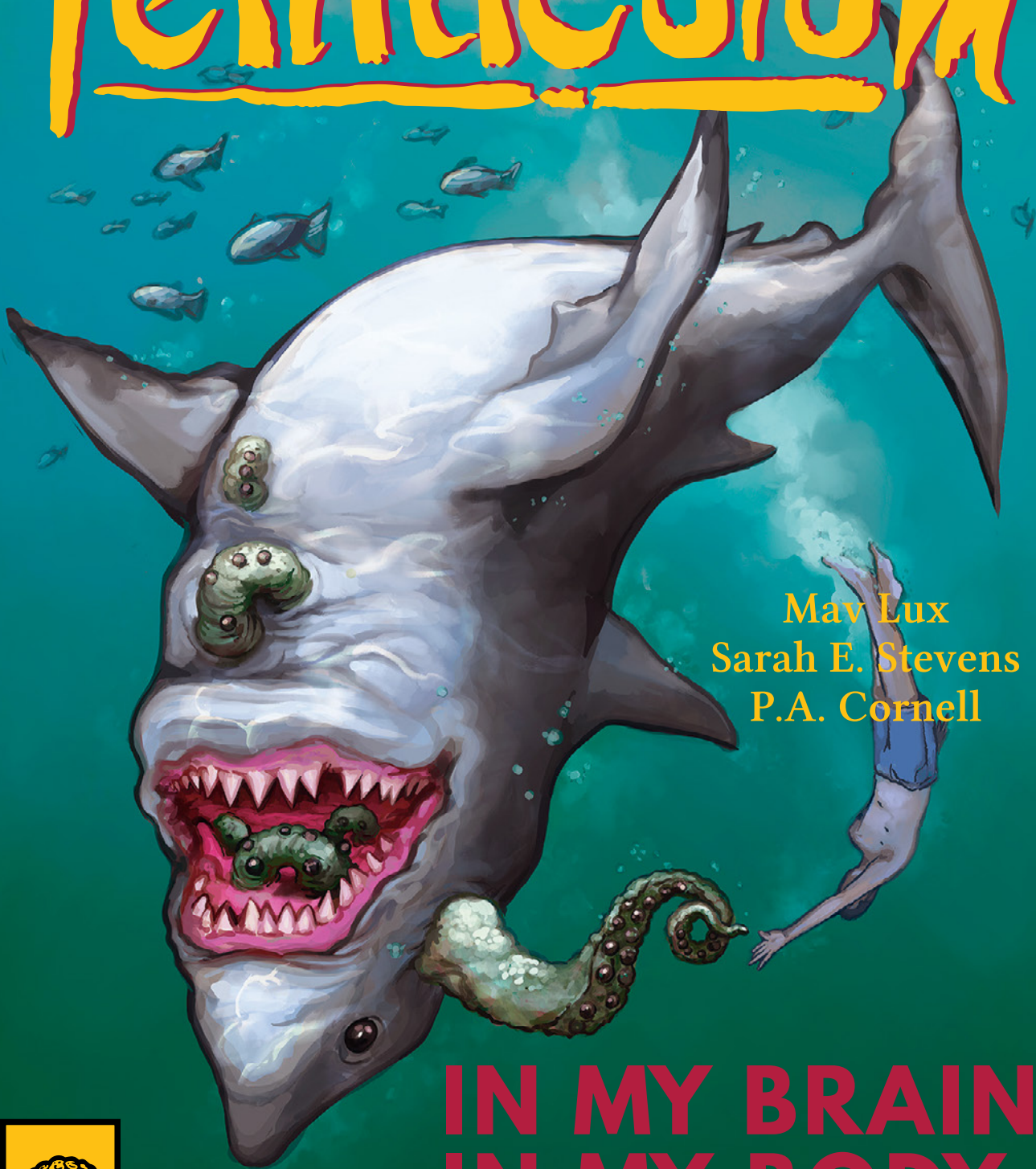


SUMMER 2022

THE Tentaculum



Mav Lux
Sarah E. Stevens
P.A. Cornell

IN MY BRAIN IN MY BODY

By Evie Mae Barber



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THE Tentaculum

ISSUE No. 1

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

IT WAS inside a 100-year-old opera house-turned used bookstore in Denton, Texas, that *The Tentaculum* first transitioned from an idea, something we merely talked about as a far-off potential project, to a reality for me. The memory is distinct in the way only such deviations from the routine of largely staying indoors during the pandemic can be. With its dusty shelves bowing under the weight of double-stacked books and labyrinthine layout, marked only by handwritten signs denoting haphazard sections, Recycled Books had all the hallmarks of a hidden gem.

It was there that Braulio Tellez — designer and partner-in-crime without whom this project wouldn't be possible — and I pored over issues of pulp magazines from another era, a time when print was how most people got their fiction fix. The vibrant and often sensational covers of publications like *Weird Tales*, *Amazing Stories*, and *Black Mask* made a promise that the stories within were sure to deliver on. Surreptitiously removing each issue from its protective casing and gently thumbing through their yellowed pages for inspiration, we felt like we were rediscovering something that had been lost. Exiting the shop, stacks of magazines cradled in our arms, we set out to create something that would instill the same feeling in our readers.

I had recently been hired as managing editor at The Drabblecast, one of many podcasts that kept me sane during long night shifts at the taxidermy shop I worked in years ago in a past life. The miles of thread and countless hours I spent sewing creatures back together kept my eyes and hands occupied, but I could still listen to great fiction from *The Dunesteef Audio Fiction*

Magazine, *Tales to Terrify*, *Escape Pod*, *Pseudopod*, and of course, *The Drabblecast*.

Listening to hundreds of episodes gave me an appreciation for the short story form and — more importantly — the people behind the scenes who brought the stories to life. It was their perspectives that helped me muster the confidence to try my hand at working in the fiction industry. And so the dream I had once chalked up as an unrealistic pursuit was made manifest, altering my life's trajectory.

In some ways, speculative fiction podcasts are modern incarnations of the pulp magazines of old, bringing short stories to a new audience. But anyone who has worked in podcasting knows the oddly detached feeling of uploading the next episode to the feed, like sending a message in a bottle — a message that in this case reaches thousands of remote listeners. For all the magic of digital distribution, it remains a largely intangible experience. Which raises questions: What did the pulp slingers of old know about connecting to their readers that we might have forgotten? What can we unearth and redevelop for a modern audience?

My hope is that *The Tentaculum*, in serving as a tangible form of *The Drabblecast* that fellow weirdos can hold in their hands, might answer those questions. Or failing that, that you get the same feeling of excitement I had in that musty bookstore when you crack it open.

— CAMERON HOWARD



A HYMN UPON THE LIPS OF THE DEAD

by Mav Lux

I WAS with her when she died. Underneath that frail shell of pallid, papery skin and tubes coiling into her body, she was still my mother. Her last sound should have been the steady trickle of the morphine drip and a low, long death rattle. She died at 3:28 a.m. At 3:29 a.m. her mouth opened, and she began to sing.

We skipped the funeral. She didn't cease singing even when they closed the coffin lid and put her in the ground. The soil vibrated with her dirge. There are songs that you never forget from your formative years; the songs you fall in love to, the songs that you fuck to, the songs that burrow into your soul and open a wound that can't be closed. My mother's hollow song swallowed those others up and made me forget every lyric that had ever meant anything to me. Left me as empty as the shell of her body the night she died. I could feel her voice inside me, and I wanted to strip the skin from my body and take a hammer to each of my bones until they were so broken they could no longer ring with that melody.

After I left the gravesite I went to my usual haunt, Porter's. It was full of obnoxiously drunk senators and their mistresses and

smelled of expensive perfume and more expensive sex. Exactly what I needed. Shitty pop music played on the jukebox at a deafening volume, music I would have hated on any other night, but tonight it was perfect.

An empty corner table and three shots of bourbon later, I was feeling just warm and stupid enough to call Deborah. It went to voicemail immediately, and I disconnected without leaving a message. I downed one more shot for the road, paid my tab, and stumbled out the door. The stars were veiled behind low gray clouds and a lazy rain that misted up my glasses, blurring my vision further. I made it home and collapsed into bed.

I awoke to my phone vibrating. “Someone from the hospital recorded her,” my brother said. “Uploaded the whole thing to YouTube.” “Fuck.” A rude awakening if there ever was one. “Meet me at Porter’s.”

“I sent a DMCA takedown notice,” my brother told me over a beer. “Not sure it will do any good.” “How clear was the audio?” “Clear enough to hear every word.” “Shit.” My phone was blowing up with texts and calls from Deb. I thumbed the power button. “Dare I ask how many hits?” “You don’t want to know.” “Tell me.”

He took a shot and swallowed hard. “Two million and climbing.” Fuck. Her death should have been a weight off my shoulders. “I mean, they can’t arrest you, right?” he asked. “Sure they can.” “But it won’t stick. The testimony of a dead woman can’t possibly be admissible in court. Besides,” he said. “All that shit she’s saying . . . It’s not true.”

He didn’t phrase it like a question, but I knew that it was. He stared through me with the cold silver eyes of our mother. “Right, David?” I said nothing. “Fuck. Seriously?” “It doesn’t matter,” I said. “Doesn’t matter? Jesus. I can barely look at you, man.” “You’ve only heard one side of the story.” “We need to get you out of the city. Let’s go up to the cabin. We can figure shit out from up there.” “I can’t. I have to be on the senate floor for an oversight hearing in two hours.” “That doesn’t matter anymore. Go home. Pack and meet at my place.”

I WALKED into my house to find Deborah lazing on the couch puffing at a cigarette, the prettiest picture of patience. I knew her better than anyone, and wrapped up in all that beauty was a woman that got off on a perverse need to wreck my life, even three years after our divorce. I was sure I had locked the door, but she played her part of slimy DA

well and had probably picked the lock. “You stupid fuck,” she said. “You dumb motherfucker.” “I don’t have time for your shit, Deb.” “You’ve got time,” she said. That’s when I saw the pistol in her hand. The same one I had purchased for her back when she was trying the DeFalco case in ’97. She had said carrying it made her feel safe. Even after DeFalco sucked down a lethal cocktail in a very public execution, she continued to carry it with her.

“If you think I’d show my face around here without this, you’re fucking crazy,” she said. “What the fuck, Deb—” “I am not going down with you for this.” “You’re going to have to give me a little more to go on.” “Your dead mother said my name, David!” “Shit. I had no idea.” “Of course you didn’t. Spotless as a fucking lamb, as always, David. Dumb as a fucking goat to boot.” “Put that gun away and get out.” “Have you even watched the video?” “I was there. I heard it.”

I made a beeline for my bedroom. She followed as I grabbed a suitcase and shoved clothes into it. “Where are you going?” Deborah asked. “The cabin.” “This is what you always do. You run away. I expect your brother is going with you?” I didn’t bother lying to her. She knew me too well.



Eyes

by Steven Saus

She remembers the glitter of his eyes when they first made love. She remembers when it disappeared, when there was just the reflection of the television or wall. She remembers the distortion from her tears when he said he wanted to see other people, how she couldn’t see or catch his averted gaze.

She remembers the night but tries not to — tries not to remember the life-light fading as the infected bite took his body. She fiddles with the brush, then applies more shellac to the orbs. His corpse strains against the ropes.

She remembers. She’ll get it right eventually.

“You need to deal with this” “I’ll figure it out from there.” “No, you’ll get drunk and pass out, and your brother will get another DUI. All while I’m stuck down here covering for your ass again.”

I flashed her the old dopey mea culpa grin that she used to have trouble resisting. That was a long time ago. She raised the gun to my head. “And what if I don’t bail your ass out this time? Hell, I’m not even sure it’s possible.”

I pushed past Deborah and back down the hall. “Come with me then,” I said. “We’ll go up together. We can figure this out.”

Her lips parted to say something, what I hoped would be a yes, but then there was a pounding at the door. Detective Waterson was waiting on the other side when I opened it. Deborah scrambled out of sight, and there I stood with my suitcase, looking guilty as hell. Might as well have been holding my dick in my hands. “Senator,” he said. “I need you to come with me.”

I HAD no choice and saw no reason to argue with the man. I was between two people who hated me for very different reasons, and both of them armed. He was the last person whose bad side I wanted to be on.

“How’s Deborah?” he asked as he drove me to the station. “I should be asking you the same thing.” “Hey, she fucked us both over. We both lost.” “Yeah, but she was my wife,” I said. “That’s the problem with the way we think. She was never ours to begin with,” he said. “It took losing her to make me realize that. It’s the opposite of everything I was told growing up. I would imagine it’s the same for you.”

“Spare me,” I said. But I knew he was right. I had never understood what Deb saw in that slimy fuck. He was a detective straight out of a Thursday night police procedural. Tall and gangling, short cropped hair, and a shitty fucking copstache. Deborah hated facial hair, so her leaving me for him never made any sense. The truth is it was just too painful to dig into the reasons why.

Waterson was courteous enough to take me through the back entrance so nobody saw us. He dropped me off at his office and returned a moment later with a cup of coffee that tasted like a mouthful of dirt.

“First, this is off the record. Second, all of our history—” he paused and chose his words carefully. “I want to leave that in the past. I know you won’t believe me, but I’m on your side. I don’t believe what I’ve seen or heard in that video. Special effects are cheap these days,” he said. “My nephew is a whiz at ‘em. Shoots his own movies and does all his own effects. Looks real to my old eyes. A regular Harryhausen. And don’t even get me started on that deepfake shit. But I do have some questions for you. Your mother died on September 29th?”

I nodded.

“I would say I’m sorry for your loss, but from what Deb told me . . .” He realized what he was saying and stammered an apology.

“It’s okay.” “You left the hospital pretty quick after she died.” Another non-question. He was good at that. I took a sip of coffee. It burned all the way down to my jackhammering heart. “I was grieving.” “Where’d you go?” “A bar.” “Can’t blame you.” He nodded in understanding. “Which one?”

“Porter’s on Fifth. I’m a regular. You can ask. They know me.” “I hate to ask this, but . . . before you left, after your mother died . . . did you see anything?”

The fluorescent lights above us buzzed noisily, like flies that couldn’t be swatted away. “You’re asking if I saw my mother come back to life?”

He shook his head before finally asking, “I know it sounds crazy, but I have to ask. Did she sing?”

I was sure he could hear the whine of hot blood pumping through my veins. “No,” I said. “Whatever that video shows, I wasn’t there for it.” “Great. I want to get ahead of this before it spins out of control. And it will. Do you or your family have any enemies? Anyone with something against you that would make a video like this?”

“I’m in politics. I have more enemies than friends.” “Okay. I’m not going to hold you here, but I’ll be in touch. I strongly advise you to not leave the county.”

Waterson was kind enough to drive me home. By the time we got to my street there were half a dozen news vans parked outside. “Fuck. Take me to Deb’s,” I said. “Really?” He couldn’t hide the bitterness in his voice. “Yes.”

H E DROPPED me off at her apartment. Deborah opened the door before I even reached it. The gun was still firmly in her hand.

“Turn around,” she said. “Go to the car.” I complied. After sixteen years of marriage I knew it was wise to do as she said when her face was that particular shade of red and her curls were that frazzled, nevermind the fucking gun.

“You saw Waterson,” she said. “Yup.” “He doesn’t know what I know.” She pushed me into the passenger seat of her Escalade. “What do you know?” I asked. She started the engine and drove. “You know what,” I said. “My offer still stands. Let’s get out of here. We don’t need to go to the cabin, we don’t even need to tell my brother. I can get us out of the country. We can board a plane and go somewhere tropical, like we always talked about. Start over.”

Starting over meant one of us would have to admit we fucked up. The inability to admit that either of us were ever wrong is what had killed our marriage in the first place. But now I knew that I was maybe just a little more wrong than she was. I knew it because I had dragged her into the whole mess of my life. I had made her complicit, and the world would soon find out.

“David, they’re exhuming her body in the morning. They’re going to press charges. My boss called to warn me as a professional courtesy. It’s all over.”

“They don’t have anything—”

“Don’t be a fucking idiot. You know how this works, how little they need.”

She was right. I knew. She stopped the car. We had arrived.

“Get out of the car,” Deborah said.

I got out. “Stop pointing the gun at me.”

She re-leveled it at my chest, as if to say fuck you, and walked to the back of the vehicle, opening the trunk.

“Grab it,” she said.

The contents of the trunk told me I wouldn’t be going up to the cabin after all. Somehow I felt relieved at the prospect. I picked up the shovel. Deborah pressed the pistol to the small of my back, and we walked into the copse of trees that led into the woods. She wasn’t dressed for a hike, still wearing her dark political power suit and Gucci Sylvie pumps. Thick tresses of branches grasped at us as we walked deeper into the woods. She tripped on a half-hidden tree root and reached for my arm to steady herself. Upon her touch I expected old feelings to rise up, but the cold metal of the gun made sure they stayed firmly in the past.

“You’re a real pro, Deb.”

“Fuck you. Keep walking,” she said.

AFTER a quarter mile of slow trudging, I started to believe my own sick inkling about where we were headed. A low drone whispering through the dirty leaves on the ground had been warning me, and the closer we got, the clearer I heard it. The tiny bones in my ears ached at the sound; the buzzing of ten thousand black flies, vying for the best pickings of split flesh.

“So what are we going to do when we get there?” I knew the answer, but part of me hoped that the old Deb was in there somewhere and she would take pity and lie to me.

“Whatever it takes,” new Deb said.

“They’ll be treating it like a crime scene. They’re not going to just let us in.”

“I took care of it.”

True to her word, we were alone when we reached the cemetery. I dropped the shovel and knelt down. Put my ear to the fresh, wet earth and listened. If I had ever wondered what the apocalypse sounded like, this was it. The chill sound of a flat voice creeping through the veins of the earth until it reached into my skull. I opened my mouth, filling it with foul earth, and imagined how it might taste to ask Deborah to pull the trigger, to let my blood answer my mother’s call.

“Get up and start digging,” Deborah said.

She pressed the nose of the gun against the back of my head. I cursed and struck the spade into the soft dirt.

“Drop the gun, Deb.” Detective Waterson had joined our throng. Then to me: “David, keep digging. I’m not here to stop you.”

“Why the fuck are you here?” Deb asked.

“There are reports on the news,” he said. “A woman died in Wisconsin today and started to sing. Two more after that, one in Arizona and one in Ohio. If that’s true, then this isn’t a hoax, and it’s not just an anomaly. I came to hear it for myself.”

“And once you’ve heard it?” Deborah asked.

“If it’s true . . . I haven’t thought that far ahead. I don’t live in a world where it can be true.”

With each shovelful of dirt the song grew louder. Halfway to six feet I wanted to snatch Deborah’s gun and do the deed myself to make it all stop. I kept digging, eyeing the two guns pointing in my direction.

I didn’t know how long it took before I hit the casket. My brain felt like an anchor in my skull, and every muscle cried out for relief. I pried open the lid to the coffin, and the crescendo hit me with its full force. I covered my ears and stumbled back. My mother was inside the coffin, singing her dead little heart out.

Whatever Deb or Waterson had planned once we made it this far was now lost upon me. There was no need to search for a radio or speaker. My mother’s swollen lips parted, the sinews of her jaw tearing as a cluster of insects and worms ruptured forth from the shreds of her mouth. She sang a lament that birthed fresh hate and secret sins into the world.

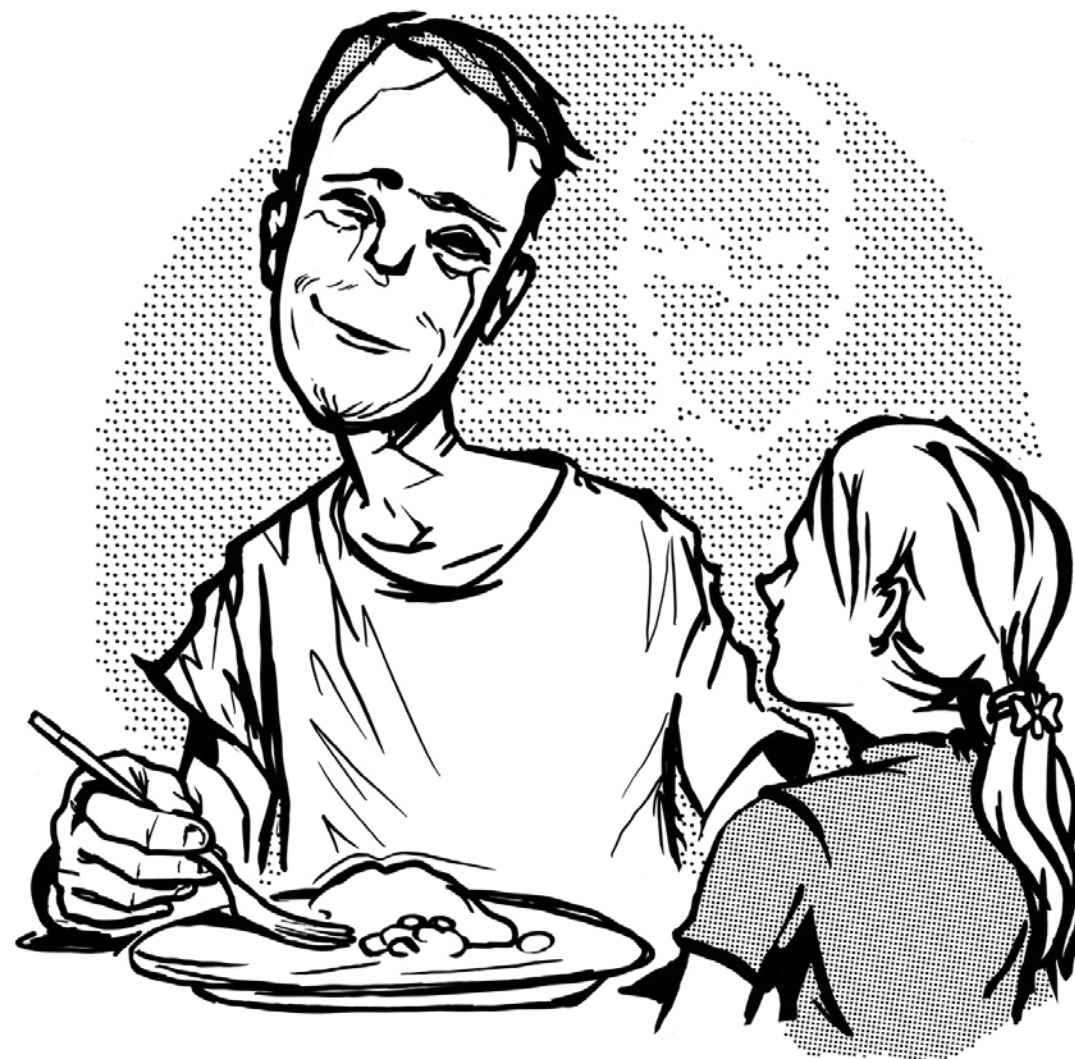
I heard Deborah whimper. “I’m not going away for this,” she said. I looked up in time to see her put the barrel to her temple and squeeze the trigger. The thick crack of gunshot couldn’t drown out my mother’s dark canticle. Bits of Deborah’s skull and gray matter fell into the grave with me, and before her body hit the ground, Deborah’s voice had joined in my mother’s ill chorus.

“Shut them up, goddamn it!” Waterson screamed down to me. I grabbed the shovel and stabbed it into my mother’s neck, but her chant still snaked out through the shattered windpipe. I scrambled out of the grave and past Waterson, sobbing and cradling Deb. I couldn’t be sure, but in due time she would be singing his own dark secrets, ending his life one verse at a time. He looked up to me and opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out.

Finally, he asked, “Is it true?” For a long moment the only sound was their dead voices ringing hot in the chill night air. “Are they telling the truth?”

“Does it really matter anymore?”

I could see it in his eyes. His pupils were infinite black holes that sucked in the old world and shat out the truth of this frightening new one. If their dead bodies gave up our secrets, we were all fucked. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But the day would come when our wickedness and transgressions would loose from the rotting mouths of our mothers and sisters and daughters and lovers. The world we knew had ended not with a bang, but a hymn.



THE TENANT

by Sarah E. Stevens

VANESSA agreed, of course. They needed the money desperately. People rented out rooms in their apartments all the time, right? Renting space in your head wasn’t much different, or at least, that’s what she and Ray tried to tell each other. They both knew he should be the one to sign the contract. Her job paid better, plus Raven wouldn’t handle her absence well. No matter how much equal coparenting they did, Raven was definitely a mama’s girl.

They negotiated to give the Tenant twenty percent of

the time. And, no, they didn’t need a regular schedule. They could be flexible, since it paid so much better. Ray would take a leave of absence from his job for the year — it was state-sanctioned, after all. Vanessa stifled her anger about the stark contrast between the government’s long-standing refusal to implement parental leave and their immediate placating of incorporeal aliens. If only parents had advanced quantum technology to trade.

As a child, Vanessa vaguely understood the Tenants from talking heads on the news and adult whispers, but she vividly remembered when Vice Prime Minister Tomas Berry allowed a Tenant to occupy him during one of the trade summits two decades ago. She’d

crowded around the screen like everyone else in her class, while the teacher talked about “intergalactic good will,” “important advances,” and “trade that would benefit the entire planet.” The teacher gushed about Berry’s bravery, how his example would prove to the public that the Tenants meant no harm. Vanessa had watched the pixels of Berry’s face carefully, hoping to see the exact microsecond when he changed. But actually, the whole thing turned out to be pretty boring. One droning politician replaced by another, apparently, who used very much the same words and phrases: incorporeal, quantum, shared potentiality, universal peace, safeguards, necessary advances, cultural competencies leading to advanced technological communication. Berry was the Prime Minister now and still a huge advocate for the Tenants. Pretty much all the world leaders were.

Contracting to a Tenant for just twenty percent of one year would give them enough money to pay for rent, school through 8th grade, food, and utilities. Her whole salary could go into savings this year. It was less time than Ray would usually be at work, after all.

Yes. They were in agreement. It all made sense at the time, even though Vanessa felt a flutter of dread when Ray took pen in hand to sign.

But how bad could it be?

Two Weeks

Vanessa walked in the front door feeling equal parts anticipation and dread.

“Hello?” she called.

“Mom!” Raven ran out from her room, black ponytail bobbing in her wake. She hurtled into Vanessa’s body for a fierce hug. From that, Vanessa knew.

“Is your dad here?”

“No. The Tenant’s in the living room, though.”

“Any trouble?”

“Nope. I would have called you. Dad was here when I first got home. He got me a snack, and I did my homework. All of it! Then the Tenant came and turned on the TV.”

Nine years old, and she coped so well. Vanessa kissed the top of Raven’s head with an exaggerated “mwah” sound. “Well, how about you and I cook some dinner? Maybe your dad will be back in time.”

“Yeah, maybe.”

Raven linked hands with her mom as they walked through the living room en route to the kitchen.

“Hi,” Vanessa said to the Tenant. She always greeted him. Talked to him, even. It seemed weird not to, even though it was almost weirder to interact.

The Tenant turned to look at the two of them. His eyes didn’t look quite focused, but he gave what passed for a smile. He was learning, then.

“Hello. Hi,” he said in a small voice.

“We’re making dinner now. If you’re staying that long.”

“Dinner,” he repeated. “Dinner?”

“Nothing fancy. Spaghetti, probably. Garlic bread. Raven, do you want salad or green beans?”

“Salad.”

“Salad,” said the Tenant.

“Well, salad it is, then.” Vanessa wasn’t sure if the Tenant repeated the girl’s words or if he really wanted salad — did he know what salad was? Had he eaten salad yet? Or was he just practicing his speech?

Maybe he’d leave before dinner was ready.

God, she hoped he’d leave.

“**W**HAT did we have for dinner?” Ray asked. “It still smells good in here.”

Vanessa turned around from the kitchen sink with soapy hands.

“You’re here!” She crossed the room to give him a kiss. Ray hugged her, and she squeezed back with her arms while keeping her wet hands away. “Hi, sweetheart. I’m glad you’re back.”

“Me too.”

“Spaghetti, garlic bread, and salad,” she said. “Raven’s taking a quick shower. Maybe we can all read together tonight?”

“I’d like that.” Ray patted his stomach. “I must have eaten a lot.”

“Yep.”

They smiled at each other before Vanessa moved



back to finish the dishes. Even the kitchen lights seemed brighter now that the house was whole again.

Five Weeks

“Vanessa, can I talk to you for a minute?” Carlos stood next to her desk.

“Sure, what’s up?”

Carlos glanced around and fidgeted in his pocket before lowering his voice to speak. “You and Ray did sign that contract, right?”

“Yes.” She drew out the word, not sure where he was going. She did not want to talk about this at work. She’d told Carlos about it after she’d burst into tears when walking past one of those street looneys — the ones who raved about interstellar demons. She’d tried to laugh it off, explaining she felt a little on edge about such a big decision. Though it was fine, of course. Totally fine. Safe.

“It’s not that bad, is it?”

She looked at him. “Are you . . . thinking about it?”

He leaned closer before answering. “We can’t afford to send Maddie and Ruth to school next year.”

“Don’t do it. It’s not worth it. Believe me, Carlos.”

“But if the girls don’t even finish middle school . . . you know as well as I do what kind of jobs they’ll get shunted into.”

Vanessa did know. Carlos’s girls were gorgeous. They’d make a decent living, and maybe when they were too old to entertain, they’d be hired as womb-mothers. And even later, when their looks were gone, nannies. To rich, kind families if they were lucky. Lucky.

“Find some other way,” she said.

“Nothing pays as well.”

“Do you . . . Do you and Deondra have both your kids?” She flushed with embarrassment at the question. Talking about money always did that to her.

“Yes. But you know that won’t pay for school for two girls. Even if we both sold.”

“How much time were you thinking? And which one of you?”

“Deondra. She insists. Ten percent, but we can’t do flexible. She needs to work, so it has to be evenings or weekends.”

“Just think about it more, Carlos. Ten percent is almost seventeen hours. All on evenings and weekends? Think about your time together as a family — let’s call it five hours on weeknights and fourteen waking hours each weekend. That’s only fifty-three hours. She loses seventeen out of fifty-three. You and the girls lose her.”

Vanessa hated how quickly the math came to her, hated that she’d spent so much time calculating the same things.

“Seventeen hours a week for one year? To pay for

several years of school for both girls? That’s worth it.” Carlos spread his hands wide. “Vanessa, how else could we get the money?”

She had no answer.

Two Months

“What does it feel like?” she asked Ray that night as they lay curled up like spoons.

She felt boneless with joy in the afterglow of such a great evening. The Tenant hadn’t come at all. Her little family had eaten dinner together and played a card game. She’d read to Raven for over half an hour. Ray sat with them on the sofa, his shoulder pressed against hers. This was all she needed.

Ten months. Ten more months till the contract ended.

She felt Ray shrug.

“It doesn’t feel like anything, actually,” he said.

“Where do you go?”

“Nowhere. I don’t know. I’m there, but I’m not.

Mostly, it’s just like swiss cheese. Giant holes where I wonder what happened.”

She twisted back to look at him. “Is it scary?”

Silence.

“Yes.”

VANESSA remembered her mom’s stories about the old days, before the Tenants came and allied with the government, trading quantum technology for their “ethnographic research” on humankind. School was free and people chose their own careers. The government helped the sick and the poor with medicines and food. She sat on her mom’s lap and soaked up those stories alongside tales of Santa Claus, talking wolves, and magic wardrobes.

They all seemed equally fanciful.

The stories petered out as Vanessa grew, as if even her mother stopped believing them.

By the time Vanessa entered middle school, people stopped muttering about “deals with the devil” and accepted the Tenants as inevitable. After all, they’d probably been around for a lot longer than anyone knew, influencing things in secret. They just stopped hiding. And they did bring advances, even if Vanessa had never been able to afford a quantcar and wouldn’t ever travel in space. Countries had to prioritize the new technologies over domestic social programs because space was their future. Even the politicians who started out leery ended up embracing the aliens. The government kept saying electricity would be even more expensive without Tenant technology, and someone needed to help them with their research so they could communicate more easily with the scientists. It was such a small ask from the public, when the Tenants had given them so much.

FOUR MONTHS

Hope and anxiety twisted in Vanessa’s stomach as she walked down the hall toward their apartment, then sank into numbness as she heard Raven and the Tenant talking. She closed the front door behind her.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hi, Mom!” Raven called. “C’mere. The Tenant wants to know about grocery shopping.”

What a difference a few months made.

She put a smile on her face and walked into the living room. She gave Raven a big hug before turning to the Tenant.

“So you’d like to learn about grocery shopping?” she said.

“Yes, please.” He smiled at her, and she had to avert her gaze. She hated seeing him look so normal.

“Can you take me grocery shopping?” he asked.

“I can’t take you right now because we need to have dinner, and Raven needs to go to bed early so she’s fresh for school.”

“How much sleep does Raven need? Is this the same for all children? At what age does it change?”

“She needs at least nine hours. Don’t you have access to that data?”

The Tenant shook his head. “Data is not the same as understanding. What happens if she does not sleep?”

“If she doesn’t get enough sleep, she gets cranky and moody. It affects her behavior, and it makes life more difficult for me, too. Plus, her brain can’t learn as well without sleep.”

“Does this brain get enough sleep?” the Tenant asked. She gritted her teeth. “Yes.”

“What happens when Raven does not want to go to sleep? How do you convince her?”

Vanessa shook her head in frustration and tried to explain the process of parenting — setting boundaries and expectations, rewarding good behavior, enacting consequences. The Tenant frowned but listened carefully.

“Are you annoyed right now?” the Tenant asked.

“Not . . .” Vanessa took a deep breath and regrouped. “Not annoyed, exactly. It’s just hard to explain how families work.”

The Tenant nodded. “That is why I am here. Not all things can be understood from books. I need to practice.”

Raven had lost interest in the conversation and left the room, but she came back now, carrying her favorite baby doll. “Mom? I’m hungry.”

“Okay, sweetie. I’ll start dinner.”

“And you will teach me grocery shopping? How you choose the foods and your budget? How you interact with others in the store?” The Tenant’s voice stopped Vanessa on her way into the kitchen.

“Yes. The next time you’re here on a weekend, I’ll take you.” She gritted her teeth. She did not want the Tenant around on the weekend. She did not want to take the Tenant grocery shopping. The only thing worse than dealing with him in the house was taking him around in public. The other day, the Tenant had talked to the neighbors for five full minutes, and they hadn’t suspected a thing.

“I will — I’ll watch the news now,” the Tenant said, dismissing them both from his presence.

She and Raven went into the kitchen. She stared into the cabinet as if deciding what to cook.

What was she teaching him? What would he do with this “understanding” he added to his data? Once he was ready, would he work with the government? Or scientists? Where would he go next?

SEVEN MONTHS

“Here, Daddy.”

Vanessa dropped her glass, and it shattered on the tiles. Raven jerked away when water splashed all over her.

“Mom? Are you okay?”

A drop of blood welled on the side of Vanessa’s bare foot, but she didn’t feel any pain. Just numbness and a racing heart.

“I’m fine,” Vanessa spoke carefully. “Raven, sweetie. That’s not your dad.”

Raven frowned. “I know, sorry. It’s just . . . I need to call him something. And I forgot.”

“It’s important not to forget.”

“Okay, Mom. I’m sorry.”

The Tenant said, “No worries, little one. Do you want me to read to you?”

“No!” said Vanessa. She took a deep breath. “I mean, Raven, why don’t you go take a quick shower? I’ll read to you before bedtime.”

Vanessa felt the Tenant watching her as she swept the broken glass and dumped it carefully into the recycling chute. She mopped up the water with a towel. She spent a long time scouring the floor for tiny shards to make sure Raven wouldn’t step on any glass splinters. As long as she focused on the floor, she didn’t have to look at the Tenant.

EIGHT MONTHS

“Vanessa?”

“Yeah?” Vanessa looked at Carlos and frowned. “Are you okay?”

“You know I’m not okay.”

“You look like you haven’t slept all week.”

“I’ve slept. It’s just . . . Do you have lots of nightmares?” Carlos asked. His voice sounded hoarse, like he might be holding back tears.

Vanessa felt her own eyes flood and blinked furiously. She felt suddenly, irrationally angry. “I have a lot of work to do. Did you need something?”

“I guess not.”

But he didn’t leave. He just stood there. Vanessa turned her back to him and pretended to be busy.

“Why do you think they do this?” Carlos asked.

“How would I know? They do it to learn so that they can help us more. Haven’t you listened to the politicians? Carlos, I need to work.”

“But what are they learning?”

“Carlos.”

“Okay, sorry. I haven’t told anyone else and . . . I just wanted to talk to someone who understands.”

“Talking makes it worse,” said Vanessa. “Just endure. We need to endure.”

NINE MONTHS

Vanessa threw her work bag next to the door with a sigh. She could hear Ray and Raven laughing in the living room.

“What’s so funny?” she asked. She smiled and tried to shake off the stress of her day.

“Daddy. He’s so funny!”

Ray waggled his eyebrows, and Raven squealed again.

“I had the worst day at work, and I’m so glad to be



Grandpa’s Stories

by Roy McDaniel

Grandpa told me good stories. He said if you catch lightning and hold it tight, it’ll pull you back up into the clouds. It would be like flying. When the boom comes, you’ve already missed your chance. You’ve gotta be real fast.

Yesterday, Mommy was crying. She said grandpa had gone to heaven. I told her not to be sad; I would bring him back. She just cried more.

Up the hill, my arms stretch real high. The warm rain tickles my skin, and my fingers start to tingle. I missed the first two, but I’ll catch the next one.

home.” Vanessa gave them both a big hug. “Hey, I’m exhausted. Do you think — is it in the budget to order some food tonight?”

Ray smiled. “Of course. What do you want?”

“I’m easy. What do you want?” Vanessa said.

Ray narrowed his eyes in confusion, and Vanessa felt a thrill of alarm shoot down her spine.

“Ray?” she whispered.

“I . . . don’t know what food to order.”

Vanessa swallowed hard. “Raven, honey, how about you go clean up your room for a minute while . . . while we talk about ordering some pizza.”

Raven made a pouty face, but the promise of pizza was enough to help her listen.

As soon as her daughter left the room, Vanessa said, “Are you Ray?”

The Tenant didn’t answer.

Vanessa moved closer so Raven wouldn’t overhear them. “You— How did you know to waggle your eyebrows like that? That it would make Raven laugh?”

The Tenant shrugged, his shoulders moving in Ray’s fluid gesture. “Ray isn’t here right now. As I spend more time here, such things become natural. The brain becomes more open.”

He smiled at Vanessa. “I didn’t mean to confuse you, sweetheart.”

Vanessa ran to the bathroom and threw up. By the time she returned to the living room, Ray was back. They ordered the pizza. Several times, she started to tell him about the Tenant, but the words froze in her mouth.

TEN MONTHS

They had a fantastic evening, the three of them. Ray cooked dinner, followed by a movie with the whole family snuggled together on the couch. Raven went to bed like a dream, only needing one extra tuck in and kiss. She and Ray stripped naked, fell into bed, and had glorious sex.

They lay snuggled together when Ray returned.

Vanessa felt his whole body stiffen in shock the instant before he recoiled from her. Her heart pounded. She rolled over and looked at him.

“Did you . . . did we . . . ?” Ray said.

“Oh God.”

They stared at each other.

“I feel like I’m going to throw up,” Ray said.

“Me too. I’m so sorry. I didn’t know. I thought you were here.”

“How could you not know?”

Vanessa’s throat burned with bile. “I don’t know. I’m sorry.”

Ray flung an arm across his face. “I can’t take this anymore.”

“When did you . . . When did he . . . What’s the last thing you remember?”

“Lunch,” he said.

“Oh God.”

“Vanessa, I just want it to stop.”

“I know. I know.” She wrapped her arms around him and held him while he cried, his tears running down her neck. Her own eyes stayed dry and open, staring at the ceiling while she murmured all the right things. It would be over soon. Life would get back to normal. This would never happen again. She loved him.

She tried to tell herself everything would be okay, but her voice only screamed inside her head. Maybe this would never be over. Maybe she’d never know the difference.

ELEVEN MONTHS

Vanessa was checking the kitchen cabinets and thinking about groceries when she noticed Ray standing in the doorway, watching her.

She whirled to face him with a frown. “Ray? What kind of fruit would you like me to get from the store?”

“Pineapple.” Ray gave an exaggerated nod.

“Oh, thank God. You had me worried for a minute, you were standing so still.”

“It’s me. Pineapple.”

“Why are you just standing there?”

Ray crossed the room and took her into his arms. “Just looking at you, how beautiful you are. And thinking about how I can’t wait to be back full time, never gone again. Only one more month.”

Vanessa hugged him back. She pushed her nose close to him and breathed in deeply.

“Do you remember how good Raven smelled when she was first born?” she asked. “How we couldn’t get enough of sniffing her head?”

“Yes,” Ray said with a smile in his voice.

“Do you—” Vanessa couldn’t stop herself. “Do you remember that cute outfit she wore when we took her home from the hospital? What was that outfit like again?”

“Green and white stripes with little Granny Smith apples all over it.” Ray pushed Vanessa away. “Really, Vanessa? Are we going to go through this multiple times every day, even after I give the password? Pineapple. It’s me. It’s me. Can’t you tell?”

“Of course I can tell! I just — I’ve had a long day, and I’m feeling really anxious, and I just needed one more check.”

Ray sighed. Vanessa tried to smile at him, but then she remembered Raven and the Tenant looking through digital pictures the other day. Were there pictures of baby Raven in her homecoming outfit? There must have been, right?

“Ray?”

“What now.” Ray rubbed his hands over his face.

“Don’t be mad at me,” Vanessa said. “You don’t know what it’s like.”

“I don’t know what it’s like? You’re telling me what it’s like when an alien takes over my brain?”

“Not that. Not the alien part. But I come home, and I never know. I’m never positive — you have to understand that I need to make sure.” Vanessa searched her husband’s face for some sign of love, of empathy.

“You don’t understand what it’s like to have my wife — the person who should know me better than anyone — confuse me with an alien. You look at me, and you don’t even trust me. You don’t trust that it is me. You don’t even know me.”

“I do know you. And I love you. Ray, I love you.”

He sighed. “I love you, too.”

“Maybe we just need to switch code words every day. In case the Tenant can find them in your mind or something. And I’ll only ask you one test question each time. I promise.”

Ray shook his head. “No.”

*Maybe this would
never be over. Maybe
she’d never know the
difference.*

“No what?”

“No more code words. No more tests. I’m tired of feeling like a guinea pig, Vanessa. It’s driving me crazy. You’re driving me crazy, not the Tenant. You. Always pushing and prodding — you’re making me doubt my own self. No more.”

Tears rose to Vanessa’s eyes, and she blinked rapidly to stop them from falling down her cheeks. “I’m sorry. I am.”

“You’re just going to have to trust yourself, Vanessa, and trust me. Can you do that? For one more month? One more month, and we’ll go back to normal life.” Ray searched her face, saw the tears, and sighed. He took her back into her arms and held her tightly. “One more month.”

Vanessa closed her eyes and allowed herself to feel comforted by the feel of Ray’s body, by his warmth, by his arms wrapped around her.

“One more month. We’re going to be so happy,” she lied.

IN MY BRAIN IN MY BODY

by Evie Mae Barber

THE great white looked like he was having a good time, swimming upside down, bonewhite belly above water, teeth gnashing playfully. Like a puppy dreams of finally catching a squirrel.

Just off the verdant coast, boaters came to see him play. Some reached out as he swam by, trying to stroke his luminous stomach, but he was out of reach.

get them out

I warned them to be careful. Something wasn’t quite right; the shark was clearly distressed. Nothing too strange — I’d seen this before — but I had to come out with my crew just to see if it might be research-worthy. Even a byline on a derelict local news site would be nice at this point. Hell, a quote would do fine.

i cant get them out

Another boat rolled up. One of the boaters said it was tonic immobility — playing dead. “Might think we’re predators. We may want to back off.”

“Might be some kind of cardiac thing,” another boater offered.

None of these suggestions seemed quite right to me. And thank God. There was no research left to be done on such mundane topics.

“Let’s try to help him,” someone else said.

they are inside they are inside

We piloted our modest boat over to the shark. It swam the backstrokes through the water in lulling curved lines. Even as a biologist, knowing full well something was wrong, a part of me wanted to join the gentle beast. The water would be cold, but my wetsuit would help. I could swim in opposing symmetrical patterns.

in my brain in my body

I hit the lever, lowering the fishing net. We needed a closer look. The electric pulley system would be too slow to catch him. It’d have to be done by hand.

We waited for him to swim over the net, but his movement, while slow, was unpredictable. A toddler’s looping scribbles.

i cant i cant i cant

He swam closer to the net, drifting left, then right, then— “Pull!” I shouted to my shipmates. We reeled in as hard as we could, snatching the beast, a young one I could tell now that we had him close.

He didn’t thrash, just remained calm, belly up on the net.

less of fin bite your tooth of long through my sk—

“Bring him in,” I said quietly, not wanting to disturb him. “Easy, easy.”

We laid him down on the deck. A stench of rotten death permeated the brisk ocean air.

Nothing looked amiss. We had to turn him over.

But I hesitated.

I touched his belly, rubbery and wet, but felt nothing. I took a breath and regretted it for the smell. An irrational fear swelled up in me, twisting my guts.

“T— turn him over,” I said to my crew. They did so,

oblivious to my fear, flipping him onto one side at first.

“What in the name of God is that?” one of them asked.

Something protruded from its skull. Something white and porous.

“All the way,” I said. My excitement began to outweigh my fear. All manner of parasites and other strange creatures lay hidden beneath our oceans. This one was new, and I saw my full name printed beneath a thousand possible article titles.

With a wet thud, the crew turned him the rest of the way.

“My God,” I whispered.

A long thick tentacle had burst through the shark’s brain. What I had thought were black holes covering the tentacle’s surface were actually spots, slightly inset. The trypophobic circles made my skin shiver and my breath catch. I reeled back, away from the still-living shark.

“What in the hell is it?” my shipmate asked.

Slowly I stepped back toward it. “I don’t know,” I said and kneeled back down, controlling my breath. I looked at the tentacle, staring at one of the black indents. My shipmates, the boat, the shark, even the ocean faded away for just a moment.

I ran a finger along the tentacle, feeling its black concavities.

“What are you?” I don’t know if I asked it aloud.

One of the larger indents moved with a squishy sucking sound. It turned, like a sphere, and I found myself staring into an eye. A great white’s, where it shouldn’t be. Not black and lifeless like Captain Quint would tell you. But complex, blue, alive, and focused.

Focused on me.

The wet squishing sound amplified. Every concavity began revolving. Soon a hundred little shark eyes were staring at me.

People were shouting all around, their voices indistinct. I heard only one. Something boring into my skull.

take them less of fin take them end this

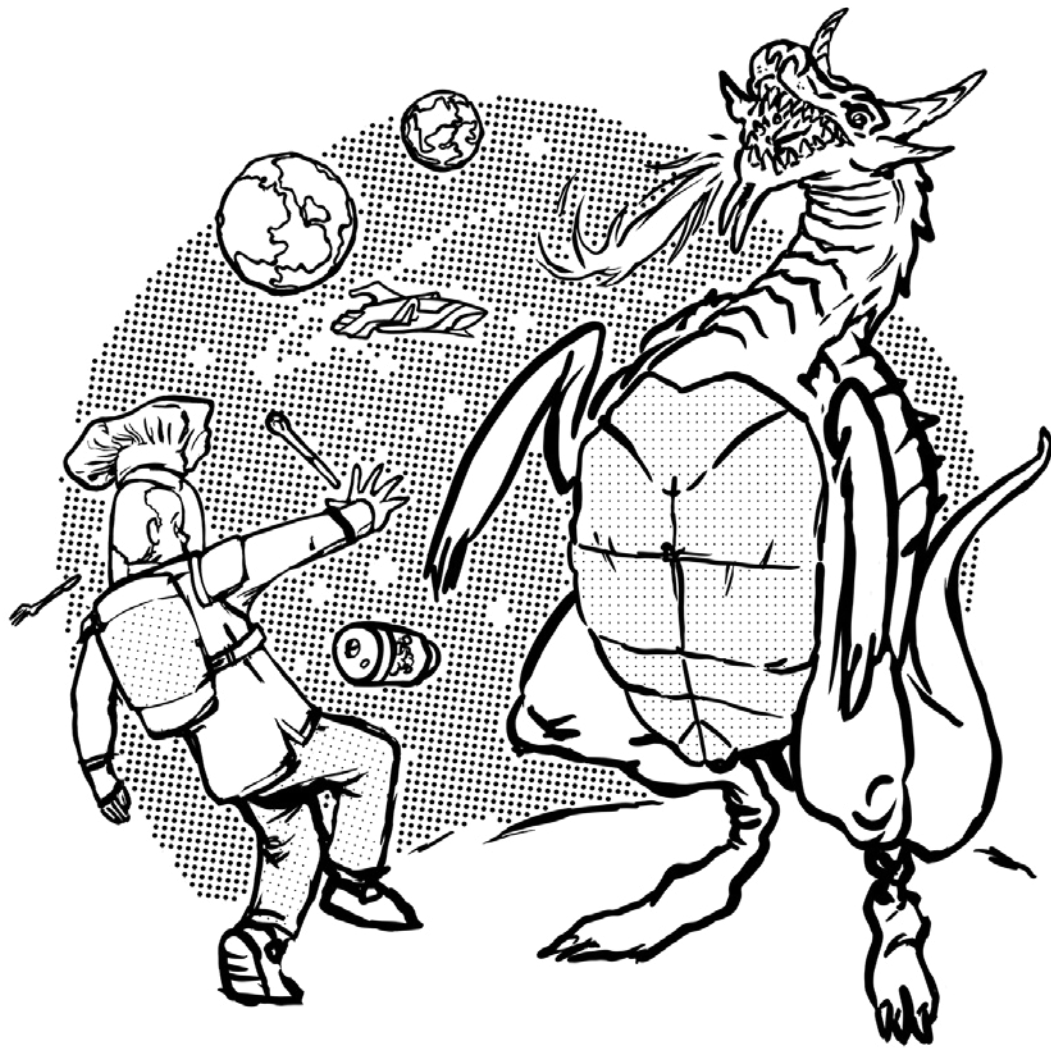
I had to say something back. I had to. I opened my mouth. Hands were grabbing me, pulling me from behind by both arms, but I fought them off.

The tentacle lurched, sprang up like a striking snake, and lunged into my open mouth.

thank the depths they are yours they are yours thank you

I leaped into the water, scratching that itch to swim, and headed deep into the ocean’s dark.

They are mine now they are mine, thank the depths, the murkiness subsides.



HOW TO IMPRESS A TOP FOOD CRITIC AND PUT YOUR RESTAURANT ON THE GALACTIC MAP

by P.A. Cornell

“GOOD morning, Chef! I am your holographic guide to getting your restaurant listed in Rothman’s Galactic Gastronomy — the galaxy’s premier culinary guide! As you know, Mr. Rothman — the foremost food critic in the galaxy — will be dining in your restaurant in a few standard weeks’ time. As such, he has sent me on ahead to assist you in preparing the meal he most desires. But before we get started, how may I address you?”

“Chef is fine.”

“How wonderfully concise! Chef it is.”

“Great. So, what’s the recipe? I can cook anything.”

“Ah yes. As you know, Mr. Rothman likes to choose a dish that does not currently appear on your menu to test your ability to prepare a meal for even the most demanding customer, no matter how complicated it may be. The dish Mr. Rothman has selected for this occasion is Fennish flat eel, served with a morganberry reduction.”

“That doesn’t sound so difficult.”

“Oh, it’s not, Chef. Even your average home cook could prepare this dish. It requires nothing more complicated than a sous vide.”

“I don’t get it. Why would Rothman want something so simple?”

“The dish is simple to prepare, yes. The skill lies in acquiring the necessary ingredients, all of which are rare and difficult to obtain — and, I’m afraid, substitutions are not permitted.”

“I see.”

“Not to worry, Chef. The ingredients are few, and I will be with you the entire time to help guide you through the locating and acquisition of them. Shall we begin?”

“Today? Isn’t it a little soon?”

“Oh no, Chef. As I mentioned, these ingredients are difficult and time-consuming to obtain. We must get started immediately if you are to prepare the dish in time for Mr. Rothman’s arrival.”

“Okay. I guess no time like the present.”

“Indeed! If you look in the crate my hover projection system arrived in, you’ll also find a duffel bag which contains some tools you may need on this quest. Be sure to review the contents thoroughly so you are familiar with your options.”

“Sure.”

“Now, do you have a ship capable of interstellar flight?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent! Be sure to bring my holoprojector on board. I will power down for the journey, but you can power me back up when we’ve reached our destination.”

“And what exactly is our destination?”

“Our first stop will be the planet Xirada. According to my programming, this planet is a tropical paradise. You may want to take some holo recordings of your own while we’re there.”

“I’m not much of a holographer.”

“Well, I hope you don’t mind if I record some of the breathtaking scenery myself. Mr. Rothman may want to see the holos while he dines.”

“Knock yourself out.”

“I’ll be powering down now.”

“Ah! It’s good to see you again, Chef. I see we’ve arrived on Xirada. My, look at that scenery. It’s every bit as beautiful as my data said it would be.”

“Yeah, that’s great. Look, can we just get what we need here so we can move on to the rest of the ingredients?”

“Of course, Chef! This is your quest, after all. I’m merely here to advise and assist. Now then . . . on Xirada we will find the morganberry bushes, which grow in the darkest recesses of the natural cave formations of the southern continent. According to my internal sensors, there’s a cave not far from here. How fortuitous!”

“Yeah, great. So take me there.”

“Of course, Chef. Follow me.”

*“That thing
nearly
flambéed
me!”*

“THERE’s the cave, Chef. According to my data this is the ideal time to harvest the morganberries. It also says morganberries are named after the explorer that discovered them in 2362, Alistair Morgan — a Terran, like yourself, Chef. According to Morgan’s records, the berries are only edible for a period of two standard hours during each planetary rotation. If we’d come any later, we might have missed the window!”

“Okay, I guess I’ll head in there and get some then.”

“I recommend you take the cryo-container included in your kit, Chef. This way you can flash freeze the berries and preserve their ripeness until you’re ready to use them.”

“Fine. Thanks.”

“Good luck, Chef!”

“Whoa, wait, what the hell is that?”

“Oh my! It appears the cave is inhabited by one of the local species of fauna. According to my database, it is a male of the species commonly known as Oura Dragon.”

“Dragon? It looks more like a cross between a seal and a turtle.”

“That it does, Chef.”

“Well I’ll just wave it off and get it out of the way.”

“Excellent idea. Uh, Chef, you may be interested in this other informational tidbit about Oura Dragons.”

“Not now. Yah! Move it! JESUSFUCKINGCHRIST!”

“Very prudent of you to run, Chef. I believe you’ve discovered for yourself what I was referring to. The reason these creatures are called dragons, despite their appearance to the contrary, is that they’re the only species in the known universe capable of expelling their breath as fire. They are very rare, Chef. What a singular privilege to have seen one in the wild!”

“That thing nearly flambéed me!”

“Yes, I have a wonderful holorecording of it! And you know the old saying, ‘If you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen.’”

“Ha ha. Well I’m not going in this thing’s cave. We need to find another one.”

“I’m afraid we can’t do that, Chef. The nearest cave is at least a half a day’s walk from here. We would never be able to reach it while the berries are at peak freshness.”

“So they won’t be as fresh. I’m making them into a reduction anyway. I can work with that.”

“I’m afraid it’s much more serious than that, Chef. If the berries are not at peak freshness, they turn not only bitter, but poisonous. Your reduction would kill Mr. Rothman within seconds of him tasting it. Then it would indeed be very difficult to have your restaurant listed in Rothman’s Galactic Gastronomy.”

“Great. Well, you’re going to need to help me then. I need you to draw that thing’s attention while I slip in

behind it to get the berries.”

“I’m not so sure I should take such a risk, Chef.”

“You’re a hologram. It can’t hurt you.”

“Yes, but my hover projection system is physical and could easily be damaged by rough treatment — and of course, fire.”

“Look, you said you were here to help me. So help.”

“Very well, Chef.”

“Okay, I’m heading in.”

“Chef . . . Chef . . . I don’t think it’s fooled. It’s turning back toward the cave . . . I advise you to hurry.”

“Aaah! Quick! Get back to the ship!”

“As you wish, Chef. And may I say, I had no idea a man of your girth could move so swiftly! Such agility!”

“Yeah, thanks. That thing singed off the seat of my pants!”

“Indeed, it did, Chef. Nature and it’s wonders!”

“I got the berries though. I hope these are enough.”

“I’m sure they’ll be fine, Chef. The dish only requires a light drizzle of morganberry reduction.”

“Okay, where to next?”

“Our next stop is the planet Erodén, where we will find the eel. You’ll be relieved to hear that this will be far less challenging. The streams on Erodén are teeming with Fennish flat eel. My data says they practically leap right out and into your net.”

“Great, I need something easy after all that. Hey, you wouldn’t happen to have some burn cream in that kit, would you?”

“Did you not review the contents as I advised, Chef?”

“I didn’t want to waste any time.”

“I see. Well, I’m afraid there is no burn cream to be had.”

“Great. Okay so give me the coordinates for this planet Erodén.”

“I’m afraid that’s quite impossible, Chef.”

“What do you mean?”

“You see, the planet Erodén was destroyed millennia ago. It no longer exists.”

“What? So how the hell am I supposed to get the eel?”

“Excellent question, Chef! We will journey to the Neemish system. There you will negotiate with the Neemish for use of their time portal. The portal will grant you passage through space-time so you can reach Erodén.”

“Okay. But I’ve never even heard of the Neemish. How am I supposed to negotiate with them? I don’t even speak their language.”

“I’m sure the Neemish will provide an interpreter.”

“Can’t you talk to them for me?”

“Oh no, Chef. The Neemish despise holographic technology. It goes against their deepest beliefs. I’m afraid I will have to be powered down until after the negotiation, so as not to offend them.”

“Ugh. Fine.”

“However, I can advise you before I power down. The Neemish respect a tough negotiator, so don’t be afraid to push back on any terms.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Excellent. Good luck! Powering down.”

“HELLO again, Chef! I see by the view of planet Erodén that your negotiation went well. Very well, judging by the Neemish marital bracelet you’re wearing. By the number of color bands, it appears you acquired not one but three spouses, one of each Neemish gender. What a blessed day!”

“Yeah, and I was a tough negotiator like you said. I agreed to the marriage but on condition that I never have to live with, procreate with, or interact with my spouses in person ever again. It’s a marriage in name only. All I have to do is wear this bracelet.”

“Yes, that is the Neemish tradition. How wonderful for you. That said, your restaurant will have to do well indeed now.”

“Why’s that? They don’t expect me to support my spouses, do they?”

“Oh, nothing like that, Chef. However, there is the Festival of Grentat.”

“The what?”

“Think of it as the Neemish equivalent to your Valentine’s Day. Except that Neemish tradition demands



Man a la Moustache

by Basil Godevenos

He grew it on a whim. To his delight, it came in thick and dark, a follicular testament to his manliness. At first his wife detested it but soon grew used to it, even fond of it. He groomed it and waxed it daily, and it became a curled monument to facial hair.

He couldn’t — wouldn’t — trim it, and it grew and grew, its curls adorning his cheeks in ever widening loops. His wife asked him to shave. He refused. She left.

But he wasn’t alone. Whenever he missed her, two waxy tendrils stroked his face and made it better.

that you send your spouses multiple gifts over a period of one standard month, each more lavish than the last. Something that could get pricey with three spouses.”

“Great.”

“Not to worry, Chef. A mention in Rothman’s Galactic Gastronomy should get you all the business you need to keep your spouses happy.”

“Alright. I’d better go get that eel then.”

“Good luck, Chef.”

“OKAY, we have the eel and the berries. What’s next?” “Let’s see here . . . according to the recipe, the eel is to be salted using the tears of a Krillixian virgin.”

“Are you kidding me?”

“I’m afraid not, Chef. The challenge here is in finding a Krillixian virgin. Apparently, the females are in heat from the moment they emerge from their chrysalis. A chrysalis which will certainly be surrounded by expectant males. Their virginal status is unlikely to last long.”

“Wonderful.”

“Yes, the sexual practices of species can be quite beautiful.”

“That’s not what I — oh never mind. So what do we do then?”

“I believe the best course of action is to be among the males as a female emerges from her chrysalis.”

“That’s it?”

“The female must choose you, of course. Fortunately, thanks to your magnificent negotiation skills we made good time acquiring the eel and therefore have additional time to spend here, should we need to locate another female.”

“Alright then, let’s give it a shot.”

“My sensors indicate a large grouping of Krillixians not far from here, surely males gathered in expectation of an emergence. Shall we join them?”

“Let’s.”

“Follow me, Chef.”

“I think I see the crowd. Ugly little buggers, aren’t they?”

“Beauty is relative, Chef. I suspect many Krillixians might make the same assessment of your appearance.”

“I guess.”

“I’m told the females are the most attractive of the two Krillixian genders.”

“Great.”

“Ah, there’s the chrysalis, and I can see it’s beginning to open. This is a special event not many Terrans ever see.”

“I’m humbled.”

“As am I. Ah, and there she is!”

“Good god! She looks like a giant praying mantis!”

“I know! Isn’t she gorgeous?”

“She’s coming over here. Why is she coming over here? She’s not going to bite my head off or anything, is she?”

“Oh no, Chef. Krillixians are a gentle species. Quite delicate.”

“What is she doing?”

“It appears she’s taken a liking to you. Look! The males are leaving, a sure sign this female has imprinted on you and chosen you for her mate. I’m afraid your Neemish spouses would not like that. They can be a very jealous species.”

“Okay well, she’s a lot heavier than she looks, can you get her off me? Maybe tell her I’m already married.”

“The Krillixians have no concept of marriage, but I’ll see what I can do.”

“Ah, that’s better. What did you say to her?”

“I simply told her that due to an unfortunate birth defect you lack the necessary male genitalia to impregnate her.”

“Wait, what?”

“Look Chef, she’s beginning to cry. This may be a good opportunity to take out the tube provided with your kit and save some of those tears.”

“Okay, sure. Man, she sure is crying a lot.”

“Yes. I believe you have more than enough tears. Due to their high concentration of sodium, a little goes a long way.”

“Okay. Can you get her to stop crying now?”

“I’m afraid not, Chef. She’s quite upset. You see, once a female imprints on a male, it’s permanent. She can never again choose another mate. I’m afraid you’ve doomed her to a life of loneliness and childlessness.”

“What? For real? Well . . . that’s not what . . . I mean, I didn’t want to ruin her life.”

“It was an effective means of obtaining tears though.”

“I guess. Look, why don’t you tell her she has an open invitation to come eat at my restaurant whenever she wants. Free of charge. Anything on the menu.”

“Chef, I’m not sure—”

“Just tell her, okay. It’s the least I can do.”

“Yes, Chef.”

“Good. At least she stopped crying now.”

“Chef, I’d be remiss if I failed to inform you that adult Krillixians eat only rarely. However, when they do, they gorge themselves on as much food as they can eat, over a period of several standard weeks. After which they molt.”

“Great. Well I won’t be seating her in the dining room, I guess.”

“A prudent decision, Chef.”

“I’ll figure it out. Let’s get off this planet before I make any more promises I’ll live to regret. What’s next?”

“Ah yes, the final ingredient. You’ll be pleased to know, Chef, that the final element of this dish is a leaf from the legendary Shero plant. There is only one such plant in existence, and it grows at the top of Mount Vrayna, on the moon of the same name.”

“Sounds like another hard ingredient to get.”

“While the plant is exceedingly rare and produces but a single leaf, it is actually quite simple to obtain. Mount Vrayna is more of a small hill than a true mountain, and the moon’s lower gravity makes the journey easier for your anatomy. It’s a matter of walking up to it and plucking the leaf.”

“Okay, let’s head to Vrayna, I guess.”

“**W**HAT a lovely moon this is. And look, you can see the top of Mount Vrayna from here!”

“Yeah, it’s great. Okay, I have the envelope you provided to put the leaf in. I guess I’ll just run up there and get it.”

“Wonderful! Chef . . . one moment.”

“What is it now?”

“My sensors detect another ship. Oh look, I see another person approaching. He’s heading up the mountain, and it appears he has a holographic companion of the same make and model as myself. One moment while I make contact. Ah yes, it appears this individual is also a chef and is likewise here for the leaf.”

“What?”

“It seems Mr. Rothman gave you both the same dish. Oh, he’s such a character! He has always enjoyed lively competition.”

“Are you saying I have to race this other guy to the leaf?”

“Oh no, Chef. I’m afraid the rules state you must do battle — to the death.”

“What?”

“In your kit you will find several tools you could use for weaponry or defense. Might I suggest a meat mallet and ground ghost pepper combination?”

“You can’t be serious.”

“Oh, I am, Chef. You can blind him with the pepper and take the opportunity to knock him unconscious with the mallet.”

“Jesus Christ! Fine.”

“Excellent. And it seems your opponent has likewise chosen his weapons. Looks like a carving knife and a torch.”

“Torch? I could’ve chosen a torch?”

“I did advise you to review the contents of your kit, Chef. I’m afraid once you’ve made your selection, you can’t change it. Those are the rules.”

“Oh for god’s sake! Okay, let’s just get this over with.”

“That’s the spirit. I’m afraid, however, that I’ve grown quite fond of you throughout this quest, Chef. I couldn’t bear to watch you be injured or worse. I will therefore be powering down while you face your foe. You may power me back on again should you survive.”

“I — okay.”

“**C**HEF, how nice to see you again, and in one piece! Well, almost. Not to worry, you can still make this dish even with those two fingers missing from your left hand. I suppose it’s fortunate the torch cauterized the wounds.”

“I . . . I . . .”

“Oh yes, I can see you have the leaf. I’ll see to it that the ship makes it to our next destination should you lose consciousness. And may I say, it’s a testament to the kind of man you are that you haven’t died of shock, given the state of your body.”

“Wait . . . next destination? You said this was the last ingredient.”

“Oh, it is, Chef. The final ingredient for the eel dish. You’ll simply place it on the plate for Mr. Rothman to crumble over it just prior to taking the first bite, thereby releasing all its flavor at the precise moment.”

“Then why aren’t we heading back to the restaurant?”

“We can’t yet, Chef. First we must acquire all the necessary ingredients for Mr. Rothman’s most desired dessert!”



THE HORROR AT MARTIN’S BEACH

by Sonia H. Greene and H.P. Lovecraft

I HAVE never heard an even approximately adequate explanation of the horror at Martin’s Beach. Despite the large number of witnesses, no two accounts agree; and the testimony taken by local authorities contains the most amazing discrepancies.

Perhaps this haziness is natural in view of the unheard-of character of the horror itself, the almost paralytic terror of all who saw it, and the efforts made by the fashionable Wavecrest Inn to hush it up after the publicity created by Prof. Alton’s article “Are Hypnotic Powers Confined to Recognized Humanity?”

Against all these obstacles I am striving to present a coherent version; for I beheld the hideous occurrence, and believe it should be known in view of the appalling possibilities it suggests. Martin’s Beach is once more popular as a watering-place, but I shudder when I think of it. Indeed, I cannot look at the ocean at all now without shuddering.

Fate is not always without a sense of drama and climax, hence the terrible happening of August 8, 1922, swiftly followed a period of minor and agreeably wonder-fraught excitement at Martin’s Beach. On May 17 the crew of the fishing smack Alma of Gloucester, under Capt. James P. Orne, killed, after a battle of nearly forty hours, a marine monster whose size and aspect produced the greatest possible stir in scientific circles and caused certain Boston naturalists to take every precaution for its taxidermic preservation.

The object was some fifty feet in length, of roughly cylindrical shape, and about ten feet in diameter. It was unmistakably a gilled fish in its major affiliations; but with certain curious modifications, such as rudimentary forelegs and six-toed feet in place of pectoral fins, which prompted the widest speculation. Its extraordinary mouth, its thick and scaly hide, and its single, deep-set eye were wonders scarcely less remarkable than its colossal dimensions; and when the naturalists pronounced it an infant organism, which could not have been hatched more than a few days, public interest mounted to extraordinary heights.

Capt. Orne, with typical Yankee shrewdness, obtained a vessel large enough to hold the object in its hull, and arranged

for the exhibition of his prize. With judicious carpentry he prepared what amounted to an excellent marine museum, and, sailing south to the wealthy resort district of Martin’s Beach, anchored at the hotel wharf and reaped a harvest of admission fees.

The intrinsic marvelousness of the object, and the importance which it clearly bore in the minds of many scientific visitors from near and far, combined to make it the season’s sensation. That it was absolutely unique — unique to a scientifically revolutionary degree — was well understood. The naturalists had shown plainly that it radically differed from the similarly immense fish caught off the Florida coast; that, while it was obviously an inhabitant of almost incredible depths, perhaps thousands of feet, its brain and principal organs indicated a development startlingly vast, and out of all proportion to anything hitherto associated with the fish tribe.

On the morning of July 20 the sensation was increased by the loss of the vessel and its strange treasure. In the storm of

the preceding night it had broken from its moorings and vanished forever from the sight of man, carrying with it the guard who had slept aboard despite the threatening weather. Capt. Orne, backed by extensive scientific interests and aided by large numbers of fishing boats from Gloucester, made a thorough and exhaustive searching cruise, but with no result other than the prompting of interest and conversation. By August 7 hope was abandoned, and Capt. Orne had returned to the Wavecrest Inn to wind up his business affairs at Martin’s Beach and confer with certain of the scientific men who remained there. The horror came on August 8.

*I shudder when
I think of it.
Indeed, I cannot
look at the
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without
shuddering.*

IT WAS in the twilight, when grey sea-birds hovered low near the shore and a rising moon began to make a glittering path across the waters. The scene is important to remember, for every impression counts. On the beach were several strollers and a few late bathers; stragglers from the distant cottage colony that rose modestly on a green hill to the north, or from the adjacent cliff-perched Inn whose imposing towers proclaimed its allegiance to wealth and grandeur.

Well within viewing distance was another set of spectators, the loungers on the Inn’s high-ceiled and lantern-lighted veranda, who appeared to be enjoying the dance music from the sumptuous ballroom inside. These spectators, who included Capt. Orne and his group of scientific confreres, joined the

* This story originally appeared in *Weird Tales*, November 1923.

beach group before the horror progressed far; as did many more from the Inn. Certainly there was no lack of witnesses, confused though their stories be with fear and doubt of what they saw.

There is no exact record of the time the thing began, although a majority say that the fairly round moon was “about a foot” above the low-lying vapors of the horizon. They mention the moon because what they saw seemed subtly connected with it — a sort of stealthy, deliberate, menacing ripple which rolled in from the far skyline along the shimmering lane of reflected moonbeams, yet which seemed to subside before it reached the shore.

Many did not notice this ripple until reminded by later events; but it seems to have been very marked, differing in height and motion from the normal waves around it. Some called it cunning and calculating. And as it died away craftily by the black reefs afar out, there suddenly came belching up out of the glitter-streaked brine a cry of death; a scream of anguish and despair that moved pity even while it mocked it.

First to respond to the cry were the two life guards then on duty; sturdy fellows in white bathing attire, with their calling proclaimed in large red letters across their chests. Accustomed as they were to rescue work, and to the screams of the drowning, they could find nothing familiar in the unearthly ululation; yet with a trained sense of duty they ignored the strangeness and proceeded to follow their usual course.

Hastily seizing an air-cushion, which with its attached coil of rope lay always at hand, one of them ran swiftly along the shore to the scene of the gathering crowd; whence, after whirling it about to gain momentum, he flung the hollow disc far out in the direction from which the sound had come. As the cushion disappeared in the waves, the crowd curiously awaited a sight of the hapless being whose distress had been so great; eager to see the rescue made by the massive rope.

But that rescue was soon acknowledged to be no swift and easy matter; for, pull as they might on the rope, the two muscular guards could not move the object at the other end. Instead, they found that object pulling with equal or even greater force in the very opposite direction, till in a few seconds they were dragged off their feet and into the water by the strange power which had seized on the proffered life-preserver.

One of them, recovering himself, called immediately for help from the crowd on the shore, to whom he flung the remaining coil of rope; and in a moment the guards were seconded by all the hardier men, among whom Capt. Orne was foremost. More than a dozen strong hands were now tugging desperately at the stout line, yet wholly without avail.

Hard as they tugged, the strange force at the other end tugged harder; and since neither side relaxed for an instant, the rope became rigid as steel with the enormous strain. The struggling participants, as well as the spectators, were

by this time consumed with curiosity as to the nature of the force in the sea. The idea of a drowning man had long been dismissed; and hints of whales, submarines, monsters, and demons now passed freely around. Where humanity had first led the rescuers, wonder kept them at their task; and they hauled with a grim determination to uncover the mystery.

It being decided at last that a whale must have swallowed the air-cushion, Capt. Orne, as a natural leader, shouted to those on the shore that a boat must be obtained in order to approach, harpoon, and land the unseen leviathan. Several men at once prepared to scatter in quest of a suitable craft, while others came to supplant the captain at the straining rope, since his place was logically with whatever boat party might be formed.

His own idea of the situation was very broad, and by no means limited to whales, since he had to do with a monster so much stranger. He wondered what might be the acts and manifestations of an adult of the species of which the fifty-foot creature had been the merest infant.

AND now there developed with appalling suddenness the crucial fact which changed the entire scene from one of wonder to one of horror, and dazed with fright the assembled band of toilers and onlookers. Capt. Orne, turning to leave his post at the rope, found his hands held in their place with unaccountable strength; and in a moment he realized that



The Work That Must Be Done

by Nathan Lee

In the factory that makes teddy bears, there are rosy-cheeked women who stuff the soft padding into the fur. They laugh and tell each other about their grandchildren.

In the factory that makes teddy bears, artists paint bright-patterned bow-ties and miniature jackets. They smile and have comradely contests to see who can make the most delightful mixture of colors.

In the factory that makes teddy bears, there is a sad-faced old man with a hammer. As each fluffy body passes by his station and sits up, blinking with the wonder of the new world, he swings the hammer once, sharply.

he was unable to let go of the rope. His plight was instantly divined, and as each companion tested his own situation the same condition was encountered. The fact could not be denied — every struggler was irresistibly held in some mysterious bondage to the hempen line which was slowly, hideously, and relentlessly pulling them out to sea.

Speechless horror ensued; a horror in which the spectators were petrified to utter inaction and mental chaos. Their complete demoralization is reflected in the conflicting accounts they give, and the sheepish excuses they offer for their seemingly callous inertia. I was one of them, and know.

Even the strugglers, after a few frantic screams and futile groans, succumbed to the paralyzing influence and kept silent and fatalistic in the face of unknown powers. There they stood in the pallid moonlight, blindly pulling against a spectral doom and swaying monotonously backward and forward as the water rose first to their knees, then to their hips. The moon went partly under a cloud, and in the half-light the line of swaying men resembled some sinister and gigantic centipede, writhing in the clutch of a terrible creeping death.

Harder and harder grew the rope, as the tug in both directions increased, and the strands swelled with the undisturbed soaking of the rising waves. Slowly the tide advanced, till the sands so lately peopled by laughing children and whispering lovers were now swallowed by the inexorable flow. The herd of panic-stricken watchers surged blindly backward as the water crept above their feet, while the frightful line of strugglers swayed hideously on, half submerged, and now at a substantial distance from their audience. Silence was complete.

The crowd, having gained a huddling-place beyond reach of the tide, stared in mute fascination; without offering a word of advice or encouragement, or attempting any kind of assistance. There was in the air a nightmare fear of impending evils such as the world had never before known.

MINUTES seemed lengthened into hours, and still that human snake of swaying torsos was seen above the fast rising tide. Rhythmically it undulated; slowly, horribly, with the seal of doom upon it. Thicker clouds now passed over the ascending moon, and the glittering path on the waters faded nearly out.

Very dimly writhed the serpentine line of nodding heads, with now and then the livid face of a backward-glancing victim gleaming pale in the darkness. Faster and faster gathered the clouds, till at length their angry rifts shot down

sharp tongues of febrile flame. Thunders rolled, softly at first, yet soon increasing to a deafening, maddening intensity. Then came a culminating crash — a shock whose reverberations seemed to shake land and sea alike — and on its heels a cloud-burst whose drenching violence overpowered the darkened world as if the heavens themselves had opened to pour forth a vindictive torrent.

The spectators, instinctively acting despite the absence of conscious and coherent thought, now retreated up the cliff steps to the hotel veranda. Rumors had reached the guests inside, so that the refugees found a state of terror nearly equal to their own. I think a few frightened words were uttered, but cannot be sure.

Some, who were staying at the Inn, retired in terror to their rooms; while others remained to watch the fast sinking victims as the line of bobbing heads showed above the mounting waves in the fitful lightning flashes. I recall thinking of those heads, and the bulging eyes they must contain; eyes that might well reflect all the fright, panic, and delirium of a malignant universe — all the sorrow, sin, and misery, blasted hopes and unfulfilled desires, fear, loathing and anguish of the ages since time's beginning; eyes alight with all the soul-racking pain of eternally blazing infernos.

And as I gazed out beyond the heads, my fancy conjured up still another eye; a single eye, equally alight, yet with a purpose so revolting to my brain that the vision soon passed. Held in the clutches of an unknown vise, the line of the damned dragged on; their silent screams and unuttered prayers known only to the demons of the black waves and the night-wind.

There now burst from the infuriate sky such a mad cataclysm of satanic sound that even the former crash seemed dwarfed. Amidst a blinding glare of descending fire the voice of heaven resounded with the blasphemies of hell, and the mingled agony of all the lost reverberated in one apocalyptic, planet-rending peal of Cyclopean din. It was the end of the storm, for with uncanny suddenness the rain ceased and the moon once more cast her pallid beams on a strangely quieted sea.

There was no line of bobbing heads now. The waters were calm and deserted, and broken only by the fading ripples of what seemed to be a whirlpool far out in the path of the moonlight whence the strange cry had first come. But as I looked along that treacherous lane of silvery sheen, with fancy fevered and senses overwrought, there trickled upon my ears from some abysmal sunken waste the faint and sinister echoes of a laugh.





THE LIFE AND WORKS OF SONIA H. GREENE

A brief biography of Mrs. H.P. Lovecraft

by Bobby Derie

SONIA HAFT SHAFIRKIN was born into a Jewish family in Itchno, near Konotop, in the Russian Empire, present-day Ukraine, on 16 March 1883. Sources on her early life are contradictory but agree that her parents were Racille and Simyon. Her father was discharged from the Russian army c. 1888. He left the family to find work in Europe, and disappeared; either dead or having abandoned his family. Racille took her daughter to the United Kingdom; c.1890, Racille left for the United States. Seven-year-old Sonia was put into the care of her uncles in Liverpool and attended the Baron de Hirsch School.

Racille remarried, and sent for her daughter. Sonia arrived in New York on 4 June 1892. Two half-siblings resulted from her mother's new marriage; Anna (b. 1893) and Sydney (b. 1897). Sonia was in school from age nine until thirteen, at which point her step-father insisted she be put to work, and the teenaged girl was apprenticed to a milliner.

Two years later, while working as a milliner in New York, Sonia met a Russian Jewish immigrant named Samuel Greene (originally Seckendorff). Greene was twenty-five years old; they appear to have become engaged when Sonia was 16, and though one source says she tried

to break the engagement, Sonia and Samuel married on 24 December 1899. It was not destined to be a happy marriage; Sonia reportedly supported the family with her earnings, and Greene may have had mental health issues. She gave birth to a son in October 1900, who died in infancy c. January 1901; a daughter, Florence Carol Greene, was born 19 March 1902.

Samuel Greene died circa 1916, by some sources by suicide. Yet Sonia's first marriage led her to her second:

"During Sonia's engagement, to improve her mind, Greene encouraged her to read widely in European literature. As a result, Sonia became an energetic self-improver. In 1917 she met James F. Morton, who introduced her to Walker's Sunrise club. This was a dinner and lecture club of which she became a habituee. While rising in the business world as a saleswoman and designer of hats, she went to night school to perfect her English."

About 1920, Morton asked if he might use Sonia's apartment for a meeting of the Blue Pencil Club, the New York society of amateur journalists. It was his turn to entertain them, and his place was too small. Thus Sonia encountered amateur journalism. Soon, she attended the convention in Boston at which she met H. P. Lovecraft."

– H. P. Lovecraft: *A Biography* 160-161

The 46th annual convention of the National Amateur Press Association was held at the Hotel Brunswick in Boston, Massachusetts, from 2-5 July 1921. Howard Phillips Lovecraft was then 31 years old and had been in amateur journalism for seven years. Accounts differ as to how Sonia and Howard first met: Reinhart Kleiner claimed to have introduced Howard and Sonia "on the deck of a harbor boat which was to take us to some neighboring beach" (*Ave atque Vale* 132; entertainments for the convention include "a visit to the principal points of Boston Harbor" and "a visit to Revere Beach"), while W. Paul Cook claimed:

"There is the regrettable joke (as we thought) when Mrs. Minitier, Joe Lynch, and I plunked Lovecraft on the sofa with Sonia — the first time they met."

– W. Paul Cook: *The Wandering Life of a Yankee Printer* 57

The most fun story that came out of the convention is when George Houtain caught a snap of Howard with his Brownie 2A camera:

"He is a modest man and great was my joy when I arranged with our official vamp Sonia Green to steal upon him suddenly, get a half-nelson clutch on his august form so that I could Brownie number 2A him — which I did. Then the fun that followed with Lovecraft burlesquing himself



as a victim of a blackmailing gang and accusing Sonia and me of being in cohorts — which we were."

– *Renaissance* 4

The earliest surviving photograph of Sonia and Howard together appears to capture this moment.

Correspondence between Howard and Sonia developed quickly. In a letter dated 30 July 1921, Lovecraft reported to Kleiner that she had joined the United Amateur Press Association and read "Nyarlahotep" and "Polaris"; a week later he wrote to fellow amateur, collaborator, and friend Winifred Virginia Jackson about her. Sonia is reported to have said "I stole HPL away from Winifred Jackson." The Lovecraft/Jackson correspondence peters out at the end of 1921, while references to Sonia in Howard's letters increase.

By the end of August, Sonia and Howard had conceived of her issuing her own amateur journal, *The Rainbow*. In early September Sonia traveled to Providence, arrived on the 4th, met Howard at the Crown Hotel, and he took her on a brief tour. He brought her home to 598 Angell Street, where Sonia met Howard's aunt Lillian Clark. They reviewed the proofs for *The Rainbow*, and then Sonia invited Howard and Lillian to dinner at her hotel; Lillian declined, and Lovecraft had a cup of coffee and chocolate ice-cream. Together the two of them toured more of Providence, including the Brown University campus, and after dinner they took in a band concert at Roger Williams Park. That was their first date.



The first issue of *The Rainbow* was published October 1921. Howard accepted her invitation to visit New York, staying in her apartment with Samuel Loveman in April 1922. The trip is described in great detail in Howard’s letters and Sonia’s memoir, full of friends he visited and museums he went to, and the great efforts Sonia went to in order to feed and house him. During the stay, Howard also met Sonia’s 19-year-old daughter. Sonia had coaxed Lovecraft down to New York, introduced him to a wider group of friends and new experiences, and yet his antisemitism remained:

“Long before H. P. and I were married he said to me in a letter when speaking of Loveman, ‘Loveman is a poet and a literary genius. [...] The only discrepancy I find in him is that he is of the Semitic race, a Jew.’

Then I replied that I was a little surprised at H. P.’s discrimination in this instance — that I thought H. P. to be above such a petty fallacy — and that perhaps our friendship might find itself on the rocks under the circumstances, since I too am of the Hebrew people — but that surely, he, H. P., could not have been serious, that elegance of manner, cultural background, social experience and the truly artistic temperament, intellectuality and refinement surely do not choose any particular color, race or creed; that these attributes should be highly appreciated no matter where they may be found!

It was only after several such exchanges of letters that he put the ‘pianissimo’ on his thoughts (perhaps) and curtailed his outbursts of discrimination. In fact, it was after this that our own correspondence became more frequent and more intimate until, as I then believed, H. P. became entirely rid of his prejudices in this direction, and that no more need have been said about them.”
– Ave atque Vale 147-148

The second and final issue of *The Rainbow* came out in May 1922. From 26 June to 5 July 1922, Sonia visited Magnolia, Massachusetts. Lovecraft went up to visit her:

“While visiting Magnolia, that beautiful, exclusive summer resort on the north shoe of Massachusetts, we often walked to Gloucester, which was a distance of about four miles. On our way we passed a beautiful esplanade. One evening while walking along this esplanade, the full moon reflecting its light in the water, a peculiar and unusual noise heard at a distance as of a loud snorting and grunting, the shimmering light forming a moon-path on the water, the round tops of the submerged piles in the water exposed a rope connecting them like a huge spider’s guy-line, gave the vivid imagination full play for an interesting weird tale.

‘Oh, Howard,’ I exclaimed, ‘here you have the setting for a real strange and mysterious story.’

Said he, ‘Go ahead, and write it.’

‘Oh, no, I couldn’t do it justice,’ I answered.

‘Try it. Tell me what the scene pictures to your imagination.’

And as we walked along we neared the edge of the water. Here I described my interpretation of the scene and the noises. His encouragement was so enthusiastic and sincere that when we parted for the night, I sat up and wrote the general outline which he later revised and edited. His continued enthusiasm the next day was so genuine and sincere that in appreciation I surprised and shocked him right then and there by kissing him. He was so flustered that he blushed, then he turned pale. When I chaffed him about it he said he had not been kissed since he was a very small child and that he was never kissed by any woman, not even by his mother or aunts, since he grew to manhood, and that he would probably never be kissed again. (But I fooled him.)”
– Ave atque Vale 138

The trip would result in the stories “The Nameless Monster” (later retitled by Lovecraft “The Horror at Martin’s Beach”) and “Four O’Clock.” In September-October 1922 Howard was in New York again, visiting Sonia and his friends. Sonia wrote:

“After his return home I was not ashamed to tell him that I missed him very much. His appreciation of this confession on my part, I believe, led us both on to more serious and perhaps dangerous ground.”
– Ave atque Vale 136

1923 saw the publication of *Weird Tales*, a pulp magazine which Howard immediately took an interest in. Howard submitted several stories for publication — and either on her behalf or with his encouragement, Sonia submitted as well. “The Horror at Martin’s Beach” was published as “The Invisible Monster” by Sonia Greene in the November 1923 issue.

On 3 March 1924, Howard and Sonia married in New York City at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Brooklyn. He had not told his aunts or any of his friends beforehand but announced it to them in a long letter, part of which reads:

“Two are one. Another bears the name of Lovecraft. A new household is founded!”
– H. P. Lovecraft to Lillian D. Clark, 9 March 1924

The couple’s prospects were not entirely unpromising; Sonia had a high-paying job as a saleswoman and manager at Ferle Heller’s clothing shop in Manhattan; Howard was placing stories in *Weird Tales*, and had been given a lucrative ghost-writing job for Harry Houdini, “Under the Pyramids.” Regrettably, the typescript for this story was lost on the way to New York. Part of their honeymoon in Philadelphia had to be spent re-typing the story:

“Being obliged to get some typing done instantly, we finished the evening at the only public stenographer’s office in town which was then open — that at the Hotel Vendig, where for a dollar we obtained the use of a Royal machine for three hours. S. H. dictated whilst I typed — a marvellous way of speeding up copying, and one which I shall constantly use in future, since my partner expresses a willingness amounting to eagerness so far as her share of the toil is concerned. She has the absolutely unique gift of being able to read the careless scrawl of my rough manuscripts — no matter how cryptically and involvedly interlined!”
– H. P. Lovecraft to Lillian D. Clark, 9 March 1924

Sonia wrote:

“It was I alone who was able to read those erased and crossed-out notes. I read them slowly to him while H. P. pounded them out on a borrowed typewriter, borrowed from the hotel in Philadelphia where we spent the first day and night copying that precious manuscript which had to meet the printer’s deadline. When that manuscript was finished we were too tired and exhausted for honey-

moonings or anything else.”

– Ave atque vale 126

They tried to make a go of married life. The aunts sent down Howard’s books and personal possessions, which he moved into Sonia’s apartment. They considered building a home of their own. Sonia finished the naturalization process, and became a citizen of the United States on 5 May 1924. She quit her job and used her savings to start her own hat shop.

Things did not work out. Howard’s search for a job failed; in 33 years, he had never held any regular employment, and his income came from sales of pulp fiction, revising the writing of others for small sums, and small sums doled out from his family’s dwindling savings. Sonia’s hat shop failed as well as her health; she was hospitalized in late October. Howard visited her every day in the hospital and advised her against surgery. A second opinion suggested Sonia needed rest in the country, and she spent a few weeks in a rest home in New Jersey, where Howard visited her.

Sonia’s return to New York came to a decision: she needed a job and had an offer in Cincinnati, Ohio. Howard either would not or could not go with her. He relocated to a small apartment in the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn. Sonia would visit him when her new job allowed. So they lived apart.

The period that followed was difficult on them both. Alone in a strange city, unable to find a job, Lovecraft’s disgust for New York and the “Melting Pot” grew. In May 1925, thieves broke into his apartment. Howard moved back to Providence and his aunts. Sonia says little about this time, though we know she visited him when she could, staying with him and made sure he had food and money. Yet once back in Providence:

“At this time the aunts gently but firmly informed me that neither they nor Howard could afford to have Howard’s wife work for a living in Providence. That was that. I now knew where we all stood. Pride preferred to suffer in silence; both theirs and mine.”
– Ave atque Vale 139

The sentiment is hard to understand by the standards of today; Howard’s aunts had been raised to believe genteel poverty preferable than the loss of social status that would follow by having Howard supported by his wife. Sonia moved where work took her. They were still married and still wrote to one another. When she visited New York, he would come down to be with her for a while. As Sonia put it:

“Our marital life for the next few months was spent on reams of paper washed in rivers of ink.”
– Ave atque Vale 140

In 1928, after more than two years of separation, Sonia pressed for divorce. Owing to the laws in place at the time, the divorce proceeded under the pretense that Sonia had deserted the marriage. When it came time to sign the divorce decree, however, Howard did not do so. Although Sonia was under the impression they were divorced, they remained legally married until his death.

“On his last visit to me I told him that while I found it impossible to remain his wife any longer I wanted him to know that I would still be his friend if he cared for such friendship; that he ought to divorce me and find and marry a young woman of his own background and culture, live in Providence and try to live a normal life and be happy.

‘No, my dear, if you leave me I shall never marry again,’ he would reply.”

– Ave atque Vale 141

Nor did he. Lovecraft rarely spoke of his marriage in letters after 1929. Their correspondence continued, and they would meet occasionally. One such meeting produced the play *Alcestis*, their third collaboration. In 1932 Sonia traveled through Europe; she was in Wiesbaden on 28 July 1932, where Hitler gave a speech on the campaign trail. Later that year, she asked Lovecraft to revise the manuscript. By the time Howard revised his wife’s travelogue, Hitler had lost the runoff election even as the Nazis had gained seats in the Reichstag. The work was eventually published, long after their deaths, as *European Glimpses*.

Sonia traveled where work took her. In the mid-1930s, Sonia lost touch with Howard and went to California. There she met Nathaniel Abraham Davis, a Jewish writer and social activist. They married in 1936. Howard Phillips Lovecraft died the next year.

Nathan A. Davis died on 6 April 1946. Around this time Sonia learned of Howard’s death. Early memoirs were error-ridden, especially about their marriage, and Sonia wished to publish her own account. August Derleth, who had co-founded of Arkham House to publish Lovecraft’s work, was less than conscientious to the former Mrs. Lovecraft.

“Meanwhile, did I tell you Sonia Lovecraft Davis turned up with some laughable idea of cashing in on HPL’s ‘fame’ and the desire to publish a ‘frank’ book, entitled THE PRIVATE LIFE OF H. P. LOVECRAFT, and quoting generously from his letters. She read me part of the ms. in New York, and in it she has HPL posing as a Jew-baiter (she is Jewish), she says she completely supported HPL for the years 1924 to 1932, and so on, all bare-faced lies. I startled her considerably when I told her we had



a detailed account of their life together in HPL’s letters to Mrs. Clark. I also forbade her to use any quotations from HPL’s letters without approval from us, acting for the estate. I told her by all means to write her book and I would read it, but it was pathetically funny; she thought she could get rich on the book. She said it would sell easily a million copies! Can you beat it! I tried to point out that a biographical book on HPL by myself, out two years, had not yet sold 1000 copies, and that book combined two well-known literary names. She thought she should have \$500 advance on her book as a gift, and royalties besides! I burst into impolite laughter, I fear.”

– August Derleth to R. H. Barlow, 23 Oct 1947

There is a passage in Sonia’s memoir about his letters:

“I had a trunkful of his letters which he had written me throughout the years but before leaving New York for California I took them to a field and set a match to them. I now have only the one in the Rainbow and one which I received from him after I returned from Europe.”

– Ave atque Vale 145

An edited and abridged version of her memoir was eventually published as “Howard Phillips Lovecraft As His Wife Remembers Him” in the Providence Journal, 22 August 1948. Relations between Sonia and Derleth thawed. *Something About Cats* (1949) published “The Horror at St. Martin’s Beach,” “Four O’Clock,” and a variant of her memoir as “Lovecraft As I Knew Him.” In 1953, Derleth traveled to Los Angeles, and met Sonia. The encounter was described in a fanzine:

“A propos your piece on Lovecraft, the question of HPL and sex had been bothering me for some time [...] so in 1953 when I was in Los Angeles, I asked Sonia Davis — the ex-Mrs. Lovecraft — rather bluntly about HPL’s sexual adequacy. She assured me that he had been entirely adequate sexually, and since she impressed me as a well-sexed woman, not easily satisfied, I concluded that HPL’s ‘Aversion’ was very probably nothing more than a kind of puritanism — that is, it was something ‘gentlemen’ didn’t discuss.”

–August Derleth to *Haunted* 114

The subject of Lovecraft’s sex life would come up more than once. As his wife, Sonia was the only other person in a position to know — and perhaps to dispel any rumors that Lovecraft, otherwise a lifelong bachelor, might have been a homosexual — a reflection of the lavender scare of the 1950s and 60s. Fan R. Alain Everts interviewed Sonia in 1967. From this interview came “Howard Lovecraft and Sex: or, The Sex Life of a Gentleman” (*Nyctalops* #9, 1974). Sonia wrote a brief memoir, “Memories of Lovecraft I,” which was published in *The Arkham Collector* Winter 1969, where she infamously declared:

“As a married man, he was an adequately excellent lover, but refused to show his feelings in the presence of others, [...] One way of expression of H. P.’s was to wrap his ‘pinkey’ finger around mine and say, ‘Umph!’”

– Ave atque Vale 152

In 1960, Sonia broke her hip and moved into a rest home in southern Los Angeles. In 1965, she transferred to the Diana Lynn Lodge in Sunland, California, where she would live out the rest of her life. On 22 December 1972, Sonia had a final phone interview with Everts; he transcribed part of it as “Mrs. Howard Phillips Lovecraft” (*Nyctalops* #8, 1973), where he announced that she had died just four days later, on 26 December 1972.

For the most part, it is hard to say how much about Sonia herself we really know — since so much of the interest about her focuses on that brief period of her life when she was Mrs. H. P. Lovecraft. Yet she was also on her own a mother, daughter, sister, businesswoman, poet, writer, and amateur journalist. There are chapters of Sonia’s life that are closed to us now, such as her work with her third husband as a humanitarian devoted to world peace, her publications as an amateur journalist, but which might be uncovered with a little digging and research... and for fans and scholars of H. P. Lovecraft, Sonia’s few memories paint an intimate picture of a marriage that Lovecraft himself was reluctant to write about, even to his closest friends.



WEIRDER THAN FICTION

Armed with a computer and an eye for the uncanny, horror artist extraordinaire Eduardo Valdés-Hevia proves that reality is often weirder than fiction. Can you determine which of the following images is a fabrication and which depicts a true story? Discover the truth on page 32.

An Octopus with 56 tentacles



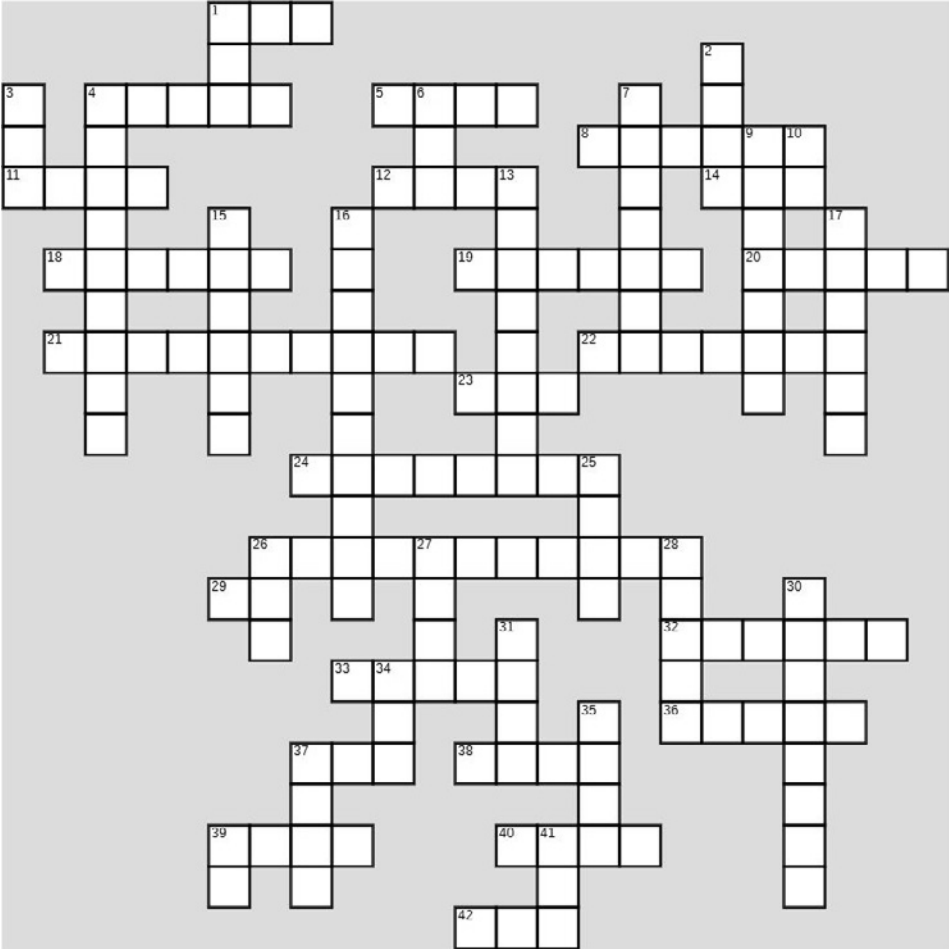
Fishermen off the coast of Japan captured this octopus in 1964, which now stands on display in an aquarium in Toba. This extremely rare occurrence has only been observed a few times in nature, and it is thought to be the result of faulty healing mechanisms in the octopus's body.

A Failed Train Prototype



In 1956, Swedish engineer Björn Eriksson develops a prototype for the raket tåg, or "rocket train." He claimed it would be the transportation of the future, capable of traversing Europe in mere hours. Björn staged a demonstration with a prototype train to attract investors, but due to a malfunction in the rockets, it ended up derailing. His project would never see the light of day.

CRYPTID CROSSWORD by Norm Sherman



Answers on pg. 32

ACROSS

- Supernatural satyr, companion of nymphs
- Controversial hobbit
- Manitoban lake monster with a sheep-like head; Mani-_____
- Gnome chromosome
- Silver schools mistaken for sea monsters
- Horse-boss
- Undocumented sky cryptid
- Taxonomic grouping between Kingdom and Class
- Aussie swamp dweller from Aboriginal mythology
- Coastal predatory bird-human
- Gives rise to mole milk (two words)
- Beaked racoon monster; Long Island corpse
- Nosferatu chicken
- Apocalypse apartment
- Garden state phantom kangaroo (two words)
- Drabblecast Art Director (this issue's cover illustrator!)
- Plesiosaur with bagpipes
- Brain-eating bear from east African folklore
- Wisconsin frog-dog
- Seen but not heard in pterodactyls
- Poisonous Arizona lizard
- Hamburger Helper's disembodied appendage mascot
- Arctic Sasquatch
- Potatohead spawn

DOWN

- Bodysnatcher birth legume
- Cave aficionado
- Bodily origin of a mythical annelid's fatal electric discharge
- Deadliest of worms; from Mongolian legend (two words)
- Lake monster originating from First Nations folklore; _____pogo
- Supernatural cannibalistic being from Algonquian folklore
- Likely owner of mothballs
- Hyper-intelligent ungulate
- Stinkiest of primates (two words)
- Lugtree pollinator (two words)
- Mexican "goat sucker"
- Mythical squid
- "Slithy" cryptid documented by Lewis Carroll
- Biblical leviathan prey
- CEO and aspiring extraterrestrial
- Midday Sasquatch feeding
- French gastropod
- Purported South Pacific origin of P.T. Barnum's "mermaid"
- Minotaur weapon of choice
- Phenomena, often unaccounted for
- Violently erupts from a horse as part of its lifecycle
- Preferred pronoun of Mothman
- Treebeard was the eldest of these

Stick It In Your Ear

The following stories and drabbles have been brought to life in audio adaptations by *The Drabblecast's* inimitable host, Norm Sherman. Here are the episodes each piece originally appeared in.

FICTION

- “In My Brain in My Body” by Evie Mae Barber was featured as the title story in Drabblecast Episode 456.
- “The Horror at Martin’s Beach” by Sonia H. Greene and H.P. Lovecraft was featured as the title story in Drabblecast B-Sides Episode 6.

Drabbles

- “Grandpa’s Stories” by Roy McDaniel appeared in Drabblecast Episode 65 - Old Clara’s Favorites.
- “The Work that Must Be Done” by Nathan Lee appeared in Drabblecast Episode 166 - Jubilee.
- “Eyes” by Steven Saus appeared in Drabblecast Episode 272 - Power Armor: A Love Story.
- “Man a la Moustache” by Basil Godevenos appeared in Drabblecast Episode 283 - The Man Who Drew Cats.

We want to hear from you

Have any comments on this issue’s stories? Have something else on your mind? Future issues of *The Tentaculum* will feature mail from readers like you, but first we need you to send us something! Send us a physical letter, and yes, we will actually read it. If you’re not into snail mail, you can email us instead. You might just see your letter in the next issue.

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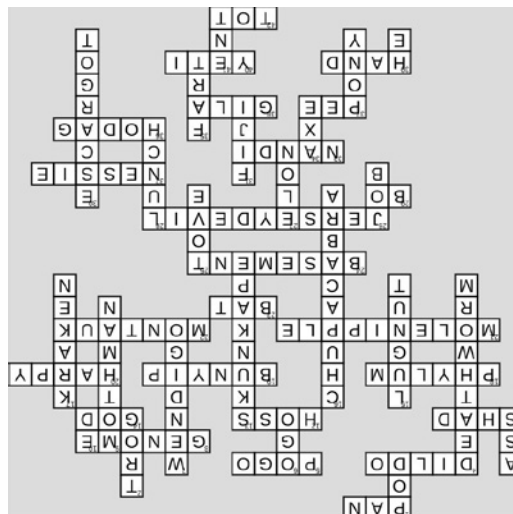
thetentaculum@gmail.com

WEIRDER THAN FICTION



This octopus really was captured in the waters near Kaishan Town, Kitamuro Prefecture in 1964 and is being exhibited at the Toba Aquarium in Mie Prefecture, Japan. Photo by Flickr user Jin Kemoole used under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 license.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS



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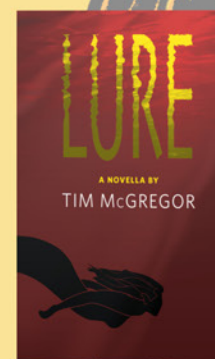
WEIRD ALL YEAR 'ROUND



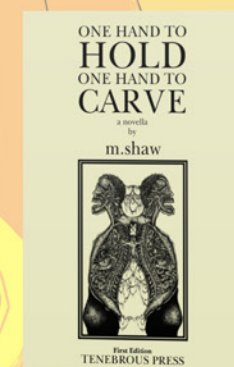
CROM CRUACH
Valkyrie Loughcrewe



YOUR BODY IS NOT YOUR BODY
by Various



LURE
Tim McGregor



ONE HAND TO HOLD,
ONE HAND TO CARVE
M. Shaw

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