



Do You Believe?

C.J. Henderson

*“Do you believe in faeries? Say quick that you believe.
If you believe, clap your hands.”*

J.M. Barrie

C'MON, FELLAS," THE NEWSMAN SHOUTED PITIFULLY, "GIMME A break!"

It was the horrible sincerity the figure before him could muster, with his pitifully outstretched arms and quickly moistening eyes, that made the balding man grin so. Turning to his friends, he shuddered in mock horror, then asked;

"Well, what'daya think? Can we tolerate his presence?"

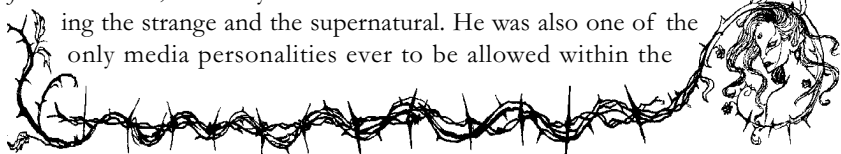
"I don't know," added another at the table, a tall, thin gentleman with intense blue eyes. "I do hate it so when his lower lip starts quivering."

"Did I mention," offered the newsman with practiced timing, "that the next round is, of course, on the network?"

"Now I could be seein' my way to forgivin' the lad his indiscretions," offered an aromatic type of extremely disreputable note. "Considerin' his warm proposal of a proper makin' of penance, as it were."

"Oh, good," chuckled the balding man, "now I'm in the dubious position of not only supportin' the local pariah, but also havin' it known that I agreed with Darby on somethin'."

Most who were gathered there that night got the joke. The newsman was Marv Richards, head anchor and main producer of *Challenge of the Unknown*, the only network news show dedicated to covering the strange and the supernatural. He was also one of the only media personalities ever to be allowed within the



walls of the Narkane. On every world, there was one spot where all dimensions met. In some it appeared to be a marketplace; in some a temple; some a school. Often it was a library. Whatever the shade of a particular reality, however, that same set of square footage was always a place where people gathered, reverently, to engage in social discourse.

In the reality where they called the third planet from the yellow sun in their Sol system “the Earth,” that spot was the Narkane, Manhattan’s most exclusive nite spot, and a focusing point for all manner of things. It was known across the widest band of the dimensional spanway as quite possibly the most interesting club experience in the “Hip” universe. Within its walls, any two creatures, entities, or semi-mobilized philosophies could bump up against each other.

The Narkane was, of course, a natural haven for scoundrels determined to transport illicit goods across inter-dimensional boundaries. Which meant on any night there you might be rubbing elbows with smugglers bent on moving anything from Romulan ale to the square eggs of the Andes. In a nutshell, it was the ultimate Spe’keasy—a place where anyone and anything could take to the dance floor. Which was more than proved by the crew at table 15, who were finally waving Richards over.

The oldest was Professor Zackery Goward. Doctor of philosophy and theology, he had spent the better part of his life in the search for the strange and the bizarre. Paul Morcey, the balding man next to him, was not nearly as cultured as “the Doc,” but, as a detective working out of the London Agency, he had come across enough of the strange and the bizarre to last most men several lifetimes. And completing the trio was one of the least reputable beings for miles around wherever he went. A storyteller known simply as Darby, he was the last word in “odious,” the kind of person who made those rare strains of sentient toilet scum feel good about themselves.

As Richards turned the threesome into a quartet, he indicated to one of the bartenders that the table should be hit once all around by pointing to the claw hammer hanging above it. Sliding into one of the table’s two vacant seats, his ears leaped into the conversation as Darby growled;

“Oh, auk now—it t’weren’t so bad.”

“Not so bad,” sputtered Goward. “You had sex with a blind nun by telling her you were Jesus.”

“Well and sure, now hasn’t every young scamp played a merry prank or two in his time?”

“Yeah,” drawled Morcey, grimacing as anyone would who had to admit to knowing Darby, “but you made a tape of the evenin’ and sent it in to ‘America’s Most Embarrassing Videos.’”

“That was you?” All heads turned toward Richards. His eyes filling with admiration, he said, “They won Sweeps hands-down with that. Forced ad revenues up for their network three points. Nice work, dude.”

“Sweet bride of the night,” groaned Morcey. “Now we got two of ’em.” The detective’s mouth hung open a moment, as he listened to a chuckling Richards say;