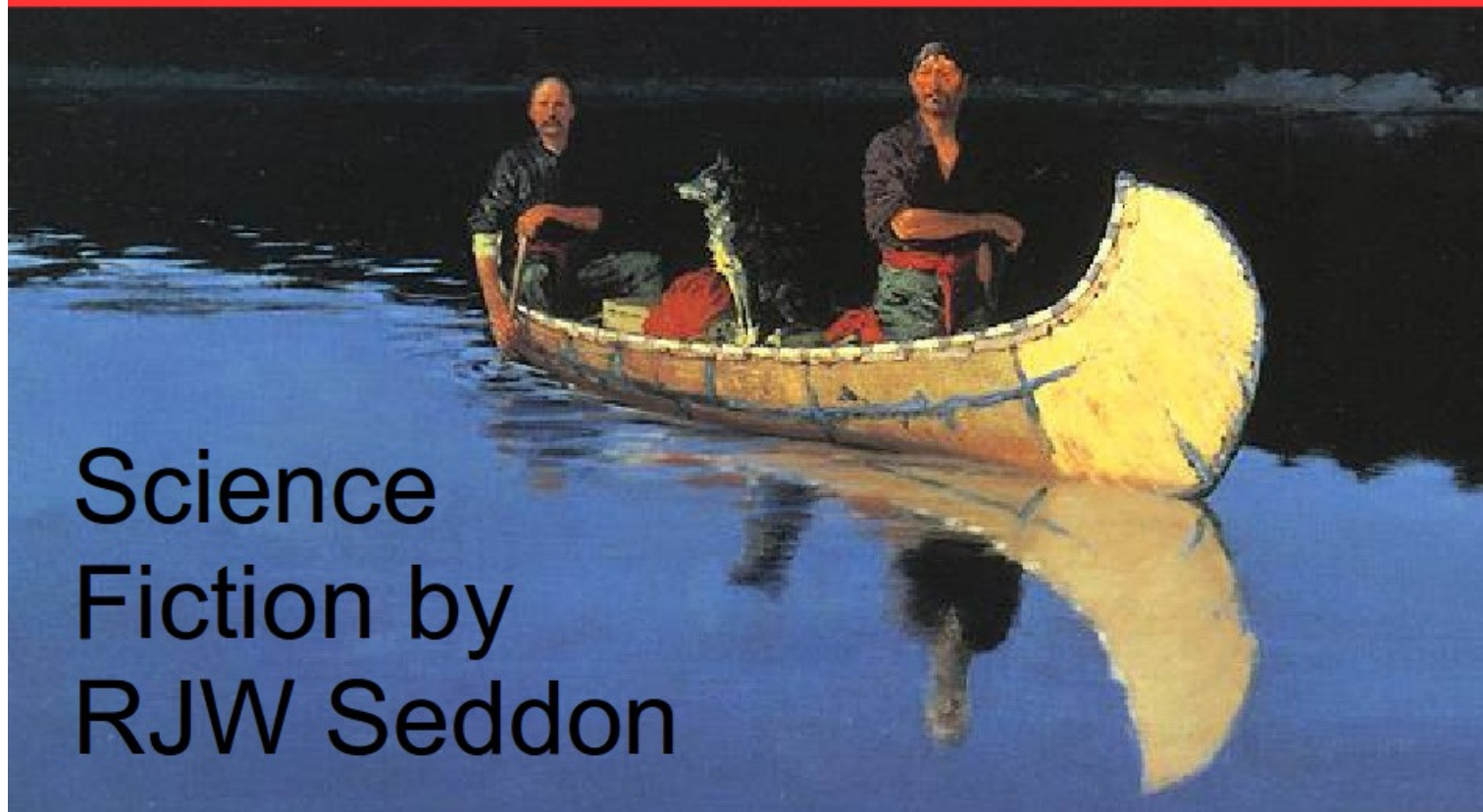


The Bureau of Extraterrestrial Indian Affairs

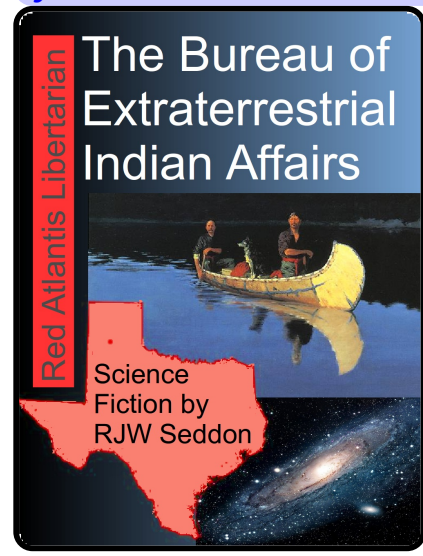
Red Atlantis Libertarian

Science
Fiction by
RJW Seddon



The Bureau of Extraterrestrial Indian Affairs

by RJW Seddon



RIDE TO B.O.I.A

"If you want an example of the failure of socialism, don't go to Russia, come to America and go to the Indian reservations."

-- James Watt, Secretary of the Interior, 1983

Horton Littlefoot had kept his multibillion dollar pickup at a steady 70 with cruise control ever since leaving the Reservation. Despite being 55 years of age, occasionally he found it relaxing to pull an all-nighter like this. He hoped to make Washington DC in one stretch. Moonlight lit the 2am interstate like day.

Actually, although the trip was business he also regarded the road trip as a mental vacation of sorts, so that he could rejuvenate. He needed to get out of the poverty and drunken haze of the reservation. Their own small neatly tended farm was an island among the slums, but even while working at home the surrounding indolence of the reservation encroached emotionally, so it was good to get out.

He did not drink himself, nor did he have a government job. Furthermore, his own father had refused handouts and so did he. The reservation looked like Dogpatch and he wanted to see a little modernity and education, sobriety, and something of the future. Just driving through the regular USA was to enter the modern world.



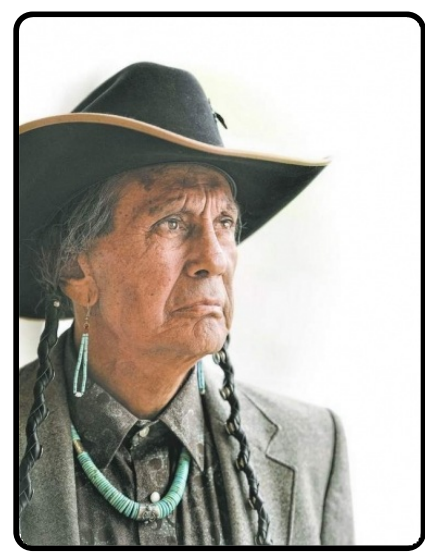
He looked across the bench seat of the cab to check on his youngest son. Johnny slept against the passenger door and used his jacket as a blanket. Horton counted himself lucky to have had Johnny from his second marriage. The boy was turning out all right and was taking his own direction in life, independent of his famous older half-brother, Ralph. Ralph had eclipsed Johnny and it would have been so easy for the younger brother not to develop

a separate life.

The sliding window to the truck's bed opened. Horton's father Maxwell Littlefoot stuck his head into the cab. The Chevy was about to come upon an interstate rest stop.

"Son, pull into that hamburger place, will you? I have to take a McLeak."

It was his old joke. He had been sitting in the back of the truck, sheltered by the aluminum cap over the truck's bed, ostensibly to lay down and read. Mostly he wanted room to think and be alone and to give those in the cab more room. He had covered himself with a blanket, though, and had sat cross legged and dozed. He was an Indian, after all.



Horton's father, Maxwell Littlefoot, was the white man's caricature of an old Indian. He was approximately 75 years old, sometimes acted much younger, sometimes acted the old man. He lied about his age in both directions and never got away with it. He always left you wondering with a smile on your face as well as his.

You could observe women found him fascinating and both young and old gave him appraising looks. At this he would smile like a skunk and say, "I'm like Rabbi Jesus -- 'Wise women still seek me!'"

His face was tanned, wrinkled leather, but he had excellent teeth and smiled constantly. White hair, neither

limp nor full-bodied, but not sparse, fell to his shoulders. Sometimes he stuffed it into a hat, an Italian-looking (rather than Western looking) fedora; in the winter he wore one of those knit ski caps with a fuzz ball on the top. He wore faded Levis, moccasins, and a blue work shirt. Three feathers woven into his hair dangled from the temples. His frame was well-built, not at all ravaged by time: he walked upright, yet he could and did sit impassively for hours at a time.

Horton turned on the "engine" as they approached the rest stop. After having removed the unnecessary engine block, Ralph had cleverly installed a stereo speaker under the hood. The truck's radio/mp3 player produced recorded engine sounds loudly there. Horton had to remember to turn down the volume as he entered the parking lot.

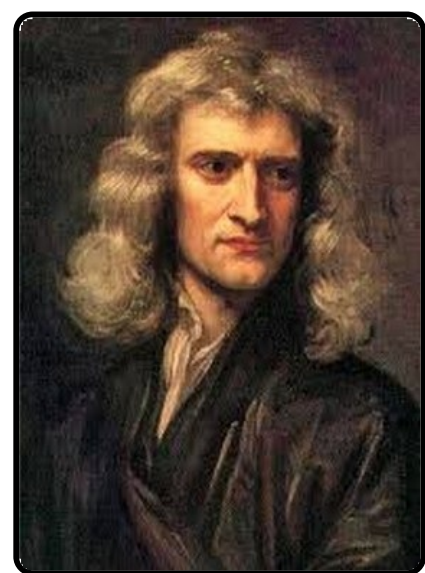
Johnny woke up from the bright lights and sudden engine noise and stretched. Horton's father Maxwell had the tailgate down and was approaching the McDonald's door in search of the restroom before they were parked. Horton carefully locked the door and activated the burglar alarm.

This truck had been Ralph's first practical application to test out the mathematics for what might have been his Master's thesis. He had come home suddenly in the middle of the semester in March. Horton thought he had been sick, but did not object when Ralph asked to work on the Chevy.

The academic community, in particular the math people, were still evaluating Ralph's first paper, but had not yet seen this one, the second. There was going to be an uproar about it when its implications became understood.

And he hinted there might be a third.

His first paper, written as a Freshman undergraduate student, had reeling effects. It had resulted in massive social, economic, and political changes in the world.



Ralph was like young Newton or, rather, like young Einstein. As a young man Einstein had written three important papers, each so different, each so far reaching.

When Newton had been young much of his work did not even see the light of day, languishing on his desk in a jumble. It has been said that Newton had advanced scientific thinking so many centuries ahead in one leap that it took several centuries for it all to sink into the human spirit.

Now the world had another, perhaps a great as Newton and Einstein combined.

The McDonalds was full of Indians and would be Indians, so even Horton's father's outlandish getup did not attract undo attention. Since his son Ralph had made the cover of

Time, Indian regalia became the season's fashion trend. In fact, the fashion statement had entered board rooms and had changed the American man's romance with coat and tie.

Everybody wore moccasins; all women now wore beads, turquoise, silver. Men affected Indian mannerisms (as interpreted by several generations of fiction and movies): grunting in response to questions, folding their arms, sitting cross-legged. Now, when men met they clasped forearms instead of shaking hands. They entered into secret societies with other males for rituals and rites. Women carried their babies papoose fashion. Many wore red, white, and blue "war paint" stripes on their cheeks. Horton looked down at the wingtips on his feet.

"Johnny, we're out of style for the big city." Johnny subconsciously, self consciously covered one of his tennis shoes with the other.

"I'll wait for Gramps, Dad; go get your coffee." Johnny took a seat in the no smoking section and Horton stood in line. It was 3am. Maxwell came out of the restroom and walked up to his grandson.

"I remembered to zip," he proclaimed loudly. He said this in earshot of and for the entertainment of the woman in the next booth. He wiped his wet, wet hands on his Levis, turning the jeans temporarily from their faded state back to dark blue. "But I forgot to wash my hands again." He made eye contact with the woman and they shared a smile at his ridiculous infantile humor.

They walked over to join Horton in line. Horton ordered three breakfast sandwiches, his coffee, and a Coke for Johnny.

Maxwell Littlefoot had his own coffee. He went back to the truck for his thermos. No one knew what he actually had in there. It was not alcohol. There was much speculation about what he used to lace his coffee. Some spoke of secret peyote powder and such. Horton suspected the old man just favored a bit of cinnamon or maybe chicory and sugar in his. But it was very black and smelled evil.

"We'll beat rush hour easy," began Horton. He took a sip. "We won't have too much trouble finding the new building because I think it's near the old one."

He was speaking of the US Bureau of Indian Affairs Building. Last year Congress had decided to vote the money for a modern large building in keeping with the Red man's sudden new status. A half-built office building was assigned -- appropriated,

really -- for the Indians.

Some of the tribes and nations had begun taking on airs, becoming militant. There was talk of secession or, at least, of UN recognition. Ironically, this family of Huyutes who started the whole trend were almost entirely absent from these proceedings. But now, today, they needed to petition the government. Their delegation representing just themselves, not the Huyutes, consisted of these three.

The sky was still pitch black when they left McDonalds, but you could smell morning in the damp air. There were a few more predawn commuters on the highway. Horton unlocked the pickup with a remote control on his key ring. The high tech, expensive lock was not vanity or merely his love for a well aged 72 Chevy. It was truly worth billions of dollars.

Maxwell had welded the latch of the hood shut from the inside to prevent anyone from servicing the engine. It would not need fuel for several months or years, anyway.

Maxwell had done a bizarre thing, though, typical for him. Next to the Chevy bow tie emblem he had epoxied a Thunderbird.

"Equal time for Mr. Ford", he proclaimed. Horton let it go, but drew the line after a Chrysler star appeared on the tailgate.

Maxwell had been the fastest to exit the McDonalds, but the other two were already buckled in and watching him in their rear view mirrors before he was inside and situated. Horton rewound the mp3 sound effects to the beginning while waiting for his father.

He still watched to make sure no one was too close. Only then did he start the player. The speaker under the hood gave forth a GM starter motor followed by a satisfying eight cylinder start and a denouement idle, complete with a quick throttle rev. A second speaker in front of the rear bumper did its impression of the dual drum beat of a muffler; that was the stereo's left channel.

The music played on and began its acceleration music. Horton moved the automatic transmission lever from park to Drive. Doing this actually did engage the drive mechanism, as did Reverse. The gas pedal governed their speed and Horton eased the truck out onto the highway. Once out of the proximity of other cars he turned off the false engine sound. Suddenly, the car became much, much quieter. The wind still whistled across the body and the tires hummed, but most of the noise which is our constant companion while driving, ceased altogether. None of them missed it and had quickly grown accustomed to the silence, annoyed at the engine noise when they did run it.

"Native Americans receive more federal subsidies than anybody else in the United States. This includes subsidized housing, health, education, and direct food aid. Yet, despite the uninterrupted flow of federal funds, they are the poorest group in the country."

-- Andrei Znamenski, Native American Reservations: Socialist Archipelago, 2013

They drove in silence and approached Washington.

Traffic picked up towards daybreak and Horton reluctantly turned the sound effects back on. The big green interstate exit signs forewarned him of his exit and he changed lanes, then took his leave of the highway. He had been right about the new building. It dwarfed all the other government structures and was opulent and beautiful.



the TRUTH of 'The Dream'

Whereas their reservation (and every one of the more than 300 reservations in the USA) looked like a neglected city dump, THIS building looked opulent. Gramps never swore but he did so now inwardly and intoned that Indian lands reminded him of a "third world Marxist shit hole", but this building looked like Google and Microsoft combined.



the SYMBOL of 'The Dream'

They entered Visitors parking and found a secluded spot several levels up. Horton further discouraged auto thieves with his flat tire trick. He bent down to let the air out of the right rear tire. He kept a cylinder of air in the truck just for this constant ruse. He armed the alarm and they went inside.

The lobby was atypical of government buildings. This lobby screamed Power, Money, Modernity, Style, Speed. The walls were hung with rich Indian tapestries and the carpeting was plush. Leather couches and expensive looking furniture filled a half acre around the central reception/security area. This lobby and the building itself represented one of The Left's most enduring precepts: Symbolism Over Substance.

"Since the 1960s, the whole theme of Native America had been hijacked by Marxist scholarship and by so-called identity studies, which shaped a mainstream perception that you should treat Native Americans not as individuals but as a collection of cultural groups, eternal victims of capitalist oppression."

-- Andrei Znamenski, Native American Reservations: Socialist Archipelago, 2013

On the wall were framed large photographs: the president on one side and Elizabeth Warren on the other. Warren held the lately-added current cabinet head position, Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She overcame her own less-than 1/512% Native Indian genetic heritage with stylish makeup trends -- feathers, silver, sea shell necklace, turquoise beads, 'war paint'. It was as though to say, "my Liberal inclinations trump your damn genes!" The Left, bureaucrats, those vetting her for office, and the president had all forgotten she had fudged the 'ethnicity' part of her resume for personal gain.



Fauxcahontas, Cabinet Secretary of The Bureau of Indian Affairs

"...and the European horse you rode in on!"

The woman looked like a powerhouse advocate for native Americans and the eyes of her scowl seemed to follow you around the room, shaming you all the way back to Europe, cursing you to hell for your own lily-white heritage. Certainly, most everyone had forgotten her former nickname 'Fauxcahontas'.

The center of the room had a larger than life-size bronze statue, not of Cochise, Tecumseh, or Seattle, not Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, or Chief Joseph, not Black Elk, Dan George, or Benito Juarez. It was a noble visage, though, a striding man holding forth a contract. The plaque beneath the heroic figure proclaimed:

--John Collier--
New Dealer
Community organizer

Johnny looked all around as they entered the great room. Horton looked straight ahead with purpose. As he walked, Maxwell reflected back on history and his own past.

"Collier was very much surprised and angered by these dissidents, who organized themselves and founded the American Indian Federation (AIF) to oppose him. In a bizarre motion, he dismissed them as fake Indians. To him, the true Indian was expected to be a spiritually-charged die-hard collectivist. Historian Graham Taylor, who explored in detail Collier's attempts to railroad tribalism in Indian Country, stressed, "His basic orientation was toward groups and communities, not individuals, as building blocks of society."

-- Andrei Znamenski, Native American Reservations: Socialist Archipelago, 2013

Not everyone in history had loved Collier, but the BOIA had rewritten FDR's history and their eraser unwrote a lot of history also. Revisionism is the home of the Left and people have forgotten the words and deeds and events of the past.

Collier would destroy the Indians by setting "the claws of his own white egoistic benevolent volition into them."

-- D.H. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia)

That not everyone in the past had loved Collier was now nowhere evident. But he had done his work during a time of domestic uncertainty, the Great Depression AND World War Two, when FDR set into motion a whole range of three-letter mandates, many of which paralleled our supposed foes in Communist Russia, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy. But although the techniques were the same, Americans could not see the similarity. Yet all of the Ukranian Kulaks did and so did about thirty percent of the Native Americans.

"More than 30 percent of the Indians rejected the Indian New Deal. Many of them informed Collier that, in fact, although they were Indians, they had nothing against private property and did not want be segregated from the rest of Americans into tribes under federal supervision. They stressed that they could not stomach his communism and socialism, and wanted instead to be treated as individuals."

-- Andrei Znamenski, Native American Reservations: Socialist Archipelago, 2013

Maxwell had been a little boy when this power play occurred. He had not understood it at the time, but reflected back on the discussions he had heard as a youngster. His relatives and family had shouted arguments about the course of action. There were some relatives who never spoke to each other again.

"This situation resembles the negative effect of foreign aid on Third-World regimes that similarly use the tribalism and national sovereignty excuse as a license to practice corruption, nepotism, and authoritarian rule."

-- Andrei Znamenski, Native American Reservations: Socialist Archipelago, 2013

When Maxwell was a young man he saw his own father imprisoned for being accused of collaboration with the Nazis. But it was not true at all. His dad had just opposed the politics of the New Deal. Nor was his dad a Communist or Fascist. He had just spoken out against the wave of social forces that washed over the Red man. And they called him nuts.

"Perhaps a lunatic was simply a minority of one."
-- George Orwell

Maxwell's father had been denounced, called a lunatic, a Nazi, even a false Indian. Most of his adult life was

miserable because of it. But he held his head high.

"Collier even resorted to nasty tricks labeling his Indian opponents as Nazi collaborators, and had one of them investigated by the FBI. Eventually, government squashed AIF as part of a larger FDR effort to use the FBI to phase out the "right-wing fifth column" elements in the United States."

-- Andrei Znamenski, Native American Reservations: Socialist Archipelago, 2013

They approached the horseshoe shaped kiosk. There were two receptionists, both blond Pocahontases, also scowling. Horton had long ago quit wondering why the head honchos at the Bureau and even most of the clerical workers there were Caucasians. HR must have noticed, too, for he saw there had been a hiring correction of sorts and, sure enough, a few shining Black and Hispanic faces filled the desks.

During the course of this history, while the minority-group of Indians were being helped, most Indians did not notice that the smallest minority among them was totality destroyed. They had being given the White man's gift of consideration as a group but had been robbed of consideration as individuals. And, of course, this parlor trick of mirrors was an end-run around the Constitution which protected individuals, not minorities. But because minorities were more easily visible, now individuals were invisible.

"The smallest minority on earth is the individual. Those who deny individual rights cannot claim to be defenders of minorities."

-- Ayn Rand

Horton did not know which secretary to approach and he sort of talked half to one, half to the other, hoping one of them would take the lead. While he did this the blazer clad security guy also scowled at him in disgust.

"Hello. I'm Horton Littlefoot. We're a delegation from the Huyute Nation come to petition Commissioner Hargrave about..." Cutting him off was better than a mere scowl.

"Do you have an appointment?" The one on the right took the lead and the one on the left joined the Security guy in scowling. She began pecking at her keyboard and looking to her terminal for the answer to her question rather than listen to whatever Horton might say.

"Actually, we only just arrived in town and..."

"I'm afraid Dr. Hargrave will be at appointments all day and through most of the week." She commiserated with her best pout then shifted out of her Reluctant Dragon role with a sudden, happy thought: "You could make application to see Dr. Hargrave with Mr. Saunders!"

"Mr. Saunders?"

"He is Dr. hargrave's administrative assistant."



They followed her directions to a small office. Saunders was a filter. He filtered 9 out of 10 people from getting to see Hargrave. He was adroit at getting you to admit first that you did not really want to see Hargrave, that you really wanted to go elsewhere. Some other office or agency. Any other.

Saunders, too, was in full Indian regalia. His European blond hair actually looked good in the ancient American style. Gramps again wondered to

himself why they just did not go ahead and hire some real native Americans.



"Morning, Gents! What can I do you for?" Saunders sat behind his desk and waited for them to enter. There was a single chair in front of the desk and Horton's father took the seat.

This act normally would have designated him as the nominal spokesman, the guy with whom Saunders would be speaking to, but Gramps took a coffee table picture book on The Plains Indians

from Saunder's desk and began ignoring Saunders altogether. Saunders was thereby forced to look up at Horton, the standing younger man; Saunders did not like looking up to anyone; it put him on the defensive.

"We're a delegation from the Huyute Nation and we've just arrived in town, but we don't have an appointment to see Dr. Hargrave. Can you help us get an appointment to see him today?"

"A bureaucrat is not inclined to listen to any problem which cannot be solved by his limited options. He cannot even see the larger picture. The particular event, when not in his play-book, is always (1) put off, (2) sent elsewhere, (3) ignored as 'not a real problem', (4) treated as a threat. It is easy to find complicit employees for gas chambers, gulags, concentration camps, or death commissions: just get some already-hired bureaucrats."

-- RJW Seddon

Saunders backed away in his chair at this direct, clear, straight forward request. "Well... I don't know." Saunders did not know how to deal directly with something so direct. "He's busy all week, you see..."

"We know that. The girl up front told us that, but we'd like to cut in between appointments, if we could. It's real important."

"Well, it SOUNDS real important. Can you tell me a little what it's about? Do you need a loan, perhaps."

He hoped it was a loan. The admission of a loan would allow Saunders to deflect them away from Hargrave. They would have to leave and go through an application process and fill out forms at another office.

"No, not a loan. It's nothing except for..."

Maxwell, still looking at the book, without even looking up, now entered the conversation by cutting off his son's sentence.

"He owes a rather large favor," broke in the grandpa.

"A favor?"

Horton frowned too, not knowing what his father was talking about.

"Yes, an indiscretion, a momentary lapse of decorum and judgment."

Saunders knew how to butter bread and quietly calculated outcomes. A scandal, perhaps? If so, Hargrave would reward him for helping to smooth the waters by ushering them in. But if there were no scandal, then Hargrave would crucify him for allowing in upstarts. Saunders decided to disinvolve himself from the risk.

"Dr. Hargrave will return tomorrow morning; supposed to be in by 10. What do you say I relay your request and y'all can wait for him here?"

There was nothing more to do. They decided to return on the morrow.

SAMUEL TWO TOES

"The BEST way to implement policy against a People is to get some of them on your side as advocates of the policy against the People. In this manner, the majority will seem out of step and you can swap the terms 'minority opinion' and 'majority opinion' as was done with 'Bolshevik' for 'Menshevik' or even 'Red propaganda' for 'Red state'. 'Red Indian' and 'Red Atlantis', 'Red scare' and 'Native American' are all buzz words now and nobody will even notice. Nasty undercurrents run deep: 'those greedy bankers and Wall Street fatcats' are code language antisemitism."

-- RJW Seddon

As they were leaving the Saunders office an ugly, evil looking acne-scarred man followed by two lackeys met them in the hall. Johnny drew back in fear at the disgusting visage. The man was misshapen, not just by nature's handiwork of his ugly face but also by years of scowling and evil thoughts.

"Littlefoot! I could feel the hallways filling with your..."

"I just knew we couldn't get away without seeing an ugly, orphaned dog," exclaimed Gramps. They knew each other, mutual dislike going back decades.

Samuel Two Toes (not his real name) limped from an accidentally self inflicted gunshot wound; Gramps always remarked that many people went through life shooting themselves in the foot -- so to speak -- but here was the real deal, a man who, more-often-than-not, was his own worst enemy, his own victim.

The ugly man held up a rattle stick and shook it, not menacingly, but ostentatiously, as though to say, 'I am the shaman!' The rice grains within it hissed as he shook it and he tried to stare down the grandpa. "I curse you, I curse you, I curse you; three times I curse you!"

"That's four times, you arrogant fool!"

"Your skin shall itch, your sphincter shall leak, you shall dribble urine..."

The grandpa cut him off, "...you should get some mouthwash, some deodorant, too; you should try washing your socks and underwear." They continued walking down the hall, through the ranting shaman and his henchmen, ignoring the rattle stick. They continued walking, shaman and henchmen in tow.

"Does he just hang around all day looking for people to curse?" asked Johnny.

"That he does. Seeing as how his curses don't work, he is entirely nonproductive. He is just wallpaper. Also, he is on welfare -- his only real skill. He likes EVERYONE to be on welfare, for company, so that he can justify not working himself."

This enraged the shaman, who screeched after them. "Leave this place! Go back to your goats! Disappear inside! Do not come outdoors!"

"Son, let's hide from this idiot and leave." Unexpectedly, he suddenly stopped on his heel while in midstride and pivoted 180 degrees, his swivel almost causing the shaman's group to bump into Gramps face-to-face again. Gramps had something ready that he had surreptitiously taken from his pocket, held it in his open palm, flat in front of his face, and blew out a puff of breath like blowing out a candle.

Red powder, so fine it looked like red smoke, shot forth and hit the shaman full in the face. The shaman's eyes grew large and he implored with a now-raspy voice, "Take that back! I refuse it!"

"Take back your damn welfare! I don't want to buy it!"

"There is no worse tyranny than to force a man to pay for what he does not want merely because you think it would be good for him."

-- Robert Heinlein, The Moon is a Harsh Mistress

Gramps spun wordlessly on his heel and the Huyute nation exited the building.

Through the doorway they heard a final curse. "I wish you to disappear! I wish you to vanish!"

The grandpa called back, smiling, "Thank you. I intend to do just that! I will fulfill your wish."

NEWTON'S WORKSHOP



(flashback TEN YEARS EARLIER)

Barn, workshop, and "barndominium"

The barn was old, dark, and large. One side of it held a fully enclosed wood shop. Years ago it had been Gramps's after he had quit running the farm. After turning the place over to his son Maxwell had retreated into his world of woodwork. Although he turned out serviceable pieces the hobby never turned into a lucrative trade for him. He designed and made things only for pleasure. His output was low. In turn, he had taken in his grandsons and taught them at an early age the secrets of wood and work.

He kept up the tutoring even now with Johnny, but ten years ago with Ralph his methodology took on an abrupt turn.

The boy had demonstrated an unusual way of thinking, figuring, analyzing. His thought content was normal, but his method of thinking was not. Horton had looked at Ralph's eyes while the boy was deep in thought and, suddenly, the old man knew. The eyes held a light such as he had once himself held once or twice in his life when he was young.

"The secret is behind a rock," he had told Ralph.

"What rock?"

"The one blocking your thoughts. You have to budge the rock with your thinking."

"What kind of thinking?"

"Number thinking. Arithmetic thinking. You have to study mathematics. That helps you budge the rock, see around it, move it out of the way altogether."

He bent over and picked up a double handful of soil. "See. I can pick up only so much without a tool." He dropped his small handful of dirt awkwardly over a fence then deftly picked up a bigger load with a long-handled shovel and expertly flipped it effortlessly over the fence. "With a good tool you can do a lot more work, and more easily."

And, so, they started. Maxwell got a kid's arithmetic workbook at Walmart and he got Ralph to go through it a couple pages a day every day. He augmented the book with a thick, red Big Chief tablet -- one of those cheap copy books made of lined blank newspaper.

He would not settle for any other other book, just the red Big Chief; he had not seen one for years. They had been discontinued as politically incorrect, but Maxwell loved the old Indian's face on the red cover. It looked like an old Remington, not derogatory in any way. The Big Chief looked noble, in fact, with his

feathered Sioux war bonnet, a little smile, a very, very wrinkled old face. Come to think of it, Maxwell could have modeled for the line drawing himself.

BIG CHIEF

"There's more lines on that Indian's face than there are ruled lines on each page!" he quipped. He bought a case load of the last of the Big Chiefs, stored in a warehouse, written off as old stock, but not yet thrown away. He smiled, having bought a lifetime supply, ten cents on the dollar.

Ralph did not rebel like a regular youngster would have done, but, instead, soaked up the math like a sponge. Maxwell saw something in the boy's eyes, something that reminded him of his dead daughter, Ralph's mother. Laura had

had the spark, too. Maxwell missed her all the time, but mostly at times like this when he could have conferred with her about the gift. Maxwell had the gift, too, and could readily see it all the more easily in Ralph and his now dead daughter.

There was a glint of genius, some spark from some angel, a laughing angel, one who delighted in God's playground of space, time, numbers, concept. You could almost see calculations at work in his brain. It was more than that: the boy could see a whole range of beauty forever unknowable by everyone else. He was like a composer who could hear new violin music, nonexistent to everyone except himself until he wrote it down.

For a brief time Maxwell worried about autism or other accompanying deficits which sometimes accompanied such a gift because once in a while Ralph was so engrossed in thought it was hard to get his attention.

But then Maxwell had read about a numerical savant possessed of 'synesthesia'. The article said the genius 'saw actual patterns of colors in his mind's eye while thinking of numbers'. The article referred to several past geniuses who also had this gift, notably Richard Feynman. The article went on to say each number had its own color scheme, some, apparently, blindingly beautiful. The old grandpa felt goose bumps when he read this, for he himself saw such over-coloring with numbers and so did Ralph. So had Laura.

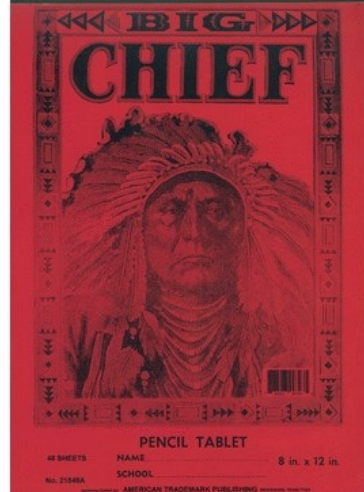
When Maxwell was a little boy he thought everyone had this trait. Didn't everyone? He had thought so until asking his grandmother.

With little Maxwell's admission, she had grabbed his upper arm tightly and ordered, "Do not ever tell anyone what you see, the colors and numbers. I see them; you see them, but almost no one else has this gift!"

No one noticed Ralph's abilities. They assumed it was a grandpa's love for a first born grandson. They might even have assumed it was remedial catchup work for a slower than normal grade schooler. Perhaps it was just an old man's passion, reliving his misspent youth through a boy's book learning.

Maxwell did not push it, made it a game. They spoke more than did problems. Once, twice the boy answered a question quickly, reliably, faster than normal. When questioned about it, his explanation raised goosebumps.

Maxwell himself had not attended high school at all, much less university level math. But he knew unbroken ground instinctively. A breakthrough at age eight meant



there was more to come. Much more. This boy would take math and physics to the next level the way Leibniz had done, as Feynman had. The responsibility was chilling and he paced the boy, playing him like a fish; not too fast, not too much.

By the time Ralph entered Junior High he was an acknowledged math whiz, but most thought it was at the normal scholarship and heavy drudgery level. They assumed it was study, grades, test taking, more than likely just a way for a dutiful, compliant son to get off the White Man's reservation.

"You ought not draw attention to yourself in school too much," counseled his grandpa. "Just be yourself and keep learning. It will come soon enough that they will notice you."

Ralphie complied and kept his nose down. Amazingly, no one, not a single teacher took notice, just passed him with A level grades. Some of the kids asked him for homework help, but just in math; he was not particularly excellent in any other course.

When he got nearly a perfect score on the SAT math portion, finally, a guidance counselor called him in.

"You'd do well in accounting, perhaps as a bookkeeper," suggested the well meaning lady. "Would you like that?"

Ralph nodded, but asked, "Could I, maybe, get into State, perhaps with a partial scholarship? In math, I mean? Do they have a scholarship for math?"

The counselor nodded, but cautioned, "Yes, they do, but few are given out because the test is very hard. Maybe harder than you think. Want to to give 'er a go?"

Ralph nodded and signed up and Maxwell drove him to the state capital on a future Saturday, very early for the signed up test.

The test room was full of high school juniors and seniors and a few college freshmen. Maxwell sat in the hallway for the duration of the multihour test. It was air conditioned at the school and the old man relished the quiet coolness. Through the crack of the open door he saw row and column of serious test takers, all hopeful for a scholarship, faithfully outputting the fruits of years of study.

Maxwell sat quietly on a hallway bench, the silence occasionally broken by the far end doorway closing. It echoed hollowly like a cave, he thought.

The test lasted a maximum of four hours and before the time was up several had either finished or given up and left early. Ralphie was not one of those. He stayed until time was up and the proctor had to insist he turn in his paper, finished or not.

Maxwell wondered what the boy had been working on.

"It was an essay type question, asking for consideration on an as-yet-unsolved problem. I don't know for sure... I think maybe I had the answer to it, but did not have enough time to write down the proofs. At least I was able to finish commenting on the proof."

Maxwell nodded. He did not know if Ralphie had laid the egg he knew would one day be forthcoming.

It took a couple weeks.



FINALLY NOTICED

"Ralphie! It's for you -- telephone." Ralph did a teenage shuffle into the kitchen and retrieved the phone his mom had set at rest. His grandpa instinctively knew what the phone call was and sat at the table eavesdropping contentedly.

"Hello."

"Is this Ralph Waldo Littlefoot?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'm Alice Chambers, secretary for Dr. Felix Larson who's head of the math department at State University. I'm phoning on his behalf -- he's in class right now -- to see if you might be able to visit?"

"Uh, sure. When?"

"He would like to invite you at your earliest convenience, perhaps for lunch. Could you make it today?"

"Today? Well, I..."

His grandpa had been listening closely and cut in, "I'll drive you, Ralphie. Tell her today is fine."

They took Maxwell's old Chevy pickup and roared out of the reservation as though on some knight's quest. Maxwell kept her at 70 and they made good time. The campus cop provided a university building map and they found the math department without delay, then made for the main office of it.

There were several elderly, learned gentlemen standing closely around a desk looking smilingly at Ralphie's entrance test. Two of the men were putting auxiliary equations onto a dry erase board, laughing in admiration, one of them saying, "I'll be darned!" over and over again. They were dressed in tweed, corduroy, had pipes, glasses -- the whole college professor ensemble. One actually wore a white lab coat.

They looked up in unison as Ralph appeared in the open doorway.

"You Ralph Littlefoot?"

Ralph nodded.

"You just did world-class work here! We're still figuring it out. Beats me how you came up with that method, but it works; it's inspired! Inspiring! I'm Dean Larson. These goofballs do math, too." He indicated the other men with a broad gesture while shaking Ralph's hand. "Jackson, Baker, Chandrasekhar, McDaniels are

all Math; Finnegan is physics. You free for lunch?"

"Uh, yessir. My grandpa drove me up."

"Good. Where is he? Tell him to come, too."

"Uh, he's parking our truck, I think." Just then Maxwell appeared and the ebullient college men greeted him, spun him around, took him in tow as they made a flying wedge down the hall on the way to lunch. They were as old school as the illegal (and overly effective) football maneuver 'the Flying Wedge'; these old professors were in years -- most of them -- beyond the jostling of younger professors for position. Now, they embraced a December romance with academics. No useless 'publish or perish' anymore for these; only real problems occupied their minds, not vanity.

"I don't mean to be forward, but we need new blood, younger blood. We would like you to consider coming to school here to study with us. What do you say?" He said all this with his mouth full of food, constantly busy, constantly happy.

Professor Baker put in a comment. "The unusual test question was my idea. The regular questions just identify competent students who can handle college level math achievement. I had to fight tooth and claw to get them to put in even just this one type of question."

"All right, all right, we know it was your idea, Ollie. We give you full credit," offered Jackson. He was the one with tweed jacket, pipe, AND corduroy slacks. "And it was a great idea, too. It worked."

Ollie had to add a point. "The ACT and the SAT, they don't test for genius, NEITHER of them."

The department head fired a question to his seemingly never-off-duty secretary, "Alice, how'd he do on the other stuff?"

The ever-prepared Alice had her documentation at hand, even during normally sacrosanct lunch.

"He aced the math portion of the test; almost a perfect score. The other areas of testing are normal or above normal: vocab, science, English, etc." She paused, scanning the results sheet. "Says here he's low in one critical area."

Ralph had not expected that and waited to hear what it was.



"Looks like his funds for tuition are way low; couldn't possibly attend school here without an assist."

"Well, what we got left in budget? Anything left?"

"Hmmm. We have enough to cover tuition, books, meal plan. Dorm's filling up fast, though. But there is a campus job as department assistant open. That comes with quarters -- little apartment."

Baker broke in, apologetically, "Ah, about that little apartment. My landlord... I, uh, kind of moved into the apartment myself."

They scowled at him for ruining their thus-far perfectly laid plan. "Well a young man needs a dorm anyway to sort of round him out socially. Let's work on the dorm."

"But first, I want to test our new whippersnapper a little more." He handed Ralph a couple sheets. "Work on this til I see you again. Tell us what you come up with."

On the ride home in the truck Ralph read the sheets provided and stared out the window. He did not talk and Maxwell did not force conversation. Once or twice Ralphie consulted the sheets. He began writing on the back of one with the stub of an old pencil, awkwardly using his knee as a desk with an ever-present, ever-required Big Chief.

The Chevy's sagging shocks and the bad highway did not help, but even then, Ralph did not stop his work. Maxwell did not comment, just drove more slowly so as to avoid interference. Ralph filled the sheet, then folded it over at the staple exposing the blank side of the other paper. He finished before they got home and looked up in perplexity, having missed the entire ride, having lost the entire hour of the ride from his awareness and memory.



He had missed the ride home because he had entered another, better world, seemingly his true home. It was a swirl of multicolored, red and blue vibrating numbers, green figures that thrummed, yellow quivering subatomic entities, which repositioned and recolored themselves, in and out of bright orange existence.

The blinking numbers loomed before him in his mind's eye, displacing anything his real eyes might see and some of them produced accompanying tones of sound and Ralph became deaf during these reveries. Together, certain number combinations hummed ethereal colored-chords of organ-loud sound. The chorus of angelic sounds were to him living,

real entities and he was in very real danger, when under such a spell, of drifting over permanently into this schizophrenic otherness, lost forever to our mode of reality.

The numbers slammed one atop the other into a jumble of computations, old teal receding, new purple accelerating forward, brown displacing, then receding, disappearing briefly to reemerge elsewhere. Now some numbers shifted beyond the human visual spectrum, beyond the rainbow the rest of us can see: infrared, ultraviolet, and others.

Ralph's brain was... Maxwell could not say.

During such concentration he was deaf, dumb, blind, insensitive to discomfort, never hungry. Indeed, he would not have even had a beating heart, nor would his lungs have breathed, except such things were automatic.

The effort of thought he put into visualizing the landscape of this alternate reality used up quite a bit of his body's physical endurance. You could see how it sapped him of energy, drained his body as though he had physically exerted himself. He almost always dropped off into a nap after such work, his blood plundered of all sugar.

The numbers entranced him. You could see his eyes darting, actually looking at them, as though they were in the room. Maxwell once looked into the direction of Ralph's intent gaze on one occasion, but, for him, there was nothing visible.

The naps did not just let him rest and reinvigorate the body. The naps also somehow, kindly lent him gentle transportation back into the real world, for the soul-wrenching shift from Otherness to the here-and-now. Such people did not like the transition, for it was painful. BEING 'there' or BEING 'here' was okay; it was the crossover that was painful.

Maxwell could see how the realm of mathematics was a young man's game, because an older person's body could not take the strain.

Ralphie laid his head against the passenger door window and closed his eyes. Within a few minutes he was asleep and his grandfather could not contain his curiosity and lifted the Big Chief tablet that Ralph had been using as a clipboard. He drove one handedly while perusing the tablet's contents. He flipped to the last page and tried to make sense of the calculations.

Ralph had abandoned regular algebraic notation a few years back and had begun substituting his own shorthand version of symbolic logic. Maxwell knew some of the symbols that Ralph had invented. He had taken to employing the new ones for a few months, then abandoning those for still yet another set of terse figures. It made no sense to him. It was like trying to read Chinese.

Ralphie had abandoned the 'equals' sign long ago and had created another symbol which let him solve the three body problem. It was like some sort of super calculus, but it was beyond the old man.

For instance, when Ralphie did a long calculation, one which covered most of a page he sometimes left spaces in the figures on, say, line eight. When he reached, say, line 14 he would somehow derive an answer at that point and fill in the blank on line eight. You could follow his pattern, that he was figuring something, but you could not know how or what he was doing. It was the next level up.

The old man knew that the interview, the trip to the University, and the stimulation of well deserved attention of like minded thinkers had worked on Ralphie. The trip had kicked him into a creative state. The tablet may hold something of great importance.

They pulled up to the farm near sundown and Ralph came to. After all, he was a teenager and it was suppertime. The nap, then, was not his only help for the mental transition back to mundane reality. He was a teenager and food was always uppermost in his mind, a caloric replenishment. Maxwell did not know for sure, but he estimated such a reverie that Ralph had undertaken had burned a full day's worth of calories. He had seen it before. What? 2000? 3000?



Their collie, Sir Isaac Newton, wagged its tail and panted a greeting as the tires crunched to a stop on the twilit gravel. The screen door creaked open immediately and Ralph's stepmother stepped out onto the back door landing, wiping her hands on her apron.

"We have pork chops almost done if you haven't already eaten!"

Maxwell smiled his filthy old man smile and procured a bouquet of flowers for his son's wife.

"They can't taste any better with these on the table, but you won't let me eat all of them unless I bribe you, so I brought these."

He never went anywhere without coming back with some sort of small present, but his gifts were never predictable, so the flowers were a surprise. Sometimes he brought a magazine or some candy. He let you know with a gift that he was thinking of you.

At table, Horton let the boy go on and on. He knew better than to interrupt and ask questions. He did not have to. Any question of his would be answered in due course by his excited boy during his garrulous discourse. A question under such circumstances would slow down the information feed.

"...and a part time job, too, I hope! Maybe. Everything's paid... It's not even far! I could come home even every day to milk the cows. I never thought I'd find something so... so neat!"

Johnny asked him immediately, "Can I come up and visit your dorm sometime?"

"Sure you can. In two years you can move in, too. We'll BOTH be at State."

AT SCHOOL

That was the beginning. Ralphie moved up without a hitch. His mom cried over her boy leaving home, but did not come up herself, though the drive was a pittance -- a few hours. The grandpa drove, loaded all of Ralph's possessions for such a move into the truck bed. Move-in day at the dorm was a snap. Upper classmen were on hand to help carry possessions upstairs for

second story dorm rooms and the whole process led to ready made acquaintances.

Ralph remained invisible at school for several months. He just learned his way around the campus, took classes, studied for tests. During this time he seemed ordinary, but soon his way with numbers, the colors of them, started him up again.



SPRING BREAK 1 YEAR EARLIER

Ralph occasionally broke away from his studies at the university and came home unexpectedly. He had done this four times. Each time he just appeared out of the blue. No explanation. Each previous time, without exception, he went through the same routine. Rather than sleep in his regular upstairs bedroom he stayed in the 'barndominium' working on a project. No food. No sleep. He did not come out and did not converse. His grandfather brought him food and drink which went largely untouched, but the old man never tried to engage him in conversation, just acted the servant.

On each prior occasion Ralph, the grandson, the nineteen year old Indian, developed new levels of mathematics and physics comparable to Newton's own work. The boy bypassed all conventional areas of high interest. Sometimes, instead of equation writing, he did everything hands on, very much like Michael Faraday had done. This slowed him down and limited him to resources available, but his last foray into experimentation had resulted in astonishing, groundbreaking discoveries.

He just now thundered in on his old blue Honda motorcycle. It was his stepmother's conviction the machine would be the death of him.

He coasted to a stop in front of the barn at idle and switched off the engine.

Maxwell rounded the barn door and caught the duffel bag Ralph tossed him.

"Hi, Gramps."

Maxwell grinned at his grandson and put the duffel under his arm and retreated into the barn. Ralph followed him in.

"You going to stay long?"

"Just a little while. There's something I want to try out."

"The world runs on individuals pursuing their self interests. The great achievements of civilization have not come from government bureaus. Einstein didn't construct his theory under orders from a bureaucrat. Henry Ford didn't revolutionize the automobile industry that way."

-- Milton Friedman

Maxwell nodded and went out to wheel in his grandson's motorcycle. He did not want his son or stepdaughter to know Ralph had come home. He needed to pursue his interest without distractions.

That evening, over dinner, while passing around mashed potatoes, Louisa, Horton's wife, noticed Maxwell spooning food into a bowl. She frowned, thinking the old man had again adopted some stray or perhaps -- worse -- some wild animal. She always complained at his antics, but loved him dearly, and could never stay too long mad at him.

"It's for Ralphie. He's come home for a visit and is out in the barn working."

"'Out in the barn!'" exclaimed Louisa. The mother in her insisted on Ralph's presence at dinner. Proper decorum pervaded her feminine soul.

This was funny to everyone except Louisa. Although Johnny, gramps, and Ralphie each had their own separate bedrooms upstairs, Ralphie had more-or-less moved into a tiny apartment in the barn. It was a teenage dream come true, enviable by all boys. Ralphie referred to his bedroom/lab as a 'barndominium', a portmanteau of 'condominium'.

Maxwell, smiling, held up a finger as warning and slowly shook his head. "No visitors. He's working. I've been given strict orders."

Horton grinned at his other son. They were both happy Ralph was home, work or no work, dinner or no.

"Well, at least let me fix it right. It looks like a dog's bowl of food you've made for him."

Johnny spoke up in defense of his grandpa. "Aw, mom, he won't eat it anyway. It'll just sit there and get cold."

Maxwell, his own meal finished, got up still chewing, still grinning, and took the bowl out into the barn.

Ralph worked standing up. He assembled apparatus of unknown purpose on the barn's work bench. Maxwell brought him the bowl of food silently, the original bowl he had originally fixed, the one that supposedly looked like it was for a dog. But the old man knew his grandson. The bowl's contents could be eaten by large soup spoon. No two-handed knife and fork usage to slow him down.

"You okay, Ralphie?" He set the bowl and spoon on a couple paper napkins off to the side. He did not want to interrupt. But it was fascinating. He could not make heads or tails of the equipment. There was a power cord at least; he could see SOMETHING used electricity. A couple beakers were heating up some goop with thick consistency like Jello.

"Thanks, Gramps. I'm trying something out. Dad and Johnny okay? How's Mom?" He asked without hardly looking up, but continued working, assembling his gadget. Maxwell remembered the Disney character from Duckburg, inventor Gyro Gearloose. The bench looked very Rube Goldberg, too. It was hard to even figure what was going on.

"We're all good. Don't stay up too late. I'll leave the back door open."

'Night." The open door was just a gesture. The barndominium had a full bathroom, not to mention galley.

He crept back out but decided to stay up and keep an eye on the barn through his upstairs bedroom window. He was too excited to sleep. He had a rocking chair in his bedroom and he slid it close to the window which overlooked the barn. He planned an all-night vigil. Something was going on here and he did not want to miss it.

DAWN OF A NEW ERA

At breakfast Johnny went out to the barn to milk the cows. It was still predawn. He carried a huge cup of coffee and a chocolate donut for his older brother.

"'lo, Ralph. You okay?"

Ralph had been up all night tinkering but now sat in an old cloth easy chair awaiting the results of his invention. He nodded an okay sleepily

to his brother and took the donut and coffee.

"Whatcha got?"

"It's like a battery. You can recharge it, too. I'm making it AC from the get-go and it's 110."

He lifted a lump of goop and kneaded it with both hands. It looked like modeling clay, bright like Play Doh. When he had squeezed it into a rough ball-shape he inserted an ordinary extension cord from an unlit lamp into it, then flipped the lamp on; it lit as though plugged into a wall.

"Cool! How long's that battery last?"

Ralph frowned in concentration, trying to figure, then replied, "'Bout a year, I reckon. Maybe more."

"That's a good battery, all right. Can I have your other donut if you don't want it?"

"What other donut?"

"It's in the kitchen."



A NEW DAY

"A creative man is motivated by the desire to achieve, not by the desire to beat others."

-- Ayn Rand

That had
been a year
ago. The GE

came with a slew of patent attorneys and there were contracts and the television station came with cameras. Ralph had diverted them all to the university, but the Huyute tribal elders did not like it. They did not care for attention to Ralph nor to the university because they figured that they, as Indians, had a right to proceeds of this windfall since it had been developed on the reservation.



Ralph cheerfully abdicated his role entirely and let the University, GE, and the tribe fight over the profits. The frowning lawyers butchered his golden calf, keeping a good portion of it for themselves. During the feeding frenzy no one noticed that Ralph, who had invented the thing, hardly got anything. He did not mind. He was oblivious to the money and the fame because he was already working on the next round of discoveries.



THE GARBAGE

Dean Larson had made arrangements to isolate Ralph from all the garbage, but there is a lot of garbage. His secretary Alice did most of it, but occasionally he had to wade in himself. The phone in his hand became an instrument of persuasion.

"I know he didn't finish the bachelor's yet, but 'I' accepted him into 'MY' graduate program and he is in

good standing. You guys do that all the time for law, dent, and med schools!"

He was referring to real good students going directly into medical school and such while still sophomores or juniors and not even finishing college first. By custom, the college gladly conferred the lower Bachelor Degree to such students as these upon completion of the loftier doctorate. It brought kudos to the school.

"'Professorship'?" he asked. "No, he doesn't have any teaching duties. But if that's what it takes, we'll call him a teacher. But let me tell you: if we're gonna call him a teacher I want to put him on payroll and I mean right away."

Larson was trying to help Ralph, but had inadvertently set into motion a legal mechanism whereby the machinations of mischief locked into place. As a teacher, as an employee, Ralph's full output now belonged to the government.

RESEARCH AS PLAY DOH

Larson's hands shook. The Play Doh ball hovered in the center of his room. He brought in the others to look. Ollie sat down in front of it staring at it. The others took seats. Larson's office did not have enough chairs and Chandrasekhar and McDaniel stood against the wall.

"Can I touch it?" asked Chandrasekhar.

"Go ahead." Ollie pushed it sideways with his palm -- sort of a tennis slap -- and it responded by moving according to Dr. Newton's laws of motion, but then slowed, stopped, reversed, and came to rest again where it once had been. It relocated itself to its preferred location.

Ollie pushed it down. He felt resistance, but down it went. When he released it, it bounced back up, again, where it had begun. Ollie pushed it UP and, once again, when released, down it went.

The doctors one by one all wanted to try the same things as Ollie had done themselves or as many variations as they could create. Ollie went for a spring scale to measure force. Since they were doctorates, they wanted to measure electrical activity, magnetic, if there were any electromagnetic radiations. Anything. They were perplexed and delighted.

Since it was like gooey clay, Ollie asked if he might pinch off a piece. When he did so, he kneaded the smaller object into a ball and it, too, floated next to its now deformed parent. The two balls floated together, touching. "We gotta try burning a piece. We should try..." They were extremely happy.

This had been a few months earlier and had led the Littlefoots to the BOIA building and the attempted meeting with Hargrave via Saunders.

(present day)

THE WHEELS OF BUREAUCRACY

"Hell hath no fury like a bureaucrat scorned."
-- Milton Friedman

When the Littlefoots left Saunders' office he bid them goodbye, not sure if he had been taken to the cleaners or not. At

any rate he felt committed to talk to Hargrave. He had to be quick. And quick he was. His phone call resulted in the Littlefoots being met in the parking lot.

WHO SHALL GUARD THE GUARDIANS?

"Love your country, but never trust its government."
-- Robert Heinlein

The Chevy was not alone. A security cop on foot stood next to their truck. He had company. One of

them rudely, defiantly rested his booted foot on the front bumper. There were two police cruisers each with a couple men. Normally, Maxwell would have referred to the extra men as 'moral support', but this was an immoral action; furthermore, no one had ever used the phrase 'immoral support'.



"Mornin'. This your truck?"

Horton handled this. He took point and nodded. "Yes, it is. We're on our way to see Mr. Hargrave."

"Sorry. Fraid you'll be going on foot today, because we have to impound this vehicle. It's been reported stolen by its owner."

Horton nodded at the power play, going along with it. He smiled and

evenly responded, "Some sort of mistake there. I own it and I'm carrying title to the truck in my wallet."

The policeman was not adept at this. He knew what he had been asked to do was illegal so he responded with anger and force and threats.

"I don't care what you're carrying. I've been told to tow this truck and we're going to take it to the impound lot."

Maxwell took over. "It's okay, son. They'll sort out this mistake at the station. But I need to get my heart medicine out first. I feel sick. Johnny, it's in the glove box. Would you get my medicine for me, please?"

He handed Johnny the door key and the boy took it and unlocked the driver door. The police had no retort at the medical melodrama. Besides, they felt confident that they had the upper hand because there were five of them and the two police cruisers blocked the one and only ramp down from this level. Moreover, the front, driver side tire was completely flat.

Johnny unlocked the driver door, slid in behind the driver's seat, then slid over some more to the far passenger side and opened the glove box. He began rummaging through it; it was full of papers, loaded with junk.

"Where is it, Gramps?"

"Hurry, Johnny! My heart!" Maxwell impatiently slid in and reached over as though to help. As he did so he slid over some more into the center of the bench seat position. "It's way in the back, to the left," he coached.

Horton did not miss a beat. As soon as there was room he hopped in also, slammed the door and locked it in one motion. Immediately, the nearest policeman swore and vainly tried to open the now locked driver door.

Without bothering with the speakers Horton pulled the gearshift selection lever from P to D and gunned the accelerator pedal. The truck silently shot across the parking garage, blindingly fast, despite the flat tire. In fact, though the tire was airless, the low tire did not appear flat; it rode above the ground as though full of air at the height it would be when full.

It was surprisingly silent, not just because the engine was silent, but also because the tires did not squeal. The engines which drove the truck consisted of several rectangular plastic blocks bolted variously to the frame and they pushed the entire frame forward by straining in unison against the frame. The wheels and tires did not make the truck go. They just went along for the ride without complaint.

The policemen swore at this turn of events, yet they still supposed they had the upper hand. There was nowhere for the Chevy to go except up.

The two cruisers both blocked the only exit down. One of them stayed blocking the only path down. The other reacted by also ascending the ramp after the old Chevy truck, but the chase cruiser took its time. The rent-a-cop in charge, the one who had done the talking got into the passenger seat of the cruiser which was going to follow the Littlefoot's truck.

The driver asked him, "They've fled the scene and disobeyed police orders. Shall I call it in?"

He was about to reach for the radio, but the officer in charge shook his head. He did not want to have to admit ANY problem with his apprehension assignment.

He figured the Littlefoots had assumed another ramp down would be available from the next level and would await surrender shame-facedly at the top. He planned to be unkind.

"I didn't want to have to do this. This is too soon," offered Horton. He wrenched the steering wheel left, then right. The truck narrowly missed the concrete wall as it raced uphill on the corkscrew ramp. The tires did squeal now from the speed of the tight turn. They burst out onto the roof, the topmost parking level.

"We got enough juice for this, son?" asked Maxwell. Horton concentrated on the length of the lot versus the height of the wall. The concrete safety wall was only about waist high.

"It's six stories. We need to control not only the drop -- which will use a whole lot of our juice -- but we also need a reserve to drive away -- we need to get a hundred miles without being caught."

The grandpa shook his head in denial and supplied. "You're incorrect there, son. Ralphie told me it's charged up real good, that we can hover for a century, that we could orbit the Earth at fifty feet for thousands of times at highway speed."



"They'll radio ahead and be on the lookout for us. Even if we get down okay they will probably catch us on our way out of the city or on the interstate."

Maxwell scanned the horizon and the building next door caught his eye. "Over there," he advised. "Go up on top."

Horton looked, then grinned when he realized what he was looking at. There was an adjacent office building across the street, one without parking garage. That building appeared to be about eight or even ten stories high. You had to look up to see its roof, so you could

not make out its roof's features. Its roof was flat but not designed to hold the weight of parked cars, yet it was encumbered by elevator access room, air conditioner, and so forth.

"Think she'll hold the truck?"

"Oh, I do. It's concrete and the weight of our Chevy is so much less without the engine and tranny. We'll be fine."

"I know we have enough juice to get over, but do we have enough nerve?"

"Definitely not a problem. Ralphie told me fuel is never a problem. There's enough for most anything. Seatbelts on, muchachos."

They quickly buckled up and Ralph pushed in the cigarette lighter. He waited a second, then carefully twisted its knob slowly in the clockwise direction. As he did so the truck rose up above the roof even as it continued forward. The flat tire thankfully quit complaining as soon it lost contact with the ground and the other three ceased humming and all four continued spinning uselessly.

He quit twisting height after the bottom of the truck had attained about six feet height over the adjacent building, but still gave it gas and it floated forward and upward, accelerating.

Johnny looked down as they crossed the gulf to the street six stories below. The roof of the building that was their destination was at a higher level, eight or ten stories high, and Ralph braked to a stop above and, then carefully turned the cigarette lighter knob counter-clockwise until they landed. The truck came down slowly, closing, six foot, then three, then one foot. It settled on the shocks and bobbed a little as the truck's full weight deformed the three good tires a bit and also settled on the flat.

"It's fine, heavy concrete. We're alright." Ralph agreed and drove the car around the air conditioner protrusion until their truck was hidden from view behind it.

Johnny hopped out and peeked his head around the a/c unit and waited. The police cruiser burst up the ramp and skidded to a stop. Its lights were flashing but, at least, they did not turn on the siren. The policemen looked around, perplexed. Johnny could see them consulting. They slowly drove to the edge of the

building and the passenger exited his side of the car and looked over the edge. They had no idea. Johnny withdrew his head because he did not want to be caught.

"How we gonna get down, son?"

"If there's a door open, we just walk into the building and take the elevator or stairs down. Come back for the truck later."

"Think anyone will come up here? Maintenance man?"

Horton shrugged. "On that, your guess is as good as mine. It's helicopters I'm worried about now, police or news. If one of them should happen to fly by and notice the truck we would be had. They all have radios. The news copter would circle back, hover, and film us and report it as a goofy sighting, perhaps a stunt. A police chopper might get called by the rent-a-cops, looking for us on the streets in the vicinity of this building, but might spot us on the roof."

"Do you think we can out fly a helicopter?"

"Probably. But they know our names, our address. My bet is that the cops will decide to tell their boss they were too late, that we had already left. That way, they won't have to give out an unbelievable story about us disappearing off the roof. If anyone told me such a story I'd probably think the guy was lying to cover for losing us, us giving him the slip, that he flubbed the assignment."

Maxwell shooed Johnny out of the cab and followed him. "There's a tarp in the bed. Help me get it out, Johnny." They opened the tailgate and unfurled the huge tarp. Within a minute the three of them had the truck completely covered. Maxwell lashed down the corners with ropes through the grommets. "No one in a helicopter would ever suspect now. It probably looks like some piece of equipment from the air, but no proper human brain would ever conjecture that it might be a truck in so improbable a place."

"If they do spot it, we can always say we got a flat and went for Triple A." Maxwell grinned as he said this. He got out a can of Fix a flat and aired up the bad tire, inspecting the side wall for damage from the short run they had made on it.

"We can chance it now and leave or we can wait here and leave after nightfall."

"Think anyone saw us cross? The building has windows."

They waited an hour and no one came up.

"Well, I'm getting hungry," complained Gramps. "What do you say if I, at least, go for some chow and bring it back while you guard the truck?"

Horton shook his head and pointed at his dad's three feathers.

"They'll be looking specifically for adults -- Indian adults. Let's send Johnny. He can blend in."

Johnny tested the rooftop door to the stairwell. It was not locked. He did not know if it triggered a burglar alarm or not. He did not see evidence of a magnet or wires at the door top.

He took the stairs down two at a time and the doors entering each floor were marked with large white numbers. He skipped the topmost floor and stopped at 9. The door opened easily and he entered the hallway. Before he let it close, he tested the door to make sure it did not automatically lock him out of reentry to the stairwell.

It was a regular, carpeted, air conditioned office building corridor. Johnny purposefully walked with speed down the hall and went into the men's room. When he came out he continued in the direction he had been going and arrived at the bank of elevators. He pressed L and rode down to the lobby which was actually on the second floor. It was a two story atrium and he was able to look down and see the glass entrance doors. There was a security kiosk and he did not see any activity that looked like this building had been alerted for absconding Indians.

A food court had some vending machines and he bought a couple soft drinks and put the cold cans in his pockets. He got a third drink from the hot coffee machine for his grandpa and put a lid on it. He went back up the elevator to the 7th floor. He wanted to try out the stairwell door to see if it was locked. It was not and he ascended the last few levels on foot.

"Got a couple cokes." Johnny passed over the drinks.

"There's been no activity on the other building's roof. The cop car eventually gave up."

"No one's going to believe them," suggested Johnny.

His grandpa looked at Johnny and agreed. "I think you're right. They'll conclude we gave the policemen the slip. In fact, it's possible the police themselves will suggest it. That way, they won't even have to recount their impossible-seeming tale."

"So, we're home free? We can just leave?"

"No, they're still gonna look for us. Maybe even harder."

"Well, Johnny, how's the lobby? We okay to go down and just walk out?"

"Looks like it." He thought a bit. "Maybe we could split up, perhaps two and one, or maybe individually."

"But then what? Bus?"

"Well, I don't know about you, but I kind of like the old girl. I'm fond of the old truck." He patted its fender affectionately. "We can't just abandon it. We would, at least have to remove the pusher units."

Horton shook his head at that. "I don't even have any tools. And we welded the hood shut. We ought to go ahead and take her home. It's the roads I'm worried about."

"Time to think outside of the box again. Who said we have to use the roads at all?"

"Okay, Son of Flubber it is. We leave late, though, after everyone's in bed. No lights. No noise."

"That means a food run, Johnny. You up for it?"

"He's always hungry. Should we chance all leaving?"

"Well, I hesitate to do so, but -- after all -- we have disappeared. Remember that curse from Samuel Two Toes? His last sentence -- he screamed at us through the doorway -- was that we should disappear. We did."

"Even disappeared guys can be refound. I say we stick together, don't leave the truck, and when we leave, go as a group."

They waited til sundown. The city lights came on and twilight turned to full nighttime. The sky grew dark and, one by one, the office building lights went out.

At 9 pm the commuter traffic and shoppers had vacated the streets. There was no moon that night, so the skyline was dark, not even many stars, due to city haze.

"Let's give her a go." They got in and tightened their seatbelts against the possibility of the unexpected. Ralph twisted the cigarette lighter and up they went. He depressed the "gas" pedal and they shot forward. The truck silently traversed the sky at 30 mph.

Even if someone looked directly up they were mostly obscured because no lights were on and there was no sound at all. The bottom of the truck was more-or-less flat black against the flat black sky.

The sensation and the handling were unique. The flotation mechanism had no banking device. When he turned, the truck did so without roll; the turns were flat. Maxwell filed that away and decided he would advise Ralph to add the more-normal-feeling bank to the device.

It was so very stable it did not rock or rollick like a boat. There was no buffeting of the type normally felt in a small plane. The wings of a small plane were not only what kept it aloft but also at the mercy of any and every significant gust. This was different. It stood firm, impervious to the vagaries of wind bursts.

There was no altimeter, but Horton had, in fact, flown small airplanes years before and he had a feeling -- from that experience -- of what it felt like and looked like at about 1000 feet.

He held speed to about thirty. Even so, he felt comfortable with the idea of cruising at 100 mph or even 150. He surmised the windshield had a maximum stress speed from wind pressure and did not want to risk blowing it out.

His farmer's frugality caused him to think in terms of flight for the sake of saving wear and tear on the tires. If one were going to design a purpose-built vehicle with this power source it would not even have wheels or tires, certainly no wings.

He daydreamed the design a little bit, adding streamlining, pressurization, radar. Those items would bring the cost up, but a homebuilt design made of scrap parts would also work just as well. The staggering potential of the introduction of this would rip apart the conventions of society and the economy. He felt it was absolutely necessary from a safety point of view that no one find out about this, that no one see them. Once seen, the whole family would be in grave danger.

"Interstate's coming up. What we going to do?"

"There!" Johnny pointed. A farmer's house was surrounded by a clump of trees whose dirt road led into the interstate feeder. They set down on it lightly, just a crunch of gravel from the weight of the tires. They pointed towards the highway and were less than a quarter mile from it. Ralph turned on the headlights and the engine noise maker. They pulled out on the feeder then took the ramp onto the highway.

The hum of the highway on the tires reduced tension in them all and they relaxed against the pickup bench seat.

"Isn't that the same McDonalds we went to last night?"

They went through the drive through and loaded up Johnny with some burgers and fries.

"Push comes to shove, we're going to fly off. I just hope the police are not looking for our plates.

"You mean these?" Gramps reached under the seat and pulled out some license plates.

"What's on our truck, then?"

Gramps shrugged. "I borrowed some. But flying is okay with me if you need to."

They drove back without incident and made home without even seeing a cruiser.

"Instead of taking the turn off to our farm, how about we bypass it, fly around to the backside and come across the pasture from the back of the house?"

"You think, maybe, there'll be some police or somebody waiting for us?"

"Maybe. Maybe not on our porch. Maybe they will waylay for us on the road. Our driveway is the only way in or out."

"It's the only way they know of. Good idea. We'll do just that. From the air we can see if there are any cars waiting. Police cruisers will be easy to spot. If they are regular cars -- unmarked -- we'll just have to be on the lookout for anyone parked funny."

There was a country convenience store with gas pumps a few miles from their farm that they wanted to visit first.

"H'llo, Horton, Maxwell. How's it going, Johnny?" Mrs. O'reilly sat behind her counter at the cash register. She spoke quietly and crossed her lips with a finger while pointing at the men's room.

"Guy's in there, waiting for you. They dropped him off with his own car, but they are in another. He has a radio phone -- big fancy one. Luckily, he just entered the bathroom. What's this all about, Maxwell?"

Maxwell grinned. "Do you do car repair here, Lizzie? flat repair?"

"You know I don't. And Sam's is closed already this evening; he won't be back til tomorrow. What's wrong with your car?"

He winked at her. "It's not OUR car that has the flat tires." He motioned for the others to follow him back out. Once outside, he made for the stranger's car and bent down to the valve stem. He went from wheel to wheel and leaked air. While it was hissing out he was able to open the hood, locate the distributor, and remove its central wire. It went into his pocket.

They drove home without incident. At the road, after entering their property Johnny checked the mailbox but there were no letters today. He pulled shut the massive gate and padlocked it shut. He could not remember having closed the gate in a very long time.

"Well, it's good to be home. Trip was sort of a waste of time, but we did get to try out Chitty Chitty Bang Bang."

"How's the gas gauge, son?"

Ralph tapped the needle which registered remaining thrust. "It hasn't dropped enough for me to see any change in the needle. It looked buried on the FULL side. We ought to try seeing Hargrave again, this time a full night trip by air at high speed."

SUPERHERO SUITS

"Years ago it was very common for all housewives to sew. My mother made all of grandpa's shirts. Then it got so cheap to buy everything at Walmart it was no longer worth it, so, little by little, it became a lost art."

Ralph's stepmother reminisced as she sewed. She was modifying a stout parachute harness. It looked a lot like a backpack but also had auxiliary straps that went between your legs that you sort of sat on. She had removed the silky canopy entirely and just worked with the harness itself.

She stitched flexible sheets of thin plastic material. It was a mesh, full of holes so that it would not be too hot worn next to the skin. One of the vest pockets had a little battery and controller.

It had taken her only an hour. Earlier, she had modified some jeans and shirt. There was a tiny wire going from shirt tail to pants that could connect them electrically. The controller was inside the pocket. Gramps had asked for lifts for the bottoms of his shoes to go along with the vest.

"I may want to look taller," he explained. There were auxiliary pads in his hip pockets, too. He could sit or stand while floating.

Johnny pulled an old full-face motorcycle helmet out of storage. The clear plastic would let him travel at speed without worrying about wind in his eyes. Without it, he knew (from motorcycle experience) that 30 mph was about top comfortable speed. The face shield would be good for 100 mph easy, he thought.

"Well, that's everyone, Louisa,, except yours."

"I certainly can't alter a dress or skirt and shorts would be too cold. I could modify some slacks, maybe some chinos, but I don't want flapping culottes." Her logic included fashion worries and the men smiled at this.

Louisa worked on her own attire and had just finished when the phone rang.

"Let it ring. Let's see what the caller ID says." The second ring brought up BLOCKED CALL on the display. It was their household rule not to answer those kinds of phone calls, almost always from telemarketers. It rang six times, then hung up when the phone began delivering its 'please leave a message' message.

About an hour later they heard a helicopter overhead. It seemed to circle or, at least, delay. It certainly was not a straight voyage across their property.

"Truck's in the barn and the barn door is locked. I've got the key to it in my pocket."

"Think we should leave the house and barn unlocked?"

"Well, they don't know about the truck. Far as they know there is nothing out of the ordinary about it, but still, we can't leave it here. It HAS to go with us."

"Ralphie has all his notes. There's nothing left. The equipment, ingredients -- everything -- it's dispersed or thrown away or put up among other stuff, out and among all our other stuff on the shelves. Ralphie said no one could make heads or tails of it much less remake it."

Louisa went to the cookie jar. It was not really a cookie jar, just what they called their emergency fund. There were several thousand dollars in currency she took up.

"Push comes to shove, we ought to pack some clothing in suitcases, like we're going on a trip."

"Like we're not ever coming back is more like it. This is going to be a final farewell to the homestead, I'm afraid. At least it may be several weeks or months."

There were no more helicopter sounds, so Johnny trundled his bags to the barn to put them into the back of the pickup. He set down the bags and unlocked the barn side door and entered. He knew the barn so well he did not even have to flip on the lights and he made for the truck by moonlight. He pushed his own suitcases into the bed and slid them to the front to make room for the others. He carefully relocked the barn door and was about to go back into the house when he saw six figures in the dark approaching the house on foot. They were silhouetted by moonlight like dumbasses, he thought. He saw them WAY OFF; there was plenty of time to evade them if he hurried.

They had not seen him yet so he stepped back and hastily retreated back into the barn. He quickly flipped open his cell phone and speed dialed the house. His dad recognized the caller ID and answered.

"Go to my birthday party place!" By this he meant the second story sun deck. "Please do it fast."



Johnny correctly assumed the phone was tapped but he did not give anything away with what he had said. He ran to the truck, quietly closed the door, and put it in D, but with the brake on, and depressed the cigarette lighter. He slowly rotated it clockwise and the truck rose straight up a few inches.

Johnny had a whole lifetime of experience working with dangerous farm equipment and knew to operate the dial very carefully for safety. He gingerly gave a little more turn and the truck lifted some more, six feet, ten feet.

He looked out the driver's window to verify upwards clearance and took it up to the second level landing.

When above it he silently coaxed the truck by means of slight pressure on the gas pedal to move forward towards the big hay doors. Each was immensely wide and he only had to nudge one of them with the front bumper. The door swung open and the nose of the truck floated through. He was still obscured by the barn from the approaching men, so he used the rear bumper -- once through -- to close the upper barn door by turning and reversing the truck in a manner which reminded him of a parallel parking maneuver.

Johnny swung the wheel around causing the truck to do a flat turn, straightened the truck, then made for the house, staying at the same two-story level of height. His parents and Gramps were out on the porch with additional suitcases waiting for him.

There was not enough room to set the truck down because the veranda was not that large and it was surrounded by its fence, so he made do by hovering four feet -- deck railing height -- near the redwood picnic table where they always held birthday parties.

One by one, the trio slid their suitcases into the bed of the truck and silently clambered from picnic table into the tailgate themselves. On his hands and knees, Gramps made for the window between cab and bed to advise Johnny.

Their silence was broken by the sound of their own front doorbell. Horton put his finger across his lips and pointed up. Johnny nodded and the truck receded smoothly upwards in absolute silence. As they ascended Horton looked down and saw an awaiting goon covering the back door. The squad of men had anticipated they might try to flee out the back when the doorbell rung, but never anticipated flight in the sense of true flight and, so, did not look upwards.

Once aloft they felt secure enough to enter the cab through the rear window. Louisa sat center seat and Horton shotgun. The grandpa seemed to prefer the truck bed behind them.

"Johnny, you okay to drive?" asked his dad.

Johnny nodded solemnly and corrected him. "I'm okay to drive AND fly!"

VACATION HUT

"The old fishing camp looks good. Think anyone will know where we are?"

"They have enough resources to find us eventually, but we'll be okay here for awhile. Few days, anyhow."

"We ought to make plans for a more secure alternate."

"Well, the tool shed has a few things, but we need some more materials."

"What? To make a vehicle?"

He shrugged. "That, too, but I was thinking of lodgings."

"What's wrong with our cabin here? This one, I mean, just at another location."

He looked down at the foot of the cabin and savored the engineering effort. It had been a premanufactured cabin, brought in by flatbed truck, then gently settled onto cinder blocks. The steel beams of the bottom were actually what the cabin sat on.

"I see what you mean. We could attach lifters all along the beams, every couple feet or so. I could do it with an electric drill. There's plenty of room under the crawl space. They're 'I' beams, so they'll be plenty secure."

The menfolk disconnected plumbing and electricity lines after adding the lifters. When they finished Ralph used a remote control to test their handiwork. The cabin hovered a yard above the ground. He could have left it there hovering for a century, until the beams began to sag.

Maxwell grinned at Louisa and offered, "Do you want to play Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz or do you want to stay in the truck?"

"The truck is scary enough. A flying house is too much. Do you think we could try out our personal lifters, for an emergency, I mean?"

"You're absolutely right. I think we ought to. Never know when it might come handy."

"Johnny, why don't you do the honors? Mind you: safety first. Let's just hover a foot off the ground to get used to the idea and to calibrate the mechanism."

Johnny nodded and reached into his vest for his personal control unit. Suddenly, he hung a foot off the ground by his vest. "It's uncomfortable. It would be better to have an entire suit made of this stuff sewn into the fabric." Louisa nodded. She could work on that.



AT THE UNIVERSITY WITH AN ATTORNEY

The university had a legal department, actually just an office for an attorney, L. Michael Hanks and his single secretary. Mostly he practiced franchise law and was used to being a solo practitioner.

Solo legal practitioners were like solo doctors, guys who were extremely competent, not afraid to go it alone, feeling no need of surrounding themselves with the insulation of a group practice. Such men as he also had no need of country club ties. Group men were well paid, for they were self-selecting and fed off the very country club people they protected and enriched. Solo practitioners had to know their stuff, for they had neither the financial safety net of a group practice nor automatic customers from the country club network.

Ralph and his Math Department chairman sat before Hanks in his office and discussed their legal options.

"Funding for the University is at the FEDERAL level. Make no mistake: they call the shots, all of them. At this point, at a certain way of looking at it, this is a 'national' university, not 'state'. The curriculum, the emphasis, the political orientation is all controlled by funding.

"Sure, the drug companies are private and they grant research money to biology, but the FDA virtually oversees them. Same thing goes for chemistry, physics; you name it. The thing is, they'll say Littlefoot developed his stuff here, on campus. That means we own his patents. That means Uncle Sam gets to call the shots."

Ralph did not mind. He was not money oriented. He was too young. Had he been in his thirties he would have resented it, but he was still in his teens, not even finished undergraduate schooling yet.

Ralph's lawyer listened to himself talk, playing devil's advocate, smiling, putting together a plan. He knew it was all theft. It was mathematics Ralph had developed. The school did not have a mathematics grant at all from the feds. There were grants in physics, chemistry, biology, the social sciences, teaching.

In fact, just about every single group of courses in the university was partially funded and under the thumb of the federal government, every course, EXCEPT mathematics. The closest thing to math that was funded at the federal level was a computer enrichment study for poor people and that was, strictly speaking, a sociology project, that is to say, a welfare project.

The lawyer Hanks knew Ralph's practical applications were all done at home 'in the barn'. The school could not document a single instance of providing Ralph with a foot of bench space or an hour of time in a lab. Nor could anyone even be bribed into saying so.

Ralph's closest encounter to bench work at State was the twenty hours a week he worked doing dishes in one of the student cafeterias. Ironically, Ralph had mentioned to him that during those hours of labor, alone, hands busy doing dishes,

was when most of the transcendent ideas were conjured up, perhaps from the steam of the hot clean dishes.

"I broke a dish, dropped it right on the floor, when I developed the first set of equations for electricity generation," he admitted.



"But this new stuff, did you write it down here anywhere?"

"No, Sir. It's all up here and only up here." He tapped his head.

The lawyer thought to himself while he stared at the floating object. It was a rough brick shape of rubbery looking reddish claylike material. He could see fingerprints in its surface where Ralph had kneaded it into shape.

He put his hand beneath it and felt nothing. His hand's presence beneath the levitating rectangle did not disturb it in any way.

He was able to raise it by lifting the brick an additional six inches. When he withdrew his hand the brick fell slowly to its former position at the same height above the desk.

He gingerly pushed its side and the brick 'slid' sideways above the desk about a foot, slowed, and then came to a stop. He tried pushing down on the brick and it resisted his efforts. He used both hands and put most of his weight down on it, but it would not budge.

The lawyer was still thinking: Ralph had not even ever officially published anything. Not a single article, not even an assignment, essay, thesis, professional journal. The school had nothing on him that he developed anything while under the auspices of the university. It was going to be very hard for anyone to make a claim against the inventions.

"It's behaving according to the settings I've got it on. You can push it up and it will sink back into position. But you can't push it down at all. You can move it horizontally. I can change any one of those settings, or all of them."

Ralph indicated his remote control device and twisted a dial.

"Now, you can push it down, but not up."

He flipped a switch.

"Now you can slide it back and forth, but not sideways. And so on. I can alter its momentum and 'at rest' characteristics."

The brick rose an additional foot.

"Now it won't budge up, down, or horizontally. It would stop a truck. You could lift a hundred thousand pounds with it -- any weight -- no maximum -- so long as the thing you are lifting does not, itself, tear apart."

"How high can you make it go?"

"Any height. I could send it to the moon. By accelerating it at high rate, say, one gravity half way there and decelerating to land at one gravity for the second half of the trip we could get there in a few hours. I could get it to Mars in a couple days easily."

"Okay." The lawyer was out of his element, completely bowled over by the tangible thing in front of him. For once in his life, perhaps the first time, a

tangible thing overshadowed the intangible legal work.

The reality of Ralph's discovery made the legal work seem peripheral, inconsequential. Now he had to be extremely careful, for this valuable commodity would rip society apart.

Many rapacious predators and carrion eaters would assemble. If he were not careful, Ralph's life and the lives of his family would be ruined for years to come.

The lawyer knew a little physics, just a little. "Okay, say you take her to the moon. What's the fuel? Where's the energy come from? How do you get the speed?"

"It's converting the stuff the brick is made out of into energy. The brick gets lighter and lighter."

"What kind of energy? Heat? Electricity?"

Ralph shook his head. "Time-space distortion occurs, which affects the inertial component of the here and now." He pointed to the brick. "What you're looking at is the brick as it was, not as it really is now. It's been displaced and that causes a deficit in its inertial mass. Sort of. I can't explain it good with words. I could show you the mathematics of it, but first I would have to teach you the equations and physics and that would take awhile."

"Okay. Let me ask you: is this written down ANYWHERE?"

Ralph shook his head. "There are no copies, no notes, not even any preliminary work. Not here, not anywhere."

"Could you, if need be, write it all down for a patent application?"

"Of course. Maybe a half hour. Couple sheets of paper."

"Okay. Don't write it down yet. It could get stolen, even from a safe. This is so big, ESPECIALLY from a safe." He paused. "What are chances -- in your best guesstimation -- of someone else doing the same thing -- duplicating your work -- now that they know it can be done."

"Well, I can't be sure, can't be absolutely certain, but I would estimate that it would take at least ten years -- perhaps never. I just don't think anyone could come up with this."

"If people -- persuasive people -- were to question your professors, your family, your friends, your roomies -- could any of them shed light on this? Could people put two and two together from snatches of conversation, class assignments?"

"There's nothing. Look, I'm not bragging or anything, but I just don't think anyone, anywhere could duplicate this. Not the electricity maker nor this floater. I have a good reason to want to believe so."

"Why?"

"Because I have a third, more important discovery in the works. This third thing I'm working on is built on top of the first two." Ralphie smiled as he said this and the lawyer knew that even now Ralph's mind was at work on the idea, just as a composer can carry on a conversation while simultaneously writing a symphony in his head.

The lawyer just stared at him, not daring to ask, so he backtracked a bit.

"Let's talk Einstein. If you accelerated it at one gravity, how long would it take to get up to the speed of light? Since you can't do that, supposedly, what

happens?"

"Well, the brick gets lighter and lighter as you use it up to go faster and faster. But remember, you get less and less efficient. Even if you went for a kazillion years and used up an entire, very large brick, you still wouldn't achieve light speed. It gets less and less efficient. It accelerates less and less."

The lawyer inwardly sighed. At least it was not a faster than-light device he had here. "So what's it top out at?"

Ralph shrugged. "Dunno. Maybe half light speed. Haven't tried it. I seems to me time dilation would not kick in too much yet, but I WOULD worry about the odd grain of dust here and there. Seems like that alone would put an upward limit on things."

Without them even having discussed the topic directly, the lawyer realized he and Ralph had both been thinking of star travel.

"Ah, I think I see what you mean. The odd dust mote between stars -- you'd hit it and it would explode like a son of a gun when you hit it. Is that what you're saying?"

Ralph nodded while thinking out loud, lost in the reverie. He solved the small problem off handedly.

"I think we could put an ablative shield in front." He paused. "Well, you know, star to star may be impractical, but with this gizmo here we have the solar system knocked. We can go anywhere. We can go cheap and fast. We can transport. Lunar or Martian colonies are now practical, not just for a few brave souls, but for millions of people at a time."

DRESS FOR THE OCCASION

Johnny dressed in dark clothes for the occasion and so did Gramps. They floated along the side of the road against the treeline, obscured by it. Gramps worried they might hit a telephone pole support wire, unseen in the dark, or a bird, or any other small, invisible obstacle.

The old man worried about the unfettered impetuosity of youth. He knew about young people's judgment, skill and fast reflexes often overtaken by overconfidence. He had heard his share of car wreck stories over the years and now lived and preached the security of caution.

He now knew the caution of Daedalus and cautioned Johnny. "Listen, Icarus, I want to stay less than ten feet off the ground and want to stay less than ten miles an hour."

Johnny smiled in comprehension. He knew the Greek story and complied with the safety warning. But after just a few minutes of flight they felt safe and their speed and height increased. Gramps relented and they must have been going thirty miles an hour and were at least a hundred feet high. But he still worried.

Especially, he now remembered a score of birds, necks broken, which had hit their invisible glass sliding door. Hitting anything at all, even at any slow speed would undo them. A fellow air traveler, a bird, even a bug could cause them injury, even death.

"Our driveway is coming up. We ought to be really careful." They dropped speed to a walk and rounded the bend carefully and came upon a pair of unmarked sedans in the company of a police cruiser at their gate at the highway, which was a mile from the farm house. There were a pair of conversing guards lounging at the gate, smoking and completely unaware that their security work was being bypassed by air travel.

Johnny and Gramps drifted back out of sight, then made for the house, still about three feet off the ground.

The lights in the house were on. It was occupied by whoever owned three additional sedans parked in the drive. They peered into the brightly lit open picture window of the second floor game room room and watched in horror as a crew ransacked their house, looking for Ralph's handiwork.

A pair of supervisors stood idly watching the underlings work. In a seething rage now, Gramps narrowed his eyes when he saw the boss flick the ash off his lit cigarette onto Louisa's immaculate carpet.

Gramps and Johnny backed away from the house and lit on the barn's steeply pitched roof. Johnny looked at his grandpa and he felt like Dick Van Dyke and Julie Andrews in Mary Poppins; all they lacked was an umbrella.

It was too steep to walk, but once seated they felt secure, their Levi seats against the gritty shingles. Even if they fell, there would be no problem. They could react to a slide or even a fall off the edge by causing themselves to hover.

From his right pocket he got out a duct taped pair of items, a small floater brick joined to a battery-powered video camera. When he toggled on the camera, its red LED power indicator came on. Johnny had forgotten about it and loosened a bit

of duct tape and covered the tell-tale light.

From his left pocket Johnny retrieved a small LCD TV to which he had duct taped two remote control devices, one which directed the brick, the other for camera lens focus. He flipped on the TV power switch, which momentarily showed snow, then mostly inky blackness as the monitor picked up the camera's broadcast, now just the image of the night time sky.

He could not only maneuver the brick around and, thus, point the camera lens, but also focus the camera and zoom its lens. It also recorded both video and audio.

He made the broadcasting camera hover in the air in front of him. When he turned it the TV image showed where the camera was pointing. The remote control danced the camera right, left, then turned it 360; its lens zoomed experimentally in and out.

At first, he made it move by looking at the hovering camera itself with his own eyes, but it became invisible in the dark as it moved away from him. Then he began to navigate it by looking at the TV picture which showed what the camera lens saw. At first he saw nothing, just a black screen, so he rotated it flat slowly in a 360 degree turn until the little TV screen showed the lit picture window of his house.

Now oriented, he moved the floating camera midway between barn and house and focused the lens through the open window where the men were searching. It was a small object -- the size of a flat-black paperback book hovering in the dark at second story height fifty feet away from the picture window. It was as invisible as the proverbial black cat in a coal mine at midnight.

However, despite the small size of the TV screen, it was very clear. A perfectly clear picture showed the group of men ransacking his house. You could make out features and identify individuals. Gramps stabbed the 'record' button in anger.

Gramps considered what to do about the violation of his son's house and decided to act boldly. He took out his cell phone and put in the battery, then dialed the home number. Immediately, he heard his own land line ringing. The two supervisors looked at each other, shrugged, and one of them answered, "Hello."

"Why have you broken into my home and why are you burglarizing it?"

Immediately, the one answering the phone made a frantic 'round up' gesture with his free hand, a couple circles in the air with forefinger pointing up, then finished up the gesture with a casting motion, as though about to throw a lariat.

Two of the other men began operating some sort of electrical equipment, probably something to search for the location of the cell phone. Gramp's cell phone had a GPS in it, but was untraceable until powered by the battery. Nor could just anyone gain access to this feature, just the phone company and just law enforcement.

"We're not burglars. Who is this?"

"Oh, yes you are! You violated my home. You have no cause to enter -- no court order -- no warrant. You know who this is -- I'm the owner of the house you are burglarizing. The door was locked and you broke in. Now, who are you?"

Gramps saw the man in the window smile as he answered. "I'm not at liberty to disclose who I am." He was approached by the other man, the one on the GPS tracker,

who pantomimed a 'He's right here!' by emphatically pointing to the ground.

The man on the phone quickly, quietly pointed three times, once each at three of the men in the room. He crossed his lips in a hush gesture and pointed to the door. Three goons silently let themselves out to begin stalking the exterior of the house.

"It doesn't matter. I know you are government. We are recording this and filming the intrusion, too. I have seen you send the goon squad outside."

Immediate reaction showed on the phone man's face. He looked around for a hidden room camera, not even thinking to look outside at all. One of the others shook his head, as though to say, 'Hey, we checked; there aren't any room cameras or microphones.'

The boss then decided the observation point was through the open window that led out into the pitch black night. He put both hands on the sill and peered out into the inky blackness. There was nothing, no tree, no other building. The barn was too much at a catty corner angle to observe from that position. Way in the distance, miles away, there was the road and the treeline, neither a visual possibility without some kind of world-class telescope.

Gramps made a last statement. "There's nothing in the house or barn except personal possessions, nothing you can use. Make sure you break nothing, take nothing, and please put everything back into its place in good order. Clean up after yourselves. Besides filming you, we also already have everyone's fingerprints."

He lied about this last bit, but knew it would force the bozos to -- at least -- dust the entire house. He quickly undid the battery which hung up the phone call. He saw the monitoring guy make a cut throat gesture to indicate the GPS was not traceable any longer and they had not yet gotten other than a general fix.

"Come on. Let's go before they spot us." Gramps nodded and they both reluctantly left the roof of the barn by silently ascending straight up. Their black clothes made them as invisible as their location. Their method of escape was so improbable no one would even think to look up.

Gramps looked over at his grandson and told him, "It makes an old man glad to go flying with his grandson." He grinned and Johnny returned the grin. It WAS good to go flying with Gramps.

Johnny left the camera hovering in place, but briefly he panned the lens and zoomed it around, widening the view until it encompassed the whole house. He panned it up towards them, where they now hovered at a higher level and could not find himself and Gramps at all. So, he knew the goons could not see find them either.

He caused it to ascend, careful not to lose track of its whereabouts. He caught sight of it as it rose and used the controls to make it come to him when it got to the same height. When it got within reach he grabbed it, turned off its flotation system and put it in his backpack.

The three goons who had been sent outside made a circular tour of the grounds. Gramps watched them assemble, then return to the interior. No one was left outside as guard.

Gramps and Johnny retrieved two 6 ft steel beams to which they had earlier

affixed floater bricks along the length of each. They silently floated to the parked cars of the government invaders and quickly slid the beams under one of the sedans, one beam behind the front wheels, the other in front of the rears.

"We've just put wreckers out of business, I'm afraid," commented Gramps. Johnny used the controller to gently, silently lift the sedan, poise it above the other, then gently 'parked' it on top of the first.

He did it as gently as possible, but there was some noise from the bottom car's metal roof deforming flat. The loudest sound came when the lower car's windows all cracked into tiny pieces of safety glass. After the top car settled completely, Johnny horizontally withdrew the beams which had been supporting the car.

He repeated the malicious stunt with the third car. The whole power play had taken less than three minutes. The goon squad would discover their rides home stacked three high.

"The good news is, the top car is undamaged."

Grandson and grandpa floated away at speed. Before going home they lighted down within walking distance of a rural Dairy Queen they always frequented and Gramps stood them for a couple cheeseburgers.

"I am truly sorry about disrupting your life, Johnny."

"Oh, don't worry about me. This is fun."

"I know it seems like fun right now, but this is serious and dangerous, too. Luckily, your summer vacation is next month and you will not miss too much school, but you understand we cannot let you attend classes right now. The government would make excuses to arrest you, and through you, us.

"You know I wouldn't rat you out, Gramps."

"Oh, I know you wouldn't, but these are clever, desperate people. Powerful and ruthless. They would figure something out. You can see that, can't you?"

"Yeah. It's best we stay invisible." He chewed his food then took a long pull on the straw of his malt. "How long we gotta lay low? And what's our long term plans?"

The grandpa stared hard at his grandson who had voiced the very question he had posed to himself, a question to which he had, as yet, no answer.

"I think Ralph will come up with another interesting development and secure us an avenue of well-being. A compromise."

"WOODEN SHIPS AND IRON MEN"

"The motorcycle helmet's plastic face shield is good, but still limits us to a hundred miles and hour or so. We need an enclosure, something like an airplane without wings, preferably streamlined, although that aspect of it does not particularly matter much because fuel is not a problem."

"Do you want to bother Ralphie with this now?"

"No, I don't. He's busy on the next project. We can't bother him. Actually, this is just detail work we are stalled on. We should be able to do this ourselves. In the larger scheme of things it's a pretty tame set of parameters: ANY streamlined enclosure."

"Well, if we go wood, there are two advantages: wood is impervious to radar; we'll be invisible to tracking."

"And the other?"

"Well, Dad, wood work is kind of your own area of specialization, isn't it? I won't have to lift a hand." He grinned at this.

"I'm thinking wood would be okay, but a really deluxe supersonic personal transporter ought to be made by the aircraft industry out of conventional materials: aluminum, et cetera. I think I could get hold of a wrecked airplane."

MOONSTRUCK BY MOONLIGHT

"This a a kazillion candle power, all right." The Lowes clerk held the spotlight in awe. "You wouldn't dare look into it. It'd fry your eyeballs."

Horton examined the box and asked, "How many you got in the stockroom?" He amazed the kid by buying all of them.

"The six spotlights are arranged in a rough circle, kind of a hexagon." Horton indicated the thick sheet of aluminum which had once been a stop sign. "They're all plugged in and can be turned on remotely. The floater units are bolted along the edges on the reverse side and our camera and receiver is here in the center."

He used the remote control to make the stop sign float. He flipped a switch and the six mighty lights went on. Instantly, they felt oppressive heat. The men grinned at the output of heat.

"You could cook lunch with that."

"My eyes are still zinging and we did not even look directly at it."

"Well, okay then. How long to get there?"

"Ralph did not know exactly. We don't have any kind of sophisticated guidance, just dead reckoning and the camera to help us. Man, I'd hate to get it there only to crash it into the Moon just because we don't know how fast we're going and if we can stop in time."

"If we crash it, we crash it." He shrugged. "Couple hundred bucks. That's nothing. But listen, I think if we're careful we won't crash it. Accelerate it from zero to as fast as it can go out to the 100,000 miles point, then immediately decelerate it at the same rate from 100,000 miles an hour to zero. If we do that we're at zero miles an hour 40,000 miles from the moon. I think we can do better than that. Ralphie's college professors can help us."

SHOOT THE MOON

It was nearing sundown when they decided to launch. The moon hung in the sky like a Moslem symbol.

"Here she goes." Johnny held the remote like some guy at a remote controlled airplane contest: control box hung around his neck on a strap, both hands on the box, eyes glued to the 'airplane'. The stop sign lifted silently into the air. The spotlights pointed straight up. Johnny tested them and when they went on it looked like an old newsreel of Hollywood, opening night for a new film. The spotlights shot straight up, but you could see them diverge and actually see the light beams in the air.

FLYING MOTORCYCLE

"Hello, Horton, Maxwell." The airport guy nodded cheerfully to each.

"Hi, Sam. Long time no see."

"You gonna set those boys up with pilot licenses?" Sam ran the airport's flying school and was always on the lookout for a sale.

"Maybe a quick course later on for Johnny, but first we want to buy him a plane."

Normally, this would have floored Sam, but he knew the old Indian's ways with jokes. But he played along with it since he did not know the direction of the conversation.

"Every plane I got is for sale at the right price." He had three: an ancient 150, a doddering 172, and a military push-pull, the Super Skymaster.

Sam was a Cessna guy, a high wing pilot. He had never in his wildest dreams ever thought of selling the Littlefoots a plane. At best, he hoped for lessons for Johnny.

Sam's hand expansively indicated his fleet, parked in a row before them. He smiled, proud of his stable.

"Actually we're interested in the BD5." Gramps half pointed to the hanger where Sam's long abandoned kit plane was stored. Sam was visibly surprised by the clarification. He suddenly saw this as a potential inquiry leading to a real sale. He would never have ever anticipated anyone interested in buying a half completed kit plane.

"I worked on her last, maybe 25 years ago. There she sits. Too big a job for me. I bit off way more than I can chew."



BD5 jet converted into motorcycle

"You seen the motorcycle version of it?" Sam nodded. Now he understood. Many an unfinished BD5 jet airplane ended up as a motorcycle. The aluminum body and tricycle landing gears had been redesigned into a rocket-shaped motorcycle by another kit maker. By leaving off and capping the wing stubs and adding motorcycle drive train one could finish a languishing project plane, giving it a phoenix-like rebirth as an enclosed motorcycle. Because of the streamlining such a motorcycle achieved extremely good gas mileage. With a tiny air conditioner added and the enclosed canopy it was more like a car than a motorcycle.

They approached the hangar. Sam slid the hangar door open and sunlight lit up the gleaming projectile. A tarp covered the canopy but its nose peeked out and its razor-sharp point pointed menacingly at them.

"You could WRITE with the nose cone, it's so sharp." He playfully touched the point of the nose with forefinger, then quickly pulled back with a fake, panicked "ouch!" as though drawing blood.

Sam pulled the dusty tarp off the transparent military-looking canopy. There were two seats, tandem with dual shoulder straps and seat-belts loosely hanging across them. Sam slid back the canopy so they could see inside. The dashboard held a sparse array of instruments and a couple gaping panel holes where future expensive radios might abide.

There was no engine, of course. The small turbine engine intended for such a project cost more than the rest of the plane and would be added last. The end of the cold war and demise of the Soviet Union had led to declassification of many military secrets, including cruise missile engines.

Cruise missiles were not really missiles, but actually unmanned turbine fighter craft with preprogrammed itineraries. The engines which powered these craft weighed a scant ten pounds -- basketball sized -- and were tiny, expensive, reliable, and -- surprisingly -- about as loud as a big fan. The civil aviation industry had hoped the declassification of such engines would lead to the transition of all small aircraft from conventional piston engines to the simpler smaller, more reliable turbines.

So, since the BD5 had no engine at all yet, it was very light and Gramps tested the heft of it by raising the tail. He was amazed that it came up. There were no

wings yet, just the stubs. Horizontal and vertical stabilizers had not been put on either. The rear just came abruptly to an end as the cone shaped sheet metal tapered down.

"Sam, we'd like to buy her from you, cash up front, but we also want to rent hangar space to work on her here."

"You could use this one, the one it's in." He waved at the workbench. "There's power tools, too. How much you want to offer?" They haggled a bit, agreed on a price and time limit for hangar rental. Gramps surprised the heck out of Sam by forking over the entire sum then and there in cash. He pocketed the key to the hangar and drove off.

SPEED TRIALS

"The Internet claims speeds of just below supersonic, but we can hover at any altitude, even fly sideways or backwards."

"It's still a radar trap."

Horton's electric drill whined as its motor screwed the last of the bricks into place. They had used the BD5's landing gear stanchions to hold up the plane. There were three: the retractable nose wheel and one each under each wing stub. They were perfect

spots to choose for the lifter bricks because those three wheels held up the weight of the plane anyway.

The wires leading from each brick went to the control unit which they had put into the instrument panel, into one of the available dashboard holes. They used a computer game controller as their input device, a joystick used on such things as Microsoft Flight Simulator. In true safety fashion, they wired in a redundant set of wires to a second controller for the rear passenger.

The plane had a few functional instruments, but they would not need any of them except altimeter. That was pretty much all they needed. Gramps had bought a Magellan GPS, one intended for cars, not aircraft, but it did also show altitude.

"I'm going to fly it VFR," he joked. "And I'm ALSO going to fly it IFR." IFR stood for 'Instrument Flight Rules' which required radar and VFR stood for the cheaper 'Visual Flight Rules' which did not. He son waited for the punch line which he knew was coming. "'(I) (F)ollow (R)oads' and '(V)isually (F)ollow (R)oads'.

Last but not least, came an epoxied Mercedes Benz star on the side. 'Least' had been the installation of a toilet paper roll spool which Gramps screwed into the cockpit within easy reach of a pilot who might need to blow his nose. "That's another thing: a Kleenex box is not just more expensive, but it might bounce around and get lost."

They finished up lifter installation, but wanted to test their handiwork before proceeding further. Gramps got in and tried on the seat belts and double harness shoulder straps.

"They feel real secure. People should wear stuff like this in automobiles." He looked seriously at his son and repeated, "We are all of us CRAZY not to be wearing a rig like this all the time in cars."

He powered up by flipping a toggle and the instrument panel lit up. A tentative twist of the altitude control lifted the plane a foot above the ground. He made it drift left, right, forward, back. Then he spun around three-sixty.

Gramps flipped a toggle and the whine of electric motors were heard as the tricycle landing gear retracted into the belly, streamlining the little plane further. Gramps redeployed the landing gear, then made the plane hover a bit higher



in the high roofed hangar.

He then rolled the plane 180 degrees until he was hanging upside down. He grinned awkwardly at his son then rerighted it and, finally, landed.

They had put an aluminum shallow cone on the back of the open stub where the tail piece would have been. True to his word, Gramps had added motorcycle accoutrement: head, tail, brake, and backup lights, turn signals and horn. He added GPS and, incongruously, a CB radio. He rigged a couple oxygen cylinders for high altitude travel. Anything over 12,000 feet and he planned on using them. He knew not to go above 30,000 because the little plane was not pressurized. It was extremely cold aloft and there would be no residual heat from a piston engine to warm them, so he got a couple of high-output electric space heaters.

NEW HOMESTEAD



Johnny floated up the mountain face. He did not want to go above the tree line because he thought they might need the cover of the branches. Also, he thought of his mom, that she would want a pretty view for their vacation house. He stayed ten feet above the highest tree and kept speed at a fast

run. The occasional hawk made way for him; once he saw a deer.

There were animal trails and once in a blue moon hunters came up here, but never casual day tourists, for the trail was too steep. It became harder and harder to contend with the increasingly steep slope.

Then, suddenly, he saw the perfect spot: a flat expanse, grass-covered, much less than a quarter acre. No way in, no way out. Maybe a small helicopter might land there, maybe not. Then, luck abundant! He saw the headwater of a spring. He alighted and looked around. Plenty of tree cover. They could slide their cabin beneath the canopy of trees on the West side and still be invisible to air traffic. He float-ran the circumference looking for trails. There were none. The slope made walking impossible.

MOVE IN DAY

"Louisa, do you want to ride in the house like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz?"

"I'll ride in the truck, thank you very much."

The building held rock steady as it rose. The cabin floor did not cant a single degree. Dishes in the cupboard did not even rattle. Johnny operated the controller that moved the cabin from the open doorway of the flying house. He led the truck that his grandpa drove. His grandpa followed at a safe distance and they both silently traversed the night sky. This was a sparsely populated region anyway and it was still a moonless part of the month.

Johnny navigated them to his chosen clearing and deftly set the house near the center of the little meadow. He kept the house a few feet above the grass and hopped down. He held his control unit with both hands and it was also held around his neck with a black nylon strap. He looked, for all the world, like a kid with a radio controlled model airplane.

Gramps set the truck down a few yards away and he and Louisa got out. She immediately surveyed her new homestead and began to smile.

"Johnny, you picked a good spot. This is beautiful."

The idea of a floating, heavy house naturally made Johnny antsy and he wanted to set it down right away, but he knew he did not have to. The house could float indefinitely.

"Even if it doesn't smush the grass, it still overshadows the grass and will leave a square mark as the grass yellows beneath it. Besides, it's completely visible from the air where it is."

"I was thinking of tree cover, either over there or back yonder. There's the spring I was telling you about." He indicated with his hand.

"Let's check out your spring and see about limb clearance for the roof."

As they walked and talked Johnny caused the cabin to tag behind them, still at about four feet above the grass. The grass was wild, about eight inches high. It was wet with nighttime dew and their pant-legs became damp.

"Louisa, what do you think?" She furrowed her brow in feminine concentration on the merits of this or that venue, orienting the front of the house first in this direction or that. Gramps smiled at her decision making process.

He had spent many an hour moving furniture within a room to the specifications of female orderliness. Every time he had done so it had amazed his male spirit how very well women knew what they were doing in this regard.

"I like it in there," she pointed. Johnny complied and scooted the house in that direction. Gramps visually checked tree branch elevation and roof clearance as the house slid toward its new foundation.

"Can you turn it, Johnny, so that the veranda points this way?"

Johnny nodded and the cabin quit moving laterally, then began to slowly spin so that the front of it faced toward Louisa's indicated direction. Gramps walked beside the house, then around back to check for height clearance.

"It's okay here, Johnny," he called. "Back her up. About twenty feet."

The house slid into its alcove like a yacht into a berth. He lowered it until

it was only a couple feet off the ground.

"Before we give this spot final approval, why don't we survey it from the air? From all directions and angles?" Johnny nodded and they used their personal floaters to carry them to the truck. By tacit agreement and some unconsciously shared thinking they both still thought of the truck as a necessary conveyance, even though their personal floaters made the truck superfluous. The truck dutifully lifted them straight up above the height of the trees.

"It's completely invisible. Can't see a thing."

"Let's try over yonder. Say we're a helicopter over there." He pointed and they tried every kind of angle of view and position.

"I'm going to say completely invisible by air from every which kind of viewpoint. Of course, it's dark yet. I want to look again during daylight. We might could see the roof through a gap in the leaves of the topmost branches. If so, we can always paint the roof."

Johnny had a sudden thought. "What about winter? The leaves fall!" Then he caught himself. They were, for the most part evergreens.

"We may very well have to re-situate later. Good thinking. We have to remember to look again when the weather turns." They returned and parked the truck next to the house under the cover of the branches. It looked really good there next to the house and it felt like they belonged there, that their former fishing camp location had just been a preliminary place for this, now permanent location.

"You know what?" Gramps smiled at Louisa. "We can leave it a foot off the ground forever. No contact with the ground. That way, no ants, either. We got a bug-free house. All except for flying bugs. No snakes, frogs, lizards, mice. Nothing." Louisa's eyes lit up at the idea.

"Gramps continued, "I'm going to tap that spring with a hose and a pump. I will have you running water in ten minutes."

He entered the cabin and came out again with a coiled green garden hose over his shoulder. True to his word, he reentered the cabin a few minutes later and ostentatiously demonstrated his handiwork by turning on the kitchen sink at full blast.

"Hot water coming up next, then toilet."

That was less pleasant but no more difficult. He had a very large diameter black hose which he coupled to the sewage line. He uncoiled the hose downhill.

"The longer the better, I say. There's nothing at all down there and it will be good fertilizer for the trees."

His floater helped him trundle the weight of the lengthy, heavy hose down the steep slope. He and Johnny covered the hose with vegetation, pine needles, branches.

"Louisa, we have to get some curtains or shutters or something. Sort of like those World War Two movies in England."

"Blackout curtains?" she asked.

He nodded and he could see her mind at work on the problem, soon to be solved either by her sewing machine or by his woodworking skills.

The cabin had a cast iron Ben Franklin stove in it, too, which burned most

anything: charcoal, wood, or commercially prepared uniformly sized compressed sawdust pellets. All those fuels produced smoke, visible by air from the black tubular steel chimney. "We should go electric heat now, I guess," Louisa said.

"We can use it once in awhile. I'll see if I can somehow disperse the chimney output."

"Well, after we get set up here, what do you say if we bring up some additional supplies?"

Gramps had already set into motion the verb phrase they would all now be employing: 'bring up' when referring to their new home.

"We can safely sneak into our home by air and raid the place. Even if there is a guard at the gate, we will be fine. Also, we should go buy groceries. Remember," he added, "we have NO limitations on travel. Any city in the world. We could eat lunch in Paris if you want."

CASH ADVANCE

Hankes drove to his bank and withdrew \$2000 in currency. That was not unusual to the teller. All he had to do was show proper identification. It was very unusual for him, though. He never did anything like this. A few minutes later he also withdrew the maximum amount allowed by the ATM machine. He planned to give the Littlefoots as much cash as they needed to live while in hiding.

He had earlier asked Ralph to hand write, sign, and date a letter hiring him for legal services. He and Ralph notarized this letter and Hankes began work in earnest, making preparations for a protracted legal onslaught. He made phone calls to colleagues in specialized areas of patent law.

TEST FLIGHT

"I am getting real tired of scurrying around at night!" complained Gramps. He slid open the hangar door as quietly as possible.

"You and me, both," agreed his son. Horton nosed their pickup into the hangar. Not only was the engine not running but the tires themselves did not crunch the gravel road leading up to the airport. He had set height for the truck at a half inch off the ground so the tires were not even touching. He

parked truck next to hangar and got out ready to close and re-lock the hangar door. While he did so his dad had entered the BD5 and silently nosed it through the doorway. Horton locked the door and disappeared down the road.

Gramps floated the plane a foot off the ground to the opposite side of the hangar so that he would not be visible from Sam's house. Once obscured by the building he leisurely put on the double shoulder harness and the lap strap seatbelt. With both hands he slid the canopy forward over his head and locked it. He touched the power button on the side of the Magellan GPS which lit up and showed a little map of the area, himself at the center. Gramps tested the oxygen bottles by cracking the valves and checking the gauges to make sure the needle read full. He left them off for now.

A dog barked. He recognized it as Sam's. The barking continued and Gramps saw the reflection of the porch light go on and he decided to leave quickly before Sam investigated the barn's exterior.

The little plane shot across the field at a gradual angle up. It accelerated like a sports car without Maxwell even giving it a fraction of the maximum. He glanced at the Magellan which read 375 mph, which amazed him.





BD5 motorcycle

The streamlined little plane did not make wind noise like their truck. Their truck was as streamlined as a brick; it fairly bristled with protrusions: bumpers, rear view mirrors, grill, door handles. All of these things not only slowed the truck down, but made extreme amounts of noise at high speed.

The plane was shaped like a bullet and had none of this. Without an engine it just slid through the air with a white noise hiss, sort of like the sound of headphones without noise cancellation. Furthermore, even though the inclusion of wings on a plane imparted necessary lift, they also produced an extreme amount of drag. This plane was characterized by the absence of wings; it did not need any lift from them and sure did not feel as though it had any drag.

He was already at 1000 feet. He quickly decelerated and dropped altitude. He did not want to show up on anyone's radar. He circled back and located Horton below still on the road. The CB radio's channel indicator lit up when he turned it to their prearranged channel.

"Ah, Rubber Duck, this is Fly Boy. Over."

"Go ahead, Fly Boy. Over."

"You see a UFO? Over."

"Saw nothing. Over."

They rendezvoused at the cabin, parked plane and truck, one on each side of their house, then went to bed.

JUDAS GOAT SMELLS LIKE A GOAT

"In my view, the enduring poverty on reservations is an effect of the heavy blanket of collectivism and state paternalism. Endorsed by the federal government in the 1930s, collectivism and state paternalism were eventually internalized by both local Native American elites and by federal bureaucrats who administer the Indians. The historical outcome of this situation was the emergence of a "culture of poverty" that looks down on individual enterprise and private property. Moreover, such an attitude is frequently glorified as some ancient Indian wisdom – a life-style that is morally superior to the so-called Euro-American tradition."

-- Andrei Znamenski, Native American Reservations: Socialist Archipelago, 2013

"The government is prepared to hire your services as an expert witness. If you are agreeable to these terms we can begin the process with your signature."

The goon did not know how to address Samuel Two Toes. He thought 'Samuel' under the circumstances was too familiar, but he did not want to call him 'Mr. Two Toes' in case it was not really his last name. He decided on no form of address until the guy actually signed. Then -- from the signature -- he would derive the preferred name.

The contract offered Two Toes \$15,000 for 'unspecified services'. It was to be a paid informer, paid liar, whatever else was called for. To go on a witness stand and say anything, perhaps. That was how the justice department did a lot of stuff.

The signature did not shed light on how Two Toes wanted to be addressed because on the signature line Samuel had put in the date (3 days wrong) but preceding it had carefully drawn a coiled rattle snake in great accurate detail instead of a written signature.

It would do. In fact, its flamboyance might solidify the action more so. They could get it notarized. Actually, legal stuff was just a curtain that had to be moved out of the way, just a doorway, not a locked door.

REAL MEN ARE RARE; REAL MEN ARE STEADFAST

"Well, hell, then they can fire me!" Dean Larson responded to the squeeze play. He had known what was coming and had prepared himself as much as he could, calmed himself, told himself to watch his mouth. But it was difficult. He looked up at Chancellor Drake like a dog that had been unjustly whipped.

The chancellor of the University sat dumb waiting for outcomes, waiting for direction. His sense of justice was dictated not by morality or what his grandmothers had taught him. He was, above all, a political guy and his sense of justice was completely tuned to 'power flow'. He automatically responded to the presence of government goons in his office and knew to cooperate with them.

They hinted at tit for tat, quid pro quo, and if he played his cards right he could benefit, his school could benefit, everyone could benefit. Except for a few sacrificial lambs, of course. He decided to take a side and enter the fray.

"Dr. Larson, it appears young Littlefoot has violated several national security..."

"Bullshit! He's done NOTHING wrong! You guys," -- he pointed at the head goon -- "You guys broke into Littlefoot's house -- smashed the furniture, slashed the couch cushions, ripped out the sheet rock without any which kind of probable cause. I saw the damn video!" He pointed sequentially at some of the men.

"You! You used a crowbar on the kitchen cabinets. Pulled them apart. And you, you tore apart their living room. Where's your court order? Where's your warrant?"

The head goon Barringer had not known the video was so clear, that his goons were identifiable.

"Dr. Larson, this business the Littlefoots are involved in transcends normal legal channels. I can obtain a court order. Easily. As many as I want."

Larson let that sink in. He had heard 'The Littlefoots' which sounded to him like the beginning of a term used to identify a gang like 'THE Bonnie and Clyde gang', like 'THE Jesse James clan'.

"I don't know where they are. I have zero notes from Ralph. No notebooks or apparatus. He did his work at home and, apparently, he left nothing there for you to steal.

"Let me say this, that video, it gets YouTube coverage if and when Ralph so desires. So does the video of THIS interview, by the way."

"Are you tape recording this, Dr. Larson?" asked the chancellor incredulously. "I gave no such authorization." He sounded petulant and hurt.

"No, it's not ME tape recording. I'm not doing ANYTHING but listening to you woos out. But there IS a video of this being made right now, and I swear to God, I am so damn sick of your dishonesty and lack of integrity it makes me sick!"

Without so stating directly, he was referring to the Chancellor's role in covering up a football player's crime so that the young felon could continue on scholarship and win the state championship.

Barringer knew the camera of the video had to originate just outside the room, across the way. There was a tree less than fifty yards away whose branches were at window height. Barringer pointed at it and nodded one of his henchmen outside to

retrieve the camera. When the man left Larson commented on it.

"That's going to look REAL great on film. Probably get a nice closeup of his face." He let that sink in, then added. "Even if homeboy finds the camera and brings it back he still won't be able to retrieve the broadcast of it to where it's been sent."

The Chancellor asked, "Where is it being sent?"

"YouTube, probably. If you guys control YouTube, there are other websites, I guess. I sure hope you didn't look bad or say anything woosy to these Nazis before ushering me in here for the big squeeze. You wouldn't want to look bad in front of millions of people, would you, Chancellor Drake? Chancellor Howard S. Drake?"

Just then the phone rang. The chancellor looked annoyed because he had told his secretary he would not take anything except an emergency call during this important meeting. He picked it up with a furrowed brow, ready to excoriate Jenny for her transgression. He blinked a couple of times, then nodded and depressed the SPEAKER PHONE button.

"Hi. This is Ralph Littlefoot. I am greatly concerned about my house being destroyed yesterday by the government agents now here in this room." He sounded like he was reading.

"I am a mathematics major undergraduate student, classified as a sophomore, at State University and I have made a far reaching discovery with practical applications which will benefit mankind. The federal government has attempted to arrest my entire family to keep them hostage in order to control my invention. I am also the sole discoverer of the Electrical Production Brick, already in prevalent use. This is another, similarly-beneficial, practical invention with far reaching implications. I have not received any monetary gain from the EPB. I have relinquished all rights to it already by signed contract. However, this new invention is mine and mine alone and I will not empower any single group or individual with its ownership. The government is being controlled by lobbyists from subsidized industries, licensing groups, foreign entities, bureaucrats, regulators, unions, Socialists and the invention will be suppressed. It will be used as a bargaining chip for international intrigue, monetary gain for a few insiders, and social engineering projects. In so doing, several congressman are reaping huge payoffs. I have additional video and intend to release the names of the men in this room now listening to this phone call. Their supervisors and departments for which they work are being subpoenaed today."

Dean Larson had been listening, but also watching the tree outside the window. Two goons had approached it, one giving the other a boost up its trunk into its branches. As the climbing man grasped around the trunk with both arms and feet he was able to inch upwards until he could reach a horizontal, smaller branch. Once there, he was able to ascend the tree more easily.

Without obtaining permission, Larson flipped the Chancellor's office TV on. It was almost always on the University's own channel and was on that channel now. Instead of a steady stream of text showing the day's events it showed the picture of the building they were now in from the tree's point of view.

As they watched, the lens panned downwards into the branches and refocused

automatically for close distance. There, below, the goon ascended, looking up occasionally, clambering to retrieve the camera now considering him. One knuckle was skinned a bloody red and his expensive trousers were torn.

Very clearly, the TV captured an epithet -- the really bad one -- as he climbed. For all the world he looked like a British comedy show, a Mr. Bean or Benny Hill, perhaps Monty Python.

When the man looked down, something occurred to change the focal depth dramatically. Larson looked out the window and saw an indistinct black object silently float upwards. The TV showed the tree grow smaller. Still in focus, the view broadened, showing clouds as the camera accelerated upwards. You began to see the Earth's curvature.

Abruptly the picture and sound went out and the screen returned to its scrolling narrative of the week's events of humdrum college life.

That lasted but a second.

The video looped back to the beginning, from BEFORE Larson entered the Chancellor's office. Audio was excellent. The Sony's zoom lens picked up each face clearly. There was no question about identity.

They watched and listened for a few minutes and before walking out Larson shook his head in disgust and intoned, "Drake, you have been a very bad boy. The students deserve better than you. I suggest you pack your bags and leave."

GOVERNMENT MEETING

The government guys sat in a conference room. They were top people, worried first and foremost about national security.

"It is a light source from the moon or very near by it. It's moving, accelerating. There are six lights, blinking off and on. It's way above orbital height and it's not in orbit; it's maneuvering." The telescope was slaved to a TV monitor and centered in the screen was a hexagon of lights blinking off and on.

"How fast?" asked a NASA official.

"We make it now at only a couple thousand miles an hour, at about a one gee acceleration. However, we tracked it going nearly 100,000 miles an hour. That's faster than we ever went when we last went to the Moon during the Apollo missions."

He explained further. "Most of the flight -- for us -- to the Moon was coasting. We accelerated up to speed of about 50,000 miles an hour, then coasted for three days until we got there. Fuel consumption made that a good compromise, because -- you see -- we could have cut 3 days down to 2, but at a tremendously additional weight in fuel. Remember, if we had gotten up to, say, 75,000 miles an hour, we would have had to triple our fuel supply, most of which would have been necessary just to accelerate the weight of the fuel itself. Also we would have needed more than TWICE the amount needed to get up to 75,000 miles an hour, half of the additional to get up to speed and the other half to slow down again -- use an additional, exactly same an amount of additional fuel to slow down again. It's a lose-lose situation with space flight."

"So, how are these guys doing this? The craft looks too small. How could it be carrying that much fuel?"

"They can't. We saw no liftoff. It did NOT go into orbit. We would have tracked it with radar on the very first orbit. They would have popped up on EVERYBODY'S radar. It went directly from the Earth without first going into orbit. Also, it is maneuvering far too much. It's accelerating, then decelerating, then jinking sideways, then returning. It's being controlled without any regard for fuel economy and I can tell you, gentlemen, that fuel economy is the name of the game in space flight. We have to be so economical that it is like a car that can only get from New York city to Los Angeles if it can achieve -- and only if it can achieve -- 1000 miles a gallon. Somehow, they have fuel to waste; don't have to economize." He shook his head in admiration. "If we had a rig like that we could do Mars in a weekend."

"You say you would have seen it go into orbit, but didn't. How did you notice it, then? The lights?"

"We DIDN'T notice it. Some amateur astronomers saw it and we picked up the internet chatter. Everyone's talking about it. The blinking lights are visible with a cheap hobby telescope, with binoculars."

CAD DESIGNING THE UNIVERSE

Ralph was not really fast on the CAD program. He picked up speed as he practiced, drawing spheres, bricks, solid pyramids. The fabricator dutifully created each one as he assigned each its solidity, converting the drawings into reality.

He was able to vary color, weight, translucency, texture. He played around with other aspects of each item's

physical properties, too, so each differed also according to magnetic, electrical conductivity, specific heat, and inertia.

But for right now he just made things for fun and practice. Hovering in the room were several globes of different sizes. They looked and acted like helium filled Chinese lanterns: red, white, blue, orange, green, and yellow.

Some gave off light, others were clear or semitransparent. On a couple, he drew patterns and copied photographs. They were beautiful and Ralph laughed as he nudged them and they floated around variously.

Some rebounded to their original position when shoved. Others caromed off each other and the wall. Some always returned to their original floating height. One always returned to rest against the west wall halfway up the wall.

Ralph made one bright yellow ball that was squishy like a real balloon; he could deform it, pinch it, stretch it, compress it flat in places, and it always kept its same volume, but he could not pop it. He made another one as insubstantial as foam. He put his hand inside of it and he was able to see his hand dimly through the material. He withdrew his hand and the wall of the sphere sealed shut again.

Ralph made one tennis ball size that was permanently hot. It was too hot to touch. He knew that he could put it into a glass of water and boil the water. He made another that was freezing cold with which he could do away forever with buying ice for his ice chest.

When he made items like brick shapes or tetrahedrons, Ralph found he had a problem: the edges were so precise they were lethally sharp. Ralph made a very thin wedge shape to experiment with this danger. He gingerly grasped it by thumb and forefinger, carefully avoiding the edge, which he tested against the side of the metal waste basket. Without ANY resistance, the blade passed through the metal as though it were not there. Ralph quickly erased the blade and it winked out of existence with a pop as air displaced where it had been.

Thereafter, as a safety precaution, when he made planar objects, he purposefully added a slightly rounded edge, but he remembered this aspect of fabrication, filing it away as a potential tool or weapon.

The CAD program helped him work faster. After he had designed a few geometrical



shapes all he had to do was change the dimensions to make just about any size object.

He used the fabricator repetitively to make him some super-sized Lego bricks and he stacked them on the desk and then he played with them like a little boy.

This set him to thinking and he added a feature. He took two such modified bricks and touched them together. They clung to each other as though magnetized. He tried pulling them apart, but could not. By sliding them apart he was eventually able to separate them.

He put them back together so that they were stuck together again, then modified them so that the two merged, flowed into one another, the line separating them disappeared.

Ralph thought about making a very large, hollow sphere with him inside of it. He would have to make sure his fabricator was inside the sphere with him lest he trap himself.

"Make a squish balloon with an air hole in it," suggested Johnny, "a hole you can stretch open. See, you can stretch it, get inside with your head sticking out, and it'll make a form fitting suit. Gotta leave about a zillion tiny air holes in it, though, so your skin can breathe"

Ralph made the sphere with a hole in it. He stretched the neck hole and got it, feet first, then one arm, and finally the other. There was only a small amount of resistance. When he got in, it bifurcated into two legs and, again, for two arms. It was too big and there was more than plenty of stretch room.

He experimentally spread his fingers and the 'mitten' shape of his hand became webbed fingers. With his other hand he was able to shape fingers, temporarily converting mitten into glove.

"If you made the holes really, really tiny the material would be like Gore Tex and you'd have a waterproof, breathable rain suit," offered Johnny.

"I can make it heatable, too, and throw away my winter coat. For that matter, I can make it cooler and be comfortable outside when it's 100 degrees."

"I guess you could make an underwater suit, too, if you carried air. Of course, it couldn't have holes in it then." Johnny paused, thinking. "Say, Ralph, could you make one -- one that carried air -- that would work as a space suit? It'd have to hold pressure against vacuum."

Ralph set to thinking on this complex task. It was a tall order: had to be radiation proof, vacuum proof and, carry air. But you also had to be able to see out of it and, certainly, you would want to be able to send and receive radio through the suit somehow, even while it had to be impervious to harsh sunlight full of cancer inducing x-rays. There had to be temperature regulation, too. As for mobility, that was nothing. The suit WAS the space craft.

For this, as yet most complex task, Ralph decided on making a body suit shape to start with instead of a sphere. He found a manikin shape in the CAD program. He had to make it bendable, but it could not expand too much, for an expandable suit would become very large as 15 lbs per square inch inside the suit tried to equalize to zero lbs per square inch outside. In such a circumstance, the suit pressure would reduce until its occupant died of low pressure.

His brother stood behind the laptop grinning.

"Wanta try? Betcha can't make us a better, faster plane."

"Bet I can! You just watch me." Johnny started by importing a 3D jet shape -- technically cheating -- but he modified that beginning by removing the wings, tail, et cetera. He became frustrated, started over. In a few hours he had a pretty good shape.

"I want to make a few changes, Johnny. Make it safe: no radiation can get through, heat, xray, you name it. No suntan, no cancer."

GROCERY LIST

Louisa made her shopping list on one of Ralphie's Big Chiefs. Let's see, she thought, a casserole and a couple pies. She added a few other things to her list, then readied herself for a trip to the store, but then she remembered their move. Which store? She smiled. ANY store. She could shop anywhere, but cash only. They had discussed that. A credit card would leave a trail leading back to the store, then, eventually, to where they were hidden. Gramps had taken it further and added, "They have probably cut off our funds."

"You mean it will come up DECLINED?" she asked.

Gramps nodded. "Most likely."

"I'm not so sure," put in her husband. "At least, not the first time. They may just track the sale, let it go on through, and try to locate us that way. What if we shop way, way off to throw them off the trail? They can't watch every grocery store in America. After a couple sales transactions each far removed from the other in unexpected locations, why sure, then they would probably cut off the credit card, but not the first few. Let's give it a try. There is no risk."

"Let's all go, then," agreed Gramps. "But I want us to shop far, far away, in a totally unexpected, safe place. A little town off the beaten path."

Louisa sat next to Horton, who drove. Johnny and Gramps sat in the bed. They planned on a large purchase and wanted to fill the pickup with groceries.

"We could actually make a couple runs, first at one grocery, then at another. We won't look too conspicuous if we limit our purchase to something reasonable at each place."

They took off at night making silent passage by moonlight beneath the clouds. The towns below them were lit up warmly with little yellow lights like model railroad towns.

"Ralphie has changed the world forever for all people," commented Louisa. "This is a dangerous time for him."

Horton nodded. "We'll have to see this through. It will take some months, if not years."

They flew silently through the clouds through the moonlight. They decided on a small town in the next state, five hundred miles away.

Horton kept the truck initially at a hundred, but kept creeping up speed until the rushing wind became too loud. He had to keep windows up, but it sounded about as loud as maybe sixty on the highway in a conventional car.

He tried the radio, but the preset stations were now tuned wrong, too far away. He manually twisted the dial and finally got a clear station.

"Oh, remember that one, Louisa?" They used to play it when Ralphie was a toddler."

She nodded and turned around to see if Gramps could hear through the window to the bed.

They could see daylight forming in the East and their little Magellan GPS told them they were near the destination they had chosen.

"It's a pretty little town, don't you think?" commented Louisa. They took it in

from a bird's eye view, each looking out the passenger window. Horton had suggested the addition of automatic banking while in a turn and now he made a lazy, silent counterclockwise circle over the town. The whole of the small downtown area lay below.

"Looks peaceful enough," he agreed. He spied a large pole sign which he recognized. "There's a Piggly Wiggly. Think they'll take our credit cards?"

"We can sure try. I have cash enough if they don't. If it comes up declined we'll quietly offer cash immediately and there will not be a fuss. Dad, do you want to wait in the truck?"

Gramps nodded. He planned to sit behind the wheel with the doors locked as a precaution. Horton, Johnny, and Louisa would load up a cart each. Louisa had made a list for each. The bed of the truck would hold all the provisions they could carry.

Horton set them down, once again, on some farmer's private dirt road. He turned on the engine sound and turned onto the highway to town.

"There's a diner. Let's get breakfast first. We'll use cash. After we go to the grocery store I think we may not ever be able to return to this town if they are monitoring our credit card. Most likely, they will assume we are hiding out here and send a search team to find us. They will be waiting for us to make a second purchase somewhere in town and will be ready to pounce. But we will fool them and try to use our credit cards hundreds, if not thousands of miles away."

The diner had been open since before daylight. It catered to all-night truckers, shift workers, and other early birds. Louisa normally would have felt guilty leaving Gramps in the car, in the bed, at that. But the weather was cool and she knew the absolute necessity of guarding their unique truck.

"Can we start with an order to go?" asked Louisa. "Scrambled, toast, coffee -- black and strong. You got yogurt?" The waitress nodded and was about to relay that single order to the kitchen, but Johnny broke in and added to that order, told her to double it, make it for two. He nodded to his dad and smiled. She took the takeout order to the kitchen as well as the dine-in meal Louisa and Horton ordered.

The waitress returned with their food and also with the Styrofoam take-out meals. Johnny delivered the two containers to his grandpa and they ate in the truck.

"You okay out here, Gramps? Should I stay?"

"No, no. You go on back in. Thanks for thinking of me, by the way. I'm happy to wait out here. Really."

Johnny returned but only after putting away his huge meal away as only a teenager can. He kept his eyes open and noticed a couple of uniformed deputies sitting at the counter. They kept their radios on, but low, and Johnny tried to overhear. Horton also kept his ears tuned for a strange-sounding call, but there was nothing concerning them that he could hear.

They paid with cash and returned to the truck. Gramps had finished and they tossed his Styrofoam into a trash can as they pulled away.

"This will be trickier. Everybody got their list?" asked Louisa.

Johnny nodded at the unexpected responsibility, patting his cash and list in his shirt pocket.

They found a convenient parking spot very close to the store's entrance and, once again, Gramps guarded the truck. Horton made for the shopping baskets and took one. Louisa took the next and Johnny the third. They entered the store and started working the aisles.

Louisa filled her own basket quickly. Horton, who did not have as much grocery experience, took longer, though his products were simpler. Johnny had the short list, but had a more-or-less filled cart full of heavy items.

Louisa got in one line, Horton in another, right next to hers. Johnny got in line behind his father.

"How will you be paying, ma'am?"

"Credit card, please." Louisa zipped her American Express through the reader when asked. She waited a moment in fear as the transaction validated the sale of a couple hundred dollars. She was ready to show her driver's license if asked, but the girl just printed a receipt as the sacker filled the cart.

Horton's cashier also finished a moment later and he proffered his Master Card. It, too, went through without a hitch.

Johnny had little experience grocery shopping and none with credit cards, so he was doubly nervous, especially coming up last.

"Uh, credit card, please." He zipped his dad's American Express through and he thought, for sure, the clerk would deny him due to age, but he passed muster somehow and all he had to do was sign. They did not even have to use any of their cash on this run.



Once outside, they sighed relief collectively and began loading the bed of the truck. Gramps assisted them from inside. They just transferred grocery bags from the shopping carts to the open tailgate and he slid them to the front where he intended to sit.

They got in and drove off.

"Oh, it's too bad about not being able to come back," commented Louisa. "It's a nice store and I would like to shop there again."

Horton watched his traffic and took note of the rear view mirror. Suddenly he saw three police cruisers head towards them, pass them, and make for the Piggly Wiggly. One of the police cars parked in front, but the others went behind to the store parking lot they had just vacated.

"The store people might have seen us leave and told them what direction we took. They will soon be after us, at high speed, too. What should we do?"

"Dad, turn here!"

They turned right down a side street, transversed a block, then made another left.

"We're still heading back in the direction we want to go, at least," commented Horton. "This is not the main drag, though, and maybe we will not see any more police."

Horton had forgotten to turn on the fake engine sound and it was good that he had, because Gramps heard the helicopter first. "Son, pull into that car wash."

The self-service car wash provided air cover as the police copter passed overhead. They watched it rendezvous over the assemblage of police cars at the Piggly Wiggly, then begin a lazy, circular orbit over that area.

"It's maybe five hundred feet up. What do you think? Five hundred?" asked Horton.

Gramps shook his head, unable to make an accurate estimate of height, but contributed, "Something like that. How long will it stay there?"

Johnny had watched crime shows on TV and estimated, "Can't be more than ten minutes. If they don't spot what they are looking for, they leave soon. It's a waste of gas. Maybe a helicopter can't stay up like that in a circle for more than a few minutes."

Louisa fed quarters into the car wash and actually began soaping down the truck. She was not finished when they saw the helicopter veer off in the direction it had come. It passed straight overhead.

"Do helicopters have rear-view mirrors like cars?" asked Gramps.

Horton grinned and they got in, truck still soapy, covered with suds. They took the street in the direction the helicopter had taken and looked around. It was a sleepy, tree lined residential section of town. Everyone was still in bed or already gone to work. The huge, old trees lined the street on both sides, so much

so that the branches shaded the street completely in places and they had to look for a break in coverage for a take off point.

Horton took a last look around. So completely had the oaks covered the street that he had to slow down to a crawl in order to break out. His only witness was an old hound dog on a porch as he twisted the cigarette lighter. The truck smoothly lifted into the foliage and branches scratched against the thirty year old acrylic paint. Three robin hatchlings looked at him from their nest two feet away as they floated past. He could have scooped them up.

As they passed the trees below them the sun hit the truck and Horton put on speed. "There's the helicopter," he announced. "Let's go above them. They won't think to look up."

"What about radar?" asked Louisa.

Johnny chimed in. He was full of TV cop show knowledge. "These police helicopters don't have radar. They are meant to be flown visually only.

His grandpa smiled and commented through the window from the bed, "Son, remind me to get some radar for our old truck, will you?"

"Actually, Dad, that's not a bad idea. For sure, we should have radar if we are going to fly."

They kept the helicopter in sight by matching speed. Compared to the truck, it flew slowly.

"They are obviously following that country highway to see if we took it. In a few minutes they will decide we did not go that way. If they should circle around and turn back they would see us immediately. I'm going to go well above them."

Horton twisted the cigarette lighter smoothly, but continuously and the truck rose at incredible speed. Their extreme speed forced them down into the seats. When he leveled off they felt their stomachs lurch like in a high speed elevator going up, then reaching its floor. Some of the groceries began to float off the floor of the truck bed, in free fall like the contents of their stomachs.

Within seconds they were beyond visual range of the helicopter. The Magellan GPS gave them altitude and direction and Louisa told it to route them home. It's female, British voice announced, "When possible, make a legal U-turn at the next intersection." For some reason, automobile GPS units all showed elevation and it told them they were eight thousand feet aloft.


"You know, I think we SHOULD go to Paris, France for groceries next time. Do you think our credit cards will be deactivated?"

"Well, my Mastercard is a debit as well as a credit card, depending on how I use it. If I use it as a debit card there is plenty of money in the account, more than three thousand dollars."

"It looks like this thing has activated a segment of the government which is overlooking our rights as citizens. They are just going to freeze the account. They will tell the bank not to allow any transactions. How much cash we got?"

Louisa opened her purse and counted. She smiled at the wonder of it. "We'll be all right. I hope Ralphie is doing okay."

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR



SUBPOENA

Ralph stretched. Voices at the door woke him up and he listened to his host L. Michael Hanks answering the front door. He lay still on the couch, quietly hidden by the back of the couch, eavesdropping on the doorway conversation, an interrogation concerning him, not ten feet away.

"This is a subpoena to appear in court today, Mr. Hanks. Failure to

appear will result in a contempt citation resulting in immediate arrest. I've come to escort you myself." Hanks took the proffered court order and perused it with the reading speed of a skilled attorney.

"Wow! 'The Homeland Security Act'. You guys are really reaching."

"Just doing my job, Sir." The constable held a pair of handcuffs at the ready.

Hanks pointed at them and commented, "Those are not necessary. Let me get my hat and coat. Wait here."

Hanks left the door open, to appease his guest, but he did want to get his coat.

He called out from the closet, "I'm not a flight risk except in the literal sense," he said enigmatically. He zipped his jacket and felt for the flight controls. If necessary he could evade corrupt justice, but hoped to try his legal skills first and was still a little bit fearful of his unpracticed flying skills.

Ralph heard the door latch and worried for a second that he did not have a key. If he left, he would not dare leave the door unlocked. He briefly wondered how he would get back in if needed, then remembered: he would not need a key, only had to leave an upstairs window unlocked. He could always float into the house that way.

Hanks would be all right and Ralph did not feel worried or even guilty at his friend's plight. He knew Hanks relished the legal confrontation.

Besides, Ralphie was still in full creative mode and he needed more quiet time alone to work. He got a huge, huge bowl of Captain Crunch and flipped on his laptop. Perhaps he could build a suit, one which bent light around the wearer, one which made the wearer completely invisible. He already had a fully reflective mirror-like surface, already had a flat black surface. Why not a light channeling re-directive surface? If so, he could waltz into the court room today to listen to the proceedings. It would not even have to be perfect. He could hover against the uniform backdrop of the white, painted ceiling. It should not be hard to cobble together such a simple system. He paused mid-spoonful, had a sudden breakthrough, then hurriedly gulped down his breakfast.

ARGUING WITH THE DEVIL IS NEVER PROFITABLE

"The Homeland Security Act was never designed to steal inventions," began Hanks.

"Your Honor, if it please the court, learned colleague Hanks has my full sympathy -- and full support. His

position is not enviable, representing the rogue Littlefoots, and I commend him on taking on this disagreeable task, an egregious burden, an indelible smudge on his career."

"That'll be enough of that, Mr. Berger. We're sticking to legalities in here. Save it for the press." The judge turned to Hanks and asked, "What you got?"

"Ah, your Honor, we contend the government is guilty of the following: Breaking and Entering without a search warrant, attempted theft, attempted kidnapping of a minor, harassment, patent infringement, violation of civil rights. Couple other minor infractions. We sue for a million on each count."

"Mr. Berger?"

"Ridiculous, Your Honor. We, on the other hand, contend the Littlefoots are about to plunder the economy with a pirated invention developed on government facility, at the State University. We intend to prove Littlefoot stole this invention and has no right to its ownership."

"Uh, it reads here -- your own argument in the brief -- that he invented it, that he is the SOLE inventor, actually."

"Well, your Honor, we contend that though he did, in fact, play a supporting role, perhaps even a MAJOR role, he was, nevertheless, supported by the infrastructure of the university. He developed the breakthroughs on the campus, while on stipend as a student. We have legal precedent that under such circumstances the government has FULL ownership."

Hanks went into a short mental reverie before answering.

It was always easy to mislead poor minorities, to convince them falsely there were only a few ways to become wealthy:



THE ONLY WAYS TO GET RICH

(ACCORDING TO LIBERALS)

steal it,
marry rich,
be born rich,
inherit wealth,
win the lottery,
sue the rich people,
tax them half to death,
obtain the money illegally.

Politicians did nothing to dissuade their constituents of this view of life and the prevalent viewpoint was to be suspicious of success.

They never uplifted the poor's spirits and showed a path to success through work, preparation, discipline, good habits, and behavior. Their only solution was to blame the rich and tell the poor that only government could help them, help them by increasing taxes on the rich.

Plan B with the rich people

1. blame them for your poverty
2. tax the bejeesus out of them
3. claim they got rich immorally
4. get the rich aboard by implementing crony capitalism
5. don't tell anybody that bureaucrats are themselves rich
6. convince everyone the rich are a bottomless pit of wealth
7. if anyone is in doubt, show how mere power leads to wealth

The poor did not know how much the politicians misled them, that most (almost all) of the tax money brought in from "the greedy rich" never ended up in the hands of the "deserving poor". Most of

the money went to government workers and well-to-do friends of the government workers.

"Taxes are not levied for the benefit of the taxed."
--Robert Heinlein

Of course, all this had been tried before under Communism in the former Soviet Union, resulting in a miserable

lowest-common-denominator sort of existence. The false promise was to elevate the poorest by robbing the wealth of the richest and giving it to the poor.

nepotism family and friends

cronyism pay for play

In practice, the poorest of the poor were not elevated in the least. However, most of the productive rich were robbed entirely of their possessions. The five percent in power became extremely powerful and rich themselves in a clandestine way while everyone else became shamelessly poor and led a frightened, fearful existence.

Once the Soviet Union fell, the world's liberals did not withdraw from the economic dead end of Communism. They merely repackaged it into other '-isms'.

They were successful in infiltrating environmental concern and creating great fear of ecological disaster, imminent death of all human beings, global warming, water shortages, famines, fear of 'nonorganic' food production, fear of genetically modified livestock, fear of nuclear radiation.

At the same time they began to clamor for cradle-to-grave health care of everyone, guaranteed education, guaranteed food, guaranteed minimum wage, guaranteed housing, guaranteed jobs, guaranteed citizenship and voting franchise for all.

The big push was for equal outcome, but never, never, never, equal opportunity. The term 'social justice' displaced 'equal justice' and nobody complained; nobody even noticed.

When direct taxation was impossible, it became just as useful to levy indirect taxes via inflation or through forcing citizens to buy this or that.

It was ever so easy to point out a pitiful victim, say, a blind widow with a leg off, a formerly hard-working virtuous woman now in a wheel chair. Who could dare resist helping her? What political party would dare deny benefits to such a miserable wretch. And it was easier than pie to point to a million similar such cases, all tacitly the fault of the opposition party. It was folly to even bring up the difference between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor.

Setting such a course was preliminary to an all-inclusive medical coverage bill, one that disguised the largest tax hike of all time. In effect, the main thrust (taxes) was entirely masked by the emotionally wrenching medical coverage of "those who would otherwise die due to corporate greed".

The world at hand interrupted these Libertarian thoughts.

"Hankes?"

"Your Honor, we refute ANY of the work done on this invention was done 'on company time' at the University, or even while at the university. In fact, we will establish that the inventions were all created several years ago while still at home, before Littlefoot ever set foot on the University premises."

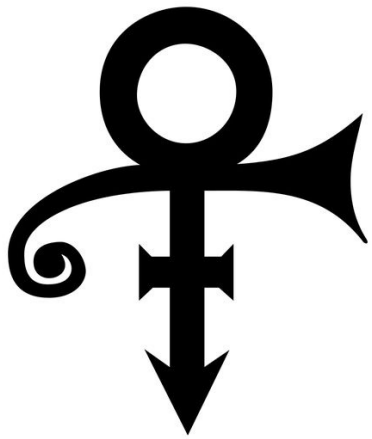
Berger broke in. "That's absurd, Mike. Kid would have been -- What? -- fourteen? Fifteen, at the time?"

"He was actually thirteen when he wrote this all down. He was still at home. We plan another line of legal reasoning entirely if you now shift tactics and say the public school gets full monetary and patent rights."

"Well. Let's see. That would have been an Indian Reservation High School, right? A Bureau of Indian Affairs high school?"

"JUNIOR high, actually. You're going to argue the JUNIOR high gets to own a

thirteen years old's patent? A patent based on physics and mathematics so high level that the patent guys are still trying to classify it?



It was then that Hanks' eye fell upon a legal folder on the judge's desk. Some of the papers were askew, a few of them slightly protruding, including one with a very, very unusual signature. He recognized the form very well despite only its bottom corner showing. It was one of those skanky Justice Department paid informant documents.

Having lost his sacrosanct cool momentarily, Hanks yanked it open, frowning in astonishment at the blatant, obviously concocted testimonay. He stared closely at the heiroglyphic signature and held it up for the more-or-less straight judge to see."

"What's this? The paid wino informant Formerly Known As Prince?"

The judge squinted at the signature, smiled, then legally commented, "Hmmm. I guess that an X would have done as well. Unless, of course, this is an OFFICIAL Native American script signature."

"Your honor, it is the sacred symbol of the official shaman of the Huyute nation."

Hanks just shook his head and left. His legal world was turning into goo.

A VERY PRETTY SCENE

Ralph float-skipped up the side of the hill. It was just a small hill on their property but it held a large place in his heart, overlooking the stock pond. The man-made drinking pond had been created by a bull dozer when he was a toddler and the hill was scooped out dirt that had once been the pond. Now trees grew around it and it was their favorite picnic area. The pond held fish and he and Gramps had driven piles into the little lake and made a pier. A small yellow kayak was tied up at its end.

Ralph considered the plan he was hatching, looked up at the sky, calculated distances, areas, volumes. He activated his little remote control box and a barely-visible transparent wall suddenly appeared. It looked like a sheet of glass hovering a few feet above the ground. Ralph enlarged it and it grew in length, but remained about ten feet tall, still floating. He gingerly moved it so that it ran along the fence line. When it was positioned to his satisfaction he increased its height. He watched it grow. Ten feet. Fifty. He stopped it at a hundred. Its thickness was almost nonexistent, less than a micron. He directed it downward to let it settle on the ground on its less than razor thin edge. It entered the earth, cutting grass blades as it did so, but it seemed to settle nonetheless at about a foot deep. Ralph decreased its thickness to less than a nanometer and it slid deeper, cutting the soil like butter. He directed it down until it sunk a hundred feet.

Satisfied with this test, he made another three identical walls around his property, around the whole farm, not just his favorite hill and pond. After he had created the four walls going up into the stratosphere, he made bottom and top also. Now his property was sealed away.

Satisfied, he stored this program in memory, then turned it off. The giant walls vanished.

He started over on a smaller scale. A meter long rectangle sliced the ground. He added the second, third, and fourth walls, bottom and top. Gingerly, a cube of soil arose from the ground, topped by a layer of grass. It hovered waist high.

Ralph rotated it slowly as he thought. Circulation. Wind. Sunlight. Even sound echoes.

If he wanted to make a microcosm it had to be big and self sufficient. The bigger, the better. Ironically, the bigger, the easier to maintain.

HOME SWEET HOME

Louisa had organized the kitchen of their cabin to its ultimate satisfaction, cleaned it beyond belief. Indeed, it was a work of feminine art. She surveyed out the window, as beautiful view as could be ever imagined.

The entire valley spread below. You could almost see the entire county, she thought.

It delighted her no end that the cabin floated a couple feet in the air, permanently above all the insects, snakes, mud, and dust. She had even improved this feature to its ultimate by asking Horton if he could somehow make the initial porch steps retract upwards a couple inches off the ground. He quickly added this feature by sawing off the steps, adding a couple of brass hinges to them where they attached to the porch. He added a couple springs to lift them. When you stepped onto the steps your body's additional weight made them swing down to touch the ground, otherwise they suspended in the air two inches above the ground.

"We can't receive cable because they would track our receiver and locate us. Nor can we use our phones, but regular reception should not be a problem."

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISSUE

The government office was in crisis.

"This is a manhunt, then?"

"Oh, yeah. And not just a garden variety fugitive hunt. This is more important than catching a terrorist group with a bomb and an agenda to use it. We've GOT to catch the Littlefoot Family. We've got to catch them before they let loose this technology."

"You don't mean -- you know -- take them out, do you?"

Barringer inhaled on his cigarette while intently gazing at Campbell before answering. His long hard look said it all.

"But they're not blowing stuff up like terrorists do, they're just letting go a new invention or two with benefits, not destruction.

"It's the BENEFITS that I am worried about. The benefits are the problem."

Campbell looked at Barringer, still not understanding and Barringer explained it.

"Every which kind of dumb ass Billy Bubba out there is gonna want to fly. We're going to have the sky full of drunken collisions with people falling out of the sky like flat, poisoned birds. You think the highways are bad? Wait until the sky becomes full of unrestricted flight! Listen: I've got a buddy in the FAA. You know what airline pilots and military pilots call general aviation airspace? Little civilian planes? They call it 'Indian country' -- you know, Aztecs, Navajos, Cherokees. It's a play on words, a reference to Cowboys and Indians. Airliners and military pilots are MOST worried about hitting stray civilian aircraft which are off course. Civilian pilots have a bad reputation now. Can you imagine what it would be like if suddenly a million people could begin flying without equipment, without training?" He let that sink in and Campbell did not respond, so Barringer felt he had to amplify a bit more and say something the mere civilian mentality could understand.

"The electricity brick nearly did in world stability. We had to dance with a lot of ugly partners to keep things going. It's STILL not entirely settled down." He left out the part about bribes, assassinations, threats, buy-offs. They had avoided, so far, wars and ends of regimes. They had kept nations together, for the most part, as working partners.

"Well, I think we could enact laws, develop pilot license procedures, restrict flight by required training. I think we could control this."

"If flying were all there was, I might agree. But I see so much more to worry about. Look. Even with just flying, it would be so easy now to do a bank robbery then fly away. It would be impossible to track people. The potential for crime is enormous. It's not just safety.

"Look, our people have been looking at the flight thing. They tell me that even just flight alone is tip of the iceberg stuff. Flight is just one manifestation of the implications. They're worried about what's in his other pocket with the flight."

"Like what?"

"That's just it. We don't know yet. But my lab coat guys, they are sure it is coming. Whatever it is, they are sure."

"SEMI" - CONFINED MEANS "PRISON"

"When abstract, philosophical debates come up against the here and now and personal, when your own life is impacted negatively, then you ALWAYS side with freedom."

-- RJW Seddon

Hankes found himself semi-confined: not arrested, not free to leave. The office was not even locked. They had even brought in food from an expensive deli and, he had to say, it was pretty good.

"Nice expense account."

"Money is not my problem. For that matter, neither are Civil Rights, police, courts, or laws."

Barringer said this dispassionately, just relaying information, as though to explain his level of purpose more than his level of power. His calm demeanor said as much, that he did not give a damn about power. He was a top-tier bureaucrat, well above the concerns of mere power. Or money. Or law.

"I don't see your level of worry," commented Hankes.

"Well, at least you can see SOME worry in it."

"Yeah, we're both seeing something, something to worry about, but we're each seeing something different. Me? I'm worried about my clients, their rights as citizens."

"Good for you. That's your job, so you're doing it with blinders on -- civil rights, Constitutional rights of individuals, stuff like that."

"'Stuff like that!' From my perspective, that's uppermost importance. I side against Totalitarianism every time."

"If the repercussions of this 'stuff' hits the fan like I think it will you'll wish for a little Totalitarianism, at least a little bit."

"Not me, I'm for the rule of law and personal freedoms."

"You're naive! Take it far enough and you get Anarchy. That's what Littlefoot is ushering in. He's young, naive, inexperienced. All he sees is a gee-whiz invention, a better way to fly or get electricity. What I see is a crime wave, world-wide in scope, anarchy. I see governments toppling. When governments fall, there is war coming soon after."

At this mention of soon-to-come war Hankes did a couple of quick blinks and for a second his was silent. Barringer could tell Hankes had not thought that far because he was so involved with his clients and their rights.

Barringer sat in a leather easy chair, slumped really. He was about used up physically. Hankes could see that he had not slept, except perhaps in his rumpled and stained suit and raincoat.

For a second, he was taken in, so much had he identified with his kidnapper. A little voice said that maybe Barringer was right. Occasionally Hankes did feel naive, taken up by the system he was working in as though his legal world was the whole universe. But he knew it was not.

"If you had to choose between Totalitarianism and Anarchy -- with no gradations in between -- which would YOU pick?" asked Hankes.

Barringer smiled the smile of the bureaucrat and answered. "Life is NEVER that

simple. There are always gradations in between and that level of freedom is ALWAYS controlled by the powers that be."

"So it's people of your caliber who decide? A bureaucrat will tell us what's what, when is enough, when too much?"

"First of all, I'm WAY beyond 'bureaucrat'. I don't claim to have those answers but I do know there is a real good need for controls. For example, I can't even just let you go. You're here for the duration."

That was enough for Hankes. When abstract, philosophical debates come up against the here and now and personal, when your own life is impacted negatively, then you ALWAYS side with freedom.

Hankes knew Barringer was armed. There were a couple of his helpers in the room and they, too, were undoubtedly carrying pistols, cuffs, pills, syringes. None of those men would hesitate to shoot him, lock him up forever, or make him disappear. He also knew he would probably be searched to a better extent and they would eventually liberate him of his overcoat. He only had a small window of time and it looked like his window was only open a crack and they were about to close it and lock it.

Hankes looked at the window. They were on the eighth floor. He had to somehow get loose before the trip to overnight accommodations where he would be permanently confined.

The problem with modern office buildings and their windows is that none of them opened. The only way through was to break them.

In court houses, for security reasons, the first floor windows had bars for sure. In many cases, so did the above ground level stories nearest the ground, variously second or perhaps third. But they were on the eighth. No bars. All he had to do was get through it.

The guards finished their sandwiches and cokes and wadded up the napkins and wrappers. One of them laid handcuffs on the table, readying them for use. Hankes knew he only had a minute.

Once liberated of his coat, he would never get it back. They might even discover the lifter unit. Who was he kidding? OF COURSE they would discover it. It was a miracle that their search of him had missed it. He understood why they did miss it, because they were only looking for gun or tape recorder.

His phone they had put on a side table, out of reach. He looked at it longingly, but who would he call? There was nobody in the whole USA to rescue him, neither police nor any other person or group. He felt loneliest due to losing his stock in trade, the whole legal world he had lived in.

The lifter was wearable the way Louisa had sewn it in. It was the fabric itself, looked like a mesh lining. A couple wires led to a tiny toggle and slider control the size of a stick of gum. A three-way toggle switch for up, stop, and down; a directional spinner to turn him; a slider to move him in any direction. It was not large at all like an MP3 controller. It did not even have a nine volt battery or something in it. It was, all in all, tiny and unobtrusive, easily overlooked by a cursory search. But they would eventually find it.

"Bureaucrats have come to realize that they can maximize their power and income when they are towards the Totalitarian end of the range of Anarchy-Totalitarianism. Because they make more money and are more powerful as the system approaches Totalitarianism the whole system drifts in that direction."

-- RJW Seddon

"You want to see the next level?" asked Hanks.

Barringer had not expected that, but now was totally entranced.

"The next level does away not just with Totalitarianism but also Anarchy. It also does away with those in-between control-freak gradations of yours that you worry so much about. It seems to me, bureaucrats have come to realize that they can maximize their power when they are in the middle range between Anarchy and Totalitarianism, just as you have said."

Barringer's tension left him a little bit because he had thought Hanks was going to reveal some real secret, not merely make some dumb ass Libertarian point.

Barringer nodded to one of his guys. "Cuff him to the table leg. I gotta take a leak before we go."

The goon wrapped the nickel-plated cuff around Hanks' left wrist and ratcheted it down tight. He slapped the other cuff around the top of the conference room table leg and Hanks heard and felt it click and ratchet, too. There was only a six inch length of rattling nickel-plated chain.

Barringer left the room. The others left also and so sure were they of security that none of them looked back, but they left the door open with total disregard.

Hanks crouched down and got under the six foot conference table. He grabbed the table leg with his left hand near the top where leg joined table. It had a cherry finish and he tested its weight by lifting it with his back from the crouching position. It only felt like a hundred pounds, maybe less, and he could easily lift it and walk with it on his back.

He reached in his right pocket, turned on the unit, and awkwardly activated the lifter controls. He had to get his weight distributed under the table so that his back centered it and kept it on even keel as his feet left the floor. He had not had that much practice, but the controls were intuitive.

"Even a dumb ass Libertarian should be able to do something simple like flying," he thought.

With his feet and the four table legs hovering six inches from the floor, Hanks floated to the wall furthest from the glass with the table wobbling on his back. He retrieved his cell phone from the side table.

He had to ready himself the same way you do when you are about to get an injection from the nurse, a little pain, a little fear. He hovered higher midway between sill and ceiling.

He worried about the impact and shards of glass. This stuff would be harder to break than it looked and huge slivers of glass could amputate, even decapitate if he were not careful.

The hundred pound table and the weight of his body made three hundred pounds of battering ram. He knew the table top would protect him from the sharp broken glass, but he felt rushed in his preparation. No time left to think about how to do it well. No time to test out any technique. No practice time.

He heard the three men, all of them, enter the restroom a couple doors down. He had a second. Perhaps he would do well to crack the glass first. The desk had a huge glass ashtray, a big ten pounder. There was also a brass commemorative doohickey of about twenty pounds.

Hankes hurled the ashtray at the window with all his might. When it hit, glass on glass, the window cracked and a spider of veins spread. The ashtray rebounded after collision and bounced once on the rug. The second shot with the brass made a good sized hole.

He accelerated himself toward the window and closed his eyes. It was a terrific jolt. He did not even hear the crash, none of the expected tinkle sound of glass, just a crunch and a lurch.

He opened his tightly closed eyes. Shards, huge shards of glass, worked loose and fell off the table top. Some were still embedded deeply with their points, snapping off in the wind stream. Hankes looked at his hands, the knuckles, in worry, searching for blood. The table itself had taken all the onslaught.

Once through, he felt himself sailing along, wind rushing. There had been no adjacent buildings and nothing impeded his flight. He did not dare let go of the table, still in a white knuckle grip on the table legs, otherwise its hundred pound weight would yank heavily at his wrist.

He looked back at the office building and it receded quickly in size due to his speed. He could make out 'his window', the only one without glass. He was quite far already and the little square suddenly had three heads appear in it. They looked down, then all around, in vain.

He was already too far away to be seen easily unless you knew exactly where to look and they did not look. He had experienced such a thing himself: frequently had heard an airplane, but could not find its tiny form in the vast sky, had searched and searched until, finally catching sight of it. Quite often you never did see an airplane you heard, even after hearing it and actively scanning the sky in all quadrants. He looked at the tiny, receding heads in the window, searching the sidewalk, then the ledge. They would not think to look straight ahead into the distance.

He did not think a pistol could shoot accurately at that distance, but he did not want to take any chances and let the device continue sailing him along. He was maybe a quarter mile, perhaps a half mile away, and still accelerating. The table started slipping away from him due to its wind resistance and he slowed smoothly, gradually, came to a stop, just hovering there.

He wanted to rid himself of the hand cuffs. He guided up, straight up and guessed himself a couple thousand feet, then slowly turned the lifter down until it was completely off. As he did so, he and the table gradually began to sink, faster and faster until he and table went into free fall. During the fall it was easy to slide cuff along weightless table leg until it reached the end and the table fell free. He grabbed hold of the leg like a barbell and gradually reactivated the lifter and let the weight of it build.

Over an unpopulated area he let go of it and watched its slow motion tumble. Looking down at it, suddenly his stomach lurched that kind of 'fear of heights'

spasm and he looked away.

He had to get away before they called out a helicopter. He had to contact home before a crew searched it for clues and discovered Ralph. His client's life, he knew now, was in more than just legal and financial danger. He felt legally over his head and he felt free somehow to be unencumbered by any of those kinds of maneuvers.

Now he was free to fly in the air like a bird and also free of all those years of legal responsibility, of paper, bills, briefs, constraints of any kind. He laughed at the thrill of being a bird, threw out his arms like a kid pretending to fly, his coattails fapping.

There were birds ahead of him in flight and he overtook them in delight of flying and startled them, as though he were some kind of giant legal hawk, but a benevolent hawk, a fellow traveler, a comrade in flight.

He had his cell phone back. He had retrieved it and reached into his pocket for it and tested it now. He giggled at a pun: he could use his phone 'on the fly' literally now. He phoned his own house, the land line phone. Ralph did not pick up, of course. He let it go to voice mail and knew Ralph would monitor the message.

"Permanently leave, immediately. Do me a favor though, will you? Envelope for you and me under the sink. I'll 'meet' you." He hung up.

He had left all his cash in a manila legal envelope under the sink. That was likely to be their only cash. They had prearranged to meet at a burger joint both of them knew. Hanks hung up and as he did so he quit worrying Ralph might pick up; now he shifted to worrying Ralph might phone him.

It rang now.

"Hello."

"This is Barringer. You said you would tell me the next level."

"You had already told ME what it was; I just literally demonstrated what you said."

"What?"

"That the rule of law just went 'out the window'. We are now well beyond legal shenanigans. Goodbye."

He giggled and flew on. Hanks quickly disengaged the back plate of his cell phone and removed the battery. He did not think it was possible to trace an unpowered phone with GPS. He put separate phone, battery, and backing plate into his zipper pocket and zipped it up.

He was able to look downwards now, no longer had the stomach whim-whams of fear-of-heights. He looked at the 'map' of the city like some giant GPS Magellan like he had in his car. Once oriented, Hanks changed direction. He made for their rendezvous place and looked for a way to descend without anyone seeing him. It was easy enough to do; nobody is ever looking up as they drive a car or walk a sidewalk. He came down between two closely-spaced buildings and alighted in the alley like some kind of Superman comic book.

It was cool out today and he did not look weird keeping his hands in his pockets, in his case, keeping the right one on the lifter controller in case he had to quickly take off again and the left one with the hand cuffs dangling in the

pocket out of sight.



CHEESEBURGERS

"Pretty much the best cheeseburgers anywhere."

Ralph had a table for them already, one in the back, a good one for some sort of Godfather mafia meeting. But he had not waited for Hanks. His teenage stomach took advantage of the excellent

menu. The kid was already working on a cheeseburger basket.

"I'm too keyed up to eat." He ordered a diet Coke. "Listen. The legal stuff, all that stuff I do, the lawsuits, the subpoenas, the trials, the briefs, all the paper. It's over with. We are WAY beyond all of that. The main thing now for you and your family is safety."

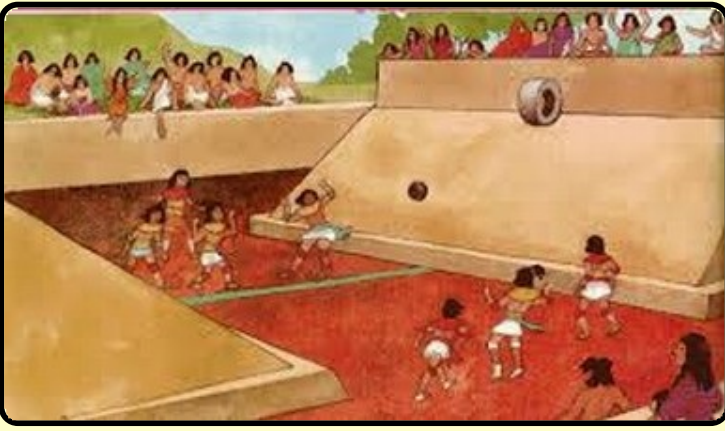
"Mr. Hanks, you're STILL talking like a lawyer. You're STILL treating me like a client." He shut up the excited Hanks with that, reminding him that he was still their advocate.

"What happened? Did you walk out on the meeting?" The kid way underestimated the interlude, thinking it was a mere negotiation, some kind of discussion.

Hanks nodded. "Yeah, out an eighth story government building. They were going to lock me up and throw away the key." He briefly flashed the handcuffs they clanked as though to accentuate his point.

"Ralph, listen, they had guns. Your family is in terrible physical danger. For me -- for a lawyer -- you have no idea how frightening that is to remove the framework of everything you believe in, all the rules and moves like in a chess game."

"They are playing hardball."



You have to keep your head to play Aztec soccer.

"'Hardball!' It's like Aztec soccer. You know: the one where the losing team gets beheaded and they use the heads as the next game's soccer balls."

Hankes surreptitiously now lifted his left hand to look again in disbelief at the handcuffs. He had been keeping that hand in his pocket but now repeatedly took it out again and again.

"You should calm yourself. Let's rest here a bit. Why don't you eat?"

He passed Hankes his paper tray of fries and Hankes did begin sampling them, ended up nervously gobbling them all. Ralph beckoned the waitress and got him a proper meal. Food is always a great tranquilizer, even for a middle aged lawyer, even one who had lost his world.

"Barringer told me he was convinced you were working on a third thing. He already knew! How did he know?"

"Probably he didn't, just worried about it. It's like that with breakthroughs, though. There are inevitable spin-offs. They usually do not yield immediate technological results, but always lead to more questions which, in turn, more theory, more technology. I think he was just guessing. Just worried. But he was right. I do have other things."

"Barringer was worried about how it might change the world, ruin the stability of society."

Ralph nodded. "I can see that. He's right. All this stuff will change everything. In fact, I may have been more worried about it than him."

Hankes ran his hand through his hair. He had forgotten about the cuffs and used his right hand and the cuffs clanked. The plate-laden, busy waitress gave him a scowl as she passed, too busy in the big city to do more than give a brief, non-interfering evaluation, not even worth a comment.

They finished their meals and took to the sidewalk. "We can't use my motorcycle and your car is out. I guess we can't rent a car. They will be watching taxis to my house and your house. Walking is the only way of getting around right now. But it's good to clear your head during a walk. We can think what to do next."

"You going to show me what you have in mind?"

"Sure. Want to come out to our farm? I want to show you our pond. We water our huge herd of three old cows there. Gramps keeps a couple goats and we used to have an old horse. It is one of the most beautiful settings in the whole world: a few trees on the hill and a picnic table. There is a short pier into the stock pond. The pond is full of fish. We got a yellow canoe tied up."

"That's your next level?"

"You'll see."

They walked along the sidewalk. Hankes frequently looked around in a paranoid manner. He knew all the video cameras in town would be sequestered and such a search would later identify him and Ralph. He looked up at the light. There was one, at least, and they had probably passed a couple ATM machines which constantly photographed passers by. Hankes almost felt like waving hello. Right now he no longer gave a darn. He was still experiencing free fall, not the feeling he felt when he was flying and had cut off the lifter so he could slide handcuff out of the table leg, but the free fall of having lost his legal world.

"Well, I wanted a big, big case and now I shouldn't be disappointed," he thought.

They ambled to the park and sought out a park bench. A cop on horseback made Hankes briefly nervous, so they passed the first bench.

"Want to take to the sky?"

"Let's wait for sundown." Hankes glanced at his watch, then the sky. "Maybe an hour."

The park was nice and they ambled along its central sidewalk, then took to a bench.

"I need to digest and not just the food," said Hankes.

"I need to take a leak. Digest while I go." He walked off to the public restroom. Hankes glanced sideways at the cop on horseback who surreptitiously guarded the public men's room for drug and gay transactions.

Hankes sat with right arm behind the park bench. He forced himself to release his right hand from controller in that side's pocket. The left hand he kept in his pocket so that he could cover the handcuffs. He hoped he did not look like a park pervert holding himself. He tried to look casual. When the cop turned away Hankes reached over and shoved the handcuff up his left forearm under the sleeve. The tight sleeve kept the cuffs suspended out of the way and he was at least able to then put both arms behind him on the back rest. He felt free. He took his arms down when Ralph returned so that he did not look like an old gay solicitor attempting to put his arms around a young male prostitute or something. The whole running and hiding thing made him paranoid.

When Ralph sat down next to him he asked, "So, you left the blue motorcycle at your home?"

"Yeah, I flew here from your upper story window. Left the front and rear doors locked, a couple lights on."

"That's been hard to digest, that from now on we don't need stuff like cars, airplanes, motorcycles."

Ralph nodded and added, "and roads, trains, ships, taxis, subways, limos, helicopters, buses."

They made a poor man's list:

"And tractors for plowing and gasoline. Eighteen wheelers, river barges, transoceanic tankers."

"Satellites!"

"'Satellites'?"

"Sure. Why go round and round? Just hover and bounce signals from anywhere you want to hover."

"What does this do to military stuff? Tanks, fighters, stuff like that?"

"Time will tell. It's wild. Everything will change. Instant obsolescence."

"Lots of people will initially hate this. How would you feel if your family owned a car dealership? What if you drove a bus or were a pilot?"

It was staggering. Nobody would need gasoline or diesel anymore. Power plants could shut down.

"We have to get those cuffs off. Let's go to a hardware store."

Hankes nodded. He was still distracted, but got up compliantly. He followed his client. Now, he was in the subservient position.

Once on the sidewalk, he continued his thought stream.

"Ralph, maybe Barringer is a little bit right."

He gathered his thoughts and painted scenarios.

"A guy could desalinate salt water and transport whole cubic miles of the ocean, couldn't he?"

"Yeah, sure. You could make a box of it and float it to the moon, cover a crater and make a lake."

"It's staggering! Dumb asses could steal whole national forests, rip them out down to the bedrock, move whole mountains around, denude the Earth!"

"I see what you mean."

They found an Ace mom and pop hardware and turned in. The clerk was watching them like a hawk from his front position at the register, so their initial plan to borrow a bolt cutter on the aisle and return it to the pegboard was not working out for them. Ralph hefted the massive tool and they actually bought it for this one time use.

Once outside, bolt cutter and receipt in hand, they sought out an alley to use it in, but Ralph whose teenage sweet tooth led them to an ice cream parlor indicated a dumpster behind the shop.

One snap did the trick and they dropped bolt cutter in the dumpster. Hankes kept the incriminating broken cuffs in his pocket for the time being.

They got a couple cones just the same and continued their conversation.

"Listen: dumb ass terrorists could 'steal' a whole city, uproot the whole nine yards, people in it and all."

"Sure could. You could 'kidnap' and hold an entire city hostage, quite literally. Are you thinking -- maybe, Barringer might be right to the extent that you want to recontact him?"

"I don't know. I sure don't like the danger. I don't like his tactics, but I am beginning to understand his thinking."

"You're still my attorney. You think in terms of maneuvering for my benefit, usually a legal maneuver, but still a kind of gambit."

"Thinking outside the box here, you said you could 'make a box' to surround stuff so that it could be stolen. What if we were to take a page out of Barringer's play book AND ours? Make a box -- our idea -- and use it to kidnap then transport

him -- his idea -- and talk to him."

"How's that help us? It demonstrates he's right."

Hankes shrugged and sighed. "Maybe he is right. Maybe we are totally wrong and totally naive. He thought this through more than we did. The only thing I don't like about his thinking is how it subverts our rights as citizens. There's got to be a way to talk this out without squashing either us, our rights, or the invention, or your rights to the invention."

AERIAL SURVEILLANCE

Barringer set up shop in the very same office room. In short order a helicopter made continuous orbits of the city's center. He had no budget limitations. When that copter ran out of gas another immediately took over without any kind of time gap. Twenty-two thousand bucks an hour for the helicopters, but Barringer signed a carte blanche chit for the expense.

The city's police were on the lookout, not knowing ANYTHING about either Hanks or Ralph, but supplied with first-priority photos on every cruiser's laptop.

They were still in the ice cream parlor, less than an hour from Hanks' escape when a black and white police car spotted them. The cops did not dawdle and double parked mid street, left the engine running and made for the front door on the double. One was on his radio already calling it in as he ran. The other had his gun out.

"Quickly!" Hanks grabbed Ralph's sleeve as he got up. His chair toppled backwards and he ran toward the kitchen, through the service door, and out into the alley. As soon as he saw Ralph was immediately behind he activated his lifter and lit upon the rooftop behind the brick waist-high ledge, already in a semi-crouch. Ralph landed lightly beside him and they both backed out of the way of observation from the ground.

Without any kind of training or practice, they both already had hit upon a natural kind of integration with the lifter. Just before 'lifting' Hanks felt very natural in helping along the unit by springing upwards with a sort of jump or hop to sort of help along the initial lift. He felt like and knew he must look like some kind of comic book super hero in the way he flew.

"A helicopter will be overhead soon, I'll bet," offered Ralph."

"Forget helicopter. I'll lay odds there is a Predator drone up there now at thirty-thousand feet invisible to us at ground level. I'll bet its camera is going to be directed towards this intersection just as soon as the policemen below us call it in. We have to get away from this area right away."

The rooftop was flat and they were invisible from the street so long as they stayed away from the ledge. The police had no experience yet with the lifters and probably were still searching the alley, its dumpster, fire escape, doorways, and windows.

"Let's zoom away fast. We'll be a blur."

"Straight up?"

"Radar can't see us and at speed a camera couldn't track us, but I think we need to get my stuff so we can capture Barringer."

"You agree, then? Kidnap Barringer?"

Ralph nodded.

They made straight up into the clouds. They accelerated and must have hit a hundred miles an hour within a couple seconds. Hanks had to slow down due to the rush of air. It frightened him to travel so fast without any kind of enclosure.



They slowed to a stop and hovered just barely in a cumulus cloud. It was cold and the clouds were damp. It was like being in a dense fog and water condensed on their clothes. The hair on the back of Hanks' hand became covered with a thousand little droplets and his coat glistened. But it was completely silent. The cloud drifted at a high rate of speed. On the ground, when you look up, the clouds seemed more or less stationary, only appear to move a

little. But now, right in them, Hanks could see that the clouds were moving a maybe fifty miles an hour. Who knew? A hundred?

"If there is a Predator up there it can't see us now. My stuff is at my farm." He led the way.

They crossed current with the wind in a new direction and ripped through the clouds with a swoosh.

"We'll be soaked and frozen in a couple minutes at this rate. You think we could risk going below?"

Ralph nodded and descended. It was actually colder, though drier at the lower level. The passage of air dried their clothes, but froze them in the process.

Hanks looked down. They would be less than dots at this height. He reasoned if he could not make out the form of a person on a sidewalk, then the sidewalk people should not be able to make him out either. He briefly looked up. The cloud bank hid them from the assumed predator, too.

Hanks had not yet been to the Huyute reservation, nor the farm that the Littlefoot family owned. They had done all their negotiations at the University or at Hanks' own office in town.

The farm, at least from the air, was as bucolic as described. It looked like a perfect little train set of a farm. Green, green grass and a little blue, blue pond. The colors stood out like a painting, like a commercial on television.

He scanned for police cruisers on the ground and helicopters. Hopefully, whatever Ralph had in mind would not take long.

But he had another unvoiced fear. Where would they go? No really plans. No real home.

They lit beside the pretty little tree, now a massive oak. As soon as they set foot on the grass, Hanks beckoned them both to get under the limbs of the tree.

"We won't necessarily know if they spot us."

"What do you mean?"

"That's what I would do at this point if I were them. We lost them to rapid flight a couple times and they know we can do it -- have been doing it. They also want to capture your family. What better strategy than to follow us? If they spot us, I think they will track us until we make rendezvous with your family. That way they will catch us all in one swoop."

Ralph nodded. It made sense. He peeked up through the limbs of the tree. The Predator would be too small to see.

"Could it be satellite?"

Hankes looked up at the sky and nodded. "Both, I'd guess." He pointed and smiled. "I think I see it." Ralph's eyes grew big in fear as he looked up, then realized he had been had and smiled back. An invisible spy in the sky, probably a military drone, a Predator or something.

Ralph knew the older man had calmed down a bit. He was ready for the demonstration.

Ralph got out his equipment. He had hidden it up in the branches and it took him a minute to set up.

"I can make standing wave forms of all shapes and sizes, all colors and properties: transparent, insulated from radiation, gravity, different weights even different masses, etc. It's a CAD program I use to interface with it. We were talking about a box?"

Hankes watched Ralph conjure up some of his creations, balloons of all colors. They floated, scampered on command. Some glowed with their own light, others so transparent, just a distortion of light showed through. Then, there were all the geometric shapes: nutating cylinders, wobbling cones, spinning tetrahedrons.

Abruptly, one of the boxes dipped into the lake, gurgled full of water, then lifted ten feet in the air. The open top box tipped, pouring fifty gallons smoothly back into the lake.

"I could desalinate the Dead Sea. We can take a cubic mile of fresh water from Lake Michigan, freeze it, then deposit the world's largest ice cube in Saudia Arabia for use by their farmers. No land? We could transport land, air, water, AND farmers to their new farm on the Moon."

Hankes ran his hands through his hair, both hands at the same time. He was enthralled, had never, would never again, see such a new, great thing. He paced as he spoke.

"Ralph, Barringer is right. We have to keep it under wraps. But WE are right, too. Barringer would probably lock us up and throw away the key to control this thing, to keep it from being dispersed to the population at large. But he's right. We gotta contain it somehow."

He put it in a nutshell.

"People would kill for this, do anything to get hold of it."

CABIN IN THE SKY

"That's right, a log cabin." The Ranger was as perplexed as Barringer's detective.

They looked at the rectangular spot where a cabin had obviously once sat, from the looks of it, had sat for years.

Barringer's guy bent over to pinch and smell the dirt, then photographed the site from all angles. He used the same phone to send the images to his boss.

"ANY idea where they could have taken it?" The ranger shook his head.

"They would have had to truck it out, probably in pieces. Road's too narrow, what with all the branches. And the expense! No, if anything, they took it in pieces."

"You got any idea where to? Some place they talked about?"

The Ranger shrugged. "No place makes sense. If anybody could go there, Lobos Peak would be nice." He pointed to the distant range. "Too steep for roads, though. The ascent is by foot only. It's a mountain climber's dream."

The detective knew he had hit pay dirt, nodded a thanks, and relayed the information to Barringer.

"It's a half-assed lead, but the Ranger here, thinks they might have taken a shining to the peak Northwest of here. If he named it right, it's called Lobos Peak. Says it's, quote, too steep for roads, unquote, and therefore an improbability, though desirable."

Barringer made his point twice for emphasis, "No helicopters! Predator and satellites only."

The point man nodded into the videophone and repeated, "No helicopters. No airplane noise."

Johnny skimmed over their cabin's roof. Although he delighted in flight, it had become natural to him very quickly and although the sensation of it was not exactly boring yet, he was, in fact, a teenage boy. He missed his friends, especially one, Sally Reindeer. She was Huyute also, her family still completely thinking of itself as wholly American Indian, despite the European mix. She had Irish red hair and looked more like she had come from the Emerald Isle than Meso America.

Johnny sighed in desperation. He had snuck out at night a couple times to rendezvous with his group of friends for an all-night movie. His parents never seemed to have caught on, though Gramps had winked at him slyly the next day.

Johnny wanted Sally to know he was still in the picture, still interested. He looked down at the cabin's green shingles and calculated speed and distance. Hmmm. He could probably make town by three, in time for high school letting out. He could probably mingle in among the students leaving for the day. He would blend in as just one of several hundred kids with back packs, kids in the school parking lot, kids getting on yellow buses, kids congregating in groups walking home. It would be safe.

DIG UP SOME DIRT

"I want to know if any of the Littlefoots had an illicit romance on the side. Try the grandpa, the father, both boys." He thought a bit, then added, "The mother, too."

His assistant had already been on it and supplied, "Ah, already have a preliminary on that for all of them. The whiz kid's celibate. Typical math genius profile. No interest at all, apparently. Father's clean. The youngest boy is social -- a regular sixteen year old kid."

This perked up his boss. "Then he's gonna miss his friends. How long they been gone?"

"Couple days."

"Then he's gonna make contact with his chums. Any regular girl friend?"

His subordinate consulted a little note book and supplied a name. "Sally Reindeer. Sophomore. They share two common classes, including last class of the day, and both ride the same school bus."

"That's it, then. I want the school zoomed in on. What time is it?"

He looked at his own watch. An hour til it lets out for the day. Friday. This might be their last chance at a snatch and grab.



"Shave off that mustache. You are now a senior. Get a back pack and some clothes that fit in. I want you hanging out near her bus and her last class. What's his name? Johnny? We want him caught so he can't fly away. We need an AC Heating repair van. I have a jumpsuit. We'll be at the school with tools and stuff. Phone the principal."

HONEY TRAP

Johnny dropped down from a cumulus cloud, straight down at a hundred miles an hour. He braked to stop like an elevator on emergency descent and landed between field house and baseball diamond, just behind the gym. As always, the gym door was open and he entered the hall. Good, there was no hall monitor. Sometimes some dweeb got himself assigned as tattletale, but today, this Friday afternoon, so near the day's end, no one was afoot in the

hall.

Johnny shifted his backpack and made for the classroom of his last class of the day. He hovered outside the door and heard Miss Gough's final instructions for an assignment. The final bell would soon ring and he wanted to be able to join the line of students in the hall, but did not want anyone to exclaim his presence loudly. Perhaps he could get aboard the bus without being noticed. That way he could sit next to Sally and explain his family's predicament.

There was no one in the hall at all except a couple workmen, guys fixing the AC from their appearance. They each were heavily laden and purposeful. One had a toolbox in one hand, a coil of hose over the other shoulder. The other carried a clipboard and another toolbox. The men were intent upon their task and ignored Johnny.

The last bell of the day went off and an explosion of kids erupted from the classrooms, like ants out of their hive, scurrying in all directions, to lockers, directly out the doors to the parking lots, to the gym, the library, the office. The quiet hall became deafeningly loud and the milling crowd became a fireman's nightmare, for you could not make passage in any direction.

Johnny spotted Sally's red hair.

"Johnny! Where you been? We heard you guys were in trouble."

Johnny made to Sally's side and was about to explain when out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of the AC guys. Hadn't they been going the other way?

They exited the school and were about to descend the concrete steps towards the parked school buses when he spied another AC repair guy, this one approaching obliquely from the parking lot. He held a phone or walkie talkie and seemed to be too purposeful in his goal, a little too fast.

Johnny gave Sally a hug, a surprising move, and said, "Lock your arms around my neck and hold on tight."

He activated his lifter just as the AC guy in the hall, the one with a coil of hose fired off his net. It was not, in fact, a mere coil of rubber hose, but some kind of bounty hunter's fugitive capturing device. An explosive sound accompanied the net as it shot forth. The net wrapped itself around Johnny and as it did so he



also felt an electric pain, a shock that disabled his muscles into total failure. As soon as the net disabled him, a spasm of rigor shot through his frame like an epileptic seizure and he began to topple like a felled tree. He could see it happening to himself but could not do anything about it as it occurred. He was a helpless spectator of his own capture.

A fraction of a second before the net hit him he had begun activating the lifter and its switch was already in the Up position, but not too much. His net-shrouded body lifted slowly in the air and he rose slowly to meet the ceiling where he lay against the ceiling tiles of the hallway. The AC guys hauled him down by the net while the students shrieked in panic at the sound of the net's explosion and the goofy looking result. One of the workmen, the older one, Barringer, was able to remove Johnny's hand from the lifter control and quickly neutralize it. He removed the controller from Johnny's person and within a mere second Johnny had been handcuffed to the pipes of the old-fashioned school's radiator.

HEAD COUNT

"Have you seen Johnny?" asked Louisa. "He was just out back, but I haven't heard from him."

An alarm went off in the Grandpa's head when he heard this and decided to listen to the news quietly. He walked to the side of the cabin where they had parked their truck. It rested a foot off the ground and he had to step up into the cab. The radio had been turned to a music station, but he stabbed the AM station he most favored. He did not have to wait very long.

"And in other news, one of the notorious Littlefoots has been captured, a renegade juvenile from the the criminal family was apprehended by law enforcement officials today. The name of the underage clan member is being withheld pending disposition. National security forces of the Homeland Terroristic Threat Unit boxed in the alleged felon during a break-in attempt at the local high school he used to sporadically attend. No reports of injury to spectators resulted when the SWAT team arrested the younger Littlefoot and Homeland Security was able to recover stolen equipment vital to national safety. A second, young person has been held for questioning in the arrest."

Gramps pursed his lips and quietly decided how to proceed. He put his battery into his cell phone and was about to speed-dial his grandson, Ralphie. Then he remembered, in order for them to talk BOTH had to insert battery at the same time. He looked at his watch. They had agreed to a once a day 6 pm, 5 second check in call. It was not yet five. He decided to get his son, but not worry Louisa.

"They will not harm him, son. They will not harm him. They want these gizmos. That's all."

"Dad, I don't know that for sure. I think this is unprecedented for a run of the mill power-play scenario. They might do anything. Let's see what they want. We can try to contact them."

At 6 they phoned Ralph and the phone call lasted only three seconds. They did not know how long it took to triangulate and trace a phone call these days. Police TV dramas seemed to all dwell on a dramatic couple minutes to keep a kidnapper talking so that the police computers could locate the whereabouts of the criminals. But they were not sure. Perhaps modern communications made this three minute trace time obsolete.

Ralph flew in low. He descended at speed and alighted near the cabin's front porch.

"Mom know yet?" he asked. His dad shook his head. Gramps looked up into the clouds.

"I have a feeling they are closing in. I think they may have means to locate this cabin."

Ralph nodded and took out one of his ever-present devices from his back pack. It was not the lifter or fabricator, but just a portable radar unit. He pointed it upwards and let it scan the sky. In a couple minutes it had identified several blips.

"Airlines travel at prescribed altitudes. When they are going East they are at

Flight Levels of even numbers. Going West, at odd numbers. That rule keeps them from hitting each other accidentally. I'm going to scan for military height or anything unusual."

The scanner located a plane at twenty thousand feet, not unusual by itself, but it was only traveling a paltry eighty knots. It was in a circular orbit, a fuel-conserving hover.

"That's our bird, right there."

"Can we disable it?"

"Oh, easily."

Ralphie shook his head at the offer of a small caliber pistol. Gramps had thought he could shoot out the fuel tank and force the plane operators to land their spy plane. Instead, he took up a can of spray paint, John Deere green.

Ralph knew they would analyze the video recording of his appearance and could ascertain his origin on the ground to some extent by the direction from which he appeared. He took no chances and veered way over to the rear of the plane, several miles behind it. He not only got behind it but actually approached from above.

He was surprised because the propeller noise was relatively low. It was a given that engine and propeller noise at twenty-thousand feet made such a spy plane as this invisible and inaudible to people on the ground. Even with binoculars you would not be able to see such a plane from the ground.

Ralphie guessed they would blow it up with a self destruct bomb if he goaded them into such action. And he did not want to go up with the explosion if they did so, so he did not announce his presence in any way.

The plane was traveling languidly for a plane at this altitude, at perhaps fifty miles an hour or so. Ralph was judging this by the stream of air on his body and from his motorcycle experience.



It was no effort to parallel the plane. He avoided the huge, lethal pusher prop, of course, and floated himself towards the bulbous nose. The nose looked like the head of a blind whale or a 747 without windows. The plane's real eyes and windows were directed downwards, a rotatable turret projected out of the streamlined body, a concession to the greater purpose of the plane in defiance to its

otherwise slick exterior.

Besides the camera there were also some rocket tubes and 20 millimeter machine gun barrels. He could see black glass and magnificent lenses focusing in and out, back and forth, whirring and searching for his fishing cabin. At this altitude the camera must be able to see many, many square miles, each square foot of which was now being, no doubt, analyzed by a team of photographic experts, perhaps even by software able to search out what human eyes cannot.

The camera alone probably cost more than their entire farm, thought Ralph as he shook the can of spray paint. He heard the little bee-bee rattle in the can as he shook it up good prior to spraying it. The mist of green paint dispersed in the slipstream at first, until he was able to direct it closely from the front of the lens directly onto its surface. He wondered why they did not include a little windshield wiper or a jet of air or water to clean the dome in case of an insect strike or a bird's digestive strike.

A puddle of green ran, then acted as a substrate for the rest and within a couple seconds the entire dome of the lens turned from multi-million dollar surveillance dome into trashed useless camera. He knew they would be able to land it blind and hoped the plane would not be blown up. They had not seen him apply his handiwork. From their perspective the picture had merely obscured into blackness from some unknown source. Once landed they would be able to figure it out, of course.

Ralph looked down at his town below. He was familiar with the map of his town and from that knew where he was in relation to roads, downtown, their farm and their cabin's hidden location. They were directly over the Lobos Peak area.

He felt a pang of fear. Had he precipitated a desperate attack? No doubt the Lobos area would be good hide out terrain to search, but it was a large area. Still. Helicopter strike was a possibility now.

They had to leave. Right away. That was more pressing than getting Johnny back. Ralph began a high speed descent, actually accelerating himself downwards instead of just letting gravity do its work.

He was only down a few hundred feet when he saw a bright flash from above and heard and felt a sharp crack a fraction of a second later. He tilted his eyes up

and watched pieces of the predator explode outwards in all directions, some coming straight down towards him. He jinked sideways as fast as he could, the lift harness cutting deeply, painfully into his shoulders, cutting bruises into his neck area. Smoldering hunks of exterior panels shot past and he could smell the aviation fuel and that horrible smell of burning plastic. The pieces tumbled down past him.

He alighted near the front porch and there was no time to lose.

"Did you hear that?"

"We saw it, but only because we were looking."

"No time for packing, just what we can carry."

Louisa had made each of them a bug-out back pack and the three of them lifted in unison. They had no particular goal and no real place to go, but headed towards the city.

Just as they lit out a gaggle of helicopters rose over the hill, four of them bristling with armament, protrusions of rocket launchers and lethal machine guns hanging heavily to the sides of each.

A weed eater of sprayed up foliage erupted along the side of the hill as one round per square foot killed off all the birdies and bunnies, not to mention beautiful trees and shredded grass. So far, the helicopters were not even close to their cabin, but it appeared that they were intent upon painting the entire hillside and it would not take too long to flush out the quarry.

Ralph panicked. Flush out the quarry! Of course! He pointed and shot forward, hoping his parents and grandfather understood and would likewise follow.

They presented no radar picture since they were not metallic, but Ralph understood modern optics and computers. It would not be hard to configure a visual tracking device based on irregular background patterns and install it on a fighter. He surveyed the sky and, sure enough, he caught sight of a contrail, not the plane itself, but its presence. Perhaps he had caught sight of it before the pilot locked in on the Littlefoots.

His family streamed behind, first Gramps, then his mom, finally his dad. The plane could out-fly them in terms of speed, but they could outmaneuver it by hovering and reversing direction. The pilot had oxygen and a pressure suit and could fly higher, but they could stay up without worrying about fuel supply. Still, the military pilot had the advantage of being armed. Ralph weighed outcomes and knew they were being tracked to kill. There was no way at all to outrun the plane.

He led his family into a dive when he saw the railroad tracks. He made for the tunnel cut through the hillside and his family got the idea. The train tunnel would shield them from blast if they could get inside. Once in, they would be safe unless the plane got orders to seal up one or both ends of the tunnel. They had to go in, then come back out and disappear before such orders for bombing got given to the pilot.

Ralph skimmed the tracks at high speed just as they entered. He risked a backwards glance and the fighter began spraying bullets at the tunnel mouth before his family got inside, but his speed worked against him and he overshot.

Ralph knew they were temporarily safe, but he had to neutralize the fighter or, at least, they had to lose him. A chase like this has two parts, the first being to

lose the pursuer, the second being to lose yourself and dissociate yourself from the pursuit.

There were train cars aplenty, boxcars one could hide underneath if nothing else, but he had seen the disregard for property. The chase had turned serious and there would be disregard not only for property but also any innocent bystanders. The fever had reached a high pitch and collateral damage was now to be totally ignored as an obstacle to the goal. The goal was now total annihilation.

Ralph, still moving, dipped down and lifted a heavy railroad implement, a bucket of gravel, maybe ten gallons of pea sized sharp pebbles. He did not know if he could take the wind speed or the gee force but he intended to try taking out the fighter. He heard it roar as it made a tight, tight turn. The pilot had the plane at ninety degrees to the ground and Ralph could see the plane as from above while it turned so tightly.

He shot up to meet it, trying for where he thought the pilot might emerge from the tight turning radius.

As soon as the plane righted itself Ralph was in the pilot's gun sights. He could almost hear the air chatter asking for permission to take a shot. The pilot was used to pursuing other planes, but not ones that could change direction without obeying rules of normal lifting surfaces, of thrust and wings and elevators. Ralph's lifter harness had turned his body into a low-mass helicopter, a hummingbird of game quarry that the lumbering fighter jet had a hard time out maneuvering.

Ralph got above the plane as it approached, closing on him impossibly fast. He upended the bucket while twirling in a circle, raining a spray of gravel in all direction like a fan as he ascended. Then, suddenly, Ralph reversed and accelerated downward through the rain of dispersed gravel. The pilot, ever diligent in his pursuit, quickly dipped down also, machine guns spraying a curved arc of yellow red tracers.

Just as they passed each other, the fighter's engines scooped up some gravel. The precision turbine blades, brittle metal, snapped as each blade hit a granite rock. Sparks, then hunks of turbine, flames, smoke, chunks of fuselage erupted.

Insanely, the pilot continued pursuing and firing, even as his doomed craft itself lost the contest. Johnny felt like some modern David who, with mere pebbles, had downed a flying Goliath.

The plane flew past, now both engines stalled, erupted smoke, engulfed in flames, its soaring characteristics as good as a brick, glide ratio of less than one-to-one.

The canopy exploded as the pilot ejected to save himself from the now voluminous inferno. Some slag and flaming debris caught on his ejection mechanism and Ralph could see the enclosed ejection seat still burning. flames arose from the pilot area, covering part of his helmet and top part of his flight suit. The shroud lines of the parachute carried yellow flames. One by one the nylon lines parted from fire and the parachute hung awry and the ejection seat dangled at an angle.

The well trained pilot ejected himself from his own ejection seat, electing to finish the descent with a smaller, manual personal parachute rig. Still, some few

fames hung on when his secondary chute brushed against the still falling ejection seat. His secondary chute fowled against the lines, tangled, his reserve chute did not fully open. He fell at perhaps a hundred miles an hour with the not fully open chute streaming, whipping above.

Ralph shot down. His face brushed through fame and he smelled aviation kerosene and his own burning hair. The pilot looked up and saw Johnny through his smoldering visor. The pilot hung onto the two shroud lines like a kid on a swing set and watched Ralph grab hold of the lines, then put gradually more and more tension on them as he gripped with all his might, at first fifty pounds or so, then gradually more, perhaps a hundred.

Ralph saw that the speed of descent was winning the battle and that they would hit the ground hard, but he kept hauling. The dangling pilot slowed from a hundred miles an hour to fifty to thirty. At about ten feet off the ground he had achieved a zero rate of descent, managing to hold the full two hundred and fifty pounds of the pilot and his gear with a two-handed hold.

The intent pilot looked up and reached for a pistol. Abruptly, Ralph dropped his load and darted off, accelerating out of pistol range.

He made for the train tunnel and caught sight of his family. They decided to disappear.

TEST FLIGHT

"Can we all fit inside, son?"

Horton shook his head as he looked in, saying, "One of us will have to get alternate transportation."

They had snuck into the airport hangar to retrieve their BD5. It seemed to Maxwell that they always were sneaking around now and he did not like it, although he did like privacy. He sighed at the contradiction as he keyed the padlock and opened the door. The little plane glimmered just a little in

the moonlight. Behind the rear seat was room for stowage, but not much.

Horton would take front seat, his wife the rear seat and Maxwell would crouch down cross-legged in the small luggage area behind the rear seat. Ralphie decided to stay. He had told his family that he would immediately follow while wearing his motorcycle helmet for wind protection. The helmet would cover his face from wind and let him increase his speed to maybe a hundred miles an hour. The little plane, of course, would let his family go much faster.

However, he had lied. He had no intention of immediately following. He decided to rescue his little brother and, perhaps, team up with his lawyer.

"If we keep it at four or five hundred miles an hour we will still have to stop for rest room and meals," observed Louisa.

Maxwell nodded and added, "We have to fly low sometimes, too. Below radar means flying at night at a hundred feet over the terrain or water. The air is very dense near the ground and, also, bird strikes are a very real danger at that height."

Louisa had fired up the camp stove in the old hangar and they cobbled together a rude picnic basket of sorts, a steaming thermos of boiling coffee.

They chose well, acting like James Bond spies. "We will rendezvous in two days, Tuesday, at the Park Hotel in Bremen, Germany. Our next rendezvous, if this one gets missed, will be the Eiffel Tower, Wednesday."

Maxwell got in first and Ralphie handed him his ubiquitous thermos of disgusting coffee.

Ralphie hugged his mom, who cried a little, before getting in the back seat. Last, he shook hands with his dad, then, awkwardly, quickly, they hugged and his dad clambered into the front seat and dogged down the canopy. Ralph quietly swung open one of the old wooden hangar doors. The plane was narrow enough not to need both doors open.

Horton silently, accurately, glided the plane out, nose first, a couple feet off the ground. He felt quite the expert at flying and maneuvering by sight with only such a short amount of experiential time under his belt. Ralphie watched the little jet float forward a few more feet to clear the roof's overhang. A last wave from his family through the canopy and the jet ascended upwards at a forty-five



degree angle, silently accelerating until it vanished into the night sky.

Ralph swung the hangar door shut, locked it, and also locked the human-size walk in door. He decided to see if he could make contact with Hanks.

JUDAS GOAT

"We would like to offer you the opportunity to contact your clients. We have their son in custody. We can negotiate something if they come in."

Hankes watched his time on the phone, limiting his conversation to a non-traceable two minutes. At least, he hoped two minutes would work.

"I will try to act in the interest of my clients, of course, and will relay your offer. But I must protest the arrest of Johnny, a minor, violently handled, perhaps injured."

"Good speech, Hankes. Those words might have cut some legal mustard in less-pressing times, but today all your Constitutional rights have been shit-canned by events. When I say 'negotiations' I mean spare your lives, otherwise my superiors will even go so far as to take out whole city blocks. Hell, they don't care if they need to take out whole cities. We are going to..."

Hankes saw that the time on his cell phone had reached the two minute mark and he disconnected the battery. His recording mechanism had clearly made a copy of the entire conversation and he now uploaded the entirety of it to YouTube and several other internet websites, the Drudge Report and a couple other overseas sites considered unsavory but something for US bureaucrats to worry about.

The websites acted as moral oversight for unconstitutional errancy on the part of runaway government. The internet was not just a data source for business, education, information, and entertainment; it became the main stopgap against Totalitarianism.

Hankes threw away the phone he had just used, the one he had bought only an hour ago and got out another, the one he had bought only a few minutes ago. He waited until 6, turned on his new phone, and waited for the Littlefoots to ring his new, prearranged number. It rang only once before he immediately answered.

"FBI building. For sure. I had some business there on occasion and recognized the operator's voice."

He hung up and hoped to the bottom of his soul that he had done the correct thing, had acted wisely for his clients.

BREAK OUT

"Websites function as moral oversight for unconstitutional errancy of runaway government. Without the internet the USA would have already either (a) collapsed, or (b) we would be full-blown Totalitarian."

-- RJW Seddon

Ralph bought a jacket and a baseball cap. He walked at a slow, regular pace and even held a sack of fast food lunch as a cover. Just another downtown employee at lunch. He neared the FBI building, then entered its lobby. There was a kiosk and plenty of security. Armed guards all over the place, but the level of security did not seem overly activated by events. This was just an average day for them.

"Human resources?" he asked. The kiosk guy shook his head.

"On-line only."

Ralph nodded and added, "part-time summer vacation. Looking for an internship."

The guy nodded understanding and added, "Everything's on-line now."

Ralph took in as many clues as he could, but nothing jumped out at him. He left and decided to do a remote visual, floor by floor.

He and Johnny had improved on the Sony video camera just by going into a strip center store that sold security stuff. They had all kinds of little secret pens which were really broadcasting cameras and he finally bought a regular-looking clothing store black dome-shaped one inside of which he had taped a lifter unit.

He screw-driven open the camera and there was plenty extra room to insert a lifter. The whole of the lifter was the size of a USB drive. He had to get it into the building and this lobby was not the way.

When he exited the main door of the building he walked around the block until he came to the edge of it where there was a narrow alley way. It was a typical downtown building separated from the next multistory office building by a sparsely trafficked concrete walkway, wide enough for delivery vehicles, garbage pickup, and basement garage entry and exit, but was never used for regular city traffic.

He looked around for anyone, then lifted straight up and alighted on the ledge of the facade built two stories up. He ducked behind a partial concrete protrusion. No one. He was at a corner position, not directly facing any windows at all, a blank spot in the architecture of the building's design. He shot straight up, up, up, rapidly accelerating to incredible speed for the remainder of the twenty stories up.

He decelerated just as rapidly mid flight and did a stomach lurching stop on the roof ledge. There were no cameras, but there was a helicopter parked on its painted landing circle with the big H in the middle, complete with a limp orange wind shock. The helicopter sat alone, engine silent, merely parked, without a pilot.

He floated a foot off the roof's surface at a fast running pace to the doorway built into the roof's access, a little doghouse of a building. The door actually had a window in it and he risked a peek. No one. He tested the lock. The knob turned easily.

Ralph pursed his lips and floated rapidly to the helicopter. He had no idea how to disable such a device. Was there a distributor wire? He certainly could not

flatten any tires or remove something as mundane as spark-plugs.

He felt along the fuselage behind the cockpit as he floated along a couple feet off the ground. There. An access panel. A little door for fuel. He felt further. This time it was a complex looking array of switches, knobs, valves.

He found a long steel wrench that looked all-in-all exactly like the device in automobiles used to change the lug nuts on wheels to change a flat tire. He took this wrench and jammed it into the circle of the rim of the hole which housed the tail rotor. He inserted the tip and pulled with all his might and to his amazement and delight, the entire tail rotor blade bent out of alignment. The precisely balanced mechanism would no longer spin without destroying itself. The helicopter was grounded. It would have to be repaired on this roof with parts brought in before it would ever fly again.

Ralph went to the door again, opened it, and gingerly entered. He scanned the stairway for cameras or sensors and descended. This stairway was actually the ground floor to rooftop stairway which was alternate to the elevators, to be used in case of fire or elevator failure. He could probably descend all the way to the ground floor.

His problem, though, was to find Johnny and he did not know on which floor he was held. The problem solved itself with the fireman's map posted on each floor's entry door. Not only did the plastic sign show the current floor number, but also showed the main layout of the building: Lobby, Garage, Cafeteria, Gym, Cells.

He guessed his goal was floor 6 where the jail cells were. At least, that is what he hoped. He descended the stairs down to 6 and tested the knob. Incredibly, it was unlocked. He could enter at will.

He opened the door and risked a peek into the empty hall and retested the door's lock, this time from the hallway side. It opened easily from either side of the door, not lockable from either direction.

He got out his little spy-bot, the flying video camera he had made, and fed it through the door crack. It floated neutrally in mid air at the same height when he withdrew his hand. A couple flicks of his controller sent it up, where it was gently stopped by the ceiling tiles. It looked now for all the world like one of the FBI's own built in surveillance cameras, just another ceiling camera!

The black dome of plastic covered the unit and anyone looking at it could not see which way the camera was directed. He rotated the camera now remotely and was able to monitor the hall through the closed door. The security store had sold him a matching receiver, a tiny screen built into one side of some glasses.

Ralph floated the spy-bot along the corridor of the ceiling of the hallway up to a T where the corridor branched. He even had audio from the device and when he heard nothing floated it into the corridor.

Immediately, the sound of footsteps and a pair of suit clad agents walked past. They did not even glance up at the security camera. It looked official and built into the ceiling, as though it had been there forever. If they had never noticed it before they did not react to its presence. Who would question such a device, especially within the confines of the FBI building?

Emboldened, Ralph skimmed it down the hall to the next junction. There a

convenient signboard gave directions which he zoomed into so he could read it and he obediently followed the arrows to the HOLDING CELLS 1-7.

He had to freeze the camera's movement a couple times as people walked past. Only on one occasion did anyone even glance up at the camera and, even then, did but walk past. He expected a Wild West style jail with bars, but, instead, saw that the holding cells consisted of mere offices with glass windows. The rooms each looked like TV cop show interrogation rooms. There was a central table and a couple of chairs each in the rooms, nothing more. The rooms were identical and all empty.

He floated down the hall and scoped out each room. Nothing. Just then, the double doors at the end of the hallway opened and a group entered. Several agents escorted his brother and Sally Reindeer. His brother had bruises and Ralph almost lost his temper.

He recognized several of the suit clad men as the same whom he had seen in the break-in video of their house and also in Chancellor Drake's office. The group obliviously marched past Ralph's camera and opened one of the interrogation rooms. The door knob was not locked, at least from the outside, and they ushered his brother and girl friend in.

The group did not speak except that the boss spoke into his phone several times. He did not think to post a guard. They all left. Ralph could not believe his luck. He had to signal his brother somehow, but the camera unit did not have a speaker, just a microphone.



Sally sat heavily in a chair and Johnny tested the knob of his prison cell before, too, sitting down. Ralph did not want to risk walking down the hall himself, although he figured it might be possible merely to take the same path of the camera to the holding cell then just twist the knob.

Instead, he floated the camera across the hallway to the huge plate glass window separated hall from room. This movement alerted Johnny who now stared at the floating camera.

Ralph remotely activated his utensil causing an invisible six inch rod to protrude from the camera. It was invisible because of its thickness, only a micron wide. It was thin, but

strong, and as he swept the camera in a circle across the glass it effortlessly cut a rude circle into the glass. The blade was so thin there was no resistance at all, not even that of warm butter.

The movement caught Johnny's attention and, at first, the younger brother did not know what to make of the strange activity. But, almost immediately, he put two and two together and smiled. He even caught the circle of cut glass as it plopped out into the room. A smiling Johnny set the heavy glass circle on the table top and this strange activity now had Sally's full attention.

The camera entered through the hole. Without being able to say anything, Ralph sailed his unit across the room to the outside window. The window was sealed shut, of course, and also had chicken wire embedded into its innards. But his device easily cut away the whole of the glass, making an opening large enough for a person to exit. Now Ralph, in haste, exited the building himself. He shot up the stairwell from floor to floor, not flying, not running, just sort of float-skipping up the stairwell at maybe sixty miles an hour using a dizzying corkscrew spiral as he went up.

He burst out on the roof, then whooshed down the side of the building, down to the sixth floor. He found the correct window almost first try. There stood Johnny atop an office chair looking out for rescue. Ralph looked down to see that the jagged shards would not hit anything, then pantomimed for Johnny to push the pane of glass out. As soon as the window was free he thrust in a flying unit and his brother put it on rapidly. Sally stood open mouthed, watching.

"Where they keep the one they took off you?" asked Ralph.

"Dunno. They took it off. Probably in the building somewhere. They said 'Property Room' but the boss said No, that he would keep and eye on it."

"That means he wants to try it out. Don't worry. They can use it, but they can't duplicate it. Can't make another one."

Once attired in his harness, Johnny tested the controls, then motioned for Sally to grab hold. Ralph retrieved his spy-bot and the three of them flew away.

TRACK THE ESCAPEE HOME

Barringer sat smoking in an office. His men stood around him as they all watched Johnny escape on a security monitor. None of them said anything except when they watched the extreme ease with which the invisible cutter sliced through glass. One of the subordinates said "Oh!" when he watched that. There was a "Lord!" as the image of Ralph floated up the stairwell on another monitor. Their hidden cameras were pretty much all over the place and there was a more or less nonstop video, one without gaps, of Ralph's entire visit, including his lobby reconnoitering earlier.

"One GPS unit is in Sally's left shoe, another in Johnny's left shoe. If they take off their shoes or even if they find them we put in a couple more backups. One is the metal button on Ralph's Levis. Another is Sally's wrist watch."

Barringer grunted approval as he tracked their flight on a laptop screen's map.

"Heading north at 30 mph at 600 ft. What's the elevation here?"

"About 550. They are in the air, but just above building height."

"When they come to a stop, I may or may not be ordered to call in a strike. It depends on if they are all together."

"You want to try out his flight gizmo?"

"Like to, but I don't know if they can somehow know if we are using it. Think they can deactivate it remotely?"

"That would certain kill our test pilot, but they already know we have it. As for tracking its location, I recommend we not use it. They would see us coming."

"But the main thing: do you think they will find our trackers?"

Barringer took a drag. "That's why we tagged them with multiple units. They might find the shoe, but not the pants button. If they do find the shoe and disable it they may not think to look further." He paused a bit and thought about it. "We need to catch them intact. Nobody gets hurt. Nobody injures anybody. Okay?"

His subordinate nodded.

CARGO COMPARTMENT

Maxwell really had to go and he was cramped, too, but he kept silent and tried to enjoy the ride. The problem was that he did not have a window. He could see a bit over the top of Louisa's head rest, but a constant view of triangle of blue sky is unrewarding.

Horton did not need a cruise control, per se, because the lifter units, once set, stayed in position and the BD5 loped along as set. In this case he had set the direction to coincide with the Magellan unit. His altitude was 8000 feet and he kept the speed at 700 mph.

His skill with air navigation was not great and he did not know the rules for airport engagement, nor for landing, transponders, radio communication, or any of the myriad of FAA requirements of pilot lore. He did realize they could be tracked by radar and, since they did not have an altimeter encoding transponder, they could be hailed by radio and even intercepted by fighter craft, scrambled to protect the continental USA.

He had hit upon a method to avoid any and all of this fooferah. It approached sundown and he put the plane down as though to land at an airport, a small, rural strip without air traffic control, no tower, just a single paved runway near a small town.

He did not land, though, nor even do a touch and go, but rather stayed aloft but just barely, remaining at fifty feet. The plane was silent and had no lights. At fifty feet nobody's radar would track them and they could not be seen or heard. Horton just had to worry about hitting the odd radio station antenna, water tower, or any such statistically rare obstruction. He took it slow, coasting along at a silent 200 miles and hour.

"Lets put in at a state park, one with a campground store. We can sleep during the day."

Louisa agreed. "But can you fly all night? Won't you get tired?"

Horton looked over his shoulder at his wife and grinned. "No, I'm good."

She nodded and went to sleep.

At midnight, precisely at 12, Horton inserted his phone battery. A second later he got a text message and it only had a single letter, a digit, really. "3" was all it said and he immediately took out the battery. He grinned and spoke, "All 3 of them safely away."

DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

Johnny set down on a sidewalk, very glad to set down Sally. She had held on so tightly from fright and fear of heights his breathing had been restricted. He rubbed his neck and gave Sally a hundred dollar bill so she could buy a cell phone and call for a ride home. He did not think they would come after her. She had just been caught up in the net.

Ralph kept watch as Johnny and Sally made their teenage goodbyes. He felt he needed more advice from Hankes and checked his time for a prearranged time to phone.

LOSS OF AN UNREAL PAPER WORLD

"They have stepped up the level of aggression to that of no-holds-barred."

Hankes had lost his paper, legal world. Now he could only think like a mouse being chased by a cat, no writs, no filing, no judge. He had no structure and felt completely lost. Yet here was his client expecting advice and a course of action. He felt dirty giving advice when he had none to give. He felt for all the world like one of those fraudulent televangelists, taking money, offering advice, but offering only wisps of speculation sounding like certainty. But Ralph saved him.

"It's no longer LEGAL advice we are after. I think that structure has collapsed and we need a new paradigm. Without even developing a new working theory we can at least agree that we need to keep from being captured."

Hankes perked up. "You're right! It is WE who have the upper hand. We have something and they want it. So long as we still have it and so long as we are not captured, we are okay. As soon as we are captured it is all over."

"Well, let me show you what can be done. Remember my little stock pond and tree?"

Hankes nodded.

"I can make a box, a VERY large box, an exact cube, if I want, a kilometer high, long, and wide, starting, oh, say, fifty feet underground. I can cut it out of the Earth and float the whole of it silently away. That includes the air to breathe. The water in the pond won't even spill from sloshing if I move it gently. The only thing I can't bring with me is the daylight. As for the light, I can filter the box and let in or restrict any wavelength of the electromagnetic spectrum -- heat, radiation, visible light. I could gently accelerate the whole cube to the Moon or even Mars. From time to time, we would either have to replenish the air or turn the box into a terrarium which recycles oxygen and CO2. We could start our own colony and just plain old live there out of reach." He shook his head at the thought. "It would be decades and decades before anyone on Earth could develop chemical rocket technology enough to pursue us."

"So, that's it? We're Robinson Crusoe on Mars? Mighty lonely, Ralph. You know it and I know it. That scenario condemns us to a life of exile. During that time it just might be possible to reverse engineer your lifter. If they can do that they just might come after us."

Ralph pursed his lips. He had begun thinking in circles, did not like any conclusions of any kind from any scenarios and kept resetting his thoughts back to square one. He kept replaying events and wished he had kept his family out of the loop, but knew they would be held hostage.

"If they eventually duplicate what we have made, then they would become one with us in their thinking, become allies, not enemies."

"You mean like the Soviets became allies with the West after they also developed nuclear strike capability on parity with the West?"

Ralph did not hear the sarcasm, just the words as plainly spoken, so he did not understand. He was politically naive and did not even know his history. He was trying to remember HOW the Soviets had become our allies from what Hankes had just

said and did not snap. He stared blankly.

Finally, he caught on. "They never did," he stated, late but correctly. "They had the bomb and we had the bomb and we remained at arms length as adversaries."

Hankes nodded. "We don't get that option because they are a kazillion times more powerful."

"If I GAVE them a sample, just handed it over to them, I don't think they could reverse engineer it enough to tamper with it, destroy it, duplicate it. Nothing."

Hankes did not know where Ralph was going, but knew something further was coming.

"I want to give them a 'temporary' sample -- some 'cripple-ware'."

Ralph goofed with his CAD program to explain. The screen held his main geometrical shapes. Ralph grabbed a sphere, colored it, sized it, gave it inertial properties. a gravitational component, and so forth. All of these he had already set up as macros and standard input. But now, he added a further set of instructions. When he was done he demonstrated his work.

Hankes watched Ralph initiate his design. A red sphere the size of a tennis ball suddenly appeared before them in the room. It hung in space, unwavering, shiny and looking just like another one of his prior creations.

Ralph hit the ten key of the keyboard, then began counting down, "Ten, nine, eight..."

When he reached 'one' Hankes watched the ball silently vanish. It abruptly made a pop as air entered where the sphere had once been.

"A count-down program?"

"Yep. I can build it in at creation time as part of each object's characteristics."

"You could rent them, then?"

Ralph nodded. "In my heart of hearts, I know absolutely no one can break in, either. It's impervious to tampering. You could work a thousand years and not get in. You could resurrect Albert Einstein AND Sir Isaac Newton AND use a Cray computer and not reverse engineer this thing."

"Can you feed coins into an existing creation -- so to speak -- or do you have to start over with a new item?"

Ralph was intrigued with the notion, his respect for Hankes continuing at a high level. He stared into space as he considered the topic.

As Ralph thought about it Hankes put it, "It's just a variation on the idea. Either way, no matter if it's possible or not, we still have a tremendous bargaining chip now."

"You mean something to sell or rent that they want?"

"No. No. Not at all. Now we have a bargaining chip to keep us safe. Now, maybe, THEY will want to keep it -- and us -- safe. They may want it now. We may want to keep the lines of communication open with Barringer."

COIN-FED MATTER

"It's Fed Ex, addressed to you."

For a second Barringer recoiled. Lord! Did they check it for explosives? Poison? Then he realized it was a message. Although he knew it would be futile, he ordered, "See if you can get a trace on its origins with Fed Ex. Cameras and so forth."

It was a regular cardboard box with regular label, addressed to him, here at this address, even correctly zip coded and so forth. They misspelled his name.

The box held a dozen golf balls, perfectly smooth, multicolored. They rolled around in the box without any packing bubbles. He unfolded an accompanying letter.

Dear Mr. Barringer,

These non-material objects are yours to evaluate critically and consider. They are safe for experimentation and you may do with them as you like.

The three red balls will grow in size at 1 pm and double in diameter, but not weight. The green balls will begin to float towards the ceiling five minutes after 1 pm. At ten after the hour the white balls will get heavier and will each weigh 100 pounds. Blue items, at a quarter after, will increase in temperature to 200 degrees Fahrenheit. The yellows, at twenty past, will emit light at the same level as a hundred watt bulb AND will roll towards the West with ten pounds force. At twenty-five past the hour, white balls will reduce in temperature to twenty below zero AND begin spinning at 200 rpm. At 1:30 the red balls will dis-incorporate, vanishing before your eyes, leaving no tell-tale trace of ever having been in existence. The blues will exist until tomorrow at 2pm. The yellows will last two days. The whites will last three days. The greens will last four days.

The characteristics of the objects, including this new 'temporary existence' attribute, are built in at the time of creation. The duration of existence as well as the other characteristics cannot be altered after the instruction set has been created. It is now possible to regulate a level of control on the usage and implementation of such creations to a safe level by impermanence. This new characteristic of a preordained time limit for the existence may interest you sufficiently that you may wish to consider this invention as well as your attitude towards the freedom of me, my family, friends, and attorney in a new light.

Best Regards,
Ralph Littlefoot

Under his name was phone number and time. As soon as Barringer read that he looked at the wall clock. He felt for his own phone.

Barringer checked the time and fidgeted while mentally grouping the colors of the balls according to the letter. His men had a couple video cameras going. One camera displayed a full room field of view, showing them all in it, including wall clock, from a tripod and it made a general record of the proceedings. Another camera was hand held by his assistant and he focused, in turn, close up onto the colors of the balls directed by Barringer. In very short order he had somehow managed to acquire an ordinary directional compass, albeit of toy quality, a thermometer, a regular bathroom scale, and he already had his wristwatch and video cameras at hand.

The red balls, as advertised, had suddenly grown, silently, merely laying there.

The green balls had floated to the ceiling slowly at five after the hour and now they rolled around the ceiling tiles.

"Ah, now the white ones. It's almost ten after."

The bathroom scale barely registered the white balls. Now they suddenly compressed the scale without any visual forewarning and the needle showed four hundred pounds, for there were four of them.

Barringer reached down and rolled one of them off the scale and it hit the floor an inch below with a hard clunk. It was small and its weight compressed the office floor tile, cutting a groove in it.

He was able to get a good grasp on it but could not lift it one-handedly easily at all, hardly at all, for he had never before encountered a golf-ball-sized object that weighed in at a hundred pounds.

The other colors, in turn, displayed their predicted temporary characteristics as the letter described. He felt he was wasting his time, but went through the

exercise item by item.

Even while making the video his wheels were turning. He had the whites three days and the greens for four. But the other colors would last -- as far as he knew -- indefinitely. He could get his men to goof with them, try to crack the secret. But already, he felt it would be a waste of time. In his heart he knew already that it was impenetrable, otherwise Littlefoot would not have released them. Maybe the time limit? Was this as significant as he thought?

HOME, SWEET HOME

Ralph felt now like a criminal. He stood beneath his favorite tree next to the stock pond. First, he had begun to shoo away the goats. He did not want to bother them, but then he relented. Where would they drink? He let them stay, cropping grass, tails wagging playfully, twitching flies.

The box cut out his pond, the surrounding land, a mile square, house included, the six-hundred-and-forty acres that his family owned. He took right up to the the old surveyor's stakes the county had put in when repaving County Rd 23 right outside their property.

How deep do you go? How high? Ralph arbitrarily decided on a hundred feet down. For height, he dialed in one mile less a hundred feet. One cubic mile he lifted, more weight than any ancient writer had ever considered for the mythological Atlas, not when you actually calculate the weight.

Hankes held his breath as he made eye contact with his young friend. Ralph pursed his lips and nudged the dial. There was a groaning sound, so deep in register it was felt rather than heard, but they heard it, too, a bass fiddle being drawn by God's own bow and the Heavens resounded with the celestial hum of it.

Yet, it was gentle, too, for the goats continued grazing, only looking up briefly at the noise, unfazed by wind, gravity, or any kind of tilt or feeling of acceleration. To them, it must have been distant thunder, nothing more.

Ralph continued twisting the dial, very gently. Still, they felt and saw nothing. Then, after a couple seconds he saw it: the edge. He looked in the other directions. Yes! There was an edge all around them.

"I can see we are rising," commented Hankes.

"About a hundred feet," Ralph evaluated. "Maybe a little more."

"You haven't told me where you intend to set it down. Uh. Hey, listen. I, uh, think I'm feeling a little queasy. It's not motion sickness. It's just... overwhelming."

"We could just set it back down." Ralph looked at Hankes' face. He did look a little green in the face.

"Can you just leave it here? Just leave it floating right here? Hanging in space?"

Ralph nodded, but added, "We'd have to build a set of stairs or an elevator or something. There's also a hundred foot hole just under us. Way too deep for worms and moles. It'll probably fill up with water."

Hankes visualized a mile-wide hundred-foot-deep square, covered by their floating cube and he did not like the image, so he suggested moving, despite his uneasiness.

"What do you say? Africa? Antarctica?"

"How about the Moon? Mars? Or, I could just float us above the ocean at ten thousand feet. That way I could open up the top and make a few holes in the sides to provide wind and ventilation. Heck of a plan to make farms, farms all over the world if we want. Think about it: the end of hunger in the world."

"Right now I am worried about an emotional response, a desperate response. If

they try something rash like an atomic weapon... Could the walls withstand the explosion?"

Ralph nodded. "I already filtered the walls. Light can get through. So can heat, but it cannot be beyond what is tolerable to our eyes. If you see a bright flash, it will be bright-looking but only up to a certain amount like sparkler. More than that cannot get through. It would just reflect off. No radiation for us inside, no leukemia or eye damage. No noise, even."

"Do you think Barringer will try it?"

Ralph shrugged, not knowing. "His superiors might order him to do just that. I don't have a good sense about him personally. He is too much like any kind of bureaucratic functionary. The guy is a robot, to be sure, but he might also feel the same way as his bosses. A guy like him cannot defy orders, I don't suppose. Sort of like a Nazi or a Soviet agent. Just another cog in the machine."

TOO MUCH GOVERNMENT IS EVIL



Blame too-much or Bad Government on Pandora

"Totalitarianism is just another name for Big Government."

-- RJW Seddon

Hankes looked out over the edge, his mind in a law school reverie. The view had kicked him into legal overdrive. He considered the boxed up mini-environment in light of boxed up government, boxed up evil.

"Government is evil, completely evil, but we have to have some, just to contain it, just to control it. The Founding Fathers knew this and wrote the Constitution accordingly, trying to box up lighting, trying to harness the fire in a just-barely-cracked-open Pandora's box. Once government escapes out of that box, starts to grow in power and scope... Well, that's when we drift over into another Nazi state, another Fascist state, into Communism. Totalitarianism is just another name for Big Government."

Ralph, a techie, a nerd, just a kid, really, did not even know what Hankes was peering at over the edge. It was another reality that Ralph had no experience with, but he had good protective instincts, knew enough to keep his family, his secret, safe from marauding predators.

"Sometimes they just want to help, don't they?"

Hankes nodded. "It is when government steps in to help that it becomes at its most dangerous. That's when it becomes all-powerful, using Goodness as invitation. Once it has a foot in the door through that avenue of offering justice, it gains a foothold, then footing, then roots, then takes ultimate, total power -- and it is ALWAYS in the name of goodness, help, justice, fairness, fighting evil. That's what the Constitution tries to warn us about and control, a limitation on power."

F a r m e r i n t h e S k y cover, a novel by Robert Heinlein



FARMER IN THE SKY

"Well, we can't just stay here. We have tipped our hand. How about Denali Park? You know, that big park in Alaska. Ever been there?"

Ralph shook his head. He had not much been anywhere.

"Over the ice and rock. The walls are 72 degrees on the inside and our little farm will stay at that temperature unless I dial it down for wintertime."

"Have you ever seen the Aurora Borealis?"

Ralph smiled and shook his head. "Every night now, I guess. And also, we could, if we wanted to, get some moose and those kinds of Dahl sheep along with our goats."

"Our advent there and our disappearance here is going to make the news. Eventually, even Barringer and his bosses will not be able to stop any of this. Why not make a couple gestures?"

"What kind of gesture?"

"Potable water, for farming in the desert."

H2O

A barge in Lake Superior rocked a bit and the captain noticed the swell, but there was no wind and thought it was a fluke and did not give it a second thought. Behind him, silently, a cylinder arose from the water, a cylinder of immense proportion. It was a hundred meters across and rose and rose silently and slowly above the surface. Even in the middle of the night, had anyone been there to see, it was the same color as the lake, black and invisible.

Inside the cylinder, as the water rose, there was a flat sieve that strained the water, excluded fish, letting only pure water through into the rising cylinder. The immense cylinder, when full, arose above the surface, floated East, silently rose upwards into the stratosphere above the level of air traffic. It headed towards the Sahara desert, towards the farmers there, men who with this gift could feed their families.

DENALI

The starving, skinny moose looked up at the apparition and started a bit, for it had never had a trick like this sort of perspective playing across its eyes. Some sort of really beautiful green grass. The moose was able to smell the wonderful goodness of this food. Strange to find such a bonanza amid the cold, rainy, and foggy weather. It clambered up a gentle ramp through a portal and clip-clopped into the heavenly fields. The warmth was summer-like, a moose's version of the afterlife, an Elysian expanse of grass. A couple goats looked up inquisitively, smelling the newcomer moose.

MEETING

Barringer went alone, but out of long-standing habit he carried his omnipresent hand gun.

He felt along the air with his hand. Nothing to see, completely invisible, but his hand encountered a wall, though he could not see anything of it. It was there, transparent, to his left. He felt along like a blind man, even though he could see through it.

Finally, he came to a doorway and walked through. Ralph and Hankes and everyone else sat at a table waiting for him. It was right in the middle of nowhere, but just where they had said.

He had parked his car where they had ordered, then walked the rest of the distance.

The table was full of dishes and the grandpa was chowing down. The other kid, the one he had arrested, Johnny was also eating and his girl friend, the red head was there, too.

Barringer smelled the food and the coffee and his stomach reacted. It had been how long? Couple days since he had last slept or eaten?

Horton, the dad, waved him in and indicated a seat and there was a plate and a cup and a glass for him. He could eat, at least.

"Mr. Barringer?"

Horton shook hands across the table and, again, indicated that Barringer take a seat.

Ralph had his hands under the table and was watching Barringer approach. Barringer's many years as an operative knew the drill. One false move and something Ralph held would respond.

"I, ah, from habit, from many, many years of habit... I, ah, would like to disarm." He gingerly, carefully, withdrew his service revolver and placed it out of reach.

Ralph still did not take his hands from under the table and Barringer approved of the caution. He would not have let up his guard, either.

"How long will the water container last?"

"Until the farmers use it up. The top has openings and you can put hoses in and use the hoses as siphons. There's enough water in that thing to last them a couple growing seasons, I guess."

Barringer grunted and hungrily devoured Louisa's picnic. He ate more than even the teenagers and they could see he had been denying himself. Louisa looked at his eyes, all red rimmed, and thought the poor man would need to nap as soon as he finished eating. Gramps, who had slipped something into the food, knew with certainty Barringer would take just such a nap.

"You know, with the electricity brick, that African government COULD HAVE desalinated as much ocean salt water as they wanted for those poor farmers. Why didn't they?"

Barringer looked up over his fork. He did not know how to answer. These people were so naive, so gullible. They were good and unworldly. They did not know about

the nature of men.

"I don't know. Could have. Don't know why they didn't."

"Well, I do. It's human nature -- the bad side of human nature. Do you know what happened to the Patagonians?"

"Who?"

"The Patagonians. The Indians of Argentina."

"No. What?"

"It was genocide. There aren't hardly any of them anymore. It's embarrassing, so they have been unwritten from history. The North American Indians, on the other hand, were not all wiped out, but now there is a problem -- what to do with them all. There is sort of a syllogism at work here: (1) Good guys do not commit genocide, (2) the North American Indians were not wiped out, (3) therefore, the North American White man must be a good guy. But actually, the North American White man's government, because he now does not know what to do at this point might have been worse acting than if he had just gone ahead and been ruthless."

"You can't be serious!" exclaimed Barringer. It was hard to think. He had been up so long and had eaten nothing for days.

"Sure. Who is to say: ruthlessness all at once, or a little bit of horrible nasty graciousness over many generations? The White man resents the Indian peoples."

"We were less aggressive in genocide, but -- in your eyes now -- more ruthless in our graciousness."
-- RJW Seddon

Barringer knew at once they had put something in his food or drink. He felt it. He hoped it was not poison, not deadly. He had to be quick.

"I saw video of your farm in Alaska. It's quite a trick. I don't think you can stay, though. I think you'll have to go, you know, for self protection, if nothing else. Just giving away gifts... People will hate you. You'll get yourselves kidnapped or killed. You'll have to disappear. If you can make it float like that, that's a start. Some sort of aerial mote, like around a castle, but now up in the air." He was feeling groggy, had but a few minutes.

"You want to go with us?"

Barringer stared at the table. The table cloth was fascinating. "I cannot even compromise with you, you know. That would be the end of me, too. It..."

Barringer thought of his parter Campbell, his boss, and all the things from the past. He just wanted to let go. It was not just the drugs they had given him, not just being so tired.

"Yes, I'd like to go." He slumped over and Hankes caught him, still not knowing that gramps had put something in his food.

B.O.X.I.A

Bureau Of Extraterrestrial Indian Affairs.

It was ALMOST in orbit, that is, it was at a hundred miles -- the right altitude for orbit -- but it was not going fast enough. It was only going around at the same speed as to keep it hovering above the center of the Midwestern states.

The Bureau of Extraterrestrial Indian Affairs

Science
Fiction by
RJW Seddon

"No, it's NOT in a geosynchronous orbit," explained Ralph. "It's not really in orbit -- couldn't be! -- not going fast enough. We're just kind of hanging here."

It was already so big you could see it without a telescope, just good binoculars, from anywhere in the US. If you had really powerful binoculars you could even read the gigantic letters BOXIA when the sunlight hit them just right.

Some kids from Johnny's high school, including his girl friend, Sally, were busy on cad programs under Ralph's supervision. Actually, the room had a hundred kids so designing. Pizza and cokes covered the rooms and there were

a dozen ongoing discussions. They were designing buildings, exterior structures, landscape architecture.

The textures, colors, and configurations did not derive from conventional, adult designs, but were free-form. The constraints imposed to architects in the past were no longer there. Totally irrelevant things like gravity did not get in the way of their imaginations and "floors" abruptly reoriented to the sides, ceiling, or were occasionally back-to-back.

It was disconcerting to adults, but not to teenagers, apparently. In some rooms people had to avoid bumping heads as they walked, for half of them walked the 'ceiling' -- in actuality the two 'floors' were only three meters apart. If you wanted, you could leap up, do a half flip, and now be walking upside down.

There were 1G "planets" of a dozen meters across floating here and there above the floor. You could jump to them and walk in circles around the equator or pole-to-pole. At each pole there were manholes to the interior where you could also walk, now glued by gravity to the inside. When bored, you could -- with all your might -- jump off the planet back onto the "regular" floor above which the twelve meter sphere hovered, a body length's away.

OLD ENEMIES

Barringer looked at the cavorting kids and designed in his head a prison for evil-doers by making the sphere a bit larger and inescapable. He shook his head at the thought. He could not drop the past.

"Another thousand people setting out for Mars, today. They are from, ah..." He looked for the name of the crowded city in the orient.

Ralph had made some standardized containers, each with a one-hundred-year life. The exterior of each had a count-down placard, listing its characteristics, capabilities, and -- most importantly -- how long it would endure. They were free for use and could be 'driven' with a controller. There were air-tight doors on some, others without, some with water filters. Most had radiation limiters and heat controls and so forth. He was careful to register each unit and he was able to locate each one with a built-in location device.

Some kids were spreading dirt across the floor for a future lawn. They put it down a couple feet thick and the gravitized floor curved up, around, fed into a cylinder, whose walls blossomed out again into an opening, spreading cone. They had had a contest and named it Freedom Park. A grooved dip in the floor was a ribbon for a future stream running through the park, just a meter deep, a couple meters wide, and it wiggled sinuously, with oxbows through the park. Little arched bridges variously crossed the stream here and there to link sidewalks and skateboard routes. The park smelled of loam and potting soil and, already, Barringer could not wait to make use of it once the grass came up. He looked up to see the spread dirt curve up, around, over his head, then back again. He was walking through a gravity cylinder, a tube-way already marked as a 'dog park'.

He took an "elevator" -- a negative gravity shaft -- up to a higher floor, and his stomach briefly lurched. The higher floor ran 2G at the gym he liked using. He spent an hour here every day, to keep fit. The higher G force added to the workout.

"H'llo, Hanks. You too old for this stuff?"

The lawyer was bathed in sweat, trying his hand at push-ups, sit-ups. Just normal stuff like that really built up your musculature in the higher gravity and several people had learned the hard way that it was more dangerous than you would think. He was up to a couple chin ups, very hard to do when you weighed twice your weight, but quite strengthening.

"Huh-uh. It grows on me," grunted Hanks. He rested up a bit and got serious. "See the civil war brewing?"

"I did. You were right and I was right, too," reflected Barringer. "And in one sense, both of us were wrong."

"Well, there is no turning back." Hanks looked around and indicated with his hand. "It is so exciting, so visually exhilarating. I just can't get over it, every day so exciting."

"They built an add-on. It's about ten times as big, wild as Disneyland." Barringer pointed over to the left. "Ralph says it'll be open in a month."

"Some of it is too crazy for me, a tube-way to the Moon! What for? You could just take a floater." Hanks shook his head at the ridiculous thought. "I mean,

who's gonna want to DRIVE a quarter million miles? Through AIR? How long would that take?"

"You gonna vote for Ring-world?"

Barringer nodded. The referendum called for a no-kidding ring-world around the Earth, an occupied ribbon. On this one, though, you could walk on either side, not just the side facing inwards. It did not rotate and one would be able to watch the Earth day pass below in real time.

"Yeah I think the Ring would be a good one. You tried that new swimming pool yet?" There was a shallow lap pool whose gravity twisted and turned around a mobius strip, an endless loop on which you ended up swimming on both sides.

The men were not just bouncing gee-whiz ideas off each other. They both still thought in terms of policy and danger and far-reaching implications. Hankes thought about personal liberty and worried about loss of freedom. Barringer concerned himself about anarchy. But each man had taught the other man to worry about both things at once.

There were a million people belonging to one of those weird new religions designing the first multi-generational ship to another star system. They had taken so much Lunar mass with them for building material that many people were complaining and told them to go loot Jupiter and leave Luna alone.

"You still worried about stuff?" asked Hankes unnecessarily. He knew Barringer did.

Barringer nodded, patting his new revolver. "That's my job, my lifelong habit. Now there is even MORE to worry about."

Ralph had made him head of security and had provided Barringer with a new kind of pistol, the only one of its kind, the most lethal handgun ever designed. No one even knew about it except a couple people. He hoped he would never have to use it.

"You know, the birth rate might now sky rocket. What do you think?"

Barringer shrugged. "Might. Might not. Look at Europe. Their rate actually went down as prosperity increased after World War II. Might happen again now. Why? Do you think a rising population will be a problem?"

"Don't know."

They met like this often to discuss the future, each still wary of the other, both respecting the other opinion.

"Here's my idea," began Hankes. "I think you are right to worry. We have made a sudden leap of 'technology progress' and we are now experiencing its benefits. The benefits of this temporarily allow us to avoid the problems associated with having made zero progress in 'economic, social, and government progress'. Ralphie has given us a reprieve, nothing more. At some later date, perhaps a century from now, we will have to revisit this debate."

Barringer had not expected his debate partner to take his side and, silently, he evaluated this analysis.

"Then, if you're right, the great hope a century from now -- or whenever -- is that another technological breakthrough will put off those kinds of problems. It's like an expanding bubble."

OLD FRIENDS

"Why don't you change your shirt? It smells so."

In response to Maxwell's observation, Samuel Two Toes put his hand of cards down temporarily and took a drink. His former arch-nemesis and now best friend Maxwell Littlefoot sat across from him cross legged. They played cards on a blanket on the ground of a hovering twenty meter 'planet' which had a view of the Earth below. Their planet itself floated above the floor of this park and an ancient oak tree kept them and their planet partially in shade from the glaringly bright Earth.

Two Toes now took notice of Maxwell's own dirty shirt, worse than his, covered increasingly with sandwich crumbs from Louisa's lunch she had brought in to them both.

"I will wager my pile of chips," Two Toes responded, "all or nothing, against the equally filthy shirt you now have on. If I win, you go shirtless this week." He pushed forward his small miserable stack of chips, for he -- as usual -- had been losing.

Gramps snorted and pushed in a similar stack to match the offer. "If I win, you have to wear another shirt tomorrow."

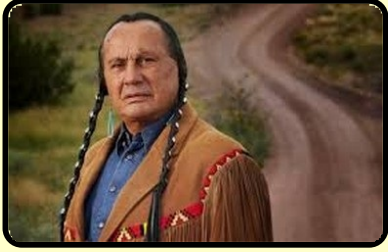
They played like this daily and had done so every day since Samuel Two Toes arrived. They spoke in Huyute and, to be truthful, neither of them spoke it very well themselves, for there were not too many people who still spoke the language. They had become inseparable, spent eighteen hours a day together.

A filthy goat whose fur was matted with goat poop approached their poker-blanket -- they sat on the ground -- and ate their not-as-yet-left overs, for they shared their food with livestock and anyone else who wandered in.

"What did you do with the money Barringer gave you? The bribe you took?"

"I bought some shirts. Let me see your hand." He put down his cards and the old Indians finally had a home together, one to be proud of. They dwelt together in the Sky Village spoken about in their Huyute legends of old. And it was also a Red Atlantis.

Special Dedication



To Russell Means

Movie star, leader, Politician, Libertarian

neither left



nor right

LEGAL DISCLAIMER



This story is a work of fiction and none of the characters or names or institutions in the story are real, nor based on anyone or anything that exists in real life.

The names of characters, though reminiscent of reality, are merely a satiric literary device making use of the well-known tongue-in-cheek science fiction device of the so-called multiverse. Hopefully, lawyers, even those in the other realm, will be thwarted from dishonorable activity by this statement.

Some of the fictional characters in this science fiction novel possess names similar to or identical to real people, both living and dead. However, the author employs a well-

known and overused literary science fiction device sometimes called 'a parallel universe', so these references are not real, nor are they intended to be taken as representing any truth or any real people. The author apologizes in advance should any passage cause an unintentional slight of the real living or dead. The people in the story from the parallel universe are not real and the author intends this story as an entertaining, humorous satire.

Dedication

To Miss Hall my Elgin, IL first grade teacher

To Ms. Morton my Hamlin Junior High School English teacher

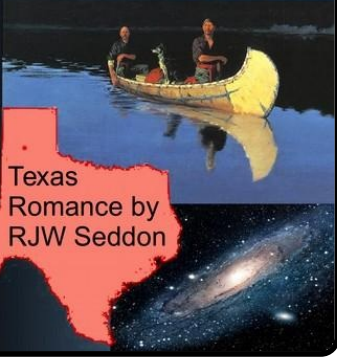
To Clara Blackwell my Kingsville High School English teacher

To Dr. Pat Wortman my Baylor University English teacher

OTHER BOOKS

You will also enjoy reading these other stories by RJW Seddon. They are either soon-to-be-published or already available.

The Bureau of Extraterrestrial Indian Affairs



The Bureau of Interplanetary Indian Affairs

Science fiction story about a teenage American Indian boy on a Reservation. Ralph Littlefoot is a mathematical genius on the level of Newton or Einstein who makes three important discoveries leading to inventions that change the world. His family is imperiled when an overarching, secret governmental agency tries to suppress these inventions before their widespread use rips apart the fabric of stable society. His grandpa Maxwell, step-mom Louisa, dad Horton,

his step-brother Johnny, and their lawyer Mr. Hankes flee for their lives. They escape using the very invention everyone is after.

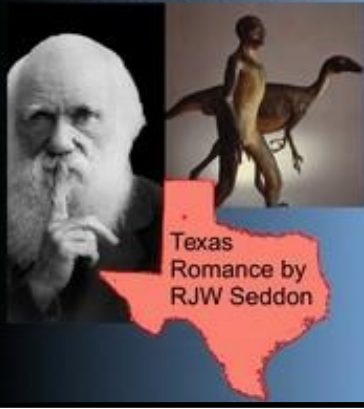
The Bureau of Extraterrestrial Indian Affairs

Red Atlantis Libertarian

Science
Fiction by
RJW Seddon

Although this qualifies as a science fiction story, a boys' adventure story, an Indian story, it is also a Libertarian political story, an exercise in practical politics when freedom is at stake. There is nothing to shake up stable totalitarianism like a new, far-reaching invention.

The Timeloop Gods of K-T



The Timeloop Gods of K-T

The second time travel expedition to the past encounters two other species visiting the same time period.

An 18 member time-traveling geological field team has spent a year in tents studying the Cretaceous (the K-T boundary) just before the Yucatan catastrophe. Before their scheduled return to the 20th Century they stumble upon two other groups: another, unknown set of time-travelers derived of four-fingered dinosaur stock and some three-fingered intelligent, primitive, indigenous, paleo-dinosaurs. Somehow the advent of the first expedition has altered events to

create a new reality with a much larger catastrophe which imperils all three groups. The problem is not time loop paradox, but politics. Much of the length of the story involves the combined efforts of the three groups to make sense of the danger to them all and to find a way to survive.

The Timeloop Gods of K-T



by
RJW Seddon

The story cuts back and forth between the three groups (the Threes, Fours, and Fives) up to the point where they discover each other. There is romantic involvement, skinny-dipping sex scene, political intrigue, a jealous, mentally-ill saboteur, a cross-country motorcycle thunderstorm chase, little girl rescue, cannibalism, humor, hunting, motorcycle/tyrannosaur joust scene, a trip to Mars. There are Nazilike, slave holding, cold-blooded bad guys. There is murder and violence, but no prurience or bad taste. A good bit of alien religion in the face of evolution.

Jack in the Bots (The Series)

Jack in the Bots



Texas
Romance by
RJW Seddon

Part One

Jack in the Bots



Texas
Romance by
RJW Seddon

Part Two

Jack in the Bots



Texas
Romance by
RJW Seddon

Part Three

by RJW Seddon

Jack in the Bots



Texas
Romance by
RJW Seddon

Part One

Jack in the Bots (part 1)

Dr. Jack Johnson, suffering from a lethal brain tumor, transfers his full consciousness, memories, and personality into a 2 petabyte hard disk. His exact copy initially communicates via word processor, sees the world through a web cam, uses a prosthetic arm, and refers to himself as Jack-in-the-box. Later, Dr. Sam Harrington and Jack's friend Dr. Jill Simpson make several Jack-in-the-bots as mobile bodies, each becoming better and better. The government

becomes concerned that Jack will become a danger, Jill worries about their romantic life, and O.J. (Organic Jack) deals with his tumor. Two government operatives, Barringer and Campbell, monitor the demise of humanity.

Jack in the Bots



Jack in the Bots (part 2)

A continuation of the hunt for Johnson's alter ego is carried out with full intensity by government operatives Barringer and Campbell. Their worry is that Johnson-in-a-box will want to procreate and make copies of his copies. Their justifiable worry watches events occur -- extreme creation of wealth in short order, taking over paralyzed bodies, enlisting aid of orphans. Barringer considers even a nuclear option for containment. His partner Campbell comes up with

plausible options that are even worse. Perhaps other people will clone themselves into computerized vessels and the scenario might lead to dominance or even war.

Jack in the Bots



Jack in the Bots

(part 3)

The Laws of Clonbotics

The famous 'Three Laws of Robotics' are superseded by the 'Three Laws of Clonbotics'

Gold for Steam

Texas
Romance
by
RJW Seddon



Gold for Steam

- (1) A research institute contacts an alternate reality,
- (2) populated by a polygamist culture of humans with extremely heterozygous sexual features,
- (3) who are at a medieval technological level,
- (4) whom we have contacted because they have a surplus of gold which they are eager to trade for our technology.
- (5) The Institute sends a female detective (Susan, the main character) to the other realm to investigate the sudden death, perhaps by heart attack, of our elderly representative there.

Gold for Steam

Texas
Romance
by
RJW Seddon



(6) Susan has just had a romantic breakup and is soured on the idea of men not being manly enough, soured on herself for having chosen a too-manly career path, when she is suddenly, ironically, thrust into a culture where she encounters more manliness than she could ever hope to see.

(7) She comes to understand the more intimate details of the culture while investigating the death of our representative, which proves to be a murder, not heart attack.

(8) Susan, like Anna of Siam, is offered a marriage proposal by her host, Torlat, the wealthiest man in North America.

(9) His proposal would consolidate his position as main trade representative.

Gold for Steam

Texas
Romance
RJW Seddon



(10) Torlat offers marriage despite the fact that he already has eight wives, potentially thousands of concubines, and is secretly bisexual, a crime punishable by death.

(11) Susan discovers her moral concern for the technologically backward culture and how the introduction of our technology (they want a steam engine) might cause them greater harm than did the steam engine of Christianity harm the New World.

(12) Susan is in a quandary at the marriage proposal and at an impasse of not solving the murder and is furthermore enamored of her host's neighbor (brother-in-law, Henifor)

when the murderer makes his appearance and Susan solves the crime.

Although otherwise completely human, they are obligate polygamists by nature, due to extreme heterozygous sexual diversity. They find our appearance repugnant since, to their eyes, our males look too feminine; our females, too masculine.

They have developed into a society which has learned to curb group-aggression by gelding their surplus male population at a nearly-universal religious ceremony. At the onset of puberty, most males choose this route through inclination, though some risk being 'duel fodder' and only a very few males survive to adulthood. The gelded majority develop into, intelligentsia, workforce, or priesthood.

Females are, all of them, available for marriage and/or child bearing or, for a few, as clergy.

The few surviving males have divided up the world into a hundred thousand fiefdoms which are run like Imperial Roman latifundia and the world is a very, very stable environment with a low population, hence, the technological backwardness of their culture.

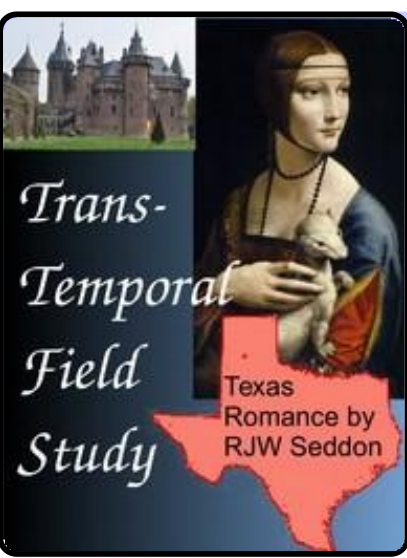
But the males are themselves ruled by testosterone and personal duels, yet their culture has never known war due to their method of controlling aggression. To them, the very concept of group aggression -- war -- is as foreign a concept as is the absurd notion that mere gold has monetary value. However, they are not unsophisticated, not unaware of jealousy, trysts, greed, and the undercurrents of society.

This is kinda, sorta, 'chick flick' SciFi, but with some Richard Dawkins memes, Robert Ardrey territoriality, Matt Ridley's "Red Queen" and Desmond Morris "Naked Ape". Men may swagger and duel and die -- and some of them even get to rule -- but women run the show.

Trans-Temporal Field Study

A SHORT STORY ABOUT TIME TRAVEL.

Assuming that (1) time travel into the past does not alter the present, (2) that people go back in time repeatedly to study the past for the sake of scholarship, what would be the inevitable outcome of all those forays into the past?



Trans-Temporal Field Study



Time traveler as history-major graduate student visits medieval England only to encounter ANOTHER time traveler from his far-distant future. His love interest is ignited. They are both in the same occupation, each writing dissertations about the past.

What could go wrong?

The Peculiar Institution

Science Fiction

Texas Romance by RJW Seddon



In some ways the economic system of slavery chained the slave owners as much as the slave.

The Peculiar Institution

A SHORT STORY

The term refers to the ante bellum euphemism for slavery. It is a tragic love story whose union is thwarted by pangs of morality.

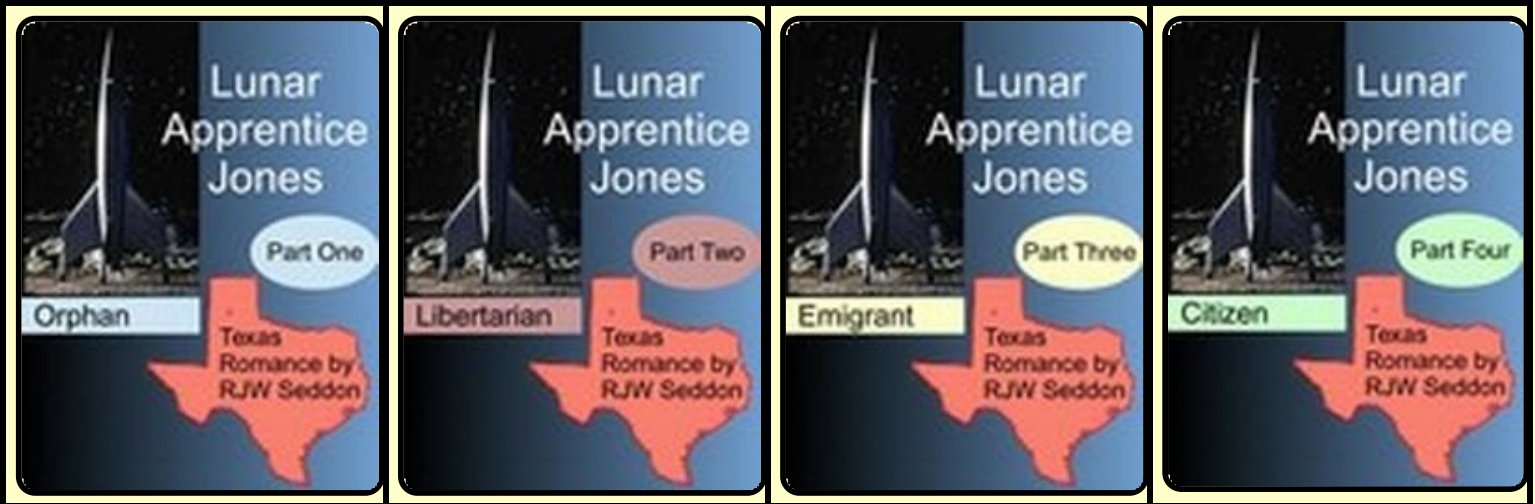
A lost colony's genetic engineers develop 'The Beast' and successfully use it for many generations as their main (and only) work animal on their planet, Demeter. The Affiliated Trading Consortium sends a representative to evaluate The Beast for export. While there, he almost goes native, falls in love with the culture, with Matilda, and

even the Beasts. This pastoral planet may be the place he will finally settle down upon.

He discovers a terrible secret and his revulsion prevents him from remaining on Demeter, prevents him from marrying Tilly, and stops him from exporting The Beast.

Lunar Apprentice Jones (The Series)

Lunar Apprentice Jones




by RJW Seddon

Lunar Apprentice Jones

The Orphan

Lunar Apprentice Jones

Part One




by RJW Seddon

The Libertarian

Lunar Apprentice Jones

Part Two




by RJW Seddon

The Emigrant

Lunar Apprentice Jones

Part Three




by RJW Seddon

The Citizen

Lunar Apprentice Jones

Part Four



by RJW Seddon

The Series

Lunar Apprentice Jones

Part One

The Orphan



by
RJW Seddon

Lunar Apprentice Jones

(part 1) The Orphan

Lunar colonization by post-apocalyptic orphaned teen-age apprentices. A coming of age story, a "Bildungsroman". Bill saves his part-time busboy wages to make application for employment right after graduation from high school with TLC (The Lunar Corporation).

Hot on his heels is Guardsman Spc Stigliano who will deliver Bill to the New Order teenage draft if he stays on Earth. Bill makes friends (and enemies) with other applicants on the way to the spaceport.

Lunar Apprentice Jones

Part Two



by
RJW Seddon

The Libertarian

Lunar Apprentice Jones

(part 2) The Libertarian

When Bill's flight is overbooked Rupert The Rat swindles Bill for his ticket to the aging ES1 (Earth Station 1) satellite, but Bill finagles a ride with a UPS mail shuttle. Prior to the flight, TLA (The Lunar Autonomy) police arrest, try, and convict Rupert and Bill receives a refund on his ticket price in addition to the free UPS ride.

He arrives on ES1 a day early and because The Sapporo and Grand hotels are both full Bill saves himself from a vagrancy arrest by working all night as a busboy at Molly's Diner. Bill declines a TLC interview and takes a job with Lyle Chandler as apprentice/personal assistant and the work at hand is the contest, the BIG contest: The Enclosure Act prize, an engineering project to seal up large craters for habitation.

Lunar Apprentice Jones

Part Three

The Emigrant



by
RJW Seddon

Lunar Apprentice Jones

(part 3) The Emigrant

Bill discovers Chandler (1) had been original part owner of TLC and (2) had been the recruiter who years ago in junior high had interested Bill in Lunar employment! Chandler and Bill get fitted for new vacuum suits at Madam Chang's, spend the night at Yoshi and Walter's wall-module Sapporo Hotel, meets Chandler's hermit-like partner Randy-the-robot-maker, and take the Shuttle to Luna.

Bill sees Copernicus City from orbit before landing, then accompanies Chandler and other passengers to a traditional "safe-arrival drink" at Harolds. Chandler is accosted by his former partner who demands a concession from Chandler.

Bill meets the love of his life, the red-headed Matilda, who joins Chandler. Molly takes a leave of absence from her orbital job and also joins the crew.

Lunar Apprentice Jones

Part Four



by
RJW Seddon

Lunar Apprentice Jones

(part 4) The Citizen

Spoiler alert: the rest you will have to read.

books and magazines
featured in the series

Lunar Horseman monthly

THIS ISSUE

Space suits
Rasing
Work horses
For sale
Saddles

Texas
Romance by
RJW Seddon

10.75 Lr

Prospecting the Lunar Appenines

UPDATED:

SATCOMS
BIVOUECS
BAUXITE
SHELTER
ICE MINING

By
Gustav Flemming

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Lunar Monthly



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

OXYGEN PRODUCTION
POWER RESERVES
WATER, WATER, WATER
IMPORTS, EXPORTS
LIVESTOCK

75 Lr
Jan

Lunar Apprentice Jones
by RJW Seddon

Dead for Sleep Apocalypse



Dead for Sleep Apocalypse

A SCIENCE FICTION DYSTOPIAN APOCALYPTIC MEDICAL ROMANCE THRILLER.

An abandoned experimental cancer treatment begins being used illegally as a recreational drug due to its power to suppress the need for sleep and its enhancement of mental state. Despite the danger of long term usage causing death from heart overuse 2-beta-somatein sweeps across society and changes the world into a dystopian totalitarian state. The few who cannot or refuse to take the drug (Rejectors and Sleepers) become an oppressed minority who cannot easily

accommodate to the standard 120 hour work week.

How would your own life, society, and commerce change if most people did not need sleep, but you did? The business world gradually demands having employees who can and will work 120 hours per week. In this story, the 'normal' people are the zombies, considered pariahs by 'enhanced' members of society.

The novel follows the course of the drug's dispersion through society, from development in Houston's medical center to world-wide prevalence. The story lines track researcher, cancer patients, psychologist, chiropractor, Hollywood, and a Moonie-like cult. The personal relationships are strung through with romance and manipulation, hunt-down and attempted containment by organized crime.

Kvetched



Kvetched

A SHORT STORY ABOUT Time Travel.

Your garden-variety time travelers usually frequent the future and the past for adventure, money, knowledge, or curiosity. Sometimes they go to alter history or save a loved one. Changing the course of history for the betterment of mankind is also a noble reason.

Kvetched

Wed 24 Mar 2027

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	01	02	03	04	05	06
07	08	09	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Texas
Romance by
RJW Seddon

THERAPY

But there are also less-noble, desperate reasons to visit the past. And it is not always a mad slasher or psychopath, someone who wants to control the world. He just may want to control himself.

It isn't about evolution and it isn't about Relativity. It's about Psychology.

Nazi
Payback,
INC



Nazi Payback, Inc

A SHORT STORY ABOUT RPG (Role Playing Gamesmanship) as real life. Travel to alternate realities and REALLY shoot bad guys. Go ahead, kill as many Nazis as you want. The multiverse is better off without them. At least, that particular reality, THAT universe will be better off. Or so you think.



by
RJW Seddon



Love and Mourning Glories

Sarah Johnson gets a phone call at home from her friend Rachel, a nurse at their small-town East Texas hospital, saying Sarah's husband Sam has just been brought in with a heart attack and that he is already dead. Sarah rushes over to the hospital.

She had been dreading this inevitable event, caused more by alcoholism than any bad heart. The EMT drivers tell Sarah they had responded to the emergency call at Koochies, the town's Porky's-like strip club/beer joint, not at Johnson's Garage. Sarah retrieves Sam's truck at Koochies and enters

that low-life world, seeing it for the first time.

Love and Mourning Glories



by
RJW Seddon

She worries about how to proceed with ownership of the faltering business. Sarah, on summer vacation as a high school teacher, had been earning a master's as a hedge against Sam's downward spiral. Now, half into her career move, she finds herself thrust prematurely into ownership responsibility.

Sarah's daughter Sue returns home from her first year at Baylor University, an expensive private school Sarah worries now she can no longer afford.

Sarah meets with Richard her accountant who advises her not to sell, but to repair the business, get it organized, and run it herself. She finds out immediately Sam had been

worse off than she knew, had re-mortgaged their previously paid off house against the business, was in arrears to the IRS, was heavily in debt.

Love and Mourning Glories



Sarah knows nothing about the business, but begins working at the garage and finds that Sam's manager Stan has been stealing hugely, catches him red-handed, and has him arrested. Meanwhile, Sam's competitor Tommy at the Firestone makes a good faith offer to buy the business from Sarah.

Stan hires an attorney and files against Sarah, claiming Sam had offered full partnership.

Cameron Mitchell, an unmarried car repair owner, is about to bail his main mechanic Dobie out of the drunk tank. While at the court house Cameron runs into and meets Sarah and her attorney, Trippet Fanning.



Not knowing why, not knowing he is smitten, even though Sarah's husband has just died, he decides against bailing out his errant Dobie and instead asks Sarah if he might borrow one of her mechanics for a half day. She agrees and afterwards also agrees to his invitation, at week's end, to have dinner together. Cameron feels very awkward, realizing he has asked out a woman whose husband had just that week died. Instead of going out to eat, they have dinner at Sarah's house, since Sue had already fixed a home-cooked meal. Cameron, they learn, has bought five acres on the outskirts of town and has recently gone into car repair himself. In the meantime he is living in his new business.

At dinner, Sue announces she signed for a certified letter which Sarah now opens in front of Cameron. She thinks it might be further lawsuit business from the sleazy exmanager Stan, but it is from a new landlord announcing that Sam's rent has immediately just tripled. Sam had let the lease lapse, so the new landlord had exercised his right to demand an immediate increase.

She thinks, at first, it might be Tommy, that perhaps he had bought the building. She reasons he may have made an end-run around his offer to purchase the business by merely buying the building. She phones him for clarification and finds out from him that he did not know anything about HER rent going up, but that HIS rent also has. During this conversation Tommy discloses that he and his wife Sandra are divorced, that terms of the settlement left her as owner of the building and land, that he also just has been served notice of a rent increase, and -- most significantly -- that Sandra's romantic interest is a lowlife character named Stan.

Sarah, Tommy, Cameron, and Richard combine forces and plan an immediate relocation by both Sarah and Tommy to new buildings on the five acres where Cameron already is. During the course of the move Sarah finds Sam had kept an old business card from a seedy motel used for illicit affairs across from Koochies with Sandra's phone number penciled on it. She breaks down at this hidden betrayal and Cameron comforts her, disclosing his love. In the midst of her breakdown Sarah realizes she has likewise fallen in love with Cameron.

Sandra and Stan had been expecting a huge revenue increase via monthly rents from both Tommy and Sarah and now suddenly have zero rent income and heavy debts, but they are saved by an accident.

Sarah has completed her move and Tommy is in the middle of his when Tommy is accidentally killed. Sandra and Stan are now in an even better financial position from Tommy's triple indemnity life insurance. Moreover, Sandra stands to inherit Tommy's equipment, now half moved to the new location.

Sandra and Stan squander the inheritance within a few months and Stan begins his pattern of theft again, this time against Sandra. He knows she will be broke in a matter of a few months and he conspires with Dobie to set up a theft ring in the same manner he had used when he had been a manager at Sam Johnson's Garage. Sandra grows increasingly erratic due to her increased use of drugs and alcohol. She begins blaming Sarah, Dobie, Cameron for her bad fortune and even Tommy's death.

She acquires a pistol and seeks revenge and death as a way out of her dilemma.

The Spirituality of Bugs



The Spirituality of Bugs

A SHORT STORY. When a hungover spaceman wakes up in an off-world jail with a feline alien he finds out his carnivorous cell mate is about to do him in.

It deals with what appears at first glance to be an incongruity: the far-flung future, but one with a prevalent trailer-trash mentality. Despite achieving interstellar commerce, many humans are still low level, unplanning philistines, devoid of any spiritual or intellectual attributes.

In this story some alien species consider Earth people unusual in that many humans behave in an animal-like fashion. Most aliens are built on a different plan, with accountability for actions NOT on the sleep/wake cycle of Earth's day/night. Among many nonhuman species there are alternating periods of Consciousness, but this does not follow the human concept of sleep/wake and day/night. The aliens are always awake (i.e., not in the coma-like state of sleep) but rather they "Revert" to an animal-like state from time to time, to rest, eat, reproduce. During that time of reversion, they are decidedly irresponsible for their actions.

The aliens certainly understand that we human are unaccountable for our actions while in our coma-like state of 'sleep' but they assume that except for the presence of daily temporary coma that we would be accountable for our actions at all other times while 'awake'.

They do not understand why humans seem to be unconscious at odd intervals while awake. They do not understand why we humans habitually accept that many of us are not held accountable for our animal-like actions while awake.

In human culture inexorable social forces excuse bad behavior by removing accountability in small pieces: bad upbringing, alcoholism, addiction, etc. The one excuse all of us, whether liberal or conservative, take for granted is that of 'being asleep', one that the aliens find as an unusual feature of our makeup, but certainly understandable. What they do not understand is our unconscious behavior while awake.

This story shows how an alien forces a drunken sailor to equate 'awake' with 'enlightenment' and 'asleep' with 'unconscious animal-like existence'. And sleep has always been a metaphor for 'unenlightenment'. The alien is amazed that not only do ALL humans go into a nocturnal coma-like unconscious state but that MOST also, more or less, sleep-walk their way through their waking hours and are not really awake in any spiritual sense.

Except for the punishment of actually falling asleep on guard duty, we humans maintain no level of responsibility for ourselves while asleep and that is easy to reconcile due to the coma-like paralysis we are accustomed to. But the aliens are amazed that we have also removed responsibility from most of our actions while awake due to legal and social exemptions, i.e., 'addicted', 'insane', 'enraged'. But 'UNconscious' (in the sleeping sense) with us means 'INactive'. What if it

didn't? Alternating periods of consciousness and unconsciousness might not follow the wake/sleep paralleling the day/night pattern we have evolved on Earth.

In this story, the aliens alternate periods of Consciousness (during which they are 'intelligent') with periods of Unconsciousness (during which they are active, but are like animals). While Unconscious, they mate, hunt, eat, as well as refresh and rest their brains. To them, the idea of going into the coma-like state we call 'sleep' is a foreign idea and it intrigues them we have a heavy urge to drink alcohol, as though we were attempting to mimic their own pattern.

Do you hate the trailer trash mentality? I mean, do you really HATE it? Unfortunately, we will always have such people and such low level thinking can reside anywhere and everywhere among us, not just a rural setting of poverty. The trailer trash mindset can even take root (dare I say it?) in Manhattan or even in the far flung future.



I give Mr. Buddha a good bit of the credit for the idea behind this story as well as the ponderously entitled book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* by the Princeton psychologist, Julian Jaynes -- hence, the duality of my two characters, 'Julian' and 'Jaynes'.

THE
ORIGIN
OF
CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THE
BREAKDOWN
OF THE
BICAMERAL
MIND

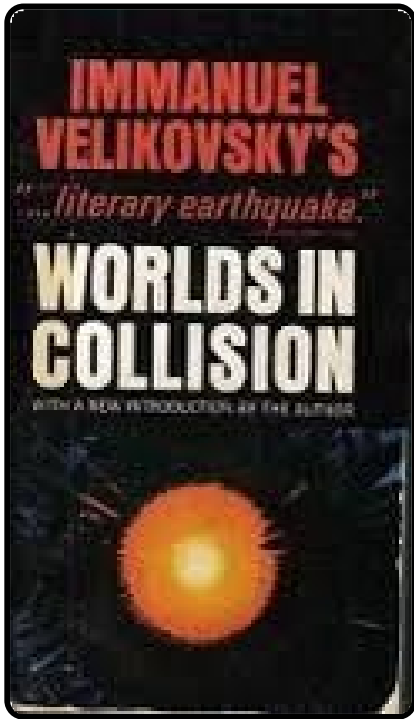
"THE BICAMERAL MIND IS A REVOLUTIONARY AND COMPELLING
THEORY OF THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN MIND."



JULIAN JAYNES

Julian Jaynes' thoughts on this idea that consciousness did NOT evolve in humanity until just recently, that the Pyramids were built by unconscious humanity is at a level of idea-generation that Isaac Asimov referred to as 'CP' (crackpot), right up there with Velikovsky's *Worlds in Collision*.

But who knows? When DID consciousness start? Is it a process, a little bit more at a time, or is it an all-or-nothing affair? Certainly, intelligence is not all or none, so how about consciousness? If you think this is totally nuts, I invite you to peruse the Wiki article on the Iliad. The article makes mention of Jaynes' theory in reference to the way thoughts were portrayed by Homer, that people had no actual forethought, just the edicts of Olympus, followed by action and reflection. Today (except in Congress and in trailer parks) people actually think.



I also give credit to John Campbell who said he wanted an alien character that 'thinks' like an alien, not a human.

All this science fiction fooferah about having a delightful, alien bar scene camoufages the fact that bars, in the final analysis, are for dissipation and for low life.



THE *franchise Handbook*

Franchise Screams

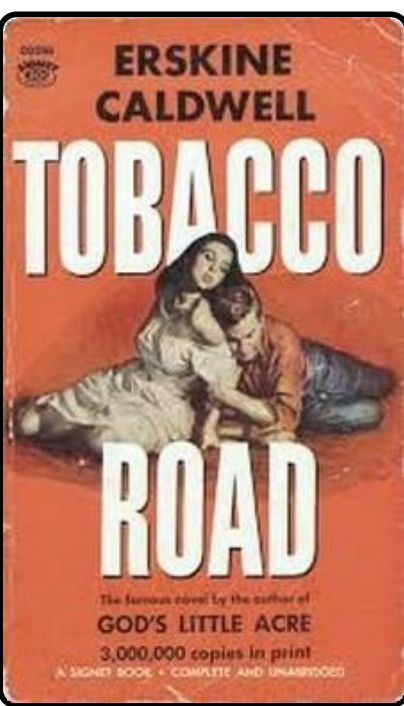
\$600,000,000!?

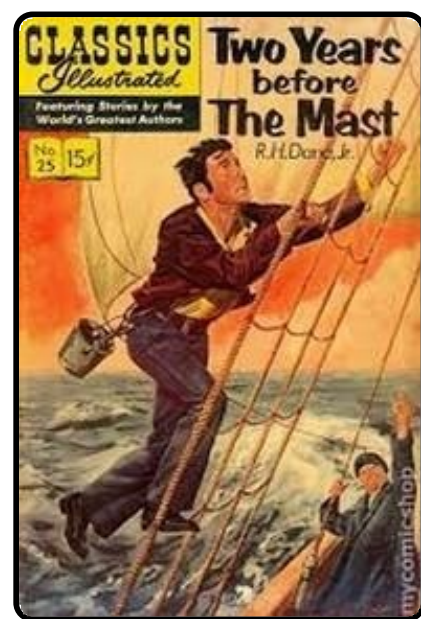
by
RJW Seddon

THE Franchise Handbook (Franchise Screams)

A LENGTHY BUSINESS BOOK relating many details of the franchise industry, car repair, Detroit, business in general. Many specific details and anecdotes, advice, warnings, roadmaps of pitfalls. Go into business for yourself with eyes opened by the experience of someone who has been there. You cannot buy a mentor, but you can read a book or two.

This book is like the offspring of Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* and Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*. There is nothing like 'been there, done that' to lend credibility to writing style to overcome its artistic, technical deficiencies. The young blue-blooded gentleman Dana went to sea because 'his eyes were weak', but he NEVER, NEVER said he regretted the loss of time spent. Wow! I love the metaphor 'weak eyes', now strengthened by having worked two years with those men.





After Dana returned to privileged high society he visited his old ship several years later and greeted the same sailors still aboard. Once they had worked side-by-side as equal laborers, but now they were no longer peers and the uncouth sailors deferred to the young gentleman's finery. He would have none of it and embraced them as equal fellows, despite their difference in rank, privilege, wealth, power. His unclear, 'weak eyes' had been made clear by the direct experience and I hope you enjoyed reading this and I hope to have 'clarified' some business issues. Bless business and bless you.

Sandy's Story
by
RJW Seddon



prequel to
Jerome Bixby's
The Man from Earth

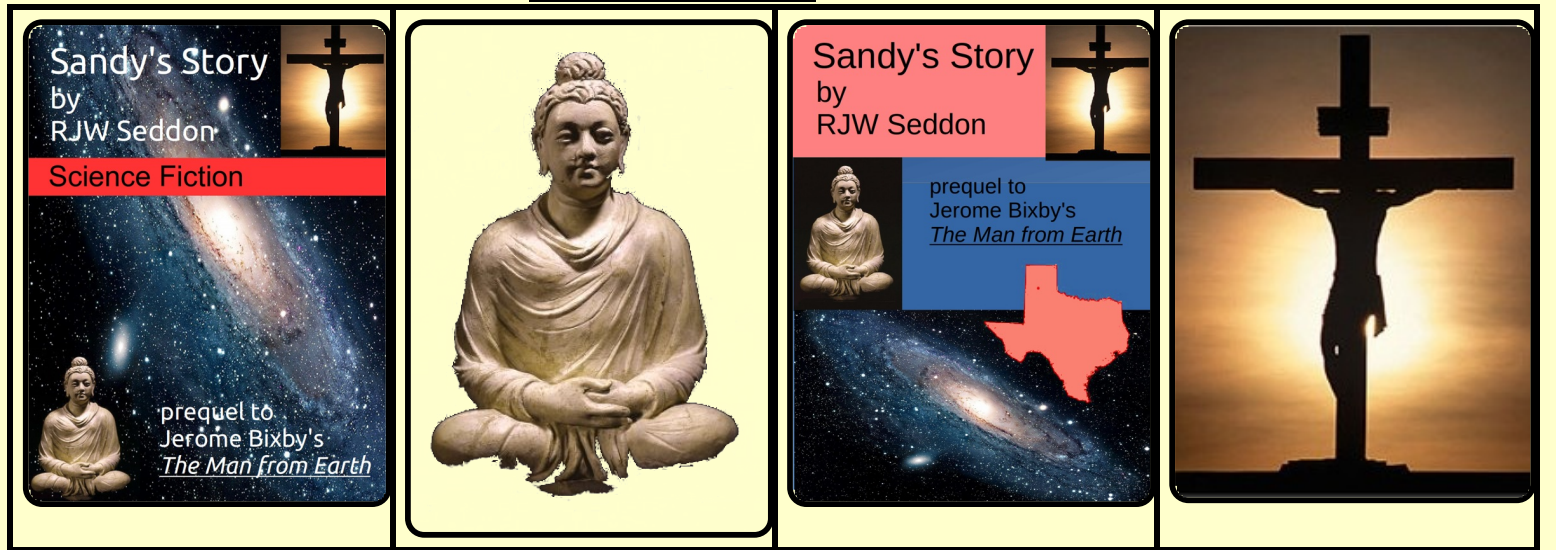


Sandy's Story (prequel to Jerome Bixby's The Man from Earth)

Sandy's Story (by RJW Seddon) is a prequel to *The Man From Earth* (by Jerome Bixby). In 2007 Richard Schenkman produced and directed a movie by the same title as Jerome Bixby's play. This prequel fills in the background decade preceding the motion picture, how Sandy met John

Oldman and how she came to be the history department's secretary. The other characters in the film (Harry, Edith, Art, Will, Dan) are also introduced, as well as some original significant others who were not in the play.

Sandy's Story by RJW Seddon



prequel to The Man from Earth by Jerome Bixby

This is the story of a man born 14,000 years ago who inexplicably does not age past an appearance of about 35 years. In order to keep his secret, every decade or so he finds it expedient to vanish and relocate. He has seen the end of the last Ice Age, known The Buddha, lived in the empires of Sumeria, Babylon, Imperial Rome. His past identities have been varied, but the most incredible one is his most closely guarded secret, that John is the historical figure we today know as Jesus Christ.

In the figurative sense, this story is an allegory of Western civilization's back drop of religion. In the literal sense, it is a science fiction adventure story. Either way, the subject matter is fascinating. It is a way, for some, to do what Christianity advises: to meet Christ personally, to see him directly, both in the here-and-now as a man and as someone very special.

Sandy's Story

by
RJW Seddon



Science Fiction

prequel to
Jerome Bixby's
The Man from Earth

Conventional Christianity maintains Jesus was a man without sin, but that does not necessarily mean a man without faults. It is the flaws that make us human and his faws and problems that make him accessible. He is not lofty, beyond reach, but very, very human, just possessing a different set of problems.

The original story and this prequel offer the possibility of a whole series of stories.



The Journey of Little Hans

This is a translation by RJW Seddon of *Haenschens Reise*, a German language children's story written and illustrated by Erica von Kager. This under-the-sea dream adventure of a little boy was a gift given to him by The Sand Man (a mythical being who bestows our dreams).

In his dream Little Hans becomes tiny and visits the princess of the ocean in her kingdom at the bottom of the

sea. Homesick and terror sets in when he feels trapped by the princess. He ends the dream adventure and returns home to his mother.

Children enjoy the story on a literal level and adults on a symbolic Jungian/Freudian level.

The Carpenter (a tale of the Christ)

A retelling of the Christ story in a modern setting.