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ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

March-April 1990 / \$3.50 U.S. / \$4.50 Canada

The Gateway Concordance, Part II

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The Ultimate Long Shot

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Peacekeeper

By David Brin

And Stories By:

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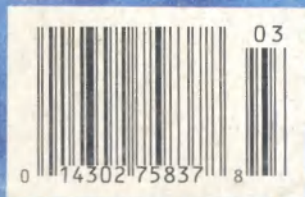
GREGOR HARTMANN

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STEVE MARTINDALE



BRIAN
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A Month of Sundays

Mud covered the Paducah wellfield of the Time Oil Company. Orange mud, green mud, blue mud. Mud like you find in the guts of feverish rivers, mud made of bullheads and bluegills and whiskery old cats.

Down the road trotted a young man in a mustard-colored sportscoat. He was a little guy with a ginger mustache and lots of bantam in his walk. Small as he was he could have climbed over the chainlink fence around the field, but he cupped his clean pink indoor hands and shouted, "Hey, Gordon! It's Mars. Let me in."

No answer from the decrepit house. Gordon must be under a mood.

Mars Shubert looked back over his shoulder at the ominous silent road, then shouted more desperately.

"Gordon Embree, I know you're in there. Let me in. It's a curly afternoon in a Sunday world and I need some big advice."

The house was silent as a barn where the kids are up to no good. Mars Shubert was a resourceful young man. Sneaky, too; a good trait in a reporter. He held up a paper bag and shook it. "I brought you something good," he called. The tiny brown noise rustled through the fence and crinkled up to the house and scratched on a dusty window.

The house rumbled. The window glass rattled. The door burst open and Gordon Embree squeezed out. Fat? Try immense. He looked like two men jammed into one body, with extra meat glopped on around the middle. The porch trembled as he boomed down the steps. Gordon wasn't fast — he had to balance all his big parts as he lumbered over to where Mars waited — but boy was he strong; one flick of his big soft arm and the heavy gate opened easy as a wink.

Gordon eyed the bag. "Is that what I think it is?"

"Raspberry Swirl. Get it while it's cold." Mars handed him the ice cream and entered. While Gordon relocked the gate, Mars unobtrusively looked up and down the road. Coast still clear — so far.

The old farmhouse had porch on three sides, so they sat on the one with the sun. Gordon Embree subsided into a maroon sofa with most of the plush rubbed off. Mars Shubert took the rocker and commenced a-rocking. The floorboards squeaked a different tune since his last visit. Not surprising. The house was only 15 years old — it dated from the Rush — but it looked 60; it was hard to keep things new with time oil in the vicinity.

Gordon opened his toolbox, took out a soup spoon, and happily dug into the ice cream. Sugar was the only thing he could taste, but the colors brightened him. Meanwhile Mars admired the view. The mud didn't just lie around like lazy unenlightened low-tech mud. This mud had piled itself into daring mud mountains cut by fierce mud canyons. As Mars watched, a patch of mud shivered. New spring grass shot up in a poke of tender yellow-green shoots. Under Mars's eye the grass darkened and grew longer. Grass like you see in wet summer ditches, a vivid mini-jungle. In seconds, though, it drooped and shriveled. A flash of brown autumn — and

By Gregor Hartmann

Art by Larry Blamire

back into muck.

Mars turned to his friend.

"Gordon, I have to write a feature story for tomorrow's paper. Something about time oil. You've been here longer than me; fish around in your noggin and catch me an idea."

Gordon licked his lips with a purple tongue. "I hear Monroe Squires is starting another company. He's a trapezoidal cretin but he knows his bucks. People like to read about that stuff."

"I'm sick of feature stories that fawn over big shots. If I have to write up one more banker-businessman with his brains in his wallet I'm going to scream. I want to write about average folks with a strange secret. Post office clerks who recreate Pompeii's mosaics with stamps. Old secretaries who wear funny glasses and pan for gold on weekends."

"Freaks like me? Weird fat guys who live in time-oil fields?"

"Sure, why not? I know you have an interesting hobby."

"It's secret. Get off my land."

"OK, OK. Help me think of a story."

Gordon Embree kept to himself, so most people in town thought he was some kind of goofblob, fit only to repair fences and scare kids away from the time-oil wells. Mars Shubert knew better. Gordon Embree was a shrewd man, and an engineer to boot. He was shy around strangers because of his weight, but once he got to know you he'd open up. You should hear him talk about hotdip galvanized anchor bolts. Or close-grained gray cast-iron pumps. He could quote the specs on Class-125 iron flanges and make language flow like pressurized drilling fluids. It was a shame he hid himself in the mud. Paducah needed a good engineer-poet to tune the town *geist*.

Gordon closed his eyes to increase the pressure in his brain and began to think.

"How about the big blowout? Were you here then? Well 63 chuffed a gasket and blew time oil for four days. The plume went through Littlefield — lord, that was something! Cats going like rockets. Buildings turned gray and collapsed in an hour. Trees sprouted in the streets faster than people could cut them down. The Company spent a fortune on judges to get out of that one."

"That's history, Gordon. I need something personal. Something calm, to ease the Monday shock. Stories about time-oil disasters make folks jumpy."

"How about when Dr. Greenberg operated on Teresa Taylor? He was time-oiled, so when he opened her up and saw what the problem was he had time to read a couple of books and practice, then come back and finish. Hours of work — and for her it only took two minutes."

"You're getting closer. But the public is sick of clever Dr. Greenbergs. It makes them nervous. They're afraid their quack will start to operate, then sneak out to play a round of golf. What happens if he gets struck by lightning?"

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Aboriginal Science Fiction (ISSN 0895-3198) is published bimonthly by Absolute Entertainment Inc. in January, March, May, July, September, and November for \$14 a year. *Aboriginal Science Fiction* has editorial offices at 12 Emeline St., Woburn, MA 01801. (All mail should be directed to: *Aboriginal Science Fiction* P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, Massachusetts 01888-0849.) Second Class Postage Rates paid at Woburn, MA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Aboriginal Science Fiction* P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888-0849. The single copy price is \$3.50 (plus 50 cents postage-handling). Subscriptions are: \$14 for 6 issues, \$24 for 12 and \$32 for 18. Canadian and foreign subscriptions are: \$17 for 6 issues, \$30 for 12 issues and \$41 for 18 issues. Material from this publication may not be reprinted or used in any form without permission. Copyright © 1990 by *Aboriginal Science Fiction* and individually copyrighted by the authors and artists who have contributed to this March-April issue, Volume 4, Number 2, whole copy Number 20, published in January 1990.

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BOOK REVIEWS: Publishers who would like books to be reviewed should send one copy to Darrell Schweitzer, 113 Deepdale Road, Strafford, PA 19087; or to: Janice Eisen, 225 State Street, Apt. 454, Schenectady, NY 12305, and one copy to: *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888-0849.

Aboriginal Science Fiction would like to thank the *Daily Times Chronicle* and various members of SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of America) for their encouragement and assistance. □

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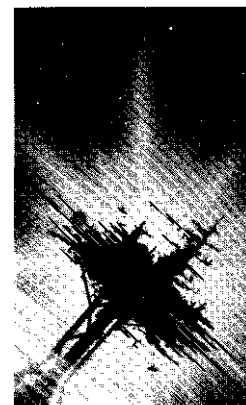
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ing? Who sews 'em up?"

"Well, how about Nelson Anticker? That genius kid? One night he locked himself in the library with lots of time oil. He spent the whole night reading every book and magazine in the place. The next morning he was 30 years older, but during the night he'd invented the Hesselflitter. Made his fortune and retired to Arizona."

"One kid. Now that's a human-interest feature. The problem is we've got too many smart-alecky Nelson Antickers. All the scientists are using time oil to get a jump on the competition. Inventions are piling up faster than we can use them. A new industrial revolution every Tuesday. The public is sick of show-off Nelson Antickers and their new ideas. Think how many Hesselflitters are sitting in closets and attics right now."

"I had one," Gordon admitted. He finished his ice cream and happily licked the spoon down to the metal.

At four o'clock Mars borrowed Gordon's phone and called around to see if a Paducah citizen had inadvertently handed him a feature story. "All quiet," said the cop on duty at the station. "Nothing's happening. No burglaries, no peace disturbers, no fights. I know Sunday is a slow day, but this is ridiculous. We're blowing the sirens to stay awake."

"No funny incidents I can pad into a human-interest feature?"

"Nothing. Not a thing. Hey, Emmet Cantril was in here looking for you. That story you wrote about his sister didn't sit well."

"It was a matter of public record."

"Kid, let me give you some advice. Anything the Cantrils do, we all know about it. You don't have to put it in the paper."

"If everyone knows, what's the big deal?"

"Ask Emmet," the cop hooted.

Mars Shubert hung up, then called the *Register* to show he was on the job. The editor reminded Mars he was holding space on page one for a human-interest feature story. Mars said it was half done.

Gordon had to make his rounds. He lent Mars a pair of boots and they set out. The mud stank like ten dead dogs. Twenty dead dogs. Make that thirty dead dogs and a bushel of skunks. Mars breathed through his mouth and tried to think of feature stories about roses. Lonnie Ferguson's greenhouse? Naw, he did that one on Mother's Day.

The stink didn't bother Gordon because he couldn't smell. He liked to say he got his job by accident. One day at work he was riding in the back of a pickup that flipped over and tumbled him down a hill. By the time he stopped bouncing, his back was busted and the nerve that ran from his nose to his brain was cut. No more smells for Gordon Embree. Since he couldn't lift heavy things, the Company made him a watchman. For 12 years he'd been sitting and eating and watching TV and watching the wells. He came into town only at night, to shop at a 24-hour market. Banking he did at machines. Lots of people knew his voice, since he liked to call and talk, but show himself? Never. Once Mars had coaxed him to a drive-in, but Gordon refused to get out of the truck.

The field was played out, so the wells were capped with small stone pyramids. The pipes were stone, too. Metals didn't last; the time oil ate them too fast. At each

Sundays

pyramid the engineer checked the pressure and temperature gauges. He noted the results on forms he carried on a brown clipboard, clenched to his side like a warrior's shield. The needles on the gauges never moved more than a degree, but Mars liked Gordon's heroic approach to duty. Monroe Squires and his wheely-dealy crowd talked a good game, but without worker-ants like Gordon Embree, Squires & Co. would be living in huts.

Walking in the mud was tricky. Mars slipped and floundered at every step. Gordon, on the other hand, had mastered a flippery skating technique that let him glide over the mud despite his weight. The struggle to keep up with him exhausted Mars. He also felt the ants-on-the-skin tingle of time oil.

"Time gas," Gordon said. "It seeps out of the wells." He peered around at the ground. "Watch."

Gordon lit a cigarette and flicked it down. The cigarette flared up, burned fiercely, vanished in a second. For an instant it was a delicate wisp of gray ash. Then it flattened and vanished in the mud.

"Wow."

"You have to be careful. Stand too long in the wrong spot and poof! Your boots rot off."

They finished checking the wells, then slogged and struggled back to the house. All around them blackberry canes sprouted, spread their leaves, coughed out pollen, and collapsed. It was fun to watch, like speeded-up movies in biology classes, but it wasn't a human-interest feature story. Mars wondered why newspapers used the term "deadline." To him the time a story was due was a wall, and he was a car without brakes zooming toward it.

To lubricate Mars's creative juices, Gordon opened his latest batch of blackberry wine. He'd started it only two days ago, but with time oil to speed up the process it was six-months smooth. They drank from Purdue University mugs, in honor of Gordon's alma mater, and looked at his latest poem, which he intended to send to the *Journal of Mackerel Engineering*. It started:

*Aqueduct, my heart
your imperial gift
complexes my rude farmer's chest.
I cannot fathom your design
you with your arms flung wide
wading in my carmine flow*

Intricate thoughts despaired in that vast body. Enigmas of spirit and flesh. Gotta pry this man out of the mud, Mars vowed, not for the first time. Helping Gordon distracted him from his own problems: by now it was seven o'clock and Mars had exactly two hours to write his story.

"I know some people around here who'd like to see this poem," he coaxed.

"No!" Gordon yelled. "I like my privacy. You write about that and every longhair in town'll be out here climbing over the fence and shoving manuscripts under the door."

"I could say you're a crack shot. That you keep a shotgun full of rock salt next to your bed."

"You could say nothing. You hear me?"

"Just kidding, Gordon. Relax."

"You're a reporter. You'd hook your mother into the electric chair for a byline."

"Since when did you become a saint, you blubbing bag of self-pity?"

"Get off my land."

"Your land my ass. Everything here belongs to the Time Oil Company. Even you. If you hadn't fallen off a truck you'd be like me, out working for a living."

"Get!" Gordon roared.

Mars stood up. Just then a red Ford pickup roared down the road and screeched up to the gate. Two big men jumped out: Emmet and Vic Cantril. Tall knobby men, with alligator eyes and snaggle teeth, and big hard hands to break things. They leaned on the chainlink fence like a couple of sycamore trees ready to come down on a picnic.

"Let us in, Gordon," Emmet Cantril shouted. "We got some business with your pal."

"We're closed," Gordon said. "Come back Monday."

"Let us in!" They rattled the gate, and waves of metal thundered along the fence.

"Stop it!" Gordon shouted. "That's Company property." In a lower voice, to Mars: "There's a crock of 30x in the kitchen. Use it and go out the back."

Mars didn't need a second invitation. The Cantril boys were big hunky guys, about six feet, 200 pounds each, but they swarmed over that cyclone fence like squirrels in walnut heaven. Mars ran into the house, popped open the time oil, and poured it over his head.

Instantly he tingled and popped and sizzled. His elbows itched and his toes felt like pebbles. His hair stood up and his fingernails grew. His fillings ached and his right knee hurt. But the kitchen grew silent and cold, and that was fine with Mars, because it meant the time oil was working. He was lubed, he was sliding through time 30x faster than the Cantrils.

Twitching and tingling and shivering, he skipped back through the hallway to the front porch. Gordon was still on the maroon sofa, right arm reaching for his toolbox, moving in super-slo-mo. The Cantrils were nowhere in sight. That bothered the reporter. They should have been in the front yard, frozen in mid-stride with goofy expressions on their ugly faces. Mars wanted to tie their shoelaces together and watch them fall in slow motion. Where were they?

Luckily he looked over his shoulder, and there was Emmet coming at him from the kitchen. They must have circled around the house and come in through the back.

Well, OK, they were ugly, not dumb. What was scary was that Emmet was moving at Mars's speed. Emmet and Vic had time oil too!

Mars lit out for the gate. Vic jumped out from behind Gordon's truck and cut him off. Mars looked left and ran right and almost ran into Emmet's arms. All this in a blink, while Gordon sat on the porch, a big soft statue, one hand s-l-o-w-l-y burrowing into his toolbox while his eyes watched the spot where the action had been seconds earlier.

The brothers were big, but that made them slow. Little Mars could maneuver faster. He crazy-dodged through the yard, but the Cantrils veered him away from the fence. Desperately he looped around the house and cut out across the mud. It was easier now; to his accelerated senses the mud felt stiff, like running on hard-packed sand.

Up and down the hills they ran, and in and out of valleys. Mars was an agile little squirt, but those Cantrils had legs of power. The two of them took turns, like a pair of beagles working a rabbit. They were going to wear him down, Mars saw. Closer all the time. So close he could see

the red sweaty faces, the broken teeth.

Around a knoll. Up a gully. The greyhound brothers closing in. Vic actually got a hand on Mars's jacket — and suddenly he flew sideways and fell and rolled.

Emmet's mouth moved, cussing. He charged at Mars. Again, at the last second, some invisible force bounced him away from the little reporter.

This time Mars caught a glimpse of a big gray blur. It was Gordon. He was using more powerful time oil, moving faster than everyone else.

Gordon's technique was crude but devastating. He watched to see which way a Cantril was heading, then stood in his path. Boom! When the brothers caught on they forgot about Mars and tried to run, but Gordon wouldn't let them go. The Cantrils bounced back and forth, like billiard balls on an invisible table. Mars realized that Gordon was herding them toward a pond. Emmet and Vic took off in opposite directions, but it didn't work. Gordon had too much speed on them. Into the water, silently shrieking. Rings of time oil surged out, foaming and bubbling. Mars was still accelerated, so he capered on the bank, enjoying their predicament. The time oil washed off and they froze in ludicrous twists, like cross-eyed mules on a narrow bridge.

Back at the house Mars plopped down in the rocking chair and had himself a good pant. The clock in the living room said seven-thirty. When his heart quit hammering he found his notebook and wrote a story based on Gordon's tales of the Rush, about the funny things that happened when the first time-oil well came in. He didn't mention Gordon's accident or anything bad that happened. Light and breezy, that was a human-interest feature. Oh, the jokes those roughnecks played on each other! The things you could do with time oil and a lunchbox! He made Gordon the narrator, a jocular old engineer-humanist, without mentioning the poetry. Several times he sensed an invisible blur hovering over his shoulder. Mars tensed, but Gordon let him keep writing. After a while Mars relaxed. Enough with the hermit stuff. A grown man needed a social life. Talking on the phone was for teenagers.

It took hours, subjectively, but only a few minutes to the objective world. When he finished, Mars called the *Register* and read the story. They did this all the time. You spoke to a special tape recorder, and later someone slowed down the squeaking and transcribed it. When he was done he used a can of Goop Cleaner to wipe off the time oil. Skin twitched and tugged; sound vrooshed on and heat returned. His teeth clattered and his left hand trembled, and then he was back in a normal Sunday evening.

Gordon appeared a few seconds later. His hair was showered wet and clean, and his cheeks were excited pink.

"Thanks," Mars said, formally holding out his hand.

Gordon ignored it. "Can't have Cantril trash on Company land," he grumbled.

"In that case you better go rescue them."

"Mud's all right for those two."

They walked out on the back porch, where they could hear the Cantrils hollering from off in the wildness. Gordon chuckled and Mars slapped him on the back and they opened another bottle of blackberry wine.

Fireflies sparkled above the time-oil field. They caught a whiff of time gas and flashed like meteors: yellow-green streaks across the muddy evening. □

Peacekeeper

By David Brin

Art by David R. Deitrick

Roland fingered his rifle's plastic stock as his squad leaped off the truck and lined up behind Corporal Wu. He had a serious case of dry-mouth, and his ears still rang from the alert bell that had yanked them out of exhausted slumber only an hour before.

Who would've imagined being called out on a real raid? This certainly broke the routine of Basic Training -- running about pointlessly, standing rigid while sergeants shouted abuse at you, screaming back obedient answers, then running some more until you dropped. Of course the pre-induction tapes had explained the purpose of all that.

"... Recruits must go through intense stress in order to break civilian response sets and prepare behavioral templates for military imprinting. Their rights are not surrendered, only voluntarily suspended in order to foster discipline, coordination, and other salutary skills"

Only volunteers who understood, and signed waivers, were allowed to join the peacekeeping forces, so he'd known what to expect. What *had* surprised Roland was getting accepted in the first place, despite mediocre school grades. Maybe the peacekeepers' aptitude tests weren't infallible after all. Or maybe they revealed something about Roland that had never emerged back in Indiana.

It can't be intelligence, that's for sure. And I'm no leader. Never wanted to be.

In his spare moments (all three of them since arriving here in Taiwan for training) Roland had pondered the question and finally decided it was none of his damn business after all. So long as the officers knew what they were doing, that was good enough for him.

This calling out of raw recruits for a night mission didn't fill him with confidence, though.

What use would greenies like us be in a combat operation? Won't we just get in the way?

His squad double-timed alongside a towering, aromatic, ornamental hedge toward the sound of helicopters and the painful brilliance of searchlights. Perspiration loosened his grip on the stock, forcing him to hold his weapon tighter. His hearthbeat quickened as they neared the scene of action. And yet Roland felt certain he wasn't scared to die.

No, he was afraid of *screwing up*.

"Takka says it's eco-nuts!" the recruit running beside him whispered, panting. Roland didn't answer. In the last hour he'd completely had it with scuttlebutt.

Neo-Gaian radicals might have blown up a dam, someone said.

No, it was an unlicensed gene lab, or maybe an unregistered national bomb -- hidden in violation of the Rio Pact

Hell, none of the rumored emergencies seemed to justify calling in peach-fuzz recruits. It must be *real* bad

trouble. Or else something he didn't understand yet.

Roland watched the jouncing backpack of Corporal Wu. The compact Chinese non-com carried twice the weight any of them did, yet he obviously held himself back for the sluggish recruits. Roland found himself wishing Wu would pass out the ammo *now*. What if they were ambushed? What if ...?

You don't know anything yet, box-head. Better pray they don't pass out ammo, 'cause half those mama's boys runnin' behind you don't know their rifles from their assholes.

In fairness, Roland figured they probably felt exactly the same way about him.

The squad swung round the hedge onto a gravel driveway, huffing uphill toward the glaring lanterns. Officers milled about, poring over clipboards and casting ten-meter shadows across a broad, close-cropped lawn that had been ripped and scraped by copters and Malus Zeps. Farther upslope, dominating the richly landscaped grounds, stood a grand mansion. Silhouettes hastened past brightly lit windows.

Roland saw no foxholes. So maybe ammo wouldn't be needed after all.

Corporal Wu brought the squad to a disorderly halt as the massive, gruff figure of Sergeant Kleinerman appeared out of nowhere.

"Have the weenies stack weapons over by the flower bed," Kleinerman told Wu in Standard Military English. "Wipe their noses, then take them around back. UNEPA has work for 'em that's simple enough for infants to handle."

Any recruit who took that kind of talk personally was a fool. Roland just took advantage of the pause to catch his breath.

"No weapons," Takka grouched as they stacked their rifles amid trampled marigolds. "What do we use, our hands?"

Roland shrugged. The casual postures of the officers told him this was no terrorist site. "Probly," he guessed. "Them and our backs."

"This way, weenies," Wu said, with no malice and only a little carefully tailored contempt. "Come on. It's time to save the world again."

Through the bright windows Roland glimpsed rich men, rich women, dressed in shimmering fabrics. Nearly all looked like Han-Formosans. For the first time since arriving at Camp Perez de Cuellar, Roland really felt he was in Taiwan, almost China, thousands of miles from Indiana.

Servants still carried trays of refreshments, their darker Bengali or Tamil complexions contrasting with the pale Taiwanese. Unlike the agitated party guests, the



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attendants seemed undisturbed to have in their midst all these soldiers and green-clad marshals from UNEPA. In fact, Roland saw one waiter smile when she thought no one was looking and help herself to a glass of champagne.

UNEPA, Roland thought, on spying the green uniforms. *That means eco-crimes.*

Wu hustled the squad past where some real soldiers stood guard in blurry combat camouflage, their eyes hooded by multi-sensor goggles which seemed to dart and flash as their pulse-rifles glittered darkly. The guards dismissed the recruits with barely a flicker of attention, which irked Roland far worse than the insults of Wu and Kleinerman.

I'll make them notice me, he vowed. Though he knew better than to expect it soon. You didn't get to be like those guys overnight.

Behind the mansion a ramp dropped steeply into the earth. Smoke rose from a blasted steel door that now lay curled and twisted to one side. A woman marshal met them by the opening. Even darker than her chocolate skin was the cast of her features — as if they were carved from basalt. "This way," she said tersely and led them down the ramp — a trip of more than fifty meters — into a reinforced concrete bunker. When they reached the bottom, it wasn't at all what Roland expected — some squat armored slab. Instead, he found himself in a place straight out of the Arabian Nights.

The recruits gasped. "Shee-it!" Takka commented concisely, showing how well he'd picked up the essentials of Military English. Kanakoa, the Hawaiian, expressed amazement even more eloquently. "Welcome to the Elephant's Graveyard, Tarzan."

Roland only stared.

Tiny, multicolored spotlights illuminated the arched chamber, subtly emphasizing the glitter of ivory and fur and crystal. From wall to wall, the spoils of five continents were piled high. More illicit wealth than Roland had ever seen before. More than he'd ever *imagined*.

From racks in all directions hung spotted leopard pelts, shimmering beaver skins, white winter fox stoles. And *shoes!* Endless stacks of them, made from dead reptiles, obviously, though Roland couldn't begin to imagine which species had given its all for which pair.

"Hey, Santarius." Takka nudged him in the ribs and Roland looked down where the Japanese recruit pointed.

Near his left foot lay a luxurious white carpet — the splayed form of a flayed polar bear whose snarling expression looked *really* angry. Roland jerked away from those glittering teeth, backing up until something pointy and hard rammed his spine. He whirled, only to goggle in amazement at a stack of *elephant tusks*, each bearing a golden tip guard.

"Gaia!" he breathed.

"You said it," Kanakoa commented. "Boy, I'll bet Her Holy Nibs is completely pissed off over this."

Roland wished he hadn't spoken the Earth Mother's name aloud. Hers wasn't really a soldierly faith, after all. But Kanakoa and Takka seemed as stunned as he was. "What *is* all this?" Takka asked, waving at the heaping stacks of animal remains. "Who in the world would want items like these?"

Roland shrugged. "Used to be rich folks liked to wear gnomish crap like this."

Takka sneered. "I know that. But why *now*? It is not

just illegal. It's ... it's —"

"Sick? Is that what you were going to say, private?"

They turned to see the UNEPA marshal standing close by, looking past them at the piled ivory. She couldn't be more than forty years old, but right now the tendons in her neck were taut as bowstrings and she looked quite ancient.

"Come with me. I want to show you soldiers something."

They followed her past cases filled with pinned, iridescent butterflies ... gorilla-hand ashtrays and stools made from elephants' feet ... petrified wood and glittering coral that must have been stolen from nature preserves ... all the way to the back wall of the artificial cave, where two truly immense tusks formed a standing arch. Tiger skins draped a shrine of sorts — a case crafted in dark hardwood and glass containing dozens of earthenware jars.

Roland saw veins pulse on the backs of her hands. The recruits fell mute, awed by such hatred as she radiated now. Nothing down here impressed them half as much.

Roland found the courage to ask, "What's in the jars, Ma'am?"

Watching her face, he realized what an effort it took for her to speak right now, and found himself wondering if he'd ever be able to exert such mastery over his own body.

"Rhinoceros ... horn," she said hoarsely. "Powdered narwhal tusk ... whale semen ..."

Roland nodded. He'd heard of such things. Ancient legends held those things could lengthen life, or remove wrinkles, or heighten sexual prowess, or drive women into writhing heat. And neither morality nor law nor scientific disproof deterred some men from chasing hope.

"So much. There must be a hundred kilos in there!" Takka commented. But he stepped back when the UNEPA official whirled to glare at him, her expression one of bleak despair.

"You don't understand," she whispered. "I hoped we'd find so much more."

Roland soon found out just what use recruits were on a mission like this.

Sure enough, he thought, resigned that he had only begun plumbing the depths of exhaustion the Peacekeeping Forces had in store for him. Hauling sixty-kilo tusks up the steep ramp, he and Private Schmidt knew they were important pieces in a well-tuned, highly efficient rapid-deployment force whose worldwide duties stretched from pole to pole. Their part was less glamorous than that of the on-site inspectors prowling Siberia and Sinkiang and Wyoming, enforcing arms-control pacts. Or the brave few keeping the angry militias of Brazil and Argentina from each others' throats. Or even the officers tagging and inventorying tonight's booty. But after all, as Corporal Wu told them repeatedly, *they also serve who only grunt and sweat.*

"Where are they taking this stuff?" his partner asked the pilot of one of the mini-zeps as they took a two-minute breather.

"They've got warehouses all over the world," the Swedish non-com said. "If I told you about them, you wouldn't believe me."

"Try us," Roland prompted.

The flier's blue eyes seemed to look far away. "Take what you found in that tomb and multiply it a thousandfold."

"Shee-it," Schmidt sighed. "But"

"Oh, some of this stuff here won't go into storage. The ivory, for instance. They'll implant label ions so each piece is chemically unique, then they'll sell it. The Zoo Arks harvest elephant tusks nowadays anyway, as do the African parks, so the beasts won't tear up trees or attract poachers. That policy came too late to save this fellow." He patted the tusk beside him. "Alas."

"But what about the other stuff? The furs. The shoes. All that powdered horn shit?"

The pilot shrugged. "Can't sell it. That'd just legitimize wearing or using the stuff. Create demand, you see."

"Can't destroy it, either. Could *you* burn billions worth of beautiful things?"

"Sometimes they take school groups through the warehouses, to show kids what real evil is. But mostly it all just sits there, piling up."

The pilot looked left and right. "I do have a theory, though. I think I know the *real* reason for the warehouses."

"Yes?" Roland and Schmidt leaned forward, ready to accept his confidence.

The pilot spoke behind a shielding hand. "*Aliens*. They're going to sell it all to aliens from outer space."

Roland groaned. Schmidt spat on the ground in disgust. Of course real soldiers were going to treat them this way. But it was embarrassing to have been sucked in so openly.

"You think I'm kidding?" the pilot asked.

"No, we think you're crazy."

That brought a wry grin. "Likely enough, boy. But think about it! It's only a matter of time 'til we're contacted, no? They've been searching the sky for a hundred years now. And we've been filling space with our radio and TV and Data-Net noise all that time. Sooner or later a starship *has* to stop by. It only makes sense, no?"

Roland decided the only safe reply was a silent stare. He watched the non-com warily.

"So I figure it's like this. That starship is very likely to be a *trading vessel* ... out on a long, long cruise, like those clipper ships of olden times. They'll stop here and want to buy stuff, but not just *any* stuff. It will have to be light, portable, beautiful, and totally unique to Earth. Otherwise, why bother?"

"But this stuff's dumpit contraband!" Roland said, pointing to the goods stacked in the cargo bay.

"Hey! You two! Break's over!" It was Corporal Wu, calling from the ramp. He jerked his thumb, then swiveled and strode back into the catacomb. Roland and his partner stood up.

"But that's the beauty of it!" the pilot continued, as if he hadn't heard. "You see, the CITES rules make all these things illegal in order that there won't be any economic *market* for killing endangered species."

"But fobbing it all on alien traders won't create a market! It's a one-stop deal, you see? They come once, then they are gone again, forever. We empty the warehouses, and spend the profits buying up land for new game preserves." He spread his hands as if to ask what could be more reasonable.

Schmidt spat again, muttering a curse in Schweitzer-Deutsch. "Come on, Santarius, let's go." Roland followed quickly, glancing only once over his shoulder at the grinning pilot, wondering if the guy was crazy, brilliant, or simply a terrific sculptor of bullshit.

Probably all three, he figured at last, and double timed the rest of the way. After all, fairy tales were fairy tales, while Corporal Wu was palpable reality.

Of course he didn't actually wish there was a real war to fight. Not a big one, on the vast, impersonal scale of TwenCen struggles. He knew a great battle sounded a lot more attractive far away, in stories, than in person.

Still, was this to be the way of it from now on? Hauling off contraband seized from CITES violators? Manning tedious observer posts separating surly, bickering nations too poor and tired to fight anyway? Checking the bilges of rusting freighters for hidden caches of Flight Capital?

Oh, there were *real* warriors in the peacekeeping forces. Takka and some of the others might get to join the elite units quelling fierce little water wars like the one going on now in Ghana. But as an American he'd have little chance of joining any of the really active units. The Guarantor Powers were still too big, too powerful. No little country would stand for Russian or American or Chinese troops stationed on their soil.

Well, at least I can learn how to be a warrior. I'll be trained, ready, in case maybe the world ever needs me.

So he worked doggedly, doing as he was told.

Hauling and lifting, lifting and hauling, Roland also tried to listen to the UNEPA officials, especially the dark woman. Had she really wished they had found *more* of the grisly contraband?

"... thought we'd traced the Pretoria poaching ring all the way here," she said as he passed by, laden down with aromatic lion skins. "I thought we finally tracked down the main depot. But there's so little White Rhino powder, or —"

"Could Chang have already sold the rest?" One of the others asked.

She shook her head. "Chang's a hoarder. He only sells to maintain operating capital."

"Well, we'll find out when we finally catch him ... the slippery eel."

Roland was still awed by the UNEPA woman, and a bit jealous. What was it like, he wondered, to care about something so passionately? He suspected it made her somehow more *alive* than he was.

According to the Recruitment Tapes, training was supposed to give him strong feelings of his own. Over months of exhaustion and discipline, he'd come to see his squad-mates as family. Closer than that. They'd learn almost to read each others' thoughts, to depend on each other utterly, if necessary, to die for one another.

That was how it was *supposed* to work. Glancing at Takka and Schmidt and the other strangers in his squad, Roland wondered how the sergeants and instructors could accomplish such a thing. Frankly, it sounded awfully unlikely.

Hell, guys like Kleiner and Wu have only been soldiering for five thousand years or so. I guess they know what they're doing.

How ironic, then, that they had finally made a science



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of it at the very end, just as soldiering tried to phase itself out of existence forever. From the looks given them by the UNEPA marshals, that day would come none too soon. Necessity allied the two groups in the cause of saving the planet, but it was clear the eco-officers would rather do without the military altogether.

Just be patient, Roland thought as he worked. We're doing the best we can, as fast as we can.

He and another recruit disassembled the shrine at the back of the cavernous treasure room, carefully unwinding snake-skin ropes binding the two huge archway tusks. They were lowering one of the ivory trophies to the floor when Roland's nostrils flared at a familiar smell. He stopped and sniffed.

"Come on," the Russian private groused in thick-accented Standard. "Now the other tusk."

"Do you smell something?" Roland asked.

The other youth laughed. "I smell dead animals! What you think? It stink worse here than Tashkent brothels!"

But Roland shook his head. "That's not it." He turned left, following the scent.

Naturally, soldiers weren't allowed tobacco, which would sap their wind and stamina. But he'd been quite a smoker back in Indiana, puffing home-grown — as many as eight or ten hand-rolled cigs a week. Could a non-com or UNEPA be sneaking weed behind a corner? It had better not be a *recruit*, or there'd be latrine duty for the entire squad!

But no, there weren't any hiding places nearby. So where was it coming from?

Corporal Wu's whistle blew, signaling another short break. "Hey, Yank," the Russian said. "Don't be a *pizdyuk*. Come on."

Roland waved him to silence. He pushed aside one of the tiger skins, still sniffing, then crouched where he had first picked up the scent. It was strongest near the floor near the glass case — now emptied of its brown jars of macabre powder. His fingers touched a warm breeze.

"Hey, give me a hand," he asked, bracing a shoulder against the wood. But the other recruit flipped two fingers as he walked away muttering. "*Amerikanskee kakane zassixa ...*"

Roland checked his footing and strained. The heavy case rocked a bit before settling again.

This can't be right. The guy who owned this place wouldn't want to sweat. He'd never sweat.

Roland felt along the carved basework, working his way around to the back before finding what he sought — a spring-loaded catch. "Aha!" he said.

With a click the entire case slid forward to jam against one of the huge, toppled tusks. Roland peered down steep stairs with a hint of light at the bottom.

He had to squeeze through the narrow opening. The tobacco smell grew stronger as he descended quietly, carefully. Stooping under a low stone lintel, he entered a chamber hewn from naked rock. Roland straightened and pursed his lips in a silent whistle.

While this hiding place lacked the first one's air of elegant decadence, it did conceal the Devil's own treasure ... shelves stacked high with jars and small, bulging, plastic bags. "Hot damn," he said, fingering one of the bags. Gritty white powder sifted under a gilt-numbered label adorned with images of unicorns and dragons,

though Roland knew the real donor must have been some poor, dumb, mostly blind rhino in southern Africa, or another equally unprepossessing beast.

"It's the freaking jackpot," he said to himself. It was definitely time to report this. But as he turned to head back upstairs, a voice suddenly stopped him.

"Do not move, soldier-fellow. Raise your hands or I will shoot you dead."

Roland rotated slowly and saw what he'd missed in his first, cursory scan of the room. At about waist level, near a smoldering ashtray in the corner of the left wall, some of the shelving had swung aside to reveal a narrow tunnel. From this opening a middle-aged man with Chinese features aimed a machine pistol at him.

"Do you doubt I can hit you from here?" the man asked levelly. "Is that why you don't raise your hands as I commanded? I assure you, I'm an expert shooter. I've personally killed lions, tigers, at close range. Do you doubt me?"

"No. I believe you."

"Then comply! Or I will shoot!"

Roland had no doubt the fellow meant it. But it seemed this was time for one of those inconvenient waves of obstinacy his friends used to chide him for, which used to get him into such trouble back home.

"You shoot, and they'll hear you upstairs."

The man in the tunnel considered this. "Perhaps. On the other hand, if you were to attack me, or flee or call for help, the threat would be immediate and I would have to kill."

Roland shrugged. "I ain't goin' nowhere."

"So. A standoff, then. All right, soldier. You may keep your hands down, as I see you're unarmed. But step back to that wall, or I will consider you dangerous and act accordingly!"

Roland did as he was told, watching for an opportunity. But the man crawled out of the tunnel and stood up without wavering his aim once. "My name is Chang," he said as he wiped his brow with a silk handkerchief.

"So I heard. You been a busy guy, Mr. Chang."

Those brown eyes squinted in amusement. "That I have, young soldier boy. What I've done and seen, you could not imagine. Even in these days of snoops and busybodies, I've kept secrets. Secrets deeper than even the Helvetian Gnomes maintained."

No doubt this was meant to impress Roland. It did. But he'd be damned if he'd give the bastard any satisfaction. "So what do we do now?"

Chang seemed to inspect him. "*Now it's customary for me to bribe you. You must know I can offer you wealth and power. This tunnel bears a floater trolley on silent rails. If you help me take away my treasure, it could begin a long, profitable relationship.*"

Roland felt the piercing intensity of the man's scrutiny. After a moment's thought, he shrugged. "Sure, why not?"

Now it was Chang's turn to pause. Then he giggled. "Ah! I do enjoy encountering wit. Obviously you know I am lying, that I'd kill you once we reached the other end. And I, in turn, can tell you have more urgent goals than money. Is it *honor* you seek, perhaps?"

Again, Roland shrugged. He wouldn't have put it quite that way.

"So, again we have a stand-off. Hence my second

proposition. You help me load my trolley, at gunpoint. I then depart, and let you live."

This time Roland's pause was calculated only to delay. "How do I know ..."

"No questions! Obviously I can't turn my back on you. So agree or die now. Begin with the bags on the shelf by your left shoulder, or I'll shoot and be gone before others can come!"

Roland slowly turned and picked up two of the bags, one in each hand.

The "trolley" did indeed float just a few millimeters above a pair of gleaming rails, stretching off into interminable darkness. Roland had no doubt that it was meant for swift escape, and that Chang would be long gone by the time UNEPA traced the other end. The guy seemed to have thought of everything.

He tried to carry as little as he could each trip. Chang lit a cigarette and fumed, watching him like a cat as Roland leaned over the tiny passenger's pallet to lay his loads in the trolley's capacious cargo hamper.

Once he fumbled one of the clay jars. It hit hard and trickled powder onto the tunnel floor, crackling where bits struck the silvery rails. Chang hissed and the knuckles of his hand whitened on the pistol grip. Still, Roland figured Chang wouldn't shoot just yet. He'd do it at the last moment, probably when the trolley was ready to go.

"Hurry up!" the Han millionaire spat. "You move like an American!"

That gave Roland an excuse to turn and grin at the man. "How'd you guess?" he asked, slowing things another few seconds, stretching Chang's patience before grabbing two more jars and resuming work.

Chang kept glancing up the stairs, obviously listening ... but never letting his attention waver long enough to give Roland any foolish notions. *You should've reported the secret passage the minute you found it*, Roland thought, cursing inwardly. Unfortunately, the opening was behind the display case, and who knew when it would be discovered? Too late for Private Roland Santarius, probably.

The look in Chang's calculating eyes made Roland reconsider the scenario. *He knows that I know I'll have to jump him, just before the end.*

What's more, he knows that I know that he knows.

That meant Chang would shoot him *before* the last moment, to prevent that desperate lunge. But how soon before?

Not too soon, or the smuggler would have to depart with a half-empty trolley, abandoning the rest of his hoard forever. Clearly, Chang's profound greed was the one thing keeping Roland alive. Still, he'd have to do it before the cargo hamper was topped off ... before Roland's adrenalin was pumping for the maximum, all-or-nothing effort.

Five loads to go, Roland thought while fitting more jars snugly into place under Chang's watchful eye. *Will he do it at three? Or two?*

He was delivering the next load, beginning to screw up his courage, when a noise echoed down the steep stair-shaft, pre-empting all plans.

"*Santarius! It's me, Kanakoa. And Schmidt. What the hell are you doing down here?*"

Roland froze. Chang edged against the wall near the steps, watching him. There came the scrape of footsteps

on stone.

Dumpit, Roland cursed. He was bent over the trolley in an awkward position, much too far away to attack Chang with any chance of success. In addition, his hands were laden with bags. If only he were carrying jars — those he could throw ...

"*Santarius? What are you doing, asshole? Smoking? Kleinerman'll roast all of us if they catch you!*"

Roland suddenly realized why Chang was watching him so intently. *Chang's following my eyes!*

Roland's gaze could not help widening when one booted foot appeared on the topmost visible step. Chang was using him to gauge where the other recruits were, to tell when the moment was just right for killing all three of them! In holding onto seconds of life, Roland knew suddenly, horribly, he was murdering Kanakoa and Schmidt.

Still, even knowing that, he remained statue-like. In Chang's eyes he saw understanding and the glitter of contemptuous victory. *How did he know?* Roland railed inside. *How did he know I was a coward?*

The admission belied every one of his dreams. It betrayed what Roland had thought were his reasons for living. The realization seared so hot it tore through his rigor and burst forth in a sudden scream.

"*Cover!*" he cried, and threw himself onto the pallet, slamming home the trolley's single lever. Almost simultaneously a series of rapid bangs rattled the narrow chamber and Roland's leg erupted in sudden agony. Then there was only blackness and the swift whistle of wind as the little car sped into a gloom darker than any he had ever known.

Seconds ticked by while he battled fiery pain. Clenching his jaw to keep from moaning, Roland desperately hauled back on the lever, bringing the trolley to a jerky halt in the middle of the arrow-straight shaft. Waves of dizziness almost overwhelmed him as he rolled over onto his back and clutched his thigh, feeling a sickening, sticky wetness there.

One thing for certain, he couldn't afford the luxury of fainting here.

"*There are two types of simple thigh wounds.*" The memorized words droned in his head as he wrestled the belt from his waist. "*One, a straight puncture of muscle fiber, is quite manageable. Treat it quickly and move on. Your comrade should be able to offer cover fire, even if he can no longer move.*"

"*The other kind is much more dangerous*"

Roland fought shivers as he looped the belt above the wound. He had no idea which type it was. If Chang had hit the femoral artery, this makeshift tourniquet wasn't going to do much good.

He grunted and yanked hard, cinching the belt as tight as he could, then slumped back in reaction and exhaustion.

You did it! he told himself. *You beat the bastard!*

Roland tried to feel elated. Even if he was now bleeding to death, he'd certainly won more minutes than Chang intended to give him. More important still, Chang was brought down! In stealing the smuggling lord's only means of escape, Roland had ensured his capture!

Then why do I feel so rotten?

In fantasy Roland had often visualized being wounded, even dying in battle. Always, though, he had

imagined there'd be some solace, if only the soldier's condolence of victory.

So why did he feel so *dirty* now? So ashamed?

He was alive now because he'd done the unexpected. Chang had been looking for heroism or cowardice — a berserker attack or animal rigor.

But in that moment of impulse Roland had remembered the words of an old Vet in Bloomington. "*A fool who wants to live will do anything his captor tells him. He'll stand perfectly still, under gunpoint, even just to win a few more heartbeats. Or he may burst into a useless charge.*"

"*That's when, sometimes, it takes the most guts to retreat in good order, to fight another day.*"

As his heart rate eased and the panting subsided, he now heard what sounded like moans coming down the tunnel. Kanakoa or Schmidt, or both. Wounded. Perhaps dying.

What good would I have done by staying? Instead of a leg wound, he'd have gone down with several bullets in the heart or face ... and Chang would have gotten away.

True enough, but that didn't seem to help. Nor did reminding himself that neither of those guys back there were really his friends anyway.

"*Soldier boy!*" The shout echoed down the narrow passage. "*Bring the trolley back or I'll shoot you now!*"

"Fat chance," Roland muttered. And even Chang's voice carried little conviction. Straight as the tunnel was, and even allowing for ricochets, the odds of hitting him were low even for an expert. Anyway, what good was such a threat when to comply meant certain death?

The threat wasn't repeated. For all the millionaire knew Roland was already at the other end.

"*Why did I stop?*" Roland asked aloud, softly. At the other terminus he might find a telephone to call an ambulance instead of lying here possibly bleeding to death.

Suddenly the cavern erupted in loud, cracking booms, reverberating the very walls. Roland covered his ears. Pulse-rifle fire. No doubt about it, the real soldiers had arrived at last.

The gunshots ended almost immediately. *Could it be over already?* he wondered.

But no. As the ringing echoes subsided he heard voices, and one of them was Chang's.

"*... if you throw down grenades. So if you want your wounded soldiers to live, negotiate with me!*"

So Chang claimed two wounded captives. Roland realized gloomily that both Schmidt and Kanakoa must have been caught, despite his shouted warning.

Or maybe not! After all, would Chang admit to having let one recruit escape down the tunnel? Perhaps he only had *one* of the others and used the plural form as a ploy. Roland clung to that hope.

It took a while for someone in authority to begin negotiations. The officer's voice was too muffled for Roland to make out, but he could hear Chang's side of the exchange.

"*Not good enough! Prison would be the same as death for me! I accept nothing more rigorous than house arrest on my Pingtung estate*"

"*Yes, naturally I will turn state's evidence. I owe my associates nothing. But I must have the deal sealed by a magistrate, at once!*"

Again, the official's words were indistinct. But

Roland caught the tones of prevarication.

"Stop delaying! The alternative is death for these young soldiers!" Chang shouted back.

"Yes, yes, of course they can have medical attention ... after I get my plea bargain! Properly sealed! Meanwhile, any sign of a stun or concussion grenade and I shoot them in the head, then myself!"

Roland could tell the marshals were weakening, probably under pressure from the Peacekeeper C.O. *Dammit!* he thought. The good guys' victory would be compromised. Worse, Chang certainly had means at his estate for another escape, even from State Detention.

Don't give in, he mentally urged the officers, though he felt pangs thinking of Kanakoa, or even Schmidt, lying there dying. *If you plea bargain, the bastard'll just start all over again.*

But Chang's next shout carried a tone of satisfaction. *"That's better! I can accept that. You better hurry with the document, though. These men do not look well."*

Roland cursed. "No!"

He rolled over and reached into the cargo hamper, tossing bags and jars onto the tracks ahead. They split and shattered. Narwhal tusks and rhino horns coated the tracks in powdered form, obstructing further travel in that direction. Then Roland fought fresh waves of nausea as he writhed to turn around on the narrow trolley, to face the direction he had come.

He'd worried he might have to manipulate the lever with his feet. But there was a duplicate at the other end. A red tag served as a governor, preventing the switch from being pushed passed a certain point. This Roland tore out, ripping one of his fingers in the process.

"Yes, I am willing to have my house arrest fully monitored by cameras at all times"

"I'm sure you are, carni-man," Roland muttered. "But you don't fool me!"

He slammed the lever home and the trolley glided forward. What began as a gentle breeze in his face soon became a hurricane as power flowed from the humming rails.

You forget, Chang, that your estate is still on Mother Earth. And my guess is that Mom's had just about enough of you by now,

The light ahead ballooned in a rapidly expanding circle of brilliance. Roland felt solenoids try to throw the lever back but he strained, holding it in place. In an instant of telescoped time, he saw a figure turn within the light, stare down the shaft, raise his weapon

"Gaia!" Roland screamed, a battle cry chosen at the last second out of some unknown recess of faith as he hurtled like a missile into space.

It was a mess the UNEPA team came down to inspect after Peacekeeping personnel pronounced it safe, and once the wounded boy had been rushed off to the hospital. They were still taking pictures of the two remaining bodies when the green-clad Ecology Department officials came down the steep stairs at last to see what had happened.

"Well, here's your missing cache, Elena," one of them said, picking carefully through the white and gray powders scattered across the floor. Three walls of shelves were intact, but a fourth had collapsed over two quiet

forms, sprawled atop each other in the corner. There, the snowdrifts had been stained crimson.

"Damn," the UNEPA man continued, shaking his head. "A lot of poor beasts died for one geek's fetish."

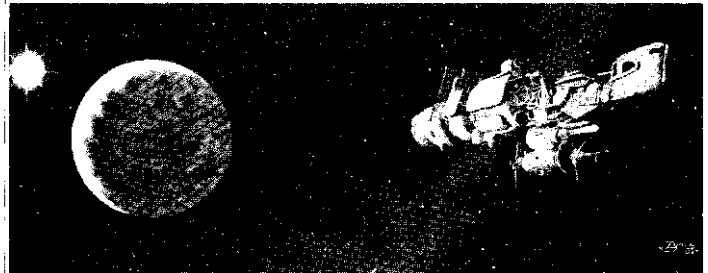
Elena looked down at her enemy of all these years. Chang's mouth gaped open — crammed full of powder which trailed off to the limp hand of the young recruit she had spoken to early in the evening. Even dying and riddled with bullets, it seemed this had been a soldier with a sense of poetry. A Peacekeeping Forces non-com sat near the boy smoothing back a lock of ruffled hair. The corporal looked up at Elena. "Santarius was a lousy shot. Never showed any promise at all with weapons. I guess he improvised, though. He graduated."

Elena turned away, disgusted by the maudlin, adolescent sentiment. *Warriors,* she thought. *The world is growing up, though. Someday soon we'll be well rid of them at last.*

Still, why was it she all of a sudden felt as if she had walked into a temple? Or that the spirits of all the martyred creatures were holding silent, reverent watch right now, along with the mourning corporal?

There may be an end to war, a voice within seemed to say, surprising her. *But there will always be a need for heroes.* □

Our Next Issue



The May-June 1990 issue of *Aboriginal* will have the concluding chapter of "The Gateway Concordance" by Hugo and Nebula Award winner Frederik Pohl with art by Hugo Award winner Kelly Freas. Fred and Kelly will be joined by newcomer William McCarthy with his debut story, "What I Did With the *OTV Grissom*," with space art by David Brian. Also on board will be Richard Bowker with "Requiem Aeternam," art by Wendy Snow-Lang; Philip C. Jennings with "Queen of the Atzu," art by Larry Blamire; Patricia Anthony with "Coyote on Mars," art by Carol Heyer; Robert A. Metzger with "Eyes of Chaos," art by Carol Heyer; and Joel Henry Sherman with "The Bogart Revival," art by Cortney Skinner. Plus we'll round out the issue with our usual articles, columns, book reviews and another story or two if we can fit them.

1,318,416 Species To Go



Before I came on this assignment, I studied taxonomy. It was considered a tough curriculum, and we had to learn the scientific names of all nine of our planet's species. I've forgotten most of them now, but like most of our race, I have a deep and abiding appreciation of the food chain that begins with the contemplative blurn and proceeds through creatures of increasing simplicity to the voracious splag.

Television signals from Earth persuaded us that this planet had five species, one of which we assumed was a talking horse. We corrected our estimate, of course, when we picked up that program about the insurance company in Omaha, as a result of which we concluded there must be a dozen species here at least. When I was leaving home, we thought Earth must be hopelessly complicated, and we wondered how the human beings ever kept track of all the creatures.

I am afraid I must report that the situation is even worse than we had supposed.

This planet is completely out of control. Counting the placental mammals, there are 1,318,416 species of animals on Earth. It is a nightmare of a management problem, and human beings are working assiduously to simplify the situation. But they have a long way to go. They have not been able to eliminate more than 125 species in the past 200 Earth years.

Some of the success stories have been truly spectacular, however. The passenger pigeon, for example, was once so numerous that its flocks blackened the skies of North America. But the human beings shot them and clubbed them (they weren't the smartest of birds) until they were gone. I know that sounds hard to believe, but these creatures are capable of great perseverance and invention when faced with a problem like a large bird population. The last passenger pigeon died in a zoo in 1914, relieving humanity of the sky-blackening problem once and for all.

There have been about 50 birds altogether that have gone the way of the passenger pigeon, but birds are generally small animals, and to human beings, they are just practice. The real work of species simplification has been among mammals, of which a out 75 spec es ave een spose of since the eighteenth century. And great strides have been made toward the complete elimination of whales, elephants, rhinoceros, and large carnivores.

The traditional tools in the pro-

**... simplifying the
animals is a
long, slow process ...**

gram to manage animal species have been the rifle, the harpoon, and the club, and these have been improved on by the addition of the snowmobile, the factory ship, the helicopter, the gill net, and the explosive armor-piercing round.

Even so, simplifying the animals is a long, slow process, and at this rate achieving a manageable number of species would seem to be impossible. But human invention has created several new tools to deal with the problem. One of these is insecticides, chemical compounds introduced into an environment to toughen insects and weaken the reproductive capacity of the local animals. Ospreys and eagles have been nearly eradicated by this process.

Insecticides, as successful as they have been, have lately been eclipsed by the simple expedient of eliminating habitats. Human beings have discovered that an animal perfectly adapted to a particular environment cannot survive the clearing and paving of it. They have therefore cleared and paved large tracts of land, applying particular diligence to the areas that are unique and irreplaceable, in order to make short work of

the rare animals that live there. But even habitat elimination is too slow a process, as it must proceed piecemeal. There are more than a million of these species to be subdued, after all.

Enter the greenhouse effect. A carefully devised combination of industrial development, automobile traffic, and the clear-cutting of forests promises to increase the proportion of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere. In doing this, human beings hope to better insulate the planet, increasing its overall temperature, raising ocean levels, and dramatically changing many habitats at once. This strategy can never be as precise as those that target single species or groups of them, but it is much faster. It would have taken thousands of years to clean up all these species at the rate they were going. Atmospheric insulation will enable them to accomplish it in just centuries.

And I am particularly hopeful for a new method that is based on opening the planet's protective ozone layer to ultraviolet radiation. Such radiation (human beings know from their laboratory experiments) will affect the growth mechanisms of animal cells directly, inducing incurable diseases. Human scientists argue over the precise size of the opening needed and the rate at which it can be made to grow, but these are really just details to be ironed out as the campaign gets under way. It is clear that a large enough opening in the ozone layer could eliminate nearly all the land-based animals in the course of a few generations.

That's one of the characteristics of human beings. Give them a problem such as too many animal species, and they don't argue about it or analyze it, they just solve it. □

The Gateway Concordance

By Frederik Pohl

Art by Frank Kelly Freas

Part II

The Home Planet

Earth was getting close to filing for bankruptcy. It had spent its wealth.

Oh, there were many millionaires on the Earth. Billionaires, too; people with more money than they could spend, enough to hire a hundred servants, enough to own a county for an estate, enough to pay for Full Medical, so that for all their lives they would have the most wonderful of all the wonderful medical, pharmaceutical, and surgical techniques to keep them healthy, and to make those lives very long. There were hundreds of thousands of the very rich, and many millions of the more or less well-to-do

But there were ten billion others.

There were the ones who scratched out a living on Asian farms and African savannahs; they made a crop when rain fell and wars stayed away and insects devoured a countryside other than theirs, and when the crop failed they died. There were the ones who lived in the barricaded slums of the big cities (the word "ghetto" was no longer a metaphor), or the barrios outside Latin metropolises, or the teeming warrens of the urban areas of the Orient. They worked when they could. They lived on charity when there was any charity to be had. They lived at the bottom of the food chain — rice and beans, yams and barley; or, if they had the money to pay for it, single-cell proteins from the fossil-fuel conversions of the food mines — and they were hungry throughout their lives. Which were short. They couldn't afford the medical plans. If they were very lucky there might be a free clinic, or a cheap doctor, to hand out pills and take out an appendix. But when one of their organs wore out they had only two alternatives. They got along without it. Or they died. The poor could never afford transplants. They were lucky if they weren't caught in a dark alley some night and themselves converted into transplants for some richer person, by some more desperate one.

So there were two kinds of human beings on Earth. If you owned a few thousand shares of PetroFood or Chemways you didn't lack for much — not even health, because then you could afford Full Medical. But if you didn't

If you didn't, the next best thing was to have a job. Any kind of a job.

Having a job was a dream of Utopia for the billions who had none, but for those who did, their work was generally demeaning drudgery that drowned the spirit and damaged the health. The food mines employed many, dipping fossil fuels out of the ground and breeding edible single-cell protein creatures on their hydrocarbon content. But you breathed those same hydrocarbons every day — it was like living in a closed garage, with motors

running all the time — and you probably died young. Factory work was better, a little, although the safest and most challenging parts of it were generally done by automatic machines, which were more expensive than people to acquire and replace when damaged. There was domestic service. But to be a servant in the homes of the wealthy was to be a slave, with a slave's intimate experience of luxury and plenty, and a slave's despair at ever attaining those things for himself.

Still, the ones who had even those jobs were lucky, for family agriculture was just a way of slowing down starvation, and in the developed world unemployment was terribly high. Especially in the cities. Especially for the young. So if you were one of the really rich, or even just one of the well-to-do, splurging on a trip to New York or Paris or Beijing, you usually saw the poor ones only when you walked out of your hotel, between police barricades, and into your waiting taxi.

You didn't have to do it that way. The police barricades were all one-way. If you chose to cross them the police would let you through.

Then you were on your own. Which meant that you were surrounded by vendors (of drugs; of plastic reproductions of the Great Wall, the Eiffel Tower, or the New York Bubble; of handmade key charms and hand-carved trinkets; of guide services or discount coupons to night clubs; of — very often — themselves.) The police wouldn't actually let them murder you or snatch your wallet — as long as you were in sight, anyway.

Quite often, the clamoring crowds wouldn't harm you even if they got you away from the police cordons, especially if you offered them some less chancy way of making money from you. But most of the poor people were desperate.

For the rich, of course, the world was quite different. It always is. The rich lived long, healthy lives with other people's organs, and they lived them in balmy climates under the domes of major cities, or cruising the warm and still unpolluted southern seas, or even traveling in space for the pure joy of it. When there were wars (and there often were, frequent though small — though quite large enough, of course, for the people killed in them), the rich went elsewhere until the wars were over. They felt it was their due. After all, they were the ones who paid the taxes — as much as they couldn't avoid, anyway.

The main trouble with being rich was that not all of the poor people acquiesced in being poor. Quite a few tried to better themselves, often violently.



Kidnaping became a growth industry in America again. So did extortion. You paid, or out of hiding someone would shoot away your kneecap. (Or torch your house, or boobytrap your flyer, or poison your pets.) Few in the solvent classes would send their children to school without a bodyguard any more ... Which did help the unemployment situation, a little, as some millions of the extortionists put on uniforms and began drawing salaries to protect their employers against extortion. And, of course, there was political terror, too. It flourished in the same soil that nurtured kidnaping and extortion, and there was even more of it. Among the apathetic majority of the landless and the hungry, there were always a few who banded together to work the vengeance of the Have-Nots on the Haves.

Nevertheless, the Haves had it made. And most other people didn't even have hope.

Then ... along came Gateway.

For most of the ten billion people alive on the used-up planet of Earth, Gateway was a hope of Paradise. Like the gold-rush miners of '49, like the hungry Irish fleeing their potato famine in the holds of immigrant ships, like the sodbusting pioneers of the American West and human emigrants everywhere, through all of history, the poverty-stricken billions were willing to take any risk for the sake of — well, wealth, if wealth could be had; but at least for a chance to feed and clothe and house their children.

Even the rich saw a good chance to get even richer, and that made for a problem, for a while. The national governments who had built the space rockets that first visited other planets and later supported the Gateway operation felt they were entitled to whatever came out of the Gateway discoveries. The rich people who owned the governments agreed. But they couldn't all own it, after all.

So there was a certain amount of buying and selling and horsetrading (and some pretty cutthroat wheeling and dealing, too, with the stakes as high as they were). Compromises were made. Bargains were struck; and out of the competing greeds of all the claimants to the limitless wealth that the galaxy promised came the just, or fairly just, invention of the Gateway Corporation.

Was Gateway a benefit to Earth's poor?

At first, not very much. It gave each of them a little hope — the hope of a lottery ticket, although few of them could raise the money even to buy that one-way ticket that might make them into winners. But it was a long time before any stay-at-home peasant or slumdweller was a penny or a meal richer for anything the Heechee had left behind. In fact, the knowledge that there were rich, empty planets out there was more tantalizing than useful to Earth's teeming billions. The livable planets were too far away. They could only be reached by faster-than-light travel. Although human beings actually improved on some Heechee space-travel techniques (using Lofstrom loops to get into orbit instead of Heechee landers, for instance, and thus sparing further damage to acidified lakes and the ozone layer), no one could build a Heechee ship — and the ships on Gateway were far too few and much too small to carry sizable migrant populations to the new planets. So a few prospectors got rich, when they didn't get dead instead. A number of rich people got

quickly richer. But most of the penniless billions stayed on Earth.

And in the cities like Calcutta, with its two hundred million paupers, and on the starved farms and paddies of Africa and the Orient, hunger remained a fact of life, and terrorism and poverty got worse instead of better.

Other Worlds

The first exploratory trip from the Gateway asteroid wasn't planned. It wasn't even authorized. And it certainly wasn't wise.

The name of the man who did it was Lieutenant Senior Grade Ernest T. Kaplan. He was a Marine officer from the U.S. Space Navy cruiser *Roanoke*. Kaplan wasn't a scientist. He wasn't even supposed to touch anything on the Gateway asteroid. In fact, the only reason he was on the asteroid was that his orders were to keep anyone else from touching anything while the scientists who came hurrying up from Earth tried to figure out just what the devil they had here. But Kaplan had access to the parked ships, and one day he sat down in one that had been equipped with food lockers and air and water tanks, just in case anyone got the locks closed and was trapped inside. He practiced opening and closing the locks a few times. Then he played with the knurled wheels for a while, watching the changing colors ... and then he squeezed the funny-looking little thing at the base.

That was the launch teat, and Lt. S.G. Kaplan had just become the second human being to fly a Heechee ship. He was gone.

Ninety-seven days later he was back.

It was a miracle that he'd managed to return; it was even a bigger miracle that he was still alive. The supplies in the ship had been meant to last for a few days, not for months. He had been reduced to catching the condensation from his own sweat and emanations as it beaded the lander port for drinking water. For the last five weeks he hadn't eaten anything at all. He was scrawny and filthy and half out of his mind ...

But he had been there. His ship had orbited a planet far out from a small, reddish star; a planet that had so little light that it seemed only grayish, with swirling yellow clouds — a little the way Jupiter or Saturn or Uranus might have appeared, if they had orbited as far from the sun as the twilight orbit of Pluto.

The first reaction of the United States government was to court-martial him. He certainly deserved it. He even expected it.

But before the court was convened, the news services carried the word that the Brazilian government had voted Kaplan a million-dollar cash bonus, and the Soviets not only had made him an honorary citizen but had invited him to Moscow to receive the Order of Lenin. So the American president jumped him to full colonel, in the same orders that grounded Colonel Kaplan forever. Then the President called all the spacefaring nations together to decide just how to handle this situation.

The result was the Gateway Corporation.

Colonel Kaplan, like everyone before him, had failed to make one vital discovery, and that was that each one of

the Heechee ships was actually two ships. There was the interstellar vessel that traveled faster than light to a programmed destination, and there was the smaller, simpler landing craft that nestled into the base of the ship itself.

The interstellar ships themselves, with their unreproducible faster-than-light drives, were totally incomprehensible to human scientists. It was a long time before any Earth person knew how they worked, and those who tried too hard to find out generally died when their drives blew up. The landers were much simpler. Basically, they were ordinary rockets. True, the guidance system was Heechee, but fortunately for the Gateway prospectors the controls turned out to be even simpler to operate than the faster-than-light vessels. They could use the lander successfully, even if they didn't know exactly how it worked, just as any average seventeen-year-old can learn to drive a car without any comprehension of the geometry of steering linkages or gear chains.

So when a Gateway prospector came out of FTL drive and found himself in the vicinity of an interesting-looking planet, he could use the lander for the purpose for which it was designed: to go down to the surface of the planet and see what it had to offer.

That was what Gateway was all about. The planets were the most likely places to look for the kind of thing the prospector could bring back and turn in to make his fortune — and, naturally, to add to the Corporation's.

It was easy to describe the kind of planets they were looking for. They were looking for another Earth. Or something enough like Earth, anyway, to support some form of organic life, because inorganic processes hardly ever produced anything worth the carrying space it took to bring it home.

It turned out that there were plenty of planets to choose from. Human astronomers were glad to know this, because they'd always wondered, and the Corporation didn't even have to pay a bonus to find it out: all they had to do was add up the findings of the returning explorers. It developed that binary stars didn't ordinarily have planets. Solitary stars, on the other hand, generally did. Astronomers thought the reason for that probably had something to do with conserving rotational velocity. When two stars condensed together out of a single gas cloud, they seemed to take care of each other's excess rotational energy. Bachelor stars apparently had to dissipate it on smaller satellites.

Hardly any of the planets were really Earthlike, though.

There were a lot of tests for that sort of thing that could be applied from a considerable distance. Temperature sensing, for one. Organic life didn't seem to develop except where water could exist in its liquid phase, which was to say in the narrow, 100-degree band between about 270 and 370 Kelvin. At lower temperatures the stuff was useless ice. At higher ones it wasn't usually there at all, because the heat vaporized it and the sunlight — from whatever sun was nearby — split the hydrogen out of the water molecule and it was lost into space.

That meant that each star had a quite narrow area of possible planetary orbits that might be worth investigating. As planets didn't care whether or not they were

going to be hospitable to life when they were condensing out of the interstellar gases, most of them took orbits inside that life zone, or in the cold spaces outside it.

Then, even when life was apparently possible, sometimes it was there, and sometimes it was not. The way to check for that was to look for chemical signatures in the atmosphere. (Oh, yes, the hopefully life-bearing planet had to possess an atmosphere, too, but that wasn't a serious constraint. Most planets in the habitable zone did.) If the atmosphere turned out to contain reactive gases that hadn't reacted — say, if it held free oxygen, with available reducing substances like carbon or iron somewhere available around — then it stood to reason that something must be continually replenishing those gases. That something was probably, in some sense, alive.

(Later on the prospectors found there were exceptions to these simple rules ... but not many.)

The very first planet that turned out to have living things on it was a solid 10 when studied from orbit. Almost everything was there: blue skies, blue seas, fleecy white clouds, and plenty of oxygen — meaning some anti-entropic (i.e., living) thing to keep it that way.

Prospectors Anatol and Sherba Mirsky and their partner, Leonie Tilden, slapped each other's backs in exultation as they prepared to land. It was their first mission ... and they'd hit the jackpot right away.

Naturally they celebrated. They opened the one bottle of wine they'd brought along. Ceremonially they made a recording announcing their discovery, punctuating it with the pop of the wine cork. They called the planet New Earth.

Everything was going their way. They even thought it likely that they could figure out just where they were in the galaxy (a kind of knowledge usually hidden from the early Gateway prospectors, because there weren't any road signs on the way). But they had spotted the Magellanic Clouds in one direction and the Andromeda Nebula in another, and in still a third direction there was a tight, bright cluster that they were nearly sure was the Pleiades.

The celebration was a bit premature. It had not occurred to them that one interesting color was missing in their view of New Earth from space, and that color was green.

When Sherba Mirsky and Leonie Tilden went down to the surface of New Earth in the lander, what they landed on was bare rock. Nothing grew there. Nothing moved. Nothing flew in the sky. There were no flowering plants. There were no plants at all, at their elevation; there wasn't any soil for them to grow in. Soil hadn't reached those parts of the world yet.

It was only one more disappointment to find that there wasn't much oxygen in its air, either — enough for a qualitative determination from orbit, yes, but nowhere near enough to breathe. For, although there certainly was life on New Earth, there just wasn't much of it yet. Most of what there was lived in the coastal shallows, with a few hardy adventurers just making a start in colonizing the shores — simple prokaryotic and eukaryotic denizens of the sludgy seas, with a few scraggly, mossy things that had struggled out onto the littoral.

The trouble with New Earth was that it was a lot too new. It would take a billion years or so to get really

interesting — or to pay Tilden, the Mirskys, and the Gateway Corporation back for the trouble of looking it over.

Although it was planets that offered profits, planets were also the places where it was easiest to get killed. As long as a Gateway prospector stayed inside his ship he was well protected against most of the dangers of star wandering. It was when he landed that he exposed himself to unknown environments ... and often very hostile ones.

For example, there was —

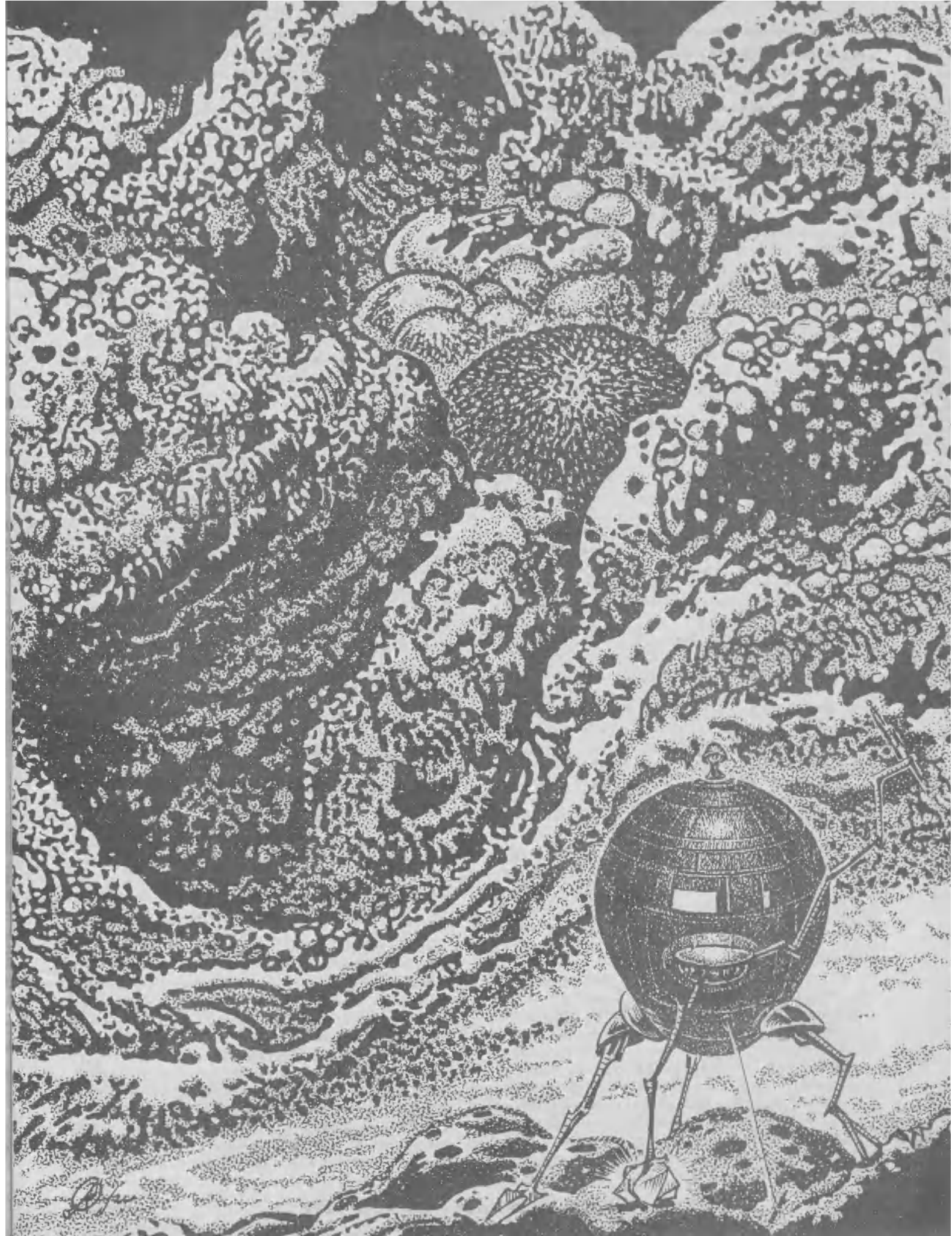
Mission Pretty Poison

A fifty-year-old Venezuelan named Juan Mendoza Santamaria was the first Gateway prospector to discover a really nice-looking planet. It had taken him forty-three days to get there, all alone in a One. That was well within his margins. He was not likely to run out of air, food or water. What he was running out of was money. He had spent the last of his credits on a farewell party before he left the asteroid. If he came back empty-handed to Gateway his future was bleak. So he crossed himself and whispered a prayer of gratitude as he stepped out of his lander onto the alien soil.

He was grateful, but he wasn't stupid. Therefore he was also cautious. Mendoza knew very well that if anything went wrong he was in serious trouble. There was no one within many light-years who could help him — in fact, no one anywhere who even knew where he was. So he wore his spacesuit at all times on the surface of the planet, and that turned out to be very fortunate for Juan Mendoza.

The planet didn't look threatening at all. The plants were an odd shade of orange, the distant trees (or were they simply very tall grasses?) looked harmless, there were no obviously threatening large animals. On the other hand, there wasn't much to be seen that looked immediately profitable, either. There weren't any signs of civilization — no great abandoned cities, no friendly alien intelligences to welcome him, no Heechee artifacts lying about waiting to be picked up. There wasn't even any kind of metallic structure, natural or otherwise, on the surface large enough to be picked up by his lander's sensors as he came down. But, Mendoza reassured himself, the fact that there was any kind of life ought to be worth at least a science bonus. He identified both "plant" and "animal" — at least, some of it moved, and some of it was firmly rooted in the soil.

He took some samples of the plants, though they weren't impressive. He trekked painfully over to the "trees" and found them soft-bodied, like mushrooms. There weren't any large ferns or true grasses; but there was a kind of fuzzy moss that covered most of the soil, and there were things that moved on it. None of the moving things were very big. The largest life form Mendoza encountered was an "arthropod" about the size of his palm. They moved about in little herds, feeding on smaller beetlely and buggy things, and they were covered with a dense "fur" of glassy white spicules, which made them look like herds of tiny sheep. Mendoza felt almost guilty as he trapped a few of the pretty little creatures and killed them and put them, with samples of the smaller creatures they preyed on, in the sterile containers that would go back to Gateway. But there wasn't anything else worth transporting.



What the planet had that was really worthwhile was beauty. It had a lot of that.

It was quite near — Mendoza estimated thirty or forty light-years — to a bright, active gas cloud that he thought might be the Orion Nebula. (It wasn't, but like the one in Orion it was a nursery for bright young stars.) Mendoza happened to land in the right season of the year to appreciate it best, for as the planet's sun set on one horizon the nebula rose on the other. It came to fill the entire night sky, like a luminous, sea-green tapestry laced with diamonds, edged in glowing royal maroon. The "diamonds" — the brightest stars within the nebula — were orders of magnitude brighter even than Venus or Jupiter as seen from Earth, nearly as bright as Earth's full moon. But they were point sources, not disks like the moon, and they were almost painful to look upon.

It was the beauty that struck Mendoza. He was not an articulate man. When he got back and filed his report he referred to the planet as "a pretty place," and so it was logged in the Gateway atlases as "Pretty Place."

Mendoza got what he was after: a two-million-dollar science bonus for finding the planet at all, and the promise of a royalty share on whatever subsequent missions might discover on Pretty Place. That could have been really serious money; according to Gateway rules, if the planet were colonizable Mendoza would be collecting money from it for the rest of his life.

Almost at once two other missions, both Fives, copied his settings and made the same trip.

That was when they changed the name to Pretty Poison.

The follow-up parties were not as cautious as Mendoza. They didn't keep their spacesuits on. They didn't have the natural protection of Pretty Poison's own fauna, either. The local life had evolved to meet a real challenge; those furry silicon spikes were not for ornament. They were armor. Those bright young stars in the nebula were not radiating visible light alone. They were powerful sources of ionizing radiation and hard ultraviolet. Four of the ten explorers came down with critical sunburn before they began to show signs of something worse. All of them, by the time they got back to Gateway, required total blood replacement, and two of them died anyway.

It was a good thing that Mendoza was a prudent man. He hadn't spent his two million in wild carouse, expecting the vast royalties that might come as his percentage of all that colonizing his planet would bring about. The planet could not be inhabited by human beings. The royalties never came.

Mission Burnout

Of the nearly one thousand Heechee vessels found on Gateway, only a few dozen were armored. Most of them were Fives. An Armored Three was a rarity, and when the crew of Felicia Monsanto, Greg Running Wolf, and Daniel Pursy set out in one they knew there was a certain element of danger; its course setting might take them to some really nasty place.

But when they came out of FTL and looked around they had a moment of total rapture. The star they were near was quite sunlike, a G-2 the same size as Earth's Sol; they were orbiting a planet within the livable zone from

the star, and their detectors showed Heechee metal in large quantities!

The biggest concentration was not on the planet. It was an asteroid in an out-of-ecliptic orbit — a lot like Gateway — and it had to be another of those abandoned parking garages for Heechee ships! When they approached it they saw that the guess was correct ... But they also saw that the asteroid was empty. There were no ships. There were no artifacts at all. It was riddled with tunnels, just like Gateway, but the tunnels were vacant. Worse than that, the whole asteroid seemed in very bad shape, as though it were far older, and had had a far harder life, than Gateway itself.

That puzzle cleared itself up when, with the last of their resources, two of the crew ventured down to the planet itself.

It had been a living planet once. It had life now, in fact, but in scant numbers and only in its seas — algae and sea-bottom invertebrates, nothing more. Somehow or other the planet had been seared and ravaged ... and the culprit was in view.

Six and a half light-years away from that system they discovered a neutron star. Like most neutron stars, it was a pulsar, but as their ship was nowhere near its axis of radiation they could hardly detect its jets. But it was a radio source and their instruments showed that it was there, the remnant of a supernova.

The rest of the story the experts on Gateway filled in for them when they returned. That solar system had been visited by the Heechee, but it was in a bad neighborhood. After the Heechee left — probably knowing what was about to happen — the supernova exploded. The planet had been baked. Its gases had been driven off, most of its seas boiled away. As the hellish heat died away, a thin new atmosphere was cooked out of the planet's crust, and the remaining water vapor had come down in incredible torrents of rain, scouring away mountain valleys, burying plains in silt, leaving nothing ... hundreds of thousands of years before.

Monsanto, Running Wolf, and Pursy got a science bonus for their mission — a small one, a hundred and sixty thousand dollars to be divided among the three of them.

By Gateway standards, that wasn't serious money. It was enough to pay their bills on Gateway for a few extra weeks. It was not nearly enough to retire on. All three of them shipped out again as soon as they found another berth, and from their next voyage none of them ever returned.

Probably the Gateway prospectors should have taken it for granted that the hospitable, Earthlike planets were bound to be a lot rarer than malignant ones. Their own solar system made that much clear. Anyway, all those years of listening to Project Ozma radio signals should have taught them that much.

What they found out was that there were a myriad different kinds of hostile environments. There was Eta Carina Seven; it was the right size, it had air, it even had water — when it wasn't frozen, anyway. But Eta Carina Seven had a highly eccentric orbit. It was pretty well iced over, though still on its way to its frigid aphelion, and there were terrible storms. One lander never came back

at all. Three of the others were damaged, or lost at least one crew member.

Mendoza was not the only one to find a planet that looked nice, but turned out to be poison. One pleasing-looking planet was well vegetated, but the vegetation was all toxicodendrons. They were far worse than Earth's poison ivy. The slightest touch meant blisters, agonizing itching pain, and anaphylactic shock. On the first mission to it everyone who landed on its surface died of allergic reactions, and only the crew member who stayed with the ship in orbit was able to get back to Gateway.

But once in a while — oh, very seldom — there was a good one.

The happiest of all, in the first decade of Gateway's operation, was the mission of Margaret Brisch, usually called "Peggy."

Peggy Brisch went out in a One. She found what was really another Earth. In fact, in some ways it was nicer than Earth ever was. Not only were there no toxicodendrons to kill anyone who touched, nor any nearby star with lethal radiation, there were not even any large, dangerous animals.

There was only one thing wrong with Peggy's Planet. It would have been an ideal place to take Earth's overflow population, if only it hadn't been located a good nineteen hundred light-years away.

There was no way to get to it except on a Heechee ship. And the largest Heechee ship carried only five people.

The colonization of Peggy's Planet would have to wait.

First and last, the Gateway prospectors found more than two hundred planets with significant life. It drove the taxonomists happily crazy. Generations of doctoral candidates had dissertation material that could not fail to win their degrees, and hard work simply to find names for the thirty or forty million new species the prospectors found for them.

They didn't have that many names to spare, of course. The best they could do was assign classification numbers and note the descriptions. There was no hope of establishing genera or even families, although all the descriptions were fed into the databanks and a lot of computer time went into trying to discover relationships. The best descriptions were genetic; DNA, or something like it, was pretty nearly universal. The next best were morphological. Most living things on Earth share such common architectural features as the rod (indispensable for limbs and bones in general) and the cylinder (internal organs, torsos and so on), because they provide the most strength and carrying capacity you can get for the money. For the same reasons, so did most of the galaxy's bestiary. Not always, though. Arcangelo Pelieri's crew found a mute world, full of soft-bodied things that had never developed bones or chitin, soundless as earthworms or jellyfish. Opal Cudwallader reached a planet where (the scientists deduced) repeated extinctions had kept knocking off land animals as they developed. Its principal creature (like Earthly pinnipeds and cetaceans) was a former land-dweller returned to the sea, and nearly everything else was related. It was as though Darwin's finches had colonized an entire planet.

And so on and so on, until the explorers began to think they had found every possible variation on water-based, oxygen-breathing life.

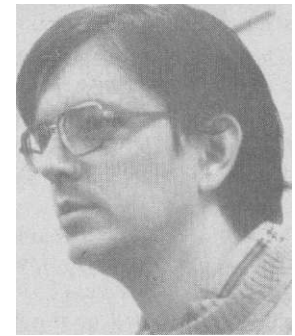
Perhaps they almost had.

But then they found the Sluggards — the same race the Heechee had known as the Slow Swimmers — and took another look at the hitherto unimagined possible flora and fauna of the gas giants ... But that's another story. □

End of Part II

Part III next issue.

Critical Theories



Most readers just read fiction and enjoy it, and never give much thought to the how and why of story construction. My brother once expressed complete incomprehension at the idea that anyone other than a writer would ever want to read books about books. Yet books *about* books have flourished for a long time, Aristotle's *Poetics* being only the earliest example that comes to mind effortlessly. *The Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson is a critical work in a way, a summary of how poets were supposed to handle Norse mythological material.

And beyond strictly technical criticism (which might well be exclusively for writers, or at least people very interested in the inner-plumbings of literature), there have long since been books of what might be called literary appreciation: which are fun, to be read for enjoyment and information, and which are intended to direct the reader to more entertainment. Isaac Disraeli (the father of the famous Benjamin) was one of history's great bookworms, whose lifetime of reading yielded *'Curiosities of Literature* (6 vols., 1791-1834), a vast compendium of charming essays about nearly *everything* that occurs between two sets of covers — except science fiction, alas. (I recommend it anyway. Let's not be provincial.)

Science fiction criticism begins relatively late, and comes from within the narrowly-defined genre. The first potentially significant contribution was H.P. Lovecraft's "Notes on Inter-

planetary Fiction" (1936), but its publication was sufficiently obscure as to delay any impact.

Real SF criticism seems to have sprung full-grown from the forehead of Damon Knight in 1945, in the form of his famous essay on A.E. van Vogt, a version of which you can read in his equally pioneering book, *In Search of Wonder*. I make a distinction between

the books under discussion. The critic is more interested in telling us what something means, or where it fits in literary history, or how various influences came together to form the work in question.

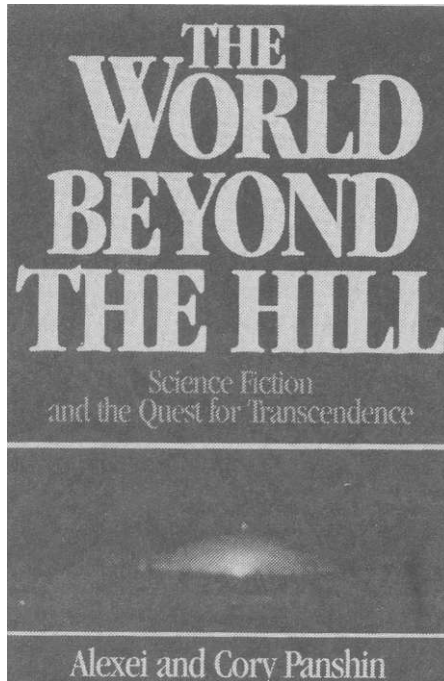
All of which leads to critical *theory* and the ticklish question of whether or not theories of fiction are of any use to the writer at all. Perhaps they are of use to the *reader*, who can use a theory to organize what he or she has read, but for the writer, I think that too much theorizing is a bad thing. It tempts one to cram the wild and unruly story-telling impulse into the straitjacket of preconceived ideas. Bluntly, a *theory* of fiction is often no more than an academically upscale *formula*. Or else it is retroactively descriptive. Ever notice that when writers come up with theories, they inevitably explain the sort of thing that the writer already writes? This is interesting and sometimes useful — but if another writer tries to write according to that theory, the result can be stifling.

My advice to would-be writers is form your own theory, and do it only after you've been publishing for at least ten years. You show me yours and I'll show you mine.

The sort of writing-about-writing I've always found the most useful as a fiction reader (quite aside from certain technical criticism which I find useful as a fiction *writer*) is what might be loosely described as literary historiography. Let me recommend a particularly good example:

The World Beyond the Hill
By Alexei and Cory Panshin
Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1989
685 pp., \$29.95

Copyright © 1990 by Darrell Schweitzer



criticism and reviewing. There were SF book reviewers long before there were any critics, including the clown in the 1932 *Amazing* who suggested that the then just-published *Brave New World* was nowhere near as good as the typical fare found in the SF pulp magazines and that the only merit in Huxley's fumbling effort was that at least it let the public know that science fiction existed.

It was enough to put the Sigh back into Sci-Fi.

The critic provides analysis and insight, not just consumer reporting. Indeed, most critical articles make little sense unless you have already read

Rating System

- Outstanding
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Alexei Panshin all but vanished from the field in the early '70s, and it seemed a loss. Well, this is what he (and his wife Cory) have been doing ever since, and it is worth the long silence. Let me first say that *The World Beyond the Hill* is one of the best books about SF ever, and it is my choice for next year's non-fiction Hugo.

It is critical theorizing at its best, an attempt to put the whole past history of the field into perspective. The theory behind it doesn't so much say *This is how science fiction should be written*, but *this is how science fiction has been written all along*.

The facts of our field's history are well enough set out elsewhere, and agreed upon by everyone. What *The World Beyond the Hill* does is show us the development of science fiction in terms of an adventure in human imagination. The real breakthroughs are the stories which widen vistas and enable us to imagine more.

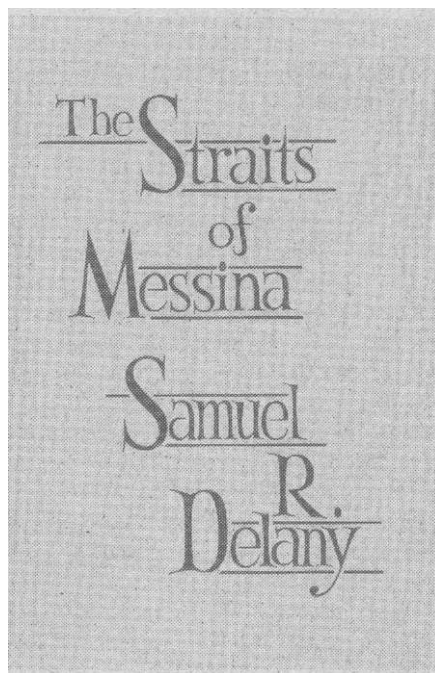
Thus, *Frankenstein* is a seminal work, but it is no more than a trembling foray from the Village (the familiar world) into the strangeness of *The World Beyond The Hill*. Having taken one good look at what technological change might imply, Victor Frankenstein, like his creator Mary Shelley, retreated in all haste. Jules Verne was able to go much farther, and Wells farther still. Stapledon, for all his cosmic vastness, could not imagine mankind venturing beyond the solar system into the universe at large. E.E. "Doc" Smith did so effortlessly. And so on. The theme continues until the end of the Golden Age, where we have John W. Campbell venturing into the psychic, and into explorations of the nature of reality. There the book ends. Another volume may well be forthcoming.

If I have any objection to this at all, it is that it displays the pyramid syndrome: something I discovered in college, while battling Hegel's very silly *The Philosophy of History*, in which the philosopher tries to prove — with much violence to the facts — that the summit and pinnacle of human evolution, toward which all previous experience was inexorably directed, was, of course, his own 19th-century Germany.

The Panshins have all of imaginative fiction coming to a pinnacle in the mind of John W. Campbell Jr., circa 1945. Now I would be the last to

deny that Campbell was, after Wells, the most important single individual in the history of the field. He largely *did* shape all that came after him — but not entirely, and sometimes people who don't fit into this neat model tend to get ignored. In chronicling the transition from the world of spirit into the rational, materialistic universe of science (and science fiction), the authors are a bit too quick to say, "After such-and-such a date nobody could believe in the spiritual anymore." Then they conveniently fail to mention C.S. Lewis and *Out of the Silent Planet*, even as an anachronism. Ray Bradbury also escapes notice.

So the theoretical model we have here is interesting, insightful, and valid; no better study of the forces that



went into forming American, generic science fiction has yet been written. But it isn't the whole story.

Rating: fttiktftk

A few more words about critical theory. One of the most absurd controversies we've been having in our little cornpatch (the dust has already settled in the field of academia, I'm told) concerns what is variously known as Structuralism, Deconstructionism, or Post-Structuralism. These terms allegedly represent three distinct schools of thought, but I think they're best summed up by Gore

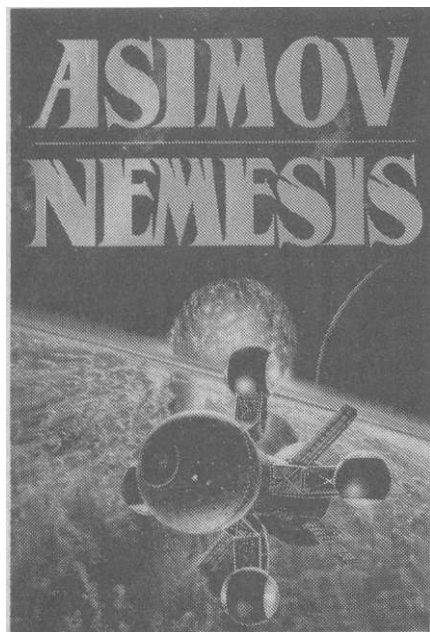
Vidal's name for them, "the French disease."

You can tell Structuralists, Deconstructionists, etc. by the funny way they talk: "What deconstruction does, if I can hazard such a declarative statement in an area noted for its insistent verbal multivalences, is dissolve oppositions: I have said that 'deconstruct' is almost a synonym for 'analysis.' But here is where that 'almost' must come home. To analyze (cognate, after all, with Lysol) is 'to dissolve from above,' while deconstruction unbuilds throughout. It unbuilds oppositions by unmasking the hierarchies that hide behind them. Often, as an interim strategy, it overturns the hierarchy to reveal the contradictions and interdependencies it rests on in order to maintain its positionality, its coherence, its unity."

That's from a puzzling speech Samuel R. Delany made at Readercon last year, which you can now read serialized in *The New York Review of Science Fiction* (issues 6-8). It's all like that, glimmering close to sense at times, then fading out again. He lost most of his audience — though, in fairness, he warned them this was going to be rough — starting with my friend Diane, who walked out after half an hour, commenting, "It's all Greek to me." Afterward several people thanked her for breaking the ice. I stayed to the end, and did indeed find it pretty rough going. I didn't find it very enlightening, though I did note that there were about five people present who spoke fluent Delanyspeak. I didn't understand their questions either. Certainly if the speech was an attempt at communication, it was a near total failure.

Now for most Deconstructionists, the only cure I'd prescribe is locking the sufferer alone in a room with a copy of *The Elements of Style*, but the otherwise curious I'd refer to Donald R. Burleson's "Why (Not) Deconstruct Lovecraft?" in *Crypt of Cthulhu* #66 (Lammas, 1989). It doesn't matter if you're interested in Lovecraft or not. Burleson has started a considerable controversy by writing long-winded "deconstructions" of Lovecraftian verse, sometimes several thousand words of murky amphigory about a single, short poem. Response from fellow Lovecraftians has been decidedly underwelming, but in response Burleson penned the article in question. He proves to be far more articulate

than Delany ("An articulate Deconstructionist?" my other friend Lee says. "Isn't that a contradiction in terms?") and actually manages to explain what the whole business is about. He doesn't *convince*, but at least he gets as far as a flat-earther saying, "Well, we believe the world is flat," rather than just mumbling in technical jargon about *signs* and *signifiers* and the like. It seems to be a crazy matter of ignoring all context and finding layer upon layer of meaning behind each word, even each syllable of what is written. (Using this method, Delany wrote a whole book, *The American Shore*, about a single



short story by Thomas Disch. It too is rough going.)

The relevance of that discussion is simply this: does this sort of theorizing have anything to do with literature? Or is it just a word-game for bored and slightly arrogant academics? (Who insist, of course, that *their* school of criticism supersedes all others, so if you don't learn their jargon you're out in the cold; I think the reverse is true.)

First of all, here's the explanation for why Delany's writing went bad twenty years ago. (Has it really been that long? Yes, aside from an autobiography, his last decent book was *Driftglass*. He remains strictly a writer of the '60s.) He is certainly the worst example in our field of the damage over-attention to critical theory can do. Now he talks funny and incomprehensibly, and so do the characters in his books. We've lost a major talent. Blame the academics. As a From the Bookshelf

result, his latest non-fiction book is of only marginal interest:

The Straits of Messina

By Samuel R. Delany
Serconia Press, 1989
170 pp., \$19.95

Most of the essays in this volume are those Delany wrote in his "K. Leslie Steiner" persona. They are, in short, reviews and critical articles about his own work which he wished someone else would have written. The Scylla and Charybdis the title refers to, and between which he must sail, are "childish self-depreciation" and "over-weening self-importance." He's not entirely successful, and is at his least convincing when he (or "Steiner") must assure us how great or philosophically rich the later works of Samuel Delany are.

But, particularly for those who speak Delanyspeak, there are insights, including a long item entitled "Some Remarks toward a Reading of *Dhalgren*" which is indeed the best analysis of this celebrated (or infamous) tome yet published. The fact that the author had to go on for nearly forty pages explaining what the book is about is in itself revealing. There are also two pieces about his still unpublished "pornographic" novel *Hogg*, which have interesting things to say about writing, pornography, and feminism, but to my mind at least, lack any overall coherence. And much of the book is occupied by a long autobiographical piece which appeared at greater length in *The Motion of Light in Water*. It's unfortunate for the author and the publisher that the present book was delayed. Otherwise all that material would be new, and *The Straits of Messina* would seem like a much more interesting book than it now does. It still remains a historically significant document, for many of us a kind of postscript to Delany's career.

Rating: ☹☹☹☹

Nemesis

By Isaac Asimov
Doubleday-Foundation, 1989
364 pp., \$18.95

I'm not in a particularly grumpy mood, nor is the subject of this column Great Writers Gone Bad, but I must confess that the reason I didn't get to read much fiction this time is that I

wasted entirely too many hours on a recent trip to the West Coast (San Francisco, I reassure you, is still there) slogging through *Nemesis*. In spare hours on planes, in airports, etc. I got the book out, and frequently dozed off, which is, ultimately, meaningful. ("Sleep is an opinion," the critic in the famous anecdote says.)

It's dismaying. I find myself alone among colleagues and contemporaries (but not the general readership; witness the bestseller lists), defending Asimov's later novels. I find considerable merit in them. *The Robots of Dawn*, for all it's too long and the hero goes to the bathroom a



record number of times, is fully as good as the other robot novels. The later Foundation novels show decided improvements in style and characterization over the original trilogy, and bring out one of Asimov's unheralded strengths: his sense of *place*. The visit to the eerie, deserted planet Solaria in *Foundation and Earth* or to Trantor itself in *Prelude to Foundation* remain memorable experiences. And, when he depicts strange societies, Asimov, more than most other writers I can think of, effectively shows us the mindset of the people living there. He writes very well indeed about *prejudice*, and enables us to examine the whole phenomenon by showing us typical human bigotry with made-up, science-fictional referents.

But somehow *Nemesis* doesn't work. It can't be that most of the action consists of people sitting around talking, then going away, then coming

back to review new developments. *All* Asimov's fiction has worked like that, all along. It can't be the scientific ideas, which are interesting and valid: the basic premise is that the Sun's companion star, the hypothetical Nemesis, is indeed present, but hidden behind a gas cloud. Next time it goes by the Solar System, it may alter Earth's orbit just enough to make the planet uninhabitable.

Somehow there's no tension, no wonder. Part of it is that nothing is immediately at stake. Even the possible destruction of Earth is five thousand years in the future. So we have assorted conversations of an Earthman who once lived on the space-colony of Rotor, his ex-wife (who has political problems now that Rotor has skipped off to Nemesis without telling anyone), and their precocious teenaged daughter who has a possibly superhuman (and certainly awkward) ability to read minds through body-language.

What's lacking is a sense of intellectual excitement. Once the basic premise is set up, the characters spend most of the book in chit-chat about their own petty affairs. The real, big situation develops, but only offstage. For once, Asimov has actually managed to be dull. I didn't think I'd ever have to say that.

Rating: *fft*

Noted:

(Since we are running out of room.)

Science Fiction from China

Ed. by Dingbo Wu and Patrick D. Murphy

Praeger, 1989

176 pp., \$18.95

It's a painful irony that this book appears now, right after the events in Tiananmen Square. I am reminded of something a Chinese-American SF writer told me, after his trip to China. The writers there explained to him that they had considerable freedom at the present (perhaps three years ago), but there was no guarantee that the government wouldn't snap down on them at any moment. And now, of course, it has, so this book is a showcase of a literary development nipped in the bud.

None of the stories is likely to be popular with American readers. They are all very crude, on the Gernsback-

early-pulp level. But as academic exercises, they show what would-be SF writers in China are (or were) thinking. (They were thinking a good deal about the West. They had read much Western SF.)

Included is Wei Yahua's "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus," the very story which shut down Chinese science fiction for a

year, because, in the guise of a critique of Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, it subtly questions authority and suggests that the future could possibly be other than a rosy Utopia. Publishers were so afraid of the consequences of this story that they stopped publishing SF.

Now, of course, they have a much better reason for jitters.

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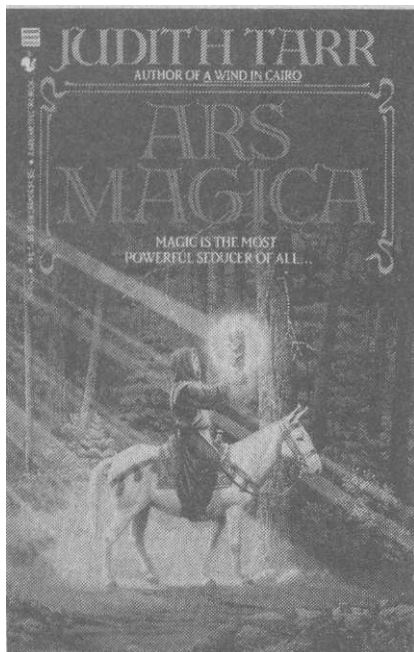
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Rating:

Ars Magica

By Judith Tarr
Bantam, 1989
276 pp., \$3.95

Pope Sylvester II, who reigned in the year 1000 (and contrary to popular belief, did not expect the world to end just then), was a noted intellectual in the midnight of the Dark Ages, about whom, inevitably, legends accrued. (The brazen head, later attributed to Roger Bacon, was once his.) Now Judith Tarr has produced a fantasy novel mixing fact



and legend, telling the story of the monk Gerbert of Aurillac (the future pope) who must balance his Christianity with his obvious talent for magic.

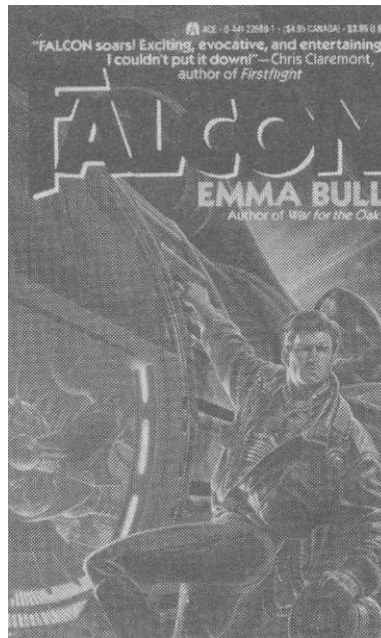
There are no great heights, no stunning beauties, but you will keep on reading. Given the present degenerate state of the fantasy novel, that's something of an accomplishment. Tarr manages to tell an interesting story reasonably well, and it isn't even part of a trilogy.

The original title, I'm told, was *Pontifex Magicus*, which would have been much better. But the publishers, who apparently think one Latin pun is easier to understand than another, chickened out.

Rating: ft-fr-ft-ft

Falcon

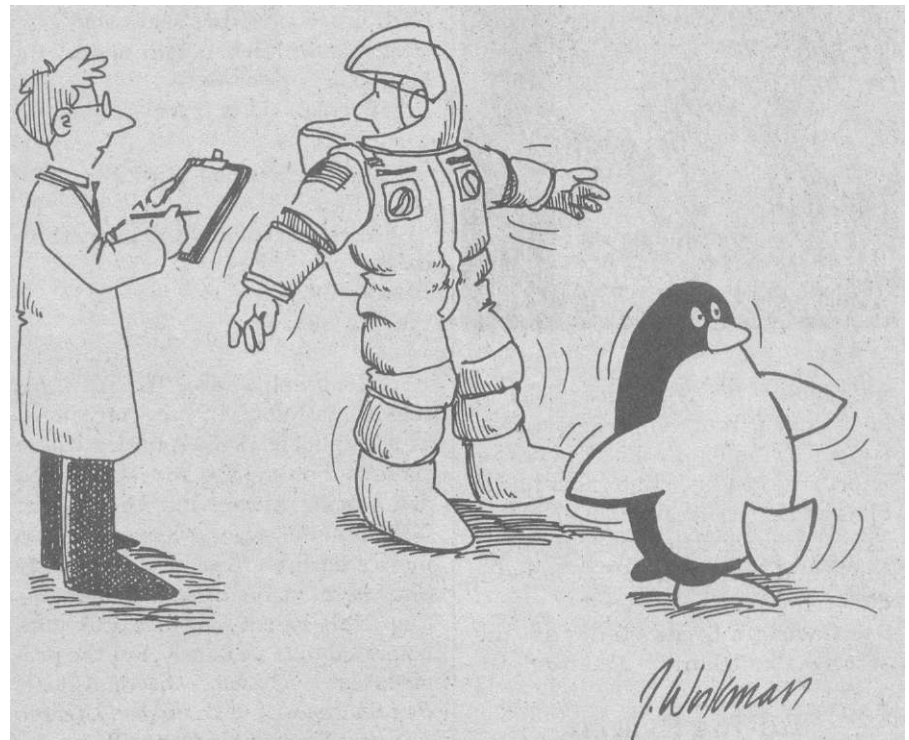
By Emma Bull



Ace, 1989
281 pp., \$3.95

Emma Bull, the author of one of the better fantasies of recent years, *War for the Oaks* (also a non-trilogy — could it be a new fashion?), now turns with equal effortlessness and grace to science fiction, in a moody space-opera of a wronged scion of a noble house who must reclaim his heritage and avenge himself on his enemies without recourse to sandworms. It's great stuff, like *Star Wars* for grownups, with better than average prose and characterization. This is not the most ambitious SF novel of the year, but within its limits it is one of the more successful.

Rating: ftfthft •



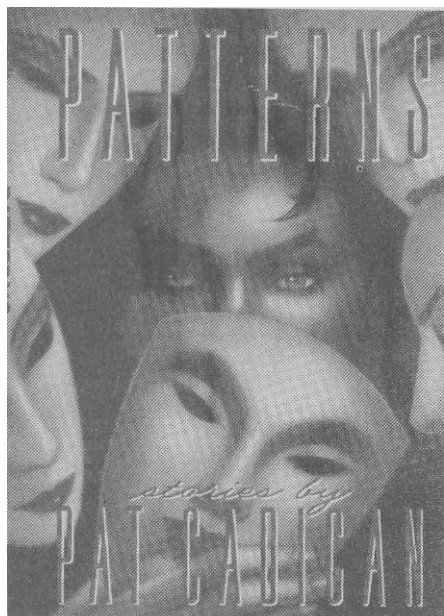
You're doing fine. Just keep following the instructor.

Strange Days In Strange Lands

Patterns

By Pat Cadigan
Ursus Imprints, 1989
207 pp., \$19.95

Pat Cadigan's *Patterns* is an impressive short fiction collection from one of the hot new stars of the SF field, even if it doesn't quite live up to Bruce Sterling's hyperbolic — and hyper-ventilating — introduction. (Note to



sateenie" (would you believe a horror story about hide-and-seeK?), "My Brother's Keeper," and most particularly "The Power And The Passion," original to this collection, which brings a shocking new twist to the vampire legend.

I don't mean to say that Cadigan's SF is not good; it's very good, if not quite as powerful as her horror. In particular, I recommend her two award-nominated stories, "Pretty Boy Crossover" and "Angel," which are both compelling. I hadn't been impressed the first time I read "Angel," but I liked it much more re-reading it here. And I must mention the oddly haunting "Another One Hits The Road," a tale of compulsive Running that should come off as ludicrous, but somehow doesn't.

Don't miss this collection. Cadigan writes first-rate, chilling stuff that will live in your mind for a long time.

Rating: fttftft+

The Silent Invasion, Book Four: The Great Fear

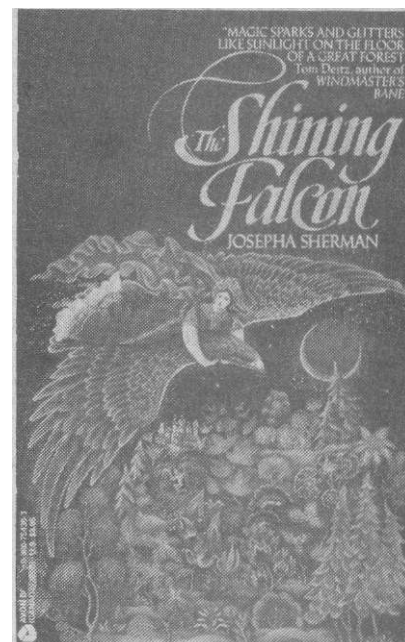
By Michael Cherkas and Larry Hancock
NBM, 1989
80 pp., \$9.95

The graphic novel *The Silent Invasion* is set in a paranoid, claustrophobic 1950s America where there's a Communist under every bed and a flying saucer behind every tree. This unique series owes a debt to movies such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, but it takes the fear further. This fourth and last book does not stand independently, but the previous three volumes — *Secret Affairs*, *Red Shadows*, and *Tarnished Dreams* — are still available from NBM.

The central character is Matt Sinkage, a reporter who keeps uncovering frightening evidence of a massive conspiracy involving aliens. He has become dangerously obsessed with the matter, though, and even more paranoid than he should be. It is

interesting and ambitious to have a paranoid main character who's right about his conspiracy theories (at least we think so) but is still obviously nuts, having gone steadily downhill since the first book.

The odd, cartoonish drawings give the books an appropriately nightmarish feel. The authors are very effective, like the best horror movies, in using our own fears against



us. The series is bizarre and involving, with a strong undercurrent of black humor. I highly recommend it.

Rating: fttftft

The Shining Falcon
By Josepha Sherman
Avon, 1989
341 pp., \$3.95

The Shining Falcon, Josepha Sherman's first novel for adults, is a delightfully entertaining fantasy. It relies on the Slavic mythos, which is interesting and unusual. (I notice that C.J. Cherryh has a Slavic fantasy out now; the idea must be in the ether.

Rating System

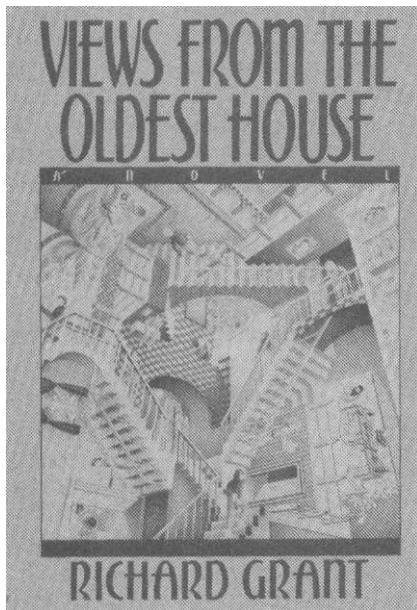
★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Very Good
★★★	Good
★★	Fair
★	Poor

Sherman's may get passed by as a result, which would be a shame.)

The plot involves romance and political intrigue. Prince Finist of Kirtesk is trying to retain his throne against the magical intrigues of his cousin Ljuba, and he falls in love with Maria Danilovna, a member of a noble family which has been unjustly exiled from their home in Stargorod. Most of the second half of the book is devoted to Maria's dangerous trek to Kirtesk to save the gravely ill Finist from his cousin's machinations.

This is not an unfamiliar plot, but Sherman swept me right through it. The tone of her writing is just right. The loving detail she provides makes the world come alive.

Sherman's characters are quirky



and believable, far more interesting than they often are in heroic fantasy. The heroine is very active and independent without being anachronistically feminist. Even the supernatural creatures who inhabit the vast forests are convincing. The villain is no one-dimensional black hat, either; by the end of the book, I was feeling sorry for Ljuba at the same time that I was rooting for her downfall.

The Shining Falcon is absorbing, and I enjoyed it a great deal. It is a beautifully written evocation of an unfamiliar world.

Rating:

Views from the Oldest House

By Richard Grant

Foundation-Doubleday, 1989

480 pp., \$19.95 (hardcover), \$8.95

(paper)

From the Bookshelf

Richard Grant's first two novels, *Saraband of Lost Time* and *Rumors of Spring*, established him as one of the finest writers in the genre. Unfortunately, his new book, *Views from the Oldest House*, is an ambitious failure, a mish-mash which is often nearly unreadable and simply does not work as a novel. Had I not been reviewing it, I never would have finished the book. The publisher says it may become a campus cult classic, and it may, since it features college students using heavy drugs at parties that last for days, but I wouldn't count on it.

The book is set in a fairly near future, after various unspecified disasters (some apparently ecological, some possibly war-related) have caused a near-total breakdown of society, called the Dissolution. The main character, Turner Ashenden, somehow finds himself embroiled in an underground rebellion against Rodarch, the dictatorial Chief Administrator, who is brutally implementing policies that seem to spring from some strange variety of socialism. I'm sorry I can't be clearer about this, but there wasn't much more of the plot I understood.

The novel is written in a weird style that blocked all my efforts to become involved. The continual shifts between first and third person (and occasionally between past and present tense) are frustrating and confusing, and the point Grant is trying to make by using them only becomes partly clear at the end.

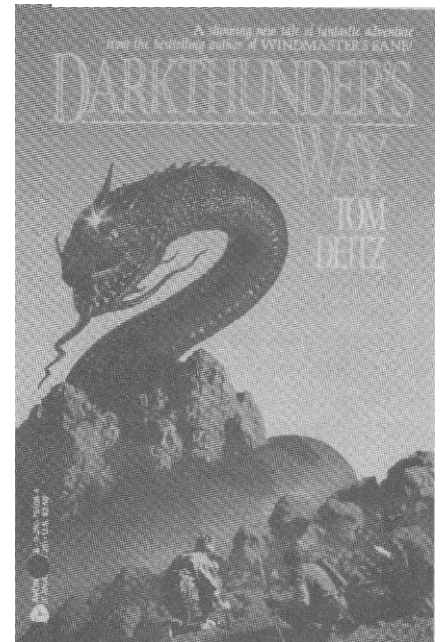
The two main characters, Turner and the mute Tristin, are both so incredibly passive that it's impossible to sympathize with them. Both of them are puppets, and most of the book seems to be a contest over who gets to manipulate Turner. Turner's roommate and mentor, Black Malachi Pantera, is the kind of overly eccentric character that I just can't abide, and I didn't believe in him for an instant. The other characters aren't bad, but they're lost in the mess.

As I read on, I got more and more annoyed by the book. I never understood the intended purpose of the pivotal GRAILNET, which in some situations sounds like it is supposed to be a real communications network but in others creates temporary embodiments of people's souls. I didn't understand why Maridel, the pubescent *femme fatale*, was important. I

was also bothered by the book's mysticism, especially since the point of it all never becomes intelligible.

There are some beautiful descriptive details in this novel, and I enjoyed it when I got a chance to see this post-Dissolution world, but it never amounts to anything. For all the struggle over Turner, he doesn't seem to have had any important effect on the world. I wasn't really surprised that the book leaves nearly all questions unanswered; by the time I plowed through to the end, I expected that.

The publisher describes the book as "gonzo," but it isn't — it's not light-hearted enough. It takes itself extremely seriously, but in the end seems to be talking to itself. At least,



I couldn't make out what it was saying. I have no bias against experimental fiction, but experiments sometimes fail, and this one certainly did.

Rating:

Darkthunder's Way

By Tom Deitz

Avon, 1989

352 pp., \$3.50

Darkthunder's Way is the third book in the fantasy series that began with *Windmaster's Bane* and *Fireshaper's Doom*. It can stand independently, although having read the other books makes the experience richer. Despite some weaknesses in plot and execution, it is an entertaining and suspenseful book.

Tom Deitz's series concerns the adventures of David Sullivan, a high school student from Georgia who chances to get involved with Faerie — in particular, with the Sidhe of Tir-Nan-Og, which, in its magical fashion, adjoins rural Georgia. In the first two books, Deitz stayed pretty much within the familiar bounds of Celtic myth. This time, however, he moves away to the Cherokee mythos, which is more interesting, as well as much less familiar to most people.

The story opens only about two weeks after the end of *Fireshaper's Doom*. As a result of what happened in that book, war is about to break out among the Sidhe, and the only way to avoid it is to smuggle the Faery Morwyn to her homeland. The usual magical routes are blocked, though, and it seems that the only way to get where they're going is by cutting through yet another magical land: Galunlati, the Cherokee Overworld. David, his best friend Alec, his Faery friend Fionchadd, and his new Cherokee acquaintance Calvin set out on a quest to find this hidden path. Of course, things go wrong almost immediately, leaving the team with many obstacles to overcome and supernatural beings to defeat before they can return home. But even then, a happy ending is not so easily bought....

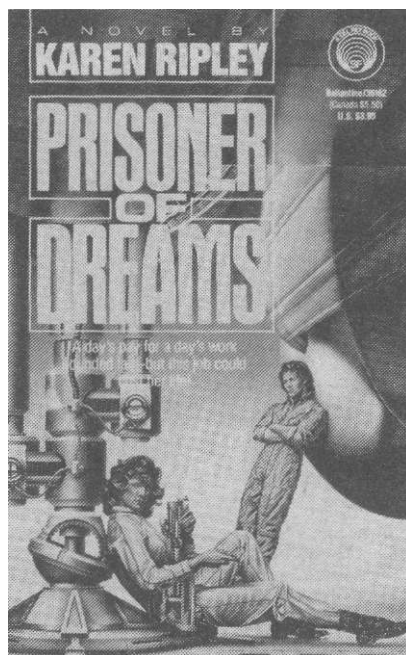
It's an exciting story, full of adventure, which moves along logically — logically for the mythos, that is, which does not have the kind of logic we're used to. In addition, Deitz examines serious issues of jealousy and loyalty among friends. Unfortunately, the execution is not always up to Deitz's ambition.

As in the previous two books, the parts of the story taking place in our own world are the weakest. Deitz continues to have problems writing credible dialogue in these sections. For some reason, he does fine in the magical worlds, even though the protagonists don't start speaking pretentious "epic" language. The writing is generally pedestrian, although it glows during the trip through Galunlati.

The plot relies on a few cheats — people not asking the obvious question, or not telling the other characters something important. I wasn't convinced by one Faery enemy's sudden change of heart toward her victim, either. Although Deitz does end the story, while leaving room for fur-

ther books in the series, there are a few loose ends that really should have been tied up. In particular, early in the book David is confronted by his friend Darrell, who is resentful and jealous because he is the only one of David's friends who is not in on the adventures in Faerie and doesn't like having secrets kept from him. David truly can't tell him, because of a magical ban he is under, and there are some fireworks. But then the issue does not come up again in the book.

The main characters are well done, and by concentrating on a small group Deitz allows us to get to know them better. The other members of David's family are a bit intrusive when they appear, since they're not relevant to the story. David treats his



girlfriend quite badly over her decision to go to school elsewhere, but that's realistic. Calvin's arrival seems remarkably convenient, although that could be justified as magical. I had the impression he had some kind of power that made David trust him immediately, but the issue isn't dealt with; David doesn't seem to wonder why this stranger is suddenly one of his closest confidants. I would have liked Fionchadd to be more active, since he's a very interesting character, and portraying credible Faeries would be an accomplishment.

On the whole, *Darkthunder's Way* is interesting and involving, featuring believable teenage characters who are only a little more competent than real ones. Deitz's writing

continues to improve, and his move away from the familiar is heartening. I'll be watching for his future books.

Rating: iViViV-}

Prisoner of Dreams

By Karen Ripley

Del Rey, 1989

263 pp., \$3.95

Karen Ripley's first novel, *Prisoner of Dreams*, is a space opera full of intrigue and adventure. Despite some problems in execution, it's fun to read and suspenseful.

Jo-lac is a space pilot who's always on the edge of insolvency. When she is cheated out of an expected cargo, she agrees to transport a government prisoner to the planet Heinlein. When an "accident" nearly destroys the ship as they take it out of orbit, Jo gets suspicious and begins to find out just who her prisoner is and why the government wants him dead.

The plot is exciting and fits together well, and the main character is engaging, though the others are a bit sketchier. The background universe is interesting and credible, with some original details.

The first few chapters are amazingly exposition-heavy, becoming quite clunky and annoying as one lecture follows another. Ripley needs to learn how to work in the necessary background more deftly. Jo's thoughts often sound like those of a denizen of the 20th century, rather than of the future. The climactic scene of the novel is painfully cliched, as the sneering villain explains all to the good guys.

But there's some good stuff in here; I particularly like the ambiguous relationship between Jo and her partner Raydor, a mutant human. The writing is fine, and the scenery of the novel is well drawn and easy to visualize. In short, this is a promising debut, and I enjoyed it despite its flaws.

Rating:

Strands of Starlight

By Gael Baudino

Signet, 1989

371 pp., \$4.50

The packaging of *Strands of Starlight*, especially the blurbs, gives it the appearance of being generic. In fact, this well-done novel belongs to

the realist school of fantasy, with a gritty and often disgusting world. It is about a woman learning the sword and taking revenge on her tormentors, but it's done with many original twists and held my interest all the way through.

The book is set in 14th-century Europe, nearly indistinguishable from our own, except that magic is real, and so are Elves; both Elves and other magic-users are considered heretics and are hunted down by the Inquisition.

Miriam is a healer, with a magical power that can absorb and cure nearly any wound or illness. Her power is uncontrollable, often leaving her very weak, and it forces her to heal



any wound she is aware of. Caught and tortured by the Inquisition, she manages to escape, and is taken in by a kindly midwife. When a difficult birth forces Miriam to reveal her power, she must flee again, and during her journey she is brutally raped by a man she has just healed. Taken into the independent Free Towns, where magic is accepted and dealings with Elves are common, she begins to work toward her revenge. At the same time, the Free Towns are in growing danger, from the church and from nobles who covet their wealth.

Baudino's writing is lovely, if occasionally a bit overwrought. The Elves, and a few humans, are Goddess-worshippers; though I generally lack patience with that sort of fantasy — a personal prejudice — the way it was executed here, I didn't mind it.

The reader isn't whacked over the head with the religion.

The author has succeeded in evoking the 14th century, in all its mud, violence, and glory; she even includes references to real historical figures to give it further grounding. Miriam is well rounded and believable, and she truly grows during the course of the novel. The other characters are good as well, particularly the humans; the Elves were more difficult to understand.

Strands of Starlight is absorbing and exciting, with a fine climax and a satisfying ending. Even if you don't read a lot of fantasy, take a look at this one.

Rating:

Tor Double Novel No. 13:
The Blind Geometer
By Kim Stanley Robinson
and
The New Atlantis
By Ursula K. Le Guin
Tor, 1989
183 pp., \$3.50

To start off, I must say that the packaging of this entry in Tor's fine series of doubles is misleading, since it leads you to think the authors' contributions are reasonably equal. In fact, the book contains Robinson's Nebula-winning novella and an additional novelette by Robinson ("The Return from Rainbow Bridge"); the Le Guin novelette, at 42 pages, is shorter than either of Robinson's contributions.

That said, let's turn to the contents. "The Blind Geometer," a tale of deception and intrigue, is quite good, though not great, and it's just barely science-fictional. I liked "The Return from Rainbow Bridge" better, but more for its beautiful depictions of the Arizona landscape than its literary value. It's a fantasy/magic realism approach to the world of the Navajo, and I found it somewhat unsatisfying.

"The New Atlantis" is well written, if a bit didactic, especially at the beginning. Le Guin presents one of the more depressing dystopias I've encountered, a totalitarian United States with its economy and environment destroyed.

Overall, this book is a decent value for Robinson fans, although it's not the place to start if you're unfamiliar with his work. Le Guin fans will find better pickings in the

author's collections.

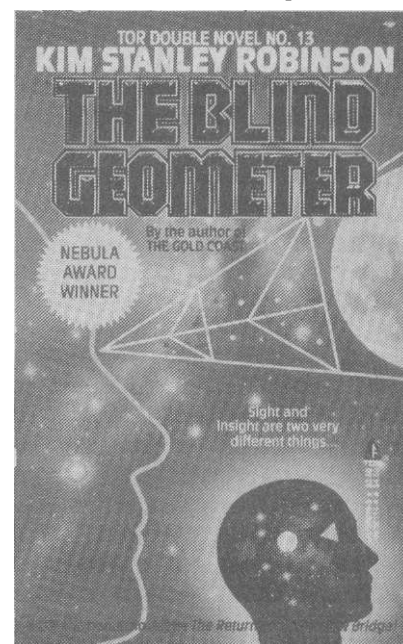
Rating:

Noted:

Science Fiction, Fantasy, & Horror: 1988

By Charles N. Brown and William G. Contento
Locus Press, 1989
463 pp., \$50.00

Locus editor Charles N. Brown and bibliographer William G. Contento have released the latest in their series of annual reference works. It is an index to all SF, fantasy, and horror novels and short fiction published in

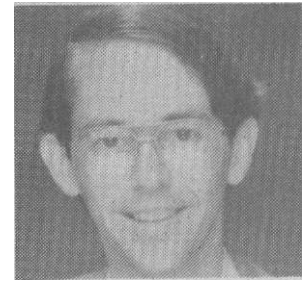


English during 1988. In addition, it includes year-end summaries and recommended reading lists, as well as a research index by Hal W. Hall which classifies by subject and author books and articles about SF and related genres.

I'm not qualified to judge the caliber of the bibliography, but it certainly appears to be the largest and most comprehensive one there is. The year-end summaries seem to have been taken from *Locus*, and at least one error that I know of has survived unchanged from its original appearance; I would hesitate to rely on them as much as on the index itself.

This series is a necessity for those doing research on the field and serious collectors. I hope that libraries will buy it, to make this resource widely available.

The Ultimate Long Shot



we all know what a long shot is. It's winning the lottery or walking out of an IRS audit actually getting back a larger refund than you filed for. The odds of such things happening are incredibly small — millions-to-one, possibly billions-to-one. But compared to the fact that you and I find ourselves on this planet, or even the fact that the Earth itself exists, those two long shots look like a sure thing.

I'm not lying.

I have a little thought experiment for you to consider.

Imagine a funnel — but a very special kind of funnel. Down at its bottom, the funnel walls are practically vertical. As you move up those walls, and the funnel's throat becomes larger and larger, the slope becomes less and less steep, eventually becoming totally flat. A funnel like that doesn't appear to be all that special, but it really is — this funnel is a bit on the large side, perhaps a hundred billion or so light years across at its outer flat surface (that makes it several times larger than the universe). In addition to imagining this funnel of extra-universal dimensions, we'll also travel backwards in time, about fifteen billion years back, just at the moment of the Big Bang. We'll be sitting right there, in the bottom of our funnel, when the entire known universe pops out of the nothingness. And as it pops out, it blows us right up that funnel (we'll neglect the fact that the radiation and gravitational forces would reduce us into microscopic chunkettes of protons and neutrons). But before we go careening through the galaxy, I want us to take note of the initial conditions that threw us up the funnel. Let's take a close look at both the energy of the Bang and the amount of mass spewed out.

Suppose that the Big Bang was not all that big. Assume that it was more like the Big Dud. What would happen to you? Perhaps the explosion

would hurl you up the side of that universal funnel, letting you travel a few million light years up and out, slowing down as you move farther and farther outward. But eventually you'd run out of steam and go sliding back down the funnel, right along with everything else spewed out in the Big Dud. In a few hundred million years, you'd find yourself, along with everything else in the universe, collapsing back on yourself at the bottom of the funnel.

That's one extreme.

At the other end of the spectrum we can suppose that the Big Bang was really the Very Big Bang. This blast throws you up along the walls of the funnel, giving you enough energy that when you reach the point where the funnel flattens out, you're still moving at a sizable fraction of the speed of light. At this point there's nothing to stop you, nothing to cause you to slide back down into the funnel. You just go on forever.

That's the other extreme.

So is there anything else that can happen — something possibly in between these two extremes?

Yes.

We'll call it the Just Right Bang.

In the Just Right Bang you come flying up the walls of the funnel with just the right amount of energy, so that as you slow down, eventually coming to a halt, you stop at exactly that point along the funnel where its slope has just gone to zero. You've found the equilibrium point. The Just Right Bang gave you just enough energy so that you don't fall back down the funnel, but not so much that you keep on sailing away.

You now sit there — *forever*.

As most of you have no doubt figured out, this funnel is not something made out of plastic or aluminum — it's a gravitational funnel, a field generated by the mass of the universe, the mass that was present in that original Big Bang. Right now, fifteen billion years after the initial ex-

plosion, all of us, all of the galaxies, are still moving outward, still climbing up out of that gravitational funnel. And just as in our thought experiment, as we rise up, we are also slowing down, being tugged at by the gravitational field of the universe itself.

Cosmologists have terms for the three types of Big Bang explosions that we just dreamed up. The Big Dud represents a Closed Universe. Under this condition there was too much original mass, creating too large a gravitational field and not a large enough explosion to hurl that mass away. Eventually it will all come crashing back (you can get no more closed than that). The case of the Very Big Bang creates an Open Universe. Under those conditions there isn't enough mass to hold the universe together; it just keeps spreading out forever — the density of matter growing thinner and thinner. Lastly, we have the third case, the one that sits just on the razor's edge between Open and Closed. This is the Flat Universe. In this one, the original energy of the outward explosion, and the gravitational field created by its mass, just cancel out.

So, which universe do we live in?

No one is sure.

We appear to be too close to the Flat Universe condition to tell which side of that equilibrium point we actually live on. We only know the mass of the universe to within a factor of ten, and that uncertainty ends up straddling us over all three conditions.

So does all this really make any difference?

At first glance, the answer might appear to be no. Unless you're a cosmologist or an astrophysicist, this is just not the sort of thing that's going to keep you awake at night.

But perhaps it should.

Don't worry. I'm not about to divulge some deep and horrible secret, something leaked from an undercover

government think tank that has discovered that the universe is really closed, and that a week from next Tuesday, the whole thing will come sucking back on itself, falling into some primordial black hole. No. It's nothing like that. What I'm going to tell you about is the Ultimate Long Shot.

In an earlier column I told you about the nonlinear nature of reality, how small changes in starting conditions can result in big changes in outcomes. Remember all that? Remember how an open window in Tokyo can make the difference between a blizzard or a heat wave in New York several months later? Well, the Big Bang and the creation of this universe, the one we find ourselves living in, is the ultimate nonlinear system. If the initial energy was a bit too small, or the mass a bit too much, the universe will crash back on itself.

At first glance, that may not seem like such a big deal. So what if in ten or twenty billion years the universe finds itself sucked down a galactic drain? Well, it probably wouldn't quite happen that way. Remember, this is a nonlinear system. If the initial Bang were just a bit less energetic, it would not have knocked a few million years off the lifetime of the universe, it would have knocked off almost all of the lifetime of the universe. And that would have been fatal to all of us.

The Earth is the result of an unlikely chain of events. After the Big Bang, what was spewed out from it was hydrogen, helium, and light. That's it — nothing else. Well, you can't build much with just those three ingredients. You certainly can't build a carbon-based human, and certainly not a planet like Earth, made up of iron, silicon, oxygen, and the other ninety-odd elements. All those elements were made billions of years after the original Big Bang, as those first hydrogen-helium stars began to die, and the most massive of them went supernova. That's where we come from. The pressures and temperatures in a supernova are severe enough to fuse low-mass atoms into the large-mass atoms that make up each of us. When those first supernovae blew, they spewed out the stuff that would make up each and every one of us.

So how long did this take? Anywhere from a few billion up to ten

billion years. And that's just to create the raw materials. After our solar system condensed out and our sun started to burn, it took another five billion years for us to show up, to evolve to the point where we could start to wonder about Open and Closed Universes. That means the universe had to be around for a minimum of seven billion years before there was even the slightest chance of something like us showing up.

You might now be thinking, That represents no problem. All that means is that this universe was a bit lucky, and that the Big Bang was actually a Very Big Bang and pushed us into the Open Universe condition. Well, you can't be pushed very far in that direction either. If the original Bang was too powerful, or the mass too low, those original hydrogens and heliums would have spread too thinly,

**A number like
this is spooky.**

**Does it imply
that the universe
was actually
made for us ...**

moving away from each other too quickly. Some stars might never have been able to form, and by the time the stars that did form went supernova and spewed out the heavier elements, the universe would have been so spread out, so thin, that it couldn't have condensed anywhere in order to form a solar system like ours.

So what does all this mean?

What it means is that for us to exist, even for our planet to exist, the Big Bang must have had the correct energy and mass to be fairly close to the Flat Universe condition. So just how close did those initial conditions have to be so that the universe didn't fall into the extreme conditions that would not have allowed us to exist?

Very close.

Very, very close.

As I told you above, the Big Bang, and the universe we live in, are nonlinear systems. But here we are, fifteen billion years after it started, and we can't tell which of the three cases we fall into. You know what a non-

linear system means — a little deviation in the beginning means a large change at the end. But here we are, fifteen billion years after the start of the experiment, and we still can't tell if the universe is Open or Closed.

Think of it this way. Imagine that you're standing in New York, with a rifle aimed at a dime that someone is holding in Los Angeles. Your aim has to be practically perfect. The slightest deviation at your end, and that bullet will miss the target by hundreds of miles. The universe is just like that — only more so. It fired its shot fifteen billion years ago, and as far as we can tell, that Big Bang bullet is still at dead center, traveling along toward the Flat trajectory. So now we finally come to the bottom line. Just how much leeway did the universe we find ourselves living in actually have? How much could the initial conditions of energy and mass have varied and still have been able to produce a planet like ours?

One part in $1E57$.

What does that mean? $1E57$ is a one followed by fifty-seven zeros! We're not talking about one in a million ($1E6$ — six zeros), or one in a billion ($1E9$ — nine zeros), but one in $1E57$!

That is the Ultimate Long Shot.

We are the result of that Ultimate Long Shot paying off.

A number like this is spooky. Does it imply that the universe was actually made for us, that someone or something had a hand in all this?

I don't know, but I do know that I find it hard to believe in winning when the odds are 1 in $1E57$. But apparently we did win, because we're all here, and right now you're reading this column. Of course, we may have won because of something that we don't yet understand or can't yet see stacked the odds back in our favor. I just don't know. This might not be the type of thing that will keep you up at night worrying about it, but perhaps it will be the sort of thing that will give you something to dream about.

Pleasant dreams.

For those of you who are mathematically inclined, or who would like to see the exact physics behind all of this for yourself, I suggest reading *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* by John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, Oxford University Press, 1988, \$15.95.

It's story time

Gregg Schuyler, this column's for you.

Mr. Schuyler is a reader who checks out these pages regularly and he noticed something.

"I wish you would go back to the original format in the Aborigines column where you gave a one-sentence preview of the story," he writes. "Now you tell us about the author but not his story — I miss that, it makes it more interesting to go to the story with an impression of the author and a taste of the story."

Well, it's nice to know someone cares. And from now on this column will include story previews.

"The *Gateway Concordance*, Part II" brings us more of mankind's contact with the mysterious Heechee culture. It's part of the book *The Heechee Trip* by **Frederik Pohl** that will be published in late 1990 by Del Rey.

The legendary Pohl says he is



Frederik Pohl

collaborating with another science fiction legend, **Isaac Asimov**, to write a non-fiction book. It discusses what's wrong with the environment, what the future holds, and what we can do about it.

Pohl and Asimov grew up together but haven't collaborated on a writing project since they wrote some short stories together fifty years ago.

When I spoke to Pohl he was off on a trip to Brazil where it was warmer.

Frank Kelly Freas, who illustrates *The Heechee Trip*, has done new illustrations just for our *Gateway* excerpts.

The much-in-demand artist has

been working on about ten magazine covers; three of them are collaborations with his wife. **Laura Brodian**



Frank Kelly Freas

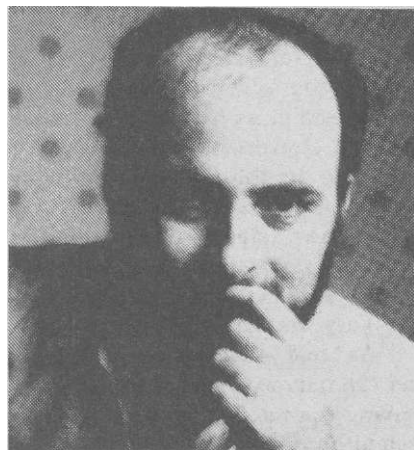
Kelly Freas, Ph.D., is a broadcaster of classical music who up until recently just dabbled in art.

"(Kelly) saw some work I did earlier and was complimentary. I thought he was just being nice."

Then one night, she says, he was working on the final version of a cover. "He said, 'I'm tired. I'm going to bed. You finish.' It was my trial by fire," says Laura.

We get a taste of multiple Hugo winner **David Brin's** "great large beeeastie of a book," *Earth*, in the story "Peacekeeper." The book features everything from the ozone layer to a microsingularity eating away at the planet's core. "Peacekeeper" is an episode involving the black market in rare animal goods.

Brin recently returned from New



David Brin



Zealand where, among other things, he jumped off a 150-foot bluff with bungee cords around his feet.

"So here comes the river, rushing up at you," he writes. "There's a terrible roar of wind, and an ululation that must be some idiot nearby screaming his head off. It lasts for such a brief time...and then BOING! You're jerked back skyward. And suddenly your confused mind and body have a context to put all of this into. Something to compare it to. 'Oh!...I see. It's a ride! Wheeeee!' "



David R. Deitrick

"Peacekeeper" is illustrated by **David R. Deitrick**. Deitrick and his family moved to Huntsville, Alabama, just weeks before tornadoes struck, killing twenty people. The twisters hit about two miles from where the Deitricks live, and there were some tense moments when their son was unable to get home because of the damage.

Deitrick has been doing a lot of illustrating for games like "Star Wars" by West End. He says he's doubled his output lately with a breakthrough in his painting technique that lets him paint much faster.

"Ride 'Em, Cyboy" is set in a future world where entertainers, including rodeo riders, are cyborgs. It's written by **Jennifer Roberson**, a



Jennifer Roberson & friend

full-time writer who just completed *Sword-Maker*, the third novel in her *Sword Dancer* series. (Her subtitle for it is *Conan the Barbarian Meets Gloria Steinem*.)

She'll be signing the first copies of the DAW book at the American Booksellers Association convention in June. She's now working on *Flight of the Raven* for DAW, due out later this year.

Roberson is married to computer games designer and former fighter pilot **Mark O'Green**. Her favorite hobbies include dog shows and "mall diving (authors checking on their books in the local chain bookstores and shelving them face-out)."



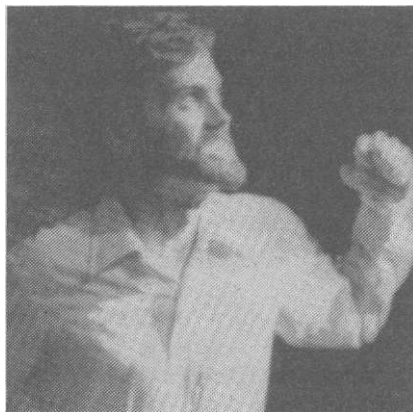
Larry Blamire

"Cyboy" is illustrated by **Larry Blamire**. Blamire sold both his paintings for "Cyboy," but when I spoke to him he was still waiting for money from Noreascon for some paintings he sold at WorldCon.

On the theater front, a play Larry

wrote four years ago is being performed by the Alliance Theater in Los Angeles starting January 27. "Jump Camp" is a dark comedy that received a lot of critical and audience praise during its run in Boston.

E. Michael Blake brings us "Frost King," the story of one merchant's negotiations with a puzzling race of energy beings.



E. Michael Blake

Blake is an associate editor of *Nuclear News*. His latest story will be

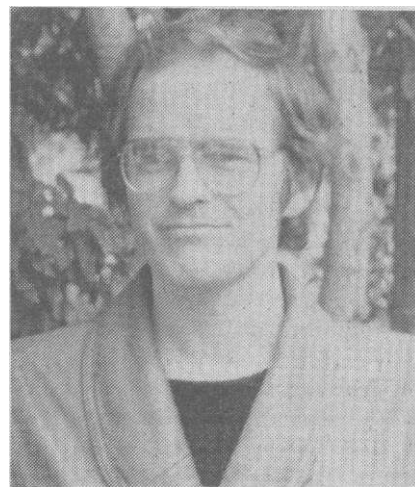


David Brian

in the book, *There Will Be War Volume TV: Guns of Darkness*, was published by Tor in 1987 and another in that series will be out soon.

Blake says he is now "hip-deep" in a cartoon project, *The SF/Fantasy Poker Deck*. He's also involved in videotaping a public access cable television series that features Moebius Theatre, the Chicago SF comedy troupe, performing half-hour sketches.

"Frost King" is illustrated by



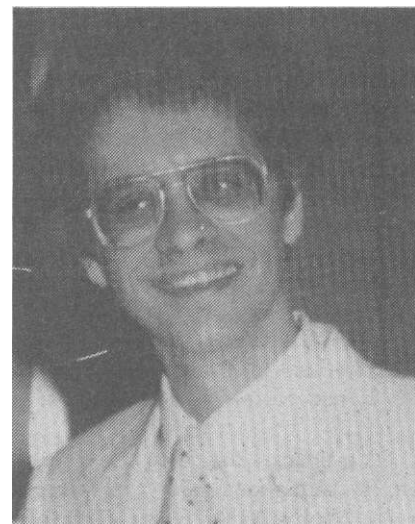
Gregor Hartmann

David Brian of "Leonardo's Finale" fame. That painting of the master has been in exhibits, magazine advertisements, and Italian television, and it's now a greeting card. One of David's illustrations for "Frost King" graces this issue's cover.

The company that is publishing "Leonardo's Finale" as a greeting card also made a Christmas card out of Brian's "Special Delivery," featuring a Santa Claus delivery on the moon.

Brian has been doing a number of magazine covers lately and is checking out European agents. He says the "Frost King" art includes his first self-portrait.

"A Month of Sundays" by **Gregor Hartmann** supposes that there is another kind of natural resource, fields of mud that produce time oil, which can speed up or slow down time. Hartmann ("Proton" to his friends) does desktop publishing for Pacific Bell and translates Japanese technical documents.



Steve Martindale

He just completed a novel, *The Silicon Dream Caper*, about a high-tech religion, and his short story "O Time Your Pyramids" is being published in Robert Silverberg's *Universe*.

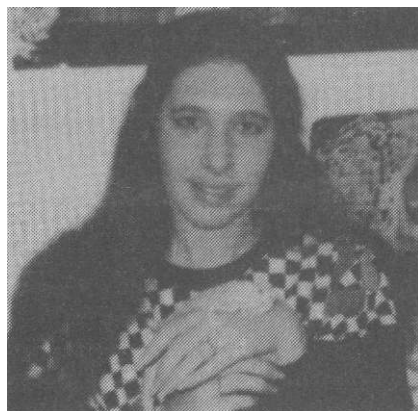
He's also been working on a story about a secret city beneath Tokyo called "Under Yamato Station." Hartmann says a year ago he was a consultant to a Japanese television show on life in the future. He helped hire four American SF writers to create the segments and acted as "harmonizer" at a two-day production meeting in Los Angeles.

"A Month of Sundays" is illustrated by Larry Blamire.

When the science of Earth conquers their native magic, some alternate-worlders seek revenge in "Technomancy" by **Steve Martindale**. A story by Martindale was selected for a *Writers of the Future* anthology, and he's been working on a series of stories based on a new ice age and mankind's cultural development therein.

Martindale lives in Phoenix with his wife Karen and lists his hobbies as

"collecting comics, coins, and choice articles from the *Weekly World News* and the *Sun*."



Jovanka Kink

"Technomancy" is illustrated by Larry Blamire.

Jovanka Kink wrote the poem "The Long Hot Silences." Her poem "Incantation" appeared in our July-August 1989 issue.

Kink is a pre-veterinary student at Wright State University in Ohio who has written many poems and several short stories for small press

publications.

Reptiles are one of her favorite subjects, and she says on a recent trip to Indonesia to visit relatives, she loved listening to the sounds of the geckos at night.

David Lunde brings us the poem "Soliloquy at the Tomb of Earth." Other Lunde poems to appear in *Aboriginal* were "Einstein's Cold Equation Blues" (Dec-Jan 1987) and "In Great Silence, Listening" (Jan-Feb 1989).

Lunde's poems show his strong background in literature and mainstream poetry. When I spoke to him the SF Poetry Association was about to print a broadside of his work.

Lunde shares his scholarly background with wife Marilyn Masiker, who is getting her Ph.D. in physical chemistry.

In March Lunde will be giving a reading at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts. The conference for academics and writers is "fairly serious but a good time" and annually attracts the likes of **Brian Aldiss**, **Harlan Ellison**, **Joe Haldeman**, and **Gene Wolfed**

A special anthology

Aboriginal Science Fiction has been nominated for a Hugo Award for two years in a row.

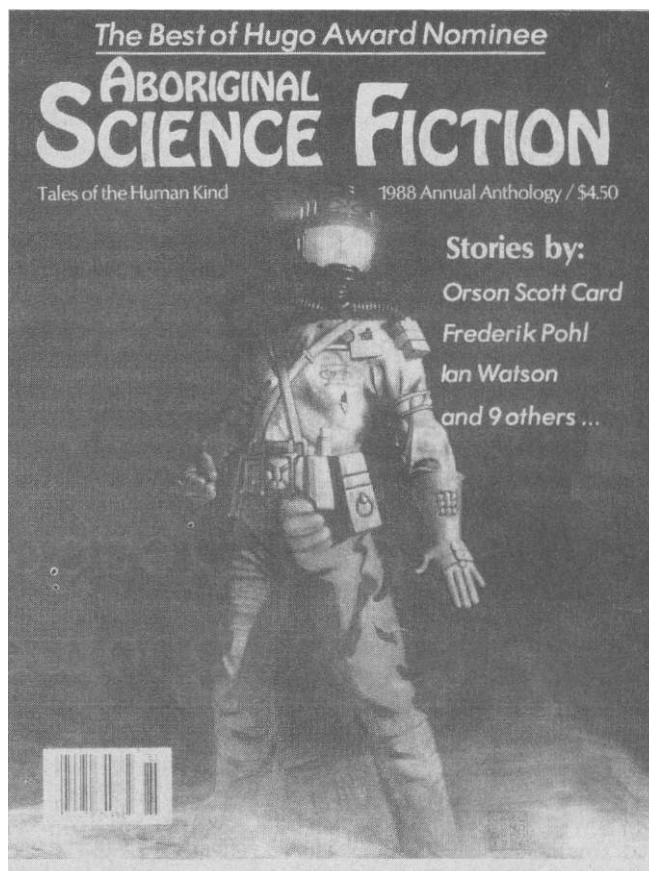
Now is your chance to see some of the best stories and art from *Aboriginal's* first seven issues — the issues for which it was nominated for the 1988 Hugo. We have published a special 80-page full-color, full-size, glossy collection of stories and art from those early issues — the issues which were originally not published on slick paper.

The anthology is 8V2 by 11 inches in size and contains 12 stories along with 19 pages of full-color art. It has 80 pages chock full of great entertainment.

The special anthology includes the following stories:

- "Search and Destroy" by Frederik Pohl
- "Prior Restraint" by Orson Scott Card
- "The Milk of Knowledge" by Ian Watson
- "Sing" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch
- "Merchant Dying" by Paul A. Gilster
- "It Came From the Slushpile" by Bruce Bethke
- "An Unfiltered Man" by Robert A. Metzger
- "Containment" by Dean Whitlock
- "Passing" by Elaine Radford
- "What Brothers Are For" by Patricia Anthony
- "The Last Meeting at Olduvai" by Steven R. Boyett
- "Regeneration" by Rory Harper

The special anthology is bound to be a collector's item. It retails for \$4.50. You can order it direct from us for \$4.50 plus \$1.00 postage and handling. Send your check or money order for \$5.50 to: *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.



A Minor Course Correction

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" — so began Charles Dickens' novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Well, it's like that here, too, and reality, like gravity and O-rings, has a way of asserting itself, no matter how vivid the dreams, or how determined the hopes.

And that reality, as you have undoubtedly noticed, has yanked *Aboriginal Science Fiction* a little bit closer to Earth.

For just over three years we have insisted on doing the impossible — which is to say, we have insisted on publishing the first and only full-color science fiction magazine in the history of the field.

Yet, after three years of publishing, three years of continual growth and improvements, the magazine has been almost completely ignored by most of the New York publishers' advertising departments.

Magazine publishing, for those of you who may not know, is like a tripod, in that it rests on three legs of income: single-copy sales, subscriptions, and advertising.

For three years, we've been limping along on only two of those three legs. Yet we have still done more, production-wise, than any SF magazine has ever attempted. We haven't been afflicted with a shortage of goals.

But the simple fact is that we cannot compete fairly with the other SF magazines because it costs us two to three times as much for each copy we print. That means it costs us three times as much for each page we print.

Which means we have to charge more per page for advertising. (Not more per inch, just more per page, as our page is twice the size of a digest page.) With the

publishing industry cutting back, the people in New York haven't been willing to cough up three or much per thousand readers to put an ad in *Aboriginal*.

So, while New York has always been ready to talk the talk about having a high-quality full-color science fiction magazine, very few have been willing to walk the walk.

That, as the old cliché goes, has put us between a rock and a hard place. That also means that we have had to seriously re-evaluate our business plan. Like the shuttle *Challenger*, our O-rings have blown out.

Now, if this were simply a business, we would have said the heck with it and walked away. But literature is more than a business. Besides, we're stubborn.

We also have a serious obligation to you, our readers, to fulfill the obligation we incurred when we accepted your subscription money. If we walked away, we'd be turning our backs on you. And that's something I couldn't accept.

So we have had to make some compromises, as you have probably noticed. We still are giving you full-color art, but we have had to limit where we put it, and we have had to print half of the magazine on a paper similar to that used by the digests. Everything else is the same, only more of it.

We converted to this format to make the magazine cost-effective. Basically, it's between you and us. If we get ads, fine. But we aren't holding our breath. And when and if they do come, we won't owe them a thing.

In addition to converting to this format, we have changed how we produce the magazine. This issue has been typeset using Ventura Publisher and printed on a LaserMaster 1000 plain paper



typesetter. We have changed the size of type to allow us to get in more material.

In this issue, that means we have finally been able to catch up on most of the letters sent to us over the past few months. Next issue it will mean more material. Editorially, we hope to continue to do what we have always done — seek out and find the best possible stories we can for your reading pleasure. Having more space means we now have the room to offer some longer stories as well.

We may even be able to fit in more letters and add a feature or two.

We are still convinced that we are on the right course and that eventually our full-color, glossy magazine will achieve the circulation and success we expect it to. The current change, in view of the overall state of the economy, is but a minor setback. But all of this has caused us to reconsider what we are doing. Do you, our readers, really care whether we have full-color art? Would you prefer plain newsprint throughout with black and white art? We don't think so, but we could be wrong. If you care one way or the other, please let us know, since if the majority of you don't care about the color art, it's silly for us to go through hoops to bring it to you.

In the meantime, we haven't quit. We won't quit. We'll be here for you as long as you're there for us.

We also haven't given up the dream. We're refurbishing our O-rings. We haven't given up the flight schedule, we've simply postponed the more impossible tasks to a later date.

In the meantime, we hope you will continue on board. □

The Amazing *Aboriginal* Science Fiction Film Quiz



A little change of pace for this issue. Just for fun we thought we'd tantalize your trivia mind and offer you the first *Aboriginal Science Fiction* quiz. The questions are geared so that everyone can play. We tried to avoid those questions that only the most fervent filmaholic could answer. The movies themselves are an eclectic collection ranging from the late '30s to the late '80s.

If you enjoy this offering, then let us know, and we'll tantalize you with even more useless questions on such films as *Fire Maidens from Outer Space*, *Abbot And Costello Meet the Invisible Man*, and *Robot Holocaust*. Next time I'll arm-wrestle our long-suffering editor to offer a prize, either \$100,000 or a year's subscription to *Aboriginal*, whichever costs less and whichever he has on hand. Until then, have fun. Losers buy the popcorn.

One point per question unless noted otherwise. You can score a maximum of 80 points.

Questions

1. Who wrote and directed *Hellraiser*?
2. Who were the *Hellraising* supernatural entities?
3. Which *Cheers* star appeared in *House II: The Second Story*?
4. Name the four Ghostbusters. (4 points)
5. Name the Ghostbusters' car.
6. Who wore the ruby slippers before Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*?
7. Who was Dorothy's robot friend in *Return to Oz*?
8. What was the name of the Magic Hen of Oz?
9. What was the number of the room that held everyone's secret nightmares in *1984*?
10. What were *Them!* in the movie of the same name, and what produced the transformation?
11. Who played the title character in *Red Sonja*?
12. Name the two actresses who have played Saavik in the *Star Trek*

movies. (2 points)

13. In *Little Shop Of Horrors*, what was the name of (and who owned) the flower shop where Audrey II was displayed?
14. What was the brand of the coffee can in which little Audrey II was planted?
15. Who played the satanic figure of Darkness in *Legend*?
16. There were both an American and a European film score for *Legend*. Who composed each of the scores? (2 points)
17. Everybody knows *The Blob*. But what was Larry Cohen's *The Stuff*?
18. Who wrote the screenplay for the underground favorite *A Boy and His Dog*?
19. What was the famous phrase that Patricia Neal used to stop Gort in *The Day The Earth Stood Still*?
20. Fill in the number to come up with the title to these classic '50s films: (10 points)
 - a. *The Phantom from ... Leagues* (1956)
 - b. *The Beast from ... Fathoms* (1953)
 - c. *Plan ... from Outer Space* (1958)
 - d. *Attack of the ... Foot Woman* (1958)
 - e. *Beast with a ... Eyes* (1956)
 - f. *Around the World in ... Days* (1956)
 - g. *The ... Fingers of Dr. T* (1953)
 - h. *The ...th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958)
 - i. ... Miles to Earth (1957)
 - j. *The ...th Day* (1957)
21. Which actor suited up for *Robocop*?
22. Who was the synthetic supervillain in *Superman IV*?
23. Which five monsters caused havoc in *The Monster Squad*? (5 points)
24. What was the spaceship called in *Aliens*?
25. Who played the Goblin King in *Labyrinth*?
26. What was the name of Jeff Goldblum's *Fly*?
27. Which well-known author wrote the novel *Psycho*?
28. Which actress played the Spider-

woman in *Captain EO*?

29. *The Witches of Eastwick* is based on a novel by which author?
30. What were the names of the two mice detectives in *The Great Mouse Detective*? (2 points)
31. Stephen King's *Christine* was what kind of car? (Color, make and year)
32. What two King movies did Drew Barrymore appear in?
33. What was the Fremmen name for the planet *Dune*?
34. What was the name of the prophet Paul Atreides became?
35. In *The Neverending Story*, what type of dragon was Falkor?
36. What was the name of the Russian spacecraft in *2010*?
37. Indiana Jones met Willie Scott at which nightclub?
38. Who played the Timelord in the *Dr. Who* films?
39. In which film was the warning "Keep watching the skies" heard?
40. Name the films based on these SF works: (4 points)
 - a. *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson (two films were based on this novel)
 - b. "Farewell to the Master" by Harry Bates
 - c. *Rocketship Galileo* by Robert A. Heinlein
41. What was the name of the duck that *Journeyed to the Center of the Earth* (1959)?
42. What were the names of the Stalkers who pursued Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Runners in *The Running Man*? (4 points)
43. What was the name of the demon who battled Eddie Murphy in *The Golden Child*?
44. The Pepsi can tapdanced to what tune in the above movie?
45. In *Angel Heart* the devil-in-disguise was Robert DeNiro. What name did he call himself?

46. *Angel Heart* was based on the novel *Falling Angel* by which author?

47. Yvette Mimieux debuted in which 1960 science fiction film?

48. Name the other six faces of *The 7 Faces Of Dr. Lao* (1964). (6 points)

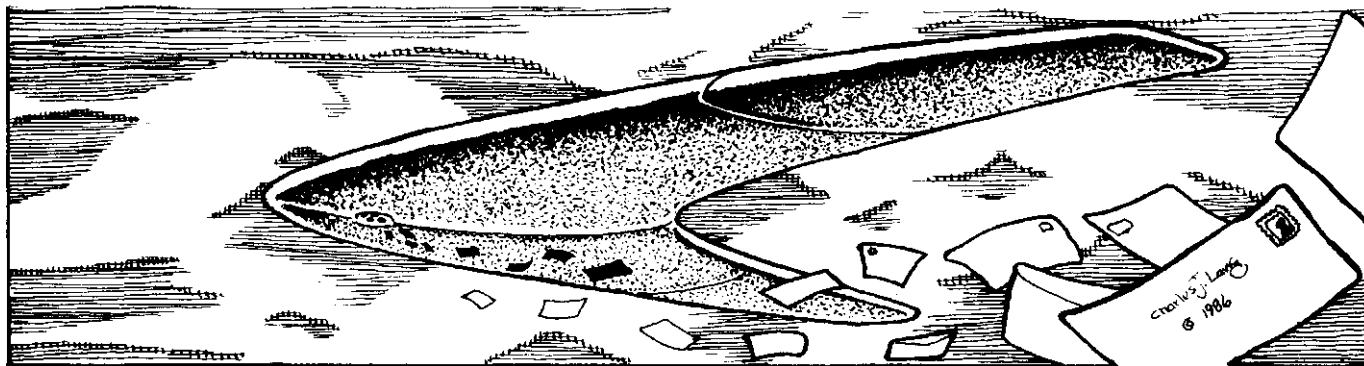
49. Which actor played *The 7 Faces Of Dr. Lao*?

50. Finally, name the other 1964 fantasy film in which he starred.

(The answers are on page 47)

BOOMERANGS

Comments From Our Readers



Boomerangs: Our Readers Respond

For Boomerangs:

I have just finished reading my second issue of *Aboriginal SF* (No. 14) and I'm very pleased with the quality of the magazine as a whole and especially with the fiction and the art. I have several comments on the "Editor's Notes" in No. 14:

1. Hunting boomerangs, alluded to as survival tools, do not usually return to the sender. They are designed for accuracy and killing capability. It is the more well-known recreational boomerang which is designed to return to the sender. It is, however, capable of inflicting serious damage to people, animals, or property with which it comes in contact during flight.

2. I team-taught a course in science fiction with a colleague in the English Department for several years in the late '60s (I'm a physicist). We learned very early in the game that a great deal of time can be spent (not necessarily wasted) trying to define "science fiction." We decided to spend our time reading and discussing fiction, by virtue of our choosing it defined what we meant by the term. I must admit, however, that your attempt to define categories and to include horror and fantasy fiction is admirable. The catch-all term "speculative fiction" gives you a great deal of flexibility in choosing what type of stories to print.

Keep up the good work!!

Sincerely,

Herb Wylen

Washington, PA

Could your magazine be cursed?

A glance at the cover of any issue immediately mesmerizes. The feel of the glossy paper tickles the nerves. A single story is sufficient to show that something strange and powerful is embedded in the glyphs. The whole experience smells of the unexplainable. It appears that your journal can even make people disappear.

Not too long ago I was engrossed in the hypnotic power of your 1988 Anthology. The experience was so enjoyable that every moment I spent away from the collection was spent in praise of it. This was a mistake. My evangelism won me a convert. Rather, it won your magazine another happy victim. This acquaintance of mine pleaded with me until I agreed to place the anthology in her custody "just to read the singing story." The magazine never returned. The person vanished. I can only imagine what horrible fate she has met.

Perhaps there is a cure. If there is, then I am already trapped by it. Please send me another copy of your 1988 Anthology. I must finish reading it.

Enclosed is a check. May your curse never be dispelled.

David Noelle

Los Angeles, CA

Dear Charlie,

In response to Darrell Schweitzer's comment that he thinks I'm "... finding a male chauvinist under every bush" (is this a very clever pun, a Freudian slip, or an honestly inadvertent double entendre?), please let me assure him that he is the first

person I have ever accused of such a transgression against the current American Way. Despite his eloquent defense, I continue to find his original statement offensive. I will concede, however, that he may have merely been caught up in the general flippancy of his review of Ms. Tepper's book, and got somewhat carried away. Enough on this subject (from me, anyway).

Ah, the Boomerang Awards. I must confess that I misplaced my note reminding me as to how I voted. Be that as it may, I have no real quarrel with the results of the voting, as I do recall having a very difficult time making my own choices. I considered my difficulty at the time to be a testament to your editing skills, and I think this has been confirmed by the closeness of the balloting. But you know, Charlie, readers' awards are not an uncommon ploy to stimulate continued interest in a particular publication. What I'd really be interested in, and I'm sure many other people would like to see as well, are what your favorites were for 1988. I know, I know, you liked them all or you wouldn't have printed them, you don't want to show favoritism towards anyone, etc. But you must have at least one that you felt stood above the rest — why not share it with us?

Congrats on your second Hugo nomination — it was well deserved, as would be a win (you've got my vote.) Keep up the good work, and let's see some more art by Byron Taylor.

Best regards,

Rich Hauptmann

Clovis, NM

Dear Charles C. Ryan,

While I like all of *Aboriginal SF*, I'm particularly fond of the book reviews. (Of course, I am a book reviewer for a number of publications, so perhaps my interest is biased.) Both Darrell Schweitzer and Janice M. Eisen write lively, insightful, and objective reviews, and it's refreshing to have both male and female viewpoints in one publication.

As long as I'm at it, the Gerald Perkins story in the March-April issue, "The Runner, the Walker, and the One Who Danced After," is, in a word, SUPERB; matched only by Byron Taylor's artful illustrations.

Thanks for your time;
Lee Crawley Kirk
Eugene, OR

Dear Charles:

The *Aboriginal* book columnist has gone beyond reviewing into advocacy when he enthusiastically endorses the views presented in Russell Miller's rather one-sided biography of L. Ron Hubbard. This cannot be based on personal knowledge of either Ron Hubbard or Russell Miller and his informant.

As a teenager, I had a chance to know Ron over a period of a few years, when he was already a famous writer. I remember him as straightforward, someone who would talk to you about writing or anything you were interested in. Unlike the columnist's statements that Ron never told the truth about anything, neither I, nor anyone around us, got the feeling Ron was not telling us exactly how it was. As for Miller's informant, he had apparently been at Scientology headquarters just long enough to gain access to personal papers that he brokered to Miller. To decide arbitrarily that Miller has no axe to grind ignores the effect of sensationalism on royalty returns.

Robert Heinlein used to call me from time to time, and as it happened during the last year of his life we reminisced about the good old days. Ron had lived with him for a considerable time, and Robert told me that Ron pretty obviously had had a remarkable life. The incident that your columnist cited to cast doubt on Ron's veracity and attributed to Frank Gruber was told to me by Robert in a much different context. According to Robert, it was himself who told Ron jokingly that he would have to be 104 to have done all the things he described. Robert was famous for never suffering fools or madmen, and he never spoke of Ron in any terms but of friendship and liking. An oral history tape by Robert reminiscing about Ron exists,

which I doubt Miller thought to consult.

There is a rational explanation for some time discrepancies in events recounted years after the fact. I remember Ron telling me how he had written a novel while traveling by train from the West Coast to the East. This four days did double duty for both "traveling" yarns and "writing" yarns, giving eight days of activity instead of the chronological four. And if, as might well have happened, Ron had, say, romanced a lady during the journey, then he had twelve effective days. Ron did have the knack of juggling things simultaneously and getting more out of life than most people. Robert told me that not only did he think the things Ron spoke about really did occur as presented, allowing for the embellishments of a gifted story teller, but also that there were many things left unsaid. In particular, Robert believed Ron's WWII, half-stated intelligence activities were authentic.

Back in 1948 when Ron was compiling his system of Dianetics, psychiatry was a competing morass of beliefs that I've seen characterized as "religious" rather than science. Ron apparently decided to systematize the competing and conflicting tenets of Freud, Adler, Jung, and others with his own observations. The differing branches of "classical" psychiatry are based on anecdotal and observational histories, mixed with personal opinions on their meanings. The psychiatrists of the time were giving patients insulin shock, electroshock, and various harmful experimental drugs. In 1948 they even ventured upon prefrontal lobotomies. Ron thought these were barbarities, and psychiatrists today hate to talk about them. The different schools of psychiatry had long been attacking one another, and took on Ron's Dianetics as another competitor.

While the merits of the competing systems of mental health can be debated, your columnist's claim that everyone in the field of science fiction, and especially those who enter Hubbard's Writers of the Future Contest, should be warned by Miller's book is patently absurd. Reviewed in the same issue was a book by Frederik Pohl, who is the chief WOF judge. Then, there are Roger Zelazny, Jack Williamson, Jerry Pournelle, Gene Wolfe, Algis Budrys, Tim Powers, Gregory Benford, Ramsey Campbell, Anne McCaffrey, Robert Silverberg, Andre Norton, and John Varley, among other great writers. Against these is set the desk-bound judgment of Darrell Schweitzer. Otherwise, Darrell is a very nice guy.

Cordially,

Jay Kay Klein
Bridgeport, NY

Dear *Aboriginal SF*,

I really really like this mag. If you think that's redundant, read your letter page some time. Every letter starts out with "I like your mag," or "this is a super mag," or something to that effect. And then there are these wind bags (or ink bags) who write page and a half letters about Harlan Ellison or some other dude of the century (no dudettes) and then some wind-ink bag writes a response to that letter. Next thing you know, these two are hogging a good three pages that could be better wasted on the "oh, this is a neat mag."

Another thing that drives me crazy is people who write the Alien Publisher saying they know of other aliens or they've got news from his-her-its home planet. As if any intelligent life forms would contact an Earthling, especially a human, unless forced to, or completely insane. (The human or the alien, either way.)

Finally, what keeps me from reading the letters at all anymore is the "Don't change your name" letters. First of all, the issue was never about the name but the abbreviation *Abo*, which I'm glad you brought to the forum to begin with. Printing the immediate responses was good, but I still keep finding the "don't change the names" in there. It's a dead issue! Stop printing the letters!

However, I'm pleased to see you discontinued *Abo*, but that square is the pits. It means absolutely nothing and as Black Elk said, there is no power in a square. Maybe you could use an infinity sign or have a contest. Maybe the alien's signature. (If he-she-it has one.) If one more person suggests to use ASF do not, I repeat as you do, do not print that letter or explain one more bloody time why you can't do that. It's extremely annoying to those of us who know better.

There's nothing illegal about a little editing (or is there?). No letter has to be used in its entirety. Most mags just have a page of condensed letters, so it seems. I hope Boomerangs never gets that small, but it is too big right now. Give us less readers' comments and more to read and comment on. That's all I ask, the rest is really, really, really, neat.

Sincerely,
Dawn Thomas
Cincinnati, OH

P.S. Almost forgot another pet peeve. I hate it when people write the book critics and complain about a bad rating for their favorite author. It's like a mother arguing

their kid's bad grade with the teacher. Who cares who wrote it, the book still could be bad. Or maybe the critic just doesn't share the letter writer's taste. Stranger things have happened.

Yo Aboriginal!!

Mr. Ryan, Crazy Alien, and fellow Aborigines,

At last! To hear the sound of flapping feathers of fellow aliens. You cannot imagine how pre-molar I felt to hear that simple sound. I simply broke down and cried.

I had given up hope. Resigned myself to despair and crepuscularity (I HAD to use that word after Darrell disliked it so much. No slight intended to Darrell, his critiques are always lucid and interesting. Even when I sometimes disagree.)

Ever since my Trans-Warp Typewriter blew a ribbon and I was cast alone on these forlorn shores, you cannot imagine how lonely it is to be alone. For seemingly microseconds I have waited, my head in the sand and my emotions tearing inside me! Oh for some sign that there was other life out there in the nether reaches of the cosmos!

For eons of time, perhaps even minutes I thought I heard the minute clitter clatter of PC keys, sighs and draws of cigarette breath mixed with slurps of coffee. But I thought it only was my mad imagination! My starved mind playing tricks on me. How could I have known that there were fellow aliens castaway here in these outer rim zones too? And even building a budding empire!! I can only clap my feet and molt in admiration!!

I was so moved that I felt compelled to take pen in foot and congratulate you personally. At the moment it is early morning, or what passes for it here in the Outer Rim Zones. Three of the four suns have already hit zenith, but since I haven't yet had coffee, I'll still consider it morning.

I am feeling a bit moppish today, so I'm sitting on the bottom of the aquarium, watching my escaping air bubbles as I scribble away. (I'm betting I can finish this letter before I drown. If not then perhaps in the next life I will return as a fish. Won't have to worry about drowning then! But then again how am I going to handle a PaperMate with just a fin? Alas it seems the problems of the world never end.)

Please find enclosed three bags of sand and 14 mollusk shells. (It was all I could dig up for currency over here.) I hope it will properly compensate you for a subscription to your captivating magazine!! (I may be weird, but I know good taste when I see it!)

I was a little concerned at first that this letter might never reach you, as I'm out in the Outer Rim and all. But then I remembered (isn't a mind a wonderful thing!) that you also are out here in the Outer Rim. So I simply addressed your letter to myself (twice removed of course) and let the double looped time-warp do the rest! Using robots would be just SO unreliable, don't you agree?

Oh before I forget, may I get a copy of your writers' guidelines as well? (I know a fish who has mammalian ambitions... blub... blub... blub...)

Thanx for Lissenen, Later Gators,
Christopher Rene
Daytona Beach, FL

Dear Editor,

When my subscription was up for renewal I renewed for two years. What a terrible mistake that was! Your magazine has strayed greatly from what I thought it was intended to be.

The latest issue, July-August, has hit a new low. The stories are so boring and uninteresting, the artwork so amateurish, that I find it very hard to finish any one of them. The advertising and non-fiction are quickly taking over.

You can't fill 60 pages with quality material bimonthly, how do you expect to do it monthly?

There are only 23 pages on which any part of a story appears. And there are nine pages with letters to the editor! I could go on, but why beat a dead horse? Which is definitely what your magazine is... DEAD.

Needless to say, I won't be renewing again!

Good-bye and good riddance,
James R. Yasko
Lakewood, OH

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Ever since a police officer in Bradenton, Florida, ran a license check on me and said that the computer showed a "Michael Armstrong wanted for murder," I've known that having a fairly common name would get me in trouble. Thus I suppose I should not be surprised to find that a Michael Armstrong from Memphis, Tennessee, has written you (*Aboriginal*, May-June 1989) and asked for writer's guidelines. "Michael" has always been one of those top-ten boys' names, and "Armstrong"... well, from Louis to Neil, the name does appear with some frequent fame. However, until this guy from Tennessee wrote, I thought I'd kind of carved out a niche in science fiction, as far as Michael Armstrongs went. Rats.

Since I am the first Michael

Armstrong to publish in science fiction (at least in recent memory; God knows what we were up to in the *Astounding* days), and since I was the first Michael Armstrong to join the Science Fiction Writers of America, I kind of think I have a legitimate lock on the pen name. I wish the Michael Armstrong from Tennessee well, but when you send him the writer's guidelines, or if you should have the honor of buying the fellow's first story, could you be so kind as to advise him to use a variation on his name, preferably one that

doesn't start with "Michael?" Life's already too confusing for me as it is, what with all these calls I get here for the noted Anchorage physician, Dr. Michael Armstrong. I mean, I sure would hate to get the Memphis Michael Armstrong's royalty checks by mistake — then I'd have to cash 'em.

Thanks,
Michael Allan Armstrong
Member SFWA,
the "Michael Armstrong" from
Anchorage, AK

Dear Editor,

So I goofed. I remember reading the warnings about saving money by renewing on my own but I thought I had plenty of time. Then I found your letter in the mail and knew I'd procrastinated too long. So I'm renewing for 18 issues and I want the anthology, too.

I'm so happy I took a chance on your

magazine. My daughter's school sold subscriptions to raise money and that is how I found out about *Aboriginal*. I love the art, the stories, the reviews, the slick pages, the protective covering it comes in, and anything else that I haven't mentioned. I do have one question about your alien publisher — is there more than one? When I read his message in the May-June '89 issue, I thought, "This guy looks different." So of course I had to dig out the other issues I have and sure enough this was a different alien. I also knew he looked familiar — ah ha! he was on the cover of the previous issue. Is this something you plan to do — invite the "Cover Alien" to give us a message in the next issue? (Oops, that's two questions.) I hope you didn't boot the old alien because of the flak you got for whatever it was that was stuck in his mouth. I was amused to read the letters questioning this. I mean, who would know what an alien would stick in his

mouth — look at all the things humans stick in their mouths.

Well, I'm closing this letter, writing out a check, and putting this in the mailbox today! I look forward to my next issue.

Sincerely,
Karen Marcus
Spokane, WA

(Actually, our alien publisher has numerous body forms and changes them regularly, much the same way some Earth creatures will undergo metamorphosis — the perfect example being the change from caterpillar to butterfly. — Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Here is my renewal for another three years of *Aboriginal*. (I always think of you as Charlie, but since you don't think of me at all, I guess I have to call you Mr. Ryan to your face.)

I really like *Aboriginal* — one time when it arrived in the same mail as *Games*, I sat down and read your editorial, the Alien Publisher's report, looked at all the pictures, and read the reviews of those books I already read (they don't like the books I like as much as I do), and when I stood up again, I realized I still hadn't opened *Games* to look for the Cryptic Crossword. That gives you a plus 10 with me, because Cryptic Crosswords have always rated a 10.

There have been three things I haven't liked about *Aboriginal*:

1. Having to look through the fine print to find the issue number — and you fixed that! Thank you.

2. The renewal coupon has always been on the back of a picture or story — which I won't cut into. This time it was against Boomerangs, so I cut it.

3. Calling your perspicacious alien publisher crazy. He's pretty bright — he didn't try to talk to more than one automobile. Gee, I've made mistakes myself. (Crazy, as Einstein would agree, is a matter of relativity. — Ed.)

Thanks for lots of good stories and terrific illustrations.

Yours truly,
Rose E. Hossner
Spokane, WA

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I have to admit that I don't write letters to the editor. So, it is a rare thing that I do now in both saying "Wow!" to Robert Metzger's latest contribution — "Burn So Bright" in July's *Aboriginal* — and in requesting a set of writer's guidelines, in order to collect my fair share of rejection slips!

In all seriousness, Metzger is a talent

(Continued from page 44)

Answers

1. Clive Barker
2. The Cenobites
3. John Ratzenberger
4. Dr. Peter Venkman, Dr. Raymond Stantz, Dr. Egon Spengler, and Winston Zeddemore
5. Ecto-1
6. The Wicked Witch of the East
7. Tik-Tok
8. Billina
9. Room 101
10. Giant ants. They were enlarged by atomic testing.
11. Brigitte Nielsen
12. Robin Curtis and Kirstie Alley
13. Mushnik's Flower Shop
14. Maxwell House
15. Tim Curry
16. Tangerine Dream and Jerry Goldsmith
17. Killer dessert
18. L.Q. Jones
19. "Gort! Klaatu barada nikto!"
- 20 a. 10,000
b. 20,000
c. 9
d. 50
e. Million
f. 80
g. 5000
h. 7
i. 20 Million
j. 27
21. Peter Weller
22. Nuclear Man
23. The Creature, Dracula,

Frankenstein, the Mummy, and the Wolf Man

24. The Sulaco
25. David Bowie
26. "Brundlefly"
27. Robert Bloch
28. Anjelica Huston
29. John Updike
30. Basil and Dr. Dawson
31. A red 1958 Plymouth
32. *Cat's Eye* and *Firestarter*
33. Arrakis
34. The Kwisatz Haderach
35. A Luck dragon
36. *The Leonov*
37. Club Obi-Wan
38. Peter Cushing
39. *The Thing from Another World* (1951)
- 40 a. *The Omega Man* (1971)
The Last Man On Earth (1964)
b. *The Day the Earth Stood Still*
c. *Destination Moon*
41. Gertrude
42. Subzero, Dynamo, Buzzsaw, and Fireball
43. Sardo Numspa
44. "Puttin' on the Ritz"
45. Louis Cyphre
46. William Hortsberg
47. *The Time Machine*
48. The Abominable Snowman
The Sea Serpent
Medusa
Pan
The Prophet
Merlin
49. Tony Randall
50. *The Brass Bottle* □

I've thoroughly enjoyed since I first read him in "An Unfiltered Man," and I hope he keeps writing for *Aboriginal* in the quantity and quality he has been. (*We have many more Metzger stories scheduled.* — Ed.)

Thanks Muchly,
Chris Finch
Hackettstown, NJ

Dear A.C. Alien, et al:

I have just today received the writer's guidelines I requested, and thanks for same. Paragraph 3 under Manuscript Guidelines presents a contradiction. We shivering hopefuls are strictly directed not to submit fantasy. Yet the showcase story in your May-June issue is a star-spangled, four-square, nine yards fantasy entitled "The Wishing Game." Am I to understand from this that *Aboriginal* will accept fantasies from established old war horses like Mr. Niven, but not from the membership of the great unwashed, namely yours truly? (I am not being critical; this is just the way I express myself when I am feeling colorful — I feel much subdued after watching *Young Frankenstein* or *Zelig*.)

The point is that I have this cracker jack story that I wrote two nights ago and was about to stuff it into an envelope with your address on the label. Since it is a fantasy in that it could be considered possible only in the wildest stretch of the imagination, I am now hesitating. To my mind, it certainly explains some perfectly ordinary things in an entirely new way, such as why there is a battle to perfect fusion power, why the Pentagon has five sides, and just what did happen to those dinosaurs? Should I now consider submission to another magazine?

If you could clear up the ambiguity between the directives in your guidelines and the presence of Mr. Niven's story in *Aboriginal*, I would be much relieved.

Respectfully,
Kurt F. Faasse
Milton, NY

(*First of all, we consider Larry Niven's stories in issues No. 15 and No. 17 to be alternate world SF, not necessarily fantasy. But we also cheat sometimes, but not just for Larry. Jamil Nasir's story "The Darkness Beyond" in the May-June 1988 issue might also be considered to be fantasy by some.* — Ed.)

Dear *Aboriginal SF*:

I'm writing off of my latest copy, No. 17, and a few comments follow.

"The Ultimate Guppy" is well-reasoned, but you left a few gaps: what is happening in the large company squeeze-

out is that the self-publishing market is burgeoning. The biggest center is in Santa Barbara. Your thoughts about giant enterprises are generally accepted, but you didn't carry your earlier thoughts on bureaucracy as far as you should have.

Remember Street & Smith? They needed new authors like a hole in the head when they used almost endless pseudonyms. That and what sells fits your concept of a narrowing field of authors for them.

The Alien Publisher is competing with your thought: you like the evil bean counters, and he likes the lawyers, also evil. I worked with (not for) a public utility for several years. When I began, the company was controlled by the Operating Dept., then by Engineering, then by Purchasing, and finally by the Lawyers. There were reasons for all these changes. Right now it is the PUC in the State of California, and the Federal Government. It is their only defense against the bureaucracy. And, my God, the waste! And the inefficiency! Finally, I was working for a small switchgear manufacturer who had a patent (in 1940), and the biggest sued for infringement. We beat them after heavy cost. Then after the second biggest sued for the same thing, they settled for shared patents, and that was the end of the harassment!

I like your comments. Keep thinking.
Sincerely,
W.F. Poynter
Santa Rosa, CA

Dear Mr. Ryan:

I have in my hand my first copy (Sept-Oct. 1989) of *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. The layout is excellent, and the material even better. Kudos for this magazine. Keep it up.

Your article "The Ultimate Guppy" is appropriate for our times. The nation has entered into a period of controlled information, and fiction, in my opinion. That is unfortunate, if I am correct, and it is a key element in the success of dictators. The freedom to engage in free speech, and the opportunity to be heard, are necessities for retaining democracy. Both are necessary for artistic growth, also.

Kudos also for review, and acceptance, of material from new writers.

Sincerely,
Paul R. Mobley
Cynthiana, KY

Dear Charles,

I want to thank you for your thought-provoking editorial, "The Ultimate Guppy," in *Aboriginal's* Sept-Oct 1989

issue.

Modern marketing techniques have made our visions obsolete. Short-term profit-takers (and their accountants) are concerned with quantity, not quality. "How much" and "How fast" have replaced "How good" and "How long will it last" in consumer-oriented vocabularies.

Sf-types aren't worried, though. Like Kuttner & Moore's protagonist in *Fury*, we can glimpse "the big picture" with our long-term visions. Nothing lasts forever in its current state, and new visions are now emerging to replace old, obsolete ones.

Witness the emergence of *Aboriginal* as a blend of old and new fiction, old and new marketing techniques. Visionary creators — the "builders" of our literate and literal futures — are beginning to break out of their cocoons.

Market forces are in a state of flux. Change is in the wind.

Nothing lasts forever in its current state. Not even Guppies.

Best,
Paul Dale Anderson
Rockford, IL

P.S. I enjoyed Patricia Anthony's story-telling immensely.

Dear Charles C. Ryan:

Once again you've hit one solidly home with "The Ultimate Guppy." As I mentioned in my letter of some months ago, a prominent panel at a con almost a year ago unanimously agreed, when the subject was raised, that too much in the hands of too few is a terrible thing. Fred Pohl, George Zebrowski, and Timothy Zahn all recounted horror stories that have already come from the chain store takeover of the retail business and the power of the bigger-ever-bigger publishing companies. But the problem can be illustrated in other ways as well.

Some years ago my father ran for office here. He won. Well, he belonged to party "A" and the newspapers were fond of party "B." The newspapers, both of them, are owned by the same company, a merger. When it was time for re-election they endorsed the fellow from party "B," a high school graduate who had a job part time working at his mother's real estate office (40-years-old and still single, living at home, and no community involvement), over my father, head of his own law firm, former claims adjustor, S.U. graduate, endorsed by five major unions (50-years-old then, married 20 years, five kids, member of the local church, VFW), the attorney for the local fire dept. & the public library, and in spite of the endorsement of the other two parties on the ballot.

So you find yourself with an urge to scream bloody murder to the world, and find that, because the same guys own all the newspapers, there's no way to be heard.

Also, more and more radio stations are being bought up by big companies that own lots of radio stations, so like the first novel, the first single of a new group or artist not only never gets recorded but, even if it does, it never gets airplay.

All of which brings about things like "the new wave" or "punk" or the sudden growth of the small presses or students being slaughtered in China, which is what happens when the guppy becomes a shark.

Most sincerely yours,
Mark Andrew Garland
Syracuse, NY

Dear Mr. Ryan:

I must say your editorial in the Sept.-Oct. issue was something to marvel. I am presently an accountant. I don't feel you do the profession justice.

I hope you realize that once an accountant begins to run an organization, he or she is no longer an accountant. It has to do with professional ethics. He or she may continue to call him- or herself an accountant but those in the profession know otherwise.

An accountant's job is to report the results of the operation to management. We try to report accurately and timely so management has reliable data. Management uses this information to make its decisions. The accountant may advise management but will not be the one making the final decision. Management makes the final decision.

So much for your editorial. You must have had a run-in with an accountant. Please do not blacklist an entire profession because of one or two persons. Should I assume that doctors and engineers are next on your list?

Sincerely,
Teri Van Well
San Diego, CA

(I'm not blacklisting a profession, only an attitude. Fiscally conservative input from accountants is valuable and necessary ... but it should never become the sole deciding factor. And unfortunately, that is what is happening. Some chain stores, for instance, decide whether to stock an author's novel, based almost solely on how well his or her previous one sold, not how good it was — and they aren't always the same thing. — Ed.)

Dear Charlie,

I am, by profession, an accountant.

Despite this fact, I find that I agree with a great deal of what you said in your editorial in issue No. 17. I'm afraid, though, that you allowed yourself to succumb to one of mankind's oldest pastimes, namely, killing the messenger. (*See response above. — Ed.*)

Don't misunderstand me, Charlie — accountants as a class have any number of shortcomings, fiscal conservatism being by no means the least. The accounting profession has, in fact, done a remarkable job of self-perpetuation by making up a bewildering array of rules and regulations that have caused the average person, as well as many above average people, to throw up their hands in dismay when trying to interpret a set of financial statements. But the decisions that lead to the badness of bigness you discuss in your editorial are not being made by accountants. They're being made based on analyses performed by accountants, combined with an instant gratification mentality that really does threaten to overwhelm our society.

The one-night stand (though tempered now by, of all things during the dawn of genetic miracles, the fear of disease), the enormous popularity of lotteries and sweepstakes, and the awesome size of the federal budget (accompanied by the inevitable impressively-sized frauds) are a few of the symptoms of the current get-rich-quick society we live in. Why, I bet there's even a science fiction editor who has dabbled in the stock, commodities, or option markets in the hopes of making a fast killing. (*Naw, none of us is paid enough. — Ed.*) And it's this same easy road to riches that causes corporations today to make decisions to publish Carl Sagan's new novel instead of Rick Hauptmann's (ahh... I do, of course, have one if you know of anyone who's interested in taking a flier). Until society as a whole begins to take a longer-term outlook on life, accountants will continue to recommend the "sure thing" — because that's what everyone wants to hear. Your statement that "Accountants want to guarantee shareholders a profit every quarter..." is simply not true. It's shareholders who want to be guaranteed the consistent profit. Shareholders pay accountants, so accountants give them what they want, then take their share of the loot and go buy a Porsche. (*Valid point. — Ed.*) And everybody falls further behind, without even knowing it.

That's a long enough tirade. I think your new heavier cover is great, and I truly hope you're going to be able to sell all 80,000 copies of No. 17 that you had

printed. Patricia Anthony struck paydirt again with her excellent "Belief Systems," and I think someone should encourage Bill Johnson to find the time to expand "A Matter of Thirst" into a novel — the possibilities seem to go far beyond his short story. Thanks for another great issue.

Very truly yours,
Rick Hauptmann
Clovis, NM

Dear *Aboriginal*,

I recently purchased my first issue of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* (No. 17), the premiere newsstand issue. A long time ago ... I was younger, and a subscriber to *Galileo*. I have sent my subscription order for *Aboriginal SF* in a separate envelope.

The best story in No. 17 was "Belief Systems" by Patricia Anthony. If this is her eighth story in your pages, why do you not have a photo of her that's not blurred beyond belief? (*I've been asking her the same thing. — Ed.*)

I also applaud editor Charles Ryan for his cautionary editorial ("The Ultimate Guppy").

I do hope *Aboriginal* is successful in its expansion to the newsstands of earth. I'm still mourning over the demise of my favorite newsstand publication, *Twilight Zone* magazine. Though *Aboriginal* is a very different magazine, perhaps it will fill that void left on the magazine racks.

Timothy M. Walters
Muskegoe, OK

Honored Humans, etc.

I'd like to say I largely agreed with Ms. Salmonson's observations in the Sept-Oct issue; many of *Aboriginal's* stories do seem banal, even — as she suggested — throwbacks to the 1950's. But then a recent Nebula-winning novel struck me the same way, and there is work like Patricia Anthony's "Eating Memories" to confront any such simple generalization. One thing is certain: the place to raise questions of throwbacks is in a column called Boomerangs!

All in all, though, you do seem to be prospering. While the environmentalist in me shrinks at the slick format of your Premiere Newsstand Issue. One need only to compare it to the yellowing newsprint to understand the appeal.

Aw, what the hell! Please slap a copy of your writer's manual in the enclosed SASE and I'll take a shot at wasting a few trees myself. How's that for banality?

Cordially,
Phil Higgins
Corrales, NM

□

Frost King

By E. Michael Blake

Art by David Brian

Amir Olumago patted a linen handkerchief against his sweating neck and continued to wait. He knew that certain officials of the Singapore Vertical Port Authority would dawdle through their tea breaks before allowing him to get out of the sun and into the office complex. He stood stoically, refusing to take offense. A few well-placed bribes might have hastened his entry — but he had already spent more on such inducements than he had expected.

He ignored the benches that dotted the ornate brick paving. He suppressed his yearning for an umbrella or canopy. Amir Olumago was a proud man, and he did not mind demonstrating the fact to all the dour mandarins who looked down on him with stony disapproval through video monitors. The Authority, dominated by the ethnic Chinese, gave precedence to Singapore-based Chinese merchants, but it was unwise to draw attention to the fact. By standing out in the equatorial heat, Olumago implied that the arrangement was somehow unjust. This certainly would not mollify the Port officials, who already saw him as a mere Indonesian opportunist from the endless sprawl of Jakarta, an unaffiliated trader and speculator who affected a Western suit and necktie.

Olumago's eyes traced the lift tower up to where the glare of the sky was too bright for them to linger. At the fixed-orbit station above, intelligent alien beings had arrived only six weeks earlier — the first such encounter for humanity, which had not yet ventured personally beyond Mars. The philosophical, religious, scientific, and diplomatic upheavals still dominated the attention of nearly everyone on Earth. Almost unnoticed, Olumago and his ilk made a few moments in these epochal days mundane, by negotiating for commerce.

Provided that I survive until the negotiating session, he thought sourly, lowering his eyes again to the heat-shimmer scething on the plaza. Over the years, Olumago had won several trade contracts on SingaPort, despite crowded bidding and his outsider status. He knew whom to approach. By calling for repayment of every favor owed to him, Olumago had gained an appointment with the aliens — or Kohollul, as the energy beings called themselves.

Some people would do very, very well through trade with the Kohollul, and even though four other businessmen had already spoken with the aliens, Olumago was eager to try his luck. Still, he had made fortunes before. If he were to liquidate his assets at that very moment, he would walk away passably wealthy — and there were times when he was tempted to do just that. He was here today, hard-shod feet squirming on the sun-brightened bricks, mainly because the aliens fascinated him. He was impelled both by curiosity and by another feeling he could not quite define, a sort of satisfaction, or a gratitude for the Kohollul — whose presence

showed that what happened down here in the insufferable heat of Earth was ultimately trivial.

His next breath came uneasily. He checked his watch. He could only last for so long in this particular gesture of defiance. Olumago enjoyed life, and bore the evidence around his middle and within his arteries. Ceremoniously he turned to face Mecca, knelt, and began his prayers.

Like millions of other Indonesians, Olumago was a Muslim in the casual, self-defined way that had been driving pan-Islamic fundamentalists to frustration and outrage for centuries. And though his prayers were entirely sincere, Olumago did not think it inappropriate that they also helped him out in the material realm by pushing enough of the infidel Port officials across some secret line of shame. When Olumago looked up, he saw that the main outer doors of the office complex were now open. On each side stood a grim functionary in white ducks. "*Allahu akbar*," said Olumago with a smile. He hefted his bulk up from the paving. "Praise Allah."

He wished for viewports. There were fifty-odd couches in the cabin, every one occupied, and Olumago's was next to an outside wall — which was opaque, like all the others. He knew that he was above the ionosphere now, and that shielding was necessary. But he would have risked radiation overexposure for even a brief look at Earth and stars, without projection or computer enhancement.

Olumago looked away from the wall and observed his fellow passengers. The two nearest him seemed to be plasma physicists. They had debated the nature of the Kohollul steadily since the start of the ride, nearly three hours before. "The peak density regions must be the memory," said one of them now. "The high field strength would secure long-term storage, even as it might inhibit cognition, which surely requires greater plasma mobility"

The ride itself is so commonplace now that they ignore it, thought Olumago. *The wonder of the Kohollul blinds us to our own wonders.* Just before he was born, researchers had developed the megacrystalline materials used in the lift towers that connected the fixed-orbit stations to Earth, and used in the cables and counterweights that moved these cabins by carefully managed centrifugal pull.

He stood and stretched, and tried to feel the extra heaviness. Five-and-a-fraction hours of acceleration at 0.01 *g* would take the velocity past 1800 meters per second. Then would come an interval of coasting, then a balancing deceleration — and none of it ever seemed to burden his often-overstressed heart.

"I say," said one of the physicists to Olumago, "are we going on a bit much? Didn't mean to disturb you."

He smiled back. "It's all right. If I were studying the Kohollul as you are, I'm sure I would do the same."

The physicist nodded his dark, bald head. He had introduced himself as the head of some academy in India, and had reverted to polite disinterest upon learning that Olumago was a businessman. "Still, must be quite a bore for you, eh? Having to go up with us, and all."

"Oh no. I always enjoy a ride on the Singapore Sling."

The Indian chortled. "Surprised you'd use that nickname. Didn't you say you're a Muslim?"

"I doubt that Allah objects to an occasional jest. And speaking of that, if you'll excuse me, it's time for my prayers." Olumago knelt between his couch and the wall, and faced Mecca — which he approximated with a 45-degree-angle compromise between west-northwestward and downward.

As he stepped out into the fixed-orbit station, Olumago was met by a tall, bland-featured Japanese woman in a plain blue unisuit. "My name is Yamanaka," she said with a deferential smile. "I am here to put the full resources of ScienTechnics at your disposal."

"Fine," said Olumago. "And I'll be ready to use them as soon as I pay a few courtesy calls. You may as well come along."

Even though his body believed it was midnight, Olumago made his rounds, visiting and flattering certain useful individuals — most of whom he had now used to the limit. He indulged in the exhilaration of weightless soaring between work zones and habitats, and thus reinforced the cheery gratitude he displayed at each stop. Yamanaka followed with smile intact, but clearly only tolerated the proceedings.

"Now, then," he said to her at last, "you may take me to the ScienTechnics zone. Are you personally involved in the translation work?"

"Yes. It is a great privilege. ScienTechnics is one of the fourteen organizations currently authorized to arrange communications with the Kohollul."

He looked at her askance, changing his grip on the handhold that bore them along a broad concourse tube. She seemed comfortably lodged between youth and middle age. Behind her deference he read condescension. "Isn't my appointment interrupting some other work you could be doing with the aliens?"

Yamanaka's smile held fast. "At the time of your request, we did not have any pending short-term Kohollul-interface contracts."

"Of course," he said. He felt the need to attack that smile. "No Chinese-run organization will deal with a Japanese company if it can be avoided. Certainly not a company with a name derived from English words, to give you an edge in the American market. And especially not one that employs women as managers and technical specialists."

She was unmoved. "The Port itself does not provide every service a customer might need. We serve a purpose here, and we pay our rent. If we lack Chinese clientele, so much the better for you."

"Exactly," he said. Then he shook his head. "They make all of this rather childish."

"Excuse me? You mean the Chinese?"

"No. The Kohollul. Their existence makes all our posturing and bickering look like the sheerest folly. The Chinese snub you Japanese, and you look down on the Chinese and all the rest of us — even though you have followed the Americans into the blind alley of a service economy. The port mandarins dominate trade between Earth and Space, but not through skill or merit. Singapore just happened to be the biggest trade center near the equator when megacrystalline technology matured. I understand that the Kohollul have difficulty perceiving us. That may be a good thing."

"And you yourself have no cultural biases?" asked Yamanaka with a hint of challenge. "Such freedom would be very helpful, in a meeting with an alien species."

"I make no such claims. But perhaps I am less rigid than the four businessmen who preceded me." He chuckled. "Certainly I'm less encumbered. I didn't even bring a briefcase."

Yamanaka led the way to the ScienTechnics facility zone and guided Olumago to a room set in sturdy bulkheads. "Here you will be secure against any cavedropping attempts," she said.

Olumago drew himself down into a chair before a featureless console. The lighting was dim and indirect. "Where will the projection appear?" he asked.

"Projection?" returned Yamanaka.

"The visual projection of the Kohol."

"There will not be one. All we have here are a speaker and a microphone."

Olumago stared back sharply, confused. His acquired reflex against connivance exerted itself. "You mean I can't see them?"

Yamanaka's smile, even in the low light, showed an amusement that bordered on ridicule. "No. Would it matter if you could? It's not as though you could read their expressions. The communicative emission is the only aspect of an individual Kohol that conveys anything, and it's not in our visible spectrum. You'll have to work out the terms of your deal without visual cues."

Abruptly, Olumago swung free from the chair and, disregarding his null-gravity clumsiness, confronted the woman. "I will *not* have you look at me as some tentmaster in an open-air bazaar, bartering and cajoling and needing to see a *face*, solely to win the better end of a bargain! I know the Kohollul have no faces. I know that I could not interpret, or even *fathom*, what I would see. I don't care how I come out on the deal, or even if there is *no* deal! I just want — wanted — to see *something*." Silently he added: *That's the only reason I came up here in person!*

Yamanaka's smile gave way to a more thoughtful expression. "Why?"

Olumago wound down, surprised by his outburst and eager to retreat behind his defenses. But something about her look — eyes more open, brows arched higher — let him answer. "I — want them to be real. I want to believe in them. And — and I wanted them to see me, too."

After a moment, Yamanaka nodded and showed a different smile — one meant for more than just herself, Olumago suspected. "Yes," she said. "Please forgive me."

"For what?" he asked, sensing that a look inside Yamanaka's mind would be rare indeed.

"For trying to confine you to a tent in a bazaar."

Olumago nodded slightly, embarrassed now. "So, um, all I can do is speak and listen, then?"

"Yes. The room is lit dimly so as to present you with no distractions." Yamanaka was all procedure again. "The chair, bolted to the floor, offers you a familiar position, if you find weightlessness disorienting. The channel will be open both ways at all times, but you may have to repeat yourself now and then. The transfer language is still somewhat limited, though by computer it becomes more sophisticated each day. Because ambiguity is always possible, you may have to make sure that you agree on what you've agreed upon. In order to ask a question, you must say that you're doing so. The vocal and semantic conventions we use to show inquiry don't translate well. You must precede every question with 'I ask,' and treat the rest as a statement. The Kohol will do the same."

He pulled himself into the chair and said, "Fine. I'm ready."

"Very well. The Kohol will speak first."

A barely audible speaker hum spread through the air, then became the backdrop for an annunciating voder. "Greetings in friendship, firm visitor. Speaking to you is Pranal. Enjoyment would follow the knowledge of your name and purpose."

Olumago's spine chilled so sharply that his whole upper body shook, and he suddenly feared that he could no longer speak. What he heard was a pseudo-voice generated by a computer only a few meters away, but still —

Finally he got his mouth open and said, "Greetings in friendship — eh — Pranal. Speaking to you is Amir Olumago. In our conversation, the name Amir is enough. My — purpose, is to offer terms of commercial exchange between your people and mine. I ask if you understand what I mean by commercial exchange." Yamanaka, off to his right, nodded with approval. Olumago smiled, but thought tensely that he'd rather have less of her respect and more of her help.

"I am pleased to discuss commerce," said the surrogate voice of Pranal. "For us, as for you, it is the exchange of quantities and qualities to the benefit of all involved. Commerce with firms is a higher-than-most purpose for us. I ask what you produce, Amir."

Olumago almost cowered. *I produce nothing*, he thought grimly, *I'm just a middleman, a leech, a tent-master in the bazaar*. "I — do not produce, Pranal, but I transact. Even as I discuss terms with you, I also discuss terms with those — firms — that produce things. I ask if you understand this."

"I understand. We consider your position to be one of great value. I ask what you offer us."

Olumago knew that all four before him had been conglomerate executives, rather than independent speculators. Was this why the Kohol saw "great value" in him? He said, "I ask what you want from the planet Earth."

"Understanding is difficult," came the reply. "You are firm. You function in greater firmness, darkness, slowness, stillness. We must conceive this. Your uses of the firm. Uses. Controls."

Yamanaka leaned in and whispered, "You have to be more specific. Don't let the Kohol thrash around like this. Offer something. I have it on good authority that this is what the other four did."

Soliloquy at the Tomb of Earth

By David Lunde

*Once again I wake
and regard the stars —
I do not "gaze" at them
in that unfocused human way —
I do not suffer from romantic fancies
nor aesthetic reveries, but rather
assess the stars as prey,
for I wait out these endless days,
these nights when only the cold feet
of wind trouble the dust,
because I must
because I am what I am
because I am hades bobbin
shuttling in and out of life
deathless as that desert fish
encrypted in the sun-baked clay
which at the first touch of rain
suddenly quickens, drinks deep
the liquid of life and swims.
But I do not swim, of course,
nor willingly cross a stream
except by air. I am a thing of earth
even more than foolish men
who spilled each other's precious blood
into the gaping dust. And now
I lie in my box of native
though unnatural soil
and survey the wondering stars.
I see no change, no new brightness there,
yet some night when I wake
there will be a light that moves,
a light that carries life
to transfuse old Earth
and make it swim. And soon
those curious souls will come —
for against these plains of ash and dust
my casket gleams with gems
like falling stars
to dazzle the alien eye —
and I will rise
and kiss the curious face
and taste the strange new blood
rich with ancient terror.*

□

Olumago waved her off. He felt acclimated now, less in need of her. "Pranal, I don't understand. I want to help you, but I don't know what you mean by 'uses of the firm.'"

"You are firm. Yet you act, and have purpose. We do not conceive. Your knowledge-discoverers have presented models of explanation. We find them self-consistent, but still do not truly understand. We seek your control of the firm."

Olumago's mind groped at the edge of something. "Pranal — I ask how you see my people."

"I do not understand, Amir. I ask if you ask about the means of sense perception."

"No. Pranal, I ask what we seem like to you. What sort of beings we are. Our size, our — other characteristics."

"You are firm," said Pranal. "You are dark. You are very slow. You are large. You are almost completely without heat. But your structures can have greater speed and heat, though still with firmness."

"And you want to know how to create firm structures."

"Seeking this knowledge is the highest of all purposes."

"You say that we are slow. I ask how long it takes for you to hear this statement, in your time."

"Eighteen percent of our single life span."

Yamanaka gasped.

Olumago leaned forward, elbows on knees. "Pranal, I ask if you are one being, or many."

"I am many. I am a self-sustaining generational colony devoted to trade negotiation. There are other aggregations in our community here, with other purposes."

"There are many of you. And in the course of this conversation, some of you have begun life, and some have ended life."

"Yes. The conversation with Amir has been the entire career of many now dead."

"We never *knew*," said Yamanaka weakly. "Their transmissions are always compressed, and we knew that they were very rapid beings, but we ... They never told us. Or couldn't, until now. The transfer language is still developing."

Olumago wanted somehow to speed up, to get everything decided at once, to give the Kohollul "uses of the firm" before any more died, having lived only for his sake. He castigated himself for the time wasted on courtesy calls. But he made himself stay at his normal cognitive pace, insisting that this was the only way he could really help. "Pranal, I ask if the other commercial negotiators gave you 'uses of the firm.'"

"No. They offered energy manifestations. They are worthwhile to us in some ways. But they leave the firm unknown to us."

The idiots! thought Olumago. *They came up here convinced that the only thing energy beings would care about is energy. So they probably offered lasers and plasma generators and electromagnetic gear, and never stopped to wonder why the Kohollul would come to a cold, solid planet.*

"Pranal, I ask if my people are the only 'users of the firm' that you have ever met."

"You are."

"I ask if you want to put firm matter in your transports."

"We do. It would allow us to direct our energies elsewhere. And higher understanding would follow uses and controls of the firm. There is always more firmness in the universe. Some of us despair that firmness means death. But you live, and use the firm. Enjoyment follows the thought that life can prosper in a universe of less heat and more firmness. There may be others of your kind on other firmnesses. Your kind may join us, may succeed us. As you help us use the firm, we can help you in your travels to other firmnesses."

"It's all because we live at such a far extreme," said Olumago as they waited in the departure lounge for the cabin that would return him to Earth.

"What extreme? Slowness?" Yamanaka still had a dark look.

"We have no control over their lifespan," said Olumago. "We have probably done the most, of anyone, to fulfill the mission to which they have devoted —"

"I *know*," snapped Yamanaka. She turned her head away jerkily.

"They probably think they're much luckier than we are."

Not looking around: "Why?"

"Because of our extreme. Think about it. Nearly every property has greater and lesser on either side. We are many millions of times smaller than a star, but many millions of times larger than an atom. To us, events on the atomic scale are rapid, but on the celestial scale they are ponderously slow. In most respects, we live in a middle range. Except for one." He left that hanging, to make her turn around.

It worked. She presented him a suitably impassive mask and said, "What one is that?"

"Temperature. There are millions of degrees above us, but only about three hundred below us. We are solid — firm, as they put it — and live on a solid world. We have learned to use the firm, to the point of making bits of it into fixed-orbit stations and spaceships and transmitters — things that even a Kohol can notice and wonder about, since to a Kohol firmness is usually frozen nothingness. As far as the Kohol are concerned, we're trapped at absolute zero."

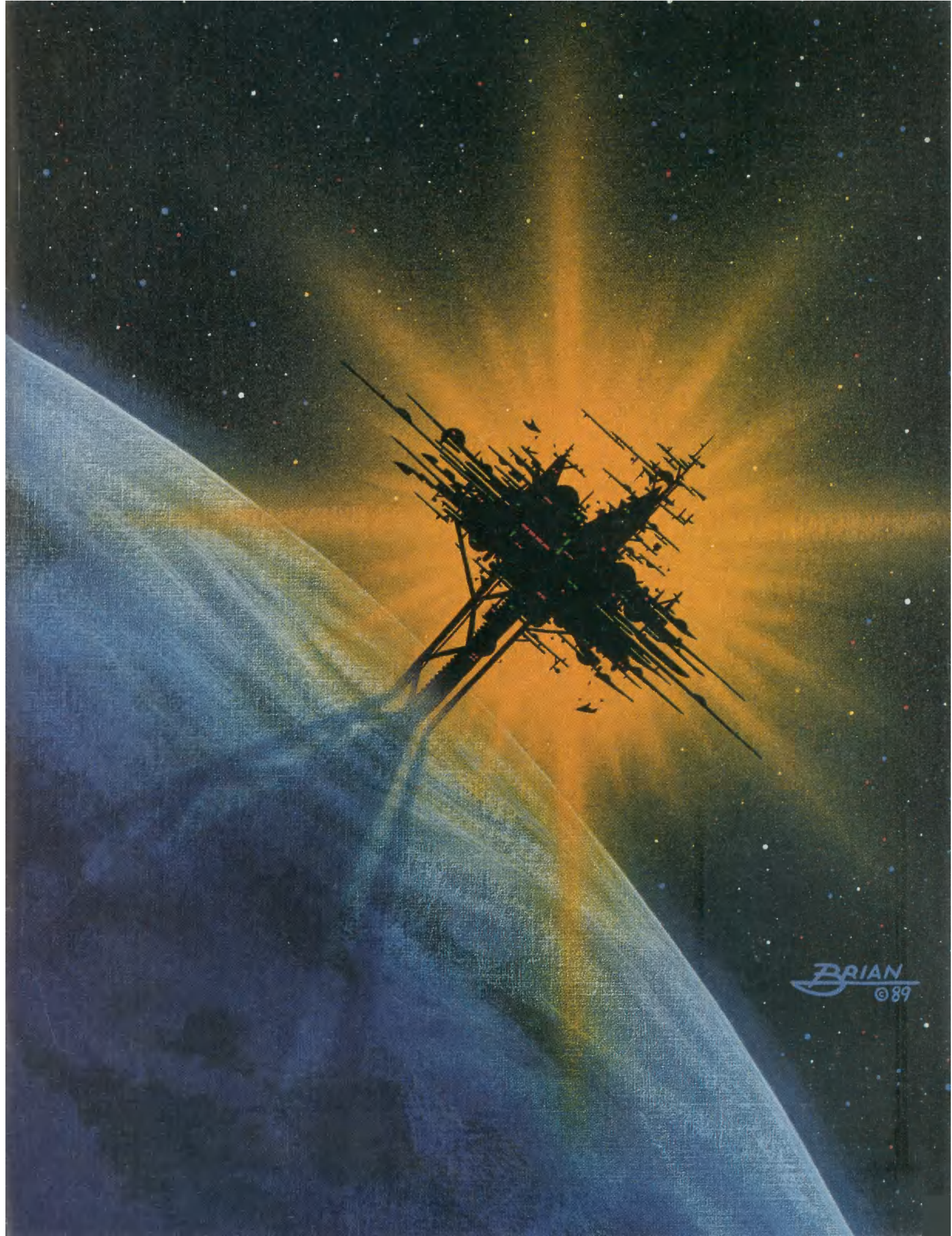
"What will you sell them?"

"Steel. Special alloys. Ceramics. Plastics, even. You people at ScienTechnics will have plenty of challenging, lucrative work, finding interfaces between the Kohollul and solid matter, designing control systems they can operate with their energies."

"And in exchange, they'll give you interstellar travel," said Yamanaka. "You'll be the richest man on Earth. Richer than any king who ever lived."

He chuckled. "A frost king." Then he laughed robustly. "It's like Norse mythology. A huge, icy ruler of a frigid wasteland. One such king was named Ymir. That's close enough." He laughed again, and despite herself Yamanaka joined in.

Hours later, Olumago stepped out of the Port office complex and set out briskly across the plaza. Sweating freely beneath the intense noonday sun, deeply inhaling the steamy air, he told himself that he was very lucky to rule over a place that was so terribly, bitterly cold. □



BRIAN
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Technomancy

By Steve Martindale

Art by Larry Blamire

When Kelikos was supreme wizard of the Middle Realms, in the days before the technomancers, life was filled with great discoveries and sorcerous surprises. Magick coursed fiercely through his body then, giving him the vigor of a man many centuries his junior. Now, however, he just felt old and disgusted. His joints hurt like a mortal's, and swelled when it rained, making it hard to get around.

It was raining now, making the cobblestones slippery and thoroughly soaking his robe and beard, as he made his way to a small winehouse where no law-abiding man would venture, nor any gentlewoman interested in preserving her virtue. In recent times, however, the place had gotten safe enough to take one's children, but Kelikos still liked to remember it as the shadowy criminal roost of years past.

He stopped at the door to turn and gaze balefully at the sparkle of the dampening field, one of many laid over the world. Though invisible to the mortal eye, it was painfully apparent to magick-users. Of all things of technomancy-making, Kelikos thought it the most vile, for it made all but the most minor magick useless, and reduced wizards like himself to humiliated has-beens. The same spell which could once raise an army in the air could now do little but levitate a few small blocks of wood. The invaders called their power science, claiming it lacked magick of any sort, but Kelikos knew better. He hadn't been a practicing wizard for three thousand years without knowing that anything which did what technomancy did was indeed magickal, and most powerfully so. Their wizards, he concluded, were probably like gods, and were no doubt the lords of men.

Kelikos studied the field, thinking, *Maybe this time!* With his right hand, he formed a potent sign, bringing to bear all the power he could summon. There was a fizzling sound, and blue sparks danced from his fingers, but the field remained. He shook his head slowly and went in the door.

The winehouse was crowded, as usual. Kelikos noted that while half the patrons were the usual crop of locals, plus one or two travelers, the rest were tourists, dressed in the odd garb of the other World. The sight of them gave him pause — it was bad enough they infested the streets during the day, and he had to smile and act as though he enjoyed their presence; did they have to intrude on his private life as well?

The dark-complected man who sat drinking from a horn was big and brawny, like a bull, with the cold eyes and shaggy black hair of a northerner. The sword he wore on his belt was permitted by the authorities as a way of preserving the customs of Faerie, even as the face of the World was changing to suit the technomancers. He and Kelikos had never been what one might call friends, but

they were friendly enough to share a horn of ale and a few stories of old times.

Once he had been a man with gigantic mirth and gigantic melancholy, who trod the jeweled kingdoms beneath his sandalled heel. Now he was a security guard at the big resort going up in what had once been Elvish Wood. (Kelikos wasn't sure what a resort was, but he had the impression it was some sort of enormous inn.) The elves had been moved to a reservation, and the little forest chopped down and plowed under. King Vannis had been a friend to the elves, giving them protection and magickal blessings throughout his two hundred years of good, enchanted life. But he had become a friend to the invaders, sitting with the Occupational Governor like a lapdog in the Governor's fancy automobile, and was more than happy to sign Elvish Wood over to them in exchange for their money. The king was enamored of technomancy, and as their money, and their money only, was needed to purchase their toys, he did whatever it took to get that money.

"Greetings, Kelikos," the barbarian said. "I'm surprised to see you out and about tonight. What with this rain and all these technomancer tourists filling the place, I thought you might have stayed home to sulk."

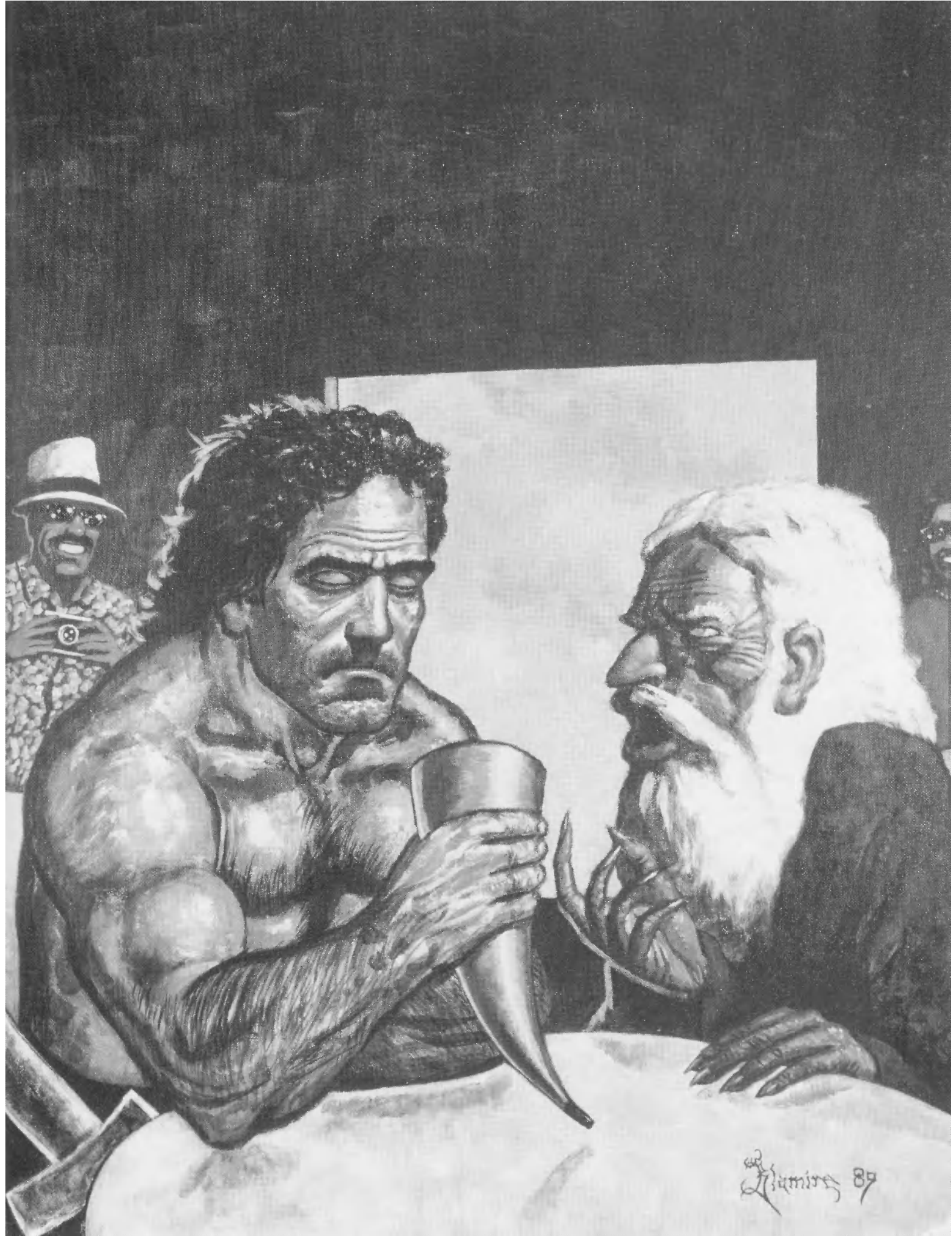
"Since you know my arthritic condition and my dislike for the foreign invaders so well," Kelikos returned, "I imagine you know I wouldn't be here were it not terribly important."

"Certainly." The barbarian made a gesture toward one of the serving wenches, and she brought Kelikos a drinking horn, for which the barbarian paid with a coin. He smiled at the girl and, for good measure, tucked a larger coin between her ample breasts. Kelikos had heard the technomancers had a similar custom, which they called "tipping."

"The most amazing-looking foreigners cross my path, asking me to pose for their ridiculous picture-machines, and I hardly give them much notice," the barbarian continued, "but a visit by a wizard of your reputation still takes me aback. I know you have no more real power, but even so" He made a sound of amusement. "There was a time when I might have sought to slay you, as warriors and wizards were frequently at odds. But you and I have been cast into the same boat."

"That's past business." Kelikos frowned. "You speak of the foreigners as though they were hardly worth noticing. I thought you disliked them."

A cold look entered the barbarian's eyes suddenly. "I used to be an adventurer, the world mine for the taking. I was a thief, a reaver, a chieftain of bandits, and in my time, I slew many a soldier, prince, and yes, even wizard. And, once or twice, I accompanied a hero and his com-



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After dark, there was a knock at Kelikos's door, and there, in the doorway, stood the barbarian, looking very pleased with himself. He extended a hand.

"I bring you a gift," he smiled.

Kelikos's eyes widened, and he seized the book with eager joy. It wasn't a book of honest parchment, bound in hide, but a flimsy thing of paper, with thicker paper covers, bound with a spiral of plastic and covered by a sheet of see-through plastic. Nonetheless, it was the very spellbook: OPERATION AND REPAIR MANUAL FOR THE TINTAX-501 MAGIC-DAMPENING FIELD -- OFFICIAL FAERIE-WORLD USE.

Kelikos opened the book to the first page, the barbarian looking over his shoulder. He'd been waiting a long time for this chance to see the technomancer spells. But as he turned the pages, his smile began to fade. Where were the incantations, the recipes, the potent gestures? Where were the secrets of the awesome wizards of the other World?

"How very strange," he murmured aloud. "How do the technomancers produce their powerful artifices without spells?"

The next pages were stranger yet. Kelikos could make no sense of them at all: they looked like tightly complex roadmaps, with tiny, arcane notations. Here was a symbol that looked like a horseshoe, and there a thing labeled "20 MHz." What could these mean?

"Are you saying this isn't a spellbook?" the barbarian said.

"Well, plainly it is," Kelikos insisted. "The dampening fields are magickal, so it naturally follows that this is the source of the magick."

"Perhaps the book is bespelled, so only the properly educated can see the magick."

"Unlikely. I feel no such power in it." Kelikos looked helpless. "You work close to the wizards at the resort. Is there anything you've noticed about them that might help me?"

"Well ..." The barbarian thought about it for a moment, then said, "... I've noticed they put a lot of importance in n y v y a h y 'w g,' w.i.c. seems to be the very heart of the artifice."

Kelikos's interest was piqued. "This 'wiring' ... what would happen if it were damaged?"

"They have men called electricians, who tend to it. Once an electrician was attaching wiring to a metal box, and there was a small mishap. The wiring spat out sparks, and the lights grew dim. The electrician drew a large tube from his pack, made light come out, and shone it on the wiring. He did something with a metal instrument and the lights returned."

Kelikos sat down to think, an idea coming to him almost immediately. "It appears that despite the potency of this magick, it's severely vulnerable. Perhaps if the wiring were detached, the artifice would be made useless." He looked at the barbarian. "Do you have access to the place where the power is generated?"

"Yes. As a security guard, I have keys to let me into every room of importance."

"What about the other places of power? Do they, too, have barbarians in security positions?"

"Yes. Not in important positions, of course — gods forbid the invaders should think so well of us — but the technomancers have admiration for our strength and value as guards. My brothers have keys to check the rooms when they make their rounds at night."

"Good," Kelikos said.

"You intend for us to tear loose the wiring in the places where they generate the dampening fields, don't you?" the barbarian said, a little uncomfortably.

"I do, indeed."

"It isn't that easy, though. Guards aren't the only protection they have. They also use picture-machines that watch the rooms at all times."

"Then you must find the wiring that gives power to everything, so the disruption will be absolute throughout the building. I have found that when many magicks are employed at once, they must originate from the same source. Do you know the source?"

"There is a room beneath the building called the power room. Supposedly, the magick is centered there."

"Then that is where you must go. Find the rest of your barbarian brothers, and instruct them, if they'll cooperate."

The barbarian grinned. "They will! Their hatred of the invaders is as thunderous as my own!"

"Then go to them," Kelikos said. "Tell them that at the stroke of midnight, five days hence, they must pull all the wiring. By

then, I shall have sought out and shared my plan with other wizards. When the dampening fields fail, we must be ready to act. We cannot waste this one chance; we must strike hard and directly, to make certain the invaders are driven out forever, and Faerie freed!"

That must have sounded a bit melodramatic to the barbarian, judging by his expression, but Kelikos didn't care. It felt good to say.

When that fateful midnight came, black-eyed barbarians throughout the city used their passkeys to steal into the power rooms of the dampening field stations, and with the triumphant glee of the oppressed throwing off their shackles, they pulled loose the wiring that fed power to those generators. The whining hum of the dynamos spiraled down to a groan, and fifteen once-omnipotent wizards grinned fiercely as they watched the sparkle of the fields vanish. Even as the last of it was fading, they could feel magick returning to them in a glorious rush. Let the technomancers beware, for the champions of Faerie were once more powerful!

But their happiness was cut short when they saw the fields reappear, and felt themselves grow feeble once more, and it wasn't until noon that Kelikos learned of something called a "back-up system." □

**"Tell them that at
the stroke of midnight,
five days hence,
they must pull
all the wiring."**

Ride 'Em, Cyboy

By Jennifer Roberson

Art by Larry Blamire

Buck Hollister reeked of the arena. He stank like a pseudo whore awash in bad perfume. Only on men they call it cologne.

Corral No. 5, I thought: piss and shit and sweat, rosin, leather and liniment, spit and tobacco, too. All carefully recreated.

It's got to smell as good as it looks, or the promoters'll scream for their credits.

I'd heard Hollister was the best. His Real Texas Rodeo was famous throughout the galaxy for providing entertainment meticulously modeled after the roughstock shows on Earth. He was a Grade II, which meant he was pseudo-human (small H) and pseudo-earthstock. This gave him the means to claim a lab link to the Old West (and to Real Texas, for that matter), not to an artificial affinity religiously refined through comsats, holos, or dreamvids.

He leaned against the rails of the landingport dock and watched his Grade I (small H) pseudos unload the cyber stock. His bulls in particular were magnificent, full of malice and a malignant intelligence, crowned with curving horns and weighted with formidable humps that turned shoulders and spines into travesties of their long-dead flesh-and-blood counterparts.

I stepped up next to him. "I was told you were the man to see."

He pushed off the rails and turned. A squat man, gray-haired and brown-eyed, squinty-eyed, short in the shanks and stiff in the knees. His belly hung over a leather belt closed with a dinner-plate silver buckle. He wore one of the new fabrics that looked like Old Earth denim, plaid yoked shirt, cowboy hat, lamas on his feet.

Hollister smiled. It was a crooked, lumpy pseudo smile, swollen out in one cheek. Then he leaned down, out of my way, and spat a stream of tobacco-laden saliva onto the gleaming plasteel of the paddock.

Sure enough, two seconds later one of the RoboMops hummed over and scrubbed it up, saying nary a word to Hollister.

His face was mashed and misshapen. I stared in astonishment; couldn't he have had himself restructured in the labs?

"Nope." He read my face. "I paid to look this way when I got out of the labs and decided on what I wanted to do."

"Why?"

He shrugged, spat, straightened. "Fits the image, don't it? Promoters pay for an image." Brown eyes studied me. "What do you want me for?"

I drew in a breath. "I want to ride your roughstock." Meaning the brones and bulls.

He leaned, spat, wiped a lip as the Robo whirred back to clean up his mess. This time it didn't leave; they're

programmed to learn fast. "All my cowboys are cyboys." He grinned at his own joke; I'd heard the term before. "No pseudos for me on the stock; cybers are cheaper to fix when they break."

"I won't break."

Hollister swore and spat again. "Don't try to con me, boy. I know all the cyber models, and you're not one of 'em. Likely you're just some jumped-up Grade I looking for an easy way out."

I peeled back the cuff of my shirt and showed him the factory service mark on the underside of my wrist. "I'm a CZX/stroke-forty-four-eleven cybernetic, designed for optimum performance in positions related to the entertainment industry here on Charon." I grinned. "You might say I'm a breed apart."

"Hunh." He aimed and caught the Robo right between the sensors. "Every time a man turns around these days, somebody's comin' up with a new line of cybers ... I say it's all a scam cooked up by the techno-science lab boys out to make a fast credit."

"Oh, no, not the technos — they're purists, Mr. Hollister." I shrugged. "I think it's the promoters."

"Lazy sons o' bitches." Hollister turned, shouted at one of his men, then turned back to me. "What do I want with a new cyboy? I got all I need."

"Because I'm the best there is." I smiled disarmingly, knowing how cocky it sounded. "Hell, Mr. Hollister, since the day they flipped my switch I've done nothing else but plan for this. It's been my only dream. You're a Grade II. You know how it feels."

Bushy gray eyebrows lowered. "Cybers don't dream."

"CZX/4411's do," I explained. Then shrugged as the brows knitted over suspicious pseudo eyes. "I told you I was a breed apart."

"Shit."

I glanced at the paddock ramp. "Yes," I agreed. "You're driving the Robos crazy."

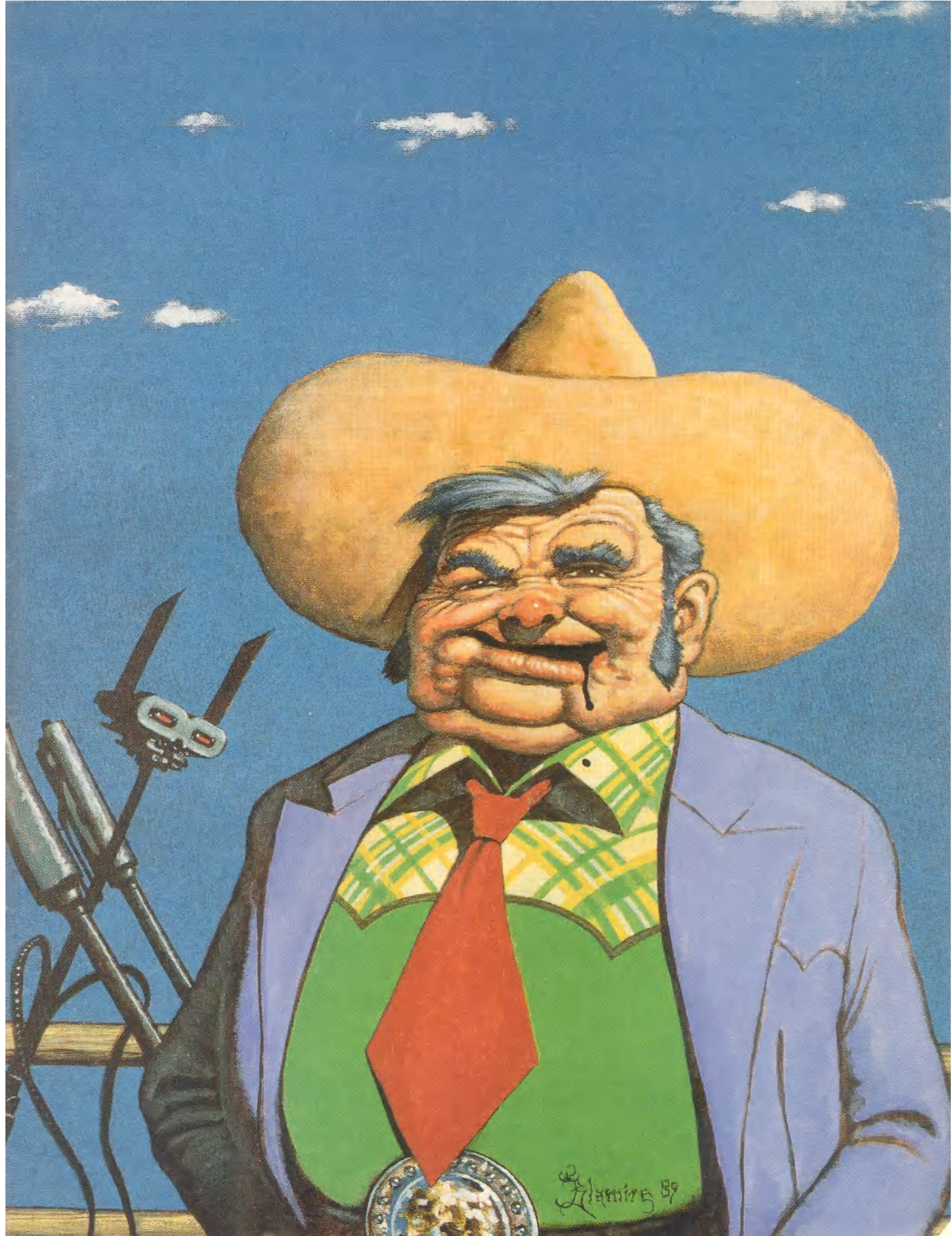
"Hell, it's what I'm paid for. My stock shits and pees and farts, just like the real ones did." He scowled at me. "I reckon you do all that, too?"

"If you want me to."

Hollister's assessment was blatant. "You ever stuffed that fancy cyber butt of yours into a real saddle? You ever eased down on the back of a bull and prayed his horns'd miss your balls?" And then he laughed, abruptly, vulgarly, and spat again in the Robo's direction. "Hell, I keep forgetting, cybers ain't got balls —"

"I do." I smiled. "CZX/4411's —"

"Yeah, yeah, shut your yap on that crap." He fixed me with a malignant stare. "They built you right for it," he admitted finally. "Not too tall, real compact, good center of gravity. Usually they build 'em too long in the legs and



torso, which throws off a proper balance. I keep tellin' 'em I ain't runnin' a basketball team, just a string of stock and cyboys." Hollister shook his head. "Who'd you learn off of?"

"Tapes, holos, dreamvids," I answered. "All the Human rodeo champions. Jim Shoulders, Larry Mahan, Joe Alexander, Donnie Gay ... all of the good old boys."

"Whose stock?"

"Rodriguez."

A ripple ran through his face, doubling as derision. Sometimes, with pseudos, you can't tell. "Shit. That phony Tex-Mex bastard ... at least I'm genuine pseudo-earthstock, not that puny foreign crap they're decanting over on Læthe." His disgust was plain; he splatted all over the Robo, which clicked and hummed its distaste.

I drew in a breath. "Do I get the job?"

The pseudo mouth stretched wide, mimicking a smile. "No room," Hollister told me. "The bunkhouse is flat full up."

"Shit." I mimicked him purposely.

Hollister leaned back against the rails and grinned his mashed-face grin around a wad of chew. "Sonuvabitch," he agreed cheerfully, and offered me tobacco.

The show was worth the credits I paid. It had a regular Grand Entry, all packed with pseudos on cyber horses, hauling in flags and girls with glittering hats. And then they shunted them out and the real show began.

I saw saddlebrons, bareback brons, calf and team roping, steer wrestling, barrel racing, and, finally, the bulls. They always save them for last, knowing the audience is more eager to see the bulls with their lethal, slashing horns and kidney-puncturing hooves. There is something elemental about bulls, something that touched even me, lost in holos and dreamvids, learning how to ride. The craving for blood and excitement, the knowledge that one hook of the horns could kill, put every member of the audience on the edge of their collective seats.

They seemed to have forgotten that neither bulls nor riders were real, but cyberfacsimiles.

Or else it didn't matter: synthetic blood is as red and squirts as far as real blood. It just washes out easier.

I didn't sit. I strolled along the concourse of the massive indoor arena, only one portion of the Charon Entertainment Complex, and watched the people who watched the show. And watched the show myself, knowing how very much I longed to climb down the slats into the plasteel chute and take my place aboard the bull who filled

A white-faced splotchy ligerence. He spun, he jumped with his head to catch the cy the cyboy into the well, glove The bull spun and spun, swit the cyber around.

Pseudo clowns and mour the cyboy, but it was much to the bull whipped back, dippe belly, then scooped him up a disdainful twitch of his mass

The cyber bled syntheti shirt was ripped, exposing t from a man, refined in the lab and was not human. And y would, ropy synthetic guts ri body.

He -- it -- was left to li riders could chase the bull b the paddock. The clowns did from the body, but clearly th be dissuaded from experien death. It was what they l Vicarious passion, vicarious c

Maybe. I couldn't say. I Charon and their jaded visit I was CZX/stroke-forty-f I was a breed apart.

Hollister was a busy r set his crew to preparing the mance, and wasn't glad to se

"Shit," he said, walking Complex.

I followed. "You need me "What the hell for?"

"The promos hired a fu And now you're a man short.

"Till they put him back juice and palmed the ID plat to your home lab, boy — I c tellin' me what to do."

"You need a smartass cy

He turned around, thru were close enough in height grown for originally, it was li ridden roughstock. He had tl

Also the typical pse

do fine as stock handlers or clowns or pickup men, but they ain't cyboys anymore, and the Grade I's won't tolerate 'em in any other position." He shrugged. "Pseudos and cybers ... You know how it is."

"Which means you're in the market for roughstock riders." I smiled, nodded, folded arms across my chest. "Hire me. I'm only two years old, and my warranty's still good."

Hollister perched himself gingerly upon the desk. He worked the chaw again, considering, and then swore thoughtfully. "I reckon you want that same bull."

"Only after everything is arranged properly."

"Shit howdy, boy, I just give you a job. What in hell —"

"If you want to take the promos for everything they're worth, give me a chance," I suggested calmly. "Advertise that the bull's never been ridden. Release all the stats on the injuries, the deaths, the disabled cybers. Here on Charon, the pseudos love that kind of thing. Let them all know how mean and ornery and vicious that bull is ... heat up their blood lust. Give them something to drool over. Give them something to bet on." I shrugged. "They'll take the bull, of course. And when I win, so do you."

"Uppity candy-ass cyber." But it lacked sincerity. "Don't you mean *if* you win?"

"When. I've told you, I'm the best." I grinned at his expression. "Pull the bull, Mr. Hollister. Give him the rest

of the week off. Hold him till the last performance, when CZ will set down on him and ride him for all he's worth."

"CZ?"

"CZX/4411. The latest trend in cybernetics."

"Shit," he said. And spat.

It went as I predicted. The word got out that Hollister had a new cyber for his killer bull. Before the week was out, the action was furious. The pseudos, of course, all bet on the bull, out of lab loyalty, techno bias and bigotry. The inhabitants of Charon bet on the bull, having carefully studied the stats Hollister released. And his cyboys all bet on the bull, as well; I was a stranger promising to do what none of them had done before, and they didn't like the competition.

Besides, they knew the bull.

Oh, I wasn't entirely ignored. There are always suckers who play the long shot, just in case.

I did, too.

As for Hollister, he wasn't saying. If he was smart, he'd bet the bull. If he was a gambler, he'd put his credits on me.

But Hollister was a pseudo; I knew he'd never risk a single credit on a cyber. He hated as well as any other pseudo, regardless of his grade.

And so, at the final performance of Buck Hollister's Real Texas Rodeo, the real show was set to commence.

A Long Time Ago

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, writers such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner and more.

We think he did a fine job at *Galileo*, and, in fact, it was on the strength of that performance that we picked him to help turn *Aboriginal Science Fiction* into the first successful SF magazine in a decade.

Now, on his behalf, we'd like to give you an opportunity to see some of the best stories he collected a decade ago.

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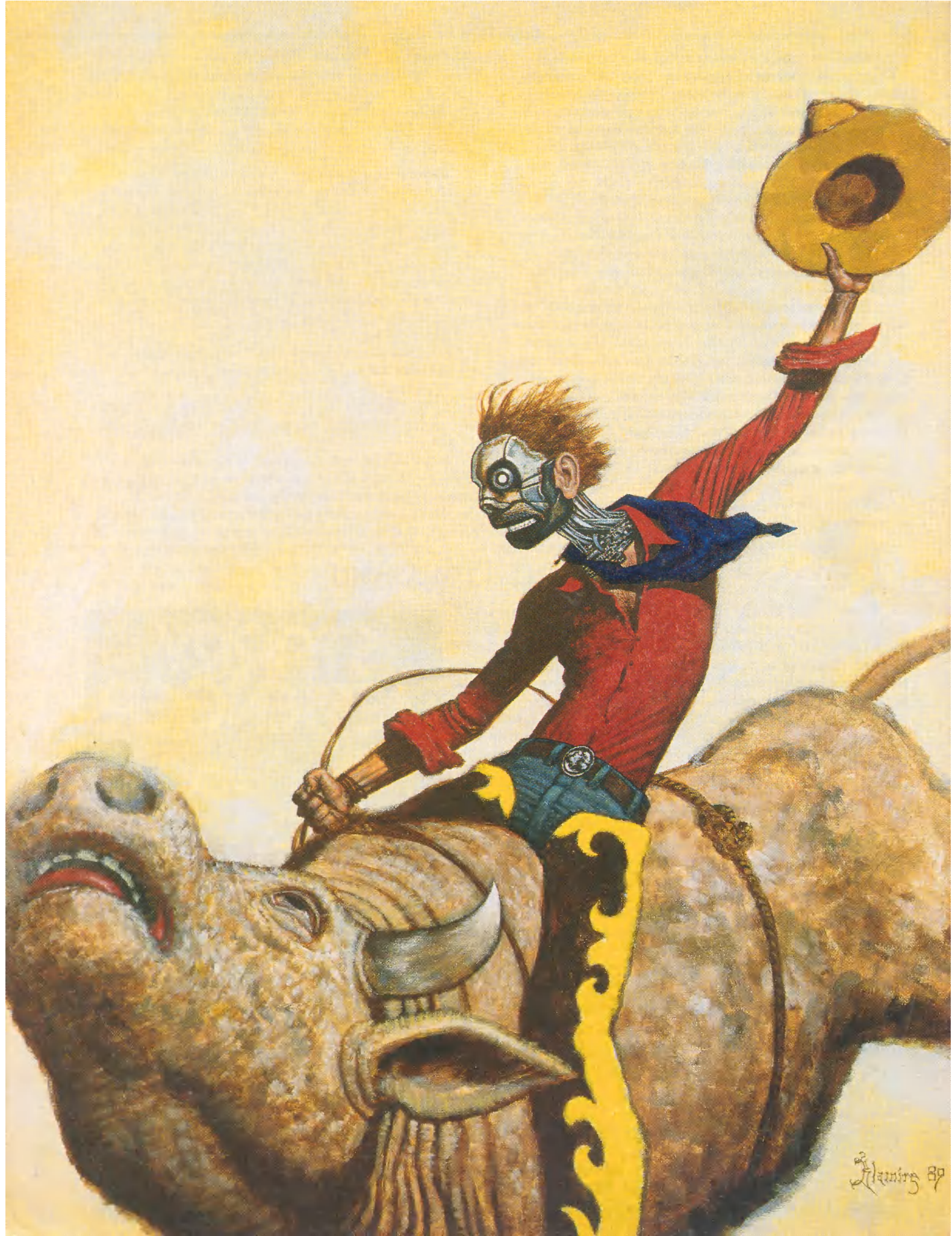
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Rice Em, Cytoy

Aboriginal Science Fiction — March-April 1990





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I sucked in a gut-deep breath that filled my belly, blew it out slowly, hooked boots on the plasteel slats. Beneath me, deep in the chute, the bull swung from side to side, smashing against his snug prison. I heard the smack of horns against plasteel, smelled the stink of feces and urine, felt the warmth rising from his body. And sensed the deep-seated bovine rage so carefully nurtured in the labs.

Hollister paid for the best, and the best is what he got.

Faces stared at me from all directions. Pseudos and cybers hung all over the chute, arms and legs braced, hands clutching, hats pulled low on their heads. One cyboy snuggled the rigging taut and clanged the copper bell depending beneath the bull. All that was left was for me to set down on him, take my wraps, and nod.

Cybernetic suicide.

Slat by slat, I climbed down. I straddled the bull, watching the spine and hump shift impatiently, waiting for my weight. And there it was, placed gingerly upon him; I thrust my gloved hand into the rigging and snuggled the loop, pulling my wraps, tucking resin-sticky rope around my wrist, my palm, back through the rigging itself. Suicide wrap, they called it in holos and dreamvids. And, sometimes, it was.

I clamped legs, flailed arm, nodded. Obliging, they jerked the chute gate open.

Loose bull. Loose bull, though a cyboy was aboard. He spun and jacked and twisted, then spun back and whirled again, bellowing rage and belligerence, hooking air with his deadly horns. The flesh was rubbery, loose-fitting; his clothes were a size too big. Muscle jerked, spasmed, quivered beneath my thighs. In front of my hand, the hump wobbled from side to side.

My world was a bull. I smelled him, heard him, tasted him. He spun wide, then tight, then swung back the other way. A rope of mucus was flung out of his nostrils; a tongue thrust out of his mouth. He blatted and bellowed and bucked. His copper bell clanged and clamored, filling my head with endless noise.

Tendons stretched from spine to shoulder, to elbow, to wrist. Any moment, any moment, one or more would pop. I could feel them fraying, weakening, contemplating surrender. It wouldn't be my decision. Nerves and flesh took on life apart from my own, separated by willingness and desire.

But in the end, willingness won. Desire dominated. Physical mechanics and training meshed perfectly, performed as they were intended to. And I won.

I rode him to the buzzer, and well beyond. I rode him to a standstill. Into docility and exhaustion; into circuitry overload.

He stopped. Stood. Shivered. And waited for me to get off so he could be led away.

I undid my wraps, freeing my hand at last. It shook, my arm shook, I shook. It would take hours for the strain to die down into manageability; until then, I was one-armed.

I slid off the bull into silence. Pseudos and cybers and Charon's honorable citizens all stared, but no one said a word. And so I walked out of the arena into the alley, by

myself, hearing only hostile silence, and found Buck Hollister waiting for me.

His mashed face was stunned and slack, lifeless in immobility. I knew then he had not bet on me after all, thinking the bull superior to the cyboy.

As usual, a wad of chew was in his cheek. Then, abruptly, it wasn't; Hollister bent over and spat it all out onto manufactured dirt, digging the excess out of his cheek with a rigid finger. The sudden absence of tobacco shoring collapsed his face into something less lumpy, something shapeless and inhuman. A pseudo stared back at me.

"You son of a bitch," he said, "you ain't no fucking cyber."

I stripped away the synthetic factory patch on my wrist. "Human. Capital II. There are still a few of us left."

I stuffed the patch into his hand and walked away to collect my winnings.

Wishing I had a horse.

Wishing I had a sunset. □

The Long Hot Silences

By Jovanka Kink

*Something has come by here and scoured
All life from the surface of this world.*

*We
Are the last walkers,
The much later invaders, we who venture
Beyond the bustle of camp and landing site
To melt into the wasteland — the expanse
Of sun-scorched rock and stark
Shadow, the sharp contrast
like dagger blades, here
Where I think strange plants once curled
and native creatures prowled, descendant
into dust.*

*You
Learn the taste of the ruin,
The intoxicating solitude, the dead-calm forlorn
Euphoria — to be the last
Living creature walking these rock-ribbed gullies,
Yellow stone being the bleached bones
Of rivers that may once have
gurgled here, mud cracks long since baked
into desert.*

*These
Are the long hot silences.
Remember how your soul tasted these
Vast empty horizons, how the heat
Had its own defiant sadness, how your little
Clawed hand in mine was your only link to the living.
Hold the long hot silences like an anchor,
like a center of gravity.
Take them with you into the scheduled flurry
of the spaceways, toward the tangled complexities
of your future;
They will remain with you forever.— □*