

## The Applicant

By Bill Wolfe

My next appointment announced himself with a bang. . .or at least a crash. Something had been T-boned by a cement truck just outside the small clinic where I was interviewing test subjects for my experiment. We all rushed to the front and watched as the driver and the few passengers staggered-off the mangled remains of what appeared to have once been a city bus. Miraculously, it seemed nobody had been killed. I was close enough to hear the driver of the cement truck on his cell phone, telling his boss that his brakes had failed. He was pretty shaken, but seemed okay.

The last passenger to limp away looked like a homeless man. He was bedraggled, with unkempt hair and a scruffy beard. He was dressed in a mismatched wardrobe of apparent Salvation Army discards, but he moved with surprising nimbleness, and not the beaten shuffle one normally associates with the homeless. It took me a moment to realize that his limp wasn't from an injury, he was wearing one old boot and what appeared to be a brand new, white sneaker.

He paused in the street once he was clear of the wreckage, and looked up at the sky. Shaking his fist at the heavens, he shouted, "Missed me again! You'll have to do better than that!" The police car that came screeching around the corner almost nailed him where he stood, but I mentioned that he was pretty nimble. It missed him with whole inches to spare.

After an entrance like that, it was hard to doubt his story—as ridiculous as it sounded.

He brushed through the niceties of the interview, signed both the consent and nondisclosure forms without much more than a glance, and then started with the questions. Real questions, good questions.

"How will you balance the alpha interphase transposition with the sodium/potassium ionic wobble?" Somehow, he almost seemed to know more about brain function transfer than I did. Some of the problems I'd faced had never made it into any journal. Not yet, anyway. He asked about how the lasers were tuned as his brain was mapped, and about the storage capacity of my mainframe, where his brain functions would be stored for a few microseconds prior to electromagnetic overlay in the 'new' brain. He seemed very concerned that the recipient brain wasn't physically damaged by whatever trauma had caused the vegetative comatose state. He insisted that he be allowed to review the entire medical history of the 'donor.'

His questions had left me a little dazed, but all-in-all, he seemed satisfied with my answers. Now it was my turn.

"You understand that this is a very dangerous procedure, Mr. Alvara. If you're chosen for this, it can't be reversed. Your brain will be completely destroyed by the mapping lasers."

"You've got all the problems solved, Doctor. It's going to work. Your technology is barely there, but it's good enough."

“You sound pretty confident. How do you know? You don’t seem to have a death wish.”

“Just the opposite, actually. I need a mental function transfer, it’s my only hope of survival. You see, your universe hates me. I know how it sounds, but it’s true. I’ve been lucky so far, but sooner or later, it’s going to kill me.”

“My universe? You think it’s alive and out to get you? I think you’d better explain.” He’d seemed like a good candidate, but there would be some fairly comprehensive mental studies performed on whoever was chosen. If he was crazy going into it. . . .

“You’re a scientist. Well, so am I. My field is physics, transdimensional paraclivity, to be precise. I’m not from this universe. I’m from a parallel universe where we are quite a bit more technologically advanced. I’m here by accident and ever since I arrived, your universe has been aware of me. I’m an irritant to it because I don’t belong here.”

“Extraordinary claims. . .”

“Require extraordinary evidence. I’m well aware of Doctor Sagan’s truism. This is about all I brought with me when I was caught in the gravity field surrounding the boson bridge. I was trying to send a sensor pod to a neighboring universe we’d detected. Yours.” With that he produced an octagonal ID badge, very official looking, with what appeared to be a holographic image of him—shaved and clean-cut—on the front. The logo wasn’t an eagle, it was a turkey. And it claimed that it was issued by the United Provinces of America. It could have been faked, but it felt right.

“I know your procedure will work, doctor, because we’ve been doing it for over a hundred years. I’ve been through it myself, when I was eight. Shuttle accident on a vacation to Luna. My mind was transferred to a force-grown clone. I went to sleep crippled, in pain, and woke-up whole.”

“But the universe can’t hate. Can it?”

“Probably not like you or I, but I’m an irritant to it. An itch it keeps trying to scratch. Every atom in my body resonates on the wrong quantum frequency. I have to keep moving, living off the discards of your society because anything I try to do will always go horribly wrong. You saw what happened when I decided to try and catch a bus across town, didn’t you?”

“I’m beginning to understand, perhaps. But there are so many things that could go wrong with this procedure. If the universe is really after you. . .”

“Doctor, you’re about to destroy my brain with a variably pulsating, multifrequency Excimer-Argon recombination laser. I don’t think the universe will interfere with that. And once I’m in a body that does belong here, it shouldn’t be able to tell the difference. It’s my only hope.”

I realized suddenly that I believed him. “When the world hates you, hate it back. But when the universe hates you. . .”

A faint smile graced his lips. The first I'd seen.

“HIDE!”

The End