

Asimov's Logo

| [Home](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Subscription Rates](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Links](#) | [Forum](#) |

---

## Why The World Didn't End Last Tuesday : Connie Willis

The meeting, was at Gabe's, and I'd told everybody to be there at three, but Sara was the only one on time.

"John can't come," Gabe said. "He had to go to Patmos."

"Is he sending somebody from the Planning Committee then?" I said. We had a lot of decisions to make, and the Planning Committee always has a fit if you don't follow their plans to the letter.

"He didn't say whether he was or not," Gabe said.

"What about everybody else?" I said. "Where's Raquel? And Rate?"

Gabs shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. Nobody else has called to say they couldn't come, and you know Phanuel and his buddies. They're always late."

"I know," I said. The three of them have never made it to any of my meetings on time, and that time they were supposed to run up to Mature and tell Abraham's wife she was pregnant, they were so late she was eighty

But Rafe is usually early. And prepared. And has actually done everything he was supposed to, which was why I'd put him in charge of Publicity. And now he wasn't here either.

## Subscriptions

If you enjoyed this sample and want to read more, Asimov's Science Fiction offers you another way to subscribe to our print magazine. We have a secure server which will allow you to order a subscription online. There, you can order a subscription by providing us with your name, address and credit card information.

[Subscribe Now](#)

## Copyright

"WHY THE  
WORLD DIDN'T  
END LAST

"It's three-fifteen," I said. "Where are they?"

"Don't get in a tailspin," Gabe said. "So they're a few minutes late. It's not the end of the world. They'll get here pretty soon." He turned to Sara. "Can I get you anything, Saraqael?"

She shook her head.

"Michael?" he said to me.

"The rest of the committee;" I said glumly.

"Yeah," Sara said, tapping her foot. "I wish they'd get here so we could get started. I've got to leave at four."

At four. Wonderful. "Where are they?" I said. "Don't they realize this thing is only two weeks away, and we're not even half ready? We don't have a place booked, we don't have the programs printed, we haven't even started on the decorations--"

"Oh, that reminds me," Saraqael said, leafing through her daily planner, "I had a question about the seating." She leafed some more and pulled out a piece of paper. "It says in the Planning Committee's report there are supposed to be twenty-four seats for the elders `round about the throne: What does `round about' mean exactly? Are they supposed to be on the sides or in front or what? It doesn't say."

Which is why the Planning Committee should be here, I thought, instead of traipsing off to Patmos. "On the sides," I said. "If they don't like it, they can change it."

"On the sides," Saraqael said, writing it down. "I hope that won't get in the way of the rainbow."

"Rainbow?" I said.

"The rainbow `round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald,'" she said, reading from the instructions again. "You have no idea how much trouble I had finding a green rainbow. I had to go to five different places, and the only one they had was huge. I'm afraid if the elders sit on the sides the rainbow will be right on top of them."

TUESDAY" by  
Connie Willis,  
copyright ©  
1994 by Connie  
Willis, used by  
permission of  
the author.

"Have them sit in the front, then," I said.

"Okay," she said. "No, that won't work. The Seven Lamps of Fire are in front. How about if they sit behind the throne?"

"Fine," I said. "Why don't you go ahead and report on the decorations, since you have to leave early?"

"Okay," she said, fishing for another set of papers. "Okay, well, I've got the rainbow and

"Sorry I'm late," Phanuel said. "Uriel and Penemue and I got stuck at Sodom. They'll be here in a few minutes."

"Can I get you anything?" Gabe said.

"No, I'm fine." He sat down. "What did I miss?"

"Saraqael's making her report on the decorations. Go ahead, Sara."

"Okay, well, I've got the rainbow, and the seats for the elders. I don't have the seats for the choir yet because I didn't know how many we needed."

"Who's in charge of the choir?" I asked.

"Penemue," Phanuel said. "He should be here any minute."

"We'll do the choir when he gets here," I said. "Go ahead."

"Okay, well, I've got the rainbow and the seats for the elders and the seven lamps

"Fine," I said. "Whatever. Go on."

"Okay, and I've got-

"Sorry I'm late," Uriel said.

"Can I get you anything?" Gabe said.

"No, that's okay," Uriel said, sitting down. "I got stuck talking

to Lot's wife. You know how she is. I couldn't get away. Are we to Programming yet?"

"No," I said. "Saraqael's reporting on the decorations." I nodded at her to start.

"Okay, well, I've got the rainbow-" she said.

"And the lamps and the chairs for the elders," I said quickly. "What about the Book of the Judgments?"

"Yeah," she said, " `written within and on the back side and sealed with seven seals.' I don't have the wax for the seven seals yet. I didn't know what color you wanted me to get."

"Red," Phanuel said.

"Black," Uriel said at the same time.

"What does the Planning Committee report say?" I asked.

"It doesn't," Sara said. "I was kind of thinking gold to go with the crowns and the trumpets."

"Fine," I said. "Gold."

"Shouldn't there be a motion?" Phanuel said.

No, I thought, but I said, "Sure. Do I have a motion that the wax for the seals be gold?"

"I so move," Sara said.

"I second," Gabe said.

"Discussion?" I said.

"I think black would be more appropriate than gold," Uriel said. "After all, the breaking of the seals is supposed to signal the coming of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."

"Or red," Phanuel said. "To go with the moon's turning to blood. And one of the horses is red, isn't it? Death or

something?"

"War's red," Gabe said. "Death is a pale horse, pale rider."

"What does 'a pale horse' mean?" Sara said. "White, or a palomino, or what?"

"Gray," Uriel said.

"White," Gabe said.

"It can't be white," Phaniel said. "Famine's horse is white:"

Penemue came in. "You guys went off without me," he said. "I thought you said we were all going to meet at Gomorrah and come over together."

"Can I get you anything?" Gabe said.

"I waited for half an hour for you guys," Penemue said. "It was like a furnace." He sat down. "What are we talking about?"

"The seven seals," Uriel said. "What color do you think they should be.

"Blue," he said.

"Blue?" Uriel said.

"Why in heaven's name blue?" Phaniel said.

"I like blue," he said.

"There's a motion on the table," I said. "All those in favor of the seals being gold say aye."

Gabe and Sara voted aye. Uriel, Phaniel, and Penemue voted nay, which meant it was a tie. I said, "Sara, get in touch with the Planning Committee and ask them what they want," which I should have said in the first place. "Do you have anything else to report?"

She shook her head.

"Good. Publicity?"

"That's Rafe," Gabe said.

Which I knew. I was getting rattled. It was three forty

"I forgot to bring my list," Penemue said. "Do you want me to go get it?"

"No," I said. "Do you have the judgments lined up?"

"That's Programming's job," he said. "I was in charge of getting the seraphim and the four horsemen."

"Do you have them?"

"All but Pestilence. And does anybody have a pair of scales that Famine can carry?"

"I've got a pair of scales for measuring the hills and the mountains, but I think they'd be too big," Gabe said.

"What about the balance Nebuchadnezzar was weighed in?" Phanuel said. "Isn't that around somewhere?"

"I think Daniel has it," Uriel said. "I'll ask him."

"Good," I said. "And you've got the seraphim?"

"Yes. They wanted to know what they were supposed to wear."

"White raiment," Sara said. "That's what everybody else is wearing, the elders and the souls that were slain for the word of God and the choir. Speaking of which, I need to know how many chairs the choir's going to need."

"Penemue?" I said.

He shuffled through a tangle of papers. "I must have left my list at home."

"I just need to know about how many," Sara said.

"Sorry I'm late," Rafe said, coming in with his arms full of notebooks and rolled-up maps. "Jacob insisted on arm-wrestling me. And then, after I got rid of him, Satan called. He wanted to know who we want for the Antichrist." He turned to me. "And he said to tell you that if you haven't reserved Armageddon, you'd better do it fast because it's already booked for the whole month of January." .

"That's the Facilities Committee's job," I said. "Does anybody know if Baradiel's done that?"

Everybody shook their heads. "He said he was going to try to call ' sometime this week," Sara said, "but he was pretty busy."

I asked Rafe, "Did Satan have any suggestions for the Antichrist?"

"The usual. Deng. Yasser. Woody."

"What about the Saddam Hussein?" Gabe said, "He'd be perfect."

"I already asked him," Rafe said. "He refused to cooperate. He accused me of being from the U.N."

"It's too bad the Republicans aren't still in office," Penemue said.

"There's always the British press," Phanuel said. "Or Rush Limbaugh."

"Why does it have to be a man?" Sara said. "Women are capable of wicked powers and blasphemies, too."

"Name one," Penemue said.

"I don't know. Leona Helmsley. Hillary Rodham Clinton. Amy Fisher. I just don't think we should automatically assume it's got to be a man."

"Amy Fisher?" Uriel said. "I hardly think trying to kill your boyfriend's wife qualifies you for the position of Head Beast."

"He claims he wasn't her boyfriend," Gabe said.

"And you believe that?" Phaniel said.

I grabbed one of Rafe's rolled-up maps and whacked the table with it. "Hark!" I said. "We're getting way off track here. The issue is the Antichrist."

"How anybody could possibly believe Joey Buttafuoco didn't-" Phaniel said.

"What about Dick?" Phaniel said. "I heard he's been making a comeback."

"What about Ron?" Sara said. "Or Nancy? Why do you always automatically assume it should be a man?"

"Or Nancy's astrologer?" Penemue said.

This was getting us nowhere. "Rafe," I said, "you and Azazel meet with Satan and choose somebody."

"I think there should be at least one female on the committee," Sara said. "Otherwise, they're going to automatically-"

"And Sara," I said hastily. "Where were we?" I said, looking at my notes. "Never mind. Rafe, give us your report on the Publicity Committee."

"Okay," Rafe said, opening one of his thick notebooks. "Everything's pretty much taken care of. I've got famines in the Sudan, Zambia, and Somalia, and plenty of wars."

"What about rumors of wars?"

He opened another notebook. "North Korea, South Africa, the occupied territories, and Macedonia, unless they decide to change their flag. I've gotten barcode scanners put in all the grocery stores, the EC currency's coming along nicely, and the ozone hole's expanding. As far as plagues go, we've got more than enough: cholera, resistant TB, AIDS, and an outbreak of diphtheria, unless Clinton pushes his health plan through."

"It is too bad the Republicans aren't still in office," Penemue



muttered.

"Earthquakes," Rafe said, reading from the notebook. "Nicaragua, eastern Japan, Poland, and Corvallis, Oregon. San Francisco's all set up, but we're saving that for the week before. Oh, and I've arranged for Pinatubo to erupt again."

I knew I could count on Rafe. I relaxed a little. Maybe we'd be ready

in time after all. "All right, so the publicity's done, Rafe and his subcommittee are going to get an Antichrist, the decorations are all set-

"Except for the choir seating," Sara said. "And the elders. I've been thinking, it's not going to work to have the elders in front of the throne even if I do move the lamps because you won't be able to see the angel opening the seven seals."

"Can't they sit on the sides?" Rafe said.

"No," Sara said. "I explained that before you got here. There's no room with the rainbow."

"Why do they have to be onstage at all?" Phaniel said. "Why can't they sit out in the audience?"

"Because they have to accompany the choir on their harps. Speaking of which, you never did tell me the number of chairs," she said to Penemue.

"Yeah, well, I wanted to discuss that with the committee before I signed up any more. I thought maybe we should consider scaling the choir back a little. Tens of thousands and thousands upon thousands is an awful lot of costumes, and, like Sara says, the stage is already pretty crowded."

"How many do you have lined up?" I said.

"This is a really busy time of year, what with New Year's and all. And I haven't heard from Baradiel. He had S through Z."

"How many do you have?" I said.

"Quite a few didn't think we should sing the Hallelujah Chorus. They say it's been done to death."

"How many?"

"Actual commitments or possibles?"

"Actual commitments."

He checked his list, ticking off names with his finger. "Four."

"Four?" I said.

"Quite a few others have expressed an interest. They said they'd get back to us as soon as they checked their calendars. I'm pretty sure they'll do it-"

"And how many would that make?"

He counted again. "Eight."

"Eight?!" Sara said. "It's only two weeks away!"

"Maybe we should consider postponing it a couple of weeks," Gabe said.

"We can't postpone," Rafe said. "The publicity's already out there. What about my signs and portents? What about Macedonia?"

Uriel waved his hand. "There are always wars and rumors of wars. Nobody'll even notice."

"Maybe we should cancel it altogether and try again next year," Sara said. "That way we'd have plenty of time to get a choir together and come up with the last Horseman, and we might have more to choose from in the way of an Antichrist."

"If we wait four years," Penemue said, "the Republicans'll be back in office:'

"We're not canceling," I said. "We've already postponed this thing twice, and we're not doing it again. What we are going to

do is get organized. Sara, you order the wax for the seven seals. Gold," I added before she could say anything.

"Penemue, you find somebody for Pestilence. Rafe, take care of the Antichrist and get San Francisco ready to go. The rest of you are going to have to help recruit choir members. We're going to meet again Thursday, and I want everybody to have at least ten thousand apiece by then."

"I can't meet Thursday," Penemue said. "I've got an appointment with Balsam's donkey."

"What about Friday?" I said.

"Hunh unh," Sara said. "Friday's no good. How about Wednesday morning?"

"That won't give us enough time to line up the choir," Phaniel said. "How about next Wednesday?"

"That's the earthquake," Rafe said.

I looked at my calendar. Sunday was out. "How about Monday?"

"That won't work either," Rafe said. "I'm pouring out vials of wrath upon the earth that whole day. And that reminds me, I don't think anybody's done anything about the Great Day of Wrath. Who was supposed to be in charge of that?"

"Programming," Phaniel said.

"Publicity," Penemue said.

"Entertainment," Uriel said.

"Do you mean to tell me that no one is in charge of Wrath?!"

"Now don't go getting in a tailspin," Gabe said. "I'm sure somebody's in charge of it."

"Wouldn't it be Facilities' job?" Sara said. "I mean, it's mountains and rocks and things. Oh, my heavens, look what time it is. I've got to go." She grabbed up her daily planner and went flying off.

"So do I," Rafe said, gathering up his maps. "Satan said he was going to call back."

"And we were supposed to be at the Ladder Climb an hour ago," Phaniel said. He and Uriel and Penemue took off.

"We didn't schedule another meeting," Rate said.

"I know," I said.

"Well, call me when you decide when it is. And let me know if you need help with anything else:"

I watched him ascend, and then sat there awhile, staring at my notes.

"Can I get you anything?" Gabe said.

"We're going to have to cancel," I said. "We don't have an Antichrist or a Pestilence. Nobody's in charge of the Great Day of His Wrath. We don't have a dragon or a Wormwood or a bottomless pit. All we have is a heavenly quartet."

"Now don't go getting in a tailspin again," Gabe said. "It'll all come together. And what if we do have to cancel? It's not the end of the world.

To contact us about editorial matters , send an [email to Asimov's SF](#).

Questions regarding subscriptions should be sent to our [subscription address](#).

If you find any Web site errors, typos or other stuff worth mentioning, please send it to <mailto:williegarcia.com@dellmagazines.com>.

Copyright © 1999 Asimov's SF All Rights Reserved Worldwide

SF Site spot art