

Canada Day Parade

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There's nothing quite like a Canada Day Parade in a small town like Kemptville, Ontario. Nearly everyone is involved in one way or another, either walking in the parade, or lining the streets to watch it pass by. It's generally a lot of fun, and usually nothing untoward happens...

This year I was again handing out candy with the Friends of the Ferguson Forest Centre. Our float was a hay wagon piled with a selection of trees from the Centre's retail nursery, pulled by a pickup truck driven by Centre Manager, Ted Parnett. The trees had been decorated with a multitude of paper butterflies coloured by grade school children. They had looked pretty two hours earlier, but now they hung limply in the afternoon humidity.

The parade mustered in the parking lot in beside the B&H Grocery. Ted parked the float where numbers 47 and 48 had been chalked between the painted yellow lines. I noticed that the organizers had put the ponies on the far side of the parking lot, well away from the lady with her two pack llamas, all decked out in

red and white tinsel. They certainly didn't want a repeat of last year's unfortunate incident.

Beside us, in 45 and 46, the South Branch Elementary School African Drummers patta-pummed their gimbles, whiling away the time. Their brown and orange striped African costumes looked a little the worse for wear in the heat. On the other side, in 49, (50 was as yet vacant) sat a little electric car pulling a garden cart, on which sat a shiny, whirling, flashing, Rube Goldberg contraption of some sort. A computer printout banner (my gosh, who had continuous-feed paper anymore!) proclaimed: Dyn-O-Tel Corp.

Dyn-O-Tel. Ah, yes, the group had bought the Richardson Building – at least the part of it which hadn't collapsed during the snows of '13 – and were using it for who knew what over there on Van Buren Street, across from the old Co-op, now defunct. The Municipal Councilors had been happy to give the company a tax break to entice them to move in, but the expected flush of jobs had never materialized. We rarely saw the denizens of the refurbished building, though a multitude of antennae and transmissions towers of varying shapes and sizes had sprouted on the roof. All we usually ever saw of them was one or two making late-night coffee and donut runs to the Tim Hortons. Mostly, we cursed the road work on Van Buren, where Hydro contractors were digging a trench between the substation and the Richardson Building.

"Do you know what they do there?" I asked Laura, Ted's wife, nodding toward space 49. Her son, Cole, had landed a summer job there, mowing the lawn and keeping the weeds down in the parking lot.

Laura shrugged, transferring candy from the store-bought bags to the wicker baskets we would carry. "No," she said. "Cole got a tour through part of the place on his first day there. He said it's full of computers and white boards, and tables piled high with printouts in one section. He said there are piles of circuit boards, and wires, and other electronic gear all behind a steel door. He caught a glimpse one day while he was on his way to the loo." She handed Maureen one of the candy-filled baskets. "Remember to save some for the kids at the end of the parade route. I hope I bought enough this time." She winced as one of the Shriners' (Tunis Temple, Brockville) funny airplanes whizzed by the bumper of the truck, headed toward where the teens of the 73's Hockey Team had nonchalantly gathered beside the convertibles filled with the North Grenville Senior Girls' Soccer Club. The girls shrieked at the airplane, and the boys tried to look cool. The Shriner gave them a big smile and a few toots of his claxon horn, and whizzed away to see what other groups he could stir up.

A rumble of thunder distracted me. A few cumulus clouds had merged into a tower shape, with a mini-anvil on top. At the moment, the cloud was just west of us. "Maybe it will miss us. Two minutes to go before the parade is supposed to start."

As though the thunder had been a cue, the Kemptville Legion Bagpipe Band punched their instruments into working order and formed ranks under the B&H sign. The Shriners fired up the rest of their airplanes, funny cars and other assorted vehicles, mostly powered by what sounded like lawn mower engines. The Swords to Plowshares Museum had their collection of WW II vehicles out, and swarmed like ants over two recalcitrant jeeps which refused to start. One finally

roared to life in a bluish cloud of smoke. Antique cars, monster trucks, ATVs, a school bus, a moving truck – its only concession to Canada Day being two tiny flags stuck in the rear door hinges – a farm tractor, and many pickup trucks coughed, grumbled or purred to life. The fumes of unburned gas, mostly from the Shriner contingent, probably added far more carbon to the atmosphere than the Ferguson Forest could mitigate in an entire year.

The parade moved out in reasonable order, with a couple of brawny Reservists pushing the recalcitrant jeep. The patta-pums from the African Drummers coalesced into a coherent rhythm as their float moved out onto the street. Ted eased our float out carefully, wary of jostling the potted shrubs out of position. The little paper butterflies fluttered on a suddenly gusting breeze. I looked up at the micro storm. It might, just, pass us to the south – not good news for the people at the big celebration down on the college campus.

Looking rather smug, the driver of the Dyn-O-Tel micro car glided in behind us. He had on a red Hawaiian shirt, with a white pocket protector. Even more lights twinkled, and whirling things intermittently extruded and retreated into the bowels of the machine. He had only just turned the corner onto Clothier street when a distraught fellow broke away from the crowd and ran up to the driver's window. He was wearing a green plaid shirt with a black pocket protector, and beige corduroy pants, not at all Canada-Day wear, I thought.

"Harry, what are you doing with that out here?" he demanded, clutching at the bottom edge of the window frame..

"It's only the Mark II," Harry said with a grin. "Besides, aren't we supposed to be raising our company's profile in the community? Now stop that, Jeff," he said, slapping at the other's hands. "You're making a scene."

The other fellow glanced over his shoulder at the parade watchers. The children were focused on candy, but the adults seemed interested in the little altercation.

"All right. But get that thing back to the lab right quick after the parade." He faded back through the crowd, but I caught periodic glimpses of him making his way along the storefronts, keeping pace with the Dyn-O-Tel float.

The little storm cloud gave a burp of thunder. Patta-pum went the Drummers, without a missed beat. Behind us, right behind Harry and his gizmo, two gray ponies with Canadian flags over their rumps, flanked a team of miniature horses pulling a cart. The driver had on a flouncy pink dress. A Pomeranian with bright black eyes panted in the space behind the seat. I couldn't see the Llama Lady. All the better, I thought. One of the pony riders looked nervously at the cloud. Her mount tossed his head against her tense reins.

We turned the corner onto Prescott Street. I had a little skirmish with a pushy urchin who tried to grab a double handful of candy out of my basket. A cheer arose from the crowd farther down the street as the Swords to Plowshares managed to roll start the reluctant jeep on the downgrade to the bridge. After a couple of smoke-laden backfires, the engine caught and sounded like it might stay running.

A spate of rain blew by us, not enough to disperse the crowd. Harry, looking somewhat alarmed, stopped his car, ran to the gizmo, poked a few buttons, and some of the extendables retracted and stayed that way. He hurried his float back into position, the ponies and minis trotting to keep up. The 73's, next in line, were

in no such hurry, because the Soccer Girls were behind them, and as well, both of the minis had taken advantage of the pause to fertilize the pavement.

The thunder cloud now loomed ahead of us, having taken an unusual turn to the northeast. It was growing more inky by the second. I could see lightning flickering under its eastern flank, and I counted the seconds to the thunder. Two and a half. That would put it somewhere near Van Buren street. I glanced back at Harry. He seemed not to have noticed, as he waved at a cluster of children in strollers, who waved back at him. They seemed fascinated and amused by the twinkling lights on the gizmo.

Over the bridge we went. I jogged to the back of our float to refill my candy basket. Patta-pum, patta-pum, patta-patta-patta-pum went the Drummers, their rhythm echoing back at them from the brick and glass storefronts. The Scotiabank building, more modern building than most, had a facade set at a 45 degree angle to the corner of Prescott and Asa Streets. The Drummers' rhythms bounced oddly there, doubling and halving, magnifying and augmenting at a tremendous rate. The students noticed this, and drummed with more vigour, grins widely. Two of the Shriners' funny cars circled around them, to the crowd's delight. Up ahead, the sick jeep gave one enormous backfire, and the storm produced a blinding flash of lightning, one fork of which zigged and zagged toward Harry's gizmo. I flattened myself against the pavement, hoping that I wasn't about to die.

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I thought for a moment that I had gone deaf. All I could hear was a rushing noise. When my eyes refocused, it was onto a vast field of soybeans, leaves quivering in a brisk breeze. A departing thunder of hooves made me climb to my feet to look. One of the ponies was headed away, fast. "Whoa, Princess!" cried the little rider. "Whoa!" Princess was not about to oblige. One side of the Canadian flag had worked loose, and flapped against her hocks, not helping matters in the least.

"Keep Petunia here," ordered the lady in the cart to the remaining rider. The minis and the Pomeranian looked shell shocked. The little dog's eyes were bugged out, and it had stopped panting. The lady scrambled out of the cart and went to the minis' heads. One reached down toward the soybeans, but snorted upward again restlessly.

"Now see what's happened!" cried Jeff in a shrill voice as he hauled himself up out of the soybeans a few yards to our left. Harry just stood there, mouth agape, staring at the Mark II. His car was nowhere to be seen. Overhead, a tiny tower of cumulo-nimbus was rapidly dispersing in an otherwise clear blue sky.

In all, our little contingent was comprised of myself, the equines and their humans, Harry, Jeff and the cart with its gizmo, which no longer twinkled and fluttered, Laura and the float with its shrubs, but not Ted and the pickup truck, two frightened little girl Drummers (Sara and Ashley), and one Shriner, complete with fright wig, red nose and clown suit, with the engineless plywood exoskeleton of his funny car. He put up a shaky hand and pulled off the fake nose and wig, and stood looking around, as lost as the rest of us.

"Fred?" Jeff said in a soft, astonished voice. The Shriner nodded sheepishly.

"After Nortel, Dianne and I sold our condo and moved to Brockville. It's cheaper there. I've got a nice little mobile computer repair business going. Dianne works part time at a florist's. What's this?" he asked, nodding toward the Mark II.

The lady with the minis broke in. "I don't care what it is. I've got one niece headed for where ever," she waved her hand in the direction Princess had gone, "and the other one needs to pee." Petunia's rider managed to look embarrassed and desperate at the same time.

Laura and I hastily hauled some potted cedars off the hay wagon and lugged them a few feet away to make a screen. I handed the little girl (another Ashley) a few tissues from the wad in my pocket, and she ducked behind the screen with a gasp of relief, leaving Petunia's reins in my hands, without even asking if I knew anything about horses. Petunia started to dance and whinny, and in the distance I heard an answering whinny. Evidently Princess was on her way back.

"Oh, thank goodness!" the mini lady cried. "Kaylee, are you OK?"

"Yes, Aunt Mickey," came the quavery reply. Princess trotted up, Kaylee with a big green stain on one knee, rattling around on the saddle like popping corn in a hot pan.

"So, gentlemen, where are we and how do we get back?" I asked of Harry and Jeff. Fred, who looked as though he might have gravitated toward that group, hastily backed away. I guess I can look rather daunting, when I'm in Organizational Mode.

Jeff glared at Harry, who rolled his eyes skyward, as though doing some mental calculations. "I, ah, think we're south."

Jeff threw up his hands then reached into a pocket of his corduroys. It emerged with what appeared to be a cell phone crossed with a slide rule. He slid the end out into an antenna and frowned at the screen. "No service off the tower." He punched at the keypad. "Nor off the satellite, either." He started to pace. Ashley Drummer started to snivel. Mickey the mini lady took her hand and Sara's, and led them toward the cart, where Ashley Pony was sitting patting the Pomeranian. I still had Petunia.

Fred sidled over to Harry. "Are we talking two, three or four here?" I heard him ask in an undertone.

"Certainly three, possibly four. Or more," Harry said, his eyes darting nervously.

Four? My heart skipped a beat. "Are you two talking dimensions?" I demanded. Harry nodded sickly, and Fred let out a slow, admiring whistle, aimed at the machine, not me.

"Will anyone be trying to locate us?" I asked. Harry shrugged; Jeff paced some more.

"I suppose, if the lightning didn't fry the towers...." Jeff conjectured, "or our locator." He popped open a hatch on the side of the Mark II and peered inside, shaking his head. Fred looked over his shoulder.

"Ted will be worried," Laura fretted. "The whole town will be in chaos, I imagine."

"There's not much we can do about that," I said. "At least we've got candy." At that, Ashley Pony, Ashley Drummer and Kaylee looked interested. Sara hunkered down into the cart.

"She's allergic to peanuts," Ashley Drummer said. "And bees, and milk products, and perfume and pollen." She puffed up a bit. "I'm her Watcher at school. I'm supposed to help her with her EpiPen or her inhaler if she has a reaction."

"Do you have your EpiPen and inhaler with you?" I asked. Sara looked dismayed. "I guess it's still on the float."

I turned to the M II crowd. "Is there anything you can tell us about how far, and how 'when' we moved?"

Harry gave me a distracted look. "About 45 km due south. That's all I can tell. The lightning did some damage...."

"That would put us" I tried to picture a map in my mind's eye, "somewhere south of the St. Lawrence, not too far from Ogdensburg," I guessed. "As to the when, the cropping system looks like what we're used to, highly mechanized, but I'm not good enough with my soybean varieties to know if these are the same as ours." I looked to Laura and Mickey, who both shook their heads. "Well, then, we should go north out of this field, then follow the roads to Ogdensburg. I don't suppose any of you has a Passport with you?" Jeff dragged one out of his back pocket. I rolled my eyes. "This should be interesting, at the border crossing."

Jeff said a bit haughtily, "They might find us before we get that far."

"Was anybody in the office?" Harry asked.

"G.W.," Jeff replied. "He ignores Canada Day and celebrates on the Fourth," he explained to us. "I've never figured out why he moved up from the Ogdensburg office."

"Health care," muttered Harry. "Got a sick kid, in and out of the Children's Hospital. | He shook his head at the gizmo. "I don't understand why this worked. It shouldn't have. The lightning must have done something. We never had enough power to get this one up to firing level."

Well, that would explain the digging to the hydro substation, I thought.

"Are they going to have enough power to get us back?" Fred asked. He continued to take in the details of M II.

"We're up to M V now. Much more compact. New surface plasma circuitry." Fred nodded as though he understood. All I could think of was the nefariously mis-led M 5 destructo-computer of Star Trek fame.

"Providing the lightning didn't damage things in the shop," Jeff grumbled. "I wish we could contact them." He tried his phone again, then shoved it back into his pocket with a look of disgust. "We must have moved 'when'. If it was a straight 3-D move, I should have been able to make contact. I'm guessing either there are no satellites, or they're not transmitting on the frequencies we generally use."

"We can't stay here while you fellows tinker with the machinery," Mickey said. "I need to get my nieces home, and Sara is starting to wheeze. Come along. Ashley and Sara, you can squeeze into the back of the cart. Jingles and Star can handle your weight."

"Wait, shouldn't we all stay together, in case they get that thing working?" I insisted.

"Action is better than standing around," Mickey insisted.

Laura half-nodded in agreement. "What about the border crossing?"

"We'll figure it out when we get there," Mickey replied.

"Just a minute," I said, thinking furiously. "Mickey, can your team pull M II on its cart?"

"If it's not heavier than it looks. But the girls will have to ride double on the ponies."

"Fine. Harry, can you sit on the edge of the cart and work on M II while it's moving?"

"Not on this rough ground. Maybe on the road."

"OK. Laura, let's see what we can scrounge off our float to hook the garden cart to the mini cart." Between the two of us, we found enough pieces of baling twine and the draw pin from the hay wagon tongue, to make a rather wobbly but hopefully safe connection. We gathered up all of the candy and piled it into the back of the mini cart. The Drummers wouldn't leave their gimbes behind, so we squeezed them in under the seat. "Does anybody else want to use the, ah, outhouse, before we go? Ashley Pony did again, and then the rest of the girls, and after adding a taller Cedar to the array, so did us ladies. I had barely enough tissues. The fellows ducked self-consciously behind the bushes too. They declined my last ragged, lint-infested tissue."

"It's a shame to leave all this potted stock behind," Laura said, looking over the items on the hay wagon. "There's more than a thousand dollars worth of stuff here."

"I suppose it can't be helped," I said sympathetically. "Some farmer's going to get a real surprise! All set?" Shriner clown Fred looked down ruefully at his size 32 shoes, then took them off and set them on the hay wagon. His bright white athletic socks quickly took on the hue of the local topsoil. "All set," he said. "Wagons Ho!"

Our motley little caravan waded through the soybeans, Fred, Harry and Jeff making sure that M II stayed steady on the cart. I helped Kaylee with Princess, and Laura walked beside Petunia, keeping an eye on little Sara, who's eyes looked a bit puffy. It took us more than half an hour to reach the edge of the enormous soybean field.

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Fortunately, the ditch between the field and the road was a shallow one; I couldn't see a culvert in either direction. The road was dirt, but smooth enough that Harry could work on the innards of Mark II. Somehow, Fred inveigled himself in there, too, while Jeff, scowling, kept an eye on the road ahead and behind. Soon enough, we came to one of those signs which seed salesmen give to the farmers, to advertise the variety. This one read "Moncarto SG-37b". My heart gave a large shudder. The company I knew, a multi-national giant, was "Monsanto". Perhaps we hadn't moved "when" so much as "where". Alternate galaxies, parallel universes, all the usual sci-fi fare rushed through my mind. I motioned to Jeff, and moved just ahead of Princess, keeping my voice low. Laura joined us.

"I'd been wondering about that ever since I couldn't get a signal" Jeff said, pulling the multi-function phone out of his pocket.

"It's just a small change," I said. "Can your phone scan for signals? Maybe the transmission or receive frequency is just a bit off."

Jeff extended that odd-looking areal and pressed a few buttons. In just a few seconds, his face lit up. "Got one! I'll try the office."

Elation turned to gloom as the phone indicated no such number. "I'll try the Ogdensburg office. It's closer," Jeff muttered, keying quickly. Again, no such number.

"Maybe it's the same as for the other things," Laura suggested. "Just a little difference in the number."

Jeff brightened again, and keyed madly. "This little program should search one number each side of each digit, and try them. Ah! Dyn-O-Tel?"

"That would be Dyn-A-Tel." The phone was on speaker mode. "Jeff, what the hell are you and Harry up to!"

"G.W.? I thought you were in Kemptville..."

"I was, until the thunder storm. I had to do some quick thinking to explain to Mr. Jameson how I got to Ogdensburg only fifteen minutes after he had been speaking to me on the phone in beautiful downtown Kemptville!" Acid dripped from his voice. "Get me out of here before I meet another version of myself!"

"We'd like to, G.W.," Jeff said with scant patience, "But it's the Mark II we've got here. We're somewhere out in the countryside south of you. Soybeans, dirt road...."

"Could be anywhere. The Mark II doesn't have enough power..."

"I know, I know. Some weird combination with that thunderstorm, I guess. Can we think of some way to boost from your location? You've got the power lines laid in already there, or at least our Ogdensburg did."

"I'll work on it." Click. Apparently G.W. was a man of even more scant patience than Jeff. Jeff headed for Harry, Fred and the Mark II at a run.

Ashley Pony piped up, "Car behind!"

"Everyone to the right hand shoulder," Mickey ordered, steering her minis onto the lightly gravelled edge. Instead of passing us, the vehicle slowed. We turned to look. A State Trooper. I could feel my complexion get two shades redder.

The Trooper eyed us dubiously. "You folks need any help?" he asked. Oh, if he did but know!

"We're practicing for the parade," Mickey said with a winning smile. Ashley Pony and Kaylee nodded vigorously.

"What about that?" the Trooper asked, pointing to the Canadian flag draped over Petunia's rump.

"We're saving the best for the parade. Wouldn't want the real thing to get dirty before hand, now, would we?" Mickey offered. "The ponies need to get used to things flapping and spinning and twinkling, so they don't get upset with all the crowds around."

The Trooper gave a little shake of his head. "Well, you all be careful now. Those two," he pointed at Ashley Drummer and Sarah, "should be wearing helmets."

"We know," Mickey said soothingly. "We just got out a bit farther than we had intended, and the girls were too tired to walk all the way back. We'll be very careful."

"What about that?" the Trooper asked, nodding at M II."

"A Shriner Funny-Mobile," Fred answered, grinning a huge clown grin at the Trooper. "Cute, isn't it? The kids love the lights and the wind vanes."

"All right, then," the Trooper said somewhat dubiously, easing his foot onto the gas. "Have a nice day." The car moved ahead. I could see his silhouette through the window, reaching for his microphone.

"Smile and wave, everyone," I ordered, doing my best to look cheerful and thankful. We waited until he was out of sight, then moved the procession up to a jog.

Laura is an avid jogger, but I'm not. I puffed my way along until I thought my lungs would catch fire. When we reached the intersection of a paved road, I was relieved to see a sign pointing right, to OgdensbErg. Laura, Mickey, Jeff and I exchanged worried looks. Jeff pulled out his phone and called G.W. Their conversation made no sense to me at all, full of techno-jargon and equations. Harry clambered off the cart and joined in.

"Maybe the Kemptville unit needs to be operating, too," he offered. "G.W., have you called there? Maybe someone will have gone in, after the lightning strike."

"I'll give it a try." Click.

Two minutes later, Fred's phone beeped. "Hello?"

"I was just talking to G.W.," came the very shaky voice over the speaker.

"Oh, God," Jeff groaned.

"We've got to hurry. The Kemptville office is full of Volunteer Firefighters. I think I hear sirens in the distance here. Harry, did you digimatize the anphromilaters?"

"Yes. Try 2348 by 7T.4."

"Calibrating." No click this time.

The air felt a little warmer around us. Ahead, I could see the outskirts of Ogdensberg. In the clear blue sky, one little cumulus cloud puffed into existence over a prominent transmission tower. Lights began to twinkle on the sides of Mark II, and two little propellor things extended, then stretched toward the large transmission tower. There was no traffic on this nice paved road. I wondered if the Trooper had had anything to do with that. My worry level increased by a couple of notches.

"How much longer?" Jeff asked into the phone.

"At least 5 minutes," G.W. said. "I'll pass this along to, ah, G.W., the other one."

A minute passed in silence. Two. Kaylee whispered something to Laura. Sara looked bluish around the lips. "We'd better get her back to her inhaler soon," Laura murmured.

"Car behind," the ever observant Ashley Pony called. Sure enough, in the far distance, I could see flashing lights – red, orange, blue. I couldn't hear a siren, though.

A small industrial park was just ahead, on the left. Maybe we could get out of sight there, between some U-Store-It buildings. We turned off the road long before I could see more of the approaching vehicle than the flashing lights.

"Got it," came the voice over the phone. "G.W., Kemptville is sending a 'pull'. I'm boosting." The cloud over Ogdensberg grew with amazing speed, and sprouted a little anvil top. A gust of wind whipped by us, and I looked up. A distortion in the air which made my eyes water.

Jeff, Harry and G.W. conversed urgently. From elbow-deep in the Mark II, Fred suggested, "There must be another factor involved."

I remembered the sounds just before the lightning. “Drums. The Drummers were playing with echos. Sara, you and Ashley get down off the ponies, and start drumming between the doors of two storage compartments across from each other. Do you remember what rhythm you were doing before the lightning came?” They nodded and ran to comply. Sara sneezed loudly.

Patta-pum. Patta-patta-patta-pum. Not too far away, a security siren blared into life. Mickey scrambled out of her cart and went to stand at the minis’ heads. She motioned for Ashley Pony and Kaylee to dismount and come over to her.

“We’ll have all the Troopers in the county here in a minute or two,” Jeff snarled. “Homeland Security, too.” He looked up. A little smudge of white coalesced, evaporated, and coalesced again. It grew rapidly, but didn’t look particularly threatening.

“Keep going,” Jeff urged Ashley Drummer and Sara as their rhythm faltered. “Put more into it!” The cloud grew, darkened. There was no lightning. I could hear a siren in the south, and two from the north, getting closer.

“It’s not enough,” Harry despaired, eyeing Mark II as it twinkled dazzlingly.

“What about the backfire?” I called. The sirens were closer still. I heard a screech of rubber on pavement as a vehicle slowed beside the entrance to the storage units.

Harry toed off a shoe, ran to the metal door beside Ashley Drummer, and wound up, slamming the shoe into the door with all his might.

Ka-blam!

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At least this time I knew I wasn’t deaf. The sounds of many feet running toward us, and of vehicle doors slamming shut, heralded the arrival of a herd of Police Officers and five paramedics in the gathering dusk. We were back in Kemptville, ours, I hoped. I scanned the storefronts for any anomalies, but saw nothing worse than an abundance of misplaced apostrophes glaring at me from the window of the convenience store, advertising “Lot’s and Lots’s of Video’s and DVD’s on Sale!”

I tried to brush away the hands of the Paramedic, then stopped. He was a rather nice looking young fellow. I glanced past him to see that all of our group had made the trip intact. Sara was sucking on an inhaler, steadied by another Paramedic. Ashley Pony and Kaylee still had Petunia and Princess. Star and Jingles, the miniature horses looked tired, but otherwise OK. The Pomeranian lay flat out in the back of the cart, panting heavily. Ted rushed over to hug Laura. Various relatives crowded around the girls and Mickey.

Two RCMP Officers and several Men In Black strode to Mark II, Harry, Jeff and Fred. “You’ll have to come with us, sirs,” said one of them. I tried desperately to catch Harry’s attention. I wanted to know if we had made it home. He had time for one brief nod for me, before a boom in the near distance made us all jump.

„The fireworks!” Sarah said excitedly. Another boom echoed between the store fronts. Fred managed to reach into Mark II’s guts before one of the Men In Black could stop him. Mark II dimmed, and the propellers slowed to a stop. I heaved a sigh of relief. I wondered if the G.W.s were back in their respective domains.

“You’re good to go,” the Paramedic stated, his checks completed. I turned to head back to the parking lot for my truck, but a burly female Officer of the Ontario

Provincial Police, Kemptville Division, caught me by the elbow. "You'll have to give us a statement," she said in a no nonsense tone. I could see Laura, and Mickey protesting about leaving her miniature horses, being escorted to other OPP cars. The children, it would seem, were to be allowed to go home with their parents.

Our little convoy of vehicles traveled to the new police station on the outskirts of town. I felt as though they asked me the same questions at least five times. I'm sure a few of the MIBs were listening in, too. It was nearly midnight by the time I got home, in my own truck, but followed at a discreet distance by an OPP cruiser.

The cover of the next week's edition of the Kemptville Advance was splashed with pictures of children with red and white face paint eating hot dogs, the winning float in the parade, and the ever popular Llama Lady and her furry friends. The accompanying article (continued on the bottom of page 5) mentioned in the last paragraph that "Several horses ran away during the thunderstorm. All were found safe later in the afternoon." The MIB were certainly trying to downplay the incident.

Another tiny article, wedged in under the Junior Bowling League scores on page nine, said that Dyn-O-Tel had closed down. The Mayor hoped that another high-tech company could be found to occupy the premises. The article didn't mention the Ontario Provincial Police car parked under the only shade tree in the parking lot, or the sudden abundance of Men In Black who had been seen in various stores and restaurants around town.

Next year's Canada Day Parade will have a long way to go to match this one.

