

RETROZINE

Two Fandom
Elders,
One More Time!

Spring, 2023 * No. 7

In This Issue:



Time Links by Alan Dunwell



Fragments by Mark Merlino



Having a Blast(er) by Bob Shimbo



Trouble Brewing: Episode 4, Looking For Trouble

by the Crew of the USS Trouble



The Ghost House, Chapters 6-10 by Fara Shimbo



Snow on the Moon Revisited by Fara Shimbo



Commentary by Germaine Swanson

And Lots of Other Cool Stuff!

RETROZINE 7

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Ready When You Are

By Germaine Swanson

Ready when you are...

...that is what the text said. It was just a friendly reminder that after many months, *Retrozine 7* was still in incubation and had not yet appeared in the inter-webs. The final words of the 'zine were hopelessly trapped in the intellectual folds of the editor. Everyone is waiting, most notably the Chinese fans, the professor who uses it with his classes, and many anonymous readers who are too shy to let us know they download us.

The statement "Ready when you are" does not stroke my ego. The creativity drought was real. I have clients who will happily attest to that using far more colorful and descriptive language.

The prime motivator that rekindled my imagination was the part of the professional article featured in this issue. *What Does the Future Hold for 'Star Trek'?* by Chris Post was an article in the April 12, 2023, issue of *Star Trek Daily News* that grabbed my attention and shook up my 'little gray cells.' I just got used to having new forms of *Star Trek* return to my life. *Star Trek* and the reawakening (rebirth) of the fandom it spawned the was a reminder of better days of my childhood and later as a nearly twenty-year-old when I found it in reruns.

It felt good to hear the mention of *Star Trek* or being a Trek fan said with a note of pride. In the (mumble, mumble) years since I was actively in fandom, things I dreamed of have happened. There are professional magazines and publications about *Star Trek* and science fiction. Fans are taken a little more seriously. Scholarly books and children's books share the subject. *Trek* is seen more like a gateway to science careers or a pioneer of civil rights and racial equality.

I settled in to absorb the infinite diversity of my universe when this article appears. I remember writing about that based on info from a "reputable source" in "the business." What I reported didn't happen for at least five years. But it happened. The was eventually a movie. I was right, it was true, but, the egg still hasn't dried from my emotional face. I have learned to report/repeat what I'm told with proof or print it as speculation. That is one of the reasons why this excerpt is here.

When Paramount+ debuted and revived *Star Trek*, many other people and I felt its rebirth was a way to capitalize on a built-in fanbase. *Star Trek* fans, Trekkers and Trekkies have demonstrated their allegiance to the franchise. The established fanbase would Paramount+ provide viewers. The celebration of fiftieth anniversary of the show would attract new viewers (perhaps curious to find out what the 'weirdos' were doing). They'd come for *Trek*, stay for the streaming TV shows, establish Paramount+ as a ratings contender and make a mint. Brilliant!

Having served our purpose, is the *Star Trek* franchise going back into obscurity to only to be replaced with action-adventure and spy shows? I won't speculate. I'll enjoy what we have while we have it.

What Does the Future Hold for Star Trek?

by Chris Post

Reprinted with permission from *Star Trek Daily News*

APRIL 12, 2023 - With the announcement that *Star Trek: Discovery* will end after its fifth season and the prediction that *Picard*'s third season will be its last, fans of *Star Trek* may be left wondering where the remaining franchise series might be heading. **Beware of spoilers!**

The oldest of the continuing series is *Star Trek: Lower Decks* which will be back for a fourth season this year. So far, no official release date has been announced, but the first three seasons appeared in August and ran through October. A 10-episode season has been ordered and promises to build on past storylines.

While we wait for a trailer, *Lower Decks* creator Mike McMahan has given fans at least some idea of what's coming in Season 4: more T'Lyn, the Vulcan character who was introduced in the season 3 episode "wej Duj." [In an interview with IGN](#), McMahan said he was surprised by fan reaction to T'Lyn, who is voiced by Gabrielle Ruiz.

"I wish I had known everybody was gonna love T'Lyn as much as I love T'Lyn," McMahan said. "Because T'Lyn is basically not in Season 3. You get a little bit with her. But then in Season 4, I went to T'Lyn town. I want to know what she's up to."

Another character who might pop up again is the exocomp Peanut Hamper. After her introduction in Season 2, the little robot-that-wouldn't showed up again in Season 3. This time around Peanut Hamper (voiced by Kether Donohue) found herself locked up in a cell next to the evil artificial intelligence AGIMUS (voiced by Jeffrey Combs). At the episode's conclusion, it appeared that the two artificial life forms might be partnering up. Could Season 4 feature a robot rebellion?

Strange New Worlds, like most prequels, is somewhat boxed in by the established canon that follows it. The cast and crew of the show proved themselves up to the challenge of making something awesome in that space during Season 1 and Season 2 has several plot threads to follow up on.

In addition to Captain Pike's continued struggle with the knowledge of his tragic fate, Season 2 could also delve more deeply into the characters of Spock and Number One, exploring more of their backstories and personal lives. At the conclusion of Season 1, fans were left wondering what will become of Number One who was arrested when Starfleet learned she lied about being a genetically engineered Illyrian. In addition, *Strange New Worlds* has

established itself as an ensemble drama and has plenty of room to maneuver as we learn more about Uhura, La'an, Ortigas, and a certain Scottish engineer whose voice was heard at the end of Season 1.

Perhaps the strangest thing fans of *Strange New Worlds* have to look forward to is a promised crossover event. While the details remain a closely-guarded secret, it has been confirmed that characters from *Lower Decks* will make a live-action appearance in Season 2 of *Strange New Worlds*.

On March 28, Paramount+ announced that *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* Season 2 will premiere this summer on June 15 with 10 episodes appearing weekly on Thursdays.

Of the three returning *Star Trek* shows, the one with the clearest future is *Prodigy*. Although aimed at a younger audience, the show found a place with *Star Trek* fans of all ages as it followed the adventures of a rag-tag bunch of teens being mentored by a hologram version of Kathryn Janeway. At the end of Season 1, most of the young explorers found out that they had essentially been allowed to skip the boring years of Starfleet Academy and jump straight to joining a starship crew.

Season 2 will presumably pick up where Season 1 ended with Dal, Rok-Tahk, Jankom Pog, Zero, and Murf serving as acting warrant officers on the crew of starship commanded by the real Janeway as it attempts to locate Captain Chakotay who appears to have been thrown 50 years into the future. The final member of the *Protostar's* crew, Gwyn, will have her own adventure where she will return to her home planet of Solum in an effort to change the effects of first contact. Fans of Season 1 will remember those disastrous effects are what set her father on his mission to travel back in time and destroy Starfleet.

Chris Post is a life-long fan of Star Trek, who has been working in journalism for nearly 25 years.



AI Art by Midjourney. Prompt: "a sleek, glass starship, flying above a planet. There are many lights on the hull"



Time Links

by Alan Dunwell

It was a Civil War buff's dream, a chance at fame after all that had been said and written on the war.

Jarod had bought the old roll-top desk in Savanna yesterday on a weekend junk shop spree in the Tennessee town. Now, while pulling out all the drawers to give it a good cleaning, he found it: a bunch of old letters, wrapped and tied in an oilskin protective sheet. They were way back in a hidden pocket on the central drawer. The pocket was made to look as if the drawer just had a thick plank for the backboard, but the board was actually hollowed out with a secret catch on the bottom side. Jarod had only found it because he was trying to wipe off some grime there, and the latch popped loose. The bottom came off and out dropped the oilskin of letters. The oilskin was dry and it cracked as he unwrapped it. He quickly snapped several photos as he proceeded to extract the letters. The first letter he opened started out:

“Lori My Dearest, May God protect me on the morrow as we set forth unto battle with them damn Yankees. They be camped up near Shiloh Church and ...”

The letter, dated April 5, 1862, went on at length but Jarod had to pause to let his beating heart come back to a more normal pace. He knew, even before the requisite authenticity test, that it was *The Real Thing*.

“Something new,” he thought, “And on Shiloh, too.” It was the Civil War battle he had chosen to be his area of expertise, and in spite of years of research on the battle there were still puzzles that remained unsolved. Why had General Beauregard of the Confederates not continued his push on Sunday the 6th? Why were all the Confederates so unprepared on the following morning? Perhaps here, in these letters, there might be some new clue.



Hours later, Jarod knew that he had the proverbial gold mine as far as his research and continued publications were concerned. But he needed proof from the actual field of battle to back up what the letters were saying. There were two letters in particular that contained the clues he needed on where to find that proof.

Harley Kyle, the author of the missives, was a scout with the Confederate Army of the Mississippi in those fateful days. He was also what he referred to with pride as one of the two *Signal Men* working with one Mr. Shacke, apparently not a military man but an inventor. This inventor had come to the army in Corinth the day they set out for Shiloh, offering his services and a mechanical device for communication over distance. Harley and Seth Clark, a boyhood friend who had joined up with him the same day, were selected from Lieutenant Powell's scouts to work with Mr. Shacke and his devices. They were shown how to use them to signal each other by means of a small lever “...set in the side of the device, a box no bigger than a cartridge pouch and wrapped up in a very slick, hard, ceramic-like material with the inventors name on it. We could signal over much grander distance than one could shout, drum, or flash with a mirror. Seth and I had much confusion until we learned that we must take turns.” No further

information about the device was given, Harley likely assuming that Lori and his family would understand or perhaps had already seen such a device. This was the same first letter Jarod had read dated April 5, 1862, and was obviously written that evening in camp before the first battle.

The second letter was not that important to Jarod. dated Sunday, April 6, 1862, most of the letter bespoke the horrors of that day's battle, but from the viewpoint of the winning soldier who was glad both to be alive and that the "cursed Yankees" had done most of the dying. The important part was an addendum of several sheets that recounted a late evening scouting mission. After a storm with little protection for the tired Confederates, Harley was called from sleep by Nathan Bedford Forest himself along with Lieutenant Powell. They roused him out,

"...at a miserable hour when I had just but got off to sleep. Seth was still with General Beauregard from our work earlier in the day and it sees that the general was desirous of detailed information regarding the Yankees' strength. While I joked that it was mighty weak if today's performance be the judge, the lieutenant was not amused and sent me beyond Tilghman Branch towards Pittsburgh Landing to reconnoiter the Union number. As I topped a bluff over the landing I was completely surprised to find myself in the midst of such a number of Yankees as I had never before encountered. Fortunately, they too were surprised which gave me the hare's jump start, but they were onto me like blue-tick hounds. Just as I crossed the tributary of Snake Creek I was struck down by a minie ball, my head hitting a tree root and I fell senseless. A short while later when I began to regain my wits, I found myself alone. I attempted to contact Seth with the communication device but to no avail. I had been shot not only in my upper thigh but also in Mr. Shacke's device as well. Not wishing to bear any extra load for my return trip, injured sore in the leg as I was, I rolled the device up in an extra oilskin and hid it between the roots of a huge oak thinking that it could be easily recovered on the morrow if need be. Then, refreshing myself with a drink from the copious spring thereby, I made my way cautiously back to camp."

There it was! Jarod sat back and thought of the consequences of the failed communicator. This explained much of the puzzling questions. Thinking the battle was all but won, the Confederate general Beauregard went to the rear on Saturday evening. Harley's news of the overwhelming Union reinforcements did not reach Forest till after 2:00am on Monday, but Forest was unable to locate general Beauregard in the rear to pass on the news, finally returning to his troops at the front. At dawn Sunday the Confederate forces were taken completely unprepared despite Forest's knowledge, and were driven back. In one stroke, the day, the battle, and some say the war, were lost for the Rebels.



The following morning found Jarod at the spring, its location marked by the now dead but still magnificent old oak, and well known to local hunters and trappers. In short order, the metal detector had the device, along with other battle field metal scraps, in Jarod's hand.

Unwrapping the remains of the oilskin that Harley had put there those many years ago, Jarod realized his fatal mistake. There was no one else there to verify the find despite his photographing as he had proceeded. He could never use this wonderful find. The Pros would just mark him off as a crank like they might with a UFO hunter and psychic healers. He had no witness for the finding of Mr. Shacke's device!

In his hand lay the wondrous communicator, inside it was an aged .577 caliber Enfield Short Pattern Rifle minie ball, still lodged in the works. On the outside was the name of the device, Radio Shack Deluxe 40 channel CB Walkie-Talkie, Mod. TRC-231.



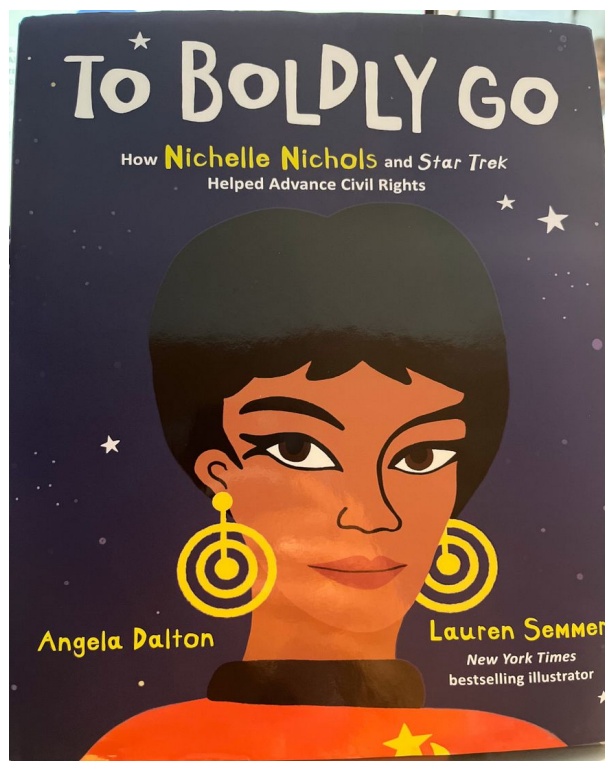
To Boldly Go:

How Nichelle Nichols and *Star Trek* Helped Advance Civil Rights

Written by Angela Dalton

Illustrated by Lauren Semmer

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I would have loved to have shared this book with my children when they were small and forced to “be quiet because *Star Trek* is on” My older daughter happily shares memories of the 70’s playing under my table in the Dealers’ Room during a convention. I did not have a sitter but in those days, she was perfectly safe with my *Star Trek* fan friends while I performed my duties in the Pressroom.

This lovely children’s book that adults can also appreciate uses a little girl’s early exposure to the *Star Trek* television show as a lead in to describe Nichelle Nichols’ role in changing race relations. On the surface, it sounds preposterous that a celebrity could have an active affect on social justice. The story is true. Many celebrities did. The book could have been longer and more substantive to accommodate Nichelle’s in role and work during the decades after the show.

I have similar memories to the child in the book. In those days there was a call to action among my people: if there was a TV show with a respectable character in it, it was our duty to watch the show. The belief being that if we and enough people view them, the shows would not be cancelled. If we didn’t watch shows with positive images of black people, would never appear again. That is how I came to be watching the premier of *Star Trek* with my father. I liked the show and the pretty black woman who wasn’t required to get coffee, clean the place, behave badly or to act as

foolish comic relief. My dad thought an integrated world was in the future, maybe even in my lifetime. That was my beginning as a Star Trek fan.

It is unfortunate that this book appeared shortly after Nichelle's death. Her comments would have enhanced the book. I think she would have liked it.



When *Star Trek* appeared on TV, America swirled in a whirlpool of change. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and any other civil rights leaders joined together to inspire people to march peacefully for equality and the rights of Black people. After *Star Trek* showed the possibilities of peace among life-forms during prime-time hours...

The book is about Nichelle, her childhood, her dreams, and ambitions. The road to becoming Uhura was not an easy one for Nichelle, who was talented from childhood. The book describes her work leading up to becoming Uhura and my favorite part, her life "Beyond *Star Trek*." This part is the rest of her story when she actively advocated for women, space exploration, and worked with NASA.

The illustrations are simple, bright, bold, and colorful. They are child-friendly. The book is a good read and a discussion starter.



The Ghost House *Continued*

by Fara Shimbo

Chapter 6: Maddie Does A Little Digging

Somehow, Jade made it home. She didn't remember leaving the old house, and she didn't remember walking back through the woods, although she must have done it. And what's more, she had done it in a state of almost delirious happiness. They had stopped at Maddie's house and gotten some drinks, then Jade and Shiro had made it home on their own.

Had Jade not found herself overwhelmingly tired, she would have rushed back to the old house. Was that her face? Was that how she looked? A round face with a short nose and short hair, and large, dark eyes? She felt all over her face. It was round, and she did have a short, slightly upturned nose.

When Evelyn called her for dinner, she ignored the summons. Shiro, in common with almost all dogs, was eager to go wherever there was food being dispensed, and after trying to nudge Jade into action, decided to go down by himself.

This being far from the usual state of affairs, Evelyn sent Philip up to see what was the matter. Philip knocked on Jade's door, and, getting no answer, let himself in. There was Jade on her bed, sound asleep, with a huge grin on her face.

He walked up to the bed and shook her. "Dinner. Get up," he said.

Jade woke up and turned to him.

"Dinner," Philip explained.

Jade waved him away and turned over.

"Fine, starve," Philip said, and left.

"Well?" Paul asked when Philip resumed his seat.

"She's not hungry," Philip said. "Can I have her dessert?"

"Mom," Maddie said over her own dinner. "That house in the woods." She tried to sound casual.

“What about it?” her mother said, dishing out green beans.

“Is it haunted?”

Mrs. Jolie huffed. “Very likely. Eat your green beans.”

“Haunted? What gave you that idea?” said Mr. Jolie.

Maddie fiddled with her food. “I don’t know.” She turned to her father. “How come you moved out of it? I mean, it’s yours, isn’t it? So why don’t you live there?”

Mr. Jolie tore a piece of bread from the loaf and buttered it. “Because it’s about to fall apart, that’s why!”

“Is it?”

“Always has been. Grandpa wasn’t a great builder, you know. All the floors creaked. All the walls creaked. There were squirrels and raccoons living in the attic and nobody cared. Really, it was just pretty awful. So I decided to build a better—”

“Now is time to eat,” Mrs. Jolie said. “Not give a family history lesson.”

“Aww, but I want one!” Maddie said.

Both parents turned to her. “You haven’t been sneaking off to that house, have you?” Mrs. Jolie said.

“No,” said Maddie, as if *of course* this was the absolute truth. “But I remember it from back when, and it would really be a shame if a place like that wasn’t haunted. I think it deserves a ghost.”

“There are no ghosts,” her mother said. “Now eat before your food gets cold.”

“Why? What happens if my food gets cold before I eat it?”

“EAT,” Mrs. Jolie glowered.

Maddie ate, but found the conversation thoroughly unsatisfying. But half way through the meal, she saw her father wink at her in a meaningful, and delightfully conspiratorial, way.

* * *

After dinner was concluded and the dinner things cleaned up and put away, Mrs. Jolie retired to the living room, put on a pair of headphones, and sat on the couch to listen to a book, as was her routine in the evenings. Mr. Jolie shouted, “I’ll be out in my shop!” and when Mrs. Jolie waved him off, he motioned for Maddie to follow him.



Mr. Jolie's shop contained all the tools he'd used to build the Jolie home and most of its cabinets and furniture. Boards and sheets of wood, some common and most exotic, lined the walls. There were hand tools, power tools, and plenty of tools that Maddie couldn't possibly identify. Each and every one of these things was, Maddie thought, a waste. She could make anything she wanted on her 3D printer, in much less time. But everyone had their hobby, so...

"So! Finally you're taking an interest in your family history, are you?" Mr. Jolie said as he rooted through his woodpile.

"Yeah," Maddie said.

"Well, what would you like to know?"

Maddie had to think long and hard about this. "I guess I want to know, what were grandma and grandpa like? I mean, as people. What did they do? And why?"

"Let's see... your grandfather Jacques was a dairyman. His family ran a dairy, had for generations so far as I know. I'm sure he told you that, he told everybody. He had two cows named Colette and Cosette whom he adored. He probably told you all about them. What wouldn't you know about him, let me think."

"What did he do in the war?"

"Kept working in the dairy, he was just a kid your age in the war."

"Did he have any enemies?"

Mr. Jolie turned. "Enemies?" He cocked his head slightly. "Honey, everybody has enemies."

"I don't have any enemies."

"Not even at school?"

"Oh, well... They're not enemies, they're just morons. I mean real enemies. Like, somebody he'd want to come back as a ghost and haunt."

Mr. Jolie chuckled. "What would be the point? I'm sure whatever enemies he had are already dead too."

Maddie nodded. That made sense. Suddenly that manic gleam came into her eyes again. "Did he have any secrets?" she asked.

Mr. Jolie laughed. "I'm sure he did but he never shared them with me!"

"And Grandma?"

Mr. Jolie put down his tools and leaned against a workbench. "I really think I've told you all about her, everything I know, anyway. She didn't talk much about her life before she came here. Said it gave her the most awful nightmares. Now, if you're looking for enemies, I'm sure she had dozens. She hated Hitler, well, he's dead. She really hated Marshal Pétain, but so did the rest of the world, and anyway, he's dead too."

"Who was he?"

"The head of Vichy France. Look it up."

“Now, she had plenty of secrets, right?”

“Being in the Resistance, I’m sure she did. But that’s the thing about being in the Resistance, you see. She had to get all the secrets she could, and tell them only to the right people. And I’m sure they’re all dead too, now, and why are you asking me these things?”

Maddie went back to being nonchalant. “Oh, no reason. Just wondering if anyone in our family ever haunted anyplace.”

Mr. Jolie raised his eyebrows.

“Just curious, you know. I mean, just wondering.”

“Uh huh...”

“Oh well,” Maddie said, figuring she had gotten the information she really wanted without asking outright. No, neither grandparent was likely to be haunting the old house, if all their enemies were already dead.

“Say Dad,” Maddie said as she left, “are there really bears in the woods?”

Mr. Jolie put down his tools and put his hands on his hips. “Oh, is this what this is all about? I’m warning you, you stay away from that house! One more snowstorm and I’ll bet the whole thing falls down. I ought to call someone finally, and have the place torn down. You stay away from there!”

“Okay, Dad,” Maddie said with a sigh. She went back outside. Her father had been saying he was going to have the old house demolished for years.

Best not to give him a reason to actually get around to doing it.

Chapter 7: Therapy

Jade fell asleep, and dreamed dreams of light, and wondered, “If that’s light, what is shadow?” She woke up the next morning all ready to run out to the Old House again, but as she was about to run out the door, her mother grabbed her and pulled her back in.

“What’s going on?” Evelyn asked. “Are you all right, dear?”

Jade nodded and pointed out the door.

“I don’t think so,” Evelyn said. “First of all, you need breakfast. And then, sometime this morning, Mr. Cunningham is going to call and I want you there.”

Jade’s sigh in response to this news was a masterpiece of pre-teen histrionics.

“I don’t care, young lady, this is going to be a family meeting and we’re all going to talk to him, so you’ll be there! Now go eat some breakfast. Go on!”

Jade made a great show of stomping into the kitchen, Shiro doing his usual gambit of following her from in front. Terry Cunningham was a psychotherapist. She disliked him intensely.

Philip came in, still surly from yesterday, and what's more, he was smelly. Jade pinched her nose and scrunched up her face.

Paul came in and made a remark about how the kitchen smelled like a locker room.

"Oh, fine," Philip said, grabbing a piece of toast and scraping his chair as loudly as he could while getting up.

"Jade dear," Evelyn said when Philip had gone, "We need to talk about Shiro."

Jade turned.

"Shiro is getting older now. He is a family dog, and we all want good memories of him that we can look back on in later years, right?"

Jade shrugged.

"That includes Philip, too. You have to let Philip have some time with Shiro."

Jade turned back to her breakfast and shrugged.

"I know he likes to be with you and he follows you around, but can't you just discourage him a little? Once in a while?"

Jade got up and went to the front door, got Shiro's leash which hung from the doorknob, and set it at Philip's place at table.

Evelyn sighed. This would not be what Philip had in mind. He would want Shiro to follow him willingly, and that was something Shiro had never seemed to want to do unless Philip was carrying food with him. Well, maybe Terry could think of something. In the meantime, "How is your summer reading going?" School had given Jade a long list of audio-books from which she was supposed to pick, and listen to, six.

Jade finished her toast, drank her tea, held up two fingers.

"So, you listened to two, or you picked two?"

Jade just nodded and got up, and headed for the door again.

"Oh no you don't," her mother said. "You can wait for Mr. Cunningham to call."

Philip came back and saw the leash next to his teacup. He picked it up and threw it on the floor, and stormed out of the room.

Paul got up and went after him.

* * *

Later that morning, Terry Cunningham video-ed in, and the whole family sat on the couch together to talk with him. There was the usual trade of greetings and small-talk, and then Cunningham asked everyone how they were doing.

Both parents said everything was fine, but Jade could tell from their voices that they didn't really mean it, and could tell from Cunningham's responses that their message was received and understood. Then Cunningham spoke to Jade.

"Jade, my girl, how's it going?" he said in his usual, jocular manner.

Jade smiled and shrugged.

"Enjoying being out in the country?"

Jade nodded vigorously.

"And have you given any more thought to the suggestion I made, where you learn to touch-type so you can talk to your friends?"

Shrug.

Cunningham, like Maddie, had already figured out that "yes" or "no" questions were the most likely to get a response. "Have you decided to try it?"

Jade crossed her arms and shook her head "No!" in the most decided way she could. She could hear her parents shifting uncomfortably in their seats, and could hear Philip slump in the way he always did when he was frustrated.

"I don't understand," Evelyn said, both to Jade and to Cunningham, "why you can read, and understand what you read, but you can't write, hon. If only you could let us know somehow what's wrong, we could help!"

Jade sat like a statue.

Philip muttered, "There's nothing wrong with her."

All attention focused on the boy. He shifted in his seat.

"You've said that many times," Cunningham said. "But unless you say what you base this conclusion on—"

Philip erupted again. "Isn't it obvious? She never shut up until she was three and then one day she just shut up! Just out of spite!"

Cunningham said, "Ah. Now we're getting somewhere. Out of spite for what, would you say?"

"How should I know?" Philip said. All attention was rivetted on him now, and Jade could feel him squirming through the cushions.

"You were such good friends when you both were little," Paul said. "What happened to those days?"

"Nothing," Philip huffed, slamming back where he sat. Jade could smell a whiff of some musty smell as air was forced out of the seat back. "We've been over this before, again and again and again. I have nothing else to say. Can I go now?"

"Sure," Cunningham said quickly, knowing Evelyn and Paul would otherwise make Phil stay.

Philip got up and stomped out of the room. “Slam any doors,” Paul shouted after him, “and no internet for a week!”

“I’m sorry,” Evelyn said to Cunningham. “He wants a cat. I run a catering business out of my home, I’ll lose my license if there’s a cat in the house, we can only get away with Shiro because he’s sort of a service dog, and even then...”

“I see,” Cunningham said, his voice clearly indicating he found this excuse unsatisfactory. Then, “Jade?”

Jade turned toward the monitor.

“Did you ever do anything mean to Philip when you were young?”

Jade’s eyebrows disappeared into her hairline. She shrugged, and then shook her head “no.”

“Did he ever do anything mean to you? Apart from the usual sibling rivalry type things?”

Jade shook her head again. Then she pointed to herself, and pointed to the kitchen.

“Yes, you’re done, see you next month!”

Jade bounded up, Shiro following in a cloud of white hair, and, grabbing her cane, left the room.

Her parents would talk to Cunningham privately later on, she knew. She would contrive to hear them later. In the meantime...

Chapter 8: A Safe Place to Play

“No, not today. We’ve been there two days in a row. I’m bored with it now. Let’s play ... anything else.” Maddie frowned and rummaged through her desk drawers.

Jade held poked at her to get her attention, then held her hands together and made her eyes very wide, as she had once heard about a cartoon cat doing when he wanted to get his way. When she heard Maddie breathe in a way she, Jade, had always associated with pending capitulation in her brother, she held up one finger on her left hand, and pointed to it with her right.

Maddie snorted. “No. I’m bored with that place now. And besides. Don’t your parents get suspicious with you being gone so long? Mine do. So, no. You want to go to Grandma Léonie’s, find your own way.”

Léonie, Maddie thought. She’d heard that before... *Léonie*...

Jade shrugged, grabbed Shiro, and left Maddie’s house.

“Where are you going?” Maddie called after her.

Jade pointed nowhere in particular.

Maddie snorted and went back to her desk. When Jade got an idea in her head, she was realizing, that idea stuck there and was pursued to the point of obsession. When Jade had first moved out here, it was finding snakes under rocks. That lasted about a week. So would this, Maddie figured. Next week it would be something else, hopefully something more fun.

A bit down the road from Maddie's house, Jade stopped and knelt in front of Shiro. She touched the dog's face so she could tell where his eyes were, and pretended to "look" into them.

With one hand resting lightly on Shiro's muzzle, she pointed to the woods, and nodded yes.

Shiro turned his head, pricked his ears (in so far as a dog with floppy ears could) and turned back.

Jade pointed at Shiro, and then at the woods again.

Shiro tilted his head.

Jade pointed to herself, and to Shiro, and then to the woods.

Shiro turned to look at the woods and stood up.

They found their way to the start of the path easily enough. There was a large catnip bush that grew there, and its odor was unmistakable. Curiously, there were no cats there.

Jade held her face up, and turned until the sun warmed the same side of her face that it had when first they'd gone in. She snapped her fingers and Shiro led the way.

They passed the smell of the lodge-pole pines. Most, when you scratched them, smelled like chocolate. Perhaps one in ten smelled like butterscotch, and these were good markers.

Here was the fallen log they'd had to jump over.

But where was the stream? It should have been to their left.

Perhaps she had scratched the wrong tree?

Maybe they just hadn't gotten there yet.

Jade held her head up. The sun had gone in, or perhaps they were in a particularly shaded part of the woods.

Should she go on? She touched Shiro's face to feel if he was expressing any misgivings.



He didn't seem to be, not immediately. But as she touched him, she could definitely feel that he thought something was not right.

They went a little further. Surely they should hear the stream by now. And that nest of ... some kind of bird that made an awful lot of fuss. But the forest was quiet. And after a while, Shiro just sat down and refused to go any further.

Jade sat too. She had heard all sorts of stories about what happened when one was lost in the woods. Wolves were not a problem. Shiro's breed was a livestock guarding dog and could handle wolves easily. Assuming there were any here.

There was plenty to eat in the woods, if she could only find it. Or knew what it was.

And there was water too, if they could find the stream, but she couldn't hear it, and she couldn't smell it. Also, she'd been warned never to drink "wild" water because there was giardia in it. Shiro had gotten that once. Better not to think about it.

Did Shiro know the way back? Jade tugged at his collar, but he just sat there.

If she finally gave up, and decided she could do with one less, and called for help, who would hear her? She had no real idea how far into the woods she was.

No, wait. There was one person who would hear her.

Jade swallowed a couple of times. She stretched her mouth, and wagged her tongue, and took a deep breath, and did something she had not done since she was three years old: she spoke. Just one word, and her vocal cords and mouth garbled what she said, simply through lack of use. She called, "*Léonie!*"

Moments went by.

And suddenly, Jade knew. She just ... knew.

She picked up Shiro's leash, and led the way.

They arrived at the house a few minutes later. Jade climbed through the broken window, and went straight to the piano. Shiro made a few valiant attempts to climb in after her, but the best he could do, even with his great size, was put his paws on the sill and look in.



She sat at the piano, and soon heard, “*Alors, ma petite fille. Bienvenu.*” And then, in heavily accented English, “You are alone?”

Jade nodded.

“But you spoke!”

Jade nodded again, then started playing the piano, hoping to see.

Her wish was granted, slowly at first, but more clearly as she played. She could see her fingers; they looked how they felt, but with lines and creases. Then the view changed to her face. She opened her eyes wide, and squinted. She stuck out her tongue. She bared her teeth. She made a moue.

She could hear Léonie giggling. “*Tu es une très jolie fille,*” she said. [“You are a very pretty girl.”]

Jade laughed for the first time a long while. Was that how she looked when she laughed? Was that “pretty?”

“*Et aussi très intelligente, non?*” Léonie added.

Jade nodded.

“Play for me, *s’il vous plaît,*” Léonie said.

Jade did. Her playing didn’t seem to affect Léonie very much, but when Jade became absorbed in her music, her vision became clearer. She played her favorite melodies until her fingers were tired, glorying in the sights as Léonie watched her, and looked around the room, and sat in a large wing-chair nearby.

“Please speak some more to me,” Léonie asked when Jade stopped.

Jade had a feeling she was going to be asked this. She hung her head and shook, “no.”

“*Mais, pourquoi?* You may speak here, *ma chérie.* This is a safe place.”

Jade turned, saw her own face looking, apparently, directly at Léonie. Should she risk it? It would be right, a good trade for the wonders that Léonie had given her. She said, “Nine thousand words left.”

“*Comment?*” Léonie said, apparently leaning forward. She seemed to think carefully. “You only have nine-thousand words left to say?”

Jade nodded.

“*Je suis navrée.* Who told you such a thing?”

Jade considered, but in the end, just shrugged.

Léonie considered this. “Well, first of all, that is a lie. Whoever told you that *est un roi des cons!*”

Jade had no idea that Léonie had called ... whoever ... a “king of idiots,” but whatever she had called him, Jade could not believe. Yet, still...

Through Léonie’s eyes, she could see that her expression had changed. What was that? Sadness? Disappointment? Disbelief?

“This person,” Léonie said after a while, “they spoke only English, *non?*”

Jade nodded, still deep in thought.

“Ah! Now there is the understanding, *n’est pas?* Your limit, it only applies to English! You can speak French as much as you like! *C’est entendu!*”

Jade could hear a broad smile in Léonie’s voice. She was almost elated. And then she realized...

“You do not speak French? *Tu ne parles pas français?*”

Jade shook her head. She knew, “Par lay voo frond say,” and “See voo play,” but that was about it.

“But there is no problem! I will teach you!” She pointed to herself. “*Je m’appelle Léonie. Et tu?*”

Jade wondered if “Broo-tay” was French (Philip had gone through a Shakespeare phase when he was ten or so) and decided not to chance it.

“You say, *‘je m’appelle Jade.’*”

Jade took a deep breath, stretched her mouth, and said, “Zhe mapple Jaaayde.”

She knew it was terrible, but... did she feel any different? No.

No, wait. Yes, yes she did. She felt wonder. “Zhe ma pell Jade,” she said again.

“*Merveilleuse! Joue encore du piano pour moi, s’il vous plaît!*” Léonie turned and looked at the keyboard. “And then I will give to you a short lesson. *Une petite leçon, oui?*”

“OO-WEE!” Jade shouted, and once again began to play.

Chapter 9. Lost and Found

“Where is your sister?” Evelyn said, shaking her son awake where he slept in a hammock outside the house. “It’s nearly dinnertime!”

“What? Idonno. She’s probably over at Maddie’s house.” Philip turned over and pointedly pretended to be asleep.

“You are supposed to look after her!” Evelyn growled. “And she’s not over at Maddie’s, I just called there and they haven’t seen her since early this morning.”

“Shiro’s with her.”

“Get up,” Evelyn said, grabbing the edge of the hammock and overturning it, “and help us find your sister!”

“Aww, Moooooom, she’ll show up, she always does.”

“At home she always does. Out here? Get up! This instant, young man.”

“But Mom—”

“Philip Aaron Quiros!”

“All right, all right!” Philip got up and brushed himself off. “I’ll go to Maddie’s house and see what’s going on there. They’re probably playing in the attic or something.”

Philip could hear his father walking across the edge of the woods, calling Jade’s and Shiro’s names. Evelyn scanned all the trees on the property, thinking, perhaps, that Jade had been climbing them, which she had been strictly forbidden to do.

Philip did not have to walk far. Mr. and Mrs. Jolie were coming down the road. “Have you found her yet?” Mrs. Jolie called.

“Not yet, Madeline. She hasn’t shown up at your house?”

“No, we left Maddie behind and told her to call us right away if Jade shows up.” She held up her phone for emphasis, or something.

“I hope she hasn’t gone into the woods,” Mrs. Jolie said. “I keep telling Maddie never to go, there are bears.”

“Are there bears?” Paul said, trotting up to join them.

“There used to be, long ago, I think,” Mrs. Jolie said. “It’s a good excuse anyway.”

“We told the kids there was poison ivy,” Paul said.

“There’s plenty of that!” Mr. Jolie said, scratching his arm at the memory of it. “You should teach her dog to spot it.”

“Right,” said Paul. “Try teaching a Great Pyrenees anything, they just look at you and say, ‘Have your people call my people and we’ll see what happens.’”

“Have you ever considered getting Jade a proper service dog? Something trainable, maybe a Lab, or an Alsatian?”

“We’ve thought of it,” Evelyn said, “but Shiro isn’t fond of other dogs. Maybe when he cashes in his chips.”

“Aww, hon,” Paul said, “Shiro’s a nice dog. Old, yes. Stubborn? To eleven. But he does look out for our girl.”

“But of course he does!” Mr. Jolie said. “The ‘Great Dog of the Pyrenees Mountains’ is a French breed, and they are very responsible.” Mr. Jolie looked around. “He has not returned without Jade, of course.”

“No, he hasn’t,” Evelyn said. “Maddie didn’t say anything about what happened when Jade showed up there this morning?”

“No, not really. Just mumbled something about her wanting to play a game that Jade didn’t want to play and Jade left. Maddie assumed she was coming back here.”

“Honestly, when that child gets home...” Evelyn snarled. “Like she doesn’t give us enough to worry about. Should we call the police, do you think?”

“The police? Why? Give it another couple of hours. She can tell when it’s getting dark, right?”



“I don’t know how she could, but Shiro knows when it’s dinnertime down to the microsecond.”

The small group began walking around the perimeter of the property. Philip decided to go check the crawl-space. Of course, Jade wouldn’t be there, but nobody could say he wasn’t looking somewhere.

It was pitch dark in the crawl-space. Was this what Jade’s world was like, Philip wondered. Probably not. The therapist had told him once, long ago, that being blind was like looking at the inside of your skull. There just wasn’t anything there.

Did she know what she was missing? Again, probably not. Many people had told him over the years that you can’t miss something

you’ve never experienced. He’d never experienced using a flip phone and he didn’t miss it.

Still, what if Jade had gotten hit by a car, or eaten by bears, or had fallen into a well? Well, that would relieve him of a lot of burdens, but not of the knowledge that he should have been there to prevent that kind of thing. Could he live with that? He didn’t know.

There had been talk of sending Jade to a “special school” for “handicapped” kids, but she wouldn’t go. She went to regular school and did relatively well. She brought home good grades and her teachers liked her. They coped with her oddities, somehow.

They wouldn’t cope with his. They refused, for example, to call him “Oswaldo” when once, in fourth grade, he announced to the school at large that he was changing his name.

He crawled around for a while, wondering if there were anything hidden down here, checking in the corners by the light of the open flap. No, there was nothing here. Spiders, probably. He liked spiders. He backed out again.

Outside, the adults were gathered around Mrs. Jolie, who was on the phone. Suddenly there was a cheer, and his mother yelled out, “Oh, thank Heaven! Just wait until I get that kid home!” They all started walking off toward the Jolie’s home.

Philip went back to the hammock. There’d better be something good for dinner!

When the parents arrived at the Jolie's home, Jade and Maddie were sitting on the front steps, both of them breathing hard and failing at trying not to show it. Shiro was lying on his side, looking utterly done in. Maddie shot Jade a warning look, then looked up at the adults. "I found her," Maddie said.

"Oh yes?" Paul said. "Where was that?"

"Down the road. Jade was having a walk, see? And Shiro saw a fox and ran off, and Jade followed her. They just got back."

Shiro, hearing his name, opened one eye, seemed to roll it, and went back to sleep.

"In rather a hurry, I see," Evelyn said.

"Well, I noticed them coming back along the road," Maddie pointed down the road, "so I ran up to them and we all ran back, right?"

Jade nodded, and made running motions with her fingers.

"Home. Now." Paul said. "Get up, Shiro, dinner."

That got the dog's attention! After a few thank-yous and I'll-call-you-laters, the Quiros family made their way home.

Once inside the door, Jade was grounded for a week.

So she began at once to plot and plan.

Chapter 10: A Plan

The next day, Paul was walking down the hallway, on his way to his office to work on his book, when he passed Jade's room, and happened to hear something. Something like a very old person saying, "Zhuh parrul fronsay, parrul lay voo oh-see?" Hmmm... Jade listened to lots of books but almost always with headphones or earbuds. She was secretive about the books she chose, for some reason. Odd.

Oh well, better get to work.

Two days later, Jade, restricted to the clearing around the house and being monitored carefully by other members of her household, received a visitor. Maddie, looking thoroughly ill-used, came over. Shiro noticed her first and ran from the porch to meet her, barking. Jade, sitting on the porch and, unknowingly, looking similarly ill-used, waved to her, and Phil came out of the house. Evelyn stuck her head out the door and looked around, but said nothing.

“Hello,” Maddie said, sitting on the porch steps. Jade came and sat beside her. Phil leaned on the rail. “Are you in trouble too?” he said. “Jade’s grounded for a week.” Phil said.

“Still have internet?” Maddie asked.

Jaded nodded.

“Lucky you. I got mine cut off. Can I use yours?”

“No, you can’t!” came Evelyn’s voice through the window.

“I love it how parents always stick together,” Maddie snarled.

After a moment, Phil asked, “So. What exactly happened?”

“Nothin’!” Maddie snorted. Jade nodded agreement.

“Nothin’ my foot!” said Phil in a whisper. He turned and peered in the kitchen window, and seeing no one therein, turned back and said, “Shiro sees foxes and stuff every day and he never chases them. So what were you really doing?”

“What do you care?” Maddie said, looking at him as if he were some kind of stool-pigeon.

“Oh, girlie-girlie secret, eh?” Phil teased.

Both girls rounded on him. “At least girls *can* keep secrets, unlike some OTHER people we know!” Maddie snapped.

Phil leaned back, miming being struck to the heart.

“Now go away, Phil, we’re going to talk Girl Stuff.”

Phil didn’t move.

“IN PRIVATE!”

Jade stood up and grabbed Maddie’s arm, and pointed to the end of the walk by the street, where there was a small planter and a mailbox, and the shade of a tree.

Maddie stood up too. “Good. Bye.”

Phil climbed into the porch swing, put in his earbuds, and pulled out his phone.

Maddie, Jade and Shiro sat down together on the path beside the mailbox. The path was made of chips of slate, which made a lovely sound somewhere between a sweep and a clack as one walked on it. Jade loved that sound.

“I think,” Maddie said quietly, “that my parents figured out somehow where we were.”

Jade sighed.

“Papa’s talking again about hiring somebody to go demolish the house.”

Jade whirled around, and grabbed Maddie's sleeve, shaking her head "no" so vigorously that she smacked herself in the temples with her own hair.

"Well, I guess it is an old dump anyway."

Jade leaned forward, still shaking her head and with great effort said, "*Non.*"

Jade could hear Maddie whirling toward her, and before Maddie could make a sound, Jade put her hand over Maddie's mouth.

"Okay if I whisper?" Maddie said.

"*Oui.*"

"I though you couldn't talk!"

"*J'apprends,*" Jade said. [I learn.] "*C'est un secret!*" She pointed to herself and Maddie, and then make a pinky-promise with herself.

Maddie understood "ahn-say-kret!" and crooked her own pinkie, and then grabbed Jade's hand and put Jade's pinkie into hers. "I solemnly swear I will keep your secret!" she said, her voice nine parts determination and one part manic glee.

Jade thought for a moment. This was a secret so outstanding that she had to tell someone! And she couldn't let the old house be knocked down. Jade curled her pinkie around Maddie's and said, "*Bon!*"

"This is wonderful!" Maddie said, remembering mid-stride to keep her voice down. "You're learning online, right?"

"*Non.*"

"Someone is teaching you, then?"

"*Oui, oui!*" Jade said, nodding. "*Léonie!*"

Jade could hear a subtle change in Maddie's voice. "Oh," Maddie said, "You know someone named Léonie too, then?"

Jade nodded slowly. "*Oui. Grand-mère Léonie.*"

Maddie shuffled on the slate paving. "Jade my granma Léonie has been dead for years now."

"*Léonie m'apprend.*" ["Léonie learns me."]

Maddie hung her head, making her hair make a subtle noise. "I have no idea what you just said."

The only other French words Jade knew so far were, "*S'il vous plaît*" (please), "*Merci*" (thank you), "*Je reviens.*" (I come again), "*Comment dit on?*" (How does one say), and "*Bonjour Madame Léonie.*" How to get this all across?

Jade sat up straight and pretended to play the piano. "*Oui?*"

"You play the piano, yeah, and then?"

Jade held up her hands and pretended to feel around herself for something. She stopped at one place and put both hands together as if holding the hand of someone else, and said, “Léonie.”

“You play the piano and Léonie ... is there?”

“*Oui! Léonie, ici!*” (“Yes, Léonie, here!”) Jade moved her hands to her face, and touched her eyes. She closed them, and then slowly opened them, very wide.

Maddie considered this. “She’s scary?”

“*Non,*” Jade said. She thought for a moment, and then did the whole routine again, and this time, she touched her eyes with her fists, then said, “Léonie!” and opened her fists slowly, and moved her arms around her, and turned her head as if searching for a sound.

“Sorry,” Maddie said. “Still don’t understand.”

Jade sighed and shrugged.

“So...” Maddie started, tentatively. “My granma Léonie is teaching you to speak French.”

Jade nodded. Her throat hurt, and she figured she had spoken enough for one day.

“And she is in the house in the woods?”

Jade nodded again.

“And she’s a ghost.”

Jade had to think long and hard about this. She had never seen Léonie, except maybe as an indistinct patch. But she had seen herself through Léonie’s eyes. In the end she tried to decide if that qualified, although to be honest, she was rather unsure of the concept of a “ghost.” Jade nodded.

Maddie found herself very conflicted. “I don’t believe in ghosts,” she said.

Jade turned to her, but said nothing.

“And besides, even if there were such-of-a-thing as ghosts, I’ve been in that house zillions of times and I never saw her. And I’m her grand-daughter too, so she should have appeared to me of all people.”

Jade shrugged and held out her hands, palm up, in a gesture that her brother had taught her, for, “I don’t have a clue.”

“But you got to the house by yourself?” Maddie asked.

Jade pointed to herself and Shiro, and nodded. If Maddie didn’t believe in ghosts, there was no point of trying to tell her that Léonie had helped.

“Well, that’s good because if I get caught even heading in that direction again I’mma be locked in my room until I starve.”

When Jade’s face fell, Maddie added, “But I’ll learn French with you! I’m sure there are lessons on the internet.”

Jade shook her head. She'd looked. There were lessons, but they all cost way more money than she had at her command. On the other hand... Jade pointed to Maddie, and then made motions as if reading a book.

“Oh yeah, I have books. That won't help you though, they're not in Braille.”

Jade didn't care. She had Léonie.

At that point, Phil came out to tell Jade it was lunchtime, and Maddie left. The idea that Léonie's house might actually be demolished weighed heavily on her mind. Did Léonie know about the plans? Did Léonie have to stay in the house?

As she ate her lunch of cheese on a hard roll, she began to plot how she might get out of the house for a while without anyone knowing. As she thought about it, she realized that the biggest problem with this as sitting right next to her, waiting for any crumbs she might drop.

Shiro had been her shadow for so long, and with such loyalty, that more often than not, when anyone went looking for her, they just looked for the dog. With his bright, white coat, he was certainly easier to spot.

If she could get Shiro to stay behind...

How would she do that? Shiro took his “livestock guarding” duties very seriously.

How to get him to stay here? She'd tried to get him to “sit,” “stay,” and all that, but Pyrs were well known for their utter lack of concern with being told what to do.

She had once tried to get him to leave her alone by giving him one of her mother's sleeping pills wrapped in bologna, and ... well, that didn't go well and she daren't try it again.

Then, suddenly, she got an idea: what if it was Shiro who was missing? If she could hide him somewhere, and everyone would have to run around looking for him because she would be pretending to be utterly distraught...

No, he would bark his head off and be found immediately unless she sent him miles and miles away.

Tie him to a tree?

No, he chewed his way through a seat-belt once.

Suddenly it occurred to Jade that she was going about this the wrong way. Instead of getting herself out of the house, she had to get everyone else out of the house. Now... what could she arrange that would cause them all to leave, but leave Jade herself behind?

She could ... push Phil down the stairs. Of course, he may get really badly hurt or he may not get hurt at all, which was probably worse.

And then, it hit her.

Her family didn't have an ice box!

She waited until her dad was hard at work on his book, and her mom had gone shopping for ingredients for a large pastry order she had to fill for a party tomorrow night. Phil had his ear buds in and would hear nothing anyway.

First, she went to the fridge and very carefully felt along it. She got a crowbar from the shed, pushed the old fridge away from the wall, carefully felt along the back of the fridge until she found the cable, unplugged the fridge, and then levered the fridge back into place, carefully feeling and measuring with her hands to put it back exactly where it was.

The next morning, the family sat down to breakfast, and Paul reached into the fridge for milk for his coffee.

“Honey,” he said, “the light in the fridge must have burned out.”

Not quite the conclusion Jade had been hoping for.

“And the milk is warm.”

Aaaah! It took every ounce of cunning Jade had to keep from grinning.

“What?” Evelyn said, walking over and taking the carton from him. “Oh no,” she said, a rising panic in her voice. Jade could hear her rummaging through the fridge, testing this thing and that. “Oh, no, oh, no, I have that huge cake order to get done by this afternoon!” Rummage, rummage, rummage, “all of this stuff is ruined! What am I gonna do?!”

“I’m sure some of it can be salvaged,” Paul said. Jade could hear him opening the meat drawer, which had a particular squeak. “The bacon’s still good.”

“Don’t bet on it,” Evelyn said. She pulled out her phone and called the Jolie’s. “Our fridge has died!” she said, almost in tears. “I have to get an order done by 3pm this afternoon and all the cream and butter and eggs—sorry, yes, of course... okay... thanks.”

She put her phone back in her pocket. “Martin is coming to look it over and see if he can see a problem.”

“What’s going on?” Phil said, walking toward the fridge. He stopped, exactly where, Jade couldn’t tell for sure, and seemed to scratch at the floor with his foot.

“Oh, just go sit down and have some ... thing,” Evelyn said.

“Well, apples and bananas shouldn’t be in the fridge anyway,” Paul said, grabbing some and handing them around.

“Can we have soda instead of tea?” Phil said.

“No, you can have plain tea like it was meant to be drunk!” Evelyn snapped. “Oh, what am I going to do?”

There was a crunch of gravel on the driveway as Martin Jolie drove up. Shiro sauntered up to the front door, barking the whole way, and getting his ears rubbed as Mr. Jolie came in. “Dead fridge, eh?” he said as he came into the kitchen. “Let’s see now.” He walked in his gum-soled, squeaky shoes to the “Hmmm, that’s bad. Well, you got some cheese here and some stuff, that’s probably still good. You can keep that in our fridge while I get a new fridge delivered.”

“How long will that be?” Evelyn asked.

“Couldn’t say. I tell you what. You go shopping and buy yourself a nice cooler and some ice and whatever you need for today, and your boy can help me carry the salvageable stuff to my house, and Paul and I, if we go

together, and find a fridge we can probably wrangle it home ourselves between us rather than waiting for a delivery.”

“Yeah, yeah, okay,” Evelyn said. She grabbed her keys and was out the door almost immediately.

“Come on, boy, up with you,” Mr. Jolie said.

Phil sighed and got up as if he were being asked to kiss a room-full of toads.

“And you!” came Paul’s voice, directed at Jade. “You’re still grounded.”

Jade shrugged. She ate her banana, then went to her room and listened carefully, awaiting results.

“Hmmm, that’s bad. Well, you got some cheese here and some stuff, that’s probably still good. You can keep that in our fridge while I get a new fridge delivered.”

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“Come on, boy, up with you,” Mr. Jolie said.

Phil sighed and got up as if he were being asked to kiss a room full of slugs.

“And you!” came Paul’s voice, directed at Jade. “You’re still grounded.”

Jade shrugged. She ate her banana, then went to her room and listened carefully, awaiting results.

The nearest town with a store big enough to have fridges in stock was about an hour away. Both Paul and Mr. Jolie, being of the Generation-Before-Internet, would hardly think of looking online first to find out what was actually available, they’d just go and get it. So there were two hours.

Phil would probably stay and talk to Maddie, so he would be out of the way, and even if he didn’t, what of it? She turned on one of her audio-books and let the sound fill the room. And the hallway.

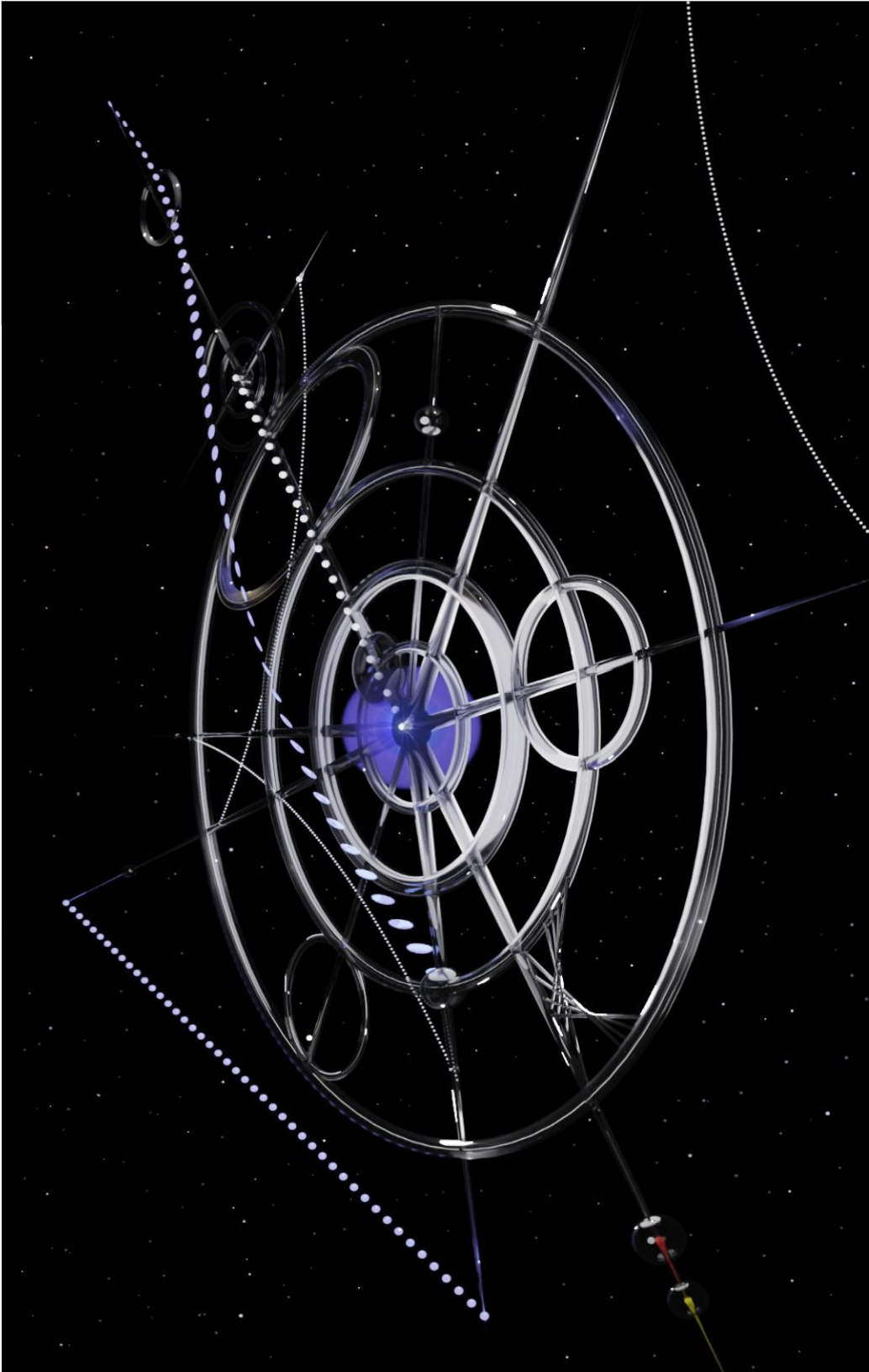
By the time Evelyn got back she would be so busy baking and panicking she’d hear the audio-book playing and just assume Jade was in her room stewing about being grounded.

Nobody had even thought of just moving the fridge and checking the plug!

This was absolutely the most genius idea Jade had ever had!

She went to the spice cabinet, and pulled out a bottle of whole cloves. Then she quietly left the house by the back door in her father’s “study,” Shiro in her wake, and walked up to the edge of the woods. She concentrated with all her might, and quietly called, “*Léonie! Je reviens!*”

To Be Continued...



🔧 Having a Blast(er)

by Bob Shimbo

A long time ago (1978) in a city far, far away (Phoenix), the World Science Fiction Convention was held. A friend of mine and I decided to attend Iguanacon and enter the costume contest. We were very new to science fiction conventions (I think we had attend a couple at the time) and had never entered a costume contest. But being an engineer and physicist we thought we could do well in the workmanship competition. We invited his girlfriend (an MD) who lived in Phoenix to join us at the convention. Now I needed to come up with 3 blasters for us to carry. Like all good projects, it took longer than the time we had, so I ended up finishing building two of the blasters in the hotel room in Phoenix.

Here is an annotated side view of the finished blaster.

The blaster is based on a Crossman 22-caliber CO2 pellet gun. The visible hammer is a bit of pre-steampunk anachronism. The aluminum boxes added are from Zero.



Officer Robert A Shimbo of the Galactic Bureau of Standards. Photo taken at Minicon 15 in 1979.

Annotated back and front views appear below.

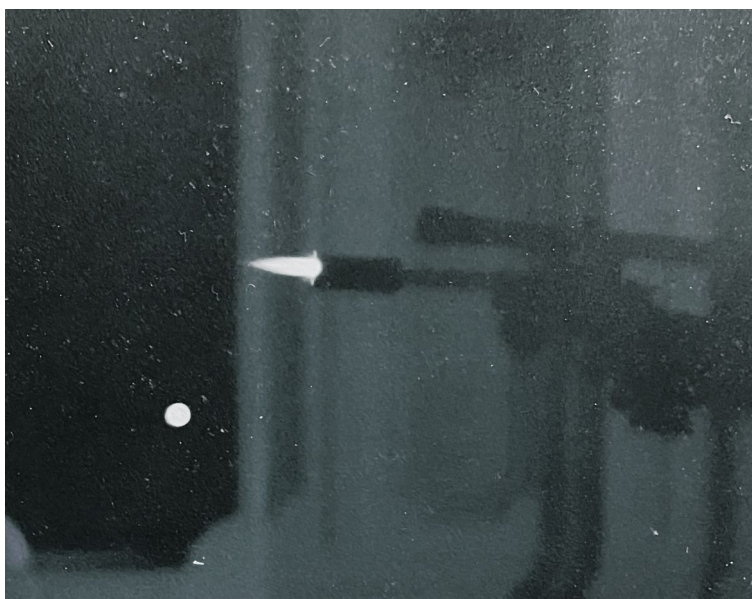


Theory of Operation

When the blaster is turned on using the power switch, the xenon flash unit begins charging the capacitor. When the voltage on the capacitor is sufficient for the flash tube, the red ready light comes on. When the trigger is pulled, a contact is made which triggers a time delay circuit. The hammer falls and releases charge of CO₂ into the barrel. The CO₂ travels down the barrel and turns into dry ice crystals due to the rapid drop in pressure. The time delay circuit has been tuned so that the flash will trigger when the crystals are exiting the barrel. The crystals exit the barrel and are illuminated by the xenon flash. The flash fires and the light is guided out the front of the blaster by the clear plexiglass tube that extends the steel barrel. The crystals are seen as a blue white spear point at the front of the blaster. There is a suitable bang to complete the effect.

There is a charging circuit included to allow the two NiCad AA cells to be recharged as needed.

Conclusion



The blaster in action. Please forgive the photo; it is a scan of a photograph taken in the Before Times. The muzzle-flash shows clearly in this light. It is more difficult to see, but still visible, in regular room illumination.

Building and demonstrating the blaster over the years has been a lot of fun. The seals in the base gun need to be replaced periodically, and the NiCad batteries tend to leak after a while. That it still works after more than 40 years is pretty astounding.



With our uniforms, blasters and other accessories, we managed to get a blue ribbon for workmanship at the convention. I met Fara while waiting in line at the costume contest. She was interested in the blasters and other gadgets, and agreed to provide off-stage monster noises for our skit. Thus began a long distance relationship with her that would result in us marrying a couple of years later.



Fragments

by Mark Merlino

This is something Fa asked me to write for *Retrozine* after visiting in person during our trip to Denver for DenFur furry convention. For those who don't know me (or much about me), I am a "fan", as in Science Fiction fan (literary AND media) and have been since 1969.

I have always been huge fan of animation, in all of its forms since I was a child (my parents placed it around 4 years of age when they noticed). When old enough to understand and appreciate how entertainment was created, I decided that animation was the ULTIMATE creative media. Creators had control of everything; anything that could be imagined could be designed and produced in animation. I watched anything animated I could find on TV, saw every animated film released (multiple times), and when video recording eventually became a reality, I started collecting animation. After realizing that I could watch my collection anytime, I decided I wanted to SHOW my collection to others, and maybe find friends with that same love for the medium.

I discovered Fandom (capitol F) when a friend and I attended a "Save Star Trek" convention in LA. Seeing all the people in costume was amazing, but even more interesting was discovering the full-scale Enterprise bridge set on display had been built by fans! No one paid them, they just made it themselves. In many ways, it was superior to the original sets. They even rented it to the studios for commercials and promotional films. I decided that these "fans" were something I wanted to find out more about.

I discovered that science fiction fandom had its roots in the 1930s, when SF writers were underappreciated by the literary community. Then there were the media conventions that supported the suddenly popular SF themed films and TV shows. After volunteering at a few SF and Comic conventions, usually as a projectionist; and later running my own video screening rooms (not without controversy... "A TV does not belong at a Science Fiction convention!"), some friends I knew who were actually in the animation business, and the venerable Fred Patten (look him up if you haven't heard the name) started the first US animation club dedicated (mostly) to Japanese animation, The Cartoon/Fantasy Organization (1977).

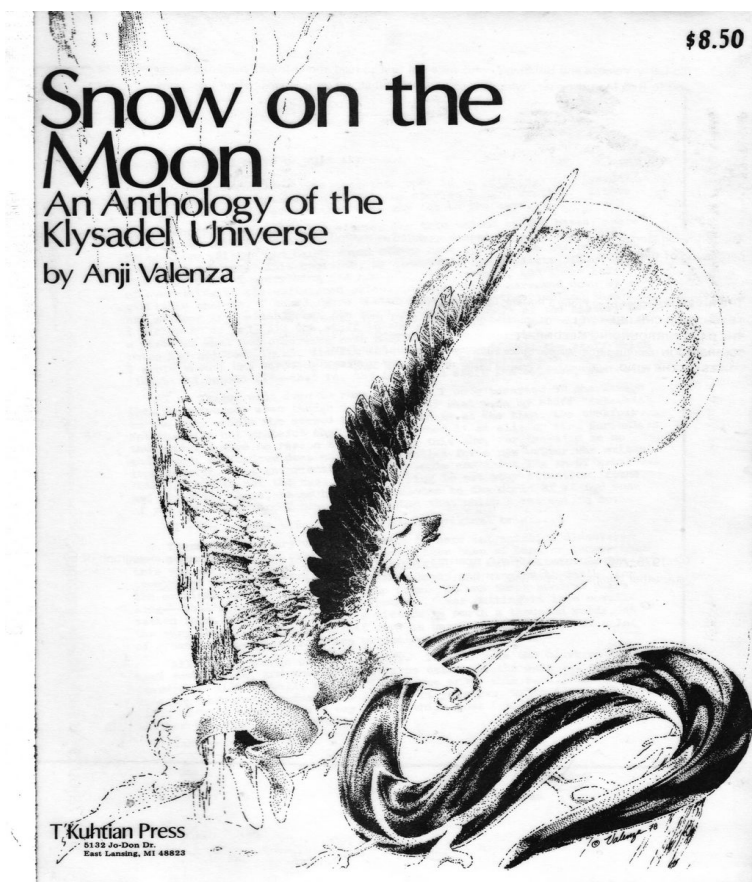
I am also very interested (obsessed?) in fictional animal characters. Animals in cartoons, like Mickey Mouse or Bugs Bunny; characters from animated films, like *Bambi* or *Gay Purr-ee*; characters that may be aliens but not humanoid in science fiction, fantasy and comic strips and books, fanzines and APAs, and even logo characters and mascots. No matter what media I may be browsing, if it has an animal-based character, my interest in it multiplies 10 fold at least! This particular aesthetic behavior eventually ended up being described (accidentally) by the catch-all term "furry." Note: The term "furry" referring to a species, art of a species, stories, films and music involving those species And the Fans too was not in common usage until around 1980, but like Lady Gaga sings, most of us know we were "born this way".

What does this all have to do with Fa's story *Snow on the Moon*? I'm getting to that...

Since I was now one of those “fans” myself; I began attending as many SF/F conventions as I could afford to get to. At every convention I attended, I would carefully search for anything involving my “furry” interest. Since art is the most visceral and immediate furry experience, the art show would be my first stop. In those days you didn’t find much art in the dealer’s room, since inexpensive high-quality prints or on-demand printing were not things yet. I would typically find 2 or 3 things in the art show and the dealer’s room that fit my criteria. I might buy a t-shirt (or have one made with an iron-on I found), or art and sometimes even attempt to win something I liked in the art auction. Obviously I was not the only one interested in such things.

At one convention, perhaps WesterCon in San Francisco or WorldCon in Phoenix, around the late 1970s, I was browsing a rack of fanzines at a dealer’s table and something caught my eye...

It was the cover art of a fanzine that appeared to be an anthology. It was photo-copied but the striking art survived the degrading printing method. I got “all the feels” from the art. (When I see something attractive, or “furry,” I actually have a physical reaction. Much like anyone gets when they experience a beautiful scene, or thing, or person; a kind of slight tightening in the chest. At least that’s how it works for me.) Then, there was that title: *Snow on the Moon*. Wow!



I picked it up, leafed through it; saw more incredible art and an interesting graphic layout that I had not encountered before in a fan publication. It appeared to be written and illustrated by one person. I bought it, and that night I began to read it while lying in bed. I read it cover to cover. The author and artist had taken me on a whirlwind tour of their universe. It was an emotional roller coaster. Some solemn and even tearful moments, incredible visualizations and a lot of real fun (including some terrible humor, but after all, it was a complete universe). In the middle of the book was the story *Snow on the Moon*. The story of an unfortunate incident and how “It takes a village” to help someone in need, and a love story too.

At the time I was not the best read fan. I’m a slow reader and much of the genre I had read (or attempted to read) did not interest me. I really enjoy well developed characters more than the intricacies of the plot. A lot of the “sci-fi” and fantasy I tried had characters that seemed like cardboard cutouts against an impressive backdrop. The *Snow on the Moon* zine had everything I enjoyed, and it wasn’t a

10 volume “trilogy.” My favorite forms of fiction are short stories and novellas.

Fa’s writing style in the anthology is very limited. It is like sahn is telling you, “Look, I know this world, I made it. I don’t have time to stop and explain everything in detail to you, so come along and try to keep up!” The

effect of this style is to place you IN the world. You aren't sitting and listening to someone telling you a story (unless the particular story is in that vein), you aren't watching a film (though I sure would love to see sahn's stories in animation); you are actually THERE, a spectator to what is going on and when it is happening.

This writing style can be experienced in two ways (for me at least). I can plow through quickly and hope I comprehend what is happening, or I can carefully dissect every sentence and paragraph to attempt to understand and fill in the missing (in my opinion, of course) details myself. I find both methods enjoyable.

Important note: This article refers to the original version of *Snow on the Moon* published in the anthology fanzine of the same name in 1978.

The story that affected me the most was the title piece, *Snow on the Moon*. It takes place on the lunar colony Wargentin, an extensive facility, mostly underground but with some transparent domes covering some areas. An alien first-contact specialist, Fara Maki, and the intelligent starship, Fa Chen, landed at Wargentin (after observing the Earth and its large satellite for some time) and selected the lunar colony as the place to make first-contact. The residents accepted the visitors and one particular Earth-created advanced android, Thobo, have befriended the aliens.

The incident that sparks the story situation is that Wargentin residents have manipulated the life support systems of the city so it is snowing in the domes for the traditional Earth holiday season. Fara Maki, though genetically modified (uplifted) Satamuri remains a completely biological member of their species, a triple-sexed carbon/silicon based creature. The created weather situation has affected Maki's natural life cycle and they begin experiencing their natural reproductive cycle, something that usually can be reliably predicted giving the individuals the chance to return to their home-world to participate in the normal breeding season.

The human residents and Maki's android friend have no idea what is happening, and the starship, Fa Chen, is equally in the dark, since the starships traditionally take a "vacation" during the Satamuri breeding time. When entering the reproductive cycle, Satamuri undergo extreme physiological and psychological changes. They essentially become completely different individuals. When it becomes obvious that Maki is not doing well, Thobo and other residents (some medical professionals) attempt to understand what is happening and how to help. Fa Chen provides as much information as they have, but the situation begins to become desperate, and Fara is really in danger.

Here is where the story becomes interesting and compelling. Thobo and many others in the community (human and uplifted dolphin) do everything possible to make Maki comfortable and safe during the trying event. Since Maki is unable to explain the situation due to the extreme biological changes they are experiencing, and Fa Chen, Thobo and the residents are all clueless, it all becomes a community effort to save their alien friend by guess and by golly. A wonderful "it takes a village" series of events occurs that includes some scary close calls, occasional silly humor and real, warm, touching emotion.

The reader (Me) is just as clueless about what is happening as the characters in the story. Fa does not stop the action to explain anything. Some of the articles in the anthology do help understand how the universe and its inhabitants work, but these are separate and not required to experience *Snow on the Moon*. The limited writing style, extensive realistic dialog and lack of exposition very effectively put YOU right in the action. You are learning along with the characters. You are right there, watching the events unfold, listening to the characters discuss and try to understand the situation, and even enjoying some brief levity to help reduce the stress.

I am a person that gets very emotionally involved in reading and other media and I have never experienced feelings of such realism and emotion in anything I can remember reading. If someone asks me what the best science fiction story I read is, I don't hesitate to answer...

Snow on the Moon.



Snow on the Moon

by Fara Shimbo (née Valenza; first printed in 1978. Presented here with original and new illustrations)

Prologue

There was snow on the Moon, to celebrate the holidays. Yule, New Year (Eastern and Western), Chanukka, Beethoven's birthday, Candlemas, the Saturnalia, and anything else anyone could think of, was combined here at Wargentín into the Festival of Winter Week. For the duration of Winter Week, the domed city's environmental units were (deliberately) tampered with, turned down during lunar night and up to full during lunar day. In addition to that, a slight bit of finagling with the sprinkler system that ribbed the domes caused snow, rather than the "rain" whose main purpose was simply to keep down the dust, to fall. And everyone knew at least one person who had come here to see what could be seen nowhere else in this system; the singular phenomenon of snow falling from a sky full of black and sun and stars.

In the thirteen years since Wargentínopolis had become its own city-state, all manner of people had become part of the city's celebrations. Recently an android test-pilot had been added—and given the job, apart from his usual one at The Spaceship Shop, of putting up all the dome decorations. More recently was added an extraterrestrial, who insisted upon the pronoun "sahn" and took it upon sahn's-self to avenge people who'd heard puns no ear should hear. Most of these came from Thobo Haradu, android.

Winter Week was over now and Thobo and Maki, the "Alien Cat," were trying to recover. Their singular friendship had been the wonder of everyone since Maki had arrived; and whenever Wargentines celebrated something (which was quite often), they were called upon to participate. Thobo, living as he was in his own element, took everything easily. But although snow on the Moon meant, to Maki, a far more homelike environment than Wargentín ever had, it was just not cold enough...

Winter Week had drained the Cat of all sahn's strength and drive. For a week, sahn'd been appearing on the Wargentín,



All-Lunar and Earth Network television as Wargentin showed off its latest status symbol (in Maki's words, "the only ET ever to admit to coming here.") Sahn'd been plied with rare and often alcoholic delicacies, and begged to show off any "alien powers" sahn might possess. In fact, sahn had none *per se*, and though the prehensile tail was not much of a novelty; but the venomous fangs did impress at least a few people.

A week spent avoiding explaining sahn's starship's drive; a week spent being hustled and hassled. A week spent somewhat ill. Well, this to would pass



Sunday

Someone had left the refrigerator door open. *Someone* had left clumps of long, tan and white hairs on the dark blue carpet. And *someone* had taken bites out of the already pathetic spider plant!

Thobo rubbed his eyes, regarding these misdemeanors as other people regard the sudden attachment of a small dog to their ankles. 'It must have been the regular cats,' he thought. Maki would never touch undisguised vegetable matter; and Thobo had taken the shedding blade to sahn weeks ago.

He shot an accusing glance at Get and Out, his, "regular" cats, who were curled up on top of the bookcase. They stared back at him until he turned away.

'Breakfast,' Thobo thought. Since Maki'd come to Wargentin and into his life, he'd gotten back into the habit of eating regular meals. He looked around the porch for the Maki, but sahn wasn't there. Sahn was usually sleeping under his arm when he awoke. Unusual, unusual. So where was the Alien Cat?

There was one never-fail way to find out. He leaned out the kitchen door and called, "BREAKFAAAAST!"

There were a series of "Thump!"s, and Thobo was pinned to the ground. Get and Out had arrived first, rushing out from the living room. Maki had fallen from the sky like a furry hailstone.

Thobo rolled out from under the feline mass; "Where were you?"

The Alien Cat chirped and pointed to the roof, and showed off some of the last of the slush, which had accumulated in sahn's fur.

"What were you doing up there?"

Maki looked down, over the railing of the porch, at the trammelled snow on the sidewalk below. Sahn pointed again and said, looking back, "Virgin snow!"

"Oh." Thobo collected all his cats, and shoved them into the kitchen. His voice became grave. "You better stay off those rooves. People will think you're rats, and set rat traps for you, which would serve you right. But second of all, I don't want you hanging around with that kind of snow. It might give you ideas, which might give me ideas. I intend to be a Dirty Old Android when I grow up, and I don't want anyone to spoil it."

Maki still didn't know all that much English, and most of what Thobo'd just said passed right through sahn's ears. Thobo caught a glance at the fangs as sahn yawned, and was very glad that it did.

Breakfast was simple; toasted English muffins and fruit juice. Just a few weeks earlier, Maki had had sahn's spaceship, Fa Chen, use a mobile sensory unit or *imbi* to line sahn's digestive tract with some material which would allow sahn to eat the local foods, especially the much-lusted-after and until-recently-deadly pistachio ice cream.

"We have no more straws," Thobo said, as he placed a glass of orange juice and some English muffins in front of sahn.

Almost disinterestedly, Maki sniffed at the glass and started to nibble.

Thobo had not touched his own breakfast (although Get and Out tried to). “Aren’t you going to complain about how I mixed that?” he said with no little astonishment.

Maki poked sahn’s nose into the glass. Sahn thought for a second. “No...” Poke again. Sahn hissed at the glass. Maki whined.

Thobo chortled. “Uncivilized beast!” Thobo snatched up the glass and playfully slapped the satamuri on the head. He poured the juice into a shallow bowl, and set it down. Maki began to drink, chirping a “thank you” and purring (or at least that’s what Maki’d said that sound was) between swallows. A much better arrangement, a bowl.

Thobo downed all his juice at once. “You know what? I think it was you who left part of you under my asparagus fern.”

“Hunh?”

“Long white hairs. They’re very pretty but the super will scream bloody hell if they get into the vacuum system.”

Maki flattened sahn’s ears and sighed, turned around and prepared to jump down from the table.

Thobo grabbed sahn. “Not now, here finish your breakfast first.”

Get and Out, hearing the magic word, jumped immediately onto the android’s lap, demanding their cut.

Thobo grunted and cursed electronically; he picked up the cats, flung them into the living room, and said to Maki, “Finish your m-e-a-l.” And leaving the Alien Cat to sahn’s own devices, he fed the Regular Cats. He wondered, though, why Maki hadn’t made sahn’s usual morning exposition upon his virtual lack of a sense of taste as evidenced in his atrocious preparation of nearly any kind of food. Maybe sahn’d finally been impressed with the futility of it all ... He hardly thought so. Sahn was probably just recovering from the previous week.



Later that day, after classes were over and students duly “terrorized” by Thobo’s “wild animal,” the two of them returned to Thobo’s apartment. It was “night” now, with the inside lights of the dome turned off, and the world outside them visible through reflections on the dome’s inner surface. Thobo walked in and dropped onto his couch. Maki, instead of dropping there with him, folded sahn’s-self up behind a potted avocado tree.

Get and Out weren’t having any of that! If those two were back, it was Time To Feed The Cats. Quietly cursing all Freshmen and especially all Sophomores, Thobo got up and went into the kitchen, where the cats were staring malevolently from behind their empty bowls.

Thobo pulled several things from the cabinets, examining each noncommittally. “What do you fancy for dinner?” he called.

He waited; no response. He harrumphed and walked back into the living room. Maki was still behind the plant, and looked quite asleep.

Thobo had seen sahn use the pretense of sleep to keep people from bothering sahn. “Hey!” he called, and gave sahn a light swat on the head.

Thobo’s hand had only brushed sahn’s forelock; but the satamuri yelped and cringed at his touch. When sahn’s eyes opened, they questioned him with bewildered shock.

Again, Thobo found himself at a loss. “Come and eat,” was all he said.

Maki waited for Thobo to return to the kitchen, and then padded after him.

“What shall I make for you?” Thobo asked when he heard sahn go past.

“Whatever there is in abundance,” sahn said without turning to him. “I’m not hungry.”

Not terribly unusual behavior on Maki's part. Sahn's half-trained, half-instinctive unwillingness to deplete the resources of another's territory usually manifested itself in this manner. There was usually subordination in sahn's voice. Tonight, there was submission as well, he thought. More confusion to add to a whole day of confusion.

Maki heard jars being placed on the countertop but did no investigating. Sahn sat in front of the glass doors which led to the porch, and examined sahn's reflection. Carefully, Maki parted sahn's forelock; and saw there, running down the middle of sahn's head, a frail, bluish membrane, which lay folded and flat under the fur there. Part of it was purple; Thobo'd hit it when he'd gone to wake sahn up.



Maki winced when sahn saw it. If that were there, then...

Sahn turned to examine the base of sahn's tail. And sure enough, growing out from either side of it were four feather-like blades.

One last indicator. Maki licked a paw, and then ran it down sahn's chest and abdomen. When sahn was done, patches of white hairs had stuck to it.

'Damn the weather!' Maki thought. Well, this was what happened to you when you keep putting off getting your hormones rearranged. If it had gotten this far, there was no delaying it (though it would probably be cut very short). Sahn had feared the worst, and, well... here at Wargentin it would be the worst, anyway. No stopping it now.

Thobo would have to be told. Sahn had known this all along. Ever since morning, Maki had been imagining sahn's self telling him, trying to pick out the right words. Sahn was still not ready to speak.

If this were not a college town with a very large, very eager biology department...

Sahn looked around. Thobo was still considering items in jars. Sahn tried to analyze the expression on his face, since around here facial expressions meant so much. There wasn't much to go on. Thobo was young yet, and wasn't the kind of person who gave away many mood cues in any case. Sahn concluded he hadn't reached the point where he'd use non-verbal cues unconsciously, and they were rarely things he remembered to employ.

Sahn did guess that he was irritated. The nearly closed eyes and steady activity gave that much away. He was probably irritated at sahn, otherwise he would have confided to sahn already. So... what had sahn done that was so improper?

Sahn shifted into a position from which sahn could easily rise if necessary. The *faan* on the top of the satamuri's head hurt, not only from the swipe, but from dryness. Maki rubbed it, touching it painfully, and noticed that one of the spines which would support it when sahn was in the water had been snapped.

At that moment, Thobo chose to look down. The voice was as blank as the face. "Did I hurt you that badly?"

Maki chirped.

“What’s wrong?”

Maki’s mouth opened but no words came out.

“Come, let me see your head.” Thobo leaned over and carefully picked through the forelock. He found the broken spine. He had never, in three years with the Cat, noticed this structure before. “What’s this?” he said.

“A transitory structure. For getting air from water,” Maki said. “You whacked it.”

“I can see that. What do you need a gill for?”

Maki shifted. “Thobo, *kaúneh...*”

That one word, from Maki’s language, carried with it a wealth of meaning: urgency, a need for privacy, a request for patience from the listener, and, especially, for the listener’s complete confidentiality.

It was one of the few Kwakyen words that Thobo really knew, and which he readily appreciated. His mood changed, albeit slightly, upon hearing it.

The two of them went into the living room, where Thobo made himself comfortable on a rug. Maki followed him and sat, tightly curled and facing away from him. How to explain...

“Thobo, my species breeds twice a year, once every year-and-a-half of your years. The cycle’s triggered by a change in sunlight, the red sun being alone in the sky for a certain time. Your sunlight is towards the red, compared to our main star, but one gets a twinge and one ignores it. And since it’s usually hot here, I have been so foolish as to do nothing to suppress accidental cycling. Between the ‘weather’ and the stress, a cycle has started. Therefore, if one can say that an amphibian is ‘in estrus,’ well, then, there you go.” Maki looked down at the blades on sahn’s tail and twitched them.

Thobo listened to what sahn’d been saying with increasing perplexity. “Izzat so,” he said. “I’ve never noticed any sexual behaviors on your part before, not that I would, necessarily, but I always figured you’d be sterile for the span of your time with us at Wargentin.”

Maki considered saying something insulting about “mammals,” but didn’t. “Who, me?” Sahn began to groom at the hairs on sahn’s chest. “One can’t really sterilize a satamuri the way one fixes a cat. We don’t have discrete organs that can be removed all at once. And since we are cyclers, rather than steady-staters like humans, it isn’t worth the bother anyway. And as far as noticing sexual behaviors on my part, first of all I wouldn’t call any satamuri behavior ‘sexual,’ and second of all, I don’t think that, even if they were, in the mammal’s sense of the word, you’d recognize any if you saw them. I’m an alien. Remember that.”

Thobo nodded. He reached out a hand, and Maki touched it briefly. “How long will this last?” he asked.

Maki shrugged, a behavior sahn’d learned since coming to Wargentin, and which sahn had incorporated into sahn’s repertoire of displays. “Three-hundred-sixty hours, normally. Twelve days at home. That’s what ... fifteen days here? At home, three days before we start producing *qoki...* eggs?” Sahn searched for a word but “gamete” was not yet in sahn’s vocabulary. “Six days of one egg a day. Then one day neutral, and one day of a ... hormone that shuts the whole thing down quickly so we can get back to hunting in packs. I don’t think it will run 360 hours, not here.”

Thobo nodded this time. “And all this time I thought that you were sick or mad or there was something wrong with you.”

“No....”

“Then what’s upsetting you?”

“Apart from ‘publish or perish?’” Maki said.

“I see...” Thobo himself had been the subject of more “scientific inquiry” than he cared to think about. “But you know, we’re both tenured professors here. They don’t want to upset anyone who’s likely to be on the peer review board, you know.”

Maki snorted. Sahn still did not appear mollified.

“Talk to me,” Thobo said.

Something within Maki ordered sahn not to say a word. Something told sahn that in this place, it was better not to speak. But Thobo said ‘speak,’ and this was his home... “Usually I would go home for this, for *fère*, as we call it. That’s why I left the last time I left. All the satamuri *shauneh* go home to the Klysadel and get drunk and stay that way for fifteen days or twelve days or whatever, and the *maileiau* Khevet spoil us rotten. I ... will not be able to teach your class with you because of now-obvious reasons, and you should know why.”

“Your behavior will change that much?”

“Yes, it will. During the first days and the spawning days I will only want to sleep.” *And there will be nothing I will want more than to be around people I trust and not to be left alone—STOP IT!* “I will be hypersensitive. I’ll panic if someone drops something. I’ll lose coherency. Terminal brain rot.” Sahn looked steadily at Thobo for some time. “On the last day or two I will be feeling badly and will need to be left completely alone.”

Thobo leaned over and scratched Maki’s ears. “Is that all? You had me worried. I thought something was wrong or you were mad at me.”

“Me? I’ve never been mad at you, *maileiau*-friend. If it bothered you, Thobo, why didn’t you say something to me?”

“Why didn’t you say something to me?”

A muffled whine. “Because I was hoping I wouldn’t need to,” Maki admitted. “I thought it might just stop. It does sometimes.”

Thobo examined the *faan* again, and rolled Maki onto sahn’s side and examined the places on sahn’s chest and belly from which the hair had fallen. “Are you certain you’re cycling now?”

“No,” Maki answered. “There’s a feeling one gets as soon as the first... as soon as the blood starts really flowing. I haven’t felt that yet.”

“What does it feel like?”

“Don’t remember, actually. I’ll know it when I feel it.”

For a while, both of them just lay on the floor. “I imagine,” Thobo said slowly, “that you’ll be missing your own kind now.”

Maki chirped.

“You’ll be staying with your starship then?”

Maki sighed. “I’ll stay in my own flat.” Sahn thought, but did not add, *Fa Chen is a muònet starship. Much more alien than I. Cycling animals make muònet nervous. But to be alone? YOU HAVE NO CHOICE.*

Maki curled up. “I don’t want the humans to know about this.”

Thobo pulled the creature to him, and began rubbing sahn’s back. “Why don’t you stay with me, then, Maki? I’ll cover for you.”

Oh, could I? “That would be a terrible imposition. Thank you, but I can’t.”

“What imposition? I can make up excuses as well as anyone else. You’re spending time in the new Wargentin Monastery—”

“No, Thobo, that’s not what I mean.”

Thobo growled and now leaned on the satamuri fully. “Damn it, I know what you mean, you grouch! If it’s any help, curiosity motivates me, then, not altruism. The thirst for knowledge knows no question. Your soup has boiled away. Come and eat.”

“Question?”

Thobo stood up and waited, but Maki didn’t move.

“Hey you!” he snapped.

Maki looked up and growled.

Thobo grabbed the animal by sahn’s muzzle. “Whose territory are we in?”

“Yours,” sahn mumbled.

“And who’s the boss here?”

“You.”

“And what do you do when the boss says do something?”

Maki sat up and yanked sahn’s self free. “Let’s go to my place where I can be boss,” sahn said. But sahn purred anyway, considerably lightened at heart. This kind of thing, of bosses and territories, Maki understood very, very well.

Thobo pulled what was left of the soup from the microwave, and as he did, he felt Maki suddenly fall against his back. He spun around quite a bit more suddenly than he would have wanted to. “What happened?!”

Maki groaned. “There’s this weird feeling you get at this time of year,” sahn said. Sahn motioned around sahn’s stomach and head. “Like vertigo.”

Thobo turned back. “Oh, does that mean it’s a long road and you have vertigo before this is over?”

The satamuri hit him, hard.



Monday

A satamuri is a creature with a circadian homeothermy. By day, they sit in the sun, letting their light-pipe guard hairs soak up sunlight. During the night, they are warm-blooded. Consequently, they spend the middle of the day and the middle of the night sleeping, and the rest of the time rocketing around. Thobo had gotten used to this state of affairs, but when he woke Monday morning, even though it was very early, Maki was not there.

Nor was sahn behind the rampant asparagus fern that grew (well, at least didn’t die) in the kitchen doorway, nor in it. Nor was sahn in the kitchen, nor in any of 214 South Goddard Avenue’s scant other hiding places. Thobo sighed, opened the porch doors and yelled “BREAKFAST!!” But all that got him was Regular Cats.

Now where ... Thobo pondered. Then he realized that he had not, after all, made it clear that Maki was to stay here.

Three doors down was Maki’s apartment, number 217, assigned to the Alien Cat not long ago. Maki’s door recognized him without difficulty and let him in. He noticed immediately upon entering that the place was quite warm.

Thobo stepped over a large grey cat and ducked under ropes and bars which Maki’d put up as sort of a jungle gym. Eventually he found the satamuri curled up in a hanging chair on sahn’s porch, which was not where Alien Cats ought to be at this time of day.

He walked up to the critter and tapped on sahn's arm very lightly.

The satamuri startled nonetheless. Ssahn looked up through eyes that were too tired to open.

"I though we were agreed that you could stay with me," Thobo said quietly.

Maki sighed and curled up tighter.

Thobo just picked the Cat up and carried sahn down the hall.

Maki opened sahn's mouth to complain, but nothing came out. As much as Maki and Thobo had been through together, as much as they welcomed each other's company, as much as they took liberties with each other which they would never dream of allowing to anyone else, Maki was still unsure whether or not sahn had gained enough favor, enough acceptance, to give sahn's self into the care of another... Now, here sahn had proof, though; and sahn was brought into Thobo's apartment without protest.

Thobo's "Silver Brother," a robot named Ranger for a long, convoluted and partially deranged reason, had already gotten there. Gaining Maki's permission, Thobo told him what was going on, but the robot only smiled sympathetically and then threw course cards on Thobo's table.

After breakfast, and before Thobo and Ranger embarked on their usual journey to Campus Dome, Maki got sahn's now 'traditional' morning brushing; for which sahn ordinarily repaid the two of them by rubbing Ranger with a polishing cloth and brushing out Thobo's abundant hair. Maki considered this the finest hour of the day, and usually remained as alert as possible, to enjoy every minute of the grooming. On this morning, however, sahn could barely remain awake, much less alert.

Thobo's *felis* cats, however, were indeed awake, and they did not like what they smelled. They trotted up in fits and starts and came to a full stop about a meter away from the satamuri. Their noses went to work, and in less than a second they had cleared the living room. In less than two, they had cleared the entire apartment.

Thobo was impressed. "I love it," he said in wonder. "You must teach me that!"

Ranger just shrugged and said, "What's the *que pasa* going on with them?"

Maki looked downcast. "Must be me," sahn lamented. "I guess I ought to wash off."

Thobo sniffed the air, but as he could only detect smoke and certain poisonous fumes, he smelled nothing. "What do they smell like?" he asked.

Maki stood up and sniffed sahn's stomach, and thought for a moment. "Mostly like that stuff that Giordano-san puts in the salad. 'Thyme,' he said it was called. I told him he wasn't allowed to use it in my presence."

Ranger noticed the cats sniffing wildly from the porch. He turned to Thobo and asked, "What are you going to tell people when they ask you why you're cooking Italian food at six in the morning?"

Thobo shrugged, rubbed his cat and said, "Why not? Maybe I had some thyme on my hands—"

"Don't start!" the Alien Cat snarled.

Thobo smirked. He got up and started rummaging through syllabi, and within a few moments, Maki had fallen asleep.

Sahn stayed that way too, which sahn never did before. Sahn slept through Thobo and Ranger raucously slamming books and syllabi together in a pile and complaining about the utter lunacy of having to teach freshmen, and sahn slept through Ranger putting sahn into Thobo's hammock and setting it swinging as he and Thobo left.

"Very strange," Ranger commented as they closed the door behind them.



Inside classroom 430 sat the third trimester freshman Comp Sci class, a veritable microcosm, as Thobo put it, of everything that was wrong with the universe. Most of them sat buzzing excitedly, impressing themselves and each other with the novelty of attending a class taught by an android with the “help” (if one could call it that) of an alien. Some of them were sure it would never work out. Some were not sure what was going on at all. It was the latter that Thobo intended to have fun with.

With Ranger at his heels, the android walked proudly into his classroom, and in accordance with time honored academic tradition, Thobo started the new trimester by scrawling his name, the course name and his office hours on the blackboard. He let the students stare at it for a few seconds and then said, “Anyone who wants to drop the course now can do so.”

When no one moved, he began his long speech about never marking on the curve, giving surprise quizzes in other professors’ material and so on, hoping to dissuade a few.

When that didn’t work, he mentioned that he intended to give homework every night and collect it. This reduced the size of the class from 27 to 23.

And then, someone asked, “Isn’t there supposed to be an alien teaching this course too?”

Thobo grinned a grin that sophomores, juniors and seniors knew well to dread. “Yes,” he said very complacently.

The student squirmed. “There isn’t one here.”

“Quite.”

“Where is she?”

Thobo sat heavily on his desk. “Firstly, the proper pronoun for referring to an Alien Cat is ‘sahn.’ Secondly, Maki is ill and will be absent with leave for a couple of weeks.”

The freshmen burred to each other. “What’s wrong with sahn?” one of them shouted from the back.

“Oh,” Thobo said, leaning back, “not much. A cold. I wouldn’t worry about it if I were you. If sahn’s not here, then sahn can’t bite you, and you won’t die. You see, if you die, then you don’t come to class. And if you don’t come to class, I tell the registrar that you didn’t come to class. The registrar says, ‘Well, Thobo, it looks like they dropped the course without saying, “I dropped the course”.’ And the registrar will give you a WF! A WF on your transcript! Where will you be then, hunh? What graduate school would take you?! What employer would hire you? So you just be glad sahn’s not here.” Thobo started collecting admittance tabs and lecturing to stave off questions, and wondered how Maki was doing at home with the cats...



It was early evening when Maki awoke, finally, feeling cold and clammy and dry at the same time, even though the light from the skylight was bright on sahn’s back. Sahn got up and shook, went into the closet, and brought out a blanket. Sahn returned to the spot in the light, wrapped the blanket around sahn, and curled up in the bright light once again.

The “regular cats” were appalled.

Maki went to the kitchen and sat in the sink with the water running.

The rest of the evening passed quietly. Maki spent most of sahn’s time playing with water and trying to get back into favor with Get and Out.

Thobo watched sahn closely, waiting for sahn to make a bolt.

He got what expected very late that night, after he'd stretched out on his bed/couch and pretended to be asleep. When all was very quiet—Get and Out were still refusing to come in—Maki rose from sahn's accustomed place at his side, stared into his face for a moment, and, satisfied that he was immobile, made for the door.

Thobo managed to be there first. He sat down in front of the door, and put his hand on Maki's chin, in sahn's own gesture for "be quiet." Maki sat.

"Ma, I know what you'll say. No, you are not imposing on my hospitality. It does not bother me that you stay here. It does bother me if you make an issue out of it, okay?"

Maki went to speak, but Thobo raised his hand again. Maki backed away from it. "You don't know what you're getting into," sahn said, very seriously.

"That may be quite true, but I can handle the two of us, especially myself." Coming to terms with Maki's first-contact training, on top of what was often totally alien meanings of gestures he thought he knew, was challenging. But knowing that Maki was essentially a guard-dog at heart, he decided the way to go was to reverse roles. "I will assume the role of troop leader for now. When this is over, you will owe me a favor." He smiled. "How's that?"

Maki smiled, in sahn's way, eyes closed and large ears pointed forward. When next Thobo went to lie down, Maki snuggled up at his side.

Tuesday

"We have twenty-three students," Thobo said, watching Maki swing from the side of the porch.

"Twenty-three? How many is that in real numbers?"

Thobo considered; Maki counted in base 12, and remembered that satamuri, being universally left-handed. "Eleven-one," he said.

Ranger came in at this point, and asked, "Eleven-one what?"

Maki considered the amount, said, "Things," forgot all about it, and went back to swinging hand over hand over tail.

It was five in the "morning" inside the dome, late afternoon on the lunar plain. Residential Dome was still clear, and the crater and stars outside, and the Earth, nearly stationary from day to day and year to year, could be seen. Lunar busses came and went. Every so often there was a bright flash as the city's batteries of lasers zapped small asteroids before they could hit the sapphire domes. Ranger would be outside with his equipment, looking for dings and scratches to repair. Few people were up at this hour, so there was little light inside to reflect on the dome, giving a clear view. The only sounds were a cat fight, and, if one had extremely good ears, the echolocation pings of the satamuri as sahn swung around.

Maki was moving like a maniac. Sahn had slept well all through the night, and was apparently making up for the unusually sound slumber. After twenty minutes or so, sahn dropped to Thobo's shoulders, and from there slunk onto the table. "Good night," sahn said, dropping sahn's head and looking very much like a dead mop.

Maki refused breakfast. Sahn was so warm that Thobo could feel the heat radiating from sahn, even when standing at the refrigerator looking for nothing in particular.

At that point, they had a visitor; a young man named Kerahn Spaade, who was in one of Thobo's classes and in the middle of fleshing out his Senior Thesis. "Making a salad at this hour? Are you mad?" the young man said, sniffing wildly.

Thobo turned to him and said, "Who invited you?"

“I did, I saw you were up, and I wanted to ask—what is that smell?”

“What smell?”

“Thyme. What are you cooking with thyme? Hello, Maki.”

Maki grunted.

“Are you sick? Everyone is saying you’re sick or something.”

“Of being on this moon,” Thobo said to Ranger, who made a snort.

Kerahn bridled. “No, really! Is she sick?”

“Sahn,” Maki and Thobo both growled.

“Why not just say, ‘they’ for crissake?” Kerahn whined.

“It’s grammatically inelegant,” Maki snorted, and curled up tighter. “Now go away or I shall taunt you a second time.”

“Don’t pet sahn,” Thobo said, “or you’ll find you have too much thyme on your hands.”

Everyone else in the room groaned.

Thobo and Kerahn went into the living room and talked over points of Kerahn’s thesis. Gradually, there came to Maki a feeling of something deadly wrong. Too quiet. Maki got up and paced in circles on the kitchen table. Sahn’s heart raced; sahn’s temperature soared. Too dry! Much too dry! Running sahn’s *faan* under the water from the sink helped for a few moments. And then, for what reason Maki sahn’s self didn’t know, sahn let out a long, high, hollow howl.

Thobo, Ranger and Kerahn ran into the kitchen. Maki was sound asleep, sahn’s head once again under the kitchen faucet.

“Your water bill is going to be huge,” Kerahn said.

Thobo just shrugged.



Thobo taught his 0800 class with Ranger subbing for Maki. All twenty-three students were there... well, perhaps, Thobo thought, an immediate quiz in Professor Ju’s material might scare a few more off. The 0900 class was missing five students since yesterday, which brightened their professor a little until he found that they had not dropped the class, just gone to the registrar’s office to make a few changes to their schedules. Thobo told the student who’d given this information to remind him to flunk her at the end of the semester.

After the class, Ranger went out onto the crater plain, and started walking toward the rim, where Fa Chen, the starship whom Maki had built as part of sahn’s training, was parked. He walked to within the ship’s scanning distance and then waited to be acknowledged. He was one of the only people who ever was. Fa Chen greeted the robot by radio. Chen was a starship one didn’t come too close to.

“Fa Chen, I assume you know what’s happening by Maki?” Ranger said.

“Maki and I have not spoken for some time,” Chen replied. “I have been otherwise engaged. Is there a problem?”

Ranger couldn’t imagine that something could happen to Maki and Chen would not know. But the Universe was full of Things... “Neither. Sahn is cycling.”

“Ah, *fière*,” Chen replied, using the Kwakyen word. “I suppose we had to expect that to happen sooner or later. You should know that I would not expect to be told, except to be told that Maki would want to return to the Klyssadel in advance of the season. We take our satamuri home, and they stay with their kind and we with ours. They indulge

in their behaviors and we in ours. We find it distressing to be among the satamuri at this time; they are so unlike themselves. This behavior repeats itself here, you see. Forgive me for anticipating your questions....”

Had Ranger been talking to a biogenic, or to an intelligence with a face on at the moment, he would have smiled. Here he thought the gesture extraneous. Chen was prone to nonstop talking once someone got sahn started, and usually there was nothing amusing about it. “You cannot sympathize at all?” Ranger said.

“I assure you that no, as you say, machine intelligence, can empathize with a non-conspecific biogenic about 90% of the time; although one can have a lot of fun playing with their heads. During *fière*, or any type of cycle, the alien in question becomes its most alien self. Now how, by all the gods of Luck and the products of Forl, could one hope to catch that ten percent of sameness that empathy demands?”

Ranger was growing impatient. “Maybe you haven’t looked where the sameness is.”

“Endless generations of *muðnet* such as I have looked, in all places, my friend. You may draw your own conclusions. Now I know you, Ranger, that you like arguing, and making a nuisance of yourself, but you’re lazy about it. You wouldn’t have come all this way out here just to argue with a starship. What is it you want?”

“Never mind,” Ranger said, walking away.

The *muðnet* muttered something obnoxious. “Ranger! Wait.”

Ranger turned and stared acidly at the ship.

“You wanted to ask me a question. You came considerably out of your way to do so. Now don’t waste your time.”

“You’ve already answered it,” Ranger said, walking away.

Chen produced a mobile sensory unit, the familiar one known to Wargentines as the Blue Wolf, from a compartment in the ship. It dropped to the ground in a cloud of dust. “Well then don’t waste my time then! Let me know which question it was that I answered.”

Ranger turned to it, and stared it in the eyes. “I came to ask a favor for Thobo and myself. We both must leave Maki alone during the day when we have other duties to perform. I somehow don’t think it’s wise to leave sahn alone right now, especially with all the ‘theoretical biologists’ creeping about. You see? But in light of what you’ve just said I think I’ll just leave.”

Chen thought hard, and said at last, “When I am, as so often happens, out of my own environment, Maki sees to it that I am well off. And sahn does admirably, for one so out of place. I will leave with you.” The Blue Wolf followed Ranger back to the domes.



Thobo had tried to get straight back to his apartment, but it didn't work. He was literally run into by Solomon Isaacson, the man who had, with his own money, built the college and the domes it was under. He had also hired almost all the city staff, including Thobo and Ranger; and considered everyone living in the place his family. "Thobo! Oy! Wait up!" he said, brushing himself off.

"Something I can do you for?" Thobo said with a little annoyance.

"Keep going, I'm going with you."

"Izzat so..."

"To see Maki," Solomon protested.

"I don't know that Maki is accepting visitors."

"But why?"

Thobo huffed. "Maki isn't feeling well enough to see anyone, Solomon. I'll tell sahn you want to see sahn and have sahn give you a call."

"No, now wait a minute! I'm worried about sahn. We've never had a sick Cat before. If there is something I can do, I want I should do it. Chicken soup, maybe! Jewish penicillin! Cures everything!"

"We'll call you," Thobo said, enunciating menacingly. He walked on, and sure enough, Solomon began to follow.

Thobo folded his arms and when he turned his own green eyes into the human's brown ones and locked them there, Solomon threw up his hands. "Alright, already!" he said, and walked toward his own dome.

But Solomon appeared at Thobo's door later that morning, carrying a pot of chicken soup which, he said, his wife Jessikka said she'd kill him if he didn't bring. Knowing Jessikka, this was probably entirely true.

Maki was alert, though not remarkably so, when Solomon barged in. Thobo picked up the satamuri and then sharply turned to Solomon, grabbing the latter by the collar.

"Before you come any further," the android glowered, "I want you to swear secrecy."

"What??!"

"Remember why it was arranged that sahn get tenure?"

"Of course I do, I arranged it!"

"Ahem."

"Alright! I swear, not a word will I say to anybody! So what's the problem?"

"Cross your heart and hope your hair falls out."

"Upon my honor!"

Thobo let him go. He set the satamuri down on the kitchen table. Maki sat upright on sahn's haunches with sahn's elbows on sahn's knees.

Solomon examined the animal, and as he did so, his eyes widened. He didn't seem to notice the gill on the top of sahn's head. Nor did he notice the blades growing from the base and sides of sahn's tail. But he did notice, and at one point motioned to touch, the patches of blue skin where the hair'd fallen out, and he did note most carefully their position on sahn's chest and belly. He slapped his forehead and nearly bellowed, "A Mamma! Nu, it should only be healthy! Mazel tov!"

Maki screamed. Sahn pulled sahn's arms over sahn's head and slammed sahn's tail against the table top. "Mammals!!! Grossness and Disgust!" Sahn hid behind Thobo's back, growling and snarling.

"... ?!" It took a moment for Solomon to reset his brain and finally blurt, "Mammals?!"

“Maki isn’t,” Fa Chen provided. “A mammal, that is. I guess the closest analog you have here is an amphibian. There were no mammals on sahn’s species’ homeworld.”

“Who, her?!”

Thobo pulled up the satamuri from behind his back. He pointed to the top of sahn’s head. “This structure here,” he said gently parting sahn’s forelock, “is a gill, sort of.” He let Solomon peruse it for a minute, then sprinkled it with water and carefully covered it over again. Pushing a tuft of hair from one of the blue patches, he displayed a small swelling with a tiny hole, the size of a dolphin’s ear, over it. “These are not teats.” He pried open the satamuri’s mouth. “Dese here is teets.” (Maki poked him in the ribs and he shoved sahn’s hand away, whining, “Lay off! Delicate equipment!”)



He went back to the little holes. “These are ducts which through which *qoki* are expelled. *Qoki* are eggs, sort a of.” Thobo let go of the satamuri and leaned very close to Solomon. “*Capishe?*”

“*Wakarimashita,*” Solomon said, much more quietly than anyone heard him say anything in several years. “She’s an amphibian?”

“Yes, and still ‘sahn,’ thank you very much,” Maki mumbled.

“Shouldn’t you be in water?”

“They threw me out of the bathtub, and it probably isn’t politic to use the beach or the pool.”

Solomon pondered the problem. “You know, last year I bought Brat Kid a little pool of her own. I could set it up in my dome!”

Thobo shook his head. “Your dome is like Grand Central Station,” he said.

“I’ll pay for the water,” Solomon offered.

“Nevertheless,” Thobo protested.

“But sahn should have water,” Ranger and Chen said, almost as one.

“If only to facilitate the release of the *qoki*,” Chen added.

Ranger raised his hand. “How about the old classrooms in the Underground? They’re big enough for a pool and no one goes by them anymore since Campus Dome was built. Move away the desks and you could make it really comfortable down there,” he said.

Thobo nodded. The Underground portion of Wargentin was vast, and offered privacy (except from hordes of wandering laboratory technicians) and some room to run. He looked at Solomon and said “Well?”

Solomon huffed. He noticed everyone was staring at him. “All right, I’ll bring the pool down to your old classroom in the lava tubes and set it up.”

“Thank you,” everyone but Maki said.

Solomon stood up. “Wait a minute, wait a minute! We asked everyone here except Maki!” He looked down on the satamuri and said, “Is this what you want?”

The satamuri looked up at him drearily and said, “What?”



Back home in Solomon's dome, a felony was about to be committed. Fortunately for lovers of chocolate chip cookies, the felon's mother was on guard. "ELIZA MIRIAMNE!!" she screamed at the scene of the crime.

The Notorious Brat Kid, then three and a half, jumped off the counter top and cowered on the chair she'd used to reach it. Jessikka Merritt-Isaacson ran into the little kitchen and towered over her, slamming the toaster-oven door shut. "Do you know what could happen to you if you put your hands in the oven?! The heat could burn them right off your arms!"

Brat Kid whimpered, glancing back furtively at the cookies roasting in the forbidden machine. "But I wasn't gonna steal them!"

"I don't care! I told you never to stick your hands in the heat!"

"I'm sorry!" Brat Kid said, but it didn't sound that way.

Jessikka harrumphed and went back to mixing frostings.

Solomon walked in at this point, with a feral grin on his face. "Jess', that pool I bought last year? Where is it?"

"In the hall closet, why? You're not setting that thing up in my yard!"

"You want to hear something outrageous?!"

"You'll tell me anyway..."

Solomon began walking toward the closet. "Wargentin's resident Alien is in heat."

"What? MAKI?!"

"The very same."

"You're joking!"

"About such a thing, would I joke? I just saw it." He stopped in the kitchen door and looked over his shoulder.

"Thobo was trying to say she was 'spawning' or something."

"Oh, my goodness!" Jessikka whistled.

Brat Kid watched her parents rummage through the closet, smiling omnisciently. "She shouldn't stuck her hands in the cookies!" she decided triumphantly, and disappeared.

Neither parent noticed. "Now wait a minute," Jessikka said. "How could Maki be in heat?!"

"Well, why not?"

"Well, for one thing, sahn's not an animal, sahn's intelligent. And you've seen that as species become more and more reasoning, estrus cycles become less and less pronounced. Judging by where Maki's at, sahn should be free to enjoy sahn's self the year 'round, like the dolphins!"

Solomon found the box he was looking for. "Ha! First of all, that's very mammal-centric, Maki would say. And second of all, have I got news for you!" he said. "I was talking to Chen one day. Her intelligence is all add-on!"

"Bull!! I've seen sahn—"

"Well, I've seen her do things too, but Chen tells me that they had to add more brain while sahn was in training to get sahn to use language! Her intelligence is as artificial as her friends' there!"

As was very often the case, Jessikka was having a hard time telling if Solomon was being honest or just having her on. "I could argue that last point, for all of them!"

"I'm sure you could, but you know better." Solomon hefted the box onto his shoulders.

On a flatbed wagon outside the house, Solomon had already loaded Fai, a dolphin of whom Maki was particularly fond. Loaded onto Fai was Brat Kid, who was slathering the dolphin with skin cream to keep her comfortable while out of the water. Jessikka rubbed the dolphin and glared at Solomon. “Oh, this is very funny! What are you doing, bringing her another ‘animal’ to commiserate?”

“Oy, don’t be silly. Dolphins don’t have that kind of cycle.” He leaned over to Jessikka and wheedled, “and besides, this dolphin is a female.”

Solomon began towing the wagon, chasing away the Brat Kid as he did so. On the way out, Solomon met Dennis McKavver, the city’s head of security, whom he swore to secrecy and then told all he knew.

Dennis’ eyes widened. “Oh!” he crooned. “You had to see it coming, sooner or later. Estrus! Imagine that!”

Brat Kid stared after the wagon. “Eshers? I thought she stucked her hands in the heat!” she said as she went off to inflict herself on the center of town.



The trolley travelled in darkness for a few seconds, then swerved into a corridor full of light. A long strip of lights had been set into the ceiling. Along the walls, between the narrow doorways, were lengths and lengths of tubing, all showing signs of wear and at one point having been duct taped. These hydroponic gardens were still in use after 30 years, growing the algae and fungi which Wargentines made into nearly everything, including the notoriously, and deliberately, noxious, “Moon Food” which only the tourists and freshmen ate.

The Underground complex was the original city of Wargentopolis. Before the domes were built, all that had been above ground had been the spaceport landing bays and the telescope. Now the telescope, long since obsolete, was a playground for those learning to use spacesuits, and six domes sat around it. The Underground was now labs, classrooms, apartments for the underclassmen, and now, with the addition of the Campus Dome, a lot of empty space.

When the trolley stopped, Thobo shouted at his old classroom door. Solomon opened it from inside; he had already set up the pool. Maki leapt off the trolley and dove into it, in what seemed a single motion; sahn tucked sahn’s back legs against sahn’s stomach, and using the blades and tail for propulsion, began swirling and leaping with joy. Fai followed sahn’s every move, with the result that by the time they slowed down, a lot of the precious and expensive water was on the floor.

Maki came to the edge and rested sahn’s head on it. “How much salt in this water?” sahn asked.

“Same as the dolphin pools, why?” Solomon said.

“Pheromones are salty. It’ll get too salty for Fai, even, if you start this way.” Sahn considered. “Of course, salt water makes you slow down. So maybe not.” Sahn disappeared under the water’s surface and seemed quite content to stay there.

Thobo and Ranger looked at each other, neither knowing what to do. “If the salinity goes up, we put fresh water in the pool,” Thobo said.

“It will cost you,” Solomon reminded him.

“No,” Thobo said. “The pool was your idea so it will cost you. That’s the price you pay for thinking.” He left the room and came back a few minutes later with a box, in which he sampled some of the water.

Solomon looked perplexed. “Hadn’t you ought to keep records?” he said.

Thobo’s eyes narrowed.

“Some scientist you are,” Solomon said, and left the room.

“Gut shabbes to you, too!” Thobo called after him.

The rest of the day was spent carousing, and behaving in generally a very silly manner. Thobo at one point tried to explain to Fai what spawning was. Fai’s ancestors as far back as her pod remembered had been born in captivity, and now being quite old and hard of hearing, living in a small tank with an amusing companion was almost charming. Maki started writing filk songs, but they made no sense; in fact, they made even less sense than the most senseless filk songs commonly sung at WargeCon. Thobo and Ranger had a good time holding things in air and then in water, testing the echolocation of the dolphin against the echolocation of the Alien Cat; the dolphin was slightly better than the satamuri in both media, but the satamuri, right now, found everything that happened just hugely amusing, and it was difficult to get sahn to stop laughing long enough to echolocate on something.

They got into a discussion about breeding cycles. Maki claimed that “all the best species” in the galaxy had definite breeding cycles and were, at other times, quite sane, thank you. Thobo remembered reading fanfiction, he said, where persons who were found to have breeding cycles were fired from their jobs for being “unstable.” Maki found this desperately amusing.

When at last the evening came and all was quiet, Thobo wandered around the room for a bit, clearing away desks and old papers and books and preparing himself a place to sleep. Maki and Fai swam in circles, in a pool in which the dolphin barely fit. Thobo watched them for a while, a big, blue and white dolphin and a tan and white satamuri, with ripples of light playing on their backs. He let his eyes wander to the shelves full of geodes, and boxes, and a couple of Oreo cookies. A wall terminal was flickering. A high shelf was full of papers and empty cups. He cleared them all away and turned the terminal off. He touched the ceiling, and wherever he touched, the recessed lights went out.

Ranger watched him silently, and when he was asleep, having little better to do, he filled a beaker with water from the pool and tested it. Its salinity was already far higher than that in the pools from which it had been drawn.

Wednesday

For almost three whole days, nobody who considered themselves anybody had seen anything of the Alien Cat. The rumors were flying.

“You know,” said a sophomore from Sinus Medii, “Maybe it’s like that book, *War of the Worlds*, where there’s no bacteria on Mars but there is here, and its the bacteria that kills the Martians!”

A short, rotund blond senior looked at the redhead with unhidden disdain. “There is definitely bacteria everywhere,” she said. “There has to be. You don’t START big! Bacteria will always be found wherever there is any form of life.”

The sophomore was unimpressed. “And the bow and arrow are the culmination of the art of warfare, and the Earth,” she said, pointing out the dome, “is flat, and that’s that.”

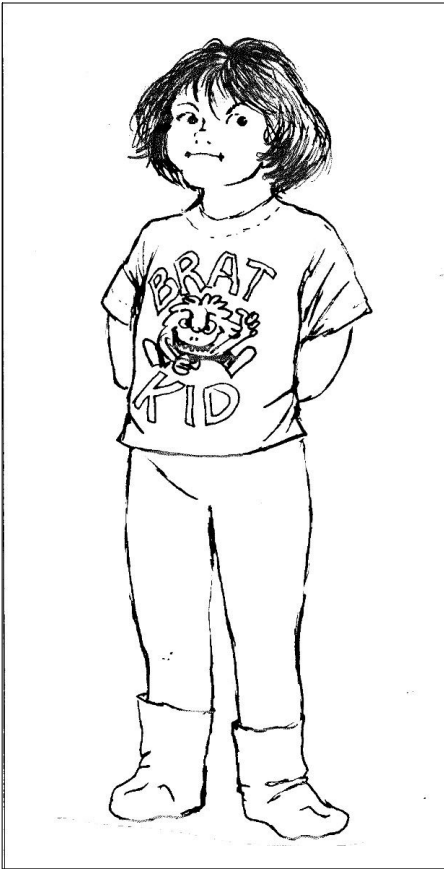
“All generalizations are wrong,” said the senior,

“Including this one, and mine is the exception to the rule.”

A brown skinned, bejewelled freshman added his voice. “I think that if all she had were a cold, then they wouldn’t keep her quarantined. Since they are keeping her quarantined, she’d got some kind of germ that can KILL somebody!”

The sophomore and senior both groaned. “If she is being quarantined at all; you don’t know that for sure! And you don’t even know where she is!”

The freshman went to give the sophomore a potch.



It was then that the three of them noticed that they were being watched.

Standing on a large, basaltic stone overlooking their table, was a three-ish looking urchin wearing a t-shirt that read, “Brat Kid.”

“I know! I know what happened to Makheee!!” it burred, and its eyes gave a predatory flash.

All the aforementioned students turned, as did a couple of professors in a store behind them.

“She stucked hers hands in the heat!” the Brat Kid giggled.

The students all gasped in unison. “It was an accident, then,” the freshman asked.

Eliza blushed. “No, on purpose I think.”

They all cooed, gathering their books to head to class as a bell sounded somewhere.

“She has *eshers!*” Brat Kid called after them as they walked away down the street.

“What are eshers?” the sophomore asked as they walked.

“Escher was a painter you know, he did all those weird things turning into other things, and that painting that shows stairways going every which way...”

“Oh, yeah.” They walked on sullenly. “So Maki got burned, hunh?”

“Well,” said the sophomore, “that’s what the kid says, and that kid knows... *wait a minute...*”



Thobo woke up that morning to the warning of an internal sensor. He was over-heating. He shot up and looked around, and as he did Maki fell to the floor. As soon as sahn had, the sensor quieted. Thobo stood still for a second, waiting to cool a bit. From a nearby shelf he then took a small disk and had Maki hold it under sahn’s arm. It read 39.17. The last time he’d used it in this way, it read 35.85.

Maki stared at it and hooted. “I must have baked you,” sahn said. “My sincerest regrets. For Fai I was making the water too hot for.”

Thobo looked at the satamuri with his eyebrows hidden in his hair. “Izzat so?”

“Hmmm.”

Fai was sleeping, probably, when Thobo walked over to the pool. He dipped his hand into the water; it was warm indeed. A sample of it in his tester showed that it was very salty as well. Ranger was not in the room, but he left a message that he’d gone to get a hose and a filter.

“Did you know how high your body temperature was?”

“Well, it’s cold where I come from. You have to heat up the tidal pools somehow so things will grow...”

“I thought you were cold blooded during the day, though.”

“That’s only usually.”

“Ah, of course.”

Ranger returned with Chen at his heels, and both of them were carrying things. Fai, in her enthusiasm for cooler water, hindered the placement of the filter but eventually they got it set up. Once all was in place, Ranger left again, and after a few moments messaged back that he had run into “a certain party” whom he, Ranger, thought might like to join them.

Thobo thought about it. He thought he knew whom the Certain Party might be. Maki had once told him that all *maileiau* (roughly, independent machine intelligences), were under the protection of all satamuri—with one exception; that person not being anywhere within 500 light years of Wargentin. Thobo knew of three in the solar system who fit the criteria; two of them were here, and that third person could definitely be trusted. “Beethoven would like to visit,” he told Maki.

Maki had to think to remember who Vaughn was. “Oh. Yeah! Beethoven the spy!” Sahn dove under the water, and stayed there.

And a few minutes later, in walked Vaughn Beethoven in person. Or one of ... their ... persons, for Vaughn had the ability to look like pretty much anyone. The profession he told everyone he had was “stunt double,” being, like Thobo, someone who could do extremely dangerous jobs but, being a non-person in most jurisdictions, could not sue if things went horribly wrong. Nevertheless, rumors about his exploits were both wild and encouraged. Today he was the person he usually presented as, when in town: a younger Ludwig von Beethoven. One with a reputation. He walked into Thobo’s old classroom, merrily singing:

*And this is number three:
Her hand is on my knee!
Roll me over, lay me down and...*

Thobo and Ranger smirked.

Evidently the sight inside was not quite what he was expecting. He shook his curly hair from his face. “I don’t see what you guys seem to find so risible.”

Thobo and Ranger looked at Maki, who looked at Fai, who looked at Chen, and all of them made their own versions noises meant to convey, “How dense you are today!”

Beethoven looked from one to another, and then walked up to the pool, picked Maki up, and crooned, “My dear, sweet child! Why, if what they insinuate be true, then I, my humble self, could best be, shall we say, of service to you!”

“Fucking mammals!” Maki spluttered, pulling Beethoven’s hair with sahn’s tail.

“Exactly,” all three *maileiau* said.

Maki wriggled and harrumphed until sahn was able to worm free of Beethoven’s grasp (which, truth be told, did not take all that much effort), and splashed back into the water.

“If you kiss sahn, sahn will turn into a beautiful princess,” Ranger said.

“Or I could get turned into a frog!” Beethoven said.

Fai slapped the water with her tail, soaking everything in sight.

Beethoven knelt next to the edge of the pool. Maki came up and spat water at him.

“Really,” Beethoven said, “How are you, kiddo? Is there anything I can do?”



Maki rubbed sahn's head on his arm almost sweetly, then bit him, and dove again.

Thobo and Ranger came and sat down next to him, and they began discussing the situation. Chen came in with an assortment of Maki's very well-chewed chew toys and threw them into the water. Maki picked up each one, chewed it once, dropped it, went on to the next one until there were no more. Eventually Fai threw them all out of the pool.

Underwater, Maki began to circle.

It was almost impossible to feel, but annoying, somehow, in its constancy. A tingling in the pit of the stomach, a feeling of the skin going clammy and tightening around the limbs so that breathing became strained. There was the tension that precedes pain, the urgent need to stop it, to escape it ... the fear of what will happen if one does not. The only thing missing was the pain itself. Sahn began to feel queasy and numb. Sahn slithered uncomfortably, faster and faster through the water, as if hoping that the flow from it would drive the sensations away. But the more time passed, the more panicky sahn felt. Now a feeling of drowning, now Maki leapt from the water and roared—

Thobo lunged over to the pool and placed his hands on either side of Maki's head ... an unnecessary gesture, for Maki was asleep when he got there.

Chen looked over Thobo's shoulder, and said, "Don't worry, sahn will sleep. This happens commonly at this time of year. There is very little chance sahn will remember any of this later on."



There was no one in classroom 430 when Thobo got there for his second section of freshmen. He was relieved. This 430 was an old Underground classroom, old enough to have real blackboards, which were actually black. Lying on the ledge were three brand new erasers, all overloaded with chalk dust.

Outside the room there was an eraser vacuum, but out by the vacuum were people, none of whom the android particularly wished to see at the moment. Well, there were other ways to clean erasers, and he just stood where he was and clapped them together. Evidently, nobody ever told him this is generally done in a stairwell, or outside an open window. He took a breath and wheezed hideously.

When Ranger came in and inhaled, not to breath but to speak, he too was barraged by chalk particles descending to places they were never meant to go.

Outside the classroom, the students were gathering. "No, the kid has got to be wrong," one of them was saying. "If all that was wrong with Maki was that she burned herself, she'd be back by now with a bandage, right? Or at least someone would have seen her!"

"Yeah, and if she burned herself really bad she'd have gotten taken to the infirmary and everyone would know about it!" said another. "This has got to be some kind of an alien disease!"

"You said it," said a third, "and you know, I bet it's contagious to humans."

"Oh, yeah, sure, and how?"

"Through those guys?!" said another, pointing through the door, where Thobo was being loudly berated by his own lungs.



"Yeah... I mean, if a satamuri has a disease and it's airborne—"

"The environmental filters are supposed to take care of that," said a Junior, in his wisdom.

“But if it’s passed by contact... I mean... the Alien Cat rides around on Thobo Haradu’s shoulders all the time, I mean, just imagine, would those germs infect synthetic biology?”

“I want to know if it’s going to effect US!” said the Asian girl.

“Whatever,” said an African boy, “I’m not going in that classroom and find out the hard way!”

“I wouldn’t worry,” the Junior said. “If there were going to be bad effects, they would have shown up by now.”

A general consensus was agreed, and the students walked into the classroom 430; where they saw Ranger cough and Thobo sneeze.

There were only 14 students in the class that day, and that made Thobo, at least, very happy.



All morning, Maki had swum in the pool with Fai. Occasionally sahn slept. Much of the time sahn sang to sahn’s self, or swapped tall tales with Fa Chen. Sahn drew pictures on the old chalkboard, but mostly sahn tried to sleep. It was a fitful sleep at its best, and at one point sahn dreamed of being eaten by a headless predator. Overheated and sweaty one minute, cold and shivering the next. And sahn’s chest was starting to feel puffy.

Once in a while, Maki would try to nudge sahn’s self against the dolphin. Fai would carry Maki between her flippers for a while, but the sleek-furred alien always slipped off, whistling forlornly and slapping at the water with sahn’s tail. At one point, Fai decided she would do this too, and having a tail with a much broader surface and a longer lever arm, she managed to drain quite a bit of water from the pool.

A little while later, Thobo returned. The Alien Cat jumped when he came in, and was just about to bark to him but remembered that sahn was here as a guest. Sahn had, so far as sahn knew, overstepped sahn’s bounds by quite a bit already. But trying to remain at the proper social distance was like having one’s guts eaten by worms. At home, Maki would be in the tidal pool waters of the Klysadel cave, surrounded by seven or eight other satamuri, all swimming in tight formation and singing, occasionally accepting treats from the Klysadel’s other residents. Runners and Climbers would share gametes, and later Carriers would come and choose zygotes, and add their own genes. The residents of Satamuri Island, all of them, were family, and the Klysadel was Home. Wargentín ... was not Home. Wargentín was where sahn worked. There was no laying aside the badge of office here.

Thobo watched as sahn got up from the pool, shook, and towelled off. Sahn looked extremely uncomfortable (or maybe just zoned). He also noticed that Maki was extremely warm; so much so, in fact, that in infrared sahn appeared as bright as some of the monitors in the wall that had been on all day. He reached for the thermometer and applied it again: it read 39.39.

Thobo lifted Maki up and set sahn down on his old desk. “Wait here,” he said, and sahn did. A few minutes later he returned, picked up the satamuri and held sahn with one arm while he opened a container of pistachio ice cream with the other.

Maki, sitting with sahn’s nose near Thobo’s neck, smelled something strange. Sahn poked around until sahn found a something very thin and shiny under his shirt. Sahn grabbed it and tugged, hooting.

“Thermal underwear,” Thobo said.

Maki looked at him suspiciously.

“So I can use you as a pillow without frying myself,” he added, rubbing his face in sahn’s fur.

Maki, hugely embarrassed, hugged him as hard as sahn could.



Under other circumstances, Maki put jig-saw puzzles together extremely methodically. Sahn started with the edge pieces, then worked on all the parts that were blue, then all the parts that had bright, pure colors, then all “the boring stuff.” Thobo, Ranger and Chen were now watching what was either methodicalness of a completely different order, or complete chaos.

Maki was sitting on the floor with a box of puzzle pieces in sahn’s lap. Sahn would rummage through the box, alternately purring and echolocating, until sahn came up with a piece which fit a piece sahn was already holding. Sahn would then place these on the floor, and start on some completely different area. Evidently, sahn found what sahn was doing extremely amusing, for every so often sahn would begin laughing hysterically for what otherwise appeared to be no reason. After a while, sahn just gave up.

Later that afternoon, Maki became very active again, and this time vented it not by swimming but by trying to program one of the classroom terminals to have a nervous breakdown. When it proved unsuccessful (though nobody watching had any doubt that under other circumstances, Maki could have done quite a good job of it) sahn began to make up an Application to Apply for a Nervous Breakdown.

At last, Thobo, still in his Mylar undershirt but now with a turtleneck shirt over it, picked sahn up and put out the lights. Maki fell asleep long after he did, unalterably thinking of Home, four hundred light years away.

Thursday

Maki was sleeping when Thobo went to class, but not for long after that. Sahn was in the pool with Fai, and Fai, when sahn awoke, was swimming around Maki, frantically echolocating on sahn’s belly and whistling implacably that something was wrong.

Maki woke up enough to make a bubbling hiss and stuck sahn’s head on the rim of the pool.

Fai continued echoranging and fussing. “What is?” she said, and then made a disparaging noise.

Maki curled up and echoranged on sahn’s own stomach. “Oh, *qoki*,” sahn said. Sahn’d been feeling that life the previous day had been a little rough. The day before spawning actually began was always rough, but this time, not entirely unexpectedly, spawning was beginning earlier than usual.

“*Kokee?*” Fai repeated warily.

“You’ll see,” Maki said reassuringly. Sahn returned underwater, and parted the hairs on sahn’s stomach, revealing a large swelling and a widening hole in one of the spots where the hair had come out days before. Under the hole one could see what looked like a pearl. “Don’t touch it,” Maki warned the dolphin.

“No! Zit!” the dolphin exclaimed.

Maki laughed until sahn nearly drowned. The dolphin had to grab sahn’s face and shove it out of the pool.

“Ouch?” the dolphin ventured.

“Only if you touch it,” Maki said.

“No!” Fai said reassuringly.

Thobo had left the data that Maki’d requested the day before on the terminal before he’d left, and Maki spent the morning translating it, by hand because it was more fun that way, into blackboards full of charts and graphs. All during the work, though, sahn became more and more prone to grunts, howls, hoots and itch attacks, and

scratching near, though not directly on, the site where the *qoki* was growing. By the time sahn was through, sahn looked like a displaced Amazon.

When the growling and hooting turned to whining, Maki returned to the water. Sahn rolled on sahn's side. The bulge in sahn's blue skin had become quite large, and the *qoki* underneath shone through like a blind eye.

Maki began breaching, landing each time with a belly-flop. "My water bill is going to be humongous!" sahn confided to Fai at one point.

"No, Solomon's!" Chen said from off in a corner.

"Nu-nu!" Maki said in delight, and began breaching and belly-flopping with more vigor. Each time sahn dove, the hole over the *qoki* was a little wider. Finally, Maki lay still, with the duct as wide as it could have gotten. Sahn leaned against the dolphin and curved sahn's back, then relaxed, and just lay there, letting the motion of the water bob sahn up and down. Sahn watched sahn's fur waving back and forth in the rays of light mottling the bottom of the pool, and relaxed as much as sahn could. Within a minute, there was a *pop!*, and the *qoki* was expelled.



Maki and Fai echoranged delightedly on the object. It was a spherical capsule of clear jelly, about two centimeters in diameter (it had been half that when originally spawned). In some spots, one could see little, distorted swirls in the surface. Inside it were tiny flecks and bubbles and hair-thin, multicolored strands which, Maki tried to explain to Fai, were nuclei, or vacuoles, or something.

Wary not to actually touch it (as *qoki* stick to anything they touch so long as it's warm), Maki and Fai began to shoot the *qoki* around with jets of water from their mouths. This developed into a game of water-polo. The *qoki* hit the sides of the pool often, and occasionally with great gusto, but never it showed a sign of damage. Fai stopped suddenly, hearing a noise "Come Bo Rae," she squealed. "For this?"

Maki looked around quickly. Sahn found a glass, and taking it into the pool, scooped up the *qoki* in it. Sahn dried off the glass with a towel and placed it in a more or less conspicuous spot on the large desk. Then sahn slid back into the pool, laid sahn's head on Fai's back, and pretended to be asleep. Fai caught on immediately.



The brothers leaned over the pool and “Mmmm”ed to each other, and then threw a day’s worth of surprise Effective Speaking quizzes on the desk. “I don’t understand!” Ranger protested. “Why don’t you just correct these things on the spot and give them back?”

“If you do that,” Thobo said, “the students don’t sweat. The longer I hold these, the worse the kids think they did. The worse they think they did, the harder they study next time. You’ll see.”

“I do see. You’re all sadists.”

“Thank you very much,” Thobo said, flopping down in a chair. It was then that he noticed the glass.

He grumbled and was just about to empty it back into the pool when he noticed there was something besides water in it.

Thobo stared. He called Ranger over, and Ranger stared too. Thobo poured the glass over his hand, and the *qoki* came out with it.

Maki started snickering.

Thobo stared at the thing that appeared to be quite stuck to his hand and said, “Is this yours?”

Maki grinned, and with great conceit said, “A perfect specimen! It even has a chromosome! Do you like it?”

Thobo tried to shake it off his hand. Eventually he succeeded.

“They stick to each other and to anything warm,” Maki said. “Fortunately for you, you’re not warm enough.”

“Thanks bunches and loads,” Thobo harrumphed. “Let me see you.” Thobo reached down and rubbed Maki on the stomach, looking for the spot from which the *qoki* had been expelled.

“Was awful!” Fai said.

“Was not!” Maki countered.

“Must have looked like a huge zit!” Thobo said.

“Aye?!” Fai screamed.

Thobo scooped up the *qoki* with the glass and handed it to Ranger. “Well done,” he said to Maki, who beamed and swirled sahn’s self in the water.



Solomon Isaacson was having a field day. Ranger had just emailed him a picture of Maki’s production, with a note in Thobo’s abominable handwriting to the effect of, “We’ll send you the original after the 18th hole. Maybe.” Solomon tried to call Thobo, but Thobo wasn’t answering.

So, stuck in his study, Solomon pored over the photo, and after three hours he could come to only one conclusion.

“It has to be a zygote!”

“*Feh!*” Jessikka sneered. “And how is it a zygote, how? Maki’s parthenogenic? Or hermaphroditic, maybe?”

Solomon was lost in his own world. “Those are possibilities,” he said, talking to himself. “But hardly probable. We already know that satamuri come in three sexes because Maki said they do.”

“No, sahn said they come in three *types*.”

“Yes, and she also said that the types are the same species anyway, so what else could they be? There must be other aliens here and we don’t know about it. Or else, she has something stored away that she can tamper this with.”

“Hanh?! Give me a break!”

Solomon turned for the first time. “Okay, so you tell me: how could something could be this big and still be haploid?”

“Maybe it’s just one big cell! Or maybe...” Jessikka reached down, grabbed a passing chicken, and threw it on Solomon’s lap.

“No, no, no! Now look here already! There is no shell. But there is a membrane around it, see here? This membrane is to keep sperm out after the egg has been fertilized! You know this!”

“Maki is an alien, you know!”

“Now what kind of a thinker would I be if I didn’t take that into account?”

“Ahem.”

“It’s diploid, believe me! Genetics I know!”

“You know how to spell it, anyway,” Jess said under her breath. Being both an MD and a DVM, she knew whereof she spoke.



The 1030 class was out and sat around waiting for the 1300 class, or looking for an excuse to be late. As usual, the topic of gossip was Maki.

“But she couldn’t have just been burned!” a biology major was objecting. Others at his table in the outdoor eatery agreed. “There just is no reason for all the secrecy if that’s all that happened.”

“That still doesn’t make any difference,” said the senior Bacteria Believer. “There are people who don’t like being seen in public when there’s anything wrong with them.”

The others at the table nodded and mumbled.

“I think there’s something wrong with her that someone, somewhere, doesn’t want us to know about because it’s dangerous!”

More mumbling. The group got up and started heading toward Campus Dome. They passed the Mart and walked by the Infirmary, where all of them had been sterilized as a condition for their staying here, and where most of them would elect to have the sterilization reversed upon their graduation.

Bacteria Believer sighed. “Just because some little kid said—”

“Oh, come on, what the hell makes you think a little kid has any first hand information?”

“Because that little kid is Solomon’s little kid!” the rust-haired sophomore said. “And Solomon knows everybody and everything! And if he’s talked about it in front of a little kid, *voilà!* And you know, kids that age don’t lie!”

The biology major spoke up. “What are you, an only child? You bet your ass they lie! Exactly what did this innocent child say?”

“Well, the kid said, ‘She stucked hers hands in the heat.’ I asked her if it was an accident and she said no.”

They slowly walked past the Infirmary, regarding it with some horror. The senior nodded, thinking. “Is that all she said?”

“Well, no. She did say something about Maki having gotten some Eschers.”

“Eschers?” the biology major pondered. Suddenly his eyes bulged. He looked over at the building. His eyebrows rose. He stared at the sign over the door. “Are you sure,” he whispered very confidentially, “she didn’t say ‘estrus’?”

Everyone in the little group turned to look at the Infirmary and whispered, “ooooohhhh!” The biology major grinned. “My friends,” he said benignly, “shall we keep this to ourselves—and publish first?!”

The group began cheering like banshees with laryngitis, and raced for their tablets.

Between classes, Thobo overheard a junior telling a TA the news.



Thobo appeared in the doorway to the ben Ytzak’s private dome and screamed “SOLOMON!!!”

Brat Kid came out, followed by Jessikka. “Thobo, I’ve got to talk to you!” Jessikka was saying, laughing hysterically.

Thobo wasn’t. “Well, I have to talk to Solomon first.”

“He’s not here. He’ll be back, though. What’s wrong?”

“Someone leaked the news about Maki. My whole class knows! And they won’t tell me how they know!”

“Uh oh!” Jessikka frowned. “Thobo, Solomon may be a pigheaded fink in some ways but if he gave you his word, he gave it.”

“He swore he’d tell no one. Obviously he told you.”

“Well... You know him, you should have seen it coming.”

“I assume this is old gossip by now, because you should hear how I’m involved in it now!”

Jessikka looked up with her eyes wide. “Is it fun?!” she laughed.

“Next time I’m mad at you, remind me you said that,” Thobo growled.

“I’m sorry....”

When both of them were quiet, the Brat Kid began to fidget. “Who you think said so?” she said in a voice that was a little too sweet.

Thobo glowered at her. “Maybe it was you!”

Jessikka huffed. “Thobo, we didn’t say a word about it in front of her!”

“I said she stucked hers hands in the heat!” the child whined.

Thobo looked at Jessikka nastily, and Jessikka too began to squirm. “Just before Solomon came in I caught her with her hands in the toaster oven! That’s all!”

“No! She has eshers! Papa told you!” Eliza blurted and then started crying.

Thobo sighed and turned around. “I’ll see you later,” he said, and walked out.



Maki produced another *qoki* in the middle of the night, and left it in a glass on the shelf.

Thobo, noticing sahn was awake, came and began rubbing the satamuri's back. He'd thought that Maki had gone to sleep at that point, but he was wakened a while later by the sound of a high, wheering howl. At first he thought it was Fai singing to herself, but Fai was back in the lake for the night. A scan in infrared showed that Thobo was alone in the room.

It was a hollow, keening cry, something cold and terrible. It echoed and reechoed through the empty, dark tunnels.

Thobo followed it and found Maki staring out a skylight, howling with head thrown back. He crouched down beside sahn and held out his arms.

Maki stared for a while as if sahn was not really there. Thobo reached over and picked sahn up, and began walking back to the room. Maki put sahn's arms around his neck and tail around his waist, and was very careful not to cling.

Low frequency sound, and the beating of a rarely-used auxiliary heart, got Maki to sleep much faster than either of them expected.

Friday

In the very wee hours of the morning, Ranger's reading (of *The Gnurrs Come From The Voodvoork Out*) was interrupted by a commotion in the hallway.

He opened the door and peered out.

Down the hall, were a gang of biologists, all full professors (and adults who should know better!) milling in the hall, checking from door to door with a water scanner. No doubt looking for the pool.

Ranger knew how to handle professors. He took the second *qoki* in its glass, and walked up to the pool and tapped Maki on the back.

Maki bleared up and said, "Why?"

Ranger pointed to the glass. "You don't actually need this for anything, do you? Because I do."

Maki thought for a moment. "Will it annoy somebody?"

"Horribly," the robot grinned.

"Have fun," Maki said, and returned to sleep on the dolphin's back.

Ranger straightened up, and picked up a piece of chalk as he left. He quietly walked down the hall and scared the sneaking professors to death. "Ladies and gentlemen!" he said as they panted.

They were about to acknowledge his presence, when they saw what he was holding, and crooned.

"Looking for someone?" Ranger said.

"Uh," said Dr. Berkowitz.

When Dr. Keenan began to walk toward Ranger, Ranger held him back. "But, but, but!" Keenan blathered.

“It may or may not have occurred to you,” the robot said, “that the Alien Cat might be down here because sahn wants to be *ahlonge*?”

The professors harrumphed righteously to each other.

“I am prepared,” the robot went on, “to give this—”

The professors gasped!

“To the most promising *student*—”

The professors choked!

Ranger took the chalk and drew a line on the floor. He straightened up and continued, “if anybody crosses that line.” He stood there and waited.

One by one, the professors went off down the hall.

For now.



The first teachers’ meeting of the trimester was held that morning, and to it Thobo dutifully, but with great reluctance, went. Maki was left in the (hopefully) capable company of Ranger, Fai and Jessikka, the latter of whom had come by the in the morning with yet another pot of chicken soup. Chen decided to take the day off. The imbi disappeared.

Maki was delighted with the company. The more people around during *fière*, the better, and the greater Maki’s tendency to become jovial and silly than morose. Sahn was feeling much better now than sahn had been feeling for a while.

Maki had a marvelous time that morning, giving Jessikka a guided tour of sahn’s self, and even inviting her to feel the newly forming *qoki* under one of the ducts. Jessikka did so with the same delight that young children feel when they first feel their unborn siblings kick through their mothers’ stomachs. She picked up the Alien Cat and hugged sahn in thanks, wet and all, and asked if she could fell the spot again.

Maki was happy to oblige, floating on sahn’s back in the pool, and was soon happily obliging everyone. Sahn welcomed the handling, and the acceptance it represented.

Thobo was gone later and later, and people began running out of things with which to amuse themselves. It was Jessikka who found the Frisbee.

“You can’t play Frisbee in here,” Ranger protested. “There’s no room! You’ll break everything.”

“Break what? A bunch of old desks? We’ll throw demurely,” Jessikka said.

“I think I will spectate,” Maki said, slipping underwater.

Well, Jessikka threw the Frisbee and Ranger caught it, if only to keep it from hitting something. And of course things escalated from there.

After a while, Maki, too, began starting to show off. Ranger and Fai, not to be outdone by a “slimy, squeaky glob of fat” followed suit, Ranger punching the Frisbee up into the air and Fai balancing it on her snout. Jessikka tossed it into the air and then swatted at it with her hips. And never before in the history of Frisbee had the game been played with such a vengeance. Faster and faster the Frisbee was thrown, its direction deliberately off course each time.

But Maki, in sahn’s brain fog, never realized this, and jumped up in front of Fai to catch it at one point—

The satamuri screamed when the Frisbee hit; sahn had passed out by the time people reached sahn. The disk had hit Maki right on the still-growing *qoki* and crushed it, and all its supporting structures, inside sahn. The water began to turn orangish-red.

Fortunately, everyone present was either ill-constituted or too well trained to panic, at least overtly. Jessikka, who had started her professional career as an MD and then became a DVM after realizing how much she really hated people, pulled Maki out of the pool. “Someone get Thobo.”

Ranger nodded and radioed for his brother.

Jessikka turned the satamuri on sahn’s back; there was now an enormous swelling where the *qoki* used to be.

“Thobo’s on his way now,” said Ranger. “What should I do?”

“Call the Infirmary and tell them we’re bringing in an emergency.”

“Oh, you’re joking!!”

“Just DO it, please!”

Ranger did. Jessikka had Maki out on a trolley before he was done.



Ten minutes later, Jessikka had Maki in the emergency room, and Thobo, looking extremely piqued, came crashing through the door. Maki was awake by then, but was lying completely still on a table, neither looking, listening, nor talking to anyone. Sahn’s breathing was extremely labored by pain.

“You shouldn’t have brought sahn here,” Thobo said. “You should have called Fa Chen.”

“Why, so he could stuff Maki in a space-suit and drag sahn a few kilometers away?”

“There might have been something Chen could have brought!” Thobo went to say something more, but decided against it. He walked over to the table where Dee Remsen, the center’s Senior Surgeon, was cleaning the site of the damage with a saline solution.

“I’m told,” she said quietly to Thobo, “you know what ought to be done?”

“You were misinformed,” Thobo said quietly, rubbing the satamuri’s neck. Maki did not respond.

“I could draw the stuff out if I knew more about it,” Remsen said. “I would gladly anesthetize sahn if I knew what to use.”

Someone came to the door and called Remsen, and she disappeared for a moment. “Let the wolf in,” she said as she returned.

Chen followed after her, and placed a small sack of instruments on the table where Maki lay. “Now who’s going to use these?” sahn asked.

Remsen looked puzzled. “I thought you were.”

“And spoil everyone’s fun?” Chen said. “If you are trained to deal with living tissue, do it then. My department is wormholes and hyperspace.”

“Well, OK, you show me how these things are used, and I’ll do the rest.”

Chen pulled up a stool and climbed on top of it. Sahn picked a sphere from the kit, held it over the site, and crushed it in sahn’s fist. A fine spray was released over Maki’s wound. “That was anesthetic. Or at least that’s how it was labeled.”

Sahn picked up another tool, a glass-like tube with a bulb on the end. Chen pinched the bulb, poked the tip of the tube through the duct, and released the bulb, sucking up fluid and blood from the wound.

“See? Easy. Do this a few times and then flush with water. Keep doing until you get either all blood or nothing but water.”

Remsen picked the tools up. They looked just like glass, and felt just like glass, but they were flexible. “What are these made of?” she asked.

“Kermartin,” Chen said, climbing down from the stool. “The same material my hull is made from.”

Remsen picked up the squeeze tool and began doing as Chen had said. An assistant turned on some soft music, and Remsen worked to the beat of it, in an effort to help the patient stay calm. Maki was still in considerable shock, but made no sound, no matter how indelicately Remsen worked.

And she and even Jessikka were a bit indelicate at times, much to Thobo’s considerable distress. There was a certain unprofessional enthusiasm in the way they *ooed* and *aaahed* at every sample they got, each one carefully saved.

They would work for a while, and then scan Maki with ultrasound. They cut and made a drain at one point, finding a whole new pocket of fluid. Twenty minutes later they stopped, and it seemed they stopped only because Fa Chen was becoming as anxious as Thobo already was.

“Make sahn sleep and see that sahn eats well,” Remsen said to Thobo as she bandaged the satamuri up. “If things happen to sahn the way they happen to other people, there will be a little swelling,” (she looked at Chen, who nodded) “but don’t worry about it unless it really gets bad.”

Maki was wrapped in a blanket, and Thobo picked sahn up and turned to leave.

Remsen pointed toward an underground exit, and Thobo just nodded as he left.



Later that evening, Jessikka came by with Brat Kid in tow. Eliza startled at the site of the bandage, and Jessikka tried to explain to her everything that had happened; that Maki was spawning and producing eggs, that one of the eggs had broken, and that Maki had to be taken to the hospital to get it taken out and get stitches.

Brat Kid was more puzzled than ever. “Why didn’t she just ask a chicken?” she said. “Lily would have given her an egg!”

Everyone laughed. Ranger said, “Maybe Maki wanted to make her own! Eggs have to come from somewhere.”

“These are special eggs,” Maki said. “If you put four of them together, they form one big egg. Then another kind of satamuri comes and puts the big egg in her pouch, and then it grows up to be a satamuri cub.”

“Wow!” Eliza said. “You were an egg once?”

Maki nodded.

“And in a pouch once?”

“Yes indeed.”

“Wow!!”

Jessikka handed Maki an intricately wrapped box.

“OOO! A present!” Maki screamed, and tore through the paper with sahn’s teeth.

“This is sort of by way of protection,” Jessikka chuckled.

Maki held up the gift for all to see. It was a padded brassiere with extra long straps and only one cup.



Solomon was still away at various meetings when Jessikka and Eliza returned to their home. Jessikka began making her daughter some French toast for dinner. “Hand me two eggs, please,” she asked.

Brat Kid went to the refrigerator and very carefully grabbed two eggs, and handed them delicately to her mother.

Jessikka picked up one egg in each hand and expertly cracked them against the sides of a pyrex bowl.

Brat Kid screamed! She ran into her room and dove into her bed, wailing her brains out.

Jessikka followed, calling, “Eliza, what’s wrong?! Did you hurt yourself? What happened?!”

“I don’t ever want to talk to you again!” the child bawled.

“What happened?! What did I do?!”

The child refused to look up. “*You broke Maki’s babies!*” she wailed.

Eliza was inconsolable all night. Maki, hearing the story the next morning, giggled and guffawed until sahn’s throat hurt.

Saturday

Maki was feeling somewhat ill when sahn woke up in the morning. Sure enough, yet another *qoki* was growing, the fourth of a possible six or seven.

The *qoki* was spawned a few hours too early. Compared to the others, it was tiny and shriveled, and held only two out of its normal compliment of 32 “chromosomes.” After it was away, Maki decided sahn had to have a change of scene, and over everyone’s objections left for sahn’s own apartment back in Residential dome.

All the way there, people pointed and stared. Maki yawned a lot and they kept their distance.

Thobo, Ranger and Chen followed, but repaired to Thobo’s place when Maki made it clear sahn wanted to rest alone. Sahn did return to Thobo’s apartment for dinner, and everyone noticed that sahn was acting quite normally. Sahn’s mood remained stable. But sahn did return to sahn’s own apartment a short time after the meal was finished.

“I think I had better keep sahn with me,” Chen said to Thobo after the Alien Cat disappeared.

“Why? Sahn looks fine.”

“That’s the point. If sahn is fine, sahn is through spawning. The next two days will see a very marked change that you won’t like. A hormone that destroys the others and forces rest. This insures that people don’t prey on each others’ *qoki* and there will be a new generation of herbivores to eat. All species back home spawn at once, you see. Maki will be rather prone to attack without any provocation you could actually identify. You worry to much. I will take sahn and you won’t have to.”

Thobo crouched to be on the same level as the Blue Wolf. “Maki told me about this. Sahn didn’t make it sound that bad.”

“Maki respects you too much to let you know more about that kind of thing than you must.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Thobo stood up again. “I invited the Cat to stay here for the duration and will not be so crass as to rescind the invitation now.”

“You made a decision in ignorance. No one could hold that against you. I’m sure Maki had no intention of staying to the last anyway. Believe me, any kind of confinement is anathema to these animals at this time.”

“That makes no difference to me.”

“Thobo, you are exasperating,” Chen sighed. “This *imbi* is just a shell. If Maki becomes claustrophobic and rips it to shreds because it looks funny, I can make hundreds more.”

“Chen, I’ve made up my mind.”

“I will stay as your guard dog, then,” Chen said, curling up at the door, out of the way.

“I’ll import you some dog biscuits,” Thobo said, sitting down to correct some tests.

Maki was mysteriously quiet all evening. Nobody complained about sahn’s piano, nor about any howling, nor about anyone swinging from other people’s porches.

Sunday

Early the next morning, Thobo went, over Chen’s admonition, to Maki’s apartment. Once again he found sahn curled in the swinging chair. Sahn felt cold and tense, and very sweaty, even though satamuri did not sweat.

Maki barely recognized that he was there. Sahn heard a word but it was some time before sahn’s brain defogged enough to place it. Sahn tried to curl up, only to find that sahn was already curled as tightly as sahn could.

“Hey, wanna eat?” came a voice.

“No thanks,” sahn said with great effort.

Thobo stepped back. ‘No thanks’? What happened to ‘ungh’? “I’ll leave you something that will keep.”

He got no reply.

“I have to check those stitches,” he said at last.

Maki just growled.

“Just tell me if you’re all right.”

“Yes.”

Thobo had a strong suspicion that sahn was not. He tried to see the satamuri in infrared, but sahn was barely there. “Call if you need anything,” he said, and left.

Maki slept fitfully for the rest of the day. Thobo visited once or twice, and each time he did, sahn felt the walls close in around sahn.

At last, at about ten that evening, Remsen called up to see how the stitches were doing, and Thobo was forced to admit that he didn’t know. But he determined that he would find out, so back to Maki’s he went.

Chen walked behind him, keeping as much of a polite distance as sahn dared.

When Thobo entered the room, Chen came and stood beside him. There was warning in those eyes...

He went over to the swinging chair anyway, and carefully tried to roll the satamuri onto sahn’s back.

This was not home. Maki knew that and only that. Somewhere a door had opened, and somewhere someone had come in. All the walls—sahn could hear them breathing—crept toward sahn. Sahn felt cold, and growled, but little came out.

“You have to eat something,” sahn barely heard. The tone was of someone worried sick, but that was not the tone Maki heard. The eyes that opened to look at the source were hazy and dry. The teeth that shown through a barely opened mouth were not.

Another set of words. The walls crept closer. All the hair on Maki’s back stood on end.

Thobo tried one last time to turn Maki over so he could check the stitches. He figured the only way to do it was to just do it, so he turned sahn over with great deliberation and forthrightness—

The satamuri knew only that something had grabbed sahn, and then knew only that the jaw muscles had clamped and the neck muscles had yanked; there was a most alien yelp, and then the agony of being pulled to the ground by the whiskers.

Chen had grabbed sahn, and pried open sahn’s jaws.

Thobo backed off, looking in utter astonishment at a six-inch gash in his left arm. He’d enough presence of mind to block all the receptors coming from it, but nothing in the universe could have prepared him for the shock of actually being savaged in the first place. He called down the corridor for Ranger, who came running and pulled Thobo out of the room when he saw what had happened.

Chen grabbed the satamuri up in sahn’s arms and disappeared down the corridor, and, inside a force field, out of the domes.



In spite of the satamuri’s efforts, Thobo was not badly hurt. The skin had been lacerated and a muscle or two, and a small cable which lie close to the bone, torn loose. He had enough supplies in his office (and others could be found in some of the laboratories if one were sneaky enough) to fix the cable, but he called Dee Remsen over to do all the rest. She stitched him up (after, to his great annoyance, having stared into the wound for a moment and pronouncing that, except for the deep cable, “It looks so *normal!*”), painted him with a sealant and told him to bandage the arm when the sealant had had a chance to dry.

It was a good thing there wasn’t any venom in that bite, he thought. Besides the stuff that could be poisoned outright, you never know what kinds of things venom will corrode. He watched Dee walk off down the street just the way professors walk when they have wonderful bits of material for a new paper to write... Next month’s *Wargentin Scientist* was going to be a doozie.

He was just about to get on with the job of bandaging the arm when he heard feet against the porch.

Maki was sitting on the railing, looking very cautiously in Thobo’s direction.

“Hi,” he said. “Are you all right?”

The satamuri hooted.

“Come here,” he said, waving a head. The animal’s infrared image was normal.

Maki jumped down from the railing but sat where sahn landed. The lost weight showed.

When Thobo went to wind the bandage, Maki stopped him, grabbing the cloth lightly and chirped.

“What is it?” Thobo asked.

Maki made a motion as if to wrap the bandage sahn’s self, chirped and backed off.

Politely, Thobo refused. “That’s all right. I can manage.”

Maki dropped sahn’s head.

Looking at the Alien Cat’s face, it suddenly dawned on Thobo that his refusal had been impolitic. He scolded himself. He handed over the bandage and offered his arm.

Maki took the cloth and wound it carefully. “I owe you a favor, at least,” sahn said.

When the arm was wrapped, Maki went to leave.

Thobo tapped sahn and looked at sahn disappointedly.

Maki sat down again, next to his chair, and Thobo, relaxing contentedly, started to scratch idly behind sahn’s ears.



Interview With Captain Shimbo

aired on *Space Life Today*, 15th February 2334

Olie Trygvisson: Good evening, viewers, and welcome to Space Life Today! We're here at Starbase 6 meeting with the Captain of the USS *Trouble*. The *Trouble* is a new type of starship, meant to house species who wouldn't be comfortable on the usual Federation starship. There isn't a class for this starship, but we do have it's newly appointed captain here with us today.

Pleased to meet you, Captain. Would you tell our viewers about yourself?

Shimbo: Thank you for having me. I'm Captain Dr. Fara Marianne Shimbo, usually called "Shimbo-san" or "Skipper" or "What's-Your-Name." I was born in Sicily, raised in Brooklyn, married into a Japanese family, and joined Starfleet to study zoology. Whatever rumors you've heard about me are probably true, except the good ones.

Trygvisson: What kind of rumors are you speaking of?

Shimbo: Oh, all of them. I haven't been keeping track, there are too many.

Trygvisson: What is so special about this mission the Starfleet would like to share with us?

Shimbo: Well, when I entered Starfleet academy, the Big Deal was that we were going to explore strange new worlds and stuff. The usual line they give you as a cadet. Of course, me being me, I believed them. Then I started getting training in weaponry and stuff and said, "Wait a minute... Excuse me but asking someone to Explore New Civilizations and fight them at the same time is kind of like asking a professor to teach and write grant proposals at the same time." Which they do, and I don't. Just crazy. So, I wormed my way through Starfleet until I could arrange for a genuine exploratory, science-y "sensa-wonda" ship and here we are.

Trygvisson: That's very interesting, I heard a bet involved in your commission. Is it true?

Shimbo: Oh yeah, it's no secret. I made a bet with Commodore Mayell that if I can make this ship work, *my way*, I win, I get to be the captain of the *Trouble* in perpetuity. If it doesn't work and I lose, I resign from Starfleet and become a pirate.

Trygvisson: Do you mean a spy?

Shimbo: Nah, just a privateer. A retired privateer zinging about the galaxy not reporting to anyone and having a great time.

Trygvisson: Is Starfleet sanctioning piracy now? Do you keep the ship if you lose?

Shimbo: Nah, I've got a nice ketch of my own.

Trygvisson: Well, besides the bet, what is different or special about this mission that the brass want us to know? We don't usually do feature stories about new commissions.

Shimbo: Well, the brass can tell you whatever their line is. Here's mine. I had some input into the design of the *Trouble*, and I made a number of decisions that were met with less than glee.

For one thing, there are no "lower decks." Everybody has an actual quarters. Why? Well, this is one of the things I learned being the Big Sister and having a raft of siblings and cousins I had to be in charge of. If you keep people comfortable and make them think they have a stake in, say, the ship—as in "yeah, this part of the *Trouble* is all mine!"—people are much more likely to pay attention and work together. This is why cubicles back in the 20th century made for a toxic workplace and were eventually abandoned.

Then, I decided, I wanted a very, very mixed-species crew. There was a lot of push-back on this. It's much easier to just clone quarters for upright-bipeds and stuff them in a ship than to accommodate other species, so even though the *Trouble* was going to be a small ship, it would be very expensive to build. Somebody even told me, "You want all this expensive stuff, you can pay for it," and I said, "On my Starfleet salary... yeah, good luck with that."



Trygvisson: With all that opposition, what made Starfleet green light the ship now?

Shimbo: I'm not really sure. I think Admiral Swanson had a lot to do with it behind the scenes, but mostly, I think, it was to get me to shut the [redacted] up.

Trygvisson: You mentioned your crew was multi-species. Tell us about them. Are they officially members of Starfleet?

Shimbo: All but a couple who are aboard by my personal invitation, yes, they're Starfleet, and most of them would not ordinarily be assigned to a starship because they require special environments and such.

My first officer, Commander Dorcas Addomecaroi is what humans would call a theropod. Dorcas' people refer to her type as "common bipeds." She studied on her homeworld, and I met her there while I was working on my dissertation.

Trygvisson: What's unique about her?

Shimbo: About Dorcas? She ... was perhaps not a star pupil but she has an absolute flair for making all kinds of communications work. Tech and diplomacy. She has a talent that Winston Churchill is said to have valued: she can tell you to go to hell in such a way that you actually look forward to the trip. She can figure out strange means of communication, especially technological communication, without really giving it what seems to be a lot of thought. And she bites, so there's that.

Trygvisson: What makes Dorcas or someone of her species more qualified than other officers?

Shimbo: Species hasn't much to do with it. I mean, as another of my crew said, who'd ever guess that humans make good musicians? I chose Dorcas for a number of reasons: she's the best I've found at what she does; she thinks of things that never would have occurred to me because of the way her species thinks that I don't; and because we get along well.

Trygvisson: How does the rest of the crew feel about her? Do they accept orders willingly from a non-biped?

Shimbo: They'd better. Besides, so many of them are non-bipeds or non-peds, so if they have a problem that's too bad.

Trygvisson: Were they chosen for any species-specific reasons?

Shimbo: Some of them are the best at what they do because of who they are. For example, Ensign ... I can't pronounce his name in a way that won't offend him so I call him "Max," is a fantastic geologist because his species lives in underground warrens. He can tell you exactly what's in a mineral sample just by tasting it, down to trace elements.

Trygvisson: That sounds like a unique skill for exploring new worlds. Who else is of interest on the ship? Or are the rest of the species there to prove something?

Shimbo: Everyone on my ship is of interest, that's why they're there. We're all here to prove that "Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations" is a value to be lauded, not an expense to be minimized.

Trygvisson: I understand there are cats and dogs on the ship? Are they part of the crew?

Shimbo: I told everyone they are allowed to bring their companion animals *provided* they can be trained to run to their owner's rooms when General Quarters is announced. Hopefully I will never need to announce that. But having them all over the place has a remarkably calming effect. We have so many different people from so many different places that you find there can be a lot of very innocent misunderstandings; then a Cat walks up and starts purring and everyone wants to cuddle the Cat so, while they aren't officially Starfleet, they are invaluable. As for my "dog" Vinny, well, he's my dog and he's a Good Dog. And my cat Harry is a pill.

Trygvisson: Is there anything you want to add about this voyage?

Shimbo: May luck be with us! We *shall* pass!

Trygvisson: Well, thank you very much for your time. Come back with your shield or on it.

This has been an interview with Captain Dr. Fara Marianne Shimbo, skipper of the USS *Trouble* due to make their maiden voyage on 15th March, 2334.

Interview With Admiral Swanson

aired on *Space Life Today*, 15th February 2334

Olie Trygvisson: Our next guest tonight is Admiral Germaine Swanson, who was very influential in getting the *Trouble* program off the ground, as it were.

Admiral Swanson, welcome to *SpaceLife*.

Admiral: Thank you. Glad to be here.

Trygvisson: For those of our audience who may not have heard your name before, I have to say, your rise through the ranks of Starfleet was meteoric! To what do you attribute that?

Admiral: Knowing where the bodies are buried.

Trygvisson: Well, that's a good strategy, certainly. Now. What exactly was your involvement in getting the *Trouble* Project, as it were, off the ground?

Admiral: Well, I was called in to participate at the last minute, so to speak. The crew is made up of many of the special recruits



we've added over the last few years. It's the first crew that was selected by the Captain based on skills and abilities. Not species.

Trygvisson: I heard there was a bet involved? Can you tell me about that?

Admiral: I've heard the rumors but that would be ridiculous. Starfleet isn't run that way. No one person has that much power.

Trygvisson: I see... But nevertheless, there was a lot of opposition to the whole project, and many observers were sure it would never get a follow-through. Instead, we ended up with a small ship and, even for her size, a very small crew complement.

Admiral: Well. Their mission is for exploration. It does not require a complement of troops, which reduces the size of the crew by orders of magnitude.

Trygvisson: Yes, about that. The Captain was once heard to say that this is definitely not a fighting ship, and it is armored only with "sarcasm and guile." Yet the Universe is, as we've seen, a dangerous place, and even support-ships like the California class are armed and armored. Now, it's been said that the lack of such protection is meant to offset the extravagant quarters required for some of the crew. Is this true?

Admiral: A smart captain does not share the intricacies of their weaponry with the press. I haven't seen the specs. What do you mean?

Trygvisson: All right then, moving on... I saw that you yourself will be aboard ship when she departs on her maiden voyage. This is unusual, to say the least. Is there any reason for this?

Admiral: I am preparing for retirement. This is one of my last voyages before I step down. I am a Starfleet Academy recruiter. I was involved in the selection of a majority of the crewmembers onboard.

Trygvisson: You studied at the Vulcan Academy of Sciences, a very rare honor for a human. Can you tell us a little about that?

Admiral: I am one of a generation of children born in the New Panama Protectorate who developed mental abilities that the elders could not harness. Some of us were sent to Vulcan to find out if we could be disciplined. The gifts of telepathy and the like are not appreciated on my homeworld. Some of us stayed and were admitted to an adjunct program the Vulcans had for non-Vulcan youth. I was later accepted to the Academy with full honors.

Trygvisson: That's quite an achievement! Have those skills stood you in good stead in your career?

Admiral: They have been helpful as are all parts of education and training.

Trygvisson: I see. Thank you. Well, one question a lot of people are asking is how exactly did the *Trouble* get its name?

Admiral: The story goes that the *Trouble* was named by a faulty translator device. It misunderstood the name a Prime Minister chose to call it in his own language. In that language, the words mean: "Smooth Sailing".

Trygvisson: Is there anything else you'd like to add? I know our audience has many questions about this most unusual Starfleet deployment.

Admiral: This is the shake down cruise of a new vessel crewed by able spacemen from most of Federation space. It's the first mission of its kind and I hope it will be one of many in the future. The Trouble was designed to house many different types of beings who require different environments in order to survive.

Trygvissor: Well, that's all the time we have. Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us today.

Admiral: Thank you for having me.



Trouble Brewing

Episode 4: *Looking For Trouble*

FADE or something:

1 OUTDOORS, ON A ROGUE PLANET, IN A BOAT

1

The CAPTAIN and EBBET are seated side-by-side in a small craft, sailing, or something, away from the island upon which the CAPTAIN was beamed earlier. The only light is from the stars, and some lanterns on the boat. The boat is an eclectic design of totally alien technology and some touches which must have come from EBBET's imagination.

EBBET

Welcome aboard! I'll take you to the zoo.

CAPTAIN

(Putting a stinger on one shoulder and the Cat on the other)
Mr. Ebbet, I presume?

EBBET

(nonplussed)
However did you know that?

CAPTAIN

I met your friend Lacincia. We were old pals way back in Starfleet.

EBBET

(suspiciously)

Oh, did you? Did she, uhm...

CAPTAIN

Happen to spill the beans? Not exactly, she sort of flung them at me.

EBBET

I say. She would have done, knowing her. Definitely would have done. I suppose you want to know where you are.

CAT

MEOW.

EBBET

And you want to eat. Of course.

CAPTAIN

I will admit, I am curious about where I might be.

EBBET

And I'd be happy to tell you, except that I really don't know myself. Rogue planet, don't you know. No sun. I've been here for ... oh, must be months. Stars go round and round, no sun.

CAPTAIN

I take it from the number and brightness of the stars that we're in a cluster of some kind?

EBBET

A globular cluster, yes. I've been able to discern that much.

The cat and the Stinger take a few swipes at each other, and CAPTAIN puts them both down.

CAPTAIN

Zoo, eh? So, we're not alone here then.

EBBET

Alone? I should say not! I should say not. No. No, there's an archipelago, you see. Just a little ways away. Each island has a-

Suddenly, a laser shoots from the side of the boat, and something, becoming annoyed, splashes and swims away.

EBBET

Damned nuisances. Good thing the boat chases them away automatically. They're like sharks but with too much in the way of grey matter, you see. You can only traverse the seas in this boat. If you try to swim away from your island, you know, they will catch you.

CAPTAIN

If this is a zoo, who's the keeper?

EBBET

(leaning over conspiratorially)

Graduate students, my dear lady. Graduate students.

CAPTAIN

Oy...

EBBET shrugs and they sail on.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Got a story to tell, in words, pictures, or sound?

WE WANT YOU! Yes, YOU!

Deadline for the next Issue (No. 7) is 21 November 2022.

Submissions can be sent to editor@retrozine.net or to submissions@retrozine.net.

Here are some tips for getting things to us.

📖 WRITTEN WORD:

For New and Original written-word science fiction, fantasy and fanfic, please send your work in a **plain text file** (no pre-formatting or PDFs, please, it only makes our job harder! We will make them here). This may be .txt (plain text), .odt (OpenOffice, LibreOffice), or .doc/.docx (Microsoft Office), though we can read pretty much every file format you can think of. We don't have a word limit, but we may suggest that anything very long be serialized.

NOTA BENE: Initial submissions of longer works must be at least 1,000 words so that we can properly decide if your work is going to be a good fit for our audience. If you're at 1,000 words or less, just send the whole thing.

If you are submitting a story that has previously been published, please note we have a cut-off date; we are only accepting work published in the 20th Century. Please include the place it was originally published, the editor at the time, the date of publication, and any reviews you think might be of interest to potential readers.

If you are including illustrations, please see the notes below for whatever type of art you have. If you were not the artist, please forward permission to use the art from the original artist if the work was not a work-for-hire. (A "work-for-hire" is any work that has been ordered from an artist and paid for, and is therefore no longer the legal property of the artist.) If you wish to use a work which you have purchased from an artist, such as a print, make sure you purchased publication rights as well.

🗣️ SPOKEN WORD/READ FOR YOU:

Please send text files first! We have really good, experienced editors here who may want to suggest clarifications, additions and the like. Once the story has been accepted, you may choose to narrate it yourself, or choose a narrator. (And please, no offense intended, but please carefully consider your narration skills before taking this step!) We will give you instructions on how to send sound files if the story is accepted, but we reserve the right to reject a sound file if it is of poor sound quality (too much background noise, cats yowling to be fed, etc).

🖼️ TRADITIONAL MEDIA ART:

Please send these as .png files, with images as large and clear as you can manage and uncompressed. One shouldn't have to say this, but please only send images of your own work unless the art is an illustration for a story which you are submitting at the same time. If you are considering submitting a print you bought from an artist, please refrain unless you purchased publication rights at the same time.

🖨️ DIGITAL 2D:

Same as the above really, but here we will accept .psd (Photoshop) and .xcf (GIMP) as well.

🖨️ 3D/3D PRINTABLE:

If you're just sending a static image (or a collection of different views of a 3D object you've made, the guidelines are the same as for Digital 2D. We'd much prefer either .blend (Blender), .skp (SketchUp) or .stl (stereolithography, the standard for most 3D printers) formats for these files. One of us (probably Fa) will likely print your model to make sure that there are no holes, that supports work, and to determine approximately the amount of time and how much filament a print takes. I (Fa) print on a Lulzbot Mini.

🎵 MUSIC and MULTIMEDIA:

Please, please, *compress these files before sending them!* [filename].tar.gz is preferred. We'll take .wav, .mp3 and .mp4 formats, as these are the most widely compatible with different operating systems. (If you are unfamiliar with translating between formats, Tenacity is an excellent, and free, tool for sound. If you want to try your hand at video recording and editing, Fa uses OpenShot on Linux (works on all platforms) for her YouTube videos; also free and very easy to learn.

🗿 SCULPTURE, CERAMIC and GLASS:

Pictures of same only, please. We cannot be responsible for the way objects subjected to the post may be handled (trust us, we can tell you horror stories). See the guidelines above. Please include the size and medium/media of your creation, and anything else you might think cromulent.

LET'S GET CREATIVE!

If you've got something that just doesn't fit into the categories above, please email a description, and we'll see if we can work something out.

LICENSING:

Original works which are being published for the first time can be [Creative Commons](https://creativecommons.org/) licensed. Do follow the link and look into it (creativecommons.org).

LAST BUT NOT LEAST:

You may only contribute **your own work!** You may not "agent" for someone else, or "surprise" someone by trying to have their work published for them. If you don't own it, don't send it. Fa has been bending computers to her will for almost fifty years now, and both of us have taught, and raised kids. Trust us, we know all the cheats.

Got it? Good! Please send submissions to submissions@retrozine.net. We will send you a note letting you know your submission was received, but we cannot guarantee when we'll get to look at it in depth.

See you next time!

