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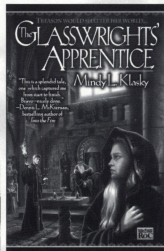
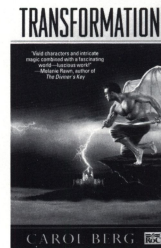
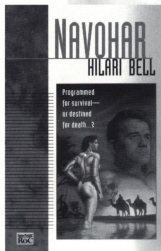
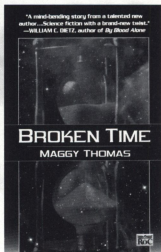
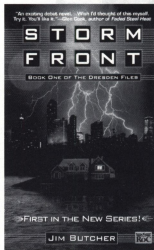
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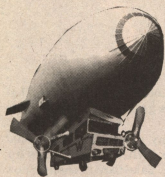
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Waterdogs

By Dennis Fisher

Art by Clyde Duensing, III

Seppie was dying. Looking back now, Tom realized that he'd known it for some time. The bulges around the base of his shellhead were swollen and pustulant, oozing splashy yellow matter. There would be worms in there, or young. Nobody knew for sure.

Mayna and now Seppie, Tom thought. Dry leaves blowing. Should have seen it before. But Mayna had blinded him to all life's small discernments.

Seppie's colors were dull. His shellhead drooped, spilling white foam intermittently on his chest. He hunched in the stern sheets of his dugout, hardly moving, ignoring his traps. The bow lifted under his inert weight. Tom worked his boat around to the lee of Seppie's and let the sail flag. The boats drifted downwind together.

"Don't come too close, Tom," said Seppie. "I wouldn't want to have to hurt you."

"I won't, Seppie." Far out, Tom could see the surging black mass of the Gyre. At this time of day it always looked black, and somehow hungry. Between the boats and the arcing current were the flat dark heads of waterdogs, trailing a ruff of gills.

"Just keep your distance." The Local sucked air through his exposed glottis. The noise was sharp and carried a long way.

"I will," said Tom. He thought: this will be bad news back at the Shore.

"I'm not having much luck today," said Seppie.

"I see that." Tom took a few strokes to maintain the distance between the two boats.

"How about you?"

"I'm not fishing today, Seppie," he said.

"Thought I'd go for a sail. A long one. Just hoist the sail and keep on going." It had seemed like a good idea when he left the beach. It seemed like a good idea now.

"Zenith is coming," said Seppie doubtfully. "You'll die out there, Tom."

"Maybe."

"I'd hate to lose a good friend like you."

"Preciate it." He felt pleased in spite of all. The past months had been very tough. There were no counselors at Southern Shore. No head doctors. You worked things out by yourself, and went on, same as people always had. Of course, Seppie didn't use words like "friend" or "hate" the same way a human would. You had to listen past the words

to the meaning. The Locals always spoke that way, complex arguments gathering behind simple phrases.

"There ain't too many of you Newfellas that like Locals," said Seppie. "When my kids grow up, I want you to be around. Take care of them. Show them how to fish."

"I'd like that. I wish I..."

Tom felt a thump behind him. The dugout surged with a wild motion. The world tilted. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the shiny scaled back of a basker sliding along below the surface. Too late, he thrust forward with his oars to pull the boats apart. The basker crested, got in his way. His left oar tangled with one of its flippers. Tom jerked it, and the oar slipped off the thole pin. Flaired in the air.

Seppie's clawhand grasped his starboard gunwale.

Tom stared at the hand, seeing how the whipcord sinews raised the skin into ridges. The hollows between the ridges. The skin seemed to have been tattooed in delicate traceries of blue and green, but it was natural patterning. The fingertips were gouges, stained with something dark.

Along the arm, Tom saw Seppie's plates ride up out of his flesh. The upturned scales turned his coat into a nest of razors. They could come up partway, in warning, or all the way, in full attack. Like they were now.

I guess this is how I die, he thought. He let the oars fall away from his hands and waited patiently for Seppie to murder him. The free oar scooted away from the boat, torpedo-like, raising a mound in the water. Time seemed to thin out as he watched it go.

He wondered how much pain he would feel. He stared at the bottom of the boat. The floorboards were clean and newly oiled. It seemed wasteful to him, in that steep instant, that they would soon be fouled with blood.

Off to his left, the basker lay breathing like a bellows, saturating its flesh with oxygen for a long dive. He turned toward it, and then away, and his head felt like a lead sinker on a long line.

Then Seppie had him. Clawhands locked onto his arms. In a second he would pull Tom close and let the razors of his flesh grind him to pieces.

Tom screamed short and high. The pain came



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on like red hot metal bands in his upper arms and steel blades in his shoulders. Seppie's shellhead was close. Through the pain Tom smelled clam flats, fish, spoiled milk. A low tide stink.

Then it was over.

Seppie pushed the boat away, gently. Tom lay spilled in the bottom, his head in the bilge and his feet up on the thwart. They felt far away. He was aware that his upper arms were bleeding. Warmth soaked his shirt.

There was a space where Tom could hear Seppie breathing in the other boat. The breaths came slow and ragged. The attack must have hurt him, too.

"Tom?"

Tom considered not answering, but there didn't seem to be any point. "What is it?"

"You hurt bad?"

Tom's head had gone light. Alertness came and went in waves. "My arms feel broken." He lay where Seppie had dropped him, staring up at the clouds. All the urgency seemed to have gone out of the situation in one breath. He felt a giddiness and supposed it was shock.

None of the other fishermen had heard his cry. The wind was onshore. Just as well, he thought. A panic on these deceptively calm waters could turn into a fight — Locals against men — and that would serve nobody. He knew there were some guns among the Shore boats lately. Tension always brought them out.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean for that to happen. It's just that, you know — you got close."

Tom felt his pain as a thing outside himself. Present, but not yet personal. It would get bad later. He tried to move, but the effort made his head throb and his stomach spin. "It's okay."

"You want me to finish you, Tom? I can do it."

Tom's fear came back. "No," he gasped. "I prefer to be alive, Seppie."

Seppie considered this. "I wouldn't want to know you out here. Alone. Z's almost here, you know. You might change your mind."

"Just tow me to the town dock."

"Okay, Tom."

He felt the jerk as Seppie took his painter, the hiss and rising slap of waves as the boats began to move. Tom felt lightheaded with relief. He'd never heard of anyone coming so close to a Local and surviving. But then, other Locals weren't Seppie. He'd live. It seemed that he would live. He was surprised to discover that he wanted it.

The feeling of movement stopped. There came a low, hopeless noise from the other boat. "I can't do it, Tommy."

"Sep?" Tom felt a sudden return of panic. The mast of the other boat drifted by, sail banging, then Seppie's head, a grotesque object. The shell-head pivoted as the boat turned. Tom could just

see it over the gunwale, seeming to float there. The splashes of pus looked like bird droppings on a rock. Seppie looked back at him mournfully with a thousand cobalt eyes.

"I got to go. Can't stay. Tom? Is it all right?"

For a while Tom was silent. Then: "It's fine, Seppie. Do what you have to."

Seppie's sail filled with a snap, and the mast heeled over. "I'd stay, but I can't."

"It's okay."

"Maybe you'll get some help."

I doubt it, thought Tom. He knew there was something else he should be doing, but by the time he decided what it was, Seppie was already gone.

Tom lay there for a long time, looking up at the dazzling clouds and the rising brightness of the sky. There was fire in his shoulders, a dull sickness in his head. His throat was raw from shouting for help after Seppie left.

He knew that the little dot of light on the noon mark at Garrison House was creeping toward the black line of the analemma. It was carefully repainted year after year, big enough so you could see it a mile offshore. Two if you had good eyes and were scared.

Finally he forced himself to sit up. The sea was empty. Everyone, Locals and humans alike, had gone racing home. Nobody noticed a canoe floating by itself, or if they had noticed, they hadn't stopped to look. He could just make out Seppie's crazy-colored sail at the entrance to Round Bay. For some reason, the sight gave him strength. Seppie had made it home. Maybe Tom could, too.

"All right," he said, out loud. "First thing, unship the mast."

In the still, eager days before the troubles, Joe Meierotto had taught Tom his trade, taking him out in the mornings and afternoons after spiny crab and shiners, showing him how to handle sheet, tiller, and trap at the same time. He had told him what to do if you got caught on the water at zenith.

"Lot of people will wrap themselves in their sails," he'd said. "It works sometimes, if it's cloudy. Other times, you can bake, just like you cook a root in paper. What you do, Tommy, is you bundle up your mast and sails, just tie up anything loose. Turn your canoe over, and it will float with air underneath. You just get under there in the cool dark and stay there until Z is past." The mast step was a simple hole in the stout blackleaf keelson. The mast was unstayed, and therefore heavy. Plus the weight of the sail, and the pressure of the wind. It would be a lot to lift. But the mast would float, and the boat wouldn't turn completely over, or it would fetch against the bottom.

It had to be unstepped.

Tom slid forward on his bottom, his arms dangling. The mast was lappawood, four meters tall. It might fall on him, when it came free, but that was better than his brain cooking in his skull. The seascape was turning white, the headland already obscured. He felt a terrible, prickling heat spiking the back of his neck.

Tom got his legs around the mast, sitting crosslegged, and tried to raise it with his knees. He couldn't get enough purchase. So he pushed backward until he could reach the heavy butt of the mast with his feet. He kicked off his boots — it seemed to take a long time — and gripped the pole between the soles of his feet. He heaved.

Nothing. Heaved again. The mast refused to move. Tom was strong, but without his arms he didn't have enough leverage. His head pounded from the effort, and his shoulders screamed with pain. Z was almost on him, and Tom was nearly blind.

Get sick later, he told himself. Be weak later. Now's the only time that matters.

Someone he got his feet under him and pushed himself up, sliding against the mast. The boat rocked. He hooked one leg around the mast and caught the smooth pole in the crook of his neck. Pushed up with all his strength. It came suddenly free, and Tom and the mast went over the side together.

He found himself in water as bright as a fluorescent bulb. He could clearly make out the shadows of the ripples on the sand bottom, the dark forms of rock and weed. Kicked for the surface. He came up under the sail and felt panic again as the wet cloth pressed against his face. Ducked, kicked sideways, and he was by the boat.

He kicked hard, pressing against the smooth wooden hull. Got his chin over the gunwale, then his chest. Still kicking, he pushed himself into the dugout.

Through the monster glare, he saw the frayed leeboard lanyard. He squirmed forward, caught it in his teeth, and threw himself back. The leeboard pivoted, and he thought the boat wouldn't come, but it finally did, flipping over heavily. Tom struggled up onto the underside of the center thwart. The reflected glare from the seabed was still strong enough to hurt his eyes. A few minutes later, the bottom of the boat was hot to the touch and the air inside became steamy. Tom drowsed, watching the rippling sand flow by below him.

At once the seabed turned from dirty purple sand to yellow clay. Tom watched from his place on the center thwart, trying to guess his position. He'd been drifting for an hour with the northerly current called the River that snaked through the Bight from Southern Shore past Round Bay and upward to Highland Head on its way to the

Banks. His neck ached from keeping his head out of the water, and his teeth ached from yanking on the line. He had pushed his other pains out of his mind.

An hour at three knots, roughly. That would put him near Round Bay, unless he had gotten into the Gyre. This was a circular offshore current that ran for a while parallel with the River. If he got into that he would slowly move out to sea, in a great arc that might bring the dugout back to Southern Shore in a fortnight's time.

He'd never make it. But they'd find his boat and body and know what had happened to him. That would be something, he thought.

No. If the Southern Shore waterfowl came upon his dried and corm-picked carcass, they'd set him out for the nightfeeders. He felt a dull anger at the thought of it. He'd give himself to the sea first. The feeders had had enough of his dead.

Tom looked down again and studied the bottom with a practiced eye. The yellow clay would be discharge from the Big Muddy River. Its banks and bed were the same sickly yellow. How far out would it extend? All the way to the Gyre?

He couldn't go to Round Bay. Not all busted up, with the Locals swarming everywhere. Tom rolled over on the thwart and slept. When he woke up, the yellow clay was gone. In its place was clean sand. He was thirsty, and he drank a little seawater, knowing it would be all right if he could get fresh water soon. But the water was terribly salty. Settlement was an old world: shallow oceans and many rivers. The salt content in its waters was high. Metal just rusted and died in it, but wood pickled and got tougher.

Hours later he saw his first slasher. It was a dark bulk moving with typical jerky speed.

He saw the long scythes of the dorsal and pectoral fins and the undulant tail. It had no teeth, just a slack sucker mouth. The leading edges of all its fins were razors. It would slam into schooling fish and then return to eat the maimed and eviscerated. It could slit a basker from crop to anus in one pass. Tom kept himself still.

The creature was an old fighter, large, with a badly scarred head. It would have no fear of a man in the water.

Another slasher, smaller and younger, appeared at an angle to the first, hovering above its own rippling shadow. They hung there for two minutes, imperceptibly keeping pace with the boat. Then, simultaneously, they slid away to left and right.

Tom gasped and closed his eyes. The trapped air in the overturned dugout was getting stale. Soon it would be time to make a move, while there was still light in the sky. The bottom seemed a little closer, as if it were shelving inland. He could see mollusks and seaweeds that grew in shallow

water. And the sea felt choppier, as if long ocean rollers were breaking near shore.

If the surf wasn't too bad, he could try hauling the boat in by its painter. If not, he would just have to try saving himself.

It was time. He started to move off the thwart. Then he saw the scarred slasher. It had drifted up behind him, and its sharp caudal fin was just touching his leg.

Tom stopped, balanced stiffly on his chest. His right hand brushed the slasher's armored head. He felt a dull tingling, like an electric field. The slasher shivered, turned toward the hand. Now its dorsal fin was resting against his calf. He could feel its insistent sharpness, like testing a honed knife against a finger.

The slasher touched his hand with its gross sucker mouth. It groped against his fingers. There was something inside the mouth like a rasping tongue. It scraped disgustingly against his flesh, and he felt distant pain.

Go away, Tom thought.

The muscles in Tom's neck and back burned from trying to hold his position. He ignored the pain, concentrated on keeping his body taut and still.

The dugout rocked harder. He thought about letting the surging water carry him away from the dugout. Maybe the thing would stay with the boat and miss him. He knew he couldn't climb on top of the rolling dugout, not without hands, and if he struck for shore the thing would just kill him.

He felt the tongue rasp his stomach and draw blood. At the same time its pectoral fin drew lightly across his thigh and opened it. He saw the pink meat of his flesh. Red fog in the water.

Tom saw the lift of an oncoming wave and felt himself borne backward. He emptied his lungs and sank in a cascade of bubbles. His feet touched the bottom, and he swayed in the conflicting surges of water, on a bare reach of sand with no cover anywhere. The boat was a dark mass off to his left, and he couldn't see the slasher anywhere.

Then it was there, a dark darting shape hung with knives. Tom waited, feeling nothing but rage. He hadn't hated Seppie when Seppie came to kill him, but he hated this thing. He wanted to kill it, as badly as he had wanted anything in his life.

Tom kicked backward, toward the beach. The slasher followed, its tail like a long banner barely rippling. Dimly, behind it, he could see another one coming. *To get the scraps, Tom thought.* He kicked. The slashers kept coming, leisurely death.

He went for the surface, was astonished to find it only a foot above his head. He broke through, gasping. Looked around.

Tom was a hundred meters from the beach,

and the beach was a shimmering mass of waterdogs. He was at Highland Head rookery. Without pausing for thought, he started kicking the surface desperately, thrashing, making as much noise and splashing as he could. Just as he'd seen waterdogs summon help when threatened by nukkers or slashers or slabmouths.

The response was instant. The bulls came off the beach like landing craft, while Tom yelled and thrashed the water. Seconds later they were tearing past him. Then they were in among the slashers, soft fleshy bodies against armor and knives. The bulls struck in a shining mob, careless of injury, filled with a high fury.

Tom saw one torn open, its belly spilling bright orange intestines.

The slashers hardly seemed to resist. Each was at the center of a writhing mass of waterdogs. One lifted a fin, twitched it, and decapitated a bull. The bulls barked and bellowed, flailing the sea to a red froth.

Finally the slashers turned and moved slowly offshore, leaving a wake thick with dead and maimed animals. The survivors pursued them a short way, but the heart had gone out of the fight.

Tom turned and worked his way inshore, against the pull of the falling tide. Toward the end he was crawling on his knees, frequently knocked over by the surf. Some females on the beach and pups playing in the surf watched him, but they didn't try to help. *Why should they?* he thought. They were just animals. But he cursed them in his mind as the sea rolled him over. Finally he just lay on his back and kicked his way in, and the tide stranded him there like a dead sea beast.

Later he opened his eyes to find himself sprawled in a tide pool among the seapines and dogwinkles. Behind him was Highland Head, a pink sandstone promontory. In front of him the Ocean, already dimming. Kochab was up, glaring like Venus through the low cloud. At least twenty dead bulls floated in the oily calm, in a sea the color of tomato soup.

And to his left, a thousand waterdogs. They lay in heaps or single animals, aligned every which way, some half buried. A few looked dead, until they rolled an eye open or shook a mass of gills. They made a grunting, barking noise when agitated, and they were almost always agitated.

The waterdogs looked like big hellbenders with iridescent sides. Not pretty, but not quite ugly either. They mostly stayed away from the fishermen, because the fishermen sometimes shot them. They were good at taking the bait from traps and had a quick intelligence that was not quite animal.

As he watched, three fights broke out on different parts of the beach, as the heavy bulls

thrashed each other. The violence of their struggles was frightening. The bulls would lock heads and roll down the sand, a half ton of steamrolling flesh, scattering cows and pups. With so many chief bulls killed, Tom figured the survivors were fighting more than usual. Maybe they would calm down with time.

Tom tried moving his arms and got only pain as a reward. His arms were swollen, a mass of black bruises and cuts. He felt chilled and sick. A few times already he'd hallucinated, thinking that someone was calling his name across the sand.

Then as evening set in, he heard a bell ringing far off. At first he thought it was in his head,

but then he realized it was the Garrison House bell, ringing for him. They always did that when somebody was lost. They must have found something to be sure so soon. Maybe his mast or his oars.

The boat was gone. He'd seen it drifting away for hours. It never came close to shore, headed for the Gyre and home.

Tom shuddered and was sick again. Dry heaves. He'd gone looking for food, but found only some rancid fish. He wasn't hungry enough to try eating it. The bell rang for a long time. It was hard to listen to.

When the sun touched the horizon, Tom walked up toward the promontory, where the sand was deep and dry. He slept a little, but mostly he lay awake and shook.

In the morning he went looking for the rotten fish but couldn't find it. All along the beach, waterdogs were stirring. The shiners were running in the Bight; he could see the ripples they made and the sudden explosions of leaping fish as the waterdogs hit them. The waterdogs moved in packs, forcing the fish into tightening circles. Feeding was a violent act. A waterdog could gulp in half a dozen fish at one time and twenty gallons of water, in a spasm that shook its whole body. Then it would vomit the water back up, and somehow the fish stayed in the stomach.

Later, a few dead or dying fish appeared in the surf. Tom kicked these ashore, knelt, and ate them, pushing his face into the sand. He ate a lot of sand too, but he didn't care. The shiners were fatty and good.

The waterdogs were into their second, less frantic, breeding cycle of the year. The pups from the first were a few months old and large as a beagle. The cows were human-sized or smaller. The bulls ranged up to 600 pounds. They all had great feathery bunches of exposed gills on either side of

their heads and wide smiles. The next generation was waiting in the bellies of the cows, to be born live and hungry in perhaps a week's time.

A few hours before Z, Tom dug another hole in the north side of a big sand dune.

The sand was moist and held together well.

He dug at a slight angle, using his feet to shovel out the coarse sand. It was slow going, and his feet were raw and bleeding

by the time he was finished. The entrance steamed at high zenith, but Tom's feet were as chilly as a bait locker.

He emerged to the smell of ozone and fried shrimp, to see the small heat-killed shellbacks sticking up here and there from the sand. He ate a few, but they were bitter, and later he threw them up.

In the afternoon, the surf brought more shiners. Some female waterdogs rolled in the creamy waves, watching him with soft, intelligent eyes. He ate jealously, watching them over his shoulder.

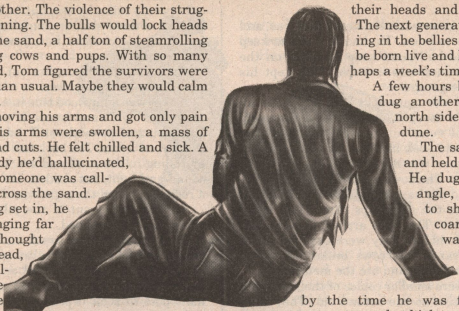
In a day or two, Tom started to feel better. Feeling came back to his arms, and he decided that they were probably not broken. He ate fish and drank from a warm freshet that came out of a gully to the north of the massif. He swam a lot, because soaking eased the pain in his arms, and he suspected the salt water would help them heal.

The gash in his thigh still looked bad, and he wondered if it was poisoned. Did slashers carry poison? He didn't know.

Tom got to know the waterdogs.

There was a story that since they were so unlike the other high forms of Settlement, all shellheaded and slow, they must have come from some other place. Maybe even followed the same painful passage as humanity, through Interval and Ascension and Arden's Purchase. However they had got here, the creatures now had a million-year lease on this beach. They made Tom feel precarious in the fixity of their belonging.

The cows especially seemed to like Tom. They would swim near him and paddle him with their broad, flat tails. The bulls were aloof, uninterested unless he got too close. Then they would thrust flat, ugly faces at him, mouths agape in silent but profound rage. If provoked further, they would lunge at him on stubby legs, tails lashing up pails



of sand.

Tom didn't know what the next stage was, and he didn't care to know. He had learned to keep away from the bulls and keep his eyes on the sand. They seemed less irritable if he kept his body low to the ground.

Tom found the waterdogs likeable. Like all fishermen, he'd thought of them as bait stealers and robbers of nets, but he thought differently now. Pups would seek him out for water games. Chase the human was a good one, but chase the pup was better. The cows watched complacently. The bulls could not have cared less.

By the time the new pups came, Tom could move his fingers. The pups arrived in sacs, like shiny plastic bubbles. They were expelled all at once on the sand. The cows broke the sacks, dumped out the pups, and ate the membranes.

The pups were smaller copies of their parents, bright and active at one second old. They were comical and winning. They battled, explored, formed allegiances and broke them, and bothered their older siblings. They took to the water quickly, warded and guided by the cows. Tom watched it all. He felt that there was something here he should know, and he studied on this need. The waterdogs returned his gaze, inscrutable, playful, giving nothing.

New life brings predators, always. The yearling females formed a cordon at the dropoff, patrolling endlessly. Their dark frilled heads bunched and thinned anxiously, like water beetles. The bulls waited on the beach and swarmed off in a horde at least three times a day. Sometimes it was nukkers, lanky eels with teeth; once a slabmouth, an awesome keeled horror that cruised with massive grandeur past the outraged waterdog pack.

And always, there were the slashers. More of them now, they came as if sensing weakness. Tom wondered if the first attack on the slashers had weakened the herd, leaving it vulnerable to an unfair predation. A guilt burned in him at the thought of all those prime bulls, gutted and dead, skeletons now picked by rock crabs.

His leg wasn't healing right. He became restless with anger and pain, watching the big slasher take first one pup, then another. The bulls were too slow and too few. Some had died in fights with the slashers or from their injuries. Some had just dropped dead, worn out or stressed beyond their limits. The survivors were tired and starved looking, their skin peeling and rank. They had acquired an irritability that wasn't like their former feistiness. Tom kept away from them.

He'd hoped to build up his strength for an overland crossing, sixty miles skirting the great green meteor hole of Round Bay. But with his leg going bad, he knew he couldn't make it. It was

only twenty miles by sea, but he had no boat. And with all of those slashers hanging around, hungry for blood, his chances in a small boat would be pretty poor.

Tom put such thoughts out of his head. He would have to try anyway.

There was a fanwood bole in a pile of driftwood above the high water mark. It was fine and long. Tom touched it with stiff hands, finding the checks and knots. The bark had been eroded away by rolling in the sand and sea, but the wood was sound and light, not sodden. He thumped it with a rock and heard the right sound.

He dragged it out of the pile, grunting with effort. His leg throbbled.

There was a long crack in one side of the trunk, and he enlarged it, driving in flat wedges of weathered slate. He had no strength to do more. Then he put a bushel of catkins in a stagnant pool to soak overnight and crawled to his hole to sleep.

Next day he filled the crack with the catkins, pounding them down with a pole, and forcing more in until the long crack was jammed full. Brown water oozed onto the sand. Tom carefully wrapped the trunk with kelp to hold everything together.

At Z, the catkin pods exploded with a gunpowder crack and a sound of tortured wood. Tom found half the fanwood bole down the beach and the other half in a grove of splitleaf.

He dragged them both to just above high water.

He had no tools but a foldknife and a fist axe he had shaped; no saw, no adze, no burner. He made a firebow out of a springy piece of driftwood and a strip of his shirt, and set fire to the pithy center of the larger section of bole.

The fire smouldered while he ate, swam, and played with the pups, then all through Z. In the afternoon, the big slasher charged an unwary group of grown pups and killed three of them. The others moved in to share.

The fire burned itself out, and Tom dug out the ash and charred wood. Now he had a ragged hollow in the trunk just about big enough to squat in. It was not the job he would do if he had a week and a burner at the Shore boatyard, but it would do. He cut a pair of strong, flexible poles from the grove and set them beside the other wood. He tied the poles to the fanwood trunks with water roots, and when he was finished he had a crude dugout with an outrigger. For a paddle he had a piece of plank with some rusty nailholes in it that had once been part of a dock. He shaped it a little with his axe. There was nothing to use as a sail.

It didn't matter. There was an inshore countercurrent that paralleled the River. He'd cut between the Outliers and Pulpit Rock, and hope

for a favorable wind. At Fallwater he could beach the craft and walk, saving a hard pull around Point Judith.

He tried out the dugout, watched by the waterdogs. It was uncomfortable and handled sluggishly. He tried standing on the gunwale, then on the float. He jumped up and down in place, and the dugout surged, but stayed upright. At least it had stability, if not grace or speed.

Tom steered by a torch in the bow made of two dried candle eels wrapped around a stick. The torch smoked and stank, but he hardly noticed, studying the water ahead. Instead of a paddle he used a lappawood pole. He balanced on the stern, thrusting against the bottom, feeling the rutch of the sand grains and the elastic tug where it turned to clay. The onshore wind was warm and smelled sweet.

The shiners were all around him, moving in blue-white columns. The glow was so bright it left an afterimage when he looked away. He edged toward one, a turgid, wormish shape. The bottom was deeper now, and he put down the pole and gave a few slow strokes with his paddle. Then he was at the edge of the mass of fish.

He put down the paddle gently and took up a long, forked spear. The end was split and sprung apart, with two inset thorns for barbs. He moved cautiously to the bow and stood there, looking down through clear water. The torch showed fat shapes, dazzled and lulled by the light. Tom struck and pulled back sharply as he felt the spear touch flesh. He hauled the bending spear in hand over hand and seized a thrashing shiner. Without hesitation he cut the fish open, sliced off a fillet, and swallowed it. The shiner was still gasping when he turned back to the work.

In a short time he had a pile of twitching, glowing shiners in the bottom of the dugout. He tied the spear to the outrigger and paddled inshore. He threw the fish above the line of dried seaweed on the shore and went back out.

And again. Once he saw the tangled, horrible form of a slasher sliding underneath him and froze. But it left him alone and moved off.

The next morning, with his arms stiff and aching and the gash in his leg burning, he cut fish for the pups. The pile of sand-covered shiners was mountainous. His knife went dull, and he ground it on a stone to sharpen it. The pups crowded around, butting his legs with their heads. He tossed them shiners, cut in three pieces.

Once he looked up and saw the big slasher. It breasted, rolled an eye at him, and was gone

again. The pups crowded around, and none left the beach.

He meant to nap through Z and work in the afternoon, but when he woke it was evening time and long shadows stretched across the beach. A big bull squatted in the middle what was left of the shiners.

Most of a dead pup rolled in the surf. Tom swore. They must have gone out in the afternoon. He saw more litter, limbs and pieces of meat.

He picked up the pup, a dripping, flaccid weight, and carried it to the dugout, expecting to be attacked by the bulls. But nothing happened. He placed the carcass in the boat and covered it with weed to keep the sun and sandflies off. Then he sat and thought for a long time.

The torch burned redly with a harsh fish stink, touching the waves with red highlights. Tom lay flat on a driftwood platform at the front of the dugout. His body was loose and relaxed, but ready — the way he always was in a boat. His eyes were on a small dark shape that drifted and twitched.

He had stuffed the pup's body with rockweed bladders so that it would float, and tied a long line to it made with knotted pieces of vine. He held the end of the line in his left hand and jerked it, making the body move like it was struggling in the water.

He hadn't dared try this in the daytime, or the cows would have come for the pup. Now it was dark, Kochab was high, and the constellation of the Bottle was spread across the sky above the ocean.

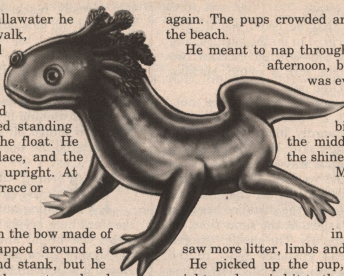
Tom waited. A warm, salty breeze licked his hair. His left hand twitched the line. His right clutched a long spear with a hardened point, its tip bristling with thorns.

For an hour, nothing. He grew sleepy. The torch burned low, and he lit a new one. The first sizzled as he tossed it far over the side.

Then, suddenly, movement.

Behind him, he heard the grunt of a bull waterdog. The unexpected noise made him start, and the tip of the spear wavered and touched the water. He was suddenly very thirsty, but he didn't dare reach for his water sack, and anyway he knew that it was fear.

Very gently he twitched the line and saw the dead pup bob up and down. He moistened his lips with his tongue. They were cracked and raw. Nervousness came over him in a wave and settled as a throbbing at the base of his spine. He stared



squinting into the darkness.

Then he realized that he could see it. The scarred slasher had drifted in on the surface, and it was bigger than he remembered. He saw two pig eyes in a blunt face with a round, sucking mouth that worked in and out.

It had reached the pup. He watched the muscular tongue come out. It was covered with small teeth and worked awkwardly, like a tentacle. The tongue touched the pup's skin. He heard a rutching sound above the lap of waves.

The slasher started to feed. Tom held his breath and took some tension on the line. He began pulling it in, closing the distance between the dugout and the slasher. At the same time, he lifted the spearpoint slightly. The slasher ignored him. Its armored head glistened redly in the torchlight. He saw the deep scars like hieroglyphs in the rough hide. He drifted closer. The spearhead was a meter from the slasher. Then it was a foot.

Tom struck, jamming the bristling spearhead into the slasher's mouth. It went in head deep and stopped against some obstruction. Not far enough to hope to hold. Tom got to his knees and leaned on the shaft. Nothing. Panic rose in his chest. He pushed, forcing the dugout away from the slasher.

The big slasher jerked and lifted a sharp fin, and the shaft broke in two. The tongue wrapped around the shaft and yanked it back and forth, trying to work the spearhead loose. Tom picked up his paddle and smashed at the creature's head, feeling cartilage break and the gelid flesh beneath. He struck again and again, until dark fluid and chunks of matter poured from the wound.

The slasher came at him in a fury of flailing knives and spray. It tore the platform from the front of the dugout, and then, rolling, sliced off the outrigger. Its tail struck the tough fanwood hull with terrible force, tearing away chunks of wood.

Tom fell. He felt the water close over his head, and then his feet struck sand. He pushed his way to the surface and struck for shore, the slasher tearing up the sea behind him. Then he was on his knees in the shallows and on his feet, running and kicking spray. The slasher lunged after him, humping its heavy body up through the surf.

Tom ran, and then he was running on sand. He turned, gasping. The slasher was a dark mass, almost invisible, in the midst of dark water and white foam. It struggled, thrashing, still trying to reach him, digging its fins into the sand and boiling the water with its tail.

He looked around and found a heavy stick wrapped in seaweed. He pulled it free and started bask down the beach. He could hear the bulls bellowing all up and down the rookery. Some of them

had already reached the water; he could just make out the pale, shining forms moving around the slasher.

Before he reached the water's edge there were more of them, and then there was no point in going any farther. Every bull in the rookery was moving, rushing the slasher, fighting the others to get to it. Behind him the cows were screaming. The bulls pulled off its knives and then bashed and battered the slasher to pieces.

Morning came with equilibrium, or maybe victory, and an armored hulk rolling in an oily sea. Corms picked at the thick hide, trying to find a way to open it. The ocean was bright and empty. Tom had watched the slasher since daybreak, and was finally convinced it was dead. It didn't seem like a thing that could ever die.

Tom loaded his dugout and pushed off, maneuvering through and past a group of female waterdogs. The boat was awkward to handle without the outrigger and rocked in the light swell.

He heard the hooting of a corm, the sullen bark of a bull, the bawling of pups, and far off, the booming call of a Local. Tom paddled strongly south. He had hours until Z, and after that, days and years. □

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I Have No Blimp, and I Must Dream

By David Bischoff

Art by Cortney Skinner

The sign floated like a message typed onto a cloud of paper by a giant Olympia manual typewriter.

JUNCTION CITY AIR FAIR
LIGHTER THAN AIR VEHICLES
THE SKY IS NOT THE LIMIT

Dick Smith eased on the brakes of the Winnebago RV and pulled onto the shoulder of the road. He stared at the sign, waiting for his eyes to adjust, waiting for the words to turn into a mistake, a phrase mirage — not something that actually promised a thrill. Making a circuit of Madge's favorite spots in the continental United States had rapidly grown very old. Surprise and delight were usually not in the cards for Dick Smith's retirement years.

"Dick? Is everything all right?"

"Yes. Yes, Madge. Just fine. Come up and take a look at this, will you?"

A sigh, a squeak of furniture, the pounding of feet. Shake of RV, parting of curtains: here was Madge Smith, gray and matronly, peering through blue glasses at Pacific Northwest green. Place-marked by a finger was a thick paperback called *Passion's Flaming Missionaries*. She smelled of Prell shampoo and the potpourri she bought at every tourist trap from Hilton Head Island to the Monterey Peninsula.

"Trees. All I see are trees and a silly sign, Richard Smith, just like everywhere else in this part of the world. I'm really looking forward to getting back to Arizona and some nice dry heat, you know."

"No no no no," said Dick. "There. Look! You can't miss it."

Beyond the sign was a wealth of fir and ponderosa pine. Above these hung slices of black metal and canvas, hints of rope and rubber, glints of plastic and glass.

Memories stirred in Dick Smith as he studied the horizon.

Madge sighed. She put a hand to her polyester pants. "Balloons, Dick?"

"Now, Madge, it's time for a break anyway, right? We have to hang a left, then head on over to Harrisburg up the road anyway, and then we check in at the RV camp." He tapped his wrist-

watch. "We've got plenty of time, sweetheart. Let's just have a look, okay?"

She sniffed. "You and your balloons. Emphasis on loons."

"I just enjoy looking at them, Madge. It's not like I go up in them to make you a widow."

Dick Smith was a short man with a carefully combed thatch of wispy hair. He had lived life as his society had prescribed, checking in his work years with a government job, clicking two children into population statistics, checking into a Baptist church each Sunday, chalking up his pension on Earth and in the Hereafter. He had filled in all the dotted lines of life's bureaucracy. Somehow, though, he felt now as though there were pages no one had mentioned.

While Dick loved her, in his twilight years he sometimes wished Madge didn't see life as just a road map with rest stops. He generally kept the peace with a woman profoundly nervous about side trips — and especially up side trips. Now, though, he had to see what was going on here.

"Just a look, Madge," he said, pleading. "Just a peek."

She relented.

Eagerly, he gunned the RV, swung her around, and headed up the trail. Trees gave way to a clearing, and he had to hold tight to the wheel or he might have gone off the rough road.

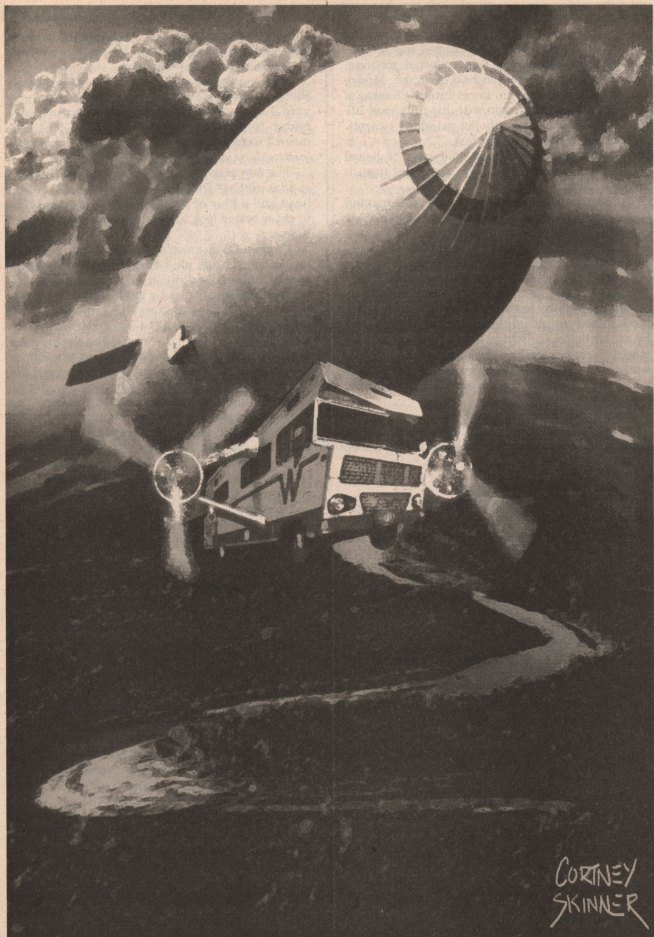
Out here was a field by a creek. The smell of grass here was fresh, but grass wasn't what Dick Smith was looking at. Moored to concrete casings and tree stumps was a forest of flying colors.

Here were blimps, wafting in a breeze. Sandbags dangled, tassels stirred.

Nearby, engines chugged: helium machines.

Dick Smith got out and wandered toward the things. Childhood wonder filled his eyes. He remembered how, as a boy, once he had watched the Goodyear blimp pass over a field and he'd thought ... One day I'll pilot that! One day I'll float among the clouds, sail through seas of wind and light.

Life and reality had held him close to ground. The highest he'd ever gotten was in the belly of an



airplane, or on the tails of his kids' kites, bobbing above farm fields in the wing-clipped south.

But he'd read books, he'd collected pictures, he'd watched contests, and he'd dreamed. Madge had never permitted him to get into the basket of a hot-air balloon, not even with his fully paid life insurance. No, her acrophobia extended neurotically to her nearest and dearest.

"Goodness gracious!" she said now. "I heard these states were weird ... Who would put together this kind of —"

A putt-putting, rotoring sound interrupted her. A sudden blast of gas-jet and a release of air came from above them.

"Good day! Good day to you! My name is Professor Kent Patterson."

The couple turned around and tilted their heads skyward.

Slanting down toward them was a man in a mechanized wheelchair held suspended in the air by hot air balloons. Behind the chair hummed and wheezed configurations of machines. His hands worked busily and deftly at numerous levers and wheels, controlling the levels of gas and his descent toward them.

"Uhm ... hello there," said Dick, automatically. The appearance of this man in this most astounding machine simply pushed him from wonder straight into awe.

"Are you the salesman here or something?" said Madge.

The man looked thoughtful. "Well, I guess you might call me that, ma'am. President, Vice-President, and stockholders as well. You see, I'm the owner, but I'm the salesman, too, I suppose. Because nothing would please me more than putting a nice young couple into the sky. Not a sunset sky, mind you. A dawn sky. A lofty cloudy land filled with wonder and joy."

"Lord," said Madge. "He's a salesman, all right. Dick, let's turn tail and get out of here before you start getting strange thoughts in your head."

"Now, now," said Dick. "No harm in talking to the man, now, is there, Dearest? I mean, it's not like I've got enough money for one of these things. Won't hurt to take a look here for a moment. Talk to the nice man. We stopped yesterday and took half the afternoon in that knitting shop you were so hot on in Portland, now didn't we?"

"I guess so ..." said Madge.

"Of course. We could use a break, anyway. I wouldn't mind talking to the guy. Maybe he has a book to sell me. I can afford a book."

Madge frowned suspiciously at the word "book". Any book that didn't have flexing abs and the word "Love" or "Romance" or maybe "Bible" in it fell into the category of "suspicious". He had to be mighty careful of his library, as disapproved

volumes tended to get "lost" or accidentally tossed out in her regular cleanings. "Okay, but not long. I'll be back in the Winnebago."

"No, no, please ... linger!" said Professor Patterson. "It's my pleasure to show you about the yard. I mean, I said I'm a salesman because I'd be happy to sell you something, but that doesn't mean I expect you to buy something. I'd be glad just to show you around."

The sun was coming in at an awkward angle, so that all that Dick could make out was a round head and a blur of hair. He stepped around a bit to get a better look at this Lighter-Than-Air-Lot-Keeper.

Professor Patterson's smile wasn't just on his mouth, but on his pink cheeks and in his bright eyes. It glowed mildly from behind his black-rimmed glasses. He had a bald head and a fringe of brown hair. His body was like some old, settled hobbit's, big-bellied and tubby and friendly. He wore a dark suit with a red polka-dot bow tie. Then Dick could see the reason why the man preferred this odd lighter-than-air contraption to float about in: on his legs he wore braces. By his side were light aluminum crutches, braces that were so prevalent in the era of polio.

"Okay," said Dick. "That would be real nice of you, Professor Patterson."

"Kent," said the man, beaming happily. "Just call me Kent. And you know ... I can see that you're a spud man."

"Pardon me?"

"You like potatoes, don't you? Both of you. I just so happen to have some mighty fine pommes frites fixings about ready to be dipped into some real nice veggie oil. One hundred percent canola. A little salt, some malt vinegar ... Would you care to join me?"

"Why, that's mighty nice of you, Mister," said Dick. "We're much obliged."

The fries, daubed with a splotch of ketchup, sat ignored in Dick Smith's hand.

He stared at the mechanism with awe.

"Pshaw," said Madge Smith. "Looks like something out of that strange cartoon crazy guy — what was his name? Ah, right. Rube Goldberg."

"Actually, Madge, it looks more Victorian," said Dick. "Something that maybe Jules Verne might conjure up ... From *Master of the World*, say. Or maybe H.G. Wells —" He turned a smile toward the guide. "Anyway, I think it's absolutely fabulous."

The man, supported by his crutches now, the little airship anchored some yards away, stepped forward and pointed along the trim of the gondola. It hung beneath a large blimp-shaped balloon, bespangled and luminous. "Absolutely. A few of

my own design ideas, but you know, it's a shame the Victorians were so thoroughly trashed with the coming of the so-called Modern. Now we find ourselves post-Modern, when things would be so much nicer if we were simply Post-Victorian." He shrugged. "Ah, well, there are still precious pleasures to be had ... as long as we remember what's vital in life. But please, come with me."

He took them on a tour, and each inch of the vessel filled Dick with fascination. All the brass and wood and aluminum fittings and trimmings were polished and proud. The colors vibrated. They seemed to yearn for the sky. And the balloon itself appeared a tethered cloud of his childhood imagination, ready to loft into fantasy at the mere toot of an engineer's whistle. Here were motors and designs that harkened back to an age more innocent and yet more alive. The future was a glorious place of possibility and hope and progress.

"My goodness," said Madge. "Looks like something out of a circus."

"Yes, Madam," said the Professor slyly. "If the Smithsonian were a circus ... And some, believe me, have described it as such. But come ... Would you like to look inside?"

"Boy, would I!" said Dick.

Professor Patterson pulled a wheeled set of steps up to the wooden door. "Now, then, Mr. Smith. The latch is unlocked. Please be my guest!"

Not looking back at his wife for approval, Dick walked up the three steps and tugged open the door. The gondola of the blimp was composed of a forward engineer's area with a brightly polished walnut steering wheel and sparking contraptions for controlling the propellers and vanes and vents and all the air-sailing paraphernalia. The remainder of the cabin, however, was living quarters done up as an opulent carriage of the 1890s' Orient Express might look. Crimson carpeting. Plush hand-sewn seats. Tasseled lanterns. All antiques that looked new. In one side of the back was a toilet compartment and a modern shower stall; in the other a small tasteful kitchenette and electric stove area. However, with all this finery on display and open for inspection, somehow Dick's eyes were drawn to a beautiful teak bookcase, filled with volumes.

"Amazing," said Dick.

"Thank you. That's one of my favorite words,"

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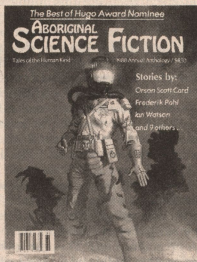
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said Doctor Patterson. "That was the title of the first sciencefiction magazine. Edited by Hugo Gernsback and started in 1926."

"Looney!" said Madge.

"My goodness!" chuckled Doctor Patterson. "As a matter of fact, that's another of my favorite words. As in the Looney Toon Cartoons of Friz Freleng and Chuck Jones. Hmm. Well ... Come to think of it I have a lot of favorite words. Words are wonderful, don't you think?"

However, Dick was only half-listening. He went to the bookshelf and examined the volumes. He blinked. He examined more volumes. He blinked again.

"Professor Patterson," he said. "All these books. They're by one person."

"Why, yes they are, Dick."

"Harlan Ellison." Dick turned and looked at their guide. "Who's Harlan Ellison?"

It was Doctor Patterson's turn to be nonplussed. His mouth dropped a bit. "You've never heard of Har —" Then a smile, brighter this time than before. He hobbled forward and patted the bookcase proudly. "Why, he's one of my very favorite authors."

Madge's mouth twisted sourly. "What's he got to do with wacky blimps?"

"Wacky blimps! Two more of my favorite words. Mrs. Smith," pronounced Professor Patterson, "you are just filling me with delight. Now as to Harlan Ellison ... Why, he's written a variety of works, but I suspect that he likes to be called a fantasist. Hmmm. Well, perhaps not, but that will do for the moment. Well, now, I got this idea when I started this enterprise. You see, Mr. Ellison, in the nineteen-eighties, briefly appeared in ads for Geo compact cars in the Los Angeles area. Now, in return for his services, he requested the Geo car people to include one of his books with every new car sold." The Professor leaned over and tapped a hardback. "*The Essential Ellison*. Well, now, when I started this business shortly afterward, I thought ... I am going first class. I am going to include the complete works of one of my favorite authors with every Patterson Air Ship that I sell! This one is the Ellison model. We've got a Wells and a Verne, of course, but also a Philip K. Dick model." He blinked. "Now that one's a little odd."

Dick looked closer. The titles included *Deathbird Stories*, *Strange Wine*, and *Dangerous Visions*. Something touched him. Curiosity? Intrigue? Mystery? Yes, all of those ... yet something more ... something that was very similar to the feeling he got when he thought of airships fabulously drifting toward him on the tides of dawn.

"Harlan Ellison!" snapped Madge. "I've seen him on TV. He's on Tom Snyder's show sometimes." She snorted. "He must appeal to you

because he's like one of your balloons. Full of hot air!"

"Ha ha!" said Professor Patterson. "Very funny!" His playful fingers drifted over the leather and plastic and paperbound books with great love, dancing gracefully across their spines. Soft shoe on *The Glass Teat*. A stirring pirouette off *I Have no Mouth and I Must Scream*. A tap dance on *Gentleman Junkie*. "I don't know. I've wondered about that. Why Harlan Ellison? I love stories of the fabulous. Science Fiction and Fantasy and the Macabre. Flights of Art and the Mind, locked in Conflict, locked in Embrace." He shrugged. "I suppose it's because the man's work has power and language, it distills wonder and awe with dread and pain. It excites me. It sends me aloft on wings of winds into lands beyond the mountains, worlds beyond the sky ... And by doing so, maybe I know something more of my own heart and the twisted, hopeful minds of other humans. In lighter-than-air vessels, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, there can be magic. In stories there can be magic. Together, perhaps, they are magic squared. Hmm?" His eyes suddenly twinkled with amusement. "But come." He grabbed his crutch. "There are other treasures on this lot that I must show you. Oh what fun we shall have!" He stopped at the door, turned around. "Some more spuds first, perhaps?"

Dick Smith flew.

He soared, he drifted, he banked, he elevated, he descended, he glided.

A cloud hung over him, filled with song. He was in a huge wicker basket, basking in the warm fire of a hydrogen jet. Then he pulled a rope, splendid flames of symphonic music rushed up, curling in crescendo, filling the balloon with chorales and glissando and jamming mellotrons of wonder.

Winds pushed him forward toward a magnificent horizon of snow-peaked mountains.

And there, just peeking beyond those mountains, he saw the spires of a city ... A hint of majesty ...

Xanadu? Pellucidar? Lemuria? Atlantis?

All these, and so much more ...

SNAP

Fearful, he looked up. Were his ropes breaking?

No. They seemed fine —

SNAP *SNAP*

Suddenly, his vision started fading, and the mountains and the glorious sky changed into the confining contours of his bed. He blinked at the darkness of the interior of his Winnebago.

SNAP

Voices. The sputter of a radio ...

He was still half asleep, and he felt dragged

and blurry, half between reality and dream. He heard another voice. In his head. The memory of Professor Patterson's voice.

"I hope you have enjoyed our little tour. I understand that you can't buy anything, naturally — but then commerce is not the sole purpose of this display. Ah, yes, I know, Mr. Smith, that you would enjoy drifting among the clouds and the stars in your own airship ... Yes, but we must face reality, then, mustn't we? 'Ah, well. I do sell rides ... And if you have merely received vicarious pleasure, then my day is complete. But say — why not hang around for the evening? Yes, go and freshen up and then return for supper. You mentioned, Mr. Smith, an interest in UFO folklore! Did you know that there were UFOs in the nineteenth century? Why, yes! Victorian Unidentified Flying Objects. It was called the Great Airship Mystery of 1896. Come over. Baked potatoes tonight. Yum! I'll tell you all about it ... and perhaps more mysteries!"

After the exciting afternoon, Dick had been feeling tired. However, not too tired to suggest to Madge that they linger to tomorrow so that he could get a ride. Secretly, he hoped to inquire about the prices of these things ... Just to find out ... Not that he'd really buy one, oh, no. He just wanted to buy one. There was a big difference, yessirree!

Madge had suggested a nap, and that seemed like a good idea. So he'd trundled off to the inside of the Winnebago to take his usual forty winks, not at all expecting to wake in full darkness like this.

And what the hell was going on outside?

He put on his shoes and went to the door. Outside in the darkness were two police cars, their red and blue bubbletops spinning above the black and white, illuminating a group of figures, looking out toward the west.

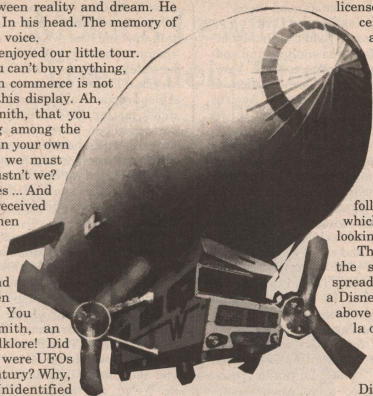
Dick Smith hurried over. "What's wrong? What's going on?" he said, fearfully.

He was relieved to see his wife coming out of the shadows, looking just fine — but with a smug, perhaps even victorious expression.

"I'm sorry, Dick. But I hate to see rampant violation of laws," she said.

"What are you talking about?"

"That Patterson fellow ... Professor Looney Toons. He was operating here without any kind of



license. I checked with the cellular, and the state authorities immediately came out and issued an edict that he has to move on. Just as we must, Dick. There are Denny's awaiting us where we can eat ... and miles to go before we sleep."

"What?"

Dick whirled around, following the direction in which the policemen were looking.

The night was clear. In the sky hung a dazzling spread of stars, glittering like a Disney film matte. Creeping above the skyline was a flotilla of lighter-than-air vehicles, just lifting off from the ground.

"He's leaving," said

Dick Smith. "But there was so much I wanted to talk to him about."

Madge put a hand on his shoulder. "Come into the Winnebago and I'll get a couple of Yoo Hoos, dear. You'll feel better after a Yoo Hoo!"

"No!" cried Dick. He flung off Madge's hand and started running. There was no time for thought. Instinct and need drove him. Desires of decades, stirred today just briefly, took hold of his legs and hurried him along toward the ascending airships. These hung now in the brilliantest sky like dark Christmas tree baubles. The air was filled with the odor of pine sap and departing hope and the taste of burnt ashes. Dick Smith's breath was ragged and harsh in his throat as he hurried.

All the air vehicles were leashed together by strands of cable that glittered beneath the rise of the moon like fairy webs. The flotilla rose softly and gently, silent bubbles of alternate technology, borne on nature's breath.

Stopping below them, Dick Smith took a deep breath and yelled, "Professor Patterson! Kent ... Please don't go! There's so much I wanted to talk to you about! Please don't go!"

The lowermost of the rising vehicles was a balloon. A top-hatted face peered down, underlit by the lights of his controls. He looked like the Wizard of Oz, tugged aloft toward distant destiny, peering down with alarm. "Oh, dear. Too late, too late, I fear. It would have been so nice indeed, Mr. Smith. Unfortunately, landbound reality has bitten me on the rump, and I must depart once more for cloudier, mistier climes." He sighed. "I sin-

cerely hope the potatoes will be as good there."

"But where are you going?" asked Dick.

"Who knows, who knows?" said the chubby little man. But his broad face was smiling, and suddenly everything seemed all right to Dick. Very, very sad ... but all right. "The pleasant gardens of Lost Mu, perhaps. The sunny climes of Ancient Barsom ... Or maybe just a little sandlot in the San Fernando Valley. Who knows ... But be assured, Mister Smith, wherever I go I won't be there for long. For always will my true home be the sky and the clouds and the stars and dreams of imagination that travel there with me. But don't be too upset. Part of me is still here. I am in the flash of the jetliner's wing, the roar of the Apollo rocket, the curve of a child's balloon, the shadows of the moon, ...and ... and" His voice was melancholy now as well — but suddenly it brightened. "My goodness me. There is a way that you can sometimes join me!" He was much higher now, and his voice was dwindling.

"How? How, Professor Patterson?"

Silence. Faster and faster the balloon journeyed up. For a moment, Dick Smith thought that Professor Patterson had forgotten him. Suddenly, though, the face — smaller now — appeared over the rim of the basket. "Here, Mr. Smith. Enjoy!" With a grunt, a large shape was hurled from the side of the basket. It fell like a rock, thumping into the soft sod just yards away from Dick Smith's feet.

The balloon, relieved now of this weight, shot up faster. Then it and its drifting caravan were caught by a high stream of air and rapidly carried west, toward the Pacific Ocean and a rich, pure darkness.

Despite the protests of his wife, Dick Smith watched until the parade was fully gone. Then he used a penknife to cut the string on the huge package that Professor Kent Patterson had left behind and began to carry its contents back to the RV.

The Arizona sun twinkled in the ice cubes of his lemonade as Dick Smith took a drink and then set the tumbler back on the table.

He took the quality paperback book called *An Edge in My Voice* up again and started reading. From time to time he would jot a note — usually a name of an author or the title of a book — on a tablet of paper. Then he picked up a hardcover called *Angry Candy* and was soon immersed in one of the stories.

His wife, who had been thumping around in the Winnebago all this time, cleaning, came out and walked over to Dick, who sat in the lounge chair beneath the shade of a tarp. They were enjoying themselves here in the RV campground

near Sun City, Arizona. There were plenty of other silver-haired retirees to play cards with and talk to, and the weather was suiting Madge's rheumatism very well indeed. He hoped that he'd be able to talk her into leaving in a couple of weeks. There was a huge balloon expo in Albuquerque in a few weeks. Somehow, though, it didn't matter. He'd already seen the wildest airship collection he could possibly desire. Besides, he had a little hobby now and was just trying to figure out where it had been all his life.

"Dick," said Madge, "I'm going to walk over to the store to get some butter and milk I need for the tuna casserole tonight. Do you want to come with me?"

"Thanks, dear. I guess I'm pretty involved at the moment. And it's kinda hot for me. How about a walk in the moonlight this evening, hmmm?"

She went over and looked at the list he'd been composing. "Roger Zelazny. Ursula K. Le Guin. Philip José Farmer. Jorge Luis Borges. Robert Silverberg. Ray Bradbury. Who are they?"

"Fantasists. This Ellison guy loves lists. He's not only a wonderful writer — he's happy to tell you about other incredible writers. And films, too ... We've got to get a VCR and use those Blockbuster Video places we keep on seeing, dear."

"Hmmm," grunted Madge. "That Professor Patterson put some strange ideas into your head."

"Yes, dear." He smiled. "Isn't it great?"

Madge shook her head. "Maybe we'd better find a good church to start attending around here. Get you back on solid ground."

But Dick's nose was already back in his book. "That would be fine, dear. Looking forward to it."

Muttering, Madge left. Dick peered up over the edge of the story "The Function of Dream Sleep," watching her go. When he was truly sure that she had passed beyond the gate of the RV park, he marked his place in the Ellison book and then turned back to the cardboard box, containing part of the treasure that had been dropped from the Professor's basket, disappearing toward the stars. He tugged up a slim volume that had been in the collection, with its fascinating text and marvelous illustrations and blueprints.

He looked up at the Winnebago and chuckled to himself as he drank some more lemonade. Then he dipped back into this most delightful and subsversive book.

Dirigible on the Edge of Forever was its title.

By Harlan Ellison and Kent Patterson.

Its subtitle: "How To Turn Your RV into an Airship Fabulous!"

Dick Smith got out some drafting paper, a pencil, and a T-square and then carefully began to draw. □

Monica Lewinsky: The Untold Story

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Dead Star Prize

By Steven D. Mohan, Jr.

Art by Cortney Skinner

A t only a billion kilometers, Alcyone was the brightest star visible, a sapphire cast against a coal-black tapestry sewn with lesser jewels. As he watched, a shadow eclipsed the sparkling face of the blue giant. He instantly recognized the two domes joined by an extended superstructure: the black figure eight was the top aspect of an alien warship. He was chilled by the sight.

Humanity knew nothing of the race it fought, not even its name. The aliens were simply called "the Enemy." The only thing Terra knew was that they were efficient killers.

The dark vessel grew, rapidly eclipsing Alcyone's light, until the star was nothing but a sliver of blue fire ringing a pool of darkest ebony. He shrank from the vision. His people had disappeared into that deadly blackness. Somehow he had to get them out. He called and called, but there was no answer . . .

Wolf 359 was a pale, crimson ghost, a bare improvement over the deep black of space. Lieutenant Henry Stone folded his arms and frowned at the red dwarf just visible through ten centimeters of polyglass.

It doesn't deserve the title "sun," he thought bitterly. Welcome to the Dead Star Project, Henry.

Stone's eyes darted away from the sickly light of Wolf, seeking solace in his own reflection. Like all Adapted-humans, he was a study in physical contrast: a bioproduct designed to withstand the heavy gravity of Indra, the scorching light of Sirius, and the deadly radiation of the Pup. The lieutenant massed a full 120 kilos but stood only one meter 61 in height. Though his features were clearly Caucasian, his skin was an eerie, inhuman indigo.

He sighed, his mind rebelling against growing despair.

They have to let me fight the Enemy again, he thought.

But deep down, in an honest part of himself, he knew that the Human Defense Council would never send him back. His bitterness deepened.

He struggled with remembered images of the court-martial: three command grade officers in service dress blues, the American naval ensign in the corner, a gleaming silver sword on a green felt table, blade pointed toward him like an accusing finger. Stone shook his head, trying to blank out

the memory. He was almost grateful when he heard the whisper of a hatch and turned to see a woman wearing a black HDC uniform standing in the door frame.

"Lieutenant, the runner is approaching the base. We expect to land in about twelve minutes." The officer gestured at the viewport; a bright disk was visible there, growing in size. "Be prepared to disembark." She spoke with a toneless courtesy that bordered on disrespect.

Stone said nothing. What could he say?

I was a skilled pilot, he thought. My marines trusted me with their lives. Like phantoms from the past he saw their faces: Williams, always afraid but never showing fear; Sentera and Brooks with their displays of loud bravado; the attention to detail of Staff Sergeant Cantrizzi; the crisp professionalism of Gunny Cortez. He had been an integral part of that team. Now they were all gone.

He blinked, and his marines were replaced by a young woman prematurely aged by a desperate war. Weariness overlaid the contempt etched into the lines of her face. To this ensign and her shipmates, Stone was just another example of human defeat. The Sirian understood the bitterness of failure well. He thought he could almost forgive the woman her distance.

He looked back at the viewport. The disk had resolved into a gas giant banded by brick, salmon, and pale yellow stripes and attended by a pair of visible satellites.

"What is the name of the planet?" Stone asked.

The HDC officer paused as she consulted MIL-DAT. "The official designation of this world is —"

"Not the designation," interrupted Stone softly, "the name."

The woman hesitated, considering. "Behemoth," she said finally. "The inhabitants of the base call it Behemoth."

That told him something about the stewards of the Dead Star Project. At 8.7 standard Terran masses, the gas giant was not even as big as Uranus. The name was a mockery.

"Thank you, ensign. I will depart as soon as we arrive."

The HDC officer favored him with a curt nod and left.

Stone turned to see Behemoth filling the viewport. The small starship was heading toward one of



its satellites, a cloudy world the color of rust. He felt the wrench of g-forces as the ship dived toward the small moon.

Stone closed his eyes, remembering his own little shuttle twisting and turning in space, performing an intricate dance of survival as it worked its way toward the Enemy warship. There it was: the shock that signaled contact. The shuttle was down, a parasite clinging to the Enemy's ebony hull. The marines were already up, weapons ready. Stone found himself waiting for the shaped charge to go off . . .

He pushed the memory away, struggling to maintain control.

Stone opened his eyes and saw a small complex of buildings huddled amidst banks of methane and carbon dioxide snow. The entire vista was shrouded in the dirty orange of hydrocarbons. The battle at Alcyone was now just a memory. This was his reality now. He turned and walked briskly through the small starship, eager to leave behind the unspoken accusations of the runner's crew.

Two or three lights flickered eerily in the dimly lit passageway. The bulkheads needed paint, the decks needed wax, and there was dust. Dust! DSP Wolf 359 certainly wasn't up to the same high military standards he had grown accustomed to aboard *USS Neil Armstrong*.

The dingy corridors added to his mounting depression. There would be little for him to do here. The machines did almost all the real work. The robots at the heart of the Dead Star Project were versatile, efficient, and required minimal human intervention.

Stone's research had been thorough, if not very helpful.

Fully eighty percent of Sol's closest neighbors were dying red dwarfs: diminutive suns that lacked the radiant energy required to make a human world grow. The Dead Star Project had been conceived as a way to make use of these systems. Useless planets were systematically torn apart, their component metals and volatiles used to seed more fertile worlds. Worlds like Tellus or Osiris or Indra.

Except that now there was a war, and humanity no longer built new worlds.

The officer who had deposited him at the hatch was tall (even for a Terran-human), but there was a hint of softness to him; Stone noticed the beginning of a roll of fat at his waistline. He wore the uniform of HDC Space Infantry, but that uniform was wrinkled. He slouched.

Stone could not imagine any of his marines ever slouching. A picture flashed through his mind: Gunny Cortez standing at parade rest, her uniform immaculate, the little marine the very image of military bearing. Stone automatically suppressed

the attendant spasm of pain.

The hatch said: "COL DAPHNE VAN DEN BURG — COMMANDING OFFICER, DEAD STAR PROJECT WOLF 359."

It slid open, and a pair of ice-blue eyes swiveled up to meet his.

"Colonel, Lieutenant Stone reporting as ordered."

The woman nodded almost imperceptibly. She was seated; she did not rise.

Van den Burg's uniform was the royal blue of Europe, and it was immaculate. She sat on the edge of her seat and held herself rigid, not relaxing back into the luxurious leather chair. She was thin and tough; her face seemed hewn from rock. And she was not young. Though it was difficult for Stone to judge Terrans, he did notice seams in her face and a touch of gray in her light brown hair. She was old, maybe very old.

Why would an officer like this tolerate the man who had escorted him here? Stone wondered.

"I will tell you what I tell all new arrivals, lieutenant." Her voice was cold and flat. "My job here is to provide raw material for the war effort. I care about nothing else."

"I understand, Ma'am," Stone answered at once. "I will do all I can to assist you."

The woman leaned forward over her desk. "You will do no such thing," she hissed. "You will not tamper with my equipment, and I will continue to meet my quotas. Is that clear?"

Stone nodded slowly. "Yes, Ma'am."

"Very well." It was a dismissal.

"Ma'am, there is one more thing," said Stone.

"Yes?"

"I would like to return to the War Zone."

She said nothing, studying him silently for a second.

"How did you come to be assigned here, Stone?" she said softly.

Surely she must know, Stone thought, confused.

He stumbled over the words. "There was a disagreement over tactics."

"When I ask a question, Lieutenant, I expect a direct answer."

Stone drew a deep breath. "My marines had boarded an Enemy vessel. The ship was about to be destroyed by our mothership, *Armstrong*. My troops weren't answering the recall signal, so . . ."

"So, on your own authority, you decided not to extract when ordered." Van den Burg cut him off angrily. It was the first emotion she had shown during the interview. "Yes, I reviewed the incident. When you finally did decide to pull out, it was too late. You were too close when *Armstrong* got the warship, and the resulting EMP wiped your data. You blew the first successful boarding of an Enemy vessel to save a few lives. We knew nothing of the

Enemy, Lieutenant. Thanks to you, we still know nothing. How many tens of thousands of lives do you think that mistake was worth?"

Stone felt the muscles in his jaw tighten. He wanted to yell out, to hit her, to do anything to stop the torrent of words. Instead, he stood at rigid attention, struggling to keep his face impassive.

"No, I didn't think you'd have an answer for that one." Van den Burg's voice was cold again. "I will not tolerate any such insubordination, Sirian." She spoke the last word as if it tasted bad in her mouth.

"Yes, Ma'am."

"You are dismissed."

The spider was a skittering, silver shape nearly lost in the omnipresent fog. It moved steadily through a shallow sea of gasoline. There were plenty of long chain molecules to be found, but this did not concern Arachnoidal Mining Robot 414-1732-85227. The spider's only purpose in life was to find ore. It could not have been looking in a worse place.

The little world lacked an official designation apart from a catalog number, but the seven human inhabitants of the star system had taken to calling it "Smog." It was an apt description: the world's atmosphere was a soupy mixture of nitrogen and hydrocarbons.

Eventually the volatiles that dominated Smog's surface would be harvested, and the planet's semi-metallic core would be left to the AMRs. Until then, a few thousand spiders scoured the little world looking for whatever ore they could find on the surface.

Like its brethren, AMR Four Fourteen's main body sat perched upon six delicate-looking but strong legs, each triple-jointed and made of high grade polysteel. A fourth pair of limbs used for grasping and manipulating rock folded vertically like the claws of a Praying Mantis. A sophisticated sensor suite dominated the spider's main body.

A lifter fired its engines high in the atmosphere. The spider, observing the heat signature, turned its sensors toward the sky to watch and record. It followed the heat trail in IR until the source was classified. The spider then turned smoothly back to its radar search of the sea. It stopped scanning when, unexpectedly, a large portion of its signal returned. The signal was inexplicable. Such a large mass of metal on the surface of a cold world was very rare. AMR Four Fourteen carefully marked the bearing and elevation of the potential ore deposit and began moving toward it, scanning the sea as it went.

In a room lit only by the dim, orange glow of Smog, Henry Stone ran. His heart hammered in his chest, his legs cried out with

pain, and the weak part of his mind pleaded with him to stop. A sheen of sweat covered his indigo skin. Still he circled the small gym.

He had already run eighteen kilometers. Stone had to run, had to work a body designed for a gravity much heavier than Terran Standard. Ironically, if he hadn't been so strong he could have gotten by with less exercise, but powerful muscles demanded a grueling workout. Stone spent seven hours a day in the little gym.

It would not have been difficult to set the station's environmental controls so that his stateroom would be subject to a heavier gravity. The engineers aboard the American warship had done it for him, but Colonel Van den Burg had not allowed him to make the necessary adjustments.

"The equipment is designed for Terran standard gravity." She had looked pointedly at him. "I will not allow you to risk its effective operation by tinkering with its basic parameters."

It was a poor excuse.

Stone understood the real reason for his commander's intransigence, and frustration gnawed at him as he ran. Van den Burg was a bitter woman, looking for someone to punish for her own past failure. The fact that he was Sirian just made him a convenient target. Stone ran harder.

When he finally stopped, he saw that Lisa Chu had entered the gym. She was thin, and short for a Terran (about his height). Chu wore a turquoise bodysuit; a pattern of crimson and golden sunfire rippled down her left side. Her flamboyant dress contrasted sharply with Stone's navy-issue khaki.

"More self-torture, Henry?"

Stone frowned. "I will have to be in good condition to return to the War Zone." He picked up a towel and wiped sweat from his face.

Chu sighed. "What's the latest project?"

"I pulled the records of all Human-Enemy battles out of MILDAT and plotted the locations on a star chart."

"What are you trying accomplish?"

"I'm looking for a pattern."

"A pattern?" There was genuine surprise in Chu's voice. Finally, someone was interested.

"Well, we can't track them in hyperspace," said Stone, growing excited. "But we ought to be able to figure out where their home systems are by analyzing the appearances of their fleets."

"Unless they carefully randomize their movements like we do," said Chu. "Give up, Henry. If there were a simple pattern, the strategists at High Command would have found it years ago."

Stone's enthusiasm died within him as suddenly as it had been born.

"You're right, of course."

"Henry, you've only been here a couple of weeks, so let me give you a piece of advice. Take it easy. Relax. You worry too much."

"I have work to do," Stone answered stiffly. "Do you really want to go back to the war?" Stone hesitated. He really didn't know Chu very well. Still, she was the closest thing to a friend he had at Dead Star. The other crew members resented him. Except for Van den Burg. She hated him.

"I don't love the war. But as long as the Enemy is killing people, I have no intention of remaining here . . ."

"And?"

Stone met her gaze, looking into dark brown eyes. "What?"

"It sounded like you were going to say something else."

There was a metallic taste in Stone's mouth. He wondered how he would ever learn to live with the stigma of the battle at Alcyone.

"No, nothing else."

Chu frowned and shook her head. "How did someone so dedicated end up here?" she asked.

"Information," answered Stone. He was looking directly at Chu, but he didn't see her. "We got close to the Enemy, closer than anyone had been before. There were lots of data. Laser analysis of their air, records of internal radiation patterns, telemetry from the marines."

"What did you do?" she whispered.

"I lost it," Stone said flatly. "I lost it all." He met her eyes. Not able to face the shock he found there, he looked away.

"I'm sorry, my fault," said Chu. "The rule here is not to discuss crimes of the past. I shouldn't have asked."

"Why are you here?"

Chu's laugh was brittle. "Does it really matter? We're all the same. There isn't a person here who doesn't have scars, Henry. Ugly ones. This is where High Command sends its garbage. Worthless star, worthless people."

"Does Van den Burg fit that description?"

"She more than anyone else. She had a command when she made her fatal error. Van den Burg is the last person HDC would return to combat."

"What do you know about her?"

"Not much. All I can tell you is that she's very old. Old enough to have fought in the Sirian Rebellion. I'd wager she doesn't like you very much."

"No, she doesn't," agreed Stone. "But there's more there than her dislike of Adapted-humans. For instance, why does she allow this station to be so lax? There is no order here, no discipline."

Chu laughed, bitterly. "Deep down, I think even Van den Burg recognizes the truth."

"Which is?"

"The material produced here is not really critical to the war effort, and the machines do all the

work, anyway. There's little we can do to influence the amount of metals and volatiles they mine."

"Van den Burg doesn't believe that. I think she believes that if she can meet or exceed her quotas, HDC will give her a new command."

"Then she's mad," said Chu. Her voice was flat; she was stating a fact. "Why worry about it, Henry?" She shrugged. "Isn't it enough to know that neither of you will ever return to the War Zone?"

According to the spider's sensors, the bright radar region was on a steep outcropping of rock covered with methane snow. Four Fourteen sloshed to the edge of the sea. The mechanism braced its locomotion limbs against the sea bed and the rock face and stretched its sensory limbs in an effort to reach above the rocky ledge.

The spider leaned forward unsteadily and grasped at the outcropping with one of its arms. It lost its balance and stumbled backward, its outstretched arm dragging across the ledge and causing a minor cascade of snow and rock fragment. A strange object caught the AMR's attention as it splashed into the gasoline. Four Fourteen reached down through the sea and pulled the object up. It was a dull brown fragment. With a curiously human gesture, the spider hefted the rugged object, testing its weight. It was very heavy. Still holding the fragment with one of its sensory limbs, the AMR selected a pen laser on the other sensory limb. Emerald light arced across the strange object, leaving behind a silver gash in its ruddy, rugged surface. The thing was metal. Refined metal.

Fortunately there was a program to deal with unexpected situations. AMR Four Fourteen opened a hatch on its body and dropped the lump of metal inside.

Grimly, Stone set about putting on his Enplas armor. It was smooth and black, the color and texture of space. It felt cool and flexible against his skin, though he knew it had a tensile strength nearly as high as most steels.

Most important, it would stand up to the cold.

Enemy plastic had been isolated from captured alien hull material. It was the perfect material for any machine subjected to extreme cold. Of course Van den Burg had rejected the idea of coating even a few spiders with it. Just another of his proposals dismissed out of hand.

He finished donning the custom-made suit, pulling the helmet down over his head and clicking the face mask into place. He carefully checked both temp regulation and atmosphere and then stepped into the airlock.

He instructed the lock to cycle, and the FTL chip implanted in his brain automatically relayed the order to the station's master computer, which complied. The air in the space started to become hazy.

This was the most tedious and dangerous task at the Dead Star Project, and Stone always drew it.

The machines could generally take care of themselves, but people were always needed. At eighty Kelvins, high-grade steels were brittle, shorts developed in logic circuits, and lubricants froze. Even a sophisticated machine could die if there wasn't a human tech nearby to bail it out. Of course, he had tried to rewrite code to help the spiders avoid accidents. That idea, too, had been summarily dismissed.

Stone felt the lock's heavy securing device unlatch, and the hatch slid open, revealing a desolate mixture of ice, snow, and clouds. The features of the little world were dimly illuminated by a sickly red half-light. Stone glanced up at clouds the color of rust and found a spot brighter than the rest. Wolf.

Sixteen clicks was not far in the light gravity (especially for Stone's powerful physique), and the Sirian naval officer decided to walk, ignoring the hangar half-buried under a bank of methane-snow.

Deliberately he set off across the barren landscape, struggling across the snow, sinking up to his knees, stopped only by the layer of hardened ice beneath the frozen gray drifts. Vapor rose about him as waste heat from his suit melted the frozen carbon dioxide and methane.

He crested a dune and saw a silver form working on a satcom antenna about forty meters away. The figure glanced at him and raised an arm. He began walking toward it.

Henry, is that you? came at him through the MILDAT link.

How did you know? he sent back to Chu.

Who else wears black armor?

Silently she tapped her helmet and then point-

ed at his.

He understood the gesture. MILDAT conversations could always be overheard. He depolarized his facemask (Wolf didn't offer much of a glare), and when he reached her, he pressed his helmet against hers.

"I see she's sending you out again."

"Of course." Stone couldn't keep

the bitterness out of his voice.

Chu grimaced.

"Henry, you have to stop antagonizing her."

"By giving up?"

"You need to learn to live with your error."

"I did not make an error," snapped Stone.

"Who are you trying to convince, me or you?"

Stone felt himself wince. There was a burning heaviness in his stomach.

"I did nothing wrong," he whispered.

Chu shook her head.

"Henry, you can fit in here." Her voice was coaxing. "The others will accept you, and Van den Burg will at least stop her harassment. But you have to stop pushing to return to the War Zone. You remind them of what they've lost, and as long as you keep it up they'll hate you for it. Let it go."

"I will not give up," he yelled, pushing her away. "I will not accept failure as easily as the rest of you have."

Chu's face hardened.

"I see."

Stone sobered. As angry as he was, he hadn't meant to lash out at her.

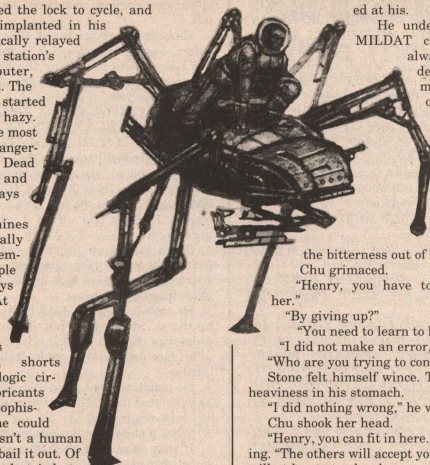
"Lisa . . ."

His voice trailed off as she turned her back on him and resumed her work, leaving him alone again.

With only a few clicks to go, Stone paused and employed the computer enhanced binocs in his facemask. He made out the spider, a forlorn figure, metallic body resting on the ground, legs curled beneath it.

It looks like a dead bug, he thought.

The AMR had some sort of logic problem and had been shut down to prevent it from damaging itself. Stone couldn't hope to repair it completely out here, of course. Software glitches were hard to fix. The best he could hope for was to coax the spider back to the station, where the automech could run diagnostics until the problem was found.



THERE IS A LOW PRESSURE ZONE MOVING TOWARD THE SPIDER'S POSITION, warned MILDAT. ETA: NINE HOURS 34 MINUTES.

That gave Stone pause. A high energy blizzard could be deadly. He queried MILDAT and studied the meteorological figures suddenly running through his brain. This would be a bad one.

Stone looked wistfully back toward the station. He should have taken an aircraft when he'd had the opportunity. He debated with himself and decided to press forward on foot. There was still a good chance that he could make it in time to salvage the machine if he hurried.

In the meantime, he used MILDAT to call down the weekly battle summary.

2027.064.28. HDC CRUISER. NU HYDRI. LOST, PRESUMED DESTROYED.

1652.065.28. TWO BRAZILIAN DESTROYERS. STAR UNKNOWN. LOST, PRESUMED DESTROYED.

1832.065.28. SLAVIC LEAGUE THIRD BANNER FLEET. GRID POINT 643281 K6 III. ENGAGED INFERIOR ENEMY FORCE. HUMAN LOSSES: 4 CAPITAL SHIPS, 12 ESCORTS. ENEMY LOSSES: 1 CAPITAL SHIP, 3 ESCORTS. SLAVIC FLEET FORCED TO WITHDRAW TO HYPERSPACE.

1347.067.28. US TASK FORCE 36.2.1. GRID POINT 985732 G4 V. LOST, PRESUMED DESTROYED.

0015.068.28. SIRIAN BATTLESHIP. PSI PHOENICIS. DESTROYED TWO ENEMY ESCORTS. SUSTAINED HEAVY DAMAGE. 1604 CASUALTIES. HIGH COMMAND EVALUATING WORTH OF RESCUE MISSION.

The terrible list went on and on. Stone listened grimly, wondering how many of the deaths were his responsibility.

The computer interrupted the litany of human failure to tell him that the storm had shifted course toward him and picked up speed. Stone would be caught by the leading edge in less than seven hours, 37 minutes.

No time, thought Stone. Why was there never any time?

The spider was up, but not quite ready to move. Stone stared at it, questions running through his mind. It thought that it had found a piece of refined metal, of all things. A spurious sensor reading was a sure sign of a software error. Yet Stone had performed every test he could out in the open, and had found nothing. The problem was more subtle than anything he had ever before encountered.

He had been working steadily for over an hour, trying to bring life to the AMR as atmospheric pressure readings tickled the back of his mind. The

storm was coming, and there wasn't much time left.

He called down the report the spider had made before, hoping to find a clue to its dementia. The few bits of data describing the anomalous metal fragment interrupted the constant stream of weather analysis.

THE COMPOUND IS ANALYZED AS A CERAMIC-STEEL CONSTRUCT, claimed MILDAT. NO MATCH TO ANY KNOWN ALLOY.

Stone climbed back onto the spider's body and opened a panel, using his body to shield the exposed keypad from the wind. He leaned forward and began to tap at the pad. The spider brought its sensory limb up and waved it experimentally in the air.

Stone tapped out another order on the keyboard. The spider responded, extending one of its sensory limbs toward him. It contained the anomalous fragment of metal.

He took it from the AMR and turned it over in his hand. Stone could not discern any unusual properties through his suit. He had to press it up to his face mask just to see it. It did not look spectacular.

No match to any known alloy, Stone thought as he evaluated the AMR's performance. No match to any known alloy.

What if there was no software error?

If that were true, then this spider had found something very strange, something that couldn't be explained by MILDAT's endless catalogue of materials. It was a small anomaly, to be sure, probably not worth further investigation.

No known alloy.

No known human alloy?

Except for the machines of the Dead Star Project itself, nothing human had touched this desolate moon, and the polysteel of which they were constructed was easily identifiable.

But the AMR hadn't been able to identify the alloy in question.

His mind raced. If it wasn't a human material, then it had to be an alien alloy, and the only known alien race was the Enemy. Could an Enemy ship or probe have crashed on Smog? He could almost see it: the characteristic shape, that black figure eight, buried in the ice. Maybe the Enemy had explored the Wolf system long before Humanity had reached the stars. Or perhaps they had stumbled into the system and crashed before they realized they were deep in the heart of human space.

Stone thought quickly. He didn't have time both to investigate and to walk back to base, not with a Class IV Blizzard brewing. He looked down at the AMR. If he could trust the spider to take him back

...
Stone, what the hell are you doing? Van den Burg's anger was overpowering even through the

data link.

I can't find the glitch, answered Stone.

Haven't you been monitoring the weather? There is a storm moving rapidly toward your position. Return to base.

If there is no glitch, then the spider's report is accurate, and it bears investigation.

Don't be ridiculous. I'm not going to risk losing a valuable piece of equipment and a semi-valuable officer because of a software error.

She had a point. A big enough storm could destroy a spider, especially one with a suspect brain. A man alone would have no chance.

MILDAT couldn't match the alloy. What does that tell you?

Return now, Stone. That's an order. Stone heard ice in Van den Burg's words. He recognized that tone. There was no point in arguing with her.

Stone was silent for a long minute. *It won't take long, Colonel. I will return as soon I'm satisfied that the anomaly doesn't mean anything important.*

Oh, yes, answered Van den Burg, *I forgot how easily you disobey orders. The bittiness was unmistakable. Why would you care about my career when you didn't give a damn about your mission aboard Armstrong?*

Stone drew a deep breath. He didn't have an answer for that one. He closed his eyes. He wasn't on a cold, desolate moon illuminated by an aged, red dwarf. He was in orbit about a blue giant, his vessel a tiny parasite clinging to the hull of an immense, black monster.

A voice had sounded in his mind: *Shuttle detach now.*

"I've still got people aboard," said Stone, actually shouting. *"Break off attack. Disengage. Disengage."*

Negative, Shuttle. Pull out.

Stone frowned. Just a few more minutes, he thought.

There was a pause. The next voice he recognized was the warship's captain. *Stone, this is Armstrong actual. Pull back, Lieutenant. That is an order.*

But his marines were still in there. His friends were in there. MILDAT ticked off minutes in his mind. Only a few minutes longer . . .

We are pressing attack. There is no more time. Lieutenant, do you read?

Stone swore. *Pulling out, Armstrong.*

His shuttle made its way from the doomed Enemy warship. Distances were not shaping up well; he was still too close. Suddenly there was a blinding light, and then all was black. As black as space. As black as the hull of an Enemy starship.

Henry? Henry, are you still there?

Stone blinked, returning to the present. It was getting darker. Wolf's feeble light could not com-

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pete with the omnipresent gray flakes of frozen methane. Despite the warmth of his suit, Stone shivered.

Henry, you will be killed by the storm. It was Chu.

I will get back before it hits.

How?

I will ride the spider back.

That's insane, noted Chu. You can't trust your life to a spider with a faulty brain. What if it suddenly shuts down on the way back? Or loses its sense of direction and walks right past the base? In a blizzard, you could pass within a few meters and never even realize it.

There is no fault in the spider.

Even if you survive, what do you think you will accomplish? They still won't send you back.

She was probably right about that. No matter what he found, this episode would only serve as another example of his inability to follow orders. But maybe there was something valuable embedded in this barren moon illuminated by a decrepit sun and attended by useless people. Perhaps the Dead Star held a secret prize. If that were an Enemy vessel buried in Smog's ice, it would mean a new edge for humanity in the war. Surely that was worth any price, even his life.

I have to try this, Lisa.

But, Henry ...

He frowned and cut the link. He didn't need any more distractions.

How could he investigate? The fall of snow was now so thick he could barely see. The wind buffeted him, and he had to fight just to keep the gusts from knocking him off the spider. The storm was getting worse.

All that he had to show for his efforts was a small lump of metal and an empty landscape covered with virgin snow.

This was refined metal. Where had it come from?

Under the snow?

He didn't have time to think through this. He certainly didn't have time to excavate.

Maybe he wouldn't have to. If there were metal buried in the ice, perhaps it would reflect radiation that would be transparent to methane and carbon dioxide snow and ice. The spider's comm suite was pretty sophisticated. It could reproduce most of the EM spectrum. Stone tapped out another order and watched the machine bend down and sweep across the outcropping of rock.

The lieutenant sorted through the filter options on his face mask. He cycled through them all and stopped. Nothing. He paused for a full minute to consider his situation, and then began to try the filters again.

There it was! A shape! There was something in the ice. A mass of metal. There was a hint of famil-

arity to the form, but he couldn't place it. Stone directed the spider to move. It drifted back and up, climbing a dune of snow.

The spider crested the snow bank, and Stone recognized the familiar shape at once. It was broken and irregular, to be sure. The main body had been crushed by the shear of shifting ice, and one of the locomotion limbs had been torn off at the first joint, but there was no doubt about it.

It was another spider.

Stone stared down into the ice. He no longer noticed the snow accumulating over his boots, or the howl of the approaching storm.

Stone stood silently atop AMR 414, watching the automech run through its maintenance program. A robotic arm tipped by a single point of crimson light traced its way across the spider's skin. The repair laser left a black line of scorched metal in its wake.

"Why didn't the AMR recognize the metal as polysteel?" asked Chu.

"A minor fault prevented the spider from accessing MILDAT. It had to rely on its own limited memory to classify the material. All it could come up with was the cryptic phrase 'metal-ceramic construct.'"

"I don't understand how that could happen."

"A patch of thermal insulation came loose, and a contact froze open."

"All this was caused by a single open circuit?" Chu asked incredulously.

Stone nodded.

Chu shook her head. "Jesus, she's going to crucify you, Henry."

The lieutenant was silent for a few seconds. He sighed. "Yes."

"Why did you do it? It was madness."

Stone turned away from the chirping automech and met her eyes.

Van den Burg had made it impossible to seek redemption, and Chu had tried to convince him not to try. Despite that, he had risked everything to investigate the anomalous fragment. He had believed that he was doing the right thing.

As he had at Alcyon.

Strangely, he felt good about that.

"It was my decision," he said softly.

That was the real prize: the knowledge that he alone was the judge of his worth. Not HDC, not van den Burg, not Chu. Not anyone else.

Confusion clouded Chu's face. Stone realized that she would never understand.

"What will you do?" she asked.

Stone glanced back at the spider and smiled. "I will keep trying." □

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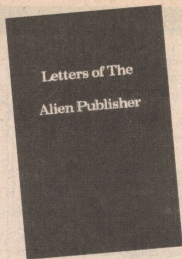
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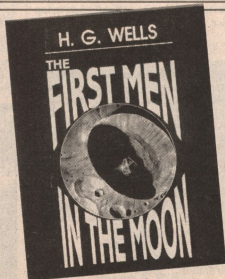
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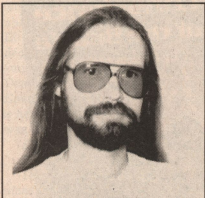


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Neoclassical buildings reflect the morning light like pastel glass and stone monuments. Rows of polished, humming, foreign cars cruise by in clumps, synchronized to the discreet traffic signals. It is sunny and warm, and there are flowers blooming, so it could be any time of year, but it hap-



Clyde Duensing, III

pens to be spring.

A WHITE CAR pulls into a parking lot. Out steps an attractive couple, without the usual California tanned skin, but otherwise looking just like actors. Their names are **Larry Blamire** and **Jennifer Arnold**.

Larry

Well, hon, we're here. And there are Bali Hai's new offices on the top floor.

Jennifer

Can you believe how fast it happened? Just a few months ago, at Christmas, we heard that Bali Hai Entertainment was moving from Massachusetts to L.A., now it's March and here we are. By late May, **Cortney Skinner** will have made the big move, too.

Larry

Yeah, won't it be great being part of Bali Hai's transformation into a multi-channel studio, branching out from internet/CD to TV, books, and film, with the help of some powerful Hollywood angels?

Jennifer

Sure, and having the head of Paramount, Mace Neufeld, on the board of directors is a big plus. I can't

wait to see what they do with your animated *Wise Eye Guys* — turning them into TV, movie, and comic book projects.

Larry

And Cortney's Secret Museum, won't that make a great multimedia project?

Jennifer

To think it all started with a simple web site, Balihighway.com.

Larry

Damn exciting!
To be continued ...

By now you've gotten an idea of what is going on in the lives of two of our well known and well loved *Aboriginal* artists. We wish them all the best in their burgeoning careers out West.

"Waterdogs" is the third story by **Dennis Fisher** set in a world that by now will be familiar to our readers. The tough fisherman Tom who struggled against his unforgiving alien world in "Locals" (*Aboriginal* #62) and "Feeders" (*Aboriginal* #63) is back in a bloody tale of survival.

Last year Fisher sold one story to *Dark Regions Magazine* and a couple to *Planet ezine*, and published some more articles on gardening and home brewing. The Maine resident has also taken up green woodworking and blacksmithing.

At this time of year, Fisher's time is almost completely taken up by his organic farming business. He says there is something very science-fictional about modern farming, which includes compost and tractors, but also high-tech plant protectors and tailored predators.



Dennis Fisher



"Waterdogs" is illustrated by **Clyde Duensing, III**, who has illustrated all three of Fisher's stories. Duensing and sculptor and toy designer **Dan Platt** just released a training CD for 3-D animation programs called "Power User tutorials for Pixels 3-D." So if you are interested in lessons, models, and support files for computer animation, you can go to the web site and click on the Power User tutorials



Larry Blamire

banner. Duensing and Platt have also recently completed some animation for a large pharmaceutical company.

David Bischoff creates a light-hearted tribute to science fiction greats such as **Harlan Ellison** and **Jules Verne** in "I Have No Blimp and I Must Dream." Bischoff sold his first SF story a year out of college in 1974. He worked for six years at NBC in Washington, then decided to write full time. He has since written close to eighty books, one hundred and fifty stories, sixty-five magazine articles, and ten produced teleplays. He has a new novel, *Philip K. Dick High*, and a short story collection, *Tripping the Dark Fantastic*, out now from Wildside Press. He lives in Eugene, Oregon where he hosts a weekly radio program of progressive rock called Soundscapes.

"I Have No Blimp" is illustrated by Cortney Skinner.

"Dead Star Prize" by **Steven Mohan, Jr.** is set during an alien-human war, but it takes place on the forgotten fringes of the war effort.

Mohan indulged his lifelong interest in other cultures by graduating



Cortney Skinner

from Northwestern with a mechanical engineering degree and a U.S. Navy commission, then completing a ship-board tour of duty that took him to the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific.

He now lives in Pueblo, Colorado where he works for a major commercial air-conditioning company, writes, and helps his wife chase after their three small children. "Dead Star Prize" is his second professional sale. His first was the novelette "Conservator," published in the *Writers of the Future* anthology.

"Dead Star Prize" is also illustrated by Cortney Skinner.

"The Day the Rapture Came to Town" by **Sue Storm** makes the Second Coming of Jesus Christ look more like a campy *Night of the Living Dead*.

Storm is an Oregon resident who sold her first professional story to *Air Fish* in 1993. Her "In the Elephant's Graveyard, Where Space Dances with Time" was in *The Writers of the Future* anthology in 1996. Since then she has had a half-dozen stories published, including "Ashes, Ashes, All Fall Down" in *Space and Time*. She lives with two cats, one a Scottish Fold that she says impersonates "a pissed-off owl."

"The Day the Rapture Came to



Steven Mohan, Jr

Town" is illustrated by Larry Blamire.

Ken Rand's "Good Dog" delves into something we take for granted, that the dog is Man's best friend. But is he really? Rand describes himself as a "semi-full-time writer," who works part-time as a library shelver to keep himself in pencils. His first professional sale was in 1996, the story "The Nine Billion Names of Arthur C. Clarke" for *VB Tech Journal*, edited by Dean Wesley Smith. His recent stories include "I Am Klingon" for *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds Vol. 2*, *The Ten Percent Solution: Self-Editing for the Modern Writer* from Fairwood Press, and a story in *Extremes*, a CD-ROM anthology by Lone Wolf Publications.

By coincidence it turns out Rand has known Steve Mohan, Jr. for about four years, and they roomed together at the World Horror Con in Denver recently. This is the second time stories of theirs have appeared in the same issue of a publication.

"Good Dog" is illustrated by **Carol Hoyer**. When I spoke to her she was very proud of being listed in *Who's Who in America, 2000 Edition*. She was working on her second cover for Baen Books, a novel by **David Miller**. She has also done several mystery novel covers and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* covers. The classic children's book she illustrated, *Black Beauty*, which had been postponed, is now out from Ideal Publishers, and she has completed a kids' diary cover and bookmark for Antioch Publishing. On the personal front, some relatives she had never met from her father's side of the family recently invited her to Texas, and she had a nice time getting to know them.

"Down in the Park" by **Russell A. Miller** is a story of genetically altered humans who prey on, and protect, the normal folk. Alas, neither Charlie, I nor our Alien Publisher can locate Russell A. Miller in order to pry out his life story. When he sent in the story, he was a student living in Boston. We know he has a very nice mother named Carol Miller, because she is the one who sent us his photo. (A computer search yielded 44 Russell A. Millers.) So, Russell, if you are out there and read this, contact *Aboriginal SF*, and we'll put your bio details in the next issue.

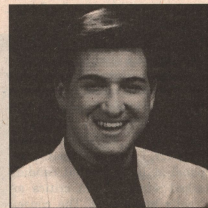
"Down in the Park" is illustrated by **Dominic Harman**, a British artist who lives just outside of London. He says he was drawing fantasy, horror, and science fiction for as long as he can remember, influenced at an early age by the work of **Derek Riggs**, who designed the album covers of the British rock band Iron Maiden. Since



Ken Rand

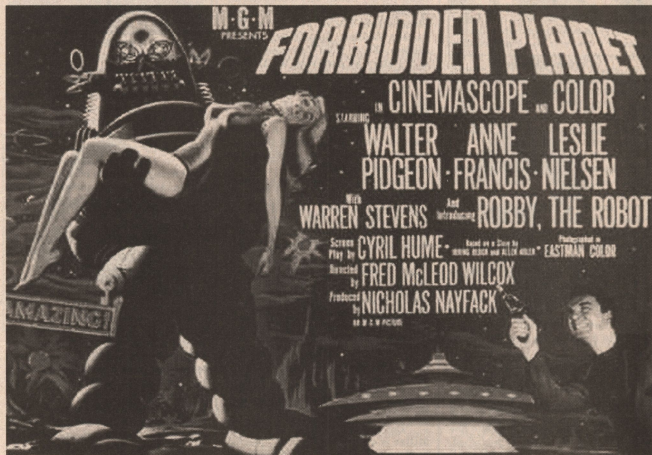
his first professional sale to *Interzone* in July 1997, he has been nominated three years running for the BSFA Awards in Great Britain and had four pieces nominated in the U.S. for the Tangent Award in 1999. He won the Paper Tiger Award 2000 at the British National SF and Fantasy Convention 2000 in Glasgow, Scotland. He has been doing numerous book and magazine covers, and he is interviewed and his work is featured in the French magazine *Ténébres, The Magazine of Dark Fantasy and Horror*, July 2000. When he gets some spare time, he likes to watch old sci-fi B movies or catch up on his sleep.

Our cover illustration is another wonderful sculpture by **David Dietrick**. This one is Pak Protector, a character from **Larry Niven's Ringworld**. Dietrick's lovely wife, **Lori Dietrick**, who has also illustrated stories for *Aboriginal SF*, was in a terrible car accident in February, totaling her Tercel wagon and ending up with 20 stitches above her eye. We are happy to say she is doing okay now. On the professional front, David has done some cards for the *Legend of Five Rings* card game. And this summer he is going to start marketing a line of collectible figures of mermaids. Stay tuned for more details. □



Russell A. Miller

The Best SF Films ... Sez Who?



One of the best ...?

Last winter in Philadelphia, I moderated a Philcon discussion devoted to naming "the best science fiction films" ever made. For nearly an hour, panelists and audience members enjoyed a nostalgic backward look at great SF features, citing scores of titles, and lots of them were happily uncontested in their candidacy. Over Easter weekend, however, I also participated in a panel at Balticon that candidly asked whether film critics are "really necessary." The consensus — *not* uncontested — was

that they are, more or less, sometimes, maybe. I evaded the issue by stating that criticism implies expert knowledge and perspective, and for that reason, we have mostly movie reviewers, not critics. Until films could be rescreened and studied on videotape, objective and authoritative cinematic criticism was very difficult and comparatively rare. Even with this invaluable tool, it is difficult to evaluate films from earlier decades in terms of contemporaneous mores and attitudes. Movies, after all, are a form of genuine time travel, but

it is a wise traveler who knows better than to laugh at his grandfolk.

With this caveat and no further apologies, here is an alphabetical, slightly idiosyncratic list of some of the films Philcon panelists designated as significant SF landmarks: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *The Man in the White Suit* (1951), *Metropolis* (1926), *The Mouse that Roared* (1959 — Didn't I say "idiosyn-

WILDSIDE PRESS

MYSTERIES • SUSPENSE • SCIENCE FICTION
CLASSICS • MUSIC • COOKING • REFERENCE

SPRING 2000 CATALOG

A WORD FROM THE PUBLISHER

Welcome to the Wildside! This is the largest catalog we've ever sent out, and it's going to thousands of new readers. Let me take a minute to introduce our company and tell you what we're about. (Wildside isn't your usual run-of-the-mill publisher . . . not by a long shot.)

My wife and I started Wildside in 1989 as a hobby to publish affordable signed, limited edition books. In part it was a rebellion against overpriced thousand-copy "special" signed editions costing \$75.00 or more. (Our average price for a signed limited hardcover edition was only \$35.00... and sometimes less.) My wife and I garnering two special World Fantasy Award nominations for our efforts, and two of our books won World Fantasy Awards for Best Collection of the Year...a pair of short story collections by Bradley Denton, which are featured later in this catalog.

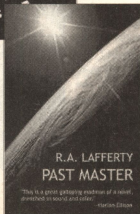
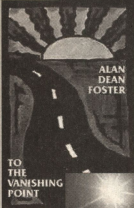
In mid 1999, I decided to devote myself full-time to publishing. Since August of that year, Wildside Press has brought out more than 200 new titles...and we should top 500 by the end of 2000. From novels to short story collections to non-fiction and reference works, from science fiction to mystery to romance—quality and affordability remain our watchwords.

Here in this catalog you will find important new works by hot young writers like Bruce Holland Rogers and Amy Sterling Casil alongside books by current masters like Anne McCaffrey, Alan Dean Foster, and Mike Resnick (to name just a few). World Fantasy Award-winner Darrell Schweitzer, who edits *Weird Tales* magazine, is reprinting his novels, short story collections, and scholarly non-fiction anthologies through Wildside. And we are rescuing long out-of-print works by important genre writers like Avram Davidson, R.A. Lafferty, and Keith Roberts before they are forgotten.

And we have begun a fantasy classics reprint program, Wildside Fantasy Classics, to bring back "lost" masterpieces of the fantasy field. Featured are titles by H. Rider Haggard, Lafcadio Hearn, William Morris, and many more.

Please take a moment to look through our catalog: from mysteries to science fiction to romance—from reference books to author studies to popular non-fiction . . . we're sure you'll find something you'll enjoy!

—John Betancourt, *Publisher*



Our authors include . . .

John Gregory Betancourt
Lloyd Biggle, Jr.
Robert Bloch
Nelson S. Bond
Chris Bunch
Lin Carter
Amy Sterling Casil
F. Marion Crawford
Avram Davidson
Grania Davis
L. Sprague de Camp
David Dvorkin
Leone Dvorkin
Tom Easton
Rosemary Edghill
John M. Ford
Alan Dean Foster
Esther Friesner
H. Rider Haggard
Joe L. Hensley
Roby James
S.T. Joshi
Phyllis Ann Karr
Marvin Kaye
R. A. Lafferty
Tanith Lee
Margan Llywelyn
Katherine MacLean
Barry Malzberg
David Mason
Anne McCaffrey
Brian McNaughton
Ward Moore
William Morris
Ray Faraday Nelson
Mike Resnick
Keith Roberts
Alan Rogers
Bruce Holland Rogers
Darrell Schweitzer
George Scithers
S. P. Somtow
Lois Tilton
Lawrence Watt-Evans
Robert Weinberg
Leslie What
F. Paul Wilson
& many more!

MYSTERIES AND SUSPENSE

David Dvorkin

- *New York Times* best-selling author
- Writes *Star Trek* novels as well as mysteries

Time for Sherlock Holmes, by David Dvorkin

In the 1920s, Sherlock Holmes discovered how to render Dr. Watson and himself immortal. Unfortunately, in the previous century, his nemesis Professor Moriarty had stolen a time machine from its inventor and jumped forward. As decades pass, Holmes and Watson travel into space to save humanity from their old enemy. Great for mystery readers and science fiction fans alike!

"[A] really wild one. . . Doyle to Wells to Dvorkin — nice triple play!" —*New York Times Book Review*

"Somewhere, Arthur Conan Doyle may be loving all of this. For us, it's a lot of fun." —*Arizona Republic*
ISBN: 1-58715-0735 (Trade paper, \$15.95)

The Cavaradossi Killings, by David Dvorkin

On the run from the Chicago mob he was part of for 20 years, Tom Hamilton returns to his Colorado hometown. But when a singer is murdered during a local opera performance, Tom is drawn into the case almost against his will and better judgment, stirring up old passions and hatreds—and endangering his life!
ISBN: 1-58715-126X (Trade Paper, \$15.95)

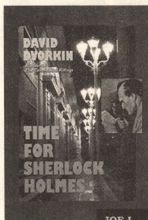
About Ray Faraday Nelson

- Writes science fiction as well as mysteries.

Dog-Headed Death, Ray Faraday Nelson

When a wealthy shipping magnate is murdered in his Egyptian mansion, several members of his family, including a son and daughter, have the means, motive, and the opportunity. But this isn't a contemporary tale—rather, it is set in the first century A.D., in Alexandrian Egypt, at a time when the upstart Christian believers were battling the established religion of Mother Isis/Father Osiris-Serapis for converts. Enter Centurion Gaius Hesperian, a reflective and compassionate member of Emperor Nero's palace guard who, with his lieutenants and soldiers, is sent to Alexandria and charged with solving the crime. . .

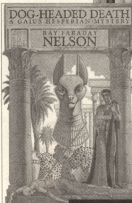
Carefully researched for period detail, it includes members of the extended Memnon family, the Apostle



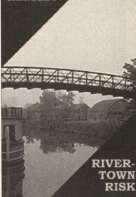
JOE L. HENSLEY
A Donald Robak Mystery



SONG OF CORPUS JURIS



JOE L. HENSLEY



RIVERTOWN RISK

Mark, Parthian spies, and many more colorful and authentic characters.

ISBN: 1-58715-0816 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

JOE L. HENSLEY

- Former judge turned mystery writer
- Most popular series features Donald Robak

Robak's Cross, by Joe L. Hensley

The seventh mystery in the Robak series.

ISBN: 1-58715-0336 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

Robak's Fire, by Joe L. Hensley

Murder, arson, a crooked town...and Don Robak. Now the sides are even!

ISBN: 1-58715-0344 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

Robak's Firm, by Joe L. Hensley

Not to be confused with *Robak's Fire*, this book is a collection of Hensley's finest mystery stories.

ISBN: 1-58715-0352 (Trade Paper \$15.00)

A Killing in Gold, by Joe L. Hensley

As Donald Robak turns from lawyer to amateur detective his safe, comfortable life-style is threatened by murder, theft, and danger!

ISBN: 1-58715-0360 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

The Poison Summer, by Joe L. Hensley

A young lawyer searches for justice in two deaths.

ISBN: 1-58715-0379 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

Song of Corpus Juris, by Joe L. Hensley

Violence and intrigue surround a small town lawyer as he defends a beautiful young woman accused of murder.

ISBN: 1-58715-0387 (Trade Paper, \$15.00)

Final Doors, by Joe L. Hensley

Fifteen short stories, collected for the first time.

ISBN: 1-58715-0395 (Trade Paper, \$15.00)

Rivertown Risk, by Joe L. Hensley

Corruption, politics, and murder make uneasy bedfellows!

ISBN: 1-58715-0409 (Trade Paper, \$15.00)

Outcasts, by Joe L. Hensley

Another fine detective novel from Joe L. Hensley.

ISBN: 1-58715-0417 (Trade Paper, \$15.00)

MARVIN KAYE

- Best-selling suspense writer
- Author of many books on toys, games, and magic

A Lively Game of Murder, by Marvin Kaye

In this first Hilary Quayle mystery novel, industrial espionage and dirty business dealings lead to murder at New York City's annual American Toy Fair trade show. Beautiful, headstrong Hilary and her Archie Goodwin-like secretary Gene, solve the mystery of three Scrabble tiles clutched in a dead man's fist.

This book offers a fascinating inside look at the American toy, hobby, game industry, for which the author used to be a leading journalist.

ISBN: 1-880448-718 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

Bullets for Macbeth, by Marvin Kaye

In this unique tour de force, glamorous PR agent Hillary Quayle returns to solve the 350-year-old hotly-disputed scholarly puzzle of the Third Murderer's identity in Shakespeare's Scottish play while her lover Gene catches the killer in a spectacular production at Madison Square Garden. Acclaimed as the most convincing solution to the centuries-old Shakespearean problem by theatre and literary scholars, including Isaac Asimov, Jose Ferrer, Dr. O. B. Hardison, Jr. (late director of The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington), *Bullets for Macbeth* has been singled out as an important Shakespearean murder mystery in two articles in *The Armchair Detective* magazine. It was adapted by the Stratford Ontario Shakespeare Festival in its staging of Macbeth.

ISBN: 1-880448-734 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

The Soap Opera Slaughterers, by Marvin Kaye

While Hilary Quayle and Gene are having a lovers' quarrel, Gene falls in love with Hilary's lookalike cousin. Meanwhile, a killer stalks *Riverday*, a popular TV soap opera, pushing its writer off the roof, poisoning a star on camera, and bashing the producer with his own Emmy award! This book features a rare inside look of how a TV soap opera works, with details drawn from the author's visits to the sets of *Another World*, *Days of Our Lives*, and *Ryan's Hope*.

ISBN: 1-880448-726 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

My Son the Druggist, by Marvin Kaye

Marty Gold, a good-natured New York City pharmacist, has his hands full coping with his father's anger over Marty's religious doubts, his mother's meddling in Marty's love life (or lack of it), and the police's suspicion that Marty deliberately poisoned one of his own customers.

ISBN: 1-880448-70X (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

My Brother the Druggist, by Marvin Kaye

While visiting his sister in Washington, Marty Gold's young traveling companion is kidnapped and it's up the amiable New York pharmacist to rescue the boy from a cold-blooded criminal.

ISBN: 1-880448-696 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

POPULAR FICTION



The Lady, Anne McCaffrey

Set in Ireland, *The Lady* is the saga of a family of wealthy horsebreeders, their lives, loves, and triumphs. A terrific change of pace from the *New York Times* best-selling author of *The White Dragon*.

ISBN: 1-58715-0174 (Trade Paperback, \$19.95)

Ring of Fear, by Anne McCaffrey

A contemporary romance from the

best-selling author of the *Pern* series.

ISBN: 1-58715-0166 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

Apart From You, by Leonore Dvorkin

Indiana University, 1968. Temporarily separated from her liberal-minded fiancé, Elizabeth Nye begins an affair, only to find herself caught in a complex web of love, lies, and belated remorse. This brilliant first novel explores several varieties of deception, alienation, and miscommunication. Sibling rivalry and infidelity take emotional center stage.

ISBN: 1-58715-0743 (Trade Paperback, \$15.95)



Forgetting Places, by S.P. Somtow

A sensitive and touching story of a boy dealing with the death of his older brother. But when messages from the dead boy start arriving, it's the start of an adventure of self-discovery and healing. A brilliant break-through

YOUNG ADULT

novel by the author of *The Aquiliad* and *Vampire Junction*.

ISBN: 1-58715-145-6 (Trade paperback, \$13.95)

The Bear Who Found Christmas, by Alan Rodgers

Joey Robins loved his toy bear. Joey loved the bear so hard and long and pure, so deeply and so truly and so powerfully, that the bear began to grow a heart. Nobody ever would have known about Bear at all, in fact, if Joey hadn't lost him in the hotel

beside the haunted shopping mall on Christmas Eve . . . And so begins a great quest, as the toy bear tries to find his way home. A timeless classic for all seasons.

Alan Rodgers won the Bram Stoker Award. He is the best-selling author of *Fire and Night*.

ISBN: 1-58715-107-3 (Trade Paper \$12.95)

SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY

BRADLEY DENTON COLLECTIONS!

The Calvin Coolidge Home for Dead Comedians, by Bradley Denton

A Conflagration Artist, by Bradley Denton

These two collections, originally published in hardcover as a set, won the World Fantasy Award for Best Collection of the Year. Each volume is a selection of the best of Denton's short fiction—some fantasy, some science fiction, all excellent—plus two original stories written just for these books.

Calvin: ISBN: 1-880448-890 (Trade Paperback, \$17.00)

Artist: ISBN: 1-880448-904 (Trade Paperback, \$17.00)

BOOKS BY MIKE RESNICK

- Hugo and Nebula Award-winner
- Best-selling author

A Safari of the Mind, by Mike Resnick

16 stories by Mike Resnick, including several of his most popular award-winners, spanning the genres of science fiction and fantasy. Included are the classic "Seven Views of Olduvai Gorge," "The 43 Antarian Dynasties," and even such fun pieces as "A Limerick History of Science Fiction." Introduction by Kristine Kathryn Rusch.

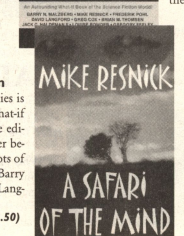
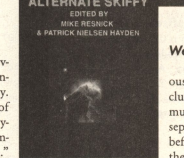
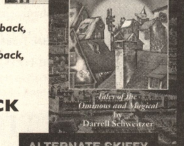
ISBN: 1-58715-0069 (Trade Paper, \$15.00)

ISBN: 1-58715-0077 (Hardcover \$30.00)

Alternate Skiffy, edited by Mike Resnick & Patrick Nielsen Hayden

The latest of Resnick's alternate histories is devoted to the science fiction field—such what-if premises as "What is H.P. Lovecraft became editor of *Weird Tales*?" and "What if Fritz Leiber became a successful actor instead of writer?" Lots of fun! Contributors include Frederick Pohl, Barry Malzberg, Mike Resnick, Greg Cox, David Langford, and more.

ISBN: 1-880448-548 (trade paperback, \$12.50)



ABOUT DARRELL SCHWEITZER

- Editor of *Weird Tales*
- World Fantasy Award-winner
- Author of *The Mask of the Sorcerer*

Necromancies & Netherworlds: Uncanny Stories, by Darrell Schweitzer & Jason Van Hollander

Bold fantasies of a land where men have overthrown the gods. "If you're at all uncertain about what is meant by "phantasmagoric," this book will set you right."

—*Interzone*

ISBN: 1-880448-65-3 (Hardcover \$30.00)

ISBN: 1-880448-66-1 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

✱

The Shattered Goddess, by Darrell Schweitzer

An epic quest, as a young hero tries to escape his destiny at the end of time. "Few writers can genuinely touch the quality of nightmare . . .

the fear that, formless and almost banal, stems from the sleeping mind. John Bellairs did it with *The Face in the Frost* . . . James Blaylock can do it. And now there is also *The Shattered Goddess*.—Mary Gentle

ISBN: 1-880448-80-7 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

✱

We Are All Legends, by Darrell Schweitzer

"... although it's written as a series of discontinuous episodes, there's a sense of progression and a conclusion. Moorcock's *Elric* stories make up a novel in much the same way, and these stories also appeared separately in a variety of magazines and anthologies before being collected . . . Nor does the similarity end there, for the protagonist, Sir Julianthe Later and Lesser Apostate (as he styles himself) has a similar sense of damnation, deriving from the murder of one who loved him." —*Interzone*

" . . . what a brilliantly berserk, schizoid universe Schweitzer has manufactured for his characters! *We Are All Legends* contains none of the cosy cuteness of standard fantasy worlds. It's a place of metal teardrops, phantom gargoyle armies, desolation and terror, and the details ring true . . ."

—S.P. Somtow

ISBN: 1-880448-83-1 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

✱

Groping Toward the Light, by Darrell Schweitzer

Fantastic and macabre poetry by Darrell Schweitzer. Illustrated by Jason Van Hollander. Available May 30, 2000.

ISBN: 1-58715-108-1 (Trade Paper, \$15.00)

ISBN: 1-58715-109-X (Hardcover, \$30.00)

Nightscares: Tales of the Ominous and Magical, by Darrell Schweitzer

A new collection of short stories, illustrated by Jason Van Hollander.

ISBN: 1-58715-060-3 (Hardcover \$35.00)

ISBN: 1-58715-061-1 (Trade Paperback, \$17.00)

The White Isle, by Darrell Schweitzer

Schweitzer's first novel, an alternate world fantasy as a young man masters the art of magic, then comes face to face with the dread god of death when his wife dies and he cannot bear to live without her.

ISBN: 1-58715-134-0 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

ABOUT LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

- Classic science fiction author
- Writing career spans 4 decades

All the Colors of Darkness, by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

ISBN: 1-880448-742 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

Watchers of the Dark, by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

ISBN: 1-880448-75-0 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

This Darkening Universe, by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

ISBN: 1-880448-76-9 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

The World Menders, by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

ISBN: 1-880448-77-7 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

Monument, by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

ISBN: 1-58715-051-4 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

The Still, Small Voice of Trumpets, by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

ISBN: 1-58715-052-2 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

The Fury out of Time, by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

ISBN: 1-58715-053-0 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

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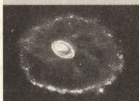
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THE FURY
OUT OF TIME

R.A. LAFFERTY



DOES ANYONE ELSE HAVE
SOMETHING FURTHER TO ADD?

PHYLLIS ANN
KARR



FROSTFLOWER
AND
WINDBOURNE

R.A. LAFFERTY



DOES ANYONE ELSE HAVE
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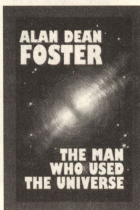
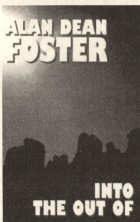
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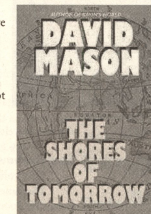
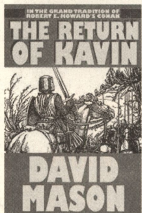
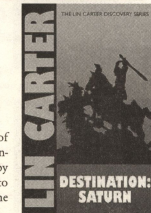
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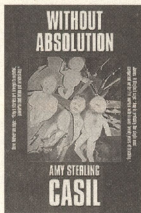
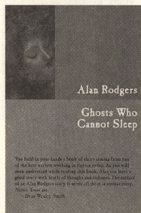
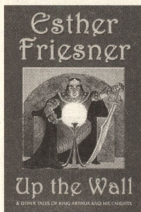
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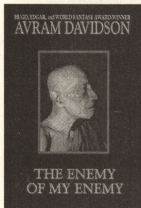
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*

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About S. T. Joshi

- Winner of Bram Stoker Award and the British Fantasy Award
- Leading authority on H.P. Lovecraft
- Author of numerous other studies on horror and fantasy writers

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About the Editors

- George H. Scithers has won four Hugo Awards and one World Fantasy Award for his editing work, which spans 5 decades: *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *Amazing Stories*, and *Weird Tales*.
- Darrell Schweitzer is an acclaimed author and critic as well as the current editor of *Weird Tales*. He won a World Fantasy Award for *Weird Tales*.
- John M. Ford worked on *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* before departing for a new career as a best-selling novelist. He won a World Fantasy Award for *The Sleeping Dragon*.



The Weird Tales Story, by Robert Weinberg

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More essays on 20th century horror writers: Peter Straub, Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber, Robert Bloch, Robert Aickman, Joseph Payne Brennan, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, and many more.

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Speaking of Horror: Conversations with Masters of Horror, by Darrell Schweitzer

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ISBN: 1-880448-815 (Trade Paperback, \$15.00)

About Darrell Schweitzer

- World Fantasy Award-winner
- Editor of *Weird Tales* magazine
- Popular fantasy author

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cratic"?), *On the Beach* (1959), *Star Wars* (1977; 1980; 1983 — regarded as one movie in three parts), *The Time Machine* (1960), *Things to Come* (1936), *This Island Earth* (1955), *2001* (1968), *War of the Worlds* (1953), and *When Worlds Collide* (1951).

Yes, there are a lot of important films not mentioned, including, without doubt, your personal favorite, but believe me, they were mentioned at Philcon, and some of those titles may well show up on lists devised by the other panelists. Some of the films convention attendees suggested included the *Alien* films, the *Star Trek* series (but everyone had different candidates; apparently, you either love or hate *ST* #s 2 and 4 — I personally disliked the second one because the filmmakers just assumed everyone already knew the Khan episode, and I did not); and *The Terminator* 1 and 2. Several votes went to the original version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and an honorable mention certainly went to *Destination Moon* (1950).

I don't believe anyone will dispute that one classic that deserves to be on the list is Stanley Kubrick's *2001*. That it is more Kubrick's vision than Arthur C. Clarke's is obvious if you read the novelization,



Alien led to a series of Ripleys

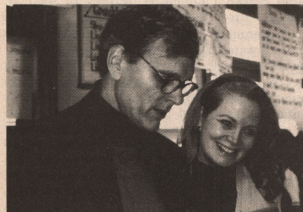
or, better yet, read Clarke's fascinating book, *The Lost Worlds of 2001*.

Keir Dullea, who played David Bowman in the film and its underrated sequel, *2010*, recently told me the studio plans to rerelease *2001* on New Year's Eve. He was not sure whether the seventeen minutes cut by the late director would be restored, but Keir said, "You wouldn't see anything really new; it would just be longer takes of things you've already seen." At least one film critic, however, lamented the excision because it provided a counterbalancing sequence for Hal's attack on the other astronaut. We'll have to wait and see. But this time, when you go on Dave's penultimate trip through the monolith/stargate, see if you can catch a glimpse of the aliens.

release on November 10th, is a Warner Brothers/Village Roadshow tale of a dangerous expedition to Mars, starring Val Kilmer, Carrie-Anne Moss, Tom Sizemore, and Terence Stamp, and also featuring Simon Baker and Benjamin Bratt.

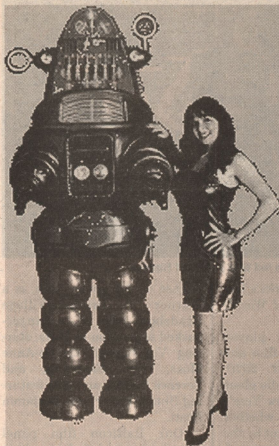
Our Balticon film panel expressed mixed feelings about *Battlefield Earth*, produced by and starring John Travolta, a devout Scientologist (is there any other kind?) who convinced MGM to make a movie out of L. Ron Hubbard's science fiction novel, *Fear*, as well. To be fair to Travolta, his personal convictions have never, to my knowledge, compromised the integrity of his acting, as for instance in the gentle low-key SF film *Phenomenon* (1996) or the recently released military murder mystery/thriller, *The General's Daughter*. To be fair to Hubbard (admittedly a more difficult concept), *Fear* is a readable little novel, ostensibly fantasy, though actually a horror story distantly analogous to Leo Perutz's neglected masterpiece, *The Master of the Day of Judgment*.

Speaking of mixed feelings ... word is out that Jar Jar Binks



2001's Keir Dullea signs at author's class

Like *2001*, several upcoming motion pictures are set in outer space, one of them literally, for *The Last Journey* is a Russian feature being filmed on the Mir space station. *Red Planet*, slated for



Robbie still has what it takes ...

will return in *Star Wars 2*. I suppose the marketing rights are too valuable to let him (her? it?) go, but whether or not one thinks Jar Jar is a disguised racial stereotype, I have yet to meet anyone who found JJ funny. If we have to endure JJ again, and apparently we must, I hope Mr. Lucas at least works on the critter's diction so we can hear more of his labored dialogue.

Outer Space is not a bad place to be, considering what movie makers have in store for Mother Earth. Disney's special effects in the newly-released *Dinosaur* are impressive, if you don't mind cutesy thunder lizards, but Tristar Pictures, in association with Japan's Toho studio, is sending us an even less benevolent monster in *Godzilla 2000*,

scheduled for release August 11, and Universal Pictures is hard at work with Michael Crichton and Steven Spielberg, who are respectively writing and producing *Jurassic Park 3*.

A different kind of mayhem may be expected in the forthcoming Tristar sequel to 1981's episodic animated *Heavy Metal*. Featuring the voices of Billy Idol, Michael Ironside, and Julie Strain, the new film will not be an anthology like its predecessor, but will tell a single story. Its title at this stage of development is *Heavy Metal 2: F. A. K. K.* (I'm too timid to hazard a guess.)

A gentler set of earthly doings,

though not without hazard, figures in New Line Cinema's *Frequency*, in movie houses as this column goes to press. The coming attractions were quite promising: a combination "feel good" and suspenseful story of a man who finds an electronic method for communicating with his thirty-year-dead father. The leading actors are Andre Braugher, Jim Caviezel, Shawn Doyle, Noah Emmerich, Elisabeth Mitchell, and Dennis Quaid. The producer is Howard Koch, Jr., son of the author of "Invasion from Mars," the radio play that made Orson Welles and H. G. Wells infamous in 1938.

Four interesting films in various stages of development or production are another animated Disney effort, *Atlantis; A. I.*, from



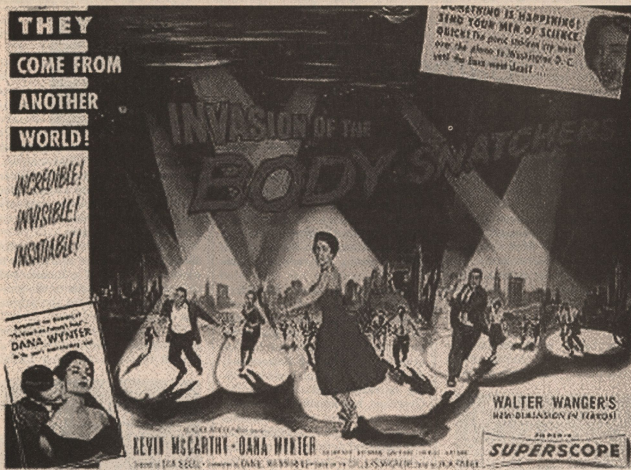
Will there be a T-37?

Warner Brothers; *The Billion Dollar Hotel*, Icon Productions; and Columbia's *The Sixth Day*, an Arnold Schwarzenegger action film slated to be released on October 6th. It's the story of a pilot who survives a helicopter accident only to find when he returns home that he has been replaced by a clone.

Atlantis and *A. I.* are both in development. The former will feature the voices of Michael J. Fox and Mark Hamill as future underwater explorers seeking to discover the lost continent of Atlantis. This will be something of a departure for Disney: an animated adventure without songs. Modified rapture; I want that great British lyricist Tim Rice to stay gainfully employed.

Steven Spielberg is directing and writing *A. I.*, partly based on Brian Aldiss's story, "Supertoys Last All Day Long." The title means Artificial Intelligence; it refers to a self-aware computer devised to help humanity survive the Greenhouse Effect.

The Billion Dollar Hotel has been filmed, but no release date has been announced yet.



INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

1950s' paranoia still runs deep ...

Starring U2's Bono and Mel Gibson, it is a black comedy loosely based on the financial difficulties encountered by Bono and The Edge when they owned Dublin's Clarence Hotel. The film is set several decades in the future in Los Angeles.

Dungeons & Dragons, a fantasy based on the role-playing game, has been completed, but no release date has been announced; estimates range anywhere from summer through October. Jeremy Irons and Justin Whalin star.

Tim Burton is developing a promising remake of a Roger Corman classic: *X, the Man with the X-Ray Eyes*. I don't use the

word "classic" lightly, especially when talking about Corman, king of quickies, knockoffs, and ultra-cheap shlock like *The Terror*, a film that made me wonder how Jack Nicholson ever got another role in his life.

But 1963's *X* (the original title) is brilliantly directed by Corman, and also brilliantly written by the late fantasy master Ray Russell. The superb cast is led by Oscar winner Ray Milland, who I have heard suffered some serious eye problems because of the special contact lenses he was required to wear. The film also features fine acting by Diana Van Der Vlis, Harold J. Stone, and — in a non-comic tour de force performance — none other than Don Rickles.

X, the story of a scientist who becomes a human guinea pig for his own formula for extending the range of human vision (with disastrous results), is a trim horror story with a harrowingly effective, yet comparatively understated climax. I hope that Mr. Burton's revival does not go for a more gruesome ending than the original. It is the subtle buildup, linked with a highly original opening, before-the-titles sequence, that makes the horror work so well. I wish I could be more specific, but I don't want to spoil it for anyone who hasn't seen it yet. □

Baroque SF

Souls in the Great Machine
By Sean McMullen
Tor, 1999
448 pp., \$27.95

The setting of *Souls in the Great Machine* is post-apocalyptic Australia, 2000 years from now, as a young librarian leaves home for a new job; she's doing so because she is a gunfighter and has made too great a reputation and too many enemies at home. A librarian-gunfighter?

She takes a wind-train to Rochester, the city that hosts the central library, Libris. As she trav-

SOULS IN THE GREAT MACHINE



els, she obsesses about The Call, a mysterious force that sweeps over the land every few weeks compelling people and all large mammals to walk mindlessly southwest, ultimately to their deaths by starvation or drowning. The reborn civ-

Rating System

☆☆☆☆☆	Outstanding
☆☆☆☆	Very Good
☆☆☆	Good
☆☆	Fair
☆	Poor

ilization has a host of clever devices, some mechanical and some architectural, to defeat The Call.

Arriving at Libris, she advances rapidly through the ranks — she's not only a dangerous gunslinger, but a brilliant librarian. (Some have semi-seriously subtitled the book *Fighting Samurai Librarians*.)

Libris has a secret project, a computer made up of human processing elements — hundreds (later thousands) of people, some kidnapped, some convicts, who sit at desks and pass numbers around, doing pieces of calculations according to instructions. Zarvora, the Overliber, has reinvented the computer in a form immune to the ancient orbiting battlestations that zap electrical devices. She uses the Calculator to take over first Rochester and later the whole confederation, leaving her Overmayor of the Southeast.

Events start flowing faster and faster. There are wars and peaceful alliances. New peoples turn up. The beamflash and windtrain networks expand rapidly. Technologies are rediscovered, and even bigger wars are fought. Rebels rebel, and a few people even find happiness.

This is a marvelous, fun book.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

Household Gods
By Judith Tarr and
Harry Turtledove
Tor, 1999
508 pp., \$27.95

Judith Tarr and Harry Turtledove have been turning out historical novels and historical fantasies for years, so I guess it's no surprise that they finally collaborated on a book. And what a book!

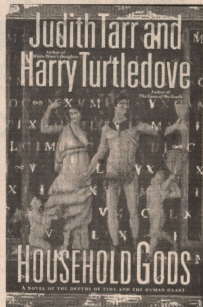
Nicole Gunther-Perrin, a youngish L.A. lawyer and a divorced single mother of two little kids, is having a *really* bad week. Her ex-hus-



band (who ran off with a floozy) is far behind on the child support. She's passed over for partner at her law firm for no good reason. Her children's day care center suddenly closes. And she's been caught in horrendous traffic jams.

In her fantasies, she thinks about a simpler time and makes a wish to a statue of a Roman god that she could go back to the simple, happy days when the statue was made.

She wakes up the next morning smelling the incredible stench of a Roman city and speaking Latin.



She's as ignorant of history as most people, but soon figures out that she's living in a time after Julius Caesar and before the Fall of the Roman Empire. Beyond that — who knows?

She's a middle class widow with two kids who owns a lunchroom and tavern in a town in the Roman province of Pannonia. And she owns a slave girl. This is a *real* problem for '90s liberal Nicole. At times it's even worse than the

stench and the lice. And did I mention that she doesn't believe in drinking alcohol?

The lice she learns to live with, having no other choice. The slave she frees — and then employs — at considerable cost to herself and against her brother's strong protests. She learns to appreciate wine after getting really sick from the water.

This sounds like it's a stupid-liberal-learns-how-good-she-has-it book, and I suppose it is, a bit. But it's also a novel of ordinary life in a very strange place (which was still better than most of the world in its day) with interesting people and events. And when Nicole finally finds her way back to L.A., she's learned enough to force her ex-husband to pay up, and to force her law firm to recognize her talents and promote her.

An excellent book — the past is a different country, and Tarr and

ing. (I'm amazed that the Heinlein Estate allowed it — they seem determined to kill his reputation for good by keeping people from reading his stories.)

Two of the stories, "—And He Built a Crooked House" and "All You Zombies—," are not fantasy by any definition I recognize. But they're really good stories. The rest are fantasy in the *Unknown* vein: "Magic, Inc.," "They—," "Waldo," "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag," "Our Fair City," and "The Man who Traveled in Elephants."

"They—" and "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag" are wonderful, and the others — perhaps with the exception of "Our Fair City," which is pretty minor — are very good.

And I'd forgotten how well RAH did paranoia and solipsism.

Read these stories.

Rating: ☆☆☆1/2

The Prodigal Sun: Evergence

By Sean Williams and

Shane Dix

Ace, 1999

393 pp., \$6.99

The Prodigal Sun is pure escapism — schlock SF at its best.

The scene is a lovely, complicated one: a galaxy that has been settled for so long that no one remembers — or cares, much — where mankind originated. A galaxy where humans like us are by far in the majority, but where numerous human-derived races (most "improved" through genetic tinkering) exist, as well as the occasional enigmatic AI or transcended human society. In other words, a galaxy where anything can happen and any kind of adventure can take place.

A woman is sent on an assignment to pick up an AI newly built for her masters in an empire's intelligence service. On the way home, her ship is attacked by forces of a neighboring empire with which they're not quite at war. She escapes to a nearby prison planet with the AI (which is starting to show a knack for manipulating people and things around it), an enigmatic, amnesiac prisoner who seems to be a very good fighter, a young telepathic girl, and a semi-

human diplomat she is accompanying. (Notice the clichés piling up?)

Upon landing, they meet up with local freedom fighters, have many adventures, escape the prison planet, and confront the intelligence service the woman served. And along the way, they just happen to acquire a ship with a built-in cyborg captain, so they're free to chase off after whatever interests them. So she and her gang go off on a series of adventures that will last as long as anyone is willing to buy them. There's no way to write about a book like this seriously. *The Prodigal Sun: Evergence*, which was a lot of fun to read, is pure, unadulterated escapist adventure set in a nicely scify world.

Rating: ☆☆☆

There and Back Again

By Pat Murphy

Tor, 1999

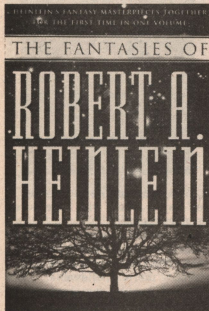
300 pp., \$24.95



I didn't know what to expect when I decided to read this book. The cover art made it look like cyberpunk, yet the brief reviews I'd seen described it as *The Hobbit* set in space. How could it be both and still be good?

By being written by Pat Murphy, apparently.

Somehow she managed to write a book which stands perfectly well on its own, yet which follows the plot of *The Hobbit* almost scene for scene and character for character. What's more, she did it without



Turtledove make very good tour guides.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

The Fantasy of Robert A. Heinlein

By Robert A. Heinlein

Tor, 1999

352 pp., \$27.95

Robert A. Heinlein, the quintessential writer of hard SF, wrote a fair-sized book's worth of fantasies, which Tor has done us the great service of collecting and publish-

mockery, without damage to the feel of *The Hobbit*, and while still writing a modern SF novel. It's a very good book and a remarkable achievement.

Everyone knows how *The Hobbit* starts out: the wealthy bachelor hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, who aspires only to live a quiet, comfortable life, and how Adventure comes upon him when a wizard, Gandalf, causes him to meet a band of dwarves who are off to regain their lost treasure and kingdom.

Well, Bailey Beldon is a Norbit, a smallish race of humans who have inhabited the asteroid belt of the Solar System for thousands of years. One day Gitana, an enigmatic adventurer who had known

THERE AND BACK



PAT MURPHY

Bailey's great-grandmother, shows up at his asteroid, followed closely by several members of the Farr Clone, a several-hundred-year-old female clone family.

Gitana recruits Bailey to go with the Farrs to find an ancient artifact. Reluctantly, he leaves his quiet asteroidal home and heads off with them into the untamed reaches of deep space. There follow SF adventures with lovely parallels to the Goblins and Gollum and a Ring, and Rivendell, and the Beornings, and the Wood Elves, and Lake Men of Long Lake, and Smaug, and the Battle of Five Armies, and, finally, the return home.

Murphy has not only done a wonderful job of writing a story, but she has managed to translate the plot and the feel of *The Hobbit* to the far future without loss.

Rating: ☆☆☆

The Stone Canal
By Ken Macleod
Tor, 1999
304 pp., \$24.95

I read and liked *The Cassini Division*, Ken Macleod's third novel, but the first to be published in the US. *The Stone Canal* is better, I think. It's a prequel of sorts, or at least it is set in the same universe with some of the same characters, mostly at an earlier time.

The story runs in two threads, one starting in the 1980s and continuing to about 2020, and the other on New Mars in the 24th or 25th century.

Jonathan Wilde and David Reid are students at the University of Glasgow in the '80s and deeply involved in radical politics. Reid is some sort of Trotskyite, while Wilde seems to be something more like a left-leaning libertarian. They argue, they fight over lovers, and ultimately part company — but not before Wilde subscribes Reid to every libertarian magazine and mailing list he can. His plot succeeds and Reid, unable to resist reading and critiquing anything political, flip-flops from Trotsky to Rand.

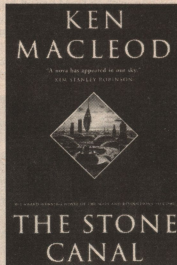
By the 2020s, Wilde's space souvenirs business has turned into a quite profitable large company involved in many space activities. The UK (and elsewhere) has collapsed into near-anarchy by 2020, and Reid resurfaces as one of the leaders of a group that plans to abandon Earth and move into space with their minds downloaded into AIs — a classic Vingean Singularity.

Some of the first AIs, however, enslave the rest, and Reid and Wilde and others find themselves in robot bodies laboring for the AIs near Jupiter. (This section, by the way, is one of the best pictures I've seen of society near a singularity.)

The other interwoven half of the story takes place on New Mars, where Reid, Wilde, and others escaped to after they freed themselves from the AIs' grasp and fled through a wormhole that the AIs had built. New Mars is Libertarian, and Reid is probably the wealthiest person on it.

Wilde wakes up knowing nothing about how he got there or what happened between his death on Earth in the 2040s and his awakening. The reader's first introduction to the sole city on New Mars is as Jonathan Wilde enters it for the first time in the company of a robot called Jay Dub.

The New Mars part of the story is complicated — there are flashbacks within flashbacks — but is altogether satisfying and fits nicely with the rest of it. New Mars has some really neat ideas in it — like using nanotech to build a huge city and then leaving most of it to a robotic ecology until people need it. Hunters venture into the robotic sectors to get parts.



And then there's the group of self-aware robots who have developed a religion.

The Stone Canal is a very strong piece of hard SF, more complicated than *The Cassini Division* and, I think, more believable. Ken Macleod goes on my short list of: buy everything they write.

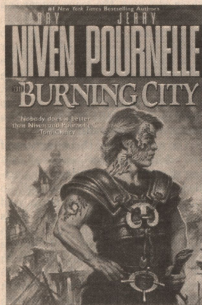
Rating: ☆☆☆ 1/2

The Burning City
By Larry Niven and
Jerry Pournelle
Pocket Books, 2000
486 pp., \$24.95

The Burning City is set in the world of "The Magic Goes Away," roughly 10,000 years ago. Magic is a natural resource inherent in matter, but it can be used up. Right after the glaciers retreated, a magic-using civilization spread

across the globe; now it's tottering as magic fails. The gods themselves — all-powerful when mana was plentiful — are weakened and mostly sleep.

This story takes place in what will later be Southern California — the L.A. basin and nearby. Tep's Town is a strange place even in this strange world, a fairly large town hemmed in by malignant forests. (One of the more interesting creations in this book is the interaction of magic and plants. The giant redwoods are magical — possibly aware — creatures, and they use their magic to surround themselves with an array of deadly plants to protect themselves



against predators like lumbermen. When the mana is depleted, all that's left are trees and shrubs.)

The town itself is decidedly non-magical and is one of the few remaining strongholds of Atep, the sleeping fire god. This non-magical town is infested with gangs — I have the impression that it's modeled on Somalia — which spend their time killing each other and stealing from anyone who works and generally keeping the town poor.

A young man who grows up in the gangs is brighter than most and learns something of the outside world and, when he finally has to flee, becomes a very successful trader in the caravans. Twenty-five years later, he leads an expedition back to Tep's Town and

changes it. The main story is his growth from an apprentice tough to a responsible adult.

Running through the story is an Atlantean wizard, Morth, who has been fleeing a water elemental since the fall of Atlantis. When Atlantis started to sink, Morth fled rather than stay behind to try to counter the subsidence. His colleagues did not take this as friendly and set a water elemental to follow him and kill him. If Morth stays close enough to water to do his magic and maintain his youth, sooner or later the elemental finds him and tries to destroy him. If he flees the elemental, he also flees the source of his power.

I greatly enjoyed the world Niven and Pournelle constructed and their elaborate working out of how mana changes our mundane world — and how the disappearance of mana changes the magical world into our own. *The Burning City* is just full of wonderful ideas. All in all, though, the book was a bit bland — it didn't have quite the sparkle of their best works.

Rating: ☆☆☆ 1/2

Windows of the Imagination
By Darrell Schweitzer
Wildside Press, 1998
208 pp., \$16.00

Windows of the Imagination is a collection of Darrell Schweitzer's essays and articles, and they're nearly all interesting — I'm impressed. They're divided into categories: My Skeptical Self & Other Evasions of Autobiography, Writing Fantasy, H. P. Lovecraft and Others, Reviews, Loose Cannonfire.

The best one — a delight — is "The Creation of Frivolous Literary Theories," which describes Darrell's sometime hobby of developing really absurd literary theories.

Rating: ☆☆☆ 1/2

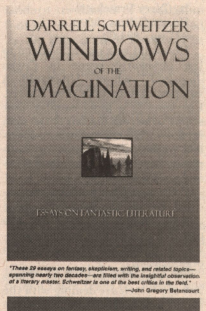
Revelation Space
By Alastair Reynolds
Victor Gollancz, 2000
476 pp., £17.99

Revelation Space is Alastair Reynolds's first book, and it's a doozy. Perhaps more than any other I've read, it's a perfect exam-

ple of Baroque Hard SF — hard SF with lots of lovely complexity and lots of cool things.

The story is set 500 or so years from now in a world where humanity has colonized dozens of nearby star systems using very good slower-than-light drives. The colonies are linked together by the Ultras — cyborged humans who use nanotech on themselves as well as on their ships. The Ultras are pretty much a bunch of loners, each (small) crew an independent and very powerful group.

The main character is an archeologist who is exploring a newly discovered planet to learn what



destroyed its promising civilization a million years ago. He runs the planet as the head of the very large expedition which has more or less colonized the planet.

That's the simple part. What's also happening is: A crew of Ultras is chasing the archeologist to get him to use the recording he has of his father's mind to cure their captain, who is being devoured by a nanotech disease. The Ultras are also being bothered by an alien mentality which has taken up residence in their weapons computers and is driving the weapons specialists mad. The archeologist was overthrown by a group of dissidents who want to terraform the planet, not study it, and has been in jail for 20 years. Humanity's highest nanotech has gone haywire due to a very nasty virus which has

nearly wiped out human civilization. There is another entity who is probably human who is trying to stop the archeologist — using any means necessary — from studying the aliens. And that's just the beginning!

It's complicated, and very clever, and well-written, and it all hangs together — even the Great Mystery that slowly builds up and is revealed at the end isn't a disappointment. This is an spectacular first novel.

Rating: ★★☆☆ 1/2

The Fifth Elephant
By Terry Pratchett
HarperCollins, 2000
321 pp., \$24.00

Uberwald was recently added to the Discworld scene in *Carpe Jugulum*, where Uberwaldian vampires try to take over Lancre. Uberwald is a large country that seems to be reminiscent of German myth — it's a country with no central authority, inhabited by vampires, werewolves, and dwarfs — and people, of course.

Politics in Uberwald are complicated. Besides the basic three-sided (people don't count) structure, the dwarfs are split and a young werewolf is trying to build up his own organization.

In Ankh-Morpork, Sam Vimes and the Watch are dealing with the mysterious theft of a replica of the Stone of Stone, an especially durable piece of dwarf bread upon which a new King of the Dwarfs sits to complete his investiture. Then the Patrician decides to send Vimes to Uberwald as Ankh-Morpork's representative to the crowning of the next Dwarf king.

As you'd expect, the missing Stone of Stone plays a role, as do Capt. Carrot (the 6-foot adopted dwarf) and his girlfriend Cpl. Angua, a werewolf.

As always, it's a good story, well told and with some moral depth to it, also. I continue to be amazed at how Pratchett has taken a cute idea and spun it out into a 20+ book series which just keeps getting better.

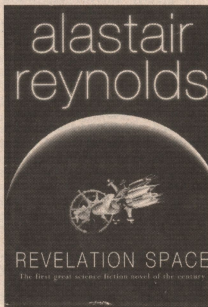
Rating: ★★☆☆

Colonization: Second Contact
By Harry Turtledove

Del Rey, 1999
486 pp., \$25.95

Colonization: Down to Earth
By Harry Turtledove
Del Rey, 2000
489 pp., \$26.00

A few years ago, Harry Turtledove wrote an excellent four-volume alternate history called *Worldwar*, in which aliens invaded Earth in 1941, just as World War II was really getting going. The aliens had been civilized for 100,000 years, had conquered two other worlds using slower-than-light ships, and had decided Earth would be conquest number three.



The aliens' technology was about what we'd expect to have in 2025 or so with the single exception of a much better space drive than we can foresee. The invasion was not a runaway success. The aliens change but slowly — their civilization values stability and introduces technological change only reluctantly. Who can blame them for sending a probe to Earth in the 1300s and expecting humans not to have changed much in the mere 600 years since?

In *Worldwar*, humans fight each other and the aliens, and after a few years of fighting, the US, Nazi Germany, and the USSR all develop nuclear bombs, and not a few are used. A truce emerges wherein the US, Germany (dominating Western Europe), and the USSR

retain their independence, Japan and Britain retain a lesser independence (since they don't have the Bomb, the aliens don't fear them as much), and the rest of the world — China, India, Africa, Australia, and South America — are all controlled by the aliens.

Colonization takes place 20 years later, on the arrival of the colonization fleet, containing one hundred million aliens in suspended animation. The truce has held and humans have learned a lot — the US, Nazi Germany, and the USSR are all in space, and computers and computer networks are all over. But old hatreds still linger.

The aliens have not had their own way: the spice ginger is a powerfully addictive drug for them, and humans are only too happy to supply it. But worse, while ginger is a euphoric for the males of the invasion fleet, it turns out to force the females who first arrive with the colonization fleet to go into heat, substantially disrupting the pattern of their civilization.

On top of that, the members of the colonization fleet arrive expecting that the invasion fleet has pacified a world of primitives, only to find a heavily armed truce and dangers everywhere — and finds that the survivors of 20 years on Earth have changed and become more flexible and changeable than is the alien norm. The invasion fleet begins to have almost as much trouble with the colonists as with the humans.

There is a lot of complexity here. As in *Worldwar*, Turtledove follows a half-dozen different sets of characters as they live and react and try to change their world. Conspiracies abound; at the end of the second book, a nuclear war breaks out, when Nazi Germany, crazy to the last, takes on the aliens.

This is a very good job, and I'm greatly looking forward to the third and final book.

Rating: ★★☆☆

The Funny Stuff



Believe it or not, it used to be accepted "wisdom" that humorous SF and fantasy didn't sell. You could get away with funny short stories, but humorous novels had to be "disguised," i.e., made to look like straight books, or they wouldn't sell.

Need I mention Douglas Adams? Or Terry Pratchett? By all reports Pratchett is not only the best-selling *living* fiction author in England, but the best-selling fiction author *period*, who has long since overtaken Dickens and is closing in on Shakespeare and the Bible. He doesn't do all that badly in the United States either.

Actually, fantasy has been funny as long as there has been written literature. Think of the comedies of Aristophanes, which are fantasy, not myth. The ancient Greeks didn't really believe in Cloud-Cuckooland. And in Aristophanes we find the earliest, most obvious use of fantasy, which is satire, a tradition very much expanded and continued by Lucian of Samosata some six hundred years later. (People who cite Lucian's "A True History" as science fiction probably have not read it. It's the sort of fantasy you saw in the Moon episode of Terry Gilliam's *Baron Munchhausen*, a whopper to top all whoppers. In addition to the famous lunar flight, the story

also includes cheese islands floating in a sea of milk and whole nations dwelling between the teeth of an enormous whale.) In fact, just about everybody in Antiquity wrote satirical fantasy. When the Emperor Claudius was bumped off, the philosopher Seneca, for the amusement of Nero's court, shamelessly composed "The Pumpkinification of Claudius," about all the funny things that happened to the late emperor in the afterlife. Three hundred years after *that*, another emperor, Julian the Apostate, wrote another afterlife fantasy, "The Caesars," in which his various predecessors are brought to the threshold of Heaven and judged.

Let's skip ahead quite a lot, past Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* with its fantastic slapstick, Cyrano de Bergerac, Jonathan Swift, and others continuing the tradition of Lucian, past Mark Twain and others, F. Anstey, James Branch Cabell, and Thorne Smith. There's always been funny fantasy, in about every corner of the genre except *Weird Tales*, where the readers were so outraged by one awful story published in the '20s ("The Wicked Flea" by J.U. Giesy, October 1925) that The Unique Magazine didn't dare raise another chuckle for almost two decades, when some of Robert Bloch's slapstick comedies appeared in the early '40s. And, speaking of Bloch, while most of the contents of the adventure fantasy magazine *Fantastic Adventures* (1939-1952) seem pretty dull today, Bloch's Lefty Feep stories are

still a delight. I wish someone would publish an omnibus of all of them.

Then there's *Unknown* to be considered, a magazine that specialized in a kind of smart-aleck, modern treatment of traditional fantasy motifs best exemplified in de Camp and Pratt's *The Incomplete Enchanter*. From there it's easy to follow the thread directly to Terry Pratchett, taking note on the way of Mervyn Wall, T.H. White, John Bellairs, and other masters of the comic-fantastic, who could sometimes use humor, not merely to amuse, but to sneak up on very profound matters of the human condition.

Now, funny science fiction is somewhat more recent, unless you want to rope in Aristophanes and Lucian, as some people have tried to. There was certainly a spate of "funny invention" stories around the beginning of the 20th century. I recall one I read once in one of the early Munsey magazines which was about a rogue vacuum cleaner and would have made a perfect *I Love Lucy* episode. Hugo Gernsback had quite a sense of humor, as people tend to forget. He would have liked that vacuum cleaner story. The earliest issues of *Amazing* contain numerous technological japes, intended for elephantine belly-laughs. Subtlety was not the order of the day, which is perhaps why none of these stories is reprinted or remembered.

Probably the first memorable writer of humorous SF was Stanley Weinbaum, who invent-

Rating System

☆☆☆☆☆	Outstanding
☆☆☆☆	Very Good
☆☆☆	Good
☆☆	Fair
☆	Poor

ed the funny alien. His work is crude and juvenile, and time has not treated it well, but he had considerable impact and spawned imitators. Certainly by the end of the 1930s, SF humor was a staple in the pulps. Much of it has dated terribly. I also remember reading a pseudonymous Henry Kuttner story in *Astounding* about the Planet of the Jitterbugs.

Kuttner, when he matured, wrote some very fine SF humor, much of it as Lewis Padgett. Many of his stories of the '40s, like "What You Need," are both funny and sinister.

And of course, after that, SF humor grew up and became an effective means of social satire in the hands of Pohl, Kornbluth, Tenn, Sheckley, Avram Davidson, and so many others, with tones ranging from very dry and subtle to broad guffaws. It was probably only because the culture wasn't yet saturated with SF imagery in the 1960s that, say, Robert Sheckley's *Mindswap* didn't break out like Douglas Adams.

Now SF humor is big money, or some of it is. It still works at every level from satire to slapstick. There is more of it than can be covered in one column, but let's look at a few recent examples:

The Eternal Footman

by James Morrow
Harcourt Brace, 1999
359 pp., \$24.00

This is the third in Morrow's "Corpus Dei" trilogy. In the first, *Towing Jehovah*, the corpse of God is found floating in the South Atlantic and must be towed to the North Pole before it rots. In the second, *Blameless in Abaddon*, enough of God's brain cells are found to be still alive that he can be towed to the Hague to be put on trial for crimes against humanity. Now in *The Eternal Footman*, God's

corpse disintegrates in the English channel. His skull goes into geosynchronous orbit over Times Square, glowing like a second moon, causing a crisis for Western civilization. Cynicism and despair set in. When someone tests "Nietzsche positive" they soon start seeing their (usually obnoxious) doppelgänger. Lesions and coma follow, then death. As much of the population succumbs to the existential plague, the only hope seems to be a neo-pagan happiness cult founded in Mexico by an ex-psychologist, who is both a genius and a sinister charlatan.

The story follows Nora, who carries her comatose son all the way from New England to Mexico, and Gerald, a brilliant sculptor who is trying to create religious art for a post-theistic age but ends up carving cult statues. There are lots of bizarre scenes of the sort one expects in a Morrow novel: a battle between Jews and an anti-Semitic militia on a golf course, a tour with a theater troupe performing the Epic of Gilgamesh as reinterpreted for the early 21st century, and a large dose of apocalypse, including a hairbreadth escape from an exploding volcano in a wrecked steamboat with a gigantic, multi-ton sculpture of a human brain (Gerald's masterpiece) embedded in the wheelhouse.

This is James Morrow in fine form, in a purely satiric mode, very much in the mode of Mark Twain's "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" or "The Mysterious Stranger." (Morrow is always compared to Vonnegut. I think he's better than Vonnegut.) The book is a philosophical comedy about death, with a lot of wit and some genuine drama. He manages to grip the heartstrings once again by having somebody we've followed all through the book die in the end. He's done this before, in *This Is The Way the World Ends*,

The City of Truth, and *Blameless in Abaddon*. I do not think this is a sentimental ploy. ("Make 'em, cry. Kill somebody off and make it slow. Works every time.") Nor is Morrow merely in a rut. The ending works. Writers get into this problem. Your plots go down certain channels over and over again. And while each individual story is completely valid on its own terms, they start getting repetitive if gathered all together. What a short story writer does is arrange his collections very carefully, for a maximum spread of variety. What a novelist has to do, I think, is next time, deliberately, avoid falling back on the same ending.

But whether you take this book alone — you can, because Morrow has not forgotten the difference between a trilogy and the three-part novels that are published as trilogies these days — or in the context of Morrow's other work, *The Eternal Footman* is definitely worth your time. It's full of wit and invention, and underneath it all, much serious thought, which is the most we can ask from a comedy, I think.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

By J.K. Rowling
Arthur Irvine Books
Scholastic Press, 1998
309 pp., \$17.95

Okay, this has been around for a while, but there's no doubt that this and the subsequent Harry Potter books are going to be in the stores for a long time. Ms. Rowling (the J is for Joanne) seems to have become, all by herself, the best-selling fantasist since Tolkien and Pratchett. These books don't seem to have been hyped into bestsellerdom. They just happened. They've become a phenomenon. Meanwhile, the true first editions,

issued in very limited quantities in England, already go for thousands on the used-book market. If somebody pays a thousand bucks for a book you published just three years ago, you must be a superstar. That's a basic rule of literary success.

Harry Potter even made it onto the cover of *Time*, and, probably much to the author's surprise, became the subject of controversy in the United States, since certain battles that most of Europe concluded in the 18th century during the Age of Reason are still being fought here. Superstitious parents are demanding that the books be removed from library shelves lest Harry Potter seduce kids into witchcraft and Satanism. As if they needed even more allure for children, now the books are "forbidden." While I don't think Ms. Rowling will be as cynical as James Branch Cabell was when he published his heartfelt thanks to the New York Society for the Prevention of Vice, which banned *Jurgen* and made Cabell a bestseller, every little bit helps. That the Fundies don't like it of course recommends the Harry Potter series all the more. It's always heartening to see the book-burners overwhelmed by something they cannot stop.

But the appeal of Harry Potter must run deeper than that. Millions of kids and quite a few adults are snapping these books up. Teachers praise them as something that actually draws children away from the TV and the videogames, to reading.

The good news is that *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* is good on a lot of levels. It's inventive, funny, and filled with clever touches. But there's more. As most of you already know, this series is about an orphaned boy who goes to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He learns that he is the son of a famous wizard, who was killed by a black magician of great

power, who, for some reason, could not kill Harry when he killed Harry's parents. There is a Destiny awaiting him, if only he can survive to master wizardry.

Sound familiar? It's positively archetypal. The story touches a lot of the basics of juvenile fiction. An intellectual, clever hero, raised by unsympathetic relatives (non-magical people called "Muggles" by magic folk) and bullied by a horrible cousin, suddenly discovers to his delight that he is someone special, that there is a whole society of people like him, and a place where his talents are appreciated. (Sounds like fandom, doesn't it? For "Muggles" read "mundanes.") He is summoned by a giant, who humiliates the nasty uncle, aunt, and cousin, and then carried off to a world of magic. This is not only archetypal, it's Hero With A Thousand Faces stuff: the hero born in mystery, raised apart and in secret for his own protection, coming to understand his destiny and special powers. Think of Moses, Jesus, Arthur, Superman, and now Harry Potter.

That's one part of Rowling's enormous appeal. The other is that, a mother herself, she has obviously observed children and how they behave. Harry's adventures at school, in their exaggerated way, recall things all of us have experienced. This is a book that can make a middle-aged adult remember what it was like to be eleven; and for eleven-year-olds, of course, it rings completely true. So the success of the Harry Potter series is, in retrospect of course, quite comprehensible.

Of course, now parents are asking, "Are there any more books like Harry Potter?" Of course there are, by Ursula Le Guin, John Bellairs, Diana Wynne-Jones, Diane Duane, and many others. The question writers and publishers are asking is why one of those didn't take off

like Harry Potter. That's much harder to answer. Yes, these are well-written, amusing books, but why are they on the *New York Times* bestseller lists? Sunspots? Maybe it's timing. Maybe the kids, whom we were so convinced were lost to video, have suddenly reinvented themselves and fooled us.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

In the Upper Room and Other Unlikely Stories

By Terry Bisson
Tor, 2000
284 pp., \$24.95

This is Terry Bisson's second collection, following *Bears Discover Fire*. In the wake of the famous title story in the first book, we inevitably ask, "Is there anything in this one as good as 'Bears'?"

I'm not sure there is. Lightning doesn't always strike twice. The title story (originally published in *Playboy*) is actually rather weak, an almost-comic virtual reality story really not all that different from dozens of others, including some we've seen on TV. Maybe *Playboy* took it because it's fast-moving and slightly racy, but I think Bisson has done better.

Fortunately, he does better in this same book. "There Are No Dead" is a very real story about three friends growing up, hanging together, trying to recapture their youth — and then the fantasy element intrudes, logically and absurdly, the way it does in "Bears Discover Fire" (which might be described as a cross between Flannery O'Connor and R.A. Lafferty). I also recommend "First Fire," which develops an idea I have never seen before. The hero invents a device that can date a flame. A megalomaniac millionaire uses it to find the oldest fire in the world and snuff it. The story is an effective fable about the loss of the past, and also, if you pay attention at the end, it's a sly takeoff on Arthur

Clarke's "The Nine Billion Names of God." There are several more that are quite good: "The Joe Show," "He Loved Lucy," "Not This Virginia." The collection is worth having, even if lightning didn't strike every time. (The weakest in the lot is from *Crank!* — "Tell Them They Are Full of Shit and Should Fuck Off," a rather juvenile parody of a first-contact story.) Bisson at his best represents a unique voice, a mixture of off-the-wall humor and Southern regionalism. He can get technical, usually about cars (Bisson may be the only SF writer who is a certified auto mechanic), but he also sneaks up on you with the damndest things sometimes.

Rating: ☆☆☆

**The Great R.A. Lafferty
Revival:**

Nine Hundred Grandmothers
Wildside Press, 1999
318 pp., \$15.00

Sindbad, the 13th Voyage
Wildside Press, 1999
158 pp., \$15.00

Fourth Mansions
Wildside Press, 1999
258 pp., \$15.00

Lafferty in Orbit
Wildside Press, no date
220 pp., \$15.00

The Devil is Dead
Wildside Press, 1999
224 pp., \$15.00

Past Master
Wildside Press, 1999
248 pp., \$15.00

John Betancourt's Wildside Press seems to be snapping up a good deal of the backlist of our field, and I say more power to him. I keep thinking of that other small press publisher who had just reprinted the *Lensman* series and said, "As long as New

York publishers aren't doing their job, I'm here." Indeed, in my darker moments I suspect that in a few years New York publishing will have consolidated into one company which will publish one book, as seen on TV, which everybody will expect to buy. (To be fair, Tor and Harcourt Brace seem to be doing their best to buck this trend.) All of the action will be in the independent small presses. As our field narrows into a handful of media-based megasellers, certain individual voices get squeezed out. R.A. Lafferty, one of the greatest philosophical humorists SF has ever seen (the only writer who compares to him is Avram Davidson), never sold enormously well, but his often quite mad short

stories and complex, idiosyncratic novels used to be published commercially and be regularly nominated for Hugos and Nebulas. But the big publishers dropped him totally. For a while various small presses worked to get all his unpublished material into print (at one point, 25 novels, not all of which have been published yet), which meant that much minor Lafferty was available, but the really big books were out of print. But now, thanks to Wildside, we have again *Past Master*, a Hugo finalist, in

which Sir Thomas More is resurrected on another planet to sort out the human condition. ("A minor miracle," Judith Merrill wrote, "that a serious philosophical and speculative work could be written so colorfully and so lyrically.") *The Devil is Dead* is an amazing fantasy like no other you've read. If Lafferty were Spanish, this would be Magic Realism and the toast of the literati, who are missing this one, and all the rest. Lafferty is a totally unique writer. That Wildside seems determined to reprint virtually all of his major work is cause for celebration.

Order from: Wildside Press,
P.O. Box 45, Gillette NJ, 07933-0045. □

Guidelines available for a SASE

Aboriginal SF has free guidelines for writers and artists interested in getting their work published.

To get a copy of these guidelines, please send a SASE (Self-Addressed, Stamped Envelope) to:

***Aboriginal SF* Guidelines
P.O. Box 2449
Woburn, MA 01888**

(PLEASE NOTE: We will only send the guidelines if a SASE is included. For those living outside the USA, please include a small return envelope and an IRC [International Reply Coupon] — available from your post office.)

Or visit our web site at:
<http://www.aboriginalsf.com>
and download a copy of the guidelines.

Celebrating the Ides?



Caesar's prophet wasn't always right. Take the Ides, for instance, most commonly spoken of in reference to Caesar as a warning about the Ides of March (or March 15*, if you prefer English over Latin).

For Caesar, the Ides didn't bode too well. That's when "Et tu, Brute?" was uttered as his close friend joined in with the other Roman senators to slip a blade into the big guy's back.

Caesar had good reason to fear the Ides.

But for us here at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, the Ides means something else altogether.

Next Labor Day weekend, 2001 (notice the coincidence of the year?), will mark the 15th anniversary of *Aboriginal's* birth.

Aboriginal's premier issue was introduced at the 1986 World Science Fiction Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. It was a 24-page tabloid with full-color art and it included work by a certain artist named Bob Eggleton who has since gone on to win a number of Hugos and Chesley Awards.

We chose the tabloid format because we wanted to display the fine art produced in the field in full color and big.

We didn't count on the book dealers who didn't like the format because they had no magazine pockets set up for a tabloid. Since it didn't make sense to try to buck that particular obstacle, we changed *Aboriginal's* size to that of a traditional, full-sized

magazine with its fourth issue. It has remained that size ever since, and was the first full-sized American professional SF magazine to survive in that format in a field that had been dominated by digest-sized magazines.

Next year, when the 59th Worldcon is celebrated in Philadelphia, *Aboriginal* will celebrate its birthday.

Fifteen years is a long time for any science fiction magazine founded since the 1940s.

Most magazines traditionally fold after their third issue (that's when they get the newsstand results from the sale of the first issue).

When *Aboriginal* was launched, another magazine was also launched, or I should say, re-launched.

If made its second coming at that same Worldcon.

The big difference is that *If* never circulated a second issue.

We did, and then a third, and then a fourth, etc.

A new anthology

We plan to celebrate *Aboriginal's* 15th Anniversary with the publication of an anthology of some of the best short stories *Aboriginal* has published in that 15-year span.

More details about that as the time draws near.

A new sister magazine

Last year, the Second Renaissance Foundation, the

owner of *Aboriginal*, entered into an agreement with DNA Publications that requires DNA to handle all, or most, of the business operations of the magazine. This frees us to focus solely on the editorial content.

DNA, headed by Warren Lapine, has grown into a big player among the small magazines in the genre.

The company also publishes *Absolute Magnitude* (its first publication), *Dreams of Decadence* (its second), *Weird Tales* (the oldest magazine in the field and DNA's first acquisition), and *Fantastic* (formerly *Pirate Writings*).

This May, DNA entered into an agreement to purchase the *Science Fiction Chronicle* — its first non-fiction magazine.

Andrew Porter will continue as editor of the *Chronicle*, but DNA plans to significantly increase its circulation and make it the new publication of record for the field.

The shared costs of building subscriptions and soliciting advertising will enable all of the magazines, including *Aboriginal*, to benefit.

It's beginning to look like 2001 will be a good year for *Aboriginal*.

Come to Philly and celebrate with us. □

*The Ides isn't always the 15th. It varies in the old Roman calendar, sometimes it's even the 13th, such as in April when tax day would have to be the 13th to be the Ides, not the 15th.

Look into the Light



With all the years of SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), why haven't we found any alien civilizations?

Probably because we haven't been looking in the right place.

I'd like to find a few alien civilizations. Nothing too fancy, mind you — just a few civilizations in our local Milky Way galaxy, which may have figured out how to live forever, travel at a nice fraction of the speed of light, end all forms of war, and be in general just all-around nice folks who would like to share a few of their insights.

How to find them?

Well, there are a few options. We could just sit around and hope that they land a few of those sublight craft on our planet. Or we could wait a few hundred (or perhaps thousands, or perhaps millions) of years until we have the technology in hand to go tripping out amongst the stars ourselves.

Both those approaches are okay, I suppose, but waiting for them to land here, or us to land there, may take quite a while even if both of us are capable of traveling about the galaxy. You see, there are a lot of stars out there in our local little neighborhood — some 100,000,000,000 strewn out across a galaxy that spans 100,000 light years in length. That's a big chunk of real estate to search through.

Rather than travelling from star to star in hopes of finding someone, it might be more prudent to call ahead and make a reservation. Well, as you might know, we have been calling ahead for a while now. Every radio/TV/radar transmission we make on this planet eventually wanders off into space, going out in all directions, as it travels at the speed of light. The telecasts from the 1996 Olympics are now just reaching the nearest star Alpha Centauri (4 light years away), and if there is anyone listening/watching from the Aldebaran system (68 light years), they are just tuning into Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats,

listening to his plans to lift the U.S. out of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

We've been sending out transmissions for about 100 years now. Think of a bubble with a radius of 100 light years, with the Earth at its center. Any ears listening in for transmissions within that 100-light-year radius bubble might be able to pick up a transmission from us.

Might be.

Think about this. Hop in your car, tune into your favorite radio station, and then head onto the Interstate. After an hour or so, what happens? That crisp and clean music coming through your radio is now full of static, and you find yourself needing to turn up the volume in order to hear it. After another hour, *all* you hear is static.

What's happened?

Remember that 100 light-year radius bubble? Think about it again, except now the bubble has a radius of 100-200 miles. As that bubble grows, its surface area is defined as:

$$A = 4\pi r^2$$

where r is the radius of the bubble. When the radio transmitter shoots out its signal, it has some initial strength that you can think of as being spread out across the surface of that growing bubble. As the signal travels away, the surface area of the bubble gets bigger and bigger. But you are not adding any signal strength.

So what happens?

If you look at a little patch of the surface of that bubble (something a few feet in size which represents the antenna on your car), the amount of radio signal that passes through that little patch becomes less and less, since the total signal is now spread out across an ever increasing area.

Radio waves, light waves, X-rays — all of them work the same way. If you double the distance away from the source of the signal, the signal

strength goes down by a factor of four, because the surface area of the bubble has increased by a factor of four. This phenomenon is what is happening when you listen to your radio (assuming the signal strength is not also getting knocked down by intervening mountains).

Your radio tries to compensate for this effect. The signal that your radio receives is a tiny thing and requires amplification so that you can actually hear it. Some of that amplification takes place in the internal guts of the radio, and some of it is directly accessible to you through the volume knob. The problem is that the amplifier only has so much sensitivity. Eventually the signal gets so low that it begins to get lost in the background hiss of low level radio noise.

You've all experienced the effect of noise and signal. Go to a rock concert, and, even if you're shouting, the background noise (music) is so loud that you cannot hear the signal (shouts) from the person sitting next to you. On the other hand, if you are sitting in the middle of a Nebraska cornfield on a perfectly still morning, you might be able to hear someone shouting for you from half a mile away. But even in that cornfield you eventually reach a limit. You can't hear someone shouting at you from 10 miles away. By then, the signal has spread out across such a large surface area that your ears can't pull it out from the background noises of that 18-wheeler rumbling in the next county, your own breathing, and the rustling of the grasses.

Signal to noise eventually gets you.

What can you do?

The most obvious thing to do is to increase your signal strength. There is absolutely nothing you can do about the signal strength dropping by a factor of four. But if you increase the signal strength by a factor of four, then you'll be back where you started.

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So if you want to send a message to aliens, you'd better use the highest power levels you can get your hands on; if you're listening for aliens, you had better hope that they are using some mighty impressive power levels in their transmissions. Also, when listening, it is important to use the biggest ears you can. Again, think about that bubble. If you can listen over a larger chunk of that ever expanding surface area, you can capture more of the signal. That is why the radio dishes that listen to the heavens are so large — the bigger the dish, the more signal you can grab.

But the stars are really far away.

A big radio station might be blowing away at 100,000 watts of power. Let's say you travel a distance of 100 miles; the effective power has been reduced to 1 watt (this is about the amount of power that a cell phone transmits). Now, when you get to the moon, which is 250,000 miles away, that 1 watt of power has been reduced by the ratio of:

$$4\pi(100)^2/4\pi(250,000)^2 = 1.6 \times 10^{-7}$$

(Note that the 4π values cancel out and you just need to look at the ratio of the r values squared.)

The signal strength is way down by the time you get to the moon. We are getting to the level now where we need to go to scientific notation in order to denote these numbers, where 1.6×10^{-7} is the same as .00000016. This drastic reduction in signal strength between the Earth and the Moon is why the TV transmissions of the moon landings were so fuzzy and full of snow. The signal strength had gotten so low when it finally reached the Earth that it was comparable to the background noise level (the snow in the picture), so that when the signal was received and then amplified, you were amplifying a comparable mix of signal and noise.

The moon is certainly far away, but it is in your back pocket when you consider the distances to the stars. If we consider Alpha Centauri at 4 light years, this is a distance of 2.3×10^{13} miles. So when the creatures at Alpha Centauri wanted to see our moon landing, the signal strength that they received, as compared to what we saw back on Earth was:

$$(2.5 \times 10^5)^2 / (2.3 \times 10^{13})^2 = 1.2 \times 10^{-16}$$

So a signal that we could barely detect on Earth, is further reduced by more than a million billion times when it reaches Alpha Centauri. And remember that this is the nearest star in our galaxy, a mere 4 light years away. Our galaxy spreads out across 100,000 light years.

Are you starting to see the problem?

There may be all sorts of alien civilizations out there sending out their equivalent of *I Love Lucy* transmissions, but we'll never see them, because the signal strength is just too low by the time it reaches us.

What to do?

Well, about the only thing you can do is boost the original strength of the signal. Remember that if signal strength is boosted by a factor of 4, it can travel twice as far before it gets lost in the noise.

A big radio transmitter puts out 105 watts. So, what is the largest amount of power we could beam out across the galaxy if we really wanted to?

Currently, if you added up the total power producing capabilities of everything on planet Earth, you would come to a value of 1×10^{13} watts — this is everything we've got, all the nuclear, coal, oil, solar, biomass, hydroelectric, and even bicycle power that this planet puts out. Now, of course it would be impossible to channel all this into a single transmitter, but for the moment, let's assume that we could.

As part of this example, let's say that the guys from the moon are sending back their Earth-bound signal at a level of 1000 watts — certainly no major league radio station, but a respectable amount of power. This power is 1×10^{10} times less than what planet Earth could put out if it packed all its potential power into the signal. So let's say that we are really proud of our moon landing achievement and want to rebeam the event out across the galaxy.

When we were sending signals from the Moon to the Earth at a level of 1000 watts, the folks at Alpha Centauri were receiving that same signal four years later which was down by a factor of 1.2×10^{-16} compared to what we received on Earth. But by

harnessing all the Earth's power and dumping it into this all powerful rebeamed signal, we have increased the power level by a factor of 1×10^{10} , which means that Alpha Centauri would now be receiving a boosted signal with a strength (compared to what we received on Earth of the original moon landing signal) of:

$$1.2 \times 10^{-16} \times 1 \times 10^{10} = 1.2 \times 10^{-6}$$

That's it. All we received on Earth was a fuzzy and grainy TV signal, but even after boosting the signal strength by a factor of 1×10^{10} (using all the power this planet can muster), the folks at Alpha Centauri still receive a signal that is 1,000,000 times weaker than what we received. Our reception was poor — theirs will be nonexistent.

Is it any wonder we haven't picked up any signals in all our years of searching for them? Our transmitters are just too weak, and the galaxy is just too darn big. What can we do? Even if we could increase the Earth's output power by a factor of ten, the signal strength at Alpha Centauri would still be 100,000 times weaker than *Eagle's* Moon broadcast.

Factors of ten just don't do much for you.

We need a really big transmitter. I mean really big.

How could we build such a thing? Do you think that an alien civilization could build a transmitter with power millions of times larger than what our entire planet is currently putting out? Seems hard to imagine, doesn't it?

So is that it?

Is there just not enough power to send signals to the stars?

Well, there is one source of power in the solar system, a source that actually produces far more power than we would need to accomplish this task.

The Sun.

The Sun sits at the center of our solar system putting out 4×10^{27} watts. This is 4×10^{14} times more power than all of Earth's energy — we are not talking about a few factors of ten here, we are talking about nearly a million billion times more power. Now, if you could harness that power to rebeam our Moon-landing transmission out across space, how much signal strength would the folks at Alpha Centauri receive as compared to what

we did from the original moon transmission?

(Sun transmission power/original 1000 watt transmission) $\times 1.2 \times 10^{16} = 4.8 \times 10^8$

Now we're talking (literally). The signal at Alpha Centauri would be nearly 480 million times stronger than the one we received on Earth. This is signal to burn. You could send that signal out across the galaxy.

So, how do we do it?

Take a lesson from history. Nearly 60 years before the first telegraph, and 80 years before the first telephone, the French had in place a communication system that could send messages across the entire nation of France in 20 minutes. Napoleon used this system in his attempt to conquer Europe. What I'm talking about is the equivalent of an optical telegraph. Every 10 miles or so, the French had set up a big light and a mirror. A signal was sent out by way of dots and dashes, seen at the next station, and passed on.

Optical transmission. This is no different in concept than how signals are currently being sent through optical fiber — the only difference being the transmission rate. So, what does this suggest? Am I saying that we should flick the output of the sun on and off in Morse Code-like fashion in order to send signals out across the galaxy?

Yes.

That is exactly what I am saying.

But you don't have to turn the entire output of the sun on and off to do this. All you need to do is cut off a small fraction of the sun's output. Imagine that you walk into a room in which a single naked 100-watt light bulb is burning. In that room sits a person with a series of small pieces of cardboard which he/she will place in front of the light bulb. As you stand there, the first piece of cardboard is placed in front of the light bulb, directly in front of you. This piece of cardboard blocks half the light from reaching you. As the person raises and lowers the cardboard, your eye has little trouble detecting the difference in light strength between the full 100 watts when the cardboard is raised and the reduced signal when the cardboard partially covers the bulb.

Such a system could be used to send a Morse Code-type message.

Suppose that a smaller piece of cardboard was used, one that only blocked 25% of the light bulb's output power. Your eye could still detect this difference. You could probably use this system by blocking out as little as 10% of the light.

But if you were to replace your eye with a chunk of not very sophisticated electronics, you could detect much smaller differences in output, especially if there was a periodic nature to the switching between the two states of light output — this is how your radio works. A radio transmission typically consists of a periodic sinusoidal wave of a fixed frequency called the carrier. The actual signal that contains the information you want to pass along is superimposed on this signal. When your radio receives the carrier signal (and the information signal that is impressed onto it), its electronics subtract the carrier signal, leaving the information behind.

What we need to implement in our solar-based radio system is a photoreceiver and a lock-in amplifier. The photoreceiver turns the incoming light (photons) into electrons — similar to how an antenna and the circuits attached to it turn a radio wave into a stream of electrons. In the case of our solar radio, the electrons are then sent into a lock-in amplifier, which does not amplify the entire input signal, but only that signal that has a periodic component to it (like the carrier wave).

Think back to our rock concert analogy. The background blare of music represents the sun's output. It is blinding and blocks out all smaller signals that are coming to you, such as a person across the stadium who is singing a perfect A note (this is the periodic signal). If you tuned the lock-in amplifier to the frequency corresponding to the A note, that is all that it would hear. All other signals would fall outside its listening range — it acts as a very narrow bandpass filter, letting only a certain frequency through. In essence, the lock-in is deaf to all frequencies except for the one at which the perfect A note is being fired at you.

But what if you don't know that it is a perfect A note coming your way. Perhaps it is a B note, or an F sharp, or an A note stepped up one or two

octaves. What can you do? It is quite easy. Just let the lock-in sample all those different frequencies — tune into one frequency, and then move onto the next, in the same way you might turn the tuning knob on your radio, working your way up and down the dial (up and down the frequency spectrum).

So how do we turn the sun into a transmitter capable of sending out some useful signals? All we need to do is block a small percentage of the sunlight in a periodic manner. How much sunlight needs to be blocked? That depends on the ability of the receiver to ignore the blinding background glare of the sun and pick up our little signal (this is like seeing the gentle rolling waves on the surface of the ocean — when looking at a column of water two miles high, it is tough to see the two-foot-high waves on top of it. But the lock-in amplifier removes the two miles of water and lets you focus on the remaining two-foot-tall waves). We'll use a figure of merit called signal to ambient, or S/A. If S is the strength of our periodic signal and A is the background ambient glare of the sun, then how small an S could we expect an alien civilization to pick up?

Twenty-first century humans would have little trouble using our electronics to detect an S/A of 10^{-6} . So let's look at the case of aliens who can detect over the range of 10^{-4} (not very sharp aliens) to 10^{-12} (some very bright aliens). To do this, we are talking about blocking off a portion of the sun's power that ranges from a factor of 10^{-4} to one of 10^{-12} . Under those conditions, for a given S/A, the actual signal strength is shown in Table I:

S/A	S (watts)
10^{-4}	4×10^{23}
10^{-6}	4×10^{21}
10^{-8}	4×10^{19}
10^{-10}	4×10^{17}
10^{-12}	4×10^{15}

We are talking large amounts of power here, anywhere from a minimum of 400 to a maximum of 400 billion times more power than our entire planet puts out.

So how would we block off some of the sun's output?

What I propose is that we install a very special ribbon around the sun — a ribbon that sits at the orbital distance of Mercury. This ribbon would completely encircle the sun, forming a closed loop. Actually, we would want two of these ribbons, placed perpendicular to each other. This is so no matter from where an intelligent alien may view the sun, one of these ribbons would be blocking the Sun's output in its direction.

This ribbon could be made out of a host of materials, but what is required is something that can optically modulate the sunlight striking it — that is, let the sunlight either pass through it or not. For example, under some conditions the ribbon would be transparent, while under other conditions it would absorb the incoming sunlight. An object that absorbs light will heat up and eventually emit this absorbed energy in the form of light. However, the frequency of emitted energy can be designed to be in the nonvisible portion of the spectrum — chiefly in the infrared. To someone observing our yellow sun, it would appear to dim when the ribbon was absorbing.

Or, instead of making the ribbon absorbing, we could make it reflecting, and use special optical coatings to shift the wavelength of reflected light out of the visible spectrum. There are many ways to make such ribbons, out of both semiconducting and insulating dielectric materials, all of which can rapidly change their optical properties (i.e., reflective, absorptive, transmissive) as a function of applied electric fields (meaning that they would change if you applied a voltage).

Current optical fiber systems use all these methods to manipulate signals.

Just how wide would such a solar spanning ribbon be?

For just a moment, think about a sphere completely surrounding the Sun at Mercury's orbit (we don't want to be much closer in than this — there are severe heating issues with the ribbon if we place it much closer). Such a sphere would have a surface area of:

$$\text{Area Sphere} = 4\pi r^2$$

This is the same formula we used when thinking about bubbles. In this case, the value of r would be 60 million kilometers or 6.0×10^{10} meters, which

would give this sphere a surface area of 4.6×10^{21} m². If we built this sphere and could turn it from absorbing to transmitting, we would have a S/A of 1. But we don't need anything this great. We want to see what area we need for the two ribbons for the cases of S/A ranging from 10^{-4} to 10^{-12} . Now, a ribbon has an area of:

$$\text{Area Ribbon} = 2\pi r d$$

where $2\pi r$ is the length of the ribbon, and d is the width of the ribbon. Our total area will be twice this, since we will be using two ribbons. Therefore, for a given S/A we can calculate how wide this ribbon needs to be from the above equation (remembering that we have two ribbons):

$$d = \text{Area Ribbon} / \pi r$$

where r is 6×10^{10} m and Area Ribbon is Area Sphere x S/A. Using this, we can solve for the width of the ribbon, d , as shown in Table II

Table II			
S/A	S (watts)	Area Ribbon (m ²)	d (m)
10^{-4}	4×10^{23}	4.6×10^{17}	2.4×10^6
10^{-6}	4×10^{21}	4.6×10^{15}	2.4×10^4
10^{-8}	4×10^{19}	4.6×10^{13}	2.4×10^2
10^{-10}	4×10^{17}	4.6×10^{11}	2.4
10^{-12}	4×10^{15}	4.6×10^9	0.024

With an S/A of only 10^{-4} , this ribbon has a width of 2,400 km. This is some ribbon. But if we are thinking about sending out signals to those really advanced civilizations that can handle S/A of 10^{-12} , then the width of the ribbon would only have to be 2.4 cm, which is just a hair under one inch.

That's it — a ribbon one inch wide wrapped twice around the sun could send out signals which are 400 times greater than the total power put out by planet Earth.

To place such a ribbon in solar orbit, I could envision a series of spacecraft, spewing ribbon out like a spider spins a web, locating every few 100 km along it the electronics required to change its optical properties.

Am I suggesting that we do this, that we build this ribbon?

No.

At least not today. We are probably 50 to 100 years away from having

the ability to spin these ribbons at the orbit of Mercury. However, that is not to say that other intelligent species are not at the technological level to do this.

This may be child's play to them.

We have been listening to the stars for nearly 40 years now, trying to pick up radio signals from alien civilizations, signals that in all likelihood are so small and buried so far beneath the background noise that we can never find them. Certainly an alien civilization some 100 or more years more technologically advanced would know this, would recognize that it is ridiculous to attempt to build the type of transmitters needed to send signals powerful enough to be detected across a galaxy. Why attempt to build such a transmitter, when their own sun offers a much larger source of power?

We are not ready to send signals by this method.

But we sure are ready to receive such signals. We have the capability of seeing such signals right now. We

have the telescopes to gather the light, and we have the electronics to look for the signals buried within the light coming from those distant stars. At this very moment, Earth could well be bombarded with signals from thousands, possibly even millions, of alien civilizations, and all we need to do to detect these optical signals is to stop listening with our large radio dishes, and start looking with our optical telescopes.

This can be done.

Today. □

The Day the Rapture Came to Town

By Sue Storm

Art by Larry Blamire

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth ... In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.

The knock sounded like someone stepping on a frog, squishy and unpleasant. Even before the hair on the back of my neck stood up, I knew who it was. I didn't want to open the door.

But I did.

My parents stood on the porch, Pap with part of his head crunched in from the car wreck, and Mom with jagged cuts all over her face. Well, of course, that wasn't the worst part. The worst part was they'd had six months to, uh, decompose. And there were plenty of little — things willing to help the process along.

Pap peered up at me with his one good eye socket. "Howdy, son," he said, though it came out more like "howry won" because of his deteriorated jaw muscles.

"Hi, Pap. Hi, Mom." I sighed. I'd been expecting them.

You see, this "Rapture" bit started out OK, with the graves opening up and all, just like the church folks said. But then some kind of serious glitch developed.

The bodies didn't rise on up to Heaven.

Nope, you could forget that. The bodies didn't go anywhere. They just milled around.

And "incorruptible"? Whew! I don't care — you can be the Grand Poobah Himself, but when you open up somebody's grave and pull out a rotting corpse, you've got a serious odor problem on your hands.

"Oh, Jimmy, we missed you so much!" Mom gushed.

My folks had died in a car wreck six months earlier. It hit me hard at the time. But I was getting over it, moving on with my life, you know? I had plans. Big plans.

Mom held out her arms to hug me. I stepped back. Uh-uh. No way. Did I mention the smell?

"I missed you both, too," and I really hadn't planned on seeing you again. I added that last

part in my head.

"Um, uh, where you off to now?" Grinning my best, good-son grin, I managed what I hoped was a look of complete innocence.

"Why, Jimmy. Where on earth would we go? This is our home. We're staying right here. With you."

I closed my eyes. Tried to breathe through my mouth.

"Look," I finally said. When I opened my eyes, they both smiled at me. I could see right into Dad's mouth. Things crawled in there.

It's not my fault they botched this Rapture gig. "You — you're supposed to be *dead*. Dead and buried. I don't know. I don't think I can handle this."

My head hurt. I thought about Susie, who'd moved in with me right after the funeral. Our relationship sure didn't need two corpses cluttering it up.

"You don't know what it's like," I pleaded. "I was just getting over your deaths, and now here you are, back again."

"Poor little Jimmy," Mom said.

Pap shook his head and clacked his teeth in sympathy. "Well, don't you see, son? We're all together now. We don't have to be separated, not ever again."

"Oh, shit," I mumbled.

Mom's hand with its bits of flesh and skin smacked me across the mouth. I tasted formaldehyde.

"That's no way to talk in front of your parents!" she snapped, straightening the collar on her good blue dress, which didn't look so great after being worn by a decomposing body for six months.

"Mom, I'm nineteen years old! You can't just hit me like I was ten!"

"Dead or not, James Moe Slate, I'm still your mother and you will show me some respect!"

I hung my head — and thanked whatever powers-that-be Susie wasn't around to hear my middle name. And if you think that moniker came from one of the Three Stooges, you're, uh, dead right. That ancient comedy team was entirely responsible for Dad's unfortunate sense of humor.



Several skeletons and corpses crowded onto the lawn, creeping closer and closer to the porch. Homeless, most of them, they wanted some place to live. While the majority lacked Mom's ability to strike out, we all wondered how long it'd be before they banded together and demanded stuff the rest of us took for granted — decent housing, nice clothes, some kind of job to keep them busy.

"Look," I tried again, eyeing the growing crowd with concern. "Can't you just wander around like the rest of them? I mean, surely God'll have this whole thing straightened out in no time."

"And where do you think you'll be when He does?" My mother leaned forward until the smell of her rotting face nearly overcame me. No breath mint could help this. "Throwing out your own parents! You'll go down with the goats, James. With the goats!"

She crossed her arms across her shattered rib cage. Pap looked up, then down. He'd always been uncomfortable when Mom talked religion.

With the goats. I tried to remember. Something about separating the sheep from the goats. And the sheep must be the good guys, if she lumped me in with the goats. What *would* God do with the goats? Maybe I better back up a little.

"OK," I sighed. "Come on in. But I gotta warn you, I made a few changes."

Stepping back, I let my folks shuffle in. A skeleton on the steps lunged for the door. I slammed it shut and clipped off a hand. The finger bones twitched briefly and then went still. I kicked the thing into a closet.

"A few changes? A few changes? *This* is what you call a few changes?" My mother's voice whined in outrage.

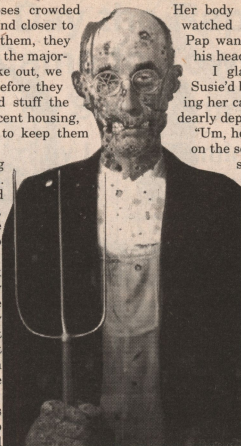
Impact with the steering wheel had punctured her lungs. I was grateful she lacked her normal decibel range. A strained smile on my face, I waved at the music posters, the guitars and amps, the drum set in the corner.

"This is where we practice."

She turned to me, and if there weren't tears in her eyes, the maggots working there did a mighty good imitation.

"Oh, Jimmy, my doilies, my needlepoint ..." Her voice trailed off.

Gingerly, she sat on a large, colorful cushion.



Her body sighed in a liquid way, and I watched a stain spread over the fabric. Pap wandered around the room shaking his head.

I glanced nervously at my watch. Susie'd be home any minute now, assuming her car made it through the crowds of dearly departed.

"Um, how about a little TV?" I switched on the set even though I knew what we'd see — round-the-clock coverage of the rotting dead on every station. All except the kids' channel, which persisted in showing reruns of *The Brady Bunch* and *Dennis the Menace* as if nothing were wrong.

Sure enough, yet another televangelist with big hair popped into focus. Shrieking about repentance and the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (who'd apparently missed their cue), he assured his audience a sizable contribution to "God's work" could fix this. I hit the remote before Mom started looking for her purse.

The newsman on the next channel reported the mayor's

efforts to get the situation declared a garbage problem.

"The sanitation workers are still on strike. Their spokesman says — and we quote — 'Hauling away zombies ain't in our contract.'"

Coincidentally, the next channel showed a courtroom where a group of dead lawyers was apparently challenging that very term "zombies."

"We deserve the rights of any other differently abled person," a woman told the court. One of her eyes hung from a red string and rolled around her cheek every time she turned her head. "We want to be treated with respect. Call us living impaired, breathing challenged, blood free, flesh-inconvenienced, or grave-afflicted, but never," she pounded a desk and parts of her hand flew across the courtroom, "never call us 'zombies.'"

I stood in my music room and stared at my "living impaired" parents. Pap kept milling around as if lost. Mom glared at me. She tried to purse her lips like she always did when she got mad. Only not much was left of her lips. I sighed and switched off the TV.

Pap stumbled down the hall, stringing my nerves tighter by a few notches.

"Pap?" I called. "You want anything, maybe some milk? A pop? How about some cookies?"

He wandered back in the room dangling a lacy

pink bra from one of his rotting fingers.

"Son." He looked at me mournfully. "Is there something you want to tell us?"

Mom screamed. "Oh no! Jimmy, my God, you're not one of those — those —"

"Geez, Mom! Of course not! I, well, I ... it's just that I —"

Four moldy eye sockets fixed on me.

"It belongs to my girlfriend." I closed my eyes. "She lives here."

"You're having carnal relations with a girl in our home?" Mom's screech came out in a breathy whisper. I smelled rotting gases. Nope, definitely *no* breath mints.

"I, uh ... yeah, I guess that's about right."

"Of all the tomfool things —"

"Beverly!" Pap put his hand on her shoulder. Unfortunately, it was the hand holding Susie's bra. Mom screamed as it touched her.

"Get that whore's trappings away from me!"

Pap shook the bra free. It fell to the floor along with a few chunks of his flesh. I shuddered. Within minutes, they'd turned the house into a cleaning nightmare.

"Mother," Pap said softly. "The boy's grown. He's got a right."

"But they're living in sin!"

He bent over and whispered something in the hole where her ear used to be. Her hand flew to her mouth, and, I swear, she actually blushed. Even with no blood in her. Not for the first time, I wondered about them. High school sweethearts, I knew. But had they ever ...?

I shuddered again. Bad enough thinking of your parents in bed. But when they're sitting in your living room spreading rotting bits of themselves everywhere, it's more than you want to know.

Much, much more.

"When do we get to meet this young lady?"

Mom asked in a sugary voice. Uh-oh — I saw her wheels turning with images of wedding showers, engagement parties, church decorations ...

"Now, Mom," I warned. "She's just — well, we're still getting to know one another."

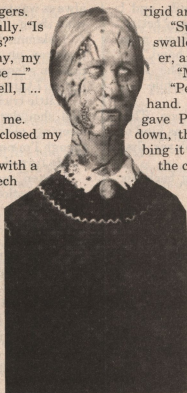
My mother tried to sniff through a missing nose.

"I'd say you knew each other pretty well."

That's when the door blew open.

"Hey, Jimmy, look what I —"

Susie stopped in the doorway, her hand frozen in midair holding a shopping bag from a fancy store. I winced. Susie sure did like to shop. Closing the door behind her, I gently lowered her



rigid arm and took her fingers in mine.

"Susie, I'd like you to meet my parents." I swallowed hard. "This is Beverly, my mother, and Howard, my father."

"Mom, Pap, this is Susie Nickerson."

"Peessed," Pap hissed, holding out his hand. My girlfriend stared at it in horror. I gave Pap a warning look, and he glanced down, then hurriedly dropped his hand, rubbing it on his pants. Some of it remained on the cloth.

Susie whispered fiercely in my ear. "What are they doing here?"

Shrugging, I whispered back. "It's their house."

"You told me it was your house."

"I thought so. They were dead, after all — I figured it'd be a permanent thing."

"So, Susie, what do you do?" Mom's acid voice cut through our whispers.

My girlfriend frowned. She avoided talking to the "breathing-challenged." It wasn't cool.

"I, uh, like, go to school. Hair

school."

Mom's eyebrows, about the only thing still intact on her face, rose to half mast.

"Hair?" She gave me that *look*.

I grinned feebly.

The doorbell rang, making us all jump. Saved by the bell, I thought, though I opened the door with apprehension. What next?

A young man in ragged jeans and a red flannel shirt stood on our porch. He didn't seem to be decomposing, though his feet were bare. He wore his brown hair long, and I couldn't help noticing he looked an awful lot like Lorenzo Lamas. Unconsciously, I moved to block Susie's view.

"Jimmy Slate?"

I nodded.

The young man stuck out his hand. "Jesus."

My mouth dropped. "No shit?"

"No shit," Jesus repeated solemnly.

"What the hell ... I mean, You look so ..."

"Normal. I know. I get that a lot. May I come in?"

"Uh, sure." Backing away, I tried to stay between Him and Susie. I mean, how was a guy to compete with the Son of God? Especially when He looked like a major star.

Jesus nodded politely to my parents. "Ma'am," He said, ducking his head. Mom looked about ready to faint.

"Hi!" Susie stepped out from behind me. "I'm Susie. Gee, I've always wanted to meet You," she bubbled. "You, like, have great hair!"

"Thanks." He gave her a sweet smile, and I groaned inside. The day wasn't getting any better.

But then Jesus turned to me. "Some guys down at Roxy's bar told me you have a band."

"Yeah," I answered, mystified. "The Bare Buttonholes. We've been together for a while."

"You got a trumpet player?"

"We auditioned last week, hired one. This other guy played much better, but he was kind of a show-stealer. You know, not a team player, that type of thing. I sent him on his way."

Jesus heaved a huge sigh, flicking back his hair. Susie squealed.

"Yeah." He nodded. "The guy's got a big ego problem."

"You know him?"

"Uh-huh. Didn't he tell you his name?"

I shook my head, not really remembering.

"Gabriel."

Two live mouths and two dead ones fell open in perfect synchrony. I was the only one to utter a sound.

"Oh."

Jesus spread his hands. "Gabe's the problem, see. We can't really get on with this Rapture thing until he turns up. He disappears for months on end. Goes slumming on earth, joins up with little bands here and there. Doesn't matter that we all get really piss—, excuse me, *upset* with him. He lives in his own world. Takes off whenever he feels like it."

Jesus shook his hair back, making Susie's knees buckle.

"Dad and I, We had this Rapture thing scheduled pretty far ahead of time, and he still took off. Dad's having a holy fit. He sent me to find the geek."

Talk about rapture. I'd never seen Susie look so cow-eyed. She kept smiling and thrusting out her boobs. I felt pretty steamed.

"Well, he split, and I don't know where he went. So can't help you there." I opened the door, rattling it to show Him I meant business. "Bye."

"James Moe!" Mom bellowed. "You *cannot* throw out the Son of God!"

Jesus' eyes sparkled with mischief. "James Moe?" He mouthed. I groaned.

"Really wouldn't mind a bite to eat, if you had it," He said out loud.

A swarm of "flesh-inconvenienced" made a run for the porch. I shut the door.

"Fine," I said shortly. "Susie, why don't you fix us something?"

"Fix it yourself, you male chauvinist pig," she said in a dreamy, sexy voice, her eyes still fastened on Jesus.

"Oh, cripes." I headed off to the kitchen.

Behind me, Mom geared up.

"You know, Jesus, Sir, there's something I've

always wanted to ask You. About that water into wine thing ..."

I slammed pots and pans around, throwing together an omelet and some hash browns. Sudden silence from the other room brought me to a stop. I turned.

"Little trick of mine." Jesus rolled His flannel-clad shoulder toward the living room. "They're sleeping peacefully. Your dad's even snoring, though I'm not sure how."

He turned his baby blues on me.

"Listen, man, I need your help. Can you post another notice for a trumpet player? I've got to find Gabe."

"But I just hired one." I stirred the eggs, ignoring His stare.

"Think, Jim. I find Gabe. He does his thing with the trumpet. Your parents? Poof! Gone again, and for good this time."

"Yeah, but what happens to the rest of us? Don't we get thrown into a lake of fire or something?"

"Aw, heck no! Your world's messed up pretty bad from those hot-shooting journalists back in the — well, I can't really call them 'the good old days.' Anyway, they sure did a tabloid number on that Bible they put out. And all the religions you guys get from that one little book? I tell you, sometimes Dad and I just watch amazed."

He shook his head.

"This Rapture bit — We're just cleaning up some loose ends. I swear, Jim, that's all it is. Crowd control. Earth's getting a little overcrowded."

"But how ...? I mean, what about their, uh, state?"

"The rot and maggots?"

Suddenly the eggs didn't look too good.

"Don't worry, all that flesh stuff is temporary. They won't need it where they're going."

"Where's that?" The twinge of worry for my parents surprised me. "I mean, will they be OK?"

"Oh yeah, We got a dandy place for them. It's fixed up real nice. Your mom and dad — they'll dance and walk on beaches in the moonlight and —"

I threw up my hands. "Stop! That's all I want to know."

"So you'll do it?"

I nodded. "Sure."

"Thanks, man."

He put his hand on my shoulder. "And, Jim? Another thing. Dump the chick."

"Susie? I know she's a little superficial, but she's, uh, um ..."

"Great in bed?"

My cheeks blazed.

Jesus squeezed my arm.

"Yours isn't the only bed she's great in," He said softly.

"What?"

"Your new trumpet player? He's boffing her. Where do you think she went this morning? That sweater in her shopping bag is one she bought last week."

My gut felt like I'd eaten those eggs raw while thinking about maggots.

"You're not just saying that so I'll fire him and get Gabe — uh, I mean Gabriel, back. Are you?"

His sea-blue eyes looked straight into mine.

"Would I lie to you?"

It didn't take long. Gabriel showed up at our first audition, and Jesus nabbed him. The angel looked a little sheepish, but not much. I saw what Jesus meant about the big ego. Guess when you're the best trumpet player around, you get a little pumped up.

The other trumpet player — well, let's just say me and my band members are pretty tight. I didn't need to ask why they hustled him off, and those noises from the alley back of Roxy's weren't any of my concern, either.

Susie I took care of myself. When I told her it was over, she screamed and cried and carried on. But I stopped her cold by opening the door and showing her the flock of "grave-afflicted" girls converging on her beautiful, expensive clothes — that I'd thrown all over the front yard.

Then she *really* started screaming.

Last I saw, she was hightailing it down the street, her arms full of clothes, and a whole pack of rotting women hot on her heels. One of them reached out with skeletal fingers and plucked Susie's red silk blouse right off her back.

Kinda made me feel warm all over.

Priately, Jesus told me sound-off time was ten the next morning. I fixed Mom and Pap a real nice dinner, even though they didn't have an appetite. Afterwards, they told old stories I'd heard a hundred times before. But I didn't care. They were my folks. In the morning, Mom insisted they change into clean clothes, even though we all knew it didn't matter. I think Mom wanted things to be as normal as possible.

We went outside at five till. Pap slapped me on the back and told me to have a good life.

"You have a good afterlife," I quipped, my eyes oddly wet.

Mom leaned over and gently pecked my cheek as I held my breath.

"I'm glad you got rid of that little strumpet. Hair college? Jimmy, you can do a lot better."

"I know, Mom."

Gray clouds tore free and drifted away. The sun blazed down, brighter than I'd ever seen it. Warmup notes floated through the air. I recognized Gabriel's distinctive style right away.

"You hear, Jimmy?" Mom gazed at me urgently. "You're a fine boy, a really wonderful young man, and you deserve someone special. You wait until she shows up. Promise?"

Impulsively, I hugged her, decomposing flesh and all. "I will, Mom. I promise."

Suddenly, Gabriel swung into a jazzy rendition of "Rapture's Here, Folks." The trumpet notes rang out, clarion sweet. Mom and Pap turned their faces up.

From all around me, dead people rose into the air and disappeared in a blaze of sunlight. My folks were gone. I swallowed the lump in my throat.

"Love you, Mom!" I yelled. "You, too, Pap. I love you!"

Jesus appeared beside me, still wearing denim and flannel. He'd tied His hair back in a ponytail.

"You gonna be OK?"

I nodded, not trusting myself to speak.

"You take care of yourself, man. What your mom said — it's true. Just hang tight."

"OK," I gulped again. "You too, Jesus. Take care. Will I see you again?"

He smiled, and we clasped elbows.

Clouds once again dimmed the sunlight. I breathed in deep, tasting fresh air for the first time in ages. Streets, yards appeared empty in all directions. Some of my neighbors poked their heads out of windows, smiling tentatively.

Gabe's notes rang in my ears. That guy sure could play. I shook my head regretfully.

Now where was I gonna find another trumpet player? □

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Good Dog

By Ken Rand

Art by Carol Heyer

Shifting, silvery rain curtains hid even the nearest trees of the forest in the mist so typical of mid-autumn in the Cascade Mountains. As he peered through the gloom ahead for sign of the human he hunted, the Truan failed to see the broken ground on the narrow trail, ready to slip away from the cliff side. The crack in the muddy trail split from the ledge with a slurp under his weight and the alien toppled, scrambling at the edge.

"Garras," Silver barked. She had been trotting two steps behind the Truan. When he fell, she backed away from the mudslide, paws digging for support.

The alien's pack caught on a bush and tore away from his shoulder. He fell. The pack stayed.

The Truan landed with a solid splash in the shallow rock-strewn creek bed ten meters below. He screamed in pain and rolled over in the water, white bone protruding through a bloody hole in his trousers just below the knee.

"Garras, are you all right? How can I help you?" Silver's tail flipped in agitation as she paced at the broken pathway edge. The rain pelted down in thunderous sheets, and she had to shout. It hurt her throat. "Your pack came off. Do you need it?"

"Yes." The Truan puffed, face pale, as he replaced the jostled breathing tube in the corner of his mouth. He took a few deep breaths, complexion returning to its normal mottled yellow. "Painpatch. In the pack. Toss it down."

In a moment, Silver held the pack in her teeth over the precipice, mud-caked paws braced against the slippery edge. She released it, and it slipped down the steep embankment. It splashed into the surging stream a few centimeters from Garras.

Hands trembling, he lifted the pack from the water, opened a pouch, and withdrew the medkit. He took out a painpatch and slapped it against his knee above the injury.

He sighed.

"What else can I do?" Silver had trotted to a more stable part of the rain-sodden trail a dozen meters back.

"I'll need you to come down and help set the fracture."

Silver looked around. Dull grayness pervaded the sky and reduced the forest to muted greens and grays. "There's a place around the bend fifty meters back. It slopes. Maybe I can slide down it. But I don't know how we'll get out."

"Worry about that later." The Truan sounded dazed as he sputtered in the rain. "Now, help me set this."

Silver ran back to the slope, where she slid in loose mud down to the stream bed. Walking upstream among the rain-slick rocks as big as her head became a problem in balance. Silver knew if she slipped, she could tear a paw, break something. Or drown.

It took a few minutes before she rounded the bend and saw the Truan, half in and half out of the rushing, muddy water. She loped to him as fast as she could in the uncertain footing.

"Good dog," Garras rubbed her sodden fur with one of his three tapered fingers. Even in the pelting rain, he smelled minty, the characteristic Truan scent.

"As good as a lom?" Silver asked.

Lom. The Truan dog-equivalent, which the company didn't allow on Earth. Some Truan had engineered enhancements of native canines to simulate their missed pets. Like Silver.

Garras smiled and patted Silver on the head. "Better than the one I had when I was a child."

Silver wagged her tail. "What do you want me to do?"

While Silver had been working her way to him, Garras had sat up, legs spread out underwater. A pink streamer wiggled downstream from the injured leg, around which he'd set a tourniquet. He held a rope coiled in one hand. In one end, he had tied a loop.

"Put this around my foot."

Silver complied, and the Truan pulled the loop tight around his ankle. "Now take the rope." He pointed at a slender but sturdy-looking tree stump a half dozen meters across the creek on the opposite bank.

"I see what you have in mind." Silver took the rope in her mouth and climbed past the stump, slipping in the mud, playing out the rope in increments as she returned to Garras.

"Now comes the hard part." Garras gritted clamped teeth-ridges as he pulled. The rope tightened. Sweat beaded on his hairless head as he grunted with the effort. At last, the fractured bone withdrew under the skin. Fresh blood gushed into the water.

Garras gasped through his breathing tube.

"Is the tube all right?" Silver sniffed at it, nose



close to the alien's waxy skin.

"Yes." With powerful thrusts of long, skinny arms, Garras pushed his body backward across the stream to the opposite bank, where he pulled himself above the water, onto the muddy embankment. The stream had risen a few centimeters since Silver had entered it. Garras opened a metallic box at his belt.

He fidgeted with a small keypad in the box. "The locator is still functional."

"Do you want to call in relief?" A lifter from the Seattle mining center could land at a meadow a half kilometer back, at the foot of the canyon.

"Give up the hunt?" Garras snorted. "I came for a trophy, and I'm going to get it."

Silver thought about Garras's injury. The alien had eight days left on his license. His injury would heal enough to allow him sufficient mobility on the last four days. He'd stay in the field until the last hour, trying for the trophy kill, a wild buck human. Then he'd call for a lifter. But not before.

Wild humans on Earth were thought to be nearly extinct, so the Truan government protected them, the hunt a concession to a powerful few who craved the sport. Only one permit per season was allowed on the North American continent. Garras had won the competitive lottery for the season, at great cost. The hunt of a lifetime. A stingy success ratio of one in twenty hunts meant a kill carried much prestige. No, Garras would not quit.

Steam began to rise from the alien's wet clothes. "The heating unit wasn't damaged. Can you fetch the pack?"

It lay in the middle of the stream, a brown lump around which the rushing water cascaded. Silver went back into the stream, almost swimming in the deepening water, gripped the broken pack strap in her teeth, and dragged it to Garras. The pack pulled at her, dragging downstream.

"We need to get out." Garras pulled the rifle from its holster on the side of the pack. "The water's rising."

"How?" Silver eyed the narrow defile.

Garras popped a round into the rifle chamber, aimed the barrel at the gray sky, and touched the firing stud. Blinding white flame spat out with a soft pop, and Silver felt the heated air singe her hide.

Garras patted the weapon with affection. "Made to last, even in Earth weather. I can use this as a cane. We can use the rope to haul us up."

"The embankment downstream might do. It's rocky, solid. Shrubbery above the trail to anchor a rope."

Garras shook his head. "It's below the slide. The human is above. Scout upstream. See if you can find a better spot."

Silver lifted her nose, sniffing.

"The human." Garras tensed. He hefted the rifle, barrel pointed upstream. "Do you smell it?"

"Just a hint. It's hard to smell anything in the rain, the wind. But I think the rain will end soon."

"Good. We need to regain its scent. It can't be far."

Silver scouted upstream.

She found a place to regain the trail, and the two set out. In reverse of their usual order, Silver walked ahead of the limping alien a few meters, calling back warnings of slippery stretches or roots that might trip him.

In a few minutes the torrential rains eased to a drizzle and then the clouds dissipated, leaving a cold blue sky to soak up steam rising from the forest in the midafternoon sun. The cliffside along which they followed the human tapered to a gradual slope, and the stream broadened. Kilometers ahead, the glacier that fed the stream loomed below a massive gray-white granite wall, the mountain's serrated, snow-packed peaks.

As the sun touched the western horizon, they stopped in a meadow to camp.

Silver caught a rabbit to supplement their rations.

"Good dog." Garras smiled as he munched his share of the roast rabbit, juice running down his chin.

Silver grunted.

They set out heat units and put up a smartwire perimeter.

"Which one is yours?" Silver gazed into the starscape.

"Truas?" Garras lay on his back on his sleep pad, hands behind his head. "You can't see it in the northern hemisphere." He grunted. "Lucky me. I asked to be assigned to the Brisbane center, but no."

"Do you miss it? Your home?"

Garras hesitated, then sighed, a lonely sound. "I suppose I do. Now and then."

Silver lay silent. Crickets scraped and frogs croaked near the stream, a gurgling lullaby. Far to the east, a coyote helloed.

"Silver?"

"Hm."

"Do you mind if I ask you, well, I mean —"

"Don't mind. Ask."

A pause. "What do you — think? I mean —"

"Yes?"

"You seem like lom, but sometimes you seem — I don't know. Distant. I can't tell what you're thinking."

"I see." Silver couldn't see the alien in the dark beyond the campfire's glow. "We are intelligent now, like your lom."

"Yes, but lom were — loyal. You know?"

"Ah. As dogs were once man's best friend."

"Exactly. But now you serve Truan and hunt humans."

"You're confused."

"Yes, I —"

"You wonder about dogs' loyalties."
"Or change in loyalties, actually. Are you, I mean —"

"Are we now as loyal to you as we were to humans?" Silver snorted, a choking noise. "When dogkind became intelligent, Garras, other changes occurred that —" Silver suddenly sat up, ears perked, sniffing the thin mountain air.

Garras stirred, rifle in hand. "The human? Is it far?"

"North. Moving away."

Garras relaxed. "He moves in the night. Frightened."

They listened to the night sounds for a while. Then they slept, both with their own thoughts.

The hike to the glacier proved rigorous as the country grew rougher. The human kept ahead a kilometer or less. In six days, Garras's leg had healed well enough to allow a vigorous trot at times.

In the late afternoon before the last day of his permit, Garras called a halt. They made camp at a spot with a good view of the glacier where the quarry lay.

Garras scanned the ice sheet with his scope. "I see nothing. The ice reflects infrared."

"Its scent is clear. A kilometer away." She pointed with her nose. "That way."

"Behind one of those boulders then, or in a crevasse, where it can huddle tonight with no fire, cold and miserable." The glacier carved a wide swath between two rock towers, like upraised fists. The human had cornered itself against those walls. "Tomorrow we take it."

"We will have to get close if it holes up like a rabbit."

"In one of those crevasses? No problem. The human will be tired. And hungry."

"Maybe."

"Oh?"

"Humans hunt, too."

Garras chuckled. "On the glacier? What can it hunt? Worms and mice?"

Silver didn't answer. They slept.

In the morning, the sun's glare off the ice sheet forced them to don goggles. They found the human's trail quickly.

Silver nosed a scuffed ice patch. "A game trail here." She looked to the west. "The trail takes advantage of easier footing along the glacier and goes back down to the forest below to the west. The human was headed north, but he stopped here and turned west, followed this trail."

Silver trotted westward.

Garras followed, reversing their usual order, giving Silver a clear field to scent. "I thought you

smelled him north, up the glacier."

Silver didn't answer. A hundred meters along the trail, she stopped and sniffed in a circle. "He followed the trail to throw me off, confuse me with deer, bear, wolverine, cat scent. He left the trail here."

Silver turned from the game trail and headed north, up the sloping glacier.

"His track is clear now."

"How old?"

"Last night."

Silver led the way, nose to the ground, at a brisk trot.

"Silver?"

"Hm."

"You said the human is trying to hide its scent, to throw you off the trail?"

"Yes."

"How does it know a dog follows it?"

Silver stopped and looked back at Garras, two paces behind. They stood on an open ice field, above the deepest, widest crevasses, which they'd bypassed, as had the human. Above and to their left, an arm of the glacier had split off, parallel cracks in the smaller arm marking its slow progress around a granite spike. Beyond the smaller glacier, a vertical granite wall. There the human hid.

"I think he watched when you fell in the creek."

"Why didn't you tell me then?"

Silver paused. "I didn't want to alarm you."

"Alarm me? Why would that alarm me?"

"I think this one wants to kill you. If he can."

Garras snorted, wiped his nose with the back of his hand, and eyed the granite spike where his trophy hid. "Against a .38 GV Bolter," he patted the rifle, "it wouldn't stand a chance."

"You were separated from the rifle when you fell."

"But you brought it to me."

Again, Silver paused. "Yes."

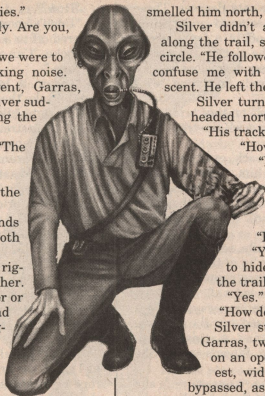
Garras patted Silver's head. "Good dog." The alien scanned the ice field ahead.

As the sun peaked in a cloudless pale blue sky, the hunter and his dog companion approached the granite spire at the main ice field edge and circled it. The ice had crumbled in the offshoot glacier arm's slow progress downslope on the spire's far side. The footing became awkward over the uneven ground.

"How far now?" Garras whispered, leaning over Silver's shoulder. His breath came in hot, white puffs.

"Just above that ice bridge. In that first crack, I think. Or the second. Forty meters."

The bridge, an ice thread spanning five meters across a long, deep crack in the ice sheet, sloped



upward to the far side at twenty degrees. Three meters broad at its top, it tapered underneath. Precarious. It would break off in a few days or weeks as the lower part of the glacier, the nearer foot of the bridge, slipped away downslope.

"A trap," Garras muttered, crouching, eyes alert.

"Yes, you will be vulnerable on that bridge."

"But how does it intend to work the trap?"

Silver didn't answer.

Garras removed the backpack, eyes on the ice ahead and slightly above him, rifle in hand. Without looking, he took a small tube-like canister from the pack and snapped it to the rifle barrel.

"What do you have in mind?" Silver sniffed the canister. Pungent, like sulfur.

"Gas," Garras aimed the rifle, set his automatic sights, and fired at the far lip of the first crack beyond the bridge. The canister popped from the rifle and thudded against the ice wall, disappearing into the crevasse thirty meters away, where it hissed. A yellow-brown fog oozed over the crevasse lip and drifted away in the wind. A stinging peppery odor brought tears to Silver's eyes. She wagged her head and sneezed.

"If the human is in the crevasse —" she sneezed again. "— that should flush him."

They waited.

At last, Garras nodded. "The next one up, then." He reached for another canister, armed the rifle.

He hesitated. "Or could it be even farther up?"

Silver sniffed the air. "No. If he wasn't in the first crack, he's in the next one. Forty meters out. No farther."

"Are you sure? This is my last gas canister."

"I'm sure."

Garras locked, aimed, and fired.

Again the gas failed to flush the quarry.

"Could you be wrong, Silver?"

"No. He's there. Even with the gas, I smell him."

Garras gritted teeth-ridges and knotted hands around the rifle, knuckles pale against mottled yellow skin. "It must be wearing a filter."

"What will you do?"

Garras scratched absently at his leg injury. "Concussion grenades are out. We'd just bury it. Probably bring down the bridge too. No, I'll have to go up, kill it point blank."

"Dangerous. Couldn't we just wait him out? He must be cold. He'll have to expose himself eventually."

Garras clucked his tongue in concentration. "No. This is a clever human. Clever and dangerous. I don't want to give it time to think, to plan. Best to take it now, while it cowers, maybe dazed." He looked around. The sun had begun to dip in the west. "And before dark." The permit expired at sunset.

"How?"

"I don't know, I don't know, I don't —" Garras tapered off to a mumble, deep in thought. At last he spoke. "Can you alert me if it moves?"

"Yes."

"I want to look at the bridge, see what I can see. I'll take the rifle. You call if you see it move."

"All right." Silver lay facing the hidden human, head on outstretched paws.

Garras approached the near side of the ice bridge and examined it. In a moment he returned to Silver and sat, stroking the dog.

Silver sat up. "You found a way?"

"On the bridge, under some loosely packed snow down the side, it looks like — I don't know; something has been buried. It is a trap. A sophisticated one for a human to have built."

"Must we give up?"

Garras' jaw worked. "No. I won't give up. Not while there's still time, while I'm this close."

Silver sat silent while Garras worked his jaw, brow furrowed, breath hot through constricted nostrils.

At last the alien rose. "I have an idea. As soon as I get to the bridge center, the human will pull a rope or dislodge something or whatever to break the bridge. But I won't fall helpless into the crevasse as the human expects. I'll be anchored on this side. When the human comes to the crevasse edge to make sure I'm dead —" He held out the rifle. "Pop. Then you haul me up. And it."

"Me haul you up? I'm not sure I'm strong enough."

"Then I'll rig it so I can haul myself back up. And the human. You just hide and bark when the human comes in sight after it topples the bridge. Make sure it gets close enough so I can get a good shot. I'll play dead to lure it in. Got it?"

Silver nodded. "But what if the human doesn't come to the edge? What if he just — goes away?"

"Not likely. Just in case it doesn't show itself, or doesn't do it well enough to get a shot, what if —"

"Yes?"

"What if you called to it. What would it do?"

"I think he might answer. Curious. Or for some other reason. It might work."

"Let's try it."

Garras hammered a long spike deep into the ice two meters from the foot of the bridge, glancing frequently beyond and up, watching for the human as he worked. He passed the rope through an eye in the spike and secured it to his belt. He tugged on the rope to test the spike.

"Good." He looked up, past the bridge. "I'm ready."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Wait and watch. If — no, when I fall, after the human triggers whatever it's rigged to pull down the bridge, I've prepared the rope so you don't

have to do anything. I can climb myself. Be ready to call when you see it. I may only have a chance for one shot. Then I'll have to retrieve it."

"You have enough rope?"

"Easily. Watch the backpack. And call out. Got it?"

"Yes." Silver chuffed, blowing steam in the mountain air.

Garras set out in a cautious crouch, rifle ready. He moved slowly, slowly, toward the bridge center, where he paused and looked back at Silver. He grinned, confident, and nodded, mouthing "good dog." He turned and continued onward.

As he moved, he played out the rope, keeping it taut between his belt and the anchor at the foot of the bridge.

One step from the far side of the bridge, he hesitated, raised up. He turned to look back across at Silver.

"Look out, Silver!" Garras whirled and aimed his rifle at the human approaching at a run a few steps behind Silver.

Garras hesitated, finger on the firing stud; Silver sat between him and the human. "Silver, move."

The dog turned at last, to face the human.

Garras fired, missing Silver and the human by centimeters.

The ice bridge rumbled, gave way, impelled by the heat and concussion from the rifle bolt. Garras cried out Silver's name, and the rope sizzled as it played out.

The rope twanged taut like a guitar string when it had played out all the way between the spike and the crevasse edge.

Silver went to the edge and looked down. "Garras. Are you all right?"

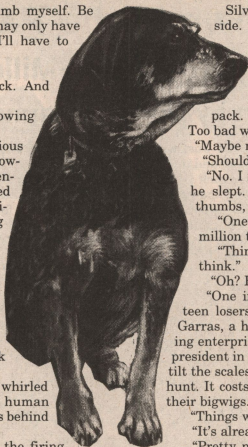
The alien hung suspended on his double rope rig, twenty meters down. He still held the rifle, and Silver realized he had strapped it on so it wouldn't fall.

"I'm all right," he grunted. "I'm coming up." He started hauling on the rope, hand over hand. "Silver, I saw the human behind you."

"Don't worry about him. Hurry up."

Silver heard Garras cry out a moment later as the alien realized she hadn't said "hurry up" to him, but to the human. Garras pulled himself above the crevasse lip in time to see the human jerk the spike loose.

"Silver!" Garras cried out as he fell back. The cry faded, piercing, an accusation of betrayal. It ended abruptly.



Silver sat at the panting human's side. "Don't you want to go see if the Truan is dead?" she asked.

"If it isn't, it'll get off a shot at me. Won't it?"

"Likely. If he can."

The human hefted the backpack. "This gear will come in handy. Too bad we won't be able to get the Bolter." "Maybe next time."

"Should we be in a hurry?"

"No. I fixed the locator last night while he slept. Tricky work without opposable thumbs, but I did it."

"One down," the human said, "and a million to go."

"Things may happen faster than you think."

"Oh? How do you figure?"

"One in twenty success ratio. Of nineteen losers, fifteen never came back. Now Garras, a high mucky-muck with their mining enterprise. More like a prince than a vice president in their hierarchy. His loss will help tilt the scales in favor of those who oppose the hunt. It costs too much. Now it's taken one of their bigwigs."

"Things will change quickly, then?"

"It's already begun."

"Pretty neat trap you rigged back there," the human said, clucking its tongue. It started walking downslope toward the game trail and the deeper cover of the forest.

It stopped after a few paces and turned around, a confused look on its face. Silver had not moved from where she sat.

"Sorry." The human dipped its head, apologetic. It took a backward step and waited.

Silver set out at a leisurely lope, the human exactly two paces behind. □

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Down in the Park

By Russell A. Miller

Art by Dominic Harman

Bones. That's all they'd found. Just well-gnawed bones: shiny, white, and utterly devoid of flesh. The remains of five corpses had been discovered around the park in the last two months, but none of the lab boys were quite sure what had eaten them. So, quite naturally, they'd called in the freak force — Rosetti and me — to do a little light recon. Let freaks hunt freaks, right?

Early evening suffused the park with a soft, ominous blue glow. Most people had left already; the scattered few who remained walked hurriedly down the thin gravel path that wound like a stream throughout the park. My eyes were fixed on the lone target we'd discovered after three weeks of intense searching: an innocuous old man with overlong arms, mottled skin, and a slightly vacuous grin. He sat a few feet away from the road on a park bench attached to a huge green trash can, mechanically tossing birdseed to the pigeons. The clothes he wore were standard old-man attire: a dark overcoat complemented by dark pants, and a small hat of a style that had been fashionable perhaps twenty years ago. He was almost too stereotypical. That had been one of the tip-offs. Systems are like that.

Beyond the bench stood a small fountain whose decrepit centerpiece spouted what little water the city could spare, though even that was probably riddled with nanocleaners and antibacterials. My view drifted farther, to where Rosetti hid with a foamgun and a radio hookup under the long shadows cast by a large copse of trees and bushes. Everything in the park had taken on a dull, muted, heavy aspect, like the lull before a hurricane. The breeze had long since died; not even insects disturbed the tranquility of the sleepy dusk air. Natural habitats hadn't been ranked very high on the list, moneywise, when the government began the post-war restoration. Congress had been too cheap to restock many bugs; only a few species of birds had been financed, and few of those had even been natural. The quiet was deafening. I inched farther out onto the elm's limbs and angled the binoculars to get a better view from my perch.

Suddenly, a lone bird landed on what it thought was an elm branch. I almost lost it right there. Not only did it block my view; worse, it was actually on my arm. Sometimes I adapt too well, I guess. What a great privilege I've been blessed

with; I get mistaken for a tree. Still, it had one advantage: a spliced who can came easily into nearly anything is a spliced who's not going to get the shit beaten out of him by a group of drunken normals. Like a few friends I'd buried.

I flexed my hand/branch. Startled, the bird squawked and flew off. The warning light made strange patterns on the bird's iridescent scales as it ascended into the darkness. I kept deadly still, almost sloth-like, but the peace of the park had been disturbed, and the system knew. Wherever its eyes were, they might have turned in my direction. Their senses were supposedly five times keener than any human's, normal or not. Hopefully, the tree was all that it would see. I reached back with the hand that wasn't as branchlike and grabbed my foamer, pulling it forward very slowly.

"Gary?" Rosetti's squeaky voice buzzed loudly in my ear.

"Whisper, Dante, whisper. I'm okay — how's your end? Is there anyone over there?"

"A few, but I don't think any of them are coming in the direction of our friend. You?"

"Four." I glanced down quickly. Beneath me an older couple strolled hand in hand next to a young woman carrying a baby. "Gimme a few minutes." I used the time to reform the branch hand back into something more useful and slightly more human; better to lose a little camouflage than a lot of utility. Even so, I still had to wait for almost three minutes; normals are leisurely walkers (it comes from not having to live in fear.) "Okay, it's clear. Are you ready?" I heard him take several deep breaths.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm ready — but can you cover me?"

"To within a square inch. Don't worry about me and my Santos. Just don't cover target. If I have to shoot, I'm gonna have to shoot fast, and remember: Santos isn't like your gun. I've modified it so that it shoots only four foam rounds per second, but they're a lot bigger than standard. So whatever you do, try to stay clear. If you do get in the fire-line by accident, duck and run.

"I'm ready whenever you are. As soon as you need backup, just scream."

"I gotcha, Gary. Okay, I'm gonna start walking in five."



D.E.H. '00

"In five."

My grip was getting too tight on the gun. Got to relax. I closed my eyes and forced my breathing rate slower and slower until it hovered about normal, monitoring my pulse rate as it alternately fell, then began climbing again, until I found my center.

My eyes were locked on the old man. He hadn't moved much, but systems are mysterious. I wondered if he could even get up. Maybe he wasn't central. Maybe he was just an arm or a snoop. I still hadn't found where the eyes were. That worried me.

A soft — *crunch-crunch* — drew my eyes upward along the road by the bench. I watched two figures move up the road — Rosetti, and someone who was about to become an innocent bystander unless we moved fast — trying to imagine how a system would view them: Hunger? Fear? The old man's head swivelled only slightly at the approach of the young corporate type walking briskly down the path, briefcase in tow. The old man's head moved even less at the approach of the kid, perhaps twelve years old, who suddenly veered out of nowhere in front of the yuppie, gliding on a skateboard, hoisting a green plastic gun. The yuppie studiously ignored the kid's harassing remarks, and kept right on walking. Crap; interference. Rosetti would have to handle it on his own. The old man's legs hadn't shifted either, but they might have been attached. His overlong arms continued in their endless pattern: scoop birdseed, lift, release.

"Rosetti — Ditch the normal. Now!"

Rosetti jerked his head slightly; nothing could be done now without alerting it. Not even radio contact. A mistake now might mean both of them would die. Best to go through as planned. I began to take aim.

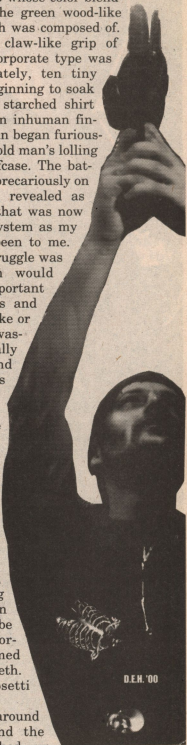
I watched for a minute that stretched to eternity. The old man ignored the little kid circling his skateboard around the bench, making "Pow-Pow" noises with his gun. The young man's face was covered with a thin sheen of sweat; he looked tired. Maybe he'd been jogging. He crossed over from the gravel path and was just about to sit on the bench. The air was quiet, the park was still. And then it, the system, struck.

The legs of the park bench flexed muscularly on one side, tilting the bench so that the corporate type began to slide precariously into the arms of the old man, whose head remained staring stolidly forward, smiling nonsensically, while his arms swung to the side, locking the yuppie in a death-grip. A passing breeze lifted the sides of the old man's overcoat, exposing him as only a small part of a larger whole. Where the man's chest should have been was only the meeting place for two gargantuan triceps muscles which met and then ter-

minated in a stump whose color blended smoothly into the green wood-like substance the bench was composed of. Within the fierce claw-like grip of those hands, the corporate type was struggling desperately, ten tiny trickles of blood beginning to soak through his white starched shirt from the grip of ten inhuman fingers. The young man began furiously smashing at the old man's lolling head with his briefcase. The battered head bobbed precariously on top of the triceps, revealed as merely a disguise that was now as useless to the system as my branch-hand had been to me. But the yuppie's struggle was futile. No system would have something important in such an obvious and vulnerable spot. Fake or natural, evolution wasn't stupid. Especially nanoevolution. And now that there was too much motion, I couldn't get off a clear shot. The arms holding the now frantic man aloft in the air began plunging him down toward his final destination, the trashcan attached to the bench. With an odd sound, a clacking, smacking, grinding sound, the trash can revealed itself to be the focus: an enormous mouth rimmed with razor-sharp teeth.

"Now!" Rosetti screamed.

He had circled around back, safely behind the bench, then worked up enough speed until he could vault over its side, landing on the asphalt path about ten feet from its gaping maw, his skateboard skidding out from beneath him as he landed. He dropped to the ground, rolled into a firing position, and began pelting away. Rosetti's small body reeled from the recoil as the green plastic gun spat foam pellets at the legs of the now (highly) mobile park bench, its metallic jaws snapping as it began rushing him to



defend its dinner. I joined in the barrage, and Santos began raining round after round of foam canisters aimed dead on at the mouth of the trash can. As each foamer landed, it exploded into a sticky gray ooze that quickly thickened to the consistency of granite. But the park bench kept coming.

In two minutes, it was all over.

Gasping for breath, I dropped down from the tree and raggedly walked over to where the young man lay groaning weakly, cradling his rib cage. He'd been thrown, hard, almost sixteen feet; he should have been dead. Instead, he was still conscious, due mostly to a group of fortuitously placed bushes. But just barely. I knelt down and searched carefully for broken ribs. He was badly bruised, and his face was a bloody mess, but most of it looked skin deep. That was a good thing, too: all I had were cop nanites, and low-grade ones at that. I tore open a pack of G-50s from my pocket and dumped them on his back, watching distractedly as what looked like blue porridge began burrowing through his shirt. I radioed for an ambulance to follow the backup and then went back to Rosetti, warily regarding the now subdued park bench with his gun drawn. Nanites crawled over a flesh wound in his chest, damping the flow of blood down onto the cartoon decorating his T-shirt. He was out of breath, but his face showed no signs of pain.

"Is that guy okay?" he huffed.

"Yeah, he got off real lucky. Landed in the bushes. What about you? How's your chest?"

"Bloody. But it wasn't more than a graze. Still, that thing sure gives a mean handshake."

"Is it conscious?" I asked.

"Hard to tell. Whatever it is, I hope I never see it again. It's the lab boys' problem now. And good riddance." We looked carefully at the creature, or at least the parts that weren't covered by several layers of granite-hard foam. I prodded an exposed iron foot and received what would have been a vicious scratch for my troubles, but we both have itchy trigger fingers. The leg was plastered to the grass a half second later.

We never found its eyes.


The cleanup crew arrived in record time, klaxons wailing, shiny black boots scuffing asphalt and turf. They ignored us; it's been my experience that normals don't like to mix much, at least with genesoldiers (like Rosetti) or spliceds (like me). I lingered a little too long looking at the system, encased in durafoam. Finally, Rosetti gave me a nudge; it was time to get out of here, it wasn't our worry anymore. Still, I couldn't help but feel slightly sorry for the thing. It hadn't asked to be born; it was just trying to survive. Just like us. I couldn't fault it for that. It had just wound up with the genetic equivalent of the joker card, and

it had chosen the wrong species as food. I watched sympathetically as the boys in black sprayed it loose from the ground and hoisted it into the armored van, still struggling vainly under the weight of the durafoam. And then it was time to go.

I turned back just once as we were walking to the car. The young man, the corporate type, was wobbling his head upward as the paramedics shifted him onto a gurney, perhaps looking for his saviors. I wondered what he would have thought if he'd gotten a clear look at us: a scrappy little kid with sandy brown hair, freckles, and buck teeth gliding along on a skateboard, hefting what appeared to be a plastic toy gun (that had seen him two through two tours in Belgium), and a tall skinny guy with curly black hair who currently looked like the love child of a man and a Dutch Elm. Ironic, I guess. Freaks saving normals. But everybody's got to work. Eat or be eaten, right? Lucky I was on the right side. A few slight changes in my own DNA and it could just as easily have been me eating foam. There, but for the grace of Watson and Crick, go I.

I turn around and jog ahead to catch up with Rosetti. In a few moments, I'll look almost human again. Almost. □

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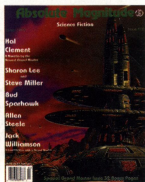
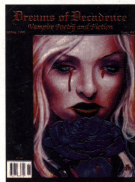
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The next issue of *Aboriginal SF* will feature two stories by newcomers. First there is "17 Views of Mount Taranaki," by Peter Friend, and then "A Wheel in a Wheel," by Debbie Stitt Baker. Stories by former Aborigines who are making return appearances include "No Job Too Small," by Wil McCarthy, "Necrofiche," by W. Gregory Stewart, "Reality's Real Estate," by Denise Lopes Heald, and "Requiescat in Pace," by Anthony R. Lewis. Plus we will have all of our usual features, including our two book review columns, movie previews, and cutting-edge science speculations.

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