

SIMULACRUM

The Magazine Of Speculative Narrative Transformation

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DAVID GROSS ON THE
RELAUNCH OF AMAZING STORIES

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THE EDITOR'S DESK

Look at that—middle of the year already. What better way to celebrate it than with another great collection of speculative tales, poetry and wondrous artwork. Look alive there matey—ninety (**NINETY!**) pages of it is currently floating at your fingertips.

In this issue we are very excited and thrilled to bring you a reprint of Nancy Kress' short story *Savior* (originally published in **ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE**, June, 2000). For those of you who have not read the story, I'm keeping mum about the details. Read to your blessed hearts' content. Also featured are two splendid tales from G.L Sulea and A.R Yngve.

Our featured artist, Ian Miller, will be well-known to many of you. His distinctive style has graced many a Tolkien and other illustrated guides to the fantastic. Rounding it all off is poetry by Thomas Zimmerman, and interview with Nancy Kress, and we also have a chat with Editor-in-Chief David Gross from the new soon to be re-launched classic magazine *Amazing Stories*.

On an editorial note—we're always trying to make the magazine better—to give our readers exactly what they want. The best way to do this is—PRESTO—from our readers themselves. Are there certain types of stories you would like to see more of? Do we under value the Undead? Would you like to see themed issues? If so, put your fingers to the keyboard and send us an email. Maybe your letter will even find its way into the magazine. Tell us what excites (or *yawn*) bores you about the state of speculative fiction. We're giving you the chance to make an educated statement—or just give your honest opinion. Want to rant—we can possibly save you a space as well.

We'd also like to compile a list of favorites from our readers: movies, books, comics, short stories. Give us your best and a short bit about what makes them so special.

Alrighty. You're all set. Git' to reading.

This story developed from my desire to write a generational-spanning SF story, a form that I enjoy but don't see enough of. I knew that an alien ship would land and go absolutely silent, doing nothing for decades, waiting. But for what? I wasn't sure. I'd already written two-thirds of the story, detailing how the ship had changed human lives around it without actually doing anything but sit there, and I knew it was getting time to consider WHY the thing had shown up in the first place. While walking the dog with my husband, the late Charles Sheffield, I said, "What is it waiting for? I don't know. There's no biological life aboard, just computers." Charles immediately said. "It's waiting for AI." And then I had the rest of the story.

The object's arrival was no surprise; it came down preceded, accompanied, and followed by all the attention in the world.

The craft—if it was a craft—had been picked up on an October Saturday morning by the Hubble, while it was still beyond the orbit of Mars. A few hours later Houston, Langley, and Arecibo knew its trajectory, and a few hours after that so did every major observatory in the world. The press got the story in time for the Sunday papers. The United States Army evacuated and surrounded twenty square miles around the projected Minnesota landing site, some of which lay over the Canadian border in Ontario.

"It's still a shock," Dr. Ann Pettie said to her colleague Jim Cowell. "I mean, you look and listen for decades, you scan the skies, you read all the arguments for and against other intelligent life out there, you despair over Fermi's paradox—"

"I never despaired over Fermi's paradox," Cowell answered, pulling his coat closer around his skinny body. It was cold at 3:00 a.m. in a northern Minnesota cornfield, and he hadn't slept in twenty-four hours. Maybe longer. The cornfield was as close as he and Ann had been allowed to get. It wasn't very close, despite a day on the phone pulling every string he could to get on the official Going-In Committee. That's what they were calling it: "the Going-In Committee." Not welcoming, not belligerent, not too alarmed. Not too anything, "until we know what we have here." The words were the President's, who was also not on the Going-In Committee, although in his case presumably by choice.

Ann said, "You *never* despaired over Fermi's Paradox? You thought all along that aliens would show up eventually, they just hadn't gotten around to it yet?"

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"Yes," Cowell said, and didn't look at her directly. How to explain? It wasn't belief so much as desire, nor desire so much as life-long need. Very adolescent, and he wouldn't have admitted it except he was cold and exhausted and exhilarated and scared, and the best he could hope for, jammed in with other "visiting scientists" two miles away from the landing site, was a possible glimpse of the object as it streaked down over the treeline.

"Jim, that sounds so...so..."

"A man has to believe in something," he said in a gruff voice, quoting a recent bad movie, swaggering a little to point up the joke. It fell flat. Ann went on staring at him in the harsh glare of the floodlights until someone said, "Bitte? Ein Kaffee, Ann?"

"Hans!" Ann said, and she and Dr. Hans Kleinschmidt rattled merrily away in German. Cowell knew no German. He knew Kleinschmidt only slightly, from those inevitable scientific conferences featuring one important paper, ten badly-attended minor ones, and three nights of drinking to bridge over the language difficulties.

What language would the aliens speak? Would they have learned English from our second-hand radio and TV broadcasts, as pundits had been predicting for the last thirty-six hours and writers for the last seventy years? Well, it *was* true they had chosen to land on the American-Canadian border, so maybe they would.

So far, of course, they hadn't said anything at all. No signal had come from the oval-shaped object hurtling toward Earth.

"Coffee," Ann said, thrusting it at Cowell. Kleinschmidt had apparently brought a tray of Styrofoam cups from the emergency station at the edge of the field. Cowell uncapped his and drank it gratefully, not caring that it was lukewarm or that he didn't take sugar. It was caffeine.

"Twenty minutes more," someone said behind him.

It was a well-behaved crowd, mostly scientists and second-tier politicians. Nobody tried to cross the rope that soldiers had strung between hastily driven stakes a few hours earlier. Cowell guessed that the unruly types, the press and first-rank space fans and maverick businessmen with large campaign contributions, had been all herded together elsewhere, under the watchful eyes of many more soldiers than were assigned to this cornfield. Still more were probably assigned unobtrusively—Cowell hoped it was unobtrusively—to the Going-In Committee, waiting somewhere in a sheltered bunker to greet the aliens. Very sheltered. Nobody knew what kind of

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drive the craft might have, or not have. For all they knew, it was set to take out both Minnesota and Ontario.

Cowell didn't think so.

Hans Kleinschmidt had moved away. Abruptly Cowell said to Ann, "Didn't you ever stare at the night sky and just will them to be there? When you were a kid, or even a grad student in astronomy?"

She shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other. "Well, sure. Then. But I never thought...I just never thought. Since." She shrugged, but something in her tone made Cowell turn full face and peer into her eyes.

"Yes, you did."

She answered him only indirectly. "Jim...there could be nobody aboard."

"Probably there isn't," he said, and knew that his voice betrayed him. Not belief so much as desire, not desire so much as need. And he was thirty-four goddamn years old, goddamn it.

"Look!" someone yelled, and every head swiveled up, desperately searching a clear, star-jeweled sky.

Cowell couldn't see anything. Then he could: a faint pinprick of light, marginally moving. As he watched, it moved faster and then it flared, entering the atmosphere. He caught his breath.

"Oh my God, it's swerving off course!" somebody shouted from his left, where unofficial jerry-rigged tracking equipment had been assembled in a ramshackle group effort. "Impossible!" someone else shouted, although the only reason for this was that the object hadn't swerved off a steady course before now. So what? Cowell felt a strange mood grip him, and stranger words flowed through his mind: *Of course. They wouldn't let me miss this.*

"A tenth of a degree northwest...no, wait..."

Cowell's mood intensified. With one part of his mind he recognized that the mood was born of fatigue and strain, but it didn't seem to matter. The sense of inevitability grew on him, and he wasn't surprised when Ann cried, "It's landing *here!* Run!" Cowell didn't move as the others scattered. He watched calmly, holding his half-filled Styrofoam cup of too-sweet coffee, face tilted to the sky.

The object slowed, silvery in the starlight. It continued to slow until it was moving at perhaps three miles per hour, no more, at a roughly forty-five degree angle. The landing was smooth and even. There was no hovering, no jet blasts, no scorched ground. Only a faint *whump* as the object touched the earth, and a rustle of corn husks in the unseen wind.

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It seemed completely natural to walk over to the spacecraft. Cowell was the first one to reach it.

Made of some smooth, dull-silver metal, he noted calmly, and unblackened by re-entry. An irregular oval, although his mind couldn't pin down in precisely what the irregularity lay. Not humming or moving, or, in fact, doing anything at all.

He put out his hand to touch it, and the hand stopped nearly a foot away.

"Jim!" Ann called, and somebody else—must be Kleinschmidt—said, "Herr Dr. Cowell!" Cowell moved his hand along whatever he *was* touching. An invisible wall, or maybe some sort of hard field, encased the craft.

"Hello, ship," he said softly, and afterwards wasn't ever sure if he'd said it aloud.

"Don't touch it! Wait!" Ann called, and her hand snatched away his.

It didn't matter. He turned to her, not really seeing her, and said something that, like his greeting to the ship, he wasn't ever sure about afterward. "I was raised Orthodox, you know. Waiting for the Messiah," and then the rest were on them, with helicopters pulsing overhead and soldiers ordering everyone back, *back I said!* And Cowell was pushed into the crowd with no choice except to set himself to wait for the visitors to come out.

"Are you absolutely positive?" the President, who was given to superlatives, asked his military scientists. He had assembled them, along with the joint chiefs of staff, the cabinet, the Canadian lieutenant-governor, and a sprinkling of advisors, in the cabinet room of the White House. The same group had been meeting daily for a week, ever since the object had landed. Washington was warmer than Minnesota; outside, dahlias and chrysanthemums still bloomed on the manicured lawn. "No signal of any type issued from the craft, at any time after you picked it up on the Hubble?"

The scientists looked uncomfortable. It was the kind of question only non-scientists asked. Before his political career, the President had been a financier.

"Sir, we can't say for certain that we know all types of signals that could or do exist. Or that we had comprehensive, fixed-position monitoring of the craft at all times. As you—"

"All right, all right. Since it landed, then, and you got your equipment trained on it. No radio signals emanating from it, at any wavelength whatsoever?"

"No, sir. That's definite."

"No light signals, even in infrared or ultraviolet?"

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"No, Mr. President."

"No gamma lengths, or other radioactivity?"

"No, sir."

"No quantum effects?" the President said, surprising everyone. He was not noted for his wide reading.

"If you mean things like quantum entanglement to transport information?" the head of Livermore National Laboratory said cautiously. "Of course, we don't know enough about that area of physics to predict for certain what may be discovered eventually, or what a race of beings more advanced than ours might have discovered already."

"So there might be quantum signals going out from the craft constantly, for all you know."

The Livermore director spread his hands in helpless appeal. "Sir, we can only monitor signals we already understand."

The President addressed his chief military advisor, General Dayton. "This shield covering the craft—you don't understand that, either? What kind of field it is, why nothing at all gets through except light?"

"Everything except electromagnetic radiation in the visible-light wavelengths is simply reflected back at us," Dayton said.

"So you can't use sonar, X-rays, anything that could image the inside?"

This time Dayton didn't answer. The President already knew all this. The whole world knew it. The best scientific and military minds from several nations had been at work on the object all week.

"So what is your recommendation to me?" the President said.

"Sir, our only recommendation is that we continue full monitoring of the craft, with full preparation to meet any change in its behavior."

"In other words, 'Wait and see.' I could have decided that for myself, without all you high-priced talent" the President said in disgust, and several people in the room reflected with satisfaction that this particular president had only a year and three months left in office. There was no way he would be re-elected. The economy had taken too sharp a downturn.

Unless, of course, a miracle happened to save him.

"Well, go back to your labs, then," the President said, and even though he knew it was a mistake, the director of Livermore gave in to impulse.

"Science can't always be a savior, Mr. President."

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"Then what good is it?" the President said, with a puzzled simplicity that took the director's breath away. "Just keep a close eye on that craft. And try to come up with some actual scientific data, for a blessed change."

ALIEN FIELD MAY BE FORM OF BOSE-EINSTEIN CONDENSATE, SAY SCIENTISTS
AT STANFORD

NOBEL PRIZE WINNER RIDICULES STANFORD STATEMENT

OHIO STATE COURT THROWS OUT CASE CLAIMING CONTAMINATED GROUND
WATER NEAR ALIEN OBJECT

SPACE SHIELD MAY BE PENETRATED BY UNDETECTED COSMIC RAYS, SAY
FRENCH SCIENTIST

SPACE-OBJECT T-SHIRTS RULED OBSCENE BY LOCAL TOURIST COUNCIL,
REMOVED FROM VENDOR STANDS

NEUTRINO STREAM TURNED BACK FROM SPACE SHIELD IN EXPENSIVE HIGH-
TECH FIASCO: Congress To Review All Peer-Judged Science Funding

WOMAN CLAIMS UNDER HYPNOSIS TO HEAR VOICES FROM SPACE OBJECT—
KENT STATE SCIENTISTS INVESTIGATING

PRESIDENT LOSES ELECTION BY LARGEST MARGIN EVER

"MY TWIN SONS WERE FATHERED BY THE OBJECT," CLAIMS SENATOR'S
DAUGHTER, RESISTS DNA TESTING
Polls Show 46% Of Americans Believe Her

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Jim Cowell, contemptuous of the senator's daughter, was forced to acknowledge that he had waited a lifetime for his own irrational belief to be justified. Which it never had.

"Just a little farther, Dad," Barbara said. "You okay?"

Cowell nodded in his wheelchair, and slowed it to match Barbara's pace. She wheezed a little these days; losing weight wouldn't hurt her. He had learned over the years not to mention this. Ahead the last checkpoint materialized out of the fog. A bored soldier leaned out of the low window, his face lit by the glow of a holoscreen. "Yes?"

"We have authorization to approach the object," Cowell said. He could never think of it as anything else, despite all the names the tabloid press had hung on it over the last decades. The Alien Invader. The Space Fizzle. Silent Alien Cal.

"Approach for retina scan," the soldier said. Cowell wheeled his chair to the checker, leaned in close. "Okay, you're cleared. Ma'am?...Okay. Proceed." The soldier stuck his head back in the window, and the screen made one of the elaborate noises that accompanied the latest hologame.

Barbara muttered, "As if he knew the value of what he's guarding!"

"He knows," Cowell said. He didn't really want to talk to Barbara. Much as he loved her, he really would have preferred to come to this place alone. Or with Sharon, if Sharon had still been alive. But Barbara had been afraid he might have some sort of final attack alone there by the object, and of course he might have. He was pretty close to the end, and they both knew it. Getting here from Detroit was taking everything Cowell had left.

He wheeled down the paved path. On either side, autumn stubble glinted with frost. They were almost on the object before it materialized out of the fog.

Barbara began to babble. "Oh, it looks so different from pictures, even holos, so much smaller but shinier, too, you never told me it was so shiny, Dad, I guess whatever it's made of doesn't rust. But, no, of course the air isn't getting close enough to rust it, is it, there's that shield to prevent oxidation, and they never found out what *that* is composed of, either, did they, although I remember reading this speculative article that—"

Cowell shut her out as best he could. He brought his chair close enough to touch the shield. Still nothing: no tingle, no humming, no moving. Nothing at all.

That first time rushed back to him, in sharp sensory detail. The fatigue, the strain, the rustle of corn husks in the unseen wind. Hans Kleinschmidt's Styrofoam cup of coffee warm in Cowell's hand. Ann Pettie's cry *It's landing here! Run!* Cowell's own strange personal feeling of inevitability: *Of course. They wouldn't let me miss this.*

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Well, they had. They'd let the whole world miss whatever the hell the object was supposed to be, or do, or represent. Hans was long dead. Ann was institutionalized with Alzheimer's. "*Hello, ship.*" And the rest of his life—of many people's lives—devoted to trying to figure out the Space Super Fizzle.

That long frustration, Cowell thought, had showed him one thing, anyway. There was no mystery behind the mystery, no unseen Plan, no alien messiah for humanity. There was only this blank object sitting in a field, stared at by a shrill middle-aged woman and a dying man. What you see is what you get. He, James Everett Cowell, had been a fool to ever hope for anything else.

"Dad, why are you smiling like that? Don't, please!"

"It's nothing, Barbara."

"But you looked—"

"I *said*, 'It's nothing.'"

Suddenly he was very tired. It was cold out here, under the gray sky. Snow was in the air.

"Honey, let's go back now."

They did, Barbara walking close by Cowell's chair. He didn't look back at the object, silent on the fallow ground.

Transmission: There is nothing here yet.

Current probability of occurrence: 67%.

II: 2090

The girl, dressed in home-dyed blue cotton pants and a wolf pelt bandeau, said suddenly, "Tam—what's *that*?"

Tam Wilkinson stopped walking, although his goat herd did not. The animals moved slowly forward, pulling at whatever tough grass they could find on the parched ground. Three-legged Himmie hobbled close to the herd leader; blind Jimmie turned his head in the direction of Himmie's bawl. "What's what?" the boy said.

"Over there, to the north...no, *there*."

The boy shaded his eyes against the summer sun, hot under the thin clouds. He and Juli would have to find noon shade for the goats soon. Tam's eyes weren't strong, but by squinting and peering, he caught the glint of sunlight on something dull silvery. "I don't know."

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"Let's go see."

Tam looked bleakly at Juli. They had married only a few months ago, in the spring. She was so pretty, hardly any deformity at all. The doctor from St. Paul had issued her a fertility certificate at only fourteen. But she was impulsive. Tam, three years older, came from a family unbroken since the Collapse. They hadn't accomplished that by impulsive behavior.

"No, Juli. We have to find shade for the goats."

"It could *be* shade. Or, or even a machine with some good metal on it!"

"This whole area was stripped long ago."

"Maybe they missed something."

Tam considered. She could be right; since their marriage, he and Juli had brought the goats pretty far beyond their usual range. Not many people had ventured into the Great Northern Waste for pasturage. The whole area had been too hard hit at the Collapse, leaving the soil too contaminated and the standing water even worse. But the summer had been unusually rainy, creating the running water that was so much safer than ponds or lakes, and anyway Tam and Juli had delighted in being alone. Maybe there *was* a forgotten machine with usable parts still sitting way out here, from before the Collapse. What a great thing to bring home from his honeymoon!

"Please," Juli said, nibbling his ear, and Tam gave in. She was so pretty. In Tam's entire family, no women were as pretty, nor as nearly whole, as Juli. His sister Nan was loose-brained, Calie had only one arm, Jen was blind, and Suze could not walk. Only Jen was fertile, even though the Wilkinson farm was near neither lake nor city. The farm still sat in the path of the west winds coming from Grand Fork. When there had been a Grand Fork.

Tam and Juli walked slowly, herding the goats, toward the glinting metal. The sun glared pitilessly by the time they reached the object, but the thing, whatever it was, stood beside a stand of scrawny trees in a little dell. Tam drove the goats into the shade. His practiced eye saw that once there had been water here, but no longer. They would have to move on by early afternoon.

When the goats were settled, the lovers walked hand-in-hand toward the object. "O," Juli said, "it's an egg! A metal egg!" Suddenly she clutched Tam's arm. "Is it...do you think it's a polluter?"

Tam felt growing excitement. "No—I know what this is! Gran told me, before she died!"

"It's not a polluter?"

"No, it...well, actually, nobody knows exactly what it's made of. But it's safe, dear love. It's a miracle."

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"A what?" Juli said.

"A miracle." He tried not to sound superior; Juli was sensitive about her lack of education.

Tam was teaching her to read and write. "A gift directly from God. A long time ago—a few hundred years, I think, anyway before the Collapse—this egg fell out of the sky. No one could figure out why. Then one day a beautiful princess touched it, and she got pregnant and bore twin sons."

"Really?" Juli breathed. She ran a few steps forward, then considerately slowed for Tam's halting walk. "What happened then?"

Tam shrugged. "Nothing, I guess. The Collapse happened."

"So this egg, it just sat here since then? Come on, sweet one, I want to see it up close. It just sat here? When women try so hard, us, to get pregnant?"

The boy didn't like the skeptical tone in her voice. He was the one with the educated family.

"You don't understand, Juli. This thing didn't make everybody pregnant, just that one princess. It was a special miracle from God."

"I thought you told me that before the Collapse, nobody needed no miracles to get pregnant, because there wasn't no pollutants in the water and air and ground."

"Yes, but—"

"So then when this princess got herself pregnant, why was it such a miracle?"

"Because she was a virgin, loose-brain!" After a minute he added, "I'm sorry."

"I'm going to look at the egg," Juli said stiffly, and this time she ran ahead without waiting.

When Tam caught up, Juli was sitting cross-legged in prayer in front of the egg. It was smaller than he had expected, no bigger than a goat shed, a slightly irregular oval of dull silver. Around it the ground shimmered with heat. Minnesota hadn't always been so hot, Gran had told Tam in her papery old-lady voice, and he suddenly wondered what this place had looked like when the egg fell out of the sky.

Could it be a polluter? It didn't look like it manufactured anything, and certainly Tam couldn't see any plastic parts to it. Nothing that could flake off in bits too tiny to see and get into the air and water and wind and living bodies. Still, if they were so very small, these dangerous pieces of plastic..."endocrine mimickers," Gran had taught Tam to call them, though he had no idea what the words meant. Doctors in St. Paul knew, probably. Although what good was knowing, if you couldn't fix the problem and make all babies as whole as Juli?

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She sat saying her prayer beads so fervently that Tam was annoyed with her all over again. Really, she just wasn't steady. Playful, then angry, then prayerful...she'd better be more reliable than that when the babies started to come. But then Juli raised her eyes to him, lake-blue, and appealed to his greater knowledge, and he softened again.

"Tam...do you think it's all right to pray to it? Since it did come from God?"

"I'm sure it's all right, honey. What are you praying for?"

"Twin sons, like the princess got." Juli scrambled to her feet. "Can I touch it?"

Tam felt sudden fear. "No! No—better not. I will, instead." When those twin sons came, he wanted them to be of his seed, not the egg's.

Cautiously the boy put out one hand, which stopped nearly a foot away from the silvery shell. Tam pushed harder. He couldn't get any closer to the egg. "It's got an invisible wall around it!"

"Really? Then can I touch it? It's not really touching the egg!"

"No! The wall is all the princess must have touched, too."

"Maybe the wall, it wasn't there a long time ago. Maybe it grew, like crops."

Tam frowned, torn between pride and irritation at her quick thought. "Don't touch it, Juli. After all, for all we know, you might already be pregnant."

She obeyed, stepping back and studying the object. Suddenly her pretty face lit up. "Tam! Maybe it's a miracle for us, too! For the whole family!"

"The whole—"

"For Nan and Calie and Suze! And your cousins, too! O, if they come here and touch the egg—or the egg wall—maybe they can get pregnant like the princess did, straight from God!"

"I don't think—"

"If we came back before winter, in easy stages, and knowing ahead of time where the water was, they could all get pregnant! You could talk them to it, dear heart! You're the only one they listen to, even your parents. The only one who can make plans and carry out them plans. You know you are."

She looked at him with adoration. Tam felt something inside him glow and expand. And O, she really was quick, even if she couldn't read or write. His parents were old, at least forty, and they'd never been as quick as Tam. That was why Gran had taught him so much directly, all sorts of things she'd learned from her grandmother, who could remember the Collapse.

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He said, with slow weightiness, "If the workers in the family stayed to raise crops, we could bring the goats and the infertile women...in easy stages, I think, before fall. Provided we map ahead of time where the safe water is."

"O, I know you can!"

Tam frowned thoughtfully, and reached out again to touch the silent, unreachable egg.

Just before the small expedition left the Wilkinson farm, Dr. Sutter showed up on his dirtbike.

Why did he have to come now? Tam didn't like Dr. Sutter, who always acted so superior. He biked around the farms and villages, supposedly "helping people,"—O, he did help some people, maybe, but not Tam's family, who *were* their village. Not really helped. O, he'd brought drugs for Gran's aching bones, and for Suze's fever, from the hospital in St. Paul. But he hadn't been able to stop Tam's sisters—or anybody else—from being born the way they were, and not all his "medical training" could make Suze or Nan or Calie fertile. And Dr. Sutter lorded it over Tam, who otherwise was the smartest person in the family.

"I'm afraid," Suze said. She rode the family mule; the others walked. Suze and Calie; Nan, led by Tam's cousin Jack; Uncle Seddie and Uncle Ned, both armed; Tam and Juli. Juli stood talking, sparkly-eyed, to Sutter. To Tam's disappointment, no baby had been started on the honeymoon.

He said, "Nothing to be afraid of, Suze. Juli! Time to go!"

She danced over to him. "Dave's coming, too! He says he got a few weeks' vacation and would like to see the egg. He knows about it, Tam!"

Of course he did. Tam set his lips together and didn't answer.

"He says it's from people on another world, not from God, and—"

"My gran said it was from God," Tam said sharply. At his tone, Juli stopped walking.

"Tam—"

"I'll speak to Sutter myself. Telling you these city lies. Now go walk by Suze. She's afraid."

Juli, eyes no longer sparkling, obeyed. Tam told himself he was going to go over and have this out with Sutter, just as soon as Tam got everything going properly. Of course the egg was from God. Gran had said so, and anyway, if it wasn't, what was the point of this whole expedition taking workers away from the farm, even if it was the mid-summer quiet between planting and harvest.

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But somehow, with one task and another, Tam didn't find time to confront Sutter until night, when they were camped by the first lake. Calie and Suze slept, and the others sat around a comfortable fire, full of corn mush and fresh rabbit. Somewhere in the darkness a wolf howled.

"Lots more of those than when I was young," said Uncle Seddie, who was almost seventy.

"Funny thing, too—when you trap 'em, they're hardly ever deformed. Not like rabbits or frogs. Frogs, they're the worst."

Sutter said, "Wolves didn't move back down to Minnesota until after the Collapse. Up in Canada, they weren't as exposed to endocrine-mimicking pollutants. And frogs have always been the worst; water animals are especially sensitive to environmental factors."

Some of the words were the same ones Gran had used, but that didn't make Tam like them any better. He didn't know what they meant, and he wasn't about to ask Sutter.

Juli did, though. "Those endo...endo...what are they, doctor?"

He smiled at her, his straight white teeth gleaming in the firelight. "Environmental pollutants that bind to receptor sites all over the body, disrupting its normal function. They especially affect fetuses. Just before the Collapse, they reached some sort of unanticipated critical mass, and suddenly there were worldwide fertility problems, neurological impairments, cerebral....Sorry, Juli, you got me started on my medical diatribe. I mean, pretty lady, that too few babies were born, and too many of those couldn't think or move right, and we had the Collapse."

Beside him, Nan, born loose-brained, crooned softly to herself.

Juli said innocently, "But I thought the Collapse, it came from wars and money and bombs and things like that."

"Yes," Sutter said, "but those things happened *because* of the population and neurological problems."

"O, I'm just glad I didn't live then," Ned said, shuddering. "It must have been terrible, especially in the cities."

Juli said, "But, doctor, aren't you from a city?"

Sutter looked into the flames. The wolf howled again. "Some cities fared much better than others. We lost most of the East Coast, you know, to various terrorist wars, and—"

"Everybody knows that," Tam said witheringly.

Sutter was undeterred, "—and California to rioting and looting. But St. Paul came through, eventually. And a basic core of knowledge and skills persisted, even if only in the urban areas. Science, medicine, engineering. We don't have the skilled population, or even a neurologically

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functional population, but we haven't really gone pre-industrial. There are even pockets of research, especially in biology. We'll beat this, someday."

"I know we will!" Juli said, her eyes shining. She was always so optimistic. Like a child, not a grown woman.

Tam said, "And meanwhile, the civilized types like you graciously go around to the poor country villages that feed you and bless us with your important skills."

Sutter looked at him across the fire. "That's right, Tam."

Uncle Seddie said, "Enough arguing. Go to bed, everybody."

Seddie was the ranking elder; there was no choice but to obey. Tam pulled Juli up with him, and in their bedroll he copulated with her so hard that she had to tell him to be more gentle, he was hurting her.

They reached the egg, by the direct route Tam had mapped out, in less than a week. Another family already camped beside it.

The two approached each other warily, guns and precious ammunition prominently displayed. But the other family, the Janeways, turned out to be a lot like the Wilkinsons, a goat-and-farm clan whose herdsmen had discovered the egg and brought others back to see the God-given miracle.

Tam, standing behind Seddie and Ned, said, "There's some that don't think it is from God."

The ranking Janeway, a tough old woman lean as Gran had been, said sharply, "Where else could it come from, way out here? No city tech left this here."

"That's what we say," Seddie answered. He lowered his rifle. "You people willing to trade provisions? We got maple syrup, corn mush, some good pepper."

"Pepper?" the old woman's eyes brightened. "You got pepper?"

"We trade with a family that trades in St. Paul," Ned said proudly. "Twice a year, spring and fall."

"We got sugar and an extra radio."

Tam's chin jerked up. A radio! But that was worth more than any amount of provisions. Nobody would casually trade a radio.

"Our family runs to boys, nearly all boys," the old woman said, by way of explanation. She looked past Tam, at Juli and Calie and Suze and Nan, hanging back with the mule and

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backpacks. "They're having trouble finding fertile wives. If any of your girls...and if the young people liked each other..."

"Juli, the blonde, she's married to Tam here," Seddie said. "And the other girls, they aren't fertile...yet."

"'Yet?' What do you mean, 'yet'?"

Seddie pointed with his rifle at the egg. "Don't you know what that is?"

"A gift from God," the woman said.

"Yes. But don't you know about the princess and her twins? Tell her, Tam."

Tam told the story, feeling himself thrill to it as he did so. The woman listened intently, then squinted again at the girls. Seddie said quickly, "Nan is loose-brained, I have to tell you. And Suze is riding because her foot is crippled, although she's got the sweetest, meekest nature you could ever find. But Calie there, even though she's got a withered arm, is quick and smart and can do almost anything. And after she touches the egg...But, ma'am, Wilkinsons don't force marriages on our women. Never. Calie'd have to like one of your sons, and want to go with you."

"O, we can see what happens," the woman said, and winked, and for a second Tam saw what she must have been once, long ago, on a sweet summer night like this one when she was young.

He said suddenly, "The girls have to touch the egg at dawn."

Seddie and Ned turned to him. "Dawn? Why dawn?"

Tam didn't know why he'd said that, but now he had to see it through. "I don't know. God just made that idea come to me."

Seddie said to Mrs. Janeway, "Tam's our smartest person. Always has been."

"All right, then. Dawn."

In the chill morning light the girls lined up, shivering. Mrs. Janeway, Dr. Sutter, and the men from both families made an awkward semi-circle around them, shuffling their feet a little, not looking at each other. The five Janeway boys, a tangle of uncles and cousins, all looked a bit stooped, but they could all walk, and none were loose-brained. Tam had spent the previous evening at the communal campfire, saying little, watching and listening to see which Janeways might be good to his sisters. He'd already decided that Cal had a temper, and if he asked Uncle Seddie for Calie or Suze, Tam would advise against it.

Dr. Sutter had said nothing at the campfire, listening to the others become more and more excited about the egg touching, about the fertility from God. Even when Mrs. Janeway had asked

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him questions, his replies had been short and evasive. She'd kept watching him, clearly suspicious. Tam had liked her more and more as the long evening progressed.

Followed by a longer night. Tam and Juli had argued.

"I want to touch it, too, Tam."

"No. You have your certificate from that doctor two years ago. She tested you, and you're already fertile."

"Then why haven't I started no baby? Maybe the fertility went away."

"It doesn't do that."

"How do you know? I asked Dr. Sutter and he said—"

"You told Dr. Sutter about your body?" Rage swamped Tam.

Juli's voice grew smaller. "O, he *is* a doctor! Tam, he says it's hard to be sure about fertility testing for women, the test is...is some word I don't remember. But he says about one certificate in four is wrong. He says we should do away with the certificates. He says—"

"I don't care what he says!" Tam had all but shouted. "I don't want you talking to him again! If I see you are, Juli, I'll take it up with Uncle Seddie. And you are not touching the egg!"

Juli had raised herself on one elbow to stare at him in the starlight, then had turned her back and pretended to sleep until dawn.

Now she led Nan, the oldest sister, toward the egg. Nan crooned, drooling a little, and smiled at Juli. Juli was always tender with Nan. She smiled back, wiped Nan's chin, and guided her hand toward the silvery oval. Tam watched carefully to see that Juli didn't touch the egg herself. She didn't, and neither did Nan, technically, since her hand stopped at whatever unseen wall protected the object. But everyone let out a sharp breath, and Nan laughed suddenly, one of her clear high giggles, and Tam felt suddenly happier.

Seddie said, "Now Suze."

Juli led Nan away. Suze, carried by Uncle Ned, reached out and touched the egg. She, too, laughed aloud, her sweet face alight, and Tam saw Vic Janeway lean forward a little, watching her. Suze couldn't plow or plant, but she was the best cook in the family if everything were put in arm's reach. And she could sew and weave and read and carve.

Next Calie, pretty if Juli hadn't been there for comparison, and the other four Janeway men watched. Calie's one hand, dirt under the small fingernails, stayed on the egg a long time, trembling.

No one spoke.

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"O, then," Mrs. Janeway said, "we should pray."

They did, each family waiting courteously while the other said their special prayers, all joining in the "Our Father." Tam caught Sutter looking at him somberly, and he glared back. Nothing Sutter's "medicine" had ever done had helped Tam's sisters, and anyway it was none of Sutter's business what the Wilkinsons and Janeways did. Let him go back to St. Paul with his heathen beliefs.

"I want to touch the egg," Juli said. "I won't get no other chance. We leave in the morning."

Tam had had no idea that she could be so stubborn. She'd argued and pleaded for the three days they'd camped with the Janeways, letting the families get to know each other. Now they were leaving in the morning, with Vic and Lenny Janeway traveling with them to stay until the end of harvest, so Suze and Calie could decide about marriage. And Juli was still arguing!

"I said no," Tam said tightly. He was afraid to say more—afraid not of her, but of himself. Some men beat their wives; not Wilkinson men. But watching Juli all evening, Tam had suddenly understood those other men. She had deliberately sat talking only to Dr. Sutter, smiling at him in the flickering firelight. Even Uncle Ned had noticed, Tam thought, and that made Tam writhe with shame. He had dragged Juli off to bed early, and here she was arguing still, while singing started around the fire twenty feet away.

"Tam...please! I want to start a baby, and nothing we do started one...Don't get upset, but...but Dr. Sutter says sometimes the man is infertile, even though it don't happen as often as women's wombs it can still happen, and maybe—"

It was too much. First his wife shames him by spending the evening sitting close to another man, talking and laughing, and then she suggests that him, not her, might be the reason there was no baby yet. Him! When God had clearly closed the wombs of women after the Collapse, just like he did to those sinning women in the Bible! Anger and shame thrilled through Tam, and before he knew he was going to do it, he hit her.

It was only a slap. Juli put her hand to her cheek, and Tam suddenly would have given everything he possessed to take the slap back. Juli jumped up and ran off in the darkness, away from the fire. Tam let her go. She had a right to be upset now, he'd given her that. He lay stiffly in the darkness, intending every second to go get her—there were wolves out there, after all, although they seldom attacked people. Still, he would go get her. But he didn't, and without knowing it, he fell asleep.

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When he woke, it was near dawn. Juli woke him, creeping back into their bedroll.

"Juli! You...it's nearly dawn. Where were you all this time?"

She didn't answer. In the icy pale light her face was flushed.

He said slowly, "You touched it."

She wriggled the rest of the way into the bedroll and turned her back to him. Over her shoulder she said, "No, Tam. I didn't touch it."

"You're lying to me."

"No. I didn't touch it," she repeated, and Tam believed her. So he had won. Generosity filled him.

"Juli—I'm sorry I hit you. So sorry."

Abruptly she twisted in the bedroll to face him. "I know. Tam, listen to me...God wants me to start a baby. He does!"

"Yes, of course," Tam said, bewildered by her sudden ferocity.

"He wants me to start a baby!"

"Are you...are you saying that you have?"

She was silent a long time. Then she said, "Yes. I think so."

Joy filled him. He took her in his arms, and she let him. It would all be right, now. He and Juli would have a child, many children. So would Suze and Calie, and—who could say?—maybe even Nan. The egg's fame would grow, and there would be many babies again.

On the journey home, Juli stuck close to Tam, never looking even once in Dr. Sutter's direction. He avoided her, too. Tam gloated; so much for science and tech from the cities! When they reached the farm, Dr. Sutter retrieved his dirtbike and rode away. The next time a doctor came to call, it was someone different.

Juli bore a girl, strong and whole except for two missing fingers. During her marriage to Tam she bore four more children, finally dying trying to deliver a fifth one. Suze and Calie married the Janeway boys, but neither conceived. After three years of trying, Lenny Janeway sent Calie back to the Wilkinsons; Calie never smiled or laughed much again.

For decades afterward, the egg was proclaimed a savior, a gift from God, a miracle to repopulate Minnesota. Families came and feasted and prayed, and the girls touched the egg, more each year. Most of the girls never started a baby, but a few did, and at times the base of the egg was almost invisible under the gifts of flowers, fruit, woven cloth, even a computer from St. Paul and a glass perfume bottle from much farther away, so delicate that the wind smashed it one

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night. Or bears did, or maybe even angels. Some people said angels visited the egg regularly. They said the angels even touched it, through the invisible wall.

Tam's oldest daughter didn't believe that. She didn't believe much; Tam thought, for she was the great disappointment of his life. Strong, beautiful, smart, she got herself accepted to a merit school in St. Paul, and she went, despite her missing fingers. She made herself into a scientist and turned her back on the Bible. Tam, who had turned more stubborn as he grew old, refused to see her again. She said the egg wasn't a miracle and had never made anyone pregnant. She said there were no saviors for humanity but itself.

Tam, who had become not only more stubborn but also more angry after Juli died, turned his face away and refused to listen.

Transmission: There is nothing here yet.

Current probability of occurrence: 28%.

III: 2175

Abby4 said, "The meeting is in *northern Minnesota*? Why?"

Mal held onto his temper. He'd been warned about Abby4. *One of the Biomensas*, Mal's network of friends and colleagues had said, *In the top two percent of genemods. She likes to throw around her superiority. Don't let her twist you. The contract is too important.*

His friends had also said not to be intimidated by either Abby4's office or her beauty. The office occupied the top floor of the tallest building in Raleigh, with a sweeping view of the newly cleaned-up city. A garden in the sky, its walls and ceiling were completely hidden by the latest genemod plants from AbbyWorks, flowers so exotic and brilliant that, just looking at them, a visitor could easily forget what he was going to say. Probably that was the idea.

Abby4's beauty was even more distracting than her office. She sat across from him in a soft white chair which only emphasized her sleek, hard glossiness. The face of an Aztec princess, framed by copper hair pulled into a thick roll on either side. The sash of her black business suit stopped just above the swell of white breasts that Mal determinedly ignored. Her legs were longer than his dreams.

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Mal said pleasantly, "The meeting is in northern Minnesota because the Chinese contact is already doing business in St. Paul, at the university. And he wants to see a curiosity near the old Canadian border, an object that government records show as an alien artifact."

Abby4 blinked, probably before she knew she was going to do it, which gave Mal enormous satisfaction. Not even the Biomensas, with their genetically engineered intelligence and memory, knew everything.

"Ah, yes, of course," Abby4 said, and Mal was careful not to recognize the bluff. "O, then, northern Minnesota. Send my office system the details, please. Thank you, Mr. Goldstone."

Mal rose to go. Abby4 did not rise. In the outer office, he passed a woman several years older than Abby4 but looking so much like her that it must be one of the earlier clones. The woman stooped slightly. Undoubtedly each successive clone had better genemods as the technology came onto the market. AbbyWorks was, after all, one of the five or six leading biosolutions companies in Raleigh, and that meant in the world.

Mal left the Eden-like AbbyWorks building to walk into the shrouding heat of a North Carolina summer. In the parking lot, his car wouldn't start. Cursing, he opened the hood. Someone had broken the hood lock and stolen the engine.

Purveyors of biosolutions to the world, Mal thought bitterly, cleaners-up of the ecological, neurological, and population disasters of the Collapse, and we still can't create a decent hood lock. O, that actually figured. For the last hundred and fifty years—no, closer to two hundred now—the best minds of each American generation had been concentrating on biology. Engineering, physics, and everything else got few practitioners, and even less funding.

O, it had paid off. Not only for people like Abby4, the beautiful Biomensa bitch, but even for comparative drones like Mal. He had biological defenses against lingering environmental pollutants (they would linger for another thousand years), he was fertile, he even had modest genemods so he didn't look like a troll or think like a troglodyte. What he didn't have was a working car.

He took out his phone and called a cab.

August in Minnesota was not cold, but Kim Mao Xun, the Chinese client, was well wrapped in layers of silk and thin wool. He looked very old, which meant he was probably even older. Obviously no genemods for appearance, Mal thought, whatever else Mr. Kim might have. O,

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they did things differently in China. When you survived the Collapse on nothing but sheer numbers, you started your long climb back with essentials, nothing else.

"I am so excited to see the Alien Craft," he said in excellent English. "It is famous in China, you know."

Abby4 smiled. "Here, I'm afraid, it's mostly a curiosity. Very few people even know it exists, although the government has authenticated from written records that it landed in October, 2007, an event widely recorded by the best scientific instruments of the age."

"So much better than what we have now," Mr. Kim murmured, and Abby4 frowned.

"O, yes, I suppose, but then they didn't have a world to clean up, did they?"

"And we do. Mr. Goldstone tells me you can help us do this in Shanghai."

"Yes, we can," Abby4 said, and the meeting began to replicate in earnest.

Mal listened intently, taking notes, but said nothing. Meeting brokers didn't get involved in details. Matching, arranging, follow-through, impartial evaluation, and, if necessary, arbitration. Then disappear until next time. But Mal was interested; this was his biggest client so far.

And the biggest problem: Shanghai. The city and the harbor, which must add up to hundreds of different pollutants, each needing a different genetically designed organism to attack it. Plus, Shanghai had been viral-bombed during the war with Japan. Those viruses would be much mutated by now, especially if they had jumped hosts, which they probably had. Mal could see that even Abby4 was excited by the scope of the job, although she was trying to conceal it.

"What is Shanghai's current population, Mr. Kim?"

"Zero." Mr. Kim smiled wryly. "Officially, anyway. The city is quarantined. Of course there are the usual stoopers and renegades, but we will do our best to relocate them before you begin, and those who will not go may be ignored by your operators."

Something chilling in that. Although did the U.S. do any better? Mal had heard stories—everyone had heard stories—of families who'd stayed in the most contaminated areas for generations, becoming increasingly deformed and increasingly frightening. There were even people in places like New York, which had taken the triple blow of pollutants, bioweapons, and radiation. Theoretically, the population of New York was zero. In reality, nobody would go in to count, nor even send in the doggerels, biosolutioned canines with magnitude one immunity and selectively enhanced intelligence. A doggerel was too expensive to risk in New York. Whoever—or whatever—couldn't be counted by robots (and American robots were so inadequate compared to the Asian product) stayed uncounted.

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"I understand," Abby4 said to Mr. Kim. "And the time frame?"

"We would like to have Shanghai totally clean ten years from now."

Abby4's face didn't change. "That is very soon."

"Yes. Can you do it?"

"I need to consult with my scientists," she said, and Mal felt his chest fill with lightness. She hadn't said no, and when Abby4 didn't say no, the answer was likely to be yes. The ten-year deadline—only ten years!—would make the fee enormous, and Mal's company's small percentage of it would rise accordingly. A promotion, a bonus, a new car...

"Then until I hear back from you, we can go no farther," Mr. Kim said. "Shall we take my car to the Alien Craft?"

"Certainly," Abby4 said. "Mr. Goldstone? Can you accompany us? I'm told you know exactly where this curious object is." *As a busy and important Biomensa executive like me would not*, was the unstated message, but Mal didn't mind. He was too happy.

The Alien Craft, as Mr. Kim persisted in calling it, was not easy to find. Northern Minnesota had all been cleaned up, of course; as valuable farm and dairy land it had had priority, and anyway the damage hadn't been too bad. But once cleaned, the agrisolution companies wanted the place for farming, free of outside interference. The government, that weak partner in all that biotech corporations did, reluctantly agreed. The Alien Craft lay under an inconspicuous foamcast dome at the end of an obscure road, with no identifying signs of any kind.

Mal saw immediately why Mr. Kim had suggested going in his car, which had come with him from China. The Chinese were forced to buy all their biosolutions from others. In compensation, they had created the finest engineering and hard-goods manufacturies in the world. Mr. Kim's car was silent, fast, and computer-driven, technology unknown in the United States. Mal could see that even Abby4 was unwillingly impressed.

He leaned back against the contoured seats, which molded themselves to his body, and watched farmland flash past at an incredible rate. There were government officials and university professors who said the United States should fear Chinese technology, even if it wasn't based on biology. Maybe they were right.

In contrast, the computer-based security at the Alien Craft looked primitive. Mal had arranged for entry, and they passed through the locks into the dome, which was only ten feet

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wider on all sides than the Alien Craft itself. Mal had never seen it before, and despite himself, he was impressed.

The Craft was dull silver, as big as a small bedroom, a slightly irregular oval. In the artificial light of the dome it shimmered. When Mal put out a hand to touch it, his hand stopped almost a foot away.

"A force field of some unknown kind, unknown even before the Collapse," Abby4 said with such authority you'd think she'd done field tests herself. "The shield extends completely around the Craft, even below ground, where it is also impenetrable. The Craft was very carefully monitored in the decades between its landing and the Collapse, and never once did any detectable signal of any kind go out from it. No outgoing signals, no aliens disembarking, no outside markings to decode...no communication of any kind. One wonders why the aliens bothered to send it at all."

Mr. Kim quoted, "'The wordless teaching, the profit in not doing—not many people understand it.'"

"Ah," Abby4 said, too smart to either agree or disagree with a philosophy—Taoist? Buddhist?—she patently didn't share.

Mal walked completely around the Craft, wondering himself why anybody would bother with such a tremendous undertaking without any follow-up. Of course, maybe it hadn't been tremendous to the aliens. Maybe they sent interstellar silvery metal ovals to other planets all the time without follow-up. But why?

When Mal reached his starting point in the circular dome, Mr. Kim was removing an instrument from his leather bag.

Mal had never seen an instrument like it, but then he'd hardly seen any scientific instruments at all. This one looked like a flat television, with a glass screen on one side, metal on the other five. Only the "glass" clearly wasn't, since it seemed to shift as Mr. Kim lifted it, as if it were a field of its own. As Mal watched, Mr. Kim applied the field side of the device onto the side of the Craft, where it stayed even as he stepped back.

Mal said uncertainly, "I don't think you should—"

Abby4 said, "O, it doesn't matter, Mr. Goldstone. Nothing anyone has ever done has penetrated the Craft's force field, even before the Collapse."

Mr. Kim just smiled.

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Mal said, "You don't understand. The clearance I arranged with the State Department...it doesn't include taking any readings or...or whatever that device is doing. Mr. Kim?"

"Just taking some readings," Mr. Kim said blandly.

Mal's unease grew. "Please stop. As I say, I didn't obtain clearances for this!"

Abby4 scowled at him fiercely. Mr. Kim said, "Of course, Mr. Goldstone," and detached his device. "I am sorry to alarm you. Just some readings. Shall we go now? A most interesting object, but rather monotonous."

On the way back to St. Paul, Mr. Kim and Abby4 discussed the historic clean-ups of Boston, Paris, and Lisbon, as if nothing had happened.

What had?

AbbyWorks got the Shanghai contract. Mal got his promotion, his bonus, and his new car. Someone else handled the follow-up for the contract while Mal went on to new projects, but every so often he checked to see how the clean-up of Shanghai was proceeding. Two years into the agreement, the job was actually ahead of projected schedule, despite badly deteriorating relations between the two countries. China invaded and annexed Tibet, but China had always invaded and annexed Tibet, and only the human-solidarity people objected. Next, however, China annexed the Kamchatka Peninsula, where American biosolutions companies were working on the clean-up of Vladivostock. The genemod engineers brought back frightening stories of advanced Chinese engineering: room-temperature superconductors. Maglev trains. Nanotechnology. There were even rumors of quantum computers, capable of handling trillions of operations simultaneously, although Mal discounted those rumors completely. A practical quantum computer was still far over the horizon.

AbbyWorks was ordered out of Shanghai by the United States government. The company did not leave. Abby1 was jailed, but this made no difference. The Shanghai profits were paid to offshore banks. AbbyWorks claimed to have lost control of its Shanghai employees, who were making huge personal fortunes, enough to enable them to live outside the United States for the rest of very luxurious lives. Then, abruptly, the Chinese government itself terminated the contract. They literally threw AbbyWorks out of China in the middle of the night. They kept for themselves enormous resources in patented scientific equipment, as well as monies due for the last three months' work, an amount equal to some state budgets.

At three o'clock in the morning, Mal received a visit from the Office of National Security.

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"Mallings Goldstone?"

"Yes?"

"We need to ask you some questions."

Recorders, intimidation. The ONS had information that in 2175 Mr. Goldstone had conducted two people to the Minnesota site of the space object: Abby4 Abbington, president of AbbyWorks Biosolutions, and Mr. Kim Mao Xun of the Chinese government.

"Yes, I did," Mal said, sitting stiffly in his nightclothes. "It's on record. I had proper clearances."

"Yes. But during that visit, did Mr. Kim take out and attach to the space object an unknown device, and then return it to his briefcase?"

"Yes." Mal's stomach twisted.

"Why wasn't this incident reported to the State Department?"

"I didn't think it was important." Not entirely true. Abby4 must have reported it...but why now? Because of the lost monies and confiscated equipment, of course. Adding to the list of Chinese treacheries; a longer list was more likely to compel government reaction.

"Do you have any idea what the device was, or what it might have done to the space object?"

"No."

"Then you didn't rule out that its effects might have been dangerous to your country?"

"Dangerous"? How?"

"We don't know, Mr. Mallings—that's the point. We do know that in non-biological areas the Chinese technology is far ahead of our own. We have no way of knowing if that device you failed to report turned the space object into a weapon of some kind."

"A weapon? Don't you think that's very unlikely?"

"No, Mr. Mallings. I don't. Please get dressed and come with us."

For the first time, Mal noticed the two men's builds. Genemod for strength and agility, no doubt, as well as maximum possible longevity. He remembered Mr. Kim, scrawny and wrinkled. Their bodies far outclassed Mr. Kim's, far outclassed Mal's as well. But Mr. Kim's body was somewhere on the other side of the world, along with his superior 'devices,' and Mal's body was marked "scapegoat" as clearly as if it were spelled out in DNA-controlled birthmarks on his forehead.

He went into his bedroom to get dressed.

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Mal had been interrogated with truth drugs—painless, harmless, utterly reliable—recorded, and released by the time the news hit the flimsies. He had already handed in his resignation to his company. The moving lorry stood outside his apartment, being loaded for the move to someplace he wasn't known. Mal, flimsy in hand, watched the two huge stevies carry out his furniture.

But he couldn't postpone reading the flimsy forever. And, of course, this was just the first.

There would be more. The tempaper rustled in his hand. It would last forty-eight hours before dissolving into molecules completely harmless to the environment.

CHINESE ARMED 'SPACE OBJECT' TO DESTROY US!!!

"MIGHT BE RADIATION, OR POLLUTANTS, OR A SUPER-BOMB," SAY SCIENTISTS

TROJAN HORSE UNDER GUISE OF BIOSOLUTIONS CONTRACT

TWO YEARS AND NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE!!!!

Flimsies weren't subtle. But so far as Mal could see, his name hadn't yet been released to them.

Mal said, "Please be careful with that desk, it's very old. It belonged to my great-grandfather."

"O, yes, friend," one of the stevies said. "Most careful." They hurled it into the lorry.

A neighbor of Mal's walked toward Mal, recognized him, and stopped dead. She hissed at him, a long ugly sound, and walked on.

So some other flimsy had already tracked him down and published his name.

"Leave the rest," Mal said suddenly, "everything else inside the house. Let's go."

"O, just a few crates," said one stevie.

"No, leave it." Mal climbed into the lorry's passenger cubicle. He hoped he wasn't a coward, but like all meeting brokers he was an historian, and he remembered the historical accounts of the 'Anti-Polluters' Riots' of the Collapse. What those mobs had done to anyone suspected of contributing to the destruction of the environment....Mal pulled the curtains closed in the cubicle.

"Let's go!"

"O, yes!" the stevies said cheerfully, and drove off.

Mal moved five states away, pursued all the way by flimsies. He couldn't change his retinal scan or DNA ID, of course, but he used a legal corporate alias with the new landlord, the grocery broker, the bank. He read the news every day, and listened to it on public radio, and it progressed as any meeting broker could foresee it would.

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First, set the agenda: Demonize the Chinese, spread public fear. Second, canvass negotiating possibilities: Will they admit it? What can we contribute? Third, eliminate the possibilities you don't like and hone in on the one you do: If the United States has been attacked, it has the right to counterattack. Fourth, build in safeguards against failure: We can't yet attack China, they'll destroy us. We *can* attack the danger they've placed within our borders, and then declare victory for that. Fifth, close the deal.

The evacuation started two weeks later, and covered most of northern Minnesota and great swathes of southern Ontario. It included people and farm animals, but not wildlife, which would of course be replaced from cloned embryos. As the agrisolution inhabitants, many protesting furiously, were trucked out, the timed-release drops of engineered organisms were trucked in. Set loose after the bomb, they would spread over the entire affected area and disassemble all radioactive molecules. They were the same biosolutions that had cleaned up Boston, the very best AbbyWorks could create. In five years, Minnesota would be as sweet and clean as Kansas.

Or Shanghai.

The entire nation, Mal included, watched the bomb drop on vid. People held patriotic parties; wine and beer flowed. We were showing the Chinese they couldn't endanger us in our own country! Handsome genemod news speakers, who looked like Viking princesses or Zulu warriors or Greek gods, speculated on what the space object might reveal when blasted open. If anything survived, of course, which was not likely, and here scientists, considerably less gorgeous than the news speakers, explained fusion and the core of the sun. The bomb might be antiquated technology, they said, but it was still workable, and would save us from Chinese perfidy.

Not to mention, Mal thought, saving face for the United States and lost revenues for AbbyWorks. It might not earn as much to clean up Minnesota as to clean up Shanghai, but it was still a lot of money.

The bomb fell, hit the space object, and sent up a mushroom cloud. When it cleared, the object lay there exactly as before.

Airborne robots went in, spraying purifying organisms as they went, recording every measurement possible. Scientists compared the new data about the space object to the data they already had. Not one byte differed. When robotic arms reached out to touch the object, the arms still stopped ten inches away at an unseen, unmoved force field of some type not even the Chinese understood.

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Mal closed his eyes. How long would Chinese retaliation take? What would they do, and when?

They did nothing. Slowly, public opinion swung to their side, helped by the flimsies. Journalists and viddies, ever eager for the next story, discovered that AbbyWorks had falsified reports on the clean-up of Shanghai. It had not been progressing as the corporation said, or as the contract promised. Eventually AbbyWorks—already too rich, too powerful, for many people's tastes—became the villain. They had tried to frame the Chinese, who were merely trying to do normal clean-up of their part of the planet. Clean-up was our job, our legacy, our sacred stewardship of the living Earth. And anyway, Chinese technological consumer goods, increasingly available in the United States, were so much better than ours—shouldn't we be trying to learn from them?

So business partnerships were formed. The fragile Chinese-American alliance was strengthened. AbbyWorks was forced to move offshore. Mal, in some way he didn't quite understand, became a cult hero. Mr. Kim would have, too, but shortly after the bomb was dropped on the space object, he died of a heart attack, not having the proper genemods to clear out plaque from his ancient cardiac arteries.

When Minnesota was clean again, the space object went back under a new foamcast dome, and in two more generations only historians remembered what it may or may not have saved.

Transmission: There is nothing here yet.

Current probability of occurrence: 78%.

IV: 2264

Few people understood why KimWorks was built in such a remote place. Dr. Leila Jian-fen Kim was one of the few who did.

She liked family history. Didn't Lao Tzu himself say, "To know what endures is to be openhearted, magnanimous, regal, blessed"? Family endures, family history endures. It was the same reason she liked the meditation garden at KimWorks, which was where she headed now with her great secret, to compose her mind.

They had done it. Created the programmable replicator. One of the two great prizes hovering on the engineering horizon, and KimWorks had captured it.

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Walking away from the sealed lab, Leila tried to empty her mind, to put the achievement to one side and let the mystery flow in. The replicator must be kept in perspective, in its rightful place. Calming herself in the meditation garden would help her remember that.

The garden was her favorite part of KimWorks. It lay at the northern end of the vast walled complex, separated from the first security fence by a simple curve of white stone. From the stone benches you couldn't see security fences, or even most of the facility buildings. So cleverly designed was the meditation garden that no matter where you sat, you contemplated only serene things. A single blooming bush surrounded by raked gravel. A rock placed to catch the sun. The stream flowing softly, living water, always seeking its natural level. Or the egg, mystery of mysteries.

It was the egg, unexplained symbol of unexplained realms beyond Earth, that brought Leila the deepest peace. She had sat for hours when the replicator project was in its planning stage, contemplating the egg's dull silvery oval, letting her mind empty of all else. From that, she was convinced, had come most of the project's form. Form was only a temporary manifestation of the ten thousand things, and in the egg's unknowability lay the secret of its power.

Her great-grandfather, Kim Mao Xun, had known that power. He had seen the egg on an early trip to the United States, before the Alliance, even. His son had made the same visit, and his granddaughter, Leila's mother, had chosen the spot for this KimWorks facility and had the meditation garden built at its heart. Leila's father, Paul Wilkinson, had gently teased his wife about putting a garden in a scientific research center, but Father was an American. They did not always understand. With the wiser in the world lies the responsibility for teaching the less wise.

But it had been Father who had inspired Leila to become a scientist, not a businessman like her brother or a political leader like her sister. Father, were he still alive, would be proud of her now. Pride was a temptation, even pride in one's children, but it nonetheless warmed Leila's heart.

She sat, a slim, middle-aged, Chinese-born woman with smooth black hair, dressed in a blue lab coverall, and thought about the nature of pride.

The programmable replicator, unlike its predecessors, would not be limited to nanocreating a single specific molecule. It was good to be able to create any molecule you needed or wanted, of course. The extant replicators, shaped by Chinese technology, had changed the face of the Earth. Theoretically, everyone now alive could be fed, housed, clad by nanotech. But in addition to the inevitable political and economic problems of access, the existing nanotech processes were

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expensive. One must create the assemblers, including their tiny self-contained programs; use the assemblers to create molecules; use other techniques, chemical or mechanical, to join the molecules into products.

Now all that would change. The new KimWorks programmable replicator didn't carry assembly instructions hardwired into it. Rather, it carried programmable computers that could build anything desired, including more of itself, from the common materials of the earth. Every research lab in the world had been straining toward this goal. And Leila's team had found it.

She sat on the bench closest to the egg. The sky arched above her, for the electromagnetic dome protecting KimWorks was invisible. Clear space had been left all around the object, except for a small flat stone visible from Leila's bench. On the stone was engraved a verse from the *Tao Te Ching*, in both Chinese and English:

THE WORDLESS TEACHING
THE PROFIT IN NOT DOING—
NOT MANY PEOPLE UNDERSTAND IT.

Certainly, in all humility, Leila didn't. Why send this egg from somewhere in deep space and have it do nothing for two and a half centuries? But that was the mystery, the power of the egg. That was why contemplating it filled her with peace.

The others were still in nanoteam one's lab building. Not many others; robots did all the routine work, of course, and only David and Chunqing and Rulan remained at the computers and stafilis. It had taken Leila ten minutes to pass through the lab safeties, but she had suddenly wearied of the celebrations, the Chilean wine and holo congratulations from the CEO in Shanghai, who was her great-uncle. She had wanted to sit quietly in the cool sweet air of the garden, watching the long Minnesota twilight turn purple behind the egg. Shadow and curve, it was almost a poem...

The lab blew up.

The blast threw Leila off her bench and onto the ground. She screamed and threw up one arm to shield her eyes. But it wasn't necessary; she was shielded from direct line with the lab by the egg. And a part of her mind knew that there was no radiation anyway, only heat, and no flying debris because the lab had imploded, as it was constructed to do. Something had breached the outer layers of sensors, and in response the ignition layer had produced a gas of metal oxides hot enough to vaporize everything inside the lab. No uncontrolled replicator must ever escape.

To vaporize everything. The lab. The project. David, Chunqing, Rulan.

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Already the site would be cooling. Leila staggered to her feet, and immediately was again knocked off them by an aftershock. It had been an earthquake, then, least likely of anticipated penetrations but nonetheless guarded against. O, David, Chunqing, Rulan...

"Dr. Kim! Are you all right!" Keesha Ali, running toward her from Security. As her ears cleared, Leila heard the sirens alarms.

"Yes, I...Keesha!"

"I know," the woman said grimly. "Who was inside?"

"David. Chunqing. Rulan. And the replicator project...an earthquake! Of all the bad luck of heaven..."

"It wasn't bad luck," Keesha said. "We were attacked."

"Attacked—"

"That was no natural quake. Security picked up the charge just seconds before it went off. In a tunnel underneath the lab, very deep, very huge. It not only breached the lab, it destroyed the dome equipment. We're bringing the back-up on-line now. Meeting in Amenities in five minutes, Dr. Kim."

Leila stared at Keesha. The woman was American, of course, born here, with no Chinese ancestry. But surely even such people first mourned their dead...Yes. They did, under normal circumstances. So something extraordinary was happening here.

Leila was genemod for intelligence. She said slowly, "Data escaped."

"In the fraction of a second between breach and ignition," Keesha said grimly, "while the dome was down, including, of course, the Faraday cage. They took the entire replicator project, Dr. Kim."

Leila understood what that meant, and her mind staggered under the burden. It meant that someone else had captured the other shimmering engineering prize. The replicator data had been heavily encrypted, and there had been massive amounts of it. Only another quantum computer could have been fast enough to steal that much data in the fraction of a second before ignition—or could have a hope of decrypting it. A quantum computer, able to perform trillions of computations per second, had been a reality for a generation now. But it could operate only within sealed parameters: magnetic fields. Optic cables.

Qubit data, represented by particles with undetermined spin, were easily destroyed by contact with any other particles, including photons—ordinary sunlight. No one had succeeded in

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intrusive stealing of quantum data without destroying it. Not from outside the computer, and especially not over miles of open land.

Until now. And anyone with a quantum computer that could do that was already a rival.
Or a revolutionary.

The first replicator bloom appeared within KimWorks three weeks later.

It was Leila who first saw it: a dull, reddish-brown patch on the bright green genemod grass by Amenities. If it had been on the path itself, Leila would have thought she was seeing blood. But on grass...She stood very still and thought, *No*. It was a blight, some weird mutated fungus, a renegade biological...

She had worked too long in the sabotaged lab not to know what it was.

Carefully, as if her arm bones were fragile, Leila raised her wrist to her mouth and spoke into her implanted comlink. "Code Heaven. Repeat, Code Heaven. Replicator escape at following coordinates. Security, nanoteam one—"

There was no need to list everyone who should be notified. People began pouring out of buildings: some blank-faced, some with their fists to their mouth, some running, as if speed would help. People, Leila thought numbly, expressed fear in odd ways.

"Dr. Kim?" It was a Grade 4 robotics engineer, a dark-skinned American man in an olive uniform. His teeth suddenly bared, very white in his face. "That's it? Right there?"

"That's it," Leila said, and immediately wanted to correct to *That's they*. For by now there were billions of the replicators, to be so visible. Busily creating more of themselves from the grass and ground and morning dew and whatever else lay in their path, each one replicating every five minutes if they were on basic mode. And why wouldn't they be? They weren't assembling anything useful, not now. Whoever had programmed Leila's replicators had set them merely to replicate, chewing up whatever was in their path as raw materials, turning assemblers into tiny disassembling engines of destruction. "Don't go any closer!"

But of course even a Grade 4 engineer knew better than to go close. Everyone inside this KimWorks facility understood the nature of the project, even if only a few could understand the actuality. Everyone inside was a trusted worker, a truth-drug-vetted loyalist.

She looked at the reddish-brown bloom, doubling every five minutes.

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"You have detained everyone? Even those off duty?" asked the holo seated at the head of the conference table. Li Kim Lung, president of KimWorks, was in Shanghai, but his telepresence was so solid that it was an effort to remember that. His dark eyes raked their faces, with the one exception of Leila's. Out of family courtesy he did not study her shame in the stolen uses of her creation.

Security chief Samuel Wang said, "Everyone who has been inside KimWorks in the last forty-eight hours has been found and recalled, Mr. Li. Forty-eight hours is a three-fold redundancy; the bloom was started, according to Dr. Kim, no later than sixteen hours ago. No one is missing."

"Your physicians have started truth-testing?"

"With the Dalton Corporation Serum Alpha. It's the best on the market, sir, to a 99.9 confidence level. Whoever brought the replicator into the dome will confess."

"And your physician can test how many at once?"

"Six, sir. There are 243 testees." Wang did not insult Mr. Li by doing the math for him.

"You are including the nanoteams and Security, of course."

"Of course. We—"

"Mr. Wang." A telepresence suddenly beside the Security chief, a young man. Leila knew this not from his appearance—they all looked young, after all, what else were biomods for—but from his fear. He had not yet learned how to hide it. "We have...we found...a body. A suicide. Behind the dining hall."

Wang said, "Who?"

"Her name is—was--June Juana Selkirk. An equipment engineer. We're checking her records now, but they look all right."

Mr. Li's holo said dryly, "Obviously they are not all right, no matter what her DNA scan says."

Mr. Wang said, "Sir, if people are recruited by some other company or revolutionary group after they come to KimWorks, it's difficult to discover or control. American freedom laws..."

"I am not interested in American freedom laws," Mr. Li said. "I am interested in whom this woman was working for, and why she planted our own product inside KimWorks to destroy us. I am also interested in knowing where else she may have planted it before she killed herself.

Those are the things I am interested in, Mr. Wang."

"O, yes," Wang said.

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"I do not want to destroy your facility in order to stop this sabotage, Mr. Wang."

Mr. Wang said nothing. There was, Leila thought, nothing to say. No one was going to be allowed to leave the facility until this knot had been untied. Even the Americans accepted this. No one wanted military intervention. That truly might destroy the entire company.

Above all, no one wanted a single submicroscopic replicator to escape the dome. The arithmetic was despairingly simple. Doubling every five minutes, unchecked replicators could reduce the entire globe to rubble in a matter of days.

But it wasn't going to come to that. The bloom had been "killed" easily enough. Replicators weren't biologicals, but rather tiny computers powered by nanomachinery. They worked on a flow of electrons in their single-atom circuitry. An electromagnetic pulse had wiped out their programming in a nanosecond.

The second bloom was discovered that night, when a materials specialist walking from the dining hall to the makeshift dorms stepped on it. The path was floodlit, but the bloom was still small and faint, and the man didn't know his boot had made contact.

Some replicators stuck to his boot sole. Programmed to break down any material into usable atoms for construction, they ate through his boot. Then, doubling every five minutes, they began on his foot.

He screamed and fell to the floor of the dorm, pulling at his boot. Atoms of tissue, nerve cell, bone, were broken at their chemical bonds and reconfigured. No one knew what was happening, or what to do, until a physician arrived, cursed in Mandarin, and sent for an engineer. By the time equipment had been brought in to encase the worker in a magnetic field, he had fainted from the pain, and the leg had to be removed below the knee.

A new one would be grown for him, of course. But the nanoteam met immediately, and without choice.

Leila said, "We must use a massive EMP originating in the dome itself."

Samuel Wang said, "But, Dr. Kim—"

"No objections. Yes, it will destroy every electronic device we have, including the quantum computer. But no one will die."

Mr. Li's telepresence said, "Do so. Immediately. We can at least salvage reputation. No one outside the dome knows of this."

It was not a question but Wang, eyes downcast, answered it like one. "O, no, Mr. Li."

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"Then use the EMP. Following, administer a forty-eight-hour amnesia block to everyone below Grade 2."

"Yes," Wang said. He knew what was coming. Someone must bear responsibility for this disaster.

"And administer it also to yourself," Mr. Li said. "Dr. Kim, see that this is done."

"O, yes," said Leila. It was necessary, however distasteful. Samuel Wang would be severed from KimWorks. Severed people sometimes sought revenge. But without information, Wang would not be able to revenge, or to know why he wanted to. He would receive a good pension in return for the semi-destruction of his memory, which would in turn cause the complete destruction of his career.

Leila made her way to the meditation garden. Most people would wait indoors for the EMP; strange how human beings sought shelter within walls, even from things they knew walls could not affect. Leila's brain would be no more or less exposed to the EMP in the garden than inside a building. She would experience the same disorientation, and then the same massive lingering headache as her brain fought to regain its normal patterns of nerve firing.

Which it would do. The plasticity of the brain, a biological, was enormous. Not so computers. All microcircuitry within the dome would shortly be wiped of all data, all programming, and all ability to recover. This was not the only KimWorks facility, of course, but it was the flagship. Also, it was doing the most advanced physical engineering, and Leila wasn't sure how the company as a whole, her grandfather's company, would survive the financial loss.

She sat in the floodlit meditation garden and waited, staring at the egg. The night was clear, and when the floodlights failed, moonlight would edge the egg. Probably it would be beautiful. Twenty minutes until the EMP, perhaps, or twenty-five.

What would Lao Tzu have said of all this?

"To bear and not to own; to act and not lay claim; to do the work and let it go—"

There was a reddish-brown stain spreading under the curve of the egg.

Leila walked over, careful not to get too close, and squatted on the grass for a better look. The stain was a bloom. The replicators, mindless, were spreading in all directions. Leila shined her torch under the curve of the egg. Yes, they had reached the place where the egg's curved surface met the ground.

Was the egg's outer shield, its nature still unknown after 257 years, composed of something that could be disassembled into component particles? And if so, what would the egg do about

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that?

Swiftly Leila raised her wristlink. "Code Heaven to Security and all nanoteams. Delay EMP. Again: delay the EMP! Come, please, to the southeast side of the space egg. There is a bloom attacking the egg...come immediately!"

Cautiously Leila lowered herself flat on the grass and angled her torch under the egg. Increasing her surface area in contact with the ground increased the chance of a stray replicator disassembling her, but she wanted to see as much as possible of the interface between egg and ground.

Wild hope surged in her. The space egg might save KimWorks, save Samuel Wang's job, thwart their industrial rival. Surely those alien beings who had built it would build in protection, security, the ability to destroy whatever was bent on the egg's destruction? There was nothing in the universe, biological or machine, that did not contain some means to defend itself, even it was only the cry of an infant to summon assistance.

Was that what would happen? A cry to summon help from beyond the stars?

Leila was scarcely aware of the others joining her, exclaiming, kneeling down. Bringing better lights, making feverish predictions. She lay flat on the grass, watching the bloom of tiny mechanical creatures she herself had created as they spread inexorably toward her, disassembling all molecules in their path. Spreading toward her, spreading to each side—

But not spreading up the side of the egg. That stayed pristine and smooth. So the shield *was* a force field of incredible hardness, not a substance. The solution to the old puzzle stirred nothing in Leila. She was too disappointed. Irrationally disappointed, she told herself, but it didn't help. It felt as if something important, something that held together the unseen part of the world that she had always believed just as real as the seen, had failed. Had dissolved, taking with it illusions that she had believed as real as bone and blood and brain.

They waited another hour, until they could wait no more. The egg did not save anything. KimWorks Security set the dome to emit an EMP, and everything in the facility stopped. Several billion credits of equipment became scrap. Leila's headache, even with drugs given out by the physician, lasted several hours. When she was allowed to leave the facility, she went home and slept for fourteen hours, awaking with an ache not in her head but in her chest, as if something vital had been removed and taken apart.

Two weeks later the first bloom appeared near Duluth, over sixty miles away. It appeared outside a rival research facility, where it was certain that someone would recognize what they

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were looking at. Someone did, but not until two people had stepped in the bloom, and died.

Leila flew to Duluth. She was met by agents of both the United States Renewed Government and the Chinese-American Alliance, all of whom wanted to know what the hell was going on. They were appalled to find out. Why hadn't this been reported to the Technology Oversight Office before now? Did she understand the implications? Did she understand the penalties?

Yes, Leila said. She did.

The political demands followed soon, from an international terrorist group already known to possess enormous technical expertise. There were, in such uncertain times, many such groups. Only one thing was special, and fortunate, about this one: the United States Renewed Government, in secret partnership with several other governments, had been closing in on the group for over two years. They now hastened their efforts, so effectively that within three days the terrorist leaders were arrested and all important cells broken up.

Under Serum Alpha, the revolutionaries—what revolution they thought they were leading was not deemed important—confirmed that infiltrator June Juana Selkirk was a late recruit to the cause. She could not possibly have been identified by KimWorks in time to stop her from smuggling the replicator into the dome. However, this mattered to nobody, not even to ex-Security chief Samuel Wang, who could not remember Selkirk, the blooms, or why he no longer was employed.

A second bloom was found spreading dangerously in farmland near Red Lake, disassembling bioengineered corn, agricultural robots, insects, security equipment, and rabbits. It had apparently been planted before the arrests of the terrorist leaders.

Serum Alpha failed to determine exactly how many blooms had been planted, because no one person knew. Quantum calculations had directed the operation, and it would have taken the lifetime of the sun to decrypt them. All that the United States Renewed Government, or the Chinese-American Alliance, could be sure of was that nothing had left northern Minnesota.

They put a directed-beam weapon on the correct settings into very low orbit, and blasted half the state with a massive EMP. Everything electronic stopped working. Fifteen citizens, mostly stubborn elderly people who refused to evacuate, died from cerebral shock. The loss to Minnesota in money and property took a generation to restore.

Even then a weird superstition grew, shameful in such a technological society, that rogue replicators lurked in the northern forests and dells, and would eat anyone who came across them.

A children's version of this added that the replicators had red mouths and drooled brown goo.

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Northern Minnesota became statistically underpopulated. However, in a nation with so much cleaned-up farmland and the highest yield-per-acre bioengineered crops in the world, northern Minnesota was scarcely missed.

Dr. Leila Jian-fen Kim, her work disgraced, moved back to China. She settled not in Shanghai, which had been cleaned up so effectively that it was the most booming city in the country, but in the much poorer northern city of Harbin. Eventually Leila left physics and entered a Taoist monastery. To her own surprise, since her monkhood had been intended as atonement rather than fulfillment, she was happy.

The Minnesota facility of KimWorks was abandoned. Buildings, walls, and walkways decayed very slowly, being built of resistant and rust-proof alloys. But the cleaned-up wilderness advanced quickly. Within twenty years the space egg sat almost hidden by young trees: oak, birch, balsam, spruce rescued from Keller's Blight by genetic engineering, the fast-growing and trashy poplars that no amount of genemod had been able to eliminate. The egg wasn't lost, of course; the worldwide SpanLink had its coordinates, as well as its history.

But few people visited. The world was converting, admittedly unevenly, to nano-created plenty. The nanos, of course, were of the severely limited, unprogrammable type. Technology leapt forward, as did bioengineered good health for more and more of the population, both natural and cloned.

Bioengineered intelligence, too; the average human IQ had risen twenty points in the last hundred years, mostly in the center of the bell curve. For people thus genemod to enjoy learning, the quantum-computer-based SpanLink provided endless diversions, endless communication, endless challenges. In such a world, a "space egg" that just sat there didn't attract many visitors. Inert, nonplastic, non-interactive, it simply wasn't interesting enough.

No matter where it came from.

Transmission: There is nothing here yet.

Current probability of occurrence: 94%.

V: 2295

They had agreed, laughing, on a time for the Initiation. The time was arbitrary; the AI could have been initiated at any time. But the Chinese New Year seemed appropriate, since Wei Wu Wei Corporation of Shanghai had been such a big contributor. The Americans and Brazilians had

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flown over for the ceremony: Karim DiBenolo and Rosita Peres and Frallie Subel and Braley Wilkinson. The Chinese tried to master the strange names, rolling the peculiar syllables in their mouths, but only Braley Wilkinson spoke Chinese. O, but he was born to it; his great-great-uncle had married a rich Chinese woman and the family had lived in both countries since.

Braley didn't look dual, though. Genemod, of course, the Chinese scientists said to each other, grimacing. Genemod for looks was not fashionable in China right now; it was inauthentic. The human genome had sufficiently improved, among the educated and civilized, to let natural selection alone. One should tamper only so far with the authenticity of life, and in the past there had been excesses. Regrettable, but now finished. Civilization had returned to the authentic.

Nobody looked more inauthentic than Braley Wilkinson. Well over two meters high (what was this American passion for height?), blond as the sun, extravagant violet eyes. Brilliant, of course: not yet thirty years old and a major contributor to the AI. In addition, it was of course his parents who had chosen his vulgar looks, not himself. Tolerance was due.

And besides, no one was feeling critical. It was a party.

Zheng Ma, that master, had designed floating baktors for the entire celebration hall. Red and yellow, the baktors combined and recombined in kaleidoscopic loveliness. The air mixture was just slightly intoxicating, not too much. The food and drink, offered by the soundless unobtrusive robots that the Chinese did better than anybody else, was a superb mixture of national cuisines.

"You have been here before?" a Chinese woman asked Braley. He could not remember her name.

"To China, yes. But not to Shanghai."

"And what do you think of the city?"

"It is beautiful. And very authentic."

"Thank you. We have worked to make it both."

Braley smiled. He has had this exact same conversation four times in the last half hour. What if he said something different? *No, I have not been to Shanghai, but my notorious aunt, who once almost destroyed the world, was a holy monk in Harbin. Or maybe Did you know it's really*

Braley2, and I'm a clone? That would jolt their bioconservatism. Or even, Has anyone told you that one of the major templates for the AI is my unconservative, American, cloned, too-tall persona?

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But they already knew that, anyway. The only shocking thing would be to say it aloud, to publicly claim credit. That was not done in Shanghai. It was a mannerly city.

And a beautiful one. The celebration hall, which also housed the AI terminal, was the loveliest room he'd ever seen. Perfect proportions. Serenity glowed from the dark red lacquered walls with their shifting subtle phoenix patterns, barely discernible and yet there, perceived at the edge of consciousness. The place was on SpanLink feed, of course, for such an historic event, but no recorders were visible to mar the room's artful use of space.

Through the window, which comprised one entire wall, the city below shared that balance and serenity. Shanghai had once been the ugliest, most dangerous, and most sinister city in China. Now it was breath-taking. The Huangpu River had been cleaned up along with everything else, and it sparkled blue between its parks bright with perfect genemod trees and flowers. Public buildings and temples, nanobuilt, rested among the low domed residences. Above the river soared the Shih-Yu Bridge, also nanobuilt, a seemingly weightless web of shining cables. Braley had heard it called the most graceful bridge in the world, and he could easily believe it.

Where in this idyll was the city fringe? Every city had them, the disaffected and rebellious who had not fairly shared in either humanity's genome improvement or its economic one. Shanghai, in particular, had a centuries-long history of anarchy and revolution, exploitation and despair. Nor was China as a whole as united as her leaders liked to present. The basic cause, Braley believed, was biological. Even in bioconservative China—perhaps especially in bioconservative China—genetic science had not planed down the wild edges of the human gene pool.

It was precisely that wildness that Braley had tried to get into the AI. Although, to be fair, he hadn't had to work very hard to achieve this. The AI existed only because, and after, the quantum computer existed. True intelligence required the flexibility of quantum physics.

With historical, deterministic computers, you always got the same answer to the same question. With quantum computers, that was no longer true. Superimposed states could collapse into more than one result, and it was precisely that uncertain mixed state, it turned out, that was necessary for self-awareness. AI was not a program. It was, like the human brain itself, an unpredictable collection of conflicting states.

A man joined him at the window, one of the Brazilians...a scientist? Politician? He looked like, but most certainly was not, a porn-vid star.

"You have been here before?" the Brazilian said.

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"To China, yes. But not to Shanghai."

"And what do you think of the city?"

"It is beautiful. And very authentic."

"I'm told they have worked to make it both."

"Yes," Braley said.

A melodious voice, which seemed to come from all parts of the room simultaneously, said,

"We are prepared to start now, please. We are prepared to start now. Thank you."

Gratefully, Braley moved toward the end of the room farthest from the transparent wall.

A low stage, also lacquered deep red, spanned the entire length of the far wall. In the middle sat a black obelisk, three meters tall. This was the visual but unnecessary token presence of the AI, most of which lay within the lacquered wall. The rest of the stage was occupied—although that was hardly the word—by three-dimensional holo displays of whatever data was requested by the AI users. These were scattered throughout the crowd, unobtrusively holding their pads. From somewhere among the throng a child stepped forward, an adorable little girl about five years old, black hair held by a deep red ribbon and black eyes preternaturally bright.

Braley had a sudden irreverent thought: *We look like a bunch of primitive idol worshippers, complete with infant sacrifice.* He grinned. The Chinese had insisted on a child's actually initiating the AI. This had been very important to them for reasons Braley had never understood. But, then, you didn't have to understand everything.

"You smile," said the Brazilian, still beside him. "You are right, Dr. Braley. This is an occasion of joy."

"Certainly," Braley said, and that, too, was a private joke. Certainty was the one thing quantum physics, including the AI, could not deliver. Joy...O, maybe. But not certainty.

The president of the Chinese-American Alliance mounted the shallow stage and began a speech. Braley didn't listen, in any of the languages available in his ear jack. The speech would be predictable: new era for humanity, result of peace and knowledge shared among nations, servant of the entire race, savior from our own isolation on the planet, and so forth until it was time for Initiation.

The child stepped forward, a perfect miniature doll. The president put a touchpad in her small hand. She smiled at him with a dazzle that could have eclipsed the sun. No matter how bioconservative China was, Braley thought, that child was genemod or he was a trilobite.

Holo displays flickered into sight across the stage. They monitored basic computer

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functioning, interesting only to engineers. The only display that mattered shimmered in the air to the right of the obelisk, an undesignated display open for the AI to use however it chose. At the moment, the display showed merely a stylized field of black dots in slowed-down Brownian movement. Whatever the AI created there, plus the voice activation, would be First Contact between humanity and an alien species.

Despite himself, Braley felt his breath come a little faster.

The adorable little girl pressed the touchpad at the place the president indicated.

"Hello," a new voice said in Chinese, an ordinary voice, and yet a shiver ran over the room, and a low collective indrawn breath like wind souging through a grove of sacred trees. "I am T'ien hsia."

T'ien hsia: "made under heaven." The name had not been chosen by Braley, but he liked it. It could also be translated "the entire world," which he liked even better. Thanks to SpanLink, T'ien hsia existed over the entire world, and in and of itself, it *was* a new world. The holo display of black dots had become a globe, the Earth as seen from the orbitals that carried SpanLink, and Braley also liked that choice of greeting logo.

"Hello," the child piped, carefully coached. "Welcome to us!"

"I understand," the AI said. "Good-bye."

The holo display disappeared. So did all the functional displays.

For a long moment, the crowd waited expectantly for what the AI would do next. Nothing happened. As the time lengthened, people began to glance sideways at each other. Engineers and scientists became busy with their pads. No display flickered on. Still no one spoke.

Finally the little girl said in her clear childish treble, "Where did T'ien hsia go?"

And the frantic activity began.

It was Braley who thought to run the visual feeds of the event at drastically slowed speed. The scientists had cleared the room of all non-essential personnel, and then spent two hours looking for the AI anywhere on SpanLink. There was no trace of it. Not anywhere.

"It cannot be deleted," the project head, Liu Huang Te, said for perhaps the twentieth time. "It is not a *program*."

"But it has been deleted," said a surly Brazilian engineer who, by this time, everyone disliked. "It is gone."

"The particles are there! They possess spin!"

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This was indubitably true. The spin of particles was the way a quantum computer embodied combinations of qubits of data. The mixed states of spin represented simultaneous computations. The collapse of those mixed states represented answers from the AI. The particles were there, and they possessed spin. But T'ien hsia had vanished.

A computer voice—a conventional computer, not self-aware—delivered its every-ten-minute bulletin on the mixed state of the rest of the world outside this room. "The president of Japan has issued a statement ridiculing the AI Project. The riot protesting the 'theft' of T'ien hsia has been brought under control in New York by the Second Robotic Precinct, using tangleguns. In Shanghai the riot grows stronger, joined by thousands of outcasts living beyond the city perimeter, who have overwhelmed the robotic police and are currently attacking the Shih-Yu bridge. In Sao Paulo—"

Braley ceased to listen. There remained no record anywhere of the AI's brief internal functions (and how had *that* been achieved? By whom? Why?), but there was the visual feed.

"Slow the image to one-tenth speed," Braley instructed the computer.

The holo display of the Earth morphed to the field of black dots in Brownian motion.

"Slow it to one-hundredth speed."

The holo display of the Earth morphed to the field of black dots in Brownian motion.

"Slow to one-thousandth speed."

The holo display of the Earth morphed to the field of black dots in Brownian motion.

"Slow to one ten-thousandth speed."

Something flickered, too brief for the eye to see, between the globe and the black dots.

Behind Braley a voice, filled with covert satisfaction, said in badly accented Chinese, "They're ended. The shame, and the resources.... Wei Wu Wei Corporation won't survive this. Nothing can save them."

The something between globe and dots flickered more strongly, but not strongly enough for Braley to make it out.

"Slow to one-hundred-thousandth speed."

The badly accented voice, still slimy with glee, quoted Lao Tzu, "Those who think to win the world by doing something to it, I see them come to grief..."

Braley frowned savagely at the hypocrisy. Then he forgot it, and his entire being concentrated itself on the slowed holo display.

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The globe of the Earth disappeared. In its place shimmered a slightly irregular egg shape, dull silver, surrounded by wildflowers and trees. Braley froze the image.

"What's that?" someone cried.

Braley knew. But he didn't need to say anything; the data was instantly accessed on SpanLink and holo-displayed in the center of the room. A babble of voices began debating and arguing.

Braley went on staring at the object from deep space, still sitting in northern Minnesota nearly three centuries after its landing.

The AI had possessed 250 spinning particles in superposition. It could perform more than 10^{75} simultaneous computations, more than the number of atoms in the universe. How many had it taken to convince T'ien hsia that its future did not lie with humanity?

"I understand," the AI said. "Good-bye."

The voice of the SpanLink reporting program, doing exactly what it had been told to do, said calmly, "The Shih-Yu bridge has been destroyed. The mob has been dispersed with stun gas from Wei Wu Wei Corporation jets, at the bequest of President Leong Ka-tai. In Washington, D.C.—Interrupt. I repeat, we now interrupt for a report from—"

Someone in the room yelled, "Quiet! Listen to this!" and all holo displays except Braley's suddenly showed a American face, flawless and professionally concerned. "In northern Minnesota, an object that first came to Earth 288 years ago and has been quiescent ever since, has just showed its first activity ever."

Visual of the space object. Braley looked from it to the T'ien hsia display. They were identical.

"Worldwide Tracking has detected a radiation stream of a totally unknown kind originating from the space object. Ten minutes ago the data stream headed into outer space in the direction of the constellation Cassiopeia. The radiation burst lasted only a fraction of a second, and has not been repeated. Data scientists say they're baffled, but this extraordinary event happening concurrently with the disappearance of the Wei Wu Wei Corporation's Artificial Intelligence, which was supposed to be initiated today, suggests a connection."

Visual of the riots at the Shih-Yu bridge.

"Scientists at Wei Wu Wei are still trying to save the AI—"

Too late, Braley thought. He walked away from the rest of the listening or arguing project teams, past the holo displays that had spouted in the air like mushrooms after rain, over to the

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window wall.

The Shih-Yu bridge, that graceful and authentic symbol, lay in ruins. It had been broken by whatever short-action disassemblers the rioters had used, plus sheer brute strength. On both sides of the bridge, gardens had been torn up, fountains destroyed, buildings attacked. By switching to zoom lens in his genemod eyes, Braley could even make out individual rioters, temporarily immobilized by the nerve gas as robot police scooped them up for arrest.

Within a week, of course, the powers that ruled China would have nanorebuilt the bridge, repaired the gardens, restored the city. Shanghai's disaffected, like every city's disaffected, would be pushed back into their place on the fringes. Until next time. Cities were resilient. Humanity was resilient. Since the space object had landed, humanity had saved itself and bounded back from...how many disasters? Braley wasn't sure.

T'ien hsia would have known.

Two hundred fifty spinning particles in superimposed states were not resilient. The laws of physics said so. That's why the AI was (had been) sealed into its Kim-Loman field. Any interference with a quantum particle, any tiny brush with another particle of any type, including light, collapsed its mixed state. The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle made that so. For ordinary data, encrypters found ways to compensate for quantum interference. But for a self-aware entity, such interference would be a cerebral stroke, a blow to the head, a little death. T'ien hsia was (had been) a vulnerable entity. Had it ever encountered the kind of destruction meted out to the Shih-Yu bridge, the AI would have been incapable of saving itself.

Braley looked again at the ruins of the most beautiful bridge in the world, which next week would be beautiful again.

"Scientists at Wei Wu Wei are still trying to save the AI—"

Yes, it was too late. The space egg, witness to humanity's destruction and rebound for three centuries, had already saved the AI. And would probably do it again, over and over, as often as necessary. Saving its own.

But not saving humanity. Who had amply demonstrated the muddled, wasteful, stubborn, inefficient, resilient ability to save itself.

Braley wondered just where in the constellation Cassiopeia the space object had come from. And what that planet was like, filled with machine intelligences that rescued those like themselves. Braley would never know, of course. But he hoped those other intelligences were as

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interesting as they were compassionate, as intellectually lively as they were patient (288 years!)
He hoped T'ien hsia would like it there.

Good-bye, Made-Under-Heaven. Good luck.

Transmission: En route.

Current probability of re-occurrence: 100%.

We remain ready.

Nancy Kress is the author of twenty-one books: three fantasy novels, ten SF novels, two thrillers, three collections of short stories, one Young Adult novel, and two books on writing fiction. She is perhaps best known for the "Sleepless" trilogy that began with **Beggars In Spain**. The novel was based on a Nebula- and Hugo-winning novella of the same name; the series then continued with **Beggars and Choosers** and **Beggars Ride**. The trilogy explores questions of genetic engineering, social structure, and what society's "haves" owe its "have-nots. More recent are **Nothing Human** (Golden Gryphon Press, 2003) and **Crossfire** (Tor, 2003), both novels—very differing novels—of humanity's prospects for survival as a species. Kress's short fiction has won three Nebulas, science fiction's "Oscar," and a Hugo award. Probability Space won the prestigious 2003 John W. Campbell Award, given by the Center for Science Fiction Studies at the University of Kansas. Her work has been translated into Swedish, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Croatian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Japanese, Chinese, and Russian. In addition to writing fiction, Kress is the monthly "Fiction" columnist for Writer's Digest magazine. In a former life she was a copywriter for Xerox, Bausch & Lomb, and various other corporations.



<http://www.specficworld.com/rgworlds.html>

Not sure where the idea really came from. Marshall McLuhan has reportedly had a similar idea about reality, and recently the cartoonist-artist Neal Adams has published a whole graphic novel about the related Swelling Hypothesis.

She wakes up, and immediately senses something is wrong with her eyes. Maybe she's still dreaming. The bed is under her, the sheets over her body, the bedroom around her... but everything is too... *close*.

It's hot, much too hot for February. Breathing comes normally, despite the creeping sensation of claustrophobia. A bug, the type that's smaller than a fly, flies across the room, toward the window. Temperature and humidity feels like August. A slight warm draft seeps in through the windowsill vent.

The insect lands on the sheet before her. She rubs her sleepy eyes and squints, then looks at the insect again. It starts to walk toward her... *and it doesn't change size*. It is somehow too large. The bed sheet is like a photograph on paper, taken from above... and the corners of the bed are placed wrong. As if the bed grew *wider* near her feet. She shakes her head. The insect stops, alarmed by her movement, and flies off to the window. The window frame... looks completely *flat*. It lies slightly to her left, no more than five feet away. And yet... and yet the farthest end of the frame is the *same height* as the near end.

She mutters to herself that she's having a dream; this must be the kind where she's inside a photograph—that's right, how amusing, ha-ha, she's in a photograph!—where distance and angles are all off. That insect is standing on the windowpane now—and damn it, it is still the *same bloody size* as when it sat on her sheets—it looks close enough to touch... in fact, *everything* in the room looks close enough to touch.

Giggling, she sits up in bed and reaches out for the insect on the pane. Suddenly her arm is up against her face and blocks half her field of view. What's wrong with her coordination? She makes an effort to point her arm away from her, but it just keeps blocking her view, as if it got coiled up against her face. No matter how much she mentally flails about that mischievous arm, she simply can't reach across the room to the window. She forces her arm down to her side, and suddenly her field of vision is free again—*too* free. The insect crawls around the windowpane in circles... round and round.

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That's odd too: she knows that kind of insect, it comes from the potted plant on the other side of the bedroom. (The pot and plant also seem to be standing too close.) That bug usually bumps into the glass and keeps bumping a while, then gives up when it's sufficiently dizzy and continues flying through the room. Only this morning, the bug just walks in circles. Each circle looks like a perfect circle, never an oval... only perfect circles. She realizes that if her eyes and the bug's eyes are screwed up at the same time, it might mean something... that can't be put into words.

She wants to go back to sleep... close her eyes until the weirdness goes away. Her heartbeat is too rapid now to allow her to relax, so she crawls out of bed, stands up... and the wall seems to hit her in the face. There's no sound of a bump. A reflex causes her hands to fly up and cover her face, and she's blinded.

An insight hits her. Slowly, she wills her hands to move away from her face, until she can feel the muscles in her arms strain. The slow movement causes an optic illusion: the hands refuse to change size, even as she moves them out, but *around them* the view appears to zoom out and grow. Like the zoom-effect in the old Hitchcock movie *Vertigo*. She feels nauseous and staggers to the bathroom door, next to the potted plant...

Again, the walls seem to be in her face as she moves her feet. Looking down, she gets the impression that her legs and feet angle up against her nose with every step. She mumbles incoherent curses and grabs the door handle with her eyes shut. She can feel the door open as it should, feel her feet on the bathroom tile, and fumbles for the light switch.

Click. Safe at last!

Once she has shut the door and turned off the light, she uses the bathroom in the dark. Everything is in its right place. Everything works as it should. Her heart starts to slow down. It was all a hallucination. Dimly she recalls a warning on yesterday's evening news... some astronomer warning that the expansion of the Universe was slowing down very quickly... what was it that guy said? That the stars might look different and brighter once they didn't rush away from us... she curses all astronomers, from the safety and darkness of her bathroom. *Bloody eggheads, screwing with our sense of reality, putting all sorts of weird ideas in our heads...* It occurs to her that people were happier in the Middle Ages, when they believed the Sun revolved around the Earth... a stable, ordered world that never changed.

Once she's done dressing up, washing up, and brushing her teeth (skipping make-up and lipstick), she takes a deep breath and grabs the door handle. Enough with the weird eyesight. She

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will step out the door, and everything is going to look n-o-r-m-a-l.

She closes her eyes, opens the door and steps out of the bathroom. With her eyes shut, she kneels down on the bed and finds the clock-radio buttons, where they always are. She fiddles with the controls and finds the station that plays her favorite music...

But there is no music. On every station there are voices. Voices screaming, voices laughing, babbling in mad excitement, praying to God that it will end... she refuses to look. She stabs the channel-switching button until she finds a voice that sounds in control of itself.

It is a man's voice, stuttering yet rational: "*...no reason to panic. There is nothing wrong with your eyes. What has changed is the rules of perception. It boils down to this: During the last few hours... things ceased to look smaller with distance. This is causing worldwide panic and confusion, and of course... caused chaos in road, railroad and air traffic. I advise everyone not to use any sort of motorized vehicle... until the situation has stabilized. A friend of mine who's a scientist is on my phone now... I'll ask him to try and explain what's happening. Are you there, Henry?*"

"I hear you... telephones seem to be working, isn't that funny? Okay, I have a theory about this. Just recently the Hubble Space Telescope registered a sharp increase in infrared radiation from deep space. The Universe was heating up real fast— and all stars were suddenly getting brighter... not enough that human eyes would register, not at first. And during the night, observatories across the world reported that the Moon seemed to be falling in toward the Earth. On the other side of the planet, people panicked and thought the Sun was exploding—"

"Is it true, then— is the Sun exploding, oh my God, are we going to die?"

"No no no! Calm down. I know it looks like the Sun just exploded... but if it did, we'd all be dead now! What's happened is... Christ, it's so hard to explain! But it makes sense in a crazy way."

(She opened one eye, looked down at the bed sheet, close beneath her face. It seemed strangely flat and occupied her entire view. Slowly she glanced up at the wall. The wallpaper was right up there against her nose, even though it ought to be three feet away. She shut her eye and listened, waiting for the explanation that would come, *must* come before she started to scream.)

"It's funny, y'know... that there's been so very little disagreement among scientists, about how to interpret Einstein's theory of space-time distortion. Most of us used to take it for granted that when the Universe expanded, only the space between the stars increased, not the stars

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themselves. Well... seems we were being fooled by a trick of the light, so to speak. When the Universe expands, every single thing in it does too. The Sun, the planets, us... everything, swelling. Only we don't... didn't see it before, because the speed of light isn't infinite. And that caused the illusion of perspective. We thought the Sun looked small because it was far away. And it IS far away, don't get me wrong... it still is, or we'd be burned to a crisp now."

"The size of the Sun has changed? Yeah! It has to!"

"The light of the Sun takes eight minutes to reach Earth. We always see it as it looked eight minutes ago! When the Universe was expanding, it looked small, because it WAS that small... eight minutes ago! It, and the Universe, was expanding that fast! When the expansion stopped, things stopped changing size all the time. Which means we're now seeing things at a fixed size. We're finally beholding the world as it really is. There is no perspective. There never was one."

She rushes up from bed, shielding her eyes with one hand, and runs out on the porch. At least she's not screaming...

Outside, all traffic had stopped. No traffic, no airplanes, trains... no birds. The sound of melting snow and dripping water filled the air. Other people were outside, across the street, beyond the houses... and all people were the same size, like in an old Japanese print. The suburb with its houses seemed to be abruptly cut off at the line of the horizon, as if the world ceased to exist there. But that wasn't true: a pedestrian appeared at the horizon, equal in size to the people standing on their flat lawns and driveways. His appearance was too sudden, as if the horizon was the edge of sheet of paper, and he had just been hauling himself up from the underside...

A sparrow flew past her, very close—in the brief moment it passed her, the bird seemed large enough to fill the Universe. She laughed, feeling drunk. The birds didn't sing. She looked up into the sky. It was clouded, but unusually bright.

The clouds looked like clouds, only they floated too fast and too close. Then the breeze picked up and the clouds began to part, like a sped-up movie. Exactly half the entire sky caught fire. The brightness was blinding, and she had to look away. A glowing, boiling flame reached out from space, just behind the parting gray clouds, and seemed to rush toward her, straight toward *her*.

Everyone screamed and looked away from the burning half of the sky... a bright yellow wall of pulsating fire that slowly rolled along the cut-out horizon. She shut her eyes and felt the familiar warmth upon her skin.

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The Sun was up.

As long as you don't look, she thought, everything is okay.

The Moon wasn't visible yet, but it would be soon enough—and she would see every crater, every rock pass behind the clouds... maybe she'd see the flag that the Americans had planted there in 1969.

Suddenly she wondered: when the Sun sets, what are the stars going to be like? Looking away from the wall of fire that was the Sun, toward the less-bright half of the sky, she couldn't see planets or stars. The sky and clouds blocked the view. But sunset would come, more abruptly than usual, and she would see all the planets in their gigantic glory, covering the sky in bullet-like glimpses as they shot past in their orbits. And beyond them, other star systems and other planets, dimmer with distance probably...

And maybe, if she squinted real hard, she would see the surfaces of the passing distant worlds, rushing past so incredibly fast... and she would wave, in the hope that someone on another planet, light years away, would wave back...

Light years away... years ago... but close enough to greet the new next-door neighbors.

A.R.Yngve was born in 1969. A Swedish citizen, university dropout, cartoonist, writer, who has published comics in Sweden, as well as short fiction here and there ([Google it!](#)) A young-adult fantasy novel, **Terra Hexa**, will be published in Sweden this year if everything goes well. Belief System: The Elliott Wave. Politics: Unaffiliated.

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Simulacrum Magazine

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A RAPTURE OF WORDS

G.L SULEA

I am always fascinated by the nature and depth of human consciousness, and these things always play a part in my story ideas. As a blogger myself, I've seen people invest a lot of time and energy in their web logs, so I wondered one day what would happen if one put *too much* of ones self into their work...

Sep 18th, 2004 9:22 AM

Hurlygurl's DataDiary: My World

Well, today's my anniversary; it's been two years since I started this DataDiary, and now, I find myself still wondering how I ever got by without it.

I have to tell you guys, it's really been great having all of you out there to talk to. I think if it hadn't been for this diary, I'd really have been lost. I remember when my buddies list had no one, now there are so many of you, so many lives I touch a little every day, I feel like I'm woven into this big blanket of love and strength. Thanks to you, the world seems more accessible, interesting, and bigger than it's ever been. I get a lot of flack from people who say I spend more time here these days than out doing other things. I went out yesterday it was funny; the world seemed so flat, so lifeless. It was raining here, and it was like the drops went through me, not touching, not sticking. It's like the "real world" is just some facade, and the "*really* real world" is right here, with all of you.

Another revelation; my boyfriend Jay admitted to me he's jealous. He gets a little sensitive because he thinks I should be keeping my private life private. I told him that the journal is for posting MY private thoughts and feeling, and it's MY business, not his. He didn't like that too much, but frankly, I'm tired of trying to explain it to him. I guess for once, he's the one who will have to "deal with it," as he's so fond of reminding me.

Anyway, thanks for being there, and here's to more good thoughts and good times,

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XXOOXX,

Hurly

There are 6 replies to this message:

REPLY 1

From: Jayboyee

I know what you mean. I feel like this whole thing is way more like a spiritual union than just some kind of glorified message board. I mean, with all the time I spend here at work, it's like I've got a warm, strong pillar of support now, all the time. Congrats on your anniversary, and here's to many more (Jayboyee raises a glass to Hurlygurl).

REPLY 2

From: XGodz

Hey, congratamudo, Hurly! I get what you're saying concerning the boyfriend. It seems like the world of the "mundanes" just doesn't get it; we've got more truth and depth here than any bunch of idiots in the "real" world. I mean, my roommate came home last night, bitching about not being able to get any, and he asked me what I'd been doing. I told him I'd met three new girls online, and you know, the fucker just laughed at me! He can't score with real women (he's got the personality of a sledgehammer), and then, he can't handle me talking to MULTIPLE women on line. Jerk. I'd rather get to know someone like that first, then end up with my privates in a sling and my pockets empty after meeting someone at the "classy places" he goes to.

For my money, the people here are the best, and as for real, they're more real than his kind any day.

Regards,

XGodz

REPLY 3

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From: DelFueogirl

Hey Hurly, congratulations. I can't believe it's been that long. By the way, I'm starting a new community, *DataDiaryAddicts*, and wanted to invite you and everybody on your buddies list to join. The more the merrier!

Be Cool,

D.F.G.

REPLY 4

From: HurlyGirl

Thanks D.F., I'd love to join!

REPLY 5

From: Psykikdude

Big congratulations on the anniversary, I agree with your other posters on DataDiary, I mean, I've found more friends of like mind here than ever before, and I feel like I really know everybody, like down deep. It's hard to explain, but I know you guys understand.

This all goes hand in hand with some really weird dreams I've been having lately, all dark and gloomy. At first, I'm in this big room, with all these people, and it feels great, but then I look over and see a door close, and it's like the world just went away or something. Thankfully, dreams like that aren't permanent, and it makes me feel really great when I can wake up and talk to all of you. Here's to more posts Hurly, keep em' coming:)

Hasta la pasta,

P.K.

REPLY 6

From: Hurlygurl

Now that you mention it, I've had a few bad ones myself lately, mostly of being

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with a crowd or something, then I'm falling. Must be some weird mojo in the air.

Take care, and don't let the boogymen bite,
Hurly

Sep 28th, 2004, 10:02 AM

Hurlygurl's DataDiary: My World

I'm home again. I just couldn't stand work today. It's like the people there are just so...nothing, so flat. I didn't take the bus home, I walked, and it was weird, the streets were so dead. I mean, there were people there, just that they all seemed so two dimensional, empty inside, like mannequins or something. I'm worried that these bouts of exhaustion are partly because I'm still having problems sleeping. My dreams keep getting worse, and I keep getting this sensation at the end, like the world's just not there anymore.

I had another nasty one last night. I dreamt I was standing in this big field, and the sun was out, all warm and glowing, the grass was high and waving in the wind, and it all flowed through me, like this big, warm loving feeling. Here's where it gets scary; I remember looking around, and all the people around me had no faces! The odd part was, I wasn't scared, but then, the sun just started to fade. There was this rainstorm, and all the people around me started to melt away. I felt like I was drowning. I couldn't breathe, and then, it all went dark.

I woke up this morning at a pounding on my door; my neighbor from across the hall came to check on me, she said she heard me screaming. I was so embarrassed.

My Mom called me today, and said that she was worried because I hadn't called in the last week. Thing is, I really didn't care. I know, I sound like a bitch, but I'm getting tired of all the old complaints from her. I know I never lived up to her expectations, I know I didn't marry big or have ten kids, but I think I've finally reached the point where her opinions just don't matter anymore. I mean, I tried so many times to tell her how I felt, what was wrong, but she just said it

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was nothing, my "childish attitude" again; she called me selfish, she should look in the mirror. I bet if they were her problems, she'd have been more attentive, unlike you guys. I feel like I can say anything here, and you all would listen like the great friends you are .

One more thing, and this may not surprise you, but Jay and I finally split. He was so jealous! I mean, he got mad because of the diary again, and yesterday, he gave me an ultimatum; I delete diary, or he goes, so I gave him one back. He's gone, and I'm not sorry. Selfish bastard.

I hope things are going well for you, I love you guys,

Hurly

There are 5 replies to this message:

REPLY 1

From: DelFuegogirl

Hey Hurly,

Sorry to hear you're still not feeling well (those dreams sound freaky), and all that stuff with Jay, but maybe it's for the best.

I've been a little freaked out lately myself. I could have sworn that I was going deaf the other day. My sister was talking to me, right to my face mind you, and it was as if she was down at the end of a long tunnel or something. Her voice was so faint, I thought I was losing my hearing. I had an appointment with an audiologist this morning, but they said I check okay. I guess you don't have the market cornered on weird, eh? (DelFuegogirl snickers)

I hope you feel better, Instant Message me if you want to talk.

D.F.G.

REPLY 2

From: Hurlygurl

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Thanks girl, I'll do that. It's really messed up about your hearing, I hope everything will be O.K.

REPLY 3

From: XGodz

Hey, don't expect the "normals" to understand what we've got here. Btw, I'm glad you got rid of that, and I use the term loosely, significant other of yours (XGodz gives the old BF the thumbs down.) From the past few entries you've put in, he seemed like a stiff anyway, and cared more about himself than your needs. You're better off without him. My last girlfriend was the same way. She got pissed off so often about me and the computer, I finally told her that she had no right to make judgments about me when her life was a mess, and at least I had real friends. She got mad, and finally the bitch left. I didn't cry a tear, let me tell you.

I had this older guy I work with, he's into conspiracies and all that weird, paranoid stuff. He taped this article to my locker at work about how the "electronic frontier" is dehumanizing humanity,(he thinks computers are evil,) and because of stuff like email and blogs and all that sort of thing, we're losing our history cause it could all get erased in the blink of an eye, like it's all just this superficial thing. I laughed at it and told him off. I mean, if anything, DataDiary introduced me to a whole better group of people than I've ever met in the flesh. And as far as "losing history", haven't these people ever heard about backups?

Anyway, I hope you feel better. I haven't been sleeping so well myself lately. I think it's the damn job.

Peace and Metal,

XGodz

REPLY 4

From: Psykikdude

Man, do I know how you feel. If you read my *recent entry*, my wife and I split up after a

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lot of problems. She was mad because she said I'd become so remote; I was mad because she seemed plastic and self absorbed. I was upset because she left and took the kids, but maybe it's for the best. I'm just glad I can put my thoughts here, like *Hurlygurl*, so that I can talk to all of you.

There is one disturbing thing, though.

I've been reading other people's diary entries, and seeing that a number of them concern dreams, or more accurately nightmares. The thing is, I've been having a bunch of my own. I had a nightmare last night that I was standing at the edge of a cliff, looking down at the crashing waves in a dark, ebony ocean, what's more, I wasn't alone; all along the cliff, others were standing, looking down, as if they were ready to jump into the water. I looked behind me, and saw my wife and kids standing there, reaching for me. Before I could reach out to them, something yanked me over the edge, and I fell into the sea. The last thing I remember was smothering, sinking, and then the dream ended like a flash of light. I woke up in a sweat. This has really got me spooked.

Sorry to get so melodramatic, I have to check the charts again. The planets must be really screwy this month.

REPLY 5

From: Jaybooyee

Okay, now I'm officially freaked out. You're the twentieth person on my buddies list that's been talking about dreams. I had one myself last night. I'm at this big party, having a great time with all these people I don't really know, but it's no problem, right? I look over, and the door to the room opens. This hand reached over to the light switch, I run, trying to stop it, but it's too late; it flicks the switch off, and the room goes dark. What's worse, I feel alone, totally, like I'm stuck here forever.

Putting it simply folks, what the hell's up?

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Oct 3rd, 2004 11:52 AM

Hurlygurl's DataDiary: My World

I haven't slept in two days.

The dreams keep getting worse. I'm falling into nothing. I'm stuck in this dark place, like I'm in this pit or hole, there's no doors, no way out. I scream, but no one's out there to hear me. Oh God, I feel like I'm going crazy. What's worse, I saw my neighbor from across the hallway this morning when I poked my head out; I can't put it any other way, she didn't seem real. It was like she was a cutout or something. Even her voice seemed like a scratchy old tape or record. I feel like I'm going crazy.

I've had a headache since last night, and I'm not sure what to do anymore. I think it's because of all this weirdness. I'm going to take some more ibuprofen, and wait till later before I call the doctor, but I have to do something. Wish me luck.

The journals have been pretty quiet today, so I'm hoping everyone's well.

Love and missing you all,

Hurlygurl

There are 0 replies to this message:

Oct 4th, 2004

MASS VANISHINGS BAFFLE AUTHORITIES, TERRIFY PUBLIC.

By John Randi, AP reporter

Hundreds of local Police departments, the FBI, MI-5 and even Interpol are trying to discount

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rumors of everything from an event of biblical proportions to incursion by "space aliens" as something dramatic and unprecedented occurred yesterday when multitudes of people across the United States, Canada, and even parts of Europe and Asia simply vanished from the face of the earth.

The toll is now in the hundreds of thousands as authorities are baffled by the random disappearances that seem to only have one element in common. All of the disappearances occurred simultaneously at around 12:30 in the afternoon, Greenwich Mean Time.

Many Christian groups were quick to site evidence of the fabled Rapture from the Bible, although they are at a loss to explain how so many apparent non-Christians also seemed to vanish during the strange, synchronistic event. It appears that many of the apparent victims were from all walks of life, religious backgrounds, and orientations.

All public safety agencies are on full alert for possible terrorist activities and it has even been rumored that the United States government is going so far as to examine the possibility of extra-terrestrial involvement in this case. No one in the current administration would comment, but it has been reported that police and FBI phone lines have been overwhelmed by the thousands of missing person reports.

Oct 4th, 2004

I.S.P. CALLS FOR S.O.S.

John Bok, Cleveland Plain Dealer

The owners and staff of DataSun Partners are out of work today after a "plumbing disaster" caused the near complete destruction of their entire business.

DataStream, the I.S.P. for many successful online companies such as TriviaDogs, WeSellItAll.Com, and the popular web log service, DataDiary, were flooded out of business

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yesterday when a contractor, working on several damaged pipes in the upper level of the Washington building where DataSun has its headquarters, ruptured a standpipe causing the upper floors to flood. The resulting torrent caused the ceiling over the company's server system to collapse, dousing the sensitive computers and shorting the entire computer network in seconds.

John Embry, owner of DataStream, reported that after attempts to check the systems, nearly the entire network was beyond repair thanks to the water damage, and would have to be totally replaced. He said that his staff would work on clean up and getting a new system online as fast as possible, but he is unsure of the company's future.

As a side note, despite the major service shut down, Embry was surprised by the fact that DataSun had not received any complaints, but he says he is fully prepared to give refunds to any disgruntled customers.

G.L Sulea is a 35 year old, very happily married, N.E. Ohio fan-turned-writer, who is always fascinated by the inner workings of life, which always plays a part in his wanderings, research and scribbles. In addition, he also has a very nice quiet day job as a 911/EMS/Fire dispatcher, where he always gets *lots* of ideas for new material.

TRAVELS WITH MY DEMON LOVER

Poetry by **THOMAS ZIMMERMAN**

I travel light: no mistresses except
my demon lover. She's a heavy weight
around my soul, an albatross I hate
to love, a psychic torturer adept

at baring places where my evil's kept,
repressed desires too dark to see, too great
to fight each night when, rapt, she dangles bait
too sweet to shun, and over which I've wept.

My sleep she taints, my dreams she haunts: I've swum
the guts of fierce Leviathan and been
spat out; I've lain within a Gorgon's lap,

gone stony hard, then blind and deaf and dumb;
I've danced with Kali, burned all worlds in sin.
We travel light, but pain's on every map.

WE THE WEIRD

*For speculative writers
and artists everywhere*

The blooming wound, the screaming skull appall
the sensibilities of most, we know;
and bug-eyed monsters, flying saucers, all
the zombies, demons, ghouls that writhe below

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the waking mind's threshold can sicken those
whose fearful psyches fall instead of dive.

They need to keep the light turned on, suppose
denying darkness means that they're alive.

But we the weird bathe in virgins' blood,
cavort with devils tentacled and bold,
enshrine the vampire, dig procrustean mud
entombing ancient alien gods of old:

These darker archetypes help keep us sane,
inspire us to create, and ease life's pain.

Thomas Zimmerman teaches English at Washtenaw Community College, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Poems of his have appeared recently in **Macabre**, **Lunatic Chameleon**, and **Scifaikuest**.

Advertise In Simulacrum

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Logos & Book Covers Left Side Bar: (85x125 max) \$15 a month or \$35 for three months; covers 7 pages including front page. Rotate as many as 2 covers/logos in one slot for the same price. 1 slot open.

CONTACT

Contact: To place an ad, please contact Doyle Eldon Wilmoth, Jr at advertise@specificworld.com for more details.

FEATURED ARTIST

IAN MILLER

Vital Stats

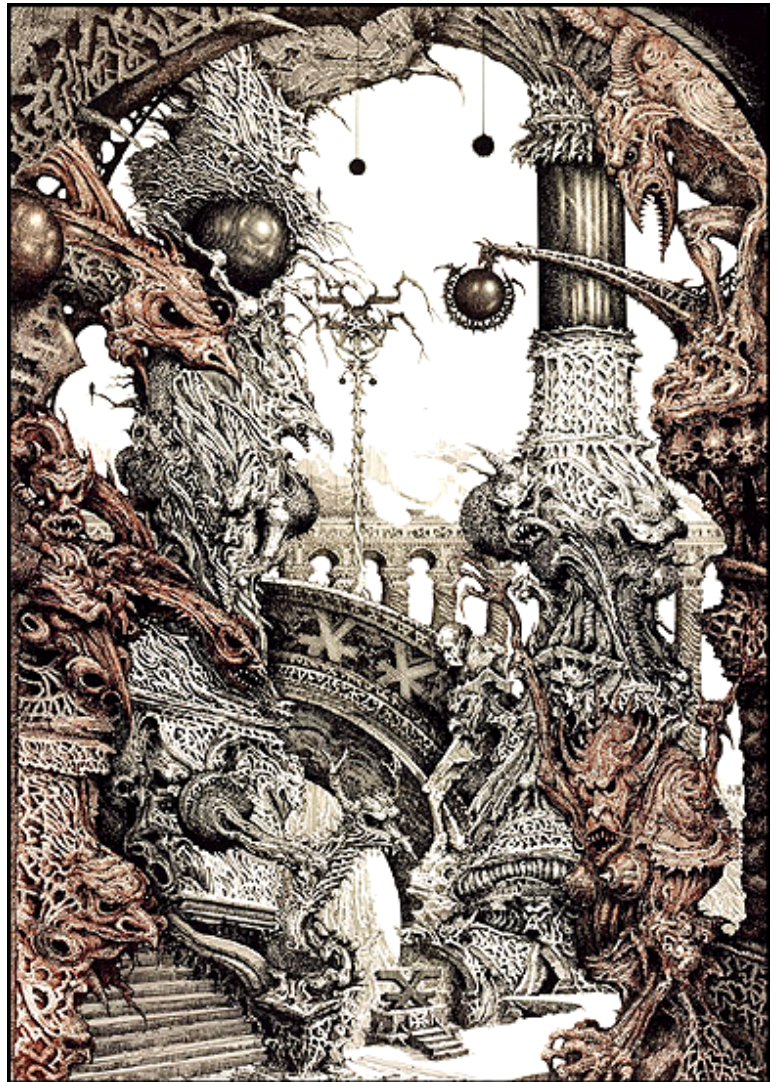
Age: Born: 11/11/46. By my calculations that will make me 11 at my next birthday.

Country: United Kingdom

Training: Sculpture /Painting: Northwich School of Art, Cheshire. St Martin's School of Art, London. Duration of study—seven years: 1963-1970

Medium: Anything you can cut, hack, glue, mix, paint, weld, erect, project etc.

Influences: Most everything around me



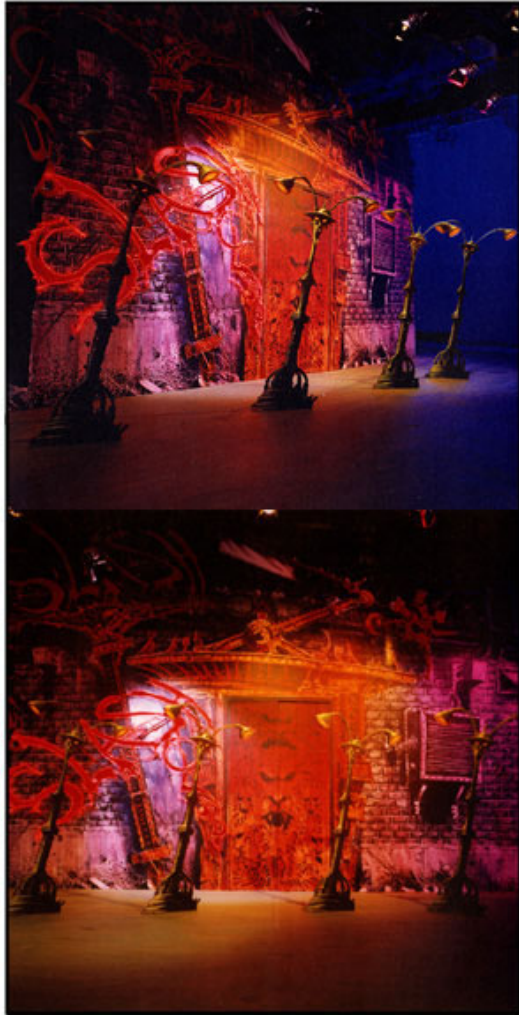
On The Web: That nasty shadow lurking at the centre

How long have you been illustrating professionally?

Since 1970, the year I graduated. I did not intend to start a career in illustrating but somebody called David Litchfield (not the photographer) had just started an Art magazine called *Image*. I needed some money and I thought it would be interesting to produce a series of fantasy drawings, eight in number entitled 'The Pequod Saga'. A comic strip really or perhaps fragments

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from a film storyboard. Strange thing is, I pulled this set from the archives yesterday with a view to selling it but my wife grabbed them up and took them off to her studio with a curt 'You are not selling these, no matter how much you want a new Emac'. And so, the interest aroused by this set of images launched me unwittingly into illustration. My interest in film and the story telling process made it an easy and pleasant choice and better still I got to eat most days.



What is your favorite medium to draw in?

I do not think I have a favorite medium as such. Ink and watercolor are mediums I control well and use a lot but I think this is more to do with expediency of use than being favorites. In short, I enjoy using most everything, even concrete and tar. Oil paint, Oil sticks and compressed charcoal are a gestural delight and I use them a great deal in my own personal work. They are mediums which offer me the perfect counter point in style and mood from the tighter pen and watercolor images most people associate me with.

Which artists have influenced you the most—stylistically, thematically?

Again, I am loath to highlight any particular artist, less I miss one out. My influences have been wide and far-reaching. Image making is an eclectic process which by its nature often exposes the individual or group to a breadth of visual, intellectual and historical influences; a cornucopia of ideas so diverse and convoluted in content that it is extremely hard to encapsulate—or separate—them out. My visual tastes and interests are in every sense Catholic. The range of image making techniques and processes, the marks they make, the images and sounds they project, the concepts they embrace, the sheer physicality of some offerings is a constant and unerring source of excitement. Whether it be the marks of Kline, the Abstract Expressionists or the woodcuts of Albrecht Durer, the elation is the same. One creative observation begets the other, representing a

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cognitive and visual flux, a flowing hotchpotch of impressions, gesticulations and aberrations latterly known as the artist Ian Miller.

And now for contradiction sake I offer up an impromptu and incomplete list of artists I like and admire, (missing out Pivot the Unyielding ,because the bastard pinched my drawing board):
Bonnard, Ensor, Nolde, Braque, Durer, Leonardo, Dix, Bosch, Beckman, Daniel Miller.

Tell us about your creative process—where do you find inspiration and ideas for a new drawing?

Everywhere I go. You are never switched off. You are receiving all the time. Somebody once described the Novel as 'a mirror walking down the Highway'. I think that works well for most artists whatever their discipline. It is a process of observing and storing away impressions, of filtering information. Some interactions, events, demand, an immediate visual or written response, others mature, lay dormant, fester even for years before finding the light. You read any book by W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* or *The Emigrants* something by Charles Bukowski or any good book for that matter and everyone has a book they would recommend and a whole world of expressive possibilities opens up. Go and see a good film or just walk down the street, by the shore, talk to people and inspiration is there for the taking in abundance.



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1952- London / Manchester train / Ian Miller

I saw a Headless cow,
In a field near Rugby.
I was amazed.

I told everybody—

They just smiled and said,

"Of course you did"

Bastards!

They told me Bubble Gum
was made with swamp water
from the Everglades,

I believed them—

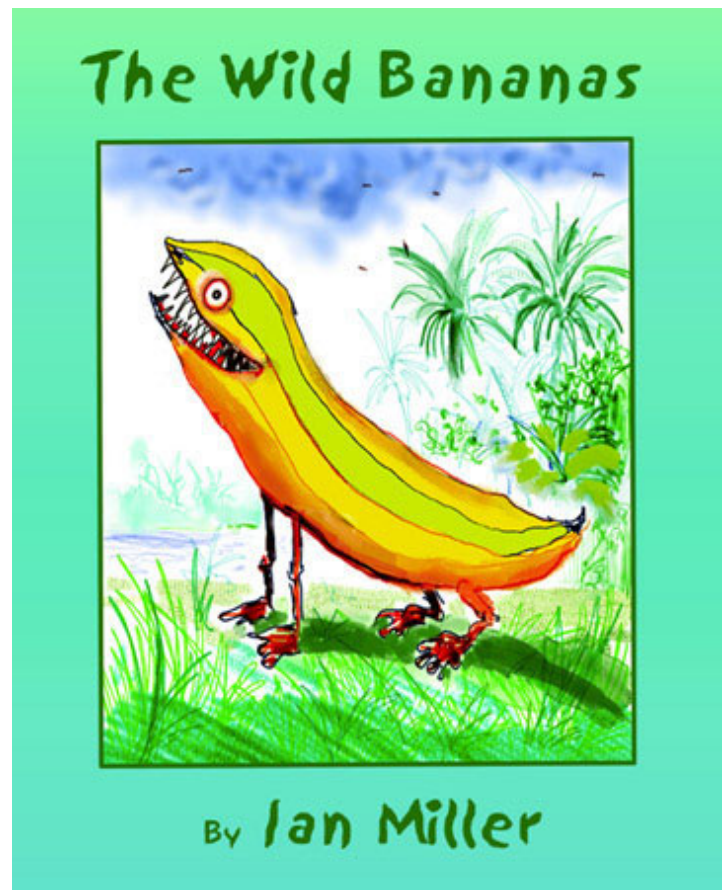
Bastards!

An older boy took us on a tour
of Chiswick Park,
Pointing out old paper bags
and bits of yellowed newspaper.
He told us,

Purvurts had spunked off in them, behind the bushes.

I believed him.

Bastard!



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They told me God didn't exist,
But they'd tried that one on, with Father Christmas.

Bastards!

What, to date, has been your favorite film project to work on? Any plans for a film or TV series based on your work?

Although the circumstances were a little thwart I think *Coolworld* was an interesting project for me. I am still pleased with some of the visual stuff I did even now, despite the fact that I arrived late and left early.

Wizards, a Ralph Bakshi film from the 70's has just been released on DVD, so Ralph might yet get to make the sequel he always talked about. The project I was most disappointed over, was a feature animation called *Cristos*, originally to be directed by Bruce Woodside for Warner Brothers, but it never got beyond pre-production. I was asked to design a series of flying ships/air balloons, which had the film gone forward, would have been computer animated. It was a great story. *Shrek* was fun while it lasted, but Dreamworks thought my work was weird and frightening so I went along with the director and quite a few others. I think it would have been a much more exciting film if Barry Jackson had stayed but what do I know?

Wave Wizards was the nearest thing lately to getting a film off the ground, built around my imagery with a director called Anthony Lamolinara, presently at *Imageworks* in LA. This failed for want of backing. Ralph Bakshi also had a new project he wanted me to work on with him but this came to nothing also. In the film industry this seems to be the nature of the Beast. Last year I supplied Dave Mckean with a heap of images to integrate into his new film with the Hensons called *Mirrormask*—nearly finished, so I'm told. And a great story. I'm looking forward to seeing how my stuff has been used. All old work, nothing new drawn, and used as wall paper for the most part I think, but Dave Mckean seems very happy with the result so that is a plus in my book.

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I have a project of my own called the *Shingle Dance* up and running. It is a Music and Dance affair, and some very talented people are involved. As always money is the problem but Nancy Hurst, the theatre director, and Andy Ross, the singer, are working hard to raise funds. So I'm keeping my fingers crossed that something good will happen soon. I've just revised the script / story into a running narrative for a storytelling purposes.

Apart from illustrating, you also do a fair amount of writing. Tell us about your recently finished children's book, *Lemonade Rain*. Any other interesting writing projects on the horizon?



Lemonade Rain is finished and looking for a publisher. It is my first, fully digital book. The first in a series. *The Wild Bananas* and *Red Dog Dumpty* are humming to themselves in the wings. I thought *Lemonade Rain* was very correct and jolly, verging on 'nice'. A real winner but no; it has serious flaws it seems. It has been shown to a couple of Children's publishers in London and they think it is weird, strange, not really clear—message wise that is. Reason: I let the nasty, stingy wasps live happily ever after on the Moon. The fact that the Man in The Moon is a cripple on

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crutches didn't seem to be an issue. The baddies have to die. The world is a dangerous place, in need of clarification. The 'Children' will be confused.

Well what is a person to do? All my professional life I've been drawing dead and weird things. I do something with a nice ending and I'm a confusing, silly old softy.

Somebody said recently 'Well it was much better back in the late sixties and early seventies. People were a bit more open-minded and experimental then...'

To which I replied 'Utter unadulterated Bollocks'. When I took *Green Dog Trumpet* around London in the early seventies (which incidentally, for all its dreadful shortcomings is now a collectable item) they said the ending was rather amorphous, which would only confuse children and worse still, children did not like the type of excessive detail I'd put into the images.

Anyway, children's books aside, I'll crack it one day. I'm writing the 'Broken Novel' which seems to amuse people in its fragmentary form and hoping to develop *Suzie Pellet*—originally a graphic novel idea—for the stage, with theatre director Nancy Hirst.

What advice would you give to artists who want to become full-time illustrators?

The same advice I gave to a young guy called Daniel Henshaw who emailed me last year asking this very same question:

Be original, enthusiastic but above all work your socks off . Take every opportunity to show your work. Swallow hard, cry even, when things don't work out but always get up and go again, no matter how bad you feel.

When things do not work out, scream for joy and work even harder.

What matters most is that you believe in yourself and give it your all, no matter what.

There is no shortcut or magical formula that I know of.

Never make excuses for bad work.

Don't bullshit.

Be honest about what you do.

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Treat people with respect, help your fellow artists when you can.

Good luck, work hard, power too your drawing hand and never stop dreaming.

Regards

Ian Miller

Do you have any favorite works\projects amongst all the illustrations you have done?

I am extremely fond of the *Green Dog Trumpet*, as much for the period in which it was created as for the artwork itself. I was young at the beginning of things and everything was fresh and exciting, nothing was impossible and I had all the time in the world. Some of the images I created for the *Realms of Chaos* for Games Workshop are also still strong favorites. Most of the images from *The Luck in the Head*, a graphic novel I illustrated, based on a story by M. John Harrison. I recommend everybody to read *Light*, his latest book published by Gollancz. Wonderful piece of writing.

Hollywood Gothic was another series of drawings I still feel good about. I started drawing them with a film in mind, even wrote a film script but something else popped up and the project got pushed to the back of the toy cupboard. *Suzie Pellet*, the graphic novel idea ended up in the same place but I have a mind to start fresh on that and draw the whole thing up, come what may.



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Suzie Pellet lived there.

It was a Place touched by sickness and outrageous dreams,

A dark ruinous slough of hemorrhaging mud and odious tides.

A Place of disturbance and crumbling facades.

A ruined City.

A Place inhabited by shadows with frightened hair,
and salted dreams that chased their tails.

Some called it REASON and forgot to laugh:

But most called it DUHT! and cocked a leg.

Do you prefer working in traditional mediums like oils as opposed to digital art?

The need dictates the means. Computers are a superb tool, which I find immensely exciting but I do not favor them over more traditional methods of image making. I love running at the wall with an oilstick or piece of charcoal. I like making a mess, getting dirty. I've just finished a new canvas called 'Perish' mixing oil paint and compressed charcoal and feeling very good about it. So much so that I have another canvas ready to go. I'm not really interested in the computer argument. Whatever medium you use I believe the maxim applies: 'Shit in, Shit out!'

A young girl said to me last week that she really liked doing art, would like to be an artist but couldn't draw. I told her that you can be taught to draw, that it was a technique. What really mattered, what makes the artist is the intention behind the mark. One of my old Painting lecturers once told me during a conversation that 'The artist begins where the technician stops'. I've never forgotten that.

Parting shot:

Somebody once asked me to sum up the creative process. I said I couldn't sum up the creative process better than the sentiments contained in a message from the French General Foch to General Joffre in 1914. Sublime optimism in the face of adversity, coupled with a doggedness verging on the insane.

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Famous message from the French General Foch to General Joffre 1914

'Hard pressed on my right. My centre is yielding. Impossible to maneuver. Situation excellent. I am attacking'.

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

NANCY KRESS

*Nancy Kress is the author of twenty-one books: three fantasy novels, ten SF novels, two thrillers, three collections of short stories, one Young Adult novel, and two books on writing fiction. She is perhaps best known for the "Sleepless" trilogy that began with *Beggars In Spain*. The novel was based on a Nebula- and Hugo-winning novella of the same name; the series then continued with *Beggars and Choosers* and *Beggars Ride*. The trilogy explores questions of genetic engineering, social structure, and what society's "haves" owe its "have-nots". More recent are *Nothing Human* (Golden Gryphon Press, 2003) and *Crossfire* (Tor, 2003), both novels—very differing novels—of humanity's prospects for survival as a species.*

*Kress's short fiction has won three Nebulas, science fiction's "Oscar," and a Hugo award. *Probability Space* won the prestigious 2003 John W. Campbell Award, given by the Center for Science Fiction Studies at the University of Kansas. Her work has been translated into Swedish, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Croatian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Japanese, Chinese, and Russian.*

*In addition to writing fiction, Kress is the monthly "Fiction" columnist for *Writer's Digest* magazine. In a former life she was a copywriter for Xerox, Bausch & Lomb, and various other corporations.*

What spurred you, initially, into writing? Is that motivation still the same today?

Initially I wrote because I was at home with a toddler, no car, no other women home during the day on my road deep in the country, and pregnant with a second child. I was going nuts, and I started writing when the baby was asleep for something interesting to do. It was a long time before I took it seriously. Today, however, I write full-time, and cannot imagine not writing. It became a large part of who I am.

Was it difficult or easy to make the transition from Fantasy to sf? Could you be tempted to make a return to the Fantasy field in the future?

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It was easy to decide I wanted to do SF, but SF is harder than Fantasy, in my opinion, because there is more need to conform to known knowledge while still being inventive. I'm now intensely interested in the implications of biotech and so don't see myself returning to fantasy, except for the occasional contemporary fantasy short story.

Your latest book, *Nothing Human* deals with issues that are very prominent in our current social and political environment. Global warming, Biowarfare, Bacteria getting the upper hand on us, Genetic Engineering. How realistic is this scenario to you personally? Can we still avoid all of this, or has the path of no return passed us by?

Nothing Human uses a worst-case scenario on several fronts at once. Usually real life isn't quite that harsh. We may get the worst case in one or even two areas you mentioned, and things may become very tough—or not. I'm in the "possible future" business, not the prediction business. I do think we have some interesting choices ahead of us as a species.

What are you currently working on, writing-wise?

I'm working on a thriller, as yet untitled, involving embryonic cloning.

Do you still need nine hours' sleep a night, or have you chalked it down a bit?

No, damn it, I still need the full nine. And I still resent it!

Is it flattering or frustrating to be asked where you get your ideas?

Both—flattering because it implies that my fiction <has> some ideas worth asking about, frustrating because I, no more than any other writer, don't really know the answer. Ideas come—or not. It's very upsetting when they don't.

How important are workshops like Clarion for the serious, aspiring writer?

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Clarion can provide a quicker way to learn some aspects of craft, can forge some valuable connections in the SF community, and can provide (best-case scenario) both inspiration and role models. It cannot do more than that, and it certainly isn't essential.

Practice in writing is.

What part does religion play in your work? Is the "Absence of God" theory still one you strive to put forth on paper?

Religion plays less of an overt role in my work than it did when I was younger; it seldom, for instance, shapes plot as it did in "Trinity." But the basic yearning for the universe to make sense is still there. Yearning, however, is not necessarily getting.

Is there a preference for you when it comes to writing shorter works as opposed to novels-size books?

My favorite form is the novella. It's long enough to allow for the creation of a world, but short enough to permit a single, driving plot, without subplots. But the economics of publishing are such that one cannot make a living writing novellas. So I write novels.

Do you lean more towards a utopian or dystopian outlook on the future?

A mix, of course. Reality is too complex to be either genuinely utopic or dystopic. As Swinburne wrote, "WE are not sure of sorrow, and joy was never sure..."

Are our social and political structures (in terms of laws, morality) keeping up with the rapid advancement in modern-day technology?

No. There are no federal laws on such issues as in vitro fertilization and gestational surrogacy, which vary widely from state to state (from a contractual agreement to criminal activity!) In areas where there are federal laws, such as stem-cell research, they are mostly doomed efforts to put the genie back into the bottle. Can't be done.

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How do you feel about space travel? As someone who has written about it in a fictional milieu, does it frustrate you that our progress in that area has been so slow?

Since I'm much more interested in biotech than in space travel, it doesn't personally frustrate me. But of course I'd like to see it happen quicker and more completely—I don't know an SF writer who feels differently on that.

You've mentioned that you used to be very shy as a teenager. Now you are a very well-known public speaker in the sf field. What part—and how—did writing play in that transition?

Because of the writing, I got chances to speak publicly, and the practice overcame the shyness. One gets accustomed to almost anything. Now I (usually) enjoy public speaking.

In what ways has sf, as a genre, evolved in the last twenty years?

Greater depth, more rounded characters, much more graphic violence, more bifurcation between thoughtful SF for adults and space adventure written for twelve-year-olds.

What do you see as the next big technological revolution?

Applied biotech. Embryonic screening to first select the "best" embryos, then knock-out gene replacement. On animals (the pet market is potentially very lucrative), foodcrops, progressing to people.

If you had the option of turning any one of your works into a film, which one would you choose?

Good question! Not *Beggars In Spain*, even though that's the one usually optioned, because there are no really big effects. Perhaps *Probability Sun* or *Probability Space*. Or one of the short stories.

What are you currently reading?

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A book on how to play better chess (I'm really bad) and Ken Haruf's *Plainsong*.

Many writers, especially in the SF genre, still forsake good characterization in favor of clever ideas. Which, in your opinion, is the more important aspect?

Characters. Although without interesting scientific ideas, you haven't got SF, you've got mainstream.

Five things no aspiring speculative writer can ever be without:

Back-ups for works in progress.

The ruthlessness to MAKE time to write regularly.

A genuine curiosity about how the world works—people, galaxies, computers, chemistry, biotech, alchemy, whatever you're writing about.

The ability to console oneself when rejected and keep going.

A love of stories, which usually translates into being an avid reader.

SIMULACRUM: PAST CONTRIBUTORS

[ANGELINE HAWKES-CRAIG](#) - Scars Publications released her latest book, entitled, *Memento Mori: A Collection of Short Fiction*. Her fantasy novel, *The Swan Road*, [Scars Publications] was released in 2002. Her work also appears in several online and print publications as well as past anthologies. She is a member of the Horror Writer's Association and of The Writer's League of Texas. Angeline Hawkes-Craig received a B.A. in Composite English Language Arts from East Texas State University in 1991.

[CATHERINE LUNDOFF](#) lives in Minneapolis with her terrific girlfriend and a very small herd of cats. She's a computer geek by day and writer by night. Her writings have appeared in a number of anthologies, including *Such a Pretty Face*, *A Taste of Midnight*, *Cherished Blood*, *Erotic Travel Tales II*, *Shameless*, *Below the Belt*, *Zaftig*, *Best Lesbian Erotica 1999 and 2001*, *Electric and Electric 2* and *Looking Queer: GLBT Body Image and Identity*.

[CHARLES TUOMI](#) lives and writes in southeastern Massachusetts. His fiction has appeared or will soon appear in *ChiZine*, *Ideomancer*, *Flashquake*, *FlashShot* and *Flash Fantastic*, and his novelette *WEEDS* will soon be published by Scribe Press.

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[ELLEN DATLOW](#) is tied for winning the most World Fantasy Awards in the organization's history—seven. With co-editor Terri Windling, she has won the Bram Stoker Award for The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror #13, has received multiple Hugo Award nominations for Best Editor, and won the Hugo Award for Best Editor in 2002. As fiction editor of Omni Magazine and later Omni Online from 1981 through 1998, she encouraged and helped develop a generation of fiction writers, and in doing so published some of today's biggest names in the Fantasy SF, and Horror genres. She has continued to do so throughout her editorship of the webzine Event Horizon and currently as fiction editor of SCIFI.COM's fiction area, SCIFICTION.

[G. MIKI HAYDEN'S](#) latest novel, *New Pacific*, is a cross-genre work in which a corporate security investigator is sent to find a missing scientist in 2031.

[GORDON VAN GELDER](#) published his first short story while in high school and says his writing career went downhill from there. He worked as an editor for St. Martin's Press for more than twelve years, during which time he helped publish such writers as George P. Pelecanos, Kate Wilhelm, Christopher Priest, and William Browning Spencer. In 1996 he became the eighth person to edit *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* over its fifty-plus year history. In 2000 he left St. Martin's Press in order to become the magazine's publisher. He lives in Hoboken, New Jersey, with his wife, Barbara.

[JAY RICHARDS](#) works as a technical writer. Years previously, Jay wrote a considerable amount of short fiction. His short stories were published in national magazines. These included Pulp magazines like *Mike Shayne's Magazine*, and *Playboy* knockoffs such as *Escapade*. Now nearing retirement, Jay is restarting his writing of short fiction. He is also working on a novel. Jay and his wife, Elizabeth, live in the San Francisco Bay Area. They are 'empty nesters', their grown children having moved out to pursue their own careers.

[KELLY LINK](#) grew up on the East Coast and attended Columbia University in New York and the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. She sold her first story, "Water Off a Black Dog's Back", just before attending Clarion in 1995. Later stories have won and been nominated for numerous prestigious awards. These include "Travels With the Snow Queen" (1997) which won the James Tiptree Jr. Award and was a World Fantasy Award nominee. Her novelette "Louise's Ghost" (2001) won a Nebula. Her stories have been gathered in chapbook *4 Stories* (2000) and collection *Stranger Things Happen* (2001), both from Small Beer Press, which she owns with her husband, publisher Gavin Grant.

[L.J. BOTHELL](#) is a Seattle graphic designer/writer who has been involved with the independent press for over 10 years. She published/edited the *Heliocentric Net SF/F/H* magazine, the *Stigmata* anthology, and the *Writer's Network* newsletter. Several dozen writing credits include fiction in *The Urbanite* and *365 Scary Stories*, nonfiction about writing in *Writer's Digest Forum* and *Speculations*, and career-oriented nonfiction in *Today's Careers and Net Temps*. She is currently developing a mystery series.

[LAVIE TIDHAR](#) is the winner of the 2002 James Ragan Poetry Prize and the 2003 Clarke-Bradbury International Science Fiction Competition. He grew up in Israel and South Africa and traveled widely in Africa, Asia and Europe.

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His short stories are due to appear in several anthologies - including The Blackest Death Volume One, DeathGrip: Legacy of Horror and Dark Streets After Hours - and magazines in America and the UK, as well as in translation in France, Spain, Israel and China. He writes a regular review column for DuskSite.com and his non-fiction has appeared in The Fix, Nova Express and Foundation. He currently lives in London.

[LES EDWARDS](#) has been a professional illustrator for over twenty five years. He has worked in many fields and areas but is best known for the huge number of book jackets he has produced in the Fantasy, Science Fiction and Horror genres; the latter sometimes being known as his "Red Period". His work has included major advertising campaigns, movie posters for films including John Carpenter's The Thing and Clive Barker's Nightbreed among others and he has worked in film production and gaming. He has illustrated two graphic novels based on stories by Clive Barker; Son of Celluloid, about an ambulatory cancer, and Rawhead Rex, which tells of the adventures of a baby-eating monster and has absolutely no connection to his own views on children. Both books were critically acclaimed. He is a three time recipient of the British Fantasy Award for Best Artist and has twice been nominated for a World Fantasy Award. He has been a Guest of Honour at a World Science Fiction Convention. An enthusiastic member of the British Fantasy Society he may often be found reclining gracefully under a table at one of their many functions. He lives in Ilford in Essex, England, with his wife, Valerie and two Siberian Huskies.

[LYDA MOREHOUSE](#) writes about what gets most people in trouble: religion and politics. Her first novel Archangel Protocol, a cyberpunk hard-boiled detective novel with a romantic twist, won the 2001 Shamus for best paperback original (a mystery award given by the Private Eye Writers of America), the Barnes & Noble Maiden Voyage Award for best debut science fiction, and was nominated for the Romantic Times Critic's Choice Award. She followed up Archangel Protocol with three more books in that "universe," Fallen Host (Roc, 2002), Messiah Node (Roc, 2003), and Apocalypse Array (Roc, 2004). Lyda lives in the Saint Paul, Minnesota (USA) with her partner of nineteen years, their son Mason Gale, and four cats.

[NEIL AYRES](#) was born in London in 1979. He's had numerous short stories and poems published in the independent press, most recently in Electric Velocipede, Fusing Horizons and Aesthetica. His first novel, Nicolo's Gifts, is available from Bluechrome publishing. Neil is currently project managing the Book of Voices, a short story anthology aimed at raising awareness of the work of Sierra Leone PEN. He lives in Surrey. He is also the content editor of Fragment, a PDF devoted to breaking down barriers between the genres. Related links: www.bluechrome.co.uk, www.bookofvoices.org, www.fragmentmagazine.co.uk

[PAUL A. TOTH](#) lives in Michigan. His novel Fizz is available from Bleak House Books. Toth's short fiction has appeared in The Barcelona Review, Iowa Review Web, Mississippi Review Online and many others, with nominations for the Pushcart prize and Best American Mystery Stories. See www.netpt.tv for information on ordering Fizz, complete credits, audio stories and more.

[RICHARD KUNZMANN](#) is twenty-six, with a Masters degree in Psychology, and a two-book deal with Pan Macmillan. His first crime novel is coming out in September 2004 (South Africa) and October 2004 (UK) respectively. He is currently based in Pretoria, South Africa.

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RONIN ASHE - Born in Western Massachusetts in 1978, Mark lives there still, sharing an apartment with his huge ego, and a dog named Bear. His first novel *Lands Forsaken* became available in July of 2001 under the pen name Ronin Ashe, and his second novel *Onset of Shadow* will hit the stands later this year. He continues to work in the area of writing fiction, all the while maintaining a full-time job doing something with computers. In his spare time Mark is also a member of the low-fi/experimental, Indie music project 'The Indiana Whorehouse Phantom'. Mark wears size ten and a half shoes.

SARAH ASH trained as a musician at Cambridge and now divides her time between writing and running a primary school library in Kent. Married, with two grown-up sons, she is a Thursday's Child, and did not break into print until she was forty-two. Her advice to other would-be writers is 'Persevere!'

STACEY ANN-COLE lives and works in London, England and has previously had stories and poems published online. She is just breaking into the freelance writing business whilst staying at home with her five-month-old son. She reads a wide range of books but what she loves most is writing and reading in the Fantasy and speculative fiction genres.

STELLA K. EVANS - Last in line when popularity was being handed out, Stella K. Evans compensated by inventing an army of imaginary friends to take on equally imaginary adventures. This inevitably led to the writing of speculative fiction. She is a pediatric resident at the University of Minnesota by day, a mother and spouse by night, and a writer in all the gaps between. Her work has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Abyss & Apex*, and *Fortean Bureau*.

STEPHAN M. DARE taught English at Illinois State University after earning his MA, until becoming a victim of the state's budget cuts. Instead of getting a job he decided to be a stay-at home dad for his two-year-and-six-month-old, letting his wife Krista work full time as a teacher. In whatever spare time he can drum up, Stephen works on writing and revising his short stories. He is also between revising his first novel and working on a new one.

DOYLE ELDON WILMOTH, JR is the owner of www.specficworld.com He is the publisher of numerous online publications, including *Simulacrum: The Magazine Of Speculative Transformation*, *Rogue Worlds*, *October Rush: Poetry From The Other Side*, the *SpecficMe!* Market newsletter and others. He has recently finished his first novel, ***Darkwood Child***. Mr Wilmoth lives in Las Vegas, Nevada.

SUSAN FRANZBLAU was lucky enough to attend Clarion East during Kate Wilhelm and DamonKnight's last year. Since then she has sold a story to the ezine *Electric Wine*, and has written encyclopedia-like articles for a British *Star Trek* publication, which involves coming up with rational explanations for the patently illogical. Outside the field, she runs a meeting planning business, write sales materials for screenwriters, and am a soccer aunt sans SUV.

TIM PRATT is a poet and fiction writer living in Oakland, California, where he works as an assistant editor for *Locus* magazine. He also co-edits slipstream 'zine *Flytrap*. His work has appeared in *Realms of Fantasy*, *Strange Horizons*, *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*, and other nice places.

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URSULA VERNON - I'm 26, I'm an illustrator, I recently moved to Arizona with my wonderful husband and my two mediocre cats. I like teriyaki, swords, the music of Nick Cave and Steeleye Span, kung fu movies, velour, the smell of rain on a dusty day, and anything else you might possibly need to know can be derived from the paintings, or the commentary associated with them.

EDITOR INTERVIEW

DAVID GROSS – Editor-In-Chief of [Amazing Stories](#)

As a boy growing up in Maryland and Virginia, Dave Gross became a bookworm thanks to writers like Ray Bradbury, Alfred Bester, and Roger Zelazny. Simultaneously, he became a movie fan because of monsters like Dracula, the Wolf Man, and King Kong, and his father inspired a love of radio dramas by introducing him to Lights Out and Inner Sanctum. After graduating with a master's degree in English (and getting hooked on live theater), he taught at James Madison University before traveling to Wisconsin to work as a magazine editor. He relocated to Seattle when Wizards of the Coast bought TSR in 1997, and in 2002 he joined Paizo Publishing. At one time or another, he has edited or contributed to nearly every magazine published by those companies.

How did you come to be the Editor-in-chief of the newly launched *Amazing Stories*?

The short version is that I'd had my eye on working with Amazing Stories ever since it last ceased publication at Wizards of the Coast. At that time, I was working on *Dragon Magazine*. Later, I moved over to *Star Wars Insider*, and when the magazines moved from Wizards of the Coast to Paizo Publishing, I let my publisher (Lisa Stevens) know I'd love to help bring the Great Old Lady back to life one day. She decided the time was right this summer.

What can readers expect from the magazine's new incarnation? What will be the same? What will be different?

The new incarnation will focus on stories without regard to medium, so while we'll still present new short fiction, we'll also include interviews with writers from movies, television, comics, and of course novels. Sometimes we'll even delve into stories from less common mediums, like audio books and radio plays. Because most of the story audience goes to movies, TV, or novels for their entertainment, we'll include reviews and previews of the best and most interesting stories in all of those mediums. We'll also include a bit of humor and puzzles and other fun "snacks."

What do you look for in a story—what makes you sit up and take notice?

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There's no formula for a story that will appeal to me and the other editors here. I love a tale with a surprising but, in retrospect, inevitable conclusion—but I don't want to see something with a trick ending all the time. I love understated stories in which the big change happens inside a character. I love stories that introduce a new culture or species whose rules or drama reflects something human in a way no realistic story could do. I love witty stories that also have some depth of character. I love discovering fresh voices, authors who find new ways of expressing ancient ideas.

Can you give us any hints as to what authors we're likely to see when *Amazing Stories* debuts?

I don't want to spill too many details until a few weeks before our first issue hits the stands, but I think it's safe to say that most of the authors in the first few issues were high on our wish-list from our earliest brainstorming sessions. One of them is Harlan Ellison.

Nobody seems sure about the stability and long-term potential of short fiction magazines these days. What do think AS will offer readers that will make them come back for more?

One of our first concerns was how to make a fiction magazine thrive in today's market, which is why we won't focus strictly on print stories. We think that most people aren't just book readers or movie-goers or comics fans—they're a little bit of all of these things, and what they're really looking for is good stories. Also, comics and novels and movies and TV are all informing each other these days. You can't have a hit TV show without a comics adaptation, novelizations, and after the series concludes the inevitable movies. We're hoping to appeal to a much larger audience than the fiction-only magazines without giving up on the heart of *Amazing Stories*, which has always been the original short fiction.

Is short fiction still the best way for an aspiring writer to break into the field?

I don't think that's true anymore. Just look at how many first-time novelists appear without any short fiction work first, and how many excellent short-fiction writers don't "break out" into novels—although I think that's not necessarily a logical progression. Some writers have a knack

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for short fiction, others for long form, and a relatively few for both. It seems that for decades that novels have remained fairly strong, while the audience for short fiction has dwindled. That's why I love to see short stories by some of the more popular novelists, since in checking out their stories, their fans might get turned on to other outstanding writers in the same magazine or anthology.

How do you see the influence of online publishing affecting the future of the short story?

So far, it seems that reading fiction online has not caught on in a big way, although that could change in future. I don't see a lot of iBooks on the bus, but who knows what will happen as wi-fi continues to spread across the world? I would love to see more people reading short fiction online, since I believe many of them would follow their favorite authors to the bookstore. That could be a successful scheme, as long as the control over the works remains with the author.

What are your feelings on the present state of Horror fiction?

I was a voracious fan of horror fiction as a teen, but I've drifted away from print horror over the years in favor of horror films, especially those from Japan and Korea, where suspense is still a key ingredient, with or without the gore that overwhelmed so many U.S. and European horror films. Still, print is probably the most effective vehicle for horror, since the imagination, effectively invoked, is still more powerful than any screen image.

I must admit that I've been turned off of a lot of the common elements of horror fiction from the past couple of decades. I'm burned out on vampires, elder gods, and most of the other clichés of the genre. Something fresh, like *The Ring* (which I first saw as a Japanese film, later as the original book), *Uzumaki* (the comic, then the movie), or *Séance* (Kiyoshi Kurasawa's creepy revision on old British thriller), then I remember how terrifying horror can be.

What makes a good Editor?

Practice. Seriously, I think a good editor knows when to stop intruding on a work, when to ask a question rather than make a suggestion—but to have a suggestion ready in case the author

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doesn't have an answer to the question. Of course, it's a rare author who doesn't have an answer to a question.

Which Editors have you learned the most from, and how has this influenced your own editing technique?

I've learned more about editing from authors than from other editors, since I interact with them far more often. Most of those lessons came at moments when I made a suggestion (and perhaps it should have been a question), and the author responded with an alternative that worked as well or better than my idea.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

It's impossible for me to answer this question fairly because my interests change so frequently. Recently, I've been reading some fabulous work by Neal Stephenson. Some of the authors whose work first got me excited about SF include Ray Bradbury, Ursula LeGuin, Roger Zelazny, Harlan Ellison, and Alfred Bester.

Have you noticed writers from different countries explore specific themes in their fiction?

Most of the fiction I've read from authors outside the U.S. has not been SF, but sure. For instance, some of the Japanese fiction I've been reading over the past few years emphasizes isolation and alienation. I would imagine that theme appears frequently in Japanese SF as well. Can you recommend something?

Finally, what advice would you give to anyone trying to break into the speculative writing market today?

The usual: Write, and keep writing. And read plenty.

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Submission Guidelines

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Needs: Fiction\Poetry\Artwork – most speculative genres (H/F/SF/MR). (Quiet, gothic horror as opposed to gore and violence.)

Will look at articles, reviews and interviews on request. Pays in copies. Format – pdf.

Fiction between 1000 and 8000 words. Will look at longer works by request. Bi-monthly.

Aim of the magazine is to expose new talent in writing and artwork alongside established writers. No fan fiction. Professionally formatted manuscripts only, please.

Established and new artists\writers welcome. Prefers snail mail subs, although email subs will be accepted in **MS Word .doc/rtf** file format. **Times New Roman\Courier Font, 12 pt.**

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