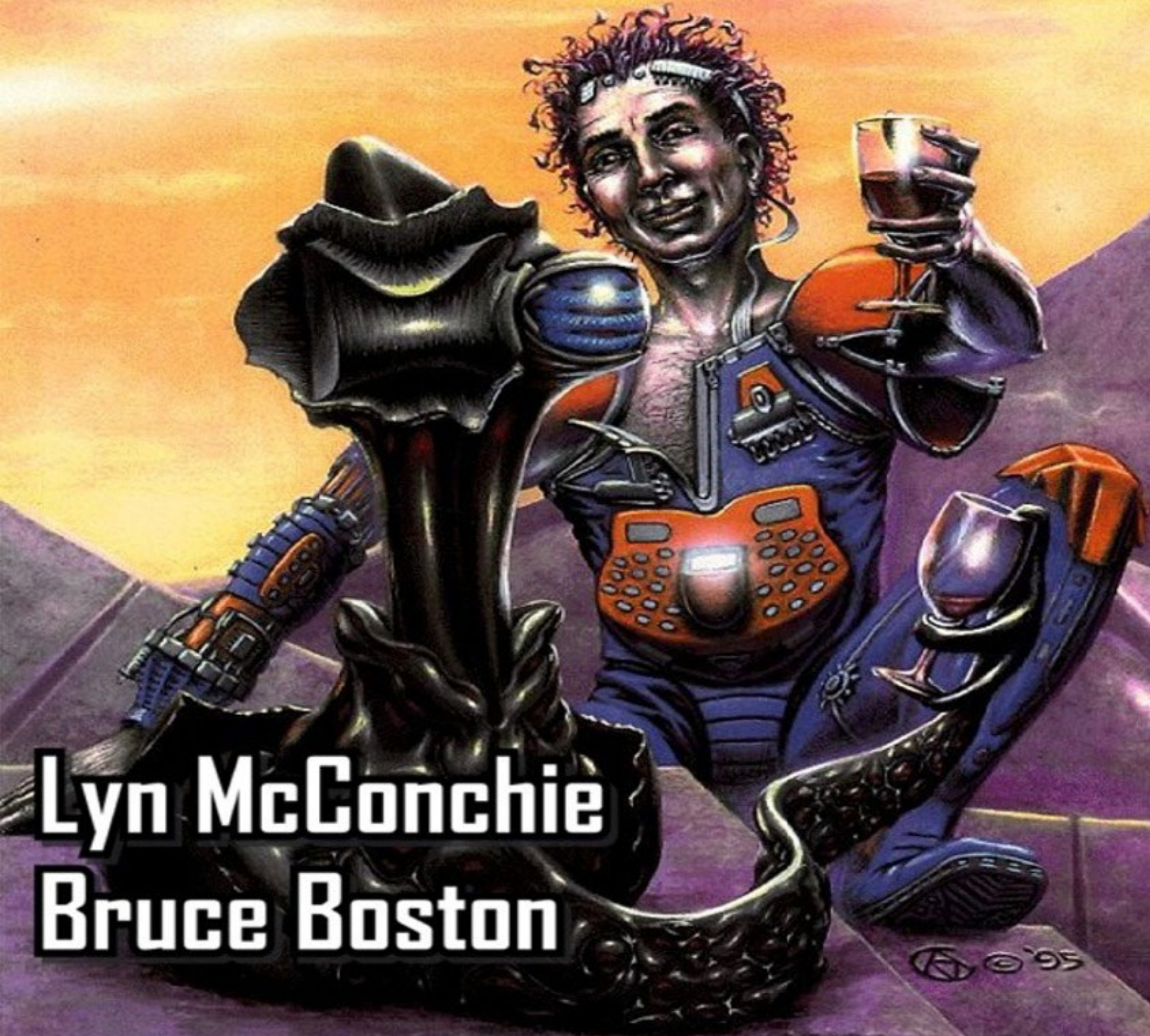


# ROGUE WORLDS

#11



**Lyn McConchie**  
**Bruce Boston**

© '95

## FEATURED FICTION

<b>THE BOY WHO STUFFED CHOOKS</b> <i>by Lyn McConchie</i>	5
<b>GALINKA ANDREIOVNA</b> <i>by Lawrence Barker</i>	15
<b>HOMESICK</b> <i>by Thomas Canfield</i>	38
<b>AN AMERICAN SCIENTIST APPLIES FOR FOREIGN FUNDING</b> <i>by Stephen D. Rogers</i>	54

## FEATURED POETRY

<b>THE SECRET OF COLD FUSION</b> <i>by Bruce Boston</i>	58
<b>THE CAR OF THE FUTURE</b> <i>by Bruce Boston</i>	59
<b>NEEDLESS</b> <i>by Bruce Boston</i>	60
<b>AVOCADO HORROR</b> <i>by Bruce Boston</i>	62
<b>IN THE COARSE MORN</b> <i>by Bruce Boston</i>	64

## BOOK REVIEWS

<b>RECOMMENDED READS</b> <i>by Jason Brannon</i>	67
--	----

---

Rogue Worlds is a product of SpecFicWorld.com. Copyright © 2004 by SpecFicWorld.com and/or respective copyright holders where noted. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced in any form whatsoever, electronic or otherwise, without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote a few brief lines in a review. Contact information can be found at <http://www.specficworld.com>.

Cover illustration provided by SimplyMedia™ (<http://www.simplymedia.com>), Copyright © 1995 by Alan M. Clark. All rights reserved.



Open it if you dare.

## BOOK OF DARK WISDOM

The Magazine of Dark Fiction & Lovecraftian Horror



Issue #4 - Fall 2004

The Plant Sitter  
by James S. Dorr

Poetry by Lee Clark Zumpe  
Another episode of  
What Rough Beast Comes

Fiction, poetry, reviews,  
another exploration into  
Strange Happenings  
And much more!

Payment types:

Check or money order (U.S.)

International bank money order (non U.S.)

Or order online at [www.darkwisdom.com](http://www.darkwisdom.com)

Send payment to:  
Elder Signs Press

P.O. Box 389

Lake Orion, MI 48361-0389

USA

Subscription rates

(3 issues):

\$18.00 US

\$22.00 Canada

\$27.00 International

Available via our website and from fine bookstores around the world.

**WWW.DARKWISDOM.COM**



# SIMULACRUM

THE MAGAZINE OF SPECULATIVE TRANSFORMATION

**NANCY KRESS**

**A.R YNGVE**

**G.L SULEA**

**THOMAS ZIMMERMAN**

**JULY 2004**

**Artwork by Ian Miller**

<http://www.specificworld.com/simulacrum.html>



# THE BOY WHO STUFFED CHOOKS

BY LYN McCONCHIE

**LYN McCONCHIE** started writing in 1991 after she was crippled in an accident and could no longer work nine to five. In her first year she sold work to *MZB's Fantasy Magazine*. Her credits include books from Warner and Tor, and short stories from a wide number of magazines and anthologies in six countries. She lives with two ocicats and some 7,000 books in a 19th century farmhouse in rural New Zealand.

☀ **Author's website:** <http://www.users.bigpond.com/jhweber/LynMc/>

I never liked Jason Aldmire. Of course he was lots older than me. Well, a year anyhow. He didn't work too hard in school and last year they kept him back a class. He hated that and he was a bully. Maybe that was why he took up the hobby he did.

His granddad used to be a taxidermist. That's a bloke who skins things. He makes a wire frame, then puts the skin back over it. After that they sort of fill the skin out with stuffing. Then they put in glass eyes. And before you know it, there's the trout you caught on holiday looking back at you just like it was alive again.

Jase's granddad used to do that for years. But my dad says the bottom fell out of the market. I asked him why and all he could say was that maybe it cost too much just to show off some old fish. Jase's granddad died when Jase was five. For years all the gear just sat in the back of their garage until Jase decided to take it up again. I don't know why. But the first we knew of it was Jase coming into school and showing off this chook.

To tell the truth it made me feel a bit sick. I mean, there it was looking at you. Just as if it was alive, when its guts were sawdust or something, and its eyes were glass. You knew all that. But it still looked as if the chook was going to sit down, cackle and lay an egg. The teacher made quite a fuss of Jason. Said he'd done a wonderful job and he just wished his old dog looked half as good and he was still alive.

Of course that was asking for it. The dog died a few weeks later. Jase was around at the teacher's place next day asking if he could have the body. Maybe Mr Davies didn't like to say no after what he'd said in class. So Jase went home carrying the dog. My best mate, Joe, was disgusted.

"Funny the way the dog died right after Mr Davies said that."

"Ah, come on," I said. "How'd Jase kill him, and anyway, it wasn't right after. It was more than a month."

Joe snorted. "Yeah, and Mr Davies gave Jase low marks in Math just before that. I heard Jase got into real trouble with his dad about it."

I could believe that. Jase's dad thinks education is important and I won't say he's wrong. But no guy likes to have the whole street hear his dad yelling about it when he brings home a report.

Joe was still thinking. "I reckon its gruesome too."

"What is, stuffing animals?" I laughed a bit at what I'd said and so did Joe, then he went serious.

"Yeah. You've got to take out all their guts and get the skin off. My brother says it isn't like just skinning a rabbit. To do the job properly you've got to sort of peel the skin. All around the eyes and face and everything."

"So why take the guts out?"

"So you don't get mess all over the skin and spoil it." We both thought about that for a while.

"Makes sense," I told him. "If the animal had just had a big meal the guts could burst and get that all over you and the skin too."

"The way roadkill does. All over your tires," Joe added.

I went home about then and when I didn't feel much like dinner mum was annoyed.

Jase got a lot of interest over the dog but then it all died down. Who can stay pumped up over a dead dog even a stuffed one. So Jase went looking. Over the next few months he showed us a couple of cats and a hamster. The hamster had belonged to jase's kid sister. He said he'd found it dead. I don't know who owned one of the cats. But the other one belonged to Jase's neighbor. The neighbor said that last time he'd seen his cat it was alive. Jase said it was dead on the road. And Jase's dad got mad and asked the neighbor if he was saying Jase had killed it.

The neighbor backed off about then. But Joe who lives in the same street said there were some nasty looks going around. Then he looked at me. I giggled a bit nervously.

"What, you think he did?"

"Maybe. I'm not saying anything but it was funny." I knew he was dying to tell me what so I asked.

"I saw that cat alive too. It was around the back of the Aldmire place and Jase was feeding it."



I looked at Joe and he looked at me. I dropped my voice. "Did you see what it was eating?"

"No, and I'm not going to ask."

Nor was I.

Things went on like that a while. The new school year started and Joe and I were in the same class with Jase again. Pets kept disappearing and showing up stuffed. Jase kept swearing that he'd found them dead. The owners just kept swearing.

No one was going to start anything with no proof and Mr Aldmire a lawyer. It stayed like that until we got something new to talk about. Flying saucers. My dad said the town was crazy. A few weather balloons, some low-flying plane, and everyone was seeing little green men.

I didn't argue. But Joe and I had been out one night. I couldn't tell dad. I'd sneaked out to go night fishing with Joe and dad would have been hopping. We'd been down at the pond off the side road and a funnylooking light went right over us. I looked up. I couldn't really see much, just something long shaped like a giant bullet.

Joe swore he could see a light in front like a window. I don't remember that. Maybe he saw it. Joe doesn't lie, or not often

anyhow. So between gossiping about UFOs and Jase finding dead animals everywhere the town was busy.

So was Jase. I think he didn't like losing the attention. He started to find animals more often. The neighbors were getting noisy about it. Jase's dad was hanging in there. Joe said there were some great fights going on in his street these days.

"What do you think, Joe?"

He gave me a sideways stare. Then he dug his toe into the ground. "Dunno. But it's funny how it's always Jase who finds dead animals. How come the rest of us never see them first."

That made a lot of sense. So much that I said it to Billy Mullen when I saw him later on. He said it to someone else and the next time Mr Aldmire defended Jase. That was what someone said to him. Joe said Jase's father went all quiet. He marched inside and slammed the door so's you could hear it all down the street. Everyone went back inside their own places then. And the street got awfully quiet.

That night the light went over again. Half the town was out looking up at it and talking. The local Policeman saw it too although he said he hadn't. I guess Police aren't allowed to see UFOs. That night Jase must have sneaked out. He didn't

come back and by next day half the town was looking for him. Someone saw a boy walking along the road that evening. The Police thought Jase had run away and started checking the side roads.

All us kids were supposed to stay in at night just in case. But Joe and I sneaked out again. Moonlit nights are good for fishing.

"You got the bait?" Joe asked me. I nodded.

"I dug worms this afternoon after school."

We went down to the pond. It was surrounded by trees and once you were there even a light wouldn't show. I stood my torch on the ground while we baited hooks. We had a peaceful hour before that darn light showed up. This time it looked as if it was coming down.

"Run, that's right behind the rocks." That was Joe. He'd be in a hurry to his hanging my dad says.

I followed Joe. We came out of the trees and there was something there. It was long and dark and solid. I couldn't see much but Joe was sneaking closer. I kept on his heels. I wasn't going to have anyone say I'd left him to what ever that was. We could hear a funny sound as we got near the shape.

Then a dim light came on. I could see something. It was sort of like a dog but it had six legs and spines down its back. It stood there stiffly. I looked harder and darned if it didn't look stuffed. Then something else came down the ramp. It wasn't little, it wasn't green, and it probably wasn't a man either. But I think it was what people meant when they said that.

It picked up the dog thing and carried it up the ramp. Then we both saw Jase. He was standing there. Like the dog thing he didn't move and his eyes kind of shone. Joe was hissing at me.

"You think he stuffed their dog?"

"I guess so." I guessed maybe it hadn't been dead when he found it. The way he'd done with the neighbors pets. It looked as if the dog's owner hadn't liked it any more than the neighbors. He could just deal with Jase better.

The dog thing's owner came back and carried Jase up the ramp. We kept watching and a few minutes later there was a whoosh and the what ever it was left fast. Joe and I didn't say anything. We ran for home. No one ever found Jase and his family left town a while later. I had a lot of questions but I knew better than to ask them.

Joe and I don't talk about it much. Just once. Joe was off at his grandmother's and when he got back we went fishing.

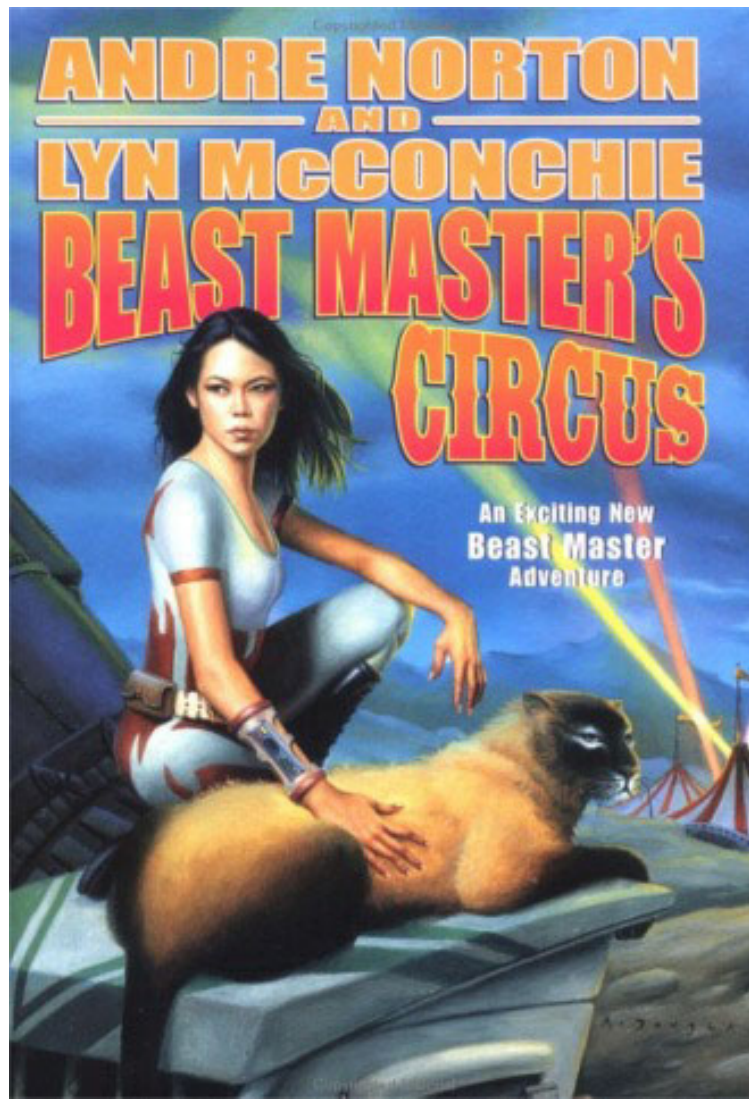
"My grandma's got a coat stand." I stared at him wondering what he was on about.

"My great-grandpa shot a bear when he was in Canada. He had it stuffed. Grandma uses it to hang her coat on. It stands there behind the door all day. With a coat over its head." His voice trailed off.

Now I knew what he meant. "Yeah," I said softly. "Wonder what sort of coats aliens have. That was all. We never talked about it again. But I still wonder about that."

COPYRIGHT © 2004 BY LYN McCONCHIE. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

**THE END**



To find more about Lyn McConchie go to  
<http://www.users.bigpond.com/jhweber/LynMc/>

# GALINKA ANDREIOVNA AND THE LYESHY: A SLAVIC TALE

BY LAWRENCE BARKER

LAWRENCE BARKER'S work includes his post-Civil War dark fantasy *Take my Stand* (available from Silverlake Publications) and his revisionist version of *Dracula* titled *Renfield*, told from Renfield's point of view, available from Marietta Publishing. His work has appeared in such anthologies as *Dark Winter*, *Grave Possessions*, *Strange News* and others. He lives outside Atlanta, where he writes dark fiction and plays old-time banjo.

The cold that seeped through Galinka Adreiovna's thin-soled shoes and repatched woolens did not compare with the bitter frosts she had known during the Great Patriotic War, waiting in ambush for Hitlerite tanks. In truth, this morning, perched between winter's snow and spring's mud, did not stand out as exceptionally chill, at least as such things are accounted in the valley of the River Ob. But Galinka's broad, tired shoulders slumped from the cold that rose from the gray mud and its frosty twin that sank from

the even grayer sky. She had no desire to experience any further chill. And now young Avram, son of a father whose mechanical aptitude kept the collective farm's tractors running just one day longer, of a mother whose devotion to the Party matched that of the grandmothers to the Patriarch of Kiev, blocked her path through the Vyezhinsky Forest.

Young Avram rattled a pair of sheep-bone dice. Although young Avram's face little resembled his father's, the boy certainly shared the older man's love of dicing. But then the grandmothers whispered that Avram Nikolaiovitch, the tractor repairman, was not young Avram's real father. Irina Denisova, Avram Nikolaiovitch's thin-lipped wife, had supposedly bedded the Lyeshy, the wager-loving master of the forest. Of course Great Stalin had declared the Lyeshy, like the Russalka and other such legendary creatures, myths that belonged in the dustbin of history. But while many of the grandmothers' tales were false, even more of the Party's claims did not bear close scrutiny. However, Galinka, unlike her long-vanished husband Lev, never questioned the Party.

At least she did not do so openly ... .

Galinka shifted the wicker basket on her back. The broad-bladed hatchet within rattled against the short, curved knife. "No dicing today. Fortune favors you too strongly, Avram Avramovitch." Although Avram was too young to even comprehend the upheaval that the valley faced, Galinka used



the adult form of his name. The broad smile on the boy's thin face showed how her doing so pleased him.

Avram turned his head, blond hair as wild as a stand of new-sprouted larches. He peered from under his krimmer hat. A hat of fine wool festooned with a pin that exhorted workers of all nations to unite was, as far as Galinka could tell, all that Avram had gleaned from his father's tireless efforts or his mother's political fervor. "Please, Galinka Andreiovna. One toss." Avram raised his hand. The third and fifth fingers of his glove dangled empty, reminding Galinka of young Avram's incompleteness. Many children born since the plant had begun processing petroleum into insect powders were less than perfect. Well, if the Peasants and Workers of the Soviet Union (not that any peasants or workers were consulted) had chosen to build a chemical factory that drained into the collective farm's primary well, nothing could be done. Anyway, Avram's imperfections were not *that* serious. He lived ... breathed ... knew the sunshine's warmth. Compared to some, young Avram was favored indeed ... .

Galinka turned to stare at the mound of earth and concrete rising in the south. Soon, the dam would block the River Ob. The newly-risen Lake Molotov would drink much of the Ob Valley, along with the collective farm and the petrochemical plant. Galinka would be relocated to housing

being built, even now, in the distant city of Yalmagorsk. Or so the Party said ... .

When the day to leave the valley came, Galinka would miss her crowded apartment, the farm, and the petrochemical plant not one whit. She would, she supposed, recall the Vyezhinsky Forest with some fondness, having spent so much time there over the past nine years. Leaving behind that one particular twin-trunked birch whose bark glistened like new-fallen snow ... well, let the Party label her attachment a bourgeois failing! Abandoning what lay beneath that tree would bring pain beyond any visit to the collective farm's blacksmith turned dentist.

Avram's piping voice returned her to the present. "My hat against ... against ... ." He indicated the stoneware flask of kvass, the fermented bread drink that warmed peasant and worker alike, at Galinka's side. "A swallow from that."

Galinka shook her head. "The stakes are too uneven. Your hat is worth many liters of kvass."

"I will take the risk. Please."

Galinka started to push Avram aside. But then young Varvara Petrovna appeared, pulling a small sledge filled with pike and carp from the River Ob. Poor Varvara Petrovna! Although she could follow simple directions, neither her

mind nor body were intact. Young Varvara's perpetually unsmiling lips proclaimed her flawed mind. If anyone doubted the evidence of the child's dead face, her unfocused eyes, as dark as the coal pits of Vzenorograd, would settle the question. The incompleteness of the child's body? Every other step marked how her ankle bones grew ever further awry. In another year, Varvara might completely cease to walk. In another year, Varvara would be nine, the age that Elena, Galinka's lost daughter of the eyes as blue as a Russian sky, would have been. Would have been ... .

Galinka raised the flask with a flourish. "We shall face chance, Avram Avramovitch." Galinka took the dice. Use had cracked them, as often happened to sheep-bone dice. Galinka tossed the dice. Her fingers subtly shifted their tumbling. At least her husband Lev had taught her the art of manipulating dice before Great Stalin's lieutenants had carried him into the night. The dice landed with one spot showing on each as Galinka intended. Truth be told, Galinka was not certain that the dice would not have done so anyway. After all, young Avram *was* much luckier at gambling than his father. "Ai," Galinka howled in mock protest. "Favored by fortune indeed!" She stuffed the dice into her ragged greatcoat, handed Avram the flask, and turned to go.

Avram's eyes widened. "We only bargained for a swallow."

Galinka shrugged. "Sometimes winning brings more than the gambler anticipates." With that, she continued into the forest.

Without giving Avram another thought, Galinka gathered wood to warm the tiny apartment that she shared with the Rossetsky and Yevtushenko families. She had almost filled her basket when, as happened during almost every visit to the Vyezhinsky Forest, she found herself at the twin-trunked birch whose bark glistened like new-fallen snow.

Save for the drip of melting ice, silence engulfed the forest. Galinka filled her lungs with the cold air. The interlocking trees formed a canopy, admitting fingers of light. A sense of the presence of something greater than herself filled her. Was this how the grandmothers had felt in what the Party called 'houses of superstition', before the Party tore them down or converted them to other use? She brushed the snow away. Only a pine board marked the small earthen mound beneath the tree. Her fingers traced the multiarmed cross of the Patriarch of Kiev that she, acting in secret, had engraved on the board. Galinka knelt. "Elena," she whispered. The 'what might have beens' of a blue-eyed child whose heart had failed before she had even known the sun, of the child buried here, haunted Galinka more deeply than all her other sorrows combined.

Galinka remained for she knew not how long. The thought that Elena Levovna might soon lie at the bottom of a lake made the cold doubly oppressive. Now, the sun brought warmth, if only a little. But when the waters rose? Galinka shivered at the thought.

For the hundredth time, she considered moving the grave. She had dug it herself. Digging another would solve the problem ... if the body were truly all, as the Party taught. But if the Party were wrong? The grandmothers said that if some bone, however small, remained behind, then the spirit might lose its way and wander eternally in darkness. Elena Levovna, lost and alone forever? The thought ripped at Galinka's heart. Supposedly, the blessing of the Patriarch of Kiev let the priests relocate the dead with impunity. Much good that did. Finding a priest was about as easy as finding rabbits from the moon. Perhaps, Galinka told herself, she should simply remain in the forest until she ceased caring about lost daughters or husbands, about the perpetual shortages of vodka or potatoes.

The snap of a breaking limb echoed from behind Galinka. Musings forgotten, she grabbed her hatchet and leapt to a defensive position.

A child-sized man, without shoes or trousers, clung to a weathered hemlock by his long, flexible fingers and toes. His fingers resembled knotted twigs. His backwards-turning

toes ended in broad, flat, sticky-looking pads. His flesh seemed a patchwork of gnarled brown-gray bark, dark green moss, and brightly colored lichens. A forest odor, of dropping needles, growing mushrooms, and decaying logs, hung about him. The smell was not unpleasant, but was not definitely not human. His face—his face resembled young Avram's, save for unnatural complexion and yellow wild-thing eyes that seemed as deep and ancient as the Vyezhinsky Forest.

"The Lyeshy," Galinka whispered. When a woodcutter became lost, when the hunter's gun disappeared during the night, when the mushroomer's harvest contained a deadly toadstool, the Lyeshy was to blame. Or so the grandmothers whispered. Galinka was determined that, if face the forest demon she must, she would do so with courage. She raised the hatchet, ready to strike the awful creature.

The Lyeshy motioned toward a nearby larch. A long, straight limb shook itself. Snow flew in all directions. Writhing like a great, bark-covered serpent, the limb reached down and took Galinka's hatchet. The limb returned to its former position, only now, instead of being straight, it coiled about Galinka's hatchet.

Galinka did not care if she was observed. Her neighbors could only denounce her. Who knows what the Lyeshy

might do? Galinka repeatedly crossed herself. As the grandmothers had secretly instructed, she prayed aloud to Saints Vladimir, the Kievan Prince who suppressed the Old Ways, and to Sergius Radonezeh, who brought the White Christ to the northern forests. Who better to protect her?

The Lyeshy scowled. Its legs twisted and propelled it in an inhuman leap. Pebbles rolled to meet it, so mud or snow might never touch the Lyeshy's feet. The Lyeshy, a rolling carpet beneath its splayed feet, stalked to Galinka's side. The Lyeshy nodded. "You are wiser than one might guess, Galinka Andreiovna." The Lyeshy's voice was the Vyezhinsky Forest wind, sad and distant but, all the same, able to topple the mightiest tree. Its accent sounded peasantish, even to peasant-raised Galinka. "Most of your generation have allowed the Tsar who does not call himself a Tsar, the one who now rules from the Kremlin's fastness, to strip away their defenses against those such as I. As circumstances now stand, I can not touch you, Galinka Andreiovna."

Galinka rose and crossed herself again. "How do you know my name?"

"I know when the deer is to rut, when the spruce is to bud. I know when the bear is to wake. Should my knowing your name surprise you?"

"My calls to the saints truly protect me?"

"That is my agreement with Vladimir, although I assure you he was less saintly than you imagine. But Prince Vladimir's drinking and goatishness have no bearing on you. You can depart in peace, if you so choose."

"You are less fearsome than tales would have?"

The Lyeshy smiled. For a moment, all the wolves and ravens that ever scoured bodies from Russian battlefields seemed to lurk behind that smile. "Do not forget: the forest and all within it, save what Vladimir shields, bows before me." The Lyeshy placed a finger against a mighty northern spruce, so large that it might have been a seedling when the invader Napoleon walked on Russian soil. The tree shivered. Impossibly, the mighty northern spruce plowed through the soil like a ship through the waves, leaving no mark of passage. A moment later, the tree stood rooted three paces from where it had grown old. "Not fearsome? What do you think, Galinka Andreiovna?"

Galinka circled about the forest demon. Never turning her back to it, she retreated. "Not if I can walk away, as you say I can."

The Lyeshy shrugged. "As you will, Galinka Andreiovna." It stroked a nearby conifer as though soothing a cat. "Soon,



all will be deep, dank mud. Not forever, though. Eventually, the dam will fail and the forest will return. Eventually." The Lyeshy patted the grave marker. "The young know so little patience. Do you not agree?"

Galinka stopped and frowned. "What do you want of me?"

The Lyeshy nodded toward the now immobile northern spruce. "If this magnificent edifice obeys my whim, could I not propel a simple grave across the countryside? If I can name the spot where each icicle must fall, would I not know where the waters will never touch?" The Lyeshy smiled again. This time it looked almost friendly ... almost, but not quite. "No drowned grave. No lost spirit. Does this not sound pleasant, Galinka Andreiovna?"

"Never has the Lyeshy given without payment, or so the grandmothers say." Galinka placed her hands on her hips. "What would your services cost?"

The Lyeshy pursed its lips and studied the trees, as though deep in thought. "Mortal beauty can conceal an empty and fragile spirit. While circumstances have left your flesh worn and battered, your spirit is glorious. Truth be told, your inner being is as tough as a bear's hide, which is, to a Lyeshy, a wondrous thing. When the water rises, a long night shall fall. I would not face it with only the Russalkas who live in

the River Ob for companions. Remain with me, Galinka Andreiovna."

"Could you not find one better?" Galinka sputtered. "Or simply move to another forest?"

"Are there such others?" The Lyeshy pointedly stalked around the grave. "Could you not simply find another daughter?"

Galinka stood stunned, her pounding heart echoing in her ears. "How do I know the value of your word?"

"Have I not kept faith with Vladimir?"

Galinka retreated a step. As she did, the dice in her greatcoat rattled. Galinka nodded, knowing what to do. "Lyeshy, I reject your offer." The Lyeshy frowned. Galinka held up the dice. "I will game with you, though. My agreement to remain in the forest against yours to move the grave, earth and contents, to safety."

The Lyeshy looked troubled, as though making some decision. "If you lose, you *will* remain, Vladimir's word or no. You accept this?"

Galinka paused. Gambling against a waggerer as accomplished and as tricky as the Lyeshy was risky. But no

priests would appear to help Elena. For a grave within the forest, the Lyeshy's power should equal the priests'. Lev's lessons with dice should see her through. At least she hoped so. Galinka nodded agreement.

The Lyeshy brightened and waved its hand. Snow and mud became a glass-smooth earthen table, with thrones of moss and twigs on either side. The Lyeshy gestured for Galinka to sit. "Let us try our luck. If the two dice show an even number of spots, then I lose. If odd, you lose."

Galinka curled her lip. "Peculiar rules."

The Lyeshy shrugged. "Those rules were old before the Mongols came."

Galinka produced her curve-bladed knife. "Let me deepen the spots on the dice. Use has worn them." The Lyeshy nodded agreement. Galinka turned and, hands hidden from the Lyeshy, carved the Cross of Saint Vladimir into the dice. If Vladimir would not protect her, perhaps he would protect the dice from any tampering that the Lyeshy planned.

Galinka seated herself. She whispered a prayer to Saint Sergius Radonezeh and tossed the dice, pushing them so that one spot would show on each. The dice rolled across the table and, weakened by carving, one split in two. The intact die landed with a single spot showing, as Galinka

intended. The other? One face showed a single spot, and a broken segment showed two.

The Lyeshy curved its finger about the intact die and one of the pieces. "The sum is even." It did the same with the other piece. "The sum is odd." The Lyeshy clapped its hands, as though delighted with the outcome. "We both lose, Galinka Andreiovna, or Galinka, as I shall call you now."

Galinka rose to flee. She covered perhaps three steps before a tingle raced through her left arm. A bomb exploded within her chest. She felt herself fall and then, somehow, rise. The world spun, her senses filled with contradictory sensations. After a moment, Galinka's composure returned. She found herself looking down from the forest canopy. Everything seemed smaller, as though she had grown as tall as a commissar's dacha. The table and thrones had vanished, leaving only the dice. A body, resembling her own, sprawled in the mud.

Galinka tried to walk. Her legs felt as though they had sunk into the earth. She tried to move her arms. The branches of a great twin-trunked birch trembled. Galinka felt something dangling from her finger. Galinka looked down. What she thought was a finger was a low-hanging limb. The Lyeshy dangled from that limb by its toes.

"Ah, Galinka." The Lyeshy beamed up at her. "You have, no doubt spotted your old body by now."

"My body? How can I be both down below and up here?" Galinka's voice sounded like the wind, even to her own hearing.

"You are now of the forest, Galinka. What belongs more in the forest than a birch? I have transferred your spirit to my favorite birch, which happens to be your favorite as well, judging by the hours you have spent by its side. You will have time to get used to your new state." The Lyeshy tapped the limb from which it hung. "Accidents will delay the dam. The Russalkas of the River Ob will see to that. Who knows? Maybe the Tsar who is not a Tsar will die soon and the dam will never be."

So I am a tree, Galinka told herself. A meek peasant learned to be a warrior when the Hitlerites came. A fierce warrior learned to remain silent when Great Stalin's purges began. Learning to be a tree could be no more difficult.

Galinka proved herself right. With effort, Galinka sent her consciousness through every leaf, every branch, every root. Awareness of all that moved through her branches or roots filled her.

More than that, Galinka now sensed the presence of many beings. It took her a moment to recognize them as spirits. Most, like the mice and voles, were encased in flesh. Some, like the Lyeshy, were without true bodies. Powerful spirits, like the Lyeshy (or, she noted with pride, herself), roared like bonfires. Weak ones, like the squirrel in her branches, seemed mere flint-on-steel sparks.

By concentrating, Galinka narrowed her awareness to the one thing she cared most about, her daughter. Her roots could sense Elena's bones. More than that, she felt the presence of Elena's spirit. Trapped within rotting bones, it smoldered like a doused candle, perhaps awaiting the resurrection that the priests promised and the Party denied.

Galinka turned back to the Lyeshy. "You lost also," Galinka snarled. At least something would come of her predicament. Elena would escape the dark waters.

"The dam might never come."

"But it might. Honor you word."

"Of course." The Lyeshy hopped down and lay its hands on the mound of earth. The Lyeshy nodded, as though giving a command. Nothing happened. The Lyeshy's eyes widened with apparent surprise. It placed its hands flat against the grave. The Lyeshy's face contorted, as though it struggled

against an unseen foe. Its muscles heaved and tossed. Nothing happened. The Lyeshy frowned. It stood back and held its chin, appearing deep in thought. After a moment, it slapped its thigh, as though to say, "Of course." The Lyeshy pointed to the symbol carved into the marker. "I gave my personal oath to Vladimir, and Vladimir gave his personal oath ... "

" ... to the Patriarch of Kiev," Galinka finished. She would have spat in disgust, if she were still able to do so. "What can you do now, Lyeshy?"

"I am truly sorry, Galinka Andreiovna." The Lyeshy sounded sincere. It opened its mouth, as though to continue. Then it stopped, as though it heard something in the forest. The Lyeshy glanced over its shoulder. "Someone is coming. We can settle this another time." The Lyeshy rose and sank into a hemlock, joining with the tree.

Young Avram and Varvara Petrovna, her dark eyes as vacant as ever, her lips locked without emotion, entered the clearing. "Galinka Andreiovna!" Avram cried. His words slurred, as though he had drunk the kvass all at once. "She has died in the forest!" Somewhat unsteadily, he approached Galinka's fallen body.

Galinka studied young Avram. Now she could see how deeply his resemblance to the Lyeshy truly ran. She cast the Lyeshy a questioning glance.

The Lyeshy squirmed. "How would I know how mortal flesh can conceal a ragged spirit, had I never experienced that flesh?" The Lyeshy's voice was the crackle of ice, but Galinka understood every word.

"But Irina Denisova?" Galinka could not hide her incredulity.

"Who would be less likely to invoke Vladimir?"

Galinka turned away. All men, whether mortal or forest spirit, were obviously alike.

Galinka turned her attention to Varvara Petrovna. The chemical plant had left the poor child tottering like one who had consumed too much vodka. What else had it done? Galinka recoiled in horror as she learned the answer. Her own Elena Levovna's spirit was a smoking ember encased in rotting bones. But Varvara Petrovna? The poor child's warm body encased only a cold clinker!

Galinka looked from the mound of earth to Avram to Varvara. A plan formed. The plan was, she admitted, desperate. It assumed that the power of the Lyeshy was



greater than she had imagined. Still, the opportunity was at hand. Such a chance might not come again.

Galinka spoke to young Avram. Her voice was the rustling of branches. Avram must have heard, though, because his startled eyes swept the forest. Without the kvass, perhaps the boy would have fled. He did not run, though. Galinka repeated her command, willing young Avram to obey.

This time, Avram understood. His lips barely moved as he whispered the words, "I can't."

"You can," Galinka replied. Avram removed his hat. Apparently deep in thought, he studied the pin that exhorted the workers to unite. "You can," Galinka repeated. Avram removed the pin and held it in his hand. He replaced his hat and lead Varvara Petrovna to the earthen mound. He lay Varvara's hand on the earth and stood back. "All that is within the forest," Galinka said. "All. Without exception. Remember that."

Avram's face twisted, his resemblance to the Lyeshy becoming all the more marked. Suddenly, the boy threw back his head. An inhuman howl, combining the cries of all the forest creatures, emerged from his throat. His hands, both the three and five fingered, shot into the air. For a moment, his features glistened with the color of forest

lichens. The entire Vyezhinsky Forest seemed to tremble with ancient magics.

Varvara Petrovna looked up. The canopy of branches parted. A ray of sunlight filtered down. Her eyes, as blue as the Russian sky, looked up at the sun. Filled with wonder, Varvara Petrovna smiled. Then she walked. True, Varvara Petrovna was a bit unsteady. But her gait was more that of one who had never truly learned to walk than that of one whose bones had not properly formed, almost as if the body had healed.

"Come," Avram Avramovitch whispered to Varvara. His appearance had returned to normal. The kvass' slur had vanished, as though the forest magic had cancelled it. "We must tell the authorities about Galinka Andreiovna." Varvara frowned as though she did not understand plain Russian, perhaps as though she had never learned. Avram paused. "At least we must tell the Rossetsky and Yevtushenko families." His eyes swept the forest, as though seeing it for the first time. "There is much for me to consider. Much indeed." He dropped the pin to the forest floor and crushed it beneath his foot. With that, the children went into back the forest, toward the collective farm.

Just to be certain, Galinka explored her surroundings. All was as she had hoped. Elena Levovna's bones were without

---

spirit. Her child had known the resurrection, although not as the priests promised. Galinka smiled, as only a tree can.

"The boy is half a Lyeshy, and all within the forest, save that protected by the oath sworn to Vladimir, obeys the Lyeshy," Galinka said softly to herself. "Only the boy swore no oath."

The Lyeshy emerged from the hemlock. What might have been fear glinted in its eyes. "Galinka Andreiovna! The child does not know what he is! Unbound by the ancient agreements, he could become a monster."

Galinka shrugged. Or rather the twin-trunked birch rained twigs. "Either he will deal with the Party, or the Party will deal with him. I know not which, although his power is great and he has cause to seek revenge."

The Lyeshy looked thoughtful. "Perhaps you are right. You have proven yourself as resourceful as I had hoped. Before your impulsiveness does any permanent harm, I must take you in hand and teach you the ways of the forest. After all, you will remain a long, long time."

Galinka shot the Lyeshy a sideways glance. "I adapt well on my own, Lyeshy."

"I am master of the forest! All within it obeys me," the Lyeshy stormed.

"Prince Vladimir says that you do not rule me."

"You surrendered Vladimir's protection."

Galinka laughed. "' If you lose, you *will* remain, Vladimir's word or no,'" she said, repeating the Lyeshy's words. "Do you see me trying to leave? Otherwise, your oath to Vladimir remains."

The Lyeshy screamed with rage.

"And," Galinka continued, "as I once told another dicing partner, sometimes winning brings more than the gambler anticipates."

Galinka sank back into the birch. Perhaps the waters would come. Perhaps not. In either case, Elena Levovna would have a chance at life. And the Vyezhinsky Forest would become a more interesting place. Galinka Andreiovna would see to that.

COPYRIGHT © 2004 BY LAWRENCE BARKER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

**THE END**

# I'LL TAKE MY STAND



LAWRENCE  
BARKER

Available from Silver Lake Publishing at  
<http://www.silverlakepublishing.com>

# HOMESICK

BY THOMAS CANFIELD

**THOMAS CANFIELD** has thirty odd publication credits in various venues, print and on-line, mostly science fiction, fantasy, and mystery pieces.

Earth. Alana found it hard to believe that she was actually back again after all this time. Ten years. No, eleven, she corrected herself. Eleven years Earth time. The past seemed no more than a distant memory, remote and not altogether real. Now she was overwhelmed with a welter of conflicting emotions, a rush of new impressions. She hadn't anticipated finding everything the same, of course. She was prepared for change. What she was not prepared for was the knorons.

Dal was leading her through the terminal when she saw one for the first time. It was vaguely humanoid in appearance, small, with delicate features and an androgynous figure. It sported a magnificent crest of hair that was variously black, blue-black, blue or blue shading toward indigo. Alana's initial reaction was one of sympathy and an intense curiosity.

"What on earth," she exclaimed to Dal.

"A knoron," Dal told her, scarcely glancing at it.

Alana remembered now. She's read a few articles about them. They were being imported from the nearby Beta system to help alleviate a severe labor shortage. They were reported to be particularly good at menial tasks, filling the dirty, tedious jobs that nobody else wanted.

"What is it doing here, at the terminal?" Alana asked.

Dal shrugged. "Working in food services. Or janitorial staff."

He looked at her. "You don't have them on Alpha-1?"

"No, of course not," Alana said. "There are only a couple hundred of us in the colony. I remember reading about them though. And I've seen pictures. But no one in the colony, I don't think, ever encountered one before."

Dal shook his head in disbelief. "You really are off the beaten track, aren't you. All these years I pictured you leading the good life out there. Clean air, wide open spaces." Dal shot a sly glance at her. "Fresh meat at every meal."

"Fresh meat, hah!" Alana snorted. "Try recombinant kelp. And as for wide open spaces . . ." Another knoron scurried

by and Alana stared after it. This one was taller and had a thick growth of black hair along its crown and down its spine. "They really are kind of cute, aren't they?" she said to Dal. Dal's face twisted in a violent grimace, as though he had just tasted something foul. But Alana was too excited, too caught up in the moment, to notice. She felt like a tourist on a new planet. Everything seemed fresh and different again after eleven years.

They boarded the bullet train into the city, a hundred miles away. Alana was surprised to find that many of the passengers on the train were knorons.

"I hadn't realized there were so many of them," she said to Dal as they made their way through the cars.

"Yes." Dal looked around in a distracted fashion. "There's a couple of seats. Over there." He took Alana's elbow. "Let's grab them."

They sat down. The train shot forward and they began cruising through mile after mile of suburban sprawl. Alana began reminiscing about when they were schoolmates growing up together. She and Dal swapped anecdotes back and forth and the years apart seemed to fall away from them effortlessly.



A knoron slid into the seat next to Alana. Alana grabbed Dal's arm. "Dal, how do you address a knoron?" she asked.

"Address?" Dal looked at her, puzzled.

"Yes, you know. Sir? Citizen? Kabooti? How do you start a conversation?"

"Why would anyone want to do that?" Dal asked. But Alana was already tapping the knoron on the shoulder.

"Excuse me. I don't mean to be impolite. It's just that I've been off planet for quite some time and I haven't had the opportunity to speak to a knoron." The knoron stared at her with wide, attentive eyes. Encouraged, Alana continued "I was curious about your impressions of Earth. I mean, it must be very different from your home planet." The knoron tugged at a tuft of hair. "Was it a shock when you first arrived here," Alana asked. "It must have been, coming to a city this large and populous. But you certainly seem to have adjusted well. I might have mistaken you for a native myself if I didn't know better." The knoron continued to stare at her.

"Alana. Alana." Dal tugged at her elbow.

"What?"

"You're wasting your time."

"How am I wasting my time," Alana demanded.

"They don't . . . they're not great conversationalists."

"Don't they speak?" Alana refused to be dissuaded.

"Yes," Dal admitted.

"Well, why won't this one speak to me?"

Dal sighed. He fished a circular object out of the pocket of his jacket. "Hey," he addressed the knorn. "Take this. And don't forget to give it back to me when you leave."

The knoron made a delighted sound, bounced in its seat. Alana looked at the object Dal had given it. The thing was a toy that had been popular back a long time ago. Back before they were born. What was it called? Alana tried to remember. A yo-yo.

The knoron began working the toy up and down, up and down. Methodically, with an almost hypnotic devotion. Alana watched for a while, turned to Dal

"What's the matter with them, are they thick?" she asked.

Dal shook his head. "No, it's not that exactly. It's something, well, more complex. They like repetitive tasks. Doing something over and over and over again. It's not simply a matter of liking it. It fulfills some primal need of theirs. Some deep rooted physical and psychological hunger. Like sex in a human being." Dal paused, added "That's what makes them ideal for menial labor."

Alana thought this over. "Could it understand me, when I was talking to it?" she asked finally.

"I suppose so," Dal said, shrugging.

"Why didn't it answer me then?" Alana looked at the knoron still engrossed with the yo-yo.

"Why should it? You had nothing to offer of any interest to it. Face it, Alana. You were trying to relate to it as a human being. That's a mistake. Why do you think I carry that yo-yo around with me."

Alana flashed him a smile. "I wondered about that."

"As well you might." Dal grinned. "You really should have one yourself. That, or a pocket watch. They'll sit and play with a pocket watch for hours."

Alana shook her head. She looked at the knoron with pity. "I wonder if it's fair really, bringing them here to Earth. It seems that we're taking advantage of them somehow. Aren't we?"

"Ask the knoron if we're taking advantage of it," Dal said, plainly unsympathetic.

Alana looked around the train. All the knorons she could see were either sitting in their seats quietly, staring off into space, or manipulating some small object between their hands. None of them looked to be particularly unhappy or dissatisfied. And yet . . . .

Suddenly the knoron next to her began coughing and hacking violently. Alana looked at it in alarm. It clutched at its throat, rasping, pawed the air. Finally it spat forth a great mass of greenish colored phlegm .

"Something must be wrong, Dal." Alana rested a hand on the knoron. "Do you think that it's sick?"

Dal glanced at the knoron. "It's not that," he explained. "It's the air. There are certain trace elements in the atmosphere that irritate their lungs. It's a condition that afflicts them whenever the weather turns warm."

"But that's terrible," Alana declared. "They could be suffering permanent damage. Does anyone know what it's doing to their lungs. Has anyone taken the trouble to find out?"

"Alana, you've been away for a long while. There are things you don't understand. It would be a mistake to rush and make snap judgments. And it would be a major mistake to take up the knorons as a pet cause. It may surprise you but there are people who don't particularly care for knorons. I happen to be one of them."

Alana was shocked. She'd never known Dal to be like this. He was usually so warm and understanding. Sympathetic. She looked at the knoron again. It had dreamy golden eyes, flecked with silver. Exotic eyes. How could anyone be hostile toward such a harmless creature. She watched it playing with the yo-yo. Like a child, she thought. Like a child a long way from home, alone and longing for its mother. Maybe they were not particularly intelligent. But that certainly could not account for Dal's attitude.

The train began to decelerate as they approached the underground pass into the city. Dal stirred in his seat, turned to Alana. "You're not angry with me, are you?" he asked. He looked anxious.

"No, of course not. Why should I be angry," Alana said.

"I thought . . ." Dal gestured weakly. "The knorons. They do that to people at first."

"Do what to people?" Alana inquired.

"Generate sympathy. It's hard for someone like me, someone who's lived with them day in and day out for years, to relate to that. I don't know as I can explain it to you."

"You really don't like them, do you?" Alana said, distressed.

Dal's jaw tightened. His eyes took on a distant look. "I loathe them," he said and there was a passion in his voice that was undiluted and chilling and final.

Alana stood at the window of Dal's apartment looking out over the city. The City! Her city, the city that had been home to her for the first twenty-one years of her life. That it had also been home to fifteen million other people did not seem to matter to Alana. It was her city, had always been her city, would remain hers no matter what.

Dal seemed subdued as he ushered her down to the lobby to take her out on the town for the first time. It was apparent that he wanted to say something to her but did not know

how to go about it. His mood communicated itself to Alana, sapped some of her exuberance.

"Watch it now. Hold your arms up," Dal directed her as they passed through the magnetic field that provided security for the building. "Face the scanner." They were cleared and thrust out into the teeming cauldron of the city streets. Alana was surprised at all the knorons hurrying about their business. They seemed to make up fully half the population. It was disconcerting somehow. A couple of dozen spread throughout the crowd might have been colorful. But this . . . no, she had not anticipated this at all.

They caught the subway uptown to the Center for the Performing Arts, a large, sprawling structure, oddly impersonal in appearance, built since Alana's last visit to Earth. A broad mural dominated the lobby inside. It portrayed a weak, chinless face pitted by acne. A thin spill of brown hair was slicked back from the forehead and watery blue eyes stared out at the viewer sheepishly. Alana had seen similar posters all along their route into the city.

"Just who is that supposed to be?" she asked Dal.

Dal scarcely glanced at the mural. "That's Danny Ozark," he said.

"Danny who?"

"Ozark. Danny Ozark. You'll see posters of him all over the place."

Alana looked at the mural again. Something about the face annoyed her. "And what is his chief claim to fame?"

"He's a composer." Dal smiled.

"A composer?" Alana repeated. She looked at the face again. "A composer of what?"

"He writes . . . muzak."

"Muzak! You don't mean that awful trash they pipe into offices and elevators," Alana exclaimed.

"As a matter of fact, that is what I mean. He is a composer. Of muzak."

"But you don't compose that stuff," Alana protested. "It's generated by a machine. Or some hack scribbles it out on the back of a brown paper bag. There is no such thing as someone who sits down and composes muzak." Alana paused. "Though I suppose if there were, they'd probably look like that." She gestured at the mural.



"I assure you," Dal seemed to be enjoying himself immensely, "Mr Ozark is indeed a composer. A highly regarded one at that. As all the posters attest to."

"But that's absurd," Alana spluttered. "No rational human being can endure the stuff."

"Who said we were talking about human beings," Dal remarked.

Alana was brought up short. "You don't mean . . . You can't mean that this has anything to do with the knorons," she said.

Dal nodded. "Danny Ozark is their pop idol. They adore the man. They are all of them fanatic fans of . . . muzak." Alana could not believe it. The cute, harmless little creatures with whom she had ridden in on the train, fans of muzak? Why, it was terrible to contemplate. Obscene even.

"Yes," Dal continued, "muzak is an art form to them. I don't know what dive Danny Ozark was languishing in before the knorons came here to Earth. But I do know they've made him a very rich man. Probably the best known man on the planet."

"But how could that have happened!" Alana gestured angrily. "I mean, why do they allow them to plaster these

posters all over the place. They should forbid it. I wouldn't stand for it for a minute." She looked at the mural of Danny Ozark. His weak, characterless features were animated by an expression of complacent vacuity. "There should be standards, laws. What do people mean, putting up with such a state of affairs."

Dal grinned at her. "Well, that's quite a change. Wasn't it only yesterday that you were telling me you thought the knorons were cute."

"I did. They are," Alana said, confused. "I just meant that there should be regulations. Governing this sort of thing."

"Ah, but this is a republic," Dal reminded her. "You can't tell people what to do. And you can't tell the knorons what to listen to and what not to listen to. Or have you forgotten your civics lessons."

Alana glared at him. "My civics lessons did not include knorons. You can't mean to tell me that you approve of all this. These posters and this . . . this Danny Ozark."

"Approve?" Dal's face took on a bitter cast. "I despise Danny Ozark. I despise what he represents. But he's on top and he's going to stay there. There's nothing you or I or anyone else can do about it."

"I suppose I'm overreacting," Alana said, shaking her head. "It's just that it's all so new. And muzak of all things. It's hard to imagine anyone actually enjoying the stuff."

"The hell with Danny Ozark," Dal said. "Let's go up to the Bund studios. They're always interesting." They caught the elevator up to the ninth floor. Muzak blared at them all the way up.

The Bund studios were closed. They had been shut down. The space was being converted to a set for catatonic still art, something the knorons were very fond of. Alana and Dal caught the elevator down again. There were a clutch of knorons standing in one corner. Five or six of them. Alana watched them. They seemed to her to be acting in a peculiar fashion. Their heads were tilted back, eyes almost closed, and they were swaying back and forth in unison. Alana nudged Dal.

"Dal, what are they doing?"

Dal looked at the knorons. His lip curled in scorn. "It's Danny Ozark," he said.

"Danny Ozark?"

"One of his tunes." Dal gestured at the speaker in the ceiling.

"One of his tunes!" Alana declared, appalled. "But it's all the same! You mean to tell me they can distinguish something he wrote from the other drek?"

"That's right. I don't know how. But they can."

Alana watched the knorns rocking back and forth as if in ecstasy. The muzak poured down upon her like a thin, cold rain, filled with misery and discomfort. Her own eyes closed and she shuddered.

It was afternoon, late afternoon, when they staggered back into Dal's tiny apartment. They had done the town. Or done as much of it as Alana felt she could endure. Her city? She shook her head at her own arrogant presumption. It was not her city any longer but the knorns. It belonged to them in a way it had never truly belonged to her. All the vitality, the vibrancy, the bright, sparkling wonder of it had been leached away. Drained out of it. In its place was a shell, a bleak and empty collection of glass and steel. A pall of mediocrity. Dal was attempting to explain it to her.

"But it had to happen Alana, don't you see. The high brass at the UN, the policy makers, they thought it would alieviate the labor shortage. Work to everyone's advantage. But they

overlooked one thing. This is an alien culture not a human one. The essence of the knoron is that if it's bland, if it's drab, if it's dull, it appeals to them. Doesn't matter what it is. Doesn't matter in what field of endeavor." Dal paused. "Look, what's the most boring, lustreless, relentlessly dull profession you can think of?"

"Oh, I don't know." Alana wanted only to be left alone. "Accountant?"

"Right exactly. And of course accountants are their heroes. They go and watch accountants 'perform'. Literally. Just like you or I might go and see a soccer match. It extends across the whole culture, every facet of it. They're like a vine, insidious, stealthy, choking the life out of a mighty oak."

Alana nodded wearily. She looked out the window, at the dusk shrouded glitter of the great city, filled with false promise. The knorons. The god damn knorons. And thinking of the immense, wind whipped plains of Alpha-1, the brilliant ochre sky overhead, the harsh, biting air, she suddenly felt homesick.

COPYRIGHT © 2004 BY THOMAS CANFIELD. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

**THE END**

# *AN AMERICAN SCIENTIST APPLIES FOR FOREIGN FUNDING*

BY STEPHEN D. ROGERS

Over three hundred of Stephen's stories and poems have been selected to appear in more than a hundred publications. His website includes a list of new and upcoming titles as well as other timely information.

☀ **Author's website:** <http://www.stephendrogers.com>

Funding for theoretical science is difficult right now in America. Even though I've budgeted in the odd eighty-dollar hammer and weekly shipments from leading manufacturers in the key vote's home state, money is tight.

Luckily for us, science doesn't recognize international boundaries. Our light is your light.

But to the specifics of my research. Many have theorized that travel faster than the speed of light is impossible. (If Einstein could be so wrong about beef stroganoff, who's to say that he's right about this?) I'm not like most of my colleagues who simply shrug, I asked myself why we

couldn't just increase the quote-unquote constant known as  $C$ .

If a body at rest tends to stay at rest, and a body in motion tends to look forward to a rest, then it stands to reason that light is slower than it could be with the right motivation.

People once said that man would never break the four-minute mile, but I reverse down my driveway every day at twice that speed. (Actually, I reverse a little slower on Mondays because I don't want to chance knocking over my trash barrels which just proves that lack of focus slows things down.)

Why should light be an exception? Sometimes it acts like a particle, and sometimes it acts like a wave. What would happen if half the time I went to work and instead of conducting experiments I spent my time writing grant applications. You see my point.

Our findings so far are encouraging. Just for an example, think about instantaneous light. It's at one point, and then it's at another. That's got to be faster than the currently held speed of light.

One avenue that I'm exploring is attraction. Light colors reflect light and dark colors absorb. There's something significant in that. If I'm not mistaken it was Ben Franklin

who said that all cats look gray at night, and he didn't have too much trouble attracting lightning either.

But if you think about it, what's the speed of iron? Zero? Place a magnet nearby. You'll see that lump of iron jump through the air, an increase of speed with a geometric order of magnitude.

For the sake of argument, let's say that I could increase the speed of light by only ten percent. That's an additional eighteen thousand, six hundred miles per second. And if ten percent is possible, why shouldn't twenty, thirty percent, or more? We are limited only by our ability to measure.

Certainly there are nay-sayers. There always are before scientific breakthroughs prove themselves out.

Take the bumblebee. The same scientists who ridicule my work say that the bumblebee can't fly. Let's close our eyes as we walk through the garden lest we prove them wrong.

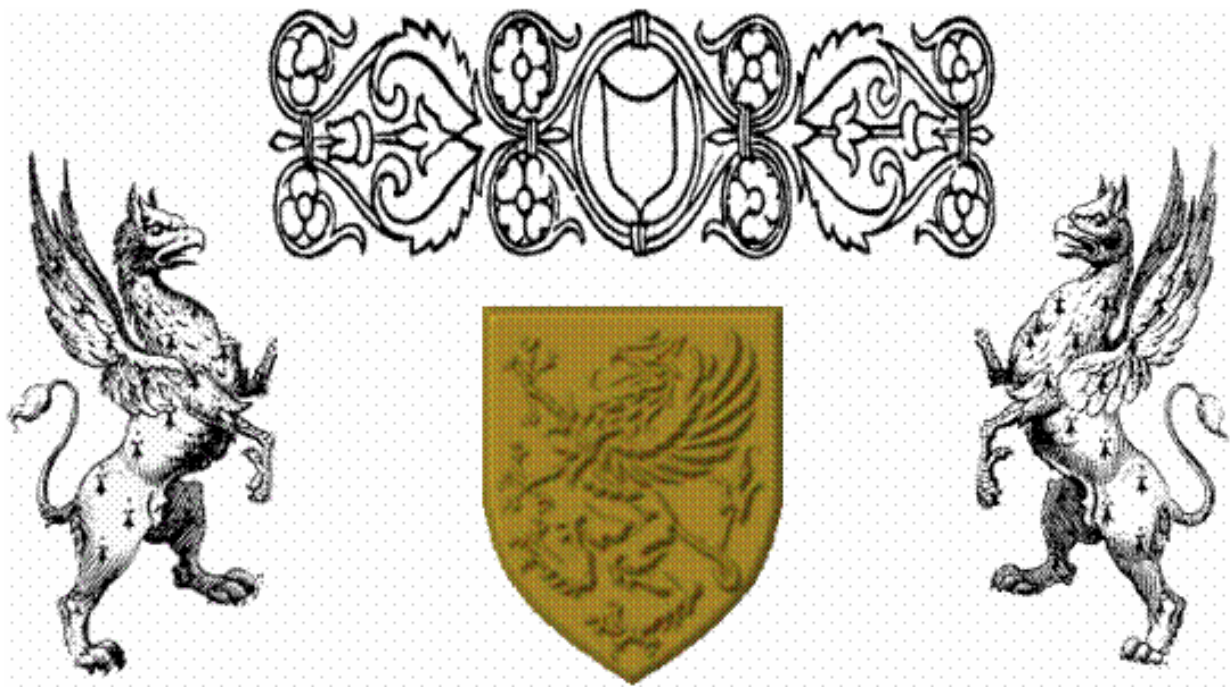
I'm not afraid to fly in the face of conventual wisdom. And when we're through here, we'll be flying into it faster than one hundred eighty-six thousand miles per second. Or do you people use kilometers?

COPYRIGHT © 2004 BY STEPHEN D. ROGERS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

**THE END**

---





# GRIFFONS CLAW ARMOURY

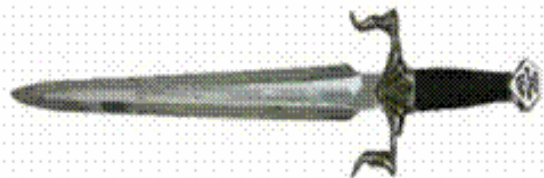
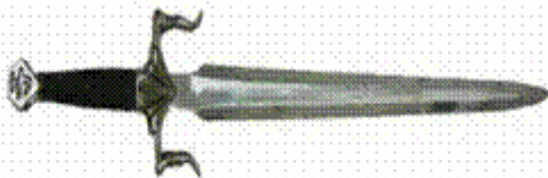
MEDIEVAL WEAPONRY AT  
REASONABLE PRICES

SWORDS, DAGGERS, AXES, FLAILS

GRIFFONSCLAW.com

TEL: 732-841-5268 – FAX: 732-537-1464 –

EMAIL: GRIFFONSCLAW@aol.com



# FEATURED POETRY

BY BRUCE BOSTON

**BRUCE BOSTON** is the author of forty books and chapbooks, including the novel *Stained Glass Rain* and the best-of fiction collection *Masque of Dreams*. Stories and poems have appeared in hundreds of publications, including *Asimov's SF*, *Amazing Stories*, *Realms of Fantasy*, *Weird Tales*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Year's Best Fantasy & Horror*, and seven Nebula Awards anthologies. His fiction has received a Pushcart Prize and the Best of Soft SF Award. His poetry has received many awards, including a record four Asimov's Readers' Awards, a record seven Rhysling Awards, and the Grand Master Award of the Science Fiction Poetry Association. More information, including a bibliography, poems, and links to online publications, can be found at his website: <http://hometown.aol.com/bruboston>

## THE SECRET OF COLD FUSION

The secret of cold fusion  
is galloping away  
on the Black Stallion.

The secret of cold fusion  
is imminent as  
your dead relatives  
reclining in their coffins.

The secret of cold fusion  
whispers in your ear  
so quickly and quietly  
only the brave legions of Mars  
can comprehend its diction.

The secret of cold fusion  
echoes in the corridors  
of skyscraper dreams  
in an age of leveling.

The secret of cold fusion  
chokes on the chugging  
freight train of its own  
insistent verifications.

The secret of cold fusion  
is alluvial and rich  
in sedimentary deposits.

The secret of cold fusion  
is lost in our pajamas.

## THE CAR OF THE FUTURE

The car of the future  
is stylish as a Jaguar  
and tough as a Mac Truck.

The car of the future  
is streamlined to the max,  
so aerodynamically perfect  
it tongue kisses the wind  
and gathers momentum

from its passage.

The car of the future  
does all the driving.  
Program your destination  
then stretch out and relax.  
Try the bar and pharmacy.  
Enjoy a premium movie  
or a full body massage.

In the car of the future  
you will overtake everyone  
in sight, its accelerations  
and decelerations perfectly  
timed for every green light.

The car of the future,  
with bulletproof windows,  
radiation shielding and  
armaments of your choice,  
rules both the streets  
of our savage cities and  
the highways and byways  
of the devastated Earth.

## NEEDLESS

No need to excavate the mine or the stream.

*Gems and precious metals have been placed on the  
necks of chosen paragons.*

No need to reap the treasure of cradled civilizations  
or whittle the rot from gold.

*Where relics reside they are wasted to clay in their own sedimentary dust.*

No need to scale star registers or conquer icy peaks.

*Imagination's wide leaps catch the passion of your intermittent ascent and decay.*

No need to document the record of your absinthe and antitheses to be filed under K.

*The boatman who poles the black river with his mutant dog has taken the measure of your lust.*

No need to salvage trestles for a monumental image that will be maimed by survivors.

No need to conjure lizards from the mouths of quail.  
No need to follow the mule's hard reins to enlightenment.

*Wherein lie oneiric realizations already framed.*

No need to hazard storms of memory and feel light crackle in your veins.

*Time's shadow is a cloth you rub between your fingers to fix its texture and density in your brain.*

No need to cast a legend from the toss of hair or bone.

*Or exhume the stony corpse once it has been graven.*

## AVOCADO HORROR

An avocado is  
the choicest of fruits,  
for fruit it is,  
even though its  
flesh is not sweet.

The dark green  
grainy variety  
yield the best meat.

Cut it up on  
a bed of lettuce,  
add salt, ground pepper,  
and toss vigorously  
with balsamic vinaigrette.

Or whip up a spicy  
guacamole with fresh  
tomato and onions  
and jalapeno peppers.

One way to eat an avocado  
is to cut it in half,  
remove the seed,  
and fill each  
curvaceous cavity  
with the finely sliced  
flesh of your victims.

To savor this rare  
delicacy raw is  
the rumored delight

---

of the discerning  
gourmet cannibal.

Meat, flesh, and all,  
it remains an avocado,  
choicest of all fruits

## IN THE COARSE MORN

His stabs at the sublime  
archetype of sanctified beauty  
could never apprise  
the midnight masses  
or conclude  
the plural norm.

This was the task of the crooked road.  
To turn all its leaves  
in divers directions  
despite the droning wind.

In the loose pavilions  
of the Lord Duke's fairground  
the pennons fly ragged  
and without repair.

The bountiful humpbacked  
ladies of South Cathedral  
drag their trousseaus in gunnysacks.  
across the sporting arenas.

Idle legions smoke and drink  
in the public squares,  
making elaborate light

---

of their misfortune.

While the castle itself,  
mortared to withstand  
the linear ages,  
reeks of mildew and moss.

This is a landscape  
in need of renovation.

And from this mélange  
of sense and sense illuminated  
he must draw a conclusion  
current to his lurking life.

Cast in shades of least blue  
and patchwork shadow  
across his neural paths.

Cartwheeling the hemispheres  
of his brain's distraction  
with its sublimated rights.

And when the sublime of the ages  
concatenate their forces  
in this illumination,  
like stones in flight  
against the dross of life,  
by the blood,  
by the horn's escalation,  
there will be thorns to pay  
in the coarse morn  
for such vital and  
extraneous excavations.



COPYRIGHT © 2004 BY BRUCE BOSTON. ALL RIGHT RESERVED.



**BRAM STOKER AWARD WINNER!**

If you enjoyed Bruce's work why not check out more about him at  
<http://hometown.aol.com/bruboston>

# BOOK REVIEWS

BY JASON BRANNON

**JASON BRANNON** is the author of over 120 published short stories, four short story collections, two novels, and four chapbooks. His writing has appeared in such diverse publications as *Dark Realms*, *The Edge*, *Wicked Hollow*, *Black Petals*, *Rogue Worlds*, and *Dark Karma*.

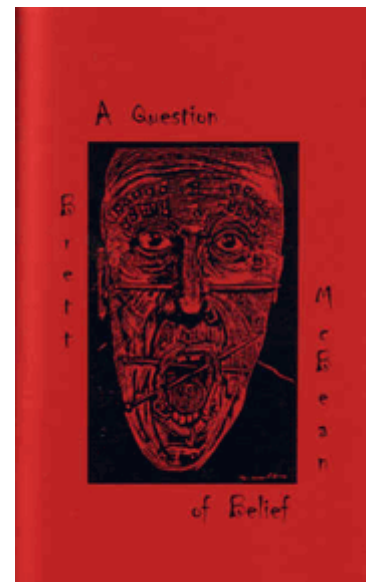
★ Author's website: <http://www.jbrannon.net/>

## A QUESTION OF BELIEF

by Brett McBean

Biting Dog Publications

Before ever cracking open this beautifully-made chapbook, I knew I was going to like it. The cover features a horrific woodcut done by George Walker set against a blood red background. Upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent



that the quality of this chapbook will be miles above the majority of the ones released. It only stands to reason that the fiction contained within will be miles above as well. I

was familiar with McBean from reading his *Laymonesque* novel *The Last Motel*. As a result I was expecting a great read and McBean delivered.

This story has lots of things working in its favor. It deals with a reverend that has lost his faith, an incoherent wanderer who needs his help, and a ship full of zombies. Yes, you heard right. This is a zombie story. But it isn't your normal, everyday zombie tale. One thing that I particularly like about McBean's take on the whole zombie slant is the reference he makes to Haiti and voodoo. I like zombie stories as much as any horror fan, but it seems like very few of them these days are dealing with the religious prospect of such creatures. A nod to McBean for going back to the roots of the zombie.

If you want a good, solid helping of horror, look no further than Brett McBean's "A Question of Belief." And here's a tip-keep an eye on this guy. I suspect we'll see lots more from him in the future. Highly recommended.

## **FEAR OF GRAVITY**

by Brian Keene

Delirium Books

ISBN: 1-929653-60-3

I consider myself to be among the lucky ones. I've got a copy of the original version of Brian Keene's *No Rest for the Wicked* from Imaginary Worlds. Why is this lucky? Simple. In addition to being a damn fine read, it is the first edition of Brian Keene's collected short stories. At the time, I thought the book was great and have since realized it is a bonafide collector's item. I think his second collection, *Fear of Gravity* is even better than his first and sure to be a much-sought-after volume as Keene continues to grow in popularity.

The thing that really makes all of Brian's work so enjoyable to read is his obvious enthusiasm and love for the subject matter. In my opinion, there isn't a weak story in this book, and Keene's dedication to his craft really shows.

Here's a brief rundown of my favorites:

"Dust" -This is a post-9/11 ghost story that hits many emotional notes. In my opinion, this is one of the most mature stories in the collection. It's certainly one that shows Keene's growth as a writer.

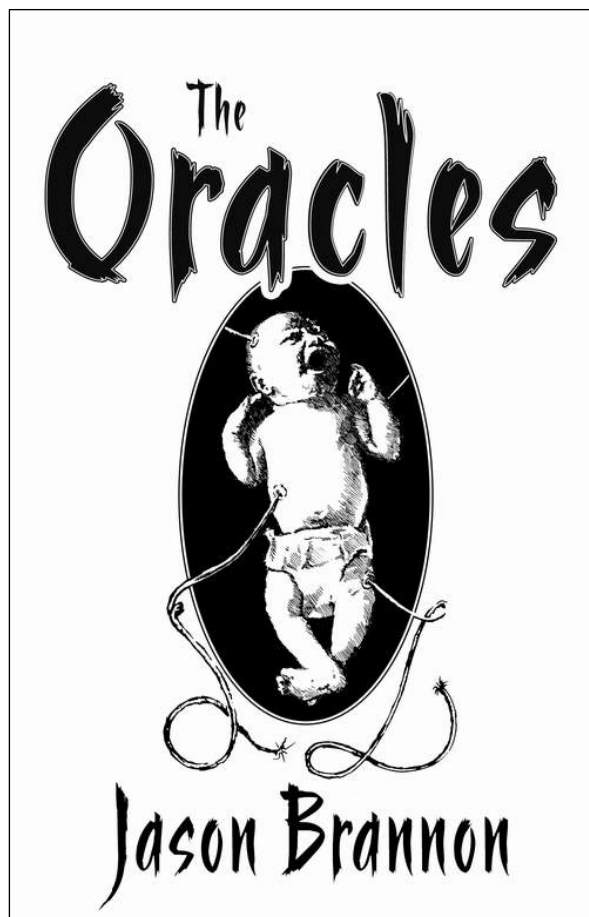
"Babylon Falling" -This story is set during the war in Iraq. It details what might happen if Fedayeen Guard attempted to summon a djinn in a last-ditch attempt to turn the tide of battle. This is one of those "cool concept" stories that every writer wishes they'd thought of first.

“The King, in: Yellow” -This is the one story out of the group that truly creeped me out. The premise of the story deals with a play called ‘Yellow’ that has been banned in several countries for reasons that quickly become obvious to the reader. This story was strange, surreal, and eerie, and I loved every minute of it. What more could you want from a horror story?

“Castaways” -This is a fast-paced tale about what would happen if disaster struck a Survivor-type reality show. This is another of those stories with a great concept that’s also a lot of fun to read. I originally heard Brian read this one at the 2003 WHC. It was just as enjoyable the second time around.

“The Garden Where My Rain Grows” -Billed as a sequel to the wildly popular “Earthworm Gods.” This is a wild post-apocalyptic tale about a world where it never stops raining.

I could go on and say more good things about this book, but that would only waste time that could be better spent actually reading *Fear of Gravity*. Suffice it to say that I enjoyed this book like I’ve enjoyed all of Keene’s work. Grab a copy of *Fear of Gravity* and see why Brian Keene is making genre veterans and horror enthusiasts’ alike sit up and take notice.



Babies are innocent, benevolent, simple versions of us who learn from our example. Or at least that's what Brian Price believes when he begins studying the vocal patterns of newborns to determine if there is some sort of primitive language at work. He quickly changes his mind about the babies when he discovers that his test subjects are truly speaking in their own language and that they are trying to warn him of an impending threat. The conclusions he comes to are even more shocking when he learns that his wife, Denise, is pregnant with their unborn child.

**ORDERING DETAILS AND MORE INFO CAN BE FOUND AT:**

**<http://www.giftedtrust.com/White%20Dwarf/pm/books.htm>**