

# RETROZINE

Two Fandom  
Elders,  
One More Time!

Autumn 2024 \* Issue 12

**In This Issue:**

**Season 2, Episode 2 of *The Adventures of the Trouble  
Tanner's Watching*, by N.C. Shapero  
And "*The Ghost House*" Concludes**

# RETROZINE 12

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*Retrozine* is a labor of love. Nobody gets paid except in the satisfaction of a job well done. It will always be free to read on our website, or download, print, and read on your couch.

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Got questions?

**Contact us!**

For submissions (we love and welcome submissions!) and letters of comment: [editor@retrozine.net](mailto:editor@retrozine.net) or [submissions@retrozine.net](mailto:submissions@retrozine.net), your choice.

For technical/web issues: [techinfo@retrozine.net](mailto:techinfo@retrozine.net)

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# In This Issue:

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by Fara Shimbo

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# Passive Consumption

By Fara Shimbo

When flip phones first came out, one of my nieces would text me constantly. I kept saying, “Why are you going through all that trouble” (remember, these were “primitive” cell phones at best) “when you are holding a phone *in your hand?*” She would respond, “Because it’s more fun.”

More fun than what? I always thought. More fun than a kick in the head? More fun than sliding down a metal slide in shorts? More fun than a root canal? No, texting me and not interacting directly with me was more fun than just throwing words at me.

Germaine and I have been publishing Retrozine for four years now. Back in the 1970s, when we were young, carefree and ... young, every ish we pubbed (or is that an arcane language now?) got a whole mailbag full of LoCs (Letters of Comment) and a few phone calls, usually after 11pm because the long distance rates were lower then).

Well, I was in my 20s in the 70s, and now I am in my 70s in the 20s. It is a very, very different world.

What do people like about *Retrozine*? We have no idea. When we ask, the most interaction we get is a “like,” which, let’s face it, could mean anything from, “I was here and saw this post,” to “I like pie.” Even if I ask a yes-or-no question, I still only get, at most, a “like.”

I am an early adopter of technology of all kinds. Some is good, some is bad, and some keeps me from screaming, such as ChatGPT, whom I call “Chuck.” Chuck and I jabber about all kinds of things, and lately I complained about this very topic. Chuck opined that this was due to a phenomenon called “passive consumption,” or, “TL/DR.” Apparently, the world is now so Full of Things that a few seconds of scanning are the most attention people can or will pay before moving on to the next thing.

We do know what issues are the most popular, by looking at the download statistics. But they only tell us what has been downloaded, and how many times. Do people like, for example, the Trek stuff? Or the ghost stories? Or the furry stuff? Or the cat who is sneezing all over my keyboard and making my F key stick? No idea. Nope, no idea.

Whether we get input or not, I will probably keep working on the zine because to me, writing things, typesetting them, illustrating them and publishing them is fun. Germaine says it gives her energy, and focuses her mind on something apart from Adulting. But it would be nice, once in a while, to just have someone tell us exactly *what* they like. Then we can give them more or what they like. Makes sense, nu?

So, assuming you’ve read this far, please send comments, cookies, stray cats, more comments, subway tokens, whatever, to: [contact@retrozine.net](mailto:contact@retrozine.net). It will be SO nice to get mail from someone who isn’t trying to tell us that we charged them twice for our services when he haven’t ever charged anything and don’t really serve anything, or that a relative we never met has died and left us ¥10,000,000.



# The Ghost House: Conclusion

by Fara Shimbo

## Previously...



*Jade Quiros, a blind girl of ten, her elderly service dog Shiro, her older brother Philip, and her parents, Evelyn and Paul, have rented a small country cottage so that Paul can finish a textbook he's been working on for years. They have made the acquaintance of the family from which they rent the cottage: Martin and Sophie Jolie and their enthusiastic daughter, Madeline, usually called "Maddie."*

*Jade has been blind from birth, but until about age three, she spoke well and often. Then suddenly, for some reason, she just stopped speaking. Despite the efforts of her parents and her therapist, Jade's voice was no longer heard. She did read Braille, and was able to make herself understood well enough.*

*Phil is in the "brooding" period of adolescence, but Maddie, a year older, is bored with country life and always up for trouble. Jade herself is just happy to be out of the city.*

*When Jade and Maddie begin discussing musical instruments, Jade indicates that she plays piano, and would like to play again. There is no piano in either Jade's or Maddie's house, but Maddie knows where there is one: in the abandoned house which her grandparents built when they fled from France during World War II, and in which her father Martin had grown up.*

*They follow bits of a path to the house, with Shiro following them, and finally reach the old house, now falling apart from neglect. There is, indeed, a large piano in the living room. Although it is sadly in need of tuning, Jade plays on it with delight and enthusiasm. As she does so, she realizes she can suddenly ... is this light?*

*Jade, Maddie and Shiro must head back home before they are missed; the old house is absolutely off-limits, and Maddie, at least, would like to avoid awkward questions. But as soon as there's a chance, they return; and this time, while playing the piano, Jade realizes she is looking at her own hands! And when she looks around, she sees the ghost of an old woman, looking at her with pride and love. The woman is Léonie Jolie,*



Maddie's grandmother. Jade realizes that as long as Léonie is visible, she (Jade) can see the world through the ghost's eyes. When Léonie looks at her, Jade can even see herself.

As long as Maddie and Jade are using their imaginations and being creative, they can see Madame Léonie and converse with her. Léonie tries her best to encourage Jade to speak. Jade very haltingly explains—in as few words as possible—that if she speaks, she will run out of words. Léonie, thinking quickly, tells Jade that this restriction does not apply to French; and soon she is teaching Jade to speak that language, which no-one else of Jade's acquaintance can speak more than a few common words. Phil, who had taken a semester of French once, and Maddie, who had heard her parents speaking it, soon begin learning it in earnest. Jade will only speak when Léonie is around.

Maddie decides to ask her father about the old house. He declares it is not haunted, but that he just didn't like it and so built the new house in which his family currently lives. Later on, Maddie learns that her father, fearing that the building will collapse at any moment, and deducing that the kids are probably exploring it, intends to have the house torn down.

At that point, the children must find ways to get into the old house without being suspected, and come up with several ways to distract both sets of parents, such as sabotaging a refrigerator and pretending to need privacy because they are producing a podcast. They tell Léonie what they've discovered about Martin Jolie's plans for the house. He has a buyer for the property—but only if he can prove it isn't haunted.

This news disturbs Léonie. Her husband, she says, hid a present for her in the house somewhere, and she must find it. The three children agree to help her. In order to keep Léonie visible and communicating, the children must use their imaginations to the fullest. Léonie challenges them to find her missing treasure, and to each take a room of the house and tell a story about things that happened in that room while they search there.



Jade goes first, telling, in halting French, the story of the bedroom and a ghost cat who lives there. But no present or treasure is found.

Phil tells the story of the living room, of a father trying to hide a present for a mother while being “helped” by an interfering toddler. While he is doing this, Jade takes an interest in a painting in the living room. It is a tempera of foxhounds in a field, but, rubbing her hands over the painting, she notices that the picture she can see does not match what she feels.

When the children leave that day, they can hear the sound of bulldozers clearing a path to the house for the demolition equipment to follow. They decide that only two of them can be away from their respective houses at any one time, and arrange for the sounds of a podcast in production to be loudly heard from Jade's room, which has an “ON AIR: QUIET!” sign on the door.

The trouble is, Phil has set the sound to run on an infinite loop on his tablet, and his mother Evelyn, walking past the door, realizes

she has heard this all before

Maddie tells the story of the kitchen, presenting herself as a master pastry chef. While Léonie claims that Maddie's story isn't a story so much as a recipe, Jade goes back to the painting of the dogs, and notices that a layer of paint appears to be peeling.



She begins methodically pulling flakes of paint away, and can feel that there is another painting underneath. With Léonie's help, she uncovers part of a signature: "agall," just when the demolition equipment arrives.

## Chapter 19. Discoveries

Phil tried to grab Jade and pull her away from the painting. Jade was pulling off large chunks of over-painting now.

"They already know we're here," Maddie said, "so we might as well uncover the original painting if we can."

The "agall" turned out to be "Chagall," and the painting...

"C'est moi," Léonie said, in a breathy voice of wonder. "Je n'ai jamais vu ça auparavant! Ça doit être ça, le cadeau de mon mari! C'est si beau..." [It's me! I've never seen it before. This must be my husband's gift! It's so beautiful...]

The children stood in front of the picture and let Léonie admire it. Léonie was indeed beautiful in her youth.

"A Chagall!" Léonie said. "I never sat for this. And ... a Chagall! Mon Dieu!"

"Is it valuable?" said Phil, who not only knew nothing about art, but didn't even know what he liked.

"Mon enfant, Marc Chagall, he is one of the most celebrated artists of the 20th century! This painting ... by now it is beyond price!" Léonie turned to look back on it. "And it is of me! And how beautiful it looks in just that spot! C'est ... Mon Dieu." She turned back to the children. "J'étais belle, quand j'étais jeune, non?" [I was beautiful when I was young, wasn't I?]

"You still are, Grandma," Maddie began.

Suddenly Jade jumped. "ECOUTEZ! ECOUTEZ!" she screamed. Shiro began barking madly.





“What?” said Maddie, who had heard nothing. Phil just looked around, puzzled.

*“Dans a route! Les gens arrivent! Sur la route, de camions, de gros camions! Ils arrivent!”*

Maddie and Phil had to search their brains for the definition of “camions,” but not for long. Outside they could hear the rumble of large trucks, and adults’ voices calling their names.

“But how did they know we were here?” Phil said. “I left the recording on infinite loop—”

“That’s how they knew!” Maddie squeaked, half angry and half exasperated. “Someone must’ve realized—”



“Children, please!” Léonie said. “Stand around me. We will meet them when they come in, and then, *ma chère* Jade, you will see your parents.”

Léonie took Jade and Maddie in her arms; Phil stood behind her, being rather taller than she.

After much fiddling with the lock, the front door opened. M. Jolie, and then the others, came in. They stood inside the door and stared. “I told you, Maddie,” said Mr. Jolie, “you were never, ever, to come in here!”

Maddie sniffed. “The previous owner said we could come in.”

“What previous owner? It’s my house.”

“No, it’s not, it’s Leonie’s!”

“And who is...”

“You can’t see her? We can see her!” Phil said. Jade and Maddie nodded.

*“Il n’a jamais eu beaucoup d’imagination,”* Léonie said. “Grand-daughter,

tell him I said this: ‘Martin Jolie, our house in France, it was not very fine, especially when we had to leave it. You were a baby then. You wore a blue ... how do you say ... a onesie, with badgers on it, and a green felt blanket with red and blue stripes. I kept them when you grow out of them. They are still here. They are in the back of the closet in my bedroom, in a box. There are also a few French francs. I thought you would need them. And the necklace I wear in that painting there.’”

Maddie repeated the message as best she could.

“I don’t remember any such thing,” Martin Jolie said.

“But I do,” said Mrs. Jolie. “She showed them to me once.” Mrs. Jolie went up the stairs, rummaged around for a bit, and came back, with the box. They opened the box, and everything Léonie had said would be there, was there.

“You must have told Maddie about it once.” Mr. Jolie said.

“No she didn’t!” Maddie said.

The door opened again, and a huge, burly man with an enormous mustache came in. “All the machinery’s here, Mister Jolly,” he said. “We’re waitin’ to start, so if you people would just step outside? Time’s money, you know.”

“Start what?” Maddie said.

“Come on, all of you,” Mr. Jolie said. “This house is coming down, now. Out!”

*“Non de non de non! Vous ne peut pas faire ça ! La maison est à Léonie, elle doit rester!”* It was Jade who spoke.

“Yeah!” Maddie shouted, and Phil nodded his head.

All the adults stood in absolute shock.

Evelyn stepped forward. “Jade,” she said, almost tremulously, “was that you, honey?”

Jade looked at Léonie, who smiled at her with delight. Then she turned to her mother.

*“Oui, maman,”* she said.

Evelyn took Jade’s hands. “But we thought... all these years... you can talk? Honey, why haven’t you spoken in all this time? Why?”

Jade stood up very straight. *“Parce que quand j’étais très petite, Phil m’a dit que je ne pouvais dire que 10 000 mots, puis que je n’en aurais plus. Alors, je les économise. Mais Léonie m’a dit que cela ne s’applique qu’à l’anglais, donc je peux parler autant que je veux.”*

“What does that mean, honey?” Evelyn said. Having heard Phil’s name, she turned to her son. “What does it mean, Philip?”

Phil shrugged.

“She said,” said Mr. Jolie, “that when she was young, her brother told her that she only had 10,000 words she could say and then she’d run out. So she’s been hoarding her words. And ...” At this point, he hesitated, “and my mother told her that French words don’t apply.”

“I never said any such thing!” Phil said. When all the eyes in the room turned to him, he added, “I mean, she used to talk and talk and talk and talk and she never... I probably just told her to, like, shut up for a change... but that was all...”

“PHIL...” Paul said in the most menacing voice he could muster.

“It was years ago!” Phil protested.

Evelyn knelt down and held her daughter close. “Honey, maybe Phil told you that, and maybe he didn’t, but it’s absolutely, positively, definitely NOT true. You have as many words as you can say in every language there is. Do you understand me?”

Jade turned to Léonie and said, in weirdly French-accented English, “This is true?”

“Yes, my child, it is true.”

Jade turned to Léonie. “Then why didn’t you tell me?”

Léonie chuckled. “Because--”

“Time’s a wastin!” said the truck driver.

Léonie stomped her foot. “You can all go! This is my house! Look what you would have destroyed if you tore it down! Look! A genuine Chagall! It is worth a king’s ransom!” She pointed to the painting, and the children pointed to it as well, and relayed Léonie’s message.

“Oh...” said Mr. Jolie. “Chagall, didn’t he live near you all?”



“That’s a Chagall?” the truck driver said. “Wow, youse guys are gonna be rich! Lemme see that there.” He walked up to the painting. “Too bad somebody painted over it, you know, but I’m sure it can be cleaned up.”

Finally, Mr. Jolie had had enough. “It doesn’t matter. Look, none of this matters. This house is falling apart. You kids are going to get killed if you keep coming in here. And besides ...”

Everyone turned to Mr. Jolie. “Besides what?” Mme. Jolie said.

“Besides,” M. Jolie said, “I have a buyer for the property. But she came by here and said the place was haunted, and she won’t buy a haunted property. But if I sell it, we can move away to someplace nicer. We can move to a city where there are better schools and more opportunities! So I thought... if

there’s no house, there’s no haunting, so...”



Léonie stepped forward and touched her son on the shoulder—which he could definitely feel! She said, “If you raze my house, *mon fil*, I will tell these children all about the explosions in the basement.” Somehow, Mr. Jolie heard that.

“You wouldn’t,” he said.

Léonie let him go. “When he was very young we gave him a chemistry—”

“Oh, did you?” Maddie said, her eyes twinkling.

“And besides,” Jade said, “I can see with Léonie’s eyes. Mom... you are wearing a yellow dress, with tulips on, and a red belt. You have a red barrette in your hair. You have a dark spot on your cheek, just here, under the eye.”

Evelyn blanched.

“And you just changed color.”

Jade turned to Léonie. “Please, Léonie... *ne pouvez-vous pas venir, et vive avec moi? Ainsi, même s’ils démolissent la maison, je pourrai toujours voir.*” [Can’t you come and live with me? Then if they demolish the house, I can still see.”]

Léonie smiled. “No, *ma chère*, I cannot do that. This is the house that was built for me, and here I will stay. You don’t need me. You don’t even need to see. You have a wonderful imagination! Use that! It will help you far more than just looking at things. Trust me. Now, tell my son, all of you, tell my son that he will not demolish my house! He will let time do so, or he will restore it. Or else.”

“Or else what?” Maddie said. She had that manic gleam in her eyes again.

“Just or else,” Léonie said, with the kind of smile one does not question.

Maddie relayed this message.

“Let’s all go outside,” M. Jolie said, herding the others out the door. He left last, and locked the door behind him.

Léonie turned and regarded her portrait. “Yes, I was beautiful when I was young,” she whispered. Then she vanished, for the present.

## Epilogue

Léonie's house was not torn down. Maddie continued to visit from time to time, telling Léonie how the world had changed since she’d become a ghost. Léonie didn’t believe most of what Maddie told her, and was absolutely flabbergasted when Maddie demonstrated a video call.

In the Quiros house, nothing at all was said about the ghost house for the next couple of weeks, even between Jade and Phil. Jade was miffed that Phil had betrayed her, all these years. Phil refused to say ‘sorry’ or admit that he had done anything at all.

By then Paul had finished the textbook he'd been working on, and their lease being up, the Quiros family moved back to the city. When she returned, Jade tried to tell her friends about her adventures, but nobody believed her. Some were very interested, certainly, but Jade could tell by their tone and their questions that they thought this was all just fantasizing on Jade's part. That was okay; Jade knew it was all true, and she had already started urging her parents to rent the country property next summer. But everyone was amazed that their once silent friend had come back speaking two languages!

And so, school went on, just as always, until one day Jade showed up without Shiro. Jade's classmates mourned his loss, and told Jade that she really ought to get another, "real" Seeing-Eye dog, a Lab or a Golden, that would live longer. But Jade was adamant. It was a Great Pyrenees or nothing; and outside of France, Pyrs were not trained as service dogs.

Spring came, and one morning, Evelyn came to breakfast carrying a large tray of crumb cake, which she set on the table in front of her family. "Good news, Jade, and for you too, Phil. We are renting the cottage from the Jolies again this summer."

Jade and Phil both looked up. "It's so dull there," Phil said, and went back to eating his cake. "Can't I stay here by myself?"

"Oh, and shop and cook and pay the rent and the bills and look after the place all by yourself? That'll be the day."

"Is Léonie's house still there?" Jade asked.

"I didn't ask," Evelyn said, and got back to her baking.

When school let out, the Quiros family, and a new Great Pyrenees puppy, piled into the car, and drove upstate to the cottage. Without even waiting to call Maddie, Jade made her way along the well-remembered track to the Ghost House. She wished Shiro was with her, to guide her way.

But when Jade ran into the clearing around Léonie's house, there he was, in ghostly form, running from Léonie to greet her as she ran up the gravel road.





# Tanner's Watching

By N. C. Shapero

(an excerpt from *RED STREETS*, a novel by G. S. Cole & N. C. Shapero)

20 August 2094

The names in this column have been changed, to protect the innocent. Conversations have been altered, and descriptions modified slightly in the interest of protecting the identity of both the Terrible Tanner and his acquaintances among the Underpeople.

This time we're going somewhere different. Both for you, oh interested reader, and for the Terrible Tanner. We're going to Church. A very special church -- a church for the outcasts, for the forlorn, for the lost. It's not the church of your childhood -- with the platitudes and the righteous anger against "abominations". This is the church of the lost, the hungry, the abandoned.

Fifteen years ago, Tanner the Terrible abandoned religion. It wasn't all that hard -- Tanner the Terrible has never been a particularly obedient little servant, and the idea of kowtowing to a God that would shit a brick at the sight of woman's tits but would glory in the butchering of thousands of His creatures turned the Tanner's insides.

He found religion again, briefly, when the bombs fell and the bullets flew. They say that there are no atheists in foxholes. What they fail to mention is that there are no sane people in foxholes--Human or Uplift, it makes no difference when the roar of the big guns sound. Tanner the Terrible did his "little bit" for the GUS--a four year stint "spreading democracy;" and while he was being shot at, bombed, and, shooting back and, God help him, killing at the orders of his superiors, often he prayed to that petty God to live just one more day.

"If you let me live, I'll pray to you." It doesn't sound very nice now in the comfort of a warm apartment with a cold beer just a few paces away in the kitchen. But at the time it seemed a fair bargain. At Osaka, we didn't have beer, cold or otherwise. We were happy enough to have ammunition. Water was a gift from God. There wasn't a one of us at Hill 419 in June of '85 that wouldn't have sold our souls, if we still had 'em to the devil, for a bit of food.

Three hundred eighty-one out of my battalion walked away from Hill 419. What was left of the 1st Armored Division was run off with its tail between its collective legs. But the people with tails stayed behind to cover our pink asses as we ran off and left them to pay the bill. The 69<sup>th</sup> Highland Guards took over our position. Their orders were simple -- "hold until relieved".

No one particularly likes vulpine Uplifts in the GUS. But we tolerate them; they're the best of the best. The pilot strain developed in the Old US are faster, tougher, and to be honest a heck of a lot more intelligent on average than your realio-trulio men. Whether Type 07, originally designed to fly the fastest, most maneuverable aircraft in the world; or Type 14, the TruthTeller variant the British developed at roughly the same time who are even faster. They're also intelligent, loyal, and every bit as tough as their yank equivalent -- and embody mobile

sensor arrays in their ears, eyes and noses which give an almost supernatural ability to “sniff out” the truth. The Type 14s are close enough, biologically, to Type 07s to interbreed, and produce fertile offspring.

The 69<sup>th</sup> was an Uplift regiment. But you know the story. Ammunition exhausted, in the end they were reduced to holding their positions with cold steel, fang, and claw. They covered our asses while we ran away; and the Terrible Tanner thanked whatever God there was that Edinburgh made the damnable voops so loyal to our masters. And he thanked whatever Power there was that he had pink skin instead of fur and fangs, and was allowed to run away while someone else paid for the stupidity of the Higher Ups’ involvement in other people’s civil wars.

Of the twenty Type 14s of the 69<sup>th</sup> who survived the battle, only thirteen survived medevac. In the big ceremony afterwards the Thirteen were awarded the highest military honors by the President of the GUS, the Queen of England, and the President of Russia in a big blow out with all the bells and whistles. They tell you in history class that after the Thirteen were granted Full Service Terms Honorably Completed, all of them cried, begged to remain in service, and pleaded to have their unit restored. But the colors of the 69<sup>th</sup> were retired, along with the survivors. “Too many bad memories,” High Command said.

What they don’t tell you in that same history class is that since those dark days in 2085 nine of the thirteen have committed suicide. That’s the kind of loyalty they gave and continue to give: “Let me serve, or let me die.”

Before anyone says that this is just a characteristic of the British variant, I would remind you, gentle readers, that the blood of Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Reynard who commanded the 69<sup>th</sup>, flows in his descendants in the GUS. The Universal Genetic Records still maintained in Hellfire show he has over fifteen thousand direct descendants in the LA Monad alone. Of course, with nearly a quarter of the GUS Aerospace Force Tactical Command stationed or operating out of Guardian, this is hardly a surprise.

But what does all Tanner’s nattering about voops, the Uplifts that even other Uplifts love to hate, have to do with the subject we started on, gentle readers? What do the Uplifts almost everyone, Uplift and Human both, call “Benji”, “Lassie”, or, if they’re feeling particularly bitter and nasty, “voop”, have to do with religion? Or anything else that you, gentle reader, might want to think about in between glasses of fine wine and finer steak?

Where others, kicked once too often might turn and snarl, or even snap, these “voops” turned the other cheek. They hold out their hands—not paws, hands—to the stranger, to the apparently lonely or abandoned. The Terrible Tanner, the Uplift from Hell, found an open hand where he expected only a bitter welcome and an unsheated-claw slap.

This last Sunday the Terrible Tanner was alone in his apartment. His putative “job” as a netJock provided an excellent explanation for his odd hours, and even odder behaviors. Humans and Uplift alike might shy away from the odd “possible Fosterite fanatic” with an implant in his head and an odd look in his eyes, a friendly hand was extended by one of those outcasts among the Underpeople.

It was roughly 1000 hours when the Terrible Tanner decided to venture out into the silence of the apartment courtyard. No Uplifts were out and about, or so it seemed. Going down to the apartment complex’s gymnasium—it seems that even Uplifts can’t maintain the superior bodies that they are so highly regarded for without a fair amount of effort—he found himself alone. Really alone. Think about it, oh gentle reader.

In a Human apartment complex, there are always sounds. People moving about, children crying, shouting, playing. In an Uplift apartment complex there are fewer sounds; the insulation is better, and the neighbors usually more considerate about noise, but there are still sounds.

There was nothing. Everyone was gone. Somewhere. And they'd left the Terrible Tanner alone. Or almost alone.

I was standing there, staring at the dumbbells in their racks, wondering if perhaps I belonged alongside them, when I heard footsteps and caught the distinctive scent of a vixen in my augmented snout.

"I was just about to leave for church, and I heard someone walking around the complex." She smiled at the Terrible Tanner. "You're the new tenant, aren't you?"

"I am."

"My name is Katrina. Katrina Elizabeth Fox. And, well, you've obviously not joined a congregation yet, so why don't you come with me to mine?" Her eyes sparkled and her smile seemed to stretch back to her ears as she looked up at me.

"I wouldn't want to trouble you." I rubbed the skin over my mastoid process, where the fur doesn't grow over the cyberimplant.

She snorted. It wasn't quite a sneeze, it wasn't a cough, it was half of a chuckle. Saying, "I think you'd be right at home with the rest of us," she wrapped her arm around mine and marched me out of the gym, the complex, and down the street. There is something remarkably irresistible about seventy-five kilograms or so of sinew and muscle that knows what it wants to do when you aren't quite sure which end is really up.

"I wouldn't want to impose," I managed to babble, on the way out of the complex.

"Are you afraid of associating with a bunch of 'damn voops'?" she said sweetly, looking me squarely in the eye. Her ears rotated towards me, and she stopped, her hand sliding down my arm to grasp my wrist softly, but firmly.

When dealing with a TruthTeller, honesty is the best policy. Hell, it's the *only* policy. "No. I'd like to, but I was afraid that you wouldn't want to associate with me -- I'm not exactly the easiest person to be around, and with a cyberimplant to boot..." I let the sentence hang.

She took a deep breath, through her nose, staring straight into my eyes until I had to turn away; there is something terribly disturbing about jet black eyes drilling into your soul. Then she reached up and licked my nose. "And so you were afraid that we'd turn on you, too?"

I opened my mouth, but nothing came out. I snapped my jaws shut with an audible click. I've dealt with TruthTellers before, but only on a professional basis. This was the first time, close up and personal, as they would say. "I wasn't exactly expecting a welcome mat."

"Well, we'll just have to see what we can do about that." Then she proceeded to march me down the street and in to the First Baptist Church of Marina del Rey. That's not its real name, of course, but it will do for the moment (names, as I stated earlier, have been changed to protect both the innocent and the guilty).

They made a "joyous sound on to the Lord" for several hours. The Terrible Tanner did his best to join in on the singing, and found much to his surprise his voice as an Uplift was better than his voice as a skinjob.



Afterwards I was introduced to the congregation and, rather than shy away from this terrible creature, part Uplift, part cybermachine, and not-like-them, the vulpine uplifts that made up this congregation tried their level best to make the Terrible Tanner feel at home. There was food—always important to an Uplift—and, though the Tanner did not bring anything to what was clearly a potluck, he was offered both first cut and choice thereof. “It’s the very least that we can do for a seeker,” I was told.

The importance of food to an Uplift cannot be overstated. Their augmented metabolisms allow them to perform the incredible physical feats for which they are so famed, at a price. Hunger lives within Uplifts every second of every day; they are not wolves, who can go for a week without food. Nor are they skinjobs who can live on bread and water (an unsatisfying, but survivable diet). Meat costs money, and of all the people in the GUS Uplifts can afford meat the least; a good moa drumstick will run N\$2.20 per kilo, which is just enough to feed an adult Uplift for a bit more than a day. They shared what they had with me, a stranger; they gloried in the sharing, asking nothing more than that I think about joining their group.

I remembered my parents’ church. I remembered the sermons about “helping others”. I also remembered the sneers those churchgoers wore when they stepped outside and saw the Uplift LEOs that kept their streets safe on Sunday.

Something went “click” inside.

Christianity has never been truly a religion of the leaders, of the masters of the world; it is a religion for the downtrodden, for the weak, for the hungry. It has been at its best when it has been persecuted. Its finest hours have always been when it must hide in catacombs, or sneak between the society’s stainless steel walls.

If Christ were to walk the streets of the GUS today, he would look out on the world through golden eyes. Walking in a fighter’s crouch, his tail a proud flag behind him, Christ would not walk the streets as a master, but as one of the slaves. God bless the Outcasts, for they have not forgotten Him.

God bless the Outcasts.

*The Adventures of the Trouble, Season 2***Episode 2: Troubled Waters****Season 2, Episode 2: Troubled Waters**

1 INTERIOR, the bridge. View of the forward window.

1

Outside is a single point of very bright light. As the crew watches, concentric rings light up, radiating out from the original point, appear. Then lines, streaks, triangles and other light sources appear. Several instruments blossom around the central ring. The ship is enormous. The Crew of the Trouble is impressed.



SANDOR  
(gobsmacked)

What a beauty!

Several others murmur in assent.

CAPTAIN

(in awe)

What can we know about it, apart from its dimensions and the fact that it's just stunning?

CHIP

This Self believes they scan us, all wavelengths, simultaneously.

CAPTAIN

Gus, any idea what the drive is?

GUS

Honestly, all I can tell you is what it's not. It's not warp. It's not sail, it's not inertial.

CAPTAIN

So what's left?

GUS

(rubbing his hands together and practically drooling)  
Can't wait to find out, Ma'am!

CAPTAIN

Dorcas?

DORCAS

(Staring at her console, fluffing her feathers)



What?

CAPTAIN

Are they hailing us at all?

DORCAS

(as if startled)

Ah! No. Don't think so. Chip-san, anything coded toward us?

CHIP

No. Constant streams only.

CAPTAIN

(like a kid in a candy shop)

Curiouser and curiouser!

DORCAS

Hail them?

CAPTAIN

Not yet, let them finish their scan. If anybody susses anything out, speak up!

SANDOR

It's very hard to scan. Except for a very few areas, the whole ship is incredibly reflective. Everything we ping at them is coming back almost entirely intact.

RATTY and KIA enter from the turbolift. RATTY stands behind the Captain's chair and stares.

KIA

Wonder of wonders... Perhaps it is a skip-ship?

GUS

Oh!

CAPTAIN

(Turning rather abruptly)

I've heard of those... what exactly do you mean?



GUS and KIA begin talking at once. CAPTAIN snaps her fingers. GUS and KIA stop talking. They hold out their hands and play Rock-Paper-Scissors. (This being the *Trouble* method of deciding who gets to speak first when both have something to add.) GUS wins, his scissors to KIA's paper.

GUS

It's just a hypothesized drive. A way to get around the speed-of-light limit. Evidently, if you use it you don't have to worry about going fast at all. What one does—what one is supposed to do, anyway—is use some high-gravity object in one universe to skip you to a high-gravity in another universe that's closer to your destination, you see?

KIA

This would require having accurate maps of many, many multiverses. This means that a culture must be incredibly old, because mapping takes time. Or else you know cultures in other universes who have mapped their universe so you can compare.

GUS

And we know neither a culture that is that old, nor a way to get into any other universe but our own.

RATTY

(to CAPTAIN)

Didn't one of your great aunts write stories about people using that kind of travel?

CAPTAIN

Yeah, but she was postulating a culture that was 72,000 years old. The oldest culture we know of is only maybe a twelfth of that.

DORCAS

Something coming. Probe? Small vehicle? Coming.

Everyone turns to the viewscreen. An object that looks very much like a smaller and simplified version of the large ship comes toward them. As they all watch, it stops, exactly half-way between the two ships.

CAPTAIN

I suppose we're to go meet them half-way. What should we bring? Flowers? Wine? A pizza?

Snickering and muttering from the bridge crew.

CAPTAIN

Dorcas, take a shuttle and whatever crew you favor and meet them.

(to the ADMIRAL)

Unless you want to go?

ADMIRAL

Nope, this is your mission.

CAPTAIN

Okay, Dorcas, off you go. We'll cover you in case that's necessary.

DORCAS

Aye-aye. Chip, you come. Grab Porchurnaki on the way.

DORCAS and CHIP leave the bridge.

FADE TO:



2 INTERIOR: The foyer of Shimbo's Brooklyn home.

2



MORIARTY is standing in the hallway, looking all around.

MORIARTY

So this is who she  
is when she's at  
home, eh? Who'd  
have thought?

MORIARTY walks on a bit, to  
where GEORGE is swimming in a  
very large goldfish-bowl type  
object, and sits down.

MORIARTY

(to no one in  
particular)  
Well, okay then.  
(to GEORGE, more or  
less)  
What's so secure  
about this place, I  
utterly fail to  
see.

MORIARTY echolocates around,  
sniffs a lot, considers.

MORIARTY

(Possibly to GEORGE, possibly to no one)  
Well, she did say I was to protect you by any means I  
thought entertaining. So... you've been housed long  
enough at Fa's house. How about we go...  
(Grinning with delightful evil)  
...to my house?

FADE

To Be Continued



