

The Writers' Slate, published by The Writing Conference, Inc., features some of the nation's top quality writing by students, kindergarten through 12th grade. The national journal is published three times a year, including one issue filled with award-winning prose and poetry. The publication is now available online.

The editor of **The Writers' Slate** invites original, creative and expository writing by students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The editor also invites submissions of book reviews of children's or young adult literature, written by students. Educators are also encouraged to submit article ideas for consideration.

The deadline for the fall issue each year is June 15. The deadline for the spring issue is December 15.

Send submissions to: Shelly McNerney
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Submissions, including electronic submissions, **should clearly indicate the writer's name, school, grade, school and home addresses, and the teacher's name.** Due to the number of submissions and mailing costs involved, the editor will only respond to a student author's submission if a self-addressed stamped envelope is included. Submissions will not be returned.

The editor reserves the right to edit manuscripts for clarity, style, and according to space limitations.

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Shelly McNerney
Editor

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My reflection
in the water is faint,
but I see it,
in the clear shimmering
water.
It flows in the direction the wind swirls
as my reflection
shows faintly.

Down,
Down, the rain pours,
Patting the ground,
it's drumming,
soft, voice.
Down,
Down, to the silent Earth.

Paris Dee
First Grade
Oceanside, California

My Mother

She has a spark of beauty in her soothing eyes.

When she walks in the fields, the wind flies through her black puffy hair

Her voice is like a lovely melody singing, at the sun but not when she screams!

I love her pretty smile that lightens up my day and that fancy look she wears with her everyday.

She's terrified of all kinds of bugs and tells me to get them out of here!!!

I sneak into her bed at 5:00 AM and then she hugs me in her chubby warm arms

I love my mother anyhow, anywhere!!!

Simran Sandhu

9 years old

Montebello, New York

BLACK

Black is the whisper of the night,
towering over you
It watches you move,
through the silent street lights.
The pupil in your watchful
eye.
Black is your shoelace.
The crack of a whip.
Your shadow,
who watches you.
The branch of a tree.
The bottom of
the ocean.
The back of the cave,
which you just can't
resist exploring.
The spine of a book.
Your hair
which
flows across you.
The cry in the woods.

By Craig Long
10 years old
New York

Fish

In the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, tons of
Colorful
Radiant
Fish are swimming in and out of plum colored coral,
Camouflaging the seaweed
Making bubble signals to communicate with one another.
Mostly just gliding around with nothing to think about.
A fish can be very graceful,
Maybe another is as treacherous as a tornado.
Today the fish are vibrating their tails,
Shaking their heads side to side
And boasting about their twinkly scales.
Fish all have something special about themselves
Their lean tail,
Their magnificent head,
Their luminous scales,
The elegant way they move about the world of beauty around them The coral,
The plants,
The large amount of dangers:
Whales, divers, the other mungo creatures.
Every fish has a heart
A small heart,
But the heart cares about the amazing ocean around them.
Not like us humans.
Always having places to go,
People to meet,
Things to see and worry about.
We do nothing but worry about the world
Why can't we move along like fish? Nobody knows!

Fish

Hannah Hicks
4th Grade
Greenwich, Connecticut

A Looking Glass

What lies beyond the looking glass?
A future of the dark, or a future of the light?
Where might we find our future and past?
Take a simple glance through the looking glass.

One side grows bleak,
One side shines bright.
One forces the world to whirl from sight,
Across plains and forests of the night.
Wrath rules in the field of death,
For Evil thrives with its white-hot breath,
Its eyes are irons, its mouth is steel.
Our outlooks and destinies rock and reel.

What lies beyond the looking glass?
A sunset of blood, or a sunrise of joy?
Where might we find our future and past?
Take a simple glance through the looking glass.

One side grows bleak,
One side shines bright.
One raises us to a brilliant height,
With a promise of love and light.
Embracing harmonies of our life,
Never subject to grief or strife,
But this path is walked by only the wise,
For hard work almost all despise.

See the choices, the answers to all,
See the ruins, the mountains tall.
See all that will soon come to pass,
All at a glance through the looking glass.

Balance sways with indecision,
For who puts ease under a life of work?
The ire of the mountains will come crashing down,
And we will remember the duties we shirk.
We will rue the times we fought each other,
For the flames of destruction draw nearer each day,
Enticed by a bowing empire,
And lured by our carefree way.

When will we choose, or will we wait,

For annihilation to finally swallow us whole?
For evil's spell will soon be cast,
If we don't see what lies beyond the looking glass.

Julia Wang
Sixth Grade
Pleasanton, California

The Opposite Direction

The icy November breeze
Chilled my neck, As muggy
Grey clouds hid the brilliant sun.

Laying my rake down, giving it a rest
From clawing the leaves into a pile.
When the desperate cries of wood thrushes
came to my ears.

The enormous amount of birds made me suck in the crisp air.
I exclaimed "Wow. You don't see that every day!"

The birds made dips and circular movements,
that were fluent and organized. As the huge swarm flew towards
their destination, one small speck of a bird left the pack and
flew in the opposite direction.

The caws and cries of the huge group echoed off
into the early morning sky.
The shrieks and hisses of the hawks greeted them as they flew into
Costa Rica and pierced through every heart of the wood thrushes.

A living nightmare for the inky black-eared wood thrushes,
A temporary amusement for the hungry hawks.
Hawks dived down on their prey like hail on ants.
Wood thrushes scattered frantically beating their wings up and
down searching for any means of escape.
Razor sharp talons and hooked beaks glinted in dusk's early light.

The wood thrushes scrambled to and fro - "Where to go!"
One small speck of a bird lead the others out of the jungle, making
swerves and dips as the hawks stopped their vicious assault.

They had a joyful reunion with the one daring bird that made a
solo flight - and eventually lead the others out of the hawk's sharp
grasp.

Ben Firsick
Sixth Grade
South Windsor, Connecticut

Expectations

expectations
placed on me
clothes I should wear
who I should be
like iron shackles
they weigh me down
drag me
tug me
smile or frown
laugh or cry
live or die
hate or love
steam or fry
twist me
turn me
cut me
burn me
save me
kill me
steal me
bill me
teach me
who to trust or fear
who to push away
who to pull near
be my instruction book
my cheat sheet
my all-in-all
my hands
my feet
show me
what is right
or wrong
teach me how
to sing this song
this melody of life
this ballad of truth
issues we face
in adulthood
and youth
boyfriends
girlfriends

money
pets
spouses
jobs
Marlins
Mets
miniscule details
hair
nails
that won't matter
tomorrow
no matter who fails
or lies
or cheats
or laughs
or cries
eventually
it is forgotten

Chloe Kovacs
Seventh Grade
Lake Worth, Florida

They Ask Me.... To Write About my Mom

The many ways which complete her
Not one word can describe her

Cheerful, when she makes her gourmet dinners
Adding spice upon spice, dish upon dish
Yet she's still happy doing the dishes

Calm when she reads her magazines by the fire
Or when she relaxes in the blazing hot sun

Respectful when she helps with homework
Hearing speech after speech
Note card after note card

Wild at baseball and hockey games
Screaming cheer after cheer, chant after chant
And after the Red Sox sweep the Yankees, she goes crazy!

Driving me from place to place
Activity to sport, helps me realize
How special and caring, my mom is

Providing my needs and wants
Walking around town with a smile on her face
Is what makes her extra special

Once again, they ask me what's so special
Not knowing what to write
I think
Only one word completes her
Gripping my No. 2 pencil I proudly say,
Extraordinary, is what my mom is

Nick McGillivray
12 years old
Pleasanton, California

Wake up world

Chicken salad, sun, and flowers all signify
pure glorious days that have arrived.
Fresh fruit and vegetables grow
in the warm ground no longer covered in bitter snow.
The sun awakes from its dormant months
a fiery ray shining on all for once.
Brilliant pinks and vibrant golds
splatter themselves in yards for all to behold.
All these things help make way
for the sweet brightness of spring days.

Sarah Rasmussen
Eighth Grade
Lawrenceville, Georgia

The Fear

She wanted to move,
To get out of this place and run,
But she couldn't.
She had no choice.

She sat,
Knees shaking,
Adrenaline rushing,
Her body fighting not to get up and run to someplace far away.

Her brain was debating over fight or flight,
But she could do neither.
She was going insane thinking about what to do,
But could do nothing.

It was almost time.
Time.
What was it,
And why was it tormenting her,
Adding to the pressure that felt as if it was going to crush her,
To knock her down and kill her?

She couldn't take this anymore.
She wanted to leave,
But couldn't.
Wanted to get out,
But that wasn't an option.

She was trapped,
And there was no way she could make herself free.
She wanted to take control,
To stop time long enough to get out of this place.

The moment was fast approaching and inevitable.
Finally,
The signal she had dreaded came,
And she stood up, walked to the front of the classroom,
And began her speech,
All eyes upon her.

Alanna Junge
Ninth Grade
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

The Great Race by Sean Donohue

When I was in the third grade, I decided to run cross country for my school Holy Trinity. I had never run cross country before, but I really liked to run. Also, I played competitive tennis so I was used to running for two to three hours for a match. It seemed to come pretty natural for me. Following a relatively short school season, I was recruited by a coach to run for an AAU cross country team. The goal was to run in the regional competition and if I was fast enough, to qualify to run in the nationals. That year the race was going to be held in Bristol, Tennessee.

We began training three to four times a week, running miles at a time. In order to train for different terrain, we rotated our practice sites from park to park. The training was grueling, but because it was a team sport as well as an individual one, it was lots of fun for me. I especially liked running with the older girls on the team. At the end of every practice, we would play games like sharks and minnows. That was my favorite part of our whole practice.

The regional race was run on a Sunday in early November. There was a chill in the air as we stripped down to our uniforms on the starting line. I was especially nervous because I had never run 1.8 miles in a competitive race before. The coach encouraged me to pace myself because he knew that I was used to doing well in most races and he didn't want me to die and not finish. Then, I would not qualify for the nationals and all my hard work would have been wasted. Luckily, I was able to complete the difficult race and somehow I qualified second in my age group.

Now the really hard training began, as we prepared for the upcoming National race, the first Saturday in December. Our coach tried to have us as ready as he could for the big race. We met as a team at a local McDonalds to caravan to the race. Following one another we drove the seven hours to the hotel where we were spending the night.

After the coaches checked us in for the competition, the team gathered for the walk of the course. This is very important, because you can see and feel the actual terrain. Also, this is where you decide your strategy for the race itself. Once my dad saw the course he discussed with me what the best way to run the race would be. We spent the rest of the night having a team dinner at Olive Garden and taking lots of pictures.

Race day began early. We made sure we pinned the official numbers on my uniform, before I got dressed. It was very chilly so I had several layers on. Once we reached the course we made sure to warm up our muscles with a short jog and a good stretching to make sure that we do not have any injuries. Then I waited for my race to be called over the loud speaker. When I heard the call I headed to the clerk of course to check in for the race. My parents were not allowed in the official area, only the coaches. They wished me good luck and I headed to sign in. I had butterflies in my stomach as I waited in the long line. We then lined up on the starting line in the box with my team. I took off my sweats and gloves and hat. I looked around at all the other boys in the race. There was about five hundred or more of the best runners in the nation. My butterflies were now becoming pains in my stomach. I couldn't wait for the gun to go off and put an end to the nervousness. "Runners take your mark." Pow! The gun went off. I was off. Then the gun went off again. Oh no, a false start. I hate false starts. My heart was racing. Now I had to start again. I hate false starts. I returned to the starting line to begin again. My legs were shaking. "Runners take your mark." Pow! The gun went off again. I took off running my fastest. The gun went off again. No way!! Another false start. I hate false starts. This is ridiculous! We lined up again on the starting line. "Runners take your mark." Pow! The gun went off again and I got my best start ever. I ran as fast as I could for the first seventy-five yards. I worked my way to the front of the pack. Then I started

picking off people. One at a time I passed runners. Exhausted, I raced up the hill to the finish. I felt a second wind coming on just as I worried I would run out of gas. I kicked it in as I headed to the shoot, running as fast as I had ever run. Surprisingly, I crossed the finish line and I was twelfth in the nation. It was my greatest race ever!

Sean Donahue
Sixth Grade
Louisville, Kentucky

Ivy Girl

Ivy Girl is a supernatural woman from a planet that has only forests and jungles. This planet is called Vineopolis. She was born and raised there like a normal child. Since there were so many forests, everyone there had the ability to control all types of plants. While living on Vineopolis, Ivy Girl was known by the name given to her at birth, Jessica.

She had long blond hair with green highlights. Her ears were naturally pointed. Normally, she would wear a green shirt that went down to her belly button and green shorts that didn't even reach her knees. Lastly, she had glowing green eyes.

Jessica had an older sister named Hilary. Jessica thought of Hilary as a role model. She wanted to be just like her. Hilary would always try to do good for others, especially her younger sister.

One day, the two girls found out that people were going into outer space to examine something called the Milky Way. They decided that they wanted to go. They thought that it would be a good way to bond.

They were right. The two sisters were having a great time until the engine broke. The ship was pulling into a solar system where all of the planets circled around this big fiery star. Everyone escaped in the emergency pods except for the two girls. There was only one left. Hilary pushed Jessica into it and swore that she would be okay. Jessica's pod flew toward a blue and green planet. She had to watch as the ship, with her sister inside it, flew right into the fiery star.

Jessica was crying as she approached the blue and green planet. The emergency pod had a map of the solar system on it, so she knew that this planet was called Earth.

When she got there she was still despondent and crying. She just moped around the town. Everyone that passed her laughed at her. Each person made her angrier and angrier. Finally, she got so mad that she made a giant vine pop out of the ground and wrap itself around one person's neck. After two seconds, the person fell to the ground.

Jessica ran away and sat on the roof of a building.

"I shouldn't have done that," she said to herself. "I don't want to be a villain." A green boomerang flew onto her lap. She made two holes in it. As she did so, she exclaimed, "I want to do good for everyone, just like my sister. I will avenge you, Hilary!" She put on her new mask with the two points facing up while she screamed, "I AM IVY GIRL!"

From then on, Ivy Girl would stop any sign of evil she could find. One of her favorite things to do was to give trees the ability to walk and have a mind of their own. Also, she would make giant vines come out of the ground, not only to fight enemies, but also to shoot her self around from place to place.

She enjoyed being a super hero very much. However, she forgot about the man that she almost killed by choking him on her first day on Earth.

That man was sent to a hospital, where they found out that his lungs and diaphragm were severely injured. The doctors had to replace both of them. After, they had to replace all of the air that was taken out of him while he was being choked. However, when the doctor asked the nurse for a four-foot tube of oxygen, she accidentally gave him a tube of toxic gas! They put all of that gas inside of him!

They left him there for a few days until he finally woke up. However, now his saliva has become toxic waste so when he would spit, he would spit toxic waste. Also, when he

breathes in oxygen, instead of breathing out carbon dioxide, he breathes out toxic gas that can melt the strongest of substances including humans!

When he left the hospital he realized what had happened to him. Then he stated, "This is that green girl's fault. I will get her back for this. From now on, I will be known as TOXIC WASTE!"

He made a metal suit that covered his entire body. In the middle the letters "TW" were spray painted. Near his mouth there was a small hole and three holes shaped as lines. The small one is for spitting toxic waste and the others are for breathing out toxic gas.

Later that day, Ivy Girl and Toxic Waste had their first super encounter. Ivy Girl was sitting on top of a building when Toxic Waste spit under where she was sitting. Ivy Girl jumped up and turned around. "Who are you?!" she screamed.

"Don't you remember me?" Toxic Waste replied. "I'm the person that you almost killed for no reason at all. Here, maybe this will help you retrace your memory." Toxic Waste breathed out toxic gas into Ivy Girl's face, but a giant vine shot out of the roof just in time to block the gas from Ivy Girl. However, the vine shriveled up and fell.

Toxic Waste walked toward Ivy Girl, spitting and breathing with every step. When they reached the end of the roof, he sucked up all of the toxic waste he had in his mouth and spit. However, Ivy Girl leaped up and as she came back down she landed on a newly appeared vine. When she jumped up, the toe of her green boot got hit by the waste. Her toes were showing.

Ivy Girl jumped up and kicked Toxic Waste in the jaw with her good boot. He spun around and walked into a tree that was right on top of the roof. It had two holes near the top. They closed as if it was making a mean face. The tree ducked down and whacked the new super villain with the top branch. The momentum spun him around again, but this time he didn't

walk into a tree. He walked into a flying Ivy Girl who launched herself off of the vine. This time, the momentum made him go flying.

As he was in the air he yelled, "This isn't over Ivy Girl! I will be back!"

Ivy Girl smiled and whispered, "Thanks, Hilary."

The End

Andrew Krinick
Sixth Grade
Valley Stream, New York

Reggie Bush

Reginald (Reggie) Alfred Bush II played running back for the USC Trojans and now plays for the New Orleans Saints. He is a fantastic football player. He was the #2 pick in the NFL in the 2006 draft. He was recognized as one of the greatest college football running backs of all time.

Bush is truly an amazing role model for all that he does for mankind. When Hurricane Katrina struck, late last August, all of New Orleans was devastated. It was chaotic around there. Bush was their new hope. First, He donated a lot of money to the hurricane relief funding. He also visited the Superdome, which at that time, was a shelter for homeless New Orleans residents after the hurricane. Next, Bush is a person that fights for what he wants. In the NFL running backs have to wear a number between 20 and 49, but in college Bush wore the number 5. He applied to the NFL to be able to wear the number 5. They rejected his request and Bush got the number 25. Lastly, he promised that he would donate a quarter of all jersey sales to hurricane relief if he could wear the number 5. He later said he would donate it anyway.

My connection to Reggie Bush would be that I like to help other people when they are in need. I also love to play football and other sports like Bush. In all, Reggie Bush is a great person and defiantly a great role model. I think a role model can be anyone who wants to help other people and not just do it for publicity. A role model is also someone that you want to be like when you grow up or in the future. He definitely fits the title of role model.

Jordan Davis
Sixth Grade
Woodmere, New York

Flight

My father had brought the birds home from one of his trips, carrying the shiny metal cage to the dining room after dinner the night he returned. They were a belated birthday present, he had told me across the table, and an apology that he had not been there to help me blow out the eight candles on the cake.

I had looked inside the cage and seen two birds-one green, one yellow-that might have been one and the same if not for the color of their feathers. I remember finding their appearance almost comical, those two miniscule bodies on the sleek wooden perch in a cage that was far too big for them. They had looked very young-newborn, even-and I had wanted to ask if they had been taken from their mother right after birth. I had wanted to ask my father quite a few things, in fact, but he had already turned his attention to a pile of letters and papers, having poured himself the half glass of wine that he always drank after dinner. He had always traveled for work, being absent for months on end, and I had gotten used to the few sparse words that were our usual conversations. So I had taken the birds to my bedroom, wondering at their bright colors and the high-pitched chirps that emanated from their tiny beaks.

While I had found their songs fascinating, my father had not, and he had often complained that their voices gave him headaches or disrupted his work. A short time later, he had taken the cage downstairs into the kitchen, telling our cook to feed and care for the birds. I soon forgot about them, and the next time I even thought about the two birds-whom, fortunately, I never named-was six years afterwards, when I was packing the things that I would take with me to the house of my aunt Julia, where I was to live for the immediate future.

My father had unceremoniously informed me at dinner one night, saying that the circumstances called for it.

"Work has not been going too well," he had said, slicing a thin piece of fish and putting his knife aside. "The house has to be sold, and I will move further north to see if conditions are better there."

I was to live with my mother's sister, he had said, since, for the time being, there would be no one else to care for me.

"She arrives in a week," he had told me, "to take you home with her."

I had paused for a full minute, staring at him dumbly over my half-empty glass of apple juice. Then I had quietly returned to my food, knowing that speaking up would not make a difference. I was used to my father's quick and drastic decisions.

A week later, having already packed most of my things, I walked downstairs and, wearing some of my nicest clothes, was waiting in front of the mirror in our long hallway when the woman arrived at our front steps, noisily slamming the door of her taxi. Her face, through the curtains of the hallway window, was familiar to me from the old photographs in the albums that I had found in the bottom drawer of my parent's dresser. My mother's older sister was a tall woman, reaching at least six feet, but the imposing effect of her height was undone by her rather mouse-like features—a small nose sharply pointed at an unnatural angle and a long, sallow face from which stared a pair of pinched blue eyes.

As soon as she saw me, Aunt Julia placed her handbag on the floor and gave a high, trilling cry. She stepped forward and opened her skinny arms. "Oh, my Evelyn! Haven't you just grown! Come, let me have a look."

With a bit of reluctance, I walked into her hug, unwillingly cringing at the thick smell of her sweet, sticky perfume—the same perfume that I would have to smell for the next few months or even years. As she gushed and exclaimed over how tall I had gotten and how

grown-up I looked-I didn't remind her that the last time she had seen me, I hadn't yet been able to walk-I pulled away and led her to the sitting room, where my father was reading the newspaper.

Standing up as we came in, he walked up to Aunt Julia, clasping her pallid, elongated hands and leading her to one of the armchairs. My father, unlike me, had known her for years-rather unlucky, seeing as how I was the one being thrust upon her for care.

Knowing what was expected of me, I stepped out of the sitting room and walked into the kitchen, leaving the grown-ups alone. The kitchen was quiet and empty, lit only by a corner light and the timid glow of the white, spotless counters.

If I wanted to, I could run away-I knew that much. I could take clothes and food and run away. All I had to do was walk out of the front door. My father and Aunt Julia would never hear me go.

I walked quietly into the pantry and turned on the light, stepping past the small, lone window and looking up at the shelves of jars, cans, and boxes. Seeing a box of dried fruit, I reached up, standing on the tips of my toes and extending my hand upwards. In doing so, I accidentally knocked over a tall wooden pole, something I had seen the cook use to reach the top shelves. It tipped to the side, wavering for a minute and noisily striking something on my left before hitting the ground with a loud thump.

I heard a chirping noise then and jumped, not having noticed anything inside with me. Turning to the left, I saw what had made the noise and let out a long, slow breath.

On the left side of the small pantry, standing on a small wooden shelf, was a metal cage, rusted from many years of use. Inside were the two birds--one green, one yellow but now they looked grown, somehow different. I only remembered them as vulnerable, small-too small

even for their cage. They looked taller now, even regal, filling out most of the space in their old, rust-covered home.

I walked slowly to the shelf and placed my hand on the wooden handle of the cage, lifting it up and turning to the pantry door, next to which was the small square of glass that served as a window. Pulling the latch of the window, I raised the cage to meet the flow of the afternoon air and opened its metal door. I shook the cage very lightly, and the two birds flew out-first the green, and then the yellow.

Placing the cage back on its shelf, I took the box of almonds and quietly walked up the stairs to finish packing.

Elen Aghekyan
Tenth Grade
Auburn, Alabama

Liberation

Flight AS785 arrived eleven minutes late to Chang'e International Spaceport, named after the Chinese mythological "lady on the moon". Incidentally, the spaceport was built just above her left nostril. Looking calmly out a window from the business class section was Frank Cathcart, who hummed softly to himself as the commercial spaceliner glided on magnetized rails into Hangar 2. A few minutes later he was walking down a pressurized jetway leading into the main spaceport complex, lugging along his suitcase and trying to fix his tie.

Frank glanced at his watch. Quarter past two. It would be another fifteen minutes before he could get on the next train to Shangtian City and he was famished. He hadn't eaten anything during the flight - spaceliner food was so horribly inedible, it made old airplane food look tasty. Frank walked over to a nearby food stand and devoured a bowl of chicken broccoli. The chicken tasted so convincingly real that only when he finished did he notice the sign hanging above the counter: "Beanster's: High Quality Tofu Imitation Foods." Frank paid the cashier with his card and hurried off to the train terminal.

The ride from Chang'e to downtown Shangtian took about ten minutes on the Maglev across the much-coveted dusty plains of the Mare. Along the way, Frank passed vestiges of past human activities on the Moon: abandoned strip mines, crude drilling sites, and discarded space junk. Exploitation of helium on the plains had ceased ever since the Chinese nationalized the lunar resources and the government-owned extraction corporation had become defunct. The Americans were furious at the Chinese for refusing plans for re-development by US firms, but the Chinese were hoping to wait until helium-3 prices are driven up by demand - fusion engines couldn't run without He-3. Frank didn't waste brainpower pondering over useless political questions; he had other, more important things on his mind.

Shangtian was a bustling, prosperous city located in the Copernicus Crater on the Mare Procellarum. Unlike the space cities imagined by the people of an earlier age, Shangtian did not have a glass dome, which would be structurally difficult to build and would have limited city growth. Its downtown boasted impressive buildings and its neat streets were full of traffic from pressurized lunar vehicles and streetcars gliding from airlock to airlock. Being a Chinese colony gave Shangtian a space-age Oriental touch, with packed mass transit and angry, shouting drivers zigzagging through lanes. When Frank disembarked from the train at the Central Station he found it unnecessary to call a cab. His destination, the Lunar Headquarters of AeroForm Space Construction Corporation, was right across the street from the station and connected via skywalk.

"What I don't understand, Mr. Cathcart, is why Spacon would be interested in buying our entire industrial construction sector," asked a graying tall man sitting in a swivel chair. He took out a handkerchief from his tweed waistcoat and wiped the mist accumulated on his horn-rimmed spectacles. A verbose placard on his desk indicated a very high rank within the AeroForm command structure.

"Mr. Potters," said Frank. "AeroForm's industrial sector has been lagging miserably for the past fifteen years." Frank sneered. "The reason being, of course, that Spacon has been holding a monopoly on all industrial construction on Jupiter and the asteroids. Sure, all the residential and commercial buildings here are AeroForm, but its traditional power base 'Fortress Moon' has a... shall I say... nonexistent industrial construction market."

"This is true," sighed Mr. Potters. AeroForm is the oldest space construction agency in history. It was formed in Seattle during the early days of lunar speculation to build facilities for

adventurous investors, and quickly established dominance on the Moon. The big boom came with the discovery of the Chauhan He-3 process, and AeroForm accommodated every single motley group of helium-3 miners, the whole nine yards. But when the Chinese industries were nationalized, helium mining practically died on the moon, along with AeroForm's industrial constructions. Now, miners either languish in the few depleted sites that are left on the American side, or ship out to the Spacon platforms on Jupiter. To think that only a generation ago, the moon ran on a helium economy...

The plump man sitting next to Mr. Potters glared at Frank accusingly. "Spacon, Spacon. You know, one wonders whether Spacon could ever run business without bribes, cheats, or illegitimate practices."

Frank smirked. "Are you going to bring an official accusation on us? Why don't you give it a shot, and find out how our Jupiter monopoly is totally legal."

"Oh, stop playing around," said the plump man. His bald crown glowed a soft orange in the incandescent light of the room. "Everyone knows Spacon's got the U.S. government in their palms. Any investigation would be useless when you could manipulate the whole system."

"Mr. Newton," replied Frank sourly. "Let's return to the issue at hand. Your industrial sector is failing, and I have a deal if you are willing to listen."

"You haven't yet answered Mr. Potter's question," insisted Mr. Newton. "Why in the world would a rival want to buy a worthless failing sector? You think you can get the Chinese to welcome you with open arms and solve all the problems?"

Frank frowned. "The way Spacon conducts business is none of your concern. Many... factors affect our decisions."

"This is ridiculous!" laughed Mr. Newton, shaking his head. His scalp glowed even redder. "Spacon, instead of going through the usual procedures for negotiating an acquisition, sends you, the third-ranking executive, to personally discuss a transaction with Mr. Potters and I, and you refuse to tell us your reasons for this! And have you thought of liability at all, or ---"

"Everything has been taken care of," interrupted Frank, with a dismissive wave of his hand. "Can we not make an exception, just for once? I want to warn you, though, this is not the routine stuff."

Frank stopped pacing the room and bent close to Mr. Potters, staring straight into his eyes. "Six hundred billion dollars," Frank uttered slowly. "Six hundred billion for all the property, capital, and personnel on the moon, and no questions asked."

Mr. Potters and Mr. Newton were stunned. They glanced at each other nervously out of the corner of their eyes. AeroForm's entire industrial sector wasn't even worth three hundred billion dollars, two hundred seventy at the most.

"You can't be serious," declared Mr. Newton.

"I'm not serious enough for you, Mr. Newton?" retorted Frank. "Fine. I'll make it six hundred and fifty billion." Frank produced a tablet and handed Mr. Potters a stylus. "All the paperwork has been made up. Mr. Potters just has to sign here, and six hundred and fifty billion dollars will automatically transfer from Spacon to Aeroform."

Mr. Potters took the stylus solemnly, and Mr. Newton snatched the tablet from Frank's hand. His eyes darted across the glowing screen as he flipped quickly through the ten or so documents on it.

Mr. Potters' frowned and looked up at Frank. He asked softly, "Where's the catch?"

"There is none," Frank stated flatly. "Six hundred and fifty billion dollars, take it or leave

it."

"Of course we can't do this on the spot," said Mr. Newton. "We'll have to look into this in more detail, have our people analyze it ---"

Frank cut him short. "You have until noon on Thursday to decide. Three days. Do whatever you wish in the meanwhile." Frank glanced at his watch. "I'll be on my way back to New York. Call my secretary if you need me," he said briskly, and started walking away. Halfway to the door, Frank turned back to Mr. Potters.

"Oh, and can I have my pen back?" pointing to the implement in Mr. Potter's hand. "I rather fond of it."

Mr. Potters tossed the stylus to Frank, who caught it and found the slight notch halfway up the back. Frank gave it a sharp pinch, and the audio recorder hidden inside switched off. Miles and miles away, the conversation was just reaching the Spacon headquarters on 7^h Avenue. He pocketed the pen and paused at the doorknob. "Have a nice day, gentle---"

Frank never got to finish that sentence. Before he could utter another syllable, the entire building shuddered with the force of an explosion. Something crashed upstairs.

"What the ...?" Mr. Newton leapt out of his chair. Another shudder. He and Mr. Potters rushed towards the window.

"Oh crap, Mickey D's hit!" Mr. Newton shouted.

Frank peered out the window. Sure enough, the McDonald's a block away was a smoldering dark mass of twisted metal, and the iconic golden arches had been blown to pieces. It was clearly hit by a powerful explosive that took out half the entire block.

Mr. Newton swore under his breath. Body parts and intact chicken nuggets blasted from the wreckage were now floating above the street. A nearby building had been

punctured, and people were pouring out trying to find pressurized compartments before they would become human popcorn.

"Terrorists ...it must be those Buddhist extremists! Always trying to destroy the fabric of civilization..." fumed Mr. Newton, who struggled with his suspender straps. Five blocks away, the Shangtian city hall was unexpectedly vaporized by a searing, white-hot beam from the heavens.

"Hey wait a minute..." mumbled Frank.

Frank squinted at the sky above the lunar horizon in the east. In the distance, one could see a large object advancing at very high speed and low altitude. As the object moved closer, Frank saw that it was a military transport spaceplane, the ones that looked like a space shuttle on steroids. As it flew over the city, it dropped a load of ordinance on the city defenses that had just scrambled to meet the emergency. Frank could make out the unmistakable markings of the circumscribed star on its underbelly.

"The war's started already," Frank thought out loud. But Spacon's inside intelligence said that the United States would not invade until the 11th...

Frank bit his lip and cursed at Spacon's bad luck.

"What war?" asked Mr. Potters, trying to cling on to the trembling floor. "You mean the Americans are attacking Shangtian?" Another transport flew overhead and banked to land on the dusty plains. Frank knew they were trying to seize the Chang'e Spaceport so they could land more space Marines. Another bomb rocked the streets below. That one was way too close.

Mr. Newton had smashed down the door to the emergency cabinet and was busy shouting at his radiophone, trying to reach the American Marines. He had turned on the backup

transmitters and was broadcasting on all the bandwidths he could. "Hello?! Hello? There are U.S. citizens here! You're going to hit us!"

Static.

"Hello? Do you read me? Americans at AeroForm Headquarters!" Static.

A very weak voice crackled in the radiophone. "Ameri -." More static. "Please --- remain - calm --- stay in ---"

"Yeah, well it's very hard to remain calm when our asses are about to be blown into zero-pressure vacuum any second!"

" --- be --- no more bombs you - will --- evacuated immediately."

Frank sat in the uncomfortable backseat of a US evacuation spaceplane preparing to take off from Chang'e, along with Mr. Potters, Mr. Newton, and a number of other Americans who happened to be in Shangtian. The entire invasion had been terribly efficient. At 13:37:00 Greenwich Time, US military orbiters launched from the other side of the Moon knocked out the main communications center at Shangtian. At 13:38:41, the city hall was vaporized by a high-powered laser fired from an orbiting satellite. By 13:40:52, Chang'e was secured and more reinforcements poured in. Within ten minutes from the start of the operation, 70% of the city was under US control. The US suffered no casualties, but 45 civilians had died.

Frank and his companions had been sent to Chang'e when AeroForm Headquarters was captured, while the soldiers dealt with the remaining resistance. There, he learned from the Marines that Phobos had also been raided, which was not anticipated even with Spacon's inside information. With the Chinese plains fully under American control, AeroForm would under no

circumstances sell its industrial construction business to Spacon. The helium scramble had begun, and AeroForm would undoubtedly have the head start here on the Moon.

Frank frowned at Mr. Potters, who was sitting beside him. "Spacon had lost this round, but the game's not over yet," he spat.

Mr. Potters was in good humor. "Uh-huh," he chirped. "We'll see about that."

The evacuation craft accelerated on its rails and took off. It would fly to Columbus City, located on the American half of the Moon, where Frank would transfer to a flight bound for New York. Well, the, former American half, because now the entire Moon was American. As the spaceplane ascended over Shangtian City, Frank could see a huge US flag being raised over the smoldering ruin of what used to be the city hall. Mr. Newton nudged Frank on the arm and nodded out the window.

"Customers are coming fast," he observed.

Far away on the horizon, Frank could see surveyors for United Helium Technologies Co. already landing on the deserted plains below.

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