

BAD TO WORSE

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To Three Children



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**BAD TO
WORSE**

**ROBERT
EDESON**



FREMANTLE PRESS

O LORD.

I am lost in my enemy's forest.
His quarrel darkens to the Counting Owl
winding the curse of his father's ruin.
Now a shadow lengthens upon me.

MY SON.

Listen to the thriced.
Then is deliverance yours, the Owl become
gracious, the tyrant stopped in his shadow
and the infidel turned, if from bad to worse.

Leonardo di Boccardo
Conversaciones e Silenzio

Foreword	5
1 Twicing Bread.....	11
2 Station BWRD (Transcript).....	22
3 Anna Camenes to Richard Worse.....	29
4 Richard Worse to Thomas Worse (1).....	33
5 Area Pi	35
6 Anna to Edvard Tøssentern	48
7 The Circular Sea.....	50
8 Nicholas Misgivington to Richard Worse	60
9 Richard Worse to Thomas Worse (2)	64
10 Regan Mortiss	67
11 Glimpse	74
12 Nusero's Map	86
13 The Intuition Reminder	95
14 Friday Latest	100
15 Monsignor Papaduomo.....	104
16 Camelline Shipping	111
17 Mockingbird.....	118
18 Haberdash.....	125
19 High Rollers	134
20 Core Temperature.....	145
21 Returns Policy.....	158
22 English in Perth.....	165
23 Volcano Street.....	175
24 Simile of the Cave	188
25 Latent Image	202

26 <i>Amicus Curiae</i>	213
27 Incident at Bakehouse	222
28 Back at the BHEH.....	231
29 Virgil in the Underworld.....	237
30 <i>In Articulo Mortis</i>	244
31 Mr Wotsan	249
Appendix A. Advanced Commentary, Sources, and Reader Exercises.....	254
Appendix B. Where to Look for Unicorns	284
Appendix C. Evading Tax in the Underworld.....	286
Appendix D. Spiritual Purity Self-test	288
Dedication to the Players.....	289
Index of First and Final Mentions.....	290
Acknowledgements.....	298
About the Author	300
Warning to the Reader.....	301

1 TWICING BREAD

DANTE, ARIZONA. 1877

Keff leaned forward, squinting to read, one hand combing his horse's mane.

'Tom Worse, Baker. All ya k-neads met. What's k-neads mean, Rigo?'

'Jesus, Keff, ya dope, it says needs, spelled wrong. Smells good. Get's a loaf.'

Keff stayed mounted, slightly standing in the stirrups as he called loudly, 'Baker!'

A man stepped from the shadowed interior; he was wearing a blue-white striped long apron and a black bandanna scarf. He picked flour from his hands as he spoke. 'The name's Worse.'

'Hey Rigo. He dressed like a butcher. You wanna meat loaf? Could be worse.'

Keff folded over in mirth, recovering just enough to demand, 'Get the man a loaf, and I mean bread, mister.'

Worse looked at Keff unresponsively, then at Rigo, who returned a cold stare.

'I was a butcher once,' said Worse. 'Miss it, somehow. Miss the blood.'

Rigo's expression didn't change. 'What side was you, baker? Where was you butcherin'?'

'What's that to you? War's long gone.'

'Shut your mouth, baker. No one answers back to Mr Rigo.' Keff's flare of temper made him tense in the saddle. His

horse felt it, moving sideways nervously. Worse read the animal, and the rider, and ignored them.

‘Side of principle, where I could find it. Butchering mongrels, where I could find them. Service of humanity generally.’

Worse glanced at Keff, then back to Rigo. ‘Reckon I missed some.’

Their gaze was locked for a few seconds, interrupted by Keff.

‘Mister, folks die from passing insults. You wanna die in a fleck of a town called Dant?’

‘Dant-tay, Keff,’ Rigo shot at him irritably.

‘Like the Inferno, Keff. That’s where the Host gets baked.’

Worse turned back into the shadows, re-emerging with a wrapped loaf. He approached Rigo on the side away from Keff, and passed him the bread.

‘I call this loaf a twicing. Enough for you both. That’ll be a dollar.’

Rigo took the bread and looked at Keff, as if to an interpreter.

‘Baker, nobody pays a dollar a loaf. And Mr Rigo, he don’t pay nothing. You know who Mr Rigo is? Hey, baker?’

‘I know. He’s a Mortiss brother. I’ve seen a reward poster. Only, up close he’s even uglier than an artist can draw without dying. That’s a half-dollar for the bread, half for delivery. No credit.’

Keff stared at Worse, shocked. Then, deciding they were dealing with a simpleton, he began to laugh again. Worse was looking steadily at Rigo, who pulled sharply on a strap, causing his horse to round on Worse, snorting loudly. Worse didn’t recoil, instead reaching up and stroking the mare’s face, speaking softly. In return, the horse nuzzled, but Rigo pulled her away with the left rein.

‘So that’s a dollar, or the bread returned, or I’ll take the horse in lieu, if that’s your preference.’

‘Go to hell, baker.’ Rigo tore at the bread with rotten teeth,

and spat a mouthful towards Worse.

‘That doesn’t qualify as returned. Now it’s a dollar or the horse,’ said Worse.

Rigo placed the loaf against the horn of his saddle, freeing his hand to hover above a right gun holster.

‘Now, mister. I’ve killed better men for lesser talk. You get back to the kitchen, you hear me? I’ll take the bread by way of apology.’

‘I’ll take the dollar by way of payment.’

Rigo straightened in his saddle.

‘There’s another payment I like to make, baker. I call it a bullet.’

Worse reached up to stroke the mare.

‘No way that would cover expenses. I’d need to take the belt-full, in fairness.’

Keff required time to take in Worse’s response, then burst into laughter. He was silenced by a glare from Rigo, and quickly recovered his role.

‘Baker, no one talks back smart to Mr Rigo. You upset Mr Rigo, you upset the brothers. And the Mortiss brothers, baker, they don’t forgive and they don’t forget. You got family, baker?’

Worse ignored him, whispering horse words to the mare but looking at Rigo, who was the first to break the silence.

‘Know what I think, baker? We’re gonna turn our beasts and ride away, with the bread, with the dollar, with the horse, and less one bullet if you raise objection.’

‘And here’s what I think,’ said Worse. ‘You turn away, get yourselves shot as thieving mongrels. I take the dollar, the horse and the cartridge belt for my trouble. You get the bread and a pauper’s burial, and the town benevolent fund has the leftovers.’

‘You telling me you shoot customers? That ain’t good business.’

Rigo’s eyes were darting around the shopfront, assessing his risk, checking for witnesses.

‘I’m selective, obviously. Just uncivil folk like yourselves, to keep up the bakehouse tone. And discouraging non-payers makes sense because it cuts losses and simplifies bookkeeping, which is definitely good business. Plus it’s effective deterrence. Plus it eliminates reoffenders. Whole of Dante knows. You should have come inside and read the conditions of purchase. Pay or die, in summary.’

‘Fuck you, baker,’ said Keff. ‘Kill him, Rigo.’

‘Think I might just do that,’ said Rigo slowly, eyes now fixed on Worse. He backed his horse up a few paces, testing the situation. It offered Worse a clearer view of Keff, but he spoke to Rigo.

‘Your mare’s uneven shod on the right foreleg. Be tender before long.’

‘You saying you’re a farrier now, baker?’ Keff’s tone was mocking.

Worse answered without looking at him. ‘I keep a forge alight, out back. All part of Dante’s inferno services. Just don’t try raising a gallop, or she’ll fall lame.’

‘You mind your bad mouth over my mount, mister,’ said Rigo.

Worse wrung his hands again, wiping flour onto the apron, at the same time loosening the tie at his waist.

‘That’ll now be two dollars, accounting for the delay and inconvenience, the expert veterinarian opinion, and the cost of conversation with the dimwitted across there.’

Keff looked stunned. Rigo continued staring, weighing up Worse. Eventually Keff found his place.

‘You got a big mouth for a baker, mister. Kill him, Rigo.’

‘I’m saying to you, baker, you make your peace real quick with the Lord, as there ain’t no preacher hereabouts gonna help you along with a prayer of the departed,’ said Rigo.

As if feeling the heat, Worse reached up to loosen his neck scarf, flicking it to the ground. Underneath was an ecclesiastical collar.

‘Preacher says the baker’s pure and deserving of Heaven. The

Lord tells the preacher two sinners on horseback will appear, each impossibly more stupid than the other, riding to the Inferno. The Lord wants only the horses spared. He's very particular: only the horses.'

Rigo and Keff stared at Worse.

'That'll be four dollars, being just two extra for the words of the Almighty.'

Rigo and Keff were silent.

Worse rubbed his hands together, then clapped, creating a small cloud of flour dust. 'There's something you may not know about flour.'

Rigo's right hand now rested within a fist length of his revolver. 'And what might that be, preacher?'

'Well, with all the understandable God-fearing nervousness and such, the shakes, the sweating and the like, it gives a better pistol grip on that lady-type pearl inlay you've got there.'

As he spoke, he casually pulled the apron sling forward over his head. 'I'd dust up my right hand, if I were you.'

Rigo's gun hand flinched slightly, and he moved it forward to rest on his thigh. Worse knew that he was drying his palm.

'You got a big mouth for a baker, mister. Kill him, Rigo.'

'You hear that, preacher? My friend here, who's a believin' man, finds the evil in your words deservin' of being shot, and I have to agree with him. Now you commune your last time with the Maker because from where I'm sitting I see two guns against the meek pickings of flour dough.'

Worse raised both hands in a sign of benediction.

'Behold the power of two. Now hear what the Lord says of sinners: In number is damnation, for the multiplicity expandeth wrong in the same measure it divideth good.'

'Kill him, Rigo.'

'Then for each among the many, his days to Judgement will become hours, even as the hours of his perdition will be made days.'

'You got a big mouth for a baker, mister. Kill him, Rigo.'

‘Well, preacher, the way I see it we still have the power of two guns against the God-speaking, hand-wringing impotence of one pastry-baking mortal,’ said Rigo.

‘Hear again the lot of sinners: The weakness of one will ever surpasseth the strength of another, wherefore the power of two bringeth the downfall of both.’

‘Kill him, Rigo.’

But Rigo had been thinking. His face turned even uglier as he smiled. ‘We don’t need to do that, Keff. We’re too smart to be wasted on the labours of killin’. Better we just get the law to help out with an official town hanging, courtesy of the local justice.’ Rigo lifted up the bread, displaying the missing bite. ‘What have we got? We was sold a defective product; extortion, threatening behaviour, impersonating a man of the cloth, talk of horse stealing. What’s the sheriff gonna say to all that?’

Rigo looked pleased with himself. He put the loaf back on the saddle, stealing a glance at Keff, who was grinning victoriously.

Worse’s left hand pulled his apron right down, exposing a right-sided gun holster, and a tin star on his lapel.

‘Sheriff’s going to say: Pay or die, mongrel.’

Keff jumped with surprise, his horse responding with a complaining snort. Rigo’s self-satisfied smile vanished.

‘That’ll now be eight dollars, to cover the humiliation of public disrobing, and time taken when the baker could be stoking the Lord’s inferno. Plus another eight for the sheriff’s impartial mediation. Plus sixteen in fees for the deeply considered jurisprudence determination in tort and mercantile law, as well as ongoing pastoral care from the preacher. Total thirty-two. For that you get complimentary flour dusting if the pearl feels damp. Judge Thomas M Worse will oversee collection of the dues and issue a receipt of the court.’

Worse held out his left hand for the money.

‘Fuck you, baker.’ This time it was Rigo; Keff had decided to stay out of the argument. ‘Now, we gonna turn our mounts and ride away from here. You’re not gonna shoot a man in the back,

being a sheriff and a preacher and a judge, are you?’

‘Well now, you seem to have forgotten. First off, I’m a certificated mongrel killer. In that event, where the lead goes in depends on which way the mongrel happens to be running, and I say that’s all his choosing.’

‘Kill him, Rigo. You can take him. Just kill him.’

Rigo wasn’t so sure. He dried his gun hand on the denim again. ‘You’re saying we can’t ride off, without getting shot front or back, unless we pay you thirty-two dollars?’

‘Correct, but you’re not keeping up with the invoicing. Sixty-four dollars, the advice of a mongrel butcher being highly priced around these parts.’

‘Kill him, Rigo. You gotta kill the fucker.’

‘Shut up, Keff. I’m thinking.’

Again Rigo’s hand wiped along his thigh.

‘While you’re thinking, I’m asking once only that Keff here slowly take his weapon and drop it to the ground, then dismount on the side I can see him, hands in the air.’

‘Now why would I do that, baker?’

‘Because I’m arresting you for incitement of a felony, being soliciting a third party killing, as well as bad hygiene, general antisocial attitude and an unworldly ugliness sufficient to cause public alarm, all of which are in violation of town statutes. First the weapon, then get down.’

Keff suddenly found himself a leading actor, and he wasn’t used to it. He looked at Rigo, who continued staring at Worse. Keff reasoned that he had nothing to lose and everything to gain by repeating the crime.

‘Kill him, Rigo.’

But Rigo wasn’t offering any comfort. He kept looking at Worse, and his right hand was now constantly wiping back and forward. Keff was left to find his own way out.

‘Now what you gonna do if I just refuse, baker?’ The voice lacked depth.

‘Well, Keff, you’re asking for your fortune told from a mongrel

killer right now, and you know his talk is very expensive. Can you figure out what that question might cost you, Keff?

‘Christ. Fuck you, baker.’

Keff’s right hand reached for his gun, but not slowly enough. Nor was it quickly enough. Before his weapon was completely drawn, he slumped forward in the saddle, his jaw anchored over the pommel and a point-45 bloodless roundel centred on his forehead.

The event took Rigo completely off guard. He turned to look at Keff and started, audibly catching his breath. Worse reholstered his gun.

‘Resisting arrest. Cursing a lawman. Attempted murder. There’s a sweet, uncomplicated judicial killing, I’d say, with a Churchman’s blessing and the aroma of fresh-baked bread. What could be kinder?’

Rigo was unable to see Keff’s head wound and couldn’t know where he was hit.

‘My friend needs a doctor, mister, plain as day. Call the town quack, for Christ’s sake. Get him some help.’

‘We’re humane and caring folk in Dante. Doc always attends a shooting.’

Worse reached to a rear pocket with his left hand, producing a stethoscope that he slung lazily around his neck. He tilted his head sideways and studied Keff quizzically.

‘Nothing I can do, sadly. I pronounce his life extinct. Cause of death: execrable depravity. An evocative final pose, you’ll agree; doubled up like that in homage to the twicing, I expect. Reverend, should you say some words?’

Worse muttered in Latin, hands clasped before him and eyes downcast. Then he looked up brightly.

‘Now, in the matter of payment. There’s sixty-four dollars arrears, plus another sixty-four in sheriff costs, attending physician’s comprehensive consultation, and the preacher’s solemn Bible talk customized to the unredeemed. Within that, there’s a one-off penalty for the final blaspheme which I

determine offensive to the Divinity as well as all bakers. There are also burial expenses for one, plus retainer for a second anticipated. I should say those interment fees have been generously discounted by the town mortician, on account of the corpse not being too messy, supplying its own transportation, and the economy of a two-for-one excavation. So that's one hundred twenty-eight dollars owing, cash only, or the horse in kind.'

Worse clapped his hands sharply in the manner of using a gavel. '*Res judicata*, Judge Worse presiding. Be assured the offer of flour *gratis* still holds.'

Rigo, though looking at Worse, seemed to be staring trance-like into the distance. He hadn't even seen the gun draw, it was so fast. When he spoke, it was emptily, without emotional presence.

'You're telling me you're the undertaker as well in this stinking town?'

'As the sign says, all your needs met. Temporarily. Funny thing is I'm a stand-in, but it's lie-down easy compared with baking.'

Rigo continued looking absently at Worse, only half listening, his mouth fallen open. He was trying to understand how one small misjudgement about a dollar could come to this. But his thinking was blunted, circling ineffectually around intimation, incomprehension, and irrelevancy.

'What happened to the undertaker?' he asked flatly.

'Appetite for bread beyond his means.'

Keff's horse suddenly sensed her deadweight. She snorted and bucked a little, shifting her rump away. The effect was to point Keff in Rigo's direction. What Rigo saw froze his spine: only a supremely confident gunfighter would make a single head shot under pressure.

'As I was saying, one hundred twenty-eight dollars. It's an exceptional loaf, being the staff of the Lord's own inferno. And, of course, you get to eat both ends of it now, blessed be Keff.'

Rigo spent the following seconds in a chill turmoil of indecision and resolve. All his life, the weapon at his side had served to settle conflict. Now for the first time, when he had no choice, it looked too hard.

His hand stopped rubbing, and Worse noticed.

'You might want to close your mouth for the afterlife,' Worse advised, 'it being sulphurous where you're headed.'

'You're one son-of-a-bitch, baker.'

Rigo was fast. His hand, so near to his gun at the start, had a grip of the pearl inlay, the barrel fully drawn from the holster and almost aligned. But his cold-sweated trigger finger wasn't yet closed on the steel when his head jerked back with the impact of Worse's shot. At the same time, his horse reared up in fright, flinging rider and loose kit backwards from the saddle.

Worse stepped forward to calm the mare, speaking in the same reassuring voice as before, holding the leather down firmly, stroking her face. He would care for her, reshoe her, and rename her. 'Twicing', perhaps, in recognition of the day's exchange: this beautiful, spirited animal for the loaf now settled in the Main Street dust before its buyer's sightless stare and gaping mouth.

An account of the gunfight is given in the *Dante Judgment Daily* of June 11, 1877, under the heading '**Incident at Bakehouse**'. It had been witnessed from an open second-floor window in a lodging house by one Miss Baker, seamstress, whose attention was drawn when she thought she heard her surname called. Two weeks later, an unnamed wit penned the epitaph:

Here lies one called Rigo Mortiss.
Drank like a hare but drew like a tortoise.
Couldn't shoot and couldn't spell
Funny how he's shot to Hell
Signing in with *Rigor Mortis*.

(Such crude and heartless parodies were common in the era.) In fact, the Mortiss grave would have been unmarked. The historic Boot Hill cemetery has itself long been buried, currently under a shopping emporium.

The hapless Keff is remembered only for a single utterance, because it proved prophetic, to the effect that the Mortiss brothers would never forgive and never forget. He was probably Kevin Dupain Fister, who was wanted in Hericho for horse stealing and multiple killings.

[Editor's note Readers are referred at this point to Appendix A. The author has advised that supplementary materials provided there ideally should be read concurrently with corresponding chapters in the text. Alison Pilcrow, UITA Press]

2 STATION BWRD (TRANSCRIPT)

[Music fade]

[Studio] That number was for Shirley from Duran who says ‘Come back, baby; Haley’s moved out and I love you again’. You are tuned to BWRD, the voice of Dante, Arizona. We’ll be back with more requests after the traffic report, and remember, folks, our lines are always open. We want to hear from all the good citizens of Dante about your news, your troubles and your joys. Stay on BWRD, the station in Dante, for Dante.

[Traffic report. Commercials]

[Studio] This is Mike Pincher back with you on BWRD, bringing you your favourite music and talk-show program. Right now, we have some breaking news for you folks. Seems like an executive jet has disappeared from radar while transiting the Dante tracking sector, about eighty miles north of town. That would be deep inside the Bleacher Desert, so let’s hope those airborne folk are okay up there. Our next number is from Duran, who dedicates the track to Marilyn with the message ‘Come back, baby; Shirley’s moved out and I love you again’.

[Music]

[Studio] Nice choice, Duran. Let’s hope Marilyn is tuned to the best airplay in the west, BWRD, the station making wireless waves in Dante. Now we have an update on that missing

airplane for you, folks. Our Flyover traffic reporter Dan Jammer is heading north with pilot Buzz Wingles to take a look in the Bleacher. We now cross live to your station BWRD's own search and rescue 'copter mission. Dan, what can you tell us about events. Is disappearing from radar necessarily a bad thing?

[Jammer] It is, Mike. Nearly always. According to Dante control tower, what we have here is radar dropout, loss of voice contact as well as transponder silence. The combination can't be good. It usually means a midair catastrophe, Mike.

[Studio] Dan, do you have information about the plane? Do you have ID on the crew and passengers?

[Jammer] We have preliminary information, Mike. The plane's an FC100 Condor, a new executive model. Apparently it was being ferried from White Sands to San Diego for its owner.

[Studio] And on board? Any ID on the folk on board?

[Jammer] Just the pilot, Mike. We have confirmation there was just the pilot and no passengers, Mike. At this stage we have no ID on the pilot but the indications are that he is an employee of the plane's designer. That's the Flight Control Corporation in New Mexico, Mike.

[Studio] Where are you now, Dan, relative to the possible down zone?

[Jammer] We're well inside the Bleacher, Mike, closing in on the coordinates. I can tell you it is barren and lifeless down there—Buzz! Over there! Something shining!

[Studio] Dan? What are you seeing?

[Wingles] Dante Control Tower. This is BWRD Gridlock Flyover in the Bleacher last contact zone. We have a visual north-west five miles. We're going in for a look. Permission requested one hundred feet over point.

[Dante Control] Dante Control to Gridlock Flyover. Roger that. Affirmative one hundred feet. Bearing north-west. Gridlock Flyover, you will be sub radar. Repeat, you will be sub radar. Maintain voice contact. Advise status two-minute parcels. Gridlock Flyover, you have Sheriff Bird tracking. State visual on Sheriff Bird.

[Studio] Dan. What's happening?

[Static. Speech inaudible]

[Wingles] Gridlock Flyover to Dante Control. Confirm radar advisory. Confirm two-minute parcels. Negative visual for Sheriff Bird. Approaching possible airplane wreckage. Four miles.

[Studio] Dan?

[Jammer] Mike, we can see something shiny on the ground, about four miles away. We're heading towards it. It's hard to make out. Doesn't look like an intact plane, unfortunately. You would have heard there's a sheriff's helicopter on the way as well. Buzz? Can you communicate with the sheriff?

[Wingles] BWRD Gridlock Flyover to Sheriff Bird. Do you read me?

[Static] This is Sheriff Bird. Loud and clear, Gridlock Flyover. What do you see?

[Wingles] We have visual, two, three miles. Confirm aircraft wreckage. One large component.

[Studio] Dan? You are streaming through to our listeners. What do you have for us?

[Jammer] Mike, we are closing in on the wreckage. Buzz is just pulling around and taking us down to one hundred feet for a better look. It's a big bit of the plane. Hard to see yet but I think it's the wings, still joined. There seem to be no other parts of the plane in view, no fuselage or undercarriage. Yes, it's the two main wings still joined but no fuselage between them. The rest could be miles away. There's a scar in the desert floor for about two hundred yards as if it came in on a shallow angle. [Shouting] Buzz! Buzz! Look! Jesus Christ! Oh shit, excuse me.

[Broadcast delay triggered: 4 sec. Six word deletion: -1 to -6]

[Studio] You're okay with that, Dan. What is it?

[Sheriff Bird] Sheriff Bird to Gridlock Flyover. Sheriff Thomas M Worse speaking. Station BWRD: maintain radio silence UFN. Gridlock Flyover: report what you see.

[Wingles] Tom, you're not going to believe this. A guy just stepped out from the shade under the wing and climbed onto it and he's waving at us.

[Sheriff] Buzz, are you saying there's a man down there waving at you? Where did he come from? Do you see a vehicle? Tyre tracks? Is he some crazy desert hiker?

[Wingles] None of that. You know hikers don't last six hours out here. He looks great. Tom, we're not graded to put down

on sand. We'll drop some bottled water and stand off till you arrive.

[Sheriff] Roger that, Buzz. Good work, Gridlock Flyover. We have you on screen. Our ETA is three minutes. BWRD, you may resume communications.

[Studio] Dan! You can see a man on the wreckage? You think the pilot survived?

[Jammer] Mike. No way that's possible. We see the two main wings still held together by the spar. That's all. Nothing else.

[Studio] Except a man down there. Could he have parachuted down, then found the wing to shelter from the sun?

[Jammer] Well, I guess. He's got something in his hand, waving at us. Can you make out what it is, Buzz?

[Wingles] No way that's a parachute, Dan. Looks just like a ribbon or a necktie to me. Gridlock Flyover to Sheriff Bird, I see you closing.

[Sheriff] Roger that, Gridlock Flyover.

[Studio] This is Radio BWRD, Mike Pincher in the studio, bringing you news of an executive jet crash up in the Bleacher. If you've just joined us, I can tell you we have our very own Dan Jammer and pilot Buzz Wingles over the wreckage now. They have clear visual of a man on the ground. At this stage we don't know if he's a survivor or unrelated to the crash. The sheriff's 'copter is close to the scene. Unlike Buzz's, it has the sand shielding to put down in the desert and rescue the man. Dan, what's the latest?

[Jammer] Thanks, Mike. The sheriff's machine is just landing. The scene's a bit obscured by the dust blow at the moment. We're pulling away some as we don't have sand-proofed mechanicals, Mike.

[Studio] I understand that, Dan. Can you see anything yet?

[Jammer] Mike, Sheriff Thomas M Worse is walking over to the wreckage and the man on the wing has jumped onto the sand to meet him. He looks completely uninjured, Mike. It's amazing, if he came down on that piece of debris.

[Studio] Dan, we have reports from Dante Control Tower that the plane was at thirty thousand feet when it was lost to radar. There's no way that could be the pilot you're looking at down there.

[Jammer] You're right, Mike. That's a crazy thought. I wonder who he is though. Mike, Sheriff Worse and the man are just getting into the other helicopter. Buzz, can we see if we can get the story down there?

[Wingles] Sheriff Bird. This is BWRD Gridlock Flyover standing off. I advise you are open mike to BWRD listeners. Sheriff Worse, do you have an ID on the man? How was it that he was on the ground right there?

[Sheriff] This is Sheriff Thomas M Worse Sixth. The sole occupant of the FC100 Condor jet that disintegrated in flight north of Dante this morning was the pilot, Walter Reckles. I am happy to report that Walter Reckles survived and has been rescued from the desert crash site. He will be flown to Dante for a medical check. He states that his only injury is a bruised shoulder where he was hit by a water bottle. I will issue a

comprehensive statement later today. Dr Reckles advises that when the plane broke up after colliding with a rogue drone he piloted the wing section down to a smooth landing in the desert. He says this was possible due to the good math and a spare necktie. I have nothing further to add at this stage. Over and out.

[Jammer] There you have it, Mike. The pilot, a Walter Reckles, is alive and well. The sheriff's helicopter is just leaving the scene to return to Dante. We can expect the Transportation Safety Board will have their investigators on the ground later today. They'll need to locate the rest of this Condor jet and recover the flight recorder. As well as search for the wreckage of the drone, I guess. But what we can say at this stage, Mike, is that we have witnessed a miracle up here this morning. This is Dan Jammer reporting from BWRD Gridlock Flyover up in the Bleacher. Over to you, Mike.

[Studio] Thanks, Dan. Well folks, you heard it first on Station BWRD. The air crash in the Bleacher has a happy ending. Let's hear some happy music to go with it. Here's a number requested by Duran and dedicated to a lucky lady called Simone. Duran says 'Come back, baby; Marilyn's moved out and I love you again'.

3 ANNA CAMENES TO RICHARD WORSE

Dear Richard

I don't think you ever met Walter Reckles from the US, but I know we spoke of him. He was the designer of Edvard's research balloon *Abel*, and I remember you commented on the ingenuity of the brim shape when Edvard and I were wearing his patent tornado-proof hats in Madregalo last year.

We have just heard that he miraculously survived a plane crash in Arizona, which we are all naturally very pleased about. I am including a link to a news report, partly because it's an amazing story, but also because I couldn't help noticing the local sheriff's name, and wondered if there might be a family connection to you.

You are probably unaware that I write occasional pieces for the popular aerospace press, and some time ago I interviewed Walter for a piece in *Aviation Reviews* on the very subject of surviving aircraft catastrophes. There's an abridged version in the book by Darian, but if you don't have that and are interested you can find the full interview at the second link below. *AR* has asked me to go back to New Mexico to reinterview him, but that will take some tricky scheduling for us both. I do think you and Walter would get on if you were to meet.

Rodney Thwistle tells us constantly what a fabulous time he had with you in Perth. He seems a much more talkative soul than when his radius of experience ended at the Cambridge ring road. Edvard says that in conversational word count, Australian wine may soon surpass mathematics, which I'm sure you will agree is a very surprising development for Rodney.

Edvard's monograph on Thomas MacAkerman and the early documentation of weaver fish is launching next month. After the events in Madregalo, he had to rewrite completely the Afterword, which took considerable time. I believe UITA Press is to make it available in Australia following release in the UK.

On the subject of weaver fish, we both read Darian's book with a mixture of delight and dismay. Granted, he's a balanced and meticulous historian, but it's still quite disconcerting to see one's own unwitting presence in those events placed on the historical record for all to see. We wonder what your thoughts might be.

Edvard and I are still trying to organize our lives so that we also can take up your offer of a guided tour of the Margaret River region. I hope it will be in the near future. Equally, should circumstances bring you to England, you must stay with us in Chaucer Road.

I expect you know that Millie has been offered a visiting professorship in Perth, though I am unsure as to when she will take it up. She recently re-joined Rodney's department, and has become a Fellow of Nazarene College.

Nicholas is back in the Ferendes now that the dreadful revolution business is over. Apparently, they have found an amazing complex of caves deep inside the Joseph Plateau, quite near the LDI station. The exciting thing is that there are prehistoric pictograms and possibly primitive alphabetic elements on the walls. Edvard has been studying photographs sent by Nicholas but, as you might imagine, he is beside himself with impatience to return and explore the site personally.

The other news from out there is that the swints have returned—presumably some of the very ones you released from captivity last year. Nicholas said there were hours of murmuration in the form of a cross over Madregalo before they roosted in the palace. I suppose the fact that the new prince is a man of the cloth has drawn them back. There's forgiveness, if ever there were.

Edvard sends his best wishes. He and I are well, and we hope you are also. Do tell us your news.

With kind regards

Anna

Anna Camenes is a research psychiatrist at the Compton Institute in Cambridge. She is the partner of **Edvard Tøssentern**, a linguistics professor who started the international **Language Diversity Initiative**. His special interest has been the insinuation of weaver fish lore into Ferent languages. An LDI field station in a remote part of the **Ferendes** is managed by **Paulo Cinnamonte**, and has as resident statistician and volunteer factotum **Nicholas Misgivingston**. **Walter Reckles** is an aeronautical engineer and founder of Flight Control Corporation, based in New Mexico. These five previously collaborated in a breakthrough study of the novel embryology and flight science of the Asiatic condor, which is native to the Ferendes. Their paper has not yet appeared but some details are given in the recent history from **A B C Darian**, entitled

The Weaver Fish, which documents events leading up to the Ferende revolution.

Richard Worse is a security analyst working in Perth. He knows personally Anna, Edvard and Nicholas, but not the others. **Rodney Thwistle** is a Cambridge mathematician who has enjoyed a long-standing correspondence with Worse on advanced cryptography algorithms, and recently was Worse's guest on a holiday wine tour of Western Australia.

Millie is **Emily Misgivingston**, Nicholas's sister and also a mathematician. People who know both her and Worse think they would make a good couple, and on occasions hint as much. In the first hours of the Ferende revolution, Worse and Millie together entered the deserted Palace L'Orphania in Madregalo and set free thousands of **swints** kept caged by Prince Nefari, whose violent death began the turmoil. The fact is briefly mentioned in Darian's book. Anna's remark about the newly acceded Crown Prince Arnaba, a theologian and cleric, alludes to the common belief that swints settle only on property that is sanctified in some way.