

Joe Nobel

Witch

Witch

by Joe Nobel

The UFO was shot down while Dr. Who blared on TV. No one had noticed until the explosion shook the windows and the fighter jet streaked away across the sky, back to its secret base in the Midlands.

“What was that?” Michael Spears asked as he got up from the sofa. He looked out over the London skyline only to see the afterburn of the jet in the twilight. Flying, or more accurately, tumbling in the opposite direction was a burning object. “Looks like a meteor!”

His young daughter, Anna, looked on, peeking over the window sill to see what her father saw. Meanwhile, Dr. Who continued on the television, oblivious to the real world. The Doctor, the fourth incarnation thereof, in his trademark scarf and wide-brimmed hat, stood before the Time Lords of Gallifrey. He was in deep shit again for some transgression or another. The TV screen flickered with static when the tumbling UFO hit the ground beyond the horizon and exploded.

“Wow!” Michael said. Then he called to his wife in the kitchen, “Mila, you’ve gotta see this.”

“Dr. Who is stupid,” Mila answered Even after living in London for the past ten years she still spoke her words with a rich Russian accent. “I’m not interested. Besides, supper is almost ready. Wash your hands, both of you.”

“No, the window. Come to the window,” he said. But by the time Mila got there all she saw was a fading glow beyond the row of neighboring roofs.

Mila Spears stared out the window. Even though there was not much to see, she pushed her husband and daughter out of the way. She kept staring even as Michael mentioned that something was burning in the kitchen.

He eventually had to take the sputtering pot off the burner himself.

“Mommy, what’s wrong?” her daughter asked. But Mila kept looking as if she were hypnotized.

“Honey?” Michael asked.

“That wasn’t a meteor,” Mila said quietly.

She forgot about the burning pot of spaghetti sauce and her family. She ran to get dressed. She put on her black London Fog overcoat, knee-high boots, and a knit scarf for good measure, for it was getting cold as autumn progressed.

“Stop right there,” Michael said, folding his arms. “Where are you going?”

“Mommy feels something,” little Anna said. “I feel it, too. It’s bad, isn’t it, mommy? Don’t go.”

“I have to, love,” Mila said, almost crying. “If I don’t, no one will.”

“Why do you have to save the world all the time?” Michael asked. “They don’t even pay you for it! Hell, they don’t even know who you are, or how grateful they should be!”

“Michael, I have to go,” she said, standing opposite him, almost confronting him.

“Where are the car keys?”

“Car keys? How will I get Anna to nursery school in the morning? And, I have a meeting at nine.”

“Grrrr. Michael Spears, you are petty and impossible,” Mila sighed with resignation. “Fine! I’ll fly! Even though it’s so cliché.” She stomped off to the broom closet and rummaged for that particular broom made of straw with an oak staff handle.

“Mommy, don’t forget your hat,” Anna said, handing her mother her black wide-

brimmed hat rising to a cone on top.

Michael watched his wife as she stood by the open window; tall, thin, with her blond hair cascading beneath her witch's hat. He remembered then why he loved her. Not for the unearthly powers she possessed, but for her strength, her will, and her character. He knew that without her, he'd be nothing but an assistant manager in some failing store. Why she picked him, he'd never know. But, she did. For that, he loved her.

"Misha, my responsibilities calls. It's time I go," she said.

And for her Russian accent, with those rolling r's that melted his heart every time she spoke.

"Um, go ahead and take the car," he mumbled. "I s'pose Anna and I can take the bus in the morning."

"No," she said. "I'll get there much faster if I fly." Then she added, "Even if these stupid brooms don't have windshield wipers or heat."

They hugged and kissed. Then Mila picked up her daughter and gave her a kiss on the head, too.

Mila held out her hand, palm facing the broom. And, it rose, staying in place in mid-air. She climbed upon it as a gymnast would onto a balance beam. She ducked as she and her broom shot out the window.

The dad and daughter watched as their wife and mother, the witch, disappeared into evening sky.

~ Rogue ~

He'd lost count of how many days he had been chained to the tree. Ten? Maybe fifteen? Time doesn't have the same relevance in this place, he reminded himself.

His tormentors, three otherwise beautiful goddesses, teased him incessantly. Sleep was unheard of. Respite, non-existent. The three, one a blonde, the other with fiery red hair, and the third a brunette with hair cropped short, would take their turns on him. They'd tease his maleness to an erection until it grew to a size which he'd thought impossible. They would take it into their mouths and pleasure him beyond the pleasures a mortal could bear. And, just as he would be ready for release, they'd abruptly stop and throw a bucket of ice water on him.

They'd spin him, on the chains as he dangled from the gnarled tree. Then, whip him with switches cut from the branches of that same tree he hung from.

And they would laugh.

Freya, the one with golden hair, and the most beautiful of the three, was the harshest. She'd make it a point to thrash his manhood as he spun by in front of her.

When red welts criss-crossed every inch of his body and he thought his flesh was ready to fall from his skin, they'd stop. Then they would be tender again. They'd rub magic lotions and balms into his throbbing skin. Not for kindness or mercy, but to heal him so they could whip him again later. And while his skin healed, they'd take him to the brink of yet another orgasm.

It was just after dawn. A gong rang out from over the hills. Its sound reverberated throughout Asgard. The three goddesses — Friga, Freya, and Sigyn — stopped their torment, dropped their whips and released their charge from his chains.

As soon as he fell to the ground, Friga, the red-haired one with green eyes, snapped an iron collar around his neck. Sigyn, the brunette, attached a leash to it. They then led him along a winding path with beds of tulips on both sides and manicured lawns

over the rolling hills. They led him into a thick wood where the air was heady with the smell of spores and wild mushrooms that sprung forth after a warm rain. They led him to a clearing with twelve sarsen stones arranged in a circle. An altar stone of polished blue marble sat in its center.

The gods and goddesses of Asgard stood in a half circle, between the sarsens and the altar. Odin, the Allfather, stood in the forefront of the group. He wore an unassuming blue robe of fading, threadbare material. His beard was long and gnarled, showing signs of many years. But, his one eye was sharp and piercing — the other being covered with an eye patch. Around him stood Frey, Thor, Sif, Baldur, Iduna, Tyr, Heimdall, and other gods the mortal could not easily name. Loki, the god of mischief, stood off to the side.

The three goddesses attending him pushed the mortal to his knees in front of the gathered gods. They then took their places: Friga and Freya went to each side of Odin, for they were his wives. Sigyn stood beside her husband, Loki.

It was Odin who spoke.

“Montana Chang,” he said. The sky thundered as he spoke the mortal’s name. “You have been granted a rare privilege. For extraordinary services to the gods, namely that of slaying a Frost Giant, you have been allowed into Asgard and to use its many holes in time as you saw fit. Your one restriction was to never travel more than one hundred years beyond either your future or your past. Yet we find in your possession these Neolithic clay pots. Artifacts which you had intended to sell, for personal gain, to a collector in the far future.” Odin pointed to the altar behind him.

Montana Chang turned to look. There lay his booty. It was true, he had a buyer lined up in the 22nd century for them, ready to pay in gold ingots.

“Your abuse of the only restriction we placed upon you saddens us. You have shamed yourself. Are you prepared to face the consequences of your deeds?”

“Consequences,” Chang thought. “What was I doing at the hands of these bitches for the last two weeks?” He then realized that Odin, and the rest of the gods, had probably read his thoughts. “I’m sorry for my lack of judgment,” he mumbled.

“Yet, we have it in our hearts to let you redeem yourself,” Odin said. “We have another mission for you. Frost Giants have come to Earth to feast on mens’ souls. You must stop them before they devour even one human spirit, for the Frost Giants are now weak, but if allowed to feast, they will grow strong. If you fail, you will die and the Frost Giants will devour your soul. If you survive, your status will be restored as a mortal guest of Asgard.”

“I will fight this battle,” Chang said as bravely as he could, trying best to salvage whatever graces he had with the gods and goddesses. After all, he’d fought a Frost Giant before, and won.

“Your battle now will be fought on Earth, not in the layers of multidimensional space as you have done before. You will see the Frost Giants in their true form for the first time.”

“True form?” Montana Chang asked.

“Loki,” Odin commanded, “show him your true form.”

Chang knew that Loki was of the Frost Giants. That he was the only one who had joined the gods to become one of them. But, true form? What true form?

Then he turned to Loki. And when he saw the god, he screamed.

~ Aliens ~

This is bad, the first one thought. It was only known as the first one, for these aliens had no concept of names. Their ship had been fired upon by an explosive chemical soon after entering the planet's atmosphere. Had they known that the creatures on this world had more than spears and axes, they would have shielded themselves better.

How ugly and repulsive these beings were, the first one thought, with only four appendages, just two of which they used for locomotion. To add to their repulsive looks, they had knobs on top of their torsos that looked like an afterthought. This is where they contained their brains, as well as their seeing and eating organs. No matter: the old one could still feast on their dying thoughts and revel in their terror as it sucked the life out of them. If only they could all be consumed, ridding this world of their hideous infestation.

The first one didn't dwell on these thoughts for long. It had more pressing concerns, namely bringing the ship down in a controlled crash in an unpopulated area. They would then have to make repairs and tend to their wounds. Only after would they be able to pay homage to the old one with the souls of one of these creatures, which needed to happen soon, for the old one was hungry and growing weak.

~ Witch ~

Mila circled the abandoned village. She was further west of London than she'd thought she'd need to be. There wasn't much in this area: rolling hills covered with brush, a few farms far and between. The impact crater was close to a village. She'd followed her psychic sense to get here. There was something filled with loathing and hatred there — and hunger. She also felt there was someone in this village: one lone human. A man. He hadn't been there before, but suddenly he was, as if he'd popped in from nowhere.

She rode her broom at ground level under the full moon along the dark lanes of



the village. The walls of the buildings were overgrown with weeds, and some of the roofs had caved in. Grass and scrub had long ago taken over the streets; asphalt, where it was, was hardly recognizable. Only the village church and graveyard had been maintained, probably by some historical conservation society.

Mila saw the main door of the church open when she was less than twenty feet away. By the light of the moon, she saw the man she'd sensed standing on the double door's threshold. She charged ahead on her broom, and rammed him in the gut.

She realized it probably wasn't the logical reaction for several different reasons. He could have been in league with the evil force she sensed, or he could have been a hapless innocent. Of course, tumbling headfirst off her broom to land on top of him when he fell wasn't what she intended.

She found herself lying on top of this man. His legs were spread open, and she was very much between them. She felt a bulge in his pants, a bulge that couldn't be mistaken for anything other than what it was.

"Ouch," he croaked.

Mila jumped off, not wanting to be so close to that kind of bulge, not tonight with a mission and the foreboding atmosphere in the surroundings.

The man climbed to his feet and dug a flashlight out of the pocket of his sheepskin coat.

"Who are you?" they both asked in unison.

"Montana Chang, ma'am," he answered.

"Mila Spears."

"Howdy, Ms. Spears," he said. "You know, you shouldn't be in this village. This

is a pretty bad place right now.”

“You’re not telling me anything I don’t already know,” she answered. “You are American, yes?”

“Yes, ma’am. I sure am,” he answered. “And, by your accent, I bet you’re Russian.” He placed his Stetson back onto his head.

“You don’t look very American,” Mila said with suspicion.

“Fifth generation, family immigrated from China way back to work the railroads,” he explained.

“Mr. Chang, whatever it is you think you are doing here, you have to leave.”

“Can’t. I’m on a mission. You wouldn’t believe me if I told you what it is.” He shone his flashlight around the churchyard as he stepped outside.

“You mean the hungry monster that fell from the sky? Yes, I would believe you. But who sent you?”

Chang raise an eyebrow and looked the lady in black up and down.

Mila Spears also studied the cowboy. She then understood why Montana Chang was sent to her just at this moment. The gods had given her powers no other mortal had but they had abandoned her to use them as she wished. But now they step in and sent someone to help. He seemed like the most unlikely accomplice.

“Well, ya see, that’s even harder to explain,” Chang said. “There’s another world, in another dimension —”

“Wait,” Mila interrupted. “I know. Odin sent you.”

“You know about Odin?” he asked, shaking his head, then scratching it.

“So that’s why I sensed you suddenly appearing. Is there a portal to Asgard

nearby?”

“Yes, ma’am, it’s hidden in the church, right behind the second —”

“Come, this way,” Mila interrupted. “Let’s go kill a monster together.”

“No, the crash site is in the other direction,” Montana pulled at her sleeve.

“It moved already, away from the crash site. I sense it’s north of the village.”

“There may be more than one,” the cowboy said.

“I know,” Mila replied after a long pause. They made their way along the deserted main village road.

“Mila, what’s a Russian witch doing in England?”

“How do you know I’m a witch?”

“Your hat and broom sort of gave you away.”

“It’s a long story, Mr. Chang. It involves a Soviet general, an American spy, and Odin sticking his nose — well, more than his nose — into things. Although I loved them all, in the end I didn’t get the general, or the spy, or Odin. So why is an American cowboy named Chang mixed up with Norse gods?”

“That’s a long story, too. Killed me a Frost Giant. That’s what this thing is we’re hunting. By the way, not only will it try to kill you, but if it does, it will eat your soul.”

They walked on in silence. Even their footsteps became lighter.

“Mila?”

“Uh huh?”

“When we’re done with the Frost Giant, you wanna get together? I sure think you’re kinda cute.”

“Mr. Chang, just concentrate on our task,” Mila finally said.

When they came upon a crest in the road beyond the village, they saw a set of buildings. They seemed to be nothing but blocks in the moonlight.

“The aliens, or Frost Giants, are there,” Mila said. “Whatever that place is.”

“It looks spooky. Worse than a cemetery behind an abandoned church at midnight, during a full moon. Hey, do you know how sexy it is doing it in an abandoned church?”

Mila ignored his comment.

“These buildings are made of cinderblocks,” Montana said, as they got close enough to make out the details. There were no doors, no windows, not even roofs. A line of bullet holes, the kind shot off by a machine gun, ran up the walls of the nearest building.

“I know where we are,” Mila said. “This is a military training area and firing range. That’s why the village is abandoned. Not only do we have to worry about these Frost Giants, but unexploded shells as well.”

“We’d best stay on the path,” Montana said in a hushed voice. “What’s that? I saw something move!” He pointed to the corner of one of the cinder-block buildings.

“I saw it, too.” Mila s whispered. “It looked like a snake.”

“You don’t want to know what it looks like. It’s not a snake, it looks closer to an octopus but with hundreds of coiled tentacles. Each one can come through and grab hold of you.”

“Through?”

“It’s hyperdimensional. It can come and go through our three-dimensional world. You wouldn’t even see it approach. It would just pop out of nowhere, and be there in front of you.”

“Sounds disgusting. After that description, I hope you're not horny anymore.”

“Um, no, ma'am. Not right this minute.”

“Good.”

“See, it was these three goddesses who —”

As Montana Chang spoke, he fell forward, landing on the gravel with palms down.

“Must have tripped over a vine or something,” he said, face flat against the ground. “Oh, no!” he screamed, as he felt a cold tentacle encircling his ankle. He tried to kick loose.

Mila saw what had caught him: a tentacle as thin as her wrist, dark green with a metallic sheen to it. It had already wrapped around Montana's right ankle three times. The other end seemed to disappear in the ground. But upon closer inspection, it disappeared *near* the ground. It was true: whatever it was, had reached through another dimension.

She shot a bolt of energy from her fingertips toward it; it was a precise beam, carefully aiming it not to vaporize Montana's foot. The tentacle quivered but did not loosen its grip. Mila shot another bolt. This time it was a “sloppy” burst on purpose, intended to disrupt and distort space on as many levels as she could, hopefully even in the dimension this creature was lurking.

“It's got my hand!” Montana gasped as he tried to push himself up.

Mila turned and fired a shot of lightning upon the tentacle grabbing his wrist. She alternated shots between the tentacles. She shot energy waves, shock waves, a bolt of electricity strong enough to power a train. Just as she thought she was running out of magic and her fingers felt like they'd been fried, the tentacle around Montana's ankle was severed from whatever body it had in the other dimension. A sickly green fluid with a

putrid stench bled out onto the ground. Mustering what strength she had, Mila shot a final bolt of lightning at the tentacle pulling on Montana's hand. That, too, had severed.

Montana jerked to his feet. "Shit," he said, panting. He grabbed Mila and dragged her as he ran. "It's right where we were, but in another dimension, perhaps no more than a Planck length away," he said when they were about twenty feet clear.

Just then, three tentacles, this time each as thick as a man's torso appeared out of nowhere — exactly where they had been standing. The massive tentacles writhed and lashed. They knocked over cinderblock walls. They rose high into the air, ten, twenty, thirty feet, then crashed down to the ground, with an earth-shaking thud. It slithered and jerked towards Mila and Montana.

~ The Sergeant Major ~

Sergeant Major Reginald Humphrey gave a crisp salute as he stood in front of Major General Wainridge Stewart's desk. "SIR, SERGEANT MAJOR HUMPHREY REPORTING AS ORDERED, SIR!"

"At ease," the Major General said, looking up briefly from the satellite images he was surveying.

"SIR, YESSIR!"

"An object was shot down over southern England earlier this evening. It crashed in the Wiltshire Downs, conveniently — maybe too conveniently — in the army training grounds. Take Unit One and secure the area. Catalog any artifacts that may have survived the impact. But remember, do not touch anything."

The Sergeant Major betrayed no emotion. If it was the secretive Unit One, then that could only mean these artifacts were of alien origin.

“Any chance of surviving beings, SIR?”

“With an impact crater, not bloody likely. But from these infrared satellite images, I detect two humans in the area already. Find the trespassers and detain them. Dismissed.”

“SIR, YESSIR!” Another crisp salute, and Sergeant Major Reginald Humphrey turned and marched out of his commander's office.

~ Rogue ~

Mila clutched the sleeve of Montana Chang's coat. They looked on as the creature materialized from another dimension. First three gigantic tentacles, then ten, then a hundred, all fading in and out of existence. Soon, the monster appeared as a ball of tentacles writhing like a nest of snakes, so large that it dwarfed the cinderblock buildings beside it.

Then its body appeared. First, it was a round blob at the center of those green tentacles. Then the eyes appeared: twelve small dots arrayed in a circle, they seemed too small for something as massive as this creature. Its mouth entered the universe next: small, puckered lips in the center of that circle of eyes. That mouth grew into a hideous round opening in the middle of that spherical body. It had three rows of circular teeth around the mouth like an inverted circular saw blade. Each tooth was sharp, long, and pointed like a dagger.

The outer row of teeth started to spin clockwise within that open mouth. The middle row spun counterclockwise, and the inner row, again, clockwise. Anything pulled into that mouth by one of those tentacles would be liquefied instantly.

Mila gripped Montana's sleeve even harder.

“My turn,” Montana said. The bravado in his voice only emphasized his fear.

He pulled out an odd-looking hammer from his belt. It consisted of an iron head no larger than a telephone handset. Twine held a wooden handle in place. Nordic runes were scratched on both the handle and the iron.

“You’re going to fight it with that?” Mila asked incredulously. She prepared herself to cast another lightning bolt at the alien.

“This ain’t no ordinary hammer,” Montana said. “Thor gave it to me. Like I said, my turn.”

He flung the hammer with an overhand throw directly at the gaping maw. The hammer sang in a high-pitched hum when it shot out of his hand. It circled like a boomerang, hitting the row of teeth as it passed by the monster in a parabolic curve, then returned to land in Montana’s hand as gently as if tossed by a child.

“Second shot,” he said. This time there was more confidence in his voice.

The hammer spun into the monster’s jaw, knocking out the inner two rows of teeth and sank deep into the opened mouth.

The alien gave a low-pitched baleful moan. Then all the tentacles quivered. It fell to the ground with a lifeless thud. It couldn’t have happened soon enough, because several of the tentacles were reaching for Mila and Montana, just inches away from entwining them.

Mila pointed at two of the tentacles that lay close to their feet. Their tips were missing. These were the arms she severed only minutes before that had gotten a hold of Montana.

Montana just nodded, dazed at what he had just done. Although the hammer had a mind of its own, it still needed human power to send it on its way. Not physical power,



but mental energy. Montana leaned on Mila to steady himself.

The hammer then shot out of the fallen creature's mouth and flew toward Montana like a bullet. Yet he caught it with the same ease as before landing in his fingers.

Once composed, he turned to Mila, grabbed her by the head and gave her a full, open-mouthed kiss.

"Victory kiss," he said, when Mila pushed him away.

She screamed in terror.

"Oh it couldn't have been that bad," Montana said with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"Look!" Mila shouted, as she grabbed the cowboy by his shoulders and spun him around.

A second alien monster had materialized behind them — rows of teeth spinning, tentacles descending upon them.

Mila aimed her fingers and shot an energy charge at the middle of its open mouth. From her other hand, she shot a lightning bolt at the creature's eyes, blinding all twelve of them in succession.

But the Frost Giant relied on its sense of proximity from its tentacles more than eyesight. Two tentacles grabbed each of Mila's wrists and hoisted her twenty feet up in the air. Another tentacle wrapped itself around Montana Chang's throat, choking him.

Montana smashed Thor's war hammer at the crushing coil around his neck. The monster didn't loosen its grip until the third strike. It took four more strikes to the metal-hard skin before it fully released Mila. By then, another tentacle grabbed the cowboy around both his ankles and pulled his feet out from under him, sending him to the ground

on his butt.

As he fell, he saw Mila just above the gaping mouth with its rows of spinning teeth. She shot charges of energy from her fingertips, but with her wrists pinned by the creature, she only hit it with glancing blows.

Montana threw his hammer again from where he lay on the ground. This time, he didn't aim for the mouth, but at the two tentacles gripping Mila. The hammer gained speed and ferocity as it approached its targets. Its hum grew louder and more ominous in the seconds it took to reach its target. It sliced through one tentacle holding Mila, then the other.

The monster spewed the green puss-like blood from its severed arteries. Mila fell to the ground two paces before the giant's mouth.

She tumbled, but managed to keep her balance, and land in a crouch. She shot a thick and heavy wave of energy straight into the creature's maw. It shuddered, but it still reached for Mila with five more tentacles. She shot another burst, then another, and another still. With the last burst, more than half its teeth shattered. Then the teeth stopped rotating in its mouth. With the last of the energy she could muster, she shot another bolt of energy even more diffuse than those before, hoping to damage as much of the monster's inner guts as she could.

The tentacles reaching for her fell to the ground at the same time she did. For minutes, she couldn't move from exhaustion. She felt her heart beat as if it would burst through her chest.

She sat up as the mouth croaked a hideous sound. The creature wasn't dead after all. What was left of the teeth started spinning slowly again and she felt a tentacle grip

her around her waist.

Just before she was pulled into the maw, she saw Thor's hammer fly by with its typical hum as it passed in front of her head. The alien released its grip over her when the hammer hit its maw. The monster finally died.

Montana unwrapped the tentacle from around her waist and helped her sit up.

"Wow," she said. "That was close." She hugged him. She pulled away from him, too quickly. But before completely releasing him from her embrace, she gave him a kiss. It was gentle, somewhat tentative, and on his mouth.

"I'm married," she whispered as she broke away from him, more to remind herself than to tell him.

"Of course you are, ma'am," Montana replied.

They hunted aliens until the eastern sky turned purple. The creatures hid themselves in other dimensions, only coming through to this reality when they were ready to strike. But, Mila sensed them, and her senses grew stronger the more she tracked them. And Montana and his war hammer struck faster and with more precision each time he aimed. They suspected there were two creatures left, but were only able to nick an occasional tentacle as they crossed into our reality.

The two monsters emerged into the universe as the sun peeked over the rolling hills, one Frost Giant on each side of them. Mila attached one with every type of energy burst she could muster. Montana successively hurled his hammer at the jaw of the other as fast as he could recover it from the previous throw. Weak and exhausted, they felt their powers wane. But the creatures used their many arms to deflect the blows instead of attacking. They, too were weak. In the end, Mila Spears and Montana Chang won as one

monster, then the other, crashed to the ground, dead.

They tiptoed around the tangle of extremities, gingerly stepping around the lifeless monster parts laying half in this dimension and the rest elsewhere. Now that the immediate danger of multi-dimensional space aliens had passed, they became aware of the fact that they could step on an unexploded shell, dying in a very mundane way.

“We done good,” Montana said, once back on the gravel path.

“Yes, we did,” Mila answered.

“So, do you wanna —”

“Mr. Chang, I’m tired and sweaty and covered with Frost Giant blood. And so are you. No, I don’t wanna.”

“Sorry, my dear, just askin’.”

Then they heard the click of guns being cocked. Looking up they saw a line of a dozen soldiers aiming their machine guns at them.

~ The Father and Daughter ~

Michael Spears couldn't find the tights his daughter wanted to wear to nursery school. He considered calling his wife to ask where they might be. Then again, she might be battling some terrible foe, saving the world again. Just once, he mused, he'd like to be a superhero, too.

The TV was on. He listened to the newscaster while hunting for his daughter's clothes. The announcer mentioned the meteor that fell last night in the Wiltshire Down.

That got his attention.

“Nearby villages are being evacuated as a precautionary measure. The military is quarantining...” the TV said.

“Fighter jets don't shoot down meteors!” he growled at the television. “And since when do villages have to be evacuated when a meteor falls in an uninhabited area?”

Anna stood beside him, looking at her father, then alternately at the television.

“We're going to be late,” she said.

“We're not going to nursery school today,” he told her. “Let's get you dressed in your outdoor clothes. We're taking a holiday.” Mila might need him, he thought. Besides, he knew where Anna's hiking clothes were, but not her school clothes.

“What about work, Daddy?”

“If you can't call in sick when you're the boss, then what good is owning your own company?” Michael said, rummaging now for a different set of items.

“We're going after mum, aren't we? I was wondering when you were going to show me what she does.”

~ Witch ~

Mila Spears and Montana Chang sat handcuffed and shackled on a bench in the back of a windowless military transport van. It was parked next to the cinderblock complex where the first creature emerged into the universe.

“This adds insult to injury,” Mila fumed.

“Well, why didn't you blast them with a heat ray or something?” Montana asked.

“Because there were twelve of them and I am really allergic to bullets.”

Every time Mila uttered her words in that Russian accent, especially when she was joking in the face of adversity, like now, Montana felt he had to have her. It was all he could do to stop himself from jumping on her and take her then and there — even if the two of them were handcuffed. He slid an inch closer, pressing up next to her.

“Besides, it would have killed those soldiers,” she continued. “It's not something I like to do. Give me some breathing room, will you, Mr. Chang!” She elbowed him.

“Um, excuse me.” He slid back away, a token quarter of an inch.

“I can still feel something out there, lurking in that other dimension,” she said in a hushed voice.

“I suspected as much,” Montana replied. “I'm glad you didn't disintegrate any of those soldiers, if there's still one of those things out there, it could grab hold of newly dead souls and feed on them. We don't want anyone killed. That would be bad.”

“Yes, we have to get out of here,” Mila said. “I would try to break the links on my handcuffs but I can't focus a beam tight enough at that angle, not without burning my own wrists off.”

“Then do mine,” Montana said, holding his bound wrists out to her.

“Somehow I like you handcuffed,” Mila said. “You're much safer that way,” They stood up in that cramped compartment and she aimed her finger at the handcuff links. She took a deep breath and prepared her mind for a hot and tight energy beam.

The door to the van opened before Mila could shoot.

“So, here we have the trespassers,” a thick necked army officer said as he stepped inside. “You are both facing very serious charges.”

“You have to let us go!” Mila said. “You don't know what's out there.”

“On the contrary, I do,” the military man said. His face was slightly red, as if Mila and Montana's very existence annoyed him. “Any fool can see there's, there's green goo on the ground and assorted, um, shall we say, snake-like bodies, strewn all around. Yes, that's an accurate description, snake-like bodies. I shall use those very words in my

report. Oh, and I must make note of some round, circular, ball-like headish sort-of objects, with round mouths. Ghastly, I dare say. Thankfully, they're all dead.”

“Not all of them are dead!” Mila implored.

“So, Mrs. Spears, you admit to killing them, these harmless-looking visitors to our world.”

For a moment, Mila was surprised that he knew who she was, but then remembered that they took her handbag with her driver's license in it.

“Oh, we know who you are, Mrs. Mila Spears, née Liudmila Bustov, born in St. Petersburg, Russia. I believe you call it Leningrad. Immigrated to England in 1963.”

“I get it,” Mila said. “You know who I am.” That was more information than was available from her license.

“But you,” the officer said, turning to Montana Chang. “We have no idea who you are.”

“And that must burn y'all up inside,” Montana answered in his cowboy drawl. “Name's Montana Chang.” He held out a cuffed hand to shake. “What's yours, buddy?”

“MY NAME IS SERGEANT MAJOR REGINALD HUMPHREY. YOU WILL ADDRESS ME AS SERGENT MAJOR HUMPHREY OR SIR, IS THAT CLEAR!”

“Yes, 'Sergeant Major Humphrey or sir is that clear',” Montana answered. “So, will you let us go? The lady's telling the truth; you and your men are in great danger. There are more of those aliens out there. And, they'll kill you all and eat your souls.”

“Nonsense. We'll have no soul-eating around here. And, we'll see about who's killing who on proper English soil,” Sergeant Major Humphrey said, then turned to leave.

One of his men ran up behind him before he could close the van door.

“Sir, we still haven't found Parsons,” the soldier said. “And now Smithfield is missing.”

“Very well,” Humphrey said, turning even redder. “Expand the search area.”

“No,” Mila said. “That's the worst thing you could do. Stay together and watch each other's backs. That's your only chance. They pop out of thin air! And before you know it, their tentacles have you. You've got to believe us. We know what we're doing. We killed those you see out there by ourselves. Your guns won't work against them.”

Her plea was interrupted by a burst of machine gun fire, then a scream. A moment later both sounds ended. Silence echoed through the morning air.

The soldier looked at his sergeant with terror in his eyes.

Sergeant Major Humphrey looked out over the rolling hills, into the crop of wood from where the scream had emanated. Then he looked back at his two trespassers sitting apprehensively in the van. For a moment he considered releasing them.

“My brave men will dispatch these, whatever-they-are, in short order,” he said, now beet red. Then added, “Don't go anywhere,” as he slammed the door.

~ The last one ~

Our crew has been decimated. I am the only one left. I alone remain to tend to the old one. I have always been the last, weakest, and slowest. Now I have been thrust into the position of 'first one' by tragic default. I must not fail. Without me the old one will be nothing. There will be none left to worship it. And it, too, will wither and die.

I must be cleverer than the rest had been. I cannot confront these creatures head-on, that was a mistake of the others. I must rely on stealth. I must remain hidden behind the cloak of the many worlds.



Yet all is not lost. More of these hideous creatures have come — not as strong as those two who have laid carnage upon our crew. I have already taken three of them by quickly reaching into their space and pulling them through.

Soon, the old one will wake and I will feed their souls to it. They are not much, but they will sustain the old one until I claim the two powerful ones — those two who have brought ruin upon our voyage.

~ Rogue ~

“Stop fidgeting,” Mila ordered.

“I'm keeping as still as I can!” Montana yelled back.

“Like hell you are. Every time I'm ready to shoot, you jerk your wrists away!”

“Okay, I promise this time I won't,” he said. He closed his eyes.

“Ready,” Mila said, aiming her little finger at the handcuff chains binding Montana's wrists. She prepared mentally, yet again, to fire a neatly placed, laser-thin beam of high energy. She hoped it would be strong enough to melt the tempered steel.

“One, two — you moved again!”

“No, I didn't.”

“Mr. Chang, I swear, I'm going to keep you in these handcuffs and let the monsters get you.”

“Frost Giants,” he said. “They're Frost Giants.”

“Don't correct me! Now, this time control yourself and hold still.” Mila said.

“And if you do, when I cut the chain you can kiss me.”

“On the lips?”

“The cheek.”

“How 'bout the neck, then?”

“Okay, on the neck. But no hickey. Now hold still!”

“I'm holding still! I'm holding still!”

“On the count of three,” Mila said, in a calm voice. “One.” Zap. She channeled the energy like the gods had shown her through her little finger in a tight a beam and fired between his outstretched wrists.

“Hey!” Montana screamed jerking his hands away as the energy beam sliced through the steel.

When he jerked the chain, it deflected Mila's finger toward him. He felt something very hot between his legs. And, the feeling wasn't sexual. A moment, later he smelled smoke.

“Ahhh!” he screamed. “You burned my prick!” Then he added, “Oh my god! I'm on fire.” He didn't even notice that the handcuffs had separated as he patted the burning denim on his crotch.

“It's out,” she said, laughing. “You're not on fire.”

“But, what about my manhood!” Montana cried.

“That's fine, too,” Mila said, exasperated.

“How do you know?”

“Because I can see it from here. A hole has burned through your pants and underpants.”

“Why'd you shoot there! How can I fight these monsters —”

“Frost Giants,” Mila interrupted.

“— with a hole in my pants and my dong hanging out? Is it burned? Oh my god,

it's burned, isn't it? Is it gonna be okay?" He to fished out his member through the open hole in his pants and clutched it tight.

"Here, let me see," Mila said, taking his cock into her own hands. She examined its soft skin, caressing it with her fingers. As she held it in her palm she felt an illicit tingle running up her body. She quickly pushed it back in his pants when the flaccid member showed signs of growing.

"Don't worry. It's safe in there. And, if you keep you mind on your job, it won't grow out of proportion. It's not burned — lucky for you."

"Okay, I guess you're right," he said, adjusting his penis as well as he could in the new-found opening.

"A lover once gave me some lingerie with a hole in the same place," Mila said, pointing at his crotch. She couldn't contain a wry smile.

Montana shook his head. Then he looked at her and said, "So how about that kiss?"

"I held your cock and I hope you enjoyed it, because that's as good as five kisses on the neck. Now hold still while I slice through the shackles around your legs. Close your eyes and don't move."

"Okay," Montana said, squeezing his eyes shut. "But tell me when you're going to shoot."

"Already done," Mila said.

"What?" He looked down. "Oh, yeah. That was quick!"

"Now be quiet, while I slice through my own shackles," Mila said. Then without fanfare, she shot another bolt of energy, that sliced the chain around her ankles along with the van's drive train through the floorboard.

“Now to get out of this tin can,” Montana said. “If you shoot a circle of that energy right there,” he pointed at a spot on the van’s rear door near the handle, “it’ll cut the lock away.”

“Forget that,” Mila said as she shot a wide shock wave that blew off both rear doors along with the back third of the van.

Thor’s hammer lay on the passenger seat along with the rest of their belongings. Montana also found the keys to the handcuffs and quickly freed Mila. Then she undid the two severed ends of the handcuffs around his wrists.

Mila found her broom propped against the truck’s side.

“I may need this,” she said.

“We need all the help we can get, now that the army and the Frost Giants are after us.”

They heard another burst of machine gun fire from over the nearest hill, off in a crop of trees. There was a man’s scream. Then silence: no machine gun burst, no scream. Just like before.

“Of course, we may not have to worry about the army for too much longer,” he added, as bile churned in his stomach.

“It’s moving,” Mila said. “I sense it. It’s going that way.” She pointed beyond the village to the impact site.

“That spaceship looks like it was completely destroyed. But you know, only the facet existing in our universe may have suffered damage,” Montana said.

With Montana in the lead, the two of them charged over the Downs towards the

crash site, ever conscious that their next step could set off an unexploded shell.

A helicopter circled overhead, then flew off to where that last man's screams emanated. Presumably it was being directed from the ground by Sergeant Major Humphrey. Three minutes later, a second helicopter circled them. This one descended upon them as they ran.

Machine gun bullets strafed the ground in a row on both sides.

“That was a warning to us!” Montana yelled to Mila above the whoosh of the blades.

“Stop, Montana,” Mila said. “We’d better give up. We can’t fight this thing if we’re dead —“

But just as she was speaking, a massive tentacle appeared through a hole in the air. It wrapped itself around the helicopter's right landing skid. The gunner shot at the arm, but his bullets bounced off the impervious skin. Montana threw Thor's hammer, but before it found its target, the arm yanked the helicopter downward. The helicopter lost control and careened towards the ground. It made no difference that by then the hammer had sliced the tentacle off.

Montana and Mila watched as the gunship, with its erratically spinning blades, fall directly toward them, tentacle still holding on and trailing it downward like an anchor.

~ Witch ~

Montana threw himself onto Mila. They hit the ground and he cradled her head against his chest. He knew that both would be killed the moment the helicopter crashed into them and burst into flames. Still, it was an act of instinct.

Mila screamed in that last second as the falling helicopter roared louder. She

clutched the lining on Montana's fleece coat as he lay on top of her. Time slowed, heartbeats became years, memories flooded her mind. She felt protected by Montana in that brief moment. It was a feeling she hadn't felt for a long time. For too long, the burden of saving the world had been hers. But for now, in this moment, she was protected, and despite her imminent death it felt good being cradled in his warmth.

Her life flashed in front of her eyes like everyone said it would moments before death. Memories of her youth gushed to the forefront of her mind. Then of her lovers, her joys and tragedies. Even in her hyper-aware, sped up perception, the crash and ensuing explosion came too fast. At the moment of impact, she felt that extra jolt of pressure as Montana's body bore down on her. Then came the sound of twisting metal and, instantly after, the deafening roar of the explosion; the heat; and the conflagration from the exploding fuel.

Mila realized she shouldn't be experiencing any of these things. She should have been dead.

She looked out from under Montana as he clutched her tighter than before. Flames swirled around her like the inferno of Hell, white-hot metal struts from the helicopter's frame disintegrating in the heat. It was too bright for her eyes, even for that moment she dared look. But, she hadn't been crushed or incinerated. She wiggled her fingers. Yes, they moved. She wondered what had happened; how could she have survived? She poked Montana's firm underside to see if he was alive, too; and he responded in kind by pulling in his abdominal muscles.

“Montana?” she shouted when the unbearable roar of the explosion subsided.

“Mila?” he answered, pushing himself up from her. He stood and then gave her a

hand up. “Why are we alive?” he asked.

“I think I did this,” she said, even as they stood in the middle of the fire swirling around them, impervious to the heat. She remembered when she had screamed and the energy that scream had summoned from her core.

“How?” he asked.

“I don't know,” she said, stunned. “I didn't do it on purpose.”

“We're not where we were before,” Montana said, as he tried to kick a piece of red-hot metal. His foot went through it as if it was a mirage. “We're in another universe. Maybe it's just a couple of Planck lengths away, parallel to ours and still close enough for light to seep through.”

“What are you talking about?” Mila said, looking around. She carefully stepped around the wreckage. Then she, too, kicked a piece and watched in amazement as her foot went through it.

“You took us through to another fucking universe,” Montana said, looking around. “I should know, I've stepped through my share of space-time portals. But, only the gods themselves make those doorways. You did this by yourself.”

“How did I get us here?” Mila asked, wondering as she stepped through the flames and wreckage. If she did, indeed, get them here by using her power in some unconscious, instinctual way, how could she get them back home?

Then, when she stepped out of the curtain of the flames, she saw downed spaceship. “Mr. Chang, look at this,” she said.

A silver ship, the shape of a bloated disk and the size of a coliseum, lay between the rolling hills. A gaping hole big enough for a jet-liner to fly through exposed the

innards its facing sides. Jagged struts with sharp, charred ends reached out from the belly of the ship. Smoldering smoke rose out of the hole and meandered up to the sky.

“It exploded outwards,” Montana said, pointing up to the hole.

They looked at each other.

“Just like in the movies,” Mila remarked. She nodded toward a crack running to the ground wide enough to step through. “Since we're here, let's go in and look around.”

“What?”

“Might as well,” Mila said, raising an eyebrow. “You're not afraid, are you, Mr. Chang?”

“Afraid? Afraid of fighting these slimy monsters in their own ship? Goddamn right I'm afraid!” Nonetheless, Montana took the lead as they stepped into the Frost Giant's spaceship.

They stepped into a tunnel running deep into the ship. The alien technology along both sides was eerily familiar; it looked like the grimy, cramped plumbing one would expect on a trail engine or ocean liner, but on a larger scale. Both saw the plumbing for what it was — pipes fitted together with massive weld joints that used to pump propellants, coolants, exhaust, whatever it took to fly this spaceship. They saw how the pipes and conduits had suffered a catastrophic failure. More than half of these tree-trunk sized pipes had pressure cracks. Many of the junctures had ruptured from the inside.

“Do you sense any Frost Giants nearby with whatever it is you use to sense them?” Montana asked.

“Not particularly,” Mila said. “Just a feeling of creepiness. This whole universe, never mind this spaceship, gives me the creeps.”



Their only lighting was a faint red glow from the top of the tunnel along a luminescent strip. It would have to be enough for them to they make their way inside. Every footstep echoed back a long, dull sound from deep inside the tunnel.

“Actually, I do sense something,” Mila said.

“You don't look too happy about it,” Montana said, seeing the sour look on her face.

“No, I'm not. I sense people. They're confused and frightened. These must be the soldiers that the Frost Giants snatched.”

“So, they haven't feasted on their souls yet?”

“Doesn't look like it,” Mila answered. “We may have a chance yet to free them.”

“Which way are they?” Montana asked.

“You saw the size of this ship,” Mila said, pointing upwards. “They're up there somewhere. But, how can we find them in something this huge?”

“I don't know. We'll just follow your nose. I guess.”

Montana and Mila continued along the passageway, avoiding the jagged edges of exploded pipes. Soon they came to a junction. A shaft led straight up.

“That's the way, isn't it?” Montana gulped, when they both looked up into the dark.

“Yes,” Mila said coldly.

“And you still don't sense any of these monsters?”

“No, just that same cold, ever-present, disconcerting feeling.”

“How can we go up?” Montana wondered as he jumped, trying to catch an edge he could grab hold of.

“I’ll fly us up,” Mila said.

“Don’t you need your broom or something?”

“No,” she said, as she wrapped her arms around Montana as if they were slow dancing. “You’ll be my broom. Hold me tight. And don’t get any ideas.” But as he held her, cradling her in his arms, she remembered when he tried to protect her when the helicopter fell. She remembered that wanton kiss he stole from her; and the feeling of his penis in her hand —

Mila brushed those thoughts from her mind as she levitated them upwards. Yet, it was hard to ignore that she was straddling his right thigh.

When it grew dark — there were no lights in this shaft to guide their way — Montana took out Thor’s hammer and held it above their heads. It glowed blue, just like Cherenkov radiation. It was enough to light their way. Mila wondered if this hyper-dimensional spaceship was radioactive. Radiation was one thing she couldn’t sense. If it was radiation, it was probably too late for them anyhow. Still, their lives would be a small price to pay to save the world.

Mila thought of her daughter, Anna. It was her life she was saving. That made the prospect of dying bearable. Then she felt Montana’s body around her: his breathing in and out, his musky scent coming from under his fleece jacket, his warmth. She thought of her husband, Michael, how he was waiting at home for her. And even though she loved him deeply, she realized that in her mind she was already being unfaithful to him with this rogue and worried that she would succumb to his charms when this adventure finished. As they ascended deeper into the alien spaceship, she felt Montana’s hold tighten and she hated how she loved the feeling.

It felt like a slow elevator ride as they kept an eye out for protruding obstacles. This part of the ship had fared much better from the explosion, and there were only a few jagged edges to avoid. After about ten minutes of ascent they arrived at another intersection. Mila stepped to the side and landed them on a horizontal conduit. This one was much larger than the vertical shaft, or even the first conduit they traversed. The tunnel was wide enough for three lanes of traffic. The three sets of strips of white running along the ceiling reminded Mila of a highway tunnel under the Alps.

“I sense it’s this way,” Mila said. “Whatever it is we’re looking for.”

“The men?”

“Yes, Montana, the men. And, a whole lot more.” She took his hand and they marched forward.

~ The Old One ~

“Wake up, master,” the Old One heard. “Wake up, the time is at hand.”

The ancient Frost Giant, the god of a dying race, rumbled as stirred from its sleep. It opened its twelve eyes and reached through the dimensions with its tentacles to feel who disturbed its repose.

It was hungry and weak. It would rather just sleep. It wondered if they'd finally arrived at Earth. It had been so long since it trod on this world.

The Old One heard again, “I have souls for you to feed upon.” It’s hunger pangs struck in its gut, yet the lethargy induced by starvation kept it from waking. In its half-sleep, it felt for who was calling.

“Where is the first one?” it demanded when the front parts of its mind began to rouse from sleep.

“Gone. I am now the first one. I am the only one. Our ship has been shot down, and our crew decimated by the vile creatures that inhabit this world. Two of them are already here, on our ship.”

“Fool!” the Old One roared. “Kill them, bring me their souls, or I’ll feast on yours!”

~ Rogue ~

“Where the hell are we?” Montana asked, looking upon the great hall.

“Where ever we are, I think we’ve arrived,” Mila said.

The tunnel they traversed, a main thoroughfare of the ship, led to this cathedral-sized dome. The floor and wall were pure-white and glowed slightly illuminating the cavernous hall. Looking up, it seemed they were inside a hollow beehive.

“Must be two or three hundred feet to the top,” Mila said looking up.

Five more tunnels spaced evenly around its edge led into this hall. The floor sloped down slightly towards the center, where there was a funnel-like hole.

“Look at those. They’re out of place,” Montana said. Clay pots, each half the size of a man, sat by the walls around the hall. Spaced about four feet apart, the only breaks were at the tunnel entrances. “It looks like those pots were crafted here on Earth, by ancient artisans. See the runes on them?”

“Those six pots, over there,” Mila pointed to a set halfway around the chamber. “I sense the missing soldiers in them.”

“Let’s free them!” Montana said, as he started across the hall.

“Don’t you get it!” Mila pulled him back by the scruff of his neck. “They’re dead. It’s their souls that are trapped in there. And this is the chamber where the Frost Giants

will feed on them.”

“Shit!” Montana's knees felt weak.

“That's why all these passages lead here,” Mila said. “And that funnel in the floor, that's where the creepy felling comes from. There's something huge down there; and it's evil, angry, and hungry.”

“That's what I was afraid of,” he answered.

“We have to free those souls before it feeds on them,” Mila said.

But before she finished her words, a wave of tentacles gushed forth from the furthest tunnel entrance. When they saw one stub where a tentacle should have been, they knew this was the monster that had flung the helicopter towards them, whose arm Montana had severed with Thor's Hammer.

“Let's finish this one off,” Montana said, reaching for his hammer again.

The monster lunged toward them, crossing the cavern at surprising speed.

Mila shot a wave of energy toward it, sending the monster flying into the far wall. It slumped to the floor, stunned. Instead of attacking again, it grabbed one of those clay pots.

“It's feeding,” Mila cried.

“No, it's going to throw it into the hole in the middle of the floor,” Montana corrected. “It want to feed whatever is down there.”

Montana flung his hammer. His aim was the pot wrapped in the creature's grasp. When the hammer found its target, and smashed the pot, the monster gave a high-pitched wail. It grasped in the air for something ephemeral as if trying to catch an erratic butterfly.

When it realized it couldn't catch what it was after — the human soul — the

creature lunged toward Mila and Montana again with fury, arms flailing, teeth spinning like turbine engines.

Mila shot another charge of energy toward it. This time, she shot lightning from her fingertips. Her supply of shock waves had been drained with that last volley.

Stunned, the creature convulsed under the electric charge Mila was generating.

Montana, in the meantime, aimed his hammer for another shot.

“No, wait!” Mila cried, not relenting her stream of lightning. “Smash all those pots!”

“Roger that,” Montana said. He took careful aim and sent Thor's Hammer flying around the chamber, smashing each of the clay pots in its path.

By the time the hammer returned to him, the creature stopped convulsing and slumped to the floor.

Mila shot one final heat wave at it. The monster exploded, showering the walls of the chamber with goo.

The two of them were doused with exploding monster innards as well. By the time they wiped their faces, the hall was silent again with green goo was dripping of the far wall where the most of the creature had splattered.

“Shit,” Montana cried. “That's disgusting. Did I smash all the pots? I did! Do you sense any of those souls around?”

“No,” Mila said. “They've been freed. They're off to whatever the afterlife has in store for them.”

“That means the Frost Giant can't feed, and won't grow strong? Right?”

“I sense more energy than I thought it had,” Mila said. “It must have fed on that

last monster's soul. These aliens are hard to read when I'm too close to them. But, I do sense, that whatever is down there is stirring from its sleep."

"Oh."

"Yes, my dear," Mila said. "We have one more to kill — down the hole."

"That's what I afraid you'd say," he said.

Mila started walking slowly toward the opening.

"What the —" Montana started to follow her.

"Wait up here," Mila said, holding her hand up. "I'm going to take a peek." Be ready to throw that hammer, just in case."

Mila inched toward the center of the chamber taking slow, deliberate steps.

"It feels like I'm on a downward slope, even though I know the floor is level," she commented. Mila took a few more steps then stopped. "There's something definitely pulling at me and I'm slipping in. The floor is extremely smooth. I'm coming back."

She turned and tried to take a step towards Montana, but slid back a step, closer to the hole.

Mila fell to her hand and knees and tried to crawl back to the edge but slipped closer towards the center.

"It looks like there's some kind of artificial gravity under the floor," Montana said.

"It's sucking me in!" Mila yelled.

"Can you fly?" Montana cried from the edge. "Levitate?"

"I'm trying," she said. "The pull is too strong."

"I'm coming to get you."

"No, don't! It's deceptive. You can't tell when you've gone too far!"

“Mila,” he cried, as he watched her levitate only a few feet off the floor in a feeble attempt to fly.

“Montana!” She reached a hand towards him. Summoning all her energy, she could barely fly ahead a few inches. Just when she thought she was making some headway, she looked down and saw she was floating above the funnel. She screamed when she saw the circular mouth below, with its triple row of spinning teeth. A blood-red tongue danced in its center and a dozen small eyes lined the mouth's periphery. She looked up as Montana disappeared over the horizon as she was pulled down.

There would be no afterlife for her, she knew. This last, most fearful monster would devour her body and soul. Should she direct what's left of her meager energy in a bolt of lightning toward that gaping maw? If she did, she'd have nothing left to resist being sucked down. At least she'd give that thing a solid whack, a cosmic punch in the nose.

Mila Spears channeled all her remaining energy into the biggest charge of electricity she'd ever made. She didn't care if the expense of power burned her out. In fact, she hoped it would — long before those rotating teeth got her.

The lightning bolt she set off vaporized the air, but didn't fry her brain. Mila was too strong for that. She saw the creature below shudder as it took her direct hit. In fact, for a moment, its pull of gravity lessened. But now, she had no energy left within her. As she tumbled, feet up, she felt a snap in her left ankle, then something tighten around it. Her descent stopped with a sudden jerk, then realized she was being pulled back up.

When she cleared the rim of the funnel, she saw that it was a rope around her ankle. She looked up to see Montana pulling on the other end. He'd lassoed her.



“Montana!” It was all she could say.

“Mila!” He pulled her towards him until he got her far enough from the edge so that the strange gravity no longer pulled at her.

She ran the rest of the way.

They hugged when they met.

Then she kissed him. Their lips met. They held each other. Mila cried.

“When we get out of here, if we get out of here,” Mila said, shaking, “we can, you can —”

Montana screamed.

“What? Now you're backing out?” Mila asked.

“Turn around!” Montana forced her around by the shoulders.

Mila screamed when she, too, saw the Frost Giant's head appear from the funnel. Green pus poured from some of its eyes where she'd her bolt of lightning had focused. Other than that, it seemed no worse off.

Tentacles by the hundreds appeared to grow out of the chamber's floor. In no time, the cavernous hall was filled with the monster's head and undulating snake-like arms.

“Shit!” Montana cried out. He grabbed Mila by the wrist and pulled her along the tunnel they'd come. “A Frost Giant, the real McCoy,” he said.

“Wha?” Mila huffed as he dragged her along. She was drained of all energy and couldn't shoot a charge strong enough to toast bread. Looking back, she saw a wall of green tentacles racing after them down the passage.

“It's a misnomer to call what we've been killing Frost Giants,” Montana said. “Those creatures are what's left of a dying alien race. That thing there, that's a real Frost

Giant: a god that the aliens created for themselves. That thing's on par with Odin.”

“I get it,” Mila cried. “It's huge and powerful.”

They reached the juncture with the descending shaft, stopping half footstep before falling in.

“Mila, can you fly down?”

“I don't have the strength. We'll fall.”

“No, I mean just you.”

“Montana, no!” she cried.

“Jump, Mila!” Montana said as he pulled Thor's Hammer from his belt one last time.

“No,” she cried again.

“Do it!” he said, ordering her. “And, find your way back to our universe.”

There were tears in her eyes as she watched him aim his hammer.

“This is what I was sent to do,” he said with a tear in his eye, too. “I love you Mila. Although it would have been nice to get into your pants.”

“I love you, too, Montana,” she said, even as her head spun as events unfolded all too fast.

Montana didn't let go this time when he threw Thor's Hammer. Instead he held on and flew with it, trailing behind it like the tail of a kite. He and the hammer picked up speed as they sped toward the wall of undulating tentacles bearing down on them.

Mila saw Montana and the hammer turn into a jag of lightning as she tripped back and fell into the chute.

She descended the shaft in a controlled fall, using energy she didn't imagine she

had. No sooner had she lost sight of Montana, now the lightning bolt, she heard an explosion. It must have been him hitting the Frost Giant. She lost control and went into a free fall, screaming as she tumbled down the shaft until she blacked out.

~ Michael Spears ~

Michael and his daughter, Anna, had been driving all day. They came from London to the Wiltshire Down, to the village of Imber. This is where they figured the meteor had hit. To avoid the military checkpoints along the paved roads, Michael turned his Land Rover down one of the dirt trails. The radio kept warning that nearby villages were being evacuated as a precaution because of the meteor strike and anyone near Imber should get out.

“Won’t mum be proud of us when she sees we’ve come to help?” Anna said with excitement, knowing they were getting close.

They passed two signs warning the area was a military training ground and trespassers would be prosecuted.

Michael rounded a corner and came to a screeching halt. An army jeep blocked the road. Four soldiers aimed their machine guns at them.

“We’ve come for a day of hiking,” Michael said to the first soldier, who leaned on his driver side window. “Did we turn down the wrong trail?”

“You couldn’t have missed the posted signs,” he replied, unimpressed.

Michael saw one of the others calling in his plate number on his radio.

“We’ll turn around,” Michael said. “We’ll look for hiking trails down the road.”

“It’s not a good day for hiking,” the soldier said. “I suggest you go home and try again some other day. There’s an evacuation in effect.”

Michael backed up and turned his Land Rover around. He kept looking back at the soldiers.

“Hang on a moment,” the soldier on the radio called to him. He blew his whistle ordering Michael to stop.

He contemplated gunning the pedal until he saw all four soldiers raise their guns.

“Mr. Spears?” the first soldier said as he trotted up to his window with his gun pointed. “You'll have to come with us.”

~ Witch ~

Mila woke with a disquieting feeling like she had woken from a horrid dream. She was lying face down in the dried grass. When she moved, harsh stalks tickled her nose. She felt something hard jabbing at her left side.

She turned over and saw three haggard soldiers pointing their machine guns at her. Then she realized she was back in her own universe, not far from the abandoned village and the spaceship's impact crater.

“Montana!” she called out.

“You'll have to come with us, miss,” one of soldiers said. He lowered his gun and offered her a hand up. The other two soldiers lowered their guns, too.

“Have you seen the man I was with?” she asked.

“No, ma'am,” one soldier answered.

Mila noticed they weren't handcuffing her. Nor were they treating her much like a prisoner. These three seemed too exhausted to bother.

They escorted her toward a large tent that appeared to be a command center. A dozen or so army-green trucks were parked around it. Sergeant Major Humphrey looked

up as Mila was led inside. He was sitting on a folding chair behind a collapsible aluminum table.

“Have a seat,” he said. There were burn marks on his neck as if a motorcycle had spun its wheels on him.

“What happened while I was gone?” she asked, sitting in the chair opposite the Sergeant Major. “How long was I gone? Have you seen Montana?”

“You were right,” he said. “Those snake-arms kept popping out of nowhere and tried to grab hold of us. We took your advice and rounded ourselves into a circle, keeping them away, more or less. One of them got me around the neck. It took my men three magazines of fire before they could even scratch it. When they did, it finally let go.” He poured a glass of water for Mila and pushed it across the table to her. “Then it suddenly stopped attacking. I presume you dispatched it.”

Mila took a drink but refused the cigarette the Sergeant Major offered.

“You were gone for the better part of a day,” Humphrey continued. “And no, we haven't found your friend. I dare say I didn't expect to find you alive,” he said. “Give me your arm for a moment.”

When Mila reached across the table, the Sergeant Major grabbed her firmly by the wrist, pulled his regulation knife from his belt, and jabbed the back of her arm with its tip.

“Hey!” Mila cried out, trying to pull away. His grip was too firm.

When Humphrey saw a trickle of red blood he released her and nodded to one of his men, who quickly applied a bandage.

“Sorry, ma'am,” Humphrey said. “Regulations.”

“What, to poke me?”

“In the event of an alien invasion.”

“Were you checking to see if my blood was red?”

“If it was blue or green I'd have to shoot you,” he answered. “But results being to the contrary, I have orders from above to let you go.”

“That's it?”

“Unless there are more of those whatever-it-is-that's-out-there.”

“I think Montana sacrificed himself destroying the last one.”

Then events hit Mila like one of those cinder-block buildings crashing down on her. She fainted from exhaustion and fell off her chair.

She didn't know how long she'd been sleeping when she woke up on a cot in the corner of the tent. She felt something on her chest between her crossed fingers, then sprang up when she realized it was Thor's Hammer.

“Montana!” she cried, when she saw him sitting on the floor, his back propped against her cot, head drooped, Stetson over his eyes, dozing. The two were alone in the tent.

He snapped awake when he heard her voice. He turned to her.

“Mila,” he cried. He smiled at her.

“You're alive!” she cried. “I thought I lost you. What happened?”

“Hard to explain. I turned into energy to fight the Frost Giant,” he said. He nodded toward Thor's hammer. “I don't remember a thing about the battle. I only know I became hyperdimensional and I moved in more dimensions than our three. I think I even navigated multiple time dimensions. All I have is visions that don't make sense.” He put his head in his hands. “Heck, I don't even know how the battle ended.”

“You must have won,” Mila said, hugging him from behind. “You're alive. You're here with me.”

“Sometimes I wonder what it means to be alive,” he said. “You know, getting turned into pure energy kinda kills you. Even though that damn hammer put me back together atom by atom, I'm not sure if I'm the same person as before.”

“You know I can sense souls,” Mila said. “And, I sense it's you, Montana Chang. New body or not, it's your soul in there.”

“Must be,” he said, looking up at her. “Cuz I've still got that hankerin' for you that won't go away. I only wish that the hammer would have put me back together without the caked-on monster goo.”

Sergeant Major Humphrey stooped his head as he walked into the tent. He cleared his throat announcing his arrival.

“Ah, I see you're both awake,” he said. “You're both free to go. We've had no more sightings since you 'reappeared'. Of course, I want a full report from both of you before you get on your merry ways. Get cleaned up first. There's a mobile decontamination truck back there in the village. You can't miss it; it's right beside the church yard. It got a shower and I suggest you both wash off whatever it is you're splattered with.”

When they arrived at the truck, Mila insisted that he shower first. Montana had caught the brunt of that last exploding monster. Mila waited for him in the church, lying on the front pew.

She dozed off again, and woke to his gentle kiss on her forehead.

“Mmmm,” she said, smiling.

He kissed her again, this time on the lips.

“I’ll go wash up,” she told him.

“No,” he said, “I can’t wait. I want you now.”

“Like this? All sweaty and dirty?”

“It’s a turn-on,” he said, picking her up in his arms. “I have to have you now or I’ll simply die.” Montana carried her to the altar and laid her on its center. There, he proceeded to undress her with a heated fury.

“You really are impatient,” she said, slightly amused, but somewhat disappointed that he wouldn’t wait for her to get cleaned up.

“Yes,” he said, as he stripped off his jacket and shirt. “Impatient, that’s what I am.” He rolled up his jacket and laid it under her head for a pillow. He tossed his shirt to the side.

He slid out of down his pants next. Mila saw that in the next hundred years, men’s underwear had gotten a lot slinkier. She admired his firm, rippled chest. Then she gasped when he pulled his underpants off and his organ sprung to attention. He was huge. A naughty girl’s dream. Fevered, pulsing, and eager to serve and be served.

“You’re as long as my arm!” she gasped, taking his member in her hand and stroking it up and down. She felt his heat; gazed upon its intense fury; watched his pulsing member as it grew even longer and thicker as she handled it. She stroked it up and down using two hands.

He climbed onto the altar on top of her. He kissed her navel.

She gasped at the tender sensation. Her body rose and fell as she breathed.

Then his tongue traveled up her body. He kissed her breasts. First the right nipple,



then the left.

Mila shuddered as sparks surged through her body.

He moved up, looking her in the eyes. And what tender eyes he had, she thought. Their lips locked. He held her tight. She felt his body lying against hers. His arms cradled her neck and held her. His legs wrapped around hers, pinning her down.

“I’ve wanted this for a long, long time,” he said. “You’ve no idea, how long.”

She smelled his musky scent, both on him and the soft wool of his fleece jacket. How nice that soft fleece felt as her pillow.

“Montana,” she said with a cold realization, “how did your coat get clean? And your underwear, I burned a hole in it?” Mila tried to struggle to pull away, but his iron grip held her down. His legs entwined hers. His penis coiled around her midriff before snaking its way toward her pussy. Mila screamed when she realized this was not Montana.

~ Rogue ~

Montana stepped into the church through the front doors. He remembered this is where he was bowled over by Mila. With nothing but a towel around his hips, he felt the autumn chill, but he was glad to be out of his war-stained clothes.

“Damn, I feel better,” he said, then looked up. He saw Mila on the altar — and someone who looked a lot like him, him but with arms and legs turning into green tentacles.

He didn’t have Thor’s Hammer with him.

“Where’d I leave it?” he thought. “Damn, in one of the pews.” He ran up the aisle, scanning into each row. Each time he slowed to turn his head, was one less moment he had to save her beloved witch.

Mila screamed and struggled to break free. She saw Montana's mouth, or what she had thought was Montana, transform into a round orifice, first looking like a foreigner making the *ou* sound in French, then turning completely into that dreaded round hole with counter-rotating pointed teeth. It reached to her, ready to plant a kiss of death, mutilating her, killing her, then sucking up her soul. She already felt the Frost Giant feeding on her, growing stronger from her fear.

Then its head exploded.

Green blood gushed from the decapitated body, spraying her. It fell on top of her, lying limp. She realized that one of the tentacles was in the process of entering her vagina.

Mila shoved the carcass off and scrambled away. She only looked up when she heard the hum of Thor's Hammer recede. She saw Montana — the real Montana — catch it. When he did, his towel slipped loose from his waist and fell to the floor.

Montana didn't know exactly what to do after he caught the hammer coming back to him, his towel falling off, exposing him. This wasn't how he wanted his dear Mila to see him in his entirety the first time. He didn't know if he should cover himself first, or just rush to her side.

He grabbed his towel with one hand while holding the hammer with the other and ran up the aisle to her. He tripped over the dragging corner of the towel and fell into the ground, face first.

When he looked up, he saw Mila laughing hysterically as she sat against the church wall watching him climb back to his feet.

He stooped down beside her and hugged her. Her laugh became a cry. She cried in his arms until she cried herself out.

“Look at you,” Mila said, finally. “You got that green stuff on you all over again. You have to take another shower.” She started laughing again.

He pulled her to her feet and led her down the aisle, out of the church.

“No, you're the one who badly needs a shower,” he said.

He led her into the contamination van and led her to the shower stalls.

Montana turned on the hot water for her.

“Um, I'll wait in the changing room,” he said tentatively.

“Okay,” she answered in a whisper, just as tentative.

He wiped the Frost Giant blood off his face and chest with a towel. Having hugged her, he got that monster blood on him all over again. He listened to the water cascading from the shower and splashing over her body, then falling like a waterfall to the floor. He thought about peeking in to see if she wanted her back washed, or something.

After fidgeting for some moments, he decided to look around outside. He'd heard rustling sound just beyond the truck. It could be the military, who were still doing their reconnaissance, or it could be ...

It must be nerves in his hyper-aware state, but still, he had to look. With a fresh bath towel around his waist, he peeked around the truck, then around the church yard, into the church again. He saw the body of the Frost Giant lying where he slew it. He may not have killed it outright while the hammer transformed him into that hyperdimensional being, but it was sure dead now. It must have been the last gasp, the last feeble attempt of the Frost Giant to feed.

When he got back to the decontamination truck the water was still running. She

sure was showering a long time, he thought.

“Mila?” he called.

“Montana,” she said in a sultry voice.

“You okay?” he asked.

“This has done wonders,” she said.

“Do you want me to, um,” he stammered. He couldn't believe how he was falling for her and how he became so choked up. No, this was impossible, he thought, she was married. I can't fall for her!

“What?” she said. “Wash my back?” She laughed. “Of course, silly. Come in and wash my back.”

Dropping his towel on the floor, he stepped into the shower stall. It was a tight fit, but the water was hot, and her body was just as hot. And inviting.

He pressed against her, his hot member sandwiched between their bodies.

“Are you sure you want this?” he asked. “I mean, are you ready, emotionally?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered. “I'm ready. I've wanted you for a long, long time, Montana Chang. I can't wait to get you inside me.”

She wrapped her arms around his shoulders, and her legs around his hips, and backed against the shower wall. Her pussy was hot and wet. He slid deep inside her with one thrust.

“Make me come,” she moaned, as her inner walls tightened around him.

“You were a wreck just minutes ago,” he gasped as he thrust into her, water cascading down on them both.

“I was,” she said in a throaty, moaning voice, “I was almost dead, but having you

here, in me, is rejuvenating.”

Then she came, squeezing him tighter. Pulling him into her, even deeper. He felt her inner wall and knew he was rubbing up against her G-spot. She threw her head back, letting the water run over her face as she shuddered in orgasmic bliss.

The two of them tumbled out of the shower, water still running. She descended to her knees in front of him.

“Now, I want to give you everything you deserve,” she said. Then she kissed him; kissed him on the tip of his cock. She circled him with her tongue. “I’m going to take you in all the way. I bet you’ve never seen anyone swallow so deep.” She laughed a mischievous laugh. “I’m going to swallow you all the way, swallow you whole.”

With his hands on her head, ready to guide her down, Montana looked up for a moment and saw Mila standing by the doorway. She had a towel wrapped around her hair and one around her chest, the way girls do, just above her breasts. Her eyes were wide open in astonishment. She dropped her jaw as she stared. Montana looked down at — who was this other Mila? — there were two of them!

The Mila on her knees held him tight against her and wouldn’t let him push her away. She descended upon his cock with her hideous, circular mouth. But before his manhood, his defining organ, got puréed, Mila’s head — or the head of the Frost Giant looking like Mila — exploded.

The real Mila, the one standing by the door, had shot a charged lightning bolt, decapitating the Frost Giant.

Montana pushed the headless body away. He backed as far away from it as quickly as he could.

“I had sex with that thing!” he screamed. “How gross is that! And it was about to bite my dick off!” He felt himself grow limp.

“I went out looking for you,” Mila said. “When I came back ...”

Montana grabbed his hammer from the bench where he’d left it. He started pounding the lifeless body of the Frost Giant disguised as the decapitated Mila.

“Swallow me whole, will you!” he screamed as he let the hammer's fury fly. “Seduce me, will you! Fuck with Mila, will you! You're through.” He kept beating the dead body with Thor’s Hammer. When his fury ebbed, he shoved the hammer into the gaping hole where the head used to be. Energy shot from the hammer, incinerating what was left of the Frost Giant.

“It's okay, Montana,” Mila said. “It's dead. You can stop.”

It was another minute before Montana stopped, leaving nothing but a charred hulk that resembled a Frost Giant tentacle more than it did an imitation of Mila.

~ Witch ~

“Now we’re splattered with green stuff all over again,” Mila said, wiping a spot from her face.

“We can shower off quickly,” Montana said, nodding at the stall.

It was a tight fit as body rubbed against body. Despite Mila’s smooth naked skin rubbing against his loins, Montana remained un-aroused. They quickly washed each other, ever mindful of the gore around them. When done, they tiptoed around the pools of green blood as fast as they could on their way out of the truck.

The Sergeant Major was outside with five new men. By their demeanor, Mila and Montana judged these new men to be scientists, not soldiers.

“You’ll have to decontaminate your decontamination truck,” Montana said. “We just killed that Frost Giant again. Oh, and there’s a piece of it in the church. I’d thought I killed it there earlier.”

“Hmmm, I see,” Sergeant Major Humphrey said raising an eyebrow. “Right, you two,” pointing to two of his men, “bag up everything in the truck. The rest of you, take the church.” Then he turned back to Mila and Montana. “You told me you killed it while you’d disappeared into that other universe. Are you sure it’s dead this time?”

“I’ll stake my reputation on it,” Montana said.

“Very well,” the Sergeant Major said with his usual stoicism. “You can both relax, but don’t leave just yet. Just in case. Oh, one more thing, Mrs. Spears. I’ve recovered your broom. It appears to have survived the explosion. If you’d consider joining Unit One, the army can supply you with an updated mode of transportation.”

“I work better alone,” Mila said, examining her slightly charred broom.

Montana, Mila, and her broom strolled behind the church to sit in the graveyard. They were finally alone together. Them, and the faded headstones of centuries past. The sun had come out. The grass was soft and ankle high. They let the rare autumn sunshine warm them. Neither talked much. They just gazed out over the rolling hills of the Wiltshire Down.

“I suppose I can fly back home,” she finally said, looking down at her broom lying beside her feet. “And you will disappear back through your portal.”

“The gods closed it,” Montana said. “I already checked. It was behind the altar.” He looked up at the clouds in the distance. “They’ll come and get me in their own time.”

“Perhaps we have a little while together,” Mila said, resting her head on his

shoulder.

Without thinking, he turned to kiss her. When his lips grazed hers, he thought she would surely push away, but instead she pulled him closer. They fell back in the grass, he on top of her, behind the cover of the headstones.

“Montana,” she giggled. “You are the naughty boy.”

He kissed her neck.

She moaned in pleasure, baring her throat to him. He could do with her as he pleased, and she had no intention of stopping him.

He kissed her just below the shoulder as his tongue moved down her body. He kissed her breasts, biting gently, sending her into shivers. Then her belly. And her navel. And then points south. He kissed her pussy.

Mila arched her back, then grabbed him by his hair and drove him onto her. Her breathing intensified. She came as he teased her nub, pulling it between his lips. She covered her mouth, knowing her screams of pleasure would bring anyone in earshot with machine guns a-blazing.

As her first wave of pleasure ebbed, Montana climbed up on her. Body to body, he entered her with slow, firm strokes. She grabbed him by his butt cheeks, holding onto him, even clawing her nails into him. Yes, this was the real Montana. She didn't know how that crass imitation had fooled her. Perhaps she wanted him as bad as he wanted her, and she'd let her guard down.

She moaned again at the feeling of him inside her.

He made love to her slowly and rhythmically, letting her savor every sensation, pushing deep into her and then almost pulling out. While all the way in, he'd find that



one special spot; and she'd shudder with pleasure that she never imagined. Then he picked up his pace, taking her with that intensity she'd seen in him the moment they met.

When he changed his tempo and slowed again, Mila seized the moment and rolled them over to sit on top of him. It was her turn now to ride this cowboy. She attacked him with fury and rode hard. Montana cupped her breasts as she bounced up and down, holding firmly onto them. He felt her nipples against his palms. She, in turn, looked down on him with a look of frantic bliss upon her face.

When she stopped to catch her breath, he rolled her over, pinning her arms above her head. Their lips locked as he ground ever deeper into her. The kiss muffled her cries and moans as she came again. He took great delight in feeling her body shudder under his. It pleased him that he could make her feel this good; that is what love-making was all about. And he was secretly relieved he didn't shoot off his load too soon — not knowing what his body might do after being denied so long.

Mila struggled, but she had no intention of breaking free. Now, this was all about the struggle, the feeling of her body under his. Even if he should let her break free, her legs were locked around his bottom, and she wouldn't let him escape.

Montana Chang came the next time she did. Her moans, gyrations, and contractions were too intense for him to resist. He collapsed on top of her, panting. Mila hugged him tight, savoring the feeling of her body against his, wishing this moment would last forever.

“Wow,” he whispered after a long while.

“I agree,” she said. “Wow.”

He rolled off her back onto the grass and pulled her beside him, cradling her in his

arm. The sun was still out, still warmer than usual for autumn. They basked in its rays, catching their breath.

He looked at her, she at him. She gave him a quick kiss. They both knew this was an impossible kind of love. She would have to return to her husband and family. He would return to his roguish life trying to beat the gods at their own game. It was a kind of love that was urgent yet savored in every moment. A kind of love that would be remembered forever yet should best be forgotten, for thinking back many years from now would bring on an ache for what could never be.

As they rested in each other's arms, neither saw Mila's family walk up into the graveyard and look down on them until it was too late.

"Michael! Anna!" Mila cried, jumping up and grabbing a towel and wrapped it around herself. She wanted to say so much, to tell them how much she and this man had been through, and about the bond they'd forged; how he'd saved her time after time; and that she knew a relationship with this rogue was impossible. But none of those words came out of her mouth.

"Mother, how could you?" Anna said, betraying no emotion. Mila knew she had just robbed her daughter of her childhood.

"Mila, I thought we had something special," Michael said, shaking in rage. Then to Montana, he yelled, "You have torn my family apart. I hope you're happy. Go hang your head in shame."

"Sir, it's not like that," Montana pleaded, wrapping his towel around his waist. "You've no idea what we've been through together."

"You think you're so big, so cocky," Michael pushed him to the ground, "killing

space aliens and their Frost Giant god. For that you think you have a right to my wife?"

"Michael, I've never seen you like this!" Mila cried.

"That's because I've never seen you like that!" Michael snapped.

"It was in the heat of battle," Montana said, reaching in the grass, gaining purchase to stand up. "It never would have happened if we'd met under other circumstances, I assure you, sir."

"Mummy, why?" Anna cried, wrapping herself around Mila's leg.

"You will suffer for this!" Michael spat.

"Yes, suffer," Anna repeated.

Montana climbed back onto his feet. The two men looked at each other eye to eye. Michael grabbed Montana by the throat and began to choke him.

Montana raised Thor's Hammer, which he'd picked up from the grass, and smashed it into Michael's head, killing him.

Michael fell to the ground with a thud.

Then Montana pulled Anna away from her mother and killed her, too, with one quick blow.

"Oh God, no!" Mila cried. "Montana, what did you do!" She knelt beside her fallen family. "You didn't have to do that!"

"It's not them," Montana said, pulling her away from the two fallen bodies. "Look, green blood."

"I say, what's going on here," Sergeant Major Humphrey said, walking up the hill to the graveyard. "What? You had to kill that monster yet again?"

"Give me your knife and hold out your hand, Sergeant," Montana, almost

hysterically.

Humphrey thought for a moment. Then he said, “Right.” He handed Montana his knife, which Montana took and pricked the back of the Sergeant Major’s hand.

“Satisfied?” Humphrey said, sounding annoyed.

“Sorry, I had to know,” Montana said, returning the knife.

“I see he’s right. It’s not your family,” Humphrey said to Mila, who was still sobbing. “A clever disguise, I must say. Note to self for final report: *Space beings can change shape.*”

“How, how did you know?” Mila asked, shaking.

“How could your husband have known we killed Frost Giants?” Montana replied.

Mila looked down at the two bodies, oozing green blood, writhing on the ground below them. They morphed before their eyes into the one hideous head of the Frost Giant. It was now a lot smaller, with most of its tentacles missing. It flopped about as it lost more and more green blood.

“How many times do we have to kill it?” Mila yelled. She kicked the tattered body of the once-great Frost Giant god, now the size of a large beach ball — a fraction of the gargantuan terror from the spaceship. “That’s for trying to pass yourself off as my family!”

The Frost Giant groaned and opened the last remaining eye that was intact. It laughed a weak, sickly laugh in a voice that was a poor imitation of Mila’s daughter. Using its four remaining tentacles, it rolled down the hill, away from the churchyard toward the open down.

“It looks like we have to kill it one more time,” Montana said.

The Frost Giant rolled onto the well-worn dirt road leading up to the village. Just then, Mila saw her family's Land Rover thudding along toward them — on a collision course with the racing monster.

Before Mila could shoot a bolt of energy, the Frost Giant ran into Michael's truck, which hit the monster and ran it over. Mila watched in horror as her husband stopped their car and got out. Oblivious to the head with four tentacles writhing in pain on the road behind him, Michael checked the front of his car for dents.

“Damn, what's he doing here?” Mila asked. She didn't know if she should be relieved to find them alive, angry that they'd followed her, or scared because the Frost Giant was crawling slowly toward her husband. “Michael!” she yelled. “Get back in the car and drive! Get away from that thing!”

Michael looked up to the churchyard less than a quarter mile away where Mila was frantically waving at him, jumping up and down. He waved back at her, wondered why she was naked, and then continued inspecting the damage on his bumper.

The Frost Giant opened its gaping mouth. It reared its four remaining tentacles ready to pounce on Michael.

Mila leapt on her broom and shot down the hill, hugging the ground as she flew like a rocket directly at the Frost Giant. She rolled off a moment before the broom impaled the monster through its open mouth.

“What the hell is that?” Michael gulped when he turned around.

Mila got up from her tumble and shot a charge of energy at the Frost Giant. The monster recoiled back, rolling onto the open down. She followed it.

“Stay away from my family!” She shot another charge at it, sending it tumbling

another ten feet further, then another.

The next bolt of energy from her fingertips set off an unexploded shell that lay beneath the surface. It blew the Frost Giant into hundreds of green bits that rained down on the grass.

“Now it's dead!” Mila fumed. She turned to Michael and Anna watching with dropped jaws. She turned to the churchyard a quarter mile away where Montana and the Sergeant Major stood. She looked just in time to see Montana disappear. The gods had taken him back to Asgard.

That's it, she thought. Not even a moment for goodbye?

~ Epilogue in Asgard ~

Montana stood in the center of the stone sarsen circle, surrounded by the gods.

“You have done well,” Odin said.

“Yesssssss,” Montana said to himself, betraying no emotion to these solemn-faced gods.

Thor stepped forward to reclaim his hammer. He patted Montana on the shoulder and grunted in approval.

Only Loki spoke. “Did it have to end like this?” he asked. “Such an unbecoming end for one so powerful.”

“Loki, you know it had to be done,” Odin spoke.

“Of course I knew it had to be done,” Loki snapped. “But did it have to die such a humiliating death: weakened, beaten, and ultimately killed by a pathetic human artifact of war. It should have been vanquished on a true field of battle. There are so few of us — I mean them — remaining. And the Frost Giants only find themselves in their predicament

because they were betrayed by Asgard; by you, Odin!”

“Loki, this is not the time or place,” Odin said.

“There was a bargain,” Loki continued. “And, you broke it. All of you!”

“That was a bargain I could not keep,” Odin said, mainly for Montana’s benefit, for this argument had be rehashed countless times by the gods and goddesses, and since Montana was standing among the them, taking in everything that was said. “The Frost Giants built Asgard for us. But in return, they wanted to come to Earth and feast on all the human souls they could take. That, I could never allow.”

“There are more Frost Giants out there,” Loki said. It was almost a warning. “Even if they number in the tens.”

“Loki,” Odin spoke. “There are now exactly ten Frost Giants — but only if you count yourself among them.

“There must have been a better way,” Loki said, not hearing Odin. “I cannot consider myself in league with you after this.” He turned and walked out of the circle.

Sygn, Loki’s wife, locked eyes with Friga, then Freya, each just for a moment. She followed her husband away.

“Sygn, you have no cause to leave,” Odin called to her.

“I have sworn to stand beside my husband,” is all she said.

~ Epilogue on Earth ~

Mila stared out of the passenger side window on their way back to London.

“Did you have a good time saving the Earth?” Michael asked.

“No,” Mila said, lost in thought. “This adventure wasn’t fun at all.”

“Sorry to hear that,” her husband said. “And, sorry about your broom.”

“I can get another one at Woolworth's.” She shrugged.

Mila kept staring out the window as fields, canals, and villages rushed by on the M3 Motorway.

“Who was that naked man beside you?” Michael asked.

“Him?” Mila said, not looking at her husband. “He came with the military. I don’t know who he is. We both had to shower in the decontamination truck.”

“Because, I swear I saw him vanish into thin air.”

“Interesting,” she said after a long pause. What could she say? Would it be better to tell him the truth? What would it accomplish besides breaking his heart? Yet, it felt like a piece of her soul had died for keeping Montana a secret.

She looked behind her. Her daughter was sleeping in the back seat.

Mila spent the rest of the trip staring out the window.

“... a piece of my soul,” she kept thinking.

The End



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<https://www.paypal.com/us/webapps/mpp/account-setup>



Send a donation via Bitcoin.

Start by scanning this QC code into your phone's bitcoin wallet.



Go to  
[www.joenobel.com/bitcoin.html](http://www.joenobel.com/bitcoin.html)  
to learn about Bitcoins and  
setting up your own wallet.

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Be well, Joe

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