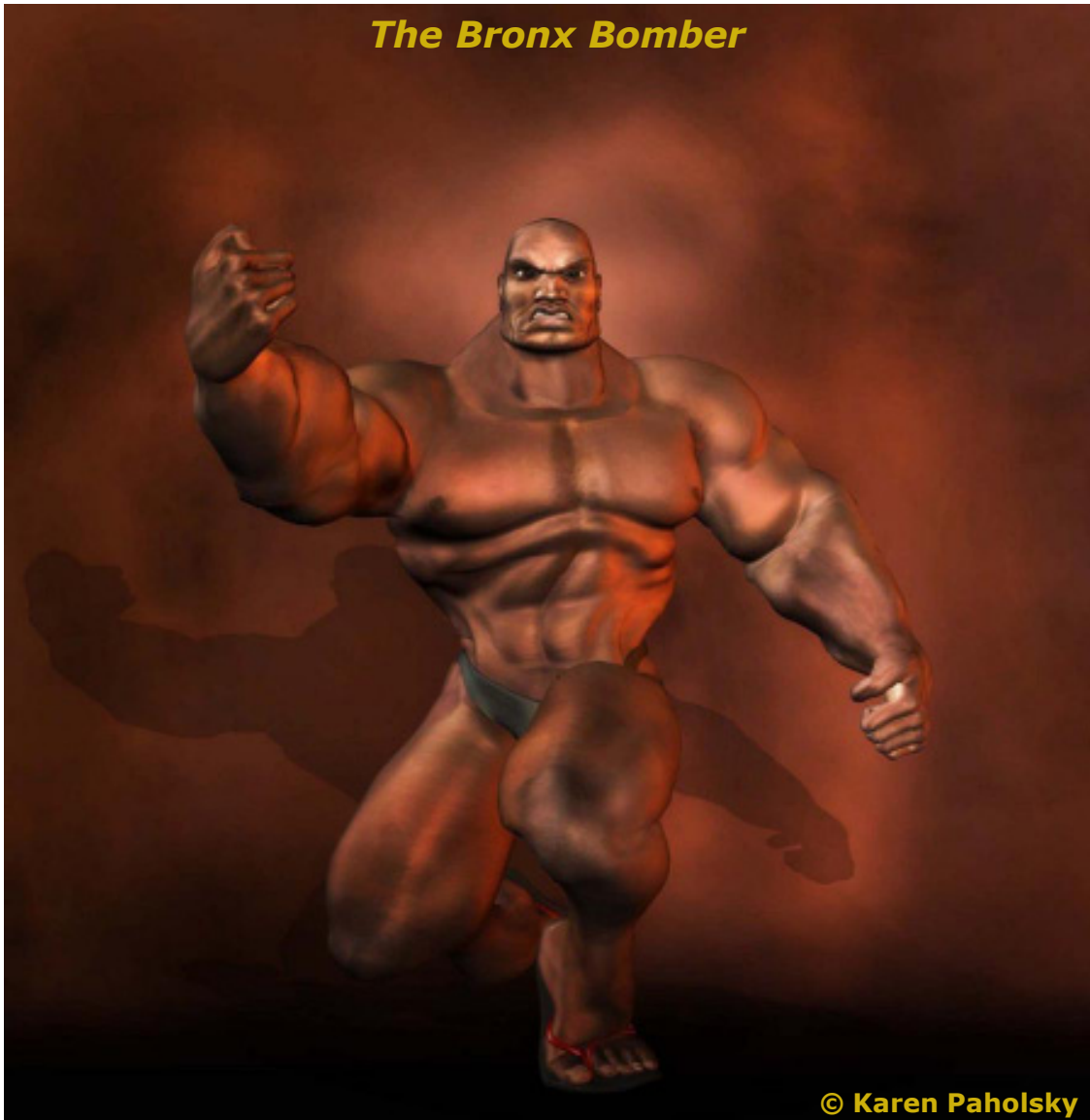


## **The Bronx Bomber**



© Karen Paholsky

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# Defining Moment

by  
Vic Fortezza

"Damn you, Lenny," said the plump woman at the sink.

"A grand, Mil," said the hulking man, the guilt of a boy in his eyes. "Double the goin' rate. I couldn't turn that down. You want me to build that deck out back or what?"

"What good's it gonna do us with you in the hospital?"

"Junior says two minutes - tops."

"You trust 'im? With all the stuff he pulls? He'd put his own mother in there if he thought it'd sell some tickets."

"We woulda never been able to buy this house if it wasn't for him and his father, an' you know it."

"You don't owe 'im nothin'. How many more operations you gotta have? When're you gonna grow up? You're in no shape to get back in there. It's been three years. You're forty-two now. You wanna end up like Freddie, wrestlin' 'til you're sixty, walkin' 'round with a cane?"

"This's the last time. I promise. He's in a bind. Jimmy must be on another bender. They can't find 'im. I can't back out. I gave my word. I gotta go. The show already started."

"If you get hurt I'm divorcin' you."

"C'mon, Mil. I don't need to hear that."

A boy of twelve had entered the kitchen. "Hey, Johnny," he called into the living room, "Daddy's goin' to get his butt kicked again."

John, a few years older than his brother, howled. "What's your record gonna be now, Da - three wins, a thousand losses?"

"Is it on cable?" said his brother. "I gotta see this."

"Awright, wise guys," said Len. "Keep it up an' yous can put yourselves through college."

"Put the towel back on your head, Da," said John. "You buffin' down to the brain? I can't see the TV for the glare."

Len flicked the towel at the boy. His bald head was gleaming.

As he was driving, he tried to calculate what his record actually was. He was certain of the wins. The three came long ago in preliminary matches when the federation still held cards at bingo halls and gymnasiums. His losses may have exceeded 1000. In 20 years he'd taken time off only to recuperate from injury. He missed the excitement, the limelight, even though he'd been only a bit player. Were the game on the up and up, he believed he could have beaten many of the stars to whom he'd been made to take a fall.

As he reached the security gate, he spotted a man of medium height and light hair, pacing, apparently waiting for him.

"How ya doin', Al?" said Len, rolling down the driver's window.

"Please hurry, Leonard," the man returned in a British accent. "You're on soon. We're all fouled up tonight."

He was at Al's heels, following him to the dressing room. There stood a handsome, burly young man in a fine suit, who extended a hand to Len, thanked him, and urged him to dress.

"Anything I should know?" said Len, pausing at the door.

"Just follow his lead. You don't even get in a punch."

"So what else's new?"

He smiled. Junior remained expressionless.

Smoke was thick in the air, as it'd been upon his first glimpse into a wrestlers' locker room. As a boy he'd gazed through the peephole at the Rollerama, fascinated that "good guys" and "bad guys" shared quarters, sat naked at a card table, chomped on big cigars, laughed uproariously. Unable to afford a ticket, he would wait outside for his heroes, some of whom even signed autographs.

"Ay!" said a huge, bearded man - "look what the cat dragged in."

Veterans approached and patted him on the back.

"There's no time for that now," said Al urgently.

"Keep your shirt on, your lordship," said a young stud in pink tights. "Boys, here's a real pro. My first match here I broke his nose with a Drop Kick - and he never said a word."

Len flushed like a teenager. "Ah, you know the

business - spit happens."

Although he didn't know the newcomers personally, he recognized them from television appearances. They ignored him.

Suddenly the door burst open and two giants entered, perspiring profusely, laughing.

"The 'marks' are restless tonight," said the bleached blonde. "I got hit with everything but the kitchen sink."

"Who's that there?" said the other, dressed in camouflage, advancing. "Lenny Giordano?"

They flew into an embrace and pounded each other's backs.

"Please, Leonard," said Al, "this is most unseemly."

"Blow it out your nose, Al," said the soldier, known professionally as the Mercenary.

The room broke into howls.

"Who'm I workin' with, Al - the Indian?" said Len, nodding in the direction of a massive young man sporting a red Mohawk.

"No, Doctor Voodoo."

He gazed about. "Which one's he?"

"He's in the office."

"Which reminds me - I forgot about my money."

"Worry about it later."

His eyes spread. "First rule of business - get your money up front. I shouldn't hafta tell you that. You been at this racket a helluva lot longer than me."

Dressed in a one-piece black spandex suit that covered two-thirds of his torso, Len knocked at the door across the hall. It opened abruptly and out stepped a tall, bronze man in painted face, beads about his thick neck, a string of shrunken heads in his grasp.

"Hey, kid," said Len, offering a hand. "I'm...."

The young hulk growled, shook the shrunken heads before Len's nose, and hurried away. Len chuckled, shaking his head. He loved the business. It was so colorful.

"Let's have it, Jun'," he said, entering the office.

"Half now, half later," said the promoter, seated at a desk.

"Since when? You know you can count on me. All of it right now or I walk. My wife's ready to divorce me as it is."

Scowling, Junior opened a drawer and counted out the purse. "You better make it look good. You're the Bronx Bomber tonight."

"But I'm from Brooklyn."

"Who cares?"

"I do. Why can't I just go by name like always?"

"We don't do that any more. Now get out there. And I want some 'juice' tonight."

"No way, not with this AIDS thing goin' 'round, with these kids all usin' needles to shoot up with steroids. God knows if I caught it in the days before we ever even heard of it. An' my forehead's like a road map as it is. No deal."

"Pansy," said Junior contemptuously.

"You been doin' 'em too, I hear," said Len. "For what? College guy like you should know better."

Junior glared. "Get out."

Pausing in the corridor, he kneeled and put the money at the bottom of his right boot, which he laced tightly. Before rising, he blessed himself. Al led him toward the arena. The buzz of the packed house grew louder at each step. Adrenaline was flowing through, raising a smile to his face.

"I feel like a kid again."

"Don't get into the ring until Bobby finishes up."

A short, frail, mustachioed, balding man was in the center of the ring, microphone in hand, announcing next month's card. Len strode forward, largely ignored. A few young males shouted insults regarding his girth and baldness. He stifled the urge to respond. A whipping boy was to do nothing to draw attention to himself, to detract from the star.

As he neared ringside, he did a quick shuffle step away from the railing that separated the audience from the "squared circle." He'd recognized an old, sour-faced woman clutching a large handbag. He was amazed she was still alive. Then again, it seemed she hadn't aged since the first time he'd seen her 20 years ago. The wrestlers referred to her as the "Queen of Marks." It was said she carried a brick in her purse. It certainly felt like it. She'd once delivered a blow to his back following a match in which he'd accidentally inflicted a deep gash in the forehead of a rising star. Did she still remember that moment? Perhaps she'd grown so feeble-minded as to no longer be able to distinguish good guy from bad. He was glad he'd

denied her opportunity.

As he passed the broadcast table, he patted lightly at the back of a giant wearing a headset. "Hi, Gino," he mouthed, winking. Formally known as the Siberian Assassin, Gino was responsible for the periodic stiffness of the neck that Len suffered, the result of a Piledriver executed too well.

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Len fought to repress laughter. Having been away from the game for so long, he lacked the discipline to take it seriously. He was sweating profusely. He'd forgotten how hot it was under the lights, how hot it could get in such a place, especially in summer.

A short Hispanic in a bow tie and light blue shirt climbed into the ring.

"Hi, Gilly," said Len softly, hand covering his mouth. "Long time no see."

"Lenny? I thought you retired."

He explained.

"Just be careful. This guy might really be crazy. Maybe it's the stuff they're all takin' to bulk up."

Len gazed toward the opposite corner, where his opponent was stepping over rather than between the ropes. He hadn't realized how tall the guy was. He looked up at him as Gil called them to the center of the ring and, lips moving soundlessly, pretended to espouse the rules of conduct, which drew a crazed, puzzled stare from Doctor Voodoo.

As was expected of a whipping boy, despite vast experience that would have even a moron know better, Len turned his back, allowing his opponent

first blood, a Double Ax Handle delivered before the bell sounded. It knocked the wind from him and sent him to his knees. Tiny stars circled his head. He hardly felt the bare foot now stomping his chest. There was hardly a sound in the house. He wondered how twenty thousand could be so quiet. Not even the "marks," those who believed the action wasn't staged, were interested. Such slaughter could be viewed daily on cable TV.

Now he was in the air, feet first, body perpendicular to the mat preparatory to a Vertical Sufflex. He was amazed at the ease with which the young man had hoisted him. He hadn't even jumped to make it easier for him. His stomach contracted as he awaited the fall. And the good doctor kept him in suspense in a display of strength that was impressive despite the cooperation of his opponent, who remained perfectly still, hands helping keep balance, which minimized the burden. Upon striking the mat, he lay numb, awaiting the inevitable throbbing.

Before he had time to recover, he was pulled to his feet and sent hurtling to a corner. Dazed, he was unable to slow his momentum and pivot, the textbook reaction to an Irish Whip. His torso struck the padded turnbuckles forcefully, and he crumpled, respiring heavily. Soon he was in the air again, supine on his opponent's shoulder, preparatory to a Power Slam, not a regular Body slam, which could be absorbed largely by the feet. He wished he'd listened to his wife.

"Hey, kid, take it easy," he said into the young man's ear, from which a satanic charm dangled.

His plea went unheeded. Doctor Voodoo described a running circle and drove his prey's back into the mat, the force of the blow generating a substantial recoil. A few "ohs" went up in the crowd.

At least it's over, Len thought, body vibrating in every fiber. He feared he would have to call in sick tomorrow. How would he swing a sledgehammer after this beating?

Doctor Voodoo wasn't finished, however. He skulked about, chanting, calling on evil spirits. Apparently, he was being told to stretch the match. Len was tempted to run from the building.

Paper balls filled the air like a swarm of bees. Gil, with nothing to do at the moment, cleaned house, kicking debris from the ring. Len lay there, arms and legs spread. Even if he wished to rise, he wasn't sure he would be able to manage it. No matter, as he refused to subject himself to any more punishment. He hoped his opponent would take the hint and execute a pin. Fat chance, he thought.

He was pulled to his feet and sent sailing into the ropes, from which he sprang directly into a clothesline aimed not at his chest, as was supposed to be done

to avoid inflicting injury, but just below the chin. His head snapped back violently and his feet flew out from under him. He was again on his back, clutching at his Adam's apple, gasping. Soon he was being hoisted into a Fireman's Carry across his opponent's shoulders. He wasn't sure what was coming. He hoped it would be a Reverse Body slam, which looked infinitely more punishing to the public than it actually was. To his chagrin, he felt himself sliding downward for a Piledriver.

"Uh oh," he muttered, blood rushing to his head.

Now the powerful biceps were clasped about his waist and his head was being held in a vice-like grip between the hulk's knees. He had an inverted view of the arena.

"Hey, kid, it's too low," he said urgently, flailing his arms; "it's too low!" He didn't care if the fans up front heard this betrayal of professionalism. He was in danger. The hold had been applied without regard to the peril it might cause. And suddenly it dawned on him - he was expendable. Junior was determined to have his new star seem invincible at any cost, even severe injury to someone who'd served him loyally for 20 years. Len cursed his stupidity. He imagined his wife was screaming at the TV set. He hoped his sons were out of harm's way.

The top of his head, a full two inches beyond the knees clamped around it, struck the mat first. His entire body went numb. The world became a blur. Was he paralyzed? he wondered. Apparently not, as he was soon hurtling forward. Vision impaired, he sailed through the ropes cleanly, so battered he failed to execute the most basic of safety measures taught in every wrestling school - to hook an arm around a rope to slow momentum and gain control of a fall. He landed on a foot and stumbled headlong into a railing.

A brilliant light was shining ahead. Immersed in darkness himself, Len moved forward timidly. A tall shadow, projected seemingly in space, beckoned.

Am I dead? he wondered, baffled, afraid. Had he broken his neck? Realizing he felt no pain, his legs buckled. He wasn't ready to die. He had sons to support. And the ignominy - would he go down as the only wrestler to succumb to injuries sustained in a match? Wasn't his win-loss record humiliating enough?

He turned to flee and found only darkness before him. He decided to stay put, to refuse to go on. It was futile, however, as he was soon being pulled by a force he was unable to resist. He was reminded of the conveyors that guided spectators through exhibits at a World's Fair.

He entered an area of immaculate white, where a

lone dressing table, light bulbs describing a semicircle about its mirror, was set. Before it sat a man with flowing, bleached hair. He wore an elegant light blue robe that had a fur collar dotted with sequins. He moved his head from side to side affectedly, gauging his look, flicking at his locks with his fingers.

"Mister George?" said Len reverently, beside himself, chagrined that he was unable to recall the man's real name. One of his earliest memories was of his parents railing at the TV whenever the man went into his act. He couldn't have been more than five at the time.

You mean it wasn't an act? he thought, dismayed.

The man turned and, sneering, said: "Begone, mortal."

Len walked away, gazing past his shoulder, mumbling to himself.

A familiar sound, repeated again and again, captured his attention. He'd heard it a million times - a wrestler dropping to the mat. He followed the light and came upon a ring, where a lean, dark man was leaping horizontally into the air and thrusting his legs out in a perfectly executed Flying Drop Kick. It was Amazon Apollo, one of the greatest "scientific" wrestlers of all time, renowned for spectacular aerial maneuvers. He recalled the man's wake, the shock that an athlete so superbly conditioned had died so young.

"Tony?" he said, puzzled.

"No botha me," Apollo returned in a heavy accent, again leaping into the air.

Where was this - heaven or hell? Len wondered.

Soon the light beckoned elsewhere, toward a spotlight where a small man wearing absurdly designed sunglasses and a turban laden with tacky jewelry was railing at space.

The Imperial Wizard? said Len to himself, gazing about. "Who you talkin' to, Izzy?"

"What?" the man snapped, startled, miffed. "Who let you in here, you two-bit hack? Scram. Awright, 'Take....'" He paused, unsure of himself. "'Take' whatever - from the top."

The familiar wrestler's rasp, always sham in the beginning, permanent in time, followed Len into the darkness and faded as he came upon another light. Ahead was another unmistakable sound, that of weights being slid into place. In a dimly lit room, a young man of massive musculature was engaged in the bench press with a poundage so heavy the bar was bent in an arc as pronounced as an arrow's bow.

"Sureshot?" said Len, agape.

Crying out maniacally, the young man did a final repetition, set the bar back on its rack, and stepped past Len as if he weren't there. Short in stature, he seemed as wide as he was tall. He reached into the lone locker in the area, withdrew a syringe, and injected himself, muttering: "Gotta get bigger; gotta get stronger." The floor was littered with similar syringes.

Len fought back tears. No wonder the young man's heart had stopped. And he'd been such a clean-cut kid. Was this hell, then?

A polished tone was speaking in the background. Was it God about to pass judgment on him? Len wondered.

"...The veteran has found a rude return to the ring. Who knows what kind of spell the good doctor's put on him, Einstein."

"I don't know, but I hope he puts one on you. He's done a public service. Now 'Chrome Dome' can go crawl back into the woodwork."

Len shook the cobwebs from his head and opened his eyes, which stung. His vision was blurred. Perspiration and blood were pouring down his face. His forehead had split as he struck the railing. But you're alive, he thought. Had it been only a dream, a hallucination, then?

"It's a shame," said the announcer, "that a classy veteran like the Bomber has to have a defining moment like this."

"You're breakin' my heart," said his broadcast partner, a blond in a sequined jacket that had "Einstein" printed on its back and "E = MC<sup>2</sup>" centered directly below it.

Defining moment? said Len to himself, wiping blood from his face with his hands. Was that what he'd seen in the dream - scenes that defined the others' lives? He did not want a similar fate for himself. He wanted his defining moment to reflect his love of his family.

"A beast like this has no business in the profession. He's certifiable."

"Crazy like a fox, Assassin. See how he leaves the ring just long enough to punish his man, then gets back in before the ten-count? Tactics. That's my type of guy."

"Here comes the behemoth again. Come on, Mister Referee, stop this abortion."

Doctor Voodoo delivered several blows to the chest with the sole of a bare foot, then slid beneath the bottom rope and, on all fours, barked like a dog.

"The Bomber - busted wide open, flat on his back, has probably wrestled for the last time."

"Thank you, Doctor Voodoo," said Einstein.

A spectator leaned over the security railing and poured beer onto Len's head. Laughter ensued. None of the guards came forward to eject the perpetrator. Too battered to be insulted, the cold draft actually cleared Len's mind somewhat. He rolled onto his hands and knees and crawled forward. Three fingers of his left hand were numb, as had been the case when the Assassin had piledrived him. He hoped it wouldn't persist for months as previously.

"The Bomber has no idea!"

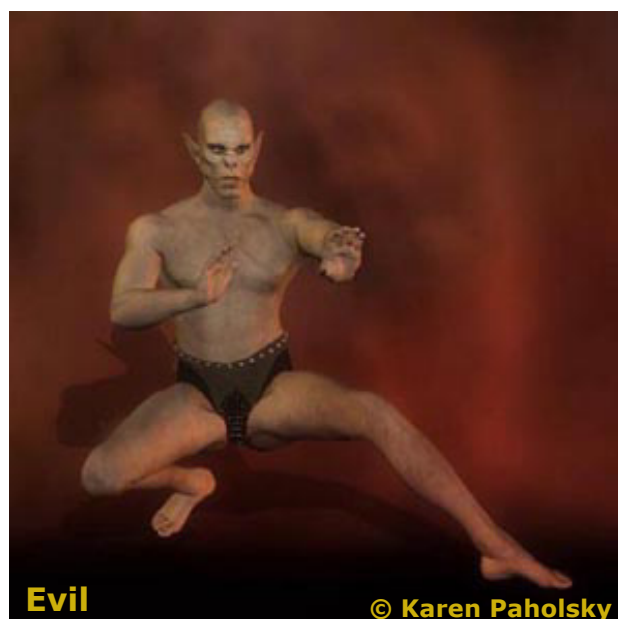
"Gino?" said Len, squinting, gazing up toward the voice.

A yank at his trunks signaled that he was to cooperate in having himself "thrown" back into the ring. He somehow managed the short leap and roll under the bottom rope. He spotted black pants and groped at them.

"Call it, Gilly," he said. "I'm hurt."

The bell did not ring. Everything was a blur, blood and perspiration again blinding him. His mind was clearer, however. If only he could get to his feet and run away. As humiliating as that would be, it would spare him an injury that would prevent the supporting of his family. Fighting back was hopeless. Even at his peak he would have been no match for such strength and stamina.

Doctor Voodoo was posturing now, working the crowd, which remained lethargic. Len lay still,



pondering strategy, conserving energy.

He's not wearin' one, he thought, as his opponent stood over him, slapping his face. It'd be dirty pool, he knew, but what choice did he have? How would he manage it, though?

He was pulled to his feet and whipped into the ropes. Upon recoil, he broke into a sprint, ducked under a clothesline, which grazed the top of his head, stopped, and whirled faster than his opponent would ever have expected. His leg was kicking forward as Doctor Voodoo turned. The blow caught him squarely in the crotch, and he let out a cry that silenced the house. He fell to the mat and rolled from side to side, groaning. Len staggered forward, fell atop him, and wrapped him in a Cradle.

"Count, Gilly," he said, looking at the referee, who backed away, fearful, unsure of himself. "If you won't, I will."

He pounded out a resounding three-count and, powered by a fresh rush of adrenaline, leaped to his feet and thrust his hands into the air triumphantly. The audience sat stunned. Len called to the timekeeper, who doubled as the ring announcer.

"Ring the bell, Bobby," he demanded.

Seated, arms folded to his chest, the diminutive man smirked. Angered, Len burst through the ropes toward him. Bob rose and backed away, against the railing.

"Gimme the hammer, Bobby, or I'll ring the bell with your head."

He snatched it, rapped it against the bell, and again raised his arms in victory. Suddenly the crowd rose in unison and roared, realizing it'd witnessed a rarity, a "shoot," a match turned real. Teetering, still bleeding, Len circled ringside exchanging high-fives with fans. A chant of "Bomber! Bomber!" filled the air. Flashbulbs were going off like mad. A paramedic was attending Doctor Voodoo. At the broadcast table the Assassin was laughing so hard as to be unable to offer commentary.

"How was that, Gee?" said Len, smiling through red tributaries. "Hey, Mil, I'm awright, hon. I'm comin' home."

Now even Einstein was laughing.

Bob climbed into the ring. The microphone was lowered. "The winner of the match, as a result of disqualification - Doctor Voooo-dooooo."

The crowd jeered and peppered Bob with paper balls. He fled to the timekeeper's table, which did not provide shelter, as he was showered with beverage, which had him scurrying backstage, to the delight of

many.

Junior was waiting at the dressing room, fuming. It seemed his fine suit was about to burst at the seams. He leveled threats - banishment, litigation, injury.

"I quit," said Len defiantly, going nose to nose with the promoter.

"Do you know how much money I had invested in him?"

"You shoulda thought of that before, dirtbag. I do you a favor an' you wipe the floor wit' me? What's that? Your ol' man must be turnin' over in his grave."

Junior leaped at him and was restrained by several men in suits, who pried him from Len's throat.

"Here," said Len, running a hand across his face; "you want 'juice'? Here's your 'juice'." He wiped it on Junior's lapel.

Again Junior tried to get at him, futilely.

"Get outta here," said the Mercenary into Len's ear. "Here's your stuff. Take it an scam. Tell Mil I said 'hi'."

Towel pressed to his forehead to stem the bleeding, he drove home, aching from head to toe. As he turned onto his street he noted a crowd in the vicinity of his house. He feared his wife had gone berserk. To his surprise, cheers erupted as he approached. "Len-ny! Len-ny!" neighbors cried. His wife threw herself into his arms. His sons followed. He staggered but they kept him upright.

"Thank God for cable TV," he said, inciting laughter, reveling in his defining moment.

**Vic Fortezza** was born in Brooklyn in 1950 to Sicilian immigrants. He has had 26 stories published in small press magazines. He is a contributing editor at [buzzle.com](http://buzzle.com). He has self-published a novel, *Close to the Edge*, and an e-novel, *Killing*. He pays his bills doing data entry in the Gold futures pit in Manhattan.



**SpinningS...intense tales of life**

# Arrival

By Edward Rodosek

It is strange.

It is so strange. Something is happening to me.

I have this feeling—somewhere inside me, something new is filling me to overflowing, something totally unknown.

This is not what I am used to.

I do not have that many experiences. My memory does not go back that far. That is why I do not know what it is, this new feeling. Until now, I have never encountered such uneasiness. I have never had such a sudden need to do something.

Something hazy, but important and urgent too. I wish . . . I want . . . Oh, but I cannot say what.

My head has a stray thought; a confusing thought which quickly fades away before I can register it. I understand that this new something is forcing me to change my present situation.

This feeling—it did not start suddenly.

It began slowly and gradually. At the beginning, it had been so small, so slight; I had not realized it was there at all. Back then I thought I had imagined it all. Later this something started growing. It became clearer, stronger and more defined. Now I am sure that I did not imagine it.

This something, which at first was only a feeling, is now a vital need, a strong, impetuous and pressing necessity. I cannot overlook it and I cannot reject it. It is too demanding. I suddenly feel that I am not satisfied with this constant, tranquil laziness in my quiet haven. Although I have always found security here, I have never been treated badly. I am not obliged to do any work. Everything is under control and somebody else manages everything for me.

I do not know if there is only one or if there are others. I do not know who these others are and until now, it did not interest me at all.

Those mysterious others are somewhere outside my haven. They never come inside to me but I know they are real because I can hear them. I hear two different kinds of sounds. The first sound is always the same; a calm, regular rhythm I am used to that regularly lulls me to sleep. The second sound from outside is different, and sometimes it changes from

a barely audible murmur to a loud roaring tumult. The sounds from outside are muffled and somehow hollow. The walls of my haven must be thick and solid.

I am secure inside here, and I enjoy that. At least it was good until I felt that unknown feeling. Until now, everything has been all right. I get food and drink regularly, and I do not know the feelings of hunger and thirst. My provisions come from those outside in an edible form that needs no preparation. I simply consume them.

I am not at all choosy. I am completely satisfied with everything I get and with everything that happens to me. But maybe this is just because I have never had the opportunity to compare different things. Here inside I have no great choices. Why should I complain, after all? Everything was agreeable here until now.

Always, until now. Suddenly this unknown, violent need has come on me.

Here it is agreeably warm and comfortable enough to sleep. I feel that I sleep a lot. I am a rather slumberous person but it seems to me that earlier I slept even more. But now my sleep has become more and more restless. I must often change my position on my resting-place, but none of the positions suit me for long. Endlessly I toss and turn, flinging myself back and forth and then coiling myself up. I don't think there is anything wrong with my bed. It is the same as always. Maybe there is something wrong with me, both when I am asleep and when I am awake.

I feel for the first time that I must do something urgently. Anything. I do not know what.

The cause of my present discontent is probably internal. For a while now it had seemed to me that there was not enough space in my haven. It is too tight in here, not enough space to move around. Sometimes I wondered why I had been so patient until now. Why did I not realize how cramped and tight my little haven was? If those outside—whoever they are—have closed me in here, why were they not more generous with the space? They have so much space—at least I assume so—and it does not seem right that they would not give me a little more.

I cannot be calm and quiet in here any more. It is becoming unbearable. How can I stay here inside and just wait for a change, without doing something to help? I cannot be idle any more. I also have to help make these changes come about. Now this strange unrest is filling my whole body. A curious discord, a puzzling wish for—I do not know what—to do something. What must I do to somehow change these unbearable conditions here inside? Is it possible at all and, if not, what then?

Then I will go somewhere else. Anywhere, to a

different place, any place.

I feel an enormous store of new energy inside. I will use this energy for something. Something useful or something funny, it does not matter. Somewhere inside me something is burning, moving hither and thither. Increasingly, I feel I must somehow push apart the tight walls of my haven, these hermetic borders, these cruel limits to my freedom. Now I realize these limits do not make a home but a severe jail. I feel my feverish pulse; my blood is flowing stronger through my imprisoned body, condemned to a permanently useless inertia.

I tremble all over and feel every fibre of my strong, taut muscles that can do nothing at all. I cannot feebly wait here inside, not any more. I must go outside.

I simply must escape. Somehow I have to break out of my prison even if conditions on the outside are uncertain. I do not know what awaits me outside. I know nothing of the unknown external world. Until now, I have never been anywhere else except here in my everlasting prison.

What is it like outside, anyway?  
U n k n o w n .  
D a n g e r o u s ?  
Ferocious?

Now I am afraid, I am very afraid. But my wish to get out of here is even stronger than my fear. It is becoming more and more urgent. Oh, I will go off if I do not

escape. I cannot stay here inside any more; I can't stand it any longer. That mysterious longing for something, that urgent need rages inside me. It is becoming increasingly violent.

If I do not leave this place right away I will suffocate. Out, out!

I am straining all my young unused muscles, so willing to act. I am pressing strongly against the walls with my back and my legs, harder and harder. Now I can hear some loud sounds from outside. They are strong

and in some ways, strange. Those voices are unusual. They are totally different to the earlier ones, and they are deeply touching. I have never heard such voices before. I am pushing the tight walls that surround me, I am pressing against them with all my strength. I persist I will not give up. But the walls are strong - flexible but tough. During my pushing, the walls have in some strange way extended a little until I think they will split. A moment later, they contract again and I am once again enclosed in the stuffy interior of my everlasting prison.

But now I see the walls are a little closer than before and now I have even less space than in the past. Oh no! I do not like this. I cannot allow this, I must resist.

Once again, I am pushing the walls away. Strongly. Furiously. All my muscles are strained and tense with

the pain but in the end, despite everything, I have to give up. I notice the walls are much closer now; they enclose me completely and tightly. I am frightened. What is happening? Why do these threatening walls m o v e spontaneously toward me? What do they intend to do to me? Now the walls are squeezing me. They are becoming in some strange way almost alive, they are compressing my body. Maybe they want to punish me.



My fear increases.

Soon I will not be able to move my arms and legs any more because they are tightly pressed against my body. I try to kick my legs but this is not possible any more. I resist. I will not surrender. Now I am angry, furious and this gives me a new strength. Just for a moment, I manage to widen the rest of my space, but then my trembling muscles collapse and the walls of my jail clasp me tightly. They are strangling me and then they start to push me

somewhere further. This is hurting me. Those strange sounds from outside become louder and louder. My head is now stuck in a narrow tunnel, a moment later my shoulders are inside it as well, then my chest, my back and my hips. I am in despair. The walls stop moving suddenly, but the contractions continue. The pain increases; one moment more and the walls will crush me completely. I will become unconscious—there is no way out, it is the end!

And then, suddenly, the contractions stop - it becomes cold and a sharp light dazzles me and I start to choke, all in one minute. I twist helplessly, open my mouth widely, I am trying to catch something that I urgently need and then—a strong clap on my buttocks and the refreshing air fills my lungs for the very first time.

Once again, I hear those strange touching voices. They are near, clear and penetrating and somehow I know they are coming from me.

**Edward Alexander Rodosek** was born in 1952 in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. He graduated as an Engineer of Civil Engineering, Ljubljana, 1974 and attained Doctor of Technical Science, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1981. Professor Dr Rodosek is a member of numerous domestic and international committees and recipient of Recognition of Merits of two foreign Universities. He has published three books in the sphere of organisation and planning in civil engineering and over hundred papers, research works and science articles in domestic and foreign publications. His intellectual pursuits include being an author of ten collections of short sci fi stories and three novels in Slovenia. Several of his short stories have been published in SF magazines in USA and UK.

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Erik Linzbach

## Rant of the Damned

Romantic fantasies and ideals  
Slurred in the speech of impairment  
Float through lives without  
Having ever existed at all  
Products of black and white films  
The stars of cigarette smoking dreamers  
Inhaled by all, believed by some  
Discussed over lattes in coffee shops  
And held by the few as poetry.

Hurt laying deep in superstar eyes  
Escapes the shallows and swims for the breakers  
And from the sea, regrets and fantasies  
Will watch a world implode  
Overloaded by lies and prejudices  
Only the truest of the good will survive  
And I will be swimming in the lake of fire  
Along with most, doomed forever,  
Damned for all of this eternity.

# Medic Five,

## *Where are you?*

**By Karen Paholsky RN**

There was a time in my career when things moved a bit slower, life seemed much simpler and co-workers were considered family. That time has come and gone and has been replaced with the high financing of the HMO system and medical care for those who can afford it. Hospital nursing has become a place where a warm body on your shift is considered qualified care for patients who are in need. This story did not happen in our now hectic times, but in a time when we depended on each other both professionally and as your extended family away from home. It has been nearly 18 years since the incident with Medic Five, but I remember it as if it were yesterday. This story is true and is dedicated to the man who pulled off a miracle.

Case in Point:

Medic 5 had been dispatched to a small rural town for a "man down" call. These types of calls can be anything from an old man who fell out of his chair, to a patient in full cardiac arrest. On this particular day, it was the latter. I remember the radio bellowing out its call to the hospital. It was a voice I knew well. Guy Hanson had been a paramedic for some time and was excellent at his job. We often kidded each other as nurses and medics will do, but we also respected each other and our positions in the emergency field. I always knew I could count on him for excellent patient care and also as a dedicated friend.

"Base Station One this is Medic 5 with a full arrest," Guy said as a matter of fact. There was no need to get excited. The basic rule is that once a patient has gone into full arrest, you can't possibly do anything to make them worse. Everything you do from that point on can only serve to help the patient. Guy and I had run many codes together on the radio, Guy in the field, and myself at the base station on the other end of a two-way radio.

Guy reported the care he and Richard, his EMT, had initiated on the patient, the usual cookbook items that go with any full arrest. "IV has been started, patient is intubated with 7.0 tube and first round meds have been given. We are in route to your facility, and CPR is in progress with a 15 minute ETA." I listened and jotted down Guy's assessment so I could ready the doctor and ER crew for what was coming in. Respiratory therapy had been called, and the doctor notified. We were ready.

And then there was silence.

With most medic calls, the paramedic stays in close contact with the nurse so we can see through his words just what is going on. We rely on his description of the patient to give us a visual image so we can anticipate the care that will be required. This wasn't happening today.

"Damn it, Guy," I thought, "what the hell is going on?" I tried over and over to raise him on the radio. "Medic 5, this is Base station one, do you copy?" My pleas were met with static and silence. Where were they and what was wrong? I called the ambulance dispatch and asked, "Where is medic 5?" They answered me, "They are in route to you," but even dispatch was unable to raise them on the radio.

I was about to send out a police unit when the silence was suddenly broken and I heard Guy's voice, somewhat excited, but more irritated.

"Base Station One, this is Medic 5, be advised that we are delayed, our ambulance has just blown up!" There was no fear in his voice, just a matter of fact for me to jot down on my run sheet.

I was the one in shock and disbelief. I answered him as calmly as possible. "Medic 5, repeat? Your unit has exploded?" The answer came back quickly. This time I could hear the background noises of the fire engines and traffic. "Base Station One, that is affirmative, we had enough time to get our patient, the drug box and the radio out before it blew up. Be advised that we are just outside the local air base." On any other occasion, the Air Force never left the confines of their secure base. They had a fully equipped ambulance and hospital, but the general rule was: if it didn't happen on the base, they didn't get involved. Today was different. They did dispatch an ambulance and assisted in transporting the patient to their own hospital. Although their attempts to save this patient were appreciated, the patient had passed away long before Medic 5 had ever arrived at the house to begin with. This was not a save.



It was later that we learned that while driving code three to our hospital, a car had flagged Richard down and yelled to him that the ambulance was on fire. Richard and Guy had no way of knowing what was burning just beneath them. They had pulled over and extracted the things they needed as their unit burned. Time was of the essence. The ambulances carried several small oxygen tanks and one large tank located just underneath the paramedic bench in the back of the unit. While waiting for the fire department to arrive, the burning flames engulfed the large tank and the entire unit exploded into oblivion.

I silently thanked the bystander who had flagged the unit down, and I thanked the patient who had been long deceased. If not this call, maybe it would have been another and perhaps the heroes that did their jobs without hesitation would not have been so lucky. That day, they survived.

As another unit pulled into the ambulance bay at the hospital, I saw the two men jump out and walk toward the hospital. They were a bit sullen that their patient had not made it, but they were both alive. One look into Guy's eyes said it all. We both smiled, and knew that no other words were needed.

Today Guy has furthered his career and is a flight nurse in the Midwest. I send him an occasional email and he always responds. Sadly, Richard died several years ago after a long battle with throat cancer. He still remains alive in our memories. I know that Guy will read this story some day, and so I dedicate this story to him, to a man with no fear, and with the highest integrity. This is for you Guy Hanson, with admiration for the man that you were and the man that you have become.