

The Thing on Marlow Street

by Matt Kang

No one really knew how it got there.

Old Ms. Simpson, on the morning of Saturday, June 14th, 1998, on a quiet street of Blanketstown, Pennsylvania, spotted it when she was putting out the garbage. Not knowing what it was, what business it had being there, she called the police; she thought of it as her duty as an American. After all, if she could get through World War II with no more than a couple of letters and numbers on her arm, she could, sure as hell, get through this.

Down the street, Ms. Simpson watched as the black-and-white cruiser turned the corner. A surprised glint on the windshield, and the car immediately slowed down, the grill magnetically locked towards the thing, approaching it slow and steady. The sirens and lights were bright and loud, but the old woman had been around long to enough to see that there was a timidity in the way the wheels of that car rolled on—so much like the tread of a tank on its procession to a threadbare but animate schoolhouse in Prague.

They got out of the car, the men in black, glint from their badges flashing in the afternoon bake. *Caws* from midnight black crows on midnight black wires as the men left the car, an expression of consternation held identical between the officer and his partner. The old lady had nothing to offer, except to ask when the thing would be gone.

The partner asked: “What's the protocol on this?”, to which the officer replied, “Protocol? We don't even know what *this* fucking thing is. Cordon off the street. Imma radio this in.”

And as the police tape unraveled in a canary stream from the tape roll in the partner's hand, men left their homes standing with hands on hips and squinting, on an off-center spot on their lawn, perplexion on their complexion, at the thing on Marlow Street. They held close their wives, who fidgeted a little in their grip.

Calls were made in unknown places, large voices telling inquisitive ears, "Did you see the thing over on Marlow? No, I—well, no—I can't really describe it...just come and look." Soon one of those ears was Archie Fender, the news station chief at KWAX.

A van was sent out, the same wheel roll, approach; timid eyes obscured behind the colored fade of sunglasses. More vans came. Choppers carved circles and squares in the sky with the thing as the center of its orbit, forming a lattice of overhanging sounds—*whush-a-whush-a-whush*.

Soon the world's attention was on the thing on Marlow Street. Newswomen stood in front of the thing, on their faces caked-on makeup and an insipid-to-serious expression, telling the camera lens in languorous language absolutely everything about absolutely nothing. *Mystery object found in Pennsylvania* chugged by on a towering ribbon of red lights on news tickers in Times Square. On message boards on computer screens people said in pubescent, pixelated tones that its alien, of course; open your eyes, sheeple!

In Washington, an embattled president was told by the Secretary of State that there was an unidentifiable artifact in Pennsylvania. His mind—glad for the reprieve of public opinion from his scandals—more on the next televised "talk" with the American public about stained dresses—came to the fastidious decision (while jabbing at the air with his enclosed thumb) to send in the National Guard, flanked by a group of scientists. "Which scientists?" "Any will do, just make sure they bring lab coats for the cameras."

From the chopper cameras onto outdated television screens in shop windows, fatigued men in fatigues rushed to all corners, the men with guns separating the plainclothes people like sage-and-ebony oil in the water of the the throng. Impassive, they pushed the people back, an oppressive cascade washing away all feeling. Intermittent shouts of order.

Scientists gathered on whiteboards, gathering samples of the surrounding area, interpreting the phenomena in terms of mass and force, integrals and derivatives. The results were inconclusive, they said, there is no quantifiable explanation for the existence of this anomalous substance. But perhaps if they had the funding for more research in electromagnetic fields...

The orders now were to go in. Men and women readied themselves, covering themselves in bright *haz-mat* suits so that not a particle could permeate through to the person inside. The onlookers wondered what would happen as they passed through the soldiered layer onto the threshold of empty blacktop that led to the thing.

They cautiously stepped up to it, the tips of their rubber gloves brushing the face of the thing. They peered through the the glare on their fiberglass-shielded helmets, not able to discern any remarkable qualities. All they could say over the microphone system was that, well, it didn't feel like it could exist in this world.

After all the head-scratching and tire-kicking, nothing could be determined about it. So, with a dark, deep shadow cast over his face from the brim of his cap, the General of the National Guard proposed a solution.

A firing squad was assembled in a long line, guns of cold, hard steel across their chest.

Ready. A unison of bolt-action clicks.

Aim. A kick-line of raised carbine barrels.

Fire. A blast, a roar. Then silence.

A small boy, framed underneath a police barricade, gave a mortified yell, and tugged on his fathers trousers.

“Daddy, why did they shoot those two people?”

