

## Leave No Trace

by David F. Dumaresq  
(200?)

Tim was certain he'd just read the name Andrew Hatcher - he'd known one growing up in Vancouver, and it wasn't a pleasant memory. The name had stuck in his head. Now, after reloading the web page, the name had changed to Andrew Toffler. Just to prove he wasn't going crazy, Tim made the web browser open a copy of the page; sure enough, the name was different. The date of the trial had changed too.

Back and forth, back and forth, he compared the two pages. He was tired, it was 2 A.M. and this new little puzzle wasn't helping his insomnia. Peering into the monitor was giving him a headache. He told himself it was just a typo. which some conscientious, likewise-insomniac, webmaster had tidied up before the morning rush hour. It might be a clue, but he'd lost his ability to concentrate, and sitting here twiddling the mouse wasn't going to help him find Shelley.

He sent both pages to the printer, shut the machine down, and went back to his empty bed.

The thought of those paper copies sitting out on his desk made sleep impossible. There was no reason to hide them, but it didn't matter; in fact, it made his anxiety (all right, his paranoia) worse.

For years Tim had practised leaving no trace and he was proud of the fact that he couldn't be Googled. He'd never used his real name on the net, didn't own any credit cards, and all his e-mail went through an anonymous re-mailer. His black-hole mystique had fuelled Shelley's initial attraction to him; it sprang from her reporter's instinct for a good story. She called him her 'negative-spaceman.' But everyone had something to hide. Some more than others.

Tim couldn't stand it any longer. He returned to his desk and set fire to the pages, dropping them in the bathroom sink. While they burned, he turned the computer back on and wiped the browser cache and history. He went back to the bathroom and turned on the water to wash away the ashes, distracted by his reflection in the mirror: Mid 40's; spatters of grey in his beard, jowly cheeks, and sad eyes. What do you expect? the face asked.

With no snappy comeback, Tim turned off the tap, and the lights, and climbed back into bed. Again he tried to fill, or forget, the empty space beside him.

At 3 A.M., he felt a warm body slip in beside him. Smelling of shampoo and cigarettes, Shelley snuggled close and draped an arm over his side, as though she hadn't been gone for two nights without a word. He sighed with relief and pretended to sleep.

The clock radio read 04:00 A.M. when three figures silently entered the apartment neatly using a tire jack to expand the door jamb. The dead-bolt swung free of the frame without a sound. They quickly found the sleeping couple and clapped handkerchiefs soaked in chloroform over their noses and mouths. Tim and Shelley struggled briefly then fell back into unconscious sleep. The intruders searched the small apartment methodically. When they discovered the few remaining ashes in the bathroom sink, they carefully scooped them into a plastic baggy and placed a fresh crisp page on Tim's desk. The job was almost complete.

"Burn everything," the leader said.

In the living room, they frayed the lamp cord, sprinkled more chloroform down the drapes, and placed a dead pair of batteries in the overhead smoke detector. Leader turned on the lamp and watched as sparks jump onto the drapes and exploded into flames.

Andrew Hatcher was eradicated once again, replaced by the notorious Andrew Toffler, wrongly tried in a time and place that only history would remember; all human memory of Hatcher had been erased leaving no trace.