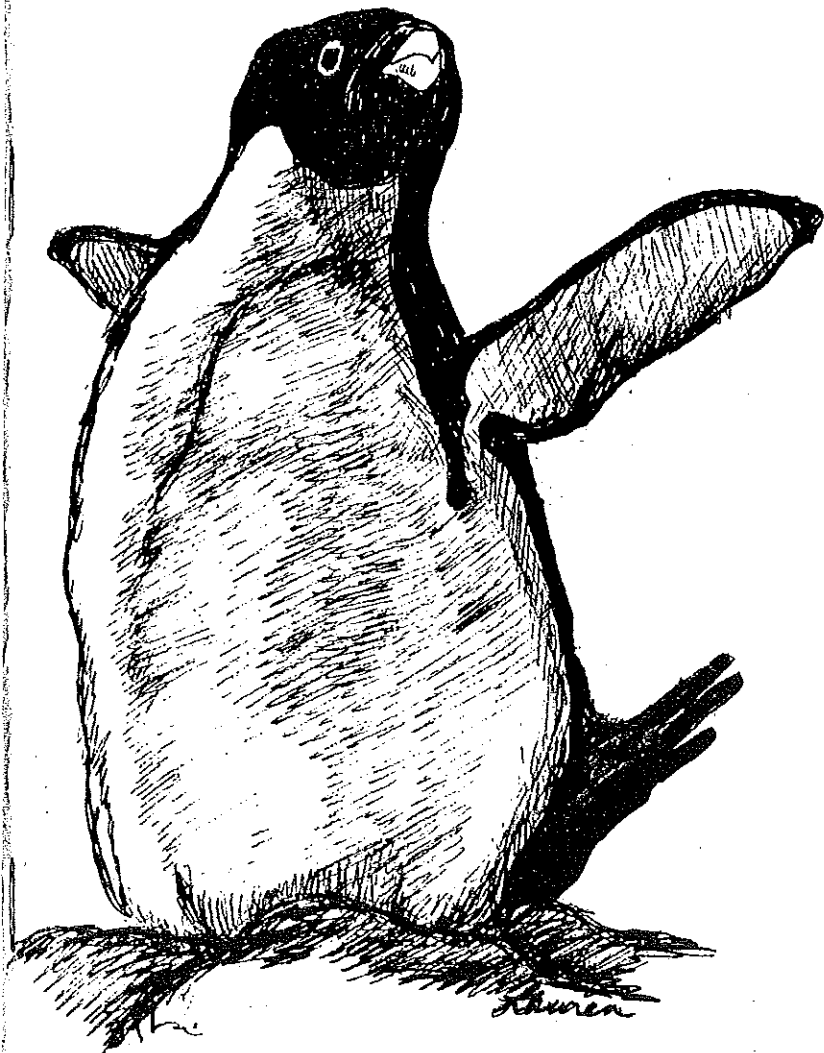


The Piper



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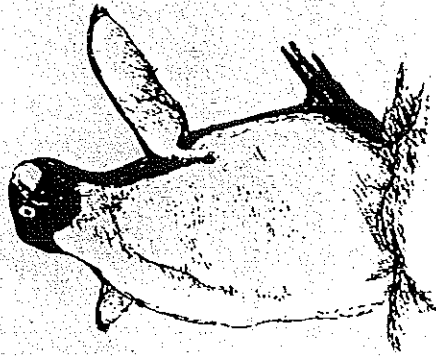
PRESENTED BY A PROUD GROUP OF STUDENTS
WHO RECOGNIZE THE CREATIVE TALENTS OF
THE NEW MILFORD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.

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THE PIPER STAFF WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL
THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE PIPER.

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FEVER: 2000

Malawa. A lush, tropical island located in the Florida Keys, the only island with a volcano. Palm trees lined its white sand beaches that skirted the island and its one large development--a two-floored scientific community in the shape of a pentagon.

The building was the largest of its kind, and because it had been built right into the side of a volcano, there had been much controversy over its location; this eventually led to the construction of two marinas instead of one, as originally planned.

Rob Lindquist, one of the two nuclear physicists in the building, sat in the coffee room adjoining the third wing. A man of medium height and build, he brushed away a strand of his short,

light brown hair in an attempt to keep his forehead cool; it was hot in the room, so hot that even the tips of his fingers were damp enough to moisten the pages of the Bible he was flipping through. Lindquist's mind, however, was on other things.

The past week had contained nothing but trials--with one crisis after another. It had been hard for Rob to concentrate on any one thing at a time. The scientists down in the second wing had predicted a volcanic eruption in less than six months; Lindquist hadn't finished any of his assignments; he'd been suffering from blurred vision and headaches all week; and what made his situation worse, he was sure that he'd discovered something--

Tina O'Shay, one of the head administrators in the complex, burst

through the door of the coffee room, immediately removing her shoes. She was shorter than Rob, but not by much; that was with her shoes off. She was light-skinned and dark-eyed, and her shoulder-length auburn hair was tied up in the back.

She slammed her diet soda can down on the table and sat down across from Rob, suddenly becoming passive; she'd seen him jump when she'd come into the room, and now she was interested in finding out what was bothering him.

Lindquist shut his Bible and placed it on the table, looking at O'Shay.

"Nothing," he said, in answer to the question he knew she was going to ask. "I'm okay."

"Sure, you are," Tina responded, opening her soda can.

Quietly, she took notice of the

paleness of his skin tones and the dark circles under his eyes.

"You really look wiped out."

Rob rose from his chair, shaking away the wave of dizziness that washed over him when he stood up; even though he felt he could trust her, he still did not wish to reveal to her the reason for his drawn appearance.

"Hours of work," he said, exhaling.

"Give it up, I know when you're trying to hide something from me."

Now, Rob knew he didn't have a choice.

"I've just been working with some different types of bacteria, you know??"

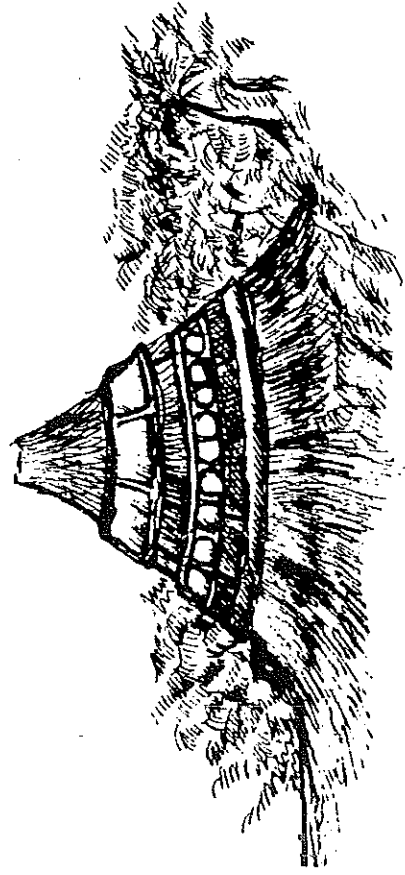
"Again?", Tina had heard this before--as a hobby, he mixed different types of eradicated bacteria in dishes; this was usually the reason for his not

completing the assignments he was given. Tina wondered if this time would be different. Already, the other administrators were bothering her about Rob's progress--especially Jack Dunane, the assistant advisor to the staff, one of Tina's closest friends.

"Jack's started to call you Mr. Germ."

"Tina, this is different. This time, I've made a mistake that could be..."

An explosion ripped through the



third wing and its adjoining hall, spewing hot glass and metal into the air; the tongue of fire it created lashed everything in its path to cinders, burned to a crisp...

Rob was thrown to the floor, landing hard on his right arm; Tina cut her forehead on the back of the chair she'd been sitting in...

The last of the debris fell like rain from the ceiling, and all became quiet except for the roar of the immense fire on the other side of the coffee room's door...

Rob stirred, fully conscious, but confused by the sudden, violent movement of the room and its contents.

"O'Shay!", he called out, scarcely heard over the roaring fire on the opposite side of the door. "Tina!"

"I'm here!", came a muffled voice

from underneath the table. "I'm okay!"

Lindquist worked his way over to the table, blinking rapidly in an attempt to focus his worsening eyesight; when he reached her, he helped her to stand up.

"You're bleeding," he observed, motioning to the trickle of blood that was running down the side of her face, and pulled a tissue out of her pocket, staring at the metal door as it turned from red hot to white-

"Rob, if we don't get out of here soon..."

Lindquist was already ahead of her; going over to the opposite side of the room, he pulled the emergency ladder out of the ceiling to reveal a narrow opening.

She touched her fingers to her head

"This vent leads to the control room."

Tina nodded.

"You go first."

Without further question, Rob crawled up into the vent; he waited for Tina to come up behind him. Cautiously, the twosome moved forward, groping in the dark for points of balance. The passage was cramped and unstable, and twice Lindquist put his hand through the metal, cutting the flesh severely.

"I see light ahead!", he finally exclaimed.

Lindquist peered down through the square opening; realizing that they had reached their destination, he pushed the ladder down. It slammed hard on the tile floor of the control room; so hard that every operator and scientist in that

room turned abruptly to see.

The electricity in the room had been shut off, because the red glow of the emergency power supply lights filled the room; activity was everywhere: Arguments, the click of heels and the hum of electronic equipment filled the air.

Rob's eyesight was fading now, going from sharp to fuzzy, colored to black and white. Even when he could see clearly for a few seconds, dizziness moved in to take its place. Rob eased himself into a chair and closed his eyes.

Tina walked forward, barefoot, her nylons torn, her tan dress and pale face smeared with dirt from her climb in the shaft and the debris of the explosion's aftermath. Cautiously, she reached

forward and touched Jack Dunane's shoulder-

Jack jumped, startled; he whirled around to face her. His eyes reflected fear, confusion, and relief at the same time--a feat even for his expressive blue eyes; he ran his fingers through his dark hair and put his hands on her shoulders.

"I thought you were dead!"

Tina smiled.

"Lucky for you I decided to take a coffee break when I did."

Jack smiled, too; then his expression became serious. He let go of her shoulders and gripped the clipboard he'd been holding even tighter.

"At least forty people are dead..."

"Are you sure they're dead?", Tina's voice was hopeful, though in the back of her mind she knew that there

couldn't possibly be a chance of survival; after all, an explosion that big-

"If they're not, they might as well be. We've got no way of getting them out..."

Rob was trying to focus on something, something he could hear--he was nearly blind now; the only thing that separated him and unconsciousness was the snatches of Tina and Jack's conversation... the explosion was nuclear... knocking out power source...unknown gas...

Unknown gas...

"NO!",Lindquist called out.

Tina and Jack both whirled from their conversation. Jack stood still; Tina moved over to Rob's chair--in her reunion with Jack she'd forgotten about him. Quietly, she knelt there,waiting

for Lindquist to say something.

"I was...trying to tell you before...", he began. "I mixed some wrong bacteria..."

Tina looked at Jack--she knew what Rob was going to tell her next...

A violent disturbance suddenly caused the floors to heave; somewhere in the far corner of the room a huge chunk of ceiling fell, making a hole in the floor. Tina gripped the leg of Rob's chair tightly--she was the only thing between the gap in the floor and Lindquist...

A strong hand gripped her wrist and pulled her up.

"Climb!", Jack's commanding voice echoed in her ears, and she managed to get a footing on the slippery wall of the hole...

She was standing now, out of breath. The room was silent; anyone left chose not to move. Then, an urgent voice came from over near where the window had been.

"That was the volcano. We've got an entire river of magma underneath us and it isn't flowing downhill, I'll tell you."

It was a control operator's voice, a voice that became quiet after its transmission. Tina wondered...



"Jack," she said.

Dunane was still on his feet, but he seemed more concerned about Lindquist's condition; certainly, Rob was fading fast.

"Fever," Lindquist said. "I've developed a type of fever. I don't even know what to call it; all I know is that I have it just from working with it...get off this island. Set this place on self-destruct--don't wait for the volcano. I mean it."

Jack straightened and shook his head in confusion. Volcanic eruption. Deadly fever. Order from a dying man...all these things were closing in on Jack now; he was locked in a cage of his own decisions.

Tina was debating, too. She knew most of the scientists had left the island by now, and only few

remained--the few that had chosen to try to defend the fort from further nuclear explosions and whatever else they'd have to fight.

"We can't leave you here," Tina said, her mind made up.

"Don't you understand?", Rob protested. "I can't take the risk of bringing this fever to the mainland!", he shouted; then another wave of dizziness filled him, and he quieted. "I have enough of this stuff in me to wipe out an entire city."

Jack had been watching a computer readout that was coming out of a printer.

"Tina, if we're going to leave, we'd better do it in the next five minutes so we have time to set a counterexplosion. That will wipe out the

island. Sink it beneath the waves, and then the fever will never get the chance to be unleashed."

Tina hesitated...Jack couldn't wait any longer. He set the timer on the self-destruct mechanism, took off his jacket, and hung it on the chair, and walked forward. Taking Tina's arm, he gently pulled her away...

By the time they had reached the marina, they were running. Only a short time remained...Jack helped Tina climb into the seaplane that was left, making ready to take off...

Tina desperately tried to shut out the memory of the colleague she'd left behind. She thought about the course they were on, heading toward the mainland; she listened to the sounds of an exploding, sinking island behind her. Jack had been right; at least the highly

contagious fever would fail to reach the
mainland. For a split second, her vision
blurred--no, she thought, it was only
her imagination...

Kristi Peterson