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ABORIGINAL SF

Tales Of the Human Kind

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Contents

Our Alien Publisher Page 3
By a crazy alien

Editor's Notes Page 3
By Charles C. Ryan

Boomerangs Page 4
Our readers respond

Aborigines Page 5
By Laurel Lucas

The Reel Stuff Page 8
By Jessie Horsting

Books Page 12
By Darrell Schweitzer



Sing Page 6
By Kristine Kathryn Rusch
Art by Bob Eggleton

Blood Brothers Page 9
By Patricia Anthony
Art by Cortney Skinner

Containment Page 16
By Dean Whitlock
Art by Charles Lang

One Spring in Wyoming Page 17
By Charles L. Grant
Art by Val Lakey Lindahn

Trackdown Page 24
By John F. Moore
Art by Wendy Snow-Lang

Circus Story Page 25
By Connie Willis
(A "Home System" Story)
Art by N. Taylor Blanchard

A Lunar Cycle Page 19
By Peg Libertus

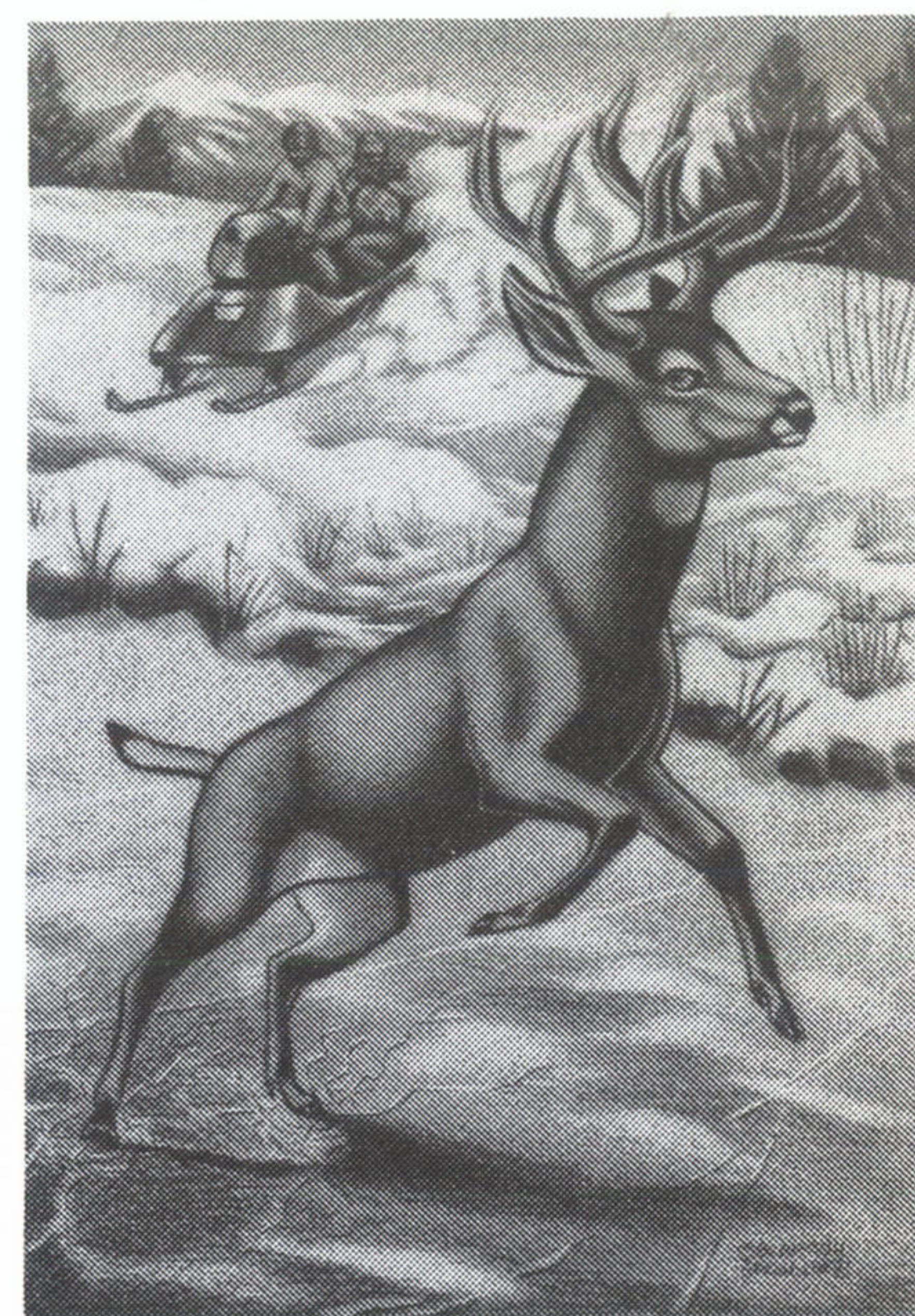
Cartoons Pages 13 & 23
By Sandy Dean

Advertisements

The ABO Art Gallery Page 32

Classified Ads Page 23

Fantasy Review Ad Page 4



About Our Cover

Okay, okay, so this isn't the cover art we had promised. Instead, the cover is based on the short story "Sing," by Kristine Kathryn Rusch, and was painted by Bob Eggleton, an up-and-coming artist who did the illustrations for "The Home System" and "The Phoenix Riddle" in our first issue.

We really like the cover done for us by Swen Papenbrock, but we also like to give our artists a target to shoot at — namely the cover. One look at the terrific painting Bob did for Kristine's story will tell why we decided it deserved the cover.

Mind you, we like the other paintings too, but Bob's was just a bit better in our opinion. Bob hasn't had a chance to display it at any science fiction conventions yet, but we suspect when he does it will be high up in the voting for awards.

He has done quite a bit of art for Boskone, the science fiction convention run by the New England Science Fiction Association each year in Boston (Feb. 13-15, this year) and will have the painting on display there. In the meantime, we'll use Swen's cover for an upcoming issue.





Narrow Escape From a Sauna

To this report, I attach something called *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, three years' worth of the letters column from *Car and Driver* magazine, the annual report of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, the instruction booklet for the assembly of "G.I. Joe's All-Terrain Combat Vehicle," and a packet of assorted fictions.

I should also like to inform you that I will no longer attempt to embed these reports in television broadcasts. I now have evidence that the diode is transmitting them, so I need not provide backup. My evidence that the diode is working comes from the fact that a small group of human beings have set themselves up with a receiving apparatus, and they have been intercepting the signals. They have even begun publishing a magazine based on my reports.

These events by themselves would be disconcerting, but these people have also started to search for me. Led by a man named Ryan, they pursue me with a determination such as you would only find in creatures crazy enough to publish a science fiction magazine. I narrowly eluded Ryan himself when he recently came to my place of employment to make inquiries. I was on my way from mopping the weight room to take my break in the sauna. Passing behind the reception area, I heard him ask the human being at the desk if there had been strange people "hanging around."

I left before hearing the receptionist's answer, but I am sure it was affirmative. The other employees at the club often talk about my strangeness when they think I cannot hear them. Human beings as a species are intolerant of strangers and nonconformists. And since few people in Miami wear heavy coats all the time (fewer still spend their free moments in a sauna, which is a closet heated to a level just a little below what we could consider cool), I am an important topic of conversation. The sauna is, perhaps, the most significant of human inventions. It is a temperate refuge in an otherwise frigid world, although the human beings never spend more than a short time in it. I have on occasion heard the other employees making wagers on how long I could remain in the sauna. Until now, their suspicions have been no hindrance to my research, as I am merely considered an eccentric in a city well noted for them. Ryan's presence, however, changes all that.

Ryan had been checking the city's health clubs, specifically because he knew they would be the most likely places to have saunas. He read in my last report that I would be in Miami. I will, of course, no longer be able to describe my location in these reports. If Ryan were to find me, it would seriously endanger the project. I do not object to his reading my reports; I do not even object to his publishing them. (Who is ever going to believe there is an alien anthropologist doing field work on

Earth, no matter how many magazines Ryan sells?) But I refuse to come into personal contact with him.

Ryan is apparently under the impression that you wish him to establish this contact. I am sure he is mistaken, as I cannot believe you would knowingly disrupt my investigations in that way. Yes, I feel alone and isolated, and at times I labor under a peculiarly human emotion called "despair." But I am still committed to the project, and I would not endanger it for the sake of momentary companionship, even if human friendship were worth the effort.

The human beings have a discipline they call "quantum physics," which is based in part on the fundamental belief that the act of observing a phenomenon

changes it. In typical human fashion, they have spent more energy attempting to calculate the minimum size of this observational error than they have in trying to make any use of it. Their philosophers argue incessantly about what causes it, never supposing that it might result from the self-consciousness of the particles under observation.

I do not wish to introduce such observational error into my studies, which is why I am trying to keep myself a secret from the human beings. My presence here has already influenced human behavior somewhat: witness Ryan's magazine. How much more would it distort their behavior if they were all aware of me? You should see them when they think they are being observed. They

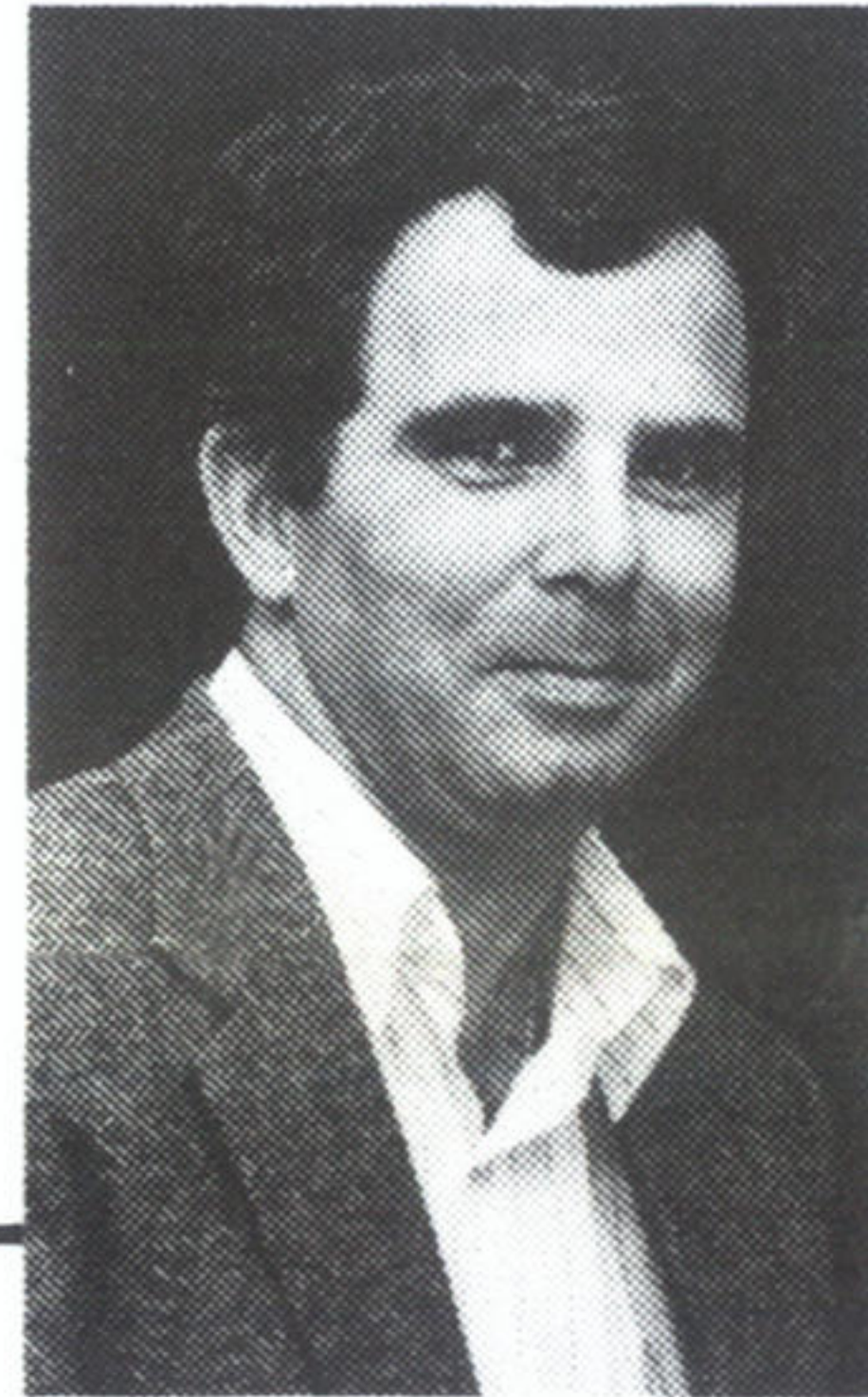
strut and preen and pose. Can you imagine an entire planet of posers and strutters? That is what it would come to if they knew of my presence.

I learned about this "quantum physics" business when I enrolled in an undergraduate curriculum at a university. I knew there was some risk, but I thought it would be an efficient way to assimilate large volumes of human culture. It wasn't.

Besides, I took steps to minimize the risk. It was a fairly simple matter to fabricate an identity as an "older student," which helps to explain my appearance to creatures that invest inordinate interest in such things. I have created a simple disguise. I clip

(Continued to page 20)

EDITOR'S NOTES



By Charles C. Ryan

Sifting For Golden Nuggets

How do you become a published writer? And more specifically, how do you become a published science fiction writer?

The answer is simple. You write a good science fiction story.

But as simple as that answer is, its execution is not.

Before you can write a good science fiction story, you have to learn to write and type (or get rich and pay a secretary to take dictation). Unless you managed to avoid attending school, you were forced to put some ink to paper along the way. Maybe you even had an English class in which you were told to write a story or poem.

Anyone, then, can write a story. But few get published.

To get published, your story has to be better than the 99 other stories the editor received the week yours arrived in the mail. So how do you join the elite? How do you become part of the one percent?

Recently I sat on a panel at a regional science fiction convention on just that subject and learned of a new way to get published — at least according to several of the panel members.

The argument was that your manuscript gets moved out of the slush pile and into the pile of elite submissions if it has been submitted by an agent.

How then, do you get an agent?

The answer used to be: "By getting published" — a Catch-22, for sure, but nonetheless a long-standing truth of publishing. In the

past, a number of agents have asked for the addresses of new writers I have published, and presumably signed them to contracts.

I didn't always know if they signed them. Very few agents handle short stories, except as a favor, because there's no profit in it.

So, when the usual questions about how to get published and how to get an agent arose, I was mildly surprised at the answers from two of the editors on the panel.

In essence, they said hopeful writers should attend science fiction conventions and buddy up to agents and editors — that way your manuscripts will get more attention and won't end up in the dreaded slushpile.

The theory is, I guess, that you could include a cover letter with your manuscript and say: "Hey, remember me? I bought you 23 Manhattans in the pub at MulchCon."

Needless to say, there are many possible variations on that little note, from the completely innocent to things better left unsaid.

Don't misunderstand. There is nothing wrong with getting acquainted with editors, agents and other professionals in the field. That's one of the reasons for holding conventions. Nor is what these editors said really anything new. As long as there have been writers, editors and publishers, friendships have been known to play a role in getting someone an inside track to publication.

But it doesn't result in a good story.

Nor is it how we do things at *Aboriginal SF*.

We have only one pile for manuscripts. If we like your story, we'll accept it. If we don't, we won't. Friendship does not enter into it — and that is something we hope our friends understand.

We reject stories, not people. We reject stories submitted by agents just as quickly as those submitted by anyone else. Stories from agents do have a slightly higher placement rate, however — more like five percent, because agents represent professional writers who tend to submit more polished prose.

My job as editor is to find good stories to publish. I do not care who writes them or where they come from. Good stories are few and far between. We do not look upon the slushpile as an odorous mound of yucky stuff which has to be waded through.

If an editor's job is similar to any other, it's that of a miner. The slush pile is his mine. The good stories are nuggets of gold to be washed from the surrounding soil.

So when you send a story to us, don't think of sending it to our slushpile, think of it as our goldmine. Who knows? Maybe we'll both strike a bonanza.

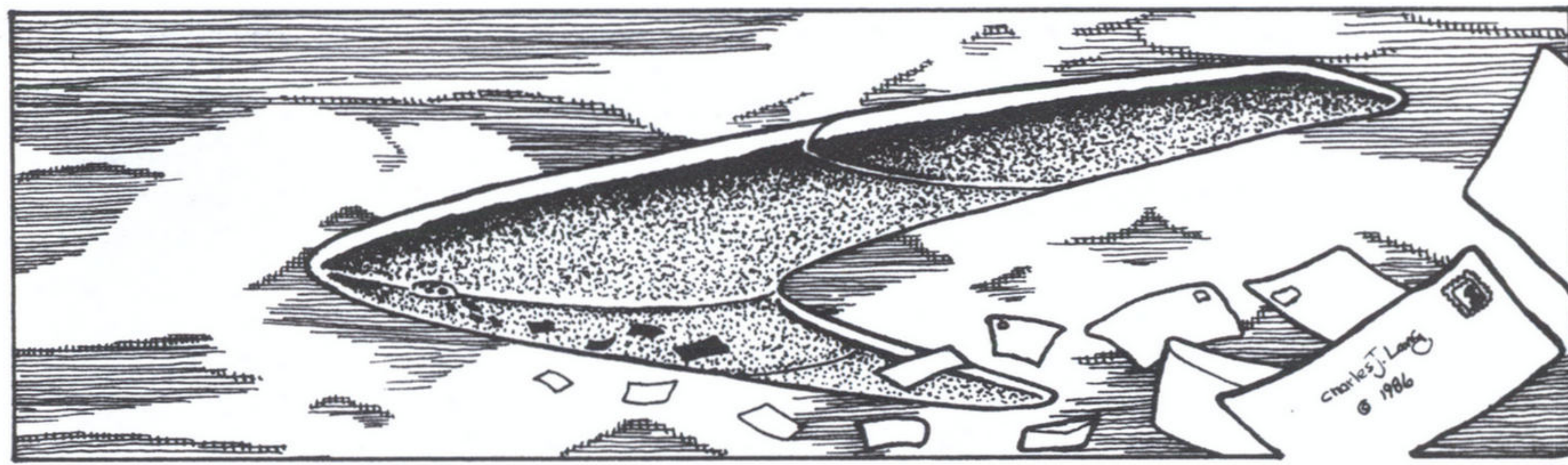
The ABO Art Gallery

Beginning with this issue, we

(Continued to page 20)

Boomerangs

Comments From Our Readers



Dear Mr. Ryan:

The second issue of *ABO* lived up to the standards you set in the first. I believe your magazine is unique not only in format, but also content, in that it gives us, the readers, good quality short science fiction. *Analog* writers can't seem to do that, and the other magazines don't seem interested in providing it. Special congratulations go to Elizabeth Anne Hull for the wonderful "Second Best Friend."

I was quite intrigued by the various motifs that ran through the issue. "Quantum Leap," "Almost 11," and the poem "Einstein's Cold Equations" all involved science fiction or science-fiction writers. Your own editorial and "Almost 11" both contained allusions to Michael Jackson. Do you think this was intentional on your alien publisher's part? And do you think we can expect such thematic unity in later issues? (Sure, see our fourth issue — Ed.)

One aspect of the magazine which disturbed me was the (L. Ron) Hubbard debate in "Boomerangs". I believe that if Hubbard had not founded Dianetics/Scientology, his books would just be duly noted and quickly forgotten, much as the latest (Robert A.) Heinlein book usually is. However, because of Mr. Hubbard's infamous past, his books receive much more critical attention than they deserve. Hubbard represents a product: action/adventure SF with a minimum of characterization. I'm sure most readers know this, and like me would be much better served by critical discussion of emerging talent (like Lucius Shepard) than with repetitive talk about yesterday's titans.

Again, a fine issue with excellent artwork, especially by the (Ron and Val Lakey) Lindahns. I look forward to many more.

Best,

Tim Fitzgibbons
Bridgewater, Ma.

Dear aborigines and esteemed sapient editor,

First of all, if it is not too late, I have a submission for the name-the-alien-publisher contest. Gullipar Verri. The derivation is probably obvious. (The name-the-alien contest is open until Aug. 1, 1987 — Ed.)

I meant to write after issue No. 1, but here I have No. 2 in front of me. I am quite impressed with the content; you have quite a bit of top-notch writing in both issues. You also have excellent artwork. One of only two complaints is that some of the stories are not merely brief, but seem incomplete. "Second Best Friend" (by Elizabeth Anne Hull) was to my mind by far the best story in the issue, but also seemed woefully incomplete. It just sort of stopped when it filled up the available space. I hope that there will be a sequel, at least!

I like Jessie Horsting's column, though I don't watch many movies (I have a small child and no baby sitter at present). Her columns read like Spider Robinson's book reviews: I read them for pleasure in word craft more than for the information.

I also heartily approve of the Aborigines column. I have been a

part of SF fandom for over 12 years, and I see this sort of column as a tie between the magazine readers and the loose family of convention and fanzine fandom. I like to know something about the contributors.

I'll tell you the other thing I don't like about *ABO SF*, now that I've told you several I do: the SIZE! I usually read on the subway, and it's almost as hard to manage as a newspaper. I would prefer the ordinary 8½ by 11 magazine size.

But even if you make it bigger than *The New York Times*, I'll still read it.

Good luck,

David C. Kopaska-Merkel
Toronto, Canada

Dear Charlie,

Congratulations on a great pair of issues. I must admit, my first reaction to the format was one of chagrin. We SF fans are a conservative lot, despite our penchant for the *outré*, and anything other than digest size seems to smack of radicalism.

But the artwork, particularly in the second issue, speaks for itself. I, for one, would hate to see it much smaller. I fear that the demands of the fans may force you down to magazine size, but here's wishing you luck whatever size you wind up.

Best,

Dean Whitlock
Vermont

Dear ABO,

You are not alone! I myself am a stranded alien investigator (From Beta R-----IV). I have been investigating Earth culture for the last 150 years now, and have come to the conclusion that the incredible leap in this planet's population during that time interval is due almost entirely to stranded alien investigators such as ourselves (apparently something in Earth's magnetic field makes those neutrino modulating diodes go POP!, or so a physicist friend of mine from Polaris VII tells me).

In fact, it is surprising but true that some cities have populations which are over 90% extraterrestrial. So if you get lonely,

(Continued to page 20)

Fantasy Review

Edited by **Robert A. Collins**, Florida Atlantic University
FEATURING AUTHORITATIVE ARTICLES & INTERVIEWS, CRITICISM,
COMMENT, AND MORE REVIEWS THAN ANY OTHER PERIODICAL.

Issue No. 95

"DAN SIMMONS: 'New Frontiers' in Violence"—an exclusive interview with the winner of the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel, whose "epic splatter novels" suggest that yesterday's "unthinkable horrors" are today regarded as "routine"

"The Funhouse of Fear," by DOUGLAS E. WINTER, World Fantasy Award-winning critic of horror fiction and film, who traces the subtle changes in "sub-text" in contemporary horror films.

"Lovecraft in the Media," by MATTHEW J. COSTELLO, the first in a series of columns by this popular critic of films and gaming.

"Stand By Stephen King," by S.P. SOMTOW, a study of the film's recreation of King's boyhood nostalgia onscreen.

PLUS the Conclusion of the Underwood-Miller Story, Jack Chalker's controversial commentary on Specialty Publishing, and Mike Ashley's survey of the British Scene in fantasy and science fiction publishing.

Issue No. 96

"The Photosynthesis of Gregory Benford," by GARY K. WOLFE, a study of Benford's combination of Hard Science Fiction with mainstream literature themes, to the benefit of both.

"Cowboys and Telepaths," by ERIC S. RABKIN—if genre formulas express the most widespread concerns of our culture, the "formula" for telepath stories is especially important in reflecting the highest ideals of the civilizing process.

"Director Stuart Gordon Interprets Lovecraft with Dark Humor," by MATTHEW J. COSTELLO—analysis of "From Beyond," and an interview with the film's creator.

"Trajectories of Two Masters: Jean-Pierre Andreon, Michel Jeury," by PASCAL J. THOMAS, profiles of France's top science fiction writers.

"TAPPAN KING," by DARRELL SCHWEITZER—a brief interview with the new editor of *Twilight Zone*.

PLUS: Text and pictures of the World Fantasy Convention in Providence, Rhode Island, The Hollywood scene by S.P. SOMTOW, more than sixty reviews of current books, and annotated announcements of forthcoming books in trade, paperback, and specialty press categories.

Issue No. 97

"An Interview with Jonathan Carroll," by FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER—high fantasy by an American expatriate in Austria.

"Tales You Never Read," by RAMSEY CAMPBELL.

"Touchstones That Shaped My Career," by MIKE RESNICK.

"On Scientific Romance," by BRIAN STABLEFORD.

PLUS: Columns by JACK L. CHALKER, MATTHEW COSTELLO, S.P. SOMTOW, MIKE ASHLEY.

In the works are interviews with GEORGE R.R. MARTIN, JOE HALDEMAN, HUGH B. CAVE, JACK VANCE, etc.

In the past year, we have published articles and interviews about:

V.C. Andrews, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Ray Bradbury, John W. Campbell, John Coyne, Harlan Ellison, Dennis Etchison, Stephen R. Donaldson, Gardner Dozois, Craig Shaw Gardner, William Gibson, James P. Hogan, Stephen King, Pat LoBrutto, Richard Christian Matheson, Al Sarrantonio, Theodore Sturgeon, Steve Rasnic Tem, Mervyn Wall, Evangeline Walton.

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Devolution and Disappearances

There is something very strange happening in this column. As you may notice, our contributors are steadily turning into animals and cartoon characters, as evidenced by the photos they are sending us.

Others are disappearing altogether, as evidenced by the fact that their photos are invisible. Hmmm ... the whole thing smacks of *science fiction*....

Which brings me to the contributors in this issue.

Acclaimed author Connie Willis brings the circus to town, complete with high-wire suspense and an unusual animal act, in "Circus Story."



Connie Willis

Willis, who won the Hugo and Nebula awards in 1982 for her novelette, "Fire Watch," has seen her short fiction chosen for numerous magazines and anthologies.

She has been writing science fiction full-time since 1980, when she won a creative writing grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

She has just completed a novel, *Lincoln's Dreams*, about a modern-day woman who appears to be having Robert E. Lee's dreams. It is to be published in May this year by Bantam. Her newest story, "Schwarzschild Radius," will be appearing in *The Universe* (Bantam).

A self-described housewife, Willis is supported by her husband, Courtney, a physics teacher. They share their Greeley, Colorado, home with a teen-age daughter and a bulldog.

Willis is currently wrapped up in her next novel. It's on a cheery subject: the bubonic plague.

"Circus Story" is illustrated by N. Taylor Blanchard, whose formal education was an unusual blending of the arts and the sciences. He has degrees from Princeton in

astrophysics and from New York University in stage design.

Some of his recent projects include the cover for the young adult book *Barbary*, by Vonda McIntyre, and eight paintings used as covers for pulp horror magazines in West Germany.

Blanchard obviously has been reading some of those German pulp horrors. The reason he gave for not supplying us with a photo of himself was that photographs "steal your soul."

Just for that, Taylor, you're going to have to tell us what the N. stands for.

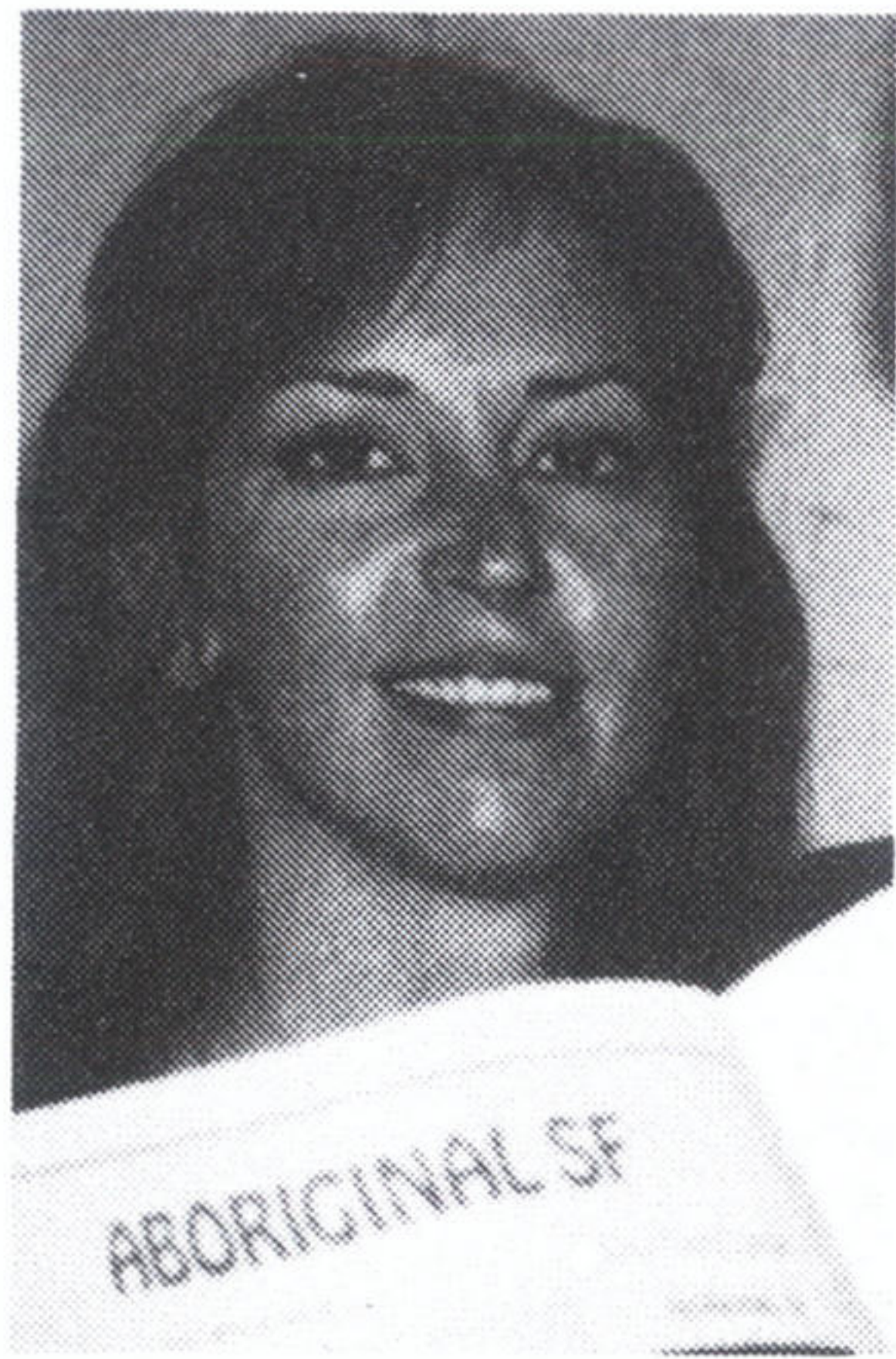
A master of horror and science fiction, Charles L. Grant, gives us a somber tale of land feuds in "One Spring in Wyoming."

Grant is a two-time Nebula award winner and three-time winner of World Fantasy awards. His latest works are two novels for Tor in the horror genre: *The Orchard*, just out, and *The Pet*, due out in June.

When asked to name a favorite from among his many works, Grant said it is always "the one I'm working on."

The one he's working on now is called *For Fear of the Night*. The genre is obvious.

Artist Val Lakey Lindahn makes her second appearance in *Aboriginal SF* with her illustrations for *One Spring in Wyoming*.



Val Lakey Lindahn

Lindahn and artist husband Ron Lindahn have recently been creating movie posters for films on the video market, including such classics as "Slaughter High" and "Crime and Passion."

The Lindahns live in one of the smallest towns in the country, Rabun Gap, Georgia. It's so small that AT&T decided to make it the site of an experiment with fiber optics. The Lindahn's phone service is finally back to normal after

days in which their line appeared to be continually busy.

The story which is the subject of this month's cover, "Sing," written by Kristine K. Rusch, tells the tale of creatures with a talent, but no ear, for music.



Kristine K. Rusch

Rusch sold her first piece of short fiction a year ago to *Amazing*. She also writes non-fiction and educational radio scripts for public radio.

Rusch, 26, attended a Writers of the Future Experimental Writing Workshop in Taos last spring.

She recently abandoned her Midwest roots for the West Coast, settling in Eugene, Oregon, and she claims she wouldn't move back to Wisconsin even if we paid her to. So we won't.

Artist Bob Eggleton has done illustrations or covers for nearly every major science fiction magazine, and has illustrated the work of Charles Sheffield, Robert Silverberg, Lucius Shepard and Sheila Finch, to name a few.

He's recently been delving into the astronomical realm with art depicting Jupiter's atmosphere and Uranus' moons for the Genras Planetarium in West Hartford, Conn.

Eggleton used himself as the model for the tormented songwriter of "Sing." He says assignments like illustrating "Sing" are a great help to his sanity, which tends to



Dean Whitlock

be compromised by profitable but mundane commercial assignments.

Dean Whitlock brings us a startling tale about one solution to the problem of nuclear waste in "Containment" — his first professional sale.

Whitlock has stories appearing in the January 1987 *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and another this spring in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*.

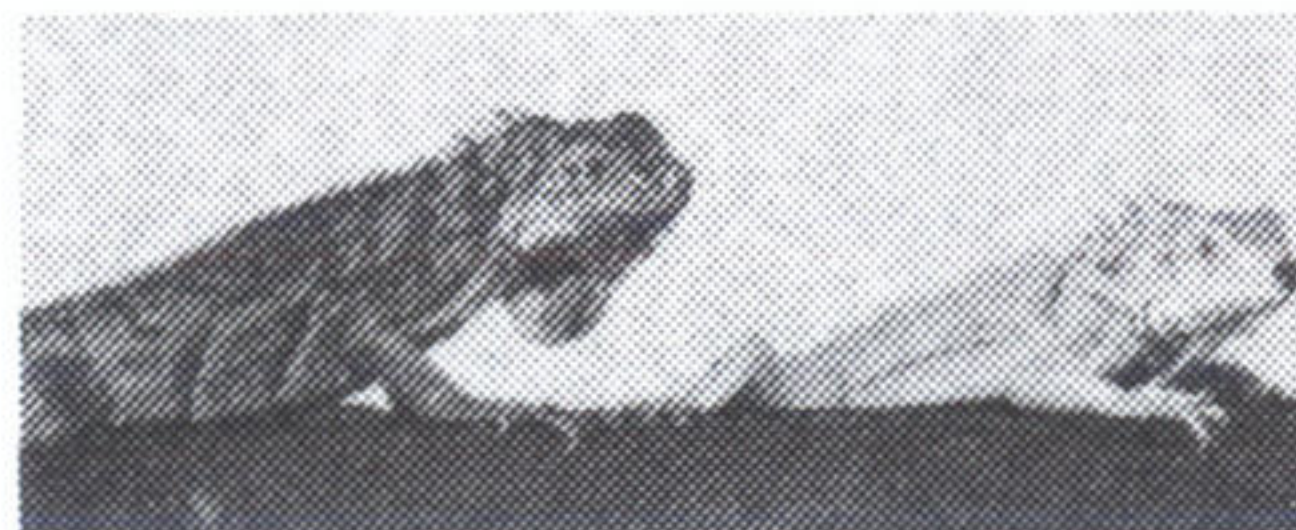
Whitlock's other occupation is technical writer. Speaking of getting technical, one of his pet peeves is misplaced commas.

Whitlock is bursting with pride over a brand new baby boy, Ross Duston Whitlock, born to him and his wife, Sally Duston, in October.

We think it's fitting that the street in Vermont where the Whitlocks live is called Sunshine Corner.

Charles Lang, the artist for "Containment," is awaiting publication of his first paperback book cover. It's a Tor book due out in the spring, written by Graham Masterton, and titled *The Manitou*.

Lang says he taught himself his art, and found that going to art shows and talking to artists was most helpful.



Charles Lang & Wendy Snow-Lang

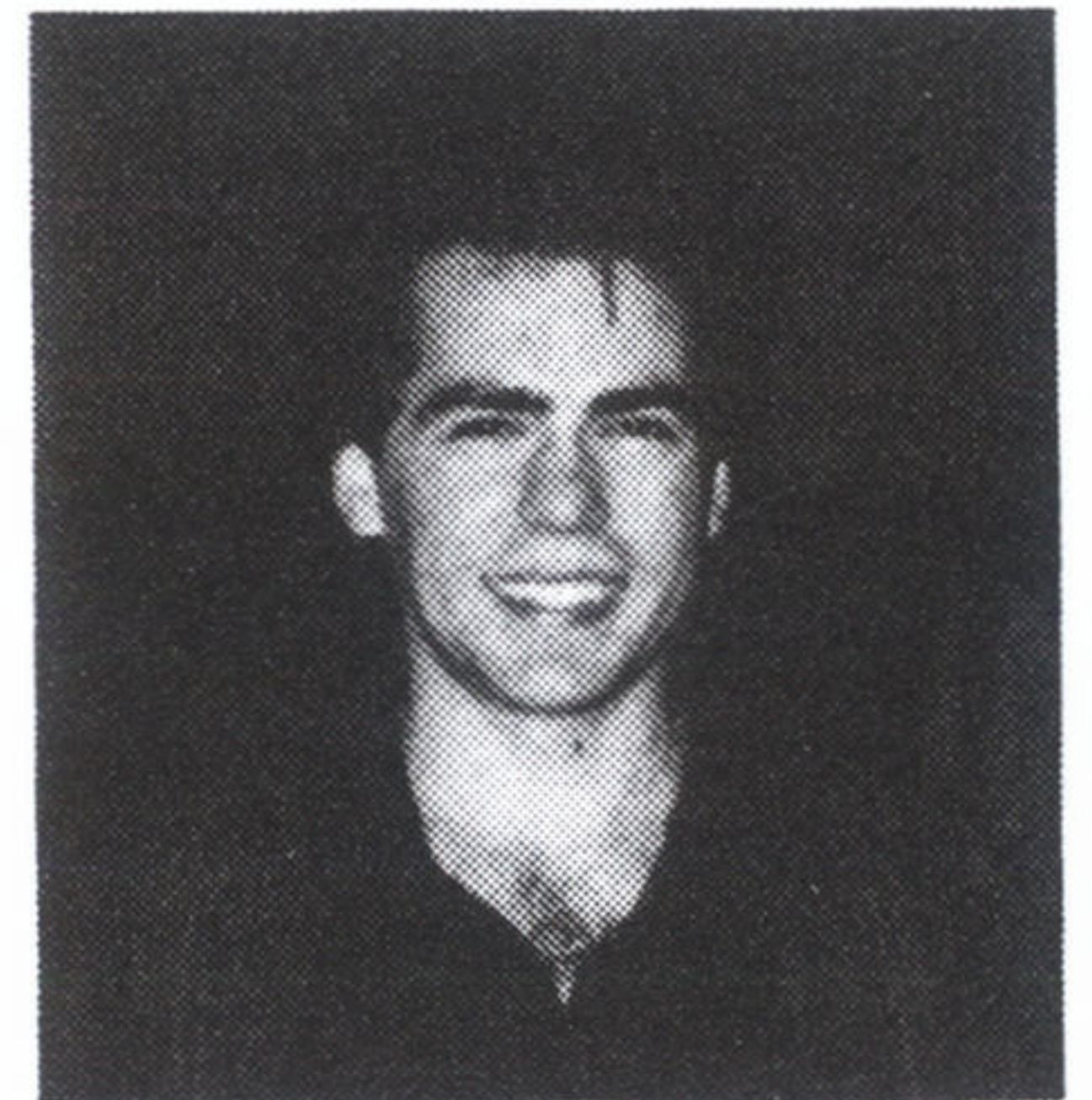
Lately he has been building up his horror book collection. He is also building a collection of sketches of electronics components, an outgrowth of having a job with a Massachusetts electronics firm.

He is married to artist Wendy Snow Lang. We're sorry to say this, but he is also going the wrong way on the evolutionary ladder. In the last issue, he was photographed as a feline, and in this issue he and his wife appear as lizards. What can we say?

John Moore, who wrote "Sight Unseen" for our first issue, now gives us a hunting tale where one can't help but root for the prey, called "Trackdown."

Moore, a chemical engineer by training, sold his first work of literature to *Scene* magazine in 1974 when he was approximately 15 years old.

One of his latest stories, "Art Appreciation," is scheduled to ap-



John F. Moore

pear in *Starwind* magazine this spring.

Moore apparently likes to live dangerously. He says one of his favorite pastimes is driving his Pontiac Fiero very fast on deserted country roads. He recently traveled to Jamaica where he went cliff diving at Rick's Cafe.

The illustrations for "Trackdown" are the work of Wendy Snow Lang.

A *summa cum laude* graduate of the New England School of Art and Design, Lang knew she wanted to be an artist when she discovered comic books.

She prefers not to specialize in her comic book work, doing everything from writing the stories to lettering, inking and drawing. She says lately the comic book ideas are flowing again.

When it comes to science fiction she would rather read hard science fiction, but would rather illustrate fantasy. She leaves the technical stuff to her artist husband.

In Patricia Anthony's "Blood Brothers," explorers discover kinship, of sorts, on the planet Mars.



Patricia Anthony & friend, a self-portrait

Anthony was a visiting professor, then assistant professor, at the University of Lisbon in Brazil for five years in the early 1970s.

Today she works as a sales training supervisor for the *Dallas Morning News* when she's not writing.

(Continued to page 23)

Sing

By

Kristine Kathryn Rusch

When I was a little girl, there was this guy who lived down the road. He was big, but he weren't mean. I don't think he ever hurt nobody before I first met him.

He called himself Dirk and the name fit 'cause he looked like the daggers children use. He was long and thin, with only two arms and two legs. But he was strong, and he moved like he owned the world — or at least a small part of it.

I used to walk past his place a lot. It was the strangest place I ever seen, all shiny and silver, but the lawn was real nice. He kept the flowers well-cropped. Sometimes these strange sounds echoed around the silver and kept me away. But most of the time, he'd sit right outside his door and blow air through a hollow tube. It made the most awful noise I ever heard, but he seemed to like it.

One day he called me over, sat me down and showed me his tube. It had a bunch of little holes punched in it. I thought maybe he wanted me to take it back to my dad 'cause my dad was good at fixing all kinds of things, but Dirk said no, he had something else to ask me.

— Would you, he asked like he was scared I'd say no even before I heard the question, would you teach me how to *sing*?

Well, I'd never heard the word "sing" before and I told him so. He kinda frowned and said it was the only word he couldn't find a translation for. That word and a couple others he called "related," as if words could share blood like people do.

— I can't teach something that I don't know what it is, I said to him and he started laughing then.

— Child, you *sing* all the time, when you're walking, when you're eating, even when you're laughing. You people make the most beautiful *music* — (one of his related words) — in the entire galaxy. So I came here to learn how to do it.

I told him I sure didn't know what "it" was and I got to thinking that maybe he was a little crazy somehow. Not scary-crazy like some folks can be, but just plain nutty. Wacky enough to make most people uncomfortable.

— Look, sweetheart, he said, back where I come from, I'm one of the most famous *musicians* in the world. But I can't do half of what you people do. You make the experience of two millennia sound like the tinkering of children. I want to use your *songs* the way *Copeland* and *Sibelius* used folk *tunes*. But first I gotta know how you *sing*.

— You're not helping me, I said. If this *sing* is something I do all the time like breathing or blinking, how come I don't know about it?

— That's the big question. None of you people seems to know what you're doing. It's driving me nuts. Everybody has their own personal *melody* which they play every day with a different variation. It's like *gypsy music*, never the same. And I'm the only one who can hear it.

I got a little scared there when he said he was going nuts. You never know what someone named Dirk would do when he went crazy. So I picked myself up off the flowers and moved away a little, telling him I had to go somewhere when I really didn't.

He said that was okay, I should come back when I didn't have anything better to do.

I went home then and told my dad about the awful broken tube and he said that maybe I should stay away from Dirk 'cause Dirk weren't like other people. No matter what my dad said, I planned to go back 'cause I thought Dirk was pretty interesting even if he were strange. But I didn't get to go 'cause the next day was the day

the first dead body turned up outside of Dirk's place.

It was the body of Rastee the sailor. Rastee had been the most romantic person in town. He sailed on air currents and sometimes, if he were feeling nice, he take a handful of us along. Ain't nothing so smooth and fine as gliding along with the breeze, letting the air dip in and out of your pores. But our chance to sail was gone with Rastee 'cause he was the only expert sailor our little town had.

He was lying in the lawn, crushing a nice poppy grouping that the people who lived there before made. The poppies had soaked into Rastee's skin, all the juices in his body had dried up and his wings had gone blue like he couldn't get no breath, but there weren't no broken bones or nothing so even though it looked like he crash-landed, most people was saying he didn't.

But we just picked him up and carried him off to the place of grass so he wouldn't decay and ruin any more flowers. And nobody said nothing to Dirk or to anyone else. We all went home and mourned the freezing of Rastee's soul.

The elders hadn't figured anything out yet when another dead body turned up on Dirk's lawn in the same spot as Rastee.

Dirk was around, same as usual that day, and we was all surprised 'cause there ain't no such thing as a murder without a suicide. There's just so much passion and violence going on that the souls intertwine and when one soul freezes over the other turns to ice too. So we all knew that Dirk didn't kill Rastee and 'cause there weren't no other dead bodies around, the town elders went to the place of grass to study Rastee hoping he hadn't flown over another town and brought a plague back with him.

The elders hadn't figured anything out yet when another dead body turned up on Dirk's lawn in the same spot as Rastee. Nobody was too surprised when they found out it was Maggtana. She'd been poisoning herself for years, sprinkling dried parsnips over everything she ate. I admit, I tried parsnips once or twice, and the rush they give is mighty nice, but everybody knows those things are addicting and will kill you if you ain't careful. And everybody knew Maggtana weren't careful.

That was pretty much it until the night Dirk called me over from the side of the street.

— You know, he said, I think I got it all figured out. Your ear can't hear certain *itches*. That's why you walk around oblivious to the sounds you make.

Like usual, I didn't know what he was talking about so I just nodded and pretended I did.

— But I think I fixed it, he said real excited-like. I jury-rigged the playback on one of my *recorders* so that everything will be in your *frequency*. I can play your *song* for you if you like.

Well, I thought that sounded just fine. It'd been bugging me for days what them related words of his meant and I was pretty glad I was finally gonna find out.

He took me inside his place and it looked as strange as he did. There was wires and metal all over, and more hollow tubes — some made from wood — and hollow boxes with strings. He sat me

down on this platform with four legs that he called a chair but it didn't look like no chair to me.

I felt kinda funny in there with all that strange stuff and so I asked him a question.

— You done this with anyone else?

— Sit them in here and make them listen? he asked back.

— I guess, I said, not knowing really what I meant at all.

— No. I put out a directional *mike* and *recorded* them while they were passing by. I didn't think of asking them in. I played the *songs* back on my outside speakers, but I don't think anyone heard.

He was talking kinda odd-like and I remembered him saying how things here was driving him nuts and I kinda got a little scared.

— Whatcha mean, *recorded* them? I asked and he didn't answer, just touched one of those pieces of metal with the wires all around it.

It made a funny little high noise and then I saw Rastee right in front of me, leaning against a metal thing and talking like he always did. Only I knew it weren't Rastee since he was dead. It had to be a frozen part of his soul. I ain't never heard of nobody seeing a frozen soul before and I was afraid it might freeze me, so I screamed real loud. Dirk hit the piece of metal and Rastee went away.

— What's the matter? he asked.

— That was Rastee!

He smiled then and said, — Yes, Rastee's *song*. Isn't it lovely? It's one of the best. So free and happy.

— You got Maggtana too then.

— Her *song* has more melancholy in it than all the others. It tears my heart.

Then he sat in one of those odd chairs and looked right at me.

— But yours is the best. My very favorite. So light and innocent and warm. If you just sit a minute, I'll *record* it. It's sound-proof in here and I'll get even better quality on you than I did on the others.

— No. I got up out of the chair and ran for the door. — You're not gonna do nothing to me. You froze their souls and now they're dead and I don't want to die like that with clogged pores and no breath and no juices and a soul that can't change when I do.

He put his hand on the door and stood in my way. He looked real upset.

— I'll let you go, just tell me who died.

— Rastee and Maggtana. We found them out in your poppies.

— How come nobody told me?

— 'Cause, I said, we thought it didn't have nothing to do with you. Your soul was all right. Nobody murders and lives. Except you.

— But all I did was *record* them, he said. *Recording* doesn't hurt anyone.

I tried to inch around him real slow. — All I know is that Rastee's soul is froze and he's dead and you bring me in here and show me part of Rastee that don't exist no more.

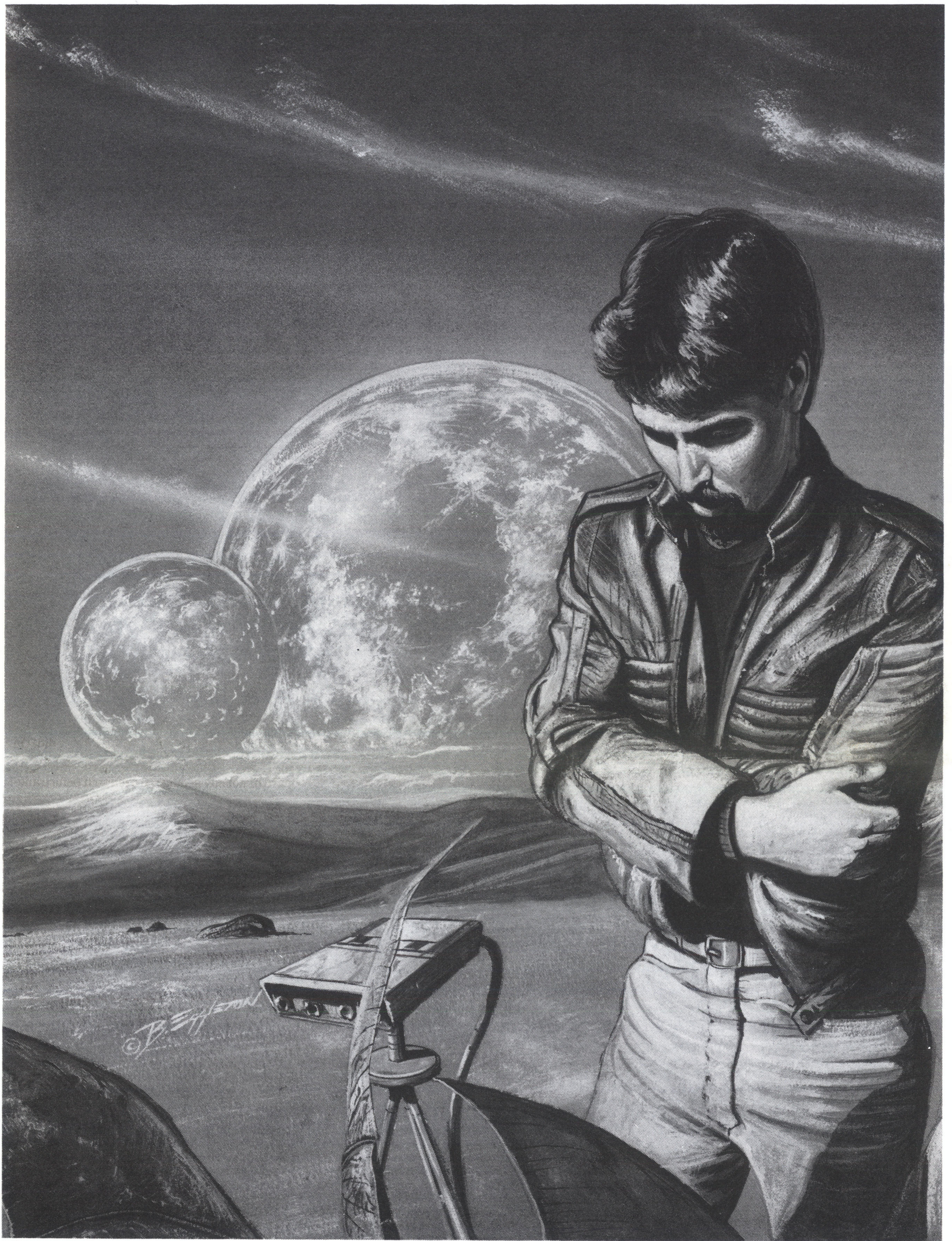
Dirk was staring at his metal stuff. — We *recorded* hundreds of you off planet and nobody died, except. . . .

He went over to one of the metal boxes and pulled papers out from beside it. I moved closer to the door. I didn't want to run in case he turned one of them boxes on me.

— *Playback*, he whispered. They died after *playback*. Oh my god.

He got out of my way. He stared at his metal stuff and water started running down his cheeks.

(Continued to next page)



Art by Bob Eggleton

(Continued from previous page)

— Oh my god.

I opened the door and let myself out and went running to the town elders to tell them it weren't no plague at all but Dirk and his funny hollow tubes and we all decided that we'd have to make him leave, so we went back to his place in a big group, but he was gone. His place, his tubes, his metal. Everything was all gone. There was just a big flat spot in the flowers where his place used to be.

We searched all over for him, but we never did find him. And Rastee and Maggtana stayed just as dead as they were that morning in the poppies. But the rest of us was all right. And

even though I'm old now, I still wonder sometimes what it is about the *sing* that makes one soul freeze without freezing another. The only reason I can think of why Dirk didn't die when he murdered those two is maybe 'cause Dirk could hear the *sing*. And hearing the *sing* meant he didn't have a right and proper soul.

And me, sometimes in the time between twilight and darkness, I miss Dirk and his strange tubes. And I catch myself dreaming about what it would be like to have him turn his metal things toward me. After all, he did say he was going to do me different. I would of loved to see my soul.

But mostly, I just feel sorry for Dirk. He was stealing souls and keeping them in a box. You

can't keep a soul in a box. You got to wear it proud, and it's got to be yours, not someone else's. I hope Dirk knows that now. And I hope he learned to use his tubes to block out the *sing*. Maybe that way his soul will come back, and he won't have to run away to strange places searching for it. But most of all, I wish that Dirk would come here so I could tell him I'm sorry. I shouldn't of run away after I screamed. I should of stayed and helped him find out what part of his soul he was missing. And I didn't.

I wonder if that means my *song* ain't light and innocent and warm no more. It bothers me that I ain't got no way to find out.

-ABO-



The Good, the Bad and the Maybes

The New Year traditionally brings a clean slate with a new digit. Nineteen eighty-seven means we can forget *Howard the Duck* and forgive *Invaders From Mars* for their particular indulgences. No more *Deadly Friends* or *Critters*. *Kong Lives* can die with dignity and *Solarbabies* (what? you missed *Solarbabies*?) can try again when they grow up. We can celebrate the memory of the best of '86 (see Celebrity Picks later in the column) and peek down the road at what's ahead.

The Good

There are several films set for release this spring that promise terrific performances and terrific stories.

Topping the list is *The Witches of Eastwick*, which has finished principal photography under the guiding hand of *Road Warrior's* George Miller. Miller's cast includes Jack Nicholson, Cher, Susan Sarandon, Michelle Pfeiffer and Veronica Cartwright. *Buckaroo Banzai's* Neil Canton is producing and the word is the *Witches* dailies have everyone at United Artists excited about the June release.

Made In Heaven is another promising entry from the feature film division at Lorimar. Scripted by *Stand By Me's* team of Bruce Evans and Ray Gideon and directed by *Absolute Beginner's* Alan Rudolph, the story concerns the soul of an embittered dead man who meets in heaven the love of his dreams. When she is sent back to earth to inhabit a newborn, he begs to follow, not knowing where or who she may be — or who he may be.

Made in Heaven features Timothy Hutton and Kelly McGillis in the starring roles and is a spring release. The story outline is fondly reminiscent of the fantasy classics of the Forties — i.e., *Harvey*, *Death Takes a Holiday*, *It's a Wonderful Life*. Word is the film captures that same sensibility.

Another Philip K. Dick classic, *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*, is lensing under the title *Total Recall* and directed by



The hero gets a grip on reality in *Brazil*

Highlander's Russell Mulcahey. The last Phil Dick story to film was 1982's *Bladerunner*. Here's hoping for an equivalent treatment.

Other literary translations on the schedule include William Goldman's *The Princess Bride* and John Varley's *Millenium*. Watch this space for updates.

David Lynch is working on his long-time project *Ronnie Rocket*. He reveals only that it involves electricity at 60 cycles.

Amblin' Production's entry, *Batteries Not Included*, stars Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn as the feisty residents of a New York tenement who are helped in their plight by a real out-of-towner.

The Bad

Twentieth Century Fox honors its multi-picture deal with Arnold

Schwarzenegger with the release of *Predator*, an adventure story about a group of mercenaries hired to track down something in a steamy tropical jungle. Word is that the "thing" did not work on film, and the producers were forced to reshoot footage of a new creation after filming wrapped.

Schwarzenegger went directly to film Richard Bachman's *Running Man* after *Predator*. Directed by *Starsky and Hutch's* Paul Michael Glaser, this Stephen King story about a future televised snuff game also features *Alien's* Yaphet Kotto, *Family Feud's* Richard Dawson, and former pro football great Jim Brown. (The next film featuring this group of talent is about a game show host who is possessed by an extraterrestrial during a football game and turns to a life of crime.)

A number of respected actors and directors have their names connected with some iffy-sounding projects. Rod Steiger returns to the screen with Kim Basinger in something called *The Kindred*. Micheal Pare and Richard Farnsworth are slated for *Space Rage*, a story about a prison planet. *Buckaroo Banzai's* Peter Weller stars in *Robocop* (uh oh — anyone seen *Brillo*?) about a mechanical peace officer, and Peter Hyams (2010) is at the helm of *Monster Squad*.

Other titles slated for this year speak for themselves:

Slaughter High, *Star Knight*, *Robojox*, *Terminus*, *The Haunting of Hamilton High*, *The Mannequin* (Who Comes To Life), *Street Trash*, *The Lamp* (The Evil Genie), and *The Form* (I think this one's about a nuclear accident at the Internal Revenue Service headquarters in Kansas City that

unleashes a devastating rampage of W2s, 1099s and 1040s.)

The Maybes

Superman IV is in production for Cannon Films, again featuring Christopher Reeve as the Man of Steel. A spokesman said it was the strength of the script (and \$2 million) that enticed Reeve to reprise his role, and forecast that *Superman IV* will be better than any of its predecessors.

Cannon acknowledged that many of Supe's fans were disenchanted with the film renditions after *Superman I*, but feels *IV* will win everyone back. Mariel Hemingway is the love interest, and Lex Luthor's nephew Lenny makes his screen bow.

Richard Donner (*Ladyhawke*, *The Omen*, *Goonies*) is the executive producer for *The Lost Boys*, a Warner's entry for the summer. Starring Cory Hyam (*Silver Bullet*), Jason Patric (*Solarbabies*) and Kieffer Sutherland (*Stand By Me*), this fantasy adventure is about "teenage vampire bikers."

Seriously.

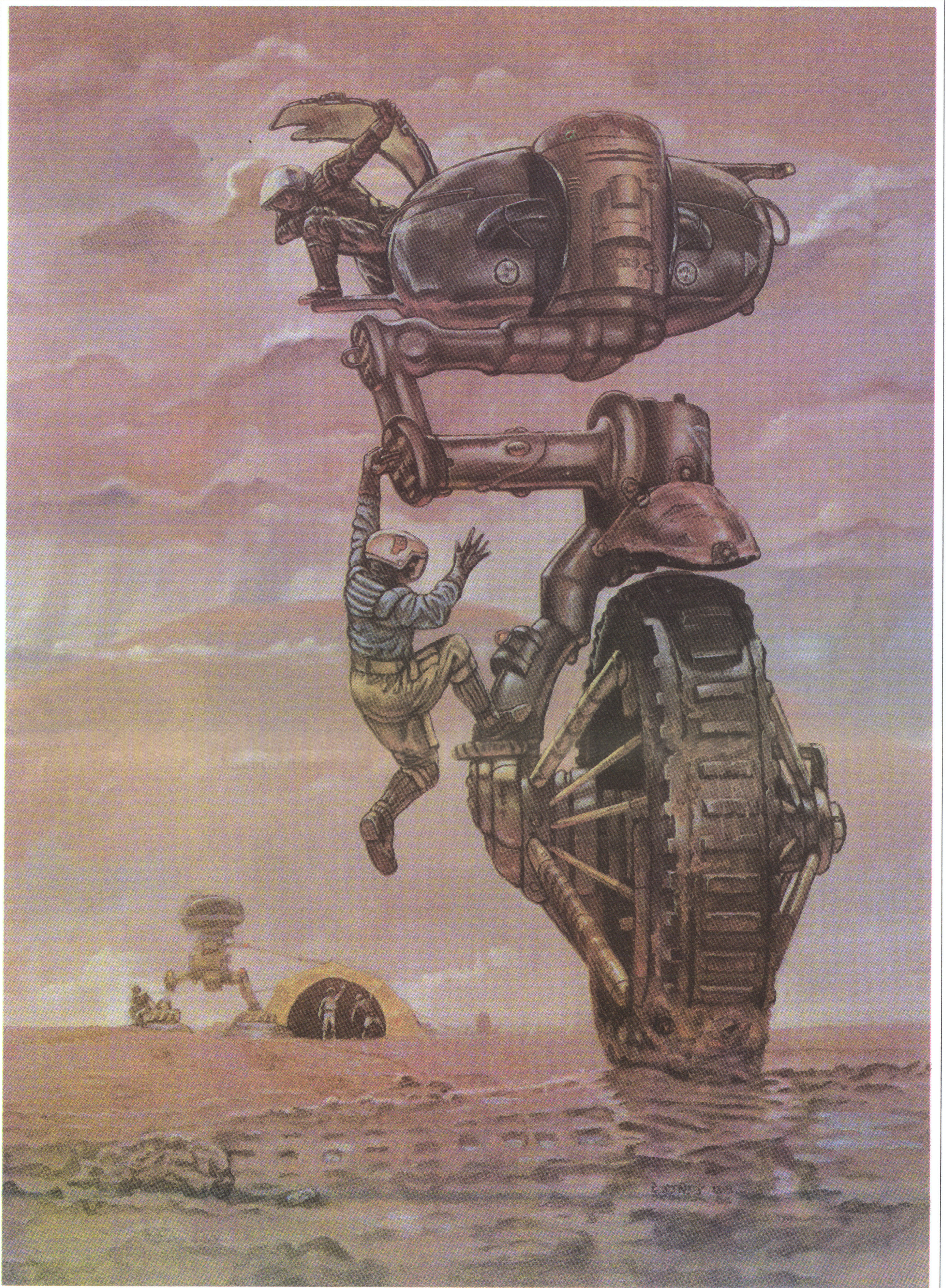
A rumor circulated about this film for a while — the story was supposed to concern what really happened to the *Lost Boys* from the Sir James Barrie classic *Peter Pan*. A Warner's rep kidded that a first draft may have gotten in circulation, but asserted the story filmed is about vampires from the wrong side of the tracks.

A science fiction parody with the unlikely name of *Space Balls* is being completed at MGM under the direction of Mel Brooks, who also plays two roles in the film. Written

(Continued to page 14)



Working up an appetite in *Little Shop of Horrors*



Art by Cortney Skinner

Blood Brothers

By Patricia Anthony

I don't know whether I'll ever like rain again. When I was a kid I loved it. Even living in Washington state I loved it. And we got a lot of rain there. We had a window seat at home in a cranny on the second floor. From fifth grade until I got too sophisticated for that kind of stuff, sometime around my senior year in high school, I'd crawl into that cranny and read novels about

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Mars while the soft rain padded up to the window, nuzzled my shoulder and curled beside me to sleep.

Here in my room I've got a pictograph of a forest in the Pacific Northwest. In it the sun's shining. On the other wall is a window that looks out over red flats splattered with lichens. To the east Olympus Mons rises from its gray shroud. I can sometimes track the blocks of ice as they make their incandescent way down the close, dark sky.

I know it was cold here to begin with, but sometimes I imagine the ice makes it colder. I imagine it carries baggage between the mass driver on Europa and here: suitcases full of chill, valises empty with solitude.

The loneliness drives you crazy after a while. That, and the neverending torrents of rain. Out in the flats in the ATV's with their bare half inch of insulation, you go deaf. You start shouting at your driver and he starts shouting at you just to make yourselves heard. When you start to blame each other because the food's cold or because your underwear's damp or because the splintered Martian rocks are so ungodly barren, it's time to come in.

I slogged through the compound, my boots making obscene sucking noises, an accompaniment to the timpani of the monsoon. Rain played frantic Impressionist Rock and Roll on my helmet. The door slid open as I approached and then slid shut behind me. In the deafening silence of the building I took my helmet off.

"Cap'n Henson, sir," the guard said, bringing up a hand in a salute. His voice sounded strange. It took me a minute to realize it was because he wasn't shouting.

I cleared my throat. "Harrison," I answered with a disoriented smile. It always took me an hour or so to unwind from outside.

"Sir, the doctor wanted to see you as soon as you came in. Should I tell her you're on your way?"

"I'll see her later," I told him as I ambled down the hall toward the cafeteria. But the doctor must have been waiting. Halfway down the corridor she stepped out of the lab and into my way.

"Greg," she said. "You look tired." Her brown eyes scrutinized me in a way that would have been flattering had it come from a younger, less perceptive woman. "You feeling okay?"

"Sure."

Helen's question was standard. My answer was, too. She'd been querying me after I came in from outside ever since Marvin Torres had committed suicide. He hadn't coped well with the solitude. Helen suspected I didn't, either. Her

childhood had prepared her for Mars in a way I could never understand.

Helen came from Arizona and still wore the mark of the desert on her face. It was hard, arid, knifed through with arroyos of worry. Nothing soft dwelled there.

I'm the opposite. My cheeks are round, all the bone hidden by flesh. A baby face at forty-seven years old. Sometimes I wonder how my men can accept my orders.

"Flu's going around. I don't want you to get it."

What she said took me a heartbeat to understand. Then I think my heartbeat paused.

"What?" I asked. "What did you say?"

"I said, 'The flu's going around...'"

My expression must have given some indication of the lump in my gut because her words ground to a halt.

Abruptly I was aware of the warm light in the hall, the cold drip of water from the damp hair at the back of my neck, the exact rhythm of her breathing as it lifted the lapel of her uniform. *That's funny, I thought. How she can be breathing when I'm not?*

"Who has it?" I finally asked.

"Lieutenant Thomas."

"He the only one?"

"So far, but..."

"Where is he?" I interrupted.

"In sickbay."

"You got him quarantined?"

"With flu?" she asked.

I hurried past her. "It's not the flu."

Roger Thomas was sitting up in bed reading a *Playboy* and drinking a Coke. By the time I got there, I was breathing hard, as much from the thin atmosphere as from terror.

"Hi, Cap'n," he said agreeably. He didn't look very sick. "How was the trip?"

"Still raining out."

He laughed.

"Howya feeling?"

Roger shrugged his broad shoulders. His mahogany face looked chagrined. "Just a little puky, sir. A touch of fever. Other than that, I'm fine."

"You take it easy, Lieutenant," Helen said at my right side. She'd moved so silently and so close that she startled me. Grabbing my arm, she led me away.

"How long has he been sick?" I asked when the door shut behind us.

"He came in complaining of a sore throat yesterday."

"Isolate him."

"You sure?"

"Damn it! Isolate him!" I shouted. My eyes were wide. Spittle flew.

Helen recoiled. "Okay. All right. So what do we tell him when the plexiglass comes down?"

"Tell him we just don't want it going around the base. Tell him I hate having roll call in sickbay. Tell him we don't have enough bathrooms to go around."

Feeling silly at my overreaction, I walked into the lab and stared out at the dark, dead lava flows in the east. They were just visible through the gray gauze of the downpour.

"Could it be anything else?" I asked, knowing Helen had stopped behind me. I realized she was staring at my back. We'd known each other for three years, in the way jail inmates must know each other. I figured she was wondering if I'd finally cracked.

"Like what?"

"Like another type of virus. Other bugs have a longer incubation period, don't they?"

"Yeah, but I've ruled those out. It's ordinary, everyday stomach flu. The kind that keeps you near the toilet for three days until it finally lets go. That kind of flu."

"That's impossible," I told her without turning around. "The ships are sterilized. No one's been sick here. Not ever. And the shortest time anyone's been here is nine months."

"So it's a glitch."

"No, it's not," I said. "It's the thing I've always been afraid of."

"So where do you think it came from?"

"It's a present. From Mars."

After a few moments, I made my way out of the lab, leaving Helen probably wondering which would be worse: a man-killing Martian virus or my losing my mind.

Roger's fever climbed to one hundred and three. He couldn't keep liquids down. I spent a lot of time down in sickbay, just waiting for Roger to die. The kid would look at me through the plexiglass screen, his chocolate face miserable. Roger wasn't stupid. He'd figured it out. He'd known it the moment the isolation screen had lowered.

"It's the flu," Helen told me. "I'm sure of it. I've isolated the virus and that's what it looks like. There's no foreign DNA in there at all."

I shook my head and risked a glance at myself in the reflective surface of the plexiglass. The skin under my round blue eyes was bruised. I looked exhausted. I also looked scared.

"Look," she said reasonably. "Where did it come from if it didn't come from us? The flu virus needs a host."

"Well, it's got one now," I told her as I focused beyond my spectral image to Roger.

"Greg, let me give you a crash course in medicine, okay? This type of virus needs a host. It doesn't live that long outside. Probably a few hours. A day at the most. Now that's just for a start. The host needs to be similar enough to us for the virus to take root and grow. That's why we don't give the flu to our cats. Or pick up distemper from them."

"Excuse me," I said somewhat huffily. A pet peeve of mine is doctors who make their patients feel stupid. "Aren't you forgetting zoonosis? You're ignoring sort of major stuff like rabies, encephalitis and anthrax."

"Not spread by droplet," she replied, finally deciding to treat me like a well-read adult.

I didn't bother to reply. I could see Helen's face beside mine in the screen. She seemed pale.

"But the DNA's still like ours," she said. "Nothing alien there."

"Who knows what alien DNA would look like? Would you?"

She tried again. "All right. Granted. But viruses don't live in rocks. Even if there were Martians who were chemical carbon copies of us...even if they maybe died of the infection...when they died, the virus would, too."

"It's cold out there, Helen," I said.

"Yeah. It's cold. It's wet and ugly as a son-of-a-bitch. So what?"

"What if the organism were cryptobiotic? What if it were just freeze-dried? We've raised the temperature. We've added water. Maybe we just woke it up."

I could see the transparent reflection of her face go somber. "So, maybe you're right. Maybe this flu bug is cryptobiotic and woke up from the higher temperatures and the rain. But it's our bug, Greg. It's a human bug. Why is it so necessary for you to believe in aliens, anyway?"

"It's a lonely planet, Helen." Close to my shoulder I imagined I could feel the skeletal fingers of Mars. "Sort of a lonely universe."

"You're an incurable romantic," she told me. Her voice seemed both guarded and sad.

Yes, I thought. *I am.* I'd come to Mars, a suitor, and had been rejected by the blank red mud, the expressionless dark rocks. We'd added water. We'd added lichens. But we hadn't given Mars our complexities. We hadn't really given it life. Helen, a child of the desert, fretted about me.

Roger wasn't reading anymore. He was coughing a lot. At the end of one coughing fit, he vomited. A nurse, standing on the other side of the screen, inserted her hands into the flexible gloves and cleaned him up. Roger grabbed her plastic-coated fingers and held them.

He was crying, so I looked away. It was the stereotypical masculine reaction towards emotional scenes. Roger embarrassed me. If I'd had the guts I would have asked if he were crying because he was hurting or because he was afraid to die — or because he was scared to die alone.

Roger didn't have to worry about loneliness. The next day three other MTF personnel came down with it. I gave the order to close the base.

In the next several hours four more people came down with it. The morning after that Roger's fever broke. He got hungry. Nobody died. Nobody felt particularly good, either.

"Told you it was the flu," Helen said. "You might as well take them out of isolation."

"No," I told her. "Not until we know where it came from."

"We may never know that." Helen leaned back from her terminal, propping her feet on her desk. "What do the soil samples show? I know you're gathering some."

"Nothing. They don't show anything."

"Sterile dirt?"

"Sterile dirt." I got up from the chair and eased the stiffness out of my spine.

"Where're your Martians, Henson?" Helen asked just before I left the room.

I thought about it. "They're out there."

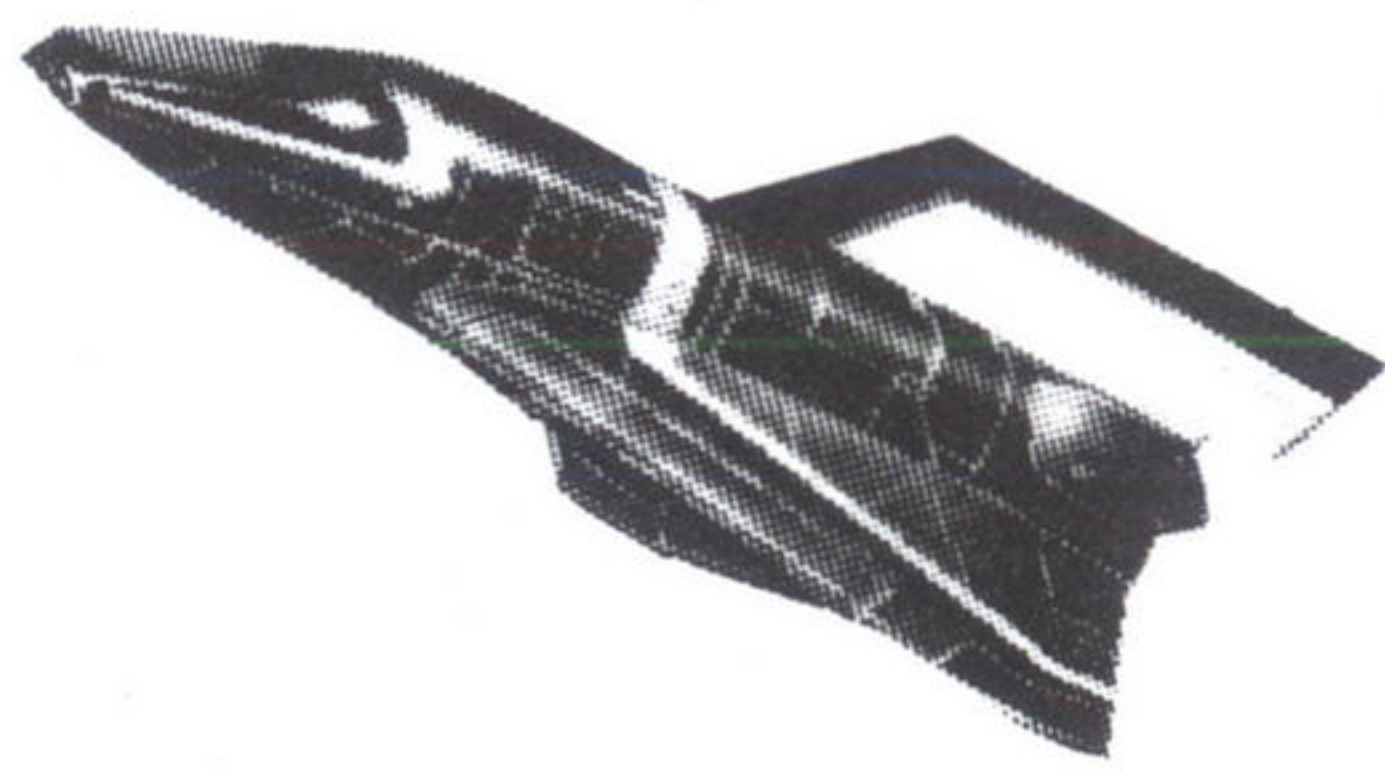
"You just want to believe in them," she said. I thought about that, too. "Yes," I told her. "I do."

When I got back to my quarters, the red light on my terminal was blinking. I logged on and brought the message up: MTF/GPE BLUE/73.15N/18.24W/13:01:49/MSG BASE CMDR CAPT GREGORY HENSON / CONFIDENTIAL ** SOMETHING HERE YOU NEED TO SEE ** /END MSG.

13:01. It had been sent over two hours ago. I hit the MSG key and indexed GPE BLUE. When the message header came up, I typed: TED. ORDERS WERE FOR YOU TO RETURN. SINCE YOU ARE STILL OUT IN THE FIELD, SUGGEST NOW YOU HEAD FOR NEXT AVAILABLE BASE, IF POSSIBLE. WE'RE UNDER QUARANTINE HERE WITH WHAT

(Continued to next page)

Moving?



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We expect our subscribers to move every once in a while — after all, look how much our alien publisher moves about. So move all you want, but if you don't write to tell us where you've gone, we won't be able to send you the next issue. That's because the post office does not forward second-class magazines, it destroys the copies when you move, and charges us for notification of your change of address. That means we won't replace copies lost because you moved and forgot to tell us in time because we've already done our part. So when you move, please write and tell us and enclose your current address label.



Art by Cortney Skinner

(Continued from previous page)

APPEARS TO BE THE FLU. IF YOU OR YOUR DRIVER ARE EXPERIENCING ANY, REPEAT, ANY MEDICAL PROBLEMS, ESSENTIAL YOU RETURN FOR MEDICAL EXAMINATION.

A few seconds after I hit the EXECUTE key, another message came up. MTF/GPE BLUE/73.15N/18.24W/15:36:39/MSG BASE CMDR CAPT GREGORY HENSON / CONFIDENTIAL/ ** CAPTAIN, RECEIVED ORDERS, BUT I THINK YOU NEED TO SEE THIS. I THINK YOU NEED TO SEE THIS NOW. THERE IS NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT ON YOUR AGENDA ** / END MSG.

MTF/BASE CMDR CAPT GREGORY HENSON/OLYMPUS BASE/15:37:20/MSG GPE BLUE/**SUGGEST YOU HAVE A GOOD REASON FOR NOT OBEYING FIRST ORDER TO RETURN. SUGGEST YOU ALSO HAVE A GOOD REASON FOR DRAGGING ME OUT IN THE FIELD**/END MSG.

MTF/GPE BLUE/73.15N/18.24W/15:38:14/**IDO.**/END MSG.

By the time my driver and I got to Group Blue they were out of the ATV, standing around in the rain. They'd put a tent up, but they hadn't gone under cover. My driver opened my door and I waded my way towards them.

"Cap'n, sir?" Ted called. It was cold. His visor was up and the word came out in a burst of fog.

I approached close enough to talk without shouting. "So, whaddya have, Lieutenant?"

Ted daCosta's mouth was in a thin line below the smoky glass of his visor. His driver, PFC Horace White, looked humorless, too. "In here, sir," Ted said.

I ducked to enter the tent, but Ted caught me. He bent to whisper in my ear.

"Sir..." he began. He didn't finish it. Behind the tinted visor his eyes were haunted.

"What?"

He shook his head. "Nothing."

I thought I saw a pale flower lying in the mud under the one-man tent, but it took a moment for my eyes to adjust to the darkness. When they did, I saw that the white splotch on the mud was a hand. Five long fingers were held in a graceful Grecian-statue gesture, the index finger pointing at nothing. At the wrist was caught a piece of cloth: navy blue with gray stripes. Crystals of

ice glittered on the flesh between thumb and palm.

"I don't understand," I said.

Ted stood slowly erect in the confines of the tent. He raised his visor and looked at me. "It's not human."

Helen smiled sadly over the rim of her coffee cup. Through the window a watery blue sky, its single ornament a far, faint sun, canopied the Martian plains. In low spots water still stood. In high spots the mud had cracked. "It really bothers you, doesn't it?"

I didn't have to speak. She saw the answer in my face. I thought of the face of the head of the creature we had found not fifty yards from where we'd found the hand. It had been beautiful.

"We've been out in space...how long?" I asked.

She shrugged. Beyond the mud flats the wintry light cast an aged crater wall in lavender. "Three years. Something like that. You've been here a few months longer."

"No. I mean us. Humanity. How long have we been at it?"

Her eyes flickered. She saw what I was getting at. "Is it that they were from Earth? Is that what the problem is?"

I studied her. After seeing the creature's face, Helen's looked crude, and I was glad I couldn't see my own. I gazed down at my hands. The creature's hands had been perfect: the fingers long, the last gesture expressive. He had been pointing when some cataclysmic force had burst his ship. *See there*, he might have been saying. *Look there*.

"They got to Europa. You think they might have been trying to terraform Mars, too?"

Her voice brought me back to the present. "Maybe they got farther before the end came. Whatever the end was. Maybe they got out of the solar system. Maybe they colonized there." *God, I hope so*, I thought. *Wouldn't it be wonderful if they were waiting for us when we arrived on the other side? Wouldn't it be something else to sail that dark sea to find we'd made our way back home?* I pictured us meeting, two warm, fragile intelligences in the desert of space. But I didn't believe it. I wanted to, but I couldn't believe.

Instead I pictured him, one of the three on the ice, perhaps seeing in his telescope the deadly asteroid arc into Earth, blazing a path

brighter and more lovely than the path down to Mars his frozen coffin had made. *See there? Look there.*

I remembered the curved metal of the ship, the intricate, spidery hieroglyphics. Only hands that were perfect could have managed that.

"I hear they're sounding the Antarctic. That's where they think they'll find the evidence, if any evidence is left to be found," Helen told me. Then she smiled and shook her head. "Have you seen the VidNews headlines? 'Slow, Clumsy And Stupid?' Jesus. Ignorant laymen. For all science has learned about their forerunners, you'd think the species would get better press, right?"

Slow. Clumsy. Stupid. I thought of the domed, hairless head. The wide, liquid eyes. They had been open when we found him. The ice was melting and running down the face like tears. *See there? Look. Look there.*

"They were so much like us," I said.

"Yes. Surprisingly. And we finally have the proof that they were warm-blooded. But it's still odd that we could be prey to some of the same diseases when they were evolved from the dinosaurs and we were evolved from the apes."

"Yeah." I put my head between my hands. That wasn't quite what I'd meant.

"So what's the matter?" she asked as she put her Styrofoam cup down on the Formica. "We found out. We found your aliens. So what the hell's the matter with you?"

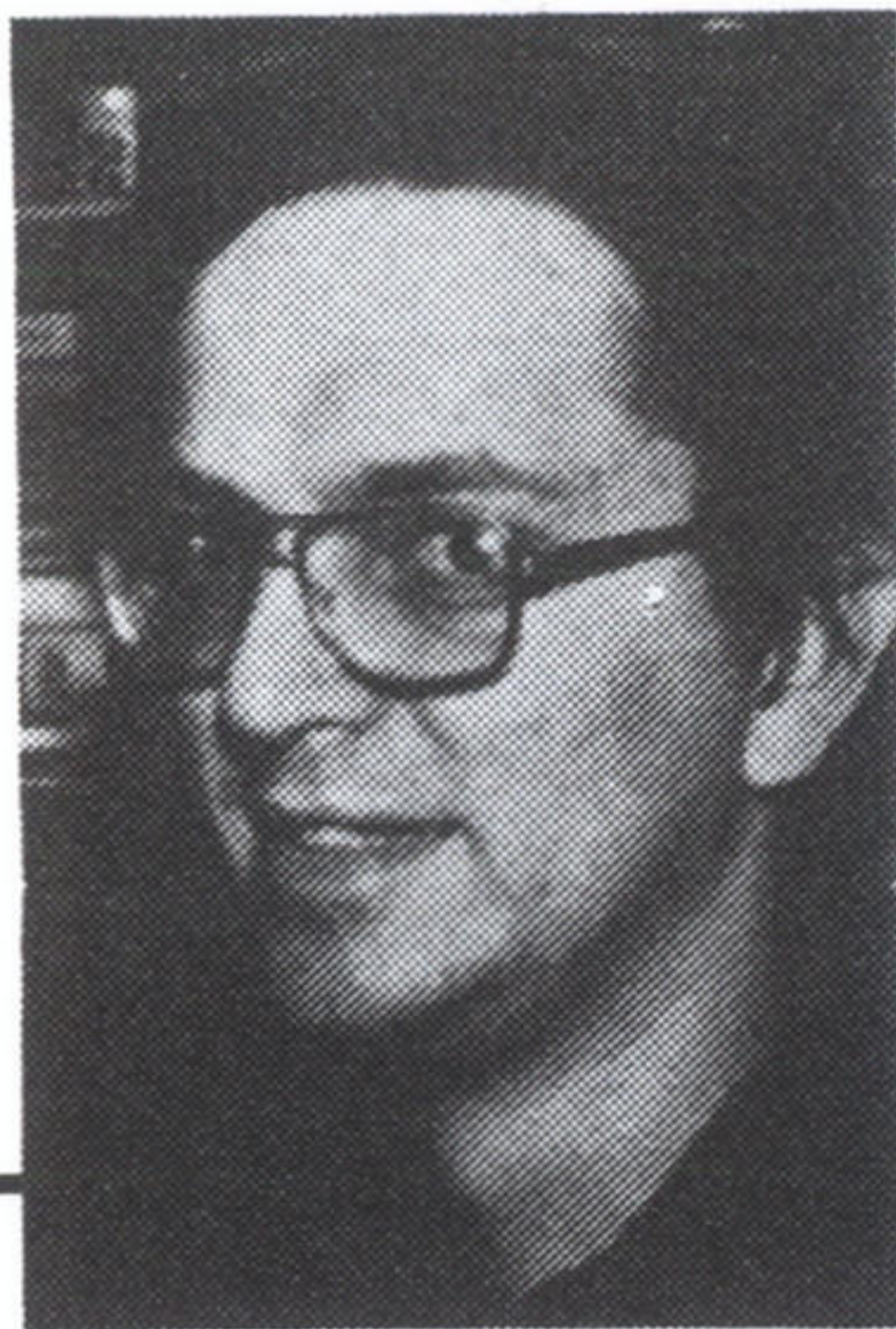
My throat closed. For a long time I couldn't answer. At my side I could feel the pressure of the wide plains of Mars alight in their brief hiatus from our unnatural clouds, our artificial rain.

In three years the lichens would take over. Twenty-five years after that, more complex plants. Sometime beyond where my future reached, men would stand on red beaches, the forest behind them, the blue seas of Mars at their front. I had the feeling those men would be lonely.

I got to my feet and grabbed Helen's luncheon dishes in a gesture of good will. Helen and I had stood in the stark white sickbay looking down at that strange, elegant body. As a gesture of good will she'd said an embarrassed prayer.

"I just wanted to be able to meet them," I said.

-ABO-



New Works From Old Masters

Science fiction ages curiously, and so do the reputations of its writers. The best-seller lists of the past forty years, or even the roster of Pulitzer Prize winners, is an elephant's graveyard of literature, filled with once mighty names now gone to dust. Yet stories which appeared in *Astounding Science Fiction* or *Thrilling Wonder Stories* in the 1940s are world-wide classics, and show every indication of staying in print for centuries. (Some obvious examples: *The Foundation Trilogy*, the early works of Robert A. Heinlein, and *The Martian Chronicles*, all of which have endured far better than, say, *Mrs. Miniver* or *Forever Amber*.)

The contents of the early science fiction magazines have completely overwhelmed those of the "better" pulps, the top-paying prestige magazines such as *Bluebook* and *Argosy*, the contributors to which seem to have regarded the science fiction magazines with contempt, or at least indifference. Today the big names of the non-SF pulps — H. Bedford Jones, Talbot Mundy, etc. — hover on the edge of oblivion, barely remembered (and occasionally reprinted by somebody like Donald Grant) because of their tangential SF/fantasy connections. Those pulp writers who didn't have such connections haven't made it. Whatever happened to W.C. Tuttle? old-timers may well ask. Nobody else bothers to.

At the same time, a lot of science fiction has dropped into oblivion, too. Some of it ages very rapidly, becoming obsolete as social or scientific trends turn elsewhere, or as literary fashions change. Science fiction has had a couple of dramatic revolutions. John Campbell's, 1938-48, was surely the most effective. (The New Wave of the 1960s was, on the surface, a failure, but has had a lingering, subtle influence.) After Campbell had been editing *Astounding* for just a few years, certain writers who had previously been at the very forefront of the field suddenly found themselves totally ignored, if they were still able to publish at all. Such was the fate of Neil R. Jones, Stanton Coblenz, David H. Keller, John Taine, Ray Cummings, and numerous others who were at the top of the heap in 1935, but virtually

gone from the scene by 1940.

I think a lot of this stems from the fact that in the first decade or so of science fiction magazines the literary standards were so low, even relative to the other pulps of the day, that it became possible for writers to publish, and even become famous, on the sheer power of their ideas, for not all the writers could actually write. It was a well-kept secret. By all indications the early pulp-SF readers couldn't tell. But today, when the ideas have rusted, the stories are no longer entertaining, or even readable to anyone but a literary historian. To the uninitiated, they are incomprehensibly awful. By contrast, the non-pulp SF of the period, if it was any good originally, still is. We can still read Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or John Collier's *Full Circle* (1933) because they were written at a much higher level to begin with.

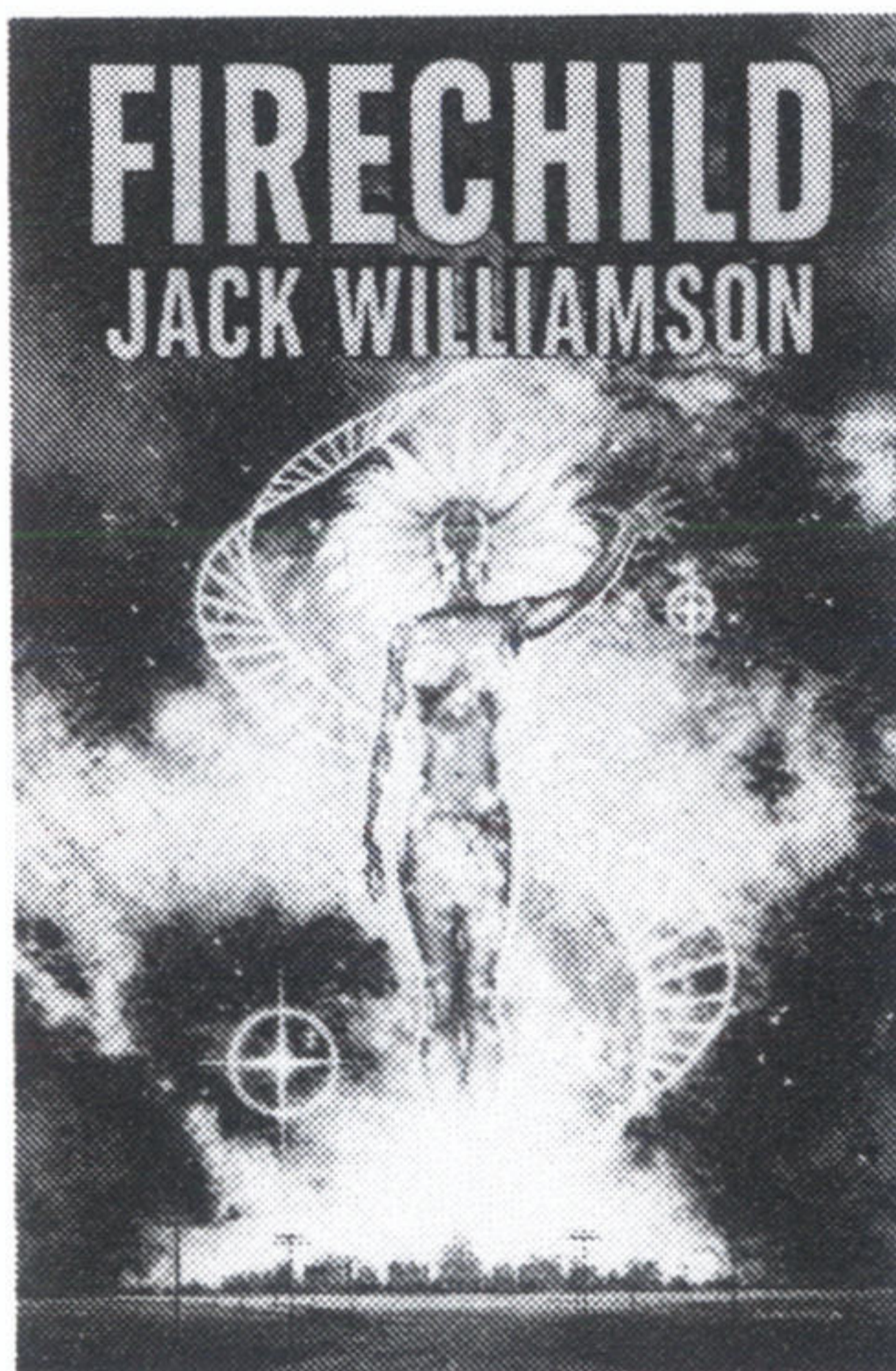
John Campbell's revolution raised literary standards to the point that the ideas, not merely the stories, not merely the ideas, have remained bearable to subsequent generations of readers. "Golden Age" SF of the 1940s never consisted of unadulterated masterpieces, but it can still entertain readers who turn to fiction in hope of being entertained, and who don't care how old the story is. For the most part Campbell discovered and trained new writers — Heinlein, Asimov, Sturgeon, de Camp, van Vogt — and threw out the old crowd. A few of the older writers he managed to retrain, and some of them, consequently, survived into succeeding decades.

Foremost among those survivors was Jack Williamson, whose career went back to the very beginning. His first story appeared in Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing* in 1923. His most recent novel has just come out.

Firechild
By Jack Williamson
Bluejay Books, 1986
377 pp., \$16.95

You can see the whole development of Williamson as a writer in this one. It is a marvelously entertaining book, a genuinely taut thriller, but interesting on another level because it reads like a collaboration between the brash pulp writer who wowed 'em with *The Legion of Space* in 1934, the

more mature, post-Campbell author of *The Humanoids* (1948), and the thoroughly sophisticated Williamson of the '80s. This novel is not a nostalgia item, folks. It stands solidly on its own merits.



The story begins with a biological catastrophe as a genetically engineered plague wipes out a Midwestern city. Then the plot and the cast widen, and there is a continuing mystery involving, among others, a crazed fundamentalist general, Russian spies, a Mexican convict, a secret right-wing organization, and even an artificial being which may represent the next stage in human evolution.

A less capable writer would have easily let the whole thing slide into melodrama. I'm sure the Williamson of fifty years ago would have, too. It would have been good melodrama, mind you, and might even be remembered fondly, but it would still be mental popcorn, something impossible to take seriously. Today, Williamson is capable of more. The characterizations are sensitively developed. Most surprisingly, in this neo-Cold War era, while one of the Russians is a slimy brute, the other is almost sympathetic, and both are believable individuals.

The real villain of the piece is the fanatically religious, anti-science general, but even he comes off as more than a stage psychopath. In his pulp days, Williamson learned to write clear, vigorous prose and to keep the story moving at a furious pace. In the Campbell era he picked up some scientific rigor. All those elements are present in *Firechild*, but the Williamson of the '80s shows himself capable of much more.

This isn't a heavy, philosophical work. It is basically a thriller, but it's

a thriller you don't have to make excuses for.

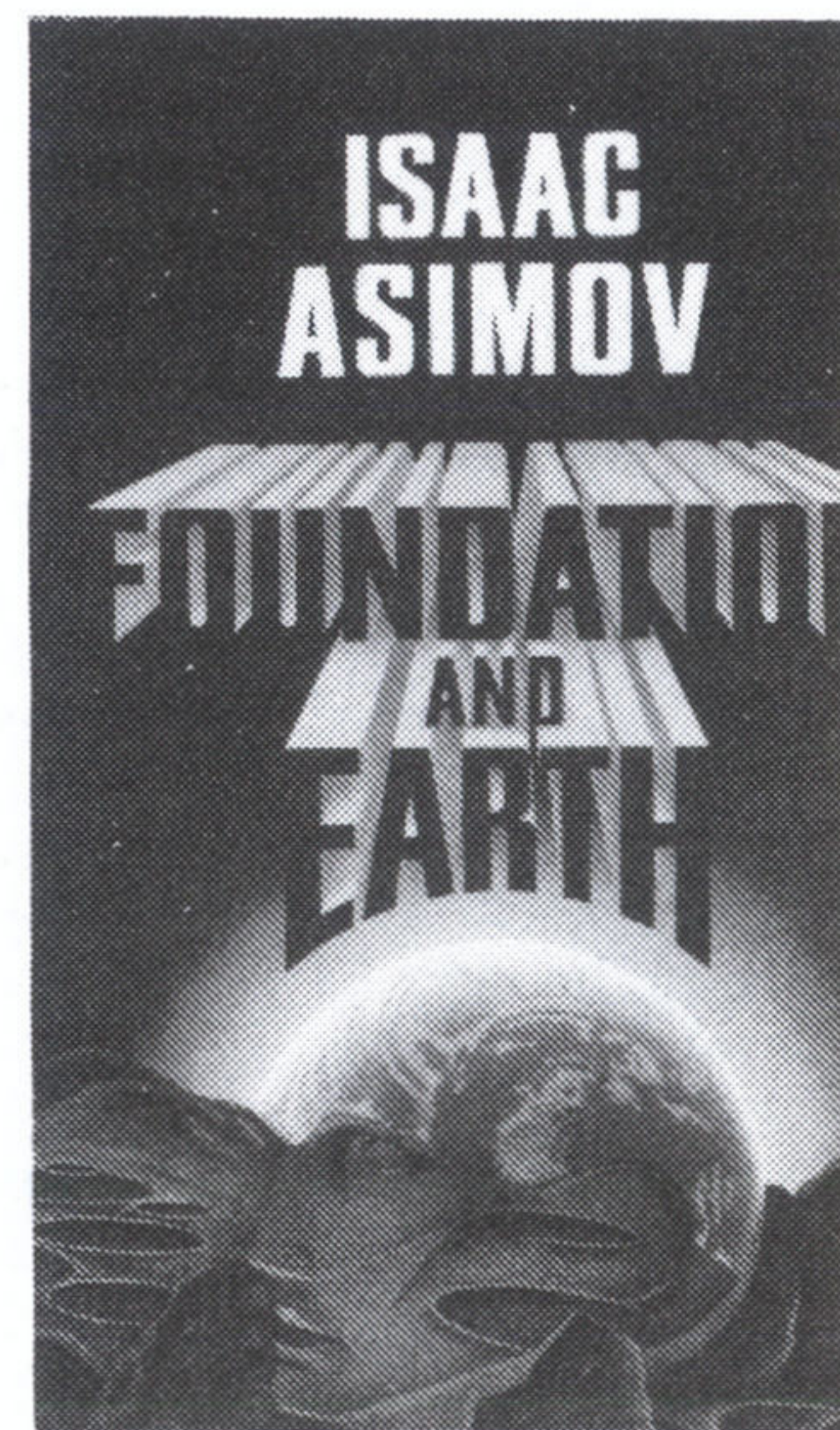
Rating: ☆☆☆

Foundation and Earth
By Isaac Asimov
Doubleday, 1986
356 pp., \$16.95

And now, the fifth book of *The Foundation Trilogy*. I have mixed feelings about it.

Asimov is the most primitive of major science fiction writers. He is the only one, it seems to me, who is still writing in a pre-Campbell mode, using the techniques of Keller and Coblenz and the writers in the Gernsback magazines, which of course he read as a child. But he was a quintessential *Astounding* writer in the days when Campbell's *Astounding* practically was the field. (Adult-level competition didn't develop until about 1948, and didn't become widespread until the establishment of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Galaxy*, 1949-50.)

What Campbell encouraged in Asimov was intellectual rigor. Asimov, like Hugo Gernsback, writes primarily in lectures, rather than with the conventional fictional virtues. Most of the text of any of his stories consists of people explaining things to one another. But where the earliest pulp writers had ridiculous stereotypes blathering tediously about the ridiculous, Asimov has plausible if sketchily developed characters clearly expounding speculations which are both valid and fascinating. That's the real difference, not that he is necessarily a better storyteller. So, even though he may still be in, as he puts it, his Late Youth, he is a dinosaur — but a living dinosaur, to be treasured.



He exemplifies a type of writing which has otherwise perished simply because he does it better than anyone else ever did.

This is not to say that every part of this novel is even interesting. Asimov has reached that point, as Heinlein and Delany did some time ago, where his books sell so well that no editor will dare curb his self-indulgences. While freedom seems to have ruined Delany and has certainly diminished Heinlein, with Asimov it is only a source of small irritations, such as the hero going to the bathroom entirely too often in *The Robots of Dawn*. In *Foundation and Earth* there are some boring lectures, as the characters seem endlessly driven to explain food, customs, spacedrives, etc., to one another. The beginning is very slow and should have been cut, but once the book gets going, the old interest returns.

This is the book which finally ties the robot series and the Foundation series together. It begins mere seconds after *Foundation's Edge* left off, as the characters of that book, their memories subtly altered, set off in search of Earth. There remain mysterious forces invisibly tilting human destiny this way and that. Of course, having read *Robots and Empire*, we know precisely what did happen to Earth, so a certain amount of suspense is inevitably lost, but Asimov retains his unique charm. The excitement is almost purely intellectual, that of research rather than of story. The robots finally enter the Foundation history proper, and we even meet a now incredibly ancient R. Daneel Olivaw, who is, to my mind, Asimov's most appealing character.

Of the recent Asimov novels, I wouldn't rate *Foundation and Earth* (or *Foundation's Edge*, for that matter) as highly as the last two robot novels, precisely because, when Daneel and Lije Baley are present, Asimov tran-

(Continued to next page)

Rating System

Supernova	A masterpiece
☆☆☆☆☆	Outstanding
☆☆☆☆	Very good
☆☆☆	Good
☆☆	Fair
☆	Poor
Black hole	Don't get sucked in

(Continued from previous page)

scends his usual lecture format and becomes a real novelist, with a story that moves on character development and plot rather than the leisurely unfolding of ideas. (The robot books have that, too, but they have *more*.) Baley and Daneel aren't realistic characters as much as they are bright cartoons, but it's the kind of cartooning that made Sherlock Holmes immortal. The robots, particularly, are vividly memorable creations, so wonderfully benevolent and rational that they're almost sinister. Now that with *Foundation and Earth* they seem pretty much phased out of the Asimovian universe, I know I shall miss them.

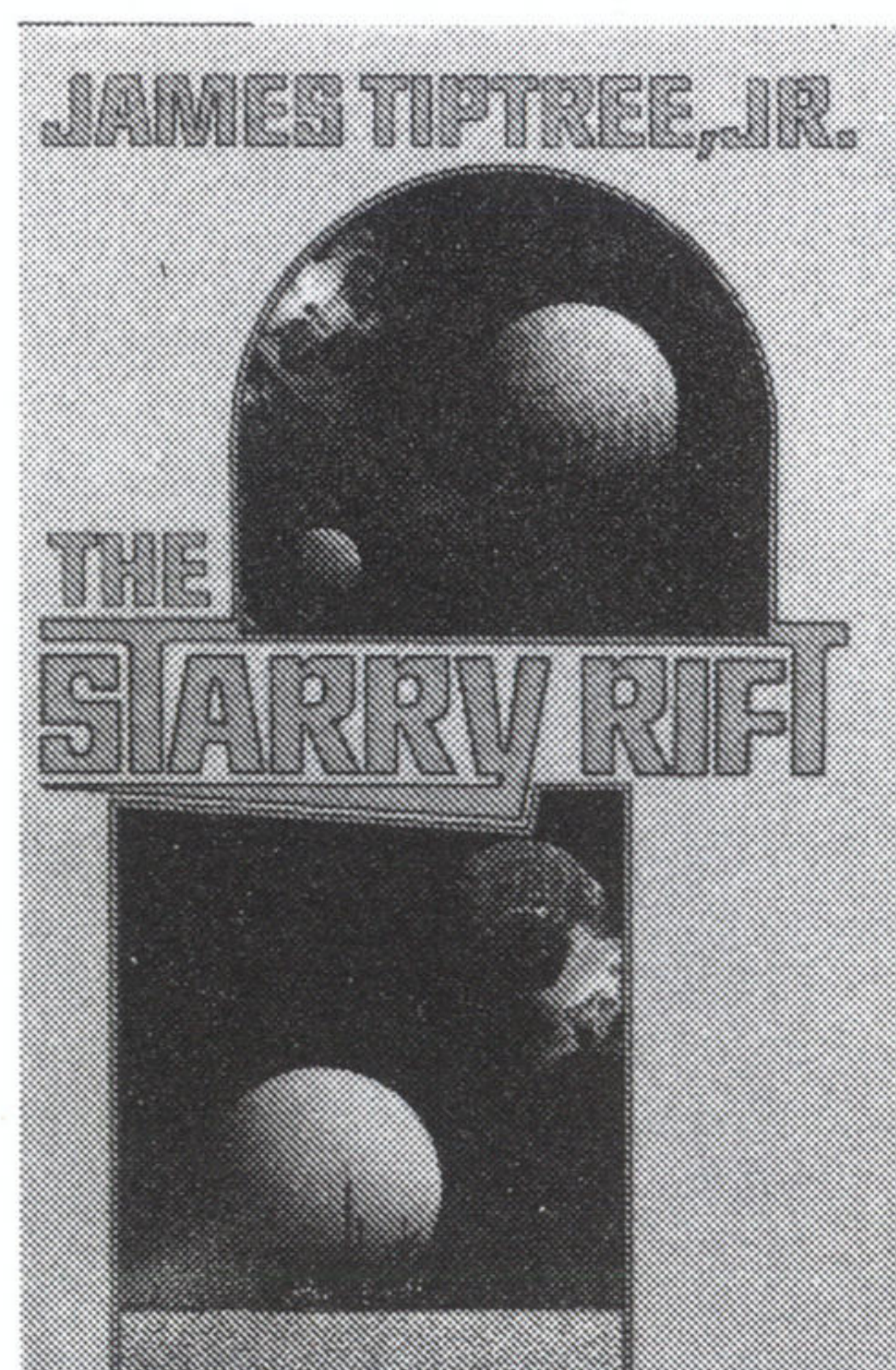
Rating ☆☆☆

The Starry Rift
By James Tiptree Jr.
Tor Books, 1986
250 pp., \$14.95

James Tiptree, a.k.a. Alice Sheldon (whose picture appears on the back jacket, as Tiptree, with no explanation for the uninformed), is not quite an Old Master, but the three novellas that make up this collection have a certain nostalgic feel to them, as if Sheldon had gone back to the pulp stories she may have read as a child and tried to rewrite them at a modern level of sophistication. The ingredients are all there — motley space pirates, luxurious interstellar yachts, scantily clad maidens (one in a transparent spacesuit worthy of Earle Bergey!) and even an image I remember specifically from a 1943 Leigh Brackett *Planet Stories* epic: a deep-space sargasso of old and wrecked spaceships, welded together to serve as the habitation of galactic riff-raff.

But the writing is hardly on a pulp level. For one thing, it's all first-person present. For another, the author isn't entirely playful as she examines our perceptions of these standard pulp images — most memorably the ancient, but still surgically youthened galactic movie starlet who would much rather be a human being. Sometimes, too, Sheldon develops what looks like frivolity into emotionally powerful climaxes.

On the minus side, there are logic lapses and outrageous coincidences, which would have been no

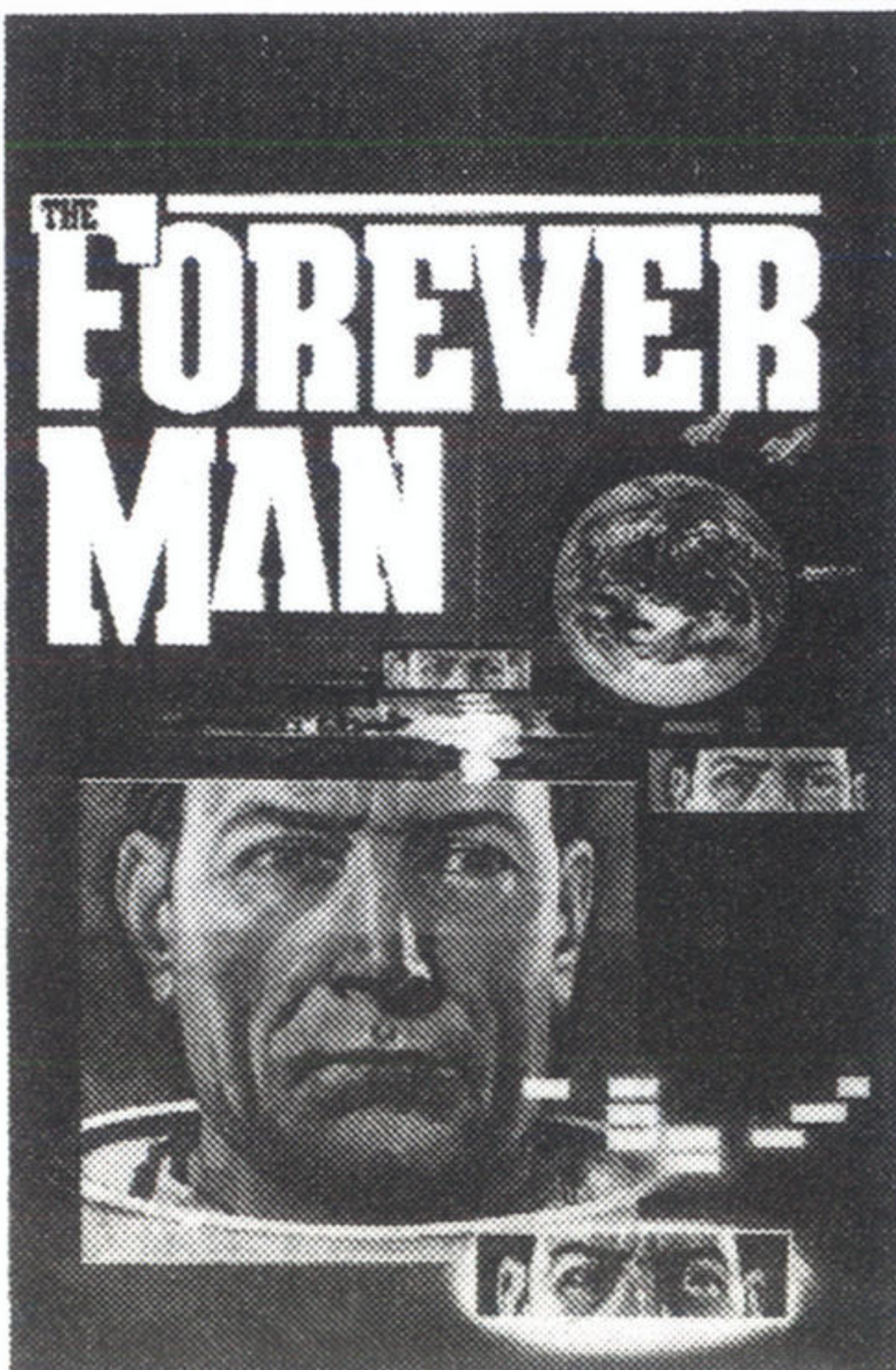


more excusable in *Planet Stories* in 1943 than they are now. And, I think, after this, I have had my fill of Plucky, Cute Girls In Peril. But the best story, "The Only Neat Thing to Do," a 1985 Nebula finalist, is very good indeed, and the other two ("Good Night, Sweethearts" and "Collision") are at least in the middle range of Tiptree/Sheldon's work.

Rating: ☆☆☆

The Forever Man
By Gordon Dickson
Ace, 1986
375 pp., \$16.95

Gordon Dickson has been publishing since 1950 and has a substantial body of work which continues to be read, so that must make him an Old Master, too, by now. But, alas, *The Forever Man* adds nothing to the reputation of the author of *Soldier, Ask Not* and *The Tactics of Mistake*.



I will be blunt: this is a dull book, almost inexplicably so. The material shows a lot of promise: in the standard *Starship Troopers/Forever War/Ender's Game* scenario of mankind's interstellar expansion running up against an implacable alien enemy, a decades-lost spaceship returns from deeper into enemy territory than anybody has ever been.

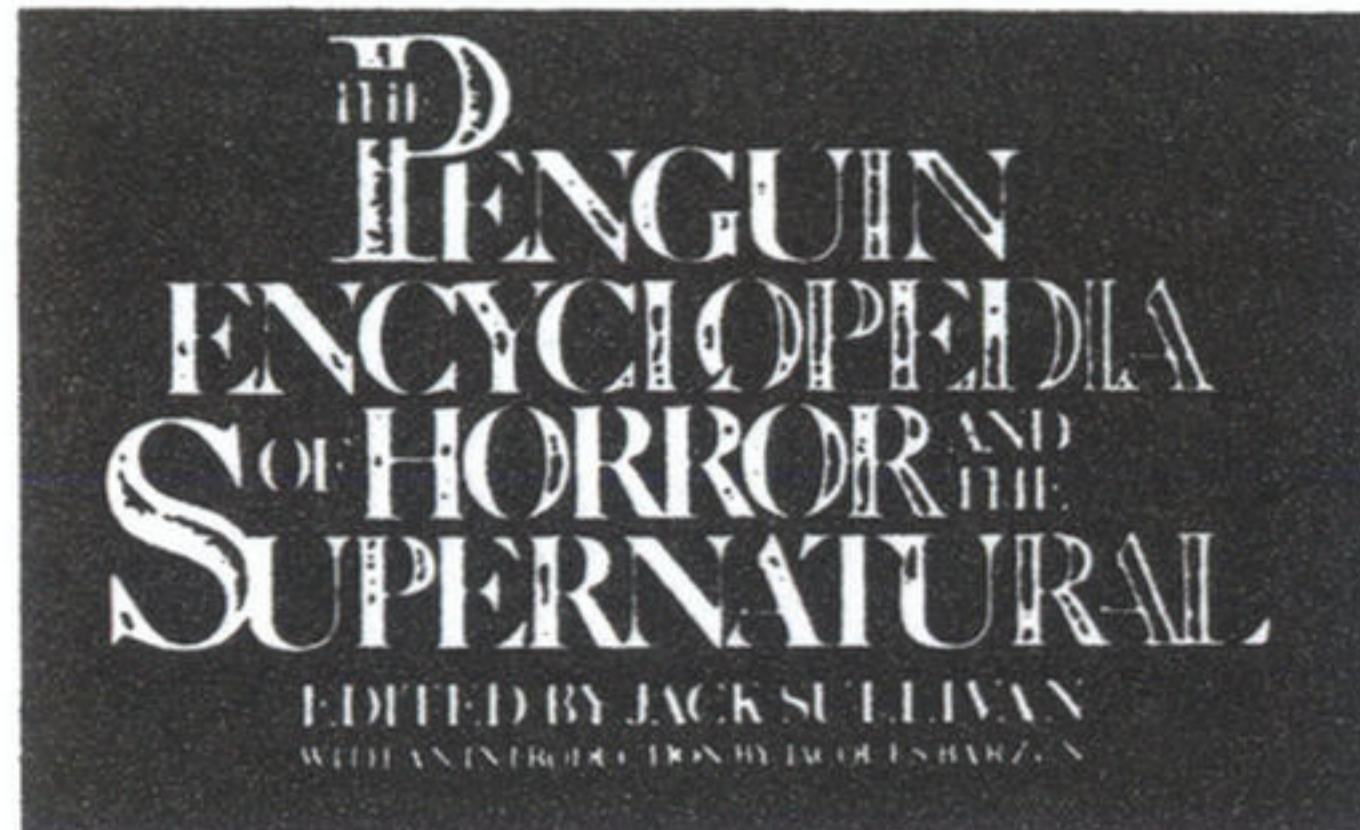
The pilot is still aboard — sort of. In a poltergeist-like phenomenon, his consciousness became implanted in the ship itself when his body died. Of course the military and philosophical implications are enormous, so our hero, in the course of being brutally screwed over by his superiors, is similarly implanted in a ship and sent off to retrace the route of the first such unfortunate.

But the novel utterly fails to build any sympathy for its characters. The hero has a female companion similarly "haunting" his ship, so he has someone to talk to, but once the two of them get off on their voyage, even the greatest wonders (and phenomena that should be wondrous) only evoke more chatter. Dickson curiously avoids anything resembling dramatic scenes. And he is nowhere near the lecturer Asimov is.

Rating: ☆

The Viking Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural
Edited by Jack Sullivan
Viking, 1986
482 pp., \$29.95

One of the things I've learned after more than a decade of reviewing is that a reference book is like a piece of software — you have to use it for a while



before you know how good it is. So any review, necessarily done shortly after the book appears, can only be a preliminary impression.

Over the years, for example, my opinion of Peter Nicholls' much-touted *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* has steadily declined, because although that book is written with real critical intelligence, it has proven to be factually weak. Donald Tuck's *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy* shows no critical intelligence at all, but Tuck gets his facts straight. What do I use such a reference book for? Facts. So Tuck is more useful than Nicholls.

My initial impression is that *The Viking Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural* tries for too wide a range (including, for instance, articles on music composers) and so misses a lot, but it is both well-written and reasonably accurate. I've compiled a little list of errors (Farnsworth Wright did not die in office, but a few months after he left *Weird Tales*; *Witchcraft and Sorcery* did not become *Coven 13*, but the other way around, and *Coven 13* was by no stretch of the definition a semi-professional magazine; etc.), but nothing so serious that I distrust the entries on subjects beyond my expertise.

There is perhaps too much of an attempt to reach for literary legitimacy by devoting long articles to mainstream figures whose relevance is tangential. (When Joyce Carol Oates gets over a page and Manly Wade Wellman rates barely a hundred words, things are clearly unbalanced.) The entry on Harlan Ellison is superficial and misleading (and it'll probably infuriate Harlan).

Overall, however, the book seems well-written and sound. The major essays are thoughtful and sometimes witty as they cover everything from the major individual authors to the Golden Age of Ghost Stories, movies, illustrators, trends, motifs, and even *The Pits of Horror*. The volume is handsomely produced and illustrated with stills, prints, and photos.

A must for any library, and, significantly, priced low enough to be within the reach of the serious fan.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

- ABO -

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<i>Firechild</i> By Jack Williamson Rating: ☆☆☆☆	\$16.95
<i>Foundation and Earth</i> By Isaac Asimov Rating: ☆☆☆	\$16.95
<i>The Starry Rift</i> By James Tiptree Jr. Rating: ☆☆☆	\$14.95
<i>The Forever Man</i> By Gordon Dickson Rating: ☆	\$16.95
<i>The Viking Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural</i> Edited by Jack Sullivan Rating: ☆☆☆☆	\$29.95

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"Up to now I had assumed finding a horseshoe was good luck!"

The Reel Stuff

(Continued from page 8)

by Young Frankenstein's team of Ronny Graham, Tom Mehan and Brooks, the space romp also features Rick Moranis and John Candy, escapees from *The Little Shop of Horrors*. Bill Pullman, Daphne Zuniga and Dick Van Patten also appear in the saga of Captain Lonestar, who roams the spaceways in a sort of futuristic Winnebago and comes to the aid of Princess Vespa, daughter of Roland, King of the Druids. (Making Vespa a sort of Drewish princess.) Special effects are provided by Peter Donan at Apogee, and the villains sport names like Dark Helmet, Barf and Pizza the Hut.

I don't know about you, but I can't wait for this one.

The Envelope, Please

I promised last column to do the unspeakable — selecting the year's best genre films — and the year's worst. I know it's a fairly predictable sort of thing for a media column, and I'm sensitive to the glut of such commentary filling the airwaves and the "Living" sections of your local papers for two months following year's end.

But consider the alternative.

The 1986 offerings go by unheralded and unlamented. There is no sting of criticism to prod the consciences of the creators. The producers and directors of the more artistically bankrupt of the releases feel we don't care about what's been foisted on us, and make more of the same, untroubled by critical backlash. It is in the spirit of public service that critics compile lists and single out those to be commended and those to be avoided. So, for your welfare, and at no extra charge to you, a few guest commentators and myself have compiled our picks. It's a dirty job, but I had help.

Harlan Ellison's Top 5

("I don't think I can think of ten...these aren't in a particular order".)

1. *Peggy Sue Got Married*
2. *Brazil*
3. *The Fly*
4. *Labyrinth*
5. *Stand By Me*

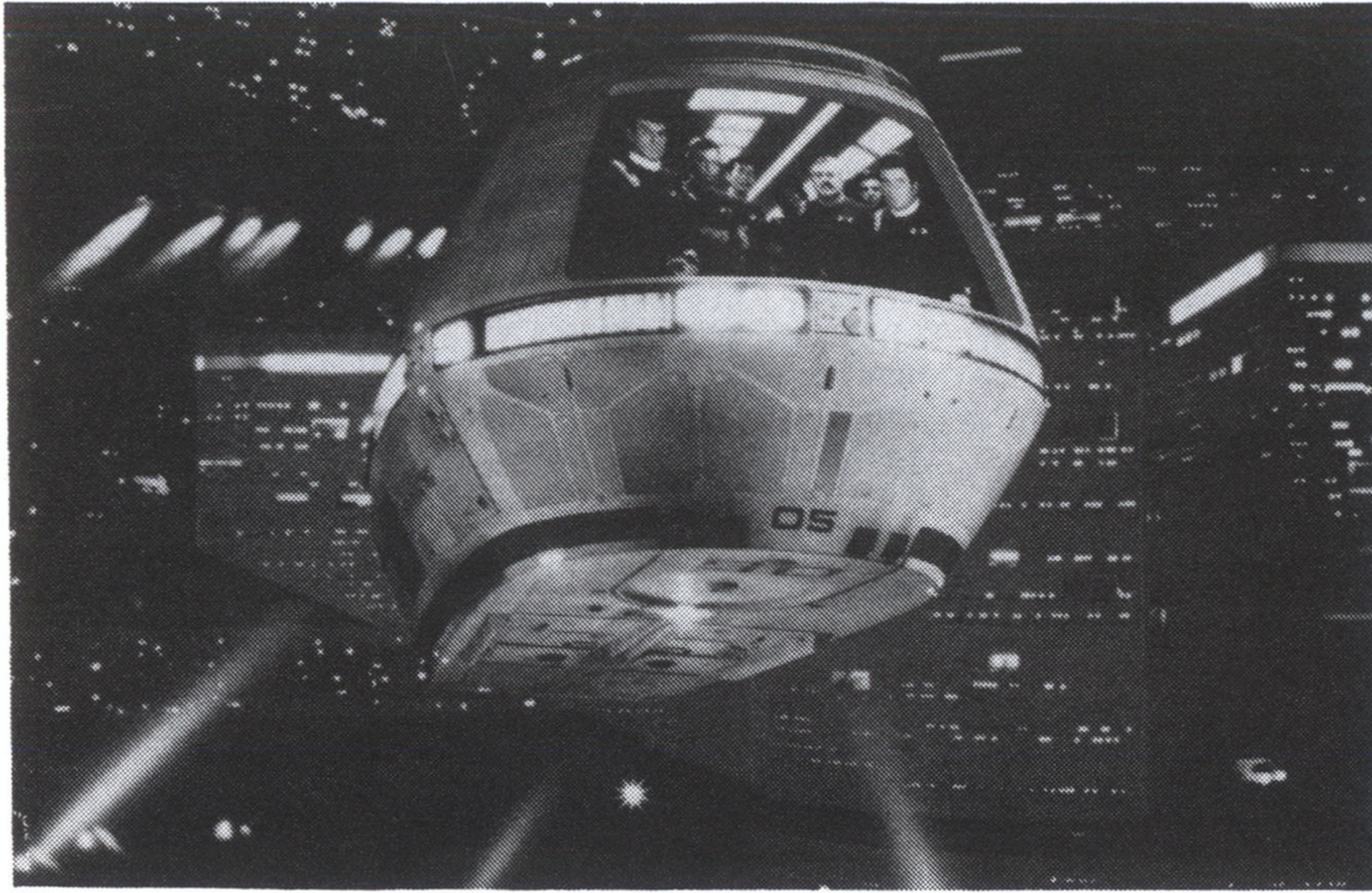
"*Stand By Me* is not a genre movie, although everyone seems to treat it like one because it's Stephen King. It's a good movie, and better it's on the top five instead of the other dreck. *Brazil* was brilliant. *Labyrinth* I liked better than *Legend*. I can't think of any others that are on a level with these." (Following suit, we all included *Stand By Me*, which we will not even attempt to justify.)

Ed Bryant's Top 10

("These are not necessarily in order, either. I have a little trouble remembering what came out this year.")

1. *Trouble in Mind*
2. *UFOría*
3. *Brazil*
4. *From Beyond*
5. *The Fly*
6. *Aliens*
7. *Eliminators*
8. *Crossroads*
9. *Stand By Me*
10. *Troll*

Ed had another list of movies that might be in his top ten if he'd seen them, including *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Star Trek IV*, and also mentioned that some he liked — *Big Trouble in Little China*, for instance — seemed to gain stature compared to following efforts. Ed confessed a real affinity for this



The adventure continues in *Star Trek IV*

year's low budget entries.

His only explanation was to remark, "What can I say?"

Dave Gerrold's Top 5

("I can't think of ten. I can't put a movie on the best list unless the story works. There were several movies I enjoyed that still don't qualify as 'best.'") Again, no order.

1. *Brazil*
2. *The Boy Who Could Fly*
3. *Aliens*
4. *Stand By Me*
5. *Crossroads*

David commented about David Cronenberg's *The Fly*: "I wouldn't take a shower with Robert Bloch and I wouldn't have lunch with David Cronenberg." David also adds that *Crossroads* had particular appeal for him because the climax was accomplished with music, elevating the soundtrack to a part of the storytelling. "I like a film that stretches the horizons."

Dorothy Parker's Top 5

("There aren't ten. I could name ten but they would only be filler on a 'best' list. There are five I think stand out in quality and storytelling.")

In order:

1. *Brazil*
2. *Peggy Sue Got Married*
3. *The Fly*
4. *Stand By Me*
5. *Little Shop of Horrors*

"There aren't too many surprises in my choices, with the possible exception that I passed on *Aliens* and *Legend* in lieu of *Little Shop of Horrors*. Though *Little Shop* was a tongue-in-cheek treatment of the genre, it did a better job integrating the fantastic elements than Jim Cameron's extravaganza. *Aliens* was the Magnificent Seven in Outer Space, with bandidos in rubber suits. *Legend* was surpassingly lush and ploddingly unsurprising other than Tim Curry engagingly decked out as what one critic called 'the Surf 'n' Turf special.' Had the story been given the careful attention paid to the filming, *Legend* would have been, well, legendary."

Alien Publisher Picks 6

1. *Aliens*
2. *Invaders From Mars*
3. *UFOría*
4. *From Beyond*
5. *Mork and Mindy*
6. *The Terminator* and anything else with Arnold Schwarzenegger

(We realize that *Mork and Mindy* and *The Terminator* did not qualify as feature film releases for 1986, but we also figured that this was the Alien Publisher's list and it can pick what it wants, not being bound by such simple conventions as what year it is — it also thinks the aliens should have won.)

Also Rans

Notably absent from the lists

are the big buck entries, most of which were popular with audiences — but not with critics — such as: *Star Trek IV*, *Golden Child*, *Poltergeist II*, *Legend*, and *Big Trouble in Little China*.

Everyone agreed on the losers. You may have particular candidates of your own, but the following films drew unanimous groans and/or unprintable utterances: *Invaders From Mars*, *Kong Lives*, *Howard the Duck*, *Maximum Overdrive*, *Critters*, *Trick or Treat*, almost everything from Cannon Films and everything from Dino DeLaurentiis (who cries about his artistic failures all the way to the bank.) If you have comments or favorites you'd like to applaud, address them in care of *Aboriginal SF*. I'll tabulate them and let you know the result — a sort of People's Choice of the year.

A New Year's Resolution

(The following memo was found in a dumpster somewhere in Beverly Hills. The stationery bore the imprint of a major studio, but a spokesperson would not comment other than to say the executives involved are no longer with the studio.)

"MEMO

"FROM: -----

"TO: Property Acquisition and Development

"After careful consideration, the head of Marketing and the senior vice president have approved the implementation of a new property strategy. In our efforts to achieve and maintain a level of wholesome, quality entertainment in all our feature releases, the following production and story guidelines must be strictly adhered to commencing January 1, 1987.

"This is our opportunity to turn over a new leaf and exhibit the sort of artistic integrity the public deserves.

"God bless you, everyone.

"STORY GUIDELINES

"1. No material which degrades or exploits members of minority, religious or ethnic groups.

"2. No material which exploits or degrades women.

"3. No material which glorifies promiscuity, violence or substance abuse.

"4. No material which is needlessly graphic in its depiction of physical injury.

"5. No material which is needlessly graphic in its depiction of sexual intimacy.

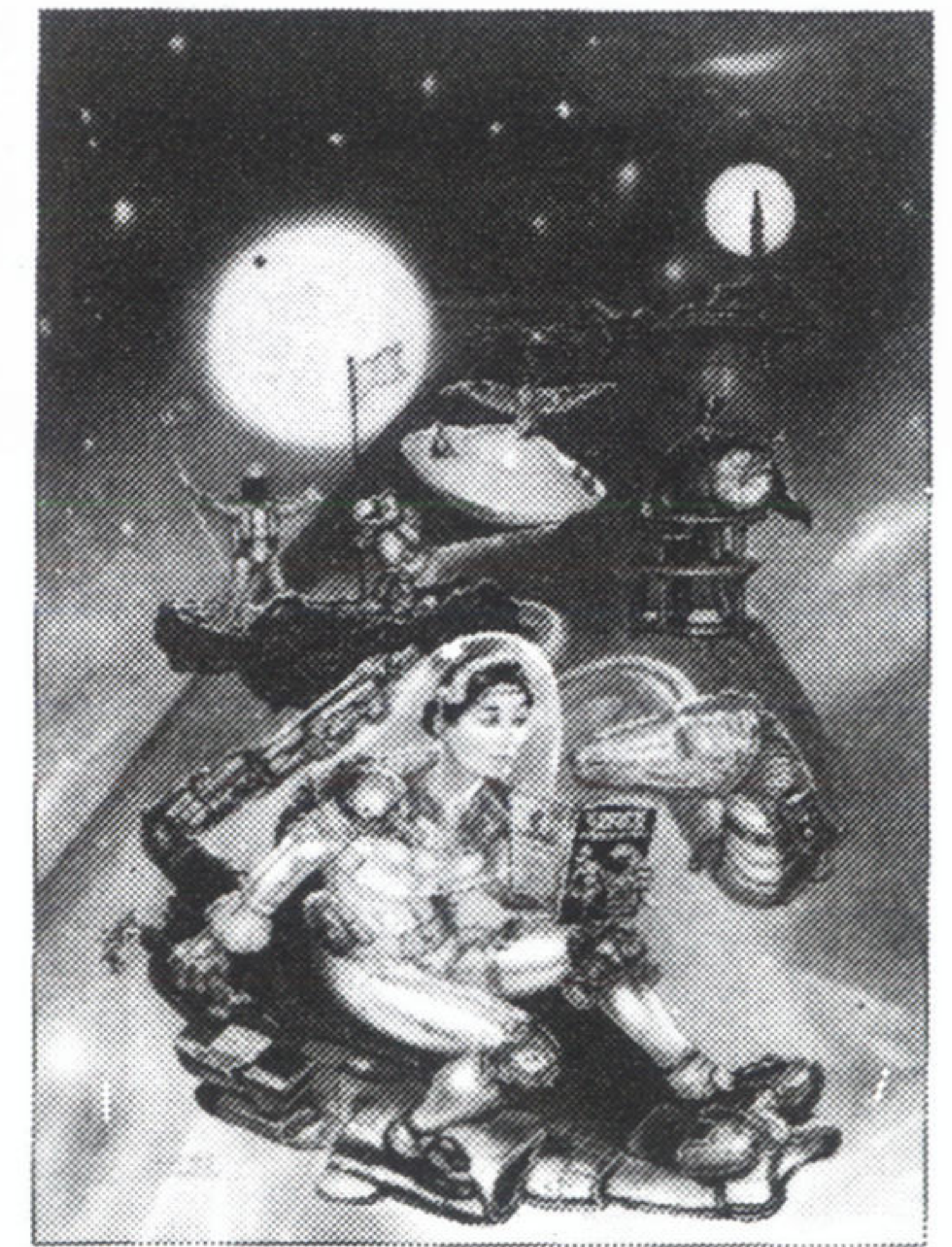
"I realize most of our properties do not currently fall within these guidelines, but I'm sure you can recognize the need to encourage good social values and examine the human condition. Thanks for your support in this endeavor.

"Signed-----"

-ABO-

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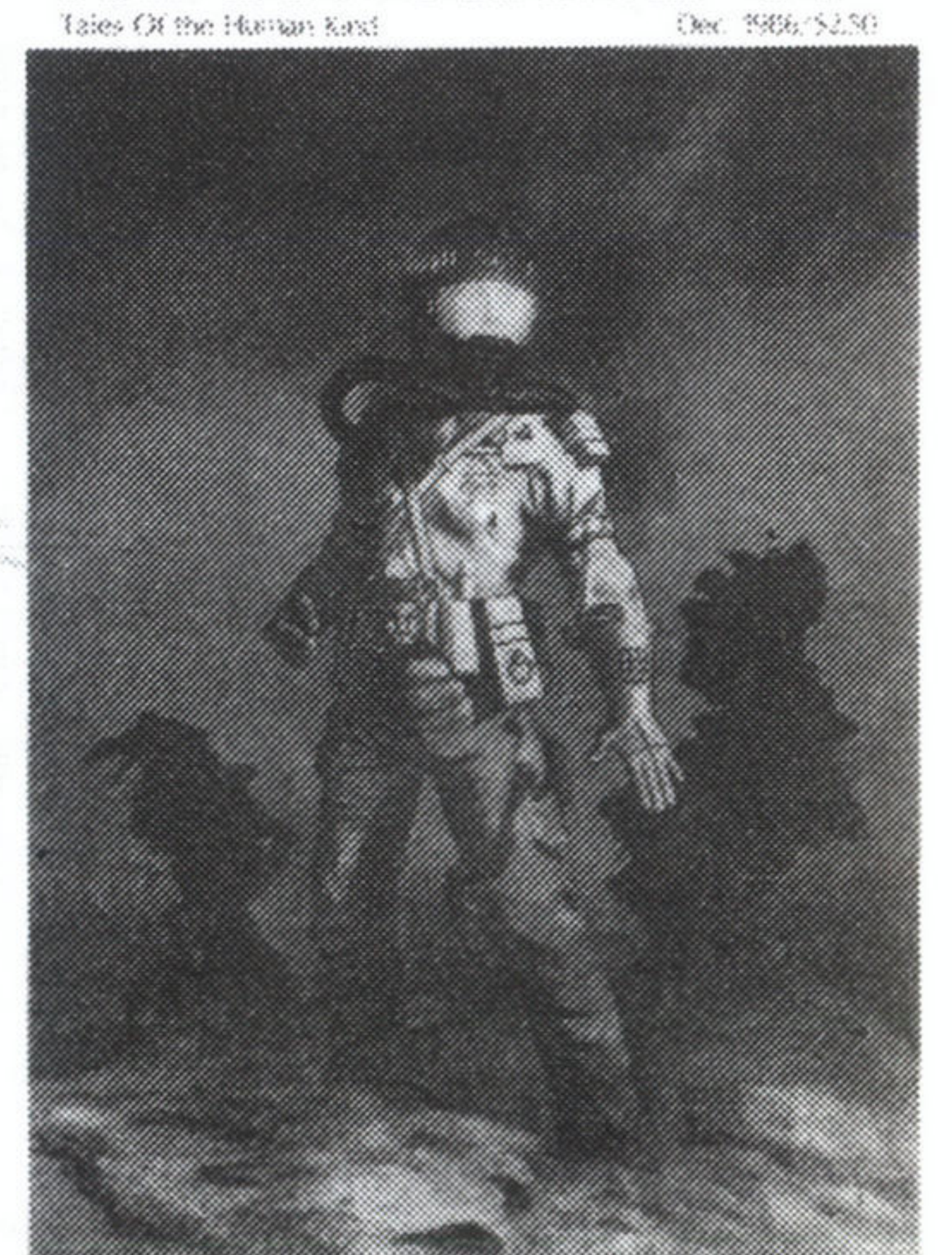


OUR PREMIER ISSUES: The supply is limited, which is why we have to charge \$3.50 each for copies of our first two issues — they are already collectors' items. Get your copies of the magazine which broke all the rules. Four-color illustrations, stories by Hugo and Nebula winner Orson Scott Card, Lou Fisher, John A. Taylor and John Moore. Find out why it's called *Aboriginal SF*. Who is our crazy alien publisher? Read about "The Home System," specially created for us by master world builder Hal Clement. Book and movie reviews and more. The second issue has an award-winning cover by Carl Lundgren and exciting stories by George Zebrowski, Elizabeth Anne Hull, Joel Sherman, Rory Harper and more. Act quickly. Send \$3.50 plus \$.50 for postage and handling for each copy you want to: *Aboriginal SF*, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.

Or order both for \$7.00 and save \$1.00 on shipping and handling.

Our Second Issue, and We're Already a Winner (see page 2)

ABORIGINAL SF



Join a Winner!

Our First Issue

Can you imagine a new science fiction magazine that wins an award before it publishes its second issue? Our magazine did. The illustration by Carl Lundgren for the cover of our second issue was chosen as THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION ILLUSTRATION at Confederation, the 1986 World Science Fiction Convention held in Atlanta. And that choice was made by the fans, those who love science fiction the most.

Our writers did just as well. Orson Scott Card, who had a story in our first issue, won the 1986 Hugo Award for best science fiction novel. Harlan Ellison and Fred Pohl, who will appear in upcoming issues, also won Hugo Awards. Our magazine will also feature other Hugo and Nebula Award winners like Connie Willis and Charles L. Grant, and many, many more. And we will introduce exciting new writers to the field.

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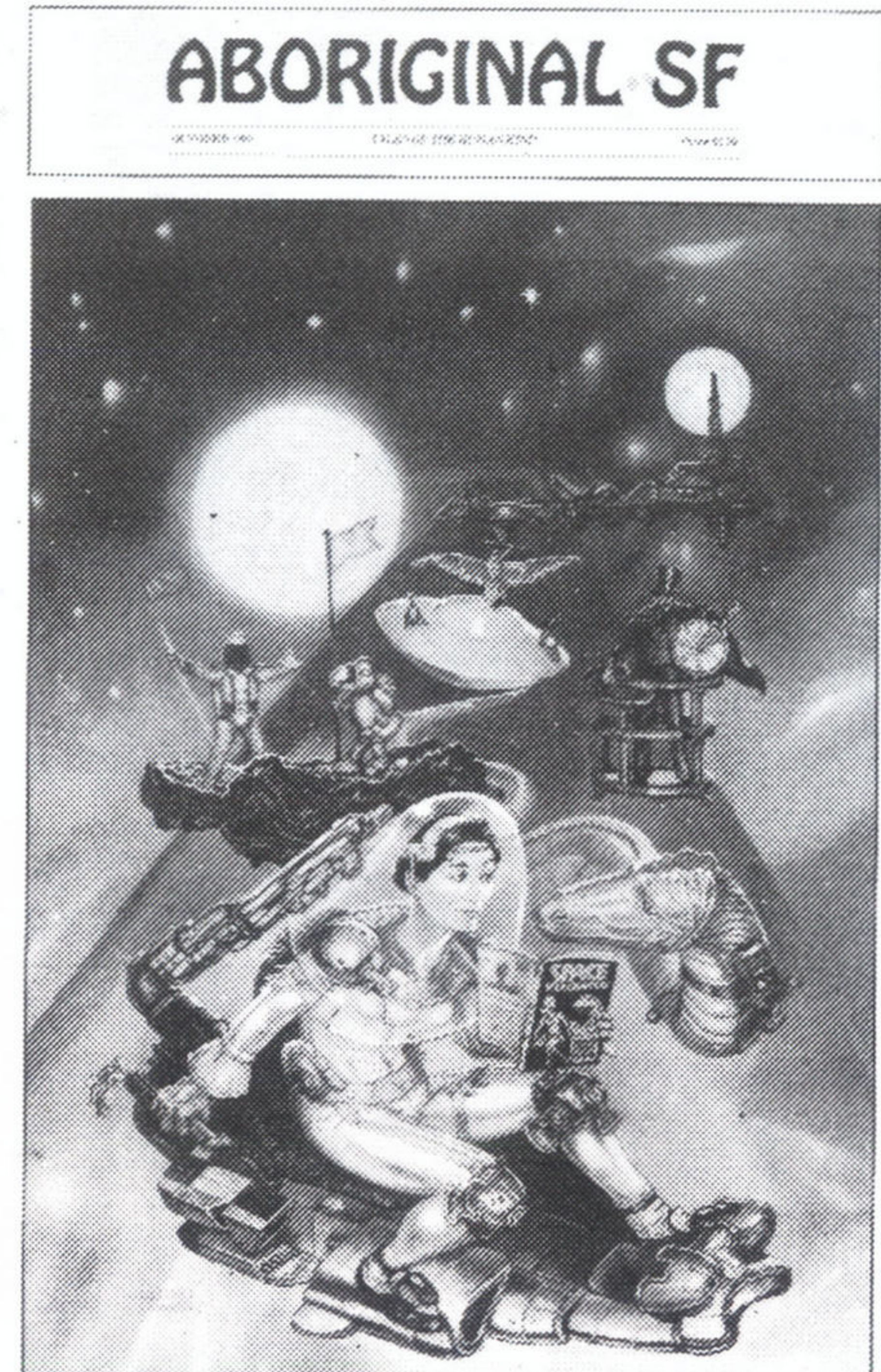
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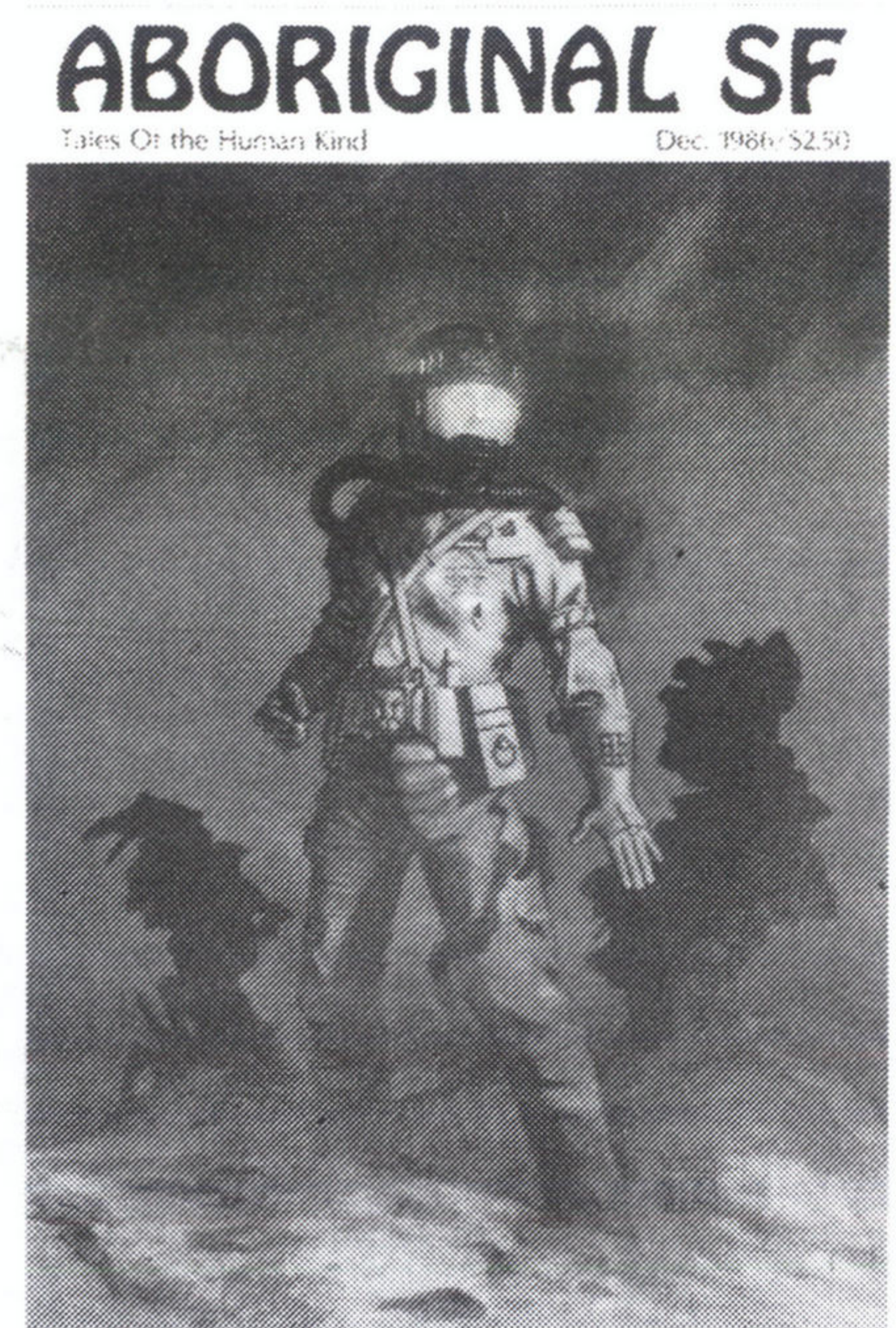
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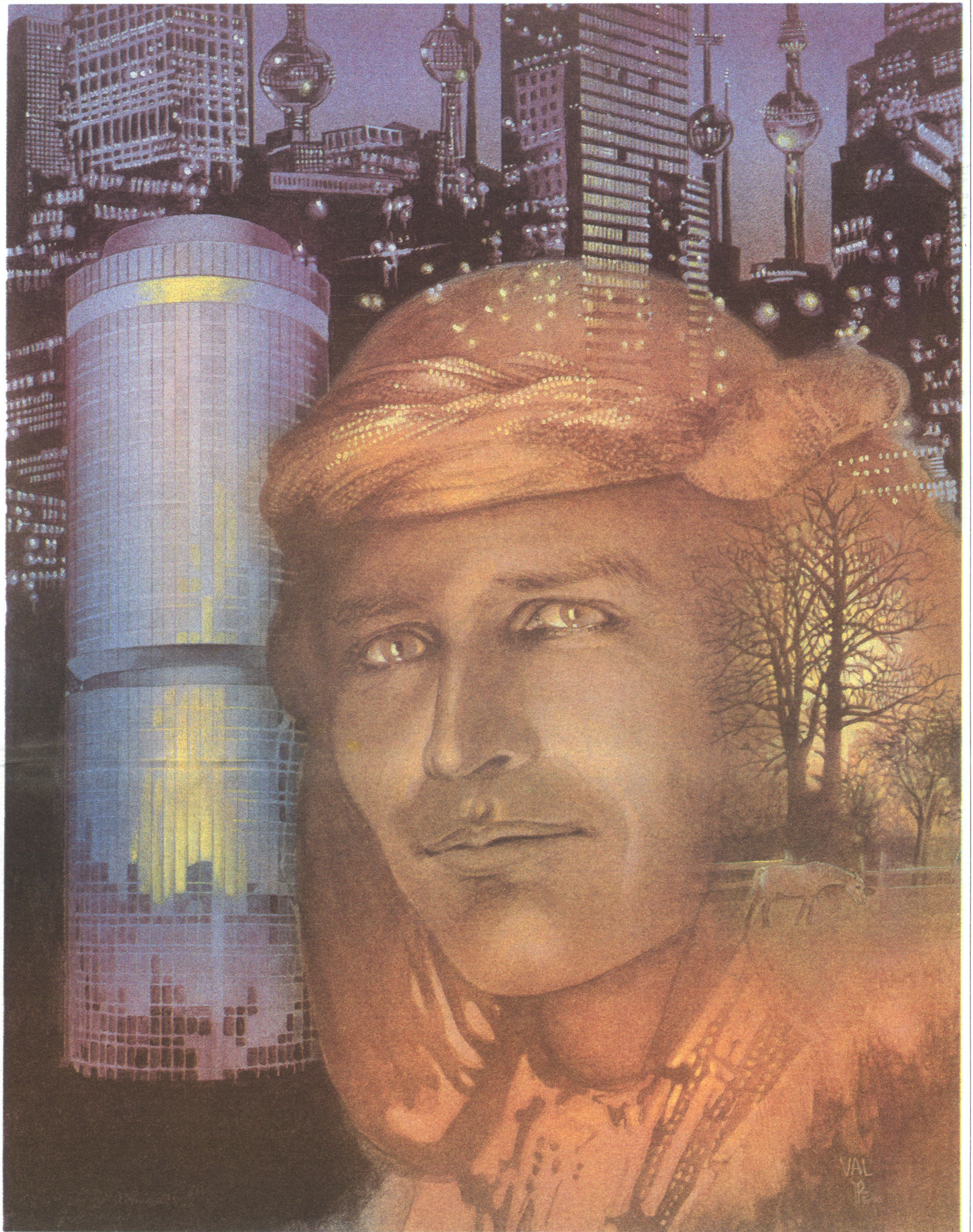
Art by Charles Lang

Containment

By Dean Whitlock

Lt. Robert Malcolm leaned against the railing and gazed out at the woods beyond the compound. They were a good half-klick away, but the day was cool and bright. The new leaves showed electric green in the clear air. Malcolm took a deep breath. A light breeze carried the smell of growing things. After months spent mostly underground, the fresh living spring was like a reprieve.

(Continued to page 21)



Art by Val Lakey Lindahn

One Spring In Wyoming

By Charles L. Grant

Beneath the hastily applied and blood-en-crust-ed surplus medpatch, John Walks Far's shoulder felt as though it had been set in poorly made, quick-drying concrete. He shrugged off

the annoying sensation as long as he could before lifting his arm until the partially healed wound sprang dull knives and made him hiss sharply. He wanted to smile until the shoulder numbed

again, but his dark face remained impassive. During the past few weeks it had been much eas-

(Continued to next page)

(Continued from previous page)

ier than he had imagined to ignore most pain; now there was only the agony of his people.

He stood alone on the narrow plant porch that fronted the low, wide house. He had been worried about the early coming of the spring rains, but sniffing the air he found it still clear, still pleasantly sharp with the spoor of fleeing winter. Then he glanced down and scowled. His shadow — head and slender shoulders — was cast plainly from a dim light shining through the single frosted pane of the front door, pushed far beyond the unpainted railing onto the stone walk. Quickly he side-stepped, damning his carelessness and startled at the way perspiration came so easily to chest and palms on so cold a night. He rubbed his hands briskly against his heavy flannel shirt, then folded his arms across his chest and leaned back against a post to wait — only half hoping there would be nothing to wait for.

There was a full moon faintly haloed, and a breeze that occasionally mustered strength enough to set the barn's weather vane to creaking. Inside the house a small dog yelped once.

It would have been a good year, he thought with less bitterness than melancholy. Why the hell didn't they leave us alone?

He looked out past the fenced-in yard to the silver-stained pasture, thinking without reason they wouldn't dare try to burn him out the way they had so many of the others. The entire territory was alerted now, and armed. But then, in that faraway and dawn-bright beginning, none of them had anticipated more than a token scattering of trouble during the New Migration; it would have been a perfectly natural reaction until time had made the situation palatable to everyone. No one had expected it, but it had come just the same.

Six days ago he had received the call, and he and his sons had scrambled into the gleaming pickup and sped into town carrying two rifles each, swearing at the ContiGuard's decision to give them barely serviceable projectiles instead of ML lasers. But they had arrived too late, and all they could do was ride through the debris-strewn streets and watch the burning buildings and administer first aid until the 'Guard arrived. One son had wept and the other had raged, and it was all John could do to keep from dying.

A woman, gutted, sprawled in a gutter.

A young man, headless, thrown into a garden.

And finally there had been a man, an old man revered, who dangled from a black oak's limb on the east side of town, his skin slashed into dripping red strips, his eyes gone and flies in their sockets. Hundreds of the morbidly curious and agonizingly shocked had filed past him, too angry to be sick, too stunned to be moved. They mourned in many tongues, and they mourned more than he.

The Oldlanders had come out of nowhere, so it was said, in landcars and hovercars and rusting armored trucks, never stopping long enough for positive identification, destroying as their first objective the Blues' garage to prevent effective, organized pursuit. It had been the first large-scale, blatantly planned raid in the entire territory, a territory that had once been a state.

No one had expected it. They had been assured of their safety by the Noram Government and the Council Chiefs of the newly combined Arapaho, Shoshone, Commanche, and Lakota Sioux Nation.

On the drive back to the ranch that night, a sniper had caught John as he slept groaning in back.

The moon shifted; the breeze kicked closer to a wind.

He heard the vidphone chime once, and though he knew he wouldn't be able to hear a word, he strained to listen for his wife's voice. Not that it mattered either way; it had been evident for days what was coming, and he shook his head in bitterly enraged acceptance of his, and the others', defeat.

"Dad," his eldest son had said one evening, "you like history so damned much, I don't see why you're surprised."

"I'll tell you a story," he'd said, grinning at his son's mock impatience. "Three hundred years ago a man named Washakie made a deal with the whites. He would keep his people — our people — out of the fighting if they would give him the Wind River reservation. They agreed. It was beautiful land. Perfect land. A few bucks rebelled, but Washakie held them. Then they moved the Shoshone's worst enemy, the Arapaho, onto the reservation. Still no fighting. It was, for the time, a marvelous deal. Peace and prosperity for everyone concerned."

"That's it? I don't get it."

John had put his hands on his son's arms, had seen in him the farseeking look of the Old People, and in his sharp-angled dark face a mirror of his own. "Think about it," he'd said. "Think hard, Bob, think hard."

A moment passed, another, and the lights

behind him were extinguished. He stiffened, sidling silently across the porch to retrieve his weapon. It was cold, heavy, and it felt good pressed against his leg.

The door opened.

"Over here," he said quietly, not moving his eyes from the land he had settled.

Jenny tripped in the dark and grabbed in a panic at his arm to steady herself. Instinctively, he put out a hand, found her shoulder and pulled her close, to merge two shadows into one.

"That was Charlie, John."

No, he thought, not wanting to hear it, having heard it in his nightmares every night since the Migration. There had been too many lean years before the good times had finally arrived. He had listened patiently to the Council's voices (all our land back, they had said, if we'll only grow the food), had agreed and had packed, traveled and resettled. He had fathered two sons and helped build a town. He had visited the glittering, labyrinthine cityplexes and was glad he was here. But none of the men working for him had returned after that raid except to pick up their belongings and head for the nearest 'plex. His foreman had paused only long enough to explain for them all: "It'll never work, John, and you'd know it if you'd only listen to yourself. Never, never in a hundred years — if we're around that long. The Oldlanders hate the 'plexes as much as we do, and they're coming back, legal or not, every damned one of them. Listen, I've been in the 'Guard, and I ain't about to put myself in another damned war, not for a goddamned farm. Washakie's dead, John, and you got to face it now — we are outnumbered. But good."

John had not argued, but neither had he run. There was a smell, a feel, a voice to the land that he listened to, that soothed him. It wasn't his fault that those who had owned the land before had preferred Noram's money to that voice, that the enticements of the 'plexes were shouts instead of whispers. They had made their choice, and it didn't matter at all that they'd finally heard the voice, too.

His wife stirred, fearful of the outdoors. It was a useless question, then, but he asked it anyway — just to hear her speak: "What did Charlie want, Jenny?"

She cleared her throat and leaned her head against his arm. For a moment, just for a moment. "He said they caught five of the Oldlanders about fifteen kilometers from here earlier this afternoon. Maybe six, seven got away. The...the 'Guard's in town, John, and some general or other wants everybody in there by dawn. For our own safety," he says. Her voice was small, tired, empty. "He said they're going to send trucks out to pick us up. He says they'll let us come back. After. When it's all over."

He said nothing. He only shook his head, so slowly the movement might only have been a sigh of the moonlight.

Damn, he thought, haven't I worked enough, prayed enough? He looked down at the dark-haired woman, wanting to ask her all he had demanded of himself over the past two weeks; but he had already done that and all she could do was shake her head and weep. He brushed a soft hand through her hair and loved her more than ever.

A temptation: to walk into the darkness, to use the Old Tongue to speak to the ghost of the one called Washakie, to ask him why, to ask if his people were as greedy now as the whites had been then. There were so few of them, now, so damnably few. Was it worth the killing to cut their numbers even more, just to have the land? But Washakie would say yes, and John Walks Far didn't know.

"How long have we got?"

"An hour or two, he said."

"You packed anything?"

"Well...you better get on, then. I'll get the boys."

A pause as a cloud bannered the moon. "John, watch yourself."

"Get, Jenny. I can take care of myself, you know that by now. Just don't turn the lights on again until you hear me leave the porch. I'll leave Mike here in front to keep an eye on the road."

She touched his arm again with her cheek, he took her hands briefly, and she was gone behind the click of the latch.

He listened, hesitated, slipped to the end of the porch and held his breath. Once again he scanned the fields, straining, watching, before reaching up and tapping the lip of the gutter with the barrel of his rifle — four times in a slow, deliberate cadence. There was a faint scuffling, and he scowled. After all he had tried to tell him, the boy still had his damned boots on.

"Yeah, Pop?" The sudden harsh whisper from the roof startled him.

"Get down here, Mike. The 'Guard's coming for us pretty soon now."

"Shit."

"Just you get down here, understand? I'm out for Bob. Stay on the porch and keep your eyes out for the trucks. If the Premier's with them, tell him I said —"

"Pop," Mike said with a grin in his voice, "that's not very respectful."

"Yeah. Right. Just get on down here, okay?"

He did not wait for a reply, but left the steps quickly and dropped into a crouch, edging between protectively high shrubs and the house's outer walls. At the building's far corner he tried to pinpoint anything unusual among the shadows of the several trees that spotted the hundred meters between the house and the barn. He waited for gravel, stones, the disturbing of a twig or the sigh of rough cloth rubbing against bark. Finally, judging he was safe and knowing he wasn't, he began running. The brittle grass crackled under his weight, perspiration nearly blinded him, and the rifle dragged his right arm down.

Then he was at and through the fence-gate and springing toward the rear of the barn. There was more gravel now, and he winced at every step, hunching his shoulders as if every stride was a shot in the back. The rear door was a single, and without slowing he was through it and on the floor to one side, keeping low in case his son was as nervous as he.

It was silent. A horse snuffled.

Bob should have heard him, should have challenged.

There was a muffled scraping, as though someone were crawling.

He eased away from the door, then deliberately kicked back against the wall, called for his son and threw himself in the opposite direction just as a flame spit blue and something thunked into the planking where his head had been. He didn't stop to wonder, nor to be grateful they were as handicapped with projectiles as he — he counted two, fired once, and a man screamed. He rolled until he reached the first stall, the sound of his move covered by the awakened animals milling about excitedly. Cautiously, he crept to the aisle, his lungs swelling his chest painfully, his tongue racing over his lips. He stretched a hand out for balance...and felt the still-warm, blood-drenched straw. He called out again and ducked. But there was no response — of any kind.

He wanted to pray, but had not the time.

Sitting back on his heels, he listened, and finally, over the commotion of the stock, heard the rhythmic creaking of taut rope against wood. Suddenly the front door was thrust open and several shadows fled outside; and in the bright square of moonlight he saw the figure swaying from the rope tied around a central beam. He reached out a hand, and dropped it. Only the pain in his shoulder was new.

A shout, then, was cut off in a yelp of startled pain as three quick shots made John hesitate in cutting down his son. He looked up in mute apology, wheeled and darted out the back door, hurdled the fence and disappeared into the trees. The spotlights he and Bob had rigged along the house's eaves covered the front and side yards with a brilliant, harsh white. A man lay still by the front gate.

He crouched, keeping his eyes averted when the lights began a clumsy motorized sweep. And when he saw the figure moving in from the back, he felled him with a single shot and had fled before he could be placed.

And there was silence.

The breeze died and all movement stilled.

John saw the world in slats of black and white.

A man yelled, his gravelly voice high with fear. "All right, damnit, all right! You win, Walks Far, you bastard. Look, our buddy out there is hurt pretty bad. Give us a break and let us get him and we won't bother you no more."

Nobody answered.

"My God Almighty, are you gonna let the man die out there?"

Nothing.

"What the hell kind of people are you, anyway?"

John breathed deeply, slowly, waiting for Mike to say something.

"Hey!"

Nothing.

John shifted uncomfortably, thinking for a moment he heard the grumbling of distant trucks.

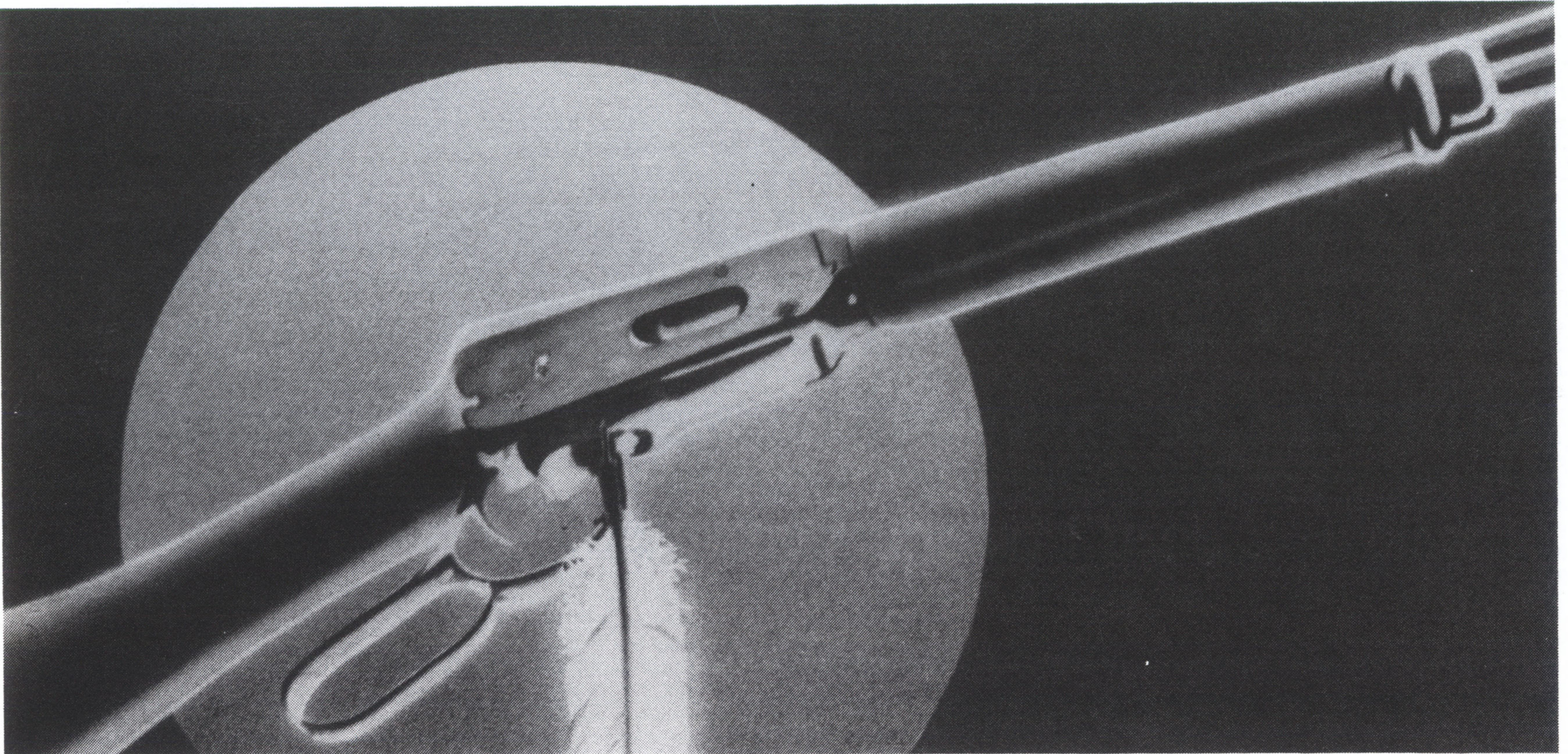
"All right," the young man called from somewhere inside the house. "All right, go get him."

"No...no tricks?"

Mike's laugh was centuries bitter. "What's the matter, pal? You think I speak with forked tongue?"

John was startled, but he couldn't help grinning, reluctantly suppressing a sudden urge to shout. In the darkness there was a hesitation he could feel, then trees became men and three of

(Continued to next page)



Art by Val Lakey Lindahn

(Continued from previous page)

them walked slowly into the light, their weapons pointed toward the ground, their gloved hands wrapped around the stocks. One of them gestured with a fist, spinning to locate the source of his frustration.

"You know me, Walks Far?"

John had never seen the man before, but he did not answer.

"This used to be my place, damnit! Mine and my father's. You bastards come along and me and my wife got to go to that damned 'plex in Colorado. You know what it's like down there, damnit, with all them damned buildings? You know what it's like?"

He sounded as though he were going to cry.

Mike said nothing.

They huddled about the fallen man, moving too self-consciously; John whirled to his left, barely in time to spot another pair breaking from the shadows of the trees for the back of the house. They carried torches that flared away from their wind, sparking the air like falling suns. He raised his rifle without thinking and fired as rapidly as he could, ignoring the screams in the fear that one might be his own.

The torches fell harmlessly to the grass, sputtering. When he turned back he saw the original three staggering away from the volley exploding from the house. One dropped immediately; one leapt back and was draped over the fence; the third shuddered under the pummeling impact and collapsed to his knees, his hands, and finally his face.

There were echoes, and there were waves of silence.

John rose slowly, unaware that he had resumed his crouch, one hand braced against the bole until he was sure his legs were ready to hold him. He wanted to tremble, but didn't; he wanted to raise his arms and chant a mourning for his eldest son, but it wasn't the time. Instead, he only gasped for a clear breath of air as he listened to the trucks crawling up the road.

And when Mike left the house and came running to his side, he turned toward the barn and began walking. Beneath his boots he could feel the soil, and for the first time in what seemed like years he felt the spring night's cold.

He looked down at his son, his mother's features clear even in shadow. "You all right? Your mother okay?"

Mike nodded once, swept the air with his weapon. "When are we coming back, Pop?"

He shrugged as they approached the open barn door. "I don't know, Michael. It depends on the 'Guard."

"Oh, that's just great," the boy said. "That's really great." He shook his head and kicked out at a tree. "It's just like old times, isn't it?"

John stopped at the door and put his hands on Mike's shoulders. "In some ways, yes. But there's a difference now, a big one."

"Sure there is. It used to be called the Army."

John couldn't help a slight grin. "Michael, you are too much like your mother." He dropped his hands and looked into the dark barn. "But that's not what I meant. We go now, son, but they're the ones who are running. Most of them are heading into the 'plexes, more of them every year. And for the ones who are left..." He put a hand on the boy's head. "Like you said, it's like old times."

"Then we will be back."
"Believe it, Michael. And be patient."
Then he walked inside to weep for his son.

- ABO -

A Lunar Cycle:

Reveries on the Nomenclature of Visible Features of the Moon

By Peg Libertus

1. OCEANUS PROCELLARUM: THE OCEAN OF STORMS

*On the Ocean of Storms
we strain for the sound of wind,
scan the sky for clouds,
dip tired oars
into a sea of stone, eyes averted
from our breathless sails.*

*Becalmed in this tumble
of frozen waves, we whisper
legends of what lies
just beyond the distant
dull-pearl jetty:
the Bay of Rainbows,
Sinus Iridum,
a promise to mariners
of safe harbor and home.*

*Dazzled by the sea's dry glare,
the fathomless black
of the sky at noon,
we pull against a rockbound tide,
lean hard into an empty gale,
praying for the Moon's quick night
and Earthrise.*

2. THE PROSPECTOR OF TYCHO

A crater named for Tycho Brahe, a brilliant 16th century astronomer. Having lost his nose in a duel, he had one fashioned for him of pure gold. He wasted much of his talent in dissipation.

*I have always worked
this claim, eyes bent
to the rubble at my feet.
I strike
and strike again, noiseless,
no echo returning
from the encircling ridges
of Crater Tycho.*

*My bright pick catches glints
of sunlight, but I must not
look up. Once, long ago,*

*I did, and there hung Earth
like a dipper of water
from a desert well.
Soft blue sky, still bluer
seas, white clouds swaddling
continents of reds and browns--
a prayer wheel!*

*Then I looked to the Sun,
feasted on its molten gold
until, with heat and light
enough to sear the eyes
from my head, it punished
my coveting gaze.*

*Now these gold-struck eyes
look down. Rubbing a flecked
pebble in my hand, I thumb
the memory of that last
glimpse of sky.*

*I work my claim, knowing
a full-Earth tolls above me
like a cathedral bell.*

3. LACUS SOMNIORUM: THE LAKE OF DREAMS

*Even the dead
quicken in these waters.
Souls come here for the baths:
"You must take the waters
at the Lake of Dreams."*

*In a mirage
of double images,
shimmering fogs,
babies snuggle
knees to chin.*

*Divers leap
from shadowed cliffs,
hang weightless a second
beyond weightlessness,
then arch into
the Lake of Dreams.*

*Everything that seems to be
is but its reflection.
You put your hand in here,
but the sensation of the hand
is over there
where a lover writhes
ecstatic at your touch.*

*On the Lake of Dreams
dreams accumulate,
compounding themselves
across the expanse
from shore to shore, until
the mists of the dreamers
blur the witnessing stars.*

-ABO-

Alien Publisher

(Continued from page 3)

my eyelashes every Earth day, I wear wrappings on my head, and I have prepared an insulated suit of clothes which is wired with heating elements that help maintain my body temperature. Needless to say, I avoid physical contact with my classmates, explaining that I am a foreigner and interpersonal touching is a violation of my religion. I do not wish to arouse their suspicions over a student with a body temperature high enough to poach eggs. I must say, I am grateful to have found an excuse not to touch them. They are quite fleshy and cold, like the highland mollusks of our home world. Ugh.

Quantum physics was the easy part of the "Physical Sciences" course in which I enrolled. And, in fact, I absorbed the material much more quickly than did my human classmates. Human beings regard quantum physics as an irrational but effective explanation of physical phenomena and have labeled the principle of observational error the "principle of uncertainty." That's only because they cannot tolerate the notion of free will in nonliving matter. I had a great deal of difficulty, however, with the course material called "classical mechanics."

During the ritual known as the "mid-term examination," I was told to entertain a question having to do with the acceleration and trajectory of a rock with a particular mass to which a human boy had applied a particular force by throwing from a particular height, in a particular direction and at a particular angle to the surface of the Earth. I realized at once that this is what the human students call a "trick question," as it lacked necessary information about the motivation of the rock. I answered accordingly.

Not only did I fail the examination, I was nearly dismissed from the class. The instructor said I was not taking the course seriously. She seemed to think that the motivation of the rock was irrelevant. I was unable to convince her that the "correct" calculation of the acceleration and trajectory of the hypothetical rock was nothing more than an estimate of probability.

I did little better in the course known as "Introduction to Management." In the mid-term examination for that course, I was told to entertain a question having to do with the strategic plan of a particular firm allocating particular "resources" (i.e., capital, plant, and labor) to meet particular goals. Again, I perceived a trick and indicated the question could not be answered without more information about the motivation of the resources. I was told the motivation of the resources was irrelevant to management decisions and was given a failing grade.

Now, when human students are rated with an unsatisfactory performance at their university, they do not treat this as valuable information but attempt to negate it and force the evaluator to change the rating. This they do in pursuit of something called "good grades," which they mistakenly believe they can later trade for something called a "good job." The instructors of the university's courses do not attempt to disabuse them of this belief, as they wish for some reason to foster competition for "good grades."

The student attempts to secure a change from an unsatisfactory to a satisfactory rating in an inter-

view with the instructor, during which each party defends a position and insists on being "right." Naturally, I engaged in this ritual in the interests of research. So I met with my instructor to discuss the mid-term exam, particularly the question about allocation of resources. When I suggested, however, that information on the motivation of the resources was required to accomplish their allocation, he said the idea was absurd. The motivation of the resources, he said, has no bearing on management decisions. I pointed out that management would require the cooperation of the resources in order to meet its goals. He thought the idea of capital and plant being at all self-conscious to be utterly fantastic. And, as far as labor was concerned, he was disappointed in my ability to apprehend the concepts of "span of control," "tenure at will," "the labor supply curve," and "hierarchical control."

I had read about those concepts in the textbooks, but I had unfortunately dismissed them as being about as useful as the calculations of the size of observational error.

I am afraid I gave in far sooner than a human student would have. My failing grade has been allowed to stand, and I will be dismissed from the university by the end of the semester at this rate. It's just as well. I think I learned more in two days of mopping up the health club than I learned in two months at the university.

I will be transmitting this report momentarily. Strangely enough, I expect to read a significant portion of it in tabloid format within the next couple of weeks, because Ryan will intercept it, choose what he wants, and publish it. I cannot do anything about Ryan's ability to monitor the diode transmissions. But I should be able to stay out of his physical reach, provided I remain alert and look over my shoulder for him.

No, do not worry. I retain my grasp of reality; that's an expression the human beings use. I know that I am no more capable of "looking over my shoulder" than a human being is capable of brushing his face with his eyelashes. You should not bother to ask how they keep their faces clean. Many of them don't.

- ABO -

Editor's Notes

(Continued from page 3)

are introducing the ABO Art Gallery (see the back page). Since good art is as important to us as good stories, we want to do what we can to help artists bring their work to a wider audience.

In the ABO Art Gallery, we will let artists offer quality prints of their art for sale to the public.

We will also give our readers an opportunity to acquire mounted prints of our covers that are of a higher quality than what appears in ABO.

While we are generally pleased with how our printer is doing his job, it isn't perfect. That is because ABO is not being printed on a coated stock run on a heatset press. This means that our artwork is not printed as true to its original color and texture as possible. (We'd have to charge \$6 per copy to print the magazine that way.)

The ABO Art Gallery is your chance to obtain a glossy print of one or more of our covers which is as crisp and sharp as the original artwork. All the cover prints will be mounted and matted in an 11-by-14-inch size.

If you express enough interest

in any of our interior art we will make prints available of that, too, for the same price.

So when you read the magazine and see an illustration you just have to have, write and tell us. If enough readers agree, we'll make that print available. One of my favorites, for instance, is the centerfold Bob Eggleton painted for John A. Taylor's story "The Phoenix Riddle," which appeared in our first issue.

Odds and Ends

The controversy still rages over our size, with most of our readers liking the large format because it allows for large color illustrations.

Others prefer something smaller. We haven't made a final decision yet, but will soon.

For those who joined us after the first issue, the contest to find a suitable name for our alien publisher is still on.

The prize for the best name is a lifetime subscription to ABO. The deadline for entries is Aug. 1, 1987.

- ABO -

Boomerangs

(Continued from page 4)

remember: You are not alone!

Stop by a MENSA (Mainly Extraterrestrial Non-intermarrying Stranded Anthropologists) meeting and say, "Grb'nn!"

Sincerely,

Bax Ter'whillig
Davis, Ca.

(Davis, Calif. is known to be 98% extraterrestrial — Ed.)

To the Editor:
Dear Sir,

Having received the 2nd issue of *Aboriginal SF*, I am glad to be a subscriber and I am anxiously awaiting my future issues. It's a nice to not have to squint to read. Some SF magazines use extremely small print. I'm hoping to see some really great, frameable color pictures.

Please don't change your format one bit. You might consider an amateur writers section. (How about new writers, breaking in? — Ed.)

Keep up the excellent quality of your publication and you'll put those other inferior SF magazines out of business.

B.J. Haungs
Cincinnati, Ohio

(We really aren't out to put anyone out of business — only offer a different (and better, we think) SF magazine — Ed.)

To the Editor:

I order and read a lot of science fiction hardcover and paperbacks and have at least six magazine subscriptions. I like all of the magazines, including yours. I only mention the amounts of reading I do and on a magazine level, for a backdrop to my comments.

First off, I genuinely appreciate your thought behind the concept of *Aboriginal SF*. It is fun and I will be following with great interest. So as not to keep rattling on I'll cut this short. I do give your publication full support. It's great. The reader service you are offering is of great help; a splendid addition.

David L. Bailey

Dear Charlie,

I'm quite impressed with *Aboriginal SF*, the first SF magazine I've subscribed to in years. I liked the emphasis on relationships in the first issue where I think "The Phoenix Riddle" (By John A. Taylor) especially, and "Prior Restraint" (by Orson Scott Card) were the best stories. In the second issue, I preferred "Quantum Leap" (by Louie Thelug) and "Regeneration" (by Rory Harper) best. Though I admired the quality of writing in "Bridge of Silence," I thought (George) Zebrowski's story lacked resolve at the end. I also admired the literary allusions and depth of writing in "Second Best Friend" (by Elizabeth Anne Hull) but thought it was a bit too long for the story's intent.

Nonetheless, the selections are a refreshing change from the superficial SF in such magazines as *Fantasy & SF*. I look forward to the issues yet to come.

By the way, I also like the full-color illustrations and the format. My only suggestion, I think, would be some kind of descriptive heads at the beginning of the stories or in the table of contents to give readers more of an idea of what the stories deal with. (That would spoil the surprise of finding out — Ed.) Also, I don't mind the tabloid format at all — if I don't have to keep paging back and forth to "Continued on page such-and-such." I'd rather the stories were complete on sequential pages, if that's at all possible. (It ain't — Ed.)

Best of luck on this project. You've at least got a staunch supporter in me!

Yours,

Steve Dimeo
Hillsboro, Oregon

Dear Charlie,

I trust it's okay to address you this way. (Yes — Ed.)

Your artwork in this issue is again superb — I especially liked the story and artwork for "Bridge of Silence" and "Regeneration" — Ron Lindahn is a heck of an artist, and that's a coming-from-an-artist compliment.

When you put size to vote it will be hard for me, for I love the full size artwork and dislike the bulk of copy. It has pluses AND minuses to weigh. I wonder what the public will say? (We'll see — Ed.)

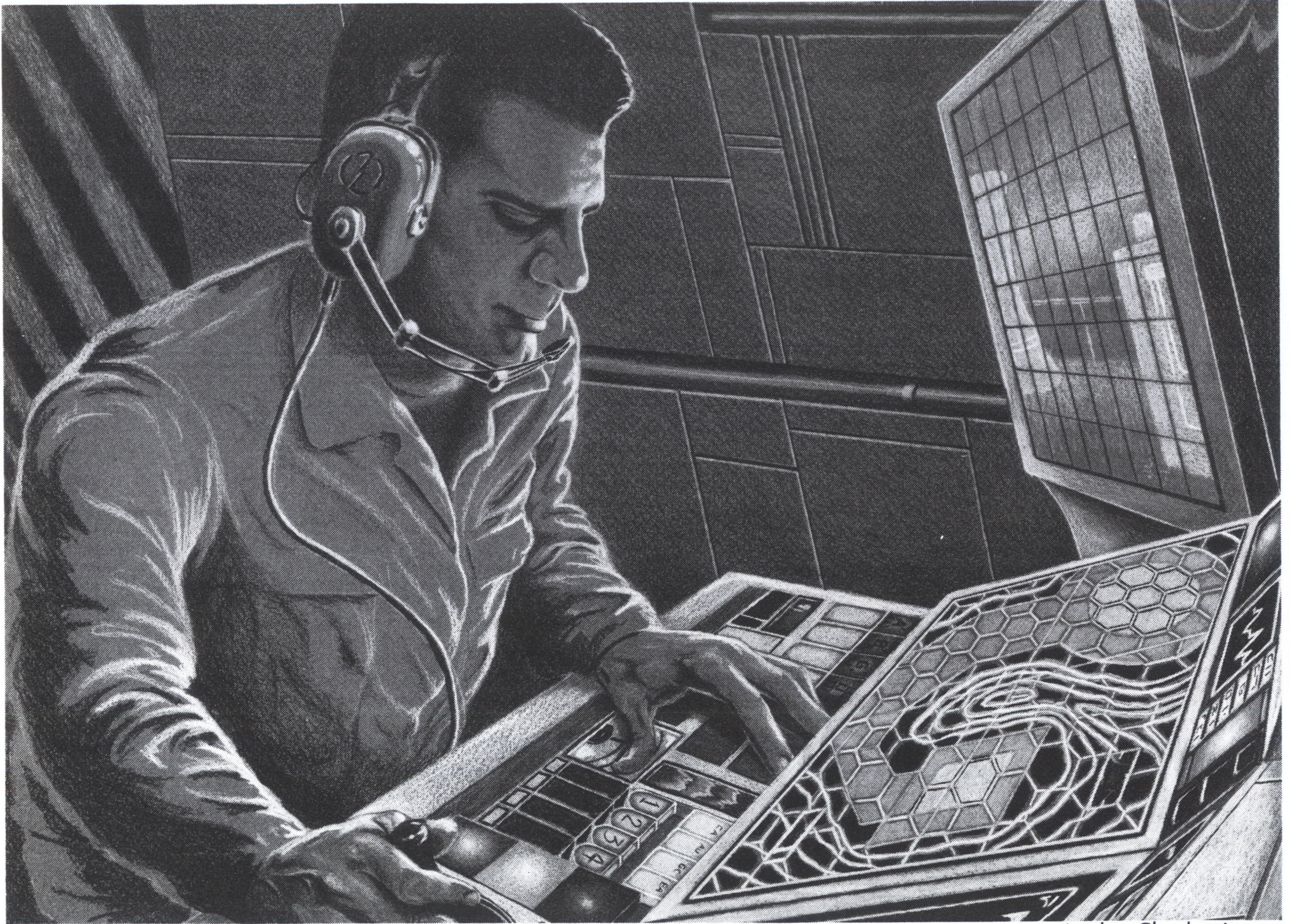
My best,

Marge Ballif Simon
Ocala, Florida

- ABO -

10 cents a word?

Yes, if you can write a good, but short, short story that we accept, we pay up to 10¢ per word. Of course if you write a longer story, your per-word rate drops accordingly. The reason is simple. We pay \$200 per story and will accept stories as short as 2,000 words and as long as 8,000, but we don't accept many long ones and prefer the really short ones. So if you think you're up to it and would like to earn up to 10¢ a word, then follow the rules below. *Aboriginal SF* will consider science fiction stories and poetry. No fantasy or horror. All submissions *must* be accompanied by a self-addressed return envelope with adequate postage, or they will not be returned. The preferred length for stories is between 2,500 and 4,500 words. We pay \$15 to \$25 for poems. Poetry should be one to two pages, typed double-spaced. All stories and poems must be original and previously unpublished. We also publish cartoons at \$15 each and jokes (50 words or less) for \$5.



Art by Charles Lang

Containment

(Continued from page 16)

He let his eyes wander over the compound, noting the high fresh grass, a spot of white wildflowers, a bird on a high perch. The perch was surrounded by a chain-link fence and barbed wire, but he didn't notice them. They were normal, part of the winter past, part of this tour of duty. Malcolm stretched and turned his face up to the warming sun. It was a good day to be out, a day to rediscover the woods and the world around them.

His gaze went back to the woods, beyond the fences and the open ground. He smiled and his blue eyes flashed in the sunlight. He felt the lure, the call to hunt and explore, and he remembered days spent with his friends, fighting play armies in the woods like these. He couldn't answer their call now, but it was nice to know that he could still hear it.

Malcolm smiled, thinking back to other, younger spring mornings. He remembered lurking behind brambles in old cellar holes, a broken plastic rifle in his hands, waiting for his friends the enemy to try to find him. That was their usual game — the hunter and the hunted, the hider and the trapped. And he had usually won, because he could hide deeper and wait better than Willy or George or any other kid in the woods. He remembered their faces falling when time and again he caught them. Malcolm's smile broadened.

He brought his attention back to the compound. He had a clear view of ninety percent of the enclosure. The cooling tower was nine stories high and gave good vantage when the weather was fair. And the compound was kept clear of undergrowth. He could see all of the perimeter except for two short sections. There his view was blocked by the second tower, standing to the east, and the dome of the core-containment building, to the north. He walked around the rim of the tower, giving everything a dutiful glance, and came back to his original vantage. Malcolm breathed in another great sigh of fresh air and looked out to the woods. It was a fine day.

He let his mind wander. He could afford to. Visual surveillance was only a small part of his duty as watchdog on the power plant. The perimeter was guarded by heat and pressure sensors buried in the ground and mounted on the fence. The entrances to the compound and to the building were watched by video monitors. The skies above were swept by radar from the second cooling tower. Malcolm's primary duty was

to the electronic eyes. They sent information to a master panel in a bunker buried somewhere under the plant — even Malcolm wasn't sure exactly where. Its only access was from this tower through a pneumatic shuttle, and he spent most of his time there. When he went outside, he carried a radio link to the comm panel and earplug alarm.

The plant had been mothballed fifty years ago, after thirty years on line. They had damped the core and removed as much of the spent fuel as the military needed. But it cost too much to totally decommission a plant, and by then there was no better place to stash the wastes than right there in the dome. They sealed up the on-site storage facilities, kept the water flowing through the core, and stripped out everything else they wanted. Then they moved in the usual Guard platoon to watch over the plant till the hottest waste could be removed or had decayed to a safe level.

As the technology of watching improved, the platoon shrank to five men. Then two. Then one. Lt. Bob Malcolm.

He smiled into the middle distance between the tower and the woods. It could be lonely duty, but he liked it. He had time to think, small maintenance jobs to keep his hands active, moments of pleasant chatter with the command center over the radio. And he wasn't completely alone. He had two K-9s, big, beautiful German shepherds who prowled the compound while he kept a distant watch with his sensors. He didn't mind the waiting at all.

Nor the end of waiting.

The moment came with a tiny peep in his ear. Without thinking, he dropped to one knee below the level of the railing and pulled the portable comm out of its pouch. The three-number readout sent a shock of anxiety through him. The code indicated a perimeter break in the east quadrant, in one of the blind spots. He risked a look over the railing, but it was no good. The east tower blocked his view. He punched for extended data, and his anxiety turned to anticipation. The sensors indicated more than one body. It could be a herd of deer, he reminded himself.

And it could be men.

He scrambled to the chute and dropped down into the shuttle. A hatch closed above him and a blast of air carried him down to the bunker. He pulled himself out of the capsule and took his seat at the main comm. The center screen showed a map of the compound, and a red light glowed in the east quadrant of open ground. It moved slowly toward the fence. Malcolm switched to radar scan, and the red light became three lights. They were moving together, one

ahead and two behind. He had no visuals that far out, and the radar wasn't sensitive enough to draw a silhouette. But he had the dogs. A switch released his lead animal, and as the dog came out into the compound, he became a blue light on the map. Malcolm gave him directions through a radio/tickler in his collar, and the dog moved southeast in a circling maneuver.

The enclosure was landscaped with long, low mounds that gave the dogs protection, and they were well-trained. The lights converged toward a spot at the perimeter fence, and the intruders stopped together, fused into a single blood-red glow. The dog stopped about fifty meters away. The animal was trained to observe and report by pawing his collar, and Malcolm stared at the screen, waiting for a signal. When it came, he almost laughed aloud. Three zeros. Men.

Man had gotten two useful commodities from nukes before the plants had become obsolete — power and plutonium. Electricity and weaponry. And despite the doomsayers, the price had been small, numbered in hundreds of lives, not millions. The track record had been good, particularly compared with other forms of power generation. Now the nukes were shut down and the wastes safely stashed underground, cast into space, or closely watched in the old plants. And the watching had not been that difficult. In the first years, there had been firefights at three stations. Once terrorists had actually stolen some low-level wastes, but they had been trapped in the streets of the town surrounding the plant and wiped out by the Guard. Very few civilians had been killed or contaminated.

The area around the plants had been cleared, the people moved to other homes, and the towns turned into nature preserves. And the Guard had developed a way to deal with intruders.

The red lights reached the fence and, after a minute's hesitation, went past it. Malcolm sent a command to his dog to follow and keyed a radio contact with the area command center.

"Central, this is Hector Station," he said. "I have a break-in here."

"Reading," came the reply. Malcolm smiled. The voice was calm and pleasant. Mitchell was on duty, and she was a good one to have on the other end. She was a career soldier, a non-com with 15 years service, and she had been in on two break-in attempts. Malcolm had met her only once. She was older, approaching 40, and built like an early 20th-century matron. But she knew her job, and she had a voice that made men dream.

(Continued to next page)

(Continued from previous page)

"Deviation?" Mitchell asked.

"Negative. Key Central for standby."

The red light moved away from the fence toward the center of the compound and split back into three intruders, one leading and two behind. The blue light followed at a distance.

Malcolm keyed a blow-up of the east quadrant. The map was overlaid with a grid showing the contours of the enclosure. A series of ridges funneled from the perimeter away from the containment and storage buildings toward the east tower. The shape of the land looked natural. The hills were low and provided minimal cover, but they served their purpose. The light moved toward the tower. Malcolm relaxed a little.

"Funnel procedure underway," he reported.

"Reading," Mitchell replied. "Do you have verification on the intruders?"

"Visual sightings by K-9 unit indicate humans," Malcolm replied.

"Intention?"

"Unknown."

"Roger. Verify at first possible video."

"Will do," Malcolm watched the map, smiling. The dialogue went exactly by formula. They were being recorded and the recording would show that the plan worked. As it always had. In 20 years, there had been as many intrusions, and they had all failed. This was the first attack at Hector Station, the first non-drill attempt in Malcolm's three years with the Guard. The excitement he felt was almost sexual.

The light moved toward the tower, and Malcolm checked out the video. A second screen above his seat came to life, and he had a view of the side of the cooling tower curving into view on the left, and a section of the compound on the right. He punched a code and a door opened in the side of the tower. He checked the map. A green light marked the position of the door. The red lights came closer, and he watched the screen. They would come into view from behind the camera, to the right.

The screen went blank.

Malcolm stared at the gray fuzz and almost cursed, but he remembered the tape recorder and kept silent. Instead, he initiated a quick remote search for a fault in the circuitry. The video had two back-ups and neither had come on. The console itself had a repair program to spot malfunctions, and that had not come on. He keyed the program himself, but it came up negative.

He checked the main screen. The green light was still bright and the intruders were within ten feet of the open door. He ran through the repair program a second time, but found nothing. Reluctantly, he keyed the mike.

"Central, this is Hector. I have lost visuals, primary and back-up. Must assume a hostile intent on the part of the intruding force."

There was silence for a moment, then Mitchell spoke out in surprise.

"Did they blow the camera?" she asked. Malcolm winced. He hadn't expected her to lose her calm.

"Unknown, Central," he replied, stressing the title.

"Have you checked the other cameras, Hector?" she asked, and the stress that she laid on the name was angry. He winced again because he hadn't but when he checked the camera inside the door, it was dead. He randomly tried others in the building, but they were all useless. Somehow, the whole system had been blown.

"All visuals are nonfunctional," he said.

"Have you tried the repair mode?"

"Yes," he snapped, and was rewarded with a short pause.

"Where are they now?" she asked finally. He checked the screen. The red lights had converged to a single large glow that overlapped the side of the tower and faded the green of the doorway. Then the light split in two, moving away from the tower. He scanned for the third red dot and found it out in the grid, within touching distance of the blue point that was his dog. His eyes flashed to the animal's readout and found a last message, missed in the confusion of the blown video.

It read "Armed."

He looked back to the screen and saw the red light move back to its comrades. The blue dot blinked out.

"Central," Malcolm clenched his hands on the console and kept his voice steady. "Confirm hostile intent of intruders. My lead K-9 unit has been nullified."

There was another silence, and when Mitchell answered, her voice was steady and businesslike.

"Reading, Hector," she said quietly. "Do you request a back-up squad?"

He stared at the screen, willing the dots to move back toward the door. And they did. He relaxed his hands.

"Negative," he said.

The light paused by the door and then went through, one leading, the other two behind in a single blob of red. The comm automatically keyed the door and Malcolm smiled. He imagined it swinging shut behind the enemy, leaving them trapped in darkness with a third of a meter of steel blocking their only way out. The green light faded off the screen.

"Funnel procedure is completed," he said. "Initiating containment."

Then he punched a code to override automatic control of the program. It was his operation.

He keyed the screen, and it shifted to a map of the corridors beneath the east tower and the core building. The intruders glowed as a single bright dot at the edge of the maze. Another key opened a door before them, a door into a lighted hallway. The red light split. Part of it moved through the doorway. After a pause, the rest followed, and the lights joined into one and moved down the hall. Malcolm's hands ran over the keyboard and the picture enlarged slightly, but the screen showed only a single light to mark the intruders.

"Damn," Malcolm said it aloud this time, without thinking.

"What's the matter?" Mitchell asked.

"No problem, Central," he replied. "My maximum resolution won't separate individuals in a group."

"Is it related to your video problem?" she asked, and he thought he heard her voice brighten.

"Negative. The two systems are independent." There was irritation in his voice and she heard it.

"I am aware of that, Hector," she said coolly, "but you have yet to confirm the identity of the intruders or the cause of the video failure."

"Their intention is clear, Sergeant," he said slowly. "They have passed the first room and are proceeding as planned in corridor E-5."

"Very good, Sir," she replied, and her voice was clipped and distant. "Do you request a back-up squad?"

Malcolm bit off an angry retort. He had pulled rank, and she was making sure he knew exactly how much of the responsibility was his — all of it.

"Negative," he said, and the tension started to leave him. He watched the light on the screen, moving slowly down the corridor. He had trained for this situation, dreamed about this moment. He wanted no back-up squad.

He keyed the comm, and the door between the first room and the hallway closed. Another code opened a third door in a side wall ahead of them.

It was a simple plan — beautiful in its simplicity. They would turn a corner and find the corridor dark ahead of them. To their left or right would be a door leading to a lighted room. Or another lighted corridor. Or a corridor with a light shining out of another door farther on. The maze twisted and turned, leading them away from the control rooms, away from the on-site storage facilities, away from anything they could use or sabotage.

If they tried to turn back, they would find themselves in a different corridor, with another open door to lead them on. If they tried to stop, the lights would flicker and fade and then die, as if the plant were naturally suffering from its years of disuse. If they still refused to move, a squad would go in and bring them out — after a few weeks.

Malcolm admired the plan. But it also disappointed him. The screen was too distant and too dry. The video cameras were spaced too far apart — and not even working, he remembered with a brief flash of anger. He followed the single light — occasionally two — moving through the maze and tried to imagine the faces. Were they men or women, Americans or aliens? Did they know they were being led to a cage? Would their faces show it? He tried to imagine the half-lit corridors, the surprise of an open door at odd turnings, the growing confusion and tension.

He reported the stages of the containment procedure and keyed each change in the path as it came up. Mitchell kept her replies to brief acknowledgments. He took the time to check the repair program and its back-up, but neither showed a fault in the video circuit. And he avoided checking for another reading from the K-9. There were back-ups built into the collar. He knew it would be dead.

The intruders stopped at one turning. The leader moved off, but a second light stayed behind and he came back. After ten minutes in darkness, they moved on.

Once, a door refused to close, and a check of the readouts indicated that it had been jammed. Malcolm smiled and activated a back-up system for the door. The servomotors had enough force to shear an eight-millimeter iron bar with the edge of the door. It closed.

Finally, they were at the center of the maze.

Malcolm keyed open the door and watched the light move toward the final room — the core-containment chamber. It was a useless shell now. The cooling fluid trickled slowly over the last of the spent fuel in the well. Its faint turquoise luminescence reflected dimly in the high arch of the concrete dome. That was all that remained of its power. But it was enough.

The light moved in and hung by the entrance. A code flashed on the bottom of the screen, and Malcolm smiled again. They were inside. He closed the door behind them and watched the light, waiting, imagining.

It was a short wait. Another light flashed on the screen, and the containment procedure was over. Malcolm initiated the retrieval phase. The green light at the entrance flicked on and, after a brief pause, the intruders went through the door in a rush. Malcolm shook his head, almost pitying the poor fools. They had no choice but to run. The opening door keyed a blast of subsonics that would drive out even the deaf.

That was the ultimate simplicity of the plan. The victims were brought out of the chamber on their own feet, and none of the Guard had to go in after them. They were led to an exit on the side of the containment building, and, if the computer figured their time in the dome correctly, they would all make it right up to the door. After a few hours' wait, they could be brought out safely, sick and dying or dead.

Malcolm watched the light hurry toward the exit. It split, and one-half fell behind, then stopped. He frowned, because it would mean going inside to bring out bodies. Still, he couldn't help admire the plan. And he couldn't help being disappointed.

"Central, this is Hector," he said to the mike. "Retrieval procedure has been completed." Mitchell was silent.

Malcolm stared at the console, suddenly aware of the quiet and the let-down building inside him. Suddenly, he keyed the mike again.

"Central, I am going outside," he said.

"Of course, Sir," Mitchell said, her voice thin over the speaker. "Do you request a clean-up squad?"

For me or them? Malcolm thought, angry at the insinuation in her voice.

"I'm going to check on the video and the K-9," he said sharply, and then wondered why he felt he had to explain himself.

"Of course, Sir," Mitchell said, her voice thin over the speaker. "Do you request a clean-up squad?"

because he wasn't expected to go near the core, but it had built-in radiation detectors, a radio in the headpiece, and a pistol strapped to the waist. He checked that carefully because it was the only part of the system without a back-up.

He was suppose to wait for the clean-up squad before venturing outside, but the decision to stay or to go was ultimately his. He had to go.

The camera was intact. He took a close look at it on its mount in the side of the tower and could find no sign of tampering. He checked around the base of the tower and found no jamming devices. Finally, he shrugged it off. It was a mystery for the technicians.

Then he looked for the dog. After five minutes of searching through the molded terrain where he thought the animal should be, he began to hope that it might have lived. But then he found the collar. It had been unclasped and tossed into the grass. When Malcolm picked it up, it sensed his heartbeat and reactivated itself.

Malcolm stood still in the middle of the compound and stared out toward the trees beyond the fence. The day had gone from early morning to late afternoon while the progress had relentlessly played itself out. The sun was low and distant, the air colder. He went to the exit door and stood listening, knowing that he would hear nothing. Finally, he tongued the radio in his helmet.

"Central," he said. "I am going to open the release door." There was a pause.

"Repeat, Hector." Mitchell was still on duty, and she sounded surprised.

"I'm going inside."

"Don't be crazy, Bob," she said, dropping all pretense of formality. "What if they're still alive?"

He didn't answer. He keyed in the sequence to open the door.

"Damn it, Malcolm," Mitchell yelled. "Can't you wait till they're dead?"

The door swung open and he stepped up to the threshold. The dog lay at his feet, its fur matted with vomit and blood.

"Jesus," Malcolm whispered.

"What's the matter?" Mitchell asked, her anger buried by anxiety.

Malcolm stared at the hand clenched in the dog's fur, at the plastic rifle in the mess on the floor, at the wasted face of the intruder.

"It's a boy," he said. "Just a little boy."

"Again?" she said quietly.

- ABO -

Aborigines (Continued from page 5)

Her novel, *On Traveling Alone*, is being considered for publication in the fall of 1987.

Cortney Skinner, who illustrates "Blood Brothers," has the distinction of being the only contributor whose work has appeared in every issue of *Aboriginal SF* so far (three).



**Youthful innocent
Cortney Skinner**

His commercial work has included designing woven belts and suspenders for children, and he is now working on a prehistoric alphabet book for children.

Skinner lives in Arlington, Massachusetts, and loves history. He is a member of the Brigade of the American Revolution, a group of people whose hobby it is to recreate military and civilian life as it existed in the 18th century.

Skinner's current project is researching the life of an itinerant artist of that era and recreating him down to the brushes, pigments and clothing.

He and his colleagues are in demand at historical celebrations such as Albany, New York's recent tricentennial.

Cartoonist Sandra Elaine Dean makes her living drawing cartoons for a large variety of general and special interest magazines.



**Sandra Dean
a self-portrait**

Her first sale several years ago was to *Hoof and Horn* rodeo magazine. She is an animal lover, and one of her specialties is horse cartoons.

Dean lives in Pensacola, Florida, with her dog and several goldfish. She dislikes loud music and litterbugs, and says her recent accomplishments include baking gingerbread and making a quart of yogurt.

Peg Libertus brings us the poem "A Lunar Cycle," which captures the thoughts of some future moon dwellers.

Libertus placed fourth in the 1986 *Writer's Digest* poetry competition, but poetry is only one of the

literary forms she is comfortable with.

She has master's degrees in theater and in drama and directs plays in local theaters. She says while it's not a living, it helps her "pass the time while being poor."

She has written a full-length musical drama called "The Boxer of Basin Street" for regional theater. She also writes theater skits and short stories and has just started a novel.

In the Oops! department: Our apologies to Hannah M.G. Shapero for getting her name completely wrong in the last issue. Also, she never met Ron and Val Lakey Lindahn (their names appeared sequentially in our notes).



Hannah M. G. Shapero

What could be worse than the cardinal sin of journalism, getting someone's name wrong?

How about this: We changed the gender of artist/author/bodybuilder Kiel Stuart, who is actually quite female, thank you.

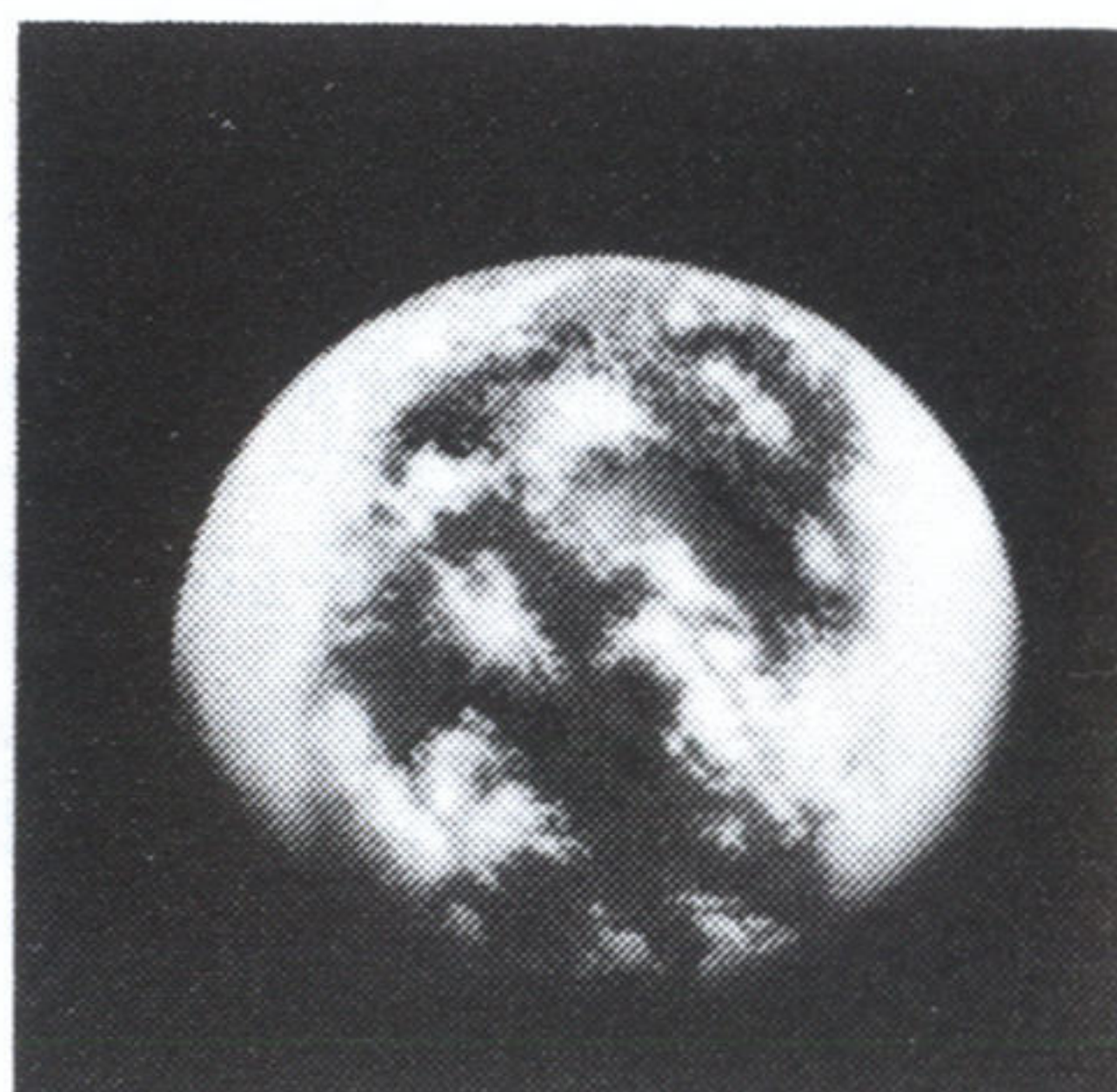


Kiel Stuart

Stuart says she was mildly surprised to discover in our last issue that she had dropped an X chromosome and added a Y.

We're sorry, and thanks for being a good sport, Kiel.

- ABO -



Our Next Issue



Our next issue might be called our issue of conflict, or battle, since each of the stories involves some type of confrontation ranging from an all-out combat for control of certain crops in Frederik Pohl's "Search and Destroy" to interstellar range war in W.T. Quick's "Cowboys and Engines." In between is an entire spectrum of mayhem and mauling (of one sort or another) in stories by Elaine Radford "Passing," Emily Devenport "Shade and the Elephant Man," and Mary Kittridge "Imago." plus as many more stories as we can squeeze in.

We also will have a special treat in the form of a commentary by Brian Aldiss, one of England's best SF authors. It's titled: "SF: From Secret Movement to Big Business." And we'll have more great four-color art, book reviews, a preview of what Hollywood has in store for us for big summer movies and more from our alien publisher, who seems to keep moving from one warm climate to another.



"Just once I'd like to meet an atomic monster that isn't immune to bullets!"

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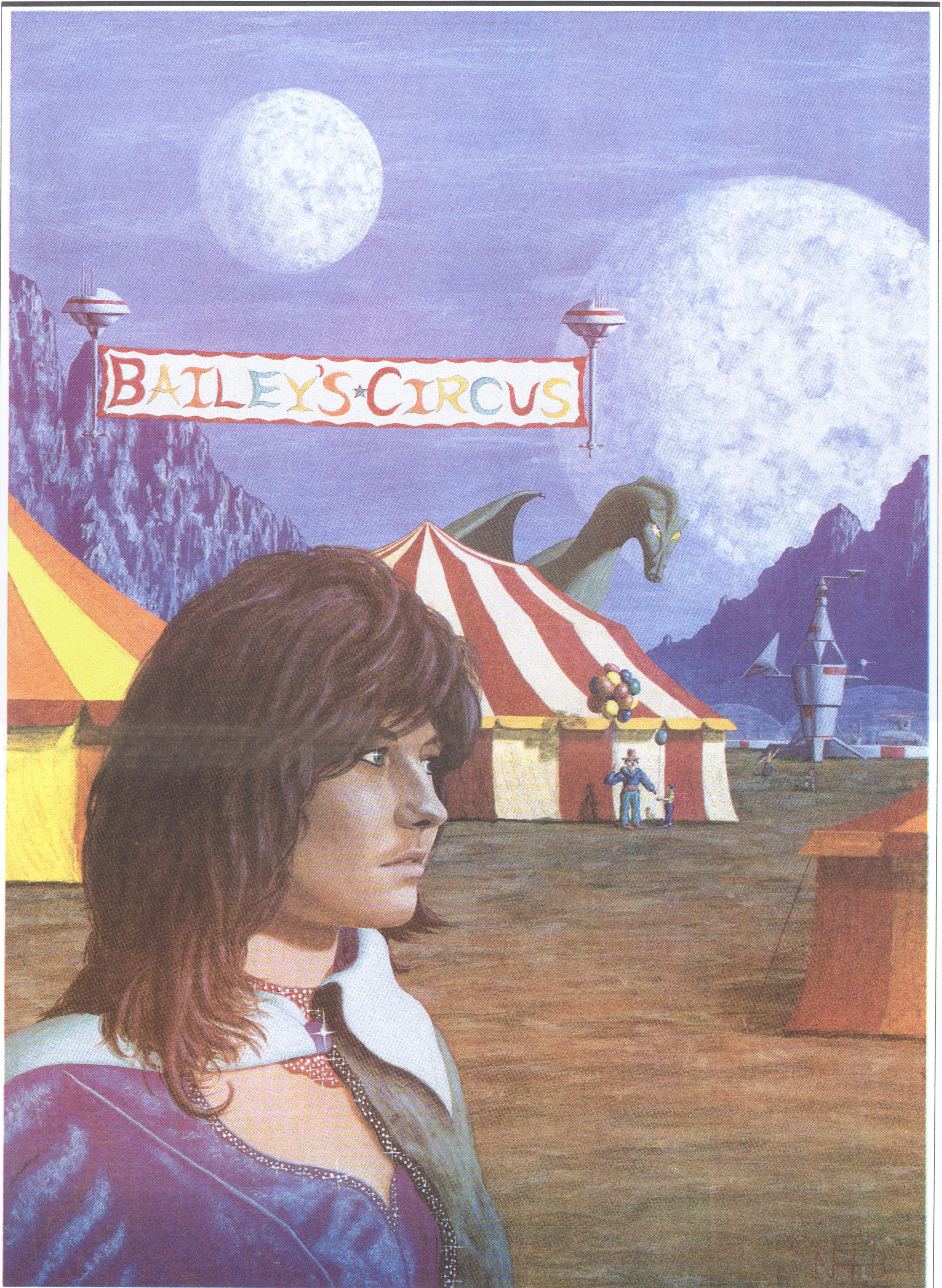
Art by Wendy Snow-Lang

Trackdown

By John F. Moore

It was a big deer, strong and well fed. Bands of muscle showed on its deep chest and sinews stood out on its legs as it worked its way through the deep snow, panting great clouds of white mist into the frigid mountain air. When it reached the bottom of the ridge it paused, breathing heavily, to survey its passage. Around the solitary animal the mountains of the Pacific Nor-

(Continued to page 31)



Art by N. Taylor Blanchard

Circus Story

By Connie Willis

"Can you tell me where Pop Bailey is?" a male voice said behind me.
"He's busy," I said without turning around. I pulled off the red nose and wiped at my face with a towel. When the wallendas had stormed in, they'd caught me in whiteface, and it had left me at a distinct disadvantage. So had the fact that Pop was out like a light in the wagon. "He'll be

(Continued to next page)

(Continued from previous page)

busy till after the evening performance," I said, dabbing at the greasepaint. "I'm Pop Bailey's assistant, Sally. Can I help you?"

"No," he drawled. "I think I can help you. I saw your wallendas on their way out. I take it you need somebody to do high wire."

"Trapeze," I said, wiping the last of the clown white off. "Peoria didn't want high wire. The yokels do it for a living." I pulled my robe around my shoulders and turned to face him.

"What a coincidence," he said, leaning lazily against the tent's door support and holding onto a duffel bag. "I do a little trapeze. The name's Tay Jones."

"Oh," I said. I don't know what I'd expected — a space-beaten old sunshiner or maybe one of Peoria's wire-walking yokels who wanted to run away and join the circus. Tay was no yokel. He had the compact, muscular body of the circus-born. And he wasn't exactly space-beaten. He looked a couple of years older than me, maybe nineteen or twenty, and he had a shock of dark hair and a confident grin. He was absolutely beautiful. "Well," he said. "Will I do?"

I was still gawking at him open-mouthed and open-minded, which left me easy pickings for Lizzie. I clamped down hard on what I was thinking and then thought tentatively, *Lizzie?* There was no answer. Lizzie usually took a nap after the matinee, but when he did, I could usually pick up his tangled sub-thinking. Right now I wasn't getting anything. *Good, I thought.*

"Have you done catchtrap before?" I said.

"Yeah. I was with the Ringling show on Kaycee for awhile. I worked both flyer and catchtrap."

"Why did you leave?"

"I wanted to work a small show for a change."

I didn't believe that for a minute. Nobody leaves a fancy setup like the Ringling show with its elaborate offworlder acts and expensive fall-proof wallenda equipment without a good reason. Maybe he was on a bounty list. "I thought the Ringlings were in the Pleiades. Pop Bailey told me Barnum was working Kaycee," I said.

He shrugged. "I wouldn't know what the Ringlings have been doing since I left. They didn't tell me their plans."

He had to be lying, but it didn't matter much. Pop didn't care if a sunshiner had a shaky past so long as he pulled his own weight, we were desperate for a trapeze act for tonight, and as far as I was concerned, he was just what I'd been looking for. I was incredibly glad I'd told him I was Pop's assistant.

"Do you know anything about Pop Bailey's show?" I asked. Like our wallendas just quit because they hadn't been paid in six months and the beatty keeps threatening to? Like Pop spends most of the gate on stims? Like I'm Pop's daughter? If he knew that, I didn't have a chance. Tradition packs a powerful wallop in the circus.

"The only thing I've heard about the show is that Pop Bailey's got the biggest dragon in captivity," Tay said.

"Lizard," I corrected. "He's not a dragon. He's a lizard. His name's Lizzie."

"Lizard," he said. "I heard he was telepathic. Is that right?"

"No," I said. "Look, this is a small circus. No robo-clowns, no skyhooks, no auto-guys. Everybody does triple duty and no cherry pie. You'll have to clown in the grand entry and work the guy-out crew. Think you can do that?"

"I can do anything," he said, and I was glad that, unlike Lizzie, he couldn't hear what I was thinking. I hoped desperately that Lizzie wasn't listening. "Just a minute and I'll show you where to stash your gear," I said, stalling, and turned back to the mirror. I smeared some cream on my face to take off the last of the white and tried to hear if Lizzie was eavesdropping.

All I had to do was look at a sunshiner or one of the acrobats to have Lizzie breathing down my neck, making rude comments and reminding me of my obligations to circus tradition.

Not that any of them had ever looked back. Even sunshiners had almost as well-developed a sense of circus traditions as Lizzie did, and I'd never met one yet who would move in on a circus kid no matter how fast and loose he played with the circus reds. But Tay didn't know I was a circus kid. He thought I was Pop's assistant, which meant I might have half a chance with him if I moved fast and if nobody interfered.

Pop wouldn't interfere with anything for at least another two hours. He'd been popping stims like crackerjack before the matinee, and had been long gone by the time the wallendas came ranting for their back pay. Lizzie was off doing something she didn't want me to know about, probably teasing the kongs or the dryads, which was why she had shut me out. It was now or never.

I wiped at my face with a towel and pulled the band off my hair so it fell in a nice tangle around my shoulders. "Come to think of it," I said, "why don't you bunk with me? At least for tonight."

I eased out of the robe so he could see my skimpy jungle act leotard. I put my hand up to his cheek. "I think trapeze acts should be closer than just flyer and catcher, don't you? I mean, really close."

He dropped the duffel like a rock. I turned my back and lifted my hair off my neck. "Undo my peel strips, will you?" I said, a little shakily. "I can't quite reach them."

"Yeah," he said, "sure." He put his hand over my hand. Please, please don't let him figure out I'm a white, I thought. He pulled the top peel free and bent to kiss my neck.

Hiya, kid, Lizzie said inside my head. Up to no good again, huh?

Go away, Lizzie, I thought at him.

What? Go away and miss all the fun?

Tay had come to a dead stop, almost as if he had heard Lizzie.

Yes, go away, I hissed. I wriggled a little, just enough to remind Tay of what was going on. He undid the second peel and started working his way down my backbone with kisses.

Pop hit the door like he'd been shot from a cannon. Tay let go of my hair and the peel strip, and I almost lost my costume. I held it up to me and cursed Lizzie while Pop struggled to get out something coherent. He was still reeling under

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the effects of the stim comedown. I got the idea Lizzie had screamed "Fire!" at him or something. I decided that in my half-naked condition an offense was my best defense.

"The wallendas quit," I said, and calmly lifted my hair up so I could fasten the peels. "This is Tay Jones. Tay, Pop Bailey. He owns this dog-and-pony show. I've hired Tay to do the trapeze act with me tonight. He's done catchtrap with the Ringlings. In Kaycee."

Pop nodded, looking confused. "You say you can do trapeze? Where were you last?"

"With the Ringlings. In Kaycee," Tay said and grinned at me.

I thought Barnum's show was on Kaycee," he said.

"I don't know," Tay said easily. "I left Kaycee awhile back and have been working my way out the Arm. Barnum might be there now."

"You ever work for that two-timing, double-crossing fake Barnum?" Pop said, his words beginning to slow down and slur from the comedown.

"No, I never had that pleasure," Tay said, grinning more broadly than ever. "I hear he's got some great acts."

That should have sent Pop into a tirade about how his old rival Barnum had stolen all his acts from other shows, but it didn't. He also didn't act like he knew what had been going on in here. Lizzie must have really blasted him.

What did you do to Pop? I said to Lizzie. Fire off a cannon in his ear?

Somebody's gotta keep you outa trouble, kid. It was the best I could do. Lizzie's gravelly voice grated in my mind.

I can take care of myself.

You're doin' great so far. I gotta hand it to ya, kid. You can really pick 'em.

What's that supposed to mean? I snapped.

No answer. He had cut me off completely. Pop was still standing shaking his head and trying to figure out what had hit him. Tay was watching me. The grin had vanished. For a bad moment I thought I'd slipped and spoken out loud to Lizzie.

"So you do catchtrap," Pop said to Tay. "What else can you do?"

"Just about anything you or your beautiful assistant here want me to."

Well, it was a nice try, but I had been stupid to think my luck would hold. Now Pop would say, "Assistant? She's my daughter Sally," and it would be all over.

Fensen burst in the door. Lizzie had certainly called in all the troops.

"What's up?" Pop said. "Trouble?"

"No. I got..." He looked from one to the other of us. "What the hell is going on?" He ran his hand through his short sandy hair.

"This is our new wallenda," Pop said. He slapped Tay on the back. "Fensen, you go put him on the payroll."

"The wallendas took their nets with them," I said. "We'll have to put the plastice-and-gut ones up for tonight."

"I'll take care of it," Pop said, having trouble getting the words out.

"Come on," Fensen said to Tay. "I'll put him on the payroll, and then I'll get those nets up for you, Sally."

"Thanks," I said, still reeling from the luck that had brought Fensen right then. Lizzie's little plan of interference had backfired, Tay still didn't know I was Pop's daughter.

"I've got to leave for Janus this afternoon to check out our next site," Fensen said. He stopped, and ran his hand through his reddish hair again. "Lizzie wants you," he said.

"That's the dragon, right?" Tay said, and there was something too alert about his question. "The telepathic dragon?"

"He's been bellowing like a sick pach over by the menagerie," said Fensen, who had never heard Lizzie utter a sound in his life. "I think he's got a stomachache. Come on, Tay."

They all trooped out. I changed into a practice leotard and ran a comb through my hair. So Lizzie wanted to see me, and badly enough that he had sent a message through Fensen. Well, that suited me just fine. I wanted to see him, too, and ask him a few questions. Like why he had suddenly started talking to Pop and Fensen and turning me off like a bad transmitter. Except for transmitting Fensen's advance-man reports from the next performance site, Lizzie had never talked to anybody but me, even though I'd griped about being Lizzie's interpreter for Pop and the rest of the circus.

Why can't you talk to them yourself? I had complained one time when I was about thirteen and Lizzie'd had me tell Pop something.

It ain't as easy as it sounds, kid. It's all in the genes.

You don't have any trouble talking to me.

You're a circus kid. Besides, it ain't me talking. It's them talking back.

I hadn't understood what my genes had to do with anything, but at thirteen I had already started to figure out what being a circus kid meant, and I wasn't very happy about it. Sex is as available as popcorn in the circus. The reds hawk it to the yokels, and everybody else gives it away for free. Except the kids of circus owners who are supposed to stay whites until they marry some other circus owner's offspring, which on the backwater planets we worked was going to be never, because where was I going to meet a Ringling or a Sells on the dog-and-pony circuit?

I hate being a circus kid, I had told Lizzie. You don't know what I have to go through.

Sure, I do, kid. I haveta listen to your gripin', don't I? Besides, sufferin's good for ya. It's the only way ya ever learn anything. You better thank your lucky stars you're a circus kid, or else you wouldn't have me to talk to.

I still don't see why you can't talk to somebody else, I said.

Let's just say I talk to ya 'cause I like ya, kid, he had said then, and I had never gotten a better answer since. When I don't like ya no more, I'll stop talking to ya. Deal?

He'd better not stop talking to me, I thought, and he'd better not mess up my chances with Tay. I was never going to marry a circus owner, and I wasn't about to die a white. I threw a shirt on over the leotard and went out into the muck of the midway to look for Lizzie.

You want to talk to me, Lizzie? I said, sloshing through the mud toward the menagerie. No answer. He still had me shut out, and I wasn't about to go trudging all over the grounds looking for him, not in this mud. Peoria's farmers were using weather control with a vengeance right now. It had rained the whole time we'd been on Peoria, a heavy, puddling rain that made it necessary to close the tent up and put it on artificial environment, which meant double-time for the guy-out crew, and how were we supposed to pay them when we couldn't even pay our acts?

I made a mental note to tell Fensen not to book us back on Peoria next season. By that time the yokels would be as sick of the knee-deep mud as we were, and they'd be letting the planet revert to its original weather, blistering winds and the full ultraviolet blast of its sun. I didn't know which was worse. I stopped in front of the menagerie tent, put my hands on my hips, and said, *You're the one who wants to talk, Lizzie. You come here.*

Still no answer. I lifted up the tent flap and looked in. He wasn't there, but he'd been this way. The tigers were pacing frantically, and the hairy kongs were slack-jawed with terror. Lizzie might be able to hide from me, but I could still talk to him. *How would you like to be sold to the Ringlings? I said. They're in Kaycee.*

You believe that, you'll believe anything,

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(Continued from previous page)

kid, Lizzie said, his gravelly voice coming from out of nowhere. *I guess you believe he's a sunshiner, too.*

I don't care what he is, I said, trying to conceal the fact that I'd left the menagerie tent and was heading down the midway again. We needed a substitute for the wallendas. Simple as that.

That's what you are, all right, kid. Simple.

He was behind the cook top. I could see the greenish-gray hump of his back over the yellow flag. I let him do his speech about what a pushover I was while I came around from behind.

In this business you gotta be smart, kid, he said, and I put my hand on his neck, which was still trailing the reins from the jungle act in the matinee, yanked on them, and brought his head around and down to face me.

How smart, Lizzie? I said, and looked him firmly in his lidless yellow eye.

Smarter'n you, kid, he said, and looked back unwaveringly. It was impossible for him to blink, and even if he could have, he would have stared me down. I looked away, knowing it was my undoing, and slackened my grip on the reins. His head reared up over the cook top, nearly taking me with it, and he looked down on me from his entire height of twelve meters.

You're crazy for him already, ain't you, kid? he grated almost kindly.

"Look at you," I said out loud. "What were you doing over here anyway? You're covered with mud. Now I'll have to hose you down. You can't do the evening performance like that."

Not so fast, kid, he said, and shied away from me as I bent over to get the hose. I ain't some yokel you can fast-talk. You're so head over heels for him, you'd pitch right off that trapeze with no net under you.

I wouldn't do that for anybody. I pulled a bucket over with my foot and sprayed water into it, then reached behind me for a soap-sponge, not letting up on the hosing the whole time for fear of things getting entirely out of hand. I just wanted to go to bed with him. I'm sick of being a white.

With him or with anybody?

I soaped down Lizzie's near leg, where the mud splatters were higher than my head. *He happened to be available, and he didn't know who I was. I'm surprised you didn't shout in his ear, too, the way you did Fensen and Pop, and tell him I was Pop's daughter.* I lifted one of Lizzie's pathetic excuses for a wing and squirted water from the hose on the mud encrusted under it. As I did so, I felt an uncomfortable twitching, as if someone was doing the same thing to me. Horrified, I dropped the hose.

You stop that, Lizzie. Don't you dare read my mind.

I don't have to, kid, he said cheerfully. All I have to do's watch your face when you turn around.

I turned around.

"So this is the dragon, huh?" Tay said.

"It's a lizard," I said. "Actually, it's kind of a dinosaur, anyway it's closer to that than to being a dragon except for the wings, of course, and..." I stammered to a stop, knowing it was all there in my face for Lizzie to see. And Lizzie was right. I was crazy about him.

The hose was whipping like a snake between us. Tay picked it up and started splashing Lizzie's forelegs with it. "He sure is big, all right. What does he do?"

Furious with myself, I wrung out the sponge and stomped around to Lizzie's other wing. "He steps on sunshiners. Two shows daily. Why do you think I hired you?"

He had followed me around with the hose, and when I lifted up Lizzie's wing, he sprayed the hose underneath. I scrubbed viciously at the dried mud that had somehow gotten between the ribs of Lizzie's stunted wings.

So this is what you're so crazy about? Lizzie growled. Scrawny-looking. Still, I suppose he's good enough for what you had in mind.

It was not the first time in my life I had thanked heaven nobody could hear Lizzie except me. I scraped at the mud with my fingernails. Lizzie didn't even flinch. *He sure is puny for a sunshiner. Assuming, a'course, that's what he is.*

Tay was hosing down Lizzie's feet as determinedly as I was scraping his wings, and staring with intense interest at the ground. I rose to the bait.

And just what else would he be? I snapped, dropping the wing and yanking down hard on the reins so I could get to his neck.

A luckyboy. A shyster. Come to steal me for his circus. Mebbe he works for Barnum. Sweet-talking you to get to me.

A shock of cold water hit me in the face and left me gasping. Tay had dropped the hose. It was twitching harder than ever. "Gee, I'm sorry," he said, and grabbed up a towel. "The dragon moved his foot and I..." He made a move as if he were going to towel off my dripping face and then thought better of it and handed the

towel to me instead. "Dinosaur, I mean."

I wiped at my face. "Dragon's okay. We call him a dinosaur for the yokels, so everybody in the show calls him that, too, but he's really a kind of dragon. I just don't like to call him that. Dragons are so stupid."

"I know," he said. "We had a mcaffrey once." He glared at Lizzie's foot. "With the Ringling show. It was so dumb it couldn't even fly around the tent without strangling itself in the rigging. A pach is smarter."

"Yeah," I agreed. "Did you ever work with a smaug?" I realized abruptly that that sounded like I was trying to trip him up again. The Barnum show had a smaug. I hurried on. "They're smart, I guess, but nasty. Lizards are the only decent dragons, and they're too smart to get caught."

"Except this one here." He was still watching Lizzie's foot warily. "How'd you manage to catch him?"

How'd you do it? Lizzie said. Put the old geezer in a box and pop the lid on? Tell me so I can cart him off to Barnum's show, willya, kid?

I picked up the flailing hose, getting thoroughly doused again, and walked over to the portable hydrant to turn it off. *It never occurred to you that he might just be an ordinary sunshiner who's interested in me, I said furiously. Not you. Me.*

Not a chance, kid. A skinny little white like you? He wouldn't give you a tumble if you weren't Pop Bailey's kid and he wasn't trying to

We didn't have any trouble getting off Peoria, which surprised me. I had expected us all to end up in jail . . .

get his hands on me.

"All done," I said brightly. Tay was staring at Lizzie. There was still a big blotch of mud on the lizard's side. "It's okay. He wears a leopard skin kind of thing for the jungle act. To cover up his wings."

He was still staring blankly at Lizzie.

"We do a Valley That Time Forgot number with Lizzie as a brontosaurus." He was not listening to me at all. I stopped and put down the hose. "We do the traditional show order. Lizzie's on right before intermission. The wallendas always come last, right before the grand finale, but we'll have to change the order tonight because of the nets. We'll put it before the beaty."

"Traditional," Tay said. He turned and looked at me, still a little vaguely.

"I guess I'd better go get dried off," I said bleakly. "I've got to get dressed for the grand entrance. You don't have to do that tonight. Go see the costume lady and she'll fix you up for the wallenda." So much for his being interested in me. I started down the midway.

Tay followed me and grabbed me by the arm, stopping me short by the menagerie tent. "You didn't tell me how you captured Lizzie."

"That's because I didn't capture him. Nobody did."

"You mean he just walked in here and said he wanted to join the circus?"

I nodded.

"But what's he doing in a mud show like this? Lizards are really intelligent. He could have..."

I waited for Lizzie to cut in with *He could have had any show he wanted. Even the Barnum circus, but he had cut me off again.*

"Maybe he's using our mud show as headquarters for taking over the galaxy," I said.

"Maybe," Tay said, but I could tell he wasn't listening again. "Where's the costume lady I'm supposed to see?"

I pointed toward the dressing room tent.

You hear that, Lizzie? He isn't trying to steal you. He's going to have you arrested for plotting against the government. By the way, what are you up to? What do you want with a mud show like this? I asked. I didn't get an answer.

Lizzie didn't come back in until it was almost time for the beginning of the Valley That Time Forgot number. I stood on a platform halfway up the tent and waited for him to pick me up in his mouth. I had worn a scrap of plastic fuzz which is supposed to look like saber-tooth fur and which I never wear because Lizzie makes rude remarks.

Great costume, he said. Going to do your

trapeze act naked?

I might, I said, and we did the rest of the act in silence. Afterwards I raced off to change into my blue spangles for the wallenda.

It won't help, Lizzie said. The only thing that'll impress him is the deed to the circus. And me.

Fensen was waiting for me in the dressing room tent. "I thought you'd left for Janus already," I said.

"I'm going after intermission," he said. "Look, I need to talk to you. About this afternoon."

I pulled on my flat slippers. "What about it?"

"This sunshiner we picked up. This Tay Jones."

"What about him?" I said, going behind the screen and yanking apart the peel strips of the saber-tooth number.

"I've seen him before. In Kaycee. He wasn't with the Ringlings."

"So?" I said, wriggling into the blue spangles. "How many sunshiners tell the truth? You think he's got a bounty on him?"

"No, but I don't think he's a sunshiner, either. At least he wasn't the last time I saw him." He rubbed his hand through his sandy hair. "He's...he was with..." He stopped and gulped hard.

I sprayed on my spangled wristlets and came out from behind the screen. "He's who? Who was he with?"

"Come to think of it, he was with the Ringlings," he said with an effort. "Yeah, now I remember. He was doing catchtrap with them, too."

I had obviously missed something. I was having a lot of trouble with conversations this afternoon. Maybe I was phasing Fensen in and out the way I had Lizzie. "I thought you said he wasn't."

"He was. I better get over to the yards if I want to make Janus. I'll report in as soon as I get there."

"When are we supposed to make the jump to Janus?" I asked.

"Day after tomorrow."

"Try to make them put off our opening till next week, will you? We're sold out through tomorrow night, and some of them are second-timers. If we had another week here, we could start paying back pay."

"I'll see what I can do," he said, but he didn't sound very hopeful.

"Or at least see if there's a possibility of our doing an open-air instead of a tent show. Or maybe we could use one of their buildings. That way we could save on equipment and the guy-out crew."

He was shaking his head. "No chance of that. Janus only has one settlement. Mining, I think, and they're living in temporaries. Besides, it's a double star planet, which means unstable weather and tectonic problems. Volcanoes—"

"And earthquakes," I said. "Why did Pop book us on a planet like that?"

"In case you haven't noticed, planets like that are all we can get. Don't worry. If it's too crummy, I'll get us out of the contract. The gravity's almost two, and the air pressure's even higher. I can claim it's too high for Lizzie."

"It is too high for Lizzie."

"Yeah, and he's who I'm reporting to. So don't worry. We won't work Janus unless it's better than I think it is."

I watched him go off, still brushing his hair with his hand, and then raced back to the main tent, already late for my entrance, which I was supposed to make from the left under the big spot with Tay. I would never reach him before Pop finished his spiel, so I shimmied up the slack rope to the platform, almost at the roof of the tent, and let the spot catch me there. Tay made his bow, dropped his cape, and came up the ladder to the platform opposite. I didn't look at him.

Lizzie, I said and got the band of silence again. I wondered suddenly if I were getting sick. Once I had had clipping fever, and until the fever broke I couldn't pick him up at all. And now Lizzie was fading in and out like a bad connection just when I needed him most.

I'm afraid of heights, a fatal failing in a circus kid, and I never do wallendas unless I have to. Lizzie helps me through them, which is a good thing because a dog-and-pony show like ours can't afford gee-belts or skyhooks. Lizzie half hypnotizes, half bullies me through the act, starting when I go up the ladder and not letting go till I'm on the ground again. Tonight I'd been too distracted to notice he was missing, and now here I was, thirty-five meters up and starting to panic.

Lizzie? I said, and shut my eyes. There was a silence so profound it buzzed in my ears, and then the flutter of applause that meant I was supposed to launch myself off into empty space.

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Lizzie? I said again, nausea forcing me to open my eyes. I wrapped both arms around the platform supports. *Where are you?*

I thought I heard a faint signal, which sounded like *I'm here* but it was so weak and jumbled I could hardly make it out.

I looked across at Tay. He held out a hand to me and smiled. I reached out over empty space for the swinging bar, grasped it with both hands, and swung off toward him. Four swings, and I closed my eyes and let go and came into his hands as if I had always belonged there. The ground did not exist, the show did not exist. There was only the blue flash of the spot on our spangles, the metal trapeze bar, sturdy as a floor, and Tay's hands.

We ended on the same platform, arms up to salute the applause, the spot up to full pink and then off. The spell held all the way down the ladder. At the bottom I stood easily against him in the darkness while Pop finished his spiel and the spot splashed onto the cage full of kongs and tigers and then onto our beatty, resplendent in his red-tailed coat.

"Sally, I need to tell you something," Tay said, and I half-turned in his arms and lifted my face up to his.

Now the phony sunshiner makes his big move, Lizzie said. Tell her you love her and then kiss her and it's back to the dressing room tent for a little something between acts. It's all part of the plan. Love her up a little so she won't figure out what's going on. And this kid's a piece of cake. Didja see the way she went off that trapeze without even a net under her?

I whirled around to where the rousts should have been taking down the nets. Our wallendas had had automatic retractables, but the show's nets were the old snap-and-tie variety. It always took the space of another act to get them down.

I could feel the color drain out of me. "Tay, I thought you and Fensen put the nets up," I said shakily.

"No. He said..." He was staring at my waist, and I saw with a sudden shock the narrow raised band of a gee-belt under his leotard. "I thought you were wearing a gee belt," he said. "Everybody wears gee-belts when they're doing a wallenda."

"Not in this mud show," I said furiously. "We can't afford them. We're a poor show. Not like the Ringlings' show. Or Barnum's. Whose show were you really with on Kaycee?" I stomped across the big top to the backdoor.

That's givin' it to him, kid, Lizzie said. Oh, shut up, I said miserably.

I had to change for the finale, but I went to the wagon and got the cashbox first. With Fensen gone, it was up to me to keep it away from Pop and luckyboys, and I always sleep with it under my pillow and put all but enough money for change in the toe of my clown shoe. There was a lot of money because of the straw houses we'd been having.

I wanted to find out if Fensen had called from Janus, but I was damned if I was going to talk to Lizzie. Anyway, the longer we went without hearing from Fensen, the longer we got to stay on Peoria and the better our chances of getting out of debt. I didn't see Tay after the show, though I wandered around the midway looking for him so I could apologize for yelling at him. I wasn't about to ask Lizzie where he was either, and as I result, I didn't find him till the next day, right before the matinee. He was heading out of the big top.

"I'm sorry I got mad about the nets," I said. "I'm scared of heights, and I—"

He cut me off. "The nets are up. I put them up after the show last night," he said stiffly.

"Thank you," I said. "I wanted to apologize..."

"For yelling at me about the nets or for not trusting me?"

"Not trusting you?" I said furiously. "I trusted you enough to go off that trapeze into your arms."

"And I caught you, didn't I? I didn't let you fall. So how come the first thing out of your mouth is, 'What show did you really work on Kaycee?'"

I half-expected Lizzie to say, *That's right. Do the newborn babe number on her. You're as pure as the driven snow, ain't ya, and how could she ever suspect ya?* He didn't, and there was that silent blankness again.

"What show did you work on Kaycee?" I said to Tay.

"Well, it sure as hell wasn't a dog-and-pony show like this," he said angrily. "The traditional order of performance. Traditional acts that you've named after the Flying Wallendas and Clyde Beatty. Tradition has kept the circus great for fifteen generations. That spiel wouldn't sell popcorn, and this show's the living proof of it. You've got tradition coming out your ears, and you can't even pay your acts."

"Is that what this is all about?" I said furiously. "You're afraid you won't get paid?"

"I don't give a damn about getting paid. You've got a lizard, for God's sake, the only one in captivity, and what do you do? You cover up his wings and pass him off as a brontosaurus. You should be billing him as a dragon and putting him on next to closing. And you should be showing him on Kaycee, not these one-horse planets!"

"I don't need any advice on how to run this circus, and neither does Pop!"

"Pop?! He's so sttimed he doesn't even know he's got a circus."

I didn't have to listen to this. "If you're so unhappy here, why don't you quit and go back to Barnum's show?" I snapped and went back to the dressing tent to get into my clown makeup for the grand entry.

"Hiya," a voice said as I came in the tent. It was a yokel, one of Peoria's farmer types, red hands and cloddish boots. He was sitting on my bunk. "You're Sally, right?"

I nodded.

"I told this guy over to the gate I was looking for a good time," he said. He bent down and started to unfasten his boots. "He said you was my best bet."

This was all I needed. "I think you want somebody else," I said, and started past him. What guy over to the gate? Pop was supposed to be working the wagon for the matinee.

The yokel grabbed my arm. "Now looky here," he said, his face going purple. "I paid my money same as anybody. And I heard about you circus reds. You don't turn down nobody." He continued taking his boots and then his shirt off without letting go of my arm.

Lizzie! I called, forgetting I wasn't talking to him.

He answered me before I had time to remember he wasn't talking to me either. *What do you care? You ain't interested.*

A blank space cut across Lizzie's words, and when it passed, Lizzie was saying, *Don't worry. I fixed everything. Sally ain't gonna be a problem.*

I went limp, and the yokel said, "Now that's better, girly. You just relax. I hear you circus reds do all kinds of special stuff."

"I'm not a red," I said numbly.

"We don't have many women on Peoria, and the ones we do have won't do anything except the regular." He yanked me over to him. "Now what I'd like—"

"Howdy," Tay said, leaning on the door pole. "Sally, can I talk to you about the nets? They're pretty rotten in spots."

The yokel stood up in his stocking feet. "This here red's taken," he said belligerently. "I paid my money."

Tay pulled the yokel aside and said something under his breath, and the yokel looked sharply at me. "Is this some kind of con?" he said. "I heard about you circus people stealing people's money."

Tay said something else to him that made him look even more suspicious, but he picked up his shirt and boots and followed Tay outside. After a minute, Tay poked his head back in the tent. "He had the wrong tent. Listen, I just got a good look at those nets. They're in terrible shape. Do you want to use my gee-belt for tonight?"

"No," I said, and sat down in front of the mirror. "It doesn't matter."

"Okay," he said, and left.

Nothing mattered, least of all the information that I might fall thirty-five meters off a trapeze. I'd fallen a lot farther than that this afternoon. It didn't even matter that Tay cared so little about me that he'd rescued me from that yokel and didn't even realize it, or that I was finally going to have to admit to myself that I didn't want to be a red. I wanted Tay. None of that mattered, because Lizzie was talking to somebody else, had been for at least two days while I kidded myself that she was asleep or I was getting sick.

I got through the matinee somehow and told Pop to scratch the wallenda for the evening performance because the nets weren't fixed. I wished I could cancel the Valley That Time Forgot act. With no link between us I almost slipped off his resined back. Halfway through, he said suddenly, clear as a bell and unashamed, *Fensen's calling in from Janus.*

I had to answer him, but I didn't have to be friendly about it. *What does he have to report?* I said, mentally keeping my chin up against any new blows.

He says he wants us to jump Peoria tonight.

We're supposed to do two more nights.

Lizzie paused. It always took him awhile to relay the questions to Fensen and awhile for Fensen to answer. *He says they've got perfect weather right now. We could do open-air and not even bother with the big top.*

Open air? I said. *I thought it was a double star planet.*

Another pause. *It is. That's the whole point.*

There's a window of good weather right now. It's between seasons, and there's no volcanic activity, but there's no way of telling how long it will last. That's why we've gotta come right now.

What about the air pressure? It was supposed to be too high for you.

Hardly any pause at all. *No problem. It's only one twenty-five.*

Tell him we've got to do one more night here to cover the lot rent, I told Lizzie, frowning. Why would Fensen want us to come now? He knew we needed another week on Peoria just to pay the bills, let alone meet the payroll. Ask him if he can't fix it so we come next week.

There was a pause that lasted a good five minutes. What was Lizzie doing? Filling in his new-found friend?

Fensen says the rainy season's supposed to start next week, Lizzie said. There was another pause, just the right length this time. He says to pull a slip.

"I will not," I said out loud. Fensen must be crazy to want us to pull a slip. It would just leave us more vulnerable to somebody like Barnum. I was amazed Lizzie didn't speak up. He was so paranoid lately about being stolen, and the best way to do it was to foreclose on the circus.

Fensen says do the knocking-down during the show. If anybody asks, tell 'em the site's mudlogged and we're movin' the show, Lizzie said.

Fensen was either crazy or there was some urgent reason to get to Janus he couldn't tell me. Or Lizzie. If that was the case, we'd better do what he said and jump Peoria tonight. But there was no need to pull a slip. There was enough money in the cashbox to at least cover tonight's lot rent and enough in my shoe to make a good-faith payment on the other bills. As soon as we'd taken our bows, I went over to the wagon to get the money.

The cashbox was empty. I went back to the big top to catch Pop. He was in the middle of the spiel for the pachs, and he hadn't finished before I figured out where the money had gone. He was so high on stims he could have done a wallenda without a wire. I turned on my heel and went back to my bunk to get the money out of my shoe. It wouldn't be enough for the lot rent, but it would maybe keep the locals from having us grounded.

The money was gone. I almost called to Lizzie, I was so frantic. Then I remembered he was the only one who could possibly have known where it was. He and his new-found friend. I told the rousts to strike the menagerie after intermission and move the shuttles out.

We didn't have any trouble getting off Peoria, which surprised me. I had expected us all to end up in jail, but we had gotten our clearance for Janus without any trouble. The trip to Janus was long enough for me to go over and over my misery, but not long enough to come to any bang-up conclusions, except that thinking about it didn't make it hurt any less. Lizzie had found somebody else to talk to. Well, he had never promised to talk to me forever, and I should be glad he wasn't around to witness my humiliating rejection by Tay and comment on it. At least I didn't have to listen to him saying, *I told ya he couldn't be interested in a scrawny kid like you and Suffering's good for ya.*

But I didn't feel glad. Lizzie could have told me he'd found somebody else. He could have at least told me goodbye. I wondered who it was he'd found to talk to, but I didn't think I could stand to find out. If it turned out to be one of the reds, I'd die. I didn't want to see Tay either. I stayed in my cabin and made the rousts feed Lizzie.

When we got close to Janus, I went up to the main cabin to check on our landing clearance. Sometimes the yokels didn't mess with trying to catch you on your way off. They just sent out warrants that kept you from landing. But we had full clearance, and I began to think maybe Fensen had been right to send for us. If we could work open air for two weeks and put the guy-out crew on slack pay, we could make back what we owed on Peoria and then some.

We landed with a thump that didn't stop thumping. Tectonic activity, Fensen had said. When the jostling around finally quit, I dragged myself forward to look at the screens, weighed down by the sudden increase in gravity. Fensen had said it was almost two gees, but it felt like more. He had said we could do open-air, too, but looking at the screens, I wouldn't have bet on it. We seemed to have landed in the middle of a waterfall.

No, it had to be a rainstorm. Waterfalls didn't usually have lightning crashing through them. Wherever the lightning cut the air, clusters of tiny red fireballs exploded around it like firecrackers. I couldn't make out the settlement, though the graphics showed it as right

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in front of us.

"I quit," the beauty said, leaning across my shoulder to look at the screen.

"You can't quit," I said automatically.

"I've worked without pay for over a year, but I'm not working in that." He pointed at the screen.

I could almost make out a bulky shape coming toward the ship. A fireball filled the screen. I flinched away from it.

"Besides, the extra gravity makes the tigers sluggish and the kongs mad. I'm not getting in the ring with them. Sorry, Sally," he said. He began pulling on a pressure suit.

I glanced back at the screen, hoping the bulky shape was Fensen, who would tell us the show was cancelled and he'd booked us somewhere else, but the shape had disappeared from the screen. Lightning flashed again, illuminating a huddle of metal temporaries against the side of a mountain. A string of fireballs lit the upper peaks like light bulbs on the midway.

"Did you tell Pop?" I asked.

"I tried to," he said disgustedly. "He was in no condition to hear me." He put on his helmet, tightened it down, and shut the airlock behind him. It opened again almost immediately. The bulky shape I'd seen outside came through dripping with rain that smelled like disinfectant. Fensen ripped off his helmet and yelled, "What in the hell are you doing here?" Ammonia dripped off his suit onto the deck. "What in the hell happened on Peoria?"

"We lit out, just like you told us to," I shouted back. "You sent for us, remember?"

"Why would I do that? I told you to stay put, that I was going to cancel our contract. How the hell are we supposed to put on a show in that stuff?" He waved at the screens.

That's what I wanted to know, but I didn't think it was smart to ask Fensen. The rain outside had slowed to a cloudburst, and the fireballs seemed a little farther away, though I still fought the instinct to duck every time one exploded. "You mean you didn't tell us to come, that we could do an open-air and save money?"

"Open-air!" he exploded. "Janus has got an air pressure three times ours, it does this day in and day out, and it's freezing cold! The only reason it's not snowing out there is because ammonia's mixed in with the water. We'll have to pressurize the tent, heat it, and use air locks for the performances, if we have any acts who'll work under these conditions." He ran a wet, ammonia-smelling hand through his hair. "I still don't see why you came. I told Lizzie—"

"He didn't deliver the message right. He said you wanted us to pull a slip and come right away. I'm sorry," I said.

There was a funny rumbling sound, like Lizzie would make tapdancing.

"I forgot to tell you the best part," Fensen said. "The mountains are the only part of Janus that passes for even remotely habitable, but they've got a hydrogen atmosphere on one side and an oxygen one on the other, and when the two atmospheres get together, they explode. And the mountains are volcanic, and they're tectonically active," he said, and the deck came up and smacked us in the face.

Fensen was flat on his back, and I was on top of him. I could hear the kongs screaming all the way from the menagerie hold. The screens were going crazy with fireballs. Fensen was flailing his arms in the bulky suit, trying to right himself. I helped him up, and went to kill Lizzie.

He was slumped in his cage in the hold, flattened to the floor by the gravity, his short forelegs splayed out under him as if he had fallen. He was breathing heavily and slowly.

Lizzie! I said, not even trying to make contact first. *What's the idea of lying to me about Fensen's report?*

Lizzie was looking steadily at me, his yellow eye fixed unblinkingly on mine, but he wasn't hearing me. I doubt if he even saw me. The wide slash of silence across my mind was as vivid as the blinding after-image of a fireball. He was talking to his new friend, and he had shut me out completely. *I'll talk to ya till I don't like ya no more, kid he had said. Deal?*

Deal.

I went back up to the cabin. "How long before we get a break in the weather?" I asked Fensen.

"This is a break in the weather."

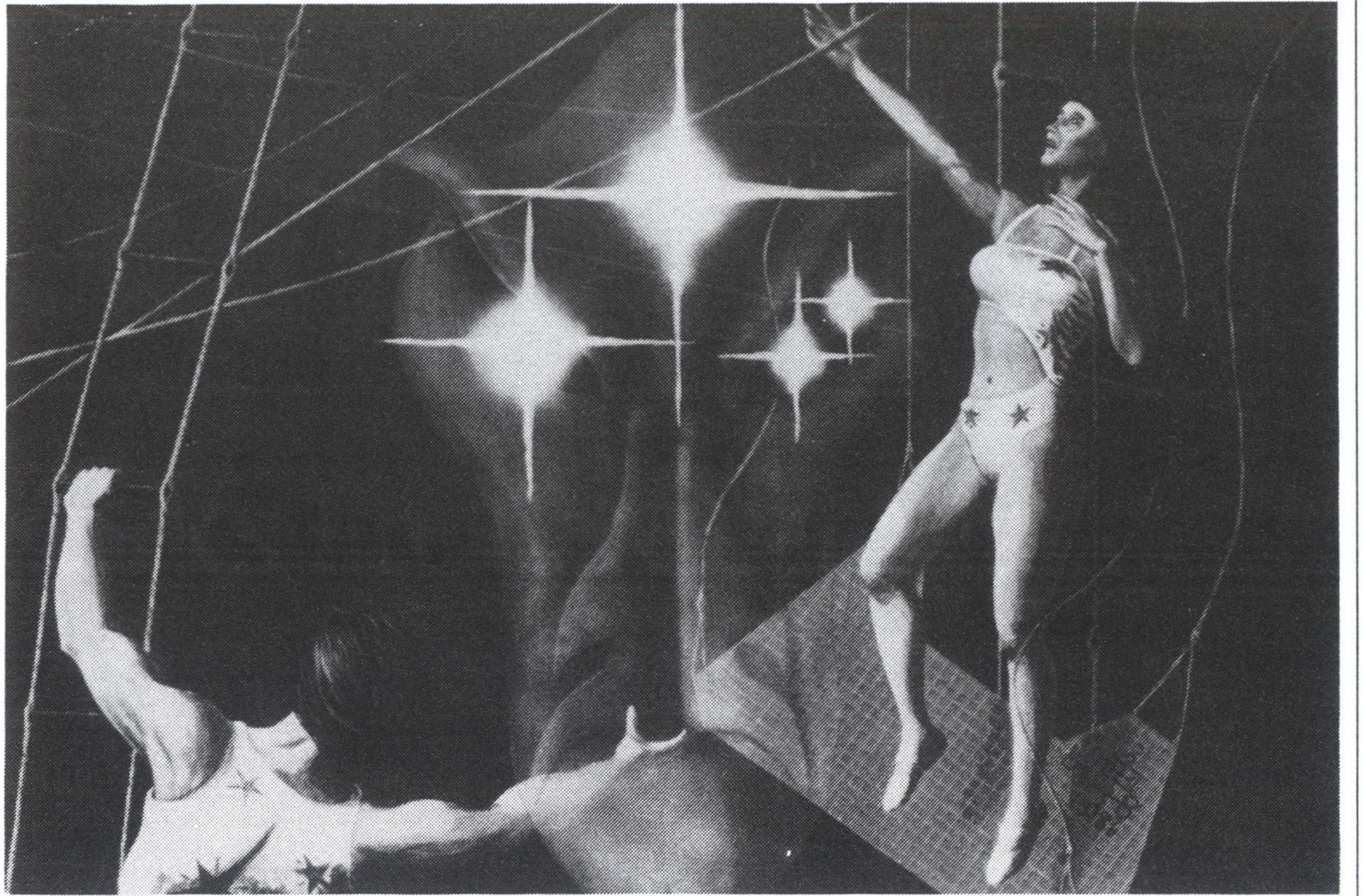
"Can you get the tent up?"

"I guess. Have we got any acts to put in it?"

"I don't know," I said. "The beauty quit. Lizzie can't do her act in this gravity, and I doubt if the pachs can either. Pop could maybe fill in for the beauty."

Fensen shook his head. "He's out. He must have gotten hold of some stims on Peoria. Where'd he get the money?"

"Go put the tent up," I said. "I'll see if I can



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talk everybody into going on."

Fensen looked like he was going to argue with me, then picked up his helmet from where it had rolled into a corner when the earthquake hit.

"Is the atmosphere poisonous?" I said, thinking of the money it was going to cost us to distill our own oxygen.

"No, it's breathable, but the rain's full of ammonia. If you stay out in it very long, you can get burned."

Yeah.

I talked hard and fast all afternoon. It didn't do much good. The pachs were in as bad shape as Lizzie, and the reds flatly refused to do the Butterfly up at the top of the tent, even though I told them the tent was grounded and that they couldn't be electrocuted even if lightning did strike. The other acts agreed to go on, because they didn't have any alternative. And neither did I. By the time Fensen got us another booking, Peoria would have posted warrants. The only way we could get off this stupid planet was to pay our bills, and the only way to do that was to put on a show.

I ran into Tay on my way back up to the airlock. He was coming from the hold. "Lizzie's having a rough time. He can hardly move."

"We're doing the wallenda tonight," I said.

"In this weather?" he said incredulously. "Are you crazy?"

"We don't have any choice," I said, and thought, thanks to Pop. And poor Lizzie. "We've got bills to pay." I went into the cabin and grabbed a pressure suit.

He followed me. "Fine. Put on a show. But leave out the wallenda. This place has twice our gravity. Even if we rig the trapezes at half-height, a fall could still kill you."

I pulled on a suit and fastened the seals. "Look," I said, suddenly unable to stand the thought of talking to him any more, "the beauty's walked, the reds won't do their Butterfly, the pachs and Lizzie are out. We're the only thing that's left."

"Pull another slip."

"Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't you? You said Lizzie belonged in a real show, not a dog-and-pony show like this. Well, if we pull a slip, she'll be in one. Peoria probably already has warrants out. They'll attach the circus for our assets, and Lizzie'll get sold to pay our lot rent. Is that what you want?"

"You can't do the wallenda. I won't let you."

"I have to talk to Fensen," I said, and put the helmet of my suit on and stepped into the lock.

"Sally, wait—" he said, and I shut the door in his face and went out into the deluge to see if Fensen had gotten the tent up.

He had, but he didn't think we should have the show either. "It'll take all afternoon to get it pressurized and heated, which doesn't leave us any time to get set up for the acts, and we won't even make it back on the gate. Janus only has a couple of hundred miners. And I'm worried about the tent. If there's an earthquake while you're up on that trapeze—"

"We already had our earthquake for today. Did you get the nets up?"

"They have three to four earthquakes a day, and that's not our only problem. There's the gravity. At two gees, your timing is going to be completely off. The air pressure inside the tent's only a third of what's pressing down from outside. If one of those fireballs burns a hole in the tent, air and rain and ammonia are going to come pouring in."

"What's the weather supposed to be like tonight?"

"The locals say that as the temperature drops, there are fewer thermals and less exchange of oxygen and hydrogen," Fensen admitted. "They say things will calm down a little, but that doesn't mean there won't be fireballs, and that doesn't mean one of them won't burn through the tent."

"The tent can reseal and repressurize," I said.

"Which is fine for the yokels down here, but what if you're up there doing your wallenda?" He pointed at the roof of the tent. "What if the rigging collapses?"

He must have been talking to Tay. "That's what the nets are for."

"I don't have time to get the nets up!" Fensen shouted. "Haven't you been listening? We're barely going to have the rings and the risers set up by tonight, let alone nets, and even if we could get them up, I don't think it's safe to do anything at the top of the tent. Lizzie says the whole tent could collapse from the pressure."

"Lizzie!" I said. "Since when does Lizzie talk to you?"

"Since this afternoon. He told me he thinks we should cancel the show."

"It's not his show," I said. "You tell Lizzie from me that we're doing a show and the wallenda, and if he doesn't like it, he can come and talk to me about it in person!"

Earthquakes and fireballs or not, we had a straw house. These miners hadn't seen a circus or a red for a long time. They would have liked anything, which was a good thing because we didn't have much to offer. Pop was still out. Fensen, squeezed into Pop's swallowtail coat, announced the acts. One of the rousts put the sleepy tigers through their paces, the reds paraded in their Butterfly costumes, and I took the pach that seemed to be in the best shape and rode him while he dragged his way around the ring.

The rain thudded deafeningly against the tent. It didn't seem to have let up much, though by intermission there weren't quite so many fireballs. In spite of Fensen's running the heaters at full blast, the temperature was dropping. I shivered into my blue spangles in the improvised dressing room next to the backdoor and then went up to the trapeze platform so Tay wouldn't be able to try to talk me out of the wallenda again.

It wouldn't have taken much talking. Fensen was right. The top of the tent was dangerous. The lightning outside was crackling and popping like grease in a pan, and the rigging wasn't attached to anything but the roof of the tent. Besides, I was afraid of heights, especially at two gees, and I didn't have Lizzie to talk me out onto the trapeze. She was busy talking to Fensen. Fensen!

Far below me, the spot illuminated Fensen, and he waved his arms and said something I couldn't hear. The spot hit me full in the face, swung back across to Fensen, and then focused on Tay as he took his cape off at the foot of the climbing ladder. Even from this far away, I could see he looked furious.

Lightning sizzled above my head. The platform swayed a little. There was a sudden crack like someone striking a match, and the platform toppled over.

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I grabbed with my free arm in the sudden drenching rain and then was sorry. The guy wires were going, too. The only thing that was going to stay put was the ground-braced ladder, and I was swinging away from that as a whole triangle of the tent gave way. I looked up, got a mouthful of ammonia, and saw that the automatic sealer was already sending out grabbers to grasp the next section of tent and pull it taut. Sealant sprayed onto the grabbers.

I was still choking on the foul-tasting rain. I gasped, gulping in rain and air, knowing that was the wrong thing to do, that I should hold my breath, but the added air pressure was making me feel like I wasn't breathing at all, and I couldn't help myself.

I clung to the platform with both hands. I still had something to brace my feet against, but the ammonia rain was slippery, and the platform was slanting at an ever-increasing angle. This part of the rigging was built into the section of tent that was now dangling by one edge. I wondered how long I could hang on with just my hands in this gravity. There was a hum, and I felt myself being pulled downward.

The pumps had come on, trying to suck out air and restore the air pressure. "The tent can seal itself and repressurize, can't it?" I'd told Fensen. Well, it was doing just that, and it was going to kill me in the process. I wondered if I could work up the courage to let go and fall into the nets. I looked down. I wouldn't have to bother. Fensen hadn't gotten the nets up.

The platform swayed again and then went completely over and hung nearly upside down beside me. I wrapped my wrist around the guy wire and yelled for Lizzie in the menagerie hold.

Hang on. I'm coming to get you.

I didn't have any time to think how little sense that made because there was another fireball, and the trapeze rigging came free and fell across my arm. I didn't feel anything at first. Then I realized I was only hanging on by one arm, and when I tried to raise the other one to the nearly horizontal guy wire, I was hit again, this time by a wave of nausea. I closed my eyes.

Hang on. I'm coming. Don't let go. I love you. Hang on! said the voice inside my head.

Don't be ridiculous, Lizzie, I said. *My arm is broken, and you can't even move.*

I opened my eyes. Tay was coming up the climbing ladder. When he got to the top, he began to pump it like a swing.

"What are you doing here?" I said as he swung over to me, and I let go.

He caught me by the bad arm, and I went out like a light.

When I came to, I was in the ship's airlock with my arm in a cast. Tay was sitting beside me on the floor, looking angry.

"You were up there almost five minutes in three times the tent's air pressure," he said, "but we're not taking any chances. We've got this set on an hour's decompression. We put you through a shower to get the ammonia off, and what you swallowed was diluted enough not to burn you, but you're supposed to drink this." He held out a cup of thick white liquid.

I drank it, holding the cup clumsily in my good hand. I was beginning to shiver from reaction.

"Get out of your wet clothes," Tay said. He held out a robe. I tried to peel off my armlets but couldn't, I was shaking so much.

Tay pulled them off and started to get me out of my leotard. He jabbed at the velcro. "So now you know," he said furiously.

"Know what?"

"That I'm not a roustabout, that I never worked for Ringling, that I'm a big phony."

He yanked the peel open. I wriggled out of the sopping costume. "So am I," I said, and handed him my robe.

"Any halfwit sunshiner could have gotten you down from there without breaking your arm. A roust would have seen to it the nets were up that first night, but oh, no, I was too busy with my little schemes. Well, not any more." He held the robe for me, and I eased my good arm into it and sort of draped the other sleeve over my shoulder. "No more pretending, Sally. Tomorrow I'm going to go tell my father that the deal is off, and tonight you and I are going to do what we should have done in the first place, and nobody's going to interfere. I've already seen to that."

I stopped shivering. "I'm supposed to be decompressing," I said.

He unbuttoned his flat slippers. "What we're going to do won't give you the bends."

"I don't know anything about..."

"Neither do I. We'll learn together."

It was now or never. I was going to have to tell him. "I'm a white."

"Well, of course," he said, peeling off his coverall. "You're a circus kid. What else would you be?"

It was now or never, all right. I shrugged out

of the robe. He was very careful with my arm.

They were gone the next morning. Both of them. Pop came out of his stim comedown with a jolt and started raving about how Lizzie'd been stolen.

"You can't steal Lizzie," I said bleakly. "He has to want to go."

"He's under contract to this circus," he said.

"And this circus now legally belongs to P.T. Barnum the Sixteenth," I said.

His face went slack.

"I sent Fensen to Peoria this morning," I said. "He'll find that all our bills were paid by Barnum the Younger. After he got you high on stims. And stole the money out of my shoe."

"I'll kill him if he makes one move to try and take this circus," Pop said.

"Why should he?" I said coldly. "He's already got what he wants."

"What's the matter with you?" Pop shouted. "He takes Lizzie away from you, and you act like you don't even care."

"Why should I?" I said. "He didn't steal Lizzie. Lizzie wanted to go with him. And I got what I wanted, too. But don't worry. I didn't besmirch your precious circus traditions by going to bed with some sunshiner. Oh, no, I did it up right. The great man's son. Phineas Taylor Barnum the Seventeenth. Not bad for the kid of a dog-and-pony show like this, huh?"

We stayed on Janus because there wasn't anything else to do. Pop pressurized the wagon and the menagerie tent and set up a shell game and the wheel of fortune. The storm settled into a vicious downpour with fireball accents. Fensen tried to confirm our bookings, but the word was already out that Lizzie was on his way to Kaycee, so nobody was interested. We lost six acts in two days. Pop sat in the wagon and drank between yokels. He said he was off stims for life.

I pondered the fascinating aspects of betrayal and the many advantages of being a red, the main one being that I had learned a lot. Once I thought I heard a faint, *Hang on, I'm coming*, which was obviously wishful thinking, considering that distance had never made any difference to Lizzie before. But then, he had his new friends the Barnums and why should he want to talk to me?

Fensen left me alone except when he had to recast my arm. Then he gave me helpful advice like I never should have skipped Peoria on Lizzie's say-so and he had known all along Barnum was on Kaycee. I told him to come back when he had something important to tell me.

He did. "He's back," he said, standing in the door of my bunk on the ship, holding the helmet of his pressure suit.

"Who's back?" I said, and my heart did a triple off the trapeze. What was I saying about reds being smarter?

"Tay. I mean, the younger Mr. Barnum. He just came in on a courier ship. He's got Lizzie with him. I just put him down in the hold."

"Tell Mr. Barnum I don't want to see him," I said. "Tell him to go to hell."

"Hello, Sally," Tay said from behind him. He stepped into the cabin. Fensen pulled on his helmet and backed out.

"Forget something?" I said. "The pachs maybe? The big top?" I started past him out the door.

He grabbed my good arm. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, I've got it. Breaking one arm wasn't enough. You decided to come back and break the other one." I wrenched free of him and got all the way to the cabin and almost to the airlock before he grabbed me again.

"Let go of me," I said.

"Not until you tell me what's going on. What's all this talk about stealing the pachs and breaking arms? What's happened?"

I turned to face him. "What's happened? Oh, not much. Our circus got foreclosed on, Lizzie abandoned me, I got... taken. Is that enough?"

"Yesterday you said you loved me. You said you didn't see any reason why there couldn't be a circus merger. You told me to hurry back."

"Yesterday I was sitting here with a broken arm trying to get bookings for a circus nobody wants without Lizzie. How the hell do you know what I said?"

He let go of my arm. "But Lizzie said... when he talked to you yesterday..."

"Lizzie hasn't talked to me since Peoria," I said. I grabbed a suit and helmet and started into the airlock to find Fensen and Pop and have Tay thrown off Janus. Tay grabbed my arm again.

"You do that once more, and I'll break your arm," I said.

"I want to get something straight," he said. "So stand still. When was the last time you talked to Lizzie?"

"Before we landed on Janus. He was relaying Fensen's instructions on the jump, only they weren't the ones Fensen sent." I looked steadily at him. "He was lying. He used to tell the truth. He used to give me good advice, too, like don't go

to bed with Tay, he's no sunshiner. He's out to steal the circus. I should have listened to him."

"Lizzie!" he shouted out loud. "Where the hell are you?"

Keep your pants on, kid, Lizzie said inside my head. *I'm right here.*

Oh, great. Now instead of that painful band of silence I was going to have to listen to them talk. I tried to shut Lizzie out.

I don't know what you're up to, Tay said, *but you had no right to lie to me that you were talking to Sally.*

Who says, kid? I'm a lizard. I got all kinds of rights you never heard of.

She thinks I stole the circus. She thinks I took her to bed and then made off with you. Tell her what we were doing in Kaycee, Lizzie!

Tell her yourself.

I thought you cared about her. You let her sit here for two weeks with a broken arm.

And a broken heart, kid. She was really torn up over you. Cried all the time.

I did not, I said.

Like I say, kid, you want the truth, you gotta get it from the horse's mouth. None of this go-between stuff. You never know when the go-between's lyin'.

Go to hell, Tay said.

Whatever you say, kid, Lizzie said and went away somewhere.

And left us together.

Sally? Tay said hesitantly. It sounded like a whisper inside my head.

What was it you wanted to tell me? I said. It was so quiet I could hear my heart.

I did come here to steal the circus. For my father. He's wanted Lizzie for years. Lizzie knew immediately what I was up to. He told me so, but he didn't try to stop me. He let me hang around, paying off the beauty and taking care of the bills. He even told me where you hid the cashbox money. I thought I had it made, that he wanted to go with me. There was just one hitch. It wasn't Lizzie I wanted. It was you.

But you took Lizzie.

To tell my father to go to hell. To tell him it was my circus, my name on all the receipts, and I was giving it back to you. As a wedding present. I took Lizzie with me to get him off Janus. The gravity's murder on him, and he said he wanted to go along so he could "persuade" my father to cooperate and so we could talk to each other. It's obvious now he had other plans.

Of course I had other plans, Lizzie said. *You think I want to work a crummy little mud show like this forever? I worked out a merger idea Pop Bailey and old P.T. can't refuse. Barnum and Bailey. Nice sound to it, ain't it? And now that I got you two kids back together...*

Back together! I exploded. You've done everything you could to keep us apart.

And whose fault's that, kid? Two weeks ago you couldn't hear Tay for sour apples, not even when he was trying to get you down from that broken rigging. I shoulda let you fall on your head. It mighta knocked some sense into ya. But I didn't. I was nice. I let ya sit here for two weeks till you was ready to listen to Tay here. I told ya sufferin' was good for ya.

It was you, I said to Tay. *I did hear you. You said, "Hang on. I'm coming. I love you." It wasn't Lizzie. It was you.*

I almost lost you. I couldn't get to you, and all I could think of was how you were up there because of me, how if I hadn't tried to steal Lizzie, you wouldn't have been up there on that platform.

Yeah, yeah, Lizzie said. *Cut the corn. We got business to discuss with Pop.*

I ignored her. It was you on the trapeze, too, wasn't it? I said. *That's why I wasn't afraid.*

I tried to tell myself I was just using you to get to Lizzie, but when that yokel tried to...

I didn't think you even knew what was happening.

I knew, he said grimly. *I heard you yell for Lizzie.*

Awright, awright, you done enough moonin' around, Lizzie said. *We gotta talk Pop into this merger and then scam. Fensen's got us booked onto the Seven Sisters Circuit. We're gonna play the Pleiades.*

Go to hell, we both said. Lizzie went.

How's your arm? Tay said.

Better, I said, listening for Lizzie. He seemed to be gone, but that didn't mean he wasn't listening, and if he was gone, what was he plotting now? He had already stolen one circus, and hadn't Pop said the Ringlings were working the Pleiades?

"You're sure you're all right?" Tay said out loud. "You didn't get the bends or anything?"

"I didn't get the bends or anything," I said, and smiled at him.

On the screens, fireballs crackled and popped, and down in the hold, where Lizzie was probably up to no good, one of the kongs screamed with rage.

- ABO -

Trackdown

(Continued from page 24)

thwest rose somberly against a gray sky. Directly in front of the deer, a high narrow ridge climbed out of the surrounding forest and over the base of a mountain. A distinct set of tracks ran up the snowy rise. The deer seemed to nod and then, crossing to the other end of the ridge, climbed back up again. This time it kept to the windswept rocks and left no trail.

The two men on the snowmobile weren't very big, but their down-filled jackets and insulated hats gave the appearance of bulk. The man in front guided the machine easily over the crusty snow, winding through the trees, smoothly avoiding the stumps and patches of bare gravel. The man in back surveyed the frozen woods with narrow black eyes. In his arms he held a heavy, big-bore rifle.

"Hold it, Avery," he told the driver. His words were lost under the whine of the snowmobile's engine and he repeated himself, louder. Avery cut the throttle and the machine glided to a halt. Before it stopped, however, the man with the rifle leaped off and was studying the ground. "Lookit here," he said.

Avery let his eyes follow the tracks up the ridge. "Looks like he's doing the same thing he's been doing all morning, Rex. Heading in a pretty straight line for the northwest checkpoint."

Rex chuckled. "Not quite. Look at the angle where the tracks go into the snow."

"Yeah?"

"Notice how it doesn't cut the snow quite cleanly — it's sorta scuffed. See, the scuff is at the front of the track."

"So what, Rex?"

"So that deer wasn't going up the ridge, he was going down it. Backwards, so as to make us think he was going the other way."

Avery whistled admiringly. "That sure is one smart deer."

"For ten thousand bucks he oughta be."

The deer had spent the last hour weaving between trees. There was enough snow in the woods to leave tracks, but at least the complicated trail would keep his pursuers from getting up much speed on the snowmobile. Now he came out of the woods to a wide stream. Carefully he evaluated the scenery. There were two checkpoints, he had been told. Back at the ranch, he had been shown them on a map. One lay to the northwest, the other to the south. "If you can reach a checkpoint," they had told him, "you're safe for another year. We'll be rooting for you." The deer shook the snow off his back and snorted. Then he skirted the edge of the ice, bending his head low to listen. Beneath the frozen surface he could hear water running. He reached out one hoof and tapped the ice, then listened some more. After a few false starts he crossed the stream and struck out again towards the northwest.

Rex and Avery stopped the snowmobile when they got out of the woods. They drank coffee from a thermos Avery had packed and whiskey from a bottle Rex carried in his pocket. "You ever done anything like this before, Avery?"

Avery shook his head. "Ten thousand dollars is too much for me, Rex. I've done the duck blinds, though. Have you tried the duck hunts?"

"Not the smart ones. Just the regular ones. You mean where they train the ducks to fly across this certain field and you just wait for them?"

"Yeah. But those genetically engineered ducks, they're something else. Fast, maneuverable; they can do loops, fly in formation. When they get really desperate they'll fly right at you." He smiled at the memory. "What a hunt! They were coming right down like dive bombers."

"I know what you mean. Take this deer, for instance. No ordinary deer ever gave me a chase like this one. Those scientists have really put the sport back into hunting."

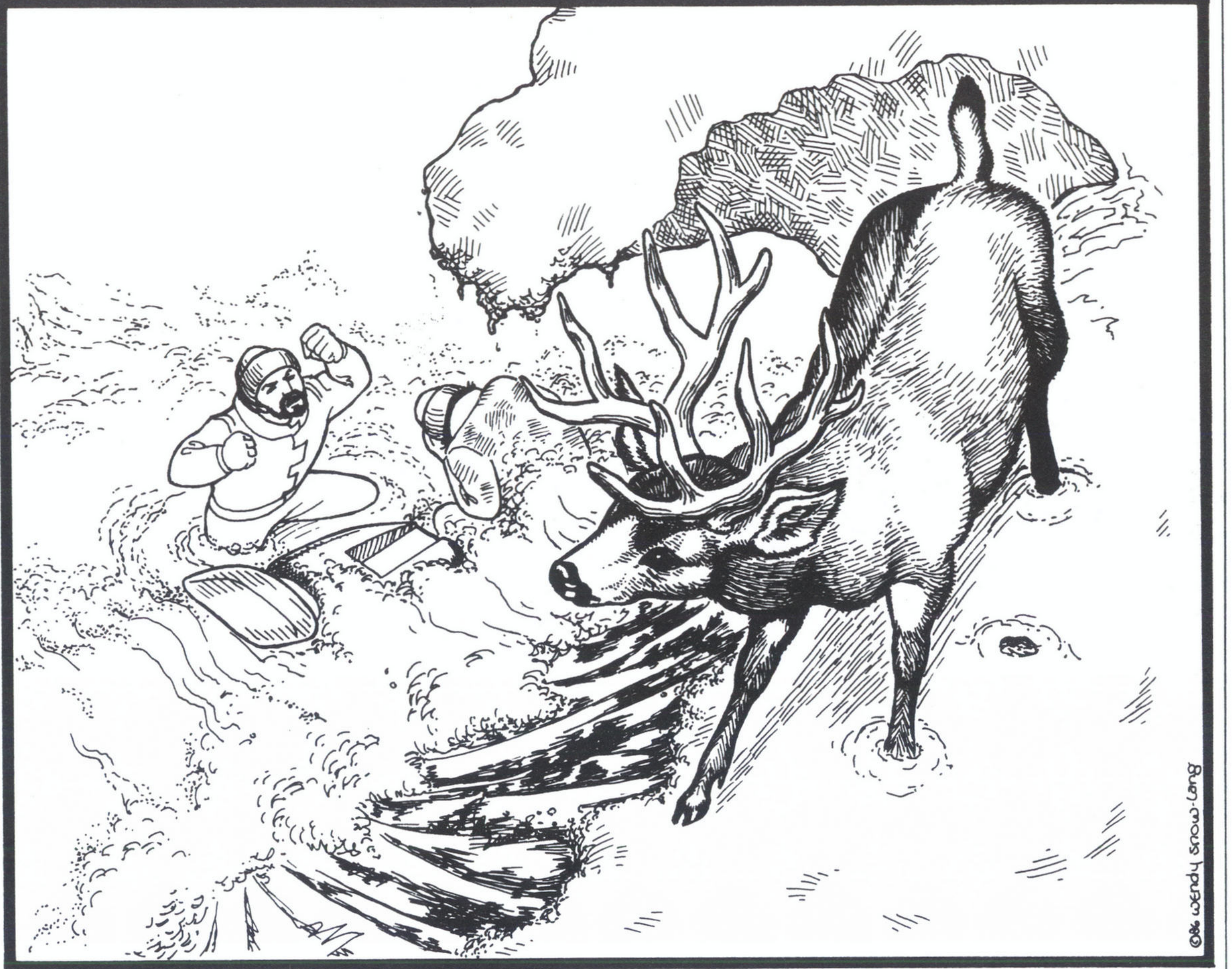
"Well," Avery looked across the stream. "This oughta be over pretty soon, Rex. He's still going northwest and there's not much cover in that direction."

"You think it's that easy? This ain't a duck, Avery. Notice how he went out a little way onto the ice, then came back, then tried again, finally crossed on the third try?"

"Yeah, so?"

"So, you want to follow him?"

Avery gave him a quizzical look, then started to mount the snowmobile. "No," Rex



Art by Wendy Snow-Lang

said. "Leave it here. Just walk out a little ways."

With a long backward look, Avery walked out on the ice. "If a big buck like that can cross, it oughta be safe for me." He bent down to examine the tracks, trying to see what Rex saw. A foot went through the ice. "What the hell!" He yanked it back and his other foot went through. Avery threw himself backwards and flung apart his arms, trying to spread his weight over as much area as possible. Cracks formed in the ice all around him as he floundered and slid to the shore. On the bank, Rex was laughing uproariously.

"The weight of that deer weakened the ice just enough," Rex told Avery as he helped him to his feet. "If we had followed the trail across, both of us on the snowmobile, we'd have gone right through."

Avery was trying to get his breath. "That is one hell of a deer."

"Sure is. We'll cross upstream a bit."

Far ahead, the big buck heard the whine of the snowmobile. He had been running steadily for almost five hours now. His breath came in ragged coughs and several times he stumbled. Lowering his head against the chill wind, he turned into a narrow, steep-sided ravine. Banks of snow overhung the top and drifts lay across the floor where small avalanches had occurred. The buck considered carefully, weighed his chances. Then slowly, carefully, delicately, he picked his way through the deep shadows at the bottom of the ravine. At the far end he turned to the left and disappeared.

A snowshoe hare was nosing around the entrance to its burrow. Avery eyed it. "I wish I'd brought along my twenty-two. We could have done some plinking while we were riding."

"Uh huh," said Rex.

"I saw some squirrel too. You can hunt squirrel even with a big-bore rifle like yours, Rex."

"Uh huh."

"You don't aim for the squirrel, cause you'd just blow him apart and then you can't use the pelt. So you shoot the tree branch under the squirrel. The concussion stuns them and they fall to the ground. Then you just pick them up while they're still stunned and bash their heads against the tree to kill them."

"Uh huh."

"Hey, Rex, why are we stopping?"

"Now why did he go in there?" Rex muttered. "That ravine runs straight north. He had a cleaner run going the way he was."

"Maybe he's lost."

"Lost! These deer are specially designed and bred for one purpose — to get to the checkpoint alive. They don't get lost."

"Okay, okay. Don't bite my head off."

Rex inched the snowmobile cautiously into the ravine. The revving of the engine echoed hollowly off the walls. "Hey, Rex, you gonna eat

this deer when we get it?"

"Naw. I'm not much on game meat. I just like to kill them."

There was a deep booming. Avery looked up. Huge chunks of snow were crumbling from the overhang. "Avalanche!" he cried. The snowmobile whined crazily and shot forward as Rex twisted the throttle. Huge chunks of snowbank were falling all around. Avery heard a *wumff* as he was thrown backwards under tons of snow. He lay stunned for a few minutes and then began kicking and thrashing his feet. The white slush loosened enough for him to sit up, his head popped out of the snow and he saw he was only waist deep. "Rex," he called. Then he saw Rex, sitting on the half-buried snowmobile, wiping the snow from his face. "Damn that deer. You okay, Rex?" Suddenly the buck appeared, on top of the ravine, framed against the sky, a perfect target. "There he is! Get him, Rex. Shoot him. Shoot!" The buck bounded away.

Rex continued to sit on the snowmobile. "Dammit, Rex! Why didn't you shoot?"

"I can't see to shoot, Avery." Avery floundered through the snow and looked at him closely. There were smears of blood on his face and myriads of tiny scratches around his eyes. "My eyes are swollen shut. I got hit with a face full of ice spicules. It'll be hours before the swelling goes down." Rex wore a mournful expression. "Damn it, Avery, that son of a bitch deer has beaten me."

Dusk was falling before the buck stopped again. Across one last field he could see the lights of the checkpoint. The deer allowed himself to relax. Only a few hundred yards and he was safe. He would be put in a truck and taken back to the ranch, where he would be fed and trained for another season. Another year until some hunter paid a price to match wits with a specially bred, genetically engineered, intelligent game animal.

Another year of life. The deer began to cross the field with a gentle lope.

There was a sudden stab of pain and the buck was jolted to the side. Astounded, he looked around. A man was standing at the end of the field. He was raising a rifle. He was sighting down the barrel. There was a roaring in his ears and the deer knew no more.

"Good shot, Avery."

"Thanks, Rex. Hey, thanks for letting me shoot your deer."

"Don't mention it. I paid ten thousand for the animal, I'm glad somebody got to shoot him."

"You want the antlers, Rex?"

"Naw, you keep 'em, Avery. I'm gonna try again next year. You know what they're coming up with. They're gonna give the deer vocal ability."

"Vocal ability?"

"Yeah, they're gonna design a deer that will scream and beg for mercy when you shoot it."

"Hey, that'll be all right. They sure got some deer, Rex."

- ABO -

The ABO Art Gallery

The ABO Art Gallery

Since good art is as important to us as good stories, we want to do what we can to help artists bring their work to a wider audience.

In the ABO Art Gallery, we will let artists offer quality prints of their art for sale to the public.

We will also give our readers an opportunity to acquire mounted photo-quality prints of our covers. These covers will be big. Most of them are 11 by 14 inches in size and are mounted and matted, ready for framing.

ABO is not being printed on a coated stock run on a heatset press. This means that our artwork is not printed as true to its original color and texture as possible. (We'd have to charge \$6 per copy to print the magazine that way.)

The ABO Art Gallery is your chance to obtain a glossy print of one or more of our covers which is as crisp and sharp as the original artwork.

And for those of you who really like our inside art, if enough of you express interest in any of our interior illustrations, we will make prints available of that, too, for the same price — \$35 per print.

So when you read the magazine and see an illustration you just have to have, write and tell us. If enough readers agree, we'll make that print available.

Other artists

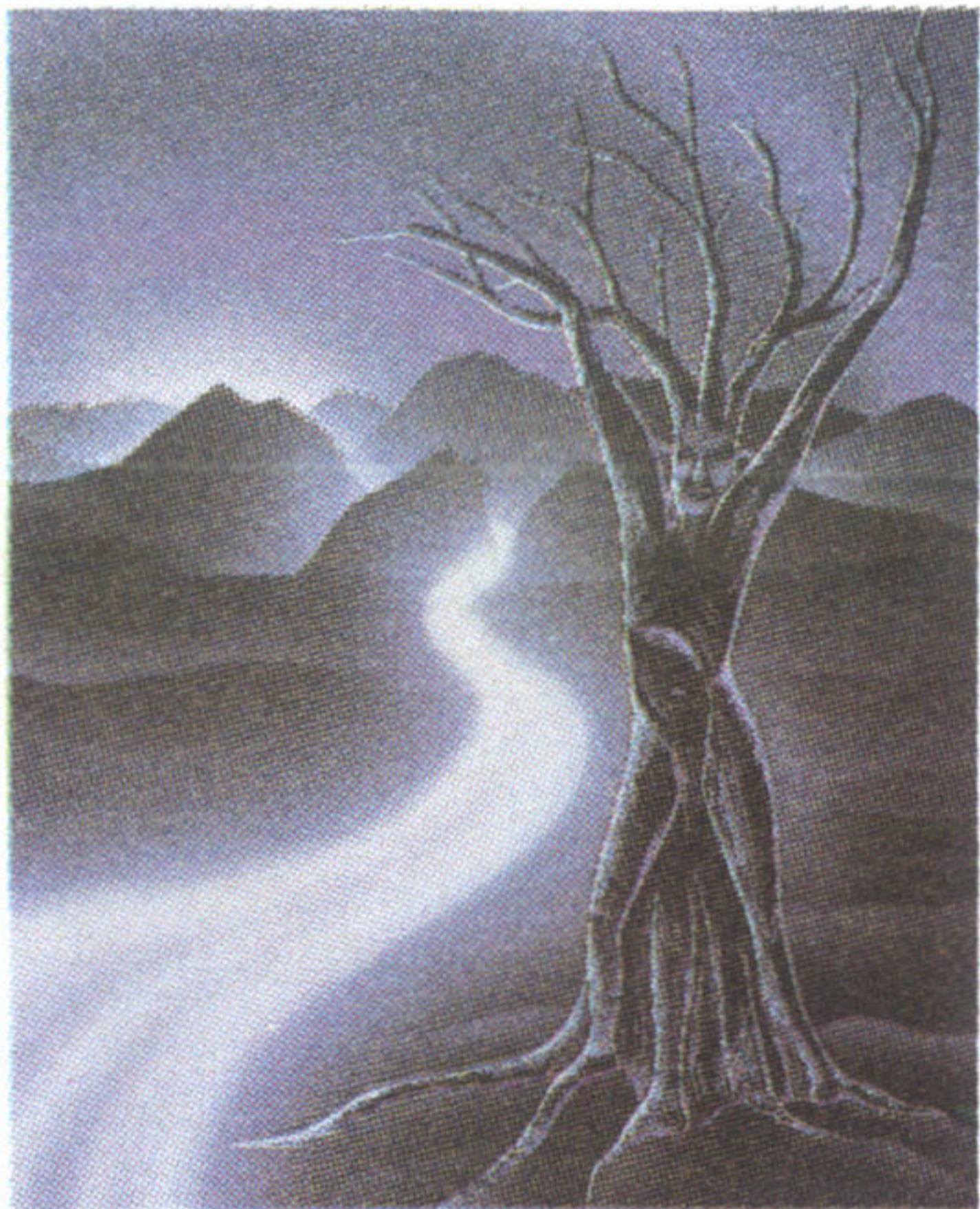
Because we think art and artists are important, we are not restricting the ABO Art Gallery to our covers, we will also feature art by artists other than those who appear in our pages. The covers, you order from us.

Art by other artists should be ordered directly from the artist.

This issue we are featuring two art prints by Jacqueline Prosser, a nationally recognized artist from Wisconsin.

The ABO Art Gallery is open to any artist who wants to display and sell prints of their art. For more information, or to order prints, please write to:

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