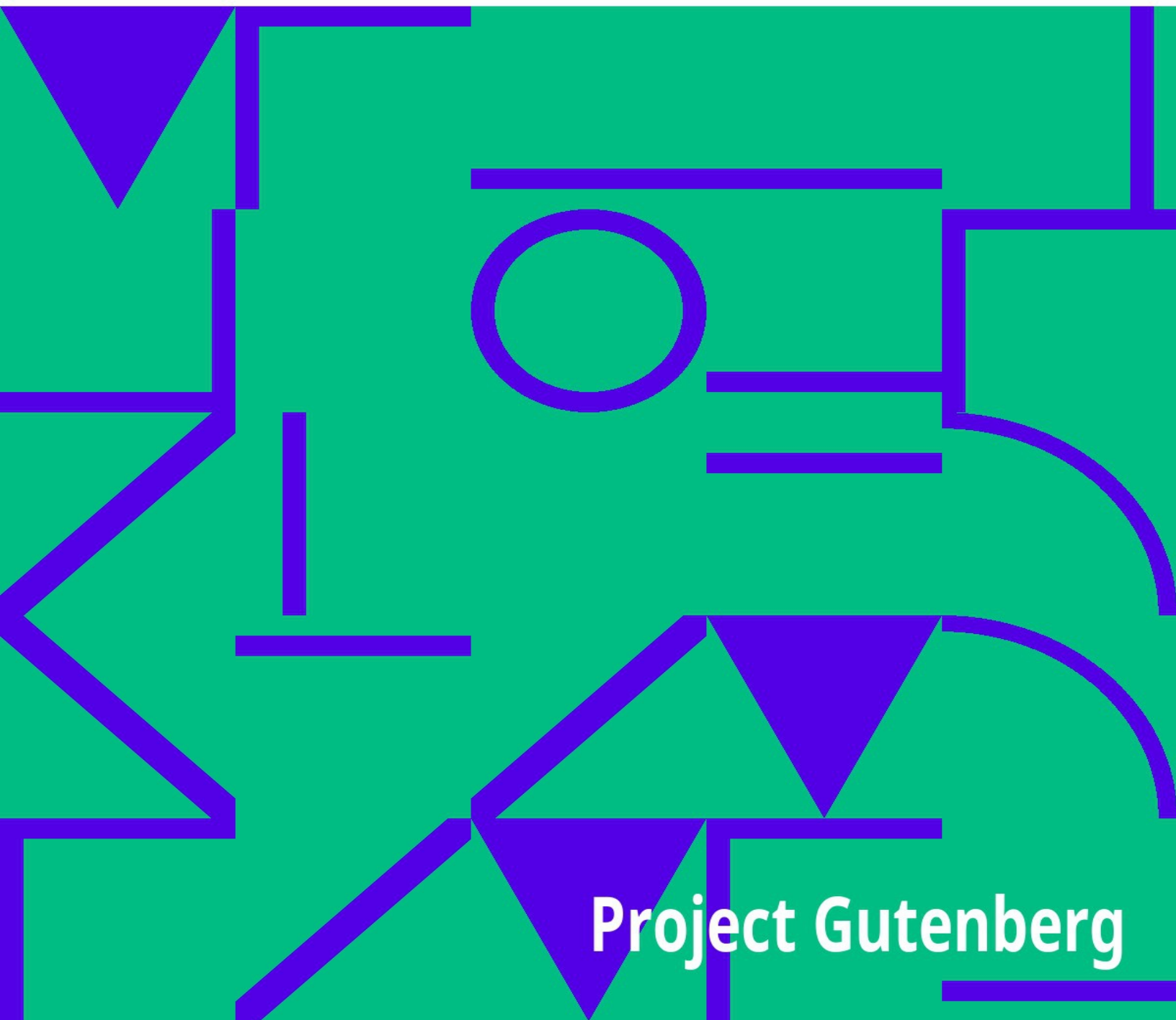


Sorry: Wrong Dimension

Ross Rocklynne

An abstract geometric pattern composed of various shapes including triangles, squares, circles, and lines in shades of blue, green, and yellow, set against a black background.

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Sorry: Wrong Dimension

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SORRY: WRONG
DIMENSION ***

SORRY:

Wrong Dimension

BY ROSS ROCKLYNNE

So the baby had a pet monster. And so nobody but baby could see it. And so a couple of men dropped out of thin air to check and see if the monster was licensed or not. So what's strange about that?

BABY DIDN'T cry all day, because he had a monster for a playmate. But I didn't know he had a playmate, and much less did I know it was a monster. The honest truth is that for the first time since baby was born, I had my nerves under control, and I didn't dare investigate why he wasn't crying. I got all the ironing done—all of it, mind you—and I got Harry's work-clothes mended and I also read three installments of a Saturday Evening Post serial I'd been saving. And besides this Mabel, my neighbor, and I had a couple or three cups of coffee. We also had a giggling fit. I remember once we went off into hysterics at the picture of ourselves we had—two haggard old wrecks of women, worn out at twenty-three from too much work around the house. "But thank Heavens baby hasn't cried all day!" I gurgled when we came out of it.

"Neither has mine," said Mabel, who isn't due for six months.

"Mabel, honest, you kill me," I said, "and excuse me while I comb my messy hair—because I'm *not* a wreck. Harry said so. He says I'm still the best hunk of female pulchritude he's met since high school—and we've been married two years!"

I went into the bathroom leaving Mabel choking hysterically behind me.

When I came out of the bathroom, she was hysterical but in a different way. She'd discovered why Harry, Jr., wasn't crying. She'd been in the nursery. Her face was white as an egg-shell.

"He's playing with something," she chattered. "It's *alive*. I heard it cooing back."

I ran three steps to baby's crib ... one on the corner of Little Jack Horner, one on the sheep of Little Bo Peep, one on the cupboard of Old Mother Hubbard. "Baby!" I almost screamed. But baby cooed and gurgled and laughed and rocked back and forth on his diapers. He was playing with his teething ring, but something was trying to jerk the teething ring out of his hands. And baby liked it.

Baby lost his hold on the teething ring, and fell on his back. The teething ring stayed up in the air and then by itself moved toward baby's waving hands and let him get a hold of it.

Mabel screeched through her teeth, "Baby's got it, the monster's got it, now baby's got it!" She began to collapse.

"Don't faint," I snapped, "and don't let's play tennis." I was shaking. I reached into the crib. My hands closed around something that put ice-water in my vertebrae. It *was* a monster.

"It's got fur!" I whispered. I felt some more. "And clammy scales!" I lifted it out of the crib. "And a trunk!" I was determined to save baby. Baby cried!

We got some chairs and sat there for ten minutes close together while baby played with the invisible monster. "I don't know what to do!" I said. "It's alive. Maybe it's poisonous. But it's friendly. Maybe it's another baby!"

"From another dimension," said Mabel.

"Rot," I said; I think I picked that up from the detective in the Saturday Evening Post serial. "Let's keep our heads."

"If baby keeps his," said

my friend Mabel.

That got me. "I've got to call Harry," I chattered. "They don't like him to be called at work, but I've got to call him."

"You'll just worry him," said Mabel. "Call the police."

"No!" I said. I felt like crying myself. Baby was so happy. Maybe the baby monster was happy, too. The police would do something awful to it. But what about my maternal instinct? Something told me I simply had to save my baby! "I've got to call Harry," I insisted, and I went to the 'phone.

The dial tone sounded peculiar, I remember, but I called Harry's place of employment. A brisk female voice cut in:

"What number are you calling, please?"

"CHarlemont 7-890," I whispered.

"Sorry. You must have the wrong dimension." There was a click as she disconnected. I sat like a statue. A haggard statue with a greasy housedress on. A statue that hadn't plucked its eyebrows in two months. I had a lot of nerve. I was a bad mother, and a poor mistress. And I had a swell husband, who could lie like a trooper. I wasn't any good, I was ugly, I was greasy. I cried. "Mabel," I choked.



It took her a while to get it out of me, and then her blue eyes flashed. "I told you!" she cried. "From another dimension!" In her broken-down green wedgies she clattered toward the door. I heard her fighting it. She couldn't get it open. Then she tried a window. It opened, but she couldn't stick her hand out. She flung herself around.

"Stella," she said, with a quiver of that good-looking short upper lip of hers, "we're trapped in. We're in the middle of some kind of fantasy. It's a crazy world we're living in, Stella. A-bombs and H-bombs and flying saucers and space-flight—it's all the fiction stuff coming true. Now we're lost in some other dimension, and I have to get dinner in the oven."

"Please," I mumbled. "Let's don't get desperate about the wrong things." I tried all the doors and windows in the house, and it was true. We were trapped in. There was some barrier surrounding the house. There wasn't anything to see outside except a kind of grey steam.

We went back to check on baby. He was still playing with the monster. I bent over the crib and held a fluffy, fifty-cent toy bear out. The baby monster took it invisibly out of my hand. He shoved it at baby. Baby squealed so darned happily. And I began to get some perspective.

"Suspicion is wrong," I told Mabel. "All the time. That's what that article we read a couple months ago in *Your World* said. Remember you and I decided we'd never be suspicious. Maybe that's the reason we're happy—if dirty. We don't suspect anybody of anything if we can help it—and now's no time to start. The monster is baby's friend."

Mabel shuddered. "Okay," she said. "But I'm still worried about getting dinner in the oven. Bill's liable to—"

"Hah, now you're being suspicious," I said, lousy with virtue. "Quit worrying. I'm going to call Harry again." This time I was a lot calmer. I decided to trust the universe a little more. I dialed Harry's number again. A scratchy male voice answered:

"Sorry, dis dimension is in use. Would ya please get off da line?"

I dug a few trenches and established a line of fire.

"Listen," I said. "I'm in trouble."

"A dame," he said wonderingly.

"Yeah, a dame," I cried. "What's so unusual about a dame? Why does every male in Kingdom Come get that note in his voice when he talks with a dame? Sure I'm a dame, a good-looking dame! I'd like to punch you in the eye to prove it!"

He laughed. He must have turned away from the 'phone. "It's a dame."

"Okay, find out what she wants."

"Spill it," he said into the 'phone. I spilled it. "What's that address again?" he asked. I told him. "Naw, naw," he said impatiently. "The planet. The *planet*. And the year." I told him.

He must have turned away from the 'phone again, because I heard him say off-stage, "They're only ten years away." I was numb. He came back on the line. "And what's dis about a baby monster? Fur? Scales? A trunk? The size of Harry, Jr.? Ma'am, we'll be there in a jiff," and he hung up.

Mabel was nervously hanging on my ear, but I didn't get a chance to answer her questions. The door in the living room opened and they walked in.

For a second I saw a ship that looked like a cake-pan, hanging in the grey steam. Then they closed the door and grinned at us. Instinctively, Mabel and I tried to shrink our bust-lines.

"Hello," said the tall one. He scratched at his hairy chest and grinned wider. He was carrying a piece of machinery that looked like a camera on a tripod. "Lemme introduce myself," he said. "Jake Comstock. We come over to do you dames a favor. We'll kick you back where you belong."

"Yeah," I said, "I'll bet."

"And this here is Beany Rocine. He's my partner. We—uh—work together."

"Hi dere," said Beany. "Where's da monster?"

"Introductions," said Jake, casting him a hard look. "Manners."

So I introduced us. "I'm Mrs. Weaver," I said. "And this is my neighbor, Mrs. Aspectia."

"Pleased ta meetcha, girls," grinned Jake. "You, Blondie," he was looking at me, "you must be the one talked on the 'phone. I liked the way you handled Beany. Real cute." He dropped the tripod thing in a corner, and sidled toward me. "Now where's this monster?" he asked, slipping his hand around my bare arm and grinning down at me.

I knew better than to play rough, so I just looked down at his hand, and didn't stop looking at it until he took it away. He lost a lot of his grin. "So where is it?" he said, his voice turning hard and unpleasant.

"Don't worry about that," I said. "Matter of fact, I'm getting so the monster doesn't worry me. He's been playing with baby all day and baby hasn't objected. The main thing I'd like you gentlemen to do for us is to get busy moving us back to our own dimension."

"That's right," said Mabel, her hands on her hips. "And let us know right now what the charges are going to be, if any."

"No charge," said the runt Beany, staring fascinated at her legs. "'Cept we're taking da monster wit' us. Real expensive, them monsters. Drinkos, they're called. Dey get lost in da dimensions now and then. Picked one up on Pluto fifty years or so acome—or ago."

"Ago?" I said.

"Acome," he corrected.

"Listen," I said, making up my mind. "You can't have the monster. He's kept baby happy all day. But I'll tell you what I'll do. Tell me what he eats and what to do for him and I'll keep him. I've got twenty-five dollars in poker winnings you can have. Okay—Jake?"

Jake broke out laughing. "You kids are terrific," he said. "You don't know

what the score is. You're cute!"

"Thanks," I said bitterly. "You restore my confidence. I feel myself blooming under your hungry gaze."

"Those Drinkos are worth a couple million credits, is what I'm getting at, and you offer us a stinkin' twenty-five dollars. Tell you what, Blondie." He winked at me. "You kids are over-worked. One look and you can tell that. Well, Beany and me have got a little cabin up on Dimension-L, cut off from everything. The four of us can go there and have a fine old time. We could stay there a month, and still get you back here in time to kiss your husbands when they get in from work. Whaddya say, Blondie? And you can keep the Drinko!"

"We are accepting no propositions this week," said Mabel with dignity.

"Ah-h, a coupla kill-joys," growled Beany, wandering off toward the hall.

Mabel looked at me and then picked up a vase off the mantle over the fireplace. I gave her the nod. "Stay away from that Drinko," she warned Beany, "or I'll let you have it."

Beany was annoyed. He stopped, looking imploringly at Jake. Jake giggled as if the whole thing tickled his sense of humor, and walked cat-footed toward Mabel. She let go the vase with a right-handed swing. He had his right arm out stiff in front of him, though, and the vase shied off and smashed against the television set. Then he grabbed Mabel in a bear hug.

That set me off. I had a yearning for Harry, then. He would have laid these mugs out. And that's all they were—mugs, cheap crooks. I hopped on one leg, yanking off one of my oxfords. I brought the heel down on Jake's curly head. But it didn't do a thing for him, except make him mad. He brought his arm back, cursing at me. It caught me on my lipstick. I remember being surprised that he was actually knocking me out. But that's what he did.

When I woke up, the first thing I knew was that Harry, Jr., was screaming. I groggily stood up, and stepped over Mabel, who was just beginning to moan.

I went to the nursery and grabbed up my baby. "Don't cry," I begged him. "Don't be mad. I'll get your Drinko back. Those dirty thieves, I'll get it back." I held him under one arm, his pants dripping. I think I looked like a Pekinese, with my hair over my eyes. I went to the 'phone, dialed Harry's number, and got the same routine.

"I *don't* have the wrong dimension," I cried before the operator could hang up. "This is an emergency. A couple of crooks stole my Drinko. Please get me the dimension-police."

"You have a Drinko?" the operator asked cautiously. "There must be some mistake. You are calling from Earth? From 1954? I am sorry. Congress ruled Earth 1954 could not be connected with the dimension-system. It would be impossible for you to own a Drinko."

"Some crooks from 1964 stole my Drinko!" I insisted.

"One moment, please. The Supervisor informs me this is an unauthorized call. It will be necessary to conduct a police investigation." There were clickings, there were buzzings, there were groups of fuzzy, far-off voices, and finally the police came in.

"A couple of crooks stole my baby's Drinko!" I repeated loudly. "I demand my rights as a dimension-citizen!"

"Two thieves confiscated your Drinko," a dry voice said. "Very well. Describe them, please. Describe characteristic phrases, expressions, and voice-intonations also." I described them. "Very good. Did you say Earth 1954? Excellent. Only a matter of six dimensions and thirty years. We shall investigate immediately." He hung up.

"Hi, Stella," said Mabel, up on one elbow and looking fuzzily at me. "You think I'll get out of this in time to get Bill's dinner in the oven? Bill's so darned touchy about dinner."

"Teach him a lesson, then," I snapped, disgusted with her, and running to the door, because somebody was knocking there. "Train him. Disappoint him. Break his pattern. Don't have dinner. Good evening, gentlemen," I said as I opened the door. The police came in. They had Beany. They had Jake.

There were three police. The one in front, a young, nice-looking one, touched his cap and smiled quietly. "Here's your Drinko, ma'am," he said, but I already knew the Drinko was back. Harry, Jr., stopped crying. He gurgled happily. Somehow, I was willing to bet, he could see the Drinko. I put him on the floor and the policeman put the Drinko on the floor. It was beautiful, those squeals that came from my baby. The young policeman smiled again, a quiet, tanned smile.

"We want to thank you, ma'am. These two are the worst criminals in the dimension-system. I want you to know you may have the Drinko as a reward for your part in apprehending them. Also, I wish to say that I admire you for your trippo in pretending to be a dimension-citizen, when, of course, you are not."

"Trippo?"

"Spunk, if you prefer."

"Well, I had to get my baby's Drinko back," I said.

"Naturally," he smiled. "Drinkos make wonderful pets. The day may come when Earth 1954 will be connected with dimension-system—and then more Drinkos will be available."

"Can't we," I asked, "just stay alone in our quiet nook of space?"

"My thought, too," said Mabel, getting to her feet at last and throwing her hair back. "And is there any chance of getting out of here? It's exciting, thrilling, and romantic, but Bill still has to eat."

"Immediately, Madam! It is merely a matter of disengaging the chrono-beam, which happened to become tangled, in space-time, with the gravitonic structure of the neutronic chrono-field."

"Well!" said Mabel. "That explains it! And so clearly!"

They set up an instrument that looked like the one Jake and Beany had. They sighted along the diagonals of the room and pressed buttons. Then they opened the door. "In two minutes, ma'am," the smiling cop said. "Good day."

It is my hope that we shall meet again." They disappeared out the door. Sure enough, there was a cake-pan ship hanging in the grey steam. They piled into it and the ship moved off, wobbling, until I couldn't see it any more.

A minute later, the grey steam melted away and so did Mabel.

Harry came home on schedule. "Baby has hardly cried all day!" I told him happily. "What a relief! I got a lot of your old clothes mended and I read three installments of the Saturday Evening Post serial."

"Fine!" said Harry, looking around. "What else happened?"

"Not much," I said, deciding to break it to him gradually. "Except we've got a Drinko." I took him into the nursery. Baby was sound asleep. I supposed the Drinko was, too. "There he is," I said, pointing to the depression at the foot of the crib. "That's the Drinko." I told Harry the whole story. He listened with a straight face.

"Well!" he said. "What thrilling adventures you have. Tell me, isn't this sort of thing sometimes too exciting?"

"Not at all," I said, deciding to feed his stomach before I really tried to convince him. "It all comes under the heading of the drab, routine duties of a housewife. Come on now, dinner's ready."



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