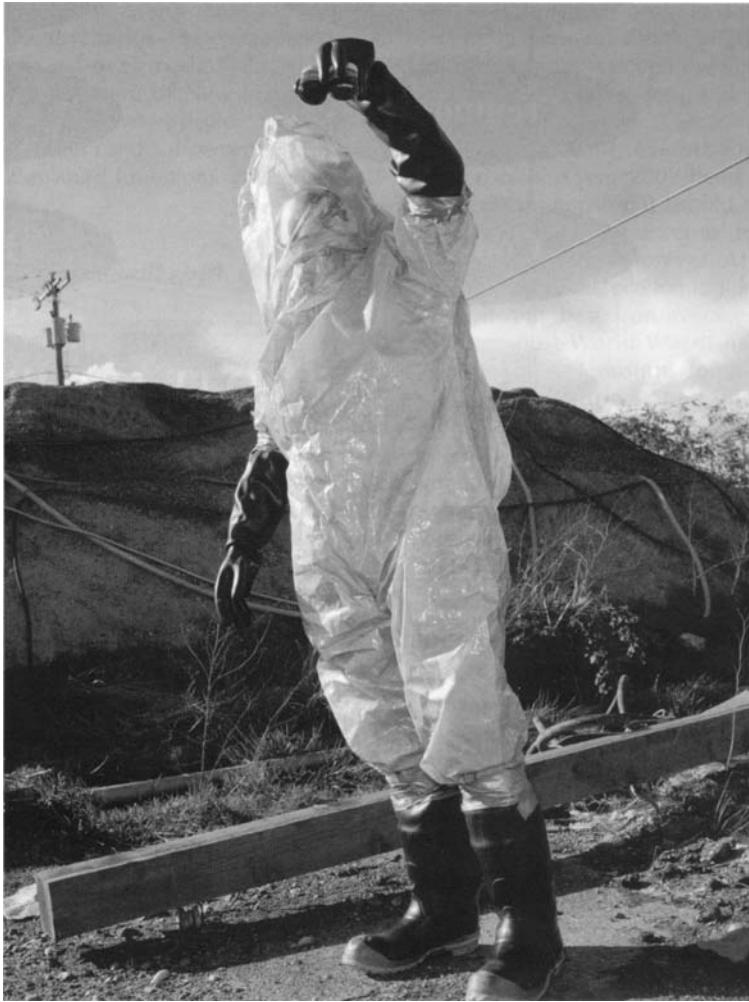


Boondock



Bob was *so* excited to be going to his first prom! He'd had little social interaction with girls and boys his own age because he lived way out in a remote corner of the Nevada desert where his elderly Aunt Flora home-schooled him. For years, his only playmates were Toodles, Flora's imaginary stepson, who materialized whenever she forgot to take her medication, plus Quantoo, Zwarbbz and Bil, the extraterrestrials who ran the nearby Area 51 Motel. But then one day, the three little green men took Flora to Planet Zon-tank for experiments in what they called "right brain reconfiguration." When a month had passed and she still hadn't returned, he reported her abduction to the authorities. Straightaway, the state Bureau of Teachery enrolled him in Boondock Academy, the nearest high school, to finish his education. Of course, "nearest" is a relative term in Nevada, and Boondock was a two-hour commute for Bob. On the other hand, the Army's nuclear test site sat only a brisk ten-minute walk away. Upwind. For someone who was proficient in magnetohydrodynamic space propulsion but ignorant of lunchrooms and jungle gyms, Bob did surprisingly well in a real school. He aced his science tests and, thanks to his anti-grav mukluks, led his track team to a string of victories. Which was enough to cause Flossie, the reigning high school heartthrob, to take notice – so much so that she invited him to the senior prom. Well, Bob was speechless, but he scraped together enough verbs to accept. Without Flora to guide his sartorial selections, he had to rely on advice from his other desert friends, Dwayne and Dwight, a pair of chatty scorpions that had grown up (*way* up – Dwayne was over six feet long!) on the nuclear test site. They suggested his Nomex-Demron radiation suit, since that's what he always wore whenever he visited their nest. Not surprisingly, Flossie was mortified when he picked her up, and all of the other boys jeered him when they arrived at the gaily festooned school auditorium. But Bob would have the last laugh for, due to a telemetry error, the atomic rocket-bomb that was supposed to land and detonate at ground zero in the Army's nuclear test site instead made a beeline for Boondock.