

PLANET OF THE DOLPHINS

By Robert A. Metzger

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Herman didn't want to die.

The only sounds in the alley were the whisperings of rats and the distant yowl of a cat in heat. But Herman could hear things that weren't quite there — the beating of waves on a distant shore, the scream of a cart wheeling gull, the swish of kelp rolling in the swells, and always the whale songs.

The songs filled his head.

They were evil, angry songs.

And there was no escaping them.

"I'll call the cops on you if you don't pay your bill!" screamed a distant voice.

Herman didn't care. Not paying for three stale doughnuts and a cup of coffee which had tasted like burnt thirty-weight was of little consequence as compared to what he faced in the alley — for what waited for him just around the corners of time and space. He knelt down and pushed his back up against the alley's brick wall, all the while knowing that it offered absolutely no safety. But old reflexes died hard. Brick and mortar were no obstacle to the things that could twist reality. His hands shook. His stomach groaned.

"Ishmael!" he screamed.

There was no reply. But he hadn't really expected one. Ishmael would only act at the last possible moment. That is, if he acted at all.

"Ugly son of a bitch," he whispered.

Herman sniffed the air. The salty-seaweed tang was unmistakable. The ozone stink of dimensions ripping apart was suddenly oppressive. He shook all over and pissed in his pants. It didn't matter. Herman looked up at the band of night sky above him, at the dim stars and the neon glow. The Strip was less than three blocks away, and just beyond that was Aqualand. He'd gotten too close.

And now he was going to pay for that.

"Ishmael? he screamed again as the sky above him shifted, filling with diamond motes and rainbow eels. There was no time for another scream. The sky

suddenly turned liquid.

Splash.

Vegas had seen less than two inches of rain in the last year. It was bone-dry, dusty, dirty, everything coated in grit and sand. But now it rained in buckets, barrels, dump trucks.

Oceans.

Herman could not breathe. The salt water beat at him, blinding him, filling his nose and mouth. The torrent pushed him down against the alley floor, driving his face into the asphalt.

“Herman Melville!”

It was a bellow so resonant that it almost cracked his skull. Herman pushed himself up on hands and knees and sucked down a breath. The water was elbow-deep but quickly receding. He looked down the alley, toward the glow, just past a wheelless, rusted-out hulk. A jewel of impossible colors and infinite angles hung there.

“Herman Melville!” screamed the jewel.

Herman stood and almost had time to turn. But the jewel unfolded itself, the hidden dimensions uncurling, time itself unraveling, Here and now touched there and elsewhere.

“Help me!”

There was a flash of black and white, the beating of a fluke, the glint of an ivory tooth, and then it hung in front of him, nestled in a crystal web, all of it hovering about a foot above the alley floor.

“No,” whispered Herman, as he stood, mesmerized, staring into the unblinking eye of *Orcinus orca*.

“Herman Melville!” roared the killer whale. It reached out from the floating crystalline cage with flippers that were not flippers at all, but stubby arms -and long slender fingers. “This planet will be ours!” bellowed the whale. It beat its tail and the crystalline cage was propelled down the alley.

“No!” screamed Herman.

He turned, tried to run, but his feet rose up from the ground as the whale’s slender fingers wrapped around his waist and jerked him up. He was pulled through

the crystalline slats of the cage. Herman pounded at the whale's rubbery black-and-white face. But it did no good. The mouth opened, revealing glistening teeth and a pink gullet. Herman was shoved chest-deep into the whale's mouth.

Jaws snapped down.

Inversion.

Rotation.

Translation.

“Ahhhhhhh!”

Herman hit asphalt, face-first, the dry, gritty surface scraping his forehead. He leaped up and ran, stumbling over trash cans and boxes, tripping, hitting the brick wall, bouncing from it, and then stumbling from the alley and out onto the street.

He collapsed.

And as he fell, he looked back into the alley. There was no whale, no crystalline cage, no flaming crystal. It was just an alley — a dry, dusty Vegas alley. Reality had reasserted itself. The back of his head hit asphalt. The neon sky and dull stars swam above him. “Another bifurcation successfully transitted.”

Neon sky and dull stars were gone. Ishmael hung over him, staring at him with his too-large eyes and grinning with a smile full of razor-blade teeth.

“Tomorrow is safe, the future retained.”

Herman blinked.

And then he leaped to his feet. “You son of a bitch!” he screamed. “The orca almost got me!” He took a swing at ishmael's misshapen head and missed, his fist flying through it, cutting cleanly from right to left ear, having been translated along directions beyond normal three-dimensional space.

“You're but a player,” said Ishmael.

Herman swung again, and once more his fist passed through Ishmael's head. “I'll kill you!”

“And this play has not quite come to its inevitable conclusion.”

Ishmael vanished, moving orthogonally to Herman's reality. It was only then that Herman saw the two cops, the ones with guns drawn, the ones that he realized

were probably in search of a doughnut thief.

“On the ground!” ordered the cop on the left.

Herman stood frozen, overloaded. The transition from the killer whale and Ishmael, to cops and pulled guns, was too abrupt. He raised up his left hand to point toward the alley, wanting to explain about the orca and why he had run out of the diner when he had smelled the salt water. He managed to open his mouth.

Both cops fired.

The high-voltage darts hit Herman in the chest. His unconscious body convulsed, danced, every muscle spasming. He hit the ground, flipping and flopping, looking just like a fish out of water.

Herman stared through a window on the twenty-seventh floor of the Elyis Presley Memorial Psychiatric Hospital. High noon and the distant Vegas Strip looked ugly and drab, cars and cabs scuttling up and down the road, darting in and out of casino parking lots, looking just like cockroaches in search of cake crumbs. He only glanced at the scene for a moment, and then looked farther west, out toward Red Rock Canyon.

Aqualand.

The dolphin pools seemed to blaze — the late-afternoon sun reflecting from them. Herman wished the blaze was real, that burning gasoline instead of salt water filled those pools and that the dolphins were being turned into charcoaled briquettes.

“Burn, Flipper,” he whispered.

“That aggression is misplaced.”

Herman turned around. Dr. Julian Stearns Cutler was seated behind the plastic table. His hands were neatly folded, resting on a thick, dog-cared folder. His white lab coat was wrinkle-free and the pens in his pocket perfectly aligned from right to left in descending order of height.

His hair was slicked back, flawless, not a strand out of place.

He smiled.

Herman found the so-sincere, compassion-filled smile nauseating. He always did. He’d seen that smile far too many times.

Herman shuffled toward the table, the only sound he made being the scrap of

his paper booties against the linoleum floor. He pulled out the plastic chair on his side of the table and slowly sat. He folded his hands, mimicking Dr. Cutler, and then offered up his own smile.

“Of course it’s misplaced, Doctor,” he said with the sweetest, most sincere voice he could manage without actually blowing his lunch. “Perhaps my obsession, the key to all this aggression, stems back to the hatred of my mother, Mrs. Melville, that kind and gray-haired old soul who could not resist naming her son Herman, forever linking me to the cetaceans.”

“What do you think?” asked Dr. Cutler, leaning forward. Having unfolded his hands, he was now tugging at his chin as if some phantom goatee hung there.

Herman chuckled. If he’d had a nickel for every time that had been asked of him he could have opened his own nuthouse and spent the rest of his life in the comfort and spendor of the Napoleon suite. He narrowed his eyelids to slits. “I think you’re a pompous, anal-retentive control freak who would suffer a complete mental meltdown if a spontaneous, original thought managed to penetrate your thick I-attended-Harvard-Medical-School ego.”

Dr. Cutler jerked back as if he’d been slapped.

That was exactly what Herman had intended. He was exhausted, beat, and was in no mood to be analyzed for the umpty-umpth time by Dr. Cutler. He wanted to spend his mandatory seventy-two hours in peace and quiet.

Dr. Cutler ran his hands across his perfect hair and then leaned forward again. “I only want to help you. It is all I ever want.” He thumped his right index finger against the thick stack of papers in front of him. “We have quite a history together.”

Herman nodded. He’d been in and out of Presley for almost twelve years. “If you really want to help me, then reach into the future and get these goddamned whales and dolphins off my butt.”

Dr. Cutler opened his mouth, getting ready to say something that Herman was certain would be thoughtful and soothing, but Herman didn’t give him the chance.

“That’s all the help I need!” he screamed. “It’s all the help I’ve ever needed!”

“Why are the whales and dolphins after you?” Dr. Cutler asked gently.

Herman stood and kicked back his chair so that it flew across the room and ricocheted off a far wall before coming to a rest. The both of them were doing the same headcase-shrink dance they’d had so many times before. Herman knew that, knew that he should just sit down, shut up, do his seventy-two hours and that would be that. But he was tired, on edge, had just been chest-deep in the mouth of a killer

whale and couldn't stand one more second of psychocompassion.

"Because I'm the one that can stop them, you son of a bitch! Reality is fluid, the number of possible futures infinite. They come from a tomorrow in which man is gone, in which the planet is theirs. But I'm the key to destroying that future, to seeing that it never comes about!"

Dr. Cutler nodded and smiled.

"I'll say it you smug son of a bitch," screamed Herman, knowing that he shouldn't say it, knowing how textbook, how classically insane it would sound. "I've saved the human race dozens of times. Every time one of them doesn't get me, can't kill me, their reality drifts away, slips back into the infinite possibility of maybe futures. But they keep coming back. If I die, if they can kill me, then I won't be there at the key bifurcation point to stop whatever it is that will be responsible for creating their world."

"Then you're the Messiah?" asked Dr. Cutler. "You will save all future generations of the human race from the whales and dolphins who are intent on our destruction?"

"Yes!" screamed Herman. "I'm the one, the goddamned Messiah who will save the world." He slammed his fist against the tabletop. "But it's not my choice. You know it. You've heard it all before. Same old record. I can't leave, can't get out of Vegas and escape it. I'm a Messiah with a gun held to his head. Ishmael won't let me go, always translating me back here whenever I try and get out of town."

Dr. Cutler nodded. "Excellent," he said. "You've admitted to the delusion much more quickly than you normally do. Perhaps you're finally ready to move past it, to see what is real and what is not."

Herman turned around and walked back to the window. He stared out at Aqualand and the still-burning pools where the dolphins swam. "That's real, you stupid son of a bitch," he said quietly.

"Exactly," said Dr. Cutler.

"It appears to be getting worse."

Herman leaned back in his chair. He'd resigned himself to talking to feeding Dr. Cutler the psychogruel that he appeared to so desperately need. It passed the time.

"A lot worse. Just a few years ago I could have walked right into Aqualand without them making a move. But now I can't get within a couple of miles of it. Just last month, a Bottlenose in a trench coat and shades tried to chomp me when I was

panhandling at Caesars.”

Dr. Cutler scribbled notes in a tight, controlled scrawl.

“I spotted him though, smelled the tuna on his breath just before he tried to take off my head.”

Scribble.

Scribble.

Herman grinned. He hadn't smelled a thing. The first he had even known about the Bottlenose was when Ishmael had stepped through the side of a Greyhound bus and inverted the damned dolphin.

“And I assume that it was Ishmael who saved you?”

“Always,” said Herman. “He's got a bigger stake in this than any of us. The future, the human future is his. He comes from a billion years down the line, and pops back here just to make sure that everything stays on track, that I do what has to be done.”

“Which is?”

Herman smiled. That was the question. He had no idea, but could only guess that it had something to do with Aqualand. That had to be the place, and the time had to be near. The cetaceans were getting anxious, sloppy, making mistakes. He'd smelled the seawater in the diner minutes before the orca had actually punctured the past. They were getting careless.

Dr. Cutler looked up from his notepad. “What do you think this man from the future wants you to do?”

Herman was about to tell Dr. Cutler to piss off, that he'd had enough of the inquisition for the time being, but he was interrupted.

Ishmael walked into the room.

He had not used the door, but had simply materialized as if he had walked around a corner that hadn't quite been there. He stood next to Dr. Cutler, with a toothpick in his stubby fingers, picking at something bloody that was between his front teeth. Herman jumped up from his seat and did an instant 360, looking for the attacker, certain that another orca was about to materialize. Nothing popped out of the air.

“Inquiries are best made at the source,” said Ishmael.

Herman did not understand. He hadn't asked Ishmael a thing. He stared into Ishmael's bulging eyes, trying to make contact, desperately wanting to understand. His life might depend on that understanding.

But Ishmael wasn't looking at him.

He was staring down at Dr. Cutler.

"Urrrf."

Herman looked at Dr. Cutler. The man had turned the color of nonfat milk — pale white with a bluish tint.

"Urrrf," he said again.

Herman fell into his chair.

"You can see him," he said, not asking a question, but stating an obvious fact. No one had ever seen Ishmael except for himself. Ishmael had always walked some ultratight sliver of reality that had been tuned only to his brain.

"Ishmael?" asked Dr. Cutler.

Herman was impressed, actually amazed. Dr. Cutler's eyes were as big as golf balls, some muscle in his left cheek was twitching like a metronome on speed, and his fingers were doing a slam dance across the tabletop, but he had not gone screaming out of the room, or simply fainted away.

"Ishmael?" he said again.

Ishmael smiled, showing a dazzling array of teeth. "Correct, Doctor."

Dr. Cutler slowly lowered his head and looked across the table at Herman. "Ishmael?" he asked in a whisper.

Herman simply nodded.

Dr. Cutler gave one big body twitch, a nose-to-butt spasm that should have broken bones, and then looked back up at Ishmael. "The door to this room is locked and I know that the guards would not have let you in."

Herman sighed. This was more in step with the old Dr. Cutler that he knew and loathed. When faced with something as impossible as Ishmael, that was the most imaginative question that he could come up with — a locked door.

“Doors are a concept I choose not to participate in.” said Ishmael, who reached toward Dr. Cutler with his stubby hand, which suddenly became paper-flat, twisted at right angles, folded over, and then simply vanished. A stump of an arm, perfectly sliced, showing bone and muscle, but not bleeding or spewing bits, hung in front of Dr. Cutlet’s face.

“I see,” whispered Dr. Cutler, who then burped, his cheeks suddenly swelling as his mouth filled with something that had just been tossed up his throat, and then slowly deflated as he swallowed it back down.

Again Herman was impressed.

There was a lot more to Dr. Cutler than he had ever imagined. The first time he had met Ishmael he had run through a glass wall at the Mirage and spent a month in the Clark County nut bin.

“The critical juncture has arrived,” said Ishmael, now looking over at Herman. “And you will require assistance.”

Herman tried to say something, but there was no time. He suddenly realized that he was no longer looking at Ishmael, but was somehow seeing the inside of his own head.

His eyeballs had inverted.

His mouth suddenly swallowed his face.

And then he actually kissed his own ass good-bye.

Stop it,” said Herman as he took a swipe at Dr. Cutler and knocked the pens out of his hand. “You’re looking too damn twitchy.”

Dr. Cutler simply nodded, bit at his lip, and then began to suck on his thumb. Herman didn’t know what was wrong with him. He’d handled his first encounter with Ishmael amazingly well, but being translated to Aqualand had been too much.

Dr. Cutler had melted down.

“What do you think?” he whispered.

Herman didn’t answer, knowing that the question wasn’t being addressed to him. Cutler had been turned into a psychobabble Top 40 station repeating over again the most cherished psycho one-liners ever uttered by a shrink. Herman looked around the arena. There were thousands of sunburned, Bermuda-shortened, camcorders-glued-to-their-faces-type tourists filling the stands. All of them were enamored with the antics of Larry, Moe and Curly, three big Bottle-nosed dolphins

that darted and leaped around the big pool, actually managing to toss creme pies at their trainers, all in some tribute to the Three Stooges. The whole place was a zoo, standing room only, full of Vid crews, this being the premiere of the Aqualand's Three Stooges Go to College show.

Herman didn't give a rat's ass about the show or the stupid dolphins. He was too busy staring at the guy two rows down who was dressed in a trench coat and floppy hat.

That was the dolphin that mattered.

"You see that guy over there," said Herman who reached up, grabbed Dr. Cutler by the chin and turned his head.

Dr. Cutler twitched. "How does that make you feel?" he whispered.

It scared the shit out of Herman. He'd spotted three of the Bottlenoses in the audience, and two down front by the exit. They were all hiding in trench coats and floppy hats. The two down front were waddling back and forth on their stumpy little legs staying in front of the exit as if on guard duty. And Dr. Cutler could see them. Up until now he'd been the only one, the Bottlenoses and Orcas just beyond the perception of everyone else. But now that was over. He finally had an ally — even though that ally was currently suffering from some sort of mental short circuit.

"We got to make a move," said Herman, who poked Dr. Cutler in the ribs, and then reached over to his front pocket and removed a stainless- steel mechanical pencil from it. "What we need is a diversion."

"Do you ever consider how they feel?" asked Dr. Cutler.

Herman didn't care how they felt. The cetaceans weren't even real, just ghosts from a future that had no right to exist. Herman grabbed Dr. Cutler's right hand, tugged him up from his seat and dragged him past a horde of babbling tourist types all munching Dolphin Dogs and slurping

Whale Shakes, stopping only when they got to the main aisle.

"When I poke the bastard, he'll let out a high-frequency yelp that will get the rest of them running up here. That's when we make our move. Those two Bottlenoses down by the exit are guarding something, and that's where we're going."

"Go with your feelings," said Dr. Cutler.

Herman tugged him down the aisle two rows, and then stopped. The Bottlenose was just the second seat in. Herman stared just a moment at his large

snout and at the watery eye on the right side of his face. The Bottlenose didn't see him, but appeared to be totally mesmerized by Curly squirting a seltzer bottle at a coed in a bikini.

Herman lunged forward.

He drove the mechanical pencil into the Bottlenose's back, ramming it in until only the worn-out little eraser at the tip was poking out. He then shoved the dolphin forward into the row of seats just in front of it, starting a chain reaction. He knew that no one could quite see the Bottlenose, wouldn't know what had just struck them from behind, but that wouldn't stop them from flying face-first into the row in front of them.

The crowd screamed.

Dozens of people fell down the stadium, bouncing from bench to bench, gathering momentum, sucking up unwary victims, behaving just like a growing snowball heading down a ski run. Those not bouncing face-first down the stadium benches jumped up from their seats, streamed into the center aisles and started to move toward the exits.

"Move it!" screamed Herman as he saw the two Bottlenoses guarding the exit begin to waddle up into the bleachers toward all the commotion. He tugged Dr. Cutler toward the exit.

"Just because you're moving doesn't mean you're getting anyplace," said Dr. Cutler.

"Shut up!" screamed Herman as he jerked Dr. Cutler down the stairs.

"Over here," said Herman, who shoved Dr. Cutler into a corner, out of range of the surveillance camera mounted above the steel door which had a security keypad mounted in it. The building that this door was sunk into had been behind the dolphin tank. "We got to get past that door," said Herman. "It makes no damn sense to have a high-security door like that at Aqualand. There's something wrong going on behind that door."

"The grass only appears greener on the other side of the hill," said Dr. Cutler.

The door suddenly seemed to shimmer, to twist, and then Ishmael walked through it.

"The time is now and the place is here," said Ishmael. "There will be four coming through this door. Wait for the last one. It is his weapon that will be the key."

Herman just nodded. This was all happening so fast, too fast, but he didn't really care. He could sense that it would soon be over and that was all that really mattered. He wanted it done and behind him, wanted no more dolphins and orcas in his life.

Ishmael turned to his left. He had zero width and simply disappeared. Just then the door slammed open and the first security guard came running through, pistol in one hand and walkie-talkie in the other, pressed into his face as he barked out orders. Herman pushed Dr. Cutler and himself farther into the corner. The security man raced past them, heading toward the arena exit and the stampeding riot that was occurring there. Two more followed, dressed in black body armor and carrying gas-grenade rifles.

Herman got ready, tensed, planted the heel of his left foot against the wall at his back and waited. He didn't have long to wait. The fourth security guard ran through the door. Herman launched himself. He hit the black-suited guard in the side and the both of them crashed into the adjacent wall.

The security guard instantly went limp.

Herman didn't worry, didn't question any of this. This was his destiny, the whole thing ordained. He was creating the future, saving it for all of mankind. He pulled the security guard's pistol from its holster, grabbed Dr. Cutler by the arm and tugged him through the open door.

They bounded down steel steps.

They crashed through a partially opened door.

They stopped in front of a tank.

It was a Plexiglas monolith, twenty by twenty by twenty feet, sitting in the center of a room filled with glaring lights, row after row of electronic panels, running, frantic lab-coat types, and more than a dozen security guards positioned in the scaffolding above the tank.

"Put down your gun!" echoed an amplified voice.

Herman didn't even realize he had the pistol raised. He was staring into the tank. A Bottlenose hung there, enmeshed in wires and struts, the top of its head peeled back and its exposed skull plastered with a bundle of twinkling fibers.

But this was no Bottlenose like Larry, Moe or Curly.

This one was different.

Its front flippers were no longer flippers. This dolphin had little stumpy arms and long tapered fingers that fluttered in the water. It shrieked, its wail penetrating through the Plexiglas tank.

Herman lowered the pistol, aiming it right at the mutant Bottlenose's overly large head. He squeezed the trigger.

"Violence is no answer!"

Herman felt his arm being jerked up, and saw just out of the corner of his vision Dr. Cutler pushing at his arm.

Bang!

The upper right corner of the Plexiglas tank shattered, a spiderweb pattern streaking across it. But it didn't break. Hands grabbed him, wrapped around the pistol and then threw him down to the ground.

"No!" screamed Herman. He knew all those white-coated psycho-scientists didn't understand what they'd created, what was really in that tank. He was flipped over on his back and heavy boots stood on his outstretched arms and legs.

Ishmael materialized over him.

His face dissolved, a rubbery snout protruding from it, his big eyes floating to the side of his now obviously Bottlenose head. "The final bifurcation," said Ishmael. "You were the Creator, the Savior, the one responsible for bringing us back to the sea."

"Son of a bitch!" screamed Herman, not quite sure what he'd done, but knowing that his actions had not erased a future controlled by the cetaceans at all, but had somehow created it.

Then there was suddenly a blaze of lights.

There were shouts and screams for security.

Herman's hands and legs were let go of.

He sat up and looked back through the open doorway and up the metal stairwell. It was full of reporters and Vid techs, those that had been here for the opening day of the Three Stooges Go to College show. Their cameras pointed first at the mutant dolphin, and then down to him.

He understood now.

Everything.

“What are you feeling?” screamed Dr. Cutler.

Herman said nothing. He turned and stared into the dolphin tank. The thing was staring at him, smiling with that stupid dolphin smile. It waved a hand at him. “You win,” Herman whispered.

Herman stared at the Vid monitor. He couldn't hear it but he didn't have to. He stood on the sidewalk along with a few dozen others, staring through the window at an array of Vids, all tuned to the same channel.

This was Release day.

There had been almost twenty of the genetically tweaked dolphins at Aqualand, the whole thing some CIA-funded experiment to create dolphin saboteurs that could be used to plant explosives on the hulls of Chinese subs. It had been headlines for weeks. The United Mammal Front and the Animal Firsters had put all their muscle, money, and bought-and-paid-for senators into stopping the project and freeing the poor, pathetic, tortured dolphins.

Freeing the Dolphins.

“They used us,” said Herman.

Dr. Cutler shook his head and tugged on his imaginary goatee. “We all need to be needed,” he said.

Herman grabbed him by the elbow and tugged him away from the window. He didn't want to see the dolphins released, didn't want to think about them free in the ocean to multiply, to outsmart the untweaked dolphins, to eventually take over the seas, develop their own dolphin science, to eradicate man and then send Ishmael back in time to use him and make certain that the original dolphins would be released into the ocean.

It was over.

And he'd lost.

“Come on, Dr. Cutler,” he said, dragging the doctor down the street. Dr. Cutler was fried, never having recovered from the ordeal. Looking after Dr. Cutler was an act of penance for the sin he'd committed against mankind. At least that was what he tried to convince himself of.

He turned the doctor down the first ally they came to. Herman knew a shortcut. He was in desperate need of doughnuts and coffee. They slowly

maneuvered around piles of rotted cabbage and rusted dumpsters.

Pssst.

Herman stopped.

Pssst.

He slowly turned. There was an ugly-looking dog wedged between a couple of dumpsters, a mutt with a swollen head and big watery eyes. It raised up its front paw, pointed it at Herman, and then uncurled that paw to show five stubby fingers.

“You Herman Melville?” asked the dog.

Herman simply nodded.

“The guy responsible for dolphins running the whole show up the line?”

Again Herman nodded.

“Well if you want to do something about it, I got a plan. Down in L.A., at the UCLA Med Center, they’re working on grafting chimp frontal lobes onto Dobermans. We need your help to make sure that work gets done.”

Herman said nothing.

He knew there was nothing that had to be said.

“We’ll treat you right,” said the dog. “We’ve always liked you, always been your best friend. You help us get rid of these damn dolphins, and there will always be a place for you at our fireplace.”

“Home is where the heart is,” said Dr. Cutler.

“You in?” asked the mutant dog who had come from some phantom future.

Herman smiled.

Flipper would pay.

* * * *

Robert Metzger has sold a dozen short stories to Aboriginal SF and Weird Tales. His first novel, *Quad World*, appeared from NAL/Roc in 1992. He does a science column called “What If?” for Aboriginal SF as well as working at Hughes Research Labs in Malibu

About the story, he writes, “For months before starting it, I’d had this recurrent daydream about Killer Whales from the future munching the homeless on Skid Row. It somehow seemed quite plausible. Who would believe them? Who would report it? Killer whales could eat thousands of homeless people and no one would know. It was a rather ugly, dark image which slowly gave way to the not so dark story that you now have . . .

One strange item associated with this story

“It may actually be true

“After I finished the story, the Weekly World News (a finer newspaper cannot be found anywhere) announced that a dolphin had grown human arms. I kid you now.”