

THE COMMON ODDITIES

SPECULATIVE FICTION SIDESHOW

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We Have a Sale Going On

by Lelia Rose Foreman

Even if the world was going crazy, I still wanted to get to work on time. Work hours in an office-supply store might seem insignificant compared to worldwide crisis and chaos, but I'm an insignificant man, and until the huge alien space ship finally rained ruin upon the earth, I needed my paycheck.

Sofia kissed me so desperately I briefly considered being late by fifteen or twenty minutes, but, house payments, you know? Even with the possibility of the world ending tonight, neither of us wanted to become homeless before we became worldless. So we released each other and Sofia double locked the townhouse door behind me.

Three blocks later, Al accosted me, waving a sheaf of papers he had printed. He used a bold, readable font this time, size 24, *The End Is Nigh! FIGHT!!!!* with alternating black and red ink. I supposed the End was Nigh, if you considered two-hundred miles straight up nigh. Well, or two miles over on our destroyed baseball field if you considered the alien lander part of the End.

"We need to fight them," said Al. "We need to hack into their computers and crash them. Blow them up. Join me in the fight."

I said, "Could you use more ink? Some more paper? We're running a sale on both tomorrow, but I could give you the sale price today."

"We should nuke them. Our government is doing nothing!" Al shouted. "Nothing!"

Well, not exactly nothing. Close to nothing, though I'm sure there was a lot going on nobody would tell an insignificant man who only aspired to be a secure cog and to have a steady paycheck. I wanted to afford a car some day, if we had any days left.

Al waved the posters in my face, creating a welcome breeze on a morning already heating up. "Why aren't you joining me?"

I had no idea why Al thought I could change events. “You know, if you used our printers, you could make larger posters. I’d let you use my employee discount.”

Al growled in frustration and stalked away.

Al was a good repeat customer, but I wished the military would let him pass the cordon. I understood the reasoning, I did. No place on earth was safe, and panicky evacuations killed people, so the military had decreed that we would stay put and stay cool. I’m sure our coolness was impressing the baffling aliens everyone was calling “furries”. Me, I would have called them giant, freaking ferrets. I don’t like little ferrets, and the furries’ behavior was not endearing me to giant, freaking ferrets.

Sofia was begging me every night to sneak out of the city. I would have loved to use up some of my vacation days, but we discovered martial law pre-empted vacations. Besides, things were busy at work with the influx of interpreters, ambassadors, politicians, scientists, technicians, soldiers, and assorted camp followers, every one of them needing office supplies to communicate, file reports, and copy other people’s reports.

Two soldiers with guns, which I swear weighed more than me, sauntered by.

“Hi, guys,” I said. “You know, my store can blow up your photographs of the lander to poster size.”

The soldier labeled Benetelli laughed. “Not happening.”

The soldier labeled Scott said, “I’d be careful about throwing around the word ‘blow-up’.”

Benetelli said, “That’s two words.”

“If you hyphenate blow-up, it’s one word.”

“But he didn’t hyphenate blow up.”

I decided to interrupt. I’d seen bored soldiers come to blows over smaller arguments. “Have the aliens come out with any technology yet?”

“Like we’d know,” said Benetelli.

“Shut up,” said Scott.

“We’re supposed to be following one,” said Benetelli, “but the furry climbed a wall and we lost it.”

“Shut up,” said Scott.

Benetelli shifted the cannon on his back. “What kind of invasion strategy calls for furies to annoy the populace?”

“What part of top-secret don’t you understand, Benetelli?” asked Scott.

“The part where I can read what every furry is doing on FaceFace.”

I couldn’t see my bus yet, so I said, “I was zapped last week.”

The soldier labeled Scott shrugged his shoulders in irritation. “Yeah, yeah, yeah, we’ve all had our turn. We should have evacuated this city.”

Actually, I agreed with Scott. We could have been put in the next city’s school auditoriums and been fed three meals a day at government expense. I would have loved to see a soldier with a big gun roust my couch-surfing brother-in-law out of my living room. Then I could have been laughing at the top-secret images broadcast every day of the lander door opening and closing and furies coming and going while rings of soldiers and tanks guarded scientists and aliens from provoking incidents. Then I could have been the one chortling as random soldiers were zapped and fell to the ground in non-provoking ways. Yeah, I agreed with Scott. I would have happily devoted my vacation days to leaving. And my sick days. I would have even considered a transfer.

But we were all staying cool, and all of us knew the drill. Observe Only. Of course, what we observed baffled all of us.

“Don’t you have somewhere to be?” asked Scott.

I did: the bus stop half a block away. Then I noticed the people in passing cars pointing in my direction. Oh no. No, no, no, no, no, no. I said aloud, “I already did this last week.”

The soldiers stepped back.

A warm nose touched my calf. *ZAP*. When I opened my eyes I was rolling on the ground, clawing at my chest, commanding my heart to beat. My heart restarted.

As I forced my shaking body to stand, I noticed three people filming this non-provoking incident with their phones. My boss would accept my excuse when he saw this on FaceFace.

As I stood, so did the furry, so we could gaze into each other’s eyes.

The furry said, “Take me to your leader.”

I looked to the soldiers for guidance, but they took another step back. Cowards.

Last week, the furry had said, “Klaatu barada nikto,” which had confused me so much that I ended up zapped three times before the giant, freaking ferret left me to go harass somebody else. The furry had pooped on my hand, too, which had led to a lot more observation than I ever wanted: scrubbing, scraping, blood tests, and quarantine overnight on a hard cot. This furry would zap me again if I didn’t move. There was no point in taking the furry to a general or the President. Over the last three weeks, since the alien lander had touched down and burned up our baseball field, seven furries had been led to the President. Every furry had zapped the person who had done the leading, and then wandered away aimlessly. I assumed the President went somewhere purposefully. I walked, hoping I could find a purposeful place to go.

The furry dropped to all fours and followed. I waited for the low, breathy “Heh heh heh. Snort!”

The furry said, “Heh heh heh. Snew!” spraying the back of my pants with furry snot. That was new. I would have to donate my pants to science, my best pair.

The soldiers followed far behind, Benetelli filming me with his phone, and Scott glowering. Why was he glowering? He didn’t need to lead a furry to a leader.

What were the furries looking for? I would have happily given them some clothes or the key to the city. They didn’t carry any weapons we could discern, beyond their ability to zap people with an electrical jolt that sometimes stopped hearts. What was the purpose of their cryptic statements? Of the two dozen identified furries, thirteen announced, “Klaatu barada nikto,” everywhere they went; five said, “Take me to your leader,” five more stated, “Nanoo nanoo,” and one said, “The only good cat is a stir-fried cat.” Every statement was followed by “Heh heh heh. Snort!”

I turned onto the sidewalk to my townhouse, still seeking inspiration. Right on time, Sofia stepped out onto the stoop.

Her eyes widened. “Jacob? What are you doing here?”

The giant ferret behind me stood up.

“Oh.”

I gestured toward the furry, “He told me—”

The alien supplied, “Take me to your leader. Heh heh heh. Snort!”

“—yeah, that. You’re it, babe. My leader.”

Her glare could have burnt a hole in my face. “I don’t have time for this nonsense. Get out of my way.” Her heels clacked down the cement steps. “Jacob, make sure that thing doesn’t raid our refrigerator.”

“Right,” I muttered. “We have to save that food for your brother.” I don’t know why she thought I could safeguard the refrigerator. Every house across the street had been raided. All you had to do was show the government your grocery receipts, and you were reimbursed. The government even paid to have furry poop cleaned out of your carpets.

ZAP.

“Aaurgh!” I was on the ground again. Soldier Scott was laughing. I bet millions of FaceFacers were laughing, too. I watched my wife’s retreating back. You don’t have time for this, and I do? Yeah, your job at a nail salon is so much more important than mine. She had cried the first time I was zapped. Didn’t she love me anymore?

A warm nose nuzzled my ear. “Heh heh heh. Snew!”

Gah! How much ear was I going to have left after the scientists were done? Benetelli held back a scientist holding a specimen bag.

The furry watched Sofia speed walking away. Then the alien loped after her.

“Stop!” I wheezed.

Sofia must have heard the skitter of furry claws behind her. She spun, pulled out of her purse a highly-illegal taser, and aimed at the furry.

At least three things happened simultaneously. I lurched to my feet and staggered over to place myself between Sofia and the soldiers who leveled their massive guns at her as Sofia screamed, “You think you can just waltz into town and disrupt our lives? You think you can eat our food and soil our carpets and assault us, and we’re just going to pat your fuzzy little heads?”

Except for the assault part, that’s what I thought couch-surfer had done.

“You’re wrong!” she screamed. “I’VE HAD IT WITH YOU ALIENS!” She shot the furry.

I looked away from the guns; I did not want to see the bullets before they tore us to pieces.

The furry stood, purring, gently rubbing his chest around the taser darts, his nose pointed straight to the sky, his eyes shut.

The charge to the taser ran out. Sofia dropped her highly-illegal gun.

The furry sighed. He dropped to all four feet and rubbed his head against Sofia's legs. He carefully bit the cuff of Sofia's pants and tugged in the direction of the baseball field where the lone lander had settled.

Sofia tottered a step. I waited for her tears that followed her every loss of control.

The furry paused to whistle high and loud. Whistles in response rose over the noise of traffic and the sound of fainting people thudding on the sidewalk. The whistles were a new sound. Was this alien speech?

The soldiers lowered their weapons. Benetelli said, "She didn't provoke—"

"Shut up," Scott said.

Drones clustered overhead.

I wondered if now would be a good time to mention the ink and paper sale.

The furry pulled on Sofia's pants again. Guns, drones, scientists, a growing number of people with phones, and I followed my now whimpering wife.

An open-bed military truck pulled up beside us. Our furry promptly forgot about Sofia and bounded into the truck. So did another half dozen furies, appearing like children in the wake of an ice-cream truck. The soldiers helped us onto the truck and joined us on the slat benches.

Benetelli sat beside me. "Don't mind Vera," he said, stroking the weapon that was bruising my thigh. I didn't mind, though I did mind the furry sniffing my crotch. "Nanoo nanoo," it said. As we trundled down the street with screaming police cars changing the traffic lights for us, the other furies bounced around the bed and hung their heads over the side.

We pulled into our baseball field. Our followers, including the civilian drones, had been stopped a mile back by military people and attack drones. Now we were surrounded by big people holding big guns, not so big people holding hundreds of instruments, and infinite-generation military drones. The soldiers helped us out of the truck. The mob of furies bounced out and shoved Sofia toward the lander and its door opened with the whine of servos.

Sofia turned and pleaded, "Jacob, I can't."

She had won my heart with those words five years ago when she couldn't reach the box of binders. I scanned the crowd and shouted, "Anybody have a taser I can use?"

Every woman poked through her purse, and in thirty seconds a score of highly-illegal tasers had been tossed at my feet. I scooped one up and shot the closest nanoo nanoo furry.

All the furies crowded around the nanoo nanoo furry and pressed their noses against his chest. When the charge ran out, the furies abandoned Sofia and pushed me across the charred grass and up the ramp to the open door. None of our instruments had been able to penetrate the skin of the lander. No one in the lander or the armada above had answered our calls on all frequencies. I would be the first human to see inside the lander. I connected to FaceFace to share, but my phone blinked out the second I crossed the threshold.

Behind me Sofia sobbed, hundreds of instruments whirred, and hundreds of guns cocked.

The lander door was huge, which made sense if you were moving equipment in and out, but every door in the drab hallway was also twelve feet tall. Why did five-and-a-half-foot-tall furies need such tall doors? I tried to take a picture of the markings on each door as the furies hurried me along. They stopped in front of a door that looked like all the others. A furry rose and tapped a discolored spot on the wall. The wheel in the middle of the door spun, and the door swung open.

I fell to my knees. The smell! My eyes watered. I could taste the reeking air. The furies zapped each other's noses. A deep, rumbling voice said, "It's about time. What took you so long?"

Before I could be zapped by a furry, I crawled into a room of mammoth proportions. I nearly lost my breakfast when I realized all the splatters on the walls and floor were dried organic matter, reeking organic matter. The voice that vibrated in my chest said, "Would you please press the red button above your head? I can't reach it." I held my breath. The voice said, "It's not a self-destruct button. That button is over here and green."

I pressed the red button. Openings in the wall appeared at floor level and robotic boxes on bristles hustled out and scrubbed at the organic splatters.

"Now the blue button, if you would." Standing on tiptoe, I pressed the blue button in a rank of white and yellow buttons and tiny screens dancing with indecipherable data. Part of the wall slid up. A twelve-foot-long alien lay on a smeared cot in the recess of the wall. The cot slid out, and wires and tubes disengaged from the alien, slurping into the wall. He fumbled with smooth,

attenuated fingers at the edge of the cot, which then raised his head. Sagging eyes above a cluster of flaccid tentacles regarded me. A uniform hung like sheets from his bony frame.

The mob of furries leaped onto the cot and twisted on his wasted legs. Electrical sparks danced from their noses to his palms. The alien zapped the furries on their stomachs with his fingers, and the furries purred. “Ahhh,” he buzzed. “I’ve missed you guys.”

I raised my phone to take a picture. The alien reached out, snatched the phone from my hand, and zapped the instrument.

He released the smoking phone to clatter on the floor. I masked my irritation. I had really wanted that selfie.

One of the bristle boxes bumped my foot and I moved aside. The floor gleamed where the box had been. The stench was diminishing but the smell of ozone was increasing as the furries enthusiastically zapped each other and the alien. I squeaked, “Furries are your pets?”

The alien stroked one of the ‘Take me to your leader’ furries. “These are lab animals for testing habitability of planets. I made them my pets. The closest human pet analog is a parrot.”

“We’ve been trying to negotiate with parrots?” I squeaked like a lab rat.

“Heh heh heh. Snort! Clever parrots who can figure out doors and how to scrounge for food when their master is too sick to feed them. They are also trained to bring back indigenous intelligent life.”

I was indigenous intelligent life, of a sort. “And then what?”

“Oh, probing, this and that. Dissection.”

I swayed.

“Sit and put your head between your knees.”

I collapsed onto a box, and then fell over when the bristle-box spurted away to scrub another splatter. I braced myself with my hands on the floor and stared up at him. “Why won’t you talk to us? What do you want?”

The alien’s rake-tine fingers combed through its floppy tentacles as he said wearily, “What would be the point of talking to you, humans collectively, or you, personally? What we wanted was your planet. My job was to find the most efficient way to rid the planet of humans.”

Again I nearly added to the organic splatters on the floor.

“Have you seen the movie War of the Worlds?”

I swallowed convulsively and squeaked in an even higher voice, like a mouse, “Which version?”

“I like the one with Tom Cruise. Heh heh heh. Snort! A death ray that evaporates humans but not their clothes. Heh heh heh. I argued for keeping some of you around for the amusement you would give us.”

“Did you win the argument?”

He rubbed the chin of a nanoo nanoo furry. More sparks crackled. “Do you remember what killed the invaders?”

I suddenly understood the splatters. “The flu is killing you?”

“Not the flu. A different virus. I am not telling you which virus. We do not want you to chase us down with viral bombs.”

“So you’ve decided not to invade the earth after all?”

“We’ve decided to get as far away from you as the galaxy will allow. From an insignificant sample size of two, we have determined the virus has an infectious rate of one hundred percent with a mortality rate of fifty percent. My partner died. Understandably, the generals are not interested in increasing the sample size. I shall return and be frozen. I believe I shall be carried around for research purposes. I do not expect that I shall ever be thawed.”

I stammered, “Y-you could stay with us.”

“I could stay with you as the only one of my kind for the rest of my sickly life while your scientists reverse-engineer the lander and learn how to wipe us out. No. The only reason I haven’t self-destructed is that I don’t want to kill my pets. Will you promise to take care of my parrots?”

Or see my city blown up? “I promise to take care of them with all my heart. I swear.” I still had a question, an insignificant question, but I had to know. “Why my city? What did we ever do to deserve having our baseball field burned up?”

His face tentacles quivered. “By all the gods of all the universes, you people have cats. What do you think happened? While I was inputting the coordinates, one of my parrots jumped on my hand. Now, go. And tell everybody to back up a mile.”

I thought of the charred sticks that used to be stands.

The alien said something in an alien language and the parrots galloped off. I followed after them, shouting, “Back off! Back off! Go go go!” The generals believed me, and we all backed off and lived to watch the lander leave. Telescopes followed the departure of the armada.

So here I am, a year later. The furrries were renamed parrot ferrets and parceled out among jealous great nations where their caretakers use shock sticks to keep the parrot ferrets happy. I called the aliens squidheads, but for some reason they were given the unpronounceable name of Cthulhus. Worse, our baseball team became the Cthulhus. The mascot is enough to give kids nightmares.

I was never able to monetize the vids of me, but Sofia got part share in the bumper sticker: I’VE HAD IT WITH YOU ALIENS! After I was finally freed by the military, my interview with a tabloid paid for our townhome, a car, and even a small condo I moved couch surfer into before I changed my locks. I still work because there are always taxes and maintenance. I got a raise because business is good. I will only put my signature on receipts for purchases in my store.

Can I interest you in a printer?

Author Bio

Lelia Rose Foreman has raised and released five children. She now writes science fiction.

The Coat

by Chris Bullard

After the waitress with green hair had served our lunches, Arthur directed my attention to the coat he was wearing. In appearance it was a standard looking, khaki-colored, below the knee trench coat with the straps across the shoulder. It differed from the usual model only in that the buttons down the front weren't made of plastic, but had a metallic sheen. However, Arthur was convinced that the coat was something more than this.

"I believe that it's some sort of survival suit for an alien life form." Arthur made this declaration with the assurance of one who has arrived at a brilliant and ingenuous solution to a previously intractable problem. Everything about his manner conveyed a sense of triumph.

I answered him with a less than polite, "That's ridiculous," before continuing my examination of something reputed to be eggplant that sat on a dish mere inches from my defenseless taste buds. Now I had another reason to regret agreeing to join Arthur at his favorite vegan restaurant after we had run into each other at the library.

I met Arthur when we both taught in the English department at the local university. Arthur handled nineteenth century British literature and I was a specialist in British literature of the twentieth century. As our courses dovetailed, we met periodically to make sure our curricula didn't overlap.

Of course, we also discussed our respective views on British literature. I always enjoyed our conversations although I disagreed with his assertion that most of the poetry written in the last half of the twentieth century was rubbish. Arthur, in turn, wasn't happy with me for claiming that Coleridge was a greater poet than Wordsworth. I wouldn't have described us as dear friends, but we had what I considered to be an amiable relationship.

We both retired from teaching. Now we met at academic gatherings at the university. We always greeted each other and made an effort to talk, but trying to catch up while being

interrupted by former colleagues asking us how we were doing and whether we still kept up with the journals was not the same as talking intensely about poetry in the privacy of our offices.

There was only one occasion when we met outside of a faculty party. It was when I attended the funeral of his wife, which was about six months before our lunch. I assumed Arthur had been through some rough times and I wondered if grief or loneliness had affected his mind.

“I’m serious,” he said, sending an intense gaze in my direction. Perhaps he’d been following my line of thought.

I considered saying, “No one is more serious than a madman and, sadly, Arthur, that’s exactly what it appears you’ve become,” but, instead, I pushed my plate closer to the table’s edge and looked directly at Arthur.

“Okay, Arthur, tell me what makes you believe that your trench coat is actually a space suit. I mean, it looks pretty unremarkable. It probably says London Fog on the label inside. Does it have a zip out lining?”

“It does not have a zip out lining,” Arthur responded in tones that seemed encased in icicles. “In fact, I have no idea what is inside this coat because I cannot take it off although I have been wearing it for at least a month.”

“That’s ri—” I corrected myself. I didn’t want to say “ridiculous” twice in the same conversation. “Arthur, that’s crazy. I mean, to begin with, that is the most unhygienic thing I have ever heard. Aren’t you bathing?”

“I don’t need to bathe. So far as I can tell, the coat keeps me completely clean.” Arthur leaned across the table and spoke in a lower voice. “It also disposes entirely of my, uh, bodily waste.”

“Do you mean to say that you haven’t, well, visited a bathroom in a month? That you’ve just gone in your coat?”

“Exactly.” He said this with an attitude of defiance, as though he knew that I wouldn’t believe him.

“Phew,” I said. “If that were true, I wouldn’t want to be sitting across this table from you. You would be reeking to high heaven.”

“But you don’t smell a thing do you, Bryce? Indeed, the only odor I have noted while wearing this coat is something like a slight rosemary scent, which is actually quite pleasant.”

I shrugged. “So what else is this marvelous coat doing for you, Arthur?”

“Well, for one thing,” he replied, “I don’t have to breathe, anymore. It seems to handle that whole respiration thing for me.”

“That’s ri—” I stopped. I would have to think of a new phrase if I was going to continue this conversation. “Ridiculous” was clearly inadequate to describe what Arthur was telling me. I wondered if the use of “bat shit crazy” would be more appropriate.

Arthur pulled a small rectangular mirror from one of his pockets. He held it under his nose for a few seconds and then tilted it in my direction. “Do you see?” he asked.

“See what?”

“Do you see any fog on the mirror that would indicate the presence of breath?”

“No,” I agreed, “but I’m not sure that proves the accuracy of your observation. You have to be breathing. Everyone breathes.

“Everyone requires oxygen. Breathing is just one way of obtaining it. I believe that the suit supplies whatever oxygen I need directly to my lungs. I did say, didn’t I, that I believe this is a survival suit; in other words, a means by which to maintain life in a hostile environment.”

“Uh, huh. And does it let you fly, too?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Arthur snapped. Now he was saying it.

Arthur paused and turned back to his plate to take a few bites of a substance that looked suspiciously like Soylent Green. When he finished chewing, he took another look at me.

“Did you know that for the last few years I’ve suffered from severe back pain associated with a herniated disc? My doctor prescribed Vicodin which I refused to take. Instead I’ve gotten by on aspirin and copious amounts of red wine.”

“I didn’t know that, Arthur. I’m sorry to hear—”

Arthur cut me off. “I haven’t felt so much as a twinge in my back since I’ve been wearing this coat. More than that, my acid reflux is gone and my senses have improved dramatically. As you can see, I’m not wearing my glasses. I don’t need to.”

“You sound like an infomercial.”

Arthur sniffed. "Say what you want to, Bryce, but I feel like I'm twenty again"

You can't reason with a lunatic. I knew that, but I soldiered on, determined to be logical in the face of illogic. "Surely, wearing a coat must cause you serious inconvenience. For example, you look a bit strange sitting at booth inside a restaurant with your coat still on. And how do you sleep in it? Isn't that uncomfortable?"

"I don't sleep," Arthur said. "I reset. I close my eyes and, in a few minutes, I come back refreshed and alert. The time I've saved by not sleeping has allowed me to catch up on my reading and to start writing my book on the poetry of Southey, which, as you know, I always said I was going to start, but never got to." Arthur raised his eyebrows. "So tell me, Bryce, what are you doing in retirement?"

I pushed whatever it was on my plate around with my fork. There was a Thai fusion bistro down the street. It looked like I would be having an early dinner there. "Okay, Arthur, how did you get this amazing coat? I hope it didn't require signing away your soul."

"Lost and found," Arthur said. "I got it right here. During that on again off again spell of cold weather in the fall, I left my own coat somewhere. I thought I might have left it here. When I checked in the back room I found this one instead.

"The owner urged me to take it. He said that it had been there for weeks and that no one had claimed it. I tried it on and it seemed to fit, so I took it. During the course of that day, the coat's properties manifested themselves. I've been wearing it ever since then."

I wondered what could have drawn an alien here. The place had started up in the sixties as a sort of dining commune. Now, it seemed like a social club for aging socialists. I could see a lot of grey hair and dangly ear rings.

"That must have been one careless alien to have left his survival suit at a vegan restaurant," I remarked.

Arthur snapped back, "I'm not surprised that an alien would patronize a vegan restaurant. I'm sure any society that could manage space travel would have risen to a cultural level that didn't require it to send animal life to the slaughterhouse."

Arthur lifted another forkful of green mush to his mouth and looked out the window at the bored drivers in a line of cars stuck in traffic. "I've asked myself the same question about why

the alien would have abandoned his coat here. It's the one thing that worries me, Bryce. If we assume that this is a suit that a being was using to survive the rigors of our planet, how could its owner depart without it? Wouldn't that be the equivalent of walking out into the Arctic in cargo pants and a Hawaiian shirt?"

"You're agonizing over what happened to your putative alien?"

He nodded. "I am because whatever happened to him could happen to me. I mean, I'm the one in the coat now. I'm the one who relies on it to breathe. What if something goes amiss? Maybe there's some equivalent of a self-destruct button. Maybe it's affected by something in the environment that I'm not aware of."

"So take it off."

"I've already told you. I can't. I suppose I could go to a doctor and ask that he remove it for me. I suppose I could go to the government and tell them that I've found an alien survival suit. But whomever I tell would either conclude that I'd lost my mind, or would start running tests on the suit with, necessarily, me in it."

He looked at me again. "Besides, it offers me good health. That's something I haven't had in a long time. I'm getting old, Bryce. We're both getting old. I thought I had reconciled myself to the mortification of the flesh, but wearing this coat has allowed me to do things that I haven't done in years. Today I walked from my house to the art museum. That's about five miles. I didn't lose my balance. I wasn't short of breath. I didn't feel tired. If anything, I felt exhilarated. To feel that good again, well, I'd take any risk for that sort of gain."

"I'd have to say that sounds like too much of a risk to take. You say that you can't take the coat off. That suggests you're trapped. Maybe that's what the coat was designed to do in the first place. Maybe that's what happened to its previous occupant. He wasn't an alien, he was a human. And the coat swallowed him."

Arthur sighed. "What can I say? I feel secure in this coat. In a violent, crazy world, isn't a little security a good thing?"

Neither of us spoke for a minute or two. That made me uncomfortable, so I tried to make a joke. "Well, I guess the aliens really have a sense of style to design their space suits to look like trench coats."

Arthur waved his hand in front of his face. “Bryce, isn’t it obvious why it looks like a trench coat? It’s a disguise. They wanted to look like us while they were wearing these things. For all I know, there’re millions of them walking around earth. All of them, I suppose, in khaki-colored trench coats.”

That was enough for me. It was obvious that my friend was having some sort of psychotic episode. He probably needed to seek medical help, but, when I suggested as much, he dismissed my concerns and muttered that he had been a fool to expect me, with my demonstrated lack of imagination, to be open to what was an extraordinary event.

We parted on such strained terms that I rushed up the street to console myself with some chicken in a curry sauce.

A few months later, the English Department hosted a cocktail party for a poet who had won an award for a book of poetry that consisted largely of punctuation marks and numbers. I wasn’t surprised that Arthur was a “no-show”, but I began to feel some concern when one of the professors mentioned that Arthur had been reported missing.

He explained that one of Arthur’s relatives had arrived on an unannounced visit and had found the front door unlocked. When he walked in he found that the only inhabitant of the house was Arthur’s starving and frantic cat, Dorothy, who was in the process of wrecking the kitchen in order to get at the food in the cabinets. No one appeared to have been home for a week.

Of course, it was easy to conclude that poor Arthur, in the grip of his *idée fixe*, had wandered off somewhere, or had even done himself in. So far as I could tell, that’s what the police assumed. It made it easier for them, I’m sure. I doubt they had a place in their statistics for a disappearance associated with an alien survival suit.

I don’t really know why I decided to stop into the vegan restaurant that night as I was passing through town after the faculty party, but I was determined to make at least a small effort to locate my old colleague. The place wasn’t crowded, which allowed the hostess to take a minute to speak with me about Arthur, whom she knew by name.

“I haven’t seen him for a while,” she said, “and I was hoping he would come by because I think he left his coat here.”

When I asked to see it she escorted me down a hallway to a small closet in the back of the restaurant. The only item in the closet was a khaki-colored, below the knee trench coat with straps across the shoulders. The buttons were silver in color. There was neither an address, nor a manufacturer's label inside the coat. I told the hostess that I recognized it as Arthur's.

"I'm sure this belongs to him," I said. "I know where he lives and I'll be glad to drop it off at his house." She told me I was welcome to take it.

Arthur's coat is hanging from a hook in my attic until such time as he returns. I can't say I'm absolutely convinced that the thing is, as Arthur called it, an alien survival suit, but the next time you encounter a stranger in a trench coat, please ask him for me, "What did you do with Arthur?"

Author Bio

Chris Bullard is a native of Jacksonville, Florida. He lives in Collingswood, New Jersey. He received his B.A. in English from the University of Pennsylvania and his M.F.A. from Wilkes University. Kattywampus Press published his third chapbook, *Dear Leatherface*, in January of 2014, and WordTech Editions published his full-length book, *Grand Canyon*, in 2015. His work has appeared in publications such as *32 Poems*, *Rattle*, *Pleiades*, *River Styx*, and *Nimrod*.

Another Typical Monday Morning

by Robert D. Stanley

Six a.m. already? It feels like I just got into bed. No sense in hitting the snooze alarm. If I sleep any longer, I'll end up late for work. Traffic is always a pain on Mondays.

I crawl out of bed and shuffle to the bathroom, working the soreness out of my shoulders. I check myself in the mirror briefly as I rub the blurriness out of my eyes. I keep my hair cut really short, almost to the scalp, and I can still tell that I'm getting gray. You look dignified, my dad used to say. I don't know, I just look old. I step into the shower and run the faucet for a bit, but the water is tepid and refuses to get any hotter. Great! The water heater is still busted. I'm really going to have to get onto maintenance about that. This is the second time in a week now that I've had to ask them to come fix the damned thing. I do the best I can considering the circumstances, towel off, and brush my teeth.

By the time I get my suit on it's almost seven. Looks like breakfast will be on the go today. I open the fridge door and just stare into the vacant empire that is my breakfast choices. I really need to go grocery shopping.

Suddenly there's the most god-awful racket from just outside my sliding glass door. Sure, I have a balcony, but I'm nine floors up. What in the world could be outside my balcony door? I throw open the shades and see one of the building's maintenance scaffolds carrying some crazy contraption with multiple arms flailing wildly, smoke pouring from a top mounted vent. It appears to be bolted to the scaffold which is unfortunate considering it's flailing so wildly it could snap the cables at any time.

Standing next to the machine, banging away on it with a large steel wrench is a tiny gnome, no more than two feet tall. He's wearing a pair of dirty work coveralls with a bright orange hard hat and a pair of over-sized goggles. His face is covered in soot, likely from the machine he's

pounding away on. I recognize him as one of the nicer guys on the service team, but he always seems on the verge of killing himself with some new machine he's created. This one is in its death throes, groaning and sputtering before finally seizing up. The little man curses at the device as I open the sliding glass door.

"Hey, Pawdorf! What is that thing?" I ask the gnome.

The gnome peers in my direction without even seeing me. He rubs a grimy finger across the goggles to clean them then beams brightly with recognition. "Morning, Mr. Warner! Just testing out my new Gleaming Bright All-Purpose Glass Cleaner 3000 with Hyper Squeegee Action." He puffs his chest out, obviously proud of his newest invention. "Still working out the bugs, but it'll clean all thirty stories in less than half an hour when it works."

I nod, half amused and half annoyed. "I bet it will. Just watch that you don't break anything, okay?"

He salutes crisply. "Will do, sir!"

"Oh, and could you let Grimmald know that my water heater is still broken?" I add before closing the door. "Damn dwarf said he fixed it yesterday, but it's still not heating."

"Sure thing, Mr. Warner." He replies absently as he begins tinkering with his machine. Luckily all gnomes seem to have instant recall or I'd be worried he might forget my request.

I lock the sliding glass door and grab a packaged honey bun for the road. I make sure the lid on my coffee is tight, pocket my cell phone and head out the door.

Thankfully, the elevator is working. I don't mind a little exercise now and then; I just don't feel like shuffling down the ten floors it takes to get to the garage. For once, I sigh in relief as it seems I have the elevator all to myself. I punch the button for the garage level and descend without incident.

When the doors open, I'm nearly frightened out of my skin as an oversized orc with avocado green skin blocks my exit. This guy is standing nearly eight feet tall and brimming with muscles I didn't even know existed. His hair is almost completely white and cut military style, which only makes him more intimidating. Thankfully, he's also wearing the light blue shirt and gold badge of one of the city's finest. His thumbs are hooked over the front of his service belt.

"Excuse me, sir. But I'm gonna need to see some I.D.," he asks in a growling baritone.

"Uh, yeah, sure," I respond as I reach slowly for my wallet. "What's going on? Is everything okay?"

He nods slightly, his eyes never leaving mine. "Everything's fine sir. Just a gang of goblins trying to steal another car. They got caught by the owner this time." He shakes his head sadly. "Guy picked them apart pretty viciously."

I snort as I hand him my license. "Got what they deserved then. Damn thieves!"

The orc's eyes widen slightly. "I wouldn't wish what I saw here on my worst enemy." He snatches the license and looks over it carefully. "It was that damned elf that lives in the penthouse suite. Hit them with some pretty wicked magic. One of them may not make it."

"Magic, huh?" I wasn't one of those guys that wanted to outlaw all magic, but I hated hearing when someone else got hurt by it. Crime was getting out of control and some folks were bent on protecting themselves by learning the latest elemental spell and damning the controversy. "Maybe this could be a life lesson for the little guys, eh? Goblins turn their lives around because of it?"

"Yeah, model citizens, just add magic," he responds with more than a little sarcasm. "You check out, Mr. Warner, so you can go. Be careful out there."

"Thanks." I take my license back and head for my parking spot. Thankfully, those goblins didn't go anywhere near my car. There are about a half dozen cruisers and a couple of ambulances parked on the far side of the garage. I can't see much from this distance, but it looks like they're putting one of the little guys in a black bag. I shake my head at the senselessness of the whole thing and hop into my Civic.

I admit rush a bit to get to the interstate. Once I merge with the cross town traffic it looks like I may just make it to work on time. Stephen hates it when I'm running late even though he knows how bad traffic can be at this hour. I only get a mile or so into the inner city limits when the traffic slows to a crawl. Cursing beneath my breath, I turn on the radio to see if I can catch a traffic report.

"...so stay away from them. They may seem tame and gentle, but wild unicorns can be dangerous creatures if they feel threatened. Remember: You have a greater chance of being attacked by a unicorn than you do a shark.

"Got an update on that traffic snarl at the I-10 split. It seems a novice wizard was trying to get a selfie while the archmage and his assistants were moving a dragon for the circus show tonight and the dragon took exception. The beast broke the archmage's hold over his mind and rampaged the city for over forty minutes before they could regain control, destroying several businesses and shattering a quarter mile chunk of the freeway. Commuters are advised to stay away from this area while the Department of Magical Constructs rebuilds the businesses and the road, which should be completed sometime in the next two hours."

Dragons again! It's always dragons! Why can't people just leave them alone? We're already taking away their habitat. I sigh deeply, trying to get ahold of myself. It's crap like this that make me want to just pay someone to teleport me to another dimension, preferably one that doesn't have mages and dragons.

I guess I should at least call in. It doesn't seem like I'll be moving from this spot for awhile. Reaching for the phone, I forget that my coffee was precariously balanced on the arm rest and I spill it across the center console splashing hot java onto the leg of my good slacks. I make a plea to no god in particular, but I'd pay good money for any of them to take me away from all of this.

Yeah, it's turning out to be a typical Monday morning for me.

Author Bio

Robert D. Stanley was born in the heart of Georgia in a small town of 10,000 people. Ever since seeing *Pete's Dragon* as a child, he's had a fascination with dragons (and a burning desire to have his own). He wrote his first fantasy story at age twelve called *Phoenix 2000* and has been writing science fiction and fantasy stories ever since. Having an over-active imagination helped. Robert has been a professional wrestler, a bass player in an alternative band and has written numerous short stories in the Science Fiction and Fantasy genre with a few published in online magazines. *The Storm Seer's Prophecy Book 1: The Core Stone* is his first novel. Robert currently lives in Arizona.

The One Who Waits

by Marisca Pichette

Somewhere, there is someone waiting. It is not a tale of loyalty—they have not been waiting long. It is merely a notion, a fantasy, if you will—that somewhere, someone, is expecting.

Who? Only they know, and it is futile to ask them.

“Comin’,” is all they’ll say to your question. “‘s a-comin’.”

Do you press them further? Perhaps not. For their face is so taugth and set in concentration, it seems as if they themselves are pulling that unknown object along through time, patiently passing the hours in wait.

To us, of course, it may seem long. It may be days that you are there with them, waiting and wondering what it is you are waiting for. The end of the world? For here in the middle of nowhere, it looks like the end of the road. The universe, ever expanding, has turned around. Now it shrinks, contracting and folding up on itself like so many disused Slinkys.

Slinking its way back to the beginning of Time.

Back to the one who waits.

Perhaps that is why they stand, staring off with such conviction, such total belief in their gaze. They give you a semblance that they know exactly what it is that’s coming, and they won’t give the surprise away. It is not that they are withholding vital information—merely that they do not find it necessary to tell you. Let that be a comfort, for things not worth knowing are not worth worrying about, either.

One hopes.

Or does one wonder further, torn apart for the want of knowledge? Things we cannot see swiftly fill our eyes, ever thought about and dwelt upon in the small hours. We try so hard to know everything that we forget what we have known in the pursuit of what we can’t. Why has

the world made us so? Perhaps it is the creaking of universal springs as they expand ever outward that pulls our hopes and dreams along, seeking new things.

Or maybe it is the shudder of a collapsing galaxy that urges us to act—quickly! Find and learn all there is to learn, for soon there will be nothing....

How odd that we cannot be content to stand beside the person waiting and not inquire as to their business in waiting there. We see them and we do not accept that they are alone and merely lingering for a short time in expectation of company of some kind, but presume, asking numerous questions about who and what and when and why...?

No wonder you are ignored when you repeat your demand of “Whom?” For you it seems so urgent, this longing, this desire to know all that is before you. But to the one who waits, it is not at all about urgency and time. They have waited for minutes you don’t remember, and bear memories you couldn’t count. They know what is your business, and what is their own. Waiting is not a chore, nor a topic of discussion.

Especially not with you—a stranger.

Dawn will still come, if the name is not given out. The mystery, left unsolved. Others will pass this world’s end, and go along their own paths, heedless of the one who stands and stares with such purpose into the distance. Seasons still come without the answers you so glibly seek. Why shouldn’t they? For the one who waits is just human, after all.

At least, that is what you must believe. For around who else does time turn so constantly, wearing away nothing of that determined face? The clothes they wear are so plain that they could be from tomorrow or two thousand years past. They have a weathered complexion, but do not appear old. It seems that they are completely untouched as they stand, solitary in their watchful vigil—ever expectant of something undisclosed, some companion unspoken.

Any answers you demand will be curt, and yield to you nothing of their motives. Perhaps they have none, you decide—and stand simply to stand. They are a spectacle—nothing else!

Yet, of course you cannot believe that. Something in their eyes convinces you of the error of that path. You know the one thing you can tell is that here, in the middle of an endless field, cut only by a worn and weary road, there is nothing to be lost in waiting. For here stands the one

who knows, and you are inclined, despite your burning questions and misguided opinions, to stay, and wait with them.

You will gain nothing from conversation, for they have nothing to give. Instead you stand, and you listen. You look out across the persevering field, and you listen. Sounds so silent they are like quiet itself fill your ears, and you barely notice the passersby as you wait. Colors spring from the even grey of the landscape, creating a vibrant spectrum you missed in your first coming.

As you stand, you wonder why you ever longed to be moving so fast. What was your rush before you found yourself here, peacefully contemplating the things that were around you, not constantly dwelling on what was to be.

In standing, in waiting, you feel suddenly as if you're waiting for nothing at all. A strange notion descends, and you are shocked by the simplicity of it all. Instead of working, instead of talking, instead of running and laughing and worrying—you are living. Purer than the calico setting and clearer than the mottled sky above, you are living. Nothing grand, no embellishments—just breathing and observing.

It occurs to you that you have never stopped before, never truly halted all breathless activity to experience what there was to see. In your haste to know everything, you realize how little you learned. In your desire to study everything, you overlooked the world.

Somewhere, there is someone waiting. They do not stand tall, do not square their shoulders in determination. They are not indignant, or impatient. They have little to say, but much to think. They will not bother you, on the road that leads from nowhere. But they may watch you as you pass, taking in your gaze and holding it for a long, long time.

In that moment, it will take all of your will to forget your tasks, and pause for a moment to inquire what it is that is worth so much rushing, and why it cannot be that perhaps there is something to be said for standing, and seeing an empty landscape fill with details, one by one.

They will not ask you to stop, nor beg you to stay. If you demand to know the reason for their vigil, they will only reply,

“Comin’. ‘S a-comin’.”

Perhaps you may be a little satisfied, and a little enlightened by what you saw and heard. Then you are likely to go on your way, forgetting the details you briefly glimpsed in that

boundless field, ever extending outward on stretched springs. Your world will continue to grow, and you may not remember that somewhere, there are things you could never learn, and sights you can never see again.

But in that place, there is someone standing.

They know what they see. They have seen it all. They know what they hear—they hear it every day. They have not been there long, but perhaps it seems so. If you ask them the way, they may tell you more than you asked, though their response will be short. They do not move from their place, and always, they are watching.

“‘S a-comin’.”

And they wait.

Author Bio

Marisca Pichette is a young adult fantasy writer and student at Mount Holyoke College. She spends much of her time reading classical and fantastical works as well as writing short stories, poetry, and two novel series. She has created two fantasy languages for her novels, which take place in both the ‘real’ world and imagined worlds. Her long fiction writing is mostly directed at young adult readers and is peppered with magic, myth and humor. Poems and vignettes are directed at a larger audience of those who appreciate the beauty of words.

Oy, It's Super Yenta, Or Kvetch Me If You Can

by Marleen S. Barr

Blog Preamble

Look up in the Sky. Is it a tweet? Is it a blimp? (No, I've been on a diet!)? It's Super Yenta. Super Yenta is a strange visitor from the Planet of the Yentas (locally known as Plotz) who has powers and abilities far beyond those of normal yentas. Feminist science fiction scholar Sondra Lear (the secret identity of Super Yenta) fights for truth, justice, and the American way.

Origin Story

So here I am starting this blog and I immediately encounter tsuris. The instructions say that the tags should be simple words that everyone can understand. But this mandate is not applicable to my blog. I am not going to talk about things which can be described by simple tags. This blog will be replete with tales of tsuris, sodden with kvetching, and routinely sprinkled with oy up the wazoo. How can I tell the truth without using "tsuris," "kvetching," and "oy" as tags? I mean my husband Pepe Le Pew (he's a goy) saw my subtitle. I asked him if he knew what "kvetching" meant. He said "no" and indicated that he didn't want to find out. So, if Pepe doesn't want to know from what I am talking about, how can I even hope to interest strange goyim?

I'll worry about this communication problem in future posts. For the moment, here is a revelation: Professor Sondra Lear mild mannered (okay this is pushing it) feminist science fiction scholar is my secret identity. I am in truth an emissary from the Planet of the Yentas (known to locals as Plotz) which is located in the same solar system as Krypton. Hence, this makes me a card carrying Plotzian, not an Earthling. In short, I am a super hero—a.k.a. Super Yenta. I can do stuff like snoop with my x-ray vision and fly toward prime gossip sites faster than a speeding bullet. Up until this moment, I have done all that I could to hide the truth. I grew up in Forest Hills, Queens, the yenta capital of the world. I tried not to stand out in a community

which was so yenta sodden that even Super Yenta would fit in. I thought that my secret identity was perfect. I mean who would notice that I am Super Yenta if I presented myself as a professional feminist separatist planet scholar who was obsessed with husband hunting? The secret identity ploy is no longer working. Other feminist science fiction scholars have followed in my wake. I finally got married. (Okay, this happened when I really was three hundred and twenty years old vis-à-vis according to my lengthy Plotzian life span. But who is counting?) My once exotic science fiction life has become mundane. Well, there is nothing to do at this point but tell the simple truth: Super Yenta, c'est moi! Or: Oy, It's Super Yenta.

Why Jewish Super Heroes Need Jewish Doctors

Or, How Joan Rivers Became an Honorary Plotzian

Oy, I'm sick!

I thought it was impossible for me to become ill on Earth. After all, as a Plotzian, I am immune to terrestrial bacteria and viruses. I can't catch swine flu; we don't have pigs on Plotz. Plotzians, Jewish feminist utopians, don't think it's kosher to eat meat. Our main food source comes from harvesting vegetarian sushi which grows wild (in both brown rice and white rice varieties) on our sushi trees.

This is not to say that Plotzians never closely encounter pigs. The denizens of Prick, our nemesis planet, are quite male chauvinist pig-like. I have been warned that "prickite"—which comes in red, green, and gold varieties—is the only thing that can harm me on Earth. My literary scholar secret identity leads me to question exactly what "prickite" means. Is it animal, vegetable, or mineral? More specifically, is it geological in terms of being a rock fragment emanating from the planet Prick—something analogous to Kryptonite or unobtainium? Or does it mean a denizen of the planet Prick? I am partial to the later definition. Prickites have much in common with Woody Allen's personified sperm (in "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex . . .") and the sentient breast protagonist of Philip Roth's "The Breast." To describe Prickites in the vein of Roth and Allen, it is necessary simply to state that these male beings are sentient penises which come [sic] in red, green, and gold diverse racial hues. Am I ill because I came in proximity to a Prickite meteor in the Hayden Planetarium? Or, could I have been laid

low after closely encountering a big green penis strolling down Madison Avenue? I guess not. Even in the age of Obama, an invasion of multiethnic sentient extraterrestrial penises would attract attention in Manhattan.

I called Dr. Mary Catherine Murphy-McCarthy, my in network primary care physician. “Hello. Doctor, the room is spinning around. I can’t move. Am I dying?”

“I can’t definitely tell you that you are not dying. Your symptoms might be signs of a stroke. Go to the hospital immediately,” ordered Dr. Murphy-McCarthy.

I could really be dying. This possibility is off the oy mode scale. I can’t go to a hospital. The doctors would immediately discern that I am not human. Even a simple flu shot would blow my secret identity; the needle could not penetrate my skin. But interplanetary breach of cultural codes aside, Dr. Murphy-McCarthy did not understand me. When a New York Jewish woman says that she is dying—as in “oy, ya can die from it” in reference to every day tribulations—she is not talking about real death. “Dying from it” is New York Jewish women’s incessant and trivial state of being—and Gentiles don’t understand this point.

Hoping that I was only “dying” in the Jewish female sense which does not necessitate immediate hospitalization, I turned on the television. Joan Rivers was telling Larry King about how she was prevented from leaving Costa Rica because her passport said “Joan Rosenberg.”

“Larry, I told the Costa Rican airline desk clerk that I was having a heart attack. And do you know what she did? She had the audacity to call the paramedics,” said Rivers.

Oy, even though I am from another planet, I could immediately discern what the Costa Rican clerk could not comprehend. Joan was not literally having a heart attack. She was not dying; she was plotzing! No wonder she vociferously insisted to Larry that the Costa Rican airline personnel were pricks. Vis-à-vis Gentile New York doctors and Costa Rican airline employees, Jewish female language is no lingua franca. Joan Rivers, who exemplified Jewish female plotz mode on national television, deserves to be an honorary Plotzian.

To do list:

- 1) communicate my suggestion re honoring Joan Rivers to the Plotzian Maternal Council
- 2) tell Dr. Murphy-McCarthy that I am not dead

3) rest in bed and drink plenty of fluids—regardless of whether or not either potential definition of “prickite” is the cause of my illness

The Alien Upstairs

I love Pamela Sargent’s work in particular and her *The Alien Upstairs* in general. I have fond memories of writing about this novel when I was first formulating my secret identity as Sondra Lear feminist science fiction scholar. But I never imagined that Sargent’s text would become real for me vis-à-vis the Manhattan co-op building I call home. The place is replete with aliens; there is one upstairs—and I would go so far as to say some live on every floor. We’re talkin’ here REAL aliens, extraterrestrials! I mean, as you are aware, I am a Plotzian and it takes one to know one.

Many of my fellow shareholders are just not normal. Since the time when I first moved in, I have only seen doormen and the super. The alien neighbors are not yet clued into the fact that humans do stuff like venture out to go food shopping (or at least use Fresh Direct). As Super Yenta, I know from everything going on in here and I am sure that some residents have not left their apartments in years. I think that pets are not allowed in the building because maybe dogs can differentiate between humans and nonhumans.

One neighbor in particular (one of the few who does leave her apartment) acted as a Rosetta Stone who unlocked the entire alien within scenario. Every day she goes to the Republican Club and wears red plaid pants. During my time in America, New York, Earth, I have accepted the fact that some humans (even New York City humans) are Republicans. But what human woman who is (to put it nicely) very corpulent would wear red plaid pants? Red plaid pants are definitely a plus size fashion choice which defies human credulity. This woman’s sartorial taste is proof positive that she hails from another planet.

So Pepe and I named her Pantaloons Rouges. I often use my x-ray vision to look through the apartment door and inform Pepe that “Pantaloons Rouges is taking out the garbage.” As a Plotzian, I naturally spend most of my waking hours plotzing. But I am plotzing especially big time from Pantaloons Rouges.

Plotzians are peaceful. I use my powers as Super Yenta for good. But my fellow extraterrestrial neighbors are definitely not from Plotz (especially since Plotz is a feminist separatist planet). OMG, what if they are from Prick? Plotz has been at war with Prick for centuries. I know; I should not assume this difficulty exists sans evidence. And I just hope that the Prickites do not have super powers like mine. If they do, the situation is beyond oy. (And I don't often proclaim that something is beyond oy.)

I can just imagine an extraterrestrial real estate agent marketing this building: ("Location. Location. Location. Just think of the possibilities of living directly under the Empire State Building. You could use the antenna to communicate with The Big Giant Head.") This is not impossible. Joan Rivers recently told Larry King on national television that her Manhattan apartment was really haunted. She said that it was cold and dogs would not venture within. She added that she employed a ghost buster who successfully de-ghosted her apartment. Oy, I am an extraterrestrial who believes that I am living with other extraterrestrials. Who am I gonna call? Joan is Jewish; I am Jewish. Do goyim have these problems?

Oh, I know who to call: the Plotzian Maternal Council. To cope with the aliens living upstairs and throughout the building, I require the advice of super powered Jewish mothers. Feminist science fiction can save the day.

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Red (Kryptonite) Pants

A rare event: someone was in the hall outside my apartment. I slanted my eyes and turned on my x-ray vision to discern what was ensuing. As I stared straight through the door, I clearly saw that Pantaloons Rouges was, as usual, wearing her red plaid pants and waiting for the elevator. Just as I was surmising that she was on her way to have lunch at the Republican Club, my vision began to cloud. I could no longer see through the door like a normal super hero. My x-ray vision super power had failed for the first time. What would become of me? Would I be reduced to looking through the peep hole like a non-super yenta?

Luckily, once Pantaloons Rouges was ensconced within the elevator, my x-ray vision was again operative. What caused the malfunction? There was one possible reason: Pantaloons Rouges' red pants were impacting upon me in the manner of red Kryptonite zapping Superman's

powers. My life would be threatened if I did not remove Pantaloons Rouges' red pants from my proximity.

Since it was impossible for me to vanquish the red pants myself, I had to ask Pepe for help. This would be no easy matter. Pepe, after all, has no idea that I am Super Yenta. He has enough trouble being married to someone who he believes to be a garden variety yenta.

“Your mission is to help me to break into Pantaloons Rouges' apartment and abscond with her red pants,” I insisted.

“Non. Jamais. This agenda would go against my heritage as a proud French Canadian descendant of Samuel de Champlain and his mighty effort to discover the Bay de Chaleur. And don't even think of asking me to channel my inner Scaramouche via challenging Pantaloons Rouge's husband to a duel. The duel will never happen. She would say that dueling in the vestibule goes against “The House Rules.” “No umbrellas allowed in the vestibule. Ditto for swords.”

I was desperate to the extent that I was forced to do something nonkosher.

“If you help me I will take us out for a shrimp dinner,” I offered.

“Okay.”

Onward to making sure that Pantaloons Rouges goes outside while her red pants remain inside. No problem. I merely sent her a notice stating that George W. Bush was going to be a guest speaker at the Republican Club and formal attire was required for admittance.

Pantaloons Rouge, attired in a red gown which bore no relation to red Kryptonite, had no impact on my super powers. When I looked through the door and saw the elevator closing with her inside, I knew it was time to strike. With Pepe in tow, I surreptitiously used super force to open her apartment door.

“Quick, Look through Pantaloons Rouges' closets, find the red plaid pants, and put them in this aluminum coated freezer bag. Good. Mission accomplished.”

Even though the aluminum coating protected me from the red plaid pants' red Kryptonite-esque characteristics, I could not risk keeping them in my apartment. What to do? Well, since they really could look good on a slender woman, I decided to donate them to my clothes swap group. The pants could live happily ever after being passed along at different swaps. I felt a great

sense of satisfaction as I watched one thin swap sister open the aluminum bag and decide to make the red plaid pants her own. And then she said something that could have meant that I was in big trouble.

“Everyone look. Look what I found at the bottom of this clothes pile. It is Super Yenta’s super hero costume. I have discovered the secret identity of Super Yenta. She must be here in this room. Super Yenta is a fellow clothes swapper.”

“The Super Yenta outfit is merely a Halloween costume. By the way, does anyone have any stuff that I could use to dress up as George W. Bush?” I said.

After all of this tumult, I was too tired to fly to Texas.

Balloon Yenta

I could fly to the latest White House State Dinner. Super heroes are always welcome at these shindigs. But that would be too simple. The biggest challenge is to be invited as a mere mortal feminist science fiction scholar. The entry plan would have to be really good; even science fiction Grand Masters are not invited to state dinners.

What to do? I had a eureka moment while looking at all the silver Christmas wrapping paper my neighbors discarded. I would not fly to Washington like a normal super hero. No, I would use the silver paper to build a balloon, put myself inside it, and float down the eastern seaboard.

I needed a disguise. I could not be recognized as either Super Yenta or Sondra. If I put on thick black rimmed glasses, no one would guess that I am Super Yenta. And, to hide my Sondra identity, I could borrow some stage makeup from the Wicked set and paint myself green.

What to wear? Well, there was that red sari my father brought back from India during World War Two. And just in case the green skin and the glasses did not provide sufficient camouflage, putting a yellow painted mop on my head would be just the thing.

I built the silver balloon. I put on the glasses, red sari, yellow mop, and green paint. I was all set to go. Ten, nine, eight... I blasted off from my apartment’s terrace.

Pepe became very concerned as soon as he realized that I was not home and he saw the balloon floating in front of the Empire State Building. “Help. I see a balloon heading south and I think my wife is trapped inside it,” he tweeted to a News 4 New York anchor.

The entire world spent the day wondering if a purportedly trapped in a balloon feminist science fiction scholar would land safely.

As planned, moi, a little green Jewish super yenta, landed on the White House lawn. I tore open the silver paper and stuck my head through the hole. "Take me to your leader," I said to the White House Social Secretary. (What else could a science fiction scholar say?)

"You are not on the guest list. But your red sari looks really cool and your straight blonde hair is to die for. True, you don't look like a tall thin shiksa. But the green skin is awesome. Barack loves diversity. Welcome," said the Social Secretary.

Mission accomplished. I did not crash land.

Sarah Palin's Manhattan

I flew to the top of the Empire State Building to check in with the Big Giant Bleached Blonde Head who runs the Plotzian Executive Council.

"Emissary to Earth America publicly known as Super Yenta secret identity Sondra Lear," I said to the antenna.

"It is about time that we heard from you. You have called home at last. What's new?"

"Sondra has been married for a decade. So enough already with the 'what's new' question."

"Fair enough. I'll get down to business. The Council members and I want to know how female politicians get elected in the Earth country America. What can you report?"

"America's major female politicians are Hillary and Sarah Palin."

"Are these women alike?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Hillary acts like a normal intelligent person and Palin . . . well it is just too complicated to explain."

"There are big time budget cuts on Plotz. We invested a lot to send you to Earth America. We want details about Palin. Report. That's an order."

"Okay. Since I am Super Yenta and I have special powers and abilities, I guess I can give this a shot. But I am not sure that you will believe me."

“I’m the Big Giant Bleached Blonde Head who runs the Plotzian Executive Council. I’m communicating with a flying feminist super hero who is talking to the Empire State Building’s antenna. Shoot.”

“How could you have known that shooting is one of Palin’s favorite activities? She has a reality television show which portrays her running around Alaska killing animals. Last week she shot a caribou. Two weeks ago, she bludgeoned big fish to death. I can’t imagine what she is going to kill next. I read this comment about how a viewer was grateful that she didn’t eat cute little sled dog puppies.”

“This Alaskan killing scenario is certainly not cool vis-à-vis the Plotzian feminist ethos. But when in Earth America do as the Earth Americans do. Your next assignment: act like Palin and run for office. Of course, we expect you to do this via your Sondra Lear secret identity, not as Super Yenta.”

“The assignment is impossible. Earth America is a big place. Sondra lives in midtown Manhattan. There is a big difference between midtown Manhattan and the Alaskan tundra—that is if they have “tundra” in Alaska. And if this were not enough, Sondra can’t even get elected to her co-op Board. The Board does not like her. But that is a long story. How do you expect her to seek national office—and to achieve success via acting like Sarah Palin? Where do you expect me to find big animals to kill in Manhattan? There are no big animals in Manhattan; we just have rats and roaches. Do you want me to go to the Central Park Zoo and blow away Gus the polar bear? That would be a crime. Ditto for exterminating the co-op Board. I’m Super Yenta. People look up to me when I fly around. I can’t do something criminal. I would not even agree to murdering the English language like Palin does—much less shooting animals.”

“You have your orders. Carry them out. I have spoken. If you don’t follow orders, we will make you come home. You will have to leave your husband. You will then have to start all over again as a single woman. You will have to find a husband on a feminist separatist planet. End of transmission.”

Aaaargh. O.M.G. This is intolerable. Pepe is very nice. I would miss him. Having to husband hunt on a feminist separatist planet would be worse than being exiled to Wasilla. It

would be worse than having to deal with my co-op Board. I'll just fly back home and think of something.

I have spent an entire day thinking and I can't come up with anything. I guess I will just escape by burying my head in the New York Times travel section. This article on Madagascar looks interesting. Here is a quote that could save the day: The island of "Madagascar is host to some of the rarest and most unusual flora and fauna in the world. There are hissing cockroaches, giant jumping rats...along with various kinds of lemurs... A team of researchers announced that they had found a new species of carnivore lurking on one of Madagascar's lakes."

Eureka! I'm saved. I don't have to leave my husband and husband hunt on Plotz. Madagascar is an island; Manhattan is an island. That's close enough! Cockroaches and rats can be interesting. It is now possible for me to act just like Palin. I can run around killing rats and roaches! I can even resort to discovering a new alligator species lurking in one of Manhattan's sewers.

My new reality show called "Sarah Palin's Manhattan" was born. I am seeking political office via using my show as a platform. I don a safari suit replete with pith helmet and—armed with gun and compass—bash the hell out of roaches and rats. (The co-op Board members, who were initially upset to see me toting my pith helmet, gun, and compass, were ultimately happy to save on the building's extermination bill.)

"Is this true?" asked Big Giant Bleached Blonde Head?

"You betcha."

The Plane, The Plane

Yentahood coincides well with doing an excellent job as a super hero. It is really good for me to know everything that is going on in the world. For example, I was on the scene immediately after hearing a fire cracker explode on an international flight. I peered inside the fuselage and saw that the passengers and crew had everything under control. That's what I like about Earth people: even though they lack super human powers and abilities, they are often capable of being super heroes.

Detroit—and every other American city—we have a problem. People are literally chafing under the airlines’ new flight restrictions. There is talk about rebelling against the “sit in your seat during the last hour of the flight rule.” The proposed tactic: asking everyone to urinate simultaneously. We have had Tea Party demonstrations. Are pee parties next?

I can’t protect every plane against this new technological threat. Even a super powered extraterrestrial yenta can only be in one place at a time. What to do? Well, I could generate more of myself. Plotzians mastered cloning eons ago. And I could always go the borrowing more of me from parallel universes route. But these are not good ideas. I don’t think that America is ready for an army of super powered yentas patrolling the skies. One of me is enough already for them.

America, a Puritanical country, is also not ready for scanning devices which makes passengers’ genitals available for the world to see. The only logical solution—requiring that everyone fly naked—is not an option. Many of my adopted fellow citizens would define the Full Monty as a fate worse than potential death. I mean bare is definitely not the way to go for Americans—people who cannot even cope with saying the word “toilet” in public. And streaking is so twentieth century.

Logic cannot save the day. Not to worry. I am not a Vulcan! As a proud Plotzian, a daughter of the planet of the yentas, it is obvious to me that there is only one way to go. (We’re not talkin’ peeing here.) I had to get on the phone and gab with an empowered woman.

Who am I gonna call? Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano. She is a fellow ethnic Baby Boomer native born New Yorker. I could certainly “tawk” to her.

“Hi Janet. This is Super Yenta. We gotta tawk. Do ya got a minute? Good. I will be right there.”

I flew to her office in exactly sixty seconds.

“Janet we gotta put our heads together. More patriarchal technology won’t work. We gotta think outside the military industrial complex box.”

“Fine. What do you suggest, Super Yenta?”

“We haveta think female. Think like the Elle Woods character in Legally Blonde. She won the day by solving her problem in terms of fashion and female intuition. We must do the same.”

“I’m all ears.”

“No, no. We’re not talkin’ Vulcan male logic here. Naked Americans absolutely will not fly. So the question is—what can they wear? My answer: they should dress like me. All plane passengers can be required to don super hero costumes sans underwear. I certainly know that it is impossible to hide anything in a skin tight lycra super hero suit sans underwear! The flying “Underpants Bomber” will go the way of the dodo bird. I can attest to the fact that super hero costumes are very comfortable for flying. Kids will love this idea. Adults too. Have you ever attended a science fiction convention masquerade? As a side benefit, this new sartorial requirement might motivate more people to exercise and eat healthfully. To put it gently, zaftig is unforgiving in the face of lycra. Last but not least, the need for all these new clothing items will spur weak retail sales. The schmata district in New Yawk will thank you.”

“I’m sold. I’ll tell Barack immediately. He’ll get on board even though he looks and acts like a Vulcan.”

The President issued an executive order mandating that all passengers on American carriers must change into super hero costumes before boarding. The new law caused the mother of all popular culture clichés to assume a new meaning: “Look up in the sky. . . . It’s super humans.”

Chalk one up for our side.

Blog Conclusion

I think that it is time to quit being Super Yenta while I am ahead. If I continue I can risk unleashing some terrible force on Earth. I could do something like unleash Prickites from the Phantom Zone. Prickites could wreak havoc here. I know this because of the damage that the real pricks on the co-op Board cause. No need to risk supernatural pricks being elected to the Board. Adhering to the Prime Directive, I discarded my super hero suit forever. Not to worry. I now have more time to devote to Professor Sondra Lear’s mundane pedagogical and scholarly endeavors.

Author Bio

Marleen S. Barr is known for her pioneering work in feminist science fiction and teaches English at the City University of New York. She has won the Science Fiction Research Association Pilgrim Award for lifetime achievement in science fiction criticism. Barr is the author of *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*, *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond*, *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction*, and *Genre Fission: A New Discourse Practice for Cultural Studies*. Barr has edited many anthologies and co-edited the science fiction issue of PMLA. She is the author of the novels *Oy Pioneer!* and *Oy Feminist Planets: A Fake Memoir*.