

Hair Suit

I got a letter that was addressed to "Resident, 124 York Street, City, 35806" and it said "Your garment needs to be picked up immediately at Sam's Cleanery. Due to a recent flood, we will be closed for an extended time." Well, I don't know why it was delivered here, or what a Cleanery is, but I thought that it might have been addressed to the previous resident, so I didn't just toss it. When my wife got home from her weekly Mahjong game, I asked her if she had the forwarding information for the previous owners.

"No, they were going to give it to us, but they left the house selling meeting without doing it. Why do you care? It's been a few years."

"I got a letter that might be addressed to them. I guess I'll drop it in the post office tomorrow. They can forward it."

After dinner, I Googled '*Cleanery*', just to see where and what the letter was all about – sure enough, it's a hip word for a dry cleaner's shop, so I Googled 'Sam's Cleanery', and there were several, one of which was on the south side of Huntsville. I figured that I could pick up the garment, and hold it until the previous owner could be located.

The next day, I drove down to Sam's Cleanery and presented the letter. An ancient Vietnamese woman looked at me suspiciously, but she didn't say anything. She went away for a few minutes and then brought a brown-paper wrapped package, about 3 feet across, and about 1 foot deep. It was tied with some funky old twine. She handed it to me and said "That'll be 8 bucks, sonny. It was very hard to clean."

I was going to explain that it wasn't mine, but I decided that that would take too much time, so I handed her a sawbuck and she handed back change, in quarters, dimes and nickels. I picked up the package, which weighed about 10 pounds, and headed for the door.

"It was very hard to clean," she repeated as I exited.

I was glad to be out of there, and I headed directly home.

By the next day, the package was driving me crazy – I just had to know about the contents, so when my wife went shopping, I put the package on the kitchen table and inspected it. Within 90 seconds, I decided to go ahead and open it. The twine knots were easy to undo, and the paper unfolded noisily. It looked like a white fur coat, so I touched it, and sure enough, it felt luxurious. I picked it up and unfolded it – it was taller than me, and it reminded me of a polar bear suit, like from a Halloween supply store. I flipped it around behind me and let it settle onto my shoulders – it was warm and comfortable. I went ahead and wrapped it around me, and it felt oh, so nice. I caught a glimpse of myself in the china cabinet mirror – I looked like a small polar bear, for sure. In a few minutes, it was getting warm, so I decided to take it off and return it to the package. That's when the terror began.

I couldn't get it off – no matter how hard I struggled, it just conformed more and more to my body, until it was like a second skin. I was freaking out, because the situation was totally illogical. I turned and twisted, and the hair suit became better adapted to my body. After 10 minutes, which seemed like 10 hours, I looked like a freakin' polar bear.

I figured that the suit must have some kind of zipper, so I looked it over, inch by inch, with no luck. I was getting quite warm inside, so I went into the kitchen for a glass of water. I glanced at myself in the

hallway mirror, and I realized how absurd this situation was – without warning, I had morphed into a small polar bear! The way the suit fit, it was not easy to walk, so I gave in to an urge, and started walking on my hands and feet, which was more comfortable. When I reached for a glass of water, the glass slipped out of my grasp – I suddenly realized that my opposable thumb was non-functional. I pondered the broken shards of glass on the floor, and then I had an idea: I could cut the hair suit off, and be free.

I tried and tried, but the hair suit was very sturdy, and I finally gave up in frustration. I grasped a glass with both hands, set it into the sink, ran the water, picked up the glass with both hands, and drank. Most of the water ran down the front of my body, so I repeated the process several times. I heard a buzzing sound in my left ear, which kept getting louder. I swatted a paw at it, and a 3D holographic image popped up right in front of me. It was a polar bear convention. They all looked at me and started jabbering at once.

"Where have you been?"

"How bad has the schedule slipped?"

"Where is Tula-mee?"

"Right," I thought. "Six polar bears sat at a fine oak table grilling me for answers." I just stood still and gathered my thoughts.

"I had an accident – a bad accident. I fell down and got hurt." I rubbed my head, and pretended to have some injuries. I guessed that would save me from answering questions.

One of them looked at me and said "Special Council Too-rab. You should be commended for your hard work, but right now, the entire fleet is orbiting at 2 boola-sorens, ready for the invasion. Please try hard to think: where is Tula-mee, and how bad has the schedule slipped?"

I decided that silence was way better than a lie, so I pretended to faint – that would buy me some time to think about my situation. As I lay on the kitchen floor, the 3D video faded out.

"All right, fool, now what are you going to do with that information? Yeah, let's see – go to the police in your new hair suit and explain about an invasion plan? You'll be in a Looney bin in 5 minutes." I rested and thought.

When I awoke, my wife was entering the kitchen with 2 bags of groceries, as I heard the garage door closing. She shrieked a blood-curdling scream and dropped the grocery bags.

"It's me," I shouted, but she just saw a polar bear, and heard a polar bear's growl. She ran into the bedroom, screaming.

I gotta get outta here – right now! I ran through the back door, and down the street, on all fours.

Chapter 2.

Well, she must have called the police, because the area was swarming with patrol cars. It wasn't easy to hide in a white polar bear suit, but I was successful. I was hot and thirsty, so I went up to one house and tried to turn on the outside water faucet, but the lack of thumbs made it impossible. I found a neighbor who had a swimming pool and drank the chlorine-tasting water. I heard a commotion in the house, and

I realized that they'd spotted me, and they'd probably call the sheriff. I ran out the back of their yard, and into the nearby woods. It's easy for a bear to hide in the woods.

I awoke, feeling very strange. I heard buzzing in my ear, but I didn't swipe at it, since I knew that would answer the phone. I looked around at the wooded area and figured that I could stay hidden here for quite a while. In a few seconds, my stomach told me otherwise.

I looked around for some kind of food, but it all looked like leaves and twigs to me. A nearby squirrel was chattering in a tree, and I decided to see if I could catch it. I instinctively climbed the tree in a few bounds, and was grabbing the squirrel before he even knew what was going on. It was a good feast, but he was rather small for a complete meal, so I went hunting for his friends. By noon, I had eaten 6 of his buddies. The hair suit seemed to enable me to climb very quickly, which was a good thing.

Early afternoon brought smells of food from the restaurants of Huntsville, and I was thirsty again. I wandered towards the nearest smell and saw the back of a Chinese restaurant. It took a moment to get the lid off of the garbage container, and I was staring at lots and lots of food. I enjoyed a big meal, and then went looking for water. A neighborhood pool was satisfying, so I drank my fill. I figured that the hair suit enhanced my powers of smell, so that was good – at least I wouldn't starve to death.

The buzzing never stopped, so I finally waved at my left ear, and the polar bear council popped into view. There were more of them now, and they were arguing loudly. They stopped when I joined them. The leader spoke.

"Special Council Too-rab, we need your input right now. Is it safe to invade? Yes or no. We can't hold back the entire fleet any longer."

"You must wait," I replied. "I have to find Tula-mee, and then I will call you." I figured that would stall them, but I was wrong.

"No, Special Council, you must answer now."

"Then I say no. We will lose if we invade right now. I am sure of that. Let me find Tula-mee and then I will call you."

The room was full of angry polar bears, and it was a nightmare.

I waved my left paw by my ear, and the video went away.

"Okay, now what, bubba? You've put off the invasion, but for how long? Nobody's going to believe this cockamamie story, plus you're on the lam from the cops." Swell.

I saw a little girl get off a school bus and go into her home. A minute later, she came out the back door, where I was drinking from her pool. She screamed a scream that would make Hollywood proud, and then she ran into her house for her mommy. I took off running, as fast as four legs could work. It was obvious to me that the hair suit enhanced my ability to run, but I had no time to savor the thought as I raced towards the woods called the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. In 10 minutes, I was deep inside the beautiful Refuge.

For a week, I feasted on squirrel, pigeon, fox, a small doe, and mushrooms, berries and nuts. Water was easy to get. I needed some time to think, and I started hatching a plan. Somehow, every day I felt more comfortable in the hair suit – was it adapting to me, or the other way around?

One night, a couple of poachers drove into the Refuge, and spotlighted a deer. An arrow brought him down in a heartbeat, and the two red-necks laughed and whooped and hollered as they went for their prize. But they didn't count on me being there...I had venison for two days. I scared them so bad, that

they're probably still running. I used my claws to flatten their tires, and then I broke their bows over the hood of the truck.

A couple of days later, a helicopter circled overhead. I froze. I knew that the hunters had decided to get the police involved, which was a stupid idea – admitting that you're poaching on Federal property is a very serious crime, but I guess they were scared even more than that. I kind of chuckled at their situation.

A few hours later, a forest ranger came tromping through the underbrush. My enhanced sense of smell picked him up long before he could see me. I quickly climbed a tall tree and sat in silence. I could see him poking the deer carcass, and he saw the damaged truck. He called for help on his radio, and then he waited.

Just before sundown, I heard dogs coming, and then I smelled them – uh oh! Two sheriff's, being pulled by hounds were coming my way. I knew that hounds had keener smell than any polar bear ever hoped for, and I realized that I was in quite a predicament. I climbed down the tree and lit out through the dense woods. Even a dog can't catch a bear in the woods. When I crossed a creek, I went upstream about a mile, and then leaped as far as I could towards a patch of briars. The hair suit protected me, but I knew that the hounds would suffer, if they ever got this far. Then I leaped back into the stream and continued upstream for a while. When I got to a wooden bridge, I came out of the water, walked across the bridge several times, and then jumped back into the water, and went upstream more. For the next two hours, I played the game, and then I stopped. I was far enough away that they couldn't possibly catch me, with dogs, at least.

Morning came, and I was hungry and thirsty. It didn't take long to bag my first squirrel, and water was readily available. Wheeler Refuge was over 10,000 acres of wilderness, and I was, more or less, at home. I heard a chopper, but it was south-bound, towards the poachers. I started thinking about the polar bear council more and more, since the buzzing in my ear never stopped. I had to tell someone, but how? I figured that I'd write a letter, but that was stupid – without thumbs, I couldn't write, plus who would read it and believe it? Nobody. What would I write? Earth is about to be invaded by polar bears? Yeah, right. I climbed a tall tree and napped. Night finally came. It was windy, with lightning. I had a bad night, with nightmares.

I woke up soaked. It was cloudy and very windy. I was hungry. Squirrels were hiding out, so I went on the prowl for other small game. It wasn't long before a wild dog came along. I had a feast.

The wind picked up, and by afternoon, I knew that something was really wrong. A sixth-sense told me that a tornado was coming – I had to find shelter. I raced around, looking for a cave or an overhang of some kind, but no luck. Finally, I decided to see if the hair suit had real "bear power," so I stood up against a tree trunk and pushed. I pushed with all my might, and sure enough, the tree cracked and fell. Great! I pushed down a couple more trees, and assembled a shelter, as the rain drove in choking sheets. The sky got green/gray, and I could hear the sound of a freight train. I pulled the tree trunks around me and waited for the worst. A tornado hit like the fist of God, and for 90 seconds, the area was shredded with flying debris. Trees were flying all around, and small animals and birds were whizzing around, mixed with the baseball-size hail. The remnants of a log cabin went whizzing by, and then the funnel cloud was gone, as suddenly as it came. Stuff dropped from the sky for 30 minutes or more. A cow fell about 50 feet away. It was bawling in agony. I quickly ended its suffering. The rain continued for 30 more minutes, and then the sky eased up, and the storm passed. I had beef for dinner.

The buzzing never stopped, so I checked back in. The polar bears were glad to see me.

"We've got coordinates for Tula-mee. You must go there immediately!"

Some kind of GPS coordinates flashed on my viewer, so I memorized them. I didn't know what they were relative to, but I'd do my best to decode them.

I signed off and pondered my next move. Even with the coordinates, I didn't have a clue who Tula-mee was, or why I should find him – it probably was a bad idea anyhow, since he was one of them, and he might insist on the invasion proceeding.

While I pondered, I scratched my right ear. A video display popped up in front of me and a voice growled "?"

I guessed that it was a computer monitor of some kind and I could ask it questions. "What do these coordinates mean?"

It growled "Not understanding."

Okay, let's try it different – "Where is 854-234-5060-15?"

"Relative 300 karo-das, 16 voor-das."

Hmmm..."Guide me there," I commanded.

"Grunt"

I stood up and swept my head around. The computer beeped when I faced north by northwest. I set off in that direction. As long as I stayed on that vector, the computer was quiet, and numbers changed in the viewer. I guessed that I was going towards Tula-mee, whoever that was.

After an hour, the computer beeped, and I halted. It showed me infra-red images of humans, about 1 mile away. Obviously I had to avoid them. I was glad that the hair suit had detection hardware built-in. I went out of the way of the humans, and then finally got back on the vector to Tula-mee. I was tired and thirsty, so I ate and drank, and then grabbed a nap, up a tall tree. By midnight, I was loping along at a pretty good clip, on my way towards Tula-mee. I just hoped that he was worth the trip.

With the help of my video guidance system, I avoided contact with humans, and soon I crossed into Tennessee, near Interstate 65. I continued a slow run, always north by northwest, and I stopped to eat small game, and drink from the local streams. Late that night, I curled up and slept. I dreamed very weird dreams of a red desert, where polar bears wandered freely and wind whipped sand into my fur – and it felt grand. With my family, I killed and ate a seal, by the shore of a small black lake. Across the lake, I saw naked humans being run to ground by my neighbors. As the pathetic humans were devoured, it made me quiver with excitement and anticipation that was like sexual arousal.

In the morning, I leapt towards my target with new strength. The dream stuck in my mind, and I had to admit that it was possible that such a place existed. Nah! It was just a dream...

In south-central Tennessee is a cave, and in the cave are polar bear explorers from *Solo-mare*. The name of the cave is *Tula-mee*, or *Place of Conquerors*. They were very excited to see me! I was treated to a feast, and we were all brothers and sisters. The far wall of the cave displayed a huge projection of the polar bear council. They were very excited that I made it to *Tula-mee*, and they congratulated me many times on my previous accomplishments. Somehow I understood that I had helped them conquer many worlds in the past. After a huge feast, and some kind of mild alcoholic beverage, I slept.

I dreamed about home; I dreamed about being a hero, like Davy Crockett, or Daniel Boone, or maybe I was Captain America or Abraham Lincoln. I went out and conquered Indians, or outlaws, or obstinate rebels, and the bears loved me. I roamed the stars, subjugating inferior races, and expanding the *Solo-mare's* interstellar empire. It was grand. I was grand – a powerful conqueror in a land of infinite wealth.

I awoke to the smell of friends in the cave of *Tula-mee*. I could smell that one of the females was in heat, and she growled quietly at me as she lowered her head to the ground – an invitation to mate.

With my dream still bursting in my soul – dreams of conquest; dreams of world ruled by polar bears; dreams of a watery-blue planet that would soon be part of my legacy. I was a hero. I was Caesar in New Rome. I growled a growl that would make your fur quiver.

After I mated with my new wife, I waved my paw by my left ear and said "Let the invasion begin, my friends."