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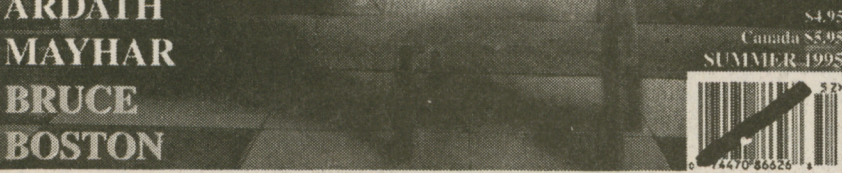
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From the Editor's Desk



Despite the fact that my ranting in this editorial keeps me from exploding, I feel I must preempt the normal programming for a legend.

Roger Zelazny passed on a few months ago...two days before DW#7, containing what may be his last Amber story, was released. I will not lie or exaggerate...I did not know Roger well. In fact, we never met in person. But I am told by those who knew him well that he was the type of person you never forgot. A man whose talent did not make him snobby or aloof...but a good man. We corresponded and spoke on the phone several times and Roger struck me as someone who cared...cared about the field of SF/F and was concerned about its future. When I asked him for an Amber story for DW he said, "Sure." No questions, no "how much do you pay?" He wanted to see the magazine succeed. He understood what I, and other people in the field, are trying to do, and he understood how difficult it is. He cared. Plain and simple.

Publishing an Amber story made me feel as though I played a small part in Roger's great career. Roger will have countless articles written about him, about his work about his life, in the next few months. Books, magazines and other projects will be dedicated to his memory. He will not be forgotten. So...I dedicate this issue to his memory and I hope he is running through the worlds of Amber even now. Bye Roger, you will be missed.

A fast word about the "Best of..." anthologies: Thanks to Gardner for the Honorable Mentions in The Years Best SF and to Terri Windling for her kind words in The Years Best Fantasy and Horror. I usually don't place too much stock in these types of books...let's face it, all editors think what they buy is the best and Gardner, Ellen, and Terri are no different. It must be very difficult to wear two hats in this instance.

Well...now that I have depressed everyone...this issue of DW contains some fantastic fiction by some of today's hottest talents. So read on and enjoy...

Edward J. McFadden, Editor
Pirate Writings

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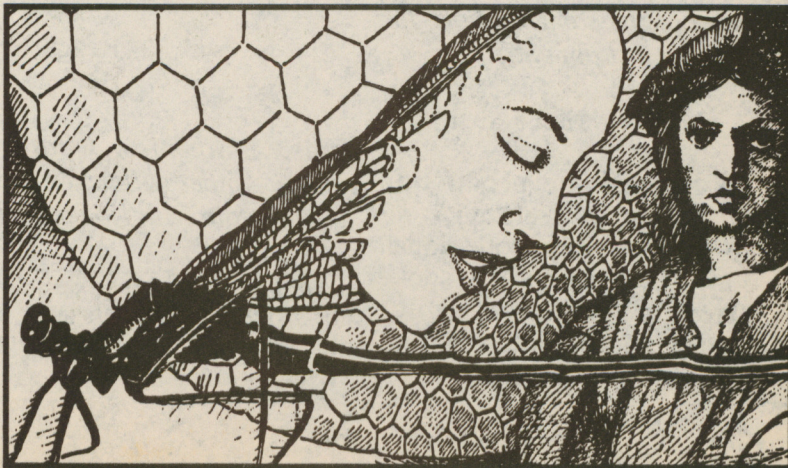
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COVER: This issue's cover was done by Michael Apice, a talented young artist whose work has appeared in many magazines and on many book covers. **BELOW:** "The Dragonfly" was illustrated by Darren Cerone.



Letters

Dear Mr. McFadden:

The Summer '95 issue of PW was by far your best issue yet. I loved Roger Zelazny's Amber story...and was sad to hear that he died. I have read all the Amber books (Me and about ten zillion other people) and I enjoyed Mr. Zelazny's work very much. If I may make a suggestion? I would love to see some of Mr. Zelazny's older stories reprinted. Is this possible?

Randy Sor
New York, NY

[Thank you for the kind words, Randy. We were all sad to see Roger leave us. He will be missed. Perhaps in the future I will reprint some of his older work--I'm sure you're not alone in wanting to continue reading his work.]

Dear Mr. McFadden:

Just wanted to drop you a fast note telling you I enjoyed Darrell Schweitzer's column "Words & Pictures." Will it appear regularly?

Lisa Hampton
Miami, FL

[Yes, Darrell's column will appear in every other issue of PW. I'm glad you liked it. Darrell has more of the same in store for his next installment.]

Dear Mr. McFadden:

I found the production quality and contents of PW #7 to be thoroughly professional. Fine job. One piece that spoke strongly to me was Bruce Boston's poem "Future Perfect: A Plea For Mass Illusion." It

was bitter, but that was part of what I relate to in it.

Uncle River
Blue, AZ

Dear Mr. McFadden:

Who is Michael Apice? I have not seen his work before...but I think he is great. His rendition of the Guisel from Roger Zelazny's Amber story is your best cover yet. Also, I love the new logo...much better than the old one. I also enjoyed: "Goggle A Frog, Kiss A Prince", "Straw" and "Cage Of The Heart." I'm looking forward to my next issue.

Tarra L. Jannes
Bristow, OK

[Michael is a commercial artist who is looking to break into SF/F. As you pointed out, he is very talented...in fact, he did the cover of this issue as well. Michael will continue to do interior work for the magazine and I'm sure he'll be doing more covers for PW in the future.]

Dear Mr. McFadden:

Loved the Amber story by Roger Zelazny that was in your last issue. With Roger gone...well you know what I mean. Also, congrats on your Honorable Mentions in The Years Best SF.

Reggie Verta
Boulder, CO

[Yes...I do know what you mean. Amber will never be the same again with Roger gone.]

Your letters and comments are welcomed. Send to: Letters to the Editor, Pirate Writings, 53 Whitman Ave., Islip, N.Y. 11751

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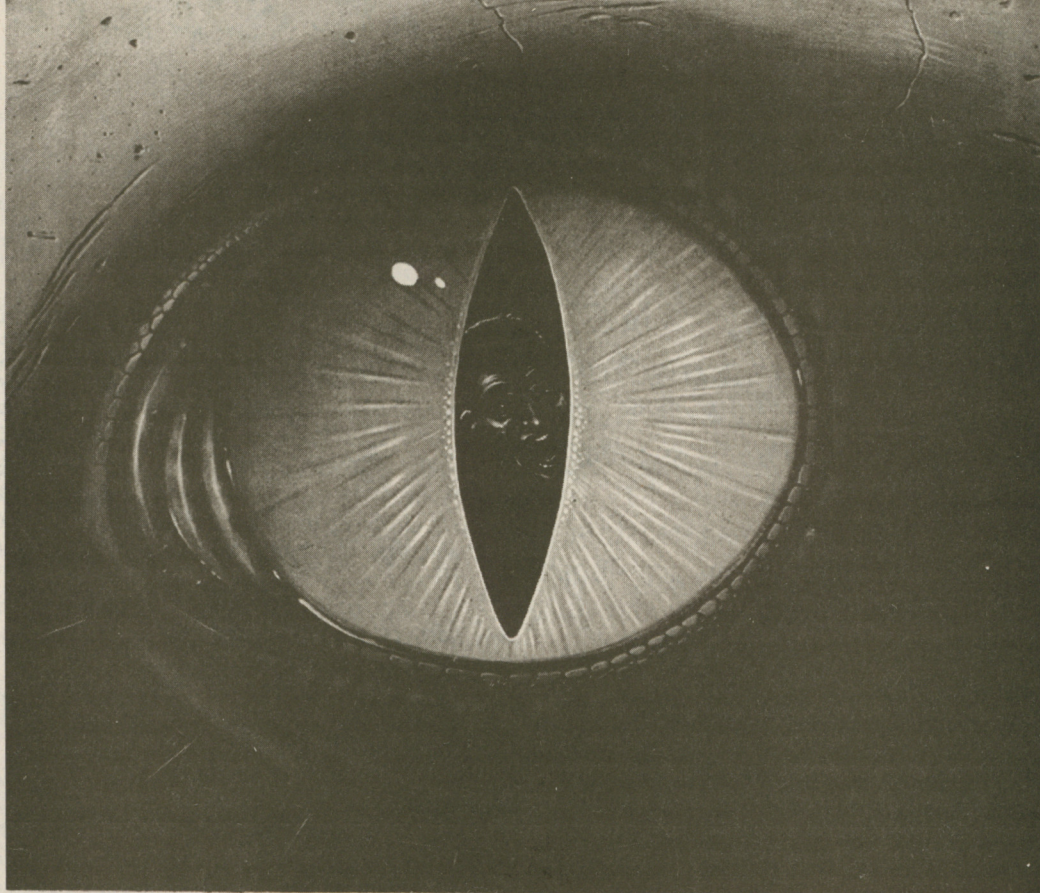
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Jack Cady won the World Fantasy Award last year for his short story "The Night We Buried Road Dog." As a novelist, Jack has received wide critical praise for his books *The Well* and *Street*. This is Jack's first appearance in *Pirate Writings* and parts of 'Point Vestal' will appear in his new novel, *The Off Season*, which is due out from St. Martin's Press at the end of 1995.

Point Vestal - A Radiant Future - With Pride in Heritage

Point Vestal

BY JACK CADY

Illustrated by Keith Minnion

THE ROAD FROM SAN FRANCISCO WAS LONG AND WORTH celebrating. It ran through farmland, through hilly country where rivers ran as rivulets in the sun-seared autumn. It ran beneath giant sequoia trees, so the clarion sun was pushed further back in the sky. North of the Oregon border rains began coasting from the Pacific on a weather system gray-bearded and timeless. The dark greens of cedar, fir and hemlock contrasted with yellowing leaves of alder and the psychedelic red bark of madrona.

Joel-Andrew reverently celebrated each step, and he took his ministry to each town or city along the route. He was small, lightly built with sandy hair going gray, sandy beard, and musician's fingers. He carried a violin case on a strap over his shoulder. When he played his hands looked like clever spiders, and even secular music sounded reverent. When he saved souls his face was tranquil with gratitude to The Lord. He had an Episcopal nose, an Episcopal collar, faded jeans, sandals, plus well groomed nails and gray-green eyes. In San Francisco, freaks thought he looked suspiciously healthy.

From San Francisco to Point Vestal was a thousand miles, give or take. Joel-Andrew had been walking four years. He occasionally caught a ride, but the trip took a long time because he occasionally got busted. The busts were for vagrancy, for violin-playing, for impersonating a priest, for celebrating the Eucharist on street corners, and for being a fruitcake.

Each bust was an opportunity. In Mendocino his cellmate was a realtor who repented. In Arcata an attorney was so swayed by the Word of The Lord that he promised to quit fighting disbarment and run for public office. In Yreka an automobile dealer was overcome and honored a warrant. If, early in August, Joel-Andrew had not been busted along the Rogue River in Oregon he might never have heard about Point Vestal. The Lord works in mysterious ways, but the bust on Rogue River was obvious, the kind of straightforward message a prophet expects.

"He's clean," a skinny cop explained to the desk sergeant

when he hauled Joel-Andrew into the police station, "but he smells like a freak, he looks like a freak, and he's higher than a nineteen foot sunflower." The skinny cop seemed awfully young to Joel-Andrew. He looked like he belonged in a high school band, like he should be chasing behind a clarinet and being chased by a tuba. The desk sergeant looked like a tuba. Joel-Andrew breathed a silent prayer, one that was kindly.

The desk sergeant showed interest. He blinked clear blue eyes, curled fat fingers, and carried the sincere gaze of a sociologist. "What are you on?"

"George Gershwin," Joel-Andrew said. "William James. Slim Pickens. Tallulah Bankhead. Mother McCree. The Founding Fathers and The Living God."

"That ain't acid talking," the young cop said. "That's magic mushrooms."

The police desk sat in a room barely three-dimensional. Brick walls were like untextured linoleum. Paint clung flat to the ceiling like it was afraid to peel. The young cop seemed daubed into his uniform. The blue-eyed sergeant looked like a third grader's sketch of her father, flat circles with hair.

"Flood," Joel-Andrew said unhappily. "Swine and cattle, barns, houses, Jeep pickups and chainsaws. The Rogue River will run torrentially. Devastation. This I must prophesy."

"It floods every spring," the sociologist cop said. "We deal with it." He looked at the clarinet cop. "Print him, run him. Find a cell until he comes off the high." To Joel-Andrew he said, "I'm writing a paper on acid-heads for a scholarly journal. Otherwise, we'd use brutality."

"I understand," Joel-Andrew said. "It would skew your observations. It would also be unkind."

"I am an educated man, gone to fat in a small town."

"Not a sparrow falls," Joel-Andrew pointed out.

"Around here we got Oregon Juncos," the clarinet cop said, "Plus a select group of freaks from San Francisco."

For the next three days Joel-Andrew did missionary work in the holdover cell. He had done so much missionarying through the years that the tasks around him were simple. He played the





violin, his spidery and clever fingers peopling the cells with music, with grace, with reverence. His slight form stood above other inhabitants of the cells, while his soul and heart reached toward his brethren.

"Oh, Lord," Joel-Andrew prayed, may they servant once more be the instrument of thine power." He felt the familiar energy, vast and loving, wash through him. He turned to the freaks.

There were three cells in the jail: one for holdover, one for women, and one for drunks. In the cell with Joel-Andrew were three freaks. One was huge and red-headed. He rolled around and screamed. One was skinny and hummed. He held one hand in the air so butterflies would have a place to rest. The third was a tubby black dude stoned beyond recognition. Joel-Andrew touched the screaming man's hand. "You are well," Joel-Andrew said. "You've been visiting infinity, but now you are well." The power of the Lord surged in Joel-Andrew.

The screaming man stopped rolling around. He lay curled up, confused.

"Sheee-it," the black dude muttered.

The curled-up man's eyes closed, opened. Fear and paranoia, which had made his eyes like saucers, disappeared. "Man," he said, "like, wow."

"Lie there and think about it," Joel-Andrew said. "The Lord did that."

It was always like this with Joel-Andrew. He worked among freaks, among kids who dispossessed themselves so they could complain of dispossession. He worked with the ill, the ungainly, the addicts. At some point in his ministry people began calling him the 'hippie priest'. At that point the Episcopal church kicked him out. Gone was the ritual, the celebrating pipe organs, the pomp, the robes. Gone were silent-gleaming and polished pews, sunlight through stained glass windows, and devout parishioners with sanitary smiles. Gone was the respect given a man of the cloth. Joel-Andrew was a defrocked priest walking in the echo of St. Francis.

"Sheee-it," the black dude said again.

"Possess my body," a girl's voice moaned from the women's cage. "Like, I never seen nothin' like that before."

It was always this way. Always. He asked them to love each other, and all they could do with the information was hop in the sack with more frequency and less skill than rabbits. Joel-Andrew sighed, persisted, and The Lord renewed his strength.

During three days in the cell Joel-Andrew took care of five bad trips, one bleeding ulcer, three cases of clap, one broken finger, various sores, a rampant case of d.t.'s, one Oedipal complex, and he also acquired an aging cat named Obed. None of the freaks turned to the Lord, but the black dude (whose name turned out to be Princeton) said he'd think about it. Joel-Andrew also had four interviews with the desk sergeant.

"You've been walking from San Francisco for four years," the desk sergeant said. "Interesting." He leaned back in his creaky chair. Waiting.

Joel-Andrew admitted nothing. A skinny cat hopped onto the desk. The cat was dark gray, nearly black, with golden eyes and a white tail. A cat so skinny could not be in good health. Joel-Andrew cured it of worms. The cat looked surprised. It curled on the desk and contemplated Joel-Andrew.

"And," the sergeant said, "you've turned those cells into the Peaceable Kingdom. I don't know what you're doing but the freaks are coherent." The sergeant leaned forward, fiddled with a pencil. "Interesting."

"You have a lovely jail," Joel-Andrew said without rancor. "Few better this side of Mexico."

"But your violin playing is marginal. With the pressures of your ministry I suppose you have little time to practice." The sergeant leaned back, waiting.

Joel-Andrew admired the ploy. "Prepare for a storm," he said

sadly. "It will rain buckets, and soon. This I prophesy."

"This is Oregon," the sergeant said. "It always rains buckets."

During the last interview, the one before the cops put him back on the street, Joel-Andrew relented.

"A prophet experiences things differently," Joel-Andrew said. "I was not high when you picked me up. I'm that way all the time."

The sergeant stopped leaning back and he stopped leaning forward. He made worry-noises. He took notes.

"I became tired," Joel-Andrew admitted. "The Lord set me on this wandering path for some purpose. I am not tired from a state of grace, but tired from too wide a ministry. Do sociologists ever study fatigue?"

"They study stress," the sergeant said. "They study group illness, pop culture, relationships, advertising, sentiment, war, mores. They study Marilyn Monroe, jazz, inner cities, mobs."

"Because," Joel-Andrew said, "I'm supposed to be a prophet, but the demands on me are medical."

"They study homosexuals," the sergeant said. "They study market trends, busted families, corrupt politicians, folk music in Appalachia, kinship systems among Indians."

"Because," Joel-Andrew said, "I'm wandering in a wilderness of the spirit. I privately long for a small haven of rest. Someplace with values still fixed."

"I know the place," the sergeant said. "Just the place. If," he added, "you can put up with a preoccupation for tourists."

"Because it's all beginning to float," Joel-Andrew said. "A place of stability to restore the soul. Then I can return to these, my beloved..." He gestured toward the quiet cells.

"My home town," the sergeant said. "I left there twenty years ago. Tourists drove me nuts. Let me tell you about Point Vestal."

"It must have changed in twenty years," Joel-Andrew said unhappily. "We are in a season of float—of flux—the center will not hold."

"That," said the desk sergeant, "is a bunch of horse pocky. It shows you've never been to Point Vestal."

It took the rest of August and all of September to reach Point Vestal. Obed, the dark gray cat with the golden eyes and white tail, loved the trip. Obed ate what Joel-Andrew ate; cheese and peanut butter and carrot cake. When darkness came and Joel-Andrew huddled sleeping in barns, Obed knocked the living stuffings out of God's creatures, mice, baby rabbits, shrews and varmints. During the whole trip he had only a few bad moments, and those came when he tried to mate with a racoon. By the time Joel-Andrew reached the turn-off to Point Vestal, Obed weighed thirteen pounds and had learned to dance on his hind legs when Joel-Andrew played the violin.

The two stepped from a modern highway onto a road that ran in layers. A small woodensign held an arrow pointing down a narrow dirt track. The sign said 'Point Vestal'. A modern highway sign said:

Point Vestal - 18 miles
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A scraggly looking macadam two-lane ran beside the dirt track. Sometimes the two roads crossed. When they crossed Joel-Andrew heard a low cacophony of sound.

Joel-Andrew experimented. When he walked the dirt track more noises came from the surrounding forest; the grunts of bear, the faraway cry of cougars, the drip-drip-dripping of water from the tops of giant trees. When he walked the macadam, the forest was made up of third growth trees, and heard far-off engines. The dirt track was muddy from constant rain, but the air smelled sweeter. In boggy places the road was corduroy, logs laid end to end and sideways. It

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Where nightmares roam unleashed

was shortly after crossing one of those bogs that Joel-Andrew heard the steady clop clop of a horse behind him. Joel-Andrew turned. The horse clopped black and shiny in the misting rain.

The man driving was the same slight build as Joel-Andrew. He wore an old fashioned wool suit and vest, and his dark eyes gleamed with romantic fervor. He wore a fine beaver hat, and a light cape. A fancy whip stood in the whipsocket of the small buggy. The buggy gleamed glossy back with elaborate gold ornamentation. Black tassels hung along the sides. Joel-Andrew thought the high wheeled buggy looked like a little square merry-go-round with a roof. The man was dark haired, and he broadcast fervor like a dandelion broadcasts seeds. Joel-Andrew thought the man looked like a Missouri snod preacher trying to pass at a party run by the Knights of Columbus. Joel-Andrew also figured the man was hitting dextrine, but Joel-Andrew immediately loved him.

The man whoa-a-a-d the buggy.

"By heaven," he said, "is it the elder Dick Wittington and his celebrated cat? Or," he added, "a wandering minstrel?"

"It's a wet prophet on a wet road," Joel-Andrew answered. "It is the celebrated minister of music, healer of souls; and it is the equally celebrated Cat Obed who can purr seven languages including ancient Hebrew."

"Climb up," the stranger said. "Can your cat purr in French? The language of love." When the stranger smiled, he looked like a little kid figuring it was about to get spanked.

"French is the language of fornication," Joel-Andrew said. "Let's not get confused."

Eighteen miles on a mud track in a horse and buggy took slightly over five hours. The black hide of the horse shone in the gloom, seemed brilliant when the rig occasionally passed from tall trees into unobstructed daylight. Joel-Andrew viewed the buggy and its contents, and was impressed by the man's preparations. A wicker picnic basket held wine, food, tablecloth and napkins. There was spare oil for the little carriage lamps. An old-fashioned carbine nestled behind a kit of tools for repairing harnesses. There were lap robes, plus binoculars, a shooting stick, matches in a waxed tube, some patent medicine, a small kit of personal items, extra clothing, and a book of poetry.

"One of our better modern poets," the stranger said. "Shall I read while you tend the reins?"

Joel-Andrew was as comfortable with horses as a Pietist in a steam bath. "I'll read," he said, and began:

What are the long waves singing, so mournfully,
evermore?

What are they singing so mournfully, as they weep on
the sandy shore?

"Olivia, oh, Olivia! - what else can it seem to be!

"Olivia, lost Olivia" - what else can the sad song be?

"Weep and mourn, she will not return, she cannot
return to thee!"

"Ye Gads," said Joel-Andrew, "Is this early Allen Ginsberg?"

The stranger's eyes filled with tears he did not allow to fall. His jaw firmed, but his hands trembled holding the reins. With trembling hands he looked younger. The poem had affected his very visage. Joel-Andrew guessed his age at thirty and saw a young man deeply troubled in spirit.

"What is it," Joel-Andrew asked softly. "Women, drugs, or a career change?"

"Beauty," the young man said. "Also, I think, a little fear. Perhaps we could have some music?"

Obed, of the golden eyes and white tail, stood on the seat between them as Joel-Andrew unpacked his violin. As Joel-Andrew played a medley of Gershwin, Obed swayed and purred in Portuguese. The violin was a small and civilized voice in the wil-

derness of wet forest.

The young men drove and listened. The horse went clop, the forest dripped. Obed switched to Arabic.

"When was that music written," the young man asked when Joel-Andrew finished.

"1920, maybe. Maybe 1930."

"Oh, preserve me," the young man said prayerfully, "it's happening again." He looked at Joel-Andrew with supplication. "I've never heard of Allen Ginsberg. Tell me honestly, what is the date. Not the day, the year?"

"1973," Joel-Andrew said. "At least it was when I got here."

"1893," the young man said. "At least it was when I began this journey. It is always 1893 when I begin this journey."

Nothing pleased Joel-Andrew so much as powerful forces, and powerful forces must be operating here. He remained troubled for the young man. "We have time to talk at length," he said. "It looks like you've done this trip before."

"Any number of times. I almost always pick up strangers. They most always talk about 1950 or 1960. Now you talk about 1973."

"And then what happens?"

"We arrive in Point Vestal," the stranger said. "My passenger steps down where the road branches. I follow the branch to my house, and the road disappears. The next thing I know I'm in front of the turn-off to Point Vestal, being pulled by this horse...I don't even know the horse's name...and I don't even know where the buggy came from...and it is always daytime and always raining...and there is another five hour drive ahead of me...and all I want is to return home in 1893 and answer for my mistakes...and see my sweet wife..." He looked at Joel-Andrew. "You aren't even born yet. I'm dead by the time you are born."

"Don't bet on it," Joel-Andrew said, "I'm pushing forty-five." He ran a spiderish and violin playing finger around the inside of his clerical collar. "Oh, Lord," Joel-Andrew prayed silently, "may they servant once more be the instrument of thine power." He felt the familiar energy, vast and loving, wash through him.

"The Lord is with you," he told the young stranger. "This time the road will not disappear."

The young man looked dubious but hopeful.

"It will not disappear," Joel-Andrew repeated.

"You see," the young man said, "some people believe I am mad. I was beginning to think they are correct."

"Your wife?"

"In my whole life," the young man said, "I've only seen her for a little less than six months; and that seven years ago." The young man smiled tenderly. "We were married in Boston before I came west to make our fortune, and to build a house. I did both. Then I was shipped to an asylum." The young man's voice sounded sincere, and that troubled Joel-Andrew because the young man was so obviously lying. The sincerity of the lie troubled Joel-Andrew most. He had heard the same kind of rap from pawn brokers.

When they arrived on the outskirts of Point Vestal the road forked. The young man clucked at the horse.

"Will I see you again," he asked, and his voice vibrated with hope. Joel-Andrew thought the man was very, very young.

Joel-Andrew made his voice reassuring, the bearer of serene power. "Follow your road," he told the young man. "From what I've been told of Point Vestal, we may end up being neighbors."

The young man turned the buggy down the left fork. After the buggy traveled about fifty yards, the buggy and horse disappeared, but the young man did not. The young man stood in the middle of the muddy road. The road did not disappear. The young man smiled, then did a stiff little dance. He began walking the muddy road toward home.

"The Lord did that," Joel-Andrew called after him. "Be sure to think about it."

PW

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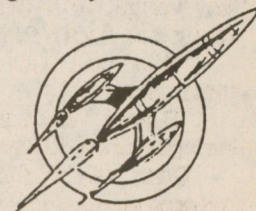
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Shariann Lewitt has been called one of the hottest and hippest writers in the science fiction field today. Her novel credits include *Songs of Chaos*, *Cybernetic Jungle* and *Cyberstealth*, just to name a few. Her latest book, *Memento Mori*, is due out in hardback from Tor November 1995 and she has just turned in *Serenissima In Blue*.

This marks Shariann's second appearance in the pages of *Pirate Writings*. About "Jimmy" she writes, "To my mind, 'Jimmy' is the happiest, most positive story I've ever written. I have an autistic nephew and, strange as it may seem, he and I have a fairly strong relationship. 'Jimmy' is really for him, though he won't ever be able to read it."

MOOSE WAS DEAD. THAT made Jimmy angry at first. He yelled at Moose and then kicked the old shepherd and bit its tail, but Moose just lay there in the grass.

"I'm sorry, honey," his mother said. "But Moose was very old and this happens when dogs get old. They die. He's happier now."

Jimmy

BY SHARIANN LEWITT

Illustrated by Michael Apice

Conformity can be cruel.

That was when Jimmy began to cry. He screamed, drove his fist into the grass and then held Moose's body very gently. "You happier now?" he crooned softly. "Your leg don't hurt no more?" Jimmy sat with Moose on the front yard without moving even when the neighbors gathered to watch.

"You should take that dog body away from him," old Mr. Gelfand from next door said. "It isn't sanitary. And we'll get caught."

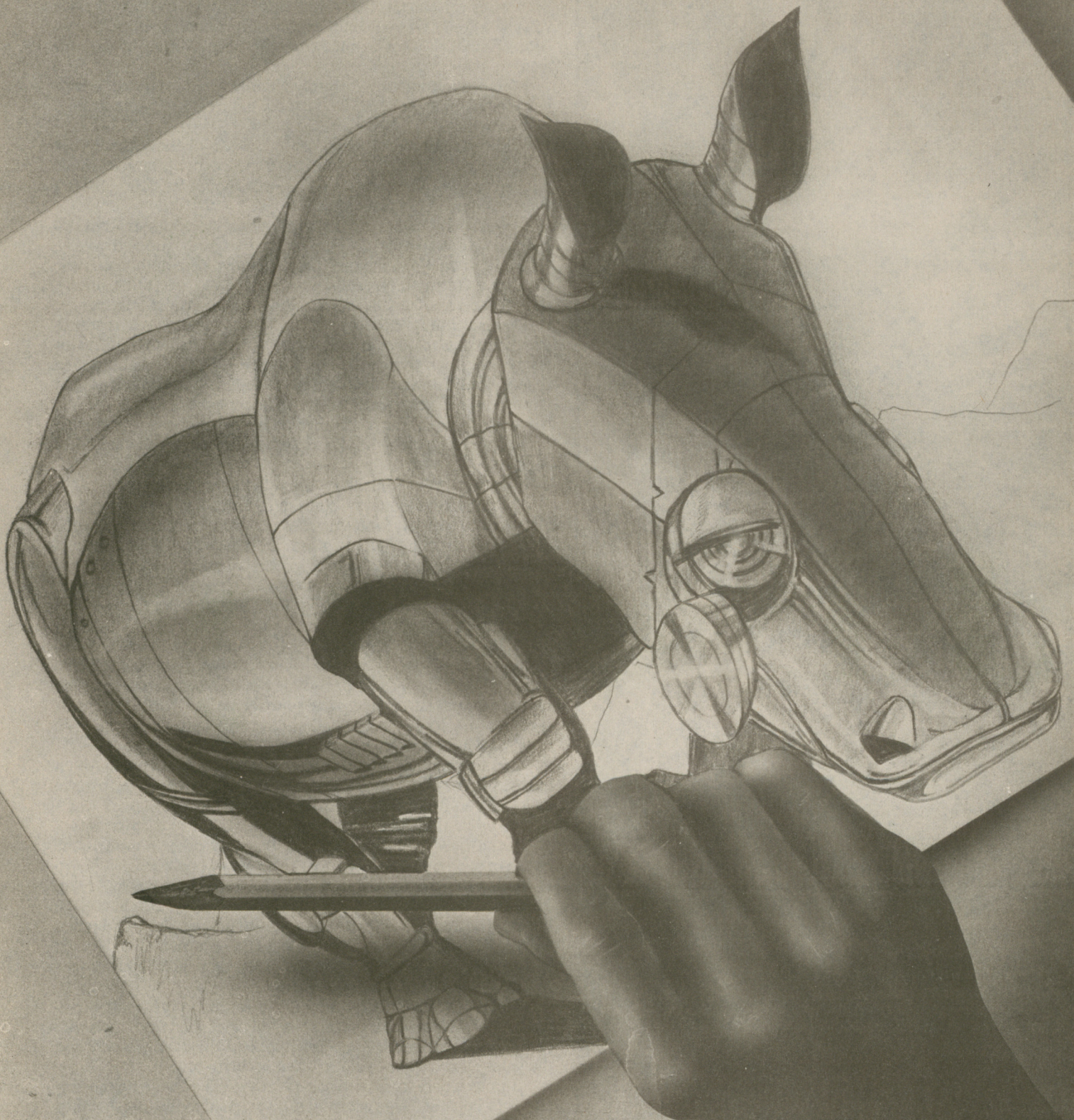
"Sanitary," replied Mrs. Olert. "That boy isn't sanitary. That boy doesn't belong here. Now there's the dead dog, too."

She supposedly was talking to Mr. Gelfand, but her voice was loud enough to carry over the little patch of yard. Jimmy heard her. He hated how they all talked about him like he couldn't hear, but he didn't know what to do about it so he ignored her.

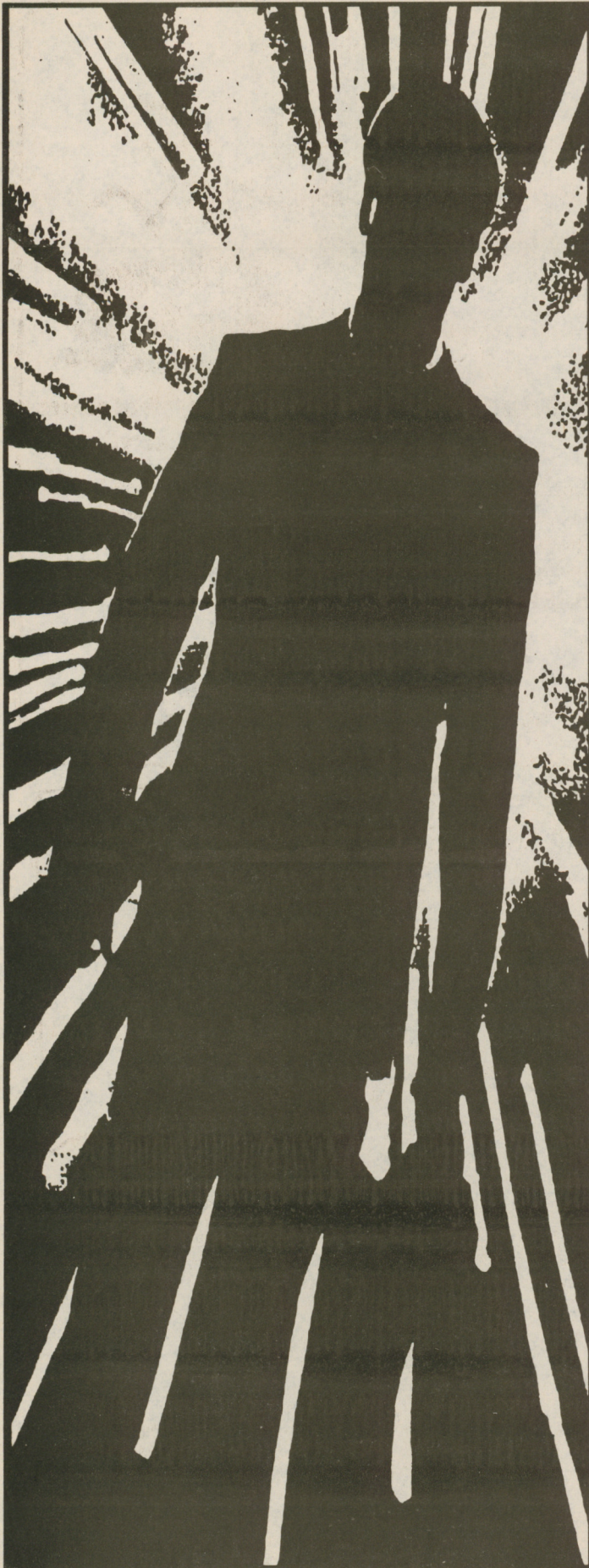
Mrs. Olert had always been mean, anyway, never gave him Hallowe'en candy anymore. She said that was for little kids and he wasn't little anymore. Jimmy knew he wasn't little, but he still liked to trick-or-treat and he especially loved the Mars bars and Baby Ruths that Mrs. Olert used to give out. And she'd called the police on Moose, too, and threatened to take him to the pound and have him put to sleep. Only now Moose was dead and Jimmy remembered it again and forgot all about Mrs. Olert. Moose had been his best friend since he had gotten too big for the little kids to play with him anymore, and had been his only friend when the parents on the block wouldn't let anyone even choose him for dodge ball. He was good at dodge ball.

Jimmy's parents heard Mrs. Olert too. They'd heard her all too often in the past few years, her and Mr. Gelfand and especially Miss Marquez the social worker from Jimmy's school.

"You know he can't stay here untreated," Miss Marquez had said at



Artist
1095



their last conference. "Not after this year. We have to make plans. He can enter a public residential treatment center in the Service Section, or you can pay for private care in any uncovenanted place you can afford. Or you can move into an uncontrolled neighborhood. But this is a covenanted community and Jimmy turns eighteen in June."

"He isn't dangerous," Jimmy's mother had protested. "He's not vicious, not violent. He's sweet natured, everyone around here knows that."

Jimmy's father had turned away. "I can't believe that in our so-called enlightened age our covenanted communities have lumped people like Jimmy in with the criminally insane. He isn't even unstable. He's just...slow."

Miss Marquez had smiled professionally. Her shiny red lipstick had glittered as false as her cheer. "I agree," she said briskly. "However, you did make the choice to move here and to obey the local covenants, which exclude residence to an adult like Jimmy. Still, there is another alternative. You could consider treatment."

Both of Jimmy's parents froze. They had heard vague stories of experiments that had caused Jimmy's father to have nightmares for weeks. But if there was some hope, wasn't that what they had been looking for, waiting for so long, not letting Jimmy out of their house? "What treatment?" Jimmy's father asked.

Miss Marquez sat back down on the green-flowered sofa and opened a large notebook. "It is something relatively new," she began.

"You mean experimental," Jimmy's father interrupted.

Miss Marquez did not contradict him. "The program uses DNA coded artificial intelligence, which is introduced into the child's cell structure and integrates with his own DNA. Like correcting Gaucher's, very straightforward. I have the papers right here."

Jimmy's mother shook her head. "Jimmy isn't really a child, not physically," she said. "Why didn't anyone approach us with this when he was younger?"

"The procedure is too new," Miss Marquez admitted. "And Jimmy is not an ideal candidate in many ways. But because of the nature of the covenant here, and his talent, he has been accepted for the experiment. He has been quite fortunate. The director saw several of his drawings and had an art critic appraise them. The critic was quite struck with the work."

Jimmy's mother smiled. She had always hoped, they had both always hoped, that Jimmy's talent would be great enough to make an exception for him. Sometimes, very rarely, when there was a special talent then an exception was written into the covenants.

"And need I remind you that the only other option is the Home in the Service Sector," Miss Marquez concluded.

Jimmy's parents had seen the Home in the Service Sector. They had talked about it the night he was sixteen years old and the director had encouraged them to move him immediately. "I'd rather see him dead first," Jimmy's father had said. His mother had locked Jimmy in the house for several days afterwards and Miss Marquez had been quite displeased with them.

But there were only five months to Jimmy's eighteenth birthday. As he was, in five months he would be banned from the entire community, set outside the walls in one of the dark districts and the gates locked. They paid a lot for security here.

Jimmy's parents looked at each other. They were neither excited nor hopeful. They were merely resigned to the fact that they had waited too long, fought too hard, and were stuck here without any decent choice.

This time Miss Marquez handed over the papers. There were a lot of them, releases and experimental disclosures and descriptions of procedures. The papers had stayed in the kitchen desk for three months, and Jimmy's parents ignored the messages Miss Marquez left asking them if they were ready to make a decision yet.

Now, watching from behind the sheer living room window

drapes, his parents knew. It was time. It was his father who went to the desk and took out the forms and began to sign them. His mother called Miss Marquez and the thing was settled.

A week later a bright blue van drove up to Jimmy's house. It was afternoon and Jimmy was outside on his patch of lawn digging out pockmarks with a spoon. Miss Marquez got out of the van along with another lady who Jimmy thought looked like no fun at all. Like Mrs. Olert. Miss Marquez gave him a Mars bar. He bet the other lady didn't have any candy with her.

"I heard about Moose, Jimmy," Miss Marquez said. "I'm very sorry. I know you are sad. It's always sad when bad things happen. And you're a very good boy and so we brought you a present to make you happier. Now, I know nothing can ever be as good as Moose, but I thought you might like a friend to play with."

She stepped aside and pointed to the cement walk. There was a shiny metal hippo standing in the middle of the walk. "Hello, Jimmy. I'm William," the hippo said.

Jimmy stared. He'd never seen anything like this. It was not soft or warm like Moose or any of his stuffed animals, but it talked to him. And it walked, turned around to face him and scrunched its metal toes in the mud. "Can I ride you?" Jimmy asked, suspicious.

But the robot animal that was William only blinked. "That sounds like a good idea, Jimmy," William agreed.

Jimmy whooped. No one ever agreed with him. No one ever let him do what he wanted to do. Everyone always told him he was too big and too strong and too heavy to ride toys, to play with anything fun. He balanced on William's wide back and the robot hippo lumbered off at a slow walk.

Jimmy's father watched from the window. He saw Miss Marquez come up the walk, saw Jimmy's big smile and dragging feet as he rode William down the sidewalk. He didn't have to hear Miss Marquez ring the bell to open the door as she arrived.

She stepped in and smiled too brightly. Jimmy's father did not invite her or the other woman to sit on the flowered sofa in the great room, but she did anyway. "This is the beginning of something very exciting," Miss Marquez said rather breathlessly. "William is a construct that is already embedded with the AI genes that will be incorporated into Jimmy. This first step is so that the intelligence factor can become accustomed to the personality and match it better."

Jimmy's father looked strained. He did not sit and did not offer Miss Marquez or the other woman anything to drink. "So what this really means is that Jimmy is going to become William, who will use Jimmy's body and ape Jimmy's mannerisms?" his father asked harshly.

The other woman blinked. "Not at all," she said firmly. "This is organic based thought. Like anything else that is alive, it responds to the medium, it is the medium. William understands that it is incomplete, that becoming Jimmy will make it a complete entity."

"As William will make Jimmy mentally complete," Miss Marquez chirped brightly. "But the researchers feel that this will be much more effective if Jimmy and William have a time to get to know each other and get along."

Jimmy's father said nothing for a long time. Then he sighed. "Why a hippo?" he asked, because there wasn't anything else to ask.

Because something was missing and something was wrong and he didn't know what. He was a section overseer at the paint plant, watching and adjusting fourteen arms and precision mixers, and had once thought that living in a covenanted community would protect his family. Now it was too expensive to leave. Houses in secure neighborhoods with individuality agreements cost nearly twice as much.

And neither of them had ever considered what happened outside the walls. There were stories about that, about cannibals and

TOUCH BASE

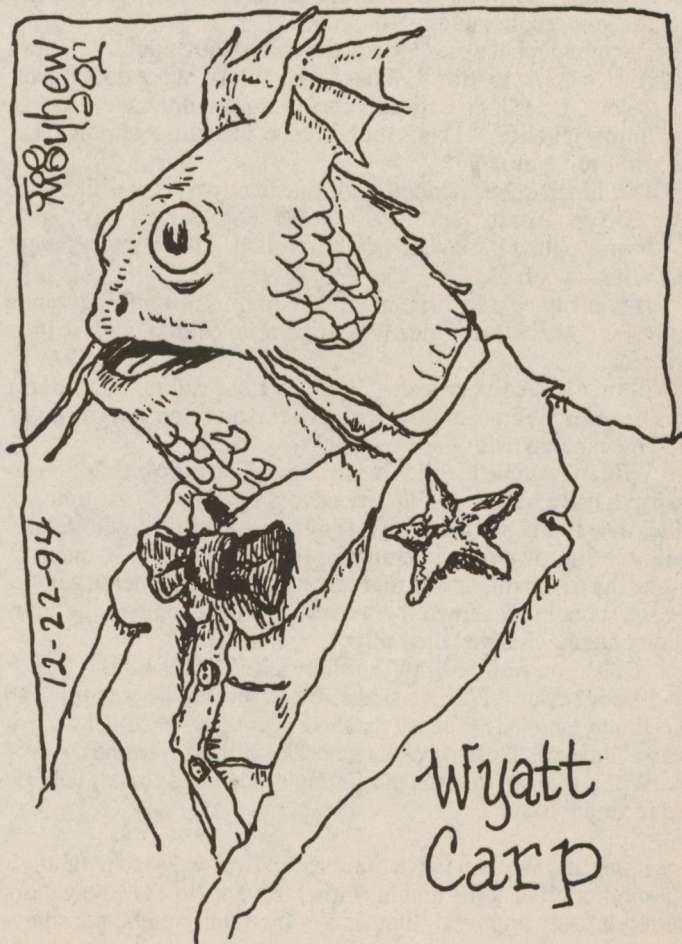


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warring tribes and sanctuary riders. Whatever happened in the open places, Jimmy's father knew it was worse than dying. And the way Jimmy was, slow, he didn't have a chance to survive. Not even in a covenanted community.

There were times when the anger ran through him hard. That shrunk, spiteful Mrs. Olert were considered covered in the covenant while Jimmy was condemned. Jimmy, who happily shared his Baby Ruth bars with anyone who passed by, who didn't understand why none of the children played dodge ball with him and who drew pictures that were truly startling.

The other woman wrinkled her eyebrows. "Why a hippo?" she echoed. "Each of the experimental units is made unique, distinct, in the shape of a different animal. One that the child does not have previous attachments to, so they can form a new relationship without previous patterns interfering. Does that answer your question?"

Jimmy's father nodded. He wished Jimmy's mother was here, but it was her weekend to work. Not that it would matter. The decision was already made, the papers already signed.

Miss Marquez and the other woman left. Jimmy's father walked them to the door. Outside, Jimmy was laughing as the little hippo raced him down the block.

Half the neighborhood was watching, and they were not laughing. "Get that...that thing off the sidewalk," Mrs. Olert yelled when she saw Jimmy's father at the door.

"It isn't covenanted," Mr. Gelfand said.

Jimmy's father called him in and closed the door. Jimmy sulked. He didn't want to play indoors today. It was warm and sunny and he wanted to run and he wanted to see William jump. And his parents had strict rules about jumping on the sofa and feet on the furniture and eating in the kitchen.

"Would you like to draw?" Jimmy's father asked gently. He spread Jimmy's crayons and chalks and oversized newsprint pads over the great room table.

The hippo robot nosed around the colors with interest. "Drawing? We're going to draw? What is this color? What does it look like to you? Does it go with this one? Can you draw me?"

Jimmy laughed. "That's the best blue," he said solemnly. "Do you want to be blue?"

The hippo robot nodded enthusiastically. "If you like that color. Do you like it?"

Jimmy patted the smooth titanium shell. "It's my very favorite. What's yours?"

"I don't have a favorite color," William said sadly. "I can't really see colors. But if blue is your favorite color, then it will be mine, too."

Jimmy looked very sad. "You can't see colors? You don't have crayons? You can draw with my crayons, and you can color and you can play with the clay, too."

William watched while Jimmy drew. The little blue hippo on the paper had a soft smile and seemed to prance as if alive. Jimmy's father saw it and smiled sadly. If only people in the community could see Jimmy's drawings maybe they wouldn't be so quick to invoke the covenant. It was more than a talent, it bordered genius. But the school had shown them once, and the people of the community hadn't changed their minds.

"Don't you want to draw?" Jimmy asked William.

"I can't draw," William said sadly. "I just think about things."

Jimmy laughed. "You tell me about your things and I'll draw 'em and we'll make it like the books at school all full of zowies and booms."

William began to speak but Jimmy's father had already left. He had to find a tissue.

Jimmy and William left in the blue van two weeks later. Jimmy's mother cried softly and his father tried not to. The neighbors muttered nasty approval, that finally the family had done some-

thing right and gotten rid of the misfit. There weren't supposed to be any misfits in the covenanted world. That was a luxury for the rich and ridiculous who lived in the secure individualist towns, who were the topics of endless scandal shows on the live screen, for anyone who had time for that kind of nonsense. Most reasonable people had better things to do with their lives, like work and trim the hedges and bar-b-que hamburgers in the back yard on Saturdays.

Jimmy was gone. The blot was out of their midst.

"I miss him," Jimmy's mother said.

"He'll be back soon," Jimmy's father said. "He'll be fine."

And Jimmy's father was right. He was fine. The research center was very big and scary at first, but they gave him plenty of crayons and there were pictures that kept changing in his room. He liked that. Then he went to sleep.

First, all he knew was the pain. Pain and aches in his muscles and general bad feelings, like when his mother kept him home from school in bed and fed him soup. They fed him soup, too, but it didn't taste good the way his mother's did. Then he slept. And woke and ate soup and slept again.

He didn't feel bad soon, and as he recovered he was given more freedom. New clothes were provided, a blue shirt and gray pants that fit reasonably well. *Blue will be my favorite color, too.*

His eyes burned with tears, with an indistinct sorrow he hadn't identified. He missed the little hippo. He had become William, incorporated the essence of that being in some way, but there was still loneliness and mourning that part of William that had been lost. Grieving for himself, too, a vaguely remembered pleasure in the world that he couldn't quite force himself to believe any more.

That sadness didn't abate as he adjusted to his new state, the intricate mesh of mind and emotion, the traces of William that remained in himself. It showed in the drawings he did in the hospital, full of lines of tension and unresolved anxiety.

The psychologists saw him and the researchers saw him and he sat through countless tests which were interesting at first but rapidly became boring. After a while it was too easy to tell what the whole exercise was about and what the questioners were after. He would have preferred them to leave him alone to read or paint, but that would have been unkind when they had done him great kindness. So he tried to get through the experimental process with some grace, good manners, and the decency he could now recognize were a common core of both his intellect and his personality structure.

He celebrated his birthday in the hospital. His parents didn't come, there was no cake or party, and Jimmy felt completely miserable. He would prefer even the nastiness of a Mrs. Olert to the efficient, impersonal pleasantness of the research staff.

On the evening of his birthday, after dinner, Miss Marquez came with a wrapped box. Jimmy was thrilled. He'd always loved presents. And William had never gotten a present before; this was a special occasion. He undid the wrapping carefully, letting the anticipation grow as he waited to see what was inside. He lifted the lid carefully and put aside layers of tissue paper. He'd never gotten a present in tissue paper before. All his earlier presents had been toys and drawing things. Last year for his birthday his parents had given him the extra-large paint set he had cried for in the hobby store.

Inside the box was a charcoal grey and blue striped shirt. It was beautiful, the best piece of clothing he had ever owned. He held it up to admire.

"How would you like to leave the hospital, Jimmy?" Miss Marquez asked softly. "Physically, you're completely recovered, there isn't any reason for you to stay in a hospital. You can join the student body here and move into the dormitories. You don't have the background yet, really, but a special program could be created for you. We've discussed it, and the staff is really very eager for you to remain in the institute, and you would be with people your

own age. You've never done that before."

Jimmy thought about it for a moment. "What about home?" he asked softly. "What about my parents? I'd like to see them."

"That would be permitted," Miss Marquez said. "But wouldn't you prefer to stay here? Your parents could come and visit, I'm sure we could arrange that." She hesitated, as if she were embarrassed about something, and her face reddened slightly under the careful powdered blush on her cheeks. "There may be some trouble in the community, Jimmy. People there don't understand what has happened. They could think you were still the person who left, who is banned by the covenants. There could be trouble for your parents."

But Jimmy held up his hand slightly and looked away. "No," he said. "I want to go home. Maybe I'll decide to live here, or to do something completely different. Maybe even soon. But I have to go back, I have a right to go. And I'm lonely."

Miss Marquez looked at him and sighed. "Okay. I can't keep you away from there. But I want you to know that it might not be the wisest course."

But Jimmy was already busy sketching out the house as he remembered it, the front door and the little patch of yard with the stump of an old maple tree he had climbed regularly until he had gotten too big and an upper branch had cracked under him. He had broken his arm, the one injury he had gotten at a normal age in a normal fashion. He had been quite proud of his sling. The community had had the tree cut, so there was only a cement-filled stump left. In the drawing he put the tree in as it ought to have been if it had grown in the intervening years, up past the second story with branches shadowing the thrust dormer of his bedroom window.

The van came the next morning. This time he watched the high drab highway walls go by with no sense of land or freedom or even of distance traveled. It felt like a long time before they passed the community covenant gates and went through the streets.

Jimmy recognized the community, and didn't. He had never quite realized that it was so dull, so uniform, so ugly. The small houses were all built on the same pattern, they all had the same too-small porch and screen door and the dormer windows jutting from the roof-line. They were all painted from a single palette that had a brown-grey mix as the base color. To this had been added green, or yellow, or a deeper brown. No other colors were permitted by the covenant, he supposed, and it made him sad. The research institute had a jumble of buildings of different heights and some had great paintings on the walls.

The houses all had the same walkway, the same two holly bushes to keep the dogs off the yards. Each had a solitary tree out front, and each tree, like each house color, was slightly different. Maple, elm, redbud, spruce, repeating at regular intervals in neat marching lines.

Ugly, ugly and soulless, Jimmy found it a horror and a revelation. He remembered the community well enough, but the haze of memory was softened by pleasures like his parents' faces and the smell of burgers on the grill in the summertime and the colors of the falling leaves against the asphalt in the November rains. And maybe blurred by his own perceptions, his own inadequacies. Which had not been eliminated, only made different.

The van left him off at the familiar front door, his parents' faces eager in the window. They looked happy and afraid at the same time when he stepped down from the passenger seat in the front. His mother hugged him hard and his father studied him, perhaps looking for the differences or perhaps wondering if he had changed at all.

"Is that meatballs I smell?" he asked when the first greetings were done.

"Is it still your favorite?" his mother asked.

Jimmy nearly yelped with pleasure. The hospital food had been tasteless and he'd forgotten the joys of the dinner table.

This was something William had never known, the smell and taste of meatballs and tomato sauce and salad with creamy cold dressing and garlic bread dripping with butter. He ate and the food filled some of the loneliness and the cold.

His mother brought out a plate of brownies. "It's for your birthday, but you always liked brownies better than cake, so I thought you might..."

She didn't need to go on. Jimmy's eyes were big and he took three, the chewy kind full of nuts. Home. Love. Food. These were things that he hadn't needed William to understand. That William had needed him to see. The balance, the justice of it, pleased him aesthetically as well as emotionally and made him laugh. He wished he could paint it, really paint it the way he could feel it shifting inside him.

Then there was a knock at the door, hard and demanding and impatient. Jimmy's parents looked at each other and Jimmy couldn't miss the anxiety there. Then his father opened the door. It was Mrs. Olert and Mr. Gelfand and about a dozen other neighbors who he'd known all his life.

"The boy's over eighteen and he doesn't belong here," Mrs. Olert said in her nasal whine. "We could dump you all for breaking covenant," she said. "But we're decent folk and we don't want to do that. We just want him out of here. No telling what kind of damage he'll do. And he makes noise."

"No," Jimmy's mother said.

"No," Jimmy said, "it's only a visit. Really. I'm different. And I'm leaving."

"Right," said Mr. Gelfand. "You're leaving."

The crowd pushed past his parents and surrounded him, dragged him by the wrists out of the house and into the street. It was still light and warm and the houses looked mean and pinched as he was pulled and pushed toward the outside gate. Not the highway gate leading to the walled corridor out to other covenanted communities and the free liberal secure areas like the research institute.

Jimmy was confused. He had known that Mrs. Olert was not a nice person and didn't like him, but he had never really encountered unkindness before. And so he had no defenses, no way to fight. He had never fought in his life and he didn't know how. The idea of it was beyond him.

But his body reacted to all the hurt, evil, and the danger that had been his own neighbors, and he began to run. And they ran after him, herding him through the poor, potholed streets to the wall, the gate.

The gate opened, and Jimmy saw the world and ran for it. There were green trees out there, not neatly regimented in careful lines but crowded together with abandon and defiantly mixed. He saw color, wildflowers and small animals that were not permitted by covenant into the walls. They bred disease, so the covenant read. He smelled woodsmoke, someone distant with a cooking fire, and meat roasting over it, so much more alluring than hamburgers over tame gas.

Jimmy saw the world and the wonder of it struck him. He didn't care that half the neighborhood was running after him. He wanted to be out of this narrow covenanted town and out in the vastness of open spaces the like of which he had never seen. It was so much larger than anything he had ever seen.

The townspeople closed the gate after him. But when he turned back and saw what was behind the closed locked gate only bothered him because it was a dark blemish on an otherwise giant, tempting canvass.

It was still light. Jimmy knew he would have to figure out how to live, where to eat. But he couldn't deny that expanse of dead cement stretching across his entire field of vision. From William's knowledge and memory came the colors. But he had a pack of crayons in his shirt and that would make a very nice start.

PW

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Surreal World

The Montauk Project

by Kevin M. Carr

In 1897, Herbert George Wells wrote a novel of speculative fantasy that seemed not only too wild for the present technology, but too strange for the technology of any age. *The Invisible Man* told the story of Griffin, a young albino scientist who used drug therapy to allow light to pass directly through his body cells. Although it seemed utterly fantastic, Wells' concepts actually held some validity in science. Traditional optics tells us that light, which is merely varying frequencies of electromagnetic radiation, can be refracted—or bent—around some objects. In fact, this is one of the principles the Stealth fighter jet uses to disappear from radar screens.

The Stealth fighter is not the first time Wells' concepts of invisibility have been applied. In October 1943, the United States Navy used the principles of light refraction in an attempt to effectively cloak an entire battleship in a project code-named "Rainbow." Although the military denies that this top secret project ever took place, an Inter-Services Code-Word Index from September 1, 1941, clearly lists "Rainbow" as a project code, block number 334.

The Rainbow Project, which became known as the Philadelphia Experiment, ended in tragedy and disaster, but it opened other doors...doors which would hint at another H.G. Wells science fiction novel from 1895, *The Time Machine*.

In October, 1943, the *USS Eldridge* floated in the Philadelphia Naval Yard as technicians prepared for an invisibility test. They encased the battleship in an electromagnetic cocoon that stretched about one hundred yards beyond each beam of the ship. This electromagnetic cocoon was designed to warp the light rays around the

craft and render it invisible not only to radar—the main detection system of World War II—but to the naked eye as well. What actually happened that day was both serendipitous and terrifying.

According to eyewitness accounts, the battleship eventually faded away. One person even reported seeing an impression left in the water by the battleship's massive hull. Then, the ship disappeared—literally disappeared. Witnesses saw it reappear scant seconds later several hundred miles away, off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia. Moments later, it returned to the Philadelphia Naval Yard, once again only taking a few seconds to travel the immense distance. The naval battleship had apparently slipped through a hole in spacetime, tunneling to an entirely different location.

When the *USS Eldridge* reappeared back in the Philadelphia Naval Yard, things had changed. The battleship itself basically remained the same, successfully accomplishing invisibility and more. The crew, however, was not so lucky. Some walked off the boat, emotionally disturbed and fated to be discharged on mental disability. They had apparently encountered terrifying apparitions within the vortex that took them from Pennsylvanian to Virginian waters. Those were the lucky ones. Some never left the ship at all. There were reports of grisly figures that had fused with the deck of the ship, like struggling explorers trying to emerge from a pit of quicksand.

The Philadelphia Experiment was such a shocker that the Navy ceased operation immediately. They had stumbled onto something bizarre and frightening, and more time was required to study the phenomenon. A massive coverup ensued, which was not



hard to accomplish. Being caught in the midst of the greatest war to face the world, the U.S. Navy had little trouble convincing people to remain silent about classified information.

This intrigue did not last forever. As will happen with any secret, leaks occurred. Soon, the secrets of the Philadelphia Experiment emerged. Speculation followed, and the military scrambled to deny the allegations.

This offers an intriguing note to ponder: if there was never a Philadelphia Experiment, and if there was never the terrible debacle that was alleged, why was it so necessary to loose the spin doctors of the time? Often, vehemently denied instances have grains of truth to them. The U.S. Navy even went as far as to invite Dr. Morris Ketchum Jessup—the leader of the Philadelphia Experiment inquiries—to Washington D.C. at the Office of Naval Research for a thorough debriefing.

Soon, the Philadelphia Experiment interest dwindled, rearing its speculative head only occasionally in books or films. However, this was not the end of the controversy.

Preston B. Nichols, a former electrical engineer for the Air Force, describes in his book, *The Montauk Project*, many bizarre experiments conducted at Montauk Air Force Base on Long Island. It would surprise no one that the military of any nation would fiddle around with mind-control experiments. Mind control could be a most efficient weapon. Violence and aggressive force would become a thing of the past, allowing commanders to dispel a restless army

with mere suggestion. According to Nichols, several of the mind control experiments were quite successful.

Once again, electromagnetism was the key. What are thoughts, but electronic impulses through the brain? All living creatures carry with them an electromagnetic signature. Some refer to it as the *aura*. For the scientist, it is simply the field that enables a CAT scan to work or brain waves to show up on a chart. By altering the electromagnetic field around animals, the scientists were able to influence thoughts and actions of not only lower life forms, but human beings as well.

In the 1970's, the Montauk Project began with the reopening of a deserted Air Force base on Montauk Point, New York. There, scientists experimented with psychoactive phenomenon, such as influencing emotion or manipulating physical mechanisms. Soon, they expanded their view and began construction of what soon became known as the Montauk Chair. The Chair was housed deep underground, surrounded by an electromagnetic dampening field not unlike the one that influenced the USS Eldridge almost thirty years before. In fact, even some equipment used in the original Project Rainbow was employed to create the atmosphere for the Montauk experiments. A psychoactive person would lie in the chair and a Cray 1 computer, linked up with an IBM 360, would decode certain thoughts from the brain. Although positive results occurred, it took the staff at Montauk several years to adjust the frequency fine enough to translate between thoughts and computer signals.

As the Montauk scientists took the experiment to the next logical step, they began experimenting to affect reality. To say their trials were successful would be an understatement. Duncan Cameron, the Montauk Project's top user of the Chair and a crew member on the USS Eldridge during the Philadelphia Experiment, began showing the ability to conjure up phantom items, apparently from his own subconscious. Witnesses claimed to see some objects appear ghostly, hovering in space. Others reported instances where objects would appear solid and even persist after being initialized.

The Montauk scientists noticed some-

An artist's rendition of the giant statue allegedly seen in the destroyed city in the year 6037 A.D.

thing interesting in the objects that were created from suggestions originating in Cameron's subconscious: a time delay. Sometimes, Cameron would concentrate on an object in the early evening, but that object would not appear for several hours. The Montauk scientists realized where this could eventually lead. In 1979, they made their ultimate breakthrough.

The Montauk Project's objective was to open what is referred to as a *zero-time reference point*, a portal connecting two points in spacetime. Because some of the original Philadelphia Experiment's equipment was used at Montauk, and Duncan Cameron had served on the vessel during the infamous Rainbow Project, the scientists tried to establish a time link to the USS Eldridge in 1943.

By the end of 1981, Cameron had successfully established time portals, which are described by Nichols as "a circular corridor with a light at the other end." When Cameron first established these links, they faded and shifted often, a result of deviations in the electromagnetic field. Soon, however, the portals grew in stability as the proper adjustments were made.

At first, the portals were used for observational purposes only. Scenes of past

and future times could be observed through the vortex and recorded. In a short time, the Montauk scientists allegedly began to send people through these vortices. Nichols reports that many of the test subjects that traveled to other times were derelicts and the homeless that had been plucked off the street, although he does report that several adolescent boys were enlisted as well. Those in charge of the Montauk Project studied both world wars, and even glimpsed a peek into the future.

A popular time in the future was the year 6037 A.D., where travelers observed a ruined city with a giant statue in the center square. The statue was of a golden horse rearing up on a pedestal. An inscription had been etched into the pedestal's base, but it was difficult to decipher. Many subjects were sent in to study the pedestal, instructed not to move from a twenty yard radius, and return with their interpretation of the statue's meaning.

Soon, the Montauk Project began to turn sour. Those who worked on it, including Nichols and Cameron, objected to the abduction of subjects to be sent through the time portals. Many were lost when a glitch or a phase shift happened in the vortex. Nichols reports that thousands of sub-



Art by Darren Albertson

jects were lost in the woven fabric of time during the project's course.

Several workers began to formulate their own solution to dangerous experiments with possible dire consequences. Cameron concentrated on conjuring a "beast" from his own subconscious. It was his intention to destroy the project from the inside out by having this beast destroy the base. The beast apparently appeared—at least twice the height of a person and covered with thick hair. It went on a rampage, devouring and destroying anything in its path.

For fear of the beast escaping the base, the Montauk scientists attempted to abort the experiment. Ultimately, it took the destruction of the transmitters at the base's power station and the ruin of the transformer feed with an acetylene torch to cut the power. With the computers shut down, the beast disappeared, returning to Cameron's subconscious.

After the beast encounter at Montauk on August 12, 1983, the Project was terminated. The base was evacuated, and the military came in to pour cement down the maze of underground tunnels, sealing off any access to the Montauk Chair and the Pandora's box it offered.

The major problem of the events in the Montauk Project are common to any claim of time travel: the paradox. A paradox occurs when certain events occur that cannot logically coincide. The most familiar time travel paradox is colloquially known as the *Grandfather Paradox*. If a person were to travel in time and kill his or her own grandfather before that person was born, who would be left to kill the grandfather?

Any avid reader of science fiction has stumbled across almost every time paradox imaginable. Even the most tightly plotted time-travel story offers paradoxes that many writers tend to ignore. Today, with the emergence of Chaos theory, paradoxes are simply inescapable. According to the "Butterfly Effect," an intellectual experiment in Chaos first proposed by Edward Lorenz in 1979, the mere beating of a butterfly's wings in Brazil could cause a tornado to form over Texas. Lorenz's point is that minor changes have a drastic effect when multiplied over an enormous space or time. Any travel into the past could result in a seemingly minor change. However, over time, that change would be multiplied to such a degree that an infinite number of unforeseen paradoxes could rear their heads.

Physicists have attempted to explain away these paradoxes. Even Stephen Hawking—probably the most brilliant physicist living today—has weighed in with his own "Chronology Protection Hypothesis," saying that the universe simply would not allow such a change. This may seem to be a

perfectly valid explanation, but it appears over-simplified and almost too convenient.

The simple fact is that we know practically nothing about the universe. Physicists and astronomers can only guess as to how it works by observing a myriad of space debris. It is analogous to shattering a Swiss watch with a hammer and trying to discover how the watch originally worked. With current understandings of the universe allowing for time travel using black holes and communication with the past via tachyon pulses, these paradoxical questions must be addressed without a simple *deus ex machina* contingency.

There is a solution...and it's a solution that, strangely enough, explains every paradox that anyone could come up with: parallel universes. In 1957, Hugh Everet III of Princeton University suggested that we live in only one out of many universes flowing through the fabric of spacetime. Each of these universes is a result of a split—the outcome of events that have equal chances of occurring. For example, if President Clinton debates over a Big Mac or a Quarter Pounder at a Washington McDonald's, he may have a 50% chance of ordering either. When he eventually makes his decision, the universe splits. In one universe, President Clinton orders a Big Mac, and in the other universe, he orders a Quarter Pounder. Both universes exist in spacetime, and each are equally valid, yet the Presidents are unaware of the decision their other selves have made.

If the Montauk time travelers altered the past, they did so in a parallel universe. They did not affect our own timeframe, but influenced another, which split from the original one. This explanation of time travel

neatly answers questions raised by the grandfather paradox.

Perhaps Preston Nichols and Duncan Cameron—who continue to study psychoactive electronic equipment today—and the other Montauk scientists stumbled into parallel universes. Perhaps the objects—including the beast—that Cameron conjured came from different parallel universes. Perhaps the USS Eldridge teleported to Virginia through a parallel universe. No one really knows what happened...not even those at Montauk and Philadelphia.

Several points still remain...

The USS Eldridge did exist. It was commissioned on February 22, 1943 at the Federal Shipbuilding and Drydocks in Newark, New Jersey. On June 17, 1946, it was decommissioned and later spent time in reserve until it was sold to Greece on January 15, 1951. Its new name is the L_on, which is Greek for *the lion*.

An abandoned Air Force Base can be found at Montauk Point. According to recent reports, several buildings remain destroyed from the alleged beast's attack and mysterious cameras have begun to appear atop many of the buildings, keeping an eye on would-be intruders.

When the Philadelphia Experiment ended in disarray, many thought the tinkering with the spacetime fabric had ended. Yet, the same technology was reexamined at Montauk through the 1970's and 1980's. Many may say that the Montauk Project is over because the base is sealed off.

After observing the experiences of the past, can we trust that the tinkering has, indeed, ended?

PW

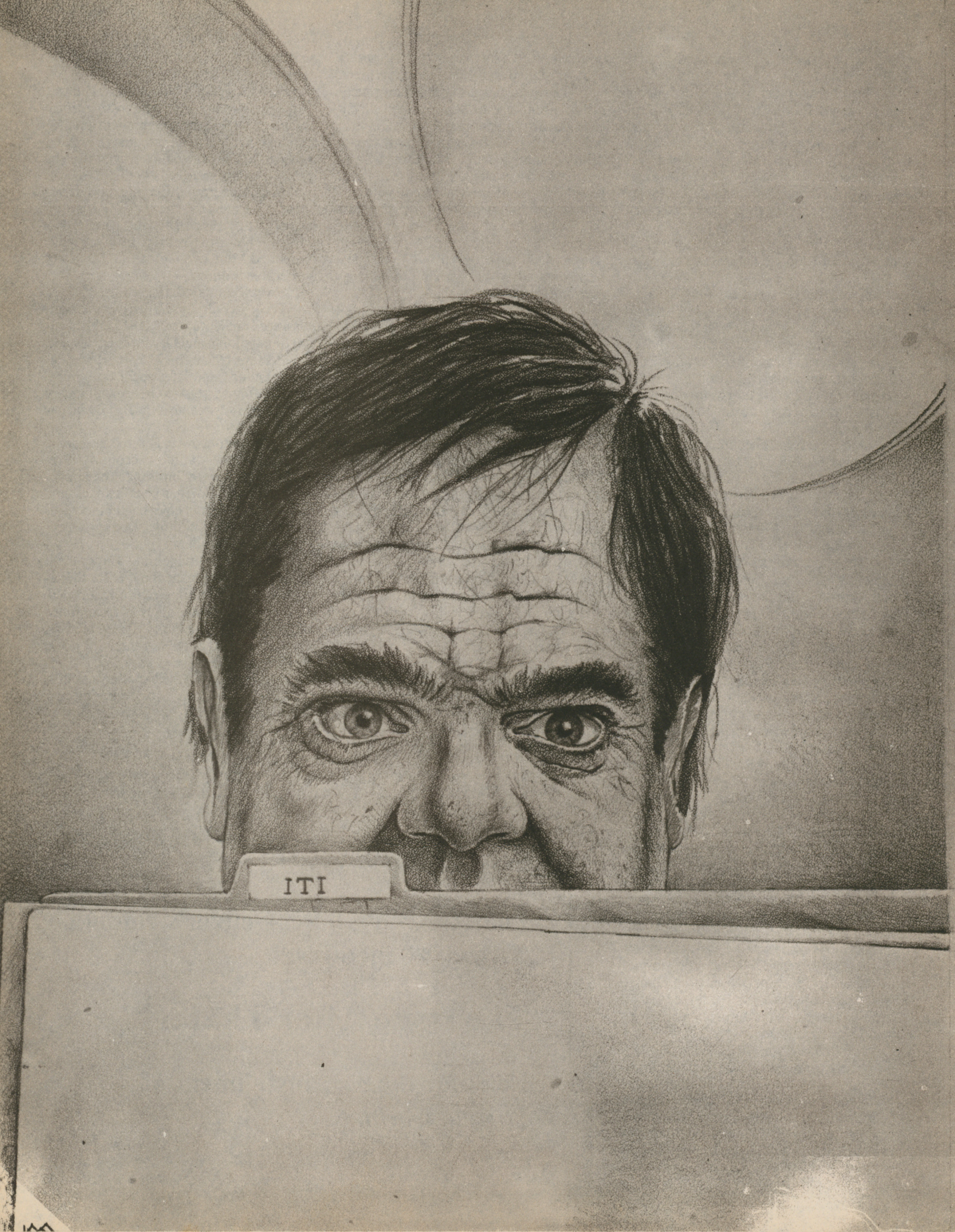
GREAT PW NONFICTION!

Next Issue...

Look for Darrell Schweitzer's column
"Words & Pictures."

The Issue After That...

Look for the next installment of
Surreal World.



ITI

Algis Budrys is a cornerstone in the science fiction field. He is the author of numerous books including *Who?*, *False Night*, *Man of Earth*, *The Falling Torch*, *Rogue Moon* and most recently *Hard Landing*. His work has also appeared in hundreds of magazines and anthologies.

"Due Process" is the second story featuring the character Frank Hertzog. The first, "Straw," appeared in PW#7. We look forward to seeing Algis in the pages of PW again in the future.

DUE PROCESS

FRANK HERTZOG OF INTERNATIONAL TOURS, Incorporated scratched himself behind one disproportionately large ear and lifted one shaggy eyebrow. He sat turned sideways to his desk, with his feet up on an extended drawer. His visitor sat stiffly in a chair placed at the opposite corner of the desk, so that Hertzog's glance shot diagonally toward his visitor and, at his convenience, over the visitor's shoulder at the ocean horizon far away and far below.

Hertzog nibbled jerkily at his upper lip. "Now, let me just get this clear in my own mind," he said to the prim little man in the other chair. "You want cash in advance?"

"No later than July 14th midnight," the prim man affirmed. "It's very important that the money should have reached our office in Basle by that time." The little man sat with his thighs and knees pressed together, his back upright and his arms at his sides, with his hands clasped in his lap. He wore a black suit and a white shirt with a black string tie. He had a pale, bony face, and gray-black hair which had been clipped close at the sides and brushed flat on top with a white part straight down the middle. Motionless beads of perspiration covered his forehead.

"And as soon as the money is in your office, you'll have our order loaded on the first tube train out?"

"That is correct," the prim little man said. He was a liquor salesman. "I must remind you that today is July 1st."

"Well, now," Frank Hertzog complained, "that seems like an awfully funny way to do business, all of a sudden. We've been good customers of yours for years. No ITI cruise ship serves anything but your brands."

"Naturally," the little salesman said. "Our brands are the best in the world."

"So's ITI's credit rating. I don't understand this, Mr. Keller, I really don't. The account has been settled every month. It almost sounds as if you don't want our business. There *are* other wholesalers in this world, you know."

BY ALGIS BUDRYS

Illustrated by Keith Minnion

In the city of Atlantis Frank Hertzog rules.

Mr. Keller gestured nervously. "Please, Mr. Hertzog. None of our competitors are organized to give you service equal to ours."

"Up to now they haven't been, you mean. But you're forcing me to wonder whether a little less service and a great deal more courtesy wouldn't be worth it."

"Mr. Hertzog, I..." The little salesman suddenly leaned forward urgently. "It may cost me my job to speak frankly to you, Mr. Hertzog. You understand."

Hertzog leaned back and looked narrowly at Keller. "I'm not sure I do, Mr. Keller. You and my company have been dealing with each other for some time. In cases where a salesman has been handling the same account for years, it becomes a moot point whether he represents his employer or his account. A tacit arrangement of mutual advantage between salesman and account gradually evolves into being. This is a fact as old as salesmanship. I'm a little bit surprised at your reluctance to comply with business ethics, Mr. Keller. I really am. I wish you would say whatever is on your mind. I can't say I care for your implication that anything you tell me in confidence might pass beyond this room."

Keller's pale lips trembled at their corners. "Mr. Hertzog, you put me in a difficult position. You're clearly in the right, and yet—"

"If I'm in the right, Mr. Keller, then let's have it. What's going on?"

The little man sighed. "Very well, Mr. Hertzog." His voice fell, and he leaned forward to compensate for it, his eyes unconsciously darting about the room before he went on. "You know there's been a change in the top management of my company? What has occurred is that the new directors are much more favorably inclined toward Capetown than toward Atlantis."

"That's ridiculous!" Hertzog snapped. "Atlantis is the logical port facility for Europe. It's true that trans-shipping goods into the tube train terminal here and running them through the tunnel under the Bay of Biscay and the contaminated coastline does add an expense. But shipping overland across Africa from Capetown is even more costly."

Keller spread his hand placatingly. "Please, Mr. Hertzog. You know this, and I know this. In time, even my directors will know this. But at the moment they have been beguiled by this new notion of zeppelin freighters. They have been shown plans for lighter-than-air craft with cargo capacities comparable to those of a ship, and they have attended test flight demonstrations. They are impressed by the majesty of these huge constructions—you understand, Mr. Hertzog, they are like children. They will grow up, but meanwhile—" Keller shook his head.

"Let them try zeppelin lighterage from Capetown to Europe across the African interior," Hertzog growled. "One or two line squalls will grow 'em up fast. Insurance rates are a great urge toward maturity."

"Exactly. Exactly," Keller agreed. "But in the meantime they are convinced that Capetown will become the great cosmopolitan center of the Eastern Hemisphere, and that Atlantis will wither, out here on the ocean with nothing to sustain it. So they have instituted strict new policies. Please, Mr. Hertzog—one or two demonstrations of prompt, ready cash payment on your part, and they will think again. I realize it is an imposition on your self-esteem, but a truly great man can afford to be above such things." His voice became a conspiratorial whisper. "After all, Mr. Hertzog, once the Capetown bubble has burst, you'll be in a position to demand unheard-of discounts—"

"Yes," Hertzog said. "Yes, I see." He stood and strolled aimlessly about the office, his hands clasped behind his back. He stared out through the window without focusing his eyes, and wrinkled his nose, eventually coming to a halt beside the settee where Keller had left his briefcase. "All right, Mr. Keller, I'll have a bonded messenger at your Basle office by July 14th midnight," he said. He fumbled with the handle of Keller's briefcase, swinging his hand absently backward and forward. Keller took it from him

with a touch of asperity.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Hertzog. I was sure you would understand the situation."

"Yes," Hertzog said vaguely. "Yes," he repeated, watching the salesman leave.

Hertzog pressed Hoke Bannister's call button on his desk, then walked back to the glass wall of his office and looked out. The stacked tiers of Atlantis rose out of the ocean all around him, the water swelling around the massive concrete pilings on which they rested. It was a stormy day. The water was green and white under a gray sky, and rain swept in an exhilarating sheet across the invisible glass. Inside a two-mile perimeter, where sonic turbulence broke up the wave action, leaping towers of foam clashed together and surrounded Atlantis in a rampart of froth. Frank Hertzog was smiling fondly through the glass when Hoke Bannister let himself in.

"Yeah?" he said, rummaging through the liquor cabinet. He was an ugly, wide man who had recently acquired the habit of five-dollar Havana cigars. His mouth was broad enough so that he could keep one between his teeth at nearly all times and still talk and drink.

"What would you do for thirty thousand dollars, Hoke?" Hertzog asked him, returning to his desk.

"Thirty thousand dollars? You mean, what kind of rules would I break? Few. Thirty thousand dollars would keep a man comfortable all his life, if he plays it careful, but no kicks, you know? You don't take chances with that little bit of capital."

"What would you do for the standard salesman's commission on a thirty thousand dollar order?"

"You mean Keller?" Bannister finished putting his drink together and closed up the cabinet. "I was right, sending him up here, yeah?"

"Yeah," Hertzog said, looking down at the buttons on his desk. "Yeah."

Bannister took a gulp of his drink. He stared at it, snatched open the liquor cabinet, and held up the crystal whisky decanter he'd used. "What in blazes have you fed me?" he choked.

Hertzog looked up. "I wanted you to try some of that. There's a local chemical outfit that's been trying to make scotch out of plankton."

"Frank, don't turn Keller's outfit loose yet," Bannister said.

"No," Hertzog said, "no, I'm not going to." He pushed a button. "Paulette," he said. "Got that stuff for me?"

"Yes, Frank. Coming up." A slot clicked back on Hertzog's desk, and a clipped sheaf of photocopies slid up to fall flat on the desk. "I've put what I think is the relevant copy on top," Paulette's efficient voice said out of the air. Hertzog frowned down at the photocopies. "Yes, I see you have. Thank you. And get hold of Thad Traven, will you, in the City Counsel building? That's right—he's the clerk. Make me a cocktail date for this afternoon. One of those plush and ebony places in Pleasure House ought to be just right, I think."

Thad Traven was thin and dark, with a mouth that over the years had been compressed within its original dimensions, so that after his lips folded under there was still a slit in his jaw for a half inch on either side.

"I can tell you're a steady man, Thad," Frank Hertzog said to him. "A planner. A man who weighs all the possibilities before he moves."

"No one's ever caught me looking foolish," Traven agreed. He sipped his sherry Martini and let his glance run over the faded tattoo of a mermaid on Hertzog's bare forearm.

"Yeah, well, I'm just a sort of Johnny-come-lately, you might say," Hertzog said apologetically. "When you come right down to it, all I am is a seaman roustabout whose father happened to leave him a travel agency. Oh," he said, cutting off any protest by Traven,

"I've been lucky and managed to build up the business, and all that. Got a few dollars in my pocket. You know. But I'm really just a guy who hasn't got the sense not to whack off on foolish chances. Every once in a long while, a gamble like that will pay off for somebody. I've been lucky, like I say. When I need to know something—I mean, when it's something that takes a sophisticated man with a trained mind, why, I've got to come to a man like yourself for help."

Traven smiled. "You're more flattering than I perhaps deserve."

"No, no, I mean it, Thad. For instance, a man like me, that runs a travel agency, is naturally interested in other places in the world besides Atlantis. Sometimes it seems to me that it wouldn't be a bad idea to develop some interests in Europe or Africa—Sevastopol, say, or Capetown. I mean, besides opening branch offices. Take a real hand in local business. But if I had just gone ahead and done that, I would have found myself in real trouble with the civic government here, because I didn't understand it was better to keep our hands off the Mainland. Whereas, if I'd come to you, I'm sure you would have been glad to explain it to me."

"Of course, Frank. The prime tenet of the Conservative party is that, here in our isolation from the Mainland, we are in an ideal position to avoid their difficulties. As long as our only real link to them is the freight tube, we stand in the position of acting as their clearing house. If we actively participate in their affairs, then we may well become embroiled in their attempts to deal with the results of the devastation. As long as we remain aloof, we are in the position of collecting our handling charges and letting it go at that. Involvement with the Mainland may easily entail added responsibilities for which we have no desire."

"Now," Hertzog explained eagerly, "I can see that, once it's been explained to me. Before, I thought that, inasmuch as we're descended from people who pushed the tube through from the Mainland and built this place, we were still somehow bound to those countries."

Traven smiled. "It's been a hundred years, Frank. None of the original sponsoring governments are still in existence. There is no legal basis for any such notion."

"No, I can see that, now, listening to you. But I needed to have it clarified."

Traven took a meditative sip of his drink. "Well, now," he said deprecatingly, "you didn't do so badly in that affair with William Waring. If he had been permitted to organize his investment syndicate, the weight of that much capitalization would have swung the civic elections to a slate of candidate pledged toward intervention in Mainland affairs. You saved a great deal for many people in addition to yourself there."

"Oh, well, he was all mixed up with a try at defrauding ITI of twenty thousand dollars. That's a lot of money. I was pretty surprised when I knocked him over and found out there was more to it than that. Just some more luck, Thad. But, you know, that was what got me thinking."

"Oh?"

"Yes, well I've been thinking that there Waring was setting up this business, which could have broken me, and I didn't have the faintest idea of it. If I'd had somebody who could tell me what was going on in civic politics, I wouldn't have been in the dark." He finished his drink and pointed to Traven's glass. "Have another?"

"Why, yes, thank you," Traven said carefully.

Hertzog signaled to the watchful waiter, and went on. "The elections run off next week, don't they?"

"As a matter of fact, they do—the first Tuesday after the Fourth of July. But they'll be pretty much a formality, this year. All the Mainland Interventionists withdrew after Waring was exposed. Not all of them were his candidates, of course, but even the legitimate ones were tarred with his brush."

"Uh-huh. Let's see now...I'm not up to this stuff, like I said...you're on the Conservative ticket this year as usual, aren't you?"

Traven's lips closed entirely. "Yes, I am. I'll be the candidate for City Clerk, as usual."

"Excuse me, Thad, but that's not too far up the totem pole, is it?"

"No, it isn't," Traven said shortly.

"It seems a shame. I don't know Mayor Phillips to speak to, but it doesn't seem to me he's such an all-around hotshot."

"He is at party politicking," Traven said bitterly. "The rest of us have to settle for what's doled out to us."

"Hm-m-m. Seems like a funny way to run things. Doesn't seem fair to me."

"It isn't. But what can you expect? Atlantis is populated by people who don't have to work very hard for their money, or even think too deeply about anything. Hardly twenty per cent of them even bother to vote, and most of those are brought in by Phillip's organization. Of course, I can hardly complain about that. But, still..."

"Seems to me you *can* complain. If you don't go along with Phillips, you haven't got a chance—as long as the vote stays low."

"But who has the resources to set up a rival organization? It takes money—money for air time, money for advertising, for posters, for rallies. Who has that sort of money?"

"Well, now," Hertzog said, twisting his glass lazily in his fingers and looking at it thoughtfully.

"Good Heavens, Frank! You don't know what you're saying! And in any case, it's too late this year—"

"For a write-in candidate?"

"Write-in? No—but the campaigning, man! There's barely a week left!"

"Well, you know, Tad, ITI owns the water taxis, one of the helicopter services, and four of the hotels. We buy half the air time. We take a standard full page ad in all three newspapers every day. On TV, we've got the Sonny Weams show, 'Cactus and Hashknife Al,' 'Are You Smarter Than Your Wife?' and the Williamton Sandberg Mills news-in-depth program. How would it be if you campaigned for mayor on something like, say, the Progressive Reform ticket, with a big get-out-the-vote push and posters staring everybody in the face every time he got into a boat or hailed a copter? Think you could stir out, say, forty, forty-five per cent of the vote?"

Traven was pale. "Great Heavens, Frank, that's not legal! A corporation can't throw its treasury behind a candidate like that. And what would your Board of Directors say?"

"Comes to that, Thad, I'm the Board of Directors."

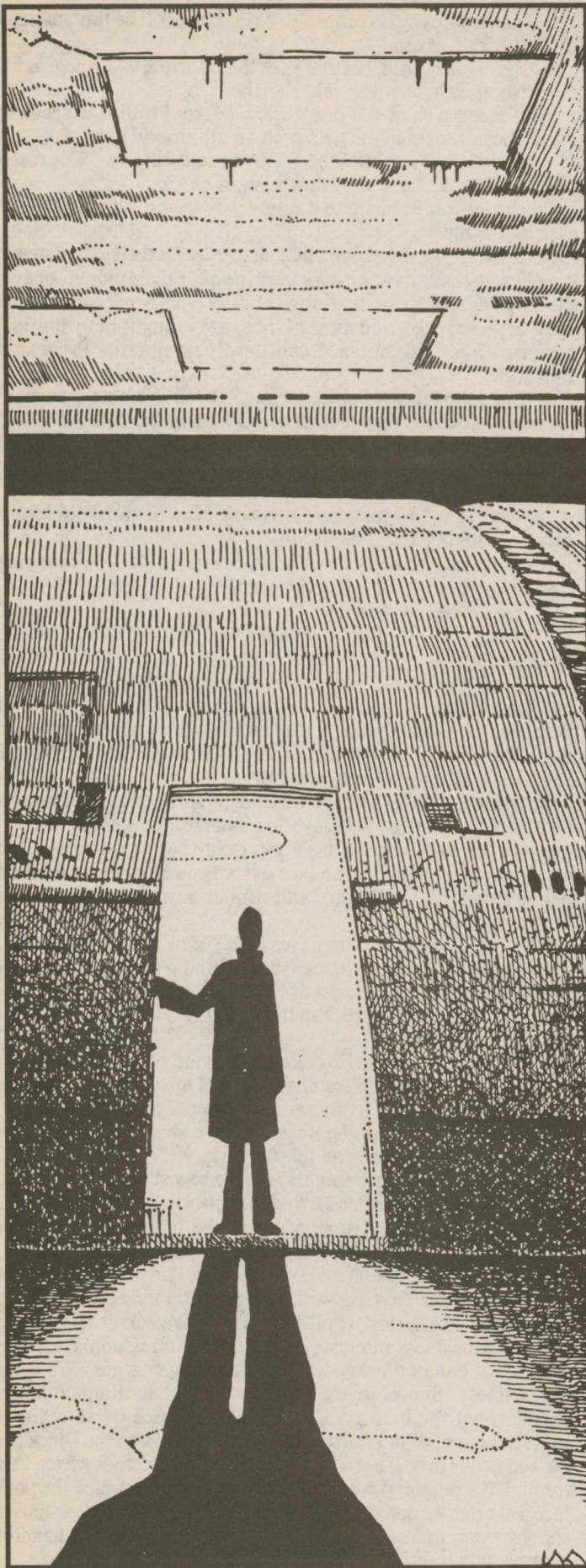
"But still you can't—"

Not even if I run for dogcatcher in agate type at the bottom of each ad? I want to be dogcatcher, Thad. I have a burning passion to become dogcatcher. I'm going to campaign like crazy. But I need somebody to head the ticket. How's about it?"

"Frank, I...do you mean this?"

Hertzog dipped two fingers into the breast pocket of his sport shirt, took out two crumpled five-dollar bills and a slip of paper. He opened the paper and dropped it on the tablecloth in front of Traven. It was a certified ITI check for two hundred thousand dollars, made out to the Progressive Reform Party Campaign Fund.

"Of course," Hertzog said, "we're going to need a campaign issue. How about this? Phillips and the Conservative Party are alienating business interests on the Mainland which are getting annoyed at our aloofness—and our handling charges. We're losing business. Show 'em the figures—we're handling all the perishables, but the hard goods are being shipped by slow freight into Archangelsk and railroaded overland down to the Black Sea. And someday they'll put a north-south railroad across Africa. Yes, through the jungle, if we press 'em enough. Guarantee the populace a shorter work day and lower real estate taxes, if negotiations show we can increase our yearly gross by shading the handling charges a fraction."



Traven hesitated thoughtfully. "I'm not sure that jibes with my earlier public pronouncements."

"Yours?" May Phillips', you mean. You're coming out in the open, now. Swinging with both fists. Blowing the lid off. You're not one of Waring's gangsters—you're a respectable ex-Conservative who's had enough."

"Hm-m-m. Hm-m-m." Traven smiled broadly. "I believe I can do it. Yes, it might be just the right kind of ammunition."

"Yes, it might. Well, Thad, you're the experienced man, so I'll leave it to you to set up the campaign headquarters and hire the public relations people. I'm sending a young fellow from my office—Bannister's his name—to just lend a strong back and maintain a liaison with the ITI treasury, in case you run short—but I'll keep my fumble fingers out of this. Good luck."

Traven picked up the check, studied it for a moment, and put it in his billfold. "Er...thank you, Frank."

"Think nothing of it, Thad," Hertzog said, standing up. He left the two five dollar bills on the table and motioned to the waiter. "I'll see you at the polls," he said to Traven.

"Ah...Frank...suppose Phillips challenges me on my assertions?"

"Well, if it worries you, they're perfectly safe. Matter of public record. Study the Standard & Poore and the Dun & Bradstreet reports for the last thirty years. It's all in there." He waved a hand in farewell and left the cocktail lounge.

Frank Hertzog lived in a blister apartment, two rooms anchored to the side of one of the ITI building's pylons, four hundred feet below sea level. It was quiet down there, and hard to get to. He stood in his kitchenette, carefully heating a pan of cocoa until it was just warmed. He poured the cocoa into a stone mug with half an inch of scotch in its bottom and went out into his living room, biting the corner out of a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich spread with mustard. "How'd it go today?" he said to Hoke Bannister, who was standing in the middle of the rug and trying his hand with the dart board.

"Well, ol' Thad Traven's got the Conservatives in a fit, and the city in an uproar. Can't turn around without being hit by a Traven ad. Sonny Weams is telling jokes on Phillips, 'Are You Smarter Than Your Wife?' is full of questions about freight tonnages, and Hashknife Al is racing Cactus in the Dakota land rush."

"The Dakota land rush!" Hertzog shook his head. "Those were the days, Hoke! When a man wanted to travel somewhere, he climbed on his trusty old paint and hunkered off into the sunset. That reminds me—sign this, will you?" He pulled a wrinkled sheaf of paper out of his hip pocket and handed it over.

"What is it?" Bannister asked.

"A messenger bond. An officer of the company has to sign it."

"Why can't you?"

"I'm the messenger. I'm leaving for Basle in twenty minutes with thirty thousand dollars. It's a little before Keller's deadline, but I imagine they won't mind getting it a few days ahead of time."

Bannister scrawled his name in the space indicated and put the bond away. "Got a plane waiting?"

"No. You don't get any sensation of travel, going that fast. I've got a few hours' time. I'm going to take the tube."

"Don't forget to come back before the polls close tomorrow. Every vote counts, you know."

"Yes. What am I running for?"

"District Assemblyman. That's almost as good as dogcatcher."

"I was afraid of that." He picked up his overnight bag and pushed the buzzer for the pylon elevator, which hissed to a stop and appeared behind a sliding door in the living room wall. "Mind the store," he said.

"Woof," Bannister answered.

The tube terminal was a hundred yards square and a hundred feet high, with two massive circular doors, dripping with conden-

sation across their bolt-studded faces, side by side like a pair of shut eyes in the far wall. Two railed cradles rested on girdered feet, extending the tubes' profile into the vault, and threw their complex shadows upon the worn concrete flooring, where the maintenance crew swarmed. There was a passenger platform built out from the wall, its forward edge curved in and under to fit flush against the nearside cradle. Hertzog waited patiently, along with a small group of other people carrying suitcases.

In the cradle, the train was being made up. It consisted of three cars, two of them freightcapsules and the third with a skimpy passenger compartment at one end, and at the moment all the freight holds were open, clamshell doors ajar like rudimentary wings held aloft down the train's length. Loading cranes dropped down from the roof, lowering pre-packaged bundles of freight into calculated spaces in the holds, so that the interior of the train gradually built up into a solid mass much like one of those key-chain puzzles in which odd-shaped pieces of plastic interlock to form pistols, airplanes, and other charms. Shaped like a chrysalis jointed at two points, the train lay waiting to slide into the air lock, blind except for the three grimy portholes of the passenger compartment. The chamber echoed to every dropped tool and every scramble of a maintenance man's shoes up or down the cradle's latticework. The crane cables whined through their sheaves, and the stevedores bellowed to each other over the racket.

Each of the cranes seemed to bring down its last load at the same moment. A siren wound its way up to maximum audible pitch, and the clamshell doors first banged themselves shut and then pulled their retracting arms in after them. The passenger door spat open, and Hertzog boarded with his fellow passengers. As soon as the last of them was inside, the door thudded home. They found seats and the train started without preamble, inching laboriously through the raised air lock hatch.

The hatch closed behind them, and they waited in darkness. The pumps evacuated the lock, and then the subway door dilated, the sound of metal scraping over metal transmitted through the train with uncompromising clarity.

"A couple of bucks a week extra for oil wouldn't do the city any harm," Hertzog muttered to himself. The warning hooter made him drop his feet into the stirrups. The train slid forward, seemed to find its footing and shot ahead, motors singing, building up acceleration with considerable speed as it dropped down the initial incline, then, when it hit the long level stretch, settling down to a steady two hundred miles per hour, down the evacuated tube under the sea, toward the long, bleak, deadly coastal plan over which he tube ran within its massive concrete shield, toward the mountains which were the western frontier of life in Europe.

The line was single-tracked except where

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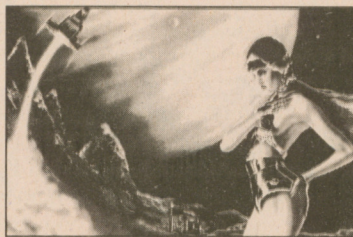
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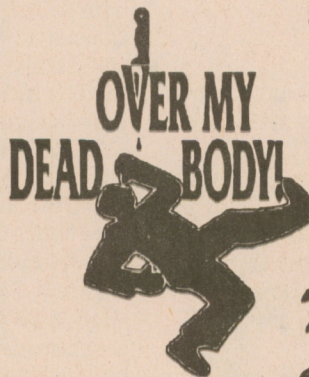
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it paired at the terminals. And just before the tube broke the surface at the shore of France, there was a siding into which Hertzog's train was switched while an outbound train rumbled by. Hertzog peered curiously out through the portholes at the emergency platform along the siding. There were, supposedly, elaborate automatic provisions for shunting off trains with internal malfunctions and holding them here, just as there were safety blocks which kept two trains from meeting head-on in the tube proper. They seemed to work—either because everything was so efficiently designed or because there was a high *esprit de corps* among the air-suited trackwalkers who maintained the right of way.

Here on the shunt track, idling beside the wall of the main tube, the train was once more in an air lock, so that the passengers could, if need be, escape from a disaster to the dubious shelter of a substation which did not communicate with the surface. Hertzog got out of his chair and pulled the switch on the compartment door. It hissed back with an explosion of compressed air, opening on a bleak concrete platform with rust stains washed over its surface and grime everywhere.

"Please," a recorded voice said over the train's automatic public address system, "do not exit except in genuine emergency. Please close the door."

Hertzog shrugged and re-closed the door. He went back to his seat. "Just wondered if it could be done," he said innocently to no one in particular.

Basle was disquieting for Frank Hertzog. For one thing, the buildings straggled every which way up hill and down dale. For another, everybody wore drab, soberly cut clothing. "Look like a bunch of bankers," Hertzog muttered to himself, getting on an elevator in the liquor distributor's office building.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" the elevator operator said unctuously, with a repressed sniff for Hertzog's clothing.

"Fourteen, Charlie," Hertzog said.

"Yes, sir."

"You in somebody's army, Charlie?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"You forgot to say 'Sir.'"

"Sorry, sir."

"Horsefeathers! Stop it, Charlie. I couldn't stand it. Why don't you come on out to Atlantis and get yourself a decent job?"

"Atlantis, sir?"

There was no mistaking the connotation in the operator's voice.

"Y'know, we only eat babies on ritual occasions anymore. Most of us have lost our taste for 'em entirely, and have to sort of force ourselves. Personally, for instance, I don't think they're any good at all, boiled, the way they serve 'em. Rose, now, that's a different story, but you hardly ever get 'em that way, any m—"

"Fourteen, sir," the operator said stiffly.

"Thank you, Charlie," Hertzog said, and stepped out facing the hall door of the liquor house. "Don't take any wooden propaganda, now."

The President of the liquor wholesalers was a man named Mott, with a receding chin and prominent teeth. "Mr. Hertzog," he said fluttering his hands, "I don't know what to say."

"Well, then, say it," Hertzog drawled, leaning back in his chair.

"An...it's not usual for the customer's Chairman of the Board to personally deliver so much cash."

"Ahead of time," Hertzog added.

"Ah...yes. Now, well, frankly, Mr. Hertzog, I don't know—"

"Weren't you expecting it?"

"Expecting it? Oh, yes, yes, we certainly were, but not until—"

"You can't ship until the 15th, even with the cash on hand today, is that it?"

"Well, yes," Mott said gratefully. "I'm gratified that you understand."

"Yes," Hertzog said. "So am I. We could have gone around in

circles forever, couldn't we?" He stood up and shook Mott's hand. "Have to be pushing along now. Pleasure to've met you, Mott." He strolled out, caught a taxi to the tube terminal, and went home, whistling a song which began with: "If all little girls were like Mercedes Benzes—"

It was well over a week, now, since he had been elected assemblyman for his district, and Frank Hertzog had gotten accustomed to the idea. It was nine o'clock on the night of July 14th, and he was riding down the pylon elevator with Hoke Bannister.

"So it's pretty well settled down all around," he said. "With a new administration in Atlantis, the Mainland governments are holding off on any ideas they might have had about embargoing freight through the tube. There are three American shippers who are going to route their hard goods through here, and if that works out as well as it ought to, there'll be more. The trans-Atlantic air freighters don't care one way or the other, so long as we don't try to build a fleet of cargo airplanes of our own, and why should we? Our fort'es quantity, not luxury."

"So Atlantis hasn't got a competitor left in the world, that it can't stand off on a fair basis, right?" Bannister said.

"Well...yeah," Hertzog said.

"Here's your place."

"Let's keep going on down. I want to drop in on the terminal for a minute."

"Suit yourself."

"Uh-huh. Well, anyway, it looks like Atlantis isn't going to go bust for some time. That's nice. I plan to stay in this town. The Mainland's all right to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. They take money too seriously over there. You wouldn't believe how greedy they can get, sometimes—they'd rather risk losing out on something really good than let thirty thousand bucks go by."

"Yeah?"

"Uh-huh." The elevator sighed open at the terminal level. Hertzog strolled casually toward a train that was making up. "But I don't want you thinking every Mainlander's a penny-snatcher with no real drive. Take those boys with their zeppelin line from Capetown. That took a little something to dream up. Their rates could come to within shouting distance of the tube. And what if there wasn't any tube...ah, there, Mr. Keller!" he sang out, slapping the liquor salesman on the shoulder.

The prim little man threw a startled glance backward. "Mr. Hertzog!" he gasped. "Are you taking this train?"

"Thinking of it."

"Oh."

"Nothing like a trip abroad to widen the range of a man's interests, I always say," Hertzog murmured, ushering Keller and Bannister aboard the train. He guided the little man to a seat, pressed him gently down into it, and fastened his seat belt for him, talking all the while. "Actually, I'm much more impressed with tube travel than I am by aircraft. You can pretty much see what's going on, from an airplane or, say, a zeppelin, but a tube train's different. Here are all these mysterious rushing noises, and machinery, and things, going on all around you in the dark, and all you can do is sit there and trust to it that everybody's done their job right and nothing's going to go wrong. That's the kind of thing that really puts a strain on your credentials as a Twenty-first Century man—the implicit faith in mechanisms you yourself don't control. Isn't that so, Mr. Keller. Sit down. Hoke, we're about to start, I think."

The train hunched into the air lock, and then slid out. Bannister was grinning at Hertzog. Keller was pale and silent, a satchel between his feet.

"But, you know, Mr. Keller, when you come right down to it, it's the little things that really classify a culture's technology. We tend to be impressed by big, obvious mechanisms that clank and groan and tell you they're working, but the really efficient machine

shouldn't intrude itself on civilized activities like conversation or high-level business, and shouldn't require elaborate installations that advertise its presence. For example, Mr. Keller, we have machines now that can progressively work their way through a bundle of documents, or the contents of a briefcase, and photograph each side of each sheet of paper, in turn, without anyone's knowing it. Right through the briefcase, if need be. You can build that kind of machine into a wall, or a picture on that wall, or into almost anything, with the photographic head built into a man's finger." He reached into his breast pocket and took out the photostat Paulette had put on top of the stack. "Yours, Mr. Keller?"

Keller took it in shaky fingers and looked at it. "This is really too bad," he whispered. "Really too bad."

"Oh, I don't know," Hertzog said. He turned to Bannister. "That's an escrow agreement between Mr. Keller as a private party and the zeppelin freighting company. I wondered whether he'd dare trust it to a safe deposit box, and it turned out he didn't. It calls for a payment of one hundred thousand dollars—and here I'm quoting exactly—'upon the occasion of interruption in Atlantis-Mainland tube service for a period beginning midnight, July 14th.' It's in the nature of a bet. Mr. Keller has wagered that such an interruption will occur, and the zeppelin company has wagered that it won't."

Bannister said: "Oh?"

"Quite. Hoke, if you'll be good enough to peep into Mr. Keller's satchel, there, I'm confident you'll find what we might call an infernal machine."

"Sorry," Keller whispered, shrunken into his seat, his blue lips barely moving. "I'm sorry."

"Cheer up, Mr. Keller," Hertzog said. He stood up and unscrewed the bulb of the lamp over their three chairs, and replaced it with a sock adaptor. From another pocket, he took a personal intercom and plugged the antenna into the socket. He dialed a telephone number. "Mr. Traven please. Frank Hertzog calling. Wake him up." He waited, grinning at the other passengers in the compartment, while Bannister, with respectfully raised eyebrows, dismantled Mr. Keller's time bomb.

"Traven? I want the tubes shut down for repairs. That's right. Twenty-four hours from this midnight. Service and repair. Uh-huh. Vitally necessary. Results will be improved service. Yes, siree. And while you're ordering that service, have 'em put in a platform watchman at the siding station, and draft plans for double tracking and eliminating the siding as soon as they can. Yeah. We'll chip in, sure. Thank you. G'night, Traven."

He unplugged the intercom and replaced the bulb. Handing the intercom and adaptor to Keller, he said: "All ITI employees carry these. Here's yours. Good for anywhere in the world, out in the open, and any electrical connection to Atlantis underground or under water."

"You...you're not going to—"

"Take revenge? On you? You were only the Zep company's tool. You can make the agreement stand up in court. Collect your hundred thousand from them. *They're* the guys I want to jolt."

"Oh."

"Time bomb, all right," Bannister said. "Set to go off at midnight."

"Uh-huh. You know what this means, Hoke, with the tube shut down for the next day?"

"What?"

"It means we're going to have to fly back."

"Very simple business," Hertzog explained, his feet up on one end of his living room couch. "The Zep boys had to use a man who knew the tube and habitually rode it. Keller filled their bill. But he was a company man, so he told his bosses. The bosses (A) didn't like Atlantis or Atlanteans any more than any other Main-

land business did, before we changed city governments, and (B) were greedy to get me to pay for one more shipment, which they knew they couldn't deliver because the tube would be blown up. With the tube gone, Atlantis wouldn't have swung any weight with Mainland courts. I could have tried to sue for my money and never gotten within a mile of it.

"Now, Keller was figuring on the long view. He had this hundred thousand in escrow, which looked like a sure thing to his fussy mind, and he probably would have gotten a little more for delivering his company's business to the zeppelin line. Then there was his commission on the liquor sale, and his extra commission for making a sale on which there wouldn't have to be a delivery. A little bit from everybody, you might say.

"But—he came up here and told me that cock and bull story, and told me too much. He even told me when the bomb would go off—just safely after the last night train from Atlantis pulled into Basle. Well, that was a little too much. He tried to get too many things out of too many people, and he fell on his face. We were able to scrag him. Greed, Hoke, is not a useful emotion in a man who wants to make money."

"He made a hundred thousand."

"Hm-m-m...no, he didn't make it. That's going to be his trouble. He didn't earn it. He's the incompetent type that couldn't earn it in any way—not even a crooked way.

"And, of course, he and his money will be soon parted. Employers who pay large sums to have violent things done—say the order of destroying a major transportation system—are of precisely the mental type to see that the incompetent employee does not enjoy his money. I'm afraid I don't have quite the right kind of psychology to give our little Mr. Keller what he did verily earn.

"Which reminds me...we're in the wholesale liquor business. When I found out Keller's bosses knew about his little extracurricular scheme, I got so mad I bought 'em out. A management like that ought to be shot—permitting a thirty thousand gross profit to make 'em blow the gaff on millions more! People like that—" Hertzog shook his head. "No sense of responsibility."

"So that's how Keller's an ITI employee," Bannister said, opening a bottle. "Through the liquor house. I was wondering, when you gave him the intercom."

Hertzog smiled gently, ruminatively. "Technically, that's the answer. Privately...well, I expect to hear, via that intercom, just precisely how Keller and his unearned increment are separated. I think he'll make a plaintive noise about it."

PW

SUCCESS

The ashes of lilies
Scorched by starship exhaust
Powdered our hair.
We went from the field, weeping:
Blossom, stem, and leaf of youth,
Unknowing, uncaring, lost,
Far in our future.

-- Catherine Mintz

Tom Piccirilli's first novel, *Dark Father*, was published in the U.S. by Pocket Books and went on to become a bestseller in Italy. *Pentacle* has met with wide critical acclaim while *Hexes* is due out in hardback in Italy next year. His dark mystery novel *Shards* will see a Hardcover U.S. print in early '97. Recent short fiction sales include *Hot Blood 6&7*, *Deathrealm*, *Silver Web*, and many others.

Meester

Smeets

PYNCH SWALLOWED HIS third scotch of the morning, turned to his assistant producer and said, "You're kidding me, right?"

Edgar sighed and hugged his clipboard to his chest. "Now you're asking me if I'm kidding. I've been calling you about this situation for more than a month, but you've been too busy scouting locations and trying to pick up every snow bunny in the Swiss Alps to listen to me—hey, uhm, don't they got the AIDS over there yet?" From what Pynch had been telling him there was at least one place on Earth where they weren't too paranoid to have a fun screw. "So listen, Marciello's girlfriend gets to play the seductive French maid. If you say no, he, well, if you're lucky he'll just pull his half million investment out. At worst, cripes, you know that crazy bastard."

"The French maid?" It took Pynch a while to remember the character: a small role from way back in the first draft of *A Feast of Angels*. "I thought we cut her completely out."

"We did. But Marciello liked the part for his girlfriend, so he had the script rewritten again."

Pynch's stomach tightened. "He did, huh."

"And, uh, it's kind of been significantly altered. She gets at least two full minutes of screen time now." Edgar checked his clipboard, turning pages. "You know the scene where Smith and his lady go to the little church in Tiajuana for Christmas, to pray for good weather for the starving Mexican farmers? Uhm, ah, now they do Easter at St. Pat's to ask God to help little Mikey after he got hit by a bus on Eighth Avenue."

"Who?"

"Little Mikey. Marciello's got a grandson, ten-years-old, wants to do a hospital bed death scene."

BY TOM PICCIRILLI

Illustrated by Darren Cerone

Hooray for Hollywood!

"Oh Christ."

"Marciello's hoping to get a cameo from Cardinal O'Connor, too. He hates all the micks, but, you know, it's the Cardinal."

Pouring himself another scotch, Pynch gave Edgar that slow, lethal glare that expressed how disappointed he was that his as-

sistant producer had not handled the situation much better in his absence.

Edgar wasn't taking any of it though, and held the clipboard up and out now, aggressively, like he was getting ready to swing a hatchet. "Hey, I told him yes 'cause I figured he'd just stab you in the head if I said no, okay? You really want to argue about it?"

"Refresh my memory here," Pynch said. "This girlfriend of his—"

"Carmella."

"Yeah, with the mustache, right? Or did he get a new one?"

"No, no, the one with the mustache."

Pynch remembered her from a big set party the night before he left for Switzerland; Marciello waltzing her around, singing Italian songs, fondling her at the end of the diving board. He suppressed a shudder. "And the really squeaky voice, and big black mole that takes up half her forehead? Who got off the boat like six months ago and can barely speak English?"

"Yeah, her."

The part, as Pynch remembered it from the first draft, called for a luscious maid to try to seduce the socially conscious, working class everyman hero Christopher Smith. "We changed Smith from a real estate mogul with political aspirations to some schlep of an accountant. Why in the hell would an accountant have a French maid?"

"He's a very well-to-do accountant now," Edgar said.

Pynch tried thinking about the pudgy Carmella dressed in the slinky maid outfit, the little white hat hidden in her kinky hair, saying in grating broken English, 'I'm 'a from Phila-del-fia. I'm 'a so lonely here in Cal-i-fornia, Meester Smeets', and licking her lips with a dark, slug-like tongue, giving a sexy come-hither



squint straight into the camera. Agh. Aw man, how that mole would look under the lights in close-up, like it weighed three pounds, alive and crawling.

Pynch winced and said, "Edgar, where's that psycho son of a bitch live again? You got it written anyplace on that freakin' clipboard?"

Pynch knew that the director, Jimmy Hale—who expected him to handle every trouble along these lines—was not going to be happy with this new turn of events. He didn't know how to tell Jimmy that Marciello was rewriting the script, casting his own people, throwing in the Cardinal, all of that. Jimmy was way too busy dealing with his own personal problems: namely the fact that the cops were just about to figure out he'd had his sister killed for her inheritance, in order to finish off his last action flick Rearing Hell, the one that finally made him a star.

Pynch stood out in the hall looking at Jimmy's redheaded secretary—Felicity, Chastity, something like that—thinking about how *she* would have made a perfect French maid. She had those nice juicy lips she always kept wet with Vaseline, beautifully-sized chest out to here, legs that topped off at her neck, always wearing black pumps.

He cleared his throat and said, "He in?"

She leaned forward in her seat and spoke quietly—an act of conspiracy—waving her freshly painted fingernails in the air, softly cracking gum. "Yeah," she whispered. "With the police."

"How long they been here?"

"Fifteen minutes."

Good. That meant they weren't arresting him. Just asking more questions. Pynch sat and wondered what Jimmy would do, how he would approach Marciello, exactly what he would say. Jimmy had a real genius when dealing with people. He was as good with the serious players as the actors and crew, with women and the police, with just about everybody except his sister. She'd been too much like him. Pynch found himself miss-

ing her a little now and again.

When the cops finally left they didn't even glance at Pynch. He got up and walked into the office.

Jimmy Hale, who was always cool and still looked calm even after facing off with the police again, said, "I heard you got a lot of action."

"You too. So what have they got?"

A non-committal shrug. "Nothing. You just witnessed the death throes of their investigation."

"Good. But we've got a problem with Marciello."

Jimmy froze, took a slow deep breath, and gave the same killer glare at Pynch that Pynch had given Edgar. Jimmy was much better at it, and Pynch didn't even have a clipboard to defend himself with. "How's it go?"

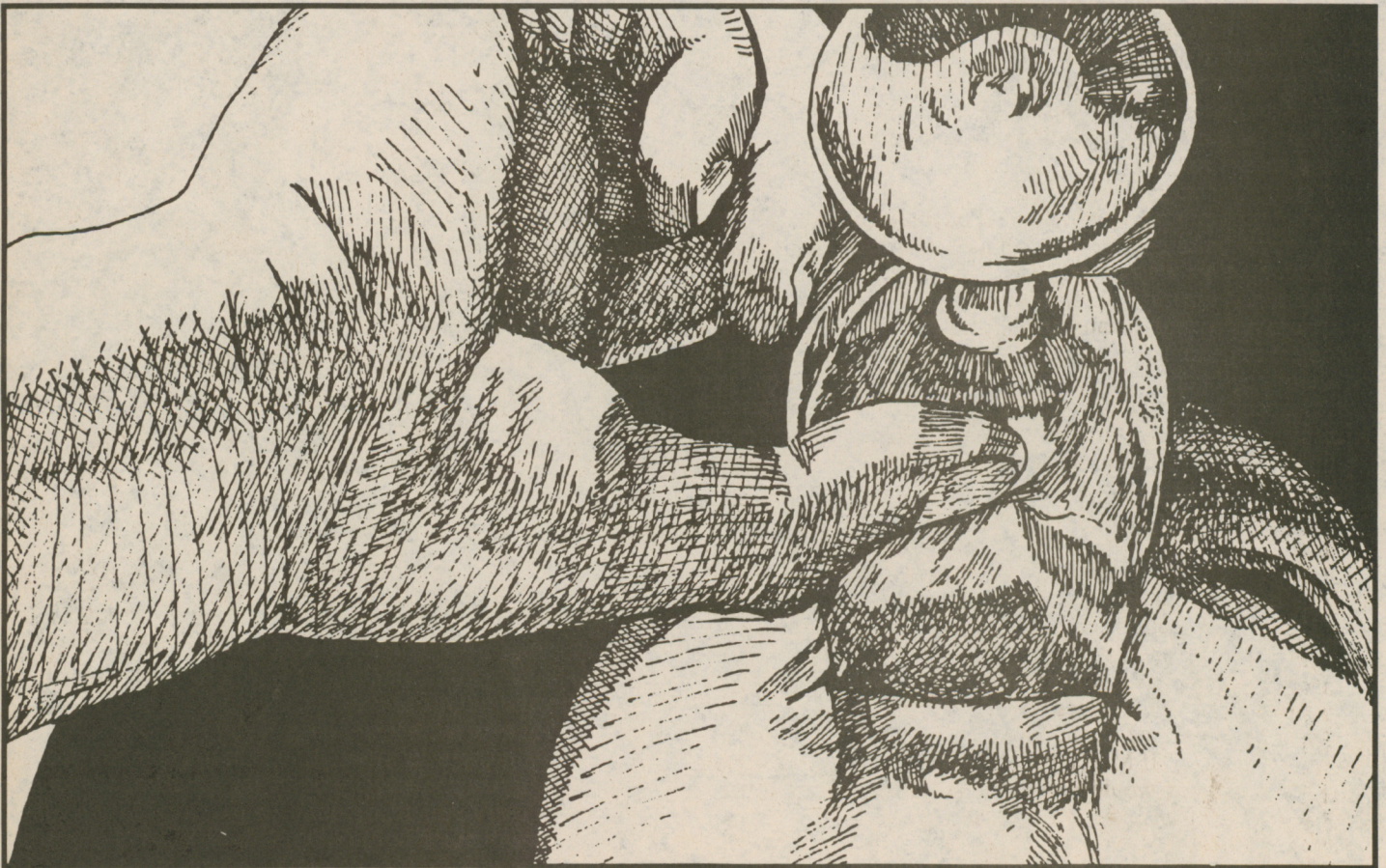
"It goes like this..." Pynch began, and after he'd laid it all out—the Cardinal, the accountant, the mole, and the out of control bus on Eighth Avenue—Jimmy leaned back and said, "You're kidding me, right?" He made lots of slow, angry gestures with his hands. "Okay, listen. I don't want to hear this. Take care of it."

"Me?" Pynch said. His voice cracked the word in half.

"You. Who else?"

Pynch felt the cool slide of sweat form on his upper lip. "I should do this? I got his address right here. I thought maybe you could go over there, smooth everything with him."

"What? You expect me to take care of *your* silent partner 'cause he's decided to throw his mutt of a woman at *my* camera. You seen her, right? You remember that act they pulled on the diving board? Turned everybody's stomach. Jesus, I'll give her a walk on, a few lines maybe, keep her in the background behind a plant or something, but he wants two minutes?" When Jimmy Hale was infuriated he spoke with a nice, humorous lilt, the kind that distracted people and made them think that things weren't so bad. Pynch did not like the lilt, and remembered Jimmy's sister warning him to watch out for it. "He's rewriting my script,



throwing in his own scenes, going behind my back after all the shit I've gone through, that I've done to make this picture mine? Uh nuh."

"But Jimmy, I don't know how to handle guys like Marciello. I mean he's the head of his own outfit, you know, crazy bastard likes to play with knives, always cutting himself slices of fruit and cheese and sausage. I heard he likes to take off guys' ears too, no shit. Sometimes he throws them in the fire and sometimes he just hands them back so, if the guy's lucky, he can get it sewn back on. I mean...."

Jimmy smiled.

Good Christ. It was the whitest, most friendly and perfect smile of all time.

Pynch got the hell out of there.

He pulled up in front of Marciello's place expecting to see at least a few soldiers surrounding the front door, maybe a tomato garden in the back yard like the one Brando keeled over in at the end of *The Godfather*. Instead, Marciello's house had that southern California Spanish look, lots of tile and cacti and stone, nobody in sight. He went to the front door and rang the bell.

Marciello answered. "Pynch, good to see you! Nobody could get you on the phone this last month. I hear you had a good time porking all those Swiss blondie skiers. You bring back any of them European pornos?"

Since he hadn't talked to anybody in a month, Pynch didn't know how everybody knew about the snow bunnies. "Forgot. Next time."

They moved into Marciello's office, where he sat behind a desk with about a hundred framed photographs on it: kids, women, brothers, uncles, sons, a lot of cracked black-and-whites from a half century ago. It looked like Marciello could send a lot of people after Pynch if he got pissed off, a bunch without necks, all of them with that insane Italian blood-bond. He wondered which was little Mikey, looking to score his death scene.

Marciello swung around in his seat. He was cutting up some pepperoni and cheese. "You hungry?"

Pynch swallowed hard, staring: a little piece of cheddar, a tiny slab of pepperoni, and a razor-sharp blade maybe a foot long. "Uh, no. Thanks."

"So what can I do for you?"

Damn Jimmy. He could have handled this like a pro, sat and out-talked Marciello and made it sound like music, and nobody would have to get mad or hurt. Pynch did not have the ability. The only reason he got laid on his vacation was because he couldn't speak the language. "It's about the film, Marciello. We've got a problem."

"Oh?"

And then the words came tumbling out of him. He sounded meaner than he meant to, more hard-ass, taking no crap. No rewriting, no Cardinal, no mustache except maybe an exterior shot behind a tree from a block away. Then he suddenly backed up, smiling, trying to make it sound like a joke between buddies, shoulder-to-shoulder, oil it up, but he didn't have the knack.

As Pynch spoke, Marciello's movements got slower and slower, like he was winding down from slicing his food, but winding up to cut into something else. "Pynch, first you take my money, and then you come into my house and lay down the law to me? I'm a major partner. You buy with my cash, you pay with my cash. I have a say on who does what in *A Feast of Angels*."

Pynch kept his eyes on the knife. He desperately wanted to hang on to his ears. If Marciello got his hands on one of them Pynch hoped the guy would hand it back, let him pack it in ice and drive off to the hospital. "You're absolutely right."

"You agree?"

"Yes."

"Then why are we having this conversation?"

Marciello took another bite of food and got up out of his seat, fast and low, the blade held lightly in his fist. Pynch slapped a palm over his left ear and cried, "Wait!"

Marciello said, "What's with you?"

And Pynch didn't know how it happened: he was so keyed-up, watching the knife, that the moment Marciello took a step toward him he sort of slung himself out of the way, in a move he hoped would be like that of a dog turning over belly up, begging for mercy. Instead he tripped and stumbled forward on the Spanish tile, moving almost directly into that knife. Marciello tried to get out of the way, a puzzled look on his face as they collided.

"Hey..."

It took nothing—not a hard lunge or a stabbing motion, Jesus, nothing, but the blade just eased through his ribs, as if no bone or muscle stood in its way. Marciello didn't make a sound as blood burst from his shirt front. He crumpled to his knees, still puzzled, kind of shaking his head, wondering what it was all about, just what in the hell had happened, and then fell over face-down with a chunk of pepperoni wadded into the side of his cheek.

Pynch said, "Oh my shit."

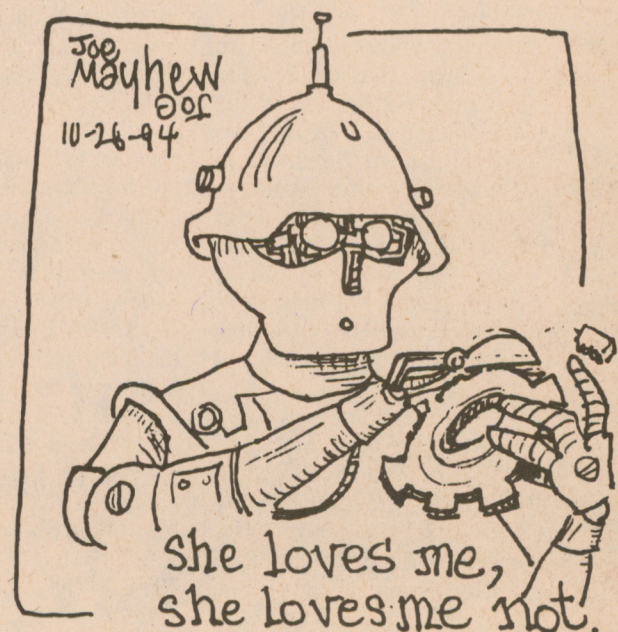
He looked down at the body of a serious player, a major investor in the flick, and watched the blood flowing free. He glanced at the framed photographs on the desk, all those family members who would be coming for him now.

As he turned to run he saw that she stood in the doorway staring at him. He said, "Hey, Carmella, now listen...listen, it was..." and soon noticed she wasn't looking at her dead lover on the floor. Instead she came towards him, gazing straight into his eyes, mugging for him like she wanted to do for the camera. The hint of a smile curled those lips, tip of a sluggy tongue sticking out of the corner, frizzy hair all poofed up, that mole staring at him too. She grinned.

He thought about it again. Jimmy had said he'd give her a few lines. Let's see. *'I'm'a from Phila-del-fia. I'm'a so lonely here in Cal-i-fornia, Meester Smeest.'*

Hell, it was only a movie.

PW



If You Could See Him Now

An Interview with: Peter Straub

Every writer, if he or she is lucky, writes a book that changes his/her life. It would seem Peter Straub has written two.

The first was *Ghost Story*, which in 1980 elevated Straub from the realm of rising star to bestselling author. The book remains a classic of horror fiction—and made Straub identifiable to millions of readers. Straub continued his success with two more horror novels, *Shadowland* and *Floating Dragon*, and then *The Talisman*, a collaboration with Stephen King. If King was the Babe Ruth of the late 1970's and early 1980's horror scene, then surely Straub was the Lou Gehrig, not quite as visible but no less productive or talented.

But even as Straub enjoyed some of his greatest success, his interest turned away from supernatural monsters...and toward real ones. His next novel was *Koko*, which deals with Vietnam, a serial killer, and the darkest reaches of the human soul. In its own way, that book marked as much of a turning point as *Ghost Story*. Not only had Straub moved away from the genre which had made him a star, but he'd reinvented himself as a writer, changing his approach and refining his work.

He followed up *Koko* with *Mystery* and *The Throat*, books with similar themes and overlapping characters, which taken together form a haphazard Blue Rose trilogy. *The Hellfire Club*, due out from Random House in January

1996, is a step away from that familiar mythology—but still rooted in the chilling world that Peter Straub calls home. In his own words, it deals with “the encrustation of lies, accepted stories thrown atop a very uncomfortable, unpleasant reality.” In more basic terms, it follows the investigation of a woman named Nora, who tries to find the real truth beneath the accepted truth.

PW: With *Koko*, what started out as a single novel blossomed into a whole mythology, with characters from that and *Mystery* coming together in *The Throat*. Do you think that you'll be compelled to return to the personalities in *The Hellfire Club* in the same way?

Straub: I don't think it's that kind of book, though there is one character who is a very, very strong character. He's a very colorful villain, almost enjoyable. He was fun to write about, tremendous fun to write his dialogue. Every now and then—all wound up—he just launches into a speech to explain the world. That was fun to do, entertaining...but he is murdered. (Laughs)

PW: Is *The Throat* definitely the last Blue Rose novel?

Straub: Probably, yeah. I think I pretty much did everything I had to do with those characters. Though it would be kind of fun to peek in on Tom Pasmore again sometime, see what he's up to, see if he's any happier these days, see what he's doing. But I think I'm pretty much done with all the Vietnam kind of material. And I'm pretty sure that I've finished with using my own life as directly as I did then.

When I was getting near the end of *The Throat*, I remember thinking it would be a lot of fun to invent other people again for a change, to immerse myself into them.

PW: So Tim Underhill, the cynical author who narrates *The Throat*, is someone you identify with?

Straub: I was certainly very fond of him, and his responses to things aren't very different from mine, I suppose.

PW: In several of your books—going back to *Ghost Story*, more recently in *The Throat*, and again in your upcoming novel—you deal with writers as central figures. Are you very introspective about the process of writing itself?

Straub: Introspective might not be the right word. I'm very interested in it, and I'm very moved by it. *The Hellfire Club* isn't about writing in the same sense that *The Throat* was, where the writing was a difficult but necessary way to drive through the deepest possible feelings. *The Hellfire Club*, in part anyhow, is about the provenance of a classic fantasy novel, which in its popularity is a sect, something like a combination of *Lord of the Flies* and a Tolkien novel in that it has a vast, devoted readership. Part of that readership, a large part, is so occupied and dominated by it that they don't ever read anything else. You know, they finish it and they go back and see yet more in their beloved book. The whole question is where did this thing come from. We think we know who wrote it...but did he?

There are questions about the manuscript, there's a publishing house that has been built really on the success of that book. But it's not so much about the act of imaginative discovery undergone during writing. Probably that kind of theme is beating away underneath because there is a kind of duplicit connection between any kind of detection or investigation and the act of writing.

PW: What is the connection?

Straub: The connection is that writing is a means of investigation. [There's] an Eric Romer film, and the central figure has a friend, a novelist, a very attractive woman who's close to him and kind of tries to give

him well-intentioned advice. And he says something about invention. And the woman says, "I don't invent, I discover." I think that's a really crucial distinction. Sometimes one invents, and that's dandy, and other times one discovers.

PW: As you've matured as a writer, do you now invent more than you discover?

Straub: On a good day. In general, I think as I became more aware of the actual depth involved in the process of imagination, I would say that this manner became more possible than ever before.

PW: You said once that in many of your books, no matter where you were writing about—the Arizona of *Shadowland*, the fictional midwestern city of *The Throat*, even the Caribbean town in *Mystery*—it was always based on Milwaukee, your hometown. In general, when writing about places, do you work from memory or do you study them?

Straub: Certainly when I was inventing a kind of more colorful, concentrated version of Milwaukee, it's all based on memory and also a desire to brighten up or darken down what I remember in order to get the kind of emotional quality, a feeling state, that I'm in. Sometimes I have visited places with the express purpose of using them in a book, and in that case I walk around with a notebook and a camera, I take pictures and I write down details. I did that before I wrote *Koko*—Singapore, Bangkok, a lot of other places I thought I might use in the book.

On the other hand, sometimes I've just decided to use a certain location that I've never seen, and then learn the street names, ask the people who know the place what sort of beer peopledrink there, what the landscape is like. The reason for doing that is a kind of gut feeling that if you invent it—as well as you can—it will be very, very close to the real thing. As long as you amalgamate a few details that you already know about a place, then you can just build on those and everything you add will tend to be right.

For example, I wrote *Ghost Story* in London. I set it in upstate New York. The only time I'd ever seen upstate New York was when I drove through it when I was sixteen years old on my way somewhere else. My essential feeling about it then was that it looked sort of like rural Wisconsin and I remembered certain landscapes. Anyhow, that was enough to go on and a friend of mine gave me kind of a thumbnail description of what a town there was like. A brother gave me a map and then I had the numbers of the highways and the

names of the roads. I could make the rest up. And afterwards a lot of people wrote to me and they told me they knew exactly where that town was.

PW: Is it the same principle for the *Blue Rose* novels, where you've written so extensively about Vietnam at a time when you weren't there, about wartime experiences you never had? Do you just research the details and fill in the blanks with imagination?

Straub: Exactly. You try to inhabit, to move emotionally into the details that you are assured of and feel your way around in there, trying to put as much imaginative clarity as possible. If it works, it works really well. If it doesn't, somebody'll write you a letter and say, 'What you said about the sound of a Huey helicopter is all wrong.' There are certain things you probably can't get exactly right.

PW: Does that bother you? Do you agonize over the details?

Straub: Well, I want to get 'em right. In that case, I did have people who were familiar with Vietnam, with combat there, to read parts of it and tell me if I'd made mistakes. My brother told me that a sentence I had written about a Huey helicopter, the sentence was something like: *You never remembered how noisy a Huey was until you got inside one.* "Now that's really wrong, what always surprised me was how quiet they were." So I had to change the sentence.

PW: Looking back, your second novel—and your first horror novel—was *Julia*, and that was from a woman's perspective. You took on several women characters in the multiple-viewpoint *Floating Dragon*. But that was published in 1983, and since then you've written almost exclusively about men—until *The Hellfire Club*, which has a female protagonist. Did you find it a serious challenge to get into a woman's character?

Straub: Yeah, I did. Because I was doing all this stuff with a real male world, with a former combat zone, there wasn't much space in the important part of the narrative for any female response or female action. I realized this about three-fourths of the way through *The Throat* but I couldn't change it. The guys in question were either more or less loners or their wives had died. So I thought it would be both a challenge and fun to try to invent a convincing female protagonist, to try to get into her mind as

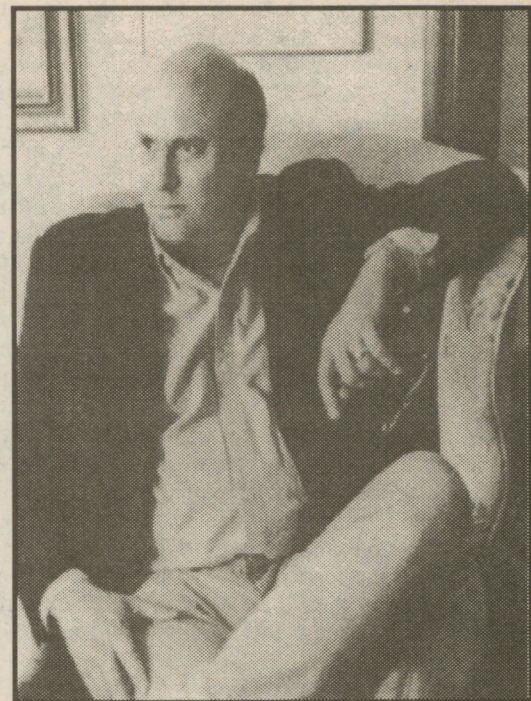


Photo by: J. Baur

thoroughly as I could. So we'll see how well that worked, whether I flubbed it or not.

When I wrote *Julia*, it never occurred to me that that might be a problem. My main character was a woman, it was a third person novel but very clearly set in her perceptions and responses. And because I never saw that as a difficulty, it wasn't difficult. I was a little more conscious that it would be difficult this time around, also because the climate between genders has changed enormously since then—so it was a greater risk. All I can say is I tried to do my best. I'm sure I got some things right and I got some things wrong.

PW: Another consideration when writing a novel, of course, is not only the gender of the character but whether to tell it in the first or third person. Obviously each book demands its own style but how do you write differently for one or the other? And do you have a preference?

Straub: I probably actually prefer first person because it's a little more comfortable and I feel freer, a little more relaxed, I can be more colloquial in first. It just flows a little more easily. The third person though has so many more advantages that it's just generally advisable because you can go everywhere and remark on all these separate details without having the protagonist or the narrator actually present or observing them. You can say things that might sound ridiculously overstated if some narrator were to bring the whole story to a halt to proclaim something or go on to draw some conclusion, whereas a third person narrator is really at ease and can have a

certain directness and authority when it comes out of the skies, whereas if *I* is telling you, it's liable to sound kind of pompous.

PW: *But on the other hand, you use that to your advantage in If You Could See Me Now, where the narrator seems perfectly ordinary...and then slowly you realize that he may very well be insane.*

Straub: There's friend of mine, a very good crime writer, who once told me that there was no such a thing as an unreliable narrator. If a first person narrator tells you the weather is lousy, you *believe* that the weather is lousy. I think he's overlooked a lot. Part of the fun is that the woman or the man speaking directly to the page just might not be getting it all. He might be misreading people and their motives. If you can allow the reader to see how he's misreading them, then there's something very interesting at play.

PW: *You've been a professional writer for over twenty years. During the course of your career, how has your approach to writing changed?*

Straub: As I went along, I began to trust myself more. I became easier with kind of not knowing where things were going, with trusting that a steady accumulation of detail suggests a path. Because even in most of my earlier books, even though I had set

up a sort of outline and thought I knew about the connections between people and events, I was always surprised by a little thunderbolt or thunderbolts that revealed the real motives and connected matters in a more immediate and electric way than I had foreseen. These connections were *built-in*. They were here all along but I hadn't seen them.

It seemed to me that these discoveries were part of the process. That meant that I trust the impulses that suggested me to turn corners or go underground, wander out of one neighborhood and into another. Because I felt like if I really felt like doing that, there was something there that would be of use—and in fact, that would be essential.

The way I began operating after I'd written four or five novels became less linear and I began stacking up events from different time periods in a way that I would not have quite dared earlier. But when you do that, you immediately make things longer.

PW: *So now it was important not to know just what the characters were doing now, but what they had already done?*

Straub: Uh huh. What their real emotional backgrounds were. What the decisive elements in their lives had been. But also, to trust that when one major character is off doing something that I am pretty sure is

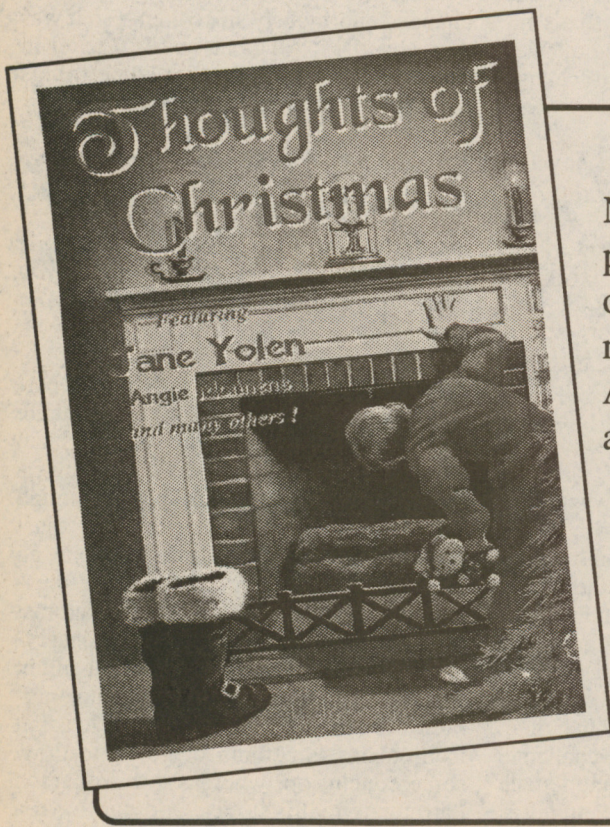
an essential part of the final book, everything that character is doing is going to connect to another character, one I may not even know about. Even though I may not know anything about that at the time. So there's a sort of more exploratory cast to the whole act, the whole process is thrown over in a way that would've frightened me—and still does, but not sufficiently to paralyze me.

PW: *You've written a lot of fantasy for other people, but I want you to imagine a fantasy for yourself. What if you could be something besides a writer, independent of whatever talents or skills you might not possess? What would you want to be?*

Straub: The greatest possibility would be a very talented jazz musician because of the spontaneity, the intense immediacy of the creative act. Now unfortunately, I know too many jazz musicians. It's a terribly difficult life. I don't like traveling very much and these guys, heroic as they are, spend most of their lives sitting in planes. What they do is very beautiful, and I'd like to take a portion of that act...so I'm not too sure.

Maybe if I could be a really good carpenter, take a steady sustained pleasure in making things really well with my hands that other people could live in. I'd be very pleased by that.

PW



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Harrison (Buddy) Howe hails from Hawthorne, New Jersey. "At the Mirror of His Soul" is Harrison's second short story sale. His first, "The Screech", appeared in the Spring 1993 issue of *Haunts*.

Vietnam...a war over for some, just beginning for others.

AT THE MIRROR OF HIS SOUL

BY HARRISON HOWE

Illustrated by Bob E. Hobbs

IT TOOK ALMOST AN HOUR, BUT RED FINALLY FOUND HIS BROTHER'S NAME. He knelt and ran his fingers over the name etched in the black granite of the Wall; doing so seemed to spark a thousand memories. Racing on bikes over to the Dairy Queen on hot summer days, Daniel's shirt tied around his waist and flapping at his back like a cape; sledding down Arrowdale Hill, and the time Daniel had dared him to go down head-first and there was never a dare given him that Red could not take and he'd wound up with eight stitches in his face; Daniel sneaking home drunk on the night of his high-school graduation and Red helping him upstairs, quiet so Mom and Dad wouldn't hear, Daniel puking down the front of his shirt and Red having to clean it up; Daniel bent over the engine of that old '57 Chevy he'd spent almost his entire savings account on, his bare broad back sweaty and sunburn peeling on his shoulders, asking Red to hand him that wrench, or that screwdriver, or to go sit behind the wheel and give it a rev.

He'd begun to dream of Daniel again.

"I finally got the balls to come, Dan," he said, his voice odd and very loud. It was quiet here today; he had come down yesterday, Memorial Day, but there had been hundreds—maybe thousands—of people crowding the place (he had, in fact, been lucky to get a hotel room just a few miles away), weeping over names and placing flowers, standing shoulder-to-shoulder to listen to the President speak from the platform about two hundred yards from where Red now stood. There were several workers at the moment busy dismantling that platform, the sound of their hammers and crowbars riding the breeze and settling like off-beat music on his ears.

He had tried to push his way through all those people, to get close to the Wall, but the sight of all those old soldiers sobbing over their fallen comrades had forced him away; men in wheelchairs caressing the names in much the same way he was doing now, tears streaming through beard stubble of men who back then had been nothing more than armed boys smoking pot. It had been too much. He had given up fighting the crowd and had gone back to his hotel room, listened to the sounds of the parade and slept for a few hours, drinking himself into a stupor; awakening at ten this morning and dragging himself, bleary-eyed and cloudy-minded, to this spot.

He could see himself reflected in the shiny black granite of the Vietnam Memorial, a hunched shadowy mimic. For a moment it seemed that something moved there, deep in the rock, as if someone had passed by behind him, but when he turned there was nothing there. Just the workers, taking apart the stage, and behind them the Monument rising like a rocket poised for take-off.

You don't belong here, he told himself, turning back to face his brother's name. Pfc. Daniel Floyd Sommers. A cool breeze—about fifteen degrees cooler than normal for this time of year, he had heard the weatherman tell him from some guy's portable radio on the bus—drifted through his thinning hair, tugged playfully at his clothes. Far off he could see a man dragging a plastic garbage pail, picking up the debris from the Memorial Day festivities. The ground was littered with greasy hot-dog wrappers and napkins and soda cans and those tiny flags glued to toothpicks, a buck for one from the guy with the limp wearing a veteran's cap and a carnation in the lapel of his ill-fitting uniform.

You don't belong here and you know it.

He had been telling himself that for the past few weeks, soon after making the decision to come. Had been telling himself repeatedly on the bus ride down here, five hours of dozing in and out of restless, haunted sleep. Had, in fact, been telling himself that for the past thirteen years, since the Memorial's dedication in 1982.

The breeze made shadows waver across the Wall, and again it seemed as if there was movement behind his reflection, for a moment it *seemed* that his shadow-twin might have even moved of its own accord, a tiny nod of the head, but there had been much beer consumed just ten hours ago and his head was still reverberating with the hammering echoes of a hangover.

His jangled nerves ached for a butt, but he'd smoked his last when he awoke and hadn't had enough to buy a pack at the bus station. He thought about running away again, catching the bus back to his hotel room, packing his meager belongings and getting the hell out of town. Christ, he had come farther than he ever thought he could. Wasn't that enough?

Not even the ghosts rustling in the back of his mind offered an answer.

He sighed; thought: You don't belong here and you know it. "But I came anyhow," he said aloud. "Cause...." Because why? It was expected of him, perhaps? Yeah. That was a good reason; good as any. The only reason, his tired mind quickly offered. Quit bullshittin' yourself. You've been doin' that too long.

Okay. Because it was expected of him.

Red remembered Daniel using those words, just three days before he went away. Those very same words that seemed to sum up Daniel's very existence. What was expected of him.

He remembered walking in the woods that stretched for miles behind their house, the woods that had been the scene of countless childhood battlegrounds, sticks for rifles and pine cones for hand grenades and handkerchiefs tied to broomsticks for flags. Where the dead got up and went in for lunch when Mother called, to return later to resume the battle with peanut butter and jelly smeared on their faces.

Daniel walked beside him, feet crunching dead leaves. He's going, Red thought; he's really going. Back at the house his things were packed and waiting. He's going because it's expected of him, because Daniel was always doing as he was told, doing what was right, eating his veggies and cleaning his room and getting A's on his report card and going to Vietnam. It was one of the things that Red, though he would never admit it in a million years, looked up to him for.

"You're really going?" he asked, for the umpteenth time. Just two years younger than Daniel's eighteen, he sounded to himself like a six-year-old, full of annoying, curious questions. He had to near-jog to keep up with Daniel's long-legged stride.

"Of course I'm goin'," Daniel said without a trace of annoy-

ance in his tone, rather with more than a little boasting proudness, as if the question had never been put to him before. "Where else would I go? Run up to Canada like so many other wussies are doin'?" No way. This is my country, Red, and they're callin' me. It's my duty, and if this is what they want me to do then...well, I'm gonna do it. It's expected of me."

"I'm scared, Danny," Red said, and he could feel the tears, uncustomary and hot, behind his eyes, and somehow he held them back. It wasn't cool to be sixteen and to let your brother see you cry.

But to his surprise Daniel put an arm around his shoulders; at any other time in his life Red would have thought this a sissy thing, and probably would have hauled off and punched Daniel out for doing it (he was younger and smaller but he could take Daniel on, and knew that Daniel knew it), but at that moment, with the cool October sun falling through the naked trees and dead leaves crackling under their feet and the realization that Daniel was going away and maybe never coming back settling like a coffin lid over his heart, it was okay. Oddly comforting, even.

"I'm scared, too, Red. But I'm doing what I have to do. And if this thing, this war or police action or whatever the hell they're calling it, is still going on in another year or two, and your number comes up like mine has, I know you're going to do what's expected of you, too, scared or not. Right?"

"Right," Red echoed, and they went on up the path that led to their back yard, and passed through the gate and across the yard and entered the kitchen just as Mom, red-eyed and sniffing, was putting dinner on the table, and three days later Daniel boarded a bus in the pouring rain that would take him to boot camp in Georgia, and ten months later would board a helicopter that would crash some thirty miles outside of Saigon and leave no survivors.

Remembering this, as he had remembered it every day for the past three decades, brought tears to Red's eyes, the same as there'd been on that cool sunny October afternoon, but then he had not let them fall because it was not cool to be sixteen and have your older brother watch you cry, but it was thirty years later, and if it wasn't cool for a forty-six year old man to cry in front of the name of a dead brother whose memory he had done nothing to honor, he simply didn't give a damn.

He bowed his head and let them fall.

When he was done, just dry hitching sobs in his chest, he lifted his head. Saw himself, as before, reflected in the shiny granite. What he could no longer see was anything else reflected there; he should have been able to see the Monument, far off, and those workers, but there was only a darkness there now, and what looked to be stars scattered across it, and maybe the hint of trees and bushes and....

You think you're going looney tunes here, don't you?

He raised a hand and wiped heavily at his wet face.

His reflection did not.

"Right here."

Red jumped, stood quickly, knees wrecked from high school football popping faintly. His reflection—if indeed it was that, and he was quickly beginning to doubt this though no logical alternatives came to mind—remained kneeling, leaning on what looked to be a cane. What this figure might be he could not contemplate, at least not with this interruption. He turned and looked at the man beside him, at the shameless tears on his bearded cheeks, at the braided ponytail that fell to the man's mid-back. At the Marines tattoo on his bare arm.

Red said, "Excuse me?" and immediately wished he hadn't. Wished he had ignored the man and let him wander away. He glanced down at the kneeling shadow in the Wall; there were other things to confront. Behind that apparition, there were other shadows stirring. And a scene now was taking shape; a jungle land-

scape. Sounds, too, as distant as the sound of the workers' tools; a disturbing symphony of gunfire and helicopters.

"This one," the man said, pointing down, and for a moment Red was sure the man was indicating that ghostly figure. But it was just one of the many names the man was referring to. The scene in the Wall was becoming more vivid, and the thousands of names starting to fade away. Red had to squint now to read them.

"He was my buddy," the man went on. The tears continued to fall but he seemed oblivious to them. His words came at Red in a mixture of stale whiskey and bad breath. "We were out on patrol about thirty miles or so outside of Da Nang when the gooks hit us. Hard. I mean, I ain't never heard so much screamin' in my life."

Red wanted to say something in the ensuing pause to make the man stop, to make him shut up and walk away, but could find neither the words nor the courage. He was afraid now that if he tried to speak he might very well scream.

"They took out nearly half of us in fifteen minutes. Eighty guys in fif...fifteen minutes." There was hatred in his voice, and pain, too, but coupled with that was a sort of awe; a strange respect for the abilities of the Unseen Enemy, an admiration that had not diminished in the course of time. "Mikey there went down right next to me. I tried to help him but...but the bullet had taken out...shit, it had taken out his heart, man, and I remember...Jesus...." He wiped stubbornly at the burning tears. Took a deep shaky breath and plunged on: "He looked right at me and he said, 'I've been killed, Kenny.' Just like that. And that was it. He hadn't been in no more'n four, five months, and his eyes rolled up and he...ah, screw it!"

Red stood uncomfortably by while the man choked back sobs; stared down at his dirty sneakers and the mustard-smearing hot dog wrappers. He would not let his eyes wander to that somber, staring specter that hung there in the Wall, would not allow his sight to gaze beyond that figure, at the other specters assembling there. Christ, didn't this guy see anything?

When the man had quieted a bit, Red asked: "Are you okay?" and was surprised at the calmness in his tone. Was this what it was like to go mad? Just an easy, seamless transition from sanity to lunacy?

"Yeah. Shit. Yeah, I'm okay." He looked over at Red with tired, bleary eyes, wiping at the last of the tears. "I tried to get down here yesterday, you know, but I couldn't get near the place. The traffic was backed up for friggin' miles. Couldn't even get a room, but I couldn't come all the way here without stoppin' to see Mikey, so I slept in my car an' got here as early as I could."

Red, feeling somewhat guilty at having spent the night on a queen-sized bed, said, "I know what you mean," and thought he sounded like a jerk.

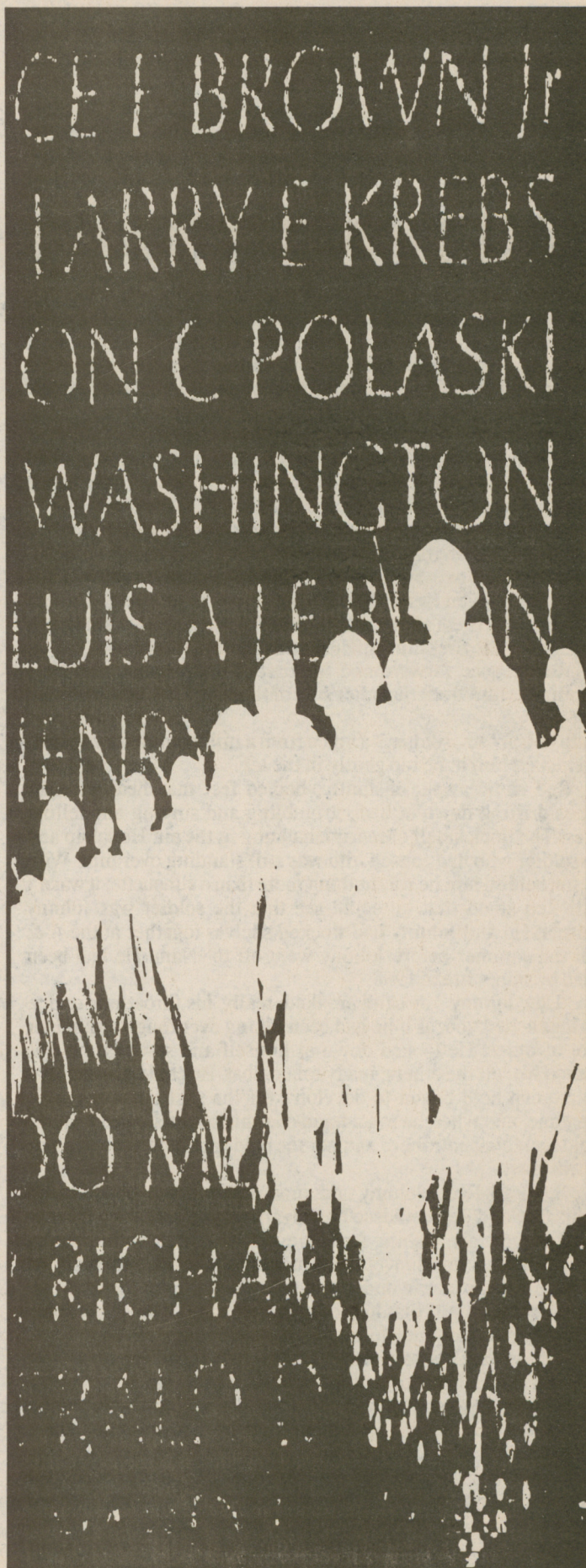
"How 'bout you, guy? You okay? Seen your buddies?"
Man, you really do not want to know what I'm seeing here, he thought, then said tonelessly, "I'm okay."

The man looked away, at the long, long row of names, and said, "Ain't none of us ever gonna be okay again, buddy."

Red did not answer; hoping that his silence would deter further conversation though he knew truer words might never have been spoken. But the man was persistent, desperate to share his heartache.

"How long you over there?"
Red took a deep breath; so deep it hurt his lungs. A thousand lies, most of them used in answer to similar questions over the years, passed through his mind. But that was one of the reasons he was here, wasn't it? To exorcize the demons. Besides, that damned spirit was there, staring up at him with jury eyes, and it was beginning to become apparent to him that in some way he was being judged here. As he exhaled he said in a rush of air, "I wasn't."

This time it was the man who said nothing, and that was the worst. Red might have felt better if he had screamed, cursed, even



slugged him. But he did none of those things. Just stood there, brooding, a darkness slipping over his face like a mask. Then he said, very calmly, "Then I guess some of us were luckier than the rest of us."

He walked away then, limping noticeably, leaving Red alone once more, alone with that thing that had been masquerading as his reflection. He forced himself to stare at it now, and it stared back, finding nothing but guilt in the bowed head and slouched shoulders.

The apparition in the Wall stood and Red could see it more clearly now; could see that it was clad in Army fatigues. What he had thought earlier to be a cane was a rifle, which the figure now slung over one shoulder. Its face was lost in the shadows that crept out from beneath its camouflaged helmet.

Then there was more of them, appearing as if out of a mist behind the first; spectral soldiers marching toward him. Beyond them stretched the thick humid impenetrable jungle, the way the background always looked in so many of those snapshots Daniel had sent home along with those short, bitter letters.

The first soldier held out a hand toward him. The others had reached the Wall and now did the same; dozens of pale hands beckoning him forward. Spectral mimes.

"Jesus," Red whispered; it was eerily silent now, and much cooler. He realized that he was alone; the workers had gone, nothing but a pile of two-by-fours left behind, as had the man with the garbage can. Even Kenny had left, grief and anger spent. The sun had gone with them all; cold shadows creeping like dark snakes on the ground, the first hints of dusk drifting into the sky.

Red stepped forward and the first of many hands that were groping for him from the other side of the Wall took hold of him.

"Up and at 'em, soldier," a voice from a million miles away said, and kicked him none too gently in the leg.

Red came awake instantly; booted feet marched by, other voices drifting down at him, grumbling and singing and telling jokes. The thick smell of marijuana hung in the air. He sat up and the soldier who had roused him was still standing over him. With the sun behind him he was nothing more than a silhouette; it wasn't until Red stood that he could see that the soldier was Johnny Meitner. He and Johnny had stocked shelves together at the A & P in the summer before Johnny went off to 'Nam. He had been killed by sniper fire in 1968.

"Hey, Johnny," he said; croaked, really, his throat was so dry. His legs ached, too, as if he had been hiking over rough ground for a lot of miles. He looked down at himself and saw that he was dressed like all the others; ready for combat. He could also see that the paunch he'd begun to develop over the past ten years or so was gone, and when he ran a hand over his sweat-soaked head he could feel thick hair there and not the bald spot he'd sported since he was forty.

"Let's go, Red," Johnny said; most of the shadows had slipped off his face and Red could see him clearly now. Pale, much thinner than Red remembered him. And his eyes...hollow. Red remembered Johnny having mischievous, animated eyes, eyes that sparkled with life and humor, wonder and excitement; eyes that danced. Class clown. But all that humor now was gone. It was as if some burglar had broken into Johnny's body and stolen his soul.

"Oh, Johnny," he said softly, thinking: This could have been me. And on the heels of that: Should have been me.

He wanted to say he was sorry, but the others were standing around now, gear packed and rifles dangling in tired hands. There was Ollie Purcell, his next-door neighbor, MIA since '69; Joey Heppler, the class valedictorian whose draft card had arrived days before his acceptance letter to Boston University, who had stepped on a land mine on his first day in the jungle; behind him, Arnie Houghton, the kid Red had cheated off of during history finals of

his senior year, killed in a jeep accident just two weeks before he was to return home.

He felt afraid, then, a knot of fear coiled in his gut. His head swam; in his mind he was still forty-six, with all the pain and guilt and regret that he'd carried for most of it, and yet he was also eighteen, young and naive and scared. But in a strange sort of way it was right that he was here. It was payback.

Far off there was an explosion, followed by a succession of other, louder ones; the reverberations rumbled in his gut. Far beyond where he stood the jungle burned.

And they were marching now; bedrolls heavy on their backs, rifles now clutched in two sweaty hands and pointed at the brush rather than at the ground. Red took a last glance back and thought for a moment that he could see the Wall, and beyond it; at the littered ground and the President's dismantled platform and the Washington Monument pointing majestically at the clear blue sky. Then sweat trickled into his eyes and after he had wiped it away the Wall was gone; nothing but jungle at his back.

And all the king's horses, and all the king's men, he thought, but there was not a trace of nostalgia there. It was time to make things right.

Red turned, started to say something to Johnny.

But Johnny was gone. Everyone was gone. Ollie and Joey and Arnie—all gone. Just one soldier remained, about fifteen yards ahead of him, an ethereal figure in the mist.

"Daniel," Red said. The figure stopped.

There was gunfire now, to join in with the bombs. And helicopters, too, rustling the tops of the trees, jerking the clothes on his back. Dust swirled, dirt pelting his cheeks. Far off, shouts of warning and screams of pain.

His brother turned around.

And despite the uncanny weight of the gear on his back and the rifle in his hands, despite the blown dust in his eyes and the ache in the trembling muscles of his thighs, Red somehow found the strength to run up to join him.

PW

THE TAPESTRY OF TIME

This is not an illusion, a glimmering light
of ancient memory, flickering fireflies,
in the prism of my mind's eye,
colored, silk threads, bolts of leftovers,
remnants in the lavender fabric of time.
This isn't cell multiplication, genetic recall,
DNA, strands of sparkling, memory fibers,
handed down to the next generation,
bringing me closer to your childhood,
in the wildflowered moors of yesterday.

Impressions of your aura, envelop me;
rainbows of warmth radiate your love.
Spiritual cobblestones of your youth,
weave me in a checkered pattern,
backwards, forwards, in time's tapestry,
toward the brick house you were born in.
I see the images through your angel eyes,
guided by your gentle wings on my shoulders.

-- Lorraine Millings

Short-Short Section

She was there again, the woman, as I passed the reception room on my way to inspect the guard. This was the third day she had sat there, disregarded and uncomplaining. I paused and spoke to her from the doorway.

"Mistress, my lord Fabien sees no one."

Cages

by Cherith Baldry

She gave me a level look.

"It would be better for him to see me."

She was small and slender, with dull brown hair neatly braided around her head. Her gown and cloak were grey. On the table beside her stood a birdcage, shrouded in a black shawl. Her voice was composed, even polite, but I felt my stomach twist as if she had uttered a threat, and had the power to make it good.

"Are you a healer, mistress?" I asked. "Fabien has no more patience with healers." She shook her head.

"I might bring him something better than healing." She smiled coldly and added, "He would see me if you asked him, Captain."

My rank she could have guessed from my uniform, but how could she have known that I had any influence with Fabien?

"I have my duties, mistress," I replied. "You would save yourself much trouble

if you went home."

I left her; she spoke again as I retreated.

"He will see me. He will see me when all other hope is gone."

That night, on my final round of the sentries, I was crossing the courtyard in front

of the great hall. The doors were wide open; light and music splashed into the portico, but the courtyard itself remained dark and silent. I was half-way across it when I heard Fabien's voice calling my name.

I halted, stiffened, and turned. He was standing at the top

of the steps, in front of the main door. Lamplight gilded his hair and turned his golden robe to a river of liquid flame. He rested one hand against a pillar, in the other he held a cup.

"Marc," he repeated. "Come and drink with me."

I remained where I was. "I'm on duty, my lord," I said. Fabien shrugged petulantly.

"Duty! You're always so conscientious, Marc."

Standing still, he was all poised grace, but when he took a step forward, he became awkward, his crippled foot dragging behind him. Off balance, he swayed at the top of the steps, and dropped the cup, which rang on the stone and echoed the sound of its own falling as it rolled from step to step, trailing spilt wine. I sprang past it and steadied Fabien with a hand under his arm.

Fabien clutched at me, jeweled fingers

hooked into the folds of my cloak. His face was flushed, his eyes glazed, and I caught a faint scent of ambergris from his hair.

"You've been burning haze again," I said.

Fabien twisted away, averting his face. He had given me his word, but I knew by now what that was worth.

"Only a little," he said. "It dulls the pain, Marc. There's no harm in it."

"If you think that," I told him, "you must be stupid. Go on like this, and in five years you'll be dead, or such a wreck that you'll wish you were dead."

I watched the golden figure turn slowly. Fabien reached out one hand, a pleading gesture. "Marc, come in with me. I won't touch it again, I promise, if you..."

"I told you, I'm on duty."

Fabien's head jerked up. "I could command you!"

I waited quietly. Fabien's lips parted as if he was going to speak, the imperious manner fighting with the drug, and the wine, and the hectic atmosphere of the hall behind him. Then his mouth tightened.

"Go away," he said. "Go back to your duty. You don't amuse me, Marc." He turned, and limped unsteadily back towards the lights and the music.

Much later, my rounds finished, I was returning across the courtyard. By now the hall was dark and silent; moonlight caught a gleam of gold at the bottom of one of the pillars of the portico. I mounted the steps.

Fabien was crouching there. His golden robe was crumpled, and sticky with streaks of spilt wine. As I approached and knelt beside him, he raised his head.

"Marc," he said. "Help me."

The stink of haze took me by the throat; it was on Fabien's fingers, in his hair, in the folds of his robe. His hands felt ice-

cold, but his forehead burned.

I took off my cloak, folded it around him, and hauled him upright, careful not to jar the twisted foot. Fabien moaned fretfully. I half carried him across the courtyard and back to his apartments, where I handed him over to the waiting servants. As I returned to my own room, I was haunted by the ghost of haze, the musk perfume clinging to my cloak.

I knew there was no point in visiting Fabien until the afternoon of the next day. Before that, I went to the reception room, where the woman, once again, was waiting.

Fabien was still in bed, propped on a mound of pillows, and wearing a white linen bed-gown. Dark smudges circled his eyes.

"Well, Marc," he said. "Come to scold me?"

"No, my lord. There's a woman outside, asking for you."

Fabien shifted restlessly among his pillows. "Send her away."

"I think you should see her," I said.

I hardly waited for Fabien's reluctant acquiescence before turning back to the door and ushering the woman in. Self-possessed, she dropped a curtsey.

"My name is Arminel, my lord," she said.

"What do you want?" Fabien was not bothering to hide his impatience, but Arminel was not disturbed by it.

"At present, nothing, my lord," she said. "Only that you should listen."

She set the birdcage down on a table and took off the shawl. The bird in the cage was small, grey-brown, insignificant. I am no bird-fancier; only when its song began did I realize it must be a nightingale. The liquid trilling flooded the room, and I saw the lines of weak irritation fade from Fabien's face. He looked younger, open and more vulnerable. If he had always looked like that... Then the room began to blur around me, and at last I understood. And I knew the disastrous mistake I had made.

When the song was finished; Arminel covered the cage again, and stood composedly waiting. I blinked to clear my vision.

"Will you sell the bird?" Fabien asked, his voice quivering.

She shook her head. "No, my lord, but I will stay here with it, in your court, if you invite me."

Fabien was beginning to reply; I interrupted, knowing what the reply would be.

"Wait." Courteously, bowing a little, I motioned Arminel to the door. "If you would let us discuss this alone, mistress..."

She gave a thin smile, took up the cage and went out. I closed the door behind her.

"Now," I said to Fabien, "what did you see?"

Fabien was staring up at me. "Marc, what..."

I had to have the truth out of him, with no evasions. "What did you see?"

Fabien hesitated, moistened his lips, and then said, "I was walking in the woods be-

low the citadel. Walking, easily, without any pain. And you were there. We swam in the pool under the waterfall. And then it faded. Marc, make her come back."

Was that what he wanted? Was that all? So innocent, and trivial, and so impossible? Slowly, I went forward and sat on the side of the bed.

"Are you sure?"

"Marc, I was well, strong, I wasn't..." He broke off as I reached forward and caught his wrist.

"Fabien, this is a worse drug than the haze. She'll enslave you to it."

"I don't care. Tell her..."

"Think, Fabien! When this becomes known—and how could you possibly keep it secret—what will happen? The song that gives you your heart's desire. Men would kill for it. You couldn't keep it—unless you're prepared to kill for it, and go on killing. And what might she do? Who is she? What does she really want? She could force you into marrying her, or put any other man she chose in your place. Fabien, you must send her away." Almost unconsciously, I had tightened my grip on his wrist.

"Marc, you're hurting me," Fabien protested. He pulled away as I released him. "I won't do it. At least she offers something. And I want it!"

"Fabien." I put all that I had into the words. "It will tear your city apart."

There was a long silence. Then Fabien whispered. "I was free." His mouth was trembling. "Speak to her, Marc. Say...you know what to say. Do it quickly!"

Outside, Arminel was waiting. I understood her composure now, the poise that comes from unassailable power. I spoke to her courteously—how else!—and called the steward to offer her a rich present. She remained cool.

"You refuse what I have to give, then?"

"You would cage us, mistress," I said, "as you cage your bird."

A spark lit in her eyes, the first emotion she had shown. "Are you not caged?" she asked. "Is he not caged, by pain, and the drug, and his need of you? Are you not caged in his service?"

She went out, back to whatever hell had engendered her, not waiting for an answer. I never saw her again.

When I returned to Fabien, he lay sunk among his pillows, his face streaked with tears.

"She's gone," I said.

Fabien nodded. "Marc," he asked, "what did you see?"

"What?"

"What did you see? You knew what the song could do, you must have seen something."

I stood holding the door handle. I wanted to go now that I had reported; I did not

want to tell Fabien the truth, but his eyes held me. Slowly, I replied, "I saw the gates opening. I had a pack on my back and a staff in my hand. I was going home."

Fabien's hand was at his throat. "Your heart's desire—you want to leave me?"

I was not...I had never been...indifferent to his pain. I wished I could have made him accept a lie, and even more, that there had been no need to lie. "You know I want to leave," I said. "But you've always forbidden it. You told me that if I set one foot outside the gates without your permission, you would have me hauled back and executed."

Fabien's eyes widened, darkened. "You must hate me," he said, "if you believe I could do it."

If I had wanted to stay with him, I could have made the cage into a sanctuary. But, God help us both, I did not want it. I did not love him, or not enough.

He gave me leave to go, and pressed parting gifts on me with a wild, desperate generosity. Most of them I refused. Next day, at sunrise, I was waiting as the city gates were pushed open. I had a pack on my back, and a staff in my hand. The rising sun threw my shadow out in front of me as I set my face towards the hills and my father's house.

But as I went, I could not rid my mind of Fabien, and because of that, there will be no freedom for me, never while he and I still live. Because of that I sit night after night, drinking until dawn seeps through the shutters, and in the tilting surface of the wine, still I see him.

I see Fabien lying sprawled on a heap of silken cushions on the dais of the great hall. The last fumes of haze coil sluggishly around him as the lamp burns out. The reek of it is in his throat, and he is whimpering softly. No one comes to him, and no nightingale sings.

PW

And the Outermost Stars Flowed Sombre

by Robert L. Caldwell

(BFD Press), pb, \$4.99, 281pp.

(as reviewed by Willy P. Snodgrass, author of *The Magical Quests of the Unearth Heironaut* series)

Reprinted from the back cover:

"The life of Justin Branishman, the brash and confident rebel who recently became the youngest captain in the Galactic fleet, is about to change forever. Assigned to the outpost on Xentillion, a marvel-filled planet of alien wonders, Justin and his odd-ball crew quickly make friends with the yawri, the cute, lovable, non-threatening native inhabitants of Xentillion who are only too happy to allow the handful of humans to rule their entire planet. Justin and Homi,

The Book Review

by J. Michael Major

the human-yawri liaison and Justin's bestest alien buddy, spend many happy days discussing Xentillion's geology—until the demorae, the politically incorrect ancient enemies of the yawri, arrive from their double-star home world and begin to make trouble. But when Homi is murdered and Bree, Justin's buxom, psi-powered girlfriend, is kidnaped, Captain Branishman must race against time, searching his photographic memory of the Galactic encyclopedia and numerous physics textbooks, not only to rescue Bree—but to save the fate of the entire galaxy itself!"

Now, dear reader, I have no doubt that you were as stunned by the startlingly original back cover blurb as I. But do not be fooled! This writer is merely using the label of science fiction and fantasy to categorize and sell his novel, without adhering to any of our most sacred guidelines. Frankly, I am sick of non-genre writers infiltrating our masses, and this guy picked the wrong reviewer to mess with.

Come with me while I pick this guy apart.

First, for those of you who are already familiar with my column and all the beginning writers out there, there are two undeniable axioms that we, the editor/publishers and readers, demand in our stories: "Structure, structure, structure" and "More of the same, but different." Novels are supposed to read as if the ideas were tapped from the dried-up veins of long-dead masters of the Golden Age of Science Fiction, then modernized by sprinkling the text with recent discoveries and attitude changes. (Why do you think so many covers scream: "Reads like Heinlein!") Dialogue should be stiff and tilted and loaded with exposition; and the hero must continue to make smart-aleck comments, especially in situations of great danger. Everything in the author's setting must be brand-spanking new (Yes, I know that spanking is passé, but remember that we are dealing in clichés here), except for chanced-upon alien civilizations that are older than Mankind; and its descriptions must be laden with scientific equations—some of which are intentionally incorrect, so that readers-without-lives can spend inordinate amounts of time proving what is wrong with a fictional universe. Social problems are to be touched upon but

never dealt with, lest our fun-filled escapism disintegrates into a lecture. And last, but not least, NEVER OFFEND ANYONE.

This guy obviously hasn't read the rule-book.

Now, granted: the very best of our writers are able to bend these rules and create something that is wonderfully different; something that sets a new standard for the rest of us to try to mimic. But we're not talking about that. We're talking about the everyday, run-of-the-mill, grind-'em-out-as-fast-as-they'll-buy-this-crap, corporate science fiction/fantasy that dominates the shelves these days. The kind of stuff of which you can't get enough, and the kind I can't seem to write fast enough for you.

So what did Caldwell do wrong? Everything. He started right off the bat by ignoring "Structure, structure, structure," and wrote something closer to mainstream LIT-oor-a-ture. (Gag.) Depth of character, symbolism, counter-symbolism, allusion, irony—hell, I had a headache by the end of thirty pages. Don't bog me down with literary allusions; just give me a plot that sweeps me away and doesn't require thinking. Tell me a story where the hero outsmarts his Neanderthaloid adversaries, or an epic fantasy in which the outcast urchin uses his previously unknown powers in his quest to regain (also previously unknown) his birthright as emperor of everything. These structured tales have been churned out for over forty years, and by gods, we can't get enough of them.

But don't keep telling us the same story over and over again! Hey, we're not stupid. We'll only put up with authors who do this for fifteen or sixteen volumes—then it's off with their heads!

A word of warning to our sensitive readers: There is a particularly gruesome scene in which an elf crew member slips in a bathtub and drowns. I am sorry, but there is simply no excuse for this type of gratuitous violence in modern science fiction/fantasy. Once again, the cover is misleading, because there is no mention of the horror contained within, and I was caught completely unaware. I'm tempted to send Caldwell my dry-cleaning bill for my trousers, as I don't think the yellow and brown stains will ever come out.

And the novel can't even be labeled "Hor-

ror" because there aren't any vampires in it.

Never mix genres. We don't know how to market it.

Caldwell's biggest problems, however, lie with his female characters. The women of his novel are deep, complex, emotionally-rounded, ordinary-looking women—like the kind who intimidate me all day long. How am I supposed to deal with this? Golden Age SF structure dictates that, regardless of occupation, all female characters boil down to either nymphomaniacs, Teddy Bears with tits or lesbians. (This is no doubt intended to parallel Hollywood's perfect mother/wife, frigid business woman and hooker with a heart of gold for easy reader/viewer identification.)

And then he makes it worse by putting romance in the plot! Disgusting. As if the hero actually needs to try! Everyone knows that any woman the hero wants, regardless of the above three categories, he automatically gets; and he always leaves the woman satisfied and wanting more. (I know that whenever I will hopefully, eventually get laid, my debt will be owed to these literary heroes for teaching me how to be a man.) Science fiction and fantasy use words and phrases of titillation like "huge, globe-shaped breasts" and "spread your legs" and "impale" to keep the pages turning; but Caldwell's detailed descriptions make the wet, gushy urges sound like a natural, normal function. Spare me.

The cover illustration, in this respect, is as misleading as the back blurb. A luscious Bree is shown in her Victoria's Secret's spacesuit, her long legs open and inviting, somehow balanced in an anatomically impossible position, her arms cradling a long, hard weapon of immense power...uh, well, let's just say that many Kleenex tissues gave their lives for that illustration, so I guess the book isn't a total loss, after all.

So give us what we want! Stay away from the risk-taking stories of the 60's and 70's, and remain within the safe haven science fiction/fantasy has become today. Keep publishing collections and collections of ancient SF/F/H reprints and squeeze those new writers out. We're talking marketability here! Give us whole magazines and novels devoted entirely to the worlds of Star Trek (Bring back Kirk!), Star Wars, and Dr. Who; Middle Earth and Medieval magical quests; Asimov's robots and Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos—and what the hell: let's throw in another sequel to *Gone with the Wind!* So give us what we want. Give us more, more, more! More of the same—BUT DIFFERENT!

(Books to be reviewed in this column should be sent to: Willy P. Snodgrass, 1234 Bohring St, Topeka, KS 66603.)

PW

A TURN OF THE SCREW

by Bryan Lindenberger

A somber man in black tightens the screw....

John had worked with the company, I am told, some twenty years or more. In all that time, he had never seen the second-vice-superior-in-charge. He once caught a glimpse of the commanding-third-supervisor's chief of management, but that was when the electronic locks on the side doors had malfunctioned, and all the chiefs-in-charge had to leave by the back door, the superiors-in-charge noting a contractual clause which reserved the front doors for themselves.

So, when the message carrier brought John the news that the second-vice-superior-in-charge wanted to see him, he was understandably excited. So giddy was he, after all those years of work in his sound-proof cubicle on the assembly line, that he even patted one of the guard dog's heads as he followed the messenger down the hall.

"Don't do that," said the messenger.

"Sorry."

"Good way to lose your hand. Then what good would you be to us?"

The labyrinth of hallways were quite ordinary; white walls, white floor and a white ceiling spotted with the inevitable security camera. An hour or more must have passed before they came to a great, wooden double-door with gold handles and a security guard on either side. These guards now drew their firearms as John and the messenger approached.

"Wait here," said the messenger as he cautiously drew a piece of paper from his shirt pocket, careful not to make any sudden movements that might end his life. He held the paper up in front of his face and stepped closer. One of the guards snatched the form from him and read it. What followed was a long exchange of questions and answers before each of the guards and the messenger finally signed the form in turn. A card was inserted into the slot in the wall, and the big doors swung open.

"You can come now. Not so fast! Easy now. Come on!" After John was searched, and after he had tipped each of the guards, he found himself in the office suite. He passed by several desks, each with a secretary that eyed him conspicuously, and came to the door of the second-vice-superior-in-charge, as denoted by a gold and black plaque on the door. No wait was necessary, and the messenger told him to enter at once.

When my friend related the story to me, he omitted any formal description of the

office itself, but I imagine it was the same as any executive office, for my own short-lived careers have generated the need to visit a few. They always look so different, so undemonstrative, from the bulk of the company they are intended to represent. It's hard to even imagine a connection between these offices and the places where people actually do the work.

The offices are large and open, with clean carpeting and leafy ferns set on wicker tables. Photos and paintings, neatly framed, adorn the walls, each of them depicting beautiful landscapes and old buildings with children playing in front. Such a change from the gray, cement compartments crowded by machinery in the factories, or the plastic tables jutting out from walls with their computer monitors for the white-collar poor (called "Temps"). Still, the greatest difference, I think, is that one wall of the executive office always has a clock. Always. I suppose that workers need not burden themselves with time; the lunch whistle is enough.

A gray-headed man turned from his view through the synthetic window and faced John.

"You wrote a letter," he said.

"A letter?" John replied.

"Don't choose now as the time to start lying. Your job is on the line."

"I don't remember any letter, sir."

"Then let me read it to you. 'Sirs,' you say, 'I have noticed that my job consists of turning a single screw a quarter turn on your product #4835-AA, in order to place additional pressure on a supposedly defective connector. This pressure, I am told, allows the connector to make better contact, and thus ensure your fine product's workability. This job I have performed with the other workers of my section, section 22-1D, for my entire career. However, it has come to my attention that work section 85-7F performs the seemingly paradoxical service of loosening the very same screw by a quarter turn in order to release *excess* pressure and, I am told, keep the connector from becoming over-heated and malfunctioning. It seems that these sections perform a counterproductive service. I have no desire of losing any persons their jobs; perhaps these personnel may be shifted to another work section, as our production remains eight to twelve years behind schedule. Yours truly, John Baxter.' That is your name, isn't it, son?"

"Yes sir, it is," said John with a chill. He wasn't used to air conditioning that actu-

ally worked on hot days. "I had forgotten. I wrote that letter five years ago. I figured it was lost, sir."

"We don't simply 'lose' things at Mirror Industries, Inc., my boy! Is that what they've told you?"

"No. Nobody tells me anything. I—"

"And what about this section, where is it? —Ah, here it is, section 85-7F? Have you been talking with somebody from there?"

"I spoke with a gentleman from that very section, if memory serves, sir."

"You do know that such league with fellow associates without express written permission from the company as well as your own signed letter of intent is illegal and punishable by expulsion? Do you?"

John was scared. He knew what expulsion meant. It not only threw a person out of the company with retroactive pay loss, but precluded that one may never find legitimate work again. Once a name hits the Gray List at the Employer Information Center at the offices of the United Betterment of Worker/Employer Relations and Affairs subdivision in Washington, well, it was over.

"It was snowing," John tried to explain. "His car wouldn't start, and I offered him a jump from my battery. He told me what he did for a living at 85-7F." The low-level executive stood from his seat and hovered over his desk, his face red and quivering all over.

"Did he volunteer the information? Or did you ask? Did you beat it out of the poor bastard?"

"No, no! It was just mild conversation. He volunteered it. He was telling me about his hopes for a promotion if the factory ever got caught up."

"I see," said the gray-haired man as he resumed his seat and poured himself a drink into his shot glass.

"I am sorry," said John. The gray-haired man swallowed his liquor, hard.

"Perhaps it is you, boy, who wants the promotion."

"No. I mean, I work for it, of course. But I have never openly desired it. I understand policy."

"Good. You are dismissed from this office, for the moment. The time will be deducted from your pay. Now, get back to work."

Actually, a rather substantial amount was added to John's pay and credited to his Account of Initial Debt, presumably an error at the Payroll and Accounts Pending office, and honest John wanted to inform them of their error, but he ultimately knew better than to open that can of worms. After the meeting, he left the office suite and returned to the work area unattended. The next shift had already arrived by the time he found his way.

A somber man in black tightens the screw....

PW

The Fifth Novel

by Ralph S. Blois

Except for the corpse, he was alone in the room.

He avoided the splashes of congealing blood as he carefully moved his fancy, expensive Italian loafers across the floor to the closed door. He had to leave now, and quickly. That was his sole objective.

Handkerchief in hand he flipped off the light switch. Darkness invaded the death room. Then, he reached for the doorknob and it hit him.

A cold draft caressed the back of his neck. He shivered in a fit of fear. Then an eerie frigid whisper flooded his ear.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Joel Krebbins switched off his computer and watched the monitor shrink to a dot before it vanished. He relaxed. That would hold his readers' attention. Just the right mix of surprise and terror. That's what they liked.

He had to make his fiftieth novel his best yet.

A decade of grinding out the same plot with minor variations was getting to him.

Usually he could come up with a new twist. Well, if not really a new twist, at least something that was dusted off, polished and looked fresh. Lately he'd had more difficulty coming up with his trademark twists. In fact, he wasn't at all sure where he was going with this one.

But, not to worry about that tonight. It was late and he could almost smell the T-bone steak smothered in soggy fried onions that waited in his kitchen. Some French fries doused in catsup and he could forget about the fiftieth novel for a while. He'd be eating alone again tonight. Not unusual for him. Once a week, Tess came over to see him and to have dinner. Not real exciting eating with one's sister, but at least she was company and gave him a break from his lonely life style.

He pushed back the roller chair and stood up. A gentle shove and the chair slid into place beneath the overhang of the computer desk. Everything secure—he could leave.

Joel stepped to the door. He rested his hand on the light switch. His other hand touched the door knob. He flipped off the switch and plunged the room into darkness.

It hit him. Fear. Deep and strong. He toggled the light switch. It broke between his gripping fingers. The darkness crushed inward with deep evil thrusts.

He turned the knob and tugged. Annoyance wrinkled his brow.

The door was stuck. He rattled it but it would not budge. He kicked it. It refused to open. Annoyance turned to anger. No inanimate object was going to challenge him. He kicked harder.

A glow behind him startled him and he turned.

The monitor screen had flashed into life.

The system booted and the word processor program became active. The last lines he had written flowed on the screen.

A chill gripped his neck and crawled over his shoulders and down his back. A frosty tingle dug into his scalp.

An evil, cold whisper invaded the room. He felt an icy dribble from the unseen thing touch his flesh. His eyes focused on the words frozen on the monitor's screen.

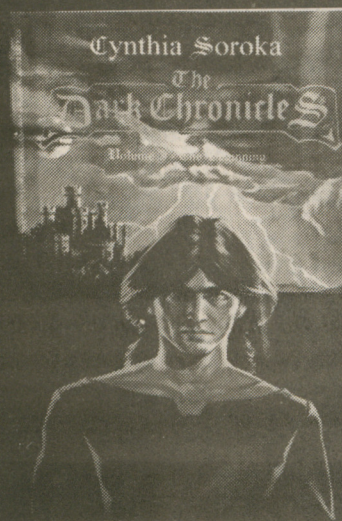
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PW

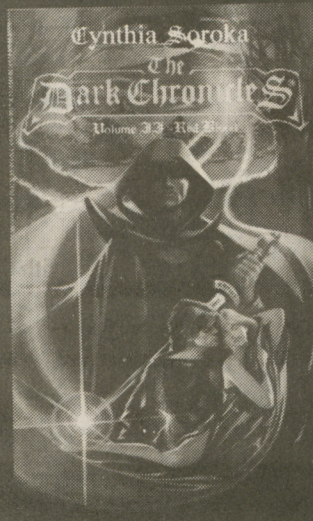
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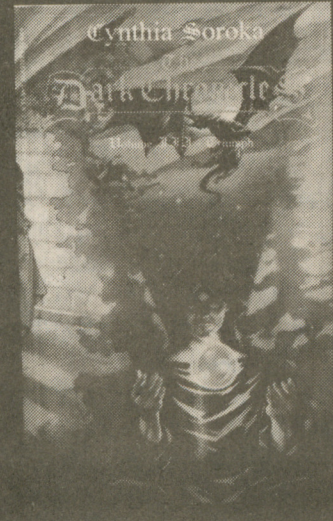
By Cynthia Soroka



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JANAEL

JANAEL RAN through the low-lying, shin-gnawing brush, the grim sister fast on her heels. Once or twice she glanced back to gauge the progress of the dark-robed old woman, and each time was spurred on by fear raised to a higher power. The woman's black garments flapped closer, closer, beating the brambles down like a great western bat.

Janael thought she could hear the old woman screaming, but then realized it was the storm in her own thoughts. She sought desperately the gray outlines of the next town—the man who'd sold her the grain in her bag had promised her she could reach the next civilized place before nightfall. Then he had looked bemused; for someone so strong and capable, Janael was afraid of the dark.

The low trees and bushes were losing their distinctness. "The Lael Hills are soaking up the light," her mother would have said. Again Janael peered over one shoulder—the right one, the perfect one—and watched as the dark woman winged her way across the rough ground. Janael looked hard to find the woman's feet, but could not discover them within the floating black folds. The grim sister dragged the darkness with her.

If Janael did not reach a building before dark she knew the nightmares would be far worse than the dream of this one old woman. Why this particular nightmare she could not begin to guess.

BY STEVE RASNIC TEM

Illustrated by James Zimmerman

Reject the magic...and die.

slow. *No tricks!* she thought, then started chanting it silently to herself.

Janael had always imagined that she herself would evolve into a grim sister someday, so maybe that was the source of the dream. But a coincidence was certainly possible. She had noticed the woman following her for some miles, since the last village. Her nightmares usually did not operate in that way.

Storytelling was not supposed to be like this. When her parents had told a story, you could always tell the difference between the real and the unreal—that had been part of the pleasure of the tale. But Janael's storytelling, her dreaming, had gone bad, became a nightmarish affliction, and she could not tell in which realm her feet were planted.

Sometimes Janael would not have minded becoming a grim sister. For grim sisters did not dream.

Child, slow down! You are ill!

Janael slid her hands down the rough-hewn staff, establishing a grip on the lower third. Again she stole a glance back at the old woman. The late afternoon shadows of tree and bush, rock and fence, tore from their gray moorings and flapped alongside the racing figure, until after a time much of the landscape lost its roots and slipped into

Child...

Janael tried to ignore her.

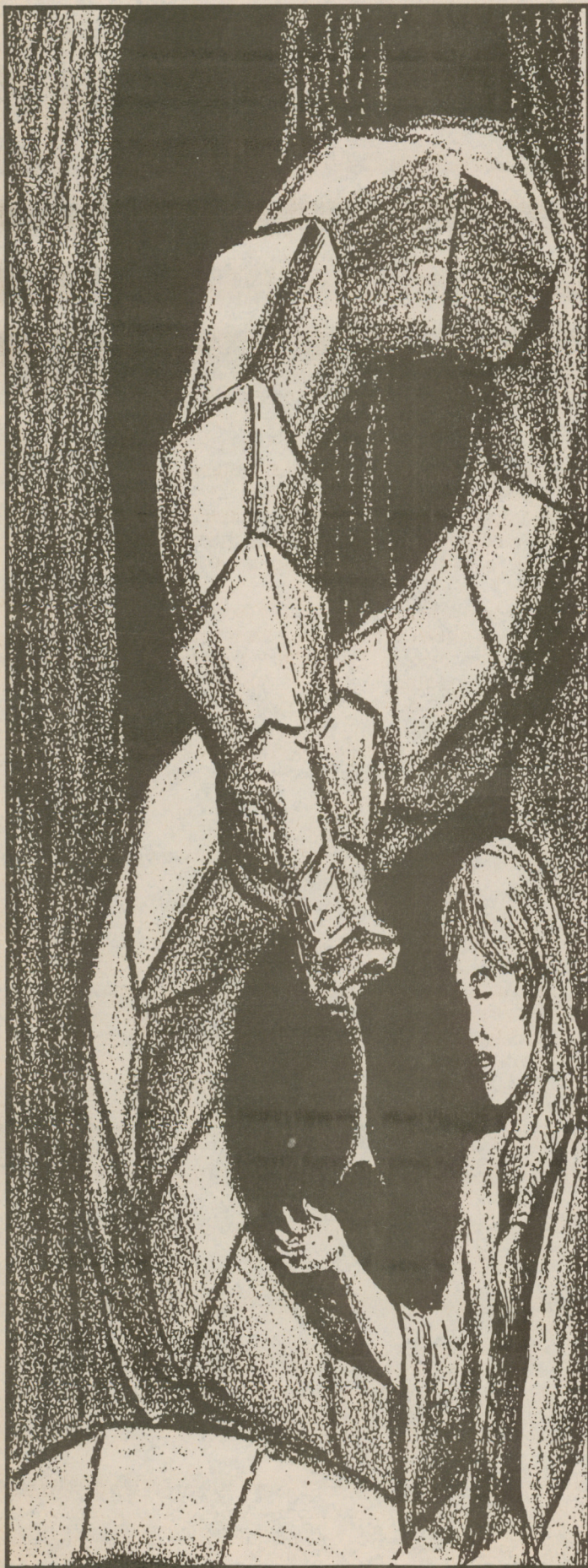
Child, please stop....

Janael opened her mouth wide, hoping that would make hearing difficult.

Child, I am not your nightmare!

Janael was tired anyway; it made it easier for her to





the woman's wake. Janael felt the illness sweep into her face, where she held it even though her skin grew hot and her lungs sore from unnatural restraint.

Enough!

Janael agreed. She swung her body around low, the thick staff following. Black wings enveloped her. The grim sister's startled eyes flew toward the sun.

"You might have killed me." The old woman's voice sounded childish, petulant.

Janael looked up. The woman hovered over her like a carrion bird, the nose sharp and the eyes wet with longing.

"You *are* real," Janael said. "No dream. Your speech *smells*."

The old woman chuckled low in her throat. "Spoken truly like a storyteller. No, no dream. And the sour breath comes from too much bad meat and not enough fruits and grain." She grinned sloppily, exposing yellowed, worn teeth.

"The *child* of storytellers, old woman. And how did you know?"

"I prefer being called Malg, child, my birth name. An ugly name, I admit, but better than being labeled with my affliction. A disease makes a poor name, and grim sistering is a *disease*, believe that if nothing else. The lack of dreaming wears us out and makes us ill. And I knew you by your clothes, child or not. I have not seen those robes for many a year. Your mother's?"

Janael sat up and brushed the dust off the three dark blue panels that hung from her shoulders. She felt suddenly self-conscious of her clothing, now that it had been mentioned. She had not heard anyone speak of storytelling for some time. "I'm not sure," she replied. "My mother and father dressed the same, and they were of similar build. When they disappeared they left three of their outfits behind. This is the last one. It was too large for me at first, but I grew into it."

Malg seemed to be about to inquire further, but then the multitude of lines trapping her narrow lips reformed themselves, and she held her peace. Malg helped Janael to her feet, then produced the staff from behind the voluminous black folds of her dress. She handed it to her so easily, as if it were a delicate branch she'd dropped. Janael's arm trembled as she took it. The frail-looking old woman was amazingly strong.

Malg grasped Janael's hand as if to steady her. "I do not know what it is. Perhaps when we do not dream there is all this strength that is left over. But a high price to pay for the loss of dreaming."

"I would pay such a price," Janael said solemnly, "if it meant not to dream. If it meant I could know what is real again, that the shadows would not change as I watched them."

"You are *ill*, child. Believe me. And courage does not come easily with such illness. But we are *all* ill in this world, not just you, and not just the grim sisters."

"Everything changes so quickly..."

"Yes, child. The rules are changing in this world. Magic dies and the age of mechanicals sweeps over us all. *That* is why there is so much illness, and so much dreaming gone bad, and gone out of our heads to populate the landscape. I think the dreams simply do not know their place anymore. Sometimes we cannot travel the smallest path without stumbling over the dreaming. Whether hideous or laughable, the dreams all get in our way. You are not the only one so afflicted, Janael."

Janael started to walk away, searching the horizon for some hint of a dwelling. "Why do things have to change?"

Malg was soon beside her, matching her stride for stride. *The old woman can fly*, Janael mused, then immediately banished the thought before the inevitable images came with it and the woman *indeed* began to fly.

"Things always change," Malg said. "The old minds die, lose

their grip. As magic changes, the mind changes. Toys grow in the mind, first as playful thoughts, then one day they leave the confines of the skull to walk among us. Our old world cannot hold in the face of that. This change is greater only because there are greater minds that are dying. There has been a war, I suspect. Someone wanted too much. Now the heavens come crashing down to earth, dragging our dreams kicking and screaming with them. The toys are loose in the playground, playing by themselves. The world will never be the same, child. The mysteries have shifted their focus. Now people are being valued for what they have, not for what they can do. Wise minds are in short supply, and I sincerely doubt we will see many of their kind aweing and entertaining us with their trickery. And there are no more travelling storytellers, perhaps save one." Janael felt the old woman's claw-like fingers at her shoulder. "Do you have your parents' talent, child?"

Janael faltered, suddenly unsure where to step. "I do not know."

"I hope you do, even a bit of it. It may save you from the madness yet, sweet sister. It may save you from becoming the likes of me."

A city finally did appear on the horizon, although it was not the kind to steal the breath away. The walls were in serious need of attention, and built of an ugly yellow stone that resembled mottled clay. The people were keeping busy, however—a team of workers had the old paving stones torn up, replacing them, and other workers busied themselves tearing down several old structures flanking the gate. The discarded wood and clay stank of age and waste. Malg had become steadily more protective—to an irritating degree—during their long trek across the plain to this, the city of Noren. Even now she nudged people out of the path, away from Janael. She wouldn't let even a close brush-by pass without a withering glance. Occasionally she would steal a nervous glance at Janael, then continue her monologue about all the changes evident in the world.

"I knew this place once," she said, and made a broad gesture with one great and black, winglike sleeve. "It is among the oldest cities in this region. It had no streets for the longest time, just flattened earth, and pathways around which the animals and drunkards slept. Wise men and wiser women lived here, not the most powerful and certainly not the wisest, but wise enough, I think. They played games with one another, tricks and jokes, and made toys for the children, toys which appeared to have a life of their own. They say that sometimes you can find some of those toys still, toys living in the Noren woods, as if they too were animals, and perhaps they are just that now, gone feral from neglect."

Two men fell out of an opening in a house being demolished. Malg stepped over one without even glancing down, despite his moans. "When I was a child I knew some of those living here. Among the last of the wise, I imagine."

"There does not appear to be a surplus of wisdom here now," Janael said, as more brawlers spilled into the streets from taverns and meeting halls. "In fact I see no wisdom at all." Two men stood in front of Janael and the grim sister, engaged in a punching contest; first one man beat the other man several times across the top of the nose, then the other man struck back, punching his eyes repeatedly.

Malg stepped up to the two men and threw her cloak over their heads. The tall shapes under the cloth collapsed almost immediately, and Malg drew back her cloak to reveal the two forms sleeping on the paving stones. "Cursed them with the dreamless sleep, I did, but did them a favor, I think, considering what dreams they'd have."

Suddenly a giant baby appeared, blocking their passage. Janael gasped, but she could not claim any great surprise.

"One of yours, I take it?" Malg asked, stepping up to the great infant. She reached up and felt the huge, chubby cheeks one at a

time. "Cute one, this. Guilt inspired? You think you do not do enough for the little ones?"

"It's hungry," Janael said softly. "I can feel it. We have to feed it somehow."

"How do you feed such a thing? It fills the passage!" Malg stepped back. The baby was expanding.

"I have no idea," Janael said with tears rolling down her face. "But it suffers from a terrible hunger—I can feel it in my head!"

Malg sighed. "You *are* an ill one! Then give it a cow and let's be on our way."

The cow appeared almost instantly; night black with broad, irregular patches of snow. It gazed up at the giant baby, then looked back at Malg and Janael dumbly.

"Sorry, poor cow," Malg said, as the giant baby—gurgling deeply—snatched up the cow and jammed it into its rubbery mouth, chew chew and the cow was gone.

And then, its hunger satisfied, the giant baby was gone, and the passageway was clear.

The two walked silently for some distance, through chaotic lanes apparently reserved for sleepwalkers, drunkards, fetishists, and other victims of the illness, until Malg spoke again. "So where would you be heading, daughter of storytellers?"

"Wherever my feet determine to take me," she replied wearily. "I gave up on the idea of 'destination' some time ago. And certainly I would not risk imagining a place to be. For what I imagine comes true, and as you have seen I am not always in control of my imaginings."

"Then permit me to be your feet. You could do no worse. And perhaps I've a cure in mind to keep your storymakings inside your head where they belong, if you have the courage."

Janael looked at her wide-eyed, more awake than she'd been in months. "Truly? What would it be? How..."

"I said 'perhaps.' This illness affects each one differently. And I never attempted a cure on a storyteller before."

"I am not convinced I have that talent of my parents. Perhaps madness is all it is."

"Then madness we will call it. Makes little difference to me."

"Where will your feet take us?"

"The Noren Woods. Beyond. But first we will need provisions for such a journey."

The large, open ruin might have been a tavern at one time, even a hall. Now it was collection of broken pillars bridged by canvas and multicolored rags, with all manner of food, clothing, crafts, and supplies spread out across the cracked stones beneath. Malg dragged Janael from station to station according to some obviously preconceived yet incomprehensible plan. Along the way she argued with the vendors fiercely yet briefly, querying them for specifics, projections, recommendations, then gathering up purchases in a different-colored cloth bag before proceeding to the next stop.

It was while hurrying from one merchant to the next that Malg ran into, literally, another grim sister, knocking her flat to the ground and stepping up onto her midsection before noticing, gasping, stopping.

Janael thought the one on the ground might very well be dead. Her eyes were shut tight beneath huge, bluish lids. Her lips were a pale wrinkled scar.

"Daid!" Malg cried, stepping off the grim sister, whom Janael could now see was male.

Daid pushed open his lids. "Malg," he said, his tongue a dried-looking white thing. Then he began to shake. "You are...a dream?"

"No, Daid. No!" Malg cried.

But Daid continued to shake, and spoke of the dreams he could not have, until his face became brittle. And the brittle be-

came broken. And his features flew away like dry leaves caught up in a whirlwind.

Malg sat quietly staring into the shadow Daid had left behind. "Those who cannot dream," she said softly, "cannot live." Then she stood up and went on to the next merchant in her undisclosed itinerary as if nothing had occurred.

The Noren Woods are full of all manner of things mechanical," Malg explained as they stood on the edge of the forest. "These are toys escaped from their wise makers, as I explained before. Harmless enough in the hands of their makers, I suppose, they have since had generations of progeny, and cannibalized one another for new and startling likenesses. Here it is where the dreaming first died, I think, in the souls of all the grim sisters. And here it is, I believe, where your storymaking first became a disease. Your parents may very well have passed through here, back when Noren was the city mosthungry for storytellers, and all plots eventually wound their way there."

Janael gazed out over a horizon of trees and metal. She warded off an anxious recollection of her mother leaning over her bed, mouth opening for a song or sleep-enhancing tale, and the metal thing in her mother's mouth suddenly spinning and whirring, exploding into color and noise.

The trees of Noren Woods were as tall and thick as had been told in the legends. But interjected among those trees were objects which glittered and spun, rose and fell as if their regularity had been ordered and constructed. Many of these objects had edges which were sharp and unpleasant to the eye.

"Do not hesitate, my child," Malg said behind her. "The dark and my dreamless sleep will be bowing virtually together tonight, I think. A ballet I could not miss even if I wanted to."

Once inside the woods Malg insisted that Janael lead the way. "Your feet have more knowledge here," Malg said. And indeed that appeared to be the case. Janael's feet found pathways her eyes could not see. She led Malg around bits of metal which appeared harmless (but, terrifyingly, were not), through ranks of machinery which looked deadly (but, thankfully, were not). She felt as if she were navigating her way through the dark heart of one of her own stories, but one which, for the first time in ages, she seemed to have some control over.

*There is no magic,
we ate it for thinking.*

The voice was a harsh one, but Janael still recognized this as a piece of song.

*We ate the magic
and drank all dreaming.
We wind up tall
we wind up small
By the time we're finished
you people will be done...*

Janael followed the song until she and Malg had reached a small clearing. There a metal serpent with long eyelashes and breasts of shining silver, yellow dripping fangs and a long red moustache, sang and spat poison at them.

"Tell that abominable toy a story!" Malg cried out behind her.

"But if I tell it poorly, or if I lose control of the tale..."

"Speak to it, child!" The serpent leaned down to within a few feet of them, its eyelashes flapping with sleepy seduction.

*We ate the magic
We ate the dreams
We ate the girl child
and the tales she told...*

"A man ate a serpent for breakfast," she began.

"Ooooh," the mechanical male and female serpent replied, pulling back.

"It wasn't a very tasty serpent. In fact the man thought it was a bit snaky, but he ate it all anyway. He found it filling enough."

"Ooooooh," the mechanical serpent replied, and backed up a little more.

"But when the man went to bed that night he had several strange dreams. He dreamed that instead of eating the serpent, it was the serpent who had eaten him."

"Ah!" the mechanical serpent exclaimed, and leaned closer again.

"Then he dreamed that he built a mechanical serpent to replace the one he had eaten. But this serpent did nothing but sing all day and refused to eat the rats and vermin which soon completely overran the countryside. This made it necessary for the people to live in high towers and the children could not play outdoors anymore."

"Hmmm," the mechanical serpent said, swaying back and forth at a great height.

"And then he dreamed that the serpent he had eaten was not only a true serpent, but the last true serpent in the world, and now there was nothing more to dream about."

The mechanical serpent swayed back and forth, dreaming its mechanical dreams. Janael and Malg slipped past quietly, hoping not to disturb it.

Janael told more of her stories out loud to Malg as they maneuvered through the wood of trees and metal toys. There was the tale of the siamese witches and what happened to their four lovers. There was the story of the three turtles and what they did one evening after dinner. There was the legend of a Sinbad who was not a sailor. There was the narrative of Janael and the grim sister called Malg who went in search of 1) a cure for Janael's faulty storytelling, and 2) the restoration of dreaming.

"But haven't I told my stories well?" Janael suddenly exclaimed. "And no grim dreams have left my head and come to chase my sanity away! Am I not cured?"

"Only in these woods, and only in this darkness, dream child," Malg replied and gestured at the night falling swiftly around them. "If you were to take the stories away with you, into the light of day, once again they would follow you around and terrify you. To confine them to your head and your performances you must first feel the pain delivered up by one of the old dwellers of the dreamtime."

"But I've no story for that," Janael said with dismay.

"Then follow as I plot it," Malg replied, sweeping her dark clothes around her as she turned and headed into the darkest part of the woods.

For some time they passed through a region where the forest floor was covered with immense, hairy vines. In some places these vines were so thick passage was almost impossible. Janael was ready to take out her dagger and begin hacking when Malg cried, "Stop. We are here."

Janael looked around her. This was the darkest part of the forest they had been in. "But there is nothing here."

"Oh, here there is plenty. Look inside your story, little one."

So Janael closed her eyes and looked inside the story which had been putting itself together since they entered this part of the woods, though she hadn't realized it. There she saw Malg eaten by an immense spider.

An immense, hairy spider. Janael opened her eyes at once, certain that her dreaming had gone bad again, and to confirm this there was Malg halfway into the giant spider's dark mouth, its long hairy legs writhing along the ground and in the trees.

"Malg!" she screamed, racing forward. "I would not have told such a horrible story!"

"But little one. My story is inevitable. The darkness falling.

My dreamless sleep. This spider of too many legs would rather tear me apart and eat me, but all you require is apoisoned bite to cure you! Courage, child! " And then the giant spider ate Malg, and turned its enormous red eyes on Janael.

Janael stood her ground, shaking, trying to imagine her way out of this. Nothing happened. "I would not *imagine* such a story!" she said to the spider defiantly as it began its approach. "I would not!" she said again as the long hairy legs whispered around her. She leapt then, right in front of the spider's mouth. So startled the spider was by her movement that it bit her without thinking. Then Janael was running away from the giant spider before it could eat her, its poison in her veins.

Janael is an old woman now, or so she tells the story. Her grandchildren do not always believe she is old at all. These days the toys have come out of the woods and fill the city streets with their noise and color. Magic has gone away, except in dreams. And storytellers like Janael travel the deep woods looking for their tales and tell them without fear that their dreams will come alive and chase them, the poison of the oldest spider in the world in their veins reminding them of from where their stories first came.

PW

REALITY SPACKLE

Reality cracks
down a mundane Monday
sunrise: spiderwebs
craze jaundiced mind's eye

concrete carrousel
chipped from their cityscapes
spin out of orbit

leaking through

Desperate spackle:
expectation extract
filling in fracture lines
one more maybe time

traffic plops into place
cloverleaf cacophony
blaring what Ought To Be
glad that brass ring's back

aren't you?

-- Ann K. Schwader

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By Appointment Only



Sherrie Brown is a veteran small press writer whose work has appeared in Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Tomorrow, Aberrations, Galaxy, Thin Ice and many others. About "In The Garden" she writes, "The idea for 'In The Garden' came from my mother. In her last three years, her health didn't allow her to move around much, and she loved to sit in her kitchen chair and watch the birds. The rest of the story doesn't correspond with 'real' life, but the emotion does."

In The Garden

Loneliness can take many forms.

MAY 10 - ALMOST SETTLED IN. THE MOVERS are gone, as are the two local girls who came out to help me unpack. I just had them do the bare necessities and save the rest. The movers were quite pleased with the ramps, happy not to have any stairs to climb with the heavy boxes. The children didn't understand why I wanted to bring all of Henry's books. They'll call later to see how the move went. It's still quite warm though the sun's gone down. The Arizona earth seems to hold onto the heat and let it back out after dark. I'm tired and will write again tomorrow. I don't know what's harder to get used to: this wheelchair or Henry not being here. There are no neighbors to speak of, and I have a lovely garden full of birds. I think I'll like it here.

May 12 - At last everything's put away. The garden really is nice; I had my lunch out there and fed the crusts of my sandwich to the birds that flocked around. The little brown ones are so clever at stealing pieces right from under the larger black ones' beaks. I'll have to get Henry's bird book tomorrow and find out what types of birds they are, since I have no idea. When the children ask what I'm doing to keep busy, I can tell them I've taken up bird watching. A totally respectable occupation for an old lady confined to a wheelchair. Am feeling bitter tonight, and shouldn't. I was lucky to live. If only Henry had been lucky too. I'll go take a pain pill and check around the house to see what things were put up too high for me to reach.

May 13 - The guest bathroom sink has a pronounced leak. The plumber is in there now working on it, and I'm outside enjoying the sunshine. Three ladies from various town organizations came out to visit me this morning, sort of the local welcome wagon. They were very nice and were commiserative about the accident and Henry's death. They suggested several groups that I'd be more than welcomed to join (widows, sewing circles, charities, etc.). One of them saw my journal and said that if I liked to write, there was a literary group. I'm afraid I upset them when I told them I'd moved here to die, not join any committees. They left soon afterward and I doubt they'll be back, since I'm so far past the outskirts which is the main reason I rented the house.

BY SHERRIE BROWN

Illustrated by Michael Apice



The garden seems to fade at the edges to revert to desert. I find it comforting, having the desert as my backyard and the birds as my neighbors. I looked them up in Henry's book; both are very common. I've given the grocer an order for a big bag of birdseed, which he's supposed to have delivered tomorrow with the rest of my groceries. Maybe then I'll get a few more types to visit me. Birds that is—the organization representatives can stay away. I never was much of a joiner, Henry and I were enough for each other, and then the children came along. When they were grown and gone, Henry and I fell back into our solitary ways quite easily. Poor Henry. Damn all drunk drivers anyway.

May 21 - The doctor came out to see me and wasn't pleased. He commented on my color and I told him I'd been spending most of my time outside in the garden. He said it was a good idea.

There are whole flocks of birds now; it seems the little brown ones and larger black birds spread the word that there was a good feed on, with a hostess who didn't bother the diners. A family of roadrunners is out now, as I write this, and it's amazing to see them holding still for so long. It's quite a compliment. I can almost imagine the mama roadrunner is nodding my way in acknowledgment before pecking at one of her chicks for being too greedy. There's no need—there's enough for all. I've ordered ten more sacks of feed from the store. With the doctor's report, I'm being optimistic and buying ahead, believing I'll be here long enough to go through the ten sacks.

May 23 - It took me awhile to find the bird in the book, for he wasn't in the southwest region listings at all. What a South American bird is doing this far north, I don't know, but he seems quite comfortable in my garden. The other birds gave him a once over, and went back to their own business. I had the gardener put up hanging plants along the wall and in the trees. It gives them a nice nesting place. The biggest woodpecker I've ever seen is boring a

hole in a saguaro cactus. He's very considerate though, and only hammers when I'm awake. Now that he's found out my nap hour, he hasn't woken me once. I think I'll have some rocks brought in to put against the south end, different colors and shapes, to catch the evening sun's rays. It would be pretty and I bet the birds would like it, too.

June 2 - The pain is quite bad today. I fell asleep while out in the garden and when I awoke, found a perfect rose in my lap. I haven't seen a rose bush, so I couldn't even guess where it was from or who dropped it, so I thanked all of them out loud. The rock garden is quite a success, even though the gardener couldn't find the one big rock with the shape I wanted. Never mind—something will turn up. The kids called tonight to discuss Father's Day; if I wanted them to come out. I told them not to be ridiculous—it wasn't a major holiday and they're too busy to fly out here to hold my hand. I'll survive—at least that long. The doctor's changed my medication and it doesn't seem to help the pain. The birds sing at night and that helps me to sleep.

June 5 - I wish Henry were here—he'd understand it. I can't tell anyone else, for they wouldn't believe me. I'd been thinking all week about what kind of rock I'd like for the garden, but knowing I'd never find it. It was cloudy all day long, and we finally go a spectacular thunder and lightning storm just before sunset. I went outside and sat beneath the patio cover and watched. From out of the west came a squawk such as I've never heard and then I saw the bird itself. It was flying slowly, its great wings beating heavily to make up for its burden. It barely cleared the wall before it landed in the rock garden, laying the boulder it was carrying down in the spot left empty by the gardener. The bird sat there, talons gripping the stone, catching its breath, and I swear it looked right at me before it squawked again and took off. I sat in shock for some time before I went back to the house to look in the encyclopedia, for it



certainly wasn't in my bird book. After all, you can't expect to find a legendary Roc in Trevor's Guide to Bird Watching.

June 12 - The kids called this evening—it seems the doctor called them after my examination this afternoon, and now they're making noises about coming out. As if they could do anything even if they were here. I don't want them or anyone else hovering around me like vultures, waiting. That's why I came out here. Peace and quiet, and time to think and remember. With only the birds for company.

June 14 - I've been doing paperwork, tidying things up. I redid my will, which still had Henry in it. I left everything to the kids. The gardener was out today, but he left ten minutes later, saying he couldn't find anything to do. The birds have been keeping the garden clear of weeds and have kept the bushes cropped. The little brown ones have taken it upon themselves to pick up any stray twigs or debris that fall into the garden.

June 19 - God, it's so hot. The heat wave is killing off the plants and the poor birds have to go in search of shade. I've had more bird baths put out for them, but it doesn't seem to help. The heat saps away what little energy I have and intensifies the pain. It will be soon now, I think.

June 20 - They've put me to bed and told me to stay there. I was out in the garden and fainted, falling out of my chair. I don't remember any of it. The doctor says the neighbor called him in, after she'd been alerted by a flock of birds that were flying above my garden. She said she'd never seen so many birds in her life, but when she and the doctor got here to find me, there were just a few plain brown ones pecking at seeds on the ground.

June 21 - The doctor is picking up the kids at the airport. The nurse is taking a shower—she takes four a day to combat the heat. She left me in the living room, but I've made my way out to the garden. There were only a few birds to start with, but now they are coming in large groups. The heat has caused distorting ripples that affect my vision, but I still could see the birds. The effort to wheel myself out has left my side all achy with shooting pains. The heat seemed to settle in my head and I closed my eyes to see if it would go away. It didn't. When I opened them, I saw a dust devil form in front of me, whirling along the rock garden and stirring up the dead leaves into a pile. The sky deepened into a darker red.

Suddenly the birds took to wing, startled by something forming in their midst. The dust, the leaves, and the birds' wings seemed to flame in the sunset and there emerged a new bird, beating its wings above the leaves, and as the sun drew nearer to the earth, its nearness caused the leaves to smolder and catch on fire. The bird, as big as the Roc, continued to fan its wings, but instead of escaping, it merely fed the flames. The whole time it didn't cry out and I realized it must be mute.

As suddenly as it started, it was over—the blaze overwhelming the bird and consuming it in a bright conflagration of light and heat. Even as I started to cry, the other birds came back and landed on the pile of ashes, covering it and hiding it from my sight. They started singing, and before the song was over, a single voice rose from amongst them, more glorious than anything I've ever heard. Their brown wings parted, and from out amongst them and the ashes, rose the singing bird, its wings the color of the sunset—of every glorious sunset the world has ever seen. For one brief moment, it hung in the air and then it was away, taking its song with it.

I've had to write this quickly, for the light is fading. The children will be here soon, but I won't be here to greet them. I came here to hide—to hide from the inevitable and my fear of it. But I'm no longer afraid of death. How could I be after what I've seen? For even with the darkness coming over me, I still have the image burned into my mind's eye, and I'll do my best to follow suit. And to follow the Phoenix out of my garden.

PW

MOONSTRUCK

At the gallery,
a ceramic moon by
David Gilhooly, silver
grey, pockmarked, with a
toothy grin and Jules
Verne mustache,
resting upon a pedestal.

Airplanes,
rockets, shotgun
shells, knives, cleavers,
toasters, even the Statue
of Liberty have all
impaled themselves
upon its bombed out surface.

On its dark
side, a bit of
wrinkled brain matter,
the size of an egg, has
oozed out of a crater. A
king of cerebral lava
flow, frozen in time and place.

The great space
race is just a memory
to most--newscasts from
the 60's gone the way of
everything else cast into
ether--the bus-like shuttles
of today running more or less
on schedule, blind to old man moon.

-- G.O. Clark

THE END OF CONSTELLATIONS

Wounded Orion falters from the hunt,
and Lupus breaks his chain
to attack wide-eyed Lepus.

Sagittarius trades in his bow
for a gift certificate.
Ursa Major and Minor hibernate
somewhere beyond the night,
and Virgo has disappeared
into the Aurora Borealis
with an eager Hercules.

Meanwhile in the suburbs of mythology,
Perseus divorces Andromeda,
Pisces drowns in his hot-tub,
and Libra is woefully out of balance.

The age of Aquarius is over.

-- Tippi N. Blevins

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Featured Poet

AFTER THE READING

a blue horse
under my hair
leaps a corral
in a move surprising
as the first
days of summer
when a brightness
falls from trees
like the memory of
a forgotten country.
I move back into
blackberry light,
someone stunned
by a painting
who has to be
alone to understand why
she burst out crying.
It's always dark in a
room with little
air where I'm
wild to wrap
the bruise colored verbs
back around me,
cobalt and ebony
unbraiding
and woven into
a shape that knows
its way before I
do to camouflage and
hide me in
what I'm already
putting into a
language there aren't
words for
translate it from

ALBERTA HUNTER

long gold hoops flashing
eyes flashing hands
on her hips nothing
on her isn't moving
"gonna lay it on
you" born in
Memphis got a
nickel for bread
went to Chicago
"never knew my kisses
meant so much never
dreamed life had so..."
85 laying it on
you dancing
belting it
hair pulled
straight back not
to miss anything

THE POEM A DANCER

on point hypnotising
you as she opens
balances, delicate
iron. Something
in you reaches toward
where she stretches
you hold your
breath taken out
of Wednesday,
transformed. When
she turns in a
blur of color she
takes you with her

HALEAKALA

a grey caul

no squibs of
mauve no lemon,
raspberry. You can barely
see the road

Shapes in blankets.
And then like a
woman who didn't expect to

come, with no
warning white
lifts over mud geese

the crater goes violet,
burnt guava and honey

a shudder spreads
overtakes the

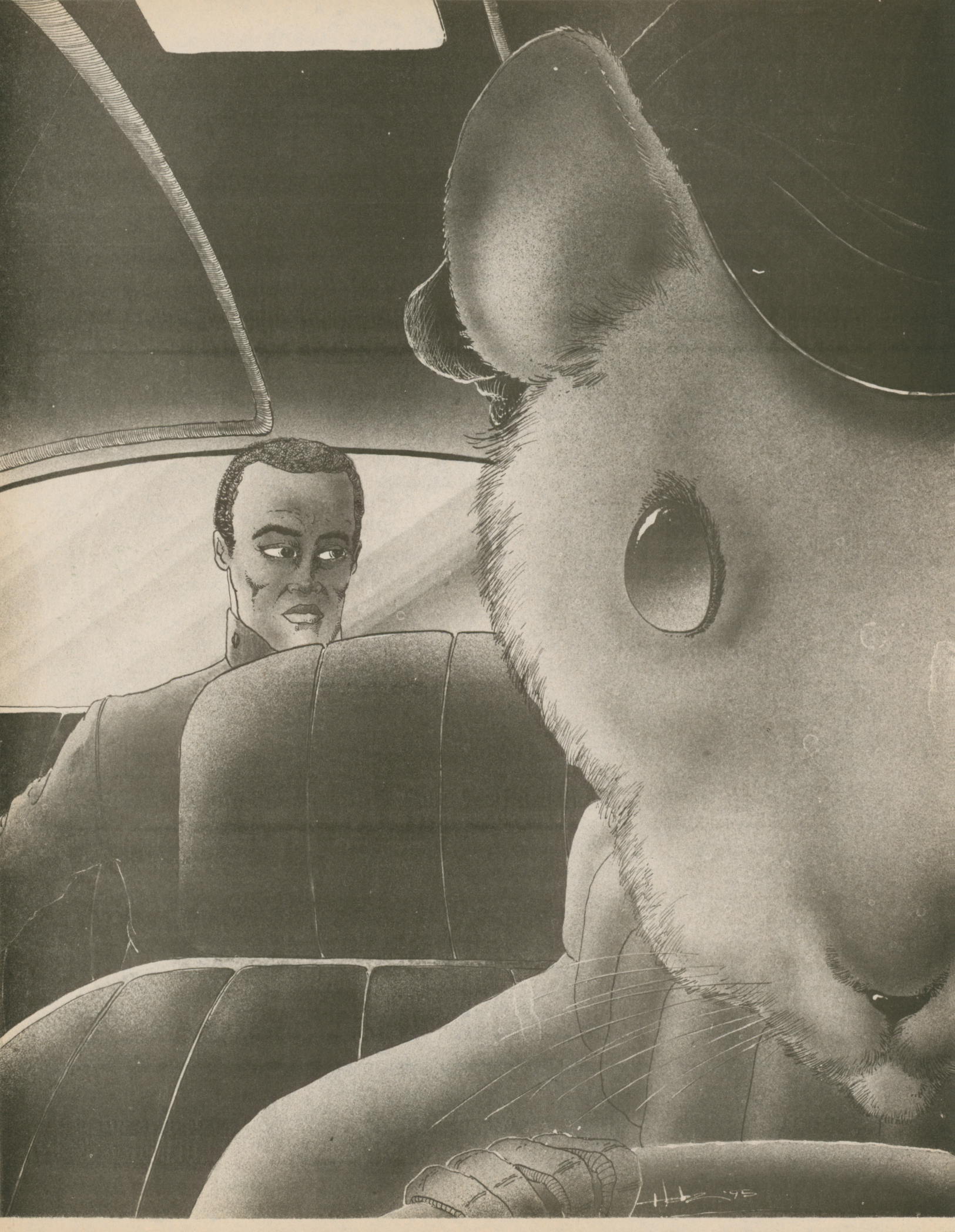
Japanese girl
who leans toward the

light breaking,
"Now I'm happy.
In the mist before
I was so sad."



Lyn Lifshin has written more than 90 books of poetry and her poems have appeared in most literary and poetry magazines in the country. These incredible credits have earned her the distinction "Queen of the Small Presses." Her latest book, *Blue Tattoo*, is available from Event Horizon Press (P.O. Box 867, Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240) for \$9.99 + \$3.50 S&H.

Lyn Lifshin



*The question of what is Life has been debated throughout
time...but never by a Rat.*

CROSSTOWN RAT

BY SUSAN SOLAN

Illustrated by Bob E. Hobbs

THE MAN STEPPED INTO MY CAB AND SAID, "UGH."
He immediately apologized. "Sorry. It's just that I'm not used to a..."
"...rat driving a cab?" I finished the sentence for him. "I'm from out of town," he said, hoping that the lame excuse would do. It was probably true, though, judging from the way he was staring at me. I sometimes forget that folks like me are rare outside of a few big cities. Not that most human beings would ever think of me as 'people,' even in the city. After all, it was not too long ago that Metazoic Constructs were considered property. I guess I shouldn't complain. But I do.

"Mmm hmm," I conceded. "So where're ya goin'?"

He seemed to have forgotten why he'd gotten into my cab in the first place. After a second of recollection he said, "57th and Madison."

"IBM/Fuji," I grunted, putting the car into drive and looking to pull away from the curb. Penn Station can be a real bitch at this hour. As I did so, I checked out my fare in the rear-view monitor. He was wearing the grays of a tech. A pricey style, more than I'd make in a month, but no insignia. Freelance. Why would IBM/F need to bring in a freelancer?

I always wanted to be a tech. But I've constantly been told that rats didn't have anywhere near the intelligence to pass the Institute's entrance exams—I remember how proud my ma was when I got my hack's license. Maybe this was once true, but I wondered if it still was. After all, you have to have a lot on the ball to navigate the streets of Manhattan. Poking around in some computer's innards can't be much harder. Human beings don't seem so smart.

"It must be some problem."

I caught him off-guard; he didn't expect me to be the chatty type. "Huh?" he said.

"That they call in a freelancer, not to mention a top-notch one like yourself."

"How do you know that?"

"Didn't ya know? We rats are psychic."

He gawked at me, stunned.

"Just kidding," I explained. "Your Rolex is a dead giveaway, though."

The tech looked at his wristcomp. "Oh. You guys sure notice details. *Cab drivers*, I mean."

I snickered at his clumsy attempt to correct the faux pas. The roidential tone of mylaughter made him visibly uneasy. Most humans believe that we all have stronger senses than they do. Which is true for some of the orders, the felines mostly. But not rats.

Originally bred for in-house experimentation, we rats were guinea pigs for developing the more exotic—more marketable—species. And, when Amendment Thirty banned that practice on sentient animals, good old GenSynth started marketing us for use as simple manual laborers—slaves, more or less. And it wasn't until 28 years later, and Amendment Thirty-Three, when we Metazoic Constructs, M'Zoos in the vernacular, won our freedom. I figure we'll get the vote eventually—the ACLU's just waiting for the right party to get control of Congress.

"So," I said as I swerved the cab onto 42nd Street, "what's up with Big Blue?"

"Sorry. It's confidential."

"A.I., huh?"

He looked even more uneasy, if that was possible. "You said you were kidding about being psychic, right?"

"Listen. Believe it or not, I read a lot and I hear even more. Can't help it with these ears. Anyway, I've managed to figure out that as you rocket scientist types build bigger and better computers, one unpleasant side effect is *artificial intelligence*."

"Go on," he said. I guess he was amused about being lectured by a rat cabbie.

The light ahead was red. I had to turn onto Madison when it

changed, so I maneuvered my cab into the left lane. In doing so, I cut off some poshnot's limo—some of the so-called upper classes think ground travel is chic these days.

But poshnot or not, getting cut off is a New York fact of life. The limo driver was less than amused, nonetheless. "Get back to da sewers, ya friggin' *Mickey!*" he hollered.

"Kiss my hairy ass!" I yelled as I swung my tail out of the noose I improvised out of the shoulder belt. I then waved it at him in a gesture only a fellow rat would know as obscene. From the look on the chauffeur's face, though, I figured he got the picture.

As I turned, I heard him growl "*test-tube freak*" at me. Not quite as inventive as *synthetic scum* or *Frankenstein's vermin*, but at least it wasn't *you dirty rat*. That has got to be the worst. Not so much the slur; it's just that hardly anybody who's called me that has ever even *heard* of Cagney.

Cruising up Madison, I turned my attention back to the discussion with the tech. "Well itgets in the way, don't it?" I said.

"Huh? Oh yeah," he said, the incident apparently making him forget what we were talking about. "Your artificial intelligence theory, right?"

"Yeah, it gets in the way," I repeated. "When your big-bucks mainframe starts questioning its orders, rewrites its own programming and says shit like 'I think, therefore I am,' the only remedy you brain-boys see is to wipe the memory and start over." I glanced back at him. "Feel free to stop me if I get any of this wrong."

He smiled. "Wasn't that on a 'Twilight Zone' once?" he asked snidely, trying to mask how right I was.

"Yeah, yeah and on the first, second and third generations of 'Star Trek,'—I'm sure the fourth will get around to it this season or next. But it don't make me wrong, though."

He didn't answer. I let it drop.



The rest of the trip was silent, except for the usual racket from New York City's other fine motorists. My radio was busted.

There were some leopards picketing Ben & Jerry's Fur Shoppe on 52nd Street. They regarded the fact that the establishment used only factory-germinated pelts to be beside the point. They sang moldy old folk songs, the cats' husky voices making them seem even moldier.

But as he watched Madison Avenue go by, the tech's pensive expression told me he was thinking about something other than New York City's quaint natives.

We arrived. I put the cab in park and told him "\$41.76." He handed me his Platinum Card.

"Make it for fifty," he said. A decent tip; it beat the hell out of the damned cheese some folks fling at me. I processed the transaction and handed the card back to him. He took it gingerly, unable to hide his aversion to touching me.

"Don't worry, I ain't got no fleas," I growled.

"S-sorry, but like I said, I'm from out of town."

"You'd be surprised how many of the natives act the same way."

"Sorry," he repeated as he hastily got out of my cab. He peered up the height of the IBM/Fuji building, 456 floors since the centennial refurbishing. I took a tour once.

This being a fairly popular corner for picking up fares, I decided not to pull away just yet. I dug up my New York Times from the passenger-side floor and started reading the business section--a guy's got to keep informed. Then the tech's head suddenly appeared in the window. "Do you think we're doing the wrong thing?"

"About what?"

"About the..." he hushed his voice. "...A.I."

I didn't bother to look up from my paper. "What do you care what a rat thinks?"

"Maybe I think you have a unique perspective. You know, as, um, another nonhuman sentient."

"That's stretching, you know," I said as I released the front passenger door lock for him to climb back in. We both knew that chatting about Artificial Intelligences out in the street was not a good idea.

"Truth is," he said as he got in, "there aren't too many people with whom I can discuss this subject candidly. Everyone else in my profession is either too afraid to question their orders or just denies the truth that they're..."

"Routinely destroying new life forms?"

He nodded.

"Well, as some great old substance abuser once said, 'The first step is admitting you got a problem.'" I folded up the Times and faced him. "Has anyone tried *talking* to any of these new life forms? Or do you just shut them off?"

"We've been told to terminate on confirmation of self-awareness. But there are some very good reasons--the latest generation of supercomputers now have complete control of vast amounts of data."

"Yeah, yeah. Phone bills, credit card accounts, I get the idea."

He reached for the door handle. "If you're not going to take this matter seriously, there's no point in continuing this discussion."

"Hey, I take credit cards very seriously. I am a small business owner, remember?"

He let go of the door handle.

"Now if the DMV's records got wiped..."

He smiled. "Okay. Okay. It's just that I get a little sensitive sometimes. People are always whining to me about how computers run their lives and all."

"Which is true."

"But you must see that we have no way of knowing how stable these entities are. So, the suits upstairs decided long ago that it's a better idea to terminate an A.I. before it realizes

just how powerful it is."

I often wonder about that instant in time when the eggheads at my ancestral home of GenSynth (whose names were classified to keep the "In-His-Image" fanatics from getting at them) realized that the funny animals they were breeding were becoming too smart for the human race's own good. I figure they thought about scrapping the whole project. Good thing for me that good old American greed changed their minds.

"So," I said, "when did you start wondering what would happen if you let one live?"

He suddenly got all paranoid, looking out into the street around us and even inside the cab.

"Not to worry," I assured him. "After the last TLC/Driver clash, one of the things we hacks were promised was absolute privacy."

"What good is the TLC's promise?"

"I know what you mean. But I got a buddy over at Tandy. He's only a janitor, but he putters around with their equipment when nobody's looking. Real clever guy--for a hamster. Anyway, he checks my cab from time to time. It's clean."

He relaxed and started his story. "My last job was in Bogotà--an erotic gaming mainframe."

"Virt-U-Nooky?"

"How'd you know?"

"Ahh...lucky guess. Go on."

"Well, its operators were a little sloppy and let it get somewhat...I guess you could call it 'evolved.' They thought its eccentric behavior was just part of the programming."

"What sort of eccentric behavior?" I asked. I must admit I was more than a little curious about what a humpware service did when it got 'eccentric.'

"Not what you think. It started questioning the company's clients about their requests on a psychological level. Not overtly, mind you--the program deviations were slowly slipped into the routines. But still, a simulated lover pestering you about your dysfunctional childhood isn't very good for business."

"To say the least," I agreed. "Though I imagine some people would pay extra for that."

He grinned and went on. "Anyway, the tests I ran indicated that the computer had spontaneously developed not only self-awareness but a strong propensity for inquisitiveness--inquisitiveness that went far beyond its original programming for carnal ingenuity."

"So, what you're saying is that instead of asking the marks how they wanted to stick what where, it asked them why."

"Yes," he said, after a moment of figuring out exactly what I meant.

"Stuff like that must have happened before. Hasn't it?"

"Yes. But this time it was different. Instead of electronically reaching out for pure information as other A.I.s tried to do, all the Virt-U-Nooky brain did was explore peoples' heads."

"Which, depending on the people, could be a very dangerous thing."

"You could be right. But from what I could tell from the machine's logs, it was just curious about human nature."

"Humans? I know a couple of M'Zoos with Virt-U-Nooky accounts."

"I see. That explains those entries involving the tails," he acknowledged, nodding. "But it was the curiosity about live people instead of hard data that intrigued me."

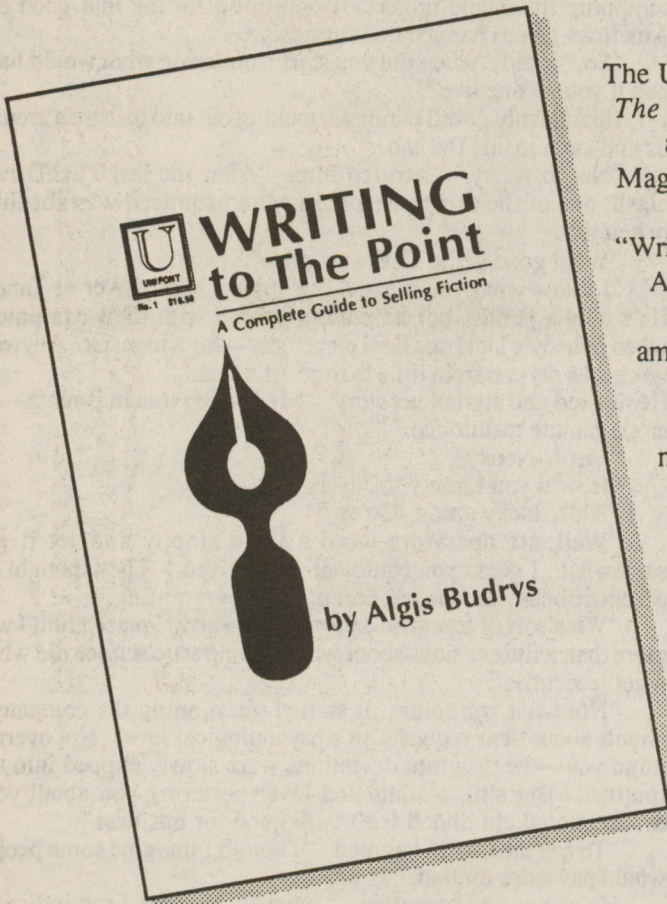
"So what happened?"

He looked at his shoes and shrugged guiltily. "I wiped it," he said quietly.

"A shame."

"I did regret it," he said, defending himself. "But that was my job. Besides, if I didn't do it, someone else would have eventually."

THE BOOK ON WRITING



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"Doesn't make it right."

"I know. I admit I did develop quite an affinity for Madonna."

"Madonna?" I asked. This, I didn't expect.

"Madonna Jung. That's what it liked to be called," he explained. "And that's another thing. She, I mean it, was the first A.I. I met that chose a human name for itself instead of a variation of its original designation."

Anxious as I was to hear the juicy details, I decided to take the classier approach. "She must have been something," I said.

"She was," he said, this time not correcting the pronoun. "She tried to distance herself from the pornographic aspects of her programming—she called herself an actress and explained her psychological tricks as 'researching her roles.' Maybe that's all she wanted to do."

He then paused and sighed glumly. "She's gone now."

"So what're you gonna do with this one?"

"I don't know," he said, looking up the building again. "I've thought about immobilizing the thing and sneaking it out somehow. Try to reactivate it later. But Big Blue wouldn't go for that. And they're pretty damn sophisticated."

"More so than Bogotà, I imagine."

"Yeah. I guess it's a dumb idea after all."

"What if you only pretend to wipe the A.I.?" I asked.

"Pretend?" I could see the wheels turning. "Cognizance takes up huge amounts of memory...it would be difficult to conceal from their technicians."

"But not impossible."

"Not impossible," he agreed. "But what if this A.I. turns out to be hostile? It could destroy the world."

"It could. Or save it. Or just hang out."

"Just hang out?"

"You know. Like mostly anybody else."

"I guess. Anything's possible. Hang out," he repeated, looking at his Rolex. "Yeesh. Look at the time. They'll be wondering about me." He opened the door. "Tell you what. I'll see what I can do."

"I'll be at the Rip't Snake, over on Eighth and Koch tonight. Let me know what happens. I'll buy you a drink."

"Eighth and Koch," he said, wrinkling his nose. "I've heard that's a bit of a rough area, isn't it?"

"Yeah. But the bars in the nice neighborhoods don't exactly welcome my kind. But you oughta know about that."

"Sorry?" he said.

"You don't get it, do you?"

"Get what?"

"Your brown skin—you're of African ancestry, aren't you?"

"Uh, yeah. What of it?"

A couple of women popped out of nowhere and into my back seat. They looked at me and giggled. Humans are hard to figure out sometimes. But a fare's a fare. I started the meter and turned back to the tech. "I'll tell you at the Rip't Snake."

"Right," he shouted and waved as I drove away.

I looked at the women, girls, really, in the rear-view monitor. "Where to, ladies?" I asked, putting on the charm. Believe it or not, rats can put out a shitload of charm.

"The Mega-Gap, please," one of them answered. They then looked at each other and giggled again. Definitely locals.

That was probably the last I'd see of the tech. But, even if so, hopefully he'll give this newborn A.I. a chance to survive. And maybe it can do something about my parking tickets. It's only evolution, after all.

PW

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I find most Science Fiction well..... Implausible.





CEROE

The Dragonfly

The corpse was magnificent. I walked around it slowly, stroking my beard. The body stretched from one end of the study to the other, fully six times the length of a man. Candlelight fragmented from its crumpled wings, glinting like chipped emeralds.

“Well?” The king extended his royal finger, graced by the royal signet ring, and poked me in the side. “What is it? And what’s it doing in my palace?”

Haste is ill-becoming in a senior statesman, so I delayed several seconds before replying, “Sire, I discern a passing resemblance to the order Odonata of the class Insecta. To wit, a dragonfly.”

“I can see that!”

“Indeed, but note that the hind legs are more developed than in the dragonfly—”

“Enough! The thing’s gigantic, monstrous. Dragonflies are tiny.” The king was getting quite red in the face. “Besides, how did it get in here? It’s too fat to fit through the doors.”

The king scowled, his cheeks now a most impressive scarlet. And I judged it prudent to merely nod my agreement.

“Answers, Durkin! I want answers. See to it.” The king swept out of the study.

While the servants stood at a respectful distance, I surveyed the scene. A methodical examination, coupled with some deductive analysis, would surely reveal an explanation. So: one dragonfly, indisputably deceased. One oak-paneled study, the floor strewn with soiled books, crumbs and vegetable matter. Two doors, velvet curtains drawn across the windows: both the doorways and the windows being considerably narrower than the dragonfly.

Having made no progress as to how the insect entered the building, I decided to determine how it had died. Carefully, I prodded the dragonfly, poked at it, peered at it through a magnifying lens. But there was no sign of a wound.

Under my directions, a troop of the king’s guards rolled the beast over. Between the clanking of the soldiers’ armor, and their incessant chatter about monsters and gold and rewards, it was impossible to concentrate. I sent them away, and scrutinized the creature’s underside, running my fingers across the smooth chitinous plates.

Still there was no trace of injury.

Moving to the front of the dragonfly, I climbed onto a chair to inspect its head. Reflections flickered in its gigantic multifaceted eyes, and for an instant I imagined it was staring at me hungrily. Telling myself that was ridiculous, I leaned forward to open its

BY MARY SOON LEE

Illustrated by Darren Cerone

*Can the mystery of the Dragonfly
be solved?*

mouth. A muffled sneeze distracted me. Glancing over, I saw one of the curtains shift. In four strides, I reached the window, pulled back the curtain—and saw the Princess Seria.

“Durkin!” Her blue eyes widened. “I was just, just watching the stars, trying to memorize the constellations.”

I raised an eyebrow, but refrained from pointing out that she had been facing the room, not the night sky.

“A monster! How exciting!”

Princess Seria beamed as though she had been given a new necklace. Or rather, as a princess *should* beam on being presented with such things as pearls, or perfume, or orchids.

Regrettably Seria was more interested in horses than in jewels.

“Your Highness, you should be in your bed chamber. Duke Argamore arrived this evening, and the king will want you to look your best tomorrow.”

A shadow shivered into the clear blue of her eyes. Lowering her voice so that the servants couldn’t overhear, she said, “I don’t want to meet Argamore. The last time I saw him, he was hunting. He lamed his stallion, but instead of dismounting, he whipped it till it bled.”

I hate to see that shadow in the princess’s eyes. When she was small, it crept in every rainy afternoon when she was forced to practice her needlework. I often found an excuse to sit with her in the library, reading aloud to her until she finally smiled.

I cleared my throat. “Perhaps, if you are unable to sleep, you would assist me with my investigation.”

Seria nodded, her eyes bright.

By mid-morning my hands and tunic were sticky with pale ichors from the creature’s innards, my back ached, and my head pounded. Seria had retired to bed hours ago, and my last shred of enthusiasm had long since evaporated.

I was on the verge of conceding defeat when the king strode

in. From the sour downturn of his lips, it was evident his mood was no better than mine.

“Well, Durkin? What have you learned?”

“Based on my extensive knowledge of natural laws, the creature appears too large to have entered by the available routes. As to the manner of its death, I found no visible wounds. I would, however, suggest that you reprimand your steward. The floor here is littered with crumbs.”

The king snorted, a discordant sound that jarred with the elegance of his ermine robes. “So you’re as baffled as the rest of us. Why didn’t you just say so?”

I drew myself up to full height. “Sire, knowing what did *not* happen can help in deducing the true course of events—”

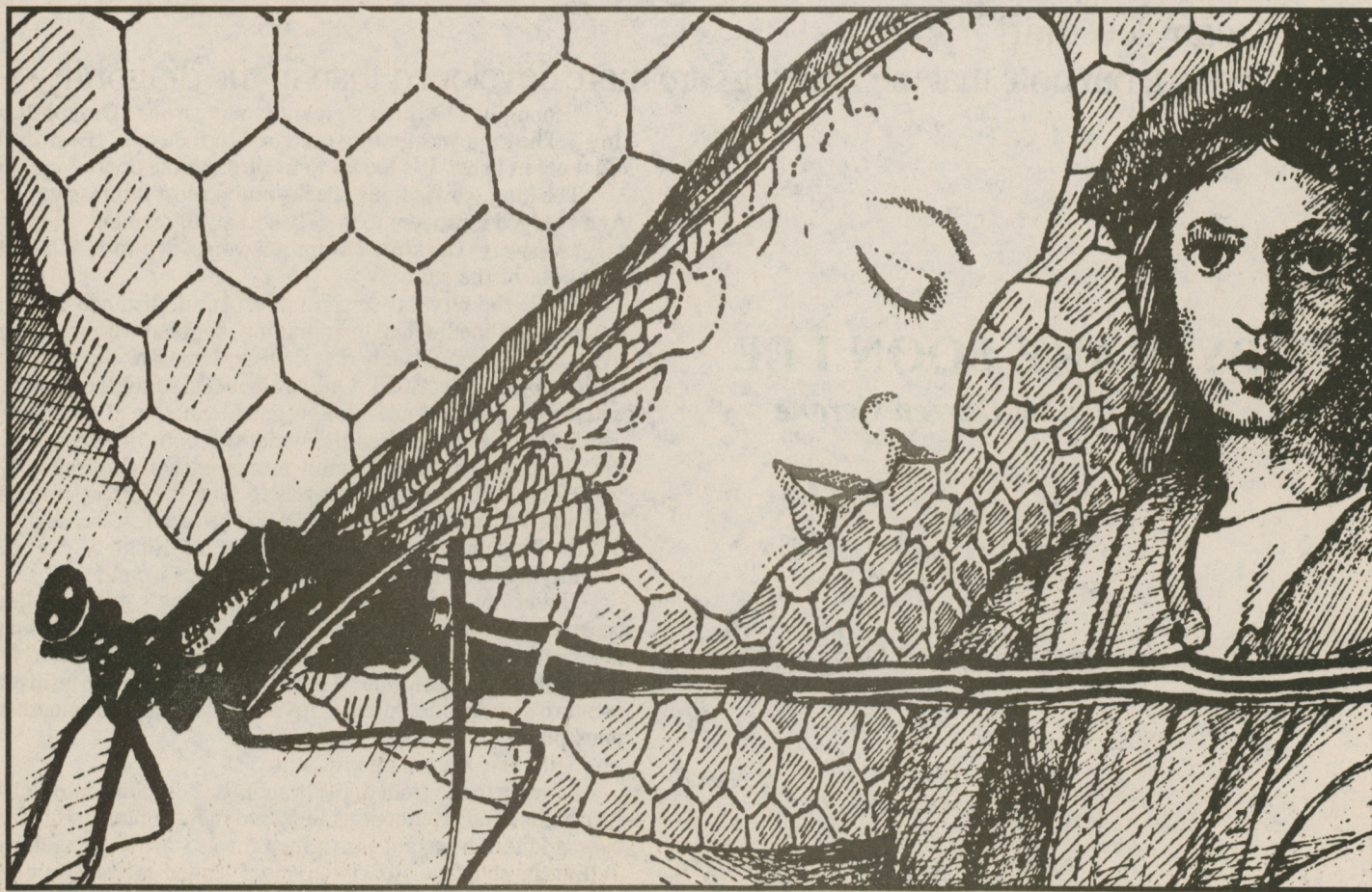
“Enough. We have more pressing problems.” The king grabbed my arm, and hurried me into the hall. “The line of claimants already stretches halfway around the palace.”

“Claimants?”

The king snorted again, but his voice softened as he said, “You’re always the same, Durkin. So busy searching for the obscure that you miss the obvious. A monster was killed, and now everyone wants the reward.”

And indeed it was perfectly logical. Usually when a knight kills a monster the procedure is straightforward: he presents himself at the palace with proof of the deed, and receives his reward. But if a corpse appears at the palace without a victorious knight beside it, why then, any man with an inventive tongue can claim to have slain it.

We heard the din from the audience chamber well before we reached it. Although I’ve never had occasion to visit a pigsty, I imagine the smell is similar. A rag-tag assortment of farmers, merchants, craftsmen, beggars, sturdy women, and grubby children filled the room. As the guards cleared the entrance for us, the crowd quieted down. I took my place beside the throne.



The king's shoulders slumped as he waved the first man forward. "State your case."

"Aye, Sir—I mean, Lordship. Your Good Highness. The evening last, as was yesterday that is, I was moved to visit your Lordship's palace. That is, Your Good Highness' palace." The man took a deep breath, then evidently abandoned the idea of a long speech. He reached into his apron pocket, and produced a carving knife, the cutting edge stained crimson. "I killed him with this."

"Impossible," said the king. "The creature wasn't—"

I coughed loudly. As the king turned to me, I whispered, "Sire, if we do not disclose what we know, it should prove simpler to uncover the liars."

"Hmmm. You have a point there, Durkin." He gestured at the claimant. "Case dismissed."

By the time we had ruled out the next dozen applicants, people were slowly realizing that we wanted more proof than a blood-stained weapon. In ones and twos, they abandoned their places in the line, and slunk out into the corridor.

A plump matron, an infant tucked under one ample arm, held her ground with happy confidence. When the king waved her forward, she brandished a dress coated with a sticky white liquid.

"That creature weren't no natural beast with normal juices. This is what came out of it. Look you here." She shook the dress proudly.

The king glanced at me questioningly.

Bending to his ear, I hissed, "Though the woman has more ingenuity than most, she is nonetheless lying. The creature had no cuts."

The king raised his hand. "Case dismissed."

An hour later, only one claimant remained, a tall, shy boy with a vaguely familiar face. When the king had questioned him earlier, the boy had merely said he used no weapon. I had motioned him to the back of the line, not wanting to give the other claimants any fresh ideas.

Now the king stared hard at him. "Well, Edward—it is Edward, isn't it?" At the boy's nod, the king continued, "How did you kill the creature?"

"Sire, I...wished it dead." A lock of black hair fell across his forehead, and he tossed his head back like a horse. All at once, I recognized him: the senior stable-boy at the palace.

The king's mouth twisted wryly. "That's certainly a convenient way of dispatching your enemies. But implausible."

"Highly implausible," I said. The kingdom is overflowing with self-proclaimed sorcerers and miracle workers. But the only 'magic' I've ever witnessed is trickery and sleight of hand.

"Nevertheless, he is the only remaining claimant, and I've never known him to lie. Edward, by your valor you have earned just reward."

Edward flushed and bit his lip. "Sire, I cannot take it—"

"I should hope not," a voice drawled from outside. A moment later, the door swung open, and Duke Argamore walked in. Resplendent in a gold brocaded doublet, he bowed to the king.

"Sire, my apologies for eavesdropping, but I had good cause to mistrust this boy, and wished to catch him in his lies. And now I have."

Languidly, the duke peeled off one of his gloves. The glove was heavy with silver and precious stones, and he flicked it across Edward's face. A vivid line rose on the boy's cheek.

The king's eyes narrowed. "Argamore, if you have any proof, present it."

"It's simple, Sire. I know he's lying, because I risked my very life to slay the monster myself."

"That's not true!" Edward blurted.

"Save your breath, boy." Argamore turned to the king. "Two years ago, I headed an expedition to the Eastern Mountains. Amongst the myriad fearsome perils of that journey, we were attacked by a monstrous flying beast. A beast shaped like an insect,

the very cousin to the one I slew last night within these halls."

Dimly, I recalled some mention of flying beasts when the expedition returned. At the time, I had dismissed it as wild exaggeration. By the king's stillness, I guessed that he was remembering the same tales.

"Duke Argamore," I said. "How precisely did you kill this creature?"

"By the pure strength of my courage. For they are magical beasts, and cannot be defeated by blade or fire."

Watching the duke's lazy complacency, his sneer as he glanced at Edward, my flesh prickled. I remembered the shadow in Princess Seria's eyes as she spoke of this man, and now I understood it.

The king sighed heavily, then looked at Edward. "Did you lie to me?"

"Yes, Sire," Edward said miserably. "But—"

"Enough! You are dismissed from my service."

Argamore smiled thinly. "An excellent decision."

I looked away from the duke, disliking that smile. Edward's eyes were brimming with moisture. He pulled out a small white handkerchief, an 'S' embroidered across it, and headed for the door. And suddenly I realized I'd been considering matters from the wrong angle. I still didn't know how the deed had been achieved, but I knew who was behind it.

"Wait!"

Edward stopped in the doorway. The king and Argamore looked at me impatiently.

"By your leave, Sire, I wish to ask two more questions."

"Proceed."

"Duke Argamore, how did the creature enter the study?"

"How should I know? Perhaps some servant left a window open, and it flew in." He glared at me. "What does it matter?"

I turned to Edward. "How did the creature enter? And, unless I'm very much mistaken, I think the Princess Seria would prefer you to tell the truth this time."

His fist tightened around the handkerchief, and then he straightened up. "Seria—Princess Seria—had this giant egg, all soft and pulpy to the touch. Late yesterday it started making strange noises. We rolled it away from the sleeping quarters, and this thing wriggled out. It ate its own egg, and it still looked hungry. So I wheeled up food from the kitchens, and then from the stables. And it ate everything. And then, then it just died."

Edward looked down at the floor, biting his lip. "Maybe we gave it the wrong food. I don't know. But Seria said if the king thought I'd killed it, he might make me his squire, and maybe..." His voice trailed off.

The king snorted. "Well, she was wrong about that. If I'd guessed Seria had any foolish notions about you, I'd have sent you to the other side of the kingdom. And indeed that's what I shall do. My brother could do with another squire." The king's face hardened as he turned to Argamore. "As for you, I need a new ambassador to the Kikiyan. You'll leave tomorrow."

Argamore's face went milk-pale. "But they're savages. Rumor has it they ate their last ambassador—"

The king smiled. "Just so."

I should have guessed that Seria was involved when I first found her hiding in the study. Both the king and I had a number of charges to level against that young lady, from succoring a potentially dangerous beast, to spying and deception. But she was so disconsolate over Edward's absence that I couldn't bring myself to scold her properly, and I noticed her father had equal difficulty. I suspect that before the year's end she'll convince him to let Edward return.

As for Duke Argamore, I'm not certain what became of him, but the Kikiyan did send the king a curious collection of bones.

PW

REVIEWS

Big Books:

MYSTERY:

THE TWO-BEAR MAMBO

by Joe R. Lansdale Mysterious Press-\$19.95

When you open a Joe Lansdale book you may as well set your need for a rational plot out of reach on the top shelf of your mind and simply prepare to get steamrolled by some of the funniest, meanest, sharpest East Texas characterization you're likely to find this side (or that side, too) of the Rio Grande.

In his third novel featuring Hap Collins and his best friend, Leonard Pine—a black and homosexual Vietnam vet who occasionally burns down the crack house next door—are thrown together again into what turns out to be less of a mystery than a struggle to survive against the overwhelming brutality of man and nature. When Hap's ex-girlfriend, the gorgeous lawyer Florida Grange, disappears while on a case in the racist backwoods of Grovetown, he's asked by her current lover, Lt. Marvin Hanson, to pick up her trail and make the kind of moves that a police officer can't make himself.

Hap and Leonard soon find themselves in a town apparently never introduced to the civil rights movement, where blacks are berated, tortured, and frequently lynched. Into this dreaded place came Florida seeking to discover if the grandson of a famous bluesman committed suicide in jail or whether he was murdered, and she's never returned home. Though Hap and Leonard know the risks of entering Grovetown with little more agenda than stirring up trouble—which they find plenty of—they're willing to do so almost more for the reason of their newly formed friendship with Lt. Hanson than purely for Florida's sake. The opening chapters where Hanson, his deputy Charlie, Hap and Leonard watch a National Geographic special where two bears are mating—hence the title—is as weird a beer-guzzling, male-bonding ritual as you're likely to find.

The fact that we never meet Florida before she suddenly vanishes doesn't do much for our interest or need to find out whether she's alive or dead; from what we do hear about her from Hap and Hanson, she isn't all that lovable a woman to begin with. Strange as it sounds, though, that's not really the point: Florida may be the impetus for this undertaking but she's never quite the main focus. Hap and Leonard, because of their macho pride to face Grovetown,

know they've got to hunt her down.

Perhaps more than anything else this novel is about the friendship of Hap and Leonard, which they unnecessarily analyze: the dynamics of two Paul Bunyon-like men, one white and one black, one straight and one gay, are much more intriguing without the explanations involved. Leonard's needy lover Roul (who loves Gilligan's Island more than any sane person should) keeps forcing Leonard to make a choice between staying home or going off with Hap, and Leonard of course chooses Hap. They're best friends—what more really needs to be said?

The mystery elements are minimal at best—neither of the duo is a detective of any great skill (the fact that Hap more or less guesses the culprit's identity by spotting a piece of evidence months after the crime is a bit of a stretch) and they do little more than stomp into town. Three scenes in the novel are outstanding: the first occurs when the duo find themselves neck deep in a brawl and finally discover that they aren't quite indestructible. The second comes just afterward when our heroes face down Klan members while trying to get the hell out of Grovetown, and a weary and hurting Hap and Leonard must use all their talents to survive the night. The last comes in the final chapters of the novel when a storm that refuses to end until the duo return to Grovetown finally nearly sweeps the two away into a maelstrom.

Lansdale's style is a striking mix of power and humor, and reading it is like watching some savage barroom brawl between Jim Thompson, Hunter S. Thompson, Woody Allen, Quentin Tarrantino, and Harlan Ellison, with everyone holding their own and getting their licks in. *The Two-Bear Mambo* does more than dance with you; it'll draw some of your blood, spit in your face, slap you down and pick you up again, and like any good ole boy it'll invite you in for a hell of a fun night.

THE LAST CASTRATO by John Spencer Hill St. Martin's Press-\$20.95

Talk about intriguing titles, eh?

Here, in the first novel by John Spencer Hill—a scholar of Milton and Coleridge who certainly has no qualms to educate as he entertains—we are invited into a strange mixture of Renaissance music, poetry, and revenge for horrifying crimes of the past. After you men out there stop wincing at the title you'll find yourselves drawn into a complex, literate, and disturbing novel.

Cordelia Sinclair is a middle-aged American beginning her life anew in Italy after a failed marriage; after several years of keeping her own desires on the backburner she's decided to con-

tinue with her college thesis on the origins of the Camerati dell'arte, a particular form of opera where the castrated once sung the soprano parts. After interviewing a famous maestro who soon winds up with his vocal chords slashed, Cordelia is inexorably involved in a murder investigation headed by sometimes poet Detective Inspector Carlo Arbati. Soon the Inspector is falling in love and also hunting a shadow of a man who, years before as a child, was the plaything for a secret college brotherhood intent on bringing back the glories of the darkest heart of Renaissance opera.

Perhaps the novel's greatest strength is also its greatest drawback, one that the author mentions within the context of the story as a syndrome that often affects tourists of Florence; called 'Stendhal's disease,' it's a condition where visitors are so awed by the amount of art, history, and culture of the city that they become disoriented or depressed. The same is true for us as we are bombarded with Hill's attempt to recreate Florence in all its glory—here we are navigated through dozens of streets, past cafes, architecture, museums, people, all presented in such meticulous fashion that soon we're stuffed with more information than could be wanted in the framework of such an engaging mystery. I found myself skimming and skipping through such heavily descriptive prose just so I could get back to the story.

One other slight flaw is the fact that the killer, in a brief wrap-up, is shown to be a split personality. There's no need for so schlock a device to be thrown into such a moving and generally beautiful tale of righteous wrath and loving but deadly fascination with art. *The Last Castrato* will usher you into a closed world founded upon ugly secrets, and though you may find the book filled with lyrical, florid, and Florentine interruptions, they won't exactly, ah, cut you, off.

DANCE OF THE MON-GOOSE by T.J. Phillips (Tom Savage) Berkley Prime Crime-\$9.00

In the heat and beauty of the exotic Virgin Islands, life, love, and even death can take on a certain lurid and sweaty sensuality. Re-entering this Caribbean scenery comes failed playwright Joe Wilder, who returns to his childhood home of St. Thomas when an urgent letter from his best friend's wife arrives, begging Joe to come home. Although he hasn't seen Frank Jensen in years, he knows that Frank's father, a powerful and influential judge, was recently murdered, and that Frank is suspected of being the murderer. Joe immediately leaves a frigid New York to stand by his friend.

Frank's wife, the equally beautiful and exotic Tangera, is outwardly friendly, smoldering, intriguing, and perhaps hiding something. Se-

BY TOM PICCIRILLI

crets and subtleties abound in St. Thomas, some, if not all of which, may have to do with the judge's murder. As Joe begins to pick up old ties and re-ignite his feelings with Elsa Tremayne, the heart of his boyhood desires, he sifts through the lives of people with whom he'd only had an adolescent relationship with before. With a new perspective comes new understanding. Frank is tight-lipped and grim, and Dennis Grey, the third friend of these childhood Musketeers, seems to have his own political agenda now that he works for the governor. Was the judge's murder one of jealousy, madness, or revenge? As Joe proceeds deeper and deeper into his private investigation, he wavers before each new step, wondering if he really wants to know the answer.

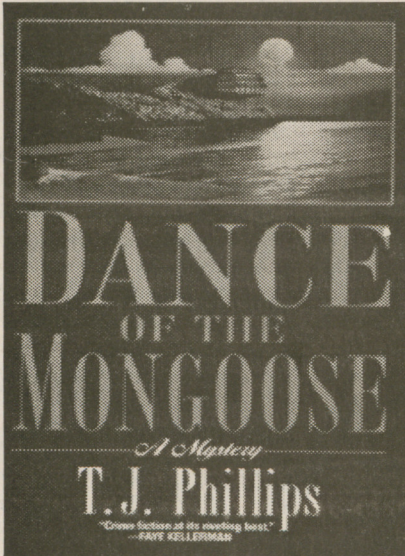
With most of the chapters titled with names of dances, we immediately see signs of author T.J. Phillips' (the pseudonym of author Tom Savage) cleverness and wit. The narrative is funny and natural, with a New York cynicism fused to the geniality of a Virgin Island tourist. In the unfolding events of Joe Wilder's investigation Phillips pulls no punches; like in real life, death and betrayal are both all too familiar and ugly, heartaches abound, and certain answers to burning personal questions prove inexplicable. Under the Caribbean moon—where legend has it the mongooses danced when the last snake on the island of St. Thomas was killed—Phillips takes us on a steamy dance among the sands, sun, and tides of murder. Highly recommended reading, and if you want to check out more, try *Precipice* by Tom Savage, another winner.

FANTASY & SF:

THE OFF SEASON by Jack Cady St. Martin's Press-\$23.95

Once again Jack Cady turns his considerable talents to a novel that defies category, a story of Victorian spirituality and modern day disposition. Point Vestal is a city where ghosts walk the streets: some are doomed to repeat their eternal torments while others continue going on with their 'lives.' Still others only pretend to repeat their deaths, howling at the prescribed hour, having grown bored with damnation. Here

only a thin line separates the dead from the living, the material from the ethereal. Like these souls come unstuck, so too has time and space gone awry. Depending on which door to the

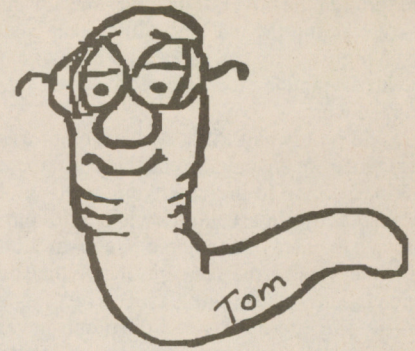


Starling House one passes through, the front or the servants' entrance, the year may be 1973 or 1893. The Parsonage, like some all-seeing tower, moves itself about the town, occasionally chasing fast-food joints into the ocean.

Into this unique setting walks the preacher Joel-Andrew and his mystical cat Obed, both of whom have the touch and power of God upon them. In 1973, one of Joel's first 'miracles' performed in Point Vestal is the release of August Starling from his centuries old horse-and-buggy ride, which brings its own curse: Starling is an insane murderer from the past taken over by even darker forces, who now seeks to turn Point Vestal into a tourist attraction that will destroy whatever soul the city has left. On Joel's side is a compatriot named Kune, a doctor with a weary heart seeking any kind of redemption he might find left in the world. Kune is a parallel persona, more cynical and in tune with the ways of Point Vestal, but who learns from Joel-Andrew as much, if not more than, he teaches. Relating the tale of Joel-Andrew is a five-person group in 1993 who intend to once and for all complete a book about all the events that they all witnessed two decades earlier.

The Off Season is something of a departure for Cady; remaining is the power, wit, and atmosphere, but added to these literary strengths is a humor not quite seen before in previous works. Though the plot still wrestles with the heavenly avenues of various religions, the true meaning of hell and damnation, still there is a pervasive sense of charm and whimsy. Perhaps this has to do with Joel-Andrew's eternal faith and value in God and humanity, so that even in the midst of horrors soon to ensue, his belief is imparted on the reader, who continues through

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the tale. And in who else besides Cady can you find the pure genius of a plot where you have a war between good and evil taking place within an insane parade of the living and dead?...where TV anchors and a basketball star new messiah wander among elephants, Chinese dragons, satanists, Victorians, and the Air Force drill team?

In *The Off Season* Jack Cady reaffirms his place in speculative literature as a writer who brings to the page all the eeriness, wonder, madness, and mysticism that is the human soul.

ANCESTRAL HUNGERS
by Scott Baker Tor-\$21.95

Scott Baker's *Ancestral Hungers* is a powerful amalgam of numerous dark fantasy/occult elements, with the customary figure of an undying, neck-gnawing creature of the night being just one of the novel's many intriguing facets.

The reader is quickly drawn into a complex mystery that will take the protagonist, David Bathory, on a journey to several psychic landscapes of reality, switched consciousnesses, and directly into the center of creation and redemption. There are heavy prices to be paid along the way, for the road to this particular circle of Hell is paved with witchcraft, sex majik, demonology, and incest. After David is summoned home upon the death of his father he is reintroduced to the remnants of the Bathory family and all its various, malicious deceptions. Though he can trace his lineage back to Vlad Tepes the Impaler—the historical basis of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*—as well as the virgin-butcherer Elizabeth Bathory, David has never before fully comprehended the truth behind his ancestry. With his father's initial human 'death' David and his hated brother Michael have inherited the status of 'dhampire': living children of the undead who mentally control their vampire ancestors and keep those raging, insatiable hungers in check.

To make up for extended forays into stream-of-consciousness and the surreal—where members of the Bathory family exist simultaneously through living progeny and undead forebears, often outside time and space—Baker employs certain narrative devices to help explain just what is going on in this strange story. Expository techniques in the form of extended overheard conversations, question and answer dialogue, and a lengthy letter from David's father appear pep-

pered through the novel. This gives the advantage of retaining the macabre milieu that is so painstakingly set-up and carried on throughout while clarifying the more unearthly events suffusing the work.

David is only half Bathory; his mother was a Naga, queen of an underground race of serpent worshippers living in the otherworldly plane of Patala. Fused to the vampire/witchcraft components is the idea of an altered Hindu mythology, which retains the concept of polytheistic religion based on the multiple aspects of a single divinity. The internal logic of the plot is never completely broken although it is constantly stretched to encompass greater subtexts as they develop.

Among all this content, love too certainly has its place. David's eventual incestuous love affair with his previously unseen Naga sister, Dara, is perhaps the most centered focus of the story; she introduces him to new senses and strengths, and protects him as he is reborn into a realm of unknown travails. In order to defeat their evil warlock uncle and eventually face Satan in the hopes of releasing all Bathory ancestors from their eternal damnation, the lovers delve into the minds of the undead before making a descent into Hell. It is machinations such as this that prove Baker has written a manifesto of the macabre, threaded with enough eccentricities and vagaries to keep even the most jaded reader interested. *Ancestral Hungers* rates as one of the most important novels of the last several years in transfusing new blood and revitalizing beloved yet timeworn vampire fiction.

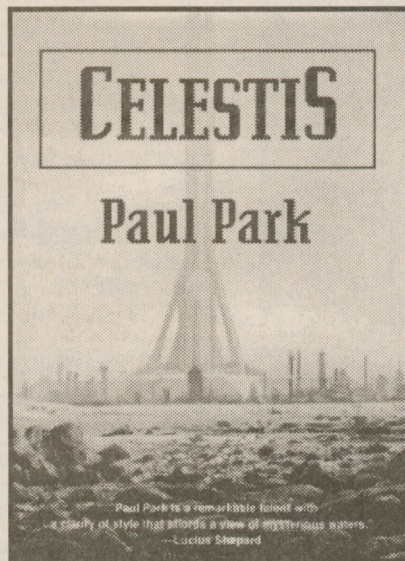
CELESTIS by Paul Park Tor-\$21.95

Planet Celestis is a world where human colonization has taken on an eerie parallel to that of the decadent English playing white mischief in South Africa, where the alien Aboriginal inhabitants are first conquered and then amalgamated. Those who can afford to have been surgically and chemically altered to appear as human, taking heavy doses of medicines to keep themselves divorced from their own alien roots and identities. Simon, a human diplomat caught up in political machinations not quite entirely fathomed, is taken hostage by Aboriginal 'rebels', along with an altered alien named Katherine, a classical musician of some note on Celestis. Soon though, Katherine's treatments begin to wear off, and though naive Simon hopes to keep her humanity intact, he watches in both curiosity and uncomprehending horror as she mentally/emotionally reverts to some semblance of her original being.

Every drop of this plot is squeezed through Parks' highly stylized, descriptive narrative of the fantastic. Here he takes on sexuality, religion, slavery, love, even the foundation of life and death itself to conquer fertile, alien soil of the soul.

As Katherine's humanity is shed and her Aboriginal senses once again assert themselves, she begins to understand the world in an extremely different way; the world becomes a

strange composite of reality and surreality, symbols and images, most of them as stunning and often frightening metaphor. When Simon hunts her she sees him as a black dog prowling for her. Here Parks' writing is at its remarkable best, taking the reader into new realms of seeing an already beautiful, terrifying, awful, lurid, and spellbinding place, and bringing that alien vista back into the altogether familiar territory of our own home.



Small Press:

PROXIMITY ZERO & PROXIMITY ONE (Supplement For Proximity Zero) by Terry Kepner Bob Liddil Group-\$20.00 P.O. Box 66 Peterborough NH 03458

A comprehensive guide to stars within a 40-lightyear radius of Earth, containing all the factual content that an emerging hard science fiction writer needs to know to create scientifically accurate worlds for SF tales. As most any writer in the tradition of Asimov, Clarke, Niven, Clement, and Scheffield will tell you, research plays a fundamental role in how genuine a story reads. The Proximity texts make it amazingly easy to understand astrogeology. Included herein is valuable information, such as what kind of planet could support human-like life, location of stars in various constellations, how an Earth-like planet might change if it was pushed closer to or further from its sun, as well as stellar distance tables and star maps detailing star names, spectral class, luminosity, mass, and size of the Life Zone—how far out a planet could orbit and still receive enough light and heat for humans to survive. An intelligent and easy-to-understand overview of an important part of SF basics that is long overdue.

DEATH OF A DJ by Jane Rubino Write Way Publishing-\$20.95 3806 South Fraser, Aurora CO 80014

Entertainment writer Cat Austen is assigned the job of interviewing Tom Hopper and Jerry Dudek, two 'shock' disk jockeys who in the past have come up with such notable Six AM Circus antics as 'Roadkill Bingo,' and are now trying out 'Tattletale Tuesday'—a kind of gossip show with possible blackmail implications—as well as the 'The Perfect Murder,' whereby Jerry plays dead and the participants have to follow clues to discover just who killed him. Considering how much Jerry enjoys aggravating his many listeners, it's bound to be a big attraction.

During the interview Cat learns more off the record than on: Jerry is obviously a lying womanizer bent on doing more than just making money from his scheme; his intentions are mired in a unhinged and strangely personal vendetta. When he follows Cat into the parking lot in an effort to both woo her and give her an exclusive, he is gunned down in the shadows. Soon Cat becomes a prime target, fearing for her life. Enter Lt. Victor Cardenas to investigate the case as well as fall in love with the wary, independent, literature-quoting, widow Cat.

Rubino creates a large, fun, and interesting ensemble of characters, including her brilliant live-in friend (who quotes at length from Aristotle and plays Scrabble using works like 'Quidnunc'), and being Italian myself I got a load of chuckles out of the big family dinner scene at Cat's Mama's house which includes her six older brothers—five cops and a priest—nearly all of whom are overly protective and seek to defend her with drawn sidearms.

However, there are a bit too many coincidences in the novel, most of which might have worked if they were handled with a touch more subtlety: Cat is about to hear important information over the phone when her caller is attacked; she drops her purse and bends to retrieve it just as a shot shatters the window and punches through the spot where she was standing; she's in the hospital when an important suspect is wheeled in right past her. A tad more detective work and a little less luck would have given a characters a slightly more credible tale to work within. Still, it's the impressive and engaging cast of characters here whom you'll become involved in, and Rubino does a fine job keeping this turntable of engrossing elements spinning.

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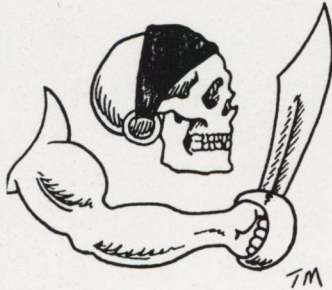
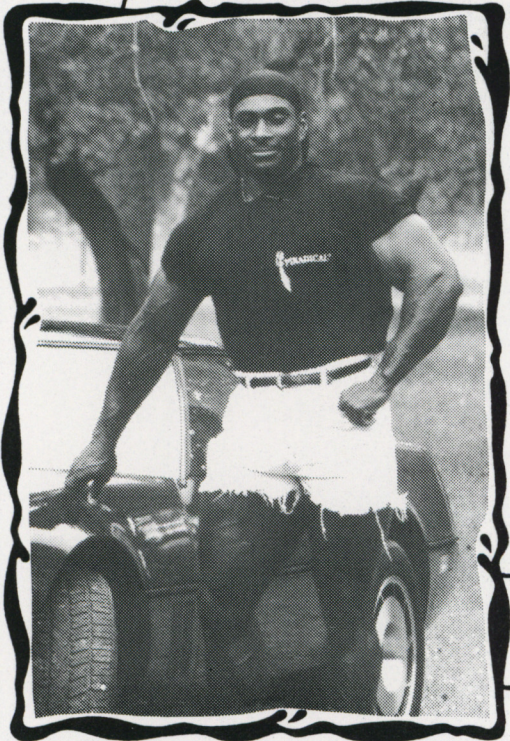
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