

The Sphere:  
And Other Strange Short Stories

# **The Sphere:**

## **And Other Strange Short Stories**



**Written By: Andre' M. Leger**

Edited By: Laura Brown  
Photography: Jessie Leger  
Photography Assistant: Lolly Leger  
Cover Design: Andre' Leger

The Sphere: And Other Strange Short Stories.

Copyright © 2000 by Andre' M. Leger. All Rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission from the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Cover Design: Andre' Leger

Photographer: Jessie Leger

Asst. Photographer: Lolly Leger

Editor: Laura Brown

This book is dedicated to:

Jessie, Preston, Catherine,  
Cuyler, and Cade

Without them this would have never been possible.

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents	5
The Pocket Watch	6
The Purse Thief and his Prize	13
A Head of the Game	18
China Drop	24
Don't Eat the Beans	30
Fatboy the Destroyer	33
Galactic Zoo	38
Giant-in-the-Box	45
Invasion from Within	49
Moon Cleaner	54
Schmackentrod's Party	64
Stinky Pinky	69
The Antiworld	73
The Collar from Hell	79
The Community	86
The Hole	97
The Long Hike	110
The Machine	118
The Protector	123
The Ripple Effect	130
The Sphere	135
The Strange Stray	146
Who's Real	150
Wipeout	157
About the Author	163

## **The Pocket Watch**

It was 6:00 AM; time for Amy Lefaux to finally get off work. She was a security officer for a large lab hidden off the beaten path near her hometown of Feldspar. Her relief came a few minutes early so that the information of what had happened the night before could properly be passed on.

Working the night shift had its advantages. For example, Amy could be home when her son got off the bus from school. This allowed her to spend valuable time with him and still make an honest living. Her son was seven years old and was in the second grade.

Unfortunately, Amy's husband, who was also a security officer, had been killed while on duty about three years ago. It had been a somewhat difficult struggle for her to overcome the odds. Nevertheless, she was finally getting over his death and was not planning on getting remarried anytime soon.

Amy liked her job and preformed it well for her company. The nighttime shifts her sergeant had put her on gave her lots of free quiet time. Often, Amy would wander through the complex in between her rounds looking at all of the strange experiments that were continually being

conducted in the labs. However, Amy was a simple woman, and did not understand most of the rather complex chemical processes.

After chatting with her fellow relief officer for a little while, Amy quietly headed out the door and went to her old and beat-up, but reliable car. She drove home in a sleepy daze and crawled into bed until her boy came home after school.

She spent the afternoon helping her son with his homework and doing various chores around the house. Fortunately, Amy's mother lived with her and was able to watch her grandson during the night while she worked. Ten o'clock came rapidly and Amy was back to work again. Little did she know that this night would change her life forever.

It started out to be a fairly routine night with not much going on. Then, while on rounds in the parking area, a silver gleam caught her eye from the far corner of the lot. Curiosity grabbed on to Amy and sent her over to investigate.

It turned out to be a beautiful sterling silver pocket watch with inlaid scrolling designs covering it. It appeared to have been modified from its original design though, because there were two ugly plastic buttons sticking out of some freshly cut holes in the side.

One of the buttons was red and the other one was black. Amy wondered why someone would ruin such a pretty watch with the goofy-looking plastic buttons. She pressed the red button and the watch second hand stopped. Then she pressed the black button and it started back up again.

"Well, I guess someone wanted a fancy stopwatch or something," Amy said quietly, "I will never understand

these lab workers with their crazy ideas.” Amy slipped the fancy watch into her pocket not giving it much thought until later in the night.

On her 3:30 AM round, Amy remembered about the watch. She pulled it out and began to examine it more closely now that she was inside a well-lit lab. She flipped the top open and noticed that someone had put a small red sticker on the inside cover that read, “Emergency Use Only.”

Amy wondered what the strange sticker meant as she slowly strolled through the lab. A bubbling sound grew louder as she approached a rack of glassware with colorful chemicals whizzing around inside. She pressed the red button again but this time more than the second hand stopped. The bubbling noise had stopped also.

Amy looked up from the watch to see the chemicals frozen in time. A drop of a red chemical was floating in mid air above the pool that had collected in the bottom of the flask. Other tubes of chemicals had air bubbles seemingly frozen into the liquid itself. Amy’s jaw dropped open at the amazing site.

She quickly pressed the black button on the watch. Instantly the drop hit the pool below while another one slowly formed from the end of the pipe above it. In addition, the bubbles began flowing from bottom to top in the tube again.

“What the heck?” Amy pressed the red button once again and time seemingly stood still. Then, she looked at the clock on the lab wall. It too was affected by the strange watch. The second hand was seemingly paralyzed and unable to move. Again, she pressed the black button thus releasing time to flow normally.



Fortunately, the bizarre watch seemed to have no effect at all on Amy herself, but had a definite effect on the world around her.

She continued on her rounds, searching each lab for something to test the strange watch on. One lab had several monkeys in cages along the walls. Amy pressed the red button and sure enough, the monkeys were frozen in time.

She walked up to one of the caged animals and put her face right next to its face. Next, she pressed the black button on her new toy and started up time. The monkey almost had a heart attack. It jumped up screaming at the top of its lungs and hit its head on the top of the cage.

To the monkey, Amy disappeared from across the room and instantly reappeared right in its face. Amy finished her rounds and slipped the watch back into her pocket. She finally realized that if she had continued playing with it, she would have never gotten off of work!

She sat down at her post and began to think of all the possibilities that were now available to her with the device. Then she remembered about the warning on the label. It was right. She could not simply play around with this thing. It was far too valuable for that. She tried to reason to herself of what the consequences of using the watch could be.

Then the answer hit her; she would age more rapidly than everyone else would. Every time she stopped time itself, everyone around her would stop aging. She, however, would continue to age. Depending on how much she used the watch, she would turn gray much faster than all of those around her. The thought of this saddened Amy, but the fact that she would be able to do practically whatever she wanted to with it outweighed that drawback.

Now Amy could sleep in as late as she wanted to with her new 'snooze' button. She played with the new watch for weeks, trying it when nobody was around. Finally, after much thought, she decided she would only use the power when it was for good purposes. After all, it was her time on this earth that she was using.

She knew she could never use it in front of anyone because of the monkey's reaction. A human would definitely question any disappearing tricks by her more than the monkey did.

Amy then put the watch in her purse and almost forgot about it. Several months later, Amy was at the local bank cashing her meager check when several men armed with shotguns entered. Fortunately, Amy had her purse open and was standing near the counter signing her check when they arrived.

One of the evil men quickly drew a bead on the security guard in the bank. The guard was reaching for his trusty .38 special by his side when Amy quickly stopped time with the watch. She stormed over to the man with the shotgun with an angry look on her face.

Thoughts of her husband came flooding back to her mind. Unfortunately, it was almost the exact same situation that took him from her. She began to cry, missing her husband dearly as she was deciding what to do next.

She regained her composure and vowed not to let this robbery take place. Amy grabbed the bank robber's shotguns and emptied all of the shells out of all of them. She put the empty guns back into their hands and walked over to the security guard on duty.

He was a young man, probably about twenty-five. Amy noticed his wedding band on his left hand. She was glad that she could make a difference in the outcome of the

situation. His wife at home would never know that Amy had ultimately saved his life today.

Amy walked back over to the counter and set the watch back into her purse with the black button facing out. She tried to get in the exact same position that she was in before she had stopped the world around her. Then she pressed the black button and released time.

Almost instantly the shotgun let out a loud 'click' as the firing pin fell on an empty chamber. The man quickly raked the slide again attempting to chamber another shell before the security officer shot him. Click! Again, the shotgun said it was empty.

Another one of the armed men saw Amy's uniform and clicked his shotgun at her. He too could not believe that he had forgotten to load it and raked the slide again in disbelief. Again, the shotgun would only click in response to his request to fire.

By this time, the security officer on duty had instinctively pointed his revolver at the center of the chest of one of the robbers. Boom! The man slumped to the floor after the slug tore deeply into his chest. Boom! Boom! The other two robbers dropped just like the first did.

After all the chaos of the situation had died down, the bank security officer stood there shaking with his revolver still in hand. He could not believe his incredibly good luck. He was baffled by the fact that all three men had forgotten to load their weapons before committing their crime.

A later investigation by the local police revealed that the men, for some unknown reason, had thrown all of their shells in a trashcan just outside of the bank. The security officer that Amy had saved was made a hero in the small town having thwarted such a robbery single handedly.

Amy kept her secret to herself. She knew that if anyone ever found out she had such a device it would probably be gone forever.

Unfortunately, Amy's purse was stolen out of her car about a month later and the awesome watch went with it. Amy only hoped that the new owner would use the watch wisely, but somehow she knew it probably would not happen that way.

## **The Purse Thief and His Prize**

Looking around to make sure nobody was watching, Ken burst the passenger side window on the scruffy-looking little vehicle. The tiny glass fragments rained to the cement below like a jar of spilled candy. He quickly snatched the purse he had been eyeing that was sitting on the floorboard. Ken hightailed it around the back of the grocery store while trying to hide the purse under his shirt and met up with the other boys in his gang.

“Did you get it, man?” one of them asked.

“Man, shut up! Yeah, I got it,” Ken panted while trying to catch his breath. He dropped it to the ground from under his shirt like an unwanted baby. Several hands reached for the brown leather purse at the same time. Its contents were spilled out and carefully examined.

The wallet went first. A total of twenty-seven dollars in cash was quickly drained from the inside. Next came the credit cards. Although those are a bit riskier in nature, they were divided evenly between the gang members. The driver’s license and I. D.’s were split up also. Ken grabbed one of the identifications from the wallet he had stolen. It was a security officer’s state commission with the name of Amy Lefeaux on it.

Ken thought it looked neat so he shoved it in his pocket without further thought. Next came the makeup and hairbrush – they went over the fence. Then a surprise came out. It was a shiny sterling silver pocket watch. Ken scooped it up just before one of the other boys got his hands on it.

He examined the watch carefully to see if the silver was real. If it was, he might be able to get ten dollars for it from his friend at the pawnshop. He flipped open the top and saw a little red sticker with some letters on it. Unfortunately, he could not read well and only was able to get the second two of the three words printed on it. It said something ‘use only’. He flipped it over and noticed that it had two ugly plastic buttons sticking out of the side where someone had drilled holes in it. One of the buttons was red and the other one was black.

“Dang man. Someone ruined this pocket watch,” he sighed, as he realized he was not going to get much for it now.

He pressed the red button to see what it did. The second hand stopped on the watch. Of course, so did his friends. At first Ken thought his friends were playing some kind of trick on him as usual. They were all acting like statues and not moving at all. He began to push around them trying to call their bluff. None of them would move even in the slightest.

Ken thought, “I’ll make ‘em move.” He reached over and pulled everyone’s share of the stolen cash right out of their hands and their pockets. Not one of the members moved an inch.

Ken was beginning to get worried. His friends had never acted in such a strange manner before. He slowly backed away from them and began to look around. It was

then that he realized that not only were his friends frozen but also there was an alley cat stuck in mid-air. It looked like it had just jumped off the edge of the trash dumpster. It had a half-eaten chicken leg in its mouth. Ken could not figure out how the cat was able to float in the air.

He walked around the corner and was amazed to see the entire block was somehow frozen in its tracks. Cars were frozen with their drivers unable to move. People were stopped in mid-stride walking to and from their cars in the grocery store parking lot. Even the birds in the sky were stuck in mid-flight.

Finally, Ken thought back and remembered exactly when his friends stopped moving. It was just after he pressed the red button on the silver watch. He pulled the watch out of his pocket. He pressed the black button and the world came to life around him.

“Wow! This is great!” Ken exclaimed.

He pressed the red button again and was rewarded with the world freezing for him. The black button again let the whole world go about its business. He quickly ran back to where his friends were. They were looking for him all around the back of the store. Not surprisingly, they all had a rather puzzled look on their faces when Ken came running up to them.

“Hey man, how did you do that magic trick disappearing thing?” one of them asked.

“What do you mean?” Ken asked with an equally confused look.

“You just disappeared when you pressed the button on that watch. Next thing we know you come running around the corner. How did you get over there?”

“Well, I just walked,” he answered as if they should have known that.

Now that the entire gang was totally confused they all just shrugged their shoulders and went back to the business of being bad. Ken though, had other plans. He made up an excuse and departed from the company of his friends in order to further test the magic watch's amazing abilities. After he got around the corner, he pressed the red button and froze the world just as he had done before. This time he walked right into the grocery store.

Everyone was frozen in their place. It was easy pickins'. Ken strolled around the store and picked every bit of cash off of every person in there. He cleaned out all of the cashier's tills as well. By the time he was finished, he had collected over ten thousand dollars. It was almost too easy.

Ken walked out the store and pressed the black button to release time. The chaos that ensued in the grocery store was priceless. All of the people were baffled by the sudden disappearance of cash on the premises. Some of the people were blaming others for stealing and fights broke out all over the store.

Finally, the police came in and arrested everyone as Ken watched from across the street. One could almost see the wheels turning in Ken's head as he stared at the scene and thought of how he could practically rule the world with this little silver watch.

He needed to find a place to hide all of his cash. It was just too much to carry around. His pockets looked funny with as much as they were bulged out. He went back to his house and locked the door on his room. Acting quickly, he stuffed all of the money in between his mattresses. The watch, however, would definitely stay with him.

As he opened the door to his room to rejoin his gang, his mom stood in his path with an angry look on her face.



“What have you been up to, boy?” she asked with a stern voice. “You ain’t been hanging around them bad kids now have you?”

“Aw mom, come on. They ain’t bad,” Ken pleaded.

“You gonna end up in jail if you keep hanging with them boys, son!” she fussed.

Ken reached for the watch to try to pull his disappearing act on his mom but she outflanked him and yanked the device from his hand before he could activate it.

“Dat is mine, Mom! Gimmie it back!” Ken shouted, attempting to regain control of the situation.

“Who did you steal this from?” his mom demanded.

“Nobody Mom. I bought it from Carl.”

Unfortunately, Ken did not lie well. He tended to look away and not make direct eye contact with the person he was fibbing to. His mother was an expert at perceiving his lies. She searched her son’s pockets and found the security commission from the purse he had stolen.

She took the watch and the commission and brought both of them to the police. Eventually, all of the money Ken had stolen from the grocery store was returned to the rightful owners. Ken ended up in juvenile detention for the possession of the stolen money although they could not prove that he was the one who took it or even how it was taken.

The commission was returned to the security officer who owned the purse, but not the watch. Somehow it was found missing from the police evidence room just before Ken’s trial date. The last people to examine the watch were a couple of agents sent from the FBI. Unfortunately, nobody ever saw the watch after that.

## **A Head of the Game**

The year was 2340 when the Board on the Exploration of Ruins granted team Alpha a commission to explore the subterranean ruins of New Los Angeles. The team of scientists had been petitioning the Board for months and was delighted to finally gain access. The area had long been abandoned ever since the big one of 2165. That earthquake was a 9.7 on the Richter scale and pretty much destroyed the entire area and all of its inhabitants. The resulting mess was contaminated with a multitude of hazardous chemicals. Even though most of the chemicals were housed in earthquake proof containment units, the big one was able to open them. The entire area was left a rubble-laden wasteland for 175 years. Team Alpha was able to convince the Board to give them the commission by showing conclusive evidence that it was safe for humans to return to the area.

A week of preparation got team Alpha the right equipment and a plan of exploration to go by. Finally, the day came and the excited team members kissed their families' goodbye for a couple of weeks then jumped on the land hoverer. It was sort of a floating troop transport that sped across the desert in a matter of minutes. The

hoverer slowed to a halt after getting to a particularly rocky portion of the ruins.

“Okay guys, you know your duties. Split up and return in an hour to see what we got.”

The scientists looked like slimline astronauts diving over the side of a sinking ship. Their personal protective gear was the best available and would prevent any possible miscalculation on safety from becoming a disaster. They scrambled and fanned out as if a toddler with a dirty diaper unit had been placed in the center of them.

An hour later they gathered around their ship again. The men found many impressive looking antiques with most of them in pretty good condition. One of the scientists took readings of the toxicity levels on their findings with his hand scanner. Most of the objects cleared the safe level. However, some of them would have to be cleaned before being brought back with them.

One of the scientists returned to the gathering a bit late and with an anxious look on his face. He was very excited and could barely speak. Trying to explain what he had found was too difficult, so he lead the others into a deep hole in the rubble.

At first, it was mostly crumbled concrete pieces, but the pieces turned into stairs as they went further down. It appeared to be an old 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘building’ basement. The scientists all began to turn on their suit headlights, which shone brightly illuminating their path with a fluorescent glow. The hand scanner indicated that the levels of the chemicals were only trace amounts down in the basement.

There were about fifteen large metal cylinders with ‘cryogenic material’ printed on the outside. Each cylinder also had the standard liquid nitrogen warning label on its

side. They also had a silver etched stainless steel nameplate on their sides and a serial number. The nameplates contained information about their content's personal lives.

Unfortunately, all but one of the cylinders had some sort of physical damage to it. There was no nitrogen left in any of the damaged tanks. It had all leaked out many years prior to their discovery. Some of the damaged tanks had holes in them big enough to see through. Peering through the holes, the scientists found that they contained human skulls in some and entire skeletons in others.

The one intact cylinder that was still holding its liquid nitrogen belonged to a woman named Cindy Delford who had died in 1997. The readings on the dials indicated that only 1% of the nitrogen had leaked out of her grave and that the contents were in excellent shape. It was too short to contain an entire body, so the scientists figured it must have just been her head in the unit.

The thing weighed a ton! It took four of the scientists to hoist it off its pedestal. Slowly, they carefully made their way up the stairs stealthily avoiding the cracks and boulders along the way. They loaded it onto the land hoverer along with all the other items they had collected so far on their journey. This was truly the most unique and rare item the Alpha team had found in a long time. They all agreed that it should be taken back to the lab for study immediately.

The land hoverer's zero point energy drive hummed to life as the craft drifted in reverse for a moment. Then it turned and slowly accelerated out of sight back into the hot flat desert with its new prize.

Within minutes the hoverer had spanned the large distance and they approached their lab facility. All of the

other objects were distributed to their appropriate labs for decontamination and classification. However, the rare finding of the cryo cylinder was brought to a special 'Artificial Life Form' lab.

Many of the scientists from the trip and others that had stayed behind gathered around to see what the cylinder contained. They flipped the pressure latches and slowly removed the lid. There inside a boiling cauldron of liquid nitrogen was a rock solid head of a 35-year-old attractive female from the past. The scientists removed Cindy from the metal coffin with special gloves so that they would not burn themselves. They gently set her on the operating table and began working furiously before their time ran out.

Several hours later they had completed construction of a body for their friend from the past. It was a bit of a pale green color but it was almost perfectly shaped. After the all clear was sounded, one of the scientists on the team hit the 'life' button and jolted the limp mass to life. Slowly, the thin green blood began to pump throughout her new body and head.

The remarkable technology of the scientists had recreated a being, melding seamlessly an ancient human head and a new artificial body and brought it back to life.

The Alpha team knew it would be a few days before Cindy would awake from her long sleep. They took the opportunity of the long wait to go to lunch to celebrate their finding and its successful reattachment to a body.

When they returned they were surprised to see that Cindy's mind had cleared much faster than they had previously anticipated. She had sat up on the table and was attempting to jump down to the floor to land onto her feet. However, her coordination was not yet fully functional and she crumbled to the floor. Cindy got on her hands and

knees and began to crawl around like a helpless baby. She almost appeared drunk as she fought to clear her mind.

The scientists quickly rushed over to help her up. One of them wrapped her beautifully shaped pale green, nude body with a blanket. She tried to focus on his face with its thick glasses and full beard. Then Cindy appeared to try to speak but she had difficulty making her lungs push the air through properly and with the correct timing. Some of what she was attempting to ask was barely intelligible.

All of the scientists agreed she was asking, "What happened?" The lead scientist briefly explained to her what year it was and that she needed to rest and allow the neural connections to complete.

They then gave her injections of nerve ending stimulant and human growth hormone as well as a slight sedative to calm her down. After the hypo began to take effect, Cindy was taken to a dark room to sleep for a while.

She awoke almost three days later. The room she was in was unfamiliar and strange. A pile of weird futuristic clothes sat on a table near the side of the bed. She stood up slowly and stretched to the sky trying to shake off the effects of her long slumber. It was at that point that Cindy caught her reflection in the mirror across the room. Initially, she was terrified at what she saw. A closer examination revealed her head had been attached to a strange-colored green body. Although it was only a pale shade of green, the effect it had visually was shocking. However, other than the color, it was perfect in every way. It was much more attractive in shape than her old body had been.

She tried to remember what happened to her. The last thing she remembered was lying on the operating table just before going into open heart surgery to correct a heart valve

defect she had had since birth. Then she remembered signing up with the Cryo-Freeze Co. to have her head frozen if she died during the operation. It was all coming back as her mind slowly cleared and she realized what must have happened to her. She grabbed the strange clothes and dressed after admiring her new body for a while.

Cindy could vaguely remember one of the scientists telling her it was far into the future, but she could not remember the exact year. As she walked up to the door, she noticed there was no handle. Confused, Cindy began to try to pry it open with her fingers. Her futile attempt was useless and it would not budge even a bit.

“Come on you stupid door!” she exclaimed getting somewhat frustrated. As soon as she said the word ‘door’, it complied and slid open swiftly with a whooshing noise. Cindy then walked out of her room and found one of the scientists. He greeted her with a warm welcome and explained what had happened. Then, he showed her to the food dispenser on the wall and materialized her a meal.

Later, Cindy was sent to the sick bay and was given a full diagnostic on her health. Every thing in her new artificial body checked out all right. She was in perfect health for once in her life.

The scientists allowed her to view the history monitor the next day. Cindy quickly learned about everything she had missed while she was frozen in time. Cindy rapidly learned to accept her new life and lived it to the fullest. Fortunately, it was just what she had hoped for before she was frozen. She felt very blessed with her situation since it was such a rarity to be given a second chance at life as she had been gifted with. She quickly adjusted to her futuristic new world and had a fulfilling and rather long lasting life.

## China Drop

“You will never get my formula. Leave me alone!” Lee slowly backed up on the metal catwalk high above the vats of brewing beer below. Several large grunts, whom could barely fit in between the rails, were closing in on him followed by a smaller smarter looking man that was dressed in a black suit with a matching wide brim hat. He was dressed as if he had just been transported from the 1920’s

“Well, if you don’t give it to us we are just gonna have to take it from you, Lee. Why not cooperate and just hand the vial over. It may save your life,” the boss growled with a New York accent.

“This formula has been in my family for hundreds of years. It is an ancient Chinese secret. I cannot simply give it to anyone. Do you realize the consequences if this stuff got into the wrong hands?” Lee was quickly running out of places to go and would have to eventually face them.

“Come on Lee, we will take care of it for you while you are away. Don’t give us any more trouble.”

“Away? I’m not going anywhere.”

The grunts pulled out gleaming pistols from under the armpits of their coats and pointed them at the now horrified



Lee. Quickly, Lee pulled out the vial and popped off the top behind his back so the men would not notice.

“Oh you’re going somewhere all right, whether you give us the formula or not. Kill him! We don’t have time for these games anymore.”

The guns barked fire echoing loudly throughout the entire plant. Searing hot lead tore through Lee’s body perforating it in several places as the brass cases that were ejected bounced about on the catwalk and found their way through one of the holes after a while. Slowly, Lee slid down the support bar clutching the rail as he fell. With his last gasp of breath Lee replied, “I told you... nobody is going to get the formula.”

His final ounce of energy allowed him to drop the precious vial into the open beer vat below. Clutching his wounds in horror on the way down, Lee slumped over as his blood slowly drained through the metal catwalk floor.

“Damn it! You idiots let him dump it into the beer!” the man in black screamed at his brainless minions. “Search him... Quickly! We need to get out of here.” The three men rapidly sprung into action checking all the pockets of the dead man for any more possible vials.

“Nothing boss,” one of them grunted.

“Come on, Let’s go you fools!” Quickly, the men disappeared from the scene before the night security guard for the brewery could get to them.

As the long black car containing the mysterious men sped off into the night the leader cursed, “If we could have gotten that vial, I could have ruled the world. It is so concentrated that the one vial will probably make the entire vat of beer become active.”

“What does it do boss?” one of the henchmen asked.

“It gives the user incredible ESP powers you dope head! Now we will have to start over and track down another source. Damn you, idiots!” he screamed slapping one of the large men in the back of the head.

Fortunately, Kelly Beer Co. had an excellent public relations manager that kept the death of Lee out of the local papers. Unfortunately, they did not realize that anything was added to the batch of beer. It was canned, as usual, and distributed throughout South Dakota. Hundreds of convenience stores in the region carried Kelly Beer and stocked their shelves unknowingly with the contaminated product.

Fred Miller had gotten off of work a little early on Friday. After all, he had to pick up a few items for his gathering that evening. It was the weekly poker night for Fred and all of his friends and this Friday was Fred’s turn to host it. Poker night for the guys always included good old Kelly Beer. After picking up a couple of cases from the convenience store, Fred went home and put out the peanuts in the large bowl that was in the center of the playing table.

Seven o’clock finally came and Fred’s friends began to show up to have a little fun after a hard week at work.

“O. K. boys, five card stud is the game.” Fred started passing out cards after a quick sip of his beer. Several others had also popped open a cold one as they received their cards for the first hand. Unknowingly to those involved, this would be one of the strangest poker nights ever in history.

By the third hand, the effects had begun to show in the men. Fred did a double take as he thought he ‘saw’ through the back of one of his friend’s cards. The face of the cards had flashed quickly in his mind.

“Stop showing me your cards, man!” Fred exclaimed to his innocent buddy.

“I didn’t,” his friend replied puffing on his cigar and opening his second beer.

The cards again flashed in Fred’s head this time staying ‘on’ longer than they had before.

“You ARE showing me. All you got is a couple of 3’s.”

“Hey man, you got a mirror set up or something? Cut it out. It ain’t funny. I fold,” he said with a restrained anger flowing through his veins.

“I’m telling you, you showed them to me. I don’t have any mirrors set up,” Fred said as he tried to defend himself.

“That’s O. K. because I see yours too. You have two pair,” his friend replied with a sense of justice.

“Hey man, now you cut that out. Nobody tell anybody what cards they have. And don’t show anyone them; this is getting out of hand,” Fred said beginning to get angry because his hand had been prematurely revealed.

“But he is right, I can see them too. You have two tens and two fives,” another of his friends blurted while taking another sip of his beer.

“What the hell is going on?” Fred asked, “I can see everyone’s now.”

“Me too.”

“Same here.”

“This is very strange. Why are suddenly all of us able to read cards without seeing them? Something is definitely wrong here.” Fred was beginning to get worried about their predicament.

“What are you guys talking about? I don’t see anything but the back of the cards,” Jack said while sipping on his Coke.

“You mean to say you can’t see through this card, Jack,” Fred asked in disbelief.

“No, it looks just like the back of all the cards. A pattern of red diamonds is all I see.”

“Wait a minute, Jack does not drink alcohol – something must be in the beer that is causing all of this.”

Suddenly Jim jumped across the table at Larry screaming in anger, “Larry you sack of s---! I can’t believe all this time my best friend at work has been screwing my daughter right behind my back!”

Larry backed up to avoid Jim’s fanatic swings and confessed, “Hey man, I’m sorry... she is my age and very pretty. How did you find out?”

Restrained by his friends, Jim yelled, “I don’t know. When I looked at you I just saw both of you together and I just knew. It must be this dad burn crazy beer.”

“O. K. Jim, calm down. Everyone knew that your daughter was doing Larry. Let’s keep our cool in this situation and think,” Fred said trying to slow the pace of his rapidly expanding thoughts.

“Maybe we could use this stuff to our advantage. How much beer do we have left, guys?” Fred asked.

“We only have half a case left.”

“Well, lets go get some more before anyone else figures this out.”

Half a dozen guys packed into Fred’s mini-van and sped off to the store where he had bought the original beer. Unfortunately, when they arrived, several armed military policemen guarded the area as others were loading the beer on to the back of a large green military truck.

“Well, I guess we will have to make do with what we have guys. Try to think of what we could possibly do with this stuff.”

The men pondered momentarily and racked their brains to come up with an idea. Then one of the men's faces lit up, as he was enlightened on a possibility.

"I got it! Let's go to Vegas. We will make a fortune; even if it is only for one night," Fred blurted excitedly.

"Good idea!" Jim exclaimed, "Who is in?"

All of them agreed that this was the best use for the leftover beer. They left immediately after notifying their wives and agreeing that they would split the money evenly among themselves.

Their weekend trip to Vegas netted 2.1 million dollars. After getting kicked out of virtually every casino in Vegas the men returned home and split up the money. The gang all quit their jobs and lived the high life for a while with their winnings. None of them ever figured out what was in the strange beer that caused them to get rich over a weekend. Never again in all of their subsequent gatherings did the friends have a more profitable game of poker.

## **Don't Eat the Beans**

Buddy Wilson had been a bean farmer in a small eastern Georgia town for most of his life. Unfortunately, he was barely making ends meet with his crop earnings. There was just not much demand for beans in the marketplace. It was springtime again and Buddy had gotten his seed crop prepared for this year's planting. He was examining the planter beans up close one day to see if they were of good quality when one of the beans in the burlap sacks caught his eye.

It was a clear bean with a glowing blue center and was radically different from all of the other beans in appearance. While pushing the beans about in the sack it got lost among all of the normal beans. He quickly dug through them until he located the strange glowing bean.

It was a weird bean, the likes of which the old farmer had never seen before in his life. Buddy decided to plant the strange glowing bean in a special spot away from the rest of his crop so he could monitor its growth. He dug a small furrow near his house and dropped the bean into the hole. Covering it over with dirt, Buddy then watered it well. He continued with his normal planting and almost forgot about the strange clear and blue glowing bean.

After only a couple of weeks the bean had sprouted from the earth and grown rapidly. In fact, none of his normal crop was anywhere near as fast growing as the special bean was. Comparing the plant with the rest of his crop, Buddy estimated its growth rate to be that of twenty times a normal bean. A few days later it sprouted pods of hundreds of beans. The crop from the one special plant was twenty times that of any of his normal bean plants. All of the new beans had the same odd appearance of being clear with a blue glowing center.

“Wow, these beans grow at twenty times the standard rate and produce twenty times the crop. But, it won’t do me any good unless they taste just as good as normal beans do,” Buddy reasoned to himself.

He took a small handful of the beans into his house to have his wife cook them up as a sample for dinner. She did her best with a light seasoning and the beans came out great. They were twice as tasty as any of the normal beans were she had ever cooked for him.

The next day, Buddy collected all of the glo-beans, as he decided to call them, and planted a special field separate from the rest of his bean crop. As he was riding on his tractor, he noticed he had some internal gas buildup from the glo-beans, but beans had always given him gas and he did not pay much attention to it. After he had gotten all of the beans planted, he had an area about the size of a small backyard garden covered. He watered the beans and treated them as he had done with the original glo-bean.

Three weeks later he had a gigantic crop of the tasty glo-beans. This time, Buddy decided to replant the entire crop and make enough to sell for a possible profit. He had never worked so hard during the growing season in his life.

He collected the entire precious crop from the plants and immediately replanted them in several of his largest fields.

Shortly thereafter, those, in turn, produced a gargantuan crop. The sight of the field was quite spectacular at night. They appeared to be blue Christmas lights strung throughout his property. Buddy decided to market the beans himself under the label 'Buddy's Glo-Beans'. His wife helped him cook and can all of the beans day and night until they had finished. It took them weeks to complete the entire crop.

Buddy sold the beans to all of the local grocery stores and even got a small contract with a larger chain store. He made quite a lot of money off of the deal and planned on growing only glo-beans in subsequent years following his great success.

Unfortunately, the glo-beans also gave off twenty times the gas levels of normal beans as they passed through the consumer's intestines. Many people were ending up in the hospital after ingesting large amounts of the new beans. A few of the customers even had their guts burst from all of the pressure.

Almost as quickly as Buddy had gained his new fortune, he began to be sued for not putting warning labels on the cans. All of the money he had made by selling the beans was lost to the defending of the suits against him. The new business of glo-beans was over before it really began to take off.

Buddy had to eventually claim bankruptcy from all of his bad fortune. After it was all over, he decided to go into another, less dangerous, line of work than bean farming.



## **Fatboy the Destroyer**

The year was 943 when a large framed woman named Sonya almost died while giving birth to a rather giant baby boy. He was born in England and was, unfortunately, not of royal birth. For all of his young life he was considered big for his age. His parents, though commoners, did their best to feed their son well.

By the time their son was 18 years old, he was head and shoulders above even the largest man in the kingdom. His massive gut hung over his belt-line making him appear to be somewhat fat, although he was mostly constructed of muscles. He was enlisted into the good king's army and trained not with a sword, as one would expect, but the mighty war hammer. He was so feared while in training that few challenged him to spar for fear of their lives. The giant war hammer was tremendously destructive in his massive hands. He quickly earned the name of 'Fatboy the Destroyer'.

Fatboy had developed over time some rather impressive leadership qualities. Consequently, he quickly rose in rank among his fellow soldiers. Eventually, he became their leader and the captain of the king's guard. For many years, all was peaceful in the land and there was

no war to be heard of. This, however, was about to change rather unexpectedly.

Barbaric invaders had been building in large numbers on the northernmost border of the kingdom. There was a great collaborator among these usually nomadic tribes and his name was Rolar the Barbarian. He was also a rather large man, but he was not as giant as Fatboy was.

The king promptly sent forth spies to their ranks to report whether the barbarians had crossed the border yet, while sending Fatboy the Destroyer and his army just behind the foothills to wait in ambush for the invaders.

The spies reported back to their king with great speed that the barbarian army was much greater than they had anticipated. Many thousands of barbarians had banded together under their new leader Rolar and had vowed to take over his kingdom by force. According to the spies, Rolar was waiting for one more group of his barbarians to return to their camp before they pounced on the king's castle. The group was expected to join the main barbarian army within a day.

The king knew he had to act quickly for much was at stake. He sent his fastest messenger to tell Fatboy the Destroyer and his men to attack at once to try and catch the barbarian army by surprise. The messenger ran with all of his speed and the message in hand.

Fatboy got the orders just in time to catch the unsuspecting barbarians off guard. It was early in the morning when the battle took place. The enemy, though attacked unexpectedly, was still able to quickly jump into action and ready themselves as the alert was sounded throughout their encampment.

Fatboy and his men killed many of the men in Rolar's army in the first half-hour, but they were vastly

outnumbered and were quickly surrounded. He knew he had trained his men well and they would not desert him under any circumstance. They were a brave army and would fight to the death if necessary to protect Fatboy and their noble king.

Fatboy had just finished crushing the skull of one of the barbarians with a powerful blow from his massive war hammer when Rolar shouted his name loudly from across the battlefield. Instantly, the two mighty warriors headed for each other as their anger began to flow. The battle around them seemed to fade into the background as the two leaders locked themselves into a fierce fight.

Rolar the barbarian was armed with a rather large broadsword that was highly polished and dripping with a soldier's spilt blood. He lifted the giant blade and swung with all his might at the great Fatboy. Quickly, Fatboy blocked his adversary's attack by deflecting the blade with his war hammer. Another quick but low swing crushed the foot of the barbarian leader causing him to scream in pain as he fell to his knees before Fatboy.

Thinking he had won the fight, Fatboy did not immediately attack the barbarian again, as he should have. Although Rolar was badly injured from the blow, he would not give up so easily. He swung his deadly giant sword and sunk it deep into Fatboy's thigh. His red blood sprayed the face of Rolar and invigorated his spirit. The wounded barbarian slowly stood to his feet while being careful not to put too much weight on his badly broken foot.

Fatboy was bleeding profusely from the wound and began to feel weak from a lack of blood. He could not allow this evil barbarian to take over the kingdom he had worked so hard to protect.

Once again, Fatboy swung the massive war hammer with his last ounce of strength and connected with a solid blow to Rolar's head. The dazed barbarian looked like a drunken man walking from a tavern as he spun off balance and toppled down to the earth. He was bleeding from his ears and his eyes were crossed. Then Fatboy almost fell down from the blood loss of his own wound. He knew he had to finish the job or the barbarian would certainly return.

Rolar was trying to regain his composure and get back up onto his feet, but at the time was only crawling on his hands and knees. Fatboy quickly struck the barbarian's head with a mighty upward directed swing and sent his head flying backwards with his body following suit. Rolar's face was crushed badly from the attack and he did not get up this time. Finally, Fatboy had defeated the enemy's leader once and for all.

When the word had spread that the mighty Rolar the Barbarian had been killed by Fatboy himself, the barbarian army began to scatter from the battlefield in fear. After a short while, Fatboy and his men had rid the area of all of the barbarians.

The king's army cheered for their victory and marched back to the king's castle with pride in their hearts. Fatboy was given the badly needed medical attention required to stop his blood loss and allow him to live.

In celebration of his victory, the king held a massive feast. In fact, the king honored Fatboy with an annual festival as celebration named after him. He called it the Fatboy Festival and many generations later the kingdom still had the celebration every year. There was never born again another man as great as he was. The memory of the king's victory lived on for hundreds of years by word of

mouth and nobody ever forgot about the legendary Fatboy the Destroyer.

## **Galactic Zoo**

Brandon Smith was just your average regular guy. He worked in a nearby plant from his house and loved his job. He lived alone having never really becoming interested in ever getting married. There was nothing particularly extraordinary about his life, at least not yet. One night in the middle of April, Brandon had gone to bed exhausted after a long day of work in the plant. He climbed into his bed after a hot shower and drifted away to dreamland.

Later that night, he was awakened by a super intense light coming into his room from all of the spaces around the doors of his house and the pulled down shades of his windows. It was much brighter than the sun and if the doors and blinds had not been closed, he would have certainly been at least temporarily blinded.

A loud reverberating throbbing noise shook his little house in the country. Brandon jumped from his bed and quickly headed for his gun cabinet in attempts to grab a shotgun, but was stopped in his tracks by a strange unseen force. He was paralyzed in mid stride and could not escape.

Unable to move and in great fear, Brandon slowly began to float above the floor in his bedroom. He floated right out of his bedroom and over to the front door of his

house. Suddenly the front door flew off its hinges and the intense light poured in surrounding him completely. The light was so bright it overloaded Brandon's eyes and neural pathways knocking him unconscious.

The next thing Brandon was able to remember was being strapped to a large metal table with no clothes on. The straps were constructed of a material that Brandon had never seen before. While it was soft and did not hurt his wrists, it was incredibly strong. With all his might he tried to break the straps from the table but he was unsuccessful.

Helpless and naked, Brandon looked around the small room that he was held prisoner in. The walls consisted of a gray metal, but they did not appear to be steel in construction. There was a small round table sitting next to him with an array of shiny metal instruments laid out on a velvety red cloth. A small metal pan with a thick clear liquid inside that had been tinged pink with blood was sitting next to the instruments. Several of the instruments also had fresh blood on them.

Brandon began to worry that the strange instruments had been used on him while he had slept. No part of his body really hurt, but then he could not readily examine himself while he was tied down. The wall across the room emitted a low hum and opened with a swiftness that startled Brandon. A large being that was about eight feet tall strolled into the room.

It was wearing a thick black hooded robe that effectively concealed much of the creature's body. From what Brandon was able to see, the creature had a bright yellow complexion and a rather triangular shaped lower face. It had two arms and was similarly shaped to a humanoid-like appearance, but Brandon was unable to tell what the remainder of the creature looked like.

The strange being rapidly and gracefully flowed across the floor and came to his side. Giant yellow six fingered hands appeared out of the armholes in its robe and reached for one of the instruments. It was a large syringe-like object with a strange shaped large needle sticking out of the end. The creature then pulled out a pea sized black pellet out of a small case and placed it into the end of the needle.

Brandon knew what was going to happen next and he began to scream loudly in attempts to frighten the being away. Unaffected by the screams, the creature pressed a button on the side of the table and a blue light engulfed Brandon on the table. The light had an incredible calming effect on him and he stopped screaming almost immediately. In fact, he began to smile a bit. The strange blue light made Brandon feel great.

The creature proceeded to push the needle into the back of Brandon's neck while he pointed it up slightly so he could place the pellet into the cranial cavity. Brandon continued to feel nothing as he lay there with a dazed smirk on his face. He did not care what the being did to him as long as the blue light was not turned off. The creature finished the operation and resealed his neck with another one of the strange instruments.

One could not even tell that an incision was ever made. The being then turned off the blue light and walked out of the hole in the wall that it had come through earlier. It closed with the same swiftness as it had opened and Brandon was again alone. He could vaguely remember what had just happened, but the blue light had fogged his memory. Nevertheless the back of his neck did not hurt in any manner.

Brandon was very tired from struggling and began to drift off to sleep. He could not sleep well since he was still



strapped to the strange table. Later he woke when the weird wall door opened again. This time several of the yellow robed creatures came into the room. They turned on the blue light that he liked and Brandon began to smile again. They unrestrained him and transferred him to a floating platform stretcher. The blue light followed him to his new location. He happily complied with the creature's demands. They strapped him to the new platform and turned off the light. Brandon was afraid of what was to become of him now.

The creatures guided the floating platform out of the room and through a maze of giant hallways. Eventually, they exited the large triangular shaped ship that they had been on and that was hovering above the red ground. A large city of strange triangle shaped buildings greeted Brandon as he was helplessly floated around by his captors. They guided him around a few blocks of the strange city until they came to a large arch of gray metal. Strange words were written on the arch that was undecipherable by Brandon. He was floated under the strange arch and into a park-like area with lots of weird plants.

There were many giant half domes of metal with the face appearing to be open on all of them. Each dome had a different species of alien creatures in them. Many of the creatures were very strange indeed. It appeared to Brandon to be some sort of intergalactic zoo.

The platform slowed as they approached one of the domes and the blue light came on Brandon again. Freeing him, the creatures pushed Brandon into one of the cages and pressed a code into the keypad on the wall. A thin green beam zipped around the entrance to the dome sealing it with an unseen force field. The blue light turned off shortly after that and freed Brandon from its effects.

He looked around in his new environment. The walls of the dome were made of the same gray metal as the ship was. He touched the force field almost anticipating being shocked. A green ripple of light circled his fingers and spread out in an ever expanding round pattern as if he had dropped a stone in a calm lake. It did not shock him as he expected, but it was indeed solid as steel.

Many of the beings had gathered outside of the cage of sorts and were staring at Brandon with awe. This made him feel like a caged animal in a zoo. Unfortunately, it appeared that he did not have much of a choice in the matter.

A search of the prison revealed a small room on the back wall with a door. It had a bed of sorts and a pool of babbling running water for bathing. He immediately noticed that there was a beautiful redhead lying under a cover on the bed. Fortunately, she was just as human a Brandon was. He guessed her age to be about 25 years old. She was naked as well. Brandon looked around the room for something to cover himself with before waking the young woman up.

He found another blanket on a nearby shelf and wrapped himself up in it. He quietly kneeled down next to her and gave her a gentile nudge. She slowly woke from her nap and jumped up in fear once she realized someone was in her cage with her.

She backed into the corner with her blanket covering her body as best as she could. Once she realized that Brandon was human, she began to smile.

“You’re human,” she said with a beautiful voice.

“Yes, I am glad to see another human myself. Where are we?”

“I don’t know. I have been here by myself for several months now. At least I have someone to keep me company now.”

“Months... Great,” Brandon sighed, “There is no way out of this place?”

She looked down and said in a quiet voice, “Not that I can find. They are much smarter than we humans are. There is not much we can do about it. I go out, walk around my cage, and show myself off to the beings all the time. I have kinda gotten used to the idea of being in a zoo.

All of my needs are taken care of. They give me food, water, and a place to stay. I didn’t have to worry about clothes because there were no other humans around before. My cage is heated to a comfortable temperature and I can do whatever I want here. I like the attention they give me and put on shows for them. It is really not that bad here.”

The woman checked out Brandon with a sexy look on her face. He knew what she wanted when he saw that look. Perhaps it would not be so bad living in a cage with this woman. After all, she was incredibly gorgeous.

The two sat and talked for hours and exchanged information about each other and what they used to be before their abduction when they were on their home planet. The woman turned out to have come from a town in a nearby state to Brandon’s back on Earth. The same thing happened to her, as did Brandon. She was taken from her bed and placed into the zoo.

Brandon searched the cage for a few weeks attempting to escape. Finally, he realized that even if he did escape he would not be able to go home. He was millions of light years away from earth. Eventually, he fell in love with the beautiful red head and had several children with her. The aliens treated the family well and cared for all their

physical needs. Brandon lived to a ripe old age and loved his wife and family forever.

## **Giant-in-the-Box**

“Oh no, not again... I have nothing left!” Mable exclaimed looking distressed as she arrived at her apartment with her groceries. The door was slightly ajar and the temporary board she had nailed to the frame had been kicked in again indicating that she had once again been burglarized.

“This is ridiculous... How many times can one old lady be robbed in a month!” Mable set the two bags of food she had purchased at the corner grocery on her counter. She called the metro police again and got a unit on the way so she could fill out the necessary paperwork.

Unfortunately, the thief had taken what little of value she had left. Her T. V. had long been gone from previous break-ins and now the small portable radio she had just bought to entertain herself on her limited social security income had been taken.

“The police are useless in this city...” she fussed, “They cannot protect us from this much crime. But what can I do? I don’t have enough money to move from here. It is hopeless.”

Mable sighed taking a deep breath and began to try and clean up the mess the thief made and take inventory of

what she had left. Eventually, the police came and left leaving her with a useless report to try and replace her belongings. She certainly could not afford to get insurance. Besides, who would insure an old lady who had been previously robbed so many times?

“There must be something I can do about this,” she pondered in deep thought after sitting down for a break. The thief had never attempted to break in while Mable was present, but she was terrified that one day he might get bold coming while she was home and possibly hurt her. Finally deciding to fight back, she sat for thirty minutes trying to formulate a plan.

“I got it!” her eyes opened wide as she grabbed her purse in order to go to the store and purchase supplies for constructing her plan. She bought a large lockable footlocker, colorful paint, several daily newspapers, a large metal spring, several bottles of glue, and various other items. She managed to get all the supplies back to her apartment just before dark. Fortunately, the thief did not break in again while she was gone.

Once she had gotten all the items laid out on her floor, she began working with a sense of vengeance. She cut the newspapers into long strips and dipped them into a watered down glue creating a kind of paper mache’ paste. She began to wrap the pieces around a large punching balloon she bought at the drugstore. Mable had blown it up to the largest possible diameter that still fit into the trunk. After several coats of newspaper, she let the balloon dry. She went about her business taking a little break from her project.

Later Mable popped the balloon that was inside the now hard sphere and painted the most horribly terrifying

face on the paper mache' giant's head. She made it incredibly realistic looking.

After the paint had dried she put the spring at the bottom of the trunk and a board on top to make a springy platform. Next, in went the scary giant's head with its mean stare. She had some difficulty closing it under the spring's tension, but after she sat on the top she managed to get it shut.

"Now for the test," Mable thought. She flipped the latch and released the top. The trunk flung open with great force propelling the giant scary head straight at her.

"This ought to make him think twice about breaking in here again." Mable giggled with anticipation like she was a little girl playing a trick on her brother.

She could hardly sleep that night and almost immediately left early the next morning almost hoping she would be robbed. After a long day, she slowly made her way home. Once again, the door was slightly ajar and splintered wood lay on the ground.

"Ha!, the stupid fool tried it again!" she exclaimed hurrying inside. She peered around the doorway into her bedroom where she had left the footlocker. Sure enough, there was her trap sprung with the big head lying on the floor. To Mable's surprise, lying next to the giant head was a local neighborhood punk clutching his chest dead. Mable gasped, "Oh my, I scared him to death!"

She called the police and sent for an ambulance. The police could not find anything that Mable legally did wrong so they left her alone. The coroner zipped up the foolish young punk in a large plastic body bag and pushed his cold body out of her apartment on a stretcher.

"I suppose it was sort of poetic justice," one of the cops said as they were leaving her apartment. Mable was

glad that she was able to stop the attacks even though she was a bit shaken up by the thief's death. Would you believe that to this day Mable's apartment has never been broken into again?



## **Invasion From Within**

One day in late October, a farmer was harvesting soybeans on a southern Mississippi farm when he stopped his tractor and watched a strange sight. About a hundred yards in front of him the earth itself was moving. It appeared to be churning like a toilet flushing. He stared in amazement as a large hole opened up that was at least forty feet across.

He waited to see what would happen next. After a few minutes, hundreds of small stature, pale beings began to pour out of the hole. They were slightly more petite than a small size man would be and they stood about four feet tall. Quickly, they fanned out across the field and surrounded the tractor and the farmer. The farmer was astonished at such a sight and stood up to greet the strange creatures.

Suddenly, one of the larger than their average framed creatures screamed a strange word in a bizarre language that sounded like nothing on earth and all of the others pulled out items from their packs that roughly resembled guns. They opened fire on the farmer with their weapons exploding him into small chunks. Unfortunately, all that was left of him was a red mush on the tractor seat.

The creatures quickly found the man's house and headed straight for it. Hundreds more of the strange beings just kept pouring out of the large hole they had created in an endless line. They easily destroyed the man's house and killed his wife who was inside. Nothing was left of his house except a pile of burning wood fragments.

Unfortunately, the man lived in a rather rural area and nobody responded to the apparent invasion from the inside of the earth. The creatures all stayed clustered in the man's fields until their numbers reached into the hundred thousands.

The massive army of beings then started marching down the road towards the small Mississippi town. The people in town were amazed to see such a sight coming towards them. Their approach quickly caused a panic in the minutes before they reached the edge of town. Some of the people were slowly walking towards them to greet the army, but mostly people were rushing to their homes as fast as they could manage.

When they reached their human greeters, as they did before, they opened fire on the small crowd. People were exploding in a red mist everywhere. A mad panic ensued as the people tried to flee from the terrible weapons. Efficiently, in less than a minute, all of the greeters had been exploded.

The pale beings began to attack the buildings of the small town and lay waste to everyone and anything they saw. The businesses offered little resistance and crumbled under the great creature army. When the alien forces approached some of the residences of the townsfolk, they were attacked. A hail of buckshot belched from one farmer's shotgun that was poling out of his window dropping several of the strange creatures. However, he was

quickly overwhelmed and his house was exploded just as everything else was.

By the end of the day, the entire town had been utterly destroyed. Fortunately, for the world, the news of their presence had spread beyond the town and the Marines were called in. The government attempted to control the giant force with ground troops the next morning. Many of the creatures were killed, but they just kept pouring out of the hole. It was like a never-ending reinforcement of the pale beings and their destructive guns. Unfortunately, the entire division of Marines was killed.

The president declared a national emergency and called air strikes into the whole area. Many more of the creatures died as a result, but they just kept coming out of the strange opening. Finally, the president authorized a single nuclear missile to be launched directly into their hole. The hope was that this would close the passage and end the never-ending onslaught.

The missile detonated after descending down it a bit and lit up the small town with a spectacular fireball. The resulting mushroom cloud that could be seen from afar. Reasoning indicated that a radioactive town in Mississippi for a couple of thousand years was better than the world being destroyed by these beings.

The explosion effectively sealed up the hole and stopped the flow of creatures. In addition, the blast vaporized many of them that were still close to the entrance. The half a million or so of creatures that were outside of the missile's range were killed off one by one by the remaining U. S. forces. Dismally, hundreds of thousands of U. S. troops were killed in the war.

Several weeks later a hole similar in nature to the original one opened in France. Hundreds of thousands of

the same kind of beings were able to make it to the surface to wreck havoc before the French government was able to authorize a nuke to close the hole. Fortunately, the closure was successful, just as in the case in the U. S.

The common enemy unified the entire Earth, as they have never been before. Governments, who were formally enemies, made agreements with each other until the whole world was together. In the following weeks, several more holes popped up globally but were quickly closed with nukes.

Humans studied some of the creatures that were captured and found their weaknesses in the aftermath of the world war. Finally, as a final attack, some twenty different holes opened up around the world at once and millions of the small warriors gushed out. The resulting global war lasted for years without end. Eventually, humankind was able to stop the creatures once and for all. They sent millions of human soldiers down into the Earth at various key entry points.

Many of the human soldiers that participated in the attack were armed with miniature tactical nukes. Not surprisingly, they discovered that the center of the Earth was hollow. There was a giant ball of molten iron floating in the center and billions of the creatures living on the inner surface. Densely packed buildings covered all of the available surface space. Apparently, these beings had run out of room in their inner world and were attempting to take over the surface in order to expand.

The human soldiers destroyed almost all of the creatures and their buildings. Earth government decided to allow about half a million of the creatures to live. They had decided that they did not want to destroy an entire race

even if they were evil in nature, but they could not allow them to destroy our own race.

The Earth soldiers pulled out of the center of the world they lived on and nuke sealed all of the entrances. Hopefully, the strange race would come to its senses and not attack humans on the next go around. Our technology was only slightly more advanced than theirs was. Next time, we might not be so lucky.

## **Moon Cleaner**

“I think I will take this house. I kinda like it,” Leo said to the realtor as he opened the master bedroom closet door and admired the large space.

“Good, I will contact the estate holder and let her know that you may be interested in buying it,” the realtor stated as she smiled while thinking of her fat commission.

“You said the estate owner. What happened to the original owner?”

“He died. He just got a bit too old I suppose. I think he was in his 80’s, although I am not exactly sure. Anyway, his daughter is the estate owner now. She did not have a use for the house since she already owned one, so she decided so sell it.”

“Sounds reasonable... now about that asking price...” Leo haggled with the realtor and set an offer for the daughter.

Several weeks later he signed the papers on the property and became the proud owner of the little house in the country. It was just what Leo was looking for. He had always lived alone and worked hard at his job. Loving his profession, Leo was a restaurant manager for a local downtown restaurant. The house he had just bought was

located just outside of the city and was only a short 30-minute drive to his work.

After a couple of weeks, Leo had finally gotten all of his things from his city apartment and unpacked them in his new place. It had a spare bedroom and was much larger than he had been used to. The perfect little house was wood framed and slightly raised off the ground, but not by more than six inches or so.

When Leo was vacuuming one day, he noticed something a little strange. It seemed that the carpet had been in the house for quite a while. The main walkways had matted down as old carpet often does and were somewhat flat in areas, as one might expect. The strange part about it was that there was a clear path straight to the spare bedroom closet. Leo wondered what the old man who had owned the house for all of those years could have kept in that closet that he would wear such a path into the carpet.

He turned off the vacuum cleaner and followed the strange pathway into the closet. Once he had opened the closet door and looked down he saw that it ended abruptly in the middle of the floor. Leo got down on his hands and knees and examined it closer. A straight line of matted carpet was butted up against a straight line of puffy carpet.

A closer inspection revealed a small hole in the carpet and the wooden floor below it off to the right side of the puffy carpet line. Leo was barely able to get his pinky through the tiny hole. He lifted up with great strength and a secret hinged door in the floor creaked open before his eyes.

Concrete steps descended down into the darkness under the house. Leo was astonished to find such a well-hidden 'basement' of sorts. Not being able to see very far

down, he went to search for a flashlight. He rummaged through a drawer in the kitchen and finally found one before returning to the steps.

Leo clicked on the light and shined it down the stairs. It was quite deep and Leo was still unable to see the bottom. Then he shined it on the wall and fortunately found a light switch. Many fluorescent bulbs came to life all the way down after he switched them on. After the first flight, the stairs curved around and kept going deeper.

“Wow! This is some kind of serious basement!” Leo exclaimed. He slowly stepped down the stairs while holding the metal pipe handrails. Not really knowing what to expect, he made his way down six flights of stairs before finally coming to a solid metal door. Unfortunately, it was quite securely locked. Cinder blocks lined the walls all the way down to the bottom and completely surrounded the metal door.

It seemed to be a rather normal style of lock though. Perhaps he could somehow pry it open. He walked all the way back up to the house and found a crowbar in the garage. All the way back down again he went, this time with a curiosity that would not let up over what was behind the door. Unfortunately, the door proved to be more than Leo was able to overcome. But, his curiosity was killing him; he had to find out what was on the other side of the strangely placed entrance.

Trying a different plan, Leo backed up and ran full force into the door in a futile attempt to break it down. A loud thud echoed through the stairwell followed by an equally loud scream. Leo slid down the still closed stubborn door with his shoulder aching quite badly. He sat at the bottom and tried to figure out how to penetrate the bizarre room. Perhaps a different approach would prove to



be more successful. He pulled himself up and slowly dragged booty up the long flights of stairs into his house.

After taking several aspirins to kill the pain, Leo grabbed his sledgehammer and quickly headed back down the stairs with a new sense of urgency. He spit on his hands and began to smash the door handle with the heavy steel-headed hammer. Slowly it began to deform and soon looked very little like it did before. After a good twenty minutes of hard whacking in the door handle area, it finally gave away and slowly creaked open revealing a dark room. Leo flipped the light switch and another set of fluorescent tubes lit the room.

The walls of the room were lined with shelves. They were well stocked with hundreds of dollars worth of cleaning supplies. Trash bags, ammonia, cleaning solvents, air freshener, toilet paper and even a mop bucket were some of the items sitting around.

There were no other doors coming into the room; this was the end of the line.

“What the heck would somebody build such an elaborate custodian’s closet this deep into the ground and hide it so well for?” Leo asked himself while scratching his head lightly.

Then he noticed a rather strange looking contraption on the far side of the room. It was a large metal rectangle-shaped object resembling a doorframe that had been pulled out of a wall. Connected to the frame was a square box made of the same type of metal. The box was mounted to the cement floor below with bolts and was about two feet by two feet in size.

Coming from the back of the box was a thick electrical cord somewhat similar to a dryer cord. It ran along the floor and terminated at an outlet cut into the cinder block

wall. It was certainly not a normal plug or outlet since it had the appearance of being much higher in voltage.

The box had a dial on the side and a small red LED display as well. Curiously, Leo examined the dial closely. It was currently in the off position. He clicked on the knob and the strange box began to whirl and click. The word 'Moon' lit up in the LED display. Leo backed up and waited a moment to see what would happen. The smell of electricity arching through the air filled the tiny room.

To Leo's surprise, an image began to sparkle into existence within the large metal frame. He backed up a little more and watched with great big saucer eyes. After thirty seconds or so, the image became clear. It appeared to be a room similar to the one he was in. It was in three dimensions and looked incredibly real.

He walked around and looked through the backside of the frame. It too appeared to lead into the other room. Puzzled, Leo wondered what would happen if he stepped through the frame. Then he remembered the thick electrical cord and the smell of electricity and decided he had better test it before frying himself.

Leo grabbed a can of air freshener off one of the shelves. He tossed it through the frame and it landed in the other room. His mouth dropped open as he watched the can roll to a stop on the tiled floor on the other side. Quickly he looked on the other side of the frame but saw no can in his room.

"Where the heck does this thing go?" he asked himself. The LED display continued to flash 'Moon' brightly as if to answer his question.

"There is no way that this thing goes to the moon. It has got to be some kind of optical illusion or something," Leo thought to himself in great disbelief. He stuck his arm

through and nothing happened. Leo looked from the side of the frame as he stuck his arm through again. It appeared as though the frame had cut off his hand and forearm. In reality, it had passed into the other room.

“Well, I suppose I better go check it out at least.” A surge of adrenaline coursed through his veins as he geared himself up to go. Then Leo stepped through the strange frame and into the other room. He turned around quickly and saw a similar frame and box setup plugged into the wall in the new room. On the LED screen was the word ‘Home’. The frame held an image of the room with the cleaning supplies he had just come from.

This new room was bare with nothing on the walls. It was a bit smaller in overall size, but had been built with the same type of cinder blocks. There was a similar metal door to the one he had broken into on the far wall. Fortunately, the lock was on the inside and Leo was able to open it with no problem. He made sure to leave it unlocked as he peered out into the hall and noticed a sign on the outside of the door that said ‘Custodian’.

The door was one of many down a long hallway lit with the same fluorescent tubes. As Leo was walking out into the hall, a man came out of a door across the hall from him. His door was marked ‘Lab 32-B’. He was dressed in a long white lab coat and had on thick glasses. He was somewhat startled to see Leo there, but then smiled a big warm smile.

“You must be our new custodian. Hi, I am Charlie Lambert. I was wondering when they were going to send us a new custodian. Frankly, I was beginning to get tired of taking out my own trash around here. What is your name?”

Leo did not know what to say to the man and was somewhat perplexed. “Uh, my name is Leo.”

“Great, Leo. Look if you need anything at all just give me a holler, you hear?” With that, the man disappeared down the hall and around the corner.

“What a strange man,” thought Leo, “Well, if I am going to pass as a custodian, I better get some supplies.” He went back through the portal, grabbed some trash bags, a mop bucket, and some other items, and loaded them on the custodian’s cart. On the shelf of the cart, Leo found a large set of keys attached by a small chain to the push bar.

“These ought to get me around,” Leo thought as he pushed the loaded cart through the portal. Before he went into any of the labs, he walked the whole complex just to check it out.

He eventually came to a sort of observation room. Amazingly, the walls were made of thick glass that had to be at least half a foot thick. There were several large telescopes set up around the dome shaped room all of them pointing out into the endless array of stars. The sight was mind blowing.

Outside was a beautiful view of space. The ground was a dusty gray material unlike anything Leo had ever seen in his life. A large blue and green marble floated in the starry sky. It was Earth! He really was on the moon. Leo was flabbergasted as he realized where the portal had brought him.

After admiring the view for more than twenty minutes, somebody else finally walked into the room. It was another scientist; this time it was a woman. Leo quickly pretended to be collecting the trash as she walked by. She did not speak, but assumed he was supposed to be there. She walked out the other doorway and continued about her business not questioning his presence.

“This is pretty neat. They think I am the cleaning guy,” he thought. Leo explored the base and gave it a good cleaning playing the part well. His keys allowed him into all of the different rooms. Most of them were labs with strange experiments going on. Some were mechanical rooms with the inner workings of the base.

One room in particular was marked “Artificial Gravity Generator”. It had a massive machine running extremely noisily. Leo had not even thought about that before, but the gravity would be a lot less on the moon than on Earth. He could not tell a difference with the large machine running. Of course, he was not about to try to turn the thing off even though he was curious as to how it worked.

After he finished cleaning all of the rooms, he went back to the ‘Custodian’ room and went through the metal frame instantly going back to his house. He pushed his cleaning cart into the corner and sat down to rest. He had not realized before how much hard work cleaning could be.

Leo figured that the transport machine was probably eating a great deal of electricity so he turned the knob in attempts to turn the unit off. The other room disappeared from the frame and a new image began to slowly sparkle into existence.

This time the LED screen read ‘Mars’. Another surge of excitement came over Leo as he realized he could go to multiple bases with the strange contraption. He turned the dial again and the word ‘Venus’ appeared on the display. Another turn and ‘Iyo’ appeared.

Leo spent the rest of the night exploring the other bases around the solar system with his cleaning cart. They too were mostly government labs. He called in sick the next day to his assistant manager position at the restaurant after the night had somehow slipped by.

Leo figured he had better keep cleaning the bases regularly so that nobody would question him. He was essentially working two full time jobs for a while, one without pay. Unfortunately, it was beginning to get tiring and to wear him down. One night, he found the lab guy Charlie that he had met on his first night.

“When do we get paid around here?” Leo asked while chatting in casual conversation.

“You didn’t get your check yet? Everyone else did. Here, call payroll and they will get it straight for you.” He gave Leo a little paper with a telephone number scribbled on it.

The next day he called the number and explained what had happened to the nice lady in the payroll department. He told her about finding the transporter in his new home and how he had started cleaning the bases.

She immediately set up a meeting with him at her office for later that day. At first, Leo was scared and was not sure if he should go, but later figured that since he already knows about the bases and has been cleaning them for a while, that they would not get rid of him or anything.

Several men in black suits were waiting for him at the meeting. They had documents galore for him to sign. Several of them were security documents, some were top secret clearances, and others were simply for payroll taxes.

They explained to Leo that he got the job because he was already doing it and the lab workers liked him. He sighed with a great relief as he signed all of their papers. Leo could never tell anyone about the existence of the bases. All in all, the meeting was not as bad as he thought it would be.

The lady from payroll congratulated Leo for getting the job and handed him his check on the way out. Leo was

glad they did not throw him into jail or worse. He walked out of the government building and opened his check finally being rewarded for all of his hard work and cleaning.

“Woah! That is impressive. I guess even the *custodian* of secret government black projects gets paid well.” Leo’s check was about seven times what he made as a restaurant manager. He decided to quit his earthly job and stick to the lucrative custodian business. Leo never told anybody what he did for a living after that. He quickly grew to love his new job becoming friends with all of the lab workers and he never complained about the pay for as long as he lived.

## **Schmackentrod's Party**

Julie was by far the most popular girl in Jefferson High School. She was a senior this year and always was the leader of the 'in' crowd. She usually had a small pack of her cool friends following her around in school.

Unfortunately, since she spent most of her time being popular, she had no time left to go to church. This allowed a rather massive demon named Schmackentrod to attach himself to her soul. He followed Julie everywhere she went in the world and whispered demonic influences into her mind in attempts to sway her to Satan.

Just as Julie was the leader of her little human group, Schmackentrod was the leader of his pack of smaller demons. Schmackentrod was assigned by Satan himself to influence Julie in her ways and eventually send her soul to the flaming pits of hell. He was also told to try to influence all of those around her to sin as much as possible. He used his minions to help him out in this area, as most of his time was spent concentrating on Julie's soul.

Many of the smaller demons that followed their leader were assigned to learn effective influencing strategies until they grew to sufficient size to attach on to their own humans. Once they grew strong enough under their leader



to withstand attacks from the other side, they attached themselves to Julie's friend's souls to attempt to influence them.

Schmackentrod had cunningly convinced Julie to throw a party this weekend since her parents would be out of town. Julie's friends, delighted with her announcement of the party, each weighed the consequences in their minds of going to the party and having fun with the trouble they would be in if they were caught.

As each of them wondered whether they should attend or stay home, the demons jumped into action and followed her friends. The smaller demons spoke into the minds of Julie's friends convincing many of them to lie to their parents about the party. Schmackentrod grinned evilly as his plan slowly came to fruition.

The high school children planned to obtain plenty of alcohol for the party at the demon's suggestions. Unfortunately, most of Julie's friends had hung around her for so long that they too had little influence of good in their lives and there was little the other side could do to help them. It was just not cool to be good and be in Julie's clique. Without the soul's willingness to want to be good, Satan's strength is a great barrier.

There were others, though, that were not nearly as popular as Julie was. Angels, majestic in their glory, followed these kids around all the time protecting them from evil. They attended church regularly and prayed often, increasing the power of God in their lives.

Jim, the president of the bible club, was sort of their leader. He had a strong accompaniment of angels following him all the time. Occasionally, one of the demons would foolishly attempt to attach itself to him, but would always be quickly slain by one of the angels. Jim

heard through the grapevine about the party that Julie was going to throw and decided to hold an emergency meeting of his club.

“We all must pray... Julie is planning one of her crazy parties again. There is always a lot of drinking at her events and probably a little fornication as well. God can make a difference. Let’s pray for these poor deceived souls,” Jim begged his club for their cooperation at lunchtime.

They all joined hands and bowed their heads in prayer. As they began, the heavens opened up and many more angels appeared around them as backup to strengthen their souls. God had heard their prayers and had set his own plan into motion to counteract Satan’s.

The mightiest angel of all came down with a plan formulated to defeat Schmackentrod once and for all. It was the Archangel Gabriel himself. He had an ethereal scroll with an assignment from God written on it.

Unbeknownst to the humans, in the midst of the Bible club meeting, the angels had their own meeting. Gabriel explained to all of his angel warriors that God wanted them to convince a purchasing agent in a far off city to buy a large order from a salesman on the day of the party.

None of the angels could figure out why God would want that to happen, but they knew his plan would work. They all knew better than to question the orders of the wise one as they divided and left for the far off city.

Finally, the day of the party came and the angels surrounded the executive behind the desk as the salesman threw his pitch. They whispered in his ear to attempt to make him buy. In addition, the angels told the salesman from ZM Manufacturing exactly what to say. It was one of the best pitches the salesman had ever done. The

purchasing agent signed the contract and closed the deal with the ZM representative.

Meanwhile, Julie's parents had finished packing to go out of town for a few days. Julie's father was also a salesman. In fact, he was a competitor with ZM Manufacturing. His boss had set up a sales meeting with the same purchasing agent in the same far off city. A hotel room had been set up since it was just over an eight-hour drive. Julie's father had decided to bring his wife along and make it into a small vacation after the meeting.

They kissed their daughter goodbye, fooled by her supposed innocence, and left in their car for the hotel. Finally, Julie was free and could have a great party without her parents there to bother her. Schmackentrode and his minions cheered at their apparent success.

Julie's parents were four hours into their trip before her father's cell phone rang. It was his boss. The trip was cancelled because the purchasing agent went with a competitor. Julie's parents talked about continuing on with their planned mini-vacation, but decided to go back since they would have to pay for the trip themselves.

Little did Julie know, her parents were going to pop up unexpectedly in the middle of her little party. There were quite a few kids there when they showed up. Beer cans all over their yard greeted the parents as their anger began to boil over.

Even Schmackentrode was caught off guard by the sudden appearance of the parents. Julie's parents wasted no time and called the sheriff's department to remove all of the drunken high school children wandering around their house.

Julie's dad walked in on his daughter in his own bedroom. She was very drunk and was sleeping with one

of her ever-changing boyfriends. Understandably, he was extremely upset with his daughter. After the deputies had arrested many of the kids for underage drinking, Julie's father had a stern talk with her about her actions. Schmackentrod went to work trying to defend Julie's party, but it did not work too well.

Part of Julie's punishment was a requirement to go to church with her parents regularly. While formulating the idea, her father was influenced by Gabriel and his angels. Perhaps going to church would straighten Julie out.

In fact, after a few months of constant attacks on the demons while she was in church, Schmackentrod was greatly weakened. One Sunday, God saved Julie from eternal damnation and Schmackentrod was cast back to hell as an utter failure.

Julie lost all of her friends but gained a savior. With her mind now free from all of the demonic influence she was able to clearly see how silly she acted in the past. She joined the bible club and helped pray for her fellow students just as they had prayed for her. God's plan was a success and Schmackentrod was never able to penetrate Julie's soul again.

## **Stinky Pinky**

Sam picked up the trashcan from the front of the house and quickly dumped it into the back of the truck with skill. He had been a garbage man for three years and gotten quite efficient at taking out the trash for the people in his town. He had learned to enjoy riding on the back of the truck even though it was sometimes hard work.

Sam was often amazed at the things people threw away. Often he would set something of interest aside in the passenger seat of the big truck and bring it home. Today was no different, for he had found an almost brand new teddy bear. It was in remarkable condition and showed little signs of wear.

Sam pulled the bear off the top of a trashcan near the lab on his route. When he grabbed it, he got some kind of strange goo on his pinky. It was not on the bear, but was just underneath it. Sam wiped the goo off and put the bear in the cab without further thought. He planned on surprising his daughter that night after work with the furry stuffed animal.

Fortunately, his daughter loved it and Sam was glad he had found the little bear. However, the next day at work his pinky began to itch. Sam had completely forgotten

about the weird goo he had touched. At first it was not too bad, itching with the intensity of an ant bite, but later in the day he could almost not perform his job.

He was constantly scratching it without end. Sam quickly scratched off the top layer of skin and was scratching his pinky raw. He was in great anguish because he knew he needed to stop scratching to prevent further damage, but it itched so badly!

Finally, the day's route was over and Sam headed to the drugstore as fast as he could. He immediately bought a tube of anti-itch cream and rubbed it all over his pinky. Relief at last! The itching had finally subsided for the moment. Sam went home and forgot about the troubling itch for the time being.

The next day Sam's pinky did not itch at all. In fact, he could not even feel it any more. Most of his pinky was very red and swollen, but the area where the goo had touched had turned into a strange clear gel. Parts of his pinky had been eaten away and he could see his bones in spots.

Sam called in sick and went to the doctor early that morning. The doctor, while well educated in his craft, could not determine an exact diagnosis on what happened to Sam's pinky. Since he had never seen such an infection, he decided to do some tests to try and determine what it was. The doctor scraped some of the clear gel off of Sam's finger into a culture dish.

After placing a white line of pasty antibiotics on it, the doctor wrapped it in heavy gauze and sent Sam home. The results of the test would take a couple of days to come back from the lab.

Once he arrived at his house, Sam called his work and informed them of his situation. They arranged for someone

to take his place on the back of the truck until he was better. Unfortunately, Sam had trouble sleeping that night. He was worried that he might lose his finger because of his crazy infection.

The next morning Sam was horrified to find his whole hand was red and swollen and all of his fingers had turned into the clear gel substance. When he lifted his hand off of the bed most of the bones of his fingers stayed on the pillow in a pool of clear goo. Sam flipped out and immediately called his doctor in a panic.

Baffled to hear of such a development, his doctor asked that he come in immediately for a reexamination. Sam scooped up the bones of his fingers and most of the gel with a dustpan and got his wife to drive him to the doctor.

No results were available yet from the lab but the doctor was very worried. Sam was given several powerful antibiotic shots directly into his reddened and fingerless hand. Assured that these were much stronger antibiotics and that they would easily stop the infection, Sam was sent home wrapped in a bandage again. Sam trusted his doctor, but in the back of his mind he was terrified that the infection would spread even further.

Unfortunately, the antibiotics were useless against the unknown disease and the next morning all his wrist bones and his forearm bones were in a pool of gel on his bed. In addition, his upper arm was red and swollen.

Immediately, Sam went berserk and sped to the emergency room. Insisting that they amputate his arm before it was too late, Sam signed the waiver of rights without delay. The E. R. doctor suited up in a space suit looking garb and broke out the bone saw. It buzzed to life after being plugged into the wall by one of the nurses

watching. Ten minutes later Sam's arm hit the E. R. floor with a thud.

Fortunately, for Sam, that stopped the infection from continuing its course. Unfortunately, for Sam's first doctor, the news was not as good. Sam hired a rather expensive lawyer and sued him for not cutting the infection off sooner. Sam won the malpractice suit and received 1.1 million dollars for his amputated arm. With his newfound fortune, he never had to play with trash again.



## **The Antiworld**

“Do I hear \$300.00?” the auctioneer begged the small crowd gathered around him, “Yes, the man in black, do I have a bid of \$325.00?” Janice was determined to get the beautiful antique mirror and she quickly raised her hand countering the man’s bid.

“The lady in the front, \$325.00. Do I have \$350.00?” asked the auctioneer.

The man in black was almost at his limit, but he went ahead and raised his hand just to see how bad Janice wanted the mirror. She was getting upset that he kept driving up the price, but she was stubborn and would not give in.

“The man in black again, \$350.00. Do I have any other bidders willing to go to \$375.00?” Again Janice countered his bid by raising her hand; after all, she had a thousand dollars to spend and could keep going if she really had to. “Excellent, do I have \$400.00?” the auctioneer asked the small crowd while looking specifically at the man in black to see if he made any gestures. Unfortunately for him, the price had gone too high and he had run out of available funds. He did not make any moves this time.

“Going once... Going twice.... Sold! To the lady in front for \$375.00.” The auctioneer then continued the auction with the next antique piece.

Janice immediately went to claim her prize and put it in her Blazer to bring it home. She paid the owner with a handful of cash from her purse. With a closer inspection, she saw that she had purchased a beautiful specimen. It was a heavy, six-foot tall, hickory framed mirror. The glass was in rather remarkable shape. Usually, with a specimen this old, one finds the silver beginning to flake from the back surface. She was very pleased with her purchase as she loaded it carefully into the back of her blazer.

Once she got home, Janice began to look for a suitable location to hang her latest antique treasure. After a short search, she found the perfect spot, right in front of her vanity. At least that way she could even get some use from her mirror as well as it being a beautiful decoration. She stood back and admired it for a while. Then, for the time being, she went about her business.

That night, as Janice was getting ready for bed, she sat at her vanity and began to brush her hair as usual. Her brush passed through her long brown hair several dozen times. Then something very strange happened. It caught her eye for just an instant, but it appeared that the image of herself in the mirror brushed her hair for an extra stroke. Janice stared at the mirror in disbelief. It appeared normal. Her image did everything as she did only backwards.

Janice finally dismissed it as having been her imagination since she was exhausted from a long day at work. Going ahead to bed, she pulled the covers down and snuggled in. The next morning she awoke refreshed. She brushed her teeth and took a shower as normal before

sitting down at her vanity once again to put on her makeup for the day.

Again, the image of herself presented itself and did as she did for the longest time. Then it happened again, a little quirk caught Janice's eye. This time she clearly saw her image blink her eyes.

"What the heck?" she exclaimed, "How could I see myself blink if I had my eyes shut?" Janice pried the mirror off the wall and looked behind it. All that was there was a wall. She tapped on the cold hard glass with her image tapping in the exact location she did. Something very strange was happening with this mirror and it was beginning to scare her.

Janice called in sick to work so she could spend the day with the large quirky mirror. After a couple of hours of sitting in front of the mirror and trying to make it happen again, she gave up and took a break. After a snack, she tried a different approach.

She began to carefully examine the beautifully dark stained hickory frame. As she pressed firmly all along the outside, she hit a hidden button that gave off a little click. As soon as she did, the surface of the mirror rippled as if it had turned into a puddle of water.

Janice jumped back in astonishment. Her image did also. She did not know what to do next and just stared for a moment. Then she slowly began to reach for the glass. As her fingertips touched it, they passed straight through. Her image's fingertips passed through from the other side as well. As they went through the other side they became a ghostly, see through consistency. Janice quickly recoiled at the strange sight, yanking her hand back rapidly.

"What now?" she thought while staring at the lady on the other side. She slowly realized why her image would

occasionally do something other than what she did. It was because the woman was not her! Whoever it was she did almost everything Janice did and looked just as confused as she was.

After a few minutes, Janice decided to try again. She slowly pushed her whole right arm through the face of the bizarre mirror. Her counterpart on the other side followed suit sticking her arm through as well. Then, while her arm was partially through, she looked behind the mirror to see where it went. It was the strangest thing she had ever seen in her life.

Her arm appeared to stop in the mirror as if it had been cut off when she looked at it from the side. She pulled her arm back to her world and pondered the possibilities.

If she were to go all the way through, her opposite would also go through. She began to get a headache trying to think about all the problems that might cause. Having an intense desire to explore the other side even though it might be dangerous, Janice decided that the adventure was worth the risk.

She backed up and nervously danced for a moment while planning her jump. Then she hopped through the mirror and into the other world. She landed in an opposite room that looked just as hers did only everything was backwards. Her opposite image landed on the other side in her room.

“Wow, it worked!” they both exclaimed at the exact same time. Janice looked around the strange antiworld. It was the same as her world, yet it was different and odd. As she explored her antihouse, she noticed something else that was quite remarkable. The writing on her calendar hanging on her wall was backwards! She flipped through all the months – all were printed in a strange looking reverse type.

She then grabbed a book off her bookshelf. Just as she predicted, it too was printed entirely in reverse. It was extremely difficult to read. She brought the book to the mirror and held it up. Her opposite did the same thing of course. She could readily read her world's book on the other side.

Passing the weird opposite book to the other side, Janice dropped it to the floor in her real room. Her image opposite did exactly the same thing. She picked up the book from her world and it was printed correctly.

"Well, objects can pass through from the other side I see," they both chattered in perfect sync. Janice and the mirror woman decided to find a few items to trade.

They both searched each other's house. All of the symmetrical objects were essentially the same in both worlds. She did not bother getting them, but she did get some other interesting things. She found her wallet and got out a few bills of backward printed money. She also got a box of pancake mix from her pantry. It just looked funny with the instructions printed in reverse. In addition, she got her portable telephone with its odd looking reverse numbers and threw it through to the other side.

"Time to go home," she said just before stepping back into her home world. She showed the opposite items she had collected to her friends but did not tell them where she had gotten them. They were all amazed at the weird items. Janice decided to keep the secret of the mirror and the antiworld quiet.

Over the next few weeks she explored the other world and found it essentially the same but in reverse. She even went to her backwards work a couple of days with her counterpart in her world going to work for her. She found it quite strange and had a difficult time typing on the

bizarre backward computer, but she managed to get through the day without too many problems surfacing.

Then one day she thought of an absolutely brilliant idea. She would open a left-handed store in her world and stock it with items obtained from the antiworld. She would be able to save the extreme expense of producing left-handed goods and could pass some of the savings on to her customers.

Janice went through with her plan and set up shop out of her home at first. She had catalogs printed up and set up a website so she could sell to the many millions of people on the Internet. She offered very competitive prices that were far below the competition.

She ordered stock of notebooks, golf clubs, fishing poles, and anything she could think of that would fit through the mirror and would sell well in a left-handed form. Her counterpart did just the same and dropped the left-handed items into Janice's world in trade for the normal items.

After a few years, her business had grown to quite a massive size. She had over fifty workers in various positions working for her. She was making millions per year and had long quit her regular job. None of her employees ever figured out why all of the stock ordered for the company warehouse first went to Janice's home address. Of course, Janice would never tell either.

## **The Collar from Hell**

The sweat dripped off of Harry's soaked forehead as he pushed his aging body to its limits by forcing it to jog in his neighborhood. The 45 years he had been alive had taken its toll on him. A small gut hung over Harry's waistline that prevented him from seeing his feet clearly. It seemed to have formed in a short period of time over just the last five years.

Harry was determined to rid himself of the spare tire, but was beginning to think it was perhaps not worth such painful effort. He had only begun jogging in the last month or so but he was already beginning to dread the 5am alarm clock telling him to hit the streets running.

This morning was no different than the previous days, since several neighborhood dogs had chased him for part of his trek around the neighborhood. Generally, Harry was not afraid of dogs because he owned a massive rottweiler himself. Sometimes he would taunt the dogs by barking back at them as if to say, "Leave me alone, I am bigger than you!"

Most of the dogs were of the smaller variety and just yipped and yelled a bit, struggling with their legs speeding along trying to keep up with him as he ran. Occasionally,

there would be a larger more ferocious canine attempt to frighten Harry.

After outrunning a small wiener dog earlier, Harry's eye was caught by a gleam from the dim early morning sunlight that had been reflected off of an object in the grass just off of the side of the street. He slowed and noticed the gleam was from a jeweled leather collar for a larger dog.

It had several spikes along the center with glittering diamond like gems surrounding each spike. It was made of two pieces of hefty leather sewn together with thick thread. It appeared to be almost new with very few scratches and wear. Harry wondered who the poor owner was who bought their big puppy such an expensive collar only to have their dog remove it at once.

"This would look good on Sugar," Harry thought to himself while slipping the collar in his pocket for his own dog. He completed his morning run and arrived home exhausted. After taking a shower and getting ready for work, Harry fed his dog for the day.

While Sugar was eating he unbuckled the cheap nylon collar that was around her neck and replaced it with the much meaner looking spike collar he had found. Almost immediately after he had buckled it in place, Sugar stopped devouring her food and cocked her head slightly looking strangely at her owner. She began to back up while shaking her head in attempts to remove the new collar.

"You will get used to it, Sugar." Harry said while closing the sliding glass door to his back yard where he kept his big dog. Harry went to the office while not giving another thought about his dog for the rest of his workday.

Sugar's problems, however, were just beginning. Little did she know it would be her last day on this Earth.



Shortly after her master left, Sugar began to act very bizarrely.

She began jumping straight up in the air to heights she was never able to before. In fact, one leap caused her paws to clear six feet in the air! After her legs became tired she began running in circles of about 10 feet in diameter, leaping occasionally as high as her tired muscles could propel her.

Next, she began running backwards, turning at 90 degree angles to form an almost perfect square. This action was so bizarre that Harry's neighbor noticed and began peering in disbelief between her window blinds. She was so amazed by the backward running, square forming dog that she came outside on her back porch to get a closer look.

After about 5 minutes of the neighbor gaping wide mouthed at Sugar's behavior, the dog just collapsed. Since she was concerned about the dog's health, she walked up and leaned over the chain link fence that separated the two yards. Sugar did not move. The neighbor began to whistle at the collapsed pooch in attempts to make it rise.

Suddenly, Sugar snapped to attention with a flash. She turned around in a 360-degree circle and then pointed her head directly at the woman. Startled by the massive dog's quickness, she backed up a step or two. Sugar took off growling and barking at the top of her lungs. She easily cleared the small fence in a single leap and sunk her sharp teeth into the neck of the neighbor.

It was only a short time until the lady stopped struggling having had her windpipe crushed in the powerful jaws of the deadly dog. It all happened so quickly and unexpectedly that she had little time to react.

Sugar had never in her life attacked anyone in her life until now. She seemed to have a distant stare as she dropped the lifeless neck out of her mouth. The woman's body collapsed to the ground and did not move.

Again Sugar began to leap wildly in the air for no apparent reason. However, this time nobody was watching. Once again the same pattern emerged after the jumping spell and Sugar began running in circles, and then backwards in perfect squares. She collapsed again, lying still as if she were dead for hours.

Eventually, Harry returned home from his work. He knew something was wrong from the start since Sugar was not pawing at the back door trying to get in to lick her master as usual.

Stepping up to the glass door, Harry was horrified to see the neighbor lying dead in her backyard with Sugar lying seemingly unconscious next to her body. Harry slammed the door open and immediately whistled to his dog.

Sugar jumped up like a bolt of lightening turning in a complete circle and pointing straight at her master. Grass flew in the air as Sugar's powerful legs tore into the turf propelling her with great speed towards her owner. She leaped over the fence and quickly closed the distance between them.

Harry was taken by surprise to see his dog act in such a bizarre manner. Before he could step out of her way, Sugar was flying in mid-air at full force with her jaws open straight for his throat. Quickly, Harry threw up his right forearm and shoved it into his mad dog's jaw.

Sugar clamped down with all her strength sinking her teeth in deeply and locking like a vice grip to her victim. Harry screamed in pain, as his shirt quickly became a

crimson rag doll. He could not believe she was acting like this. She had never done anything like this before.

Harry could not support the 100+ pound pooch with only one arm. He dropped her down to the ground below hoping he could break free from her jaws.

“What the hell are you doing, Sugar!” he screamed backing partially through the open sliding door. Sugar did not react to her master’s voice except to clamp down even harder. Harry backed up and placed his crazy dog’s head in line with the doorframe. He quickly slid the door shut smashing Sugar’s head in between the wall and the door.

She let out a sharp yelp and let go of his arm. Harry quickly shut the door and backed away from the glass in fear clutching his bloody arm.

“What the hell has gotten into that crazy dog?” he shouted as he examined his badly crushed right forearm. Sugar began leaping great distances in the air once again just outside the door. Harry stared in amazement not knowing his dog could practically fly. As Harry thought, “This dog has snapped!” Sugar began to run in circles.

Harry quickly grabbed his cordless phone and dialed 911 while watching the bizarre behavior. He explained to the police that his dog went crazy and bit him and the neighbor badly. Shortly thereafter, the police and an ambulance arrived at Harry’s house.

The police officers were amazed to see a large full-grown rotwieller running backwards in perfect square patterns. They looked at Harry’s bleeding arm and decided not to take any chances and went to get their shotguns out of the squad car.

Harry knew Sugar would not see tomorrow when the two officers raked their shotgun’s slides chambering a round. He loved Sugar greatly, but knew he could not own

a dog that behaved in such a manor. The paramedics stayed clear as the two policemen split up and went around each side of Harry's house to encircle the bezerk dog. Just after they got into position Sugar dropped unconscious before their eyes.

The police radio clicked to life, "Maybe it died..." one of the cops grunted to the other. The other cop instinctively let out a sharp whistle to see if the dog would respond. Of course, Sugar bolted to attention as she did before. She spun in a circle and immediately flew full force snarling as she floored it and showing her teeth as she headed straight for the whistling cop.

The officer's shotgun quickly pointed at the rapidly advancing overgrown puppy. Booming like thunder, it spit out a powerful load of buckshot with full force. The bulk of the pellets tore deeply into the crazy dog's chest, some completely penetrating her.

The shot slowed Sugar but did not completely stop her. Boom! The gun spoke again belching more of the deadly round lead balls. Boom! The other officer fired striking Sugar in the rear legs knocking her off balance and down into the dirt.

Finally, the effects of the shots began to accumulate as Sugar struggled to get up, but fell back down on her side. After a brief moment of anguish Sugar succumbed to her wounds. The officers approached her with extreme caution, not knowing exactly what to expect. One of the pellets had torn a hole in her new collar to reveal hidden electronics sewn in between the layers of leather. Somehow the collar was able to control the dogs actions.

When Harry learned of the electronic device he was very upset and angry with himself for even picking the stupid thing up. The officers took the collar as evidence

and Harry never really knew how it worked. Eventually, he got another dog to replace his beloved Sugar, but vowed never to put strange collars on any more of his pets.

## **The Community**

Joe Saxton, while looking for his birth certificate in his mother's attic, had found a rather strange map. The paper had started to yellow showing its age. Joe figured it was probably made in the early 50's based on its appearance.

There was not very much to go by on the map; only a few scribbled notes near some of the landmarks. He sat down and examined the map closer wondering what was at the 'x' in the center. Joe smiled wildly as thoughts of a gold filled chest raced through his mind.

Then, of course, reality set in. Joe reasoned that since the map wasn't really hundreds of years old, it was probably not a map to an old pirate chest. However, curiosity over the mysterious 'x' had hooked Joe. He decided that he would just have to find the 'x' and uncover whatever it held.

Unfortunately, none of the markings on the map looked even remotely familiar. He showed the map to his old wrinkled mother. She was unable to see the map clearly because her eyes were failing quite fast. Her old jumbled memory could not recall any map being in her attic. Joe's father had died last year so it was not possible

to ask him of the map. Joe called his sister – no luck, she did not remember any map either.

Fortunately, it was Saturday, and Joe had a bit of time to kill. Perhaps the local library would have some information on the markings. Joe jumped in his jeep and jetted to the library eager to find out where the map led.

He had no idea where to start so he showed the map to the old lady behind the counter and explained where he found it. She studied the markings for a minute and then said she knew what one of them meant. Joe's face lit up with excitement as the librarian explained that the mark she recognized was an old mill that was about ten miles North of town. It was just enough information to go off.

After a quick trip to the hardware store to pick up a compass and a shovel, Joe was on his way to find the mill. He had written down directions from the librarian and figured he would find the rest of the landmarks as he went. Within fifteen minutes, Joe had found the old abandoned mill.

It was nestled in the woods with a small creek running next to it. Joe pulled over and found a shady spot to park his jeep. His excitement began to peak when he looked around and found another landmark.

This time it was a rather large rock that had a particular shape. It was drawn on the map exactly the way it appeared embedded in the ground. With the two landmarks, Joe was able to get his bearings and orientated his direction.

The distance between the two landmarks gave Joe an idea that he was fairly close to the 'x' on the map. He grabbed his shovel and compass from the jeep and headed Northwest from the mill looking for the next clue.

Within twenty minutes, he had found another of the landmarks that was right next to the 'x' on the map. He began looking all around for anything that might indicate the exact spot indicated on the map.

"It has to be right around here somewhere..." Joe muttered, searching the general area. Pushing aside some thick brushes, Joe found a rather large boulder blocking an entrance to a cave. It was embedded into the ground slightly and had brush and grass growing all around it showing its age.

"This has got to be the 'x'," thought Joe. He grabbed his shovel and attempted to pry the rock away from the entrance. Straining to the max, Joe popped the hickory handle on the new shovel. He fell back on the ground with the top half of the shovel in his hands.

"Dang! That puppy is sure heavy!"

Trying with all his might, Joe could not move the heavy granite chunk. He sat down next to it exhausted and breathing heavily. After resting for a moment, Joe got an idea. He quickly made his way back to his jeep and pulled out his emergency towrope.

"This should do it." He drove back to the cave entrance with his jeep easily climbing over the rough terrain along the way. Once he was back to the cave entrance he strapped the towline around the big rock and attached the other end to his tow hitch.

"Here goes nothing!" he exclaimed while putting the jeep into first and hitting the gas. The line laying on the dirt jumped to attention as the jeep and the rock locked into a tug of war match. Slowly the boulder began to budge from its earthly embedding. Once it tipped over far enough, it just fell to the side revealing a small entrance.



“Well, what do you know? It worked!” Joe exclaimed excitedly while jumping out of his jeep. He quickly unhooked the towline and grabbed his flashlight. The hole was not too much bigger wide than a couple of people.

He shined the light into the darkness but could not see much of anything. Crawling through the entrance, his hands got dirty and covered with cold mud. He kept crawling deeper down into the side of the mountain. After about fifty feet, he began to wonder if there would be anything at all in there.

Eventually, the tube shaped cave opened into a much larger cavern. Joe looked back up the entrance where he had come in at and could not see any daylight at all. His little flashlight flickered trying to fight the darkness.

He began searching the cavern looking for the treasure that the map had alluded to. Unfortunately, he found nothing but some weird-looking bugs and a few rocks. Then he found another tunnel connected to the cavern, this one bigger and not as slanted down as the entrance tunnel.

“Maybe the treasure is deeper,” he thought as he started into the new tunnel. He no longer had to crawl but only slightly stooped as he walked deeper into the darkness. After a while, Joe stopped to rest for a moment. It was at that time that he thought he could hear voices in the distance.

Joe was perplexed, “I must be going crazy. Nobody could possibly be down here.”

He pushed on in the direction of the voices. They grew louder the deeper he went. It seemed to be multiple people speaking English and holding several conversations. It was difficult to hear exactly what they were saying with all of the echoing in the caves. Joe turned out his flashlight

before approaching any further. To his surprise, a dim orange light came down the cave in front of him.

“There must be another entrance,” Joe thought as he made his way toward the light and voices. Suddenly the tunnel opened into a giant cavern hundreds of feet across. There was a large pool of lava in the center of the room giving off an eerie orange glow.

Joe could hear the roar of a nearby underground river flowing steadily. Back along the walls of the large cavern, he could make out dozens of people in small groups. There were men, women, and children doing various activities.

Joe was astonished and did not know whether he should approach and make his presence known. Some of the people were sleeping under old tattered blankets. Others were cooking some kind of meat over the smaller lava pools surrounding the main pool. There were children playing and laughing in some of the side chambers. Overall, he estimated that there were at least 100 people down in the cave.

Joe decided to try to find out what this gathering was all about. He turned on his flashlight and shined it towards the people. Immediately, there was a flurry of activity as many of the older gray haired men jumped to attention grabbing good-sized rocks in each hand.

Others grabbed old crack barrel shotguns and 50's vintage rifles. Some had old style revolvers. Joe was completely surrounded in under a minute. He dropped his flashlight and put his hands in the air wondering if he had made an awful mistake by making his presence known.

“Back away from him. He may be a radioactive mutant,” one of the silver headed leaders cried. Everyone backed away slightly straining to see Joe's strange clothes.

“What is going on here guys?” Joe asked looking somewhat puzzled.

“He is one of ours; he speaks English.”

“Of course I speak English, we are in America. What are you all doing here?”

“We are survivors of the war, son.”

“What war might that be?”

“World War III of course. Where did you come from and how did you find us?”

“World War III? Don’t you mean World War II?” Joe asked.

“No, we remember II, we came down here just before the third World War started.”

“There has not been a World War III,” Joe stated with a serious look on his face. The crowd around him immediately began whispering amongst themselves and looked amazed at the news.

“He is lying. There was a war. For all we know it is still going on. He could be an enemy spy,” the leader cried attempting to control his people’s emotions.

“It is true. I am not lying; there was no World War III. America has never been attacked,” Joe exclaimed trying to prove his point.

“How do we know you are not an enemy spy, son?”

“Well, I dunno... Here, look at my driver’s license,” Joe pulled out his wallet and showed all of the people his license.

“This was issued in 1998... What year is it?”

“It is the year 2000.”

The crowd around him gasped.

“We cannot tell time well down here. The only way to gauge time is by our children. Many of them are adults with their own children.”

“What year did you come down here?” Joe asked.

“It was 1951 when we sealed the portal.”

Joe’s mouth dropped open, “1951? You mean you all have been living down here for 49 years?”

“Well, if it is really 2000, I suppose so. Many of our children have never seen the light of day.”

Another one from the community stepped up, “Tell us, what is it like on the surface?”

“Well... where do I start?”

Joe spent the afternoon explaining what the world was like since 1951. Many of the people there wanted to return to the surface. Others liked their home and thought going up to the outside world was a bad idea.

Eventually the leader called his people together for a feast in celebration of Joe’s arrival. The meal consisted of bats, insects, and several varieties of mushrooms. Joe did not want to be impolite, so he nibbled on the mushrooms and mostly drank his water. It was extremely clean tasting water purified by the natural aquifer of the rocks.

The old man, who was their leader quieted everyone and spoke, “We must call a vote, for we as a people are divided by Joe’s arrival. Some of us want to leave and others want to stay. We have grown to love this place and call it our home. Many of us know no other place. It would be wrong for only some of us to leave. Our survival here depends on everybody’s help. All have jobs to do here and we have grown to depend on each other. We are essentially one large family. Our children have married and have children of their own. The continuation of this community depends on its members sticking together as one. Now it is time to decide on what it is that we really believe in. Come, let us vote on our destiny.”

With those words all the people rose and followed their leader into another room. Joe sat near a small lava pit wondering how these people could possibly want to stay down here. Half an hour later all of the people returned. All of them had a rather peaceful look on their faces.

“Joe, my friend from the surface,” the leader addressed the newcomer, “we have come to the decision that we will not leave our home here. We have grown to like it here and cannot leave. We know no other way. Many of us are simple people. We would not be able to adjust to the complexity of your outside world. Our culture has grown to a point where we are no longer a part of your society. Even those of us who remember what it is like are convinced by your description that earth as they knew it has changed to a point where it is virtually unrecognizable. Please accept our decision as the way it is and do not try to change our minds.”

Joe was amazed that these people did not want to come out of this nasty dark cave. He sat for a minute pondering their decision.

“Joe, there is only one problem.”

“What is that?” Joe asked waking from deep thought.

“You know of our existence. There is a possibility of our discovery now.”

“Oh, I won’t tell anybody you are here if that is what you mean.”

“We can’t take that chance, Joe. Others would continually come after you once our secret is out. We do not wish to be further disturbed.”

“Well, I can promise you nobody will find out of your existence,” Joe pleaded with a worried look beginning to form on his face.

“Nobody will with find us because you are staying here, Joe.”

“You can’t make me stay here!” Joe jumped up angrily.

“Seize him!” the leader screamed.

“No!!” Joe yelled attempting to make a dash for the corridor. Several men quickly overpowered Joe and held him tight. “This is not right, you can’t do this to me,” Joe pleaded with the members while he struggled to break free. “People will know I am missing and will look for me.”

“Joe, you will learn to like it here once you have been here a while. Tie him up!”

“No... Wait!” Joe struggled as they bound his hands and feet.

“We must put him in the isolation chamber until he decides to join us,” the leader said motioning his people to take Joe away.

“Wait, you can’t... Somebody help me!”

None of the people questioned their leader’s wisdom. Joe was blindfolded and carried to another cave that was far from the large lava cavern. He did not see the path that they took him on and lost his orientation from the blindfold. The men dropped him to the hard cave floor and left.

“Wait, don’t leave me!” Joe screamed, as their footsteps slowly became faint. Hours passed and the silence was deafening. At first, Joe screamed and yelled at the top of his lungs. However, nobody came to his rescue. His voice quickly became hoarse from his pointless cries. The ropes were tight on his wrists and would not allow him to slip out no matter how much he struggled.

Joe searched the floor of the cave with his hands and feet still bound looking for a rough spot or a sharp rock.

Eventually, he found a rough protrusion near the cave wall. Joe began rubbing the ropes furiously on the rock, slowly eating through the fibers.

After he had become exhausted several times and rested accordingly, the ropes became thin enough for him to break free. He quickly untied his blindfold only to be greeted with total and complete darkness. He untied his feet and began to feel his way around the cavern. He began wandering aimlessly through the maze of passages in the pitch-blackness, void of light.

After what seemed to be days, Joe came upon the community again. This time he did not approach them, fearing for his life. He waited hours for them to fall asleep, but there were always some of the people awake. After not having the day and night cycle for so long, apparently the people just went to sleep when they became tired.

Joe was getting desperate. He needed to make his way across the cavern to the tunnel he came in from on the other side. He hoped that they had not moved the boulder back over the entrance. If that were the case he would almost certainly be trapped forever.

Joe could not wait any longer. Since a large percentage of the people were sleeping, he decided to make a run for it. He got up his nerve and took off with a full speed sprint across the cavern stealthily avoiding the lava pits throughout.

Almost immediately, someone began screaming quite loudly alerting the others to Joe's presence. Shortly thereafter, all of the people stirred to their feet grabbing their weapons.

"Stop! Don't move!" someone yelled. Joe kept running as fast as he possibly could towards the tunnel. Unfortunately, several of the people opened fire and struck

Joe with their marksmanship. He collapsed down in a pool of expanding crimson blood. He was quickly surrounded with lots of guns pointed directly at him.

The last thing Joe remembered before dying is the strange orange glow on the faces of the community staring at his fallen body. If only he would have listened to the old man and stayed with them.

The community members resealed the entrance to the outside world after their leader drove Joe's jeep off a nearby cliff. Joe's picture made its way to a milk carton side as a final memorial to his existence.



## **The Hole**

Andy was a young man who had just turned thirteen last week. His mother had a small party for him with some of his friends over and a cake. Andy did not come from a rich family, though he never went hungry. His father worked hard for the money that he brought home for his family.

Andy and his family lived in a small house out in the country. Often, Andy's father would take him on his days off camping in the woods near his house. He looked forward to the camping trips with his son because they had so much fun together.

Andy absolutely loved the woods. He would sometimes get his camping gear together and take hikes to explore the area even when his dad was not around. Although he knew the trails that ran throughout the area like the back of his hand since he spent most of his free time there, he was not yet allowed to spend the night out there without his father being present. His solo hikes and his hikes with his friends always had to end before dark.

Next week was the beginning of the summer vacation and the end to all those books for a while. Andy and his

best friend, Robert, had planned on taking their first camping trip alone in the woods – without Andy’s father.

After months of begging his parents he finally convinced them to let him and Robert go alone. Andy’s father had trained him well and knew that Andy would be all right by himself for just one night. However, deep in his heart he was torn.

He knew that Andy was getting old enough and responsible enough to handle himself unsupervised, but he was hurt that his son did not want him along on this trip. It seemed to him that Andy was just getting too old too fast.

As the final bell rang dismissing school for the summer, a great roar of kids poured out of the buildings. Excitedly, Andy jumped on the bus for the last time that school year. Robert had already beat Andy to the bus and had saved him a seat.

“Well it is about time we got done with this year, man. I did not think it was ever going to be over,” Andy shouted over the gleeful screams of the many kids on the bus.

“I know what you mean; it seemed to drag on forever,” Robert answered.

“Hey, my dad just bought me a new backpack for this weekend. It is awesome,” Andy blurted with excitement. “It has pockets all over the outside and it holds lots of stuff.”

“Cool man, where did he get it?” inquired Robert with a touch of envy in his voice.

“I think he got it at the Army surplus store in town. It looks like it is an Army style backpack.”

Andy was ready to leave for the woods and had completely packed last night after his father presented him with the gift.

“What time do you want to leave tomorrow, man?” Andy asked impatiently.

“I figure if we leave for 2pm we will have enough daylight to set up camp and cut firewood.”

“Sound’s good,” Andy replied.

The two lived within a country block of each other and had been friends for as long as they could remember. After arriving home the two boys got together at Robert’s house and spent the rest of the afternoon packing and planning what they were going to do on the trip. Neither of the boys were able to sleep well that night due to the excitement.

Finally, 2:00 came and Andy and Robert strapped on their boots and put on their camouflage camping clothes.

“I can’t believe we are finally going without your dad here tagging along.”

“Yeah, although he wasn’t ever that bad. I mean, I am kinda going to miss him this time.”

“Are you kidding? We will have a blast without anyone else there”

“I suppose so, but we can make it without him, right?” asked Andy with a hint of apprehension leaking from his voice.

“Of course we can. We have camped in these woods more times than you can shake a stick at. We have it down pat – no problem, man.”

Andy was reassured by Robert’s confidence in their ability, although deep inside he was just a bit scared. Andy strapped on his trusty survival knife. The knife, although only a piece of steel, gave Andy a feeling that he could handle any problems that might occur in the night. Nothing had ever happened on any previous camping trips to worry Andy, but without his dad there it would be somewhat different.

“Now you be back here by 10am tomorrow,” Andy’s mother stated, her voice somewhat shaky and uncertain about the situation. Her baby was now old enough to camp on his own and she did not have the strength that her husband had about these things. “Please..., Please, if anything happens y’all come home tonight. I know you both know what you are doing, but I still worry about my baby.”

“Come on mom, I am not a baby. I’ll be all right. It is not like I am going away forever. I’ll be back in the morning.”

“I know honey. Just promise me you will be careful.”

“I promise mom.” Andy gave his mom a warm hug.

“See you tomorrow Ms. Bauman.”

“O. K. Robert. You be careful, too.” Andy’s mom waived as the two gear laden boys disappeared down the road heading towards the woods at the dead end.

Stopping at the beginning of the trail, the two young campers doused each other with bug repellent. The mosquitoes got big in the woods near Andy’s house. Without repellent they would be miserable all night in the summer heat being eaten alive.

Happy to be free for the night, the two strolled down the trail while keeping a sharp eye out for snakes along the way. After hiking quite some distance, they finally arrived at the campsite and dropped the heavy gear they were carrying.

The site was well established and was nestled in a bend of a small creek. There was a little bench made of two Y-shaped logs stuck in the ground with a small diameter limbless tree for a cross bar. The firepit was already dug in the center of the camp. Small clearings dotted the

perimeter where the boys had set their tents on previous trips. The campsite was well maintained and not trashy.

Andy had been taught by his father to leave the campsite cleaner than he found it if he could. A thin coat of yellow pollen covered the leaves that Andy brushed away from his tent clearing. A piney odor flowed through the woods riding on a cool breeze as the two quickly set up camp. Having set up their tents many times before, they were done in short order.

“Well, let’s get firewood for the night,” Andy stated as he passed a small hand axe to Robert and pulled out his machete. They knew exactly what to look for: dry, dead, standing wood. “You go and look over there and I will start on this side of the camp,” said Andy stepping into the woods. Robert jumped off the bench and went the other way with the axe in hand.

After an hour, the two had collected a small pile of wood that stood at least three feet high. It was plenty enough to make it through the night.

“I think that is enough,” said Andy dropping his machete with sweat pouring off his brow. Robert looked at Andy with a doubtful glance.

“We need more than that, man. We will burn that up halfway through the night!”

“That IS enough!” argued Andy.

“Look, lets just get a little more just in case. I hate looking for wood after dark.”

“Yeah but there is no more around here, at least not anywhere near the site.”

“Sure there is... You just didn’t look hard enough,” Robert argued his point.

“All right. I guess you are right. It is kind of a pain in the butt to find wood after dark,” Andy reluctantly agreed, “Let’s look on the other side of the old barb wire fence.”

“That is too far, besides it would be difficult to get the wood through that old, rusty, tangled mess.”

“NO – you insisted we get more wood. There is no more around here, so lets check over there,” Andy stated firmly as he stood up and grabbed his machete.

The boys had never gone to the other side of the old wire fence. It had long since been overgrown. The wire passed through the center of large trees at some points indicating that it had been wrapped around the tree when it was very young. Normally too far and too dangerous to cross for fear of a nasty puncture wound, the two headed in the direction of the fence with no father there to stop them.

“We haven’t ever been able to cross this thing with your dad around, man.”

“I know. I was just thinking about that. It is going to be fun exploring a new area.”

The two approached the rusty tangle and scanned the line to see if they could find a good place to breach it.

“We will cross there, where the pole is down,” Andy suggested.

“I’ll hold it for you first, then you hold it for me,” Robert grabbed the top wire pulling it up and stepped in between two of the barbs pushing the middle wire down. Andy gazed past the fence into the thick unkempt woods behind and wondered for just a moment whether or not he was making the appropriate decision. After all, they only needed a bit of wood. After the battling thoughts in his mind had cleared, the adventuresome side of Andy took over and he stepped through the gaping hole in the fence.

Almost immediately Andy recoiled in fear pulling his leg back with a quick jerk. He had almost stepped on a coiled up rattlesnake waiting for him just on the other side.

"Whoa, look out!" he yelled to Robert who quickly let go of the fence. The two boys looked at each other and simultaneously said, "That was close!"

"Let's cross further down."

"Yeah, let's."

Moving out of the snake's immediate range, the boys crossed the fence about 20 feet down.

"Look, there is a couple of dead trees we could use," Andy pointed out after crossing. They proceeded to chop the small dead trees down and drag them to the side of the fence.

"Let's get a couple of more pieces and then we will throw it all over the fence and head back to camp."

"O. K.," agreed Robert. "Let's check over that hill."

Once they reached the top of the hill the two boys' mouths dropped open wide and they stared in amazement at what they saw just on the other side. There was a giant hole in the ground at least 15 feet wide sloping down into the darkness. The edges were covered in brush and it was obvious that nobody had disturbed the hole in a very long time.

"Wow! Check it out, man!" exclaimed Robert after picking up his jaw. "This is awesome!"

After all the many trips into the woods over a lifetime of thirteen years, Andy had never come across such a sight. A powerful force quickly drew the boys to the edge of the hole.

"We gotta go check it out man. We can't just leave this alone," begged Robert.

Andy looked suspiciously at Robert, "What? You want to go down there?"

"Yeah!" Robert shouted.

"I dunno man, we don't know what is down there," Andy blurted. "Besides, what if we got lost?"

Robert, sensing Andy really wanted to go too, tried again to convince him. "Come on, it will be fun!"

Andy picked up a stick and threw it into the hole. Nothing happened for a moment, and then the stick could be heard sliding down a long slope deep inside.

"Well, we need to go back and get our flashlights for sure."

"Yes! I knew you really wanted to go. Come on!"

The two forgot completely about the wood piled up by the fence waiting to be chopped up and scrambled through the rusty barbwire like a couple of wet fish.

"Bring your knife as well, Robert," warned Andy expecting the worst. The two quickly grabbed only the essentials from their backpacks: water, a bit of food, flashlights, and a few other items. They left most of their gear at the site in anticipation of a quick return after exploring the interesting hole.

Bubbling with excitement, they slid back through the rusty wires that for so long before had kept them from discovering the hole. They climbed the hill again and quickly slid down the other side clicking on their flashlights. Very little could be seen down in the hole since the sun was still up. Deep and dark, it seemed to just eat the light and not give a glimpse of what it contained in return.

"We are going to have to go down if we want to see what is in there, y'know."

"Well Robert, Let's go!"



They started into the gaping hole squinting to adjust to the lack of light. The hole maintained its giant 15-foot diameter well into the darkness. It sloped down rapidly, but it was not steep enough to cause them to fall. Slowly their eyes adjusted and they were able to see better than before.

The walls of the hole consisted of compressed earth with pieces of rock embedded within. It had a red clay-like appearance the deeper they went. Andy reached over and touched the wall and pulled off a chunk smashing it in between his fingers. It seemed like normal dirt but had some sort of slime-like substance holding it together.

“What the heck made this kind of hole?” Andy wondered out loud. His voice echoed down the hole indicating that it was much deeper than they had at first thought. Slowly they crept down into the strange hole shining their lights before them into the darkness trying to make out what lied ahead. They turned and looked back the way they had came and were astonished to see the light of day so far up the steep slope.

“Man, this thing is deep!” Robert exclaimed, “This is so cool!”

“Maybe we should go back; we can’t even see the bottom.”

“Aw come on,” Robert prodded, “It is probably right in front of us. It is just that our flashlights aren’t too good. Let’s keep going.” They pressed deeper into the mysterious hole of unknown origin.

After walking down for quite some distance the floor began to slowly level off from its slope and begin a series of curves. Astonishingly, the hole kept its gaping size and did not get any smaller as one would expect.

At this point, the boys could see no daylight at all. They were solely using their flashlights to provide the light they needed to see. Andy's light caught a glimpse of something white poking out of the hard dirt floor just ahead of them.

"Look, what the heck is that?" Andy asked while pointing at the object.

"I don't know. Let's go see. It is too far away right now," Robert answered.

As they approached it seemed at first to be a white stick poking out of the ground, but to their horror they perceived it to be a bone once they got close. It was old and looked like it had been there for some time. They tried but could not figure out what animal it could have possibly have come from.

"Maybe it is human." Robert's voice was cracking.

"I doubt it. Don't be silly. It was probably some poor animal that wandered into the hole and got lost. It couldn't be human," Andy replied with a hidden inner uncertainty. Robert nodded as he gulped and they kept going deeper into the unknown.

Eventually, the hole came to a rather large room. The ceiling opened up and the vast room seemed to go on forever. Their flashlights quickly became useless as they just faded into the endless darkness.

"Hey!" Andy shouted just to see how big the room was. It echoed with grandness. "This place is huge."

Suddenly, the boys froze with terror gripping their hearts. They could hear something walking in the same room. Their instincts quickly told them they were in trouble. Adrenaline coursed through their veins and chilled them to their bones.

“What the heck was that?” Robert could barely get the words out.

“I don’t know but we better get out of here now!”

The two turned and began to run full force. They could hear something huge slumbering about and chasing them. The boys filled the room with screams as they ran aimlessly. With no walls to guide them they quickly lost their bearings in the darkness.

For the moment the noise following them stopped. They slowed their frantic pace of running with their flashlights shining in all directions. They stopped and turned desperately shining their lights behind them to see what was making the freighting noise. Nothing could be seen.

“O. K. Be quiet... Shhh!” Andy said, straining to hear the recently stopped terrifying noise over his heavy breathing and pounding heart. The silence in the cave was deafening.

“We need to find the entrance hole and get out now, man. Something is in here with us,” Robert panted. “We just can’t hear it now.”

Then it started again in the darkness just beyond the flashlight’s reach. It was sort of a dragging sound with intermittent giant earthshaking footsteps. Fear once again gripped their hearts. It felt like their chests were going to explode.

They frantically attempted to shine their lights towards the noise. They could barely make out the silhouette of a giant creature. Their lights reflected off its eyes making them glow like a cat’s eyes in headlights. They were spaced apart by at least a foot, although it was difficult to tell how far away the creature was in the darkness.

“That thing looks like it is at least 15 feet tall!” Andy cried in fear.

Suddenly the creature let out the most horrible noise that sounded like a cross between a terrible lion and an angry monkey screaming. Andy and Robert looked at each other with their eyes wide in horror. Both of them were pale white with fear. It seemed like they both wanted to say something, but the words would not come out properly, only incoherent babbling. They turned and began running again – anywhere, just away from the noise.

The boys easily outran the slow-moving creature finally running into the giant room’s wall. They quickly turned out their flashlights and listened for the noises. They could hear it far away from their present location but still echoing loudly in the large room with them.

“Come on, let’s follow the wall by feeling it until we find the exit hole.”

Making sure the creature stayed far away, they made their way around and finally found the entrance. Quickly, they jogged up the long seemingly endless tunnel. Upon exiting the hole, they found that night had already fallen.

“Somehow I don’t feel like camping tonight, man,” Robert blurted.

“Me neither – lets pack up and head home,” Andy replied while trying to catch his breath.

It was the fastest pack up and tent takedown they had ever done. They pulled out of the campsite after loading themselves with their gear and hit the trail heading home.

“Look, do you think anyone will believe us if we tell them what happened?” Robert asked.

“Of course not, man. They will think we are crazy.”

“Well, what are we going to do?”

“We are going to keep quiet about this,” Andy stated with sincerity.

“But why? We need to tell our parents what happened.”

“Are you crazy – we finally convinced them to let us go camping alone and you want to give them a crazy story and make them never trust us by ourselves again? Think about it, man.”

“Yeah, you know you are right. We better keep quiet about this or we will never be able to do anything else alone,” Robert realized.

“We are just gonna tell them you had a stomach ache.”

Andy’s plan worked and their parents never found out the real reason they came home early on that trip. Andy and Robert vowed to go back to the hole one day when they were bigger and with better equipment.

Their hearts were filled with wonder and fear as they grew up thinking about the mysterious hole and the strange creature. Until the day they return, they will never know what was at the bottom of ‘the hole’.

## **The Long Hike**

Jane Serell was an attractive young brunette police officer for the Los Angeles City Police Department. She was twenty-five years old and single; a very stubborn and strong young lady. She had always wanted to be a police officer ever since she was a little girl. After much proving she had finally shook the 'rookie' status with her fellow officers after having been on the force for over three years.

She, unfortunately, had to work extra hard because she was a female. The other officers were reluctant to let her into their 'boy's club' of sorts. But, Jane was tough and could hold her own in a fight, so she earned their acceptance.

She loved the outdoors and especially the woods. Hiking was one of her favorite activities and she went as often as possible when she had some time off. She normally hiked the trails near her house. Since it was somewhat dangerous to hike alone for fear of both mountain lions and the two-legged predators who like attractive young ladies, Jane always carried her personally owned Beretta 92FS 9mm.

The pistol was perfect for her since she could easily handle the mild recoil and liked the 15 round capacity. She

usually carried two spare magazines along with a medley of other items like a cell phone and other emergency provisions, just in case something should happen and she would become stranded.

Jane had cunningly swapped shifts with her fellow officers and manipulated her schedule to allow her to have off four days in a row. She had planned an extra long hike with a two-day campout in between.

Finally, the day arrived and Jane hit the woods walking along the familiar winding trails. However, she was not going to take her usual route on this trip. She veered off the path once she had gotten a mile or so into the forest. Her compass would keep her from getting lost as she explored the exciting new terrain.

After an hour or so of walking, the brush became rather thick so she pulled out her machete and began cutting a new path. She got through about a hundred yards or so of the thick vines before discovering a rather well hidden natural cave etched in to the mountainside.

Jane knew there might be a bear or mountain lion that had claimed the cave first so she drew her Beretta in one hand and her Maglight in the other. Her eyes slowly began to adjust to the darkness as she crawled into the narrow opening. The cave opened to a larger cavern once she was several feet into it. Jane gasped at the beauty of the natural formation. She could readily stand up completely since there was so much room.

It appeared that the cave had not been disturbed in a very long time. There were no traces of modern civilization anywhere in sight. No beer bottles, no trash, no junk – nothing. The brown limestone walls did not contain any drawings either, at least, not yet.

Jane continued deeper into the cave, stepping over large rocks and winding passages looking for a suitable location to set up camp for the night. Some of the passages got quite narrow and she had to slither through them. Unfortunately, she had lost her bearing long before realizing that she should mark her path so she would be able to get back to the entrance.

Deciding to go back to the larger first cave at the beginning, Jane turned around. She did not recognize any of the openings behind her and just chose one. Jane knew she would be all right even though she was apparently lost in the labyrinth. She had four days worth of food and water and an extra set of batteries for her flashlight. However, she did have an uneasy feeling in the back of her head about the current situation.

She pressed on through tight passages and winding areas until the cave opened up into a small room. However, this one was very different from the other room at the entrance. It had some rather strange drawings on the wall. Jane wondered how or why someone would go this deep into the cave to make the drawings. She shined her Maglight along the wall to try to make out the weird pictures.

Something was different about these images – strange little quirks that made the picture bizarre. One of the pictures contained three moons above a strange looking people. All the beings were lined up in rows praying or bowing to a much larger being. The creatures were definitely not human but had some of the same basic features.

A noticeable difference was the creature's heads. They were much larger and had a weird 'bug eye' look to them with large black eyes. She also noticed that the brown



limestone that was at the beginning of the cave had been replaced by a more gray colored rock.

Jane wondered at the strangeness of the room for a while then continued to search for the exit. She was definitely lost because she did not recognize any of the formations. Eventually, Jane saw a dim light illuminating an area just ahead. Turning off her flashlight, she headed straight for the light. It seemed to be moonlight streaming in through a small opening.

Jane looked at her watch and saw that it was only 4:00 PM. She had been lost for a while, but not long enough for it to be nighttime outside. She was barely able to slip her body through the tight opening – something she prided herself in knowing that most of the men on the force could not fit through such an opening.

It seemed to be almost an overcast day with all of the reflected light that the three moons were throwing back to the nighttime alien world. Jane stared into the night sky at the three moons.

“Where the heck am I?” she wondered, attempting to assess her surroundings. She was high up on a mountainside hundreds of feet above a tree line. The combination of the alien plants and the heavy moonlight sent chills up Jane’s spine. It was truly an eerie sight to behold.

She sat down for a minute to try to figure out what to do next and how she got where she was. “There has got to be an explanation for all of this,” she thought, “I must have hit my head in the cave and am dreaming this.” Jane pinched her arm to try to wake herself, but she knew she was not dreaming. She stared into the alien sky – all of the stars looked different. She could not find a single familiar constellation anywhere.

The only possible explanation was that somewhere in the cave she had passed through a wormhole in space-time and ended up in a cave on this alien world. Unfortunately, she did not even realize she had passed through it, since she had gotten lost.

Jane's mind wondered as she pondered the possibilities of what had occurred. She thought about going back into the cave to try to find her way back, but her adventuresome side wanted to go down the mountain and explore the area before going home.

She stood to her feet and began down the massive peak. After what seemed like forever, she reached the edge of the tree line. A most spectacular array of alien plants and trees greeted her. She held her Beretta at low-ready by her side just in case there were any hostile alien creatures about.

Jane slowly crept into the midst of the alien trees. Most of them were of a bizarre variety that had three main branches coming off a center trunk at 120-degree angles. Then each branch had three sub-branches in the same fashion. Strange three spiked leaves covered the ends of each of the branches.

Every once in a while, Jane heard a buzzing noise followed by a zip noise. At first, she did not know what the source was, but soon noticed the small flying creatures zipping around the trees and close to the ground. They moved so fast that it was hard for her to make out what they really looked like. However, they did not seem to mind that Jane was there, so she did not feel threatened by them.

She continued down the mountain admiring all the strange flora and fauna as she went. With her pistol ready,

Jane came upon a small village of mushroom shaped huts covered with strange diamond shaped leaves.

Several creatures were moving around in the little village. It was the same creatures whose pictures were on the cave wall that came and greeted Jane with their spears in hand. One of the creatures began emitting a high pitched tone and dozens more of the creatures began to emerge from their huts. They were considerably shorter than Jane, only reaching her waist in height. Their bodies were a pale gray color with large black bug eyes.

Jane backed up while pointing her gun at the aliens. There were many more creatures than she could possibly kill. She would run out of bullets long before all of them would receive one. The creatures quickly surrounded Jane.

She decided that she was going to wait to see what their first move would be. While it was probable that the loud pistol would frighten the aliens, it was also possible that the noise would cause them to attack. If they attacked her, they would almost certainly quickly overwhelm her.

The aliens held her at spear point, as the village slowly became silent. A path opened up like a zipper in the sea of aliens and a very large alien could be seen approaching. It looked similar to the smaller aliens but it was at least 2 ½ times larger. Several of the smaller aliens were carrying the larger creature on a strange platform. Once they got within fifteen feet of Jane they stopped and set the big one down.

Unintelligible gibberish poured from what seemed to be a sideways mouth on the large alien. Then, all of the smaller aliens backed away from Jane and put their spears down.

Several of the small beings brought a bowl of green glowing worm-like creatures and set them at Jane's feet.

The rather gross looking worms slithered in and out of each other in the alien bowl. It seemed as though they wanted to be friends and had made a peace offering to her.

Jane pretended to accept the offer and knelt down next to the bowl. The creatures seemed pleased at her actions and began speaking to each other in a strange language.

They prepared a grand feast and had a bizarre festival of sorts in honor of their newfound guest. Jane would not eat any of the weird food for fear of poisoning herself. Instead, she pulled out a can of beef stew and ate that. She gave tastes of her stew to several of the aliens who seemed to like it.

Hours passed and the three moons barely moved. Jane looked at her watch – 11:00 AM for earth time. She figured the day must be a lot longer on this planet. None of the aliens were getting tired, but Jane, having apparently stayed up all night, was exhausted. Finally feeling more comfortable with the little gray creatures, she found a soft spot in the leaves of one of the huts and fell fast asleep. The aliens watched her in amazement perplexed by her strange behavior.

Jane woke up much later to see that the moons were still in the alien sky, although they were considerably lower. Her watch read 10:30 PM. She knew she needed to get back to the cave and find her way back as soon as possible.

Jane tried to communicate to the beings that she had to leave, but they did not understand her. She walked out of the village and slowly headed up the alien mountainside. Somehow, the trek seemed longer on the way up, but eventually she was able to find the small entrance. Slipping through the hole, Jane clicked on her trusty flashlight. She began to look for the earth entrance by

trying to take the most familiar looking path although she mostly guessed.

Once again, Jane got quite lost in the winding labyrinth of endless rocky walls. Eventually she found the earth side entrance and made her way back to her home in California.

Unfortunately, she did not mark the trail and was never able to find the strange cave again. She dared not tell anyone on the force of her bizarre adventure after finally gaining their trust. Even though, she continued to search for the cave for most of her career, she was never able to find it again.

## **The Machine**

“Boy, this thing really does give you quite a workout, man,” Carl’s friend Dan said as he pulled against the massive spring on the new Workmaster II prototype. Carl was an inventor and a sort of jack-of-all-trades. His latest and greatest invention was that of the Workmaster II workout machine. Carl was excited that it worked and that it worked very well based on his guinea pig’s reports. Finally, he had constructed a viable product that actually might have a demand.

Though he had been disappointed before, Carl hoped he could make some money this time for all of his endless effort. He had spent several months developing and designing the machine. This one had hope though, unlike some of his past attempts, such as the toilet seat warmer and the electric tape dispenser. His friend Dan hopped off of the contraption with sweat pouring off of his brow.

“Hey, when you get this thing off of the ground let me know, I might buy one myself!”

Carl smiled from ear to ear after hearing such positive feedback from his buddy.

“Glad you like it. I’ll send you the first production model free of charge.”

“Great, thanks,” Dan replied, “Look, I have to be going, but you keep up the good work.”

“Thanks, see you later.” Carl was left with a sense of accomplishment as he excitedly contacted his financing business partner and let him know it was finally complete. Carl set up a demonstration of the new contraption with him for the next day.

Fortunately, he was very impressed with Carl’s machine and signed a contract with him to mass-produce the invention. He felt lucky that he had caught his backer on a good day. Carl walked out of the meeting with a check for ten thousand dollars and a contract that allotted him 20% all sales thereafter.

Finally, Carl had hit the jackpot. He was elated as he strolled into his bank to cash his fat reward for a job well done. He deposited his check except for \$500.00 cash so he could celebrate with a grand night on the town.

Several months later, Carl was watching T. V. late one night. An infomercial came on for his invention, the Workmaster II. Carl watched with excitement as the skimpily clad models exercised on his machine. They had almost perfect bodies with large powerful muscles.

Every few minutes a toll free number popped onto the screen telling viewers to send \$99.95 in and they too could look like the models did. Carl was delighted to see his unit being sold on national T. V. even though it was rather late at night.

Carl became excited as he realized that he might actually make a fair amount of money in the coming months. At almost \$20.00 a unit for his profit, he would be raking in the money.

The next month, Carl received a check for \$20,000.00! His infomercial was on almost every night now and even

some Sunday's during the day. He could not wait to see the next check. Carl called his business partner to inquire how thing had been going at the factory.

Fortunately, he explained to Carl that the units were selling like hotcakes. They were having trouble keeping production up to match the tremendous demand for his new machine. Needless to say, Carl was floored. He had never in his wildest dreams thought that one of his inventions would do so well in the marketplace.

Over the next six months, Carl's bank account swelled to over a million dollars. He invested most of the money wisely so if future inventions were a flop, he would be covered financially. With that much money to spare, Carl took some time off. He had finally made the big time and could afford not to have to work for a while, although he never dreamed of retiring. Carl loved to invent too much for that.

One day, Carl's new cell phone rang while he was enjoying a round of golf with his old friend Dan. It was his business partner on the line and he was somewhat upset.

"What is the problem?" Carl asked.

"Well, it seems that we have had a complaint from a customer that may present a problem in the future. It turns out that the customer was injured by the Workmaster II he had just bought last month. The main power spring snapped at its juncture with the sliding joint causing it to slam full force into the customer's forehead.

Unfortunately, this crushed his skull with relative ease causing instant death. Now, we haven't had any more complaints as of yet, hopefully this incident is isolated, but you might want to get some advice on how to proceed from here from your lawyer."



“My lawyer? What do you mean my lawyer? I don’t have a lawyer. I signed over the production rights to your company. It is not my fault that one of your customers died,” Carl argued sensing that he may be in trouble.

“If you will refer to your contract under section two, paragraph four, line 3, it reads: The original designer retains all liability in any case of design flaws whether perceived or real and agrees to hold J. K. manufacturing harmless. Like I said, Carl, you better talk with your lawyer. Hopefully, this one will go away though.”

“I will have my lawyer call you. Goodbye!” He quickly hung up on his business partner of the past. Carl was notably upset over the situation.

The next day he brought his contract to a local lawyer and retained his services. He left copies of all the documents and a \$1,000.00 retainer fee. The lawyer promised to read over the legalese and call Carl with an English translation of his actual limit of liability at the end of the week.

Two days later Carl started getting calls from angry relatives of customers who had bought his machine. J. K. manufacturing had started to refer the calls directly to Carl. Before the day was out, Carl had referred nine more people to his lawyer about injuries resulting from broken power springs. Unfortunately, several of them were complaining about fatalities. Carl began to get extremely worried. He tried to think of how he could have overlooked such an obvious design flaw when creating his machine.

Carl immediately called his lawyer and inquired about the situation. Basically, his lawyer said he was screwed legally. He also demanded more money to defend the multitude of cases that had presented themselves. Carl

coughed up ten thousand more dollars for him to do research and gather evidence in his defense.

Over the next three months, Carl was served with twenty-three separate lawsuits by the local sheriff. A recall of the units had already been set into motion by J. K. manufacturing but it was too late for many of the poor customers. Carl lost all of his newfound fortune on the defending and settling of the suits. Unfortunately, he had to claim bankruptcy before it was all over.

A few weeks later, a giant body builder whose girlfriend had been killed on the Workmaster II assassinated Carl. It is always good advice that one should completely read the fine print carefully before signing anything at all. Unfortunately, Carl did not heed such advice and he was ruined as a result.

## **The Protector**

The Boss once again sent his orders to his faithful servant for eternity. An ethereal paper scroll slowly materialized in the mighty angel's hands. The commands of God slowly appeared on the assignment in a beautiful gold print. Corbin read the words just as soon as they appeared, anxious to do the Lord's bidding.

"Excellent! It is another protection assignment. Those are my favorite types," he said with a deep excited voice while flexing his massive wings. Corbin loved being an angel for the Lord. He had long lost count of the number of missions he had completed for the Almighty after 2500 or so.

Existing outside of time and space had great advantages. For one thing, he would never grow old and his glorified body would never become saggy. In addition, his assignments could be at any location on Earth and at any point in time. With the variety of different missions he was presented with, he never grew old of serving his master.

This mission would allow him to visit Germany during World War II. He was assigned to protect an American soldier at a particular spot in time and space. The enemy

was also aware of what this soldier would do after the war and had targeted his demonic forces to that point in time as well.

If the soldier died in the war, his great grandchildren would not be born. One great grandson in particular would be an influential prophet in the earth's future that would lead thousands of souls to salvation during the tribulation. Corbin's assignment was to protect the young American soldier at all costs against the attacks of the enemy. The important soldier's name was Robert Ventre.

Corbin liked to get a head start on the enemy and get a feel for the person that he would be protecting. Usually, he would go at least a week ahead of the critical turning point and follow his human, watching his actions. This gave him important tactical information about how the person might react in the situation they would soon be put in.

Corbin strapped his massive double-edged sword to his back. The highly polished sword was exquisitely decorated with beautiful gems and was over seven feet long. Of course, Corbin himself stood some twelve feet tall with super strength and a massive wingspan.

With his royal weapon in place, he turned and stepped through the multi-dimensional portal of heaven. He spread his wings and soared through time itself. Almost instantaneously, he appeared above a battlefield in Germany in the heat of a great battle.

He soared down and gently landed near a deep trench that was filled with brave American soldiers. He easily pinpointed Robert from the crowd because he could see his soul directly. While he was walking over to his assignment, several bullets zipped straight through Corbin since he was unaffected by the physical world.

Robert was loading his rifle at the bottom of the trench. Long rows of soldiers were firing up at the ground level and had the German force on the other side of the battlefield retreating.

Once he had finished loading it he stood up and carefully took aim at a German soldier's head poking out of the enemy trench. Corbin could tell that Robert was completely exhausted. Unfortunately, this caused his aim to be off and he was not hitting much. Still, the shots hit close enough kicking up a spray of dirt and frightened the German to the next trench back.

After several more hours of constant fighting, the gunfire slowed down and finally came to a stop. The Americans had successfully pushed the enemy significantly back. Their leaders granted a well-deserved break to the Americans that were on this battlefield.

Robert slumped down with the muddy trench wall to his back and rested. Corbin took this time of safety to scope the area in search of any demons that may have arrived before him. He took flight and circled the area. Fortunately, it was all clear.

As usual, the enemy, being disorganized and self destructive, had not planned their attack well. Corbin flew back to Robert's trench and sat down beside him while he rested. Looking at his quadra-dimensional God watch, Corbin figured that he had six days, two hours, and thirty-seven minutes before the critical time node split would be there.

Corbin knew the enemy would probably send a unit of demons to attack within a few hours before the time came. He sat silently with a regal look on his face and watched over Robert while he slept. Many of the troops were sleeping at the time. They were all exhausted from the long

battle that they had finally won. Fortunately, Corbin did not ever need to sleep, so he stayed watch to make sure Robert got well rested.

Later, orders came via a Lieutenant to the troops. They were to band together with several other groups and take control over a known German base in a few days. The American men were rounded up and gathered into a force of hundreds. They all met at the base of a large hill near the German fortress. Robert was well rested and ready to take the enemy and whatever they were throw at him. All of the men were gung-ho and ready to win the important battle for their country.

Corbin knew the node split was rapidly approaching when he noticed several of the smaller variety of demons poking around on top of the hill. He slid his massive sword out of its sheath and sharpened it to a razor's edge in preparation for the upcoming fight. The demons noticed the massive angel and his mighty sword and disappeared over the hill to warn their leader.

Finally, the last group of the American soldiers had arrived and the Major briefed them all on how the attack was to take place. It would begin in a few hours at the break of dawn. When he finished his speech, all the men knew what their mission was and took their positions all around the hill.

Corbin spread his powerful wings with his sword in hand and lifted himself into the air. He quickly flew over the hill after them but was surprised at the number of demons lying in wait for him. There were several dozen of various sizes and one rather large demon who was obviously the leader.

Usually, the enemy does not send so many demons that are so well organized, but this sub-dimensional battle

apparently would be particularly important. If the enemy won, thousands of souls would burn in hell forever since the prophet would never be born.

The prize was great and Satan must have decided it was important enough to send an overwhelming force of his minions to ensure Robert's certain death. Corbin had a moment of doubt, not knowing if he could possibly defeat this many demons. Then, almost instantly, his faith in the Lord's decision to send him on the mission reassured him that he could do it.

Fireballs began to fly through the sub-dimensional space in attempts to knock the mighty Corbin out of the air. The demon leader knew that such a powerful angel would cut deep into his ranks before he could be stopped, so he wanted to kill him as soon as possible. Corbin flew into the midst of the demons and began swinging his sword at the nasty demons.

They quickly surrounded him flinging fireballs at him and attempting to jump onto his back. The heavy bladed sword cut deep into many of the demons. They were quickly dropping left and right, some with no heads, others disemboweled.

Corbin was able to block many of the fireballs with his sword, but some impacted his holy body causing serious burns in several places. Still, Corbin kept fighting with a never-ending sense of urgency. He knew he could not lose such an important battle.

If he lost, the demons would ensure that Robert would have a cloudy mind and would be easily killed by the Germans. Corbin was cutting and slicing his way towards the demon leader. He knew the leader was controlling many of the smaller minions. His death would cause chaos

and most of the demons would simply flee from the battle without his control.

Eventually, Corbin made it to the large and powerful demon leader. It swung its giant flaming sickle attempting to cut off one of Corbin's wings. Ching! Corbin's sword swung swiftly and stopped the deadly sickle's decent just in time.

The giant angel quickly swung his sword again and sliced its blade deep into the demon's shoulder. It screamed in terror as the word of God tore into its evil flesh. Next, the master demon launched a huge fireball into the center of Corbin's chest in retaliation, sending him flying back several yards and down to the ground clutching his horrible wound.

The demon leader slowly approached the downed angel planning on finishing him off for good. Corbin used his sword as a crutch to help himself to his feet just before the demon approached. He mustered up some inner strength and swung the giant sword directly at the demon's head.

Putting up his sickle to block the attack, the demon leader was surprised to see the mighty angel's sword cut straight through his weapon of evil and lop off his head.

Almost immediately the hail of constant fireballs stopped and the remaining demons scattered in all directions. Corbin thought, "What a great battle! Praise God! Victory!" He fell to his knees with most of his energy having been sapped.

He began to pray to the Lord for healing. A warm glow from heaven surrounded Corbin's massive body. He was healed completely of all his wounds from the battle and he jumped up in renewed strength. Quickly, he flew into the air and began to look for Robert.



The battle for the base had already begun. Corbin looked at his watch; only 5 minutes until the critical node split. He rushed to Robert who was at the time charging over the enemy held hill. Bullets zipped around him as the Germans tried to pick off the advancing Americans.

He quickly jumped in front of Robert and ran along just ahead of him. Then Corbin saw what was going to happen. A soldier in the German bunker had several demons all around him whispering into his mind. The German loaded his weapon and took aim at the center of Robert's chest. He slowly squeezed the trigger and his rifle cracked to life. Corbin quickly stopped time itself just before the bullet made impact with the center of Robert's chest.

The bullet was frozen in mid-air having been stopped in time. Corbin grabbed the bullet and moved it over a few feet to the right. The demons saw what the angel had done and began cursing him from the bunker.

Corbin rushed over to the demons that were in the enemy camp and quickly slew them. He started up time and the critical node split appeared. The correct dimensional path was taken because of Corbin's intervention.

God's plan worked! Corbin had successfully completed another mission for his Savior. All of heaven rejoiced as the thousands of souls that were saved as a result appeared in eternity. Robert's great grandson was born in time and space and was a great spiritual warrior in his life leading thousands of souls to God, thus saving them from eternal damnation.

## **The Ripple Effect**

Dr. Steve Duff was an inventor with a mission in mind. He was attempting to build a time machine and he was very close to getting it to actually work. He was extremely bright although slightly mad. Working on the project for a long time, he had long since worked out all of the mathematics.

The calculations needed for time travel are seriously complex in nature. Not only does one need to compute the location in time, but also the location in space as well. After all, the Earth is rotating on its axis. It is also revolving around the sun. In addition, the Milky Way is rotating and flying away from the center of the universe at the same time.

It took years for Dr. Duff to complete the computations. His machine worked great on paper. It was just a matter of time before he would be able to produce a working prototype. He had built the basic structure, a large stainless steel cylinder, and was working on all the complex electronics and power system for his machine. After a few years, he had gotten it ready enough for its first live test.

He called his test chimp, McKenzie, over and placed him into the steel machine. Dr. Duff closed the door and

set the remote control unit for five minutes into the future. He stood back and activated the time machine with his fingers crossed.

A large blue arch of electricity slowly began to circle the cylinder. It spun faster and faster and the image of the cylinder slowly began to fade from existence. After thirty seconds or so, it disappeared all together. Steve jumped for joy as he celebrated its apparent successful operation.

Five minutes later the blue arch began to slowly materialize into existence again. After the arch stopped, Dr. Duff opened the large stainless door of the cylinder. McKenzie hopped out and into his arms. The machine had worked! Finally, after all those years of work Dr. Duff had successfully completed a working prototype.

He quickly performed a similar test with himself as the subject and reappeared thirty minutes into the future. He stepped out of the cylinder with a great big smile on his face. The trip was almost instantaneous to him, but his watch read thirty minutes slow when he compared it to the clock on the lab wall.

Finally, a lifetime of waiting would pay off and he could attempt to complete his original mission. Dr. Duff was a very strong believer in the Christian faith. Unfortunately, his views were slightly warped from the rest of the church. While his motives were good, he did not realize the far-reaching effects his plan would have if it were successfully completed.

He believed that Christ should not have to die on the cross. He had started on his quest to build a time machine after vowing to save Christ from the humiliation of being crucified. This, however, would change the very nature of Christianity itself. Dr. Duff, however, was determined to save Jesus and did not realize that the very reason God

allowed his son to die on the cross was to save all of humanity from damnation.

God knew that Dr. Duff would succeed in controlling time with his machine and had set a counter plan into motion to try to stop him from effectively destroying all of what Jesus had done for humankind. If he were to succeed in preventing the death of Jesus, it would cause a massive ripple in the very fabric of time and space and change all of the events that were affected by his death thereafter.

Dr. Duff loaded several items, one being an automatic pistol, into his time machine and set the dial for the year 33 and the place of Calvary. The machine came to life arching electricity and faded out of time.

Slowly it materialized and came to rest just outside of the city. Fortunately, nobody was around to witness the appearance of the strange object. Dr. Duff stepped out and noticed he had landed in a rather highly visible and open spot. He reset the coordinates for a small cave that he could see in the side of a nearby mountain.

The machine disappeared again and reappeared near the cave. He quickly hid the machine in the bushes just inside the cave entrance and headed to the city. Dr. Duff had gotten a minor in Hebrew while in college and was able to understand the bulk of the conversations around him, though the dialect was somewhat different than he had known.

He questioned many people of the whereabouts of Christ. Most of the people were looking at him as if he was from a far off land. His long white lab coat was particularly intriguing to many of them. Fortunately, Dr. Duff was able to barter some of the trinkets he had brought for some less conspicuous clothes. He gave a merchant a

sheet of hologram stickers and a pack of bubble gum for the garments.

The fact that he was there was already having an effect on what was to happen later. Everything he did in his search was magnified deep into the future. A small change far in the past causes a large change in the future. Nevertheless, Dr. Duff was not concerned with the effect his presence was having. His only mission was to save Jesus.

Eventually, he was able to locate him. With his pistol hidden under his tunic, Dr. Duff followed Jesus around as if he were one of the twelve disciples. He never let him out of his sight for very long.

Just as the Bible was written, the events of the final weeks of Jesus' life were unfolding right in front of Dr. Duff's eyes. Judas obtained the silver pieces and told the Roman soldiers where they could find Jesus. That is when Dr. Duff then took action figuring if he stopped these soldiers from finding Christ, he would stop his death as well. He pulled out his pistol and pointed it at the leader of the small pack of Roman soldiers. He yelled 'halt' in Hebrew and the soldiers stopped even though they spoke Greek.

Unfortunately for Dr. Duff, the soldiers had never seen a gun and did not know what it was. They were amazed that a Hebrew commoner would have the gall to stop them from their official business of the Emperor.

He did not have a sword, so they did not fear him or his handheld metal device. They pulled their swords and immediately attacked him. Dr. Duff quickly fired his pistol several times at the leader. The 9mm bullets zipped through the soldier's shield and punched through his ancient armor as well.

Before the others realized that the noisy device had killed their leader, they had run their swords through the unruly Hebrew. The Roman soldier fell next to the cut up doctor and both of them quickly bled to death. The strange gun was taken to the Emperor as a precious weapon just after Jesus was crucified.

This changed history some, but not excessively so. The Roman ruler quickly ran out of bullets while testing the gun and its abilities to penetrate the thickest of their armors. Then he gave it to one of his blacksmiths to see if he could make it work again. Of course, the gun was useless without any bullets and eventually was melted down to make more swords.

The Roman soldier who was killed fortunately had already had all of the children he was going to have in his lifetime and nobody was eliminated from existence. The time machine is still well hidden in a cave and has not been discovered to this day.

God was the one who made the soldiers attack Dr. Duff and therefore continue the events already set in motion. All of the changes he made while he was there were swallowed by the never-ending ravages of time.

Only smallest of changes still exist that do not matter in God's grand plan for all of mankind. However, if Dr. Duff had succeeded, we would certainly live in a very different world; a world without Jesus' saving grace.

## **The Sphere**

“Mr. Douglass, I believe the best answer is the Civil War.”

“That is correct, Jill,” Mr. Douglass stated while looking at his semi-attentive high school history class. Suddenly, the bell sounded and almost immediately the classroom came alive with movement.

“Now remember, read pages 200-215 in your textbook for tomorrow and there is a quiz on Friday,” Mr. Douglass attempted to remind his class over their hustle and bustle to get out the door.

The class moaned simultaneously at the mention of the quiz. Without delay, the room quickly emptied as the teenagers left for home for the day. Jim Douglass had been teaching history for over 25 years. He loved it even though sometimes his classroom was somewhat less than enthusiastic about it.

Slowly he put his things in his big black leather bag almost sad that the day was over. Some days are better than others at Monticello High, but today Jim felt as though he had actually made a difference.

After a quick stop at the bathroom, Jim shuffled out to the employee parking lot to his car and got in. The old rusty

Toyota Corolla was on its last leg, but it got him around with a fair consistency.

He headed to his house stopping by the grocery on the way home to pick up a few things. The grocer at the small country stop knew Jim by his first name and greeted him as he left following his normal daily routine. Jim was set in his ways, a man of 53 years, and did not care too much for big cities. His country home was small and cozy. He lived alone having never married, although he almost did once in his youth.

Jim's car crunched through the stones as he coasted into the gravel driveway of his familiar home. While nothing seemed as though it was out of place, Jim sensed that something was terribly wrong. He was unable to pinpoint anything specifically, but had an overwhelming unexplainable feeling.

He quickly grabbed his single bag of groceries from the front passenger seat and opened his car door stepping out. While walking up to his front door, he clumsily fumbled his keys and they chinked down to his cement steps. The uneasy feeling grew as he walked in and sat down his bags. Looking around, he saw that nothing was out of place.

A small red LED flashing on and off begged Jim to press the button on his answering machine, but he was not thinking that the feeling might be because of a message needing his attention. After settling down in his EZ chair and taking a deep breath, Jim finally noticed the little light blinking.

"Well, looks like I have a message," Jim said, struggling out of the rear end engulfing chair. Pressing the button finally let the machine speak after a shrill tone.



“Jim, it is Nancy. I am at the General Hospital near Mom’s house,” his sister’s voice said while holding back tears. “Mom has had a stroke.”

Jim sank back into his chair in disbelief as his sister’s words rang in his head.

“She was in a coma all morning.” Nancy’s voice was quivering as she tried to stop sniffles that had surfaced. “She passed away just a few minutes ago.” Nancy burst out in tears on the tape. She composed herself just long enough to give a phone number where she could be reached and then continued to cry before hanging up and ending the message.

Tears began to well up in Jim’s eyes as he stared into space. His father had died two years ago of cancer, but as far as he knew, his mother was still perfectly healthy. He had just made the two hour trip to his hometown last month to visit his mother. She seemed fine then. Jim could not believe she was gone.

Memories of his mother flooded his mind as he slumped deeper in his chair and began to sob like a little boy. He grabbed the nearby phone and called the number his sister left after later coming out of his daze. A nurse answered his request and called Nancy to the telephone.

“Oh Jim, I can’t believe she is gone,” Nancy sobbed. “Can you come to Mom’s house right now?”

“Of course, I’ll get my things together and meet you there at 7pm.”

The two were both crying by the time they had hung up. Jim called the school and arranged for a substitute to take over his class for a week. Then he packed a small suitcase and left for his mother’s house in Springfield.

The trip seemed to drag on forever as his mother’s memory lingered in the air. Finally, he arrived at his

boyhood home. His sister's car was parked in the driveway. He strolled past it in a dazed hurry, almost knocking off the side mirror as his mind was elsewhere. His sister greeted him at the door and gave him a warm hug while beginning to openly weep.

"When is the funeral?" Jim asked.

"Saturday, at Golden Meadows Funeral Home."

The two sat and talked for hours about their late mother and all of their wonderful memories of her. Eventually, they both felt somewhat better about the sudden death and began to talk about what to do with her house.

"I suppose we could sell it," suggested Jim. "I mean, you have a family and your own house and don't need this one. I have a job and a house that is over two hours drive from here so I don't need it either. I don't think Mom had a will or anything. Do you know if she had a will?"

"I don't think so, Jim. Not that I know of."

"I am going to spend the day tomorrow looking through the house to see if I can find anything."

"O. K."

"Let's get some rest; it has been a rough day."

The two retired for the night in their old beds that they used to sleep in when they lived at home.

The next day Jim began his search early through his mother's paper's and possessions looking for some kind of will. After spending the entire morning looking through a small filing cabinet and finding nothing but old bills and somewhat useless information, he expanded his search. Another two hours later he had gone through all of the closets of the house finding only items of marginal interest and not the will that he was looking for.

He began thinking to himself that it was perhaps a longshot, but it may be in the attic. Jim climbed the steep ladder into the creaky old attic. There were lots of things up there, from old baby beds to Christmas decorations of all sorts. Most of the junk up there was essentially useless.

After a quick initial search, Jim noticed an old trunk sitting in the corner of the attic that was covered in dust. It appeared to be a very old wooden trunk that Jim did not remember ever seeing in the attic before. It had a rusty old padlock on the hasp.

Curious to know what the old trunk could possibly contain, Jim began a search for a key. No luck. No key could be found anywhere in the house. Eventually giving up the search, he found a crowbar. Then Jim popped off the old lock with ease.

The trunk creaked and moaned like it was asking for oil as Jim slowly raised the lid. Many small treasures of old sat within: old newspaper clippings from the turn of the century, several pieces of old jewelry, a small stack of old magazines, an old Colt 1911 .45 auto with two magazines that was probably from WWII, and a small gray shoebox size metal box.

The small box intrigued Jim and as he picked it up he noticed how light it was. He could not quite make out what kind of metal the box was made from. It had a luster that he had never seen before. He flipped the box over searching for an opening without luck. There were no visible seams on the strange rectangular box that he could see. In fact, the box was so strange that Jim decided he would keep it and perhaps later he could figure out what it was.

After searching through the rest of the attic, Jim gave up, figuring that his mother had not left a will after all.

However, he did take the strange box down the ladder with him just before he closed up the attic.

His sister was on the phone talking with relatives about the upcoming funeral. Jim placed the small metal box in front of her and gave her a puzzled look. Nancy picked up the box and looked it over. She returned the puzzled look to her brother.

Next, Jim brought the box to his car and put it in his trunk as his sister continued the conversation on the phone. For the time being, Jim forgot about the strange box and focused on the funeral at hand.

After the funeral was over, Jim returned to his house and to work. Trying to forget about the death he poured himself into his class. Several weeks later Jim found the box in his trunk while searching for some tools and brought it in his house to examine it further.

He placed it on his kitchen table ascertaining what to do next. Again he searched the box for any openings – none, no seams – nothing. He began to press in firmly all over the box figuring it may have some sort of trap opening. Quite by accident, while holding it against his body and pressing all four corners on one side, Jim heard a ‘click’. He set the box on the table and noticed that a top had formed from a seemingly seamless area of the side. Jim pulled the top off slowly and stared at its contents.

The box contained a red velvet-like insert that surrounded a shiny metallic ball in the center. It was about as big around as a softball was and was quite amazing in appearance.

“Now what the heck is this thing?” Jim thought as he reached to touch the strange sphere. As soon as his hand got near the ball, it suddenly lifted out of its case and began to hover in mid-air near the table. Jim was astonished and

backed up with his eyes gaping and mouth open in amazement.

“Great Scott!” Jim shouted staring in fear at the floating device. He did not know what to do next. The ball continued to float about a foot from the table surface with no attachments or strings holding it up. Jim thought about calling the police but decided not to because they would think he was crazy.

Suddenly, Jim’s T. V. turned on for no apparent reason with the sound blasting loudly. Then his microwave turned on all by itself. Jim was getting scared now and wondered how to turn the bizarre sphere off.

He reached for the strange object and as he did, his hand began to tingle. He recoiled away from it immediately. Looking at his hand to see if it had been shocked revealed that it was in perfect condition. In fact, it was in better than perfect condition. His hand looked approximately 20 years younger. Several small scars that were on his hand from his youth were completely healed. Jim was shocked by the fact that his hand looked as it did. He slowly reached for the floating ball again.

The silver sphere allowed Jim to catch it momentarily. A tingly feeling spread over his entire body as he slowly pulled it closer to himself. This amazing object defied description. A closer inspection revealed that the sphere had thousands of tiny ever-changing patterns of silver on its surface. After allowing it to float over his hand for a while, Jim put the ball back in its case and closed the top. He wondered how the heck that thing had gotten into his mother’s attic.

Suddenly Jim caught his reflection in the mirror across the room. He jumped in astonishment because it seemed to

be a stranger long forgotten staring back at him. Jim had been transformed into his youthful self of age 23.

“Uh-Oh!” Jim thought, “Nobody is going to recognize me at work now.” He walked up to the mirror in disbelief. Jim tore off his clothes and discovered it was true. The change was complete and total. He really was changed into a much younger version of himself.

“This could be a slight problem, but the benefits definitely outweigh the problems,” he thought grasping the reality of what happened.

Try as he might, Jim could not figure out the ball’s origin. There were no markings on the strange box anywhere.

Jim thought, “Nobody will believe what happened to me. I certainly can’t attempt to teach a class like this.” He picked up the phone and called in sick arranging once again for a substitute to take his place for a few days. He had to figure out what to do next. His sister had seen the box – perhaps he could confide what had happened to him to her.

He dialed his sister’s number and she answered. Jim tried to explain who he was, but unfortunately his sister did not recognize his voice. She became angry at the apparent prank caller and eventually hung up after arguing with him for a while.

Jim knew he had to see her in person to convince her of the bizarre change. He packed his things and grabbed the little gray box on the way to his car. He threw his things in the trunk and pulled out of his driveway.

However, as he was leaving, he noticed a solid white van with no markings or windows start its engine. It had been parked in front of his neighbor’s house and slowly pulled out some distance behind him.

“That’s strange,” Jim thought, “I don’t remember my neighbor owning such a van.” The van followed him all the way to the interstate, but stayed a few hundred yards behind him. At first Jim did not pay much attention to the van, but after it continued to follow him for more than an hour he began to become worried.

He decided to get off the interstate to get some gas even though he had almost a full tank. Perhaps he was only being paranoid and the van would continue down the interstate without him. He pulled off at the next exit looking in his rear view mirror to see what the van was going to do. Sure enough, the van followed him down the exit ramp.

Now Jim was scared. “What could this person want from me?” he thought as the fears ran through his mind with lightning speed. He pulled into the first gas station and quickly jumped out of his car looking for the mysterious van.

Slowly, the van passed in front of the station. Jim sighed with relief as he pumped \$2.00 worth of gas into his tank. After paying for his gas and heading back to his car, he saw the van slowly passing back in front of the gas station. An icy shot of adrenaline coursed through Jim’s veins. He knew something was going on, but did not know what.

He did not want to endanger his sister. If something was going to happen he did not want to involve her. He slipped back into his vehicle with a bit of confusion as to what to do next.

He pulled back onto the interstate heading towards his sister’s house. At first he thought that he may have lost the strange white van, but not long after that, it again appeared in his rearview mirror.

Jim knew he had to try and ditch the van. He floored his little Corolla and sped up. His vehicle began to shake and rattle as he slowly approached 90mph. Unfortunately, the van easily kept up with him. Perhaps he could lose them on some back roads with lots of curves.

Jim took the next exit and, of course, the van followed suit. He did not know the area around this exit but had to try something. Jim quickly sped around the first left he could find. Then a quick right and another left. After several more turns, Jim was definitely lost. He turned onto a gravel road and sped down it as fast as he could go and still control his vehicle. Fortunately, the area was thick with woods and had very few houses. Soon the road came to a dead end and Jim started to turn his car around.

"Surely I lost them," he thought as he straightened out his front end facing out and turned the engine off. "I'll just wait here for a while until they give up."

Ten minutes later, to Jim's horror, he saw the van coming down the rock road straight towards him. "Uh-Oh!" Jim's voice quivered. His only thought was to flee as fast as possible. He quickly got out of his car and instinctively locked it as he slammed the door and took off into the nearby thick woods.

His now young and agile body flew through the trees with newfound youth. He slowed his pace and paused a moment to look back and attempt to see what was happening back at his car. He could barely make out through the dense trees two men jump out of the van. They were both dressed in black suits and had on dark sunglasses.

Immediately, they attempted to open his car but found that Jim had locked it. One of the men reached under his jacket and pulled out a large automatic pistol. The gun



cracked to life eating a gaping hole in his window. They quickly searched the interior of his car and moved to the trunk.

Again the gun barked loudly, opening the trunk lock with ease. Without delay, the men grabbed the gray box and jumped back into their van. They quickly turned it around and spit rocks from underneath their tires as they left the area.

“Well, at least I know what they wanted,” thought Jim, “and I am still alive.” Jim decided not to go back for his vehicle for fear that the men would return for him. He picked a direction and began walking straight until he found a road. He followed the road and fortunately found civilization eventually.

Not wanting to go home because he knew they would be waiting for him there, he started life over again. This time he got married and had four children from his lovely young bride. He eventually outlived his sister by many years, although he was too afraid to contact her for the rest of his life.

He never returned to his old life, but happily enjoyed his new one. He always wondered what happened to the strange ‘sphere’ he had found, but was never able to locate any information on it. Luckily for Jim, the men who took the sphere never paid a visit to his new home. Having lived almost another complete lifetime, Jim was a very wise man in his new town. He thanked God that he survived the ordeal and fortunately, he was one of the few people to be given a second chance at life.

## **The Strange Stray**

Troy was on his way home from school one day when a medium size dog began to follow him. He had just jumped off of the bus when the dog approached him. At the age of 9, Troy was not afraid of dogs and welcomed the lost mutt.

It had a slightly smushed face along with a pointy looking head. It was a terribly ugly specimen of the canine family, but Troy took a liking to the dog and allowed it to tag along. He hoped in his heart that his mother would let him to keep the dog. It stayed slightly behind him all the way to his house.

Unfortunately, his mother was not too receptive to the idea, but saw the glow on her son's face with the mutt and decided to talk the idea over with Troy's father. Troy was elated that his mother would even consider the notion of letting him keep the dog.

As soon as his father came through the door, Troy jumped on him and begged him to say yes. His mother quickly briefed his father on the little lost stray dog and it's plight. His dad caved under the onslaught of pressure from the two of them and said Troy could keep the dog provided he would be the one to have to care for it.

“Yippee!” Troy shouted as he jumped for joy at his dad’s decision. The ugly little mutt walked into the room and almost seemed to smile at the news. It appeared to know that it was welcome in their home. Troy quickly set up a water dish and a food dish for the little dog. Then he set up a little bed for his new friend.

The ugly little dog seemed appreciative of the water, but did not seem interested in the food that he was offered. Troy reasoned to himself that the dog would eat eventually if he were hungry enough.

Later that night the whole family went to bed. Troy’s mother tucked him into his warm bed and kissed her son goodnight. The little dog jumped up onto his mattress and lay next to Troy. His mother smiled as she was walking out of the room glad to see that the new dog was accepting his new home so quickly.

Not too long after his parents had gone to bed and Troy was in a half asleep daze, the dog jumped down to the floor. It walked over to Troy’s closet and nosed the cracked door open far enough to gain entry. The door creaked a bit and woke the sleeping boy.

Troy watched his dog to see what he was doing but did not sit up to alert the dog that he was, in fact, awake. Amazingly, the mutt began to speak a strange language that Troy had never heard before. He was intrigued by the dog’s strange behavior and adjusted his position so he could see through the crack to watch it.

The dog was lit up with a strange light blue glow that filled the little closet. A small panel on a bizarre device was emitting the light. The dog was speaking into the device with its non-earthly language. Then the device began to speak with the same weird language.

Troy figured it must be some sort of communication device and that the dog was actually some kind of alien. He watched the crazy dog until he was finished. The dog then quietly jumped back onto Troy's bed and went back to sleep as if nothing had happened. Troy pretended to be sleeping when the dog got back into bed with him. Needless to say, Troy did not sleep very well that night.

The next morning, he told his mother what the ugly dog had done the night before in the closet. Troy tried to explain it in a serious manner, but his mother kept laughing at him. She explained to him that he must have just had a bad dream and that it was impossible for a dog to actually be an alien.

However, Troy knew it was not a dream. He was scared of his new friend and did not want to interact with him in the same way as he did before. His mother saw the difference, but attributed it to the dream and just blew it off.

Later that night, after all had gone to bed, the dog again went into the closet to communicate with his ship. Troy cowered under his covers again and feared for his life. When he was finished, the dog hopped back up onto his bed again like nothing had happened. Troy was absolutely sure he was not dreaming this time.

The next day, he begged his mom to listen to his pleas, but she would not hear the voice of her imaginative little boy. Again, she blew off his crazy ideas of the alien dog to a bad dream.

Time passed and the night fell. Troy became afraid to go to sleep with the alien dog. His mother tucked him in as usual and told him to have sweet dreams as she left the room. Almost as if it were on a schedule, an hour later the dog repeated his communication routine in the closet.

However, this time the alien called his ship over to the house. It hovered outside Troy's window and awaited the alien's commands. Troy was terrified and could not move or speak. Unfortunately, the dog that he once loved for a pet was going to abduct him and take him for his own pet.

The dog used a strange device to transform himself from the dog back into his natural shape. A small gray alien with a big head and large black bug eyes stood over the terrified Troy and examined him in his bed.

The alien then used a strange device to paralyze Troy and froze him solid. He floated Troy up out of his bed and out of his window into the waiting ship. Troy was strapped down to a table of sorts and taken out into the night sky on the ship.

The next morning, Troy's mother and father were horrified when they saw that their son had mysteriously disappeared. They called the police and reported him missing. Unfortunately, Troy's parents never saw their son alive again.

His mother was forever heartbroken over his disappearance. Every day of the rest of her life she wondered if the little stray mutt, who also disappeared mysteriously on the same night, was really an alien as her son had tried to tell her.

## **Who's Real?**

Garton was a small farming village where everyone knew everyone else. It was not a very large community, but the people tended to get along and help each other out during bad times. The population of the entire community was less than 200.

It was late October and every capable body was out working on the harvest. Victor Crowell was one of the community's hardest workers. He was in his mid 40's and was very strong. Unfortunately, the community could not afford any fancy tractors to harvest their wheat; so they used an old fashioned sickle. Victor was very efficient at harvesting wheat with his sickle and could out-gather many of the younger members.

This morning was like any other during this time of year. Victor had gotten up at the crack of dawn and headed to the fields for another hard day's work. His friend since youth, Burney, arrived at the field a few minutes after him. Good old Burney was about the same age as Victor and the two had played together as youths.

The freshly sharpened sickle sliced through the light brown wheat with ease. Victor bundled up several bushels in no time at all. Then, when he was working near Burney,

his blade accidentally slipped out of his hand and chopped off his friend's left pinky finger.

However, instead of spurting blood all over the place, the inside of his finger revealed some rather complex circuitry. Burney tried to cover his secret as quickly as possible. He grabbed his handkerchief out of his pocket and wrapped his bloodless wound. Victor was amazed that Burney was not bleeding everywhere. He picked up the sliced finger and saw the machinery inside as he handed it back to Burney.

"Sorry buddy, let's get you to a hospital as soon as possible." Victor tried to act sorry but was concerned by the weirdness of the wound. "That is, if you think we need to go. Normally, a wound this bad would require immediate medical attention, but I do not see much blood in this case. In fact, I have never seen electronics in someone's hand."

Burney was acting very strangely. He held his hand and acted as if it was a very painful wound. Victor was able to perceive that his friend seemed to be faking the pain. Burney did not say anything else to him, but just took off running towards the farm truck. He jumped in and sped off into the distance.

Victor was left standing in the field with his sickle in his hand and a very strange feeling in his gut. He did not know what to think of the bizarre situation. Could his friend for all of these years actually be a robot? How could this possibly be the case? If Burney could fool his friend for such a long time, could some of the other community members also be robots?

Victor wondered if he was real. He took out his pocketknife and made a small cut on the back of his hand.

Blood began to ooze out of the slice and drip to the ground leaving little red dots on the wheat.

“Well, I suppose I am real, or at least human,” Victor said with a low voice. He looked around to see if anyone else was working in the area and might have witnessed Burney’s strange behavior. Randy was in the next field over chopping wheat with his sickle. Victor walked over to Randy and tried to think of a method to test his theory while on the way.

“Randy, did you see what just happened with ole’ Burney?”

Randy stopped his swing and turned to greet Victor.

“No, what do you mean? What happened?”

“Well, it was kinda strange. I was cutting wheat next to him and my hands had got a bit sweaty and wet,” Victor pretended to swing the sickle as a demonstration. “Then, my sickle accidentally slipped a bit and sliced off his pinky, like this.” He swung the sickle slightly and let it slip out of his hands a bit too much so the blade nicked the leg of Randy.

Victor quickly looked down to see the wound he had ‘accidentally’ created on Randy. His leg, just as Burney’s finger, did not bleed either. A circuit board was revealed just under the skin of Randy’s leg.

Victor’s mouth dropped open in amazement as he backed away from the Randy robot in fear. “Sorry about that. It kinda slipped again. Say, what the heck are you anyway?”

Randy did not answer Victor’s question but quickly tried to cover the exposed electronics in his leg. He turned and ran off just as fast as Burney had.

“Yeah, you better run you dad burn robot!” Victor started screaming loudly at the fleeing machine. Victor



was actually beginning to become a bit worried. How many other people in the community were robots? Who is real here? Victor decided he had better arm himself as soon as possible.

If the two robots got together and decided to retaliate against him and try to keep their secret quiet by killing him, he wanted to be ready. He quickly walked to his truck and hopped in. He sped through the wheat field and down the road back to his house. Victor quickly got his shotgun out of the closet and found a box of shells for it. He loaded the old crack double barrel and stuffed the rest of the shells into his pockets just in case.

Unfortunately, Victor's wife had died several years ago of cancer and they had never had any kids. He had been living alone for a while and was not worried about any of his family members being robots. Victor reasoned that if he could find another human and show them that there were robots among the community that he could get some help.

He decided that the best way to accomplish this was to go to the community church house and ring the bell to try to get all the members together in a meeting. This was somewhat dangerous since he did not know if the entire town was robots. If this was the case, he might be quickly overwhelmed, but he had to take the chance.

He walked down the road a bit and stopped at the big bell on the pole outside of the small church building. He began to ring it furiously and continuously. Several women came out of the nearby houses and asked Victor what he was doing. He explained to them that he needed to have an emergency town meeting and that they should gather everyone together.

Immediately, the women went out into the fields to collect their husbands and after a mere thirty minutes or so almost everyone was within shouting distance.

“What is this all about, Victor?” one of the men shouted.

Victor collected his nerves and spoke to the crowd, “We may have invaders that have infiltrated our community. I was in the field with Burney cutting wheat when I accidentally cut off his finger.”

Several of the people gasped at the news. Others had a puzzled look on their faces as he continued his story.

“He did not bleed a single drop of blood. He had some sort of electronics inside of him instead of flesh and bones.”

Now many of the people started to shake their heads in disbelief.

“Have you been drinking Victor?” one of them shouted loudly.

“No. Look I am telling you the truth. Randy is a robot too. I cut his leg and he had wires in him. I am telling you...”

“Come on Victor, what kind of hoax is this?” another yelled.

“I’ll prove it. Come here, Gary.”

Gary looked a bit frightened at what might happen next. He slowly made his way to the front of the small crowd to get to the strangely acting Victor.

“Now pay attention people,” he shouted above the crowd. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his pocketknife. Before Gary could resist, Victor flipped open the blade and cut a small slit into his palm. A trickle of blood spilled out as Gary yelped in pain.

“What the heck has gotten into you Victor? Have you gone mad?” he screamed as he held his hand tightly to try to stop the bleeding. The crowd began to get very restless at Victor’s bizarre behavior.

“I don’t understand. You must be real,” Victor said quietly while backing away slightly from the angry crowd.

“Of course I am real! What is your problem going around cutting people like that?” Gary fussed at Victor.

“Wait! I am telling you all that Burney and Randy were robots! Now you will all be tested or I am going to start shooting!” Victor waved the shotgun in the crowd’s direction showing his intent. They all fell silent and gave their full attention to the shotgun wielding crazy man.

They could not believe that their friend was acting in such an abnormal manner, but they realized he might be serious if he was willing to commit murder to prove his point. Victor tossed his pocketknife to Gary.

“I know you are human so you will be my tester,” Victor shouted to him. “Everyone get into a line!” he yelled at the community members as he waved the double barrel shotgun in their direction. Many whispers were exchanged among the people as they slowly formed a single file line. Victor got behind Gary with his shotgun pointed directly at him. “Let’s get started. A small cut on each of their hands will do.”

Gary reluctantly took the knife and sliced a cut into the first man’s hand. He flinched as the blood trickled out of the opening.

“O. K. you are real too, Next!”

“Victor, when are you going to stop this madness?” Gary begged.

“When we finish everyone,” he replied with a stone cold look on his face.

Next in line was a young lady, one of the many farmer's daughters living in town. Gary took her little hand and made a small incision with the pocketknife. To his surprise, circuitry was revealed inside her hand. He stepped back away from her and stared at the wound in disbelief.

"Great Scott! Victor is telling the truth!" Gary yelled loudly. The girl robot covered her wound and took off running from the line.

"Let her go! We need to test everyone before we do anything," Victor barked to everyone. Gary tested the next person in line and found he was a robot as well. Just as the others had done, he turned and ran out of sight.

They went down the line and tested all of the people of the community. After it was over, only a small handful of real humans remained. Only a total of about 35 people huddled together were left, many of them crying about their loved ones being robots, all of them clutching their freshly cut hands.

All of the robots had run off after having been discovered by the humans. Unfortunately, the community had lost a large amount of their population from the ordeal. However, fortunately, the robots never came back to the town again. All of the members living there had meetings once a month from that time forward to cut each other to test if they were still real. Nobody questioned Victor's words ever again.

## **Wipeout**

The waves were nice and big when Lenny decided to skip his work of flipping burgers at the local burger joint. Unfortunately, he had not ever finished high school because he thought it was not very important compared to having a fun lifestyle. Now, at age 25, he was still in a never-grow-up state of mind. He would always be immature until he decided to take his life a little more seriously. But, for now, surfing and partying would have to do.

Beckoning him to come and play, the never still water taunted him with an excellent surfing challenge. They were particularly nice today with massive crests curling over on themselves. Lenny had waxed up his board the day before and was ready for action.

He quickly donned his wetsuit and hit the water with a sense of anticipation. He waded out far into the ocean while admiring the grandness of the waves. After finally getting into the perfect position, Lenny patiently waited for the right wave to begin to ride. Finally, a rather large mound swelled up underneath him and he jumped onto the yellow surfboard.

He rode the wave all the way onto the shore with a professional flair. Lenny had been riding waves like this for most of his life. He waded slowly back out to his starting position and waited to catch another wave. This time a massive wave came barreling towards him.

“Excellent, dude!” He exclaimed as he jumped up onto his board. He rode the wave in for only few seconds before it completely overpowered him and crashed down on top. His board jetted up out of the water as the wave passed over. Lenny, however, did not come to the surface. He was pulled under deep into the ocean by the undertow. Unfortunately, he blacked out and did not surface.

Later, he woke up on a dry patch of sand. He could not remember what had happened to him. At first, he thought maybe he had died, but later realized that it was not the case. He slowly stood up trying to shake the deep sleep out of his body. He found himself on the ocean floor far below the surface. A large bubble shaped dome kept the water from crushing him.

“Whoa, dude! Where am I?” he thought out loud as he examined his surroundings. The ocean floor under the dome was as dry as the beach up on the surface. It was strewn with many more shells than the surface and lots of dead fish bones.

The dome construction was like nothing Lenny had ever seen before. It was supported by massive gray metal beams with a strange clear substance spanning between them. Lenny could not figure out the composition of the clear material. It looked like a thin plastic film but he knew that such a film would be unable to hold back such tremendous water pressure.

A closer inspection showed him that he could stick his hand through the film and into the water on the outside

without bursting the bubble. The film clung around his arm and sealed itself tight. It was the most fascinating thing Lenny had ever seen in his life.

He looked around and guessed that the dome was probably about a half mile around. He looked through the wall and saw that there were many other domes that dotted the ocean floor as far as he could see. It was practically an underwater city the size of a large surface town.

He looked around the interior of the dome with a sense of awe. That is when he noticed that there were several people off in the distance towards the center of the dome. Lenny began walking to them as he dusted the sand off of his body and out of his hair.

As he got closer he could see that they appeared to be scientists in white lab coats. They were surrounding a large saucer shaped metallic disk. They all had strange tools and appeared to be trying to repair the ship. They were surprised to see Lenny and questioned how he got there. Shortly thereafter, several armed men in black suits came through the nearby wall between the next dome over and the one they were in. They pulled out their pistols and forced Lenny to go with them.

They took him to another one of the domes where there was a normal looking building sitting on the bottom of the ocean. Inside the building, a room that looked like it was a sort of police interviewing area was their destination.

They began to pick the simple mind of Lenny after injecting him with some sort of truth serum. He spilled the beans and let them know that he had skipped work to go surfing, and that a large wave had pulled him under. He explained to the two men in black that he woke up in the dome and did not know how he had gotten there.

After several hours of repeated questioning, the men were satisfied that he was telling the truth and had just accidentally discovered their location. He was locked in one of the rooms and allowed to sleep off the serum.

Meanwhile on the surface, an exhaustive search by the authorities, lifeguards, and EMS personnel was being conducted to locate Lenny's body. One of the people tanning on the beach had seen Lenny surfing and saw him go under. They had recovered his surfboard but were unable to locate him. After several days of fruitless searching, they figured the sharks had eaten his body or he was stuck under the water somewhere and they gave up.

Lenny had been living under the surface in the locked room. The men brought him food and water while they discussed what they were going to do with him. Clearly they could not allow him to go back to the surface. They had already had a funeral for him there. He knew too much to be released back into the public. They could not allow him to reveal the location of their secret base.

After several more days and after consulting with the scientists, they decided to allow him to stay. The men in black explained to him that he had two choices. He could stay in their base for the time being provided he would help the scientists and become a sort of assistant. All of his needs would be met if he chose this option.

Or, he would be released out of the dome wall and allowed to try to make it back to the surface on his own. They quickly explained that that would pretty much be suicide. They were terribly deep under the ocean. There was no way he could hold enough breath to make it to the surface. In addition, the crushing force of the water would surely kill him long before he made it to the top.



Lenny thought hard for a moment, and then spoke. "O. K. dudes, you are saying I can stay here and help the science dudes or I can die trying to go back home. Right?" The men in black nodded their heads in affirmation. "Well I guess I am staying with you guys then. All right!" The men looked at each other and shook their heads while laughing.

Lenny stayed down in the secret base for months and months. He never really caught on to what the science dudes were doing but he had an awful lot of fun helping them. He would go get them tools and parts that they needed at various times.

Finally, one day the scientists felt bad about holding Lenny captive in their underwater world since they could come and go freely to the surface at night via special ships. They held a conference amongst themselves and decided that Lenny had never really comprehended what they were doing.

They reasoned that his intelligence level was low enough that anyone on the surface would never truly believe a story he told about the base. They decided to knock him out and take him to a far off city on the other coast. They waited until he was sleeping for the night and injected him with a sedative.

They loaded the out-cold Lenny on to the ship and flew out of the dome and to the surface. It was midnight and dark as they zoomed across the continent in the classified ship. They dropped him off just outside of New York where it was very early in the morning. The scientists flew back to their base and forgot about Lenny.

When he woke, he had a terrible headache. He found himself somewhere near New York. He wondered what had happened to the science dudes, but was happy to be

back on the surface. He got a job at a local restaurant as a dishwasher and found himself an apartment.

After many months he began to miss his surfing action. He saved up some money over time and bought a one way ticket to Hawaii. He eventually became a professional surfer and competed in many large tournaments to earn a living.

He loved his life and was grateful that his major 'wipeout' was not fatal. The mysterious scientist dudes who lived under the water gave him a second chance at life. Of course, nobody really believed his story but they listened just to be nice.

The author, Andre' M. Leger, is a Louisiana State University graduate. Currently, he writes in his spare time whenever he is not at his full time job as a field supervisor for a large security company. His interests include camping, target practice, and spending time with his family. His love of science fiction, as evidenced in his writing, started when he was very young. Andre' considers this short story collection to be the beginning of a long and prolific writing career.