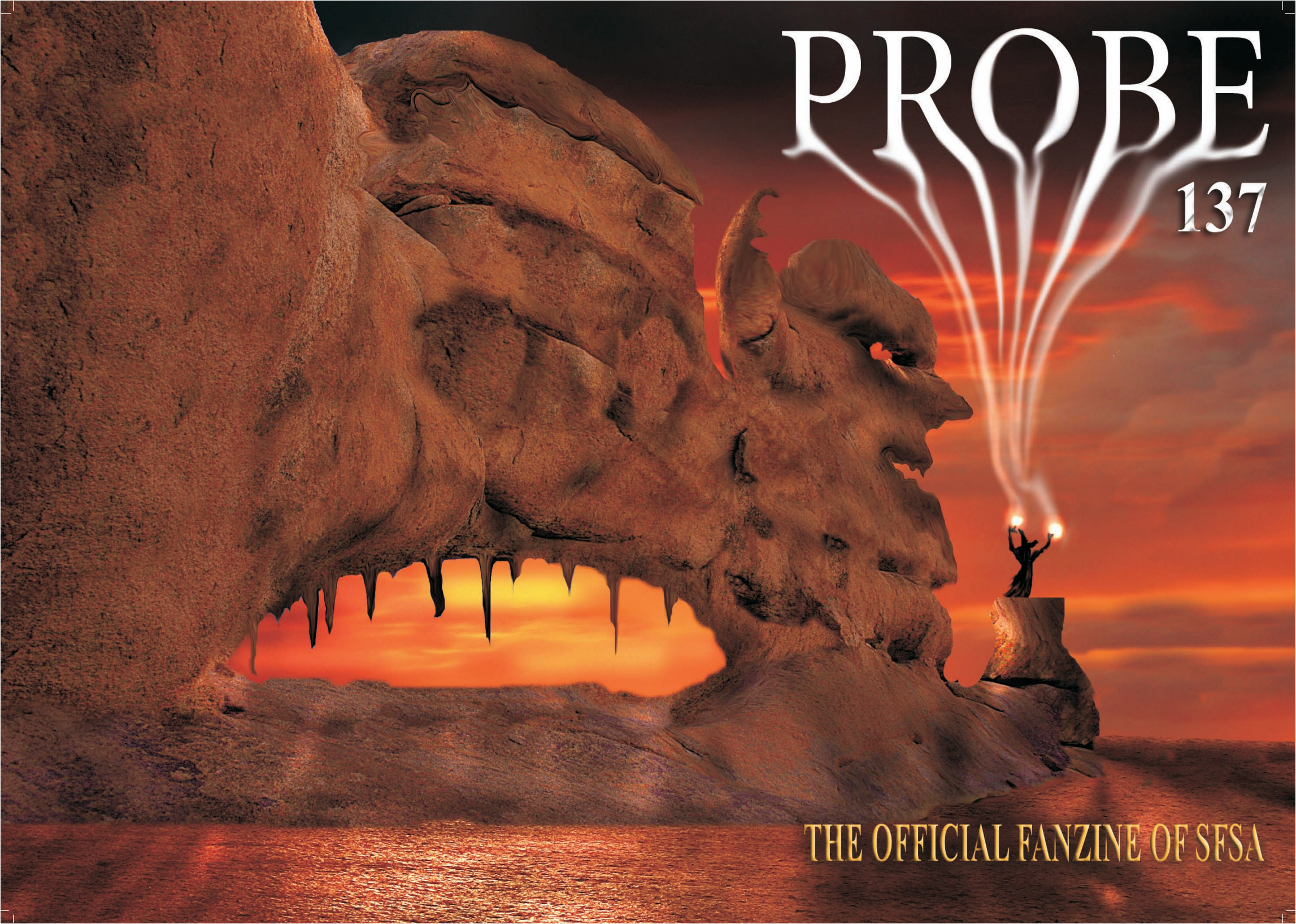


# PROBE

137



THE OFFICIAL FANZINE OF SFSA



# PROBE 137

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*hardly believe our luck and spent the  
day moving everything over .....  
..... been eating Chlorophyte on a  
regular basis, the results are  
amazing. We look younger, feel  
stronger and are actually growing  
taller. We need less food as the  
algae is very filling but I have noticed  
a craving for raw meat. A downy  
layer covers my body which makes it  
easier to keep warm.*

Dr Peter Leverton at 21 :30

## ***Log Entry No. 990 - Sunday, July 30, 2006 .***

*..... my second is undermining my  
authority. Arguments grow fiercer  
every day. He refuses to obey me,  
thereby endangering the project  
.....  
..... tragic accident today. The  
icefield broke up and the spacecraft  
vanished into a chasm. The two  
women were pulled into the  
avalanche.*

*..... our food depleted Four of us  
living entirely on algae, with no ill  
effect. No problem keeping warm*

*now. We stopped research because  
... can't remember why*

## ***Log Entry No. 1026 - Friday, September 15, 2006.***

*Smetna gone ... three of us left  
we can't get home no point in log  
waste of time can't remember must  
eat now maybe soon I will ... what  
was I ..... must eat ...must eat*

\*

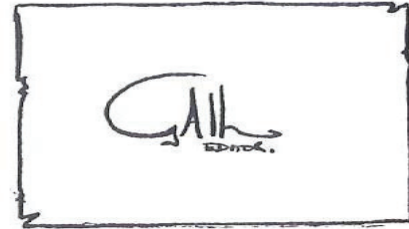
From the spacecraft Mell could make  
out Roberta's herringbone tracks,  
skimmer craft marks and large  
footprints round the base. A  
snowdevil swirled through the area  
and the tracks were erased.

.....

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I was reading a previous issue of “Ethyl the Aardvark” and saw that they have seen a difficulty of attracting new members who stay members, much the same as we do. I wrote a mail to them and in passing, asked how long they had been in existence for. The answer came back – for 55 years. And here I was thinking that we were doing so well. Next year



SFSA will turn 40. Still I think it shows that SF clubs have persistence and stamina. I suppose, come to think of it, WorldCon has been going for 63 years so there must be clubs out there who have been going for that long as well. I wonder which one has the honour of being the oldest one still in existence.

We decided to try our annual camping weekend earlier this year, as we had been rained out before we even left last year. Six hardy souls arrived at the Mountain Sanctuary Park in the Magaliesberg on a sunny Saturday afternoon in April. We set up our tents and sat down to have a sundowner. We were congratulating ourselves on having chosen a good date when Norman drew our attention to the dark clouds building up behind us. Within a very short time they moved above us. We decided that we had better make a fire and cook our supper which we did, to the accompaniment of an increasing wind and as we ate, the patter of rain. And then the heavens opened. And the electricity went off. We all dived into our respective tents and battened down the hatches. Fortunately we had our battery-powered lights so we were not in total darkness. For over an hour the wind tried to blow our tents away and the rain slipped though wherever it could. Eventually, the storm died away. We discovered that the cover sheet of Gavin's tent had been blown underneath him and that his bedding was floating. Fortunately he was able to sleep in the back of his 4 by 4. There was still no electricity and now the stars were magnificent. The following morning other campers told us that there had been a much worse storm the night before. Later on Terry Tharck, a geologist arrived and gave us a talk on the interesting geology of the region and we then walked up the mountain to have a look at it. We decided that it had been worthwhile camping but that just maybe, next year, we would look for a place where we could stay in huts.

## Amanda Meyer

**Mrs. Moses**

And then they called this place EDEN. Ga, look at it now,' said Rietbroer waving an unsteady hand in the direction of the sandy stretch between the houses, 'so dry even the goats have to tie up their stomachs.'

'It was a paradise before the fountain dried up,' retorted Morkel. 'I remember the veggie gardens and the fat pigs and the flock of sheep...' The five members of the People's Electorate were sitting in the Mayor's Office as usual, sharing a *papsak* of cheap wine and complaining about everything "they" promised when the *karretjie mense*, the migrant workers of the North-West, were settled on this land. Most meetings of the electorate ended in a rehash of all the things "they" should have given and "they" should have done to keep the place going.

Why don't you do something constructive, Morkel? You are the Mayor. Stop complaining and do something to restore the water, so that the place can be an Eden again.' Barendse was more sober than the rest; the cheap wine gave him heartburn.

'Like what? Why don't you come up with a good suggestion for once?' Morkel was well aware that there was an election looming and that he had to maintain his position of authority or risk losing his mayoral salary. Barendse sat looking out of

the window at the bare fruit trees still standing around the indentation in the ground marking the location of the old fountain next to the cement reservoir with the rusted pump gear and the greenish rainwater in the bottom. An idea had been forming in his mind since he saw that TV show. 'Why don't you write to Mrs. Moses to come restore the fountain? She had given water to many places, man. Why not us? She does not ask for payment. She was on TV again last week, talking to Carte Blanche. They showed how she just pointed to a rock and the water started to flow out. I know you say she is a fake, but she looks like a good woman. All those other places still have their water. We can only try,' he finished lamely, knowing that Morkel ridiculed every suggestion other than his own. Morkel was sparing with the wine today because he had used some of the 5 litre *papsak*, meant for this meeting, the previous evening and he did not want the others to notice and to accuse him of corruption and illegal use of Municipal refreshments in an election year. The idea of a grand event to boost confidence in his leadership appealed to him. What if this woman could restore the water? His future would be ensured. 'And how do you propose to get her address to send a request?' 'Just post it to the SABC, they will forward it to her.' Barendse was

momentarily taken aback by his own forwardness and even more shocked when Morkel said: 'I propose that Mr. Barendse formulate a formal request for my signature to this lady called Mrs. Moses. All in favour say Aye.' Three stunned voices said: 'Ai,' 'aai,' and 'aai-jaai-jaai-jai-jaai' respectively.

\* \* \*

The road was getting progressively more desolate; the landscape more dry and barren. The soil was mostly bare sand with sparse, bone white grass showing here and there amongst small bushes with tiny green leaves. Piles of dark boulders lay everywhere, as if swept together by a giant's hand. Now and again the road crossed dry river beds with names full of promise: Groenrivier, Rietspruit, Olifantsfontein, Lion's River, Sweetwater, and Elandsvlei indicating that once this area teemed with herds of game, lion and elephant. She saw a few small herds of Springbok and a few flocks of sheep miles apart. Now and then a meerkat bobbed across the road and disappeared. Once she saw an ostrich, black and white plumage flowing in the wind, running up and down against a jackal proof fence. Her constant companions were the crows patrolling the tarred surface in search of a meal. Black crows with wingtips like outstretched fingers, swept against the incredibly wide blue sky, always in pairs. The horizon seemed a hundred miles away.

Next to her on the seat of the SUV lay an envelope decorated with

children's drawings. It was these drawings that decided her to renege on her decision and go once again to draw water from the earth in Eden. Barendse had written a simple letter, stating the plight of the community so far away from civilization, so totally dependent on the one fountain for survival. She received many such requests each week, but this one seemed different, more innocent, more sincere somehow. The children's drawings around the edge of the envelope told a tale of poverty, and drought and hope. The last drawing was of a lush, green garden with happy animals and people: Eden.

She found the information on the Eden project easily enough on the internet, but it was nowhere to be found on a map. It seemed that 20 years ago a young politician donated his farm, some 30 square kilometres of veld for sheep grazing, deep in the semi-desert of the Karroo to the *karretjiemense* – the migrant workers of the area who moved from farm to farm with their donkey carts to help with shearing or harvest. They had no permanent homes; all their belongings were carted along on the donkey carts. Most were illiterate and schooling for children was almost impossible.

It seemed an idealistic project: the land would provide a healthy, uncomplicated lifestyle in tune with the rhythms of nature. A school, a home for each family with orchard and garden, an irrigation system, a community dairy and sheep flock were supplied. Within two years the

community was established and self-sufficient. The sheep shearers still plied their trade, but now they were transported to places of work. The Eden project was the focus of the media for a while, the politician's face prominent in every report; then interest waned.

She had been driving now for twenty minutes without seeing signs of organized life: no vehicles, no homes, no live stock, no fences. The tar gave way to a sandy track a long time ago. Only the presence of the telephone line indicated that there was civilization somewhere ahead. Even the telephone poles seemed stunted: short, thin poles with a tiny crosspiece at the top; two wires sagging from pole to pole.

The veld was winter white and dry. So dry, so dry. Suddenly she remembered the first time she had drawn water from a rock: she had been walking across a burnt veld, every plant and tuft of grass reduced to stubby charcoal sticks. Suddenly a large rock started moving towards her: it seemed to have a thin leathery neck with beady eyes and a boney mouth. She ran, stopped, looked back and recognized it as a tortoise. The animal was still coming at her; the crooked, stubby legs struggling to find soft footing amongst the black stubble. Its neck stretched towards her, the beak agape. Tortoises do not bite people, so what was wrong with this one? The patterned, brown carapace reached to her knee and the animal was pushing against her leg, the beak reaching up to her waist.

Then it dawned on her: it was thirsty. She opened her water bottle and the animal became frantic. She poured some water on the ground. The scrawny head bent down, the bony beak biting the wet soil. She looked around for a hollow rock, and finding none, poured water in her palm. The scaly neck and head was much too snake like in appearance for comfort, but she steeled herself and let it drink from her palm, pouring more water from the bottle. When the water was gone, she had to run away to escape the tortoise who was still thirsty.

The rest of the memory was a bit foggy: she remembered shouting at God in anger to look after his creatures, not to let them suffer; to give them water. And then God's voice in her head: *Why don't you give them water?*

'How?' she had shouted, 'How?' And the image of Moses striking the rock had sprung from a memory of a Bible story long ago. She had groped around for a rock, found one and poked it with her finger. The dim memory warned that it was not such a good idea to hit the rock, but she could not remember why. Cool water had bubbled out. She had placed the rock on the ground in front of the animal and sat there for the rest of the day, watching lizards and rats and snakes and ants and other tiny animals she could not name, appear from the blackened veld to drink from the rock. She was in a haze of prayerful gratitude, unthinking, as if in deep meditation.

She repeated the miracle many times over. She was a passive person, accepting life without much reflection. God had always existed for her, but she was not particularly religious. Soon the media discovered her and innocently she performed as often as she was asked. The media dubbed her Mrs. Moses, and later she was grateful that so few people knew her real name: it allowed her some privacy.

Churches embraced her and proclaimed her miracles as proof of a living God, but most pastors did not like her simple message: in order for miracles to happen, you must forsake Mammon. You can not ask God for money and miracles as well. You have to choose. The preachers debated with her, but had no answer for the challenge of Mathew 21 verse 21. Soon the preachers preferred to talk about her, rather than invite her to speak.

The realization that she was being used by others came slowly and left her only confused, unable to grasp such deviousness. There was the agent who arranged her appearances and pocketed large fees without her knowledge. There was the Town Clerk of a needy town, who had her create a fountain on his private property and then sold the water to the town. There was the fat preacher who wanted water to flow from his chancel – to bottle and sell. And then there was the kindly lawyer who sued the agent on her behalf – and pocketed 80% of the proceeds as fees.

These experiences taught her some wile. She went back to all those places where the water was abused for monetary gain and turned the water down to a trickle, except the decorative fountain in the foyer of the lawyer's office which started gushing at odd times. The lawyer gave her this lovely SUV out of gratitude for turning off that fountain. Lately she only responded to appeals for help for animals in need.

Another dry riverbed with narrow cement bridge loomed as she crested a ridge. She braked, realizing too late that she was driving too fast to navigate safely onto the narrow bridge. Too late she saw the donga washed away between the road and the straight cement edge of the bridge. With feet off the pedals and elbows braced to keep the steering wheel straight, she hit the donga. The SUV gave a mighty lurch and a jump. She hit her head against the sunroof, bounced back on the seat and realized a moment later that she was still alive, still on the bridge, still moving in a straight line between the bridge rails; rails that consisted of no more than a child's beach bucket of cement every metre along the edge of the bridge. She stopped and got out on the other side of the bridge, walked around the SUV and inspected the wide tyres with their large silver wheel nuts for damage, but saw none. Belatedly her heart started pounding as she contemplated the consequences of an accident in this remote location—this was a miracle indeed.



She had slept over in a B&B in a small Karroo town the previous night where the hostess had warned her to drive carefully and showed her photo's of an accident at a similar bridge, the car standing on its nose in the riverbed, the wheels resting against the side of the bridge. The hostess also found someone who could draw a map to Eden, a young man with a toffee coloured face and an angry demeanor.

'I don't know why you even want to go there! They do not deserve a miracle, the way they messed up that place. I tell you, every one who was worth something has left. Only the lazy and the useless and drunkards have stayed behind.'

She looked into his eyes with kindness and said: 'But you made good...'

He became a little pensive: 'Yes, Eden was good to me. The school there gave me the means to escape the poverty and the stupidity of the elders. It was a good place to grow up. The farm was producing good crops. But alcoholism killed it. Men and women and even young people fell to it. Most of their income went to booze, instead of improving the place. By the time I got to high school, the gardens were neglected. The flocks deteriorated. I remember the day they slaughtered the last dairy cow. There was a big drunken party. I do not even remember what was celebrated. Mandela's release or something. What angers me most is how they always blame this or that person for their failure. Morkel sits there with his wine in the Mayor's

Office and complains that Eden was forsaken by the government. Every meeting became a pity party, consuming more of the profits. And now you want to go there too. It will change nothing.'

'At least they can not say that they had been forsaken by God. Maybe they will start again.'

'No, everybody worth something has left there.'

She sat pondering, while picking at her food, wondering what she would find at Eden. Then she remembered reading some research findings indicating that the IQ, the average intelligence quotient, of the population in rural areas was almost 20 points lower than the average IQ of people working in cities. Suddenly it made sense in terms of what the young man said: those who are intelligent and ambitious do not stay in places like Eden, they seek opportunities for further training or a follow careers in a more stimulating environment and do not return.

An hour later she was lost. There was a fork in the sandy track where none was indicated on the hand drawn map. She stopped and climbed through the sunroof onto the roof of the SUV which was rubberized for that purpose. The roof was often used as a platform to protect her from the crowds. The two roads wandered off in different directions for as far as the eye could see and disappeared behind low hills without any indication of which to follow to Eden. She sighed and inspected the heavens; the firmament was just so much wider

here than she had ever seen. There were some cloud formation, great dark clouds; and amazingly, a patch of green sky between the clouds. She blinked, took off her dark glasses and looked again: the sky was green, greener than the sea, green as the first leaves of spring on a willow tree. The sight filled her with soft laughter; a sign surely. Then she spotted a small stone house backed up against a pile of boulders, as high as a hill, almost as if the house was hiding there. The house was almost invisible against the rock; being built from the same stone. The door and window shutters of weathered wood were closed, but intact. A dog started barking as she approached. A small girl with toffee coloured face and hair in two stubby plats, appeared in the doorway but did not approach the vehicle. She got out, smiled, sank down on her heels and asked as friendly as she could: 'And what is your name?' The girl shied away, pulled her t-shirt over her head and ran a few steps. Then she stopped and peaked out shyly. 'I'm not allowed to say.' She seemed about six years old. 'Dash it,' she thought, *'what is the world coming to? I have reached the edge of the world and even here kids are taught not to talk to strangers!'* She knocked on the door. 'There is nobody there,' the little one volunteered. 'Can I look? Is there really nobody?' 'Just my little brother. I have to go fetch water for him because he is crying,' she said in the whiney voice children use when they are

complaining, but also proud of their ability to perform the task.

Yes, she could hear a baby cry somewhere behind the thick stone walls. She opened the door and peered inside. There was a kitchen with a scrubbed table and chairs of a style she had last seen in Van Gogh's painting of his room in Arles. Cups and glasses shone on a green kitchen cupboard with curved glass doors. Beyond the kitchen were two bedrooms; plain but neat. The little girl slipped past into a bedroom and appeared with a boy of a few months old, holding him clumsily under his arms, the thin legs dangling.

'He is hungry.'

'I have some milk in the car. Will you get his bottle?'

She poured the milk into the proffered plastic bottle and looked around for a means to warm the milk, all the while keeping up a stream of light chatter to put the child at ease. The black coal stove was cold and she did not know how to operate the primus stove the child indicated.

'I will just heat it myself,' she reassured the child. She placed her hands around the bottle with a vague, sweet look in her eyes, heated the milk and handed it to the baby, now sitting in a box in a corner, which seemed to be his crib. 'How did you do that? You can do a magic!' said the girl accusingly.

'*Magic or miracles,*' she thought, *'same process, different explanatory paradigm.'*

'Anybody can do miracles. Every child knows about miracles and

magic, but when they grow up they become stupid and forget.'

'Why?'

'Because girls get silly when they grow up and then they just want to kiss boys and then they get babies and lose the magic.'

'And then their children get the magic,' said the child with surprising logic. The girl had brightened up during the exchange. 'Can you show me?'

She poured milk in a glass and instructed the girl to hold it between her palms. The little face screwed up with concentration. She tapped the girl on the forehead and took the glass.

'Magic happens by itself. You do not have to try to do it. Just hold the glass and watch the miracle happen.' Her voice had acquired a deep, melodious tone, but soft as a gong ringing deep within the walls of an ancient monastery. The little face lit up with understanding, as if a light had been switched on inside. She took the glass and looked at it with the dreamy look she observed from the older woman.

'Sjoe!' She put it down quickly, blowing on her burning palms. Then she drank the milk with a delighted laugh. She threw up her hands and danced a hotnotsriel, whirling her slim body and stomping. The older woman watched the merriment and wondered if she was ever going to get the directions from this child. It was getting late.

'And now I wonder if you can tell me which road leads to Eden?' The little one laughed uproariously: 'All roads

lead to Eden!' She danced some more, laughing as if she knew a secret, whirling round and round.

'I know! I know!' she sang in a taunting voice. 'You are Mrs. Moses!' She danced some more, then stopped and looked the older woman up and down. 'No, you don't look like Mrs. Moses.'

'And what should Mrs. Moses look like?' The girl ran into the back room, rummaged in a box under her bed and reappeared with an ancient children's Bible. It was evident that many generations of children had paged through those stories. She searched among the loose pages with their colourful illustrations till she found a picture depicting Moses returning from the mountain with the stone tables in his arms; the tribe of Israel dancing around the golden calf in the distant background.

'Like that!' she said triumphantly.

'How?'

'With a long dress you stupid! And a thingy on your head! Like an angel.' She remembered a documentary program about Princess Dianna. A young girl, who had met the princess, expressed her disappointment afterwards: 'She did not look like a princess. Her hair was short and she wore a blue coat. A princess should have long hair and wear a princess dress ...' she said while indicating layers of frilly skirts. She smiled inwardly; this child was reacting in the same way.

Appearances are indeed important. 'Well, let's see...' She open the back of the SUV with sleep bunk, mini kitchen and computer station, and

drew a colourful, striped caftan, normally used for lounging about her garden, from the cabinet. 'Like this?' she said popping the caftan over her head.

The little girl inspected her critically, as if mentally comparing her with the Moses-drawing. 'And your head .. You must have ...' she waved her little fingers around above her forehead. A little more rummaging produced a forgotten gift from a niece: an Alice band with battery operated, lighted spikes. '*I must look like the statue of liberty!*' she thought, but it seemed to meet with the approval of her little critic who moved purposely around the side of the house as if she expected to be followed.

'Now see,' she said with her hands on her hips, 'every day I must go theeeeere'...' she pointed down a valley, 'to fetch water for the house, and for the chickens, and the dog...' 'She looked at Mrs. Moses, twisting her little shoulders this way and that, hands still on her hips, as if to say: 'jeez, but you are slow!'

'... and for my brother...' '

*'Stuff,'* thought the older woman, '*I'm being blackmailed by a six year old.*'

'O Kay, O Kay..' she said. She pulled a hollowed stone, used for grinding corn, close to the wall of the house, studied the rocks in the wall for a moment, pressed her finger on one and stood back to let the a stream of silver water sprout into the hollow stone.

'... but you must promise me that you will study hard and one day go away from this place and ...' The

chickens smelt the water first, cackled loudly and ran over to the wall, dust puffs forming along their path. The first to reach the water stretched his neck, scooped drops in his narrow beak and lifted his head with floppy comb to let the clear water flow down his throat. The dog, that had been hiding since she approached the house, as if used to being kicked, approached shyly and lapped noisily at the water. Two donkeys, their coats rough and dusty, appeared from behind the pile of boulders behind the house and lumbered with uneven gait to the water. She watched them for a bit, till the girl pulled her sleeve.

'I can't go to school ... the karretjie broke and there is nobody to fix it.'

'But you can read by yourself: just let your mom show you the words when she reads these stories...'

'I know some words said the girl.'

She ran off to the kitchen and began pointing to the pictures in the children's bible; 'Adam, Moses, David ...'

Pre-reading stage, thought the woman. She looked around and then put the child on the table so that she stood in front of the calendar on the wall. 'Do you know the names of the months?'

"January, February, Maaaaarch...." sang the little voice, the hips gyrating to the catchy melody of the ancient tune.

'O Kay. See, this letter is Jhe .. January ...jhe ..trace it with your finger, and this letter is Ffff..

February ... and Mmmm .. March.

This one is Ay... April. And this one



is...?' She pointed alternatively to the M of March and the M of May.

'May? Mmmm!! May!'

'See how clever you are, you can do it already. Now you must just learn to write them. Practice every letter with your finger till you know them and then you write them. I will give you paper and a pencil. But promise me.. you will study hard and become smart and leave this place ...

Promise!' the girl looked up, a little bit alarmed at such a strong appeal, put her finger in her mouth, withdrew it with a plop, held the wet finger to the wind and said: 'True's njanies!'

*'If I can get you to tell me your name ... and if I can get directions to Eden, then I will make some arrangement to get you to school...'*

She suddenly remembered a ploy from an old film: 'You are very clever, but I bet you do not know your own name,' she said in a challenging tone.

'I do, it is Davina!' shouted the girl triumphantly.

'And I bet you do not know your surname.'

'I do ... it is ... Esau.'

'O yea? And I bet you do not know the best road to Eden ...'

'Silly, it is this one ...' she said pointing to the east. She laughed a shy little laugh as if she realized she had been tricked and said: 'You must go, they are all waiting for you.'

The old farm house, shaded by tall, old blue gums, appeared soon after she had rounded the hills on the horizon. She followed the road

around the house, past the barn to a scene of utter abandon and cacophony.

When Morkel received the letter from Mrs. Moses, confirming her arrival, he abandoned all caution and used his whole month's salary to order wine for the occasion. The bottle store in town even delivered the order to his house in Eden. It became a full time job to keep thirsty men away from the hoard. The news of Mrs. Moses' visit soon became the talk of the settlement. Morkel had never been so popular in his entire career. Everyone wanted to speak with him and know more about the event. Speculation about what the woman could do for Eden grew with every telling. The letter stated only the day of her arrival, not the time, so people arrived from early, parked their donkey carts and cars in a wide circle and picnicked around the old fountain. Excitement grew as people milled about and speculated. Some time during the morning consensus was reached that the donkeys should be tethered in the bed of the fountain to create a good impression. She is soft on animals, they said, we saw that on TV. The donkeys, normally a passive-resistant species, got excited by the smell of water so close under the sand and started digging with their tiny hoofs, to great applause of the crowd.

By lunchtime the pressure on Morkel to break out the wine had become irrefutable, but being a sensible man, he realized that the crowd will need food as well, if the lady did not appear soon. He negotiated with the

owner of a small flock of sheep and soon fires were built and four sheep turned on the spit. Long queues formed in front of the cellar where he kept the wine. Soon someone connected a CD player to a car battery and the party got under way.

She stopped the SUV by a gate opening in a stone wall. The gate posts were of ancient dressed, blue granite: the two stones standing as tall as sentries at the gate. The gate was long gone; the gate opening half filled by a vicious cactus plant with long spiky thorns. A long dead housewife, longing for the beauty of flowers in this dry land, had planted a single small arm of cactus near the gate and marveled at the brief, beautiful flowers but over the years the plant that grown numerous arms, taller than a man. The vicious spikes had repelled every effort at eradication. 200 metres further on was the depression of the old fountain, the area still marked by greener, more lush growth than the rest of the place. Thirsty donkeys were frantically scratching in the sand. Around the fountain a few hundred people were dancing in drunken abandon to loud music. The dust from their stomping feet hung like a low cloud over the scene.

She surveyed the area. Beyond the milling humanity, the farm stretched as far as the eye could see. White houses shaded by trees, were evenly spaced, each surrounded by its plot of land, but the gardens lay fallow and dry. The shrubs flowered

only dusty plastic bags. She thought of the many a city dweller who that have a secret dream to live in a rustic place like this where they could live a clean and uncluttered life away from crime and rush hours breathing petrol fumes. A city dweller, grateful to be out of the rat race, would have turned this place into the Eden it was meant to be. Her gaze wandered back to the bed of the fountain. Her inner sense told her that the water was still there, just a metre below the sand. This fountain had been neglected: herds of uncontrolled animals had trampled sand into the eye and blocked it. A few hours of digging would have restored the water. Her anger was slow to form. Always a passive person, she was a stranger to anger. She retrieved her megaphone, switched the hooter of her vehicle to “bull horn” setting and waited for a break in the music.

She seemed an avenging angel, standing there on the roof of the dark SUV with the tinted windows, the setting sun right behind her. The glittery stripes of the caftan and the glowing spikes on her head were all they could make out of her. When the blaring of the bull horn ceased, the crowd streamed towards her like a river and dammed in the road leading to the gate. Everything was quiet. The crowd became still. She lifted the megaphone to her mouth.

**‘The streams of living water can not flow where the spirits of Mammon flow.’** The voice like a

great wind, echoed over the stunned crowd.

**'You will not receive a drop of water if there is a drop of alcohol in Eden.'** Every word was clear.

**'Cleanse this place!'** An ominous echo seemed to reverberate over the crowd.

**'I will return tomorrow to restore the fountain, but if any one person on this whole project consumes even one drop of alcohol,'** the echoes lingered, **'the water will dry up for ever!'**

She slipped down onto the seat, backed the vehicle away from the gate and drove off. To the crowd, looking into the last rays of the sun, she just seemed to disappear. Stunned silence gradually gave way to dumb looks and vague questions. Everybody turned to Morkel. He turned to face the crowd. 'Drink up, my bru's, let's not waste one drop; it is going to be a long, dry winter.'

She parked her vehicle in as lonely a spot as she could find, got undressed, went outside, stretched her arms heavenwards and drew forth a light shower. She showered and scrubbed for a long time, wondering if the creation of an Eden always necessitates the posting of a "Thou shalt not..." And then she realized, belatedly, as a great sadness filled her being, that the posting of any prohibitive law must inherently cause the destruction of every Eden.

*'Moses, O Moses, how could I get so angry with them? How can one not*

*be human?'* she moaned softly to herself.

Before sunup she drove back and restored the fountain. The area was deserted and littered. She did not even watch the donkeys shuffle up and drink from the bubbling water. A dark cloud of failure hung heavy over her soul. The words, once spoken, could not be undone.

\* \* \*

In the stone house next to the hill of rocks, an old argument had broken out again. A wiry little man with kinky hair and eyes screwed up against the incessant glare off the sand, stood over the stream of water splashing into a bucket from the side of the house.

'The stingy bitch!' He said loud enough for the woman, kneeling over some tomato plants, to hear. 'She could have given us a bigger stream of water. Made me rich. Now I still have to work like a slave, breaking my back, carrying water.'

'You ungrateful so-and-so! We are making good money with the pumpkins and the tomatoes!' 'What good money? We could irrigate this whole place if there was more water!' He hit the wall. "If only the hole was bigger!"

He appeared a minute later with a heavy chisel and a hammer, and started chiseling away at the rock that showed many previous chisel marks. The woman ran up, alarmed; tried to restrain him. He hit her. She fell on the ground, grabbed a rock and threw it at him.

'You will kill the water!'

'It is useless,' he shouted and grabbing a big rock, he pounded on the wall with amazing strength in his thin arms. She hung onto his legs, screaming, begging. Suddenly the stone wall gave way. A hole appeared. She shrieked and tried to locate the precious stone in the rubble around the wall. 'My water. My water!'

She ran at him with fists and teeth. He hit back and grabbed a handful of hair. More shrieks. They rolled around on the ground.

The little girl, slightly taller but just as thin, appeared from the house with a book in her hand. '*Silly grownups.*'

.

She looked at them and at the hole in the wall. She clucked her tongue. '*I will never be as stupid as you are. Now I will have to fix everything.*'

She walked around the fighting pair, dragged the hollow stone over to the top of the garden, pushing it along the sand with all her strength, her bum in the air, and placed it below a rock. She studied the rock for a moment, got a dreamy look on her face, placed her finger on the rock, twisted her finger a little to enlarge the hole and stood back to let the thick stream of clear water splash down

# Books Received

## **PENGUIN:**

Matter by Ian M. Banks R170.00

The Rat Killer by Alexander Terekhov R170.00

## **From the Author:**

Moxyland by Lauren Beukes



## Fool's Gold Trilogy by Jude fisher

Being a nasty review - well justified – of Magic Rising, Wild Magic & Rose of the World – by Jude Fisher.      Tor Books

Spoiler warning: if you like nasty books about things which should not happen and certainly should not enter print, don't read any further. Find the books. In brief the story is of another world and an adventure which 'started at the World's Fair'. So far so good – see later – but it is a thinly disguised feminist and anti-Sharia treatise and is oddly out-dated. Good points are made re motivations of all parties, but they are lost in a welter of wordiness and utmost nastiness. Jude Fisher is an editor. Which is a pity. For it seems that Editors don't need editors.

She inflicts some 1500 pages upon us, spreading a pretty good 750 page book into a nasty and overwritten meander through the backwaters of human behaviour.

Have I complained before about overlong? For sure. This did not, though, happen when I read Robin Hobb. Her Fool and her Hero could have as many pages as they wanted.

Most authors bulge a little at the seams [seems so] and an Editor tells them – shorten volume one, spice up volume two, edit, excise and shred almost all of volume three and we have a good classic fantasy novel on our hands.

Jude Fisher did not turn to herself and say this, alas,

Volume one starts off well, with just the one solecism – Point of View. Each character is followed, and sometimes they pass in the road or touch or even interact, and many stories are told. Still, it is pretty good and enjoyable. Volume two is less interesting as further quests begin. Volume three is a nightmare. About 200 pages are readable. The rest describe really nasty things done by really nasty guys. In detail. Then it seems to wind up ok. However, I skipped a lot.

Other rules are broken in volume three. Something which is an innocent cause of much of the book's drama in the first two books is cruelly disposed of in half a sentence in volume three. Yeucch.

There was, in the house of the Mother of a friend a nasty old painting of a terrible subject. "How could you have this upon your wall?" "Oh it is very valuable." Poor taste, Jude Fisher, is everywhere.

So, yes, JF can write. I daresay she can edit. Turn the blue pencil on half of this book and you would have a good one.

If you are not sure what a 'trilogy' is, consult a Book. Or read Robertson Davies. He knows, you know. Or that Durrell fellow. Lawrence. Yes, try him on quartets. By the end of – before the end of – volume three, even the staunchest reader has taken his mind, and his custom elsewhere.

Not recommended.

"The Best of SFSA Volume III" is at the printer. It's been a long time since Volume II and this issue will cover the best of the fiction published in Probe from 1985 to 1996. Liz Simmonds has worked tirelessly to produce an excellent compilation.

It is one that you must have in your SF collection. Please contact us on [info@sfsa.org.za](mailto:info@sfsa.org.za) for prices and delivery information.

# Magazines Received

**Ethel The Aardvark.** 134 Feb - March and 135 April – May 2008 . The Melbourne SF Club Zine P.O. Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Vic 8005. Australia

**Opuntia.** 64.1A Dec 2007, 64.1B Jan 2008, 64.1C Feb 2008 64.3 St Urho's Day 2008 .Dale Spiers. Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E7

**Vanamonde.** No. 718 to No. 735 February 13<sup>th</sup> 2007 to 27<sup>th</sup> June 2007. by John Hertz. 236 Coronado St., No. 409, Los Angeles , CA 90057  
(Still arriving addressed to Deirdre Byrne who was two editors previous)

**Warp 69.** Winter 2008. Vol 22.01 Editor Cathy Palmer-Lister. New address: c/o Sylvain St-Pierre, 4456 Boul. Ste-Rose, Laval, Quebec, Canada H7R 1Y6

**Tumble Junket to the Planet Barrayar**  
**The Lois McMaster Bujold Interview**  
**(Part One)**  
**MICHAEL LOHR**

Lois McMaster Bujold is an acclaimed science fiction and fantasy writer and in my opinion is one of the most underrated novelists writing today. Her novels are engaging, taut and just down right entertaining. A native of Columbus, Ohio –land of distraught, near suicidal Buckeye sports fans- Bujold now makes her home in the frigid land of Minnesota; Minneapolis to be more exact, the home of Prince, Neil Gaiman and Husker Du, or was it the Pixies. Anyway...

Discovered from the slush pile by the late, great Jim Baen himself (one of the greatest editors in science fiction history), Bujold has not disappointed. She has won the prestigious Hugo Award four times, matching Robert A. Heinlein's record. Her novella The Mountains of Mourning, perhaps one of the best science fiction novellas ever written, won both the Hugo and the Nebula Awards. Her fantasy novel, The Curse of Chalion won the Mythopoeic Award for Adult Literature. The same novel was a finalist in 2002 for the World Fantasy Award and her novel Paladin of Souls won a Hugo and a Nebula, her fourth and second respectively.

Lois McMaster Bujold is a very talented writer in the finest storytelling tradition. Her books are filled with visionary worlds, robust characters and mythic adventures. Her creation of the primary religious text from her *Chalion* novels the, *Fivefold Pathway of the Soul*, unto itself could be the focus of a dissertation.

**ML:** Your novel series The Sharing Knife is hitting the shelves as we speak. Without giving too much away, could you tell our readers a little about it?

**LMB:** The Sharing Knife is a fantasy-romance novel, divided into a duology for publication due to length. Volume One is titled Bequilement, and came out in hardcover last fall (and is just now out in mass market paperback); the second half, titled Legacy, hit the shelves in hardcover in June 2007.

The Sharing Knife is the tale of two people, Fawn Bluefield, a young farmer girl running away from home for some very traditional reasons, who meets Dag Redwing Hickory, a seasoned soldier-sorcerer from a nomadic people called the Lakewalkers, who are dedicated to hunting down and killing a recurring supernatural menace called by his people malices, and by hers, blight bogles. The sharing knife of the title is a critical magical weapon to this purpose, and the revelation of just what the knives are and how they work is part of the plot. When both characters are caught up in a malice hunt, a peculiar accident happens to one of Dag's sharing knives, which binds the couple together for a time until the mystery can be solved. Propinquity leads to romance leads to,

eventually, troubles (and growth) neither of them could have imagined at the tale's beginning.

The books and the series have also been my chance to play with genres, attempting to blend fantasy and romance. This turns out to be a trickier proposition than it looks, as the two genres have different focuses, reader expectations, structures, and scopes. The focus of a romance is normally personal: it's the tale of a successful courtship, beginning when the two protagonists meet and ending when their relationship, explored and tested by the plot, is finally confirmed by a lasting commitment. By the end, the reader expects to understand that couple. The focus of a fantasy is normally its world, which may almost be considered another character; we expect to meet that world, get to know it, be shown what makes it different. By the end, the reader expects to understand that world.

Threats in a romance are to the central relationship; in a fantasy, to the world and nothing less, to the limit of whatever scope the book shows, which can range from a hundred-acre-wood to multiple universes. The fantasy reader expects the book's world to be in danger, and the book to be about the characters who will save it -- no others need apply -- i.e., not some other characters down the block or over the hill or in a different generation. Which rather answers that essay by Ursula LeGuin about fantasy vs. Mrs. Brown. (Although the ornery woman in the back of my mind mutters, "Yeah, try and make The Wind in the Willows fit *that* template, sure!")

So I deliberately set myself the problem of weaving these two disparate structures together in The Sharing Knife. This is in part aided by the two protagonists being themselves representatives of the two main cultures of their shown world, so I can explore those world-aspects through them. Whether I've succeeded will be for the readers to say when Legacy comes out -- the reader responses so far seem to be interestingly bifurcated. Some folks relish the blend; others become as hysterical as a toddler who discovers his peas are touching his mashed potatoes. Well, you can't argue taste; but The Sharing Knife is much to mine.

At the end of The Sharing Knife, the matter of the romance was resolved to my satisfaction and that of its mother genre, which was mainly what I set out to do. I might well have left Dag and Fawn there, at least for a time. But the matter of the world still begged some questions, hence the second duology, working title The Wide Green World, of which more below.

**ML:** In your *Chalion* novel series your concept of the five-fold gods reminds for some reason of the Hindu mythos, primarily due to its avoidance of duality and the central scarcity of any central yin-yang principle. How much time do you take to focus on the creation of myth and folklore for your novels?

**LMB:** In *Chalion*, quite a lot. I deliberately set out to make that world's religion non-dualistic, as I think dualism generally is one of the main mistakes of



traditional Western philosophy. It seems to be a compulsion so universally rooted that I suspect it must be biological. People seem to insist, whenever there is more than one of anything, to attempt to shove the items into some hierarchy of value, assign superior or inferior status to them, and scramble to align themselves with the top. Whether *it makes any sense or not*. Books, food, art, races, genders, gods, cultures, religions -- if you can you name it, people will try to make it a counter in status games. People also have a veritable passion for the fallacy of the excluded middle -- choices shall be cut down to two, sirrah, no more, and you'd better pick the right one.

In part, I suspect this is a heritage of people having to process an infinitely complex world with enough speed to make survival-critical decisions before being eaten by the oncoming saber-tooth. Make it simple; make it fast, you might make it to tomorrow morning. But making it simple doesn't necessarily make it true.

So I chose a system of five gods to resist dualism, and to align with a lot of things in the natural world, including the fingers of the hand and the four seasons (and the leftover bits). The Chalionesse religion makes deliberate provision for the untidy parts of life, unlike more Procrustean forms of belief that attempt to chop off the untidy bits to make practice fit the theory.

And, of course, my characters in *Chalion* being as much like real people as I can make them, they *immediately* invented a religious heresy that re-inserts dualism...

A less obvious feature of Chalionesse theology, one that I think not many readers have twigged to, is that in *Chalion* the world created the gods, not the other way around. The gods are the highest-order emergent property of the world. So there is an unbroken line from foundation to apex, from the fundamental structure of the universe, through physics, through chemistry, through bio-chemistry, through life, through brain, through mind, through to the gods. The gods of *Chalion* are continuously generated by their world, remember it all, have evolved, and continue to evolve. If I continue the series, I hope for a chance to follow out this line some more, and see where it leads.

As a more general answer, I tend to do just-in-time world building; I make things up as the book in progress need them, which means that to a large degree my worlds are created by the stories moving through them. Which makes my worlds largely un-sharable, unlike those of writers who start with an enormous amount of world-building, and then construct a story to explore it.

**ML:** What is your opinion of e-books as opposed to hardcopy editions? I remember hearing back around 1999 or 2000 that this new medium would overtake book publishing and render books obsolete in five years, but as of 2007, this has not happened, and doesn't appear to be plausible. Do you think e-books will exist much like audio books, as a supplement to the actual hardcopy book?

**LMB:** So far, e-books seem to be falling into a supplemental niche just like audio books, yes. Tree books are mortgage money; e-books are (still) pizza money.

Although I note with bemusement that ninety percent of my audio book sales now take place as internet MP3 downloads, for people to play on their i-pods and what-not, rather than the bulky physical media of discs. I hadn't expected that to change so much, so fast.

As the generation comes up for whom reading off a screen is the default norm, and as reading devices improve, I expect to see more e-books sold, or at least downloaded. I'm not sure how much this will help the economics of individual living writers, as given the infinite shelf space in such e-book stores as [www.fictionwise.com](http://www.fictionwise.com) (who are adding about 120 new titles a *week*), a writer finds their books competing for reader attention not just with one season's releases, but with a century's worth of offerings. Time for people to read in is still only issued 24/7, a hard limit. You do the math...

**ML:** Do you believe there exists the quintessential science fiction novel? Some would argue that for fantasy, J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy is just such a work.

**LMB:** A few years back, I read a review in which the reviewer made the enthusiastic assertion, "All books should be Towing Jehovah!" (He was dissing one of my books at the time, which is how I happened to be reading it.) Which gave me a mental flash of an entire Barnes & Noble superstore filled with nothing but various editions of Towing Jehovah. The hardcover, the paperback, the trade paperback, the limited leather-bound... the Towing Jehovah Cookbook... the Towing Jehovah Pop-up Book... Losing Weight by Towing Jehovah... The Annotated Towing Jehovah... The Towing Jehovah Companion... Son of Towing Jehovah... ☺

I think even the book's author James Morrow, once he got over the first flash of economic thrill, would be appalled (I've met Jim, who is a very nice man, even if he does writes books that are not to my taste).

I am increasingly of the opinion that there is no such thing as a quintessential book in any category, toward which all authors and all books should convergently aspire (and suspiciously closely matching the personal tastes of the asserter), and that the notion that there ought to be is pernicious. It's just another example of the compulsive hierarchy-building that I wrestle with in the Chalionesse theology. Every book should be itself, to the top of its bent.

The question, "Is this book good?" should always be countered with the question, "Good for what?" The words "good" and "bad" are merely modifiers, and have no intrinsic meaning till they are attached to something very specific. There is far more than one purpose in reading, and far more than one kind of good book for those purposes. Literary monogamy is not required: you're *allowed* to love more than one.

Or, in short: No.

**ML:** As a heralded science fiction and fantasy novelist and supporter of the genre in general, do you feel that speculative fiction, as a medium can change the way people look at the world, especially in such dark, pessimistic times we live in?

**LMB:** Social engineering is the province of sermon or propaganda, not of art. When art changes the way anyone looks at anything (which it may, as a side-effect), it's a very uncontrolled consequence, shifting -- even with the same text or image -- with every receiver in every different time and place. The writer shapes, but does not control, the reading. The most a novel can do is let the reader see how one writer looks at things, which the reader is then free to take or leave as they please. Indeed, more and more as I read, I have the sense not of entering another world, but of entering another writer's head. There are some people's heads I care to be in, others I don't. But I no longer mistake them for the world.

To put it another way: I am not a literary Neo-Platonist. I do not believe there is a disembodied Ideal Book/Genre/Whatever. I've defined genre as "any group of works in close conversation with one another", which is genre from the practitioner's point of view. Genre is a *consequence* of the way a lot of folks are looking at the world and reading and writing about it -- transactional, a continuing feedback loop. Genre is an emergent property of this process, and therefore -- if it's live art at all -- always changing and growing.

Obviously, the conversation has the possibility of devolving into a bad or destructive feedback loop; likely the best way of averting a downward slide is to encourage as much variety as possible, to buffer the system.

**ML:** Much like British novelist Storm Constantine, you push boundaries and explore concepts of gender, gender equality, homosexuality and social justice in your novels. Is this interjection of social issues into your writing deliberate?

**LMB:** As you may guess from the trend of my answers so far, no. I am interested in people, in what goes on inside their heads. My main thematic interest is probably identity formation -- how folks get it, lose it, change it. The rest of it just comes along for the ride. As I once described one of my characters, I'm as apolitical as I can be and still be conscious and walking around.

That said, no writer can escape writing their own world-view. It's a default, like breathing. One might hold one's breath for a time as a stunt, but it would be hard to sustain. World-view is inherent in the very choices of what topics and people the writer is interested in enough to write about at all, in the choices of heroes and villains (or lack of them), in the kinds of problems they tussle with, in the other genres the writer has internalized or rejected, absolutely in the world-building, which is the writer's psyche projected onto the page. F&SF doesn't need "symbolism" in the sense that the literary genre uses it; it's all symbol here, folks. No work can exist and not have all these aspects, but they aren't necessarily a conscious agenda.

**ML:** Literary pundits always opine for the next great American novel. Is such a creature just myth or does such an ideal truly exist? And can a genre novel succeed in gaining such a stature? Some say Kurt Vonnegut achieved just that with Slaughterhouse Five.

**LMB:** I thought the Great American Novel was supposed to be Huckleberry Finn?

It's all a myth. Publisher hype, mostly. And, dear lordy, stature according to whom? Who is this faceless authority that you are letting set itself up as the arbiter of your thoughts? And why are you doing this, again? Actually, I know why: it's "Reading for Status", again.

Well, actually, that's unfair to the folks who are either honestly looking for or to share some good reads that excite them, or looking for a fine argument as a fun art form in its own right. Both those are legitimate uses of literary discourse, I think. It's not all one-upsmanship.

( Continued in the next issue)

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Michael Lohr is a professional journalist, outdoorsman, treasure hunter and adventurer. His writing has appeared in such diverse magazines as, Outside Magazine, Southern Living, Cowboys & Indians, Sailing World, Caribbean Travel & Life, Canoe & Kayaking, Outdoor Life, and Adventure Sports, to name a few. He contributes regularly to Bluegrass Unlimited magazine and Persimmon Hill, the Journal of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, and also had a few dabbings published in Rolling Stone and Esquire.

His webpage can be found at: [http://www.internet.is/artist/writer/michael\\_lohr.htm](http://www.internet.is/artist/writer/michael_lohr.htm)

## Book Review

## AL du Pisani

**No Tomorrow**      **Philip Machanick** A novel about Climate Change

Rampage - paperback - 356 pages.

Philip has been a member of SFSA for many years, although currently living in Australia. It was therefore interesting when he sent us his novel for review.

Martin Truscott, child of a failed marriage, and a failed relationship with his one remaining parent, his father, turned to computers to fill the void in his life. At University, a young woman managed to socialize him, but then abandoned him also. Now in his early thirties, he is embarking on a journey of discovery, and he sets out to find out the Truth about Climate Change.

In this journey, he will find out about Climate Change, but he will also resolve some issues with his family, as he starts out with a new love.

Stylistically, this is clearly the novel of somebody inexperienced. Yet the story told was interesting enough that you could read past the choppy flow of narrative.

This is a book with two stories. The interesting one is the story of redemption and healing of relationships, as a new relationship is being forged. Since in a lot of relationships, you cannot go forward until the past has been sorted out, to one degree or another, I found this part of the book the most interesting.

The story about Climate Change is unfortunately, a different story. There are three major reasons for this: The choice of occupation for the main character; an inability to articulate what Climate Change is, and what should be done about it; and thirdly dishonesty about claims made for Climate Change, by implication and omission, rather than explicitly.

Taking them in order: The story of the impartial and unbiased journalist honestly seeking the Truth, is in many ways a discredited trope. Real life has produced so many examples of "unbiased" and "impartial" journalists who were neither, and who kept on insisting their obvious bias and partiality was a figment of their audience's imagination. And whose search for the Truth ended up finding a truth in line with their pre-existing bias and partiality.

So Martin Truscott, making a film about Climate Change, and earnestly trying to find out what is the truth, rings alarm bells in my head. Secondly: The author never explicitly writes down what is meant by Climate Change, and what should be done about it. He assumes that the reader already knows about it, and knows what should be done. And this is not the case.

Climate Change as I understand it, is an argument that the temperatures of the world are rising and, or falling, solely due to industrial and other activities of Man. And then to resolve this, Man should go back to living a pre-industrial lifestyle. This may be a crude and simple caricature of Climate Change, which would be denied by a lot of people active in the field, but is unfortunately the impression I got from the writings and resolutions about Climate Change.

Thirdly, once the author has failed to make an argument of what Climate Change is, and what should be done about it, he starts bringing in snippets of evidence. These snippets are never placed in any context, but are dropped into a general pool, resulting in the idea that the scientists working on Climate Change are erring on the small side, on what the effects of Climate Change will be.

Let me try and write about some of these claims:

**Solar influence:** Early in the novel, an alternative theory explaining Climate Change is brought up: Namely that the Solar cycle drives weather and climate on Earth. (And on Mars and Neptune, but that is usually not mentioned) Now, the full argument requires more knowledge about the Solar cycle than I have, and it is an area where scientists know that they do not fully understand the process and what drives it. But in short, the Sun goes through cycles. The best known is the 11 year sunspot cycle, followed by the cycle of 22 years. In these cycles the amount of energy emitted by the Sun varies, from a high to a low. The argument for this theory is that we are currently coming out of an energetic cycle, where the Earth warms up. Thirty odd years ago, when the Sun was in the low energy part of the cycle, Newsweek had a cover story about the coming Ice Age.

This theory is dismissed without explanation in the novel. As is the Medieval Climate Optimum and the Little Ice Age, which seem to support the Solar cycle theory.

**West Antarctic Ice Sheet (WAIS):** Here is one area where the author admits that scientists do not know what is going on. And he uses it as evidence that we should be worried. The WAIS is a huge frozen body of fresh water. Should this become unfrozen for any reason, this should cause the oceans to rise an estimated 30 meters. This will be an epic disaster. But scientists do not know enough about the behaviour of ice flows etc, to be sure if and when it may happen.

More research is clearly needed. The author stresses this example on about five occasions in the book.

**GISS and calibration of weather stations:** The Goddard Institute of Space Sciences operates a series of weather stations across the USA. Using these weather stations, and additional sources, such as space based monitors, they produce climatic data. This data is used in climatic models to predict what is going to happen with the world's climate. Some people have looked at the data coming out of these weather stations, and are worried that the data is wrong, or uncalibrated.



For instance, there are regulations on where weather stations have to be located. These regulations were drawn up in the 1930s. They specify locations in the shade, in a non-built up area. Since then, the built up areas have expanded to surround some weather stations, and some new weather stations have been located in built up areas. These weather stations are therefore no longer measuring the same environment they were originally. So much so, that a certain weather stations has been documented to be in a parking lot, outside a lot of buildings, all dumping their waste aircon heat on top of it.. (There are some observers who believe that some of this is being done deliberately, to increase the temperature measurements.)

This is covered in maybe half a page of dialogue in the book, when one of the scientists explains that it would cost too much and would be an ongoing job, to calibrate the weather stations. That this was accepted without question, is completely unacceptable. And the only reason this could be handled in this fashion, was because the context that I gave above, was not given.

Models: While the book talks about climate models a lot, and it is mentioned that some predictions by some models have at times been discarded, it is implicitly assumed that the models uses models are inherently accurate. And this is a not the case. While there is accurate climate data available for the last thirty years, no model has ever taken the first 25 years, and used it to predict the next 5 years, and came to anything close to the measured climate. Since models are inherently simplifications, there are areas that are not being modeled. For instance, clouds have only recently been incorporated into climate models.

The Kyoto Protocol: This is touched on by implication in the novel, as one of the solutions to Climate Change that has been accepted in the real world. What is almost never said, is how much it is going to cost: Thousands of Millions of US Dollars. (And the USA is expected to provide most of the money)

Where millions of dollars was too much to pay for accurate data, thousands of millions are expected to be spent on solutions, based on inaccurate data.

A book that argues for the same old song, I cannot accept this.

Nova 2007

SA Section

Third Place

Liana Botha

## Children of Eden

Then the earth reproved the unrighteous

- The Book of Enoch 7:15

*(Translated from Ethiopic by Richard Laurence,  
London, 1883)*

The church elders called them The Watchers – large rims of broken, half-demolished buildings on the outer edges of Johannesburg, empty hulking shells of dead giants. They were always there, ominously circling our homes, great brooding things, marvels of an age not so long past. The elderly still spoke about them sometimes, but not loudly, for the church hated them, and those who had built them.

I didn't know much of their history, nothing beyond what the elders themselves told. *Men much like ourselves*, old father Cloete would say, eyes glowing with drink and fervour, *led astray by their idleness. They invented great things – giant buildings, mammoth structures and cities, luxuries Satan himself desired...and where did it get them? It annihilated them, and annihilation is inevitable with these things.*

Old father Cloete was dying now, but his propaganda refused to be smothered as age set in. It was evident outside his home, where my mother and I waited with dozens of others – most of the town, it looked like. Father Cloete's protégés and advisers made periodic appearances to appease the crowd. They spoke of great rewards waiting for him, and their eyes glowed with the great rewards waiting for *them*, if they were chosen to succeed him.

That was probably the thing that fascinated me the most about the Old Ones, the ones who had built The Watchers – their freedom. I had heard some things (mostly snatches gleaned from our neighbour's loony ravings as she, too, deteriorated), things that seemed like myths now, of how everyone had been allowed

to do pretty much what they wanted, how they were free to say and think as they pleased.

You could still have that, but now there was a price tag. But as my grandmother had commented, before she gave up this world for the other, "There has always been one."

It was Trevor Tomlin who came out to announce that *respected leader, beloved father and generous adviser* Cloete had gone on to a place where *God would surely reward him*. He added that a successor had been chosen. With great fanfare Disciple Khumalo was announced. Applause followed.

"Oh God," murmured Tannie Annetjie, who stood next to us. She lived in the house across ours, and her hair was terrifying to behold: a great gold stack of it. "To the dogs,

to the dogs!” She didn’t like black people because her forefathers hadn’t liked black people. *Why hadn’t they?* I had once asked her. She couldn’t remember.

The crowd dispersed soon after that, Disciple Khumalo urging us to be solemn in our prayers, as Cloete’s passing indicated evil things to come. *Such a good man does not part so heavily from this earth unwarranted*, he explained earnestly. *He knew his people would suffer, and he wanted to warn them, but decaying bodies linger for no one, as is God’s will.*

“Kak man,” whispered my grandmother in my mind. She did so often, especially when there was drama in the air. “He was afraid he wouldn’t go to heaven, and he had

reason to be. As for decaying bodies, brandy will do that.”

\*

I always watched the light colouring The Watchers in hues of red, gold and orange when the sun sank below the horizon. With dazzling lines of gilt drawn around their frayed edges, the old buildings truly did look alive, and almost brooding. Marie, Tannie Annetjie’s daughter, fiercely believed that those mammoths lived, and that they served as a warning against the dangers of over-thinking. *We are simple creatures*, she would say, nodding vigorously, *and we should not bother with thinking too much*; it only did us harm.

The prettiest girl in town at fourteen, Marie had the luxury of not needing to think, and I doubted if she would ever transgress by over-thinking.

She had been old Cloete's favourite during his last years, *net na die slang haar gepik het* (like my grandmother used to say), and things weren't different with Disciple Khumalo. I was watching the sunset when I spotted him outside Tannie Annetjie's house. It was her husband, Oom Frik, who answered the door, and even though he disliked black people too, he would never disobey the church. Disciple disappeared inside, and the street was quiet again.

"I hope Annetjie likes coloureds," my grandmother said earnestly, and after awhile I started giggling. My mother found me like that, giggling at my grandmother's voice, and ordered me outside, to distract me from *the devil's things*. I silently thought there were more "devil's

things" outside than in our house, but I went. I was lucky enough not to be pretty, and went mostly unnoticed by the Inspectors who patrolled the streets.

We lived in a small area known as Core. It was a blatant lie, as we were the closest to the Plains, or those areas of The Watchers and beyond. The real 'core' was the place the churchmen and their families lived, and other wealthy people, sometimes even the attractive concubines of the powerful.

"Sandton" it was called. Marie would end up there, probably soon – she was turning fifteen, and then she would be married or kept, as fifteen was the usual marrying age.

At seventeen, I was an *oujongnooi*, and at nineteen, I would be hopeless.

I traipsed the streets, circling out towards the Rim, which was the last block before you entered the Plains. No one went there, not even horny kids, and the place was deserted. If I walked across the torn tar road, and stepped onto the cracked pavement, I could be punished. I'd be right under The Watchers, I'd be standing in their shadows, in the pits of their stomachs.

I stood here often, poised at the edge, almost tumbling but not quite. It was an eerie sight, this place, so empty and deserted. Where Man had failed to demolish completely, Nature had taken over, and greenery throttled at the cement, the tar, the timber and steel. It was like a giant garden, monstrous and broken. And free.

Perhaps Marie was right, perhaps The Watchers were alive. It was almost as if the silence here breathed. There was a feeling of unease, of resentment, among the mounds of rubble and earth and plants. *Why have you left us alone, why have you deserted us, why won't you come closer?*

The shadows in their bellies seemed to twitch. I couldn't move.

"Hey you!" The harsh voice bounced off the concrete. It was an Inspector. His badge gleamed silver in the final rays of the sun, and an aggressive face met mine when I turned around. I recognised him. He was one of the church's most recent turn-about, men who had strayed from the Narrow, but who were redeployed in an effort to lead them right.



He peppered me with questions immediately – what was I doing here, what was I looking at, wasn't I supposed to be home, didn't I know it was almost past the curfew. I replied solemnly: I wandered off to the wrong place, I wanted to clear my mind of Cloete's death, I lost track of time, I was sorry about it all. "Am I in trouble, Inspector?"

His aggression turned almost instantly to a leer. Swaggering closer, thumbs hooked through his belt, he said, "You might be, you might not be. It all depends on your actions." He made a tweak at his holster, and then at his zipper.

"Inspector, I am a married woman!" I said, shocked and aghast. Inside my head, Ouma cackled, clapping together her gnarled hands, eyes swimming with tears.

"You live in Core, don't you?" he asked, shrewdly. "I know you; you hang out with *Mooi Marie* sometimes, don't you? So who is it, this 'man' you're married to?"

I pulled myself upright and said, without flinching: "God."

\*

Inspector Nel delivered me to my house twenty minutes after that, having spent most of our walk back apologizing profusely, he had only been kidding, would I forgive him? And then he had launched into his story, about how he had strayed from the Narrow. Being an Inspector was, first of all, an act of shaming.

*It makes you, and everyone else, realize that you've sinned. Father Cloete always said shaming is a necessary part of redemption. By being shamed, we lose the shell of*

*wrong-doing, to reveal our inner goodness.* “Some inner goodness you wanted to reveal,” my grandmother remarked, and I had to stifle my giggles with sobs. “How true, how true,” I told Nel, and he seemed pleased with himself.

My mother was upset that an Inspector had found me. “Oh Emjanette!” she cried, exasperated, dragging me into the house. “What have you done?”

“It wasn’t her fault, ma’am,” Inspector Nel told my mother. “She was upset about Father Cloete. She lost track of time. We all lost track of ourselves, today, so no harm done. Right, Emma?” he asked, desperately.

*Of course,* I replied. *God alone judges,* I added, and Ouma told me off for being spiteful, but with a smile.

\*

The sky was grey and churning when I woke the next morning. Twitching back my curtains I watched as it rained, the *patter patter* loud on the *sink* roof. It was Monday, the day before Cloete’s funeral, and all the world seemed to be in mourning. Even though it was past eight, the houses lining the street were silent and still. No one moved, nothing rustled, the world was a prayer.

I could hear movement in the kitchen. My mother ran a home industry, which was a very respectable pursuit for a modern woman. Cakes, loaves, buns, cookies and desserts, all sold at the local bazaars on Sundays. My mother was a respectable woman; she didn’t do “*men’s work*” like Rosie

Day in the next street, who ran the postal office, or Mara Joubert, who built houses. The church didn't usually approve women working like that, but my grandmother said they sometimes allowed ugly women to do what they wanted, because they couldn't get anything from them anyway.

*It's a good thing to be married, she'd told me, before she finally let up for once, and passed away. Married women have nothing to worry about. The church don't kak where they sleep, and that sort of adultery is a sin not even they dare commit.*

As soon as I entered the kitchen, my mother turned to me. "Emjanette," she said, and there was something choking her voice. I was named after my two grandmothers, Emma (who

was still so verbose) and Annette, who had died long before I knew her. Only my mother used my full name, and only under duress.

"I want you to be dressed by six tonight. Annetjie, Frik and Disciple Khumalo are coming over to see your father, and you will have tea with us afterwards."

I didn't understand at first. "Tea" meant "marriage proposal", something that had happened only once to me before, when I was fourteen. Marie had had several so far already, but the church had approved none of them. "Why?" I asked. "Tea? I mean—"

It dawned on me. "He's only thirteen!"

My mother hid her face by splattering a pan with a chunk of butter. "He turns fourteen in a month. He's a big

boy for his age, which is probably why he's getting it so early."

Jacques Vosloo was, at thirteen, a tall lad who played soccer for the school team. When I visited Marie, he would usually be fooling around outside with a ball, barefoot, splattered with mud. Sometimes he mowed our front lawn for a few pennies. I usually took him lemonade.

"Andrew Duvall was a totally different case, Emjanette – your father disliked him instantly – but Jacques...you'd better prepare yourself, dear, your father will agree, and as Disciple Khumalo himself is coming along, the church agrees, so there isn't any way out of it." She said it all very quickly, while spooning batter into a pan. She didn't turn around.

Then she added, brightly, "Marie is engaged, too, Disciple visited them yesterday. The church felt Marie should marry, so that her beauty does not get the best of her. They selected a suitable candidate, from the Sandton congregation too. Ike Watt. Ever heard of him?"

"He's forty years old," I said. He owned the market.

"Age is nothing," my mother said airily.

I didn't believe her.

\*

After lunch, when the rain stopped, Marie and I took off into the streets. The day was gloomy and the light was strange, but it at least was open. Our homes were stifling us, a sort of thin panic spreading through the musky interiors and seeping in under the floorboards and shut doors.

Ouma said it was called *claustrophobia*, but when I mentioned this to Marie, she was vehement.

“It’s demons, not some made up disease,” she said, nodding vigorously. “Father Cloete told me all about it. How the demons swayed us into believing we could cure ourselves with potions and philters and – *doctors*.” She shot me a fearful glance. Doctors were a forbidden topic. They insisted people were organisms, and got ill. *Lies lies lies! We are all inhabited with the spirit of God, we are not animals, if our souls are clean our bodies are clean!* Old Cloete, like my grandmother, refused to be silenced, and his propaganda mulled around in my mind.

After that, we fell silent, and in the misty light we went unnoticed. I was

leading the way, as Marie rarely left our street. Now she was engaged to Ike Watt, the richest, fattest man in Johannesburg, no Inspector – or anyone, for that matter – would bother her. I asked her how she felt about Ike.

“He’s forty, Emma,” she said, “he’s old and he’s ugly and he’s gross. But Daddy thinks it’s a good connection. Ike lives in Sandton, in a big house. Only Disciple Khumalo’s house is bigger. I don’t know why Disciple wants us married. He doesn’t like Ike.” She giggled. “*He doesn’t like Ike!* I don’t either.”

She hesitated, shooting me a nervous glance. “I like someone else,” she said, and even though the air was chilled and we wore only jumpers over our cotton dresses, her

cheeks glowed red. "In fact, Emma...I...I think I love him."

I asked her who it was.

"Jonas," she replied breathlessly, and gave another squeamish giggle.

Jonas worked at the butchery. He was a boisterous black boy, just past sixteen. Oom Frik called him a "kaffir". I pointed this out to Marie.

"What's that mean?" Marie asked.

I didn't know. "Maybe it's just a made up word?" suggested Marie.

"Probably," I replied.

I stopped suddenly. We were at the Rim.

I hadn't meant to come here; my feet had followed themselves. Marie stopped, too, and for a moment we both stood watching the ruptured view across the street. Here and there, through the large gaps left by the spiking fingers of had-been

towers, we could see a greener horizon. It looked like a promised land, fresh and alive. Behind us lay a concrete prison, its gardens and parks mere window boxes.

"The Watchers?" Marie asked, pointing.

"Not yet," I said. "Across the street – the street after this one. That's where they begin." And that was where they ended.

"Have you ever been--?"

"No. I come here to watch sometimes, but I've never been across the road."

"I think they see us," Marie said, and we fell silent. Marie was right. It was as if the old buildings pulled what remained of them together, to stand straight and proud, waiting for us to dare pass judgment on them. We stood like that for a long time, *Mooi*



Marie and I, staring. We both felt it, like we felt each other's heat – the old things were considering us, trying to make us out. Something returned our stare with its own. My skin pricked with Goosebumps.

"I think they miss us," I said. The silence hissed. My heart beat in my ears – *this is stupid, this is stupid, this is stupid.*

Marie was in tears. She knew what they felt, she sobbed, she missed Jonas and she didn't want to marry Fat Ike with his twelve horses and his carriage and his big house behind the rectory. She wanted to be invisible, she hated *dead Cloete* and Disciple and the church. And finally, she wanted to go home.

I delivered her to her house just as the sun was dropping in the sky, towards the haggard line of The

Watchers. Her tears had dried up, an ominous kind of silence taking its place. She walked into the shadows of her house without a word. I shut the door behind me, and turned to leave, but the door swung open again.

Jacques looked nervous for all his brawn. "You'll be there later, won't you Emma? Afterwards – for tea?"

If I refused to have tea, I refused the marriage. Not that it would matter much. It would be a silent protest, but it wouldn't change anything. "Gandhi was an idiot," my grandmother remarked, but I didn't know what she meant.

I wanted to tell Jacques a lot of things, none of them to do with marrying him. I wanted to tell him about The Watchers and Jonas and the silence of the rain. I didn't

understand my own mind. Even Ouma was silent, for once. For a few moments we stood there together, and there was a strange sense of unity as we both struggled to figure out the way our mouths worked.

“Have you ever been to the Rim?” I asked him finally.

He hadn’t. *Why do you ask?*

“I’ll take you sometime,” I replied. I left. It was all I could promise him.

\*

Marie disappeared before her parents’ appointment with us at six. Jacques came over to tell us. *My sister’s disappeared*, he explained nervously. I watched from the doorway. *Without a trace. She shut herself in her room when she came back, and twenty minutes later she was gone, door shut behind her.*

Khumalo and his Inspectors were roaming the streets, and two dozen other volunteers. Jonas was gone as well, but he hadn’t disappeared as quietly. A few people reported that they’d seen him leave the butchery an hour before he was supposed to go. Some said they were sure a girl with a heavy cloak was waiting for him, but they admitted it could have been their imagination.

We joined the frantic search parties, our way lit with torches and gas lamps and candles. After a while I lost my parents in the darkness. The moon was waning, only a thin strip left before it would disappear completely. The dark shadows between the moving lights rustled, and I soon lost myself.

I wandered slowly, meandering away the time. I couldn’t quite believe that

Marie was gone, that she'd taken Jonas and ran. All through the hasty interrogations just after her disappearance I had repeated I knew as little as anyone. *No, she didn't seem strange when we came back, she was just a little shocked about Ike. No I don't know where she would have gone to, or why.*

Lies, of course. I knew instinctively she and Jonas were in the shadows of The Watchers or beyond. They wouldn't have gone far, not in the dark, but come morning they would be unreachable. The Watchers would never tell their secret, and nor would I.

I walked among the pattering of feet and the distant thunder and the sharp smell of rain. I walked close enough to feel the heat of the panicking parties. Drops started to

fall, one by one, until they clapped on the tar and the people, and voices were yelling and lamps were spluttering into darkness. Soon I was stationary. I realized I stood close to someone, close enough to feel their breath on my cheek. It was Jacques. He was crying quietly.

I held him to my chest. "Where's she gone, where's she gone?" he kept asking. And I kept telling him, "Don't worry, Jacques, she's free."

*She's free she's free she's free she's free she's free.* It became his lullaby.

Soon he was asleep, his lamp spilled onto the tar and extinguished. We were huddled together on the pavement of a strange street, and the sky was growing lighter. A few stragglers wandered around, dazed and wet, and as the last drops of rain

pattered away, the noise of gushing drainpipes took their place.

\*

My mother found us like that, just as the green silk ribbon of dawn broke over the crumbled remains of the city.

“Emjanette! Who is that? Is that—oh, Jacques, thank goodness! Your mother is raving! Why are you sitting here? Let’s go, there’s going to be a plaza meeting in a few hours, everyone has to be there. You’re soaking, both of you! Come!”

We marched silently after my mother. Soon we turned an intersection and found our street buzzing with the remnants of the search party, people trying to find information, and those politely curious who lined the pavement. Ike Watt had arrived — his horse

cantered up and down the street, left to its own devices. My mother was engulfed by a swarm of bodies wanting to know — is she dead? Have they found her?

“Hopeful, aren’t they?” Ouma asked, and there was a sigh in her voice.

\*

Jacques’s parents were sitting in their kitchen around a large, heavy wooden table. They were staring at the grain of the tabletop, mute. Tannie Annetjie glanced up when we entered, and Jacques went to her and they hugged. Then everyone became still again. I wanted to leave. Oom Frik began to speak then, slowly at first, but after a while the words just spilled out by themselves. He blamed himself; he should never have listened to the *bliksemse kerk*; he should have gotten to know

Jonas. *He's always been very polite to us*, Oom Frik said, nodding vigorously, and I realized *that* was where Marie had picked it up. He was a large barrel of a man, more meaty than fat, and his knuckles were clenched white. *It's all my fault*, he concluded.

We left a little after that, so that the family could grieve alone. *They're treating it as if she's already dead*, I told my parents, but they didn't break stride; in fact, they didn't look even mildly surprised. "She might as well be," my mother answered. I glanced at those hulking monsters on the horizon. *I wasn't made of concrete*.

That was why I set out to find Jacques at the plaza meeting. He was at the back, away from his parents, as mute and void as ever.

"There's something you need to

see," I told him, and took his hand. Nobody noticed our slip; soon, we'd left the crowded plaza and the wide main roads for the alleyways. We walked quickly. Jacques didn't ask where we were going.

We walked half a block on to reach the spot Marie and I had stood at. The same stretch of torn road and rubble, the same leering fists pointing forever upwards. Jacques looked around with mild interest; he still didn't understand.

"We came here, Marie and I, the day she left," I said. "We didn't plan to...we just ended up here. It was fate. I think she and Jonas ran this way."

Jacques followed my pointing hand into the cold shadows. A sudden shrill twang reverberated in the air, bouncing between the buildings and

street. "Cloete's funeral," Jacques said quietly.

"They won't realize we're gone for hours," I said. "And even then..." They might not realize we're missing at all, or they might not care.

"They won't come back with us," Jacques said. "Marie and Jonas, if they're not—if they haven't—"

*The Watchers consume people, and the skeletons litter their bellies.* It was Old Cloete again.

We looked at each other. Without taking his eyes from me, Jacques stepped from the sidewalk, and onto the chunky street. The moment strung in my head, and countless scenes flashed past. Cloete was screaming. Everything he'd ever said, all his warnings, pounded in my ears. *Sinners seek them out, and*

*there is no repentance for embracing their call!*

"We're all sinners, Emmannette." My grandmother was earnest. She always pronounced my name precisely, without the slip my mother gave it. Her brow was furrowed, her eyes frank. "Every last one of us. That's not the question God asks. What he asks is, *do you believe?*"

I stepped onto the road. Another shrill blast scattered the air, like it was Cloete's rage as his voice was banished from my mind. Jacques gripped my hand tightly.

"We can achieve nothing with this," he said.

"I know," I replied.

*Freedom – Can You Afford Not to Pay?*

It was drawn in huge, belching fire-black letters on a stretch of



crumbling wall. It almost looked like an *advertisement*, similar in style to those in the monthly Church Gazette. My grandmother always said the church's printing press was bordering awfully close on *technology*. Then she'd giggle and do the crossword, asking my father how you spelled Nebuchadnezzar.

*With two z's*, he'd reply.

Jacques didn't understand it, and neither did I – not entirely, at least. "Tannie Diederik from next door," I told him, "once said that the old ones were free. They could do whatever they wanted, and think and say whatever they wanted."

"Father Cloete said *Freedom Made the Church Die*," Jacques said. "But my father said it's always been dying, it just didn't know it."

"Too right," commented my grandmother. This time she had a "water tonic" in her hand. *For my rheumatism*, she'd always say, smacking her lips, a sharp clear smell on her breath. *Don't you tell anyone*, *Emmannette*, she'd threaten, and I could have a sip.

The ghostly shapes of the broken buildings rose hauntingly around us.

Vegetation crawled through the cracks and slithered down the walls, and in some places it carpeted the shades beneath the empty hulls. Our every footstep was magnified, our whispers bouncing back, embellished with intent. I could hear my heart beating.

It was early afternoon and the sun was arched up high, beating down senseless heat. Everything baked with it, and even the shadows of the

gaping holes seemed vagrant, the coldness gone. We walked on and on, snaking our way through the winding labyrinths, carefully picking a path. As we went farther, the buildings' damage became more ruptured, their intestines spilling around them. I knew then, as we passed a colossal heap of debris, that we'd left The Watchers behind.

It felt strange. They no longer stared at me, barring my view of the spaces beyond them. As we walked and walked, the tall buildings thinned and the rubble became more pronounced, great earthen mounds of it, greenery spilling from its womb. The skies were opened to us – a liberated vault of blue with straggler clouds, all pure white, drifting lazily past, driven by a force high above us, one that did not care for our

presence or our desecration of the church's laws.

Night fell just as we paused beneath the spreading canopy of a large willow. Its many reeds swayed gently to the wind. We settled beneath it, having made no provision of our own. "We should've taken my father's canvas, and some food," Jacques said. But we both knew, had we lingered, we wouldn't ever have left. And we both knew it would have been a much starker end, trapped in Core with the church elders.

"Cloete used to call the town Eden," I said. There was a pause, and we both burst out laughing. We giggled ourselves to sleep as darkness cloaked the land, the willow's many wands swaying above us.

Pat Jacobs

## Footprints on a Distant Moon

A snowdevil spiraled past snatching Mell's hood off. Her auburn hair flamed against the monochromatic landscape. Icy needles stung her cheeks. Turning her back to the wind, Mell tugged the hood up, lifted her snow goggles onto her forehead to examine the tracks. 'Same as last time,' she yelled. Constantin placed his size seventeen boot inside the print.

'Incredible,' he rumbled in his Russian bass. 'Must be size twenty. ' 'Maybe someone had their feet wrapped in fur skin,' said Georges, 'or maybe it's an animal. A type of bear, per'aps?' 'There aren't any animals here,' said Mell. 'It's a man's footprint. Maybe Haig will believe me now?' 'Stop criticising,' Georges said,

his eyes snapping, 'the *capitaine* is a good man.'

Mell was sick of arguing with Georges. Surly bloody frog eater. Also it was tiring to shout over the ululating wind. She tapped her wrist. Time to return to base. The two men tramped to the skimmer. Mell picked up the sample holder and looked at Fugi standing off to one side, barely visible in white fur. He was gazing at his wrist monitor, waiting for Roberta. Mell touched his shoulder. He turned, liquorice eyes aglow with exhilaration.

Fugiwataraki Yoshimitsu looked no more than sixteen. He was nineteen, still far too young for this type of mission but a brilliant addition to the team; with an IQ of 196; a genius in robotics. One always thinks of

Japanese as dour. She loved his irrepressible humour and he lightened the leaden mood at the base, caused mainly by their cheerless commander.

Fugi pointed. 'There she comes. ' Mell braced herself to face the wind. A black figure came skimming across the ice.

Roberta. The robot designed, built and operated by Fugi. At this distance she looked human, except that she ran on tracks, leaving twin herringbone patterns on the snow. She went where no human could, digital eyes capturing data needed to make charts, tables, and maps.

Maps? Of this desolate landscape? Not a mountain, tree, or landmark anywhere? Just flat ice field as far as the eye could see. A better use for Roberta was to sense temperature; warmth in the form of submerged volcanoes, animals, liquid water and even more importantly, lost humans. God forbid, thought Mell with a shiver.

'Time to get back,' she yelled at Fugi.

He ran towards the robot.

'Darling, you're home.'

They stopped short of each other.

Roberta made a series of bleeps.

'Say what?' he said.

Mell's mouth twitched and she joined in the game.

'What did she say?'

'She said,' he turned in a circle, 'snow, snow, snow, nothing but snow.'

Mell laughed.

Fugi followed her back to the skimcraft, Roberta tagging along behind.

\*

Fugi finished drying Roberta and dropped oil into her joints and track system. If Roberta stopped working they were in deep shigla. He was in the mood for kata, to loosen his muscles and relax his mind. These people made him tense with their unhygienic habits and petty squabbles. If he hadn't suggested the immersion tub, they would never have bathed. As to the arguments, they were getting worse.

A shadow fell across him. Fugi looked up. His grandfather always warned him about Americans: Never underestimate their capacity for violence, Taki, he'd say, outside they appear relaxed and friendly but inside they are killers. After two years working with Max Ryder, Fugi realised his grandfather had been prejudiced.

'Are you sleeping with Roberta tonight, my little yellow peril?' said Max. 'Or can I borrow her?'

Fugi hissed in his breath.

'You waste your time American giant, she fligid.' He reverted to his normal voice. 'Have you heard about the men stationed in a weather station who each had a wooden board for sex purposes? One guy killed his best friend because he caught him sleeping with his plank. '

Alexa came out of the laboratory.

'Who? Max Planck?'

Max and Fugi burst out laughing.

'You two laugh at anything,' she muttered.

They laughed even harder.

Still smiling, Max strolled over to Mell. Ah ha, thought Fugi, he's after Mell the Red.

\*

She saw Max coming and a ripple went through her. Mell was cool when it came to men. Her father was a serial womaniser and she'd sworn never to marry. A couple of men had spent time with her but didn't stay around long enough for a commitment. Ten people thrown together on a remote world for two years, it was only natural liaisons would be formed, and broken. Mell was surprised when Max began to take notice of her. With Rochelle around, Mell was surprised anyone even saw her.

'What you doing, Mello?' Max asked. Thinking'

'Want to talk?'

'Okay. Drag over an airbag.'

'I hate sitting on those things,' he replied. 'I don't know what to do with my legs.'

Mell had this urge to say, Wrap them round me, and felt her cheeks getting hot.

'Uh, ... what's the commander doing?'

'Writing home,' Max said. 'As usual.'

\*

**Log Entry No.881 - Monday, 19th day of June, 2124.**

*Work Report:*

*Weather relatively calm today.*

*Today's team was: medic, geologist, robotist, and meteorologist, to gather respectively: ice samples, regolith, if any can be found), terrain features (SSW), and weather information.*

*We are at the end of the winter phase on Europa, so Constantin has not been able to study the geology per se, nevertheless he goes out regularly and is a valuable team member. (More on this subject below under Personal Note.) The Jovian summer is here and once the ice layers melt a little, it may be possible to find rock samples. The geological research is the only section that's behind Once completed, I may decide to head back to Earth a month or two early.*

*Laboratory fully functional. Alexa has her own microbiology reports, as*

*required by the Director. After recent setbacks, maps - above and below the ice - have been recorded by "Roberta". Due to snowstorms and lack of landmarks, we rely heavily on the robot to find the way back to base. Compasses are unreliable because of the fierce magnetic field from Jupiter.*

*Alexa and Kameko, our astro-biologist, are cultivating flora samples. As hypothesized, basic vegetation such as lichens, ice mosses and algae are abundant. Krill has been found. An important discovery because, Kameko posits, where there is a food chain there must animals to eat it. Although, as stated previously, none have been found*

*A type of stonewort (the Latin name escapes me) or grey algae is available in great quantities, which contains calcium, protein and minerals. I've been eating it. It tastes quite pleasant - far better than it looks - somewhat like broccoli. Not everyone agrees and they refuse to eat it. Kameko was an excellent*

choice for this expedition. Being Inuit makes her ideal for the conditions. She's unfazed by the sub-zero temperatures (-134° at night but rising!) unlike the rest of us mortals. Circadian time is easy to maintain because it's dark inside the "igloo" but the 9.8 hour day (earth hours), cuts into the amount of time that can be spent outside (approximately five daylight hours). As stressed by WUSS-2 Executive, the ship is kept stocked, fuelled up, and in a state of readiness for our departure in five months. **Personal Note:**

Yesterday, staff stayed in due to winds of 160 knots. I dread the days when they can't go out and try to keep them busy with chores, but they're becoming increasingly restless. As previously stated, some members are attempting to subvert my authority and, I now suspect, take over this project. The seconds-in-command, Maxwell Ryder and Mellory Keegan are the obvious culprits.

After thirteen months on Europa, Keegan's mental stability is suspect.

For example, she maintains she's found human footprints. This upsets everyone and I've had to pull her up about irresponsible reporting. Today she found another set of these "prints" and again insists they are human. She knows it's impossible for humans to be here but she continues despite my warnings.

Reports have filtered back to me that she's saying I'm an unfit leader.

The psychologist, Rochelle, is most unreliable. She disturbs the men with her blatant sexuality and cannot do her duties with objectivity. I strongly recommend that in future endeavours of this nature, women should not be included on the team. The ceiling blocks have to be replaced again. Naturally rising heat causes melting.

Replacing the ice blocks uses up precious research time but is a necessary part of daily life here.

**Commander Altman P Haig  
signing off at 21:46 (Earth time)**

\*

A noise dragged Mell out of deep sleep. She lifted her head to hear

and cold air crept down her neck. She shivered and pulled up her collar. What woke her? It came again. Outside. A roar, and in the distance, an answering cry. The hair on her arms rose.

She struggled out of her thermobed. Max, Constantin and Byrne were in the mess pulling on outdoor gear. What is it?' Mell asked.

'There's something out there,' said Max.

'I don't think we should go out,' said Byrne, shivering. 'We don't know what we're up against.'

Rochelle came out of her cubicle, looking as if she'd been at an all night bacchanal. 'What happened?' she asked huskily.

'There's something outside,' said Max, 'we're going to check.'

'Forget about the skimmer,' Mell said, 'I don't think ... '

'I'm not going,' said Byrne abruptly.

'Max and I will go,' growled Constantin. 'It's better not too many go.'

'Come on,' Max urged him, 'or whatever it is will be gone. '

They watched anxiously as the two men opened the retaining door, letting in a mini-tornado of snow. Byrne busied himself turning up the water heater. He was a small man and Mell didn't blame him for not wanting to face God only knew what out there.

A minute later Max rushed back in. 'Connie's given chase,' he panted.

'Tell Haig if we're not back in five minutes, send

Roberta.'

Then he was gone again.

'What is Connie chasing?'

Before Mell could reply, Haig emerged pulling on a blue anorak. He shouted, 'What's going on?'

'Someone's outside.'

'Are you still on about footprints. '

Mell shook Fugi awake. While he booted up Roberta, she zipped into a thermal suit.

'You're not going *anywhere*, do you *hear*?' Haig yelled. 'It's dark. You'll get *lost*.'

Ignoring him, Mell grabbed the bullwhip off the wall. They'd all laughed when Alexa unpacked it on



arrival but she'd shrugged and said she took it everywhere.

Haig followed her back and forth, almost hysterical.

'... and if anything happens to Ryder, we can't get back to Earth.'

'Fugi, keep track of us. '

'Right, Mell.'

'Are you *listening* to me? I *forbid* you to go out. '

'Commander Haig,' said Mell,

'Connie and Max are out there. I'm just going to assess the situation.'

That's the only language the idiot understands, Mell thought grimly.

Meeting jargon.

Outside, the cold made her gag.

Fifteen bleeding moons and it was still pitch black.

She pulled down her infrared goggles, waved the LaserLume beam back and forth. No tracks, just churned-up snow. As it turned out she didn't need tracks, roars and yelling guided her as she stumbled toward the men.

They were on the ground while a man larger than Connie, stomped on them. She shouted. The stranger

looked up. In the beam she saw he was covered in ... fur? Hair. Grey hair. She cracked the whip, hoping to frighten him. No bloody fear. He started towards her. Just then her hood blew back. The ... thing bellowed, turned and ran Stunned at the speed he moved over the ice, Mell watched him vanish into darkness.

Constantin groaned and heaved himself up. Max was unconscious but breathing.

Saliva gathered at the corners of Haig's mouth. His tirade had gone on all the time Mell examined Max's injuries: two cracked ribs, a sprained wrist, bruising, mild concussion.

Max murmured, 'His strength was ...'

'Shhh,' she said. 'Rest, but don't sleep yet.'

Everyone crowded the opening of Max's cubicle. They were anxious. Without Max they had no pilot. Haig had been an astronaut a long time ago but wasn't up to date on technology.

'Look, he's going to be fine,' Mell reassured them. 'The doctor says clear out and let him rest.'

'Stop throwing your weight about,' snapped Haig, 'I give the orders. This is your fault. You and your footprints. '

'She was right,' Constantin said, 'the footprints were human. '

'You said an animal.'

'I think ... I am not sure. '

'Obviously, it was some sort of, of, ... of *bear*,' said Haig. 'It's entirely possible there are animals here. Kameko, didn't you say that?'

Kameko blinked.

'Not that sort of ...'

'I refuse to listen to any more of this. Everyone back to bed, we have a full day tomorrow.'

Mell was frustrated. She could see Haig falling apart and with Max unfit, that left her to run things. Haig would never accept that.

After an hour of tossing Mell gave up trying to sleep and sat with Max. He frowned in his sleep, so he was in pain. She gently took his hand and only then realised ... she was in love

with him. He sighed and the frown cleared. She rested her cheek on his thigh and got comfortable. Maybe they should go home. They had everything they came for. The geological research was behind; they hadn't expected a solid icecap, but most other...

Someone was creeping around. She got up and peered round the curtain. Fugi slipped out of Haig's cubicle and headed for his own.

'Fugi?' she whispered.

He leapt a foot in the air.

'*Shigla!* You scared me. I thought everyone was asleep.'

'Obviously. '

He glanced over his shoulder, crowded into Max's cubicle with her. Haig was so secretive about his precious logbook he'd become curious and begun reading it once or twice a week. The man's crazy he told Mell, tonight he'd written that she was trying to take over his command.

'*I'm trying...?*'

'Yes. That you refuse to obey his orders. '

Rochelle peered in.

'What are you two talking about?

You woke me. '

'Sorry,' said Mell. 'Come in. There's something I must ask you'

She asked Rochelle's opinion on Haig's mental state.

'At first I thought it was incipient paranoia,' Rochelle said, 'but he's displaying all the symptoms of borderline personality disorder.'

'That's not serious, is it?'

'More serious than it sounds,' said Rochelle. 'Depending on how far he goes. The signs are anger, disturbed self-image, instability. This leads to impulsivity with ...'

'Hi,' said Max. 'Is it visiting hours?'

Their heads swung to the patient.

'Hello,' said Mell, 'Welcome back. '

'Woo, what a hangover. How was the party?'

It took two seconds for Mell to realise he wasn't delirious but joking. They all fussed over him until Mell said he needed his rest. He squeezed her hand. She touched his cheek in reply. Fugi went off to play computer games and Mell took Rochelle back

to her cubicle to hear more about Haig. It wasn't good news.

He was likely to become more irrational with the possibility he could put lives in danger, even his own.

As soon as it was light, Haig gathered the day's team; Mell, Georges, Kameko, and Fugi with Roberta, but when he said Max had to go there was a chorus of objections. There was no room for shirkers, he shouted. Everyone was shocked into silence. Except Mell. 'Two cracked ribs and concussion is hardly shirking,' she said coldly. 'The conditions are tough out there but you wouldn't know that, would you?' Haig's eyes narrowed into two blue flames.

'What are you suggesting? That I'm not pulling my weight?'

'I mean you don't go out.'

'I'm not supposed to go out, I'm supposed to plan.'

Before the argument was over, Max was ready to go. He felt fine, he insisted, it was better to keep moving. Mell was incensed. Here she was fighting for him. Shit, *men!*

Essentially, Georges had to check his instruments, the rest were there to help Kameko collect samples. Mell ordered Max to stay in the skimmer with Fugi.

\*

'We have half-an-hour of light left,' Max said. 'Maybe we should call them back.'

'Be cool,' said Fugi, 'Mell knows her time and Georges said it would stay clear all day.'

'It looks threatening to me.'

'How d'you feel?'

'Stiff and sore in the ribs, otherwise fine.'

Max glanced at the monitor. He saw three orange blobs against a grey background, hopping about in an intricate dance. The blobs came together, grew and turned deep orange, then red as they drew near Roberta.

'They're coming back,' said Fugi.

He pressed miniature keys on the wrist computer. The blobs vanished as Roberta circled, then picked them up again. Soon three figures appeared and Max felt himself relax.

The terrain was treacherous and at the back of his mind, was the fate of the previous expedition. Everyone had vanished. They hadn't even found a sign of the ship.

Kameko was ecstatic. They'd found two preserved icefish skeletons which they'd cut out in a block of ice and stored it in the sample bag.

'What's an icefish?' asked Max.

'It's a scale less *percoidean* of the family *chaenichthyidae*, with a transparent body...'

'Whoa. Keep it at kindergarten level.'

'It's a fish found in icy seas,' she explained. 'I told Haig where there was krill there'd be animal life. '

'He thought you meant bears,' Mell said.

While she rattled on about her find, Max smiled at Mell over Kameko's head.

Fugi noticed a yellow blob on his monitor.

'Look,' he shouted, pointing.

'What?' said Georges.

Through thickening snow there was a flurry of movement.

'I see him,' Kameko shouted. '*There!*'

'No!' Mell cried. 'Kameko. *Wait!*'  
But the tiny Eskimo was already  
vanishing into the snow. Mell chased  
after her.

Max shouted after her. Last night,  
the creature seemed afraid of her.  
Not of the whip. Of her. All her life  
she'd kept physically fit and trained  
hard when she'd been accepted for  
this trip, she soon caught up with  
Kameko.

'He's gone,' she said to Mell. 'I've  
never seen anyone run so fast on  
ice.'

'We'd better go back. The snowfall is  
getting heavy.'

'Roberta can find us.'

'Come on, Miss Alaska, I'm freezing.  
I wasn't born to this weather.'

'Miss Noatak actually.' She  
hesitated. 'Was that what attacked  
the men last night?'

'Yes. Let's hope there isn't a whole  
tribe of them.'

They met Roberta on the way back.  
She circled behind them.

'What happened?'

'He got away,' Kameko told Fugi.

'Where's Max,' asked Mell.

Georges and Fugi stared at them.

'He went after you,' Georges said.

'Didn't you see him?'

'No. Why didn't you stop him? He's  
not fit to be out there.'

'He ran after you. '

'Quick, Fugi, send Roberta.'

'It is getting dark,' Georges said. 'And  
the snowfall is increasing.'

'I'm not leaving him out here,' Mell  
shouted.

She forced herself to calm down. He  
couldn't have gone far.

'Let Roberta look,' she said to Fugi,  
'we'll follow her.'

They searched for an hour. By then it  
was completely dark. They forced  
Mell to return to base.

'This is your doing,' Haig yelled. 'Now  
you want a search party to go out.'

Next thing there'll be five people lost  
instead of one. You stupid bitch.'

'Steady on, old man,' said Byrne. 'It's  
not Mell's fault.'

'Shut *up*,' Haig screamed. 'Shuddup,  
all of you.'

Mell wouldn't rest if she didn't look  
for Max. He wouldn't last more than  
a few hours at night. She called for

volunteers over Haig's vehement objections. Everyone pictured themselves slowly freezing to death. Even Rochelle volunteered. Mell chose the strongest; Constantin, Georges, Fugi and herself. And Roberta.

They searched the remaining four hours of darkness and nine of daylight. They couldn't find him. When they arrived back the others were waiting for news - all except Haig.

'He's in there,' whispered Rochelle, 'writing his log.'

Everyone fell into bed but Mell couldn't sleep. She sat near the boiler to keep warm, trying to think. Roberta had a range of eight miles in all directions. There could be only one reason why they hadn't found Max, he'd fallen into a crevasse. In which case they'd never find him. She felt her heart petrify. Mellory Keegan, in love for the first time, now he was gone. Hot tears welled over. It was a long time since she'd had reason to cry.

Mell awoke aching from sleeping on the floor.

Fugi sat staring at his computer screen. Mell sat up quickly.

'Is Roberta out?'

' Yes. Nothing yet.'

Life went on. She put oats in the solar oven, then she had to use and empty her Butt-Scuttle. She trudged the required thirty yards from the igloo, dug a hole and was swilling out the bucket, when she heard a distant roar from a westerly direction and an answering cry from the southwest. That's what she'd heard last night. There was more than one creature. She hastily filled the hole with ice and ran back.

They had to search again, Mell told them. There was more than one iceman, they must have a refuge. They'd search for three hours then, if they found nothing, head back along a different route and arrive at base as darkness set in.

\*

The dome of the igloo was a welcome sight. Mell had pushed the three hours into four, with another

four for the return trip. They'd seen nothing but flat ice. No sign of Max, an iceman, or his lair. Georges was first into the igloo.

*'Dieu! Que s'passer ici?'*

Shock turned Mell to stone.

Broken dishes, overturned tables, ripped curtains and clothing, all of it strewn around as if by a madman.

The Japanese bath had been tipped over, torn paper floated in pools.

Mell's first thought was that Haig had flipped and done this.

They heard a scraping noise outside.

Skin prickling, they stared at the entrance.

Connie stepped into the passage, blocking the way. They heard panting, moaning, muttering. A woman's voice.

'Rochelle?'

Connie caught her as she fell.

'She's fainted,' said Mell, 'put her over here.'

She came round three minutes later and began to jabber hysterically in French.

Georges frowned.

'She says ... three furry creatures came and took everyone. Ran off with them.'

'Jesus,' said Fugi. '*Three* of them?'

'Why didn't they take her?' Mell asked

He translated.

'She was emptying her bucket and hid in the snow.'

Mell sedated her, covered her with pieces of sleeping bag.

'We can't assume they're dead,' Mell decided, 'we have to look for them.'

'*J'ai folie*,' said Georges. 'Madness to tackle these creatures. I say we leave for the ship before they come back.'

'I say we look for the team. '

'Da,' Connie agreed, 'dey our team. '

Georges said he would stay with Rochelle and gather food, research samples, reports and personal items.

There wasn't time to pack instruments, they'd leave them behind. Mell told him not to forget the log book.

The search party pulled out at first light.

\*

Kameko was the first to spot the cave.

This time they'd taken a west-southwesterly direction and traveled for two hours when Roberta picked up a group of yellow blobs off to their left. Five of them. Unmoving. Putting their heads together they agreed it could be three icemen and a child, or woman, but could just as easily be the team.

As they drew nearer, Fugi checked the monitor, no sign of movement. That's when Kameko saw a black hole in the snow, about three feet high. Mell left Fugi with the skimmer. 'Guard it with your life,' she told him, 'or we'll all die. '

Mell was terrified but they had to attempt a rescue, otherwise it would haunt her forever. They crawled through the opening into an ice passage high enough to stand upright. All this time, living in the raging elements and here was shelter. Probably others.

The tunnel sloped sharply downwards and gradually the passage became warmer as ice

gave way to rock face. Connie couldn't help but smile as he pocketed rock samples. Up ahead the tunnel widened.

Heart hammering against her ribs, Mell stepped through the opening into a cavern.

Dim green light filtered through ice in the roof. Water trickled in a never-ending veil down algaed walls and ran into hollows in the rock floor, forming pools of varying sizes and depths. The pools had grey-green muck floating on it. One large pool was a mass of grey algae. A natural nursery. The mustiness of rotting vegetation was overlaid with the stronger smell of animal lair. Their breathing was the only sound next to dripping water and the occasional groan of shifting rock.

Ripped clothing lay about and Mell recognised Alexa's fleecy top and Haig's blue anorak. They looked at each other and knew. Without clothes they were dead.

'Kameko,' Mell said softly, 'What d'you think?'



'This is their home. There must be a pantry.'

Mell gagged. They searched the walls.

'Over here,' called Kameko.

Mell followed Kameko into a cleft.

Another ice passage. The tunnel slanted upwards, a freezing current drifted through it. The passage led into a small ice cave, brightly lit from a steep chimney open to the sky.

Nature's freezer. Mell recognised the coppery smell of blood. Thrown behind piled wooden crates, they found Haig, Byrne and Alexa. Naked, frozen, and stone dead. Kameko retched and ran out.

The crates were splintered but faint markings read WUSS-I. My God, equipment from the previous expedition. They contained rusting instruments, books and papers preserved by the cold. The creatures must have killed everyone and taken the crates. Mell scratched through a couple and in one found a book with WUSS LOG BOOK written on the cover. She zipped it inside her suit and got the hell out. She'd seen

plenty of dead bodies but they weren't her friends.

Connie stood in the opening of the largest passage. Mell looked across the cavern at Kameko pale and trembling, leaning against the wall. Above her was a rock shelf and on it, far back, Mell saw a black shape. God, was it a sleeping iceman? But they were greyish-white. She played a beam over the shape.

'Max!' she yelled.

At the same instant a roar echoed in a tunnel.

Connie dragged Max off the rock shelf. He was hypothermic, his breathing shallow, but he was alive. Connie hoisted him into a fireman's lift and made for the exit. Kameko was frozen with fear at the grunts and roars echoing down the tunnel. Coming nearer.

Mell dragged her along.

'Come *on*,' Connie urged.

The women stumbled across the cavern, swerving round pools.

Three icemen erupted into the chamber. Mell pushed Kameko out

and turned to face them. They stopped. Cautious now. They fanned out, began to move in. The leader grunted, waved his fists. Except that they were much larger and covered in thick grey hair, they were very like *homo erectus*. Their feet were wider, splayed. The leader had bright blue eyes.

She heard Connie running and backed through the opening. The leader rushed her.

She fainted toward him, stamping her feet. He stopped. She took three slow steps backward. Turned. And ran.

Running, she pulled her hair band off, threw her head forward, mussed her hair.

She spun round and shone the laser beam under her chin. The leader bellowed, staggered, slipped, rolled into the other two. She charged uphill and writhed out of the tunnel.

'Take Max between you,' said Connie, pushing the rock samples into her pocket.

'I'll hold dem off.'

Where was the skimmer?

'Fugi!' Mell shrieked.

His arms round their shoulders the two women tried to drag Max away. He was too heavy. Especially for tiny Kameko. Noises from the tunnel.

Mell looked over her shoulder.

Connie had gone back in. Oh God, he couldn't fight three of them.

Whining announced the arrival of the skimmer. Fugi helped them heave Max aboard.

'Where's Connie?' he asked.

'Start moving,' panted Mell, 'If he comes out first. We'll wait for him. If not ...'

Three pairs of eyes stayed glued on the cave mouth. Connie's head appeared.

'Wait!' Mell shouted.

Connie ran towards them, legs pumping in the deep snow.

Three shapes appeared behind him.

He disappeared under them.

'Go! Go!' she screamed at Fugi.

\*

**WUSS 1 - Log Entry No. 903 -**

**Wednesday, May 10, 2005.**

*We've been here six months today and we've found a cave. We could*