

Terrestrials

By Shane Dent

Two beds with two pillows. Two layers of sheets. Two lamps, one above each bed. One phone. One chair. One bathroom with two sinks. Two hairless, naked husks stand reflected before two mirrors.

Two lidless eyes stare into the mirrors, the harsh fluorescent light bending off their greasy sheen. Four slick, webbed hands reach into one vat, filled to the rim with a thick, creamy substance. The hands rub the cream into their damp skin as steam sizzles off their gray crust.

Water droplets slide down the tiled walls, the air thick like a swamp. The mask of human skin tightens around the creatures as it dries. They plunge their hands into a jar full of color, painting on lips and noses, hair and irises.

Squinting at their new flesh in the glass, they look almost like the Earthbound ones. All that's left now is to practice. They slide their new feet across the carpet, feeling it bristle against their new casing. One form puts on a deep blue suit, fumbling with the tie while the other drapes itself in a blazing red dress.

They practice the rhythm of walking, pretending to portray the likeness of having bones and sinew beneath their painted masks. Their shoes press circles into the carpet as they try and try again. They fall and fumble, and the "female" breaks its heel. The "male" loses its nose under the bed.

One broken chair. Two broken lamps. One torn sheet. One lost nose. Three missing ears. One thousand three hundred and eleven shards of broken glass. At last they step outside on the patio, testing their perfected walks in the light of the Sun. The heat softens their shells, giving it a

texture similar to the Earthbound's skin. They sit across from each other at a table, studying each other's freshly molded features.

They scrunch and contort their Earthbound faces, experimenting with expression and emotion and body language. At first blinking causes their new "eyes" to slide down their cheeks, but after enough repetition they can blink without upsetting their camouflage.

They pretzel their mouths, twisting out grunts and moans in an effort to speak like those they hide amongst. Their whoops and spasms draw the attention of a flock of nearby birds, touching down at the top of the fence to see where the commotion is coming from. After an hour of practice the pair decide it is better if they avoid trying to speak the Earthbound tongues.

They wriggle back through the sliding glass door and over the sea of carpet, leaving the birds behind as they shuffle their way to the door of the hotel room. They survey the room one last time, taking in the litter of broken glass and piled ears before the "female" limply turns the doorknob.

It is time now. Time to observe. Time to blend in and become a part of this undocumented species, these Earthnoids. Time to infiltrate their institutions and confiscate their devices. They confidently cross the threshold and stride down the hallway side by side, leaving a trail of ears and noses behind them.