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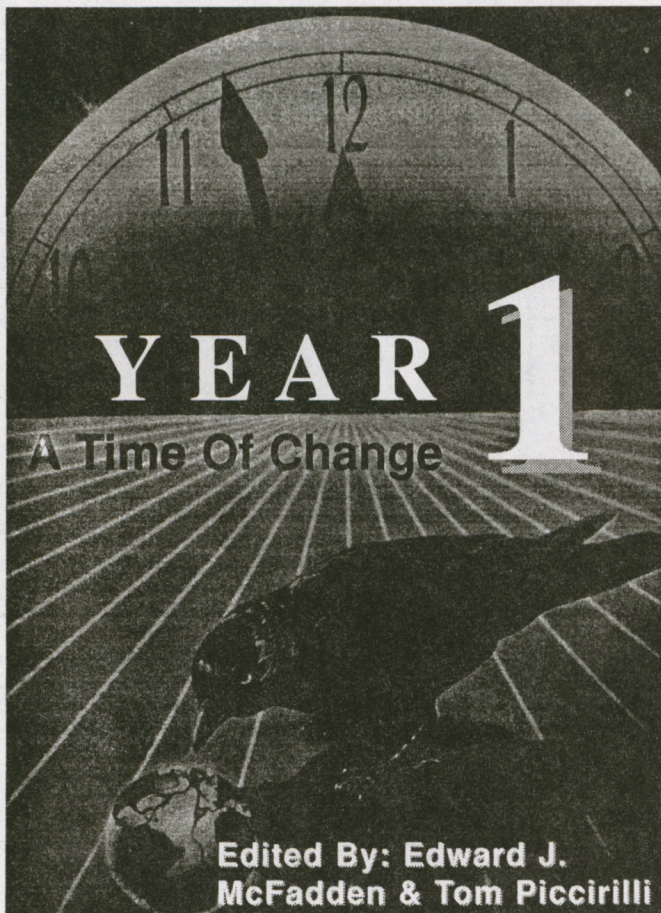
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From the Editor's Desk

My editorial in the last issue of *Pirate Writings* was suppose to be my last. Due to space needs for advertising, etc., I had decided to discontinue my editorial. However, I was told by those close to me that discontinuing it would be a mistake—that my editorial gave the magazine a personal touch. Is this true? Does anyone out there care what I write about? I rarely receive letters about my editorials, so I had no way of knowing...until now.

Just when it seemed Edward J. McFadden's editorial page was gone, I started to receive letters from readers telling me how much they enjoyed my editorial on Karma. How it made them laugh—or in some cases angry. Angry because though many of us complain about our lives, we live very well. I suppose this is true. Every time you think you have the worst luck in the world think of a handicapped person you know, or someone who has lost a loved one very close to him, or people who live on the street and can't even buy food. When you look at it that way...I'd be willing to bet that most of you reading this are doing just fine; myself included. So, as you can see I redesigned the Table of Contents, and moved the magazines Masthead and—you're stuck with reading my drivel forever.

By the time this issue is released I will be a married man (yes ladies, you missed me) and I would like to dedicate this issue to my wife, Dawn Rogers. (Now Dawn McFadden.) Thank you for putting-up with all my crap, my shitty attitude, and most of all, for hanging around for nine years while I got my head together. (Note: This unholy union is certain to be explored more thoroughly in future editorials.) Read on and enjoy...

Yours In Haste,
Edward J. McFadden, Editor

PIRATE WRITINGS

Tales of Fantasy, Mystery + Science Fiction

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Cover: NASA

Dear Mr. McFadden:

First let me tell you how much I enjoyed reading issue #8 of *Pirate Writings*. It beats a lot of the commercial magazines I see on the market—not only in design and layout, but in the quality of the works themselves. I enjoyed all the stories, especially Shariann Lewitt's "Jimmy" and Algis Budrys' "Due Process"; I've been a fan of Mr. Piccirilli's writings for awhile now, having read them in other magazines; and Kevin Carr's column *Surreal World* really grabbed me (essays along that subject I find fascinating.) If I were to pick a favorite tale, however, it might be Sherrie Brown's "In The Garden." All in all, it's a great issue. Take care and keep up the good work with *Pirate Writings*.

Sincerely,
Dennis Kirk
Tulsa, OK

[I'm glad to hear you are enjoying PW. Sherrie's story was reviewed in a magazine which shall remain nameless and the reviewer said, "I hated it." Exact quote. Obviously, I agree with you, Sherrie's tale was one of the best in the issue. I hope to publish more of her work in the future.]

Dear Mr. McFadden:

Karma? You think you know bad Karma? New Year's Eve I totaled my car, I lost my job on Jan. 8th, my parents moved to Florida on Feb. 1st and yesterday my landlord informed me that his son wants my apartment and I have to be out by March 1st and I have no place to go. Want to trade?

Oh yeah, the last issue of PW was cool.

Yours,
Tammy George, Bad Karma Queen
Tacoma, WA

[Damn! You make my New Year look good. Hang in there. Worst comes to worst you can move in with PW's Associate Editor Tom P.]

Dear Mr. McFadden:

Marc Schultz's story in the last issue of PW is great. Where did you find him? I've never seen his work before.

Sincerely,
Ray Bello
New York, NY

4 *Pirate Writings*

[Marc is a native New Yorker now living in Japan. "Crystal Memories" was the first story he ever sent me and I haven't heard from him since. Hope he sends more soon though...the response to his story was very positive. I know he has a story slated for publication at *Algis Budrys' Tomorrow Magazine*. Subscribe and you'll be sure to see more of his work!]

Dear Mr. McFadden:

Last issue was a good one (PW#9). Liked the interview, the stories by John Serna and Brendon Adams, and parts of Schweitzer's column, though he didn't really have much new to say. The Serna story, "Nemesis", hit home as the Polly Klaas murder was big news around here for some time. The guy that did it is going on trial this month in San Jose. My niece lives in Coverdale, near where Klaas' body was found, and whenever I visit her I pass by a makeshift memorial on the side of the road: flowers, toys, crosses...weird. I liked your editorial about Karma. Boy, don't I know it! There's no way around it.

Well, enough for now, oh wait, one last thing. The Barnes & Noble in Sacramento used to carry PW, but I haven't seen it there in awhile. Does your distributor still distribute there?

As Always....
G.O. Clark
Davis, CA

[Klaas' murder saw some press on the East Coast as well, though not as much as out west. It's a very sad story and I was happy to publish "Nemesis." Made me hope that justice will be served in real life. As to distribution: yes, PW is in hundreds of Barnes & Noble stores around the country. Could be that it wasn't selling in Sacramento (which I find hard to believe because PW does great in CA) and was cut from the list. But the one sure way to get PW, cheaper and faster, is to subscribe. What are you waiting for?]

Your letters and comments are welcome. Send to: Letters to the Editor, *Pirate Writings Magazine*, 53 Whitman Ave., Islip, NY 11751

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Edward J. McFadden
Editor & Art Director

Tom Piccirilli
Associate Editor

Carol Joyce
Tom Piccirilli
Copy Editing Assistants

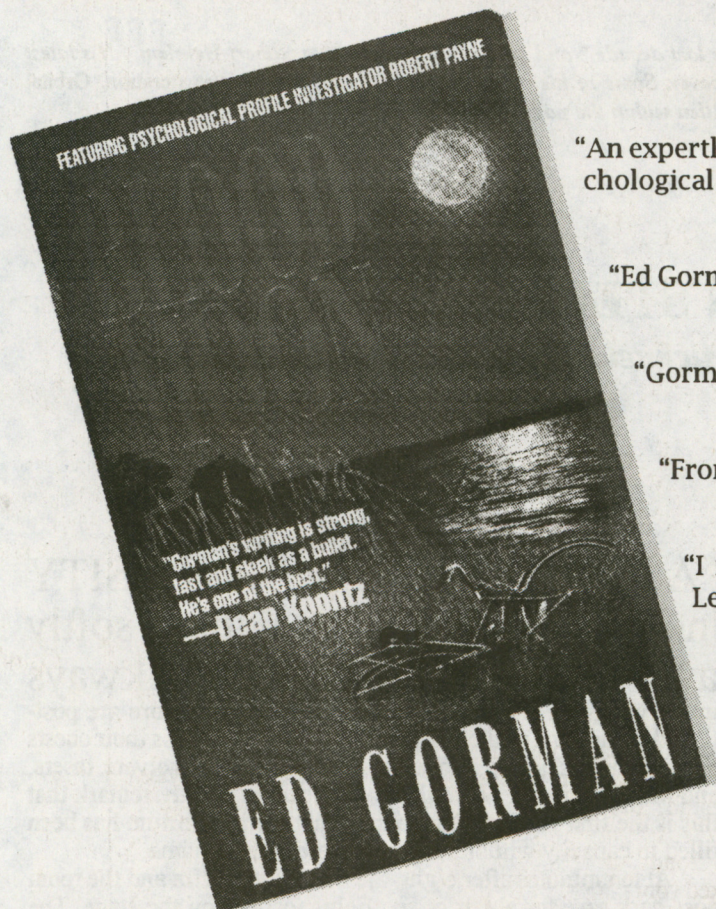
Dawn Rogers
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Online Consultants
Edward J. McFadden, Sr. (WWW)
David Niall Wilson (Genie)

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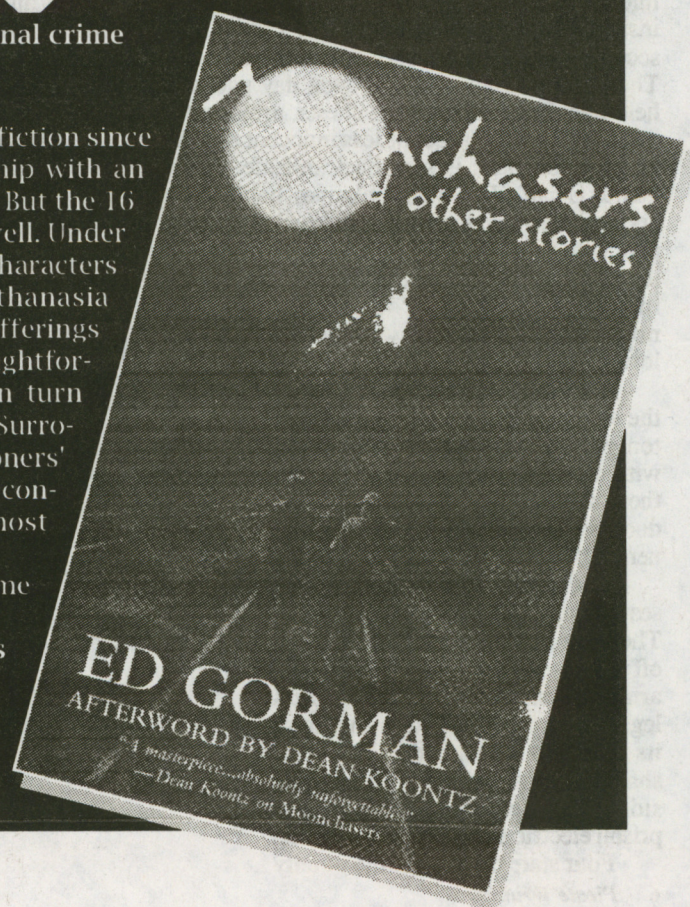
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AFTERWORD BY DEAN KOONTZ

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Allen Steele has been called "The best hard SF writer to come along in the last decade," and "A worthy successor to Robert Heinlein." His latest book, *The Tranquility Alternative*, was recently released as an Ace Hardcover. Some of his other novels include: *The Jericho Iteration*, *Orbital Decay*, and *Lunar Descent*, just to name a few. We look forward to seeing Allen within the pages of PW again soon.

BY ALLEN STEELE

Illustrated by Michael Apice

A CRISP AUTUMN NIGHT ON A MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY campus. A cool breeze, redolent of pine cones and coming winter, softly rustles bare trees and whisks dead leaves to scurry across the walkways leading to the main hall. Lights glow

from within Gothic windows as a last handful of students and faculty members hurry toward the front entrance. There is to be a famous guest speaker tonight; no one wants to be late.

A handful of students picket in the plaza outside the hall; some carry protest signs, others trying to hand fliers to anyone who will take them. The yellow photocopies are taken and briefly read, then shoved into pockets or wadded up and tossed into waste cans; the signs are glanced at, but largely ignored.

A poster taped above the open double-doors states that absolutely no cameras, camcorders, or tape recorders are permitted inside. Just inside the doors, the crowd is funneled through a security cordon of off-duty police officers hired for the evening. They check campus I.D.'s, open day packs, run chirping handheld metal detectors across chests, arms and legs. Anyone carrying metal objects larger or less innocent than keyrings, eyeglasses, or ballpoint pens is sent back outside. A trash can behind the guards is half-filled with penknives, bottle openers, cigarette lighters, and tear-gas dispensers, discarded by those who would rather part with them than rush them back to dorm rooms or cars, and thereby risk missing the lecture. Seating is limited, and it's been announced that no one will be allowed to stand or sit in the aisles.

Two students, protesters from the campus organization opposed to tonight's presentation, are caught with cloth banners concealed under their jackets. They're escorted out the door by the cops, who dump their banners in the trash without reading them.

The auditorium holds 1,800 seats, and each one has been claimed. The stage is empty save for a podium off to one side and a stiff-backed oak armchair in its center. The chair's legs are securely bolted to the floor, its armrests equipped with metal shackles; loose belts dangle from its sides. Its vague resemblance to a prison electric chair is lost on no one.

Four state troopers stand quietly

in the wings on either side of the stage. Several more are positioned in the back of the hall, their arms folded across their chests or their thumbs tucked into service belts carrying revolvers, tasers, and Mace canisters. More than a few people quietly remark that this is the first time in a long while that the auditorium has been filled to capacity without anyone smelling marijuana.

At ten minutes after eight, the house lights dim and the room goes dark save for a pair of spotlights focused on the stage. The drone of voices fades away as the dean of the sociology department—a distinguished-looking academian in his early fifties, thin gray hair and humorless eyes—steps from behind the curtain on stage left and quickly strides past the cops to the lectern.

The dean peeks at the index cards in his hand as he introduces himself, then spends a few moments informing the audience that tonight's speaker has been invited to the university not to provide entertainment, but primarily as a guest lecturer for Sociology 450, Sociology 510, and Sociology 525. His students, occupying treasured seats in the first six rows, try not to preen too much as they open their notebooks and click their pens. They're the chosen few, the ones who are here to learn something; the professor squelches their newfound self-importance by reminding them that their papers on tonight's lecture are due Tuesday by ten o'clock.

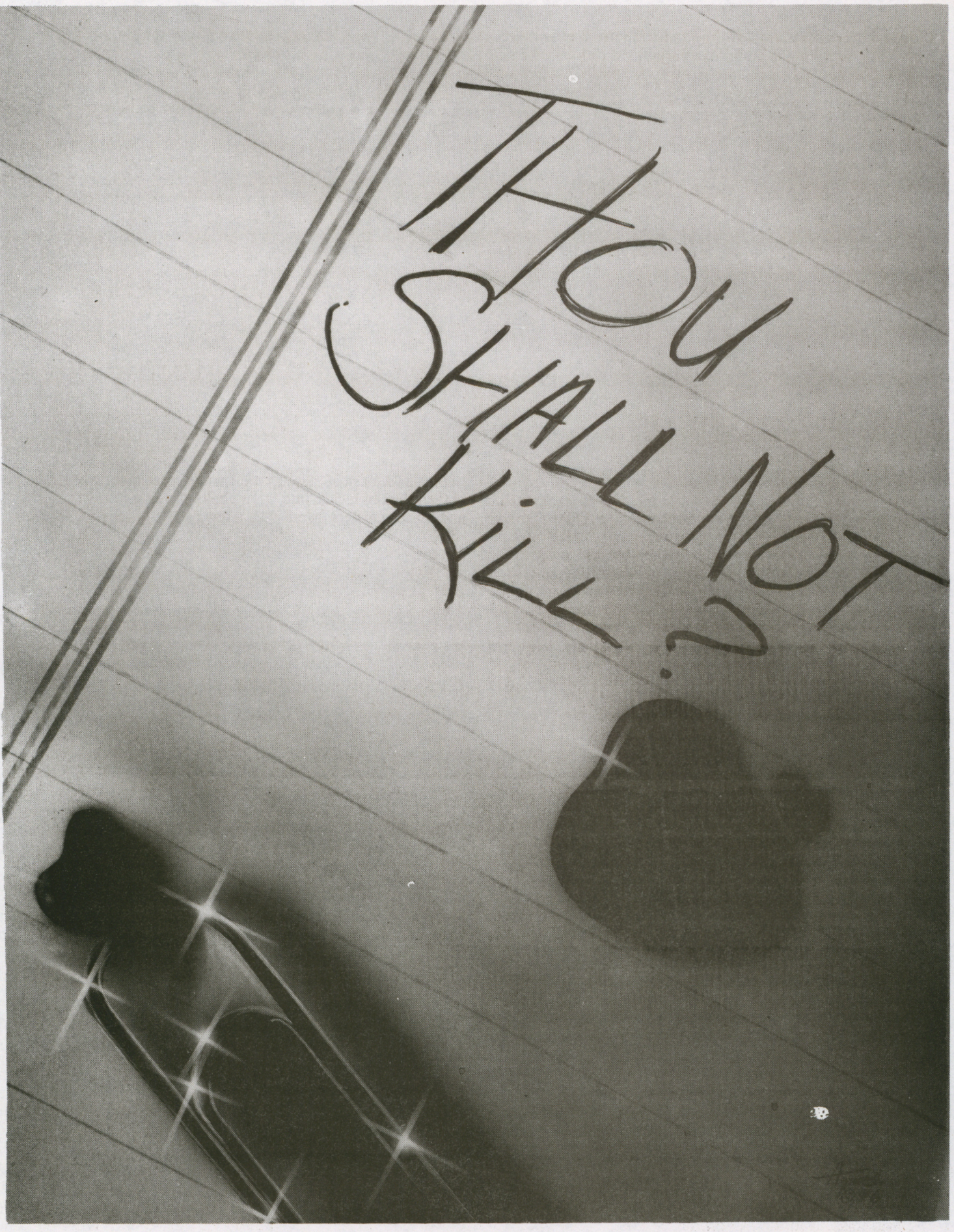
The professor then tells the audience that no comments or questions will be permitted during the guest speaker's opening remarks, and that anyone who interrupts the lecture in any way will be escorted from the hall and possibly be placed under arrest. This causes a minor stir in the audience, which the dean smoothly placates by adding that a short question-and-answer session will be held later, during which members of the audience may be allowed to ask questions, if time and circumstances permit.

Now the dean looks uncomfortable. He glances uneasily at his cards as if it's faculty poker night and he's been dealt a bad hand. After the guest speaker has made his remarks, he adds (a little more softly now, and with no

DUBLIN'S

LECTURE

IF YOU
SHALL NOT
KILL?



little hesitation), and once the Q&A session is over, there may be a special demonstration. If time and circumstances permit.

The background noise rises again. Murmurs, whispers, a couple of muted laughs; quick sidelong glances, raised or furrowed eyebrows, dark frowns, a few smiles hastily covered by hands. The cops on stage remain stoical, but one can detect random shifts of eyes darting this way and that.

The dean knows that he doesn't need to introduce the guest speaker, for his reputation has preceded him and any further remarks he might make would be trivial at best, foolish at worst. Instead, he simply turns and starts to walk off the stage.

Then he stops. For the briefest instant there is a look of bafflement—and indeed, naked fear—on his face as he catches a glimpse of something just past the curtains in the left wing. Then he turns and walks, more quickly now, the opposite way until he disappears past the two police officers on stage right.

A moment of dead silence. Then Charles Gregory Doblin walks out on stage.

He's a big man—six feet and a couple of inches, with the solid build of someone who has spent most of his doing heavy labor and only recently has put on weight—but his face, though brutal at first sight, is nonetheless kindly and oddly adolescent, like that of a grown-up who never let go of some part of his childhood. The sort of person one could easily imagine dressing up as Santa on Christmas Eve to take toys to a homeless shelter and would delight in playing horsey for the kids, or on any day would help jump-start your car or assist an elderly neighbor with her groceries. Indeed, when he was arrested several years ago in another city and charged with the murders of nineteen young black men, the people who lived around him in their white middle-class neighborhood believed that the police had made a serious mistake.

That was until FBI agents found the severed ears of his victims preserved in Mason jars in his basement, and his confession led them to nineteen unmarked graves.

Now here he is: Charles Gregory Doblin, walking slowly across the stage, a manila file holder tucked under his arm.

He wears a blue prison jump-suit and is followed closely by a state trooper holding a riot stick, but otherwise he could be a sports hero, a noted scientist, a best-selling author. A few people automatically begin to clap, then apparently realize that this is one time when applause is not warranted and let their hands fall back into their laps. Some frat boys in the back whistle their approval, and one of them yells something about killing niggers, before three police officers—two of whom, not coincidentally, are black—descend on them. They've been led out the door even before Charles Gregory Doblin has taken his seat; if the killer has heard them, there is nothing in his face to show it.

Indeed, there is nothing in his face at all. If the audience had expected the dark gaze that had met a news photographer's camera when he was led into a federal courthouse on the day of his arraignment four years ago—a shot engraved in collective memory, deranged Eyes Of A Killer—they don't see it. If they had anticipated the beatific look of the self-ascribed born-again Christian interviewed on "60 Minutes" and "Prime Time Live" in the last year, they don't see that either.

The killer's face is without expression. A sheet of blank paper. A calm and empty sea. A black hole in the center of a distant galaxy. Void. Cold. Vacant.

The killer takes his seat in the hard wooden chair. The state trooper hands him a cordless microphone before taking his position behind the chair. The arm restraints are left unfastened; the belts remain limp. Long moments pass as he opens the manila folder in his lap, then Charles Gregory Doblin—there is no way anyone here can think of him as Charlie Doblin, as his neighbors once did, or Chuck, as his late parents called him, or as Mr. Dobbs,

as nineteen teenagers did in their last hours of life; it's the full name, as written in countless newspaper stories, or nothing else—Charles Gregory Doblin begins to speak.

His voice is very soft; it holds a slightly grating Northeastern accent, high-pitched now with barely-concealed nervousness, but otherwise it's quite pleasant. A voice for bedtime stories or even pillow-talk with a lover, although by all accounts Charles Gregory Doblin had remained a virgin during the thirty-six years he spent as a free man. He quietly thanks the university for inviting him here to speak this evening, and even earns a chuckle from the audience when he praises the cafeteria staff for the bowl of chilli and the grilled cheese sandwich he had for dinner backstage. He doesn't know that the university cafeteria is infamous for its food, and he could not possibly be aware that three cooks spat in his chili just before it was delivered to the auditorium.

Then he begins to read aloud from the six sheets of single-spaced typewritten paper in his lap. It's a fairly long speech, the delivery slightly monotone, but his diction is practiced and nearly perfect. He tells of childhood in an abusive family: an alcoholic mother who commonly referred to him as a little shit and a racist father who beat him for no reason. He tells of having often eaten canned dog food, heated in a pan on a hibachi in the bathroom, for dinner because his parents could afford nothing better, and of going to school in a slum neighborhood where other kids made fun of him because of his size and the adolescent lisp that he didn't completely overcome until he was well into adulthood.

He describes the afternoon when he was attacked by three black teenagers who attacked and beat him without mercy only because he was a big, dumb white kid who had the misfortune of short-cutting through their alley on the way home from school. His voice remains steady as he relates how his father gave him another, even more savage beating that same evening, because he had allowed two niggers to get the better of him.

Charles Gregory Doblin tells a lifelong hatred for black people that became ever more obsessive as he became an adult: the brief involvement with the Klan and the Brotherhood of Aryan Nations before bailing out of the white supremacy movement in the belief that they were all rhetoric and no action; learning how some soldiers in Vietnam used to collect the ears of the gooks they had killed; the night nine years ago when, on impulse, he pulled over on his way home from work at an electronics factory to give a lift to a sixteen-year-old black kid thumbing a ride home.

Now the audience stirs. Legs are uncrossed, crossed again over the other knee. Hands guide pens across paper. Eighteen-hundred pairs of eyes peer through the darkness at the man on the stage.

The auditorium is dead silent as the killer reads the names of the nineteen teenagers that he murdered during the course of five years. Besides being black and living in black neighborhoods scattered across the same major city, there are few common denominators among his victims. Some were street punks, one was a sidewalk crack dealers, and two were homeless kids looking for handouts, but he also murdered a high school basketball star, a National Merit Scholarship winner recently accepted by Yale, a rapper wannabe who sang in his church choir, an aspiring comic book artist, and a fifteen-year-old boy supporting his family by working two jobs after school. All had the misfortune of meeting and getting into a conversation with an easy-going white dude who had money for dope, beer, or pizza; they had followed him into an alley or a parked car or some other out-of-the-way place, then made the mistake of letting Mr. Dobbs step behind them for one brief, fatal moment...until the night one kid managed to escape.

The audience listens as he says that he is sorry for the evil he has done, as he explains that he was criminally insane at the time and didn't know what he was doing. They allow him to quote

from the Bible, and some even bow their heads as he offers a prayer for the souls of those he has murdered.

Charles Gregory Doblin then closes the folder and sits quietly, hands folded across his stomach, ankles crossed, head slightly bowed with his eyes in shadow. After a few moments, the dean comes back out on stage; taking his position behind the lectern, he announces that it is now time for the Q&A session.

The first question comes from a nervous young girl in third row center: she timidly raises her hand and, after the dean acknowledges her, asks the killer if he has any remorse for his crimes. Yes, he says. She waits for him to continue; when he doesn't, she sits down again.

The next question is from a black student further back in the audience. He stands and asks Charles Gregory Doblin if he killed those nineteen kids primarily because they were black, or simply because they reminded him of the teenagers who had assaulted him. Again, Charles Gregory Doblin only says yes. The student asks the killer if he would have murdered him because he is black, and John Gregory Doblin replies that, yes, he probably would have. Would you kill me now? No, I would not. The student sits down and scribbles a few notes.

More hands rise from the audience; one by one, the dean lets students pose their questions. Has he seen the made-for-TV movie based on his crimes? No, he hasn't; there isn't a television in the maximum security ward of the prison, and he wasn't told about the movie until after it was aired. Did he read the book? No, he hasn't, but he's been told that it was a bestseller. Has he met any members of the families of his victims? Not personally, aside from spotting them in the courtroom during his trial.

Have any of them attempted to contact him? He has received a few letters, but aside from the one from the mother who sent him a Bible, he hasn't been allowed to read any correspondence from the families. What does he do in prison? Read the Bible he was sent, paint, and pray. What does he paint? Landscapes, birds, the inside of his cell. If he could live his life all over again, what would he do differently? Become a truck driver, maybe a priest. Is he receiving a lecture fee from this visit? Yes, but most of it goes into a trust fund for the families of his victims, with the rest going to the state for travel expenses.

All this time, his gaze remains centered on a space between his knees, as if he is reading from an invisible Teleprompter. It is not until a aesthetic-looking young man in the tenth row asks him, in a rather arch voice, whether he received any homoerotic gratification when he committed the murders—an erection, perhaps? perhaps a fleeting vision of his father? —does Charles Gregory Doblin raise his eyes to meet those of his questioner. He stares silently at the pale young

man for a long, long time, but says nothing until the student sits down again.

An uncomfortable hush follows this final question; no more hands are raised. The dean breaks the silence by announcing that the Q&A session is now over. He then glances at one of the guards standing in the wings, who gives him a slight nod. There will be a brief fifteen-minute intermission, the dean continues, then the program will resume.

He hesitates, then adds that since it will include a demonstration that may be offensive to members of the audience, this might be a good time for those people to leave.

Charles Gregory Doblin rises from his chair. Still refraining from looking directly at the crowd, he lets the state trooper escort him offstage. A few people in the auditorium clap self-consciously, then seldom-used gray curtains slide across the stage.

When the curtains part again fifteen minutes later, only a handful of seats in the auditorium are vacant. The one in the center of the stage is not.

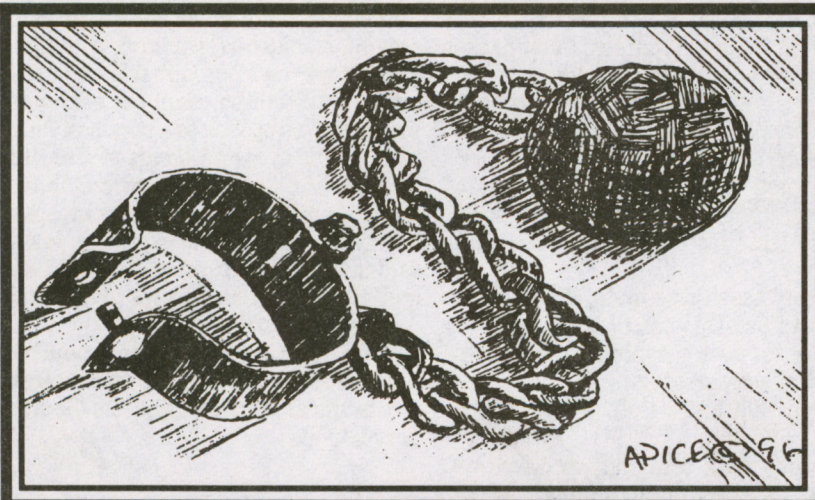
A tall, skinny young black man is seated in the chair that Charles Gregory Doblin has kept warm for him. He wears a prison jump-suit similar to one worn by his predecessor, and his arms are shackled to the armrests, his body secured to the chair frame by the leather belts that had hung slack earlier. The same state trooper stands behind him, but this time his riot stick is in plain view, grasped in both hands before him.

The prisoner's eyes are cold searchlights that sweep across

the audience. No one can meet his gaze without feeling revulsion. He catches sight of the young woman in the third row who had asked a question earlier in the evening; their eyes meet for a few seconds, and the prisoner's lips curl upward in a predatory smile. He starts to mutter an obscenity, but shuts up when the state trooper places the end of his stick on his shoulder. The girl squirms in her seat and looks away.

The dean returns to the lectern and introduces the young black man. His name is Curtis Henry Blum; he is

twenty-two years old, and born and raised in this same city. Blum committed his first felony offense when he was twelve years old, when he was arrested for selling crack in the school playground; he was already a gang member by then. Since then he has been in and out of juvenile detention centers, halfway houses, and medium security prisons, and has been busted for mugging, narcotics, car jacking, breaking and entering, armed robbery, rape, attempted murder. Sometimes he was convicted and sent to one house of corrections or another; sometimes he was sentenced on lesser charges and served a shorter term; sometimes he was just let go for lack of evidence. Each occasion he was sent up, he spent no more than eighteen months before being paroled or furloughed and thrown back on the street.



The killer's face is without expression. A sheet of blank paper. A calm and empty sea. A black hole in the center of a distant galaxy. Void. Cold. Vacant.

Nineteen months ago, Curtis Blum held up a convenience store on the city's north side, one owned and operated by a South Korean immigrant family. Blum held mother, father, and teenage daughter at gunpoint while he cleaned out the cash register and tucked two bottles of wine into his pockets. The family knelt on the floor and begged him to be merciful and just leave, but he shot them anyway, along with an eleven-year-old kid from the hood who had been sent out by his mother to buy some cat food and beer, and had the misfortune of walking through the door just as Blum was going out. He didn't want to leave any witnesses, or maybe he simply felt like killing people that night.

A police SWAT team found Blum at his grandmother's house two days later. He wasn't hard to find; although by then he had bragged to everyone he knew about how he had capped three slants the night before, it was his grandmother who had called the cops. She also testified at her grandson's trial six months later, saying that he regularly robbed and beat her.

Curtis Blum was convicted on four counts of second-degree murder. This time, he faced a judge who didn't believe in second chances; he sentenced Blum to death. Since then, he has been filling in time on death row in the state's maximum security prison.

The dean steps from behind the lectern and walks over to where the prisoner is seated. He asks Blum if he has any questions. Blum asks him if the girl in the third row wants to fuck.

The dean says nothing. He simply turns and walks away, vanishing once again behind the curtains on stage left.

Curtis laughs out loud, then looks again at the woman in the third row and asks her directly if she wants to fuck. She starts to get up to leave, which Blum misinterprets as willingness to conjugate; even as he assails her with more obscenities, though, another female student grasps her arm and whispers something to her.

The girl stops, glances again at the stage, and then sits back down. This time, she has a slight smile on her face, for now she sees something that Blum doesn't.

Curtis is about to shout something else at the girl when a shadow falls over him. He looks up, and finds himself looking into the face of Charles Gregory Doblin.

Killing a man is actually a very easy thing to do, if you know how. There's several simple ways that this can be accomplished that don't require knives or guns, or even garrote wires or sharp objects. You don't even have to be very strong.

All you need are your bare hands, and a little bit of hate.

The dry crack of Curtis Blum's neck being snapped follows the students as they shuffle out of the auditorium. It's a cold wind, harsher than the one that blows dry leaves across the plaza outside the main hall, that drives them back to dormitories and apartments.

No one will sleep very well tonight. More than a few will waken from nightmares to find their sheets clammy with sweat, the sound of Blum's final scream still resonating in their ears. Wherever they may go for the rest of their lives, whatever they may do, they will never forget what they have witnessed this evening.

Fifteen years later, a sociology post-grad student at this same university, in the course of researching her doctoral thesis, will discover an interesting fact. Upon tracking down the students who were present at Charles Gregory Doblin's lecture and interviewing them or their surviving relatives, she will find that virtually none of them were ever arrested on a felony offense, and not one was ever investigated or charged with spousal or child abuse, statistics far below the national average for a population of similar age and social background.

Yet that is still in the future. This is the present:

In a small dressing room behind the stage, Charlie Doblin—no longer Charles Gregory Doblin, but simply Charlie Doblin, Inmate #7891—sits in a chair before a make-up counter, hunched

over the dogeared Bible the mother of one his victims sent him several years ago. His lips move soundlessly as he reads words he does not fully comprehend, but which help to give his life some meaning.

Behind him, a couple of state troopers smoke cigarettes and quietly discuss tonight's lecture. Their guns and batons are holstered and ignored, for they know that the man in the room is utterly harmless. They wonder aloud how much vomit will have to be cleaned off the auditorium floor, and whether the girl in the third row will later remember what she yelled when the big moment came. She sounded kinda happy, one cop says, and the other one shakes his head. No, he replies, I think she was pissed because she missed out on a great date.

They both chuckle, then notice that Charlie Doblin is silently peering over his shoulder at them. Shut up, asshole, one of them says, and Doblin returns his attention to his Bible.

A radio crackles. A trooper plucks the handset off his jacket epaulet, murmurs into it, listens for a moment. The van is waiting out back, the local cops are ready to escort them to the interstate. He nods to his companion, who turns to tell Charlie that it's time to go. The killer nods his head; he carefully marks his place in the Bible, then picks it up along with the speech that he read tonight.

He didn't write this speech, but he has dutifully read it many times already, and will read again tomorrow night in another college auditorium, to a different audience in a different city. And, as always, he will end his lecture by becoming a public executioner.

Somewhere else tonight, another death-row inmate unwittingly awaits judgment for his crimes. He sits alone in his cell, playing solitaire or watching a sitcom on a TV on the other side of the bars, and perhaps smiles at the notion that, this time tomorrow, he will be taken out of the prison to some college campus to make a speech to a bunch of kids, unaware that what awaits him are the eyes and hands of Charles Gregory Doblin.

It's a role which Charlie Doblin once savored, then found morally repugnant, and finally accepted as predestination. He has no say over what he does; this is his fate, and indeed it could be said that this is his true calling. He is very good at what he does, and his services are always in demand.

He has become a teacher.

Charles Gregory Doblin scoots back his chair, stands up and turns around, and lets the state troopers attach manacles to his wrists and ankles. Then he lets them take him to the van, and his next lesson.

PW

**Next issue of
PIRATE WRITINGS**

**on the
newsstand
August 1st!
Don't miss it!**

by Linda D. Addison

An Interview with:

Nancy Kress

Unusual surprises are often born from surprisingly usual places. Nancy Kress spent her childhood in the town of East Aurora in upstate New York, the oldest of four children. While growing up it never occurred to her to become a writer because she thought all writers were dead, so she decided at twelve to be a teacher. After going to college for elementary education and getting a B.S. in education Nancy became a 4th grade teacher. She received a M.S. in education and a M.A. in education in order to switch to college teaching.

Soap operas and her lack of interest in them while pregnant with her second child created this Nebula and Hugo award winning writer. She started publishing fantasy, and then science fiction, and has recently added a SF whodunit novel, *Oaths and Miracles*, to her lists of publications. Followers of her *Beggars' Ride* books will be pleased to know that a third novel, *Beggars Ride*, will be released later this year.

Her teaching background has led Nancy Kress to co-authoring, *The Writer's Companion*, a software package in development for writers, teachers and students.

PW: *What was the first piece you wrote?*

NK: It was a short science fiction story, two pages long, which wild horses will not drag from me—ever. It was really dreadful. All first stories are dreadful. I have them in a writer's trunk in my study but they are so awful no eyes will ever see them but mine. I'm going to destroy

them one day. I started writing because I was going nuts. I was home with one kid and I was pregnant with another. It was either do that or watch soap operas, so I started writing.

PW: *How long did it take to write your first book?*

NK: Five months. A ridiculously short period of time because I didn't know what I was doing. It's episodic, the character wanders from place to place and has different adventures. Although the adventures are linked thematically it didn't really have an integrated plot, which is, of course the easiest thing to write. The shortest amount of time it took for me to write a book was five weeks, *The White Pipes* and the longest was *An Alien Light* which took three years. Partly those differences are because life interferes, other things happen.

PW: *What has changed in your writing since you first began?*

NK: In the beginning writing was something I did on the side, so as a result there was no economic pressure. What has changed now is that I'm a full-time writer and there's a certain economic imperative driving me. And that's become more difficult. I've also set my sights higher. Stories occur to me now that I know ten years ago I would have written. Now I look at an idea or the characters with a far more withering eye and reject a lot of them because I can see they wouldn't make very good stories. They would make adequate stories but they wouldn't make good enough sto-

ries to justify the time. So it's gotten harder in that way as well.

PW: *How do you balance what you want to do as a writer creatively against the pressure of writing as your job?*

NK: I always write what I want to write creatively. My agent and publisher are very open to this. I write what I'm going to write. I don't worry about trying to shape it for any marketplace or selling it. The only way being a full time writer puts pressure on me is that I don't have the luxury of not writing.

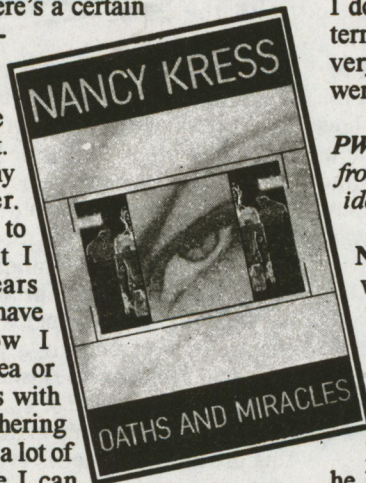
PW: *What do you struggle with in your work?*

NK: Two things. Plot is hard for me. Characters come much easier, but then deciding what the characters are going to do is harder, especially bringing the plot to a resolution that's exciting. The other difficulty is that I don't have a scientific background and increasingly more and more I'm writing hard science. This means I spend a lot of time doing research. Not only do I not like doing research, but I'm not particularly good at it. The science I'm working in is microbiology and often times I don't have the terms to understand the terms to understand the terms. So I wish very much my educational background were different.

PW: *Oaths and Miracles is very different from your previous work. When did the idea occur to you?*

NK: I don't know when it occurred or why. Sometimes these ideas just come to me and I want to write them. The motive for writing that book was Judy Kozinski, one of the three main characters. She's struggling very hard with the end of a difficult marriage because her husband is killed and she finds out he has been unfaithful. I wrote it when I was coming to grips with the end of my marriage, under different circumstances, but some of the emotions are similar.

INTERVIEW



PW: This is a thriller with strong science fiction elements. It reads very true. How did you do the research for the book?

NK: For the microbiology I started with articles in *Scientific American* on MCH complexes and type-G receptors. The basic idea I put together is built on plausible science. At the time I happened to be dating a doctor, an oncologist. I asked him to listen to the basic idea for half an hour. When I finished I asked him if I was going to make a total fool of myself and he said it was not only plausible but something that could possibly be done. This was a high point for me. I'm indebted to three friends for the detective details. A friend who works for the Department of Corrections in New York gave me information on basic detective procedures. Organized crime, as it turns out, works by entirely different rules. Two writer friends, Mary Stanton and Miriam Monfredo, read the first draft and said this wasn't convincing as far as the detective work against organized crime. So I started reading about how the FBI and the Justice Department prosecute the mob. They do it far differently from other kinds of crime because of the RICO statutes. I found myself reading many things, including a 600 page document of a hearing before a senate sub-committee on organized crime. Every word is transcribed, there's just pages of stuff but there was some useful things as to how they actually go about doing their investigation. I also read FBI brochures and training manuals. I'm fortunate to live near a university library that has a government document section. What it doesn't have it can get on an interlibrary loan. Then I tore down the manuscript and rewrote it entirely.

PW: Oaths and Miracles is this fine weaving of three plots. Did you know how it was all going to come together before you wrote it?

NK: No, I never know the ending of my works, even novels. I did understand the scientific McGuffin before I began and how it was going to be used. That's all I knew. The characters take over as I write and the ending emerges out of that. If I knew the ending ahead of time I wouldn't want to write the book. The whole point, for me, of writing is to find out what I'm going to say.

PW: Do you remember where the genetic no-sleep idea came from that you developed in your Beggar novels?

NK: Very clearly—jealousy. I'm one of those people who needs ten hours sleep and I really resent it. I could get so much more

done if I didn't need all that sleep. I first tried to write about the sleepless 13 years before I wrote the novella *Beggars In Spain*. It was a terrible story and rejected everywhere. Five years after that I tried to do it again. It was still a bad story, but the idea didn't go away. Eventually I wrote *Beggars In Spain* which was the first thing I wrote after I became a full-time writer. This time I finally got it at least more right. When the story was finished I realized I wasn't done with Leisha so it became a novel. Then I realized it wasn't done again so it became a second book, *Beggars and Choosers*. Then I thought it was done but my publishers told me there should be a third one, so *Beggars Ride*, the third one will be coming out in October of this year. Now I'm really done with the *Beggar* novels.

PW: *Beggars in Spain* is a somewhat internal story where *Beggars and Choosers* puts us more in the *Beggars* world, external. How would you describe the third *Beggars* book?

NK: *Beggars Ride* returns more to the personal. There are four point-of-view characters and it follows them pretty closely. There are large changes afoot, having tackled the revamping of the human body in previous *Beggar* novels I'm now dealing with the human brain and its neural chemical components in *Beggars Ride*. Two of my favorite new characters I've ever created are in *Beggars Ride*, a brother and sister named Jackson and Theresa Aranow. They're very unsure of themselves. The brother, Dr. Jackson Aranow graduates from medical school the same month that Miranda Sharifi completely makes medicine unnecessary by making the cell cleaner available to humans. He's essentially a person with an obsolete career and he always wanted to be a doctor. This is five or six years later and he hasn't really come to grips with losing his dream. His sister is even more uncertain of herself because she suffers from clinical depression. Theresa also suffers from a desire to have religious faith which

is almost impossible in the world in which they are born. She is aware that she was born out of her time. She should have been a medieval abbess or something. I liked these people because they're fundamentally decent human beings.

PW: Where did the title *Beggars Ride* come from?

NK: The market department of TOR chose it because my editor, David Hartwell, and I couldn't come up with anything we both liked. It's from the saying:

If wishes were horses
then beggars might ride.

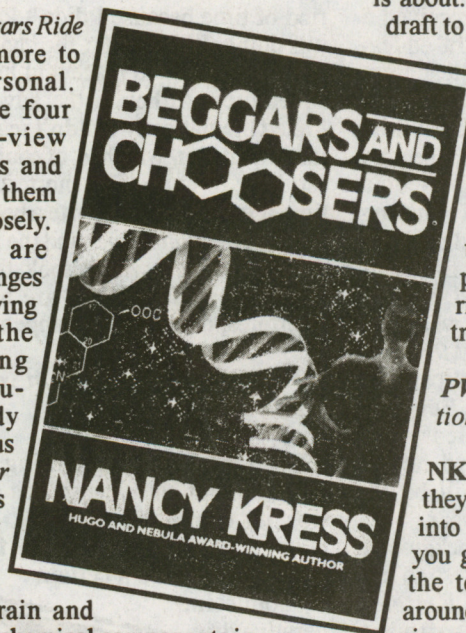
PW: Do you write with a message in mind?

NK: Not in the beginning certainly, because I don't know the end. I make it up as I go along, which means my first drafts end up as 600 page outlines. When I finish the first draft I finally know what the book is about. Then I reshape it on the second draft to emphasize those elements that fit

with whatever I've decided the book is about, but I don't really consider it a message. This is going to sound grandiose but my view is that life is so complex you can make two contradictory statements about it and they are likely to both contain some truth. While propaganda, which is absolutely rigid statements that exclude contradictions, is almost never true.

PW: What do you think of conventions?

NK: I like doing conventions because they're so wonderfully tacky. You go into a science fiction convention and you get a really weird mix. There are the totally tacky people wandering around in barbarian costumes, worshipping some ridiculously bad writer whose written a series of 42 books about a warrior princess. Mixed with that are serious academics who are talking about what science fiction is and should be. There are writers of all stamp, serious, tacky, exuberant, depressed. I like it. I like the fact you can sit on a panel and it will consist of six people; two of whom will know what they'll talking about, two of whom won't know what they'll talking about and will bluster ahead anyway. One of whom will be offering a feminist perspective no matter what the topic, there's always somebody on the panel offering a feminist point of view. And a last one who only wants to tell stories of fandom in the thirties. I like all that. It's exuberant.



PW: Do you have a pet peeve with writers?

NK: Yes, I have a very strong pet peeve with all people, but writers in particular, who can't tell the difference between saying they like something and saying that it's good. If you tell me something is good, I want you to be able to justify that by saying how it measures against this set of standards. I may dispute the standards, that's perfectly legitimate, but at least when you say it's good you are working from a set of standards. If you say "I like it," you mean merely "I like it." But if you say "it's good" or "it's not good" and what you mean is that "I like it" or "I don't like it" and there's no standards, that really bothers me. What this does is reduces all opinions, the defended and the carefully thought-out to being equal with the uncarefully thought-out and the uninformed. There are four categories: you can like something that's good, you can dislike something that's good. You can like something that you know is trashy. And you can also dislike stuff that isn't good, but those four cells are distinct or should be. For example, I've disliked Hemingway even though I know he's good. There's a movie that's completely awful but I loved it, "Shining Through" with Michael Douglas and Melanie Griffin. Terrible movie, but I loved it, but that doesn't make it good.

PW: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

NK: I'd like to talk about whether or not I'm a feminist writer because this often comes up with women writers. This year, for the first time, in May I'm going to WisCon, the feminist SF convention held every year in Madison, Wisconsin. I'm also a member of the feminist SF network on the internet and I listen to what other women writers, some of whom I respect a great deal as writers, say about women writing science fiction. I am a feminist but I'm a moderate feminist. I'm not a separatist in that my fiction doesn't reflect the idea of women living separately from men or that women are in any way superior to men. People have asked if almost all my major characters are female because I think that women are more interesting or stronger characters. It's because they're easier for me to write. It's harder for me to write male characters because men think differently than women, not just quantitatively but qualitatively different. I find it's very hard to get inside of a mature male character's mind, not a male child, and create it. I hope I've succeeded somewhat with Dr. Jackson Aranow (*Beggars Ride*) and even with Robert Cavanaugh (*Oaths and Miracles*) but it's difficult. I don't think men and women are the same. This gets

me in trouble with some of the radical feminists. I don't think our capacities and natural capabilities are the same. Intellectually, yes, in other ways, no.

PW: What do you think of the perception that the science fiction field is ruled by men?

NK: Science fiction isn't, but hard SF is. There aren't a lot of women trying to write really hard SF, partly because they are fewer women who are trained in the sciences. A new writer I'm very interested in right now is Catherine Asaro. She's published one book, *Primary Inversion*, and she's the first female SF writer with a Ph.D. in Physics. I'm very interested in seeing how she handles this technical background in her books and how seriously she's taken as a member of the hard SF club.

PW: If I looked in your favorite bookcase what would I find?

NK: You'd find a very weird mix. There would be books by friends and writers I know and admire in science fiction such as Ursula Le Guin and Charles Sheffield and Gene Wolfe and Karen Joy Fowler. There would be a lot of Victorian stuff, the Bronte sisters and Jane Austen, which is pre-Victorian but from that period, Zachery and Dickens. There would also be a select few mainstream, contemporary writers and jumbled together in ways that make no sense, Anne Tyler and Cormac McCarthy, which as far as I can see have nothing in common, except that I like them both. You'd find nonfiction in the field of biology. There would also be the juveniles I've hung onto, that I liked from when I was young like Zane Grey. A dreadful writer, but I encountered him at a time when I was beginning to read adult literature. I was immensely turned on by these gaudy western melodramas. There are 38 of them. I was up to number 26 before I realized they all had the same plot and then I didn't even care.

PW: What do you do to relax?

NK: I don't have enough hobbies. The main thing I do to relax is read other people's writing, which in some sense is sort of a carry over. I really need a physical hobby that is mindless. I have friends who garden and those that horseback ride and other things. Clearly I need to find some such thing and do it. But so far, I haven't. The closest I've come to mindless activity is housework.

PW: Is there a question you wish someone would ask you?

NK: Yes. What do you see as the relationship between a writer's personal life and what they write? I think there is one, but it's often very subterranean. There are comedy writers who write out of utter chaos and despair in their personal life and they write comedy. There are other people who out of the utter chaos and despair in their personal lives write utter chaos and despair. Both of these are connected in that one is an escape and one is an attempt to deal with life. I think you can tell a lot about a writer by what he's writing at the time of his life, if we know how to interpret it. When I realized that, which I did after about six or seven books, it was kind of scary, because you are putting yourself on display for people who know even a little bit about you. Not only do I think that's true of my books, but I think it's true of my closest friends' books as I start to read them. The externals are fiction, the internals are often real.

PW: If you could clone yourself and change your body, so you could be anything you wanted, what would you change? What would you do?

NK: Oh, that's easy, I would have been Gelsey Kirkland, a ballerina with the New York City Ballet. I love the New York City Ballet and there's not a chance in hell I ever would have made even a remotely adequate dancer. I have no flexibility, no stamina, no sense of rhythm, no musicality and I'm too tall. Gelsey Kirkland was incredible, unbelievable until she ruined her career with cocaine. Which I wouldn't do.

PW: Thank you, Nancy.

PW

MER EVOLUTION

A fish in a wine glass
instead of orange liquor?
Its tail's gone a plum deeper
and, left in the sun, the tiny
rainbow trout has developed
age spots or moles. Filled
to the salted edge with
sea brine and plankton,
its fins fast become
webbed hands and lips
turn to eyelids.

- Bobbi Sinha-Morey

Ed Gorman is one of today's premiere mystery authors. His short fiction has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies. His novel credits include: The Autumn Dead, The First Lady, Blood Moon, and his latest collection, Moonchasers and Other Stories. Look for an interview with this prolific author in an upcoming issue of PW.

The Old Ways

BY ED GORMAN

Illustrated by Michael Apice

THERE HAD BEEN A GUNFIGHT EARLIER IN the evening, but then, in a place like this there usually were gunfights earlier. And later, for that matter.

The name of the place was Madame Dupree's and it was one of the big casino-drinking establishments that were filling the most disreputable part of San Francisco in this year of 1903. The Barbary Coast was the name of the entire district and, yes, it was every bit as dangerous as you've heard. Cops, even the young strong ones, would only come down here in fours and sixes, and even then an awful lot of them got killed.

The way I got this job was to get myself good and beaten up and tossed in an alley behind the Madame's. One of her men found me and brought me to her and she asked me if I wanted a job. Since I hadn't eaten in three days I said yes and so she put me to work as a floater in her casino. What I did was walk around with a few hundred dollars of Madame Dupree's money in my pockets and pretend to be drunk. Inevitably, rube would spot me as an easy mark and invite me into one of their poker games. Thanks to a few accouterments such as a holdout vest and a sleeve holdout, I could pretty much deal myself any cards I wanted to. Eighty-five percent of my winnings went back to Madame Dupree. The rest I kept. Not bad pay for somebody who'd been raised on an Oklahoma reservation and seen three of his brothers and sisters die of tuberculosis before they reached eight years of age. I'd gotten my memory back and wished I hadn't.

What Madame Dupree didn't say—didn't need to say, really—was that an Indian was a perfect mark because he was held to be the lowest form of life in these United States, even below that of Negro and Chinaman. What rube could possibly resist taking money from a drunken Indian? Or, for that matter, what Indian could resist? You saw a lot of red men along the Barbary Coast, men who'd worked or stolen their way into some money and now wanted to spend it the way white men did. The Barbary was about the only place in the land where no distinction was made among the races—if you had the money, you could have anything any other man could have. This included all the white girls, some of whom were as young as thirteen, though this particular summer a wave of various venereal diseases was sweeping the Barbary. More than six hundred people had died so far. A Methodist minister had suggested in one of the local newspapers that the Barbary be set afire with all its "human filth" still in it. I wasn't sure that Jesus would have approved of such a proposal, but then you never could tell.

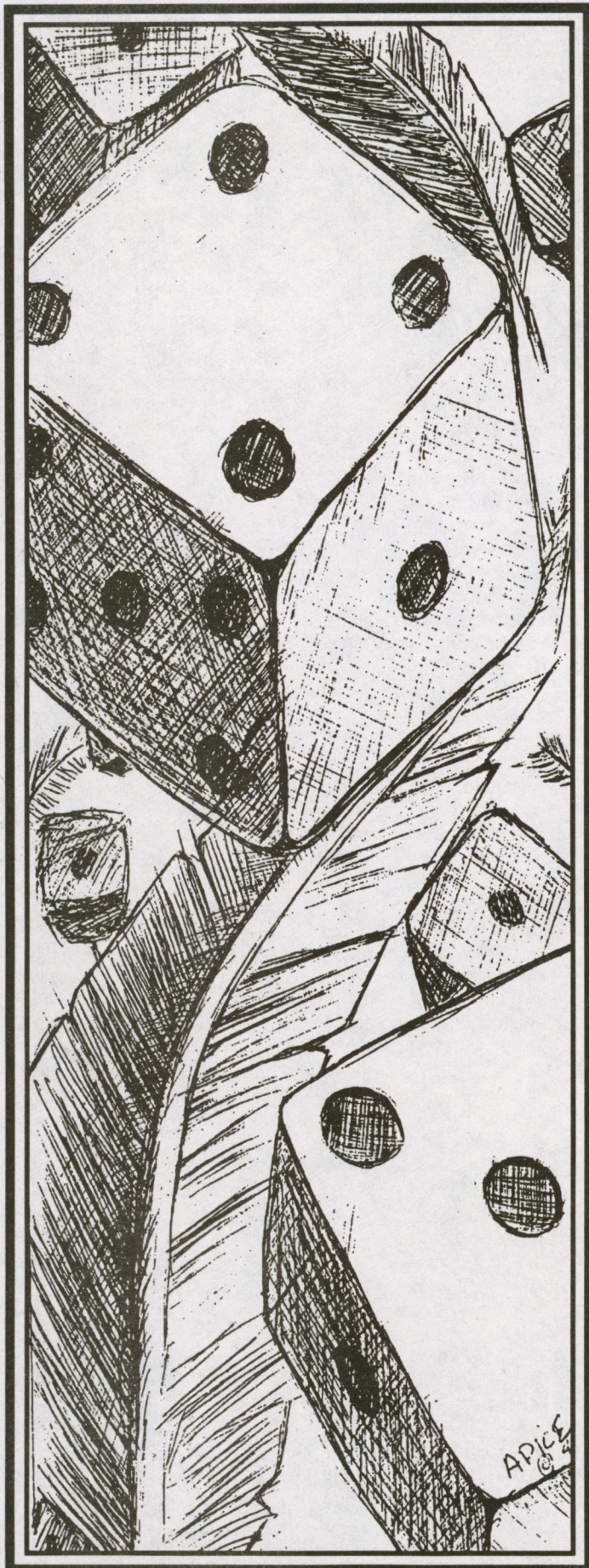
Tonight's gunfight pretty much started the way they all do in a place like this.

On the ground floor, Madame Dupree's consisted of three large rooms, the walls of which were covered by giant murals of easy women in even easier poses. As you wandered among the sailors, the city councilmen, the crooked cops, the whores, the pickpockets, the professional gamblers, the farmers, the clerks, the disguised ministers and priests and even the occasional rabbi, the slumming socialites, and the sad-eyed fathers looking for their runaway daughters, you found gambling devices of every kind: faro, baffling board, roulette, keno, goose-and-balls, and—well, you get the idea.

Tonight a drunken rube suspected he'd been cheated out of his money. And no doubt he suspected correctly. He got loud and then he got violent and then as he was being escorted out one of the side doors by a giant Negro bouncer with a ruffled white shirt, already bloody this early in the evening, he made the worst mistake of all. He pulled his gun and tried to shoot the bouncer in the side. And the bouncer responded by drawing his own gun and shooting the man's gun away. And then the bouncer took the man through the side door and went out into the dark alley.

Everybody who worked here knew what was going to happen next. Every bouncer at every major casino in the Barbary had a specialty. Some were especially good with knives and guns for instance. This man's specialty was his strength. He liked to grab the top of somebody's head with his giant hand and give the head a violent wrench to the left, thereby breaking the neck. I'd seen him do it once and I couldn't get the sight out of my mind for a couple of weeks afterward. The funny thing was he was called Mr. Stevenson





because late at night, at a steak house down the street, he read Robert Louis Stevenson stories out loud to anybody who'd listen. Mr. Stevenson told me once, "I was a plantation nigger and my master thought it'd be funny to have a big buck like me know how to read. So he had me educated from the time I was six and a couple of times a week he'd have me come up to the house and read to all his friends and they just couldn't believe I could read the way I did." That gave us something in common. An Oklahoma white man who ran the town next to my reservation put me through two years of college. I probably would have finished except the man dropped straight down dead of a heart attack and his son wasn't anywhere near as generous.

That was how Mr. Stevenson and I were the same, the education. How we were different was his physical strength.

After Mr. Stevenson finished with the rube. I got myself a good cigar and wandered around in my good clothes, weaving a little the way I did to let people know that I was a drunken Indian, and I got pulled into three different games in as many hours. I won a little over four hundred dollars. Madame Dupree would be happy—at least she would be if she'd gotten over her terrible cold, which some of us had come to suspect was maybe something more than a cold. Be funny if one of the owners died of venereal disease the way their girls and their customers did.

Around ten, I saw Mr. Stevenson working his way over to me. He wore his usual attire, a bowler perched at a rakish angle on his big head, his fancy shirt with the celluloid collar, and a sparkling diamond stickpin through his red cravat.

"You catch a drink with me?" he said as he leaned over the table where I was playing.

"Something wrong?"

He nodded. He had solemn brown eyes that hinted at both his intelligence and his anger.

"Five minutes."

"You know that coon?" one of the rubes said after Mr. Stevenson had left.

"Met him a little earlier. Why?"

The rube shook his head. "Scares the piss out of me, he does. I heard about how he snaps them necks." He shuddered. "Back in Nebraska, you just don't see things like that."

I finished the hand and then joined Mr. Stevenson at the bar. As always, he drank tea. He took his job very seriously and he didn't want whiskey to make him careless.

I didn't much worry about things like that. I had a shot of rye with a beer back.

"What's up, Mr. Stevenson?"

"Moir."

"Oh."

There was a group of reservation Indians who had collected in the Barbary over the past two years or so; maybe a dozen of us, all employed in various capacities by the casinos. One was a very beautiful Indian girl who'd been called "Moir" by the Indian agent where she'd grown up. Mr. Stevenson was sweet on her, and in a terrible way. He'd go through periods where he couldn't sleep; you'd see him standing in front of her cheap hotel, staring up at her window, doing some kind of sad sentry duty. Or you'd see him following her. Or you'd see him sitting alone in a coffee house all teary-eyed and glum and you knew who he was thinking about. Or I did, anyway. I'd gone through the same thing with Moira myself. I'd been in a bitter love with her for nearly a year but then I'd passed through it. Like a fever.

Not that you could blame Moira. She was as captivated by another reservation Indian named Two Eagle as we were captivated by her. Did all the same things we did with her. Followed him around. Bought him gifts he didn't want. Wrote him pleading little notes.

Then they got a place and moved in together, Moira and Two

Eagle, but word was things weren't going well. He was one of those Indians too fond of the bottle and too bitter toward the white man to function well. Kept a drum up in his room and sometimes in the middle of the night you'd hear it, a tom-tom here in the center of the Barbary, and him yowling ancient Indian war cries and chants. He was fierce, Two Eagle, and he seemed to hate me especially; seemed to think that I had no pride in my red skin or my ancestors. I returned the favor, thinking he was pretty much of a melodramatic asshole. I was just as much an Indian as he was. I just kept it to myself was all.

Only time I ever liked him was one night when I ran into him and Moira in a Barbary restaurant, real late it was. Two Eagle was gently drunk on wine, and was telling her in great excited rushes about the old religions of ours, and how only the red man—of all the earth's people—understood that sky and sun and the winds were all part of the Great God spirit. He spoke of how a man or woman who knew how to truly speak to God could then address all living creatures on the earth, be they elk or horse or great mountain eagle, for all things and all creatures are God's, and thus all things in the world, seen and unseen alike, are indivisible, and of God. And he spoke with such passion and sweep and majesty that I could see tears in his eyes—as I felt tears in my own eyes—and I saw that there was a good side to his belligerent clinging to the old ways. But his bad side...

Moira liked white-man things. Back when she'd let me take her to supper a few times, we'd gone for a long carriage ride by the bay and she'd enjoyed it. Then we went up where the fancy shops were. She made a lot of little-girl sounds, pleased and cute and dreamy.

This was the part of her Two Eagle hated. By now he'd got her to dress in deerskin instead of cloth dresses, her shining black hair in pigtailed instead of tumbling tresses, her face innocent of the "whore paint" as he pontifically called it. He worked as a bouncer in a place so tough it might have given Mr. Stevenson pause, and she worked behind the bar in the same place. Pity the man who got drunk and started sweet-talking Moira. Two Eagle would drag him outside and make the man plead for a quick death.

Now that I was over Moira, I didn't especially like hearing about either of them. But you couldn't say the same for Mr. Stevenson. He was as aggrieved as ever, all pain and dashed hope.

"She went out on him."

"Oh, bullshit."

"True," he said. "Few nights ago. They got into a bad fight and he kicked her in the stomach. He didn't know she was just startin' to carry a baby. Killed the baby and nearly killed Moira, too."

"The sonofabitch. Somebody should kill the bastard."

"You haven't heard the rest of it."

"I'm not sure I want to."

"He wants to cut her."

"Cut her?"

"The old ways, he says. What the Indians used to do back when I was on the plantation. When a woman went out on a man like that. You know—her nose."

"That's crazy. Nobody does that shit anymore."

"He does. Or at least he says he does. You know how he is. All that warrior bullshit he gets into."

"Where's Moira?"

"That's the worst part. She thinks she's got it coming. She's just waitin' in her room for him to come up and cut her. Says she believes in the old ways, too."

I shook my head. "That sounds like Moira." I took my pocket watch from my breeches. "I've got some time off coming. I can tell Madame Dupree I'm going for the rest of the night."

"You're tough, man, but you aren't that tough. Two Eagle'll kill you." He showed me his hands. How big they were. And

strong. And black. "Fucker tries to cut her, I'll take care of him." He nodded to the front door, his bowler perched at a precarious angle. Sometimes I wondered if he had it glued to his bald head. "Let's go."

We went.

Making our way along the board sidewalks this time of night meant stepping over corpses, drunks, and reeking puddles of vomit and blood from various fights. Every important casino had a band of its own, which meant that the noise was as bad as the odors.

It was raining, which meant the boards were slick. But we walked fast, anyway. Two Eagle had a couple of rooms on the second floor of a livery stable. Moira lived there, too. She'd waited a long time for him to marry her. I figured she'd wait a lot longer.

A drunken rube made a crack about Mr. Stevenson, but if the black man heard, he didn't let on. He just kept walking real quiet and intense, like he had only one thought in the entire world and everything else just got in the way. Moira can make you like that.

The Barbary looked pretty much as usual, a jumble of cheap clothing stores for drunken sailors, dance halls where the girls were practically naked, and signs that advertised every kind of whore anybody could ever want. There was a new one this month, a mulatto who went over four hundred pounds, and a lot of Barbary regulars were giving her a try just to see what it'd be like, a lady so fat.

Half a block away you could smell the sweet hay and the sour horseshit in the rain. Closer, you could hear the horses roll against their stalls, making small nervous sounds as they dreamed.

We went up a long stretch of outside stairs. The two-by-fours were new and smelled of sawn wood, tangy as autumn apples on a back porch.

Stevenson didn't knock. He just kicked the door in and stepped over the threshold. The walls inside were stained and the floors so scuffed the wood was slivery. She'd put up new red curtains that were supposed to make the shabby room a home but all the curtains did was make everything else look even older and uglier.

Moria, sad beautiful Indian child that she was, sat in a corner with her head on her knees. When she looked up her black eyes glistened in the lantern light. She wore a deerskin dress and moccasins. The walls were covered with the lances, shields, knives and arrows of Two Eagle's tribe. He liked to smoke opium up here and tell dream stories about ancient days when the medicine men said that the bravest warriors had horses that could fly. But the boys on the wall looked dull and dusty and drab. Every couple of weeks he had his little group of Barbary-area Indians up here, Moira had told me once. The last stand, I'd remarked sarcastically, but she hadn't found it funny at all.

"This is crazy shit, Moira," I said. "We're gonna get you out of here before he comes back."

She had wrists and ankles so delicate they could make you cry. She stood up in her red skin, no more than ninety pounds and five feet she was, and walked over to Mr. Stevenson and said, "You don't have no God damn right to come here, Mr. Stevenson. Or you either," she said to me. "What happens between Two Eagle and me is our business."

"You ever seen a woman who's been cut?" I said. I had. The man always took the nose, the same thing the ancient Egyptians had taken, just sawed it right off the face, so that only a dark and bloody hole was left. No brave ever wanted a woman who'd been cut, so many of the women went into the forest to live. A few even drank poison wine to end it quickly.

She looked at Mr. Stevenson. "We don't have no whiskey left."

"So the nigger goes and fetches you some, huh?" he said in his deep and bitter voice.

"I need to talk to Jimmy here, Mr. Stevenson, that's all. Just ten minutes or so."

He brought up his big murderous hands and looked at them as if he wasn't quite sure what they were.

"Rye?" he said.

She smiled and was even more beautiful. "Thanks for remembering. I'll get some money from Two Eagle and pay you back."

"I don't want any of his money," Mr. Stevenson said, and fixed her with his melancholy gaze. "I just want you."

"Oh, Mr. Stevenson," she said, and gently touched her small hand to his wide hard chin. Sisterly, I guess you'd say. She was like that with every man but Two Eagle.

"You don't let him lay a hand on her," Mr. Stevenson said to me as he crossed the room to the door.

I brought up my Colt. "Don't worry Mr. Stevenson."

He glanced at her one more time, sad and loving and scared and obviously baffled by his own tumultuous feelings, and then he left.

"Poor Mr. Stevenson."

"He's a decent man," I said.

"Kinda scary, though."

"Not any more so than Two Eagle."

"I just wished he understood how I felt about Two Eagle."

"Maybe he finds it kind of hard to understand a man who kicks a woman so hard she loses the baby she's carrying—and then wants to cut her nose off."

"He didn't mean to kick me that hard. He was real sorry. He cried when he saw—the baby."

I went over to the window and looked out on the Barbary Coast. One of the local editorial writers had estimated that a man was robbed every five minutes in the Barbary. At least when it rained, it didn't smell so bad.

I turned back to her. "I want to put you on a train tonight for Denver. There's one that leaves in an hour and a half."

"I don't want to go."

"You know what he's gonna do to you."

Her eyes suddenly filled. She padded back to her corner and sat down and put her head on her knees and wept quietly.

I went over and sat down next to her and stroked her head as she cried.

After a time she looked up, her cheeks streaky with warm tears that I wiped away with my knuckles.

"He caught me."

"It's not something I want to hear about."

"I was so mad at him—with the baby and everything—that I just went out and got drunk. Didn't even know who I was with or where I was."

"Moira, I really don't want to hear."

"So he came looking for me. Took him all night. And you know where he found me?"

I sighed. She was going to tell me anyway.

"Up in some white sailor's room. There were two of them. One of them was inside me when he came through the door and found me."

I didn't say anything. Neither did she. Not for a long time.

"You know what was funny, Jimmy?"

"What?"

"He didn't hurt either one of them. Didn't lay a hand on them. Just stood there staring at me. And the guy, well, he pulled out and picked up his clothes and got out of there real fast with his friend. It was their own room, too. That's what was real funny. By then, I was sober. I tried to cover myself up but I couldn't find my clothes, so I went over and held Two Eagle just like he was my little boy, and then he started crying. I'd never heard him cry before. It was like he didn't know how. And then I got him over to the bed and I tried to make love to him but he couldn't. And he hasn't been able to since it happened, almost a week now. He's not a man anymore. That's what he said to me.

He said that he can't be a man ever again after what he saw. And it's my fault, Jimmy. It's all my fault."

I wanted to hate him, or her, or myself, I wanted to hate some God damned body but I couldn't. It was just sad human shit and at the moment it overwhelmed me, left me ice cold and confused. People are so God damned confusing sometimes.

She laughed. "You and Mr. Stevenson must have some conversations about us Jimmy."

I stood up, reached back down, and took her wrist. "C'mon now, I'm taking you to the train."

"You ain't takin' her nowhere."

A harsh quick voice came from behind me in the doorway. When I turned I was looking into Two Eagle's insane dark eyes. I'd never seen him when he didn't look angry, when he didn't look ready for blood. He wore a piece of leather tied around his head, his rough black hair touching his shoulders, his gaunt cheeks crosshatched with myriad knife slashes. His buckskin outfit gave him the kind of Indian ferocity he wanted.

He came into the room.

"Why can't you be true to our ancestors for once, Jimmy?" he said, pointing his Colt right at my head. "Cutting her is the only thing I can do. Even Moira agrees. So why should you try to stop it? It's our blood, Jimmy, our tribal way."

"I don't want you to cut her."

His hard face smiled. "You gonna stop me, Jimmy?"

He expected me to be afraid of him and I was. But that didn't mean I wouldn't shoot him if I had to.

And then Mr. Stevenson was in the doorway.

Moira made a female sound in her throat. Two Eagle followed my gaze over his shoulder to the huge black man in the door frame.

"You're smart to have him around, Jimmy. You'll need him."

Mr. Stevenson came into the room carrying a bottle of rotgut rye in one hand and a single rose in the other. He carried the flower to Moira and gave it to her. Then, without any warning, he turned around and backhanded Two Eagle so hard the Indian's feet left the floor and he flew backwards into the wall. The entire room shook.

Mr. Stevenson wasn't going to bother with any preliminaries.

He went right for Two Eagle, who was trying to right his vision and his breathing and his ability to stand up straight. He'd struck his head hard when he'd collided with the wall and he looked disoriented. Bright red blood ran from his nostrils.

Mr. Stevenson grabbed him and it was easy to see what he was going to do. Maybe he thought that this would ultimately give him his first real chance with Moira, killing Two Eagle by snapping his neck.

"No!" I shouted, and dove onto Mr. Stevenson's back, trying to pull him off Two Eagle.

But it was no use. I clung to Mr. Stevenson like a child. I could not even budge him.

By now he had his hands in place, one on top of Two Eagle's head, the other on the bottom of his neck—ready for the single wrench that would kill Two Eagle.

Two Eagle used fists, feet, even his teeth to get free, but Mr. Stevenson paid no attention. He was setting himself to perform his most magnificent act...

Moira shot him once in the side and then raised the gun and shot him once on top of the head. His hair flew off, a bloody black coil of curls affixed to the wall by pieces of sticky flesh and bone.

The funny thing was, he kept right on going, as if he refused to acknowledge what Moira had done to him.

Getting ready to snap Two Eagle's neck—

And then she ran closer, shrieking, and shot him again, and this time not even Mr. Stevenson could refuse to acknowledge what had happened. Blood poured from his ears.

An enraged Two Eagle was now able to bring his hands up and seize Mr. Stevenson's throat, holding tight, choking him, as the big black fell over backwards, Two Eagle riding him down to the floor and then grabbing the gun from Moira's hand.

Two Eagle put the barrel of the .45 to Mr. Stevenson's forehead and fired three times. Didn't seem to matter to him that Mr. Stevenson had died a little while ago.

With each shot, Mr. Stevenson's head jerked upward from the coarse board floor and then slapped back down.

Two Eagle was calling him nigger and a lot of other things in our native tongue.

Then he was done, Two Eagle, pitching forward and lying face-down on the floor, very still for a long time.

I got up and straightened my clothes and picked up my gun from the floor where it had fallen when I'd jumped on Mr. Stevenson.

Moira said, "You two shouldn't have come up here."

"I guess not," I nodded to Mr. Stevenson. "He was trying to help you that's all."

"It wasn't none of his business and it ain't none of yours either."

"I guess he didn't see it that way. Seeing's he loved you and all."

"A nigger," Two Eagle said, getting up from the floor suddenly. "A nigger, lovin' Moira. Maybe you think that's all right, Jimmy, but then you gave up bein' a true man a long time back."

And then he went for me. Couldn't help himself. He still had all this fury and it had to light somewhere.

So he came at me, but he was stupid because he didn't look at my hand.

I felt his powerful arm wrap around my neck. I smelled his sweat and whiskey and tobacco.

He pushed me back against the wall.

And that was when I raised my Colt and put it directly to his ribs and fired three times.

He was dead before he hit the floor.

She was screaming, Moira was. That was about all I can tell you about my last few minutes in the room. She was screaming and Two Eagle had fallen close by Mr. Stevenson and then I was running. That's about all I can remember.

Then there was the night and the rain and I was running and running and running and tripping and falling and hurting myself bad but no matter how far or how fast I ran, I could still hear Moira screaming.

WWeek later it was.

I was back doing my nightly turn at Madame Dupree's, winning upwards of five hundred dollars this particular night, when I saw Lone Deer come in the side door by the faro layout.

She looked frantic. I figured it was me she wanted.

Being's as we were waiting for some liquid refreshments at our table, I got up and went over to her.

When I reached her, she said, "She's goin', Jimmy. Leavin' us. Twenty-five minutes, her train leaves. I didn't find out till half an hour ago myself. Thought I'd better tell you.

"I appreciate it."

I suppose, like Mr. Stevenson, I'd had the idle dream that Moira and I would be lovers now that Two Eagle was gone. I didn't have to worry about any recriminations from the law getting in my way. A dead nigger and a dead Injun on the Barbary Coast don't exactly turn out a lot of curious cops. They're just two more slabs down at the morgue.

I'd figured I'd give it a few weeks and then go see her, tell her how what I did was the only thing I'd known to do—kill him to save my own life. And then I'd gentle-like invite her out for some dinner and...

But that wasn't to be. Not now.

Moira was leaving.

"You'd better hurry," Lone Deer said, and then took my arm and drew me closer. "There's something else I need to tell you."

Less than two minutes later I was running toward the depot. It was crowded and the conductor walked up and down all pompous as he consulted his railroad watch and shouted out that there were only a few minutes left before this particular train pulled out.

I found her in the very back on the last coach. The car was barely half-full and she looked small and isolated there with the seats so much taller than she was. Moira. She'd always be a child.

I dropped into the seat next to her and said, "Lone Deer told me what you did."

"I wish she wouldn't have. I didn't want nobody to see me off."

"I love you, Moira."

"I don't want to hear that. Not with Two Eagle barely dead a week. Didn't I betray him enough?"

I'd seen the soldiers drag my grandfather from the reservation one day when I was very young. They were taking him to a federal penitentiary where he would die less than two months later at the hands of some angry white prisoners. I could still feel my panic that day—panic and terror and a sense that my own life was ending, too.

That's how I felt now, with Moira.

"But I won't betray him no more," Moira said. "You can bet on that."

"Is that why you did it?"

"Why I did it is none of your business."

I looked at her in her black mourning dress, hat and mourning veil, a veil so heavy you couldn't make out anything on the other side.

"No man'll ever want to bother me again. I made sure of that."

I was tempted to left the veil quickly and see what she looked like. Lone Deer had said that Moira had used a butcher knife on her nose and that nothing remained but a bloody hole.

But then I decided that I didn't want to remember her that way. That I always wanted her to be the young and beautiful Moira in my mind. Every man needs something to believe in, even if he knows it's not true.

"You got a ticket, buck?" the conductor asked me. Ordinarily, I'd take exception to his calling me "buck", but at the moment it just didn't seem very important.

I leaned over and kissed Moira, pressing her veil to her cheek. I still couldn't see anything.

"Hurry up, buck. You get your ass off of here or you show me a ticket."

I squeezed her hand. "I love you, Moira. And I always will."

And then I was gone, and the train was pulling out, all steam and power and majesty in the western night.

Then I walked slowly back to Madame Dupree's where I got just as drunk as Indians are supposed to get.

PW

Robert J. Levy was born in Brooklyn, NY. He is the author of four poetry collections: *The Glitter Bait*, *Whistle Maker*, *Partly Green Till The Day We Die* and *The Perfection of Standing*. His short fiction has appeared in *Amazing Stories* and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

WHITEWORK

BY ROBERT J. LEVY

Illustrated by Bob E. Hobbs

BECAUSE IT WOULD BE ARLEN AND SARA anniversary present to each other, and because it would their newly renovated barn (bought mostly with her savings, as she always reminded him), and too, because Arlen hoped it would temporarily heal, at least symbolically, the ever-widening rift between him and his wife, their purchase had to be special. No, more than special. It ought to be a reaffirmation of their love.

Sara had taken over driving duty—fast and reckless, much as she managed her mutual fund. Arlen watched her, half-admiring, half-afraid, as she careened along increasingly unfamiliar back roads. He realized they were lost, but knew better than to mention it to his stormy wife.

What was it that Tim Hansen, Arlen's sole employee in his private home-design firm, had said of her once after she'd spoken animatedly about company stock she'd purchased for her fund? Oh yes, he'd called her "Artemis the Huntress." It had vaguely irked Arlen to hear someone characterize Sara so accurately. Of course, he thought now, Artemis had been a "virgin" huntress: even more relevant given how asexual their relationship had become of late.

Sara began to say something, then stopped herself. He knew without her saying it: *Arlen, this is ridiculous! Getting a damned present for each other is not going to make up for whatever is wrong with us. You're just being typically sentimental.*

He'd heard it all before during their year of marriage. Arlen recognized himself to be a bit of a romantic idealist, though Sara always seemed to be doing her best to kill that part of him. Anyway, what was wrong with his idea? The gift wasn't meant to end their troubles, but rather as stopgap to remind each other why they married in the first place.

Arlen hoped, though, that it was much more: an attempt to heal themselves. What had gone wrong? They had loved each other so much. And now...

It was so many things—the increasingly rare, lackadaisical sex; the begrudging quality in Sara's voice when Arlen needed cash; their mutual refusal to discuss children. And too, as they drove, Arlen occasionally drifted away, thinking about his recent meeting with a new client—widowed, wealthy and flirtatious Nan Goodridge.

Thus it was they found themselves one chilly, early fall weekend haunting the upstate antique stores in towns along the Sequahannock River. Nerves were frayed; they'd already been to a half-dozen shops and seen nothing of interest.

There was no need to speak. They both knew: the woman had been a master. The work was amazing. Her color sense was perfect. Her variations on traditional patterns uncannily intuitive. She was an artist.

THREADGILL'S FIRST be the initial acquisition for

Sara grew increasingly agitated as she turned down one country dirt road after another, climbing higher into the mountains—not lost, thought Arlen, but looking for something. He watched the road as well, a sense of imminence disturbing him, much as it seemed to have gripped his wife.

As they made a tight turn, Arlen saw it.

"Hon, stop right down there! Near that...shack."

"Here?" she said, half questioning, half in assent.

"Just do it!"

She pulled over, stopping in front of a dilapidated cottage badly in need of paint and re-shingling. Out front were a dozen or so pieces of old furniture. A small sign nailed to a post read "antiques."

"This looks good," said Arlen, hopping out of the car as his wife trudged after him. Sara, he often felt, respected his enthusiasm for antiques more than shared in it. Then again, one shouldn't expect much aesthetic sensibility from a woman who ran a mutual fund. Still, he loved her—he had loved her, hadn't he?—and the money she brought in didn't hurt either, not when his free-lance business was so erratic.

"Good? It's a wreck."

Arlen ignored her and walked up the steps to the front porch. He rapped a couple of times on the frame of the torn screen door. There was silence, and he slowly retreated down the rickety steps.

"I guess no one's in."

"But...this is the right place," Sara said, almost dreamily.

Arlen stared at her. She'd obviously had the same feeling about this shack as he had. Just then the door opened slightly.

"C'mon in," a woman said in a raspy, aged, voice. For a moment Arlen hesitated, wanting to take his wife's advice, get back in the car and...flee. Funny that the thought even occurred to him. But he could not pass up the possibility of a great find.



"Come on, hon," he said to Sara. "Have a sense of adventure for Christ sake." Fancy himbeing the daring one in this relationship; it felt good for a change.

The screen door squeaked shut behind them, leaving them in near dark. As Arlen's eyes adjusted, he could pick out a welter of desks, cabinets, weather vanes, barrels and cupboards; the place was packed, and they had to watch their step carefully.

A figure loomed forward, materializing out of the blackness: rake-thin and stooped, holding a cane and using it to help her through the maze of bric-a-brac, an ancient woman inched towards them.

"Afternoon," said Arlen. "We noticed your sign, so we thought we'd have a look."

"No charge for lookin'," said the woman, cocking her cadaverous head. She sat on a stool while Arlen and Sara rummaged for the next ten minutes. Arlen soon realized it was junk, plain and simple. He was disappointed; he'd had a gut feeling about this place.

"Well," said Arlen, feeling somehow betrayed, "thanks for..."

"Got some quilts," interrupted the woman.

"Huh? What sort?" he asked.

"Best sort," said the woman. "Made 'em myself."

Even Sara perked up. "You're a quilter?"

"Yup, I would be seein' as how I made quilts." She turned towards Arlen. "You're lady friend's sharp as a tack."

"She's my wife," said Arlen.

"You sure?" said the woman. "Funny, I'm rarely wrong 'bout such things."

"We'd love to see your work," said Arlen, suddenly uncomfortable, as though the strange woman had seen through his and Sara's surface relationship to a deeper, essential disconnection.

The women shuffled to a cloth-covered bookcase near a window. "Only got a few left, though, and only offer 'em to special folks. Don't do quiltin' no more." She pulled back the dusty cloth over the shelf. Piled there were perhaps a half-dozen meticulously stacked quilts. Arlen and Sara began unfolding them.

"My god," whispered Sara.

"Jeez," said Arlen quietly.

There was no need to speak. They both knew: the woman had been a master. The work was amazing. Her color sense was perfect. Her variations on traditional patterns uncannily intuitive. She was an artist. Even though they had just sunk all their free cash into their house, Arlen was going to propose purchasing the entire collection; hell, he and Sara could sell some of these back in the city for ten times what the old woman would ask.

"Only sell one to a customer," said the woman, preempting his offer.

No matter, thought Arlen. He was certain that in this pile was the gift they'd been looking for. They examined each in turn—a chain quilt, a cherry basket pattern quilt, a drunkard's path pattern quilt—each more superb than the last. Finally they came to the last one.

"It's...white," said Sara.

"Hmmm," said Arlen. "Yeah, completely white, with 'eye-of-God' embroidery." Arlen gently unfolded it. The quilt was distinguished by an incredibly intricate play of white lace needlework that made it seem like a huge, pristine doily. It was magnificent.

"You'll be lookin' at the whitework quilt, eh?" the old woman piped up.

They turned toward her; the woman was staring off in a completely different direction. In the same moment Sara and Arlen realized she was blind. Somehow, though, she guessed they were looking at the white quilt.

"That was my last quilt," she continued. "Done it when my sight was about gone. Oh, folks hereabouts offered to help me...you know, choosing colors and such. I said no. They all think I'm just

stubborn, and I s'pose I am, but I don't want no one helpin' me on my quilts."

"So you worked in just white," said Sara, "because you didn't need to see the colors?"

"Yup. I can do stitchwork fine just by feel. That white'un's a double wedding ring pattern with eye-o-God needlework thrown in fer good measure. Meant to be a gift for the preservation of new-marrieds. Pure, white and strong—like young love. And, like young love, unforgiving."

"Unforgiving?" asked Arlen.

"I was married once. Long ago. Loved that fella' till I was near crazy. Then he run off with some young thing from town. Never forgave him. Never will. Anyway, that quilt's got something of me in it, folks. Into it I put everything I know about life and love. I even kind of like to think the last of my fading sight is in it now, stitched in there forever, seeing the beauty and ugliness of love."

"That's a wonderful legend," said Sara. Arlen tried to silently hush her, worried that her enthusiasm would up the price.

"Legend? Well, call it what you will. And you don't need to hush your missus," the woman said to Arlen.

She couldn't possibly have known he had tried to silence Sara.

"I'm askin' a fair price," she continued. "Especially since you're obviously close to newlyweds yourself."

"How could you know that?" asked Sara.

"I may not be able to see, lady, but that don't mean I can't see. I can also tell you've been through troubled times."

Arlen and Sara stared at each other.

"Who hasn't?" said Arlen.

"Have it your way, son. But this quilt is special. Use it, be true to each other, and it'll heal the small hurts and woes. Your marriage will remain as white and pure as the quilt."

"Sounds great," said Sara.

"It is...as long as you two do right by each other. Hear what I'm saying?"

"Uh, sure." Arlen decided this old gal would give them both nightmares if they hung around much longer. He had a disconcerting image of Nan Goodridge. She had definitely come on to him from the very first, and while she wasn't his "type," he couldn't deny that she had a steamy sexual presence. Why had he thought of her now?

He haggled with the old woman a bit over price—hefty but reasonable by city standards. As he counted out bills it occurred to him that the blind woman would have no idea what denominations he was actually giving her.

"You're not the sort to cheat an old, half-dead blind woman?" she said with a hint of malice.

As they left, the old woman turned to them. "Remember. You two be true to each other." Then she faded back into the inner darkness of her ramshackle home.

"Queer old bird," said Arlen as they drove off, vaguely perturbed the woman had twice mentioned something that had sounded like an accusation of infidelity.

Sara threaded effortlessly through back roads now, almost flawlessly finding her way back to the heretofore unlocatable parkway. Arlen watched as she drove, noticing how her free hand unconsciously moved to the quilt folded on the seat between them, how her fingers lightly traced the stitching, as though she read a sort of Braille road map guiding her back home. Soon Arlen found himself also touching the quilt, running his fingers over the delicate tracery, until their fingers twined about each other in a firm, loving grasp. Suddenly Sara broke free and made a sharp turn off the main highway onto a bumpy side road. She drew to a quick halt in an isolated culvert overhung with trees.

"What's up?" said Arlen.

"You, in a few seconds. Happy Anniversary," she said, and began removing her blouse.

It was intense, lovingly brusque and spontaneous: all the things sex had not been for so long. It was only after they had finished, the car's merry rocking slowing to a standstill, that they realized an opened bottle of iced tea had fallen from atop the dashboard—a tan stain spread on the quilt.

"Shit!" said Sara. "I can't believe you."

"Me?"

"It was your tea!"

"You expect me to think about tea when you want to have sex for the first time in God knows how long?"

Damn. A perfect moment—all too rare these days—ruined. They quickly dressed, and sat there in the now stifling, motionless air of the car. In the midst of their anger, it occurred to Arlen that neither one had tried to get the stain out. He removed a handkerchief from his pocket, dipped it in his wife's inevitable bottle of Evian, and started rubbing the spot.

"What are you doing?" she said. "How do you know that won't make it worse?"

"I don't."

At first there was no effect, but as he continued he found his mind drifting, growing oddly blank, and as he began rubbing mechanically, without thought, the action providing some relief from his anger. He felt something like an electric current flowing from his head into his shoulder and arm, down into his fingers and finally into the quilt. The quilt vibrated with an unpleasant energy, as though it had absorbed his rage and now held it trapped within its fibers.

When he stopped rubbing the quilt, the stain was gone.

"Funny," said Sara. "There ought to be a stain."

Arlen experienced a strange unease, thinking of their recent meeting with the blind quilter. All the anger of the preceding minutes had drained from both of them, the blot on their day now lifted. Arlen took over driving duty, and they headed back onto the parkway just as the first light misting of cold rain slicked the windshield.

A few months later Arlen sipped a glass of burgundy, listening to the early winter wind howl outside. He sat on the whitework quilt on the bed in their sleeping loft, watching Sara, exasperated, leafing through a pile of opened mail. Finally, she threw up her hands.

"I give up," she said. "I don't see how we can pay these, let alone the ones that are past due."

Neither did Arlen. How could things have collapsed so quickly? The stock market had turned violently bearish, and Sara's mutual fund had nosedived, scaring off investors. The market downturn affected Arlen, too: new building died, and even projects well into the planning stage were put on hold. Only one of Arlen's clients, Nan Goodridge, had remained. Thank God it was an interesting project, and she allowed him artistic license. However, there was a constant undertone of sexual tension between the two—flattering, yes, but potentially dangerous.

"Shit," said Sara. "I should never have listened to you about buying this house."

"Me? I thought you loved this place."

"I...loved it for your sake. I raised my objections several times. I follow the markets, you know, and I knew this was a bad time to invest in real estate."

"This wasn't just some...investment. Not for me at least. It was supposed to be our dream house."

"Lord, what an idealist! Everything one spends money on is an investment. Tim told you this place wasn't close enough to the ski resorts to be rented in the winter."

"He's my employee, not my counselor. And you would think of this as just some investment! We bought this barn out of love..."

"We bought it?"

"Meaning? I thought we decided: my money or your money, it's all our money."

"Except that it's mostly my money."

"So now your saying I forced you into this..."

"I don't know what I'm saying," she said burying her face in her hands. "I just wanted you...us, to be happy."

All this time, slaving over their house, working together on every detail, and she had merely been thinking of it as an unsound investment. A sudden fury welled within him, and he slammed his fist on the bedside table in frustration with his whole life, sending the glass of burgundy flying, splashing the whitework quilt.

"Damn!" said Sara, leaping up, running to the bathroom for paper towels and water. Arlen rushed to the kitchen for a container of salt. They poured salt on the red patches and together blotted up as much liquid as they could. A while later they wiped off the crusted pink powder that remained.

They both stared. It had happened again. Of course, by this point it had happened many times. There was no stain.

At first it had been a shared joke: their weird clumsiness whenever they had a fight, which always seemed to take place on their bed, and always ended up with someone spilling something on the quilt.

The stains always came out. It didn't matter what: coffee,

tomato sauce, grease. Odd at first, then increasingly eerie, for the quilt had never been chemically treated in any way. After a time, the jokes about how easily the quilt became clean ceased, the whole matter tacitly accepted as something which they couldn't speak about.

At some level Arlen believed: the quilt, as the old woman had said, removed the blemishes on their relationship, sucking their pain and anger inside itself. Sometimes at night he'd wake and have the feeling that the quilt writhed with a kind of negative life force.

"Well...I guess it worked," said Arlen uneasily. "I guess I said some rotten things before," Sara said, and it was as if Arlen knew the words before she even spoke, the sort of speeches they always made after one of these incidents. "I've been under strain managing the fund. I know you have too, trying to get new commissions..."

"It just hurt to think that you don't love this place the way I do."

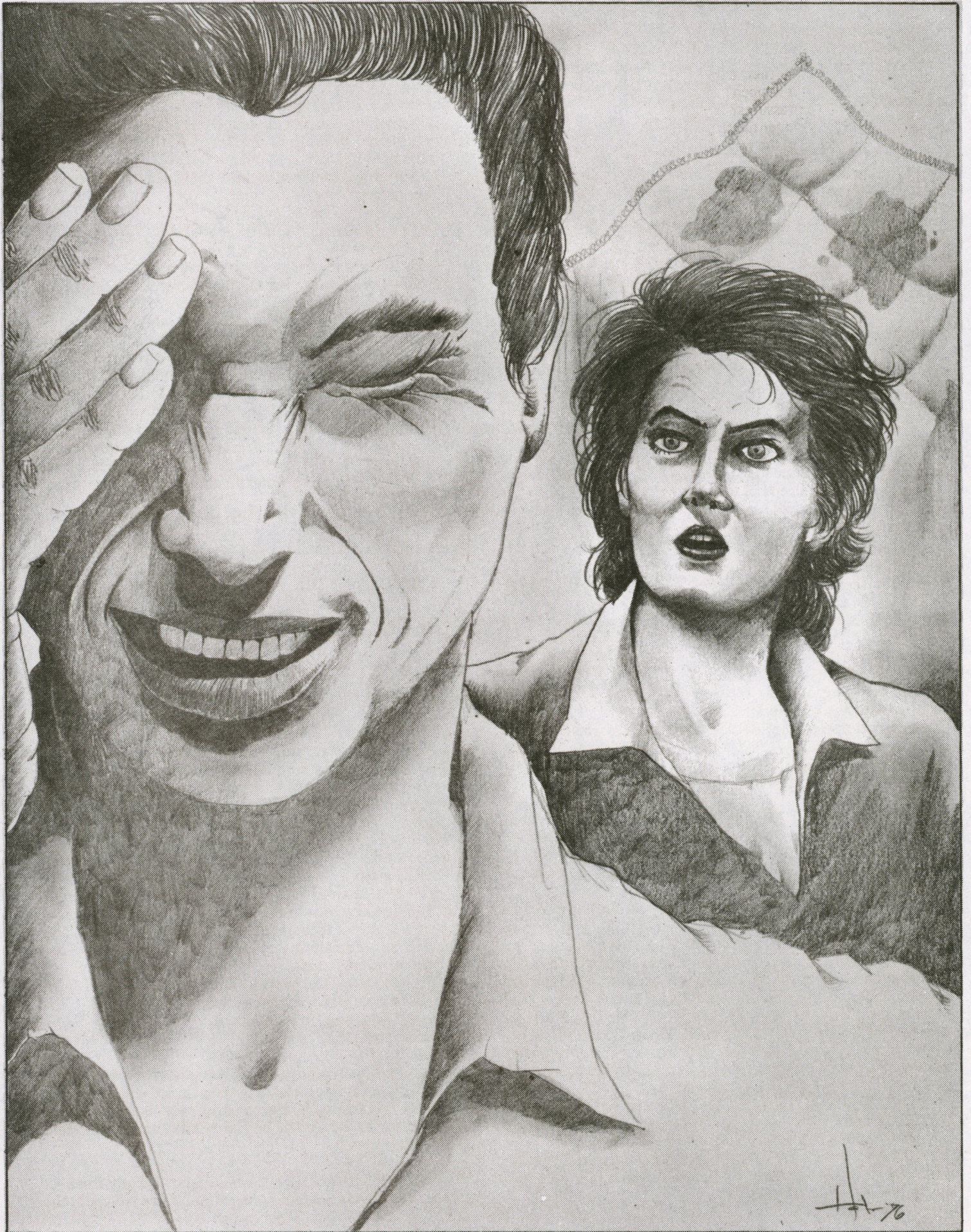
"Well," she said. "Maybe sometimes it's...too empty."

"Empty? It's completely furnished."

"I didn't mean that," she said.

Children. At that moment it seemed like a real possibility, a way back into their lives and a shared future. Arlen turned to her, held her head between his hands and began kissing every inch of her face, searching there for the woman he had married and for the child they might conceive.

He looked at his watch: Sara would return shortly from yet another fretful visit to her gynecologist. He stared outside at the



newly blossoming late spring world, feeling as though all the seeds he and Sara had tried to plant within themselves—both literally and figuratively—had died that afternoon. It was early evening, but the salty-sweet taste of Nan Goodridge's skin still lay on his tongue from their tryst hours earlier.

How had he let it happen? Actually, how could he not have, given his financial pressures? She was still his only client. She had shown up to go over another redesign of the guest house—just what he needed in the wake of Tim suddenly quitting on him without explanation.

What had happened in their year-and-half marriage to leave him feeling at such low ebb? It was money, but not just money. It was also Sara's sudden neurotic intensity about becoming pregnant, even though they'd only been trying for five months. And, too, it was his increasing shame at having to go to his own wife for pocket money. It all conspired against them.

And now, Nan.

It began with her red vintage Mustang pulling into the driveway. She sauntered in as Arlen opened the door, wearing her usual tight black jeans and silk blouse. She was probably forty-five, but with the right clothes and makeup accenting her smooth skin, and her flirtatious, over-the-top manner, she could pass for late 20s.

She'd announced, in her usual, off-handed manner, that she'd suddenly decided her new place must, simply must, have a sleeping loft—just like the one Arlen and Sara had. Arlen protested vainly, saying it would require a major redesign of the central living area. Nan refused to listen, suggesting instead that they go upstairs to Arlen's sleep loft to "get a feel" for the space.

From then on it had been an uneasy cross between blackmail and seduction. She knew she was currently Arlen's only client, that he could not afford to alienate her. And despite his professional qualms, Arlen was attracted to her.

The love they made was quick, sure, practiced, not unpleasant exactly, but very much the task for hire that Nan had made it sound like. The only weird moment for Arlen was when his concentration faltered, and he found himself staring at the eyelet pattern on the quilt. For a second, he felt they were indeed eyes—the eyes of the old woman—staring at him with that stone-blind, all-seeing gaze, but then the image evaporated in the urgency of physical need. Afterwards, Nan immediately resumed her normally cocky manner and began dressing, making it clear this had been a one-time thing, completely unimportant, that need never be spoken of again.

But for Arlen something had indelibly changed. After Nan left he sat on the quilt, thinking "emptiness," if that was possible. He loathed himself with a hatred almost palpable in its intensity. This wasn't him. He loved Sara, or wanted to, and he knew she loved him. What he had just done felt less like adultery, less like an illicit act he was supposed to have furtively enjoyed, than a wake-up call.

Things were going to change, he decided. He was going to jump-start this marriage, build it from the ground up, like one of his homes. A complete redesign.

His glance veered down toward the quilt, symbol of everything he and Sara had been, or had tried to be for each other. Now he and Nan had made love upon it. White indeed.

As he watched, a stain appeared on the quilt.

Something about the stain stopped him short, seemed to throw him back in time. It was tomato red—some V8 juice Sara had spilled when they were once again pointing fingers at each other over their inability to discuss starting a family. But that was months ago. He knew that stain had come out perfectly, just like all the others.

He peered down, and an unsettling sensation came over him. Soon he noticed a pinkish tinge at the far end of the quilt—the wine stain from their fight over money. Then, in the middle, a

brownish tinge from the iced tea. As he watched, dozens of other tiny imperfections started reappearing on the previously immaculate white surface of the quilt.

Arlen started to sweat. He closed his eyes. No, this isn't happening. When he opened his eyes again the quilt was fine. It had been his imagination.

He stood and walked downstairs to pour himself some juice. As he drank he wondered: what is wrong with me?

Then he heard a noise upstairs, a slippery, shifting sound. He dropped the glass on the floor, shattering it into a hundred pieces.

He listened again, but now the house was silent.

Of course, the window was open in the sleeping loft, and the wind tossed the drapes against the window frame as usual. Feeling like a jittery fool, he cleaned up the glass shards and headed upstairs. A breeze from the open window had blown the quilt onto the floor. He stooped to pick it up. As he placed it on the bed, he found his hands tangled in the fabric's folds, as though the quilt wound itself about his wrist. An image of the old woman popped into his head. More imagination, he realized, as he returned to his study downstairs to sketch in Nan's new loft and wait for his wife's return.

It was an entrance he'd never forget.

Sara clumped into the house, dropped bags of groceries on the table, stared at her feet, and announced shamefacedly that she'd had sex with Tim a few weeks before—right here in the house—while Arlen had been out. She'd been miserable and guilty. She said she knew Arlen must hate her for it. (It certainly explained why Tim had quit without a word.) She had not been at the doctor's at all, but rather to see Tim, to tell him it was over, and that she didn't want to speak to him or see him again.

Arlen—first stunned, then enraged—gave in to his worst self and immediately countered by telling her he'd slept with Nan that very afternoon. Sara said, unexpectedly, that she was surprised only because she'd thought they'd actually been having an affair for some time.

So it was out in the open: every crime against their marriage had now been committed by them. The remainder of the day saw them stalking about the barn like two caged animals, incapable of expressing their disappointment, frustration and inchoate rage.

That night Sara slept with her back turned toward Arlen at the far edge of the bed. It was 2 a.m., and the wind flung the maples' branches against the rooftop, as though the trees themselves were punishing the barn and its inhabitants.

Arlen, exhausted but sleepless, tossed and turned endlessly. A sickening feeling that had pursued him all day coalesced as an aversion to the quilt. Even though it was chilly in the house, he had gradually kicked it off him during his fitful sleep; Sara, he noticed, had done the same.

Finally, he drifted off to sleep, but was suddenly jerked awake. For a moment he could have sworn something clutched at his foot. He sat up in bed, his face covered in cold sweat. He thrashed at his feet with his hands. Nothing. A foot cramp, perhaps. Sara remained asleep.

He stood and headed toward the bathroom. He heard a slipping of fabric behind him; the quilt had fallen to the floor.

The quilt was bathed in moonlight. As he watched, the wavering shapes of tree branches played across its stark emptiness—but beyond that he saw the various shapes of old stains materializing, and this time they moved across the white surface, shifting, coalescing, all the dark splotches combining, gathering together, pooling forces.

He felt himself on the verge of hysteria—maybe this was a horrible nightmare after all. He couldn't bring himself to kick the quilt. Instead, he went into the bathroom in the hall, turned on a small nightlight and threw water onto his face. Taking a deep breath, he turned about towards the opened bathroom door.

The doorway was gone.

Blinking, he looked again. No, the doorway was there, but some...thing filled the space. And it rippled, and swelled inward, and a fetid, warm wind, like the breath of some sick and dying creature, filtered into his nostrils. Arlen, nauseated, instinctively grabbed the edge of the sink behind him for support. The thing rippling in the doorway pulled away back into the darkness.

He sucked in cold air, trying to keep himself from passing out or becoming sick. Impossible, he thought. This can't be happening.

Then he heard a slow dragging sound, like flesh pulled over the rough carpet leading back into the bedroom. It was heading for his wife.

He inched around the corner of the bathroom door, and moved down the hall, avoiding squeaky floor joists. He quickened his pace as he went. Finally, he turned into the bedroom and his breath caught in his throat.

Nothing in his life had prepared him for this moment.

At the foot of the bed, spotlighted in the full moon's exacting radiance, was the quilt—slowly rearing to its full height like some horrific parody of a Hokusai tidal wave, arched as though preparing to strike, its entire length trembling with life, its color no longer white but a murky, shifting darkness.

The face of the old woman came to Arlen again, and her words about the quilt—what it could do within the confines of their marriage, what it might do if their vows were trifled with. Arlen took an uncertain step towards the thing, one that placed his foot on a particularly loud floorboard.

Like some beast of prey, the quilt stopped and turned, its topmost part almost imitating the motions of an animal's head. It "saw" Arlen—of that he had no doubt. He even imagined he could hear it roar—but it was only his heart pounding, blood caroming through his skull.

In an almost hypnotic motion, it extended one pointed corner towards Arlen, and began to twirl its fabric into a tighter and tighter cone shape.

Arlen stared, mesmerized. It never occurred to him to question what it was doing. Then—with a motion too sudden for any human reaction—the twisted corner of the quilt lunged at Arlen's face with rapier-like speed. Arlen, aghast, did the natural thing: he opened his mouth in surprise. And the pointed corner of the quilt rammed itself into his mouth, and down his throat.

Arlen staggered backwards, out the bedroom door. He gagged and choked. He couldn't breathe as the fabric muscle of the quilt pushed itself further and further down his windpipe.

"Arlen," Sara called sleepily.

He had to warn her, make her lock the door. But he grew dizzy from lack of oxygen. He would black out soon unless he did something.

Still choking, he grabbed the quilt and started yanking with both hands, pulling it inch by inch from his throat, feeling its repulsive texture as it slid unwillingly back up his larynx, fighting every inch, like a living insect being pulled back up the length of a flesh-eating-plant.

A floorboard squeaked: Sara was coming down the hall. Suddenly the pressure of the quilt weakened. It seemed...distracted, and Arlen's fight became easier. He was winning the battle after all.

Only too late he realized it was no such thing. The quilt withdrew from his mouth, whipped itself around and smashed into the side of his head, knocking him to the floor. Then it was off, like some murky ghost, slithering down the hall towards the sound of Sara's footsteps.

"Sara!" Arlen called, his breath coming back. "Lock yourself in! Now!"

A few seconds later came the thunderous sound of the nightmare smashing itself in frustration against the bedroom door.

"Oh, god, Arlen! What's happening?"

What could he say that she would believe, that he himself would believe?

A quilt is trying to kill us?

No, it's really not the quilt. It's ourselves. It's us trying to kill us—all the worst and most violent impulses in Sara and me that have been imprisoned in that thing.

He knew he should have been paralyzed with fear, yet he felt energized by these events—the pain of looking hard at themselves as never before, knowing they had both sunk as low as they ever would, and the realization that they were going to make things work despite it all. He was furious that this monstrosity was attempting to put an end to their life together. It redoubled his resolve to save their marriage. If only he could talk to Sara right now, tell her what he had been unable to say all day: that he could forgive her. But could she forgive him?

The quilt came boiling around the corner from down the hall—a white wave churning in his direction. Sara was momentarily safe, but he was trapped in the hallway. He had no ideas, no plan. He just wanted to keep moving, take this beast further away from his wife.

He ran to the head of the stairs and practically fell down them into the living room. He turned back to see the quilt spilling onto the steps, slowly pouring down like curdled milk. Arlen ran into the kitchen and heard Sara call from over the landing.

"Arlen? Are you OK?"

"Yes! Stay quiet!" But it was too late.

The quilt was in the living room now. It had arched to its full height at the sound of Sara's voice, sniffing the air, it seemed, or listening. Sara leaned over the balcony and looked down. Her scream deafened Arlen, but it only focused the thing's attentions. The quilt wrapped itself around a vertical exposed wooden beam and, slug-like, with sickening, peristaltic motions, began hoisting itself up towards Sara.

Arlen ran to the hearth, grabbed the first fireplace tool that came to hand—a large, hooked affair—and swung it over his head at the quilt, ripping into the fabric...and catching. He pulled harder and heard a loud tearing sound. The quilt disengaged from the wood and fell to the floor.

The sudden release of tension sent Arlen flying back into the dining room table with a crash. For a moment he blacked out from the blow. The next he knew Sara was crouching down, cradling his head.

"Sara...no, what are you doing down here. Get back upstairs...lock yourself in the attic..."

"No...maybe it's OK. Maybe you killed it or something."

A slow rustling sound put an end to that hope. The couch across the living room shifted, and from underneath it the edge of the quilt slowly poked out.

"Oh my God," whispered Sara.

Arlen grabbed her, and they ran. They crashed into a wall and stumbled into Arlen's study, one of the few rooms in the barn that could be completely closed off. He shoved Sara towards a far corner of the room. As he started shutting the door the edge of the quilt curled around the doorway. He pressed his whole weight into the door, but couldn't lock it. More of the quilt squeezed into the room, now reaching, finding, and tightening around his leg like a tentacle—though, Arlen sensed, perhaps a bit more weakly due to its "injury." He yanked his foot with all his might, breaking free, tumbling backwards to where Sara crouched. The door was wide open now, and the creature slithered towards them.

"Oh God, Arlen," she said, clutching him. "Forgive me."

"Forgive...?"

"Yes."

They stared into each others' eyes. Each knew: they could die apart...or they could forgive each other and die together. Sec-

onds before the quilt embraced them, they chose. Wordlessly they put their arms around each other as the quilt fell upon them.

Arlen smelled the stench that hung about the thing—and he saw again the blind woman's unforgiving, harsh face. He experienced the unending pain and shame she had felt decades ago when her husband had left her. He felt, too, the ultimately corrosive effect it had on her in the ensuing years, how she would not let go, ever, of that hate, how it had warped her, warped even the work of her hands into a beast of malice and death.

As it tightened, he felt the air leaving his lungs, but even as he grew dizzier, he tried to think of Sara, of what their love had been, not of the horror that was now destroying them. He knew Sara was doing the same.

Arlen felt that strange tingling he had experienced whenever he tried removing a stain from the quilt, the sense of energy pouring out of him into the fabric—except this time it was an affirmation, something altogether new for them, somehow going into the quilt. He held Sara tighter—even as the quilt squeezed them, separating them, pulling them apart from each other. Nearly unconscious, he thought his ribs would crack...he felt something give. The quilt relaxed slightly, and then a little more, and then Arlen felt the cold sting of air in his lungs.

He heard Sara's sharp intake of breath from beneath the occluding white folds of fabric, and a pale hand reached towards him. He grabbed it and pulled her closer. The quilt collapsed about them. Where it had once been turgid and taut like a living muscle, it now slackened, falling in loose, yielding folds, tangling their arms and legs. It lasted several minutes, this gradual unfastening of its snakelike coils around their bodies.

Finally, it gave a shudder and ceased to move.

Taking her hand, Arlen pulled Sara from underneath the bedcover. Once out they lay on the floor, drained. The quilt lay there too, a dead thing, covered in blotches and stains—a piece of filthy cloth. It was a long time before they could move. And then they held each other close, for a long, long time.

They never talked of that night to anyone for fear they'd be considered mad. And, too, they rarely spoke of it to each other—their deeper fear being that they had, indeed, for one evening at least, been insane.

Soon afterwards, Sara became pregnant. It seemed another turning in their marriage. Things improved between them, and even the outward signs—the market, a few new commissions for Arlen—boded well. Arlen completed Nan's home without further complications. True to her word, she never spoke of that day, and she even recommended Arlen's firm to others in her set.

Once, when Sara was laid up with morning sickness, she forced him out of the house to be alone with her discomfort without her husband's overbearing ministrations. Arlen took a long drive, ostensibly going nowhere, but really attempting to find that strange road in the mountains, the shack and old woman that had precipitated their most direst moment as a couple and, in some way, their rebirth.

He could never find the place, not even the road.

Arlen and Sara burnt the quilt in the fireplace the night of its rampage. Unable to tolerate the feel of any bedcovering over their bodies, they slept coverless for many weeks thereafter, the heat turned up full blast, their frail bodies now their only protection against the cold and the waiting outer dark.

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By Appointment Only

Short-Short ■

EDDY DEWAR ROLLED OUT OF BED at 8:55, grabbed a cup of coffee from the machine in the kitchen, and telecommuted to work in time to beat the rush-hour traffic and log-on to the Acme Publishing House computer before nine o'clock. While his computer navigated its way through Acme's outer security system, Eddy looked out the window to another grim grey winter's day.

"Just think what it must be like in the city," he said to himself as he put on his headset and glove.

He was online.

It was virtual noon, and the slushpile surfer was paddling out, watching the horizon for the tell-tale swell of an incoming set. The place was patterned after San Onofree, California, with nuclear power plant cooling towers on the shore and a certain clean grittiness to the beach. In the water it was a zoo, with the inside crowded with newbies and cools, while the hotshots were out beyond the breakers, watching and waiting in their usual cliques: the Goths, the Hardcore, the Greens, and the G'Oldies. The first two were in the best location, so the slushpile surfer aimed for a spot between them.

Scanning the cliques, he recognized

Jargonaut, Captain Jingo, Olivia Drab, and the Esperanto Kommando as the Hardcores (Pink Panzer had apparently left them for the Greens), but there was a newcomer with Astrogoth, Flamin' Pagan, and Baron Volapük of the Goths. This new guy was a long-haired albino with a hook-hand.

"Outside."

The slushpile surfer spotted the incoming set of three, and began maneuvering to catch the second one. He caught the wave just as it was about to break, riding down left against the glassy wall, staying ahead of the tube. His board jerked a little, hit by something underwater, and then he nearly collided with Mr. Hook, who was trying to plow through the wave to get to the third one.

"Totally uncool."

A few sets later, there was a really big outsider that everybody was trying to get on. The slushpile surfer caught it at the middle, and glanced back to check the tube in time to see the albino swooping down from the crest, pushing surfers out of his way, dominating the wave.

"Clear the vamp-ramp! Make way for the Hook!"

Down went the Green Witch, back fell Pidgin Man, into the falls went Psibrat.

"Asshole."

It was virtual noon, and the slushpile surfer was paddling out, when suddenly a sea otter popped up from the water beside him.

"Number of accesses?" said the otter, his big black eyes peering inquisitively.

The surfer counted the dings and scrapes on his board. "About seven," he said.

"Not so good," said the otter, looking away and rubbing his whiskers thoughtfully. "I see our new friend 'Vampire Hook.' His board looks pretty beat-up..."

"Surf bully," said the surfer. He spat.

"Probably true," said the otter. "Well son, its time to come home." The otter pointed its webbed paw towards the shore, where the surfer could see a parked Woody. The headlights of the Woody flashed once. The otter was gone.

The surfer paddled in, walked up the beach past the shredded remnants of surfboards and surfers (a bikini top with a green theta on the cup caught his eye), and got into the awaiting vehicle. It was a 9600. The interior was a blank, there wasn't even a steering wheel, just a dial that went from zero to 9600 in less than a second. The beach dissolved in a blur of motion and was replaced with a bleak and gloomy house.

The slushpile surfer entered Bleak House. In the antechamber waited a few colorless characters wearing name tags. One read 'Bill Toupee.' Another read 'Ms. Dawn Lode.'

"Catch any fish?" said Ms. Lode.

"Not quite," said the slushpile surfer. "I mean, I surf. I don't fish."

The house spoke. The voice was slow, ponderous. "Only...seven...accesses? Very...disappointing..."

"You need something to set you apart from the crowd," said Bill Toupee, in an oily sort of way. "You know, a gimmick or something."

"Well, Astrogoth wears a spacesuit with horns on the helmet," said the surfer. "And the Green Witch has death runes on her bikini. At least, she did. Do you mean something like that?"

THE SLUSHPILE SURFER

by Michael Andre-Driussi

"Yeah, that's the ticket. Something with name recognition, label consciousness. Snob appeal."

"It's only for surface," said Ms. Lode. "Nobody really cares about what you're like inside. It's all just for show."

The house spoke again. "Surfer...must...go...naked."

"What?" said the surfer, trying to cover his suddenly exposed crotch. "Hey, this isn't funny, man. Gimme back my baggies!"

"Send...surfer...out."

"Don't let 'em get away this time," said Ms. Lode.

The surfer was back in the Woody, sans bathing suit but equipped with a new board. The dial went from zero to 9600 and then the slushpile surfer stepped out onto a new beach, shielding himself with his board.

"This isn't funny, man."

The Woody was gone.

The surfer sat on the sand behind his board, refusing to enter the water, until the otter swam up out of the surf.

"Come on," said the otter, standing up on its hind legs. "The water's fine."

"But I'm naked," said the surfer.

"So am I," said the otter. "So what? Who cares?"

"Yeah, well you're just down in the water all the time," said the surfer. "I'm standing up on the damn board where everybody can see me."

"Great gimmick," said the otter. "Come on now, surf's up. Or are you just gonna be a wussy?"

It was virtual noon and the naked slushpile surfer was paddling out into a place patterned on Makaha, Hawaii. Slick and glossy. With a grim determination he caught waves and fought to keep ahead of the tube while the board took hits. He noticed now that all the hotshots had something to make them stand out from the crowd: Flamin' Pagan with his external combustion, Olivia Drab with her military hardware, Baron Volapük with his projectile vomiting, and so on. The hotshots also seemed to be mainly short-lived, disappearing not long after arriving. Where was the Green Witch, Astrogoth, or Jargonaut? He

saw White Light Knight's board literally disintegrate under his feet; the tube swallowed him and he was gone.

The slushpile surfer saw Vampire Hook paddling out, and he knew that the beach wasn't big enough for the both of them. It was high noon.

"Outside."

There was a big set coming in. Everybody paddled into position. The naked surfer caught the new wave along with a dozen or so others. The wave was glassy smooth and phosphorescent, but the ride was strictly rocky-road. The board was taking some serious hits. Buck Naked glanced back for the tube and saw Vampire Hook swooping down, pushing people into the maw, closing in on him fast. And right behind him came the tube. Buck zigged and he zagged, trying to force Vampire Hook into slowing down. Their boards bumped, and Buck went down to one knee to keep from falling off. Hook's triumph was short-lived: Buck saw the tube close over him, he was too low and too slow to race out of it, and the churning waters took him away.

It was virtual noon. The otter popped up in the water beside Buck Naked.

"Number of accesses?"

Buck counted the dings and dents, lingering on the one that looked like a bite. "Twenty," he said.

"Not bad," said the otter. "I guess the gimmick is helping after all. Have you seen Vampire Hook around?"

"I took him out."

"You what?" The otter dove down for a while, then came up again. "I don't believe this," it said, baring its teeth.

"He was an asshole," said Buck. "Surf bullies must die."

"You don't seem to have a clear idea of what is going on here," said the otter. "You're supposed to surf, you're supposed to shoot the tube. What is wrong with you? How come you never shoot the tube?"

"I don't want to," said Buck. "Guys get chewed up in there."

"I've had it with you," said the otter, slapping the water. "The next wave that comes along, you better catch it and get tubular,

you understand? Or else."

"Or else' what?" said Buck. "You gonna bite me or something?"

The otter put his forepaws onto the board and leaned forward. "This board is going to disintegrate, then the Woody will come to take you back to the Bleak House, and you will never go surfing again."

This sank in.

"Harsh," said Buck.

"Yep," said the otter. "It's do-or-die time. Look sharp, soldier."

It was virtual noon as Buck Naked the slushpile surfer slid down the face. The tube was forming behind him. He put his left hand into the wall to help slow down. The tube was closing in. Buck looked to the shore and saw the Woody waiting ominously. The board was dragging something. He looked back to see a great white shark gnawing on the tail. The curtain of water was drawing past Buck, and in his last glance to shore he saw the beach covered with otters standing at attention. Then the tube closed.

The shark tore him into bits which the smaller fish could eat. Buck Naked entered the food-chain, and ultimately he became food for thousands.

Eddy Dewar took a lunch-break, surprised it was already noon. He had had a fairly productive day so far, scanning through the slushpile at Acme House, tagging the prospective stories and rejecting the rest. There was one he particularly liked, one about this albino with a vampiric hook-hand. His supervisor, who usually approved most of the stories tagged by Eddy, had already bought a few from today's session via standard contracts and electronic transfers. In a matter of months the stories selected today would appear in the Acme magazine, to be consumed by thousands from coast to coast.

Outside, it began to snow.

PW

SECTION

ALBERT'S ROBOT

by Gerard Daniel Houarner

IT WAS ALBERT'S MOTHER WHO told him the robot was gone. Around the breakfast table, Albert and his parents sat for a quiet moment. Finally, Albert asked, "Where'd he go?"

"Who knows?" his father answered, turning back to the data screen in his hand. Across his silvered pupils, reflections of figure columns scrolled past like a conquering army.

"It happens sometimes," his mother added. Her fingers tapped a pocket keyboard on the table as she gazed at words flowing across a tiny screen. "Who understands metal and plastic? Data System will issue another tutor for you as soon as they track the old one down."

"But I want *this* one back."

His father and mother looked up for a moment. "Why?" his father asked.

Albert thought for a moment. "Because he's been with me ever since I can remember, and because he taught me numbers and words, and...and he tells me stories every night."

His mother tsked and shook her head. "It's just a machine, dear. A tool we use to help you in school and take care of you while we're at work."

Not letting his eyes waver from the numbers, his father said, "It's not very healthy to get attached to a robot, son. It's like falling in love with a car, or a lawnmower." To Albert's mother, his father added, "I didn't know that thing was telling stories to Albert. Was that in the specs?"

"Mr. Fredricks next door loves his car," Albert said.

"Mr. Fredricks isn't well, dear," his mother replied.

Albert slipped away from the table while his parents discussed their recollection of the robot's specs. He went out the back door to look for his robot.

He took the mag-lev to the city dump, where runaway robots were sometimes reported hiding, and searched all day. He found several robots fleeing Data System retrievers as well as people living in bro-

ken Fuller Domes and abandoned gas-engine cars, but not his robot. As evening fell, he drifted closer to one of the many campfires burning across the dump.

"Come sit in the light and have a bite," an old man told him, pointing to an old tire and holding a chipped plate filled with hash.

Albert took the seat and plate gratefully.

"What's a young boy like you doing out here? Your folks know where you are?" the old man asked.

"Not likely. I'm looking for my robot. He ran away."

As they ate, Albert looked at the figures around the fire. Men, women and children dressed in outdated clothes savored their meals, joked and teased one another while pointing to jets taking off and orbitals being launched from the nearby port. Only the robot sitting in the circle did not turn to admire the lights and fires streaking across the sky.

"He's too old to be yours," the old man said.

Albert noted the missing hand, the scars and dents marking the body, as well as the signal blankets blinking on his skull over data transmitters and receivers. Retriever serial number plates decorated the robot's chest.

"We put them on him," said the old man, pointing to the plates with his knife. "He lost his speech center after the first retriever tried to take him in, not that he talked much before, so we figured we'd let the plates do all the talking he'd ever need."

Albert put his plate down. "Why did he run away?"

"Didn't say."

"Why does he stay with you?"

"Never mentioned a reason."

Albert turned to the old man. "Did he ever say anything?"

"He thanked us, once. For what, I don't know. And then he busted up an old, working data screen one of the kids found. He said he didn't like the noise anymore."

Albert went to the robot and inspected

him. He was a biped model, like his tutor. Old paint and facial details indicated he might have once served as a business or club receptionist. His own robot was smaller, cruder, based on the model used to aid the handicapped. Still, he patted the old robot on the back and returned to his seat to watch the lights of the distant city and the much nearer light from the fire try to push night's darkness away.

Moments later, someone said, "It was in the time of heroes," and everyone else stopped to listen. Albert listened as well, and soon the roar of distant aircraft faded, the blaze of distant towers dimmed and vanished. He forgot about his home, parents, even his missing robot as the speaker told the tale of an ancient hero who battled monsters; lost his best friend; searched for, found and then lost the precious gift of immortality.

When the speaker had finished, another called everyone's attention, this time beginning with "Once upon a time." She told a story about a little girl in red and her encounter with a terrible wolf, and Albert almost cried out a warning when the wolf lured the girl into her grandmother's house. Another called out, "It was a dark and stormy night," as soon as the last speaker ended. Albert shivered as he listened to a story about a creature made out of dead men trying to find a place in the world. Still another tale followed after that, and another, until Albert's eyes were almost closed with exhaustion as he leaned heavily against the old man.

At last, the camp fire died and the voices fell silent. People left the circle, mumbling their good-nights, and ambled to their make-shift homes. The old man showed Albert the cab of a battered truck and moved on to his own shack. Curled atop a seat, Albert thought about the stories he had heard, so different from the shorter tales his robot had told about runaway rockets lost among the stars and androids with missing programming chips causing mischief in city services. He didn't quite understand the magic that had captured him by the campfire, but he could not forget the tales, or the voices from the edge of the campfire's light that had told the tales.

He quickly fell into dream-filled sleep. The next day, instead of going back home, he went out to look for his robot again.

He never found his robot, though he looked until the day came when he could no longer walk. But in time he began telling stories around the campfires at the dump. And in his tales, which he told until he was older than the old man who had invited him into the circle so many years past, he found his robot every time.

PW

CASH HAD SEEN IT UNFOLDING LIKE this a half dozen times in his own films: the three guys walking in too loud for their own good, shoving each other and roughly pushing through the crowd at the end of the bar.

He'd never heard a hyena chuckle until he'd taken a road crew into the Nevada desert and taped the wild dogs for a background track used for this exact same scene in *Death Stalks a Quiet Town*. Tough teenagers hassling nice folks in a local sink-hole, the violence starting subtly, just clowning around at first but escalating quickly until the hero steps up and gets a blade in the belly and they rape his waitress girlfriend. Hero recovers but not before the girl's parents get killed and more gratuitous violence ensues. Hero gets even. Audience cheers. Turned over fifteen million in its first week-end, in only a hundred and twenty theaters.

These three guys looked cut from wardrobe. They had the style Cash liked when casting borderline psychos; black jeans and leather, steel-tipped boots, some facial hair but not too much, keeping it on the charming, boyish side. One of them had a knife sheathed on his hip, out in the open so he wouldn't be breaking any of the concealed weapons laws. They barreled through a couple who were drinking martinis, sending both glasses spinning through the air like badminton birdies to smash against the bar railing. The chatter died as if unplugged.

The man said, "Hey, watch it!" and his wife shushed him with a tug at his elbow.

"Sorry," the first kid said.

"No harm, no foul," the second said. "Let me get you another."

"That's unnecessary," the wife told them in a frail voice. Funny how self-conscious a lovely woman can be of her features when the wrong set of gazes are nailed on her. The wife gave the guys a sheepish stare and backed so far up against the railing that Cash could hear the broken glass being crushed to powder beneath her heels.

"No, it was our fault," the third kid said, soft and meek, almost shy, with a glint that told Cash the kid was trying to impress the pretty lady as much as disarm her. Pearly smile next. Would she go for it?

"We were in your way," she admitted, as if that would end it. Cash admired her na-

ivete: her husband was still angry, glancing left and right, making judgment calls, wondering if he should calm down or keep up the heat. Cash hoped he'd make the right choice. Don't get stupid now.

In *Death Stalks A Quiet Town* they were named Grainy, Snazz, and Hitch. The screenwriter wanted to give them local yokel names like Merle and Farley, going for a little humor, but Cash liked nicknames hacking through the gloss. Originally, there had been four kids. Nuh uh, Cash told the writer, cut one. He understood they wouldn't stalk in fours, that when they came they came in threes. Superstitious, maybe, but true. Just look.

The hero and his waitress girlfriend were Robert and Alice. More respectable, civilized names.

Other patrons in the area picked up the

turn, her eyes as animate as mice. "You said you would..."

"We would..."

"...buy us a drink."

"...yeah, buy us a drink." Grainy mugged for a non-existent camera, searching the crowd for beautiful teeny-boppers, his mother, anybody who might be watching. Cash thought he could've used him at some point, as an extra in one of the town establishing shots, panning across the locals outside the bar where the hero gets his guts ripped.

More or less, it still seemed calm, the bartender keeping tabs on the action but busy with a group at the far end. Cash searched for the bouncer and saw the no-neck hamming it up with an under-aged big hair at the rear exit, his pectorals larger than her tits. Soon her hand came up and the bouncer led her daintily out into the parking lot.

Alice tried smiling again and failed miserably, sweat gluing a few blonde strands to her cheek. Robert remained stuck, and Cash watched him inch closer to the nearest group of people, seeking refuge in numbers, but it was a no go, everybody had given him too wide a berth. Grainy acted as if he was going to signal the bartender, his awkward gestures meaning nothing, just priming the situation, all of it build-

up. What perfect action. Hitch threw open his jacket and took out his wallet. It was chained to his belt, lots of leather showing. Cash liked the dramatic flare and wished his screenwriter was here so the kid could learn: look at the loops and tassels on Hitch's shirt, a heavy metal motif but kind of played down, with just the right amount of overkill.

Robert scanned everyone who was in relatively close range, hoping to make eye contact, but shoes were a big topic for the moment, the crowd looking down. He managed to miss Cash, who continued studying them. Odd how long you could be toyed with and still not fully understand you were in the game.

Cash sipped his beer as Hitch moved in, coming up from behind the wife, closing the circle. Alice crumpled against the railing, trying to hide herself, wishing herself smaller and smaller, but going nowhere fast. The first hand barely brushed her. She froze as if slapped. The next came on

Extreme Closeup - Frame Blood-Red

by Tom Piccirilli

signals and backed away, step by step, until the couple was in the center of the bull ring. Cash drank his beer and watched, script changes coming to him quickly. He wished he could coach the couple on their lines.

"Okay," Robert said.

"Okay what?" Snazz asked.

Robert's eyes widened behind his glasses and a frown creased his ample forehead. "Okay, you can buy us another drink in lieu of the ones you knocked out of our hands."

Red flag. Cash grimaced and shook his head. *In lieu?* A heavy, Manhattan edge in his voice. What did he think, they were in New York? Upper West side? Lincoln Center? You don't talk literature this close to Sunset Boulevard.

"Sure," Grainy said, leaning in close, his face about a six inches from the woman, "sure, you can buy us a drink."

Anxiety building again, Robert acted torn between holding his wife closer and pushing her away, arms semi-akimbo. Alice licked her lips, uncertain of where to

stronger, fingers plying her shoulder. No time to do anything but squeak. Next it would be a grab, squeeze, fondle, a goose. Her husband brought his arm out and Snazz slapped it away, smiling. They were all buddies, good ol' boys. No offense.

Look at the white teeth.

"See here," Robert said.

"Uh hm," Snazz went.

"Please," Alice said. She had visibly paled, the sweat a sexy sheen on her face, tears welling but the mascara must've been the water-proof good stuff. She could cry all she wanted. The first tear spilled and arced in a strange angle over her nose, her mouth working, little half-formed words plinking out. Robert leaned towards her hoping she would give him good advice. His tie was askew and his glasses kept slipping.

Grainy made the grab. Hitch went for the squeeze, missed, tried again, scored, giving her breast a nasty little twist. Cash imagined the feminists picketing the scene. Alice didn't even whimper as her husband put his arm out again and got it slapped away, again.

Snazz closed in for the fondle, his hands as supple as a magician's, quick, almost invisible, but slow too. Taking their time to enjoy. They slipped beneath Alice's skirt, reappeared, dipped again as she stared wide-eyed and began to mewl. The knife would come out soon; if not now then afterwards as they awaited the couple in the parking lot. The rest was cliché.

Cash sighed, drank half his remaining beer in one pull and went to the bar with the empty mug, stepping up beside Snazz. He liked the way the metal on all their jackets flashed even in the dim bar lighting. "You get them at the biker shop on Vine?" he asked. "We must've tried ten places but nobody had 'em with those kind of studs and the tassels both."

"What?" the kid said.

"I said that's enough, Snazz."

Snazz grunted and smiled and looked at the other two, snapping his head back and forth from them to Cash. "What'd you call me?" He laughed way in the back of his throat, as if he hadn't yet learned how to do it quite right. It was so much like a hyena's chuckle that Cash was sorry he'd wasted all that time recording in the hills. Snazz stopped laughing, his eyes getting nice and Eastwood squinty for the camera, and then, as if this scene were beyond his limited imagination, he started giggling again, forcing it now. Of course, more humor, just check out this old, bald guy shaped like a potato, tipping two-fifty and couldn't make five-nine on his tippy toes.

Cash remained silent. The husband smiled politely, managing to take his wife's hand at last. Alice sniffed and stood, re-

gaining a modicum of composure. Cash found the single drying tear streak over her nose to be vaguely erotic, and knew other men would too. What a night, he had enough for half a movie already.

"My name isn't Snazz," Snazz said.

"It might as well be," Cash said. "I like the laugh."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

In *Death* Snazz had a knife hidden in his left boot and a .38 jammed into the back of his belt. This kid had the blade on his belt, up front, showing it off, gaze upon me and tremble. No harm, no foul.

"Go away," Cash told them.

"Do what?" Hitch asked.

"Go away?" Grainy repeated.

Cash nodded. "You might be good on the direct to video releases, Taiwan, Thailand maybe, but you just don't have what it takes out here. Really, believe me. If you want, I'll give you my card, you can come down for an audition if you think you might be smart enough to remember a few lines. Otherwise, I never want to see any of you again."

"Go away?" Grainy turned it over in his mouth once more.

Snazz smiled the hey, we're all friends here smile. He pulled his jacket back, winked to the wife and reached for her. Cash slapped his hand away, thinking of where he'd put the camera to get each shot; maybe up high at the end of the bar, where you could peer down at Snazz flapping his jacket back and the couple slipping out behind Cash in one slick motion, rushing but not running for the door.

Snazz was through laughing. The grin stayed plastered to his face, kind of a sneer, leer, and grimace in one. Christ, was this kid perfect for the part. The intent clearly showed through from beneath. The knife on his hip was a Bowie, the same one from *Death* except the sheathe was too clean. The cocky smile returned and he started striking poses. His hand drifted but he wasn't ready to pull the blade yet, wanting to play some more with Mister Potato Head. "We were just..."

"Yeah, right," Cash said. He brought his mug down against the railing and broke it perfectly, leaving jagged shards but with the base and handle intact. He swept it around himself without looking, catching Snazz and Hitch in the same motion, tearing them both across the face. He expected shrieks but only got muffled grunts before they both dropped to their knees. It was tough to find good male shriekers. Grainy's eyes flashed with fear and went goo-goo, his jaw dropped but he didn't move, just stood there as if he were only watching a movie. Cash brought the mug up into Grainy's throat and twisted like he was spinning a forkful of spaghetti, got a good

chunk, and then pulled. The maneuver finally dragged out a scream. A short one. Another let-down.

Hitch and Snazz tried to talk with only half their mouths, and Cash got a new idea for the F/X boys when they started the sequel to *Death* this summer. It had style. He brought the mug down on Hitch's head, the glass splintering further but still intact as Hitch fell backward and hit the floor. Cash shattered the mug against Snazz's forehead and watched him waver on his knees, unsure of which way to topple, weaving back, forth, blood pouring down his chin, his upper lip hanging by a thread. Cash left before he saw which way Snazz finally went over.

The onlookers looked on, quiet mumblings changing to normal speech, growing louder, and eventually even the laughter resumed. Cash returned to his table and lit a cigarette.

Somebody ordered him a beer; he looked around, staring at them, and knew *Death's* sequel would top a hundred million. They wouldn't be able to get enough.

Somebody else ordered him another.

And then another.

PW

THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES IN life. I wish the hell there were, but there aren't.

Wayne Dubrick pointed to the framed motto over my desk at "Undercover Operations" and grinned. "That your way of saying I don't get my money back if I'm not happy?"

"Don't worry," I said. "You'll be happy. If your wife is bed-bopping your best friend, she won't get a dime from the divorce. If she's not, you've got yourself a 23-year-old ex-model who's faithful. Either way, you're the happiest, wealthiest whiskey baron in the state."

Dubrick had been married for a record six months—this time. At fifty-four, he had reached a point in life where Dubrick Distilleries ran itself, leaving him free to retire, rake in the profits, and party.

"So," I said, getting back to business. "You have these overnight bashes how often?"

"Couple times a month. It makes sense. Don't let friends drive drunk, you know? Else you'll get your ass sued off. And there's plenty out there looking to get a piece of Wayne, the Brick, Dubrick."

I checked my notes. "If you saw evidence of infidelity at the last three parties, that means something's been going on for a couple of months. Starting just four months after the wedding?" That would break the record set by my ex-husband.

"Maybe sooner. Chelsea's pretty hot. It's hard to keep up, you know?" His leer made

it evident he enjoyed trying. "And Parker Barnes has a thing for redheads with big breasts."

"What proof do you have?"

"The first time, they were acting funny the next day. Parker and his wife were pissed at each other, plus I found him whispering in a corner with Chelsea twice. Actually," he said, shrugging, "I didn't think much of it till the next time. That's when I found the fancy panties in our bed."

"Panties you'd never seen before."

"She must have bought 'em just for him. Believe me, they weren't the kind of panties I'd forget. Then two weeks ago I found this."

He threw a crumpled scrap of paper on my desk. I flattened it out with my palm.

It read: Upstairs. Midnight. A lipstick print was the only signature.

"Chelsea's handwriting," Dubrick said. "It was all rolled up in the sheets the next morning, but I didn't say anything. Better to catch her in the act, you know?"

I asked what time to arrive at the party.

"Dinner's at eight," he said. "Oh, and uh, bring a date, if you got one. Look more natural, you know?"

My assistant, Harley Meeks, played the part of my date, though I don't know how natural we looked. Harley is twelve inches shorter and wears a red-checked bow tie to formal functions. It clashed with my black silk dinner gown.

Dubrick saw us arrive and gave me a nod across the room, but we were on our own at dinner. The Chateau Lafite-Rothschild was well-aged, and Dubrick's glass was kept well-filled. Chelsea Dubrick poured for her spouse, while Parker Barnes ignored his. Back straight, eyes averted, he talked to everyone but his wife. And when he spoke to Chelsea, his tone trembled.

Dubrick fell asleep before dessert; his chin dropped to his chest, his mouth opened, his snore shivered the anemones in the centerpiece. When the meringues

were cleared, Chelsea led the way to the drawing room. A deejay had been hired. Chairs and sofas lined the walls. Chelsea and Parker began dancing.

Then Dubrick reappeared. He'd greased back his hair, put on a smoking jacket. While his wife and her partner cut the rug, Dubrick danced with the spurned spouse.

When I turned to snag my third stinger, Chelsea and Parker disappeared. Dubrick and Harley had, too, so I followed alone, my Nikon nestled neatly in my handbag. I spotted the lovebirds going up the stairs and reached the second floor landing just behind them. They left the door ajar as they slipped into a bedroom. Camera in hand, I nudged the door open and stepped inside.

"Beautiful," Chelsea crowed, "just beautiful."

A bulb flashed, but not mine. Chelsea Dubrick clicked off more shots as Mrs. Parker Barnes rolled off the bed and ran screeching and naked into the next room. Her husband went after her. He'd have plenty to say to her now.

The man who sat up in bed had glazed eyes and ruddy cheeks—cheeks the color of bricks. I could see why they called him Wayne, the Brick, Dubrick.

Chelsea turned to leave and found me

standing in the doorway. "Looking for some action? Don't worry, even when he's stoned he stays hard as a rock. And he won't remember a thing tomorrow." She laughed. "You can get away with murder."

"Or conspiracy, like you did. Whose idea was the lipstick note?"

She didn't blink a lash. "The good ideas are always mine. Parker's wife is a nympho. All she ever needs is a nod. Give Wayne a few drinks, leave anonymous notes and next thing you know it's Kodak to the rescue." She waved the camera at me. "The snapshots I've taken will get us both a divorce and me a big bundle."

Dubrick had passed out again. His head and one arm hung over the edge of the bed. Chelsea left the door open as she exited down the hall. Rock and roll and loud laughter drifted up the stairs. I hoped Harley remembered he was designated driver. And knew Dubrick wouldn't believe whose panties he'd forgotten.

The blood was rushing to Dubrick's face and he'd slipped two inches closer to the floor. I squatted down to get a better angle and put my eye to the view finder.

"Smile pretty," I said, and clicked the shutter.

PW

BLACKOUT BLUES

by Evelyn A. Archer, P.I.





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Some 300 years ago, the Virgin Islands were the central location of a vast piratical activity that extended over the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, off the Florida Coast. In fact, the entire sea lanes of the New World were fair game.

One of the most respected writers of the time was Daniel Defoe. He published, in 1724, a book entitled A General History of the Most Notorious Pyrates. Its author did not approve of the pirates he wrote about, saying, "They are like Mad Men that cast Fire-Brands, Poisoned Arrows, Wickedness and Death, and then they say, 'Are we not Sports?' and often die in Agonies equal to their Villainies." Yet Defoe tried to understand the pirates, and at times indicated admiration for those bold seafarers. "They were usually Brave Men," he wrote, "and Wise Warriors, and Civilization is often led by Men no better. Under different Circumstances, they were capable of Decency, Dignity and Honourable Power." The Society of the pirates was governed by only a few rules. It was a basic, simple democracy that demanded justice and rights of the individual.

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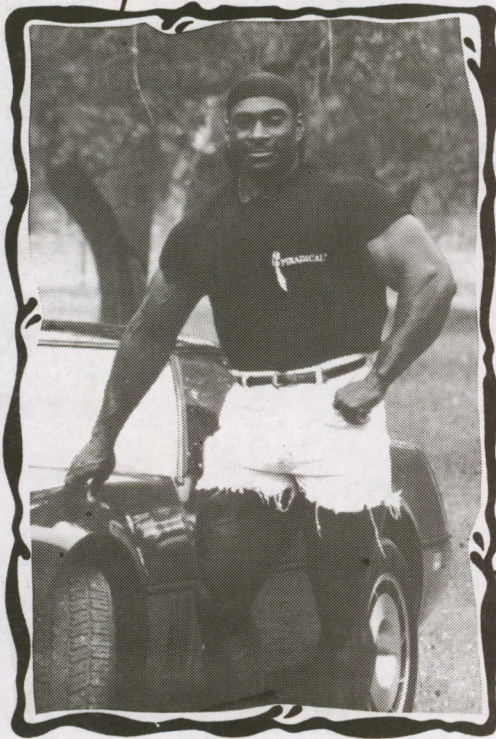
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Price each: \$18.00 T-Shirts Piradical and Jolly Roger Art, Bandannas - \$10.00 ea.



Featured Poet

FOOL'S GOLD

Coughing my life away,
claimed, ions' legacy,
clouds on high
gray, green particles,
beautiful, dusty sunsets,
harbingers of our debt...
Perhaps in a millennium,
a new life form chosen,
crawling from the ooze,
assume civilization's mantle;
Searching and spanning the stars,
whereas we could only
tread earth under foot.



HIS CREATION

Visitor, strangeling wayfarer
come to check their souls,
found, when not a citizen,
turned away faces
and roving, festering gangs-
dogs set to heels,
so scooted back out of the system,
not to return
for seven days.

THE VESSEL

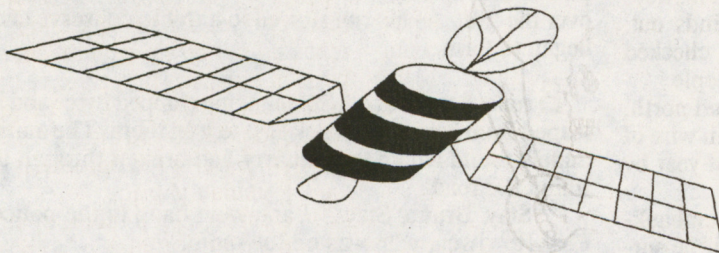
Caressed, but not caged...
her fires slumber-
suspended in torus,
when in self immolation,
they stoke her power,
vent from magnetic stream,
shatter the calm,
mix with negative matter
a miniature sun
in the starry night.

NEW UNIVERSE (and afterbirth)

Shrouded in time,
right angles to spaces,
dimension vertices slide,
lock into altered places,
tall transformed to wide,
red zeroes to black aces,
universe ruptured in spinning tide,
placenta trailing a million faces.

TRUMPETS

Sunrises, gilded, bloated,
alabaster wings on high...
cower beneath
horns' brazen glory.
Anointed, we wait,
gathered as flocks in sleep
while strident
sergeants, cross and grim,
whip the levies into line.
Saved, loyal and meek,
chosen only to tremble and pray,
while the angels fall.
And in the yielding,
relinquish our world



Since he was first published in 1991, J.W. has sold over 350 stories, poems, and articles. His credits include *Galaxy*, *Aboriginal SF*, *Dragon*, *Weird Tales*, *Adventures of Sword and Sorcery*, and many others. This marks his third appearance within the pages of *PW*. *Babylon Gardens*, his first book of short stories, will be published soon.

J.W. Donnelly

CALL FORTH THE

DEAD

BY J.L. HANNA

Illustrated by Keith Minnion

THE HUNTERS FOUND CHRYS MADREEN IN THE ESHAI WOODS before dawn, after his car broke down.

The engine died in silence, as though the battery's contacts had rotted through. A possibility; it wasn't his car. He coasted to the side of the road out of habit, not expecting other traffic on *this* highway.

He pulled up the parking brake, took the flasher from the dashboard socket, and slid his door open. A rabbit or some other skulker darted across the highway ahead of him, startled by the light or his presence. He was about to flip the motor compartment open when headlights flashed over the hill behind him.

Hunters.

That was his first thought. Perhaps it was paranoia. Then the idea firmed; no one else took the ancient road from Mahoneel to Bethrem—not with their lights, openly, as if they had a right.

He reached into the driver's compartment and pulled his keys and the heavy leather backpack with his notes and finds out. Nothing else in the car to link it to him, not until they checked with the University motor pool and beat up the right people.

He looked up at the stars, finding the Fisherman and north. The inner moon was a red dot in the Starship and the thin wire of the space elevator was washed out of vision this time of year by Sister Sun's light—five hours to sunup.

Madreen sprinted across the highway and down the embankment on a course that might take him back to the city if he survived. Around him the plant life glowed faintly in the light of the stars and the Sister Sun. This was Parklands, Crai preserves, a plant kingdom as alien to Argos-natives as to the near pure terran transplants of Analayne continent.

Madreen made it half way up the side of the hill before he turned back. If the other car sped past he could return and work on his engine, if not...

The car slowed policewise and stopped behind his. The doors slid open.

Hunters.

He was dead. His luck had run out.

Quickly he pulled his binoculars from his backpack and focused on the enemy. A light came on when the door opened revealing two of them. An older man, hard-bitten, his age, with a look on his face that said he would kill his mother for the line of Zherar Heunis, and...there was a chance he wouldn't be dying after all. The other man was Phar Rowlwen, who'd taken his night course two semesters past. If he could be reasoned with, shown the *m'shee* in his backpack...

He'd have to get Rowlwen alone, even to speak to him.

He watched the policemen examine his car. They spoke a minute. Perhaps they might think it had been there for hours...

Obviously, they didn't. The older man clapped his hands and an enormous hound—one of the hunting breed the Crai had developed—leaped out of the police car and began to sniff around.

He didn't see what happened next because he was running as fast as he could through the shimmering forest. From the back of his mind he called up mental images of Parkland memorized from a stolen map, recalling all he could about his people's past masters, their technology and their world. The High Lords of Kentaret had an estate nearby, and there were roads of a sort once you got over the hill. As his run slowed to a trot to conserve energy ideas began to form.

"Bruno, here Bruno." Stanen Lane clapped twice and his Hound leaped from behind the back seat to join them. The animal immediately found where their quarry had broken through the bushes lining the road.

"Stay, Bruno, Stay." Lane went back to the police van and Phar Rowlwen, who was on the radio.

Lane's ears pricked up when he heard the voice through the static from the other end.

"...wish to have to deal with Scholar Madreen. That would be unfortunate. Is that clear?" The question was totally unnecessary.

"Yes, Citizen General," Rowlwen said. The younger man looked up at Lane, shrugging. Lane's Hound would probably do the killing; Rowlwen thought that was a pity.

"Anything Scholar Madreen has with him is to be brought to me immediately, unopened. I am especially interested in his notes."

No doubt orders had sent other Hunters to Madreen's lab and house, but he would have been a fool or mad to have left anything there.

They signed off. Lane got out a map of the area and looked it over. "Couldn't you have gotten one with details of the Preserve?" he snapped at Rowlwen.

"No. General Gelter said only the First Citizen had them, and he wasn't giving any away."

The moss of the Crai highway grew perfectly, as though it were still gardened by patient fourfingered hands.

His flasher showered the area with a blank oval, surrounded by mixed terrene and argolid forest.

"At least we know the boundaries," Rowlwen quipped.

Behind Lane, Bruno had trotted up to them, then sat to heel, and slowly wrapped his long tail three times around his handler's legs. Lane idly leaned down and stroked the feathery head.

The hound's shoulders came up to Lane's waist; its hairless body was a mottled brown in color. The outline of the head was generally canine, but the genengineers had imported the fangs from one of the Old Terran big cats, Lane wasn't certain which one. Because of his need to bond with the animal Lane had raised Bruno from a puppy, which had tended to restrict the people he could invite to his home to close relatives and fellow cops, though Bruno was always gentle until given his orders. While Morneen had been sick Bruno had snuggled up to her in the bed, and after the funeral the animal had been disconsolate for months.

Thinking of Morneen's death made Stanen Lane want to kill—who really didn't matter. A Crai would have been ideal; before the Conquest most cancers had been curable. That much even Lane remembered from school.

"It's up to you, boy," Lane told the hound as he wrapped the map back up. "You have to find the Enemy of Humanity, Scholar Ch. Madreen." He suddenly looked at Rowlwen, "What would Madreen know about the Preserve?"

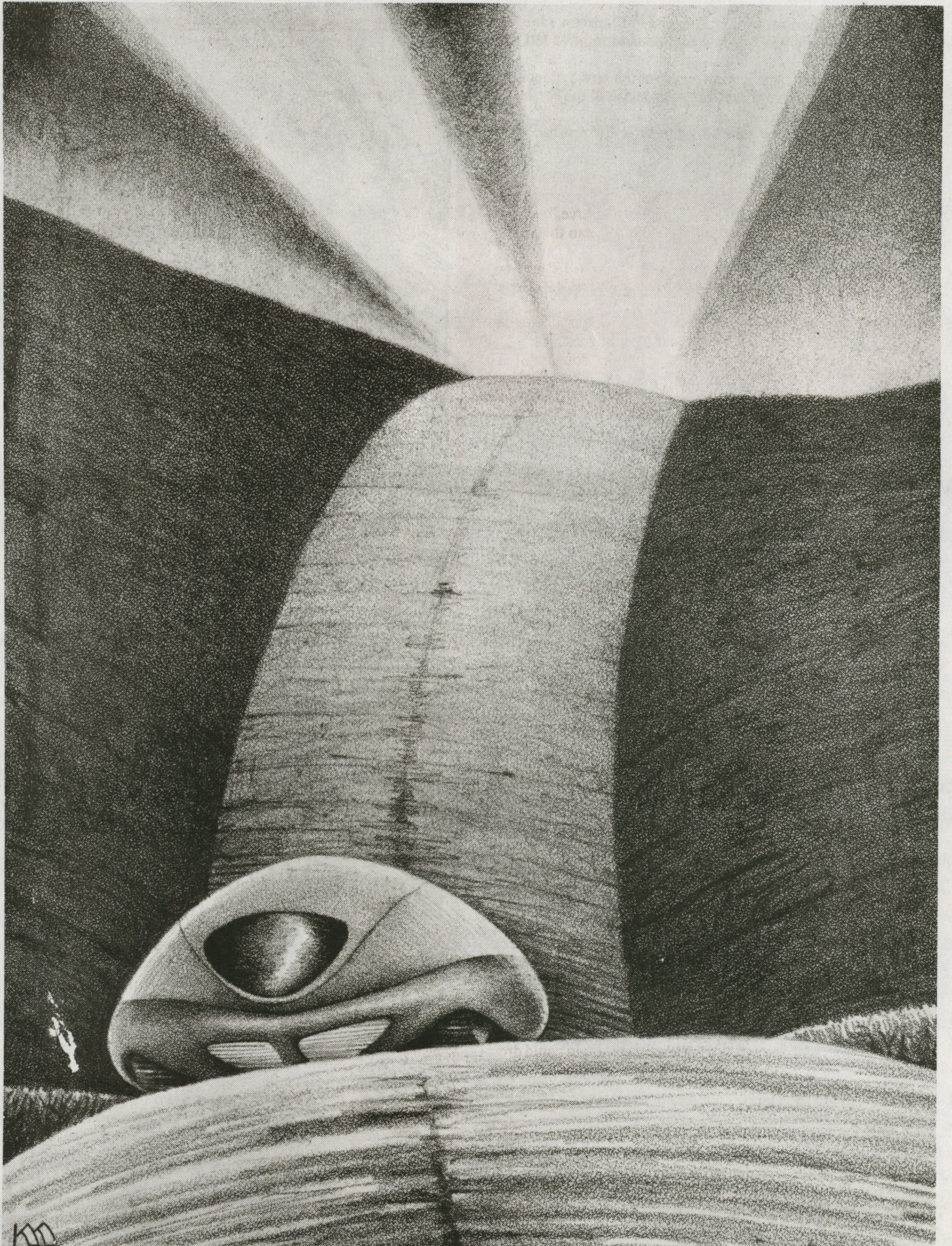
Rowlwen had pulled out backpacks and semi-automatics. He thought a moment before answering. "His profession is learning. And he remembers everything. I got to observe him working for Intelligence. I know he can read Crai symbols—I saw a few Crai books, ones he could have legally—in his library. I'd say he could know more about the Crai and the Preserve than we do."

"He's a bookish type then? Slow..." That would make it easy and quick.

"No," Rowlwen said. "His legal work is on Analayne, in the First Settlement ruins at a thousand meters' elevation. Heavy machinery's expensive, shovels aren't. He spends three months a year playing ditch digger, and he isn't carrying much extra weight." Rowlwen snapped a round of explosive cartridges into his rifle.

Lane brought the hound over to the University car and let Bruno sniff the seat and steering wheel until he was satisfied the hound really had the scent. He spoke softly into the rear set of ears. "Enemy, Bruno, enemy. Kill enemy, Bruno, kill." Then he pulled off the collar and the hound bounded off across the old





Crai highway. Shouldering their rifles, Lane and Rowlwen followed.

"First Citizen." The servant's murmur came over his shoulder. Jonas Coraish, heir to the Heunis lineage, half-turned angrily, then made himself listen. After all, he had given orders not to be disturbed.

"Pardon me." The First Citizen of the Republic of Argos got up from his gaming table. His guests smiled back at him, grateful that he was caring for their welfare.

"Security reports a break into the Crai Reserve." The servant spoke more audibly once they were away from the public.

"Have they identified the trespass?"

"A University Scholar. Madreen. Works in early and mid-post-settlement archaeology. He's been trouble before. General Halding has ordered termination."

"Halding's an idiot. Call him back and cancel it. We want him alive for questioning so we can identify his nest."

"The policemen have already crossed the boundary." The servant left the pertinent fact unspoken: they can't be called back.

"Get me a flyer and two Loyal guards, and tell the General I'll be on my way to the Reserve myself. I'll be a minute telling my guests they will have to entertain themselves for a while."

Humans had been on Argos for three thousand years, Madreen thought, and still the terrene ecology often came out second best to the argolid. Yet in the three hundred years since the Crai Conquest and the seventy-five years since the 'expulsion' nothing had troubled the pristine *Crainess* of the Preserve. No imported terran birds sang from the trees, no moles or voles burrowed in the soil beneath the phosphorescent plants; the native argolid worms and soil bacteria came up against a barrier and stopped.

The moss of the Crai highway grew perfectly, as though it were still gardened by patient fourfingered hands.

There were still signs in Crai characters, as there had been on the day they'd left. So this was the *Glory of the Hunt Joypath*. He knew all about it, if only by reputation.

He wasn't the first human to run it, nor the first to be chased by a mutated Hunter dog. The human tribute of old had a 3% chance of survival and had been rewarded with breeding rights and a chance to serve the masters that, the official histories told, only one man had rejected. That one man led the revolt, which culminated in the Expulsion and human freedom.

The official histories lied.

The *m'shee* was proof—could be proof if it could be shown.

A gate stood down the end of a short alley off the Joypath; he went up to it and looked over the symbols. Beyond was a breeding unit compound—the human cultural anthropologists who studied the Crai during the Conquest, before they were extirpated, called the breeding units *septs*—space enough for a group of sisters and their current inamorata and the young. No symbols indicated residence; it must have been abandoned prior to the Evacuation.

He turned and went back to the Joypath. A wind stirred the trees and flowers; the trees chimed, the flowers were aromatic, and made his nose itch.

This was still the Border, close enough to the Wild that a compound had been abandoned. Further on in a man could drown in the perfume.

He turned down the Joypath and ran, feeling for his pulse and trying to keep his lungs active. Soon he'd be sneezing.

The Joypath widened into a circle surrounding a monument. He stopped. It was a giant *m'shee*, dedicated to the first Crai to find Argos, the female who commanded the troops who rode the elevator anchor on the inner moon, turned off the planet's power, and took control of the world. Her holo stood pedestaled. As he came near she spoke, became alive. He understood the words.

"I am Ganerath Ahdissa of Lysaagh of the Mehedern sept which has served the race for ten thousand years as my sept will always serve the race with wisdom and success. I thirsted for glory and led my sisters to this world, and made its race an appendage of our own. We control their economy, determine their breeding. To all who come after me I say Thou shalt keep faith with our Glory...."

Madreen turned away; he'd heard it all before.

A few minutes later he came to another side-path and another gate. Here the symbols were up; the Dalashg sept declared that those who trespassed herein would feed their young.

He went back to the road to where he'd seen a pedestrian bench; a metal grating two meters long held up by concrete pedestals at either end. The metal was simply slotted into the stone. He lifted it up; it was fairly light, probably aluminum.

He brought the bench seat back down the path; from two meters away he threw it as hard as he could into the gate. Then he fell on his face and covered his head.

The gate wasn't locked, naturally. The Crai never locked anything. The gate flew open, and the metal bench seat exploded when it struck the disrupter field. A moment later the path ahead glowed white hot where pieces of metal had activated anti-personnel mines.

That seemed to be standard with Crai household defenses, more pro forma disinclination than anything really deadly. After all, the Crai were occupiers on a hostile world, so they limited their aggressiveness toward each other, for as much as they found it disagreeable. He'd learned a lot about Crai household armament in the past few years.

He got up and advanced toward the gate, picking up loose pieces of the bench that had splintered and almost impaled him. He threw a few shards down ahead of him onto the path, but nothing happened. Then he was through the gate, and within the Outer Defensive Ring.

Now the only traps would be natural, if just as deadly. After all, this was the children's playground.

"Stinkin' Crai...this place should have been cleared out years ago." Lane looked warily at the old monument. "Stay, Bruno! Stay meant for Bruno to run no more than ten feet ahead of his man.

"Then we'd have nothing to remind us of the Tyranny," Rowlwen said. "Of the need to keep vigilant against Enemies of Man." He had the political litany memorized. "I'd say he went this way." He pointed to torn moss on the Joypath. "And Bruno thinks so too. Want to let him have a go?"

"No," Lane refused. He was senior, after all. "I remember too many stories."

Rowlwen laughed. "With luck the old Crai traps will leave enough of him to identify sowe can get our bounty."

"Heel, Bruno." Lane caught the dog and attached the leash. "Bruno cost the State more to train than you did, Phar."

"The way you treat him you'd think he was a lap dog," Rowlwen said. The younger policeman went into his backpack and pulled out a series of twister trap sets; he keyed them to the control on his rifle butt. They were transparent and the size and thickness of a large sheet of writing paper. "We might want to leave a few of these around in convenient locales. He might actually outwit us."

Lane grunted and took several.

Bruno led them down the right path; the gate had yet to grow back.

"Why would he head in here?"

"He's spent a lifetime studying the traps," Rowlwen said. "He thinks he's going to use them against us." The younger man bent and picked up some metal debris and stones. He tossed them onto the path ahead to see what would happen.

"He might have doubled back," Lane suggested. Bruno pushed forward.

"Only if he went off into the trees." Rowlwen pointed to the groves on either side. "You remember what an *iashlag* is?"

"Yes." That let out doubling back using the trees.

"So he went right ahead into the nest."

"And the worms."

"Better a worm than an *iashlag*."

The Crai had never liked roofs; if humans in their architecture had recapitulated the cave, the Crai continued to live in giant nests. The roofless walls might tower and peak fancifully, projections of concrete and metal drapery, but what they surrounded were still nests for birds that had been barred from the skies for most of their evolution.

And nests could also be traps.

Madreen had managed to spend half an hour prowling the nest and the verge of the surrounding trees. He was fairly certain he had spotted most of the threats, but something could come shooting out of the underbrush before he had a chance to move aside. His hunters had been wise in not rushing in after him. There were *iashlag* in the trees, bladebirds, and any number of toxic thorns and bushes.

Madreen spent some time watching the worm hole at the base of the inside wall near a line of ancestor statues. For the moment the worm was the least of his worries, and he had plans for it.

As if sensing him the creature stuck one horn out of its hole; the horn was a pheromone detector as well as a weapon. It could smell you, gut you and drink your blood. But only if he was unable to control the stink of fear.

There wasn't much of a breeze, and he had done his best to stay downwind of most of the threats. Of course experienced hunters could find him that way too. He hoped they thought that's what they were doing.

He'd taken off his backpack but it really hadn't contained much more beyond his finds, note pads, and a half-eaten sandwich. The sandwich had proven the most useful. It was sitting out in the open; several bladebirds had descended upon it and were gorging on the peanut butter and jelly. Already one or two of them were beginning to show signs of drunkenness. They were clearly ignoring the worm's horn.

The 'nest' proper was some thirteen meters in diameter, a raised marble bowl intricately carved with the creatures of human fantasies and nightmares. In the years since the Crai evacuation nothing had taken up residence in the bowl itself, nothing would. The moss surrounding was flat and trim, free of fallen leaves and branches as the day the Crai had left.

Hopefully the hunters would not know why.

He heard them before they came into view. Anything could have heard them. Everything did. In a terrene or argolid environment noise was a safety factor; most animals tried to get out of the way of human beings. But not here.

Madreen caught sight of the dog first; it advanced warily towards the nest, sniffing the air, clawing the ground with front and back paws. The dog was enormous; the short saber fangs were a recent addition to the canine lineage. The fur was black, and the scientists had clearly modeled much of their work on illustrations of Indian tigers rather than wolves.

But I'm not afraid of you, Madreen thought. The dog could only tear him to pieces.

The drunken bladebirds screamed and dove. Drunk, they were little danger to the hunters, but looked frightening. Rowlwen went flat; the other man batted at one of the birds with his rifle. The dog caught two bladebirds with its paws, then wiped smears of blood on the moss.

That brought out the worm. It reared out of its hole at least

three meters high, its horn twisting, mouth pulsing as it sought the scent of blood.

The dog surged forward, protecting the older man; it knew what to do, certainly. It pushed him behind it, growled and brushed the lunging horn out of the way.

In an instant Chrys Madreen was behind Phar Rowlwen, a blade at the man's throat.

"Don't move," Madreen whispered. "If you want to live look at this." With his free hand Madreen placed the *m'shee* on the rim of the nest beside them. He had already activated it.

"Take a look at it; don't turn around." Madreen backed away into the bushes; a bladebird slashed at him.

Bruno leapt into the air and caught the worm with all four claws, ripping open the torn mouth. After a moment the worm collapsed on the ground.

Lane got to his feet slowly, then shot a pair of drunken bladebirds out of the air.

"Rowlwen." Lane looked around. His partner was out of sight, behind the curve of the nest. In a moment he found the man looking at a smaller version of the Crai *m'shee* that stood in the middle of the Joypath.

"Over here," Rowlwen called. "Come here and look at this." Rowlwen shot at a bladebird. "Have you ever seen one of these?"

"Sure. It's Crai..." It took Lane a few seconds to realize the figure was human and the language comprehensible.

"Know that I am Zherar Heunis the Loyal, Defender Unto Death and After of my mistress Elosang Ahdissa of Argos of the Mehedern sept that has served the Race for ten thousand years and will always serve the Race in wisdom and success. I have drunk the blood of the races enemies and befuddled their minds so they yet serve while thinking they are Wild..."

Rowlwen fingered the twister trap control. The traps hanging from Lane's belt exploded around him. The older policeman sprawled on the ground, squirming in the sticky twists. Lane managed to hold onto his rifle, but it was wrapped around his chest pointed at his face.

Bruno ran over to his master, then looked at Rowlwen and back to Lane. The beast tried to get a grip on the twists with his jaws but they were too tight.

"I thought that might have some affect on you," Madreen said from behind a bush.

The dog howled, then barked in Phar Rowlwen's direction. Rowlwen went over to the *m'shee* and picked it up.

The image of Zherar Heunis, Liberator and first First Citizen of Argos, continued to proclaim his undying loyalty to the Crai race and his mistress' lineage. The rebels on Verren had been routed and emasculated because of his betrayal. Tedryng Faber, the politician who had nearly united the Revanchists and Union Party had not died of a heart attack before victory, but from poison administered by one of the Loyal; the jump gate to human space had been disabled through *his* doing.

"And Heunis's heirs are still traitors to the human race," Madreen said, walking into the open. "Coraish and his clique are just waiting for the Crai Empire to expand again and overwhelm Argos."

Then Madreen heard Heunis' declaration of Loyalty switch off; through the leaves he saw Rowlwen's hand move casually across the base of the *m'shee*. And Madreen stopped moving.

He's one of them.

"I'll drink your blood, traitor!" Rowlwen put the *m'shee* down on the ground and hefted his rifle again. "Then I'll feed your body to the worm." Rowlwen stepped over to Lane and made certain the man was still incapacitated. "Don't waste your time, Bruno. He's worm-meat."

Madreen sank deeper into the underbrush. *Stupid, stupid. I*

should have killed him. Rowlwen fired into the underbrush. It was the safest approach.

Madreen looked around. He stood five meters from the Wood. There was another worm hole ahead of him, but no way to attract Bladebirds. There were a number of gorgeous flowers with toxic pollen, but he doubted he could wait the six or seven days before Rowlwen died. A blast of metal pellets shattered a golden blossom; the wind carried it away from Madreen.

Madreen had a fairly good map of the area in his mind. He needed to be about fifteen meters north, at the edge of the Wood.

The dog howled again. He ignored it.

And while I am moving from one square to the other to outwit my opponent, where is he moving himself?

Finally, the scholar positioned himself.

Rowlwen came closer; Madreen could hear the footsteps on the moss. The man walked much more carefully than earlier. Not silent enough for the Crai Preserves, but he knew what he was supposed to do. Every so often he fired into the underbrush. Eventually he'd find his target. In the distance the dog was still howling.

Madreen dared not move. He had to be completely still, completely silent. He couldn't look to see if Rowlwen was where he had to be.

Now!

Madreen cast his mind down into terror. His memory sorted out everything and isolated the one memory he knew would produce the desired result. Once while he was a student they had been testing one of the big cats from Analayne in the lab on a caged treadmill. It was a mass of muscle and white and black stripes and its limbs were a blur at 40 miles an hour. Then, without thinking, Madreen had walked directly in front of it.

The big cat had looked at him; the digital counter on the treadmill climbed to sixty.

Madreen had known fear.

The fear was in his mind; he let it overpower him until he stank of terror, and the wind carried his stench downwind.

The worm erupted from its hole. Rowlwen saw it and fired; he missed and had to dart backwards to avoid the horn.

Then he was in the trees.

The *iashlag* struck, wrapping its tentacles around the policeman; Rowlwen was snapped backwards and lifted into the brush. The *ialshag*'s tentacles were toxic to human beings. The man had gone into shock, and his heart had stopped beating before he had a chance to make a sound.

Madreen found Rowlwen's gun; it had fallen from his dead hands and hit the ground almost directly below the *iashlag*. That was probably the safest spot in the entire Wood, underneath a feeding *iashlag*. Madreen recovered the gun and checked it; several hundred minibullets left.

He walked back to the nest. The dog crouched over its fallen tangled master, head darting right and left, striking out with forelegs and hind claws; a pair of worms approached it from both sides.

Madreen shot the worms. The dog looked at him quizzically, sniffing, remembering his scent.

Madreen went over to the *m'shee*. Lane lay a few meters away, looking in his direction. The dog moved between them, ready to die or kill if its master gave the word. The cop was silent.

"Hello boy," Madreen said to the dog. "I'm a friend of sorts, I guess."

Madreen pressed the control stud on the stock of the gun. The twister net began to flex.

"I take it you watched this." He picked up the *m'shee* and placed it back in his pack. "Our glorious First Citizen is a traitor. They betrayed us seventy years ago. We're just sitting out the recession in the Crai Domain, waiting for them to expand and rule us again. They cut us off from the rest of the human race...."

The policeman tried to stand, but the twister net was still too tight.

Can I trust him? Rowlwen didn't, but he might very well want to move into the ranks of the Loyal, and my head will do it for him. I can't take the chance.

"I took Phar Rowlwen's car keys. I can make it back to the road before you get free. Don't follow me."

Away from the nest Madreen went into an easy lope, the gun in his hands, the pack swinging gently on his back. After working at two kilometers for most of the past season he expected to be able to keep this up all the way back to the road. He'd avoid the trees and be moving too fast for whatever worms were in the area to respond to him. He was feeling overconfident and didn't see the flitter until it was almost on top of him.

A four-man government job with Protectorate markings, and someone was aiming a weapon at him out the side window.

The only cover nearby was a grove of trees; a good way to get killed by a *ialshag*. He headed for it anyway, but the ground ahead spouted goutts of dirt and flame.

Pebbles and mud whipped his face, Madreen half-turned away and raised his own weapon, firing blindly in the direction of the flitter. Another explosion caught him from behind and threw him to the ground.

When he awoke they were breaking his legs. He fought not to scream and failed.

"...thought that might bring you around. It's remarkable what a little pain will do." He'd have recognized Jonas Coraish's voice anywhere.

Two beefy men in security uniforms stood over him. One had a foot on his chest.

"That was your right tibia," Coraish said. "Your left femur will be next."

One of the Security goons had a metal bar. While the first held him down, the second raised Madreen's left leg and struck it deftly with the bar. Agony swept over Madreen and he shrieked.

"That's better. Breaking your left tibia and your right femur will be even more interesting..."

There was a shrill sound. Through a haze of pain Madreen vaguely recognized it as a com beeper. It came from five meters away, where they had landed the flitter.

"I'll have to get that," Coraish said. "Your shots took out our pilot." He told his men, "Don't do anything fun until I come back."

Coraish walked to the flitter and climbed inside. It would be some official or semi-official call in his capacity of First Citizen, to some Argolid Citizens who didn't know he was First Traitor. The two goons just stood around Madreen, waiting for orders.

Stupid of me. I should have known they'd send someone after the cops... Three people had died to steal the *m'shee* from the graveyard where the Loyal interred their dead, all students of his, and he had failed them....

The police dog made no sound until it was on top of the Security men. Madreen first saw it as a black blur flowing over him, reaching out with claws to push one disemboweled man down while it drove its saber fangs into the other one's throat...

When he heard the explosions in the distance Lane broke into a run again; a couple of his ribs were broken and it hurt like hell whenever his feet touched the ground. He had barely gotten out of the underbrush and seen the landed flitter and the three men before Bruno leapt from him.

"Bruno!" Lane shouted; before he could act the dog was on the Security guards, its massive temporal muscles crunching the skull between maxilla and mandible.

A moment later the civilian had jumped down from the flitter; his machine gun cut through his own dying guards and Lane's animal. Bruno flew backwards in a spray

LEVIATHAN

Volume No. I -- Into the Gray

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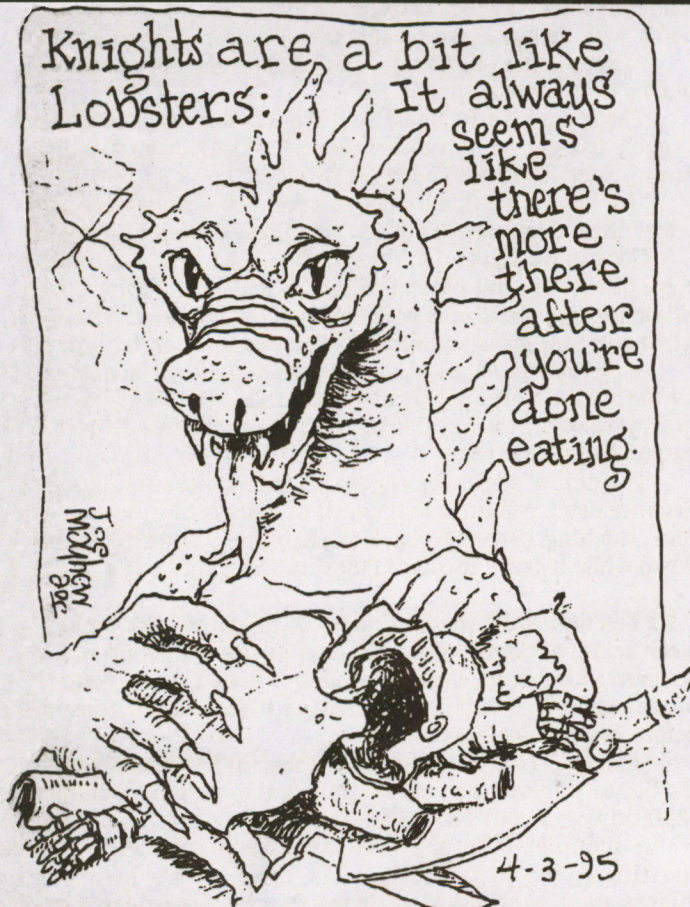
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of red and lay twisting on the ground.

Madreen tried to get to his feet but both his legs were broken; he floundered and bit back screams. The civilian was walking toward Madreen—Lane recognized the First Citizen Coraish immediately.

“Don’t move,” Coraish was saying to Madreen. “I need you alive for a little while longer...” Coraish ignored Lane; he was just another policeman who would take whatever orders he was given. As Lane limped toward him Coraish seemed to notice him for the first time.

“You, Sergeant Lane is it? Go to the flitter and bring me the first aid kit...”

As the First Citizen spoke the policeman found himself standing over his dead dog. Bruno lay eviscerated on the gray moss.

“Sergeant, I am the First Citizen, your commander...” The voice was strident and insistent, ready to break into a declaration of loyalty to the Crai on his *m'shee*....

Lane raised his weapon. It was the last thing the First Citizen ever saw.

Chrys Madreen wiped blood from his shirt and pushed the body that had fallen on him to one side. The First Citizen had a look of total bewilderment frozen onto what was left of his face. The police special Lane had used caused an enormous stink.

Lane sat on the ground with the head of his dead animal in his lap, rocking back and forth. Of all the mistakes Madreen had made in the last two days, this was the one he would regret the most.

And my legs are still broken.

Coraish had said the first-aid kit was in the flitter, hadn't he? Five meters away. There was no way he could crawl that far.

Madreen turned back to the dead First Citizen. He slid through the mess Lane had made of his master. Madreen found a private pocket phone in Coraish's vest pocket. A few centimeters lower and Lane's gun would have taken it out as well.

Anyone he called would have their phones tapped, but he could think of things to say that would only be understood by friends. They'd get help out here before sunrise. He punched out the numbers.

PW

NIGHT WATCH

Moonbeams pierce the shroud of dusk
Where dwellers of the night
Lurk amid the darkened dells
Beyond the touch of light.

Misty realm of shadow paths
Kissed in lunar glow
Beckons me into a world
Where only phantoms go.

The moon peers down
Through clouded lids
Stark silhouettes portray
Dark-side apparitions
Eclipsed in shades of gray,

Though I'm a creature of the Sun
and shun nocturnal veils
I fantasize with each moonrise
To wander twilight trails.

- C. David Hay

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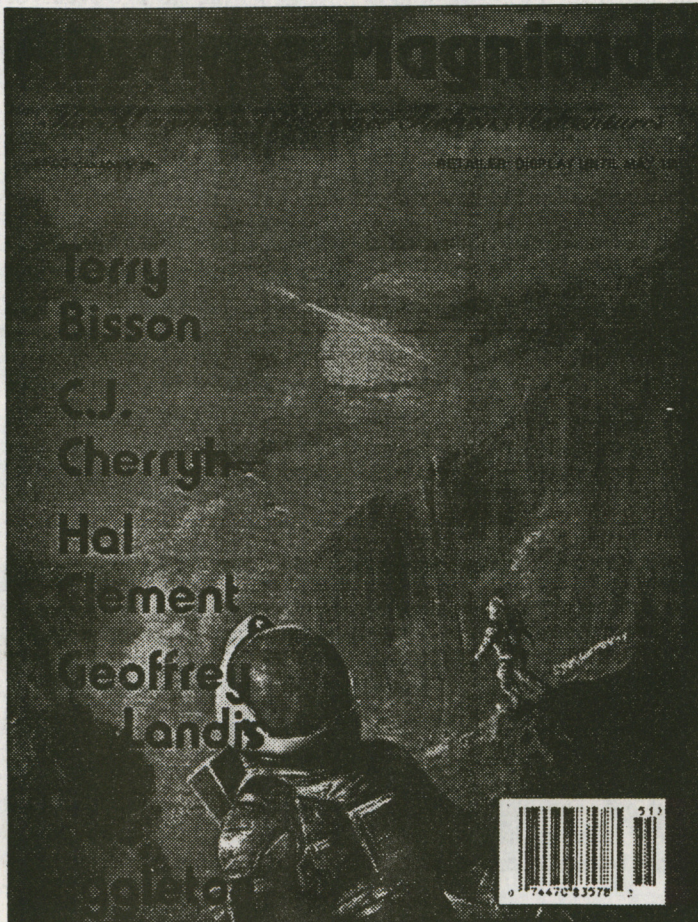
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IS SEEING BELIEVING?

In 1947 the United States Army Air Force thought it was. General Roger Ramey invited the press into his office at the Eighth Air Force Base in Fort Worth, Texas, to take pictures of Major Jesse Marcel kneeling in front of a haphazard array of broken balsa wood fragments and torn pieces of metal foil. Those present in the room easily identified this debris as the remains of a simple weather balloon and its Rawin radar target device.

The Air Force contended that Marcel had recovered this debris from the Foster Ranch in Roswell, New Mexico, after foreman William "Mac" Brazel had discovered it. When Marcel returned to the Roswell Army Air Force Base (RAAF), Colonel William Blanchard announced to the press that RAAF had recovered material from a flying disk possibly of alien design. The purpose of Ramey's photo session was clear: show the world that Major Jesse Marcel, an intelligence officer in the elite 509th bomber group, which had clearance to handle atomic weapons, had mistaken debris from a common weather balloon for that of an alien spacecraft.

But there were reports of more than just debris. About 35 miles south of the Foster Ranch, an archeology research team from the University of Pennsylvania happened across a 20 to 25-foot disk-shaped object partly embedded in the ground. The military soon arrived to seal off the area, but they were unable to do so before the witnesses saw what was inside. Three or four beings (the actual number is unclear from reports), one of which was still alive, were in the disk. They wore gray, full-body suits

The Alien Autopsy Controversy

by Kevin M. Carr

with no visible zippers or seams. Their heads seemed too large for their bodies, and they had no hair. According to several witnesses, the military flew the remains to Fort Worth, Texas, where autopsies were performed. Then the bodies' and debris from the Foster Ranch were sent on to Wright Field, now Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, near Dayton, Ohio. The military successfully removed any evidence of a crashed disk. The photoshoot in Ramey's office was the added touch to discredit the story. And it worked...for about thirty years.

For that time, people believed that Mac Brazel only found tinfoil and balsa wood scattered across the dusty soil of the Foster Ranch. However, in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the story of Roswell resurfaced with new insights. Jesse Marcel appeared on WWL-TV in New Orleans in 1978, declaring that the debris he saw in Ramey's office was not what he found on the Foster Ranch. He claimed to have handled seemingly indestructible scraps of material that would neither break nor burn. Jesse Marcel, Jr. corroborated his father's story, citing several mysteriously indestructible I-beams his father brought home. UFOlogists began probing into the Roswell Incident. Over the ensuing years other witnesses talked, including retired Brigadier-General Thomas DuBose who confessed in a 1991 home video interview that the weather balloon story had been a cover-up from the beginning.

Representative Steven Schiff (R-NM) took the lead for his constituents and began to inquire about the strange events of 1947. After a letter to the Secretary of Defense, a referral to the National Archives and a subsequent referral back to the Secretary of Defense, Schiff felt he had been given "the runaround." He used his authority to call upon the General Accounting Office (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress, to search for records pertaining to the Roswell Incident. The GAO released its report in July 1995, and stated that, among other records, "RAAF administrative records (from March 1945 through December 1949) were destroyed." The GAO was unable to find any evidence pointing to who destroyed these vital records, when or who authorized such actions.

This is especially suspicious for the Roswell Incident considering that an original 1948 Estimate of the Situation for Project Sign (the predecessor to Project Blue Book, the Air Force's investigation into the UFO phenomena in America) was ordered to be rewritten because it mentioned the debris and bodies from the Roswell Incident. After information regarding physical evidence of UFO's was removed from the Estimate, all remaining copies were destroyed.

The month after the release of the GAO report, on August 28, 1995, FOX television networks, in association with London-based film producer Ray Santilli, aired their

own record of the physical evidence from Roswell. The program, entitled *Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction*, shows footage from the apparent autopsy of an alien corpse. The cameraman, who wishes to remain anonymous and has since broken all ties with Santilli, claims to have filmed this autopsy in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1947. The being in the footage is approximately three to four feet tall, with dark, discolored bruises spotting its flesh. It has no hair or external genitalia. Its head appears too large for its body, and it has twelve fingers and twelve toes. A gory wound covers the creature's right leg, and a deep laceration almost severs its right wrist. Two surgeons in full-body suits perform an autopsy while a third figure looks on from behind a window. About halfway through the autopsy, a fourth person appears to remove the being's internal organs and take them off-camera, presumably to have them weighed, tested and sampled. The uncut footage lasts seventeen minutes, but the wall clock shows a time lapse of about two hours.

Public interest in the FOX special spurred a second run of the show in September and a third in December. Although Santilli independently sells videos of his footage under the title *Roswell: The Footage*, FOX has released its own, complete with the seventeen minutes of uncut autopsy footage and pictures of the debris from the crash. The wreckage includes what appears to be control panels, with six-fingered hand prints. Raised buttons, which UFOlogist, Jim Donohoe, points out resemble the pattern of an acupuncture meridian, are found on the prints. Several I-beams with symbols on their inner surfaces are also shown.

FOX's multiple airings of the special have sparked a heated controversy in both the mainstream scientific community and the UFO research field. Skeptics claim the footage is an elaborate hoax. Some UFOlogists, including Kevin Randle and Stanton Friedman, express distrust as well. They do not believe the autopsy footage to be real and feel it may damage the search for the truth about Roswell.

Many of the criticisms center on the cameraman's abilities. The film often goes out of focus, especially on close-ups of the body, and the cameraman rarely captures a steady or stationary shot. However, this is to be expected. The standard issue camera used by the military in 1947 was hand-held and had no focus adjustment. Also keep in mind that the cameraman presumably wore a cumbersome full-body suit similar to those worn by the others in the room.

The footage has also been criticized because the material removed from the being's abdomen does not resemble known organs. Many pathologists have since been

consulted about the footage. FOX interviewed Doctors Cyril Wecht and Chris M. Milroy, both of whom vouch for the organic appearance of the body. They also point out that the equipment used in the autopsy was consistent with the time frame and that the procedures used were indicative of experienced pathologists. Some pathologists have called the footage a fake, yet the reporting sources offered little support for these theories. British forensic pathologist Ian West said he believed the footage was falsified, but he said that there was "nothing on the film that makes me say this is definitely a hoax."

Covering all the bases, FOX interviewed Stan Winston—the creator of such grotesque screen stars as the aliens from *Aliens*, the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* and the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*—and his special effects team. The effects team seemed perplexed at the realism of the footage and agreed they would have been proud if they had produced a model as elaborate and convincing. However, Winston is unequivocally quoted by *Time* as believing the autopsy to be a hoax. No explanation of this apparent discrepancy is offered.

of flesh that uniformly sticks to bone or the tough connective tissue that held the internal organs together.

In an obvious attempt to debunk the footage, several still photos were sent to a British publication and aired on *American Journal*. The photos show a head similar to the one in the footage with a person adding touch-up paint to its neck. However, when compared side-by-side, differences can be seen. The mouth, neck and eyes of the head in the photographs were obviously different than those in the autopsy.

In an attempt to verify the date of the film, FOX gave Kodak employee Larry Cate a tiny strip of the leader film. Cate pointed out that the identification code used on this small portion is consistent with those in 1927, 1947 and 1967. Don Jernigan, founder and President of the Phenomenon Investigating Committee in Columbus, Ohio, reports that an independent German laboratory has tested the film from a reel that came in the same batch as the autopsy. Chemical tests show this film to be from the late 1940's. However, the master film of the autopsy has yet to be authenticated.

Questions are still left unanswered, and the topic continues to be debated.

Is it a hoax? Is it a model? Or is it an actual alien body which the United States Air Force dissected?

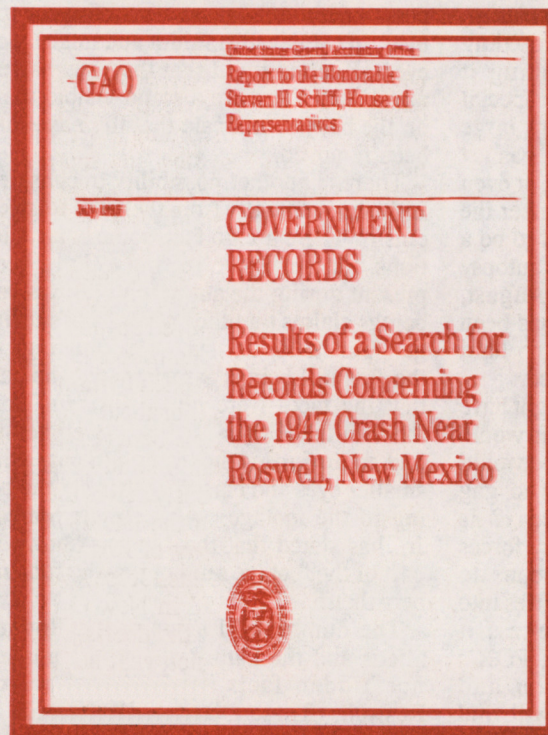
If the master autopsy film is chemically dated to the 1940's, then this pretty much rules out the use of a model. All the special effects technicians questioned agree that the materials and techniques needed to make such a model were not available until the late 1960's.

If the film is a hoax made in 1995, it still would not have been particularly easy. The perpetrators would have had to acquire a room filled with equipment from the 1940's—including an old telephone, wall clock, bone saw and a special sunken pathology tray—that is no longer used. They would have had to obtain a hand-held military-issued camera from the 1940's and film that fitted the model. They would have had to make a model so realistic that it could fool world-

renowned pathologists, then film bits and pieces of a two-

hour autopsy with no second takes. Finally, after delivering the footage to Santilli, they would have had to take steps against anyone involved admitting to the truth.

While this is entirely possible, it is unlikely. This model was not put together in someone's basement with papier-mâché and



American Journal asked special effect's technician Rick Lazzarini if he could construct a model that would duplicate the appearance of the alien body under the knife. In response, Lazzarini whipped up a head that bled when cut. However, Lazzarini could not demonstrate the realistic organic characteristics of the body, such as a saturated subdermal layer

Actual U.S. Investigation Report Filed July 1995



Photo by Kevin M. Carr

bubble gum. The perpetrators would have needed plenty of capital for this venture. Special effects technicians have unanimously agreed that a model of this design would be incredibly expensive—exceeding \$100,000—and the persons making it would need expert knowledge in special effects. Also, this would require large amounts of manpower, yet no one has yet claimed responsibility for the hoax or even leaked bits of information. Remember the Hitler Diaries? They were shown to be a sham in a matter of weeks. The autopsy aired on national television in August, 1995, and the complete footage has been available for several months, yet no hard evidence of a hoax has been offered.

If this is a hoax, consider who might have had the means to perpetrate it. Who would have access to such resources? Who would have the authority and/or power to gag those who helped perpetrate the hoax? Is it possible this was put together by forces within the Government as a means to muddy the waters about UFO inquiries into the Roswell Incident? If this is the case, it might have worked. Eventually, FOX's *Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction* and Santilli's *Roswell: The Footage* will find their way to the \$2.99 rack at the local Wal Mart, but for the moment they are the center of UFO attention. In a time when new truths from Roswell are available, few are discussing the actual events of 1947. Instead, they are debating the autopsy.

Perhaps the body is real, but not alien. Could it be the body of a deformed human being? Cyril Wecht has suggested this might be the body of a dead girl afflicted with Turner's syndrome, a chromosomal

disorder in which secondary sexual characteristics do not develop. However, this condition does not explain the body's other peculiar features, such as extra fingers and toes, an oversized cranium and huge black eyes. Keep in mind that the body has no navel, and there are also no visible scars on the belly to indicate that the navel has been removed.

There is another possibility to consider. Is the body actually from the 1947 Roswell crash? There are, in fact, some contradictions. A nurse who reports to have been present during the autopsy of the Roswell beings claims that the bodies had four fingers per hand, not six. Her drawings of the Roswell beings' appearances indicate that the faces were much different from those in the autopsy. The Roswell beings had more jutting noses and chins, with smaller eyes and ears than those of the being in the footage. Also, Jessie Marcel, Jr., has stated that the I-beams shown in part of the footage are not how he remembers them.

The number of fingers of the Roswell aliens and the nature of the I-beams are not hidden facts in the literature on Roswell. These facts are documented as visible details. Why would such blatant errors be included in a footage otherwise meticulously crafted? If the perpetrators went through the trouble to find a phone, wall clock and pathology tray used in the 1940's, wouldn't they be sure to put the right number of fingers on their models?

While the bodies do not resemble the Roswell reports perfectly, they are consistent with other claims of UFO occupants. For example, the body in the autopsy foot-

age appears to have little or no intestines. Reports of other alleged alien autopsies state the beings to have incomplete or under-developed digestive systems. The description of small figures with large heads and huge eyes are popularly recognized as "the aliens" in general, but not all reports are the same. UFOlogists claim that many different alien races may be visiting our planet. Could this creature be one of them?

One other peculiar feature of the body in the autopsy footage that has received little notice is the presence of nipples. These anatomical structures are found solely on the breasts of mammals. While skeptics will point out that this may be a flaw in an otherwise well-constructed model, it is nonetheless consistent with the claims of some abduction cases, which report alien-human hybrids.

What if the autopsy is of a being from another crashed disk, separate and independent of the Roswell Incident? Reports of crashed UFO's are as old as UFO reports themselves. Bodies recovered from these crashes may have found their way to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. One example of this took place in 1953 when a disk supposedly crashed in the Arizona desert. The remains of the craft and its four occupants were flown to Wright Field. Karl Hamilton†, who worked in Air Procurement and Development, told his family that he saw several of the bodies. According to Hamilton's report, these beings were autopsied and found to have no tooth decay, and their bodies were free from harmful bacteria.

In 1947, the Government successfully buried the Roswell Incident for almost thirty years. After all, if the RAAF really had nothing to hide, then why have they not come out with infallible evidence to refute the rumors? Has the Government tried another ploy to engineer the same consequences of apathy and frustration that they did in 1947? Or is this the real autopsy of a dead alien from Roswell or elsewhere?

Have you seen it?
...do you believe?

PW

† The name has been changed to protect the privacy of the family.

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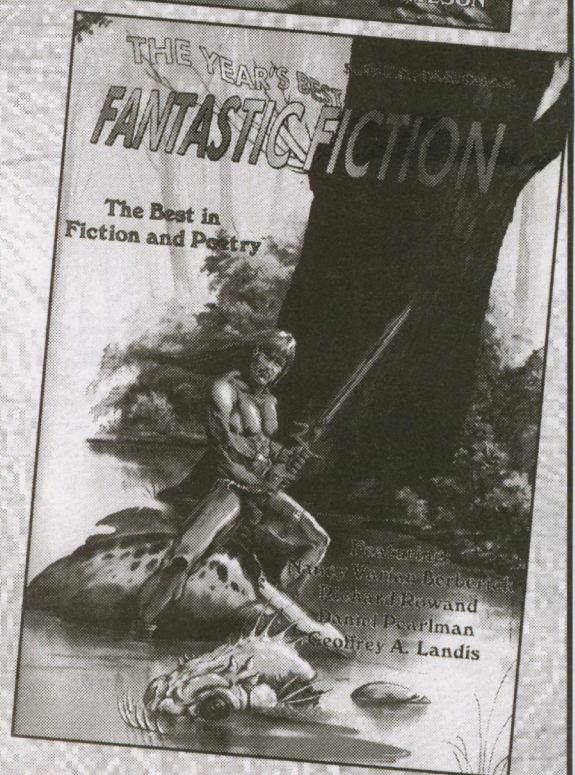
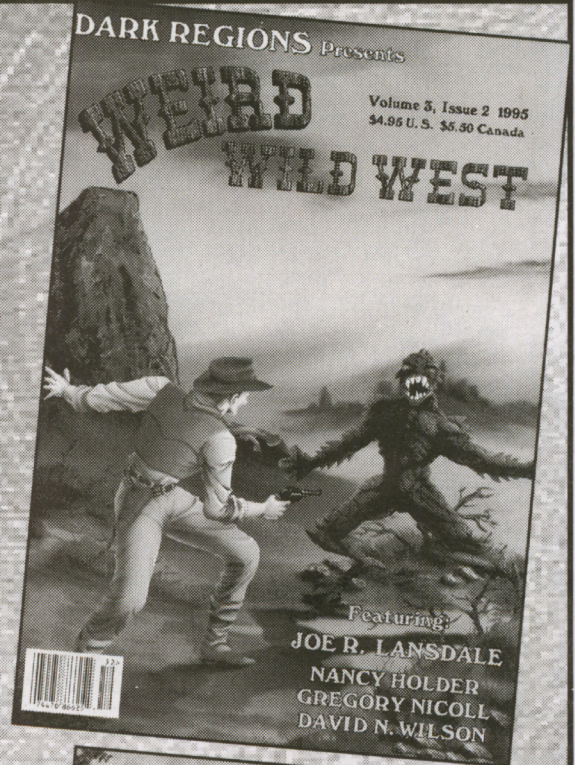
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BY BRIAN PLANTE

Illustrated by Darren Cerone

FOREVER

"**H**YLAN, I HEARD WE GOT THE GUY. IT'S all over the station house," said Detective Rossado.

"Yeah, we got him," Hylan replied. "He's been down in Interrogation for a couple of hours."

"Is he talking?"

"*Is he talking?* Jeez, we can't shut him up. Craziest story you ever heard. The press is gonna love it."

"What do you think, is he going for an insanity defense?"

"Probably. And from what I heard, he may really be nuts. It'd be tough to find a jury to convict him, I'll bet."

"How did we catch him?"

"You're not gonna believe this, but he just *walked* in..."

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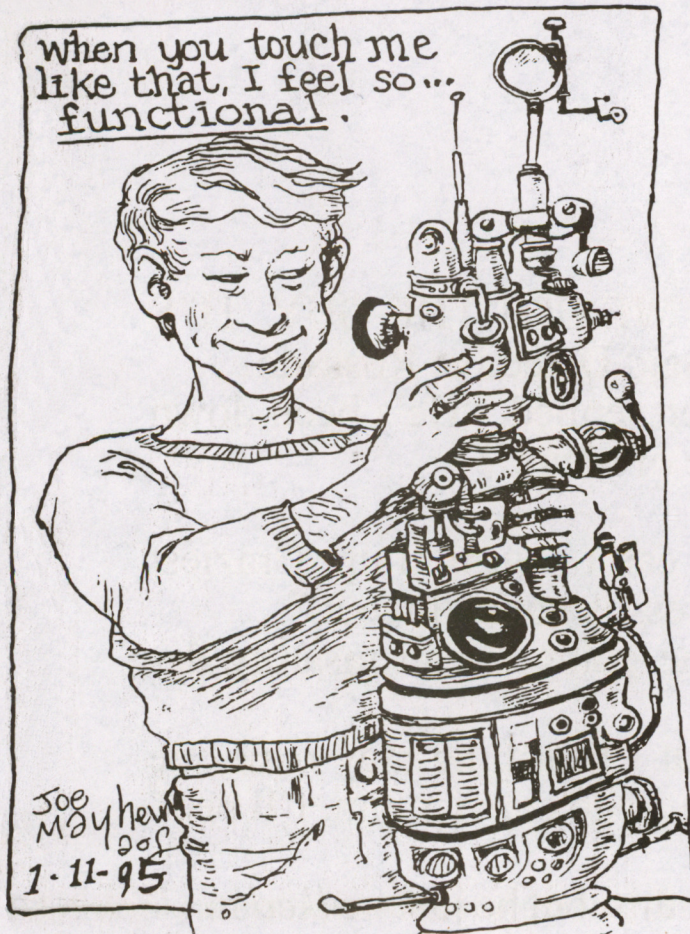
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Sam Dunnery drowned in the La-Z-Boy, anesthetized by a TV movie and several Budweisers. Sam's wife, Jenny, was out at the mall picking up some Christmas presents for the approaching holiday. A movie ended and the eleven o'clock news came and went before a talk show started up, all unseen by the slumbering Sam.

Just as always, Sam was eventually roused by Jenny. He heard her call his name through the thick fog of sleep. She must have returned from her shopping and let him sleep where he was, and now it was time for her to lead him to bed, having once again missed the news.

"What time is it, Jen?" Sam asked groggily. He looked about the room with half-closed eyes, but Jenny was nowhere to be seen.

"Honey, listen to me," Jenny said, speaking indistinctly from somewhere out of sight. Sam noticed a quiver in her voice. "Something's happened. I'm...I'm dead, Sam. Somebody killed me. He...Sam, he raped me!"

Sam's head snapped up, a surge of adrenaline driving away the last vestiges of sleep. His vision came into sharp focus and he scanned the room. He was alone. It was 1:00 AM.

"Jen! Jen, where are you?"

Sam looked behind the big upholstered chair and craned his neck to peer into the dim kitchen, but his wife was not there either. Calling Jenny's name, he quickly searched the house, and a quick check in the garage revealed Jenny's car was still out. Even with holiday hours, the shopping mall had been closed a long time.

It wasn't like Jenny to stay out late, certainly not without prearranging it with Sam. She would have called. The nightmare that woke him had Sam frightened. He became panicky and called the police. A tired sergeant took the information, but said they would have to wait at least 24 hours before they could consider it a missing persons case. Sam was urged to go to bed and see if Jenny didn't turn up in the morning with a reasonable explanation.

Sam sat up, waiting. At 4:00 AM the squad car rolled into his driveway. The pained faces of the officers walking up the drive told him what he dreaded.

"She's dead, isn't she?" he asked before they could speak.

The two officers looked down in silence, confirming it.

"Was she raped?"

After a heavy pause, the taller of the two cops spoke up. "That hasn't been determined yet." The cop's face went awry with an expression that told Sam he knew more than he was saying.

"We need you to come down and make an identification," the other cop said gravely.

"She said he raped and killed her," Sam blubbered, putting a hand to his tearing eyes. "It wasn't a dream."

The two cops stole glances at one another.

"Let me get a jacket and I'll come with you."

Six days later Jenny was buried. Throughout the anguishing days of the autopsy and funeral commotion, Sam barely slept. After it was all over, he sat in the old La-Z-Boy and crashed hard. The TV played to no one until nearly dawn.

As the first pink tint of sunlight filtered into the room, Sam began ascending from the depths of sleep and could feel her with him.

"Sam, Honey, can you hear me?"

He stirred slightly in the chair.

"Relax," Jenny whispered in his head. "If you wake up too much, it's real hard for you to hear me."

Sam's lips moved slightly, and a faint sound emanated. In his dream, if it was a dream, he heard himself say clearly, "Jen, I really miss you."

"That's sweet," Jenny said. "But don't you worry about me. It's okay here. Really."

Sam teetered on the brink between wakefulness and sleep. As he became more alert, he heard Jenny's voice fading, so he shut his eyes tightly and tried to relax his way back into the comfortable trance. "Where are you, Jen?" he said in his dream voice.

"I don't know, Honey. It's just a place. It's kind of hard to explain, but we're all okay."

"Who's 'we'?"

"There's four of us here. Claudia, Danuta, Tish, and me."

Sam thought about the names. One of them sounded familiar—Danuta, the Polish name—although he was sure it was not

As the first pink tint of sunlight filtered into the room, Sam began ascending from the depths of sleep and could feel her with him.

one of Jenny's usual friends. "Who are they?"

"Just some other ladies like me, I guess," Jenny said.

He flashed on a mental picture of Jenny in flowing white robes with silvery wings sprouting from her back. "Are you in heaven, Jen?"

Jenny hesitated. "I don't know. It's not bad here. I guess it's not hell."

"Is there a white light or something you're supposed to walk to?" Sam asked, remembering something he had seen on TV.

"Um, not really. There's no angels or music or clouds or anything like that either. We just *are*, you know? It's too hard to explain. We're just kinda hanging out, I guess."

"Baby, I miss you so much," he said, beginning to lose it. He was getting emotional and it was waking him up.

"I know, Honey, I know."

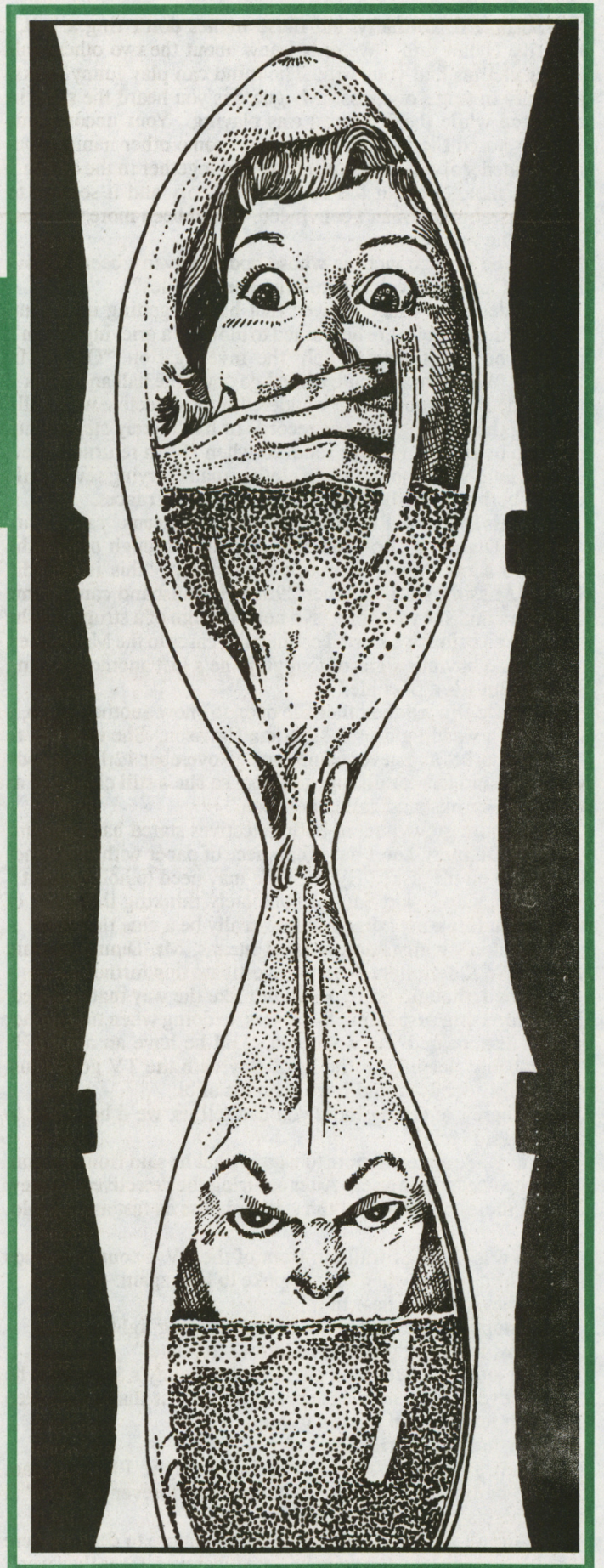
He roused fully awake and the voice fell silent. But it had been too vivid to dismiss as merely a dream. Sam rose quickly and walked into the kitchen, searching for something to write on. He wanted to get it down on paper before it slipped from his still weary mind.

Sam stayed home from work the following week, hoping to regroup. For the first time since Jenny's death, he picked up a newspaper from the growing stack on the coffee table next to the recliner. The headline read "MALL KILLER CLAIMS THIRD," a huge story for the suburban town. He learned that Jenny was victim number two in a series of recent slayings, all occurring in and around the local shopping areas.

The most recent victim, Josephine Schott, was found the night before, December 15th, strangled and dumped in a department store parking lot. Jenny was killed on December 8th at the mall. The first known victim was discovered on November 5th in a Salvation Army clothing box near a supermarket. Her name was Danuta Wilczewski.

He remembered Detective Hylan, who was assigned to Jenny's case. Hylan had interviewed Sam earlier in the week and urged him to call if he remembered anything that might help the investigation. Sam made an appointment to go down to the station house.

"The other two names were Claudia and Tish," Sam concluded, waving the piece of paper with the scribbled names at the homicide detective.



"Sorry, Mr. Dunnery, but those names don't ring a bell," Detective Hylan said. "We only know about the two other mall murder victims and your wife. The mind can play funny tricks, especially in times of stress. My guess is you heard the story in your sleep while the TV news was playing. Your unconscious memory stored the victims' names and some other names from an unrelated story, and they just came out together in the dream."

Sam thought about the detective's theory and it seemed to make sense, but he wasn't convinced. It had been more than just a dream, he was certain.

"Maybe they're victims whose bodies haven't been discovered yet. Can you check the missing persons files?"

The detective's face showed that he was getting impatient, but not to the point where he wanted to blow off a grieving victim's spouse who was trying to help the investigation. "Okay, Mr. Dunnery. Wait here a minute while I go down the hall and check."

Alone in the room, Sam wondered if the detective was really checking the missing persons records or had merely stepped out for a cup of coffee. He was relieved when Hylan returned a few minutes later with another plain clothes man carrying several file folders, both men with deep concern lining their faces.

"This is Detective Rossado from Missing Persons," said Hylan.

"Mr. Dunnery," Rossado said, flipping through one of the folders to show Sam a woman's photograph, "this is Claudia Grado. Missing since October 29th. Her husband came home from work and she was gone. No note, no sign of a struggle. She disappeared before we started connecting cases to the Mall Killer, and with no obvious signs of foul play she's just another missing person. But it's a possibility."

Rossado flipped the other file open to show another photo, a woman in a wedding dress. "Patricia Harrison. She went out to the supermarket and never came back. November 12th. No body was found and her car disappeared too, so she's still classified as missing. Her husband called her Tish."

The room grew quiet as both detectives stared hard at Sam.

"Mr. Dunnery, can I have that piece of paper with the names you wrote on it?" asked Hylan. "We may need to hold on to it."

"Yeah, sure," said Sam, immediately thinking the better of it. "So you think my...dream might really be a clue then?"

"We don't really know what it means, Mr. Dunnery," said Hylan. "We'll definitely have to investigate this further."

Oh hell, thought Sam. He didn't like the way that sounded. He was arousing suspicion. What was he doing when those other women disappeared? he wondered. Did he have an alibi? He was probably sleeping in the La-Z-Boy with the TV going, just like always. Jenny would have been his alibi.

"If there's anything more you can tell us, we'd be happy to hear it," said Hylan.

Sam made a mental note to watch what he said from now on. Maybe he needed a lawyer. After assuring the detectives he knew nothing more, he got out of the station house as fast as he could.

Sam was dozing fitfully in front of the TV, a couple of Buds helping him along, when Jenny spoke to him again.

"Honey, can you hear me?"

He stopped snoring but continued sleeping lightly.

"Why don't you go up to bed now? It's late."

Sam smiled, cherishing the sound of Jenny's voice, but he kept his eyes shut, and relaxed, staying just at that half-asleep stage that let her keep talking to him.

"Jen, are you all right?"

"Yeah, I guess. It's kind of boring, though. I hope it's not going to be like this forever. It couldn't be forever could it? I mean, there's got to be more to it, right?"

He didn't know. Surely there *must* be more to death. There must be a reason why the women were wherever it was they were.

"There's five of us now," Jenny said, "and we keep each other company, so it's not so bad. Tish is a really nice person."

Tish. Patricia Harrison, disappeared at the supermarket. "Tell her I saw a picture of her in her wedding dress. I told the police that you're all together, Jen. I'm sure they'll get the guy."

"Oh, Sam, he's such an animal. He has to be stopped. But we're okay now, really. Josephine came a few days ago. It's disgusting, what he did to her."

Anger was making him wake up and he was losing Jenny, so he forced himself to hold back his emotions.

"Jen, who is he? What happened?" Stay calm, stay asleep.

"I was only in the mall for ten minutes! This guy, a big guy, maybe six-three or so, comes up to me in Macy's and says somebody's trying to steal the car." Jenny began to weep. "He showed me a badge!"

"It's okay, Jen. It's not your fault."

"He said...he said he had a surveillance camera in his van and they were watching the car, so I g-g-got in with him."

Jenny's voice trailed off as rage forced him awake.

"Jen, quick, tell me about the van."

"It's...kind of a dark blue with little windows shaped like the spades on a deck of playing cards. He had candles and this dirty old mattress in there and he pushed me down before I could do anything. He hit me and gagged me and...and he drew a five-pointed star on my stomach with a marker...he drew it on all of us before...before..."

"Jen, we'll get him, I swear. What else can you tell me?"

But it was too late. Sam was too alert now and the voice was gone. He grabbed the pencil and pad he left in the La-Z-Boy's side pocket and began scribbling down the details before he forgot.

Sam wanted to tell the police about the tall man in the dark blue van with spade windows, but there was no rational way to explain what he knew. If anyone was going to investigate this, he would have to do it himself. After all, he'd promised Jenny.

Sam decided to cruise the mall parking lots each night, searching the rows for the dark blue van. He only stayed an hour at each shopping center, so that the beefed up police and security patrols wouldn't notice his lingering.

After a week and a half Sam was getting discouraged, when he finally spotted a blue van with spade windows circling the parking lot of a strip mall only a few miles from his home.

He followed the van and pulled in nearby when it parked. He watched from a few rows away as a tallish man got out and stalked the lot. Sam jotted down the van's license plate number. This was something he could go to the cops with. Something concrete. They could investigate the van, which surely contained evidence. This was just what he needed.

But what about tonight? The killer was probably cruising for another victim right now. Even if he went to the cops immediately, someone else could be dead before they picked him up.

Sam got out of his car. He was about to walk over to the van, but he opened his trunk first and pulled out a tire iron, just in case. He cautiously circled the van. It was midnight blue with heavily smoked spade-shaped rear windows. He peered in the driver's side window but couldn't see if there was a mattress in the back because of a curtain strung up behind the front seats.

He had to confirm this was the van before he did anything. He tried the driver's side door: locked. Walking over to the passenger side, he tried the sliding door and found it unlocked.

With a deep breath, Sam shoved the door open and peered inside.

There was the dirty, stained mattress. Drug paraphernalia and burnt candles littered the floor. Something rolled out and hit Sam's foot. He bent to retrieve it. A wide magic marker. For draw-

ing five-pointed stars on victims' bellies before raping and strangling them.

He couldn't let this guy go. Couldn't take the chance that someone else would be dead before the cops picked him up. Sam stepped up into the van and closed the door behind him.

After ten minutes, the tall man returned. Alone.

Sam kept quiet in the back of the van while the man got into the driver's seat, silhouetted on the other side of the curtain. Before the man could start the engine, Sam swung the tire iron hard through the curtain into the back of the guy's head, producing a sickening crunch.

Quickly, Sam hauled the killer behind the curtain, out of the sight of any passersby in the parking lot, and laid him out on the mattress. He was still breathing, and blood ran freely from the back of the man's head, forming a crimson halo on the mattress. He looked like an average Joe. Maybe a few years older than himself. He expected the face of a monster, but the guy was just plain—almost pitiful-looking laid out like that.

Sam weighed his options. He could leave the murderer where he was, hoping he would stay unconscious long enough for the police to arrive. Or he could take care of him right now.

If he called the police, there would be a trial. In this crazy world, who knows if some slimeball lawyer might not be able to get the murderer off on some minor technicality? He'd probably say Satan made him kill those women and get sent to some country club mental hospital instead of the electric chair where he belonged. More likely, Sam himself would be brought up on charges for whacking the scum.

No, it was better all around to just take the guy out now, skip the trial, save victims' lives and taxpayers' dollars. Jenny and all those other women would be avenged, and Sam would keep his promise to get the guy.

"For you, Jenny," Sam whispered as he raised the tire iron again and smashed it down with all his might, cleaving skin and bone and brain.

"Aaargh! Sam, he's here!" Jenny shrieked in his mind. He was wide awake and he could hear her. Screaming.

"Sam! The killer. It's him—he's in here with us. Help, please! No, no, he's got Tish. Sam, do something! He's coming this way!"

Sam looked in horror at the ruined face of the killer on the mattress. What had he done? Jenny's screams, and those of the other victims, went on forever.

"So let me get this straight," Rossado said to Hylan. "The Mall Killer was found bludgeoned to death over a week ago and we didn't have a clue until this Dunny guy just gave himself up?"

"Ahh, we had some clues, but nothing solid. It wasn't like we were really looking too hard for whoever killed the bastard."

"So why'd Dunny come in?"

"Crazy stories. Like, he hears his wife screaming all the time and it's his fault. Says he can't live like this and that he's a murderer and has to go to the electric chair. He says he wants to be with his wife."

"Oh, man!"

"Isn't that something? Like I said, from what I heard, no jury's ever going to convict the poor guy."

"They should give him a medal."

"Yeah, but the way he's ranting and raving, they'll probably keep him locked up forever in a padded cell. Too bad."

"Yeah, a damned shame."

PW

MYSTERIUM

Light steady rain
in the darkened street
below my window. The sidewalk
doing a slow dissolve.

A world without adjectives
is all that remains.

This, the beginning of night,
and steam rises uncertainly
from the sun-baked bricks
to be lost in a starless
sky. Definitive statements
are impossible. A shadow
figure plays hide-and-seek
in the black depths.

At times, a hat pulled
over one eye, the outline
of a trench coat. You gotta
be sugar, if you want to
be a girl of mine.

-Bruce White

ASTRONAUT MEMORIES

The moth, dusty winged and muted brown,
danced in the syncopated rhythm to the haze of fireglow,
throwing itself at the quaking flame of the lantern
in a masturbation of death, dervish frenzy,
until, with a brief flirting kiss, the paper wings
touched the metal bonnet, scraping the smokeblack,
and burst into flame. The burning body flowed
down the delicate curve and fell into the dirt
below, the warm smell rising, mixing with the aroma
of dead fish that had shortly before been pulled
onto the shore, gasping bulge-eyed and flapping,
and a thin trail of smoke rose on angel wings,
beating its way toward the blinking beacon stars.

-Carroll Brown

"Dear Mother" marks Craig Parker's first short story sale. About the tale he writes, "I saw a documentary about Great White Sharks living in captivity and the tremendous amount of work that goes into creating the perfect artificial environment for them to live in. However, despite this attention to detail, the sharks stopped feeding, weakened, and died. There was something missing. The sharks couldn't survive outside their natural environment. This intangible bond, applied to humans, is the premise behind 'Dear Mother.'"

DEAR MOTHER

HOW MANY DID YOU lose in-transit?"

Morgan Hausch hesitated a moment, then answered softly, "All of them."

Harmon Brooks nodded, as if he had heard. "I knew those sons of bitches wouldn't let a little thing like killing people stop The Program."

He looked out of the past into Morgan's eyes and pitied him. "I don't know how long it'll be for you. This is the afternoon of my second sol; I doubt I'll see much of the third."

Morgan reached over the back of the empty pilot's chair, found the pause key among the dozens set into the semi-circular polished titanium dashboard, and pushed it. The white, rigid-skin EVA suit, which he wasn't so much wearing as occupying, forced him to move like a man encased in half-set cement.

He studied Brooks' frozen image, which peered at him from the millimeters-thin plasma-matrix vidscreen in the console of the small landing/ascent vehicle. Morgan had seen that same square-jawed face, had heard that same soft-spoken drawl (although now it sounded somewhat reedy in his ears since he had had to cable directly from the vidcorder's phone jack to his helmet speakers), in countless news vids. He had even met Brooks once, about ten years ago—Morgan unconsciously flexed the fingers of the carbon-fiber glove on his right hand at the memory of the big man's bone-crushing handshake—and was struck at the time by the total confidence that the tall Texan exuded. Confidence both in himself and in The Program.

Now though, the weary, haggard man—nearly five years dead—who looked back at him from the vidscreen reminded him not so much of a daring, fearless astronaut, but instead a death-row inmate who's just been told that his final plea has been rejected and he can have anything his heart desires for supper.

Morgan's own features—wide-set, light blue eyes and neatly-trimmed blonde mustache confirming the Germanic ancestry that his surname suggested—clouded with nascent anger behind the Lexan visor.

You bastards.

Morgan surveyed the neat interior of the little craft. There was no indication of the official story that Brooks had gone ber-

serk and wrecked the communications equipment. From all appearances he had completed an orderly, system-by-system shutdown then simply walked out into the rusty desolation, leaving the airlock open behind him.

The EVA suit containing Brooks' desiccated remains had been resting, still upright,

against a large boulder about a hundred meters away from the L/AV when Morgan had found it. A cursory inspection of the battery pack, air exchanger, and the various pumps and fans revealed no evidence of failure in the life-support systems. It looked as if Brooks had just stood gazing out across the rock-strewn plain, like a bored commuter leaning against the signpost at a bus stop, then died. The exoskeleton of the hard-shell suit, lightly burdened by the low gravity, had left his corpse standing all this time.

Morgan stretched stiffly across the seat again and stabbed the resume key. Brooks' image sprang back to false life.

"What did they send, ten of you? Fifteen? Those were the numbers that they were throwing around back when a fully manned flight was still being seriously considered; before some genius came up with the idea that by sending a robot crew with two humans as backup systems they could do the mission for half-price. After all, machines don't need air or food or bunks or toilets; you just pack them away for the trip out, activate them and let them go about their business when you get there, then put them back in the closet for the return run."

Brooks gave a mirthless smile. "They might just as well have saved the whole bundle."

At the time he had first been approached, almost three years earlier, to command a follow-up to the disastrous first mission, Morgan had recently been put in charge of the underwater training program; a glamourless position that was intended to keep him occupied until he reached forty-five, when he would be assigned the plush office, efficient secretary (also plush, he had hoped), endless paperwork, pointless meetings, and country club dinners that he had earned for a steady, if unremarkable, career.

The Program Director's contention had been that the second flight was a situation in which Morgan's experience as a regular



MOM'S

FOOD
LIFE
LODGING
AT EARTH EXIT

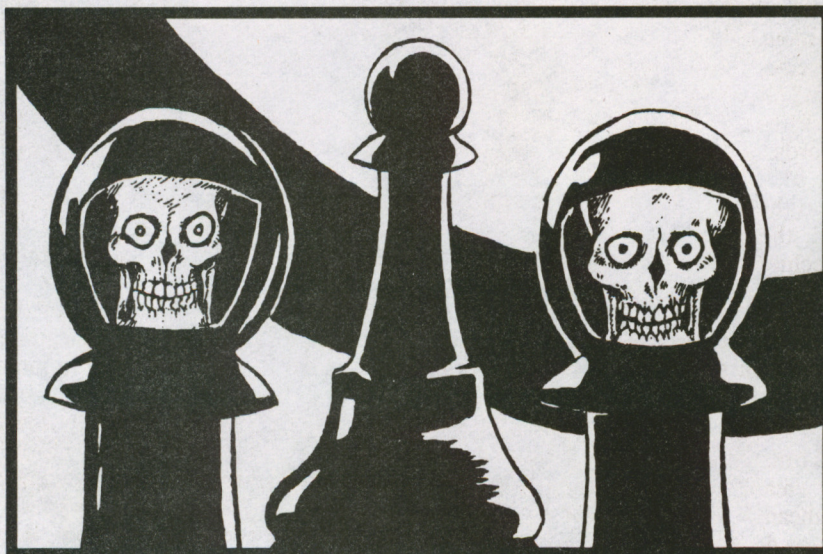
NEXT
EXIT EARTH
ONLY 48.8 million miles
MILES

GEROIST

rotation shuttle-jockey carried a lot more weight than his lack of any specific technical specialty, or the fact that his reflexes might be just a hair slower than they once were.

Of course, the Director hadn't needed to push his argument very hard. Morgan had been passed over ("not selected" had been the mealy-mouthed term that they had used to destroy what had been his dream since childhood) when the Program administration had chosen the original trainees. Too old, they had said; the ten-year training period would put him at forty—two years above the "optimal mission parameters" that had been established—on the lift-off date.

Then, for some unknown reason, he had been offered the command of this mission, at forty-three. He had seized the chance like a gift.



Now, as he stood glaring at Brooks' animated likeness, Morgan felt the same heavy, grey lump in the pit of his stomach that he remembered from the day, a dozen years earlier, when he had returned from a routine resupply run out to *Unity Station* to find his home devoid of wife, children and furniture. Nothing remained except his own clothes and a short letter from Shelly, full of words that cut like broken glass. It had taken months before he finally admitted to himself that there had been plenty of warning signs, and that he subconsciously chosen not to heed them.

This time though, it was only a matter of moments before the oppressive weight dissolved in the face of ever-growing anger, which now widened to include himself. Like the divorce, he should have seen this coming.

"I tried to tell them that sending anybody else out here was murder, pure and simple," Brooks said. "But since you're here, I'll just bet they didn't let you see all of my comms." He paused and raised his eyebrows in query. "Or did you see any of them?"

"You lying bastards!" Morgan said it aloud this time. Everything he saw or said or heard, as well as telemetry on his physical condition, was being transmitted real-time from the minicorder in his helmet to the orbiting *New Horizon*, then continuously downloaded to Mission Control; but it would be nearly ten minutes before his epithets reached the hundreds of listening ears, and another ten before any response got back to him.

What the hell could they do about it, anyway? He was over a hundred million kilometers from Earth.

The crew of this follow-up mission had been told there had been only one brief, barely coherent message from Brooks after he had made planet-fall, before he went completely insane and cut the comm-link. None of them had been allowed to see that alleged vidclip (psychologically, not a good idea, they were told)

but had been given copies of a transcript that bore out the administration's assertions that Brooks had been certifiable when he sent it.

There had been rumors of second and third transmissions, but Morgan dismissed them as the sort of stories that were inevitable whenever a project the size of The Program failed in such a spectacular manner. When the *Mars Observer* had malfunctioned and been lost back in the summer of 1993, a near-cult had sprung up around the fantastic report—still sworn to by some, twenty-five years later—that several pictures had in fact been transmitted, which showed the cause of the probe's loss to be a gigantic alien craft.

He pulled his attention back to the vidscreen. Brooks was saying, "...knew something was haywire when Moore killed himself, eight months out. There were no warning signs: no depression, no erratic behavior, nothing. He was late for breakfast one morning, so I went to see what the hold-up was.... He had swallowed a whole damn bottle of tranq-tabs."

It appears that the old term 'Mother Earth' means more than any of us ever imagined.

Morgan grimaced as he remembered how readily he had accepted the administration's line that Rob Moore had succumbed to a stroke; a brain embolism had amazingly gone undetected by the exhaustive medical tests. Bad luck, the doctors had said.

One-in-a-million chance.

Brooks said, "After listening to several hours of psycho-babble from the shrinks at Mission Control, trying to convince me that I was delusional due to Moore's death and my own extended isolation, I shut down the comm-panel. I knew they could erase the disks from Earth and I wanted to be sure that whomever they sent later—that would be you, my unfortunate friend—would be able to find out what really happened." He hesitated, then let out an audible sigh. "Not that it's going to do you a whole hell of a lot of good."

Morgan and the rest of the mission crew, both aboard the *New Horizon* and on the ground, had searched for answers after they found Jolie Haberson in her bunk, six months out, with an empty syringe still stuck in her arm; and they hunted anew each time someone else died.

Donald Hennes, mission medical specialist, had performed post-mortem examinations on the next two victims, but had not uncovered a single solid clue as to the cause of the deaths. It was as if someone had just turned them off.

Click: you're dead.

There had been no more autopsies, though, as Dr. Hennes was the fourth to go, ignominiously taken while enthroned on one of the ship's three odorless, noiseless, comfortless (on this, the crew all agreed) plastic toilets; a printout of a medical journal article, about the effects of microgravity on circulatory systems, floating above his naked lap testified to the fact that he'd been pursuing his investigations right to the end.

Duchovny had been the only other suicide, accomplished by the messy expedient of a scalpel applied to both his wrists in the shower module just eight days before orbit.

Then, yesterday, Amy Jurgensen had fallen asleep and never awakened, leaving Morgan alone. It had been more than risky,

almost foolhardy, to attempt the violent, flaming L/AV drop from orbit by himself, but his pride had reminded him that he still had a mission to complete; and he had no illusions about the fate that awaited him aboard the orbiting spacecraft.

"I'm not a biologist or psychologist or whatever the hell a person would have to be to figure out exactly what's going on," Brooks said, "but I can tell you that I know—more certainly than I've ever known anything in my life—that I'm on the right track about what's killing your crew, and what's killing me...I mean...what killed—dammit, this gets confusing!" He chuckled ruefully. "That's almost funny, isn't it? I'm not gone yet but I'll sure as hell be talking in the past tense by the time you hear this."

He took a deep breath, as if preparing for a long dive into icy water, then continued. "Near-Earth orbit. Space stations. Even Luna Base. We've been doing those things for years without any ill effects; but generation ships, solar-wind sails, curved-space engines.... For what? We could never use them, anyway."

Morgan felt the hair on the back of his neck react as he began to grasp the full scope of his dead predecessor's words.

Brooks shook his head sadly, then went on. "For so many years we believed it was our destiny—some God-given right—to explore the solar system, to colonize where we could, then to head for the stars. All we had to do was wait for the technology to catch up with the vision." He paused and looked directly into Morgan's eyes. "But you and I have both learned, the hard way, that there is another factor in the equation; something beyond the technical aspects that never occurred to anyone: it appears that the old term 'Mother Earth' means more than any of us ever imagined."

Morgan's knees tried to give way. The stiffness of his suit was all that stopped him from dropping to the deck. As he reached out a gloved hand to steady himself against the bulkhead, the idea that had been gnawing at his mind since the third death, during the seventh month of the voyage; the theory that he had subconsciously refused to incubate, suddenly sprang into full being, clamoring to be heard.

One suicide? He could accept that. Some hotly debated research had suggested that suicides were inevitable in long-term space travel, regardless of how stable the psych-tests said the subjects were.

A second corpse; cause of death, unknown? Unlikely and unsettling, but not outside the realm of possibility.

But number three, also with no discernable cause? Huh-uh. Not acceptable. Nearer impossible than unlikely. And numbers four, five, six...?

Even after the other inexplicable deaths and the second suicide, he hadn't allowed this suspicion a single breath of life because he had been certain that someone, either aboard the ship or back on Earth, would come up with a logical explanation for what was slowly annihilating the twelve people who had begun the mission nearly a year before.

But someone on the ground had known the answer all along—and it was certainly not logical.

That was why the administration lobbied Congress so hard to obtain the funding for a full crew for this flight. That was why they had his team wasting a lot of time rehearsing mundane, almost useless tasks that they had all been proficient in since their second year in the Corps. That was why so little emphasis had been put on what should have been the *raison d'être* for this whole exercise: investigating the cause of the failure of the first mission.

Like canaries in a nineteenth-century miner's cage, they had been thrust into the darkness with the hope that they wouldn't confirm the Program Administrators' worst fears, but with the knowledge that they probably would. They had never been ex-

pected to accomplish anything; except die like lab rats, wired up and sending data on every possible aspect of the last months, weeks, days, hours, and finally, seconds of their lives streaming back across the void to Earth.

Such information would be vital in preparing for the next mission. (The *real* mission, damn them!)

But what about this (*his!*) mission?

Of course, lab rats rarely benefit from the valuable, interesting data that they provide.

"We brought everything with us that should sustain our lives," Brooks said. "Atmosphere, food, water, medicine, even companionship. But Moore died, I'll be dead soon, and you're dying. Call it a life-force; a psychic connection; an emotional bond—hell, call it magic, if you want—but there's something that we can't pressurize or dehydrate or distill and bring with us. And the only place it exists is on, or near, the Earth."

Morgan stopped the disk. He could see by the counter that there were still several minutes left, but he knew that nothing more Brooks had said five years ago, nor any words he might send Earthward now—he switched off the comm-link control on the front of his pressure suit—would change anything: Brooks and Moore, his entire crew, soon himself; all dead because the Program Administrators certainly couldn't recreate something that they wouldn't admit was real in the first place. How many more lives would be sacrificed before they finally acknowledged it?

The ancient Druids had known it; the modern-day Gaetians believed it; now Morgan understood it, too: the Earth is more than an accidental ball of mud that, by sheer chance, developed in just the right way to support life. There is an alliance between the planet and her children that sustains them both; whether physical or psychic, Morgan didn't know, but he could no longer deny its existence. Like a background noise you don't notice until it suddenly stops, the proof of that connection was its absence here on the cold, dead surface of Mars.

He stepped through the open airlock and stood alone in the Martian twilight. The anger that had been building as he listened to Brooks' dying words faded. It wasn't merely his own death that was a certainty.

The dream was over.

There would be no untouched new worlds to house an ever-increasing population's overflow. No vast new supplies of natural resources to replenish the Earth's raped stores. No exciting new discoveries to keep the soul of mankind alive with the age-old yearning to see what was beyond the next rise.

Suddenly, despite the suit's support, he felt altogether unsteady on his feet. He shook his head and blinked repeatedly: the starlit, alien landscape swam before his eyes as though he were seeing it through a fishbowl.

He gazed in the same direction that Brooks had faced death and marveled at the predawn sky, slowly changing from black to pale reddish-yellow; then, struggling to focus, he saw what his long-dead comrade must have been watching for: a solitary, unwavering light that hung just above the horizon. A beautiful, beloved blue jewel that he now knew was so much more than just a home.

"God, I miss you," he whispered to her as the darkness began to take him.

PW



"A Burning Green" is E. Jay O'Connell's second short story to appear within the pages of PW. His first, "The Option," was published in the Summer '95 issue. (Though many of you might not know that since we goofed and spelled his name wrong! Sorry, Jay.) Jay's short fiction has appeared in Aboriginal SF, Galaxy, Mindsparks and others. Keep your eye out for Jay's next story for PW, "Listening Box."

BY E. JAY O'CONNELL

Illustrated by Bob E. Hobbs

CATHER RESISTED THE TEMPTATION TO LET DOWN HIS hood, let his scalp go green. He'd reached the outskirts of Samahaddan. He couldn't risk being spotted now. His feet had blistered, his ankles bled where his sandal straps abraded the flesh, but he'd chosen to stop noticing that pain.

Fortunately, his kind still bled crimson.

An emaciated boy with skin the color of caramel ran up beside him. "Sahib, let me carry your pack. Please, good sir. Please!"

Cather's shoulders ached. He'd been walking for three days, after all. "Are you a thief?" he asked.

The boy's eyes widened. "No, sir!"

A BURNING

Cather adjusted his vision to study the infrared patterns behind the boy's features—his heatmask—and saw the honesty there. The child wasn't a thief.

The boy shuffled bare feet and hugged himself. "I'm a valet! Tourguide! Singer!"

Cather let the heavy pack fall, sending up a puff of dust. The delicious sun beat down all around them uselessly. He hadn't fed since shipfall. No cart would stop for him. Too many lonely vagrants trudded these sun-baked roads.

Cather smiled from the shade of his merchant cloak hood. "You can carry the bag."

The boy lashed the pack into his pullcart, the muscles under his skin sliding like whipcords under tan silk.

"Where to, Sahib?"

"Do you know of an inn with private prayer courtyards?"

The boy peered over his shoulder as he slipped into the pulling harness. "The Oasis—follow me!"

As they made their way through the outer village of stick-and-daub huts, Cather saw the famine clearly in every face they passed. Dust-etched lines in the corners of the eyes and mouth, cracked lips, furrowed brows as old men on porches glanced up at the relentless sun. Children sucking on pebbles, crouched in the shade of desiccated palms. There were no animals in sight; no curs, no cats. All had long since made their way into the soup pots.

The walk from his shipfall had been a nightmare trek through farmland turned dustbowl—fellow refugees and red-robed soldiers sighted just frequently enough to prevent him from feeding. Maddening. Too much sun and not enough water, and they starved. And perversely, so did he.

"What's in the bag, sir?"

"Choices," Cather said, immediately regretting the word.

"Choices?"

"Samples. I sell medicines from offworld." This was the truth, after a fashion.

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"We're not sick," the boy huffed. "We're starving. Are you from offworld?"

Cather chuckled again, tipping the hood away from his head. His skull glistened in the harsh sunlight, the swirling indigo patterns covering his cranium, indistinguishable from the southern continent's merchant caste tattoo. He hoped. Holding the colors, purple tattoo, and swarthy brown skin steady in the delectable sun took more effort than he could have imagined.



"Do I look like an offworlder?"

"Of course not, Sahib! Sorry to give offense!"

Cather smiled. "None taken." They made a turn down a wide boulevard lined with two-story, white-washed dwellings roofed with ruddy terra-cotta. As they reached the paved central courtyard, Cather froze.

Five blackened corpses were lashed to posts on a platform in the deserted market square. Cather stood and stared at the charred, gaping faces, struggling to keep his expression impassive.

The pair stood and looked up at them for awhile.

"Demons," the boy said softly. Strong emotions played over and under his face—strange. Children in this culture were supposed to be used to public executions. They were considered valuable object lessons in piety. The boy sniffed. "Heretics—but strong! They didn't scream, not even as they burned."

Cather nodded, cold in the noonday sun, hungry, and suddenly very, very tired. He was fairly sure his liaison was the corpse in the center.

They'd hacked his wings off before burning him.

The boy carried his bag to his suite; a series of clean, sparsely furnished rooms surrounding a courtyard with a dry fountain and scorched-looking shrubbery. The sun was beginning to fall in the sky, slanting into the courtyard at an angle. In a short while, it would be in full shadow.

Cather tipped the boy. "I need to pray." The Southern hemisphere rituals differed from the local ones. The northerners prayed in private. The boy looked crestfallen. "But I was going to take you on a tour of our city, Sahib! Sing you an epic song of the Prophet!"

Cather shook his head, ushering the boy to the beaded archway. "Thank you, son. Goodspeed." He forced another silver coin on the boy, and urged him through the door, his hand pressing a shoulder blade so sharp it seemed in danger of slipping through the boy's skin.

Finally!

Dizzy with hunger, he stripped out of his cloak as he dashed across the tile, letting the color rise in his face and hands like a man releasing the pressure on a too-tight belt. The brown faded,

became pale, then olive, and finally emerald green.

He stood panting, legs planted wide apart, head thrown back in the diminishing sun, his feeding wings unfolding into the light with a liquid rush of pleasure. He sighed, loud and long.

The green membranes undulated in the still, dry air, distending into a translucent film above him like a green parachute. He felt the sugars trickling into his blood, and with it, a certain clarity. He would have to abandon his cargo. They would have to try again, find more moderates that would listen...by which time, many, many, many more of them would die.

"Sahib!"

The little boy was crouched in the archway, his eyes showing white all around the dark pupil, his face flash-

They'd hacked his wings off before burning him.

ing hot in terror. Then he screamed, once, a piercing cry, one word, in this tongue, a monosyllable—*abomination!*

Cather bolted for him, his wings collapsing, clamping his hand over the boy's mouth.

The child's heat-mask flashed rage and fear. Cather held him tightly as he wriggled, settling into the cross-legged position and dropping into a light synthesis trance.

Within seconds, his palm sweated out the tranquilizer, and he rubbed it roughly into the boy's mouth, nearly losing a finger in the process. Almost immediately, the boy's fear mask faded, as the potent chemical invaded his flesh. "I won't hurt you."

"You're an offworlder!"

"Yes. I'm Green."

The boy snorted. "I can see that! What are you doing here? Will you infect us with a plague? Turn us into vegetables? Steal our souls?"

What did it matter anymore? His trip was useless. Perhaps he could make some difference, with this curious boy. "No. We don't do that. All those that come to us, do it of their own free will."

"What was in that awful heavy sack you made me carry?"

"These." The boy had stopped struggling, as the drug calmed him. Cather reached under his right arm, pinching off a ripe seed nodule with a little shiver of pain. He handed the smooth, pale ovoid to the boy, who held it like a scorpion, between thumb and forefinger.

"It grows on you?"

"It is part of me. My seed."

"What does it do?"

"If you swallow it, it turns you green. It changes you, at the most fundamental level, in places so small you cannot see. Those changes grow from the small to the large. You grow feeding wings."

"They say it makes you a demon," the boy said quietly, looking him in the eyes, his heatmask flashing in chemical-dampened confusion and hatred. "One of you did it to my brother! He burned for it!"

Cather nodded as the boy's emotion in the courtyard falling into place. He fought the upwelling of hopelessness at the show of anger. If the boy's brother had been reached, perhaps he could be. Perhaps.

"I'm no demon." He thought a moment and began to pray, singing softly the words of the Prophet, a beautiful hymn to the peace of God and the perfection of His Harmony, and to mercy for all things living.

Most faiths had their good sides. But it had been Cather's People's observation that when times became difficult, these words fell by the wayside.

The boy listened. Demons couldn't recite holy words. Their eyes would boil in their sockets, their tongues sizzle like sausages. Cather finished the prayer, released the boy to make the passes with his hands, to east and west, Heaven and Earth.

The boy retreated a short distance and stared. "They say you can read minds like a man reads a book. Can you hear me thinking?"

Cather shook his head. "I can see a broader range of light than you, is all. I can see the blood moving in your face, know a little bit about what you're feeling.

"Becoming Green won't destroy you. You will change. You won't starve. No more hunger. No more scratching in the dirt for food."

The boy licked his lips. "The priests say it is our place in the world. The Almighty gave us the plants and animals. Our place in the chain."

Cather nodded. "Yours is one place in the chain. There are others. I am my own chain, my own master. Millions of organisms live in me, feeding on each other's wastes in almost perfect balance. I am a world complete. I am Green.

"You could be too. To the Green, freedom is the right and privilege of all sentience. Freedom from hunger. Freedom from coercion. I need water and sun to live, a few trace elements in small quantities, here and there. Nothing more."

The boy looked skeptical—but hungry, and interested despite his conditioning. The young often wanted to live more than they cared for their souls.

"Hasn't the Prophet said that you are his chosen people? That you will not die?"

"Yes." The boy nodded cautiously.

"You're dying now. I bring you a way out. Perhaps I've been sent by your God."

The boy eyed the seed contemplatively. Finally he popped it in his pocket.

"You think well, for a demon. True, we are the chosen people, and will not die. The rains will come soon. The Caliphate has told us."

Cather shook his head. "No. Your atmosphere has been altered by the explosions in the south, from the war. There will be no rains."

The boy looked scared, forgetting his distrust. "How do you know?"

"From my ship in space, we've made a survey. We have a model of your world. There will be less and less rain. The desert will take back this entire continent." He hated this part, destroying the false hope. "You will starve, slowly, oh so slowly, to death. Your pain now is nothing. You will eat each other's flesh in the end, and be damned."

Tears leaked from the boy's compressed eyelids. Cather couldn't stop. "Your family. Your people. Your songs. Everything about you and your nation that is good—"

There was a shriek from the doorway. Cather looked up to see a veiled woman screaming at the top of her lungs. He struggled to force the color from his face, his heart pounding. The boy rustled through the beads, sobbing, and was gone.

He jerked his robes on over his deflated wings, shoved past the woman into the street, his feet pounding in the dust. The cry went up all around him. "Abomination!" He burst through a small knot of beggars into the courtyard. Soldiers in billowing red caftans bore down on him from every entrance. He was surrounded. He cried out, "Halt!"

Amazingly, they did.

He ripped out of his cloak, letting his wings unfold into the dying sun, his skin blooming emerald. It felt good, right. He

whipped his head around at the ring of horrified faces. "You don't have to die! I come from the Prophet to free you! I—" He didn't see who delivered the blow that knocked him to his knees.

He looked up, in time to see the sun glinting on the curved sword as it sheared off both his wings at their base.

"You don't have to starve!" The fists and kicking feet descended now from all sides. Snarling animal faces, men and women both, surrounded him. He lost his front teeth to a soldier's steel-toed boot, and afterwards gave up speaking, as they beat him into a bloody ruin.

He shut off the pain when he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that they were killing him. It was the right and privilege of all sentience to be free of bodily pain, when that pain served no good purpose.

The final right and privilege. So thinking, he passed into unconsciousness.

They revived him with a dash of sewage to the face. Water was too precious to waste on his kind. Valuable trace minerals in the muck tasted earthy and good to Cather, tugging a half smile from his torn lips.

He blinked nightsoil from eyes almost swollen shut, cutting off the pain instantly as consciousness returned. He was lashed to a wooden post, on a platform. He glanced around at the small crowd of citizens surrounding him. His satchel lay at his feet, piled among the dung and branches. A hundred thousand seeds. A hundred thousand wasted lives...

The shame burned in him. His death was utterly useless. He couldn't get the thought out of his mind. Useless! Futile! In a moment of nihilism, he wondered if infecting the people with Green as a plague might not have been a better idea, ethical or no.

The priest sang a hymn, his voice ululating up and down as he circled, sprinkling herbs, making arcane passes with both hands. He was the best-fed person Cather had seen since landing, with a quivering double chin, and thick, pink lips. In a moment of weakness, Cather simply hated him. Hated his filthy, stupid, primitive faith. Hated their pathetic scratching in the earth, their slaughter of innocent animals and each other, and him...

Finally, the priest touched the smoldering punk to the brambles, and Cather looked down at the faces around him. They were more dispirited than angry looking, really. One or two actually seemed to be crying...

He saw the boy looking up at him, his heat mask lost in the infrared glow of the flames. The boy grinned wide, his lips pulled back in a peculiar grimace. Cather almost missed it, his eyes tearing from the smoke. His seed, held in the boy's fine white teeth. The boy nodded, closing his mouth, swallowing the marble of flesh.

My son! Cather thought, closing his eyes and shuddering. The genetic imperative fulfilled in a sudden throb of joy. My boy!

The entire planet was his, and his alone! His bloodline could well infect a multitude—as the boy grew and spread his own seed amongst his hungry friends.

As he burned, he felt certain the Green would spread through the children, as it had on many worlds. Those who cared more for their lives than their souls. Those that could learn new ways. They would not all die, though their songs would surely change.

There was no pain. Cather smiled as the fire wrapped him in a living shroud of warmth, his flesh bubbling into steam, carbon smoke and energy. Which was all that life was, when you got right down to it.

And in the end, Cather thought his sacrifice a small thing. The world would be his.

And Green.

PW

REVIEWS

THE FIRST LADY by E.J. Gorman Forge Books-\$23.95

In recent efforts for the Forge line, Edward Gorman has taken on the slightly different appellation E.J. Gorman: last year's *The Marilyn Tapes* and now *The First Lady* both center on corruption, sociopaths, and murder in high places of government. I've been a long-time fan of Ed Gorman's wistful mystery novels and stories, most of which concern characters who find they can leave their small town roots for a time but always wind up returning home to deal with unfinished business of one kind or another. His novel *The Autumn Dead* and heart-wrenching novella of adolescence "Moonchasers" remain personal favorites. As E.J. Gorman, the author has moved into the much different vein of political conspiracies and power games.

At odds with her husband over a possible affair he's had, Claire Hutton, the First Lady, takes to dressing in a wig and overcoat, escaping the White House, and visiting an old college friend, David Hart, in the middle of the night—certainly a potential problem right off the proverbial bat. It's not long before Hart is black-mailing her under the threat of announcing false reports that they're having an affair. After paying (who says all Presidents' wives have to be smart enough to run the country?) she discovers her troubles are only starting. Hart is found dead and another college friend—this one being ex-boyfriend Knox Stansfield who's now a shock jock personality who makes Howard Stern and Rush Limbaugh seem mild in comparison—comes to the forefront, still carrying an obsessive and hateful torch for Claire and threatening to ruin her life. A video is found of Claire at the scene, and pretty soon the president's wife is up on murder charges.

Gorman's ability to bring main and tangential characters into play is always in top form, and you won't find anything less here. Events build at a slow and serious momentum, and characters' whose parts we're uncertain of soon grow in importance as the novel progresses. We feel the mounting tension as the plot moves forward at a greater and greater pace, characters drawn together like wires on a shotgun trigger being pulled taut. Especially believable and affecting is Claire's daughter, Deidre, who begins suffering a nervous breakdown under the constant onslaught of Knox's brutal smear campaign. We're taken through the awful pressures of living under constant scrutiny.

Here's an engaging narrative that draws the reader into a fast-moving melee of action, depth, double-crosses, and poignant storytelling. For the pacing and characterization alone, this novel is well worth your time, and there's much more to be found here. Ed Gorman's writing is always a mixed-bag of oddities, from the sublime to the touching to those chilly situations that

run through your spine; let Newt and Bill duke it out in reality—you get under the covers with *The First Lady*.

FOOTSTEPS OF THE HAWK by Andrew Vachss Knopf-\$23.00

In a recent television interview Andrew Vachss stated that his latest Burke novel, *Footsteps of the Hawk*, is comprised of more elements pertaining to a mystery novel than any of his previous books, which he mentions are more examples in professional stalking. This may be true, but not by a great deal. For those who are new to the series, Burke is a career criminal raised on the dirty streets of New York City who spends most of his time chasing after and bringing down greater evils than himself.

Now two cops—scheming Belinda Roberts and vicious Morales, both of whom have had run-ins with Burke before—have managed to drag him into the middle of a strange ballet of murder as they hunt one another through a case of serial rape-killings. Belinda wants Burke to help get an innocent man out of jail because she believes Morales is the true killer. Morales is apparently trying to turn Burke into a suspect for a new string of murders that may, or may not, be connected to the others. While this dance continues, certain evidence comes into play that shifts his suspicions from one to the other. Nothing slows Burke down much, yet although he's able to access police and coroner reports, he's still incapable to make heads or tails of the true situation.

For the reader's part, of this initial premise, too much takes place 'off camera': we've walked into the show, along with Burke, after everything's happened. While this does set up a situation that throws a spotlight on Burke's confusion and frustration, it's all backdrop for character and none for story development. Consequently, the plot, as it is, suffers: we want to know more about all those dead people, what happened to them and why. After all, Burke is always in the middle of something bad, so give us a hint at just what else is going on.

Burke's voice is Vachss' greatest achievement: we're so up-close into the man we can feel nerve-endings firing in him, as well as smell and taste the constant underlying bitterness and hate for his sexually abusive family that turned him into the creature of the bad streets he is. At the same time a dichotomy exists within him, where his love for his chosen family—made up of Prof, his former teacher in jail, Max, Burke's mute and deadly partner, Mama, wise Chinese mother figure, and Frankie, a young white boxer newly welcomed into this tightly-knitted fold—seeps to the forefront at important moments. His protective love is a perfect counterpoint to his consuming vengeful wrath.

Though Burke's complexities are fascinating

in their own right, Vachss often feels the need to press him a bit too far into the realm of superiority. When he meets with a psychologist treating an abused girl, it takes Burke only a few quick sentences to break down her walls of repression, whereas a team of psychiatrists have failed for weeks. Though the scene in itself could be worked to great effect, Burke merely appears a bit too superhero-ish. When the psychologist asks Burke to stay on because of his acumen, we know we're heading out to dark but possibly silly waters. And for a man who prides himself on trusting no one, with survival instincts like a beast, Burke stumbles about blindly allowing himself to be drawn into an obvious trap. The title of the novel itself refers to being so concentrated on following the ground that you never look up to see trouble coming at you from elsewhere. While this is another facet of a complex character, it seems contradictory to all we know about him. And basically *all* we know about in the book is about *him*.

But these are more or less minor quibbles in the midst of so much raw energy and brutal, gut-wrenching honesty as portrayed herein. If Bill Pronzini's "Nameless Detective" is the P.I. pared down to the bone, then Burke is the career criminal carved down to the marrow. There's an enormous amount to be found in such a soulful, ugly, insightful character, but while you're looking down here digging into Burke's nervous system, be careful to notice other troubles stalking about.

AN EXALTATION OF LARKS by Robert Reed Tor Books-\$21.95

Magic realism is a term that's taken on new life over the past number of years, a gray area of genre-crossing that can include almost any fusion of fantasy or offbeat science fiction: Robert Reed's *An Exaltation of Larks* is an ambitious merging of intensely detailed characterization and an unfurling of the veils of reality. Reed toys with the foundation of the universe with such a particularly trained style of realism that this novel succeeds in smoothly carrying the reader from a small American college campus to the borders of the cosmos without hardly making a ripple in believability.

As the editor of a college paper, senior Jesse Aylesworth spends a night in 1978 delivering copies around the campus during a blizzard: a major story about the college president stealing funds has just broken, and Jesse suffers through the blinding snow worried about the shake-up that may destroy the college while reviewing his years as an aggressive ladies' man and the numerous co-eds he's known intimately though not especially well. In the swirling snow he's shook from his thoughts and meets with another woman he's hardly acquainted with, Sully, who offers him a ride. Slowly events unfold as they tour the buildings and dorms: radios and televisions

BY TOM PICCIRILLI

emit only static; the science lab has been broken into and the turtles murdered; certain friends and family members have become strangers.

The plot speeds forward as The Turtle makes his entrance; appearing first as an Indian, the Turtle is a time-traveler who explains how he's

returned from the very end of immortality, space and time (three trillion years in the future) in order to recruit the next generation of time-travelers before willfully expiring himself: all living vertebrates alive in an eighteen month period will be transformed into immortals, living out their allotted spans only to return again to recruit the next generation, an so on until reaching the Creation itself. Yet the Turtle needs Jesse's help to trap a "cheater"—one of the immortals who has returned yet is attempting to relive his trillion year span again. This is absolutely forbidden, the worst crime possible

against the universe, and the cheater can be anyone or anything alive in Jesse's time period.

Sully plays a mysterious role in all these events: is she the "cheater" or is she working for the Turtle? Is she manipulating Jesse or is she his one true love fighting to save him from some secret agenda of the Turtle's? Jesse struggles through an intoxicating blend of god-like powers and tenacious humanity, where he becomes even more lost as more and more truths are revealed about his friends and himself. Exactly why are the immortals so desperately fighting to leap back to the Creation, and why is "cheating" so horribly wrong anyway?

The journey is a fascinating mixture of philosophical grandeur and the foibles and fears of mankind. Reed's sensitive attention to detail, dialogue, sentiment, and poignant realizations are always heady and intriguing. (I'll never forget the scene where a quickly evolving catfish "makes a low wet sound in apology" because it's eavesdropped on a conversation instead of studying Milton in class). *An Exaltation of Larks* is full of aspirations and startling incidents that will wind the reader into an intricate and sensational series of absorbing, thoughtful inhalations and mysteries of existence.

PEACE ON EARTH by Stanislaw Lem Harvest/Harcourt Brace-\$11.00

A new paperback reprint by Harvest/Harcourt Brace reintroduces us to the brilliant and biting wit of Stanislaw Lem. As his legions of fans across the world already know, Lem is a master of the science fiction parable, where satire, philosophy and social comment fuse with gripping, highly-charged SF. He is capable of packing his

fiction with more groundbreaking ideas and eccentric characters than perhaps any other writer.

Here we meet with Ijon Tichy, protagonist of Lem's *The Star Diaries* and *The Book of Robots* among others, once again as he works his way through a web of political indifference, conspiracy, and alien technology.

The novel begins with Tichy attempting to make sense out of a disaster on his latest mission, one which he can barely remember: a weapon of some sort has severed his corpus collosum, leaving his left side brain an "It" that not only craves sweets and pinches ladies' backsides, but also seems to know more about the mission than it is willing to share. Soon he's on the run as agents from both the East and the West race each other to discover whatever information the "It" of Tichy's brain has. After teaching his left sided self to read sign language he is able to make for-

ays at communication. Most of what he learns leaves him even more confused than before.

In funny, moving, yet often chilling background chapters we learn that the nations of the world, rather than fighting among themselves, have worked at various levels to keep at war through robotics without endangering human life (micro-robots can engage in world wars within only a few feet of space). In an effort to keep peace on earth, the world powers send their constructs and doomsday machines to the moon. However, contact is lost and the politicians fear that the self-creating self-programming robots have joined forces and turned against their masters.

Any single concept found within *Peace On Earth* is more than enough for a whole novel, but Lem manages to spin intricate arrangements of back-story and plotlines, drawing them together in such a tightly complex piece of fiction that the reader is at once dazzled by the farcical elements and stunned at the amazing heights of imagination this author possesses. Harvest/Harcourt Brace is to be commended for bringing back into print the works of underappreciated authors such as Lem and allowing new generations of readers the chance to get acquainted with such evocative work.

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THE 37th MANDALA by Marc Laidlaw St. Martin's Press-\$22.95

A powerful, frightening, and ultimately highly disturbing novel *The 37th Mandala* is a feast of occult horror fiction that covers the spectrum of dark fantasy lore, from the shysters of New Age bestsellers to the Old Gods seeking entrance into our human dimension via sex magic and rivers of blood. Author Marc Laidlaw slows his usually quick-paced narrative down to a suspenseful crawl in an effort to build a wider foundation for the supernatural mythos involved herein.

Derek Crowe is a writer of New Age material, a money-hungry and self-serving hack whose latest book has inspired a wave of students and followers who believe him to be in touch with a spiritual race of benevolent beings known as the Mandalas. The truth of the matter, hidden behind years of repression, is that Crowe stole most of his book from the works of Elias Mooney, a sorcerer of sorts who knew the Mandalas for the evil creatures they are and lost his lifelong battle with them. In an effort to cash in on Mooney's memoirs and notebooks, Crowe has merely changed all hints of the Mandalas' depraved intent and shifted the focus to one of altruism and beneficence. Which is apparently exactly what the Mandalas themselves wanted.

Michael Renzler is a devoted fan of Crowe's works; though Michael is a naive practitioner of magical rites, it is his wife, Lenore, who succumbs to the mysterious power of the Mandalas. She is possessed and begins a strange transformation filled with visions and murder, one that sends the pair on a wild cross-country journey in search of Crowe, whom they mistakenly believe to be the Master of Mandalas.

Crowe's character, like his belief in the supernatural (and *The 37th Mandala* as a whole) is a two-sided sword: he is at once an unsympathetic jerk and a victim of circumstance, an egomaniac and a cat's-paw of occult forces. Laidlaw took a chance in making his protagonist something far less than a heroic figure. Like an expert driver pressing a behemoth vehicle along a dark highway, the author fluidly shifts gears whenever he finds himself on different ground. The story speeds and slows as need be, vascillating between past and present, the reality we exist in and a new lurid dawn awaiting us, the sins and skins of vile Cambodian horrors and the magic shops of San Francisco that cater to the New Age fanatics searching out belief systems like various soups of the day. *The 37th Mandala*

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merges so many facets and invigorating twists that reading it is like entering a carnival and never knowing which ride you'll be forced to take just around the next corner—a slow and sweet seat or a slip down a razor slide. Buy your ticket, this one will make you want to try it all.

SHOW CONTROL by Keith Snyder Write Way Publishing-\$20.95 3806 South Fraser Aurora CO 80014

In Keith Snyder's *Show Control* the archetype of the amateur detective is taken to a new level of wit and carefully constructed near-slapstick humor, full of fun everymen characters who's greatest skill is the fact that they don't take themselves seriously in the least. Scenes abound where our trio of protagonists run into hardboiled schemers, thieves and murderers only to escape by luck or the intervention of other key players. As one of the 'professionals' in the novel puts it: "If you plan to continue this thing you're doing, you can't be making beginners' mistakes." For a highly impressive first novel of rare quality it's decidedly clear that Keith Snyder doesn't make any beginner's mistakes.

Recovering from the pangs of a recent divorce, musician Jason Keltner becomes embroiled in the murder of performance artist Monica Gleason, a woman he barely knew through a shared interest in computer-run light shows and synthesizers. While on-stage Monica is cut down by one of her own lasers, tampered with in a computerized fashion that Jason soon uncovers. Along with two of his other starving artist friends—Robert, an actor, and Martin, a graphic designer—the trio set out on a vague notion to find the killer, but they're actually more interested in diversion and excitement than justice. Soon they discover that they're much better at being thorns in the side of crime than they are at their own respective and stumbling artistic careers, and enjoy becoming more deeply entwined in the mystery at hand.

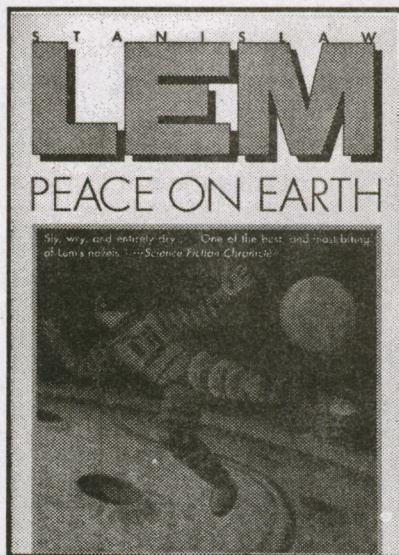
After downloading files from Monica's computerware Jason finds she spent a good deal of time on the Net; he sends out a general howl across the Net asking, "Who killed Monica Gleason?" When he isn't infuriating the police officer in charge of the case he's attracting gun-toting attention from persons unknown. Pressing people's buttons seems to be what Jason does best, and it isn't long before he's on the trail of the Preacher, a false church leader with stolen millions lining his pocket. But the Preacher's only the first stop on a path that twists deeper into Monica's life and death, and somewhere beyond the conspiracies and robberies hides a clever killer and his true motive.

Using *The Art of War* as a guidebook the trio decide to 'harass the enemy ceaselessly,' only to realize later that perhaps it wasn't such a good idea. Sharp-witted, silver-tongued protagonists draw together as the stakes are raised higher and higher throughout the novel, and herein Keith Snyder has developed a style of characterization that is at once hilarious, realistic, and immensely gratifying. The three friends working together adds greater depths of humor and poignancy, so that running jokes roll even more quickly and the bonds of comradeship come into focus. Keith Snyder certainly shows control,

deftness diversity, and a wealth of talent in this first effort; definitely take in the enigmatic show of *Show Control* and come back for the next.

VAMPIRE MISCHIEF by Wendy Rathbone **THE DIVINE HERETIC** by Tippi N. Blevins Night Sky Publications-\$2.00 (Make checks to Tippi N. Blevins) PO Box 1511 Pasadena TX 77501-1511

In a decade when the vampire theme has had most of the life's blood squeezed from it by redundant writing, Wendy Rathbone infuses the sub-genre with a carefully executed foray into the exotic milieu and intensely personalized romantic, hellish figure that is the Vampire. Here



is *Vampire's Mischief*, a poem in fourteen parts that explores various avenues of the age-old creature: from untouchable mythic figure to 'living graveyard flesh' to one who must 'dream on the elixir of telepathic heat.' Vivid concrete imagery swirls about in stanzas that resonate the joy and horror of being immortal, more god than beast, more universal soul than condemned spirit: "look look/ just as the lantern sputters/ and you edge the/ dark red scythe of sleep/ just as the rain whispers/ to a stop." As much as her lyrical writing, it is Rathbone's willingness to take on the much more difficult task of sidestepping a subjective single view of the Vampire figure, instead relishing in an all-encompassing understanding of an angelic demon that makes this poem a noteworthy accomplishment. Intriguing cover by Chad Savage with interior artwork by Tippi Blevins reminiscent of Tanith Lee's illustrations.

Blevins' own mini-chap *The Divine Heretic* takes on a number of gothic—in its original connotation, not the Greenwich Village club scene)—elements: with such titles as 'Sin', 'The Storm's Lover', 'Vengeful Serpents' and my own favorite 'The Gods Have Teeth' Blevins underscores the frustrations encountered when questioning such pithy states of spiritual rest as purity, sanctity, faith, and just about any form of soul-soothing. "Her elbows drip ruby rain/ where the deep punctures/ in her wrists/ whisper sacrilege."

Death—and perhaps more specifically, failed redemption—stalks these pages like a cheating lover, one you come face to face with time and again only to have the painful past shoved back hard in your nose. "I gave you every chance/ to return from the dead." Blevins weaves a dark but slick net that captures the essence of an aching wrath at both the majestically divine and the impurity of humanity.

LEVIATHAN ed. by Jeff VanderMeer and Luke O'Grady Mule Press & The Ministry of Whimsy-\$8.50 (postpaid) PO Box 4248 Tallahassee FL 32315

A solid collection of literate fiction featuring a variety of tales with various concerns and styles, most of which seem to blend the visceral facts of daily life with surreal aspects of living dream. Dawn Baumann Brunke's "The Other House of My Father" brings us a woman who discovers a separate persona/person of her unassuming father living out exotic and erotic adventure surrounded by numerous intoxicating friends, including Salvador Dali. Tanyo Ravicz's "A Passion for Puppy" is perhaps the most outright humorous story of the volume focusing on a man driven to wild distraction by a constantly barking dog and its strange and inviting mistress who plots to kill Puppy in order to torment her husband; this is like a demented version of a James M. Cain novel, a fusion of wit, sex, crime, and borderline madness. "Insensates" by Kathryn Kulpa is one of the more realistic pieces, emphasizing a woman's quandary between continuing in an emotionless existence or placing at least a modicum of faith in the chance for love and fulfillment; the author does an exceptional job of portraying the protagonist's cool, distant torment as germs of hope infect her pragmatism, and her ruthless sense of reality stunts her very heart.

A few of the tales, for my tastes, didn't completely manage to find a balance between gripping narrative and literary invention or else convey a particularly engaging plot—some pieces feel oddly underdeveloped and seem like forced mixed-messages—but perhaps that too was the editors' intent at giving the reader a wide array of fiction working at different levels. Though we often hear of 'eclectic mixes' of stories in collections, that's rarely the case in this decade of themed anthologies: in *Leviathan* though you'll find differentiations of several orders, from the sublime to the lurid, passionate to soulless, yet each with its own set of incredibly sharp, or at least strikingly strange, hooks to snag a reader's imagination.

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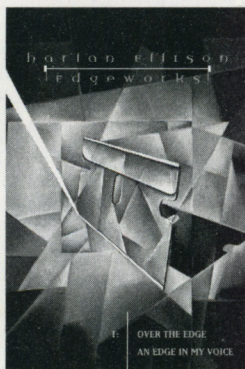
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