

*At Jinny O's ...*

“Are you sure you’re OK with this?” CedrosCM hesitated as Jinny unlocked the apartment door, opened it wide, and faced her guest.

“Don’t be silly, CM. Come in. I’ll put the kettle on. The computer’s in the kitchen as well.”

Jinny led the way, CedrosCM following like a puppy, taking in the compelling rear view.

“There, on the table.” Jinny pointed to the laptop with open lid. “No need to boot up, it’s always on. No telling when I’ll get a quick fizz up for my writing.”

“Your writing?” Cedros’ head was doing a back-and-forth glancing at the laptop, the table full of notebooks and papers, but roaming more keenly over Jinny’s unwriterly bod.

“You only see the bimbo me, CM, but I have to admit I’m pretty convincing, wouldn’t you say?”

“More than convincing, a full RW11, I’d say. CedrosCM’s eyes bulged at Jinny’s bimbo pose and turn.

“What’s RW11? Sounds like a bloody car part.”

“Raquel Welsh 11. Better than the original.”

“Why, thank you, CM. But let’s not go too far down that RW11 road for now. You are here because you are a writer, you need a computer, and you need to write; you’re the only one who knows I am a writer too.” Jinny took the kettle off the flame and poured the boiling water. Coffee. Instant. No cream. “You like it the way I do, I know. Black and

bitter.” Jinny set the cups on the table, pulled out a chair and sat down. “Sit,” she pointed Cedros to the chair in front of the computer.

“You’ve created quite an abyss in my mind, Jenny. Not sure I can bridge to this new you.”

“All in your mind, CM, all in your mind. And, for now, let’s keep it there. Now get to work. How many words do you need to send in?”

“Only a hundred, but it’s not the number that’s stopping me. It’s ... it’s ... *the power!*” Cedros peered into the screen and began to read what Jinny had left open there. *The air circled in on itself as his hands ...*

“Close it up, Cedros. Not for your eyes yet. Open a new page. This power—you mean this writing Compton back to life?”

“Well, that yes, but I want to get back at Truffington and Brabazoom. I’m sure they are behind the threats, but I don’t know how far the narrative power goes.” Cedros closed up Jinny’s file, noticed it was called *Satin Knights-Chapter 7*, and stared into a new blank page.

“What threats?”

“I gather that what I’ve written so far is not to their liking and is making trouble for them although how that can be I can’t fathom. So, they sent around a couple of thugs to rough me up and get me in line. Except what the line is, I have no idea.”

“But Compton is back to life, big as a naked Jay bird, so far as I could see, and hauled off to the clinker, so what’s the problem?” Jinny leaned forward, distracting Cedros with her bounty.

“But I didn’t write that, Jinny. How does something happen in my narrative that I

didn't write?" Cedros seemed to be asking the question of the twin oracles that were the focus of his stare.

"Nose up, Cedros. Look, this happens to me all the time. I write something one day and the next it's all gone horn-squabbled. You can't trust your characters to stay still. There's always only one answer." Jinny was tapping her finger on the table, her long nail making a clickety-clack sound.

"So, Miss Brainy RW11. What's the answer?"

"Write. Write. Write."

"Jinny, my mind's a blank, I want Compton out of Metro, but it's all just a bunch of mixed-up puzzle pieces in my brain. Can't even get started."

"Aliens." Jinny pointed to the blank screen.

"Aliens?" This time, CedrosCM looked straight into Jinny's eyes.

"Sure. Aliens move in on Metro and abduct Compton. Police are left frozen in position as if time-stopped. Then they break in on the full meeting of the Lottery Commission, all those clowns dressed in their full knightly regalia, and hold everyone in stopped motion while they do a full-body, all-orifice scan of Truffington and Brabazoom. That should get you started."

CedrosCM's smile set him in motion as his fingers went flying over the keyboard.

*CedrosCM conjures an invasion of aliens ...*

Jinny O stood up again, too agitated to sit. Instead, she hovered over CM like an *ambivalent angel*—helpful but cautious, watching him bang away at the keyboard. She wanted to make sure he was comfortable with her new computer, but, more importantly, she also wanted to make sure he wasn't going to peek at her work-in-progress for the *Satin Knights* series.

Then the banging abruptly stopped. CM had run smack into a writer's block. It sat smack in the middle of his highway, as it were, and he sat staring at the screen.

“Hey, Jinny?”

“Yeah, love?”

“How do you spell ‘alien’?”

“Oh, come on now, CM, do I have to get out my schoolgirl dictionary? It's A-L-I-E-N. Have you got that?”

“Thanks, love. Got it. Words is funny little buggers, ain't they, how they come and go as they please? It's like they have a regular bleedin' life of their own.”

The angel snorted and CM resumed typing. But this time he was no longer banging out the words; he was picking his way slowly, stopping often, like a barefoot beachcomber braving barnacles and beach glass.

“Nope, nope,” he exclaimed, “that doesn't work.” And he deleted everything he had written.

“What doesn't work?” asked Jinny O.

“You know—busting Compton out of Metro right away, busting up the meeting of

the Knights—all that stuff. I mean, don't get me wrong, love, it was a great idea. But why should I waste a space ship on getting old man Compton out of Metro today? Let him stew for a while. And I can always have the aliens come back and break up the meeting some other time, can't I? I mean, that's the thing, Jinny. *I've got time!* So, what I'm gonna do is, I'm gonna take this little space ship straight to Truffington's office and introduce him to my wee aliens."

"Sure, CM, you're the writer, right? Like, if I want one of my Satin Knights to slip out of his drawers I just bloody well do it. I write it and—boom!—the drawers are gone and there he stands, holdin' his knightly lance for m'lady!"

"Yeah, yeah. Maybe m'lady should hold his lance for him." CM snickered.

"Go on, CM, now you're showin' your filthy colors!"

"Just followin' your filthy lead, love! But anyway, back to the aliens—so, how many legs do you think they've got?"

"Oh, I would definitely think they've got, maybe, three legs apiece!"

"Yeah, that's swish, Jinny, love. Three legs it is."

CM thought for a while, twisting his lips, forming a scene in his head. Then he exclaimed, "I think I've got it. Yeah, this oughtta work! OK, Mr. Lord Your Highness Sir Truffington," he announced to the computer. "It's time for your little rendezvous with destiny."

And for several minutes, as Jinny fussed around the apartment, CM typed:

*Far away from London, its congestion and its worries, a space ship passing through the asteroid belt had fixed its navigational beacon on the Deathling Crown Lottery Narrative Section Headquarters. So precise was the signal that the aliens in charge of the craft were able to home in on the office of Sir Randall Truffington III. 'Get Truffington in the beam,' said the ship's captain, Commander Xhactu. "Yes, Xhactu!" replied the three-legged underling, twisting a big dial on the shiny console.*

*"Truffington*

*office coming into beam-focus right about—two space-time seconds passed—now!” The underling flipped a switch to lock the beam. Without delay the commander issued another order, to Insta-Locate the ship to just in front of Truffington’s office—”*

“Hey, Jinny, love, this is great stuff.” CM, bubbling, broke off writing for a moment. “Old Boy Truffington is about to get his comeuppance! About time, too! What shall we do to the old bastard?”

“Lemme read it, CM.”

“Wait, I ain’t done with it yet, love.”

“Just a quick look, CM.”

Reluctantly CM leaned to the side so Jinny O could scan the text on the screen.

“Oh, CM, you aren’t really going to submit this drivel, are you?”

“What do you mean, drivel? I mean, listen to this: ‘London, its congestion and its worries.’ Why, that’s right literary, sounds like somethin’ out of Dickens!” CedrosCM was pleased with his effort.

“Yeah, but what about ‘Insta-Locate’? What kind of space-ship jabber is that, CM? Sounds like the shock-absorber system on an old French Citroën. Insta-Locate! You should make it something spiffier.”

“Yeah? Like what?”

“How about—” Jinny thought for a moment. “How about this? Why can’t they *hyper-translate* the ship to Truffington’s office? You know, something technical, future-like.”

“Well, do you want to write it yourself then?”

“Oh, for Pete’s sake, CM, I’m just tryin’ to help! Or maybe you’d like to go rent a computer down at the YMCA?”

“Now, Jinny, come here, love. You’re not going to throw CM out on the street, are you? Not with the big surprise I got waitin’ for you, later on?”

“Surprise, eh? A big one? Well, CM, maybe you can use the computer just a teeny bit more.”

CM’s quick thinking narrowly averted a disaster. Having smoothed Jinny O’s ruffled feathers, he decided after all that the ship could indeed *hyper-translate* itself from the asteroid belt, and he complimented Jinny on her creative zest. In fact, he was anxious to explore the asteroid belt with her as well, maybe even *hyper-translate* her to the bedroom.

But he realized that his fantasies were getting dangerously energized, forming a gravitational tractor-beam that could yank him out of orbit. He *had* to get this section written soon. And it had to be good. So he resumed the task at hand.

*“Earthling Truffington! You must surrender! Come out and submit to our inspections and we will spare your building and everyone in it. If you resist, you will be vaporized!”*

CM chuckled and shifted in his chair, stretching his arms, flexing his fingers. Then he re-addressed himself to the computer.

*A little static marred this otherwise perfect message broadcast from the ship’s loudspeakers. The computers had done an admirable job of translating the message into English from the original Altoonian-Verba. The message had the desired effect. Within a few minutes Earthling Truffington came quivering out of the building, hands held above his head. He sniveled obsequiously. A boarding ramp was lowered to the ground and Truffington, the supercilious pig, walked miserably on board the gleaming spaceship. Once he was securely held within, several three-legged underlings in white robes began hooking him up to a hideous tangle of wires and tubes, and proceeded to probe, measure and scour every cavity in his miserable body.*

“There, that’s it!” CM rubbed his hands together. “THE END!” he cried. “Drop the

curtains, roll the credits, and I hope the bastard rots in hell!” He punched the Save button in a defiant gesture of finality.

CM was sweating from his exertion. He had borrowed Jinny’s dictionary to check spelling on some of the words—*obsequious*, *supercilious*—but still he exuded a rosy glow, like a mother flushed with admiration for her new-born baby.

“What do you think of that, love?”

Jinny O printed out the text and held the copy in her hands, eyebrows knitted into a frown.

“Well? Do you like it or not?” CM was fidgeting as he awaited Jinny O’s reaction.

“Hmmm. I don’t know, CM. I think you overdid the adverbs and adjectives in this one. Could be tightened up a bit.”

“OK, Jinny, love. Let’s tighten it up, but later, OK? Meantime, why don’t we go loosen up in the other room? Take a little ride in our own space ship. How about it, love? Put the paper down.”

But still Jinny O examined the printout. There was something disturbing about this particular narrative. It bothered her in a way she couldn’t quite put her finger on. So she shrugged it off, placed the document on top of the computer and followed eager CM into the bedroom. She could use a little relaxation herself ...

Meanwhile, in the anteroom to Truffington’s office, Owen Darby stood in an alcove in front of the wet bar, mixing a little pick-me-up drink for his boss, when he noticed a strange phenomenon. All the crystal glasses in the liquor cabinet were shaking and tinkling. He realized that a low-frequency vibration—sub-sonic, perhaps even tectonic—was emanating from every direction. The tinkling glasses themselves made a



high-frequency sound, of course, being made of fine crystal; they reminded Darby of the poetic term, *tintinnabulation*. Wasn't that Wordsworth? he thought. "Lines Written A Few Miles Above Tintinnabulation Abbey"? No, that wasn't it. *Oh, forget it*, he thought, and brushed it aside.

But the vibration only got stronger, and soon Owen felt his face, hands and feet going numb. He tried to move but couldn't. Then everything was suddenly very quiet and Owen was as if frozen in his chair. There was no one to hear whether the glasses were still tintinnabulating or not. If a tree falls in the forest—is it half-empty or half-full?

Under these strange circumstances, the door to Truffington's inner office opened and Sir Randall walked slowly out of the room, shuffling as if hypnotized. Everything seemed to have come to a stop, except for Lord Truffington's odd movements, the sub-sonic vibrations, and the shrill sound of a loudspeaker, still bleating outside. Though he seemed to be in a trance, these words reverberated in Truffington's befogged mind:

*"Submit ... or you will be vaporized."*

*Jinny O worries ...*

“So what’s this about a big one?”

Jinny’s question prompted a huge grin on Cedros’ face as he flailed about with the girlie stuff that had fallen off the hook on the back of Jinny’s bedroom door when he closed it with more force than necessary, an expression of his high energy at having sent off his narrative, and his focus now on his new prize: a live, living lady, no narration required.

He had succeeded in getting his shoe entangled in a fallen bra and his efforts to catch the dainties with his hands left him holding what he assumed must be panties, although the absence of much material left him wondering and smiling even more.

“You want to play with my undies or with me, Cedros? Are you being a buffoon on purpose?”

Cedros shook the bra off his shoe and tossed the panties in the air with a gesture he hoped would regain some command of the situation. “A buffoon at the service of your every whim, my sweet. Can’t blame a guy for a bit of awkwardness at his first time.”

“First time?” Jinny had her hands on her hips, shaking her head. “What do you mean, first time?”

“With you, of course, with you. Although I must admit to having been here many times before in my dreams and wishes.” Cedros began what he thought was his best move, a slow jig toward Jinny O, a kick this way, arms up-thrust that way, when he was stopped altogether by her upturned palms.

“Whoa, boy. Mind you, I haven’t forgotten about the big one. A girl’s got her own

dreams, you know. But I'm taking you at your word that you're going to serve my every whim. So, like it or not, here's my first whim. Go out to the kitchen and fetch that page of what you sent in to the lottery. Something about it is buggin' me and we ain't going to be playing no games until I get it figured out."

"But—"

"No butts, twats, or other treats, Cedros, until I'm satisfied I know what's making my spine go all prickly. Go get it while I make myself comfortable."

By the time Cedros was back with page in hand, Jinny had shed her jeans and blouse, and everything else; wrapped herself in a fleecy-trimmed nearly see-through short robe and ensconced herself amongst the pillows of her king-sized bed.

CedrosCM stood gaping.

"Let me have it." Jinny's command seemed to confuse Cedros as his eyes took in more and more of the bounty before him.

"The page, Cedros, the page. Where the hell's your mind?" Cedros' paralysis finally broken, he brought the page to Jinny and she took it with a snap, and began to read.

"My second whim, Cedros, is for you to relax here on the bed while I work on this. Whatever that means to you."

Cedros' befuddlement was complete. He sat on the bed, reached down, took off his shoes. Lifting one leg partially onto the bed and the other left planted on the floor, he looked at his prize as she was reading away. There was an unmistakable frown on Jinny's face.

"I know it's not the greatest prose," said Cedros. "Maybe it's even drivel, as you said. But how the bloody hell can you be so into 'too many adverbs and adjectives' at a

time like this? You were never like this in my dream.”

Jinny O was paying no attention to Cedros. She was reading his narrative *sotto voce*—slow and deliberate, the frown deepening with each sentence.

Surprising himself, Cedros snatched the page from Jinny’s clutch and shouted: “That’s enough. What the fuck’s the matter with you? I’m here, you’re here. Let’s not be readin’ and screwing around with grammar. Let’s just be screwing plain and simple.” At this, Cedros stood up and began undoing his belt and emitting what could only be taken as a growl.

“You’re a pantser, Cedros. That’s the problem.” Jinny was undaunted by Cedros’ show of male prowess, although nothing Jinny O would consider male prowess was yet in evidence.

“What the hell is a pantser, Jinny? Cedros immediately fell back into a pit of befuddlement, his efforts at trouser removal brought to a halt.

“A pantser is not a plotter, Cedros. A pantser just writes whatever comes to mind. The plotter plots, outlines, knows the story arc, knows where the hell the story is going even before a word gets on the page. That’s what’s got my skin to crawling. You ain’t got no plot, no story, you’re just writing, without any threads backward or forward. It’s going to be trouble, Cedros. I can tell.”