

Fantasy Hunters

By Mel Hartman

Translation from Dutch by Birsen Uçar

Dreams are illustrations...

from the book your soul is writing about.

(*Marsha Norman*)

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My name is Kate Lillian, I'm thirty-one years old, and I'm an emobeing from Emo World, the second dimension. Emo World is a place where ratiobeings from Ratio World dreamed of and dreamed in. Dreamt *because*, for most this activity now belongs in the past.

I scribble down these notes with a plain old fashioned pen. It does something to me, the contact of my hand touching the sheet of paper, via such a pen. I don't like a machine blocking my thoughts from the things I will create. Even if these are simply notes or scrawls with which I might want to do something serious later on. What precisely, I still have to figure out. Writing a novel perhaps. I often do things without knowing where it will all lead to.

Good, there are still beings from Ratio World, the first dimension therefore, who don't know we exist. They still think that their dreams are plays in their own fantasy world. Actually, we are dealing with a dimension filled with creatures, just as alive as themselves, and within their eyes there are many strange creatures. The so-called monsters from Emo World wouldn't harm a mosquito, even if it would suck them dry. We too have rules and laws, though these are based on more liberal principles than the ones in Ratio World. Emo World is a real world, just as the Earth, which is now called Ratio World.

However, at the time, there were many ignorant. These were actually ratiobeings who still thought they owned their own dreams. You recognize them, apart from their vague contours; they had expressions in their eyes showing fear, stress and insecurity. They mostly conducted themselves in a manner not quite sure of the next move. They had the listlessness resembling someone who smoked too much weed.

Visually, these dreamers clearly differed from the emobeings and ratiobeings who visited Emo World through the Portal. Their body was a little translucent. It seemed as though they hadn't entirely passed through, as if the ink of the printer had run out. They ran most of the time, although this cost them a pitiable amount of effort. In general, they were frantically

trying to eluding one monster or another. If they only knew these creatures never intended harm towards anyone.

Just like that young woman who ran past me once. Two seconds later, there followed an old scrawny werewolf who heeled next to me. He panted, his tongue hanging from his jaws, his eyes rolling back from exhaustion. As a ratiobeing, you think: poor woman being chased by a dangerous werewolf. That's not the case, one should rather say poor werewolf.

I asked him: "Are you alright?"

He squeaked something incomprehensible.

"Do you want some water? There's a witch shop nearby."

He shook his head. "I'll survive," he panted.

"Why did you chase that dreamer?"

"That dreamer? Was I chasing a dreamer again?" He cursed so loud a few startled by-passers looked up stunned. "That's why that screaming woman wouldn't stop, I should have known. I am such a useless old wolf."

"You scared her to death."

He chortled with a wee bit of pride. "I still look quite dangerous, don't I? What a shame I didn't see her face, these days you don't encounter many dreamers."

"Why were you chasing her?"

"She dropped her bags. O well, she won't be missing them when she wakes up. OK, I'll be off, thanks for your sympathy." Off he went.

It was forbidden to play tricks on dreamers. Even if the dreamer considered himself to be in danger, we were not allowed to intervene. At times difficult to resist, you did it anyway.

I had strolled to the park. I was laying on the grass on my back with my eyes closed, while thinking about those things. I often visited the park, since it was situated near to my apartment. It was a lovely day, with a sky that seemed to have come right out of an animated movie. Clear blue adorned with polka dot cotton ball clouds, and a brilliant yellow sun. The sound of crickets resonated though the air so delicately it almost entirely faded away within the serenity of the park.

I felt a presence. When I looked up, a man stood in front of me: it was a dreamer. He looked around, confused and surprised, seeing all those strange creatures. The park wasn't even crowded. There were only a handful of emobeings and one leprechaun walking around.

I wish I knew what was going on in his frightened head. My telepathic gifts don't work on dreamers who did not arrive via the Portal. To me he looked blank, an ignorant to our world, in other words a real dreamer. They still didn't know that their dreams transported

them to a real and existing world. They were few and decreasing in number, which is truly sad. We often found it very funny and indeed interesting to see how a rational being from the other dimension would let their emotions and behavior run free. Those few who still thought that they were dreaming usually came from the more primitive parts of Ratio World. In those places, primary lusts and feelings were still accepted to some extent.

I figure this guy to be around forty by the way he wore his attire. Wearing shapeless rags around his body, he wasn't de-wrinkled like most of the ratiobeings, which often looked as though they were smoothed out by a flat-iron, had an untrimmed beard. The man's appearance did not hide his life's hardships. That's what made him interesting.

The dreamer now stood on a bench and tried to jump in the air. He was wildly flapping his arms, trying to raise himself unsteadily on the tips of his toes.

With my friendliest face, I went up to him in case he should really take off. Not every day you had the chance to talk with a blank. He only noticed me when I was right in front of him. With his sleepy eyes he briefly looked at me. Blanks can't concentrate very long when they're dreaming, it's as if their brains are partially shut off. That's why I had to operate fast before he would really fly away.

"Hello," I said.

"Eh... hello." He looked at me with nervous anticipation.

"I'm Kate, what's your name?"

With that kind of childlike behavior you had to approach a blank. They had trouble making a normal conversation because they usually let their dream take hold of them. So it was my job to maintain the interaction between us.

"Eh... Bob," he replied.

"Do you know that you're dreaming, Bob?"

He blinked. Of course, it was like asking someone if he knew he was actually dead. I've never really understood why ratiobeings couldn't see the difference between reality and their dream world. Apparently, the part of their brain which sets a distinction between realism and surrealism doesn't function while they're sleeping.

He was flapping his arms even more wildly, but eventually, he gave up and sat down, his eyes fixed on me. He looked pretty frightened.

I asked: "What were you trying to do?"

Another problem was their memory. While they're dreaming, it hardly ever functions. By the way, that's why it took Ratio World such a long time to find out that the dream world

is actually an existing dimension. Besides, your memory generally lets you down entirely when you wake up.

Defeated, Bob looked around, scratching his beard. “What I was trying to do? That eh... that I can’t remember. Can you?”

I suddenly felt sorry for him. That’s a problem we emobeings have to deal with; we’re too sensitive. Besides, my empathic abilities are unusually highly developed. I knew I had to leave the man alone, before he would panic even more.

“You tried to fly. You will be able to if you try your best.”

Once more, he knew what to do, and he seemed relieved. Ratiobeings always *have* to do things, even in their dreams. Strangely enough, they find it a complete waste of time when they’re doing nothing.

Again, the dreamer stood up on the bench. Apparently, he thought that he would take off more easily if he went on doing breaststrokes. In fact, in Emo World this technique has the greatest effect for these dreamers. Maybe because in reality, swimming means you are going forward. In real life, flapping one’s arms has never gotten anyone up in the air.

Dreaming ratiobeings can fly in our world, because it’s their subconscious that leads them. The subconscious is a part of your mind which carries out your wishes and thoughts. Ratiobeings would be able to do the same in their own world, but there, it is made impossible by their rational thoughts.

I watched him go. The dreamer took off southward, doing breaststrokes, climbing higher and higher up the sky. Afterwards, I lay down again, and fell fast asleep.

When I woke up, the sun had disappeared. Clearly, the werewolves had had enough of it. Now, dark clouds were suspended from threads high in the air. Hopefully, these werewolves weren’t thinking of drenching us with rain. They sure had a pretty simple sense of humor.

It was time for me to be off since I wasn’t dressed for bad weather with this light cotton dress I was wearing.

I realized rather late that I was walking too closely to a witch shop. Something you must never do if you don’t need anything. Their magical tempting odors are even too strong to resist for someone who has witch genes, like me. You get the compelling idea that you want to eat something (one day I had bought ten jars of pickles which had expired a long time ago), or that you need extremely useless things.

Let's just enter the shop then, as if tracking a scent, like dogs do. However, dogs are actually the only creatures that are not affected by these tempting odors coming from witch shops.

"Kate, dear, how are you?"

Witches know everyone by name, even though they have no telepathic abilities. They just have such a good memory, it's a trick they use to catch you off guard. In Ratio World, managers do the same thing with their clients, but instead, they use their secretary or their laptops to pull it off.

Even though you can see through their tricks, you always have to be polite towards witches. They don't have a sense of humor, and they can never forgive rudeness. I must admit, I also possess some of these characteristics, but I do know where to draw the line.

At the time, when ratiobeings entered through the Portal and put their first steps onto our world, there happened to be some problems concerning these matters. One day, a witch had taken offence because of something a ratiobeing had done or said. Consequently, she had transformed her permanently into a toad. From then on, transforming ratiobeings has been prohibited. Rude people could still be prosecuted and penalized no longer could they be punished as severely and irreversible as that.

I looked around the shop. What did I need again?

The witch looked at me: "I think you're up for some pizza. Transform me into a jellyfish if I'm wrong."

"Good guess," I replied resignedly. Of course, she knew that pizza was my weak spot.

The witch grinned, showing her white teeth. Their true appearances are really quite beautiful, but they still employ a façade of illusions. Intuitively, witches sense the preferences of their costumers, and then they assume the looks their costumers find greatly attractive. Evidently, a witch looks different depending on the person who's looking at her. That day, she had reddish-brown hair, blue eyes and an athletic figure. Luckily, I didn't need to use these tricks. According to the people surrounding me, I looked more than decent.

The witch shuffled to the back of the store. In a witch shop, they keep everything at the back. There is no shop-window, neither is there anything on display. You just know it is a shop, because witches make you think that when you come too close. I imagine they merely conjure the things you want to buy. Anyway, you can find anything you want in a witch shop.

While I was waiting for my pizza, a man entered the store. "Hello!" I said admiringly while I examined him closely. That's the way it goes in Emo World, we don't waste any time like people do so well in Ratio World.

He smiled. "Looks like the werewolves have chosen dark clouds today."

A pure emobeing, I supposed, no strange genes though clothes could conceal many things. His skin was so soft and brown: you couldn't even see minor imperfections. His searching eyes showed a mixture of grey and brown, and his features were masculine but not arrogant. He was quite tall, but not as tall as an elf. He radiated that much power and litheness, he could very well be descending from vampires. He didn't have vampire fangs, though.

"You are quite a catch," he stated.

I knew he meant it. Like I said, in Emo World such things are just put straightforwardly.

"My ancestor was an elf," I explained. "You're not too bad yourself."

The witch appeared, holding a large box in a plastic bag, after which the man switched to telepathic conversation. *That witch better not hear what we are saying.* He looked at me, questioningly.

He was right. You never knew what these charlatans did with their information. *I sure feel like having you, nice and good,* I answered equally.

You read my mind. He briefly caressed my cheek, so tenderly a shudder went through my body.

"Oh, you are going down that road," the witch said, referring to our telepathic conversation which she could not hear. She sounded a little upset. "Here's your pizza."

I took the bag. Without a sound, I gave the man my address and the time when we could meet. After that, I paid the witch, greeted her with as much courtesy as possible, and walked out the store. I knew he was watching me, so I swung my hips even more.

I met several other people and some creatures, none of them were interesting enough to sleep with. That day was not exactly a success.

Yet, I was curious to get to know the man from the witch shop especially because I craved for some physical contact. Generally, that was the case when I had spent some time in Ratio World. Being there, without any contact, honest emotions or smiling glances was simply too exhausting. Ratio World could be as tiring to emobeings as Emo World could be to ratiobeings.

As I opened the door of my apartment, I sought contact with Ewok, my little dog. Safely inside, I was no longer afraid of eavesdroppers. With the limited magical powers I had inherited from my Great-Great Grandmother who was a witch, I had sealed my apartment off with a shield. No one outside that shield could read my mind when I was at home.

Ewok jumped on me with great enthusiasm. Only elves can communicate with animals, but because of the quarter elf blood that was running through my veins, I too had this ability.

Watch out for my pizza!

I missed you. I missed you. I missed you.

When I picked her up, she licked my face, giving it a thorough washing. Ewok is part Jack Russell and part Maltese, and she doesn't get any bigger than a full-grown cat. Her character is both lively and gentle, and because she descends from a werewolf, she is stronger and more powerful than any other dog of that size. Ewok sure is sweet, but she can turn into a monster that can take on three pit bulls at a time. I've seen her do it. However, because her mother was a Maltese, she looks like a neglected mongrel.

I wanted to come home sooner, but I fell asleep at the park.

I'm hungry.

Werewolf or no werewolf, she is still a dog, and food is one of her top priorities.

I walked to the kitchen, placed a slice of pizza on a plate, and gave Ewok a piece. Of course, that's not really healthy for dogs, but she liked it.

When I finished, Ewok laid beside me on the couch, resting her head on my lap. She looked at me.

Who is coming tonight?

A very attractive man

Of course, but what is he?

That's none of your business.

This is my house as well.

Since when are you paying rent?

People usually shrug, but a dog replies with a sigh.

I went to the bathroom to freshen up. I always put a lot of effort into that before I go to bed with someone. My hair was the same color as the sun; yellow; orange and red. The more I brush my hair, the more it goes on shining. It probably has to do something with the genes I inherited from the elves. I have an extremely white skin, without looking unhealthy. My mom claimed that Snow White was probably one of our ancestors. Actually, Snow White was also an elf. The fairy tale tells us her stepmother wanted to kill her because she was so jealous of Snow White's beauty. But in fact, the truth was too confronting for Ratio World. In reality, Snow White was much better in bed. That is why male elves preferred her. The brothers Grimm had gotten the idea from their dreams, or rather, from Emo World. They had

experienced it and seen it, but they had interpreted it incorrectly. Oh well, you couldn't blame them. Ratio World has always had trouble with the more natural side of people.

In our world, sex is just as ordinary as eating or drinking. Making love is just a wonderful invention of Mother Nature, isn't it? It's the ultimate way of uniting people and conveying emotions. Everybody does it in their own personal way, and nobody will consider it to be strange. For some time now, we are trying to eradicate every aberration, each restraint, and eliminate every anxiety in these ratiobeings, but it often seems a hopeless task. They don't want anything to do with ghosts, vampires, trolls and other non-human creatures. They obviously don't know what they are missing.

When the doorbell rang, I had just put on another dress. Naturally, I could even have opened the door wearing nothing, but the dress, which was almost completely transparent, added a certain flavor of eroticism, and that made me feel really good.

For a human, it will do, I guess, Ewok told me.

Make sure you stay out of the room. I watched Ewok as she walked to the kitchen.

The man didn't waste any time giving compliments. He entered my apartment and grabbed me immediately. He wrapped his strong hands around my thin waist and lifted me up. As long as they didn't hurt me, I gladly took on the role of the fragile girl.

Carefully, he laid me down on the couch and undressed me, his mysterious eyes fixed upon me.

Now I would surely get to know him. It was a dangerous game most people wouldn't dare to play. In Emo World, there were creatures you'd better not invite to your bed, unless you didn't mind being ripped to pieces. However, I wasn't as fragile as I seemed to be, and I loved the unknown, which was extremely exciting.

"You are very special," he said.

With a tender touch, he kissed me, making me very impatient, I wanted more, now! The next thing I knew, he tore up my dress with one single pull. I felt the tip of his tongue circling around my left nipple. The tip of his tongue, *both* the tips of his tongue! Amazingly I had picked up a snakebeing. I had never heard a woman complain about them.

I closed my eyes, and I let myself drift away in a blissful sea of double pleasure.

All human beings are also dream beings.

Dreaming ties all mankind together.

(Jack Kerouac)

I woke up with a few scales lying in my hand. Immediately, I remembered what had happened. I had caught the most amazing and sensual creature in my bed. Destiny had given me a blazing hot kiss. But not only destiny had. Shuddering, I stretched out, and enjoyed the smell of sex coming from the sheets.

Snakebeings are extremely talented lovers, and not just because of their tongue. They could twist their body in such a way your orgasm was lifted up to the highest level, one, you thought, you would never return from.

We made love four times, but then he left. Unfortunately, he had another date with a female troll. And you can't keep them waiting. A man who dares to do that, had better count their body parts afterwards. Sizzling creatures these trolls were. Most men were ready to take many risks just to be with one.

My watch sent a bright pink beam to the ceiling. The Fantasy Hunters seemed to need me straight away.

It was still night time, but I didn't need much sleep, thanks to my grandfather, who was a vampire.

I hurried to the bathroom to rinse off the odor of the snakebeing. After that, I made myself a milkshake mixing pig's blood and fruit to boost my energy level.

With regret, I threw away my torn dress, and put on some pants and a sexy top. It had just been made clear that you never knew who you were going to meet during the day.

It was not without reason that I lived in an apartment close to the airport, you could just get there by foot. Emobeings can fly if they want to, but I like to walk. When I float I feel pretty helpless. And it didn't exactly go fast.

The streets were practically deserted; only some vampires and several witches running their night shops passed me by, briefly greeting me. The airport, however, was crowded with people from both dimensions. It was a large building, constructed with more glass than metal. Ratiobeings couldn't understand that the building didn't need steel girders or pillars to support the whole structure. But in Emo World, plenty of things seemed illogical and incomprehensible to ratiobeings. That is why they loved to come here, even though their constitution didn't allow them to stay very long.

There were never any non-human creatures in the airport, unless they worked there. These creatures weren't allowed to travel to Ratio World. They were banished from the place when ratiobeings understood that their dream world was an actual existing dimension. They couldn't cope with the sight of demons, trolls and vampires walking around freely. Difficult

beings, you know these ratiobeings. Terribly intolerant, but hey, they're the ones missing out on all the fun.

People were queuing to enter the Portal, but you didn't have to wait very long. The system was also very simple. You had to pay at the Portal, after which you were required to walk through a detector of some sort. In fact, it was a test to see whether you were human or not. The machine made a loud noise whenever it detected even the slightest trace of non-human elements. I had a special pass because I had essentially four types of genes, but being a Fantasy Hunter, I could make use of quite some privileges.

The Portal man didn't feel happy. His aura had the same grayness of corpses, and it was dull green like dying leaves. He looked at me gloomily. In a burst of enthusiasm I gave the man a kiss. Immediately, I felt him brighten up, pink colors appeared in his aura.

"Lady, you taste of sex," he said. He sounded a bit jealous. As she was walking towards the detector, the woman in front of me glanced disapprovingly over her shoulder. No doubt, it was just another hypocritical ratiobeing. I ignored her.

"Had a tough night?" I asked the Portal man.

Loud enough so the woman in front of me could hear, he said: "Too many ratiobeings, not enough affection." He winked at me.

The woman pretended she hadn't heard it, but I sensed that she was irritated. Good.

The Portal was made out of a colossal, revolving metal sphere, which was suspended in the air, without any visible support. Actually, it was being held up by energies I could not even begin to pronounce. The man who had invented the Portal was obviously a ratiobeing. It's clear that their mathematical and technical capacities are much more evolved than ours. That's also why ratiobeings don't have enough time to think about their feelings. The man must have been baffled when he realized that the other dimension which he was looking for was really the dream world. What's more, his invention had brought about an enormous breakthrough. Both our worlds had been merged into one. It took a lot of time before ratiobeings were able to get over the shock and the confusion. In fact, that still hasn't entirely ended.

As the light turned green, I stepped into the sphere of the Portal. Traveling to another dimension isn't exactly fun. It's like being turned inside-out, which could be the case, really. It would be an amazing fairground attraction for people who like to vomit. Eventually, you do get used to anything. Strangely enough, when you arrive at the other dimension, you land exactly on your feet, as though you have been carefully put down by a giant hand.

Many things indicate that you've arrived in Ratio World. Playtime is over, everything is deadly serious now. Something like that. Fortunately, the sun was shining.

The bureau where the Fantasy Hunters meet is situated, very conveniently, next to the airport. Sometimes it was really important to get to work rapidly, because lives could depend on it. Moreover, a creature that slipped through the Portal illegally could be caught immediately.

Once again my watch glowed. Ratiobeings are extremely impatient. Everything has to happen quickly, efficiently, and all this in accordance with *their* standards.

The bureau of the Fantasy Hunters is one of the last old buildings in a world where technology and renovation is now the most important thing. Every other building in town has been constructed in a rigid and tasteless manner. However, the bureau was built in the twenties, revealing splendor and charm which characterizes the Art Nouveau era. It is the only building in Ratio World that makes me feel at home, keeping everything the same as it was. I consider it to be some kind of antidote for the aloofness of Ratio World, making it possible for me to be there a little longer. It's not that easy for me, being the only representative of Emo World in the group, although these ratiobeings do their best to accept me in their midst. Or to pretend that they accept me.

Gehlen, the leader of the group, waited for me by the door. He was extremely tall, even by human standards. If I didn't know any better, I would be convinced that he descended from giants. He was 8 foot 2 and had the build of a gorilla. I'm 6 feet 2, and even I felt insignificant standing next to him. However, he was surprisingly tender, a kind of gorilla as it were. I couldn't remember a time when Gehlen had been scared, and we had been through a lot! Unlike most of these 'heroes', who were only brave because they didn't have to carry around an awful lot of brains, Gehlen was pretty smart.

I often wondered how he would be in bed. It must be fascinating to be overwhelmed by such power and mass. However, even in bed he would be rather tender. Unfortunately, he was a ratiobeing, so you couldn't just try these things out. Miserable boring peoples these ratiobeings.

"Kate, finally!" he said to me.

"I left in a hurry, Gehlen."

"We know how you guys hurry." He grinned warmly. Unlike most ratiobeings, he started to learn to accept people just as they are.

"What is going on?" I asked, while we entered the building.

"You will hear it in a second."

We walked silently up the marble staircase with its magnificent wrought iron banisters. Vaguely, I noticed that I had to take twice as many steps to walk the same distance as him.

The office of the Fantasy Hunters was on the third floor. At the time, our members had been brought together by the governing authorities of Ratio World. As the two worlds got to know each other, the ratiobeings suddenly understood why they had been seeing so many ghosts and monsters throughout the centuries. They realized that their legends about elves, leprechauns, trolls, vampires and other creatures had found its origin in the other world. Even the so-called UFO's lost their mystery. (As a matter of fact, these aren't aliens. They are called moon landers and they come from Emo World). Every now and then, non-human creatures from Emo World ventured to visit Ratio World. It was usually a short visit, because they were only confronted with a lack of understanding, fear and disgust. When ratiobeings had understood where these creatures came from, these visits were no longer possible. From now on, not a single non-human creature could enter Ratio World. That's such a shame actually, but that's the way our xenophobic opposites were. Incomprehension led to repudiation.

The Fantasy Hunters had to make sure this prohibition was being carried out. We sent the trespassers back home. At worst, we took them out, but fortunately that was hardly ever necessary.

My co-workers were seated at a round table, which resembled the table of King Arthur and his knights. (He actually existed. Our history books are more accurate than those of Ratio World). As usual, Aspen was sitting there with her face stuck to the computer screen. She just lived day and night with that thing.

Aspen was twenty-five years old. Her parents had lived at the end of the Aquarius era, during the second hippie wave. At that time, ratiobeings had discovered their latent paranormal abilities. After having experienced an intellectual boost, their brain had developed in another direction. For a short time, ratiobeings had also accepted the fact that there were different ways of using the brain, other than putting numbers and words in specific orders. Some people hadn't tried to hold back this new evolution, and they had acquired interesting gifts, such as telepathy or telekinesis. Some people, or actually most people, had just wanted to keep things as they were.

Aspen's parents, however, had embraced these changes with great enthusiasm. They had even proved themselves to be representatives of the second hippie wave. That also explains her name. Still, Aspen hated her own name; she'd rather be a genuine ratiobeing.

Aspen didn't have paranormal abilities, but she was a wizard on the computer, and was highly talented in several other areas. She was petite and slender. It seemed as though all the energy had been put in her brain, and that her body had been left out. Though there was nothing wrong with her figure, on the contrary. As for knowledge, I could only outdo her in the field of Emo World beings.

When I arrived, she merely looked up, very briefly. I knew she harbored negative feelings, and I could imagine why.

Cody greeted me with much more warmth. He even raised from his chair. "Hello", he said, almost whispering like he always did.

I liked Cody. He was barely eighteen years old, and he was so shy, sometimes it seemed as though he completely disappeared, but his paranormal talents were legendary.

Then there was Aqua, an expert in fighting techniques, weapons and a clairvoyant specialized in behavior. That meant he could anticipate other people's reactions. He already knew what you were going to do even before you knew it yourself. He too had Aquarius parents. I found it a real pity that he was a ratiobeing. He was exceptionally good-looking with his long blond hair and his icy blue eyes. Sometimes I just wanted to tear his clothes off and take him on top of that round table, while everyone could see us. At home, that would have been possible, but here obviously not. Besides, he consciously maintained a certain distance between us. Apparently, he held a grudge against all things associated with my world. I didn't know why. He couldn't entirely hide the fact that he found me attractive. Gehlen was the only one who knew exactly who I was and what I was, the others could merely assume things. At the time, he hadn't wanted the other members to be shocked by the new member of the group; the 'monster' from Emo World, so he had found it best to let them get to know me little by little. Nevertheless, I had already proven myself during previous assignments.

I sat down between Gehlen and Cody. I sensed that Cody was trying to read my mind, but I locked my thoughts. He too was quite taken by my good looks and charms. I positioned myself to make sure he had a clear view of my breasts.

"Alright, we're all present." Gehlen always started a briefing with this catchphrase.

Aspen briefly looked at me with an inscrutable look in her eyes. Then she focused her attention back on Gehlen.

"Moon landers", the latter one said. It sounded as a sigh. "They are back in action."

Aqua flinched. Moon landers were disastrous for the relations between the two dimensions. As long as there were ratiobeings who still didn't know them, these jerks kept on

scaring them with their so-called ‘abductions’. Moon landers were good at creating illusions. They loved that people believed they were extra-terrestrials, even if they were not. Some people also called them ‘the grey ones’, because of their thin grey skin. They also had a skinny little body and a large head with unusual big black oval eyes.

“Where are they?” Aqua asked.

Aspen gestured to her monitor. “According to the internet, they’re spotted in a small town in Pennsylvania.”

Gehlen was irritated. “How can it possibly be that these people don’t know anything about Emo World?” He had a problem with people not following the news. People acted as though the world had stood still half a century ago. These people are absolutely shocked when they come across phenomena which they’re not familiar with. He sometimes compared them with cavemen who fell to their knees when they saw lightning for the first time.

“What are we going to do?” Cody asked in his usual timid way. He didn’t look anyone in the eye. I often wondered what had made him this shy.

“We’ll kick their asses, I hate these bastards!” Aqua said wholeheartedly. Of course he meant the moon landers. He hated all non-human creatures. Nobody knew why.

“We’ll hunt them down,” Gehlen said. “Like we always do and hopefully we’ll catch them.”

I knew from experience that it wasn’t going to be easy. Moon landers were sneaky. I remained silent because nobody asked for my opinion. They were also extreme jokers. That’s why they loved playing tricks on people. Most of the time, they waited until our airships were close by, after which they took off with extreme velocity. At the time, when the two dimensions weren’t connected yet, this had caused extreme frustrations. During many generations it had been embedded in their culture. Moon landers just couldn’t help themselves, they kept on fooling and frightening ratiobeings. Secretly, I found it rather funny, but the other members of the group didn’t.

I had an idea. I put my hand on Cody’s shoulder. Clearly, he was startled by this unexpected gesture. “You can both teleport yourself and Gehlen, can’t you?”

“Eh... yes?”

I looked at Gehlen. “And your telekinetic abilities are powerful, aren’t they?”

Gehlen replied carefully: “That has been said, yes...” He thought about it for a while. “It’s not that I don’t trust Cody, but I’m not looking forward in letting myself get *demolecuarlized* by him.”

Even the bravest men had their weak spots, I thought.

“I’ve done it before,” Cody said. “With my cat.” He had an innocent look on his face.

“Is it any different than with an elephant?” Aspen asked.

I was surprised and looked in her direction. So the girl did have a sense of humor.

Gehlen merely grunted something unintelligible. I didn’t wait for him to think about the danger of being teleported. “This way you could catch the moon landers before they have the chance to disappear,” I told him.

“Those flying saucers of theirs, those are just illusions, aren’t they? How are we supposed to stop those?” Aqua suggested.

“Their bodies should do the trick,” I replied.

Gehlen said: “Not a simple task, they’re barely traceable in those fake machines. You can’t even see them.”

“That’s where Cody comes in,” I said.

The boy nodded vaguely. “It’s worth a shot.”

“They won’t know what hit them.”

“These guys are really smart,” Aspen remarked. She looked at me with that strange look of hers.

“That’s where you are wrong,” I answered. “They make you think they are smart, that’s their great power. Creating illusions is their only true talent. The great challenge is to look through that.”

Aspen smiled vaguely. I realized that she had also been aware of this. Probably thanks to her damn computer. She’d only wanted to test me. They were sneaky, these ratiobeings.

Aqua asked: “Suppose we do catch them, what are we going to do with them?”

“That’s up to the government,” Gehlen replied. “If I can hold them long enough to hand them over, that is. Okay, we’ll carry out Kate’s idea.” He rose resolutely.

While we left the office, I noticed he didn’t exactly feel confident about the whole operation. This was understandable, since teleportation wasn’t always a safe activity. One time, a fellow passenger came out even worse than those things from Picasso’s Blue Period. It all depended on the ability of the person to whom you trusted your life. Yet I was convinced that Cody was going to do just fine.

Then Cody and Gehlen disappeared. You only heard a *pop*! Like a cork being pulled out of a bottle. That was the sound of air filling up the space where Gehlen and Cody had been standing.

Aqua, Aspen and I hurried to the roof of the building where a small aircraft was waiting for us. These aircraft had gradually replaced cars when there hadn’t been any space

left to drive. In fact, the name 'airport' was misleading. There were Portals to travel through dimensions, but airplanes were no longer in use. Only a couple of larger aircraft were used by people who couldn't afford private transportation.

Our group owned a small aircraft, which was shaped like an amorphous box filled with chairs. It operated on zero-point energy. These things went incredibly fast and made sharp turns without you even noticing it. It had something to do with atomic movements, but I didn't know more about it. I'm not really interested in technical humbug. People who want to know more about it can look it up on the internet.

Aqua sat down on the pilot's chair. As a result, the onboard computer switched on. "Warm up the engine," he commanded.

"Hello Aqua," the computer replied with a sensual female voice which could not be distinguished from a real voice. Not even with my highly developed hearing skills. Sometimes I believed that the computers in Ratio World were more sensitive than the people who had made them.

The flying vessel started to vibrate.

"Pennsylvania, Julie," Aqua instructed. "Maximum speed, please." He was remarkably kind. I felt almost jealous of the cybernetic Julie.

The craft rose up in the air like a speedy elevator.

"Cape Valley, please," Aqua said. "With coordination points fifty - thirty."

I sighed. Why were ratiobeings friendlier to their machines than to people of their own kind? Sometimes these people are hard to understand.

The view through the windows became blurry when the flying vessel gathered speed six hundred miles per minute to be exact.

"Dreams are the royal road to the unconsciousness."

I looked surprised at Aspen. She was staring out of the window. "That's beautiful, who said that?"

"Sigmund Freud."

I read about him. He had some worthless theories, but he was gifted with words.

I noticed the shadows in Aspen's aura. "What's the matter?"

"I was thinking... switching off our dreams like that, I think it's wrong."

"Do you?"

"When I was a child, I believed in Santa Claus. I was heartbroken when I found out that he didn't exist."

That was not entirely true. Santa Claus did exist. He lived somewhere in the south of Emo World. There he ran an orange plantation. Once a year, usually in December, he went to Ratio World to fool the children, but he wasn't allowed to do that anymore.

Aspen looked at me. "A life without dreams and illusions feels so empty..."

I had never seen her so emotional. It was as if I was looking at a different Aspen. Her left eyelid trembled a little.

"Physically traveling to Emo World is not the same as dreaming of it," she said. "You miss out on something. No, you miss out on a lot. We've really lost something truly important. Taking drugs to make sure you'll sleep without dreaming." She shook her head. "This can't be right. We are all becoming so... so boring and groggy. But what is the alternative? Being transparent, wandering around in your world, while everyone makes fun of us?"

Since we never dreamed, I could not imagine how that would feel like. I only knew that things usually went wrong when you tried to go against nature.

"I envy you, sometimes," Aspen said.

I was taken aback by her sudden confession. Usually, ratiobeings were never this sincere.

"We have arrived," Julie announced with her sensuous voice.

When we landed, I saw that Cody and Gehlen were already waiting for us. Gehlen was holding his arms up in the air. A flying saucer floated above him, or at least, the illusion of a flying saucer. They had clearly caught one of those things.

Around the area, ratiobeings were grouped in a large circle. Some of them held on to one another, something they only did when they were scared to death.

We jumped quickly out of the vessel.

Visibly, it cost Gehlen much effort to keep the flying saucers under control with his telekinetic powers. Sweat was dripping off his face and his hands were shaking. "Get them!" he snarled when he saw us.

I immediately sought contact with the Council.

"It's Kate."

"Yes?"

"We've caught a group of moon landers running amuck in a small town."

"What are their coordinates?"

I passed on the information. As I was doing that, I saw the moon landers looking out the imaginary windows of their imaginary craft. They looked frightened. Nevertheless, they

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