

## ***The Next Adventures of Guy... more wackiness***

*The only parts of this that aren't true are the parts that I made up.*

*By Norm Cowie*

*“God is a comedian, playing to an audience too afraid to laugh.”*

*Voltaire 1694-1778*

### **Prologue**

*“Hey, dude.”*

*“Yeah?”*

*“You ever heard of something called a siesta?”*

*“Siesta? Yeah, sure, I guess.”*

*“You know what a siesta is?”*

*“Well, um, I think so. It's like a nap or something, right?”*

*“Yep. You got it. It's a nap or rest that one takes in Latin America or Spain after eating.”*

*“Okay, sure. That makes sense.”*

*“Do you know why they have siestas after eating?”*

*Though I was busy running through a graveyard, I thought for a second.*

*“No. I guess I don't really know.”*

*“Well. It's so that we won't do this.”*

*And with that, the chicken quesadilla that I'd had for lunch slugged me in the gut. Hot sauce vapor burped past my lips and my ears popped as I went into a controlled roll.*

*Okay, maybe it wasn't a controlled roll. It was more like a graceful ballet dance move.*

*No, not really, it wasn't.*

*A gymnastic spiral?*

*I wish.*

*Um. A tumbler's spin?*

*No.*

*Okay, okay. The truth is that that I doubled over in mid stride, my legs collapsed weakly and I stumbled into the sorcerer who was running next to me. He shoved back roughly, causing me to lose all control, trip over a tombstone from a guy who died in 1967, and skid face first into some ragweed missed by the cemetery's groundskeeper.*

*I'm allergic to ragweed.*

## **Chapter 1**

I rolled over, my nose and eyes already itching.

"Aw, damn it!"

"You okay, Guy?"

I glared at Thurman. "Why'd you shove me?"

He looked hurt, "I didn't shove you. You banged into me."

"I didn't bang into you. I fell into you."

He was sweating profusely. Guess black Goth garb isn't the best thing to wear when you're expending unnecessary and excess amounts of energy.

The grass was nicely manicured and comfortable, so I rolled over and rubbed my nose.

"Dude, we have to get out of here," he said.

I sneezed but didn't move.

"All right, Thurman. Do you want to tell me where we're going?"

Something jabbed into my side. A television remote. My travel bag was lying against a tree, its contents strewn over the grass. The remote had likely spilled from the bag, which he'd packed in our rush to leave the house.

"And why was this in my bag?"

He gave me a look, "which do you want to know?"

"Huh?"

"Which question? You asked two."

"Oh, uh. Let's start with ... what's going on? Why are we running?"

"Those are new questions," he accused. "Now you're up to four. How am I supposed to answer four different questions at once?"

I sighed. I knew better than to get into that argument.

So I said with that really patient voice that parents use to cover up their irritation when talking to a naughty toddler, "So, think. You busted into the house swirling purple smoke and yelling 'they're here,' and something about a Quest. Do you remember that?"

"Um, yeah."

"And like big dummies, we dropped our beers, left the stereo on and ran up into the graveyard. Are we in agreement?"

"Well, yeah, I guess so.."

"And my beer is dying of warmth right now and I'm not there to save it."

"Um."

"And I got tripped up and landed on my face."

"Okay."

"So the question really is, 'why am I here right now?'"

I sneezed again. A string of gook spewed onto my hand. Gross. I wiped it on the grass. My eyes were watering from the ragweed.

"Oh, that question."

Two panting figures ran up. Knob and Seth. Knob immediately flopped onto the grass and made himself comfortable.

The other one was my little brother Seth. Yeah, I was letting him tag along. He isn't too bad as little brothers go.

"So, guys. Why'd you stop? We were running really fast. I was keeping up with Knob really well!!" Seth exclaimed.

"I'm trying to figure out why we were running in the first place," I said.

"Exercise, wasn't it? Weren't we just working out?" Knob asked. He plucked a piece of ragweed and chewed on a leaf. I winced.

"Uh, no, Knob. If you'll recall, you and I were having a nice cold beer together when numb nuts here came running in yelling and screaming."

Thurman looked hurt. "I'm not a numb nuts."

"Fine, you're not a numb nuts. You are a goof though."

"I think Thurman is pretty neat. He can do magic and wears black, and all that stuff," Seth said rapid-fire. His words practically tripped over themselves in their haste to get out of his mouth.

"Dude, what's wrong with you?" Knob asked him.

Seth had a manic look on his face. "I only had four words in the last book. I have

all kinds of making up to do. I'm going to just keep talking until I have something to say."

"Whoa. Dude. Slow down. I get the feeling you'll get more opportunity this time. Just take it easy."

"Ignore him. He's just a teenager. Besides, there's always the 'delete' key," said Seth's big brother, who's had a lot of practice ignoring his little brother, though I still feel kind of bad about it once in awhile.

< *Delete* > responded Seth, his lips going a mile a minute.

"There, see. Okay, now what was I saying?"

Thurman looked scared, "Look guys, I don't like being in the open like this. Let's get under cover somewhere and talk about this."

I glared at him, "We WERE under cover. You're the reason we're OUT of cover."

He turned red. "Sorry. I don't think clearly when I'm freaking out."

"When DO you think clearly?"

"Look, I'm sorry. But this is serious! We can't be in the open!" His eyes darted around. He grabbed them and plugged them back in.

"Fine. We can visit the Warrior. Her house is right here," I gestured.

Knob brightened. "Yeah, let's go there. I haven't seen her in a while."

Thurman nodded, "I'd feel safe there. That works for me, too."

Seth said something else, but it was deleted again by our helpful writer.

I stood up, sneezed, and brushed crushed grass off my knees. "Okay, let's go. Knob, would you spit that stuff out?"

Knob spit out a green glob of munched up ragweed.

Then I sneezed again.

“Bless you,” Thurman said.

“Bless you,” Knob said.

< *delete* > Seth said.

**Wah-choo!**

“Bless you.” “Bless you.” < *delete* >

“Would you guys ....”

**WAH-CHOO!!**

“Bless you,” they chimed in unison. All but Seth, who said, < *delete* >

“...please stop saying...”

**BLA-CHOO!! WHA-CHOOO!!**

“Bless you. Bless you” < *delete* >, they sang.

“...’bless you’ every time I ...”

**WHAA-CHOOO!!!**

“Bless you,” they chorused.

“....sneeze???!!!”

I glared at my three blessers. My nose was running like a marathoner.

They looked back with wide-eyed innocence.

Then Knob said, “You’re supposed to say, ‘thank you’ when someone blesses  
you.

“I’m not thanking you!”

“You’re welcome,” he said.

“I didn’t...”

Thurman interrupted, “Why do we bless someone after they sneeze?”

“Yeah, I never thought of that,” Knob said.

“We don’t bless people when they cough, right?” Thurman said.

“Or burp.”

“Or fart.”

“Or hiccup.”

“Or make that noise under your armpit.”

“It came from the late 500 AD,” I said. Now my nose was lacing up a pair of Nikes.

“What do you mean?” Thurman wondered.

“Hang on, I have it here,” Knob said, having pulled a book from somewhere.

“Where’d you get that boo....”

“Hey, check it out,” he said. “People used to think that your soul leaves your body when you sneeze, leaving it open for evil spirits.”

“Wow! Evil spirits,” Thurman said.

“And before that, they thought your heart stopped when you sneezed, and since you were dead for second, you needed to be blessed.”

“You think that’s why you can’t keep your eyes open when you sneeze?” Knob asked. “That way you can’t see your soul leaving?”

“You can’t see your soul at all. C’mon, let’s get out of this stuff,” I snarled.

We went down the hill, and as we got closer we heard excited kid-chatter. Kid-chatter is that very weird noise that comes from mixing growth hormones with an

overabundance of sugar. It reminded me of hyped up African honeybees attacking a wild boar.

The graveyard backed up to her backyard , so we walked around the pool to the deck. The pool's surface was roiling and frothing as if there were frenzied piranhas feeding underneath. Suddenly, there was an eruption of water, and the top of a kid popped out with an orange floatable noodle, squealing with delight.

The urchin saw us and flashed bright white teeth from a sun browned face. "Hi, Knob!"

Knob's face lit up. "Sean, little man. Howsup?"

Another brown body catapulted out of the water, "KNOB!!!"

"Hey, Kris. Que Pasa?" he grinned.

"Man, how do you tell them apart?" I said sourly.

Knob slid me a look, "Not my fault if you can't tell a girl from a boy, kemosabe."

"Just go on in," Kris said. Or Sean. I didn't know which, and I wasn't going to hazard a guess. If I had had the right angle to see their swimsuits, I might have figured it out.

"Gracias, Chiquita," Knob said, and pulled the sliding glass door open. The twins slipped like otters back into the water.

We followed Knob into the house and found ourselves in the dining room.

Well, we didn't 'find' ourselves there. We knew exactly where we were and we weren't lost, so we couldn't 'find' ourselves in the dining room. If we had been lost, it might have been a revelation. But we weren't ... so it wasn't. Rather, let's say when we thought about where we were, we realized that we were in a dining room.

Uh, okay, sorry. Enough nitpicking. Sometimes I get pretty upset over the abuse of the English language, as amended by Americans and slaughtered by many.

“Hey, boys, how are you?” the Warrior asked from the kitchen. The dining room and kitchen were separated by a tall counter and bar stools.

“Hey, Warrior, what’s shaking?” Thurman chirped.

Then he turned white, most likely considering, first, what could shake on our curvaceous friend, and second, whether she would accept this kind of casual buddy-buddy salutation.

“Oh, er.. I’m uh....” he managed, choking over the words.

She smiled and Knob and I took this as permission to let the hair on our necks fall back into normal position.

“Actually, I’m not the Warrior anymore,” she said pleasantly.

“Oh, yeah, that’s right. You take on a new name for every quest,” Knob exclaimed.

“So you aren’t Buford either?” Seth asked.

“Nope, neither one,” she said, casually walking around the counter from the kitchen. Actually, she wasn’t exactly walking. I won’t tell you what she was doing quite yet, so I don’t ruin the surprise.

“Whoa!!” I said.

“Whoa!!” Thurman said.

“Wh...”

... well, you get the point. We all said “whoa.”

All except Seth, who said, *<delete>*

What you don't know is why we said, 'whoa.' It wasn't because all of a sudden we were riding horses, because we weren't. It was a simple declaratory statement of awe and profound interest uttered by that dumber and less expressive half of humanity ... guys.

You see, when the Warrior, or whatever she was known as now, came around the counter, three things preceded her. We were familiar with two of them, Mounts Left and Right. Our memories of these two peaks of pleasure had been burned permanently into our retinas during our first adventure with her.

But now, her mammary twins had somehow increased from their already ponderous proportions of gravity defying wonderfulness. That means that they got bigger.

It was what was beneath them that almost ... but not quite ... made us lose interest in her twins. And it was what made it so that she wasn't walking. She was waddling.

A belly.

About the size of a cantaloupe. Ha Ha ... just kidding. More like a cantaloupe on steroids... No, a cantaloupe on the steroid of steroids. No. More like, well, you get the point. It wasn't a teeny thing.

She grinned at our reactions.

"You're... uh... wow," Thurman exclaimed.

"Yeah, you could say that," she said. She looked down and stroked her belly like the proud winner of a beer drinking contest.

"So, uh, when are you, like, due?" Knob asked

“Oh, a few more months yet. But let’s sit down. I shouldn’t be standing all that much right now.”

We filed into the living room and took over the chairs. Knob claimed an armchair and draped over it like an octopus. Knob is a sprawler. He won’t stand if he can sit. He won’t sit if he can lie down. He leans, lays, slumps, lies ... well, no, he doesn’t lie. He’s pretty honest. But his favorite position is not vertical. Horizontal is more his game.

“What do you mean, a few more months? It looks like you’re about ready to go,” Thurman said.

“Well, you know me. It’s going to be twins again,” she said, a grim set to her mouth.

The Warrior already had three sets of twins. And that doesn’t include her personal twins. All because of the double uterti that gave her awesome powers of double PMS for almost a quarter of each month.

“Hey guys. She isn’t going to be able to come with us,” Thurman said quietly, his face tragic.

“Who says we’re going anywhere?” I shot at him.

“Why don’t you boys tell me what’s going on?” she said, curiosity etched on her face.

We turned our gazes to Thurman.

“Oh, well. It’s like this... Um... it’s going to sound silly.”

“Like we haven’t seen that before,” I said.

“Be nice,” the Warrior admonished.

“Okay, look, ...it’s like this,” he stammered.

Seth waved his hand until he had everyone's attention, "*< delete >*"

Everyone looked at him and he pointed at a pad of paper and a pencil on the table.

"What's wrong with him?" the Warrior asked.

"Ah, he, well, kind of pissed off our writer," Knob said.

"Our what?"

"Let's just say that he can't speak right now," I told her.

"Oh, that's just horrible! He couldn't speak during our adventure last year, either.

Do you need to write something down?" she asked him.

Seth nodded vigorously.

"By all means, go ahead," she told him.

He grabbed the pen and paper and started scribbling.

We all waited with interest.

Well, not Knob. He was staring vacuously into space. Thurman was covertly looking at the Warrior's belly. Meanwhile, she was looking out the back window, monitoring her sharks, er, kids. And me, I was, ...uh... I don't know. Thinking or something.

You get the point. We weren't paying attention at all. But we're college kids, so what do you expect? Well, not the Warrior, who was simply being parentally vigilant.

Seth got up and handed the paper to her.

"Let's see," she said, reading, "If I promise to settle down, may I please have the power to speak normally back?"

She looked up, "that sounds reasonable. And he said 'may,' so that has to count for something."

“Yeah, like Mom would let him get away with saying, ‘can,’” I said.

“So who do we talk to about this?” she asked.

“Oh, I can take care of that,” Thurman said. “Can I have my remote back?”

“You mean, ‘may I,’” the Warrior interrupted.

“The remote? What do you want my remote for?” I asked.

“Oh, that’s not your remote. It’s mine.”

“What did you bring your remote to my house for?”

“I sorta upgraded my wand.”

“You what?”

He reached over and snagged the remote from my bag. He pointed it at Seth and touched a button.

“< *delet.*” ...s’ not working. Hey! It worked! I can talk again!”

“Remember your promise,” Thurman admonished him.

“Okay, okay. Sorry, I’ll settle down.”

Seth shut up but sat grinning like a maniac.

“What are you talking about, you ‘upgraded’ your wand?” Knob asked Thurman.

“This is my new wand,” Thurman said, brandishing the remote.

“A television remote? Your wand is a remote?!” I scoffed.

“It worked on your brother, didn’t it?”

“Well ...”

“What’d you do? Hit the ‘mute’ button?” Knob asked.

“You can’t use a remote as a wand,” I sneered.

“I don’t know,” the Warrior said. “Guys and remotes... that’s a pretty powerful

combination. And he is a sorcerer, after all.”

“He’s not a sorcerer,” I shot.

“Guy, he is a sorcerer,” the Warrior glared me down.

“Yeah, right, ...”

“I don’t know, guys. He’s the Unbeliever, you know.” Thurman said.

“Huh?” Knob said.

“The Unbeliever,” Thurman repeated.

“So what, I don’t get it,” Knob asked.

“I’ve been thinking about it. His powers of unbelief might be significant, even powerful.”

“What the heck are you talking about! I’m not an unbeliever!”

“Whoa, you’re right,” Knob’s eyes were bright with wonder.

“I’ve been thinking that if he started believing stuff, he might actually become a believer and lose his powers of unbelief, or worse,” Thurman explained.

“What powers of unbelief?” I snarled.

The Warrior’s furrow was creased with thought. “You mean like if he unbeliefes something that isn’t true, it becomes true?”

“Or vice versa. Who knows how his powers might end up manifesting themselves?” Thurman acknowledged.

“Like my powers of Esquire, right?” In our last adventures, Knob had acquired the powers of Esquire, which gave him the ability to read attorney-speak and converse with attorneys.

“Exactly! Why his powers might just be incredibly vast, but so subtle that we

can't understand what affect he has on events.”

“I don't HAVE any powers,” I raged.

A wind suddenly blew through the living room knocking over knick-knacks, paddy-wacks, brics and brac and other stuff artfully arranged around the room as temptations for little kids to destroy.

A silence fell over us as we all were likely considering how amazing this was since the windows were closed tightly and the kids were outside.

“Wow,” Seth said in a small voice. “Please don't ‘unbelieve’ me, okay?”

## **Chapter 2**

“So what are you guys up to?” the Warrior chirped, breaking the icy silence.

“Well, Warrior ...” Thurman began.

“Oh, wait,” she interrupted, “I'm sorry, but we have to resolve that. Remember, I'm not the Warrior anymore. At least, until, well, you know.” She was buried under throw pillows on the sofa.

We did know, but we didn't want to know. Or more accurately, we didn't want to talk about it... or think about it. Woman organ stuff.

*La la la la la la.*

“So what do we call you?” Knob asked.

A tall blonde man came down the hallway. “Just call her Beth. That's her name.”

“Hey, Jim.” Knob sang.

Jim is the Warrior's husband. As he plopped onto the sofa next to the Warrior, he

put an arm around her. She turned to him and said sweetly, “Honey, I told you. If you ever touch me again, I will rip your arms out of their sockets, and stake you outside for raccoons to munch on.”

He immediately got up. “Well, guys. It’s been great seeing you again. I, uh, have some stuff to do in the garage.”

He didn’t exactly bolt out the door, but there was a little popping sound caused by the vacuum created in his wake.

She looked at our shocked faces. “Oh, I didn’t mean it. He’ll be fine. I always get a little grumpy once I hit the second trimester.”

The garage door opened again, and Jim’s head popped out, “Uh, are you guys going to need her again for another adventure?” He had a hopeful look on his face.

“Jim. Maybe you should get back in the garage,” the Warrior said mildly.

“Oh, yeah. Good idea.”

His head disappeared with the alacrity of a meercat bolting in its hole.

“What’s he afraid of?” Knob wondered. “You don’t have your powers anymore, do you? I mean, PMS can’t happen when you’re pregnant, right?”

She gave him an evil grin, “Would you like to see my NEW powers?”

He turned pastry, er, pasty. “Uh, no. That’s quite alright.”

“Your name is Beth?” Seth asked. “I like that. We rhyme.”

“I always wondered what your real name was,” Thurman said.

“Oh, I knew it all along,” Knob said, always a quick recoverer from fear.

“So why didn’t you tell us?”

“Why? You have to call people what they want to be called.”

“You mean like African Americans?” Seth asked.

“You mean, ‘People of Color.’”

“Yeah, they used to want to be called ‘black.’”

“And before that, they were Negroes.”

“Right. I don’t have any problem going along with things like this if it really matters to people,” Knob said.

“And maybe she needs to hide her real name when she’s out fighting evil-doers. You know, like Batman. Right, Warri ...er, Beth?” Seth asked.

“Yep. Something like that.” She turned back to Thurman, “Anyway, what’s up?”

He was still looking shaky.

“Yeah, Thurman, this is your show,” I said.

“Uh, okay. Yeah, I guess.”

“Ain’t no guessing here. If not for you, I’d be sipping a brewskie right now,” I reminded him.

He pulled himself together and lightly caressed the keys of his remote.

“Let me think about how to put this.”

“How about in English?”

“Guy, be nice,” Beth warned me.

Thurman shook it off. “Okay, you guys know Wendy, right?”

Knob nodded “Your girlfriend?”

“The one that works at Wendy’s?” Seth asked. “Wendy from Wendy’s?”

“Yeah. As you know, we’ve been going together for quite awhile, and she, um, kind of helps me work on my magic and stuff.”

“She, uh, helps you, huh?” I grinned wickedly.

Thurman shot me a glance. I ducked it. The glance ricocheted off a lamp and shot through the window looking for someone else to hit. “It’s not anything dirty, you fiend.”

“Heh, heh. If you say so.”

“Can she get me fries?” Seth said, his eyes hopeful.

“Oh, probably. I’ll get her to bring some home,” Thurman assured him.

“And maybe a Frosty, or something?”

“Sure.”

“Can we get back on subject?” I growled. My stomach let out a growl of its own, having dispatched my chicken quesadilla lunch to its twenty-seven foot long journey through my intestines.

“Oh, yeah, sorry.” He pointedly ignored me and continued, “Well, anyway, we were doing some experimenting...”

“I’ll bet you were!”

“Guy, leave him alone!”

“Never mind. I can handle it.” Thurman pointed the remote at me.

“Whoa, I’m scared. What are you going to do? Mute me?”

“Yes.”

“You can’t mute ...” And Thurman pushed the mute button.

My mouth was moving, but nothing was coming out.

Seth shot me a look of mirth. He’d been here before. Unlike Thurman’s glance, Seth’s mirth look hit dead center.

“Good thing you hit him before he could unbelieve it,” Knob observed.

Beth gave me a look of amusement. I ignored her and tried to form a decibel.

“Do you think he’s really muted, or maybe it just changed his voice so that it was ultrasound or something?” Seth asked.

“You mean like bats who make noises too high for our ears?” Beth wondered.

“Or elephants and alligators. They make noises too low for our hearing range,” Knob put in.

“No. I’m pretty sure he’s just muted,” Thurman said. “I didn’t try to do anything else. Are you okay, Guy?”

I shot him the finger.

“He’s okay,” Knob said.

“Now where were you?” Beth asked Thurman.

“Right. Like I was saying. We’ve been testing the magic and seeing what we could do with it. I was shooting rays up into the sky where they wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

“What about airplanes?” Knob interrupted.

“Oh, we were being careful. I can aim them so they will avoid certain objects like bugs and birds and stuff like that. It’s just easier than trying to shoot around things nearer to the ground.”

“Okay, so what happened?” Beth asked.

“Well, I shoot the beams up into the sky, and when they come back I can capture images from them as they come back.”

“So you saw something in these images?” Beth asked gently.

“Yeah, you could say that.”

Thurman took a deep breath.

“We’re being invaded.”

That was too much for me.

My eyeballs strained, and there was a big ‘pop.’”

“There are no such things as aliens!”

They looked at me in shock.

“Hey, he broke the mute spell,” Seth exclaimed.

“Wow!” Knob’s eyes bugged.

“See, I told you his powers might be formidable,” Thurman said, a smug look on his face.

“I don’t have ...”

A pillow whacked into my face.

“Don’t say it!” Beth cried.

“Yeah, we don’t know what triggers his powers,” Knob agreed.

Thurman was nodding his head, “Yeah, for all we know, he may have just wiped out every alien in the universe by unbelieving in them.”

“Well, that’s that, then,” Knob said. “We don’t have to worry about an invasion, then, right?”

“You guys are crazy,” I snarled.

“Don’t say that,” Knob cried. “You might make us crazy.”

“I don’t think it works that way, Knob. He can unbelieve something, but that doesn’t mean he can believe something into happening,” Thurman said.

Beth nodded solemnly, “And for all we know, him unbelieving something may

actually believe it into existence.”

“Shouldn’t it be ‘disbelieve,’ not ‘unbelieve?’” Seth asked.

Knob shook his head. “I don’t think grammar is the issue here, dude. Thomas Covenant was the Unbeliever, not the Disbeliever.”

“Anyway, we’re guys,” Thurman put in, “Grammar isn’t relevant.”

“We’ll have to test Guy and try to learn the extent and nature of his powers,” Knob suggested.

“Yeah, get some rats or mice or something,” Seth agreed.

“It would have to be under the strictest laboratory conditions,” Thurman said.

“You aren’t testing me!”

“Okay, so what happened? Did he just make it so we have to test him? Or did he just make it impossible for us to test him?” Seth cried.

“I’m so confused,” Knob said.

“So we’re all back to normal,” I sneered.

“Guy! What’s up with you?” Beth frowned at me. “You’ve been snarly and mean ever since you got here.”

“I’m, ah…” My anger faded quickly back to DEFCON One as she stared me down with Mom-eyes.

“That’s better. Now you just sit there and be good.”

She turned her attention back to Thurman.

“So, what’s this about aliens?”

“There aren’t any…” I began. But she shot me down immediately with another ‘Mother-Look.’

“What about the telemarketers? They were aliens,” Knob pointed out.

“Yeah, and President Twig. He can’t be a real person,” Thurman laughed.

“Tell us about these aliens,” Beth urged.

“Okay. Remember, these are thoughts evoked by images. So their accuracy might be in question.”

“Agreed. So tell us what you saw.”

Thurman took a breath. “Somewhere out there, we pissed off some aliens.”

“Pissed off? How?” Knob frowned.

“I’m not sure. I think ... I think... it had something to do with names.”

“Names?” Beth looked confused. So there must have been a misprint here, since usually either Knob or Thurman were the confused ones. We’ll check with the editor.

“I think it has something to do with ... I don’t know. I keep seeing something called the ‘Interstellar Star Registry.’”

“The Interstellar Star Registry? Isn’t that the place who sells people the right to name stars?” I asked. I was getting sucked into this.

“I’ve seen the commercials for that,” Seth chimed in. “For just \$49.99, you can have a star named whatever you want.”

“What a crock,” I said. “You’d have to be an idiot to do that.”

“Jim named a star after me,” Beth said.

“Oh! Uh, I didn’t mean idiot,” I stammered.

“That’s okay,” she said, rubbing her belly. “Jim is an idiot.”

“Well, he is a guy, after all,” Knob said.

“Yeah, we’re all idiots.”

“And damned proud of it.”

“Yeah!”

“Boo-yah!!”

High fives were slapped, grunts were grunted, and we all longed to play with tools. Beth watched with the same what’s-new-look that saw the many stupid acts committed by three sets of juvenile twins.

After we calmed down, our brains kicked back into gear.

“I don’t get that penny thing,” Knob said pensively.

“Huh?”

“You know. The penny off thing.”

“Huh?”

He sighed. “Check it out. They charge, what, \$49.99 for naming a star, right?”

“Yeah, so?” Thurman asked.

“Why gyp themselves out of a penny? Why not charge \$50.00 instead?”

“Yeah,” Seth added. “The ad said that they’ve already named over one million stars.”

“So they’ve gyped themselves out of one million pennies, that’s what, a hundred bucks?”

“Ten thousand,” I said sourly.

Knob’s eyes got big. “Ten Thousand Dollars!”

“Yeah, and how about a car that costs \$19,999.99? Why not just charge twenty thousand dollars?” Thurman added.

“I think they are trying to help the economy. You know, stimulate spending or

something,” Seth suggested.

“No, I don’t think it’s that,” I said. “They think we’re stupid, that’s what. They think we’re too stupid to know that \$19.99 is twenty bucks.”

“Like an illusion,” Seth breathed.

“Yeah, and we fall for it every day.”

“That’s why they keep doing it.”

“I don’t know,” Knob frowned. “I’d hate to think advertisers and businesses are that evil. Tell you what I’m going to do....”

“What?” Seth asked.

“I’m going to give it back to them,” Knob announced. “I’m going to pay an extra penny for everything I buy! Maybe that will help the economy.”

“Idiot!” I muttered.

“So how did the Interstellar Star Registry get aliens angry?” Beth asked, changing the subject. Or more accurately, putting us back on subject.

Thurman frowned. “I don’t know. It has something to do with, ... ah, it’s coming to me...”

“How can they name a star?” Seth asked. “I mean, I can go out there, point my finger at one, and just give it a name myself. Isn’t this basically just what they do?”

“I named a grain of sand once,” Knob put in.

“Huh?”

“Seriously, I was at the beach, and was running sand through my hand. Then I wanted to see what one grain of sand looked like. So I separated it out until I had just one. It looked lonely without its buddies, and I kind of figure that no one else in the

entire world ever held this same grain of sand in his hand before.”

“So you named it?” Thurman asked.

“Yeah. And I think it liked it.”

“So what did you name it?” Seth asked.

“Anak,” Knob announced with a flourish.

“You named it ‘shit?’” I laughed.

Knob looked hurt. “I did not! I named it Anak. And it was happy.”

“You named it ‘shit,’ you idiot. Anak means ‘shit’ in Eskimo.”

“What?! That’s not true!”

He whipped out a book from somewhere and started thumbing through frantically.

“Where’d you get that boo...” I started.

“Okay, here it is....” He said. A frown crossed his face on its way to other places.

“Oh, no! It does mean ‘shit!’”

“And that’s why we don’t let college students name things,” I laughed.

Knob looked stricken. “I have to find it.”

“Huh?”

“I can’t let it go through life named shit,” he moaned.

“Knob, a grain of sand isn’t alive.”

“How do you know? You didn’t even believe in telemarketers.”

“I, uh...”

Beth gently cut in, “Uh, Knob. You can’t find a single grain of sand on the beach. It’s impossible.”

“No it isn’t. All I have to do is call it. No other grain of sand has a name, so I’ll

hear it for sure.”

“Wait, I got it!”

“What, Thurman?” Beth asked.

“I know what got the aliens so angry.”

“What’s that?”

“It, uh, seems like someone named their star a name that seemed to offend them.”

“Why would they care what someone on our planet names them?” Beth wondered.

“I know. They actually put it in a book and file the book in the US Copyright Office. That makes it legal and binding. No wonder the aliens are upset,” Knob declared.

I interrupted, “What would they care what an insignificant person on an insignificant planet revolving around an insignificant star calls them in an insignificant book whose only claim to fame is it’s copywritten, though that basically means nothing to anybody?”

“I don’t know. But it got them pretty mad.”

“Well, what was it? What were they named?” I asked.

“Farfignuggen.”

“Farfignuggen?” we chorused.

“Yep. Someone named their sun, Farfignuggen.”

I shrugged, “So? What’s so bad about that? Doesn’t ‘farfignuggen’ just mean ‘downright distracting?’”

Seth looked at Beth, “That would be a good name for you next time you need a

warrior name.”

“Oh, how sweet,” she said.

He blushed.

“Sure is sweet,” I agreed, a carefully straight look on my face.

“It’s not so sweet in their language, though,” Thurman said grimly, probably saving me from another of those ‘Mother-Looks.’ “It means ‘little.’”

“Little’? What’s so bad about little?” Knob asked.

“I don’t know,” Thurman said, “but they don’t like it. And they are coming here to do something about it.”

“Does NASA know about this?” Seth asked, his eyes round.

“NASA? There’s nothing they can do.”

“I don’t know,” Knob said. “I’m still concerned about that whole copyright thing. Isn’t that binding?”

“No,” I laughed. “Anything can be copywritten. It doesn’t mean that that’s the official new name of the star. I mean, seriously, the gall of some piddling company claiming it has the right to sell the name of a star.”

Beth laughed. “For all we know, some caveman looked at that same star tens of thousands of years ago, and named it ‘Gorg.’”

“Hey, check it out,” Knob said, flipping through a book. “It says here that the only agency that has the right to name a star is the International Astronomical Union, IAU.”

“Where’d you get that boo....”

“Do they have any stars named, ‘Gorg?’” Beth interrupted, giggling.

“Does that mean that the IAU was around in caveman days?” Seth asked.

“Um, I don’t know and uh, I don’t know,” Knob answered them both.

“There should be a planet named, ‘Gorg,’ Beth said.

“So what are the aliens all ticked off about then?” Knob asked.

Thurman just looked distressed, “I don’t know. Uh, Warri... er, Beth?”

“Yes?”

“Can I, er, may I use the bathroom?”

“Sure. You don’t need to ask. It’s down the hall.”

Thurman got up and headed to the head.

“Yeah, I think better in bathrooms, too,” Knob observed.

**KLOMP! SPLUSH!**

“SHIT!!” Thurman yelled.

Splashing.

“You don’t have to announce it, dude,” Knob yelled.

“DAMN!”

There was more splashing and angry muttering from the bathroom.

The rest of us sat in the living room carefully not looking at one another, because we knew we’d bust.

Finally the door flung open and Thurman lurched out, red-faced.

Nobody said a word as he stormed down the hall.

Nobody said a word as he flung himself angrily on a chair.

Nobody said a word as he sat there, not saying a word.

Everybody kept not saying a word ...

...until finally, in a dry voice, Knob said, "Well, I hope you washed afterwards."

That was it. Everyone busted laughing.

Except Thurman.

He sat in the chair, a scowl on his face, glaring at each of us in turn.

As the hilarity and hiccupping faded away, he gave us a scathing look that only whooped us right back into gales of laughter.

"Oh, jeez," Beth whimpered a few moments later, wiping tears from her eyes. "I thought for sure I was going to go in labor."

Well, that sobered the room right away.

"So, when are you actually due?" I asked, curious.

"In three months," she answered.

Seth's eyes goggled, "But, you're so, uh, so ..."

"Big. Yeah, I know. I tend to have healthy sized kids," she said wryly.

"Like, how big?" Knob wondered.

"Let's see, the last two came in at eight and half pounds each. Twenty-four inches long each."

"You had seventeen pounds of kid at one time?!" Thurman seemed to have licked his pouting thing.

"Felt like more."

"I never understood that whole weight and length thing," Knob said.

"What's that?"

"You know. Every time a woman has a baby, usually the first question is, 'boy or girl?' Then the next question is 'how much did it weigh?' Like who cares what it

weighs?”

“What?!” Beth’s eyes were round. “Of course it’s important!!”

“Why?” Knob retorted. “Do people ask that question later? How’s it relevant?”

He turned around to Seth, and said in a mock deep voice, “Well, hello there, young man. My name’s Knob, six feet four, one hundred seventy-five pounds. Who are you and how much do you weigh?”

Seth giggled.

“Well, it tells people things,” Beth cried, waving her arms.

“Yeah, like how much it hurt to deliver,” Knob said.

Thurman interrupted, “I’d think a better judge of that would how big the baby’s head circumference is.”

“All I know is if guys had to go through the pain of bearing kids, we’d die out as a species,” I said.

“You bet!” Beth said. “Guys are nothing but babies when it comes to pain.”

“I don’t know,” Knob disagreed. “I think it’s prudent to avoid pain. That’s the body’s warning that you’re doing something not good for it.”

Seth jumped in, “Like when you burn yourself!”

“Right,” Knob smiled at him.

“I don’t know, guys,” Thurman said slowly. “I don’t think that goes for childbirth.”

“Of course it does,” Knob said. “Your body knows.”

“That’s ridiculous,” I shot. “How else are we supposed to propagate the species?”

Knob gave me a serious look, “I think that’s what would be interesting to find out.

Nature would find a way.”

“Yeah, right,” I folded my arms over my chest.

“So what happened in the bathroom?” Beth asked Thurman. She was probably afraid he’d peeled some of the chrome off the faucet with man-stink.

“You lost your remote, didn’t you?” Knob cried gleefully.

“How’d you... yeah... yeah, I did. It was in my back pocket and when I sat down it kind of ... slipped out.”

We all smiled, carefully keeping from laughing again.

“What are you going to use for a wand now?” Seth asked.

“I dunno, I guess... maybe ...”

Knob interrupted, “You didn’t want to use a remote anyway.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because of that Adam Sandler movie.”

“Adam Sandler?”

Seth jumped up, “Oh, yeah. I know that movie. He plays this guy who gets a Universal Remote that controls the universe.”

“Never heard of it,” Thurman shot.

“Doesn’t matter,” Knob said. “Copyright laws, you know. You don’t want to get into trouble for copying or anything.”

“But I’m not control....”

“Doesn’t matter. Copyright laws rule supreme. And look at how the aliens are all upset over that star naming book.”

“So the US Copyright Office rules the entire Universe?” Seth said, his eyes wide

with wonder.

“You got it,” Seth affirmed.

Thurman had a defeated look on his face. “Well, okay, I guess it didn’t really have much in the way of range...”

“Yeah, there have to be lots better things you can use,” Seth interjected.

Knob interrupted. “I hate to interrupt,” he interrupted.

Interrupt is such a fun word.

So he did it again.

“I hate to interrupt, but we need to get this Quest on the road.”

“Yeah, a Quest!” Seth shouted.