

To: Samantha Dempsey
From: Don Jackson

Karen and I need your help. Lisa
has joined a cult and is ...

A groovy mystery

The Daughters of Freya is a groundbreaking piece of fiction, but you can't find it at your local bookstore—check your inbox instead

by Vince Darcangelo

As a journalist, I live by e-mail. Being in contact with more than 100 people a day precludes more intimate contact except for the most necessary of communication. The downside of this efficient, electronic-messaging world is that human relationships take a back seat to productivity. Which leads to the question, "Who is on the other end of all those e-mails?"

This was the question asked by friends and writers Michael Betcherman and David Diamond, whose long-distance e-mail discourse (Betcherman lives in Toronto, Diamond in California), evolved into a mystery novel. The result is *The Daughters of Freya*, a groundbreaking book released in e-mail format.

"In January of 2003, [Diamond] suggested writing a book together that would all be e-mails, taking advantage of the fact that you don't know who is on the other end of an e-mail," says Betcherman.

Though originally conceived as a traditionally published book of e-mails, at the suggestion of another friend the book evolved into a pioneering project synthesizing literature and technology into a new and exciting format.

"There've been a lot of other attempts to use the Internet to get people to read, and most of them have really been trying to get people to open an e-mail and read a chapter of a book," says Betcherman. "They haven't been very successful because people don't want to read it that way. The way we use the Internet mirrors the way people actually use the Internet. You go to your inbox and open an e-mail and you're reading an e-mail. They're not written as chapter prose. They're written as e-mails."

The Daughters of Freya is a mystery in which journalist Samantha Dempsey investigates a mysterious sex cult in California that has recruited the daughter of one of her friends. Reuniting with a college chum who's now a West Coast magazine editor, Dempsey begins investigating the Daughters of Freya and

To order *The Daughters of Freya* or sign up for the first three free installments, visit www.emailmystery.com.

its charismatic leader, Simone, and discovers that this is more than some kooky California cult—there is something sinister going on behind the sex and the New Age preaching.

"It's a conventional narrative in the sense that it's a mystery with good guys and bad guys and clues," says Betcherman. "But with the storytelling we wanted to take advantage of the delivery, take advantage of the Internet, of the way we were using the story, by looking for opportunities to make it as suspenseful as possible."

The e-mail format allows *The Daughters of Freya* to be told in "real time." Readers receive between three and five e-mails a day for three weeks, following Samantha's investigation through missives exchanged between her, her family, her friends and others. The e-mails also include links to websites that provide further information. Adding to the suspense is the fact that readers can't read ahead.

"The idea was to try to give a sense of a real-time experience in the way that as she's investigating the story, you have to wait for the next development. You can't just turn the page," says Betcherman. "The few occasions that [Samantha]'s in jeopardy, those e-mails would come 15 minutes apart, so if you were at your computer you would get a real sense of suspense building up because you know she's in jeopardy and you have no way of finding out what's happening except to wait for the next development, just as people would in real life."

So far, reader response to *The Daughters of Freya* has been very positive. Betcherman says that he constantly receives e-mails from readers who have finished the story but continue to check their inbox for further installments. For less than \$10, *The Daughters of Freya* is comparable to most mystery paperbacks, and cheaper than a hardcover. And for those nervous of the unique format, the first few installments of the novel are available for free at the book's website, www.emailmystery.com. **Z**

Respond: letters@boulderweekly.com

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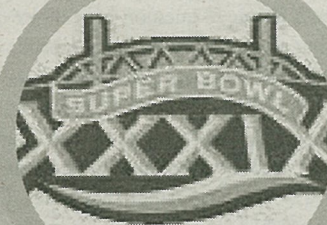
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Web watch

Who needs world peace when you've got football?

<http://www.superbowl.com>

Normally, the B-dub's mind is pre-occupied with girls, beer, rock 'n' roll and world peace. But come January, all other pursuits take a back seat to the NFL postseason. Sorry ladies, it's all about the football right now. I'll make it up to you in February and take you somewhere nice.

If you're with the B-dub on this, then you've probably found your way to www.superbowl.com, where you can read all about the big game. The site features facts, stats and historical pieces on the game—once known by the cumbersome and less superlative title, The AFL-NFL Championship Game—that has become an international event. You can even join the NFL Playoff Challenge, a postseason-themed fantasy competition. Of course, you'll be crushed if you do sign up, as the B-dub is going to dominate the fantasy-football world this postseason! (Yeah, the B-dub Flamers are number one!)

For right now it's, "all football, all the time." We'll get around to solving that whole Middle East thing after the Pro Bowl. **Z**

—Vince Darcangelo

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