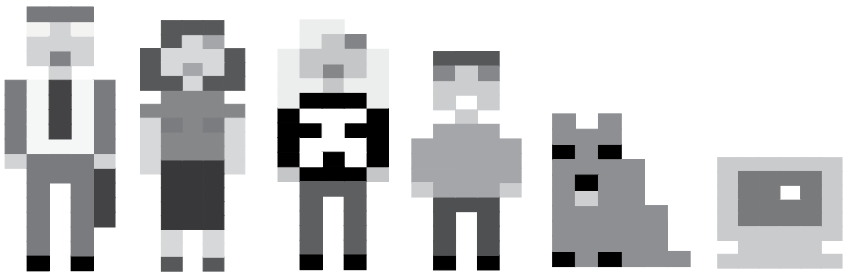


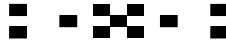
Game Quest

by Leopold McGinnis



**Read the novel in its entirety at
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Chapter 20B; insert disk #2 to continue

January 3rd, 1995

Kendra slipped the key into the lock, turned the knob and was infinitely thankful for the cool rush of air that came through the window as she entered. All that lying in the sun had cooked her skin. What an afternoon. She'd gone down to the pool to relax but had away with a terrible nightmare *and* a sun-burn. It was as if she suddenly had the luck of Swarthy Victor. Funny about the window, though. Kendra had been the last one out and didn't think she had left it open.

Dropping her towel on the bed Kendra stepped into the bathroom to assess the damage to her skin. Well, it was pretty red. She burnt easily. But it didn't seem to hurt when she touched it. Kendra reached for the moisturizing cream she had in her cosmetics bag and then noticed that half the stuff had been pulled out and strewn across the counter. Suddenly she was nervous. Had someone been in the room? Or maybe it was Mark? But what would Mark want with her cosmetics bag?

Kendra was worried now. Peering out the bathroom door she quickly returned to the bed and slid on a pair of jeans over her swimsuit. The room seemed only slightly messy, the mess typical of hotel rooms, and Kendra seemed to be the only one in it.

Kendra walked cautiously over to the window to see if anyone could have gotten through. Nobody was behind the curtain, which danced gently in the breeze suggesting shapes of assassins. She stepped closer to peer over the window ledge.

There was a sudden roar as Dan Destroyem flew up in front of her. A wide grin stretched across his face.

"Peek-a-boo" he growled, drifting from side to side as the transparent jet flames streaming from his sleek silver jet-pack quivered behind him. Looking through the vapor Kendra saw the resort below ripple and warp as if beneath boiling water.

Dan jerked his heavy machine gun from his side, cocking off the safety. Kendra dove sideways, landing between the wall and the bed, the whining of the gun barrel starting up before she hit the ground. The unopened

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half of the window shattered as bullets ripped through and entered the far wall. As Dan strafed the opening the bullets chewed through the standard hotel décor: bedside lamp, comforter, mass reproduced flower painting...

As soon as the barrel began to wind down Kendra leaped over the bed and out the door, tearing off down the hallway towards the stairs.

She was halfway to the end of the hall when Dan Destroyem hovered into view outside the window at the end. Kendra's heart was racing now. He jerked his gun up again and Kendra, having no choice, jumped down the laundry chute beside her. She felt pleased that she fit but quickly realized racing face first down a metal shaft wasn't much preferable to being riddled with bullets, especially when you are on the sixth floor. Luckily the drop wasn't far, perhaps ten feet, and Kendra landed in a big pile of laundry – some sort of maid's room.

Kendra ran for the only door. It opened and she ran down the dank utility stairs. Both doors on the way to the bottom greeted Kendra with the disappointingly familiar *chunk* of a locked door. The door at the very bottom opened up into a pitch black basement. She could barely tell where she was until her eyes adjusted, but by the smells, sounds and subtle gleams off nearby bins and machinery, Kendra guessed it was some sort of utility room. As Kendra wildly searched for an exit she realized the basement storeroom was like a massive, empty dead end. The first door marked 'exit' was locked. Kendra couldn't open the next door she found no matter how she tried. She felt the disturbing microwaves of panic shivering up her skin towards her brain. He would be here any minute! He was going to find her and she was lost! A few minutes later, feeling her way around the wall, she found another door and yanked. It opened.

Thank god!, Kendra thought and ran inside, only to be greeted by a wall right in front of her...and immediately to her left and right. A closet! Her heart gave out and she fell to her knees, sobbing quietly. She didn't have her strength anymore. It was only a matter of moments before that door opened and she was riddled with bullets. No more making games. No more mother for her kids.

It was like a bad dream.

A bad dream? It had to be a dream. She knew...because jet-packs don't exist. Do they? She was pretty sure they didn't exist. Her recollection seemed hazy. And Dan Destroyem was from a game... That seemed right...somehow...or maybe she just dreamed that. Or maybe Dan Destroyem was based on a real life person... But why did he want to

kill her? It didn't make any sense. It was a dream. She was sure now. It couldn't be anything else.

And if it was a dream, she could change it, right? She should be able to wake herself up. But she couldn't. She closed her eyes and thought hard...tried to remember herself in a field of flowers...anywhere but here...and just as she was starting to believe it, she opened her eyes. She was still in the closet. Frustrated and angry, the tears began to flow again.

"WAKE UP!!!!" she screamed in terrified frustration at the command interface in her mind, but then quickly shut up. Fuck. That was a dumb idea. Her anguished voice burst through the closet door and echoed around the walls of the basement...slowly fading away. Kendra waited in silence. Then she heard a door unlock and open. And then footsteps. She didn't know if it was him...but she would assume that it was.

It was then that she noticed the cool breeze at her side. Feeling down the wall she found a vent. She tried to pull it open, but it wouldn't budge. It was screwed shut.

CHECK INVENTORY

You have: The room keys
 Change
 Staple remover from Will's office

Kendra had an idea.

USE STAPLE REMOVER ON VENT

How?

USE STAPLE REMOVER ON SCREWS

Opening the staple remover you carefully and quietly unscrew the two screws holding the vent in place. Nice work!

Quietly placing the vent beside her, Kendra squeezed into the opening. At least she still had a thin body. Buried in the ground, the vent didn't bend or make noise like one in the ceiling would, luckily for her. Kendra crawled several meters and stopped, listening to the footsteps. For sure it was him. *Clunk! Clunk!* He was trying to open doors. A few minutes later

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she heard the door of the closet open. There was a slight pause and the door closed again. The footsteps moved away. After a few more minutes of this a door opened and the footsteps didn't return.

Kendra, who had been tensely holding her head up to listen, let it collapse into her arms, simultaneously letting out a sigh of relief. Sigh is, perhaps, too small a word for the weight that blew off of her...it could have pushed a sailboat across the ocean. The hard beating of her heart against her chest was now the only sound in this narrow tube. She closed her eyes and rested.

It was really cold in here with the cool wind rushing through and she began to shiver, too tired to crawl out. In a way she felt stuck...but she didn't care. She started to fall asleep. Was she dying from the cold?

Kendra woke up. She was freezing. The clock on the bedside table burned 3:18 a.m. into the back of her eyeballs. The kids were asleep in the bed next to her. Looking to her right, she found Will cuddling all the covers like a baby at its mother's breast. Beyond him the open balcony door blew the pale curtain about. The wind coming through the window was biting cold...or no...it was just blowing across the sweat that had gathered under Kendra's arms, between her legs and on her forehead. She was shivering but noted, with some relief, that the window hadn't been shattered with bullets and as she went over to slide the door shut she was also pleased to remember that they had been placed on the third floor and not the sixth, as she had dreamt.

Kendra unwrapped a glass in the bathroom for a drink. The sunburn she'd gotten a few days ago when she'd fallen asleep by the pool was going away, thankfully. Her eyes were bloodshot. They had been here five days already and she was being terrorized by nightmares. This was nonsense. She hadn't come here to stress herself out. If she was going to have dreams, couldn't they be inspiring, at least? And having dreams about Dan Destroyem no less... a cheesy game character... he couldn't be less frightening! How juvenile.

But he was scary in her dreams. Absolutely terrifying. Well fuck him, she thought, angry at herself. She was tired of running. If Dan Destroyem wanted to terrorize her, she was going to give him a run for his money. She took another drink of water.

Taking off her pajamas she ran water over her face, under her armpits and breasts, dried off and put her pajamas back on. Turning off the lone bathroom light, Kendra returned to bed, reclaimed a substantial amount of sheets from her husband, and snuggled up to him for warmth. He was always so hot when he slept.



They were at the pool again. It had been a few days since they'd last been here. The family had been busy taking in attractions...the volcano, god statues, museums, stuff that was blown up years ago. But as they had gotten tired of the pool and beach after the first few days, they had grown tired of excursions and returned to the pool again. It was less crowded now, since all the seasonal tourists had returned to work...to their cold parts of the world.

Kendra sat by the pool, soaking up the sun and a mystery novel. The novel was kind of disappointing. Interesting...but fairly typical. In the pool Will and Heather and Mark were playing some sort of treasure hunt game. One would hide the hotel key in the pool while the others would close their eyes. Then it would be 'hotter' or 'colder' until someone found it. Whoever found it got to hide it next. This was the sort of game, Kendra figured, that could only lead to paying fifty dollars to replace a set of hotel keys. Mark had hidden the key a moment ago and they hadn't been able to find it. They were looking everywhere.

"Colder," Mark said to Heather. "Colder. REALLY COLD! Papa's really hot," he said. They searched a bit more, diving under the pool. Looking into the pool vents, in the pots around the pool. All the while they seemed to be getting hotter and cooler... seemingly at random. Even Kendra was curious now where it was. They'd been looking for about five minutes...which was by far the longest time so far.

Will and Heather were teaming up now, confused out of their minds, and did a full scan of the pool, walking up and down, peering closely into the water, 'hotter' and 'colder' fluxuating randomly. Kendra suddenly realized where the key was and shook her head at the stupidity of it all. Heather and Will were going to be sooooo mad when they finally figured it out.

They were so mad, in fact, that the argument over it and the chastising of Mark, popped up periodically through the day...as if a running theme. Mark had hidden the keys in his swim trunks.

"Of course you can't hide it there!"

"Why not? You didn't say it was against the rules."

"It's a game...it's supposed to be findable, Mark," Will said, sounding like the calm advising dad from a fifties family TV program. "The game loses its fun if it becomes impossible."

"Well, you found it."

"God, and who wants to touch the key after it's been nestled in your

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crotch for half an hour...”

“Heather, please,” Kendra commented as she fed a forkful of pasta into her mouth.

“Well that’s what he did!” she retorted.

“It’s chlorinated,” Mark defended. Will and Heather rolled their eyes. Kendra rolled her eyes at all of them.



She’d taken Will’s bird-watching binoculars and was squatting behind a fat palm tree. She was invisible. No one would see her in this hidden corner of the hotel grounds, near the obtuse power generator. The palm tree and generator covered her well, the corner of the hotel wall protected her from a rear attack. From here she could survey a large portion of the grounds.

Kendra wasn’t aware of how long she’d been waiting here, but it was quickly paying off. His orange hair was like a beacon, a lighthouse warning of imminent danger. Kendra spotted him the instant he entered the hotel gate, casually making his way towards the hotel. He didn’t appear to be on the hunt. She ducked behind different palms and fronds as he moved, getting closer to him, hoping he was headed for his room.

Sneaking towards the hotel doorway Kendra saw him take his key from the concierge. Taking position behind a potted plant she watched Dan Destroyem enter the elevator. When the door closed Kendra watched the elevator lights climb to five. Recalling the elevator, she entered and hesitantly pressed five. The carriage jolted and started ascent. The elevator buttons counted down to Kendra and Dan’s next encounter.

The elevator stopped and Kendra pressed herself up against the corner. Her hands were shaking. After a short pause the elevator doors separated onto a quiet and empty floor lobby. Cautiously, Kendra peered out. Nobody. A door slammed down the hallway to her left. Creeping around the corner she found no one was there, but the sound had definitely come from this direction. Ducking behind a potted plant Kendra waited.

About ten minutes later a door down that hallway opened and orange hair emerged from behind the door. Kendra quickly counted the number of doors down before slipping down another hallway and hiding behind a couch. She peered over the top and a few moments later Dan came into the elevator lobby. He was wearing only shorts, with a towel slung over his shoulder. They were the trendiest shorts too, really short with a colorful pineapple decoration, tied with a white string at the front. Had he not been her deadly enemy, Kendra might have been pleased by the

sight of this tanned, well muscled, orange topped young man in tight shorts. But instead she just hoped he would get into the elevator and disappear.

Dan pressed the button, put his hands in his pockets and began to whistle his theme song from the game. The elevator doors opened and Dan stepped in. But Kendra hadn't counted on him turning around to select his floor. She ducked as quickly as she could but was sure he had seen her. She cursed her stupidity. She sat there, hunched over, her eyes held tightly shut, for several long moments, waiting for the death blow that was sure to come. When nothing did she carefully opened one eye, and then another, expecting to see Dan Destroyem's shoes there in front of her face, toying with her. But there was nothing. Carefully, and expecting certain doom, she peered around the edge of the couch. Nobody. A careful, cursory check of the halls revealed the same.

PHEW! Kendra moved swiftly down the left hallway to the seventh door. This was his room. She was sure of it. Room 563. Mission Successful!

She reached for the door handle and turned. *Clunk!* It was locked. Hmmm. Too bad. But this was a contingency she had prepared for.



"You're lucky I'm not in charge of this hotel or you would have been fired. Very, very fired. Just be thankful Mrs. Wrigsworth has decided not to sue."

"But I'm not even the ice guy, I'm supposed to—"

"That doesn't matter. You do the jobs you're told to do and do them right, Mister, or..." The snooty concierge made an 'off with your head' motion and a hiss.

The bellhop nodded and sighed.

"It's even more important now that we get ice up there because of her hip. I can't imagine how swollen it must be. Just be thankful nobody else slipped on it! Don't drop any this time." The bellhop, biting back his lip to hold forthcoming insults, nodded and walked off. The concierge turned to Kendra, waiting next in line at the front desk.

"I'm sorry, Ma'am. Our ice machine on the second floor broke down. Now what can I do for you today?" The concierge offered his best customer service smile. To Kendra it seemed he had a very big head.

TALK TO CONCIERGE

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“Room 563 please,” you say confidently.

“Oh, I’m sorry. You must be mistaken. That’s Mr. Destroyem’s room,” the concierge replies. “Are you sure you have the right number?”

Mr. Destroyem? “That’s right,” you say. “I’m his sister.”

The concierge’s attitude suddenly, almost imperceptibly, changes as he eyes you up and down...feeling the power that that emanate from behind that desk. “May I see some ID please?”

“I don’t have any. It’s in the room.” Great. This is all you need. A concierge out of a Swarthy Victor game. You’ll have to remind Art Loel to stop messing with your dreams.

“I’m sorry. But I don’t believe you. I really doubt that Mr. Destroyem would rent the deluxe love suite with his sister.”

The concierge turns away snottily and looks busy behind the desk, forgetting you ever existed.

TALK TO CONCIERGE

“Yes, how may I help you?”

“Room 563 please.”

“I’m sorry, that’s Mr. Destroyem’s room.”

“I know. I met him out by the pool. He wants me to slip into his room and slip into something more comfortable.”

The concierge smiles knowingly. “Don’t you wish! You’re a little old to be Mr. Destroyem’s type, sister.” He turns back to his business behind the desk.

Too old?! What did he mean by *that*?! She was barely 39. Is that too old?! You are getting very frustrated.

JAB PEN IN CONCIERGE’S EAR

Grabbing the ink pen you plunge it into the side of the concierge’s head. He lets out a high pitched wail and flings his arms about yelling ‘Security! Security!’ Two overly large Hawaiian thugs come and drag you off to jail...or worse. Hmmm. That wasn’t such a good idea. Too bad, and you were getting along so well. You got 56 out of a total 134 points. Unfortunately, your game is over. You have three options. Restore, Restart, Quit.

RESTORE

“May I help you?” the concierge asks. You shake your head no and he returns to his business.

LOOK DESK

This is where they keep the keys.

LOOK KEYS

The keys are right behind the desk. You could just reach over and take them.

TAKE KEYS

“Ah ah! That’s my job. What room please?”

“563”

“I’m sorry, that’s Mr. Destroyem’s room.” The concierge returns to his fake working behind the desk. If only you could distract him somehow.

Kendra turned around in frustration. She sat on a bench by a potted frond and pondered her predicament. Maybe she needed another item? In front of her the berated bellhop carefully carried buckets of ice to the elevator. Kendra suddenly had an idea. It might work.

She quickly headed up to the second floor and over to the ice machine.

GET BUCKET OF ICE

You take a bucketful of ice. It’s free after all, you should abuse it!

Kendra returned to the lobby and walked into the middle of the marble floor.

DUMP ICE ON FLOOR

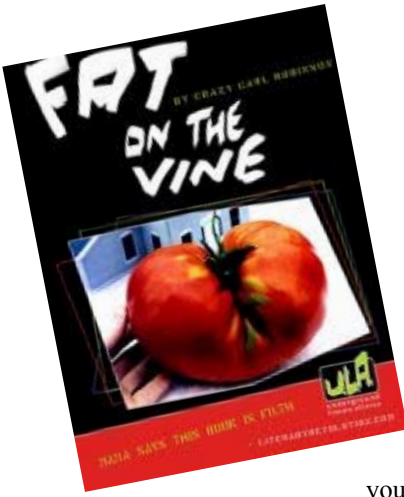
You subtly dump some ice and water into the middle of the floor. The ring of the elevator sounds behind you. Better get out of the way...

Standing by the sitting area you see an old lady limp out of the elevator, aided by a younger man. She has a pack of ice pressed to her hips.

Suddenly, the concierge is out from behind his desk and walking along side Mrs. Wrigsworth.

“Oh, I’m terribly sorry Mrs. Wrigsworth. I just wanted to say how

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**MAMA SAYS THIS
BOOK IS FILTH!**

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ROBINSON**

What would you do if your name was 'lil big sexy' and you were a 28-year-old virgin and the first girl you ever slept with informed you the next day that she was a 'Nixon-lesbian'? What would you do if you lived in your parents' basement and your genteel, Christian mother followed you around all day singing spirituals and telling you that you were 'demon-possessed.' *Fat on the Vine* appeals to readers who fancy themselves as underdogs. It's about drugs, self-hatred and obsession. It's written without social filter or shame. The novel is as beautiful as it is disturbing.

**"IF LITERATURE WANTS TO REGAIN RELEVANCE
THEN CREATIONS THAT ARE REAL NEED TO BE IN
FRONT. FEW PUSH THE ENVELOPE FURTHER THAN
CRAZY CARL ROBINSON. IT'S TIME WE LET A FEW
UNRULY WEEDS INTO THE GARDEN."**

- VICTOR THORN, EDITOR OF BABEL MAGAZINE

"BEAUTIFULLY REPUGNANT"

- LEOPOLD MCGINNIS, AUTHOR OF BAD ATTITUDE

get it while it's hot at
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or wherever filthy books are sold

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grateful we are that you pitied us and decided not to sue. We will make it up to you.”

“You just better make sure it doesn’t happen again!” cautions the old lady.

“Oh, I assure you Madam, we have made every effort to right the situation. The worker responsible will be severely disciplined.”

“You know I’m paying a good deal to stay at this hotel. One is not supposed to break their hip in a hotel they paid to relax in.”

“I know, Mrs. Wrigsworth and—”

And then her good foot, carrying most of her weight now, steps down on a cube of ice sending both her legs flying out from under her. Time seems to freeze as the concierge looks on in horror, his faced twisted into an exaggerated ‘Oh no!’ Mrs. Wrigsworth’s expression is that of half-surprise, half ‘it figures’, but mostly of ‘that’s enough!’ The young man beside her does his best to maintain his balance... Time starts up again and the lady hits the floor with a loud, muffled thud causing, no doubt, Richter-like ripples along the plump skin beneath her baggy clothes.

What follows is an incredible scene in which Mrs. Wrigsworth berates the concierge and explains how she is going to sue and the concierge tries to shirk responsibility while begging her not to press charges.

“It’s the help. We’ll have him fired immediately!”

“And who is in charge of the help, Mr. Tillnik?” she retorts, assuring him she will have his job too. It serves him right for being such a snob, you think as you make your way to the counter and snag the key to room 563.

Slipping into the elevator, you are off to floor five, where it is much quieter.



The inside of the Deluxe Love Suite was quite something. Impressive... but suitably tacky. Although there was only one door leading in, the room was the size of three and the first thing one noticed was a large, heart-shaped Jacuzzi only feet from the wide window that peered out over the hotel grounds. There were a few girly magazines lying about, most by the pool next to empty cans of beer and a half-consumed bottle of champagne now half-floating in a bucket of tepid water. The carpet was pink and quasi-erotic paintings adorned the wall which, unlike the magazines, came with the suite.

Kendra began to snoop. She first rummaged through Dan’s suitcase: White tank top, ammunition, trendy shorts, white tank top, blue jeans,

white tank top, orange hair dye, a +10 medi-kit, blue jeans... There were a couple of used tank tops and blue jeans scattered on the floor and another +10 medi-kit. Kendra used the medi-kit to boost her health, but other than that, there was nothing of use. Kendra nervously snuck into the bathroom.

There wasn't much interesting there either. Some half used hair dye. A hair restoration bottle. It claimed 'to bolster the war against hair-loss by bringing soldiers to the front!' This made Kendra laugh. She didn't know Dan Destroyem had hair problems. Now she felt like she had power over him. *Too old indeed! He was too bald for her!*

Sneaking back over to the window Kendra peered way down at the pool. As she suspected, Dan had gone for a swim. Or, rather, a poolside visit. Though it was far down, his hair was unmistakable. He lay by the pool on a long white lounge chair, as Kendra often did, holding a large, colorful drink – no doubt made with exotic fruits, dyes and bizarre Mediterranean alcohols like almandine – with a large pineapple speared on the side. A large, curly, twisty straw wound out the top. On each side Dan Destroyem had some svelte beach babe fawning over him. For what reason they were attracted to him, Kendra could not fathom. Perhaps for his high sense of trend and low level of intelligence? Kendra didn't always understand other women. Especially popular ones.

Seeing him way down there, without a care in the world (especially of killing her) calmed the twitches in Kendra's hands. She inspected the pool where most of Dan's junk seemed to be strewn. It was most likely his hub of the room... Perhaps he even slept in the Jacuzzi. As she turned around a large flash blinded her for a moment. The sun was gleaming off of a large metallic object. His jetpack. Now *that* was something. She knelt beside it.

LOOK JET PACK

Although you know absolutely nothing about jet packs, it seems to be intuitively labelled. There's the large ignition pull-chord, the safety, and the jet fuel compartment...

This was good. Kendra had an idea.

OPEN JET FUEL COMPARTMENT

It's screwed shut.

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USE STAPLE REMOVER ON SCREWS

The edges of the staple remover are too fat for that.

USE CHANGE ON SCREWS

Taking a dime you find it fits perfectly into the screw slot, but only hurt your thumbs trying to turn it.

This part had Kendra stuck for a few minutes. But she was good at these games. In fact, she invented these games!

USE STAPLE REMOVER ON DIME

Good work! Pinching the staple remover around the dime you now have enough torque to twist open the security screw. The lid pops open to reveal a small canister of fuel. A small wire leads from the tip of the can to an indicator on the outside.

EMPTY FUEL

The release valve is too small for your fingers.

USE STAPLE REMOVER TO EMPTY FUEL

You can't get a good angle on the release valve.

USE KEYS TO EMPTY FUEL

Good idea. Using the pointy end of the key you depress the valve and leak the fuel into the hot tub, careful to leave a bit left. The fuel indicator now reads low.

CUT INDICATOR WIRE WITH KEYS

You slowly saw through the wire. The fuel indicator swings back to half-full.

BREAK SAFETY

You bend the back of the safety switch. It now looks on...but is off.

That should do it, you think.

Kendra wondered, momentarily, how many points all that was worth, but, smartly, didn't dwell on it, slipping out of the room instead.

The Dan Destroyem theme song in muzak form was playing in the fifth floor lobby. Somehow all its energy had been drained away into an easy-listening sludge. Maybe it was all the violins. Kendra fidgeted as the elevator lights climbed, anxious to get out of there.

The door had barely opened when she saw the sliver of trendy shorts and orange hair through the crack. Instinctively, Kendra turned and bolted down the hallway towards the stairwell. Looking behind her she saw Dan smile and turn casually towards his room. She hoped he was going to follow her, that he felt like hunting. Turning back she rushed into the elevator just as the doors closed, and rode down to the first floor. Bursting out into the lobby she ran for the grounds and found a hiding space deep in the palm trees. Moments later Dan exited the resort, decked out in his attack gear.

Through the binoculars Kendra watched and waited until he began to search near the palm forest. She snuck from tree to tree, keeping out of sight, keeping behind him as he searched, inching closer. Suddenly he changed direction and she ducked behind a tree. She could hear his footsteps coming closer now. She could hear his breath. He couldn't have been more than a foot away, on the other side of the tree. Noiselessly she slipped around the tree until she could see his jetpack. She reached out for pull cord and yanked it hard. Nothing happened. Dan turned and grabbed her hand, grinning. Reaching out behind him with her other hand she yanked the cord again. There was a small *click* and Dan's face suddenly lost its grin. At rocket speed he blasted up into the air, losing his grip of her in the jolt. He rocketed through the fronds of the palms above, which rattled and shook after he blasted through. It was now very silent except for the distant sound of the jet stream from Dan's jetpack way above. Then, slowly, it died away while another sound faded in, growing louder and harsher.

"BRWWAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGGHHHHHHHHH!!"

Suddenly there was a large *WHUMP!* and the ground shook, sending coconuts to the ground with dull syncopated *toks!* There was no doubt in Kendra's mind that she had finished him off. Suddenly a coconut fell and clocked her on the head. Kendra woke up in the dark of her hotel room. Her heart was racing. But she felt good. Nobody was going to ruin *her* vacation.

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“What are you doing?” Will asked groggily. Kendra was hunched in front of the bedside light. Will didn’t know what time it was...but it must have been 3 a.m. or something.

“Writing,” she said.

“oh. Did you have a dream?”

“No,” Kendra says. “Inspiration.”

“Oh.” Will was too tired to enquire further. He watched her writing madly on the small complimentary hotel pad. He turned over and went back to sleep.

It was a brilliant idea. It had come to her, like good ideas always do, in a sudden flash...an idea so perfect there was no denying it. She’d woken up from her dream, sweating slightly, wishing that she could capture that fear...the *pure terror* she felt in her nightmares, in a game. And that was it! She was going to make a horror game! It hadn’t been done yet. Not a really scary one...with a plot, anyway. Not an adventure game. And Kendra wanted to make a really scary one. It would be a fugitive-horror. Like her dream...but not so cartoonish and silly. A young reporter...in a haunted house for some reason. A dare? A bequest? Something like that...and something is chasing her. Trying to kill her...something unnatural. And she has to find out why. What it is, how to deal with it...and most importantly...find out what happened in this house. That was great! She wrote that down...but ideas were coming so fast she could barely keep up.



Kendra was still writing on that pad at breakfast. She’d had to get the people at the front desk to sharpen the pencil. Her family sat talking around her, but Kendra was engrossed in her ideas, barely finding time to stuff food into her mouth between thoughts.

She wrote all day when they went to the beach. Will and Mark played with a ball in the salty water, running tip-toed over the hot sand. Heather was equally inactive as her mother, lying on a beach towel a few feet away. A couple of times Will tried to convince Kendra to come take a swim but she said she couldn’t because she was having a brainstorm.

“I don’t understand,” said Will. “We came on vacation to *relax*. To get away from Madre. Why are you working all the time?”

“Because I’ve got ideas now,” she replied.

Will just shook his head, dumbfounded by her answer. Will didn’t

understand the creative process. He turned around and took a swim.

Kendra paused for a moment to watch her husband swim. She felt wonderful. Loose. Breezy and careless. The vacation had worked. All her dark energy had been sucked out by those nightmares.... She'd found the release valve and diverted her dark energy into this work of horror. Negative energy into positive energy: the zen of computer game making. Kendra felt normal. Happy. Funny. Her normal self. She returned to her pad.

Heather lay back on her towel, wondering about Carol. *What was she up to now?* It had been a week and a half since they'd last spoken. She couldn't wait to get back and tell Carol how lame the vacation was, how stupid her own family was. At least she was getting some sun. She had been really pasty before coming here. Not that she really cared about tans...but at least she felt like she was accomplishing *something*. And the tan made her look tougher. Less sickly.

Heather inspected her fingers. They were wrinkling up like prunes from all the water. Even her calluses were going away. She had worked long and hard at those gaming calluses...and now they were peeling off; she could feel herself losing her gaming touch as she sat here. They'd been on this stupid vacation long enough. Five days was good...but TWO weeks? Even her dad seemed to be struggling to think of things to do. And they still had four days left.



That night Will broke down and finally let the kids watch the hotel TV. He'd managed to hold his ground for a week and a half. Not bad, but the kids had complained there was nothing to do.

"Nothing to do?" he retorted, incredulous. "You could take a walk! Read a book! Play a card game!"

Mark and Heather both looked at each other and then back to Will. "That's what we said, Dad. Nothing to do."

He didn't have the strength to argue any more. Kendra was busy in the corner writing on her pad, shaking her hand out, as it seemed to be sore. Will went out for a walk.



The next day Will and Kendra sat out on the patio sipping their drinks and relaxing in the sun. Kendra shook her hand out and massaged it.

"Geeze. I'm getting a hand cramp from all this writing. And I'm going to have to re-type all this into the computer when I get back. I hope I can

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read my handwriting then.” She pushed deep into the pad of her hand with her thumb. “You should have brought the laptop,” she added.

That was it! Will was mad now! He had had enough of this abuse. Next time he was going to leave the family behind and go on his *own* vacation. And with all the money he saved he would rent a decent family that knew how to appreciate and enjoy a vacation and he’d have a good time.

“Humpf!” he retorted. And he said it loud and clear...to make sure she knew that he was mad. But she didn’t hear. She was too busy writing to care anyway. It was only two and a half days until they went home. He would survive.



The night before they were to head back to California, they decided to get dressed up and hit up a nice restaurant for an early dinner. Everybody seemed genuinely excited. And they had all gotten hungry after a big hike up the volcano.

They were just exiting the lobby into the cool, crisp Hawaiian air when the phone in their room rang. It rang ten or eleven times before it stopped.



They were all packed up by 9 a.m. the next morning. After breakfast, they picked up their bags and headed down to the lobby for check-out. The hotel room had seemed strangely empty with all their stuff tucked neatly away in their luggage. It was hard to believe it had been their home for the past two weeks. But they were all glad to be returning home, for one reason or another. They had had enough vacation.

Just minutes after they locked the door behind them the telephone rang again. A good dozen times. When it stopped ringing the hotel room seemed even more desolate. A missed call in an empty and abandoned room. A breeze blew gently in through the window, blowing about in the emptiness.



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