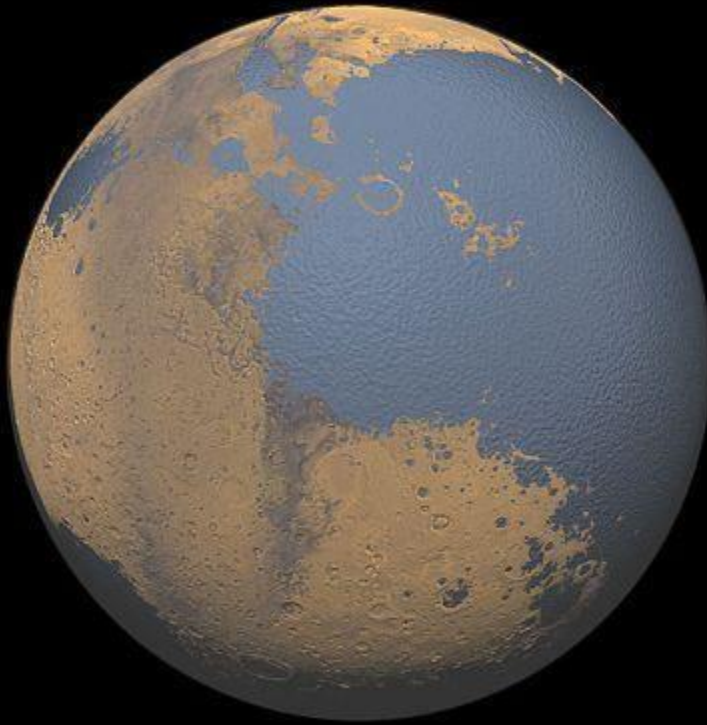




Redstone Science Fiction

May '12

#24



Matthew Bennardo ~ Alter Reiss

Redstone Science Fiction #24 - May 2012

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Editor's Note – May 2012

by Michael Ray

Hey!

Paul and I enjoy a broad range of science fiction (and fantasy) stories. Two of the most important ideas I enjoy seeing explored are human expansion into space and the increased interaction between humans and computer/communication technology. Our stories this month take a look in those directions.

We did not get the transportation revolution that science and science fiction suggested in my youth. We can see the exo-planets now, but we are not getting there any time soon – the distances are just so vast. We are unlikely to experience interstellar space. But we might get to Mars. The idea of terraforming Mars and expanding our civilization there is something that seems within our grasp. In [Imagine Cows on Mars](#) Matthew Bennardo takes a hard look at what frontier life on Mars might be like. As a historian, the idea of a new frontier, not too dissimilar from the American frontier is quite appealing. Matthew does a great job considering what it might be like.

We did, however, have a communications revolution beyond our wildest dreams. It is easy even for modern adults to forget a world of telephone directories, almanacs, and the nightly news. Our access to info and each other is so natural now. But what dangers does this access to each other hold? When we become closely enmeshed with our tools and our data, what could happen to us? In his story, [Into Place](#) Alter Reiss does a tremendous job of examining one dangerous avenue we might wander down.

This is the end of our second year publishing Redstone Science Fiction. We've had a great time getting these quality stories the attention they deserve and look forward to bringing you more in the future.

Your friend,
Michael Ray
Editor
Redstone Science Fiction

Imagine Cows on Mars

by M. Bennardo

WINTER

I don't know how long I lay in the capsule, slipping in and out of consciousness after touchdown. The landing had been rough and terrifying, and I was certain that my leg was broken. When I moved I blacked out, so I just lay there, sipping water to replace the rivers of sweat streaming down my face. When the reservoir ran dry, despair and apathy had equal shares of my heart.

The sun set and the sun rose. The day passed almost exactly as it did on Earth, save for the rapidity that light and dark melted into each other in the thin atmosphere.

At last, long after I had given up hope, the hatch popped open and a face appeared in the aperture. It was a great, hairy, red-cheeked face with frost-rimed goggles and beard. Through chapped, sunburned lips, the face laughed and said, "Welcome to Mars, you filthy immigrant."

I was next conscious of jangling harness bells and of the crunch of sledge skis gliding through frozen sod. It was afternoon. It was cold. We passed under pink and ochre cliffs, deep black shadows falling over irregular heaps of snow. Something had been strapped to my leg to brace it, and the whole limb had been wrapped round and round with blankets, but it still hurt like hell with every jostle and bump.

Later, there was a tent, round and domed like a yurt. It was large and somehow full of drowsy warmth. I lay on a pile of shaggy skins with more of them heaped over me. My leg still ached, and I drifted in and out of fever.

Across the yurt was another bed. A girl lay in it, her pink face and blonde pigtails floating ridiculously above her own mounds of skins. Between racking coughs, she told me her name was Ellana. Before I could answer, the bearded, red-faced man returned and drew a curtain between us. Then he pressed a bowl of soup into my hands—a pale, steaming broth with floating masses of slippery, wispy fungus. I gulped it gratefully.

"Where are the others who came with me?" I asked.

"Did you know them?" asked the bearded man. I shook my head, and he shrugged. "There was only one parachute. Your capsule was the only one I saw. It's always that way. You're lucky to be the one that got through."

Emigration to Mars was illegal. Those who sold the fares were unscrupulous—charging too much and spending too little. But I didn't know it was as bad as that. I didn't know that almost nobody ever made it to the surface alive. If I had, would I still have risked it all to come to this chilly, half-barren, still-unfinished rock? I thought of Earth again, and I thought I probably would.

I felt under the blankets for the chain around my neck, and the two rings hanging from it. It was still there—nobody had taken it. I looked again with amazement at the heaps of blankets, the soup, at the great man at the side of my bed. I tried to ask why all this should be done for me, but he just smiled. “We need you to make it through,” he said. “I wish a lot more of you did.”

SPRING

When the valley warmed, we drove the yaks up into the cooler hills. There was no rain, but the snow melted, and rivulets of water ran down from the highlands. Hardy grasses sprouted everywhere. We even sometimes saw the sun glinting off the terraforming drones as they flew overhead, spraying seed and fertilizer into the air.

Ellana showed me how to drive the yaks and how to call them back at dusk. She was only twelve, but she knew most of what there was to know about the animals. She taught me the herding songs and laughed when I tried to sing them. I’d never learned singing on Earth, and had never learned about this kind of work either. It was too crowded there for husbandry—food that required pasture was an unthinkable luxury. Efficiency, mechanization—those were the important things.

As we sat among the wildflowers, watching the yaks graze, I showed Ellana the rings I brought with me. They were my family’s wedding rings—saved and passed down from generation to generation. Ellana had never seen gold, but she told me about the mining camp they had passed once, with their hastily sunken shafts plumbing the depths of the planet for iron, copper, and tin.

Perhaps, when Mars was finished and officially open for human habitation, the terraformers would turn their attention back to Earth. Perhaps, one day, it would again be a paradise—less crowded, more open, full of opportunity. But I had decided not to wait for that. I wasn’t the only one.

Ellana’s father, whose name was Roald, had come to Mars much as I had when in his own impatient youth. Things had been even harder then—colder, drier, less populated. He told me that sometimes the yak herds (stolen by the first squatters from the wild herds released by the terraformers) had sometimes eaten nothing but lichen for months. He told me that sometimes the immigrants had nothing to drink but blood. But things had gotten better. It still wasn’t easy—Roald’s wife had died in childbirth, and now Ellana was sick. But he had three daughters. He had his yaks and his yurts and his wagon. He was a free Martian squatter and he was determined to survive.

Spring, they told me, was the longest season—fully seven months long. I was glad to hear that, as it was a beautiful season as well. From the highlands, we looked out over our valley, marveling at the great green fingers that climbed the sides of every rill, and even across the plains and up into the highlands themselves. The mountain peaks were still capped in bright white snow, but below them life was struggling and reaching for the sun, then dying and falling back to the dirt—each fallen blade of grass or cake of yak dung making the planet richer, turning the dirt into soil.

“Imagine it,” said Roald to me one bright day as we watched Ellana and her sisters braid edelweiss into their hair. “One day you might look out here, and see cows instead of yaks.”

SUMMER

One warm evening, Ellana and I returned from the highlands to find a stranger sitting with Roald. The herding song died on my lips. Nothing was amiss, exactly, but no strangers had visited the valley since I had been there. I had heard Roald talking with other settlers on the shortwave at night, but otherwise it was easy to think the planet was ours alone.

Ellana and I put the yaks away, but as soon as I could, I sought out one of Ellana’s sisters. “She’s a terraformer,” she told me. “Officially, they aren’t supposed to visit, but sometimes they do. None of them are supposed to admit or know that we squatters even exist. But they know it, and this one is here to tell us this valley will be flooded next spring.”

“Where will you go?” I asked. Then I blushed and said, “I mean, where will we go?”

The girl shrugged. “Over the highlands, to the next valley to the east. The sea is west of us. It’s good it’s growing—that means more rain and snow in the fall and more meltwater in the spring.”

“But what if that terraformer hadn’t found us?”

“We’d have had to run to the next valley with water up to our ankles, and rising.” Then Ellana’s sister grinned and I knew she was kidding me. “Despite what we say, the terraformers aren’t that bad. One way or another, they let us know. Dad’s in there now, trying to get medicine for Ellana, to keep the redlung from getting worse.”

I knew how important that medicine was. Redlung was a fungal infection, and everyone on Mars had it to some extent. For most it grew slow enough that it didn’t matter. It might hasten the death of people who had lived forty or fifty years already on the planet—but even then, not always.

But others weren’t so lucky. For them, the spores spread quickly, covering the mucus membranes of their lungs. They dried out, and their lungs stopped working. Inevitably, they died—young, and painfully. When the rains came in the fall, Ellana’s condition would worsen again.

When the terraformer left the yurt, I stopped her. I didn’t know what she had said to Roald, but I wanted to know if she really meant to bring the medicine. She was young—almost as young as I was. We stood in the Martian night, under the impossibly rich band of the Milky Way, a handful of desert crickets rasping around us.

When I asked, she nervously smoothed her already impeccable jumpsuit. “It’s hard to get the medicine,” she said. “Most other things I could manage. But the medicine...”

“You’ll try?” I asked.

“Of course,” she said.

I slipped the chain from off my neck and pressed the two rings into her hands. I knew that Roald didn't have anything of value to a terraformer, but the rings would be worth something. “I mean it—you'll try.”

She shook her head. “I can't take these,” she said, wanting to give them back. She sounded hurt. “Even if I could, a couple of ounces of gold aren't worth more to me than a little girl's life.”

“I want you to owe me,” I said. “If you don't bring back the rings or the medicine, you'll be stealing from me. One way or the other, you'll at least have to come back and face me again.”

She was quiet a while, but then she said, “All right.”

FALL

The rains came in the fall. Cold, cutting, miserable, but filled with the promise of life for next year. Ellana and I watched the clouds gathering from the highlands—first white, then grey, then black and ominous. There was no doubting their intent, and we drove the herd back to the valley in the face of a stiff roaring wind. Before we reached the paddock, lightning seared the sky.

Later, from inside the yurt, I could see sheets of water blowing across the paddock. The yaks huddled against the cliff that formed one end of their enclosure, shivering under the dark clouds as streams of water poured out of their shaggy coats.

As the moist, cold air settled in, Ellana subsided into bed and stayed there, pink with fever and racked with dry, aching coughs. Every season on Mars stretches endlessly compared to those on Earth, and the slow passage of time was doubly cruel in that I knew that things must get worse before they got better again.

I was surprised there was not more work to do to prepare for the move to the next valley, but Roald simply shook his head and laughed. “Everything fits on the wagon,” he said. “Everything but the yaks. There will be plenty of time to pack it up when we're ready to go. Until then, we have yaks to breed.”

With the yaks now kept in the valley, I spent more time working alongside Ellana's sisters. Sometime in the drizzling fall, amid the work of milking the yaks and digging for potatoes in the garden, it was understood that I was to marry one of them next summer. Love wasn't a question—not really. It was a consolidation of resources, a strategy for survival. If I did not marry one of Roald's daughters then either she or I, or both, must eventually leave. To break apart what Roald had worked to create seemed wrong, and so it was decided.

One day, when the rain was especially cutting, the terraformer returned as she had promised in the summer. I was milking one of the yaks in the lee side of the paddock when I felt the beast stiffen and then quiver. There were no wolves or cougars on Mars, so I knew it could only be another human. I stood up and looked over the sodden back of the yak.

The terraformer stood before me in a waterproof cloak, the heavy drops of rain rolling off her shoulders and back. Despite what she had said, I hadn't been sure I ever would see her again. She awkwardly proffered a bound package to me and then made as if to go. I caught her wrist and tried to find words to ask her what I wanted to know.

She turned back to me and merely whispered the words, "For the girl." Then she twisted her arm and I let go. In a moment, she had faded completely away into the falling rain.

In the shelter of the cliff, I opened the package with trembling fingers. On top was the chain with my rings. Next there was a chocolate bar, and two books of old Earth adventure stories, packets of soup and tea, and a small nightgown of soft new flannel. By the time I reached the bottom, my hands were shaking uncontrollably. There was no medicine.

When I could work my fingers again, I put everything back into the package and tied it. Moving as though I were in a dream, I took it inside the yurt and gave it to Ellana. Everyone watched. I could tell that Roald understood immediately—where the package had come from, why the terraformer hadn't come inside, why she hadn't wanted to see him.

Ellana was delighted with everything. She never knew what else the package could have held. But she hugged me and her father and her sisters again and again, thanking us with tears in her eyes. For as long as she lived, she wore my parents' rings on the chain around her neck. When she died, I let her keep them.

WINTER

As we drove the herds into the highlands, I looked back down into the valley again. Nothing was left of our home except the imprint of the yurts and the tilled soil of the vegetable garden. Just as Roald had said, everything had fit on the wagon.

It was still early in the season, before the true bone-dryness of deep winter, so snow was falling. Great flakes drifted out of the yellow-gray sky, falling at half speed in the light Martian gravity. The snow packed loose as well, covering every surface with a thick white fuzz that blew to pieces at the slightest kick or puff of air.

Roald had scouted the path over the mountains in the fall, and it was a relatively simple journey to the next valley. We followed a broad wash up into the highland plateaus, and then would wind our way through a pass in the mountains. By leaving early in the winter, we could be sure that it would be neither too stormy nor too cold—though Roald did expect that we might need to push through great powdery drifts five feet deep above the mountain snowlines where new glaciers were forming.

As we reached the end of the plateau before starting up the climb to the mountains themselves, Roald called a stop. We all knew why—we too could feel the ground growing firmer and colder below our feet—so we stayed away. An hour later, he placed the shovel on the wagon, and we started off again.

“The next valley,” he said to me later that day, after a long silence, “has a joshua tree.”

“Really?” I asked. I hadn’t seen any trees since landing on Mars.

“Not large,” said Roald. “And only one. But yes—somehow a fertilized seed must have made it out this far and sprouted. If it blooms in the spring, we’ll have to find out how to pollinate it and plant some more.”

“If they let more immigrants up here, all this would get done faster. People would take care of the land like you do.”

Roald stopped and looked around at the snow-capped Martian peaks, and then turned his red-cheeked face to mine. “Probably,” he said. “But when we’re finished with Mars, it’ll be another Earth. And we both risked everything to leave there.”

He grinned at me, but his eyes were full of tears. “I would have given anything to get that medicine. But we can’t always have it both ways. We’re still risking everything, staying here—and not always just our own necks anymore.” He pointed back down the valley. “If this isn’t what you signed up for, there’ll be terraformers along soon enough to scout the valley before they flood it. I can give you what you need to keep you alive until they arrive, and then they’ll take care of you. I don’t know exactly where they’ll put you, but they’ll find a place. Eventually you’ll likely end up back on Earth—that’s why we’re moving on now. But if you want to stay, I’ll understand.”

The last of the yaks brushed carelessly past us on the way up into the mountain pass. Looking behind, I could just barely see the freshly turned dirt where I knew Ellana must be resting now—hopefully above the waterline of the new arm of the sea that would be created when the valley flooded. I wanted to come back to this spot to visit someday.

Beyond the grave was the valley we had left, looking much the same as it had when I first saw it. It was ochre and pink, with little daubs of green and brown—and everything now dusted with snow.

I had lived there for a year with Roald and his family. I had worked hard, slept sound, and grieved deep. Sometimes I had been hungry and sick and cold and exhausted. My leg had been broken, and even now there might be a fatal profusion of redlung spreading inside my chest. I too might be dead from it in a few years. But Roald was right. I had risked everything to come to Mars, and the only thing that made sense now was to let the wager ride.

I smiled and clapped Roald on the shoulder, turning back towards the mountain path and the swaying tails of the hindmost yaks. “I want to see that tree you told me about,” I said.

Roald nodded at me, his eyes shut to hide his tears, and then together we walked on, up and over the mountains and into the next valley below.

The End

M. Bennardo's short stories appear in Asimov's Science Fiction, Strange Horizons, Beneath Ceaseless Skies, and Shimmer, among other markets. He is also editor and publisher of the Machine of Death series of anthologies, the second volume of which is publishing in 2012. He lives in Cleveland, Ohio, but people everywhere can find him online at <http://www.mbennardo.com>.

Into Place

by Alter S. Reiss

The light on his desk meant that someone upstairs wanted to yell at him about Anne Marion. LaMarr stabbed at the light, and it blinked off. The agents would take care of that; that's what they were for. Besides, he wasn't behind on Marion, and besides that, he was going to do it right, however long that took.

He spread his hand out, and watched bits and pieces of Anne's life dance across the mirror-screen of his desk. College transcripts and elementary school report cards, dating profiles and corporate evaluations. Pictures. Pictures of her as a girl, high school pictures, pictures from her cousin's wedding. Some shapers didn't like to look at pictures at all—they felt it was a distraction.

Shapers who didn't look at pictures couldn't make a trap worth spit.

A picture at the corner of the desk was yellowed; overexposed or something. LaMarr reached out to move it to the center, enlarge it, but it was yellow, and the right size. His hand froze. Yellow covers red unless it's near gray or pink. The other pictures twisted and shrunk and shifted, and he was making patterns in his head.

Someone was yelling. Something about agents. Slowly, LaMarr came out of it. It was one of the bosses. Stouffer? Dan Stouffer. "And fuck you," continued Dan, "if you think this is some sort of game. You are working for us, Harker, and I'll be damned if this whole business—"

LaMarr shook his head, trying to keep the colors from moving and shifting like they were supposed to. Two-twenty by the desk timer; he'd been out for almost an hour. "Trance," he said. "You know I get trances."

Dan's face was puffy with rage. "Maybe you were tranced, and maybe you weren't. But goddamn if you haven't been putting us off. There's a double priority rush on this Marion, and I want her in the can tonight. Tonight, you hear? If you can't—"

"If you want her out for a week, I can give that to you now," said LaMarr. "If you give me the time I was told I would have, she'll be out for two months, minimum."

"Minimum?" asked Dan, deflating. "Two months is more than any syndicate will guarantee. Are you sure that—"

"If I have the time to get this right," said LaMarr, "my estimate is that Anne Marion will be catatonic for two to three years."

Dan took a step back. "Two years? Even the best government blanks only—"

“Mr. Stouffer,” said LaMarr. “Look. It took me almost a year to climb out of a very good government blank, and I’m still trancing. This is going to be better. If you don’t think I can deliver what I—”

“It’s not that,” he said. “It’s that you’re slow, LaMarr, and you seem to think that we’re running this syndicate for your amusement. We don’t need the perfect trap. Just get this woman out of the picture—”

“It’s a custody fight, isn’t it?” asked LaMarr. He moved the pictures around on his desk, enlarged one of Anne and Eric Marion, going boating with a three-year-old Jason Marion. It was about a month until Jason would be four. “Being catatonic for a month would hurt Anne’s custody chances, and after-trances would hurt it more, but two years ends the case. There isn’t a court in the world that’s going to give a child to a mother who has been catatonic for two years, and will be likely to trance out for at least another four.”

“That won’t matter,” said Dan, “if they track it back to us.”

That was the problem. It fit like a purple tile between two reds, when there was a red and— LaMarr cut that line of thought short. “Look,” he said. “You hire good people. The investigators got me everything I needed, and more. You know the sort of work I do. I’m sure the insertion team are just as good at their job as the rest of us. They’ll get it in clean.”

Dan winced. “Nobody is as good at their job as you are at yours, LaMarr. But that doesn’t change the fact that there are new patches every day. The insert team has an exploit, but if it’s closed, it’ll be touch and go getting—”

“If it’s closed, they’ll find something else,” said LaMarr. “There are always holes. You can’t attach a brain to the net without leaving a door or two open. Now, if you’re really worried about getting this done, let me work.”

“Tonight,” said Dan. “I want it out tonight.”

“Tomorrow,” said LaMarr. “Three o’clock in the afternoon. That’s the time frame that I was given, and that’s what I’m going to meet. Unless you want an inferior trap.”

“Please,” said Dan. “Have it done tomorrow morning. For my sake.”

“I can’t—”

“I will give you a five thousand dollar bonus if you have this done before nine o’clock tomorrow morning.”

LaMarr considered, and gave a brief, single nod. Dan slipped out, presumably to badger the insertion team, and LaMarr forgot him, slipping back into Anne Marion.

A government operation would start with more-closed files, tax returns, all types of official documentation—but there was so much of a person on the net that LaMarr wasn't missing much. The investigators had assembled it, organized it as best they could. So much information, so much raw material. There was an Anne Marion in his desk, a ghost, a shell, a face. She didn't like being called Annie, she had been a serious child, and a serious adult. Eric had been her one big mistake, and she'd make the same mistake again if she had the chance. LaMarr knew it, and knew that she didn't know it.

With what he had learned, he could . . . well, he could do many things. She wasn't a pretty woman, not really, but it was a face he had grown accustomed to. He knew her moods, he knew her loves. He could slip himself into her life as easy as a gray square into a gold. Instead of doing that, he would finish his trap, give it to Dan, and cut her down. For the moment, he loved her.

Shapers who didn't love their targets couldn't make traps worth spit.

LaMarr always tranced hardest when a trap was close to being finished. Once it was done, the colors and shapes would be less compelling. The sense of things about to come into proper shape did it, and Anne Marion's trap was coming into shape.

Some shapers thought of their traps as games. They were wrong. Some of them used imagery that connected to the real world, cartoonish and otherwise. That was also a mistake. If you reminded the target of the real world, they would miss the real world; they'd remember what they had left behind, and look for it. LaMarr worked with geometry, patterns, with systems as close to mathematics as the target's personality would allow.

Anne was a good target. She had liked math in school, though she had never gone beyond second year calculus. She liked order. A well made bed, a properly set table. That was what LaMarr was going to work with. Or, more accurately, that was what his agents were going to work with. He would sketch the broad outlines, and pseudo-AI would do the rest.

It was time. He plugged in, and started sketching.

The trap for Anne Marion was based on circles. The size and the shape would change, shifting up to red or down to blue depending on how much attention she gave it, and when a circle looped other circles, it would grow, and shift onto other planes. For her wedding china, Anne had chosen a pattern with interlocking circles around the border, and she had blogged about watching the bubbles rise and change in the saltwater tank her parents kept when she was little.

On that level, it would have caught her for a week, maybe two weeks. But LaMarr didn't stop there. At the higher planes, the circles tended toward the color of her baby blanket. The lower planes had the purple-blue of bruises, which would force her to consider her fears, which Anne hated to do. The other sensory stuff, the smells of the circles, the sounds they made as they expanded and contracted, they were all tied to her interests, to her hobbies, to her loves and her fears.

LaMarr tranced four times in the last stages of work on the trap, once for three hours. Some of that time would have been lost anyway, waiting for the agents to finish coding, but most of it was time that was really wasted. He couldn't help it. The slick-gray mind feel of being plugged in brought on trances, but more than that, it was a good trap. It felt like it could be perfect.

It was hypothetically possible, but nobody had come anywhere close. A mind trap that would last as long as the mind it trapped. Something that could evoke a permanent catatonic state. This one . . . this one was very good indeed.

LaMarr checked the agents' work, and sealed up the program, and unplugged. The insertion team would have to get it in, and . . . he was tired. He had been up all night, working and trancing, and now he was done. His back hurt, and his wrists hurt, and there was a dull pain from the plugs at the back of his head. He leaned back, stretched, and Dan came in the door, all smiles.

"Good work," he said, sitting himself down in the chair opposite LaMarr's desk. "We're in; no problems."

"Good," said LaMarr.

"And," added Dan, "we got the client to agree to a bonus for every week she's under, up to a year. He's expecting a month, tops, so we've got him cold."

LaMarr realized that something was expected of him, so he smiled. "Do I get any of that bonus?" he asked.

"That's where your five thousand dollars are coming from," said Dan.

LaMarr nodded, and started cleaning up his desk. Some shapers kept trophies, but that didn't interest him. He was done with Anne Marion; looking at her pictures made him feel faintly ill.

"Do you ever wonder," asked Dan, after a pause that had gone on so long that LaMarr had almost forgotten he wasn't alone, "about what we're doing?"

"How do you mean?" asked LaMarr.

"I mean . . . well, Eric is a client, right. But he's not . . . I mean, Anne wasn't a bad parent, really, despite what our guy says. At least I don't think—"

"Morality?" asked LaMarr. "From upstairs?"

"Sure," said Dan. "Why not?"

"Because I'm not the one working with clients," said LaMarr. "If you have a problem with who we work for, pick them better. But to answer your question, no, I do not have a problem with what I'm doing." He got up, found his jacket.

“You’d have to be in a trap to understand,” LaMarr said, putting on his jacket. “When you’re in a trap, there’s no pain, there’s no worry beyond the context of the trap. Everything is solvable, everything is manageable. You can leave whenever you want, Dan. If Anne Marion wanted to leave the trap that I’ve built for her, she could do it now, this very instant. She’s won’t. She’s in the trap because it’s better than being outside the trap.”

Dan was still sitting, and he had to swivel his chair around to watch LaMarr as he walked towards the door. “Anne Marion was a good person,” said LaMarr. “So I built her a heaven.”

“And the kid?”

“Get me a profile, and I’ll build one for him too.”

Outside, it was a spring day, and the streets were crowded with people enjoying the sun. The light glinted off the windows of an office building across the street; blue squares and white squares.

The day would come when he’d have the money and expertise to build a trap for himself. A proper, perfect trap. For now, his work was enough; matching people with what they wanted, fitting them into place as smoothly as a purple tile between two reds.

The End

Alter S. Reiss is a field archaeologist and scientific editor who lives in Jerusalem, Israel with his wife Naomi, and their son Uriel. He likes good books, bad movies. Alter’s work has appeared in Daily SF, Abyss & Apex, Ideomancer, and elsewhere.