

pirate writings

Tales of Fantasy, Mystery & Science Fiction

"Shani"

Josepha
Sherman

Jane Yolen
J.N. Williamson
Paul Di Filippo
Don D'Ammassa
Daniel Hatch

\$4.99
Foreign: \$5.99
Fall 1994



YOUR WINDOW ON THE STARS:



Blast off to adventure!

Each issue features fiction and art from established talents such as: C.J. Cherryh, Hal Clement, Allen Steele, Terry Bisson, Barry B. Longyear, Geoffrey A. Landis, S. N. Lewitt, Bob Eggleton, Daniel Hatch, Don D'Amassa, Denise Lopes Heald, and Frank O. Dodge; as well as interviews with luminaries in the science fiction field such as Roger Zelazny.

Quarterly • Full Size • 90+ Pages

\$4.00 per copy, postage-paid in the USA (\$5.00 in Canada)

Four-issue subscriptions are \$14.00, U.S., and \$18.00, Canada and Mexico. U.S. Funds only.

Absolute Magnitude • P.O. Box 13 • Greenfield, MA 01302-0013

SF in a Jugular Vein

TOMORROW SUCKS

Edited by
**Greg Cox &
T.K.F.
Weisskopf**



87626-0 (CAN \$5.99) U.S. \$4.99

O
C
T
O
B
E
R

1
9
9
4



JEM

FREDERIK POHL

"Frederik Pohl is the shrewdest
thinker on the future, both in fact
and fiction, that I have ever met."

—Isaac Asimov

There were too many people and too few resources on Earth. The old alliances had crumbled, and three global alignments now coexisted uneasily. No one could afford the resources for a conventional war, but even the smallest nation could afford thermonuclear weapons.

Then, in a nearby star system, the Earthlike planet Jem was discovered. Traveling by tachyon transport, it could be reached in only a few days, and its untapped resources might bring a renaissance to Earth—or bring on the final apocalypse.

0-671-87625-2 • 352 pages • \$4.99

TOMORROW SUCKS

GREG COX & T.K.F. WEISSKOPF

Science Fiction in a Jugular Vein

From the streets of old London town to the squalid fleshpots of Mars, from the Russian steppes to the gleaming decks of interplanetary spaceships, a new breed of bloodsucker is on the loose. Born of bacteria or technology or extraterrestrial biology, these *scientific* vampires stalk through time and space in search of prey both human and otherwise.

Not even Dracula was more deadly.

So throw away your garlic. Pour that holy water down the drain. The old rules no longer apply, and nothing can save you: TOMORROW SUCKS!

TALES OF SCIENTIFIC VAMPIRISM BY

Roger Zelazny • Ray Bradbury • Dean Ing • Spider Robinson
and more!

0-671-87626-0 • 304 pages • \$4.99

Distributed by Paramount

Fiction: *pirate writings*

5 Shani

by Josepha Sherman

Can a young daughter of a despairing King save a Kingdom?

11 Frontier Spirit

by Don D 'Ammassa

On Mars there's not much for kids to do, except explore the past.

18 Bad Beliefs

by Paul Di Filippo

Stopping "Bad Beliefs" will fix the world. Or will it?

24 The Singer of Seeds

by Jane Yolen

Floren was the salt of the Earth, and its savor.

28 All Justice Fled

by Daniel Hatch

The Earth Rod Strauss knew was lost, but can he make peace with his son, and himself?

41 Homesick

by Dawn Schloesser

There's no bond stronger than that between a boy and his dog.

52 The Proust Syndrome

by Howard Goldsmith

The past is dangerous?

59 Seems Like Old Times

by Tom Piccirilli

Some wounds never heal and the past often far hurts more than the present.

65 The Field of Blood

by J.N. Williamson

Wherefore that field was called, The Field of Blood, unto this day.

69 To Whom It May Cancer

by J. Michael Major

Everyone likes you. Don't they?

Poets Throughout:

Tippi N. Blevins - pg. 15, Jeremy Gadd - pg. 43, C. David Hay - pg. 23, Timothy Hodor - pg. 15 and Mark Kuhn - pg. 37

Departments:

45 Short Short Section

Featuring Warren Lapine, Gary Bernard Phaup, De Odom, Kandy S. Jarvis & Arthur P. Cosing

17 Featured Poet - Kat Ricker

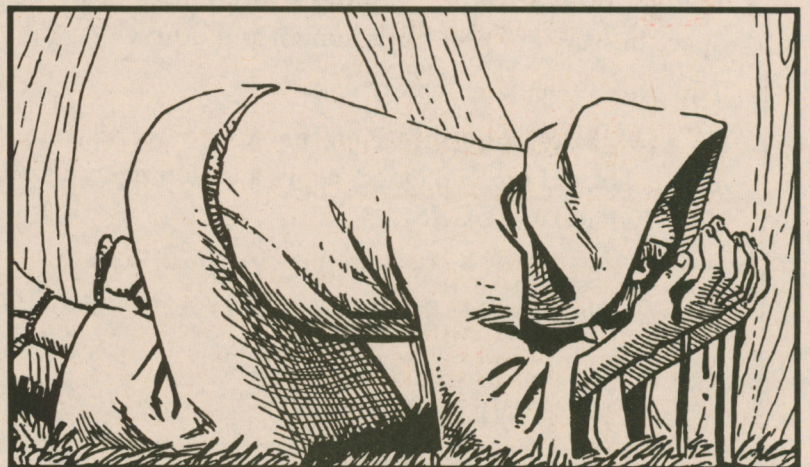
9, 32 Cartoons by Joseph Mayhew

70 Small Press Dispatch & Big Books

Illustrators Throughout:

David Grilla (pgs. 4, 7, 19, 21, 25 & 26), David Lee Ingersoll (pgs. 53, 56, 64 & 66), Alfred Klosterman (pgs. 58 & 60), Russell Morgan (pgs. 10 & 13), James Zimmerman (pgs. 29, 33, 40 & 42)

COVER: This issue's cover was done by LISSANNE LAKE, a talented young artist whose work has appeared in many magazines and on many book covers. **BELOW:** "The Field of Blood" was illustrated by David Lee Ingersoll.



pirate writings

Tales of Fantasy, Mystery & Science Fiction

ISSN 1073 - 7758

Publisher:

Pirate Writings Publishing
53 Whitman Ave.
Islip, N.Y. 11751

Edward J. McFadden
Editor

Tom Piccirilli
Associate Editor

Edward J. McFadden
Art Director

For advertising rates write:

Pirate Writings Publishing
53 Whitman Ave.
Islip, NY 11751

Distributors:

IPD Distribution
Fine Print Distributors
Ubiquity Distributors
and others
(Write for complete list)

All Rights Reserved

From the Editor's Desk



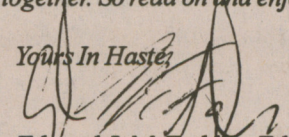
How we define the idiom "Cutting Edge" becomes more difficult every day as the chaos we call life begins to accept situations, lifestyles and behavioral standards that stretch the boundaries of the reality we know and have grown up living. Americans pride themselves on being the best; being at the forefront of technology and pop-culture. Well, are we?

Recently a librarian was fired in Texas for purchasing a copy of Howard Stern's best-seller *Private Parts*. Cutting Edge? I recently attended a ceremony in which the honoree was Shannon Faulkner, the young lady who was denied admittance to the Citadel because she was a woman. Cutting Edge? We as Americans need to get involved. The masses, that being the people who **let things happen**, and the special interest groups, that being the people who **make things happen**, have very distinct differences on many issues. The Texas library had so many requests for Howard Stern's book that there was a waiting list, but the city council members decided it wasn't right for the community and forced the librarian to remove the book and was then fired. Excuse me, but who the hell gave them the right to decide what their constituents should read? They were elected to govern and run a city, not to make judgments as to the personal First Amendment rights of the people they serve. I'm preaching here I know, but if people don't stand up and say this is unacceptable, someday you might not be able to buy a copy of *Pirate Writings* because one of the stories features a gay character, or there's some idea, some original thought, that someone somewhere doesn't like and they'll feel it's their responsibility to stop you from being damaged by it. Cutting Edge? Not even close.

As I try to choose entertaining stories for *Pirate Writings*, I try and keep "Cutting Edge" in mind and what it means to me, and more importantly, to my readers. Many have asked, "What the hell does *Pirate Writings* mean? There's no stories in here about pirates!" Well, yes that's true, but - "Oh, does it mean that all the works within are pirated from the creators?" Well, no - it means cutting edge - outlaw. Many have suggested a title change, and I gave it some VERY serious thought. However, the magazine has grown from a circulation of 250 to a circulation of 4,000+ in the last year. People are enjoying the magazine and it's title and they have the final say. The name stays. At least for now. If a time comes when the magazine is being held back by the name, I'll change it.

Special thanks go out to Tom Piccirilli, Carol Joyce and Dawn Rogers; some of the people behind the scenes at *Pirate Writings* and are in part responsible for the fine product you now hold in your hands. PW started out as an infant, grew to a young child and now is a young adult. PW's new format is the realization of a planned evolution that has come to fruition. However, in the cosmic scheme of things, PW is just beginning to come together. So read on and enjoy!

Yours In Haste,


Edward J. McFadden, Editor

Pirate Writings Magazine (ISSN 1073-7758), Vol. 2, No. 2, Whole No. 5, Fall 1994. Published every four months in the United States by Pirate Writings Publishing, 53 Whitman Ave., Islip, NY 11751. Copyright © 1994 Pirate Writings Publishing. Protection secured under The Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. All rights reserved. The contents may not be reproduced whole in part without the express written consent of Pirate Writings Publishing. Any similarity to persons or places mentioned or implied in the stories, poems, or reviews and persons living or dead or actual places is entirely coincidental. Opinions expressed within these works is not necessarily those of Pirate Writings Publishing. After publication, all rights to the works contained herein revert to the individual writers and artists. Pirate Writings welcomes unsolicited material when accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope, but Pirate Writings Publishing assumes no responsibility for these submissions. Subscriptions: Pirate Writings Publishing, Subscriptions, 53 Whitman Ave., Islip, NY 11751. United States - \$14.00 one year, \$24.00 two years. Foreign - \$19.00 one year, \$29.00 two years. POSTMASTER: Please send any address changes to Pirate Writings Publishing, 53 Whitman Ave., Islip, NY 11751.



Josepha Sherman is one of today's hottest Fantasy authors. Her novels include *King's Son*, *Magic's Son*, *The Chaos Gate* and *A Strange and Ancient Name*, just to name a few. She has also collaborated with Mercedes Lackey numerous times. Their novel *Castle of Deception* was a best-seller. Her short fiction has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies including: *Cricket*, *Dragon*, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Sword and Sorceress* series, *Alien Pregnant By Elvis* and *Alternate Warriors*. We are lucky to have her within the pages of PW.

SULTAN OZIRAKH SAT ALONE IN the council chamber of his mud brick palace, brooding. Outside the chamber window mountains rimmed the horizon, jagged and fierce as so many fangs sheltering Ifrana, his oasis land,

Shani

shining green and fertile in the hot desert sun. So much green should have gladdened any desert man's heart, but Ozirakh only groaned at the sight and buried his face in his hands.

It was all the fault of those hundred-times-ac-cursed *efriti*, those demons who'd decided the one good trading route through the mountains, the one pass that kept Ifrana from stifling in isolation, was just the place to lodge. Ozirakh groaned again. At least there were only three of the demons, or so the wild-eyed solider who'd been the only one to escape them had insisted. But those three were evil enough for three hundred! Bad enough that they preyed on caravans; bandits did that. But when the word got out that they ate those they caught, that put a stop to travel into Ifrana.

We can't survive on our wells alone, the sultan

*Can a young daughter of a despairing King
save a Kingdom?*

BY JOSEPHA SHERMAN

Illustrated by David Grilla

thought in misery. We've grown too vast in numbers for that. We must trade with other lands.

Ozirakh had sent his bravest soldiers after the *efriti*. But arrows shattered against those evil, scaly skins; swords broke like twigs. Only that one shattered man had returned to him.

Who is left? Who can I possibly send?

"Father?"

Ozirakh looked up with a start, staring at the small, slim figure with her straight black hair and startlingly yellow eyes, for one ridiculous moment thinking, Mera . . . But of course it wasn't his one-upon-a-warlike-time wife. "Shani."

"The magic was only supposed to guard the pass."

Shani was his daughter, to Ozirakh's utter shame his only child, his heir by default, the issue from his marriage to Mera, a tribeswoman of the fiery, wandering Zhan. What a mistake--a wild, glorious, terrifying mistake--that marriage had been! Ah, the fights they'd had (and oh, the ferocious reconciliations!) Mera had never had the vaguest idea of the submissiveness proper to a woman. And at last she had run off with her nomadic tribesfolk, and only Ozirakh's pleading that Ifrana couldn't be deprived of its only heir had persuaded her to leave Shani with him.

Mera surely must have loved him, Ozirakh told himself wryly, because at least she hadn't tried to knife him before leaving. Shani. Shani had enough of her mother in her for Ozirakh to long ago have despaired of instilling that womanly submissiveness in her. Instead, he'd settled for having the wildness tempered by regal lessons in history, geography and statecraft. If she had to be his heir, he would at least see her trained like one!

The lessons obviously hadn't included tact. "Father, you can't just sit here and brood! You have to do something about the *efriti*!"

"And what do you think I've done?" he snapped. "Have you forgotten about all those soldiers who've lost their lives?"

Shani signed. "The poor men. No, of course not, but--"

"What more do you want of me? Do you want me to go riding boldly out there?"

"I don't--"

"Believe me, girl, if I thought it would make a difference, I'd sacrifice myself in a moment; let those damned demons chew on my bones!"

"But, surely there's another way, something besides warfare."

"Against demons? You're not a fool, Shani! Don't talk like one! No. Everything that could have been done has been done."

"But it hasn't!" she insisted. "I could--"

"You!" Ozirakh thundered. "Do you think yourself a hero? Do you dare? Go back to your quarters, girl, and look in your mirror! You aren't a hero! You are nothing but a girl! Remember that! Now, leave me."

He could practically feel her frustrated rage scorch him, but Ozirakh sternly ignored her. And of course Shani at last had no choice but to obey him. Alone once more, Ozirakh sank back to

his chair, and his brooding.

The little fool. All had been done that could be done. Of course all had been done.

Shani stormed down the palace corridors, too angry with her father to be still. How could he talk like that? How could he just up and abandon his people? And how, oh how, could he patronize her like that?

Ah, gently, gently. She could remember what her mother would have said: she who keeps her head wins her war.

Aie, Mother! Why did you have to leave?

Never mind. She knew why. Mera had been slowly stifled by living within palace walls. Shani couldn't quite understand that; there was too much of her father in her for her not to enjoy settled comfort. Besides, Ifrana was her land, her home, as it never could have been for her nomadic mother.

But, I'm my mother's daughter, too, and damned if I'm going to turn into a meek little slave!

Particularly not when Ifrana's safety, its very existence, was at stake. Shani thought of her father's people, *her* people slowly dying if the trading route could not be reopened, and bit her lip. That couldn't be allowed to happen! There *must* be a way to rid the land of the demons. Shani turned abruptly and headed down a flight of stairs for the palace library.

Sure enough, old Haruch was there, his back to her. Too eager to wait, Shani called out, "Haruch, I--oh. Sorry. I didn't mean to startle you."

She hurriedly knelt to help the old scholar gather up the books he'd dropped. "Haruch, I want you to be honest with me this time."

He blinked. "About what, Princess Shani?"

"Those *efriti* didn't just happen to appear where they did, did they?"

"Princess Shani . . ."

"Haruch, please! I have to know. My father had something to do with it, didn't he?"

The old man sagged. "Yes," he murmured wearily.

"But how? Why?"

"It was an accident. You see, he was down here in the palace library when I chanced to find an ancient scroll. Would that I'd destroyed the thing before he could see it! You see, on that scroll someone had inscribed a spell . . ." The tired old eyes blinked at her. "He meant only good for Ifrana, you must believe it."

"Of course I do. Go on, please."

The scholar sighed. "The magic was only supposed to guard the pass. Who would ever have thought the spell would turn out to be so horribly literal? When your father had finished, the pass was guarded, indeed--guarded from every living human soul!"

"It summoned the *efriti*."

"It . . . alerted them to a fine, safe lair," Haruch corrected, "and a plentitude of prey."

"I don't know very much about magic," Shani admitted. "But if my father set the spell, doesn't that mean only one of his blood can undo it by destroying the *efriti*?"

The scholar nodded, and Shani bit her lip. "So," she murmured. "I was afraid of that. Still . . . come, tell me everything you know about *efriti*, everything."

He eyed her doubtfully. "Well, they're evil beings, no shadings of niceness at all, huge and cruel just for the sake of cruelty. They are magical in essence, of course, though they have no innate spells of their own . . ."

As the old man droned on and on, Shani had to bite back a smile. She loved her father dearly, even when he was at his most maddening, but even she had to admit he never was one to look at

the obvious. It used to infuriate her mother. Shani could remember the woman shouting at him that because he'd once been a warrior, he always let his sword do his thinking.

Well, maybe that wasn't quite fair, Shani thought. Ozirakh was normally a good, strong, honest ruler. But he did hold Haruch in a sort of gentle contempt for being a mere scholar who'd never once held a sworn. He never would have suspected that ever so slightly despised scholar might have the information needed to--

Shani straightened as Haruch broke sharply off, staring at her in sudden horror. "Why do you need to know all this?" he asked.

"Oh . . . I was . . . curious, that's all."

He wasn't believing that. Voice shrill with alarm, Haruch stammered, "Princess Shani, you can't be thinking of--you mustn't--you can't!"

"Hush, now."

"But you're not a trained warrior! Yes, yes, I know you can handle a dagger and even a sword, but--I'll stop you. I'll tell His Majesty and--"

"No, you won't. You know the *efriti* must be destroyed, and the spell with them."

"But, I--you . . ."

His voice trailed into silence at Shani's smile.

"I think I have a plan," the Princess told him. "In fact, I know I do. And it's not going to need force of arms at all, not really. Oh no, my good, kind Haruch, all I ask of you is a carpet, a coil of rope, and three jugs of wine!"

Shani stole quietly down the palace corridors, her slim form shrouded in a servant woman's drab brown cloak, her face hidden behind a scratchy veil. Lashes downcast to hide her telltale yellow eyes, feigning proper humility even though it

chafed at her spirit, the Princess slipped past courtier and guard alike, with not a one of them so much as glancing her way.

Ha, now for the stables! I only hope Haruch hasn't failed me.

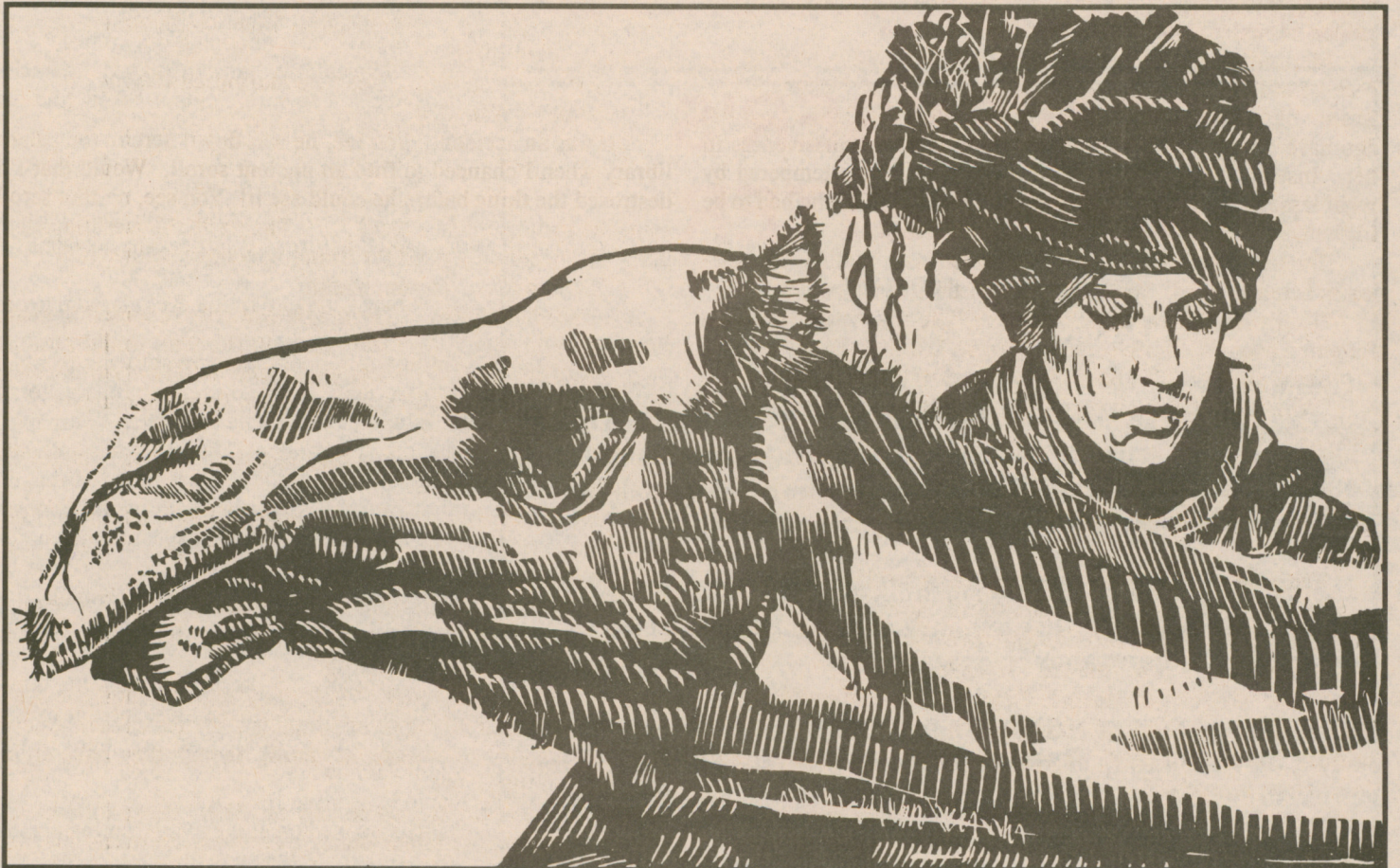
He hadn't. For all that the old scholar was blatantly miserable about the whole thing, he had left a camel laden with the requisite rug, rope, and wine jars standing half-hidden in shadow. Grinning, Shani shed the constricting servant's robe and veil, revealing the hooded cloak and loose white robes of a desert traveler. The Princess fastened a sword belt about her waist, staggering a bit at the weight of the blade, then revelled for a moment in the sudden free rush of air (admittedly camel-scented air) on her now bare face, then swung into the saddle, glad her mother had taught her the fine art of camel handling. Not a soul stopped her as she rode slowly, seemingly totally at ease, out across Ifrana, heading for the mountain pass. And the *efriti*.

This was the caravan route down which the *efriti* loved to rush to the attack, this narrow, lonely pass between two rugged cliffs that towered up to all but shut out the sun. Shani looked about, all at once sure she could hear the death cries of her father's soldiers, and of the poor, doomed travelers on whom the *efriti* had fed when--

No! Stop that! Only children let their fancies run wild. She was not going to let this gloomy place frighten her, not when not a thing had hurt her.

So far.

Stop that! Shani snapped at herself again, and slid to the ground. For a moment she stood stretching stiff muscles, then led her camel some distance away, hobbling it, hidden, among a jumble of great fallen rocks. Staggering under the weight of the carpet, the Princess carried it back into the open and spread it out right in the middle of



STRAIGHT FROM TOMORROW'S HEADLINES!

END TIME

NOTES ON THE APOCALYPSE
by G.A. Matiasz

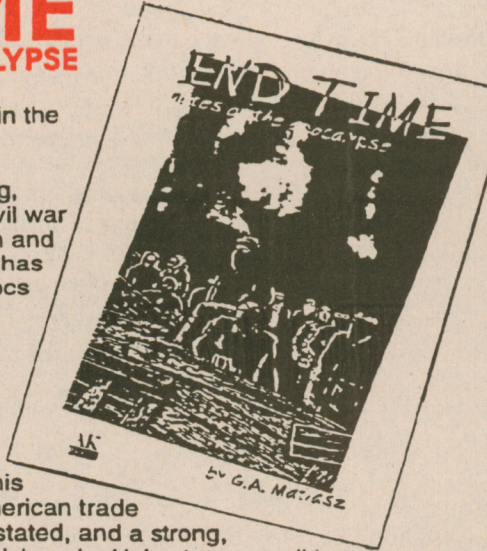
Is it just sex, drugs and rock'n'roll in the year 2007? Hardly!

End Time is the first novel by G.A. Matiasz, an original voice of slashing, thought provoking style. War and civil war rage across the former Soviet Union and most of the Third World. Capitalism has consolidated competing regional blocs in Europe, North America and East Asia, under multi-national corporate leadership. The U.S. is fighting a sophisticated, high-tech counterinsurgency war in southern Mexico, against a popular revolution claiming the tradition of Zapata. In seceding from Mexico, this insurrection threatens the North American trade zone. A military draft has been reinstated, and a strong, home front anti-war movement flourishes. In Alabaster, a small town north of San Francisco, a group of anti-war, draft-age college students, Greg Kovinski among them, gets hold of enough bomb-grade rhenium to build a nuclear weapon several times more powerful than the one detonated over Nagasaki. As they struggle to "do the right thing" with the potential for nuclear destruction they possess, Greg struggles to deal with the anger and helplessness he feels over being "dumped" by his girlfriend of five years. Greg lives in "interesting times," when friends turn out to be thieves, and the City of Oakland rises in revolution, becoming the 21st century's Paris Commune.

ISBN Number: 1-873176-96-1 Size: 5-1/2 x 8-1/2 Pages: 320 Illustrated Price: \$8.00 / £5.95 ppd.

END TIME IS AN AK PRESS BOOK

This and other titles are available from AK Distribution. Write to: AK Distribution, P.O. Box 40882, San Francisco, CA 94140-0882, USA or AK Distribution, 22 Luton Place, Edinburgh, Scotland, EH6 9PE, Great Britain. A copy of the AK Distribution catalogue listing scores of hard to obtain radical titles is also available.



SCAVENGER'S NEWSLETTER

Janet Fox, 519 Ellinwood,
Osage City, KS 66523-1329

The monthly marketletter for SF/Fantasy/Horror/Mystery writers and artists with an interest in the small press. SCAV has been bringing writers and artists timely market news on a regular monthly frequency for over ten years! Besides market info SCAV presents mini-articles, small press reviews, commentary and poems.

Sample \$2, \$15.50/yr, \$7.75/6 mo. bulk mail. \$19.50, \$9.75 1st class. Canada \$18.50, \$9.25. Use a money order in U.S. funds for Canadian orders. Inquire about overseas prices.

Also offering, SCAVENGERS SCRAPBOOK, a twice/yearly (January & June) roundup of SF/Fantasy/Horror/Mystery markets in capsule listings. \$4 for one, \$7/2 in U.S. and Canada. Specify month(s) & year(s) when ordering.

the pass, then returned for the equally heavy wine jugs. Shani placed these on the carpet, then straightened in a sudden surge of panic. Aie, aie, what did she think she was doing? Her father was right, she was only a girl--

And a Princess. And the heir to the throne of Ifrana. Its people were her responsibility as much as they were her father's, and if what Haruch said about the spell was true, only she could protect them now.

"Enough," Shani told herself softly, and settled herself on the carpet to wait.

With a sudden rush and a swoop, the *efriti* were before her. Shani bit the inside of her cheek till it bled to keep from screaming at the horrible sight of them; all claws and fangs and eyes like orange flame. Their skin glinted with grey-green scales, and they reeked of blood and cruelty and hungry death.

"Look, brothers!" one croaked harshly, plainly meaning to frighten her. Its fanged mouth was clearly never shaped for human speech. "See what a fine woman-gift is before us!"

"Hardly a gift," Shani said, and amazed herself at how calm she sounded. Too frightened to be afraid!

The three demons started at her words, then circled her in a dizzying rush of stale wind. Their words rained down on her from all sides. "Who are you? Who?"

Shani only smiled.

"A woman," one *efrit* hissed.

"A girl," spat another, "only a girl."

"A human!" the third *efrit* mocked. "A meal!"

"Are you so sure?" Shani asked, and the *efriti* froze, staring down at her.

"So calm," one said.

"So quiet," said another.

"She does not scream. She does not fear us," said the third. "Why does she not fear us?"

"Why not ask me?" Shani said.

Three pairs of flaming eyes glared into her own. "Speak!"

For a moment, staring into the terrible, empty cruelty in those eyes, Shani was terrified she'd never be able to answer. "Perhaps," she forced out at last, hand toying with the fringe of the carpet, "one has heard of you, oh mighty *efriti*." She wasn't going to lie, not if she could help it. Shani suspected such perilous things as spells--particularly spells to be broken--would not allow for falsehood. But that didn't mean she had to actually tell the truth, either.

"A sorceress," they hissed, and the faintest flicker of alarm was in those terrible eyes.

"Who else would be sitting here in the middle of nowhere?" Shani asked. "Who else would be waiting for you?"

She looked up at the *efriti*, forcing herself not to flinch. "Are you mere beasts?" the Prin-

cess asked. "Are you mere mindless things that hunt and kill and eat?"

Insulted, they drew themselves up to their full, horrific height. "No! No! Of course we are not!"

"And yet you waste time and power hiding here in the mountains like such beasts."

"The prey is good!" one insisted.

"But boring," Shani cut in. "If you were to ally yourself with a sorceress, a human sorceress, just think of the mighty deeds you could perform! With your strength and her knowledge of the human kind, you could rule a land!" That was the wrong thing to say; the *efriti* were too alien to care about ruling. "Humans would cringe before you," the Princess continued hastily. "Think of their fear! Think of the joy of feeding it, enhancing it!" I can't go on like this, I--I can't! But Shani forced herself grimly on, "Think of the feeding then, on prey that is intelligent enough to know and fear its master! Is that not far, far better than this stupid hiding in the mountains, this pouncing on whatever passes, like a cat on a mouse?"

"Yesss." It was a savage hiss. "Ah, yesss."

If they asked her why a human would want to betray her own kind, she'd be lost. But Haruch had been correct, bless him, the *efriti* really did seem to be near-mindless cruelty personified. It never even seemed to occur to them to ask. Now, if only . . .

"Do you agree?" Shani asked. "Will you seal the pact? Will you let me take you right to human lands?"

"Yes!" they snarled, and Shani hastily looked down at the carpet rather than see the demonic fury in their eyes.

"T-then," she said, and swallowed hard to stop the tremor in her voice. "Then why not do this once as humans do? Drink with me as humans do."

That clearly puzzled them. Haruch, Haruch, you were right about this, too: the *efriti* don't even know what wine is!

Hastily she broached the three wine jugs. The *efriti* brushed her aside, their casual strength horrifying her, and raised the jugs as though they were weightless. As shani watched, hardly daring to hope, hardly daring even to breathe, the *efriti* drank the strong, unwatered wine as though it were water, drank it to the very dregs and hurled the jars aside to smash against the rocks.

Oh Powers, it isn't having any effect on them.

But then one *efrit* staggered, blinking in bewilderment. "Funny . . ." it muttered. "Funny . . . nice drink!"

A taloned hand big as half her body gave Shani what was probably supposed to be a friendly tap. The girl went sprawling, breath knocked out of her, and the *efriti* stared down at her in surprise.

"Good jest, human! Do it again!"

A second hand came smashing down at her. Shani twisted desperately aside, but even so the impact was enough to send her flying against a rock. She struggled to her knees, gasping, aching, seeing the laughing *efriti* coming at her again.

Drunk, they're even worse! They're going to kill me, and laugh while they do it!

But without warning, one *efrit* swayed and fell headlong. The other two blinked down at the first, gnashing their long fangs in befuddlement. And without warning, they, too, crumpled to the ground. For what seemed an eternity, they lay like upturned turtles, clawing the air, muttering, "Kill all the humans . . . eat all the humans . . ."

And then they lay still, snoring heavily. Shani forced her aching body to its feet. Fortunately nothing seemed to be broken, though she didn't doubt she would be bruised over every bit of her.

But now one last ordeal lay before her. Gritting her teeth, Shani drew the heavy sword and started forward.

It had been a long, weary ride back to Ifrana and the royal palace. At first, swaying in the saddle, Shani didn't even notice her father standing in the doorway.

"Shani! What--where--"

He came running to catch her, royal dignity forgotten for the moment as she slid from the saddle, so worn with fatigue she nearly fell. Ozirakh's hands closed with bruising force about her already sore shoulders, and she winced.

"Father, please."

"What? Are you hurt? Look at you! You're filthy! Where in the name of all the Powers have you been? How dare you--"

She was far too tired to argue with him. "I kept my promise," Shani said wearily. "I said I would bring the *efriti* to Ifrana, and so I did. At least part of them."

As servants opened the carpet roped to the camel's back and cried out in horror at the sight of three hacked-off *efriti* heads, Shani smiled faintly to see her father stare at her in wonder. "Nothing but a girl, oh Father?" But she was past the point of caring about petty triumphs. "The spell is broken," the Princess said. "The *efriti* are dead. And I beg for only two things."

"Name them, daughter! Anything!"

Shani burst into weak laughter. Tomorrow, the terror of what she'd undergone was probably going to hit her, but for now all she could do was tell the sultan:

"First, I desire, with all my heart, a bath. And second, I want never, never to smell the smell of wine again!"

ptw





Don D 'Amassa has been reading Science Fiction and Horror for over thirty years. He is currently the book reviewer for *Science Fiction Chronicle* and former editor of *Mythologies*. His first novel, *BLOOD FEAST*, was published in 1988. He has sold over sixty short stories since then to *Analog*, *Pulphouse*, *Tomorrow*, *Harsh Mistress*, *Space & Time*, and many other magazines and anthologies.

FRONTIER

Spirit

THERE'S NOT much for a kid to do on Mars. Oh, ask an adult and you'll get a long list. Log on to a good book, they'll say, or check a film out of the online library. There are organized sports in the gymnasium dome and all sorts of real mode games like cards and stuff in the Rec Center, and every once in a while someone will sponsor a trip outside, maybe as far away as the crater wall.

Big deal. Sit quietly or have a proctor watching to make sure you don't bend the rules or try something new or take a chance. The trips outside are almost as boring as classroom work; it's always Dr. Bentley lecturing about "the planet's history etched in stone" or Professor Cohen explaining how some day our great-great grandchildren will be able to pull enough water out of the

BY DON D 'AMMASSA

Illustrated by Russell Morgan

On Mars there's not much for kids to do, except explore the past.

permafrost to grow plants outside the domes, and how *their* great-great grandchildren might even be able to breathe without an oxy mask for a few minutes.

"It's not really a good idea to spend a lot of time by yourself, Ken," Dad says all the

time, as if I needed another lecture about how we're living in a world we weren't meant for, and how even the smallest mistake might mean disaster.

I think he understands though, because he and Mom never bother me when I have the door to my room closed. If you can call it a room. With my bunk and closet and computer terminal, there's barely enough space left for two people to stand.

Mom always wants to know, "Why don't you invite your friends over?" And when I say there's no room for them, she looks like I insulted her or something and I get told for the umpteenth time



RED EFT

Come dance in our rattlin' bog.

ISSUE TWO

Featuring:

A.R. Morlan

Janet Fox

D.F. Lewis

Jeffrey Thomas

Cathy Buburuz

...and many more



Send \$3.00 plus \$1.00 for postage to:
Margaret Smith
606 Westford Street
Lowell, MA 01851 • USA

how space is almost as valuable as food and air here in Bradbury settlement, and I'd just better learn to accept things the way they are and not complain about them.

Usually that's when I go out.

Well, not "out" exactly. I watch the movies and stuff that get sent from Earth and see how kids there don't think twice about being able to go any place they want. They can stand and look up at the sky without having the light filtered through a glassteel dome or the faceplate of a lifesuit and walk for miles and miles without seeing anyone they know, and maybe not anyone at all.

It's not like that here. When Proctor Nkrumah yells at us for playing tag on the catwalks or making too much noise in the commons, we know our parents are all going to find out about it when they go offshift and check their E-mail. There's only forty kids in the whole settlement if you don't count the babies and the ones too young to be let out by themselves. And now that they've opened up Brackett for families, we won't even see as many new faces from Earth as we used to.

So anyway, when they told us there'd be no school for eight days while they upgraded the dome, I was all excited until I realized there really wasn't much of anything else to take up the time.

"We could go down to Port Dome and see if any supply ships are coming in." Roshi was seven years old when his family moved to Mars, and I think he missed Earth. When he first arrived, he wouldn't talk about it at all, but later we couldn't make him stop. He spent a lot of time down at the Port, just staring at the empty landing pads.

"No chance." Keri leaned back against the guardrail and stared down toward the lab complex ten meters below us. "My mother said they were going to resurface all the pads because they had plenty of time before the next ship was due."

The three of us were pretty good friends, although with so few kids our own age around, it was hard to tell if that would have been true if we'd had any choice. Keri and I are real Martians, born here. Back around then, when it looked like Bradbury was going to be abandoned after the Big Blowout destroyed two domes and a lot of valuable equipment, most everyone held off having kids until things settled down. Jimmy Nicholson is only a year older than us, but he's a bully and spends most of his time with younger kids who can't stand up to him.

"We could go down to the caves," I suggested, not looking at my friends.

No one answered right away, but then Roshi and Keri started talking at the same time

"We're not supposed to go anywhere near there," said Roshi, while Keri asked if I'd finally figured out the access code to the hatch.

"Nope," I admitted. I'm a pretty good hacker, but the internal security web has the tightest lid in the net and I hadn't been able to crack it.

"Then what's the point?" Roshi sounded relieved.

"Well, I couldn't find the code sequence to open it, but I figured out which subroutine monitors the lock."

"And . . .?" Keri was interested; I could see it in her face.

"And there's enough time between sequences for us to run a bypass."

Roshi's eyes were wide open. "But that's a breach crime! We could get in a lot of trouble for that."

"Only if we get caught." Keri remained calm, thoughtful.

"And it's not really a breach crime," I explained. "The caves are within the containment area. They're just not used any more."

"What about the monnies?" Keri tapped the electronic locator device pinned to her blouse.

"We leave the monitors outside. Anyone checks, they'll think

CYBER - PSYCHO'S

A. O. D

Art, poetry,
fiction and
reviews from
the underground!

\$4.00 Single, \$15 one yr (4)

Send Ck or Mo to:

Jasmine Sailing

P.O. Box 581

Denver, CO 80201



we're all playing some game in the underways. There's places where there's no live coverage and no one's going to be looking for us."

"I don't think this is a good idea." Roshi's voice actually shook.

"What's the problem Roshi?" I was honestly puzzled. "You weren't scared when we sneaked into the ponics lab and stole the apples." It was the most fruit I'd ever had at one sitting. Dr. Gupta had raged about it the next day, threatening to pump the stomach of every kid in Bradbury until he found the thieves.

"My Dad says there's ghosts down there."

"That's just a story they tell to keep us away. There's no such thing as ghosts, just like there are no real Martians."

"But there are real Martians," Keri corrected me. "We're them."

"You know what I mean." Friend or not, sometimes Keri was a real pain.

It didn't take us long to reach the hatch, even though Roshi dragged his feet the whole way. There'd been three accessways originally, but the other two were permanently sealed. The early settlers had lived underground in a series of artificial caves they'd dug through the rocky soil, the walls fused solid and coated with glassteel. Once the domes were up, no one wanted to stay in the caves where you couldn't see the sky, and where there were so many unpleasant memories.

"How many people do you suppose died in there?" Keri's curiosity had its morbid side, but as it happened, I knew the answer.

"Thirteen. Three just got sick and died; nine were hurt outside the settlement and died in the infirmary."

"That's only twelve." I was sure Keri already knew the answer; she just wanted to make me say it.

"And one suicide."

"So they say. Some people think Colonel Cavendish was murdered by Martians. Monsters, I mean, not people . . ."

"That's just a story, Keri." I glanced at Roshi, who was looking more upset every minute. "Cut it out, okay? Cavendish cut a passage through the wall into a cavern and decided to explore without telling anyone. He got lost and froze to death."

She gave me a look but kept quiet. We stuck our personal monitors behind one of the support columns so no one would notice them if they happened to walk through the corridor. I logged onto the net at the closest relay panel and waited until the screen showed me what I wanted to see.

"All right. Let's go. We only have a few minutes."

Even without Roshi's help, we finished the bypass with time to spare. Although we were technically breaking the rules, the caves were just as secure as the domes themselves, maybe more so, and really good locks were on the perimeter, where they guarded against the accidental release of our pressurized atmosphere.

"How about lights?" Keri stepped through the hatch as soon as it opened, but stopped almost immediately.

"Panel to your right." I started to reach for it, but her arm flashed up, slapped the wall, and found the controls. The overheads were dim, but still worked. "You coming or not, Roshi?" I waited until he nodded and stepped over the threshold, then followed.

"What are you doing?" Roshi grabbed my arm when I started to swing the hatch shut behind us.

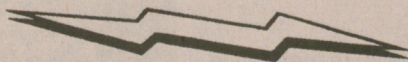
"I have to close it," I explained. "If anyone comes by, they'll know something's wrong if the hatch is wide open."

"He's right Roshi. Don't be such a wimp." But even Keri sounded a bit nervous.

I was feeling a little strange myself. The air smelled different, stale, dry, and there was dust everywhere. The light was grainy and our footsteps sounded funny. If I'd been alone, I don't think



I didn't see him at first, just noticed that there was some kind of irregularity in the shadows to my right, close to the tunnel wall. Curious, and I guess pretty stupid, I took a half step in that direction, just as my eyes focused enough to recognize the curve of a shoulder merging into a neck.



I'd have gone any further. Mad at myself, I tried to take the lead, but Keri was quicker.

"We're going down." Roshi sounded scared, and I began to feel bad about making him come with us.

"It should level off soon. There's another hatch at the other end, but it's powered down and locked open."

A minute later we reached it and passed through into the original Bradbury settlement.

There wasn't much to see, actually. Anything useful had been taken out before I was born. We recycle just about everything on Mars; metals, plastic, water, organics. Everything we use has to be shipped in from Earth, which is very expensive, or found and processed locally. There is some mining on Mars, but the most valuable things the planet has to offer are water and oxygen, and that's where most of our efforts are directed.

The walls were pretty much bare although we could see marks where equipment had once stood. Every few meters doors were cut through the walls leading to alcoves which had been storage rooms, laboratories, and living quarters. None of these were lighted; the fixtures had been taken down and moved elsewhere.

"There's nothing down here." Roshi was beginning to sound more confident now that we hadn't been attacked by monsters. Keri on the other hand had lost her enthusiasm. To be honest, I was pretty disappointed myself, but as long as we'd come this far, I planned to see whatever there was to see. Besides, if we went back, we'd still be looking for something to do, and I didn't have any more ideas.

"The corridor is supposed to end just ahead."

"Great. This is turning out to be a real bore, you know." She made it sound as though it was my fault.

"Yeah, well, there's something I want to check out."

It was like ESP, I swear. I could feel the way she looked at me even though my back was turned.

"Are you holding out on us, Ken?"

I was, actually, but I didn't want to say anything and spook Roshi again. Up ahead was the entrance to a side tunnel that was to have been the gateway to a new wing of the colony. Work had stopped when the Quiet Riot in the Burroughs settlement had convinced the government to risk domed cities rather than burrow further into the ground.

Colonel Armand Cavendish had died in that tunnel.

"It's just through here." And I stepped around the corner before she could answer.

It was no big deal. The colonists had taken advantage of a natural chasm to create a wider thoroughfare here. The lights were more scattered and thick shadows hid much of the chamber.

"No way I'm going in there. You could fall into a pit or something in the dark."

"There's nothing to fall into, Roshi. It's a tunnel like the other one, just bigger." But Keri didn't sound as sure of herself as usual. "Looks like a waste of time to me, though."

"I just want to take a quick look. Wait for me, guys."

The floor wasn't level and there was even some rubble, apparently fallen from the roof. They'd only completed a couple of hundred meters of the expansion, but there wasn't enough light to see the far end.

It was incredibly quiet down there. I mean, you don't realize how noisy Bradbury is all the time until you stop and think about it. No matter where you are, you can hear the ventilation system, the fans and spargers, and the hum of the power grids. There's always heavy equipment running and the sounds get caught inside the dome and bounded back in odd directions. And most of the time there are people close by, talking, or operating machinery, or doing something that makes noise.

It was real quiet down in that cavern. Quiet enough that I could hear my own breathing. And so cold I was shivering; I guess they didn't bother doing much to keep the caves habitable.

The shadows were so thick, I didn't realize I'd reached the end until I'd just about run into it. I reached up with my right hand and touched the wall; the stone was cold, so cold it stung.

"Come out of there, Ken! We can't see you any more!" To my surprise, the panicky call was from Keri, not Roshi. When I turned I could just make out their figures silhouetted against the dull glow from a light above and behind them. Apparently I was completely invisible from where they stood.

As was my companion.

I didn't see him at first, just noticed that there was some kind of irregularity in the shadows to my right, close to the tunnel wall. Curious, and I guess pretty stupid, I took a half step in that direction, just as my eyes focused enough to recognize the curve of a shoulder merging into a neck.

Someone was standing in the darkness, about ten meters away, not moving, not making a sound.

I know I said that I didn't believe in ghosts, and it was the truth. But at that moment, I knew this wasn't a proctor conducting a perimeter inspection, or another kid playing a trick on us. It was

the ghost of Captain Armand Cavendish; I knew it even before it stepped out of the shadows and reached for me. My left arm came up automatically and something intensely cold brushed my hand with icy fingers. Roshi and Keri were both shouting and I knew they'd seen him too, and then I was turning to run and a piece of rubble shifted under my foot, and I was falling.

I guess I hit my head against something on the way down.

The first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was my Dad's face. "Welcome back," he said quietly. "Need I say that you are in some serious trouble?"

"What happened to me?" I didn't hurt exactly, but I felt weak and dizzy when I tried to sit up, and lay back down almost immediately.

"Not much compared to what's going to happen. There's a large bump on your head, you have at least one bruised rib, and a mild case of frostbitten fingers. What were you and your friends doing down in the old settlement anyway?"

"Just messing around. Dad, I saw something down there."

"Yes, I know. You saw the ghost of Armand Cavendish."

I told you before, I've watched lots of movies from Earth. I knew how this scene was supposed to play, and no one was supposed to believe me. "But . . ."

"It was a hologram. The Cavendish family back on Earth offered a lot of money if Bradbury would install a permanent holographic monument to their illustrious relative. They didn't specify where it had to be, so long as it was within the colony perimeter, and with space at such a premium, well, I don't suppose it's very respectful, but it met the letter of the law."

"But it was so real."

"It was dark, you weren't expecting it, and your imagination just ran away with you. You're just lucky you're confined to the infirmary for the next couple of days, and don't count on much sympathy when you get out." He'd been sitting on the bed, but abruptly stood up. "Now I've got to go wait for your mother to bring her crawler back inside. She's not going to like this any more than I do."

He was halfway out the door when I called him back. "How'd I get the frostbite?" It wasn't hurting yet, but I couldn't move my fingers or feel anything.

Dad shrugged. "The wall's pretty cold there. I was surprised myself, but that's the only thing we could think of. Maybe you're just very sensitive to the cold."

I let him go after that and managed to sit up a little, staring at the opposite wall of the cubicle they'd put me in. I had a lot to think about, but mostly I went over what had happened down at the end of the tunnel. The wall *was* pretty cold all right, but I'd only touched it for a second. And with my right hand; I was sure of it. And my right hand was perfectly all right; it was the left that was numb.

The hand that had touched Captain Cavendish.

ptw

ETERNAL SPACE TRAVEL

The world evolves --
it revolves around a sun
that takes it
on an unimaginable journey,
eventually brushing
into every black corner
of the universe.
In time,
we will wear stellar dust
of places we only
dreamed into ourselves.
This is our
eternal space travel,
no machines
nor silver suits,
just wide-open eyes
and the breath
of stunning awe,
understanding this:
we have been there before,
we will be there
again.

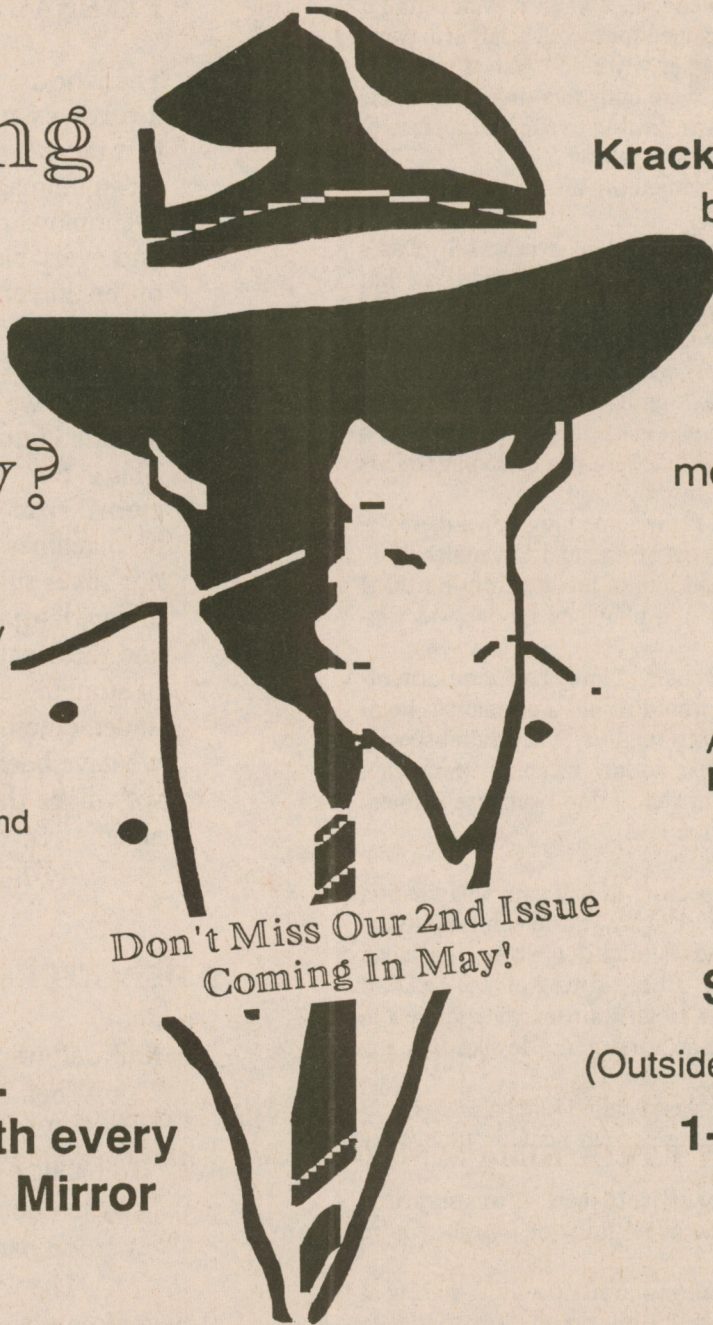
- Tippi N. Blevins

A DEPARTURE FROM SOLIDITY

Railroad tracks were different
When I was young.
I used to like
To balance myself on them.
When I couldn't do that,
I stood back and watched
The trains go by.
I never knew where they were going.
Today I find that I know
Too much about destinations.
All the things
Pointing towards the future
Seem to have an end;
And the infinity
I thought I once played on
Was a childhood
I had to walk away from.
I remember now
The time I had to leave
The iron tigtrope behind.

- Timothy Hodor

Searching For A Good Mystery?



Kracked Mirror Mysteries
brings you 45+ pages
of the best
mystery, suspense
and gothic ghost
stories by today's
most exciting authors...
three times a year!

Intriguing stories of mystery
and suspense by such
authors as William Bowers,
Edward McFadden III,
Curt Fischer, Carter Swart,
Mary Sass, Malissa Clay and
many, many more.

Plus gripping artwork by
such talents as Ted Guerin
and Richard Dahlstrom.
Also, every issue includes the
Kracked Mirror Marketplace
and the **Kracked Mirror
Mystery Puzzle.**

*Don't Miss Our 2nd Issue
Coming In May!*

**Everyone loves
a good mystery...
Discover why with every
issue of Kracked Mirror
Mysteries!**

Single Issue \$4.00

(Outside U.S. add 50¢ per issue)

**1-Year Subscription
\$11.50 (3 issues)**

Yes, I'm in the mood for a mystery! Send me **Kracked Mirror Mysteries** so I can find out whodunit!
Enclosed is my check (or money order). Please send me the following...

Single Issue - \$4.00 One-Year Subscription - \$11.50 (add 50¢ per issue if outside U.S.)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

**Mail to: Kracked Mirror Mysteries
370 E. Woodlawn,
Le Center, MN 56057**

Featured Poet

THE STENCH OF POETRY

The stench of Poetry
Is adulterous to life.
It breathes the vulnerability
Man is forbidden to possess.
Falling from its eyes
Are unabashed truths
Life abolished long ago:

Musn't see
Musn't know
Musn't touch

The stench of Poetry
Send the laws to an uproar
And helpless falsity has no refuge.
The Spirit rapes Death
And sin and tumultuous Love;
Chases the sunray into sight.
Swift hands laughingly toss the knife
And climaxically stab the unsuspecting reader.

Men cannot coexist with Poetry.
Only Man can.

I HOPE SHE DOESN'T TELL HIM I'M MAD

I hope she doesn't tell him I'm mad.
You never know about people who tell people
That they are mad.
They look just like everyone else,
Walk and eat and comb their hair and hold jobs.
It's unpredictable, who they'll tell and when they'll tell
And whom they will tell it about.
They can't help it.
I don't hold it against her.

Perhaps what they need is someone to understand them,
To listen and smile and remind them the world is kind.

Perhaps what they need is to be kept away from sharp instruments.



PLAY

Our lives met in a glass marble
And we nodded eager recognition.
I slipped into your mood without suspicion
You tangled your fingers around my questions.
Hide and seek in a wood of giant dandelions
Who roared us through, shivering petals.
We played shadow puppets with our souls til the light went out
Then reached the end of the thicket,
Unclasped hands, and were gone.



*Can you hear my voice through my pen?
I would have the world know my wailings,
And the animals my name.
The ink is the only outlet for this lifetime,
And I see the pages are beginning to curl.*



Kat Ricker


Paul Di Filippo is one of today's hippest authors of short fiction. His stories appear regularly in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Science Fiction Eye*, *Amazing*, *Pulphouse*, *New Worlds*, *Asimov's*, *Interzone*, and many others. He has been nominated twice for the Nebula Award. "Bad Beliefs" is the first of two stories we have in inventory from this talented writer. His second, "Leakage", will appear in the Spring '95 issue.

BAD BELIEFS

BY PAUL DI FILIPPO

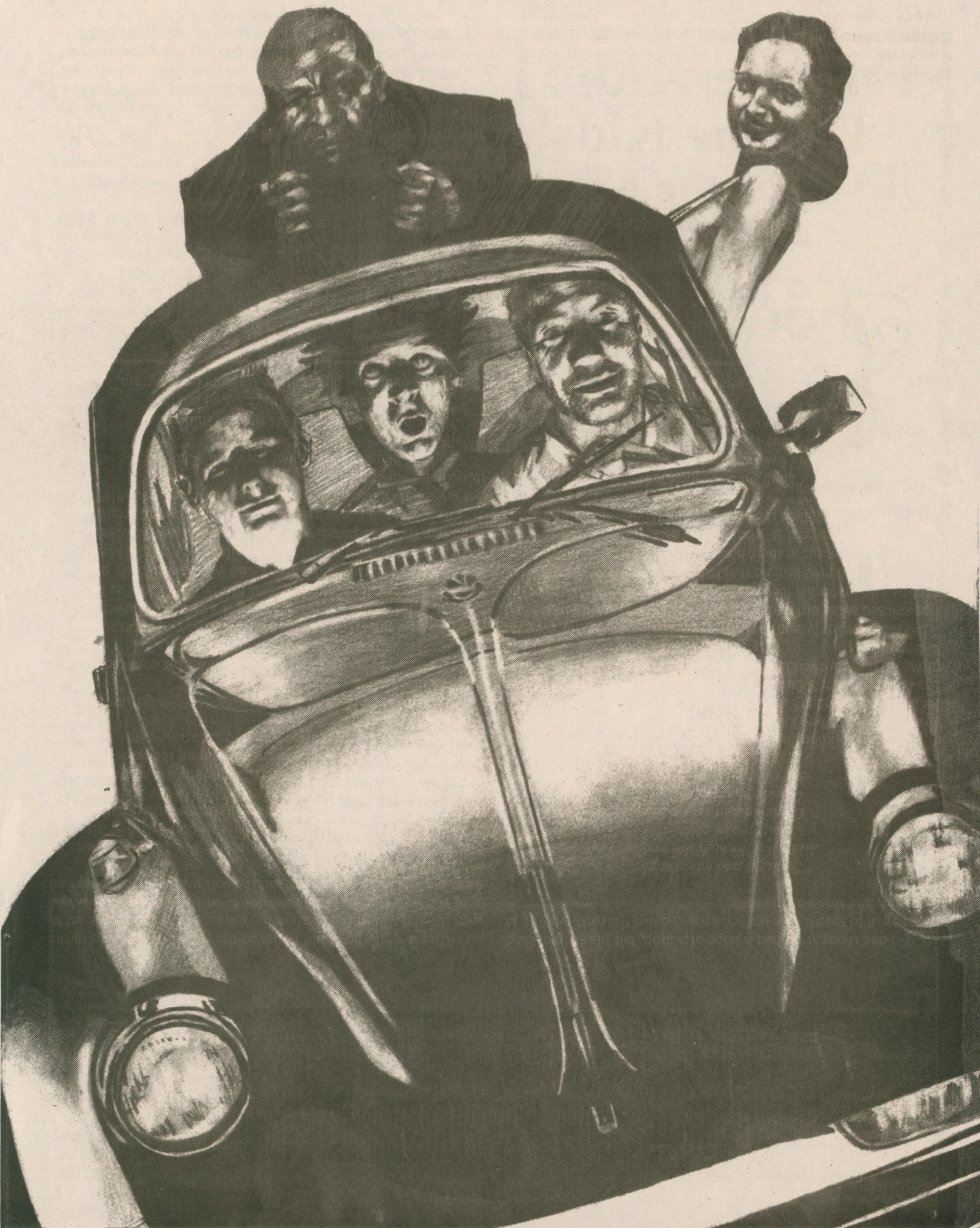
Illustrated by David Grilla

Stopping "Bad Beliefs" will fix the world. Or will it?

 HAD KEPT PUTTING OFF MY MANDATORY QUARTERLY visit to the local branch of the Department of Memes, and now I couldn't leave the house because of all the Bad Beliefs hanging around on my doorstep.

Don't ask me why I had neglected my checkup and inoculations, because I can't tell you. I know it's every citizen's civic duty to keep his antimeme vaccinations up to date. But some perverse streak inside me (possibly, now that I think about it, an anti-antimeme meme) made me keep postponing my appointment until it was just too late.

Maybe it was the way the nurse had treated me the last time I went to the DOM clinic. She was very pretty, and I wanted to like her. But she regarded me as if I were a leper, just because I was diagnosed as having a mild case of Yuppie Flu. With a look of absolute distaste, as if she had swallowed a fly,



**For the Kids!
For the Kids!
For the Kids!**



*** For the Kids!**



Thoughts of Christmas



A Childrens' Christmas poetry book
featuring:



Jane Yolen



and many others!



Fully illustrated!

Full Color!



\$5.00 + \$1.00 Shipping and handling
(Teacher Discounts Given)



Send Ck or Mo to:
Pirate Writings Publishing
53 Whitman Ave.
Islip, N.Y. 11751



she boosted the volume on her white-noise earphones and clicked down heavy filters on her protective goggles. I felt like a criminal.

Or maybe it was the supercilious way the doctor talked to me as he hefted the heavy needle whose tip dripped with antimeme juice. He was the kind of doctor who wore his degrees like a thousand-dollar suit.

"I'm afraid you've got a very bad complex this time, son. On top of the Yuppie Flu, the tests show definite traces of Someone Else Will Pick Up My Litter, Bodybuilders Are Godlike, and Elvis Lives."

"But Elvis does live!" I said.

The doctor just clucked his tongue chidingly while the buzzing, shortsighted nurse swabbed down my right ass cheek with antiseptic. Then he jabbed the needle in, and it really hurt.

For a whole day afterwards I was very disoriented. As the serum surged through my brain, driving out all the bad memes inside, I experienced frequent hallucinations. Most of these involved a pumped-up Elvis driving a pink BMW while throwing empty soda cans out the window.

After twenty-four hours, I was back to normal. Or at least what I had to assume was normal. It was so hard to tell these days. I felt a weird compulsion to pay my taxes early, and that kind of pissed me off. The government isn't supposed to put any proactive memes of their own into our shots, but you can't tell me that they don't. I've had several pacifist friends who have just upped and joined the Armed Forces without even saying goodbye.

Anyhow, for whatever reason--whether out of sheer stubbornness or actual meme infection--I delayed my next shot until the last possible minute and well beyond. And now I was paying the price.

Besides the antimeme components specific to a patient's unique illness, each tailored shot contained a general-purpose booster that protected you from a wide range of memes. Mine had run out. That was why all the Bad Beliefs were now camped on my doorstep.

They seemed to be able to sense when a person was vulnerable, and tended to congregate around a victim's house. Generally, what with every responsible citizen being well and frequently inoculated, you didn't see many Bad Beliefs in the good neighborhoods. Oh, sure, you might spot Don't Mow The Law or Thumbsucking Is Cute hanging around, but that was about as bad as it got out in the 'burbs where I lived. In the quarantined inner-city ghettos though, where people disdained DOM and their shots--man, that was another story. You tried to avoid those places if you could. The streets were full of Bad Beliefs of every conceivable variety, and there was no telling what you could pick up.

Now, though, I was the source of contagion.

Why, oh why, hadn't I just gone in for my shot?

With a start, I realized that I was falling prey to Crying Over Spilt Milk Will Help. That meme had been one of the first to arrive, and was surely still out there now. Or was it? Maybe they had all gone . . .

I crossed my living room carpet and timidly pulled back the corner of one thick drape, hoping that somehow all the Bad Beliefs would have just vanished.

But of course they hadn't.

In fact, there were more of them--many more--than the last time I had dared to look.

They were all shapes and sizes and degrees of solidity. They were big as an elephant and small as a mouse. They were human-shaped, animal-shaped or shapes in-between. You could see right through some, but others looked as substantial as your reflection.

The Bad Beliefs were insouciantly draped over my shrubs and steps. They sat atop my car and on my lawn. They walked up and down or squatted stolid as Indian chiefs. A group of four were

playing poker, and some others were performing a kind of frenzied cannibal dance. A clatter from the roof indicated they were up there too.

The ones nearest the window spotted me and shouted.

"Hey, Jimmy, come out and play!" "We won't bite!" "We just want to be friends!"

I dropped the curtain as if it were aflame, and faded back into the room.

They knew my name. I hadn't realized they would know my name. All my previous bouts with bad memes had been low-grade infections, nipped in the bud. But I guessed when things went this far, the memes apparently got more powerful, more tangible and active.

How active I could not at that moment have guessed.

I wished for the prophylactic glasses and headphones that the nurse had worn. They might have helped me to escape. But such devices were permitted only to medical personnel. It was felt that such mechanical contrivances were subject to failure, and could cause a person to neglect their shots . . .

My neighbors must be going nuts right now. My deliberate inattention to my own mental welfare had succeeded in lowering their property values immensely. Even yesterday, things hadn't been this bad. It was only a matter of time before one or more of my fellow homeowners called the DOM and a truck was dispatched to get me. In fact, I thought I could hear the distant wail of sirens even now.

Irrationally, I suddenly wished that I could have been born during a simpler time. I knew that life was supposed to be so much better nowadays, with all these shots to protect us from Bad Beliefs. But on the other hand, it was these same shots that had made the Bad Beliefs assume these potent and visible forms. Until they were expelled en masse from the human mind, Bad Beliefs had been strictly internal, invisible, a private matter. They had spread invisibly too, unlike this assault today on my house. But once they had been banished from their ancient lodgings in the human skull-banished, not exterminated, for that seemed impossible--they were free to roam at will.

And today I seemed to be the sole object of their attention.

I was feeling like one of those besieged humans in an old zombie movie when from behind me came a scuffling noise and a human grunting that made me jump almost out of my skin.

I whirled, heart pounding like a lawnmower piston.

Coming out of the fireplace was--Santa Claus.

"Santa," I said. "Santa, I haven't thought of you since I was four years old."

Santa brushed the soot off his outfit. "I'm surprised you held on to me that long, son. Old Santa's a Bad Belief nowadays. Santa Is Real is something you just can't say anymore."

"Santa? A Bad Belief?"

"Sure. They say I cause too much heartbreak when it's revealed I'm imaginary. But I ask you, do I look imaginary to you?"

"Oh, no, Santa. I still remember when I sat on your lap at the mall . . ."

Santa advanced on me. I let him put his arm around my shoulder. He smelled like plum pudding.

"Well then, you'll trust old Santa when he says that you should go outside and meet all your new friends. They'll help you get on with your life, Jimmy. You've been stagnating."

Was it true, what Santa was saying? I knew I didn't particularly like my job, or have any lovers or friends or interests or passions. But "stagnating" was an awfully harsh word.

"Gee, Santa, I don't know--"

Suddenly, the sirens grew louder, and Santa said, "You don't



want DOM to get you, Jimmy. Haven't you heard what they do to people who skip their shots? They implant a permanent antimeme pump in you. It's set for such a high dose of drugs that you'll have trouble holding on to a It's Time To Tie Your Shoe meme. You'll end up a ward of the state, living in a meme-free rest home. No, your only hope now is to flee to the ghetto, where DOM has no power."

The sirens sounded about a block away, and I knew I didn't have any more time to hesitate. I had to make up my mind, and fast. Should I wait for DOM and take my medicine, or throw my lot in with the Bad Beliefs?

Images of the sanctimonious doctor and the priggish nurse floated up before me. Then I looked straight into Santa's twinkly blue eyes.

It was no contest.

I don't even remember opening the door and fleeing my house. But somehow I was standing out on the lawn, surrounded by the Bad Beliefs.

"Quick, let's go!" I yelled to no one in particular. "DOM will be here any minute!"

Santa came up alongside me. "No they won't, Jimmy. Nobody's even called them yet."

"But the sirens--"

Santa Ho-Ho-Hoed. "That was just Paranoia Is The Real Story, Jimmy."

A skinny dude with the nervous look of a speed-freak stepped forward. He pursed his lips and out came a perfect siren noise.

"You--you tricked me!"

"It was for your own good, Jimmy, believe me," said Santa, just before he vanished.

"Santa, come back!"

Another of the Bad Beliefs grabbed me by the shoulder and spun me around. I found myself facing a big burly male figure wearing the head of a German Shepherd.

"It's a Dog Eat Dog World out there, kid. Ain't no one gonna help you but yourself. If I was you, I'd get my ass on the road. You're not gonna be safe until you get outa DOM's reach."

Dog Eat Dog was right. There was only one place for me to go, and that was the ghetto.

I jogged toward my car, the Bad Beliefs capering after me, whooping and hollering with delight. Their shapes were enticing and glamorous, and I had to fight to keep my focus.

My hand shot out to the handle of the driver's door, but one of the Bad Beliefs beat me to it.

"I'll take the wheel," slurred Drunk Driving Is Safe. His shirt was covered with vomit stains, and a haze of alcohol fumes hovered around his head.

"Oh, no--" I began, but other Bad Beliefs interrupted me.

"Don't worry," said You Can Trust Me, a beautiful young girl. "We always let him drive."

"There's never been an accident we couldn't walk away from," said You'll Never Die, a precocious ten-year-old.

"You don't want to hurt his feelings," said You'll Lose All Your Friends, a weenie of a teenager.

"Well, if you all think it's okay . . ."

"We do, we do!" they shouted, and hustled me into the back seat.

Drunk Driving slammed the car into reverse and peeled out, clipping my lamppost and dragging it halfway down the block before unhooking it when he climbed the curb and ran over an ornamental calf-high cast-iron fence.

"Does he know how to get there?" I asked with some trepidation.

Improbably, there seemed to be dozens of Bad Beliefs crammed into the car with me. What's more, they seemed to be continually

changing, new ones replacing the old. Right now a hearty salesman-type of Bad Belief was sitting beside me.

"Know where he's going?" demanded Bluster Will Clinch The Sale. "He drew the map! Don't worry, Jimmy. We'll get you to safety all right."

"We might have to make a few stops first, though," said Short Attention Spans Are Postmodern.

"Stops? For What?"

"I need some more booze, for one thing!" said Drunk Driving, turning completely around. The car veered into the oncoming traffic, forcing several vehicles off the road, and I closed my eyes. Now I heard sirens again.

"Is that Paranoia?"

"No," said Indecision Is Charming. "I mean, yes."

Bluster had vanished. In his place was a scary-looking black man with a goatee.

"Screw tha po-leece!" he said.

Having regained our own lane, Drunk Driving floored the accelerator and I was pressed back into the seat.

All the Bad Beliefs were cheering and screaming with glee. We took a curve, and I was pressed into the seemingly solid flesh of a girl besides me, who had replaced Screw Tha Police. I looked at her, and was shocked to see the form of my thirteen-year-old sister, who was really now thirty-five and living a thousand miles from here.

My sister giggled and said, "Oh, Jimmy, let's make out." She began to unbutton her shirt.

I scuttled away until the door handle was digging into my back. "Who---who are you?"

"I'm Incest Is Harmless."

Incest had her shirt off, and I couldn't take my eyes off her juvenile breasts. I have no idea what I would have done if I hadn't been interrupted. But luckily for me, at that moment Drunk Driving jumped another curb and slammed on the brakes. Even so, he still crunched into the side of a parked car.

In a daze, I asked, "Where are we? Are we at the ghetto?"

"Are you blind?" said Don't Tolerate Fools. "It's a packy. We need booze."

All the Bad Beliefs tumbled out, hustling me with them, and we blew into the package store like a hurricane of malevolent spirits.

Drunk Driving began to grab bottles off the shelves, stuffing them in his pockets and down his pants. The rest of Bad Beliefs did likewise. The startled owner came out from behind the counter, while the cashier picked up the phone and punched out 911.

"What the hell is going on here--?" demanded the owner.

Suddenly, out of nowhere materialized a new Bad Belief. He resembled a Hell's Angel, all fat-overlaid muscles, greasy leather and tattoos. And he was carrying a sawed-off shotgun.

The owner froze and all the color drained from his face.

"Property is theft," sneered Property Is Theft.

Then he pumped both barrels into the refrigerator case, spraying glass and liquor everywhere.

The owner dived back behind the counter and the cashier hit the floor. Property Is Theft laughed. "You're damn lucky Life Is Worthless was busy dive-bombing over Africa!"

We were back outside. I heard sirens again. This time it was really the cops, three cruisers in fact.

Screw Tha Police materialized, along with a dozen other Uzi-toting black men.

"I brung tha boyz from tha hood," he said. "We'll cover while you make a break for it."

We piled in the car. I found myself lying on the floor in the back. Then we were screeching away, the sound of automatic weap-

ons fire competing with our smoking tires.

I dared to get up off the floor. Somebody stuck a quart bottle in my hand, and I unscrewed the top and drank, heedless of what was in it.

When I was done spluttering, I asked quietly, "Can we go straight to the ghetto now?"

"Sure," said Promise Them Anything, who looked just like a famous politician.

We picked up the freeway heading toward the city. Weaving from lane to lane, Drunk Driving passed the other cars as if they were motionless. He didn't let up on the horn, and the blaring noise assumed the sound of the Last Trump. I closed my eyes when the speedometer cracked one hundred.

A familiar figure began tossing empties out the window. Someone Else Will Pick Up My Litter. I remembered when he had seemed like a big problem, and a hysterical laugh that was more like a sob escaped my lips.

"Take this exit!" a new, fanatical voice shouted.

Deceleration crumpled me into the upholstery. I opened my eyes and saw a new figure next to me. Half his face was bearded, half clean-shaven. Half a turban and half a cowboy hat sat on his head, half a string tie and half a set of prayer beads hung around his neck. Something about him immediately convinced me that he was one of the most dangerous Bad Beliefs.

"We must stop to smite the infidels!" said the mullah-preacher.

"You're, you're--" I began.

"God Is On Our Side!" he screamed.

"Right," I sighed

Not far from the foot of the exit ramp was a gas station. We pulled in and filled several of the empties with gasoline, then corked them with some of the windshield-clean rags. Then we went looking for churches.

Luckily it was a weekday, and most churches--these days--remained empty anyway, tainted with Bad Belief connotations. We torched a synagogue, a mosque, a storefront mission and an R.C. church--God Is On Our Side was strictly nondenominational--leaving plumes of smoke and leaping flames and screaming sirens in our wake.

As we screeched down the city streets, taking turns seemingly at random, I wondered if I would ever live to see the safety of the ghetto. Had I been right to trust Santa, what seemed like an eternity ago? Was this escapade really going to lead to my personal growth? Would the Bad Beliefs lead me through hell and out the other side, or just leave me stranded mid-inferno?

In any case, it could not be said that I was continuing to stagnate.

We took one final spine-snapping curve and the walls of the ghetto loomed up. The street terminated in a massive gate. In front of the gate was a six-story-high dragon.

All the Bad Beliefs shrieked in terror, and Drunk Driving stood on the brakes.

"Who--what--is that?"

One of the Bad Beliefs said in a whisper, "That's Failure Is Inevitable."

The dragon leered and breathed forth a jet of steam. Each of Failure's scales was as big as a manhole cover.

A small voice piped up. "We can do it. Just try."

It was Hope Springs Eternal, looking just like Tinkerbell.

Drunk Driving took a stiff belt from his pint. "Who the hell wants to live forever anyhow?"

He peeled out.

We made it within fifty yards of the gate. Then Failure raised a claw as big as a tugboat and slammed our car.

We tumbled over and over before we came to a stop, upside

down on our roof. The Bad Beliefs had cushioned me from serious harm, and we spilled out the windows, rumpled and bruised.

Failure had lowered its head to our level and glared at us with gemstone eyes the size of cathedral windows. It opened its mouth, revealing fangs and a forked tongue. Its breath smelled swampy.

Winged Hope was hovering right by me.

"Never fear, don't worry, there's always a way, just give it one more shot, don't hold back, pick yourself up off the ground--"

I couldn't stand it anymore. I grabbed the sprite, crushing her wings, and threw her into Failure's mouth, which instinctively clamped shut.

There was a brilliant flash of light, and I squeezed my eyes shut.

When I opened them, Failure was gone. Hope Springs Eternal and Failure Is Inevitable had cancelled each other out of existence.

The remaining Bad Beliefs let out a lusty cheer. Lifting me to their shoulders, they dashed for the gates, which were swinging open.

Then we were inside, and I was standing. The gates closed behind me.

The Bad Beliefs all shook my hand and dispersed, home at last. I found myself alone, except for two women.

One of them seemed human enough. She was gazing shyly at the ground, so I couldn't really see her face, but she seemed rather pretty, like the nurse at the DOM clinic.

The other figure was definitely a Bad Belief. She looked kind of like a combination of Guinevere, Venus, and Mae West. Alluring as she was, I knew at once that she was even more dangerous than God Is On Our Side.

"And you are--?" I said.

The Bad Belief smiled. "I'm Romantic Love Solves Everything. And this is your bride."

And you know what?

I believed her.

ptw

DARK JOURNEY

The twilight is my solitude,
I shun the realm of light,
Shadows stretch dark fingers
In mist touch of night.

Phantoms mock my passing
In dreams of transfixion.
I wander lost forever
On trails beyond the sun.

Cat eyes flash in yellow stare,
A thousand blink unseen;
The nether world of dusky things
And I am trapped between.

The Valley of the Shadow
Is where I choose to dwell.
I have no fear of dying -
I've spent my time in hell.

Lost in a black dimension
Beyond the will to find
Pathways of salvation from
Dark journeys of the mind.

- C. David Hay

Jane Yolen is one of America's most distinguished creators of original tales in the classic tradition, and her works have brought her numerous honors, including the Kerlan Award, the Golden Kite Award, and the World Fantasy Award. Author of more than 150 books, she writes for both children and adults, and is also an editor, a gifted story teller, and folk musician. "The Singer of Seeds" originally appeared in *The Faery Flag* and is reprinted by arrangement with Orchard Books, NY.

The Singer of Seeds

BY JANE YOLEN

Illustrated by David Grilla

Floren was the salt of the earth, and its savior.

THERE WAS ONCE A MINSTREL named Floren who had never held a piece of earth in his hand. He could sing birds out of the trees and milk from a maiden's breast, but of the strong brown soil he knew nothing.

One day, when he came into a small fertile valley named Plaisant and heard the surrounding mountains sing his name, he was more than a little surprised. Still, being a man who believed in signs, he sold his harp for a plow and a plot of land--a poor plow and a strip of earth running close by the mountain foot--and sowed the field.



No one thought he had a hope of a crop, but his strip of land soon began to sprout. He walked up and down the rows singing to his grain, and this was his song:

*"Sunlight and moonbright
And wind through the weeds.
Come up and come over,
Come up and come over,
Come up and come over
My swift-growing seeds."*

At first neighboring farmers had laughed at Floren and his strange songs. They knew him to be a minstrel, and a good one. He had entertained at their fairs. But he was not a man of the land. His father's father's father had not put in long sweaty years at the plow. So they mocked him, even to his face, and called him Singer of Seeds.

Floren had returned their mockery with a smile, for even he was amused at the dirt under his nails and the way the grain seemed to spring up under his feet. He expected --as they all did-- that the few rows would give him no real harvest and that by winter's edge he would be singing in their houses for food. Still, the mountain had called to him and it would have been impolite not to have answered. So he walked the rows of small tender shoots, and sang:

*"Sunlight and moonlight
And wind through the weeds.
Come up and come over,
Come up and come over,
Come up and come over
My swift-growing seeds."*

After a while he found he loved the sound of his song in the open air, the way it fell against the mountainside and returned to him, the way it seemed to rain down on the new young leaves. After a while, he was content and the soil under his nails seemed natural and good.

But the farmers grew envious of Floren. For though he was no farmer, his plants were growing higher, his corn hardier, his grain fuller than theirs. Though his father's father's fathers had all been wandering minstrels, he was proving to be a better man of the soil than those who had lived all their lives with the soil of Pleasant under their feet. They began to mutter among themselves.

"He does not sing a mere song," one farmer said. "He sings hymns to the devil."

"He does not sing mere hymns to the devil," said another. "He sings an incantation for his crops."

"He does not sing a mere incantation for his own crops," said a third. "He calls out curses on our crops as well."

And so it grew, this seed of envy that the neighboring farmers planted. And by the following spring it was in full flower in their hearts. All they could think of was Floren's luck, for as he flourished so they seemed to decline. And when their early plantings died, flooded out by unusual rains, while Floren's field high on the mountain foot was saved, they knew where to lay the blame.

"It is *his* fault," they said, staring at the drowned crops, as if by not saying his name aloud they would not be accountable for anything that happened.

So they blamed Floren, but they could not decide what they should do.

"Perhaps we should raze his fields," said one.

"We should set his crops ablaze," said another.

"We should send our cattle to trample on his grain."



But though each of them desired revenge, they could not agree on the means. So in the end they agreed to visit the witch who lived in a cave high up in the mountains. She was an old woman who gave nothing but evil advice, and such as their mood, they wanted to hear only the worst.

It was a long climb to her home. For each man the climb seemed endless. Their backs were furrowed with sweat long before they reached the top. And though it was hard enough to climb up alone, each man feared to be left behind so he held onto the shirt of the man in front and, in this way, doubled his agony.

The old witch woman was nearly blind, but the men made enough noise with their curses and cries to tell her they were coming. And so often did they now mix Floren's name in their loud talk, she also knew why they had come. She greeted them when they rounded the last curve, saying, "So you wish to know what to do with that cursed Singer of Seeds."

The men were hot and tired and so their marvel grew. Surely this was a mighty witch, nearly blind yet seeing with such a clear inner eye she had known they were coming and seen their purpose. They did not understand that their own lips and hearts had already betrayed them.

"We wish . . ." they began and then, to a man, stopped.

The old witch smiled at them, waiting. Fear and envy were common enough coins to her. She could afford to wait.

Then one man, braver than the rest, said, "We would end his song."

"Then thrust him from you," advised the witch.

Muttering amongst themselves, the farmers could come to no agreement. At last the same man spoke up again. "He would only return. He claims the mountain sings his name. He says he has sown to the mountain that he will be with us forever."

They agreed at last. Though none had heard him say it, all believed it had been said. "He swore he would be with us forever," they concurred.

"Then thrust him where he cannot return," said the old woman, making a downward motion with her hand. "Seal his lips with his own mountain and then see if he can sing." She turned her back on the farmers and went into her cave. None of them dared follow.

So there was nothing the tired men could do but go back down the mountain. They grumbled all the way.

Now all the while the farmers had made their way up and then down the mountain, Floren had been at work. He had plowed and furrowed his fields. He had sown his seed. He had weeded and watered and waited for sprouts. And all the while he sang:

*"Sunlight and moonbright
And wind through the weeds,
Come up and come over,
Come up and come over,
Come up and come over
My swift-growing seeds."*

Floren's song rose over the fields, over the meadows, up and over the mountain standing jagged against the sky.

The angry farmers, angered even further by their difficult trip down the mountainside, reached their homes late at night. And though they thought it was the ending of that same long day, it had been a season. Such is the way with magic; such is the way with madness.

In the morning when the sun rose, the men rose, too. Each by

his own hearth dressed in surly silence. They met by the crossroads that led to Floren's farm.

No one spoke to any other except in growls and signs, for they had almost lost their human tongues. And if by chance a traveler had met them on the path then, he would have thought them a pack

Floren's corn sang in a thousand voices . . .

of feral men, so fierce were their faces, so wild their eyes.

They came to Floren's farm but he was up before them. It was the time of harvest and he was out with his crops at the sun's first rays. The men were amazed--was it harvest time already? Yet they had left right after planting. They thought the hasty season was magic of Floren's making, though in fact it was they who had climbed throughout the whole growing season, and what they had grown now lay rotted in their hearts.

The farmers lifted their faces to the late summer sun, shrouded in clouds. They sniffed the air. The sounds of Floren's song drifted to them.

"Come up and come over," he sang. "Come up and come over."

The music hurt their ears. One after another they cried out their distress, and the sound was a howling in the wind.

Then they ran into Floren's field, surprising him by his corn, which was full and golden and ripe. Surrounding him, they snapped at him with their teeth and tore at him with their nails. They watched as his life's blood poured out upon the rich dark soil.

Then suddenly the beast in them departed and the sun came out from behind the clouds. Horrified at what they had done, they buried Floren under the field, under the glowing corn. They sealed his lips with the dirt of his own mountain and left, no man daring to look at his neighbor.

The next morning when the sun rose it was pale and thin like a worn copper penny. Every farmer in Plaisant rose, too, hurrying to his own field. But the growing time was over and what little had sprung up in their fields was weedy and scant. Only Floren's field, at the mountain's foot, was full of ripened corn.

As each man looked across his fields, a wind came sighing down the mountainside. It blew a song across Floren's corn field as if on a giant reed pipe. The song was wordless, but each farmer in his field recognized it at once. Floren's corn sang in a thousand voices, as clear as doom:

*"Sunlight and moonbright
And wind through the weeds,
Come up and come over,
Come up and come over,
Come up and come over
My swift-growing seeds."*

It sang on and on that year and every year for the rest of their lives. Every season from that time on, the corn grew without planting in Floren's field, and every season it sang his song. The wind whistled his song across the valley of Plaisant. And though passers-by thought it a pleasant, cheerful song, the farmers heard a different tune. Floren was indeed with them forever.

ptw

Daniel Hatch works as a reporter for the *Journal Inquirer of Manchester*, and has written for the *New York Times*. His short fiction appears regularly in *Analog* and *Absolute Magnitude*. The inspiration for "All Justice Fled" came from an exercise on the computer with virtual astronomy and the question: "What would happen if a Black Hole passed through the solar system?"

All Justice Fled

BY DANIEL HATCH

Illustrated by James Zimmerman

*The Earth Rod Strauss knew was lost,
but can he make peace with his son, and himself?*

FROM UP THE HILLS, AWAY FROM THE CITY lights, the night sky was sharp black and burnished with a thousand diamonds--and full of comets and shooting stars.

It was easy to tell them apart--even at first glance. The comets were wider and didn't fade away as you watched.

It would have been quite a show under other circumstances. But I was painfully aware of just how deadly it all was. It hadn't been nearly as pretty when I was up there in the middle of it.

The flight in from the Belt had been two weeks of hell. Every few hours, the ship would ring like a bell from an impact with an ice chip or a dust mote. The hull looked like it had been through the war. And even though the odds against a critical hit were too low to count, I spent the whole trip waiting for it to happen. The ride down from LEO through the defense net had been a relief in comparison--though the net was pretty toothless these days.

Even on the way down, I was paced by a big meteorite that left a bright green trail across Pennsylvania before hitting somewhere in the South Jersey pine barrens. I wondered how big a crater it had left--judging by what I'd seen in the war, the impact looked equivalent to a ten-kiloton nuke.

I'd put the lander down in the field behind our old house, walking across ten acres of hip-high



grass soaked with dew and full of mosquitos. The place looked empty and deserted, but I gave it a wide berth anyway. There was no way of telling who might have gotten into it in the three months since we'd evacuated -- especially considering the way things had been coming apart when we left.

Besides, there were too many memories tied to that house. I was having a hard enough time as it was without making this even more complicated.

I decided instead to hike on down the road to Ned Covallo's. It was only half a mile, and I figured Ned might still be around.

As I rounded a corner, I watched another bright meteorite cross the sky, wondering if it would come down or skip back into space. The trail petered out before it reached the horizon.

A few minutes later a more immediate menace appeared.

A truck roared around a corner a few hundred meters behind me, lights on bright, floating a meter off the roadbed. I had just enough time to duck into a drainage ditch before the lights swept the spot where I'd been walking.

I didn't know what to expect, but even before I'd left for Vesta, the night had belonged to raiders, scavengers, and worse.

The truck passed by, the low sound of manic music throbbing audibly at its closest approach. They didn't stop, so I presumed they hadn't seen me -- but I kept the needler in my hand with the safety off just the same. A few seconds later, I heard the pulse of an attack rifle tearing up the scenery farther down the road.

I continued walking and a few meters along I saw what was left of the vegetable stand at Boone's Farm, still smoldering and painted with bits of flame. I remembered buying sweet corn and green beans from his stand in better times. Boone was long gone, though, so all that was lost was one more memory. I didn't have the patience to mourn another of those.

A moment later, I didn't have time either -- the truck was back.

It came up the road before I could get away. I stood square in its headlights, wishing I were a lot smaller than I was and feeling a lot bigger. Then the ground began to chew up around me.

Boone's yard was wide open with no good cover, so I ran across the pavement into a field of tall rye grass.

The ghostly glow of the truck's headlights pitched up and caught faint tendrils of fog overhead. I zigged left, zagged right, and went to the ground. The big vehicle smashed through the grass behind me. The attack rifle pounded away at the field somewhere in front of me.

Amateurs. They were aiming too high. Obviously a bunch of flatheads who'd gotten their hands on some heavy weapons.

I pressed forward, my clothes soaked from the wet grass and my hands covered with dirt. The truck made a wide circle around to my right. I turned into the arc, hoping to avoid them.

Then the lights came on.

Big lights, hidden in the rocks, with the silhouettes of auto-guns lurking in front of them.

"Stop where you are," came an amplified voice from somewhere behind the lights. "If you know what's good for you, you'll

**Amateurs. They
were aiming too
high. Obviously a
bunch of
flatheads who'd
gotten their hands
on some heavy
weapons.**

put down your weapons and go back the way you came."

The truck swung back on a true course, striking out defiantly for the lights, blasting away its weapon as it closed.

A battery of auto-guns opened fired from the darkness at the base of the rocks when the truck was still a hundred meters away. The third shot hit dead on and the truck plowed nose first into the field. A couple of shots later, one round must have hit the power pack for the attack rifle, because it discharged with a low thump and a flash of green light.

I stood up to get a better look -- unafraid now. I'd seen that happen once in the war. It took out half a platoon.

"You in the brush, stay where you are. Drop your weapons." I recognized that voice. It belonged to Ned.

"Ned, it's me -- Rod Strauss," I said. I hoped there was a live body behind the voice and not a computerized message. I spent half a lifetime waiting there with that hope before Ned spoke.

"Rod Strauss got off planet three

months ago," he replied.

"I came back," I said.

"I don't believe you. What would bring Roddie back here? He was one of the lucky ones. The ones who got away."

I answered with just one word: "Tomas."

There was a long pause, then Ned said, "I still don't believe you, Rod. Your son just isn't worth it."

"It wasn't up to me, Ned. Carrie sent me back for him."

He made me wait another few minutes, then the lights went out, fading slowly, leaving me blind from the glare.

"Come on up to the house, Rod. It isn't safe out there."

Ned was waiting for me in the kitchen.

"I'd offer you a beer, but we ran out last month," he said. "Have some wine instead. I was saving it for the end."

He was an old man -- that was why he was still here. His hair was gray and white, tight curls cut short against his leathery black scalp. He had a face full of wrinkles -- payment for a lifetime of worries. I wondered if I'd look like that when I got to be his age. I couldn't imagine having as many worries as Ned must have had, though. He'd raised six kids when I only had the two -- though Tomas was worry enough for ten. And Ned was a veteran of a war before mine. That one had been a lot nastier with fewer veterans.

Because Ned was so old, he had remained behind, even when I offered him a billet at Vesta. He was stubborn about it, too. Said he'd lived his life and didn't need to escape. There were others that deserved it more, he said.

I'd come to him because I knew he wouldn't resent the fact that I'd gotten away. For most folks here on Earth, the fact that I'd returned wouldn't have cooled the jealousy and hatred for those of us who were trying to survive.

"So what's it like out there in the system these days?" he asked after he yanked the cork out of the bottle and poured two glasses of sparkling white wine.

"Bad," I said. "Worse than incoming artillery. You never know

when something is going to hit."

"They don't tell us much anymore -- not since they locked up the astronomers and closed down the observatories. But I heard Achilles came pretty close to you folks."

"You heard right," I said. I sipped at the wine. It was fruity and tart, with a taste of apples and cinnamon. I savored it. In a short while there would be no more wine like that, no more apples or cinnamon either. "All the leading Trojans were stripped away. Achilles and some of the others were tossed into a retrograde orbit. It was like driving southbound in the northbound lane of the freeway. It came within half a million kilometers -- close enough to give us all nightmares for a week."

"Your nightmares are nothing compared to what's been going on down here, Roddie," Ned said. "Everything's gone to hell. I owe you for tipping me off early, though. I never would have gotten those auto-guns once word broke about the Doomsday Hole. They've saved my butt half a dozen times in the last month."

"I don't know if I did you such a big favor," I said. "I still feel bad about leaving you behind."

"Don't start with me again. Like I told you before, back when I had cancer and I was waiting for them to decide if they were going to give me a shot of nanomeds, I made peace with myself and my maker. There's no point in wasting fuel and air on an old-timer like me -- not for the couple of years I might have left at this point."

"Just the same --"

"Just the same nothing. I'm safe up here. I'll last a long time. Right up to the end."

"You're more confident than I am."

"I'm not afraid to die. Besides, how much longer do I have to wait? A year? Two years?"

I swallowed hard. I wasn't sure Ned really wanted to know the answer to that question. And I wasn't sure I wanted to tell him.

"Do you really want to know?" I asked after a long silence. I sipped some more wine while Ned grew serious. I felt terrible about adding to the wrinkles in that sad old face.

"No. I don't really want to know. Not how long I've got, anyhow. But answer me this, how bad is it going to get?"

"You tell me -- what's the weather been like this past winter? Warmer than usual?"

"Yeah -- a lot warmer. We didn't even get a killing frost. The government called it a greenhouse glitch. Said environmental engineering would take care of it."

"That's a lie. You lost five million kilometers off perihelion -- that put you three percent closer to the sun. And that was nothing compared to what's going to happen this summer. The Earth's going for a ride -- a long, cold one. It'll be like winters used to be for a few months. Then it'll get worse. The oceans will freeze. Eventually, it'll be colder than Mars."

"Are we going to lose the sun completely?" Ned asked. I could tell he was a man who'd learned long ago to take the worst news without flinching.

"No -- not completely. But you'll be on a high-eccentricity loop with a big aphelion and a perihelion that won't do you much good. You'll be lucky if you get as warm as Mars in the summer -- and the summers will be five years apart."

He let out a low whistle. "No wonder they arrested the astronomers. There have been rumors, stories. Lots of folks know something about the sky. But if it got out that any of this stuff was true, that's all it would take to push things over the edge."

"Doesn't seem like there's much of an edge left," I said.

"That's where you're wrong. Real wrong. We're still holding it together. Not well, but well enough. The economy's gone com-

pletely crazy. Nobody's investing in anything long-term and the banks and stock markets went belly up weeks ago. The money's going to the survivalist enterprises -- the Moon, Mars, anything off-planet, life-support, spacecraft, you name it. But people aren't starving -- leastwise, not in this state. And there's still power and communications -- when the sunspots don't get too bad."

"Then I guess there's a chance I can find Tomas."

Ned narrowed his eyes at me and shook his head. "You think he's worth going after? What are you going to do with him if you find him? Do you really want his kind in your new world?"

"Wouldn't you do the same for one of your sons?" I asked, turning his narrow stare back at him.

"I did do that -- once," he said. "During the war -- during my war. And it got him killed and almost got me killed with him. Do you want to make the same mistake for someone as worthless as Tomas?"

"His mother doesn't think he's worthless," I said. "And I'm not sure I could face her again if I didn't try."

Ned sighed. "I guess not -- not if she got you to come all the way back here already."

"Will you help me?"

"Help you? What can an old man like me do to help you?"

"I need a ride into the city," I said.

"Humph. That's not much, I guess. Not enough for me to turn you down -- even if I do think you're a damned fool."

"Thanks," I said and I finished the glass of wine. Ned poured another for me and for himself, and we drained the bottle in short order. And when it was gone, we sat at the table, talking all night as we waited for the dawn.



was still in the Defense Corps when the Angels came," I told him.

My unit had been in the orbital assault on Kenya, dragged itself by foot across Kilimanjaro and up to the Rift Valley and Lake Tanganyika, then made a suborbital jump to Bombay. We were still mopping up in the suburbs when the word came in.

Their star had materialized out of nowhere on the edge of the solar system. It wasn't a real star -- though most of the news channels never got that much straight. It was just a little ball of live fusion, about as massive as the moon and a few kilometers in diameter. The Angels themselves swarmed around it in their habitats. There must have been a thousand of those -- all different shapes and designs. If humans had manned them, they each would have been big enough to house thousands of us. But we never saw what kind of creatures the aliens were, whether they were organic or cybernetic, whether they were whale-sized or shrimp-sized.

Their probes descended out of the skies, sweeping across the planet. The panic started quickly, but died out just as quickly. Martial law has a certain calming effect. They hovered over cities and outside space stations and along coasts. They inspected our battlefields, swatting away weapons' fire as if it was a blight of gnats.

"What I can't figure out is why they never tried to talk to us," Ned said. "You'd think they would have answered us sometime."

"I don't know," I said. "It was like we were a colony of termites and they came to document us. We tried. We used every form of radiation we can control to send signals and codes and images to them. I wonder if they thought we were trying to communicate or if they thought it was just another kind of weapon."

Nothing they did helped either. No signals passed between the Angels and their probes for us to monitor, decode, and imitate. The devices finished their work then returned to their masters.

David R. Adelman • Brett Harris • William Carr • Harold D. Cope • Richard Daddstrom • Mark Powell • Harry ...
Aberations
 science fiction, fantasy & horror
 Issue #16
Aberations
 adult science fiction, fantasy & horror
 E.D. Falk • John F. Tall
 Harold D. Cope • Hugh Hume
 Greg Atkinson • Katherine Judson
 S. Darabrock Colson • The Bad Step of Hru •
 Marg B. Brown • Gregory G. Hyman • K.I. Jones
 Lana Hayward • Herb Kaufman • Alfred Klotzerman

\$4.48 Single issue \$31 (12 iss.), \$37 in Canada, \$43 elsewhere.
 Two year subscription - \$58
 (Please make all checks payable in U.S. Funds to Aberrations Magazine,
 P.O. Box 460430 San Francisco, CA 94146-0430

The Angels' star continued on a simple gravity-warped hyperbola, coasting on its initial velocity in a long arc that carried it in no closer than the Belt and then carried it out to the system again. Then, when it had passed the orbits of Neptune and Pluto, it winked out of existence, as if it had never been.

Of course, the war came to an abrupt and premature end. The Indian government changed hands two or three times in the course of the Angels' passage, too quickly to maintain a military effort. And back in the States, the Congress and the General Assembly offered a cease-fire.

"I got caught up in the demobilization," I said. "Within a year, there were a couple million of us vets on the streets looking for work, looking for a place to invest our G.I. Bonds, looking for a way to get over the war. I had a big enough bond to go home and retire -- thanks to three unit citations and a Medal of Valor. But I was too young and too full of energy to just quit. And Carrie was tired of sitting at home with the boys. She wanted to travel and see the world once the travel restrictions were lifted.

"We did some of that, got tired of it, and spent too much of my bond holding for my comfort, and ended up making dirtfall back here in the States. When the war started, I'd been in grad school - sociology. But there wasn't much need for academics in the social sciences in the postwar economy. And I'd never been very excited about a future as a college professor. So instead of opening up a little sociology shop, I became a cop."

It was one of the careers that was still wide open to vets. We were the only ones they could count on to control the other soldiers who had come home and found no place to go and nothing to do.

I put in fifteen years on the force -- long enough to roll my G.I. bond over eight times and add a municipal bond to it. When I retired I had a pension and a nest-egg. The nest-egg went into the Space Resources Co-Op -- my idea and the best one I ever had.

It really paid off when the Doomsday Hole followed the Angels.

The cophouse was an armed fortress, surrounded by fused-sand gun bunkers, autogun emplacements with radar, ground tracks rolling in and out on patrol, and armed sentries dug in at their posts.

I'd expected as much -- the signs of a city under martial law are easy enough to recognize. The highways had been full of tracks, and high-lifters studded with guns and monitoring equipment floated over the bit interchanges. The civilian traffic was quick and sparse, though I was surprised to see as much as I did. Life goes on, I guess, no matter what.

We were stopped at the checkpoint outside the station by a small woman with a big rifle. She came out from behind the scrap steel barrier that blocked the road and forced traffic to make a series of right-angle turns before going any farther.

Ned tried to jolly her up. Considering his generally sour disposition, I figured it was a bad move. I was right.

"Hey good-looking -- how do my buddy and I get through here? We've got business inside."

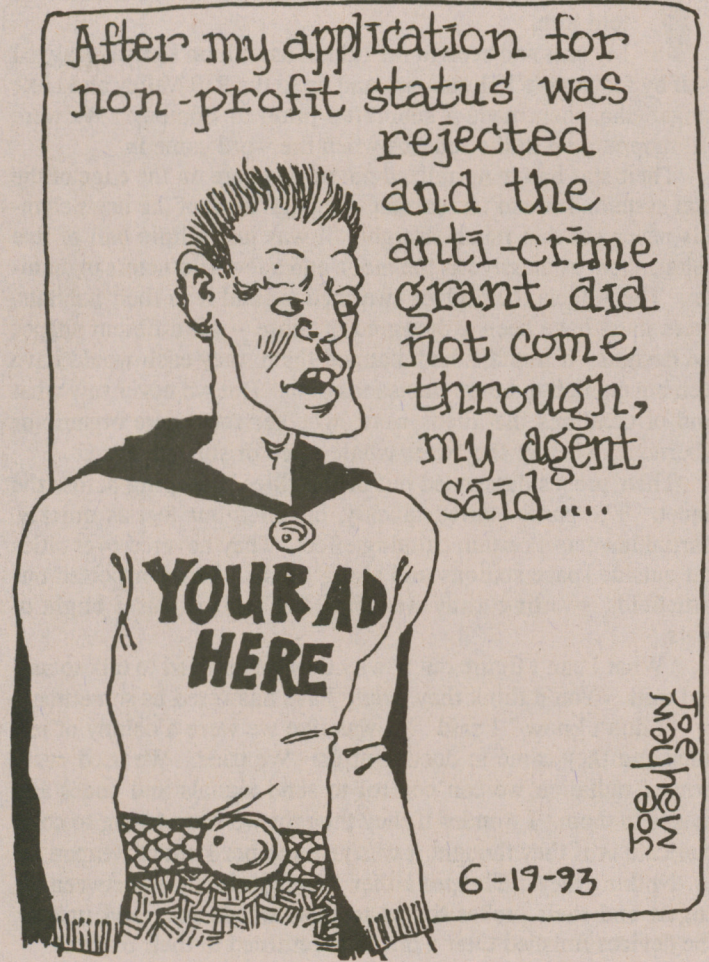
"Out of the truck," she ordered without smiling.

"Relax, sugar. We're both veterans and Roddie here used to be a cop."

"I don't care if you're Commandant Crown himself. Everybody gets out of the truck before they can get through here. Let's go." She swung the barrel of her weapon suggestively and Ned shut off the turbine. The truck settled to the ground and we got out.

Three of her friends came to loose attention behind the barrier and swung their rifles in our direction.

"Veterans, huh?" she asked. "You got cards?"



Ned fumbled for his wallet and extracted his pension card. I had my Retired ID and my police holo ready when she was finished with him.

"What unit were you with?" she asked.

"Second Space Command -- Africa and Bombay."

"Oh, yeah?" she said, her eyes narrowing as she looked me over. "My father was with the Second. He bought it in Uganda."

"So did a lot of good soldiers."

"You don't look old enough to be a combat vet."

"You don't look old enough to be a sergeant," I replied.

She rankled at that, shoving my cards back into my hand and looking mean at me. I looked her back. We were both right. I didn't look my age and she looked hers. Some of us who went through the war seemed to stop getting old once we came home -- after what we'd been through, life was pretty tame. And judging by her unlined face, I was sure this soldier hadn't seen much more than riot and traffic duty since signing up.

But she and her comrades-in-arms all shared a look that brought back old memories. It was a grim expression that grew on us as we fought our way across the dry African plain -- a resignation towards death. It was haunting, eyes focused on the horizon, or close in on the nearest target. And behind it you knew that everyone had written themselves off as dead -- only to be resurrected by pure chance and perseverance if Judgment Day came before the end of the war.

For us, Judgment Day had come and gone. But for this sergeant and the guards around her, it was just around the corner. Only this time, there would be no resurrection -- and I could tell that they knew it.

"What's your business?" she asked after apparently deciding that glaring ugly at me wasn't going to scare me away.

"I have to talk to Detective Sergeant Barnwell. Official business."

She laughed. "Yeah, right. CHIEF Barnwell hasn't been a detective since you were a cop. Don't try that line on me. I ought to impound your truck and send you packing."

"Call him and tell him I'm out here and see if you can get away with it," I said. Ned stared at me and winced. I could tell he wasn't happy about me using his truck as the ante in a game of one-upmanship. It was a long walk back to his place.

The guard sergeant flipped down her visor and talked into it for a moment while Ned and I grew hot under the mid-morning sun. I watched the clouds roll by. They were thick and turbulent -- dark gray on the bottom despite a bright blue sky above. You could tell there was a lot of energy in the atmosphere. It reminded me of the monsoon clouds over Bombay -- but they were entirely out of place here in the States. I wondered if anyone else noticed that the weather had gotten seriously out of whack.

"He stays here," said the woman with the rifle, pointing at Ned. "We take the truck over to that lot and it sits there until you come back. And you wait until someone comes out to get you."

Ned handed her the keys to the truck and strolled over to the shade of a tarpaulin behind a pile of sandbags. I looked for the door to the station where my escort would appear, and the sergeant just looked sour.

"I don't care if you are a combat vet," she said. "You try something and I'll cash your bond for you."

Geez, Strauss, I thought you got the hell out of here months ago," Barnwell said as he dropped his big frame into the chair behind his desk. He'd changed a lot in the six years since I'd last seen him -- he'd put on twenty kilos and all his hair had turned gray. His face looked like rough leather - alligator hide.



Too many artificial stimulants did that to you.

"I had to come back," I said. "I need a favor."

The way he turned his eyes away made me realize I'd made a mistake. Barnwell was long past the point of doing favors for old friends. To make chief, favors had to be a professional deal and they no longer came cheap.

My heart sank briefly as I realized how poorly prepared I was for this encounter. When I left the Belt, I'd figured that Barnwell would still be over in the detective division. That was where he was headed when I quit the force. But a lot had changed since then.

"That was a crazy thing to do," he said. "You had your ticket out. It should have been one-way. Me, I got a slot in a bunker. They're going to need cops, no matter how few of us make it. But you had your chance and you blew it."

"Not quite," I said. "I've got a ride back to Vesta when the time comes."

He smiled, revealing yellowed teeth. "Good for you then. Vesta, huh? How's things out in Belt? They don't tell us anything down here dirtside anymore. Not even us cops. How much time have we got anyway?"

I started to tell him, but then hesitated. I realized suddenly that I might have something worth a favor from the police chief. I didn't know if I could parlay it into all that I wanted, but at least it was a start.

"I heard they locked up all the astronomers," I said, keeping a poker face. "Too bad."

"You don't know the half of it. We picked up everyone with a subscription to the Sky and Telescope bulletin board and shut down every science service on the networks. Can't let them go starting a panic by spreading unreliable rumors, can we? It's hard enough keeping order as it is."

"I can imagine. Must be like the old days, right after de-mobe."

"Worse, Strauss. Lots worse. It was different trying to handle the vets in the old days. Even the combat types like you and me. Sure they were rough, but they'd been through the system. They knew what they could get away with -- and what they couldn't. The young flatheads out there today, though, are out of control. They know there's no tomorrow. They don't care what happens. I'm just glad I've got the Defense Corps to back me up. Without them this city would be a jungle."

"I know what you mean," I said. "My kid is one of them."

"You mean Tomas? I remember him. Always in trouble, wasn't he? Didn't he come through here a few times when you were still in blues?"

"More times than I want to remember."

"Yeah, that's right. Larceny six. Burglary three. Grand theft auto. You had a real workout with that body didn't you?"

"More than you'll ever know."

A light came on in his eyes. "Say, this is about your boy, isn't it?"

"Exactly," I said. "I came back to get him."

"Well, I'll be damned. That's a crazy stunt to pull -- even for a good kid. Is that the favor you want? You need some muscle to pull him out of the city?"

"Not quite. The last word we got from here was that he'd been pinched. No details. His mother sent me back to find out where he is. And, if I can, to bail him out . . ."

My words hung in the air as he gave me an incredulous look. We both knew that bail was not an option under the rules of martial law. We both knew I meant something else.

Barnwell shook his head slowly. "Strauss, you always were wired for demolition. And I always figured that one of these days you'd take us all with you."

I smiled and shrugged.

"I wish there was something I could do for you, you know. I really do." He shifted his weight in the chair and for an instant I was afraid he was going to get rid of me. I spoke up before he could do it.

"Maybe there is. How about an even trade? You tell me what you know and I'll tell you what I know. We haven't locked up our astronomers on Vesta. There's no place for them to go as it is."

He sat back in his chair and looked down at his desk for a long minute. Then he pressed a button on the comsat. A couple of seconds later a uniformed officer stuck his head through the door.

"Run a check on the status of Tomas Strauss," Barnwell told the cop. "What's his ID number?" I told him and the officer disappeared.

"Thanks," I said.

"This will take a little while. The sunspots have made normal communications crazy and the landlines are all tied up with more traffic than they can handle. So tell me Strauss, what's happening out there?"

They figure the Doomsday Hole came from the same place as the Angels," I said, relaxing back into the couch that filled one wall of Barnwell's cramped office. "They traced back through the images and the first indication was a burst of X-rays in just about the same spot where the Angel Sun appeared back twenty years ago. Both of them were coming through at about sixty kilometer per second relative to the sun. The difference is that the Doomsday Hole is a black hole with a mass of 2.57 times our sun."

"God!" Barnwell said in a hoarse whisper. "No one down here wants to admit how big it is. Now I see why."

"The X-rays came from comets and stuff falling into the hole. It makes quick work of anything that gets within reach."

"Are we going down the tube as well?" Barnwell asked, his eyes momentarily wide.

"No -- not at all. It'll never get that close to the Earth. No, the problem isn't falling into the hole. The problem is getting ripped out of orbit. Two and a half solar masses is enough to tear the hell out of the solar system. Like pouring the whole thing into a magnetic blender."

"I guess so. That would explain all the comets and crap falling out of the sky. They had a big one over in Jersey last night."

"Exactly. It started pulling comets out of their orbit, whipping them around and speeding them up, then sending them down here. Lots of little stuff, too. Tidal forces were enough to break up a lot of the cometary material, turn it into grit. The whole system is full of trash now. You should see what it did to my ship."

"I can imagine."

"Now think about what it's doing to the big stuff. Jupiter's already shifted out of place. And it made hash out of the Trojans."

"There were stories -- but the word from higher up was to discount rumors."

"No rumors. The leading Trojans -- Achilles and some of the others -- they got torn loose when the Hole passed too close and they were whipped around into retrograde orbits. They're on their way out of the system now, but before they left they came close enough to Vesta to give us all heart failure."

"And now it's coming this way?"

"Exactly. Once it has passed through the Belt we'll know for sure if Earth is going to make it through without a major impact event. They've been running projections on orbits for weeks back on Vesta. But our cray has limited capacity -- and other demands on it. As near as we can tell, none of the big stuff is going to come

this way. But there's thirty thousand asteroids bigger than a house, Barnie. We don't know if that thing is going to send a mountain down your pipes. Remember the dinosaurs."

"That's not funny, Strauss. Not at all. What are you going to do if Vesta is the one that gets tossed at us?"

"Won't happen. We'll be on the other side of the system from the Hole when it passes."

"I guess you wouldn't still be there if it wasn't. Okay, suppose we don't get behind the eight-ball. What happens then?"

"Orbits are all a matter of vectors. The faster you go, the wilder they get. When the star passes by it's going to pull the Earth along after it. That's going to make it go faster. Fast enough, and it'll break loose from the sun forever. Out into the deep freeze for a billion years or more."

Barnwell turned pale as he contemplated that.

"But don't panic," I said. "That's an easy calculation to do and we already know it isn't going to happen. You'll still be around. But it's going to get awfully cold around here. Cold enough to freeze the oceans, for sure. Maybe cold enough to freeze out some of the atmosphere. The carbon dioxide, at least. Maybe more. I don't know enough about the chemistry of it. And we haven't spent a lot of time out there worrying about that part of the problem."

"Geez, Strauss, you sound so damned casual about it. I'll bet you wouldn't be so calm if you were going to be stuck here with us."

"Hey, Barnie, I thought you had a place reserved in a bunker somewhere."

"Sure, but I've got friends. I've got family."

"So do I."

That shut him up for a moment and brought him back around to the other side of the bargain. That and the arrival of the uniformed officer with a message pad. My heart began to pound at the sight of it.

Barnwell looked at the pad, then said: "I guess you do."

"So what can you tell me?"

"That depends," he said.

My blood froze. Was he going to double-cross me? "Depends on what?"

"You still haven't told me what I wanted to know. The most important thing, Strauss."

I shrugged. "What do you mean?"

"How long? How much time do we have? That's the big secret down here, didn't you know? No one wants to say just when it's going to happen. They want us all to think we're going to live forever. Only a handful of big shots know the truth."

"And you want to know so you can be a big shot, too!"

"No -- so I can make some plans. There's things I need to do before we go under. People I need to take care of."

"I've got people to take care of, too."

He looked down at the pad again. "Your kid's up in a prison camp in mid-state. They nabbed him hijacking a truck-load of heavy equipment last month. No court date. No one up there has one. I think we're just going to keep them there until the end."

I didn't know whether to feel angry

or sad. Instead, I felt cold and calculating. I only had one advantage now and I had to use it.

"All right then, an even trade. Give me papers to transfer him out of there. An ID or whatever to verify it. In return, I'll tell you how much time you've got."

Barnwell sneered. Under other circumstances it might have been a smile. "How do I know I can trust you?"

"It's just information, Barnie. If I'm wrong you can have my bond. How do I know if I can trust you?"

"Strauss, you disappoint me. Even if the world's coming to an end there's still honor among vets. All right, it's a deal. But if you ask me, you deserve whatever you're getting out of it."

I stuck out my hand and after a brief hesitation he shook it.

"Ninety-seven days," I said. "Three months. If you've got something to do, you better get busy and do it."

"Damn," he said, shaking his head. "Damn."

The detention camp gave me a chill that cut down to the bone, despite the bright sun. It had a raw look, like a fresh wound -- new scraped earth, the sharp edge of the forest with limbless trunks crowned by thick leaves, and triple coils of razor-wire sparkling in the sunlight. What looked at first like stubby stumps growing haphazardly from the fields behind the wire turned out on closer inspection to be men and women -- the detainees.

Ned was driving. Since it was only a two-hour trip to the camp, he had volunteered. I was glad of it, because when the human dimension of the camp fell into perspective I was hit by a wave of vertigo.

All of the ambiguous and dissonant emotions that marked my relationship with my son tore at my heart at once.

I couldn't count the times I had warned him that one day he would end up in a place like this. And I'd lost track of the number of times I'd moved earth and sky to prevent it. This time was no different.

The passes from Barnwell got us through successive layers of security. Ned did all the talking, while I sat stone-faced and silent beside him, struggling with my feelings. Struggling mostly to avoid them.

A thousand faces tracked the movement of our truck along the last dusty road into the heart of the camp. The hollow eyes of the condemned stared at us. Capital punishment was a thing of the distant past, my war and Ned's, long since banished by the arrival of the Angels. But under the circumstances, it didn't matter. Everyone in this place knew that the end of the world was approaching, one way or another.

We waited a long time in an empty fast-foam building, long enough for me to catalog the way the light caught the dusty streaks on the windows and the marks left on the floor by the cheap soles of too many boots.

Long enough to wish I'd never returned to Earth. Long enough to swallow that regret and steady myself for what was to come.

The guards brought Tomas in.

"Strauss, you disappoint me. Even if the world's coming to an end there's still honor among vets."

"Hello, Dad," he said with a sharp, humorless laugh. He seemed surprised to see me, but otherwise unimpressed.

"You're looking good, Tom, considering . . ."

"Considering the accommodations?" He curled his lip in a sneer. I saw my own features, but the emotions behind them were alien. Carrie had told me many times that they were familiar enough to her though. Tomas took after her father -- a cold man, with foul moods, a short temper, and no remorse for the pain he caused. Tomas wasn't as dark as all that, but the iciness was there for sure.

"How have they been treating you?"

"We're fed often enough," he said. "And they try to keep us warm at night. Other than that, they pretty much leave us to ourselves. Not that that's so great."

He looked at me with questioning eyes. The words went unspoken, but he knew that was more than a casual visit.

"Do you have any property?" I asked.

He huffed sarcastically. "Are you kidding?"

"Dumb question," I said. "All right, then. You're coming with us."

"All right," he said, instantly alert, shifting his weight on his feet. The guards backed off. We left the building in silence -- even Ned kept his mouth shut. I tried to relax, breathing carefully and intentionally. I was less worried about being stopped than by what Tomas and I would say when we were free of the camp and its security.

At least he waited until we were out of sight of the camp.

When the Angels first appeared, the Hindus in Bombay had done something that amazed and frightened me. With a war rumbling all around them, they had begun celebrations and ceremonies, marching through the streets, chanting and praying at the waterfront. It didn't make any sense, at first. Then the liaison officer explained it to us -- they were making preparations for the end of the world. We'd laughed, the other soldiers and I, but in the end they'd had the last laugh. They were right.

It was out there now. I'd seen the images from the 'scopes on Vesta. It was a flat disk of bright white that faded near the edges and two spindle spikes bathed in the blue glow of synchrotron radiation.

It didn't wobble or precess. All that mass made a gyroscope more unyielding than space-time itself. And the invisible fingers of its gravity reached across space to pluck worlds from places they had held for billions of years.

The Hindus weren't the only ones to see the Angels as the coming of the end. Quite a few of the philosophers back home made the same argument. We had been judged, and found lacking. The angels had come across us in the full heat of a world-spanning war. The blood was still fresh on our hands. Our hearts were still filled with fear, greed, and arrogance.

That was why they never bothered to talk to us. There isn't a lot to say to a man who's going to die before the end of the conversation.

We all dismissed them until the Hole appeared.

While the governments back home had suppressed the truth, the astronomers on Vesta told us the story. There were some arguments at first. Some claimed that the Black Hole had been on its way before the Angels arrived -- that they had come to document our race before it was wiped out. But the record was clear. The X-ray bursts in the Oort Cloud as the Hole swallowed comets had begun all at once, in the same place that the Angels' Sun had.

Among the crew on Vesta, there was no doubt the Angels themselves had passed judgment on all of us. I guess that wasn't hard if they never had to talk to us.

There was still a lot of that going around I realized, when I finally had a chance to speak to Tomas.

"So what did you do this time?" I asked.

No sooner had the words come out of my mouth than I regretted them. Tomas gave me a look that recapitulated our whole relationship as father and son -- from the earliest days when I scolded him for misbehaving, through an adolescence marked by anger and guilt, to the tense and distant silence that prevailed once he came of age.

I never had been able to control him. As a boy, he was always into mischief, stealing things from Carrie and me, running away, starting fights with the other kids. When he became a teen, the trouble was more serious. Any attempt to discipline produced only more extreme misconduct. And he never showed any signs of guilt, no matter how much we tried to induce it. He had no conscience.

Maybe it was Carrie's father. Temperament is inherited, even if character isn't. But I think there was more to it. He wasn't the only kid to act that way, the only problem child in the world. His whole generation was like that in one way or another. They had grown up in the awful suspense that followed the departure of the Angels. The world had been changed in some mysterious way, but no one knew quite how. And no one knew what would follow.

It made them feel like they could do anything they wanted to. There was no more morality. No law. All justice had fled. Only power prevailed, and it had its limits. No matter what we did as parents, we couldn't lock him up or tie him down. And once they were out of our control, he and his friends did whatever they wanted.

They kept the department busy enough. Like Barnwell had said, they were worse than the veterans.

Carrie never came to terms with it though. She was always trying to reform him. And that was something he had always resisted. The fights between them went on into the night, long after I had given up on him, until he finally left home and declared his emancipation down at City Hall.

I had never hoped to do more than police him the way we did that whole crowd. It was a lousy time for all of us.

Sometimes I wondered if he felt bad that nothing he could do ever pleased either of us. But at other times, like now, under that withering icy glare, I saw a remorseless soul that knew resentment, but not regret.

"We hijacked a truck up on the turnpike," he said. He shrugged, as if to ask why that was wrong.

There was more he wasn't saying. Hijacking was a more serious crime than any he'd ever tried, that I knew of. And he almost seemed to acknowledge that it was a crime.

"Anything inside the truck?" I asked, trying to draw him out.

He shrugged again. "Equipment. Stuff they were shipping up to the coal country. You know the only kind of stuff that moves these days. NVAC. Heaters, ventilators and air conditioning. Computer controls for the system."

"Sounds like you could get quite a deal on the black market for that stuff."

"Ha!" he said, shaking his head in disgust. "You don't know a thing about it."

I felt the barbs in his voice, but tried to ignore them. "Then why don't you tell me."

He drew back from his anger briefly. "We weren't going to sell it. We were going to use it."

My mouth hung open a full minute, until Ned chopped short a laugh from the driver's seat.

Tom and his friends were not random vandals. Not by a long shot.

They had plans, big plans. There were places down in the old part of the city where you could go down underground, seal yourself off, and set up the right equipment to stay alive. They weren't

violent for the sake of violence, like the people in the truck who welcomed me home the night before. They intended to survive.

And Tomas planned to survive with them.

He told me as much when I explained why I had come back to Earth for him.

"You want me to do what?"

"Come back with me to Vesta. There's a place for you up there. It's safe and secure. And it won't be like it will be down here. Things are going to get bad when the final days come. You may not live long enough to make it to your bunker."

"Forget it, Dad," he said, his voice thick with scorn. "You really don't understand, do you?"

"Understand what? Do you want to die?"

"I'd rather die here trying to make it on my own than spend the rest of my life in prison with you as my jailer and Mom as my warden."

I felt the vertigo again as I realized how his mother's plan must have looked to him. It was obvious now, but I'd never looked at it that way. Of course, that had been the problem between us all Tom's life. Neither one of us could see things from the other's point of view.

"Your mother will be terribly disappointed," I said.

"She's always been disappointed," Tomas said. "Nothing I've ever done has pleased her."

Once upon a time that would have been enough to set me off. I would have yelled at him for an hour about being ungrateful and selfish. And he would have screamed back about how no one understood him.

But it was too late for that. Much too late.

We argued some more about what he wanted to do. I tried to poke holes in the plans his friends had. But he had an answer for everything. They'd spent a lot of time working it out.

In the course of the argument, I began to realize that my son had changed. There was more to him now than I'd ever seen before. In a world where all justice and honor had fled, he was just being practical and realistic. Life seemed to have caught up with him -- and in the end, it had adjusted itself to his terms instead of the other way around.

We dropped him off on the side of the road in one of those wide spots in the highway that called themselves a town. I choked back a sob as we drove off without him.

For so many years I had been afraid of losing my son. It seemed like I'd been trying for half my life to hold off the end of the world -- the end of my family.

Now they'd both come . . .

Why had the Angels sent the Doomsday Hole? What had they decided about us?

I wondered if it was the same as Tomas and I. At some point, while he was still young, I'd passed judgment on him. I knew that he was lost to us -- that he would never do what was right, only what he wanted to do.

Had the Angels judged us the way I'd judged Tomas?

Maybe they were right. Maybe the human race was no better than my son at his worst. Maybe that justified tearing apart the solar system and wrecking our world.

I didn't know. None of us knew. It was such a vast event, the destruction of all that existed. Maybe there was no way to make sense out of it. Tomas didn't even try. The Hindus knew something long before it happened. I just wanted to forget.

Ned brought me back to our place, up in the field to my ship. I shook his hand and asked one more time if he wanted to come with me.

"I couldn't take the trip, let alone live out there, Roddie," he said. "But thanks for the offer."

I looked around the world one more time, at the blue sky, the gray-and-white clouds, the trees rustling in the wind, the hills and houses, drinking in the richness of the world one last time before condemning myself to a future where I would be forever indoors. Then I climbed aboard and took off for home.

ptw

EXCUSE, 2014

Dear Professor Kunkle,
I am Jeffie's uncle.
His homework will be tardy
Though he attends no party.

In the basement he did work
With demented smirk,
Test tubes and retorts,
As though cementing forts.

Test tubes made an evil burble, burble,
Retorts retorted with putrid purple,
Slimy substances slithered sinuously.
Filters fouled, foiled, attracted a flea.

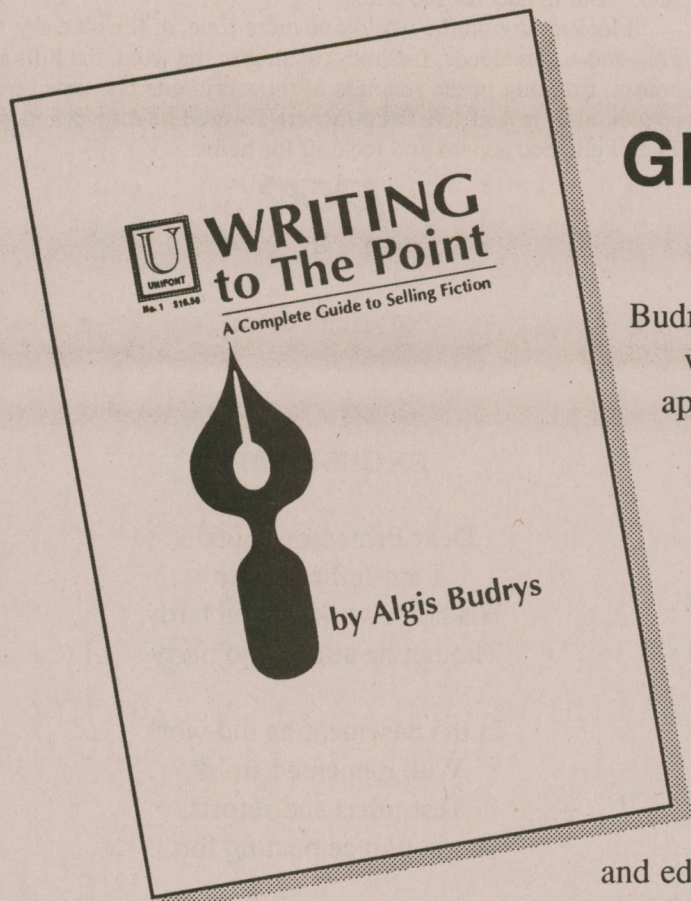
Given meat to eat, they were quite fleet;
Grew tiny feet, a heart beat, generated heat.
Clambered about with tiny pouts.
Clanged on the glass venting wee shouts.

He set them free, not knowing their name.
It's unfortunate they were not tame.
Genetic engineering, you should practice in class.
Don't send him home with any more glass.

'Fore filling my flask,
I really want to ask:
Can Jeff dissect a frog?
His homework ate my dog.

- Mark Kuhn

THE BOOK TO GET YOU STARTED



The Unifont Company has brought out Algis Budrys's *Writing to The Point*, a 64-page book on writing. It contains all the writing articles that appeared over the first ten issues of **tomorrow** Magazine, re-edited and expanded. It has an introduction by the author, and an appendix containing three separate essays, "Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy," "Ideas, How They Work And How To Fix Them," and "What a Story Is." In this book you will find, in permanent form, everything an aspiring amateur needs to know in order to become a published author. Algis Budrys has taught hundreds of people at scores of workshops, and edited not only **tomorrow** Magazine but many books and other magazines. The methods he describes in *Writing to The Point* are methods that have worked repeatedly.

5 1/2" by 8 1/2", 64 pages, perfect bound, with sketches by the author. \$10.50.

**Write better stories! Fix mistakes in your present stories!
Get a master's competitive edge in the writing business!**

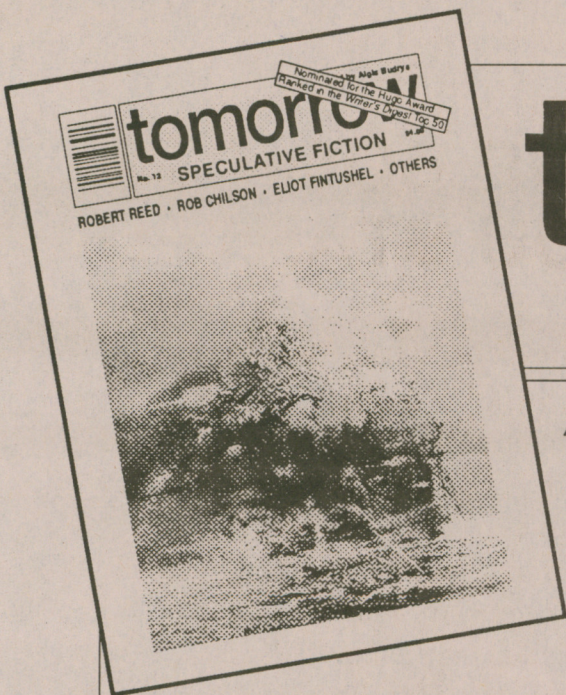
ORDER FORM

WRITING TO THE POINT by Algis Budrys

\$10.50 in the U.S.; \$11.50 Canada and Overseas

Name _____
Address _____

THE UNIFONT COMPANY, INC., Box 6038, Evanston, IL 60204



\$4.00

tomorrow

SPECULATIVE FICTION

edited by Algis Budrys

A Bimonthly Magazine of Speculative Fiction

Authors in Future Issues Include

Don D'Amassa	Gene O'Neill	Charles L. Fontenay	Robert Reed
Valerie Freireich	Juleen Brantingham	Jerry Oltion	Rob Chilson
Elisabeth Vonarburg		Jane Mailander	
Jamil Nasir		Charles E. Fritch	
J. Steven York		Jonathan Post	
Richard Bowes		Kim Antieau	
Geoffrey A. Landis		Michael Shea	



and Many, Many Others

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER

tomorrow

SPECULATIVE FICTION

6 issue (one year) subscription.....\$18.00

First class subscriptions, Canada, or overseas add \$1.00 per issue.

Name _____

Address _____

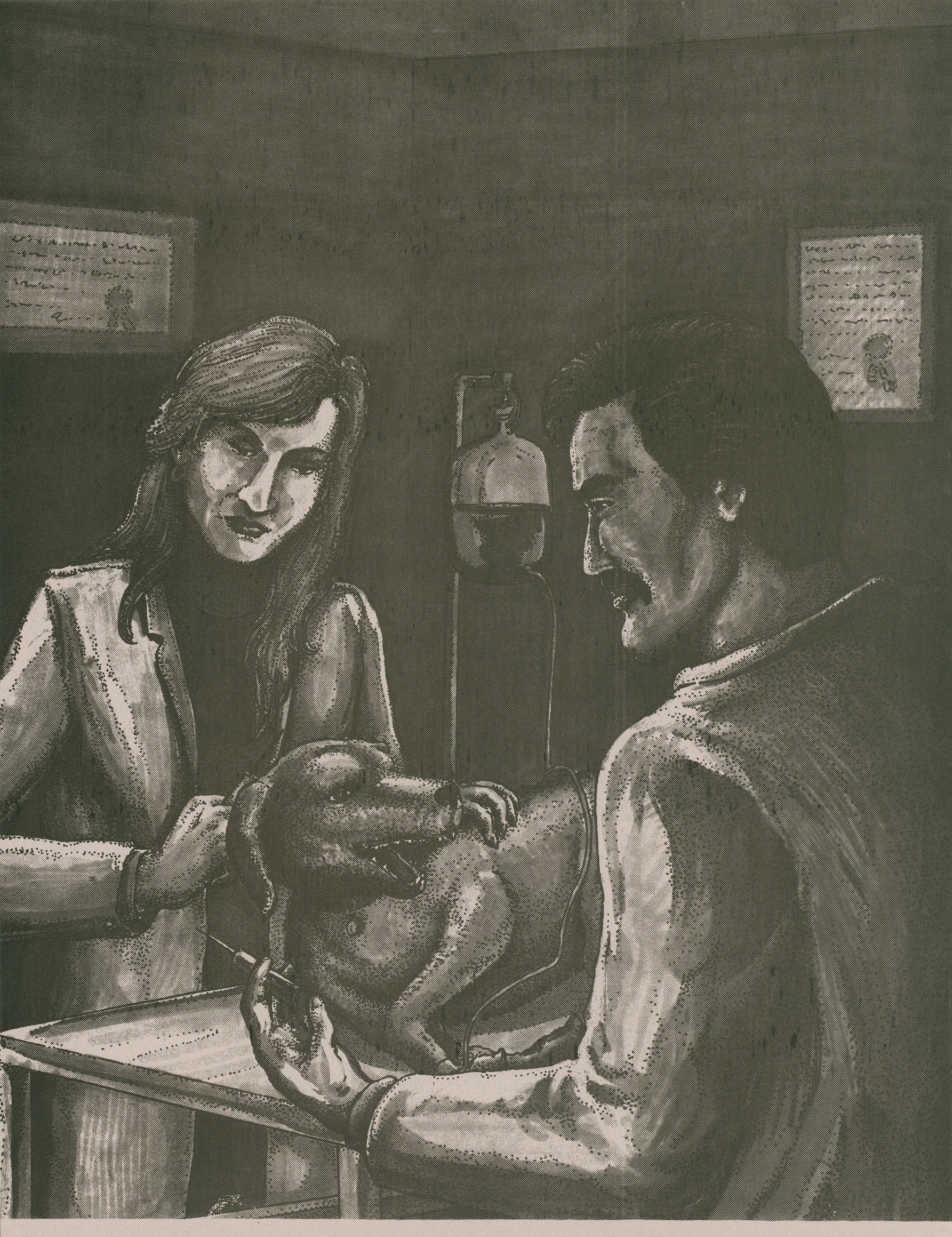
INDICATE ISSUE NUMBER TO BEGIN SUBSCRIPTION: _____

\$1.00 additional requested if subscribing by credit card.

VISA MASTER CHARGE Number _____

Expiration date _____ Signature _____

THE UNIFONT COMPANY, INC., Box 6038, Evanston, IL 60204



Dawn Schloesser is a student majoring in writing and literature at Long Island University, Southampton. She contributes to various school publications and has placed stories at several Star Trek fanzines. "Homesick" is her first short story sale.

There's no bond stronger than that between a boy and his dog.

NO ONE HEARD MY BARKING.
Timmy sat in his room playing his music too loudly and Daddy worked in

Homesick

Homesick

BY DAWN SCHLOESSER

Illustrated by James Zimmerman

his office, paying what he calls “those damn bills.” Daddy doesn’t like to be bothered when he’s in his office.

I had been lying outside in the soft summer grass, taking a nap with the full moon as my night light, when the gray truck pulled up. Strangers don’t visit our house often, especially not at night, and the big truck made me nervous, so I barked.

Then men wearing starchy white shirts stepped out of the truck. I didn’t trust their scent at all. Even as they walked across the lawn toward me, I howled.

“Shut this goddamn mutt up,” whispered the fat one.

The other one, who was younger and really skinny, looked down at his feet and said, "Yessuh. Shut 'em up, right away. You got it."

The younger man seemed scared. I bet his tail, if he had one, would have been between his legs when the fat man yelled. He didn't like the fat man at all, I could tell. I didn't like either of them. They smelled bitter, sweaty, like Timmy after baseball practice, only different. I looked at them and barked the meanest, loudest bark a puppy could muster. If only Daddy or Timmy would hear, they would help me. These men and their noisy truck meant trouble.

"I said shut him up!" the fat one whispered, but I could tell from the look in his eyes and the tone of his voice that he would have yelled if he wasn't afraid of somebody hearing him.

I barked and growled, but no one heard. At the last second I thought of running away, even though Timmy told me never to leave our yard. I figured this time was different and Timmy would forgive me. Besides, I only planned on darting to the other end of the street. But before I took two steps, the fat man grabbed me. With one quick move, the skinny man wrapped a dirty old muzzle around my mouth and I couldn't bark anymore.

Other dogs sat in the back of the truck with me, each of them penned in a tiny cage. All of us, from German Shepherd puppies to tiny lapdogs to medium-sized mutts like me, sat in the same kind of wire cage. The cage bottom scratched my paws; within minutes they were red and sore, and the muzzle made it hard to breathe. Each of us just lay there, helpless, whimpering, and scared.

Not knowing what would happen next, we just waited, all sorts of thoughts invading our minds throughout the bumpy ride. Would they hurt us? We had all heard of the bad place where they send animals that no one wants. If no one takes you home in a few days, you never come out. But Daddy and Timmy loved me. They wouldn't send me there, would they? If only someone had heard my barking.

As we approached a tall white building, the van slowed and stopped. I sensed danger from that building, just as I had from the men. The other dogs felt the same way, and our whimpering grew louder until we sounded more like a pack of wolves than a bunch of pets.

They carried us, cages and all, into the building. It smelled like the vet's office and I didn't like it. As we reached a door at the end of the hallway, the fat and skinny men were replaced by a gray-haired man and a man with a mustache, equally ominous looking. Both of them wore long white coats and though they didn't smell dirty or bitter, I didn't trust them either. These men were almost too clean; they stank of alcohol and disinfectant.

"All right, we're ready to freeze this pup," said the one with the mustache as he lifted me onto a cold metal table. He gave me a shot right in my back, like I get at the vet's, and I felt my joints grow stiff. As they removed the muzzle I tried to bark, but I couldn't open my mouth, so I whined, hoping someone would rescue me.

Picking me up, the gray-haired man put me into a tiny steel box with thick walls and a heavy top. I hoped they weren't going to close that top, I'm scared of the dark.

"Prepare to close lid and lower body temperature, on my mark," said the gray-haired man.

"Ready," answered the one with the mustache.

My Daddy has a mustache and he's nice, but this man had beady brown eyes that wouldn't look at me directly, and I didn't like him.

"Do you think this will work?"

"We'll find out eventually. Long-term freezing." He shook his head. "Amazing. If this experiment is successful, the next step is people."

"I wouldn't have my guts frozen for anything," said the gray-haired man. "Glad I'll be long gone before they find out if it works."

They gave me another shot and soon my eyelids grew heavy. I sensed the lid slowly closing. It got very dark and then, though I



didn't want to and I tried not to, I fell asleep.

Timmy's scream jolted his father out of his chair, putting a long straight line at the end of his signature on the check. He murmured a curse under his breath, and pushed his chair away from the desk.

"Timmy? You okay? What happened?" he shouted as he left his office.

"Dad, Dad!"

Nick Milton watched as his twelve year old son stampeded down the hallway, coming to a sliding stop on the newly waxed floor. "What is it?"

"Abercrombie's gone!" Timmy said breathlessly.

"Gone? Where?" Nick asked, trying to remain calm for his son's sake. Meanwhile, his heart had dropped into his stomach, where it competed for space with a swarm of butterflies and bitter acid.

"I don't know! He was out front, and now he's not. I shouted for him. He always comes when I call, Dad."

"All right, Timmy," Nick said. "Calm down, we'll find him. We'll find him." He knew it was the right thing to say to his son, but he wondered if they would ever find him. So many dogs ran away, were hit by cars, even stolen for laboratory experiments. He had to fight the tears as he thought of little Abercrombie and how quickly he had become part of the family.

Halco Foundation, Cryonics Lab, 2093

Opening my eyes, I wonder how long I have napped. Smelly men surround me, putting tubes in my body and giving me shots. When I try to bark, and a weak sound comes out, I realize I can move again. Finding a space between the bodies, I jump off the table.

"Grab him!"

"Don't let him get away!" the men yell, reaching for me.

But I'm too smart and quick for them and I dart between their grabbing hands. The needles connecting the tubes to my body fall out as I run. It hurts a little, but I don't care. I have to get home. Daddy and Timmy must be worried, and it's dinnertime.

Oops! I run nose-first into two small feet, a lady's feet in high-heeled shoes, and I look up.

"There, there, puppy," she says. "You did a good job for us so we've found you a good home."

I'm in a big gray truck, again. It's not so bad this time because they said I'm going home. To make the time pass quicker, I play with the red rubber ball they gave me.

We turn into a driveway, and two little boys run out to greet me. But neither one is Timmy.

"Daddy, Daddy, our dog is here," one of them says.

"Who are you? I want to say. 'I'm not your dog, Timmy's my master.'" All that comes out is, "Wood, woof, woof!" I hate that.

"Nice doggie," says the shorter one, patting my head. I growl; I want Timmy. Frightened, the boy pulls his hand away.

I watch as an older man, like the ones who hurt me, gives a green paper to the truck driver.

"Thanks for taking him off our hands," says the truck driver.

"No problem. He looks like a good dog. And for this price . . . it'll make the kids happy. Right, Matthew?"

Matthew, the older boy, looks at me, saying "You're a good dog! We're gonna be pals, right?"

As we walk toward the house, I notice that it looks almost like mine, but something is different and I can't put my paw on what it is. The low front step is the same, and so is the big swinging door. When the man opens it, I run into the living room and can almost

feel the softness of my favorite chair envelope me.

But it's gone! The furniture is not soft and comfy, but hard and straight. When I try to sit on the couch, a lady taps my nose. "We don't allow doggies on the furniture," she says.

I'm hungry, I think, trotting into the kitchen. The spot near the refrigerator where Timmy puts my food and water smells like floor wax and my dish is gone. Where am I?

As I walk into Timmy's room, or what should be Timmy's room, the smell of lilacs hits me, though I don't see any flowers. A lace blanket covers the bed and all of Timmy's posters are gone. The same lady who kicked me off the couch shoos me out of the bedroom.

These people aren't my family. I want to go home. Lying down on the cold hallway floor, I go to sleep. I'm not very hungry anymore.

The Halco Foundation, Division of Veterinary Medicine

"But why did he die?" asked Matthew, disappointed.

Only after much begging did his father agree to let him have a dog, and then only because this one had all its shots and was cheap.

I'll probably never have another pet, Matthew thought. He looked with disdain at the lifeless lump laying on the silvery table. Dumb mutt. Why'd you have to go and die?

"Do you know why he died?" Matthew repeated.

"I can't find a thing wrong with this dog," answered the vet, shaking his head.

ptw

Without those prepared to speculate
There will never be a Shangri-La or future
When Homo Sapiens wander from star to star.
For those who suppose and postulate,
Who, prepared to risk their dream's destruction,
Put themselves to the acid test;
And, by facing up to their personal failings,
Learn to count themselves among the best.
Those who never dare aspire,
Never gauge the nature of their fettle;
Un-tempered by the forge and fire,
They weaken the structure of their metal.
Many may ultimately come to rue,
Dreams lost forever, that might have come true.

- Jeremy Gadd

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE!

\$4.99

Pirate Writings

Tales of Fantasy, Mystery & Science Fiction

"Festival"

S.N. Lewitt
Jessica Amanda
Salmonson
James Dorr
and many others!

Jane Yolen

Next issue features stories by

Ian Macleod
Nancy Springer
Paul Di Filippo

Detach here and mail

Read the most cutting edge fiction by today's hippest writers

Each issue of **Pirate Writings** has a full color glossy cover and is filled with fiction, poetry, art and reviews by top name professionals and tomorrow's rising stars. Read original work you can't find anywhere else from such established talents as Jane Yolen, Josepha Sherman, Nancy Springer, S.N. Lewitt, J.N. Williamson, Ian Macleod, Jessica A. Salmonson, Don D' Ammassa, Paul Di Filippo, Steve Rasnic Tem, Mark Rich, D.F. Lewis and hundreds of others! Our list of talented writers grows every day. Don't miss one single issue. Subscribe now and save almost 20% off the newsstand price!

PIRATE WRITINGS ORDER FORM

1 yr. (3 iss.) for \$13.75

Name: _____

2 yrs. (6 iss.) for \$24

Address: _____

Foreign subscribers please add \$5 per year. US FUNDS ONLY.
Please allow 3 - 5 weeks for delivery of first issue.
All subscriptions will start with next current issue unless specified otherwise by subscriber.

Send CK or MO to: Pirate Writings Publishing, 53 Whitman Ave., Islip, NY 11751

Short - Short Section

TERRANCE GREENWOOD KEPT his eyes locked onto the weapons board. He felt the fighter shudder as the pilot, Tim Elliot, fought to avoid being shot down by five Venny fighters. A green light came on and Greenwood fired off two missiles. One of the enemy fighters disappeared silently in a dazzling display of light. Another green light came on and Greenwood flamed a second fighter. Damn, but Elliot was a good pilot.

days ago and this was his first real mission, but he had a right to know what he was risking his life for, didn't he? Not according to Elliot.

"Information about this mission is on a need-to-know basis, and, kid, you don't need to know." That had been all Elliot had told him when they'd strapped into the fighter. Greenwood knew that if he hadn't been the only weapons technician available for a non-scheduled mission, Elliot would have cho-

back to a safe distance. "Looks like they're going to be content to follow us," Greenwood said.

"That suits me just fine," Elliot replied.

Greenwood couldn't blame the Vennies for deciding to break off the fight. Elliot was one of the best. He wasn't quite as good as Luke Torington or Ridkin Vega, but then who was? Until just last week it had been even money as to whether Torington or Vega was the best. A three-hour dog fight had settled that. Torington was the best and Vega was just another flamed Venny.

"Okay, kid, E.T.A. one minute."

Greenwood looked at the screens again. The only thing even close was the uninhabited moon. That had to be their target. Suddenly, three more Vennies vectored onto the screen, between them and the moon. "We've got company."

"Don't sweat it, kid. We'll be just fine."

Greenwood marveled at the calm in Elliot's voice. Didn't the son-of-a-bitch ever sweat? There were Vennies on both sides of them. This was going to require some fancy flying.

"Greenwood, on your screen you should be able to find three satellites orbiting the moon. I want you to target the smallest one."

The targeting was made difficult by the maneuvering that Elliot was doing to keep from being shot down. Greenwood could almost feel shockwaves from the near misses. Finally, he had a lock on the satellite. Instead of dropping the bombs Greenwood told his screen to magnify the target. The satellite swam into view. It wasn't like any satellite that Greenwood had ever seen. There was an inscription on it. Here lies

FLY IN PEACE

by Warren Lapine

"Keep it up, kid," Elliot said. "We're just five minutes from our target."

According to Greenwood's screen, they weren't five minutes away from anything but an uninhabited moon orbiting a sparsely populated enemy planet. As far as Greenwood knew, there wasn't anything on that moon worth bombing. What the hell could the target be? And damn Elliot for not letting him in on it.

Sure, he'd only arrived on the front two

sen someone else.

Once again, the green light flashed and Greenwood fired. "I fixed another enemy vector," he said to Elliot. "The fighter pilot ejected." Greenwood got a lock on the pilot, but before he could fire, Elliot shouted at him.

"Don't, we're not here to kill pilots."

What the hell is going on here? Greenwood wondered. Are we on a mission or not? This doesn't make any sense.

The remaining two enemy fighters fell

Ridkin Vega. May he always fly in peace.

God, this was sick. Elliot had gotten him all the way out here to bomb the tomb of an enemy pilot. No wonder it had been an unscheduled mission. This wasn't a mission, it was some kind of a twisted joke. Greenwood almost refused to fire, but then it occurred to him that there was probably more to the tomb than met the eye; it probably housed some sort of weapons system. Greenwood pressed the button. The tons of bombs that Greenwood had expected failed to materialize. In their place was a multitude of swirling color.

"What the hell? Flowers! We dropped tons of flowers," Greenwood said in disbelief.

"What did you think I was going to drop?" Elliot asked from between clenched teeth, as he pulled away from the moon at six gees.

"I didn't know."

The radio came to life. "Elliot, is that you?" one of the Vennies asked.

"Yeah, it's me."

"He would have appreciated it."

Greenwood watched the scene in shock. The Vennies were breaking off the attack and the tomb continued on its way covered with flowers. "We risked our lives for that?"

"We sure as hell did," Elliot said, slowing the fighter to a more normal speed.

"Why?"

"Because it was the right thing to do."

"Elliot, you're out of your mind."

"A lot of people have told me that."

"I still don't understand."

"I went up against Vega my third time out. God, he was good. He flamed me without even trying. I managed to eject. Instead of shooting me down, he radioed my position back to our side. I never forgot that. Greenwood, if he had been any other pilot, I'd be dead."

"But to risk your life like you just did."

"Vega deserved it. Torington realized it, too."

"What do you mean?"

"After Torington shot him down, he towed him to that moon so that he could have some sort of decent burial. He didn't want him to be just another dead Venny. I'm glad it was Torington that flamed him and not some kid who just got lucky. It was better that way. He got the respect that he deserved."

Greenwood watched as Vega's tomb, now cloaked in color, disappeared from the screen. He heard Elliot whisper.

"Fly in peace."

ptw

SETH SLOCUM OPENED THE door and the little bell jingled as he walked in. When he closed the door, the bell jingled again but Seth didn't notice. He was staring into the corner of the shop behind the door, and his Momma was standing there staring right back at him.

When Seth turned toward the counter, Earl could see tears in his eyes. Seth pulled out his blue bandanna and wiped them away, then he blew his nose.

"I'm sorry, Earl," he said. "Momma . . ." But that was all he got out before he teared up and pulled out his bandanna again.

told him. "But I think she'll come out real good."

"After seein' Momma, I don't have any doubts about that," Seth said. "Well, I'll load her up and be goin', I reckon."

"I'll help you," Earl told him, and came around from behind the counter. They walked to the corner and lifted Momma, then carried her to the door. They put her down while Earl propped the door open with a brick, then picked her up and turned her around head first to get her out.

When they got to Seth's pickup, Earl thought it looked like Seth had spread about ten blankets across the bed. Carefully, they

Lifelike Momma

by Gary Bernard Phaup

"That's all right Seth," Earl told him. "I know you were real close to your Momma."

Seth turned back to look at her and said, "She never looked any better than that. I swear to God, you'd think she was gonna start talkin' to you."

"Thank you, Seth, I appreciate that," Earl said.

"It's the cigar that makes her look so lifelike. You never saw Momma without that cigar in her mouth, did you?"

"I don't reckon I did, Seth," Earl admitted. "Except at church. Before they put in that smoking section."

The memory of Momma smoking at church must have been too much for Seth. Out came the bandanna again.

When he got control of himself, Seth turned back toward Earl.

"Here's your check," he said, handing it across the counter. "And it don't seem like enough, after what you done for Momma."

Seth was real quiet for a moment or two, then said, "How you comin' with Aunt Fern?"

"I'm just getting started on her," Earl

laid Momma down from corner to corner. Earl went to the cab and took out four more blankets and they spread them over the top of Momma.

When they climbed down, Seth stuck out his hand to Earl and said, "I can't tell you how much this means to me," and he looked like he was going to cry again and hurried back to the cab. After he got into his truck and pulled away from the curb, Earl saw the bandanna waving through the back window.

Earl was unrolling Fern Lopp when Seth walked in, and he could tell something was ~~bad~~ wrong when he looked at Seth's face.

When the bell stopped, he said, "Seth, I haven't seen you look like that since your Momma's funeral. What's wrong?"

Sober as a judge handing down a life sentence, Seth shook his head and said, "We lost Momma, Earl. Again."

"You what?" Earl almost shouted, wondering how one of his large-as-life handiworks could actually be lost. "Tell me how you could lose your Momma! It's for sure

she didn't walk away."

"Well," Seth began, stumbling for the words, "I don't mean we honest lost her. She burned up."

"You lit the cigar, didn't you?" Earl asked him sternly.

"Yeah, I suppose we did," Seth said sheepishly. "I guess we was all a little drunker than we thought. You know, we'd only had Momma back a week, and we wanted to show her off to the family. So, we had everybody come over and after dinner we set to drinkin' a little."

Seth took a deep breath and went on with the story. "Sometime pretty late, I remember Uncle Kirby sayin', 'You know, that don't look like Pearl Slocum without that cigar lit.'

"I think I tried to say somethin' about not lightin' it, but before I knew it, it was lit.

"Now it looked good, I got to tell you," Seth said, still excited a little by the memory. "It looked just like Momma, with that smoke comin' out. But then it started to flame up a night. I jumped up and hollered for somebody to get some water, but Uncle Kirby grabbed up his glass of bourbon and threw it on her. About the same time, Aunt Cassie threw a jug of some homemade stuff up Momma's way, and then, well, as Momma woulda said, it was all over but the shoutin'."

A solemn look came over Seth's face, and he said, "I swear to you, Earl, Momma went up like one of them space rockets. I thought she was gonna blast off right out of the dinin' room. Them volunteer firemen, they saved most of the house, but that dinin' room looks like hell."

Even more reflective as he finished his story, Seth said, "It didn't take long. Momma wasn't a big woman, you know." Then he looked Earl straight in the eye and said, "Anyhow, I know you prize your work, and I just came by to say I'm sorry about Momma. She did look good though. I just wish you'd been around here when Daddy died."

Earl was furious. But he figured Seth's loss was greater than his, so he didn't say much, just, "That Kirby never could hold his liquor, could he?"

Seth was thinking about his Daddy now though.

"I could just see him Earl, standing out there at his station."

Still too angry to be very interested in what Seth was saying, Earl asked him anyway, "What kind of station was that, Seth?"

"Daddy run a Sinclair gas station out on the highway where that Etna one is now. They're the ones had them dinosaurs on their signs, and Daddy had a hat with a dinosaur on it. If you'd been around back then,

he'd still be standin' out there with his dinosaur hat on, puffin' away and wavin' at his customers. You know, he smoked them same cigars Momma did. Fact is, he's the one got Momma started on them. You couldn't pry one of them things out of their mouths for love nor money."

His story told and his apology made, Seth started toward the door. "Well, I gotta go over to the funeral home, Earl. I think we're just gonna bury Momma this time. What's left of her."

"I'm real sorry about the fire, Seth," Earl said, a grave and sympathetic look on his face.

When Seth closed the door behind him, Earl's mouth broadened into a smile. He couldn't help but wonder if he had been around when Seth's Daddy died, if that Sinclair station and its dinosaur might still be in orbit.

Earl turned and walked from the counter back to his workbench, and started unrolling Fern Lopp again. Fern had been the first female member of the police force in Benjamin, and the very first one in all of the North Carolina mountains. Her sister Daisy had insisted that she be posed not merely in her uniform, but with her .44 Magnum in her hand.

As Earl started to work, he heard a tiny haunting voice in the back of his mind. He recognized it, although the bourbon slurred the speech a bit. He heard it say, "You know, that don't look like Fern Lopp without no bullets in her gun!"

Earl shuddered.

pro

ANOTHER NEW YEAR, JUST A few more hours until the proverbial ball drops. Time for a drink. I watched The Professor put things in a

large mixing glass. A splash of colored liquid from the top shelf, a pinch of powder from under the counter, some things thrown in so quickly I never saw what they were. I lifted the cold bottle of home brew to my lips and drained half its contents. "Y'know Prof. no matter how many times I see you do this it still amazes me." He smiled in my direction and kept mixing, mixing with a casual air of concentration that forced you to watch him. I gulped down some more of the house special ale and waited my turn. My turn for a little magic.

The place was packed tonight, more than the usual couple of familiar faces; more then it looked like should be able to cram in here, all of us comfortably drinking, toasting, or waiting for a cocktail like no other. I guess I should be use to the size of the crowd on the eve of a new year and all. One of many I'd spent waiting here for my holiday cheer.

The Professor finished mixing and poured the glowing blue liquid into a fluted glass. He set it on a lace doily in front of an older woman down the other end of the bar. Her evening gown shimmered as she handed him her metallic credit card with a flourish. I watched the elegant senior gingerly sip the drink with an easy grace and style.

I finished my cold draft and ordered another from Kelly, the only waitress I'd ever seen working here. She was always ready to take your order, almost before you were ready to give it. I figured she could probably make better money somewhere else with a regular crowd, especially since she was so efficient. Our conversations, if you could call them that, always went about the same way.

"Kelly, did you ever think about . . ."

"Nope, I enjoy working here. Besides, we all need to find out what it is we really want and do it. Otherwise . . ." and then she'd wink. It was a knowing, cute, sexy, sympathetic kind of wink.

Here's Looking At You

by De Odom

"How'd you know I wasn't going to ask if you ever thought about life?"

"You just did." Then she'd wink again. That same impossible wink.

"See you around Kelly."

She'd always turn and go about her work before I could wink back at her. Every time.

I watched The Professor moving down the bar in my direction; soon it would be my turn. He quickly whipped up a dark mixture and poured it into three shot glasses. A big guy halfway down the bar placed a huge wad of bills in The Professor's hand and drank the three shots down with a grimace. Standing still for a rare moment The Professor waited as this dangerous looking biker struck his chest a few times with a rock-like fists. A wide smile began to spread across both their faces and the big man pulled a pair of cigars out of his leather jacket for each of them. He slapped a leather cap on his head, pulled the brim down over his eyes and puffed away on the cigar which actually had a pleasant aroma.

I looked over my list carefully. A few years ago I had forgotten several things. Fortunately, my memory has never failed me since then. At least not so far as I can remember.

"What will it be this year kid?" The Professor startled me out of my reminiscing.

"The usual holiday cheer Professor!"

"Well let's see . . ." The Professor read to himself mouthing some of the words as he went along. "That's a new one for you, isn't it?" He smiled with one eyebrow raised in my direction.

"Sure is. I decided on something a little sweeter this year. You know I only come out for a drink on New Years Eve."

"And you're sure about this one?" The Professor held up the list pointing to the last item on the page.

"Without a doubt Prof. I do need a little hot and spicy to go with the sweets." I let a giggle escape.

He gave a courteous nod that was nearly a bow and went to work on my drink. The contents of two small bottles poured together into the mixing glass produced a light green liquid. A pinch of snow white powder sprinkled from The Professor's fingers glistened inside the glass. Next he hoisted an old wicker covered bottle with a huge cork and released its thick reddish contents into the mix. The molasses-like liquid spiraled around the mixing glass from top to bottom. The Professor replaced the giant cork with a pop and eyed the mixing glass carefully. "Now are you sure about that last item?"

"Absolutely!" And then it occurred to

me what the perfect gift to myself would be, the icing on the cake. "In fact I'd like to add something else if I could?"

The Professor set the glass down and pushed my order sheet back across the bar to me.

"Something I've wanted to try for years."

"Really now, and what's that?"

I leaned across the bar and whispered my request in The Professor's ear. He raised his head with an impish grin spreading across his features and said "That one's on me."

I paid for my drink before tasting it as was the custom here and beamed in anticipation of the delicacy before me. "Thank you Professor. I know I'm going to enjoy this at least all year."

I raised the large glass that held my drink and gazed into it. Dark red swirls of color swam through the light green liquid and glistening white sparkles. I let its fragrance rise under my nose, sweet and spicy with a faint musky scent. The drink went down easily.

"Very tasty brew Professor, as always."

I couldn't wait another second though. It was time.

"Kelly?"

There she was, ahead of my request as usual.

"Good night and have a happy new year. Maybe we'll see you back before a year is up this time?"

"You can count on it." I said and gave her a wink so big it felt like my whole face was involved. A wink that was cute, sexy, sympathetic and I hoped very knowing.

She just stood there with more than surprised look on her face as I walked to the front and pulled my coat off the rack.

"Good night to you too Professor and thanks again!" The Professor's lighthearted laughter and Kelly's surprise followed me out the door.

It has started to snow. The only light in the alley, a small neon sign gives the falling snow an unnaturally bright color as the flakes fall past its glowing face. I'm warm inside, despite the frosty air. The Professor's liquid magic is already at work. I feel more than ready to take on the new year now. But, I think that of all the things I drank this evening, I'll enjoy that wink the most of all.

ptw

I WISH I'D NEVER COME. THE thought tore through him like an old song. The Gunner tapped his wrinkled fingers on the table, each tap a solid whump against the earth-grown wood. He crumpled the cloth napkin and stared vacantly, at the shadowy crevices in the velvet drapes. The dark, slightly reddened beef steak lay untouched on the fine china plate. His appetite was long gone. A heavy sigh whispered past his lips and he pushed himself to his feet. He peered out the viewport and stared hungrily at the blue-white marble in the sky. His soul ached for that world. His birthplace. The place he'd left spitefully so long ago.

"For the adventure. For her," he hissed. He finally turned from the view and evaluated the richness that filled his quarters.

"Worthless. What value is all this? What good?"

He wondered if anyone still listened to the muttering of an old man, however famous.

"You!" he shouted at the suit that hung limply in its glass closet.

It's tinted facepiece glared balefully at him.

"How many lives have we taken?" he demanded bitterly. "Fifty? A hundred? Five-hundred?"

You know as well as I, it whispered in his mind. *Six-hundred and nine.*

He laughed. "And we never even knew their names or crimes."

Doesn't matter. We do our job.

"Maybe too well."

May be.

He ran his hand through his grayed, shortly cropped hair and sank into the old rocker. He absently traced the carvings on the arms of the chair. They'd balked when he'd first asked for it. Shuttling a rocking chair--shuttling anything--to Luna was outrageously expensive.

"Had to threaten not to do my job," he murmured. "I really might have, too, if they hadn't given in. As if I'm not the most expendable person here. I think they've just grown accustomed to having to me as their Gunner. Didn't want to have to deal with a new Gunner every week. After nine years, I guess they figured they had nothing to lose and everything to gain. That maybe I'd be here awhile." His shoulders sagged. "Well, they was right. I been here awhile, all right. Computer! Play me 'Mary'."

"Mary O'Meara" chimed softly on the speakers; the tenor's voice filled the room with the haunting lyric. He let the sadness of the tale momentarily wash away his bitterness. He opened the box on the stand

next to his chair and carefully dug through the photos.

There it is. He pulled his prize out. *Ah, Jessica. My sweet, darling Jessica.* He lovingly caressed the picture. *How has it been so long? My beautiful bride. You wanted to challenge the frontier. You wanted to taste the danger and wildness of Luna's colonies. Oh, what I did for you. What I did because of you. I wonder where you are now.*

He climbed to his feet and peered toward town. "It ain't changed much, Jessica. It's still like the day we stepped off that rocket."

He saw his reflection in the viewport glass. He reached out and touched it. *So old. Used up.* "This ain't no place for the likes a me. This sort of nonsense is for the young."

He could see the distant light of a shuttle's retros as it settled into the quarantine sector. "More newcomers off-loading. In a month, their quarantine'll be up and they'll charge into the towns. Another set of hotshots riding in, ready to make their fame and fortune. They think they're ready for the hard frontier!" He laughed bitterly. "But

if you make a mistake, Lady Luna will squeeze the breath out of you. Let you bake in the sun. Let you freeze in the dark. She'll let solar flares scorch you with radiation. Maybe you won't make that sort of mistake. Maybe you'll have too much to drink. Maybe you'll find your woman--or your man--is stepping out. Then maybe you'll think revenge. You'll do something foolish. And you'll get caught. Then you'll meet me. And you'll lose."

He looked at the picture once more then stuffed it into his pocket.

Jessica! Molly hissed. *You wish you'd killed her instead of poor, old Jimmy Niles.*

"Jimmy weren't 'xactly a saint, not by any stretch of the imagination," he reprimanded. "He just liked his women fast and hot."

Like Jessica liked her men? Molly taunted.

He sighed. "I thought I could be enough for a woman like that. If I could have seen her for what she'd been, I wouldn't have killed Jimmy. And I wouldn't 'ave been sent

to face the Gunner. And I wouldn't have won his job."

His voice had lost its bitter edge, a sad weariness tingeing it instead. The door slid open.

"Evening, Gunner."

"Kyle," he mumbled.

Kyle tsked. "If you don't get your appetite back, we'll have to call in the doc. You mind?" he asked as he settled himself at the table.

"Nah. Help yerself."

"Have to say, I don't mind you not having much of an appetite," he grinned as he sliced off a chunk of the meat. "I know I've gained a few pounds."

THE GUNNER

by Kandy S. Jarvis

"New shuttle just came in," the Gunner said, settling down across from Kyle. "When's the next batch getting let out of quarantine?"

"Happened two days ago. The jailhouse is beginning to fill up already."

"Any for me?"

"Probably. I haven't paid it much attention. Brennan just had the baby. Been kinda busy."

"How they doing?"

"Fine." He rummaged in his pocket and pulled out a holo. He pushed it across. "Isn't he just the handsomest devil?"

The Gunner studied it a moment, then chuckled. "Right so. What'd you name him?"

"John. I know, not very original, but Brennan insisted," he laughed and winked.

"Insisted?"

"We named him after you, you old fool. For all the stuff you've given us."

The Gunner waved his wrinkled hand. "I ain't got a use for all this finery anymo'. You folks got more need."

"And we appreciate it," Kyle said sincerely. He chewed on a piece of steak, his eyes half-closed in pleasure. "And we're beholden to you for those wool blankets. The Tanon sheets are warm enough but there's nothing quite like real wool to curl up under."

"I still got five in my closet. Take another one with you. For John."

Kyle had long since learned arguing with the old man was pointless. Whether he was on the Gunner's Plate or not, he always won.

"Thanks, Gunner."

"So why you here?"

Kyle finished the last bite of steak.

"Well, they wanted me to talk with you. Find out why you won't talk with your niece."

He handed the baby's picture back to Kyle and stood. "I got nothing to say no more."

"C'mon, John. You used to look forward to hearing from her. She's worried about you."

"I don't expect you to understand. Don't spect her to, neither."

"Well, let's start with me. What don't you think I'll understand?"

"I ain't lost as Gunner nigh on forty years. Used to be, I'd wonder-

-was what I'm doing right? Killing them people. Then you know what happened? I stopped wondering." He turned to Kyle. "Oh, I still look at their faces. Do you know what I see?"

Kyle shook his head.

"Fear. I look into eyes of fear incarnate every time I stand on that damned plate. Every time my fingers stretch and I'm ready to reach for my gun--my Molly."

"Weren't you afraid the first time you stood on the plate?"

"Yeah. I was afraid. Don't rightly know if I ever stopped being afraid. But then I just kept winning. What's it gotta be like--them facing a man they know's not lost in forty years. Sometimes I see their hope. That maybe I'm too old. Maybe I'm slowing down. Then I see their eyes bulge and their blood splatter as my bullets go through 'em."

"Well, Brennan and I are glad you win. We both watch, worried about you. Worried maybe . . ."

"That maybe I won't win? Hell, Kyle, I ain't winning cause I'm faster than them anymo'. They just don't think I can be beaten. So I'm not."

"Maybe you don't lose because you love life so much, John."

"No. I ain't never loved life. Except when I had Jessica I win because I'm scared of dying. There's a difference. But I'm growing less scared every time I stand on the plate. I watch 'em die, and I regret--I regret what they never got to be. What I never got to be because of the Gunner."

"John, you're like a father to Brennan and me. I don't like seeing you talk like this. Maybe you just need to go into town, blow off some steam. You'd feel better. You could come over and have dinner with me and Brennan and meet your namesake. And then maybe you'd want to talk with your niece again."

The Gunner's shoulders sagged. "I can't talk to her again. It hurts too much."

"It hurts--"

"To know she's there and I'm here on this forsaken rock. When I go to sleep at night--that fountain's gurgle yonder--I dream it's the crick that ran behind the house where I was raised. I dream about trees. And running through grass barefoot. Boating on the ocean. Can you imagine what it's like to look out and see nothing but water everywhere? To look up and see a blue sky. To be able to walk outside without a damned spacesuit! I want to go home."

"You're home is here," John said gently.

"My home." John repeated. "This ain't no home. It's a bribe for a condemned man. All the riches that Luna can provide to entice the opponent to survive, to entice the Gunner to return. The richness you win if you survive the death penalty for another day--and if you kill your opponent." The Gunner sighed wearily. "I want to go home. Back to Earth."

"You'd never survive the flight. Your bones--they'd be too weak. Even if you did survive, you'd never be able to stand, let alone walk."

"A man's got a right to die on his native soil. It ain't right to die here on this dusty rock. It just ain't right." He turned to Kyle. "Tell 'em for me, Kyle. Tell 'em I want to go home. Ask 'em. Beg 'em, I don't care. Just let me go."

Kyle stood and walked over to John. He laid his hand on the old man's shoulder. "When the government came up with the position, it wasn't meant to be held for as long as you've held it. Hell, before you were given the death sentence, the longest a Gunner had survived was four months. You

broke all the rules. They kept expecting you to lose. But you didn't. I'll try, John. I'll talk to them."

"Thank you, Kyle."

The bell chimed softly. The Gunner bowed his head.

"I'll let you get ready," Kyle said. "I promise, if I can get you sent home, I will."

The Gunner nodded mutely.

Kyle paused, as if wanting to say more, but instead turned and left.

Time again. He slowly limped over to the suit and keyed the lock on the glass door. The door whispered open. He carefully examined the suit--tested each section--then stepped into it and sealed the closures.

"Air supply--good, battery pack--fully charged. No leaks reported," he said as he scanned the checklist.

He strapped on his six-shooter. *Molly, dear, Molly, and how are you today?* He checked the chamber. Full. Ready to fire. Ready to kill. He stroked the pearl handle then placed Molly in her holster.

He walked to the airlock and peered out the window. He could see the prisoner standing on the field, his--no, her back against the wall, her ankles locked into clamps on the Gunner's Plate. He could see the gun holster wrapped around her delicate waist. He wondered what she'd done--not that it really mattered.

The Gunner sighed and moved into the airlock. *Maybe today I'll let 'em win.* He always thought that just before he stepped out into the Lunar day. But today was different. Today, the Gunner was tired.

ptw

THE MORNING SUN STREAMING through the bathroom window was glorious. But Harry didn't think so. Wincing, he snapped the blinds shut.

Harry Cornell was hung over, dizzy, nau-

seous, and thinking about death. Booze is voluntary poison, Harry thought. We ingest it as sort of a death wish. We drink, knowing full well we overtax our livers, stomachs, and kidneys. We alter the very cells in our brains. It's a death wish. Pure and simple.

'Harry's wife had cautioned him about his binge drinking many times. "You can't drink like you use to, Harry," she'd say. "Give it a rest. We're both getting older, you know."

Harry hated those words most of all. Talk about age always angered him. "I'm not old," Harry protested.

Harry stared through half-closed lids into the bathroom mirror, his nose barely six inches from the glass. Bloodshot eyes. Sallow skin. And three ugly scratches on his cheek.

"Brush your teeth and shave," commanded Harry's aching head.

"I will . . . I will . . . Don't rush me," said Harry's dry, swollen tongue.

"Drink some water," said Harry's I-told-you-so head. Harry obeyed.

"More, more," said his tongue.

Harry pressed his palms to his throbbing temples, and glanced out the bathroom door into the adjoining bedroom. Alice was still in bed. Her favorite chenille robe lay in a heap at the foot of the bed, and trailed off onto the floor. She loved that robe, almost as much as her fuzzy bunny slippers, the ugly ones that shed so much--the ones he hated so. Those slippers said it all, Harry thought. They are the footwear of choice for all those late-sleeping, soap-opera-watching, suburban housewives who pine for Donahue.

Harry glowered into the bathroom mirror. His mind was elsewhere, but he actions he initiated were totally automatic: his morning ritual. He could do it with his eyes closed, or even in his present delicate condition.

The Fifth Item On The Shelf

by Arthur P. Cosing

Step one: with one hand he supported himself over the sink; with the other hand he fumbled for the cabinet door. It swung open obligingly at his touch.

Pleased with this minor success, he proceeded to step number two: find his personal shelf, the only one Alice granted him, the only shelf that didn't contain face creams, laxatives, hair dyes, or wrinkle removers.

Step three through six: find his toothpaste, find his toothbrush, find his shaving cream, and razor. Four items, left to right on his shelf, one at a time. All automatic. Use each item in turn, then return it to its appointed place. When the fourth toilet article was back on the shelf, Harry knew it was time for his shower.

"Item one . . . item two . . . item three . . . item four." Harry counted out loud as he prepared to close the cabinet door.

But hold on! Something was different this morning. Harry paused with the cabinet door still ajar. And stared. Things seemed so far away and out of focus this morning . . . but something was new, definitely new: a fifth item on the shelf.

Harry blinked, struggling to make sense of the wavering object: a glass bottle of some kind, with clear liquid inside. A prescription bottle? It certainly wasn't his. The last time he'd seen a doctor was August.

"For a man your age (must everyone speak about age? Harry thought), you're in the best shape I've seen you," Dr. Frank had said.

"I'm taking better care of myself," Harry had replied. "I've begun a whole new life style. I'm eating better. No junk food. No between-meal snacks. No tobacco. And I chase my secretary around her desk for exercise once every morning."

Dr. Frank had to laugh. "Well, whatever you're doing, it's paying off. Keep it up."

"I intend to," Harry said, smirking. He knew the real reason for his new vitality. He owed it all to Grace, lovely nubile Grace. He had to keep in shape for her. She was twenty years his junior and she loved to dance. His wife hated to dance. He couldn't remember the last time they had gone dancing.

"We're getting too old for that kind of foolishness," Alice liked to say.

Harry sighed, took a deep breath, and moved his face closer to the mysterious bottle on the shelf.

Without his glasses, Harry struggled to read the small print: a "P," an "O," an "I," an "S," an "O," an "N". It said "POISON." Harry blinked, and blinked again. His hands shook as he retrieved the bottle. He held it nearer the light and re-read the label.

A small card on a string fluttered be-

low the bottle, a typewritten card tied to the neck. Harry read the words: "You are a dead man, Harry," it said. "I know your morning rituals almost as well as you do. You will be dead in less than five minutes--just long enough to read this card. And look for me. Yes, I know about your mistress. Yes, I've known for months. I might even have tolerated that, but when I discovered those two one-way tickets to the Caribbean I knew I had to act. Yes, I put this fast-acting poison in your drinking cup. Bon voyage, Harry. ALICE."

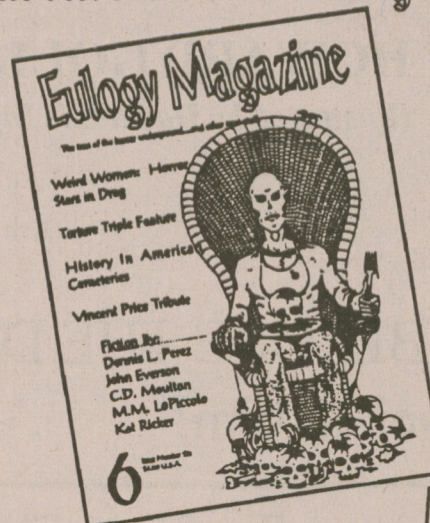
Harry gasped and let the bottle of poison slip through his trembling fingers. It

shattered in the sink upon impact. Clutching his throat, Harry slid slowly to the cold tile floor. With great effort he crawled to the open door. The last thing he saw before he died was a fuzzy bunny slipper under the bed, the missing mate to the one stuffed in Alice's mouth.

pro

Eulogy Magazine

The best of the horror underground...and other neat stuff.



Issue #5 was our full-size one-year anniversary special, with a cover by Eric Turowski and centerfold art by Ray Carlson.

Featuring fiction by:

David B. Silva
D. F. Lewis
Lauren Fitzgerald
Bill Jacques
Kurt Newton
Eddie Gaul

Columns include Serial Killers A Go-Go and Cemetery Plans. Don't miss this special issue! \$5.00 ppd.

Eulogy Magazine #6 will be available in February! Be sure to catch up with horror's neo-romance, born-again chainsaw massacre! Now full-size!

Featuring fiction by:

Kat Ricker
C. D. Moulton
Dennis L. Perez
John Everson
M. M. LoPiccolo

Columns include Torture Triple Feature, Weird Women: Horror Stars in Drag and Ed Yarb's continuing From the Pulpit! Only \$4.95 ppd. A four issue subscription is only \$18.



Make all checks payable to:

Eulogy, 2130 Brown Street, Napa, CA 94559-1230

Howard Goldsmith is a prolific writer who has had over 40 books published in various genres over the past twenty years. His novel credits include *Invasion: 2200 A.D.*, *Evil Tales of Evil Things*, *Junior Classics*, and *Spine-Chillers*, just to name a few. His work has also appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies.

THE PROUST SYNDROME

The past is dangerous?

BY HOWARD GOLDSMITH

Illustrated by David Lee Ingersoll

HE HALTED BEFORE THE DOOR OF HIS OFFICE.
His name stared back at him:

Jason Turner, Director
Department Of Nostalgia Control

He straightened his tie and composed himself. It was important to look the proper executive; cool, crisp, and commanding.

He wondered how long it would be before he was exposed. It seemed inevitable. A person with only average powers of observation could surely penetrate his thin veneer.

He had been barely managing to maintain the pose for a month now. He hoped desperately he could keep it up.

He started to open the door, but checked himself as he saw his reflection in



the glass. His mouth was set in a tight, tense line. He forced his facial muscles to relax. Then he stepped briskly into the office.

"Good morning, Mary."

"Good morning, Mr. Turner."

He walked past his secretary and into his private office. He swung the door closed behind him and laid his briefcase down, glancing down at the desk as he eased himself into his chair. What was on the calendar for the day? An appointment with Senator Cantwell at ten-thirty. He groaned inwardly. Doubtlessly coming to apply the screws once again. If anyone had the power and inclination to unmask him, it was Senator Cantwell. The tic on his cheek started up.

The chair squealed as he shifted his weight backward. He gazed up at the framed sign on the opposite wall. It read: THE PAST IS A PERVERSION OF THE PRESENT.

Next to it hung a Presidential citation: IN HONOR OF MERITORIOUS SERVICE PERFORMED BY JASON TURNER IN HIS FIRST YEAR OF OFFICE AS DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NOSTALGIA CONTROL. DATED MARCH 7, 2023.

Jason gripped the arms of his chair until his knuckles showed white. If only he could get Evelyn out of his mind! If only he hadn't found the old high school yearbook with Evelyn's picture in it. With Evelyn's smile!

He stood up and paced restlessly about the office. That had been the start of it, finding Evelyn's picture. It had stirred feelings he had long forgotten. Memories began to lap over the dikes he had erected around his past. He was assailed by vague stirrings and longings for a remote time, a time of innocence. A growing restlessness seized him, clawed at his nerves, robbed him of his usual machine-like efficiency.

He was haunted by Evelyn's smile. The beguiling tilt of her chin. The tinkle of her careless laughter. The sun streaming through her golden hair.

Jason drew himself back painfully to the present. In forty-five minutes Senator Cantwell would walk through the door. The old war-horse would, predictably, be exactly on time. Forty-five minutes.

Jason lingered in the aura of the past. He felt again the flicker of first love. The giddy swings of mood, the flights of exultation and the pain . . . Evelyn and Jason; their world had vanished. An aching void opened up within him. He mourned the passing of his youth.

Dammit, how could he hope to keep up his official position

Nostalgia drains our energies from present tasks and future goals.

with all this sentimental wallowing in the past? He of all people.

Psychiatrists had a name for it, the Proust Syndrome, a morbid, absorbing obsession in recalling things past. It had begun to afflict scores of people toward the end of the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century it had taken on epidemic proportions. A wave of nostalgia for a pre-computerized, pre-technocratic America had swept the country. Nostalgia clubs sprang up everywhere. Businessmen enjoyed a boom in old audio cassettes, video tapes, magazines, and other memorabilia.

The problem of occupying leisure time had become acute. A vastly expanded gross national product and increased per capita income had brought a drastic reduction in the work week, along

with early retirement and longer vacations. Lacking constructive outlets and bored with modern life, increasing numbers of people became absorbed in reveries of the past.

Social scientists declared that America was fast becoming a futureless society. People were unable to enjoy the present until it had receded far into the past. Memories assumed more substance than reality.

Alarming sociological analyses of future-oriented versus past-oriented societies documented the thesis that past-orientation inevitably augur the decline of civilization. Nostalgia was deemed a form of psychological withdrawal from reality, escapism of the most negative sort.

A full-scale Congressional investigation had been launched. Legislation swiftly followed (The Reliquary Act), outlawing the sale of relics and memorabilia. Any book, tape, phonograph record, magazine, or film over twenty years old was subject to official scrutiny and, in most instances, was banned.

The Reality Squad, a crack corps of specially selected investigators, scoured the country, rooting out nostalgia pushers, who were severely dealt with in the courts.

Still, a brisk underground trade in nostalgia items persisted. "Take a trip back," the pushers urged. "Linger in the filmy twilight of the past. Renounce the garish present. Restore our old values."

Senator Lucas Cantwell, in a memorable address, had been moved to declare on the floor of the Senate that "these votaries of the past must be rounded up and quarantined for the protection of society. Crass exploiters and commercial leeches, they pander to human weakness. Books of the past are the pornography of the present. Nostalgia drains our energies from present tasks and future goals. It cripples the initiative of our citizens. We must work for the future, build for the future, live for the future. Sense, not sentiment, must rule our actions."

The Administration created a Department of Nostalgia Control to coordinate the anti-nostalgia campaign. Forty-two year old Jason Turner was named its director. He set into motion a full-scale nostalgia surveillance, reaching into homes and businesses alike. Files were amassed on the leisure activities of all citizens. This information was fed into the giant memory banks of a nationwide computer network. Continuous checks were maintained on the entire population, and updated data was automatically transmitted to the computer control center in Washington.

Wherever cases of the Proust Syndrome were discovered, horizon-stretching drugs were employed to produce desired personality changes. Future-oriented thinking was rewarded by electrical stimulation of cortical pleasure centers. In resistant cases, ultrasonic impulses were applied to induce reorganization of neural circuits. By interrupting feedback loops triggering old associations, the brain was eventually washed clean of the past.

Guidance counselors in schools were alert to premonitory symptoms of the Proust Syndrome, but it was mainly from the ranks of the middle-aged and the elderly that most cases were drawn. Agitated cases were isolated and kept in a permanently drugged, pacified state. Dr. Hugo Meister, the pioneering chemotherapist, advised his colleagues that "stasis be induced in all cases of intractable reality shock. By erasing the patient's past we aim to create a psychic *tabula rasa* upon which we can imprint a healthier, coping, forward-directed identity." Unfortunately, under protracted narcosis many cases developed hallucinations and slid into progressive personality deterioration.

It was fifteen months now since Jason Turner's Department had swung into action. In addition to receiving a Presidential citation, Jason had earned the plaudits of public officials of every po-

litical stripe. They all agreed that Jason maintained a tightly knit organization, a model of sleek, operational efficiency. Jason himself was regarded as prime Presidential material.

Senator Cantwell alone had faulted his department. He, along with a band of devoted acolytes, continually urged a stepped-up anti-nostalgia crusade. Most people dismissed him privately as a fanatic, but he was a force to contend with as co-chairman of the powerful Nostalgia Investigation Committee. And, he was a bur in Jason's side.

If Senator Cantwell ever detected anything of Jason's mental state, he would force his resignation. It would spell the end of Jason's public career. Jason glanced nervously at his watch. Twenty. He had ten minutes to pull himself together.

But the past kept unraveling in Jason's mind like a spool of thread. The yielding pressure of Evelyn's lips against his. The soft, sinuous curve of her body. The airy froth of her laughter bubbling across the years.

A buzzer sounded from the outer office. Jason sat erect.

"Senator Cantwell is here, Mr. Turner."

"Show him in," Jason answered in a husky voice.

Senator Cantwell strode into the office with a vigor that belied his years. His bristling white mane, crowning a wide, furrowed brow, lent the suggestion of an old lion, wily and dangerous in repose. He beamed a patriarchal smile at Jason and shook his outstretched hand.

"How have you been, Jason?"

"Fine, Senator. And you?"

"Fair, fair. I've been meaning to drop in to see you."

Jason stirred uneasily.

"I know you agree with me, Jason, that there must be no slackening in our crusade. I've never questioned your sense of commitment to our cause, and if from time to time I've grown impatient with the pace of our campaign I'm sure you understood there was nothing personal intended in my criticism."

"I realize that, Senator."

"Good. Well, I've brought along some documents I recently acquired from reliable informants. They give the names and addresses of suspected nostalgia provocateurs." He opened his briefcase and drew out a sheaf of papers. "Here, for example, are the names of underground exhibitors of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton movies. And here is a list of stores selling old LP's under the counter. One of my agents bought a record made as far back as 1972 by a singer named Diana Ross -- reactionary music flaunting the most blatant emotional appeals. And here is the name of a clandestine publisher of cheap reprints of Henry Miller and Norman Mailer." He leafed through the papers. "This is the list of unregenerate antiquarians still teaching in colleges and manning important administrative posts. They must be weeded out, Jason, ruthlessly if need be. The times call for toughness. Our international enemies would like nothing better than to weaken the fiber and resolve of our citizens."

"I'll get on to this right away, Senator. I'll call our legal department and have our men in the field supplied with summonses this very afternoon. I appreciate your bringing this information to my attention."

"Well, that's what I'm here for," said Senator Cantwell, grinning broadly. "I knew I could depend on you to recognize the gravity of the situation. You will report to me shortly then?"

"I'll have copies of our investigators' reports sent over to you as soon as they reach my desk."

"Fine," said Senator Cantwell, rising. He glanced out the window. "A lovely spring day. I think I'll take a stroll along the

Potomac. It will feel good to stretch these old legs. You look a little restless, Jason. Or is it just a touch of spring fever, perhaps?"

A trap? Jason answered quickly. "No, sir. I'm not affected that way by the weather. I'm just anxious to get going on this information you've brought."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Jason. We must guard against complacency and never lose our zeal. As I said to Senator Taylor this morning, the past is passe'. If we all pull together, we'll lick this nostalgia pollution. Then old goats like me will ride the forward wave of the future together with youngbloods like you. Well, I've talked enough, Jason." He grasped Jason's hand. "Good day to you, my boy."

He swept out of the office.

Jason sank into his chair, wilted. A trickle of perspiration rolled down his cheek. He felt wrung out.

He reached for the phone and dialed the legal department. "Hello, Russ, this is Jason. I just had a visit from Senator Cantwell . . . Yes, he was in excellent form . . . He had some new lists. I'll have them sent over to your office. Will you see that our field workers are supplied with summonses today? . . . Fine. Thanks, Russ."

He hung up and rang for his secretary, asking her to have copies of Senator Cantwell's lists delivered to the legal department.

Alone again, he stared off into space. He toyed with a corner of a folder on his desk. He opened it and looked at it blankly. It contained some letters marked for his attention. He thumbed through them. It was no use. The words didn't register. His mind was adrift in time and space. He wondered for the hundredth time what had gone wrong with his marriage. When had the recriminations started, the endless series of petty, ego-scoring debates? God knows he'd tried to interrupt the cycle. Would it have been different with Evelyn?

He pushed back his chair on a sudden impulse and walked into the outer office.

"I'm knocking off for the day, Mary. If anyone calls, please say I'm out in the field."

"All right, Mr. Turner," Mary said uncertainly with a surprised lift of her eyebrows. It was unlike Jason Turner to leave in the middle of the day.

Jason rode down in the elevator and left the building. The sunlight made him blink. He averted his eyes from the shimmering, glass-fronted buildings.

He proceeded north up the street, the reverse of his usual route home. His legs seemed to urge him in a direction of their own choice, away from the most populated areas of the city.

He walked absently, jostled by occasional passers-by.

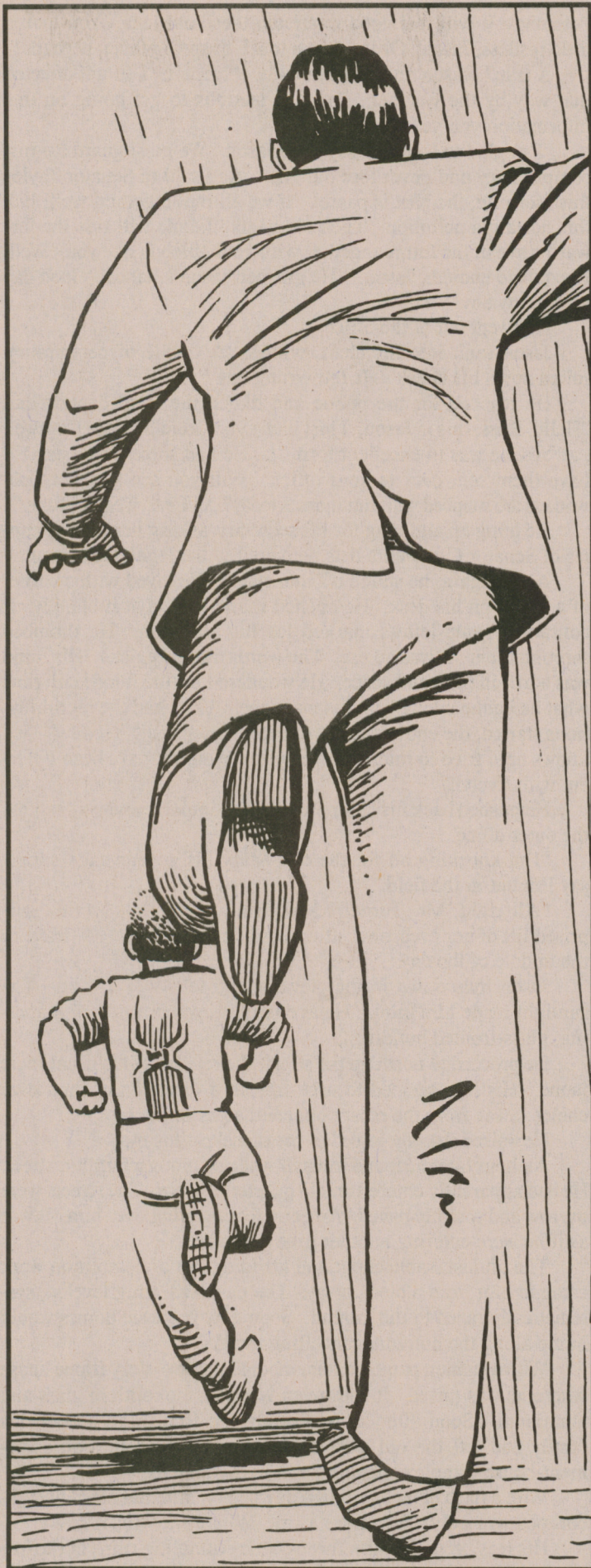
An hour later he found himself walking along a familiar street. He had apparently entered an old quarter of town. The streets were narrow and roughly paved. An eerie feeling crept over him. It was as if he were entering another time and place.

The unmistakable clank and grinding din of demolition work came to him from a block away. The past was being leveled, systematically razed to the ground. Soon new geodesic domes would hump along the horizon, cancelling the sky.

With a sudden pang, he remembered the two-story frame house where he was raised. It had given way to a monolith of glass and aluminum. Soon after he was graduated from high school, his family had left the old neighborhood and moved into an apartment-house complex spanning a mile in diameter.

With a flash of recognition it dawned on him that his old neighborhood was only a few miles away. Which way was it now?

His legs propelled him through the crumbling ruins of the fossil city. The air was gritty with cement and plaster dust. Gigantic



cranes reared like dinosaurs against the azure sky. Beams sprawled across the streets like fallen redwoods.

"Hey, mister, watch your step," a voice rapped out. The voice was joined by those of other construction workers.

Jason quickened his pace, oblivious to the warning shouts. An old street sign caught his eye. BEECH STREET. Left on Beech, right on Dexter. It was all coming back to him.

He mustn't be late. Late for what? Piano lessons? But he had stopped practicing the piano when he was twelve.

Some urgent summons drove him on. Evelyn was waiting. No, Evelyn was lost forever. Tears welled in his eyes.

The sidewalks were caked with years of grime. He picked his way through piles of rubble. It was like walking through the ashes of his past.

He bent over and scooped up a handful of dirt. The years trickled through his fingers, 1991, 1992, 1993 . . .

He began running. A boy suddenly appeared next to him. He trotted along beside him. It was a newsboy.

"Buy a paper, mister?"

"No, I'm in a hurry."

"Where you running?"

"Home."

"Do you live far from here?"

"Just a mile away," Jason panted.

He was running out of breath. His sides began to ache. He slowed to a walk.

"Mind if I walk along with you?" asked the boy. "I live that way too."

"But wait," said Jason, suddenly remembering. "Weren't all those houses torn down to make way for office buildings?"

"Office buildings? No sir. But I've heard them talking about putting up new buildings. There's something in the paper about it today."

"Here, let me see," said Jason, grabbing a paper.

"That'll be a dollar," said the boy.

Jason took out his wallet and withdrew a bill. He handed it to the boy.

Jason unfolded the paper. His eyes raced down the columns. There, on page 3, was an item about a proposal to construct a series of office buildings extending from Newport Street to Wilmot Drive.

"But, then maybe they haven't touched my old house yet," said Jason, with sudden jubilation.

"They haven't touched any of the houses yet," the boy assured him.

They walked along in silence. The boy began humming a tune to himself.

Jason froze to attention. "What's that you're humming?" he asked.

"Just a song. You like it?"

"But that sounds like a song I once made up. How did it go? 'Fifteen daisies in a row / Toss their head to and fro.'"

The boy looked perplexed. "Funny, I thought I made it up."

Jason regarded the boy thoughtfully. There was something familiar about him, the way he cocked his head, the cadence of his voice. Could he be the son of someone he once knew?

"Have you lived here long?" asked Jason.

"All my life," said the boy.

"What's your name?"

"Jason. Jason Turner."

Jason started. "Are you pulling my leg? What's your game? Who put you up to this?"

"What do you mean? That's my name."

"I suppose you followed me all the way down here, didn't you? Did Senator Cantwell pay you to trail me?"

"No, mister. I don't know what you're talking about. I never

heard of Senator Cantwell." The boy inched away uneasily.

"Come here, you." Jason sprang at the boy.

"Hey!" The boy dodged out of the way, whirled around, and took off down the street.

"Come back!" shouted Jason, pouncing after him. "Don't go!"

The boy flew around a corner, ran halfway down the block, and ducked into an alley. Jason trotted after him, laboring for breath. "Come back!" he rasped. As he turned into the alley, he collided with a trash can, and took a flying spill. The boy shot a glance over his shoulder, hesitated, then hopped a fence and disappeared.

Jason struggled to his knees. He heaved himself up and leaned against a wall, spent and winded. From afar his ear caught the refrain of that familiar tune. "Fifteen daisies in a row/ Toss their heads to and fro."

Jason rocked back and forth. He began to hum to himself. Tears slowly rose and spangled his eyes. The newspaper fell from his grasp . . .

"Jason, are you all right?"

Someone was shaking his arm.

"Huh?" Jason looked up, a fog spilling across his brain and rolling away from his eyes. "Senator Cantwell!"

"I was driving by when I spotted you in this alley. What on earth are you doing here? You look hung over. Have you been drinking?"

"Oh no, sir! I never touch alcohol. I just had a dizzy spell. First time it ever happened to me."

"What are you doing in this part of town?"

Jason's mind raced, the fog lifting. "I grew up here."

Senator Cantwell's eyebrows rose. - He eyed Jason sharply.

"Nostalgic for your childhood home?"

Jason flushed. "On, no! Furthest thing from my mind, Senator. Just took a walk, and I was attracted by the new construction in this area. The old buildings were an eyesore, an architectural anachronism. It's good to see them leveled away. Don't you agree?"

"Indeed, Jason! Where are you headed now? Back to your office?"

Jason nodded.

"Let me give you a lift. You still look a bit shaky."

"Thanks, Senator." Jason got into the limousine.

"To Nostalgia Control," Cantwell instructed the driver. "Overworking yourself, Jason?"

"In a good cause, Senator. I think I may have caught a bug. My stomach felt queasy this morning. A twenty-four hour flu virus is going around."

They soon pulled up at Jason's building.

"Keep up the good work, Jason, and watch your health."

"Thanks very much, Senator. I'll send over our investigators' reports as soon as possible."

"Good." The limousine drove off.

Jason felt steadier now. He rode up on the elevator, walked past his secretary and into his private office.

As he sat down at his desk he thought, "The past is all illusion, just a dream. That's all it was, a dream -- revisiting my past. It never happened. I only imagined it. Thomas Wolfe said 'You can't go home again.' You *can* go home, but only in a reverie. Home is never the same as it was. The past doesn't exist except in memory. And memory is so imperfect . . . Just let it go, Jason. Let them all go, all the ghosts of your past, Evelyn and all the others. No use brooding over what once was or what might have been.

"All you have is the present. That's all anyone has. Hold on to it."

Jason felt a sense of relief. He looked down at his desk and began to tackle the papers that had accumulated from the morning.

ptw

The Fifth Season

by J.N. Williamson

-- 8 stunning tales of the macabre and the surreal by one of America's leading horror writers --

*"I am counted with them that go down into the pit.
... Free among the dead, like slain that lie in the
grave . . .*

- Psalm 88, and The Fifth Season

Introduction by James Kisner

Cover art by B.E. Bothell

\$4.95 + \$1.00 Shpg (U.S.)

P.O. Box 68817, Seattle, WA 98168-0817

A **Detours** Book

Poetry in Motion

"A Writer's Home Companion"

Editor: Nadia Giordana

(612) 779 - 6952

Is published quarterly by the National Poetry Association. For subscription information and submission guidelines, send a SASE to: NPA newsletter P.O. BOX 173 - Bayport, MN 55003-0173. Sample copies can be obtained for \$3.00 (U.S. Funds) at the above address.



Tom Piccirilli's first novel, *Dark Father*, was published in the U.S. by Pocket Books and was a best-seller in Italy. In addition to being a talented young writer, he reads for Baen Books, Pirate Writings Publishing and *Space & Time*. His short fiction has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines including: *Not One of Us*, *Hardboiled*, *Dead of Night*, *Silver Web*, and many others.

Some wounds never heal and the past often hurts far more than the present.

SEEMS LIKE OLD TIMES

BY TOM PICCIRILLI

Illustrated by Alfred Klosterman

SANTA MUST HAVE BEEN READING MY Christmas list back to front because the last thing in the world I needed was a tear-streaked blonde pulling at my elbow.

After twenty hours of driving I'd made it to the Dry Falls county line. My '68 Mustang finally gave up its 170,000 mile ghost and I'd walked the last hour through the winding back roads heading towards main street in the light rain. Only in Dry Falls could you still kick up dust in the rain.

The Drop-Out Inn used to be Harlsey's Sunshine Diner when I was a boy. Except for the sign out front nothing else seemed to have changed much: the patrons were the same, the dog-eared photocopied menus still offered such delicacies as a Hound Dog Chili Burger Special, and, if you were inclined to do so, you could find the same sites of distant lands in the grease stains on the floor and ceiling. It was better than staring at the two slumping, mascara-smearred waitresses or the toothless drunk gumming toast at the end of the counter.

And then she rushed in.

Without a doubt, she was the most beautiful woman I'd seen in the last fourteen hundred miles. Maybe eighteen years old at the outside, her large lips were made to pout, and the wind had swept her long, honey-colored hair in a tousle around her freckled neck. She dressed like

Daisy May: cut-off jeans riding way too high, short white blouse tied at mid-rift, showing off the perfect tan of her smooth belly. Worst of all—depending on how you think—she was crying harsh, real tears. After you've been betrayed by the lying sobs a couple of times you learned the difference. Honest weeping affected any man who had a soul, and Dry Falls tends to crush it from those who possess one and breeds guffawing morons who are without.

Having foregone sleep for twenty-eight hours, with only beer and beef jerky in my stomach, legs tight and the shoulder holster cutting a wide arching welt over my shoulder, I didn't want to even talk to another person, much less get involved in something I knew would be bad from the start and only become much worse.

"Please, Mister, you gotta help me," she said. Her fingernails were short and dirty; for some reason, I liked that about her. She twisted a handful of my jacket and tried to yank me to my feet.

I turned in my seat the same moment my Hound Dog burger arrived. Her lips looked infinitely more edible than what lay on the plate. I sighed and asked, "What's the trouble?"

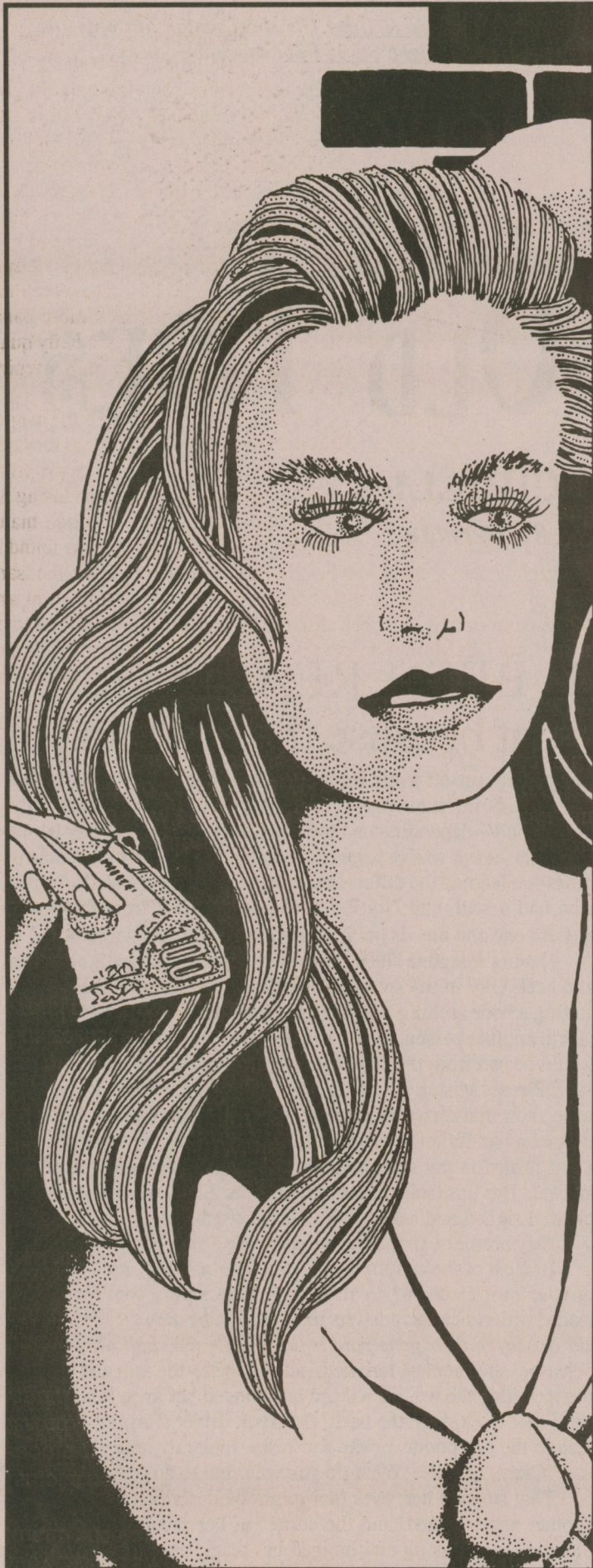
"My brothers, they're coming for me."

In most of the country someone might ask *Why are you afraid of your own brothers?* In this town it became a fool's question, loaded with ridiculous answers like, *Maybe she didn't feed the chickens* or *Maybe their gene pool is just a little too shallow*.

"Please!" she shouted, terrified, pulling me by the arm and scratching me along the waist. I winced and shoved her away, and nobody else—not the kids in the back, the truck driver slurping his coffee next to the pay phone, or the waitress—took any notice of her.

"Okay," I said. "What do you want me to do?"

That stopped her; eyes that might be described as 'limpid' in another age widened, and the corner of her mouth turned down. She did a nervous jig and hugged her arms, smoothing the sweat



into a sheen. I looked out the plate glass window and saw nobody in the parking lot, nothing out of the ordinary.

There are times you go with your guts no matter how tired, hungry, broke, and on edge you are: I'd traveled across country from New York to see my father one last time, to get what was deserved and pay what was owed. It would be just about the worst meeting of my life, second only to the one I'd had with a Colombian hitman named Throat on the night that ended my career on the force.

The fly-specked phone in the corner was rotary. I picked up the receiver and reached into my back pocket for change. A meaty guy with a FRED'S TRUCKING insignia on his cap shoved back his seat and stood, came forward and pressed his chest at me. "I'm waitin' fer a call," he said.

"I need the sheriff."

"Six blocks up, past the church, make a right."

They'd either moved it or he was lying. "Look, it will only take a second. The girl over there is in trouble."

"You will be, too, if you don't put down the phone."

His tone had a completely inoffensive lilt, as if he didn't really want to break my arms but would do so in a friendly effort to teach me proper etiquette. It had been a long time since I'd heard anyone with that mudkicker timbre. The sediment in my veins stirred. I was waking up. Fred smiled beatifically; I could count all his teeth on my fingers. One halfway decent shot to the jaw would take out the rest of them.

The girl wheeled in close to me, doing her best to hide under my arm. Fred gently took the receiver out of my hand and hung it up. The phone rang instantly and he answered by saying, "Ma? Zat you?"

"I need your help," she said. "Get me outta here, please, I swear I'll make it worth your while."

I doubted if her seductions were always so inept, but I gave her credit for at least thinking of rewarding me. We went out into the parking lot, and she gave a short moan, looking around as if expecting her brothers to leap down from the roof. At the far end of the lot was a pick-up with FRED'S TRUCKING on the side. I led her to it and she whispered, "This yours?"

We got in and I found his keys under the seat. It's amazingly infantile to steal something from a man who mouthed off a bit, but for the first time in days I smiled. I started the truck and began backing out; Fred came sprinting across the parking lot when he heard the guttural pop of his engine, and I pulled away slowly, just ahead of him as he ran. I rolled down the window and shouted, "Tell Ma I said hello!"

The girl laughed, a nice giggle, a little wild but still in control. If I'd gone this far for her, she no doubt decided I'd be along for at least the next part of the trip. Her eyes remained fixed and haunted, but some of the tension eased. She'd gotten out of the frying pan, and now had to decide just where burned the fire. "I'm Holly," she said.

"Where to, Holly?"

"You from around here, Mister?"

"No."

"Figured. You got that moody Northeastern breeze to your voice. There's a house, about seven, eight miles up ahead off county route fourteen. It's hasn't been lived in for years, all boarded up and mice filthy, but it'll do for now until I catch my breath."

"Won't your brothers think to look for you there?"

She stared at me. "No, nobody goes there anymore."

The drizzle ended; here, it never came down more than ten minutes at a time. We drove the wooden bridge passing over Sutter's creek, which had once been a river and now had gone to dry bed.

She pointed occasionally, telling me, "Turn here," leading me further into the dark, highback ridges. The scenery caused a flood of memory to reel back inside my mind faster and faster like shards of a mirror coming together, but it still took a while for me to realize where we were headed.

"Left," she said.

I pulled the truck left and we rose into a clearing across a dead field of sunburned crabgrass and dust. The house there fell back into a mass of overgrown thistle brush, dormers rising against the full moon and liquid starscape of the night sky. This county was littered with abandoned houses, but unlike New York where the homeless found every empty cranny, here the mighty clapboard traps lay empty for decades.

Holly discovered a flashlight under her seat, checked it against her palm and grunted in satisfaction. "Moon's so bright we almost don't need it." We got out and she navigated me among the ruts of the wasted lawn and rotted steps of the front porch. The field mice scurried and bolted at our sounds.

Inside, she'd made a lean-to for herself in the center of the living room, complete with clothes, blankets, and an oil-burning lamp. The room was torn up from top to bottom: the floor looked like a mine field had gone off, smashed wood and tile, mangled plumbing and ancient wiring lay exposed in the broken walls. I knew the rest of the house would be the same. Holly struck a match and lit the lamp. The fireplace had fresh ash within.

"How long have you been shackled here?"

"Just a couple nights."

Humming to herself now, either as a defense or a disarming maneuver, she settled onto her sleeping bag. I leaned against the slate at the base of the fireplace.

"Okay, Holly," I said. "Spill."

Now would either come the further seduction, more weeping, or else outright deception. She didn't trust me, but at the moment required my help and figured I could be handled later as need be. Now that the tears were gone, I could see she had the same lying eyes as most of the Dry Falls populace; nobody was any good at real trickery, only idiots bought into trusting their neighbors, yet they all thought they could pull craftiness on one another.

Those lips turned into a smile that tightened my abdomen, and she unbuttoned another button on her tied-off blouse. "You haven't told me your name."

My best New York cop glare didn't cut much in bramble country, but she understood I wasn't about to pass out at her feet, as much as her mouth made my own water. "You got all night to waste? Forgotten already what it felt like back in the diner?"

The pout returned and she sized me up again, searching for chinks. It was starting to become irritating. "All right," she told me, "here it is. I took some money from them and now they're after me."

"Try again," I said, moving closer until I stood over her. "First off, nobody in Dry Falls has any money, and you weren't hysterical because of a little stolen beer cash."

Bending quickly, yet lithely, without any sudden moves, she slid her hand towards her purse on the floor. I kicked out and knocked the bag aside, reached down and dumped it. Wadded up tissue, two opened packs of cigarettes, and Vaseline for those lips fell out, alongside the torn, singed, mouse-chewed remainder of a hundred dollar bill.

"That's mine," she said.

I handed it to her. "It's not worth anything. You've got less than a quarter of the entire bill." The lamp threw haphazard shadows and yellow tongues of light over her face; I watched her cheeks grow tinged with crimson.

"All right," she said, "the truth. An East Texas lawyer was around these parts early this month. My brothers think any lawyer walks about with a thousand or more dollars in his wallet. They think I stole a wad of his bundle and won't let me alone until I give it up, but I ain't got any. I found that hundred dollar bill in this house, this very room, part of a mouse nest in the far wall. It don't mean nothing, but try telling that to Shad and Timber Haskell. You ain't from around here, so you don't know. They're gonna bloody me."

In the spring of '75 the sheriff's daughter was kidnaped by a redneck named, of all lovable names, Barney, and sent a ransom demand for ten thousand dollars. Redneck childsnatchers aren't as greedy as their New York counterparts, they have a more banal view of the value of the dollar. Throat had been paid a hefty quarter million to take me out after his boss learned I'd been sleeping with his wife.

But the sheriff didn't have ten grand and begged the money from the town's affluent mayor, Casper Crofty. Crofty agreed and came back with a hefty satchel that was soon left at the appropriate place. However, Crofty had been too covetous to chance losing his ten thousand, and the satchel had been stuffed with a rich man's bricks packed in dirty socks. Two days later, the girl was found in Sutter's creek without half her head. The sheriff took ten thousand from Crofty at gunpoint, blasted him with a shotgun, went and found out Barney had been shackled up outside of town with a stripper from Des Moines, blasted her face off when he learned Barney had split, and then went home and killed himself. The money was never recovered.

I could see this was part of the original stash; the mice had discovered a tiny bit and used it for their nests.

"You think there's more money around this house, don't you. Well, they looked, Holly. It was a popular pastime, coming with a crowbar and shovel and hunting the missing ten grand. The whole town's been through this place at one time or another. There's none here."

She drew her chin to her chest. "I thought you wasn't from Dry Falls."

"I'm not. Anymore."

Her teeth edged over her lower lip. "My brothers think I took that Texas slick for at least a couple hundred, but if I tell 'em that I found a piece of old ransom money in the wall, they'll beat me for ten thousand in cash nobody's ever seen. Either way, they want something I ain't got."

"It's only a matter of time before they get here," I said, and, before the words were out of my mouth, like I'd tolled my own bell, probability and greed snuck up on me again, and we heard a car approaching down the road.

"Oh hell," she said, rushing the window; I turned out the lamp but the moonlight unfurled through the shattered panes of glass, illuminating the house almost as brightly as if the sun was shining.

A rust-gnawed Plymouth pulled up in front of the house and parked beside the pick-up. Three men got out, weaving slightly, tossing beer cans before them. Good, the more drunk they were the better.

Shad Haskell climbed from the passenger seat, as mountainous as Throat, with the same gorilla arms swinging wildly at his sides. He reached back into the back seat and removed a shotgun. I remembered Shad used to be the best wrestler in the county, taking pleasure in twisting his grimacing opponents legs up their backs a few too many notches until they snapped. His brother Timber came from the same white trash stock as the rest of his family, except as runt of the litter he'd learned to be twice as sneaky and vicious to make up for lack of muscle. He favored knives, and now unclipped

Galaxy[®]

The Legend Returns

GALAXY Magazine, pilcted by Editor E. J. Gold, is published six times per year. Available at \$2.50 for a single copy (\$3.50 Canadian), GALAXY subscriptions are \$18 for U.S. Bulk Rate, \$22 for U. S. First Class, \$28 for Canada, \$30 for Great Britain/Europe, and \$32 for the Pacific Rim.

With your subscription, you get a **Free GALAXIAN Button** (\$2 value) and a **\$10 Merchandise Certificate** (not redeemable for cash) to use with your first order from the Official Galaxy Catalog. **GALAXIAN buttons** are available separately for \$2 each, plus \$1 shipping & handling.

Your subscription will begin with the current issue. Subscribers will be given preference for back issue orders.

A limited number of **Volume I, Number 1** have been put aside as **single issue samples** @ \$2.50/copy plus \$1 first-class shipping & handling. Offer good only while supplies last! Contact:

GALAXY MAGAZINE

P. O. Box 370

Nevada City, CA 95959

Telephone: 916/432-1839; 800/869-0658

FAX: 916/432-1810

email: brdotown@netcom.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS

THE LEGEND RETURNS THE LEGEND RETURNS THE LEGEND RETURNS THE LEGEND RETURNS THE LEGEND

a Bowie from the sheathe on his belt. When I left town twenty years ago he'd been in jail for raping two fourteen year old girls behind his father's junkyard.

The third member of their little hunting party was the illustrious Fred; holding a rifle, he moved to the front of his pickup and inspected the grille for any damage that may have occurred after I'd absconded with his vehicle. He actually took the time to rub a smear of insect off the windshield.

"Holly!" Shad shouted. "Come on out here right now, hear me!"

She slid into the crook of my arm and whispered, "That's like calling the catfish outta the lake, ain't it?"

Timber had a weasel's face that hadn't changed much in two decades; he brushed his long, greasy hair aside with the tip of the blade. He spoke in a low, whiny voice that carried further than it should have even in the open night. "You're being talked to, girl. We jest wanna know where the rest of the money is, however much, wherever it is you got it from."

Fred moved forward, unsure of where to look as he yelled, "You rotten son'bitch done stole my truck, you I'm comin' after myself!"

"Without your Ma?" I shouted back. I tugged Holly and said, "Let's go," taking her by the hand and leading her upstairs. We stumbled over the rubble of the floor, but once on the stairway we stuck close to the rail and were on the second story the moment the front door burst in. I ran into one of the long since unused bedrooms and pushed her down in the far corner. "Stay here."

"Whatcha gonna do?"

"Have a chat."

"They'll kill you."

The three of them drunkenly clucked and grumbled downstairs, tripping in the twilight and cursing, searching the rooms. I stood at the top of the stairs out of view, shaking my head. I tried to trace my fall from grace and discover when I'd lost the path, but couldn't be certain; one step had simply followed another down an ill path. Maybe the fall began the day I joined the force, or when I went undercover for the DEA, or on the night I met Manuel Escobeda's wife, Moira, and decided to take her and a clump of his money. It should have been obvious that a cop ought to know better than falling in love with a drug czar's wife, but, as they say, at the time it seemed the right thing to do.

In the city I'd seen men die over a cargo bay full of twenty-five million dollars worth of heroin, and I'd seen a mugger kill a hot dog vendor over a buck and change. I put this battle for a worthless, shredded hundred dollar bill pretty damn high on the chowderhead scale.

Finally they ascended the stairs, charging up one behind the other like a redneck SWAT team. Fred came on first. At the top, I spun out fast and took hold of the barrel of his rifle.

He eyed me for an instant. "You phone-grubber! You stole my truck!"

"You were unfriendly," I said, lifting the barrel and shoving him backwards, hard into the others. I had to suppress laughter as they toppled down the flight of steps, spinning and shouting. Shad's shotgun went off and hit nothing but more rotten wall. I heard bone crack on bone, their skulls thick with intent and stupidity. All three struck the bottom with a force that rumbled throughout the foundation of the house. I raced down, picked up the guns and Timber's knife, and threw them aside.

Fred was out cold, and three of his few remaining teeth rested on his collar. Timber moaned and hissed, trying to stand and failing. Shad sat up and touched a nasty gash on his forehead from the splintered railing. He got to his knees and took a swing at me that would have broken my neck if it had connected.

The comforting weight of the .38 in my hand was like the

reassuring touch of a guardian angel; it's an old-fashioned gun, unlike the latest weapons of choice, the .9mm Brownings and Glocks, but it fit my palm perfectly and had a cold, gray, steel dignity. I thrust the gun under Shad's chin, the same way I'd done to Throat, except now I waited before pulling the trigger. The silky experience of *deja vu* slipped over me.

"Hi there."

"You," Shad said, gazing at me, blood running out his mouth over his thick, wet lips. "I know you. Don't I know you? Who are you?"

"Been a long time, Shad Haskell."

His eyes cleared in the moonlight, the ignorance bright and alarming, realization dawning. "You're Sheriff Ryan's kid. This used to be your house."

Timber unrolled out of the crumpled ball, his left arm hanging at an awful angle. He was numb with shock, but the weasel remained loose. He'd be whining for the next minute or two, and then he'd start screaming from pain. "You know where the money is, don't ya?" he said, going for his knife, and, not finding it, going for it again and again as if it might suddenly appear. "Why'd you come back? Where's that ten thousand? You in it with Holly? Where is she? Ow, my arm hurts!"

"Listen," I said. "I'm going to say this once and then you stooges are going to get in your trucks and get the hell out of here and go to the nearest doctor before you all drop dead. My father burned the money."

"What?" the Haskells spoke in unison, and then again, synchronized in their belligerence. "What?"

"My father burned the money in the fireplace after he stole it, after my sister was fished out of Sutter's creek; that little burned square of a bill was all that's left, and it belonged to the mice. Don't you understand, boys? He didn't kill and die for the money, it was about vengeance, and the irony of just how deadly greed can be. He was making a point. You ought to learn something from it, but you won't." And then, barely whispering, "I didn't either."

"Huh?" Shad said. "There ain't no cash?"

I called Holly and she came down cautiously, looked at me and said, "Thanks for the help, Mister, but it seems you're as much outta luck as the rest of us." I turned away and let her help her brothers to their feet. Fred moaned and stumbled to his feet. He took his teeth and tried to reinsert them. By now, Timber was done whining and the shrieks began.

"Get out of my house," I said, and watched them go.

I'd meant to spend some time in the cemetery communing with my father, staring down at his headstone and spilling at least a few of my guts now that I knew what it meant to be a cop, to fail in my duty and lose everything that mattered. I thought about how tough it was being an officer of the law, knowing morality from pleasurable evil, to keep your distance without falling too far away from purpose and pride.

I'd have to find another pick-up service and lead them back to my car; I still had a little hope for my Mustang. Maybe I'd go back to New York and work the streets a while, finish up with Escobeda, find out if Moria was still alive. Or maybe I'd spend some more time in the badlands that had birthed me, and see if I couldn't track down the shadow that haunted my life all these years, Barney, the man who killed my sister.

I still had a little hope.

ptw



J.N. Williamson is one of today's most prolific writers of Dark Fantasy. He has over fifty books published to date and over a hundred short stories. His novels include: The Book of Webster's, Don't Take Away The Light, and The Monastery, just to name a few. His short fiction has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines.

Wherefore that field was called, The Field of Blood, unto this day.

The Field Of Blood

BY J.N. WILLIAMSON

Illustrated by David Lee Ingersoll

FOR A PERIOD OF TIME that seemed to him as painful as the impact of the length of rope from which his body swung, the man endured the punishment of the damned -- specifically, what he considered an apt punishment and an agony suitable to one who believed himself literally damned. The noose had tightened

so abominably at the point when he had begun his drop that he'd imagined he could no longer breathe, that he was, in fact, dead.

But when he had whispered every anguished and guilt-ridden word of prayer he knew, and when it occurred to him he was simply *thinking* about the condition of lifelessness -- when he realized that the bite of the noose had not broken his neck and he still occupied a body that should perhaps be dead but was not --

He accepted that his flight from the terrible last deeds of his life would not be as swift as oblivion, and that his true punishment might prove far worse than sudden death, even the tortures of hell.

By the time he had laboriously unknotted the tight noose and, arms enfeebled and fingertips seeping blood, tumbled to the earth beneath the tree, the man was uncertain whether he was truly alive; dead; or a tenant of some unmapped terrain between the extremes. His throat was so badly bruised that he doubted his ability to whisper, and he sprawled atop the shadow-painted hill to squint fearfully into the darkness of late night. He saw that no one was afoot beneath the hill; no living soul had witnessed his futile attempt to end his existence, yet the night was not still. Sounds of furious voices and others that pleaded, entreated, rose up the hill like phantoms, disembodied but (he knew) given life -- given reason for the clamor -- by his own difficult and convoluted acts. Those who muttered with anger would not welcome him should he descend the hill and return. Even if he had acquiesced to their will, they had demanded he be gone from their sight forever.

And those whose sad, plaintive voices drifted to his bramble-sharp ears might wish him dead. Although he had once attempted to fulfill their wishes as well, he suspected now he could not con-

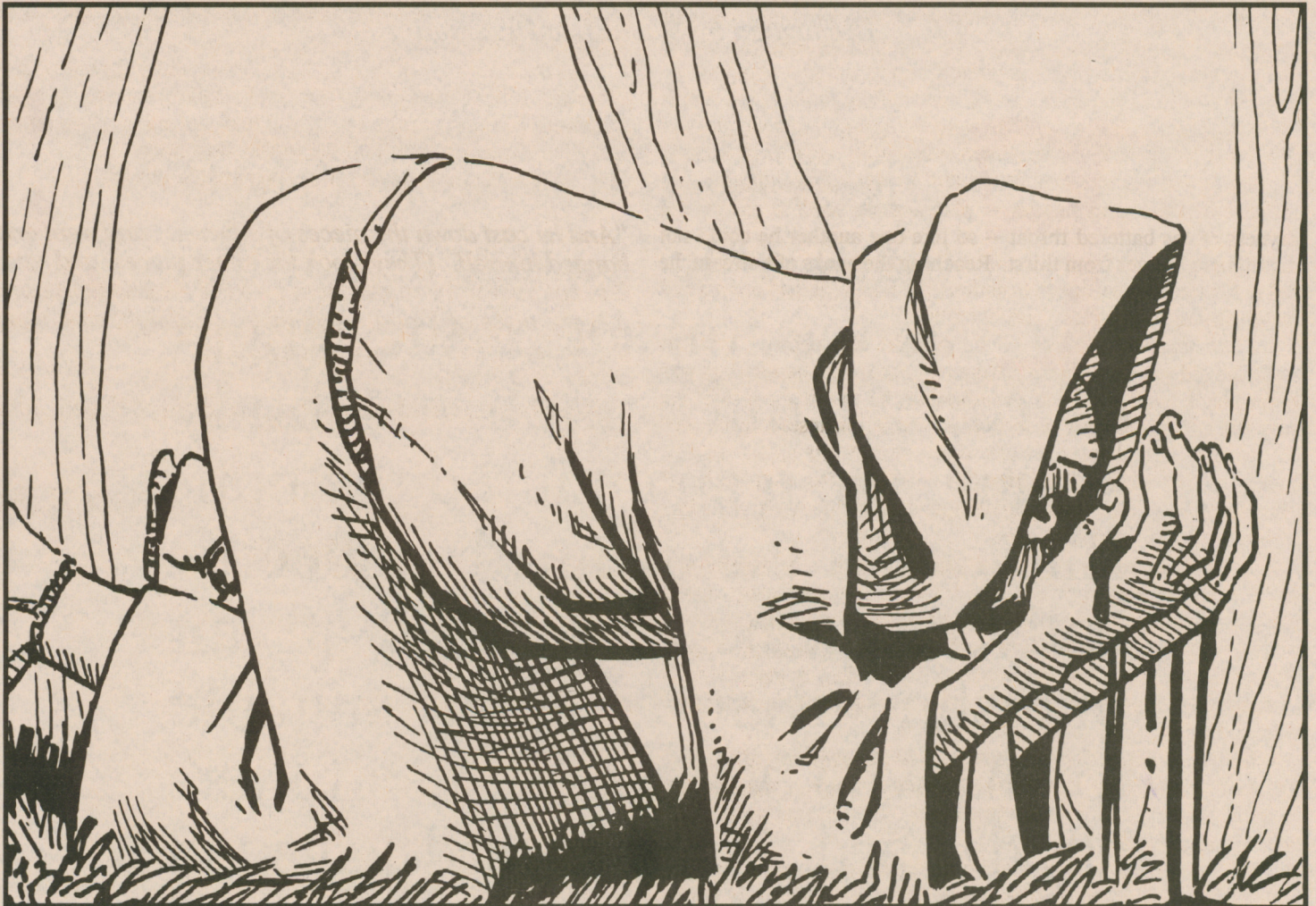
ceivably explain to or please them either. There was nowhere to go. In life or in the community of the dead.

Above him night wind sifted through the ancient tree with a replication of mourning. He glanced up quickly with all his old terror of the unknown and cried out, shrank into himself with the simultaneous yearning for the strange. Intuition told him his deeds of this day had only made him a part of that which had always brought fear to his breast. He saw the rope he had used dangling from the red-bud tree, forming an X or a cross with a shivering, outflung branch. The image provoked from him a moan but he did not know why. Shuddering, hands trembling, he pulled up the hood of his calf-length garment till his entire head and face were hidden in it except for his blood-filled and staring eyes.

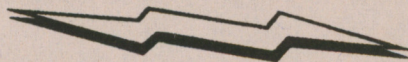
Fleeing somewhere seemed his one choice. Running, elsewhere, in the crouch of a beast doomed to constant travel in an endeavor he recognized as futile to evade both the crowd commissioning his treachery and the one that would see him now as irretrievably evil -- that was all he could imagine doing.

Erect, his thin shoulders hunched, he peered once more down the hill and detected the tentative emergence of daylight. He saw it, self-damned, as merciless tendrils of vengeance bound to find and expose him, to grope for the bruised throat that hadn't broken, and remorselessly pull from it the inexplicable living breath that sustained him like some grotesque, unpitied miracle of unguessable midnight gods--

Except, it was not in fact inexplicable, incomprehensible, he saw. Those glimpses of the future could always be relied upon when the source of prediction and prophecy was itself unimpeach-



He saw the rope he had used dangling from the red-bud tree, forming an X or a cross with a shivering, outflung branch. The image provoked from him a moan but he did not know why. Shuddering, hands trembling, he pulled up the hood of his calf-length garment till his entire head and face were hidden in it except for his blood-filled and staring eyes.



able. With those so lately his companions he had been assured that there were some in the company who would not taste of death until their leader assumed complete authority. Yet he himself, this night -- for reasons he truly could not fathom -- had lost sight of that unimpeachable pledge! What had come over him, overpowered both his judgment and memory and overwhelmed his faith in their leader?

Cursing his confusion and culpability alike, he lurched down the other side of the hill, wanting to escape the dawn and what he felt it would mean for him. When he had wandered aimlessly till he was lost in the countryside, he knew a rage was beginning to build inside him unlike any others. Of his sins he had little doubt, but he had striven to inflict self-punishment and yet remained afoot, staggering on until a more complete awareness of his plight filled him with incipient fury. He was part, now, of the frightening unknown -- of the ambiguities and impenetrable mysteries that had drawn him, in part, to his leader. He was obliged now to continue this mockery of life without guidance, enlightenment, companionship, or anything except a mostly unspecified point in the future which might free him, too. Why wouldn't he lash out in vengeance, take what he pleased, make others suffer as he, now, must suffer?

But it was not a real question and he was suffused then with a mixture of thirst and hunger -- plus a great need to relieve the dryness of his battered throat -- so like one another he could not distinguish hunger from thirst. Reaching the banks of a stream, he fell to his knees in an approximation of a man at prayer and started frantically to scoop water into his mouth.

I can scarcely swallow it! he thought with agony. And that water he did get down came up again at once! His manic urge was to hurl back hood and head, then howl at the day-dappled sky. Yet now the sun had almost risen and even the glimpse of light, after his miserable and interminable night, seared his vision and felt nearly on the verge of melting his sallow cheeks and forehead! *Has a man ever been so exquisitely punished?* he wondered -- *Has any man before me ever become . . . undead?*

It was not until -- moving in a crouch now -- he arrived at a potter's field he had never witnessed before, wended his way among the graves of the destitute and the unwanted, then knelt at a pool ringed with glorious wild flowers, that he experienced any alleviation of his torment. Perhaps there, with the dead, it would remain comfortingly shadowed, overcast; there, and possibly in other such places, he might for awhile lose himself.

But when he had sipped cautiously at the contents of the pool, the man neither marveled at the fact that it was *not* water he was keeping down but blood, nor thanked his Creator that he would be able to sustain himself with it.

His only thought was that he required more. And more.

He felt color flushing his cheeks, his lips. Nothing of his pe-

culiarly combined thirst and hunger was sated yet the strength of many seemed to course through his veins. When a field mouse scampered within arm's reach, he caught it with astounding ease, ripped away its tiny head, and drained the hot body as if it had been a goblet.

And more, he thought avidly, pushing himself to his feet. However, it was time now, this blazing morning, to locate a place of concealment. There he would remain, trying to rest, until the hour of his faithless deed returned by night, and he had, once more, to attempt the most futile of flights.

His eyes filled with blood matching the color of the new sun as he loped and ran for a hiding place. He bit his lip with teeth that seemed oddly longer, sharper, than they had been. When he found an empty grave, he jumped into it, intentionally dislodging a great pile of round objects that descended upon and concealed him. Golgotha, he remembered the name of this awful field. The "place of skulls." It was perfect.

For the remainder of that day and, subsequently, for many days afterward, Judas thought about the kiss he had given Jesus in order to identify Him to the soldiers. Haste had seemed very important under the circumstances, and the Master was taller.

The kiss had not been on the cheek but the throat.

"And he cast down the pieces of silver . . . and went and hanged himself. (They) took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they . . . bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in."

"Wherefore that field was called, The Field of Blood, unto this day."

--Matthew, 27: 5-8

ptw

ZERO GRAVITY FREEFALL

A magazine of speculation and reflection.

An

exciting

new magazine

for all readers who

desire thought provoking

fiction, penetrating analysis,

innovative poetry and brilliant

artwork that draws you into . . .

ZERO GRAVITY FREEFALL

Exploring the human condition, wherever it may be.

Issue #0 Preview - \$1.00 while supplies last!

Single issues - \$3.95 published on a quarterly basis.

Four issue subscription - \$12.00

Eight issue subscription - \$22.00

With a four or eight issue subscription you receive issue #0 free!

*Send check or money order payable to Lake Retreat Publishing to
Zero Gravity Freefall c/o Lake Retreat Publishing*

Pirate Writings Magazine
53 Whitman Ave.
Islip, NY 11751

TO WHOM IT MAY CANCER:

If you think this is just another chain letter that begins with an inept typo, think again. Even as we speak, your number is already up. You will be dead within a week. So pay close attention. We don't want to break the chain, now do we?

Is this a joke? Hardly. The moment you opened the letter, the moisture on your fingertips activated a lethal dose of toxins within the paper's fibers. It was absorbed immediately and is now traveling throughout your bloodstream. By the time you finish reading this, a number of target sites, including your liver, pancreas, kidneys, breast and skin, will have already begun producing viable mutating cells that will exponentially metastasize to your lungs, stomach, colon and mandible. Within three days, you will be almost unrecognizable.

Need to sit down? Go ahead. You're not the first. By the time this letter reaches you, it will have traveled the world two or three times. Haven't you wondered why there's such an epidemic when so many treatments are currently available?

Why you? I really don't have the time to get into that now. Suffice to say that at some point in your life, whether it was twenty years ago or yesterday, you ruined my life. Maybe you don't remember me or never realized what you did. But I never forgot you. I swore I'd get even.

Like the man who started this letter, here was a man who'd contracted a disease that no one wanted to do anything about. And like many who suddenly realize they're going to die, he became angry. He wanted to take someone with him. But not another loved one. He wanted to kill someone who kept others from finding the cure he needed. And he wanted that person to suffer.

Being a virologist in a genetic research facility, he had the opportunity. During the next few years while his disease progressed, he extracted the lethal components from a number of extremely painful, incurable diseases and combined them into a single genetic strand stored within the fibers of treated sheets of paper. And . . . well, you know the rest.

Was that a trickle of sweat rolling down the side of your face? Feel the warmth building within your groin? Not yet? You will. In fact, I recommend that you get laid tonight--by whatever means it takes. (It's not like you have to worry about catching anything now.) The toxins stimulate your senses to a heightened awareness you've never experienced before, and the sex will be the best you've ever had.

Enjoy it while you can, because the toxins continually increase the rate of firing at the neurological synapses throughout the course of the disease. By tomorrow morning, the slightest touch of a caring hand will be torture. Even the comfort of sleep will be denied. Over the next few days you will watch your body jaundice. You'll feel your skin swell and stretch until it tears open. You'll smell the pus that has abscessed between your sub-dermal and dermal layers oozing from the gaping wounds in your flesh. Your only nourishment will be the blood seeping from your cracked and swollen tongue. And the only sounds you'll hear will be your own agonized screams until death.

Thinking of throwing the letter away? Being a hero for stopping the chain? Go ahead. The man who started the letter expected there would be a few, so he sent out a large number of copies. But let's be honest; isn't there someone with whom you've always wanted to get even? Someone whose face you see laughing at your every failure? Someone who hurt you badly, but never worried about your pain? Well, here's your last chance for revenge. You're about to receive the punishment, so why not commit the crime? For all his claims of compassion, Man is nothing more than a bitter, vindictive animal. Frankly, your knowing that the person you hate the most will suffer this because of your actions is the only thing that will help you through the next week. As, even now, it helps me.

So go get laid. Blow your brains out, if you want. But first, send this original copy to your worst enemy while you still can. Keep the chain going! Then we can all meet later in Hell and compare notes as to why we chose each other. Meanwhile, I wish you nothing but the most excruciating pain for everything you did to me.

See you soon --

Always,
J. Michael Major

SMALL PRESS

Small Press Books:

SQUASHED ARMADILLOCON

by Paul Riddell, illustrated by Ernest Hogan - HillBilly Feast Press 360 West First, Eugene OR 97401—\$10.00

This off-the-wall journal of 1991's Armadillocon science fiction convention in Austin, Texas properly captures the frustrations, backstabbing, bickering, and highs and lows of most pro cons. If the only ones you've ever attended are those for Star Trek or Fangoria fans, here you'll discover another side of just how the fans, name authors, and publishers interact when the booze is flowing in hotel suites and the weekend never seems to end. Parties are crashed, names are rubbed in the mud, publishers and editors meet face to face with the struggling semi-pros whose books they've rejected. Riddell lets out his venom in a miasma of funny, gripping, angry showdowns, love of fine science fiction, and friendships bonded in good and bad blood beer, all in the Hunter S. Thompson gonzo quasi-journalism tradition.

THE ISLAND OF FLOATING WOMEN

by Batya Wienbaum—Clothespin Fever Press 655 4th Avenue Suite 34, San Diego CA 92101—\$9.95

Seldom do collections come along down the proverbial pike where the voice of the author rings through each tale regardless of theme, style, or character. Herein the dialogue stings, and the underlying tensions, fears, and rage in the face of suicidal depression, anti-semitism and sexual frustrations glide along the surface of each story, while at the same time taking us down into wells of sensitivity, pride, and pain. The surreal qualities of such stories as "The Woman Who Lived Above and Beneath the Ground," "The Subway Ride," and "Rainbow to the Moon Goddess" never undermine the reality of female conflicts—emotional, social, physical—in an often uncaring and ignorant society. Batya Weinbaum's sense of self and spirit pervades the collection, her multifaceted poetry careening and caroming off the harshness of daily existence, dreams meeting head-on with desperation. Rarely do we get the chance to read so much of humanity's wills and ills placed side-by-side with its need to augment the soul; these stories will leave you gasping.

END TIME: NOTES ON THE APOCALYPSE by G.A. Matiasz—AK Press P.O. Box 40682, San Francisco CA 94140—\$8.00

The enormous cast of *End Time* exists in the midst of terrorist activities, a war in Southern Mexico, anti-war riots, and general civil unrest, with each character somehow tied to the 'Apocalypse fever' of California, 2007. The world is—once again—on the brink of destruction as civil war erupts in the former Soviet Union and the United States fights an extremely unpopular war in the Yucatan. The story, more or less, centers on the events surrounding a politically-active col-



lege student, Greg Kovinski, after he discovers radioactive material that's been dumped on the side of a road after a botched holdup by a criminal named Peregrine. Everyone wants the bomb grade riamanium that can create an explosion ten times more powerful than Nagasaki. The college activist groups such as the New Afrikan Lords, Hooligans, Black dada Nihilismus, all seek it in one fashion or another as the FBI hunts Peregrine and Peregrine hunts the riamanium. Nothing much is as it appears: Peregrine has a number of identities, Greg betrays the trust of his friends, and the FBI are all hair-trigger, including one man who'll stop at nothing to keep his dirty secrets from airing. There are chapters explaining the weapons of war used by counter-insurgency campaigns, politico-movements, historical viewpoints on anarchy, and nationwide penal colonies that are creating warrior armies. *End Time* is an engaging, thoroughly realistic novel that might very well frighten you into studying the political agenda of our leaders a bit more closely come November.

The Selected Works of Ardath Mayhar: **MEAN LITTLE OLD LADY AT WORK** Dark Regions Press P.O. Box 6301, Concord CA 94524—\$5.95

In Joe R. Lansdale's introduction to *Mean Little Old Lady*, he states that "even when Ardath Mayhar isn't writing about East Texas, she's writing about East Texas." Being a New Yorker, I can't truly argue that particular point (though I have my suspicions), but if it's true, then East Texas is a land of sprawling, bizarre, and fanciful imagery, where authors work and dream hard in order to gain perfect pitch writing that brings to mind the fantastical works of Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, and Tanith Lee. These dozen selections of Mayhar's small press publishings oscillate between the potentially surreal fantasy of "The Guardians of the Shrine" to the poetic bloodletting of "The Anthologist" to the fanciful kindheartedness of "A Gift of Light." This small press collection is wonderfully illustrated by Donald Schank making this a beautiful and thoroughly enjoyable book.

Magazines:

Small Press & Semi-Pro

HARSH MISTRESS SF ADVENTURES #2 (now **ABSOLUTE MAGNITUDE**) — P.O. Box 13, Greenfield MA 01502-0013 —\$4.00

Powerful science fiction adventure tales fill out the latest issue of *HM*, including Hal Clement's "Sortie," a serialized novella of futuristic warfare that's worth further issues to finish. Don D'Amassa's "Jack the Martian" is a cross-genre piece about the first serial killer to hit a Mars colony, just who he might be and why he might have to exist in the closed ecosystem of a more or less sterilized society. "Virtual Success" by Larry Miles and Brian D. Gairdner takes the function of virtual reality directly to the heart of paranoia as the tale unwinds into a cat and mouse duel between a creator of fantasy worlds and a hacker who infiltrates them. D. Lopes Heald offers another gripping work of struggle in "The Prize," wherein two wounded soldiers try to earn battlefield trust and respect from each other as well as live long enough to overcome the enemy. This magazine is capped with a reprint of Allen M. Steele's "Free Beer and the William

DISPATCH AND BIG BOOKS

Reviews by Tom Piccirilli

Casey Society" that will leave you laughing as you read just how Cowboy Bob managed to outwit the far right and get 444 cases of beer up to Skycan.

XIZQUIL #12—P.O. Box 285, Reserve, New Mexico 87830—\$3.50

A mixture of lengthy, surreal poetry, offbeat and eclectic tales of fantasy and science fiction, and other general weirdness, *XIZQUIL* offers some intriguing journeys into the realm of the strange. Jack Ellis' "This Star Over There" is a humorous fantasy piece about the arrival of a philosophic, colloquialism-cracking extraterrestrial and her effect on the 'local rational' in the form of a normal guy. "Rebellion In A Curious Way" by Jodey Bateman is a novel excerpt about the political movement of the 60's, giving the reader a close-up view of campus life and overheated rallies during those times. However, the standout tale is Sue Storm's novella "Home," which captures all the flavors of horror, SF, and dark fantasy as an old Indian medicine man wanders the stars in search of his People's great God Coyote, who may or may not be the wounded, feral woman on a dead desert world. Some of the poetry in this issue strikes hard and clean while other works tend to be a bit too self-absorbed and esoteric.

TOMORROW SPECULATIVE FICTION
#11—Box 6038, Evanston IL 60204—\$4.00

The term 'speculative fiction' might very well have arisen from Harlan Ellison's trend-shattering anthology *Dangerous Visions*, but it's good to see that several magazines out in the current market take up the mission of printing genre-breaking material. *Tomorrow* publishes some of the best offbeat, thought-provoking fiction that can currently be found on the stands. Brooks Peck's "Personal Computing for the Disembodied" takes us along on a scientist's wild trip to remake his body after a laboratory accident changes him into a creature of pure energy. His valiant efforts to keep his memories alive by recreating his brain's synaptic structure out of shredded cotton and bandages is a startlingly original idea. "Greenhouse" by Cathy A. Ball thrusts the reader into a microcosm of the taut and painful world suffered by the loved ones of AIDS victims. In a story inspired by the wonderous magazine cover painting by Kandis Elliot, editor Algis Budrys gives us "Jeever's Lost World," a short, strange yet somewhat

unfulfilling tale about a race's lone survivor left in an automated, moss-encrusted city. However, by far the best story in the issue is the eerie, moody, and beautifully evocative "Blood Bonds" by Shira Daemon, about a social worker and modern day worker of white majiks and her feral ward and sometimes shadow named Sundry; their lives cross in a haunting manner while the protagonist deals with guilt, pain, and the rest of her 'coven' of college friends. All in all *Tomorrow* has something for everybody today.

Big Books

Mystery:

THE EDGE by Mark Olshaker
Crown—\$21.00

Detective Cassandra Mansfield is hunting a serial killer whose crimes mimic those of the now-dead murderer Neville Ramsey, who used his artistic and medical training to arrange his victims in scenes with religious or literary significance. Sandy decides to focus on Neville's brother, Nicholas, a brilliant and (what else?) handsome neurosurgeon who's been likened to Frankenstein for venturing into forbidden territory when the more accepted methods of brain surgery failed his patients. Their relationship, hinged on suspicion and animal attraction, is the novel's greatest drawback. As Sandy says herself: "Here I am pleasantly having dinner with this man who may be a multiple killer, I thought, who may be the one taunting and terrorizing me with letters, and all I can think of is how much I want him and how much I want him to want me." Although this is supposed to play out as a wire-taut psycho-sexual thriller, the fact is you won't believe it for a minute. It's too psychologically sloppy.

The police work is sloppy, too. When Sandy discovers the killer has broken into her home, she decides that a criminal clever enough not to leave fingerprints at the scene of the crime probably won't leave them around her house either. There's

no investigation of the premises, no canvassing of the area. Her police skills are less than adequate, though we're told she's good at catching killers. So good, in fact, that back in college she captured her roommate's murderer. How? She thought of all the things she could hate about her roommate, and then found someone who felt the same way. This is such an offhand quip as to be insulting to the reader.

However, the novel's medical science is both entertaining and informative, where modern science has taken us to the edge of playing God, to the point of resurrecting the dead. The ending dips backward into the science fiction genre, but you won't mind because it's cleverly handled. Mark Olshaker does indeed take us to the edge, but he trips a few times walking us around it.

LAST CHANCE FOR GLORY by
Steph Solomita Otto Penzler Books—\$21.00

New York City is as much a primary character as it is a backdrop for *Last Chance For Glory*. The idiosyncrasies, daily existence, and atmosphere of the city are just as important as the lives of those involved with this straight-forward, out-for-justice novel: retarded, homeless Billy Sowell is framed into taking the rap for a murder he didn't commit. Two years later sleazy criminal lawyer Max Steinberg is looking to adjust his karma and make up for all those criminals he set free by now taking the case of a man he knows to be innocent. He hires private eye Marty Blake, who's more at home hacking into computers and planting bugs than he is at working the mean streets. He, in turn, teams up with Bell Kosinski, the now-retired cop who was in on the original investigation before the word came down that Sowell was to take the fall.

More than anything else, this is a book about guilt, regret, and redemption. When Marty finally makes his decision not to be run off the case—knowing he'll probably die battling against such odds—we find ourselves caught up in an absolutely chilling scene. This novel doesn't play out in the good guys in white hats battling Black Bart; Marty and Bell realize there's barely a chance in hell they'll make it out alive, and yet they still decide to push on

further—for themselves as much as for some antiquated concept as justice.

STREET by Jack Cady
St. Martin's Press-\$19.95

Every sentence of Jack Cady's latest novel *Street* is deftly woven, entwining to form a perfectly controlled, honed masterwork that combines the best of suspense, horror, and mystery. Cady has the remarkable ability to fuse mystic tension to the daily events of life on the street—note the use of the singular, for there is only one street, and it is everywhere.

The story centers, though, in Seattle, where a killer has already murdered fifty young women. The police are ineffectual, so a group of street folk decide to take matters into their own hands. Leading 'the cast' is the nameless thespian who once was the best advertising man in the market before his fall from grace and self-imposed exile. The remainder of the cast is made up of such memorable characters as demolitions expert Symptomatic Nerve Gas, the incisive Elgin, the thespian's beloved Silk—a former nun and mother figure to the troupe—and the honorable and religious Hal who wears a broadsword across his back like the weight of a cross, as both his weapon and his potential downfall.

The two most brilliant concepts of the novel underscore the nature of the thespian: for he is a man with the ability to create his characters to such an extent that he not only acts them out—does not even become them, really—but actually exists within their lives. At different points the actor is an Indian wino who dreams of whales, a pool shark with a penchant for biblical quotes, and a married woman who works in a thrift shop and has two daughters. In a thoroughly haunting scene, the killer shocks the thespian so out of role that the woman dies. It takes the actor days to recover and leave her murdered soul behind.

The second wonderfully executed idea is the thespian's power to let his overreaching mind be everywhere at once—an ability for which he thanks the 'gods of theatre' for allowing him to possess. At times, his mind wanders the nooks and digs of the street, all the homes of his neighbors, and his enemy's lair. He knows a great deal more than a man should know, but is equally impotent to change the fates of those closest to him.

The murderer is the 'ultimate consumer', for which the thespian feels at least partially responsible. The killer toys with his victims, sending them out to buy him gifts, wallowing in his existence as shopper. The murderer is both male and female, and neither, nor is it human, but perhaps represents the greatest of human foibles, finding delight in our most human indulgence of purchasing, and our need for ownership under any circumstance.

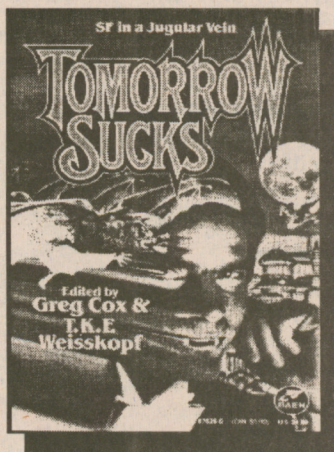
Jack Cady has proven once again he has absolute control over presenting us with the shadow and light of the human—and inhuman—experience. Visions of heaven and hell merge on the street,

the writing is so sublime and effective that we are at once spellbound, and held up to witness.

Science Fiction:

TOMORROW SUCKS ed. by Greg Cox & T.K.F. Weisskopf BAEN Books--\$4.99

The most basic problem suffered by most 'theme' anthologies is that of repetition. However, herein the editors have chosen reprinted supernatural science fiction/fantasy stories that are unique and various in substance, style, content, and



execution. Tales range from Ray Bradbury's excursion into the madness of the last vampire existing in a utopia where mankind no longer understands murder and the dead are all immediately incinerated in a "Pillar of Fire," to Dean Ing's disturbing parable on humanity's vicious food-chain "Fleas," wherein a professor with an appetite for brainfood meets a beauty with a taste all her own. Other outstanding stories are Spider Robinson's "Pyotr's Story," a tale taken from his popular Callahan series, which deals with an altruistic vampire working in a bar who risks discovery to filter the blood of an overdose victim, and Roger Zelazny's short but powerful "The Stainless Steel Leech," where the last vampire in the world befriends a robot that has more or less taken his place, draining batteries of his robotic brethren. One small quibble with this anthology is that some of these tales hinge a bit much on the fact that we're not supposed to know the protagonists are/or will soon face vampires; so, on occasion, the twist-ending doesn't quite twist as well as it might have on original publication. Still, *Tomorrow Sucks* will take the vampire-lover on a ride to the stars--via the coffins and crypts of the undead.

Fantasy:

MISTWALKER by Denise Lopes Heald
Del Rey Discovery-\$4.99

Writers who have their first books published often feel a euphoria that fades to a sullen sick-

ness. How many one-time novelists are there in the world? Many. Denise Lopes Heald is not one of these authors. Her first novel, *Mistwalker*, is a deftly woven tale that I'm not comfortable categorizing as Science Fiction, but I don't think it's Fantasy either. Let's call it light Science Fiction with a Fantasy feel. The Fantasy feel comes from the jungle setting, where mystical-like creatures called Mistwalkers stalk 'bad' people. The fantasy feel comes from the quest-like theme of the book. Set on Ver Day, a jungle planet, the native inhabitants are broken into two distinct groups; the city dwellers and the people who live in the green; Greenies. Naturally the two groups don't see eye-to-eye on much. Kinda' sounds familiar, doesn't it? The political undertones of the tale are common, almost boring. The refusal by Greenies to use what the author calls 'Tech', shows a strange comparison that is reminiscent of much of America. The story revolves around a female Greenie, Sal, who hauls cargo through the jungle to homesteads and towns that are unreachable by modern methods. The other main player is Raschad, a young off-worlder or 'Newbie', who Sal hires to help her haul cargo. Naturally, the two begin to feel more for each other as the book moves forward. This was obvious from the very first passage in which they met, therefore making much of their interaction, at least for me, a little dull. However, their relationship grows, as do they. Learning each other's ways, etc., etc., etc. The book started off slowly and didn't really hook me. However, Heald picks up momentum as she goes, creating a setting full of imagery and depth. She chooses her words well, the dialogue was fantastic, and I enjoyed the ending. In short, a very well written first book. This author will definitely grow and I look forward to seeing what she does next. Also, (time for a shameless plug) look for her short fiction within the pages of PW in '95) **Editor, E.M.**

If you would like your book, chapbook or magazine reviewed in Pirate Writings, please send the publication in question to Pirate Writings Publishing, 53 Whitman Ave., Islip, N.Y. 11751. PW will try to review as many of the publications/books we receive. Tom & I look forward to hearing from everyone!
- Editor

In Future Issues:

An Original AMBER Adventure!

Coming To A Cord by Roger Zelazny

*Also read great fiction by such
established talents as:*

Nancy Springer

Ian Macleod

Jessica Amanda Salmonson

Steve Rasnic Tem

Denise Lopes Heald

Paul Di Filippo

Charles M. Saplak

A.R. Morlan

and many others!

Don't Miss a single issue!

Subscribe Now!

See special subscription offer on pg. 44

KING'S SON, MAGIC'S SON

JOSEPHA SHERMAN

A New Magical Fantasy
By the Co-Author of Castle of Deception

Having won her at great peril, the young magician Aidan would be content to enjoy the fruits of peace with Ailanna, his Faerie love. But his mother's deathbed wish is that he provide magical aid to the King, his embattled half-brother.

Unfortunately, to win Ailanna in the first place, the young mage has also sworn a mighty oath to the Lord of Faerie. He is about to learn how hard it is, even for a magician, to serve two masters....



"Sherman creates a richly detailed novel with all the charm and readability of a fairy tale. Highly recommended."

—*Library Journal*

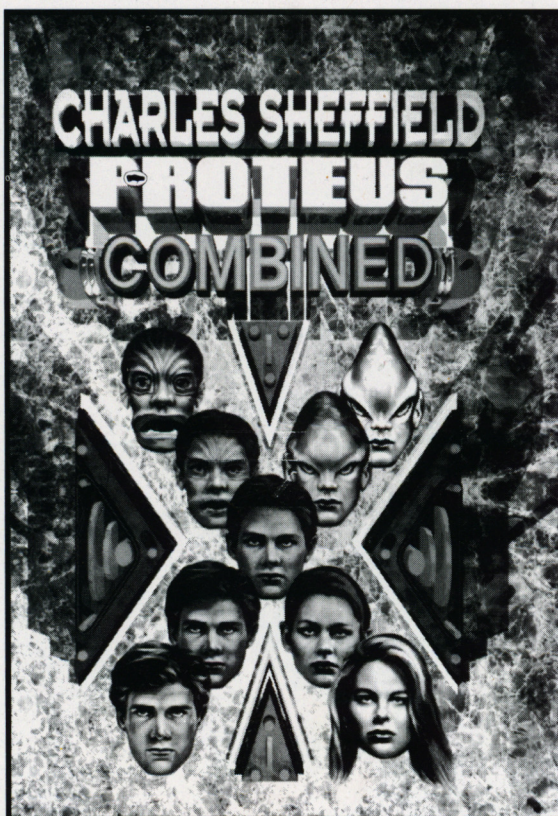
"Sherman weaves a traditional yet sparkling tale of romance harried by enemies both mundane and magical."

—*Dragon*

"A *Strange and Ancient Name*...is an entertaining...magical adventure."

—*Locus*

0-671-87602-3 • 336 pages • \$5.99



PROTEUS COMBINED

CHARLES SHEFFIELD



Hard SF by This Year's Winner of the John W. Campbell Award for Best Science Fiction Novel of the Year

In the 22nd century a combination of computer-augmented biofeedback and chemotherapy techniques has given man the ability not only to heal himself, but to *change* himself—to alter his very shape at will. Behrooz Wolf had invented the process of Form Change—now he would have to tame it....

"He has the scientific grounding of a Clarke, the story-telling skills of Heinlein, the dry wit of Pohl or a Kornbluth, and the universe building prowess of a Niven."

—**Spider Robinson**

0-671-87603-1 • 496 pages • \$5.99 • MAY 1994

Distributed by Paramount.

Publisher's Note: This novel was previously published in parts as *Sight of Proteus* and *Proteus Unbound* and has been revised for this edition.