ALPHA LOG V



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IT TAKES ALL KINDS

--transcribed by Judy Moore

On Novemeber 18, 1979, Barbara Bain, looking slightly different from the Helena Russell we know, appeared on a local television program in Los Angeles called It Takes All Kinds. *This particular half hour dealt with the many problems children face today in the world around them. As most of us know, Barbara holds a degree in Sociology, and through her fifteen minute segment, we see another side of the lady that is Barbara Bain. She is a successful mother and concerned citizen. Her involvement is with children, very special children, as this was the Year of the Child.*

PATRICIA: I'm sure most of you remember Barbara Bain as the very glamorous woman in *Mission:Impossible*. She won three Emmys for her role as Cinnamon, and in addition to her career as an actress, she also is very involved in working with children, children who need help.

You have worked with the Free Arts Clinic; we've had Caroline Zarjon on talking about her work with abused children. And you are now working with an organization called the Los Angeles Child Developement Center. Right off the bat, one wonders why this particular area of interest for you. There are a lot of areas in which you could do your work, but you seem specifically interested in children.

BARBARA: Well, it's an irresistible interest, first of all, because children are, to me, irresistible! I have two of my own; I have, I think, successfully raised two children. It's been a very pleasant and pleasurable experience. I've also been aware through the years of the difficulty children face today in growing up, the constant kind of sensations and things that come at them through the media, through their everyday existence, but I don't think came at me as I was growing up.

PATRICIA: They (children) really are bombarded, aren't they...

BARBARA: With everything! In fact, probably it was brought home very strongly to me with my older daughter. She's now 19 and away at college in the East. But, at the time, for instance, Eisenhower died and he was lying in state in the rotunda; she came through the room and saw that image on the television and turned around and ssid to me, "Who shot him??" It was an enormous kind of moment to say, "Well, he died of natural causes, Susie..." In her lifetime, that was unusual, and that's terrifying to contemplate; a child trying to deal with those kinds of experiences as a matter of course--not as an unusual thing, but as a matter of course...

PATRICIA: We hear about this all the time, the kind of pressures on children, the breakdown of the family which is something that certainly is happening. I'm wondering...in what areas in the Los Angeles Child Development Center working? What kinds of services do they provide?

BARBARA: Well, it specifically was formed a number of years ago, a very short time ago, really, just two years ago, by a number of senior professionals in the field of psychiatry, therapy, psychology, etc., who were concerned very seriously about the widespread need for therapy for children and the unavailability of it. They formed together and prepared to make this treatment available either low cost or not cost.

PATRICIA: Now, it surprised me that there was not this kind of treatment already available. I would have thought there would have been plenty of it available.

BARBARAL There's some available on a minimal level, very little long term treatment; for instance, if a child needs a long term treatment, it is hardly available at all. For instance, in this county alone, today, statistics are depressing at best. First of all, there are numbers, I'm hard put to remember numbers ever, I think one of the reasons we don't like to remember numbers is beacuse we don't want to incorporate all this terrible information into ourselves. Besides that, I'm bad at math...but, indeed, there are at least 50,000 to 60,000 abused children in the county of Los Angeles. In fact, the county is incapable as such of dealing with this massive scale. They are able to deal on a certain level. There just exists in one place at all, and that's Rice-Davis Clinic, any long term treatment. There is a lot of 'band-aid' therapy..."Let's have a quick chat, have a nice coca-cola, and bye-bye, everything's going to be fine. Well, in fact, *it isn't fine.*

PATRICIA: So, your organization, which, by the way, is *not* a building or a center...

BARBARA: Nope...

PATRICIA: ...is a group of doctors who have given their free time.

BARBARA: That's another kind of interesting fact, because we find that in trying to get funding, either from private foundations, etc., they rather object to the fact that there's not a building. "Where's the building?", as if people want to contribute money to a building, but not to the children. These doctors decided that once they had their own offices, and were, in fact functioning anyway, they would rather bring the children in that 'space', and in that way, be able to keep it to a minimal cost.

PATRICIA: So, it's basically a group of doctors who have said, "We wish to contribute our time, our expertise." *Who* are the children? What are the kinds of problems that you are seeing crop up most often?

BARBARA: There are all kinds of problems; obviously, the abused child, the teenage pregnancy, adolescence, of course, which is a difficult time at best, and certainly even worse in itself. It's a problem without any serious problems; as my daughter says to me every once in a while, "I'm adolescing!" She's turned it into a verb!

PATRICIA: It's an excuse for anything! (laughter)

BARBARA: Well, almost. (laughter). But the range is battered children, abused children, children who are in pain and silently suffering, not necessarily causing a great stir. On the other hand, it might be a child setting fire to the school building. There's just an enormous range. They are referred through the schools through the county, through the mental health field itself and then evaluated and placed with a therapist.

PATRICIA: You're also doing some work which interests me, which is working with children of Holocaust victims, people who escaped from Germany, who were in concentration camps.

BARBARA: Yes, it's an interesting kind of thing, because we've come to know, certainly, that our parents, their parents, etc., the kind of filtering down of life experience does affect the child in its growing up. And these are very special people who suffered through and managed to survive an extraordinary experience and in many ways affects them, then children, and the ways are different. There are many, many different kinds of ways that this experience has affected these children. Some of the parents chose to withhold the information from the children, not tell them these terrible things. Oddly enough, it doesn't work. One can't withhold one's life from one's child. Many of the children feel bound to do some extraordinary thing to make up for this thing that happened to their parents. Many of the children end up parenting the parent, many kinds of changes. And they have done through the group, the Los Angeles Child Development Center has gotten involved. There is a chair that has been endowed at UCLA to further studies of these children.

PATRICIA: You, as you mentioned, have two children. And you really enjoyed being a mother, and you said to me that you were surprised at what a good mother you were! Why would you say that?

BARBARA: I don't know (laughs). I didn't expect it. I found I was good at it. It was a nice surprise.

PATRICIA: Did you ever feel any kind of guilt about the conflict between having an active career, being a busy actress and having these children?

BARBARA: It wasn't so much 'guilt'; there was conflict with that moment of truth when a child says to you, "Where are you going?" and you say, "To work..." and then they say, "Why?" And were I able to say, "If I don't go to work, we don't eat..." that was kind of clean and strong and neat, and I would have felt fantastic and marched out the door. I couldn't say that, it wasn't true. I had to simply say, "I go to work because I *want* to work." Then the difficult question is, "Do you want to go to work or do you want to stay here with me?" And you have to discuss that, that I wanted to go to work as much as I wanted to stay with them. Anyway, we did manage to sort all those things out and stay close.

PATRICIA: They seemed to come out okay.

BARBARA: So far. Is there any wood we can knock on?

PATRICIA: Cinnamon on *Mission: Impossible* was probably the best female role ever written on television. You got to play a multitude of different roles and different disguises. You were old one week and young the next and sexy and not sexy. What was it like to have the best role in television, ever?

BARBARA: What was it like?? *Delicious!* It was a very special moment, there were very special people. There was a kind of growing rapport when I came in. Initially, I was sort of the girl on the series, and the writers that began to write for me, they were pleased with how I would play what they had written and began to expand it as we went along. It was a growing thing in a very, very exciting time.

PATRICIA: There's a lot of speculation about Cinnamon. Did she compromise herself for her country or not?

BARBARA: I beg your pardon! (laughter)

PATRICIA: We never quite knew...

BARBARA: Well, it's just as well! (laughter) I think that as we used to say, the boy, the cavalry, would arrive just in time to extricate me from the situation.

PATRICIA: So, she never did have to compromise herself, really.

BARBARA: Of course not.

PATRICIA: Oh, good. I'm so relieved for you.

BARBARA: Not for her country, anyway.

PATRICIA: You are married, of course, to Martin Landau. You've been married for, again, we can knock wood, over twenty wonderful years...

BARBARA: Mmm hmm, twenty-two, I think it is, some extraordinary number.

PATRICIA: It's a long time, I hear.

BARBARA: Indeed it is. We giggle a lot when we say that number. Seems very peculiar, but very good.

PATRICIA: You choose to work together. You worked together on *Mission: Impossible*, and then went to London and did *Space:1999*. There are a lot of people who would say working together is difficult. They would prefer to work separtely. You seem to really want to do that...

BARBARA: I can't quite understand that. I don't understand when somebody says it's hard to work with him. First of all, that's the person you've sort of chosen to set up a tent with, and if you can't get along together in a tent, I don't think you're going to get along anywhere else as well. But that's a closed viewpoint, because Martin and I *do* enjoy each other's company.

PATRICIA: You're hermits, aren't you?

BARBARA: Basically, yes.

PATRICIA: Do you sit home a lot and don't do a lot of socializing?

BARBARA: Work and home primarily. The thing is that we both respect each other's opinion. It's kind of great to have somebody there whose eye you trust and we've gotten pleasure out of that. We equally as well will work, obviously, *not* together.

PATRICIA: Now, this is a little silly, but...

BARBARA: Uh-oh. All right...

PATRICIA: In this land of tempatation, where marriages last past five years they say, "My goodness, they had a great thing!" Do you have any advice for people as to how to really make it work as long as 22 years?

BARBARA: I'm not good at handing out advice. I *do* know that, way back when, in the land of temptation, I don't know how one describes that, either, I don't feel it as such, it's just a place that we live in, we did start out with a kind of rule we made up. We thought we were terribly clever making up a rule in the first place. We did start out with a sense of, we were both young actors at the time, we kind of made this rule up: "Be kind to whomever is working". That worked because it simply meant the other person would take the dog out and do the extra things to make room and a little peace and tranquility for the person who was working. As the years went on, we were kind of, well, ecstatic to find out we were both working and therefore it just simply became, "Be kind."

PATRICIA: That's very nice. So you're kind to each other.

BARBARA: We try to be. Yes, basically.

PATRICIA: Well, I wish you lots of luck with Martin, of course, but with the Los Angeles Child Development Center--it sounds like they do a lot of good work.

BARBARA: Yes, indeed.

PATRICIA: I hope that they can continue to do that and some of those children can be helped.

BARBARA: Thank you, Patricia.

PATRICIA: Thanks for being with us.

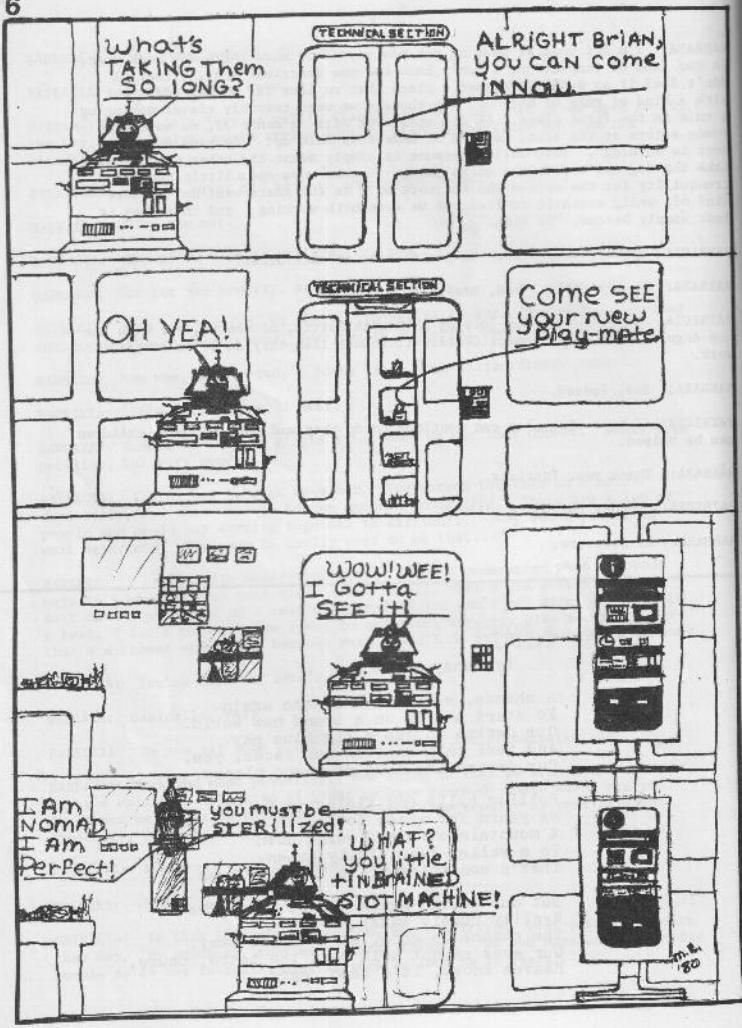
BARBARA: My pleasure.

A CHANCE
++++++++
by Sandy Doyle

A chance, we have a chance again.
To start a life on a brand new world.
Our desire to see a big blue sky
And feel rain fall on our faces, yes,
Our dreams are made of these places.

Rolling hills and fields to farm,
We yearn for space to breath.
A mountain stream flowing down
To a valley beautifully green,
That's something we've long not seen.

But our dreams again do not come true.
Reality rudely wakes us.
The chance is gone, as we drift away.
Our eyes cannot hold back the tears, cause,
Heaven knows, it's been years.


What's TAKING them SO LONG?
TECHNICAL SECTION
ALRIGHT BRIAN, you can come IN NOW.
OH YEA!
TECHNICAL SECTION
Come SEE your new play-mate.
WOW! WEE! I Gotta SEE it!
I Am NOMAD I Am Perfect!
you must be STERILIZED!
WHAT? you little +INBRAINED SLOT MACHINE!
m.e. '80

GIRL TROUBLE

BY JIM COBB

...Moonbase Alpha Status Report, Dr. Helena Russell recording. 1408 days since departure from Earth orbit. We continue in deep space transit mode between star systems. Our stores of consumables are adequate and all base functions are normal. Things continue to go well and we can foresee no undue difficulties. Barring, of course, the inevitable unknown...

The day was as normal as any could be within the corridors of Earth's lost lunar colony, Moonbase Alpha. Nonetheless, Security Chief Tony Verdeschi had been casting suspicious glances back over his shoulder for the bulk of the morning.

"Tony, what is the matter with you?" asked Maya, Alpha's Psychon Science Officer, in a rather peeved voice. "I don't think you've heard one out of ten words I've said."

Rather guiltily, Tony returned his attention to the beautiful auburn-haired alien girl walking at his side. "Agh, you're right. Sorry about that. I've just got something under my skin today."

"Under your skin?"

"Terran colloquialism for a spooky feeling you can't exactly place. I've got a premonition that something is going to happen, but I can't place exactly what."

Maya responded with an indulgent smile. "Are you certain it's not just that latest side effect of that noxious brew you concoct?"

"Maya, my dear, while my beer does tend to expand the mind and generally make a better human being out of one, this is something different. Mark my words, the bottom is going to fall out of something."

They reached and paused at the next corridor intersection. "Well, Tony, when it comes to human intuition, I've found accuracy painfully lacking. However, if you like, when I go on duty in Command Center, I could order a stepped-up safety check program."

The wiry Italian security man gave Maya a quick grin and a light kiss. "All contributions to the cause gratefully accepted. I'm going to Security Control to see what I can see from there. See you around, kid."

They parted, Maya continuing ahead while Verdeschi angled off down the side corridor. He had not gone far when he heard a faint but definite "pop" like the bursting of an old-style flashbulb. He spun to find that some "thing" was now resting in the middle of the empty passage. It seemed to be a conglomeration of multi-colored diamond and conical shapes, each rather warped and convoluted, the whole thing having a diameter of about seven inches. It was totally unlike anything he had ever seen before and without thinking, he knelt down to examine it.

An instant later, there was a vicious crack like arcing electricity and Tony felt himself engulfed in something that froze and scalded and made every nerve cell in his body scream in outrage. There was a sickening moment of dissolution, then he was thrown aside against the bulkhead half-jolted away from consciousness. He lay still, waiting for the fire to drain from his limbs and for his vertical to stabilize. There was something wrong. He felt peculiar, all over. And his uniform--suddenly, it didn't fit.

There was the sound of lightly running feet, and Maya, alerted by the noise of the device, came skidding around the corner. She halted abruptly, eyes wide and staring.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "Where's Tony?"

"Who am I? Maya, what...?" Aghast, Tony let his words trail off. For the soft soprano voice he had spoken with did not belong to him. Nor could have it belonged to any *him*.

Tony Verdeschi gazed at the image of the naked girl standing before him. Slender, petite with thick black hair falling to a narrow waist, small, firm, conical breasts, really great legs. Quite a dish, all told, Tony would have been enjoying the view if he hadn't been standing in front of a mirror.

"Helena," he said tightly. "What the hell did this to me?"

"I don't know, Tony," replied Helena Russell, Alpha's senior Medical Officer. "I really don't know, and I sincerely wish I did."

The willowy blond physician tapped the sheaf of computer read-out paper she carried. "You've undergone a selective mirror reversal of all major DNA-RNA sex determination factors. This is genetic engineering on a scale Earth medicine couldn't even dream of matching. Apparently that whatever-it-is ran a complete genetic analysis of you, then broke your body down via some form of matter-energy metamorphosis, probably something similar to Maya's powers, but artificially induced. Then it rebuilt you into this new form with the sex dominants of your cellular structure altered to female."

"What do you mean, sex dominants?"

"Those are all the sub-factors in your genetic make-up that key off the prime male/female selection coding. Height, skeletal structure, reproductive organs and secondary sexual characteristics. These were the only type of factors affected. In many ways your body hasn't changed. For example, your finger prints and retinal scan pattern haven't changed; nor has your blood type or electroencephalograph. In effect, you're wearing the body of your own identical twin sister, or to be even more accurate, the body you would have had if you had been born a woman instead of a man."

While Tony digested this information, there came the Medical Center doors opening from beyond the screen examination area, followed by the voice of John Koenig. Dr. Russell stepped from behind the screen to find Alpha's lean, hawkish commander and an anxious Maya waiting for her.

"All right, Helena. What are we facing here?"

Dr. Russell present her findings to the two as she had to Tony. "That's how it stands," she concluded. "I can see what happened, but not how or what to do about it. I hoped Maya might have come up with something working with the alien device."

The Psychon unhappily shook her head. "Technical is still experimenting with it, but so far we've gotten nothing. As you said, it's some form of artificial metamorphosis projector, but the technology that designed it seems to have absolutely no relation to ours. We can't comprehend how it functions, or how it is activated, or even how it is powered. It seems totally inert now."

"It wasn't when I found it, believe me." Tony's unfamiliar voice came from behind the screen. "I suppose that means you couldn't find a reverse switch either?"

A deeper expression of pain crossed Maya's fine lynxlike features. "We've just started, Tony. We'll find something, I promise you."

She suddenly remember the bundle she carried beneath her arm. "I brought you some clothes. I borrowed them from Sandra. You're about her...I mean, they should fit."

"A perfect size eight, huh? Well, bring them back, and, uh, Maya--could you come back too?"

Maya disappeared behind the screen to aid Tony. Commander Koenig show a final glance after the departing girl, then returned his attention to Helena.

"All right, then," he said, lowering his voice. "Now what about the bottom line? Is Tony's condition reversable?"

Helena gravely shook her head. "I don't know, John. There is nothing I can do with our available technology. Perhaps someday by studying Maya's abilities, we may come up with something, but as it stands now, barring some new development, Tony's condition looks ominously permanent."

"Good Lord. Poor Tony...Helena, this is damn serious!"

"I know. It won't be long before the shock wears off and Tony realizes what all this sex change means to him. Then the problems will really start cropping up."

"I was thinking about more than Tony."

"Oh?"

"Helena, that device just didn't grow in the middle of that corridor. It had to be built be someone and delivered here by someone for some specific reason. Until we know the whos and whys of this situation, it's like having the Sword of Damocles hanging over Alpha."

Suddenly, the commlock at Koenig's belt chirped urgently. He unclipped the little unit and keyed it for reception. "Koenig here."

Alan Carter's featured filled the tiny screen. "John, we're monitoring something strange here in Command Center."

"What have you got?"

"We're not sure. You'd best get down here, Commander."

"On my way." Koenig started for the door. "Helena, send Tony and Maya after me on the double. I think our sword has started to fall."

Much to the commander's relief, Tony and Maya followed him into Command Center by only a few moments. The science officer slipped unobtrusively into her familiar position at the moster computer terminal, but a number of questioning glances were aimed at the strange woman who took up a position at the security desk.

"What have we got?" Koenig demanded, hanging over Maya's shoulder. The Psychon's slender fingers danced lightly across the control studs, her sky-blue eyes shifting from read out to read out, digesting and analyzing the raw data faster than it could be translated from computer binary to human tongue.

"Disruption of lunar and galactic gravitational fields. It is a...local phenomena. Hmm. There is also a faint warping of the time-space continuun itself and it's concentrating...just beyond the base perimeter to the east!"

"Base to full alert!" Koenig snapped. "Sandra, put the east quadrant on the Main Screen!"

As the alarm klaxons sounded, the big screen filled with the craggy expanse of the surrounding lunar terrain, dull grey in the starlight, backed by the jet black of deep space.

Then, something began to take form within the center of the image. A shimmering, warped pyramid shape of wavering strobing color. A weird semi-musical singing began to sound over some of the sensor circuits as the light form began to solidify.

"Weapons section! Anti-meteor screens to full intensity! Laser gun crews 2 and 4 cover the eastern base approaches!"

Suddenly it simply was, like a huge, old-fashioned child's top, inverted and balanced on a spindly set of tripod landing legs.

"Oh, no," someone murmured. "It can't be."

The thing's hull was patterned in a garish collage of screamingly mismatched primary colors intermixed in various patterns and crisscrossed with alien hieroglyphs.

"There is only one being in the known universe with that kind of atrocious taste," Koenig siad in a deadly monotone. "Sandra, open all hailing frequencies."

A moment later, an all-too familiar fruity baritone thundered out over the loudspeakers. "Ahoy, Alpha! Many a long light-year has passed since last our courses crossed, but here we are, well met again, fellow travelers across the starry waste. Well, aren't you going to invite me aboard, Skipper?"

"Taybor the Trader!" Tony almost screamed. "I should have known!"

"Too right," Koenig commented grimly. "I think we've found the source of our metamorphosis machine."

"Yes," Maya agreed coldly. "If memory serves, the first time we encountered him he sent some of his nasty little devices ahead to announce his coming."

The normally amiable young Psychon's distaste was obvious; however, she also displayed a certain amount of fear. The first time the Alphans had encounted this weird being, he had offered them the secret of a hyper-jump drive that potentially could have transferred the castaway Terrans to a habitable planet if not back to Earth itself. The only catch was the the space merchant, in exchange for the drive, wanted Maya as the latest addition to his private 'beauty collection'. When his offer was refused, Taybor had attempted to kidnap the Psychon and was only prevented at the last second by Commander Koenig's quick thinking and Maya's powers of metamorphosis.

To say the least, their parting hadn't been of the friendliest sort, and even barring Verdeschi's situation, a certain amount of caution was indicated.

Koenig gestured for a transmission channel. "Taybor, what the blazes are you doing back here?"

"Just passing through, Skipper," the voice boomed back jovially. "Makin' my way between Orion's bellybutton and the south motor bearing of the galaxy. I happened to see your little bit o' free floatin' rock drifting by and I remember the, ah...little set-to we had and I says to myself, Taybor, you left some dissatisfied customers down there and you should do something about it. So here I am, hat in hand, and ready to make amends. How about it?"

Koenig exchanged glances with the rest of the Command Center team. "Very well, Taybor. You're cleared to come aboard."

"On my way."

In a far corner of the Center, an man-high shimmering pyramid, a miniature of the larger ship warp, flickered into substance, glowed for a moment, then vanished to disclose an incredible rotund individual clad in a garish robe, his pudgy, cunning features capped with a grotesque cockscomb of silvery hair. There could be no doubt--Taybor the Trader had returned.

"Hallo, Skipper! It's good to see you again! Dr. Russell, my dear lady, you're looking well. And of course, the lovely Miss Maya, as beautiful as ever...and who is this charming child?"

"You try and cockhie-coo me, you fat bastard, and I'll kick your face in," Tony bristled.

Taybor drew back with raised eyebrows. "My, my. The form is different, but the atrocious manners are unmistakable. Mr. Verdeschi, how you've changed."

With a wordless snarl, Tony began to rise from his chair, but Koenig dropped a restraining hand on his shoulder. "This 'change' is what we'd like to talk to you about, Taybor. It was caused by an unknown device that appeared on Alpha a few hours ago. You wouldn't happen to know anything about it?"

Taybor seemed taken aback. "Oh, dear, you terrestrials do seem to have your problems with the little gifts I send along."

"Then it *is* your device?"

"Yes, indeed. Last I had in stock aboard the old *S.S. Emporium*. It's a gender trasverser from Shorthgol, a fast-roving little item, too. You see, the Shorthgolians as a race change sexes as they mature and sometimes they get to longing for the good old days. Be that as it may, I found it lying around the store room and remembering your science officer's metamorphic proclivities, I beamed it along ahead of me. I thought she might find it amusing. I forgot you Earthers are a rather...unsophisticated lot, and that it might be a bit too much for you."

Tony muttered something under his breath and Koenig silenced him with another squeeze on the shoulder. "Can the effect be reversed?"

To everyone's surprise, Taybor nodded agreeably. "Surest thing you know, Skipper. No problem at all. Give me a moment to adjust the transverser settings, and we can have Mr. Verdeschi back to being the fine broth of a boy he once was."

Commander Koenig paused suspiciously. Somehow he hadn't expected such willing cooperation.

"The unit is in our Research Section. We could take you there now."

"Fine, fine, lead on. Never let it be said that Taybor of Pinveth the Lesser was slow to render aid or correct a mistake."

However, after they had retired to the science section where the alien machine was being held, Taybor rapidly lost his enthusiasm. "Ah, you didn't mention that your people had been monkeying with it."

"Well of course," Maya cried. "After what happened to Tony, we examined the device, but we didn't damage any of the components."

"But the settings! Dear child, the settings, they have been knocked into the proberbial cocked hat. I fear the transverser is useless now for any kind of genetic restoration."

A growing look of horror came to Tony's feminized features. "You mean I'm stuck like this? *Forever?*"

"Look at it this way," Taybor said benignly. "You've only got to change the 'y' in your name to 'i'."

With a choked, curse, Tony clenched a small fist and took a step forward, but Maya waved him back. "Please, Taybor," she begged. "There must be something? Can't it be replaced...or fixed?"

"As I said, this was the last I had in stock. As for fixing it..." Taybor strung out the suspense for several seconds before continuing. "No, I'm no mechanic. I've said so before with that jump drive deal that...ahem, fell through. But I do receive something like a maintenance manual with that consignment of transversers, and maybe, just maybe, I can tinker this one into working order. I'll be needing some help, though."

"I can promise you the full resources of Alpha if it can help Tony," the commander replied.

"That's not exactly the kind of help I need, Skipper. To do this right, I'll need someone well versed in metamorphic biophysics. That kind of learning isn't all that common."

"I know all about it!" Maya burst out eagerly. "As a metamorph, I have to. Please, I'll help."

"Well, that's fine, Miss Maya. I'm sure we could work something out, but..."

Suddenly, Commander Koenig could feel the bite coming, as clearly as if he had set it up himself..

"...you see, the problem is that resetting the device is likely to take some time, and I simply don't have it."

"What do you mean?"

"The old *S.S. Emporium* has a cargo waiting for her in the Torgon Group. I've got to lift off from here no later than tomorrow morning to keep to my schedule. I'm as sorry as the next man about Miss...pardon me, Mr. Verdeschi's condition, but I'm just a humble businessman, and I must earn my daily bread, as it were."

"Somehow, though," Koenig said sardonically, "I'm sure you'll come up with some kind of solution."

Taybor beamed. "As a matter of fact, I have. I'll simply leave the device here, and have your science officer accompany me on my journey. We will have more than enough time to work on the problem and when we've solved it, I can transmit the necessary instructions back to Alpha over my hyper-spatial communications system so you can return your security chief to his usual manly grace. Then, once I've concluded my business, I'll return Miss Maya to you, safe and sound and all the better for having a pleasant little outing."

"You lying bastard," Tony screamed. "It's a set-up! John, can't you see that this whole thing has been a set-up? If we let Maya on that ship, we'll never see her again! She can't go with him!"

"I'll let that pass, Mr. Verdeschi," Taybor replied loftily. "However, I'd advise you not to be too hasty about forbidding your Psychon friend about what she can do. After all, she would be of little...shall we say, 'use' to you in your present body."

Almost sobbing with rage, Tony threw himself at the alien, but Maya caught his slight body in her arms and held him back fearfully. John Koenig stepped between the two Alphans and the space trader. "Tony was just calling it as he saw it," he said coldly. "And as I see it, too. I don't like this, Taybor. I don't like it one damn bit."

"Whether you like it or not is immaterial, Skipper. That's how it is. I'll be lifting off at 0900 hours lunar time tomorrow morning. If Maya is not ready to come aboard by then...I'd advise Mr. Verdeschi to start looking up the name of a good gynecologist. So long, Skipper." Taybor made a vague twisting gesture in the air and before he could be stopped, he vanished into the shimmer of his personal transporter effect.

Tony broke away from Maya, spun and grabbed her by the shoulders. "Don't even think about it! Even if I have to stay like this for the rest of my life, you're not going with him! John, you tell her!"

"Tony, settle down!" Koenig demanded. "Nobody is going anywhere if we can help it. You go back to the Medical Center with Helena. Maya, you and I will stay here and work with the Technical Staff. We've got sixteen hours to figure out how to make this contraption work ourselves. So let's get to it."

A quarter of their available time had passed before Tony Verdeschi was again released. Maya awaited him in the corridor beyond Medical Center. "Hello, Tony. I see Helena finally turned you loose."

"Yes. There wasn't anything left attached to me that they couldn't examine, poke, prod, or hack samples off of. They had to let me go by default."

"Did they find anything?"

"Not yet. How about your people?"

"We're still working on it," Maya replied hastily.

"Yeah, sure." Verdeschi paused for a moment and raked back a wave of heavy black hair from the side of his face. "Blast this stuff, anyway. I wanted to hack it off, but Helena wouldn't let me."

"Of course not. Until we get things sorted out, we dare not change any of the variables of your condition. Here," she moved behind him. "Let me help you."

"Oh, hell, Maya. Not a hair ribbon!"

"No, not a hair ribbon. Just a rubber band. Now hold still."

She gathered back the hair of Tony's feminine form, snapping the band in place at the base of his head to make a simple pony-tail. "There, that's better."

"Hm. It is. I still don't see how the female of the species puts up with it, though."

Maya almost said *You'll get used to it* but caught herself. Instead, she changed the subject. "I haven't had anything to eat since breakfast, and I'm starved. What about you?"

"I haven't much of an appetite. I don't think I was issued one with this body."

"Come on, Tony. Let's go down to Recreation 2 and get some dinner. We both need it."

"Okay, Maya. You're right, as usual."

Tony wasn't quite so sure, however, upon reaching the Recreation area. His situation was now known throughout Alpha, and as he stepped through the door, he became aware of the sudden silence and the many questioning stares aimed his way. Maya was sensitive

to it as well, and she sought to shield him from it.

"Find a quiet place for us to sit, Tony," she said with studied casualness. "I'll get us something to eat."

As she departed, Tony settled into a corner lounging chair, stretching out and making a deliberate effort to relax and let his growing tensions drain. However, he couldn't disconnect his hearing and gradually he became aware of a series of remarks being passed about him, remarks both highly personal and highly uncomplimentary, and obviously meant to be overheard.

Tony had many friends among the inhabitants of Alpha, but being Head of Security made him in effect 'Chief of Police' as well, and as any cop could testify one tended to make enemies, enemies who were waiting and willing to take any opportunity available to get even.

With a sigh, Tony rose to confront his antagonist. He already had recognized him as Rafe Shelby, one of the outside prospecting engineers. Twice before he and Tony had clashed; both times Rafe had come up the loser. Now, smiling lazily from amid a small group of cronies, he obviously felt all the odds were on his side. Quite likely they were, Tony admitted to himself, but it wasn't in his nature to idly submit.

"All right, Shelby. That's enough."

"Why, 'Miss' Verdeschi, this conversation wasn't meant for your pink shell-like ear, but then you never could mind your own business, could you?"

Tony heard his back teeth creak as his jaws clinched. "Very amusing. Now knock it off!"

"Or what, 'Miss' Verdeschi? Are you going to whistle up one of your Security Teams and have them shut me up?"

Shelby came out of his chair, primed and waiting.

"I've never needed anyone but myself, Shelby."

"Maybe you could get away with that once, *Miss* Verdeschi, but you're forgetting you've been whittled down to a more fitting size. Who knows? Maybe if you smile pretty for your friend Koenig, he might let you resign from Security and take up something more fitting to your stature. Say something in Cafeteria Services."

"Hey, Rafe," one of the engineer's friends cut in lazily. "That's no way to talk to the little lady. She'll never give you a case at this rate."

Shelby's grin widened. "I'm not interested in *Antonia* here, but I'm certainly going to look up that alien lady friend of his. I've always figured she'd go for the kinky stuff, but I imagine this is going too far..."

That did it. Tony stepped forward and unleashed a vicious right cross at Shelby's jaw that missed by a good three inches.

Tony instantly realized his error. His new smaller body lacked the reach of his normal form and even if he had connected, his female frame lacked the leverage to land a damaging blow.

Acknowledging all this in a split second, he used the momentum of his swing to slam himself against Shelby and to drive his elbow into the man's kidneys. Rafe was jolted back in pain, but the blow was not crippling. With an angry bellow, he threw himself at Verdeschi.

By right, a good woman should be able to take a fair man in one-on-one hand-to-hand combat, making up in speed and dexterity what she lacked in brute strength. However, Tony Verdeschi was not a good woman fighter. He was a man trapped in a female body, and nothing worked right. His sense of balance and timing were off and his combat skills and instincts, geared to a six-foot 180 pound frame, were worse than useless.

His second disorganized attack was blocked and returned with double force. Dazed and hurt, Tony found himself bulldozed back against the wall. Shelby pinned him there at arms length with a single hand at his throat. Despairingly, Tony struggled to break free, but he was helpless, impaled like a butterfly on a display card and all through his frantic resistance, Shelby laughed.

Then Rafe's sadistic chuckle was twisted into a shriek of pure terror.

Maya had returned.

The sight of the shameful indignities being heaped on Tony touched off a scalding rage within her that even she would have thought impossible for her normally even temper. Furiously, she hurled herself across the room, transmuting as she did so, so that it was a hulking, blue-scaled reptilian horror that locked taloned paws on Shelby's shoulder and waist. With a single explosive heave, she tore him away from Tony and hurled him in a skidding roll across the floor, his wild flight sending chairs and small tables tumbling.

Maya stalked in pursuit. She had resumed her normal form, but she wore around her an almost tangible aura of otherworldly power and anger. And all who looked on had it driven deep into their hearts that this quiet woman who walked among them was still the daughter of one of the Elder races of the galaxy, and that they were her equals as long as she willed it.

For long second, Maya stood over the cowering Shelby, eyes blazing, daring the man to move. Then, distastefully, she turned her back on him. She wanted to go to Tony to see if he was hurt, to find out what had happened. But he had already slipped silently from the room.

Maya found him in his quarters. He was seated on the edge of his bed in the darkened room as she quietly entered. At once she was stricken by how small he seemed. His converted woman's body had been petite from the start, but his carriage and attitude had made him seem to 'walk tall'. Now, it seemed as if something had collapsed within him.

"Tony, are you all right?" she asked gently.

He didn't look up at her words and he held his gaze into nothingness for several more seconds before replying. "Shelby...I used to be able to put him in his place without even straining."

"Oh, Tony, it's not your fault. It's this condition you're caught in."

"'Trapped in' is the word, Maya. I'm trapped in it and I don't know how to get out."

"We'll think of something. We'll find a way to help."

"But what if you can't? Maya, I have got to face the possibility that I have got to live out the rest of my life stuck in a woman's body!"

The terrible anguish in his voice disconcerted the Psychon. "It's not a terminal condition, Tony. Half of us are born that way, after all."

"But I'm a man. Inside I am still a man, and nothing works for me anymore. I'm supposed to be teaching a class in hand-to-hand combat, but how can I continue that when the greenest tyro there can flatten me at will? Suppose I decide to use the pool. Which dressing room do I use, Maya? Hell, I couldn't even dress myself this afternoon, I needed your help. All the habits and abilities and standards of my lifetime are gone. I'm a freak. An it."

"Oh, no, Tony, no! You mustn't think that. You are right in saying that inside you are a man. You're still the sane strong, virile man you always have been. That's what's important. I know better than anone just how insubstantial mere physical appearance is, and I know this to be true. So do all the rest of your friends."

"But I can't make myself believe it! The way I live...by the standards I've been raised by..." He looked up at her, tears starting to glisten in his eyes. "Maya...I can't even touch you anymore."

Maya wanted desparately to prove to him that it wasn't true. She wanted to drop down by his side and to hold him and comfort him. To do so, though, might only drive his pain deeper by emphasizing that now she was taller tan he. Instead, she drooped to her knees before him. Pressing close to his legs, she gently rested her cheek against his thigh. "You must never, never think that, Tony," she said tearfully. "Never."

After a moment, she felt his hand hestitantly begin to stroke her hair in his gentle, familiar way. This small victory was overshadowed by the haunted hopelessness of his voice as he spoke. "What am I going to do, Maya? What am I going to do?"

Much the same question was being asked elsewhere within Alpha that night. John Koenig and Helena Russell sat on the couch in the commander's semi-darkened quarters, the low table before them shared by a scattering of reports and data tapes and a cooling pot of coffee. Many times previously since that fatal September 13th, they had sat thus, searching for a solution to Tonying problems of survival. Often an answer had been found, but tonight, the intense exchange of ideas and information between the two had accomplished nothing. Now they sat silently, mentally exhausted, hoping for some inspiration, yet fearing that maybe this time they were beaten.

The commander's comlock chimed a request for admission. He acknowledged it and the panel door slid back. Maya entered. Koenig could only shake his head at her questioning gaze. "No, we're no closer to being able to reverse Tony's condition now than we were this morning."

"I feared that was how it was, commander." The Psychon tried to revive a ghost of her usual smile. "I suppose I'd better look to my packing."

Dr. Russell sat up quickly, her grey eyes wide. "No, Maya. You can't even consider that."

"I've no choice. Taybor is the only one who knows the secret of that conversion device. His price for it is me. Therefore, if Tony is to be returned to normal, I must go with him."

Koenig angrily shook his head. "We don't even know if Tony can be changed back. We've only got Taybor's word for that and that...trader's word is worse than useless. We could lose you both for nothing."

"You will lose Tony for sure if I don't go. Do you know what happened in the Recreation Room tonight?"

"That thing with Shelby? Damned right I do. I've already made arrangements for his punishment."

"That's not the point. I've just spent the last couple of hours with Tony, trying to help him. He's humiliated and depressed and...and frightened. Commander, he cried. I've never seen Tony cry before, for anything. All this has happened in less than a day. What will this do to him in a week? Or a year?"

Dr. Russell nodded in agreement. "She's right, John. I've run a psychological projection on Tony, and unless he can be returned to his own body, things look anything but promising."

"What are the unpleasant details?" Koenig asked flatly.

"Tony is suffering from an incredibly acute identity crisis. Tony was and still is a very male individual and is quite happy as such. Suddenly, in the wink of an eye, he is female, and he can't cope with it. He is cut off from his proper mode of existence, and is left in a kind of sexual limbo. He can't be what he truly is and his emotional conflict with the situation will tear him apart.

"What will happen to him?"

"The exact term is paranoid schizophrenia and it could take several forms. Classic paranoia, the feeling that we're all out to get him because he's different, leading to increasingly hostile and violent behavior toward those around him. Self-hatred leading towards suicidal tendencies or he could just slip deeper and deeper into depression until he turns into a total vegetable. As far as any psychiatric treatment goes, if Tony were a more nallable personality, we could try and turn him into a functional female; as it is, though, he would resist any such change fiercely. As it is, we might be able to provide enough counseling to allow him to cope with his condition. However, I don't think much of the chances for that."

"Even if it does help," Maya asked slowly, "this 'coping' would bear little resemblance to a normal, happy life."

"I'm afraid not."

The Psychon shrugged her slender shoulders. "That's it, then, Commander. Helena. You both know I could never allow that to

happen to Tony, no matter what the price is to myself. I must go with Taybor in the morning. There is no alternative."

"No!" Koenig's voice was explosive. He paced a few angry steps. "There is always an alternative. We just, damn it, have to think of it!"

"We have to think of it in time, commander," Maya answered quietly. "And our time is almost gone."

At exactly 0900 hours lunar time, Taybor's corpulent form materialized within the confines of Command Center. There was a certain natural trepidation in his manner at first, but that rapidly evaporated as it became apparent that no traps had been set. Other than a minimal duty crew, only Commander Koenig, Dr. Russell and Maya awaited him, and Maya had a small packed carryall bag slung over her shoulder.

"Morning, Skipper, morning. I hate to be one to put 'hello' and 'goodbye' on either end of the same sentance, but I'm afraid I've got to be on my way. I just dropped in to see if you were going to take me up on my...little plan."

"We've no choice, Taybor," the commander replied. "Maya has agreed to accompany you as long as you will provide the information necessary to reconvert Mr. Verdeschi back to hi normal form."

"Of course, of course, Skipper," the Taybor bu-bled. "As per our agreement. We'll have your Security Chief back the way he was in no time. By the way, just where is Mr. Verdeschi?"

The trader glanced around uneasily as if expecting to find Tony lurking in ambush in some dark corner.

"Tony was taken seriously ill early this morning," Dr. Russell replied stiffly. "We have him in Medical Center now trying to diagnose the problem."

"Well, well, that's too bad," Taybor said unhappily. "I know how difficult it must be for Miss Maya to tear herself away at a time like thing, but we really must be going. Come along, my dear."

Maya nodded silently and stepped forward. Taybor suddenly held up his hand. "Oh, my dear, one more thing. The...research necessary to reset the gender transverter is going to be rather extensive and time-consuming. We won't have time for any of the little...differences of opinion we had upon our first meeting. I do hope you understand."

"I understand. There will be no resistance."

"Very well, then. I do hate long goodbyes, so we'd best be on our way."

With a final glance back at her Terran friends, Maya moved to Taybor's side. The alien raised his hand to perform the gesture that would spirit them both away.

Suddenly Command Center was filled with the desparate tron honking of the Emergency alarm. The screens of the Master Communications Panel flashed to life, filling with the image of Helena's associate, Dr. Ben Vincent. The features of Alpha's Number Two physician were twisted with shock and a thin trickle of blood was etched across his forehead. "Dr. Russell," he was crying. "Emergency in Medical Center! Dr. Russell..."

Helena raced to the panel and slapped open the microphone. "Ben, what is it?"

"It's Tony Verdeschi, Doctor. He's..." Vincent grimaced as he searched for some proper wording. "He's changing again. Horribly!"

"What do you mean?"

"A short time ago, he suddenly became delirious. He began to rave about Taybor and about getting even with him. Then he began to alter into some...thing? It was hideous, Dr. Russell. He...it has wrecked the Center and has broken out into the corridors. He've taken casualties down here..."

"Deal with them as best you can, Dr. Vincent," Koenig said, shouldering Helena aside, already trying to adapt to and counter this new threat. "Get operational again as soon as possible! Yasko, put the base on full internal security alert and scan all corridors leading out from Medical Center. I want to see what we're fighting here!"

The Main Screen came on line and begna to flick rapidly through a series of views of corridor and compartment sections, each empty except for scatterings of Emergency Personnel hurrying to their stations. Then, "Hold it!"

The screen was centered on a set of pressure-tight pocket panel doors, doors obviously being opened without the benefit of a combluck. With a burst of sparks and a sob of tortured metal, they sprang apart to disclose their forcer. The thing framed in the portal bore absolutely no resemblance to the Tony Verdeschi male or female known to the Alphens. It was a grotesques, glutinous mass, vaguely humanoid in shape, its entire outer surface seeming involved in an aimless, seething change. Features, growths pseudolimbs all formed, grew and merged back into the entity's protoplasm without rhyme or reason in endless cycle. It was a sight ghastly enough to force cries of horror from even the seasoned Command Crew.

"My God, what the hell is happening to him now?" Koenig exclaimed.

Maya had gone pale at the sight. "I was afraid of this," she cried. "Tony's human cellular structure can't adapt to its genetic change. It's breaking down into uncontrolled metamorphosis. In this state, he's lost in a mindless rage, and he's all but unstoppable."

"I hope you're wrong on that count," the commander commented grimly. "Because it looks to me like he's making a beeline for Command Center."

At this statement, Taybor, who had truend rather green at Verdeschi's appearance, cut in hastily. "In times of crisis like this, you certainly don't need noncombatants cluttering up your quarter deck. So Miss Maya and I will just..."

"Not so fast, Taybor." Koenig grabbed the front of the quivering trader's robes and spun him around. "You got us into this mess in the first place. So now you can bloody well sit in the frying pan along with us, too."

And so the Taybor stayed and watched as the thing that had been Tony Verdeschi battered its way past bulkhead doors and security teams, its amorphous structur seeming immune to weapon fire. It bored in, closer and closer, until it passed out of

camera range and Maya commented quietly, "Sensors indicate he's in the corridor just outside Command Center."

Something began to land heavy, hammering blows upon the outer door. Instinctively, every man and woman turned to face the threat.

"Maya, you're our expert on metamorphics," Koenig snapped. "What can we do to bring Tony under control?"

"I don't know. I've seen cases something like this on my homeworld of Psychon, when I was learning how to become a metamorph. Some who tried it lost control and became as Tony is."

"Could anything be done for them?"

"Yes. If they could be returned to their original form, they would recover automatically."

"All right," Koenig said savagely, spinning for face Taybor. "All right! Enough is enough! Change Tony back!"

"But...but, Skipper," the rotund alien blubbered. "I can't. The machine, it's not set!"

"The devil with the machine!" Koenig roared. "You're lying and you damn well know it. You've had the power to convert Tony back all along and you've been banking on our not being desperate enough to try and force it out of you. Well, the game has changed. This is life or death now. Change him back!"

The hammering at the doors was wilder, more insistent now and Taybor stared uneasily at the panels as he tried to formulate a reply. "Skipper, believe me, at the moment it is my fondest wish that Mr. Verdeschi was back to being his more or less normal self, but there is nothing I can do!"

"You'd better change your story fast," the commander snarled, giving the alien a shove towards the doors. "Because when he breaks in here, you're the one who gets fed to him!" The fire in Koenig's eyes marked this as no idle threat.

"There is nothing I can do!" Taybor gibbered. "It's the truth! The machine is useless! I can't change him back. Once set the process can't be reversed!"

"Why, you lying..." Koenig advanced threateningly.

"Wait! Wait, Skipper! The process is irreversable, but it isn't permanent! The conversion is only of limited duration. Mr. Verdeschi will return to his own body seventy-two of your hours after conversion, automatically. Until then, nothing can be done."

Koenig stepped back, a frosty smile coming to his features. "Thank you, Taybor. That's all we needed to know. Yasko, let Mr. Verdeschi in."

The doors began to slide open and Taybor issued a despairing wail and covered his eyes. After a moment, Tony in his feminine form ambled into the Center looking cool, composed and damnably attractive, the massive pipe wrench he'd been using on the doors tucked under one arm. "Knock, knock," he said conversationally.

For the first time in a life that had spanned light years, Taybor the Trader was left speechless. He could only gawk and gabble for words that would not come, until the sight overwhelmed Maya and she began to giggle helplessly. At once her mirth mushroomed and engulfed the entire room and everyone from the most junior grade of technician to John Koenig himself exploded in laughter.

"Koenig, you tricked me!" the flustered trader screamed.

"On Earth, we'd call it paying you back in your own coin," the commander replied dryly. "I think Tony's suffering and your attempted kidnapping makes any sin of ours minor in comparison."

"But how..."

"We have another old saying on Earth. 'It's easy to cheat a cheater.' Our monster was really Maya in one of the more horrendous forms she has listed in her repertoire and the images you saw on the screen were a series of video tapes she and some of our more theatrically inclined personnel made earlier this morning. We added a little additional stage dressing, and you fell for it."

"I won't stand for this, Koenig!" Taybor roared. "I'll..."

"You'll what?" the commander responded evenly. A pair of security guards had materialized at his side, hands resting on stun gun grips. Maya stood poised and ready, mentally thumbing though her listing of the most gruesome creatures in the known universe Tony took a stip forward, experimentally hefting his wrench in a small, capable fist.

"Oh. Er...well, can't blame a man for trying," Taybor's trembly attempt at humor rang hollow. "Can't we talk about this, Skipper?"

"There is nothing to talk about. Taybor, you are a lying, thieving blackguard and I've giving you exactly five minutes to get that spacefaring five & dime store of yours off this moon before we start shooting. Furthermore, if you ever come nosing around here again, I'll have you blasted from here to the Sea of Tranquility. Now, beat it!"

The last was in a roar that made the Taybor's beard ripple. The alien started to answer, then thought better of it, and with a final angry look around, he faded out in a prismatic shimmer. Just as four minutes and forty seconds later, his ship did from the surface of the moon.

The commander permitted himself a small portion of satisfaction as he looked out across the empty plain. "Since this seems to be a morning of old Earth sayings, I'll use another. 'Good riddance to bad rubbish!'"

"Indeed," Helena Russell said, moving closer to him, admiration in here eyes. "If you hadn't been able to think of this whole incredible bluff, we would have lost Maya for certain. As it is, thanks to that devious mind of yours, she's still with us, Tony will soon be his normal, manly self, and we have seen the last of Taybor the Trader."

"I just wish I had your confidence in that, Helena. Somehow, I've got htis gut feeling that we haven't seen the last of that interplanetary pest."

Helena reached over and gave his hand a warm squeeze. "In that case, John Koenig, you will just have to outfox him again."

"I suppose so," he replied, responding to his lady's smile. "But, really, the lifestyle we lead generates enough problems without running rematches with the old ones."

Later, as they walked down the corridor leading to the residence section, Maya's heart was light. Although Tony Verdeschi still wore a 5'2" slip of a body, he was again 'walking tall'.

"I'm very happy everything is going to be all right with you, Tony," she said.

"You and me both, kid. For a while there it looked as if I was going to have to swap jockey shorts for panty girdles for good. Now, though, I've got to take advantage of this while I can."

"Take advantage of it?"

"Sure. You know, see how the other half lives, walk a mile in the other guy's moccasins, that sort of thing."

Tony continued as they paused before Maya's quarters. "I've been giving this a lot of thought. This is a chance that just about no man has ever really been given. To see the world through a woman's eyes. I'm going to spend the next couple of days seeing what makes you female types tick."

"So, you are looking upon this as a learning experience. That's very admirable."

Tony suddenly was on guard. He hadn't liked the way Maya had said that at all. There was a studied sweetness in her voice and a pixie-ish sparkled in her eyes that seemed to warn of one of her infamous practical jokes coming on.

"So, you wish to know how the other half lives..."

Maya unleashed her metamorphic powers and dissolved into a shimmering cocoon of energy. When she coalesced, Tony found himself confronting a new Psychon, handsome, powerfully built, and undeniably male.

Tony was momentarily bewildered. "Maya, what in the world do you think...Hey! Whoa, hold on there! No way...Maya...*Help!* ...cannot, put me down!" Tony's slight female form was swept up into a pair of powerful arms and struggling futilely, he found himself being carried into Maya's quarters where, for the next hour he was lovingly but thoroughly initiated into 'how the other half lives'. And yes, it was a most interesting educational experience.

THE END

WHO WOO!, Tyrannicans, Halkeenetus Leucocephalus, Maternity, and the Angelical

--by Don Palermo

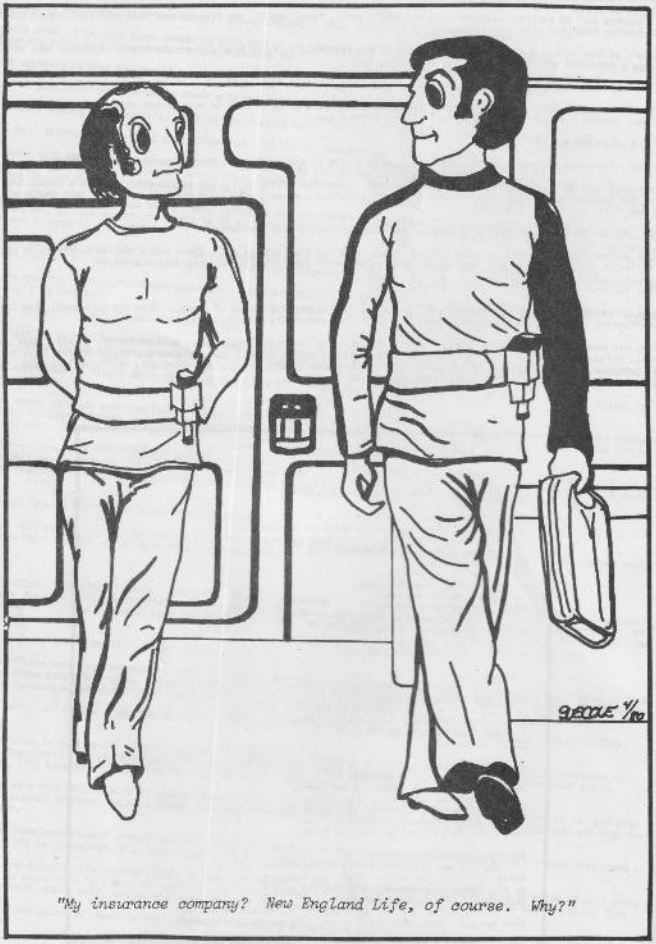
Mistress and child of the borderless sea,
* she woke she rides*
Through harsh sun-stone ashirt,
* Lochenya of ether, greater ships on the call, and*
Talarde, all too often hails too distant
* by the black fins that threaten men,*
In the endless Sea.

Waves and plates converging hates,
* around redundance that*
Thinks, and yet don't think;
* a volume of space enveloped by*
Metals, plastics, and a thousand
* materials, combined in one design,*
To protect the Beings as they were.

Bird of prey,
* she in the endless sky soars,*
With depthless eyes of night-black,
* talons of scoring, shadow light,*
Wings of the infinite, infinitesimal atom,
* she bird through the clear of*
The sky screams.

Pregnant with beings,
* unmoved atop the red ornuene,*
Holding them warm and secure in her belly,
* through the hostiles of a universe*
She pushed herself, searching tirelessly for a new
* home; her eyes and senses scour the*
Depths for whatever her fragile young.

While one owns her destiny;
* lifting her helmsmore to the beyond-description*
Skies, to loves that can be lived, not endured,
To the angels this keeper pulls them out of the
Mud, through the fires, to the
* skies; she is the Ship of Light, of all colors in one hue,*
That man can touch, that lifts beyond this domain to the skies.



"My insurance company? New England Life, of course. Why?"

Alien Return

by Rebecca Eisenbach

Helena Russell frowned at the big screen in Command Center. For the last fifteen minutes, an eerie high-pitched disturbance had drowned out all communications with the robot Eagle Commander Koenig had sent out. Its soft female computer voice should have said something by now, but they weren't receiving the slightest note that an Eagle spaceship even existed out in the cold depths of darkness.

Two days ago, a strange object had appeared before Moonbase Alpha. It looked like a large rectangular alien craft, but the computers refused to give positive information on life signs.

John Koenig, Commander of Moonbase Alpha, decided not to take any chances. He sent a robot Eagle out for a close reconnaissance. He didn't want anyone in the Eagle in the event that the object before them was inhabited and/or hostile. They might take the Eagle's appearance as an act of war.

"Commander," Maya reported. "It's communications..."

Sandra Benes pushed several buttons on her console and looked confused. "Commander, we have contact with Eagle Three. It's on course for Moonbase Alpha."

"Ask for a report," ordered Koenig.

"Eagle Three, report."

The Eagle's computers paused strangely before replying, "Eagle has nothing to report. All functions are normal. No abnormal activity in alien spacecraft."

"What the hell is it talking about?" exploded Tony Verdeschi. "We lose contact with the damned thing for a quarter of an hour and nothing is wrong? What does it consider wrong?"

Koenig looked at Verdeschi for a moment, then back at Sahn. "Tell it to return to base. I don't thing we should look into this any further. If the Eagle thinks that it's accurate, then something is coviously wrong and we certainly don't need Alpha's computers acting the same way."

Sandra nodded and called to the EAgle.

Helena left her monitors and walked over to Koenig. "John, are you going to check that Eagle?"

"Yes, I'm leaving now," he nodded.

"I'll go with you. There is something odd about this and I want to see it first hand."

Koenig smiled at her. "What's your worry, doctor?"

"I have a feeling unlike anything I've ever had before. Call it a woman's sixth sense, but," she lowered her voice, "...I think we may be in serious trouble."

Koenig's smile slipped a notch as he followed her out of Command Center. "Helena, we've come across far more dangerous things than this."

"Maybe you're right, John. I'm just a worrier. I worry about people and I worry about the unknown."

"Yes, and sometimes I worry about you, Helena." He laughed, "Sometimes I think that we all work too hard."

Helena looked up at him. She would have liked to say something, but time would not permit it. They were in front of the travel tube now and the security men looked uneasy.

"Okay," Koenig began. "You can go. Dr. Russell and I will go through. Send the technical crew through when they get here. We'll meet them on the other side."

"Yes, commander," a guard replied.

Sitting in the travel tube, Helena looked at Koenig silently. He was handsome, diplomatic and intelligent. He would have made a good politician, she thought. Or, no, not a politician, but a...

Her thought were interrupted as the tube docked.

Koenig hit a series of buttons. The Eagle hooked up, depressurized, and the doors sliced apart.

As Helena and John entered the Eagle, he went straight for the computers, while Helena scanned the Eagle's cockpit. Everything seemed normal, but she got the same feeling that she had earlier. In front, Koenig couldn't make any sense out of Computer's readings: COMPUTER IS UNABLE TO RESPOND IN THIS AREA. MORE DATA IS NEEDED. THIS DOES NOT COMPUTE.

Koenig turned in his seat. He thought he heard something--a gasp from Helena. He swiveled out of his chair and entered the back.

He stood still, shocked by what he saw.

A tall, dark humanoid man was standing next to Helena. In his hand he held a laser gun. But his face was what fascinated Koenig. He had seen this face before...

"Keep thinking, Koenig. It will come to you soon," he said.

"Balor..." breathed Helena.

The alien smiled. "Very good, my dear."

Yes, it was Balor, the immortal alien Balor from the planet Progron. The man with whom John Koenig had a death battle during the first year of the perilous trek. The alien ripped through the base, nearly crippling or killing any Alpha who didn't consider him 'master'.

"You thought you had destroyed me, John Koenig," he said, throwing his weapon on a nearby tabletop.

"You thought you had destroyed me, John Koenig," he said, throwing his weapon on a nearby tabletop. "I will not need this."

Koenig remembered that he couldn't kill Balor and to get rid of him, he had to shove him out into space to float for eternity ...he thought.

"How did you...?" began Koenig.

"You will have time for all your questions later, Commander." He paused. "I wish to go into Alpha."

"Why?" Helena snapped.

Balor smiled down at her. "The years have improved you, Dr. Russell. You are quite lovely." Turning to Koenig, Balor said again, "I wish to go into Alpha."

Unable to control himself, Koenig operated his commlock. The doors instantly sliced apart to the travel tube.

"Shall we go?"

Koenig glanced at Helena and they followed the evil man.

Command Center was shocked to see Balor again, except for Maya who had never seen him before.

"All right, Balor. What do you want."

Balor smiled again. "I only wish to have what is rightfully mine. Moonbase Alpha."

A murmur of objection grew from the room. "Moonbase Alpha was never yours," Koenig corrected.

"It was mine until you shoved me into that air lock. You will pay dearly for that, John Koenig." Balor glanced at all the anxious faces. "I floated out in space for years until another tribe of people like yourself rescued me." His sadistic smile widened. "Every man, woman and child on the spaceship *Dolcom* is dead." He looked up at the screen. "I inherited the craft and now I am here to get my revenge on you."

Maya frowned. Something was puzzling her. "Why is it that we couldn't contact our Eagle?"

Balor looked at the attractive Psychon. He hadn't seen this woman before. "There is a force field surrounding the ship," he said simply.

Maya looked away from him to Koenig.

"So, what do you do now?" asked Helena.

To make his point, Balor walked over to Koenig's Command desk and sat in his chair. "I am your ruler once again," he said, leaning back in the chair. "I am in command of Alpha and all of your people will take your orders from me."

"You tried this before and failed," said Tony. "You will fail again."

"I am glad you have such confidence in your Commander. However, after I am done with him, John Koenig will not be fit for command."

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Helena, menacingly.

Balor put his feet on the desk, unmoved. "It isn't what I will do to Koenig, but what I will do to the things he cherishes most."

Koenig looked up. "Like what?"

"I will start with Moonbase Alpha and finish with the moon."

The lights dimmed around the base. Maya pushed several buttons on her console, but her monitors were not working. Moonbase Alpha was inoperable.

"I have shut off your systems. You will have life support for fifty-four more hours. That is enough time for me to destroy as much as possible." So saying, he left Command Center.

"Commander," Maya broke the silence. "Isn't there anything we can do?"

Tony Verdeschi walked over to her. "Maya, you don't know him like we do. The man is an insane monster, but he has powers. He's incredibly strong, vicious, and unless we can make a perfect move, we'll be at his mercy."

Helena put her hand on Koenig's shoulder. "I've been thinking about the people on the *Dolcom*," she motioned to the screen. "Wouldn't they have thought it strange that a man was alive, floating in space without a spacesuit?"

Koenig sighed. "Those people were like us. The man was in trouble, so they helped him. They decided to ask questions later. Unfortunately, later, he killed the whole crew."

Balor's promise of revenge was not idle. On his first trip he stopped off at the Eagle's port and with a few swift motions, he activated the ground lasers, destroying most of the fleet. On his next stop he contaminated Alpha's water supply and destroyed a month's ration of food.

"Commander, we have to do something before it's too late!" The call came from many Alphans, some of whom were hurt by Balor's sadistic actions.

Koenig breathed in and broke the connection. "Balor will be watching for me. He knows that he can't trust me."

Helena Russell sighed deeply as the next person was sent in on a stretcher. The man's arms were broken and scratches covered his face. "Bob, could you take care of this one? I must speak to Commander Koenig."

"Right, Doctor. But come back as soon as you can, all right?"

The usually crowded halls, Helena noticed, were unaccountably empty. No one had passed her since she started for Command Center. Cautiously she rounded a corner and to her horror and surprise, Balor was standing in front of her.

"Doctor Russell..."

She backed up a few paces as he reached for her. "Helena Russell, you mean a great deal to him," Balor said quietly. He looked at her for quite a few moments before he spoke again. "Now I see why Koenig is attracted to you."

Helena said nothing. He reached for her again and she backed up. His eyes looked deranged. Balor looked less human with each second. "He cares for you, doesn't he?"

Helena screamed as Balor took hold of her. She beat at his chest. The heal of her boot landed on his foot and Balor screamed out in rage. As he loosened his grip on her, she broke free and began to run.

"Maya," Koenig began. "Balor knows less about you than anyone. He has no idea that you're a metamorph."

Verdeschi frowned. "John, are you saying that Maya...no, it's too much of a risk."

"Tony, if I don't do anything, everybody will be at risk!"

"What about a plan? Do you have one?"

"Tony, Maya is capable. She has plans..." Koenig might have said more, but he was interupted by a call from Medical Center..

"Yes, Bob."

"Commander, I think you should come to Medical Center--it's important."

"Details?"

Mathias paused. "Commander, it's Doctor Russell. She's been badly hurt by Balor. She's calling for you."

Koenig made it to the Center at a run. He looked at Helena closely. An eye was blackened. She had many bruises and Mathias was setting her leg.

"I'm sorry, Commander, but she's unconscious now." He moved from her leg to the monitors that showed her life signs. "She has a concussion that looks pretty bad." Unintentionally, Mathias made the hurt worse. "We've pumped so many chemicals into her that if she woke up, she probably wouldn't feel anything."

Koenig could feel the tears rushing to his eyes. He bent down and touched her badly cut cheek. As if on cue, Balor walked in. His expression showed amusement.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Koenig gasped, emphasizing every word.

"I was right. You are in love with her." He leaned back on the door. "I told you that I would destroy everything you cared about."

Koenig's blood boiled. With a burst of violence, Koenig launched himself at Balor. Balor hit him once with such a powerful force that he was unconscious before he hit the floor.

Looking at Mathias, Balor said, "Take care of him, doctor. I don't want him dead--just yet."

When Koenig first awoke, he heard the moans of the people beside him. He also heard the activity of the orderlies rushing more patients into the room. John sat up and looked about him. The Center was far mor controlled than before. There were more injured crewmen, but Mathias and Ben Vincent were working well.

"Commander, please lie down."

"How long have I been out?" Koenig groaned.

"Not long. Just under two hours."

"Did anything happen during that time?"

"Balor has given Medical a minimum of power. He said that he wants me to keep the men alive so that he could kill them."

Koenig frowned and looked over to where Helena should have been resting. She was gone, replaced by another patient.

Panic rose in Koenig's throat. "Where is she?"

"Commander, it's all right. Dr. Russell has been moved to her quarters. She is being taken care of by an orderly. She will call me if there are may changes." Mathias sighed and ran his fingers through his dark hair. "I had to send here there. It was just getting too crowded."

Koenig nodded, relieved. "Where is Balor, now?"

"I'm not sure, but I think he's in Command Center."

Koenig slid out of his bed and walked out the door. His head spinned and his body was sore, but he knew that he couldn't remain idle with Balor destroyed everything in sight.

Mathias was right. Balor was in Command Center. Again, leaning back in the Commander's chair.

"Balor!" Koenig's voice boomed.

The Center's personnel looked shocked, but Balor seemed more relaxed by his voice. Koenig refused to let Balor's calmness get to him. "Please, Balor, before you do anything else, can't we talk?"

"I gave you a chance to talk years ago, and you tried to destroy me. Why should I take a risk now?" Balor's dark eyes stared up at him.

"Balor, I give you my woard that I will not lay a hand on you while we talk."

A smile traced itself across Balor's face. "Commander, you are a man of your word. We will go to your quarters to speak." He stood up to walk to the sliding door. "I warn you, John Koenig. If you try to harm me in anyway, all your people will die of slow torture."

They walked out. Maya looked over at Verdeschi. "Tony, I've never felt so useless. What do we do?"

"I don't know, Maya. If we attack, Balor will kill John and destroy Alpha."

Alan Carter joined them. "If we could only catch him by surprise. But he knows every move we make. I guess he learns by experience."

"We've seen what he did to the crew of the *Dolcon*."

"No." Sandra stood up. "We haven't." She crossed to them. "All we have heard is talk. Could Balor really kill the whole crew?"

"It's possible," said Maya.

"Yes, but it's also possible that Balor lied and there wasn't a crew aboard that ship. Remember, the computer was having trouble."

Tony nodded. "Yes. Well, either that or a small enough crew that he could handle."

Carter was pacing. "Balor is powerful, but is he *that* powerful?"

In spite of herself, Maya was smiling. "You know, it's this type of thinkin that could get us killed."

"But think about it, Maya." Tony leaned against her console. "Balor has powers. He has strength and he's smart. But could he kill four hundred Dolcons, at the same time?

Maya say up, deep in thought. "He hasn't shown that kind of power." She looked into Verdeschi's eyes. "Are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting?"

"Balor," Koenig's voice was gruff. "You can't kill all of us. Without us you couldn't generate the pain and suffering you like so much. After we're all dead, you won't have that."

Balor smiled. "Koenig, it's a good try, but your years of command have made you dull. There are other people such as yourself. It may take time, but I will find them. Remember, I have all the time in the universe."

"If you want to kill us, why don't you get it over with?"

"Because, as you've said, Commander. I would enjoy hearing the pain and suffering of your people." Balor's smile widened. "Your death will be special, Commander. I've decided that your death will be last, so that you may live through the suffering of others."

Koenig could almost feel the fear needle him on the inside. Not so much for himself, but for his friends.

It might have been possible for Balor to read his thought, because his next line caught Koenig by surprise. "Where is Dr. Russell?"

Koenig did not answer.

"I have decided that her death will be slow."

Koenig realized the Balor was working on him psychologically. Using Helena's life as a standpoint. Balor was brilliant when it came down to the finale points.

"Balor, I will fight you."

For the first time since Balor returned to Alpha, his eyes grew wide with surprise.

"You think that you have me beat, but I will kill you." Koenig's voice held conviction that was absolute. It was almost frightening.

Balor blinked with confusion for a moment, then he straightened. "Commander, you are making an idle threat. It is impossible to murder me."

The men looked at each other, their silence challenging. "Balor..." Koenig began.

The communications post hummed for attention. Sandra's face was anxious. "Commander, will you please come to Command Center It's important."

"I'll be right there."

Maya looked at Alan Carter tensely, then back at the double doors connected to Command Center. "They should be here soon."

"Dont be nervous, Maya," Tony touched her hands.

"I'm not nervous. I just hope that..."

Koenig and Balor entered Command Center. Koenig looked at his people questioningly, but it was Balor who spoke. "What is this?"

Carter stood up. "It's mutiny."

"What?"

"Balor," Tony said, "We've grown tired of your childish games."

"Yes," Sandra yawned. "Did you honestly think you have full control over us?"

Balor's features conveyed angry confusion. "What are you talking about?"

Maya took a stab. "We don't believe all the people on the *Belaon* are dead."

"Of course they're dead. I..."

The Alphans in Command Center began to laugh. It started in slow, then began to grow in volume. Anger made Balor's voice coarse. "You fools! No one laughs at me. Balor is invincible."

The laughing continued.

Koenig moved to stand by Sahn. Not being a stupid man, he hoined in. He wasn't sure what was up, but he was sure that his people had come up with some sort of plan.

"You believe me, Koenig! Stop this, or..." Balor hesitated as he noticed for the first time that Koenig too was engaged in the same mocking Taugh. "I will have your respect or I will..."

Almost as fast as it started, the laughing stopped. But it wasn't because of Balor's orders. A howl from something unearthly came from the front of the room and all Alphans turned to look up at it.

The creature was large and tentacled. Slime oozed from its mouth and saucer eyes. Its body was a blood red color, looking like decayed flesh.

Balor's handsdropped to his sides. It was a horrifying sight, and Balor could do nothing but stare at it, open-mouthed.

"Now!"

Tony and Alan held up two large laser weapons, pointed them directly at Balor and fired. The rays from the guns was so forceful that Balor was knocked to the wall and fell unconscious. He should have been dead.

The creature reverted back into Maya. "Quickly, we've got to get him into the pod before it's too late."

"So, Balor is gone?" asked Helena from the bed in her quarters.

Alan, Tony, Maya dn John smiled their reassurance. It had been three days since Balor's demise, but Helena had been in no conscious condition to fully understand. As a matter of fact, this had been the first day she gained any type of understanding since her ordeal. "But John, if he was put in a pod, others may--"

Koenig sat on the edge of her bed and grasped one of her hands. "We've taken precautions," he said. "Balor is locked in and we've attached a recorded warning explaining what he was and why we did what we've done."

Alan walked over to her. "Actually, the whole thing was a big trial & error. We had Maya change into something...interesting We wanted to divert his attention." Smiling, he continued. "Earlier, Tony and I went to the weapons section and got two of the strongest powered hand lasers we could find." He nodded at her expression. "We caught Balor off guard. It worked."

Tony grimaced. "By the way, what was that thing you turned into?"

Maya moved in close to Tony. "It's called a Exonvo. They're known as very passionate beings...to their own kind, of course."

Verdeschi backed off a bit. He had seen that look before. "Listen, Maya, you're not going to try something funny, are you? You know, like turn into that thing again?"

"Would I do that to you, Tony?"

They left the question hanging as Verdeschi turned on his heels to leave.

==THE END==



Tony
Moonbase Alpha
22 April 2001

Dear Maya,

I live for you, my Maya,
Make no mistake, my dear,
Deep in my heart, for you I yearn,
My Maya, my lady-faire.

You and I see desires fade,
As dreams often do,
Please don't be discouraged,
I'm not when I'm with you!

Yes...I believe in fate,
And so would like to share,
The hopes and dreams of realities,
When I find you there.

Sometimes when Alpha beckons me,
With her endless deeds,
The precious moments we would shar
Are spent for others' needs.

Though always, I come back to you,
Never doubting in my mind,
That in your understanding,
Your thoughts of me are kind.

I love you, Maya...

(by Judy Moore)

AFTERMATH

by M.D. Bloemker

Bergman nodded firmly. "It's Meta."

Meta. Koenig stared up at the screen as the familiar wave pattern took form in the clearing static. The last voice any of them would ever hear from Earth had faded to be replaced by this alien signal. Was it an invitation--or a warning? Koenig allowed himself a hopeful half-smile. "Maybe that's where our future lies," he said, a low whisper. "Maybe there."

Around him, the Main Mission personnel exchanged glances among themselves, and several weak smiles broke through the greyness of their faces.

The spell was broken a long moment later when Koenig straightened with a sigh. "Paul?"

Instinctively knowing what the commander's next question was going to be, Paul Morrow bent over his console. "Link-up, please."

"Link-up," Ben Ouma confirmed at his communications console.

Paul stood back as the readout appeared on his visual display terminal. "Trajectory still unknown, commander. Seventy-two percent possibility of the moon coming within probe range of the planet. ETA--two weeks."

Koenig looked up, startled. "Two weeks? The most conservative estimate for the Meta Probe was three months."

Bergman had been reading the information on the tiny screen past Paul's shoulder; he held his finger up for attention now. "That blast has boosted us to a terrific velocity, John," he said. "Unless something happens to slow us down, we'll continue at this speed indefinitely."

Koenig nodded thoughtfully. His eyes caught Simmonds's, who met his gaze levelly. "Well, commissioner," Koenig said without inflection. "It looks as though you'll have your Meta Probe after all. And two and a half months ahead of schedule, too."

Amused glances were being turned Simmonds' way, and the man visibly chafed. He maintained a staunch silence, imparting only a hostile glare in Koenig's direction.

"All right." Koenig turned, unconcerned with Simmonds' embarassment. "We've got a lot of work to do. Another command conference at--" he consulted his wrist chronometer briefly. "--0900 hours. I want complete damage and casualty reports at that time. Back to your posts."

They dispersed, quietly returning to their duties. Koenig started up the steps to his office, to be stopped by two voices calling his name simultaneously. He turned his head, glancing at Carter and Simmonds in turn. The commissioner's black eyes were dancing with rage; Carter's were unreadable. Koenig hesitated

then decided that he had heard everything Simmonds could possibly want to say to him. "Captain," he nodded in the pilot's direction. "My office."

"Thank you, commander," Carter said, oblivious to the scathing glare Simmonds gave him before stalking out of Main Mission. Koenig watched him go, shaking his head. He'd have his share of trouble from that man before any of this was through. He motioned Carter to go with him, opening the doors between his office and Main Mission with a touch on his commlock.

He let the doors slide closed behind them, shutting out the noise and bustle of Main Mission. "Sit down, Captain," he said, crossing to his desk.

Carter remained standing where he had stopped, just inside the doorway. He had both thumbs hooked loosely in his belt, and was shifting his weight agitatedly. Koenig, about to sit down behind his desk, looked up to see his normally unflappable chief Eagle pilot with a distinctly troubled look on his face. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Problem in your section?"

"Yeah. You might say that," Carter answered, subdued.

"I know that the Eagle section was the hardest hit," Koenig said quietly, not knowing whether it was a good idea to state the obvious. "But you indicated that you thought you could recover..."

"There's no problem there, commander," Carter broke in. "Just a lot of hard work, and we'll have things patched up. Don't worry about that. It's just--well, you know that I...we lost ten of the best pilots this base ever had." His voice had softened as he spoke the last words, and Koenig knew instinctively that this was to disguise the fact that his voice might have broken if he hadn't. Koenig nodded. "I know," he acknowledged quitely.

"The thing is, commander..." He broke off with an irritated sigh, unable to find the right words. "We'd like your permission to hold a sort of--memorial service, if you know what I mean. It would mean a lot to them--they've lost a lot of their mates in this thing and...do you see what I mean?"

Koenig did not answer immediately. He crossed to stand in front of his desk and folded his arms across his chest, in thought. "I think I do," he said. "I'm not sure, though--that it's a good idea, considering..."

"I've talked with some of them, commander," Carter pressed, sensing a denial in the offing. "I think it would really help morale. I know that sounds strange, but if you knew those guys..."

Koenig held up a hand. "You forgot something. I started in the Flight Section, remember? Yes, I know those guys." He nodded, the small smile fading slowly. "And you're right. They'd need something like that." He looked up a moment later. "All right. You have my okay."

"Thank you, commander," Carter said, mustering up a smile of gratitude. The effort this action cost him showed on his face, and Koenig's eyes narrowed. He straightened, approaching the man.

"Carter--how long has it been since you've had any sleep?"

The pilot hesitated, unwilling to admit that he had had only an hour's rest in the last twenty-six. "I'm okay, commander," he insisted, with a deprecating wave of his hand.

"Has Dr. Russell checked you for radiation?"

"Well, no, but..."

"No buts. Report to Medical."

"Wait! Commander, you know that if I go down there, she'll put me in confinement for observation," Carter protested. "I've got work to do down in Flight Com, I can't take off now...!"

"That's an order, Captain," Koenig snapped. When Carter looked away, agitated, but defeated, Koenig added, "You heard Paul. In two weeks we might come within probe range of Meta. I'm going to need you to help plan the recon mission, and that means I need you on your feet."

Carter nodded stiffly. "Yes, sir," he said, his displeasure obvious on his tightly drawn features.

Koenig activated the switch on his commlock and the door opened onto Main Mission once more. He and Carter descended the steps, Koenig heading for Paul's control console, Carter for the far door.

Carter paused at the entranceway, looking back as though hopeful of a last-minute reprieve. Koenig looked up and dismissed him with a sharp nod. Carter left, reluctantly, slamming the flat of his palm against the frame of the door as he went.

Paul had not failed to see the exchange. "Problem in Flight Control?" he asked the commander, *sotto voce*.

Koenig shook his head. "Just one stubborn Eagle pilot, that's all," he said with a smile.

Paul grinned. "Stubborn is his middle name," he said, turning his attention back to the moving line of readout on his screen.

Carter's commlock beeped for attention as he turned down the last corridor towards Medical Center. He unhooked the device from his belt. "Carter."

"Hendricks. We need you down here, Cap."

"What's the problem?"

"The locking mechanism on Lift Four is jammed. You're the only one with authorized access to the main control panel."

Carter was about to protest that two other pilots' commlocks opened the control panel in the main hangar deck, but caught himself in time. He had sent Ravi and Gendemenico out for the dispersal mission. They had been caught in the

final explosion. "Right," Carter sighed. "Look, how serious is it? Can it hold for a bit?"

"No, sir," the man said emphatically. "There's an Eagle on the lift now. If the lock isn't unjammed soon, we won't be able to repair the structural damage on the upper levels. Possibility of an atmosphere leak."

Carter sucked in his breath sharply. A pressure break in the main hangar area would wipe out what little hope they had of getting back in shape in time for the Meta recon mission. "Right. I'm on my way." He hesitated a moment after replacing his commlock, debating whether he should at least check in at Medical Center. No, he decided a moment later. He couldn't take the chance that Russell would simply hand over his commlock to some security type who wouldn't know the main pressure valve from his own grandmother. He turned and hurried down the corridor, away from Medical Center.

Hendricks had to shout to be hear over the din of the repair crew's heavy machinery. "What did he say?"

"Eh?" Carter yelled back. His fist was tightly clenched around the manual control stick of the jammed lift, while his other hand held the commlock which kept him in touch with the control room suspended high above the main hangar floor across the width of the massive bay. "Hold it, Josie. What did you say, Hendricks?"

"I said, what did the commander say?"

Carter nodded. "He said all right," he called back. "He'll let us have the service."

Hendricks nodded, winding the heavy pump hose around his arm. "Good. That's good."

"Josie." Carter spoke into the commlock again. "What's the word?"

"The repair crew is making progress, Captain." Despite the emergency and the vast distance that separated her in the control room from the situation at Lift Four, Josephine Delgado managed to look just as harried and worried and to sound just as cool and collected as anyone working on the floor. "Shall I get Johnny Roy to spell you?"

"Yeah," he said after a moment. "Good idea."

Hendricks had moved off, back to join the rest of the crew who were busy trying to pump the spilled fuel from the repair pits. Nearby, the generators for the pumps started up again, causing even Carter, hardened to the usual din of the hangar deck, to wince. The noise was making his head swim alarmingly. He found, to his annoyance, that his grip was beginning to slip on the control stick. His knuckles were turning white with the effort. With growing alarm, he started to bring his commlock up to urge Josie to in turn prod Johnny Roy along, but the device slipped from his hand, skittering a short, unreachable distance away. He clamped the now free hand down onto the control stick and held. A wave of nausea overcame him, nearly costing him his balance. He

pulled back on the stick with all his strength, as much to keep himself steady as Lift Four. He looked around for Hendricks, but the other man was far beyond calling distance.

The spilled fuel. Any accident could sent the entire hangar deck ablaze within seconds--they wouldn't have a chance. Cold sweat broke out on Carter's brow now, and he could feel his knees threatening to give way beneath him. If he let go, the lift could slip suddenly, sending the trapped Eagle crashing to the floor below--the accident that would set off the spilled fuel.

He summoned up the last ounce of his fading strength. Grinding his teeth together, he held on, feeling the stick beginning to pull from his numb fingers. Above him, he dimly heard the screech of the lift beginning to list, and the shouts of consternation as the repair crew above realized what was happening. The stick jumped, twice, nearly tearing itself out of his hands.

A firm hand closed over his, stilling the control lever. Another hand pulled him back. "Hendricks!" Roy's voice, next to his ear, but sounding as though it were coming from the far end of a tunnel. "Hendricks, move it!"

The pilot bounded up to the platform, taking Carter by the shoulders as Johnny Roy took up his position at the control lever. As he helped Carter away, Hendricks asked worriedly, "You okay? Hey...come on, sit down."

Carter sank down onto a nearby workbench with Hendricks' help, shaking his head slightly. His head and eyes throbbed painfully, and a chill went through him like a knife, causing him to shake visibly.

"Hey, Cap--I think you'd better get down to sick bay," Hendricks said slowly. He hadn't taken his supporting hand from Carter's arm, and his grip tightened now, as though he intended to help him down to Medical Center this moment.

Carter started to rise, settling back down as his knees refused to support him. "Wait, don't call--" he began to protest, but Hendricks ignored him, already calling in a medical emergency. Carter sighed and pressed his hands to his burning eyes. He couldn't be sick--not now, not with so much work to do. He looked up a moment later to see Hendricks staring at him with an expression of faint horror.

"They're sending the radiation team for you," he said, thickly.

Koenig was waiting in the outer area when Dr. Russell emerged from the isolation ward. She gave him a questioning look as he turned to her, arms folded across his chest. "Well?"

"Well?" she returned, her eyebrow delicately arched. "If I interpret that correctly to mean, is it radiation? It's too soon to tell." She sighed, replacing her instrument tray on a nearby trolley. "I'm keeping him in isolation for at least six more hours observation, but I'm putting my money on shock and exhaustion." She looked up at him a moment later. "There's no trace of the disruption of brain tissue, if that's what you're worried about."

Koenig said nothing, but some of the tenseness eased from his muscles. The possibility that Carter had contracted the debilitating disease precipitated by the magnetic radiation emitted by the nuclear waste dumps prior to the devastating explosion that had hurled the moon out of earth orbit only hours before had certainly occurred to him. Carter had flown the same course as the other pilots affected by the disease; he had been in a relatively unprotected ship when the waste piles had ignited. Even the danger of conventional radiation poisoning was very real.

"If it is shock--he'll need a week to recover sufficiently." She paused, regarding him coolly. "I know you need him for the reconnaissance mission, but..."

"I'd like to see him," Koenig broke in stiffly.

"All right," she said slowly. "Only a few minutes, please. I want to administer a sedative--what he needs now is rest."

Dr. Russell preceded him into the room. Alan Carter was lying on the cot, anything but relaxed. He turned at their entrance, a brief glint of surprise lighting his eyes at seeing Koenig. He successfully supressed it. He was still fully dressed, but a set of lounge clothes had been brought in and laid out on a nearby chair.

Koenig waited until Carter met his gaze, keeping his expression carefully impassive. "Report, captain," he said crisply. "Your explanation why you disobeyed direct orders to report to Medical Center."

Carter drew in a deep, steeling breath. "I was responding to an emergency on the Flight Deck..."

"Are you aware that your subsequent actions on the hangar floor could have resulted in a very serious accident?" Koenig broke in.

Carter stopped, not breathing. His gaze was fixed on the far wall of the room as he said, slowly, "I realize that, commander. But..." He stopped before the word had been completed. No. He refused to qualify himself. No buts.

"Well, captain?" The ice in Koenig's voice had not thawed. "Your explanation. I'm waiting."

It was a long, tense moment before Carter said, without emotion, "No explanation."

"What was that?"

"I said, no explanation, commander."

Behind him, he heard Dr. Russell move slightly, and then silence. Giving her presence no further thought, Koenig extended his hand towards Carter.

Wordlessly, Carter unhooked the commlock from his belt and placed it in Koenig's hand.

"Captain," Koenig said, dismissing himself. He turned on his heel and left the room without a backward glance.

He stopped in the outer room, waiting until he heard the door of the isolation ward close before turning to find Dr. Russell staring at him with a puzzled, troubled expression on her face. "What was that all about?" she inquired, a sharp edge of disdain in her normally placid voice. "You know the whole story of what happened down on the floor as well as I do."

"He disobeyed orders. His actions could have set off a disaster."

Disdain gave way to incredulity on the woman's soft features. "I had you pegged as a lot of things, but a martinet was not one of them."

"Would you have me ignore what happened?"

"I'm not asking you to ignore it. I'm asking you to take all the mitigating factors into consideration."

Koenig's expression widened slightly at this. The cool professional facade of Dr. Helena Russell had suddenly flamed with spirit and it was this he regarded with a mixture of interest and surprise. "Go on."

"You know as well as I do that Carter was the only person with access to the vital controls."

"There were a dozen ways that situation could have been handled, none of which would have required his presence on the hangar floor."

"What are you saying, then? That he acted deliberately, with malice aforethought? That he acted rashly, without thought? Or that he reacted instinctively to an emergency situation?"

Her voice had softened to a low whisper as she spoke; he found himself regarding her intently, beginning to see the woman in a new light. A better light. An interesting light...

"Before you do anything else, Commander," she said, taking a few paces towards him until she stood before him, meeting his gaze coolly. "I want you to consider only one thing. If it had been you facing that situation--what would *you* have done?"

It was obvious that Dr. Russell, a week later, was mystified by Koenig's request to be notified upon Carter's imminent release from Medical Center. She held her silence, however, when Koenig arrived minutes after her call. She agreed perfunctorily to his request to speak to Carter and stood back when the doors opened onto the isolation chamber.

Carter was fastening his belt, and looed up as Koenig entered. He froze, trying to read the commander's expression. Failing that, he straightened and waited for Koenig to speak.

"I've chosen the crew for the initial recon mission," Koenig began, speaking in the casual manner of one who was imparting extraneous information. "The landing party will consist of myself, Dr. Russell, Paul Morrow and Sandra Benes."

Carter lifted his head. "You'll need a co-pilot, commander." He paused, then added quietly, "I'll see you get the best."

"That won't be necessary, captain," Koenig said. "I've already chosen the co-pilot for the mission. I'll be sending him to Hendricks to go over the projected flight plan."

"Hendricks," Carter repeated hollowly, failing in his attempt to conceal his bitter disappointment. "Well. There's no better man for the job, commander. You made a good choice."

Koenig's eyes flared for a moment. "I'm glad you concur," he said pointedly, causing Carter to look away briefly in embarassment. When he looked back again, it was with resigned calm. "May I be excused now, Commander?" he said, his voice flat and emotionless.

Koenig's eyebrow lifted. "Where do you think you're going?"

"My quarters. Sir," he added, a reluctant afterthought. "I'm on confinement. Sir."

Instead of answering, Koenig held out his hand. In it he had clutched a commlock, and he offered it to Carter without a word.

Carter took it, expecting to see security markings explaining his limited access under confinement. His head snapped up a moment later, giving Koenig a look of mixed confusion and faint hope. It was his own commlock, confiscated by the commander nearly a week ago.

"Hendricks is waiting for you down in Flight Com," Koenig told him. "We've only got five days before we're within range of Meta, so you'd better get that flight plan down as soon as possible."

Despite himself, relief was washing over Carter's face. Hooking the commlock onto his belt, he stopped. "Commander?" he said, tentatively, not sure he understood correctly.

Koenig waved him on. "Get moving, captain," he said with a badly concealed smile.

"Yes, sir!"

Dr. Russell came up behind Koenig as Carter left the Medical Center at a near run. He turned to find a bemused smile on her face. "Opinion, doctor?" he said, tongue pressed lightly against his cheek.

"You handled that well," she told him with a nod. "Your sense of humor leaves a lot to be desired, but you handled that well."

"I hope you realize that I have no intention of making this a regular habit," he told her, following her into the main area of Medical Center. To her questioning look, he continued. "I'm not going to ask your opinion every time I make a decision."

"I wouldn't expect such a thing," she told him, her eyes veiled. "As long

as you realize that I can't be expected to agree with every decision you make."

His head went back in surprise. While there was no question that she was taunting him, there was also no doubt in his mind that she meant every word of it as well. She noted his expression and the beginning of a smile curled her lips. "No, I'm not planning a mutiny. I just want to make sure that you never take me for granted."

He smiled slowly. "Oh, I don't think I could ever do that," he said warmly. She had seated herself behind her desk as they talked, and he now leaned across, confidentially. "But to be completely honest--I'd rather have you on my side."

"Nobody said I was on any side," she protested in mock defense. She looked up at him, and Koenig could have sworn that he caught a glimmer of coyness there, so uncharacteristic of his intial impression of her.

"You know," he said impulsively. "When I first came here, I thought that you were..." He broke off as she turned lifted eyebrows towards him, expectantly. "Yes, commander?" she prompted, her voice dangerously low.

He appeared undecided for a moment, then shrugged. "I can't remember anymore."

"I'll bet," she scoffed.

"But, if you like, we can have a cup of coffee down in the rec room, and I could work on it a little?" he offered.

She regarded him warily. "I can't be bribed, you know. At least, not for a lousy cup of coffee."

"I'll throw in a cheese danish."

Her face clouded, as though insulted. Then: "Make it an apple danish, and you've got a deal."

"Done." He returned her smile (why hadn't he noticed that beautiful smile before?) with measure.

Round One was over, Koenig reflected ruefully to himself as they walked down the corridor towards the recreation facilities. This was shaping up to be a very interesting battle of wits, and it would be even more interesting to see who would eventually emerge the victor.

Maybe, if they were both lucky, both of them would win.

==THE END==

A BAD, MERCIFULLY SHORT POEM

There once was a man named Ernst Queller
Who really was quite a nice feller;
But he made a bad ship,
Which was really a gyp--
Too bad it wasn't made weller!

--Little Donny Ho-Ho

I WAS HERE

I watch as the Eagle slowly touches down.
He was gone,
left behind by a
Five light year journey through
a Space Warp.
And I was here, waiting.
Out there, they were
Searching, he and Tony.
They were together, yet seperated
from the people they care for,
the people they love, and
who love them.
He was alone, in the cold, black
void of space, and
I was here.

I was here, isolated among
friends. Without him,
Alpha could no longer be
the place I have come to
think of as home.
A new home is our goal,
But as long as he is with me,
Alpha is all the home I need.

The rest of Alpha welcomes them.
I was here, and I will wait
until he and I can be alone.
We will not soon forget this day,
Nor will I forget the fear
I felt
When I thought he was lost to me
Forever.
But, our love will never be lost.
We will be together across the
black void of space, and
Far beyond.

Terry S. Bowers



BIOGRAPHY OF DAVID KANO

by Meta Campbell

David Kano was born in Kingston, Jamaica, W.I., January 29, 1965. He is the only son of Professor of Computer Technology James Kano, and Doctor of Medicine Denise Webster. David has a sister, Patricia, who is six years his junior.

David showed a very early interest in computers, and at age thirteen, he began helping his father to build, maintain and program computers. As a student, David excelled in all his studies, and was always in the top percentile of his class. Aside from being an exceptional student, he also was something of a practical joker, and a sportsman. He was an important member of both his secondary and collegiate chess and soccer teams.

At age sixteen, David graduated from secondary school, and was awarded an academic scholarship to the college of his choice. He elected to attend Cambridge University in England, where he majored in computer science.

While at Cambridge, he met and fell in love with a fellow student named Alicia. Though very much in love with David, Alicia felt that her pursuit of a career in music would leave her little time for marriage. As a result of her decision, they both ultimately went their separate ways.

David obtained his Masters in computer science at age twenty-three, and proceeded to earn his doctorate in the same field of study at age twenty-nine. Between these periods of time, however, he became involved in a unique, and totally new experiment which almost cost him his life.

In 1989, David, along with scientists Peter Jenkins, and Josef Von Brammer volunteered themselves as subject in an attempt to link a living brain with that of a computer's. Up until this time, such an attempt had only been theoretical. The outcome of the experiment was both a success and a failure, in that of the three men, only David came away from the experiment virtually unscathed. Jenkins and Von Brammer's minds were wiped clean by the experiment, leaving them little more than vegetables. David gained a deeper understanding of and a heightened sensitivity towards computers.

Once he'd acquired his doctorate, David went to work at M.I.T. for three years, after which he applied for a position at Alpha Moonbase. On May 1, 1999, he was assigned to Alpha as head of its Technical Section.

A few years after the Moon left Earth's orbit, David resigned as head of the Tech Section to devote his time, along with Paul Morrow as heads of the Bergman Project to safeguard Alpha against enemy alien attacks.

BIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT BRIAN MATHIAS

Robert Brian Mathias, born August 5, 1963 in Kingston, Jamaica, W.I., is the fourth child of Major Joseph B. Mathias, and Michelle Dubois. Robert has two elder brothers, Andre and Adam, and a younger sister, Danette.

At the age of ten, Bob became interested in medicine after having helped his

neighborhood veterinarian during the summer. He decided then that his goal in life was to be a veterinarian, also. After a time, though, Bob came to the realization that he just was not cut out to be an animal doctor.

The Mathias family moved to Brooklyn, New York when Bob was fifteen years old, and by this time he had definitely decided to become involved in medicine, but on a human level. He worked in a local hospital as a lab assistant, until he graduated from high school. After completing high school, Bob joined the Military Delayed Entry Program under which his college tuition was paid for by the military in exchange for his services in the future.

Bob chose to attend New York University, as a pre-med major. After three years at NYU, and on the advice of one of his professors, Bob applied to and was accepted by the medical school of Cambridge University in England on scholarship. He made his major Space Psychiatry.

During the War of 1987, Bob took a leave of absence to work in the Medical branch of the World Armed Forces as an assistant staff psychiatrist in a London hospital. After the war, and with his obligation to the military served, he returned to Cambridge to obtain his Masters in space psychiatry. He then went on to earn his doctorate.

As his doctorate thesis, Bob chose to write and research a paper on the causes, effects and treatment of psychosis on the long-term space astronaut. This paper is now required reading for psychiatric majors.

Upon receipt of his doctorate, Bob applied to New York State Psychiatric Hospital for the position of director of the hospital's adolescent psychosis center, and was accepted. While at NYSH, he became acquainted with Dr. Helena Russell, a visting consultant. After being told about Moonbase Alpha, and on the suggestion of Dr. Russell, he applied for duty on the moonbase.

On July 5, 1999, Bob began his duties as assistant Medical Officer of Moonbase Alpha. Sometime after the moon was torn from Earth's orbit, Bob transferred to the data section to apply himself full time to the study of man's stress factors in deep space to help insure the survival of the inhabitants of Alpha.

His position was filled by Dr. Ben Vincent.

* * * * *

ANOTHER BAD, MERCIFULLY SHORT POEM

There once was a woman named A
Who fell for Koenig one day;
She'd change her body,
to be with him naughty,
But the fool said, "No way!"

--Little Donny Ho-Ho

THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH THE BIG SCREEN

by Mark Robertson

"Moonbase Alpha Status Report, Dr. Helena Russell recording. In a few minutes, we will in range to pick up any signals from the new solar system ahead. I am about to leave to join everyone else in Command Center."

John, Tony, Maya and Alan watched the big screen for any visual contact. The doors to Command Center opened, showing Helena walking in. "Anything yet?" Helena asked.

"No, nothing," John responded.

"Wait!" Sandra ssid.

The big screen was full of static. "What is it?" Tony asked.

"Something coming in," Sandra said.

A slight image, undefinable, started to clear up. "Sandra, everyone is anxious to see what it is, so put it on the communications posts," John said.

"All right. The picture was now crystal clear and an audible voice came through. The base was silent; everyone was listening.

Finally...

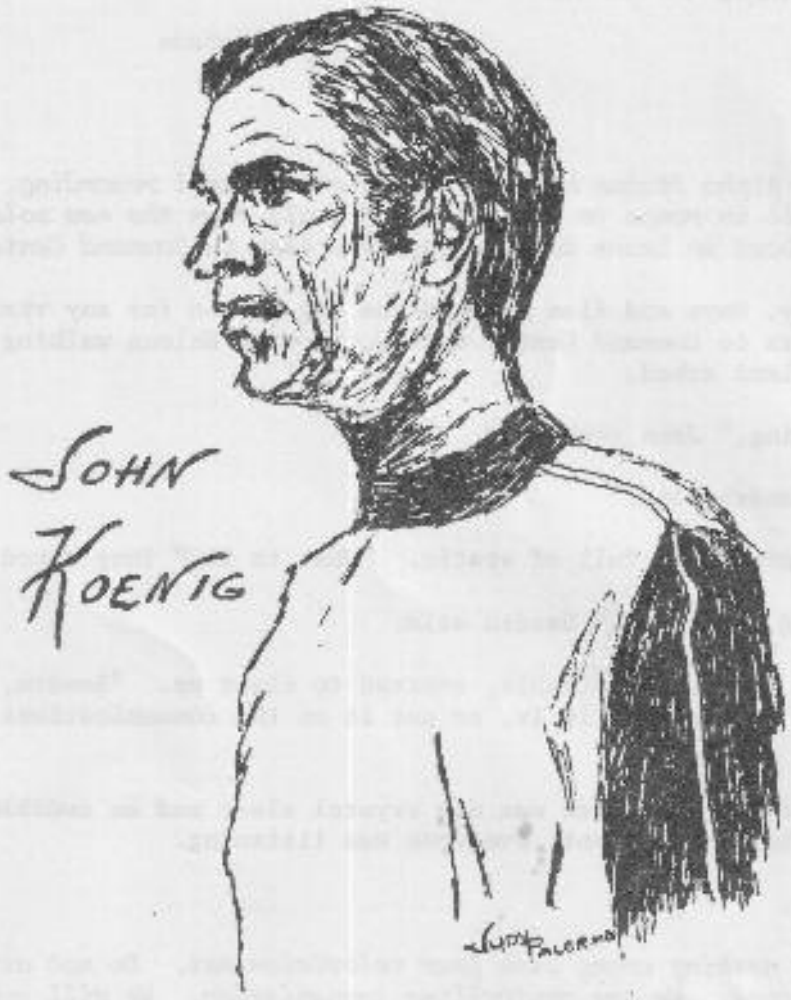
"There is nothing wrong with your television set. Do not attempt to adjust the picture. We are controlling transmission. We will control the horizontal. We will control the vertical. We can change the focus to a soft blur, or sharpen it to crystal clarity. For the next hour, sit quietly and we will control all that you see and hear. You are about to participate in a great adventure. You are about to experience the awe and mystery which reaches from the inner mind to: THE OUTER LIMITS.

The request made, the Alphans sat quietly and participated in an adventure with *The Outer Limits*.

STILL ANOTHER BAD, MERCIFULLY SHORT POEM

There once was a man named Balor
Who had a quite-kinky tailor;
But he made a mistake,
As his people did make,
And now he sure needs a jailor.

--Little Donny Ho-Ho



JACKIE

By Elizabeth R. Springer

You race down the corridors, shouting and laughing
A small boy among all these grown-ups
Right now you seem no older than your six years;
And yet at other times, you seem so much more than a child

But what else could be expected from you?
You live among so many other grown-ups.
The only child here.
We can't have other children here
Not now.
Not yet.

What is your destiny, Alpha Child?
Will you ever see the planet of your people?
Will you ever run in the sunlight, in green grass under blue skies?
Will there ever be other children for you to play with?

I watch your play now, Jackie
So happy and carefree
And as I do, I wonder, what is the destiny ahead of us all?

STARSHINE THOUGHTS

by Judy Moore

Moonbase Alpha eased itself into morning. One by one, the illumination grew in each paneled corridor to simulate morning. Alphans slipped quickly from slumber to wakefulness to begin another day. As others scurried to their stations, one drone in the working hive of Moonbase Alpha ignored the wake-up call and lazed in bed.

Helena Russell pushed back her covers, thinking how she missed the freshness of wind-dried sheets and the sunshine that warmed them to crispness. "Sunshine..." she thought and looked at the far wall of her suite where a window might fit nicely if it were an apartment or a house. There was something sad about the plexiglass inset; if it would only open and let a cool breeze come through, any breeze, for that matter.

Always at daybreak, the blonde woman longed for her home-planet, the breath of wind that ruffled her hair and the tiny rays of gold that shone through lace curtains and danced on the floor. She would not see sunshine again in her life time, and cursed herself silently for coming to Alpha. It had been an emotional reaction and one with which she had learned to live.

Helen thought deeper of what she would have done had she not selected medicine, but could think of nothing she had wanted to pursue more. The decision had not been wholly her own, and after giving the matter due thought, she realized the men had always influenced her life.

Her father's heart attack directed her to the medical field, her instructor drove her to finish her studies, and years ago, a husband guided her will to seek the stars.

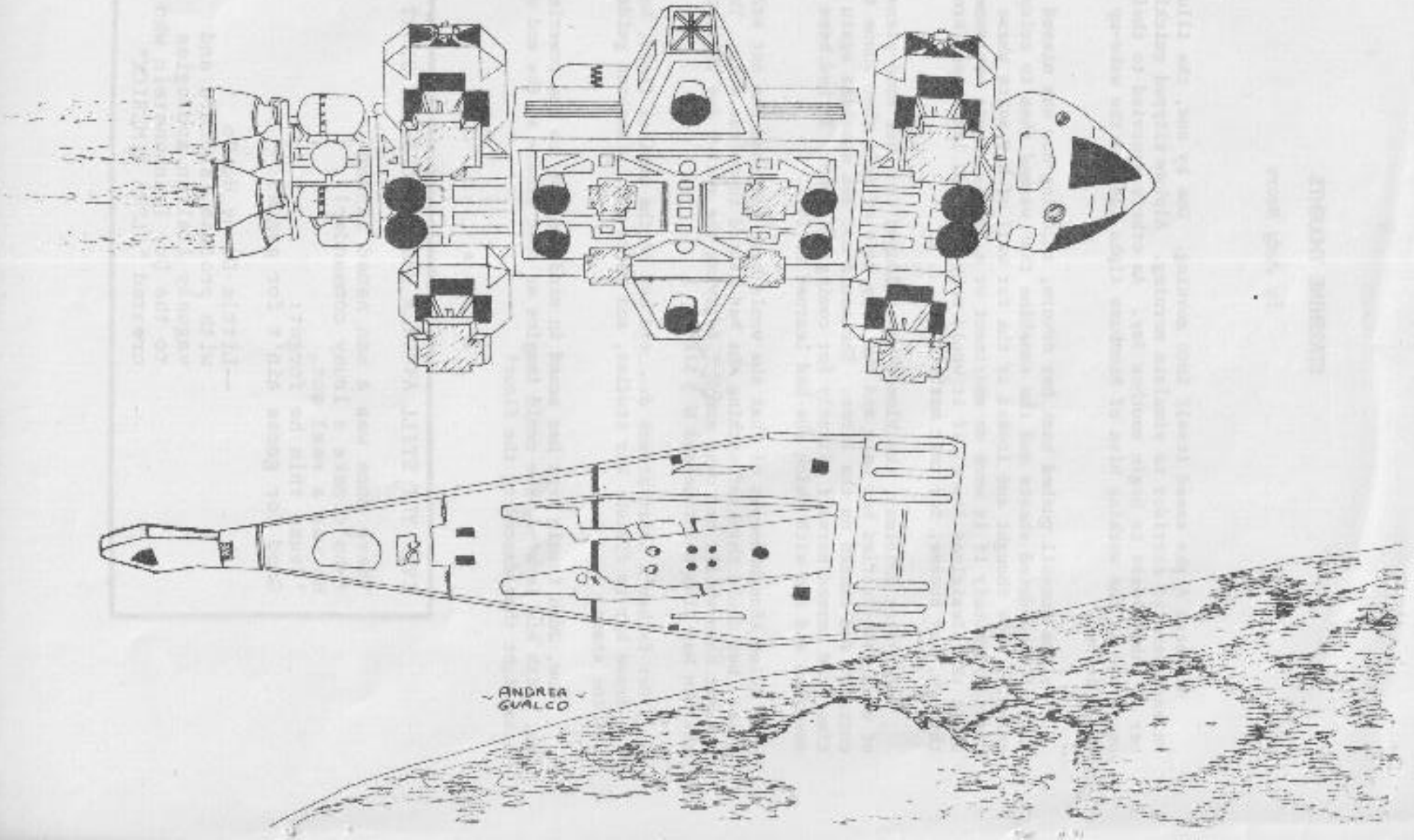
Now, John Koenig kept her sound in mind and body as the powerless moon sped on. With him in mind, she could imagine an open window at the end of her bed and star-light that danced on the floor!

* * * * *

EVEN YET STILL ANOTHER BAD, MERCIFULLY SHORT POEM

There once was a man named Sandor
(Who'd make a lousy commander!);
He was a real sot,
'Cause this he forgot:
Good for goose ain't for gander!

--Little Donny Ho-Ho
with profuse, sincere and
vaguely Italian apologies
to the Dr. Frankenstein who
created "ALPHA LIMERICK"


ANDREA
GUALCO