

# SPACE SQUID

Summer 2019

Issue 16  
Two Dollars



## SONNET 155

**William Shakespeare's Lost Sonnet Unearthed, and Stories from Other Notable Writers**

YOUR PUNY PLANET'S FINEST SCI-FI STORIES & HIJINX · CHILDISH YET NOT FOR CHILDREN

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**BLAME WHERE BLAME IS DUE**

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CONSULTATIONS AND EXEGESIS

**BUDGET CUTS**  
ANY TYPOS OR GOOFUPS



### **A Brief Note from Our Corporate Mascot**

Not to brag, but we've had our share of publishing coups. Writers and artists we have no right to publish. However, we're proud to say that we've outdone ourselves.

It's hard to believe, but in this issue we're publishing the lost sonnet of William Shakespeare. Our London office has located and verified sonnet 155, "My sky boat's heart is stoked by the sun." We present it here in its sublime entirety on page 19.

When we located the long-lost and decaying quarto that bore sonnet 155, our research team promptly contacted University of Texas literature professor Martin Kevorkian for his opinion. To his credit, Kevorkian rushed to London to inspect our find. What followed was an emotional and joyous celebration of this miraculous discovery and a renewed appreciation for the poetic abilities of the Bard of Avon.

"Knowing the reputation of *Space Squid*, I initially wanted to debunk 155," Kevorkian admits. "But when I saw the actual words on the page, and had a few hours to absorb them, I was convinced. It's all there, the perfect phrasing, the complete command of tone and word choice, the precision and power. The steampunk element is difficult to absorb, honestly, but there's no doubt in my mind that this is his work.

"To read 155 is to be reunited with an old, dear friend. Thank you, *Space Squid*, and thank you, William Shakespeare."

# THE SQUEAK

by Bill Whitcomb

I had this squeak in my shoe that really drove me insane.

At first, I didn't notice it much. Maybe I'd be walking down an echoing hallway or passing through some quiet area. Suddenly, I'd become aware of the squeak. It was a squelching, squishy sort of squeak, not overly loud, but subtly invasive. On carpet, it sometimes sounded as if the rug's fabric was soaked through with some viscous or unclean liquid, making me want to see if I needed to clean the bottom of my shoe.

After the first few months, I began to notice the squeak more and more frequently. It didn't so much worsen as achieve a new quality of omnipresence, so that the silences between each squeak could not be perceived in isolation. I bought a new pair of shoes, but somehow the squeak was able to transfer itself to the new shoe. I went back to the store and exchanged the shoes for another pair, but it made no difference. I tried loafers, cross-trainers, boots, moccasins, and wingtips, even sandals. Each time, the squeak lay dormant until I bought the new shoes and left the store.

Slowly, other people began associating me with the squeak. Its unwholesome rhythm, suggestive of deformity or crippling injury, could be heard well ahead of me as I walked. I suspected that people I knew heard the squeak as I approached and extinguished the lights in their houses or quickly turned the corner onto another street. People gestured as I passed. I could imagine them pointing me out as they identified other oddities of the neighborhood: "See, that's the woman with all those cats, the one who talks to the lawn ornaments, and... oh, look, there's that guy with the squeak." It was during this period that I began to spend as much time barefooted as possible.

I devised various plans to nullify or combat the squeak. I tried gluing foam to the bottom of my shoes, but it made me more likely to trip and the squeak sounded little different. If anything, the squeak sounded worse with the foam padding – it sounded more surreptitious. I began to realize that there was nothing I could do to my shoes that would prevent the squeak. I didn't need to change what I wore when I walked; I needed to change how I walked.

Studying the specialized steps and movements of the Japanese ninja, I developed a walk that did not produce the hated noise, but it was painful, so very painful. I persevered, but the strange and unnatural motions required by the special walk strangely affected the muscles and bones of my leg. Certain muscles became hyper-developed, bulging outward in new and alien configurations, while other muscles atrophied to the point of nearly vanishing. Some bones became more massive; others curved and thinned, bending to conform to the anatomy of some other species. It was as if the squeak was so firmly established that the vacuum left by its absence somehow communicated the squeak's malignant influence to my flesh.

I abandoned the special walk. My leg slowly returned to normal, but the squeak was more penetrating, more obscenely suggestive than ever. I became haunted by the fear that my leg was becoming habituated to the squeak. What if I began to need the squeak just to be able to walk? I finally resorted to crutches in an effort to avoid walking on the afflicted foot altogether. Perhaps I could somehow destroy the squeak by starving it.



I successfully avoided the squeak over the next several weeks, but my sleep began to suffer. I had a recurring dream where I could see myself sleeping, tossing fitfully. My view moved back and I saw the dreaded shoe sitting on the floor next to my bed. With glacial slowness, the toe of the shoe began to flex. The squeak, when it finally began, seemed to last forever. Many nights, I'd wake up and stare into the darkness, unable to return to sleep, looking for any signs of movement near the bed.

After nearly a month of increasing sleeplessness and anxiety, I lost control in the food court of a shopping mall and began stomping on the floor in a futile attempt to hurt the squeak. I was restrained before I injured myself. A link to a video of the event was posted to social media, however, and inspired a short-lived dance fad in Southeast Asia.

Shortly after being admitted for psychiatric observation, I began regular sessions of analysis and therapy. I was asked how I felt about the squeak, what I thought the squeak represented, and whether the squeak reminded me of any incidents from my childhood. The sessions were getting nowhere until one day the analyst realized that he also had the squeak. A syndrome was named after us. My case was widely publicized as the discovery of the first transmissible mental illness. Despite the professional acclaim, the analyst was overcome by revulsion for the squeak and committed suicide. The tape recordings of our sessions were confiscated by an unnamed government agency. Eventually, my insurance company ruled that my condition was not covered by the existing policy and I was released. Dismissed? Disenrolled?

I began my motion studies again. Inspired by my mental collapse at the shopping mall, I studied martial arts from around the world, concentrating on those forms that emphasized using the feet. I learned to extend my life-force, my chi, so that I could kick with ever greater power and precision. Finally, I sought out one of the rare masters of dim mak, the "Chinese Death Touch," to complete my training. As my mastery grew, I allowed myself to hope that my growing control over subtle energies might allow me to nullify the squeak or that a perfectly-timed blow might somehow catch the squeak by surprise. I retired to the hills and lived for months on roots and berries while I practiced my martial arts in preparation for the coming showdown.

Coming down from the hills, I was surprised to learn that my story had been made into a major motion picture. In the movie, my character is portrayed as a scientist tortured by the need to know the secrets of creation. Despite the warnings of my colleagues and considerable foreshadowing, I continue my research into realms best left unexplored, heedless of the danger. The squeak is created in a paroxysm of special effects. Repenting my meddling with nature, I try to destroy the squeak, but it is too late. My foot and shoe have merged into an unspeakable new being that has outgrown its symbiotic relationship with its host. I am consumed in a scene described by most film critics as "excessive." The foot/shoe creature breaks out of the lab and gratuitously kills a variety of unsympathetically-depicted morons. Finally, a broadly-muscled heroine in torn clothing shoots the creature to pieces. It comes back repeatedly, but is eventually obliterated... or is it? As the credits begin to roll down the screen, part of a shoelace

slithers into the underbrush to lick its wounds before the inevitable sequel. The film was mildly successful and received an Oscar nomination for best post-production sound effects.

My mastery of martial arts proved fruitless. I met the squeak in an abandoned industrial park outside of town. After a brief bow, I unleashed the full fury of my flashing feet. I split concrete sidewalks with a single stomp, but the squeak seemed unaffected. The squeak defeated me easily, openly displaying its contempt for my martial arts skills.

I was plunged into despair as the squeak began to receive offers of representation and late-night talk show appearances. Tabloids began reporting rumors that the squeak was buying luxury properties in several different countries. I attempted to capitalize on the media attention, but with little success. Television shots and newspaper photos typically showed closeups of my shoe. People now pointed at me constantly on the street, but in the way that bystanders point at the cars of passing celebrities: "Do you think the squeak might be in there?" In one magazine article, I was mentioned in passing as the squeak's "long-time acquaintance." I received incessant requests for money from my relatives who were convinced that the squeak was supporting me.

Unable to tolerate the squeak's growing fame, I faked my own death by rolling my car off a cliff into the ocean. The squeak's funeral and retrospectives of its career were televised worldwide. I grew a beard and went underground. I lived for a while as a lifeguard, but I made the mistake of wearing a pair of flip-flops to work one day and the squeak was recognized. I was arrested and charged with kidnapping the squeak. An outraged public demanded swift justice. After a brief trial, I was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Suddenly, the squeak was gone. I paced the exercise yard with tentative steps, each moment expecting to hear it, but there was nothing. Newspapers in the prison library occasionally reported the squeak's appearance at a party or a charity function with some celebrity date. The squeak now sat on the boards of several Fortune 500 corporations and was active in political fundraising. Commentators speculated on an eventual bid for a congressional seat or even the presidency.

I volunteered to work in the prison library, where I work to this day. I read everything I can get about sound and vibration, about the manufacture of shoes, and about the anatomy of feet. I study types of soil, stone, and pavement. I study fashion. I examine the history and philosophy of annoying noises. I delve deeply into the occult practices of binding and exorcism. I research civil law covering cases where a spouse or family member has supported another's career and later sues for a percentage of net worth. I am eligible for parole in twenty years and I must be ready. •

# SHISHKOSH

by Janet Garber

Originally published in a different form in Newtown Literary Journal

Three thousand habitable planets in the known universe, and I'm stuck on the only one without shishkosh. Now for most people this might not pose a problem, but I happen to hail from a leading family in the shishkosh culinary empire. I mean, we have



recipes that go back to the days of Putrid the Minor, the days when most of the ingredients for shishkosh en papillote grew wild.

When my Papov had me on his knee, he whispered variations for this dish in my baby ears till I grew so tired, he could carry my limp body over to the body cradle capsule and tuck me in. If I am ever tortured, out would pour all the secrets of each of the 523 dishes that can be made with raw, cooked, pureed, strained, braised, sautéed, broiled, fried and fricasseed shishkosh: the drikweed gathered before its time, the salting process for the kosh itself and so on. Though these days, this will hardly come up in routine conversations or in torture chambers here and abroad. Did I mention that Papov would save the reeds and administer light thrashings on my tender body for St. Machiav's birthday? Every part of those ingredients served multiple purposes.

Today, here on Eustachia, it's a different ballgame altogether. First of all, they don't eat anything they can cook. My guard in his white apron serves me Eustachian wafers at prescribed intervals. Though they come in different flavors, I've yet to distinguish any difference between them. Imagine a piece of hide from a zulkof, maybe a baby zulkof (if you're lucky), that you chew and chew and chew, turning it over in your mouth again and again, sucking down the juices, before finally—if you're a foreigner like me—spitting it out in sheer fatigue and boredom. One thing I must say for it: it does kill the appetite and stall the cramps for a while.

It does nothing though for the dreams haunting my daylight hours as well as nighttime attempts at sleep. How will I get my hands on some of the shishkosh ingredients? Surely, drikweed must grow on Eustachia too? It's part of the same solar system as my home planet, Earth. Kosh is possibly growing moss-like right now on those shrubs I glimpse through the small window at the top of my cell. If I could bribe the guard to gather some for me, then maybe I'd be in a position to prepare one of the 523 dishes.

I'm pretty sure I could count on the same results. I mean, why not? Eustachians are humanoid creatures, not as highly evolved as we are, but recognizable. The most noticeable differences: they've got this short stubby green spiky tail jutting out at the end of their tailbone. Also droosek ears that are huge and plastered flat against the sides of their heads. And I guess you could say an overall burnt look to their skin.

What works on us should work on them. But this problem, or rather its solution, occupies all my thoughts, as it has done these last eleven months, three weeks and two days.

How has the year gone by so quickly? Well, it hasn't. Almost every hour I've been mentally flayed alive, imagining the worst outcome possible. I've worked through



escape scenarios – the bars are too thick, the window too high, my guard doubtless as clever as I. I tried feigning illness, impending appendicitis, wild and woolly psychotic breaks. Nobody cared.

I have five days left before I must prove my worth to the judges of Eustachia. Then it's all over. I'm just nineteen! Shishkosh is my only hope, my only possible contribution to their society.

Did I mention Eustachians don't eat?

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Day Two

My guard, Kaydor, was feeling happy in his heart today for this morning he brought me Eustache wafers made from aborted zulkof fetuses. Sounds disgusting, right? But so much easier to chew. For me, these days, this represents haute cuisine.

I don't know much about Kaydor despite the fact that he has been ministering to my needs for the whole of my year-long term. Looking into his eyes, a trick from my hometown, I can read that he has two little bitty Eustachians at home and a wife even thinner and more dour than him. They all resemble long strips of bark after a long hard winter. Must be their diet. I can't imagine where they get any fat from unless there's a secret stash of kosh that they keep hidden from me.

As always I talk to Kaydor about my childhood and recite one or two of the 523 recipes. He sits on a chair outside my cell and I sit on one inside, facing him. He's my number one strategic tool and I can see that I've made some headway, though it's been slow going. Images of shishkosh decorate the heretofore barren walls of his being now. I see the inner Kaydor turning his gaze to admire them. The fish has taken the bait. (Oh, for some fish!)

"Most esteemed guard, I would like to recount today for you only Recipe #3, Shishkosh Supreme."

Kaydor nods. I am his first and only prisoner and he takes his assignment very seriously.

"You will see how your mouth waters as much as mine did back in the day. First you go into the fields and gather armfuls of fresh yellow drikweed. The women salt it, strip it, grate it, pound it into a pulp, then make a thick paste out of it by adding week-old water. The children are sent to gather green sticky kosh from under the branches of shrubs and little trees. The men mix the paste into the kosh and shape it into a huge round ball the size of... the pregnant belly of an orbek. By the way, orbek meat is to die for!"

Kaydor shakes his head.

"So anyway, the whole village rolls the ball through the fields and positions it somewhere it can catch the sun's rays. After a few days, my father determines it is ready. It's Shishkosh Time, he says. He cuts a door in the side of the ball and clears a passage. We file in, hand-in-hand, taking positions. At the signal, we open our mouths and bite into the soft spongy walls."

Here I mime opening my mouth as wide as I can and clamping down on my hand and pretending to chew. The memory is too much for me; I feel like I'm going to pass out. I read that Kaydor is displeased. He stands up and removes his chair. I'm alone with my thoughts once again. Tears slide down my face.

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### Day Three

Kaydor seems a bit put out with me. Why, I wonder. He's hardly overworked. Of course on that diet of theirs....

With so few days left, I decide to let him in on my secret, my ability to read him. "You know, Kaydor, though you have almost never spoken, I can tell you I know everything about you."

I tell him about his wife, once a firecracker; his kids, awkward, loud, and messy; and then go for the jugular: "She doesn't excite you any more, does she? So lean and dry and flaky. Every day (and night) it's the same old in-and-out. Nothing to look forward to. Ever?"

I've got his attention. "Now if I had something to work with, I could let you have some shishkosh. Did you ever wonder why there were 523 recipes for this delicacy? Or why my father and his father and grandfather before him were all lords? Or why I got the honor, at my age, of being shot into space to explore the known and not-so-known universe?"

I don't dare tell him we are running out of shishkosh ourselves and are desperately searching for more.

Kaydor comes closer and puts his hands around the bars of the cell. He is panting. I read the desperation, see the lolling tongue. Now we're getting somewhere.

But after a moment, he rattles the bars, then walks away.

Maybe I laid it on too thick?

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### Day Four

You know, I am so thin and weak and pale. If the judges spare me, will I survive even then? Why did I have to crash land here of all places? I won't even get a last meal.

Execution is by trampling. The judges and their clerks, all together twenty or thirty men, run back and forth over the prisoner, in this case, me, until all that is left are splinters. I will hear all my bones break, see all my organs rupture, all my fluids run out of me, resembling, I imagine, their only delicacy: stillborn baby zulkof. That's before they make it into a wafer.

I'm too despondent to try anything today. Anyway, Kaydor never reported to work this morning. I suck on an old wafer that I find sandwiched between the cot and the wall.

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### Day Five

Kaydor unlocks the cell, hoists me onto his back and carries me into a large open courtyard where he lays me down on a plank. The three judges sit in a circle around me and along the edges of the courtyard are the town's people, at least two hundred, all with the same weary woody look that Kaydor wears.

"You, Trespasser, have failed to prove your worth. By Eustachian law, we have given you a year to do so. All you have done is babble about your koskhish."

These bastards can't even get the name right. I see out of the corner of my eyes that they are lacing on their thick boots. But the one closest to me stops halfway and then the others stop too. They are looking at something beyond me.



A woman approaches. I recognize her—it's Kaydor's wife. She seems to be crying. The judges are stupefied. With both arms, she beckons to the crowd and soon there are many women standing with her.

Stepping forward, she hands something to the judges.

"Ahhhh... ohhhh," say the judges, passing the photo back and forth amongst themselves. The murmuring in the crowd grows louder.

The judges ignore Kaydor's wife, then try to wave her and the other women away. They continue to look at what she's given them, transfixed by the images therein.

The Chief Judge, the oldest and craggiest, giddily punches judge #2 in the arm. Number 2 laughs, Eustachian-style, a cross between a hiccup and a belch. The third judge—is it possible?—seems to be performing a kind of celebratory jig.

The women too seem happier. They've backed off and now are smiling through their tears.

I'm not close enough to read anyone. What could be happening? What's in that photo anyway? Are they still planning to trample me?

~ ~ ~

So that's how I got my reprieve. I have thirty days to comb the countryside with Kaydor, his wife and her friends, looking for drikweed and kosh. Assuming it is somewhere to be found here or on their sister planets, I will then concoct some monstrous batch of shishkosh and start feeding it to the women. If it takes, I'll be free to go... back to my high school sweetheart, Milot, with her luscious rounded arms and breasts and thighs and posterior, her flushed smiling countenance, her sweet breath. Kaydor's wife already looks better, just from the hope the future partaking of shishkosh engenders.

I had forgotten about that photo they took from me when I was captured. It was the one I took at the school picnic – Milot never even noticed. She was wearing that skimpy green gauzy sari and purple halter and she had yellow flowers in her dark hair. She looked good enough to eat.

Excuse me! I am a little obsessed with food these days. I know you understand.

Funny, I had forgotten about Milot. My family. My friends. Is she waiting for me?

A peach like her, hanging from a low branch, does not go unplucked. Or so we say where I come from. •

# THE GUNS

by Zella Christensen

Unlike many of the innovations introduced during the global rule of Plague and Mad Doll, the Future Projection Project was not an unmitigated success. The time machine it required, a yellow apparatus the size of a bumper car with a clear plastic bubble where the pilot sat, was constructed using the last of the planet's uranium. World peace seemed inevitable now that the various nations of the world were united under one flag, so there didn't seem to be any reason to save a little extra.

Agent Ted, the time machine pilot, had once been employed by a shadowy agency within the country formerly known as the USA but had enthusiastically supported Mad

Doll and Plague when it became clear which way the political wind was blowing. His assignment was simple: figure out what's going to happen and report back.

At least, it sounded simple.

Ted decided to jump ahead one month at a time, reporting back after each mission. Up through July, six months from when he was assigned to the project, things on Earth looked pretty normal, even boring. On Ted's seventh trip, to August, he noticed a strange whining sound as soon as the time machine started up. He ignored it and set a beach in Australia as the machine's destination. He'd never been to Australia before.

Once he arrived and climbed out of the time machine, Ted stood on the beach and stared into the night sky. The machine wasn't so precise that he could predict at what time of day he would arrive, and it looked like he had a few hours to wait before the sun came up. Then he would find a convenience store in the nearest town and buy a newspaper to skim for information. On his previous six trips, the headlines had all said things like **Long Live Our Glorious Rulers** and **Breaking News: Era of Peace and Plenty Continues Uninterrupted**. It was a boring job, but the pay was unbelievable, and Plague and Mad Doll hadn't asked him to "remove" anybody like his old bosses sometimes did. His new job also involved fewer smoky rooms, and his asthma hadn't given him trouble in months. Ted smiled at the thought of how far he'd come since the days of his old, morally questionable job working for a dangerously powerful government agency.

A bright flash in the sky caught his attention. Ted frowned and squinted upward until he picked out a strange light in the sky. The light resolved itself into three lights. Then five. Then fifteen. Forty. He lost count.

Ted's eyes widened as he realized what he was seeing: a fleet of massive, shining spaceships heading straight for Earth. He scrambled desperately for the notepad and pen in his pocket and muttered under his breath as he tried to get an accurate count of the approaching fleet. Binoculars! That's what he needed. He'd have to head back to January, grab a pair, and come back so he could report on the enemy as accurately as possible. How would Earth prepare for this invasion? What kind of weaponry and technology did their enemies have?

He remembered with a sinking heart that the planet's supply of uranium had been exhausted in making the time machine. How did you defend yourself from an interstellar military force without nuclear weapons?

Behind him, someone coughed. Ted jumped and whirled around, but there was nothing there but the time machine. It shuddered and coughed again, and a thin jet of steam shot from some internal mechanism. Clearly, something was wrong with Ted's ride home. He thought fast. If he got into the time machine and it broke down, who knew what would happen? Would he be catapulted into the far future or distant past? Stuck in some weird in-between dimension? Killed outright?

But if he didn't get back to January and bring news of the impending alien invasion to Plague and Mad Doll, humankind would be caught with its collective pants down. Ted hesitated. He looked back at the sky, now dotted with huge spaceships.

Ted took a deep breath and did something heroic. He got into the coughing, steaming, trembling time machine and set his course for home. The time machine went from trembling to shaking. Its coughs started to sound less like the effects of a lifetime of smoking and more like a lion hacking up a hairball. And then—

—he was in the lab, and Plague and Mad Doll were standing nearby. They rushed forward together, grabbed one of his arms each, and dragged him away from the time machine just before it gave a final hacking cough, as if it had finally cleared an annoying bit of phlegm, and vanished.



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There are a lot of theories about where the time machine went: into the far future, the prehistoric past, or another dimension. No one's figured it out yet, and with the world's supply of uranium exhausted, no one's been able to duplicate the experiment with a new time machine. At least for the time being, Earth's brief age of time travel was over.

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After hearing Ted's news, an ordinary world dictator might have started building up their global army in preparation for the impending disaster, but Plague and Mad Doll were no ordinary world dictators. Instead, they created a special unit with only one task: to save the world.

Plague's cousin Ian was assigned with heading up the squad, a promotion that had nothing to do with prior experience and everything to do with nepotism. Nineteen of the world's brainiest and brawniest were placed under his command.

For their first day on the job, these nineteen finest lined up in front of Ian, who paced up and down in front of them. His second-in-command, Floyd, paced behind him. He didn't have a lot of experience either.

"What do you think we need first?" Floyd asked.

The nineteen finest stared stoically ahead.

"Guns," Ian said.

What followed was the speediest and most massive buildup of armaments ever conducted for twenty-one people. Ian had requested guns (when Floyd asked how many and what kind, he said, "All of them"), and so the nineteen finest, plus Ian and Floyd, soon had a whole lot of guns. They arranged them in piles. The machine guns got their own pile, the pistols got another, and so did the carbines, tranquilizers, rifles, revolvers, and antique shotguns.

Ian and Floyd surveyed the piles. The nineteen finest stood in row behind them.

"That's a lot of guns," Floyd said.

Ian crossed his arms. "Not enough."

The up-building of armaments went on, but it involved more than a simple accumulation of guns (although there was plenty of that too). Ian was a visionary who knew that guns don't defeat alien invasions, people with guns do, and so he made sure his nineteen-member team had plenty of time and resources to prepare for the

impending battle. The training happened mostly in Plague's secret underground laboratory, into which was piped an unending stream of inspirational soundtracks from zero-to-hero films. Ten-Shot Tracy perfected her skill of holding and firing a pistol with each of her fingers simultaneously; Dr. Proctor, the token mad scientist on the team, was finally able to design her dream weapon, which launched poisonous sea urchins; Strong Mack spent his days benching assorted friends and furniture until he could lift the three-hundred-pound Huge Gun comfortably with one arm; and Floyd, who wanted a cool nickname, had his arms amputated at the elbow and replaced with tiny cannons and insisted on being called Guns-for-Arms Floyd from then on. The sharpshooters, strategists, and mechanics on the team honed their unique skills.

~\*~

By the time July drew to a close, the nineteen finest had built themselves into veritable gun-fighting machines, and anyone who so much as hummed the *Rocky* theme was likely to get punched. Guns-for-Arms Floyd had just about gotten his new limbs under control. A few days before the alien invasion occurred (or would occur—time travel makes tenses confusing), the nineteen finest (plus Guns-for-Arms Floyd) lined up in front of Ian one last time.

They were all aware of the gravity of their situation. If they couldn't defeat their alien foes, the lives of everyone they knew would be in danger. The fate of the world was in their hands (or tiny cannons, in Floyd's case).

Strong Mack looked down the line at the nineteen finest and Guns-for-Arms Floyd. "Maybe Plague and Mad Doll should have built up the army," he said.

Ten-Shot Tracy spun her guns around her fingers. "I'm sure they know what they're doing."

Strong Mack shrugged. It was hard to tell whether he was expressing skepticism or adjusting the weight of the Huge Gun he was holding.

Ian finished inspecting the nineteen finest and Guns-for-Arms Floyd and nodded in satisfaction. He led his team up through the lab's trapdoor and onto the public playground under which it was located. Each member of the team was carrying a box full of guns and ammo (you know, be prepared and all that), except for Guns-for-Arms Floyd, who was having trouble gripping his box. Strong Mack compensated by stacking Guns-for-Arms Floyd's box on top of his own. A private plane, which had torn up the lawn near the kiddie slide, waited to take the team and its guns to Australia, where Ted had seen the aliens descend.

Normally, the nineteen finest would probably have enjoyed getting an all-expenses-paid trip to Australia and staying in a five-star hotel on the beach, but knowing that soon a bunch of aliens were going to land on that beach made the whole thing less fun somehow. The nineteen finest spent their time sitting in front of the hotel, which they had reserved entirely for themselves, and cleaning the guns. They looked like grim old men from tacky cowboy movies. Guns-for-Arms Floyd looked grimmer than the others, but that was just because shaving had turned out to be challenging without hands, so he'd grown a long, shaggy beard which covered up his sunny smile.



As dusk fell after a day of grim gun-cleaning, a strange light appeared in the sky, which quickly resolved itself into the shape of a fleet of spaceships. Guns-for-Arms Floyd saw it from hotel window, and so did Ted the time traveler, who was standing on the beach, listening to the calming roar of the waves, and marveling at how far he'd come since the days of his old, morally questionable job working for a dangerously powerful government agency.

Dr. Proctor joined Guns-for-Arms Floyd at the window.

"What the hell is that?" she said. She was pointing at Ted and the time machine, not at the spaceships, which were still hard to make out.

At that moment, a tendril of smoke rose from the time machine. Ted climbed inside, and the whole thing vanished.

Guns-for-Arms Floyd pointed with one gun-arm at the lights in the sky. "Are those spaceships?"

They were definitely spaceships.

"Shit," Proctor said. "You'd better wake Ian up. I'll rally the troops." Like most people, Dr. Proctor had secretly always wanted to say "rally the troops," and even as she realized she was facing what might be the last night of her life, she took some satisfaction from being able to fulfill that dream.

As it turned out, Ian didn't need to be woken up. Like most of the team, he was too anxious to sleep. Guns-for-Arms Floyd took him to the window to see the approaching spaceships.

"Prepare the guns," Ian said.

The team was well-prepared already. The nineteen finest took their positions at windows, behind columns, and on balconies. Once they were in place, Ian and Guns-for-Arms Floyd went outside and stood on the beach near the hotel, courageously taking the most visible and vulnerable positions. Behind them, the metallic sounds of ammo rattling and guns being loaded faded to silence. The spaceships grew large in the night sky.

"Are you ready?" Ian said.

"Yeah, man." Guns-for-Arms Floyd tried to sound upbeat.

The spaceships hung in place. They had stopped moving.

"What are they doing?" Guns-for-Arms Floyd said.

Ian shook his head. Finally, one of the ships separated from the fleet and drifted down to land in the ocean. It was as big as a small town, and it landed very slowly and gently. After what seemed like a long time, a smaller craft detached itself from the ship in the ocean and skipped over the waves toward the beach. It was hard to tell, but it looked to Ian like it hovered just above the water instead of actually touching it. It stopped when it reached the beach. A door slid open on the side of the ship, and a small, furry creature stepped onto the sand. A big-eyed scaly animal was perched on what might have been its shoulder, and the furry creature was inspecting a large piece of paper in its four hands.

Ian and Guns-for-Arms Floyd waited tensely to see what the creature would do. It looked up from the paper it was holding and walked toward them.

"Hi there," the creature said. Its mouth (located in more or less the expected place) moved, but the sound came out of the creature on its shoulder. Ian guessed that the scaly creature was some kind of translator. "Can you point me toward Barnard's Star?"

Ian stared at the paper the creature was holding, then at the creature's face. "Barnard's Star?" he repeated.

"Yeah. We're on our way there to visit some friends, but we got a little turned around. Do you know the way?"

Ian glanced at Guns-for-Arms Floyd. The nineteen finest looked around at each other and shrugged.

"Uh, no, sorry," Ian said.

"That's alright," the creature said. "We'll just ask at the next planet."

It rolled up the paper it was carrying, tucked it under its arm, and walked back to its ship. It stepped inside, and the door closed behind it. The little vehicle skipped back across the water to the larger ship. After a pause, the enormous craft lifted slowly and silently into the sky, joining the mass of glowing shapes. As Guns-for-Arms Floyd and Ian watched, the whole fleet grew smaller and smaller until it faded out of sight. The nineteen finest drifted from their hiding places to stand by Floyd and Ian on the beach.

"Wait—that's it?" Dr. Proctor said. She hefted her gun uncertainly and noticed, for the first time, a funny smell coming from the barrel. She hadn't changed the urchins in awhile.

"I guess so," Ian said.

There was a moment of collective silence as the team stared down at their various weapons. Ten-Shot Tracy spoke first.

"Shit!" She pointed her ten pistols in the direction the fleet of spaceships had gone and fired until they were all empty. The rest of the team held their ears and winced at the noise. When Tracy was out of ammo, she let the guns slip from her fingers to the wet sand and took a number of deep, presumably calming breaths.

Strong Mack wept silently, cradling the Huge Gun in his arms like an alarmingly overweight infant. "You never got to kill an alien," he whispered to it. "Not even one."

Ian, the only unarmed person there, squinted up toward the sky, but the alien fleet was long out of sight.

Guns-for-Arms Floyd looked down at his gun-arms. "I think we might have made a mistake," he said. •

# THE ONE WHO ANSWERS THE DOOR

by *Christa Carmen*

Harley reached for Zombie-Elsa's long blonde braid and tugged, her smile impish.

"Quit it." Zombie-Elsa adjusted her wig in the mirror. "You're on Mom's bad side for your slutty costume, so don't push your luck."

"It's not slutty," Harley Quinn said, surveying her appearance. "It's true to the comic. You're just jealous I picked it first."

The undead snow queen ignored this. "Hurry up. We're supposed to meet them in ten minutes. It'll take longer just to walk there."

Zombie-Elsa grabbed the icicle purse her sister had helped her splatter with fake blood the night before. They did not stop to say goodbye to their mother. Eleven and thirteen were too old to ask permission to go trick-or-treating.

They opened the door on the biting autumn air. The sun had succumbed to its washed-out cousin, and the timing of its lunar phase meant a moon that hung low and large on the evening of All Hallows'.

The wind blew up tornadoes of leaves around their feet. Zombie-Elsa practiced her lumber, and giggled at her sister's attempts to execute a sexy slink. The sound was cut short by a scream.



A figure rushed Harley from the bushes. Harley gasped and jerked out of her attacker's reach, but the cape had already been lowered to reveal the grin beneath the eye mask.

"Gotcha!" Batgirl said. "You should have seen your face."

"There wasn't anything to see. You didn't scare me for shit," Harley countered.

"Just because you're wearing a disguise doesn't mean you can swear." The voice was Zombie-Elsa's, but the words were their mother's.

"Hush up," Harley said. "Hey, where's—?"

"Carrie, the pyrotechnic prom queen?" came a voice from the shadows. A thin girl bathed in blood stepped out onto the road. "Right here."

"Cool costume," Zombie-Elsa said.

"Thanks," Carrie replied. She pinched a roll of non-existent fat under her bloody prom dress. "I can't wait to eat oodles of candy. I've been dieting for weeks so I can cheat tonight. The houses in town better be ready to offer up the goods."

"We're skipping the houses in town tonight," Batgirl said.

"Why would we do that?" Harley asked.

"To trick-or-treat in Riverbend."

"What?" Zombie-Elsa squealed.

Harley held up her hand to silence her sister. She turned to Batgirl. "Why would we go to River's End?" she asked. Zombie-Elsa couldn't help but notice that she used the nickname the high school kids did when talking about the 'bend.

Batgirl shrugged. "The boys did it last year. They couldn't get Old Man Hitcher to open his door to them. Bobby dared us to try this Halloween. We can't let those losers show us up. Although, I shouldn't call Bobby a loser since you totally have a crush on him. Unless..." Batgirl paused for emphasis. "You're too scared to go yourself."

"I'm not scared." Harley twirled a pigtail, defiance written all over her face.

"Then what are we waiting for?" Batgirl began to walk in the direction of Riverbend. Harley quickly followed, and Carrie fell in line without comment. Zombie-Elsa hurried to catch up with her sister, bombarding Harley with frantic questions.

"Shhh," Harley hissed. "If you don't want to come, then go home."

Harley had done a skillful job applying Zombie-Elsa's makeup, and beneath the white grease paint and black-red lipstick, Zombie-Elsa's frown was a grimace. She trotted behind her sister, wishing she'd worn sneakers under the long dress rather than the uncomfortable shoes that'd come with the costume.

A dense mist thickened the air, clinging to the foils and fabrics of the girls' costumes. By the time they'd walked beneath the archway marking the entrance to Riverbend, Zombie-Elsa's teeth were chattering. Her cape seemed little more than condensation-dampened saran wrap that would no longer stick. Batgirl led them deep into the 'bend. Zombie-Elsa saw Harley trying not to look at the residents' dwellings as they passed.

They walked without speaking. The only sound in the mist-muted night came from the leaves rustling in the trees. Batgirl stopped in front of a row of stone abodes, and gestured at the first in the line. "This one. Miss Johnston's. Carrie, you knock first."

Carrie looked like someone had interrupted her prom queen acceptance speech with a cruel practical joke. Batgirl's glare goaded her into action. She rapped three times, her features betraying her apprehension.



Seconds passed. A cloud smothered the moon.

"Looks like nobody's home," Batgirl chirped. Her eyes darted between slits of a mask that made her look more cunning raccoon than daring superhero. "Elsa, you're next. Susannah Pratchett's place."

"It's Zombie-Elsa. And no."

"No?"

"I don't want to."

"You have to," Batgirl said. "Otherwise, your sister has to knock on two."

Zombie-Elsa saw Harley's pale face grow paler. Perhaps thirteen wasn't so grown-up after all.

"Fine," she said, approaching the intricately-patterned door. She knocked a timid rat-a-tat-tat on the looming edifice.

When no one answered, she breathed out a sigh she hadn't realized she'd been holding prisoner. *I wonder if these edifices hold other things prisoner.* She shook the thought from her head and gave Batgirl a triumphant look.

"My turn," Batgirl said, unimpressed. She strode up to the fortress at the top of a steep stone staircase and banged on the door loud enough to wake the dead.

They waited.

For one dread-filled moment, Zombie-Elsa thought she heard the grating sound of scraping stone. She tensed, fearing the worst.

The door remained closed.

Batgirl tried to hide her relief, but the fingers that clutched the straps of her bag were white-knuckled and shook ever-so-slightly.

Batgirl turned on Harley, hands on hips, regaining her earlier arrogance. "Last one," she said, moving down the dirt path. She pointed to the largest structure and grinned, a wide-mouthed, Jack-o-lantern grin. "There. Old Man Hitcher."

Everyone knew the story of how Old Man Hitcher had come by such a foreboding residence. According to the legend, the farmer had grown tired of providing for his family, and banished them from his property at the start of a bitter, snowy winter. Only one of the relatives survived, Hitcher's niece, and when the day finally came on which she could exact her revenge, she had her uncle removed from the farm and exiled to the stone house in Riverbend.

The dwelling was designed to keep in what shouldn't be allowed out. Granite vines crawled up the walls, and weatherworn pillars encircled the property like road signs for a neighborhood in the land of the dead. Fiendish angels held vigil at either side of the ivy-choked doorway, and granite vases of desiccated flowers bookended the leaf-littered stoop.

Zombie-Elsa watched as Harley pursed her lips and stepped forward. She wanted to stop her, wanted to take her sister's hand and run all the way home, locking the door behind them. There would be other dares, she wanted to tell her. Other boys to impress. But Zombie-Elsa could tell that Bobby was the furthest thing from Harley's mind as she approached that terrible, waiting door. It stretched up, yawning before her. Zombie-Elsa imagined vampiric teeth springing from its hinges to bite her sister's fingers.

Harley Quinn reached a trembling hand toward the door. She knocked once, twice, three times, on the stone panel. The echoes continued on, like the beating of the Tell-Tale Heart.

The crypt door swung open. •

# HOW TO TRAVEL WITH UMBRELLAS

by Line Henriksen

This story previously appeared in *Andromeda Spaceways*

Excuse me, but I couldn't help noticing that you've been standing here for quite some time now. It's the traffic lights, isn't it? They take forever to change.

You know, there *is* a faster way for a pedestrian such as yourself to travel through this city. One with no traffic lights, no cars, no accursed cyclists. Just you and the open road. Wide open road. *Missing* road, some might say, but not me. No, I'd never say something like that. Ridiculous thing to say, really. I'll be quiet and trouble you no more. I swear, you won't hear another word from me.

Not a word.

Not. A. Word.

Is that an umbrella there, under your arm? It is! What a coincidence. Who'd have thought. In light of this, I feel obligated to tell you a little more, for your own safety. Umbrellas are dangerous things after all. I mean, this city is crawling with them, and nobody seems to know how to use them properly! Can you believe it?

Humour me for a second, if you will, and open your umbrella.

Yes.

Like so.

What people seem to forget is that as soon as you open your umbrella and place it above your head – like you did just now, excellent – the sky shifts. For all you know, it may have gone completely. And for all I know, you may be right. This is not a problem, of course, it's just part of the umbrella experience. However, if you want to travel with umbrellas, you know, *really* travel, there are two more steps you'll have to take. Now listen. Shush. There it is...

Can you hear it? Yes, yes, it *is* thunder, but where from? The sky, you say? You are right of course, but remember: the sky has shifted. Listen again. Listen closely and



think about the sky. Not the one above. That sky may be lost for all you know, standing here, underneath your umbrella. No, I'm talking about the sky *below*.

Oh, the light has changed! Hurry, hurry, away we go.

Can you feel it? The rumble beneath your feet? This is a sky that umbrellas do not shield us from. Oh no. They embrace it. They open their wings to it, to the dark and the deep and the deep dark of an upside-down sky. This, my friend, is when you get a chance to hit the open road. As soon as you hear that thunder, you jump! It doesn't have to be much, just enough to lift both your feet off the ground, and when they land –

Well, that's the thing: they don't. Instead they'll be dangling over a boundless abyss of swirling thunder as the world rearranges itself around you, and your umbrella steers you towards your destination, quickly, quickly, and you'll find yourself home in no time, I swear! And this is all perfectly safe of course. Perfectly! As long as –

Well.

As long as you don't look down. You need to keep looking ahead, no matter what happens. And something may well happen, I won't lie – I'm no liar! – but it's quite preventable. You see, as the dark and the deep and the deep dark of the shifted sky is opened, some... things... may appear too, and not all of them are kind. Yes, let's go with that. They're not kind, and they'll notice that you're floating across the void, carried only by the fragile wings of your umbrella, and they'll want to –

How to put it.

They'll want to plunge you into the abyss! Yes. No! No no no, much too dramatic. But yes, that's what they'll want. And they'll soar up from beneath your feet, and they'll try to make you look down, so they grab you by the ankle and say something like "Are you waiting for someone?" or "Excuse me" or –

Wait wait, I know what you're thinking! I know! You think: "That's what this stranger said to me when we first met," but never fear, never fear, I'm not from the abyss.

Or am I?

Hahah, no no no, only kidding my friend, only kidding. Yes, I am. Anyway, they'll say something along the lines of "excuse me" or "beg your pardon" – most of them are if not kind then at least polite fiends, you see - and then, when you look down, your umbrella will collapse, and you'll no longer soar but fall straight into the dark and the deep and the deep dark, never to be seen again.

Mind that loose tile there.

Now, I wish I could tell you more, I really do, but I shouldn't. I shouldn't. Except, it appears the rumbling has grown louder. Do you feel the ground? No? Oh dear. Well, this is the trouble with travelling with umbrellas. One cannot always decide for oneself whether one wants to or not. Open your umbrella on a night of abyssal thunder, walk with a bit of a spring in your step or jump over a loose tile, and all of a sudden the shift is made. But at least now you'll get to travel fast and –

Don't look down! Have you not listened to a word I said? Now you must keep looking ahead, no matter what happens. Keep looking ahead, keep looking ahead! Can you feel them grabbing your ankles? Asking you to wait? Yes, yes, me too, but never fear for there is your house already, and you are home, alive and well! Now, remember, don't look down. Don't ever look down. What was that? When you'll be back on solid ground? Why, never, of course. You're travelling with umbrellas now! Never let it go, never look down, and you'll be moving so quickly that –

Oh, we've passed your house. Ah well, you can always return home later. Now there's just you and the wide open road. *Missing* road, some might say, perhaps even I.

One learns as long as one lives, right? And one lives long and lonely here, in the deep and the dark and the deep dark. Long and lonely indeed.

Anyway, I'd better get going. People to see, tricks to teach. And no no no, no need to thank me, my friend, I insist!

No need to thank me at all. •

# William Shakespeare's Lost Sonnet

We at *Space Squid* rarely have claim to any literary significance. However, thanks to years of research by our dedicated London office, we have unearthed a lost sonnet of the one and only William Shakespeare.

Shockingly, in this exquisite piece of work, Shakespeare finally admits that (as we had long theorized) he employed some kind of steampunk starcraft to travel to distant planets and grift work from their inhabitants in a primitive form of cultural imperialism. If he'd only known how to properly enslave cultures, he could have changed the world.

## **My sky boat's heart is stoked by the sun (sonnet 155)**

by William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

My sky boat's heart is stoked by the sun;  
In darkness she endures on aether fine;  
A swift and stealthy star-road she doth run.  
Come drought, she brings me verse from stranger climes,  
The myths of folk that England's never seen.  
Some say 'tis base to filch from poorer men,  
But gold is lead in these weird spheres serene,  
Where wealth is wrought with words and skillful pen.  
O hark! I sense her captain's silent call;  
Our human thirst for misery she'll slake.  
I'd fain forbear this shameful caterwaul,  
But guilt compels me witness for her sake.  
My love's full belly, ripe with tales of woe,  
Now glows aloft; soon we may start the show. •



THE EVIL KING RAYMOND HAS RAISED TAXES ON BREAD!

WE MUST STOP HIM! / Yes, let's lobby the legislature and... / NO! WE MUST SLAY HIM!

1 10  Go to 8	2 MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH CRUNCH!  Go to 8	3 Today: PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON BREAD TAX Tomorrow: C-HARDY BAKE SALE!!! Go to 33	4 YE OLDE MARKET? BREAD 7 → 29 ← Back 1	5 OK! Head on in, 2nd door on the left  Go to 33
6 So, you want to discuss the new tax proposal? Y 20 N 22	7 MENU Fish 'n' chips 2 Fried Shrooms 26 Back 4	8 You found a lighter in the chips.  Go to 4	9 The King will see you now. Go to 21	10 It's a haystack  Go to 16
11 Do you have business at the castle?  Go to 13	12 OK! That was a bad idea! Go to 14	13 Yes to... ... discuss bread tax 5 ...kill the king 12 Back 19	14 <b>The End</b>	15 DEATH TO YOU ALL!  Go to 35
16 Walk around... 18 Burn... 17 Back... 1	17 You need a lighter! Do you have one? Yes 32 No 16	18 CAN'T YOU READ! KEEP OFF THE GRASS Go to 16	19 Back 1 Talk 11 Slay 15	20 OK! Take a seat. Go to 31
21 Go to 22	22 Wait! There are voices...  Go to 23	23 ... the bread tax will help fund Go to 24	24 ... our schools program and free meals... Go to 25	25 AH HA! I HAVE YOU!  Go to 12
26 MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH AHIIIIHH I HATE SHROOMS! to 27	27 DIE!!!  Go to 12	28 How To Slay Big Fish Small Fish Go to 9	29 It now costs 60d for one loaf!  Go to 30	30 OUTRAGE! DEATH TO THE KING!  Go to 4
31 There's a magazine.  Go to 34	32 BURN BURN BURN HA HA HA  Go to 19	33 6 3 Leave 19	34 FISHING WEEKLY  Go to 28	35 You killed the guards  Go to 33

by Jack Peacock; read more at spacesquid.com



Squid swag? Here's what we have now: the Harrison Ford (\$10), black upcycle (\$6), and runner tees (\$10); and the massive e-book (\$3). More info at spacesquid.com