

## FAST LIVING

Hank Quense

Flash  
Fiction Online

**Y**ou both have a very rare condition,” the doctor said to my twin brother and me. “In fact, you two are the fourth and fifth cases ever recorded in the hundred years of Martian inhabitation. It might be caused by something in the well water that effects a small number of people.”

“Can you cure it?” Tommy asked.

The doctor shrugged. “We’ll send you back to Earth so their research facilities can work on it.”

I didn’t want to know, but I asked anyway: “What happened to the others?”

“Your syndrome is like arthritis combined with Hutchinson-Guilford disease. Fast aging, in other words.” The doctor paused. “The other patients didn’t live long.”



For six months researchers prodded and tested us, but they seemed more interested in running their tests than in finding a cure. We eventually searched for doctors on our own and found a guy whose medical degree was from a country we had never heard of.

“I’ve had success treating fast-aging symptoms,” he told us, “but I must warn you. This treatment is not approved by any government.”

Tommy and I goggled at the man.

“You can cure us?” I stammered.

“I can arrest the disease and possibly effect some improvement.”

Tommy and I exchanged painful high-fives.

“However,” the doctor said, “I use a highly concentrated elixir made from an oil found in the liver of cold-water fish. Haddock, for instance, or cod. The concentration makes it toxic and many people develop an allergic reaction.”

I wiggled in the chair. This didn’t sound too promising.

“We’ll try a sample.” He removed a small vial and eye-droppered two measures into paper cups that he topped off with orange juice.

We took the indescribably disgusting medicine.

“By tomorrow,” the doctor said, “you will know if you’re allergic to it.”

Tommy’s reaction was like a debilitating hangover combined with shingles.

A daily dose of elixir produced a marvelous improvement in my condition, but my delight was tempered by the continued deterioration of my brother. Tommy was soon confined to a nursing facility.

Towards the end, I visited him one last time while he lay in a coma.

The nurse said to me, “I’m sorry.”

I nodded and replied, “There, but for the trace of cod, go I.” ●

## HANK QUENSE



folks who crave serious Fantasy and SF can get a full measure in any daily newspaper.

In the spirit of disclosure, Hank reports that all of the story ideas (the good ones anyway) come from Manny. Hank merely translates the dog’s ideas into a manuscript.

The pair of them have sold stories to *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*, *Cyberpulp*, *Fantastical Visions*, *Neo-opsis*, *Irish Fantasy Quarterly*, *Faeries* (France), *Electric Spec*, *Scyweb Bem*, *Glassfire*, *Darker Matter* as well as several anthologies.

Hank can be reached via e-mail at [hanque99@verizon.net](mailto:hanque99@verizon.net), while Manny refuses to get an internet address until someone develops a paw-friendly keyboard. Visit their website at [hankquense.com](http://hankquense.com).

Hank—assisted by his faithful mutt, Manny—writes science fiction and fantasy stories (along with an occasional writing article) from Bergenfield, NJ. All of these stories are humorous or satirical because he refuses to write serious genre stories. He feels that