“Oh, Hell”, he thought as he looked around at what was obviously a Boilermaker’s inaccurate vision of Albuquerque, NM. “I’m stuck in another Gill Hunter story.”

This had been happening more and more as the summer wore on. At first it was interesting to be in a new, or newly envisioned, place. He’d always been open to adventure. It had even been a little flattering. He’d been many things to many people over the years, not all of them necessarily positive. But to be a muse. Well. That was something you could put on your resume.

But, now, here, it had become a bit tedious. Like that moment a bar mitzvah switches gears from a wonderful, celebratory gathering where everyone is having fun to that moment when a too-young uncle is offering you coke in the bathroom in an attempt to squeeze the last bit of joy from an empty tube of party.

Yeah, he was in that bathroom now with Gill cutting out lines of altered reality.

He needed to get his bearings, and quiet, still observation had proved to be the best method. Don’t move, don’t speak, just observe and categorize. This was definitely the way that people from east of the Mississippi imagined the desert. Unfortunately, Albuquerque was a lot less pink and teal, and had a lot fewer cow skulls than he was seeing now. The old adobe mission church was pretty accurate, and somehow Gill knew about the Pueblo Indians selling silver and turquoise jewelry laid out on blankets in the plaza, and had nailed the image. As he continued to look around he saw any number of Mexican restaurants. If Gill had done his homework he would have known that *New* Mexican cuisine, though similar in some respects, was a different animal in both ingredients and preparation than its southern cousin. The Zia tattoo on his left calf was also a little over the top. Gill had seen him in shorts, and this little bit of poetic license rubbed him, metaphorically and, as the tattoo was still pretty fresh, physically, a little raw. Well, at least he wasn’t wearing a Cubs jersey.

The one thing that always struck him in these stories was the overwhelming sense of earnestness. Sure, bits of humor and fun were sprinkled throughout Gill’s adventures and he often ran up against both odd characters and strange situations. But always with an underlying sincerity that set him on edge. In real life he had developed a habit of making ridiculous statements and playing fast and loose with authenticity, but within the confines of the author’s reality, he adopted a more sober demeanor.

The most important thing he had learned was to not fight against the coming story. Previously, he had tried to impose his will on what was happening around him, and the more he struggled, the more twisted up his brain became, all the while the story grinding along around, and through, him. This was the kind of futile effort that he was learning to put aside, mainly in the name of self-preservation. If he had to draw an enormous scene of carnage in sidewalk chalk, then so be it. Hating chalk as he did, he had tried to fight that one, but it had made no difference. The image still got made, the lady from the arts council still went berserk, and he had almost stroked out while trying to resist. The way to survive, and derive some enjoyment, from the situation was to let go and float along on the tale as best he could.

With that in mind, he walked over to the circus clown peeking through the side curtain of a Volkswagen microbus and ordered a burrito.