

Smite the hindmost of them, Joshua 10:19

by Larry Strattnr

I was doing some housework, cleaning the bathroom and kitchen floors. The new steamer gizmo I bought shoots steam out to clean the tile and linoleum floors. I'm telling you, it works! The only problem is, as soon as you buy one they come out with another one with more adjustability and cleaning pad shapes so you can get into tighter and more oddly shaped corners. Being constantly rendered obsolete pisses me off.

"You're paranoid." My wife said. "Get over it. That's the way it always is. You're paranoid about everything."

Fine for her to say. She goes to work while I'm home cleaning the house, doing the wash and cooking dinner. I'm thinking to myself. *How did this happen?* Maybe if I'd been a better programmer I'd still be working. Maybe if I was an Indian programmer living in Mumbai I'd still be working for ten cents per hour.

The doorbell rings and I go to the door to answer but can't quite see who's out there. I open the door.

"Hello, I'm Marlene, and this is April," says the older of two women. Both Marlene and April wear ankle length taupe dresses. The name Hester Prynne flashes through my mind. Marlene smiles at me with her lips pressed together. The young girl standing with her can't be more than fourteen or fifteen although she is tall for her age. She too smiles. She has an intricate set of braces on her teeth. I can't tell if Marlene has teeth. I return their smiles cautiously.

"We are calling on folks to promote reading of the Bible," says Marlene holding up what appears to be a paperback version. "The world is changing, yet God continues to love us. You, April, me. All of us. His love is described in His book. There are verses we all should read."

"I do that." I lie. I don't want to argue. "Thanks for stopping by." I move to close the door.

"I also have a booklet here," says Marlene, "highlighting the verses most helpful in guiding your life." She produces a nicely done, full color pamphlet. There is a glowing sphere trailing a streak of malevolent fire on the cover. I recognize the handiwork of a sect that has always pissed me off. "We would urge you to read this." Marlene says.

"Certainly." I say, taking the brochure. "May I ask you a question?"

"Of course" says Marlene. April hasn't said a word and continues to smile through her braces.

"Didn't you predict the world was going to be destroyed by a huge asteroid three times now and it hasn't happened? Do you think someone might be trying to tell you something?"

Halfway through my question Marlene's face changes from serene to apoplectic. "I am so sick of you stupid heathen unbelievers! I walk my ass off all day and all you can think of is some stupid rumor! I've had it! Answer his question April!" April is pulling an ugly black pistol out of the folds of her dress, still smiling at me.

I slam the front door and dive into the entryway closet. I can hear the Pow! Pow! Pow! of the pistol out on the porch. Thank God I put the metal sheathing on the inside of the door. The bullets make bumps where the metal stops them. The bumps are pretty big. Good thing she wasn't firing those machined-bronze, armor-piercing slugs. Damn.

I lie on the closet floor amidst winter shoes; galoshes, dust bunnies and my paranoia, listening to the floor mop hissing steam where I propped it up in the kitchen while I answered the door. The directions said if you leave the mop in one spot too long it will discolor the floor. Oh well.

When the coast seems clear I stand up, hanging coats framing my face. I carefully peek out the side window beside the door. Marlene and April are standing on the porch of the house across the

street talking animatedly to its owner, Mrs. Newman. I hope their doctrine has a little more flexibility over at the odd numbered houses.

