



# Utopia

Science Fiction

**FEATURING:**

**KEVIN STADT**

**LOUIS GALLO**

**AND MORE!**





**DECEMBER**  
**2019**



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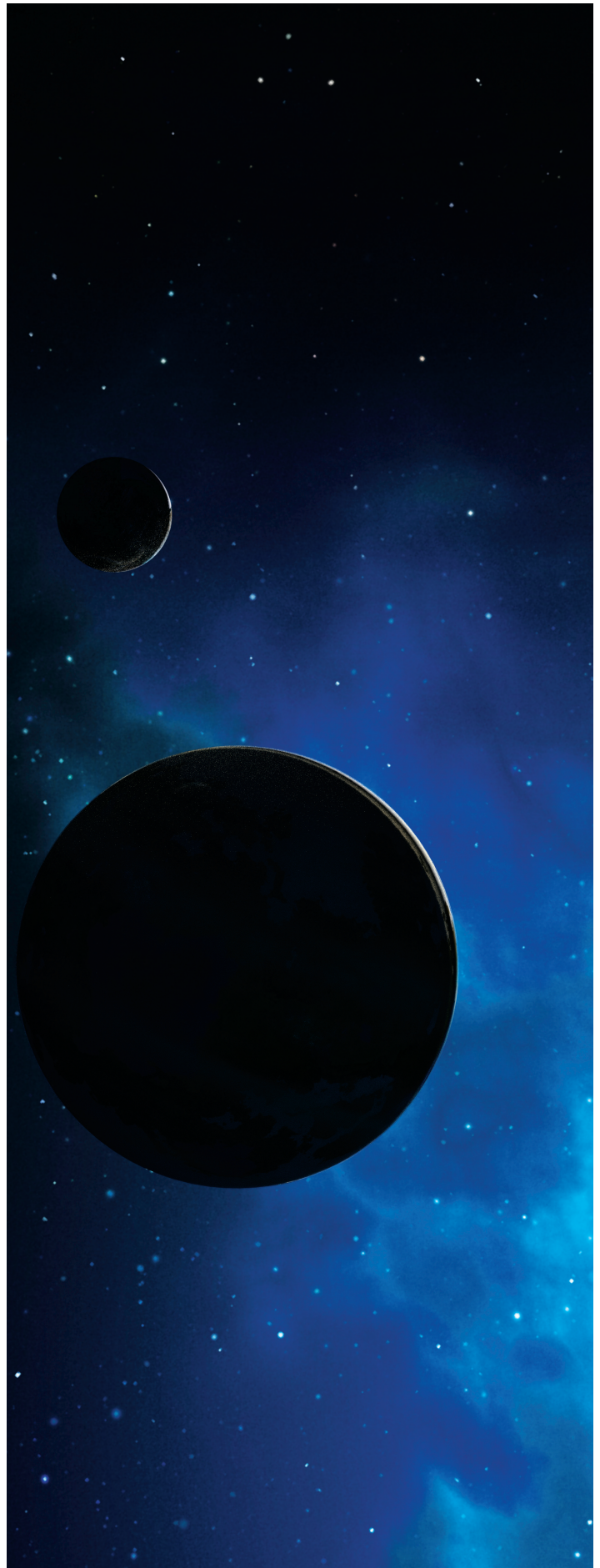
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## Letter from the Editor

IT IS that time again! Having finally finished digesting a Thanksgiving Feast I'm happy to say I'm fully ready for the next round of Holiday feasting. There are feasts for the body and feasts for the mind and the imagination. It is the latter that Utopia Science Fiction is happy to provide for you. I am very happy to share with you, dear reader, our December Issue.

To whet the appetite for good, quality science fiction stories, we have Lena Ng's 'The Library of Life'. It is precisely the kind of story one waits with baited breath to receive and exemplifies everything about the types or stories Utopia Science Fiction strives to publish. We dive straight into Kevin Stadt's short story 'Defective.' Action and one of the most well-developed worlds we've seen yet, 'Defective' is part of a series of semi-autonomous stories set in the same universe. Other related stories in the same universe can be found in the magazines Phantaxis, Fiction on the Web, and Corner Bar Magazine. If you like what you've read, why not try to find his other stories there?

For the next course, the short story 'Angry Girl' by Yvonne Schnoeker-Shorb. I've had the story for a while, but have had to wait for the right issue to publish it in. It seems like the perfect fit for this issue, so I'm happy to present it to you now. I won't give much away about it, but it's a quick and enchanting read.

Moving forward – Steven Translateur's 'Alpha Palvonius Telepathy' adds a unique flavor to our current issue with a distinctive voice which is vaguely reminiscent of the grand satires of William Tenn. If you aren't aware of those masterpieces of the genre, I highly recommend you search the internet archives and read a William Tenn short story right away.

A sweeter story can be found in Penny Leigh's wonderful 'Queen Bees' as children gather honey in a gigantic hive/cave of the buzzing insects.

Onward, the 'Joker's Handbook' and Giles Selig's "Bender's Homecoming" could not provide a better end to our short story section. Delectable stories cross space and time and deliver us a compelling question and a parallel universe.

Let us not forget our fine poetry section, not without its share of savory poems. We have the return of tried and true talents like Sukarma Rani Thareja, Denny E. Marshall, and Louis Gallo with some particularly wowing works. We also have a new poet featured. Linda Neuer carries well among the established writers of this magazine and her poems are not to be missed.

Our final main course of the evening is served

to us by Nathaniel Wander, a retired anthropologist and biologist who takes us through the biological probabilities (or improbabilities) of Angels.

As a particularly special treat there's one final thing for our ravenous readers. Owing to a particularly slow response to our usual The Readers Speaks section, I've decided for this particular issue to do something different and feature a short article written by Joyce Frohn entitled 'The Religion of Trek.'

If you're still hungry for more, here's some final food for the thought. We have a new line of special merchandise just for Utopia Science Fiction. As a mostly digital magazine this is the perfect chance for you to bring a piece of this wonderful publication into the real world. If you visit our site at Shop - [Utopia Science Fiction](#) you can find posters, notebooks, cell phone cases and a lot more all featuring the various cover art of all of our current issues. Purchases there are greatly appreciated as they are essential to keeping us able to publish great stories and pay authors. Having bought a few notebooks myself, I can personally attest to the quality of the work. Not only do they look really awesome, but they're useful too!

We continue to encourage hearing from our readers, like you. Tell us what you think about our magazine (this issue or past issues). What do you like about the stories and the artists? What do you not like? What do you want to see more of? Together we can make this the best science fiction magazine in publication. We are always in need of poems and science articles so if you know a writer (or are a writer yourself) we encourage sending in a few pieces of your finest work for us to consider for publication. Our upcoming February issue is mostly full, and seems to be centering on conservation and environmental issues so stories and particularly poems, which relate to that are of special interest to us in the next month or so.

Wishing you all the fondest holidays and a joyful New Year. In that cry which has become the rally of our magazine, I leave you with this. Let us push onward, ever onward. Onward through the impossible!

Sincerely,  
Tristan Evarts  
-Chief Editor







# DEFECTIVE: A HOMINUM FUTURUS CHRONICLE

by Kevin Stadt

GRIEGER SAT IN HIS SMALL APARTMENT on Space Station Nexus and stared at the old service sidearm on his kitchen table. Why not just end it? What good was he to anyone?

A sudden bang on the ceiling interrupted his existential crisis. That Homo Heremus woman who'd moved in above him made nothing but noise and he'd had enough. Grieger stomped up the stairs and down her hall. His stomach revolted at the smell of desert-planet cooking—fermented bol root—as he neared her door. He pounded on it.

A slight woman in thick layers of sand-colored tunic answered, her face scaled and reptilian. She tilted her hairless head back to look up at him. “Oh, my. You're a big one.” Though his short military-cut hair and beard had grayed, he still stood a full six foot six. He knew his muscled frame and his face's hypermasculine features, with a heavy jaw and brow, let everyone know he was Homo Bellicus—and scared most people.

“I live under you. There's a lot of noise coming from up here. Can you keep it down?”

“I'm sorry. I didn't realize. Please, come in.”

“What? No. I just came to—”

She waved his refusal away with a hand and opened the door wide. The smell of cooking hit him full force as the woman shuffled over to the stove. He stood there in the hallway, suddenly feeling ridiculous. He bent forward to put his head in without stepping across the threshold.

“I'm not coming in.”

She lifted the lid of a pot and stirred. “Young man, where I come from it's rude to refuse an invitation into a neighbor's home.”

His shoulders slumped and he glanced back down the hallway, toward the stairs. He took a deep breath and held it for a moment before releasing it slowly. Then Grieger stepped forward.

In contrast to the Spartan atmosphere in his own place, the neighbor's apartment was warm, in more ways than one. Sweat broke out on his skin almost immediately, but the woman took a knit cap off the table and pulled it on.

But beyond the temperature, the apartment felt warm like a home. The living room was filled with simple and comfortable furniture, with toys on the floor and desert landscape paintings on the walls. The kitchen

had food all over in various stages of preparation, and a vase of flowering cacti decorated the dining room table.

“My name is Lakshmi. Are you hungry?”

“No, thanks. I'm Grieger.”

Lakshmi gestured to a chair. “Please, sit.” She turned toward one of the doors and shouted. “Qor! We have a guest.”

A Sapient boy, perhaps ten, burst out of the door with excitement on his face. His complexion, hair, and eyes were dark and he lurched awkwardly. Apparently unafraid of Grieger, he walked right up and held out his hand to shake.

The boy's speech came out slow and thick, and his voice sounded like that of a much younger child.

“Hi! I'm Qor. Why are you so big?”

Grieger felt acutely aware that his life experience socializing with neighbors or children was nonexistent. He looked at the old woman as if for help, and a corner of her mouth turned up in the hint of a smile.

“I'm Homo Bellicus. I'm...I was a soldier.”

“Are all soldiers so big?”

“No. They make different kinds. For different jobs.”

“What was your job?”

“Infantry.”

“What's that?”

“Foot soldiers.”

The boy regarded Grieger's enormous black boots at length and nodded. “Did you fight against the Chaku?”

“No. I left the service before the war started.”

“Why aren't you a soldier anymore?”

Grieger shifted in the chair. “It's a long story. There's a problem with my brain, so they kicked me out.”

A huge, white-toothed smile formed on Qor's face. “I have Herz Syndrome.” Grieger didn't know much about it, but thought the condition involved mental disability and something to do with chromosomal damage from cosmic radiation. “Are you my neighbor?”

“Yes.”

“Do you have family?”

“No. Well...” Grieger considered the question. “Homo Bellicum are engineered. We're raised from birth in units, and they're like brothers and sisters.”

“Lakshmi is my family now because my parents went to heaven because of the Chaku and her family did,



too, so we made a new family together.”

Grieger didn't know what to say to that.

The woman broke in. “Mr. Grieger stopped by because there's a lot of noise coming from his ceiling. Do you know what's right above his ceiling?” Qor shook his head. “Our floor. Maybe your dancing got a little too enthusiastic tonight.”

The boy made a circle with his mouth and turned back to Grieger. “I'm sorry. I'll stop it.”

Grieger's face warmed and he cursed himself. “She's just kidding. I didn't hear anything. I just came to...say hello to my new neighbors.”

Qor brightened, and when Grieger glanced at the woman she smiled and gave him a conspiratorial nod. Just as the boy opened his mouth to speak again, a distant explosion echoed through Nexus, followed by a low rumble Grieger could feel through his boots. Then, as if the world had shifted to a new axis, gravity began to pull them toward the wall and time slowed to a heavy crawl.

Qor's eyes widened and he raised his hands in slow motion. “IIIIII diiiidn't doooooo iiiiiiit!”

When time snapped back to normal, Grieger jumped to his feet and sprinted to the window, peering out into the nighttime cityscape. He saw nothing unusual, just the lights of the city dotting the interior of the ring's curve. The floor and walls continued to shudder faintly in concert with faraway explosions for the better part of a minute.

Lakshmi held Qor, his face buried in her arms, the sound of soft sobbing filling the apartment. Grieger closed his eyes and accessed his mindscreen, mentally swiping through icons until he found the station news-feed.

A female Sapient reporter's voice spoke over video of a Chaku dreadnaught firing missiles at Nexus. “...uncloaked suddenly and destroyed the central transport hub with a gravity weapon, while smaller attack fighters simultaneously targeted each ring's emergency escape capsules. Defense swarms are mobilizing, but symbiote intruders have already boarded the station. Citizens are advised to lock their doors and wait for further instructions.”

Grieger opened his eyes. “It's the Chaku.”

Qor cried louder and buried his face deeper in Lakshmi's robes.

Knowing the woman and child probably didn't have mentalink tek, he said, “They're telling everyone to lay low.”

“Shouldn't we get to the—”

“Destroyed. A gravbomb took out the hub.” He

turned toward the window and squinted in thought for a moment. “I'm going to go—”

Qor pulled away from Lakshmi and grabbed Grieger's arm. “The monsters will kill you!”

Some emotion he couldn't quite name knotted up in his gut. What was it about the boy that touched him? Was it the boy's innocence? Or that he'd also been born different? “I'm just going downstairs to contact some friends. They have a special ship, a really fast one, and I want to see if they can pick us up.”

“Special?”

“Have you ever heard of a Mimoc ship?”

Qor's expression shifted instantly from horror to rapt attention. “Like an octopus that can make itself look like other kinds of ships? Are those even real?”

“My friends Kace and Rohana live in one. It's called the Nistra.”

Qor seemed thoroughly impressed by the information. Finally, he nodded once.

Grieger strode into the kitchen, Lakshmi following. He picked a kitchen knife up off the counter. “Mind if I borrow this?”

“Take all of them if you want.”

As he approached the front door, he said, “Keep this locked and don't open it for anyone but me. I'll be right back.” Before he opened it, he closed his eyes again and accessed his mindscreen and mentally clicked on the large, red combat protocol button in the bottom left corner.

Waves of warm adrenaline washed through his limbs. His sense augmentations activated. He toggled through several vision modes, finally settling on heat vision that allowed him to see through the walls. Electroreception and mechanoreception nodes implanted beneath the skin around his mouth, nose, and ears came online. He gave his brain a moment to adjust to being able to sense electrical fields generated by living organisms and minute air pressure changes that indicated movement. Reticles and infobubbles overlay his vision with tactical information. A ticker of news ran across the bottom of his mindscreen, while medical data and biocontrols appeared along the right side. He turned his attention to the biocontrols and adjusted his pain threshold so that injury would register visually on his mindscreen, but would cause minimal physical sensation.

Grieger stepped into the hallway and closed the door quietly behind him. He focused on the vibrations in the air for a moment. Screams and gunfire in the distance, but nothing yet breaking out in their quadrant of the ring. He sprinted down the hall, the stairs, and then his own hallway to his apartment.



Locking the door behind him and dropping the knife on the counter, he jogged to the closet and flung open the door. Weapons and gear filled racks from floor to ceiling. He pulled out a bulky black case and set it on his kitchen table. Grieger closed his eyes and swiped through screens until he reached an icon that looked like a cartoon satellite dish. He clicked it and said, "Nistra."

Liquid ripples washed over the formerly smooth black surface of the device. Composed largely of programmable matter elements, it began reshaping itself into a thin, tree-like antenna reaching up nearly to the ceiling. A video feed of the bridge of the Nistra appeared on his mindscreen. Rohana hopped up and down, clapping her hands and giggling. She picked a small, fluffy brown dog up off the floor and snuggled it close. "Look, Mr. Bubbleberry! It's Grieger!" Ro's face lit with excitement, her green eyes and smile wide. She wore a tight, shiny black skinsuit and her red hair was cut shorter than he remembered. Ro's silly schoolgirl affect and intense loyalty to friends and family aside, the woman was wanted by the Ministry for more crimes that Grieger could count—anarchy, terrorism, smuggling, illegal augmentations, and murder among them. Her husband, Kace, sat in a chair behind her. Grieger could hardly make out his shaved head, heavy black beard, and conspicuous arm augmentations through the cigar smoke. Only his glowing blue eyes shone clearly through.

Kace stood, downed a glass of what Grieger knew had to be Corvellian whiskey, and stepped out of the haze. "Good to see you, soldier."

"You too."

Rohana's expression shifted to concern. "Grieg, everything okay? We haven't heard from you in a while."

"I could use an emergency evac. The Chaku showed up, and I have a woman and child I need to get out."

Ro said, "Of course, G. We were just going to pick up some boring package anyway. It can wait."

Kace addressed his ship. "Nistra, mimic a Chaku nautilus scout and get us to Nexus as fast as you can."

The ship whined in the voice of a teenage girl. "So, you mean, like fly straight into a Chaku attack fleet with gravity bombs—"

"Just do it."

"I like where your head is at, but I think I should get a say in this, too. I'm the one who gets her ass kicked if—"

Kace ran a metal hand over his scalp and turned to Ro. "I hate it when you have her on personality setting Q, especially in front of our friends. It's embarrassing."

She slinked up to Kace, pressed herself against him, and stroked his beard. "But I like Q, Bun-Bun."

"Do not mindhack me. It fries my neural lace and gives me a two-day hangover." Grieger smiled, knowing Kace meant Ro's mindhack suite, a highly illegal aug that combined pheromones, aural hypnosis software, and nanotek.

Kace whispered, "How about we just use T for a little while, to help our friend?"

She threw her head back and rolled her eyes dramatically. "Whatever. Bore me to death with T."

Kace said, "Nistra, switch to personality T."

The ship replied with a sober, clipped male voice. "Yes, captain."

Ro sneered and muttered, "Captain."

Kace puffed his cigar. "Get us to Nexus at maximum speed."

"Yes, Sir."

Grieger let out a breath of relief. "Thanks, guys. What's the ETA?"

"We were on a run halfway to Arboros, so it'll take a while. Forty-five minutes. Can you hang on that long?"

"I think so. The bays have been destroyed, so just burn through the hull as close to my location as you can."

Ro squealed and hopped up and down. She beamed at Kace with the expression of a kid on Christmas morning. "We get to kill some gutslugs today, Guapo!"

Grieger scanned the reports on his mindscreen. Nexus security forces seemed to be doing their best, and a scattering of hominum vessels—Apparatum, Oceanus, Sapien—had trickled in to help, but the Chaku bore down with the force of two dreadnaughts, a cruiser, and a constellation of smaller fighters.

"Don't engage unless you have to. The Chaku are attacking with overwhelming numbers. This is purely a stealth rescue mission."

Ro made an exaggerated pouty face.

"Please, Ro. My neighbors...one is a boy with Herz Syndrome. I just want to get them out."

She squared her shoulders and nodded. "Okay. Hang tight, Stretch. We'll be right there."

Kace and Ro had a better chance of getting past the enemy than anyone. The thought of the boy being taken by the Chaku made Grieger want to punch a hole in the wall. The Chaku did two things with captured humans. They either implanted one of their kind, a small slug-like creature, to control the person for use as a soldier or spy, or ate them slowly over days while keeping



the victim alive and conscious. Grieger knew the force invading Nexus at that very moment would be made up of squadrons of Chaku who'd implanted themselves in a terrifying variety of alien species from dozens of planets.

He crossed the small apartment and stood in front of his closet, considering what gear to bring. First, he picked two metallic gauntlets off a shelf and slid them on. Wearing them felt like home. He slung a fat, heavy rifle over his shoulder and grabbed the old service side-arm off the kitchen table. After throwing a few personal belongings into a backpack, he headed upstairs.

When Grieger came in, Qor ran to him, wrapping his arms as far around Grieger as he could. For a moment Grieger stood there, his own arms held up in the air, briefly caught off guard and unsure what to do. Then he patted the boy's back.

Qor took Grieger's hand, turning it over in examination. "No way. Is this a pro-g?"

"Yes."

"I saw these in a war movie called Lost Earth about a battle on Earth Prime where the Bellicus general killed two hundred Chaku all by himself with just one gauntlet."

Grieger chuckled. "Really? I never saw it. Tell you what, when we get onto the Nistra, let's watch it together."

Qor nodded enthusiastically.

Lakshmi asked, "Did you see any of them?"

"No."

"Are your friends coming?"

"Yes. It'll be forty minutes. Pack light. We'll need to move fast."

"I already did. Qor, put some clothes in your school backpack. Not too much. Okay?"

He nodded and dashed into his bedroom. Grieger moved to the window and scanned the night-scape. Lakshmi took a place beside him. Though he felt anxious to get going, leaving for the rendezvous point early was pointless and dangerous, so he told himself to relax while he waited.

Lakshmi said, "Qor likes you. He doesn't act like that with everyone."

"I like him, too."

"Your friends. Who are they?"

"They're Homo Apparatus smugglers. Anti-Ministry anarchists."

"Criminals."

"Yes."

A few moments of silence passed. "Can they help us?"

"Yes. I worked with them for a couple years after

my discharge. They're good. And well-equipped."

She fell silent again, and when she spoke her voice was softer. "You told Qor that you were discharged because of something wrong with your brain. Do you mind if I ask what it is?"

He squinted into the distance. "It's nothing you should worry about. I was born different. Defective. I hid it the best I could and they didn't catch it for a long time."

"Different how?"

"Multiple sub-optimal personality traits."

"Such as?"

Grieger let out a sigh and cocked his head. "I experience empathy."

"Ah. I take it that's not what they want in a soldier?"

"It's sub-optimal."

"But they invested so much in engineering and raising you. Augmenting you. Wouldn't they just try to fix it? Well, I don't think fix is the right word, but you know what I mean."

"It's not just the empathy. My personality matrix also tends toward questioning authority and other traits that are—"

"Sub-optimal."

"Yes. They might have altered me, but with that time and money they could spawn three better, newer versions. Wasn't worth it."

"Do you think you're defective?"

"I am."

"If one of your brothers or sisters were standing here, would they be helping Qor and me?"

"If ordered to, they would fight to the death for you."

"If they weren't ordered to?"

"No."

"But you're helping us."

He folded his arms and shifted his weight.

She asked, "Do you think Qor is defective?"

Grieger answered immediately. "Of course not."

"Maybe different doesn't mean defective. I hope you come to understand that."

GRIEGER WATCHED VIDEO FEED of the attack on his mindscreen. From space, Nexus looked like a long, dark cylinder divided into a dozen sections, all spinning independently. Each ring had special gravity and environmental specifications for various hominum species engineered to live in the environments of colonies on different planets. The first ring had high gravity and low temperature for Homo Hibernus



residents, the second boasted underwater cliff dwellings for Homo Oceanus, and so on. The fifth ring, where Grieger's apartment was located, housed mostly Sapiens and the heavily augmented Homo Apparatum.

Chaku vessels surrounded Nexus, a medley of odd shapes. The smaller ships resembled nautilus shells, eels, and trilobites, while the dreadnaughts and cruiser looked like featureless, torpedo-shaped monoliths. Explosions lit up the black of space, with hominum forces clearly being crushed.

Grieger opened his eyes and surveyed the scene of the curving interior of the fifth ring from Lakshmi's window. The streets had broken out into full chaos. Lakshmi did a good job of distracting Qor, keeping him away from the window and the violence outside, but she couldn't keep him from hearing the screams and commotion which had now spilled into their quadrant.

The reticle in his vision continuously scanned and locked onto anything moving, infobubbles appearing to offer analysis. A Homo Sapien man ran between apartment buildings, shrieking with a millipede-like creature scuttling up his back. A Homo Apparatus woman with augmented arms thrashed a snake-like animal that groped frantically toward her with bizarre fanged mandibles. A Homo Simius teenager covered in skittering insectoids jumped out of a thirtieth-story window only to spread his fleshy wings and crash headlong into Grieger's building and fall to the pavement below. He spotted a dozen other alien species implanted with Chaku symbiotes, each more horrifying than the last.

Grieger held the rifle tightly, gripping the cold metal. Twice while watching the battle outside he found himself at the door, about to rush into the fray. But the boy. The woman. If he left now, he wouldn't be there to get them out. Trying to save everybody would just mean getting killed and saving nobody.

As he watched, at war with himself, Ro appeared on his mindscreen.

"Hey, big guy. We're ten minutes out. You ready?"

"Yes. Thanks for doing this."

"Here's where we'll burn through." On Grieger's mental desktop, the window with Ro's face shrunk to the background and a map popped up with the route highlighted in flashing red.

"Roger."

Ro giggled and held up Mr. Bubbleberry, waving the dog's paw at the screen. She spoke in a funny high voice. "Bye-bye!"

Moments later, standing at the front door with the woman and child behind him, he paused and took a

deep breath. Like all Homo Bellicus, his heart rose at the prospect of battle, but unlike others of his kind, he experienced anxiety. Fear not for himself, but for Lakshmi and Qor. The suboptimal result of his defect.

He turned to them. Though the woman seemed amazingly unruffled, the boy's face was a mask of fear. "It's okay. Just stay behind me. It's not far, but we'll have to move quickly."

Both of them nodded, and a tear rolled down Qor's cheek. Grieger hugged the boy and said, "I'll protect you. I promise. Watch this." He held his huge arms up and willed the gauntlets to change shape. The programmable matter on his right arm re-formed itself, covering his hand and hardening into a razor-sharp axe. The one on his left hand transformed into a spiked mace. Grieger nudged the boy with an elbow. "Pretty cool, right?"

Qor wiped a tear on his sleeve, smiled a little despite himself, and nodded.

At that, Grieger said "open." When the door did, he rushed to the nearest symbiote, a millipede-analogue creature the size of a dog with three spiked tentacles on its tail end. It scuttled along the wall in his direction, and Grieger swung his left hand toward it. The mace smashed the Chaku and viscous brown matter shot out of it, splattering both ceiling and floor.

The next one appeared much like the first, but with fanged, arm-like mandibles. It raced along the floor, and Grieger brought the axe down on it. Four more came, and his gauntlets shifted through as many iterations—spear, sword, hammer, and claw—as he dispatched them. Qor and Lakshmi peeked out the door.

He gestured at the dead aliens. "See? They're not so bad. Come on."

They jogged toward the stairwell, and before he got to the doorway Grieger saw the heat signature of a man-sized symbiote waiting on the landing. He paused and motioned for the boy and woman to stay back, then rushed through the door with gauntlets raised and a war cry in his throat. The creature was a black turret-like animal with a wide base, and it already aimed the dark opening at its head straight at him.

It fired a fist-sized bolus right into Grieger's face. His nose broke with a sharp crack and his head snapped back. He lost his footing on the stairs and crashed down them, hitting his temple hard on the sharp concrete edge of a step. In a corner of his mindscreen, an image of his body appeared, the nose and head flashing red to indicate injury. Grieger shot up and closed the distance, swinging an axe in an arc, and cleaved the beast nearly in half.



At the moment the two halves slumped to the floor, Grieger's electromechanoreceptor sense aug registered movement behind him, a tickling around his nose and mouth. Something hit his leg and his injury body map flashed red on his left calf. He spun around and brought a gauntlet down in the form of a mace, but the stinging millipede symbiote had already driven a second jab into his skin.

Grieger's vision blurred and a wave of dizziness brought him to his knees. The ticker of medical information warned of a toxin spreading through his bloodstream.

The boy appeared at his side. "Are you okay?"

Lakshmi raced down the stairs and squatted next to Grieger. She examined his leg and nose and shook her head. "We should go back to the apartment."

Grieger took a deep breath. "No. This might be our only shot to get off the station. And my friends are risking their lives to help us. Let's go."

They encountered no more Chaku on the way down, which Grieger was thankful for, given how light-headed and weak he felt. Once on the ground floor, they jogged in a crouch across the lobby toward the arched pod bay entrance. Grieger ushered them into the first pod, a black oblong spheroid with a hatch and a ring of seats inside. He closed his eyes and transmitted the rendezvous coordinates. The outer bay door opened and the pod lifted them into the night.

A screen showing the view below covered the floor of the pod, and each of them breathed heavily as they watched the violence unfolding on the ground. The pod ascended until it cleared the tops of the apartment buildings, then floated horizontally toward the meeting point far more slowly than Grieger would have liked. They flew over green park space with wooded areas around the perimeter and open space in the center. A flashing red reticle in Grieger's vision zoomed in on a cluster of three turret-like symbiotes at the far end of the park.

Before he could react, they fired.

He closed his eyes and ordered the pod to take evasive maneuvers, but it merely descended lazily. A football-sized object careened past the window, a trail of dark smoke behind it. An object crackling with glowing blue energy zoomed past the window on the other side. Qor shrieked and Lakshmi put her arms around him, muttering that everything would be all right.

Whump. The pod shuddered. A gooey wad of something smacked into the front of the vehicle, and immediately started corroding through the glass and metal. The mental link he had with the pod blinked out and

the vehicle started a freefall from a hundred feet up.

Grieger kicked the hatch open. Without saying a word, he ripped open the emergency bailout kit next to the door and pulled two sticky, hand-sized blue gel patches off the rack. He slapped one on Qor's chest, the boy screaming all the while, and one on Lakshmi's back, then threw them unceremoniously out the door.

Grieger was just about to jump. He kept his eye on the woman and boy and as they neared the ground, the patches suddenly blew up into protective balls of foam each nearly as big as the pod, foam that softened Qor and Lakshmi's landing. This was the last thing he saw before the pod crashed.

The impact smashed his bulk to the floor and sent him sprawling out onto the grass. The breaking of bones rang out audibly even among the screams of wrenching metal. His mental desktop lit up with medical warnings all over his body. Even with his pain threshold set at maximum, the agony sang in his brain.

With a groan, he tried to sit up. His vision swam. Qor and Lakshmi kneeled over him, shouting words that sounded like they'd been spoken underwater. Above the woman and boy a cluster of winged, spidery creatures buzzed toward them.

He tried to reach for his sidearm but his hands wouldn't work right and everything felt dreamy and far away. He tried to tell them to look up, to run, to leave him, but his lips just moved soundlessly.

Grieger tried to say he was sorry.

Blackness crept up on the edges of his vision and it seemed his eyes were a window through which he watched a different and distant world.

So, so sorry. His eyelids slowly closed and a warm heaviness, not unpleasant, settled over him.

But before he dropped fully into the blackness, something ripped him back.

His lungs sucked in breath and his eyes jolted open to see a nanobot injection syringe sticking out of the middle of his chest and Ro over him, laughing.

"How great is this, G? I thought today was going to be boring before you called." Ro stood and pointed her finger like a gun and yelled "Bang!" A symbiote exploded in a gloopy mess.

Grieger turned his face to see a dozen drones hovering behind Ro. Each time she pointed her finger at a symbiote, a drone fired and vaporized it.

He felt himself lifted off the ground. Turning his head the other direction, he saw Kace wearing the black gloves and head ring of his telekinetek rig.

Ro winked at him. "We got you, big guy. Let mommy kill some gutslugs and we'll have Nistra fix you



up real nice.”

He closed his eyes and surrendered to oblivion.

**H**E’S AWAKE!” Grieger squinted out of one eye to see Qor and Lakshmi next to his bed. His mouth was dry and the medbay seemed altogether too bright. Nistra’s six-armed docbot incarnation fussed with his broken arm, immobilizing it in a bony, porous healing husk that also covered much of his torso.

Qor’s face was all smile. “Grieger! I was so scared and I thought you were going to die and when we got onto the Nistra I cried for a really long time but Ro made me feel a lot better with some magic touch thing she can do and they have so much cool stuff on this ship! They have a fantatek chamber that lets you do anything in any world you can imagine and Kace can move things just with his mind and Ro lets me eat whatever I want but Lakshmi doesn’t like that actually and we were going to watch Lost Earth but I said we should wait to watch it with you.”

Lakshmi put her arm around Qor and took Grieger’s hand in her cool, scaled fingers. “There are no words. Qor and I are deeply grateful you were there. With your sub-optimal defects.”

Ro elbowed her way in front of them and put her beautiful face so close to Grieger that he could smell her, some mix of berries and alloy. “I absolutely LOVE these two! I’m keeping them, Beanstalk. And you’re staying with us, too. Understand?”

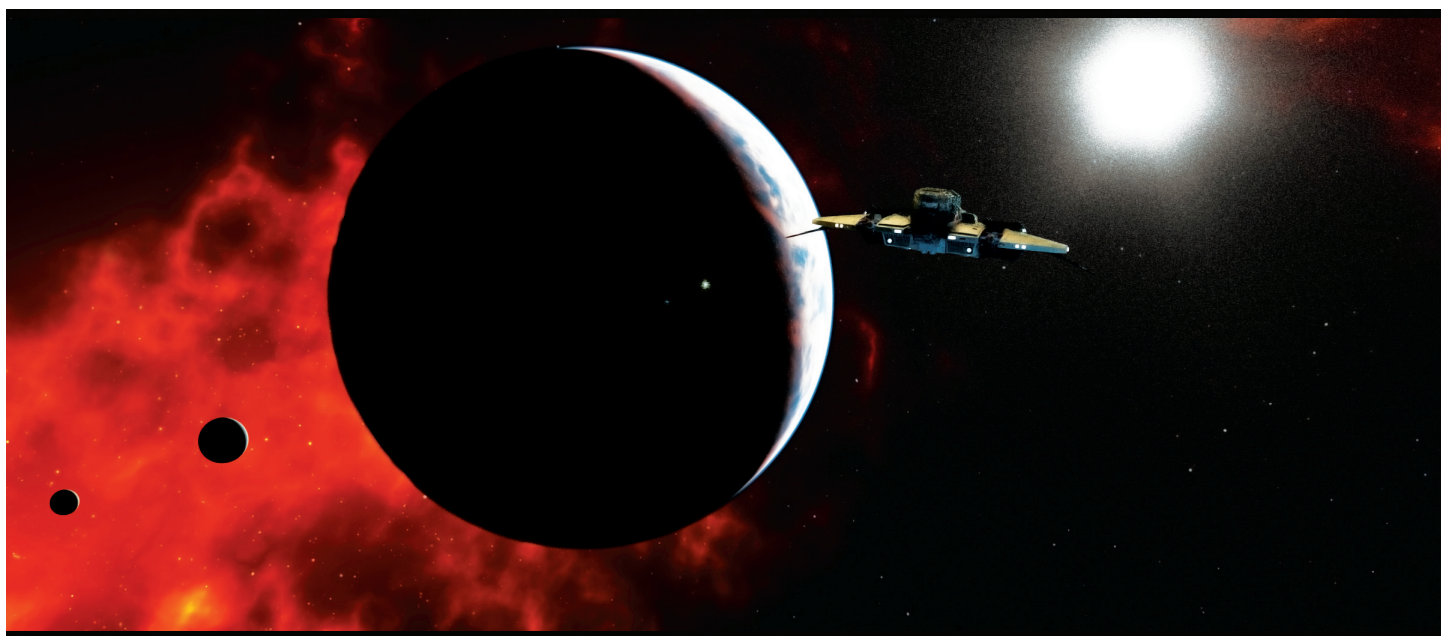
His thoughts drifted back to the moments before he went upstairs to yell at his neighbors about their noise, before the attack. Why not just end it? What good was he to anyone?

Grieger nodded and saluted with his good arm as tears welled in his eyes and warmth spread through his chest. “Yes, Ma’am. I understand. I’m not going anywhere.”



# THE JOKER'S HANDBOOK

by T.J. Weavers



IT JUST HAD TO BE A CON, but the man was in the captain's lounge, in uniform, in the middle of HQ. I'd doubt my own sanity before doubting Fleet security.

"You found the Joker's Handbook?" I repeated, raising one eyebrow.

Stanton nodded and smiled with a level of sincerity that can only come from hours of practice.

BEFORE CAPTAIN "Call me Alan" Stanton had wandered in and introduced himself, I'd been having a quiet drink and watching the boards. The new flagship needed a captain. The imminent announcement had the place full of hopefuls. My taut spine started to ache, and my mother's oft-repeated words rolled through my mind once again. "In a room full of males, you need all the height you can get."

I didn't really believe it would be me. But I found myself imagining the orders appearing on the boards. I saw myself settling into the shiny new ready room. Got to visualise what you want right? Helps make it happen? Yeah doesn't work for me either. Maybe if it did, I could keep up with my mother. She was the youngest admiral ever, female or not. The more she opposed me, the more I wanted to break that record. Flagship captain would get me halfway.

Orders for other captains came in. I had to laugh at the auto-translation on the Turkish board. Computers always had trouble with that language. Captain Turan,

for years my mother's first officer, never found it funny. He left with a growl and a glare. "It's not the board's fault Batu," I wanted to tell him. "Don't kill the messenger board."

My mother, Admiral Arkin, called it my three-year wasteland. But I had loved the discipline and challenge of linguistics. The sound and rhythm of language was better than music to my ears. But it turns out mother was right. No one employs a person for translations these days. Once my degree was complete, Fleet was my only option.

"Fleet deserves people who want to be here," my mother told me at my induction. "You're too restless, like your father. You'll quit soon enough, I'll see to that." I was too deflated to retort at the time. But I fought through every difficult and humiliating assignment she threw my way, just to prove she was wrong. About me, if nothing else.

"Elenore?" I didn't recognise the smooth deep voice that broke my reverie. But the way it caressed my name sent a shiver down my spine.

"Captain Arkin" I had snapped automatically, and turned to survey tall, grey and handsome.

I PUT MY WINE DOWN on the little table between us and looked Stanton in the eye. Men always seem to find that unnerving. "And do you now possess the knowledge of an undiscovered alien race?"

"Well no, I..."

"You know why it's called the Joker's Handbook, don't you Stanton?" I leant forward. "Cause it's a myth, a fantasy, a joke."

Stanton's smile slipped a little. "Look, just trust me. It's real alright, but it's not a book. It's a computer the size of a freaking moon," He looked over his shoulder, and lowered his voice. I almost giggled it was such a cliché. "There are four keyboards, and four sets of instructions. None of them human. I need a linguist to come back with me."

I stared at Stanton without moving. It was the perfect pitch, playing on my love of language.

Stanton held up a placating hand. "Captain, please. You're sceptical, I get it. But you said it yourself. A guide to the knowledge of a long-vanished race. It was given to four other peoples, and they all vanished too. Think of the new technologies at our fingertips. Even the very nature of our existence could change. We need to unlock this ourselves, not some grubby treasure hunter. Besides, you have to see it. It literally has its own Rosetta Stone."

I sighed and picked up my drink again. "A Rosetta Stone is useless without knowing one of its languages."

"I'm hoping the famous Captain Elenore Arkin will find one of them familiar," Stanton said.

"You've overplayed your hand Stanton," I said. "I'm not famous."

"If you come with me, you will be." Stanton played with his untouched drink. Scotch, no ice. "Wouldn't you like to be the first to decipher four new languages?"

It did sound tempting. A return to the fun and freedom of University. A chance to get out from under mother's thumb. But being Captain of the Flagship was unbeatable. I glanced at the boards, still nothing. "Would this be an official expedition?" I asked.

"It's a private venture."

"Ha, they don't believe you either." I saw the boards change out of the corner of my eye. I turned my head and saw that Admiral Arkin was about to make a Fleet-wide communique. I took a big sip of wine. If mother was making the announcement, then I would definitely not be getting the flagship. Heat rose up my neck. I banged my drink back down and held out my hand. "Show me then," I said.

"What?" Stanton asked, looking confused.

"The video or pictures you took of these languages. Surely you have samples."

Stanton rubbed the back of his head with one hand. "Alas no. I tried, believe me. But there's a suppres-

sion field of some kind. Pictures came out blank, videos show only static."

I threw my hands up in the air. "I know this game. Next you're going to say, 'All I need is a ship'. Well you won't get one from me. I'm Career Fleet!"

Stanton stood up, a frown crinkling his forehead. "Well Career Fleet, just think about it ok?" He held out a card. I let out a breath and took hold of it. He kept his grip on the card, and my eyes too. Now I was unnerved. "A ship I have, what I need, is you."

AFTER HE'D GONE, I sat and waited for my mother to block me yet again. Why was I doing it? I'd never win. She had all the power, I had none. I looked around the room at the other candidates. All older, all with more experience, all with more testosterone. But none of them could read every word on every board like I could.

I looked at the card in my hand. The offer had to be a con. No question. But in that moment, I didn't care anymore. I couldn't best my mother. Maybe I could take a chance and do something greater. I put my thumb on the scanner on the little table. "Computer, this is Captain Elenore Arkin requesting a leave of absence."

I SAT IN MY CABIN on Stanton's ship and stared at the screen in disbelief.

"It's good you called. I wanted you to hear it from a friend," Captain Turan said. "Not a tabloid journalist."

I nodded automatically, although my face was going numb. If I'd stayed in the lounge for one more second, I might have seen my proud, disciplined mother shed a tear as she offered her daughter the captain's chair of Fleet's new flagship.

"It was quite a speech," Captain Turan said. "Though I've never seen her tear up like that before."

You've never seen it? No one has. "Thanks Batu," I said and started to breathe again. He dipped his head, wished me luck and disconnected.

I placed a call to Admiral Mother. Here I was chasing down a fantasy with the flagship in my hand. What must she think of me? Before she could answer, the ship jumped to hyperspace. External coms went offline.

Good timing I said to myself, then thought about the timing of other things. The gut-deep suspicion I'd felt when Stanton first presented himself returned. On a hunch, I looked up the Expeditions office in the Fleet registry. "Arkin to Stanton," I snapped when I read the entry.



"What's up Elenore?" Stanton's smile filled my screen.

For once I didn't insist on being given my rank. "How did you come by my name?" I demanded instead.

Stanton's face fell, "Oh," he said. "Um, that's not important."

"I knew it," I said. "Com off."

She'd done it to me again. I couldn't believe it. Actually, I definitely could. Appearing to offer me the flagship. All the while getting Stanton to distract me with fool's gold? Got to admire the depth of the planning.

Next time we drop out of hyperspace, I'll take an escape pod and go... somewhere.

I turned off the screen and read the words once more as they faded away. Expeditions office: Admiral Arkin will be assessing applications in the absence of Admiral Harris.

STANTON KNOCKED ON THE DOOR of my cabin. "Elenore!" he shouted through it. "Your com is off! Let me in. I need to explain."

I opened the door. Stanton did a double take when he saw my face. I stood just inside the doorframe, blocking entry. "What do you want Stanton?" I growled.

"May I come in?" Stanton asked. "And please call me Alan."

I didn't move. Though part of me suddenly wanted to.

"Alright," Stanton said, holding his hands up in defeat. "I did meet with your mother, but I didn't know who she was at the time. I applied for expedition funding and got sent to a different office. She turned me down flat before she even saw your name."

"Then why hide it?" I said.

"Your mother said, if I mentioned I'd seen her, you would never come with me." Stanton extended his hand to me. "But it's alright Elenore, she wasn't the one who gave me your name."

"That's, Captain Arkin," I said softly. "But who could be worse than my mother?"

"Well, if you must know?" Stanton paused.

I nodded.

"It was your father," Stanton said.

The strength left my legs. I staggered backwards two steps and sat on the little bed. "But... he's dead."

I'M SORRY I STARTLED YOU," Stanton said. He'd stepped over the door lintel and seated himself beside me. Close, but not touching. "It wasn't him directly, but rather his notes. You see it was he who found the

Joker's Handbook. I merely followed his directions."

My heart slowed down again. Was the ship spinning? "I see why Mother laughed you out of her office," I said, trying to match Stanton's flair for the dramatic.

"She told me never to mention his name again," Stanton said. "She also said you shared her scorn for the whole idea. That's why I hesitated earlier."

"You have Dad's notes?" I asked.

He nodded.

"I want them." I commanded.

"Certainly," Stanton said. "He mentions you often, admired your facility with language. He said you were always moving, never comfortable anywhere."

I opened my mouth to speak, but I didn't know what to say. Except that, while it was probably true, how had Dad known those things? He had wandered off to seek his fortune when I was ten. I hadn't thought about him for twenty years.

"I've been studying your father's notes for a decade," Stanton continued. "I feel I know him, and you. Did you know he was the one who started calling it the Joker's Handbook?" I shook my head. "He thought it might make a useful smokescreen." Stanton looked me in the eye, I stared right back. This time we both held our nerve. "In the notes," Stanton said. "He calls it Elenore's Legacy."

I had to look away then. You shall not see a tear in my eye, I'm an Arkin after all.

AS WE TRAVELLED ON, I read through my father's notes. They were part scientific journal, part personal log. After a time I began to hear his voice when reading the words. Sometimes a turn of phrase would jump out. A fragment of memory, or a trace of his smell would return to me.

Father had struggled with the suppression field too, but he had sketched the consoles and written extensively about the room they were in. Towards the end, the tone changed. He began addressing me directly. He had followed my life and wrote of how he'd laid the seeds that took me into linguistics. After I saw that, I had to take a break. I'd thought I'd only had one manipulate parent.

The final entry read: "Ellie, perhaps one day you'll stand here with me, and together we will move humanity forward a thousand years. It's my greatest wish."

After I finished reading, I hounded Stanton, demanded he tell me where he had gotten the notes from. He told me a friend of his had found them during the salvage of an abandoned ship. I kept at him till he promised to get me some details.

After months of travel, backtracking and hiding our trail, we finally arrived. From a distance the moon sized object appeared like any other space rock. But as we approached, it became clear that the craters were deliberate and not natural. Evidence enough of technology beyond our own.

STANTON AND I STOOD in the hall of the Handbook, the Legacy, whatever. I took his gloved hand in mine and just stared. Now I was here, it didn't seem so much of a joke.

The only building on the artificial moon was all one room, each of the four corners open to space. It had been years since I last had a spacesuit on. But it was familiar, easy, and felt really good.

In the centre of the room was a column made of an unfamiliar metal. Set around it at the cardinal points were four floating chairs of various designs. Above each was a dark screen. No two were the same size. Each of the four walls were covered in text. I noted with a smile, that I couldn't read a word of it.

There was no sign of Dad. There was no sign of anyone. I don't know what I expected. Mother always said he was dead. Maybe he is. He had definitely been here though, he'd described the room with great accuracy.

"This is going to take a lifetime Alan," I said through the static. The suppression field also interfered with communications.

"That's true Captain Arkin," Stanton replied.

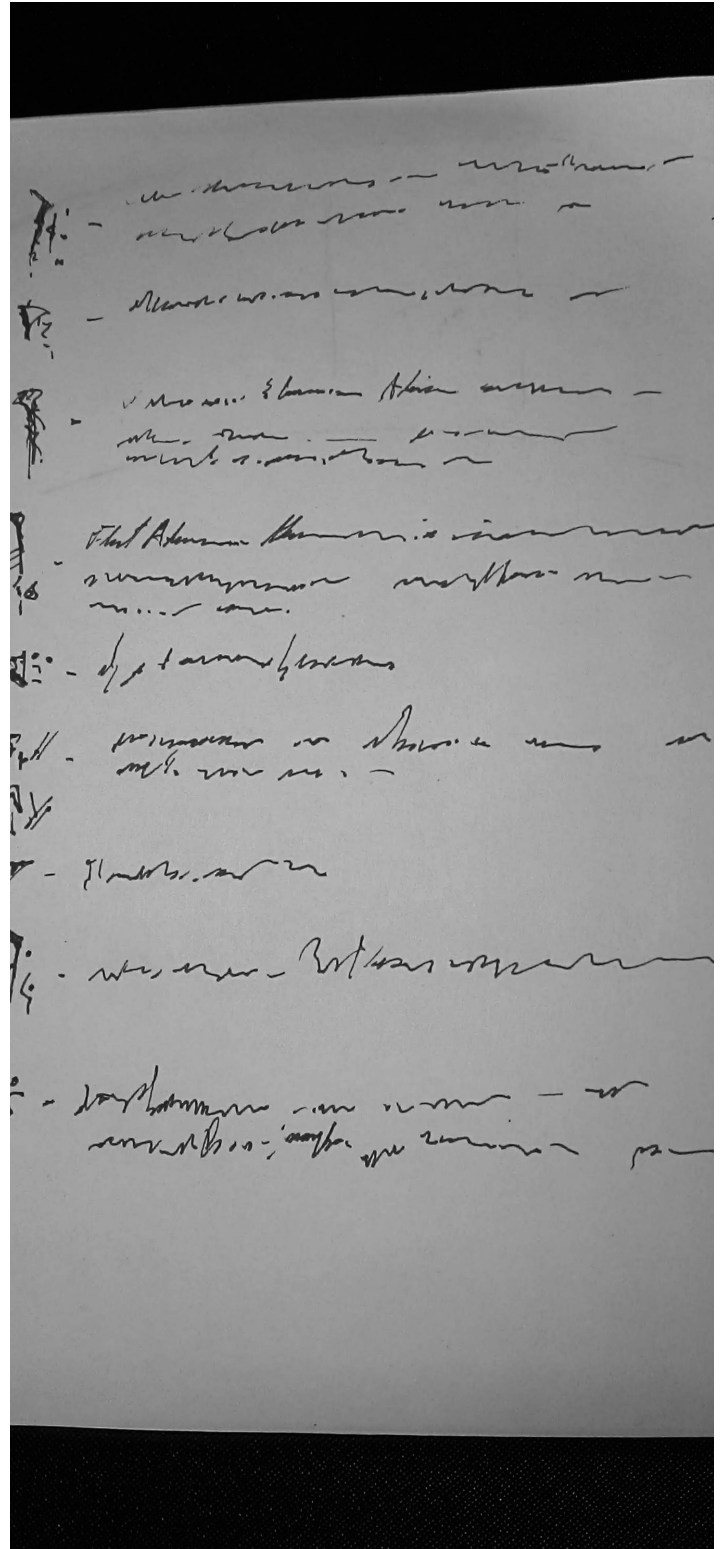
"But how many people actually get to have a life's work?"

"Call me Ellie," I said and let go of his hand.

I sat on the smallest of the floating chairs. It bobbed a little under my weight, and was not very comfortable, but it would do. My gloved fingers caressed the nearest keyboard. The deep-etched letters shimmered a little as my mind tried to fit them into something known.

A life's work says Stanton. It cost my father his, would it cost me mine too? Maybe that's been the Joke all along.

Tell me mother, what was the tear for? Did you manipulate events to get me to come here? Or did you hope the flagship would be enough to keep me away from the things that killed Dad? Maybe one day I'll ask you. But right now, I know in my heart, that I'm home.





# POETRY CORNER

## CHAMELEONS

By Denny E. Marshall

Intruder's Spaceship  
Lands in tall corn field  
Outside the edge  
Of Iowa town

Emerge from round hatch  
None the color green  
Like chameleons  
Blend with surroundings

After some seconds  
Visitors unseen  
Weapons and gear share  
Camouflage ability

Footprints appear  
Like invisible magic  
Tracks all leading  
Straight towards main street

## ZENO'S ARROW

By Louis Gallo

They solved this ancient problem,  
I'm told, but how possible  
When infinite semi-integers,  
Like the shooting ducks  
At a carnivals, lurk  
Between, say, one and two?  
I assume at some point you just  
Make a leap of faith into two,  
The way it goes with God.

Or consider the other way, backwards,  
From one to zero. This is really wild  
The greatest mathematician  
Who ever lived, Georg Cantor,  
Proved—zero and infinity  
May be the same thing.  
So you traipse in reverse  
In your covered wagon,  
Creaking along the prairies  
And tumbleweed  
And finally, after eons,  
You're closing in—

But you can't ever get there  
And once again must make the leap,  
This time into hell.  
And it's even more complicated  
Because if zero is infinity  
You're diving from that solid you  
In the canyon, slurping  
Your victuals and java,  
Into something, or rather nothing,  
That never ends or begins



# SCIENCE CORNER

## OUT ON TWO LIMBS: THE PROBLEMS WITH ANGELS

Nathaniel Wander

Birds have wings and angels have wings. But, while birds have wings and legs, angels have arms and legs in addition to wings. That's their first problem: a superfluity of appendages.

Although angels in paintings look pretty much like us, no living vertebrate—animals with a spinal cord enclosed in a backbone—has more than four limbs. Whales and snakes among other vertebrates, have given up their external limbs, but no vertebrate has ever been known to add any. There were six-limbed fossil fishes, but none survived the evolutionary crap shoot long enough to make it ashore. Even modern fish, which have all kinds of external structures for locomotion and/or stabilization, are built around the basic 4limb vertebrate bauplan (body plan) of paired pectoral (chest) and pelvic (hip) limbs. Perhaps four is the generally optimum number of limbs—enough to get the job done not so many as to squander energy during embryological development or in locomotor practice. Likely it's just the consequence of our all having evolved from a common four-limbed ancestor.

Among those who made it ashore—and holding aside species that returned to a maritime life and lost some or all external limbs—the most radical limb evolution among vertebrates has been the modification of forelimbs into either grasping arms (primates), or flapping wings (birds and bats). But no vertebrate species has both ... or they wouldn't have a leg to stand on. Per their illustrations, however, angels have perfectly competent arms as well as feathered wings. It's hard to even puzzle out how a creature could have gotten there, angels, from here, the 4-limbed vertebrate body plan.

Evolution is essentially a bricoleur, in throwing up new species it makes do with what's already lying around the shop rather than designing from scratch. The body plans of all existing multi-celled animals originated during the Cambrian Explosion 530 million years ago. Arthropods enjoy the most limbs, ranging from approximately 14-limbed insects (you thought they only had six, but several of their mouthparts are actually

modified limbs) to many hundreds, even approaching a thousand on very old millipedes. It's not 'hard' for arthropods to add limbs: they do it by multiplying body segments, each of which produces a pair of 'limbs'—antennae, jaws, wings, legs. Vertebrates, however, are bound by a three segment structure comprised of a head without limbs, and a thorax and abdomen each with a pair.

If it's hard to imagine how angels' wings might have originated, it's even harder to imagine how they could work. All vertebrate limbs—arms, legs, wings, fins—attach to the ventral (belly) side of the pectoral and pelvic girdles, but angel wings apparently emerge from the dorsal (back) side of the pectoral girdle. How would dorsal wings be moved? The ventral wing muscles of bats and birds articulate off the sternum, but there is no comparable bony structure in the back. If angel wings attached directly to the spine, wouldn't they torque it all to hell and gone every time they flapped?

And a fourth thing! Angels are depicted with feathered wings but long silky hair. Hair and feathers are analogs: no living species forms both.

Of course, Gabriel's flowing locks might not really be hair, but the kind of long, soft, mostly barbless feathers called filoplumes thought to play sensory and/or decorative roles in birds. Filoplumes may sense the position of body feathers so they can be kept properly aligned, they may play a role in providing body awareness in flight, they may make birds more attractive to the opposite sex. If Raphael's filoplumes were misconstrued for tresses, one has to wonder what they did for him. Did they make him more attractive to lady angels?

Of course, hair and feathers are not features that fossilize well. It's possible that somewhere out there just waiting to be found, or perhaps already found and mistaken for a feathered dinosaur, is a furry, fluffy, multi-limbed fossil of the vertebrate/angel last common ancestor. I suspect one could more profitably spend one's time searching for the Lost Ark of the Covenant. Oh, wait. That's in some dusty U.S. government warehouse, isn't it? Or, was it a church in Ethiopia?



## SCIENCE TRIVIA

*For the curious and well informed this magazine provides some trivia questions. Some of the answers can be found in stories and articles in this issue. Others we've answered on our Facebook and Twitter feeds. Still others will have to be given some thought. The answers will be provided in the next issue.*

### Answers for October Issue

#### **Question One:**

What is the Schwarzschild Radius for a celestial object with a mass of  $7.3 \times 10^{22}$  kgs?

*The mass given is about the mass of the moon and its Schwarzschild Radius is 0.11 mms*

#### **Question Two:**

What is the name of the fungus which turns ants into 'Zombies'?

*Ophiocordyceps is a fungus which hijacks an ants body turning them into 'zombies'.*

#### **Question Three:**

Who created the first Science Fiction film?

*Georges Méliès created the first science fiction film in 1902 titled 'Le Voyage dans la Lune' (A Trip to the Moon).*

#### **Question Four:**

Which forefather of Science Fiction is responsible for creating the sub-genre of Impact stories (where a heavenly object collides with Earth?)

*H.G. Wells wrote 'The Star' in 1897 and subsequently created the sub-genre of Impact stories*

#### **Question Five:**

What science fiction author engineered the baking method for Pringles chips and subsequently had himself immortalized as the face on Pringles packages?

*Gene Wolfe was an engineer. He developed the baking machine for Pringles chips. As a result a caricature of his face is now immortalized as the Pringles man on packages.*

#### **Question Six:**

Which process of programmed cell death, often recognized by DNA fragmentation, does the average human lose around 50 billion cells a day to?

*Apoptosis is the process of programmed cell death.*

### Questions for December Issue

#### **Question One:**

Who was the first person to discover that our galaxy was one of many?

#### **Question Two:**

Which Apollo Mission was struck twice by lightning while taking off?

#### **Question Three:**

How many flowers must a honey bee visit to make one pound of honey?

#### **Question Four:**

What does Zeno's Achilles and the Tortoise paradox state?

#### **Question Five:**

Who is the founder of anthropology?

# THE READER SPEAKS!

*In this section we will post a few comments submitted to us by our readers, allowing them to share their opinions (what they like or dislike) of past stories and to ask questions about points of scientific interest in regard to a story of the past issue, a trivia question or article, or just general curiosity.*

*Hearing from our readers, like you, is one of the most rewarding parts of working this magazine. We welcome your thoughts, critiques, or praise to our writers. Please submit any comments through our website at [utopiasciencefiction.com](http://utopiasciencefiction.com) or e-mail us directly at [utopiasciencefiction@gmail.com](mailto:utopiasciencefiction@gmail.com). This is a small section and we will only select a few comments or questions with which to fill it in and then, only with the commenters permission. Feedback is important to us and there is nothing more exciting then hearing back from our readers, so please do send us a message*  
*For this particular issue we have a special article written by Joyce Frohn.*

## THE RELIGION OF TREK

Why am I a writer? A writer of science fiction? As always there are a lot of factors, like a lot of kids that felt different, I escaped into books and stories and my imagination.

But there was more. I'm a diaper Trekkie. Like all diaper Trekkies, I didn't have a real choice. When I was a small child, my parents hired the girl next door as a babysitter for my brother and me. She walked us home from school, and took care us until Mom or Dad got home. My mother was stern about TV; it was supposed to educational channel only, except for The World of Disney. But even at four I knew to keep my mouth shut about the forbidden show.

Our babysitter wasn't going to miss "Star Trek", even if it was already in reruns and it was on at the right time, 4:30. I was a small town kid, never been anywhere, but after Star Trek? I was going to the stars.

I took objects and devised whole religions around them, remembering the Comms. I even had the same tri-cycle that Miri had. It was so real. Sometimes, as I moved from that town and to another and then four more towns before I graduated high school, those other worlds seemed to be more real than where I was. I didn't, we (my brother and me) didn't meet another fan until high school.

But I always held on to what I learned on the Enterprise in my heart. All those good messages about peace and diversity and guile beating anything. When I was in schools that said that women couldn't do things, in the back of my mind, I saw Uhuru. I knew better. And I knew that it was going to be the future. When people said that war and prejudice were inevitable, I could simply say, no. I watched many other shows, fell in love with Tolkien and C.S. Lewis but something crazy happened.

Ever since those days of sitting in front of that small screen, I can't see the future as hopeless. Some place deep in me; I still believe that our future is in the stars in a future where men and women and all races and species work together. Sometimes I think for some us that started too young, we got religion from our TV.

• Joyce Frohn



## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

### **Lena Ng**

Lena Ng is from Toronto, Ontario. She has short stories in close to three dozen publications including *Amazing Stories*. Her 2019 current and forthcoming publications include *Hinnom*, *The Literary Hatchet*, *Dying Earth*, *We Shall Be Monsters*, *Colp*, *Beer-Battered Shrimp*, *The Little Book of Fairy Tales*, *Mortal Realm*, *Zooscape*, *Rufo's Dog*, and *Mother Ghost's Grim*. "Under an Autumn Moon" is her short story collection. She is currently seeking a publisher for her novel, *Darkness Beckons*, a Gothic romance.

### **Kevin Stadt**

Kevin Stadt is an English teacher with a master's degree in teaching writing and a doctorate in American literature. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in anthologies and magazines such as *Enter the Aftermath*, *Kzine*, *Lazarus Risen*, *Phantaxis*, *Stupefying Stories*, and many more. He lives in South Korea with his wife and sons, who are inter-dimensional cyborg pirates wanted in a dozen star systems.

### **Yvette Schoeker-Shorb**

Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb's prose and poetry have appeared in *About Place Journal*, the pulp publication *Serial Magazine*, *AJN: American Journal of Nursing*, *Into the Void Magazine*, *Clockhouse*, *Medical Literary Messenger*, *Watershed Review*, *The Conium Review*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Eastern Iowa Review*, *Terrain.org*, the anthology *Talking Back and Looking Forward: An Educational Revolution in Poetry and Prose* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group), and elsewhere, with work forthcoming in *Weber—The Contemporary West*. She has been an educator, a researcher, and an editor, and is co-founder of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit natural history press.

### **Stephen Translateur**

Steven Translateur's work has appeared in a variety of publications including *ANTIPODEAN SF*, *MIND IN MOTION*, and *NEXT PHASE*

### **Penny Leigh**

Penny Leigh is a freelance writer who lives in Fort Collins, CO. Her fiction was recently published in *The Showbear Family Circus*, she has a website at [www.pennyleigh.com](http://www.pennyleigh.com), and she has been an active member of the

Northern Colorado Writers Group since 2016. When she isn't writing she's busy either spending time with her husband and daughter or catering to the needs of her canine, feline, and psittacine family members, all of whom are demanding, opinionated, and completely adorable.

### **T.J. Weavers**

T.J. Weavers is an author of the speculative and the weird. He has a degree in Computer Science, and lives in Sydney. During the day he writes software. At night he writes of the possible and the impossible. He has a fantasy novel under construction.

### **Giles Selig**

Giles Selig (a pseudonym) writes anonymously in Rhinebeck, NY. His fiction, poetry, and humor have appeared in print and on-line outlets. Credits include *Chronogram*, *Foliate Oak*, *Light and Dark*, *Broke Bohemian*, *Penny Shorts*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *The Hunger*, *Literary Yard*, *Corvus*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Pilcrow & Dagger*, *Medium*, *Made-Up Words*, *Laughing Earth Lit*, *Henry*, *Edna*, the *Strange Recital* podcast series, and more. His novella, *Blaustein's Dream*, has been anthologized by the Society of Misfit Stories. He used to be an advertising and communications guy.

### **Sukarma Rani Thareja**

Dr Sukarma Rani Thareja is an Associate Professor(Retired) of chemistry from Christ Church College, CSJM Kanpur university, Kanpur, UP, India. She did PhD Chemistry from IIT-K, India. She is passionate about poetry, art, science. Her works have been published in National/International conferences/Journals...

### **Louis Gallo**

Two volumes of Louis Gallo's poetry, *Crash and Clearing the Attic*, will be published by Adelaide in the near future. A third, *Archaeology*, will be published by Kelsay Books. His work has appeared or will shortly appear in *Wide Awake in the Pelican State* (LSU anthology), *Southern Literary Review*, *Fiction Fix*, *Glimmer Train*, *Hollins Critic*, *Rattle*, *Southern Quarterly*, *Litro*, *New Orleans Review*, *Xavier Review*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Missouri Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Texas Review*, *Baltimore Review*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *The Ledge*, *storySouth*, *Houston Literary Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Raving Dove*, *The Journal (Ohio)*, *Greensboro Review*, and many others. Chapbooks include *The Truth Change*, *The Abomination of Fascination*, *Status Updates* and *The Ten Most Important Questions*. He is the

founding editor of the now defunct journals, *The Barataria Review* and *Books: A New Orleans Review*. His work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize several times. He is the recipient of an NEA grant for fiction. He teaches at Radford University in Radford, Virginia.

### **Denny E. Marshall**

Denny E. Marshall had had art, poetry, and fiction published. Some recent credits include interior art in *Midnight Echo* #14 and poetry in *Space & Time Magazine* #134 Fall 2019. See more at [www.dennymarshall.com](http://www.dennymarshall.com).

### **Linda Neuer**

Linda Neuer is from Miami, Florida. Recently, some of her poems have been published in *Space & Time*, *BFS Horizons*, *Allegro Poetry Magazine*, *Jupiter*, *Abyss & Apex*, *Quantum Poetry Magazine*, *Sangam*, *Lily*, and *Astropoetica*.

### **Nathaniel Wander**

Nathaniel Wander is a retired public health anthropologist who came to specialize on the international tobacco industry's attempts to influence both the public and its leaders with regard to health policy-making. He has also studied how societies and environments shape each other and how even 'sophisticated' cultures use myth and folklore to 'think about' ongoing problems. "Out on Two Limbs: The Problems with Angels" is drawn from a series of essays titled *Annals of Imaginary Biology*. These essays examine the intersections of folklore and biology primarily, but not exclusively in Western culture.

### **Joyce Frohn**

Joyce Frohn has been published in "Page&Spine", "Strange Stories" and "ClarkesWorld", among other places. She is married with a teen-aged daughter and a Patreon account





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