

# The Rise of Stone Moons

## By Deena Larsen

Rob's course deepened my already incurable addiction to hypertext. My writing has been straying outside the lines of printed texts since I started to work on *Marble Springs* ([Eastgate Systems](#), 1993) in the eighties. After finishing *Marble Springs*, I was experimenting with Storyspace, reading hypertexts, and just basically wondering where to go next. Rob's course seemed like a logical progression--here were people who were thinking along the same lines I was and who could talk about the same things I was reading. The online discussion was slow, but it allowed time for reflection and exploration in a way face-to-face courses cannot. I understood much more about the various hypertexts, learned how to read in a more in-depth, methodical way than simply diving in and giving up the first time I hit a rock or a block.

Rob encouraged collaboration on our class projects--after all, why let a little thing like distance stop interaction? Jeanne Templeton, a graphics artist, and I thought that working together would be interesting--I would play a little with graphics, she would play a bit with structure and text. We talked over the phone a few times and brainstormed some ideas. Our subject was easy to pick and hard to do: Jeanne and I wanted to merge mythology with modern life.

A good friend of mine, Clarsa<sup>\*</sup>, has an autistic, nonverbal child. She has fought the system for a long time to keep her child at home and to get the needed services. As this is a job that takes nearly every second of every day, she kept us all informed through e-mail. She would type in a few lines at a time between crises, spilled jam, and glasses flying out windows. Clarsa had long wanted to write about the situation but could not find the time to do so--and was delighted when Jeanne and I suggested using her material in our little hypertext. Further, Clarsa's child has been working with facilitated communication, a controversial method of communication with nonverbal children. A facilitator will hold the child's wrists over a keyboard so the child can press the keys. This has produced results (which are either a Ouija board phenomenon or a child's actual thoughts).

Jeanne and I took Clarsa's battle with social services and made it into a mythic epic. Jeanne wrote the mythic path; I provided the parallel modern path simply by changing a few dates and some incriminating details in Clarsa's e-mail and writing in some more (fictional) details. The main characters in this tale were Sarah (the mother), Laurel (the autistic child), and an unnamed goddess.



Jeanne provided this illustration of the work to show all its different aspects. Originally, we thought of the goddess as the mythic dimension, the keyboard and desk as the present, the moon as a bridge between the myth and the present, and the autistic girl at the keyboard as the battlefield where past and present beliefs played out their wars.

This picture put our work into perspective. We thought readers would be able to gain a sense of the relationships and connections between the desperate fight with social services and the history of mothers fighting to save their children.

As I had more experience with Storyspace's quirks and time was getting short, I put together Jeanne's words and photos with Clarsa's e-mail. We got some comments on the work from Rob and classmates, saying, you have something interesting here. Keep going.

So we took their advice. Jeanne and I continued to work on it off and on (mostly off) for about a year. We had a flying meeting in an airport, many e-mails, and a couple of telephone conversations. And Stone Moons just grew. Clarsa's e-mail messages came more and more frequently as she fought to keep her child. There was little I could do except include these in Stone Moons as Sarah's main voice to the world.

But Sarah started to show a more secretive side, and her e-mail to her friends transformed unanswered files dredging up old memories to explain her prejudices and motivations. For example, a segment showing that Sarah's mother had abandoned her highlighted the fight with social services:

To: Sarah Murphy  
 From: Sarah  
 Subject: Unanswered files  
 DateLine: Spring 1972

The second time and every time after that my mother left us, Kelly, my sister, and I settled into a routine. After she would leave, we would straighten the house. We shoosed the shouts and dark noises into the back corner of the closet. I would take the broom, because I was a little taller, and we would sweep the hurts into a dustpan and carry it outside, Kelly holding the edges tightly, carefully, so nothing could spill.

And we would be ok.

If she didn't come back that night, I would get us up, dress us in something clean, and fix sandwiches out of anything edible in the refrigerator. I would tell Kelly not to say anything, because someone from Social Services was always listening to little kids, ready to pounce on them and take them off to reform school if they thought anything at all was wrong.

Kelly would nod solemnly. We both knew that Social Service people only looked human. Really they were vultures, which you could always tell by the fleshy folds at the front of their throat, the last vestiges of scavengry that they could never quite hide. Somehow, looking back, I guess what was funny was that Kelly and I believed implicitly in the horror of the Social Services, yet discredited completely notions of Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny.

Later, we added Sarah's truth files which delineated her cosmoagony. The mythic battles began to center around the moon as Sarah became convinced that the moon was a being determined to steal her child:

To: Sarah Murphy  
From: Sarah  
Subject: Truth files

When I drive at night, the moon appears as the goddess with the curved knife in my rear-view mirror. I see her scythe across the back seat of the car, coming slowly, lovingly toward Laurel. She nods at me. I nod back. We both know what she wants.

Breathing deeply, I do not panic. I wait for a red light, pray for a red light. When it comes, I slow and stop. Then I reach back and look. But there is only Laurel, asleep. Safe. Janet, in the front seat, sees nothing. We continue. I glance back at the rear view mirror, and she is still there, her scythe sharp, undimmed by the streetlights.

Like clay on a potters wheel, the work began to take a shape. The structure is now like a bottle:

- The rim      **Sarah's Reality:** Sarah, the mother fights to save her child, Laurel. These are the e-mails Clarsa sent about the fights with social services and the school.
- The sides    **Deeper Wars:** Sarah's subconscious, her memories, and her thoughts about her child and her universe.
- The bottom   **Laurel:** Facilitated exercises (the "ftory" from the autistic child's point of view)
- The insides   **The Moon:** A mythic battlefield where the moon is an ancient enemy who is trying to steal Laurel.

I have provided a [sample](#) of each of these elements.

As the structure grew, the story became more complex. (The work, like nearly all hypertexts, embodies infinite possibilities and could easily go on for thousands of nodes and millions of words.) Our collaboration diminished as the complexity grew. I have been adding Clarsa's e-mail messages and ideas as well as occasional graphics from Jeanne into the delicate structure--yet now it has grown so large that I need to have at least a week of clear, uninterrupted time to work on it. I am adding a link structure where each text link provides 3 - 8 content link choices. Names of the links themselves add yet another layer of text to show the relationships inherent in the connection points. (Clarsa

is adding a few of these aphorisms: for example: Frisbietarianism: When you die, your soul flies up and gets stuck on the roof). However, the linking structure adds another dimension of complexity--further precluding active collaboration.

Hypertexts are inherently dynamic--and Stone Moons shows that this fluid, changing nature goes beyond links and nodes to writing relationships. Collaboration at different levels of intensity throughout a project can help stimulate ideas and uncover passages that a single author may never suspect are there.

The ideas about collaboration and hypertext exploration gleaned from Rob's class have shaped this work as well as my other forays into geometric shaped hypertexts (*Samplers*, Eastgate 98). More than anything, going through Rob's course and working with Jeanne and Clarsa showed me how to discover the multidimensional stories hypertexts have to tell--and to write.

---

\*This is an assumed name, as my friend would like to maintain all her relationships in the autistic community, social services, etc., and still tell the true story. ([back](#))