



## HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM MEERKAT MEADE

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Friends,

It hardly seems that a year has passed! Just a few moments ago, it seems, it was summer; now it's time for the annual Holiday Letter.

We've been working on self-improvement this year, and we're pretty happy with the results. It all started in January, when Renfield dusted off his old weight bench and started using the exercise bike. In no time at all, he was lifting twelve hundred pounds with each arm. (Of course, the bionic implants helped a little bit.) Not to be outdone, Thomas began a jogging regimen (coupled with implanted servo-motors and a compact fusion power source); he's improved steadily and recently broke the four-second mile. Don, meanwhile, succeeded in April in getting the top off a jar of mayonnaise.

We haven't neglected the needs of the mind, either. Thomas decided to improve his language skills; in addition to 14th Century Serbo-Croatian and the whole Finno-Urgaic family, he also picked up Tagalog, Basque, and Botchi. As a result, Thomas is now fluent in six million forms of communication. Don, building on the foundation of his math degree, completed courses in hyper-dimensional Riemann geometry, sixth-degree tensor calculus, and transformative matrix algebra. And Renfield finally finished *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*.

This year, we've also been improving our artistic skills. Don entered the world of painting with a six-week apprenticeship under Rick Sternbach and Michael Whelan. Renfield, in turn, took some classes to improve his voice. His teachers seem impressed by his progress; we got very complimentary notes from Placido Domingo, Paul McCartney, and that nice Ms. Battle. Thomas, meanwhile, ate half a jar of library paste.

In all this self-improvement, we haven't neglected our spiritual sides. In his spare time, Renfield completed an exhaustive study of the Ten Commandments, going back to the original Semitic texts and following their development through successive translations into Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and English. His conclusion is rather comforting: whatever else one can say about the Ten Commandments, one must always come back to the pleasant fact that there are only ten of them. Thomas sought the wisdom of Buddhist scholars; he spent months in a Nepalese monastery and says he is not quite ready to discuss the profound insights he received. And Don is still investigating the mysterious disappearance of all those parishoners in "Here's the church, here's the steeple."

Finally, we've tried to improve our mechanical skills. Don practiced his neurosurgical skills extensively (hence all those bionic implants we talked about). Thomas took a collection of odd components and assembled them into a working time machine, with which he detected (and successfully corrected) a major flaw in the time-space continuum (which is why summer was followed so quickly by December this year . . . oops!). And Renfield, after years of failure, managed at last to open a milk carton at the right end.

Here's hoping that *your* life will keep improving through all of 1998 !

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