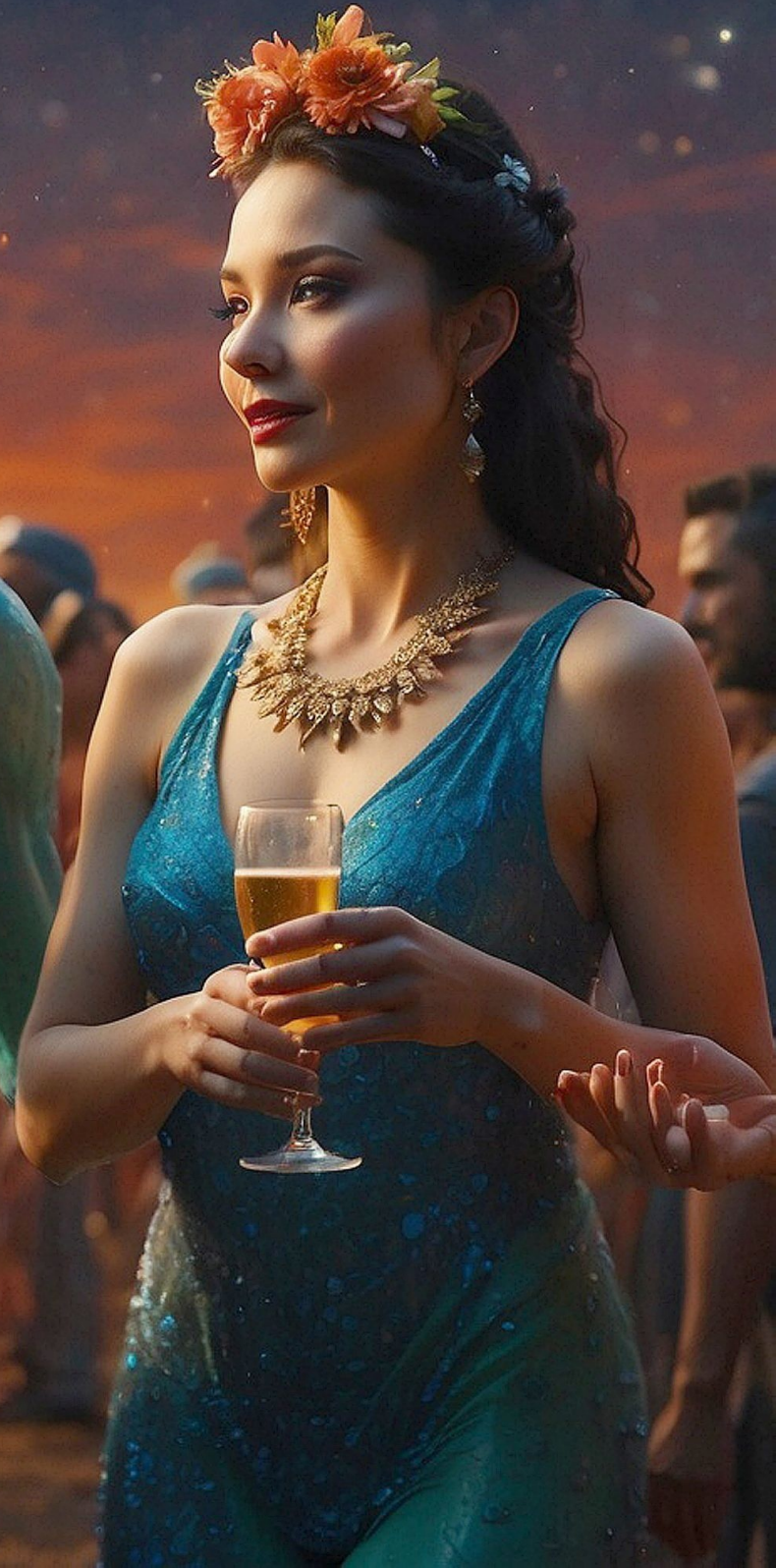


PROBE

202



PROBE 202

December 2024

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PROBE 202

December 2024

- 3. Editorial
- 4. Ramblings Tony Davis
- 6. Magazines Received
- 7. Carla Martins
- 9. Nova 2023 Finalist. Renesh Lakhan “Fast Food”
- 26. Nova 2023 Finalist. Stuart Tudor “The Cage and the Dolphin”
- 37. Nova 2023 Finalist. Andre Ian Clarke “Fishing with My Father”
- 47. Blast from the past... from PROBE138
September 2008
- 50. Mondi Incantati



Editorial

Gail

For the third time in a row, I have to sadly report the passing of one of SFFSA's Chairmen(persons). I had previously mentioned that our current chairperson, Carla Martins had not been well. She unfortunately passed away early in November and SFFSA will be that much less bright without her. You will see her Eulogy in this issue.

I asked Gary Kuyper to create a cover that would "raise a glass" to those we have lost this past year. When you receive this issue, please join with us all in sharing "A Toast to Absent Friends"



And on a much more positive note: You will have seen that with every meeting notice that goes out, we have been asking (pleading?) with the membership to offer to come onto the committee and helps us with the organisation of our club. There were about thirty people at the end of year function dinner on last Saturday night and the general consensus was that our members really enjoyed the camaraderie they found with other members of SFFSA, and that they would be very disappointed if the club were to fade away.

So, I am really very glad to tell you that two of our very new members have volunteered to join the committee and help out. Shanil Misra, whose novel "Simba Singh and the Tears of India" we reviewed last year has agreed to take over our Website and Gert van de Linde has also agreed to join us and we'll meet as a new committee in January and decide on the rest of the portfolios.

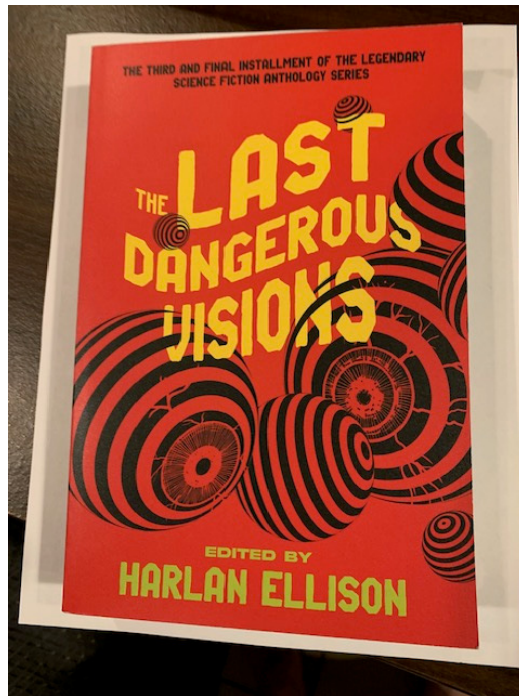
So, I guess, that SFFSA will be rejuvenated as we enter into our 56th year!

RAMBLINGS... Tony Davis

Here are some Ramblings from your faithful scribe in Canada. (No, not Lloyd Penny, the other one.)

I was excited to order online The Last Dangerous Visions recently. This sf short story anthology has been awaited by readers for decades and was finally released through Amazon on October 1, 2024.

Harlan Ellison previously edited Dangerous Visions and Again Dangerous Visions. The stories were called “dangerous visions” because they steered away from traditional space western yarns or scientific treatises that were popular from the late 1930s to late 1960s. And they dealt with topical issues such as sex and violence (o, the horror!).



Dangerous Visions was published in 1967 with 33 never-before published stories by authors such as Farmer, Dick and Delany. Its sequel was published in 1972 again with many new authors and stories.

While *The Last Dangerous Visions* was in preparation for some time, it wouldn't be published until well after Ellison passed away in 2018. This volume is still listed as being edited by Ellison. Delays in its publication have been the topic of many articles and controversies in the science fiction community in the United States for years.

The third volume is a large tome at 433 pages. Most of the 32 stories in *The Last*

Dangerous Visions have fiction written during the 1970s. A brief afterword includes scans of Ellison's typed listing of contents with comments. Ellison often uses the phrase "off-beat" to describe his selections.

(Way back when, I lined up at Torcon 2 in Toronto in 1974 for Ellison to autograph my hardcover copy of *Dangerous Visions*.)

— — —

I am busy in non-working hours writing an article about academic research by a British scholar that was published in 2021 on the subject of female authors in the Pulp Era.

The analysis interestingly posits that there were more women authors in the science fiction and fantasy pulps in the early days and fewer in the later pulp period of the 1940s. You would think it would be the other way around.

The author analyses content of six major pulp magazines that published science fiction and fantasy during the period 1926 to 1946. These pulp magazines are: *Amazing Stories*, *Astounding Science Fiction*, *Weird Tales*, *Wonder Stories*, *Fantastic Adventures* and *Startling Stories*. Between 1926 and 1946 (the end of the so-called "Golden Age" of science fiction) the number of female authors had declined from 52 to 38 writers. It is no easy task to confirm female identities as often their names would appear in the pulps with only initials or pseudonyms.

Catherine Lucille Moore was usually identified in print as C.L. Moore and Dorothy McIlwraith, who edited *Weird Tales* for years until its closure in 1954, was identified on the Table of Contents page as D. McIlwraith.

One reason for the decline of female authors in the science fiction and fantasy pulps in the mid-1940s can be attributed to the "old boy's club" of authors which prevailed, especially in *Astounding*, edited by John W. Campbell Jr. Many of its notable authors were Asimov, Clarke, Van Vogt, Heinlein, Hubbard and Pohl.

There have been several science fiction anthologies published in recent years, highlighting female authors (such as Women of Wonder).

I read in the October 2024 issue of Locus, the science fiction and fantasy magazine, a review of the Hugo Awards ceremony which included lots of photos of attendees. And there was an sf veteran – Robert Silverberg (born 1935). Silverberg has been frequently published in sf digests and in hardcovers and paperbacks. As a young teenager he was submitting short story fiction and won a Hugo Award at age 21. He has attended every annual Hugo Awards since the ceremony was started in 1953. Let's treasure these authors and express our appreciation to them while they are still here with us.

Magazines Received

Ansible David Langford

September 2024 448 <http://news.ansible.uk/a448.html>

October 2024 449 <http://news.ansible.uk/a449.html>

November 2024 450 <http://news.ansible.uk/a450.html>

De Profundis

DeProfundis #601 September 2024 Heath "Scribbles" Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230; kalel@well.com;

DeProfundis #602 October 2024 Heath "Scribbles" Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230; kalel@well.com;

DeProfundis #600 November 2024 Heath "Scribbles" Row, 4367 Globe Ave., Culver City, CA 90230; kalel@well.com;



Carla Maria Neto Martins 05 November 1969 to 05 November 2024



As our friend Gavin Kreuter has said this has been an Annus horribilis. Particularly for SFFSA but also for me. It is with a sense of loss that we have had to bid farewell to our good friend and SFFSA chairperson, Carla Martins. I shall always remember Carla as the effervescent but kind and caring person that I grew to know over many years. Who could forget the many bring-and-braais that we had with Carla's self-braaiing meat. She would waltz up to the braai, leave her meat and lo and behold when she returned it would be done perfectly. I'll never forget a couple of hysterical games of SF Pictionary with Carla cheering on the "artists". She also brought with her an amazing knowledge of movies, both SF and other. She would always brighten up the room when she arrived and her caring presence will be sadly missed.

Gavin Kreuter

My first memory of Carla is from the first SFSA meeting I attended. Andrew, who was a work colleague, had discovered my interest in SF and suggested I attend a meeting. I walked into a room full of strangers, feeling rather nervous, uncertain and shy. This lively person bounced over and introduced herself as Carla, whose role on the committee was public relations. She was a bit disappointed that I was there because of a personal conversation, rather than through PR, but she certainly fulfilled her function of welcoming new members/visitors. I was made to feel so welcome that it is one of the main reasons why I am still a member. My last happy memory of Carla is at an SFFSA film outing. On her own, she had decided to organise movie meetings. They were very popular pre-epidemic, although they had

dwindled down to sometimes just Carla, her mother Helena, and myself. And memories in between? Two things impressed me the most about Carla; her encyclopaedic knowledge of movie trivia, and her positivity. She was so full of life that it is difficult to accept that she has gone. She will be missed. RIP, my friend.

Simone Putterman

While Carla and I were both (separately) at Grant Charlton's 1998 ICON Comics & Games Convention in Edenvale, Joburg, I only just dethroned Carla as the youngest active SFFSA member in 2022 (excluding Gail and Ian's kids). She was another, more exuberant, sister to me. She joined my family in the Drakensberg one December, and she was part of trips to Gaborone, Botswana, to visit our mutual friend Gwen Watkins, who started the (unofficial SFFSA) home movie evenings Carla loved (and which Franz and I took over until the pandemic started). We shared favourite SFF series: CJ Cherryh's *Foreigner* (which I gifted to her almost every year on her birthday, although I'd read the book first) and Kim Harrison's *The Hollows*. Carla was full of life and enthusiasm for everything, and always happy to drive far, including the SFFSA Soutpansberg trip. May her memory be a blessing

Grant Kruger

My heartfelt condolences to Carla's family and friends. Knowing her was a delight and I always enjoyed hanging out with her. She will be missed.

Cedric Abrahams

Carla always put passion into anything she did, whether it was editing PROBE, or haranguing us for articles, as chairman of the club or secretary, keeping meticulous notes to remind us to do what we had promised to do. She was always a welcome force in any social situation, happy, or sad, she could raise our spirits and light up the room. She will be deeply missed and will always be part of SFFSA (even though she hated trying to pronounce it. You will be sorely missed.

Franz Tomasek

Two things that immediately come to mind were Carla's generosity of spirit and encyclopaedic knowledge of movies. If you attended a club meeting you were guaranteed a heartfelt hug. Ditto for movie evenings or just a meal. If there was a club movie quiz, she and Norman had to be on different teams or the rest of us stood no chance. Just how board a knowledge it was could be seen when she took on renowned movie critic, Barry Ronge before an early screen of Pan's Labyrinth. Carla will be missed immensely at the club and as a friend.

Also, sincere condolences from the following people, many of whom joined us and her brother Joao to hold a wake for her last Saturday. All said how much she would be missed:

Norman Pringle, Gerhard Hope, Dierdre Byrne, Erin Brunette, Franz Tomasek, Simone Putterman, Sally Leibowitz, Gwen Watkins Nick Heyns, Digby Ricci, Jan Benvie, Nial Mollison, Adele Meyer, Cedric Abramowitz, Trevor Derry, Kyle Brunette, Steve and Alyssa Levitt, Ron Cowley, Ilse von Willich, Grant Charlton, Colin from France, Tony Davis from Canada, and Anne-Marie who came all the way from Saudi Arabia to be with Carla's mom and brother

Nova 2023 Finalist

Fast Food

Renesh Lakhan

'It's a damned shame,' said the American reporter. 'The biggest event in the history of man's existence has to be in the pit of an African country. A damned shame.'

Thandi Shezi, the South African journalist, bit her lip. She surveyed the stretch of the Karoo desert, fringed with cerise mountains below a milky-blue sky. It had once been flat and endless, with miles of dust and scrub. Now it was festooned with executive marquees and temporary residences, boasting national flags of every country on the planet.

'We coulda hosted this in Vegas,' the American continued. He obtained no support from the international media teams that jostled about, setting up their equipment.

'Sure, John,' a Columbian technician quipped, 'Aliens just love Americans.'

The raucous laughter didn't deter John.

'Laugh all you want. But if those bastards in that space-craft turn on us, only God knows what firepower they have. The US can deal with this shit – we have the artillery and the best military.'

'If that craft wanted to fire on us, they would have done it already,' someone said, amidst the bustle.

They stared at the craft, set slightly off-centre of the cordoned expanse of desert.

'It looks rundown. Like a gipsy caravan,' an Irish voice said, 'if there isn't a kitchen knife inside, I'll burn my socks.'

Laughter.

The South African's resolve to remain silent failed.

'Bull's eye, John. I think you hit the reason why this event is in my country, not yours.'

The American stared at her. 'I don't follow you, lady.'

'Your ilk is a trigger-happy bunch. It was fitting that my country leads this –we have a track record for resolving battles without a blood bath.'

'Lighten up, lady. This is a crash site, not a planned visit. And these critters might not have blood for any bath.'

In the centre of a barren and cracked Karoo desert, a black and silver furrow trailed the crash site, ending in the *Capsule*.

The American media called it a *Capsule*. *Typical*, reflected Thandi. *Anything un-American must be small. And the damned African media copied them...*

But to Thandi, this was a *Dome*. Even though she was more than a hundred metres away, the silver-grey Dome dominated the landscape, towering over trucks, prefabricated rooms and marquees.

'It's majestic,' she heard herself say.

'Majestic, yeah,' the American mumbled.

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'Did you catch the streaming ten minutes ago, lady?'

'No,' she said, mustering arrogance, 'we had other assignments.'

'Sure.'

He fell silent.

'Spit it out,' she said. 'They allowed a delegation into that Thing this morning.'

'Delegation?'

'Us. Us humans, lady.'

'Interesting.'

'That so-called impenetrable shield opened, and guess what?'

'I'm listening.'

'All their damned technology is stuff we have. In fact, our experts figured their technology is stolen from us.'

Thandi almost fell, laughing.

The Irish journalist and a bunch of others within earshot howled, keeling over.

'So you are saying they came all this way,' the Irishman started, 'these alien beings, with pirated parts from good old USA...'

'Wishful thinking, mate,' a voice bleated. 'Most likely made in China.'

'You're on in five, Thandi!'

The laughter in the South African camp died.

The South African team manoeuvred into a vantage point, the cameraman panning across the haze of desert and resting on the Dome, now partially obscured by Thandi's golden weaves, set against a golden-brown face with striking eyes and purple lips.

'All right, all right.'

Clanking of equipment... squeak of trolley wheels... whispering...

'Five, four, three, two, one...'

'This is Thandi Shezi on SABC 1, bringing you a news update at 2 pm. Behind me is the so-called Capsule, a vessel reportedly belonging to extra-terrestrials, grounded here three weeks ago. Most NATO surveillance teams have since disbanded, but this site is still visibly protected within a radius of about two hundred metres.

Speculations abound – questions still have to be answered. How did this craft get here? Where are the extra-terrestrials that alighted five weeks ago? Which governments did the South African government collaborate with, to hide, host or

capture these aliens? It has been speculated by political analysts that this could be an elaborate hoax by politicians to detract attention from greater challenges of global inequity, terrorism and cross-border tensions.

While we speculate, there is one certainty. Today has been declared the Meeting of Two Worlds, endorsed by a rare pact of the nations of our world. Our first-ever Earth Flag flies proudly, replete with a recently hashed anthem that plays in the background. Today, at 15:00, the world will witness an apparent alien civilisation. Thandi Shezi, SABC 1.'

Thandi lowered her sunshades. 'Something's happening,' she said, and beckoned her crew. 'Let's get closer.'

Two enormous stadium screens were rotated into view and wheeled away from each other. A conference centre was unveiled below the screens, white marquee sheets gently parting to reveal semi-circular seating consoles.

'That's as close as you're going to get,' said the Irishman.

Thandi was taken by surprise. The Irishman walked up alongside her.

'I'm Stan Lambert.'

'Thandi Shezi.'

'Your reputation precedes you, Ms Shezi.'

'Really?'

'Oh, I just heard you introduce yourself to millions of South Africans.'

She almost smiled. *Smart ass.*

'It might be your country, but those thin wires across that trench are an electrified barricade sanctioned by *your* government. I wouldn't touch it.'

Thandi had seen them. Reluctantly.

'But look at those media guys inside!' she said, feeling her skin prickle. There are dozens of them!

'Big media houses. Big money. They're like fly paper for politicians and VIPs.' He glanced at the American team. 'John can feel assured that American capitalism is intact in Africa.'

'This is unfair!' she said.

She stared at the Dome with a new perspective. The surrounding marquees were pristine, colour-coded, with different countries represented. Logos and slogans of big brands now seemed a clutter. Of course, richer countries occupied more space. 'It's unfair...'

The Irishman lowered his baggy cap, aligning it to his furrowed brows, and stared into the haze of activities. Within their shared silence, he sensed her revelation.

'Which house are you with,' she asked, suddenly feeling invaded.

'Besides a little cottage back home, none really.'

He observed her confusion, and added, 'Oh, I snuck in. I'm a freelancer. I don't report stuff. I leave that to real media people.'

'What?'

'I write with a different take. I write about the reporting. Human perspectives. Nothing serious. Humorous angles.'

'Humour is serious.'

He looked at her, triumph in his eyes.

'Thank you.'

She had a brief discussion with her crew. 'Find a way to get us closer,' she told her cameraman.

'You're considering getting through that fence, aren't you?' the Irishman asked.

'We have a job to do, Mr Lambert.'

'If your work on Africanising Africa is anything to go by, Ms Shezi, this is your passion rather than a job.'

She looked at him sharply.

'Where is *your* passion, Mr Lambert? Surely you want to get closer.'

'Oh, I don't need to.'

She couldn't hide her confusion.

'It's quite obvious what going on here.'

'Obvious?' she said, feigning disdain.

'A space-craft lands in the desert—a clique. The local government – your government thankfully – finds the wreck, its military whisks the aliens away. Cordons off this site. Your government and the alien beings spend time trying to communicate. If the aliens could travel all the way here, they are obviously more sophisticated than us. They would have the intellect to communicate. Your government would have collaborated with other governments – good old South African democracy. Enter the developed world. Those poor aliens would have negotiated their entire technologies away to Wall Street comen. Theory 1.'

Thandi laughed.

'It's pretty unsettling, Ms Shezi: Countries that failed to find peace amongst themselves, now aspire to rise above their incompetence, and find common cause with alien beings. What a thing. I believe we now have an Earth flag and anthem. Lovely.'

'Is this all a joke to you, Mr Lambert.' Thandi stifled a smile.

'Hardly. Any joke ends when the aliens realise that they are part of an elaborate marketing campaign, replete with grand alien brands, government election campaigning and tourist revenue. They would either be very confused or demand royalties if they were anything like us. But I digress.'

'Really, Mr Lambert?'

'Well, you've seen the images of the aliens scuttled out of this wreck?'

'Amateur footage. If it's not fake.'

'You would have noticed that they have large snouts, cute panda bear ears, Pooh Bear bellies and flexi-hooves. I can see a commercial opportunity for the cartoon TV market. Kids will love them. A capitalist's dream, really.'

'What would you write about, Mr Lambert.'

'Oh, how forty-odd countries with dubious records of getting along, come together to welcome an unfamiliar guest. Like a wedding hosted by a splintered family who can't stand one another. The ultimate act of grinning and bearing it.'

One of Thandi's crew members was trying to negotiate with stone-faced guards at an entrance.

'Look!' Thandi pointed out. 'They let the American through!'

John was already on the other side with his cameraman. He heard Thandi's scream and turned, his smugness distinct in the distance. He turned back towards the Dome.

'How the hell did he do that?' said Thandi, unleashing her wrath on the guards. They remained stolid.

'American currency is quite strong,' observed Stan. He winced, watching Thandi's fierce, moist eyes and flared nostrils. South Africans bribed by foreigners instead of locals, he thought. Not a pretty sight.

He ambled to the head of the security group and asked, 'We'll pay the same. How much?'

'Don't you dare, Mr Lambert!' said Thandi.

Stan seemed bewildered. He shrunk away from the guards.

'Where's your passion, Ms Shezi?'

She ignored him and ordered her crew to set themselves as close to the fence as possible.

'Ah,' said Stan. 'The most important day in the history of mankind, and she refuses to taint it with a bribe. How sporting.'

Her anger was almost a solid barrier.

'I wonder who sweats to make your spare cash, Mr Lambert.'

'Yuppie publishers. A misled fan club. A well-insured aunt.' He shrugged. 'Mostly a dead aunt.'

He wrung his hands, avoiding her eyes.

'You could be my incredible story, Ms Shezi. But I'd be lying in creating a story of the triumph of human righteousness and ethical conduct. Because the real reason that stops you from doing what the American did is your *pride* – John treated your countrymen like instruments. The trademark of a colonial era. As you yourself wrote: *Treating people like instruments is the tragedy of the plunderer. Accepting being an instrument is the tragedy of the plundered.*'

She glared at him.

'I'm guilty of reading everything you wrote,' he said disarmingly. 'So I understand why you would choose to not mimic a foreigner like John, even if it foils your ambitions. Pride aside, the fittest will survive, Thandi. And break the rules doing it.'

She headed to her team. He grimaced.

Thandi looked at the Dome wistfully. Her vision trembled in the rising heat waves. The large screens below the Dome rippled with advertising. Speakers, hoisted on chromed stands, flanked the screens and consoles like a rock concert. The seats on the semi-circular platforms below were arranged in a triangular conference style. Thandi imagined a talk-show host on the central stage, with contestants on platforms on either side. Technical personnel, dressed in white, slowly disappeared from the scene.

No one expected the South African president to walk onto the podium and speak. There was a humdrum as the media and guests scurried into their galleries and organised themselves. The President's voice crackled through the speakers. People emerged from marquees: presidents and leaders, dressed in business clothes, tuxedos, some in traditional garb. The South African president was introducing his colleagues, occasionally tripping on titles and names.

'Keep it rolling!' Thandi shouted.

'This is Thandi Shezi with breaking News....' She had to shout above the media frenzy.

Then they came.

The Dome's door parted, almost unnoticed. They emerged in single file – seven of them - like red ants out of a mound.

'Oh my God.'

The Karoo fell silent as images appeared on the screens. The little red-skinned beings bobbed as they tried to walk onto the platforms, on feet that were webbed yet partially hooved. Their human usher was almost twice their height. They clutched white fabric around their bodies like blankets, which did little to hide the swoop of their ample bellies. They had large foreheads flanked by short donkey ears. Each had a prominent snout that sported some gadget, like a lens cap. Perhaps their dark glasses, above what seemed to be hand-drawn smiles, drew sporadic laughter.

The president introduced them as travellers from Nebula 6 or what he referred to as planet 'Clis', and proceeded to explain where this was in the solar system as though explaining how to get from the airport to a summit meeting.

The visitors' usher seemed confused as he showed them their stations. It became apparent that their reserved seats were makeshift hammocks into which they awkwardly collapsed. Only the dignitaries on the platform didn't laugh.

The president introduced each alien by a name that neither he could pronounce properly nor anyone recall.

'As we are Humans, they are the Clis, from the planet Clis, and that is not the exact pronunciation, good people, as we are limited in certain... inflexions. They are from an ancient, wonderful civilisation. We want to learn about this great civilisation. We will have time to learn.

'When they had the accident here, on this very place on which we stand, they encountered our rescue services.' He paused to allow the impact of a little South African rescue unit in the Karoo, rescuing aliens of Nebula 6.

'They were weak but stable, as they were able to treat themselves. You will notice they wear breathing apparatus, as they require more nitrogen and boron and less oxygen to survive. They also require our sunshades as they cannot deal with this brightness. Their planet is smaller so walking in our heavier gravity is a challenge.'

The president stared at the camera sternly, trying to kill remnants of laughter. The interlude was awkward.

'In the past few weeks, we were able to achieve some level of communication. Cano, the Clis on my left, can now understand the basics of our English, and will be able to interpret basic terms.'

After a call for applause and goodwill, the NATO Secretary General was introduced as a key speaker, to spell out the objectives of the day.

'We have agreed, with our visitors, to keep this introduction short,' he said. 'They have journeyed a long way to be here. Their bodily circumstances cannot tolerate long sessions; they need rest. There will be plenty of time for interaction. The purpose of this meeting is to say to you, the people of our beloved planet, *we are not alone*. Our neighbours have arrived.'

'Zoom in,' said Thandi, 'I think those aliens are fake.'

'I don't think so.'

She wheeled and met Stan's gaze. A BBQ Burger cap replaced his baggy one.

'If they were fake, they'd look more real. Least of all ridiculous.'

'They *do* look ridiculous, don't they?'

'At least it silenced the Second Coming lobby group. Come with me, Thandi, I'm going in.'

He caught her stare. He offered her a BBQ Burger cap.

'What are you up to?'

'Wear this, and you can work in the fast-food industry today.'

He finally placed it on her head.

'We're going in with a permit, replacing the drivers. BBQ Burgers have the contract to feed the service workers and technicians. Truck's waiting outside.'

There was no way that Thandi would refuse. She turned to her team.

'Keep rolling. Give me a camera. I'm getting closer.'

'How the hell did you get this arranged?' said Thandi as she climbed into the truck.

'You don't want to know.'

'Yes I do.'

'The BBQ team loves me. Also, I thought I'd give them a paid holiday.'

He imagined her thoughts and sighed. *Old money. Amassed from the working class. Maybe from African soil?*

Too lame to explain.

She looked out the window.

They travelled along a protected pathway and were stopped at a gate under the Dome.

Capsule, my foot, thought Thandi, peering up the Dome.

'It looks ragged from near,' said Stan. 'Like a giant version of a child's science project.'

'Grab your burgers and drinks, lads,' Stan bellowed. 'You don't want heatstroke.'

The security officials were reluctant to stall lunch arrangements. The truck was waved through two security points. They were directed to the back of the screens.

Thandi set her recording on her camera to capture the audio of the Chinese Prime Minister. He was introducing the alien called Cano. He proudly explained how Cano and a human task team used hand movements with increased use of symbols to initiate communication, before filling in verbal cues. Cano, being something of a communication expert, was able to link English vocal speech patterns to the symbols, leading to the start of structured communication.

They alighted and headed towards the platforms from the rear. Stan carried a handful of burger packs, trying to look busy as Thandi trailed behind him, her camera panning the seating consoles ahead.

'Stop!' a uniformed official shouted. 'You're not allowed here. Especially with that camera.'

'We're feeding the extra-terrestrials,' said Stan, confronting the guard. 'They have to eat now.'

The guard scowled at Stan.

'They're diabetic. Hold these and wait right here,' said Stan, placing the burgers in the guard's hand, while he made a break for it.

Thandi had darted amidst the technical and administrative workers, weaving stealthily amongst them until dissolving into the journalist's gallery, while the guard chased Stan. By the time he had tussled Stan to the ground, Thandi was perched on the floor with the international media.

She steadied her camera on the speaker, the American president.

'Our media across the world would have to demonstrate leadership now, more significant than at any other time in history. While we strive to bring peace, justice and order to our world, we take solace in the fact that there are more of us who seek peace than those who don't. Our history is by no means without its regrettable.... moments. We have made our history palatable by splitting it into the good and the bad, the liberators and the detractors. However, today, all of this planet's history

becomes ours rather than hand-picked slices of our past, as we are, for the first time, judged as a collective.

‘In our visitors, our conscience has arrived. Let’s focus on the hopeful future. This is the message we seek to share. We don’t need self-serving journalistic sensationalism now. To be possibly judged by a neutral external being, is humbling. And unnerving. In the months to come, our aim as Humans and Clis is to share and learn, strengthen relations, build trust and cooperation. Trade agreements over the next few years may change the trajectory of our technological evolution and eliminate our resource challenges. So I am confident that you, as our media, will see your responsibilities in a new context.’

Silence fell over the media gallery, only for a short spell.

Responsibilities? Context? thought Thandi. ‘Do we hide the poor? Downplay corruption? Tear off the pages on a colonial, sexist, racist history? Am I being muzzled?’

Cameras hissed, spluttered and snapped, bright flashes showering the alien group on the console. The aliens hung on their hammocks, with their dark glasses and snouts upturned. The U-shaped smiles under their snouts were uniform, as though applied with a pink crayon by a kindergarten child. Journalists’ hands shot up and a hubbub grew.

The American President raised his palms. ‘We take no questions at this stage. Our visitors need rest. We will schedule a briefing in the days to come. In the meantime, there is an itinerary – our spokespersons will meet media networks-’

The clamour increased. The glass screen that protected the VIPs began shaking as journalists and sojourners attempted to expand themselves across the demarcation. Behind the privileged inner group, security guards were struggling to hold off those left behind the 200-metre fenced boundary. Thandi faintly smelled the familiar sting of tear gas. The murky swirls along the perimeter of the fence were accompanied by the sounds of frenzied protests that even the thin Karoo air could not dissipate.

The South African president made a solemn reappearance to stare down the media team and distant mobs.

‘WE ANSWER QUESTIONS.’

The alien’s voice was, with the faintest reverberation, almost a chime. It hardly required a microphone although one was planted in front of it.

'GIVE QUESTIONS.'

The Karoo was plunged into silence.

Although the alien's fluted lower lips moved, he seemed to speak from the pit of his large abdomen and even beyond.

The American President was on his feet, red-faced.

'You don't have to do that, Cano. It's better not to...'

'WE WANT QUESTIONS.'

A sea of hands from the media section shot up.

'PRESIDENT OF THE USA. PLEASE DIRECT QUESTIONS.'

The president gaped. The dignitaries alongside him were stunned.

He pointed to the journalist in the first row who asked, 'How is it that you can speak English now, when it was said all you knew were certain keywords.'

Cano seemed to smile. 'WE LEARN FAST.'

He added, 'WE LEARN THROUGH CONSCIOUSNESS OF OTHERS. THE MORE LIFE AROUND US, THE MORE QUICKLY WE LEARN. WE LEARN THROUGH YOU.'

Deadpan faces waited for more. The US president diffused the confusion by clapping hard, his forehead moistening. The dignitaries joined him.

'I'm deeply impressed, Cano. Your question Ma'am.'

A CNN correspondent rose. 'We were told you cannot survive in our atmosphere. You had to wear adaptive devices to breathe. Now I see it lying on your desk. Explain.'

More laughter.

'WE ADAPT FAST.'

Cano removed his sunshades with three webbed fingers, as did his colleagues.

They had round ogling eyes with pink lids. The crowd gasped and leaned backwards.

The president steadied himself and clapped. A feeble applause followed.

'Are you from a civic movement, Ma'am?' he asked. 'Ok. What's your question?'

'What's your diet? Are you vegetarian? Do you eat meat?'

'WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION.'

The president whispered something to Cano.

'WE STILL DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION. ALL MEAT AND VEGETATION HAVE LIFE. IT IS UNNECESSARY TO DIFFERENTIATE. WE NEED WHAT YOU CALL NUTRIENTS; MANY OF THE ELEMENTS YOU NEED ARE WHAT WE ALSO NEED.'

This time the dignitaries clapped first.

The lady from the organisation, Greening the Planet, persisted. She screamed above the applause, 'We humans mass produce and eat lesser beings, some of whom have features that resemble your own!'

The laughter amongst the media section was uneasy.

The president quickly explained, 'Animals are part of our food chain. They don't have the intellect nor inclination to do anything besides exist. Next question.'

A man's voice broke through the sea of hands. He was dressed as a priest, and the president relented to his gravitas. 'Are you bound by compassion, love? Do you subscribe to a higher being? To God?'

Cano answered, 'WE HAVE REFERENCED YOUR WORLD OF LOVE THROUGH YOUR MEDIA. WE DID NOT REALISE THAT MOST OF YOUR VISUAL RECORDINGS OF VIOLENCE AND MATING RITUALS WERE NOT YOUR HISTORICAL ARCHIVES, BUT SIMULATIONS FOR ENTERTAINMENT. WE WILL HAVE TO ANALYSE THIS AGAIN.'

The media gathering rocked with laughter. The dignitaries shuffled.

The president acknowledged the American, John. Thandi felt her pulse rise.

John asked, 'Thank you Mr President, and Welcome Team Clis.'

He waited for the laughter to die and said, 'This morning a delegation entered your capsule and reported that your technology has duplicates of our technology. Explain.'

'IT IS YOUR TECHNOLOGY.'

The burgeoning laughter stopped dead.

'WE DID NOT ARRIVE IN THE VESSEL. IT IS NOT CAPABLE OF TRAVEL.'

The US President's grin was a frozen piece of work, which slumped into a hard thin line.

'WE HAVE A TECHNOLOGY OF DIMENSIONAL TRAVEL. BY MANIPULATING ASPECTS OF SPACE AND TIME, WE ARE ABLE TO DISPLACE OURSELVES FROM ONE LOCATION TO ANOTHER. THAT IS HOW WE ARRIVED.'

The dignitaries looked at the Aliens strangely.

'WE TRAVEL FAST'

'What about the craft outside,' asked the President.

'BEFORE WE ARRIVED, OUR STUDY OF YOUR MEDIA INFORMED US THAT WE WOULD NOT CONVINCED YOU OF OUR CREDIBILITY AS TRAVELLERS IF WE ARRIVED WITHOUT A VESSEL. SO WE BUILT A CRAFT. WE TELEPORTED FASHIONABLE EQUIPMENT FROM YOUR POPULAR INDUSTRIES.'

John sank slowly like a hernia patient while staring into Cano's ogling eyes and cartoon smile.

Thandi's voice cut the silence. 'Tell us about your world! Do you have poverty? Do your beings steal, maim or kill one other? Do you have to imprison them? Do some live better than others, do the weak wither and the strong thrive?'

Silence. For once the Extra-terrestrials seemed to be thinking.

There began a squelchy sound amongst them. It dawned on Thandi that they were communicating. Thandi felt the familiar wave of hopelessness in the hush, borne of a lifetime of unanswered questions and wishful thinking. She looked around, hoping to glimpse Stan. For the first time, she sensed trepidation amongst her media colleagues. She was used to the journalistic bustle and frenzy, nothing as tentative as this. She searched for Stan and found him a few metres behind her, his mouth bloody. He clasped his knee against his chest. She ran to him.

'Stan! Who did this?'

'Security guards. Dieters, no doubt.'

She relaxed, realising his condition was better than he looked.

She began wiping blood off his lips with his BBQ Burger cap.

‘You’ve silenced them, Ms Shezi. Do they seem too fake to be fake?’

‘They’re fake until I see something mind-blowing. Lift your chin; you’re getting blood on your clothes. And keep quiet.’

‘If they’re learning through us as they claim,’ he persisted, ‘there’ll come a time they won’t need questions, right?’

‘WE ASSURE YOU WE ARE NOT A FABRICATION. WE INVITE YOU TO OUR PLANET. WE HAVE PREPARED AN EARTH-LIKE ATMOSPHERIC ZONE IN WHICH YOU MAY OBSERVE AND EXPERIENCE OUR WORLD. ASSEMBLE HERE AND VISIT NOW.’

Thandi froze. The silence that followed Clis’ announcement was boisterous.

‘THE TRANSIT TIME IS 30 SECONDS, AND 30 SECONDS TO RETURN.’

Everyone tried to speak at once. Media leaders hollered questions, the US and South African presidents tried to restore order and dignitaries tried to attract the attention of senior dignitaries, who tried to attract the attention of the alien beings. But the seven smiley faces with protuberant eyes and saggy lower lips remained unperturbed.

‘THOSE OF YOU WHO WISH TO EXPERIENCE OUR WORLD, STEP INTO THIS SPACE NOW, AND WE’LL COME BACK FOR THE OTHERS IN A SHORT WHILE. THE SCIENCE OF THE JOURNEY IS SOLID AND OLD. THE TRANSIT IS RELIABLE.’

‘Big claim,’ said Stan. ‘Roll your camera, Thandi.’

They observed the turmoil. Stan eyed Thandi’s face sceptically; he could feel the quickening pulse on her fingertips.

‘Thandi. Roll your camera. Don’t miss this.’

Thandi could barely speak. ‘I want to go, Stan.’

‘What?’

‘I’m going.’

There was chaos around the platforms; some people were pushing their way to the front while others were forcing themselves out. Most dignitaries remained in their seats, their status as reluctant travellers affirmed, while others hurried out.

‘Let’s go, Stan.’ She tried to pull him. He resisted.

‘Even if my leg wasn’t busted, I wouldn’t move. Not a chance.’

‘Don’t you want to see a civilisation that works?’

‘And pigs will fly.’

Stan Lambert had followed the career of this restless soul; he knew he wasn’t stopping her.

‘Either see another civilisation, Miss Shezi, or dine with me in a magical setting of bushveld cuisine. I’m sure your aliens don’t have anything on red wines of the Cape.’

She forced an uneasy smile. ‘I’ll be back.’

‘I’ll wait right here.’

She walked unsteadily into the area the size of a tennis court, now bustling with people.

The alien who sat alongside Cano removed a semi-circular gadget the size of a cell phone and directed it at the floor. Its crimson beam demarcated an area shaped like a low wall along the perimeter of the group.

‘KEEP WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE BEAM.’

The display of technology was the first evidence of the possibility of authentic extra-terrestrials; it flared anxiety and excitement; some within the demarcation looked like children at a carnival, others had fear etched on their faces. Before Stan lost sight of Thandi, he caught her fleeting gaze. A mild, soft confusion. It reminded him of her expression on press releases; those bouts of bitter-sweet victories when she exposed corrupt politicians. Her elusive pursuit of an ethical society burnt a hole in his throat. She would be his story.

His jaw dropped when the group disappeared. The unrest at the entrances ceased; the silence of the Karoo was unsettling. Everything was focused on the space where people should be standing; the asinine smiles and bulging eyes of the aliens remained the focal point.

The unrest resumed at the gates. Stan felt the sting of tear gas as his eyes blurred. He didn't need to stand; he could sense the anarchy. Guards had given up their posts and people thronged closer.

Journalists were in a frenzy. *'Where have they gone?', 'When will they return,' 'What did you do to them!' 'Are they safe?'*

'WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO EMULATE YOUR THINKING. WE LEARN FAST. WE ADAPT FAST. WE ALIGN WITH YOUR SPECIES.'

'What do you mean? When are they returning? For Heaven's sake, when?'

All eyes were on the empty rectangle as though it was a shrine.

Slowly a shiver of wave-like disturbances began in the space.

'THEIR VISIT IS OVER.'

The sound of small squeaks began growing. Red wave-like blotches filled the space. The sounds rose as everyone craned forward to peer. It grew louder – a clamour of squelches – and finally became intolerable and sinister.

'Stop that sound! What the hell is going on here?'

'MY PEOPLE ENJOYED THEM. THEY ARE ALL COMING. WE EAT FAST.'

And the screaming began....

Nova 2023 Finalist

The Cage and the Dolphin

Stuart Tudor

Eva watched the world of Durban go by. She could never be a part of it. She was, after all, too busy to spend time in the outside world. Her beautiful Durban, where the beaches stretched on forever, gold sand littered with pure white bodies.

But she couldn't join them. She couldn't walk the streets and browse the shops. She had to ensure the house was spotless.

And today, for now, it was indeed spotless. Eva had scrubbed the dust away, and the floor shined like a newly polished mirror. But she was just resting, trying not to move, trying not to let her smile droop, waiting for her husband to return. She had to wait for him and greet him at the right place and time to make him happy.

Otherwise, he would get angry.

So she waited, seated in her best polka dot dress, love beads, and high heels, lipstick freshly applied. She dulled the heavy throbbing of her heart. He would be so happy this time.

The door opened at half past five, and Johan stepped inside. He was a tall, muscular man dressed in a smart black suit. His hair was blond, and his solid square jaw line was a wonder.

Eva swooped down on Johan and kissed him gently on the cheek. She beamed with pride and asked him about his day.

Keep to the script, keep to the script, she thought.

"The Japanese investment deal has been sealed," he said, kissing her back on the lips, lingering there for a moment too long. "South Africa will be getting more iron in the coming months."

Tearing herself away from him, she replaced her smile. "I have dinner ready for you!" she said, guiding Johan towards the table. "It's your favourite too, Lamb potjiekos and Greek salad."

Johan's eyebrows raised in delight. He kissed her again, his lips hungrily against her pretend enjoyment.

The two settled to eat. Eva continued to smile, eating very little. She had to be thin for him.

Johan ate hungrily, devouring the food with the mad gusto of a hyena.

That was until he got to the salad. He frowned and beckoned to Eva, ordering her to go to him.

Eva knew by the frown that she had made a mistake. Her heart screamed as she dragged herself up and walked towards him, still smiling her plastic smile.

“What’s wrong honey?” she asked, trying desperately not to fear what would happen.

“The salad dressing is too tangy,” he said, anger boiling up from the surface. His beautiful face turned a horrid shade of red.

“I’m so sorry Honey; I didn’t mean to…….” Eva tried to say; she knew arguing was fruitless. It was worthless to disagree or try to tame the man she used to love. The back of his hand hit her with the force of a cannonball. She staggered, clutching the side of her face that received the punishment. Tears were falling, her perfect makeup smudged and messy.

He climbed out of his chair and hit her again, sending Eva tumbling to the floor. She begged him to stop.

An eternity passed before he finally held Eva sobbing in his arms. He soothed her before telling her not to make that mistake again.

Eva nodded.

Later that night, as she slept, she felt her husband’s hands slide over her body. His invasive hands caressed her roughly, hungry for her.

She said no, even though she had learned that he didn’t listen to her requests. She was supposed to fulfil her duty regardless of what she felt.

His assaulting hands soon found their way inside her. She let it happen. There was no way to fight back against him. He had to play the dutiful wife.

As it happened, she gazed at the ceiling, imagining the Eiffel Tower and the smell of freshly cooked bread, the type the French were famous for. She couldn’t remember the name, she thought, dreaming of walking down the streets of Paris, seeing the Tower, and holding hands with the man she used to love.

They always had plans to go, but Johan would always find a way to postpone the trip. It might have been about money, the hostility between European countries and

South Africa, or the lack of time to go on holiday. There was something that kept her from seeing Paris.

After he was done, Johan was fast asleep, finally satisfied with himself. She waited until his breathing was steady and rhythmic. She then slipped out of bed to wash, careful not to awaken the beast.

She missed the rain, and how she and her school friends back in Cape Town used to play in it during storms. Now she was lucky to get the post from the mailbox outside. She let the shower water pour onto her violated body, and the nagging shame crept within her. It was gnawing at her soul.

Johan was gone the next day, not even leaving a kiss on her cheek like he used to. She cleaned up the filthy table and set about scrubbing the floor.

Johan wasn't always like the man he was now, Eva remembered. When she first met him, she graduated from UCT as a journalist. He was in finance and the model of the perfect gentleman. He was as gentle as a baby, as kind as a priest, and had the patience of a saint.

The change happened after their marriage. On the third day of the honeymoon, he wanted sex. Eva said no, but he wouldn't listen. When she fought back, he hit her and beat her into submission. That was the first time he forced her to stay indoors because of the terrible bruises he inflicted.

He would be nice. He was always nice until something went wrong. He might hit her, shame her; he might demand sex as payment for her failure. Sometimes, he simply took what he wanted when needed, never mind what she said.

Eva pushed the memory out of her mind and focused on the floor scrubbing, forcing back the tears that threatened to overwhelm her.

The cleaning would take all day. When she suggested they could get a maid from the township, he said no. It would cost too much, and the paperwork would be too tedious. Instead, he wanted Eva to clean, as it would be cheaper. She would be the perfect housewife.

After the floor was tidy, Eva wiped down the windows. It was there that she watched the forbidden outside move by, the idyllic beautiful waves crashing against the

golden shore. The life of the people going wherever they wanted to go was too busy for her, too chaotic for her tranquil existence.

How did I mess up? Why do I consistently and repeatedly mess up? She scrubbed harder, a renewed vigour filling her to avoid another punishment.

Time continued to tick over. He had to be coming soon. She cooked the dinner, a roast duck with grilled potatoes and green salad, complete with koeksusters for dessert. She ensured everything was perfect. Eva grilled the potatoes perfectly, the duck tasted delicious, and she set the table nicely. She was washed and clean, and now she was waiting for him in her special place to greet him at the door.

Johan arrived, and she kissed him on the cheek, which he gladly received and returned. He ate with gusto, a smile of satisfaction on his face as he did so. All was well.

He didn't hit her; nothing was wrong, she would be fine tonight.

Much like last night, he fucked her. He didn't wait for her to say yes. The next thing she knew, she was under him, feeling him inside her, hurting her with each disgusting, sickening movement. She stared at the ceiling again, trying to block out the pain, pretending to be enraptured by his power.

When she realized it was about to end, she gripped her husband's shoulders' preparing to show him how good he was.

Her hands sank onto something wet and slimy as if she felt a damp, mold-encrusted shower drain. The icy cold water sent a shock of disgust through Eva. She wanted to scream; it sent shivers down her spine. It wasn't sweat but mucus.

He climaxed with an animal groan before removing himself from her. Her heart was racing, deafening anything else around her. Her body repulsed her. She wanted her soul to leave her filthy disgusting body and be free.

Johan snored soundly, content, and happy with his conquest.

Eva crawled out of bed and crept into the shower. She scrubbed herself raw, desperate to get rid of the stains and the horrid fluids inside her. She looked down at her hand and saw it.

She wanted to vomit, the strange mucus pushing her toward the breaking point. She stopped herself. If she vomited, that would mean something to clean up.

It had to be sweat. There was nothing else that it could have been. It was a warm night, nothing to be concerned about. He would let her know if something was wrong.

After cleaning, she slept on the bed covers, desperate not to touch the wet spot underneath.

When she awoke, he was gone, leaving a mucus stain on the bed. Disgusted, she stripped the bed and washed it, scrubbing it thoroughly, desperately, anger filling her at what he kept doing to her.

Later, as she washed the windows looking outside on a typical cold overcast winter's day, she saw something across the street, on the side of a bookshop.

It was painted lavishly, much like African art she had seen when she was younger. But it had a haunting quality. It was black and white, depicting a bizarre humanoid dolphin standing on its hind legs with hungry human arms outstretched. The disgusting smile, a mockery of man and dolphin, grinned back at her with strangely human teeth. Its cold, soulless eyes bore into her. The face, a once human face, was stretched painfully over a dolphin frame.

He Who Accepts the Beast Becomes One Himself

Those words, before her eyes, were cruel and blunt, painted in pure black paint on the wall. It was a warning. How on earth did such a disgusting work of art appear overnight?

She tore her eyes from the painting and scrubbed with renewed frenzy, putting all her anxiety into cleaning the windows. Then, finally, her eyes dragged themselves to the dolphin. Of course, no well-meaning Afrikaner would paint something like that. A black man or a group of them had to have sneaked in and painted it. But the entire night? With nobody seeing them?

She would have called the police, but she didn't know the number, and there was nobody to talk to. Johan would not be happy if she talked to anyone or complained about anything, let alone a painting.

She silently prayed that someone would clean the wall and continued scrubbing. The time was drawing near. ; She prepared a fresh lettuce salad and chicken with Malva pudding. Everything was perfect again. She would make it through this evening.

Johan came in wearing gloves and a thick woollen coat covering him from head to toe. He never took off the scarf or any of his winter clothing. He refused to let her kiss him. She abided by this new rule. She didn't touch him at all. He declined to speak at all, remaining completely silent throughout the meal.

Eva watched him closely. He seemed disinterested in eating, only consuming for sustenance. He didn't ask about her day, nor did he typically talk about his. Instead, he just shovelled food into his mouth.

He finished the meal without saying a word and left Eva to clean up after him. She did so, and a sensation of dread grew within her as she washed the dishes. *Could it be infectious?* She thought a hole was developing in her stomach. *Perhaps I should sleep in the spare room.*

The thought of her asking her husband not to sleep in the same bed as him made her skin crawl. He wasn't in the mood for deviation from the perfect marriage. Breathing deeply, steeling herself for whatever was to come, she entered the bedroom.

The room was already pitch black. Eva was guided only by her husband's groans and grunts in bed.

"How are you feeling?" she asked, as timidly and meekly as she could manage. The grunts and groans sounded more animal than human.

"I...am...fine....," he gasped.

"Should I call a doctor?" she asked, trying to find the phone.

"NO," he shouted, a piercing shriek punctuating his order.

"Shall I sleep in the guest room?"

Something vaguely shaped like a hand grabbed Eva's shoulder, slimy mucus sent chills down her spine.

She wanted to scream and yell for help. Instead, she shook her head in a peacekeeping gesture. She sank into the bed, letting the disgusting fluid seep into the bedclothes, reminding her of fluid stains she had to sleep through over the years.

She waited for him to make his move, waited for him to invade her again.

Nothing happened. It was as if he wasn't there.

She continued waiting with heavy breathing. Maybe he would spare her tonight.

She woke up to something on top of her, something tearing through her with animalistic fervour. It squeaked and whistled with disturbingly childish glee. The pain that seared through Eva brought tears to her eyes and terror to her heart. Before she could scream again, a wet webbed hand clamped her mouth shut. It continued to click and chortle its inhuman joy as it thrust in and out.

Consciousness failed Eva.

She awoke with her husband gone, the clothes soaked in mucus, and a red stain pooled around her crotch.

Eva shakily climbed out of bed, naked and bruised. *He must have done it while I was dreaming*, she thought; the dolphin sounds fresh in her mind. The art she had seen had to have influenced her, merged into the nightly torment. It couldn't have been confirmed. She had just seen too much of that Zulu art. She had been influenced by it, and her mind used it to make sense of Johan's assault.

In a daze, she cleaned herself, stripped the bed, and staggered to the living room, the pain sharp.

She tried not to cry. She was just too weak for him. She had to be stronger than whatever was afflicting him.

She noticed that Johan's jacket and shoes were in their place. He hadn't gone out.

The terror came back in full force, tightening in her throat. *Where is he, then?*

"He is in the guest room," said a male voice that echoed with a buzz of smaller voices in different languages.

This voice was coming from the living room.

Eva ran to the kitchen, pulled out a steak knife, and followed the sound. Her mind was a haze of panic.

She found herself in the sitting room, eyes glued to a shadow on the far side. It was the shape of a black man in a local Zulu dress. He knelt with one knee on the floor, spear and shield on his back.

“What are you?” she ordered. “How did you get here?”

“Your husband isn’t human anymore...” said the black man in perfect Afrikaans. “We have revealed his inner beast.” He spoke solemnly, with a hint of sadness.

“What are you talking about,” she demanded, another scream rising in her throat.

“He accepted the beast when he first hit you. We will reveal the beast inside to all.” said the shadow before fading, “Africa will see the beast. Run, for he is coming for you.”

The words: **He Who Accepts the Beast Becomes One Himself** flashed in Eva’s mind. *What was happening?* she wondered, paralyzed as to what to do. If she found the suitcases, where would she run to? She had no friends. Her family was in Cape Town, and nobody in the town knew she existed. She couldn’t drive, and she didn’t know where to go.

The house was deathly quiet. It seemed like the entire world froze still, waiting for her next move. Eva ran upstairs, put the knife down, and tore the bedroom apart, looking for a suitcase. Upon finding one, she locked the bedroom door and began to empty the wardrobe into the case, stuffing everything, she thought she was going to need into it.

Money. She thought in horror. He had all the money.

She quickly found his wallet, with two one hundred rand notes inside. She had no idea if that would be enough for the Durban to Cape Town bus ticket, but she could work as a cleaner between destinations to cover any extra costs.

There was a sharp crack, wood breaking apart, and the guest bedroom door had broken apart.

A high-pitched chortle followed.

Heart racing, Eva rushed to squeeze the remaining clothes into the suitcase. Whistling, chirps, and trills, along with the heavy plodding footsteps, grew louder.

Oh Lord, he knows I am here!

A strong force rammed against the bedroom door, causing it to crack instantly. She was cornered. The drop outside the window would be too significant, and the bed sheets were gone. She grabbed the knife.

"I know you are in theeeerrree," said a voice that Eva barely recognized as Johan's. A manic squeal was reminiscent of a dog toy mingled with the words.

"I want yoooo!" The voice alternated between his ordinarily deep voice and high-pitched squeals.

Eva readied herself, shaking, knife in hand, tears of terror falling down her face.

The door collapsed in on itself, revealing what Johan had become.

His eyes were no longer hazel but jet black, and a long wide smile cut into his cheeks, revealing rows of knife-like teeth. His hair had fallen out, leaving skin tinged with a light grey, shiny transparent mucus that made a thin coat all over his body. His legs were still normal, although the feet and hands were webbed. The arms were bent at unnatural angles as if God were twisting them into a mockery of fins. A blow hole had formed on his temple, and a fully formed fin had grown out of his back. He was naked, complete with an erect tentacle-like penis.

Eva froze momentarily. The monster began to move toward her, giggling with manic glee, and chirping like a downing bird. His arms were flippers outstretched, and his smile cut cruelly at the sight of prey.

Johan was gone. The creature before her was the Johan that he had been since the honeymoon.

Eva screamed, ran forward, and rammed the knife into the monster's head. Then using the suitcase, she hit it as hard as she could. The already staggered creature fell to the ground from the blow.

Eva fled the scene, suitcase in hand, and broke down the front door. The sea air filled her nostrils, alien to her after being locked up for so long. Passersby, already seeing the commotion, ran to help her.

The following hours passed in a blur, and Eva soon found herself in a darkened room. It was barren except for only a hash black metal table and chair, the latter she sat upon, facing the former.

A distant clang, followed by a pair of heavy boots, stomped down a hallway to her left. Eva's head was still spinning. She didn't know the time of day, but her stomach begged for food. A metal door opened, and a powerful man stepped into the room. He was dressed in a smart black business suit and gave off the air of a soldier. He was in his early forties.

"Hallo, Mrs. Visser," he said, his tone pleasant and comforting like a father figure.

"Hello," Eva replied She curled into herself, speaking softly. "If I may ask, where am I?"

"You are at the Bureau of State Security: BOSS." the man said with a smile. "I am Hendrik Van der Poel, and we at the Bureau would like to ask you some questions about what happened to Johan Visser."

The name caused Eva to wince, "Okay."

Van der Poel offered a hand out to Eva. "You have nothing to fear her; you are safe."

"Can I get some food, please?" Eva asked, barely able to produce a whisper.

As Eva ate, she told Van der Poel everything that happened. The abuse, the art outside the bookstore, the shadowy Zulu who appeared in her living room, and the monster Johan became. Van der Poel listened intently, writing on a notepad intermittently, handing her a tissue when she cried.

After she had finished her story, Van der Poel wore an expression of grim horror.

"Please wait here; I shall be back." He left promptly, slamming the door behind her.

Eva, could not stop shaking, her face wet with tears from all the memories. She stared simply at the empty plate, waiting for him to return.

When he eventually returned, still smiling with empathy, he handed her a document folder containing two pages.

"All you have to do is sign the document, and then you are a free woman." Eva gingerly picked up the folder and read the contents.

“In signing the agreement, you will swear to never mention the creature or anything supernatural to anyone. In exchange, the state will cover travel costs, therapy sessions, housing, and bills for a year while helping you find a job. You will be expected to find yourself a husband in two years.”

Horror stung her as she finished the document.

“Failure to adhere to the demands will result in institutionalization in Valkenberg for destabilizing behaviour. Do you understand what that means?”

Eva wanted to protest and warn South Africa of what happened to Johan. But she had heard the stories within that mental hospital- the cruelties and humiliation she didn't want to risk. She signed the order with a heavy nod. Van der Poel grinned in approval.

“We shall send you to Cape Town at once. Thank you, Ms. Visser, for your cooperation. South Africa is proud of you.”

Later, bundled on a bus headed for Cape Town, Eva would stare out the window at the rain-soaked roads between towns and settlements. Eva would sometimes see the art she saw on the side of the bookshop. Always the same horrifying warning, but always a different animal monster. And yet, everyone pretended not to see the art, to shudder under the horror of a Hyena creature or a Toad-human nightmare. She, like everyone else, didn't want to acknowledge the presence that was consuming South Africa.

Nova 2023 Finalist

Fishing with my Father Andre Ian Clarke

One would think, considering my career, I wouldn't feel any fear sitting in a small, windowless room. After all, it wasn't my "first rodeo" as the cliché so eloquently states. Being a somewhat lauded journalist (not my words), who cut his formative teeth writing during the final throes of the chaos of pre-democracy South Africa, me finding myself in interrogation rooms should not be an unusual situation. After all, although this room may have been far nicer than

many of the places I found myself in before being questioned by various species of government thug, it was still just an interrogation room. I couldn't suppress a bitter smirk. Decorate the room all you want in calm pastel colours, add some freshly cut flowers in vases, hang one or two pretty but twee and generic paintings of sunsets. I still felt that familiar twist of fear.

I shifted my position a little, trying to ease my back. Like the rest of the room, the chair I sat upon was comfortable and tasteful in a nondescript way, but I had been waiting for more than an hour. No doubt someone with the distinct aura of "bureaucrat "at best, "special forces" at worst would be paying me a visit shortly.

*

It would be a lie to say I didn't have the vaguest clue why I found myself sitting in this serene detention area; the reporting I had been doing over the last two or three years had certainly attracted attention.

To be fair, the reading public didn't seem to care terribly much. After all, as long as they had reliable electricity in their homes, why would they give a damn how it was generated?

Of course, the interest my articles generated (excuse the weak pun there, I have to amuse myself somehow, don't I?) was unfortunately only from the very target of my investigation.

Eskom.

A meagre ten years ago, the mere mention of the power utility would enrage just about any reasonable South African.

I certainly hate to milk a dead cow and repeat yet again the sordid and ridiculous history of Eskom's fall, but why not? Until somebody comes into this goddamned room and explains just how much excrement I am in, why not just run through it all again? Perhaps recalling the utility's initial downfall may ease my anxiety.

Let's simplify as much as possible though, as a few decades of reporting on the spectacular failures of our state-owned entities has left me jaded and bored. At least I can pretty much recite it all without consulting my notes these days.

*

Power to the people was the concept. Power to a few was the result.

A few connected (my apologies, I couldn't resist another pun) individuals capitalised on preferential procurement all in the name of empowerment. While this began the feeding frenzy of unscrupulous businesses on the carcass of Eskom, the rest of us who couldn't afford alternate sources of power suffered

in darkness.

Despite the so-called socialist leanings of the regime, in the early 2000's Eskom shifted to a profit-making model, rather than an entity which existed to provide the country with one single thing.

Electricity.

This abrupt change in business model was the lurch at the top of the slippery slope.

Shady business deals were conducted (hey, another pun!), all in the name of economic empowerment.

I couldn't help but smirk again. These deals became ever more shady, just as South Africa itself became ever more shady without lights and power.

Ironically, it was just before one of the country's proudest moments - the 2010 Soccer World Cup - where all the corruption and its devastating effect on ordinary citizens passed the point of no return. Only the inner cabal of corrupt officials, incapable Eskom employees and absurdly greedy "private business" emerged unscathed as Eskom began its inexorable slide into a sinkhole of uselessness of its own making.

Move ahead to just over a decade later. South Africa enters the COVID epidemic. A

period of fear, financial instability and social anxiety. Already on its knees, the country faces the indignity and sweeping economic destruction of regular load shedding to add to the fun.

Stage six.

Something considered a bad joke when the load shedding scourge just began in the late 2 000's, Stage six and beyond became an everyday reality for the country.

Through Eskom's downfall, I was always there to comment. To write. To report to the public how contractors were charging a hundred thousand Rand to supply Eskom bathrooms with a dozen rolls of toilet paper. Single ply *nogal*, the cheeky bastards.

Although I certainly wasn't the only journalist recording the downward spiral of Eskom, I ensured played my part on keeping our citizens informed.

I wrote constantly on the happenings at the SOE. Also, the lack of happenings. I wrote through several South African presidents. I moved from print to digital.

Through one failed marriage, a mild but stubborn drinking problem - and through a new face staring back at me in the mirror every few years - I told South Africa what Eskom was doing to the nation.

Admittedly, I never really had any hope things would improve as dramatically as they eventually did. Things were too far gone. Most of the unblinkered of my fellow countrymen held the same view I'd warrant, but who knows.

I certainly learned to bury my head in the sand due to the sheer hopelessness of it all. Apathy. The best cure all known to humanity since chicken soup.

Then it all changed of course. And with a haste even the most blindly optimistic South African couldn't predict.

Enter one Doctor Abrahams. A visionary to make Jobs, Gates, Einstein, Tesla, Zuckerberg - the whole bloody lot of them - look like a bunch of primates just learning how to hold a stick.

And I mean it literally. Enter Doctor Abrahams. Because without knocking, the rake thin woman with the famous lazy eye entered my serene little interrogation room.

*

The pole-like lady barely glanced at me before sitting at the opposite side of the bare table. She hadn't offered to shake my hand, but there was no need to be fair. It wasn't the first time I had met her. However, this time she clearly there was to interview *me*.

"Mr van der Wald", she said in her peculiarly bland accent, "have you been offered any refreshments? Apart from this water here?"

She indicated the glass jug and glass before me. The jug was dewy with condensation. "Not yet," I said warily, "But I had some water already thanks." She looked like she was about to call someone, but I interrupted her as she turned her head towards the door.

"I'm fine though thanks," I said as politely as I could. "I'd rather just know why I am stuck in this detention room."

Her thin lips twitched in what might have been a smile. As always, that lazy left eye of hers was disconcerting. It was difficult to look her in the face without appearing to stare at it.

*

"Well, Mr. van der Wald - can I call you Gerhard?" Abrahams asked with precisely no emotion.

"You can call me Elvis or whatever you want if you can just tell me why I'm

here." That little twitch of a smile again.

"Well Gerhard, I'd just like to know why you are so committed to spewing so much bad press about Eskom?"

The outright straightforwardness of her question might have caught me unawares, but as I had already said - it was obvious my criticism of her policies was why I was here.

I tried to maintain some composure.

"Well, Dr Abrahams," I replied carefully, "I've hardly been the first journalist to point out irregularities. The public needs to know, and circumstances seem to of late to seem to enforce this view."

She raised a corner of her lips once again in that ghostly imitation of a smile, but her iciness remained.

"Not so long ago, you were one of my most ardent supporters. Yet over the last three or four years, your enthusiasm for my methods seems to have waned. Care to explain?"

"You know damn well why I've been questioning your way of doing things."

"Indulge me." Her slightly sinister eye seemed to glow for a moment.

"Well, call me old fashioned, but it seems to me one should certainly question why people suddenly start disappearing without a trace."

That little flicker of a smile returned for a much longer moment. There was no humour in it, no cheer nor joy. It put me in mind of the bared teeth on the faces of exhumed mummies.

"Tell me Gerhard," she said in a strangely soft voices, "what is your fondest memory?"

*

In five short years, South Africa became not only one of the greenest countries in the whole world, but also one of the safest. All thanks to Doctor Abrahams, and her tenure as minster of science and technology.

And of course, I was there to document it all, from the very beginning.

She began her public sector role with minimal fanfare, but her appointment correlated with a gradual but efficient cleaning out of Eskom. As expected, government claimed her competency as their own, but Abrahams didn't seem to care and simply went about her business. By the time Eskom was purged of its worst elements it was as already too late for government to backtrack on her appointment. Anyone with even a slight tarnish of corruption was

systemically removed. Of course, at first the public were baying for the blood of those deemed most corrupt and responsible for the power utility's numerous failures. Nonetheless, as load shedding eased, so too did the fury of the citizens.

Dr Abrahams's next move absolutely stunned the entire country.

I remember that press gathering only too well, as it had coincided with the day my divorce became final. Looking back, all of these moments linking together may have meant something. Or perhaps not. Either way, I was as shocked (another pun?) as everyone else in that stately conference room in Sandton by Dr Abrahams's now famous words.

"Criminals in this country will never entirely pay their debt to society unless they give something back for their crimes. A room and meals every day is not enough. From this day forward, the second of August 2027, convicted criminals will work hard labour in our power plants country wide to provide inexpensive and reliable electricity for us all."

*

Sure - her reforms at Eskom were controversial to say the least, but many lauded her radical views. I had never heard such noise in my life. It was several hundred human beings erupting into incredulous and frankly insensible chatter, and not the hotel's foundations shuddering from an earthquake.

Few people were stunned into silence by Abrahams's words, but I definitely was one of them. Fortuitous it seems now, as I was one of the few to really register the ripple of emotion across the thin woman's sallow face. Dr Abrahams's expression was a momentary one of insidious pleasure, like a predator faced with much weaker prey that wanted to fight back.

Soon her face was her usual emotionless, calm mask as she awaited order and the barrage of questions to follow.

*

The rest of the press conference and the months following her announcement have been well documented to the point of indoctrination. Convicted criminals, particularly those of the inherently violent and dangerous variety, were to become human hamsters. These once severely dangerous now hapless convicts had their strictly regulated exercise time on the "hamster wheels" - enormous tracks of treadmills providing enough energy generation to all but eliminate load shedding.

The hamster wheels concept was brilliant in its simplicity, and it ruthlessly solved two of the biggest problems to plague South Africa for decades in one fell swoop. The electricity crisis would be solved by the by-product of the crime crisis.

The human rights naysayers were silenced swiftly by the overwhelming numbers of those in favour of ensuring the country's most despicable criminals actually paid their debt to society. Hardened criminals could never repay those they had wronged; but a kind of grim satisfaction was gained by simultaneously punishing miscreants while providing clean electricity for almost every South African citizen. "Let them sweat out their crimes," was the nation's call.

*

Even globally this relentless approach was praised. Soon, several other countries followed our example.

But we were always the leaders. The pioneers. We were greening the land, the economy and deterring criminals in a way nobody could have ever foreseen. Slowly at first, but soon momentum was gained in eliminating the dependency on dirty coal. Likewise, and perhaps even more significantly - the crime rate began to decrease. In 2029, crime in South Africa, even of the pettiest variety - had all but ceased.

And of course, that's when load shedding began again.

*

"My-my fondest memory?" I stuttered, the abrupt change in conversation startling me. "Yes." Dr Abrahams replied. "No judgement at all, but I am just curious." "Well..." I was surprised into the first truth that came to mind. "I used to love fishing with my father when I was just a little kid." She grinned that rictus smile again.

"That must have been the early 70's. A very different country then."

I frowned and tapped the table angrily. "Yes, but what has this to do with anything? Why am I here? All I have done is my job, to the best of my journalistic ability. Of course, when you insinuate, I have created negative press for you and Eskom, I'm assuming this is why your jackbooted thugs escorted me here from - I must say - what was rather a pleasant lunch just around the corner."

"You assume correctly. I won't insult your intelligence to suggest otherwise." I said it earlier, being in four walls like these wasn't my first rodeo. I sighed heavily.

"So what now," I muttered with what I hoped was an intimidating glare. "You'll charge me - with what exactly? I ask again, what exactly have I done - apart from tell the truth?"

Abrahams leaned back in her chair, her eyes narrowing slightly in a kind of tired resignation.

"Mr van der - *Gerhard* -" she said in that same strangely soft tone, "the truth may be important, but when you consider where this country was just a short while - the precise truth can be dangerous."

I continued to glare at her. "Dr Abrahams, people are *missing*. Perhaps nobody cared when it was murderers and rapists off to the hamster wheels for hard labour at Eskom, but the homeless? The addicted? Even some of the innocent poor?" I paused, emphasizing my next words. "Even some *journalists* are allegedly missing. And I simply don't accept that suddenly some have moved overseas or retired or changed careers."

As I spoke, a cold tingling caressed my spine. Whatever was happening in this interview had happened to others before me.

My blood froze as I spoke my next words.

"I'm about to find out what happened to all those missing persons, aren't I?" I said with a calmness that didn't betray my growing dread. "And... I'm guessing I won't like it?"

Abrahams's masklike expression remained, but her next words actually seemed sorrowful. "Gerhard, I'm afraid for all the good we've - I've - done for the country, there is a price

to pay." She sighed deeply. "You are a relatively private individual. You are comfortable with being alone. Indeed, you seem to prefer your solitude. You are divorced. No kids. Your ex-wife remarried and moved overseas."

I was stunned by her accuracy.

"You've certainly done your homework." I swallowed loudly. "When I disappear, few people may realise I'm gone."

"It's not without regret you will no longer be of service to South Africa." Abrahams said quietly, and I could almost believe her. "Your initial appraisal of my methodology at Eskom

won us much support. However, over the last while, your questions were making me, well, uncomfortable."

"People are missing." I said. "Their disappearances are somehow linked to what has been done with our electricity supply."

That lazy eye suddenly looked extremely sinister once more.

"You are correct of course. At first, criminals were enough. Then, as the prisons began to empty, we had to consider other... sources."

I was horrified. I certainly never had all the facts, but society's forgotten and under classes had been reported to have disappeared. Her candour meant she had nothing to hide. Which meant, I probably was also due to disappear.

"You mentioned your favourite memory was fishing with your father when you were a young boy. If that was your happiest memory - surely, you'd be quite satisfied to relive that memory over and over until you died?" Abrahams sounded as if she was speaking more to herself than to me. "You will be happy every single second of your life, until your final breath. Your sacrifice, after all the negative press you have been spewing, will serve a greater good." My horror turned to confusion.

"What on earth are you talking about?" She smiled grimly.

"Have you even watched the movie The Matrix, Gerhard?" "Yes, but I hardly see what that has to do with-"

She cut me off abruptly.

"You are to become a human battery Gerhard. To power Eskom."

*

My entire body went cold. At the same time, two largely built men in hazmat suits entered the room. Each held what looked like a cattle prod. Dr Abrahams hardly seemed to notice them.

"My reforms became *too* efficient," she said, nodding at the faceless thugs. One went over

to one of the sunset paintings, and pressed a button concealed within its frame. With barely a sound, the entire room began to descend, like a freight elevator.

Panic began to overtake my fear and I jumped to my feet. The thug closest to me crackled his cattle prod thing. Miniature arcs of lightning cobwebbed across its tip. I backed away, my heart thudding like a bass drum.

"Careful," Abrahams warned. "He's not that young any more. If he dies from a heart attack, you will take his place."

The thug backed off, as silent as the descending room. The walls had lowered enough to discern what was essentially an elevator shaft; brushed steel; cold, hard and unforgiving as the thin woman still seated calmly at the table.

"As I said, my reforms were *too* efficient. The prisons emptied, and so too did our new source of power. Awaiting trial prisoners never had their time in court. Instead, they were better utilised in Eskom. Then those petty criminals also became too few. As an unforeseen consequence, crime dwindled, making what was once one of the most dangerous countries in the world one of the safest."

The room continued to slowly descend. The original ceiling, the only part of the room remaining, was perhaps five or six stories above me. There was clearly nothing to do but listen to this insane, and not to put too fine a point on it - *evil* - woman.

"Petty thieves, trespassers, even vandals were captured. No matter how many *batteries* we had, we never had *enough*." She stared me directly in face, her own sinister eye once more devoid of any discernible emotion. "And that's why we had to start taking the homeless. The poor. And of course, those reporters who had nothing but ill to say about Eskom and me and my methods."

The room stopped with barely a sound nor a jolt.

The wall behind me slid to the side to reveal something beyond my most nightmarish imagination. A long metal walkway connected to a huge, cavernous chamber; brightly lit and stacked wall to wall, floor to ceiling with what resembled oversized test tubes. Perhaps thousands of them, it was difficult to ascertain how large the chamber was.

I couldn't see the ends of the chamber, and had only the vaguest idea of where the ceiling was. Below the walkway, the test tubes descended into a brightly lit but ill-defined chasm.

The worst of it was the test tubes weren't empty. Although a few seemed to contain nothing but a viscous, milky liquid, most of the thousands I could see contained human bodies. Each was connected to tentacle-like cabling, and various lights of different colours pulsed around dark frames holding each test tube.

"Welcome to the Source Gerhard," Abrahams said. "Here you will be processed, and you will serve your country with an honour you couldn't imagine."

"Honour?" I snarled, ready for a fight I knew I would lose. "You're using people as *fuel*."

"Not unlike we did with the dinosaurs and their remains." Abrahams nodded, and both biohazard guards each took one of my arms.

"These are people!" I shouted. I was ignored.

"You will be put into a deep sleep. You will feel no pain, nor even any emotional distress. For the rest of your days, you will generate power for a grateful, unknowing public. All the while repeating your most precious memory."

She waved her arm vaguely towards the racks of human power cells.

"For many of these people, this existence is preferable to a life of poverty, hopelessness and pain."

The thugs gestured towards the end of the walkway, where a previously unseen door opened, showing revealing what looked like a high-tech lab.

End if the road I thought bitterly as I was led gently but firmly along the walkway.

"What happens when you run out of dissidents?" I said through gritted teeth, my horror unable to override my disgust at this evil woman. "You're already running out of the homeless and the poor. You have no more criminals! What then? The disabled? Minorities? You are no more than a mass murderer!"

Dr Abrahams revealed no emotion, but her lazy eye widened slightly.

"Nobody is being killed Gerhard. And as for where we find more of our... batteries. Well, that is not your concern. I thank you for what you are doing for your country. I really do

hope you truly relished this memory of fishing with your father."

Dr Abrahams stepped back into the detention room, pressing the same button the guard had earlier. With a final cold glance at me, the room began to ascend.

"Power to the people!" I yelled with a kind of defiant madness. Abrahams said nothing as she ascended out of sight. I gave her the finger and saw mild shock on her face.

"I changed my mind," I said to the guards as they led me to the lab, grinning like a lunatic. "Fishing with my father was my favourite memory. Now it's zapping Abrahams. Make that the one that gets repeated ad infinitum."

The guards were silent, but I couldn't stop cackling. For a brief moment, my terror was gone.

Blasts from the pastfrom PROBE 138

September 2008

As we've had a very rough year, I thought I would end off with the light-hearted Wormholes that were written during the Star Trek Mini-Con that was held at Wits earlier in that year. Somehow I get the feeling that Wesley Crusher was not the most popular member of the Next Generation Enterprise crew.....

The Beautification of the Borg

Alison Main, Ashley Cuerden, Owen Swart

The bounteous Borg, we are everyone. Because you are us, we care about you. No civilization will ever leave us unhugged.

"We're really excited to meet you" "We're so eccentric, our socks never match."

"If you like you can have some of our implants"

"With these fashion decals you'll be the envy of all your friends, cell phones will be Vulcan green with envy"

"There is always a little Borg hamlet on every street corner, Free eye tests!"

"We love it when all your plans come together.

If you want us, you can always find us – we are the B-team."

Surf's Up

Favienne Walther, Liz Simmonds, Iain Sinclair, Cedric Abrahams

Ensign Cody was furious. "Omo, I mean oh no. There is no Skip! What will Mag say?" He pulled on his away strip; yellow, and discarded the soiled red shirt he had planned to wear dirtside.

Ensign Crusher was steaming. He would have to wear the traditional red shirt.

They beamed down into a swamp of triple concentrated enzymes, which made all colour Vanish from any fabric.

Suddenly a current began to rotate them. They realized they were stuck in a spin cycle.

Crusher was sucked into the Vortex!

"At least", mused Captain Kirk, "it was a clean death."

Gender Bender

Heidi Hertz, Shaun v.d Berg Devan Main, Debra Pienaar

In the Alpha Quadrant near the Bajoran wormhole the Enterprise hovers. Wesley Crusher is performing routine maintenance on the transporter. Spot is chasing her tail. All is well with life. Suddenly the ship gets sucked into the wormhole. Wesley

comes to and finds himself in what appears to be a litterbox and with an uncontrollable urge to lick his genitals. Data arrives and realizes that a freak transporter accident has amalgamated Wesley and Spot. Data recreates the conditions. Back on the ship only Spot materializes. Wesley Crusher is never seen or heard from again

Cliff Hanger

Anya den Teuling, Ron Cowley, Franz Tomasek, Norman Pringle

Wesley seethed. How could he be stuck on this dusty planet while the luscious Amelia waited.

Perhaps he could throw sand in the works and get back early.

That sand dune looked rather unstable.

Perhaps this was the time to test his new hand tractor beam and bring down the whole thing on Data's head.

He directed the beam at the base of the dune and set it to loosen the foundation and trigger a landslide. Unbeknownst to him, he had wrought better than he anticipated. The cliff behind the dune teetered, tottered and came crashing down.

Wesley Crushed.



Once again, we have had the winning story from last year's Nova competition translated into Italian and published in *Mondi Incantati*, which contains both awarded stories from Trofeo RiLL (and from other literary awards that are organized in Italy) and some winning stories from other literary awards with which we have partnered. Since 2013, we published in MI winning stories from literary awards organized in United Kingdom, Finland, Ireland, Australia, South Africa, Portugal and Spain.

SFFSA is proud to continue this tradition with our fellow SF&F fans in Italy. Here is the cover of the 2024 *Mondi Incantati* and below it the information you will need to find out more about it.



The page about the book:

<https://www.rill.it/si-riparano-macchine-del-tempo>

The page about the RiLL World Tour (containing all information about the foreign literary awards and their short-stories in the book)

<https://www.rill.it/rill-world-tour-2024>

The page for making an order of the book, via PayPal or credit card:

<https://www.rill.it/ordini-antologie>

Finally, the page devoted to the book in Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.it/dp/BODMHBJKD8/>

