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Johnny Quantum And The Supergalactical Hellfire Jamboree

by Terry Black

When he was just a baby boy, all dimples and forelocks and pudgy, flailing arms, Johnny Quantum's mother looked into those eyes as clear and blue as a mirror lake and told her husband, "Harold, you mark my words—someday this little boy will go farther and faster than any man who ever lived."

And Johnny Quantum's father squinted at that little face and said, "Mabel, you're right. The boy's got a gift, sure as rain in springtime, he can do most anything he wants. I just hope it don't bite him in the backside."

Well, Johnny he just smiled that silver-dollar smile, and melted their hearts like spun sugar, and lay there in his crib waiting to see what fate and fortune and the Good Lord Almighty would heave into his path.

Of course, this was long before the aliens came, or time ran backwards, or the U.S. Air Force ever thought to wonder just what in the hell happened to that Jet-Assisted Take Off engine in Hangar Three. But they say Johnny had an inkling even back then, you could see it in his eyes, as clear and blue as a mirror lake.

He was up to something.

"Johnny, don't do it," begged Sue Ann Swanson, the pert and pouty lovestruck prom queen stuck like a barnacle to Johnny's elbow. "You're crazy, it's too dangerous!"

"Don't you worry, Sue Ann," said Johnny, who'd sprouted weedlike over eighteen-plus years to the dimpled Samson in leather and Ray-bans that Sue Ann found so attractive. "I'll just take the Princess here for a little spin and be back before you can powder your nose, you see if I'm not right."

And he pulled back the tarp over a candy-apple-red

'57 Chevy, all spit and sparkle under the Harvest moon, except for the large and ungainly Jet-Assisted Take Off engine secured by sausage-thick cables over the Chevy's pulled-back convertible top. Johnny had, with some finagling, charmed a supply clerk at Nellis Air Force Base into shipping the engine (and some 200-plus gallons of hydrazine jet fuel) to Johnny's home address, post-paid. (The clerk, whose name was Jolene, later married the Judge Advocate General dispatched to find the vanished hardware.)

"Seriously, Johnny, this is a bad idea," Sue Ann persisted, running her ruby fingernails through Johnny's flaxen hair. "The last time some poor fool gave his car a jet boost, he wound up decorating a mountainside."

"Don't you worry, Sue Ann." Johnny pulled a jug from the rear seat and fortified himself with a double swig of Grandma Quantum's kick-ass Cayenne pepper and Indian corn moonshine. "I'm not going into the mountain, I'm going *over* the mountain. Give me a kiss for luck." And he vaulted into his seat like a Rumanian gymnast.

Sue Ann pouted prettily, pressed her lips to his, and watched hand-to-throat as Johnny put the Chevy in gear and careened toward the looming hulk of Shoebox Mountain, seeming to fill the sky with its sheer granite face. He gave a jaunty wave and pulled the lever marked JET BOOST on his dash.

And nothing happened.

Johnny felt the first tremor of concern. Only a prodigy of thrust vectoring and aerodynamics could have figured the trajectory of a jet-powered Chevy to the one-hundred-and-ninth decimal place, but Johnny had, and he knew the danger of even the slightest hitch in his stunt-ride timetable. When the burners kicked in