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on the cover: *Stand Alone Complex*
images courtesy Production I.G.

It's a happy, creepy time of year

by Jeff Georgeson

This is my favorite time of year. It is a time of beginnings: the oppressive heat of summer has subsided, and the cool crispness of fall has begun; the boredom of summer break done, school started (and I one of those who actually liked being in school); the sports I enjoy (football and hockey) are into their seasons; Hollywood gears up for the holiday season rush of Big Films; and even television begins anew, with new shows just testing the waters of audience delight.

It's enough to put me into my happy place, to paraphrase Ed from *Ed, Edd, and Eddy*.

But imagine my happiness upon discovering that one of my favorite books/films of all time, Masamune Shirow's *Ghost in the Shell*, is being made into a TV series as we speak. For those who don't know, who have been cleaning out the stables of Augeas for the last ten years, *Ghost in the Shell* is one of the best cyberpunk stories ever created. It has action, it has tech, and, perhaps best of all, it explores the meaning behind the cybernetic exterior, if you will, of the world it creates. What is life? Who has a soul? Can we create such beings? This is one of those works that defies the notion that science fiction can't be a Great Work, that it can't explore the human condition as well as, or better than, mainstream literature.

And now, after seven years of wondering what would come next, an entire series dedicated to my favorite story ... and we at *Penumbric* have the honor of presenting to you our interview with the director of the series, Kenji Kamiyama, and the principle scriptwriter, Yoshiki Sakurai.

I am in my happy place indeed.

Another reason I like this time of year is, of course, Halloween, the time when traditionally the doors to the spirit world were opened. To celebrate, we have some macabre offerings for you. The intellectually creepy (or is that intellectual and creepy?) renderings of Robert Elrod grace our page for the first time, with his graphic narrative "Life"; "Hector" (another gn), this time by Brian Comber, is a vision out of Poe; and even Stan Yan's "Misclassified Romance" answers the oft-asked question, what would Hannibal Lecter's classified ads look like, anyway?

We've creepy writing as well, in particular Peri Charlifu's "Seeds." For those who'd rather their horror mixed with fantasy, we've Anita Harkess' "The Student's Nightmare." And for those who'd really rather read science fiction, we offer Leslie Aguillard's "Bill and the Night."

We also have our first animated piece, Michael Connolly's *Dragon*, to accompany Ms. Harkess' work.

So while I go play in the leaves, carve pumpkins into the likenesses of my favorite authors, and watch TV (because I'm sure I won't have anything else to do, ha ha ha), have fun and enjoy this issue of *Penumbric* and the fall, sandwiched between the heat of summer and the panic of the holidays. I hope what you find herein puts you in your happy place as well.

Jeff Georgeson
Managing Editor, psfm
October 2k2

Do you have comments about anything in the magazine?
Click the following: [Comments](#)

Building on a Masterpiece

Director Kenji Kamiyama and scriptwriter Yoshiki Sakurai talk to Penumbria about work on Production I.G.'s new TV series *Stand Alone Complex*, the latest addition to Masamune Shirow's classic cyberpunk story *Ghost in the Shell*

The near future. Completely cybernetic bodies are not only possible, but encountered regularly—albeit some are nonhuman machines, while others are at least nominally human. In fact, some persons' only human parts are their brains, and even those are not wholly human.

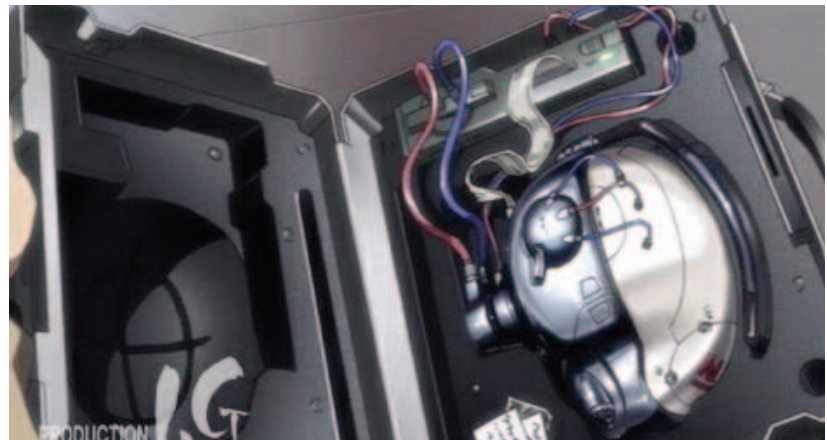
Meet Major Motoko Kusanagi, a special agent for the government. She is one of these almost entirely cybernetic humans, as are most of the members of her team. Her assignment: To expose/arrest/destroy cyborg criminals and “ghost” hackers, and to come back alive afterwards.

But there's more to it than that.

In the *Ghost in the Shell* series by Masamune Shirow, cyberpunk meets cybernautica as people are fully integrated into the electronic environment which surrounds them and permeates their daily lives. Are you a slow typer? Try having fingers that split into fifty smaller and more mobile digits. Having trouble

GitS:SAC continued next page

PICTURED: Images from Production I.G.'s *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*. Click for larger image.



What's this "anime" & "manga" we keep talking about?

We reckon there are very few of you out there who haven't heard of anime by now, although some may not know it by that name. Anime (pronounced "ahh-nee-may") is Japanese animation, typically films, television series, or video releases covering the entire spectrum of genres and aimed at all age groups—releases in the US include *Akira*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Cowboy Bebop*, *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040*, *Serial Experiments: Lain* (DVD/VHS only, as far as we know), *Sailor Moon*, *Dragonball*, and, yes, *Pokemon*. US television networks, however, have been reluctant to show anything animated that isn't "for kids," continuing a tradition of putting animation in the nursery that has plagued US TV and film since at least the 1950s or 1960s.

Similarly, manga ("mahn-ga") is best but imperfectly translated as Japanese comic books—but these again run the gamut of subjects and audiences. This is as opposed to the classic idea of US comic books, which are typically filled to overflowing with well-muscled (and, we presume, well-oiled) superheroes in skin-tight spandex suits. (We admit a certain growth in the development of US comics, especially in the 1980s and again now, as compared to animated films, but the US product still has nowhere near the breadth and depth of the Japanese industry.)

But, as they used to say on *Reading Rainbow*, don't take our word for it ... Here are comments on anime and manga by two people very involved in bringing anime to the US, although with differing perspectives. The first, Roger Morse, is the co-owner of Gimme Anime (www.gimmeanime.com), a retail store selling anime, manga, and other Japanese things to the public; the second is Rebecca Norman, director of the Denver anime convention Nan Desu

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with your computer? Jack into it directly via a port in your neck and give it a piece of your mind.

But this is not a 1950s happy consumer view of the future. Vast corporate and governmental entities conspire to take over both cyberspace and the world, and the place of cybernautic "persons" in society, and whether they should be treated as fully human, is a central issue of the original manga and anime versions of *Ghost in the Shell* (GitS). In fact, it is one of the most philosophically intriguing works I have ever seen, while still including a frenetic action movie pace that would wear Mel Gibson out.

GitS (the anime) was one of the most successful anime films ever released in the US, comparing well to such classics as *Akira*—in fact, GitS has become a classic in its own right, doing what it could to disprove the old American notion that anything animated has to be for kids. Grossing highly worldwide and spawning everything from toys to t-shirts to web sites to philosophical debates at universities, GitS is at least as important as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* in shaping our discourses on the future.

Now, seven years after the US release of the anime and coinciding with the American release of Shirow's sequel to GitS (*ManMachine Interface*), the Japanese com-

PICTURED: *Stand Alone Complex* director Kenji Kamiyama. Unfortunately, no image of scriptwriter Yoshiki Sakurai was available



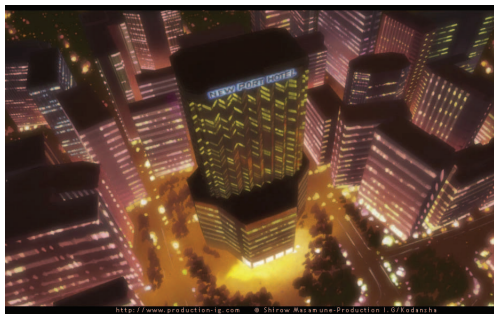
pany Production I.G., in collaboration with Shirow, has developed a 26-episode television series called *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*. It is an ambitious project, and from what little we've seen, it looks to be very high quality, full of both action and introspection, and a great addition to the GitS milieu. We were honored by being granted an interview with director Kenji Kamiyama and scriptwriter Yoshiki Sakurai, via email from Japan, just before the show's first episode was due to be shown in Japan in October.

Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex appears to be higher quality animation than most of the anime seen on television in the





PICTURED: (left) Tachikoma; (top) Major Motoko Kusanagi; (below) the bustling city of the future as seen in *Stand Alone Complex*



U.S. Is it unusually high quality for Japanese TV as well?

Kenji Kamiyama (KK): I hope it would be considered so. The amount of the budget was twice the amount of ordinary anime and the time for its preparation was about eight times as much (usually 3 months; we took 2 years).

The visual style appears to be somewhere between that of the Ghost in the Shell manga and the film. Is this on purpose? What design sense were you going for?

KK: We didn't intentionally take the middle way. We wanted to make Kusanagi look more human-like in this series, so that may be the reason for your impression.

How much computer 3D work is there in Stand Alone Complex (and how much was done in more traditional ways)? Is this average for anime on TV?

KK: Most cars, helicopters, planes, tanks and other large mechanicals were created in 3D. Some masked troops and mob people were made in 3D also. Characters were mainly done in traditional 2D hand drawing. This might be the usual way that is used in Japanese anime. I should say about a third of each episode is made in 3D.

In the original manga and film stories, Kusanagi is searching for her humanity, and for meaning in her life. Is the TV show also philosophically-oriented? In what way?

KK: Kusanagi herself might not be as philosophical compared to the film but we do propose some social issues. Tachikoma might be a little philosophical instead. (*Note: Tachikoma are an updated version of Fuchikoma, which in the manga serve as both robotic battlesuits and as stand-alone units capable of independent action.*)

Does the TV show begin where the first manga left off (that is, in the TV show has Kusanagi joined with the Puppetmaster), or is it in an alternate timeline?

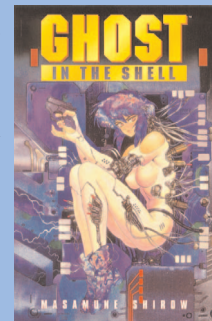
KK: It takes place in an alternate timeline, or otherwise we would not have Kusanagi in the series. It is an alternative story that diverges from the eighth episode in the manga.

What is it like to write a script for a 26-episode TV series? Does it take multiple scriptwriters? Do you work together to cre-

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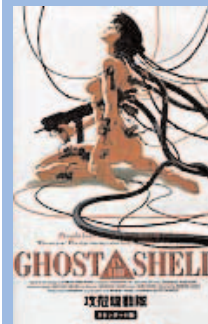
What is Ghost in the Shell?

The original manga version of *Ghost in the Shell* (GitS) by Masamune Shirow was serialized in *Young Magazine* in Japan in 1989-90 before coming out as a collected graphic novel, first in Japan and then in the US (where it was sold as separate issues and then collected as well). In it,



Major Motoko Kusanagi leads a somewhat eclectic and independent team on secret missions against various high-level villains, including evil cyborgs heading vast corporations and “ghost hackers”—that is, hackers who invade people’s minds and wipe out or otherwise mess with their very souls.

The overall thrust of the stories contained in the manga is at least as philosophically oriented as it is action-filled. Among the questions posed by Shirow are: What will it be like to live in a world with cybernetic “people”? What is “life”—can a mostly cybernetic/mechanical being be alive? How much of a person has to be organic to be considered human? What is the soul, and can a cybernetic organism have one? What is the next evolutionary step for humanity?



The anime version of GitS (1995) focuses on one storyline from the manga, that of the Puppetmaster, an entity existing in the 'Net who is not only ghost hacking, but is also involved in some very nefarious government dealings. Motoko and her crew

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Recommended Anime

Psfm's recommendations:

Ghost in the Shell. One of the best cyberpunk stories we've ever seen. Combines action and philosophy in ways the rest of the cyberpunk movement only dreamt of.

Serial Experiments: Lain. By far the most philosophically challenging and strangest (but in a good way) explorations of cyberspace and its relationship to the so-called "real" world.

Cowboy Bebop. Excellent storytelling and an incredible score are only part of this one's attraction.

Sailor Moon (first season, Japanese version). Yeah, we know, it ain't cyberpunk, but again the storytelling and the message behind this one make it a favorite.

Perfect Blue. Very disturbing, but equally well done. The tag line, about this being the product if Hitchcock and Disney made a film together, is almost right. Disney would never go here.

Akira. A classic, a must-see.

Jin-Roh. This one pulls no punches: It's a violent look at a violent alternative history, yet still the human story under it all is the most important thing.

Other's recommendations:

Roger Morse, co-owner, Gimme Anime:

Cowboy Bebop, *Vision of Escaflowne*, *Trigun*, *Macross Plus*. If you want comedy, *Ranma 1/2*. It depends on a person's preferences.

Rebecca Norman, director, Nan Desu Kan:

Cowboy Bebop for fans of sf space action cowboy bounty hunter comedies with a touch of the tragic about them and a rockin' jazzy soundtrack. *Vampire Princess Miyu*, for those who like a shivery edge to their elegance. *Vision of Escaflowne* for the fantasy fans on a large scale. *Ranma 1/2* for beginners, a great introduction to Rumiko Takahashi's popular works. Any Miyazaki movie for anyone who

Recommended continued page 32

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ate the overall storyline, and then work individually on episodes?

Yoshiki Sakurai (YS): Yes, that's right. The director, the producer, and all scriptwriters gathered once a week for the script meeting to decide the overall storyline and to check the individual episodes written by each writer (and comment or add to or revise them). We took a trip to Production I.G.'s villa in the countryside several times last summer to concentrate on the story, where we spent many nights talking and talking about how the story should be.

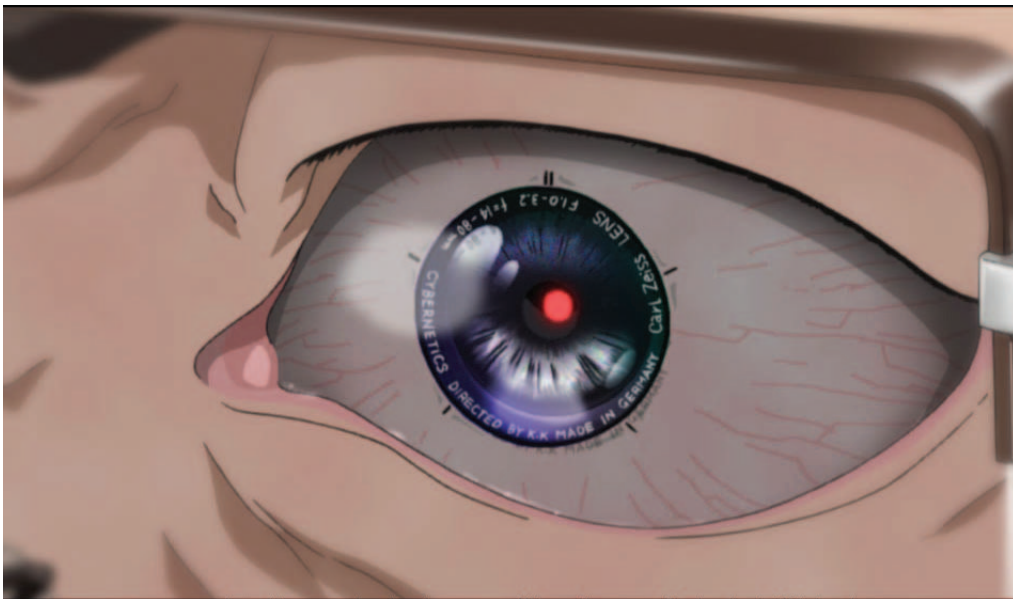
Did you have to do a lot of research for this series? Was it fun to work on, and a good experience?

KK: Yes, very much! It was of course fun,

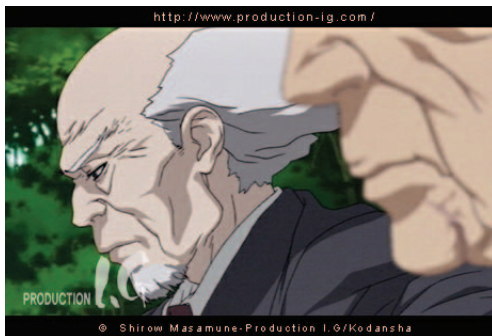
but really tough at the same time. Especially, we knew that the world will be showing attention and expect a lot from this title. But we certainly had a good experience and to some extent we think that we were able to show something really original.

I've read your monthly column on the Production I.G. web site. What kind of future do you predict? Do you envision a future with cyberbrains and cybernetic bodies?

YS: To some extent, the future with cyberbrains and cyborg technology is not mere SF anymore. For example, NTT is testing an implantable phone gadget that you can implant inside the back of your ear and when the phone rings, one of your fingers trembles and you press that finger against this gadget to talk, etc. Also, pacemakers that you implant inside your heart are somewhat close



PICTURED: A very close close-up of a cybernetic eye, which could be enhanced to see further, see into the infrared, or even be fitted with a zoom function



PICTURED: (above) Chief of Section 9 Aramaki; (above right) could that be Bateau? Probably just a side character; (right) Major Motoko Kusanagi once more

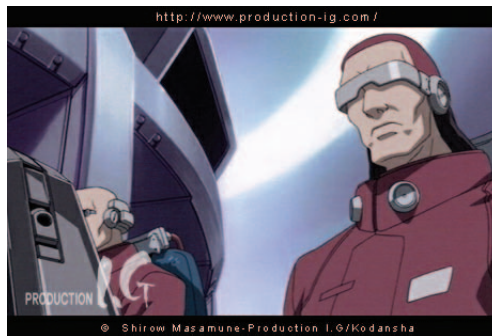
to cyborg technology. There would probably be more organic/inorganic machineries inside our physical body in the near future, I think.

Would you say that science fiction is a good medium for teaching/discussing philosophy? Would you say science fiction is or could be a “mythology of the future”?

YS: SF is no doubt a popular medium, and probably an easy entrance for discussing the so-called philosophy. “Science Fiction” might grow and be called just “Science” in the future, and at that point we can all imagine that it would gain enough support to be called a mythology, as science is the only worldwide prevailing myth at the moment.

What is your next project? What else is Production I.G. working on at the moment?

KK: We cannot tell you now what we are working on, but we can assure you that they are all interesting and exciting. As for the next project, there are some decided ones and



undecided ones, but we shall have a report on them in the near future.

—

As rumored on the very active Production I.G. forums, the American/English release of *GitS: Stand Alone Complex* is due for December 2002 on Cartoon Network’s Adult Swim. This would be one of the fastest migrations of anime from Japan to US TV screens ever done—in fact, the series will still be running on Japanese TV when it begins in the US, a first (as far as we know) for anime on television. *Ghost in the Shell* continues to break new ground.

Comments? Click the following:

• [Comments](#)

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are much more integrated into their government unit (called Section 9), going so far as to indicate that the government owns their cybernetic bodies—giving them a certain incentive not to quit, as they would have to give the bodies back, leaving, as Kusanagi says, not more than a few brain cells to call their own. The anime asks the same philosophical questions as the manga, is well-scripted (but we do suggest you watch it in the original Japanese, with subtitles), and includes a haunting score by Kenji Kawai.

GitS: Stand Alone Complex is yet to be seen in the US (and, at the time of this writing, has only just started in Japan), but from the trailer, images on Production I.G.’s web site, and information from their forums, we can tell you the production values look very high, the story is more episodic (like the manga), and the music is bound to be excellent (seeing as it is being done by Yoko Kanno, who did the score to *Cowboy Bebop*, currently airing on Cartoon Network’s Adult Swim in the US). It takes place in an alternate timeline diverging from episode eight of the manga, and thus doesn’t follow the Puppetmaster storyline at all.

Additional Note: The sequel to the *GitS* manga, also by Shirow, is called *ManMachine Interface* (MMI) and takes place after the Puppetmaster story in the manga. MMI is currently out in Japan as a collected graphic novel and is (or was, by the time you read this) due out starting in



October in the US, coming out as individual issues put out by Dark Horse and translated by Studio Proteus, both of whom were involved in bringing the first manga to the US.

The Student's Nightmare

by Anita Harkess

This was the time when Dr. Morgan most envied his students, who had been freed this very morning for their summer break, while he still had days of work ahead of him. Running a hand through his just-graying hair, he dragged another argumentation exam from the pile in the corner of his ancient pine veneer desk. "I may as well get something done during my office hours," he told himself. No one had come in to talk with him today. The wall clock above his head read 11:55. Five minutes to go.

Five minutes until he could take himself out to a well-deserved lunch ...

At that moment, of course, the phone rang. "UCD Communications. This is ..."

"Dr. Morgan!" a voice trampled over his ear. "This is Rebecca Norris! I'm so, so sorry, I ..."

Dr. Morgan sighed deeply. "Miss Norris, I have given you every break I know of. I have accepted two papers late, I let you make up three missed quizzes, let you into lectures in the middle of class ... We agreed that you would be in class and on time for the final exam or else ..."

"Dr. Morgan, please let me explain ..."

"You have had sixteen weeks to figure out how difficult it is to park on campus. You can plan for that. You should know by now what traffic is like at nine o'clock in the morning. If your alarm clock didn't go off, I'm terribly sorry, but I don't care. This had better be a very, very good explanation."

"Please, please. I did try to get there." The voice on the other end was shaking now, whining high on the verge of tears. "I studied, I'm ready, I even left a whole hour early to be sure nothing could pos-



PICTURED: *Dragon* by Michael Connolly

sibly happen to make me late, I ..." She snuffled loudly.

"Yes?" Dr. Morgan supported his forehead with the palm of his hand. "I'm listening."

"You know how I live in Evergreen, way up in the foothills, so it takes about an hour to get to campus. I left an hour earlier than that to make sure I wouldn't be late. Well, I got to Highway 73 – that's Main Street in Evergreen, it takes everyone to I-70 and then into Denver – and Highway 73 was all blocked up. I mean, it's usually heavy in the morning, but now it was hardly moving at all. It took me 25 minutes just to get past Evergreen Lake, so at that rate, it would take over an hour to get to I-70. I'd be late anyway! So, as soon as I was past the lake, I flipped a U-ey and went off in the opposite direction. I was going to take Parmalee Gulch Road through Indian Hills and then to Highway 285, which would take longer to get to campus, but I'd still be on time with my extra hour ..."

Dr. Morgan twirled his chair around and stared up at his clock. "How long is this going to take, Miss Norris?"

"I have to tell the whole story so you'll understand. Anyway, I decided to take Parmalee Gulch – that's this back road through the middle of nowhere. It winds through all kinds of forest and curves

and hills. You know, that's where a lot of the hippies and new agey types wound up, 'cause it's way out of the way. All kinds of things could live out there, and nobody'd even know about it. There's deer crossings everywhere. There's a few houses every now and then, and a little town called Parmalee Gulch that's really just a seed nursery and a community center and a really big church with a playground and a couple' restaurants, but that's about it."

Dr. Morgan sighed deeply into the phone. "You digress, Miss Norris. Please get to the point."

"Well, okay, so I was driving over all those curves, going really fast like only mountain people can drive, 'cause there was nobody else on the road and I know there are never any cops out there. And I really wanted to be on time for your test. I was going really good, picking up more time, when I went around the curve right before the church and ..." She began to snuffle again. "Well, something jumped out in front of my car. I swear I just didn't see it, it just ran out there! I felt so guilty, I've never even hit a bird before, but I ..."

"So you missed my test," Dr. Morgan filled in, "because you hit Bambi with your car."

Rebecca sniffled yet again. "No that's not it. I mean, that's not even why I was late, not totally. And I thought it was a deer, but it wasn't. I got out of my car and walked around front to see if I'd killed it – and to get it out of the way, 'cause I really wanted to get to class – and I heard this incredible, loud sound, like a huge pack of dogs was chasing me. I was about to jump back in my car, then I realized it was coming from the animal."

"You're losing me," Dr. Morgan moaned. "What animal?"

"The animal under my car! The one that wasn't a deer! Pay attention! Sir. Sorry. Anyway." She cleared her throat. "It was barking and howling, but it wasn't a dog. And it wasn't a deer. I thought it was at first, because its head was kind of rolled under the car, so all I could see were these legs with hooves."

"So it had hooves. What was it? A moose?"

"No, no mooses ... moose ... meese ... well, they don't bark. And they don't have spots all over their front legs like this one did. And I've never seen a moose with a snake for a tail."

"You expect me to believe that something with hooves and spots and a snake for a tail jumped out in front of ..."

"Well, it surprised me too! And it gets worse. I was trying to fig-

ure out how to get it out of the road so I could get to school – I really, really wanted to get to school, you know – when, just behind my front wheel, the biggest snake I ever saw curled out at me. It was howling now, like a pack of wild dogs in pain. I guess that snake must have been the thing's head. But I didn't stick around to find out. I mean, I was sorry the thing was hurt, and all, but I didn't have time to fix it and I didn't want to fight with a wounded giant snake. Besides, I could tell by now that my car wasn't going to do me any good. The whole front end was smashed in, and I was definitely going to be late! The only thing I could think of was maybe I could walk back to Highway 73 in time to catch the Evergreen-to-Denver RTD bus and maybe I could catch part of the exam and explain it all to you."

"Maybe you should have taken the bus in the first place."

Now it was Rebecca who sighed. "Well, I couldn't have known that some half-spotted, snake-headed, deer-hoofed, dog-barking thing would jump out in front of my car, could I?"

"Anyway, I was walking along this curvy, hilly road, trying to get back to Evergreen in time for the bus, which I knew was impossible, and I knew I'd miss the test and you'd never believe my story and by this time it was starting to rain and I was crying right along with the rain.

"And that's when I heard this huge, gravelly voice calling: 'Whyfore am I blest with a sight so dear? How am I given this virtuous maid to know? For 'tis heaven's own sweet angel here, and none so base as we who crawl below. Her eyes are starry crystal orbs, her hair a gift of light from a benev'lent sun. Her skin's not white as snow, but still more fair. She walks with grace like that of deer who run. But why tears? What troubles dim her brow? Has sadness come upon a one so blest? An honest knight, I take this as my vow: 'Til you're at peace, I shall not take my rest. My name is Tristan, know and call on me. Where you have need, right there I'll always be.'"

Dr. Morgan cleared his throat. "You heard all that? Just like that? Come, now, you're making this up!"

"No, no!" Rebecca whined. "I couldn't possibly have made all that up! It was just so beautiful. It flowed just like the way we all speak, but with this, this glamour ... like poetry. And I suck at making up poetry. Just ask Dr. Nightingale; I had her for English comp.

Nightmare continued next page

But this was so perfect, and it flowed so beautifully, it just stuck in my head exactly the way it was.”

Dr. Morgan sighed deeply. “I suppose that’s no more difficult to believe than the monster-movie creature under your car. And I trust that you couldn’t make up a poem like that. You may proceed ... if you really are going somewhere with this.”

“Oh, I am, I am! So, I heard this beautiful, flowing poetry, and I turned around to see where it came from. But all I saw was this guy hanging out of a rusty old black pickup – I guessed that he must be Tristan. He reached out with long, skinny fingers – almost like claws – grabbed my hand, and kissed it with dry, scaly lips. *His* eyes weren’t starry crystal orbs. They were kinda watery brown, almost yellow. His hair was black and wiry, sticking straight up, and his nose was thin and curved down, like a beak. To top it all off, he really, really smelled! I mean, it was like this cloud of sulfur was pouring out at me – I couldn’t see it, but I sure could smell it. He seemed nice enough, though, and I was *so* desperate to get to school, so I climbed in and told him that all my troubles would be solved if I could just get to the Evergreen bus stop right away. And just like that, he took off, speeding even faster than I had.

“I told Tristan all about the thing on the road, but he didn’t seem surprised at all. He said, ‘Humanity’s growth’s destroyed ancestral homes of wond’rous creatures far more rare than deer. They find such hills as these when far they roam. All sorts of beasts find sanctuary here.’”

“And again,” Dr. Morgan sighed, “all of this flowed so poetically that you memorized it word for word.”

“Well, yeah, it just stuck in my head. And I thought about what he said. I’d believed that the only strange things taking refuge here were human. But I couldn’t think too long, because just then I heard sirens. A cop was pulling us over! I swear there has never been a cop in Indian Hills, but just my luck, there was one today. Man, was he mad! He started ranting at us about families living around here and public safety and all that. I thought about all the time this was taking, and how I was going to miss your test after all, and I started to cry again.

“But Tristan was the worst part. He took one look at me with the tears running down my face, and – I know you won’t believe this, but I swear to God, it’s true – Tristan started to smoke.”

“Cigarettes?” Dr. Morgan offered.

“No! Not like that! He started smoking all by himself, until all I could see was a cloud of smoke, and the smell of sulfur about killed

Misclassified Romance

by Stan Yan



me. And then, through the smoke, his eyes started to glow. I could tell it was his eyes because there were two little points of glow, and they were the same color as his eyes. They really were yellow! I heard the cop make a choking sound, and then there was a ball of fire where the cop had been. Through it all, I heard Tristan grumbling, ‘Her comfort is my sacred duty. I must end each thing that makes my lady cry.’

‘I’ve never been so scared in all my life! When the fireball started, I lost my head. I jumped out of the truck and just ran, as fast and as far as I could, into the woods. I heard Tristan calling after me, ‘My Venus! Wait! Thy gentle, pristine eye has been insulted by this needful sight? Come back, my dove! Oh, for thy sweet sake, I renew my vow to make thy troubles right!’

‘I just kept on running. After ... well, I don’t know how long. After a long time, when I got too tired to run anymore, I realized I was lost in the woods. Tristan was nowhere to be seen (or smelled). So my new goal was just to get back to the road. I just picked a direction and started walking. Then, amazingly enough, I heard the creature barking again. It sounded like a kennel full of dogs being horribly abused, like those puppy farms they talk about on *20/20*. Well, I followed the sound back to the road, back to my car, but just as I stepped out of the trees, the howling stopped. That huge, rusted-out pickup was parked behind my car, and who do you think was standing over the beast? Who?’

Dr. Morgan coughed, suddenly startled to full attention. ‘‘What? Do you honestly expect me to answer that? Miss Norris, I must say ...’’

‘‘Please hear me out, Dr. Morgan. I’m almost finished. And I swear to God, it’s all true!’’

Dr. Morgan again fell silent. Rebecca continued, ‘‘It was Tristan, of course! He’d found the beast, and he was mumbling something and pouring blue liquid down its throat out of a carved crystal bottle. I guess that’s why it stopped barking: to drink. And then, to my surprise, it jumped to its feet (well, hooves, really), licked Tristan’s face with this long purple tongue, and ran off into the woods yapping like a hundred puppies at play. I just stood there, staring, until Tristan noticed me.

‘‘You’re not human, are you?’’ was all I could think of to say.

‘‘Alas, we dragons, too, have come to be homeless or outright killed by new technology,’’ he explained. ‘‘But some of us, gifted with wizards’ powers, survive here through this, our darkest hour. A mage like me, whose spells fool human eyes, can live in peace in humanish disguise.’’

‘‘I didn’t know what to say about that, so I just thanked him for healing my poor beast. Then I looked at my watch and realized I was almost three hours late for your test! So I begged Tristan to just drop me off somewhere with a phone (I was still sorta scared of him, you know). Well, so here I am now. I called you as soon as I possibly could.’’ Rebecca paused at last to take a breath.

‘‘Is that all?’’ Dr. Morgan moaned.

‘‘That’s all. That’s what happened. And now I’m calling you. Please, Dr. Morgan, I know it sounds strange, but I really did try to ...’’

‘‘I really did try, Miss Norris. I tried to give you every opportunity to get your act together and finish this course, but you never did rise to the occasion. I can’t say that this is a surprise, but I must say that I am disappointed. To add insult to injury, you expect me to believe this ridiculous fable ...’’

‘‘Dr. Morgan, please, I ...’’ Rebecca started to sniffle yet again.

‘‘I have heard quite enough for today, Miss Norris. I will give you the grade you have earned: an F. Good bye, Miss Norris.’’ Dr. Morgan clapped the sobbing telephone firmly into its cradle and dropped his head onto his desk. ‘‘Unbelievable. Simply unbelievable.’’

Still muttering, he scraped a stack of exam papers off his desk and into his Italian leather attaché case. Something was not quite right. ‘‘Is that gas?’’ He sniffed. ‘‘Or sulfur? What does gas smell like?’’ The professor turned about, searching for the source of the under-worldly odor. Only then did he notice the cloud of smoke just inside his door, shot through with two points of yellow glow. ‘‘What the ...’’

‘‘Her comfort is my sacred duty,’’ a grumbling voice declared. ‘‘I must end each thing that makes my lady cry.’’

The talons crushed Dr. Morgan’s scream before it left his throat.

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Bill and the Night

by Leslie Aguillard

Bill arched his aching back and twisted to his right, then left. The old leather of the saddle creaked in a comforting and familiar way beneath him as he stretched his legs and lifted his tired butt for a moment. His horse snorted, pawed the dry desert earth then sniffed for something to chew. The sun was nearly set and long shadows of violet stretched towards them; silhouettes of the hills and towering cactus formed a beautiful border on the western horizon as he urged his mount onward toward camp. He could just about see the campfire and imagined something hot and juicy turning on the spit. It was hungry out, and dusty. His canteen was emptied an hour ago. Washing up sounded real good. He had mended at least ten miles of fence and rounded up a few strays, that was enough, he figured, time to call it a day. High overhead the first stars were becoming visible in the darkening sky. “Just beautiful,” he said out loud to himself and his horse, Buck. “I just can’t understand what people see in city life. Aie, get up!”

Then there was a blazing streak across the sky. A thin fiery tail illuminated golden against the turquoise and coral of the sunset. “Better make a wish on that, ol’ Buck. Maybe some nice new shoes or a soft bit.”

Then there was another and another. “Well, I’ll be. It must be one of those meteor showers.” He reigned in Buck and looked around overhead and behind him and saw streak after streak of falling fire, long ones, too, bigger than he’d ever seen before. To his amazement there seemed to be one coming right toward him, too fast to do anything but watch. It was like a bomb went off, the noise and the shock underfoot, and a fair bit of dirt and dust and rock flung in all directions. Buck reared up and whinnied and it was a good thing Bill had a firm grip on the saddle horn or he’d be pulling thorns out of his backside with a pliers. Buck swung around in a few circles before Bill calmed him down and then could determine where the meteor crashed down. “Good thing we stopped to do some sight seeing there, ol’ Buck, or you and me would be statistics.” He put his heels into

Buck’s flanks and trotted toward the crater ahead. It was about three feet across, a foot deep and as round as a skillet, and there in the center of the pit was a rock half buried in the Arizona dirt.

Bill regarded the hole and the rock. He’d seen a few drive-in movies and he knew something about space and radiation and wasn’t all that fired up about exposing himself or ol’ Buck to anything too strange and possibly dangerous. “Maybe this is the kind of thing the museums go for, Buck. Maybe we’ll be famous or get us a little reward for being lucky enough to see this one come down. Buck jumped and turned around again and Bill had to reign him in hard, hearing other explosions and seeing other impacts around him. “Damned strange,” he thought, “there’s a lot of these things hittin’ the ground. I’m no expert, Buck, but I’d say this is mighty unusual.” He patted the horse’s neck and looked up into the night. The meteor shower appeared to be over just that quick. He wondered if the camp was all right, more than that he wondered if his cabin was in one piece, and just how widespread was this celestial event? Well, there were enough of the craters that they wouldn’t be too tough to find again in the morning, so he decided it was best to skeedaddle on to the camp and maybe on to the cabin. Buck knew the way back to the barn even in the dark, but tonight there’d be a full moon which would coming up soon. Bill had looked forward to another night under the moon listening to the desert and the crackle of his fire, but now he had enough unease to urge him to break camp and move along toward home.

Twenty minutes later he was at his campsite and damned if there wasn’t a little crater not ten feet from his tent. He packed up his gear and tied it over Buck’s back and off they went. It was two hours to the house but the moon was already at the horizon and lighting up the landscape. He didn’t want Buck to lose a leg in one of those craters and was glad the moonlight would help them out in this regard. Bill rocked in the saddle and considered the meteors. Surely the observatories would be all excited about something like this. He thought,

“Well, I bet there’ll be helicopters coming this way any time now to check it out.” But he neither saw any aircraft or heard their confounded noise. There was nothing in the night but the sounds he expected, Buck’s hooves plodding and scraping along the dirt and stones, an owl, a coyote, the skitter of a lizard, the flits of bats. The air was cool and delicate as any spring night in the desert and other than an extraordinary number of little round craters, the land was as peaceful as a sleeping calf.

Then he saw someone walking, the silvery figure in the bright moonlight, a man walking in the middle of Bill’s spread. “Now look here, Buck, who do you suppose would be strolling way out in the middle of our ranch at this time of night?” Bill patted the Winchester 30/30 under his leg as if making sure it was still there and ready if needed, then he called out toward the walking man. “Yo, there, you lost or somethin’?”

The figure hesitated, then began to walk again, waving an arm in the air. “Hello there, mister, yes, I’m ... lost.”

“You sure as hell must be. The road is five miles in the other direction. Nothing the way you’re going for thirty miles. You’d sure be disappointed come sun up.” Bill leaned in the saddle and rested his forearm across Buck’s withers then gave him a few pats on the neck. Buck snorted and pawed the ground.

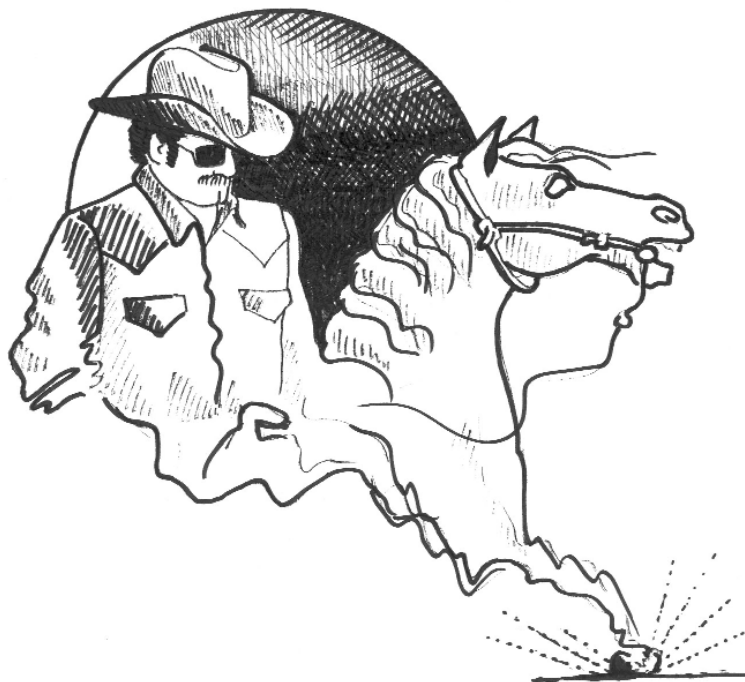
“I’m certain you are correct if that’s the case. Perhaps you could get me turned around correctly,” the walking man said, coming close enough now for Bill to get a good look at him. Could have been a military type flight suit he was wearing; tall, lean, non-descript, pale faced especially in the blue light of the moon, reddish hair. The stranger arrived at a spot about fifteen feet from Bill and his horse and stopped, a little out of breath.

Bill inquired, “Your vehicle broke down, I take it.”

“Yes, you could say that. I’d certainly appreciate your assistance.” The man leaned over and put his hands on his knees, taking a few deep breaths, then stood again.

Bill smiled at the man, patted Buck’s neck and the horse shook his head, snorting. “Well, you’re in luck. My cabin isn’t too far and it’ll be heading in the right direction for you if you think you can walk another few miles.”

The stranger nodded, still a little breathless. “Thank you, sir, lead on, I welcome your hospitality.”



PICTURED: *Bill and the Night* by Leslie Aguillard. [Click for larger image.](#)

Bill nudged his horse on and the trio moved through the night. “It’s almost too beautiful for words, isn’t it?” Bill asked the stranger.

“Excuse me?” The stranger asked.

“The night, the landscape, the peace and the quiet. It’s almost stunning in comparison to the other parts of the world, the cities, all the noise and congestion, all the craziness of people, wouldn’t you agree?” Bill grinned as he spoke, confident in his assessment but also appreciative of a viewpoint that seemed as rare as it was fast fading in these times of computers, space exploration and speed, endless speed. Everyone was in such a hurry, everyone except Bill and his horse and the few scraggly cows he kept.

“Oh, why yes. The night is quite ... beautiful. The sky is remarkably clear out here away from the light pollution of the cities. And the landscape, yes, the stark and primitive nature of it has a very strong

Bill continued next page

appeal for you, I can see that.”

Bill figured the stranger wanted to develop a rapport as soon as possible and would probably agree to just about anything he might say. He didn't mind. He had a knack of assessing people quickly: dangerous or benign, willing or not, curious or just passing the time of day. Bill rocked easily in the saddle and glanced at the man keeping pace, still breathing a little hard. He would have thought such a walk would be more manageable for a military type. “I haven't always been a cowpoke.”

“Indeed,” the walker replied.

“That's right. Once I was neck deep on the cutting edge. Nearly drowning. The racket it all made. There was so much to do you couldn't even think about anything else. Come to think of it, there wasn't anything else to think about. Just get the job done. Computers, equations, probabilities, technology upon emerging technology galore. It never stopped. Then I came here and the sheer weight of the silence about knocked me over. This apparently barren land is overflowing with life and the inter-relatedness of it, the complexity of the ecosystems actually put our technology to shame. Life here is simply astounding.” Bill closed his eyes and breathed in the perfume of the night blooming flowers, enjoying the sound of his own voice pledging his love to this land, and even hoping, if just a little, that the stranger might feel even a tiny bit of it.

“Of course, life is amazing and complex, and yes, I can see how this ... primitive place could be, well, a refuge for someone overwhelmed with the demands of a busy career.”

The stranger stumbled slightly every once in awhile but was keeping up fine. Bill pointed out details in the bright moonlight to the stranger. He named the cactus and other desert vegetation and spoke of the ancient people who once lived there and of the plants they farmed, the animals they hunted, and how they lived with nature, a part of nature, not as the dominator but as an ingredient in the recipe of life. He described the weather patterns, the temperature ranges, the geology of arroyos and mesas, the minerals and crystals. It would have been clear to even someone not paying much attention that Bill loved this place and his place in it. Soon they came upon his homestead, a cabin, a barn, corral, a fenced garden, a few shade trees. It

was perfect in its simplicity and rustic detail, charming in the way a romantic would envision such a place pre-atomic age. The stranger was visibly relieved and sat down on the first wooden step which led to the cabin's front door while Bill untied his packs from the horse. Bill flung the packs past the stranger so they landed on the verandah, then he slid the saddle and blanket off the horse's back and laid it on the porch rail. He patted the horse's rump and Buck trotted off to the water trough for a long noisy drink.

“Let me just light a lamp inside,” Bill told the stranger and noted that the stranger seemed content to stay put. Bill put a kerosene lamp in the middle of his wood table and soon a soft yellow glow filled the room. He called out to the stranger, “You want something to eat? Some coffee?” He lifted a box out from under the sink. The iron hand pump for water cast a shadow on the calico curtain drawn over the window behind it.

The stranger stood stiffly and dusted himself with his hands, “That would be very good. Whatever you care to share would be most appreciated.” He turned to enter the cabin and stopped short.

Bill stood inside the screen door facing the stranger, a tall dark silhouette with the small blinking lights of a charging weapon in front of him. The weapon began to whine softly and the blinking lights changed to a steady glow. The stranger stood as motionless as Bill. The swing on the verandah moved in the breeze; the chain links suspending it clinked. The breeze died down again to absolute silence. Behind the stranger the horse stood watching, intently focused on the two men.

“You could kill me, of course. But there would be others. You were important to us,” the stranger said.

“No, I wasn't important in the least. I was one of millions. You just can't stand the thought of anyone getting away, of any choice not in line with corporate projections. Well, I did my part, sent all the reports. I just decided not to return, and now I'll give you a chance to decide. You can gather your re-con and report non-contact, or I'll do my own re-con and eliminate you and the team they sent with you. You know I can, and will.”

Three tiny lights appeared on the stranger's chest, the targeting of the weapon aimed with lethal accuracy to his vital areas. It would be over in seconds. There would be no sounds, no remains. The stranger considered the options. Life was indeed astounding. His own never

seemed quite so precious as it did in this moment. His superiors really did not know where “Bill” had gone or how he may have integrated into this planet’s life system, or even if he was still alive. There was even a small doubt that he had stayed here. Some theorized he had fled to another satellite more familiar to their own world. He had been completely taken in by Bill’s disguise as a native being. Could he deceive his superiors as easily as Bill had deceived him? They would have no conception of why anyone would lie about something like this, it had never happened before. Of course, he could try to deceive Bill. Bringing him back would be a coup.

Bill said, “I know what you’re thinking. I can read your thoughts as easily as a beginner’s flight manual. It’s something I picked up down here. I just want you to know that I am more sure of how this will end up than any scenario you could envision for it otherwise. It is my way or no way. Time to decide.”

The stranger cleared his mind and agreed. There were millions just like him and just like Bill. Well, maybe not just like Bill. If he wanted to stay in this miserable void of a dust bin why should he care? How he could breathe this nitrogen oxygen mix was beyond him. His superiors would simply have to bring another XK3 up to speed and plug him into the next project. What could be so important about one singular loss? It could just as easily been a collision in space, a toxic mishap with some primordial flora, could have been a thousand reasons why Bill was lost. His report could reflect that. Decision made.

Bill nodded and instructed the man to step backward, carefully down the wooden steps into the yard. He glanced at Buck, and toss-

ing his mane Buck stepped forward, snorting and shaking his head. Bill said, “Buck will return you to your lander. Never return here. If you attempt treachery, Buck will kill you and soon after your team will be destroyed. They’ll never know what hit them. Do you understand?”

The stranger nodded. He turned tentatively to the horse and Bill gestured for him to go ahead. Buck bowed down and the stranger struggled onto his back. He immediately appreciated the convention of a saddle but thought it best not to suggest it.

“Just hold onto a handful of Buck’s mane and squeeze a little with your knees so you don’t slide off. You won’t like falling into those prickly-pears.” Buck moved like lightning and the two of them were gone faster than a June bug down a duck’s gullet. Bill lowered his weapon and pressed the release to disengage the charge; the lights dimmed, the soft whine ceased. He laid the weapon on his table and turned down the wick on his lamp. Moonlight streamed in through the door, filling the room with its cool silver light. He stepped out on the verandah and eased himself onto the porch swing. It was the perfect distance from the railing for him to put up his feet and relax to enjoy the night air and the distant cry of some small prey fulfilling its destiny in the cycle of life.

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Seeds

by Peri Charlifu

The most powerful force in the universe is the need to perpetuate the species. This is done to the exclusion of all else by the most successful creatures. Those that fail to make breeding their only goal are consigned to extinction by stronger species.

—Dr. Theo Tolimikis

“ Ms. Luduc, would you come in here please?” Surprise struck Terrel as Ms. Constantine beckoned from the little office.

“ Ooo, you got it now girlfriend!” Marge mumbled under her breath as Terrel passed her desk. Terrel just smiled and rolled her eyes as she rounded the plastic computer terminal.

“ Yes, Ms. Constantine?” Terrel was unsure whether to sit in the chair before the large cherry wood desk. It was almost altar-like, and quite intimidating.

“ Please Ms. Luduc, have a seat. How long have you been with *La femme*, Ms. Luduc?”

Tula Constantine looked like a predatory feline, all eyes and teeth. Her sleek suit was tailored in France and she wore it like a challenge.

“ Almost a year.” Terrel’s voice was steady, a bit weak, but at least it didn’t crack. She knew that Ms. Constantine liked strong women; there was no place in the company for weak, mousy gals.

“ I have been reading over some of the articles that you have written, I like the style and the way you handle the language. I want to send you on assignment.” She lit a thin black cigar and exhaled a small cloud of pungent blue smoke. Terrel’s heart raced—she was on the verge of jumping up and dancing. Finally to get out of the office and work on something substantial! To write something that wasn’t fluff. That’s why she had become a writer in the first place, she wanted to do something that she could sink her teeth into. She smiled broadly and waited for her boss to continue. The first thing that she had learned at *La Femme* was that Ms. C didn’t like to be interrupted.

“ Have you heard of ‘Settlers Cove’?” Terrel shook her head no.

“ It’s a little place in Massachusetts, on the shore. It’s run by Quakers or Mennonites or one of those tacky cults.” Terrel thought that Ms. C wanted her to investigate a story on polygamy, or some other juicy tidbit. Her heart sank almost as low as it had soared not a minute before as Tula Constantine continued.

“They make the most wonderful quilts and homespun there, and I would like a story on their lifestyle and production to use in the November issue. I want to contrast the old style of women to the new modern woman.” Terrel smiled and nodded as if she were deeply interested, but she felt bitterly disappointed. Yet she knew if she ever wanted to do the kind of writing that she desired, she would have to prove herself to the queen bee.

“ Jack has your itinerary, tickets, and expense forms. Do you have any questions?” She made it clear by the sound of her voice that asking questions was not a wise career move.

“ No, thank you for considering me for this assignment.” Truth was that Terrel had about a dozen questions, but she knew that Jack could answer them. She almost added that she wouldn’t let Ms. C down; thank God she had gotten in the habit of reviewing her thoughts before she verbalized. It would have been the totally loser thing to say, and Ms. C would have never have forgotten it.

“ Well that’s all, thank you.” Her dismissal from the queen’s presence was pre-functionary, and overly rehearsed. She imagined she should feel honored, and Terrel had pangs of guilt that she didn’t. She could see her best friend, Marge Trent, peering around her terminal as Terrel ushered herself out of the office. A look of barely contained curiosity spread over her face. At such times she looked like Woopi Goldberg, minus the dreadlocks. He face seemed to scream WHAT!

“ Guess who’s going on assignment?” Terrel sang, teasing.

“ Let me guess ... not Doug, he has the Netwon article to write.” She put her pen to her pursed lips, in mock contemplation. Terrel began bouncing.

“ No way... girl you got it?” She smiled. “ Well it’s about time, you’re a damn good writer.”

“ Well, it’s far from what I would call a glamour assignment, it’s not even socially relevant.” Terrel sat down at her desk, some of the wind taken from her sail. The little stoneware picture frame with Barbra Walters’ smiling face looked up at her.

“Ter, you got to take what comes, show the big C that you got what it takes. Where are you going anyway?” Marge asked as she waited for the screen to run through it’s spell check program.

“Massachusetts, upstate I think.” Terrel sighed.

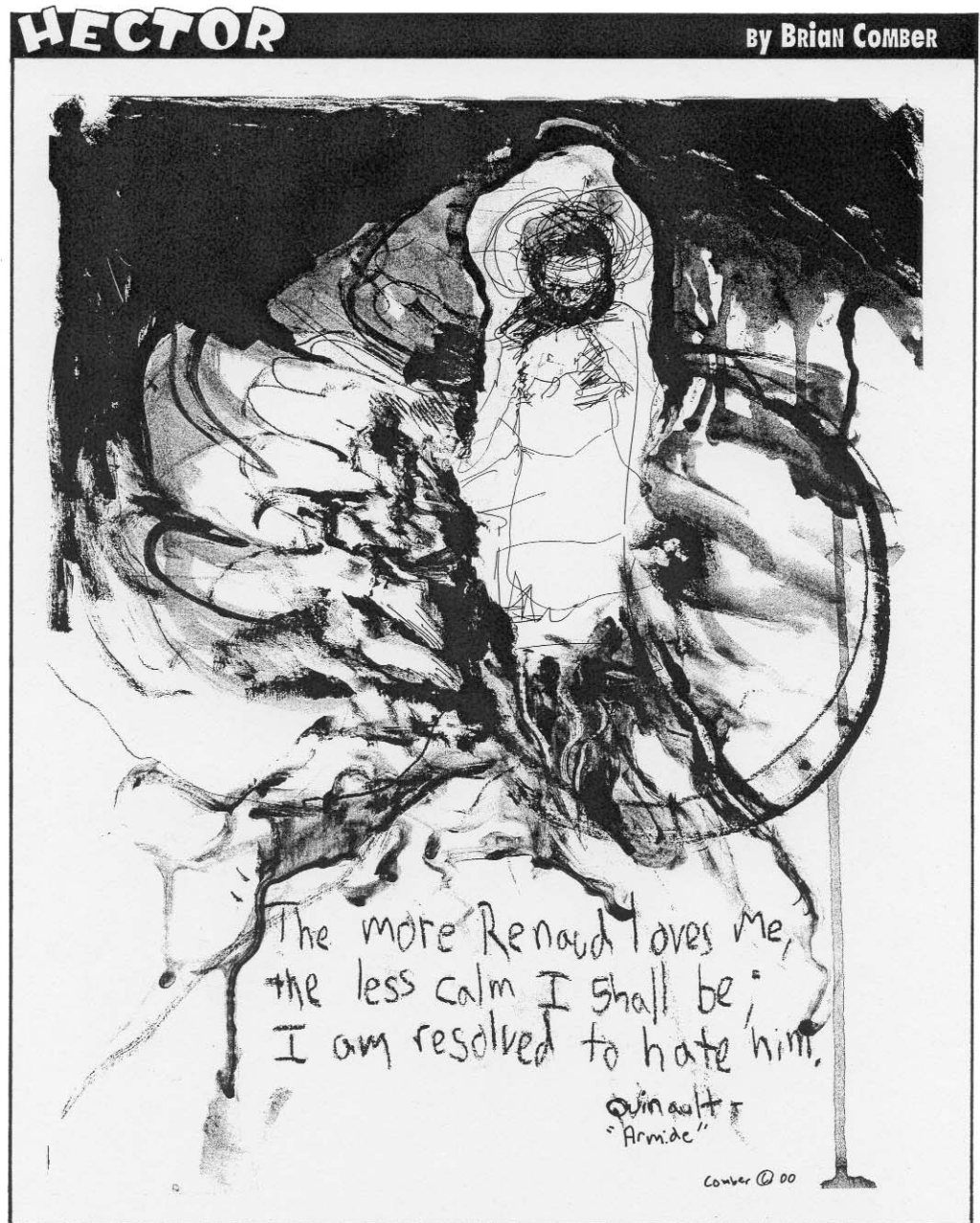
“What!? And your wrecked about that!” Marge said in her best chastising voice.

“It’s to do a story on this community of Quakers or something, they do the most wonderful quilting.” She languished her best Tula Constantine for Marge.

“Well I understand that it’s very beautiful up there this time of year.” Marge replied in her best Yankee drawl. This caused both women to burst out laughing.

The train ride was depressing; Terrel should have known that only the bigwig reporters flew anywhere. Well, she thanked God that it wasn’t Greyhound. She had always suffered from travel sickness and the dog of transportation would have had her puking in her seat the entire way.

The porter told her that her destination was the one following the next stop, and Terrel was glad that her ride was almost over. Jack had made arrangements for her to be met at the station at Kalgor Straits. The community of Settlers Cove was supposed to be twenty-seven miles up the coast. She dozed in the hot compartment she shared with three men and their little girl. She was uncertain the relationships the four had, and would never find out. Her one attempt at communication ended badly when she tried to make small



Seeds continued next page

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talk. When she told them that she was going to Settlers Cove, the oldest of the men scowled at her.

“We come from Clayton, we don’t like folk from Settlers Cove.” She asked why, her reporter mind taking over. The men just ignored her and even the little girl turned her nose away from her.

She was pleased when the train pulled into the last stop before hers. The three gentlemen and the little girl that were her rude, dozing companions, left their warm, sleepy seats and, grumbling, took their bags and departed without a good-bye. She breathed a sigh of relief as the train jerked slowly out of the station, the feeling of suppressed power slightly numbing her legs. As she watched the station move slowly away from her, a young man stumbled into the seat across from her. She was so surprised that she reached out and caught him by the arm, thinking that he was going to fall.

“Are you OK?” she asked somewhat breathlessly; he had startled her. She thought that she was the only passenger on the train now. She looked into the bluest eyes, eyes of deep water, silent and cold. She was swimming in his eyes. A feeling of electricity flowed through her hand at his masculine touch. He twitched his hand out of hers.

“I am well, thanks to you for asking.” His voice was a rich tenor, filled with discomfort and unease. He was about twenty-six or twenty-eight, his blond hair was worn long and loose under a black felt cap. He was very good looking, like a blond Alec Baldwin. Terrel always put people’s faces with the rich and the famous. It was a bad habit that she picked up from playing spot-the-movie-star-in-the-crowded game, with her sister at the malls where they spent much of their long summer vacations as young girls. His clothes were as black as his hat, and were closed by buttons made of shell.

“Are you from Settlers Cove?” Terrel asked. She was cautious about what she said; she had no desire to ride along in silence as she had before.

“I am of the Cove,” he answered simply. His eyes darted like little clear blue fish, from her face to the floor. His odd way of speech was a hook that lured Terrel to be bolder.

“I’m going there myself, I work for a magazine called *La Femme* and I’m doing a story on the way the women of the Cove make a living from selling their sewing.” Terrel had a hard time catching the eye

of the big blond.

“Oh.” Terrel thought that he was going to say more, but he just looked out of the window.

“Uh, so how long until we get to the station at Kalgor Straits?”

“I do not know, this is the first time that I have traveled by the train, I would not have done so except that my wagon was overturned by a group of young men in Clayton, and I must be back before the sunrise. The people of Clayton do not like us from the Cove.” He warmed a little, she could tell that he was excited by the train ride.

“Yeah, I can tell, I just met a few people from Clayton, they were less than friendly.” She smiled at the look of distaste that moved over his face like a pull-over Halloween mask

“The people of Clayton have never liked the people of the Cove, we are better at fishing and our women are better at their crafts.” He didn’t meet her gaze, but seemed to enjoy talking to her. Terrel enjoyed hearing him speak, the lack of contractions in his speech made him seem foreign somehow.

“I’m sorry, I haven’t even introduced myself, my name is Terrel Luduc.” She held out her hand, strong and steady. Her mother would have cringed at the un-lady like way she shook hands, but if women want to be taken seriously then they have to act the part. Ignoring the offered hand he said, “It is unseemly for me to touch you, for you are an outsider and a woman as well.” Terrel dropped her hand, and he continued, after an uncomfortable pause.

“My name is Jadon Chapmen, the eldest son of Sabirius.” He inclined his head slightly to the seated woman. They rode in droning quiet for several minutes, Terrel unsure how to continue their conversation. Jack said that the people of Settlers Cove were odd, much like the Mennonites, but he hadn’t given her any other information. Terrel knew that she was headed for some serious culture shock. She just hoped she would not alienate herself before she got the information she wanted.

“Who will be conveying you to the Cove, and who will you be lodging with?”

“Oh, let’s see ...” Terrel pulled out her notepad from her oversized bag and thumbed through it.

“Mr. Uzzah is picking me up and I’m to stay with the widow Macabe. Do you know her?”

“Yes, she is the eldest women of the Cove, she is the.. Never

mind.” Jadon was about to say something of great intrigue, that much Terrel could tell; however, it was obvious that whatever it was must not have been for ‘outsiders’ ears. In the interest of keeping the conversation alive, she didn’t press the point.

“What is she like?” she inquired off handed. Again the distress crept into his voice, like a man confessing to a dirty habit.

“She is a great woman, She has got a great deal of authority among the people of the Cove.” He wanted to say more but bit back and resumed his careful study of the floor.

“Why is it called Settlers Cove, when was it settled?” Terrel thought that she might as well get all the information she could for her story.

“It is called Settlers Cove because our people were the first to tame the Cove,” he answered, almost as if it were rehearsed. Terrel was piqued at his answer; it couldn’t have been too much more vague, unless it was in Latin.

“Your people?” She wanted to ask him if they were like Mennonites or Mormons or something, but the subject of religion hadn’t come up yet.

“The deep folk,” he answered, the tremor in his voice waiting to leap out at any second.

“The deep folk? What do you mean?” She very much hoped that all of the people of Settlers Cove weren’t as hard to interview as Mr. Chapmen.

“The deep folk are the people that live around the Cove, it was once called Clears Deep, and the name stayed with us,” he explained.

“I see, and what year would that have been?” She was scribbling in her notepad.

“My people settled the Cove in the year one thousand five hundred twenty and eight. We have been there ever since,” he stated simply. But Terrel was an amateur historian and something didn’t smell right with Jadon’s account of American history.

“That would mean Settlers Cove, Clears Deep, was the first American settlement, even before Saint Augustine. Do you mean to tell me that this settlement was established at the same time that Cortez invaded Mexico? Why isn’t it in any of the history books?”

Jadon just shrugged. “Writing is a tool of the opponent, we know this to be the truth. It is as I have said. It could be that the people who drove us from our native lands could not endure the thought that our

people were the first. As for us, we do not care what the outside thinks of us.” His manner was high and Terrel disliked it considerably.

“Where were your people from originally?” she asked. Instead of answering Jadon looked out the window.

“Here, we have arrived at Kalgor Straits, you see that carriage, that is the rig belonging to Nath Uzzah.” The train slowed and wheezed to a stop, the ancient metal groaning as the tired wheels came to rest at the station of Kalgor.

“Would you allow me to fetch your bags to the carriage. I have none of my own.” He smiled at her and she wondered if he just thought that the question wasn’t important.

“Thank you, if you could just get that one from the top, I think I can manage the rest.” She was a liberated woman, but she also allowed people, men included, to help her out when she needed it. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Terrel thought that good manners, like opening a door for someone regardless of sex was, well, good manners. It wasn’t an issue of who was patronizing whom. You helped out a person, even opening a door, that sore spot for so many women in the building, was only an act of good manners. It had nothing to do with the ableness of the person. It was just a nice thing to do. She herself had opened her share of doors in her time, for both sexes, and she never felt as though she were demeaning anyone by it. She supposed that it all boiled down to security; she was secure in herself as a person, so little things like this were just that, little.

The afternoon sunlight was waning and a slight chill crept in the fall air, the promise of a cold and deep winter. There was a smell of open fires and stale sea air moving like a lazy fog on the thin afternoon. The old man in the buggy wasn’t as old as he first appeared. He was in his early forties, it was his face and the way he held himself that belied his true age.

“You are surely Miss Luduc, I am Sire Uzzah. The widow Macabe hath sent me to convey ye hither.” The way he said widow was wida. He was a small man, only five foot two or so, but his lack of stature was made even less by the way he slumped over, like a man bearing a heavy load. His once blond hair was thin and wispy, and his skin was waxen and had the same quality the skin a frog has. His eyes

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were large and unblinking; they reminded Terrel of the pictures of the insane that she had seen once. All the colored part of the cornea was ringed by the yellow-white of the bloodshot eye. He had a reptilian feel to him, and she was glad that these people had an aversion to touching the opposite sex.

“Thank you Mister Uzzah, Jadon has my other bag. Jadon, would you like a ride back to the Cove too?” She gestured to the young man standing in the background. Sire Uzzah ogled him and he twitched his head to the side a bit. Terrel realized that the weird old duck was nearly blind and he hadn’t seen Jadon until this very moment.

“Esht rtujt kne aza dhyshada! Ruka zsa shaz fsatha ta kuta?!” The peculiar old man hissed to Jadon. Jadon looked down and scarlet burned across his cheeks.

“Naz shadert, uth caz saz casz, isha netathyul, konda sitha liskj asz mauuder azs Maacabe,” Jadon said quietly. Terrel knew that Jadon must have broken some rule and hoped that she wasn’t the cause of all this strife. She wondered what language they were speaking. She was very good at languages, she spoke French, Spanish, and a little Italian, and she considered herself to be somewhat of a linguist. Yet she couldn’t even begin to fathom what root language they were speaking.

“Get in the carriage missy, we must reach the Cove afore the fall of the night,” Sire Uzzah barked gruffly.

“What about Jadon? Isn’t he coming?” she asked as she slowly mounted the little step into the cab. She looked quizzically at Jadon as she pushed her way onto the seat.

“Nay, he must stay here until his kin come for him.” With that the driver cracked his whip and the tired brown nag jolted forward. Terrel saw Sire Uzzah’s hand as he put aside the crop, it was hard to tell in the dwindling light but she thought that he had a peculiar skin growth between his thumb and forefinger.

“Mister Uzzah ...” Terrel began.

“That is Sire Uzzah, I am no longer unmarried. You must address me as Sire or procreator,” he said in a humorless tone as he skillfully guided the horse over the overgrown trail.

“I’m sorry, Sire Uzzah, what language were you using to speak to Jadon? I don’t recognize it at all, is it some sort of Baltic dialect?” Terrel looked out into the wild countryside; the thrush grass and sea

blades grew in raucous clumps, clinging to the thin, rocky soil in tenuous patches. Great swaths of black, decayed seaweed rotted on the cold ground, evidence that there had been a considerable storm recently. It must have been a huge blow to throw seaweed up this far onto the road. The smell of fish and dampness was strong and it made Terrel’s lungs hurt a little.

“It was the language of the Cove,” he said in the same tone.

“I understand, that’s not what I meant. I was wondering what root language it was?” Terrel disliked this man more and more, and she was beginning to get cold and hungry.

“It is the language of he who moves beneath the still waters,” he intoned as if teaching a child about God.

“I see.” It sounded sarcastic to her own ears, but if Sire Uzzah caught the mordacity he didn’t show it.

“Do you?” was his simple and chilling answer. They road the rest of the way in uncomfortable silence. Terrel believed that the old man (not so old, she reminded herself) could watch her from the side of his head. His eyes were positioned in such a way that they sat back in his skull, the way a dog’s eyes do.

She felt out of place, shifted in time. The sea was to her right and she could hear it rolling, not even a mile away. The skies were overcast and the wind lamented its unknown sorrow over the damp land. Somewhere in the distance a lone bird gave a forlorn powerful cry. Sire Uzzah gave a startled jump and small cry himself. He whipped the horse into a trot.

“It will be dark soon and ye must be hungered and ready for slumber, so I will make haste for ye,” he said nervously. Terrel didn’t answer.

The little community of Settlers Cove was out of a history book. It looked much like the pictures that Terrel had seen of the first settlements that were established in the New World. The little town was in darkness and the only light came from the bloated moon that was just days from being full. The windows of the little houses glowed with the warm light of lamps and Terrel could smell the aroma of wood fires and cooking food.

The little knot in her stomach spasmed loudly, and Sire Uzzah looked over at her with one eyebrow raised. Instead of going down into the little valley along the shore of the Cove, Sire Uzzah maneu-

vered the squeaky carriage up a little pathway to the house that stood sentinel over the entire town. From this vantage, Terrel could see that the settlement was a small one; there were no more than two-dozen houses in the entire valley.

The largest of the buildings was one that stood right on the shore of the Cove itself. It was a massive barn-like structure, and part of it seemed to be built over the water. Terrel guessed it to be a shipbuilding house of some kind. Jadon had spoken of fishing, so perhaps it was a boat house.

“ We hath arrived, Missy.” Sire Urrah’s harsh voice scattered Terrel’s meditations. She turned to see the home of the widow Macabe. It was ancient, and looked to be some type of a French design. Its venerable timbers were worn with age and weathering, yet it stood as a strong and potent thing, almost alive. Standing in the light of an open doorway was the widow Macabe herself.

“ Greetings to ye, I was concerned that it grew so late, I was afeared that ye were lost. Come inside child, Nath can bring in the bags. I have supper hot on the stove for ye.” The old woman was kind and her smile was full and bright. She was not what Terrel expected. While she wore a long black dress in the style of the Quakers and a strident white bonnet, she was much younger than the primordial old crone that Terrel had pictured, only being fifty or so.

“ Thank you Widow Macabe, my name is Terrel Luduc ...” The widow took her by the elbow and led her inside as she quietly interrupted her.

“ I know who ye are child, remember we have not many outsiders visit the Cove.” From outside Sire Uzzah wrestled with the bags.

“ Zath lthpag Jadon nazza,” the old carriage man called to the widow.

“ Be so kind as to wait here my child, the Sire calls,” she said as she piloted her young guest into the entryway of the two-story house. Terrel could hear them speaking in hushed tones, Sire Uzzah’s voice harsh and excited, the widow’s calm and even. Her voice held a kind of power, almost a threatening quality. The language was the odd one that she had heard him speak to Jadon in.

Not understanding what was being said, Terrel noted the tone and inflection of the voices while she scanned the entryway with a reporter’s eye for detail. The entry to this large house was in much better repair than she had thought it would be from looking at the out-

side of the building. A large staircase lumbered up before the front door, it’s old wood polished to a translucent red glow. The hall wrapped around the sides of the grand stair and opened into rooms on both sides. To the left was what Terrel had thought was a sitting room; a large rocking chair was positioned looking out of the huge picture window. The floor was hard wood and Terrel could smell the scent of pine and rose oil. The fireplace was banked and glowing warmly as the coals burned in their last hour of life.

To the right Terrel saw a huge dining room; the large yet rustic table that crouched in the room’s center was made out of the same type of wood that the stair was constructed from. The dozen chairs that stood obediently around the table looked less comfortable than the rocking chair had, but Terrel could imagine a large family gathered around the table for family dinners, the smell of fresh baked bread in the air mingled with the scent of simmering clam chowder. The sound of children’s laughter floating over the adult’s conversation from outdoors. No matter what the culture, Terrel believed that some things were the same all over.

She noted that the door in the far wall of the dining area was open and warm light poured into the room from what was presumably the kitchen. Terrel moved around the stair to a door that was cleverly built into the staircase where the stair met the back wall. Terrel wouldn’t have even noticed it except that it was slightly ajar. The damp smell of seaweed and fish lurked in little wisps from the open crack as the chilled night air came in from the great ocean that lay beyond the Cove.

“ My dear child, come to supper.” The widow Macabe pulled her shawl from around her thin shoulders and hung it from a shaker peg set in a carved rack on the side of the stair. As she firmly closed the stairs’ hidden door, she took Terrel by the elbow and guided her away from the door into the lit doorway.

“ You do not want to venture in there, it is just an old cellar, all filled with damp and molded things that young outsiders would want nothing with.” A defiant cord in Terrel’s mind was struck and hummed ‘you want to bet?’ But Terrel just smiled and nodded as they went into the kitchen.

“ I fixed you some cod and wild rice, I hope you like the fare of

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the Cove, we are not much for rich and fancy foods.” The Widow set a plate of the baked fish and rice at the wooden table in the large kitchen. Terrel pulled off her jacket and hung it on the back of the chair as she sat down.

“I’m sure that it will be delicious. I’m so hungry that I could eat a horse!” Terrel looked around the warm, bright room. It was the very model of the modern kitchen—if you were from 1662. Not one contemporary kitchen appliance was in evidence. The stove was an antiquated cast iron affair that used split wood logs for fuel. There was no refrigerator, and nothing as luxurious as a toaster or can opener. Hundreds of jars lined the walls, preserved meats and fish, jellies, jams, marmalades, and the like.

“So missy, how long will ye be in the Cove?” the widow asked as she sat down in a chair before the stove.

“Not long I’m afraid, a day or two, just enough to get the facts that I need and some pictures, to go along with my article,” Terrel said around a mouthful of the fish. She was very hungry and the meal was good, though the fish tasted a bit odd, like some kind of spice she couldn’t identify.

“So ye will be gone afore Cultus-uber tide?” The widow turned her face toward the open fire chamber and forced in another fagot of wood. She seemed to just be making small talk, but when Terrel didn’t answer right away, she turned her gaze on the young reporter, and the cherry light from the fire reflected in her too blue eyes. It shone there, waiting in un-fathomed urgency. Terrel drank from the old jelly jar filled with water and swallowed hard.

“I don’t know, what is cultus-whatever tide and when is it?” Terrel had almost choked and felt a little foolish at having been eating like a hog.

“Cultus-uber tide is the time of the spawning, it is a special time for us and we observe it as a holiday. We be fisher folk ‘round these parts ye know.” The widow sat back in her chair and warmed her feet in the fire’s renewed glow. “It always comes in the month of October, always on the first night of the full moon.”

Terrel thought about this for awhile as she finished her fish. It made sense that the people of the Cove would celebrate the reproduction of the fish they relied on for food.

“The full moon is in what, two days? I should be gone by then, although I think that watching the celebration of the fish spawning would be fascinating.”

“I am sorry dear child, the celebration of Cultus-uber is not for outsider folk, it is time that we give abundant thanks to he who swims below still waters. Ye would not understand. It is much like the thanks giving day ye outsiders celebrate.” The widow stood and crossed to the sink and worked the handle of the water pump to fill the little basin. Adding a cake of soap, she then poured hot water from a kettle that steamed sluggishly on the stove.

“I see. Well perhaps you can tell me about it sometime, so that I can mention it in my article.” Terrel brought the widow her plate and glass. “Really widow, let me do that, I made the mess, I can wash my own dish.” She smiled at the little woman.

“Missy, I will excuse the lack of knowledge of our ways. If ye want to help, then sit ye self down and let do my work.” She said this with a twinkle in her eye, and Terrel didn’t know if she was being chastised or not. After she had washed and dried the plate, she sat down across from Terrel with a grunt. She leaned back in her chair and contemplated the outsider with her large eyes.

“If ye are to be about our Cove, then it has fallen to me to instruct ye of the ways that thou should behave,” she said after a long pause.

“That sounds fair.” Terrel took out a notepad and laid it on the table with her pen. She smiled at the old woman, although it was forced and she hoped that the widow didn’t notice.

“Firstly, ye may take images of our cloth, and of our homes, but ye may not capture the images of any of the townspeople.” Terrel wrinkled her brow, and the widow Macabe noted it.

“Ye keep the ways of the outside, we keep our own.”

“Yes of course, I’m sorry, but I was hoping to shoot a few pictures of the women working on their crafts ...” Terrel quit in mid-sentence.

“As I have said, no images of the people. Ye may speak to any adult, but not to the children of the Cove. If thou speak to a man, ye may not touch him, it is forbidden.”

“Yes, Jadon has told me, on our train ride here,” Terrel said in a rather rushed way. She was not accustomed to being so stifled, but the widow just looked at her and continued.

“Our ways may seem strange to thee, but if ye art to be among us, ye must keep our Covenants.” Her tone was kind, but beneath it was

a predatory quality that made Terrel think of certain religious leaders, that offered poisoned Kool-Aid with their hopes of paradise.

“Of course I will do as you ask.” Terrel almost said *Ye* instead of you, and she had to painfully stifle a giggle that welled up out of her. She changed the subject quickly, after pretending to have swallowed her tea wrong.

“I would like to ask you some questions about the Cove, if that would be all right?” She clicked her pen top and waited for the widow to answer.

“Aya, what is it ye want to ask? I thought that ye were to write about our weave craft and sewing, or has that changed?” Again she had that strange undercurrent of menace in her voice.

“I wanted to get some local background on the Cove and its people, to make the story more interesting. Like what religion do you practice? How old your community is, that sort of thing.”

“That is none of the concern of the outsiders, it is our business alone. If ye want to see and write of our cloth, that is fine, but leave the rest to us.” She seemed to be getting upset, and Terrel didn’t think that telling her that she had already interviewed Jadon, and that he had given her some of the Cove’s history, would be a prudent idea. So she just left it at that. She would go into town tomorrow and do some interviews, and she was sure that she would get others that would be more cooperative.

The rest of the short evening was spent interviewing the old woman, looking at her quilts, weavings, and needlepoint. Terrel didn’t usually pay much attention to this sort of thing, but she had to admit that the work was superb.

Just short of 8:00 p.m., the widow Macabe showed the reporter to her room. She left her an oil lamp and bid her good night. Terrel got ready for bed, for there was little else to do in a place that didn’t even have electricity, let alone anything like a T.V. or a radio. So she put on her oversized T-shirt and slipped between the covers (handmade, of course), and tried to get some sleep.

Some time passed, as Terrel thrashed and turned in the warm bed. She was not used to going to sleep so early; she was a night person and just couldn’t get comfortable enough to sleep. At 10:27, she sat up in the bed and with a heavy sigh, swung her feet over the edge of the bed.

She stretched and looked around at the items in the room. That

took about twenty-eight seconds. It was sparse and very plain. She thought awhile, as she sat there. It was her first real assignment, and the people of the Cove were little more than social morons. If she couldn’t get something worthwhile from this trip, the dragon queen would never send her out on any assignments ever again. She would be lucky if she wasn’t transferred to the mailroom, with the only (GASP!) men that worked at *La Femme*.

As she sat there, pondering what it would be like to handle packages all day, and have to put up with the men, who she herself had given hard times, too, she noted that she could hear voices, vary faint, coming from the room below her. She slipped on her 501’s and eased out of the room.

She crept out of the room and quietly made her way to the head of the stairs. Terrel carefully poked her head around the top of the banister and looked below. From her vantage point, she could look into the parlor. What she saw made her catch her breath.

Below in the parlor were about two dozen people. They were all from the Cove, judging from their clothing. Almost all of them were men; the few women in the room sat quietly beside the widow Macabe. They were conversing in hushed tones. Some of what they spoke was English, the rest of the time, they spoke that strange language that she had heard them use earlier. Jadon was there, his tall frame slumped as he hung his head, his felt hat in hand. He shifted from one foot to the other, and Terrel thought that all kids look the same when they get busted, no matter where you’re from.

An old man, one that Terrel had never seen before, was chastising Jadon in that strange tongue, until the Widow Macabe finally interceded. The old man turned to her and said something in the language of the Cove. Terrel could see the Widow, in three-quarter profile, her face scowled and the old man looked down. She answered him in English.

“We have lived among them for so long, it was just a matter of time afore they came among us. If we give them a little, perhaps that will placate them. Had we not agreed to allow one of them here now, we would have had to contend with them coming without our approval. She does not know us, even the things that Jadon has told her are not enough to threaten us. We will give the thing she has come

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for and she will leave. She herself hath said that she will not be here for Cultus-umber, she will leave afore then.” The old woman gazed around her, like a queen holding court.

“What about the great house? What if she wishes to see the great house?” one of the younger women asked.

“Why would she? She will be told that the great house is for our boats, from whence we fish. She will have no desire to see that, I am sure.” The Widow Macabe was so self sure that Terrel wondered what position this woman held in the community. She was also intrigued about the place they called the Great house. She remembered the large building that was constructed partially over the ocean; that had to be what they were talking about. Well, now this sounded like a story worth unearthing. They spoke for another twenty minutes or so, mostly in that strange language. Then the company rose and walked toward the stairs. Terrel shrunk back into the shadows; below the knot of villagers moved to the kitchen area. She held her breath and then heard the hidden door open, and the people proceed into the damp doorway. She heard the Widow speak to them, wishing them a safe night, then she closed the door and shuffled into the kitchen. That secret door must be a passageway to town.

Terrel would be careful, but truly what could they do to her? All these old sects were pacifists. She also wanted to know what this Cultus-UUb or whatever was. It sounded too intriguing to pass up. The mystery of the hidden door and the cryptic widow fueled her imagination. She made her way back to the little room and quietly got back in the bed. She tried not to get her hopes up too high; all the mystery was probably no more than an old moonshine still or just the paranoid circumspection of a fringe cult that no one would even care about. Still she drifted off to sleep with visions of the Pulitzer Prize dancing in her head.

The next day, the Widow Macabe woke Terrel early; the light on the eastern horizon had just barely begun to glow in the cold pre-dawn sky

“I let ye sleep a bit longer, for I thought that ye would be atired from the train ride,” the spry old thing said as she bustled around the kitchen. It was 5:52 in the morning and she looked as if she had been

up for hours. On the table was a big plate of fried fish and corn cakes. The thought of eating fish first thing in the morning turned Terrel’s stomach. She managed a weak smile as she sat down.

“I’ll just have a cup of coffee please.” The smell of the food did little to boost her wane appetite; she had never been a breakfast eater in the first place. She never really got hungry until the afternoon.

“Nonsense, ye have much to do today if ye wish to be on the train this eve, asides I do not have coffee, it is a foul and noxious drink. If ye like, I do have some mint tea.” She brought a cup of the tea to the table along with a plate and served Terrel a large helping of the oily fish and dry corn cakes.

Not wanting to offend the Widow, Terrel forced down the food and even managed to drink all the weak tea. It tasted more like grass clippings smelled; Celestial Seasonings this wasn’t. She finished her food and, after making some polite conversation, Terrel excused herself and took her leave of the old woman. The Widow seemed almost anxious for her to be on her way, and saw her to the door with a friendly, if not too subtle urgency.

“Talk to the women in the village, they know that ye are coming and they will have their goods ready for ye.” She waved at Terrel as she walked down the steep road that lead into the town half a mile away. When Terrel was safely on her way the Widow Macabe gazed thoughtfully after her, and then went quickly inside to make preparations for their most holy of holidays.

As Terrel walked down the path she checked her camera and made sure that she had her tape player and notepad. She entered the somber little village just before 7:00 a.m., but already the boats were out in the harbor and the women of the Cove were about their daily work. Terrel saw a few scrawny children as they went about their chores, presumably before school. They stopped in gape-mouthed fascination as Terrel walked by. She returned their gazes and smiled at them, as one often does to small children, but they just gaped blankly back at her. She felt that there were something wrong about the children, but she couldn’t put a finger on it.

She spent the morning speaking to the plain, dull women of the Cove, ans she marveled at them. It was like trying to interview people that had experienced a great shock.

“How long have you been doing this type of needle point?” she would ask. The vacant woman would look around her as if she might

be blasted out of existence if she said the wrong thing.

“Since I was small.” came the weak and unsure voice.

“Oh, I see, and how old were you then?” She would ask.

“Small.” It was like trying to interview idiots, or people who didn’t speak the same language. Some of the women were so unnerved, they just turned and walked quickly away from Terrel. She took two rolls of film, about one quarter of what she had expected to take. The pictures were good, the work, like that of the widow’s, was excellent. But the people were worse than she had imagined. She walked around the village for awhile longer trying to unobtrusively to snap some shots of the dreary buildings of the town.

She was meandering toward the main building, the one they called the great house, when Jadon came out of the small side door of the building. His head was downcast and he was hurrying along so fast that he walked right into Terrel.

“Whoa there big fella, you’re are going knock somebody down!” Terrel had to grab him by the arm to keep from being bowled over. He looked shocked and quickly pulled away as if he had come into contact with some dead, rotted corpse.

“Do not touch me. Please,” he added almost as an afterthought. He looked around wildly and when he didn’t see anyone he relaxed, but only just a little.

“What are you doing in such a big hurry?” Terrel wanted to make conversation; Jadon had been the only one in this strange little town that had spoken to her with any kind of openness.

“I am to be married tomorrow,” he blurted out; he didn’t seem at all happy, as one would expect for a new groom. He sounded miserable, and Terrel thought that it must be an arranged marriage.

“Your getting married on Cultus-thingie, that holiday.” She was instantly sorry she had said that, she sounded like the typical ugly American, ignorant of the culture and not even taking the time to learn the proper names for their important observances.

“When else would I get married?” he asked with such matter of factness that Terrel didn’t have a reply. The uncomfortable silence was broken quickly by Jadon’s father, the older man that she had seen the in the parlor the night before. He had emerged out of great house, and called roughly to Jadon.

“Jadon, ye know the law, ye are an asposued man and shall have no intercourse with others but ye intended!”

“We were only talking, I wasn’t going to go that far!” Terrel attempted to lighten the mood; this was the second time she had accidentally gotten Jadon into trouble. The old man wheeled on her, his face screwed up in a scowl. A look of barely concealed contempt crossed his face.

“Outsider Woman, the Widow Macabe has said that ye are to be treated here as a guest, that we are to show ye our womenfolk’s sewing, but mark well, ye shall not break our laws. Ye are not wanted here. Get what ye came for and leave.” He abruptly turned his back on the stunned woman and called after his humiliated son in that strange language.

When Terrel looked up, she saw that Jadon and his father had disappeared around the building. She had started to go after them when two big, bullish men came out of the great house and stood sentinel before the door. She felt like an American spy behind enemy lines. She smiled at them, and when they didn’t return her smile, she turned and walked away, perhaps a bit too quickly.

When she had walked a few minutes, she slowed. She noted that she was sweating and her heart was beating a little too fast. She calmed herself and took a deep breath.

She decided to return to the Widow’s house and ask her about the great house and about their religion once more. Now that she had gotten all she felt sure that she could get, it hurt nothing to ask. She began to walk back up the hill to the house; she had chosen to walk up the back side of the hill, through the tall grass. The wildflowers had died already in the first frost of the coming winter, and had left their bodies dried and well preserved.

She moved on up the hill, and stopped when she heard the laughter of children ahead. The young reporter quietly topped a small dune and saw them in the low gully below. There were about nine of them. She smiled as she watched them playing below. One of the girls, about eight, spied her at the top of the rise. The other children stopped their games and followed her gaze to Terrel. The woman smiled at them and they smiled back, heartened, Terrel picked her way down the little gully to the loose knot of children.

“Hello, my name is Terrel.” She was slightly out of breath. The children just giggled.

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“What are you children playing?” She had a young nephew and she often sat for him, so she knew how to speak to kids.

“We are gathering the reeds for Cultus UMBER. In six more turns I will be old enough to stand in the great hall like my Brother Jadon.” This came from a young boy, about ten years old. He had the same looks as his brother. Terrel thought that their mother must be one hot looking babe, because the handsome boys definitely didn’t get their good looks from their grouchy old father.

“Jadon is your brother?” The boy nodded as the other children went through another round of giggling.

“Well I know Jadon, we talked on the train yesterday.” She looked at the children carefully, she again noted that there was something wrong about them, but again it eluded her. One of the little girls, no more than four, handed Terrel a handful of dried flowers. They were much the worse for ware, but Terrel was very touched by the gesture.

“What’s your name?” Terrel knelt and took the flower, bringing herself down to the little girl’s size. The blond youngster blushed and hid her face behind her smallish hands.

“Her name is Elud.” Again Jadon’s brother spoke; he had become the spokesmen for the group.

“I am Koruth.” He then named off all the other children. Terrel listened attentively. She was raised a Catholic and had been forced to go to Catholic school until she was 15. She knew the Bible as well as the next gal, but she had never heard any of the names of the children in anything she remembered. Didn’t these Bible cults take their names right from the Bible? Weren’t there supposed to be a hundred Sara’s and Joshua’s? Her musing was broken by the giggles of the children.

“How old are you Elud? Do you know when your birthday is?” She wanted to get the little girl to speak to her.

“I am four turns old. Don’t you know when you were born?” She asked with innocent eyes, bright, clear blue, filled with awe.

“Of course I do, I was born November 15, 1962.” Terrel spoke slowly. The children giggled again, as if sharing an inside joke. Terrel remembered what it was like to be young, but her memory didn’t stretch far enough back to remember the secret language of the children.

“No, you were not. You are being foolish.” Elud giggled harder,

Terrel didn’t know what game they were playing.

“Yes I was, when were you born?” Terrel asked again.

“Same as you, you are playing a game with us.” The little imp seemed delighted that a grownup was playing with them. They all were laughing now, even Terrel. She sat down in the sand perplexed as the children laughed and proclaimed that Terrel was born on November 15. They chanted 15! 15! Suddenly their revelry was shattered by the booming voice of the Widow Macabe.

“Children! Ye are acting as fools! What are ye about?” The Widow stood at the top of the hill, her dark shawl flapping in the cold October wind. She looked like a great, black raven, bony and shrill.

“We were gathering reeds for tomorrow, Widow Macabe.” Koruth said, head downcast, in a tiny voice. Terrel grimaced at the old bag. The boys, first Jadon and now his diminutive brother, seemed always to be in trouble because of her.

“Well get back to ye chores! Those reeds are not going to gather themselves.” The old woman glared down at Terrel.

“Don’t blame the children Widow, it was my fault, I stopped them in their chores, I ...” The black bird rudely cut in.

“Sire Uzzah is awaiting ye, the train leaves on the hour.” She turned away; the Widow didn’t leave any room for compromise. Terrel turned back and waved to the children, who just looked away, embarrassed, and afraid. Terrel didn’t blame them, she felt the same way.

When she reached the top of the hill, the Widow was standing with the repulsive old Uzzah, her bags having been packed and loaded on the wagon for her. The widow smiled at her and handed her a small basket.

“Here child, I prepared ye a small dinner, I know that the train does not provide ye with good food, goodbye to ye, be safe.” With that she turned and walked into the house. Terrel felt that she had been dismissed from the presence of the Pope.

Sire Uzzah roughly told her to get into the wagon, and once in, cracked his whip and sent the horses into a full gallop. He neither spoke nor looked at Terrel during the ride to the station, and once there, rudely threw her bag to the ground, and without a word turned the wagon around and left.

Terrel waited for a little over an hour and a half before the train slowly pulled into the station. The conductor helped her with her bags, and when he took her ticket, she told him that she would not be going

home right away, instead, she would spend the night at Clayton, She would rent a car in the morning and visit the little Cove, under the cover of darkness. She had finally figured out what bothered her about the children. They all seemed to be in the same age groups. All either two, or six, or ten, like that; she also hadn't seen one infant. A few youngsters about two, but none younger. She wanted to find out what all the fuss was about, and about the covert door of the Widow Macabe.

The accommodations at the Clayton Seaside Inn were clean and fairly comfortable. Terrel slept well that night and in the morning went into the small downtown of the little village. The people here were a vast improvement over the freakish folk of the Cove. They were typical New Englanders and were very amiable and friendly. She spent the forenoon securing a car. It was not an easy task, but she was at last able to obtain an old manual pickup truck. She hadn't driven a shift in many years, and hoped that it would come back to her. After an embarrassing incident involving a woman, a baby carriage, and the truck, she got the gearshift under control.

Terrel had lunch at a local restaurant, called Mo's Clams N' things. She didn't hold much hope for such an establishment, but she noted that there were many local folk having lunch. She thought that she might get some information about the Cove, from idle tongues.

Her lunch was a mixed blessing, and a contradiction. She had entered the eatery with the hopes of getting information, and a bad lunch. However, what she got was a good lunch and no information. The people were open and hospitable until she had mentioned the Cove. Then they treated her like a drunk passing gas at a wedding banquet. She spent the remainder of the day looking at the little shops and galleries that the tourists love to frequent.

At about 4:30, she drove to the old sea road that connected the sea coast towns. Settlers Cove was about 40 miles up the road. She stopped at the local Tru Value and picked up a flashlight. Then, with her bags lying on the seat, she drove up the antique dirt road. The drive was badly in need of repair; she could see that trucks and animal drawn carts must be the only ones to use it. She was still not used to the truck, especially the gearshift, and the bumpy road made her slow even further. She finally crested the rise that overlooked the Cove just before sundown.

She killed the lights; she didn't want to alert the people of the

Cove. She doubted that anyone would have been watching, for it was apparent that very few, if any, cars ever made it into the Cove, but she might have been seen accidentally. About two hundred yards below her sat the Widow Macabe's house. It looked somehow swollen and potent in the deepening twilight. Terrel got out of the car and walked to the edge of the rise. As she studied the valley that spread out below her, she heard singing. It was a weird, undulating noise that brought chills to her, as if they were fingernails on a chalkboard. Then she saw figures carrying torches exit from the great house in town. They were too far away to really see well, but to Terrel, they didn't seem to have any clothes on!

The source of the singing was not coming from there, but seemed closer. Although every fourth and sixth stanza of the song was answered by a deep, call of 'AHIEE!' from the group at the great house.

Terrel's eyes strained in the wane light; then abruptly light spilled out of the front door of the Widows house, at the same time the singing became louder. A procession of the women from town exited the house, carrying reeds and sea grass in large clumps, waving them over their heads in time with the strange liturgy they chanted. At the rear of the panoply was a massive litter, born by several of the larger women. It was enclosed in gauzy netting. The women were dressed in dark robes and walked in darkness. Only the ominous call from the men below guided them.

The front door of the house was left open and Terrel watched the procession until it reached the great house, where all the people entered. She waited for several long minutes, unsure of what to do next. She wanted to go into town and watch the ritual through the window of the great house, but she wasn't sure that it even had a window; she didn't remember seeing one. Instead she opted to enter the Widow's house; if she were caught she would say that she had forgotten a cassette with some important notes on it.

Gingerly picking her way down the slopes of the rise Terrel darted to the front door. She carefully looked around, and when she was satisfied that no one was about, she entered the house. The room smelled funny, as if incense made of fish and sea reed had been burned here. She quickly made her way into the hall by the stair. She had a

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hard time finding the secret door, and had she not known about it, she would have never found it. As it was she spent almost ten minutes locating it.

The door opened gently, once the counterweight was discovered. Terrel wondered why a primitive religion would invent or use such a deceptive and hidden thing as a secret door. The doorway was framed in softly glowing light from beyond, but Terrel took out her own flashlight, just in case. Old, moisture-swollen stairs rambled down into the chamber below. It smelled of low tide and had an uncomfortable coldness to it as well. The reporter moved down the stairs, holding on to the slimy handrail with her free hand. She reached the bottom after about fifteen steps and found that she had entered a natural cave that was lit by some odd natural phosphorescent substance that clung on the walls.

The floor was covered with many footprints, too numerous to see any one clearly. They lead into two smaller side tunnels. One went to the south, the other east. Terrel went to the east tunnel and listened, and, in the distance, she could hear the sound of the surf. She then listened at the other tunnel and found that she could faintly hear the sound of chanting. She moved down toward the south.

The tunnel was damp and in some places water had pooled ankle deep. As she drew closer to the source of the chanting, she noted that she was also moving gradually downward. Ahead, in the subdued light, she could see the flickering of torchlight. She slowed and advanced with wariness. The sound of water echoed dimly splashing, as if she had come on a swimming pool. She moved low to the ground and peeked around the corner. The passage opened into a large room, behind a low pile of wood boxes. She had come to the great house, and what she saw almost made her cry out! It took all she had to remain silent; she had no wish to be discovered now! She almost didn't believe what she saw below her in the great house, it was if someone had played an elaborate and cunning practical joke on her.

The entire interior of the great house was a single large room, and where the floor should have been, there was water, like the massive swimming pool Terrel had thought that she heard earlier. A ten-foot wood platform was built into all the walls, right at the water level when

it was high tide. The chamber was illuminated by the torches the men had held. This, however was not what had Terrel so afraid and baffled.

In the pool, the men swam, naked, and their backs and legs were a pale green color, almost white, and from their backs bristled small, vestigial spines, like de-evolved fins. The older men had webbed feet and hands, and the spines were far more prominent. On the left dock were the women, dressed in blue robes, but likewise naked beneath.

At the rear of the chamber, just a few dozen yards from where Terrel was concealed, was a statue of some horrible sea creature. It had the head of a man, but the body was covered in scales and was dolphin-like. Great clawed fins protruded from the thing, and though the workmanship was crude, it appeared to be carved out of a single piece of gray coral.

Terrel's fascination grew, as did her revulsion, when she saw the Widow Macabe brought on her litter before the image of the beast. She was naked from the waist up; her torso was distended, as though she had swallowed an enormous balloon. She wore a white kilt with odd designs sewn on it. They reminded Terrel of Egyptian hieroglyphics. She was attended by several old women, far past the age of child bearing. They knelt in supplication to the idol, and kept chanting the word, Dagon! Dagon! Dagon!

The Widow Macabe let out a shrill cry and Terrel could see that she was in pain. Sweat stood out on her brow, and she grimaced as her huge belly undulated and contracted. The people stopped, and the men in the water swam quietly before the woman on the litter, and formed a loose line. The men, who were just a few feet away from Terrel, seemed mesmerized or stoned. Terrel let out a gasp as she saw Jadon, toward the back of the line; he too seemed to be under the spell of the great house. Terrel's attention was ripped away from Jadon when she heard the Widow scream out again. Terrel had never heard a shriek like that, except when her sister gave birth to her nephew.

When she looked over at the widow, she saw that her attendants had pulled her down, and propped her legs up, on the foot of the altar. The first attendant furiously working something between her legs, under her kilt, then with a sickening, sucking, sound, the widow gave out a great cry and the nurse maid pulled free a round object, about eight inches across. It was pale white, and translucent. It was covered with a bit of blood and mucus. The old crone held it up before the idol that the people called Dagon, then rose and elevated the thing to the

congregation. It was met with a collective gasp. Terrel's mind was reeling. It looked like an egg, a giant fish egg or some corrupt insect larva. But Terrel was not prepared for what happened next.

The old woman walked over to the first of the old men, bobbing in the water. He took the "egg" reverently from her, as if he were receiving communion. Then he swam off a little ways and held the thing in his webbed hands. His eyes rolled up in the back of his head, and he stretched out his neck. His mouth opened and he brought the thing close. A long, snake-like tongue flickered out, over the surface of the egg, and gently cleaned the surface. Terrel watched in mute fascination and revulsion as his jaws unhinged and the skin of his face became impossibly elastic. He slowly and methodically swallowed the egg. The flesh of his neck bulged and his face turned bright red. Terrel had to turn away as he finally swallowed the thing completely. She noted, just before she turned away, that the next attendant had removed another egg from the cursed womb of the monster she had called the Widow Macabe.

Tears ran down Terrel's face and she had to swallow hard several times to keep from spraying her lunch of crab cakes and beer all over the boxes that she had been hiding behind. Her head swam and the taste of bile was strong in her mouth. She hung her head low and counted to ten, several times. When she felt the sickness pass, she again ventured a look over the boxes.

Several of the men had already ingested the eggs, and slowly swam to the women who sat on the platform, feet dangling in the water. She watched in growing dread as one of the men swam up to who was presumably was his wife. He nestled his face between her legs, which she spread to receive him. Terrel did then shriek as she saw the man regurgitate the egg, his neck and jaw bulging. The egg passed from his mouth into her body, through an orifice that was not part of a human anatomy. The organ that the egg passed into was like a tentacled worm; it took the egg, and pushed it into the canal, folding itself inward as the egg passed into the body. The woman shuddered and slipped off her robe. She was also almost green from the waist down, and, horribly, she had no breasts. She eased into the water with her husband and they embraced.

Terrel realized that she had screamed, and she looked around wildly. She had gone unnoticed, among the other noises that filled the room. She began to understand what was going on. This was the

spawning. The "eggs" came from the Widow. She didn't know why, she hadn't figured that part out yet. But the men must have to swallow them to fertilize them, and then the women must carry them to term. It made perfect, chilling, insane sense. She sat down hard on the wet floor. That's what Jadon meant when he said that he was going to be married tonight.

Another thought occurred to her, the children. That's why the children thought that she was being silly. All their birthdays will be at the same time. And that's why all the children are grouped in the same age groups. They are all born in what? Litters? Her mind was swimming with what she had just seen. She looked down at herself. Trying to figure out what it must be like, to give birth like that—then she remembered her camera hanging around her neck.

Nobody would believe her without pictures. She seized the camera and got to her knees and poked her head up, over the boxes. Standing right on the other side was a group of men, their wet, naked, skin shining in the dancing firelight. Terrel fell back and screamed; she tried to scurry back but slimy, powerful hands caught her and hauled her out in front of the idol. The Widow Macabe had just given birth to the last of the eggs. She smiled at Terrel, who thrashed against the iron strength of the men who held her.

"It is so nice that ye have waited to show ye self, Terrel. I had hoped to be done, so that I could deal with ye. I hope that ye enjoyed our little holiday." The widow sat up, her skin hung like old material about her waist. A steady trickle of blood turned her white kilt crimson.

"What are you going to do to me? You inhuman bitch!" Terrel was terrified; she had visions of being eaten alive.

"On the contrary Terrel my dear, I am the only one here that is human." A chuckle ran through the congregation. "You see, these people need to use humans to reproduce. You have heard the legends of the Mermaid. Well these people are the reason." A spasm of pain passed through her and a bit of bloody foam issued from her mouth.

"I don't have much time left. This is my ninth spawning and as I thought, this is my last." She coughed up more blood and the color went out of her face.

"What do you want of me?" Her voice was weak and Terrel had a

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lump of ice sitting in her stomach.

“Hadn’t you guessed? You are to be the new Spawn mother. It is a great honor, to serve the God Dagon.” She again was wracked with convulsions. Her insides were torn apart from the spawning.

“It’s really not so bad, ye are the leader of the Cove, once ye are taken by the God.”

“I’ll never do it, I’ll kill myself first!” Terrel thrashed against the hold of the men and though her fight was brave, she was unable to free herself from their iron grip.

“Ye still don’t understand, child, ye have no say, The human that was once this body is no more.” With a final trembling gasp, the Widow pitched forward and came to rest on the floor before the altar of the evil Deity. Terrel watched in morbid horror as the skull of the old witch split open and fell away. A long, pale worm-like thing, bloated and pulsating; wriggled free of the impediment of the broken bones.

The worm was just over a foot long, and had hooks that ringed what presumably was the thing’s mouth. Its body glistened from the thick, milky mucus that covered it. No trace of blood or brain matter was evident in the now empty skull. Sire Uzzah gracefully pulled himself out of the water and bent, reverently picking up the sickening thing.

He was naked and held the worm before the altar. Terrel now saw that he had no human genitals, and his skin was smooth and gray where he should be a man. Sire Uzzah turned on the women and barked an order in the strange language that these abominations spoke. The two men who were holding Terrel roughly wrestled her to the ground and pinned her beneath their weight.

One of the old hags that had assisted the birthing bent and, with clawed hands that were impossibly strong, wrenched Terrel’s mouth open. Terrel screamed as she saw what it was that they were about to do. The scream was long and piercing, but turned into a gagging, choking, sound as Sire Uzzah forced the worm into her opened mouth. The vile creature wiggled down into her retching throat, and burrowed into her sinuses. She shuddered and gasped in agony, and then her body went limp. The men gently lifted her body to the palanquin and propped her amidst the handmade pillows.

The body of the woman looked dead; she didn’t breath and her

hair hung in limp curls about her ashen face. Then her head began to jerk spasmodically, as if there were some living thing tearing within the corpse’s skull, which of course there was. Slowly, with much anticipated watching, the life flowed back into the body of the young woman, who gracefully lifted her head and ran an approving hand over her body.

“Aye, this body will do well for Ye.” She smiled and turned to the image of the ancient Sea God. The crowd of villagers shouted “Hail Dagon! Lord of the Sea! Hail Widow Macabe! Mother of Clears Deep!”

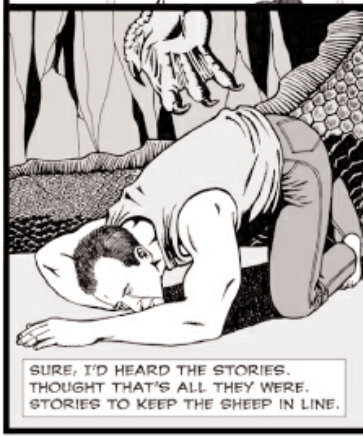
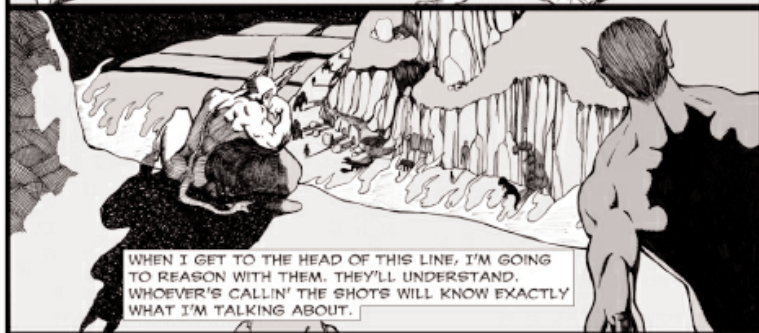
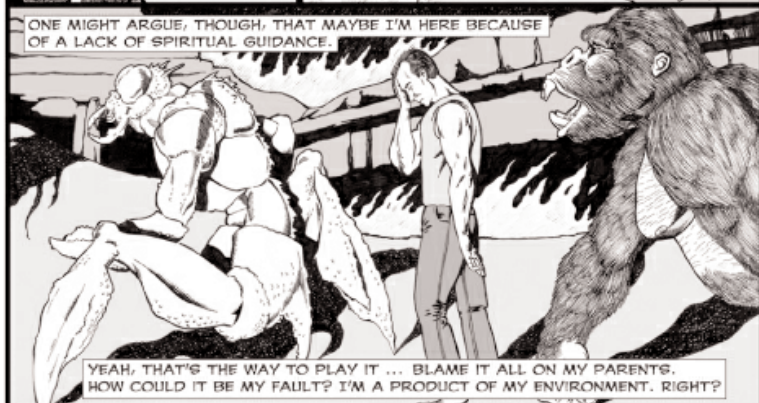


PICTURED: *Cthulhu* by Peri Charlifu. [Click for larger image](#)

Life

by Robert Elrod

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Kan, at which lovers of anime gather once a year to meet industry professionals and share their favorite stories.

How is anime different from the American concept of cartoons, and how is manga different from American comic books?

Roger Morse: What we think of as cartoons is generally for children; anime treats animation as a medium to tell stories, whether they're for adults or kids or teenagers, men, women, whatever. It goes the wide spectrum. Other than that, it's pretty much the same techniques. It's pretty much the same difference [between manga and comics]. Comic books, for the most part, they're mostly just for superheroes, although they're getting away from that. It is still looked on as a children's, or at least a teenager's, medium. Over in Japan, they have different comic books to target different audiences, and some of those stories end up being animated. There are comics for boys, girls ... some that are targeted at housewives, some that are targeted at professionals, sometimes just your general *salaryman* ... it goes all over the place. You'd find about as wide of a range of manga in Japan as you would walking into your average magazine store, seeing different targeted publications.

Rebecca Norman: The biggest differences are in scale and scope—scale in that anime frequently dives into stories with huge story arcs of dozens or even hundreds of episodes, within which they may have many sub-stories. There can be casts of dozens of primary characters interacting with each other. In scope it differs since many more mature themes are treated than in cartoons. Not necessarily mature as in “adult movies” the way that term is used in the US, but in the sense that the themes can deal with tremendously difficult universal emotional struggles, with how you react when your divorced parents marry someone else, what you do when your family dies in front of you, what you do when another kid at school

makes it their life goal to look innocent and terribly tortured by you so that everyone's got it out for you. Manga and anime both have these qualities—and they tend to treat them in a more serious way. While superhero comics here in the States subject their heroes to all sorts of torture, very few of them do more than having the hero react with “Well, I must pull myself up by my bootstraps, and this offense shall energize me to become the person who must save the world!” Meanwhile, over in the anime frame, a little cyborg girl is looking out at a blue sky floating lazily by as she runs a coffee shop no one ever visits, and thinking about why her creator put her in a coffee house three hundred miles from nowhere, and she thinks she might go outside and enjoy the rain. And three episodes later we see a parcel delivered from her creator, and it's a tiny silver coffee grinder, and she thinks about how this thing is a created machine just as she is, and the wind blows softly through the rushes. Manga and anime can be obvious, garish, and gaudy as any cartoon—they also have the freedom to be as thoughtful as a poem or a Dostoevsky novel.

In fan circles, there is a “Sub vs. Dub” debate. What is that?

Roger Morse: One of the things that has been known to really irk some of the hardcore fans is the fact that the English voice acting seems half-done, it seems like they're not putting the effort into it ... It just doesn't hold up to what the Japanese do. The Japanese, when they record their stuff, it's almost like an old radio drama. You have everybody in the studio, they can interact with each other, they can work off of each other. Even the professional animation here in America, generally the actors do not see each other when they're recording. It depends on the studio, but for the most part, there may be one or two of the actors recording at the same time, but that's about it. There was somebody talking about *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*. The two main characters were recorded on separate coasts. It takes a great actor to pull that kind of thing off

when there's no one else to interact with. So, if you've got somebody who's not quite a professional voice actor, it's just going to sound flat. The other thing is, some people do not want to read subtitles, they feel it takes away from actually watching the animation ... so it's a mediocre dubbing job, but they don't have to keep looking at the subtitles, looking at the animation, looking at the subtitles ... Generally American audiences do not like subtitles at all. If nothing else, [I know this from] the reaction that I heard when watching *Brotherhood of the Wolf* and *Iron Monkey*, when they came into general release. The second the subtitles hit the screen, the crowd groaned.

But some people feel [it comes down to] whether it's that the Japanese voice actors do a better job and are closer to the original vision of the character, or whether you want to go for accessibility. It's a toss-up.

Any other comments about anime/manga you feel should be recorded for posterity?

Rebecca Norman: I've always loved stories, and that's why I love anime and manga—there are thousands of new stories here to discover, whether they're live, painted, or drawn. There's another world to step into.

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loves grand animation and music with a love of nature and many touches upon the most traditional Japanese culture. After that it gets difficult because there are a lot of others that I love for different reasons and that would be good for different people depending on their personalities. I also really enjoy the art style and comedy of *Trigun*, the goofiness of *Slayers*, the beauty of *Vampire Hunter D*, the girl's baseball team story of *Princess 9*, and so forth.

What anime do you enjoy? Let us know on our [discussion boards!](#)

Contributors' Bios

Leslie Aguillard

Leslie sees the world a little differently and as an only child spent a great deal of time in creative pursuits for companionship and entertainment. Leslie wrote her first story at the age of six and since then has published poetry and articles and other short pieces of fiction. Her education and career has been primarily in the arts, though for the last twelve years she has worked as a registered nurse. A lifelong love of science fiction, fantasy and horror, especially with humor or insight that may give the reader or viewer options or broader understanding, is what Leslie prefers. In this metaphoric tale, "Bill and the Night," we have some who have made a choice, changed their lives fundamentally, demanding that quality take precedence over quantity, or perhaps peace and harmony over the vapid rigors of corporate careers. You can't make assumptions based on appearances either way ... well, you can, but you might be quite wrong.

Peri Charlifu

Peri Charlifu was born in 1962. He makes his living as a freelance potter, sculptor, and graphic artist in Denver, Colorado. He attended Metro State College in Denver and studied Fine Art and Abnormal Psychology. He has written several dissertation papers on Parapsychology, the Occult, and Religion.

He is a practicing Greek Orthodox and has studied faith and the occult from a psychological and religious standpoint. He has incorporated these studies into his writing. Peri is inspired by the works of H.P. Lovecraft and others of his contemporaries, including Poe, as well as many of the modern masters of the genre. Much of his work reflects the hidden, unexplained terrors in our society. Not the everyday horrors, but the unseen and unexplained. Other of his work deals with the Cthulhu mythos, as written by Lovecraft—he has taken some of the Cthulhu entities and put them in a modern setting, and, he hopes, with his own twist. The third theme of Peri's horror work is based on the contention that supernatural or paranormal creatures exist in our reality. Peri has tried to integrate these creatures in believable narratives.

Michael Connolly

Michael Connolly lives in the Nambucca Valley on the Eastern Coast of Australia, illustrating for various publications there and overseas. He finds inspiration in mythology, technological innovation, as well as human feeble-

ness and bufoonery, which go well together. Publishing credits include *Tabula Rasa*, *Fables and Reflections*, *Antipodean-sf*, among others. Contact at mconnolly@yahoo.com or <http://antipodean-sf.com>.

Robert Elrod

It was obvious from the beginning that something wasn't quite right with Robert. He would rather spend his time reading and drawing than playing sports and learning to hurt others like normal children do. Instead he wiled away the hours channeling the spirits of less intelligent creatures and communing with paper dolls. The voices claim that he enjoys many forms of music, all sorts of movies and classic television. He believes that claymation monsters are real and that Ray Harryhausen is a god trapped in human form. Robert makes his living as a graphic designer and shares his dwelling with his mate, Teri, and their two male cubs, Rob and Matt. Their intention is to live happily ever after.

Anita Harkess

Anita Harkess was born and raised in Colorado, although she has never lived in Evergreen. She holds a B.A. in English Writing from the University of Colorado at Denver, where she is proud to have been a student of *Penumbra* contributor Colleen Donnelly. Anita would like to thank Ursula K. Le Guin, T.H. White, and the originators of the Arthurian legends for giving her the fantastic creatures in "The Student's Nightmare."

Stan Yan

Stan Yan is a Denver-based, self-published comic artist whose credits include "Only Chaos," "OC2: Eugene the Queen," and "The On-Campus Crusader"—all available through www.squidworks.com, where Stan exerts his dictatorial power over his creative peers. Stan has also notably contributed cover and story work to "Potlatch: Comics to Benefit the CBLDF." Currently, while he's not whoring himself out to the corporate world, he's working on a new series entitled, "The Wang."