

Dottie Hinkle, Originally from Baltimore

By Ken Gerber and Brian Hirt

Published January 6, 2014 in *AE—The Canadian Science Fiction Review*

YOUR NAME IS Dottie Hinkle...

My name is Dottie Hinkle. I'm nine years-old, and I live in Sheridan County, Nebraska. My family moved here from Baltimore in 1904 when I was just two on account of times not being so good in Baltimore and good land being so cheap here. My folks said the government was trying to encourage people to move out west. I guess it worked on us.

Now, before I start, I want to say that I'm a good girl. Ask anyone. I mind my parents and I'm a hard worker with the house chores and the animals, and I don't hardly ever fight. But I hit back—and hard—if anyone messes with my little brother Ernest. But even that's a good thing, right? I'm not bad. I'm not.

But I've done a horrible thing. *Invented* a horrible thing.

No, not horrible at all. Ingenious. Groundbreaking.

I call it my killing eye. Hardware embedded in my left optic nerve can develop and deliver a beam of concentrated Zhao-Weissman energy—up to 40 Gigajoules through the right medium.

My real left eye, my organic one, remains alive but unseeing. A small price to

pay.

My killing eye is a weapon of assassination and a weapon of war. I have killed with it. I may yet start a war.

You're nine-years old...

Killing eye? No, I couldn't have built something like that. My name is Dottie Hinkle. I'm nine years-old, and I live in Sheridan County, Nebraska. I'm learning multiplication and division now in school. Our teacher Miss Barton held a competition in our class—"Fifty-six divided by eight" and "forty-two divided by six". (The answer is seven to both of those.)

And when it was over, there was a tie between me and Norman Overland. He's a smart boy, but kind of a show-off. Next, Miss Barton gave us a tie-breaker: "Show that the map $w = \log((z-1)/(z+1))$ maps the upper half plane in the complex plane of z to the semi-infinite strip bounded by the lines $w=0$ and $w=\pi*i$ in the complex plane of w ."

You live in Sheridan County...

No, I got mixed up. That was a question from the math portion of the January 2080 Applied Physics Qualifying Exam at Berkeley. Miss Barton's question was easier than that—but still hard for a nine-year old. "One-sixty-nine divided by thirteen." I knew the answer was thirteen, but Norman Overland got it first. That was unfair, because Norman has a Ph.D. in Biophysical Dynamics from University of Waterloo, and I'm just a nine year-old girl who lives in Sheridan County, Nebraska.

My name is Dottie Hinkle. I'm nine years old.

Today Ernest and I had some trouble on the way home from school. We were stopping at Mr. Morgan's stables to visit Penny and maybe feed her some oats. But Penny wasn't there today. The stable wasn't there today either. Sometimes it isn't.

Instead, we saw two men who stopped us and asked a lot of strange questions. Something about Zhao-Weissman energy, whatever that is. Ernest didn't like that they were bothering us, and he shouted at them to leave us alone. One man knocked Ernest to the ground, so I punched him in the chest. He staggered and fell

down again, even though I'm just a kid.

Your parents moved here from Baltimore when you were two...

No, let me think: Ernest and I came straight home after school. That's right. The days were getting longer, and Ernest and I went up to the loft in the barn. There were some boards that I thought would make a good fort. I like to build stuff. Dad says that girls shouldn't build stuff, but he's never seen some of the things I can build.

Ernest and I were building the fort when we saw the two men. They entered the barn, and we tried to stay quiet in the loft but they spotted us. When they started to climb the ladder, I got scared. And I know I'm not supposed to use my killing eye, but I did. I concentrated my thoughts in the back of my brain and I shot a beam at the first man. He disappeared in a hot white flash. And then the second man too. The barn erupted in flames. We fled.

I feel awful for killing them, but they were going to... what? Arrest me? Kill me? Worse?

So Ernest and I chartered a flight out of Sheridan County. I have colleagues in Lucerne, and that seemed like the best chance to find harbour. Ernest had inhaled a lot of smoke, and my list of crimes now included killing two government agents. I know they were only doing their jobs, upholding the Zhao-Weissman Test Ban Treaty of 2098, but I couldn't just let them capture me, or extract the killing eye from my head. Wait, 2098? I mean the Test Ban Treaty of 1904. No... 2098.

Stop.

My name is not Dottie Hinkle. I'm not from Nebraska or Baltimore. My name is Michael Weissman. I'm a Berkeley research scientist. I'm a prisoner.

The killing weapon integrated in my optic nerve is too dangerous to extract, too precious to destroy. And my captors need me alive and conscious to unlock how it works.

And look how afraid they are on the other side of the glass.

Just how good are the ambient conditions for summoning a killing beam? I wonder.

(Damn. Choose another program. The Nebraska profile isn't working. Quickly.)
Your name is Allen Fisk. You are thirty-three years old, and you live in
Coquitlam, B.C. ...

My name is Allen Fisk. I'm thirty-three years old, and I live in Coquitlam, B.C. Today I went camping with Carol. We drove up to Okanagan Lake and pitched a tent right on the sand. We had the whole spot to ourselves until two men showed up. I destroyed them with my killing eye. I've done a horrible thing.

No.

Not horrible at all.

THE END