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## Seven Fictions

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SEVEN FICTIONS

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
English Literature

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by  
Steve J. Leech  
May 2010

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Accepted by:  
Keith Lee Morris, Committee Chair  
Dr. Jillian Weise  
Dr. Barton Palmer

For Grumps, Turps, Ichiban, Dunk, and the Spanner

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And, of course, my eternal gratitude to all my family and friends for their support and love.

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## INTRODUCTION

### -Structure-

Depending on whom one asks, the short story is anything from the ultimate challenge for any writer of prose, or a proving ground for young writers to cut their teeth for the fictionist's real work: The Novel. I am inclined to agree with the former opinion; although the short story is not as difficult to get a hold of as the novel, mastery of the short story is far harder, requiring the focus to pick each optimal word, and the discipline not to ramble or make unnecessary asides.

The short story, then, in possessing both the narrative and linguistic structures of the novel as well as poetic elements of brevity and interconnection, is the ideal choice for a thesis. Furthermore, a novel is an undertaking better suited to a dissertation. In a thesis, it would have to be abridged or excerpted, and I do not believe it is appropriate to evaluate such work in less-than-complete form.

I also chose to write a collection of short stories as the genre is poised to experience a massive resurgence in popularity over the coming years. On-demand and e-publishing have slashed the cost of getting short stories to an audience economically, and our lives are more fast-paced and instant than ever. The stage is set for the short story to reenter the public consciousness as our downtime becomes increasingly fragmented and the Internet increasingly available. The collection contains two experiments in such a direction: "The Refined Palates" and "Night in the City of Dreams", the latter of which is an ersatz flash-fiction collection unto itself.

Even my title honors two of the greatest short story writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Jorge Luis Borges and Donald Barthelme. *Seven Fictions* refers to both Borges' seminal 1944 *Ficciones* as well as Barthelme's two collections *Sixty Stories* (1981) and *Forty Stories* (1987). Not only do I appreciate these gentlemen for their high quality of writing,

but also their approach to storytelling. Their stories are largely challenging amusements, philosophical Chinese finger-traps, that stick with the reader until he or she either gives up in frustration or has come to some happy solution. My own experiments with such stories have not met with success.

#### -Genre-

The distinction between ‘literary’ and ‘genre’ fiction is an elitist farce. Although there should be a distinction between that which is worth studying and that which is not, it should not be based on whether or not the protagonist wears a cape, or cowboy hat, but rather the quality of the writing and stories themselves. This philosophy led to the heavy generic lean of the collection, showcasing the Lovecraftian weird (“Carter’s Monsters”), hard-boiled crime (“The Dots”), scientific romance (“Cavusonauts, Ho!”), Gothic ghost (“Through the Perilous Night”), superhero (“Night in the City of Dreams”), steampunk (“The Whale-Zeppelin *Canard*”), and a variety of others, somewhat deconstructed.

In the deconstructing, I have also, in some cases, brought two of these genres together. For example, “The Whale-Zeppelin *Canard*” is predominantly steampunk, a genre characterized by advanced technology based on Victorian- or Edwardian-era science and ideas, such as a steam-powered robot, or advanced airships, such as the *Canard*, with its hunting and butchering systems. The underlying philosophy focusing of the indomitable human spirit and the saving graces of science. However, the psychic whales themselves are more Lovecraftian in nature, the hallmarks of the genre being an indifferent or malicious universe where the greatest danger is not death, but insanity. Juxtaposing these generic elements serves to reinforce the optimism of the steampunk; even in a harsh reality, people will persevere and even thrive, doomed though they may be.

The appeal of genre writing comes from the sheer breadth of the boundaries

involved, which is to say, the lack of practical boundaries. That space allows the writer to move beyond the limitations of what actually is and out into the realm of what is not or cannot be to examine issues from fresh, new, and unique angles. The inclusion of generic elements affords an entire palette of elements and emotions that would otherwise be unavailable.

My exploration of genre has been influenced by a slew of writers from H.G. Wells to Michael Chabon. Even Borges and Barthelme have also dabbled in genre, albeit not necessarily their finest work. The two writers most directly responsible for my genre stylings are Joe R. Lansdale, who writes all varieties of pulpy genre work, and Howard Waldrop, who writes science-fiction. Behind these gentlemen are a host of others, but tracing the development of a writer's influences, I feel, is as foolish and complex as tracing the development of a whole person.

Lansdale's work has a dark humor and usually stays in horror or neo-noir, with the occasional foray into science-fiction. "The Whale-Zeppelin *Canard*" and "Through the Perilous Night" are the two most heavily-Lansdalian (or 'mojo', as Lansdale describes his own work) stories here present. The influence of Mr. Waldrop is most evident in the first half of the collection, especially in "Cavusonauts, Ho!" and "Carter's Monsters". Much of Waldrop's oeuvre consists of alternate histories and is full of references to 'low-brow' culture, such as monster movies and Mexican wrestling. Probably due to their shared Texan heritage, Lansdale and Waldrop write with simple language, a style I try toward as a rule.

Together, these gentlemen – both accomplished short story writers – introduced me to an unfamiliar school of science-fiction that did not deal with dystopian societies or grand space operas, but rather a much more intimate, dirty kind of science-fiction cobbling together Frankenstein stories out of bits of popular culture detritus and sheer affection. The first Lansdale story I read featured Elvis and Jack Kennedy fighting a



cowboy-mummy in an East Texas rest home. The first Waldrop had the dodo surviving on a family farm in Mississippi until the Depression. Lansdale and Waldrop opened the door for me to start writing whatever I damn well pleased.

They did not simply redefine my fiction experience, however. Both men have similar interests to the point that I discovered Waldrop after having exhausted local supplies of Lansdale. A recommendation pointed me to Waldrop, based on this similarity. Cinema and alternate histories form cornerstones of both writers' work (although Lansdale leans more towards cinema and Waldrop to alternate history) and blur the line separating what is from what is not, even more so for their presence in fiction, which also inherently has this effect. This tension between the real and the unreal forms the thematic core of this collection.

#### -Theme-

Originally, the collection was to focus on America – that is to say the United States – as a concept and a manifestation. This thread still remains, but it does not have the prominence it did in earlier iterations. As I looked more critically, though, I realized that the collection dealt more with the nature of reality and unreality, as well as the consequences of clashes or transgressions between the two. Of course, none of the stories are real, since they are fiction, but within each story there is an element of unreality, whether it be dreams, hopes, hallucinations, or simply delusions. When the characters spend too much time occupied with these unrealities, they are all brought low by the intrusion of actual reality.

In the first half of the collection, the delineations between realities are much more complete. The captain of the *Canard* in the eponymous story clearly has hopes of catching a record haul of whale and improving his lot in life, and on these hopes he gambles the lives of his entire crew. However, the ship herself cannot survive the

prolonged voyage, a fact known to members of the crew. When the unreality of the captain's hope meets the actual reality of the zeppelin falling out of the sky in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, the captain will clearly lose out. A similar situation occurs to Randolph Carter in "Carter's Monsters", although there we see his unreality of hope subsumed by a one-two of actual reality and the unreality of Champlain's vision.

In the latter half of the collection, starting with "The Dots", the tone and style of the stories shift. Rather than having fairly clear-cut lines between what is real and not, the stories drift in the liminal space between. They lack central anchors for the reader to hold onto and be able to discern the landscape. "The Refined Palates" and "Through the Perilous Night" do this by severely limiting the reader's exposure to the universe of those stories. While this tunnel vision poses only a pathetically fallacious hindrance in the former, it creates a problem in the latter, since the location and timing of the story are, seemingly, key and yet almost completely nebulous.

The ambiguous space-time of the story forms a part of its role in the collection, though. As the penultimate story, it represents a solution, albeit an unacceptable one, to the tensions between reality and unreality. In this solution, one never stops aggressively pursuing one's own personal unrealities, regardless of what happens. As a solution, this leaves something to be desired, as it leaves Tommy and Jackie in limbo, unable to fully realize their dreams due to the interference of the General (i.e. reality), and only experiencing nightmares when they sleep.

A far more acceptable solution appears in the final story of the collection, "Night in the City of Dreams". Although it gives a broader view of the story's universe, it still restrains the reader's ability to explore and fully understand all the rules and laws. The fragmentation of the story and confusion of the reader mirror those of the Spook (the hobo), a natural candidate for protagonist, as he also lacks a formal place in this liminal universe. He is homeless, jobless, and even appears not to fully belong in the story's

reality, due to his translucency. The Spook's clash of realities comes in the flashback sections 'The Editor' and 'The Talk', wherein his idealism does not mesh with that of the larger society in the City of Dreams, which, it should be noted, is mostly populated by unhappy people, much like the dream-country of the previous story. We join him after he has been brought low, and follow him as he regains himself. His solution is not to give up on his hopes and unrealities, but to carve them out of the actual reality present. He can neither police nor report on this society through the official channels, such as they are, and so he compromises one part of his dream (ironically, the American part of his dream – a house and a job) for another more personal part, and in his homelessness, he is able to guide society, however small his guidance may prove.

Ultimately, the Spook's solution is to adapt his unreality to the reality around it. He creates what he wants wherever he finds room for it, using whatever materials he has at hand. His dream is one of justice, essentially, but the reality of the Civil Maintenance and The Journal prevent him from doing so there. Nothing can stop him from doing his investigations on his own, and so he creates his own little world within the larger one. He builds unreality out of reality.

Which is, essentially, writing.

## CARTER'S MONSTERS

Randolph sat in the plush chair of the large office and looked out at the Manhattan skyline. The city was louder than Hoboken and the weather was bitter cold, which he hadn't been prepared for at all. The letter had said that the hustle and bustle of the city kept the air warm, which had been a lie.

He wriggled his shoulders and tugged at the cuffs of his suit jacket, trying to get it to at least look like it fit. Everyone he'd seen so far in the tower wore clothes that looked like they could pay Randolph's rent at the boarding house for a year. Randolph's father's suit had been just as fine if not finer, once, twenty years earlier.

The owner of the office swaggered in with gusto and noise, slamming the double doors wide open and making an impressive bass-line of footsteps, even on the thick carpet. Randolph turned in the plush chair to get a look at the man who'd brought him from the gambrel roofs of home to the mahogany office four-hundred feet above Fifth Avenue.

Yards of expensive blue fabric wrapped around the bulk of the man and somehow managed to make a good impression of a well-cut suit. The fist-sized knot of his tie stood in proportion to the fat neck built of rolls and slimy sweat, capped with a head like a carp. He had no hair, but rampant eyebrows and dark glasses and a well-fed thickness to him.

He shrugged off his large suit jacket and hung it on a coat rack in the corner. In just his vest and sweat-thinned shirtsleeves, he flopped down into his luxurious, red leather chair. He plucked a cigar from the box on the desk and jabbed it into his rubbery

mouth, then took his glasses from his wide-set eyes.

“Mr. Carter,” he said with New York speed. “I’m Willy Champlain.”

He thrust a hand across the table. Randolph reached out as far as he could and shook from a distance. His soft hand came back clammy.

“Well, first off, Mr. Champlain,” said Randolph.

“What’s that?” asked Champlain. “You’re gonna have to speak up, I’m afraid, sir. My ears are fine, but you’re a little soft-spoken.”

“First off, Mr. Champlain, I’d like to thank you for the train ticket and the hotel room. Both are very generous.”

“Not at all, Mr. Carter,” said Champlain, waving a stubby hand. “Courtesies of business in my book. Now, let’s get down to it, shall we?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Business, Mr. Carter, let’s talk business. Do you mind if I light this?”

He pointed to the cigar in his mouth that he had already begun to light and puff on.

“Thanks. Now, I’m a fairly wealthy man, Mr. Carter. I have made my money in shipping and I’m starting to make some more in aircraft. Now, I was in Europe about a year ago on business when I happened to see my first motion picture. I’m a busy man; I don’t have much time to go out and entertain myself, so I’m a little behind the rest of the class in that field.”

He paused and grinned around the cigar, which had never left his mouth.

Randolph caught the cue and chuckled politely.

“I enjoyed myself so much, I stayed a whole extra week and saw a bunch more of them. There’s a future in motion picture, Mr. Carter, a big one, and I plan to get in as close to the ground floor as I can, see? Now these Kraut pictures that I saw were of the scary kind. A mesmerist that goes about killing people, a Jewish mud-man running riot, ghosts, devils, all kinds of things. I figure, heck, everyone likes a ghost story, right? Keeps men like you in shoe leather, right?”

“Well....”

“So I started looking for a scary story to blow the socks off everyone worldwide and really put the Champlain Motion Picture Company on the map. Nothing was doing it for me, until my little nephew comes to visit. Now, my nephew, he’s about fourteen, comes to visit, and he’s got a bundle of these magazines full of scary stories, such as the ones you write, sir. And in one of those magazines was a story that kept me awake two nights running, and when I was in the trenches, I slept like a baby every night. I got this in the war.”

He pointed to a small, faded scar along his jawline that could have been a bad shaving accident.

“I’m impressed,” said Randolph.

“I’m impressed, too. I’m impressed by that story; you know what story it was?”

“No, Mr. Champlain, I don’t,” said Randolph.

“It was ‘The Beast From the Stars’ by Randolph Carter,” said Champlain. “Your

story. The Antarctic ice, the monster coming out of the man, it's like a whole different take on the haunted house. Very original. How'd you come up with it?"

"I had a dream."

"If this is one of your dreams, I'd hate to see your nightmares!"

Champlain laughed alone. When he finished, Randolph stood up.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Champlain, that I am not a fan of motion pictures, and my story is not--"

"Mr. Carter, I will give you three-hundred dollars to make your story into a motion picture."

"I'm afraid I sold the story to *Strange Tales*, the magazine," said Carter.

"I have contacted the magazine, Mr. Carter, and they are of the opinion that you are the one to talk to about this. Now, look, I'm not trying to buy something you already sold; I'm not trying to scam anyone. You sold them the rights to print the story. I want the rights to make the story into a picture. I will give you three-hundred dollars, right here, right now, today, cash or check, and you sign on the line that says I can make this picture."

"Thank you for the offer," said Randolph. "But I spent six weeks writing that story; I went through twelve complete drafts."

"Four-hundred."

"I don't think you understand, Mr. Champlain. I have suffered for this story; I bought paper and ink instead of food. It is part of the long tradition of literature that will

be around long after the motion picture fad has died. To sell it to you would be crass and tarnish its reputation. I'm sorry, but I am resolute."

"I see," said Champlain. "I'll go as high as five-hundred, but no more."

"Mr. Champlain, sir, I still don't think you understand. My family is an old and proud one; my ancestors were among the founders of Hoboken and my line was, for many years, a cornerstone of Hoboken society. In recent generations we have fallen on some harsh times and I am seeking – through art – to restore my family name to its rightful place."

Randolph felt no compulsion to explain that his rented rooms were in the former family residence of his great-uncle.

"So it's riches you're after, eh?" said Champlain, one eye lethargically winking.

"No! Prestige, sir! Prestige!"

Champlain folded his hands across his prodigious belly.

"Let me let you in on a little secret," he said. "Would you say this office is prestigious?"

"Yes, I suppose."

"I have my name on a quiet little study room in one of the branches of the New York Metropolitan Library. Would you say that is prestigious?"

"Yes, most definitely."

"Well," said Champlain. "I got it all with money. Prestige is nothing more than the proper application of money."



Randolph made to object, but Champlain held up a hand and he paused.

“People will respect you if you have money. They don’t care where it comes from. I walk down Broadway and people step aside, even though they have no idea who I am. It’s the suit that does it, the rings.”

“But film, sir,” said Randolph.

“I’ll pay you five-hundred dollars for the story,” said Champlain. “I’ll cut you in for a percentage of the profits. Let’s say the film’s a hit; you make a lot of money. Lots of people see it and they see your name in the credits, which I’m legally-bound to do.”

“You are?”

“I am. They see your name and think maybe they want to read your stories. Maybe we make more films. All of this is more and more money in your pocket. Maybe you become a runaway smash and other studios want to adapt other stories; publishers want to print entire books of just you.”

Randolph stared into middle distance and barely smiled.

“Suddenly,” Champlain said, “you’re in a position to turn offers down and before you know it, you’ve got the big house on the hill, the silk suit, the trophy wife, and kids at Yale.”

“Harvard.”

“Harvard. All you have to do is sign on the line.”

Champlain wet his lips when he finished and sat looking at Randolph. Neither of them spoke. Randolph’s gaze snapped out of middle distance.

“Five-hundred. You say I could have it cash?” he asked.

“Let me just call my accountant downstairs,” said Champlain as he reached for the telephone on his desk. “And feel free to stay at the hotel through Sunday; the room’s paid up until then.”

Randolph leaned back in the chair and allowed himself a touch of a smile. Five-hundred dollars minimum for a story he’d already sold once? He might have to revisit his opinion of motion pictures.

Randolph arrived overdressed for the winter, which was beginning to slide off into spring. He stepped out of the chauffeured Rolls-Royce and onto the grass outside the studio. He looked about and breathed deep in a way he felt a man in the motion picture industry should.

The industry had been growing on him, he had to admit. The simple five-hundred dollars had gone the way of all money: rent and food. Mr. Champlain, however, had been dropping money all over New England for Randolph, paying for trips to New York, fancy hotel rooms and expensive dinners, and now a chauffeured car to the studio itself.

The film studio had been a hangar on a dilapidated airfield that Champlain had bought especially for converting. Large skylights occupied the bulk of the roof; offices and workshops took up a third of the floor space. The remainder of the hangar housed four large stages – three full-size prosceniums and a rake off to one side.

Voices and the sounds of preparation echoed about the hangar, adding to the

considerable noise. People ran about, carrying props and makeup and technical equipment and scripts. Actors stood on the main stage in front of a large silver-and-black camera, pointing at the pages in their hands and holding earnest discussions about blocking and interactions.

Men on scaffolds furiously cleaned the skylights to let in as much of the mid-morning sun as possible. People stood in clutches behind the cameras, pointing and making squares with fingers, and occasionally looking up at the skylights, shielding their eyes with hands, and shaking their heads. A pretty woman in rich clothes sat to one side of the fervor of the stage, calm and serene while another woman adjusted the bold greasepaint makeup that ran in fat, sticky blobs down the actress' face. Randolph knew the woman from somewhere, he was sure of it, but the muck on her face made the flimsy memory harder to grasp.

Suddenly, Champlain was striding towards Randolph, a burning cigar in one hand. He laughed, but the sound got lost in the cacophony of the studio. The producer spoke even faster than he had in the office, and seemed a good deal sweatier, his eyes flatter and mouth less expressive.

"Mr. Carter, Mr. Carter, Mr. Carter," he said. "So good of you to come, and today's a good day to be here. We're filming a pivotal scene, absolutely essential, a good scene to see!"

"It's very nice of you invite me," said Randolph.

"Well, it was nice of you to let us use your story for our picture," said Champlain.

He put an arm around Randolph's shoulders, forcing the writer to suppress a shudder of revulsion. Together, they walked across the space of the studio, with Champlain guiding and talking while Randolph looked around and tried to take it all in.

"The winter filming's a hassle like you wouldn't believe, since the days are so short, but they're getting longer. We have to use sunlight, you see, since its cheaper to put in skylights than rig this place with enough electric lights, but it cuts down on how many hours a day we can film, and if we get cloud cover, ha! You can forget it. That won't be an issue once the permanent studio in Jersey gets finished. We're wiring that place up so it'll shine like the Star of Bethlehem!

"As you see, we have four stages, three of them have permanent sets and the fourth is for miscellany. All the scenes in lifeboats and longboats are done over there on the rake – that's the sloped one. Stage one is for scenes above decks, stage two is for scenes in Captain Dulles' quarters, and stage three is for anything else we need to throw on.

"We have a top-notch cast and crew, all of them came highly recommended and with superb qualifications. The director we have, well, the director did what I'm told is one of the scariest motion pictures ever, but I haven't seen it. They destroyed all the copies, something about a lawsuit with a widow or something. Tragedy of the law, tragedy. Where is he? Hey! Has anyone seen Mr. Murnau?"

One of the technicians pointed to the camera, where a sharp-looking man with hair swept back under a beret stood with a pair of men in costume and the woman from the makeup chair. Champlain led Randolph over and clapped his free hand on Murnau's

shoulder, leaving a slightly damp print.

“Mr. Murnau, this is our dear writer Mr. Randolph Carter,” said Champlain.

“Ah, Mr. Carter,” said Murnau with a German edge. “You wrote a wonderful story. Not just anything would take me away from my homeland and a picture about Dr. Faust.”

The group chuckled, except Randolph who didn’t get it.

“We are about to film the scene with the monster emerging from Mr. Caine, as played by our dear Mr. Hart here,” said Murnau.

He extended a hand towards the tall, regal-looking actor dressed as a sailor, who graciously nodded. Murnau gestured to the other man, barely in his twenties with buggy eyes and a touch of a stoop.

“Mr. Löwenstein here is playing Mr. Asher,” he said. “And Ms. Swanson plays Ms. Lambeth, Warrant Officer Ridley’s fiancée.”

Randolph frowned.

“Ms. Lambeth? But Lambeth was the navigator and a man. There were no women on board.”

“Yes, Mr. Carter,” said Champlain. “Unfortunately, one or two small revisions had to be made in the interests of the medium. Audiences usually react better when a woman is in danger, rather than a man, especially if the woman is important to one of the major characters.”

“I suppose,” said Randolph. He didn’t look anyone in the eye.

“Well,” said Murnau. “Shall we begin?”

The actors moved into places on the third stage, which had been dressed as a small dining room on a ship, with a long table covered in various luxuriant dishes and a long table cloth. The actors took their places along the far side of the table, with Hart on one end and the actor playing Captain Dulles on the other.

“And,” said Murnau. “Action!”

The actors began to eat, breaking bread and passing wine bottles to one another, all smiles and claps-on-the-back for Mr. Caine.

“Good, good,” said Murnau. “You’re enjoying yourselves; you’re relaxed and happy that Mr. Caine is all right. And Mr. Asher, a toast!”

The sinister-looking Löwenstein raised his wineglass and declared a toast to Caine’s good health. The others all saluted and took a drink.

“Wonderful,” said Murnau. “Now, Mr. Caine, you are coughing, but still smiling, maybe the wine went down wrong. Coughing, a little worse. Everyone, you are concerned a little now, patting him on the back, still just a little wine in the wrong pipe. Serious coughing now.”

Hart leaned forward, placing his hands on the table and racking his whole body in loud coughs. The other actors gathered, concerned, with gentle hands on his back and arms, furrowed brows.

“And now you collapse on the table, roll on your shoulder.”

Hart did everything Murnau said with convincing realism.

“On your back, one really bad cough now.”

A hacking, gruesome noise came from Hart’s throat as he flailed a little on the long table.

“And cut, everybody freeze. Bring in the fake torso.”

“But,” said Randolph. “That scene isn’t in the story! What scene is that supposed to be?”

“That, Mr. Carter,” said Champlain, “is the scene where the monster comes out of Caine.”

He put a soggy arm around Randolph’s shoulder and gently started herding him back towards the offices, away from the main stage.

“No, it isn’t. The monster comes out of Caine quietly, while he’s asleep. It pours out of his mouth and nose like a mist.”

“That’s very hard to do, visually,” said Champlain. “This way has far more visual impact; it’s much more dramatic.”

“Well, I...” said Randolph.

“Relax, Mr. Carter,” said Champlain. “The acid and flamethrower effects more than make up for the lack of electro-plasm.”

“Ectoplasm,” said Randolph. “Wait, what acid? What flamethrowers?”

“The acid the creature bleeds,” said Champlain. “That’s why they can’t use guns or knives. They have to use that electric stick you came up with. Great idea, by the way, that electric stick. We rounded out their arsenal a bit with some flamethrowers.”

“But it doesn’t bleed acid! It’s made of ectoplasm! That’s why they can’t shoot it!”

“The average Joe isn’t going to understand electro-plasm,” said Champlain. “Not like you and me do. Acid, though, everyone understands acid.”

“But flamethrowers? Why would they have flamethrowers on a wooden ship?”

“For de-icing the ship, of course. They are in the Antarctic, you know. Now, look, you know they probably wouldn’t have them, and so do I, but the people who will pay to see this will be too enthralled to care. No one’s ever done flamethrowers in a motion picture before.”

“This isn’t ‘The Beast From the Stars’!” said Randolph.

“No, it’s *The Star-Beast*,” said Champlain. “Much snappier.”

“If you were going to do this to my story,” said Randolph. “Why did you even bother to buy the rights?”

“Look, Mr. Carter – Randolph – what makes a good book doesn’t necessarily make a good motion picture doesn’t necessarily make a good play doesn’t necessarily make a good radio-play. We had to make a few adjustments for it to be the best motion picture it could be. Consider them nuances of translation.”

“But you’re missing the whole point of the story!”

“Now, I thought, sir, that the point of the story was to scare people.”

“Yes, but a scare for the mind! My story is an exploration of the impotence of the human condition, not like this...this pap!”



Randolph snorted and turned. He stormed out of the studio to the field where the Rolls still waited. He slammed the back door behind him and told the driver to take him to the railway station; he was done with motion pictures.

Almost a year later, *The Star-Beast* came to Hoboken. Randolph persuaded the theatre manager to let him into the first matinee for free. He sat in the back row, clutching his copy of *Strange Tales* and trying not to wring his hands. In his coat pockets, he had a stub of candle and a half-empty box of matches.

The house lights went down and the pianist in the orchestra pit began shuffling through pages in his music book. As the titles flickered up on screen, backed by vague paintings of the ocean, ice sheets, and terror, Randolph felt something cold and nauseous settle in his stomach. He took the candle and matches from his pockets and tried to sneak to the end of the row as quietly as possible.

When the screen lied about Randolph's participation, he found himself striding up the aisle to the stage in front of the hung screen. With the magazine tucked under his arm, he lit the candle and mounted the stage stairs.

In front of the screen, looking at the projector lens, Randolph saw the film as a brilliant circle of light and didn't realize the film played over his face and chest. He held the magazine aloft, as a relic to ward off evil, and spoke as loudly as he could without shouting.

"Ladies and gentlemen, what you are seeing here is not the work of Randolph

Carter, me; it is a lie and a fabrication and unworthy of your time!”

The pianist’s fingers stumbled on the ivories and the music fell into disarray as he tried to regain his place in sync with the movie. People in the crowd grumbled.

“Get down, you lunatic,” shouted one man. “We paid to see this picture, not you!”

“Sir,” Randolph said. “I wrote the story they stole to make this picture and you are not going to see a tale of true terror as you suspect you are going to.”

“I’m going to get an usher,” said someone.

“I will now read to you the real story, which you will, I’m sure, find more appealing.”

Randolph lifted the magazine to read by the glow of the candle.

*“I am forced to write of my experiences because the undeterrable explorers and men of science keen to violate the frozen wastes at the bottom of the world will not otherwise heed my warnings. I do not wish to expose myself to ridicule, but if it will prevent this Antarctic trespass, then I will. I fear, however, that my efforts will be in vain-”*

The usher came up on the stage and calmly snuffed the candle before grabbing Randolph by the collar and pushing him all the way to the main doors and out onto the street.

“If you come back again, I’ll snap your sorry neck,” he growled.

Randolph straightened his jacket with an indignant tug. He hoped the usher didn’t hear the stitches split in the collar.

“Sir, if I ever deigned to return, I’d snap my own neck.”

The usher stormed back into the theatre and Randolph turned to the street. A few passing people looked at the remains of the scene and whispered to each other.

“There is no need for secrecy, friends,” said Randolph. “This establishment is showing a lie!”

“It’s a theatre,” said one young man. “You expected the truth from plays and motion pictures?”

“This theatre, young man, claims to be showing a work by Randolph Carter - that is, me. What they are showing, though, is an abomination of art fit only for slobbering dogs and imbeciles!”

People slowed as they walked by. Randolph took note.

“This theatre, and places like it across the country, are showing a picture that claims to be one thing, but is a base and senseless appropriation of high literature, pushed by a deviant pornographer.”

A small crowd had gathered. Randolph climbed up on the ornate base of a lamp-post and began to orate to the crowd. The theatre manager sent the usher to fetch some policemen.

“And to think I let that bastard in for free,” he muttered.

By the time the usher returned with two stout policemen, the crowd had swelled onto the edge of the street. Cars and carriages had to move into the other lane to pass. Randolph was almost swinging from the lamp-post, holding his magazine up like a Bible and railing against the deviance of the picture house.

The policemen beat him from the post with truncheons and arrested him.

The next morning, Randolph woke from a stiff sleep when a policeman banged on the bars of his cell with a stick.

“You’ve got a visitor,” he said.

He walked down the hallway and pressed himself against the wall to allow the bulk of Willy Champlain to pass. When Randolph saw the doughy, wet face grinning slightly around a cigar, he pulled the rough jail blanket over his head.

“Quite a show from what I hear, Mr. Carter,” said Champlain.

“Please, go away.”

“Such manners,” said Champlain. “And after I’ve paid your bail and persuaded them to drop everything, too!”

Randolph pulled the blanket from his head.

“What did you say?”

“As soon as you and I are done talking, you’re free to go. It’s all cleared up, although it took quite a bit of money.”

“Why, why thank you, Mr. Champlain.”

“Don’t thank me. I used your money.”

“I don’t have any money. Well, a couple of bills in my room.”

“Yes, well, had you answered any of my messages or letters, Mr. Carter, I could have given you your share of the profits from the film. Nine-thousand, five-hundred dollars so far.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Your share of the film’s profits is nine-thousand, five-hundred dollars. Really a little less now, thanks to all this business.”

Randolph sat up and put his hands over his mouth.

“I had another idea, Mr. Carter,” said Champlain, inspecting his cigar. “One that will make us even more money. Earn us more prestige.”

“What’s that, sir?”

“People see that the film is based on the story, so they want to read it. The thing is, the film and the story are so different, they’re disappointed.”

“What are you getting at?”

“Rewrite the story. Base it on the film and we’ll publish it, along with a few of your other stories if you like.”

“I don’t think so. Not now.”

“Pity. I have a publisher friend who was willing to offer you a contract for four books at a two-thousand dollar advance each, plus profits, of course. And then if any of those stories would make good pictures, I might purchase those rights at, oh, say, a thousand dollars apiece? That’s a lot of money. One could buy, oh, a stately home for that much money.”

Randolph let his head sag into his hands. Drops spattered the concrete floor of the cell.

“I’ll need a new typewriter ribbon,” he said.

## THE WHALE-ZEPPELIN CANARD

The captain stood at the foredeck scope, scanning the horizon for the blurry heat haze that signaled the presence of a weighty, overpowered whale brain. He tapped his brass foot on the wooden planking, annoyed at the lack of whales. It was, of course, possible that a dozen or more of the animals frolicked right below the big gray zeppelin, hiding themselves with the wicked powers of their oily brains. Of course, a layer of thick rubber lined the keel to hinder the animals' hypnosis, but it was far from perfect.

The foredeck scope swung loose in its mounts as the captain turned back to his pilot, standing in the cabin.

"Mr. Huxley, are we in the right place?"

Huxley spent a moment consulting his instruments and the navigator, Mr. Jenner.

"Aye, sir. As best we can tell, we're right over the breeding grounds."

The captain nodded, then harrumphed.

All summer, the vast brownish waves of the Eighth Sea had yielded barely haze or hump of the black, fatheaded whales. Even in known breeding sites that had in previous years borne such crops of big, healthy animals that the zeppelins had barely been able to carry them to shore, people came back broke and empty-handed.

Now, it seemed the naysayers were right and the whales were all dying. It baffled the captain how hunting could kill off all the whales, but it seemed to be so. For years, harvests had been waning. Still, as fewer whales came in, the price per catch went up.

Last year, a big cow, less than average in the captain's opinion, had paid for the whole season's expeditions, which was fortunate because they'd only pulled in one other – a juvenile bull.

This season looked even sparser. So far there hadn't even been a false alarm and soon they'd have to turn and go back to Nuevo Francisco empty-handed. The *Canard* was getting older and she couldn't take long trips as well as she used to. Too long a hunt and the zeppelin would simply fall from the sky. Another two seasons, maybe three, and she would be retired - if she didn't give out beforehand. It depressed him down deep, but ultimately he knew that times changed and even booms as big as the whales eventually ended. He just hoped he could get his fortune and retire before that day came. Lord knew, he didn't want to go back to running pleasure flights for the wealthy, having the failure rubbed in his face day in and day out. He'd rather die.

The captain looked up at the giant balloon that kept the *Canard* airborne and sneered at the dirty fabric and ragged patches. Brand new, the balloon had been a clean white and easily large enough to hold a sailing whale ship. Through the intervening years, the fabric turned grubby and the balloon bloated as they double- and triple-wrapped the gas bags to help contain leaks.

Under the planking of the deck, too, the ship was getting old. The captain had had to pay for a number of patches and touch-ups to the rubber lining of the hull. In just a single off-season, the black sheet had gone from firm and new to old and cracked. As the rubber degraded, it became less and less effective, and the *Canard's* insulation was

well on its way to being useless. He'd brought back the heavy copper-and-leaded-glass helmets of the early days. Unfortunately, there simply weren't the funds to get one for every crewman.

“Haze ho!”

All hands on the deck ran to the larboard side where a young boy stood by one of the swivel guns with a telescope in hand. Each man held up his own glass to scan the horizon for the steady haze that meant a whale had breached to breathe. With a score of eyes on the hunt, the whale had no place to hide, especially when those same eyes were fueled by the promise of double-shares in the profits. Again, the same young boy cried out and the prey was found.

Clumping his way to the cabin, the captain called out to Huxley and Jenner.

“Gentlemen, adjust heading. Stoke the fires and get us to that whale as fast as you can! Get Mr. Norden ready and load the harpoon bays! Issue the helmets!”

Orders went out all over the ship. Boilermen heaved more shovel loads of coal into the steam boilers. Master Harpooner Norden loaded small powder charges and heavy iron harpoons into the vertical launch bays. Deck hands ran around the ship handing out helmets to key crewmen. A team of tight-muscled Tagalog braced themselves on the winch handles that would pull the whale out of the sea and into the harness mounted on the keel. As smoke bulged out of the iron chimneys that wrapped around and cradled the balloon like industrial fingers on a giant bladder, two giant propellers picked up speed, blowing gale-force winds into the zeppelin's sails.



The *Canard* drew over the black whale; its sleek back lining up with the crosshairs in the lead-glassed harpooners' scopes. The pilot pulled the levers and twisted the dials to bring the ship in line with the whale and keep it in the sights. He looked over at Jenner, who made exaggerated nods and thumbs-up signs. The pilot lashed and bolted the controls in place to keep the *Canard* from straying off course and ruining the harpooners' shots. With so barren a season, the whalers could not afford to pierce the brain or maim the animal.

Out on the deck, the captain loaded a bomb lance into one of the swivel guns. The harpooners were good enough to make the lance unnecessary, but the captain didn't want to risk the odd mistake.

Everyone worked on experience, without talking; the heavy helmets that kept them safe from the whale's bloated brain made conversation impossible. Thankfully, it also kept out the various screams and wails and noises that would soon come from those without helmets. The captain once had a whale get into his own head. Not something to joyfully repeat.

Norden kept one eye on the aiming scope and another on his thumb. It had a tendency to subconsciously creep on the trigger if he didn't pay strict attention. In the view of the scope, the whale drifted slightly left and right as it swam and the zeppelin rode the winds. He waited. The perfect shot would pierce the whale's neck near the second bone, partially paralyzing the animal and leaving the entire contents of the skull

intact.

The crosshair crept up along the spine of the whale. When it reached a little bit behind the blowhole, he'd pull the trigger. Too early wouldn't properly paralyze the whale and if it took too long to stop moving, the animal could damage itself or the ship. Too late and he'd spear the brain. No amount of teaching could make a harpooner, only experience. In his first season, Norden had speared two bulls right through their brains. He'd almost been fired.

Norden's gut tightened; the crosshair lined up perfectly. His thumb jabbed down on the trigger and the small power charge exploded, hurtling the harpoon seaward. Trailing rope, the iron spike slammed into the whale's back, shattering its second vertebra.

The animal bellowed in pain and rage, tossing and rolling in the foaming, bloody water. One furious orange eye rolled up at the *Canard's* keel. A second harpoon shot down and smashed through the whale's spine. The heat haze coming off the animal's head flashed deeper, stronger.

As the captain watched from the deck rail, the young boy who'd first spotted the whale ran up, screaming and waving his arms. The captain sighed; the boy wasn't wearing a helmet.

"Bats! Bats! Good God, captain! Can't you see the bats!?"

The captain reached into his pocket for his knuckledusters and clocked the boy across the face, dropping him to the deck with a broken nose. Most of the crew had

disjointed noses or dented skulls from knuckles and pipes. Knocking a whale victim out kept them from killing themselves or damaging the ship. Thousands of whalers died in sailing ships before the advent of the zeppelin took crews to the air, keeping them at a distance from their prey, further limiting the hypnotic effects.

In the belly of the *Canard*, the Tagalog winchers set their leathery hands to the worn wooden handles and bent their backs. The sixteen of them pushed with strong arms and taut legs, turning their winch around, drawing in rope foot by foot. The rope grew tight as they wound up the slack. Shakes from the whales' death throes jolted the handles of the large wheel and the men unwound a few feet of slack. Hauling in a writhing whale had torn more than one zeppelin from the sky. Every wincher worth his salt knew not to wind in a whale until it stopped moving.

Gradually, the whale bled out into the water. It stopped railing against the two metal poles spiked through it. The Tagalog began to turn their wheels, winding up the rope and pulling the whale up out of the water, toward the harness. A flipper twitched and the crew in helmets felt the whale try to poke just once more at their minds. The bareheaded crew saw their world shift just a little further to the horrifically demented.

The probe lasted only a moment before the whale died and went limp.

Huxley unlashed the controls and followed Jenner's directions back to Nuevo Francisco. The captain came in, limping on his brass foot, with his bomb lance in hand

and dragging the young boy with the broken nose. Norden and his harpooners slapped each other on the backs and prepared to swab the harpoon bays clean. The Tagalog winchers locked their winches in place and secured the harness around the speared whale.

Out on the deck, one of the hands rested against the rail and spat into the waters of the Eighth Sea. He watched the white blob fall slowly down in the salt air, counting off seconds in his head. The water below the spit began to waver before the black back of a whale split the waves. To the whale's side came another haze and back, then another on the other side, then another and another and a sixth. The wad of spittle broke on the first whale's back, but the deck hand had gone, running to the cabin to tell the captain.

The boy earned a big coin in reward for his sharp eyes. As the young hand rushed off to his bunk to stow the treasure, the captain pursed his lips and thought. Carrying a second whale would weigh the ship down a great deal and add days to their voyage home. Still, with another specimen as good as the first, the captain could afford to buy a new ship, top of the line, with a fresh layer of vulcanized rubber on the hull and a stack of five commercial gas bags to replace the comically large single one. Maybe even one with automatic winches: he could fire the Tagalogs and up everyone else's profit.

And the profits would be rolling in. After all, the captain thought, the whales weren't dying out at all! They had simply become more adept at hiding. If he kept his newfound knowledge under his hat, then the competition would all drop out of the business, thinking that the whales were all dead. He'd have a monopoly on a healthy

industry. The thought that he might be hunting the last surviving pod couldn't fit inside the captain's head alongside the dream of a brand new vessel. Maybe he'd call it *Venus*.

A ship like that was an investment. Turning around for another whale was a gamble. A gamble on an investment, albeit one that could easily lead to an early and comfortable retirement. Of course, if the gamble didn't work out, the *Canard* would fall out of the sky, probably killing all hands.

The captain licked his lips and looked at his pocket watch, as if it would tell him what to do. He felt the deck gambol beneath his foot.

"Mr. Huxley," he said at last. "Turn us around. Tell Mr. Norden to ready his men."

Huxley looked over at the captain.

"Captain," he said, "if we go back to port now, we can--"

"Mr. Huxley," said the captain. "Turn us around. Tell Mr. Norden to ready his men."

The giant zeppelin turned, back out to sea, to follow the whales. Riding low with the dead booty, the *Canard* and her crew disappeared over the horizon.

## CAVUSONAUTS, HO!

To Bartlow, the world was steel. He sat cramped in a submersible the size of a large coupe with his bags and a perky helmsman. The window in the top of the craft was blocked with the weathered metal of the crane's claw that held them fifteen feet over the battleship-colored North Sea. To one side, he saw the rusty pylons of the modified drilling platform and to the other, a gray sheet that could have been the evening sky or sea or something else entirely.

He didn't like it. The submersible reminded him of the Harrow troop carriers he'd ridden in during the War.

A gust came out of the storm and swung the submersible on its chain; the rig pylon loomed so close in the window that Bartlow white-knuckled the flimsy aluminum arms of his seat. Everything hung for a second before the wind let up and the craft swung back into position. The chain creaked and strained. The crane's claw scraped a little against the hull, setting everything trembling and protesting.

"Sorry, sir," said the helmsman. "Just a little turbulence."

Bartlow didn't feel reassured. He remembered turbulence that had been exploding flak, trying to shear the thin metal skin of the plane and spill the occupants into the unfriendly skies. At least, he thought, if a plane went down, you had a parachute to save you – and a gun. If something went wrong with the submersible, he'd probably get crushed like a pancake. Then some glassy-eyed, squirming thing from the deep would

eat his corpse instead of earthworms, as God intended.

“I don’t mean to question your abilities, son,” said Bartlow, lying. “But what’s taking so damn long?”

“Just system checks, sir,” said the helmsman. “Routine stuff. We’re almost done now.”

The helmsman continued tapping gauges and muttering into his headset for another few minutes before the whole submersible juddered. Bartlow felt his stomach drop before he realized that the crane had started lowering them to the unpleasant sea. Everything shook like an idling plane, which comforted Bartlow; as much as he hated being in the air, he suspected he’d hate being in the sea more.

Smoother than it had started, the shaking and lowering stopped. Spray from the rough sea splattered against the bottoms of the port and starboard windows. The helmsman warned Bartlow to hold on. The crane let go of the submersible with a ping and the whole world lifted. Bartlow’s stomach lurched and his slight lunch tried to lift out of his mouth. The helmsman seemed calm, almost excited.

You bastard, thought Bartlow.

As the submersible started rolling to one side, it slapped heavily against the surface and righted. Despite the canvas seat and tall springs beneath him, Bartlow’s head snapped violently, wrenching something in his neck and clacking his teeth so hard it made his eyeballs hurt. Behind him, in the small space that counted for a hold, his bags slammed against the diamond-plate floor, breaking delicacies.

They waited on the surface for a moment while they collected their bearings and recovered from the drop, then the grinning helmsman pressed a button on the control panel before him. Something in the rear of the submersible began to whine, then hum, then growl. It moved slowly forward with a whooshing sound under the howling wind and slapping waves. The helmsman jammed the controls forward and the submersible swung nose down beneath the waves.

It wasn't as bad as Bartlow had feared. Dim, gray light came through the churning above, giving meager illumination that barely wavered. Silvery fishes of all sizes and grotesque shapes swam by, with and after each other. To one side were the large, red pontoons of the rig, bobbing slightly in the storm. Beneath them were the eight taut anchor lines that Bartlow thought he could almost hear humming like guitar strings.

The deeper and darker they went, the less Bartlow liked it. When what sunlight came through the clouds and water above began to fail against the rolling silt, they followed lights tethered to the anchor lines. Sterile white lights holding out, barely, against the thickening twilight. More than a few yards out and they were reduced to little more than glowing blobs, lures for horrific, mutant angler fish with eyes like glass footballs and teeth like filed-down thighbones.

The helmsman turned on a magnetic tape of brass band music. It was loud and pompous and caused what fish they could see in the gloom to twitch and disappear, but it couldn't entirely mask the sound of metal moaning under water pressure. Bartlow could feel it through his boots and it made him uncomfortable. It reminded him of a



compromised airframe.

Over a half-hour since the crane had cracked them against the waves, a steady glow appeared below them. The helmsman pulled the submersible into a gentler dive, looping around the anchor lines, which each had two flags on them, one green and one red. The helmsman kept below the green ones and above the red as they slowly meandered around to whatever shone beneath them.

They banked hard around one of the last lines, with the lowest flags and it came into view. A box sat on the sea floor, fixed with giant bolts, easily the size of a man. Two of the rig's anchor lines were fixed to the flat top. A few exterior lamps illuminated the floor around two large airlocks and light leaked out from two rows of portholes. Bartlow guessed it stood as tall as a two-story house and would have covered a football pitch. He could make out figures walking about inside; some of the silhouettes looked like they had guns.

The helmsman looked at Bartlow and grinned his giant grin.

“Welcome to the Royal Navy's North Bed Outpost,” he said as he steered them towards the opening iris of an airlock.

After the airlock had cycled, leaving the submersible in just enough water to keep it upright, the two men climbed out of their vehicle, dragging Bartlow's bags. Three men dressed in Navy blues walked into the room, two of them carrying guns. The unarmed man, sporting an authoritarian moustache, stepped forward.

“You must be the Army wallah. Major Bartlow, isn’t it?” he said.

“Yes, sir,” said Bartlow, saluting.

The Navy man returned the salute with a wry smile.

“I’m Commodore Hughes,” he said. “I suspect Nicks here has welcomed you?”

Bartlow nodded and realized that he’d not known the helmsman’s name. He made a point to try and forget it. No use wasting room in his brain.

The outpost had low ceilings and thick walls. Armed Navy men patrolled and stood guard everywhere. Overhead, harsh light bulbs swung on short, shadeless wires. Pipes were exposed and doors had frame edges along the floor. Were it not for the stability of the place, the sturdiness of it, Bartlow could have easily thought he was back on the destroyer that had carried him out to the rig, some six-hundred meters overhead.

As they walked, Hughes talked and Bartlow listened.

“Construction on the outpost started in summer of 1951, which was ahead of schedule, but the sea was notably calm that summer. It took just under three years to complete at a classified cost, and we’ve been operational down here for about seven months now, doing our work diligently.

“This is the ground floor, of course. There’s not a lot to interest a military chap such as yourself, mostly laboratories and technical facilities. Two airlocks, five scientific stations, a meeting room, boiler, electric generators, rebreathers, oxygen scrubbers, and the drilling room. If you’d like, I’ll talk to the top scientist – Gerry by the name of Schenk – and get you a proper look around. Upstairs is our domain.”

They came to a ladder sent into the wall next to a porthole of thick glass and heavy metal fittings. Hughes took to the rungs and went upstairs. Bartlow took a quick look out, but even with the lamp set above the window, he couldn't really see anything. He mounted the ladder.

“Up here,” said Hughes, “are all of the living and Naval facilities. Forty cabins – we’ve saved one for you, obviously. We have an armory, communications center, the air pumps, my office, the galley, library, laundry, chapel, clinic, and lounge. Give us a week or two and we’ll have sorted out an office for you.”

Bartlow nodded as if Hughes had been seeking his approval for the facility. Had he been, he certainly would have gotten it. That the government had been able to afford such a project so soon after the War amazed the major.

“Any questions?” asked Hughes.

“Can I see my room, sir?” said Bartlow. “These bags are getting a little heavy.”

“Ah, certainly, certainly, Major,” said Hughes. “This way.”

They walked down a corridor lined with numbered doorways. At room nineteen, Hughes stopped and gestured. The door swung easily open onto a room of military sparsity, with a bunk, an empty bookcase, and a closet. A door led off to a small bathroom.

Bartlow swung his bags onto the bed and stretched his back. He sat down and looked up at Hughes expectantly. The Commodore looked at his watch, then at the clock on the wall.

“I suspect you’re curious about why you’re down here and all,” said Hughes.

Bartlow said nothing.

“Dr. Schenk wants to see you at oh-six-hundred tomorrow in the meeting room. It’s just about twenty-hundred hours now, so I’d recommend getting to bed. People tend to have a hard time getting to sleep their first night.”

The men saluted each other and Hughes left with measured, military manner. Bartlow emptied his bags into the bookcase, closet, and bathroom. They’d told him to bring three weeks’ worth of affects, but his life simply didn’t add up to that much. He thought about the course of events that had brought him to a secret Navy base on the bottom of the North Sea. It made about as much sense as anywhere, he figured, but they seemed to keep him up for hours before he fell asleep.

Dr. Schenk had a big, Teutonic handlebar moustache and a curly nest of fading brown hair. His small eyes looked much bigger behind his thick pince-nez glasses. When he smiled, which was often, his slight chin disappeared entirely into the geriatric folds of his neck. He spoke with a thick German accent and a laugh right behind the words.

“How are you settling in, Major Bartlow?” he asked.

“So far so good, doctor,” said Bartlow.

“I’ve been looking over your records,” said Schenk, fiddling with the papers on his desk. “Quite impressive, quite what we’re looking for. Enlisted 1935, aged twenty,

assigned to the Third Highland Rifles. Noted for valor, you moved into a commando unit that, as far as I have been able to tell, had no name in 1942. Missions in North Africa, the Netherlands, Spain...you were at the Battle of Barcelona, yes?"

"Yes, sir," said Bartlow, shifting in his seat.

"Impressive, impressive. You spent most of '47 sweeping Kashmir for Werwolf units and stragglers. You were in Shimla when the India Korps surrendered there. After the war, you joined the Experimental Warfare Group as Army liaison. Mostly a desk job with the occasional test run, yes?"

"Predominantly, doctor, yes," said Bartlow.

"Bachelor, no children."

"No, sir."

"And now you are wondering why we scientists and our Navy cohort want an Army man no longer on armed duty down at the bottom of the North Sea, yes?"

"It had crossed my mind to wonder, doctor, yes. Why am I here?"

Schenk arranged the papers on his desk into a neater pattern while he thought about what to say.

"In time," he said at last. "In time. First, there are some other matters we need to discuss. The material is, as yet, classified. For your ears only. I was told to say that, 'for your ears only'. People down here are all aware, but it is not discussed unless we have to. Do you understand?"

Bartlow nodded.

“As you know,” said Schenk. “The Soviet Union became the first and only party in human history to use atomic weapons when they dropped the bomb Fat Lady on Berlin in September 1948.”

“Of course,” said Bartlow.

“Of course,” said Schenk. “What you may or may not know is that this was the first time an atomic bomb had been detonated at ground level. All previous tests by the Americans, the Soviets, and the Germans had been either aerial detonations, or underground.”

Bartlow hadn't known that and said so.

“That is a key point,” said Schenk, waving a finger. “The force of such an explosion at ground level sent a shockwave through the ground. Sort of like when you jump into water and make waves, yes?”

“Yes.”

“As far as we know, the British were the only ones who paid attention to that shockwave. Something was not right about it; it did not behave as it should have done.”

Schenk stopped for a moment, holding up a finger for pause. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a hip flask. After a swig, he offered it to Bartlow, who refused.

“What do you know about wave transmission through solids?” asked Schenk.

“Nothing,” said Bartlow.

“Seismology?”

A shrug.

“Well,” said Schenk. “Let me see. Have you ever read a book or seen a film where a character was looking for a secret compartment?”

“You mean tapping on a wall, that sort of thing?” asked Bartlow.

“Exactly! Yes!” said Schenk. “Do you know why they were tapping on the wall?”

“Because the hollow compartment would sound different from the solid wall?”

“Exactly!”

Schenk almost jumped out of his chair. He wiggled his upthrust fists in some sort of half-dance and grinned widely, hiding his chin in his throat.

“Wait,” said Bartlow. “What are you saying?”

“That shockwave, which was so much like a sound wave, behaved unusually. It behaved more like a thick sheet pulled taut than the surface of a solid.”

“In plain English, please, doctor.”

“Earth is, at least to some degree, hollow.”

A long pause. Both men blinked at each other; Schenk grinning and Bartlow frowning.

“I don’t believe you,” said Bartlow at least.

“That is perfectly acceptable,” said Schenk. “It is also part of the reason you are here. You are to be one of the first men in the hollow of the earth.”

“Beg pardon?”

Schenk grinned, but it looked to Bartlow like a sneer.

“We’re sending down a unit, a team, to observe the interior of the earth.”

“I’ve spent a lot of time in caves,” said Bartlow, “but I don’t know anything about mining.”

“Oh, my dear Major Bartlow,” said the doctor. “The shaft is already complete. Digging began almost as soon as construction on the outpost. We established a mining facility first and foremost, and then added everything else as we went along.”

Bartlow stood up and walked over to a pair of large, chrome pots. He poured himself a cup of tea; the steam wavered some. It scalded as it went down, but he barely noticed.

“Run this by me again, please, doctor,” said Bartlow.

“The earth is – in part or whole – hollow. We are sending you down into the hollow with two other men, to see what is down there. Currently, the trip is set for tomorrow morning.”

Bartlow flopped back into his chair.

“Who are the other two?” he asked.

Schenk rifled through the papers on the desk in front of him. He lifted folders and packets, then began to curse in German when he realized he had lost the files in question. He excused himself and left Bartlow alone in the room, except for his thoughts.

He didn’t know enough about the sciences involved to refute anything Schenk had told him. Even so, it felt wrong, like a poorly-cut coat. It wrinkled and pinched his mind to think that the planet didn’t have anything inside it. Maybe, he thought, every major



scientific breakthrough feels like this at first. He didn't know what relativity meant, so he couldn't apply it to any change in his everyday life, and when he heard about the Bomb, he just got scared at the sheer power of it. A hollow Earth, though, that could very much change the day-to-day living of his life. Why it could lead to.... It could cause....

“What the hell could they do with it?” he muttered.

He couldn't really think of anything. In theory, it would be more real estate, assuming it wasn't some sort of uninhabitable desert or Arctic wasteland. Although, he doubted there would be snow inside the earth, or sun, for that matter. If they did start setting people up to live down there, what would they do for power? No sun for solar, no wind for mills, no nothing, except maybe geothermal. Or maybe shipping down coal and oil, but would that be worth it?

The implications of it excited and scared the soldier, who considered himself simple. He stood up to pace, which he liked to do when he mused over a problem. As soon as he got to his feet, he felt lightheaded; the room swung wildly around and he almost fell over.

Gravity, he thought. What to do about gravity?

He'd been assuming that gravity would pull towards the interior surface. If it pulled towards the center, then people would have nothing to stand on. They'd have to build upside-down houses, bolted to the ground above, suspended over the abyss. He couldn't imagine anyone wanting to live like that, nor anyone wanting to fund the sort of research that would have to be done.

Bartlow remembered that Schenk had never said that Earth was entirely hollow. The idea struck him that there could well be a second, smaller planet, or moon, or whatever, spinning away inside the outer shell. Something like that would certainly have a great deal of value, both for the land and for what may or may not be in it. Minerals, ores, metals, possibly even water, life....

The other two members of the team turned out to be Petty Officer McVitty, a Navy frogman, and Dr. Brown, who'd been a combat engineer. Bartlow met them shortly after his meeting with Schenk and took immediate dislike to the pair of them.

McVitty didn't talk much and stood at attention a lot. When he did talk, it came so softly that Bartlow had to lean closer to hear him, which led to McVitty giving him a lot of suspect looks. Most of what he said was bragging set to simple, matter-of-fact tones to give it some air of truth. Bartlow didn't doubt McVitty's stories, but found them hardly worth bragging about.

Brown, on the other hand, couldn't seem to shut up or keep his voice down. He rambled on and on about how good it felt to be back in a military operation, full of camaraderie, and how excited he was to be a part of this historic mission, and, and, and, and. Bartlow tried to tune him out, but it seemed that every time he managed to, Brown changed his tone and broke right back into Bartlow's consciousness again.

They met in the drilling room, which occupied a fair chunk of one end of the station and descended into the raw rock by some eight or ten feet. A giant metal hatch

took up the middle of the floor and a bathysphere about the same size as the submersible Bartlow had ridden down in rested on top. Most of the room held the huge crane apparatus that would lower the metal bulb and the men inside. Bartlow could see where it had once been some sort of auger or drill.

One of the scientists stood next to the bathysphere, patting it every now and then.

“Gentlemen,” he said. “You’ll be carrying a lot of the equipment down with you, but the bathysphere does have some of what you’ll need built-in, namely a two-way radio, some external lamps, a sonar device with magnetic tape recorder, and enough breathing machines to keep you down for seven hours.”

He pointed out the appropriate features on the metal surface when he mentioned them.

“You will be taking with you: two cameras, a pair of low-light goggles, two ration packs each, and whatever specialized equipment you choose. Please be aware that there are no bathroom facilities on board, so take care of yourselves before you leave.”

A few people in the room chuckled, but Bartlow didn’t see what was so funny.

“Please bear in mind,” said the scientist. “We have no idea what may or may not be down there. It could be a cave-like environment, or a desert, or an ocean, or absolutely nothing at all. Between the three of you, you have experience in just about every environment on Earth. Well, the surface at any rate. You also have combat experience, which may be necessary. There could be some life down there; it’s unlikely, but possible, and you may have to deal with it.

“Other than that, though, you are purely going down to reconnoiter. Photograph the environment, make visual reports, and, depending on what’s there, send out sonar pulses. Don’t leave the bathysphere unless absolutely necessary. There’ll be plenty of time to look around outside once we’ve got a good idea of what we’re dealing with.”

McVitty seemed disappointed that he wouldn’t be gallivanting about the hollow environment like a latter-day Livingstone. Bartlow hoped the moment never came when he had to rely on the petty officer; he’d probably get everyone killed trying some pulp heroics, the whispering pillock.

The next morning, Bartlow walked back into the drilling room in full battle dress and webbing. He’d left his helmet and flak jacket back at the armory, taking only one of the new Enfield carbines and a few magazines.

Everyone else had already arrived and the room gumbled with activity. Scientists checked printouts and charts while sailors looked over the hull of the bathysphere and the attached cables. McVitty and Brown stood off to one side, talking to Schenk and Hughes, all looking excited. Bartlow’s stomach lurched, but he couldn’t tell if it was the mission or the greasy eggs he’d had for breakfast.

Hughes looked up and waved Bartlow over. Everyone saluted each other and Bartlow wondered how long McVitty could stand to attention with all of his equipment weighing on him; he looked ready for all worst-cases to happen at once. Brown, on the other hand, had only his scientific effects, which raised Bartlow’s opinion.

“You are all ready, yes?” asked Schenk.

“Almost,” said Bartlow. “Commodore, who is officially in charge while we’re down there?”

“Well, I should think a major outranks a petty officer and a corporal,” said Hughes and he grinned to the edge of laughter.

“I see,” said Bartlow. He almost heard McVitty’s smile droop.

“Mr. McVitty,” he said, “get rid of all that junk. Take a rifle and your frogman equipment, we’re not going on bloody holiday.”

McVitty began unbuckling and dropping all the junk until he stood in his Sladen suit and rebreather, surrounded by a pile of discarded equipment. He had an Enfield in one hand and a speargun in the other. He looked thoroughly dejected.

“Good man,” said Bartlow. “We’re working with a small space. Think like a paratrooper and only take what you need.”

Schenk clapped loudly, then rubbed his hands together.

“Now we are ready, yes?”

The three men walked to the small staircase that had been wheeled next to the bathysphere, climbed up it, and into the big ball.

A low bench ran around the edge of the round cabin. Machines, screens, dials, and equipment lined the steel walls, butting right up against reinforced portholes. A small hatch in the floor led down to a tiny, one-man airlock.

They sat on the bench, piling their things in the middle of the floor for lack of

anywhere better. Brown checked the radio, tested the sonar, and flashed a few experimental photographs. His massive smile twitched like he was trying hard to look solemn, but couldn't.

Bartlow closed his eyes and tried to get comfortable. Brown was fidgeting and watching him made the major tired and nervous. The radio crackled, then whined, then calmed down into the voice of Hughes. McVitty craned his neck to watch him speak through one of the portholes.

Hughes' speech washed over Bartlow, but none of it sank in. He'd heard a dozen commanding officers give a dozen such speeches before missions that were exciting at the time, but routine in hindsight. Bartlow's enthusiasm for the trip had waned following his first encounters with his crewmates and his realization that they just wanted him to make sure the place was safe before they sent in the real explorers. People like Brown would do the real discovering while he went back to his office to sit at a desk and write reports.

While Bartlow thought, the bathysphere began to descend. The crane ran smoothly, which he appreciated after his drop from the rig in the submersible. A small counter on the wall pinged as the rollers turned to show a hundred meters. Brown read it aloud and began to ramble.

"A hundred meters, gents. The shaft is about seven kilometers deep, so it should take us, oh, I'd say about an hour to get down. It gets hotter as we go, because of magma, you know. The crust is like a jam sandwich. You've got solid rock on the top and bottom

and magma in the middle, like the jam, you see? But don't worry, they flushed the shaft with cold seawater as they were drilling, so the magma cooled and formed solid rock for the shaft walls, so we shouldn't have to worry about melting or anything."

He laughed and tapped his fingers on his knees. McVitty said something and Brown leaned closer to hear. McVitty repeated himself, but Brown didn't lean back before he replied.

"Oh, I suspect something like a honeycomb of caves," he said.

McVitty winced at Brown's loud reply, then shifted away slightly on the bench. He said something else, which Brown leaned in again to hear, then shouted a reply to. The conversation inched them around the bench until McVitty sat uncomfortably close to Bartlow.

"Gentlemen," said Bartlow, "a little space, please?"

They muttered apologies and spread back out.

"What do you think we'll find?" asked Brown, staring at Bartlow.

"I don't know," he said. "I'm a soldier, not a scientist."

"But surely you've thought about it."

"Yes, and I think I've come up with some fairly decent ideas, but I wouldn't want to pick one and then be unprepared when it turned out to be something else."

"Ah, 'be prepared,' then. I was in the Scouts, myself, when I was a boy."

Brown rambled on with his new tangent, leaning back and forth to catch McVitty's muttered contributions. Bartlow set his eyes on the dark porthole and

wondered if it might be worth turning on the exterior lamps. He decided not to; the walls of a mineshaft didn't present any more possibility for distraction than did the other men in the vessel.

Bartlow awoke to McVitty shaking his elbow. The counter on the wall pinged off seven-thousand, one-hundred meters. Outside, the electric lamps hummed, illuminating the drill-smoothed rock. Brown had the camera in his lap and the low-light goggles pushed up on his head. McVitty had an Enfield in his hand and Bartlow cast a glance at the safety to check it was on. It wasn't. Both men smiled and twitched with excitement. Bartlow thought about children at Christmas.

As the walls of the shaft lifted away and the bathysphere descended into the hollow proper, Brown slapped the goggles down over his eyes and began snapping photos from the hip. Bartlow and McVitty turned to look out of their own portholes. For long moments, the only sounds were Brown stifling giggles and his camera clicking pictures.

"Does anyone see anything?" asked Bartlow.

"No," said McVitty.

"What?" said Brown.

He looked closer, taking the goggles off and looking outside.

"No, I don't," he said. "But let's take this a little more scientifically. Can anyone see anything with naked eyes and the lamps on?"

No one could. Brown turned off the lamps and looked out with the goggles. He



checked all of the portholes, then took off the goggles and handed them to McVitty, who did the same. Bartlow looked last.

“Anything?” asked Brown.

They both shook their heads. Brown sent word over the radio.

“That’s disappointing,” said the anonymous voice on the radio. “Do a sonar reading; that should tell us if there’s anything worthwhile nearby. Take an air sample, too.”

Brown signed off and shuffled over to a couple of the machines, hitting buttons, making things in the hull of the craft grunt and beep with industrial exertion. Once he’d done, he flopped down onto the bench. McVitty took a pair of large headphones from a small hook and nestled them on his head to listen to the mysteries outside.

“Now we wait,” said Brown. “We’ll take any readings and the air sample up with us. My bet is that the air’s same as ours, just higher in oxygen.”

Bartlow didn’t bother to ask why; he just took a deck of cards from his pocket and began to shuffle. A dozen games later, they began to ascend, empty-handed.

It took a week for them to find anything. Teams had been up and down in the hollow almost continuously since the pioneering trip, taking measurements, sending out complex light signals and sonar pulses. More than one voice expressed a wish for a radar machine, but neither the device nor an explanation came.

Bartlow was beating Brown at brag when McVitty sat up and pressed the

headphones tighter on his ears. He waved for his companions to be quiet and closed his eyes to help concentrate. He nodded slightly, then opened his eyes and rewound the audiotape attached to the sonar and played back the sound – a series of soft pings.

“What is it?” asked Brown.

McVitty shrugged and played the pings back over the radio.

“When did this come through?” asked someone on the other end.

“Just now,” said McVitty.

Silence, then, for a few minutes.

“We’ve checked our feed from your sonar,” said the voice. “Looks like something small under Mexico or the United States. Wait a moment.”

They did. Confused mutters slipped out of the speaker.

“Check your headphones, please.”

McVitty put them back on and immediately frowned. He looked at Brown, then Bartlow, then back, and began tapping his finger against the metal bench. Tap, then a pause. Tap, pause, bursts of taps, broken by pauses. Bartlow didn’t recognize the pattern; he counted eight taps in the last burst, then it went back to one.

“Those are Fibonacci numbers,” said Brown, wonder in his voice and face. “Let me at the sonar.”

He began turning the sonar on and off, sending out sound pulses in controlled groups.

“I’m sending back prime numbers.”

The incoming signal stopped shortly after, and the men waited in silence for more signs from the void. Almost an hour passed before McVitty began tapping out perfect squares on the bench. Bartlow gripped the pistol on his hip while Brown kicked his legs and squealed with glee.

McVitty stopped tapping out the numbers. Brown moved over to the radio and held the microphone in shaking hands. He adjusted the broadcast frequency and spoke over the waves.

“Hello, this is Dr. Truman Brown with the Royal Navy.”

He left a moment to listen, then adjust the frequency again.

“Hello, this is Dr. Truman Brown with the Royal Navy.”

Another moment, another frequency, the same message, and again, and again, until the repetitions had almost put Bartlow and McVitty to sleep. A noise over the radio brought them fully alert.

“I guess you limeys found this place, too, huh?” said a Texan, dangling in a bathysphere half the Earth’s cavity away.

Bartlow smiled to himself and didn’t say a word.

# THE DOTS

*This article originally appeared on Wednesday, 6 December 2008, in the Alabama Gulf Sentinel.*

## Police On Alert Following Needle Attack

*By B. Page - Staff Writer*

PENSACOLA, Fla. - Law enforcement officials along the I-10 corridor are looking today for two men suspected of attempting to attack a 16-year-old hitchhiker with a syringe.

The victim, whose identity has not been revealed due to her age, was hitchhiking to Tallahassee from San Diego when the two men picked her up.

According to police officials, the two men planned to ambush the victim all along.

"One suspect drove the vehicle, while the other remained hidden in the back seat under a sheet," said Florida Highway Patrol spokesman Henry Munro.

The driver - who identified himself as 'Jack' - pulled into the rest stop on I-10 about thirty miles east of Pensacola. He asked the victim to retrieve some money from the glove compartment. When she

leaned forward, the unnamed accomplice revealed himself, brandishing a hypodermic needle.

The victim managed to knock the needle from the man's fingers at which point he began to choke her with his hands, according to police.

"There were contusions on the victim's neck consistent with choking," said Munro.

The victim managed to slash her attacker's face with her house keys and get away.

Police agencies along I-10 have been alerted about the incident and are on the lookout for both men, as well as a possible third accomplice called 'Eddie' mentioned by the driver.

Although police are quick to describe the attack as a singular occurrence, others point to an increase in disappearances along I-10 in the past twenty years.

"This is not an isolated incident," said Dr. Susan Kitchener, who teaches anthropology at Florida State University.

"FBI crime reports and local police blotters from Jacksonville to San Antonio show a steady increase in disappearances along I-10 since 1986," she said.

According to FBI reports, 118 people went missing on I-10 in 2005, up from 63 in 1986.

Police, though, are adamant.

"There's a lot of wild speculation about this," Munro said. "But I can assure everyone that this is not part of some urban legend. Perhaps the perpetrators were inspired by the stories, but they are not

**-Continued on page 22A.**

*Entry from the 1973 edition of Florida Who's Who, published by Troubadour Publishing, 1972.*

**Eddie Starkweather (Edmund Marshall Starkweather, Jr.)**

**Occupation:** Automotive Businessman, Philanthropist

**Born:** Baltimore, Maryland, August 20, 1922.

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**Education**

High School Diploma, St. Petersburg High School, 1940.

**Career**

Private, United States Army, 1940-1946. Salesman, Starkweather Family Motors, Clearwater, Florida, 1946-1954. Owner, founder Starkweather Friendly Motors, Jacksonville, Florida, 1954-. Owner, founder Starkweather Friendly Motors, Gainesville, Florida, 1958-. Owner, founder Starkweather Auto-Wreck & Tow, 1958-1964. Owner, founder Starkweather Friendly Motors, Brunswick, Georgia, 1961-.

**Civic**

Director North Florida Young Scholars Foundation, 1960-1964.

**Family**

Son of Edmund, Sr. and Amy-Lou (Greene) Starkweather; Married Sandy Brightman, September 30, 1953; children: Rachel Amy, David Matthew.

*Bad Times Down at Eddie's by F. Scott & The Tweed Jackets lyrics copyright 2005 by A.K. Royle and J.L. Hansil. Reprinted here with permission. The album Tweedlife is available on Elektra.*

A deal gone bad,  
and some meat on the road.  
A car full of stiffs  
rolled up along the road.  
It's bad times down at Eddie's.

(spoken)  
Honey, honey, what's that rolling  
around in the trunk?  
Oh, that's nothing, babe. Just a little  
something I picked up for Eddie.

Bad men coming,  
and getting paid to unload.  
Everyone's happy;  
they get what they're owed.  
It's bad times down at Eddie's.

A deal gone bad,  
and some meat on the road.  
A car full of stiffs  
rolled up along the road.  
It's bad times down at Eddie's.

No ride's safe,  
just like your momma told.  
Thumbs to yourself,  
and just deal with the cold.  
It's bad times down at Eddie's.

It's bad times down at Eddie's. (x3)

<b>Real Life Hitch-Hunters!?!?!</b>
by Melonhead (Dec. 6, 2008 - 14:31 EST)
<p>omg!!! check this out:  <a href="http://www.abgulfsentinel.com/news/crime/91481122.ece">http://www.abgulfsentinel.com/news/crime/91481122.ece</a></p> <p>two guys attacked a hitchhiker with a syringe along I10. this anthropologist says its proof that the hitch-hunter myth isn't a myth. crazy!</p>
<b>Re: Real Life Hitch-Hunters!?!?!</b>
by the_texas_goatman (Dec. 6, 2008 - 14:38 EST)
Did anyone notice how the driver is supposed to have mentioned an Eddie? Eddie Starkweather, anyone?
<b>Re: Real Life Hitch-Hunters!?!?!</b>
by Dr. MyFisto (Dec. 6, 2008 - 14:39 EST)
omfg!!! totally awesome!
<b>Re: Re: Real Life Hitch-Hunters!?!?!</b>
by Polybius (Dec. 6, 2008 - 15:54 EST)
<p>Kitchener is a kook and a looney. Her heart's in the right place, but she's too concerned with proving myths as real and everything she writes has an agenda. I'm surprised that a newspaper would publish her verbatim without any sort of qualifiers.</p> <p>Also, Fisto, this girl could have been seriously hurt or killed in this attack, far from totally awesome, if you ask me.</p>
<b>Re: Re: Re: Real Life Hitch-Hunters!?!?!</b>
by Dr. MyFisto (Dec. 6, 2008 - 15:57 EST)
eat shit poly, you stuck up fuck
<b>Re: Real Life Hitch-Hunters!?!?!</b>
by UnluckyMummy (Dec. 6, 2008 - 16:08 EST)
I just think its wierd that these guys would imitate the myth like the cop said. Its one thing to make up a hoax but its something else to live out an existing myth.

*Continued....*

<b>Re: Real Life Hitch-Hunters!?!?!</b>
by Demon de Dover (Dec. 6, 2008 - 18:12 EST)
this is just a coincidence that people are blowing out of proportion. does anyone honestly believe that people have been hunting hitchhikers for money since the late 70's and this is the first evidence? come on now people
<b>Re: Real Life Hitch-Hunters!?!?!</b>
by El Yid (Dec. 6, 2008 - 18:38 EST)
i don't think the hitchhunter bullshit is widespread enough to be a full blown myth. has any one not along the gulfcoast ever even heard this outside this forum?
<b>Re: Re: Real Life Hitch-Hunters!?!?!</b>
by Melonhead (Dec. 6, 2008 - 19:31 EST)
How many people outside of VA have heard of the Bunnyman, Yid? You talk about that thing all the time and we don't call you on it.

*The complete thread reacting to the I-10 attack may be found on <http://forums.urbanemythology.net>. It is approximately 63 posts long and digresses considerably.*

**EDDIE STARKWEATHER**

From Encyclopedia Internettica

Edward "Ten-Thou" Starkweather (November 22, 1918 - June 12, 1982) was a notorious contract killer and enforcer for the State Line Mob during the 1960s. He gained his nickname for charging a flat rate of \$10,000, regardless of the contract's difficulty.

A self-proclaimed "freelancer," Starkweather worked for a time as a licensed bounty hunter in Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas, performing hits and collecting underworld bounties on the side.

Starkweather is perhaps best known for his last contract killing: his own suicide. Living destitute in Memphis, Starkweather was approached by long-time rival Howard Kee, who offered "Ten-Thou" his usual fee to kill himself, with the money going to Starkweather's teenage son, Darryl. Eddie instructed friends to kill Kee if he reneged before shooting himself in the head with a .38-caliber revolver. Kee paid Darryl shortly thereafter.

*Portions of the Encyclopedia Internettica entry for Edward "Ten-Thou" Starkweather taken from [http://www.internettica.org/entries/Edward\\_Starkweather](http://www.internettica.org/entries/Edward_Starkweather) and used here under Creative Commons license.*

<b>Eddie Starkweather</b>
<b>Born:</b> November 22, 1918 Hernando, Mississippi
<b>Died:</b> June 12, 1982 (aged 63) Memphis, Tennessee
<b>Cause of Death:</b> Self-inflicted gunshot.
<b>Number of Victims:</b> 12 - 33
<b>Notable Victims:</b> Arless McGovern Jack Hathcock Edward Starkweather

*Below are excerpts from a recent draft of an article by Dr. Susan Kitchener. The original draft was written in 1998, but has yet to be published in its final and complete form. I requested permission to print the article in its entirety, but was denied.*

## **The Road Warriors**

by Susan Kitchener, Ph.D

Despite being a German invention, the super-highway truly came into its own in the United States with the implementation of the Eisenhower Interstate System in 1956. The interstates criss-cross all fifty states (their presence in Alaska and Hawaii is a subject for another day) with three main arteries cutting east-west across the continent. The southernmost of these is the Interstate 10, which runs from Santa Monica, California to Jacksonville, Florida, and I-10 is rife with the first truly American cryptid.

...The first truly American cryptids are the so-called hitch-hunters - men and women prowling up and down the roads of the U.S. in their automobiles, looking for hitch-hikers to pick up and brutally murder. These killings are not gang related, nor are they driven by some sort of gruesome psychosis, but purely for profit, as the dead hitch-hikers are delivered to some central depot for bounties.

This depot may usually be found in a major or semi-major city, with Jacksonville, Florida; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Houston, Texas as the most common suspects. The director or manager of the central station goes by many names, usually a variation on Ed or Fred, although in East Texas, he is Charlie. Interestingly enough, the bounty remains the same, regardless of geography - \$10,000.

[...]



The myth first appears, seemingly out of the blue, in the early-to-mid 1980s. In 1985, a concerned citizen spoke to the Mandeville, Louisiana, police department; the report of which is the first known appearance of the story, but anecdotal evidence goes back to 1982. These first accounts contain certain elements that later ... disappear ... most notably that the hunters must provide proof of the victim's danger to motorists. By 1990 ... everyone is fair game.

[...]

The myth, then, rests entirely on a case of mistaken identity between two men who have nothing in common but the sum of \$10,000 and a name.

[...]

The entire tale hinges on the nomadic road culture. Neither the killers nor the victims are operating out of a singular location - this is not a home-invasion or haunted house myth. All of it is fluid and dependent on the American image of the open road, serving as a warning of our times and the dangers inherent in acts such as hitch-hiking.

[...]

Marxist commentators - notably Rory Brown of Portland State - have noted an anticapitalist strain to the myth. The 'haves', who drive cars, are killing the 'have-nots', who have to walk, for a substantial sum. This small business literally makes money on the corpses of the poor.

[...]

We have, then, an unusual fusion of myths warning against hitch-hiking and those warning of capitalism. Such a combination cannot have arisen in any other nation, due purely to the nexus of

elements present in U.S. culture. It also marks the predominance of postmodernism and appropriation in modern America[.] Perhaps, though, the most interesting thing about the hitch-hunter myth is that disappearances along I-10 have increased by thirty percent in the last twelve years...

## NEEDLE ATTACK -Continued From 1A

part of some vast conspiracy to wipe out hitchhikers. The idea is absurd."

There is, however, a myth popular along the eastern Gulf Coast which tells of teams of serial killers murdering hitchhikers in revenge for a young girl allegedly murdered by a carjacker who was never caught.

"We are well aware of the myth," Munro said.

"Please, if your information relates solely to these myths, do not call the tipline. We know about them and are taking appropriate action with them."

For anyone with information relating to the attack, please call the Florida Highway Patrol tipline at 1-800-~~333-3333~~ or visit <http://www.fhsmv.gov/fhnp/>.

*This article appeared in the Jacksonville Courant on Sunday, 16 June, 1974.*

## Local Businessman Offers \$10,000 Reward in Daughter's Death

by Cameron St. Clair  
COURANT STAFF WRITER

Mr. Eddie Starkweather, owner of Starkweather Friendly Motors, offered a reward yesterday for information that may help solve the murder of his daughter earlier this month.

Mr. Starkweather held a press conference on the front steps of City Hall in which he begged anyone who may know anything about his daughter's death to come forward. He offered \$10,000 for any tips that lead to the closure of the case.

"Anyone who knows anything, please. The money isn't worth anywhere near as much as knowing how and

why my baby Rachel left us," said Mr. Starkweather, holding up a high school photograph of Rachel.

Police found Rachel Starkweather's body in a retention pond on I-95 last week following a weeklong search. She had been shot in the head.

Police believe the murder was a failed carjacking. Rachel's car - a 1971 Ford Mustang, license plate number CDN-24J - has not yet been recovered. To report any tips, please contact the Jacksonville Police Department.

*This article, titled Pitt to Go Hitch-Hunting, originally appeared in Variety magazine, March 2004.*

Brad Pitt's production company, Plan B, has picked up a script called "The Hitch-Hunters" by Jim Barnard, who is perhaps best known for writing "Night in the City of Dreams."

The script follows a group of men who bait and kill dangerous hitch-hikers in East Texas. A local business magnate pays a bounty for each corpse.

Based on the little-known urban myth, usually given the same title, "The Hitch-Hunters" has been described by some insiders as 'Peckinpah doing a serial killer noir.'

As yet, no decisions have been made regarding cast or a director, but the producers are hoping to start shooting in September and have the film in theatres next summer.

## Life of Crime - Minigames Preview

by Morgan Trudeau

Things get ruthless as we get to cut our teeth on some of the upcoming shooter's minigames.

Free Radical made some waves when they first unveiled their crime shooter *Life of Crime*, whose grim scenario and ruthless missions are a strong departure from the company's tongue-in-cheek flagship *Timesplitters* series. Although the much-rumored and ballyhooed torture minigame has been confirmed as not appearing in the final product, there's still no shortage of things to do in between all the contract killings and drug deals.

*Life of Crime's* minigames are accessed from different rooms in your house, with new minigames unlocking as you buy newer, larger houses with more rooms. Given that the house also serves as a way to customize your character's appearance (as discussed in our last go round with the game), manage weapons, and start certain key missions, it's a natural and easily-accessed hub.

The first game we got to play - called 'Riders on the Storm' - begins from the garage. What at first appeared to be a mundane drive down the highway, dodging traffic and weaving between lanes, got interesting as our car automatically stopped to pick up hitch-hiker.

With our passenger safely aboard, we had to get ready to attack him while keeping his suspicions low by completing a number of quicktime events - answering questions and taking a screwdriver from under the driver's seat. The violence of the eventual murder is a massive departure from Free Radical's usual M.O. and will no doubt garner a solid M rating.

The quicktime events in *Riders on the Storm* felt a little demanding for our tastes, but our host assured us that the development team were still nailing down the right balance between fun and challenge. Upon completion of the minigame, we got treated to a cutscene showing our character selling the corpse to a warehouse for a fat wad of money.

Up next was a backyard skeet-shoot, only available in a giant plantation-style house that is surely one of the last properties to appear in the game. The shoot felt a lot like a simple first-person shooter and really showed off Free Radical's pedigree in the genre. Even though we were standing in a fixed position, aiming at simple clay pigeons, the tension of going for a high score is a great thrill.

Although the final number of minigames has yet to be determined, the promise and potential on display have us very excited for how *Life of Crime* will shape up. Stay tuned for more information as we approach the game's worldwide release on August 5. -MH

*The above preview first appeared in the April 2008 issue of Computer & Video Games (Vol. 6, Issue IV). It is also available at <http://www.cvgames.com>.*

Date	Name	Amount	#
5/1	Page, B.	175. <sup>00</sup>	#8255 (Payment)
"	Walsh, H.	25. <sup>00</sup>	"
"	"	140. <sup>00</sup>	#29070
"	Rosenthal, J.	168. <sup>00</sup>	#29069
"	"	168. <sup>00</sup>	#8194
"	Blake, F.	231. <sup>00</sup>	#16113
"	Montgomery, L.	188. <sup>00</sup>	#10008
"	Bishop, M.	203. <sup>76</sup>	Services rendered
"	Smithee, A.	- 10,000. <sup>00</sup>	FCOS
"	Porter, Inc.	1100. <sup>63</sup>	#23622
"	Lister, D.	197. <sup>00</sup>	"
8/2	Yonkers, Y.	210. <sup>00</sup>	#19729
"	Sherman, T.	2090. <sup>00</sup>	See gauge by 3/2
"	D.I.	- 10,000. <sup>00</sup>	Services rendered

Photograph allegedly taken of a page from Eddie Starkweather's ledger that began appearing in conspiracy and mythology circles ca. 1991. Neither the negative of the photograph, the page, nor the ledger itself were ever recovered. The image is almost unanimously considered a hoax. Note the ninth entry, which shows a payment of \$10,000 to A. Smithee for "Services rendered." A similar entry appears at the bottom, but the name is cut off.

-Eds.

## THE REFINED PALATES

The woman in the beautiful white suit offers the Bohemian-looking artist a cup of coffee. He does not know that she once sat where he sits, that she once thought of making a big splash in the New York scene with her vibrant, daring, and profoundly vaginal art. She knows this. She knows that she has found contentment in her administrative duties – answering the phone and making appointments and filing. She has reached a point where she sometimes masturbates thinking about filing. She has also recently started masturbating thinking about being forced by her boss – the curator – to masturbate in public. The office. The mall. Times Square. The curator does not know this.

The curator knows that the woman in the beautiful white suit is still stunning, even into her mid-forties. The woman likes to think she knows this, but deep down does not. Often, he will ignore details in stories or art that ruin his immediate and pleasing mental image of the piece, even when he knows the artist did not intend this image. He knows that he sometimes asks her opinion of the artists who come in and of their work. She knows he is humoring her failed artistic ambitions, laid aside in favor of her erotic clericalism. He knows she has a keen eye for exceptional work. He knows his own eye is not so keen. Never has been. Never will be. The curator has reached a point where he sometimes masturbates thinking about being forced by the woman in the beautiful white suit to masturbate in public.

If the curator and the woman in the beautiful white suit come to know what the other knows, they will both also come to know awkwardness. They may take turns forcing each other to masturbate in public. Knowing that the forcer will be the forced next time will take the edge and thrill off.

Aside from the curator's office and the reception, the gallery has an accountant's office. The accountant keeps odd hours. The curator and the woman in the beautiful white suit forgot what the accountant looks like. He does his work in a thorough and timely manner, though, and doesn't bother anybody.

The Bohemian-looking artist knows that his work is a fraud and that he also is a fraud. He knows that his work is little more than a Rorschach test. Nothing from him goes on the canvas except the potential for meaning. He knows he will eventually be discovered and cast aside. He does not know if there will be any uproar or if it will be a quiet dismissal. He also knows that his girlfriend does not truly love him and he does not truly love her. He wants to have sex with the woman in the beautiful white suit, but she does not know this. His lunch contained prosciutto rather than the pastrami he wanted, but he does not know the difference. He does not know that he does not know the difference. He enjoys being gagged and forced to wear dresses.

The curator looks at the works of the Bohemian-looking artist and thinks it is good, but does not know if it is truly good or simply to his taste. He calls in the woman in the beautiful white suit. She knows the curator is humoring her. He knows that her taste is far keener than his. She says the art is good. The curator then knows that the

art is truly good. They tell the Bohemian-looking artist that the art is good. All three of them come to know that the Bohemian-looking artist will be shown in the gallery from early April until the middle of June.

They all three go for drinks. They are all unmarried. They have a threesome. The woman no longer in the beautiful white suit lies beneath the curator. “You’re on my hair.” “Oh, sorry.” They have trouble finding a rhythm. The Bohemian-looking artist still looks Bohemian naked. He does not comment on their arrhythmia. He keeps painting his abstract of the coupled couple.

The woman lies beneath the artist. They find a rhythm. She knows the artist satisfies her more than the curator. She will not tell the curator. The artist stares intently at the closet and thinks of dresses. He considers asking the woman if he might borrow one. He knows he is too big for anything she might have.

The curator stands by the artist’s abstract. He stares at the canvas as he works himself with a tight fist. At just the moment, he sees that the art truly is good.

After the sex, they all know contentment. They all know that they cannot remain just having had sex forever. They need to eat and drink and pay taxes and watch plays that make them feel cultured even though they know they do not understand the plays. In the knowing, the contentment slips away.



## THROUGH THE PERILOUS NIGHT

They killed the engine and the boat coasted to a stop in the middle of the lake. In the bow, Tommy the Pen turned off the electric spotlight and they both tossed their burning cigarette butts into the water. They sat there for a time, in the boat, not talking, to allow their eyes to adjust to the moonless dark. Shapes and impressions were as good as it got.

Each picked up one of the strong rods from the bottom of the small boat, and baited the hooks by touch. One of them, pained, gasped and then began sucking on a bloody fingertip as the bait dangled flaccidly from the metal spike.

They made sure of clearance from one another, then cast their lines whizzing away into the inky world, ending with a satisfying plop in the wind-stirred lake. Then they waited, neither one talking to the other. The boat was not the place for socializing, not with the lines in the water. The car, sure. They could talk all they wanted in the car, and did, about greasy spoons and dive bars and drive-in churches with peeling paint and blue-haired organists warbling out harsh falsettos of Amazing Grace.

But in the boat, they didn't say a word to each other, they simply sat, flicking out the lines, bait, and floaters, which would reach out into the darkness with a whiz and a plop, then wait for the rod to tug and dance, occasionally reeling the line in with a mechanical sound. Such was the way the men behaved. Such was the way they'd gone hunting for bison, at first with guns, then just with their eyes. Such was the way they'd



tried to find Bigfoot, just to see. Both times, their trips had spalled off into random asides and alternate ideas for hunts and adventures and quests. Such was the way the men worked.

In the dark, and focused as they were on the task at hand, neither man noticed the General approach the boat, although neither suspected they would have, even on a full summer noon. He'd probably just slid up from the depths of the lake or snapped into existence without any approach or fanfare. The first they noticed him was his voice cutting through the sound of the water lapping against the sheet metal hull of the skiff.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” he said, the voice sounding from six feet or so above the water.

“Is it?” asked Jackie Too-Tall, hardly surprised at the General's sudden appearance. They'd been expecting him to show sooner or later, to torment and discourage them.

The General tipped his head back and looked into the cloudy blackness where the sky had been before dusk, although no one could see him do it.

“The moon passed it's peak, oh, I'd say over an hour ago,” he said.

“Well, it is, then, isn't it?” said Jackie, jerking his rod a little to make the bait dance underwater.

A few moments passed with both men trying to ignore the General as he stood just a foot or so from the skiff, the water – choppiest in the stiffening breeze – lapping at the soles of his leather cavalry boots. He tried to read them, gauge them; he'd never been

able to, but he always felt progress. Moment by moment, he had to concentrate less and less, by increments too small for his population to perceive, to maintain his status quo.

He enjoyed this progress. It was his way, The Way.

Tommy reeled in his hook and recast into the dark.

“What are you doing, then, gentlemen?” asked the General.

“Watching TV,” said Jackie.

“Fishing,” said Tommy.

The General made appreciative sounds to himself, and then they heard the damp sound of him drawing his thin lips out into someone else’s grin, and smelled the sharp smell of his oily, moonshine saliva as it ran between his mismatched teeth. He sucked it wetly back into his mouth as it threatened to overrun his mouth and begin cascading down his chin, drooling all over his tunic and into the lake water below. He swallowed loudly before he spoke again.

“What are you fishing for?”

“Alligator gar,” said Tommy.

Still, neither fisher looked away from the dark where the water should be.

“Alligator gar,” said the General, a thoughtful tone in his throat. “Such a despicable creature. I shan’t imagine there are any in these waters, gentlemen.”

“That remains to be seen,” said Jackie, curtly.

“What about tilapia?” asked the General. “Tilapia’s a lovely fish. Not so ugly, as fish go, and quite tasty. Why, I’m sure you could find a whole mess of tilapia in this lake

and spit-roast them over a fire down on the shoreline. You never know, if you did that, the sky might open up a little, shuck off this cloud cover and you'd get a lovely moonlight coming down. Doesn't that sound good, a little campfire tilapia by moonlight?"

"I'm allergic to tilapia," said Jackie.

"I don't like roast fish," said Tommy.

"Well, maybe you could pan fry it. Get a little oil in a skillet and fry it up, maybe have a fried tilapia sandwich. Or, I know, there's a small town called Sunderland just a little way up the dirt road you took to get here – well, I assume that was your Ford parked out that way."

"It's not a Ford," said Tommy. "It's a Tucker."

"Anyway, I'm sure you gentlemen would love Sunderland. It's a quaint little bayou town, you know, all dirt roads and crab shacks and little barefoot children in denim overalls with straw hats and freckles--"

"And Whites Only drinking fountains and Negroes on the back of the bus?" asked Tommy, cutting the General off mid-thought.

"Don't be foolish," said the General, with malice thick as hot asphalt. "There's nothing so ugly around here, not these days."

"We know," said Jackie.

"I was only going to suggest that you could go to Sunderland and get your tilapia deep fried and served up with some French fried potatoes and tartar sauce," said the

General.

“That does sound good,” said Jackie. “But there’s just one problem.”

“What?” asked the General, almost hopeful it was something he could fix, but knowing deep down that it probably wasn’t.

“We’re not fishing for tilapia,” said Jackie.

“We’re fishing for alligator gar,” said Tommy.

The General audibly grit his teeth and tapped the toe of his boot on the water, making little splashes of anger. Neither man in the boat reacted outwardly, mostly because they weren’t sure how well the General could see in the dark, but they knew they could just make out the General’s snow-white coiffure of other people’s hair and the wet glint of his adopted teeth.

“This is going to be like the bison, isn’t it?” asked the General.

“We’re just fishing,” said Tommy.

“For alligator gar,” added Jackie.

“Yes, I know,” said the General. “And before you were just hunting for bison.”

“Well, not really,” said Jackie.

“No?” asked the General.

“No,” said Tommy. “We were hunting for the extinction of the bison.”

“I think,” said the General, his voice still carrying the trappings of friendliness, “there’s a storm coming.”

The wind picked up, then, and the waters got choppier. Little Rockies of water

slapped against the side of the skiff, splashing droplets into the boat and spotting Jackie's t-shirt. The General remained where he was, stoic, the lake reaching up and soaking the lower reaches of his culottes.

"Shall we head in?" asked Jackie.

"Let's," said Tommy.

They reeled in their hooks and bait and floaters and laid the rods in the floor of the skiff. Up in the bow, Tommy turned on the electric spotlight, the beam cut by the growing rain that fell heavier and heavier from the choked-thick sky. It fell hard and cold, flattening Jackie's black shag of hair, and bouncing painfully from Tommy's shaved scalp.

The engine grated into life and Jackie angled the boat around and headed towards the charmingly rickety dock they'd taken off from, which Tommy pinned with the spotlight. The wind picked up, blowing water into the boat as the rain came in at flatter and flatter angles, with fatter and fatter drops that began to soak into the bones and stiffen the joints.

Jackie didn't ease up on the throttle as the skiff made for the shallow beach, built of sand and mortared with mud. The skiff ran up onto the shore, the propeller blades scraping against the bed in the tideland shallows. Tommy killed the spotlight as Jackie turned off the engine, then they both hopped out onto the crunch and damp sand before they ran for the Tucker.

"Aren't you going to get your rods and gear?" asked the General, suddenly stood

leaning against a fence that set the overgrown fields off from the dirt road and the scrub beach of the lake shore.

“They’re not ours,” said Jackie as he dropped into the passenger seat.

They sat in the car, toweling the rain off and getting situated. Tommy pulled out a beaten pack of cigarettes that had the same four lonely smokes as always. He took two out, handing one to Jackie and putting the other between his lips. They lit the tobacco with matches and smoked for a little while, relaxing.

“I should call the police about that fishing gear,” said the General from the back seat.

Tommy adjusted the rear view mirror so he didn’t have to see the General’s beady eyes and puffy face.

“You know as well as we do, Georgie, that we can be too much for any of the police you could send after us to handle,” said Jackie around his cigarette holder.

The General conceded that point with silence.

“Shall we head out?” asked Tommy.

“Let’s,” said Jackie.

Tommy slid the key into the ignition and turned it, kicking the engine to purring life. He flicked on the three headlights, catching a shaggy-haired animal with a bald head and black eyes in the glow for a moment, then it was gone.

“A possum,” said the General. “Ugly, brutish animals.”

“An opossum,” said Tommy.

“Reminds me of Jenkins,” said Jackie, wistfully.

“Me, too,” said Tommy.

“Who is Jenkins?” asked the General from the back seat.

“It’s from a story Carter used to tell,” said Tommy.

The three of them were silent for a few moments, then, unsure of what to say to each other and not really wanting to say anything anyway.

“I am sorry about Carter,” said the General.

“He was delicate,” said Jackie. “He’d have been miserable anyway.”

The Tucker eased up the sandy scrub to the dirt road and cruised along between the brown fences and tall grass fields beyond. The cab filled up with tobacco smoke as the two men in the front seat wore down their cigarettes.

“You know, sooner or later, that pack of cigarettes will run out,” said the General.

“Then you’ll have a hard time finding more.”

“It hasn’t failed us yet,” said Tommy. “And it’s been with us a long time.”

“It’ll certainly get us to the next stop,” said Jackie.

“And where might that be?” asked the General.

The men shrugged.

“We’ll find it,” said Tommy.

“Might I suggest Coney Island?”

Neither Tommy nor Jackie responded; they knew what had happened on Coney. The General had set it aside as a place for all the people who didn’t care to submit to his

model America, where they could do as they pleased. For a time, the savage colony stood askew and proud, then the haircuts started getting more conservative, the skirts longer, the parties pleasanter. With no squares to stand apart from, the Coney Island counterculture collapsed into the General's normalcy.

"I hate to say it," said Jackie, "but fuck Coney Island."

And then the back seat was empty.

"About Goddamn time," said Tommy.

Neither man found the disappearance odd or commented further on it, since that was how the General had always operated. They drove on in silence and letting out plumes of blue-gray smoke that had begun to accumulate around the roof of the cab. Tommy finished his cigarette first, dropping the glowing butt into the tray and bringing the pack out for another.

Three cigarettes lay along one edge of the pack.

"That's a bad sign," said Tommy.

"There are always bad signs," said Jackie.

They didn't talk again until after they had passed the small hick town of Sunderland. The houses had picket fences and the one stop light had a soda shop kitty-corner from a little red brick church. They didn't need to point out to each other than there had been no such town on the road when they had arrived at the lake that evening.

"I think maybe Carter understood this stuff better than we ever will," said Tommy.

"Me, too," said Jackie. "I think that's maybe why he did what he did."



Both of them thought about the scene; Carter, so thin and sickly, swinging gently from a rafter, blown by the air conditioner. When they laid him out on the bed, he could have passed for sleeping, were it not for the rope burn about his throat. They'd given him a Viking funeral on the Delaware, much to the General's displeasure.

"Where are we going next?" asked Tommy.

"I think we could be at Wounded Knee in a day or so if we sleep in shifts," said Jackie.

Tommy nodded and gripped the wheel a little tighter as he pressed the gas a little tighter. As he turned on the radio and picked up a happy, twangy country song, to play at low volume, Jackie pulled a hanky from his pocket and dropped it over his face as he settled down to sleep. By the time the song was over, Jackie was in his nightmare.

## NIGHT IN THE CITY OF DREAMS

### -The Victim-

One evening, a man, remarkable in his ordinariness, ducks down an alley behind a Chinese laundry in midtown. From a nearby street corner, a man of vicious bent and granite body double-takes before stomping across the road and down the alley. Dirty snow falls from the deep sky and makes the roads slushy, but no brakes squeal.

The granite man grips the victim in one massive hand, palming the scalp, and lifts him off the ground. The victim yells out for help and the granite man laughs. He rips the simple brown jacket from the squirming, yelling victim's shoulders and takes out a wallet. The victim keeps shouting.

A hand – a woman's hand – grabs the wallet from the granite fingers. The hand sprouts from an arm twenty feet long, stretched thin in red spandex. It recoils back to the owner, a shapely young woman in a jumpsuit and domino. The granite man looks at her and sneers. He tosses his victim aside and turns on her.

She stretches out her arm again, circling his stony feet. He laughs and lifts one foot from her lasso limb. Something bright and fast strikes him in the back, knocking him off balance, onto his face. A third man, a boxer wearing a luchador mask, steps out from behind a dumpster. His fists glow and the flakes around them melt in the air.

The victim, dazed, looks at the boxer and woman with thanks in his eyes. He staggers to his feet, collects his wallet, and rushes off into the winter night.

The boxer goes to find a patrolman. The woman stretches herself every which way she can and ensnarls the fallen granite giant. The snowfall is not perturbed.

-The Spook-

The hobo grabs at scraps of newspaper. He wears an old suit with no hat or tie and a hood with a crude ghost face on it. The orange of the streetlights passes through him, a man made of mist. A headline catches his eye. He used to work for this paper and believed principles meant more than a paycheck. The story tells of the rubber woman and boxer, the granite man and Victim. The hobo does not trust the Victim and thinks from fetishes to conspiracies. With a flip of his jacket collar, he heads for an alley he knows in midtown, behind a Chinese laundry. A pizzeria there sometimes gives out old pies from the back door.

He finds a memorial to the lost art of the crime scene. Everything has gone under the snow and shoes. A shred of brown fabric hangs from a rusty gash in a dumpster. It reminds the hobo of a suit, but he can't even know if it relates to the attack. Lots of people wear suits, even the hobo himself. He heads back to where he found the newspaper, keeping an eye out for anything else he might use to insulate his box against the snow.

-The Patrol-

The patrolmen – a man and a woman – wear tight blue jumps with big shiny

shields on the breast and mirrored visors over the eyes. White letters say “Civil Maintenance” across their backs. Both have bodies like Greek sculptures and teeth like high-beams. They lean against the cruiser parked outside the penitentiary, which used to be a manor house. The majority of the inmates play baseball on the lawn; there aren’t enough outfielders. Their feet disappear into the inches of ground snow.

From the kitchen door comes the hobo, barely visible in the battleship-colored daylight. He loops around the baseball game. The large black eyes of his hood look straight at the leaning pair. He pauses before he starts walking towards them.

“Don’t you know you’re not supposed to be here?” The patrolman can pass through solid walls.

“He knows; he just doesn’t care.” The patrolwoman has a large, bald head, for she can move things with her mind.

“Who ratted me out?”

“You need to leave this to the professionals. You don’t even have a job as an excuse any more.”

“I still have my passport.”

“Like you show up in pictures!”

“Keep out of this, okay? It’s being handled.”

-The Lithic-

The granite man sits on the couch in the common room. The wooden frame broke

as soon as he sat down. He looks at the TV. A woman in go-go dress and cowl attempts to prove paternity by similarity of powers. She disappears when the granite man closes his eyes, but he can still hear her. The wail of her conviction becomes the shout of a man calling for help. The thick warmth of the penitentiary falls away into the snowy night cool. He sees the look of the man's face in his mind's eye – the panic, the stress. Both corners of his stony mouth rise.

The blob of energy slams into his back, he feels, and the heat lingers. Despite the harshness of his skin, he feels the tight bind of the rubber woman restraining him, the taste of the ground slush. In the memory, he hears the receding footsteps of the panicked victim. A parade of faces dances in his memory: patrolmen, reporters, inmates, and a hobo, all asking him questions. The smile lingers.

-The Editor-

“You can't run this story.”

“We're obliged to. We're a newspaper.”

“This will completely undermine the city's Civil Maintenance.”

“They undermined themselves. We're just pointing it out.”

“No, we're not. We're not. You're on Lifestyles & Incidents, anyway. This isn't even your beat.”

“Sure it is. The story's all about incidents that support the lifestyles of certain patrolmen.”

“Okay, you’ve got two choices. Drop the story or clear out your desk.”

“You said when you hired me that I’d have more investigational freedom than I did with the Maintenance.”

“I know, but I didn’t say anything about editorial freedom.”

“Guess I’m out of a job.”

“As you like it.”

#### -The Guard-

The guard sits in his guardhouse at the gate of the penitentiary and watches the bottom of the eighth. With one hand, he taps a pen against the desk. With another, he drums his fingers on the arm of his chair. Two more arms cross and uncross themselves. He straightens papers on the desk with the remaining hands, tapping the sheets towards a perfection he won’t attain.

He remembers them telling him to rat. He refused on principle. They bullied him with his expunged record, asked how his employers would feel about such a man in such a position. He waved the law in their faces. They laughed at him.

The phone leers at him from its place on the wall. A feeling of filthiness lingers on his ear, the ear that heard the ‘thank you’ from the Civil Maintenance branch and later the engine of the patrol car purring up to the curb. It feels like his hands feel when he doesn’t wash them, like there’s a layer of germs all over. He mutters to himself, repeating what he told the authorities.

“He’s here. He’s going in.”

All six thumbs set to twiddling. The guard wonders if he can afford night classes in IT at the learning annex.

-The Reporter-

As she rounds the corner on her way home from the paper, the reporter doesn’t need to use her super-vision to know he’s going to be there waiting for her. She smooths the raincoat over her disco-ball dress and checks the thousand tiny mirrors for smudges and cracks. Turning to the window of the taxi, she makes sure her overbuilt goggles are straight.

As she approaches the stoop of her brownstone, she catches sight of him, his heat, in the shadows and the cold. She can’t understand why he even attempts to hide from her and suspects he can’t, either. He does this every few months, lurking in the shadows and alleyways around the house, pretending she can’t see him. She sees him, though, and ignores him. She refuses to embarrass him; when he wants to talk, he’ll ring the doorbell.

He doesn’t ring the doorbell, though. He steps from his hiding place and onto the sidewalk next to her stoop, just as she mounts the step. They look at each other.

“Hello.” He can’t believe how deep the longing had gone.

“Have you been waiting long?” She can’t believe how low he’s gone.

-The Alter-Ego-

The gentleman the public has dubbed their Victim stands before a mirror by his bed. He has his jumpsuit up to his waist and the top of it hangs limp in front of him. Cuts and bruises mark his torso alongside fading scars. In the closet next to him hang two brown suits – one abused, one pristine. He wonders how to get discreet repairs and not lose his identity to the wind.

Pleasant memories haunt his home. Walking from room to room, he can feel the emotions of the families who lived there before him. The dining room brims with anticipation and satisfaction; the back bedroom lust; the bathroom fear and a little bit of relief. The master bedroom, his favorite room, feels like contented love.

He pulls on the rest of his jumpsuit, a thing of rubber and canvas and copper topped with a gimp hood. It keeps out the press of emotions and thoughts that move with their sources through the city. Without his suit, the sheer density of the feelings can press them into becoming his own. He has not yet solved his relationship problems.

As he picks up his bag, which contains his laptop and prescription uppers, the Victim takes a moment to appreciate the aura of the room before pulling on his mask and heading out to work. In the relative silence of his head, he thinks about the times now when he feels completed, lighter on his feet, clearer in his mind, and broader in his chest.

-The Man-

Steam lingers in the air as the fan whines it away. He sweeps a thin hand across



the mirror and stares at his reflection in the wet glass. A beard hangs shaggy from his jawbone and he realizes he can't remember how long its been there. His skin is translucent, which is nothing new. It's pale, and starved of sunlight. The eyes look deeper-set, the cheeks gaunter. Streaks of gray stand out in his dark hair and beard. He pulls back his lips from his teeth, which look all the more yellow next to the pallor of his skin.

The man imagines how the stranger in the mirror must look even when he's dressed, when his suit covers up the meat hanging limp and flaccid from his ever-apparent bones. The hood, he suspects, fits a little large around his meatless face these days. If his slide continues – and it will – he suspects he'll have to trade in his spooky mantle for one more ghoulish.

He looks at the suit hanging from the door. It's a spare he left here years ago and forgot about. It's crumpled match on the floor doesn't look so passable after the contrast. The frayed seams and stained cuffs stand out all the more next to the clothes that hung inside with mothballs for all those nights on the asphalt.

#### -The Couple-

Candles flicker all around the bedroom and the scented smoke sinks into the fabrics. The rubber woman lies on the bed, naked but for her domino. Her body doesn't settle like it should, with the bones bending and sagging as she thoroughly relaxes.

From the bathroom, the boxer steps out and tosses his gloves into a corner. The

luchador mask on his head creases and she can tell he's smiling, enjoying the view of her naked body. He walks over and climbs into the bed, kneeling over her. With two gentle fingers, he peels the domino from around her eyes. The sight of her naked face arouses him and she smiles when she sees it.

She stretches her head up to kiss him through the mask, then she bites the fabric and pulls it off. She looks at his face, studying the nose and eyes and mouth and cheeks like she hasn't before. There are differences between his face and the face of the Victim, but she can't put her finger on them. She's had so little practice. In her memory, their faces blur together. The boxer runs from the snowbound alley. She lies in bed with the Victim.

As they entwine each other, the rubber woman feels the weight of the boxer on top of her and remembers the weight of the granite man as she bound him. As he moves in the bed, the boxer feels a warm pulsing in his hands. He closes his eyes and imagines her knotted about the granite man as he pummels the villain's face into powder.

In the smoky aftermath, they hold each other and remember.

-The Ex-

The hobo comes down the stairs. Even though he's only a hazy shadow, the reporter can tell he looks better than he did on her stoop. He's lost weight and she didn't have a hat or tie to give him, but for a moment she sees the man who used to cover the Lifestyles beat and do other things with her.

The raincoat hangs on a hook in the hallway and she bustles about the kitchen in just her disco-ball dress and goggles. She's put on a little weight, but it works for her, accentuating her womanliness, making her all the more real for him, more intimate, closer, more of a figure stepping out of his memory than of his past. Smells from the pots on the stove pack the space and give the tension a scent both delicious and promising.

"You look good." He takes down some plates from the cupboard where they've always been.

"So do you." She starts dishing out the food.

They sit down on opposite ends of the table. He rolls the hood up over his mouth to get forkfuls into his rumbling belly. She keeps her eyes trained on the plate in front of her so she doesn't have to watch him attack the meal with such vigor. They don't say anything while they eat.

When the plates are empty, they ask each other questions. The reporter expects questions about the past. He asks her questions about the present and she becomes acutely aware of the emptiness of the house.

-The Chief-

The Chief of Civil Maintenance looks at his desk, which is loaded with files in organized piles. He has stacks of active files for traffic accidents, domestic disputes, broken monorails, and everything else that went into the day-to-day affairs of the Civil Maintenance. One file lies alone at the edge of the desk, almost falling off. The Victim

incident.

He doesn't know what to do with it. It doesn't fall under the normal auspices of the Maintenance, but it falls even further from everyone else's jurisdiction. The irregularity bothers him. He can't do nothing with it. None of his patrolmen have the investigative skills to get anywhere, not that they have any leads anyway.

His chair creaks as he leans back. Other issues pressed closer as the incident got older. Snags and accidents happened every day and the Victim didn't really affect the larger running of the city. He grabs the file and taps it against his forehead. He knows there's at least one civilian conducting his own investigation. He knew that from the start and sent out word to scare him off, but he knew it wouldn't work.

The chief puts the file in the empty drawer of his desk reserved for inactive files and looks out his window at the snow. If the civilian turns anything up, or the Victim shows up again, he'll take another look, but for now, he has bigger fish to fry.

-The Visitor-

"I'd like to ask you a few questions about the incident the other night."

"We've spoken to Civil Maintenance and the Journal. Who are you?"

"I'm a concerned citizen."

"Why are you concerned?"

"This isn't ordinary behavior."

"No, you're right. It's extraordinary."

“We’re lucky.”

“You don’t know that yet. You don’t know why he did it.”

“Yes, we do. He did it because he cares.”

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

“If that’s so, then we can’t help you.”

“You can help me find him.”

“How? You expect us to recognize a person without a mask? Without a jump?

Or even a domino?”

“You wouldn’t help me even if you felt you could, would you?”

“You want to find him and stop him. Don’t. He’s trying to help us.”

“You don’t know that. You can’t know that.”

#### -The Talk-

The man who just took the first steps in becoming the hobo sat in one of the diner’s window booths. He held the salt shaker under one finger and span it with the other hand. The blotchy eyes on his hood stayed fixed on the shaker, but his own grown eyes moved now and then to study the face of his companion.

The girl in the disco-ball dress and goggles idly pushed a dollop of mayonnaise around her plate with a cold fry. Her goggles remained fixed on her companion, but with all the lenses and filters, her eyes could have been anywhere. If she made eye contact, she wouldn’t know it for his hood. Part of her acknowledged that he wouldn’t know it

either.

She folded a few notes into the bill and tucked the bundle under the edge of her coffee cup, then got up to go to work. He had nothing to offer and nowhere to go.

### -The Hero-

The hobo stands on a street corner at night. It's been snowing heavily for five days and nights. The streetlight casts orange light into the winter dark, but it doesn't go far before it dies. He thinks about everyone he's asked and their refusal to help. Maybe it's him. Something rises in him and his legs start to move, to walk, to stomp it back down or out.

“Help!” A shout snaps the bitter silence.

“Help me!”

The hobo turns to find the sound. On a side street, a man, remarkable in his ordinariness, stands with his hands thrust into the air. Snow sticks to his brown suit before it melts away.

A villain in a violet cloak stands laughing in front of him. Small bolts of lightning crackle all over the villain's body. He points his fingers at the ground, shooting electric forks at the man's feet, making him dance.

The hobo walks over, coming up behind the villain. The slushy snow underfoot doesn't crunch. He manages to get right up behind the villain before clearing his throat. The villain turns, eyes wide and mouth slightly open. An uppercut to the gut lifts him off

his feet and a hook to the face puts him on the sidewalk.

The Victim looks at the man laid out on the floor, then up at the hazy hobo. He smiles and nods once before turning and trotting off into the city night. In between streetlights he vanishes, only to appear in orange glow as he passes the posts.

As he watches the Victim go, the Spook thinks, in some detached part of his mind, that he just missed his best shot. The thought vanishes soon after. The Spook stands in the street long after the villain has regained consciousness and fled. No snow fills his footprints.