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NWSFS ANNUAL
PICNIC
COMING UP ON
JUNE 16TH!

GUEST CONTRIBUTOR:
MARY STURGEON

UPCOMING NWSFS EVENTS

Monthly Social Dates*

May 19th – NWSFS Officers Nominations social at the Pawtowski home

June 16th – Annual Picnic and Elections Social at Woodland Park Zoo

July 21st – social

August 18th – social

September 15th – social

October 20th – Mad Scientist Social

November 17th – social

December 15th – Holiday Season Social

Upcoming Outings

June 23rd - Seattle Sub Tour, a humorous bus tour of offbeat neighborhoods and sights

Visit here: <http://www.subseattletour.com/p2.html> to learn more!

July (TBD) – Log House Museum

August (TBD) – Ride the Ducks!

*June – December dates are subject to change. NWSFS Socials are traditionally held on the third Saturday of each month which is the date listed above. As the dates approach, our "Cruise Director" emails NWSFS members for more details about each outing and social! For more information on how to become a member or receive emails about upcoming events, see the contact info below.

Want to keep abreast of NWSFS news? Join our Google group! People who want to join the NWSFS Google group and receive email updates should visit the Google groups home page <http://groups.google.com/> and search for **NWSFS-announcements**. Click on the NWSFS Announcements link and then the link to join the group. Get your creative juices flowing and suggest a destination! In prior years, NWSFS has gone to Powell's down in Portland, taken the Underground Tour of Seattle, visited the Museum of Flight...

A REVIEW OF A SOLDIER'S DUTY BY JEAN JOHNSON

By Peggy Larreau

This novel has well-defined characters that leap off the page. The main protagonist, Ia, is a precog (a person with precognition). She walks a tight-rope made of intersecting time-webs that stretch over centuries to reach a final goal. It should be easy, if you are a precog; but “should be” and “is” are two entirely different situations.

To get to her goal, Ia must remake herself, her family, her friends, her co-workers, and even her enemies' chosen paths. Some of the paths even have to be “adjusted” long after she will be dead, which is a difficult prospect at best. So, what kind of a goal is so important, that you might have to set up instructions in the present for futures that may never be? Nothing terribly important—just saving the human race.

This book reminds me of the great epic stories from the Norse or Greek mythologies; stories where even great heroes and demi-gods must fight to save countless unknown people. Only instead of taking place in the distant past, this book is in the future with multiple worlds, strange aliens, space ships, pirates, and, of course, Marines. Instead of monsters, Ia, must face intractable social organizations, religious fanatics, criminals, politicians, and the military. The multi-headed hydra of humanity becomes her monster to face and it must be driven toward a common goal.

A QUICK NOTE FROM THE EDITRIX

Just a quick note before I dash...Spring is in the air, and with it, new beginnings. Funnily enough, our First Contact submissions all tackle that subject. And the *Westwind* itself is in the middle of a revival...which could be argued, is another beginning. I've been writing in what spare time I have and in this issue is the first complete short story I've done in *years*. And our guest contributor, Mary Sturgeon, is starting down the path of becoming a professional writer.

Stories, newsletters, and lives all shoot up sprouts and bloom in their own time. Beginnings are the start of change. And science-fiction, more than any other type of fiction, deals with change. Change of venue through the exploration of space, inner and outer. Change of paradigm through the exploration of the consequences of scientific innovation. Change of perspective through the exploration of themes like first contact with aliens. Change in all of its forms is the basis for our literature of ideas.

In spring I often look for new science-fiction. Many of my all-time favorites like *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Gate To Women's Country* by Sherri S. Tepper, and many others I remember getting in the spring. [Must be an unexpected side effect from all those pollen fumes. Mm-hmm. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.]

Right now I'm about to dive into *The 4% Universe*, all about dark matter and Mira Grant's latest in the Newsflesh trilogy. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. What's on your reading list?

WESTWIND would love contributors! We accept short, sci-fi or fantasy fiction pieces and non-fiction articles about science, sci-fi, fantasy or anything else of interest to fandom. No more than 2000 words please. Illustrations also welcome. Black and white please and no larger than 8.5 x 11." All submissions should be sent to katrina.marier@gmail.com subject to editing and proofing by the Editrix and her staff.



I HATE ZOMBIES...WHICH IS WHY YOU MUST READ THE NEWSFLESH BOOKS!

By Katrina Marier

I hate, hate, HATE zombies. They make me twitch, to put it mildly. Decaying flesh does that. Bleh. That being said, you should read **Feed** and its sequel **Deadline**, Books One and Two in the Newsflesh trilogy by Mira Grant. (And for those of you who get hooked, Book Three is due out this month.) The first two volumes were both nominated for Hugo Awards...which is saying something.

And now for the nitty gritty: WHY you should read this book. Well, should the zombie apocalypse occur, you'll have a good idea on how to survive it. But what really makes these two novels is Grant's thoroughly detailed evocation of just what the world would be like. What would you order in restaurants? How would you go shopping at Costco or Target? How would new houses be designed and built? Would there be pets? All these and a thousand other little details really bring her world to life.

And she knows how to pace a story—I could not put either book down. I HAD to turn the pages to find out what happened to the characters. Needless to say, I lost some sleep while reading them. But it was worth it. Both novels are good; I slightly prefer the first as politics really interest me; and since the plot revolves around some reporters embedded in a presidential candidate's campaign (which gives a whole new meaning to the term 'cutthroat'), it is riveting. But no sooner have you survived the first Vomit Comet, you are hurled into Book Two which deals with the conspiracy to hide the real origins of the zombie plague and a cure which *might* be being suppressed to keep the human race enslaved by fear. Hmmm, why does the current state of politics come to mind?

And for those of you who LIKE zombies, there are plenty of attacks, near misses, and gobbets of flesh to satisfy even the most devoted George Romero fan. (In this universe, he's a hero. After all, his films went from mere entertainment to survival how-to guides and are responsible for the survival of many. As you are reading, count up just how many characters have names that are derivatives of George. Told you Mira Grant paid attention to the little details.)

For more information, including when Book 3, **Blackout**, will be published, visit her website at <http://miragrants.com/index.php>

THE TOUCH PARLOR

BY MARY STURGEON

Gloved fingertips press against the viewscreen, caressing the image of a colored orb, the spaceport Kali. His heart jumps beneath the rubber sheathing that surrounds his body. His eyes flick from the viewscreen to the control panel behind a slick, reflective visor. Sweat beads beneath the suit's machinations, only to be whisked away as the next droplets surface.

Desire wracks his trembling form in relentless waves, each stronger than the last as Kali draws nearer. He knows he can still turn back; knows that he won't, despite the knowledge that this is forbidden, the certainty that it is dangerous, the conviction that it is wrong. Fingers shake with the effort of restraint as they glide over the keyed suit release, almost feel the ridges through his gloves.

A muted tone echoes efficiently through the control room, announcing communications with the spaceport. Slowly, he comes to life, begins guiding his craft toward one of the hundreds of docking stations that pierce the surface of the spaceport. His eyes barely scan the credit agreement as he clicks his approval, waits for permission to dock.

The ship quakes as it merges with the station. Pebbles of anticipation rise on his skin. He squirms as the rubber lining of the machinesuit presses inward, warms by scant degrees, stifles his base reaction.

Running his gloves along the plastic exterior of the suit, he moves toward the rear of the ship. The portal blossoms open, offering admittance to the touch parlor.

Over the plastic rasp of his breathing, a sighing emanates from within. Skin suffocating beneath the rubber suit, he plunges through the portal into the outer chamber of the parlor.

Heavy boots scrape against textured floor as he steps into a stall. He presses his wrists against a panel and stilled breath burns his lungs as he waits for the system to decrypt the suitlocks. He fears that this will be the time that the locks can't be broken; fears that Kali has been discovered and he will be met by the heavy, black Decon Suits; that they will take him away to that mysterious punishment that his indiscretion merits.

Breath floods from his chest in a long sigh as he feels the suit loosing its grasp all at once. Warm, living air trickles through the gaps and the heavy machinesuit falls away as he shrugs it off, childlike in his impatience. He quickly sheds greaves and gloves; plucks the visor from his head, and runs his fingers over the prickly ruffle of his close cropped hair.

He opens his eyes wide, ignoring the stinging that comes of the unaccustomed orange hues in the light, the tears that trace warm runnels along his clinically shaven cheeks in response to the colors that line the walls. He hungrily drinks in the blues, the yellows of the wallpatterns, the swirling grain etched in smooth paint; the pale gray of soft floor tiles. As the barrier to the inner chamber whispers open, a scent rises that he associates only with this place, heady, warm and floating around him.

Within the parlor, virulent spirals crawl along the walls, and he is drawn irresistibly inward. The dry, papery scritch of the walls whispers to naked fingertips. Spongy tiles give slightly beneath his bare toes. The heavy fragrance tickles his nostrils. The sighing, chirping and trickling sounds sing out, oddly echoless, deadened on the non metallic edges of the room.

He begins to feel dizzy and full, ambles over to lie on the graceful arch of the chaise lounge that presents itself in the center of the chamber. Sleek, pale fur lines the chaise, caresses bare skin. His eyes fall out of focus as he is enfolded by stillness. He surrenders as the ecstasy of sensation breaks over the edges of consciousness, wave after wave.



At some unexpected jolt, his eyes flick open from deep sleep and those rarely experienced jewels that are his dreams. Breathing the scented air, he listens for signs of disturbance. Again, the station shudders beneath him, seems to sway as he struggles to gain focus. His fingers tangle in the fur of the chaise, idly stroking its silk as his thoughts become ordered. Beneath the susurrant of the sounds of Kali, something more ominous; a stiff cadence of bootfalls becomes unmistakable. He listens at first, fascinated by the way the sound seems to fall flat with each percussion, perplexed by the way the mundane meshes so easily with this place, so exotic and lush.

With a mechanical whir, the back wall grinds open. Intruders press through, violating his paradise. The black Decon Suits and hissing filtermasks are a perfect pantomime of his fears, and too late he skids across the serene swirls of the floortiles, bare skin skittering for purchase. He scrabbles toward the outer chamber where his ship awaits.

Cool rubber grips him by his arms, the strength of steel beneath. It mimics the feel of his own machinesuit, and he draws desperate breath, determined to remember the scent that he will never know as gardenia. To his newfound repertoire of sensation, he adds the dull pain of tightening grasp as he struggles to escape, the brief prick of the needle that pierces his skin, the gut wrenching anguish of knowing that he will never visit his Kali again. Vision fades.

He wakes at Hospital, safely encased in deadening rubber once more, newly encrypted locks at his wrists. He breathes the sterile air calmly, no trace of Kali left in his memory, but an empty space in his heart that even now, he begins to explore; prodding as at a sore tooth with the tongue, searching for the source of his pain.

MARY STURGEON WAS BORN IN NOVEMBER OF 1979 TO A DEPRESSINGLY NORMAL FAMILY, WITH A DEPLORABLE LACK OF THE CHILDHOOD DYSFUNCTION THAT NORMALLY MOLDS TALENTED WRITERS OF THE GENRE. AS SUCH, SHE WAS FORCED TO CREATE HER OWN STRANGENESS, AND FOUND HER FIRST TRIUMPH IN FIRST GRADE WITH THE WILDLY SUCCESSFUL DEADLY PUMPKIN SERIES. IT WAS WILDLY SUCCESSFUL IN THAT IT LED TO A PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCE, WAS WIDELY READ BY THE FIRST GRADE CROWD AT ORCHARD DRIVE ELEMENTARY, AND INTRODUCED HER TO THE ADDICTIVE NATURE OF WRITING ABOUT THE UNUSUAL.

TODAY, MARY LIVES IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, AND WHEN SHE ISN'T WORKING ON HER LATEST SPECULATIVE NOVEL OR SHORT STORY, SHE IS BUSY EDUCATING HER TWO KIDS OR INDULGING IN HER GAMING HABIT (D&D, MTG, MMOS, CONSOLE RPGS; IF IT HAS AN ABBREVIATION, IT'S PROBABLY ON THE LIST!)

I CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.MARYSTURGEON.NET, AND ON TWITTER AT MARY_STURGEON.

FIRST CONTACT: BECKY AND FANDOM

By Becky Citrak

I had been an avid reader of Science Fiction for many years, but the only contact I had had with fandom was the convention listing in the back of the Asimov Science Fiction Magazine. In 1980 I was working at Universal Services in Seattle, WA. I had made friends with Barbara Hunter, one of the computer programmers there, and we used to hang out frequently during lunch, and sometimes on weekends.

One day I asked her what she was doing on a weekend in March. She said “I’m going to a Science Fiction Convention.” I intelligently responded: “Wait – what?!?” She asked if I was interested, and I responded enthusiastically that I was indeed! Whereupon she asked: “Well how would you like to run the office?” I attended my first convention meeting shortly thereafter.

That was Norwescon 4. I spent my first convention working most of the weekend in the office but I had a wonderful time, and have never looked back. In the years since I have done a wide range of things in fandom. Some of my favorite things have been running the Info table at Norwescon a couple of years ago, and arranging outings for NWSFS.

FIRST CONTACT

By Katharine Bond

“Are we ready?”

I hated that question. Hated it with a passion. But, that didn’t seem to stop Kingston from asking it at the start of each mission. I was so tempted to answer him with the truth sometime. Tell him that, of course, we were not ready. We would never be ready. We were not capable of being ready. We would likely fuck this mission up just as badly as we had fucked up the last thirty. Fatalism, thy name is Vic.

“Yes, King. We’re ready.”

Kingston gave a short, brief nod and then sharply turned on his heel to pull the door closed. He spun the wheel and the ship gave a brief groan as the seal engaged. He stalked back up to his seat, sat down so fast he almost looked like a marionette whose strings had been abruptly cut, and began the laborious process of strapping himself into the seat.

Once he was safely strapped, I flipped the switch to get us underway. Once flipped, the rope lines detached, the engine started, and the propeller began to spin. We lifted slowly into the air, slowly gaining speed.

I leaned back in my chair and tried to relax. It would take us almost 24 hours—not quite a day—to break into the upper atmosphere. Then, we’d engage the rocket, break out of the gravity well, aim ourselves towards the ancient clusterfuck, and let inertia do the rest. Four days later, we’d be at the mission site and ready to try again.

I did have to admit, even if only to myself, that the mission site was startlingly beautiful in a way. It was an ugly tin can with a solar array haphazardly attached and no paint except for its name stenciled on the side. But, you had to admire how it had been put together with, essentially, nothing more than bailing wire and chewing gum and fired out into space. The ultimate act of belief and hope.

What was troubling, however, was the fact that appearances were truly very deceiving. This ancient tin can did not look like it could cause any trouble unless it happened to fall out of orbit and onto your head. But, we’d been trying to make first contact with it for the past 7 months, and well, what more can I say than that this is attempt number 31? Who knew that first contact would be so hard?

LAST FALL, KATHERINE BOND SUGGESTED NWSFS SOLICIT SHORT FICTION PIECES FROM NWSFS MEMBERS. ONLY A COUPLE OF MEMBERS SUBMITTED PIECES ON THE TOPIC 'FIRST CONTACT.' IN OUR LAST ISSUE, WESTWIND PRINTED THREE OF THE SUBMISSIONS; AND HERE, FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE, ARE THE OTHER THREE.

I ENJOYED HEARING THE AUTHORS READ SAMPLES OF THEIR WORK AT THE SOCIAL AND IT IS FUN TO READ THEM ANEW HERE. IF YOU ARE ENJOYING READING THEM TOO, WHY NOT SUGGEST A NEW TOPIC FOR OUR BUDDING WRITERS TO CHEW ON? CONTACT ME DIRECTLY WITH OUR IDEAS (SEE PG. 2 FOR CONTACT INFO!)

FIRST CONTACT

By Michael Citrak

While still living at mom and dad's house, from time to time, I noticed a black human shaped shadow in the house but only just outside of my bedroom. The bedroom opened up into the rec room in the basement.

At first I would just catch "him" out of the corner of my eye walking past my open door....I didn't think much about it as I assumed it was my brother and it didn't happen very often...then one day he walked by and I realized that my brother wasn't home, I looked outside my room and there wasn't anyone else in the basement.....

He never came into my bed room, except once. One day, I was typing away on my first computer, so this was in late 1989 or early 1990....and I felt a presence of something looking over my right shoulder. It was as if he was very curious wondering what the thing was.....without thinking, I just yelled out...."it's a computer!!!" and continued my typing.....it was as if the shadow said, "oh"....and walked out of my room.....I do not remember seeing him again.....I suppose I shouldn't have been so rude to him.

As a side note, this housing development was new so we didn't think anyone had lived there before....but a few years later, we did find that about a block west of the house there had been a small house many years prior and a Native American family lived there...so it's possible that was the source of the spirit. Though a few of the newer houses had been there for a few years, so it is possible that the spirit was from one of these houses.

A PESTY PROBLEM

By Katrina Marier

"What? Honey, there are hundreds, if not thousands of fast-moving satellites passing over the earth right now. Not to mention all of the orbiting garbage."

Rosemarie shook her head. Again. "No, Dad. One of the spiders escaped her habitat. Look." And she indicated the cage with a now-solitary orb weaver spider. "And I'm not sure *how* she got out."

Her dad shrugged. "No reason to panic. One escaped arachnid is within the allowable margin of scope creep. Other insects have escaped from time to time, no harm came of it..."

"Then why...", Rosemarie's voice trailed off as the comm overhead beeped.

"Uh, Dr. Evans? We have a problem..." It was First Officer Mifune, part of the crew of the Challenger Space Station. "Dr. Choudhurri will meet us in Botany Bay." Botany Bay was the nickname for Hydroponics. Normally, he always had a quick wink and nod for Rosemarie; but today he was preoccupied.

"A problem, Tosh?" Her dad's voice grew fainter as they stepped over the threshold and moved down the hall. She'd have to pester him again over dinner. Maybe mom...no, mom was covering someone's shift and Rosemarie was in charge of dinner. Which reminded her, she had to feed the remaining orb weaver and other arachnids and the ant colony and check on the pupae, larvae, and eggs in storage. All were destined for the biodomes in Lunaport; and it was Rosemarie's responsibility to make certain they were healthy, if not happy, upon arrival.

As she left her workstation in Bug Heaven, Rosemarie privately thought that the ants were none the wiser about their change of venue, or at least didn't care. The spiders on the other hand...instead of the gossamer wheels that elegantly decorated bushes back home, their work here resembled three-dimensional tangles of ramen noodles. *I would want to leave them too. In disgust.* She thought as she headed to her family's pod. *Yes, I know spiders don't feel disgust but I sure think they know something is definitely wrong.* Gravity was not a priority on the space station. Short stints in zero-gravity had not proven too harmful over the course of decades of experiments. *And the scientists back home haven't figured out how to create true artificial gravity yet,* Rosemarie thought as she looked out a porthole to see the big blue marble below. *There's Asia. I wonder if Cho's having a good time with her parents at the training camp.* Rosemarie sighed. Cho and her family were also emigrating to the moon, but they would be arriving six months after Rosemarie.

I hope there are kids on the moon. Delete that, cool kids on the moon. Emigration's been so tight... Even with the space elevators in place to shoot astronauts up to the orbital platform where shuttles launched to and from to both the space station and the moon, space was still at a premium.

Rosemarie's family had spent several months aboard Challenger because her dad was an environmental engineer and had volunteered to fill in during the gap due to staff rotation. Hopefully next week they would be en route to the moon. And now there was a spider on the loose. *Maybe Dad's right and one little spider isn't a problem. But what with all the weird technological problems...* The corridor lights abruptly flickered and then steadied. *Like that.* She shrugged as reached their family pod. *It's not like dinner is all that difficult to prep. Select packets and ready water. I'll be glad when we have a real kitchen again, no matter how cramped,* she thought to herself as she selected the evening meal. None of the food was great; but some things just didn't translate and even their novelty couldn't make them edible. Fried chicken for instance. It never came out crispy, despite what the experts claimed. *Thank goodness for squeeze bulbs of water. Ah, Szechuan noodles. Or macaroni and cheese?*

While she heated water, Rosemarie considered her missing charge and tried to come up with a plan to trap it. Pesticides were forbidden station side; and releasing one of the shrews would create more problems and was strictly against regulations anyway.

Rosemarie tried to get her dad's attention again about the missing spider over dinner; but her dad seemed quite worried as he wolfed down his dinner and then went right back to work. Her mother too was worried, saying that now some of the computers in

the med lab were malfunctioning. Minor stuff really, she said. Rosemarie began to worry. The entire station operated by computers and if they began to...her alarm must have showed because her mom gave her a quick hug.

"Don't worry sweet pea. According your father and Tosh it's just some minor fluctuations in temperature control. They're confident they'll have it under control by morning," here she smiled, "remember, temperature critically affects my work; and so far everything seems to be fine with the medicines I'm working on," but Rosemarie could see her mom was concerned. To keep her mind off her internal panic button, Rosemarie decided to research spider traps.

The information she dug up was so interesting she went to bed with her head whirling about ways to trap her eight-legged friend. *Let's see, I can't use pesticides...spiders need food and water just like any other living creature...set a trap with a live insect?...no, that might escape too, water...water...*and thinking that she drifted off to sleep.

And woke up with the germ of an idea. A quick search of the storage cabinets near Bug Heaven came up with packages of double-sided tape. *I can put several of these around my workstation and the cage with the remaining orb weaver in it and bait them with droplets of water. The spider will need water and come to drink and she'll stick to the paper.* Carefully she broke the seal on a squeeze bulb, covered it with her thumb, and then managed to attach an eye-dropper to the open end without letting any water loose. Gently squirting a small droplet onto the sticky strip proved tricky, but she managed. She left a test strip out right near her computer console and checked it after lunch. The test droplet was still firmly attached!

She knew she couldn't lay traps for the spider throughout the station until she cleared it with the crew. But since no one except Dr. McIntosh or occasionally her parents ever came into Bug Heaven, it was reasonably safe to lay down sticky strips, each with its small pool of water, around the door, the ceiling, the remaining spider in his cage, around the ant colony and so on. The strips were a distinctive mauve color so Rosemarie knew people could easily see them. So she finished up, snagged her uchuu-bento*, and went toward the exercise area.

She had finished cleaning out the mouse habitat and was about to take a snack break when she heard her name broadcast over the comm system. Luckily she hadn't rehydrated¹ her uchuu-bento yet, so she stuffed it back into her temporary locker. The voice had sounded like Tosh's so she headed back to Bug Heaven.

And tried not to laugh. Tosh, her mom and dad, Dr. McIntosh, and Dr. Choudhurri were all...well, they were all stuck to the strips she had left out all around her workstation. Rosemarie gave up after a heroic effort and started laughing. Quickly she went to free them...and realized that the tape she'd used had somehow been mislabeled. Instead of the mildly tacky rosin-rubber mineral oil the package label said the tape's adhesive was supposed to be, everyone was thoroughly stuck in place with Super Glue. Luckily no one's skin had gotten stuck to anything, only their clothing - which was easily and neatly snipped away. Rosemarie got her mother free first and then went to gather up all the strips as her mother freed the others.

As they were all brushing themselves off and firing up for a lecture, everyone witnessed a spider trailing a cloud of silk behind it float into the room and gracefully spin its way across. In such situations, rarely is one prepared with the right tool at the right time and now was no different. Rosemarie's hands were full of a bag of used sticky strips; the others desperately tried to avoid the tiny arachnid by grabbing onto whatever they could. This quickly became a wild jumble of humans. And by the time everyone had sorted themselves out, the spider had disappeared through a vent.

"Sweetie, what were you thinking, laying out Super Glue to trap a spider with?" Her mom was obviously struggling for patience. Four other pairs of eyes looked at her accusingly. Rosemarie held up the package the glue strips had been in. "I didn't know it was Super Glue, Mom. The package says its adhesive is rosin-rubber mineral oil. Standard ingredient in fly paper. Non-toxic and easy to clean up." And she held up the package.

Here Tosh sighed and swiped his hair off his forehead. "I know that joker streak of Commander Lee's would come back to bite us."

Everyone looked at him. "The last stationmaster, Commander Lee, was something of a practical joker. He switched glues on the last Chief Botanist because...well, they didn't get along." here he paused and looked faintly embarrassed. "I thought most of the glue and tape had been collected after the incident, then checked and relabeled as needed - but I guess we missed a box." He sighed again, "I'll go and talk with inventory." Then the lights flickered and went out. Within the seconds, the red safety lights came on so everyone could see, if not very well. "Lieutenant Mifune, please come to the bridge," blared the comm system. "Duty calls," and Tosh pulled himself to the door and floated off in the direction of the bridge.

Then the regular lights flickered on again. And when Dr. Choudhurri managed to maneuver over to the vent the spider had entered and open it, a cloud of silk whirled into his face. Rosemarie and her mother had to clean him off. Of their tiny friend there was no sign.

"Well, that might explain the lights," her father said.

"What?" asked Rosemarie.

"Lights and some of the temperature controls have been fluctuating. If that bug's..."

"Arachnid. And I thought the troubles have been happening over the past few days."

"You are correct about the lights. But temperature control problems in the med lab got worse yesterday evening and this morning. If that arachnid's been free and trying to spin webs which keep floating free...all that spider silk's been collecting and getting stuck in some interesting places."

Everyone turned to look at Rosemarie. "She only escaped yesterday afternoon. And I did tell you. And filed an incident report. I put down the sticky strips only in my area for the time being because I needed to clear more drastic measures with Dr. McIntosh. My original thought was that since spiders need water, I would have available water stuck to the tape. The spider would walk across the tape to get to the water and get caught. Then I could put her back in her habitat. I was going to go talk to Tosh right after cleaning the mouse habitat. Honest."

Her parents sighed. "Do you know how she got free?"

Now Rosemarie sighed. "No. I sealed the habitat just like I seal all habitats once I am done with a particular task; and the seals were intact when I went to feed them next. It's *possible she could have slipped out when I was putting their food in. If there are cameras there, I don't know about them.*"

Then Tosh's voice came over the com system asking Rosemarie and her parents to come to the bridge. Rosemarie's heart sank. *I am soooo much trouble.* But with her parents right there, there was no way she could get out of this one. Dr. Choudhurri told Rosemarie that he would check the remaining habitats; and Rosemarie belatedly remembered he was one of the environmental engineers working with her dad in keeping atmosphere optimal throughout the station. *Yeah, he'd know about leaks wouldn't he? she thought.*

The Captain looked very grave as they entered the bridge. "Dr. Evans, Dr. Evans, Rosemarie," he said, nodding at each in turn. "Intern," here he looked directly at Rosemarie, "I understand an arachnid under your care has escaped?"

She swallowed hard. "Yes, sir. I'm not sure how."

He looked at her gravely, "Well, our eight-legged friend has been busy spinning webs throughout this section. Several of the crew have collected no less than six balls of fluff that Dr. McIntosh assures me is compressed spider silk?"

"Yes, sir. Webs in space don't look anything like those on earth. It's the lack of gravity."

The Captain nodded. "When did it escape?"

"She. Yesterday afternoon, around 04:00 or so. I told my father and left a message for Dr. McIntosh. I guess he's been busy with the same problems my dad has so of course I hadn't heard from him about my solution..." A button flared red over the Captain's head, and he adjusted so he could press it. "Yes?"

"Dr. Choudhurri here. All habitat seals in Bug Heaven are intact and in proper working order. The infrared alarms which should have gone off if a critter were to escape indicate they were never tripped. In short..."

"In short, we don't know how the spider got out," here the Captain sighed and ran his hand from forehead to neck. And sighed again. "Problem is, the spider fluff is interacting with the ship's systems unpredictably. So far only the lights and a few temper-

"We can't evacuate the station and vent all the air due to one little spider," came Dr. Choudhurri's voice through the comm system. "Completely impractical. Ms. Evan's notion of trapping the spider near Bug Heaven was a good thought, if precipitously invoked. Luring a spider to sticky paper for its daily water was a good and quick solution using available materials. We'll just have to learn to live with her. And everyone should have a trap or a swatter handy should she be seen again. Ms. Evans, you know more about this creature than I do. Do you think she will come out to try and spin another web?"

"Yes, she's operating on instinct. And the webs need to be out in the open but not in a place where they'll get tampered with. Look for her to try it again in corners would be my best guess. Luckily there's no food flying around so she may try to make her way back to Bug Heaven, or maybe Botany Bay because that's where food will be. Or she'll die trying."

Duly noted. Dr. Choudhurri, let us know what procedures will be needed to deal with spider fluff as it presents itself. All personnel in Bug Heaven and Botany Bay should be briefed on how to catch spiders. *Live demonstrations of the technique are strictly forbidden,*" he added dryly.

More strips were put up and in about a week, the spider, dubbed Vampirella, was returned to her mate. But no one ever figured out just *how she managed to escape in the first place.*



This story is *loosely* based on an incident when one of a pair of orb weaver spiders escaped from their habitat on the International Space Station in 2008¹. Granted, that arachnid didn't cause any major havoc then; but what if she had? Most think that the term "bug" when applied to computers refers to a moth caught in a computer at the Harvard Lab in 1947!² However, there is evidence to indicate that the term was used in the 19th cent, and maybe even by William Shakespeare!

For more information, try this article: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,454327,00.html> and more details here, <http://www.tomsguide.com/us/Spider-Space-Station-Carnage,news-2983.html>.

*Uuchu-bento. Uuchu is the Japanese term for outer space and bento for a meal-on-the-go, so "outer space lunch." Given their compact nature, I've always thought bento would be perfect for space travelers!