

KATZ CONTEMPORARY

Bill McCoy - The Call

Michel Mettler

I. 30 Seconds above Helgoland

Jack must have confused the low-volt with the high-volt switch again. But the force that flat-tened us on to the desert sands of Köpenick back in 2061 has now catapulted us in the direction of the mesosphere. My head snaps back, forward, back again, and the soft, felty crackling of the ligaments reminds me of my whiplash trauma in the Ardennes anno 44 when the reverse thrust swung my dinghy around so hard on the village square in Saint-Marceau-La-Flize that I practically lost my mind. There must be something wrong with the altitude compensation - Jack's face behind the helmet visor seems to be getting flushed the bluish red color of Japanese Umeboshi plums. "Jack!" I scream above the howling of the centrifugal stabilizer, but Jack is hanging motionless, sort of slumped over in his harness. He has either over- or underdosed on nanomed. And our course has probably deviated a couple of Hessian degrees from the correct parabola. While the flapping sound is heard of single tiles clattering out of the thermal protective shield on the outside wall, I collect my thoughts by doing a few YOGA AND EGOISM exercises - then my right hand resolutely grabs Jack's space suit. I seem to feel something mushy underneath, and the sight of Jack's face does nothing to allay the nasty suspicion rising up inside me. Deep below us, the clouds curl up into Hubbard's famous "black bread formation". The particle wind is still whooshing around our capsule. I have the feeling that we are decelerating by several Roehms. I think briefly of Dikika, Jack's wife, a Korean delegate to the Central Council of East Ossetia, who is probably still bedded at the moment in her sweet dreams of interplanetary world peace, while the Nevada desert with its shiitake-like protuberances is racing by underneath our windscreen like an undulating pizza ai funghi. Along with the climate change, which has turned the Barisan Mountains of Sumatra into the world's most important winter resort for sports, so much in our lives has become disjointed, which can not all be attributed to the climate. In the tropical camp of Baikonur for example, way back then, under Kazachistianian palm trees, when cheap jokes were being bandied back and forth like cricket balls from Hawaii shirt to Hawaii shirt and in the evenings at the Absolut Vodka Party, the small talk seamlessly segued into inner thoughts fizzing like mental champagne, we had spent weeks learning how to cope with such emergencies in the capsule - "pedantnik" was what we had dubbed our grumpy, uigurian DI. So the next items on the checklist should have been engraved in my memory. But unfortunately our vessel is a prototype from Pyongyang's new generation BASTION, and even my intimate knowledge of the latest in interstellar realism will not be of much use in trying to find the emergency ejector device. At this point, when I am suffering from the greatest helplessness since Pyongyang took control in Washington, a call comes in - at the most inconvenient time one is tempted to say. It's John-from-Beyond, who I saw at the end of the zero-fifties burning up in the fireball of an exploding ion jet engine. Irony of fate: that very day POLICE ACADUMMY I was running on our interior screens. Let me add that I have been hearing impaired since that incident on the Nevada base and that I wear a capsule-shaped hearing aid in my inner ear, a so-called cochlear implant, a kind of probe. This bang was too loud even for a drilled ear.

But more about that later. John-from-Beyond has been keeping in touch regularly ever since, via induction call on my implant. My wife Dikika - stupidly, all of our wives have been called Dikika since the "Girl of Dikika" came to life again in Ethiopia - anyway, my wife has made a habit of teasing me about it. "So, has John-from-Beyond called again lately?" she says when she thinks my ideas are getting too crack brained, her complexion turning into the ochre tones of disapproval, which have recently cropped up in every penny dreadful on the market. "Dodgeball. The Air Yurt. ManTram and BamBus. Cosmodrome," I recite, all of it from Gun-tram Renzenbrink's THE MAGIC OF WORDS. A couple of Inge Albert's weightless iambs from THE SNUFF occur to me. Lots of useless efforts to ignore John-from-Beyond's throaty organ, which is now thrumming the most disturbing incantations my cochlear implant has ever heard. In the meantime, the whitish spawn that has been spreading out in my field of view since our unplanned start refuses to disappear. On the contrary, it keeps puffing itself up even more! Are the floury white balls the abodes of unknown beings that live within our gaze? Within our gazes? And while, all certainty about the outcome of the undertaking dwindles in the wake of these speculations, there is only one thing I still know for certain: that our orbit is going to drop us at the exact northern vertex of Heiderup, a mere three nautical Rommels away from the legendary site where Fletcher Henderson found the "antique space capsule" two hundred years ago.