

# **Francisca Montoya's Almanac of Things That Can Kill You**

## **Shaenon K. Garrity**

### **Allergic Reaction**

If you get ill after eating or touching something that didn't make anyone else sick, you may be allergic to it. Especially if there's a rash. Allergies are caused by your body rejecting substances it doesn't like. There is no treatment but to avoid those substances. Fortunately, only a few types of allergies can kill you. Nut allergies, for instance. Bee stings. But I imagine most people with fatal allergies to common things have died by now.

I am allergic to wool, soy, peanuts, and pollen. Only my peanut allergy can kill me.

### **Appendicitis**

There is an organ in your body called the appendix, and sometimes it goes bad and kills you. The only treatment is to cut it out of your body. I don't recommend trying this. You'll bleed to death. On the other hand, death from appendicitis is long and excruciatingly painful. So maybe try surgery. There's something to be said for the quicker death.

# Complex God

Scott Sigler

## WOODWARD AVENUE

Dr. Petra Prawatt pulled her jacket tighter and shivered against the cold of a Michigan winter. There wasn't much left to block the icy, stiff breeze that whipped in off the river, not since the nuke had crushed most of the buildings in downtown Detroit. The wind tugged lightly at her yellow-and-red-striped scarf and blew a lock of her blue hair into her eyes. She brushed it away.

She stood on rubble-strewn Woodward Avenue, turning slowly to take in a desolate scene lit up by the setting sun. Snow clung to the few bits of buildings that remained standing, making them look like broken teeth in a mouth rotted brown.

It wouldn't look like that for long, though.

*Everyone loves a parade, she thought. Especially parades that aren't radioactive.*

Two people were with her: Roger DuMonde, a grad assistant five years her senior, and Amy Stinson, governor of Michigan. The wind drove scattered flakes of snow, some that fell from the sky and some that were dusted up from the two or three inches that had accumulated on the ground. Nearby was a still photographer, from the *Detroit News*, Stinson's

two-man security team, and a two-person video crew. The video crew was also Stinson's, of course; if something went wrong—or if nothing at all happened—the governor didn't want that video going viral.

Petra had met the governor twice before, once at a press conference announcing the project, and once at Stinson's office. Normally, Stinson beamed with the confidence and power expected of a woman that many thought would soon make a run for the presidency. Standing in the ruins of Detroit, however, that confidence seemed forced. The governor clearly wanted this to be over as soon as possible.

Or maybe she was just annoyed by the red balloon that floated from a string held in her right hand.

“Dr. Prawatt,” the governor said quietly, “can I let go of this ridiculous thing?”

Petra shook her head. “You promised at the press conference. Everyone heard you.” She raised a noisemaker to her lips and blew. The curled paper shot out to the sound of a whimsical whistle. “Just hold on to it for a little while longer, Governor. After all, what's a parade without balloons?”

“This isn't a parade,” Stinson said. “This is a progress check. So how about we check some progress?”

Petra smiled. How would Stinson react when she saw how far things had come along? Petra's weekly reports made it clear she was closing in on the project's objective, but she'd held back a few details; she was much closer to the goal than she'd let on.

# The Day the World Turned Upside Down

Thomas Olde Heuvelt

That day, the world turned upside down.

We didn't know why it happened. Some of us wondered whether it was our fault. Whether we had been praying to the wrong gods, or whether we had said the wrong things. But it wasn't like that—the world simply turned upside down.

Scientists lucky enough to survive the event said that it wasn't so much that gravity had disappeared, but that it had flipped over, as if our planet had suddenly lost all of its mass and was surrounded by some colossal object. Religious people, unlucky enough to survive the miracle, said that life was give and take, and that God was now, after so many years of giving, finally taking. But there was no colossal object, and being taken by God is a dubious given.

It happened like a bolt from the blue, at ten-o-five AM. There was a moment, one magical moment, when you could see us all floating in mid-air halfway up our living rooms, upside-down in whatever pose we had been in at the time—coffee drinkers drinking coffee from inverted coffee cups, lovers clinging to each other's falling bodies, old men groping for slipping hairpieces, children crowing and cats screeching, all of us surrounded by the asteroids of our possessions. It was a moment of perfect madness, frozen in time.

Then began the groaning and the clattering, the roars and

# **BONUS APRIL FOOL'S STORY**

## **The Legend of RoboNinja by RoboNinja (Translated by Brooke Bolander)**

He had a name once, doled out by a loving mother in some antecedent time and place so distant it seems impossible the stars moved in their current polity. Gone now. Fallen and trampled to an obscure macule in the roadside mud, like his vanished arms and legs and viscera. Nothing would be changed in the knowing.

RoboNinja. A name for garbled tongues and garbled times. Interstate mudlarks peer at him from beneath grotty brows as he passes, eyes the size of headlamps reflecting the gelid glow of his visor. He once tried obscuring the light with handfuls of ash, smeared across LEDs and his shining silver carapace like the penitential marks of a sect long forgotten. It had worked for a time, until the monsoon came mocking once more.

What alloy is he, that does not rust or falter? What spirit turns the clockwork heart, the hydraulics hissing at each joint like chained and malignant demons? Why do his knees have running lights? None step forward to ask. He walks the highways alone. The blasted countryside sighs with relief to see the back of him, an unlucky silver coin passed on to some