

AD HOC

by Greg Stolze

Gina screams and sweats. Dr. Kwon encourages her.

“C’mon Gina. Push. Push!”

More screams. Gina’s making history.

“I can see the head. Oh yeah, it’s a beauty, push, *push!*”

“IT HURRRRTS!”

“I know honey, it always hurts, but you’re doing great! Hey, at least you don’t have full gravity pulling on you, right?”

“IT! HURRRRTS!”

“One more big push and the shoulders... yes! Yeah, you did it!”

Gina starts to sob and laugh. Dr. Kwon takes big, moon-bounce steps to a table and a blade. Dr. Kibiwot helps harvest the infant’s umbilical cord blood, rich in stem cells. They’ve got close to a gallon of stem cells frozen somewhere in the vast store-rooms labeled MEDICAL SUPPLIES/SUMINISTROS MÉDICOS but this is the procedure, store it in case this particular human needs it. Less chance of rejection and, besides, something could go wrong. Something always could. They could lose all those frozen stem cells and need to start over with these.

Dr. Kwon cleans the baby, smiling. Two more lightweight bounds and she’s beside Gina Vaccaro, PhD, MLS, mother to the first human born in space, as far as anybody knows.

“It’s a boy,” Dr. Kwon says.

“Is it?”

“That’s what the ultrasound indicated.”

“Well, I know.” Gina pushes a sodden lock of hair back over the top of her head. She’s still panting.

“The first baby born off Earth!”

Gina smiles as the infant lies on the warm skin between her breasts.

“He’s perfect,” she says, blinking back tears. “I think I’m going to name him Travis.”

“Travis Vaccaro, space baby. I love it.”

###

The news spreads quickly. First it’s the medical personnel, who’ve been watching the three late term women aboard the ship. From there, it gets out to the food process engineers, one of whom is named Nargiza.

“Great,” Nargiza says, picking at a patch of dry skin on her scalp. “Another mouth.”

“That is not a very celebratory spirit,” her co-worker Ismalba replies. Ismalba is sharing her living space with a woman in the hospital, which is how she gets the news before any kind of official announcement.

“You want to celebrate? Get me a drink. Get me a cake. I’ll celebrate with vigor and abandon.” Nargiza was a boozier, back on Earth. She’s lucky. Her problem wasn’t discovered before liftoff. No one in charge could read the reports from her last-but-one job, when she got drunk on duty in a research submarine. By the time the file got translated, Nargiza had secured her position. On paper, submarine experience plus high IQ plus food engineering expertise *plus a*

Madrid gallery photography show? An excellent candidate.

Nargiza and Ismalba's job is to make sure everyone on the spacecraft eats. It is not solely their responsibility, but they are top decision makers, answering only to the captain. Ismalba surveys the slowly shrinking, tightly monitored caches of food they brought with them when they fled Earth. She has some discretion to assign it medicinally, as a reward, or at random as a fun surprise. Having given birth, Gina Vaccaro gets a full size Snickers bar, reducing their total Snickers stockpile to 571. It's possible that when those are gone, there will never be any more, ever.

There's another woman, Leighann, whose job is monitoring and encouraging the crops they raise under synthetic sunlight, cataloging every bean or bud. No one wants to be in space long enough for the ship to become self-sufficient, but no one has any idea how long creating the Exit will take, not even the pilot. Nargiza and Ismalba don't talk to Leighann much. They think she's a bitch.

Nargiza's responsibility is recycling digestibles. Everything organic that gets thrown out, sweated off, micturated, discarded or shed is broken down into component proteins and lipids and carbs, purified as much as possible, then reserved to the people onboard. The efficiency isn't where she wants it, so she supplements the daily food allotment with stored ingredients from Ismalba's stores. The resulting slurry is served in three 700 calorie doses per day. Each serving is called a "plop." Ismalba doesn't care for that term.

"At least now there's one less maternally enhanced meal to balance in. And the child will eat very little, comparatively," Ismalba says.

Nargiza grunts in reply, then asks, "Did they say what it is?"

"A boy."

"Superb. Just what we need."

"It won't be the same," Ismalba says.

"Why wouldn't it be?"

"Well, being raised mostly around women, you wouldn't grow into an old Earth-fashioned *man*, why would you?"

"He could be even *more* cosseted and privileged, feeling even *more* special and unique and entitled. Especially with access to all the recorded macho bullshit culture humankind ever produced."

"We're making our own culture up here," Ismalba says, but she's starting to wonder if, perhaps, Leighann is not more tolerable than she initially thought.

"Don't forget *they're* making culture too," Nargiza replies. "All those composers and poets and actors in their *safe space for men*. What do you suppose they're talking about in there, hm?"

###

Despite what the women think and say about it, the men aboard the ship don't spend much time in the small area set aside for their exclusive use. Since the craft was a rushed venture—going from plans to launch in only nineteen months—certain aspects of life aboard weren't apparent until its maiden voyage, which is also its shakedown cruise, which is also its final journey. Its official name is

the *Aloha*, which someone who got left behind thought was very apt, meaning both hello and goodbye. The technicians on the journey—the people who maintain the ion engines and the food reclamation and the atmosphere purification—rechristened it the *Ad Hoc*, after the revolt. The captain wasn't about to argue and the pilot doesn't care.

The room set aside for men is about seven hundred square feet. It has some seating and screens and lights, but it's dim and close with a low ceiling, like almost every other place aboard. It has no exterior view, of course: the *Ad Hoc* can't afford luxury windows. The men call it "The Club" and it's on the exterior of the spinning torus that forms the body of the ship, so the gravity is as heavy inside as anywhere aboard—almost an eighth of a G. Because it's at the "bottom" of the ship's artificial weight-space, moisture tends to very gradually descend to it. The atmosphere is not quite as arid as it is in, say, Gina's birthing suite. That's a mixed blessing. That moisture comes out of or off of a machine or person, so the aroma is dense. The room's also warm, since it adjoins the angled ion engine that gradually imparts spin to the ship. Temperature throughout the *Ad Hoc* is irregular. Some areas where ventilation isn't perfectly sealed get icy cold. Other suites are always hellishly hot.

The first time anyone in the safe space for men talks about Travis Vaccaro is three hours after the captain announces his birth, to game but brief cheers from most of the 7,461 souls aboard the *Ad Hoc*. At that time, "The Club" is occupied by three men. One is Antonio, a 67-year-old Nobel laureate who never really recovered from liftoff.

Another is the 36-year-old physician, Makoud, who saved Antonio from his launch-induced cardiac event. A fan of Antonio's raw, spare and cynical novels even before the world started to end, Makoud's hero worship is obvious to the third man, Franco, a 27-year-old Chilean painter whose assigned studio occupies one of those cold spots. He comes to the safe space for men in order to paint unencumbered by clothes, except a jockstrap.

"Put some goddamn clothes on," Antonio says in cranky Spanish. "No one wants to look at your scrawny buttocks."

Franco, ears plugged by headphones, ignores him.

"What did you say?" English is the only language Makoud shares with Antonio, and it's not his first, nor even his second. In addition to being an MD, Makoud speaks six languages, or seven if Levantine Arabic is sufficiently different from Moroccan. He's learning Spanish in his spare time.

"I criticized his faggotry," Antonio replies, scowling. He's got a chess board and a notebook and is working on an article addressing whether the obvious inclusion of chess in the collective unconscious qualifies it as an art form. His heart's not really in it.

"Surely," Makoud says, "That's... um..."

"Oh just *look* at him! I don't understand why they packed this ship—the last remnant of mankind!—so full of queers!"

"I hardly think it was planned that way," says the soft-spoken doctor. "The

men, the ones with whom I speak, mostly seem... er... full blooded.”

“Well, I suppose I can understand a crew that’s ninety percent female going in for a certain amount of *Sapphic activity*,” the old author sneers, “But that only raises the question of why we needed...”

“Sir, with the greatest respect, we’ve been over this. One man can impregnate dozens of women, while one woman can only be impregnated by one man. Faced with a genetic bottleneck, women are far more necessary.”

“Then why have any men? After all, their lead-lined freezer full of sperm could knock up every woman aboard a thousand times over.”

“Well, I don’t think they wanted to throw away the masculine perspective.”

“I’ll tell you what it is, it’s like in *Doctor Strangelove*. The pervert politicians who built this contraption wanted a vast, nubile population to fondle and impregnate.”

“That’s not even close to true.” Makoud smiles gently, shaking his head. “The goal was to maximize technical knowledge, physical fertility, genetic diversity and cultural potential in a small population.”

“Bah! If you want to have the greatest artistic and scientific minds on a ship, you can’t exclude the bulk of them simply by gender. It’s ridiculous!”

“I’d think you’d be glad to be rid of the competition, you flaccid old donkey,” the painter says, never taking his eyes off the canvas.

“So you *did* hear me!”

“To my intense regret, sí.”

“What’s he saying?” the doctor asks.

“He’s being an insolent philistine and resorting to personal attacks!” The novelist ostentatiously turns a page, even though the previous is only half-full. He doesn’t know that there are only 397 unused notebooks in the ship’s stores. “I tell you, I pity this child, this ‘Travis,’ born as the great fires of the human experiment die down to embers!”

“You only think that because there’s no longer a stream of skinny white boys from the *New York Review of Books* purring about how ‘visceral’ and ‘grounded’ your novels about gauchos fucking are,” the painter replies, in English this time.

“I’m none of those things, my friend, and I admire his writing greatly,” Makoud says.

“Oh, we all noticed,” Franco replies, with a wiggle of his pale and rashy thighs.

Antonio, the great wordsmith, is reduced to snarling wordlessly before burying his head in the notebook.

“And what do you think of Travis, the first human born in the sky?” Makoud asks.

“I think he will have a slight leg up when he starts screwing, especially if he likes women old enough to be his mama.”

“There’s more to this historic occasion than that, surely.” Makoud wonders if everyone has been on the ship long enough to be comfortable sharing awfulness, the way people on Earth used to be on Facebook, or whether it’s just the heat and cold and plop and confinement making everyone irritable.

They've been in space 131 days and have covered roughly 5,000,000 miles. There was about a week there, days 33-40, when people were friendly and optimistic. That was right after crossing the lunar orbit. More importantly, it was day 33 when the nightmares stopped.

"I'm pleased by this new milestone, but I cannot express it in this snot-cough of a language," Franco says. "I shall have to put it on canvas."

After checking his watch, Makoud excuses himself for his shift in the contagion lab. Everyone let aboard was healthy, for the most part, but the low-level illnesses endemic to the human condition require constant vigilance in a closed environment.

"You are wrong about Travis," Antonio mutters, once his doting doctor departs. "He will grow up effeminate, emasculated and weak. They will grind him down, the women."

"Only if they treat us the way we treated them," Franco replies.

"They will be a thousand times worse because they never had any power, so they never learned to use power or, more to the point, to refrain from using it. A society with men in charge could possibly survive, though it would be unlikely. A culture ruled by women? Doomed. Nothing for it but to die as soon and as happily as possible. And without liquor, we can't even do *that!*" These are things Antonio dares not say outside, so they come out in a rush. He worries that Franco might repeat them, but doubts anyone would take it seriously. What's a little sexism when the human race is on the brink of extinction?

"Oh, poor Antonio," Franco croons. "So backed up with self-righteousness and semen. Would a little suck job put a smile your face, hm?"

Antonio frowns. He resents Franco's flirting, but not enough to refuse. "Lock the door," he says gruffly, and the painter laughs.

###

Another fiendishly hot section of the ship is nicknamed the "P-hole," after its inhabitants. The demographics of the thirty-one humans residing in it are different: most are male. They do not have technical tasks to complete, and many of them suspect the plops they receive have fewer calories than what the others get.

There is only one way in and out of the P-hole. It's a long, bent, airtight corridor with cameras. Most of the time, it serves as a storage vault for de-oxygenated gasses. The four times people have left the P-hole, breathing gear was left there for them. Neither of the hallway's doors can be opened from inside.

The P-hole people sit and sweat, most of them stripped down to underwear but some insisting on wearing their old finery.

"Did you hear?" asks a man who once chaired the US Senate finance committee. "Baby got born. Little boy. Named him Travis."

The aging man to whom he speaks, a onetime governor of a desert state, grunts in response. He permitted the *Aloha* (as the P-hole residents still call it, among themselves) to be built in his district, despite being told that fallout from its nuclear pulse engine could ultimately

kill up to 31% of his constituents. “I guess humankind’s starting the turnaround.”

“That’s the spirit. Anybody know if he’ll grow up speaking English or Spanish or what?”

A man who used to be German chancellor makes a rude gesture. The ex-Americans ignore him.

For an hour or so, there’s lively debate about the gender politics of life aboard the ship. Most of the points are well known, rehashed again with slightly edited phrasing or a novel historical example. Meanwhile, in the corners, a man and a woman are having a rehashed discussion of their own.

The man, who led a country called Venezuela back when there were countries, believes that the four people released from the P-hole were re-integrated into the crew. Only three people ever communicate with the P-hole: The captain, and two technicians who have anthropology or sociology degrees. All three of these sources agree that those who went free were given jobs and made to contribute. They say that the politicians who were let on the ship have to be isolated for their own protection, and as a measure to ensure social concord among the artists and engineers. Gradually though, they can be re-introduced.

The woman who governed Mexico, back in the before times, says the captain is a cannibal and that the only hope of the ship—the only hope of the human race—is if they, the leaders, rush the airlock the next time it opens. She is certain that the public will embrace their politicians if only they can present their case, tell their tale, reveal the heinous betrayal worked on

them by the commander and the technocrats.

“There’s no way there’s enough food on board this flying junk barge,” she says. “They took away Fritzl and Peder and fed them to the new bosses.”

“You are paranoid,” replies the Venezuelan.

“If I am, why do they not let us speak to our old colleagues?”

“They fear we will collude against them, and with some reason.” He smiles a smile that charmed the votes out of millions, but it does not sway the Mexican.

“You’re starting to parrot their lies. You are a fool. Next you’ll believe in their ridiculous promise of ‘building the Exit’.”

“I was dubious,” he says, “But you can’t deny that the nightmares all stopped at about the same time.”

“I still have nightmares,” she replies, but he doesn’t take the bait. Everyone’s having bad dreams, of the common sort which make one start awake, panting, with a racing heart. But the deeper nightmares, the ones everyone shared, the ones of the sea and strange stars and the King of All the Earth rising to reclaim a muddy throne... the nightmares that had, by the day of launch, driven 22% of the adult population of Venezuela to suicide... those broke like some sun-sized soap bubble on day 33, leaving only the residue of memory.

They escaped the flooding planet, from the sea-beasts that raped, and ate, and ruined entire coastlines, and then they escaped from the mind of the monster-god. All according to plan.

The political class who'd organized the escape craft getting locked up? Well, that was an unforeseen wrinkle.

As the Venezuelan reaches out to take her hand, a sudden sound blares through the P-hole. "One non-Spanish speaker required." It's Dawn, the sociologist/computer technician. "One non-Spanish speaker required." She starts to repeat it in German, then Japanese.

"This is it!" the Mexican leader cries, standing tall and raising her arms. "We charge the door when it opens, we flood the tunnel!"

"They'll kill us all," says a flinty young man from Montana who, at the last moment, was given his father's place on board. "We wouldn't get halfway before we gas out."

"Then we die! At least it's quick, instead of frying and starving in this toilet! But if we stick *together*, they won't kill us all! You think that fine-fingered intellectual cadre has what it takes to murder us *all*?"

"Historically, intellectual cadres excel at such things," mutters a grumpy industrialist from Singapore. He was never even elected, he extorted his passage because only his company had the resources to build the structural framework on schedule.

"Then stay in your prison, you sorry weak bitches! The rest of you, are there any men, real *men*, who will fight beside me?"

When the door opens, there aren't. Instead, a gloomy Finn resignedly steps into the hissing, stinking passage and stumbles towards the air tank left at the corner. The Mexican glares as the

pressurized, unbreathable stink blows in, she takes a step forward... but she does not enter.

###

The captain's name is Antonía Carmona, and she sometimes wonders how she wound up in charge. She supposes it's because no one quite trusted the Americans, no one wanted a man, and she commanded the largest European NATO ship to make it to the Great Lakes. She was credited with relieving the siege of Montreal, leading her ship in a toe-to-toe battle with something she later heard called a "Cthunia Minoris." They fought it long enough for the denizens of Laval and Vaudreuil-Dorion to evacuate. She questions how badly her assault actually damaged it. In dark moments, she suspects the beast was only resting, that the barrages and chopper attacks delayed it no more than a cobweb.

But the news media was eager for a win, and she didn't go crazy. She was young—fertile anyhow—with command experience battling the invaders. Nobody wanted to blackball her, and some elected officials were in her corner.

It hurts to think that her command might have been endorsed by Fritzl Gerhardt or Peder Kjaer or one of the other politicians pulled out of the P-hole in the name of expedience. But she's ordered men to their deaths before.

Like this one. Ensio Prinkkala. She has no idea how he bribed or blackmailed his way onto the *Ad Hoc* but now she is taking him to see the pilot.

He's saying something to her in Finnish, but Antonía speaks only

Spanish. Whatever it is, he's wheedling. She turns to him and raises a finger, her expression stern but compassionate. She practiced that look a lot, dealing with seaborne refugees in the Mediterranean, back in the good old days of 2016.

He looks hopeful, which is the worst part. She knees him in the crotch. It's unexpected and he immediately folds forward. Antonía wraps an arm, grabs him by the hair and slams the top of his skull into a bulkhead. He drops, groaning, and she has his wrists zip-tied in moments. His ankles follow. She was expecting a wrestling match, this is worse somehow. He doesn't even kick as she drags him facedown along the passageway. In the low gravity, he moves like a blanket.

Dawn is waiting farther down, with a wheelchair. Ensio says something to her in English and she flinches. Then they get him seated and tape over his mouth.

"You're coming with me," Antonía tells Dawn.

"I don't want to." It's out before Dawn even considers her words. She puts a hand over her mouth, wondering if the captain will slap her. Antonía just takes one wheelchair handle and assumes Dawn is taking the other. Dawn does.

They wheel the groaning former UN commissioner to a door with a keypad lock, and a keyhole, and a key card reader. The captain has the code, the key, and the card. Ensio screams behind his gag as soon as the vault-like portal opens.

What lies within is not a temple. There is no grandeur. It is the smallest space into which the statue could fit. Although

the idol is clearly meant to be upright, it's stored sideways, like a snow shovel crammed in a car trunk at the last minute.

Ensio knows of things like this. As the stars came right, the UN was briefed. He has not seen photos of this particular entity, but he's seen the like—trunks and fangs and frilled sense organs and a frame *almost* terrestrial enough to just be sculpture, but somehow more alien than anything native to the deepest ocean trenches.

As for Antonía, she doesn't know much about it. She was told the Nazis found it and the Commies stole it, the oligarchs sold it and the CIA bought it. Its name is an unpronounceable mess, so they just call it the pilot.

The women dump Ensio on the tarp in front of it. The captain pulls a knife out of her pocket, opens it, and slams it through the statesman's temple. When he twitches longer than she'd prefer, she pulls it out and reinserts it, with some difficulty, at the base of his skull. Dawn throws up, being careful to keep it on the tarp—the acids are valuable to the recycled digestibles department, though less so than a dead human body. Antonía withdraws the blade and flicks it at the statue.

The instant the blood makes contact, the stone moves. An appendage, something like a trunk or a snout, reaches out and touches Ensio's corpse. The whole time, the material looks like granite, even as it flexes like flesh. With surprising delicacy, it peels back Ensio's eyelid and conforms itself to the orb beneath. It seethes and pulses. Blood and brains ooze from the stab wounds, loathsomely suggesting that something

extruded from the pilot's organ is displacing matter inside the skull. And then the dead man speaks.

"I acknowledge your presence." Every word is a death-rattle.

Antonía swallows back her bile. Every time she does this, she worries about exposing a body to alien tissue and then incorporating it into the crew's food. But total reprocessing is the goal, has been since the first days planning the *Aloha*. She has to watch this thing interface with a human nervous system, operating it like a puppet, and know that germs or particles from it could be making their way into her diet, into *Travis'* diet. But they've already entrusted the survival of this human remnant to guidance by this thing, this corpse-talker, this inhuman. If you believe the Nazi archaeologists who dug it up in Tunisia, it's accepted human sacrifice for 5,000 years.

"How long since last I spoke?"

"It has been two months. We are... more than a tenth of the way to the orbit of the fourth planet."

"And the Exit?"

"You tell me."

The inhalation is as grotesque as the words, a violent tug of air by muscles that feel no pain, their natural limits overridden by inhuman will. A half-hour of talk with the pilot damages the vessel's vocal cords beyond repair. For the last ten or fifteen minutes of animation provided by the infusion of death-blood, the pilot's reduced to gestures and writing. The captain doesn't know what's so special about death-blood, why that can awaken the entity and a simple donor bag can't. She could ask but she doesn't.

"The Exit does not yet exist."

"Dammit!"

Dawn quietly starts to cry. Her first instinct is to drip it on the tarp for reclamation, but would such a small volume of water and salt make any difference?

"Are we pursued?" the captain asks, aware that the pilot could lie to them for its own purposes, that it might have no way of stretching its senses beyond the reach of their cameras and antennae.

"No."

Antonía is relieved, almost against her will.

"The other things you talked about, the fungi... are they anywhere nearby? Are they waiting for us?"

"To the limit of my senses, they are disinterested."

She nods, grimacing. The next question is one she doesn't want to ask. "One of the artists... wants to commit a murder. She thinks that the collective unconscious might be strengthened by... by an intense discharge of emotion, of fear. Could that work?"

"Perhaps. More than your murder of this person through whom I speak? Unlikely."

This time, Antonía can't help vomiting too.

###

The first time someone told Antonía about the Dreamlands, she shrugged and accepted it. Back in the before times, she would have scoffed or laughed or worried that the person telling her had experienced some kind of brain seizure.

But then the King of All the Earth rose from the depths, great works of humankind were disposed of as if they were lint on a jacket, and she led her troops in battle against a creature the size of the Sydney Opera House. Learning that there was a separate dimension, connected by dreams, that people could enter and move through? Sure, why not?

It was especially plausible after King Cthulhu's coronation nightmare. Once the oceans got warm enough and the sleeper awakened, everyone alive slept through the same annihilating triumph.

Many despaired. Others became desperate. A few—the survivors who got locked in the P-hole—sought escape.

Those well-connected political experts briefed Antonía about the Dreamlands, the dimension King Cthulhu dominated psychically before awakening, rising from the depths, and leading its minions in the subjugation of its world. They were the ones who consulted the pilot, and came up with the plan for the Exit.

The pilot claimed to be older than humanity, to have come to Earth the last time the sky was right, only to find itself stranded when Cthulhu took control. The pilot couldn't dream, but it could travel through a Dreamlands built by others. But of course the Dreamlands of Earth were the domain of King Cthulhu, even more than the seas of its waking world.

Thus, the plan. The Exit. Remove enough people from the Dreamlands, form a critical mass of artistry and hope and creativity and desperation, and physically pass through that realm to someplace safer.

When the artists heard of the Exit, they laughed, but without much mirth. "All this time, science has looked for a path to the stars, when the answer lay with painters and singers, tellers of stories and players of games? How rich."

It was the sensible scientists, of course, who pointed out that if Cthulhu predated human evolution, then perhaps *every dream* has been from the King, always. Perhaps the *Ad Hoc* is fated to simply drift deeper into the solar system until its food stores run out and the pilot, dry of blood and sacrifice, is petrified once more.

This argument is still quite heated.

###

Aboard the *Ad Hoc*, the *Aloha*, the pebble in the sky with the last free humans aboard, the night shift workers rise to patch hull leaks and purify water and oversee the production of the next day's food plops. Others rest.

Dr. Kwon dreams of the divorced husband left on earth, and the young son who couldn't be allowed on board, who had nothing to contribute. In her dream, they are all three in a big bed, in a stadium, watching a baseball game. In her dream, they're still married, still a family, it's still 2016. The Cubs are winning the World Series.

Nargiza dreams of numbers, balance sheets out of balance, the tiny new mouth of Travis Vaccaro replacing the old hunger of Ensio Prinkkala. She wakes briefly, wondering what Ismalba would say if she knew the real purpose of the P-hole, a monster's larder. She sleeps again, and has a nightmare about the pilot. She knows nothing of the pilot

except its appetite. What she imagines leaves her in a cold sweat, gasping her way to wakefulness. But if she saw the real thing, she would find it far worse.

Antonía dreams nothing. She has pills, something no one else has, outside the hospital. Ensio's death, and the voice of the pilot saying "*You must dream harder,*" and the grim implications of Nargiza's reports on Ismalba's stores... none of these can penetrate her cherished nightly oblivion.

In the hospital, swaddled and watched by his mother, Travis Vaccaro sleeps, his young and undeveloped mind barely dreaming of anything beyond colors and sensations. But in him, for the first time in all of history, a human mind grows and dreams beyond the reach of Cthulhu.