

## MAUDE MOLD

#6

by Stanley Lieber

### INTO THE WHITE WORLD

tags: 1961, mars2, spiro\_mold, sue

10 August.

These colors don't run. The familiar red, white, and blue flag of the Russian Federation over the slogan, a bumper sticker some smartass had stuck to the side of the school bus. Spiro waved his hand over the sensor and climbed on.

Kids were packed in like too many comics in a short box. There were no empty seats. Instinctively, Spiro turned to the bus driver, but this was an optionally manned vehicle. He sat down in the arbitrary driver's seat.

After a prolonged period of setbacks both fiscal and technical, the new school buses had progressed from nighttime to daytime operations, migrating out of the black at least partially into the white world. Students still needed to be moved from their apartments in the mancamp to their classrooms over in the next county, and someone up the chain had hit upon the idea of putting them (the school buses, not the students) to honest work. One thing had led to another, and after an extended litigation in which it looked like the primary contractor's preference for Ghost Gray might carry the day, the transports were all painted School Bus Yellow and deployed to the south end of the range.

It seemed to be going well.

Spiro had not been apprised of any of this. But he also didn't know that the school buses were only one variant out of seventeen separate models derived from the same airframe during the past five years. All of which were referred to as "Sue," in honor of the Soviet-era Sukhoi SU-27, an aircraft that had first flown in 1977, and was somehow still generating new model variants even after time had rolled over and then righted itself back to 1961. This might also have explained the Russian flag, come to think of it.

Sue was Spiro's school bus.

"You're sitting on my outfit," Sue said, and Spiro obligingly migrated down the aisle in a vain effort to locate a vacant seat that did not in fact seem to exist.