

Guadalupe and Hieronymus Bosch

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"Guadalupe and Hieronymus Bosch" was published in Interzone, which began to settle into a new commercial look in 2005. Full of true strangeness, it relates how Harna, one of those weird SF creatures who can travel through time and space using branes, helps Glenda Gomez fulfill her lust by helping her abduct Hieronymus Bosch. Sound wild? It is wilder than that.

As an unemployed overweight unmarried overeducated woman with a big mouth, I don't have a lot of credibility. But even if I was some perfect California Barbie it wouldn't be enough. People never want to listen to women.

I, Glenda Gomez, bring glad tidings. She that hath ears, let her hear.

An alien being has visited our world. Harna is, was, her name. I saw her as a glowing paramecium, a jellyfish, a glass police car, and a demonic art patron. This morning, when she was shaped like a car, I rode inside her to the fifteenth century. And this evening I walked past the vanishing point and saved our universe from Harna's collecting bag. I'm the queen of space and time. I'm trying to write up my story to pitch as a reality TV show.

Let's start with paramecia. Unicellular organisms became a hobby of mine a few months ago when I stole a microscope from my job. I was sorting egg and sperm cells for an infertility clinic called Smart Stork. Even though I don't have any kind of biology background they trained me.

I'm not dumb. I have a Bachelor's in Art History from San Jose State, which is just a few blocks from my apartment on Sixth Street. Well, almost a degree. I never finished the general education courses or my senior seminar, which would probably, certainly, have been on Hieronymus Bosch. I used to have a book of his pictures I looked at all the time—although today the book disappeared. At first I thought it was hidden under something. My apartment is a sty.

My lab job didn't last long—I'm definitely not the science type. I wasn't fast enough, I acted bored, I kissed the manager Dick Went after one too many lunchtime Coronas—and he fired me. That's when I bagged my scope—a binocular phase-contrast Leica. I carried it home in my ever ready XXL purse. Later that day Dick came to my apartment to ask about it, but I screamed through the door at him like a crazy person until he went away. Works on the landlord, too.

Now that I have a microscope, I keep infusions of protozoan cultures in little jars all over my apartment. It's unbelievably easy to grow the infusions. You just put a wad of lawn grass in with some bottled water. Bacteria breed themselves into the trillions—rods and dots and corkscrews that I can see at 200X. And before you know it, the paramecia are right there digging on the bacilli. They come out of nowhere. What works really well is to add a scrap of meat to an infusion, it gets dark and pukeful, and the critters go

wild for a few days till they die of their own shit. In the more decadent infusions you'll find a particular kind of very coarsely ciliated paramecium rolling and rushing around. My favorites. I call them the microhomies.

So today is a Sunday morning in March and I'm eating my usual breakfast of day-old bread with slices of welfare cheddar, flipping through my Bosch book thinking about my next tattoo. A friend named Sleepy is taking an on-line course in tattooing, and he said he'd give me one for free. He has a good flea-market tattoo-gun he traded a set of tires for. Who needs snow tires in San Jose? So I'm thinking it would be bitchin' to bedizen my belly with a Bosch.

I'm pretty well settled on this blue bagpipe bird with a horn for his nose. It'll be something to talk about, and the bagpipe will be like naturalistic on my gordo gut, maybe it'll minimize my girth. But the bird needs a background pattern. Over my fourth cup of microwave coffee, I start thinking about red blood cells, remembering from the lab how they're shaped. I begin digging on the concept of rounding out my Bosch bird tattoo with a blood-cell tiling.

To help visualize it, I pinprick my pinkie and put a droplet on a glass slide under my personal Glenda Gomez research scope. I see beautiful shades of orange and red from all my little blood cells massed together. Sleepy will need to see this in order to fully grasp what to do. I want to keep on looking, but the blood is drying fast. The cells are bursting and cracks are forming among them as they dry. I remember that at Smart Stork we'd put some juice on the slides with the cells to keep them perky. I don't know what kind of juice, but I decide to try a drop of water out of one of my infusions, a dark funky batch that I'd fed with a KFC chicken nugget.

The infusion water is teeming with those tough-looking paramecia with the coarse bristles—the microhomies. What with Bosch on my brain, the microhomies resemble tiny bagpipes on crutches. I'm like: tattoo them onto my belly too? While I'm watching the microhomies, they start digging on my ruptured blood cells. "Yo," I say, eyeing an especially bright and lively one. "You're eating me."

And that's when it happens. The image loses its focus, I feel a puff of air, my skin tingles all over. Leaning back, I see a bag of glowing light grow out from the microscope slide. It's a foot across.

I jump to my feet and back off. I may be heavy, but I'm still quick. At first I have the idea my apartment is on fire, and then for some reason I think of earthquakes. I'm heading for the door. But the glowing sack gets there before me, blocking the exit. I try to reach through it for the doorknob.

As soon as my hand is inside the lumpy glow I hear a woman's voice. "Glenda! Hello dear."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Harna from Hilbert space." She has a prim voice; I visualize flowery dresses and pillbox hats. "I happened upon your brane several—days—ago. I've been teeming with the microlife, a bit humdrum, and I thought that's all there is to see in this location. Worth documenting, but no more than that. I had no idea that only a few clicks up the size scale I'd find a gorgeous entity like you. Scale is tricky for me, what with everything in Hilbert space being infinite. Thank goodness I happened upon your blood cell. Oh, warmest greetings, Glenda Gomez. You're—why, you're collectible, my dear." I'm fully buggin'. I run to the corner of my living room, staring at the luminous paramecium the size of a dog in mid-air. "Go away," I say.

Harna wobbles into the shape of a jellyfish with dangling frilly ribbons. She drifts across the room, not quite touching the floor, dragging her oral arms across the stuff lying on my tables, checking things out. And then she gets to my Bosch book, which is open to *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

"A nonlinear projection of three-space to two-space," burbles Harna, feeling the paper all over. "Such a clever map. Who's the author?"

"Hieronymus Bosch," I murmur. "It's called perspective." I'm half-wondering if my brain has popped and I'm alone here talking to myself. Maybe I'm about to start fingerprint-ing the floor with Clorox. Snorting Ajax up my nose.

"Bosch?" muses Harna. Her voice is fruity and penetrating like my old guidance counselor's. "And I just know you have a crush on him, Glenda! I can tell. When can I meet him?"

"He lived a long time ago," I whisper. I'm stepping from side to side, trying to find a clear path to the door.

"Most excellent," Harna is saying. "You'll time-snatch him, and then I can use the time-flaw to perspective-map your whole spacetime brane down into a sack! Yummy! You are so cute, Glenda. Yes, I'm going to wrap you up and take you home!"

I get past her and run out into the street. I'm breathing hard, still in my nightgown, now and then looking over my shoulder. So of course a San Jose police car pulls over and sounds me on their speaker. They think I'm a tweaker or a nut-job. Did I mention that it's Sunday morning?

"Ma'am. Can we help you? Ma'am. Please come over to the police car and place your hands on the hood. Ma'am." More cop-voice crackle in the background and here comes Harna down the sidewalk, still shaped like a flying jellyfish, though bigger than before. The cops can't see her, though.

"Ma'am." One of them gets out of the car, a kid with a cop mustache. He looks kind, concerned, but his hand is on the butt of his Taser.

I whirl, every cop's image of a madwoman, pointing back down the sidewalk at the swollen Haraa, who's shaping herself into a damn good replica of the cops' car. She's made of glowing haze and hanging at an angle to the ground.

Right before the cop grabs my wrist or Tasers me, Harna sweeps over and—pixie-dust! I'm riding in a Gummi-Bear cop car, with Harna talking to me from the radio grill. The cops don't see me anymore. Harna heads down the street, then swerves off parallel to spacetime. She guns her mill and we're rumbling through a wah-wah collage of years and centuries, calendar leaves flying, the sun flickering off and on, Earth rushing around the Sun in a blur. And it's not just time we're traveling through, we're rolling through some miles as well. We arrive in the Lowlands of 1475.

It's a foggy dawn, Jerome Bosch is at his bedroom window, arcing a stream of pee toward the glow of the rising sun. I know from books that Hieronymus was just his fancy show name, and that his homies called him Jerome. Like my given name is Guadalupe—but everyone calls me Glenda. Seeing the man in the window, my heart does a little handstand. My love has guided us all this way.

"He is scrumptious," says Harna.

As he lowers his nightshirt, Jerome's gaze drifts away from the horizon—and he sees us. His expression is calm, resigned—it's like he's always been expecting a flying jellyfish/cop-car carrying a good-looking woman from the next millennium. Calm, yes, but he's moving back from the window hella fast.

Harna flips out a long vortex of force, a tornado that fastens onto Jerome and pulls him to us. He's hanging in the air a few feet away from me, slowly spinning—and yelling in what must be Dutch.

"Grab your fella," says Harna. "It has to be you who lands him. It's not for me to meddle in a brane's

spacetime."

The wind has flopped Bosch's hair back. His cheekbones are high, his lips are thin, his eyes are bright. The man for me. I reach out and catch hold of his hand. It's warm.

Harna's light flows down my arm and up Jerome's. Augmented by Harna, I'm strong as a steam-shovel. I set Bosch down on the jelly car seat next to me.

"It's too soon," he says, clear as day. "I'm not ready."

"I'm Glenda," I say, not all that surprised he's speaking English. Another Harna miracle. "Ready or not, I'm taking you home."

"To Hell?" exclaims Jerome. "That's quite unjust. Only yesterday I was absolved by the priest. My sins in these last hours have been but petty ones. A touch of anger at the neighbor's dog, my usual avarice for a truly great commission, and the accustomed fires of lust, of course—" As he mentions this last sin, he looks down my nightgown, which I'm just loving. I press his hand against my warm thigh.

"Don't worry, sweetie. I don't live in Hell. I live in San Jose."

For the rest of the ride, Jerome is busy looking around, taking everything in. What eyes he has! So sharp and smart and alert. What with the time-winds flapping my flimsy, he can see I'm all woman. I'm doing my best to keep the fabric cinched in around the problem areas at my waist, and I'm trying to get his arms around me, but he's kind of reluctant. He's uneasy about whether we're bound. I can dig it.

Finally Harna sets us down in the sunny street outside my apartment. Lucky me, the cops are gone. Everything looks the same—the dead palm leaves, the beater cars and pickups, the dusty jasmine vines, the broken glass on the dry clay, the 7-11 store, the university parking garage—sunny and dry.

Harna rises into the air and spreads out, layering herself across the scene like extra sunshine. No doubt she'll be back in some more personal form pretty soon. But meanwhile I've got me a man. I smile at Jerome and give his arm a happy squeeze.

"This is Spain?" he wonders.

"America," I tell him, which doesn't seem to ring a bell. "The new world across the Atlantic Ocean, plus some five centuries past your time."

He shakes his head, and stares around like a bird fallen from its nest. "It's after the Second Coming?" he asks. "Christ has dominion over the Earth?"

"The Church is doing fine," I say, not sure where this is going. We shouldn't stand around the street in our nightgowns. "Come on inside."

I hustle him up the stairs into my apartment and first of all get us in some clothes. I dress him in my favorite vintage red Ramones T-shirt and my yellow SJSU sweat pants. Me, I put on some nice tight Capri pants with a Lycra tummy panel and a pink baby-doll blouse that's loose at the bottom. Truth be told, I do a certain amount of my shopping in the maternity section at Target.

In the kitchen I offer Jerome some Oreos and microwave two cups of instant coffee. Buzz! The microwave is built into the wall so we delinquent renters can't hock it. Jerome overlooks the futuristic aspects of my kitchen because he's busy holding one of the cookies up to the light, studying the embossed writing and curlicues.

"They're food," I tell him. I rotate one in two and give him the better half. He scarfs it down—and I'm secretly glad, thinking that we've broken bread together now. Jerome takes another Oreo and eats the whole thing. They're gettin' good to him.

Meanwhile I touch up my black lipstick and lip liner. All the time I'm watching him. Even though he's from a long time ago, he's not old. Maybe twenty-five. He would have still been at the start of his career. No reason he can't have as good a career here in San Jose with me.

Jerome watches me right back. His gaze is warm and alive, as if there's an extra brain inside each eyeball. After a bit he fixates on my mug of colored pencils, looking at them the way I wish he was looking at my boobs.

"Want to draw?" I ask him. "You can decorate my walls." There's two smooth blank walls in my living room, a short wall across from the hall door and a big one across from the window.

"A mural?" says Jerome, examining a couple of the pencils.

"Bingo."

He starts in on the smaller wall. And me, I sit down with pen and paper at my round table on the one chair I've got. I want to try and start documenting some of this unfurling madness. For sure there's a reality TV show in this. All my friends say I should be on TV, and who am I to disagree. I recite a prayer to give me courage to write.

"Hail Glenda, full of grace, an alien paramecium was with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of your brain, Glenda And Jerome."

I lean over my spiral notebook, pen in hand.

To whom it may concern:

It may interest you to know that...

Is it Hie or Hei? Love has made me dyslexic.

I look around, trying to find the book that turned Harna on to Jerome, but I can't see it just now. Thinking about the book, I have to grin, thinking how incredible it is to have the artist himself here with me.

"Hey, Jerome. I'm writing about you."

"Not yet," he says and taps his thumb with his finger. Like that's the Lowlands chill-it gesture. He's holding a purple pencil in his other hand. Getting started on marking up my little wall. Holding the pencil gives him power, aplomb. He's a suspicious genius with sharp eyes and a trapdoor mouth. I keep talking to him.

"It's fabulous that you're drawing, Jerome. This hole will be an art grotto. I hope they don't paint it over when we move." And surely we will be moving quite soon, with Jerome pulling in the Old Master bucks. We'll be on TV. We'll get a condo in one of those beautiful new buildings across from the SJSU library on Fourth Street.

I smile at Jerome and fluff my hair a little. I wear it long and black with henna highlights and Bettie Page bangs. Too bad I didn't happen to shampoo and condition it yet this week. I look sexier when my mane is lustrous.

Jerome thins his lips and shades the outstretched arms of a little man. He's digging on the excellent twenty-first-century quality of my pencils and the luscious smooth whiteness of apartment dry-wall. Sketching a picture of Harna and me snatching him. Harna looks like a fish as much as a car. She's surrounded by glow-lines of blue light. Her prey is just now seeing the shape in the sky, he's holding out his arms with that odd look of non-surprise. His unmade bachelor bed is in the far corner of his room. The vortex from the aeroform is gonna cartwheel him into the arms of a voluptuous dark-haired sorceress. Me!

"You're cute," I tell Jerome. He pinches the fingers of one hand at me again, the other hand busy with my pencils. He draws terrifically fast. I'm really glad I bagged him. But I wish he looked a little happier about it.

"Why don't we get to know each other better?" I say, imagining he might pick up on my tone. I unbutton my baby-doll blouse enough so he can see my boobs—but not the runaway rolls of my stomach. My breasts are a major plus, easily the equal of Pammy Anderson's. And they're natural.

But Jerome looks away. It occurs to me that maybe he still thinks this is Hell—which would make me a demoness. I decide to play up to that. I cackle at him and beckon with witchy fingers, the light glinting on my chipped black nails. My fingers are quite shapely, another plus feature. But they're not bringing Jerome Bosch into my arms.

So I go get him. He tries to escape, racing around the apartment like a sparrow that flew in the window. I shoo him into my bedroom and—plop—we're mixed in with the sheets, magazines and laundry on my bed.

I give him a wet kiss and pull down my stretchy pants—keeping my top on so as to minimize that troublesome abdominal area. Of course I'm not wearing panties, I've been planning this all along. I tug down his sweat pants—and there's his goodies on display. A twenty-five-year-old fella here in bed with me, the answer to a maiden's prayer. I roll him on top of me and pull him in. It's been a while.

But—just my luck—this turns into a totally screwed-up proposition. He comes, maybe, and then he's limp, and then—oh, God—he starts sobbing like his heart is going to break. Poor Jerome. I cuddle him and whisper to him. His sobs slow down, he whimpers, he slides off to one side and—falls asleep!

I feel down between my legs, trying to figure out if he delivered. What a thing it would be to carry Hieronymus Bosch's baby! That would tie him to me for sure. I think I'm ovulating today, as a matter of fact. Just for luck, I twist around and prop my feet up on the wall, giving the Dutch Master's wrigglers every opportunity to work their way up to the hidden jewel of my egg.

Resting there, thinking things over, I can visualize them, pointy-nosed with beating tails, talking to each other in Dutch, enjoying themselves in Glenda-land, on a pilgrimage to my Garden of Earthly Delights.

He keeps on sleeping, and I amble back into the kitchen to make myself a grilled cheese sandwich. I'm happy, but at the same time I have this bad feeling that Harna somehow tricked me. That stuff about wrapping me up and taking me home. Some weird shit is gonna come down, I just know it.

But now here comes Jerome out the bedroom, looking mellower than before. Our little hump and cuddle has helped his mind-set.

"Greetings, Glenda," he says. "I enjoyed our venery."

"Likewise." He looks so cute and inquisitive that I run over and kiss his cheek. And I can't help asking, "You don't think I'm too fat?"

"You're well-fed," he says, cupping my boobs. "Clean and healthy. But do you worship Satan? Your spirit-familiar Harna—surely she is unholy."

"I don't know much about Harna," I admit. "She only appeared today. And Satan? Naw, dog. I'm a Catholic girl." Fallen away, I don't mention. I cross myself and he's relieved.

"I can go home?" he asks, glancing out the window at the quiet street in the noon sun.

"You belong with me," I tell him. "I'll give you a baby. You never had one back then. I love your art. You're mucho famous here, you know. I have a whole book of your pictures."

I root around the apartment, wanting to show him, but damn it, that book is totally gone. I'm guessing that Harna took it. She was saying something about copying Jerome's perspective maps so she can—fit our world into a sack? That has to be wack. If only she's gone for good. Maybe hoping hard enough can make it so. I skip over to Jerome and kiss him again. He lets me.

"I can't find my book, but we can go to the SJSU library," I tell him. "It's just across the campus and they're open on Sunday. And I think the Art Mart is open today too. I'll buy you some paint."

"Buy paint?" says Jerome. "I mix my own."

"We get it in tubes," I say. "Like sausage. Ready-made. Here, you eat a grilled cheese sandwich too, and then we'll look for Hieronymus Bosch books in the library."

Well, guess what we find under bosch, hieronymus, in the library? Not jack shit. When Harna and I abducted him from the fifteenth-century Dutch town of s'Hertogenbosch and carried him to twenty-first century San Jose, California, we wiped out his role in history. Maybe he finished one or two minor paintings before we nabbed him, but as far as the history of art is concerned, he never lived. Jerome doesn't really pick up on how weird this is—I mean all he's seen me do is look at an incomprehensible-to-a-medieval-mind online card catalog, and we nabbed him before he was famous anyway, so he's not feeling the loss. But me, I feel it bad.

Bosch was a really important artist, you know—or maybe you don't. Come to think of it, I might be the only one who remembers our world before I changed our history. But take it from me, Hieronymus Bosch was King. The Elvis of artists. His work influenced a lot of people in all kinds of ways over the centuries.

More ways than I'd imagined.

Because now, walking off the campus and getting a coffee, I'm paying attention and I'm noticing differences in our non-Bosch world. There aren't any ads for horror movies in the paper, for instance, which is way odd.

The Episcopal church that used to be by the coffee shop is a pho noodle parlor. On a hunch, I look in the yellow pages in the coffee shop, and there's no Episcopal or Baptist or Proletarian or whatever churches in town at all. With no Bosch, the Protestant thing never happened! The sisters that whipped me through grade school would be happy, but I'm thinking, Dear God, what have I done?

The cars are different too, duller than before, and every single one of them is cream-colored, not even any silver or maroon.

The barrista in the coffee shop who usually wears foundation and drawn-on eyebrows has her face bare as a granola hippie's. And her hair is all bowl-cut and sensible. Ugh. The world is definitely lagging without the cumulative influences of my man Jerome.

On the plus side, you can smoke in the coffee shop now, and all the cigarettes are fat and laced with nutmeg and clove, which I dig. The Supertaqueria next door isn't selling tongue anymore, also fine by me. The fonts on the signs are somehow lower and fatter and more, like, Sanskrit-looking. The people in the magazine ads are wearing more clothes, and generally heavier.

Hey, I can live with some change, if that's what it takes to get Glenda her man.

I buy Jerome a canvas and some acrylics at the Art Mart—putting them on a new credit card that some pinheads mailed me last week. Back home, my Dutch Master sniffs suspiciously at the paint, preparing to start layering the stuff over the colored drawing on my smaller wall.

There's a knock on the door. I've been expecting this. I peep through the peephole and it's Harna, looking just like her voice sounds, like a rich old white woman in a flowery dress and pillbox hat. I don't want to let her in, but she walks right through the closed door.

"Hello, Glenda and Jerome," goes Harna. "I have a commission for the artist." She plumps a velvet sack right down on my kitchen table. Clink of gold coins. Perfectly calculated to get Jerome's juices flowing.

"What kind of painting do you need, my lady?" asks Jerome, setting down his paintbrush and making a greedy little bow.

"A picture of that," she says, pointing out the window to Sixth Street and the San Jose cityscape. "With full perspective accuracy. You can paint it—there." She points to my big blank living room wall.

"How soon would you need it?" asks Jerome.

"By sundown," says Harna.

"He can't paint that fast," I protest.

"I'll speed him up," says Harna, with a twitch of her dowager lips. "I'll return with the rising of the moon."

Sure enough, Jerome starts racing around the room like a cockroach when the light comes on, pausing only long enough to ask me to get him more paint.

When I come back from the Art Mart with a shopping bag of paint tubes, he's already roughed in an underpainting of the street—the houses with their tile and shingle roofs, the untrimmed palm trees, the dead dingy cars, the vines, a few passers-by captured in motion, the tops of the houses in the next block, the houses after them, the low brown haze from the freeways, and beyond that the golden-grassed foothills and the blank blue sky.

He's all over the wall, and the painting is so perfect and beautiful I can hardly stand it. Every ten seconds, it seems like, he darts over to the window, then darts back. He's such a nut that he's putting in every single person and car that goes past, so the picture is getting more and more crowded.

The sun is going down and a few lights come on in the windows outside. Somehow Jerome is keeping up with it, changing his painting to match the world, touching the buildings with sunset gold, damping the shadows into warmer shades, pinkening the sky—and then darkening it.

A fat full moon comes up over the foothills and, quick as a knife, Jerome paints it onto my wall, sprinkling stars all around it.

And then Harna's in the room again.

"It's enough," she says. "He can stop."

Jerome cranks down to normal speed. I hand him more Oreos and coffee. He slugs down the nourishment, then drinks a quart of water from the sink.

"What happens now?" I ask Hama.

"Like I said before," she answers, not looking so much like a human anymore. Her pink skin is peeling away in patches, and underneath she's green. "I'm going to bag you and your world and take you home. Don't worry, it won't hurt."

And then she shoots out of the window and disappears into the distance past the moon.

"We have to stop her!" I tell Jerome, picking up my purse.

"What?" he says. He sounds tired.

"We have to run after Hama."

Jerome looks at me for a long time. And then he smiles. "If you say so, Glenda. Being with you is interesting."

The two of us run down the apartment stairs and right away I can see that things are seriously weird. The cars across the street are two-thirds as big as the cars on my side.

"Hurry," I tell Jerome, and we run around the corner to the next block. The houses on that next street are half the size of the houses on my street. We run another block, which takes only a couple of seconds, as each block is way smaller than the one before. The houses are only waist high. We go just a little farther and now we're stepping right over the houses, striding across a block at a time.

Another step takes us all the way across Route 101, the step after that across east San Jose. The farther from Jerome's picture we get, the smaller things are.

"Perspective!" exclaims Jerome. "The world has shrunk to perspective!"

We hop over the foothills. And now it gets really crazy. With one last push of our legs, we leap past the moon. It's a pale yellow golf ball near our knees. We're launched into space, man. The stars rush past, all of them, denser and denser—zow—and then we're past everything, beyond the vanishing point, out at infinity.

Clear white light, firm as Jell-O, and you can stand wherever you like. Up where it's the brightest, I see a throne and a bearded man in it, just like in Jerome's paintings. It's God, with Jesus beside Him, and between them is the Dove, which I never did get. Right below the Trinity is my own Virgin of Guadalupe, with wiggly yellow lines all around her. And up above them all are my secret guardians, the Powerpuff Girls from my favorite Saturday morning cartoon. Jerome sees them too. We clasp hands. I know deep inside myself that now forever we two are married. I'm crying my head off.

But somebody jostles me, it's Hama right next to us, pushing and grunting, trying to wrestle our whole universe into a brown sack. She's the shape of a green Bosch-goblin with a slit mouth.

I turn off the waterworks and whack Hama up the side of the head with my purse. Jerome crouches down and butts her in the stomach. Passing the vanishing point has made us about as strong as our enemy, the demonic universe-collector. While she's reeling back, I quick get hold of her sack and shake its edges free of our stars.

Harna comes at me hot and heavy, with smells and electric shocks and thumps on my butt. Jerome goes toe-to-toe with her, shoving her around, but she's starting to hammer on his head pretty good. Just then I notice a brush and tubes of white and blue paint in my purse. I hand them to Jerome and while I use some Extreme Wrestling moves from TV on Harna, Jerome quick paints a translucent blue sphere around her with a cross on top—a spirit trap.

I shove the last free piece of Harna fully inside the ball and, presto, she's neutralized. With a hissing, farting sound she dwindles from our view, disappearing in a direction different from any that we can see. I wave one time to the Trinity, the Virgin and the Powerpuff Girls, and, how awesome, they wave back. And then we're outta there.

The walk home is a little tricky—that first step in particular, where you go from infinity back into normal space, is a tough one. But we make it.

As soon as we're in my apartment, I help Jerome slap some house-paint over his big mural. And when we go outside to check on things, everything is back to being its own right size. We've saved our universe.

To celebrate, we get some Olde Antwerpen forty-ouncers at the 7-11 and hop into my bed, cuddling together at one end leaning against the wall. I'm kind of hoping Jerome will want to get it on, but right now he seems a little tired. Not too tired to check out my boobs though.

Just when it might start to get interesting, here comes Haraa's last gasp. I can't see her anymore, but I can hear her voice, and so can Jerome. "Have it your way," intones the prissy universe-collector. "Keep your petty world. But the restoration must be in full. Before I leave for good, Hierony-mus must go home."

"Think I'll stay here," says Jerome, who's holding a tit in one hand and a beer in the other.

"Back," says Harna, and her presence disappears for good.

As she leaves, the living breathing man next to me turns into—oh hell—an art book.

"No way," I sob. "I need him." I quick say the Hail Mary three times, like the sisters taught me. But the Bosch book just sits there. I pour some of the microhomies onto it. Nothing doing. I squeeze red paint onto the book cover and stick a split Oreo cookie to it. Still no good. And then in desperation, I pray to my special protectors, the Powerpuff Girls. And the day's last miracle begins.

The book twitches in my hands, throbs, splits in two, and the two copies move apart, making a, like, hyperdimen-sional man-hole.

And, yes, pushing his way out of the hole, here comes my Hieronymus Bosch, his hair flopping, his eyes sharp, his mouth thin with concentration.

He's in my bed—and the dumb book is gone. Screw art history. Jerome will make even better paintings than before. And if that doesn't work out, there's reality TV.

You know anybody who can help with my show?