

# Going Harvey in the Big House

a novelette

by Douglas Smith

Big G's first thought each wake time was how much he missed his drawer in his old sector of the House. His new cube was too big.

Rubbing his eyes with a beefy hand, he sat up on his sleep shelf, ducking his head needlessly from habit born of years of waking in a drawer. Triggered by his movement, the ceiling tiles glowed to full brightness.

Big G looked around his cube. Dull green walls. A floor covered with a gray coarse carpet. His private in-chute and dis-chute in the opposite wall, with a hidden compartment big enough to make his few personal items seem lonely lying inside. He shook his head. All of this luxury still made him uneasy.

But what bothered him most was the size of the cube. Six and a half feet long, and five feet wide, with a ceiling so far overhead that he had to stand to touch it.

He sighed. Too much space. It wasn't right.

Sometimes now, he'd wake in sleep time, reach out, and feel nothing. He'd panic then, flinging out his arms and legs, snapping his neck back, only to thump his head and crack his knuckles on the walls beside him.

Falling reflex. That's what Tapper, his partner, called it. From when our ancestors built the House generations ago to shelter us from the poisons of the Outside. The Builders would fall sometimes, Tapper said, and they'd throw out their arms and legs, trying to catch a girder or a beam to save themselves.

Tapper used to work in Archives, so he had lots of stories of Outside and the Builders and the House. Big G didn't know about those things. He just knew his new cube made him nervous.

But the Inners had made him a Smoother, and the Inners were the direct descendants of the Builders. *The House protects the People, and the Inners protect the House.* And Smoothers were the arms and legs of that protection. Smoothers needed to be respected and feared, so the Inners gave them cubes. Big cubes.

His ID chip pulsed in his head, signalling an incoming call. Grabbing his specs from where they hung above his sleep shelf, he slipped them over his eyes. The word "Dispatch" flashed in red on the left lens. He touched a finger--the one with his Smoother chip imbedded in the tip--to a stud on the temple of the specs.

"Yeah?" he answered, sounding groggy even to himself.

"What 'yeah'?" snapped the voice in his ear. It was Marker. Marker was an asshole, even for Dispatch.

Big G bit back a retort, glad that ID chips could only transmit basic biometrics, and not thoughts. Still, it wouldn't do for his readings to show him getting angry. He swallowed hard. "I mean, Smoother on shift, sir."

"Better be. Got a Harvey for you and Tapper. Here're the cords." The coordinates for the Harvey's location in the House flashed on his lens as they stored themselves in his specs:

