in my collection) in CAPTAIN FUTURE #5, dated "Winter 1941"-- but just to give you a better idea of how those magazines were dated, Winter 1941 is **followed by Spring 1941. That is, it is the first issue dated 1941. (I have the previous four issues of CAPT FUTURE; Sarge Saturn is not in them.) My TWSs and STARTLINGs are spottier in that era, and the first TWS I have with Sarge in it is dated November, 1941 -- but I lack all earlier issues dated 1941. (Interestingly, there's a letter in that November, 1941 issue by "D. W. Boggs" of Minneapolis, whom I sure we all recognize as Redd Boggs.) I assume that Sarge appeared simultaneously in all three magazines around the beginning of 1941. The Sarge was in the February, 1947 issue of TWS. He was **not** in the March, 1947 issue of STARTLING. I assume his last appearance was in issues dated February, 1947.**

So there you have it!
ShelVy

Thanx for the complement (AND the info.)

The next isn't a fan letter -- it's a very welcome offer of assistance. You've seen what he can do -- it's this issue's cover!

I saw your note about starting up this modern pulp, and thought I'd offer my services. I enclose some examples of my art, mostly from superhero apazines or RPGs. At present I don't have a lot of other stuff on my comptuer, but if

you would like to see otehr examples, I will send some.

Bill Jackson

Now, a letter from a fan who knows what he's talking about. (He likes us; that proves he knows what he's talking about!):

Wow! I really don't think I could express it more clearly than that. I've just finished reading the first issue of Planetary Stories and am very impressed. You've managed (in this youngster's opinion) to recapture the spirit of the Golden Age pulps, bringing back the sensawunda that so much modern SF lacks.

I enjoyed every story, each one more than the last. (Almost literally - with the exception of having prefered "Moult Revolt" to "Neutron McGuirk," the stories are in increasing order of how much I enjoyed them.) Keep up the good work - I'll be eagerly awaiting the next ish!

**Jason K. Burnett
4903 Camden Ave N
Minneapolis MN 55430**

Here's a brief one that just came in, from one of our favorite people:

Pulled your latest up and gave it a brief glance. Loved the cover! I am really looking forward to reading it all, because I greatly enjoyed your first issue.

D Gary Grady

The letters just keep piling in! (Not surprising; the counter says there have been over 100 hits so far on our new ish!)

This from a wise and intelligent newcomer:

Just saw mention of you in a newsgroup, so thought I'd give you a try. I was pleased! Really smashing cover, and the Lensmen story was a great takeoff on E E Smith's great series. Is a sequel possible? Also, there is a kids TV program called Power Rangers that is plagiarized from (strike that!) inspired by the Lensmen.

The shrIndu story was enjoyable, too. Any more of those?

I'll be looking for more of Planetary Stories!

Cyrus Mackin

I could hug you, Cyrus! Thanks for the kind (but true!) words. As for a sequel -- that's up to Lee Gold.

Lee?

ShelVy tells me he is working on several other stories in the 'Trouble On' series. If he finishes one, we'll run it! (Surprise, surprise!)

[HOME](#)

LINKS FOR YOU

VERY unlike a pulp magazine! We're including links to places you might find handy, starting with business links for Ross Chamberlain and Clif Jackson.

[ROSS](#)

Ross, as you can see, is a great fanartist. His website shows many other examples.

[CLIF](#)

Clif, as well as being a fanartist, also makes and sells a great line of personalized clocks!

. . . And, of course, there's the link everyone should have

[GOOGLE](#)

. . . And, equally necessary

[EFANZINES](#)

A great site, full of both old and new fanzines -- AND Planetary Stories!.

Yeah, might as well include my own, too.

[ShelVy](#)

If you are one of those rare few who don't know about it, there is also

[TRUFEN](#)

which is loaded with news about fandom.

I added a counter. It was free. Below is a link to it:

[COUNTER](#)

Are you a fan of Zenna Henderson and The People? If so, here is a topnotch website.

[THE PEOPLE](#)

Here's a link for lovers of pulp mags in general. Lotsa good stuff at:

[PULPGEN.COM](#)

[EDMOND HAMILTON](#)

The above site, part of pulpgen.com, pays homage to Edmond Hamilton, one of the greatest sf authors. .

Here's a link to another sf/fantasy/horror magazine you'll want to follow:

[SCREAMING DREAMS](#)

[HOME](#)

[HOME](#)

WRITE!

[Comment by emailing shelvy@planetarystories.com](mailto:shelvy@planetarystories.com)

It's writing that keeps Planetary Stories going – writing stories and, sometimes, the even more important writing of letters of comment.

STORIES –

As you can tell, we use both serious and flippant material. We want it to help us revive the feeling of the old pulp mags; new ideas that fit the profile, and parodies that make fun of them. We'll look at whatever you send. Send it to shelvy@planetarystories.com. Meaning, email all material. Thanx.

LETTERS –

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