



# News from the Pouch

Volume 4, Issue 3

[www.swimmingkangaroo.com](http://www.swimmingkangaroo.com)

March 2009



## Contest Winner!

Congratulations to Jackie Wisherd! Her name was drawn from the pouch and she wins two free books of her choice from Swimming Kangaroo Books!

### Come to Our Launch Party! Tuesday March 17, 7:00 PM CST

between 7 and 8 PM (CST) on Tuesday, March 17 and meet authors Karina Fabian and Susie Schade-Brewer. Learn all about their newly released books, Magic, Mensa & Mayhem and The Sacrifice of the Sage Hen. And who knows - you may just win a prize!

To join in the fun, come to the Chat Room at:

[http://chat.parachat.com/chat/login.html?room=Swimming\\_Kangaroo\\_Chat&width=600&height=400&lang=en](http://chat.parachat.com/chat/login.html?room=Swimming_Kangaroo_Chat&width=600&height=400&lang=en)

And type in your name to LogIn

Or click on the SKBooks Chat on the lefthand side of [www.swimmingkangaroo.com](http://www.swimmingkangaroo.com)

See you there or be square!

## Check out trailers for two of our newest books!

Magic, Mensa & Mayhem: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36ao0\\_gkEjY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36ao0_gkEjY)

The Unselfish Gene: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlhmp-F305k>

# Interview Roulette

*The RULES: The interviewee selects 10 numbers between 1 and 57 (or however many possible questions we have.) We send the interviewee the questions corresponding with those numbers. Our victim this month is Karina Fabian, author of **Magic, Mensa & Mayhem**.*

## **If writing was not an option what would you do to express your creativity?**

I'd tell stories, probably learn to draw better. But mostly, I'd probably be burning off my energy cleaning the house and reading bunches of books--which is what I was doing before I started writing. (and slowly going nuts.)

## **How do you deal with criticism?**

Depends on the situation, but usually, I get snarly and sarcastic to myself or with a good friend, then when that's out of my system, I either shrug and move on or try to fix the problem.

## **What is your favorite article of clothing?**

I have a pair of blue jeans with purple flowers embroidered on the leg. They're soft and comfy and warm. My favorite shirt is a velour tie-on with sheer bell sleeves. It's burgundy, so they don't go well together, alas.

## **What inspires you in your writing?**

Everything. Yes, it's a cliché, so I'll give you two examples. Today, someone asked me when Vern was going to take on a pack of werewolves. That got me thinking about how I'd have them in the Faerie world--and what about vampires? Still not sure on werewolves, but now I know the vampire idea. (Essentially, Satan granting wish fulfillment and making the person think he died and came back as a vampire.)

While I was writing *Magic, Mensa and Mayhem*, I learned that in order to run the hospitality suite at a gathering, someone has to take a test on food preparation. That gave me the perfect reason for the Faerie French chef put in charge of the food to rant. "They feed on swill and test me--me!"

## **What Will Your Famous Last Words Be?**

Nothing famous about them: "It's been fun." And "I love you."

## **Are you a good cook?**

I can be, but at this point in my life, I don't put a lot of effort into it for a lot of reasons, the fact that my attention is on writing being one of them.

## **What author should write your biography?**

I don't want a biography of me written. I live a very ordinary, happy life. Could I get someone to write press copy for my books instead? If so, I want Terry Pratchett's press agent.

## **What's your favorite invention?**

The computer, despite the love-hate relationship I have with it. Then, the dishwasher. However, if you want to get really basic, my favorite invention is the wheel because so much has come from it--from transportation to--hey!--my dishwasher.

## **If you were a car, what type would you be?**

I'd want to be a Ferrari--exotic, exciting and ready to take off! What I am is a Honda Element--comfortable and dependable, and kind-of square.

## **Who do you take after more, your father or your mother?**

In looks--my mom. In humor, my dad. In work ethic, compassion and morals--when you have examples as terrific as my



# Magic, Mensa & Mayhem

## By Karina Fabian

### An Excerpt



There's nothing like a bloodcurdling scream to wake you up in the morning. The rest of the night had gone rather quickly. First Cory, his partner Joe, and I handled the fight in the playground. It turned out to be a rivalry between two local gangs. My presence broke things up pretty fast, so much of our work was in rounding them back up to face justice. I did let one from each gang go, to carry the message that a dragon was in town and didn't like boys and girls who didn't play nice. Then I had to explain myself to the local police - not my participation in the bust, mind you, but my actual presence. It'd been a long time since I'd had to explain that I was indeed sentient, tame, and - this gets me every time - *housebroken*.

"I have better control over my bowels than you, officer. Want me to prove it?" I finally told the uniform after the third such question. Like I said, diplomacy.

After the cops had packed the last of the goons into the squad car and had grudgingly admitted that I didn't need a license or rabies tags, Cory and Joe invited me to their office to copy my paperwork and have some coffee. Then we split up to do our respective rounds and gathered back for the six a.m. shift change so I could meet Gary Spade and Janey Taylor of the day shift. I got to the room in time to join Grace for morning devotions and settled myself on my big bed for a luxurious sleep.

Naturally, that was not to be. Sometimes, I think God has proscriptions against my luxury.

The scream in question was coming from the other end of the wing, but by the time I'd thrown myself out of bed, the shrieks had morphed into vows of vengeance, so I relaxed. No one had been murdered. Yet.

When I got to the room, Gary was shooing people from the scene, but I nodded at him, and he let me pass.

"What's the problem?" I asked as I moseyed into the room. It was a smaller version of ours with a bathroom and closet flanking a narrow hall to the bedroom itself and done in the same tasteful but neutral color scheme. Soaps posed at forty-five degree angles to the corners of the sinks, which almost sparkled in the florescent lights. Towels folded with five-

maids had just cleaned or the occupant was a neat freak. Grace was already there, checking for magic, while a pajama-clad male Caucasian with thinning blond hair watched, his back to me.

"The problem? This is the problem!" he shouted and indicated the room with a theatrical sweep of his arm. The momentum from his gesture spun him until he was facing me. His rant died in his throat and became a small gurgle.

"Nick," Grace interceded cheerily, "this is my partner, Vern."

I gave him my best tame dragon smile - me and Puff, we're like brothers, really - then looked around the immaculate room. "Something's missing?" I ventured.

Á Q c C • Á } [ c Á c @ æ g a n i z e d ! Losing his cool in this rage, he stormed to a freshly polished drawer and yanked it open. The shirts inside were folded more neatly than for a Macy's Grand Opening. I glanced at the open closet, where the pants and Bermuda shorts were similarly perfect.

My imitation of human facial expressions must have gotten pretty good, because he glowered at my bemusement. "I'm color-blind! Before I left, my wife packed everything in coordinating outfits. Now I have to get someone to help me match everything. That's just embarrassing. And then there's this!" He shoved a puzzle magazine at me. *The Giant Travel Book of Magic Squares*.

He continued, "I know Sudoku is the new thing, but I happen to enjoy these. But someone's gone and filled them all in - wrong! In pen! ù c ~ ] ā ā É Á ] i æ } \ ā } \* ö Ä

Grace offered to help Nick get his clothes coordinated while I perused his book. At first glance, it did look like random numbers, every number less than 19, some with halves, even some with letters. Mishmash.

If you were using the standard Mundane number system. I didn't know whether to be amused or exasperated. What were Shoemaker Brownies doing on this side of the Gap? I held the book under my nose, nostrils twitching, but I didn't smell anything other than paper and ink and all the stuff that gets on human hands that they never notice. I wasn't expecting anything, really. Brownies can cover their tracks very well when they don't want to be caught - and they never want to get caught.

Nick took one of the outfits Grace picked for him and ducked into the bathroom to change. Grace went to work on the rest. "Well, it's definitely brownies, but why would they come to this room?" she asked, echoing my thoughts.

"And who brought them?" Brownies were essentially invisible. We never saw any on the airship, and none had been on the passenger list.

"Who?" Nick asked as he came out of the bathroom in a pale blue collared shirt and navy Dockers. He reached into the closet for his shoes, then sat on the bed to put them on. Suddenly, he stopped and looked at the sole of his clean and polished loafer.

"Broken before?" I asked.

"Just starting to tear. I noticed it at the airport. How did you know?"

## Magic, Mensa & Mayhem

(an excerpt)

"You, my friend, have had the privilege of living a fairy tale. While you slept, the wee folk snuck into your room and cleaned. They repaired your shoes - and probably anything else they found broken. They even finished what they thought was your work," I told him as I tossed the Magic Squares book on his bed.

"But it's all nonsense!"

"Actually, it's a legitimate numbering system - and one you're slightly familiar with, though it's far more complex than the one Mundanes use. You like a good mental challenge, right?"

Grace and I left him with a closet of neatly pressed coordinating outfits, a charm to keep out any future "assistance," and a grin on his face as he dove into his puzzle book, scribbling in the margins and trying to work out the number system.

"What are brownies doing here?" Grace wondered as we headed down the hall.

"Not selling cookies, that's for certain."

Neither of us was grinning. Faerie brownies would not be at this convention on their own - someone brought them. That meant that someone coaxed them to "clean" that room.

Somehow, I couldn't believe it was a random act of kindness. At least it narrowed our suspects to those who could use magic.

I said as much to Grace, speaking in Faerie Gaelic against curious ears of the Mundanes poking their heads out of rooms or passing in the hall. Once we got to our room, she checked the confirmation records against the computer assignments we found and the final room assignments. She said, "That room was supposed to be Gozonvabosomofic's. I checked; there's no trace of harmful magic or substances, and Nick didn't find anything missing. Seems to me that they were directed to the wrong room and, as long as they were there, did what comes naturally."

"Except Gozon doesn't like brownies," I protested. "In the centuries I've known him, he's never once allowed someone else to handle his stuff. Neurotic that way." Last night, I'd noticed that in addition to the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the doorknob, Gozon had put up security spells around his room. "Breakfast?" I asked.

"I don't think there's time. I need to get my notes and harp and get ready for my lecture. Remember how neat the luggage was in the airship? The purser only knew someone had tampered with it because everything was rearranged. No one's reported anything missing, either. So perhaps Nick's room wasn't just cleaned - it was searched?"

"Looks like it. So we're back to who and why." I twitched my tail in annoyance.

More work we weren't getting paid for.



Want a Free DragonEye, PI story? Join the DragonEye, PI, website at [www.dragoneyepi.net](http://www.dragoneyepi.net) before May 1 and get a copy of "Amateurs," where Vern and Sister Grace take on Sekhmet, Egyptian goddess of death.

# The Sacrifice of the Sage Hen

## By Susie Schade-Brewer

### Excerpt

Eyes ablaze with anger, a burly six-foot farmer looked past a crowd of shoppers in the General Store and roared at a man near the back wall.

"Grant West," he bellowed.

The wiry store owner glanced up from his scales and past his customer at the sound of his name. His eyes widened when he recognized the man who had earlier stormed out without buying anything, upset about the price of an oil lamp, but who now was suspending the same at the end of his fingers. Hoping to save his last precious lamp, West lunged forward.

The farmer raised the lamp high then flung it to the floor. Shards of glass scattered in every direction.

The gaping crowd pulled back as the storeowner slid to a stop before the angry man. "What the."

"Where I come from, we don't cotton to them that horn-swaggles good honest folk." The farmer wrenched a handful of Grant's shirt into his fist and lifted him to his toes. He doubled his other fist, preparing to exact his retribution. At that moment, Charlie, the shopkeeper's wife, five-foot-five and slender, stepped through the front entrance. Immediately, her gaze fixed on her defenseless husband dangling at the end of the big man's grasp.

"Ira Pritchard!" she screamed. "What in the Sam Hill." She dashed through the shoppers to her husband's aid and grabbed hold of the man's shirtsleeve, jerking back hard.

As she did, Ira's fist came down, missing Grant but sending her flying to the floor, petticoats aflutter.

"Why, you no-account southern cracker," she swore. In one motion, she was back on her feet and lunging again at Pritchard.

Grant wheezed, caught in the grip that tightened his collar into a noose. His eyes bulging, his lips turning blue, he lost his footing and stumbled sideways into the scattering crowd.

Pritchard stumbled, too, his low-crowned hat tumbling off his head and rolling away.

Seizing her opportunity, Charlie vaulted atop Pritchard's back. While her legs tightened around his trunk, her hands laced across his eyes, and her fingernails curled in.

"Scratch 'is eyes out," boomed a thunderous voice from the front door. "Blind the plug-ugly varmint!"

With the screams of several timid young women, Charlie only half heard the voice.

Pritchard dropped the storekeeper like a load of coal, bellowing loud enough to shake soot from the chimney. He stumbled forward, twisting and wheeling, pulling at the fingers gouging at his eyes.

West scrambled away on all fours. He snatched a shovel from a nearby display, rose unsteadily to his feet, and swung it up and over his shoulder.

But Pritchard was on the move. Unable to dislodge the fiery-eyed woman, he headed for the wall.

Terrified, Charlie closed her eyes and braced for a pounding. Just then, an explosion detonated the ceiling above her as if dynamite had hit it; chunks of plaster and plank wood fell over her and Pritchard, bringing their spin to an abrupt halt.

Charlie's eyes opened. As she attempted to peer through the thick white smoke that swirled through the room, she heard the same booming voice.

"Put that woman down," it ordered. This time she recognized her father's voice.

Pritchard's gaze found the tall man with long gray hair at the door.

Charlie saw him too, as well as the double-barrel shotgun aimed at Pritchard's mid-section. Releasing her grip, she slid to the floor and moved back quickly.

"You get yer sorry hide outta here, Ira," Micah Fremont demanded.

The farmer's jaw set firm, and he stubbornly planted his feet.

"Now," Fremont demanded again, arcing his shotgun toward the open door, "afore this second barrel rearranges yer middle!"

"I don't take orders from nobody, Fremont. Not even you!"

"Best reconsider this one time, Ira, for the sake of yer health."

The farmer turned sideways to find Grant. "This ain't over, store-man. I ain't done with you." Then he barreled toward the door, pausing before Fremont. "Ner you neither, Fremont! You best keep an eye over your shoulder."

"Bring it on, farmer boy, anytime you've a mind to. Keep one thing in mind, though. You ever try to harm my daughter again, it'll be the last time you see daylight. Now, git!" He shoved the double barrel against Pritchard's chin.

The big man stormed out the door. No sooner had he crossed the threshold than Grant rushed forward with renewed fervor. "Yeah! And don't you never come back into my store again!"

Charlie spun him by the arm. "What in heaven's name did you do to start that ruckus, Grant?"

"Ah, he was burning about the price of the lamp."

"I told you raising prices would start trouble."

"How I set my prices is my business, Charlotte. You can keep your opinion to yourself."

Charlie wagged her head. "Every spring I warn you."



# The Sacrifice of the Sage Hen

## By Susie Schade-Brewer

(excerpt)

"Any good businessman knows you make your money when folks's willing to buy. Spring is when the overlancers come in. Anyhow, I reckon I'm man enough to handle trouble if it happens."

"Like you just did? If it hadn't been for my pa..."

"Ah, your pa. I get tired of hearing it."

Fremont had waited by the doorway, ensuring the troublemaker did not return. Once the farmer's buckboard disappeared around the corner, tilting wildly on two wheels, Fremont turned back to his daughter.

"You all right, Charlotte?"

"Yeah, I'm all right, Pa. Pritchard was just mad, and rightly so, I figure." She glared again at her husband.

Grant pointed to the back room. "Instead of complaining, you need to be sweeping up this glass."

"Me? It was you that made Pritchard mad."

"Just do as I say, woman. I got no time for your contrariness, too." Straightening his apron, he again plastered a smile across his face and returned to his customer.

Charley huffed toward the back room to find the broom. Near the door, an elderly woman counted brown eggs into a peck basket.

"That was a most unpleasant way to start a morning, Mrs. West," she consoled. "But we all know nothing comes second to business with that man of your'n."

"I reckon I know that, Mrs. Nyby."

"Course," the woman peaked one eyebrow, "whenever there's trouble, a wife must at least consider if she is the cause."

Charlie stopped abruptly. "Excuse me?"

"Oh, dearie. The Lord put womenfolk on this earth for one reason - to serve our menfolk. Take it from an old woman, life is a whole lot simpler if you'd just let your man make all the decisions."

"Mrs. Nyby, why would the Lord have given gals a brain if it weren't to be used? Or a mouth to speak with if she was just to keep it clamped up tight as a wolf trap? I thank you for your concern, but my lips flap about as well as any man's."

The older woman's jaw dropped as Charlie brusquely left her to find the broom.

After cleaning up the mess that Pritchard had left, Charlie left her husband to his work and slipped outside to the front porch. With a stiff breeze whipping her long hair across her face, she found a sunny spot near the front steps where she could view both directions down Main Street.

For several weeks, fervor had consumed their town. Folks bustled through the streets and crowded all the shops. Since Independence was an embarkation town, every spring the city swelled with pioneers buying up everything from food and tools to black powder and firearms. Not only was the town located near the Missouri River, but also where both the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails originated.

Watching the bustling activity stirred Charlie's imagination. How exciting for them to be preparing for the most thrilling adventure of their lives, she thought. At the end of their journeys, a new life awaited them in the breathtaking Willamette Valley, with its majestic timbers, glistening rivers, and towering mountains. For years to come, their families would speak of it all. Books would be written if only she could be a part of it, stand on the buying side of the scales rather than the selling.

Countless times, she had tried to convince Grant to go west and share in building the new land. She had highlighted the advantages, appealed to his sense of adventure. Yet, his reply was always the same. "Profits of the store are exceeding expectations this year. Why would we want to go to all that trouble when we do such good business here?"

Grant exited the store and came toward her. "Charlie, you need to come back inside now. There's work to be done."

"Did you ever think that there might be more to life than work, Grant? Look out there. Can't you just see the excitement in those peoples' faces?"

"Yes, and I think it's insane. Every spring we go through this. We're not pioneers, Charlie. We're merchants."

"You're a merchant. I'm just a merchant's wife."

"You'd be a whole lot happier if you'd get those dern fool ideas of going off somewhere outta your head."

Charlie raised her finger, ready to debate, when she heard a gunshot, and something whizzed past her ear. When it thumped into a post behind her, she screamed and dove behind several barrels.

**Susie Schade-Brewer interviewed in The Independence Examiner**

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<http://www.examiner.net/archive/x598680019/Frontier-Independence-is-novels-setting>

## AUTHOR NEWS

**Mark Eller (Traitor, April 2009)** I am the featured reviewer for I Just Finished this week. Also last month I was interviewed on the Adreinna Turner Blog Talk Radio Show. At the beginning of March I took part in Horror Fest in Second life, speaking on podcasting, doing a horror poem reading, and also presenting horror in real life, the Vlad Dracula story. Emerian Rich, the podcaster, recorded it with the intension of 'maybe' playing it on her horror addicts show.

**Larriane Wills (Evil Reflections, Thirteen Souls)** was interviewed on the Authors Show on February 26.

**Karina Fabian (Magic, Mensa & Mayhem)** , æ • Á ã } c ^ ! ç ã ^ , ^ á Á [ } Á S Ý T Ô Á V X q • Á } [ [ ] Á • @ [ , Á  
 March 22, 9-11 EST: Talking about Worldbuilding at CWG Chat: <http://tinyurl.com/bu6bcz>

March 29, 7-9 EST: Guest of Honor at The Writers Chat Room: <http://www.writerschatroom.com/Enter.htm>

### Follow Karina and Vern on their Blog Tour in April 2009! (A new event every day!)

- 1: TWEET TOUR: [www.twitter.com/karinafabian](http://www.twitter.com/karinafabian)
- 2: tour announced on [www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com](http://www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com), [www.fabianspace.com](http://www.fabianspace.com), [www.dragoneyepi.net](http://www.dragoneyepi.net)  
 (Interview) with Jane Lebak: <http://philangelus.wordpress.com>
- 3: Interview with Vern on Larion Will's website: <http://www.larriane.com>
- 4: Interview about Florida and Gater Louie scenes: <http://bayourenaissanceman.blogspot.com>
- 5: Information and interview of Vern; <http://blog.frankcreed.com/>
- 6: Snippets from those who helped make MM&M: [www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com](http://www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com)
- 7: book review [snoringscholar.blogspot.com](http://snoringscholar.blogspot.com)  
 10-11 EST Second Life: Meet & Greet <http://www.tinyrul.com/sllgg> .
- 8: TWEET TOUR: [www.twitter.com/karinafabian](http://www.twitter.com/karinafabian)
- 9: Interview with the content editor: [www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com](http://www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com)
- 10: interview <http://unwriter1.wordpress.com/>  
 Talking about blog tours at <http://www.sallymurphy.blogspot.com/>  
 Talking about worldbuilding: Speculative Friction <http://francespauli.blogspot.com>
- 11: review: [www.shoutlife.com/cindysbooks](http://www.shoutlife.com/cindysbooks)
- 12: Interview on Plotting Your Novel: <http://writewow.blogspot.com/>
- 13: Interview with Nancy Famolari: <http://sites.google.com/site/nancyfamolari/>
- 14: Book review; <http://www.freewebs.com/brynnacurry> *The Fairy Ring*  
 Book Review: <http://bibliophilesretreat.com>
- 15: Book Signing at Minot AFB BX 10-2  
 Interview at <http://joyceanthony.tripod.com>  
 TWEET TOUR: [www.twitter.com/karinafabian](http://www.twitter.com/karinafabian)
- 16: Interview with the copy editor: [www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com](http://www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com)
- 17: Information and interview on Ascroft, eh? [www.dianneascroft.wordpress.com](http://www.dianneascroft.wordpress.com)
- 18: Book Signing at Minot AFB BX 10-2  
 Review by CF Vici: <http://cfvici.blogspot.com>
- 19: TBA
- 20: interview and review <http://www.frederation.wordpress.com>  
 Review: <http://pennylockwoodehrenkranz.blogspot.com/>
- 21: Guest column on worldbuilding: <http://pennylockwoodehrenkranz.blogspot.com/>
- 22: TWEET TOUR: [www.twitter.com/karinafabian](http://www.twitter.com/karinafabian)
- 23: Excerpt: [www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com](http://www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com)
- 24: Review with Cathi Hassan: <http://cathischatter.blogspot.com>
- 25: Interview with Cathi Hassan: <http://cathischatter.blogspot.com>
- 26: Review and interview on Wayfarer's Journal Blog Review: <http://www.wayfarersjournal.com/blog.htm>
- 27: Vern guest blogs on "Scribblings": <http://tree lady.livejournal.com/>
- 28: interview [snoringscholar.blogspot.com](http://snoringscholar.blogspot.com)
- 29: TWEET TOUR: [www.twitter.com/karinafabian](http://www.twitter.com/karinafabian)
- 30: MM&M Trivia contest: [www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com](http://www.virtualbooktourdenet.blogspot.com)

# Short Story Feature

## Birdhouse of the Seven Chambers

### by Patrick Scalisi

Iron Claw dove in for the kill. Years of training at the Aviary Temple came to bear as he executed a perfect maneuver toward Metal Feather, Guardian of the Birdhouse of the Seven Chambers. Talons raking the air, Iron Claw moved with the finesse of a ballerina, never breaking stride as he became a solid whirlwind of power. Metal Feather dodged to the left - but just barely. The Guardian used his wings to remain upright, then oriented himself back toward his attacker.

Metal Feather decided not to wait. He executed a flying arch that landed him behind Iron Claw and lashed out with one razor talon. Iron Claw

The Guardian of the Seven Chambers was middle-aged, with flecks of gray at the very edge of his feathers. The years, though, had not di-

Monks, and scars crisscrossed the length of his hooked beak - Worm King. Iron Claw faced this legendary fighter now and was sworn to defeat him.

dropped to the earth below. Iron Claw felt a trickle of blood stain his wing.

ing an advantage, Iron Claw continued his assault, throwing blows left and right in equal measure. Metal Feather brought his wing up in an attempt to resist the barrage. Satisfied with his offensive, Iron Claw backed away to regroup, bouncing nimbly from one talon to the next.

The smaller bird remained rooted in place as the Guardian closed the distance between them. He closed his eyes and recalled vividly the final technique taught by Master Copper Talon. When Metal Feather was within mere inches, Iron Claw twisted away from the approaching Guardian.

Bodies collided.

wing.

Metal Feather began to struggle, command over his body completely lost.

Metal Feather screamed in rage, apoplectic fury bubbling from his beak. The cries, though, were mostly lost on Iron Claw, who had already entered the Birdhouse of the Seven Chambers.

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I jumped in my seat when Maria tapped my shoulder.

I glanced at the blank computer screen. Maria sank into the loveseat that occupied our small home office.

Maria laughed again and gazed out the open window. The small screen granted a perfect view of the backyard and deck, where we had built a small birdhouse at the start of spring.

### Short Story Feature **Quake Man** **Scott Virtes**

John Finn was convinced there would be an earthquake in Parkdale, a hundred miles from where he lived. He had computer models and access to the USGS databases, and he had a gut feeling when he looked at the stress maps. The red zones told the story, and his nightmares filled in the details.

He warned Parkdale City Hall, but after a few calls they would put him on hold and never pick up. He even called the National Guard, urging them to be alert . @ ^ Á , æ • Á à ! ~ • @ ^ à Á [ ~ ~ Á à ^ Á æ Á • ] [ \ ^ • { æ } Á c [ Á à ^ Á æ | ^ ! c É + Á Á P ^ Á c [ [ \ Á c [ Á c @ ^ Á • c ! ^ ^ c • Á , ã c @ Á ~ | ^ ^ ! • Á æ } á Á

But the quake happened in Lanfield, ninety miles to the east. He shrugged, then went home to wait for new data.

His new map had different contours, fresh swirls of red danger. This time the quake would hit Stony Hill. He spent over a year trying to warn residents in this remote desert town. They chased him off, banned him from the local parks and diners. The local cops roughed him up and asked him to leave. Even the old guy at the rusty gas station said his credit cards were no good anymore, and when he tried to pay in cash he remembered that the tanks were dry, and they were waiting for a new shipment any day now.

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The quake hit Danville instead, just over the hills.

New data, new map. A new town sat in the bulls-eye. He tried to warn them, but met the same dense resistance. He ended up in the main street of Carbondale, wearing a sign that boldly warned of the impending disaster.

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• [ Á @ æ ! á Á c [ Á à ^ | ã ^ ç ^ Á c @ æ c Á c @ ^ ! ^ q • Á \* [ ] } æ Á à ^ Á æ Á ~ ~ æ \ ^ Ñ Á Á Q c Á This time he was dead right. The ground heaved. The coffee shop across the street took a step back. A crack opened up beneath his feet, shifted, then closed.

When he was gone and the tremors subsided, folks looked out from their windows, warily. A halfhearted cheer spread through the village.

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The people went about their lives like nothing had happened. And nothing would ever happen, if they could help it.

### **The End**

*Scott Virtes has had about 400 stories & poems published since 1986. He was just in Analog (July/Aug 2007), and has had works in Space & Time, Ideomancer, Star\*Line, Cafe Irreal, Planet, and many more. He has two story collections and 5 poetry chapbooks available. You can watch him die in "Master and Commander", but he's okay now. Home page: <http://tales.scvs.com>*