

## INSIDE AURORA: Hare Despair

By Scott Johnston

I couldn't believe it; the Easter Bunny's annual visit to Aurora had stressed him out again.

That was the obvious conclusion, looking down on him, where he sat slumped on a bench in the arboretum, with his furry face in his hands, and what seemed to be the weight of the world on his shoulders.

?What's wrong?? I asked, sitting down beside him.

He sighed heavily.

I thought back to previous years when I'd run into him in some last-minute panic, and some of the problems he'd encountered here in town.

?You have all your eggs and prizes prepared??

He nodded slowly.

?And you know that the event's being held at the Seniors' Centre??

Another nod.

?On March 30th, right??

?Yeah, I'm all set,? he mumbled.

?So what's wrong??

?I've gone to so much trouble preparing, and this year I know I've thought of everything. But it may all be for nought.?

He looked up at me with red-rimmed eyes.

?The town may not even let me host my own event!?

?Why not?? I asked, astonished.

?They're opening it up to other bidders.?

Seeing my puzzled expression, he continued.

?After all the fuss about the use of Town Park for the Jazz Fest, someone suggested that I have a monopoly on Easter week-end. They think it's only fair for other characters to have the chance to apply. The town may get a better offer.?

?But you've been doing this for years, and the kids and their parents always have a great time. Who could possibly put in a better offer than you?? I asked, incredulous.

He sighed again. It was sad to see his shoulders slumped so much.

?Well, Santa Claus, for one.?

?Santa! He only comes around at Christmas.?

?Yeah. But he's not busy this time of year, he's got deep pockets, and at least a bazillion elves to help him prepare. Sure, the Girl Guides are a huge assistance to me, but let's face it; if St. Nick puts in a bid, I'm sunk.?

?I can't imagine he'd do that. You guys are all friends, aren't you??

?We are, but it's getting harder to compete for children's attention. They're just too jaded by our modern world, and don't have time for us old-fashioned types, anymore. My colleagues are looking at anything they can do to help keep in the spotlight. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if the Tooth Fairy put in a bid.?

I tried to think of some angle to cheer him up. ?This is the first year the town's done this. Perhaps your friends haven't heard about the new open bidding process.?

?Maybe?, he agreed, his eyes brimming with tears. ?But what would I do if I lost out? Easter's all I've got!?

I waited in silence for a minute, while he composed himself.

?So, have you put in your application??

?No, I was just on my way over to drop it off,? he sniffed, brandishing a stack of official looking documents. ?I was up all night working on them.?

He glanced at a tiny watch he'd taken out of a pocket. ?In fact, the deadline's soon. I'd better get going, so I don't miss it.?

?Wish me luck,? he said, slipping off the bench and hopping slowly off towards Town Hall.

I hoped he was successful in maintaining his tradition. He'd been through a lot, and even if a better offer was received, a spring egg hunt in Aurora hosted by someone like the ?Easter Tooth Fairy? just didn't seem the same.

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